Alexandria Black History Museum and Related Sites

John Parker, Principal, Snowden School for Negro Boys, 1875-1918.

The 1939 sit-in at the Alexandria Library led to the creation of the Robert Robinson Library.

Alexandria Black History Museum

902 Wythe Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
phone: 703.838.4356
website: alexblackhistory.org
e-mail: blackhistory@alexandriava.gov

Hours

Tuesday - Saturday: 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
(Contact the Museum for holiday hours.)

The Alexandria Black History Museum (ABHM) is located in the Parker-Gray district of the city. Staff and volunteers from citizen organizations interpret the contributions of African Americans to Alexandria's history and culture. The building that today houses the Museum was constructed in 1940 as the Robert Robinson Library, the African American community's first public library. With desegregation in the 1960s, the building was converted to use for community service programs.

The Alumni Association of Parker-Gray School and The Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage, Inc., reopened the building in 1983 as the Alexandria Black History Resource Center and provided the volunteer staff. In 1987, the City Council placed the operation

of the Museum under the direction of the Office of Historic Alexandria and provided paid staff and funds for an addition to the building, which was completed in 1989.

The Alexandria Black History Museum presents lectures, tours of the Museum and other activities relating the history and accomplishments of African Americans in Alexandria. Paintings, photographs, books and other memorabilia document the African American experience in Alexandria and Virginia from 1749 to the present. The Alexandria Black History Museum has a special collection on the history and graduates of the Parker-Gray School.

The Alexandria Black History Museum seeks objects and materials on the history of the African American community in Alexandria as well as the community's African heritage. Docent and behind-the-scenes volunteer opportunities are available.

Watson Reading Room

(Adjacent to the Museum)

Hours

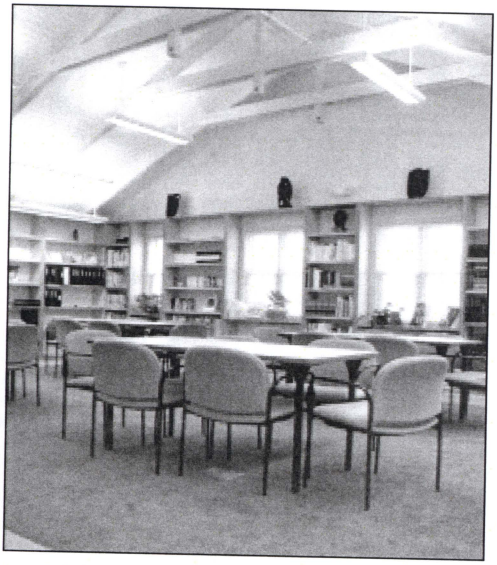
Tuesday - Saturday: 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
(Contact the museum for holiday hours.)
Handicapped–accessible

Located next door to The Alexandria Black History Museum, the reading room is a non-circulating research repository focusing on African American history and culture. Alexandria Black History Museum staff and volunteers are available to work

with scholars of all ages on their questions about African American history.

The Watson Reading Room is named in honor of Charles and Laura Watson, early African American land owners in Alexandria. Laura Watson established the Sunnyside community with her sons, using land bequeathed to her by her husband in 1874. The Sunnyside community, located in what was then the Jefferson County district of Alexandria, flourished as an African American neighborhood.

In 1992, following the wishes of Sunnyside residents, funds from the terminated Sunnyside Home Ownership Assistance Program were used for the construction of the Watson Reading Room, providing a site for a research facility that would educate all Alexandrians about the contributions of African Americans. Officially opened in October 1995, the Watson Reading



Room offers a growing collection of books, periodicals, and videos on African American history. The reading room is part of the Alexandria Black History Museum, which also includes the Alexandria African American Heritage Park. Volunteer opportunities are available.

Alexandria African American Heritage Park

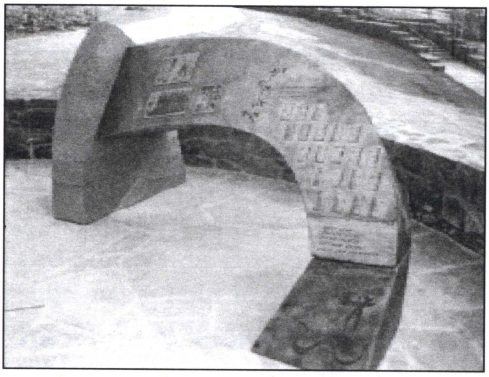
Duke Street at Holland Lane

Hours

Dawn to Dusk
Handicapped–accessible

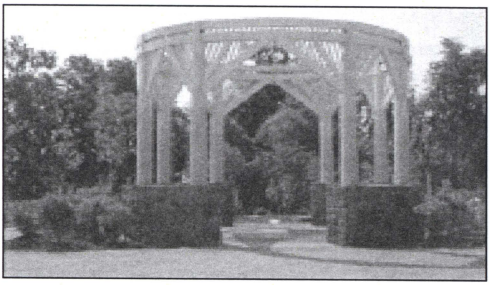
The eight-acre memorial park includes a preserved one-acre 19th century African American cemetery. Of twenty-one known burials on this site, six identified headstones remain and are in their original location. The park was designed to co-exist with the original landscape of the cemetery and preserves the interesting and varied plant life on this site. The park's innovative plan also sustains a wetland area that provides a home for mallards, painted turtles, beavers and crayfish in their natural habitat.

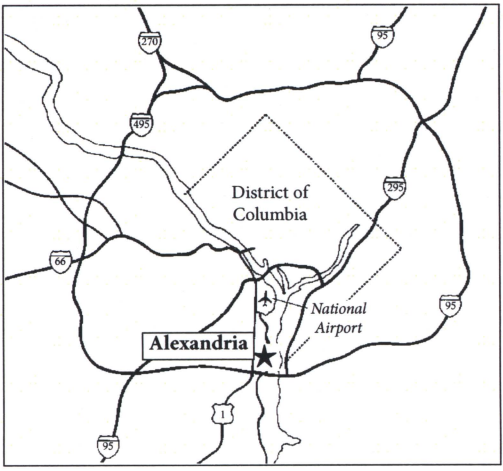
On June 17, 1995 the Norfolk Southern Corporation presented the park to the City of Alexandria. The park is part of the mixed-use Carlyle Development and a satellite site for the Alexandria Black History Museum. The memorial sculptures in the park are the creation of Washington, D.C., sculptor Jerome Meadows. The focal point of the park is a sculpture group of bronze trees called "Truths that Rise from

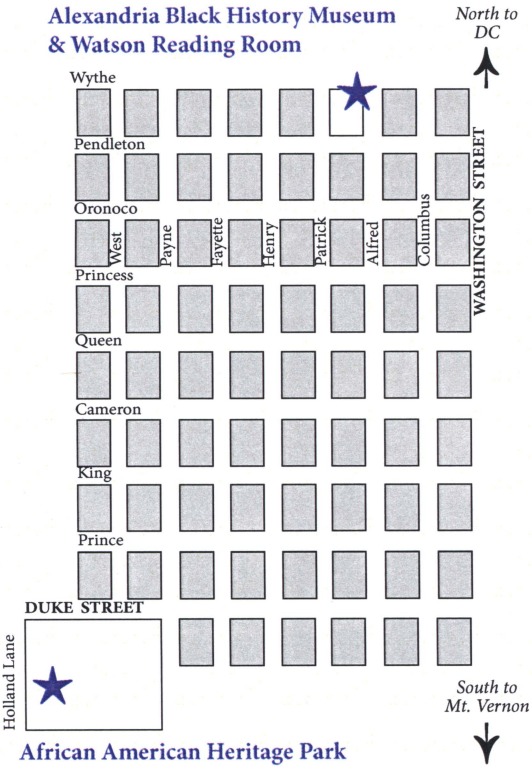


the Roots Remembered." This formation acknowledges the contributions of African Americans to the growth of Alexandria. Other smaller sculptures throughout the park commemorate historic African American neighborhoods and the people known and unknown buried on this site. A bookstand in the park contains a visitors guide which identifies the names of African American citizens and sites etched on the sculptures.

The Alexandria Black History Museum, Watson Reading Room and Alexandria African American Heritage Park may be rented for private functions. Due to the historic nature of the sites, special conditions apply. Interested parties may call the museum's rental coordinator at 703.838.4356 for more information.







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