Enhancing the Waterfront Trail

Presenter: MacArthur Myers
Map
South Trail
Raise the White Flag
Wilkes Street Tunnel

The Wilkes Street Tunnel was part of the eastern division of the Orange & Alexandria Railroad, founded in 1839 to promote trade with eastern Virginia. The Orange & Alexandria inaugurated its track in Alexandria on May 7, 1851 with a run from the north end of Union Street to the Wilkes Street Tunnel. Thus, the tunnel linked the railroad to warehouses and wharves along the waterfront. Located nearby, the Smith & Perkins Foundry manufactured locomotives for the Orange & Alexandria and other railroads.

The Wilkes Street Tunnel continued in operation until 1913 when declining industrial activity along the waterfront no longer warranted rail service. The tunnel is one of Alexandria’s few surviving 19th century transportation sites.
Battery Cove

BATTERY COVE FILLED: A NEW SHIPYARD

Between 1911 and 1912, Battery Cove, the southern bay north of the Potomac, became the site for a new War Battery founded and named for the War. The purpose of the project undertaken by the U.S. Corps of Engineers was to create a harbor on the Potomac River and to receive and store along the construction. Approaching 45 acres or new land, about one-third of today's Fort's Landing site, was created by deposit of the dredged soil.

When the United States entered World War II in 1917, the U.S. Atlantic Shipbuilding Corporation established a shipyard to construct ships for the war effort. The government purchased a farm in order to produce ships for the war effort. The farming community was then bought out, and a contract to construct twelve 4,500-ton ships was signed in 1918. The President's design, the Potomac, was named for the river. The shipyard was completed in 1919. With the cancellation of the government contract, the shipyard was eventually sold. The concrete bulkhead and shipyard still stand, as well as the concrete boathouse.
Alexandria Marine Railway
Small Sign/High Rise Building
North Trail
Oronoco Bay Park
Grassy Lot
Founders Park
Walkway
Street Sign
Carver Nursery School

Carver Nursery School / Post 129

This modest, two-story building has played an important role in the segregated history of Alexandria. During World War II, the federal government encouraged women to join the war effort by providing a safe and affordable day care. In Alexandria, as elsewhere, racial segregation was the norm. The Carver School was completed in 1944 and operated as a segregated nursery school for children of African American war workers. After the war, federal support for day care ended, but Alexandria's working mothers braved the city to keep the nursery open. The city agreed to operate two white nurseries and the Carver School, but doubled the monthly fees to $27. In the black community, social clubs helped fund Carver students. The nursery ultimately closed in 1950 and the building then served as a segregated American Legion post. By 2018, the building was vacant and neglected and came close to demolition. It was finally preserved and adaptively reused in 2014.

“I have been at the Carver Nursery School a long time, and have enjoyed working with pupils, but when janitorial duties were added. I had no alternative but to resign,” said Mrs. Smith, a graduate of Spelman College and Atlanta University.

City’s Controversial Decision, 1946

Alexandria doubled its janitorial services at the nursery schools in 1946 to save money. At the Carver School, the two professional teachers, Lucille C. Smith and Velma D. Leigh, were required to perform janitorial duties including cleaning the building and maintaining the furnace. When it was learned that white teachers were not subject to the order, the teachers resigned. They were quickly replaced by a single teacher who agreed to perform the janitorial work.
Universal Lodge #1

Prince Hall Masonry originated in Massachusetts in 1775 when a lodge attached to the British army initiated Prince Hall and 14 other free black men as Freemasons. Universal Lodge No. 1, the first Prince Hall lodge in Virginia, was established in Alexandria on 5 Feb. 1845. According to tradition, founders William Dudley, Benjamin Crier, and Sandy Bryant were seamen who had become masons in Liverpool, England, in the 1830s. They later joined Social Lodge No. 1 in Washington, DC, and worked to charter a new lodge across the Potomac River. Before the Civil War, Universal Lodge No. 1 met secretly in a house on South Royal Street in Hayti, a black enclave.
Map of 1845
Questions & Answers