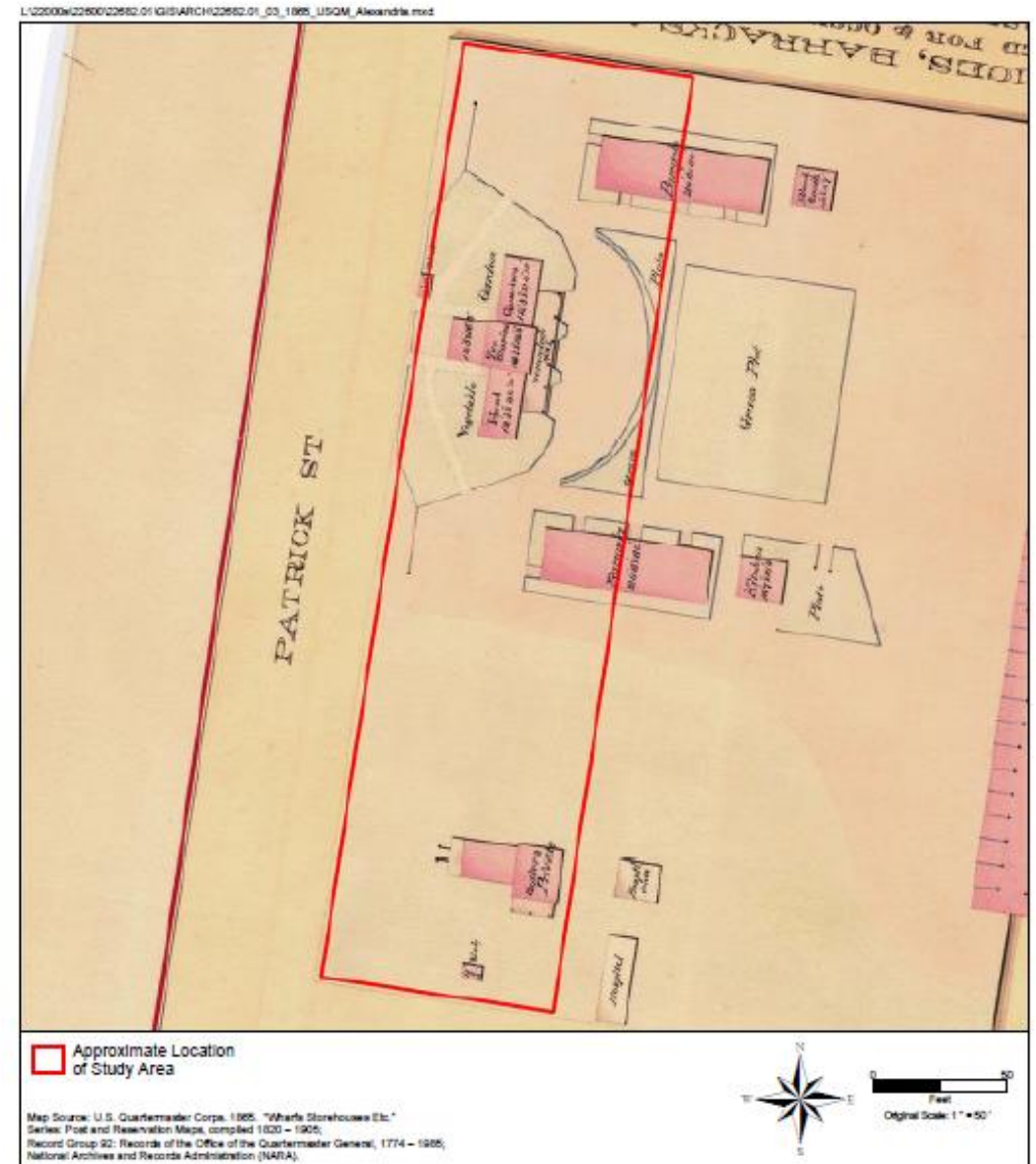


Community Garden

- One of the early uses for the site was *Agricultural*, which stimulated creation of buildings in the area (History Report p.89)
- The block on which Ramsey Homes was situated was largely used for market gardening between 1834-1861 (p.57)
- Even after this period, when used for war housing, a vegetable garden surrounded the Head Quarters (see map)



U.S. Quartermaster Corps Map 1865

Preserve building footprint and incorporate into open space design



UVA Campus, Historical Mitigation
Foster Memorial Site, in honor of a free black woman's
(Catherine Foster) home and a burial ground

The Hump: Open Lots For Blocks



1912 Sanborn Insurance Map
Sanborn Map Company



800 Block of Madison Street



800 Block of N. Alfred Street



900 Block of Madison Street

1910s Photographs
Earl Underwood Branch Library Photo Collection

The racially integrated working class neighborhood, known as the Hump, named for the high ground at its northern boundary, once spanned three blocks along, centering on the 800 block of Montgomery Street. The Hump was first settled in the decade following the Civil War. After the nearby Alexandria Canal was abandoned in 1886 and the railroad tracks along Henry and Fayette streets were closed in the early 20th century, inexpensive housing in this marginal area attracted European immigrants and African Americans, descendants of free and enslaved black Alexandrians including the thousands of African Americans that sought refuge in the city during the Civil War. Many residents were employed by the railroad, at Portner's Brewery and at several local glassworks. Notable among the neighborhood occupants in the early 1900s were African American educator John F. Parker and Reverend Robert Robinson.

"It was so cold that you could go to bed and see the moon shining (through the walls). The snow'd come through them cracks on your feet... Ice'd freeze on the washstand... It'd freeze in your bedroom... We had to go to a pump to get water to wash with. The pump was right in the street on just 'bout every corner—great big old wooden pump."

- Henry Johnson, a neighborhood resident in the early 1900s, from oral history recordings owned by Alexandria Library.

Considered one of Alexandria's several historic African American neighborhoods, the Hump appears to have remained ethnically diverse and was characterized by wide open spaces that were utilized for agriculture, public refuse disposal and social life. In the 1950s many of the homes and small businesses in the neighborhood were razed as part of a program of urban renewal.

"We're talking about 1915... We played baseball because there were plenty of open spaces. We could build a baseball diamond any place. We played marbles in the street. Played spin tops in the street... there was open lots for blocks and blocks. No houses whatever."

- Buster Williams, a neighborhood resident in the early 1900s, from oral history recordings owned by the Office of Historic Alexandria

Vacant lots on these blocks were used, in the 1940s and possibly earlier, by the African American owned and operated traveling tent variety show Silas Green from New Orleans which toured the south by rail between 1904 and 1957.

Part revue, part music comedy, part minstrel show, Silas Green became one of the longest-lasting tent shows in American show-business history and featured well known performers including Bessie Smith, the legendary blues singer. It was enormously popular among both black and white audiences, and offered a segregated seating arrangement with a section reserved for whites only.

"... there used to be a Silas Green show and that was a very entertaining show under a tent. They would come to town with a tent and they would have entertainment. We never paid, we just kind of looked under the tent and watched..."

- James E. Henson Sr., a neighborhood resident in the mid 20th century, from oral history recordings owned by the Office of Historic Alexandria



Silas Green Band Tent Show
Black Show Photo

Produced by Richard Underwood and William, Jr. and Thomas
Copyright and reprint from Dr. Alexander A. Hays
Historical Office of Historic Alexandria

James Bland Homes - City
Historical Marker



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA EST. 1749

James Bland Homes



James Bland Homes Building Type D (1959) 161-111 North Patrick Street

Funded by the U.S. Public Housing Administration and built by the Alexandria Housing and Redevelopment Authority (ARHA) between 1954 and 1959, the James Bland Homes was Alexandria's fourth public housing project and it more than doubled the city's stock of racially segregated public housing units intended for its African American citizens. Alexandria's public housing emerged from an effort to improve substandard or 'slum' housing associated with the President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal of the 1930s. Many felt that the slums contributed to high crime rates and posed serious public health problems. The James Bland Homes project was preceded on the site by a World War II era federal Public Housing Authority trailer camp established in 1943 for African American residents of properties condemned during a 1941 program of slum clearance in downtown Alexandria. The establishment of the James Bland Homes required the condemnation of 57 parcels in an area known as 'the Hump'. Many residents of this historically integrated working class neighborhood fought to preserve or receive fair compensation for their homes.

The design of the James Bland Homes, typical of public housing projects of the period, was influenced by the Modern Movement and included minimal decorative elements and the use of mass produced construction materials. Joseph Henry Saunders Jr., a student of Walter Gropius and a prolific architect in Alexandria in the 1950s, was the designer. The orderly and open layout of the complex featured courtyards, circulation networks and recreation areas inspired by the Garden City and Garden Suburb movements of the early 20th century and was designed to contrast to the perceived chaos of the slums that the public housing replaced. The Samuel Madden Uptown public housing, similar in style to the James Bland Homes, was built in 1945 to the west of N. Patrick Street.

"...when I lived in Bland the people that I knew were very happy to be there. There was a lot of camaraderie. We thought the accommodations were great. People watched out for people's houses. There were times when we didn't lock the door. It was a very folksy neighborhood."

- James E. Henson Sr., a neighborhood resident in the mid 20th century, from oral history recordings owned by the Office of Historic Alexandria

The James Bland Homes encompassed 194 public housing units located within the Parker-Gray Historic District on five city blocks bounded by First Street, North Columbus Street, Wythe Street and North Patrick Street.



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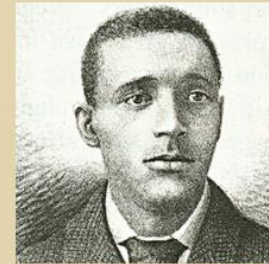


Illustration from "James Bland's 3 Great Songs", 1879

James Bland

The public housing was named for James Alan Bland (October 12, 1854–May 5, 1911), an African American musician and songwriter born to a free family in Flushing, New York. Bland graduated from Howard University in Washington, D.C. in 1873.

He composed over 700 songs, including "In the Evening by the Moonlight," "O Dem Golden Slippers," and "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny", the official State Song of Virginia from 1940 until 1997.



"Arlington, Virginia, FHA Trailer Camp Project for Negroes, Single Type Trailer, April 1942" Library of Congress, Oregon, FSA

The James Bland Homes project was preceded on the site by a WWII era Public Housing Authority trailer camp established in 1943 for African Americans displaced by urban renewal in downtown Alexandria.

Published by Richard Walker and William, Jr. and Eleanor Connelly with support from the Alexandria, VA Housing Museum, Office of Historic Alexandria.

James Bland Homes - City Historical Marker



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA EST. 1749