

NOVEMBER 16–17, 1855

## The Night Alexandria Lost Seven

A deliberately set fire broke out in the Dowell china shop in the 200 block of King Street. Volunteers from the city's fire companies fought it through the night, working the upper floors and the cellar of the adjoining warehouse.

At about 4:00 a.m. the warehouse's west gable wall collapsed. Six men died beneath it. John Roach was pulled from the wreckage alive but died of his injuries at home. Six others were hurt.

It remains the deadliest night in the history of Alexandria's fire service.

### Where the Seven Rest

|                  |                                          |
|------------------|------------------------------------------|
| G. David Appich  | Presbyterian Cemetery                    |
| William Evans    | Methodist Protestant Cemetery            |
| James W. Keene   | Methodist Protestant (gravesite unknown) |
| George O. Plain  | Methodist Protestant Cemetery            |
| Robert I. Taylor | Methodist Protestant Cemetery            |
| J. Carson Greene | Christ Church Episcopal Cemetery         |
| John Roach       | St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery             |

*In the memorial procession of 1856, John Dogan — an African American laborer lamed for life by the collapse — carried the fire's damaged hose nozzle, engraved with the names of the seven.*

### The Firefighters' Memorial

In 1856 the cornerstone was laid for a memorial obelisk at Ivy Hill Cemetery, carved with the names of the seven. The Friendship Fountain beside it was dedicated in 1970 and rededicated after September 11, 2001. Each Fire Prevention Week, Alexandria's firefighters still gather here to remember.



### Catherine Weinraub, Historian

This guide rests on Catherine's research. Historian for the Ivy Hill Cemetery Historical Preservation Society, she led the effort that placed Ivy Hill on the National Register of Historic Places in 2024. She is also Historian for the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association and author of *Friendship Fire Company 250th Anniversary, 1774–2024* (2023). Her background includes the Office of Historic Alexandria, George Washington's Mount Vernon, and Arlington House. She leads Ivy Hill tours through the Society — schedule at [ivyhillcemetery.net](http://ivyhillcemetery.net) — and collaborates with Gravestone Stories on special tours and living-history programs at the Lee-Fendall House Museum.

### FOUR FIRES THAT SHAPED ALEXANDRIA

**1810 • The Waterfront Fire.** An unattended candle in Lawrence Hill's cooper shop set the waterfront ablaze on September 24. Three days later the Sun Fire Company voted twenty dollars to reward the "persons of color" who had worked its engine — one of the earliest records of Black Alexandrians fighting the city's fires.

**1827 • The Great Fire.** Starting in James Green's cabinet shop on January 18, it burned dozens of buildings in 13° cold and could be seen from Washington — a lesson in mutual aid.

**1855 • The Dowell China Shop Fire.** Seven firefighters killed in a single night. *See inside.*

**1871 • The City Hall Fire.** On May 19, flames destroyed City Hall and Benjamin Latrobe's 1817 steeple.

### Alexandria's Early Fire Companies

Friendship 1774 • Sun 1775 • Relief 1788 • Star 1799 • Hydraulion 1827. In 1866 Joseph H. Young became the city's first paid fire department employee.



### Explore the Interactive Map

Every grave in this guide, plus the historic fire sites, with photographs and full stories. [gravestonestories.com/fallen-firefighters-alexandria](http://gravestonestories.com/fallen-firefighters-alexandria)

## David Heiby

INDEPENDENT HISTORIAN • FOUNDER, GRAVESTONE STORIES

As Superintendent of the Presbyterian Cemetery & Columbarium for more than a decade and founder of Gravestone Stories, David Heiby has documented Alexandria's historic burial grounds — including the more than 35,000 burials of the Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex. He has led tours there since 2012, including firefighting history tours for groups.

### ROLES & RECOGNITION

- ◆ Superintendent, Presbyterian Cemetery & Columbarium
- ◆ Treasurer, Virginia Trust for Historic Preservation (Lee-Fendall House Museum)
- ◆ Treasurer, Alexandria Historical Society
- ◆ Member, Alexandria America 250 Committee
- ◆ History Columnist, *Alexandria Gazette Packet*
- ◆ Research cited by the Library of Virginia, Wikipedia & the City of Alexandria
- ◆ Featured in AARP • Emerging Civil War • *Alexandria Times*

Sources: *Alexandria Gazette*; Old Presbyterian Meeting House roster; cemetery burial records; ground-penetrating radar surveys; research by Catherine Weinraub. Photographs: Gravestone Stories. [dave@gravestonestories.com](mailto:dave@gravestonestories.com)

A GRAVESTONE STORIES RESEARCH GUIDE

# Where Alexandria's Firefighters Rest

*The fallen, the injured of 1855, and the men who built the city's fire service — and the burial grounds that hold them*



Names of the seven killed in 1855, on the Firefighters' Memorial, Ivy Hill Cemetery

|                                 |                                   |                        |                               |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 29<br>FIREFIGHTERS<br>& LEADERS | 12<br>DIED IN THE<br>LINE OF DUTY | 8<br>BURIAL<br>GROUNDS | 1774<br>FIRST FIRE<br>COMPANY |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|

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THE WILKES STREET CEMETERY COMPLEX

## Firefighters by Burial Ground

From the Friendship Fire Company of 1774 to the professional department of today, Alexandria’s firefighters are buried across the city. Most rest in the Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex, thirteen burial grounds side by side in Old Town.

- 55 Killed in 1855 fire
- + Other line of duty
- I Injured in 1855
- Members & leaders

### Presbyterian Cemetery

600 Hamilton Avenue

- 55 **G. David Appich** 1833–1855  
Confectioner; at 21, the youngest of the seven killed in 1855. *Sec. 43:99, obelisk.*
- I **John Dogan** dates unknown  
African American laborer of Royal Street, lamed for life in 1855; carried the engraved nozzle in the 1856 procession. *Presumed family plot; location uncertain.*
- I **Charles James Wise** 1830–1898  
Hydraulion and Relief companies; face cut in 1855; served on the monument committee. *Sec. 44:132, obelisk.*
- Col. Dennis Ramsay** 1756–1810  
Mayor and Sun Fire Company member; pallbearer at George Washington’s funeral. *Sec. 42:72.*
- Thomas Vowell** 1769–1845  
Merchant, Presbyterian elder, and Treasurer of the Relief Fire Company. *Sec. 42:61.*
- Anthony Charles Cazenove** 1775–1852  
Star Fire Company; escorted Lafayette to Washington’s tomb in 1824. *Sec. 43:107.*
- Capt. Charles McKnight** 1774–1853  
Innkeeper, captain of the Independent Blues, and Friendship Fire Company member. *Sec. 41:20.*
- Robert B. Jamieson** 1796–1862  
Flour merchant, Presbyterian elder, and Sun Fire Company member. *Sec. 44:131.*
- Robert F. Prettyman** 1821–1892  
Coachmaker who built the hose-reel carriage Friendship bought in 1858, now at the Friendship Firehouse Museum. *Sec. 44:143.*
- E. E. Downham** 1839–1921  
Mayor, 1890–1894; President of the Friendship Fire Company, 1903. *Sec. 25:22, obelisk.*
- Edward L. Daingerfield** 1847–1925  
Banker, benefactor, and Columbia Fire Company member. *Sec. 25:20.*

### Methodist Protestant Cemetery

1500 Wilkes Street

- 55 **William Evans** 1827–1855  
English-born plumber, killed in the wall collapse. Obelisk.
- 55 **James W. Keene** 1832–1855  
Woodseller and Friendship Fire Company member. The *Gazette* reported him “borne to his grave in the cemetery of the Methodist Protestant Church.” *Gravesite unknown.*
- 55 **George O. Plain** 1809–1855  
Painter, 46 years old when he was killed.
- 55 **Robert I. Taylor** 1814–1855  
Pavior who helped lay Alexandria’s streets; his Red Men’s tribe erected his carved stone.
- + **Charles Glasscock** died 1852  
Friendship Fire Company. Run over on June 28, 1852, he died two days later — Alexandria’s first line-of-duty death. Grave rediscovered by ground-penetrating radar, 2024. *Plot E:60.*
- I **David Williams** 1820–1899  
Cabinetmaker; face cut in 1855. Later worked for the Southern Railroad. *Lot E232.*
- Joseph H. Young** 1828–1893  
Civil War veteran; in 1866, Alexandria’s first paid fire department employee, engineer of its steam engine.

### Christ Church Episcopal Cemetery

1501 Wilkes Street

- 55 **J. Carson Greene** died 1855  
Grandson of Dr. James Carson. His long-lost burial beside his family was confirmed by ground-penetrating radar in 2025.
- Dr. James Carson** 1773–1855  
Merchant, War of 1812 veteran, and Friendship Fire Company member from 1810; escorted Lafayette in 1824.
- George Deneale** 1766–1818  
Attorney, Christ Church senior warden, and Sun Fire Company member; directed the arrangements for Washington’s funeral.
- William Herbert** 1743–1818  
Irish-born Treasurer of the Sun Fire Company and twice mayor of Alexandria. *Plot 62:1.*

### St. Paul’s Cemetery

601 Hamilton Avenue

- Capt. Benjamin Thomas** 1811–1856  
Welsh-born merchant and fire company patron whose portrait appears on the Prettyman carriage. *Sec. 4, Lot 235.*

**See Them Today**

On view at the Friendship Firehouse Museum, 107 South Alfred Street: the 1851 John Rogers suction pumper whose wheels struck Charles Glasscock, and Prettyman’s 1858 hose-reel carriage, with portraits of Thomas and James Keene.

### Bethel Cemetery

1300 Wilkes Street

- + **George S. Whalen** 1908–1925  
The “boy fireman.” He fell into a ship’s hull on his first fire call, at the Jones Point Shipyard on August 2, 1924, and died six months later at 16 — the youngest Alexandria firefighter to die in the line of duty. *Plot G30.*
- + **Chief George W. Petty** 1851–1911  
Fire Chief, stricken by a heart attack answering a fire on South Henry Street on April 15, 1911. His stone reads 1841; records support 1851.



Chief Petty’s stone, Bethel Cemetery.

### Washington Street United Methodist Cemetery

a.k.a. Union Cemetery · 1400 Wilkes Street

- I **William Henry Lambert** 1829–1907  
Banker at Citizens’ National Bank and Masonic leader; legs bruised in 1855. *SE quadrant.*

**Beyond the Complex**

**St. Mary’s Catholic Cemetery**  
1001 South Royal Street

- 55 **John Roach** 1823–1855  
The only Catholic among the seven; pulled out alive, he died at home.
- + **Leo E. Moore** 1920–1958  
Died of a heart attack fighting the Truman Boyles Mattress Factory fire, 315 N. Fairfax Street.

**Ivy Hill Cemetery**  
2823 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22302

- + **Joshua Weissman** died 2012  
Died of injuries suffered at an automobile fire on Interstate 395. *Sec. 6, Circle of Honor, Lot 15, Site 4.*

**The Firefighters’ Memorial** cornerstone 1856  
Obelisk honoring the seven of 1855, with the Friendship Fountain nearby. Site of the annual Fire Prevention Week service.

All Wilkes Street addresses are in Alexandria, VA 22314. The burial grounds are active or historic cemeteries; please respect posted hours and rules.