About

Gravestone Stories

ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

Gravestone Stories is a public history project dedicated to researching, preserving, and sharing the stories of those buried within Alexandria's thirteen historic cemeteries — particularly those who have been forgotten or overlooked by mainstream history.

WHAT WE OFFER

- **400+ Burial Biographies** — original primary source research on individual lives
- **69 Family Trees & a Name Index** — more than 1,000 people, searchable across the cemeteries
- **80+ Research Articles** — in-depth historical essays and discoveries
- **Expert-Led Walking Tours** — one-to-two-hour tours rated 5.0 on TripAdvisor & Viator
- **Living History Programs** — first-person portrayals and special events

RECOGNITION

- **TripAdvisor** #1 Cultural Experience in Alexandria
- **Cited by** Library of Virginia · Wikipedia · City of Alexandria
- **Featured in** AARP · Emerging Civil War · Alexandria Times · The Zebra
- **Rated 5.0** TripAdvisor, Viator & Google — Recommended 100%

VISITOR INFORMATION

- **Location** Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex · 1475-1501 Wilkes St, Alexandria VA 22314
- **Hours** Open daily, dawn to dusk
- **Parking** Street parking is available in the complex

gravestonestories.com

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What You'll

Experience

A TWO-HOUR WALKING TOUR

This is not a ghost tour — it is a rigorous, research-driven walking experience through Alexandria's Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex. From Enslavement to Justice brings twenty-two first-person historical voices to life among the graves and grounds where that history unfolded.

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE

- **Format** 22 first-person voices — laminated cards read aloud at each stop
- **Duration** About two hours
- **Location** Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex, Alexandria, VA
- **Group Size** Private groups of 22-25 participants — not sold as individual tickets
- **Themes** Enslavement · Resistance · Military · Education · Civil Rights · Injustice

IDEAL FOR

- Heritage organizations and reunion groups
- Faith communities and dismantling racism initiatives
- Schools, colleges, and universities
- Educational and historically curious audiences
- Team building with meaningful storytelling
- Visitors seeking authentic Alexandria history

SCHEDULE THIS TOUR

gravestonestories.com/ private-group-tour-request

Explore all our walking tours at gravestonestories.com or on TripAdvisor and Viator

A Gravestone Stories Walking Tour

From Enslavement *to* Justice

HOW AFRICAN AMERICANS FORCED CHANGE IN ALEXANDRIA

22 First-Person Historical Voices

13 Historic Cemeteries · One Walkable Landscape

Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex

Alexandria, Virginia

Two Hours · Private Groups of 22-25

Thirteen cemeteries. Thirty-five thousand stories. More forgotten American history than anywhere else — finally told in the voices of those who lived it.

"This is not your typical history tour… a deep dive into the lives and untold stories of the people who shaped our city and nation."

— Visit Alexandria Sales Team

Gravestone Stories

gravestonestories.com

Rated 5.0 | TripAdvisor, Viator & Google

A History Buried

in Plain Sight

Within a single square mile in Alexandria lies a landscape holding more than 35,000 stories — and among them, the untold stories of African Americans who endured enslavement, fought for freedom, served in uniform, built institutions, and ultimately forced this city to change.

BORN FROM CRISIS

After the 1803 Yellow Fever epidemic, Alexandria's churches established new burial grounds just outside city limits on Spring Garden Farm in Fairfax County. Annexed into the city in 1915, these thirteen cemeteries now preserve more than two centuries of American history.

WHY THIS TOUR EXISTS

African American history is not a footnote to Alexandria's story — it is the story. These are people who shaped history without receiving credit for it — and this tour restores their voices.

Commissioned by Old Presbyterian Meeting House's Dismantling Racism Team in 2026, this tour was built from court records, pension files, family papers, archaeological reports, and the published work of fellow historians — researched and written by independent historian David Heiby.

AN INNOVATIVE FORMAT

At each stop, participants receive laminated cards and read the words of a historical figure in the first person — their own voice, reconstructed from the historical record. The experience moves from grave to grave, building a cumulative portrait of a community that endured, resisted, and transformed.

CEMETERIES ON THIS TOUR

Among the cemeteries visited on this tour:

Christ Church Episcopal · Methodist Protestant · Presbyterian · Trinity Methodist · Union · Penny Hill · Bethel

gravestonestories.com

Voices of the

Tour

Twenty-two original voices — each an individual composition built from court records, pension files, newspaper accounts, and family papers. Many of these individuals had never been written about before this tour.

ENSLAVEMENT

- **Caroline Branham** — Enslaved chambermaid — the first to know Washington was dying
- **Mary & Emily Edmonson** — Pearl fugitives — captured, sold to New Orleans, and redeemed
- **Paul Jennings** — Pearl escape organizer — White House servant, self-freed author
- **Gustavus Gibson** — Freedman and Market House keeper — bought his own freedom, then began freeing his children
- **Gazaway Bugg Lamar** — Confederate banker — father of the Wanderer's financier

MILITARY SERVICE

- **Shadrach Murphy** — 23rd USCT — his death sparked the petition that integrated a U.S. military cemetery
- **Tobias Trout** — Fifer, 31st USCT — refused an unjust order
- **Alfred Whiting** — Sergeant, 54th Massachusetts Infantry — survived everything, then didn't
- **Joseph Harris & John Pipsico** — Revolutionary War veterans who fought before the nation decided what to do with them

EDUCATION

- **Laura Missouri Dorsey** — Teacher — forty-nine years, one day missed
- **Rosier Lyles** — Teacher — forty-six years, one classroom at a time
- **Gladys Quander Tancil** — Mount Vernon's first African American female guide

CIVIL RIGHTS & POLITICS

- **George Lewis Seaton** — Legislator — "I built Alexandria, and Alexandria lost me"
- **Fields Cook** — Minister, author, and civil rights leader
- **Julius Campbell** — T.C. Williams co-captain — the true story behind *Remember the Titans*

INJUSTICE

- **Joseph McCoy** — Lynched on false accusations, April 23, 1897
- **Benjamin Thomas** — Lynched August 8, 1899 — sixteen years old

22 voices · 13 cemeteries · one walkable landscape

Your Guide

David Heiby

David Heiby is not a scripted guide — he is the researcher who found these stories. As Superintendent of the Presbyterian Cemetery & Columbarium for more than a decade and founder of Gravestone Stories, he has documented more than 35,000 burials and produced more than 400 individual biographical profiles.

The first-person voices on this tour are his original compositions — drawn from court records, pension files, newspaper accounts, and family papers. Many of these individuals had never been written about before. David found them, and gave them back their voices.

ROLES & RECOGNITION

- Superintendent, Presbyterian Cemetery & Columbarium
- Founder, Gravestone Stories
- Treasurer, Virginia Trust for Historic Preservation
- Treasurer, Alexandria Historical Society
- Appointed to the Alexandria Archaeological Commission (2026)
- DAR Excellence in Community Service Award (2026)
- Cited: Library of Virginia · Wikipedia · City of Alexandria
- Featured: AARP · Emerging Civil War · Alexandria Times · The Zebra
- Rated 5.0 — TripAdvisor, Viator & Google — Recommended 100%

BRING THIS TOUR TO YOUR GROUP

From Enslavement to Justice is available as a private group experience tailored to your audience and schedule — for heritage organizations, faith communities, educational groups, and conference programs. Tours are offered for groups of 22 to 25 participants and can be customized for your specific goals.

Schedule a Private Group Tour

gravestonestories.com/private-group-tour-request

gravestonestories.com