

PROCLAMATION

6
5-27-03

WHEREAS, during the Civil War, the City of Alexandria became a haven for thousands of enslaved African Americans seeking their freedom; and

WHEREAS, these peoples were called at the time "Contrabands," and eventually they became known as "Freedmen"; and

WHEREAS, life as a Freedman in Alexandria was marked with deprivations, and many children and adults succumbed to disease and malnourishment; and

WHEREAS, some Freedmen served as United States soldiers and sailors; and

WHEREAS, a Freedmen's Cemetery was established by the Union Army on South Washington Street across from the Catholic Cemetery known as St. Mary's; and

WHEREAS, it is the oldest known African American cemetery in Alexandria; and

WHEREAS, records dating from the 1860's reveal there were 1,879 burials in Freedmen's Cemetery; and

WHEREAS, today the land is the site of a gas station, office building, parking lot, and intersection, and there is no visible sign of the Freedmen's Cemetery's existence on the property nor indication of the exact boundaries; and

WHEREAS, Alexandria recognizes that cemeteries are an important part of American history and a priceless cultural legacy for future generations; and

WHEREAS, the City wishes to protect and preserve this burial ground and to memorialize the deceased Freedmen and to raise awareness of the site's vital importance to Alexandria's history before it is lost permanently to further development of the land; and

WHEREAS, the City of Alexandria will work towards designation of the Freedmen's Cemetery as both a Virginia Landmarks Register property and a National Register of Historic Places property; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting for the City of Alexandria to proclaim each May 25 through May 31, "Week of Remembrance of the Freedmen's Cemetery" in memory of the African American slaves who sought haven in our City, and of their descendants, and of those who seek freedom from injustice throughout the world;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, KERRY J. DONLEY, Mayor of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, and on behalf of the Alexandria City Council, do hereby proclaim May 25 through May 31, 2003, as:

"WEEK OF REMEMBRANCE OF THE FREEDMEN'S CEMETERY"

in the City of Alexandria.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City of Alexandria to be affixed this 27th day of May 2003.

KERRY J. DONLEY **MAYOR**
On behalf of the City Council
of Alexandria, Virginia

ATTEST:

Beverly I. Jett, CMC City Clerk