

Alexandria Gazette Packet

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Memorial Cemetery Dedicated

The City of Alexandria today dedicated a memorial to the hundreds of African Americans who died in the city during the American Civil War, many of whom were refugees who had escaped bondage in Maryland and Virginia, seeking protection behind Union Army lines. Freed African Americans also sought protection under the Union soldiers in Alexandria. In the early years of the Civil War, slaves who had escaped to freedom to areas under Union control were called contrabands, after the term “contraband of war,” which protected their refugee status and prevented their return to the Confederacy.

The cemetery was established by Union military authorities in 1864 in response to an overwhelming health and humanitarian crisis in Alexandria. Ulti-

mately, more than 1,700 freed and formerly enslaved African Americans were buried in the cemetery during and just after the war, more than half of whom were women and children. The cemetery fell into disrepair and nearly faded from memory before being restored and rededicated in 2007. Now, in the sesquicentennial of both the cemetery and the Civil War, a new memorial honors this site and those who were

laid to rest there. Their descendants now live in nearly all 50 states.

The memorial features artist **Mario Chiodo's** sculpture “**The Path of Thorns and Roses**,” an allegorical depiction of the struggle for freedom; the memorial's bas-reliefs depicting the flight to freedom and contraband education were created by local sculptor **Joanna Blake**.

