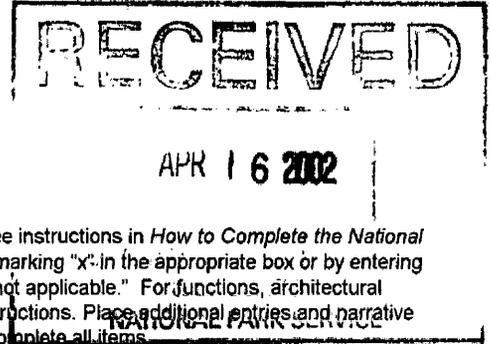


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Cemetery Street

N/A  not for publication

city or town Alexandria

N/A  vicinity

state Tennessee code TN county DeKalb code 041 zip code 37012

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Herbert L. Hays

4/15/01

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
  - See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register.
  - See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Edson H. Beall

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5/30/02

Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District  
Name of Property

DeKalb County, Tennessee  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

| Contributing | Noncontributing |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1            |                 | buildings  |
| 2            |                 | sites      |
| 2            |                 | structures |
| 0            |                 | objects    |
| 5            | 0               | Total      |

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Rural African-American Churches in TN MPS

**Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: Religious Facility

FUNERARY: Cemetery

SOCIAL: Lodge/Community Center

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

FUNERARY: Cemetery

SOCIAL: Community Center

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Folk Vernacular

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Limestone; Concrete; Wood

walls Limestone; Concrete

roof Tin

other METAL; GLASS

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheets.

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** moved from its original location.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: African-American  
SOCIAL HISTORY  
SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

**Period of Significance**

1836-1951

**Significant Dates**

1836, 1869, 1931

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

- Previous documentation on file (NPS):** N/A
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
  - previously listed in the National Register
  - Previously determined eligible by the National Register
  - designated a National Historic Landmark
  - recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
  - recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State Agency
  - Federal Agency
  - Local Government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: MTSU Center for Historic Preservation

Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District  
Name of Property

DeKalb County, Tennessee  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** Approximately 3.8 acres Alexandria 318 SE

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 16 587440 3992640  
Zone Easting Northing

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carroll Van West, Margaret Nickell, Traci Nichols  
organization Center for Historic Preservation date August 3, 2001  
street & number Middle Tennessee State University—Box 80 telephone 615-898-2947  
city or town Murfreesboro state TN zip code 37132

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

## Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Alexandria  
street & number City Hall telephone 615-529-2840  
city or town Alexandria state TN zip code 37012

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District  
DeKalb County, Tennessee**Description**

The Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District is located at the end of Cemetery Street in Alexandria, Tennessee in DeKalb County. Alexandria, Tennessee is a small town (population 730 in 2000 census) placed in a rural setting surrounded by rough hills. The two cemeteries are located behind an extant historic African-American church on the apex of the hills overlooking the town square. The cemeteries are of rough rectangular shape surrounded on three sides by a historic limestone wall, which is in disrepair in several points primarily in the African-American cemetery. The limestone wall also divides the area between the church and the cemeteries and the African-American cemetery from the white cemetery. On an open space located to east of Cemetery Road, and thus east of the East View Cemetery and the Seay Chapel Methodist Church, is a metal water tower, constructed circa 1965.

## 1. Seay Chapel United Methodist Church (1931, c. 1962)

The present Seay Chapel United Methodist Church was built in 1931. It replaced the original chapel built in 1868. It is of simple vernacular style. The chapel is a one-story rectangular building resting on a limestone cut stone foundation with a cement block addition in back. The addition was added in approximately 1962 during a remodeling that also added windows, red carpet, red décor to the interior as well as installed gas heat. The addition formed a slight L-shape in the back, and it served as a kitchen and fellowship hall. The original church of 1868 was located on the area where the fellowship hall now stands. There was also a building used as a school and a lodge located south of the church near the entrance to the African-American cemetery. The only remains from the school/lodge are the foundation stones. This site is unassessed at the time of nomination.

The church building has a tin-plate gable roof with wide eaves. The entrance is located at the gable end. The facade of the building faces north. There is a concrete sidewalk leading up to the church and two concrete steps up into the church at the north facade. The exterior wall is crab orchard limestone veneer and measures 34 feet in width. It has a double entrance door with glass panes over the top. There is a window flanking each side of the doorway with a brick triangle above and a brick rectangle beneath the window. Located above the doorway is a dedication sign, which reads:

Methodist  
Church  
Erected March 1931  
J. Aburnley Pastor

There is a second illegible sign under the main sign with the last two lines reading "Methodist Church".

The west elevation of the building reveals an exterior wall that measures 45 feet. There are three symmetrical clear glass windows with wood frames. All windows are one-over-one, double-hung, wood sash. There are

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Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District  
DeKalb County, Tennessee

three rectangular windows on the east and west walls, two rectangular windows on the north facade, and a two-pane window over the double doorway. They also have the brick triangle above and the brick rectangle beneath the window. The window openings are historic. According to interviews conducted with four elderly members of the congregation who still live in Alexandria, with the interviews conducted by Ria Baker of Alexandria, the brick portions exist because the congregation in 1931 had its contractor to build the walls so to frame lancet windows, like those in the first church. However, the congregation found that such replacement lancet windows were too expensive in that depression year of 1931. Therefore, members bricked in the lancet window opening so that a standard double-hung sash window could be installed. [One elderly congregation member asserted that the congregation lacked the money for any type of glass window in 1931 and opted instead to leave the window openings without any window until after World War II.] In 1962, when the kitchen was added to the building, the congregation also had the contractor replace the original, double-hung, sash windows with new double-hung sash windows. The 1962 changes occurred because the congregation had the money to update and improve the building to more modern standards of comfort and convenience. The tin roof overhangs the west elevation. There is a missing vent under the third window that reveals heavy timber trunks used to support the foundation, timbers which possibly are from the previous church foundation

The east elevation rests on a cement/stone foundation. The exterior wall measures 45 feet. There are three symmetrical clear glass windows with wood frames. They also have the brick triangle above and the brick rectangle beneath the window. The tin roof overhangs the east elevation. There is a brick and stone chimney emerging through the tin roof at the mid-point of the building.

The rear, or south, elevation of the church measures 34 feet. An addition was made, c. 1962, to the rear of the church to be used as a fellowship hall and kitchen. It is constructed of cement block with a shed tin roof. The addition has two double clear glass windows with metal frames on the south elevation and one clear glass window with a metal frame and wooden door with an attached black screen door on the east elevation. There is a chimney off center to the left.

The interior of the church is primarily a one-room sanctuary with a small pastor's office located off the raised platform at the south end of the building. The floor is hardwood with one plank up. The walls are plaster, with a prominent pine wainscoting, installed c. 1962. The ceiling is tin-plated with wood crown molding around the top of the walls. There are three globe lights suspended from the ceiling in the center of the room lengthwise from the front (north) to rear (south) of the sanctuary. On the south side of the sanctuary is a raised one-step platform/altar with a wooden rail, which opens into a communion tray. The rail is dated 1931 while the communion tray was installed c. 1962. A small pastor's office is located off to the west of the platform/altar; it has a rectangular window on the west wall and hardwood floors. The room has a doorway to the fellowship hall (new addition). The concrete block addition held a kitchen and a fellowship hall. Two of the original wooden pews are still in the church; most other church furniture was removed when the congregation disbanded in 1998.

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Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District  
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Due to its date of construction, its historical relationship to the cemeteries, and its general integrity of materials, design, workmanship, association, and setting, the church building is a contributing building. (C)

2. A men's privy of board and batten construction, c. 1931, is located behind the church. It is of wood construction and of square design. Posts elevate the metal shed roofs. (C)

3. A woman's privy, built in 1931 of board and batten construction, with a metal shed roof, is located behind the church building. (C)

4. Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans (c. 1869)

The Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans is located off the southeast corner of the Seay Chapel United Methodist Church and to the south of the East View Cemetery. The cemetery has a rough rectangular shape measuring approximately 288 feet on its south side, 177 feet on its west side, 368 feet on its north side, and 300 feet on its east side. An extant dry-stacked limestone wall surrounds the cemetery on the north, south, and west sides and divides it from the East View White Cemetery on the northern side. The limestone wall is in disrepair on the south and west sides of the cemetery. Barbed wire fencing bounds the east side of the cemetery.

The cemetery consists of approximately 500 fieldstone or depression marked gravesites and 56 graves with extant grave markers, mostly erected between 1880 and 1950. Out of the 56 marked graves, the earliest death date is 1881, and the latest is 1989. The cemetery was most active between 1900 and 1950, when 27 of the grave markers were placed into it. Of the 56 extant markers, 38 were erected before 1950.

The lettering fonts used on the marked graves consisted of varied styles. The primary three used were a form of Times New Roman, Block, and Italics. The Italic font was used mainly on the epitaph section of the stone. The stones could use either one or a combination of the three main styles. There were 47 specimens, which were engraved; three had raised lettering, and six had a combination of the two. Of these six, three were hand carved, not professional engraved.

Of the 56 markers, 23 were granite, 14 were limestone, and 18 marble. 33 had no discernable finish, while 21 were partially finished and two stones were entirely finished. In their style, the cemetery had three cross gabled monuments, one double tablet gravestone, 14 flush gravestones, 1 slant marker, 1 tablet with a base, 9 upright gravestones, and 2 upright with no base gravestones.

Most markers reflect prevailing Victorian era mortuary art. Symbols include a four-leaf clover (Emma Philips, 1897); an anchor (Rev. Thomas Belcher, 1918); military cross (Hurshel Williams, 1937); varied flowers (Carrie Moore, 1910); lily (Dock Burks, 1909); drooping flower (A. G. Porter, 1900); clasped hands (Annie

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Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District  
DeKalb County, Tennessee

Dowell, 1901); eight pointed star (Mon Eddings, 1924); lamb (infant Rollins, no date); Holy Bible (R. E. Floyd, 1909); hand pointing skyward (Fannie Dowell, 1890); and an urn (Chas. V. Gwynn, 1924).

Intermingled among the graves are young growth cedar trees, thorny vines, and historic size maple and oak trees, probably planted as part of the initial landscaping of the cemetery. Vinca minor is heavily prevalent with its deep green leaves and small purple blooms. According to oral history tradition, African Americans often used this plant to mark and decorate their cemeteries. But vinca minor may also be found in other rural cemeteries because, compared to grass, it needs relatively little maintenance. About ten family plots are marked by a rectangular placement of stones. The oldest area of internment appears to be located in the northeasterly corner where an intense number of fieldstone marked graves exist. (C)

## 5. East View (White) Cemetery (1836)

The East View (White) Cemetery is located off the eastern side of the Seay Chapel United Methodist Church on the apex of the rough hills overlooking the town square of Alexandria. The cemetery has a rough rectangular shape measuring 463 feet on its north side, 362 feet on its east side, 458 feet on its south side, and 318 feet on its west side. An extant dry-stack limestone wall surrounds the cemetery on its west and south side. Barbed wire fencing bounds the east and north sides of the cemetery. An iron gate with stone posts, c. 1920, denotes the entrance to the cemetery. A raised section outlined with cut stone is located in the center of the north, south, and west side of the cemetery possibly denoting a cross if viewing aerially. (C)

There are approximately 665 burials at this cemetery, with a total of 558 grave markers. This includes concrete markers commonly used to represent paupers' burials. The graves are arranged in north to south rows. The center of the cemetery appears to be the oldest section of the cemetery. This section also contains historically mature magnolia trees. Scattered about the cemetery are mature oak, maple, and cypress trees, evidence of the original landscaping of the cemetery. The gravestones and markers are in good condition for a cemetery of this age and represent a wide range of Victorian era cemetery artistic style.

Judging by death dates on extant markers, the earliest burial took place in 1836; the vast majority of burials took place before 1950. Only 99 burials have taken place in the cemetery since 1950. The highest concentration of burials occurred between 1870 and 1920 when 236 burials took place. There were three primary forms of fonts used on the grave markers: Times New Roman, Block, and Italics. These were used independently and sometimes in combination, but Times New Roman was the most prevalent. The Italics were located usually on the area of the stones that contained the epitaph and could be called a script form of letter. Two exceptions were a footstone, with the letters BTW engraved using a fancy script or calligraphy form of writing, and a huge limestone marker (MARTIN, MOTHER FATHER, no dates) that was hand carved using a stencil-like form. Of the 558 markers, 387 were engraved lettering only, 88 had raised lettering only, 95 contained both engraved and raised, two had engraved and raised rounded lettering, and 11 had raised rounded lettering. One stone was hand carved.

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DeKalb County, Tennessee

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Most of the markers were granite (206), and then in order came marble (221), limestone (183), bronze colored metal (2), and ceramic (1). There were approximately 96 concrete blocks denoting pauper burials in the cemetery.

The marker styles varied considerably: 191 flush monuments, 120 upright monuments, 119 tablets, 50 tablets with base, 26 slant monuments, 19 obelisks, and 11 upright monuments with no base were the top categories. The marker symbols varied considerably as well, although Victorian era influences predominated. Some of the most prominent stones were:

Three interlocking rings (associated with the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows)  
Masonic symbol  
Bible  
Cross in a crown  
Russian cross  
Dove  
Drooping flower  
Hand pointing to the sky  
Clasped hands  
Lamb  
Palm/weeping willow tree  
Child sleeping  
Drapery

One Mexican War veteran, 12 Civil War veterans, three World War I veterans, and five World War II veterans also are buried in the cemetery. Two limestone benches and a limestone couch are in the cemetery so visitors would have a place to sit and rest.

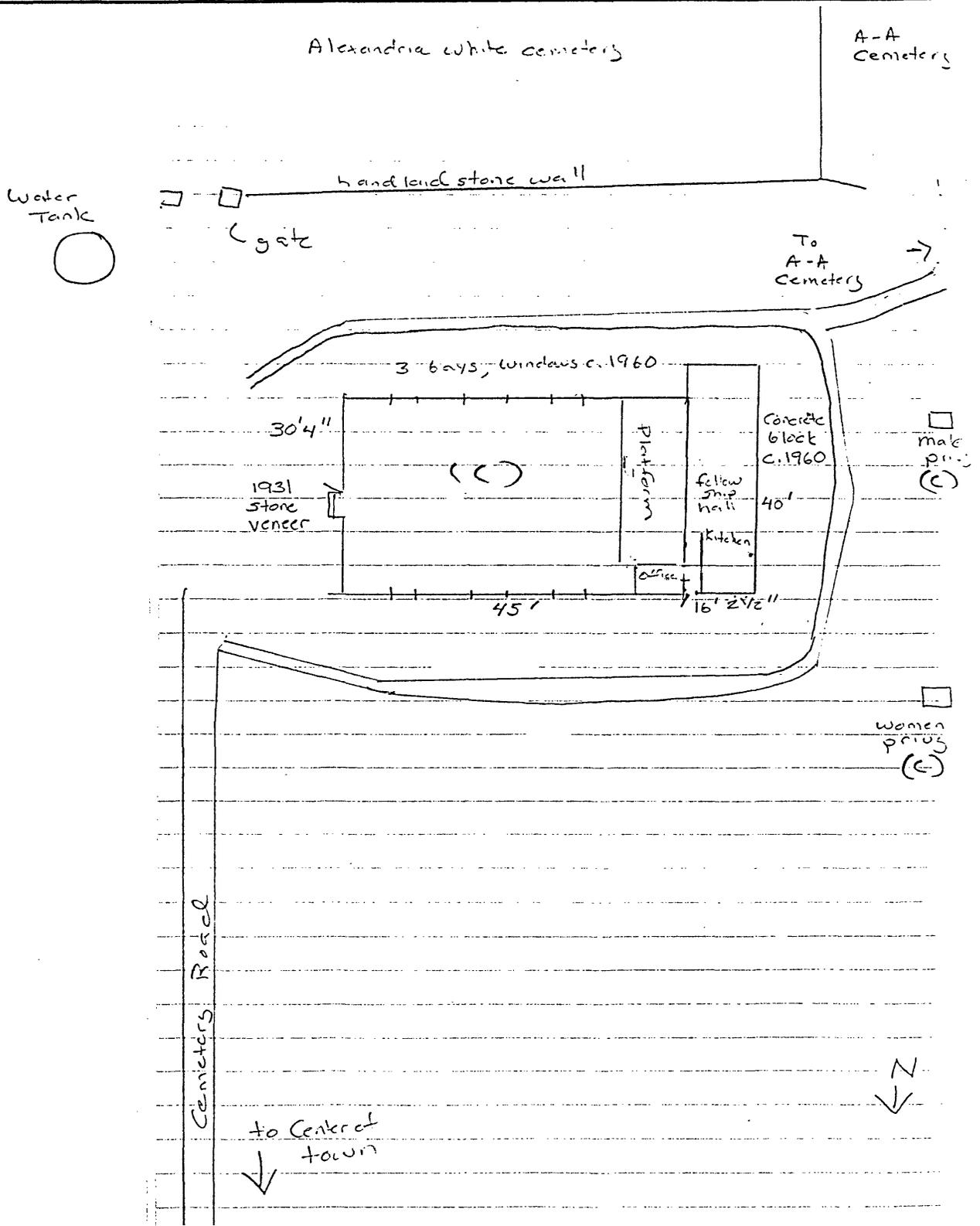
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Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District  
DeKalb County, Tennessee

Sketch map



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Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District  
DeKalb County, Tennessee

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## Statement of Significance

The Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District--comprised of the East View (White) Cemetery, the Alexandria African-American Cemetery, and the Seay Chapel African-American United Methodist Church--in DeKalb County, Tennessee, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its local significance in the areas of African-American ethnic heritage, the mid-nineteenth century settlement patterns of Alexandria, and social history.

The earliest extant marker in the two cemeteries dates to 1836 and is located in East View Cemetery, which is on a prominent hill directly north of the small business district of Alexandria. While a picturesque location, the cemetery occupies largely useless land for cultivation; there are limestone rock outcroppings and thin soil on the hilltop. Thus, it was a logical location for the cemetery; close enough to local churches and residences so people could easily attend the graves of their families and loved ones, yet on land that had little to no value for cultivation.

East View Cemetery remained the primary white city cemetery until c. 1960 and still has periodic burials. Most of the extant grave markers, and all of the large mature trees and the series of walks and driveways, however, date before 1950, with the greatest concentration of burials coming between 1880 and 1930. This period also represents the height of the local agricultural-based economy and the time when Alexandria was a prominent town, capable of supporting numerous churches, stores, banks, businesses, and rivaling in importance the DeKalb County seat of Smithville. After the Great Depression, the economic significance of Alexandria never recovered; residents left for urban areas; and business traffic—due to better roads and the wide adoption of the automobile—shifted to the towns of Lebanon (to the west) and Smithville (to the east). The comparative paucity of grave markers from 1940 to 1960 documents this shift in the town's fortunes and settlement history. (1)

East View Cemetery also records the military involvement of local whites in the Civil War, World I, and World II. The greatest concentration of military veterans is Civil War veterans. DeKalb County was largely evenly divided between the two sides, and Alexandria was home base to a large group of Unionists, headed by former state representative William Brickle Stokes (1814-1897). Stokes was a colonel for the 5<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Calvary, U.S.A. There are more identified Federal soldiers buried in the cemetery than Confederates. Several were stationed in Alexandria in April 1865 to combat the incessant guerilla warfare in the vicinity, although it is unknown if any of the burials represent soldiers who died in combat in the Alexandria area.

Since many of East View's grave markers date to the late Victorian era, the cemetery also is a valuable record of the acceptance of Victorian values by a rural southern community, judging from the number of graves that exhibit statuary and/or carving with religious images and iconography. The shrouded grave marker of Zachery T. Davis (1874) is a classic Victorian expression of grief over the death of a loved one. The Delhah Lawrence Wood marker (1880) shows an extended hand holding an open Bible skyward, reflecting the belief

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that the bible provided the fundamental directions to heaven. The James J. Baird marker (1880), with its scales of justice symbol, speaks to the justice of God while the Parillee A. Stokes marker from that same year has a finger pointing skyward, expressing the faith that the loved one was a Christian who had gone to heaven. The Victorian era tendency to turn grave markers into monuments praising the virtues and accomplishments of the deceased is documented through several stones, such as the Eliza Whaley Jones marker (1880) that is an urn supported by capital. The use of statues of lambs to express the loss of a child is found in both the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century; good examples are the Willie C. Eason marker (1880), Infant Lafavor (1935), and Infant Botts (1947). Pillow stones are not found in large numbers of Tennessee cemeteries, but this unique marker, suggesting that the loved one is at rest, is documented in the Bethell marker 1920). Another rare feature, especially for a rural small town cemetery, is the presence of cemetery benches and a stone couch (c. 1900) as places of rest and reflection for the living as they walked to and visited the cemetery.

When white antebellum slave owners buried their slaves before the Civil War, it is not known if one location was selected or if the slaves were buried in unmarked spots in the East Lawn Cemetery or within family cemeteries. A local tradition is that town slave owners buried their dead slaves "on the other side" of the limestone fence that lined East Lawn Cemetery. This type of proximity has been earlier documented at such family cemeteries as the one at Woodard Hall Farm in Robertson County (NR 4/28/1995).

Local government records, however, make it clear the Alexandria Cemetery for African-Americans and the later Seay Chapel United Methodist Church began their histories in May 15, 1869, when town officials deeded a plot of three acres for a cemetery, church, and school to a group of African-American trustees and the Methodist church (DeKalb County Deed Book J, 1869, p. 517). There is no mention in this deed transaction of an earlier existing cemetery. More likely, the town deeded this largely worthless property of limestone outcroppings and cedar breaks because recently approved state laws commanded counties to create public schools for whites and blacks. (Obviously, by being listed in the deed, the Methodist church was sponsoring both the school and church as a mission). Yet, the transaction is clear. The graveyard was the primary objective; the school and church was to receive the remainder of the plot. Over 130 years later, the cemetery is the only extant active property of the three. The African-American cemetery is not known to have ever had a proper name. It is known to this day as the "cemetery on the hill," according to an interview with Carrie Helen Smith of the black community, and the only place that a black person could be buried in Alexandria between Reconstruction through the era of Jim Crow segregation. This piece of property is the oldest known African-American property in Alexandria.

Today, the cemetery at first glance has little to say about the African-American community that developed around these three institutions in the Reconstruction era and the late nineteenth century. There are only 56 extant grave markers. Yet, the large number of other graves within the cemetery—an estimated 500—testifies to the size of the black community in Alexandria in the years after the Civil War and before World War II. Most of the graves originally had either no grave markers, fieldstone markers, or merely wooden

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ones, which rotted away, especially between 1980 and 2000 when the cemetery was not maintained. The patterns documented in the survey indicate that the Alexandria African-American cemetery was like other black cemeteries documented in small towns across Middle Tennessee. Families tend to be grouped together, often with a rough rectangle of stones marking a family plot. There was only one extant example of a cast-iron fence marking a family plot. Two gravestones were of veterans: one World War I veteran, Hurshel Williams (died 1937) and World War II veteran, Henry Clay Floyd (1914-1948). The range of cemetery artwork, from the clasped hands of Annie Dowell (1909) to the hand pointing skyward of Fannie Dowell (1890), and to the four-leaf clover of Emma Philips (1897), shows how African-Americans embraced and adapted Victorian era symbolism to their final place of rest. That most of the burials had either small triangle-shaped fieldstone markers, or now missing wooden markers, is a testament to the general poverty of the black community during the years of the cemetery's greatest use.

Standing at the entrance to the cemetery was the town's black school and Seay Chapel Methodist Church. Judging from one surviving photograph of a class of students standing in front of the school/church with their teacher, the building was a frame, weatherboard one-story building. It was the only school in the town for African-Americans until the Rosenwald Fund sponsored the construction of a new school—built on the opposite end of town—in the 1920s. The Seay Chapel Methodist Church also was a frame, one-story building until it burned circa 1930. The present Seay Chapel Methodist church building dates to 1931, and it stands upon the location of the combination church and school built for African-Americans in 1869. The carpenters of the Seay Chapel Methodist Church are not listed in any record, but the structure has been attributed to an early to mid-twentieth century Wilson County construction company, comprised of Carmon Manning, Edward Manning, and Charles McHollin. This group of carpenters was known for rock-faced masonry, and this building is a good representative example of their exterior craftsmanship. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, the church was active within the community and in neighboring counties through frequently held singings and socials. The church had a community choir that traveled throughout the area. The church is still the site of annual homecomings reuniting those who had scattered elsewhere to the industrialized north and Nashville. "Cars would be lined up throughout the town and up Cemetery Road. Those who had long since left the community returned in fancy clothes driving fancy cars in what was the largest gathering for the community with the one exception of the county fair," recalls Alexandria resident Ria Baker. Members of the church further remember it being used for political meetings in the Jim Crow era, when such meetings were prohibited from being held at the Rosenwald school since that was owned by the county school board. Meetings about the recent passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1964, and how local African-Americans could register to vote, also took place at Seay Chapel during the 1960s. The congregation remained active until it was forced to close in 1998 due to lack of members.

The church and cemetery are the only surviving artifacts from the once active and growing African-American community of Alexandria that lived on this hill during the post-Civil War years well into the twentieth century until the trend from African-American migration to urban areas increased to the point that few blacks remain in Alexandria (in 2000, only 1.4% of the county's population was African-American).

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Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District  
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The best evidence of the nature of the neighborhood that developed around these African-American institutions, a description of this neighborhood from the late 1800s to the turn of the century, comes from an unlikely source, the writings of William E. B. Du Bois. Although the present church building dates well after De Bois's stay in Alexandria, this overall property of the cemetery and church location is the only extant historic place left in the county that is associated with this internationally famous African American. Thus, the history of De Bois's association is included in this nomination.

During the two summers of 1886 and 1887, while an undergraduate at Fisk University, W.E.B. Du Bois taught at the Wheeler School, a seasonal "colored school" (no longer extant) in the neighboring Wilson County, and he attended church at the Methodist Church in Alexandria. He brought to the community his passionate commitment to education for the black race. He returned to Alexandria in 1897 after being the first African-American to receive his Ph.D. from Harvard in order to experience the change in an area that "would remain in his memory bank for a lifetime"(2)

During his sojourn, Du Bois recognized "a common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages" in the Tennessee rural area."(3) Du Bois described the area as a "land of varmints and rattlesnakes," an apt description for the poor land that constituted the black neighborhood. From his experience attending services at Seay Chapel, Du Bois was left with vivid impressions of the importance of religion in rural African-American communities, as well as the power of the local minister. (4) Thus, this unimposing hilltop in Alexandria was where Du Bois melded together his life as a first-rate intellectual with his emotions as an African-American man. As he described the community in his classic book *The Souls of Black Folk*:

Cuddled on the hill to the north was the village of colored folks, who lived in three- or four-room unpainted cottages, some neat and homelike, and some dirty. The dwellings were scattered rather aimlessly, but they centered about the twin temples of the hamlet, the Methodist, and the Hard-Shell Baptist churches. These, in turn, leaned gingerly on a sad-colored schoolhouse. Hither my little world wended its crooked way on Sunday to meet other worlds, and gossip, and wonder, and make the weekly sacrifice with frenzied priest at the altar of the "old-time religion". The soft melody and the mighty cadences of Negro song fluttered and thundered. I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, a burial, birth, or wedding; from a common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages; and above all, from the sight of the veil that hung between us and Opportunity. (5)

In describing the church at Alexandria he observed, "most striking to me, as I approached the village and the little plain church perched aloft, was the air of intense excitement that possessed that mass of Black folk."(6) Du Bois eloquently described the powerful and active center known as the church by expressing the same

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feelings as the present day Alexandria African-American community when he described the Negro church as being a "central Club House" that housed various organizations, supplied entertainment, prepared suppers, collected and expended money, found employment for the idle, introduced strangers, disseminated news, and provided charity. The church was social, intellectual, and economic center with great power that further conserved morals, strengthened the family, and was the final authority on what was good and right. The church reproduced the world from which the Negro was cut off from by prejudice. (7) When recalling his time as a country schoolteacher in the hills of Tennessee, Du Bois stated that he "would not take \$200.00 for his summer's experience (he was making twenty-eight and thirty dollars respectively for each month in the summer), and he would not experience it again for \$2000.00." In 1891, he wrote an essay while at Fisk University titled "DeKalb County." He further recalled this time often in his writing throughout the years. "The intensity of his prose when he describes these two summers attests to the personal impact of the Alexandria sojourns," remarks his biographer David Lewis. (8)

The chapel where Du Bois actually stood existed until 1931, when it was replaced by the nominated structure on the same location. What remains from the Du Bois period is another powerful artifact, the African-American cemetery. While *The Souls of Black Folk* is silent on whether Du Bois attended a funeral at Seay's Chapel—although it is logical he did—it is perhaps more logical to think that while he visited the church he also strolled back to the cemetery. What he encountered was certainly not an imposing place, but even today it has a power all of its own.

As one approaches the property today, one may experience a landscape different than that recalled by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folks* as "a little world . . . cuddled on a hill north of town." The homes that once surrounded the church and school are gone and forgotten as the rugged landscape of limestone outcroppings and scrub trees is increasingly reclaiming the hilltop. The three primary properties of this historic district—the two cemeteries and the church—have always been linked by the nature of the land. It was poor land, a perfect spot in the antebellum era for a town's white cemetery and a perfect spot to place the freedmen after the Civil War. However, time also links the three institutions. The year 1869 is key—a time still when the experiment of Reconstruction held promise—because it was then that the town fathers chose to give three acres of this rocky, worthless hilltop to its freedmen, and left them the challenge of building a community. They met the challenge, and the community thrived until World War II when new opportunities elsewhere began a process of slow community decline. By the 1980s, the congregation of Seay Chapel was mostly elderly and poor, and the cemetery began to be reclaimed. By 1998, the congregation was so small that the Methodist Church closed the church. Members today moved to the Dowelltown Methodist Church, also in DeKalb County. Two years later, black and white together in Alexandria began the process of renewing these resources, and remembering this African-American community. The cemetery was cleared; the church was partially restored, cleaned, and opened for a Christmas 2000 celebration. This nomination is another step in the reclamation of these properties, and this history, for Alexandria's future.

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The Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District meets the registration requirements for a historic district listed in the Rural African-American Churches in Tennessee, 1850-1870, MPS. The two cemeteries retain their integrity and the historic church building retains a high degree of integrity, with the exception of the replacement double-hung sash windows installed circa 1962. Overall, it is an exceptional site that is associated with the town's settlement patterns and its African-American ethnic heritage.

## Endnotes

1. U. S. Census, DeKalb County, 1880-1930; Thomas Webb, *DeKalb County* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1986).
2. David L. Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 68.
3. Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr., "Alexandria, Tennessee: Slumbering in the Shadow of Progress," manuscript chapter provided to Frances Lawrence, Alexandria, p. 3.
4. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin, 1995 [1903]), 89 and 211.
5. *Ibid.*, 102.
6. *Ibid.*, 211.
7. *Ibid.*, 189, 213-214.
8. Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 69-70, 115; W. E. B. Du Bois, "How I Taught School," *Fisk Herald* 4(December 1886): 10.

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Johnson, Willie. Interview by Traci Nichols, 18 July 2000, Alexandria, TN. Notes available by

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author. MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

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Smith, Carrie Helen. Interview by Traci Nichols, 18 July 2000, Alexandria, TN. Notes available by author. MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Tubbs, Inez. Interview by Traci Nichols, 18 July 2000, Alexandria, TN. Notes available by author. MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Webb, Tommy. Interview by Margaret Nickell, 18 July 2000, Alexandria, TN. Notes available by author. MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

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### **Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property is located at the end of Cemetery Street in Alexandria, Tennessee as noted on the DeKalb County Tax Map 22G, Group C, Parcel #1.

### **Boundary Justification**

The nominated boundaries contain all the significant historical resources associated with the Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District.



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## Photographs

Alexandria Cemeteries Historic District  
DeKalb County, Tennessee  
Photos by: Carroll Van West  
            MTSU Center for Historic Preservation  
Date: Summer and Fall 2000  
Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commission  
            2941 Lebanon Road  
            Nashville, TN 37243

Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, facing west  
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View of Church and cemetery overview, facing west  
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Sign over Entrance Door of Seay Chapel United Methodist Church  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, north façade, facing south  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, northeast corner, facing northeast  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, east façade, facing west  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, southeast corner, facing southwest  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, south façade, facing north  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, west façade, facing northeast  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, west façade, facing east  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, interior, sanctuary, platform area, facing south  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, interior, sanctuary, ceiling  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, interior west wall, facing west  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, interior, entrance, facing north  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, interior east wall, facing northeast  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, interior, fellowship hall, facing northwest  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, interior, fellowship hall, facing east  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, Female Privy, facing west  
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Seay Chapel United Methodist Church, Men's Privy, facing south  
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East View Cemetery, cemetery overview, facing southeast  
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East View Cemetery, cemetery overview, facing north  
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East View Cemetery, cemetery overview, facing east  
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East View Cemetery, cemetery overview with raised cut stone portion, facing east  
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East View Cemetery, cemetery overview, facing north  
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East View Cemetery, cemetery overview, facing northeast  
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East View Cemetery, cemetery overview, facing southwest  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Mercer gravestones, facing east  
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East View Cemetery, cemetery overview and detail, Foutch gravestone, facing southwest  
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East View Cemetery, cemetery overview, rear of cemetery, facing south  
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East View Cemetery, east side of cemetery denoting raised cut stone portion, facing northeast  
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East View Cemetery, cemetery overview, some of the older graves, facing northeast  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Infant LaFevor and Infant Botts gravestones, facing west  
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East View Cemetery, cemetery overview, detail Dunn gravestone, facing west  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Delilah Lawrence gravestone, facing east  
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East View Cemetery, detail, James M. Baird gravestone, facing east  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Willie Eason gravestone, facing east  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Bethell gravestone, facing east  
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East View Cemetery, detail, limestone cut couch, facing northeast  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Nancy Goodner gravestone, facing east  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Robert Yeargin gravestone, facing west  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Jessamine F. Turner gravestone, facing east  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Flora J. Mercer gravestone, facing west  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Dr. N. Mercer gravestone, facing west  
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East View Cemetery, detail, John Goodner gravestones, facing east  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Drusilla B. Wheeler gravestone  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Eliza Whaley Jones grave marker  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Walker family grave markers  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Zachery T. Davis gravestone, facing east  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Parillee A. Stokes gravestone  
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East View Cemetery, detail, Harry Everett Bone gravestone, facing east  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, entrance denoting limestone walls, facing northwest  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, cemetery overview, facing east  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, cemetery overview, facing north  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, cemetery overview, facing northeast  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, detail cast iron fence surrounding Baird family plot,  
facing east  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, cemetery overview, facing northeast  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, cemetery overview, facing north  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, cemetery overview, facing southeast  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, cemetery overview, facing northeast  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, detail, Melissa N. Preston gravestone, facing east  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, detail, Dock Burks gravestone, facing east  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, detail, Priest Rutland gravestone, facing east  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, detail, Margaret Williams gravestone, facing east  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, detail, Hancock Family gravestone, facing west  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, detail, Nettie Malone grave marker, facing east  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, detail, Henrietta gravestone, facing east  
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Alexandria City Cemetery for African Americans, cemetery overview, facing northwest  
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Picture of school children in front of original Seay Chapel United Methodist Church (c. 1868)  
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