

Alexandria Times

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African American history in the 800 block of Duke Street

The 800 block of Duke Street is one that captures the essence of what makes Old Town so charming. Stately homes that reflect the building trends of a city founded in 1749 are pleasantly accentuated by a generous tree canopy. Aside from beautiful architecture, Alexandria's history attracts visitors from across the world. This particular block has a lot of that history.

One of the most renowned former residents of the block, Dr. Albert Johnson, lived and practiced in 814, a brick, antebellum townhouse, from 1896 to 1940 in an African American neighborhood then known as the Bottoms. Johnson was born in Lynchburg to formerly enslaved parents just after the Civil War. He later attended Howard University Medical School, graduating in 1892, and would become the first African American licensed physician in Alexandria. In 2004, Johnson's home was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to his work as a doctor and a pillar in the African American community, Johnson was a property owner. One of those properties he owned was 812 Duke St., which

he sold to Annie Bailey Rose in 1941 following the death of her husband, William Henry.

Annie B. Rose wore many hats professionally, from teacher to nursing assistant, but throughout most of her 96 years, Rose was a tireless community activist. In addition to her work with aging residents, she was the founder of the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage and instrumental in ensuring the history of Freedom House, located at 1315 Duke St., would not be forgotten. Her father, Lewis Henry Bailey, was one of many thousands sold to the Deep South when the building was the center of the domestic slave trade in the U.S.

Directly across from 814 lived John Strange and his children. In the 1930 census, his two youngest children, sons Clarence and Robert, were 8 and 4 years old, respectively. By the end of the decade, they would fearlessly challenge Jim Crow laws in Alexandria. In 1939, local attorney Samuel Tucker specifically chose respected young men who were mature enough to handle backlash to protest his hometown's segregated library policies.

On Aug. 21, 1939, Clarence



PHOTO/THE OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

The Annie B. Rose House at 812 Duke St.

Strange, William Evans, Edward Gaddis, Morris Murray and Otto Tucker entered the library at 717 Queen St., requesting library cards. When they were refused, they each grabbed books from the shelves and sat down to read in protest. The younger Strange's job was to act as a lookout, alerting Samuel Tucker when the police were en route. This pre-Civil Rights era act of civil disobedience employed the same sit-in strategy which would help to

topple segregation across the South years later.

These three stories speak to the rich history of Alexandria and its strength of community. Examples were set and ideas circulated among neighbors – and these Alexandrians from the 800 block of Duke Street helped to shape the city we have today.

Out of the Attic is provided by The Office of Historic Alexandria.