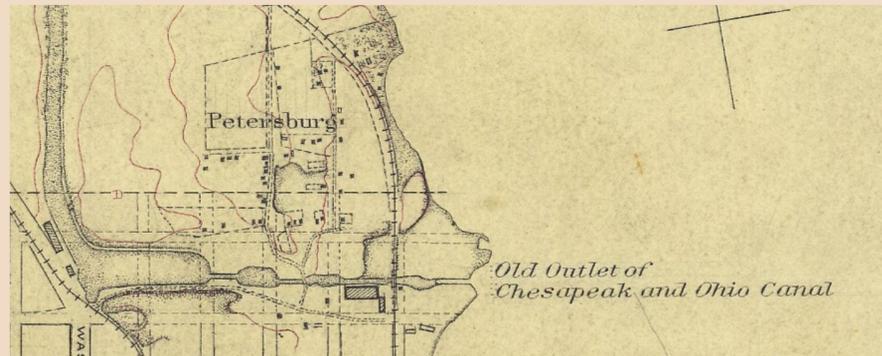
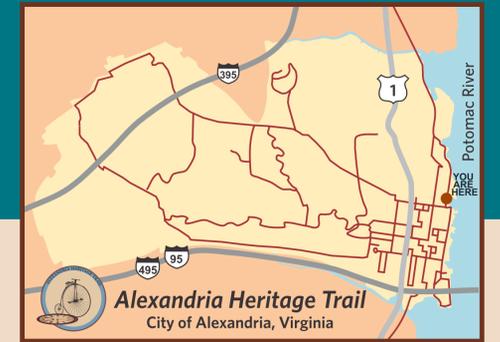


African American Neighborhoods



Detail from *Potomac River, West Shore, Alexandria and Arlington Counties, VA, 1902*, showing the vicinity of Petersburg.
US Office of Coast Survey

“We have ‘Petersburg,’ and ‘Richmond,’
‘Contraband Valley,’ and ‘Pump Town,’
and twenty other towns in our midst.”

Alexandria Gazette, August 25, 1864

Three African American neighborhoods surrounded Oronoco Bay—what became known as The Berg and Fishtown to the south and west and Cross Canal to the north. Community names took a variety of inspirations including areas from which enslaved men and women fled during the Civil War to Union-controlled Alexandria or characteristics of their new settlements.

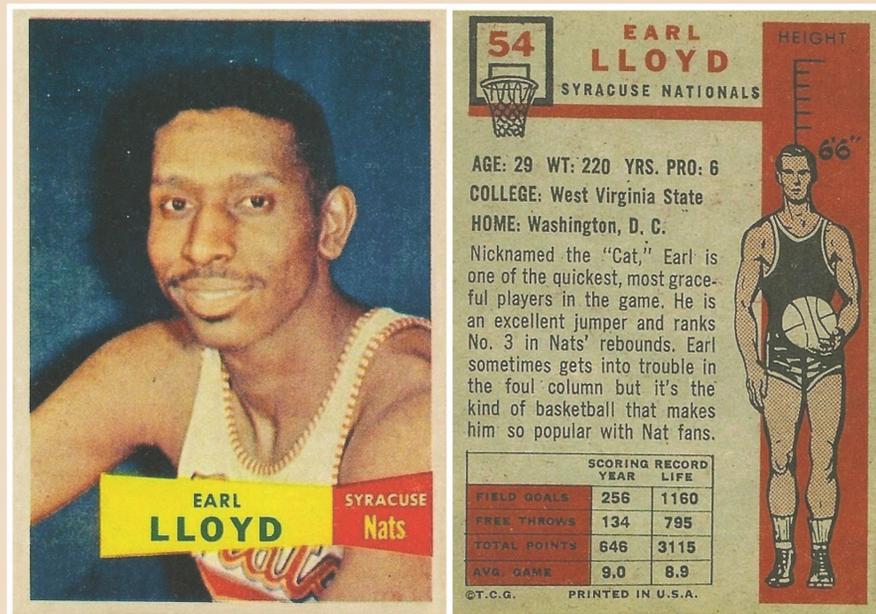
During the war, “Grantville” and “Petersburg” came to identify roughly the same area of the city. Historic records attribute the name Grantville to two people: General Ulysses S. Grant, who led Union forces for the last few years of the war, and Peter Grant, a shoemaker said to have built the first house in the neighborhood for a cost of \$39. The community’s name, recognizing both Grants, was said to have “killed two birds with one stone.” In 1863, Julia Wilbur, abolitionist and aid worker to freed men and women in Alexandria, wrote “Grantville numbers about 100 houses now, & they are building a school house too.”

Petersburg, shortened to “The Berg,” alluded to the area in southern Virginia from which many of the refugees had fled, a location of intense fighting during the Civil War. A 1982 oral history interview with long-time resident of The Berg, Henry Johnson, spoke of the connection between the neighborhood’s name and the city in Southside Virginia. After the Civil War, The Berg replaced Grantville as the neighborhood’s name in the written record.



Parker-Gray High School Basketball team ca. 1940. Earl Lloyd is in the first row, center, with a basketball at his feet.
Alexandria Black History Museum

Residents of The Berg included 20th-century luminaries like Earl Lloyd, the first African American athlete to play in the National Basketball Association (NBA), breaking the color barrier on October 31, 1950. Born in 1928 in Alexandria and raised in The Berg, Lloyd graduated from the City’s segregated Parker-Gray High School. Today, the Parker-Gray site is the location of Charles Houston Recreation Center on Wythe Street across from the Alexandria Black History Museum. Lloyd received a scholarship to play basketball in college before entering the NBA. He was also the first African American person to become an assistant coach in the NBA.



Earl Lloyd basketball card, Syracuse, 1957.
Alexandria Black History Museum

