

## BENJAMIN THOMAS LYNCHED IN ALEXANDRIA, AUGUST 8, 1899

*A majority of the soil collected for Benjamin Thomas was excavated from 720 N. Patrick Street. In 1899, the Thomas family lived on this block in the predominately African American neighborhood known as Uptown.*

*Soil was also collected from Thomas' home where he lived and was arrested at 700 N. Patrick Street, then from Hard Corner where Princess and N. Fairfax meet, the jail on St. Asaph where he was kidnapped by a lynch mob, and from the site of his lynching at Fairfax and King Streets. This was mixed with soil from the Odd Fellows Hall where protest meetings occurred after his death, his home church, and locations significant to the heritage of the African American community in Alexandria.*

*The combined soil representing the life and death of Benjamin Thomas has been placed in a vessel engraved with his name made by students from Jefferson-Houston IB K-8 School led by their technical education instructor Nicole Reidinger.*

### 6. 700 N. PATRICK STREET

On August 7, 1899, Benjamin Thomas, 16, was at his home at 700 N. Patrick Street when Lillian Kloch, 7, a white girl who lived at 702 N. Patrick Street, came by to retrieve an ax.

Hours later, two police officers knocked on the Thomas' front door. They held a warrant for Benjamin's arrest sworn out by the girl's father, Edward Kloch. He was accused of criminally assaulting the girl and despite his plea of innocence the officers arrested him. That night, as he was pulled out of his mother's arms, Benjamin saw his house for the very last time.

### 7. HARD CORNER



On the night that Benjamin Thomas was arrested, more than 100 African American men gathered on the street corners around the police station after overhearing

a group of white men threaten to lynch the youth. Their offers to help law enforcement protect Thomas were rejected by police and Mayor George Simpson. Refusing to recognize their valid concerns, police arrested the ring leaders at the intersection of Fairfax and Princess Streets - a crossroad at the heart of The

Berg known at the time as Hard Corner. Soil from this spot was excavated to represent these local heroes.

### 8. CITY JAIL



On Tuesday, August 8, 1899, Mayor Simpson placed Thomas in the custody of the City Sergeant. Thomas was moved to the City Jail at 401 N. Saint Asaph

Street to wait for a grand jury to meet. According to newspaper sources, a lynch mob surrounded the jail at 11 p.m., sought out Thomas, and tortured him as they paraded him through town.

### 9. LYNCHING SITE

On a lamppost at the intersection of S. Fairfax Street and King Street, a lynch mob hanged Benjamin Thomas.

### 10. ODD FELLOWS HALL



The late 19<sup>th</sup> century brick building at 411 S. Columbus Street was an important gathering place for African Americans at the turn of the last century. In the wake of the Thomas lynching,

the African American community rallied and held a series of protests - some of which were planned in this building.

### 11. SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH



The Thomas family belonged to Shiloh Baptist Church at 1401 Duke Street. Two years before his lynching, Benjamin was Baptized and became a member of the church. More than 600 African Americans from Alexandria and Washington, D.C. attended his memorial service at Shiloh. The church was established in 1863.