

Alexandria Times

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Alexandria War Memorial updated

On Jan. 6, 2023, the City of Alexandria installed a new sign at Alexandria Union Station commemorating the Alexandria War Memorial. The Alexandria War Memorial was dedicated on Nov. 11, 1940, to honor those Alexandrians who lost their lives in World War I. The Memorial originally omitted the names of African American Alexandrians who fought and died in the Great War. The city corrected those omissions in 2018.

The primary sponsors of the Memorial were Russell Mitchell Post No. 609 Veterans of Foreign Wars, Florence Angelo Cannady and the citizens of Alexandria. Cannady played a crucial role in the story of the War Memorial. The widow of a former executive of the Richmond, Fredericksburg, & Potomac Railroad, she provided both substantial financial support and influenced the memorial's construction on what was railway property at the time.

Contemporary news articles credit her with gifting the Memorial's green granite shaft, which they valued at \$4,000. A local legend claims that the shaft was originally intended for the Masonic Memorial at nearby Shuter's Hill but was damaged during transit from the quarry to Alexandria. However, the Masonic



PHOTO/ALEXANDRIA HISTORY MUSEUM, GIFT OF CRAIG KEITH

White draftees pose in front of Alexandria City Hall with members of the draft board on Oct. 6, 1917.

Memorial archives show no records of Cannady purchasing the granite from the Masons or a request for the shaft from the Veterans of Foreign Wars. It is easy to see how the legend came about, as the granite on the War Memorial bears a strong resemblance to the green granite columns in the Masonic Memorial's Memorial Hall.

The new sign includes photographs of the War Memorial and its surroundings. It also includes images of the men the Memorial commemorates. One photo dated Oct. 6, 1917, poses white draftees in front

of Alexandria City Hall with members of the draft board.

Two men in the photo, Samuel Haynes and Eugene Wilburn died in France in 1918. The sign also includes a photo of William Thomas, the first Alexandrian to die in World War I, and a digital copy of his draft registration card, which notes in multiple ways that he was African American. Other features of the sign include aerial photos of the area during the construction of the nearby George Washington Masonic Memorial and a postcard image of Alexandria Union Station commis-

sioned around 1910. A photo of the World War I-era tank that stood next to the War Memorial from 1941 until the late 1980s when it was moved to a museum also graces the sign.

The interpretive sign on the Alexandria War Memorial is part of the Alexandria Heritage Trail network of interpretive signs. You can view this and all of the other signs virtually at: alexandriava.gov/historic-alexandria/alexandria-heritage-trail.

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