

**1. 105 N. Randolph Street** The original two over two brick structure with basement kitchen was built in 1849 by Diego Evans, a free black businessman, and his wife. They would sell the house and emigrate to Liberia, a nation founded by freed U.S. slaves in 1847, where they planned to start an import-export business. Instead, like so many of their compatriots, they died of disease.

**2. 112 N. Randolph Street** Irish immigrant and Civil War veteran John Sheridan purchased the property and made it his home in 1887. That same year, the Sheridan Livery Stable was completed on N. Main Street. The Randolph Street property subsequently had many owners and served as the site of numerous businesses. In 1970, J.B. Lewis, Jr. purchased the property and operated it as a funeral parlor.

**3. 201 N. Randolph Street** The 1893 "Sheridan House" was designed by William G. McDowell, architect of the 1897 Rockbridge Courthouse, as well as many prominent residences in Lexington. Located on the highest point on Randolph Street, the house was occupied by John Sheridan until his death in 1929.

**4. 207 N. Randolph Street** The home was purchased in 1893 by William Price. Born in 1869, Price would serve as butler to Curtis Lee, son of Robert E. Lee. His daughters, Martha, Laura, and Frances, all became educators. Frances Price Ragsdale taught at the Buena Vista Colored School from 1935 to 1957.

**5. 214 Massie Street** One of the more unique buildings in the community, the ground floor is of stone construction, while the upper floor is frame. It was the home of Dr. Alfred W. Pleasant, Sr. and Dr. Alfred W. Pleasants, Jr. who graduated from Leonard Medical School of Shaw University in Raleigh and Meharry Medical College in Nashville, respectively.

**6. 205 Fuller Street** Hayden and Rebecca Holmes moved to Lexington from Amherst County following the Civil War. They purchased a small structure on Fuller Street in 1876 and expanded it significantly over the next two decades. Hayden Holmes was a Trustee of the First Baptist Church and a professional cook and waiter. The home was purchased and partially restored in 2010 by Historic Lexington Foundation to prevent its demolition.

**7. 12 Fuller Street** The substantial early 20th century building was home to John B. Thompson and his family. Thompson was an entrepreneur and a leader in Lexington's African-American community. Among his entrepreneurial activities, he was a caterer, who together with his wife, would cater Fancy Dress and other parties at Washington and Lee University. He used his earnings to acquire a great deal of real estate in Lexington, including Thompson's Knoll.

**8. 300 E. Washington Street** Designed by architect Isaac E.A. Rose, the Ruffner School was built in 1892 for the education of Lexington's white children. The black children of Diamond Hill and Green Hill would have to walk beyond the community to the "Lexington Colored Graded School" on S. Randolph Street next to the Randolph Street Methodist Church. The Ruffner building now serves as Lexington City Hall.

**9. 9 Tucker Street** Built in 1897, the home was owned by Zach and Arlene Franklin and operated as the Franklin Colored Tourist Home by the couple. The home was a place where African-American visitors to Lexington could find housing during the period of segregation. It operated as a tourist home until Mrs. Franklin's death in 1952.

**10. 101 Tucker Street\*** Jacob Fuller, a classical scholar and librarian at Washington College, built an imposing Federal home in the late 1820s at the top of Henry Street (then Locust Street). John Randolph Tucker, a founder of the Washington and Lee Law School, acquired the property in 1872, remodeled it in the Italianate style, and named it Blandome. The property was acquired in 1917 by Harry Lee Walker, a prominent black businessman. His daughter, Mrs. C. M. Wood, acquired the house from her father. The Wood family played an important role in the founding of the Lylburn Downing school.

**11. 109 Henry Street** With the construction of the railroad following the Civil War, the area's Irish immigrant population grew. In 1873, St. Patrick's Parish was formed in Lexington. The same year, construction began on the parish church at 109 Henry Street. Irish immigrant John Sheridan played a major role in the establishment of the parish and construction of St. Patrick's Church.

**12. 103 N. Main Street\*** The present First Baptist Church building was completed in 1896. The Negro membership of the Lexington Baptist Church (now Manly Memorial) requested and received letters of dismission in 1867 in order to found the Lexington African Baptist Church. For 25 years, worship services were held in a frame building on a lot adjacent to the present building. One of the first financial contributions to build the 1896 church came from Lylburn Downing, Lexington-born African-American minister at Roanoke's First Avenue Presbyterian Church.

**13. 29-33 N. Main Street** The Sheridan Livery Stable was completed in 1887 for John Sheridan. Sheridan had the responsibility for carrying the mail and operating the stagecoach line between Lexington, Staunton, and Hot Springs. In 1919, the building became the Rockbridge Steam Laundry Corporation.

**14. 23 N. Main Street** The John Ruff House was built in 1811 and served as the Ruff family residence and hat factory for the next 70 years. In 1883, Lexington Lodge No. 2461, G.U.D. of Odd Fellows, established residence in the building. The Grand United Order was the African-American Odd Fellows organization founded in 1843, whereas the Independent Order of Odd Fellows was the white counterpart.

**15. 30 N. Main Street** The Willson-Walker House was built in 1820 as the residence of Captain William Willson, local merchant, postmaster, and treasurer of Washington College. In 1911, Harry Lee Walker acquired the property and turned the ground floor into his butcher shop, while the family lived above. He would subsequently purchase Blandome (see 101 Tucker Street) and move his family to Tucker Street.

**16. 118 S. Randolph Street** In 1864, the black and white members of the Randolph Street Methodist Church separated. The white congregation built a new church, while the black congregation retained the frame church building on Randolph Street. The congregation tore down this building in 1892 and replaced it with the present brick structure. Andrew Carnegie donated half of the cost of the church's pipe organ.

**17. 300 Diamond Street\*** Now a community center, the school was dedicated on September 11, 1927 in honor of the African-American minister Lylburn Downing. Downing was born in 1862 in Lexington in the household of wartime Governor James McDowell. The school served Lexington's black students grade 1 through 10 until 1944, when it added grades 11 and 12. It was only then that black students in Lexington could graduate from high school without having to leave Lexington.

**18. 321 N. Main Street** In 1927, Progressive Lodge No. 266 of the Knights of Pythias purchased this property and built the current structure. The African-American Knights of Pythias was a secret society founded in Richmond in 1864 and dedicated to the principles of Friendship, Benevolence, and Charity. After the lodge failed to make payments during the beginning of the Great Depression, the building was purchased at auction by Knights of Pythias Trustee John B. Thompson. It continued to operate as the Knights of Pythias and was a major center of the African-American community. Members of the Count Basie Orchestra are said to have jammed there during one Fancy Dress performance. Following John Thompson's death, the property was sold in 1977 to American Legion Post 291.

*\*Listed on the National Register of Historic Places*

## THE DIAMOND HILL & GREEN HILL COMMUNITY OF LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA

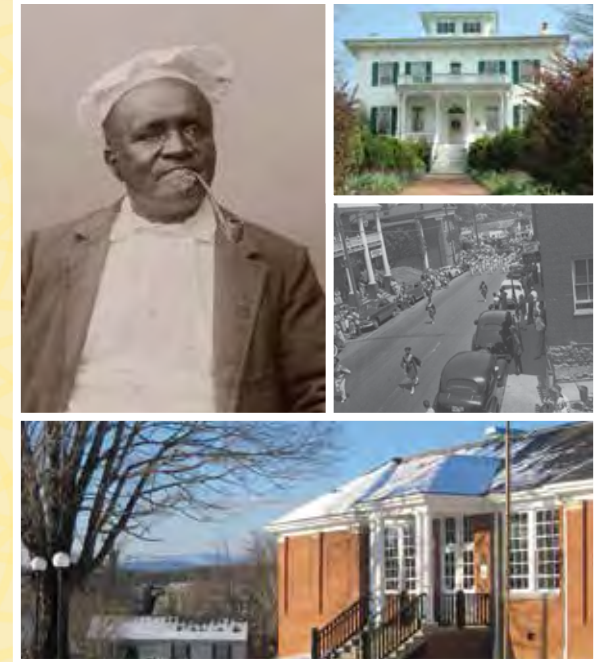
Diamond Hill is the story of people. It is the story of African-Americans, such as William Hayden Holmes, Harry Lee Walker, John B. Thompson, and Zach and Arlene Franklin. It is also the story of European-Americans like Irish immigrant and Civil War veteran John Sheridan, who lived on Diamond Hill and helped in its development.

Diamond Hill is also a lesson in 19th and 20th century architecture, from the elegant "Blandome," an Italianate villa built in the late 1820s, to numerous vernacular styles of the early 20th century. Additionally, the neighborhood and nearby North Main Street is home to several late 19th century churches and a National Register designated building constructed in the late 1920s as Lexington's "Colored School."

Following the Civil War in 1865, nearly 4,000 African-Americans in Rockbridge County had been freed, and they joined several hundred others known as free blacks. Many came to Lexington to seek work and an education. They settled mainly along north Main Street and eastward along Randolph Street. Across from VMI lay a largely open hill that became known as Diamond Hill. The origin of its name is unknown.

In 1883, a street from North Main to the top of the hill was called Diamond Street. Other streets followed. Fuller Street had begun as an antebellum lane where Jacob Fuller, a classical scholar and librarian at Washington College, built a large brick house, later known as "Blandome." In 1883, Maury Street, named after oceanographer Commodore Matthew Fontaine Maury, was also laid out. On top of the hill, Lewis Street, named for attorney William C. Lewis, was recognized in 1912 as the town's northeastern boundary.

John Sheridan, local land speculator, who owned most of the upper hill, created the Green Hill Subdivision in 1925. With its fifty lots, it became the nucleus of the town's black community. Other African-Americans also lived on Davidson and Moore Streets and along North Main Street. After World War II, most of Diamond Hill's lots were filled.



## WALKING TOUR OF THE DIAMOND HILL & GREEN HILL COMMUNITY *Lexington, Va*





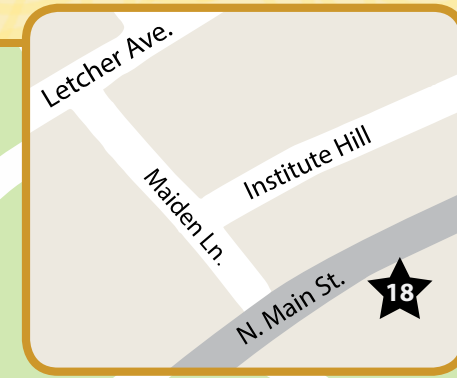
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Note: Locations 16 and 18 are located outside the area covered by the general map. Some patrons may choose to drive to the address listed in lieu of walking.



- ★ 105 N. Randolph Street
- ★ 112 N. Randolph Street
- ★ 201 N. Randolph Street
- ★ 207 N. Randolph Street
- ★ 214 Massie Street
- ★ 205 Fuller Street
- ★ 12 Fuller Street
- ★ 300 E. Washington Street
- ★ 9 Tucker Street
- ★ 101 Tucker Street
- ★ 109 Henry Street
- ★ 103 N. Main Street
- ★ 29-33 N. Main Street
- ★ 23 N. Main Street
- ★ 30 N. Main Street
- ★ 118 S. Randolph Street
- ★ 300 Diamond Street
- ★ 321 N. Main Street

Cover top left to right: Patrick Payne, VMI cook in the 1890s, courtesy of VMI Archives; Blandome; marching band on N. Main Street; Lylburn Downing School