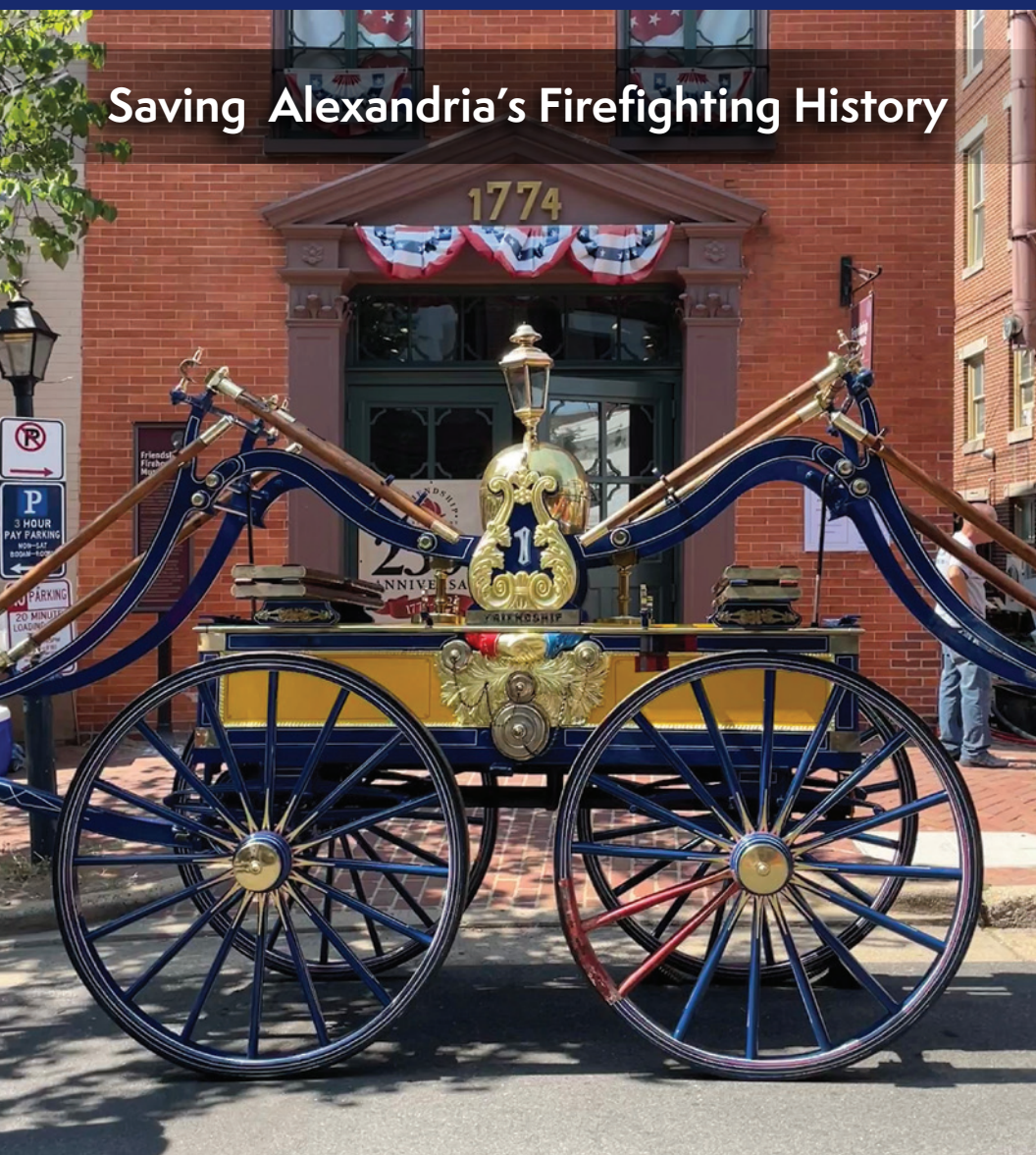


# Historic Alexandria

— QUARTERLY —

## Saving Alexandria's Firefighting History



ISSUE 5 | APRIL 2025



To commemorate the Bicentennial of the Marquis de Lafayette's February 21, 1825, visit to Alexandria, a France vs. Virginia wine challenge was held at Gadsby's Tavern Museum. Photos courtesy of Jeff Hancock.

## MISSION

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The Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA) preserves and shares Alexandria's past to enrich the present and inspire the future.

## VISION

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To infuse Alexandria's rich and complex history into the fabric of the community.

## VALUES

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### Equity

- Engages in scholarship and research-driven content.
- Acknowledges that history is complex and embraces dialogue

### Community

- Offers compelling and innovative research-driven experiences for both residents and visitors.
- Builds community by fostering understanding and civic value.

### Collaboration

- Actively seeks community partnerships and input.
- Offers resources for community projects, planning, and decisions.



## CITY COUNCIL:

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Liz Williams  
*Deputy Director*

As winter gives way to spring, I want to take a moment to reflect on all we have accomplished together and look ahead to the exciting months to come.

Over the past few months, Historic Alexandria has been alive with activity. December brought the warmth of holiday traditions. In January and February, we honored Black History Month with meaningful programs and exhibits that deepened our understanding of Alexandria’s African American history. These winter months also allowed us to focus on preservation efforts and planning for the year ahead, ensuring that we continue to safeguard our city’s past while making history accessible to all.

As we move into spring, we look forward to our annual participation in Act for Alexandria’s Spring2ACTion community-wide day of giving, raising funds for the Freedom House Museum interior renovations.

Your continued dedication and financial support ensures that Historic Alexandria continues to thrive, preserving the stories, artifacts, and places that make our city unique. As we look ahead to an eventful spring and summer, we invite you to join us—whether by visiting a museum, attending an event, or deepening your engagement as a supporter.

Thank you for being a part of our Historic Alexandria family. I look forward to seeing you soon!

Gretchen M. Bulova  
Director  
Office of Historic Alexandria



Gretchen Bulova, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria celebrating the 293rd Birthnight of George Washington with interpreter Brian Hilton and Sue Johnson, Chair of the George Washington Birthday Celebration Committee.

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# Saving Alexandria's Firefighting History: Conserving Friendship's Suction Fire Engine

By Kris Lloyd



In the summer of 2022, the suction pumper was sent out for conservation after a successful fundraising campaign with many donors coming from the community.

The Friendship Firehouse Museum's hand-operated suction fire engine is once again a focal point of the firehouse engine room. This antique apparatus has returned after undergoing professional conservation treatment thanks to the generous contributions of the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association, Alexandria Association, Historic Alexandria Foundation, and many individual donors.

The Friendship Fire Company, established in 1774, was the first fire company in Alexandria. Members were volunteers motivated by their concern for public safety and property. They purchased their first fire engine in 1775 and subsequent engines were acquired in 1799 and 1838. In 1851, the Company purchased the hand-operated suction fire engine that is in the historic firehouse today. It was made by John Rodgers of Baltimore.

**THE UNDERSIGNED ENTERED INTO CO-PARTNERSHIP on the first of January last, under the firm of JOHN RODGERS & SONS, for the MANUFACTURE OF FIRE APPARATUS AND MACHINERY IN GENERAL.**

**JOHN RODGERS,  
WM. RODGERS,  
GEO. H. RODGERS**

**W. H. RODGERS, OEO. H. RODGERS,  
JOHN RODGERS & SONS,**  
No. 42 N. HIGH STREET, BALTIMORE,  
Manufacturers of FIRE ENGINES of every description, HOSE CARRIAGES, HOOK and LADDER TRUCKS, HOSE and SCREWS, LEATHER KICKING TUBES, TONGUES &c. Also, FIRE PLUGS, STOP COCKS or VALVES of every size and miscellaneous construction, and other articles relative to WATER and GAS WORKS, STEAM ENGINES and MACHINERY in general. Repairs attended to with promptness and dispatch. From their long experience and facilities for manufacturing, enabling them to have nearly all the work done in their establishment, and under their immediate inspection, they confidently look for a continuance of the patronage hitherto bestowed on them. The facilities afforded by railroads, &c., for transporting apparatus together, avoiding the trouble and expense of taking to pieces, should be taken into consideration by Fire Companies located at a distance. In all orders for work reliance may be had in having the best workmanship and materials employed.

1851-52  
**JOHN D. HAMMOND,**

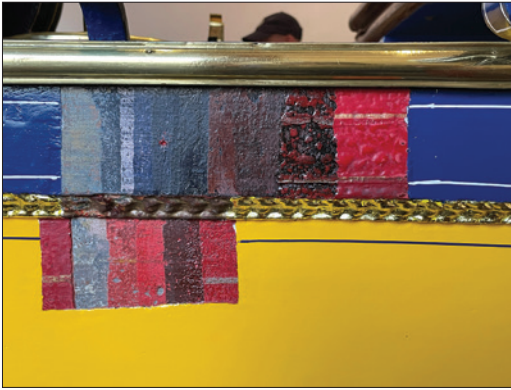
American and Commercial Daily Advertiser, March 5, 1855.

Source: Genealogy Bank



The newly conserved pumper is gently rolled into the firehouse with assistance from the Alexandria Fire Department and members of the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association.

Although made in Baltimore, the engine's design was developed in Philadelphia as an improvement on earlier British models. This type of fire engine was especially popular in communities from Philadelphia to Richmond, and New York City and San Francisco. They were powerful firefighting machines with ornate carved moldings and sculptures, making them suitable for parades as well as firefighting. John Rodgers was an Irish immigrant who began building firefighting apparatus in the mid to late 1820s.



The color study for the suction fire engine is visible on the proper left of the engine.

over our rough streets – the whole constituting an engine of decided beauty and efficiency.” When the engine was tested, it threw water 155 feet.

Firefighters pulled the suction engine from place to place by hand. It has a two-cylinder brass piston pump mounted in a wooden water reservoir designed to suction water in from a hose on one side and then force it out through a hose on the other side. When the Alexandria Water Company organized in 1852, water became easier to access. Running the engine was very hard work – 16 to 20 men operated the pumping levers to provide a constant output of even water pressure, and they had to rest every two to three minutes! Replacement firefighters would stand ready to take their place.

Josiah Wagener Art Conservation performed the suction engine’s conservation treatment. The process included paint analysis, painting and striping, repairs, and polishing. Wagener identified a history of six paint layers and determined the engine body was originally a straw yellow with dark blue trim. Ripple molding and leafy decorations on each side of the air chamber were gold leaf. He was able to preserve the many layers of historic paint by carefully sanding and priming the top surface. Then new paint was applied to recreate the engine’s original appearance. For interpretive purposes, a small area where the various layers of the

In the 1840s and 50s, he was one of the most prominent builders of Philadelphia-style fire engines in the country.

Friendship purchased the Rodger’s suction engine for \$1,100. Company member and secretary John Muir described their new apparatus as being of “the most substantial construction, having a mahogany box, balloon shaped air vessel, levers and arms of best style, and wheels of unusual strength, as best suited to a rapid movement



The suction fire engine wheels are quite decorative.



The conserved Rodger's suction fire engine on view in the Friendship Firehouse Museum.

paint colors were revealed was left unpainted. This area provides a "window" showing the engine's paint history. The wheels were similarly analyzed and recreated.

The conservation work was documented, and this information will be retained as part of the suction engine's historical record. The conservation treatment and the climate controlled, monitored, museum environment in the historic firehouse helps to ensure the Rodger's engine will continue to be a resource for generations.

The suction engine has played an important role in Alexandria with service in both firefighting and ceremonial duties.

One example was the devastating fire of November 16, 1855. Friendship and the engine responded with all of Alexandria's fire companies when flames were discovered at Dowell's China Store on King Street around 11:30 p.m. Efforts to extinguish the blaze continued until daybreak on the 17th. This conflagration injured three non-firefighters and killed seven firefighters, one from Friendship and six from the Star Fire Company.

Friendship, like other 19th-century volunteer companies, provided members with the opportunity for social exchange. They organized parades, picnics, excursions to other cities, and performed ceremonial duties for civic events. As early as 1839, Friendship marched in Alexandria's annual George Washington birthday parade. Members also provided a support network. Upon the death of a fireman, even when it was not in the line of duty, his company would participate in the funeral and assist in looking after his family.

The legacy of these early firefighters continues today as the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association (FVFEA), the name the organization adopted in 1903. The FVFEA assists in the preservation of the historic firehouse, supports the Alexandria Fire Department, and provides scholarships and other philanthropic services to the Alexandria community.

# Spring2ACTion to benefit the Freedom House Museum Restoration



The Freedom House Museum at 1315 Duke Street tells one of Alexandria's most difficult and important stories. From this site, thousands of Black men, women, and children were trafficked into the domestic slave trade, their lives forever changed within these walls. Today, this site stands as a powerful place of truth and remembrance—a place where every visitor should have the opportunity to fully experience history, no matter their physical ability.

In April 2024, we shared the Comprehensive Plan that outlined plans for the exterior and interior restoration. By July, scaffolding went up and the exterior restoration began. The next step is to prepare for the interior restoration, improved visit flow through the building, and new exhibitions throughout the site.

One of our highest priorities is to make Freedom House fully accessible, with the elevator able to access the site's basement, ensuring that no barrier prevents someone from bearing witness to this history.

Your gift today helps open doors—literally and figuratively—for all who seek to learn from Freedom House's past.

## Help us determine our social impact!

We are participating in

### Museum Social Impact in Practice!

Office of  
Historic Alexandria

MSIIP is a project of:

American Alliance of Museums

Made possible by:

INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

**WE NEED YOUR HELP**

We are measuring the impact our work has on the community. Visit 3 of our museums + tell us about your experience!

# Historic Alexandria celebrates Black History Month



On January 31, 2025, Councilman John Taylor Chapman presented a proclamation recognizing February 2025 as Black History Month in the City of Alexandria. Photo credit, Alexandria Library.

In February, Historic Alexandria celebrated Black History Month with a series of events led by the African American History Division. Black History Month is an annual recognition of the history, culture, achievements, and contributions of African Americans and persons of African descent in U.S. history. Highlights of the month included the Annual Martin Luther King Jr Poster Exhibition, Story Time for Little Historians, and the Washington Revels Jubilee Concert. We kicked off the month with a lecture on The African American Cowboy and learned about legendary cowboys, including Bill Pickett, and the impact of African Americans on today's national rodeo scene.



The Revels perform "The Courage to Be Concert." Photo credit, Lois Kebe.



Gregory Freeman speaks about the influence of African Americans in shaping country and western music and culture.



Ruby Griffis, 5th Grade Naomi L. Brooks Elementary, Luisa Tio, Art Teach, Poster submission for the Martin Luther King Jr. Art Exhibition. The theme was Mission Possible: Protecting Freedom, Justice, and Democracy.

# Black History Acquisitions



Wooden Bowl thought to have been used at the Alexandria Slave Pen.

## WOODEN BOWL

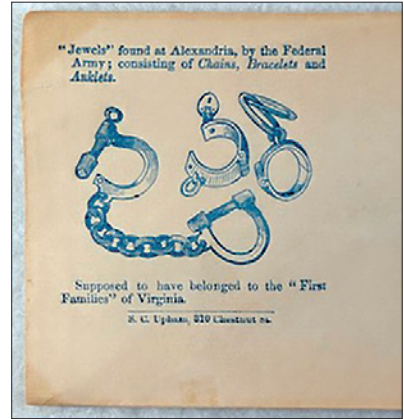
This wooden bowl is believed to have originated from the slave pen that once stood at 1315 Duke Street in Old Town, Alexandria, Virginia. Oral tradition says that the bowl was saved by a Union soldier from Massachusetts. Recently donated to the Alexandria Black History Museum, the bowl is in excellent condition and we are eager to further explore its history and connection to Alexandria's past.

## UNUSED POSTAGE COVER

This unused postage cover was acquired at auction and added to the Alexandria Black History Museum's collection at the end of Black History Month this year. It is believed to have been printed in 1861, near the start of the Civil War.

The cover features a wood engraving printed in blue ink, with the text:

"Jewels" found at Alexandria, by the Federal Army, consisting of Chains, Bracelets, and Anklets. Supposed to have belonged to the "First Families" of Virginia."



1861 Postage Cover.

The phrase "First Families of Virginia" refers to the prominent colonial families who settled in the British colony and later the Commonwealth of Virginia. The leg irons and shackles depicted on the cover are, of course, not jewels, but stark symbols of the North American economy's foundation in enslavement and oppression.

The stamp bears the imprint of engraver Samuel Curtis Upham, sometimes called "Honest Sam Upham." Upham was known for his work as a journalist, lyricist, and engraver, gaining particular notoriety as a counterfeiter of Confederate currency, or "Rebel notes." During the Civil War, he capitalized on a Northern market for counterfeit Confederate bills, marking them with a notation that read, "Fac-simile Confederate Note." His counterfeits were so convincing that they reportedly damaged the Confederate economy, potentially influencing the Confederate military to conduct transactions exclusively in gold.

This postage cover is a rare find and adds historical depth to the museum's collection.

## Alexandria Canal Lock and Basin



Public viewing of the Alexandria Canal. Photo credit, John Mullen, Wetlands.



View of the Alexandria Canal lock number 4, looking east from North Pitt Street.

On January 19, Historic Alexandria welcomed the public to see the remains of the Alexandria Canal lock and basin site in Old Town North. Discovered by archaeologists from Wetland Studies and Solutions, Inc., a Davey company, they worked closely with Historic Alexandria's Archaeology team to find a nearly intact fourth lock and third basin of the Canal. Archaeology is part of the development process in Alexandria because of the unique Alexandria Archaeological Protection Code. City archaeologists work with developers and their consulting archaeologists to ensure that archaeological sites are studied and documented in advance of construction.

The Alexandria Canal fully opened in 1845 for trade and navigation, linking Alexandria to the Chesapeake & Ohio (C&O) Canal terminus at Georgetown. The four canal locks between N. Pitt Street and the Potomac River allowed canal boats to ascend or descend the approximately 40 feet. The Alexandria Canal stretched seven miles to the aqueduct bridge where it crossed the river and where it connected to the C&O Canal in Georgetown. Between these four locks were three basins, which allowed for staging of boats traversing this section of the canal and for the storage of water which was required to operate the locks. Upkeep of the canal system was costly and railroads were becoming more common. The aqueduct bridge broke in 1886 and the Alexandria Canal system was abandoned.

Future preservation plans include working with Carr Properties to salvage and relocate samples of the stones uncovered during construction. Additionally, images



The walls of the lock were likely built of Aquia sandstone. The upper courses of this regular dressed stone have been robbed and reused elsewhere or were removed during the construction of the 1980s office building. A pair of recesses in the stone wall would have allowed the lock gates to tuck away when the lock was open and one of these survives at the eastern end of the lock, as seen in this photo, facing north.

will be taken of the canal to be able to create a high resolution digital recreation of what the canal looks like.

**STAY UPDATED!**

**ALEXANDRIA  
CANAL  
PRESERVATION**



## Gifts to Historic Alexandria



Verdella Jennings (left) and Stephanie Johnson (right) presented a \$700 donation check on behalf of the Social Responsibility Group to Historic Alexandria to support the restoration of historic Douglass Cemetery. This gift will support the preservation of Douglass Cemetery through flood mitigation, gravestone conservation, and, ultimately, restore the sacred space in the way the cemetery founders originally envisioned. To learn more about the Douglass Cemetery Restoration project or to make a gift to support these efforts, please visit <https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic-sites/douglass-memorial-cemetery>



The Mortar and Pestle Society, whose mission is to support the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum, recently gifted the museum with new kitchenette doors. The second floor kitchenette was previously covered by an accordion screen to hide the kitchen equipment from tour visitors. The new doors feature a large image of the third floor wheel and hoist mechanism that was used as a lift to carry products to all levels of the business which is not accessible for regular tours. The doors also showcase other historic photos of the business and Leadbeater proprietors and work staff. The next time you are on a tour, check it out! Projects like this allow the museum to tell a more robust story of this important family business.



# Alexandria Historical Sign Finder



Scan the QR code to check out Historic Alexandria City Historian, Dan Lee, as he takes WTOP's Matt Kaufax through Alexandria to look at the different signs.

research and stories about people and places in the past. As new signs are installed, the map will be updated.

The Alexandria Historical Sign Finder: History Around the City is an interactive map designed for exploring historic interpretation signs throughout the City of Alexandria. The map provides digital access to Alexandria's heritage as presented on signs. The goal of this interactive map is to make history signs created by or in partnership with the Office of Historic Alexandria easily accessible. Click the point you are interested in and read the sign. This map is meant to be an evolving repository for the

## Unveiling of Historic Minnie Howard School Integration Sign

During the height of segregation, five young Black students of the Belk and Bradby families integrated the white Minnie Howard Elementary School. A new historic interpretation sign was unveiled on Saturday, March 8, 2025 and tells this history. Members of the Belk and Bradby families, including Marie Bradby who shared her first-hand account of her experiences as a 10-year-old at Minnie Howard. Mayor Alyia Gaskins delivered an official apology from the City. ACPS School Board Chair, Dr. Michelle Rief, and Dr. Clinton Page, Chief Accountability and Research Officer for ACPS, shared the lasting effect of integration, including white flight and disinvestment, but that in spite of this ACPS has incredible diversity. The entire school system enrolls over 16,300 students from 118 countries who speak 127 languages. The sign is easily accessible in front of the new building.



Members of the Belk and Bradby families, City of Alexandria officials, and ACPS School Board members and staff cut the ribbon at the new Minnie Howard Integration Sign.

# Honoring George Washington, Commander in Chief

In February, Historic Alexandria celebrated the 293rd birthday of General George Washington with a series of events. The annual birthday parade, with the theme of George Washington: America's Commander-in-Chief, featured Lieutenant General Heidi J. Joyle, Deputy Chief of Staff, United States Army, as the Grand Marshal. Though it was a rainy day, it was a great celebration of the community in Alexandria. Later that night, the annual George Washington Birthnight Celebration was held, featuring guest speaker Dr. Peter Henriques, Professor of History, Emeritus, at George Mason University, who offered insights into Washington's military career and legacy.



## Commonwealth History Fund Grant supports Alexandria City Hall and Market Square Renovations!



Alexandria City Hall and Market Square. Photo credit, Misha Enriquez, Visit Alexandria.

Historic Alexandria has received the Commonwealth History Fund grant from the Virginia Museum of History & Culture (VMHC). The \$75,000 grant will allow Historic Alexandria to conduct documentary research to better understand the full history of Alexandria's Market Square. The project's findings will inform future efforts to interpret and share the complex history of this early urban center.

### Events Calendar!

For more events, visit the Historic Alexandria calendar on our website by scanning QR code.





## *Historic Alexandria*

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## MAKE YOUR GIFT TODAY!



The Office of Historic Alexandria counts on the generous donations from community members like you! Make your gift today to support our important work and leave your mark on history.