



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as The Alexandria Times and Advertiser

Out of the Attic

Juneteenth in Alexandria

Alexandria Times, June 17, 2021

This Saturday, we celebrate Juneteenth – June 19th – commemorating the end of slavery in the United States. Celebrated first as a state holiday in Virginia in 2020 by executive order, legislation was passed unanimously in October 2020 to officially declare it a permanent statewide holiday. The City of Alexandria also recognized it as a paid holiday for city staff in 2020 and again in 2021.

We remember that on June 19, 1865, Gen. Gordon Granger of the Union Army and his troops arrived in Galveston to announce that the enslaved people in Texas were free. It had taken approximately 2 ½ years after President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation for the news to reach the enslaved people in Texas. Texans began celebrating Juneteenth in 1866 and it was the first state to declare Juneteenth an official state holiday in 1980.

A special Juneteenth flag was created in 1997 and revised in 2000 and 2007. It features a star, a burst, an arc and the colors red, white and blue. All have special meaning to the story of Juneteenth. The star represents Texas, the Lone Star State, and the freedom of African Americans in all 50 states. The burst outlining the star is inspired by a nova, or new star, representing a new beginning for African Americans across the country. The arc across the width of the flag represents a new horizon full of promise and new opportunities. Finally, the colors red, white and blue represent the flag of the United States of America and are a reminder that enslaved people and their descendants were and are Americans.

Alexandria has a rich history of observance, beginning in 1889. The first decade featured two eminent and renowned speakers, Frederick Douglass and John Mercer Langston. More recently, the Alexandria Black History Museum held outdoor festivals as well as notable speakers, such as U.S. Senate Chaplain Barry Black, in collaboration with the Northern Virginia Urban League, and historian C.R. Gibbs.

This year, City Hall will be illuminated with Juneteenth colors. Virtual programming on Zoom will offer the following three opportunities for learning and celebration.

On Friday, there will be a free webinar from 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. entitled “Making Reconstruction Count: The Era of Reconstruction with Ed Ayers and Annie Evans.” Jointly sponsored by Virginia Africana, Virginia Humanities and the Alexandria Black History Museum, the program looks at the decade from the perspective of the four million Americans who made themselves free, opening exciting new possibilities for teaching and engagement.

On Saturday, there will be a free webinar from 11 a.m. to noon entitled “Exploring the Alexandria African American Trail (AAAHT).” Members of the African American Heritage Trail Committee will discuss the importance of Black history in Alexandria, what archaeology reveals about the past and the potential benefits and impacts of community history initiatives.

Saturday afternoon will feature a free virtual Washington Revels Jubilee Voices concert from 2 to 3 p.m. The Washington Revels Jubilee Voices ensemble is committed to the preservation of African American history and traditions – presenting songs and stories of struggle and perseverance, trials and triumphs, as expressed through a cappella music, drama and dance. This concert will feature WRJV singing at sites important to Alexandria’s African American history, blending history with performance.



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

To learn more about Juneteenth, to sign up for any of the virtual programs or get ideas for visiting the city's many outdoor sites that bear witness to the journey to freedom, visit alexandriava.gov/BlackHistory.

"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria and invited guests.