

## The History of Historic Alexandria Foundation

Historic Alexandria Foundation was incorporated in 1954 by a dedicated group of citizens who fervently believed that the remarkable early town of Alexandria, which survived nearly in its entirety, with complete streetscapes of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century structures, needed to be protected, preserved and restored. Most of the old buildings were run-down; many were derelict. It was a different town then, not so prosperous, and not a particularly desirable address in the Washington area. The organization's purpose, stated in its charter was "*to preserve, protect and restore structures of historic and architectural interest in, and associated with the City of Alexandria, Virginia, to preserve antiquities, and generally to foster and promote interest in Alexandria's heritage.*" It was to be a membership organization, governed by a Board of Trustees; throughout its early history, volunteers carried out all its activities. Luther H. Dudley, president of the Alexandria National Bank, was elected the first president of HAF.

The Foundation's first enterprise was a comprehensive survey of early buildings. Worth Bailey, a well-known architectural historian and Mount Vernon curator, was employed, along with a professional photographer, Russell Jones, to document every old building in downtown Alexandria. HAF Board member, Ethelyn Cox, a lawyer, labored as a volunteer developing deed research to establish the dates of construction of various early houses. The first area surveyed was Washington Street, because of the continuing threats of redevelopment. Considerable money was required to fund this ambitious project, and, during these early years, the Foundation seems to have lived hand-to-mouth. A synopsis of Ethelyn Cox' research, and many of the photographs, was published in 1976 as *Historic Alexandria: Street by Street*. Parts of the survey were also published in conjunction with the Department of Planning of the City of Alexandria as a *Historic Chart, Alexandria, Virginia*. The photographic collection and Mrs. Cox' detailed research notes are housed at the Queen Street branch of the Alexandria Library.

During the 1950 and 1960s, Federal Urban Renewal programs offered monies to cities for revitalization—favoring demolition and rebuilding rather than preservation and conservation. The urban renewal plans for Alexandria would have destroyed most of the downtown, leaving only a few landmarks; high rise apartment and office blocks were to line the waterfront and Washington Street. HAF mounted a Plaque Program to designate historic structures, thereby raising public awareness of the town's threatened early architecture. Ultimately, HAF and the Old Town Civic Association succeeded in educational and lobbying efforts that limited the destruction to three blocks along King Street. The plaque initiative continues today as a program that recognizes 100-year-old buildings which retain integrity of historic architectural features.

Preservation and restoration of the Lyceum, Lloyd House, Athenaeum, Carlyle House and Boyhood Home of Robert E. Lee, to name but a few, were spearheaded by the Foundation. It has provided funding over the years toward the preservation of most major museum properties in Old Town.

Beginning in the 1980s, HAF sponsored architectural investigations of the 1785 Alexandria Academy, a building constructed as a private schoolhouse, but endowed by George Washington to support the education of orphans and indigent children. Owned by the city, the structure was offered to a developer for commercial redevelopment. HAF convinced the City Council that it could take on ownership of the building and fund an academic restoration. The building was acquired by HAF in 1995; \$1.2 million dollars was raised to complete the project in 1999. The restored building at 604 Wolfe Street is now leased to the Little Theater of Alexandria for its educational programs for children and for rehearsal space

The Foundation owns a small inventory of decorative arts, including antique furniture, as well as photographs, prints and Alexandria memorabilia. This is placed on loan in various museum houses in the city to assist in their interpretation of the city's past.

In 1989, we inaugurated the Historic Alexandria Preservation Fund with proceeds from, the Historic Alexandria Foundation Antiques Show—the antiques show has in recent years been replaced as a fund-raising vehicle by our annual November “Toasting Our Town” event. Over the past 27 years, more than one million dollars in grants have been awarded to a broad array of preservation projects. These include architectural surveys of historic buildings in several Alexandria neighborhoods—Del Ray, Rosemont and Seminary Hill—as well as Afro-American historic sites; bricks and mortar restoration of museum properties, conservation of artifacts in museum collections, funding for a digital survey of the Old and Historic District of downtown Alexandria, and sponsored research on Alexandria's cultural history. Grant applications are solicited from the community and judged by our Grants Committee once a year.

In 1997, the Foundation established a preservation awards program to recognize outstanding efforts in restoration, conservation, and stewardship of historic properties. Applications are judged by a panel of experts, and awards are presented at the annual spring meeting of the Foundation.

The Foundation, in conjunction with the Department of Historic Resources of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the City's easement commission (the Alexandria Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission), holds historic and open space easements on eight important properties: the Lafayette House at 301 South Saint Asaph, the Benjamin Dulany House at 601 Duke, the Bayne-Fowle House at 811 Prince, 711 Prince Street, 207 Prince Street, 418 South Saint Asaph, 229 South Pitt and 207 Duke. Information and legal assistance for the donation of easements is available from the Foundation.

We remain politically alert and in close contact with city officials regarding preservation issues in Alexandria. Our representatives on the City Council-appointed Historic Alexandria Resources Commission, the Archaeological Commission, and the Waterfront Commission contribute directly to the formulation of public policy in these areas. We regularly comment on proposals before the Board of Architectural Review, the Planning Commission, and the Board of Zoning Appeals. Educational workshops designed to assist homeowners in caring for their historic properties are presented on a regular

basis. Our telephone line and e-mail are always open for advice and consultation.

The Foundation depends upon volunteers to carry out many of its activities. We welcome your membership and active participation. Among the benefits of membership are invitations to our elegant spring garden party and to “Toasting Our Town during November. More importantly, you will become a part of the Foundation's ongoing work of preserving Alexandria's unique character and can serve on one of our active committees. Join us in helping to save our cultural heritage for the enjoyment and education of future generations. There is much work to be done, not only in our two established historic districts, but in our many other special neighborhoods as well.

## **Learn More About the History of Preservation in Alexandria and the Historic Alexandria Foundation**

[The Foundation Turns Fifty](#) by Morgan Delaney, MD, President of the Historic Alexandria Foundation

([http://www.historicalexandriafoundation.org/downloads/Delaney\\_19490\\_text\\_21\\_26.pdf](http://www.historicalexandriafoundation.org/downloads/Delaney_19490_text_21_26.pdf))

[Partners in Preservation: A Celebration of Recent Accomplishments](#), by Jean Taylor Federico, former Director, Office of Historic Alexandria

([http://www.historicalexandriafoundation.org/downloads/Federico\\_19490\\_text\\_47\\_52.pdf](http://www.historicalexandriafoundation.org/downloads/Federico_19490_text_47_52.pdf))

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