Address by William Seale to the

Alexandria Historic Preservation Conference and Town Meeting

Alexandria, Virginia, May 4, 2007, St. Paul's Episcopal Church

In preparing for this evening, I tried to stand aside from this town (where I lived for 35 years) and see it in the broader context of American history and historic preservation. It is interesting when you do that, to realize how much greater and more pivotal Alexandria is than just the town we know everyday.

Through history Alexandria has been fairly close to the action, in some measure or another, certainly for two centuries because of the national capital a few miles upriver; but Alexandria was an important place before there was a capital across the river or even an idea that there might be a capital or a nation or even a Revolution against the Mother Country.

The buildings of Alexandria, seen collectively along the old streets chronicle a long history by their characteristics architecturally and in many cases because of the mellowness only time can achieve. Beyond their doors are rooms most people never see, and some very distinguished interiors---some architecturally refined, while many remarkable simply because they have survived for so long unchanged. There is quite a mix of houses and buildings, but it all conforms in a sense to a tone. This tone I think we've never taken the time to define. *More on that later*.

Today when someone speaks of "Old Town" nearly anywhere, it means Alexandria--- a more dignified French Quarter a few steps from Washington. To continue: It is not as trendy as Georgetown, which is a plus; its historic architecture is far

finer. Alexandria, to its boundaries, is primarily residential and a real town, not a suburb. To those who know Alexandria up close, it is a larger matter than merely Old Town. But in their private, tree-shaded anonymity the suburbs turn to the old and historic area for their community signature---their trademark. The assemblage of old buildings has given Alexandria a special identity that makes it so different from Arlington---or for that matter, Chevy Chase or Tuxedo Park. Down in Florida they are building new towns that look like Old Town. Alexandria has many reasons to be thankful for this body of historic buildings, mixed together side by side in varying degrees of importance, some in and of themselves, most as vital parts of a total picture.

The cultivation of this physical presence is vital to the town, as much as to the relative minority who own and occupy the old houses. Preservation is the usual name of the philosophical basis for keeping old buildings. I'm sorry someone wasn't around with a thesaurus when antiquarians were looking for just the right word. Whatever the word's power, preservation, unlike the conservation movement, has for too long seemed peripheral and often adversarial. Today preservation has a huge constituency nationally. Finding someone who is not at least somewhat in favor of the idea is not easy. Yet why does preservation seem so often defined in negatives? One reason I guess is because its hot issues are nearly all emergencies.

If historic preservation was better blended into the system, supported by more precise legislation, sounder, stated philosophy, the challenges would appear early and could be debated by calmer heads, with rules. It is a more comprehensive framework and tighter rules that I think are the future for Alexandria. The system today is too weak for what it has to protect. If you've ever watched a house go down, it falls with amazing

speed. Little, almost imperceptible changes go fast too, and the awful result is not seen until it all adds up over time to a situation that never would have been permitted as a single event.

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Alexandria, Virginia was a business town from the day its plan was laid out and the riverbank surveyed. The plan was certainly not visionary but as plain and obvious a grid as could have been imagined. The tight-fisted founders built this town to facilitate making money, a market place where one could fill his pockets, with adjacent lots for stores and shops where the money could be spent; houses nearby served the human machinery that made the town click. Everything was in walking distance. There were no sidewalks or conveniences.

The founders allowed only one civic space, Market Square, the town center. Here stood the market house---meat market, vegetable market, fish market--- and exchange or bank, and here the city functions and activities took place. Even the tax-supported Church of England found no space in town for a building, so what was to be called Christ Church was built outside the grid and until the 20th century was to be the only building in Alexandria set up with a long street axis to emphasize its importance.

The town's glory, as today, was what we call "location—location—location." Of course in the first half century there was no Washington or federal district. Alexandria stood alone, filled with bright prospects and colonial prosperity. This spot on the Potomac River in colonial days was one of the farthest places one could travel inland by sea-going sailing ship. Waterways were of course the freeways of that time. On upriver

from here, at Georgetown, the Potomac had areas of rock outcroppings that precluded all but very local navigation.

Imaginative business people like George Washington envisioned by-passing these rocks and others upstream and creating a connection between this region and the Ohio River, which crossed the northwestern territory and linked in Kentucky with the Mississippi River that headed on to Spanish domains and the Gulf of Mexico. With canals built around the rocky parts of the river the connection could be complete, linking the Atlantic Ocean with the back country and the Gulf, a super highway that ran right along beside the port of Alexandria.

So you see Alexandria had no small ideas about the future. This plan involved Washington and others before the Revolution and well into the 1800s, although with the Louisiana Purchase the entire picture changed and rather left the Potomac out in the cold.

With the river connection in mind Washington used his influence to place the national capital on the Potomac River, envisioning a city that was both capital and capitol, like Paris and London. Alexandria was absorbed in the new Federal District, as was the less promising Georgetown in Maryland. In fact after the British invasion in 1814, when Washington was in shambles, a movement in Congress nearly reestablished the capital in a location more central to the expanded nation, more particularly Cincinnati. This was heartily fought by people in this region. They won. And it might be noted that the Alexandria trades flourished with the resurrection of the federal city, not least Charles Bennett, who was the contractor who rebuilt the burned out White House. His memorial, built in his honor by the city, is the marble obelisk in the graveyard at Christ Church.

Alexandria history is a feast and the more interesting because you don't have to imagine where it happened. Some of the physical setting survives and the ambiance of it all has remained somewhat the same---that "tone" again. From Market Square General Braddock marched out with young Major George Washington to the French and Indian War. This opened the Seven Year's War in Europe. Young Washington's name was known in the courts of Europe almost as well as that of Braddock.

There used to be an ongoing argument in Alexandria about just how they marched from Market Square. One one side were those who said the troops, British and Americans, marched out King Street to what we call Braddock Road and on to Leesburg and onward. Others insisted that Braddock boarded flatboats and went upriver to the rocks, disembarked and marched from there. It seems that along the river, not far from where Memorial Bridge now crosses the river, there was a rock the stuck out at the water's edge, a big rock, traditionally called "Braddock's Nose." This was where the troops went ashore and headed for the Ohio country. During the City Beautiful Movement in Washington in the early 1900s that whole area was filled as an extension of the Mall; Braddock's Nose was buried beneath the landfill. With the power of the landmark gone, the debate fairly well died out.

Alexandria grew through the 19th century, with ups and downs, and alas mostly downs. The architecture tells the tale. Townspeople were aware of their history. Old issues of the Alexandria Gazette prove the fascination with heritage over and over. The Masons kept their accumulation of museum relics in their hall on Market Square. They've always been great friends of Alexandria history. Most of the town's problems economically stemmed from its position in the District of Columbia, for the legal

arrangements were not good.. When in the late 1840s the town returned to Virginia, the town generally returned to prosperity.

Location worked against Alexandria in 1861 when it found itself the southern or Confederate town closest to the national capital. As soon as Virginia left the Union, the town was flooded with federal troops. It became a center for stores headed to the south. And at this point Alexandria developed for the first time as a tourist attraction, for it was the most convenient southern town Union visitors to the capital could go and see. Great care was taken to accommodate the tourists. Christ Church was kept free of hospital or storage use, so George Washington's church could be inspected; on Duke Street one of the slave markets was a popular attraction and today at flea markets occasionally one finds a stereopticon slide someone took while visiting there, or Christ Church or occasionally even Gadsby's.

Union occupation wore the town down. Vice flourished in every form known up until that time. Yet the officers, many from the Army Corps of Engineers, modernized a very archaic place with sewers, bridges, pavements and all sorts of improvements made for the instruction of and to keep busy the troops stationed there. The Yankee visitors sometimes found the town odd. One New England youth wrote home contemptuously that this was "an old royal town, with the streets named for princesses and kings and dukes." Governor Pierpont, Union governor of West Virginia, head of a government for the time in exile, yet recognized by the federal government, lived in Gadsby's Tavern in a room off the ballroom. It angered this pious man that George Washington had actually *danced* and *frolicked* there just a few blocks from the church where he worshipped the Lord.

More people than not seemed quite as charmed by the town as we are. A youthful Andrew Carnegie, a telegraph operator here, years later remembered Alexandria nostalgically and sent a donation of $500 to the library. Had the library been a public, civic operation, we might have received one of his library buildings, for which, doubtless five or six good early buildings would have been demolished. He insisted that his libraries have public or civic support. Alexandria was not much into civic in the late 19th century, or the early 20th for that matter, and a considerable contrast to the town today, with its extensive city government and agencies.

The soldiers departed. Alexandria was stretched and laid bare. It took a long time to recover and times were hard. People here still held with pride that their town was important in American history. A tour boat from Washington made regular trips on the Potomac to Mount Vernon. One of the tours stopped here overnight and there were boarding house type hotels just for the visitors, even ladies groups unescorted. Visitors toured Gadsby's and Christ Church, viewed the Mason's relics, and walked the old streets. Popular magazines published woodcuts of romantic vine-grown Alexandria places, old town pumps, courtyards with rotting carriages and sagging shutters and sheets fluttering on the clotheslines. History was here a stone covered in moss and it was in the moss more than the stone that lay the appeal.

Downriver Mount Vernon had been rescued by women in the decade prior to the Civil War. It became a national cause, to save Washington's house. The heirs had long since moved out, because the pressure to open it to the public left them no peace of mind. Assisted by the great orator, preacher and politician, Edward Everett, a great deal of money was collected to pay the heirs and the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the

Union secured the first significant historic site in America (Valley Forge predates them a little). They were resolute and by the artistic standards of the time, ignorant, having the cheek to refuse the best advice in America to tear the old wooden house down and rebuild it in white marble, as a more fitting memorial.

Through the balance of the 19th and into the early 20th century, Alexandria could as easily have been in Southside. It was a small Virginia city struggling along. But well before World War I the suburbs started. They followed or accompanied the streetcar lines from Washington and early purchasers of lots got in some cases a year's worth of street car tickets.

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Preservation's influences were here anchored in history. Preservation of another sort had appared in the District of Columbia already twenty years before. By the late 1840s the United States Capitol had become too small for practical use. The functions of Congress were stuffed into a building completed in 1821 that might have served a big state better than a national government. Robert Mills, the government architect, made extensive plans for expanding the building to the north and south in large wings, demolishing portions of the center part. Perspective drawings abounded. The Congress appropriated money with which to begin. The president, Zachary Taylor, the venerable hero of the Mexican War, took no interest.

However, on the Fourth of July 1850 this president attended the dedication of the Washington Memorial on the Mall and unhappily, had to endure in the scorching sun a four hour oration by George Washington Parke Custis of Arlington, who billed himself as the "child of Mount Vernon." Poor General Taylor was utterly frazzled and when he got

back to the White House he ordered up cold cherries, and ate like a starving man. This made him sick and he went down from there, breathing his last on July 9.

Of his successor, Millard Fillmore, we are conditioned to make much fun. H. L. Menken said that his importance was that he put the first bath tub in the White House. But I am here to tell you that he was the most artistically sophisticated president we ever had. He was in step with the times. Immediately he intervened in the Capitol work, fired Mills and brought in the leading architect of the day, Thomas U. Walter. In his instructions to Walter he demanded that no demolition take place with the existing capitol building. He would allow two openings cut, one on the north, to enter a wing, and one on the south for the other wing.

In discussion it became clear that so horizontal a building needed a vertical thrust to give it civic importance. Another dome was the response, a very tall one. Fillmore was told that the old walls would not support it, that the original building would have to go and he stood firm. So Walter conceived a dome of cast iron, patterned on the dome of St. Isaac's cathedral in St. Petersburg, and it is the dome we know today, light, resting upon the old walls of a building----which was considered "historic."

Behold Millard Fillmore, the first preservationist. He did not preclude practical expansion, but insisted that the original be saved. Interesting to reflect that when he went to the presidency in 1851, the Capitol had been completed only thirty years.

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Seeing Alexandria, then, on the "broader landscape," has as its bookends, Mount Vernon downriver and upriver the national capital, both the objects of ongoing preservation and restoration. In the 1920s the Masons built the skyscraper George

Washington Memorial, an architectural salute to monumental Washington. Also in that decade of the twenties the government answered the pleas of Alexandria and relocated the George Washington Memorial Parkway to allow it to pass right down Washington Street, on the condition that the "colonial character" of Washington Street remain always the same. This has not been honored and the attempts to violate that agreement continue even into recent months. Old houses fell, replaced by ordinary superscale "colonial" buildings, at least one memorable intersection was ruined, and so the problem continues.

Alexandria is a remarkable survivor and presents a remarkable assembly of buildings. During the New Deal thirties people from outside got interested in "restoring" old houses here. They sold cheap and were full of charm, a short drive into the Mall. This was at the same time the Colonial Williamsburg project was far enough underway to give a fairly finished resurrection of that historic town. This massive restoration, upon which John D. Rockefeller Jr vowed to spend 5 million if he had to (and ended up spending 77), delighted the design appetite of nation like nothing since the Chicago World's Fair forty years before.. To Virginia the restored town gave a renewed physical past, something more positive than the rotting, sagging old mansions people had admired for a century, but a place with shiny white paint, green shutters and trim gardens. To the nation Williamsburg gave an architectural alternative, sanctified by American history, that was accepted eagerly by those willing to abandon the dying Beaux-Arts neoclassicism (in its variations) but not quite willing to take up the sparse Modernism that was attempting to take its place. *Alexandrians boasted that their town had more 18th century buildings than Williamsburg, where many structures, after all, were mere copies.*

The claim was accurate, but while Alexandria's first restorers greatly preferred the 18th century buildings, in truth what they really loved was a town that was a mixture of architectural styles and types heavily 19th century. Dates of houses were deceptive. The late Georgian designs of buildings lingered here as a local mode from the late 1700s into the 1850s. Georgian proportions remained. Flemish bond brick construction was popular here long after it had been abandoned everywhere else in favor of cut bricks with a slight glaze. Alexandria has good examples of both. The tight 18th century floor plans, side hall etc., remained in use here long after the open planning central heat made possible had taken over elsewhere. Alexandria more often felt a gentle touch of architectural style than finished expressions.

Most of the old cottages and wooden row houses that were here in the 1920s are gone or are remodeled into brick houses. The building up of brick walls over wooden clapboard houses was well underway in the early 1800s. Yet the photographs from the twenties show more a wooden town than we have any idea of today. Now and then one finds a borrowing. The Carlyle House would be at home in Scotland, with its dressed stone front and rubble elsewhere; even that Georgian shape is more Scottish or Irish than colonial American. New England neoclassicism, Portsmouth in particular, is seen in the Lord Fairfax House on Cameron Street. And for years people have attributed the brick house on the north side of the 700 block of Prince Street to Boston's Charles Bulfinch. Yes, it is profoundly New England, but an 1890s colonial revival remodeling of an earlier, smaller house. The colonial revival was always a stronger expression than the original.

The Lyceum's Grecian architecture is straight out of the pattern books. Indeed Professor Hallowell claimed to have designed it and I'll bet he did, taking his cues and proportions from Asher Benjamin's or some other architectural how-to. That building's design kin can be found all over the United States---the outside, at least---even in California in the 1850s. The Greek Revival provided a fine way to make a box important. Add a cupola and you had a court house, or in Minnesota or Michigan, a state capitol.

In Alexandria the Greek Revival, adapted to row house architecture, provided an alternative to the late Georgian vernacular of the town and we see examples along Duke and Prince and elsewhere.

The big yellow house across North Washington Street from Christ Church is a remodeling, probably by an architect named Starkweather, of an earlier house. It sets the tone for the Victorian decades. By the end of the 19th century Alexandrians were making quite a point of their colonial buildings. When one of those "building preachers" got his hands on Christ Church in the late 1880s and tore out a good bit of the interior, the congregation by 1893 had ordered the interior rebuilt as it had been in "colonial" style. A portion of the pulpit remained in the carpenter's shop but the rest is probably a copy of that in King's Chapel in Boston.

We have our main buildings, and our secondary ones. No one is more important than the other in what counts about Alexandria. Alexandria has only a few structures that would be called "architectural monuments." It is the whole here, more than the parts. And while preservation has had its trials, the old city survives.

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The first breaths of public efforts to preserve here---after the Christ Church interior--- came with the Parkway and with the rescue of Gadsby's Tavern, which was achieved by the American Legion even as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, encouraged by an ardent preservationist, was pulling out the architectural embellishments for the new American Wing. The front door was retrieved and brought back from New York, but to see the rest, or the original of the rest that is, one must go to the Met. In general, preservation was a matter of poverty or private endeavor. Public laws protecting historical sites did not come until after World War II, when the enormous expansion of population in the Washington area threatened the integrity of any existing community and the rocket like growth of Arlington was underway. The ordinance preserved only 18th century buildings. But nearly everything was judged 18th century, there being no architectural study of what was built when.

The Historic Alexandria Foundation adopted a program that mounted plaques on buildings to identify them as "historic" and therefore offer some protection in popular opinion, rather as a shield. These were given out generously for the very reason they existed, to protect as much as they could. Home owners had to pay for them. The program was abused, but it did serve a purpose in heightening public awareness of the parts of the whole picture of Alexandria's Old Town. A house by house survey appeared in the seventies, based upon land records, dating or generally dating buildings street by street.

Meanwhile, a board of architectural review, called by that name, was established by the city to filter what could and could not be done to old buildings. Success has been marginal. The inevitable appeal of a town setting so close to Washington naturally

brought in all sorts of vulnerability beginning in the sixties. An unhappy venture into Urban Renewal gutted downtown and replaced what was there---which looked like a small city---with very ordinary buildings one might have imagined in California, replacing buildings that dated from the whole spectrum, from the 18th century to the 20th.

Pressure for residential property in the convenient town fairly well ended the issue of buildings about to fall down from neglect in a whirlwind of prosperity, bringing a lot of good and some bad to the fabric of the city. *Most of the bad could have been controlled.* In what was lost, or distorted, are lessons for the future.

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Historic preservation is no longer largely a battle against bulldozers. More than anything I think the battle is against ignorance---or ignorance of a perfectly valid point of view. The emergency nature of preservation in the past has made preservationists lie in the shade when there were no problems to address. Education on the subject of historic preservation, indeed and historic architecture and its place, has been profoundly lax. Even the National Trust for Historic Preservation has fallen very short in this area----but after all, the Trust was founded to serve emergencies the government could not address. The Trust was to be ready to rise in the nick of time to rescue threatened heritage. It was not an educational institution. (It always amuses me to think how the Trust's charter was signed in Harry Truman's Oval Office, with the noise of bulldozers in the background gutting the White House).

The Trust, whose founding was so well-meant, was held often in contempt by those in power. At about the time it was founded, Truman ordered the midnight bulldozing of Francis Scott Key's house in Georgetown, after vetoing a bill in Congress

that would have saved it. Indeed, Truman's high handed rebuilding of the White House would probably not be tolerated today, thanks to a more general understanding of preservation. Yet one must allow that had he not done what he did, the White House would today be a museum with the president living elsewhere, in a better protected building. So there are points for both sides.

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Poverty has been a key force in preserving historic buildings. That is why Alexandria survived for so long. It is prosperity that offers the threat. What has made Alexandria a desirable place to live is once again location, with the highway serving what the river once did. Indeed the first significant paved highway in America ran from the Lincoln Memorial to Gettysburg in 1914 and a little more than a decade later the George Washington Memorial Parkway was plotted from Washington to Mount Vernon, passing along Washington Street.

Besides location, Alexandria is a charming relic, with pretty old houses, pretty old streets and a variety that is wholly unique. What a good place to live! People come with ideas, kindled somewhere else; most are suburban refugees with their house ideas still rooted in the suburbs. The houses are squeezed, pushed and pulled to adapt to suburban comforts where space is no limit. Enough of this and the character of the whole town begins to change. Then there is outright commerce, development of new residence and stores. The colonial idea has been followed here for a hundred years. House design in Rosemont and out into Del-Ray certainly honors the idea. The bungalow was considered the modern version of the first American home. I know one on Cedar Street that has a fireplace made of cobblestones from Old Town streets.

We see the theme in Yates Gardens, a sort of compromise between Old Town and the suburbs with "yards," yet row housing. And the motif continues in new houses all over, out Duke and King, along the river, wherever you go. This is Alexandria's "style." Yet what of the old core? The inventory of historic buildings is very large here, not only in Old Town but out in Seminary Hills and other areas, where individual houses are likely to appear along new suburban streets that date back to the early periods. On Janney's Lane is even a house where Lincoln stopped for a drink of water. I'm not sure he'd recognize it today. On Quaker Lane is the house occupied in his last years by James Murray Mason, the Confederate diplomat headed for England and arrested at sea in the notorious *Trent* affair.

Along a suburban street is the stone house where Jim Morrison of the Doors grew up; Mama Cass lived elsewhere. These vignettes of history and building are everywhere but never more concentrated than in Old Town. Nor are they more difficult to protect than here. In my opinion they are not protected adequately. It is far simpler to stop a bulldozer than to curb the insidious alterations that are adding up to demolition by part that is quite as detrimental.

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Preservation as a field has changed radically over the past two decades. I think one might say that it has come of age, and the following increases---and compared to Cleveland and St. Paul, for example, Alexandria is in the dark ages. Once entirely in the hands of architects, today a whole field of practitioners address the subject at its highest level. Architects have been a blessing and a difficulty. To begin with, most are educated as modernists and have, if any, very superficial knowledge of past building in terms of

materials, proportions or, most of all in this case, the possible options in renovating a building. They naturally tend to want to turn the old building into something they can understand. I would hate to think how many fine parts of old Alexandria houses went out in dumpsters, to be replaced by something ordered by number.

Alexandria has never had a community of professional architects willing to really study and serve preservation with a true understanding of the old buildings here. Glenn Brown offered a beginning early in the 20th century but moved on to Washington and other interests. Where houses are concerned, what is served up here is adaptation of the most "remodeling" character, the importation of ideas from elsewhere and applied to existing houses, the inspiration found not least in current trends in Florida and California. New Orleans had Richard Koch and Sam Wilson, Philadelphia Charles Petersen, Charleston Sam Stoney, Salem Arthur Little, the Turnbulls in San Francisco, and in Santa Fe two generaions of John Gaw Meemses; and there are other examples of architects like those who studied the subject in depth and set the pace for the era of preservation. Alexandria has not had that and has suffered severely for the absence.

New study and interest in construction methods and materials have influenced historic restoration. In some places preservationists are learning, as Europe has known for many years, that the literal *restoration* or rebirth of original structural systems can rescue a building that has structural problems. Slow pressure on timber parts can bring joints back together as strong as ever. Expert repair of old window sash—in which there were no nails whatsoever, but pegs at the corners and shims within, can revive sad old windows with splicing and other attention, producing a window that the best shop cannot

provide anew. The same applies to doors. When original materials go out, the integrity of the building goes with them.

In planning people are learning to compromise with the original manner of use of the old houses. Too often new houses are applied to old ones. Either the interior is cut open or some wing is added, to serve as a house trailer might for modern conveniences. At least someday the trailer can be rolled away. I have found in thirty years of this that if possible people should live in a house for at least a year. Usually they will find a pattern of living that will work, leaving the house much as it is, with minor adjustments. Everybody who moves into a house will change some things. One does not usually have to maul the place.

In design, the conforming of all buildings to specific architectural picture book standards of high style has been replaced by a more intensive study of individual buildings to determine their own character. The uniqueness is very much a feature of the charm of American houses, which tend to be smaller and less ceremonial than what one finds in Europe. An interest in interiors---which are not protected at all in Alexandria except in some houses covered in easements---has led to a better understanding of them. Architectural history was for so long the study of the outsides of buildings. Windshield history I call it. The approach today is more toward totality.

There has been little understanding of what Alexandria really *is* architecturally. Neither New Orleans, Monterey, nor Charleston have suffered from this. The effects of being so in the dark are lamentable. And it is odd, because I don't think there is a city in the United States that gives more attention to history. No cities---even big ones---rival the extent or high quality of the history department here. Research on this town is vast, not

only city-sponsored but with private practitioners who are interested in the buildings. The published literature on Alexandria is extensive and detailed, I call particular attention to the books of T. Michael Miller, the city historian. The body of documentation brought forth by the archaeology department is rich and amazing in its scope. Thus historians, curators, and a building department with architectural expertise all serve the city.

I have been at BAR meetings and wondered where these experts were. Why weren't they there to give their knowledge where it was so seriously needed?

The legal framework for preservation in Alexandria needs to be tighter. Communication between the historical groups, and even city agencies like the BAR is weak. In my time on the BAR years ago most of us sometimes suspected the motives of officials we dealt with directly; and they could make our decisions very difficult. Appeal beyond the BAR to the city council is a mistake here and anywhere it is the case; going direct to the courts usually means fewer appeals. Politicizing architectural decisions is folly. Alexandria's record is not good. There are guidelines for the BAR to follow, but they are not strong enough; new guidelines for Washington Street are proposed, in reaction to development pressures that would start it on a path of becoming a new Bethesda.

That developers see opportunity here is not surprising. Indeed the way has been paved for them by preservationists, but the preservationists did not guard their own flanks. A developer's purpose naturally is to make money. There are many degrees to such opportunities in a place so desirable as Alexandria, from the most glaring to the very subtle. The question is, is what they want to do good for Alexandria? For example, is the super high rise, fifteen stories tall, proposed south of the bridge out the parkway really

good for the town? Of course not. It approaches in a curious costume of "affordable housing." What really does that mean? How will it be sustained? Affordable for whom? And without the affordable housing offered by keeping the buildings across the street, will the impact of the high rise be worth it? Don't be distracted by an offer that could change overnight, when the time is favorable. Perhaps the maximum use of land for an individual financially is not a beneficial use for the community. Then tell the developer to go elsewhere.

Development comes to the table too often as an equal and with heavy political pressure, as a favorite. Some of the worst has been battled away but more has succeeded than should have been in a sort of development that has not been good for Alexandria. There will always be threats to the old and historic, because of where the town is, and its intrinsic appeal---which of course is based entirely upon the historic ambiance.

Altering the system is a good idea. It is time for it. But what will it serve if those who make the decisions do not know Alexandria better---that is, know what needs to be preserved and why? A big part of the preservation problem in Alexandria in the years I've known it is that the historic city has never been defined in a meaningful, expert way, so that anyone can make an educated decision. It is all piecemeal. I've seen the BAR deliberate three months over a sign and allow an unacceptable addition or alteration to a house pass through in one brief session.

If there was a basis of information and analysis upon which to base judgements, I can assure you the results would be different and at least have a chance at being satisfactory. It is amazing how many bad decisions are made. I think for example of the recent unfortunate addition to the Elliott house beside the Old Presbyterian Meeting

House. Had there been some recourse to authority, that addition would never have been permitted. It is gross; it is clumsy; it defiles not only its neighborhood but one of the best Greek Revival houses in town. When a stand should have been taken against it, the wish to please a church congregation swept over the BAR and allowed this intrusion. Was the BAR addressing architecture, or being Lady Bountiful? Was it doing its job? Of course not.

This is not to decry change. I only speak of change arrived at through some basis in knowledge and reason. Taste is a varied thing, as we see in the Urban Renewal buildings on King Street, now forty years old. They will be eventually demolished. Wouldn't a better solution have been to preserve all or part of what was there before Urban Renewal built these neo-California intrusions?

Some years ago now, Peter Smith and Al Cox of the city made a citywide survey of buildings that were or were approximately 100 years old. Nothing has ever been done with that study. It needs to be revisited and expanded into a rich body of architectural fact and analysis that, building by building, will evaluate individual buildings by history, design, placement in the townscape and the site's value individually and to the town. From such a written and illustrated study emerges a *grading* or *classification* system, wherein the style, materials and state of authencity is spelled out. Classing buildings in this way is a several hundred year old concept. It was practiced in London in the interest of construction even as our Georgian houses here were being built. The Lafayette house, for example, would have been classed "third class" for its scale and materials. Such a system for Alexandria would address the historical place of a building.

For example, the "A" list would likely be buildings that law would protect from any changes in appearance. That is, they could not be added onto designated features of them altered, whether in view from the street or not. It would be highly desirable to include some interiors in this category---not the whole insides of a house, but special interiors. An 18th century interior on Lee Street, much acclaimed back in the thirties when Alexandria was "discovered," has been gutted and replaced with an Arts & Crafts confection entirely new. Calling attention to interiors would help stop this sort of thing.

"B" category would allow some change, of a sort designated; "C" a more liberal approach and so on, but all of them would specify the sort of alteration that was *not* to be allowed. Some buildings that seen alone might seem unimportant would be protected for what they contribute to the surroundings. I do not throw these categories out as absolute in any sense, only to give the general concept.

At first glance such a program might appear to threaten the entire preservation system. Ultimately I think not. This is a bugaboo we've heard for years; yet as the Alexandria City Council has strengthened the preservation laws over time, no revolt has taken place. Other cities like Cleveland have very stringent rules and they are accepted as necessary to support a good thing.

Acceptance by the public of a strong system is going to rely upon education. It is absolutely imperative that the preservation community take its educational role seriously; The historic foundation might well take that role. Making such a survey is a tall order. Many cities are working toward such surveys, even unlikely places like Dallas and L.A. Most involve some volunteers and volunteer organizations. A young woman of my acquaintance is leading this sort of project and supervises 450 volunteers. Still it takes

professional participation, such as that which created the present survey in Alexandria, which I hope we can see taken up again, continued and taken to its fullest completion.

Strong laws aren't going to kill the preservation movement. Funny how quickly even developers---business people--- will get used to things. I am involved in historic preservation of public buildings and I remember when the handicap laws came in and how people groaned over having to change so many arrangements to accommodate them. All manner of extravagances resulted. A case in point is the long columned ramp leading to the Lyceum. No one would built such a monster today; there are better, more subtle and accommodating ways. Objections are soon thrown aside, the laws taken as facts of life and the work moves on, inspiring innovation. The situation with handicap access is true of security in public places, which has become so highly innovative that you sometimes aren't aware of it. For awhile when the first scare caused reaction, state capitols got to looking like prisons. That soon changed and security was handled in other, less intrusive ways. Strong historic preservation laws will be greeted the same way and bring the same desirable results for us all.

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Agree with me or not, a well-defined foundation for better laws gives an important ideal to work toward here in Alexandria. The days of hanging plaques in the hope that someone will consider the building too historic to demolish or deface are really over. Alexandria is saved, Alexandria is universally admired. It is threatened in insidious ways. Now the challenge is to protect it---to preserve it. The objectives are different now and involve small things like materials. They require positive interaction, giving and taking, while on a basis of fact. For example, this very building, St. Paul's church. A few

years ago the front was altered to allow for handicap access. Now a new plan is afloat to create an entrance in the north alleyway. If it were me I'd insist that Latrobe's front be restored before approving the new alley entrance.

Time is passing. Preservation in Alexandria is a very old thing. It is a very old matter in this region; it is far more important in an ongoing and enduring sense than what usually comes along to challenge it.

Long ago a conference here on Market Square that failed, led to a weekend at Mount Vernon that led to a badly attended meeting in Annapolis that led to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Maybe this preservation conference in Alexandria, which is far better attended than that earlier one, will cast seeds for a new approach to the care and perpetuation of Alexandria's historic buildings.

Thank you.

William Seale