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Alexandria
 COMMUNITY MEDIA

From Arlandria to Chirilagua: A neighborhood story

BY KATE RUTHERFORD

The neighborhood of Chirilagua is home to a significant portion of Alexandria's Hispanic community; however, until the 1980s, very few Latin Americans lived in the neighborhood.

Officially called Arlandria, the neighborhood was largely developed during the post-World War II period and takes its name from the Arlandria Shopping Center, built in 1947. When the neighborhood was new, it housed mainly working-class white people, but as Alexandria moved toward desegregation, more working-class African Americans moved in.

The history of the neighborhood is based on work by Krystyn Moon, Ph.D. You can learn more in her newest book, "Proximity to Power," or search for her blog for the Urban History Association.

In the 1980 United States



GRAPHIC/ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH GROUP

A cultural history was created during the city's process of creating the Arlandria-Chirilagua Small Area Plan in 2020 and 2021.

Census, only 3.9%, or 4,042 people, of Alexandria's population was Hispanic. That number more than doubled to 10,778 in the 1990 census, around 9.7% of the population.

Immigration from El Salvador, as a result of the Salvadoran Civil War, fueled this rapid growth. From 1980 to 1992, the war was fought by the military-backed government of El Salvador and left-wing guerrillas. The war resulted in over

75,000 deaths, economic instability and hundreds of thousands of refugees. Many of the refugees who fled to the U.S. landed in the Washington, D.C. area, including Alexandria.

With prices kept low by regular flooding from Four Mile Run, the Arlandria neighborhood was one of the few places in Alexandria that was affordable for recent immigrants. Many of the first Salvadoran immigrants in Arlandria were

from the city of Chirilagua in the Southeastern part of the country. They nicknamed the neighborhood after their home, and Arlandria has also been known as Chirilagua ever since.

Some people decided to move back home to El Salvador in 1992 when the war came to an end, but many chose to stay in Alexandria.

Chirilagua has continued to be home to a large Hispanic and immigrant community, with around half of its residents now being foreign-born. The community has grown to include people from all over Latin America, as well as parts of Africa and Asia.

Historic Alexandria is proud to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month. For more information on Hispanic Heritage Month in Alexandria, please visit alexandria va.gov/HispanicHeritage.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.