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Alexandria  
 COMMUNITY MEDIA

# Alexandria's history and philanthropy

It is only due to the philanthropy of its community members that so many of Alexandria's historic buildings still stand today. The buildings, artifacts and stories that have been saved can all be linked back to dedicated community members.

After the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary closed its doors in the 1930s, Alexandria citizens partnered with private buyers and purchased the collection and archives. The then-newly formed Landmarks Society purchased the apothecary buildings, ensuring that the collection and archives could remain.

The Society's actions preserved the collection that teaches medical history inside Alexandria and beyond. To date, the Landmark Society, now the Mortar and Pestle Society, has given more than \$200,000 to help preserve the Apothecary Museum.

Individuals like Annie B. Rose, an advocate for African American history, housing, voting, senior rights and education in Alexandria, have also driven historical preservation. Rose helped found the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage, opened the Black History Resource Center – which today is the Alexandria Black History Museum – and worked to secure landmark status for the Free-

dom House Museum at 1315 Duke St. Her grassroots organizing, fundraising and civic leadership rescued stories and places that might otherwise have been overlooked.

Another Alexandrian who used philanthropy to preserve Alexandria's historic buildings was Rebecca Ramsay Reese. Her efforts touched many of the historic buildings that draw tourists today: Gadsby's Tavern Museum, the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum, Ramsey House, Christ Church and the Old Presbyterian Meeting House.

Reese leveraged her influence within her social circles and organizations, including the Mount Vernon Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Alexandria Garden Club, to raise awareness and money for preservation projects around Alexandria.

Reese also personally oversaw the restoration of Gadsby's Tavern Museum. She corresponded with Milton Grigg, an architect best known for his restoration work at Colonial Williamsburg and Monticello. Reese was determined to restore the building accurately, and walked to the tavern from her nearby home multiple times a day to personally supervise the workmen.

As quoted in the newspaper, she believed "Alexandria must



PHOTO/HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary from 1928.

maintain its historic landmarks if it is to retain its character ... [and not] become a mere suburb of Washington."

In the final years of her life, she advocated for permanent protection of the city's historic character. Her advocacy played a key role in creating the Old and Historic Alexandria District in 1946, which codified the protection of historic buildings by a Board of Architectural Review.

Friends Groups, private donors and other nonprofit organizations have funded everything from research to restorations, wayfinding signs and collections care across

many Historic Alexandria sites. The Alexandria Oral History Center also receives gifts of stories that preserve the personal histories of Alexandria's residents.

Through this support, activism and funding, Alexandria's historic buildings and histories remain accessible. Alexandria's preservation has always been a civic act: the community making gifts that together protect the places and people who made the city what it is.

*Out of the Attic is  
 provided by the Office of  
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