

Alexandria Times

Denise Dunbar

Publisher & Executive Editor
ddunbar@alextimes.com

Margaret Stevens

Director of Sales & Marketing
mstevens@alextimes.com

Caitlyn Meisner

Editor
cmeisner@alextimes.com

Sydney Kodama

Reporter/Photographer
skodama@alextimes.com

Mathylda Dulian

Photo Intern
mdulian@alextimes.com

Ella Mitchell

Reporting Intern
emitchell@alextimes.com

SALES & MARKETING

Margaret Stevens

mstevens@alextimes.com

Marty DeVine

mdevine@alextimes.com

Patrice V. Culligan

pculligan@alextimes.com

Stephanie Santiago

ssantiago@alextimes.com

Tina Franco

Business Operations Manager
tfranco@alextimes.com

DIRECTOR OF ART & DESIGN

Jessica Kim

gphics@alextimes.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Gayle Converse

Kim Davis

Mark Eaton

Mark Edelman

Thompson Eskew

Kim Gilliam

Jim McGrath

Erin Shackelford

Hannah Shiblaq

Kathryn Ziemer

ACM BOARD

Denise Dunbar

President

Russell Bailey

Suzanne Brock

Carter Flemming

Joe Sestak

Tax-deductible donations
can be mailed to:
Alexandria Times
908 King Street, Suite 200
Alexandria, VA 22314

Alexandria
COMMUNITY MEDIA

Women-owned businesses in Alexandria

BY REBECCA JARRETT

Alexandria has a long history of women business owners, but the city is not an outlier. In the 1700s, many American women owned hospitality businesses. As many as two-thirds of Virginia taverns in the 17th and 18th century were run by women.

One of these women was Hannah Griffith, who owned the 1785 tavern in Alexandria. Her business, the Alexandria Coffee House, was located to the left of John Gadsby's 1792 City Tavern and Hotel. Griffith was resilient and savvy, living through the American Revolution, being suddenly widowed and providing for herself and eight children.

Hannah Colvill was born sometime between 1745 and 1751 in New York. In 1766, she married David Griffith, a doctor and chaplain in the Church of England. When the Revolutionary War broke out, David joined the Continental Army. For three years, Hannah managed their plantation in Loudoun as a "deputy hus-

band," or a colonial wife who took over her husband's duties while away.

After David was discharged in 1779, he became rector of the Fairfax Parish, which included Falls Church and the Alexandria Church – now known as Christ Church. In 1789, church leadership held a conference in Philadelphia to reorganize into the Episcopal Church. David fell ill there and died at 47 years old.

Griffith needed to care for her seven unmarried children and pay off the family's debt. She sold and leased land and moved to Alexandria in 1794. She then joined the ranks of white, middle-class women who opened their own taverns.

Because she was a widow, she could establish the business in her own name, rather than her husband's. She may also have benefitted from social connections. The Griffiths were friendly with upper-class congregants, including George Washington.

Griffith ran a coffeehouse, which was more exclusive than a regular tavern. She ca-



PHOTO/HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

The dining hall of the 1785 tavern, which Hannah Griffith operated as the Alexandria Coffee House from 1794 to 1800.

tered to wealthier customers by charging subscription fees. The Alexandria Coffee House operated for six years, and likely relied on enslaved labor. Records indicate that she enslaved at least one person in her lifetime. In 1797, Griffith also opened a boarding house.

Griffith lived to be around 60 years old and died on Nov. 22, 1811. Her story demonstrates how the American Revolution and its aftermath shaped women's lives. She

also shows how some women leveraged what rights they had to build opportunities for themselves.

This March, Historic Alexandria proudly celebrates Women's History Month. For more information about Women's History Month in Alexandria, please visit alexandriava.gov/WomensHistoryMonth.

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