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The Alexandria Almshouse

In 1800, the City of Alexandria purchased a large tract of land outside city limits and built an almshouse at the current intersection of Monroe Avenue and Richmond Highway in today's Del Ray neighborhood.

Built in approximately two years, the Alexandria Almshouse served as a publicly funded poorhouse and workhouse. While the building offered refuge to the city's needy, the courts often sent people found guilty of vagrancy or indebtedness to the property.

While the almshouse had a 3,350-square-foot footprint, the property spanned almost 20 acres, which the residents farmed for food.

The building served the property for almost 125 years, including through the Civil War. In January 1862, records show 38 residents, along with three horses, two cows, one

bull, 19 hogs, 20 hens, four roosters and five ducks. The keeper's family, which included eight members, also lived in the facility.

Alexandria County Vital Statistics notes three keepers of the poor house between 1886 and 1896: Mary Cornwell, Laura Cox and Thornton Hyett. It is worth noting that Cornwell was appointed to the position after her husband, Samuel Cornwall, died while holding the same post. Cox and Hyett were listed in census records as African American residents of Alexandria.

The 1900 census showed superintendent William Smith and his wife living in the building, along with 13 men and 15 women. The building held 15 white residents and 13 Black residents.

A 2022 Alexandria Archaeology report documents the possibility that residents of the



The Alexandria Almshouse served as a publicly funded poorhouse and workhouse in the 19th and 20th centuries.

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almshouse were buried on the property starting in 1891.

Alexandria County used the building as a poorhouse until a larger, modern facility was built outside of Manassas in 1926. The new property was used by Alexandria and four nearby counties in Northern Virginia.

After selling the land in 1928 and it serving a seven-year stint as a tourist hotel, the City of Alexandria repurchased the land in 1935 and built Eugene Simpson Stadium

on it. The city demolished the original almshouse in 1952.

Readers can learn more about the Alexandria Almshouse in the Alexandria Archaeology Site report, authored by Dr. Krystyn Moon and Dr. Benjamin Skolnik, at media.alexandriava.gov/content/oha/reports/ArchaeologySiteReportAlmshouse2022.pdf.

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