

Alexandria Times

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Alexandria
COMMUNITY MEDIA

More than historic buildings

National Preservation Month started as National Preservation Week in 1973. In 2005, the National Trust expanded the celebration from a week to the entire month of May to offer a fuller exploration of buildings and spaces of historical significance to a larger American history.

This year, Historic Alexandria highlights its work preserving the Douglass Memorial Cemetery.

Long before the designation of National Preservation Week, historic preservation was a priority in Alexandria. Alexandria has the third-oldest designated district in the nation, behind only Charleston and New Orleans.

The Old and Historic District was designated in 1946. Historically, African American Uptown was designated as the Parker-Gray Historic District in 1984. The establishment of both the Alexandria Archaeological Commission in 1975 and the Archaeological Resource

Protection Code in 1989 was the first of its kind nationally.

Alexandria's initial love of historic preservation focused on buildings, not cemeteries. A major catalyst for historic preservation in Alexandria was the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration.

Some of the buildings restored for the commemoration were The Lyceum, Carlyle House and the two buildings that compose Gadsby's Tavern Museum. After serving as a tavern and hotel into the late-19th century, Gadsby's two buildings were used for a variety of commercial uses and fell into disrepair.

In 1929, American Legion Post 24 purchased the buildings, saving them from demolition. In 1972, the buildings were given to the City of Alexandria, restored and reopened for the 1976 Bicentennial celebration.

The Douglass Cemetery Association established Douglass Memorial in 1895 at 1421 Wilkes St. The Association named

the cemetery after Frederick Douglass.

The burials initially were placed in the western half of the cemetery. This half was divided into family lots, allowing relatives to be buried together. The eastern half of the cemetery shows a chronological pattern of burials.

Records suggest more than 2,000 people were buried in Douglass. Today, only 605 individual gravestones, footstones, corner markers and other fixtures are identified and recorded.

The City of Alexandria committed itself to the preservation of Douglass Cemetery in partnership with the Social Responsibility Group and the Friends of Douglass Cemetery. Residents and city staff have identified multiple issues that threaten the cemetery, including standing water, the condition of burial markers and drainage.

Preservation efforts have required patience, given the



PHOTO/HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA
Douglass Memorial Cemetery.

complexity of the challenges and the sensitive nature of the historic site, including unmarked burials.

This May provides residents and visitors with unique opportunities to further Alexandria's legacy of historic preservation. We hope you will join us!

Readers can learn more about historic preservation at www.alexandriava.gov/Preservation. To learn more about Douglass Cemetery, please visit www.alexandriava.gov/historic-sites/douglass-memorial-cemetery.

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