

Alexandria Times

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Alexandria
COMMUNITY MEDIA

America's 200th birthday stirred city's historic preservation

As the nation prepares to celebrate its 250th birthday, the connection between the celebration of the country's 200th birthday and Alexandria's historic preservation efforts deserves a retelling.

While Alexandria declared the Old and Historic District the nation's third-oldest designated historic district in 1946, many of the historic buildings open to the public in Alexandria were restored for the bicentennial celebration of 1976. Some of the buildings restored for the commemoration were The Lyceum, Carlyle House and the two buildings that compose Gadsby's Tavern Museum.

A tavern and hotel until the late 19th century, the two Gadsby's Tavern buildings served 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.

Archaeological excavation, paint analysis and research of surviving documents have provided an accurate picture of the furnishings and use of the buildings in the period 1785 to 1808. Gadsby's Tavern Museum regularly offers a specialty tour, "Peeling Back the Layers," providing visitors the chance to go behind the scenes in spaces not normally open to the public to



PHOTO/HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

The newly renovated Gadsby's Tavern Museum in the 1970s.

see how the buildings have changed over time.

Unlike Gadsby's Tavern Museum, Carlyle House Historic Park was bought and restored by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority. Following the death of John Carlyle in 1780 and the later construction of Green's Hotel, the main site of the "Mercy Street" PBS series, the house owned by Carlyle fell into disrepair.

As early as 1969, the house and the former hotel, then used as an apartment building, were

targeted for restoration as part of the nationwide bicentennial celebrations. Since its reopening in 1976, the building has had one major update: the installation of a Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative fire suppression system in 2023.

Historic preservation in Alexandria predates the bicentennial celebrations. But many buildings that we now think of in relation to Old Town's history owe their restorations to the nationwide celebration 50 years ago.

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. Readers can learn more about historic preservation in Alexandria at www.alexandriava.gov/Preservation.

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

Weekly Poll

Last Week

Total vote count: 345

Do you agree with City Council's vote in support of the Braddock Road corridor improvement plan?

50% No, I supported the appeal.

47% Yes, I think they made the best decision for the city.

3% I'm not sure.

This Week

Take the poll at alextimes.com

Should City Council fund ACPS' Communities in Schools program?

A) Yes, it's vital for Council to work with ACPS to keep the program in schools.

B) No, ACPS should find cuts in its own budget to fund the program.

C) No, neither ACPS nor Council should provide funding.

D) I'm not sure.