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“Nothing but Independence” at the Alexandria Forum

For the first time since 2023, the Alexandria Forum will return to the Alexandria History Museum at The Lyceum Friday. In keeping with the theme of America’s 250th birthday, this forum focuses on Alexandria’s role in the American Revolution.

Arguing that the revolution was a revolution of ideas and not just a war – and that those ideas still resonate today – the forum explores Alexandria and Northern Virginia’s special role in the birth of the new nation. The Alexandria Forum, in partnership with the Emerging Revolutionary War organization, will showcase the region’s Revolutionary War history.

The forum includes a presentation by Kerry Mitchell, historic site specialist at Carlyle House Museum and Historic Park, on the signers of the Fairfax Resolves. The Fairfax Resolves are some of the strongest local resolutions to the “Intolerable Acts,” which

served as a template for the Declaration of Independence, written two years later. Alexandria was the county seat of Fairfax County at the time. The Fairfax Resolves were written and adopted in our city.

Not all Alexandria residents supported the revolution. Public historian Ken Bancroft will present research based on the Revolutionary War Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, a British loyalist who both sought to spoil the revolution in Alexandria and escape it. Cresswell eventually got his wish to return to British soil but left one of the most complete portraits of life in Alexandria during the Revolution.

Greg Beaman, author of the recent city documentary study of City Hall and Market Square, will present his research on the lives of enslaved people who lived near Alexandria’s center during the same time as Cresswell’s journal.

Military historian John Maass will conclude the fo-

rum with a presentation on the Marquis de Lafayette’s 1781 Virginia Campaign. Maass argues that American independence resulted from a determined operation led by the still-young Lafayette to defend the Commonwealth against Lord Cornwallis’ experienced troops. The campaign culminated in Cornwallis’ surrender at Yorktown.

The Alexandria History Museum at The Lyceum is a fitting setting for this exchange of ideas. For two decades before the Civil War, The Lyceum served as Alexandria’s intellectual and cultural center. Like most of the other large structures in town, the building was seized in the spring of 1861 for use as a hospital by the Union Army.

In 1868, John B. Daingerfield bought The Lyceum and remodeled it into a fashionable residence for his daughter, Mary Helen. After years of deterioration, Jean Keith and other

local preservationists mounted a major effort to save the structure, capped by a dramatic 4-3 vote in favor of purchase by Alexandria’s City Council in 1969. Renovated and refurbished, The Lyceum reopened as Virginia’s first Bicentennial Center in 1974 and became the city’s history museum in 1985.

Forum attendees are invited to the Tavern’s Games Night at Gadsby’s Tavern Museum following the Friday forum. The event includes historic tavern games, a brief presentation and trivia. The cost is \$10, and Forum attendees receive one free drink.

For more information and to purchase tickets for the 2026 Alexandria Forum, please visit alexandriava.gov/shop. Tickets are \$60 for the general public, and \$40 for Office of Historic Alexandria members and students.

Out of the Attic is
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