

The Alexandria Archeological Commission

The Alexandria City Council approved the creation of the Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC) in 1975. It was the first group of its kind in the United States. The AAC is a volunteer citizen advisory board to Alexandria's Mayor and City Council on matters dealing with archaeological and historical resources located in the City of Alexandria. It is charged with advising on, and setting policy and direction for, archaeology in the City. The AAC's responsibilities, as established by the City Council, are to:

- ◆ Establish goals and priorities related to Alexandria's history and heritage;
- ◆ Analyze and make recommendations to the City Council concerning Alexandria's archaeology;
- ◆ Propose local ordinances and state statutes;
- ◆ Encourage integration of archaeological and historical information;
- ◆ Provide archaeological recommendations to individuals and communities; and
- ◆ Promote public awareness and participation in archaeological preservation.

Commission Membership

The AAC consists of 14 public-spirited citizen volunteers from throughout the City who are appointed by the City Council to a four-year term. In addition to one resident from each of the City's three Planning Districts and five At-Large resident seats, the AAC's representatives include one member from:

- ◆ Alexandria Association
- ◆ Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
- ◆ Alexandria Historical Society
- ◆ Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage
- ◆ Friends of Alexandria Archaeology
- ◆ Historic Alexandria Foundation



Volunteers excavate Jamieson-Hill Bakery ovens at the Lee Street site in 1997.

Together with Alexandria Archaeology and the Friends of Alexandria Archaeology (FOAA), the AAC practices "Community Archaeology," a concept pioneered in Alexandria which is now recognized world-wide as a model approach. Community archaeology is a cooperative effort involving local citizens as well as City offices, private organizations, and public groups and individuals.

Commission Accomplishments

The Alexandria Archaeological Commission serves as a conceptualizer, catalyst, advocate, partner, and leader when working with the City, private interests, and citizens concerning Alexandria's archaeological resources. As a result of the AAC's involvement, artifacts have been preserved, prehistoric and historical sites recovered, and parks and public memorials created.

Some of the AAC's accomplishments, made working in collaboration with many others, include:

- **The Alexandria Canal Tide Lock Park** (1985)

The creation of this Potomac waterfront park not only preserves the original tide lock but serves as reminder of the City's long waterfront history through interpretive signs and a replica of the tide lock. It was built above the original lock, which is protected below ground. The project was a catalyst in the redevelopment of the city's waterfront, with public access to the riverfront open space and trail.



Alexandria Canal Tide Lock Park

- **Alexandria's Archaeological Resource Protection Code** (1989)

This Code was the first of its kind enacted in Virginia and one of the few in the United States. It serves as a model for other cities in the country.

- **The African-American Heritage Park** (1995)

This memorial park lies on the location of the oldest known independent African-American burial ground in the City and contains the graves of at least 21 persons and commemorates the contributions of black Alexandrians.

- **The Alexandria Heritage Trail** (1990s and on-going)

The AAC developed the idea of a recreational trail which would highlight the archaeological and historical heritage of the City. Today, the Heritage Trail is a 23-mile hiking and biking trail with more than 56 archaeological and historic stops and 100 sites. The Heritage Trail connects to the Mount Vernon Trail and has been designated a part of the Potomac River Heritage National Scenic Trail. The AAC and the City are working with private interests to erect interpretive signs along the Trail.

- **Alexandria Freedmen's Cemetery Memorial Park** (planned 2008)

The Freedmen's Cemetery (1863-1869) contains the remains of about 1,200-1,800 African-American men, women, and children who were interred during and after the Civil War. The site will be preserved as a memorial park to commemorate refugees from slavery buried here.

Archaeological Resource Protection Code

The City Council enacted Alexandria's Archaeological Resource Protection Code in November 1989. The Code establishes Archaeology Resource Areas for the City, overlay zones similar to historic districts, and requires assessment of any development projects in protected zones for which site plans must be filed. Alexandria Archaeology reviews proposed development projects to determine possible impact on archaeological resources and whether preservation actions are needed prior to site construction. Site developers can be required under the Code to undertake research, and, in some cases, archaeological excavation, which must be conducted by a qualified archaeological consultant with oversight by City archaeologists. When excavations are performed, the developer must also provide a site report and a public, non-technical document, and donate the collections to a repository for preservation. Property owners may be asked to allow City archaeologists and volunteers to excavate prior to construction or to monitor the site during construction for those projects which do not require a site plan. The goal of the Code is to share responsibility between the City and developers to preserve archaeological heritage and enhance public appreciation of the City's past.



Early Archaic spear point found at Jones Point, 2001

Since the adoption of the Archaeological Resource Protection Code, archaeological investigations have been undertaken at many sites within the City, about 40 of which are significant. Summaries of some of these sites can be found at <http://oha.ci.alexandria.va.us/archaeology>. The code has saved sites and thousands of artifacts representing more than 8,000 years of human presence in Alexandria, such as:

- Four approximately 5,000-year-old Archaic period tool-making campsites;
- Cameron Mill and mill race, and the Roberts family homestead;
- West family burial vault (one of the founding families of Alexandria);
- Ford's Landing project which contained 18th and 19th century wharves and nine vessel hulls as well as a 19th century railway;
- Quaker Burying Ground (late 18th and early 19th centuries);
- The Alfred Street Baptist Church (founded 1816);
- Civil War encampments, hospitals, and privvies;
- 19th-century Bush Hill estate/plantation houses, a tenant farmer's house, businesses, and cemeteries;
- Oldest lager brewery and brewery vault in Virginia;
- 19th-century African-American burial grounds.

Archaeology in Alexandria

The AAC works actively with public and private organizations, non-profit groups, and individuals to identify, analyze, preserve, and protect archaeological resources in the City. Included among the many groups with which the AAC works are the Alexandria Historical Society, Alexandria Open Space Sub-committee, Historic Alexandria Resources Commission, the Friends of the Freedmen's Cemetery as well as the National Park Service and the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail. The two groups with which the AAC works most closely are Alexandria Archaeology and the Friends of Alexandria Archaeology.

Alexandria Archaeology

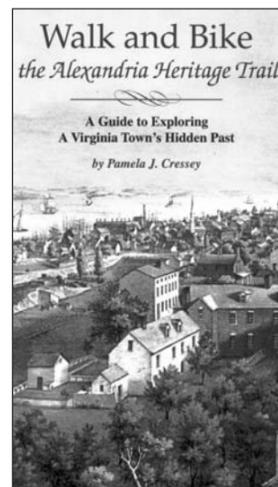
Alexandria was a leader in the historic preservation movement in the 1960s. It appointed its first full-time City Archaeologist in 1974. Today, four city archaeologists staff Alexandria Archaeology, a division of the Office of Historic Alexandria. Alexandria Archaeology maintains a permanent museum and offices in the Torpedo Factory, 105 N. Union Street, and is assisted by volunteers who help with artifacts, excavations, collections management, research, and education. Although Alexandria Archaeology continues to rescue artifacts and information under emergency situations from archaeological sites in the City, its primary responsibilities are to survey and plan efforts to locate, study, and protect archaeological sites in the City, to educate the public, and to study and curate the Alexandria Archaeology collection.

Friends of Alexandria Archaeology

The Friends of Alexandria Archaeology (FOAA) is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1986 to support Alexandria Archaeology, provide volunteer opportunities for persons interested in archaeology, and increase public awareness of archaeology.

As part of its public awareness mission, FOAA sponsors many public events, provides scholarships for students attending Alexandria Archaeology summer camp, and produced the illustrated 80-page book, *Walk and Bike the Alexandria Heritage Trail*, written by City Archaeologist Pam Cressey, which is available in many Washington, D.C. area bookstores.

To join the Friends of Alexandria Archaeology, visit www.foaa.info.



Walk and Bike the Alexandria Heritage Trail, 2002



Getting Involved



Past and present members celebrated the Alexandria Archaeological Commission's 30th anniversary in 2005.

All are welcome to attend the AAC's regular public meetings, held the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the Alexandria Archaeology Museum, Studio 327 in the Torpedo Factory Art Center, 105 N. Union Street, or in other locations throughout the City.

City of Alexandria residents interested in serving on the AAC can learn more about possible vacancies by contacting the City of Alexandria Office of Citizen's Assistance, phone 703-838-4691, website <http://alexandriava.gov>.

For more information on the Alexandria Archaeological Commission, contact Alexandria Archaeology.

Alexandria Archaeology

Torpedo Factory Art Center
105 North Union Street, #327
Alexandria, VA 22314
703-838-4399, archaeology@alexandriava.gov
www.AlexandriaArchaeology.org



Alexandria Archaeology is a division of the City's Office of Historic Archaeology.
Support Alexandria Archaeology!

Alexandria Archaeological Commission



Search • Study • Share