



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Marking Time

Abolitionist accessories

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Image: Ruffled silk purse. Courtesy, DAR Museum.

During the early 19th century, the anti-slavery movement shared its message through publications, speeches, and imagery. Among the most effective images was the profile of a kneeling slave in chains with the wording “Am I not a man and brother?” This image was first used in the late 18th century in Britain, and English potter Josiah Wedgwood soon produced a cameo with the image and message, which could be worn as a fashion accessory.

Soon similar images, including that of a female slave, appeared on creamware and pearlware pieces and in particular on sugar bowls. Because the sugar trade’s success was heavily dependent on slave labor, these bowls offered an effective message about the human toll behind the sugar trade. The kneeling slave images also appeared on items, like purses and medallions, which were sold at bazaars to fund abolitionist efforts.

One example is this ruffled silk purse dating to around 1830. The purse was owned by abolitionist Elizabeth Margaret Chandler or a member of her family. Chandler, a Quaker from Philadelphia noted for her anti-slavery poetry and other writings, served as an editor for the women’s section of a national abolitionist publication where she first introduced the image of the kneeling female slave to readers in the United States.

On loan from the DAR Museum, this drawstring bag is now on display at the Alexandria Black History Museum as part of their exhibition *Securing the Blessings of Liberty*. The museum, located at 902 Wythe Street, is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free.



“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.