



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Robinson Library

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Image: Robinson Library. Photo, Alexandria Black History Museum.

The Robert Robinson Library was originally constructed by the City of Alexandria in 1940 as a library to serve Alexandria's black citizens. This followed a sit-in at the segregated Alexandria Library the year before, which resulted in the arrests of five African American men.

The library, located at the southwest corner of North Alfred and Wythe streets, was named after Robert H. Robinson, a grandson of one of George Washington's slaves. Robinson, who himself had been enslaved, later lived in Alexandria and became a pastor at the Methodist church on South Washington Street known today as Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church.

In March 1940, Evelyn Roper Beam, a native of Alabama and a graduate of Hampton, was named the librarian, and a few weeks later, the Robinson Library opened. Alexandria's African American population used the library until segregation in the early 1960s, and the building was later used for a variety of community service programs.

In the early 1980s, the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage and the Parker-Gray Alumni Association saw the need to document Alexandria's black history, and the city opened the building to them to establish the Alexandria Black History Resource Center, which was staffed by volunteers who collected oral histories, artifacts and photographs.

In 1987, the city assumed operation of the center to develop exhibitions, education programs and collections, and in 2004 the center's name was changed to the Alexandria Black History Museum to more accurately reflect its function and mission of preserving the history of Alexandria's African American people, businesses and neighborhoods.



"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.