



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

A 19th century society formed against slavery

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Image: AntiSlavery Society Broadside, 1836, Library of Congress.

One of the most influential organizations formed to oppose the dark forces of America's most notorious institution of slavery was the American AntiSlavery Society, initiated in Philadelphia in 1833 by William Lloyd Garrison and Arthur Tappan. The society was developed as a direct response to the growing debate concerning forced labor in the first half of the 19th century, and the increasingly inhumane treatment of those individuals and families consigned as chattel.

Early in the 19th century citizens in Northern states, which had already begun urbanizing and transforming their economies from agriculture to industry, began to recognize the cruelty of slavery and the devastating impact on those who not only toiled each day during all of their waking hours, but who were subject to beatings, separation from family members, and sudden sale and relocation to faraway areas.

Gradually a realization emerged among many whites that these African descendants





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

were equal human beings who were historically wronged excluded from the “The Land of the Free” principle that founded the United States.

Yet in the increasingly contentious societal conversation, the debate initially focused not on the institution of slavery in the young country, but rather on the spread of slavery to new geographic areas as western territories were incorporated as new states and accepted into the Union. Even areas where the labor of slaves was largely unnecessary were subject to intense controversy as whether they would be admitted as slave or free states, the major consequence being that the representation of the new state in the House of Representatives and U.S. Senate would have a profound influence on sectional and national political differences.

The Three-Fifths Compromise of the 1787 Constitutional Convention that determined the non-voting slave population of each state would be counted as only 60 percent of the total for representational purposes, and the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which restricted the spread of slavery to new areas, only temporarily eased the controversy.

By the 1830s, increasing agitation between Northern and Southern states and the Nat Turner rebellion in Virginia that saw 60 whites killed by hostile slaves, the conversation shifted between the abolition of slavery altogether or increased enforcement of existing laws on the issue. Within the next three decades the situation would explode into the Civil War.

In 1836, the AntiSlavery Society published the broadside seen here that detailed the hypocritical public policies of Washington, D.C. and the intolerable conditions at slave markets within the nation’s capital, of which Alexandria was then a part. Over the next few weeks this column will detail the elements included within the poster, documenting Alexandria’s role in fomenting controversy, and even violence, against the society which by 1838 had over 250,000 members.

“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.