



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

National Register historic districts in Alexandria

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Image: Ballou's Lyceum, Office of Historic Alexandria.

Historic districts only began being identified and recognized in the 20th century but are a major aspect of historic preservation today as they recognize the significance of collections of buildings and the larger built environment as being worthy of preservation. And it is no surprise that Alexandria was one of the first municipalities to designate one. Following Charleston, South Carolina in 1931, and New Orleans in 1937, Alexandria's Old and Historic District was locally designated in 1946. In 1984, the city designated a second historic district, Parker-Gray. Both local historic districts are subject to local regulatory review.

There are also six historic districts in Alexandria listed on the National Register of Historic Places: Alexandria Historic, Fairlington, Parkfairfax, Rosemont, Town of Potomac and Uptown/Parker-Gray. Listing on the National Register of Historic Places is primarily honorific and includes a number of incentives for contributing resources. The listing of a district recognizes the historic significance of the community, in accordance with certain criteria established by the National Park Service, and encourages good stewardship by both present and future owners.

Unlike local historic districts, residents of national districts are not subject to local design review. Owners of contributing properties can donate historic preservation easements, for which they may be able to reduce real estate taxes, and can qualify for federal and state rehabilitation tax credits to offset the cost of historically appropriate repair and rehabilitation.

The Alexandria Historic District, located in Old Town, was first placed on the National Register in 1969 and was amended in 1984. Rosemont and the Town of Potomac (which includes St. Elmo's and Del Ray) were listed in 1992. Located west of Old Town, adjacent to Alexandria's Union Station, Rosemont is an unusually intact example of an early-twentieth century middle-class trolley suburb. Rosemont's initial development was closely linked to the growth of the electric rail system in the Washington area.

The Town of Potomac similarly exemplifies suburban growth based upon transportation development in the second half the 19th century. Both of these districts have an excellent collection of 20th-century American architectural styles including Craftsman bungalows, Cape Cods, Colonial Revival and Art Deco.

The planned neighborhoods of Fairlington and Parkfairfax were listed in 1999. Both communities were built to house workers employed by the defense industry during World War II and were designed in the Colonial Revival style within a parklike setting. The Uptown/ Parker-Gray District was designated in 2010. Named after the high school that African American students attended in a segregated Alexandria, it is primarily residential, with some commercial buildings along the Queen Street corridor which used to be the center of the city's African American business district. Its architecture is similar to that found throughout Old Town.



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

The National Register historic districts allow us to identify, survey and preserve places of local, state and national significance and contribute to the character that makes Alexandria unique. Join us next week for a brief overview of Alexandria's nationally significant National Historic Landmarks.

May is Preservation Month, a time when communities across the country celebrate historic preservation. The city is hosting a series of events to highlight Alexandria's historic preservation initiatives. For more information, please visit historicalalexandria.org

“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 staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.