



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Our national historic landmarks

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Image: The George Washington Masonic National Memorial, Office of Historic Alexandria.

Last week, we discussed the six historic districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places in Alexandria. Today, we discuss the five National Historic Landmarks in our city. While there are more than 90,000 properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places, just slightly more than 2,500 qualify as National Historic Landmarks.

While both programs are run by the National Park Service, NHL resources must meet a higher level of significance and must “tell stories that are important to the history of the entire nation, not just local communities or states.” Landmarks must also “posses a high, not simply good, level of historic integrity.” If they are not already on the National Register, National Historic Landmarks are automatically listed on the larger list as well.

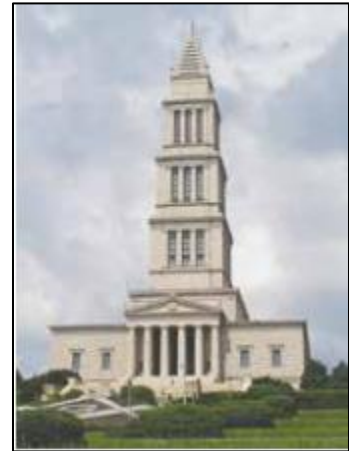
The Alexandria Historic District was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1966. The NHL boundaries are significantly smaller than the National Register District and the local historic district and concentrate on the 18th-century core of Old Town. The nomination highlighted the Chequire House at 202 King St. and the Gilpin House at 208 King St. as particularly unique examples of 18th-century merchant houses.

Christ Church was nominated in 1970. Its application notes that it was designed by James Wren and constructed between 1767 and 1773. It remains “probably the finest surviving and least-altered example of the type of the small rectangular two-story brick church that was utilized in Virginia during the last third of the 18th century.”

Gadsby’s Tavern was listed in 1975. While its late 18th-century Georgian colonial architecture is significant, the museum’s application also highlighted its former guests, including: The Marquis de Lafayette, Thomas Jefferson, John Paul Jones, Baron de Kalb, George Clinton, Benjamin Franklin, General Braddock, Aaron Burr, George Mason, George Clinton, the Lees, the Byrds, the Washingtons, the Fitzhughes, Francis Scott Key and Henry Clay. Indeed, there were very few notable men between 1752 and a century later who did not visit the tavern on journeys between Philadelphia and the South. There were few stops of any kind on the stage routes of that era, and taverns the quality of Gadsby’s were very rare indeed.

The Franklin and Armfield Office at 1315 Duke St. was also listed in 1975. Today, it houses the Freedom House Museum, a memorial to the enslaved people bought and sold by Isaac Franklin and John Armfield’s slave trading firm. The firm at one time was responsible for one-third of the revenue received in the domestic slave trade in the entire country.

The Gerald Ford House at 514 Crown View Drive was nominated in 1985. While the building reads as a typical mid-20th-century middle-class suburban house, it is significant, as the Ford family lived here from its construction in 1955 until they moved into the White House following Nixon’s resignation in 1974, including the first ten days after his assumption of the Presidency.





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

The most recent nomination was the George Washington Masonic Memorial in 2014. The nomination notes both its architectural significance as a memorial to George Washington and its cultural significance in bringing together freemasons from across the country for its construction.

The National Historic Landmarks in our city reflect Alexandria's importance to the larger history of our nation. The National Park Service recognizes Alexandria not just as a colonial port, but also in terms of places of worship, its role in the slave trade and in 20th-century political history. Please join us next week for a discussion on the preservation of Fort Ward, the city's first major historic site preservation project.

May is Preservation Month, a time when communities across the country celebrate historic preservation locally. 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.