

ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT

for

FISCAL YEAR 2020: JULY 2019 - JUNE 2020

SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Fiscal year 2020 marked the 45th anniversary of the formation of the Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC). The mission of the AAC is to establish goals and priorities to promote Alexandria Archaeology (AA), encourage volunteerism, and to advise on the preservation and interpretation of Alexandria's extraordinary sites and collections.

As in the past, the AAC is dedicated to *providing guidance and responsive advocacy, assisting in establishing goals and priorities, as well as supporting Alexandria Archaeology staff and ongoing outreach and education to our community*, so that Alexandria Archaeology can continue to be one of the country's most respected, innovative and leading city archaeology offices. Even with the onset of the pandemic in March, the AAC continues to be active and through their achievements, continue to positively impact and enrich the lives of residents, attract visitors (in person or online), and bring national and international attention to Alexandria's discoveries.

COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP, ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Providing Guidance and Responsive Advocacy

In pursuit of achieving AAC's long range goals, the Commission continues to use as its guiding principles the City of Alexandria Strategic Plan. The members have agreed to retain the four goals originally developed in FY2012 involving: (1) People - Alexandria Archaeology staffing, volunteers, and the history community; (2) Archaeology Museum/ Lab/ Education Center/ Storage; (3) Resource Management - funding and resources; and (4) Archaeology, History, and Preservation. Regardless of the archeological or historical context these remain our areas of focus.

To direct attention to each of these goals, the AAC implemented a new committee structure aimed at increasing engagement with the above core principles. The **Alexandria Archaeology Support Committee** will support Alexandria Archaeology staff with a designated coordinator to liaise with staff and AAC. The **Community Outreach Committee** will work with AA staff to develop and implement a consistent messaging and social media program to engage with the community and to optimize opportunities for advocacy, whether for resources or preservation, education, and resources. The **Civic Engagement Committee** will work to develop strong

relationships with City Council members to highlight waterfront archaeology and the growing role of interpreting Alexandria's African American story, present the challenges with artifact storage, and foster ideas for improving office, lab, and Museum facilities. This committee will also explore partnerships with other City boards and commissions to expand our presence in Alexandria. We look forward to implementing this structure in full force in FY 2021 and engaging City staff and working together through challenging fiscal times.

The AAC strives to support AA within a broad range of topics, sometimes offering expertise in various professional realms represented by members. In FY2020, these areas included analyzing the complex needs of the waterfront artifacts and massive ship timbers, focusing and guiding fundraising and grant proposals, and strategic planning for the role of archaeology as development continues across the city and new historical acquisitions occur.

Ships Committee: To address the burgeoning questions about the best strategy to exhibit, conserve, and store the ship timbers and related artifacts, AAC formed a *Ships Committee*. The primary goal of the Ships Committee was to analytically assess options, address critical needs, and define a strategy and recommendation for the timbers and artifacts. In biweekly meetings, AAC's Ships Committee evaluated a range of options, taking into consideration scholarly use, public access, community interests, interpretation, display, and budget issues. The Ships Committee reported to the Commission and had intent to finalize its report in FY2020 with anticipated distribution to City Council and City staff until the pandemic struck in March. Completing this report and distributing the findings will be one of the first objectives in FY21.

Funding: The AAC extends its thanks to the Mayor and City Council regarding the outcome of the FY2020 City Budget Process. AAC and our sister organization, Friends of Alexandria Archaeology (FOAA), continue to assist in defining the funding needs for archaeology, conservation, and interpretation. As the funding for the conservation of the ship from the Hotel Indigo reaches completion (*to date, over \$64,000 has been raised for the Save our Ships Campaign*), we have broadened our fundraising activity to a campaign aimed at preserving Alexandria's maritime history. The Council quickly supported funding the initial stages of conservation, a process that will take at least five years. The Commission continued to support the annual addition of \$50,000 to the Alexandria Archaeology budget as a contingency to support a visible series of significant discoveries in addition to \$30,000 to stabilize the ships from Robinson Terminal South. The AAC advocates for ongoing City funding to ensure that the ships project will be carried out to completion with an exhibit and interpretation of the ship on the waterfront when conservation is completed. The Commission is already working with FOAA to support this goal.

New Development and Historic Finds: The AAC remains supportive of AA involvement with development across the city – the parking spots near Waterfront Park, for example – and recognize that with each development there will be more to learn about our history and potentially more to store, exhibit, and conserve. For example, the remains of John Carlyle's 1755 warehouse will return to Alexandria from the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory in FY2021 and the ship will be close behind in

2023. Working with AA staff and other City staff for the short and long term needs for these finds increasingly is becoming a priority.



Carlyle Warehouse at the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory

Supporting the Alexandria Archaeology Program

One of AAC's key objectives has been to support the Alexandria Archaeology staff, a critical goal given their increasing workload with the substantial waterfront discoveries, challenges with the pandemic, and amazing creativity and ability to employ social media. With the City's acquisition of Freedom House, these will be greater.

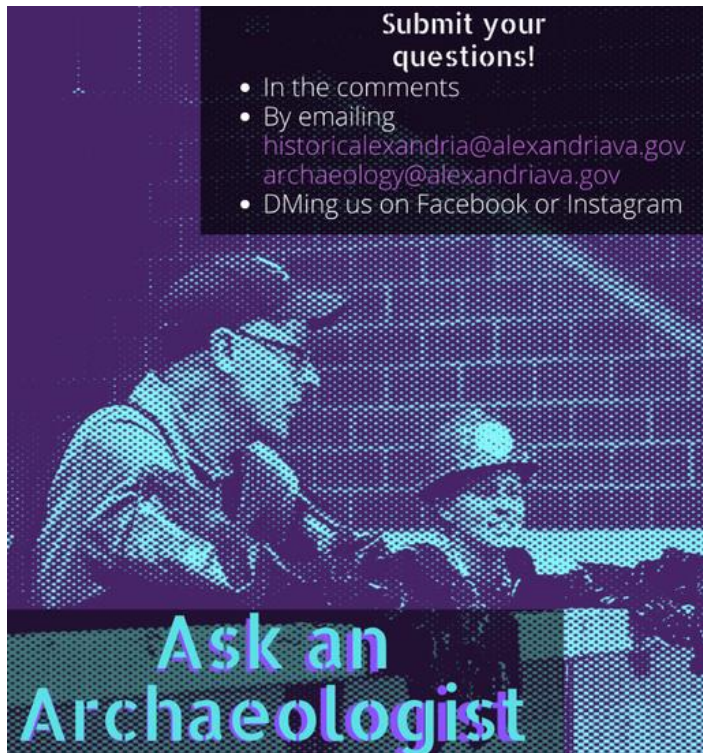
The AAC continued to advocate that two part-time AA staff be made full time: an Archaeologist position and the Museum Education Specialist position. In the past year alone, the part-time Archaeologist has provided invaluable research into and oversight of the waterfront archaeology, Freedom House, and cemetery survey projects and communicated that information to the community, professional organizations, and volunteers through dozens of articles, events, and programs. The part-time Museum Education Specialist created and provided more than 64 Ship Science lessons in past two years to Alexandria students and educators. We predict demand will for these STEM-based history lessons will continue. ***We recognize the hiring freeze set by the City and anticipate the fiscal consequences of this year will be felt for several more to come. However, when appropriate, we request that these positions be increased to full time so that***

the professionalism of Alexandria Archaeology maintains the highest standards as one of the best in the country.

AAC would be remiss if we did not take this opportunity to acknowledge and advocate for the social media efforts of AA. Alexandria Archaeology has stepped up its social media presence in the past few years, and even more critically in the past 6 months since the museum closed its doors to visitors and volunteers, due to Virginia's Stay at Home Order/COVID-19 precautions, and Alexandria City Public Schools and others shifted to virtual learning. Across all platforms – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram – they have 6,715 followers/likes. The #WaterfrontWednesday series has become a staple, covering everything from herring to intestinal parasites to airplanes. Their most popular post from Facebook (February 19, 2020) this year reached over 3,000 individuals and defines the term “sternpost.” This post was written in partnership with the Chesapeake Maritime Museum, who at the time happened to be working on installing a sternpost on the *Maryland Dove* reconstruction for Historic St. Mary's City. This Facebook post shows the power of social media to share meaningful content and forge relationships among cultural institutions, broadening the reach of any one museum.

<https://www.facebook.com/ArchaeologyAlexandriaVA/photos/a.134598742548/10157165892397549/>

During the pandemic, AA has continued sharing stories from the waterfront and in May added a new, limited run, video series, “Ask an Archaeologist.” They have adapted quickly to a rapidly changing world, adopting video and live streaming to bring Alexandria Archaeology to existing and hopefully new audiences! During the height of the pandemic, AA staff also assisted OHA in establishing its own social media presence, using AA staff's skills and knowledge to create the #HistoricALX2U initiative. This move allowed the sharing high quality content and highlighted OHA museums and sites that did not already have social media accounts.



Annually the AAC, in conjunction with AA, present the **Ben Brenman Awards** to those individuals or organizations that have demonstrated exceptional involvement with city history. The AAC selected two recipients for the 2019 Awards, which were presented by the Mayor and City Council in October. The recipients were for Outstanding Interpretive Plan, the Fort Ward Interpretive Committee, and for Outstanding Community History, McArthur Myers.

Fort Ward Interpretive Committee (Frank Cooling, Mary Furlong Minkoff, Carol Johnson, Krystyn Moon, Frances Terrell, Adrienne Washington, and Charles Ziegler): Outstanding Interpretive Plan, for their stalwart devotion to the ongoing interpretation of history at Fort Ward Park; for their leadership in guiding and directing the implementation of a new interpretive experience for visitors to the park, as a Civil War fort and then the center of an African American community; for their pursuit of and vision for a new and updated park history based on the theme, Bastions of Freedom, which charts the arc of history at the park from Civil War to Civil Rights; and for immeasurably enhancing the interpretation of the park with their knowledge, foresight, and dedication to one of Alexandria's most treasured historical sites.

The AAC thanks Council for allocating funds for interpretive planning and associated archaeology at Fort Ward but recognizes that additional funds needed to implement these plans will be scarce in the upcoming years.

McArthur Myers: Outstanding Community History, in recognition of his dedication to the preservation and interpretation of Alexandria's African American heritage; for his leadership of the community history movement through organizations including the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission, the Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage, and the African American Heritage Trails Committee; for his exceptional and lasting contributions to the

interpretation of Alexandria’s history at the Universal Lodge #1, Third Baptist Church, the Historic Waterfront, and others; and for his commitment to public service, devoted to instilling a sense of collective ownership of the past for all Alexandrians.



Additionally, this year Mayor Justin Wilson gave a special proclamation to Elizabeth (Indy) McCall in recognition of her ten-year commitment to outstanding leadership and vision not only for the City’s community archaeology program, its history and historic preservation, but also to her dedication to the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission, Old Town Civic Association and others.

The AAC also pays particular attention to the Archaeology Museum and offices. The addition of the screen featuring Elizabeth Luellen’s depiction of Alexandria in 1765 and the scale model of the ship from the Hotel Indigo site has proven to be a highlight for staff, volunteers, and visitors. As will be discussed in Goals for the Future section, AAC is advocating further upgrades for the office, lab, and museum. In addition, AAC remains attentive to the future of the Torpedo Factory Art Center and plans to continue to follow and participate in the Vibrancy planning process.

Community Outreach and Education:

Since the work began on EYA’s riverside development site at Robinson Terminal South (RTS) on South Union Street, archaeologists have uncovered, in addition to the ship timbers, a rich complex of buildings and artifacts dating from the 18th through 19th centuries, including foundations of homes and businesses of a broad spectrum of free and enslaved Alexandrians from many walks of life. These discoveries have become the core building blocks for engaging the community with their stories.

AA, with support and participation from the AAC, ***offered nearly 80 public programs and lessons this past year.*** Several key accomplishments in FY2020 including annual Day of Archaeology event in partnership with DC-based non-profit Archaeology in the Community (serving over 215 people), Archaeology Day as part of October’s Virginia Archaeology Month (serving 506 visitors), Archaeocon – sponsored by the Archaeology Institute of America (serving over 350 people), our ever-popular hands on activities including ship biscuit making (over 650

people) and shoreline building, just like Alexandrians did in the 18th century! Finally, AA held a symposium at this year's international Society for Historical Archaeology conference presenting Alexandria's waterfront history and inviting colleagues to present their research on the topic, "Urban Archaeology, Down by the Water."

COMMISSION MEMBER ACTIVITIES

AAC members have followed, advised, and participated in multiple aspects within Alexandria that focus on the city's history. Most notable in FY2020 include:

- Monitored progress of the **waterfront plan** via our participation on the Waterfront Commission and the **waterfront public art process**.
- Supported the implementation of the **Fort Ward Interpretive Plan**.
- Supported, as the primary public commission supporting the **Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery Memorial** and **African American heritage** in the city, the 5th anniversary of the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery Memorial dedication in September 2019.
- Followed and advised on the Section 106 process for the **Ramsey Homes** redevelopment project and the mitigation strategies.
- Advised, as a member of the **RiverRenew Stakeholders Advisory Group**, on the potential archaeological implications of various options considered.
- Represented, as a member of the **Waterfront Commission**, the voice of archaeology and history on the waterfront.
- Spearheaded the efforts of an ad hoc committee on developing an **African American Waterfront Heritage Trail**, the outcome of which will serve as a template for future collaborations.
- Volunteered a total of 220 hours in its commitment to review, advise, and advocate to Council for the many important occurrences of archaeological discovery and areas of historic importance throughout the city of Alexandria.

GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

The goals of the AAC for the future, at the time of this report, can best be summed up in a few words – we are open and ready to be a partner with the City in navigating the upcoming pandemic related challenges regarding :

- Development of a waterfront/maritime plan that recognizes the budget and competitive needs of the city and its residents;
- Interpretation of the African American story of Alexandria based on updated historical analysis of the Freedom House and other sites, projects, and collaborations focusing on African American history;
- Support for innovative solutions for the storage, exhibition, conservation and accessibility of maritime artifacts;
- Support for the continued leadership, staffing, and professional development of AA including education, museum upgrade, and lab facility (s) to remain one of the country's leading archaeology programs;

- Continue to advocate for a sustainable budget in support of a viable archaeological program for the city and seek new funding sources to support the work of the program; and
- Recruit membership in the Commission to fill vacancies.

As our last several annual reports emphasized, the ongoing **waterfront/maritime** discoveries amplify the role of the Commission and its mission of preservation, education, and advocacy for Alexandria’s archaeological and historic resources, as advanced by the City of Alexandria Strategic Plan. Integration of maritime history and interpretation into the design of the Hotel Indigo provides a small example of how some private involvement and creativity benefits the city. *It would be the intent of the AAC to continue to participate and advocate for exploration into other opportunities that may arise where private industry acts as partners in the planning for future waterfront/maritime goals.* Several discoveries, such as Carlyle and Hooe warehouses (the former being the site of Alexandria’s first brewery) lend themselves to this opportunity.

Our primary goal is to ensure that interpretation is incorporated into and part of the upcoming waterfront projects.

Alexandria Archaeology and the AAC have consistently led the charge to seek out **our African American history** and to weave those stories into the historical narrative we present to residents and visitors. Whether it be Freedmen’s Cemetery, Fort Ward Park, or Douglass Cemetery, Alexandria’s preserved sites, sacred places, exhibits, and programs honor the legacy of African Americans – enslaved and free. Just as all eyes turned to the City to follow the progress of the reclamation of Freedmen’s Cemetery from a forgotten and desecrated space to one of healing and reconciliation with the past, now the City again takes center stage with the purchase and preservation of Freedom House.

The AAC fully supports the Freedom House initiative with the goal to create a museum that is a national focal point and resource to not only learn about Alexandria’s implication in the domestic slave trade but also as a place that challenges visitors to pursue ideals of racial equity and deep historical knowledge. This requires not only seeking funds for the preservation of the building itself, but also for new staff that can usher Black History, OHA, AA, and the rest of the City into this new era. In addition to our support of Freedom House, the AAC will continue to pursue additional efforts that educate and preserve African American history; like the African American Heritage Trail, cemeteries and the Equal Justice Institute Community Remembrance Project.

AAC would like to take this opportunity to recognize City Council and the City Manager for the creation and appointment of the City’s first Race and Social Equity Officer, Jacqueline Tucker. The position demonstrates the City’s commitment to ensuring that all actions and policies are assessed through the lens of anti-racism and promote equity within the walls of city government and in the community. We look forward to inviting Ms. Tucker to an AAC meeting.

The AAC is highly committed to updating the facilities used by staff and finding **innovative solutions**. In fact, the Commission has moved our meeting location to the Lloyd House versus the museum conference (lunch) table to: a) promote accessibility for members or public attendees, and b) have more opportunity for professional presentations. This speaks to the

broader issue of upgrading the AA museum and office space to further attract visitors; enhance their experience with contemporary, interactive exhibit space; and provide adequate meeting and research space.

The AAC does recognize some progress in this area but acknowledges that there is much more work to be done. Not only must outdated exhibits be replaced, there is an urgent need to maximize the efficiency of the current office space as well improve the accessibility of all exhibits.

Museum visitation remains high (despite the museum closure due to the pandemic from March through June). This highlights the role of the museum as a waterfront and Torpedo Factory Art Center destination. More than 30,000 visitors explored the exhibits in FY2020; 95 volunteers assisted in the museum for a total of 4500 hours; and thousands of artifacts were analyzed in the lab. In order to sustain and improve upon this growth, ***it is urgent that the City address areas of need and long-term neglect in this free, yet highly visible, City museum, office, and lab.*** Beyond addressing the aging and failing infrastructure of the museum, staff office, and artifact storage space, the AAC ***suggests that the City support museum redesigns and office updates and continued discussions about the plans for the Torpedo Factory Art Center.*** AAC looks forward to working with the City to find fiscally sound solutions.

As noted earlier, several large conserved sections of Carlyle's warehouse and the timbers from the ship from the Hotel Indigo will be coming back to Alexandria starting in less than 24 months. ***Storage will be a key need beyond the museum that must be addressed.***

One of the key priorities for the AAC is to assist the AA in **remaining one of the country's leading city government archaeology programs.** AAC feels it is critical for our city, which is so rich in archeological tradition and historical significance, to continue to attract the best in their field, be leaders in academic and scholarly advancement, and provide engaging interpretation for residents and visitors.

Currently, AAC accomplishes this goal by inviting AA staff to present topics throughout the year. This year, presentations covered the museum's new Preserving Alexandria's Maritime Heritage exhibit; the Certified Local Government grant project to conduct non-invasive geophysical studies of two city cemeteries associated with African Americans; the documentation, stabilization, and storage of the three ship hull remnants from Robinson Terminal South; and a visit to Fort Ward. These presentations offer the commission a deeper understanding of the operations, challenges and discoveries of the City's archaeological work; opportunity for discussion; and significantly strengthens the AAC's ability to advise Council and recommend specific courses of action to the City of Alexandria.

Budget advocacy for the critical projects that AA and OHA plan and undertake will continue to be a main objective in FY2021. ***We plan to prioritize the most essential initiatives that require funding beyond the annual allotment.***

LEADERSHIP AND CURRENT AAC MEMBERSHIP/TENURE

The Commission elected officers in September 2019. Ivy Whitlatch was elected as Chair, Esther White as Vice Chair, and Ann Davin as Secretary. One new member was appointed (Elizabeth Vehmeyer) and two members resigned (Elizabeth McCall and Katy Cannady). ***There are three key vacancies on the Commission that require attention;*** the commission is seeking representatives from the Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage (and is currently exploring ways to change that designation to the broader coalitions of Alexandria African American historical organizations/persons), Visit Alexandria, and the Alexandria Historical Society.

Chair	Ivy Whitlatch	December 2022
Vice Chair	Esther White	December 2021
Secretary	Ann Davin	March 2023
Members	Ralph Rosenbaum	January 2021
	Seth Tinkham	April 2021
	Janice Magnuson	May 2021
	Jacob Hoogland	September 2021
	Mark Ludlow	December 2021
	Richard Owens	April 2022
	Dylan Colligan	September 2022
	Edward Pulliam	March 2023
	Elizabeth Vehmeyer	December 2023

Eleanor Breen, City Archaeologist, acted as the staff liaison to the AAC during the course of the year.

ATTACHMENTS

January 16, 2020

Mayor Justin Wilson and City Alexandria Council
Alexandria City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Mayor Wilson and Alexandria City Council:

The Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC) commends the Alexandria City Council for their intent to purchase Freedom House. This represents an exciting opportunity to study and present a more complete version Alexandria's unique history to current and future generations.

The last archaeological study of the Freedom House was conducted in 1984 and 1985. As we all know, both archaeological research and technology have evolved considerably since that time. The opportunity for Alexandria Archaeology to discover new insights into the story of the Freedom House is a unique and exciting prospect for the City and its residents. The professionals in the department are well positioned and eager to work with city staff to research Freedom House.

The Alexandria Archaeological Commission views Freedom House as one of our key initiatives. We look forward to assisting Alexandria Archaeology and the City with this significant urban archaeological endeavor.

In closing, the AAC endorses the City's intent in acquiring Freedom House and welcome the opportunity to support the City in their efforts.

Sincerely,

Ivy Whitlatch, Chair

Alexandria Archaeological Commission