

A SELF-GUIDED TOUR

By

Kathy Holt and Anne Webb

Welcome to the old Hume School, now the Arlington Historical Museum. This Victorian brick building is the oldest standing schoolhouse in the County, built in 1891 on land donated by Frank Hume (whose portrait hangs on the wall of the Museum's main room). Mr. Hume was a Confederate veteran who arrived in Washington in 1869 and established a large wholesale grocery business in the District of Columbia. His summer home, "Warwick," built in what was then Alexandria County, is now the site of the Warwick Village Apartments. Mr. Hume took an active part in the civic and political life of the County for many years, including serving as a delegate to the Virginia General Assembly.

The school was closed in 1956, and Arlington County, with the permission of Frank Hume's heirs, turned the building over to the Arlington Historical Society in 1961. After renovation, it was opened to the public as a Museum on May 11, 1963. Today over 2500 objects belonging to the Society are catalogued and the staff is able to change the exhibits every six months.

Notice the brickwork and other Victorian detail on the exterior of the building. The iron gate at the front entrance was added in the 1920's after a coal theft. The original bell, inscribed MacPherson, Philadelphia 1891, still rings on special occasions. Enter the building through the iron gate, the double doors, the old entrance hall and into the main room.

In the main room, you will see an exhibit on the School itself. ① Note the medals given as awards for perfect attendance in the early 1900's. The current displays here include an 1892 Beckwith Parlor Organ in working condition ②, a display on Washington-Lee High School ③, a recreated printing office ④ (note how many different newspapers have been printed in Arlington), a display of a few examples of the civic pride and spirit that have always characterized Arlingtonians ⑤, and some "Toys of Long Ago." ⑥

Out in the hallway, you will see an early victrola and two old radios. As you go downstairs, note the large photos of a few of Arlington's historic homes, including the Ball-Sellers house (built c. 1750 and belonging to the Arlington Historical Society), and the Glebe house, originally built c. 1755 for the rector of the Falls Church.

Downstairs the first things you will see are the large pawn balls ⑦, a reminder of Rosslyn's early days. Seventy-five years ago, Rosslyn was a den of iniquity infested not only with pawnshops, but also with gambling dens, saloons and bordellos. Farmers returning from market in the District had to form armed convoys to get safely home.

The huge cauldron ⑧ came from the William Torreyson farm. Mr. Tor-

reynson was a Quaker who used this kettle to cook rations while he served as Forage Master for the Confederate Army. After the Civil War, he used this kettle on his Arlington farm to scald hogs.

Arlington had to have some way to deal with all this illegal activity and built its first jail and courthouse in 1898. Here we have the jail door, two locks and keys as well as the cupola and cornerstone of the original courthouse. ⑨

Arlington's first distinct identity came with the creation of the Federal District in 1790. In 1801, George Washington ordered that ten square miles of the District of Columbia be enclosed with boundary or jurisdiction stones placed at one mile intervals. A map ⑩ locates the stones remaining along this original boundary line, which now forms the northwest and southeast lines of Arlington County. Arlington was first known as Alexandria County, and retained this name even after the Virginia portion of the Federal District was returned to Virginia in 1846. In 1920, the name of our County was changed to Arlington to avoid confusion with the City of Alexandria, and in honor of George Washington Parke Custis' (George Washington's adopted grandson and Robert E. Lee's father-in-law) home, Arlington House. The Arlington House and Cemetery is one Arlington's finest and best known landmarks. A photo display ⑪ here gives a brief history of this Arlington "trademark."

Other photographic displays include:

- a few of Arlington's schools ⑫
- historic homes ⑬
- cemeteries ⑭
- early roads ⑮
- bridges ⑯
- industries ⑰
- transportation ⑱ (a major factor in the development of Arlington County was the railroads, and one of the first Wright Brothers flights took place in Arlington, at Fort Myer)

Arlington was a rural community until very recently. On permanent display are farm and household items used by Arlington residents in the past. Arlington's last farmer, Nelson Reeves (who closed his dairy farm in 1955), is represented by the wood from his barn ⑲ and his milk bottles ⑳. There is also a picture of the farm, which straddled Arlington Boulevard near Bon Air Park ㉑.

Please go upstairs through the hall and up the next flight of stairs for more exhibits. As you ascend notice the "wood" step risers—this is not really wood, only a painted imitation (a Colonial/Victorian art called graining). Also notice the Centennial Flag and the Paisley shawl—a must for every woman in the 1880's.

Turn right immediately at the top of the stairs. The school room reminds us of the history of the building and shows us what a school room of the 1890's looked like. The school master's desk was made in 1861 for a schoolhouse in Vienna. To recapture the flavor of the Hume School when it was first opened, a variety of items are shown—a set of mottoes, McGuffey readers, and slates.

Next door is the parlor of a well-to-do family of the late 19th century. The fireplace mantel came from Blair House in Washington. Pay special attention to the walnut desk that belonged to Jefferson Davis during the Civil War, and the horsehair sofa with its original upholstery. The oval portrait of the small girl is the woman who donated the marble-topped sideboard (an elaborate Louis XV revival piece) and the Eastlake bedroom set next door. Here in the parlor, a tea party is in progress.

Step to the bedroom; notice the packing going on—vacation time. The leather hat box once belonged to Chief Justice John Marshall.

Behind you is a small exhibit on a very important part of Arlington history—the influence of our Black citizens. The dress belonged to Blanche White, a former slave. Her photo and story are alongside.

Next are some examples of “Country Crafts” in Arlington. The rocking chair is made of walnut—grown and made by George Donaldson, a pioneer Arlingtonian. The quilts and spinning wheels are symbols of a simple yet hard-working life.

The Civil War was a traumatic time for Arlington—twenty-two forts were built along the Arlington heights and over 15,000 troops were stationed here. Although there were no real battles in Arlington (only a minor skirmish or two) the impact of this encampment made more changes for Arlington’s 1,447 people (1860 census) than if there actually had been fighting in the County. For one thing, the landscape was completely changed (hundreds of thousands of trees were cut down). Even today there are reminders of these times—bullets, buckles, canteens, swords, etc. may still be found here. These cases and maps, along with the contemporary photos, give us some insight into what it must have been like.

Around the corner are many photos of Old Arlington and around the next corner are even older items, the Indian and geological relics found in Arlington. The diorama is an idealization of the village Captain John Smith found at the site of the Pentagon when he sailed up the Potomac in 1608.

A collection of maps and information on the County called Arlington completes your tour of the Arlington Historical Museum. We hope you enjoyed it. Come again!