Arlington Historical Society

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Arlington Historical Society
Spring 2023

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Arlington Historical Museum

1805 South Arlington Ridge Road
Saturdays, Sundays
1:00 - 4:00 PM

Ball-Sellers House

5620 3rd Street, South
Saturdays 1:00-4:00 PM
April through October

Virtual AHS

Website: https://arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org
Facebook: Arlington Historical Society
Twitter: #ArlingtonHistory
Instagram: ArlingtonHistory

AHS Board Meeting

Board meetings are on the fourth Tuesday of every month at the Arlington Historical Museum.

President's Dispatch

It is with mixed emotions that I write this, my final President's Dispatch. After five years as AHS President, I will be stepping down. When I assumed this leadership role, I was just finishing up my career as a social studies educator in APS and this was a wonderful transition to allow me to focus on my love of history and Arlington. It has been my honor to serve in this capacity and help lead the telling of our county's history.

Over the past five years, I am so thankful for all the amazing people with whom I have had the opportunity to work. The dedication of the Board members and volunteers at AHS is so impressive. I am awed by how much we can accomplish with people who are doing this work as volunteers because they care about Arlington history. In addition, we have had numerous guest speakers who donate their time to share the untold stories of the county.

I am also proud of the progress we have made in the past five years. Our updated website has become more robust with decades of research articles about Arlington and educational resources for teachers. Our social media team has done an outstanding job reaching out with daily history posts, described by one viewer as a "history lesson every day." Most importantly, we have worked hard to "uncover" Arlington history and tell stories that have not been told. This is our current work and one that we will continue to do. Very impressive for a team of volunteers.

There have been challenges during my five years with the biggest one being fundraising. Owning a museum that dates to the 1750s and a museum in an 1891 building means costly preservation and renovation challenges. Since we do not receive any on-going government funding for operations and maintenance, we depend on membership dues and donations. Therefore, we spend lots of time writing grants and seeking donations when we much prefer spending time exploring and uncovering history.

My plans include continuing my work with AHS. I look forward to focusing more of my time developing educational resources about Arlington history. I am thankful to be a part of such a great organization and I thank all the members for their support.

Upcoming AHS Events

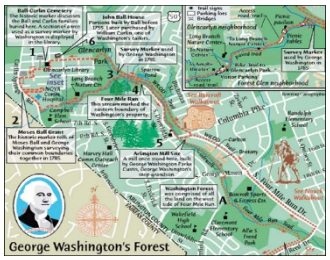
Unless otherwise noted, all events are free to the public and monthly events are held virtually via Zoom and in-person at the library auditorium on the Marymount University main campus. Visit https://arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org/events for Zoom access or directions to free on-campus parking.

Saturday, April 1, 2023, 1-4 pm

Threading History in Wool, Linen, and Cotton: Colonial Textiles. We're celebrating the opening of the 2023 season of the Ball-Sellers House, the oldest structure in the county. Mt. Vernon expert Sandy Newton will demonstrate how the original owners and their five daughters would have made cloth and clothing. You can try your hand at felting and weaving like they did. *(In-person at the Ball-Sellers House 5620 3rd Street, South, FREE)*

Thursday, April 13, 2023, 7 pm

Cherrydale Drug Fair Sit-In. This event is jointly hosted with the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington. Local historian Gregory Embree takes us back to that era to the planning, the fear, and the abuse. Based on personal interviews with many of the protesters, firsthand reports, and in-depth documentation, our speaker will also talk about what this protest meant to the Cherrydale community, to Arlington, and to civil rights in our region. *(Virtual on Zoom and in-person at Marymount University Reinsch Library Auditorium, 2807 N. Glebe Rd, FREE)*



Saturday, April 22, 2023, 1:30 pm

George Washington's Forest Guided History Walk. In 1775, Washington bought 1200-acres in what is now Arlington and after the Revolutionary War, he returned to survey his property. You'll walk in Washington's footsteps and see survey markers he used, a DC boundary stone, the site of a mill built by his step-grandson, and much more. *(Starts at the Ball-Sellers House at 5620 3rd St., South in Glencarlyn 1:30 pm FREE but donations welcome!)*

Sunday, April 30, 2023, 10- 3pm

Spring Celebration. The Ball-Sellers House, in partnership with the Glencarlyn Library Garden celebrates colonial gardening. Tour the c.1750 farmhouse and learn from reenactors, master gardeners, and Friends of Urban Agriculture how colonial Virginians grew and used their garden produce. Practice with a quern or a mortar and pestle to grind grain or corn like our ancestors did. *(In-person at the Ball-Sellers House at 5620 3rd St., South and at the Glencarlyn Library at 300 S. Kensington St., FREE)*

Thursday, May 11, 2023, 7 pm

Annual Members Meeting. At the beginning of this month's public program, AHS will take a few minutes to ask our members to vote for the 2023-2024 AHS Officers and Board of Directors. Our public program will follow directly afterward. *(Virtual on Zoom and in-person at Marymount University Reinsch Library Auditorium, 2807 N. Glebe Rd, FREE)*

Thursday, May 11, 2023, 7:15 pm

Baseball in Arlington. Join us for a fun night of Arlington baseball history as seen through a collection of photos and stories from Johnathan Thomas, board member of the Arlington Sports Hall of Fame, a past president of AHS, and "career" Arlington ballplayer. Follows a brief annual members meeting. *(Virtual on Zoom and in-person at Marymount University Reinsch Library Auditorium, 2807 N. Glebe Rd, FREE)*

Notice to Members of the AHS Annual Meeting

The Arlington Historical Society will hold its annual meeting of members on Thursday, May 11, 2023, at 7:00 pm. The meeting will be held BOTH on Zoom and in person at the Reinsch Library Auditorium on the main campus of Marymount University. If you plan to attend by zoom, please register at this link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdP1n6ER6vnLsiqi6qW71UwkpQdcJtswICL5PNX37z921z_Hg/viewform?usp=sf_link

The business portion of the meeting, when new officers and other directors will be elected, is expected to be short. It will be followed by a presentation titled "Arlington Baseball," presented by former AHS Board President, Johnathan Thomas. Further information can be found at AHS's website at https://ArlingtonHistoricalSociety.org.

At the meeting, the AHS nominating Committee intends to nominate the following for election as officers and directors for the 2023-2024 year:

Officers

President: David Pearson
Vice President: Sean Denniston
Treasurer: John Tuohy
Secretary: Sandy Newton

Members of the Board of Directors

Catherine Aselford
Annette Benbow
Charles Clark
Cathy Bonneville Hix
Patrick Hope
Jessica Kaplan
Richard Samp
Michael Schaffner
Annette Scherber
Dale Smith
Martin Suydam
Peter Vaselopulos

Members Only: 10% Discount at the AHS Online Book Store

https://arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org/shop

AHS Members get 10% off all purchases online just as you would if you visited our museum shop. Use this Coupon Code on the Checkout page: AHSMEMBER10

AHS offers the largest selection of books on Arlington history anywhere. Some are not even available on Amazon or Barnes and Noble! Every book you buy helps support the AHS mission to strengthen our community by improving the understanding of our shared history.

AHS ANNUAL BANQUET
September 27, 2023
Washington Golf and Country Club

Stewardship of Your Money

AHS depends on donations and membership fees to allow us to carry out our mission. Your financial donations have allowed us to continue the following work:

- Purchase of supplies to improve storage for the AHS artifact collection.
- Management of a Zoom account that we now use to live stream events.
- Downpayment for the September AHS banquet.

USS Arlington Model to Be Installed at Ellen M. Bozman Government Center
AHS Members Invited to Installation and Private Reception

On April 12, 2023, the Arlington Historical Society, in collaboration with the USS Arlington Community Alliance and Arlington County, will host the dedication of a USS Arlington display area and the installation of a model of the ship at the Ellen M. Bozman Government Center at 2100 Clarendon Boulevard. The event will be at 5:00 pm in the lobby of the building and will culminate years of planning and fundraising to honor this ship and the history it represents at the seat of our county government.

The USS Arlington (LPD-24), a San Antonio-class amphibious transport, is the third US Navy ship to be named for Arlington, the location of the Pentagon and the crash site of American Airlines Flight 77 during the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Onboard the ship is a legacy room dedicated to the events of that day in Arlington.

Money to purchase the model was donated by James Pebley, an Arlingtoninan and navy veteran, before he died in 2020. Additional funds were raised for the model through donations to the Arlington Historical Society in his memory. A smaller version of the model is on display at the Arlington Historical Museum.

Following dedication of the model, a private reception will be held at 5:30 at the Navy League of the United States at 2200 Wilson Boulevard. Although the reception is by invitation, AHS members are invited to attend both the dedication and the reception. We hope to see you there to remember the generosity of James Pebley and to honor a ship which bears the legacy of one of the most important events in our county's history.

Gone But Not Forgotten: Parking Spot D32

Proximity to the nation's capital has frequently made Arlington the location of national historic events. One of those events is often described as one of the biggest journalist scoops of all time and a parking garage in Arlington played a major role. In 1972, during the presidential election, burglars broke into the Democratic National headquarters at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C. with the intent of stealing documents and wiretapping the phones. The burglars were caught and the break-in was exposed. At the time, President Richard Nixon denied any knowledge of the break-in.

Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein talked on the phone or met in person with a source identified as "Deep Throat." Six of those meetings occurred in space D32 in a parking garage in Rosslyn bordered by Nash Street and Wilson Boulevard. During the meetings, the source provided information that enabled the reporters to "break the story" exposing the President Nixon's involvement. Their reports led to Nixon's resignation in August of 1974. He was the first president to resign from office in our nation's history.

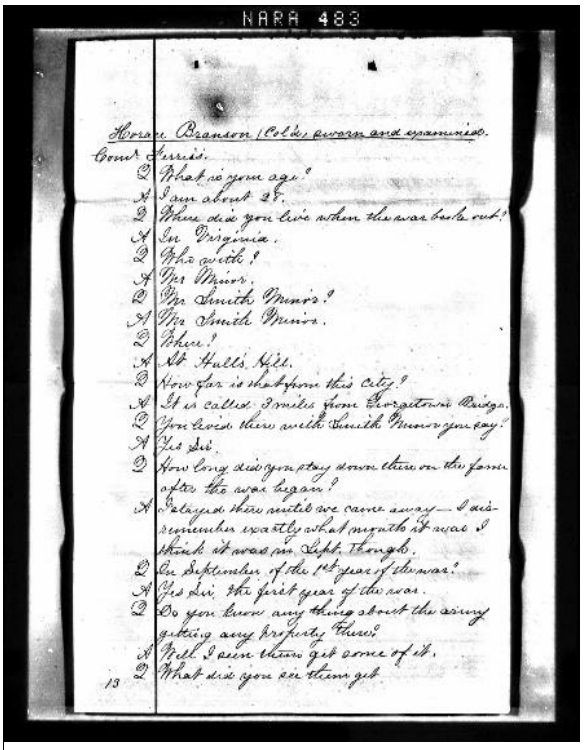
There was always much speculation about the identity of Deep Throat. The answer was revealed in 2005, more than three decades after the Watergate scandal, when Mark Felt identified himself as the person who provided information to the reporters. In the 1970s, Mark Felt was the FBI Associate Director, second in command and in charge of day-to-day operations of the FBI.

The building over the parking garage was built in the 1960s and in 2014 the Arlington County Board voted to tear down the building. It is currently under development for future residential and business use. The developers have agreed to keep the Watergate Investigation historical marker that was erected in 2011 to show the historical importance of the garage that is gone but not forgotten!

Investigating the Enslaved in Arlington's Past

By Brennan Park who has been working on the Memorializing the Enslaved project as part of his Eagle Scout requirement.

Looking at Arlington today, with Clarendon's tall high rises and Ballston's bustling shopping mall, it is hard to believe that 163 years ago its landscape was covered by farmland and forests. While it might be easy to forget Arlington's history, it is important to acknowledge and to understand how far Arlington has come and how history has shaped what Arlington is today. Most importantly, it is imperative for all Arlingtonians to understand Arlington's more obscure and darker history during the 1800s.


NARA 483

Horace Branson (Col'd) sworn and examined.
Court Juris.
Q What is your age?
A I am about 28.
Q Where did you live when the war broke out?
A In Virginia.
Q Who with?
A Mr Minor.
Q Mr Smith Minor?
A Mr Smith Minor.
Q Where?
A At Hall's Hill.
Q How far is that from this city?
A It is called 3 miles from Georgetown Bridge.
Q You lived there with Smith Minor you say?
A Yes Sir.
Q How long did you stay down there on the farm after the war began?
A I stayed there until we came away — I can't remember exactly what month it was I think it was in Sept. though.
Q In September of the 1st year of the war?
A Yes Sir. the first year of the war.
Q Do you know any thing about the army getting any property there?
A Well I saw them get some of it.
Q What did you see them get
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An Arlington County claims document.

There is an assumption that the Washington Metropolitan Area has been the epicenter of progressiveness and equality, especially since it was the US Capital even during the Civil War and continues to be touted as the world's beacon of freedom. But even in the area closest to the Capital City, the problems of practices as evil as slavery were still present.

As a part of my journey to becoming an Eagle Scout in my Boy Scout troop and as a way to better understand the history of my neighborhood in Arlington, I was fortunate enough to work on the Arlington Historical Society's joint project with the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington: "Memorializing the Enslaved in Arlington." My work was focused on using the Arlington Public Library's access to the Ancestry.com database to research Southern Claims Court Documents. The Southern Claims Court was put in place during the aftermath of the Civil War so that loyal Unionists could apply to receive compensation for property taken and damage done by US Army troops during the war. In these documents, claimants detailed who they were and what they had lost. The records provide information such as the number of apple trees someone owned that US troops cut down, how many cows were stolen, and sometime how many slaves they owned.

My task was to find the names or at least the existence of enslaved people who lived in Arlington County to shine a light on their lives which have been overshadowed throughout history. In my research I found there were dozens of families in the Arlington area who farmed crops, such as corn, wheat, apples, and potatoes. There were also several residents in Arlington who used their lands for lumber production. Many of these residents prospered from their agricultural endeavors, but by looking at the contents of their claim's documents, it was clear that many of these residents used slave labor. For example, one set of claims documents, filed by Smith Minor of Arlington County, used one of his former slaves, Horace Branson, to testify to the court to verify the loss of Minor's property. Many claimants either used their slaves for their testimonials to validate the claims or they were mentioned in the property stolen or killed. In total, I found a total of 12 enslaved people mentioned in a list of several dozen claims documents. I also was able to find the existence of enslaved people on the Charles E. French property in an account of French's testimony about the US Army burning down one of his houses for his slaves. Unfortunately, only a few of the 12 enslaved people I found were named, further stripping their identities as individuals.

This project has been very enlightening for me and reading these claims documents served as a portal for me to see into the past and to see the people who once lived in Arlington. I was fortunate enough to find several names of enslaved people and I hope to do them justice by commemorating them through the completion of the Arlington Historical Society's project. I believe that this project is key to allowing the Arlington community to acknowledge all of its history and to acknowledge those who suffered under slavery.

Artifact Spotlight: Lucky Horseshoe Charm

The Arlington Historical Museum is spotlighting this newly acquired artifact in our current temporary exhibit: *Fields to Flights: Arlington's Airports*. It is a lucky horseshoe charm that would have been carried by an airplane passenger in a pocket or purse to bring good luck on a flight. Horseshoes have been used as symbols of good luck for centuries. In the early days of flight, being an airplane passenger was seen as being much riskier than it is today.

This charm fits in the palm of the hand and has a plane over a globe on it. The seal in the center reads "Washington National Airport" so it was likely sold at the airport as a lucky souvenir. It is very shiny. Either the person who had it flew often or they rubbed it for luck a lot during turbulent flights and rough landings that were the norm in the early days of flight. You can see this and other mementos and photos of commercial flight in Arlington at the Arlington Historical Museum (1850 South Arlington Ridge Road, Saturday and Sunday 1-4 pm).

* * *

Still Standing: The Arlington Cinema and Draft House

In the 1930s a population boom occurred in Arlington. Our population rose 40% from the 1920s to the 1930s. As a result, new businesses sprang up throughout the county. One of those businesses was the Arlington Theatre and Bowling Alley, built on Columbia Pike, an area that at one time was rural. The theatre replaced a general store run by M. Sher and Sons and located on land owned by a local dentist. The movie theater was operated by the Richmond based Neighborhood Theatre company. At the time of its opening in 1939, tickets were 25 cents and popcorn sold for 10 cents.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Arlington Theatre and Bowling Alleys was restricted to whites only. In the 1960s, efforts to desegregate schools and other public areas were succeeding. Dorothy Hamm, who helped lead the fight to desegregate Arlington schools also picketed to challenge the desegregation of theatres, even getting arrested for these protests. Eventually, a lawsuit was filed against Neighborhood Theatres and in June of 1963, a deal was struck to desegregate the theatres owned by the Neighborhood Theatre group. This made the Arlington Theatre one of the first desegregated theatres in the Commonwealth.

In the 1970s, the Neighborhood Theatres group had financial difficulty. Many single theatres were being replaced by large multiplex theatres. It was sold to Tom Sarris (of Orleans House fame) who sold it in 1985. The new owner changed the concept of the theatre to a cinema and drafthouse. Today it is a popular venue to see movies and touring comedians.

The Arlington Theatre/Cinema Drafthouse is identified in Arlington County as an essential property, defined as having the greatest historical, architectural or visual prominence in our community. With its historical role in the fight to desegregate businesses in the county to its beautiful art deco style this is a property that we are happy to say is STILL STANDING!

Thank You to the Businesses and Organizations Supporting AHS!

Aurora Hills Women's Club
JBG Smith Cares
Marymount University
John Marshall Bank
Fairlington Historical Society
MTFA

AHS in the Community: January 2023 Through March 2023

AHS owns and operates two local museums: The Arlington Historical Museum and the Ball-Sellers House. We also worked to bring history to the community with the following ways:

- At AHS's January free public event "The Retrocession Riddle" AHS Board member, journalist, and author Charlie Clark discussed the many reasons why the land now known as Arlington and once a part of Washington, D.C., was returned to Virginia in 1847.
- In February and March, AHS Board members met with the National Landing Business Improvement District to help provide historical context to future work being done in that neighborhood.
- In February, Jessica Kaplan presented findings from the Memorializing the Enslaved project to the Arlington Retired Teacher Association.
- In late February, Jessica Kaplan, Tim Aiken, and Michael Schaffner represented AHS at the Feel the Heritage Festival in Green Valley. Jessica and Tim shared information about the Memorializing the Enslaved project and Michael showcased local African American regiments from the Civil War, specifically the 1st USCT, raised in DC, and the 2nd and 23rd USCT, both organized in Arlington.
- At our February free public event, Dr. Spencer Crew, Professor of History at George Mason University and Emeritus Director of the National Museum of African American discussed Freedman's Village and shared the stories of how resilient the village was from its establishment during the Civil through until it was dispersed in 1900.
- In March, AHS Board member Tom Dickenson shared his photographs of historical homes that have been torn down in Arlington at a Salon Arlington event.
- The AHS event in March, "The Byrd Machine and Its Impact on Arlington and Northern Virginia" featured noted journalist and author Michael Lee Pope who shared fascinating details about the Commonwealth's last political machine and the power it wielded on throughout the era of school desegregation.
- In March, Annette Benbow presented a unique perspective on Arlington's oldest structure, the Ball Sellers House to the 55+ History Discussion Group.
- Board members Annette Benbow, Charlie Clark, Tom Dickenson, Cathy Hix, and Jessica Kaplan made presentations about AHS to several Arlington Civic Associations.

(AHS offers all monthly events both on Zoom and in-person.)

AHS is Seeking Volunteers

AHS is busy with a myriad of projects. We are looking for volunteers to help us. Below are our current key categories of need but we have many other opportunities that are also fun and rewarding. Please contact: info@arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org

- Grant Writing
- Project Management for construction/preservation work
- Video editing

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Arlington, Virginia 22210

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History Awaits

Come Visit!

Arlington Historical Museum
1805 South Arlington Ridge Road
Arlington, VA 22207

Ball-Sellers House Museum
5620 Third Street South
Arlington, VA 22204

The Arlington Historical Society seeks to build a stronger community by improving the understanding of our shared history.

AHS was founded in 1956, and is a non-profit organization incorporated under Virginia laws.

AHS Board meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 7:00 P.M. in the Arlington Historical Museum and are open to the public.

Website: https:/arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org
Email:info@arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org
Facebook: ArlingtonHistoricalSociety
703-892-4204