



Arlington Historical Society

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Arlington Historical Society

Winter 2024

President's Dispatch

I hope this finds you having a peaceful, restorative holiday period. As we look back at the activities of the AHS over the past year and look forward to our plans in the first part of the new year, we are incredibly thankful for all the support we have received from our members and the community.

In this issue you will read about how we have accelerated preservation and rehabilitation work on the Arlington Historical Museum, and how we are now poised to reopen the museum this spring with a completely refreshed set of exhibits. Even before we open the exhibits, we will be ready to start hosting some community events and education sessions in the space on the second floor that was previously used for storage.

All of this progress has been made thanks to our volunteers, museum staff, and financial contributions from our members and from the county. As a private non-profit organization caring for the oldest extant school building and the oldest extant structure in the county, we take great pride in carefully managing the funds entrusted to us. Both properties require significant ongoing maintenance and your support over the years has allowed us to take on significant additional non-recurring capital efforts, particularly with the Arlington Historical Museum.

In the short term, we are focused on finalizing the new exhibit design and implementation as we prepare to reopen in the spring. But the reopened museum will be more than its exhibits, as we envision having continuing programming and rotating displays that will make the museum an enticing place to return to and continuously learn more about our local history.

AHS has accomplished a great deal as an all-volunteer organization, and we hope you have enjoyed our monthly events, events at our two museums and in the community, our new website, our social media with daily mini lessons on Arlington history and our publications. To fully realize our vision of telling the diverse stories of our local history in many compelling ways and reaching a wider range of audiences, we feel that we will require a small number of paid staff. In the coming year, we will be looking to raise funds to employ a Museum Director and an Executive Director on a permanent basis, though possibly on a part-time basis to start. We hope that you will consider supporting these efforts or suggesting people or organizations that may be interested in providing funding allowing us to further our mission in this way.

We wish the best of 2025 to all of you. Thank you for your continued support of the Arlington Historical Society.

David B. Pearson, AHS President

Upcoming Events

Learn more on the AHS website: <https://arhist.org/event>

Thursday, Thursday, January 9, 2025, 7:00 pm

Celebrating Lafayette's Visit to Arlington and the New Capital Region



Elizabeth Reese, author of "Marquis de Lafayette Returns: A Tour of America's National Capitol Region" will talk about Lafayette the man, his worldview on the abolition of slavery, women's rights, and his importance in American history. During the American Revolution, the Marquis de Lafayette volunteered from France to help America win its independence from England. When he returned to the newly formed America in 1824-1825, he urged Americans to embrace the ideals they had promised during the revolution. Part of the Arlington VA250 commemorations. (Virtual on Zoom AND in-person at Marymount University Library Auditorium, FREE. See details on Zoom registration and directions to free parking at <https://arhist.org/event>)

Thursday, February 13, 2024, 7:00 pm

Celebrate Arlington's Ethiopian Community



Celebrate Black History month by exploring the history behind the Ethiopian community in Arlington. Ethiopians have been in Arlington County for at least 50 years. Our speaker, Kidist Ebenezer, of the Ethiopian Community Development Council, will shed light on the factors driving migration to the U.S. and to Arlington. She will delve into the challenges faced by early immigrants, the journey of establishing a vibrant community, and the support provided by local institutions like churches, businesses, and nonprofits. Part of the Arlington VA250 commemorations. (Virtual on Zoom AND in-person at Marymount University Library Auditorium, FREE. See details on Zoom registration and directions to free parking at <https://arhist.org/event>)

Saturday, February 22, 2024, 12:00 – 5:00 pm

Feel the Heritage Festival



Celebrate Black History month at this annual festival. The Arlington Historical Society will be there with exhibits from the Memorializing the Enslaved of Arlington, a joint project with the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington, and information about the Civil War's US Colored Troops. This year's festival will also have artisan vendors, free kids' activities, a full agenda of great entertainment, and delicious food. Admission is free. Part of the Arlington VA250 commemorations. (Charles Drew Community Center, 3500 23rd Street, South)

Thursday, March 13, 2024, 7:00 pm

The Outstanding Women of the Ball-Sellers House



We are celebrating the 50th Anniversary of receiving the John Ball House from its owner, Marian Sellers. She donated it to AHS for \$1 in 1975. So we're highlighting Women's History Month by sharing stories of some of the women who lived there over the centuries. Join us for a unique look at these special women. Part of the Arlington VA250 commemorations. (Virtual on Zoom AND in-person at Marymount University Library Auditorium, FREE. See details on Zoom registration and directions to free parking at

<https://arhist.org/event>)

The Arlington Historical Museum: Reopening This Spring

Over the last few months, AHS has been hard at work caring for the oldest extant school building in Arlington and re-envisioning the museum exhibits. You may have noticed scaffolding on the building as the bricks on the upper part of the front wall were repaired and the mortar repointed. We replaced some rotting wood on the window awnings and repainted them. We also fixed a leaking gutter. As a result of this work, the building looks great, and we have addressed water seeping into the basement.

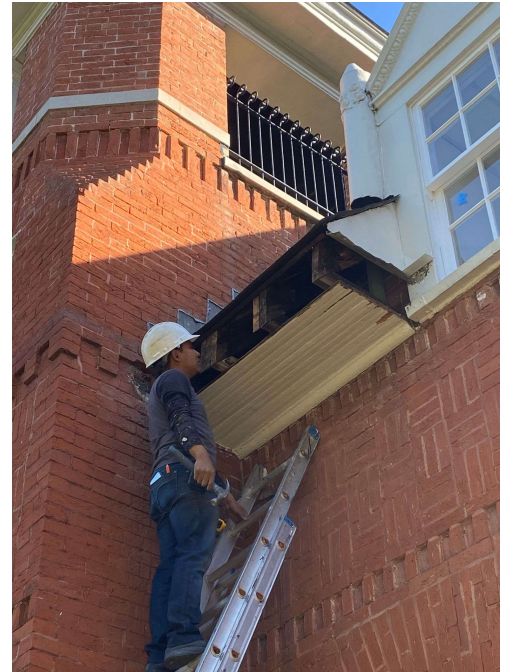
But that's not all. We are preparing for our second floor's new life as a community space, education center and for rotating community-curated exhibits. We removed a couple of small walls and doors on the second floor to open the space previously used for storage. Cracks in the hallway and the walls have been repaired and the entire area was repainted to prepare it for its unveiling.

On the first floor, while the artifacts have been stored and the cases moved away from the walls to allow for space for work refurbishing the windows, we painted the entire exhibit hall and front entry. We also worked on our exhibit cases—giving the usable cases a thorough cleaning and repainting. In a feat of engineering ingenuity, we managed to remove the base from the massive 5 foot tall and 30-foot long case to allow more natural light in the exhibit hall and provide some additional display area on top of the case.

We did not forget the basement. That area will take on more importance as we shift work on artifacts and exhibits there to allow public access to the second floor. We replaced the basement door with a door that enables safe emergency exiting.

Looking ahead, in early January, preservationist Duffy “the Sashmaster” Hoffman will reinstall the final sets of window sashes, completing the work on the windows. Then we'll move the exhibit cases back into place on the first floor, finalize the layout of the museum, and complete the installation of the new exhibits!

We engaged contractors for some of this work but most has been completed by AHS volunteers, notably George Axiotis and Peter Vaselopoulos. We thank them for all their work as well as the work they have done promoting Arlington history. George has been a director of AHS, an author, a presenter of local history topics, and has spent countless hours over many years maintaining and improving the museum. Peter is our Vice President who designed the application Arl Hist and has greatly accelerated the pace of the work on the museum.



Meet the New Museum Director: Bethany Baker

AHS is excited to introduce Bethany Baker to you as the new Museum Director for the Arlington Historical Museum. Bethany is starting at a crucial time for the Museum, as we are currently closed for preservation work on our historic windows, and we are taking advantage of this time to rework all the exhibits in the museum.

Bethany comes to us with both best-in-class training with a Museums Studies degree as well as over twenty years of practical experience with all aspects of running local institutions, including exhibit curation and design, artifact preservation, public outreach and education, grounds management, retail store operation, overseeing staff and volunteers, and developing and implementing policies and procedures.



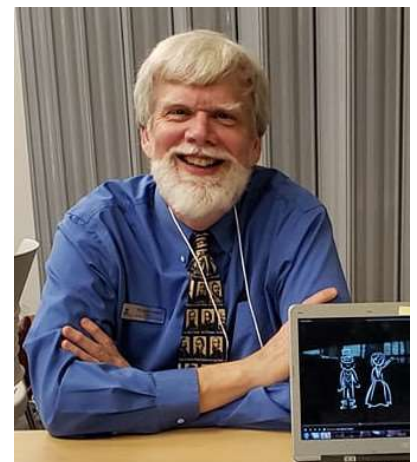
As a well-traveled military spouse, she has worked with a wide range of institutions, including museums in Hawaii, Arizona, and Maryland. As a result, she is an experienced museum professional who develops and implements creative exhibits that show unique local insights and knowledge from the community. Bethany has also served as an Executive Director and board member in these organizations and she has demonstrated her ability to work with diverse groups of people to meet deadlines within a budget with quality work that has consistently been lauded by past supervisors.

Bethany has been hard at work building on the work that the Museum Committee began under Karen Edgerton, our previous Collections Manager, along with volunteers who have identified the themes and topics that the exhibits will cover. As the new museum director, she has been working with volunteers to design new exhibits and with the museum operations team on the layout of the museum. She has identified third-party service providers to produce signage and other materials for the exhibits, within the budgeted amount approved by the board at the beginning of this fiscal year.

While there is still a significant amount of work to be done before we reopen, Bethany has hit the ground running and has made very significant progress on this daunting task. We hope you are as excited about seeing the new museum this spring as we are!

Thank you, Dr. Mark Benbow

None of this would have been possible without Dr. Mark Benbow, who has been our Museum Director over the past 14 years (as a volunteer!). He has, almost single-handedly, kept the museum going during this time by adding exhibits, refreshing them with new artifacts, and overseeing maintenance. As fortunate as AHS is to have had him serve so ably in this role for all this time, we are doubly blessed to have him continue as Consulting Historian with the museum. As we redevelop the exhibits, his input remains crucial to ensuring the community can trust our exhibits to be as historically accurate as current scholarship permits!



AHS in the Schools

This fall, students at Arlington Tech have been hard at work designing and fabricating six-inch bronze plaques (referred to as “stumbling stones”) that will be placed throughout the County to memorialize where enslaved people lived. AHS’ efforts on this project have been led by Jessica Kaplan, who has been working with the school and students. You can see the progress that has been made by the students on our website using this link <https://arlhists.org/stumbling-stone-progress/>.

The *Memorializing the Enslaved in Arlington* project is a joint project between the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington and AHS. To date, extensive research has identified over 1500 individuals who were enslaved in Arlington, encompassing a period of over 200 years. Detailed research information, story maps, and stories about the lives of several of the individuals can be found at <https://arlhists.org/enslavement/>



We are deeply appreciative of the funding provided by Virginia Humanities and JBG Smith Cares to allow us to conduct the initial research and to place the initial three stumbling stones at the Ball-Sellers House. The County has provided critical support in funding the project during the current school year, producing the stones by the public school system, and through the various county departments that will be involved in placing the stones in sidewalks in various locations. Look for announcements about the unveiling of the new stumbling stones in the next few months!

Did You Know?

Did you know that Sojourner Truth lived in Arlington County (then known as Alexandria County) during the Civil War? She moved to Freedman’s Village, located on the grounds of the former Arlington Plantation, in 1864. Already a national figure as a renowned activist and abolitionist, she came to this area to work with the National Freedman’s Relief Association to improve conditions for African Americans. While she lived in the DC area, she was invited to the White House by Abraham Lincoln and she addressed injustices in this area by riding DC streetcars to help force desegregation. Even after moving away from this area, she continued her political activity, including returning to the White House in 1872 in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to secure land grants for formerly enslaved people.



On December 12, the Arlington Historical Society was honored to cohost a special event with the **Black Heritage Museum of Arlington**. Historical interpreter and actress Karen Bostic brought Sojourner Truth to life, preceded by remarks on her life by Arlington educator, Antionette Waters, who has written Arlington’s Black History curriculum. You can watch this very special event on our YouTube channel, which contains over ten years of our monthly free public events highlighting all areas of Arlington History: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5oqjSm4Y2tPb000c8fnPUg>



Bellringer Fundraising Campaign Reminder

Bellringer Fundraising Campaign letters were mailed or emailed to you at the end of November. This is our annual fundraising campaign. This year all funds will go to preserve and update the Arlington Historical Museum. You can donate through the safe and secure AHS website at: <https://arlhist.org/support/donate/> or send a check to the Arlington Historical Society P.O. Box 100402, Arlington VA 22210. We thank you and sincerely appreciate your support.

AHS Museum Store Open 24 Hours, 7 Days a Week!

We're Online! Besides having the best selection of local history books in the world, we have stationary, maps, commemorative coins, even the Arlington Historical Museum ornament and the board game: Arlingtonopoly. Show your community pride and support for local history! Visit the store on our safe and secure online site:

<https://arlhist.org/shop/>



Ball-Sellers House 2024 Season Wrap Up

We are happy to tell you that the number of visitors to the Ball-Sellers House surged by more than 46% this season. Thanks to our cadre of docents, we shared the house with 603 people. This is up from 412 in 2023. The house is open only on Saturday afternoon from April through October so these numbers mean that our docents were busy! AHS is very proud to provide guided tours by trained volunteer docents. Many people complimented the docents and the tour in the guest register. Local folks seemed to be bringing their visitors in larger numbers to the Ball-Sellers House. Perhaps they saw our advertisements in social media of our Saturday open house tour hours. They said they came from all over the country including California, Arizona, Oklahoma, and Kansas to name just a few states. We even had visitors from Scotland and Brazil!

The Ball-Sellers House had a busy calendar this year. Here are just a few highlights. We had 10 special tours, three student groups, and seven special events: including the Monumental Fife and Drum Corps and the Guillotine Theatre both performing a concert on opening day. We partnered with the Glencarlyn Civic Association on two Saturdays: Heritage Day and to celebrate their library's centennial. We also enjoyed two George Washington Forest Walks with local historian Kevin Vincent, including a 250th Anniversary walk in December (shown at right on the chilly December day walking tour).



If you would like to learn to be a docent at the Ball-Sellers House, we train you and partner you with experienced docents until you're comfortable giving the tour yourself. More docents could allow the house to be open more and share this historical treasure with the public even more! Next year we'll be celebrating 50 years since Marian Sellers donated the "John Ball House" to the Arlington Historical Society. We're planning some BIG celebrations throughout our April through October 2025 season. Hope to see you there!

AHS in the Community

AHS hosts free events, provides speakers upon request, and hosts special group tours of its museum and local historic sites all year long. If you want something special for your community or organization, email AHS at info@arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org. Here is a sample of some of the ways AHS brought history to the community in the past few months.

October

- Oct 5: Appraisal Roadshow, free informal and fun appraisal show of items that individuals brought. This event was a benefit for the Ball-Sellers House.
- Oct 10: Michael Schaffner spoke at the AHS monthly event on the US Colored Troops in Arlington during the Civil War.
- Oct 14: AHS co-hosted a commemoration at Arlington House of the 200th anniversary of the Marquis de Lafayette's return visit.
- Oct 26: Jessica Kaplan, Craig Syphax of the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington and Walk Arlington led a guided history walk along Columbia Pike tracing the history of free and formerly enslaved African Americans.
- Oct 30: Dr. Mark Benbow spoke to the County's 55+ history discussion group about the history of the Arlington brewery.

November

- Nov 5: AHS Museum Store participated in the Women's Club of Arlington Holiday Bazaar by bringing the store to their door.
- Nov 9: Annette and Mark Benbow hosted a thank you party for all the AHS volunteers at their home.
- Nov 13: Bethany Baker represented the Ball-Sellers House at the quarterly meeting of the regional Historic House Museum Consortium.
- Nov 14: Lloyd Wolf and Duy Tron spoke at the AHS monthly event on the Columbia Pike Documentary Project about the changes they have seen in the last 50 years of the project. The audience was treated to a treasure trove of photos from the team.
- Nov 19: Peter Vaselopulos spoke to St. Peter's Episcopal Church about the major role that Arlington played in the defense of Washington, D.C. during the Civil War.
- Nov 23: AHS attended the 90th Anniversary of the John Lyon VFW Post 3150.

December

- Dec 12: Annette Benbow spoke at the annual National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association Arlington Chapter luncheon about commemorating our nation's 250th anniversary in 2025 and 2026.
- Dec 12: AHS partnered with the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington to host a historical interpretation of Sojourner Truth by Karen Bostic with historic context provided by APS educator, Antoinette Waters.
- Dec 14: Kevin Vincent led the 250th Anniversary guided walk of George Washington's Forest.
- Dec 16: Peter Vaselopulos spoke to the local Genealogy Club at Lubber Run Community Center about using digital history and storytelling methods to capture family and local history.

Thank you to our business and organization members for their continued support!

John Marshall Bank JBG Smith Cares Fairlington Historical Society
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**The Arlington Historical Society strives to build a stronger community by sharing stories  
of our diverse history.**

**Visit AHS online or in-person**

Website: <https://arlhists.org/>

Email: [info@arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org)

Facebook: [\*\*ArlingtonHistoricalSociety\*\*](#)

Instagram: [\*\*@ArlingtonHistory\*\*](#)

Blue Sky: [\*\*@ArlHist.Bsky.social\*\*](#)

ArlHist App online: [\*\*https://arlingtonhistorical.com/\*\*](https://arlingtonhistorical.com/)

**Arlington Historical Museum**  
1805 South Arlington Ridge Road  
Arlington, VA 22202

**Ball-Sellers House Museum**  
5620 Third Street South  
Arlington, VA 22204  
April through October

**The Arlington Historical Society**, founded in 1956, is a non-profit organization incorporated under Virginia laws. The Society's goal is to help build our community through a better understanding of our diverse history.

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