



The Arlington Historical Society Summer 2025 Newsletter



President's Dispatch

Greetings from your new president. First, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our former president, David Pearson. Due to his tireless efforts, almost all of the planned renovations of the Arlington Historical Museum have been completed. As a result, the grand reopening of the museum on May 3rd was a great success. I encourage you to visit the museum and see the new exhibits prepared by Museum Director, Bethany Baker, and our dedicated volunteers. While some additional exterior work needs to be done, the museum is now open and we have great plans for new exhibits and educational programs for the upcoming year.

Speaking about next year, the Arlington Historical Society will be celebrating two important events in 2026. First AHS will turn 70. This is a significant milestone for AHS and its members. Also, next year marks the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the birth of our nation. AHS has been asked by the Arlington County Board to lead the VA250 committee, coordinating local historical events commemorating the Semiquincentennial (<https://arlhist.org/arlington-va250/>). The Ball-Sellers House, under the direction of Annette Benbow, will be part of the commemoration activities. Please stop by and learn more about what was happening in our county 250 years ago.

As part of the Arlington VA250 committee planning, AHS is proposing a history festival next May. One goal of the festival will be to encourage historical research by discovering and sharing new stories. If you are interested in getting involved or have an idea for a new historical story, please let us know at arlingtonhistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

Finally, June is membership renewal month. Membership in the Arlington Historical Society is open to everyone, including businesses and organizations. Membership dues support the Arlington Historical Museum and the Ball-Sellers House, helping us preserve and promote local history. If you haven't renewed yet, please visit our website at arlhist.org/support/join and do so today.

Thank you for your continued support. We couldn't do much without you.

Peter Vaselopoulos
President, AHS

Inside the Museum: Notes from the Director

By Bethany Baker, Museum Director

Add Your Voice to the Wish Wall: Celebrate

Civic Season This summer, we're celebrating "Museum Civic Season" which is between Juneteenth (June 19) and July 4th, by reflecting on our shared past and imagining a better future as we gear up for America's 250th anniversary. Join us at the Arlington Historical Museum to explore what it means to be an engaged member of our community. Add Your Voice to the Wish Wall Visit the museum and contribute your thoughts to our "Wish Wall," a space where visitors can share their hopes for the future of America as we look ahead to the nation's 250th anniversary. What's your vision for a more just, and united country? Stop by and let your wish be part of our living exhibit!



New Saturday Hours at the Museum Beginning in July, the museum will be open on Saturday from 10 AM - 4 PM. Sunday hours will stay the same from 1-4 PM. Come see us, admission is always free!

15-Minute History Talks on Select Sundays On Sunday afternoons, enjoy a quick and engaging 15-minute history talk followed by conversation at the museum. These bite-sized stories uncover fascinating moments from Arlington's past—and help connect them to the present. Visit the website and our social media pages for specific dates. Our next talk will be July 13th at 2pm. Michael Schaffner will present information on Camp Casey followed by discussion. Come for the 15-Minute Talks and stay to tour the newly renovated museum.



Family Tea House: Temporary Exhibit Upstairs Rising high school freshman Caroline Tso researched and designed an exhibit on the "Family Tea House," one of the first Chinese Restaurants in Arlington. Visit our new community display case upstairs to learn more about this restaurant and its legacy. On Sunday, July 27, Ms. Tso will do a 15- Minute history talk about the restaurant.

In the Community The Aurora Hills Library has opened a new exhibit based on the book, "The Museum of Ordinary People" by Mike Gayle. We are thrilled to have several artifacts in the exhibit highlighting Arlington residents and events, past and present. Visit the library today to see the exhibit which runs through August 16.

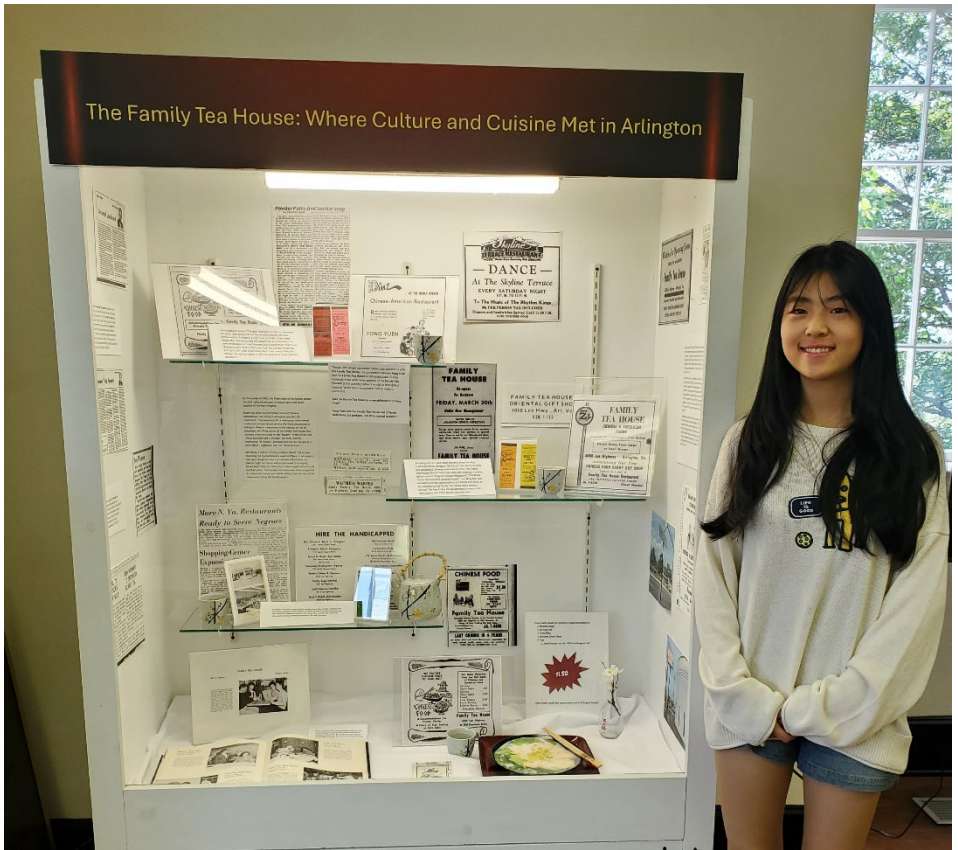
Back to School! Summer has just begun but we are hard at work installing a new exhibit in the museum schoolroom on the history of education in Arlington county. Discover how this small segregated rural community became known for its world class school system and the diversity of its students. The exhibit opens in September.

Family Tea House: Where Culture and Cuisine Met in Arlington

by Caroline Tso

I am a rising freshman at Woodson High School. I enjoy learning about history and uncovering interesting local stories. I also participate in National History Day, enjoy art, and compete in debate. In my free time, I love volunteering as a docent with the Arlington Historical Society. I hope you enjoy the exhibit I curated with the help of the AHS.

This initially began as a project to celebrate Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month. I became interested in the history of Asian Americans in Arlington and found advertisements for Chinese restaurants from the late 1940s and 1950s. I was curious about how these restaurants started in Arlington and how they differed from, yet were similar to, the numerous Chinese restaurants we have today, decades later. Come visit this exhibit!



Ms. Tso will do a "15-Minute History Talk" about the restaurant on Sunday, July 27.

Can't You Hear Me Calling

by Jessica Kaplan

The AHS June public program had twang! Four distinguished musicians steeped in the Arlington bluegrass scene, Don Rusnak, the founder of CABOMA; Tom Gray, a Bluegrass Hall of Fame bass player; Andrew Acosta of the New Old Time String Band; and Randy Barrett, President of Bluegrass Radio, discussed their adventures in the local bluegrass community from the 1950s to the present. Zack Youcha, author of the 2024 *Arlington Historical Magazine* article, "From the Seldom Scene to the Seldom Heard of: An Interview about Arlington Bluegrass with CABOMA Founder, Don Rusnak," organized and coordinated the discussion. Due to illness, Tom Gray sat in for Michael Jaworek of the Birchmere.

The evening started with a discussion of the origin of bluegrass in the Washington, DC area. During the New Deal Era, musicians from Appalachia settled in Arlington and Washington, DC and brought bluegrass music with them. Local radio station, WARL, embraced the music and broadcast it through the region, inspiring a generation of bluegrass fans. Big name musicians like Jimmy Dean and Bill Harrell, got their broadcasting start at WARL, often performing on the Don Owen's Show. Owens was an Arlington native.

After WARL's demise, Randy Barrett recalled that WAMU began playing bluegrass every afternoon. Barrett still plays bluegrass on his streaming platform, Bluegrass Country Radio. The panel then focused on Tom Gray's experience as the legendary bassist of the "Country Gentlemen." At the age of 19, Tom joined Arlingtonian John Duffy, and bandmates Charlie Waller and Eddie Adcock in what became the permanent line-up of the band. The "Country Gentlemen" played often at bars and restaurants by Bailey's Crossroads like the Admiral Grill.

In 1971, John Duffey, Tom Gray, Mike and Ben Aldridge, and John Starling started the band, "Seldom Scene." Barrett believed the bluegrass band "created a sound and repertoire that was compelling... it changed the direction of the music to a modern sound." John Duffey owned a music store where Pastries by Randolph is today. Duffey was the band's frontman, playing mandolin. Randy Barrett described him as a "generational talent," a homegrown musician, with a fabulous wide-ranging voice. In the 1970s, "Seldom Scene" started playing at the Birchmere in Arlington every Thursday night. People lined up around the block to see them.

Don Rusnak, an early lover of the banjo, opened the Vintage Music store in the early 1970s in Clarendon. He held jam sessions in the store that evolved into CABOMA, the Capital Area Bluegrass and Oldtime Music Association, in 1978. CABOMA nurtured the love of bluegrass and created a community of bluegrass musicians and listeners that still exists today. Early in its history, CABOMA gave free concerts at the Birchmere once a week, often in exchange for burgers.

Andrew Acosta grew up playing bluegrass in Falls Church. He discussed his friendship with two bluegrass musicians who "came out of the scene" in Arlington: Pete Kuykendall and John Kaparakis. Pete and John went to Washington-Lee High School together and in 1966 helped establish the magazine, "Bluegrass Unlimited." Pete became the editor of the magazine in 1971, and John wrote for it for many years. Acosta described Kaparakis as, "the nicest guy in bluegrass."



To the pleasure of the large crowd, the evening ended with the four musicians playing a few bluegrass tunes.

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### Shop At Our Online Museum Store

Our museum store is online. You can get stationary, maps, books, and more. Visit us online at <https://arlhist.org/shop/> and don't forget to use your 10% member discount.

## **Saving The Declaration of Independence: 15 Minute History Talk at the Museum**

*By Peter Vaselopoulos*

The Arlington Historical Museum launched the first of its 15-Minute History Talks. On Sunday, June 22nd, AHS President Peter Vaselopoulos shared the little-known story of how the nation's founding document was safely hidden during the War of 1812 in what is now Arlington County. Attendees learned that, on August 22, 1814, Secretary of State James Monroe rode horseback to observe the landing of British troops along the Patuxent River in Maryland. Monroe realized the nation's capital was in imminent danger and sent a note to his senior clerk, Stephen Pleasonton, instructing him to secure as many valuable documents as possible and remove them from the capital.

Pleasanton hurriedly went out to buy coarse, sturdy linen, which he and the other clerks cut into bags. They then packed as many historic documents and books as they could find into those bags, including George Washington's correspondence, which contained the historic letter of Washington's resignation as General. Pleasanton loaded the bags in wagons that he borrowed and drove them to an abandoned mill for safekeeping located near today's Chain Bridge. However, soon realizing that the mill was opposite a munitions factory, he decided to move the documents again. He then drove 35 miles to Leesburg, Virginia, where he found an empty farmhouse where he placed the documents and secured the building.

Today, on the Arlington side of Chain Bridge, near the entrance to the Pimmit Run trail, there are three historical signs detailing the event. Every day, commuters pass by this historic spot, unaware of the role Arlington played in saving our country's most important document.

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Juneteenth 2025

By Sean Denniston, Vice President, AHS

On June 19, Arlington celebrated the Second Annual Juneteenth Community Day. Torrential rain and a change of location from National Landing's Met Park to Wakefield High School couldn't dampen the spirit of those attending. As with many Juneteenth events, the emancipation of African Americans and their culture and heritage were celebrated through music, speeches, and singing. Food was provided by some of the region's most popular food trucks.



Volunteers from the Arlington Historical Society displaying information and artifacts on "Memorializing the Enslaved" and Freedman's Village, and encouraging visitors to explore our reimagined museum.

The Arlington Black History Museum displayed pictures and books on Arlington's Black Communities. A living link to Arlington's contribution to the Civil Rights movement was Joan Mulholland, who shared her personal experiences promoting equality.

While certain events were geared towards adults, thanks to the Howard University PBS station (WHUT), Daniel Tiger and Buddy the Tyrannosaurus were special visitors, delighting young and old (mostly young).

Membership Renewal Drive in Full Swing!

By Annette Scherber, Membership Team Lead

Thank you to all the AHS members who have already renewed their annual membership with us electronically in response to the email our President, Peter, sent out at the beginning of June.

On June 21st, a team of volunteers (powered by doughnuts and coffee!) dedicated their morning to stuffing envelopes with membership renewal letters for all members who have not yet renewed.

Keep an eye out for your membership renewal form in your mailbox if you have not yet renewed. Please consider opting to check the box on your form to "go green" and receive most communications

electronically to help the historical society save money on printing and postage costs. This year we also have a new option for you to select on your form to opt in to receiving the annual Arlington Historical Society magazine in print. Check the box if you want to continue to receive the magazine in print in the mail, rather than electronically via email.



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

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Do You Have the App?

Want to have stories of our shared history at your fingertips wherever you go? Get the "Arlington Historical" app. It's free from wherever you get your cell phone apps. This is a fun place to read about stories of our history or go on your own tour in the Tours section identifying the location where the stories took place. Credit our President Peter Vaselopulos for this 21st century way to view our history. You can visit it online at <https://arlingtonhistorical.com>



Upcoming AHS Events

For more details: visit: <https://arlhist.org/events>



Friday, July 4, 2025, 1-4 pm

Reading the Declaration of Independence and Making Revolutionary War Protest Signs

Help read the Declaration of Independence at one of the only existing houses in Arlington that could have heard it in 1776! Then make protest signs of the many complaints the colonists had against the king! If you want to read a portion of this important document starting at 1:00

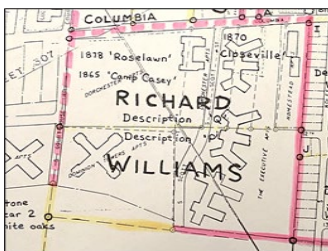
pm, please email: info@arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org (Ball-Sellers House, 5620 3rd St, South. FREE)



Thursday, July 10, 2025 @ 7 PM

The Power of Place: Built By the People Themselves

Dr. Lindsey Bestebreurtje will help us explore segregation and racialized zoning and planning laws in Arlington to see how these policies impacted the County's growth. (In PERSON and via Zoom, see details for driving and free on-campus parking and to register for zoom FREE)



Sunday July 13, 2025 @ 2 PM

15-Minute History Spotlight: Camp Casey

Learn about the powerful story of Camp Casey, a Civil War training ground in Arlington for Black men who joined the US Army. Located near today's Pentagon, Camp Casey was a symbol of freedom, hope, and change during a pivotal moment in our nation's history.

(Arlington Historical Museum, 1805 S. Arlington Ridge Rd. FREE)



Saturday, July 26, 2025, 2-4 pm

What's Buried in Your Dirt? We challenge you to bring something you found in your gardens, lawns, or in the dirt somewhere in Arlington and our experts will identify it for you: bits of metal, ceramics, pottery, glassware, even plastics. Bring it on! (Ball-Sellers House, 5620 3rd St, South, FREE)



Sunday July 27, 2025 @ 2 PM

15-Minute History Spotlight: The Family Tea House

Caroline Tso will discuss her new exhibit at the Arlington Historical Museum, "The Family Tea House: Where Culture and Cuisine Met in Arlington" This young high school historian will talk about the restaurant, the first Chinese restaurant in the county, its place in history and what she found out about it. (1805 S. Arlington Ridge Rd. FREE)



Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, August 15-17, 2025

AHS at the Arlington County Fair

Visit the AHS indoor booth at the fair this weekend. Try to find your house on a map from the 1800s, test your knowledge of local history and win a prize, and see historic artifacts. (Thomas Jefferson Community Center, 3501 2nd St, S, FREE)



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

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

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

**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.