



Arlington Historical Society

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Arlington Historical Society

December 2020

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Arlington Historical Museum

1805 South Arlington Ridge Road
Closed until the coronavirus threat has passed.

Ball-Sellers House

5620 3rd Street, South
Open by appointment only due to the coronavirus threat.

Virtual AHS

Website: <https://arlingtonhistorical-society.org>

Facebook: Arlington Historical Society

Twitter: #ArlingtonHistory

Instagram: ArlingtonHistory

AHS Board Meeting

Board meetings are on the fourth Tuesday of every month and are being conducted virtually until further notice due to the coronavirus threat.

President's Dispatch

By all accounts, the year 2020 has been a challenging one. In fact, there is a popular meme circulating on social media that encourages people to stay up late on December 31st to make sure the year goes away. Like many across the nation, the pandemic has been personal for me. My mother, a six-decade Arlington resident is quarantined in an assisted living facility. Balancing the risk of exposing her to the virus has been weighed against seeing her memory slip away. As she has missed family celebrations, we have had daily conversations about an upcoming vaccine. Her resilience and optimism have allowed her to continue her daily routine with **hope** for better times.

This resilience and optimism have echoed throughout the years in Arlington. Between 1941 and 1945, our nation was involved in a global war. Arlington rallied to fight WWII on the home front. Tom Virnelson, only 7 years old when Pearl Harbor was bombed, reminisces in an [article in the 2004 edition of the Arlington Historical Magazine](#) about his family's life during the war. Signs of support for the war such as "V is for Victory" signs were posted in schools and businesses across Arlington. The "V" for victory three cent stamp became the standard stamp on all mail. Families who had soldiers at war posted blue stars in their house windows. Arlington, like many other communities, made blackout curtains and practiced air raid drills. Rationing became a way of life and scrap metal and cooking fats were donated at collection drives. Arlington residents also raised money for the war with bond drives sponsored by civic associations and stamp drives conducted at schools. All of this was done "for the duration" with the understanding that these conditions would exist only until the war was over. It was the **hope** that these efforts would soon bring an end to the war.

This same spirit has prevailed in Arlington throughout the last nine months. Arlingtonians have been sustained by connections to family and friends via zoom, cell phones, and social media. County residents have done their best to support those in need from the neighbor bringing food for an elderly neighbor to the local businesses and churches providing free meals to the hungry. Signs of encouragement and support for first responders have been displayed. Masks have been made in every color and design to protect the residents. Despite all the challenges, the Arlington community has carried on, knowing that "for the duration" this is needed. The **hope** for an end to the COVID-19 crisis has encouraged us to carry on until life becomes "normal" again.

The **hope** of the Arlington community was evident when the flu epidemic struck in 1918, when the Great Depression was at its peak in the 1930s, when we were hopeful for a polio vaccine in the 1950s and on many other occasions. In all these instances, the community rallied and carried on "for the duration." South African cleric and human rights activist Desmond Tutu once noted, "**Hope** is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness." As we come to the end of this challenging year, may you find that **hope** for the better things ahead. The best of 2021 to all of you.

Upcoming Events

The coronavirus emergency continues to shutter venues for big gatherings, so AHS presents our series of free monthly public events online via Zoom. They are held on the second Thursday of each month. We advertise the specifics of each event by email to our members and to the public via social media. Visit our events page at <https://www.arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org/events> for details on how to attend.

January 14, 2021: The 1920 Census: A Snapshot of Arlington History

The 2020 census count is over, but this month Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager, will speak on the 1920 Census in Arlington. He will describe what the census questions were, what the answers showed, how it was used, and how it still impacts us today. (This is an online event. Visit arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org for registration details.)



If you would like to request a topic, please email us at info@arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org.

Arlington Historical Society Tribute to Arlington Businesses: Ayers Variety and Hardware: An Arlington Institution

An integral part of Arlington's history are the businesses that provide services within our community. Many of these businesses have been part of our community for decades. AHS has launched a series to highlight the great business community of Arlington. Stories of these businesses can also be read at <https://www.arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org>



From personal care items to gardening supplies, Ayers Variety and Hardware Store has been serving Arlington residents' home needs for over 70 years. Located in Westover on Washington Boulevard, the store was originally founded by John W. Ayers. Ayers, a World War II veteran, who relocated to the Arlington area from Georgia while working for Woolworth's, opened the store in 1948 as J.W. Ayers Five and Ten Cents Store.

Ayers was known for his involvement in the Westover community, most notably as an active member of the Arlington Chamber of Commerce and president of the Westover Businessmen's Association. The deservedly nicknamed "Mayor of Westover" also pushed for streetlights and sidewalks to serve the neighborhood's increasing

pedestrian shoppers. Many Arlington residents recall Mr. Ayers providing local elementary schools with candy from the store on Halloween, Christmas, and Easter each year.

Ayers' investment in the community was underscored by his commitment to his employees. In 1968, Ayers implemented a profit-sharing model in the store, granting control and management responsibilities to his 32 employees. The venerable store owner also encouraged employees to pursue higher education and took pride in financially supporting several of his employees through college. When Mr. Ayers passed away in 1976, many locals feared that the store may disappear from the Westover community.

Luckily for Arlingtonians, Ayers Variety and Hardware store was acquired from J.W. Ayers' estate in 1977 by the Kaplan family. As Arlington and Westover have changed over the years, the Ayers store has remained, providing top-notch customer service and a space for shop-goers to see, and be seen. A large selection of plants alongside stationary, toys, and anything else shoppers may need can be found at the shop on Washington Boulevard. After severe flooding in Northern Virginia in 2019, the community rallied behind the store by crowdsourcing funds for necessary repairs. Residents volunteered to clean the area surrounding the store. According to local media, people even came to the store to offer in-person contributions.

Neighborly feel, convenience, and customer service have solidified Ayers as a key to the history of the area among the small cadre of Westover shops. Ayers' esteemed store remains an anchor of the community and has continued to provide its wide selection of homeware and items necessary for the maintenance of the area's historic houses. Ayers can now be found on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ayersvarietyandhardware) in addition to its original Westover location.

Three Sisters: Person, Place and Artifact

“Three Sisters” showcase three historical things that make Arlington so unique. Our Three Sisters consist of a person, a place, and an artifact from the AHS collection.

Person: James B. Mahon



James B. Mahon was born in 1924 in Maryland and came to Arlington as a teen. He graduated from Washington-Lee High School in 1942 (His high school photo is at left). He enlisted in the army and after Officers Candidate School was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant. He joined the 1st Armored Division.

In 1944, in letters home to his high school civics teacher, Sally Loving, he told her that he had been all along the northern coast of Africa and was then in Italy. He said Italy was an incredibly beautiful country, but the rain, snow, ice, and mud were terrible. He also admitted that the Germans were making life “pretty miserable” and that he was proud to command an excellent platoon. In another letter he said he had been at Anzio. He would always be able to complain about bad winter weather: it grounded allied air support and bogged down the army against German counterattacks. In his letters to his teacher, he joked about how cold it was and said he had been wounded twice and had been awarded a Purple Heart. He did not tell her that he lost a leg during combat at Anzio. He was awarded a second Purple Heart and was hospitalized at Walter Reed Hospital for two years.

He was discharged as a captain and attended William and Mary and the University of Maryland. In 1950 he married his high school sweetheart, Doris Martini, and they had five children. He worked for 25 years for the National Geographic Society and retired in 1977. Mahon remained active in the Arlington community. He served as president of the Arlington Fire Department; he was a leader in the North-South Skirmish Association preserving Civil War weapons, battlefields, and artifacts. A woodcarver by avocation, his work is in museum collections and was exhibited on the USS Anzio. He died in 1999. *(AHS is grateful for Sally Loving who saved Mahon’s letters and many others that she received from her students. The collection is available to the public on the AHS website.)*

Place: Reevesland’s Sledding Hill

In anticipation of “Winter Fun,” the next virtual exhibit that AHS is planning for its website, we highlight Reeves Hill now referred to as Reevesland, as one of the best winter sledding spots in Arlington.

William H. Torreyson purchased the land in 1863, built a house, and farmed there. In 1898, it became the home of Torreyson’s daughter, Lucy, and her husband, George Reeves. The last owner was their son, Nelson Reeves. Born in the farmhouse in 1900, he spent his life there. The family raised dairy cattle and crops until 1955 making it the last farm operating in Arlington. Upon Nelson’s death in 2000, most of the land was subdivided and sold. Only two acres containing the farmhouse, a milking shed, and the sledding hill remain.



In an article Nelson Reeves wrote for the *Arlington Historical Magazine* in 1975, “Recollections of Arlington’s Last Dairy Farmer” he remembered tough winters. He did not have any childhood recollections of playing on the hill, but remembered working alongside his grandfather and father, delivering milk in a horse drawn wagon along cold winter roads, being so cold on some of those milk runs that he wondered if they would make it back home or freeze on the road.

Reeves recalled a particularly heavy snowstorm—the same one in January 1922 that collapsed the roof of the Knickerbocker Theater. At that time, the county did not clear any road west of Glebe Road. Five men and two teams of horses spent all day Sunday breaking track from the farm down to Glebe Road so they could get through

the next day with milk. Those tough winters in his younger days might be why in later years, when he ran the farm, he invited neighborhood children to use the hill for sledding in the winter.

Arlington County designated the farmhouse and remaining two acres of property as a local historic district. The county owned it until March 2020 when it began the first steps to sell the property to Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia for use as a group home for individuals with developmental disabilities. The written agreement guarantees the hill will remain a public park available for sledding in the winter.

Artifact: Davos Sledge or Sled



This is a Davos sledge and was donated to AHS by Donald and Martha Orth in 1980. The brand name is on the middle wooden slat and is named Davos because it was used in the first annual toboggan race in Davos, Norway in 1883. The design has not changed much since production began in Norway in the 1880s. It was first used as a winter transport vehicle; the Germans used them in both world wars to haul supplies. Underneath is the name of a likely previous owner: Mike Henderson. Mike probably sat on it, leaning to either side to steer and braking with his

feet. Adults used them for fun, too, but at three feet long and 14 inches across, parents probably deferred to their smaller fry to use it, at least at first.

“I Remember Warren” Stambaugh Event Scheduled for December

In the fall newsletter, we shared the exciting news that AHS had won a small grant from The National Trust for a preservation study. The expectation for this grant award was that we would find a matching funding source. We were fortunate that the Warren G. Stambaugh Memorial Foundation stepped in to provide that support. For the past two months, the Arlington Historical Society has been collaborating with the Warren G. Stambaugh Memorial Foundation to plan a virtual event. This event titled “I Remember Warren” provides a glimpse into his life and success as a legislator for Arlington. It also shares a glimpse of the Arlington Historical Museum and its current need for preservation and renovation so that it is accessible for generations to come. During his tenure in office, Warren G. Stambaugh co-sponsored a bill to bring Commonwealth funding to the museum for



renovation. The event features current Arlington delegate Patrick Hope, former delegate Karen Darner and former Arlington senator James Almand. We have partnered with Arlington Independent Media to show this event during

the month of December. Stay tuned for more details.

Milner Preservation Studies Arlington Historical Society Museum at Hume School

AHS is fortunate to have two historic properties: the 1750s Ball Sellers House and the 1893 Hume School, site of the Arlington Historical Museum. Our museum is home to thousands of artifacts



representing the diverse history of Arlington. It is important that we protect these artifacts and provide a structurally sound building that will provide good climate control to protect them. Currently, this museum property needs work to meet that standard. We have hired a local Arlington firm, Milner Preservation. They are conducting a feasibility study of this historic property and have been on site investigating the interior and exterior. We have asked the Milner Group to evaluate the museum and make recommendations to ensure the building is maintained for future generations. They are also providing suggestions for building use to optimize exhibit space, climate-controlled storage space and accessibility issues so that all can enjoy this treasure for years to come.

Preserving the Febrey-Lothrop-Rouse Estate

Anyone who has driven along Wilson Boulevard near 7-Corners has most likely noticed the large grey house at the end of a long-paved driveway, surrounded by a wood split-rail fence. The main house, several unique outbuildings, and the entire 9-acre property are under serious threat for demolition and redevelopment.



Tom Dickinson, local historic preservation specialist, member of the Arlington Historical Society Board of Directors, and Chair of the AHS Historic Preservation Committee, has long sensed that the property was extremely vulnerable to demolition and development.

In April 2020, he completed an application for Local Historic District (LHD) designation for the property and buildings. He then submitted it to the County Historic Preservation Office (CHPO), and the county Historic Affairs and Landmarks Review Board (HALRB) for review and approval.

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On November 19, 2020, this application was placed on the meeting agenda for the HALRB. After extensive discussion, the HALRB voted unanimously to authorize the CHPO to conduct a thorough review and analysis of the main house, several outbuildings, and the 9-acre surrounding property, to determine if the property warrants LHD designation. The CHPO stated it would take that office at least six months to complete this study.

If approved, a LHD designation will not guarantee preservation of the buildings or property but will require additional steps to maximize preservation from any potential developer. AHS will maintain vigilant oversight of, and provide any applicable inputs to, the pending review process. AHS believes that this is an important property to preserve. Read the [full article](#) or a recent updates [at ArlNow](#).

Aurora Hills Women's Club Sells Wreaths for AHS

The Arlington Historical Society is so thankful for the many partners that contribute to our success. One of those groups is the Aurora Hills Women's Club. Throughout the year, the women of this group work tirelessly to raise funds for local non-profits. Each holiday they run a wreath sale as a fundraiser. Undeterred by the challenges of 2020, they moved their face-to-face wreath sale operation to an online provider. Profits from the sales of these wreaths will benefit both the Arlington Historical Museum and the Arlington Food Assistance Center. We are very appreciative of the support the Aurora Hills Women's Club has provided over the years and are thankful to have such an amazing community partner.



AHS Annual Meeting Held November 2020: New Board Officially Elected



AHS held its first virtual annual meeting on November 12, 2020. Our May 2020 meeting could not be held due to the COVID-19 restrictions. As large gatherings are limited, the Commonwealth of Virginia authorized organizations such as ours to conduct annual meetings virtually. During this meeting, the slate of officers and directors of AHS was unanimously elected. They are: President Cathy Bonnevillie Hix, Vice-President: Dr. Gerald K. Haines, Secretary: Sean Denniston, Treasurer: John Tuohy and Directors George Axiotis, Annette

Benbow, Tom Dickinson, Patrick Hope, Tracy Hopkins, Jessica Kaplan, Annette Marrero-Oliveras, Lara McCauley, David Pearson, and Karl VanNewkirk. Dr. Mark Benbow was re-appointed as the director of the museum. We thank the AHS members who were able to attend this important meeting.

Do You Know Arlington History?

Although 2020 has not been the year we expected, it has been one to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the naming of Arlington. As we come to the end of this year, we offer you a short quiz to see how well you know Arlington's history of the last 100 years. Answers to the quiz can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/y5gicx4x>

1. What neighborhood was the site of Arlington's first public library?
2. In what **decade** did the construction of the Metro begin and in what **year** did the first Metro stops open in Arlington?
3. Where did the last dairy farm operate in Arlington and when did it close? Later generations remember this location as a great hill for sledding.
4. What African American community was bulldozed in 1941 to make way for the Pentagon?
5. What school in Arlington has the distinction of being the first school in Virginia to desegregate?
6. What was the name of the famous football game played each Thanksgiving between Washington-Lee High School in Arlington and George Washington High School in Alexandria?
7. What street in Arlington has been called "the world's zip code" for the diversity of people from around the world who live there?
8. What department store in Arlington had imported monkeys from Brazil at its opening?
9. Arlington was the site of foundational work by the Advanced Research Projects Agency for what important technology that is now an integral part of our lives?
10. What is the connection of the USS Arlington to the legacy of 9-11?

Stewardship of Your Money

AHS depends on donations and membership fees to allow us to carry out our mission. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our museum curator and director have staggered hours to work in the museum. Additional volunteers have worked from home to add to our resources. Your financial donations have allowed us to continue the following work:

- The use of new museum software to create a membership database.
- The continued development of an education page on our website
- The management of a zoom account to offer virtual programming
- The ongoing preservation study to address current needs and plan for future renovation

Business Members

We are thrilled to have the support of the following local businesses and organizations:

Altria Client Services
Aurora Hills Women's Club
Dominion Energy
Glass Distributors
John Marshall Bank
Prudential Financial
Warren G. Stambaugh Foundation

Your donations enable us to continue to serve the residents of Arlington even during the pandemic.

AHS is on the Radio: Listen for "On This Day in Arlington History"
WERA 96.7 FM every day at 9 am and 5 pm.

AHS in the Community October 2020-December 2020

AHS operates two local museums, the Arlington Historical Museum at Hume School, and the Ball-Sellers House. The pandemic and regulations from the Commonwealth have required us to keep our museums closed. However, we have been able to sustain our sharing of Arlington history through multiple virtual events. These events included:

- A September virtual event: “Runyon vs. McCrary: Desegregation of Arlington’s Private Schools” by AHS member Richard Samp. Mr. Samp provided details of the steps to integrate private schools in Arlington. Our attendees included the family of one of the students involved in the Supreme Court lawsuit.
- In October, historian Dr. Lindsey Bestebreurtje was the guest speaker at a virtual event: “The Fastest Growing County in America: Suburbanization, Segregation, and Community Development in Arlington.” This compelling program explored how racialized zoning and planning laws in Arlington impacted the development of suburban communities.
- President Cathy Hix presented a history of the AHS museum properties to members of the Optimist Club in October and the Kiwanis Club in November.
- In November, noted author Ric Murphy presented a virtual event highlighting Section 27 of Arlington Cemetery and Connections to COVID-19. Much of the material in this interesting presentation was drawn from his award-winning book *Section 27, Freedman’s Village in Arlington National Cemetery*.
- AHS Board member Karl Van Newkirk conducted two online programs for the Senior 55+ Community: one on the Civil War in Arlington and one on The Carlin Family.
- Our December virtual event commemorated the centennial of the 19th Amendment with Dr. Alice Reagan of the Northern Virginia Community College who told the story behind “The Suffragist Night of Terror at the Occoquan Workhouse.”
- A virtual exhibit, “A Short history of Voting in Arlington” was created by Jessica Kaplan to coincide with the election.

*** Online exhibits and videos of virtual events are available at arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org. ***

Bellringer Campaign Funding Drive

Each year the Arlington Historical Society conducts its Bellringer Campaign, the annual fundraising drive for the society. It is titled bellringer in honor of the school bell at the top of Hume School that has been rung by many over the years. Letters were sent out in late November to all AHS members. This year we are asking for a special gift to help with the preservation and renovation of the museum. We hope you will consider donating this year. And for those who have already responded, we are very thankful for your support.



Thank You
FOR YOUR
SUPPORT



P.O. Box 100402
Arlington, Virginia 22210

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History Awaits Come Visit!

Arlington Historical Museum

1805 South Arlington Ridge Road
Arlington, VA 22202

Closed until further notice due to the
coronavirus threat

Ball-Sellers House Museum

5620 Third Street South
Arlington, VA 22204

Open by appointment only
due to the coronavirus threat.

The Arlington Historical Society, founded in 1956, is a non-profit organization incorporated under Virginia laws. The Society supports research, collection, preservation, discovery, and dissemination of Arlington County's history. Board meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 7:00 P.M. in the Arlington Historical Museum at the Historic Hume School and are open to the public.



Website: <https://arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org>

Email: info@arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org

Facebook: [ArlingtonHistoricalSociety](https://www.facebook.com/ArlingtonHistoricalSociety)

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