



Arlington Historical Society

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Arlington Historical Society
Winter 2022

Inside This Issue

	Page
President's Dispatch	1
Upcoming AHS Events	2
Gone But Not Forgotten	3
Giving Tuesday	3
Members' Sales Discount	3
Still Standing	4
Memorializing the Enslaved	5
Salute to AHC	6
AHS Visits Crystal City BID	6
AHS in the Community	7
Stewardship of Your Money	7

Arlington Historical Museum

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

Ball-Sellers House

5620 3rd Street, South
Saturdays from 1:00-4:00 PM
through the end of October

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

President's Dispatch

On the wall in my home office is the preamble to the Constitution. The words "we the people, in order to form a **more** perfect union" resonate with me as they help me to understand that our nation is a work in progress. Because these words and the rest of the Preamble have set the stage for some of the biggest debates throughout our history, it is not surprising that there is much national discussion on how we tell our history and what we tell about our history.

Arlington, itself has its own unique history. Today, Arlington is a vibrant community that is diverse and progressive. While there are urban components to the area, there is still a small town feeling among many of its residents. However, a look into Arlington's past reveals that we had to strive to be the inclusive community we are known for today.

Research for our current project, *Memorializing the Enslaved* has revealed that the enslaved could be found throughout the area now known as Arlington. We have discovered ads for runaway slaves and we know that there were several plantations right here in the county where the enslaved toiled.

Arlington gets credit for being the first in the state of Virginia to desegregate schools but the rest of the story was that it was a fight right here in Arlington with local Nazi Party members showing up at meetings to intimidate those fighting for racial justice.

The Arlington community came together on 9/11 as one of the attacks occurred right here in our county. However, as a teacher at that time, many of my Muslim American students faced backlash and the parents of those students were concerned for their safety.

Knowing these stories about our past doesn't diminish the present. It points to the fact that we continuously strive to create a more perfect community.

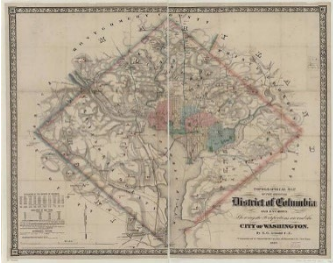
As we move into 2023, the Arlington Historical Society is committed to telling the stories of the past- the good, the bad, and the ugly. As we renovate our museum, we are working to make sure our exhibits tell a complete story of Arlington, inclusive of all. We have scheduled events in the new year which highlight many of the stories of Arlington that need a more complete telling. Our *Memorializing the Enslaved* project has allowed us to partner with BHMA and Arlington Public Schools to make sure our students know this story of Arlington through resources and lesson plans. We strongly believe that it is only through acknowledging the past that we strive to create a better future.

The best of 2023 to all of you. Thank you for your support of the Arlington Historical Society.

Cathy Bonnell-Hix

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.



Thursday, January 12, 2023, 7 pm

The Retrocession Riddle. What was the true motivation for Alexandria County separating itself from the District of Columbia in 1846-47? To preserve slavery, or to better control its economic development? What key role was played by Arlington House creator George Washington Parke Custis? Come hear history-lover and writer Charlie Clark examine the riddle.



Thursday, February 9, 2023, 7 pm

Freedmen's Village. Dr. Spencer Crew will discuss how Freedmen's Village was established and was successful, its impact on those who lived in it, and its role in American history. Join us as we help commemorate Black History month with this presentation by the Emeritus Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.



Thursday, March 9, 2023, 7 pm

The Byrd Machine and Its Impact on Arlington. The organization rose to power during the Jim Crow era, influencing everything from who got the nod to be governor to how the state maintained racial segregation. Its policy of massive resistance to desegregating public schools closed schools rather than integrating them. Journalist and author Michael Lee Pope details the rise and fall of Virginia's last great political machine and its impact on Arlington.



Saturday, April 1, 2023, 1-4 pm

Ball-Sellers House Season Opener

Planning is underway to celebrate the opening of the 2023 season for the oldest structure (c.1750) in Arlington County. The Ball-Sellers House celebrates its new season and its colonial beginnings with history, food, and fun for all ages. *(In-person only, 5620 3rd Street, South)*



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.



Bellringer Fundraising Campaign Reminder

Bellringer Fundraising Campaign letters were mailed at the end of November. This is our annual fundraising campaign and all proceeds this year will go to the preservation of Hume School. We appreciate your support of AHS.

AHS gets no government support at any level. We rely on donations and membership dues.

Gone But Not Forgotten: Bob Peck Chevrolet

This newsletter column features ways Arlington buildings and businesses, that although now gone, played a role within our living memory.



For those residents newer to Arlington, you might wonder about the diamond blue canopy on one of the high-rise buildings in Ballston. However, some know this building provides a nod to the iconic Bob Peck Chevrolet building that existed on the corner of Glebe and Wilson Boulevard for decades, during a time when the Ballston area was not a landscape of high-rise buildings.

The building was a familiar site to all who traveled through the Ballston area. Bob Peck started his career at Ourisman Chevrolet in Maryland during the Great

Depression. By the late 1930s, he launched his own dealership, a partnership with Ourisman salesman Lawrence Kenyon in Clarendon. During the 1940s, they focused on used cars and car service. The partnership dissolved in the 1950s.

In the 1960s the business was officially named Bob Peck Chevrolet and the showroom moved to its prominent location in Ballston on the corner of Glebe and Wilson. The car dealership flourished there and stayed in business until 2006. Bob Peck was one of the first car dealers to appear in his own commercials and some remember him juggling in these commercials.

The Chevrolet car sales building is gone but not forgotten, thanks to the developers who designed the tribute canopy that graces the new high rise in the same location. (*Vintage postcard from AHS Collection. Recent color image courtesy of The Washington Post*)



Giving Tuesday Success

For the first time, AHS participated in Giving Tuesday, a global day of giving powered by collaboration and social media. The AHS fundraising team sent emails, posted to Facebook and Instagram, and Tweeted from November 7th through November 29th. Our posts and tweets were “liked” and shared by 74 different individuals. We received \$2,900.00 in 14 separate donations.

Our goal was to raise both money and awareness, and we succeeded in doing both. We hope we can convert some of the people who “liked” and shared into future members.

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: [deleted for public consumption]

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 understanding of our shared history.



Still Standing: A Trip Down Memory Lane

The Crossman House is an 1890's farmhouse located in the Arlington neighborhood of East Falls Church. The surrounding property was one of the last operating dairy farms in the county, closing in the 1940's. Today, the home has been lovingly preserved so that its history is not forgotten. This article was written by Erica Wargo, Yorktown student and AHS volunteer.

If you've ever visited the Tuckahoe Elementary or Bishop O'Connell High or have been in the surrounding neighborhood, you've set foot on the sprawling 60 acres that once belonged to the Crossman family. The once grandiose tract of farmland is now less than an acre. Built in 1892 for George Crossman's wife, Nellie, the home on the remaining property also had a barn just behind the house, a windmill, an outhouse, and several other farm structures. The Crossman house isn't technically part of Falls Church, but the Crossman name has had a lot of influence on the neighboring city. Christ Crossman, a United Methodist Church in Falls Church, was named for Issac Crossman who was George Crossman's father. When I met with the current owners of the home, Leslie Aun and Buzz McClain, they showed me photos of the property before the land's suburbanization. As a Tuckahoe Elementary alum, it was fascinating for me to see pictures of these mystical green hills that went on for miles. I spent a lot of my childhood on the former Crossman property as a Tuckahoe student and I reflect on those years fondly.

The owners relayed stories to me about the house's history including that it was one of the last operating dairy farms in Arlington County in the 1940's. One day while Buzz was out in the yard, an older man walked past and pointed out how the current color of the house wasn't the original. The passerby identified himself as George Crossman, the grandson and namesake of the original owner. Another interesting story features a very famous visitor, the acclaimed actress Elizabeth Taylor. The owner of the Crossman house at the time was a secretary to John Warner, a senator, who was married to Elizabeth Taylor. When the couple traveled to Middleburg to visit their estate, they often stopped at the Crossman house to drop off papers. It was also believed that Liz gave some of her kaftan dresses to the secretary.



The farmhouse is a classic example of Victorian architecture. Throughout the home are many examples of this style, such as the steeply pitched roof, asymmetry, and wraparound porch. My favorite feature of the home is the roof, specifically the eaves. Carved into the wood of the eaves are cutouts which, when the sun is shining, create shadows of birds on the exterior. Leslie told me that although that the cutouts look like birds, they also resemble crosses that tie back to the Crossman name. It is a very unique architectural feature. (As an architecture enthusiast myself, I appreciate the detail and craftsmanship displayed on the facade; they truly don't make homes like this anymore.) The attic, which temporarily housed workers during the harvest season, has a stained-glass window. The window is split into two panes with a large central square in each pane and small squares making up the border.

Leslie and Buzz are very enthusiastic about maintaining the home's original splendor. Many of the home's historic features have been preserved including the original siding of the home which is displayed on one of the walls in the added-on kitchen. The original floor plan changed when bathrooms were added on and staircases taken out. In the back of the home, a small room was discovered during renovations which could only be entered by a staircase since it was not connected to the second-floor hallway. The staircase was taken out and replaced with a refrigerator and the room is now accessed via one of the second-floor bedrooms. This room may have been a maid's quarters. Originally there were four main bedrooms since the bathroom/closet area of the master bedroom was another small bedroom. The main staircase is in the entrance hallway and the other is in the kitchen. Yet another staircase connects only the second floor to the attic. Buzz and Leslie's dedication to preserving their home is admirable. Arlington is lucky to have this historic property still standing.

A Runaway Advertisement and Arlington's Enslaved

This document was found in our research for the "Memorializing the Enslaved Project."

Advertisements for the return of enslaved "runaways" often appeared in many 18th and 19th century newspapers. Arlington—then Alexandria, DC from 1801-1846 and Alexandria County (1846-1920)—residents published advertisements seeking the return of what they considered to be property in the *Daily National Intelligencer* and *The Alexandria Gazette*. These ads are invaluable records of slavery and provide insight into the lives of both the enslaved and enslavers.

The following July 26, 1841, advertisement appeared in the *Daily National Intelligencer*.

FORTY DOLLARS REWARD.

RAN AWAY while in the employ of Mr. John A. Sommers, on the 20th of February last, a yellow Girl named SARAH, about 20 years of age, slender made, narrow face, has a long under jaw and lip, and has a down look when spoken to, and a small impediment in her speech, and has been raised as a house servant; is a smart, brisk girl.

Also, her sister REBECCA, who absconded from the subscriber on the 18th inst. without any just provocation. She is a yellow girl, about 18 years of age, thick and stout made, with a broad full face; has been raised as a house servant, and is a smart active girl, is neat and cleanly in her dress; she wore away a blue domestic frock, and took with her several other dresses. Their mother, who calls herself Maria Simpson, resides in Washington City, in the Valley north west Six Buildings.

For the apprehension and securing of either of the above negroes in jail so that I get them again, I will give \$15, if taken in the District, and \$20 if taken out of the same, and the above reward for both:

S. SOMMERS.

Alexandria County, D. C. July 26—2awtf

Much information can be gleaned from it about Sarah and Rebecca including the sisters' ages, physical appearance, dress, and mannerisms. Despite being siblings, Rebecca was "thick and stout" while Sarah was "slender made." Sarah had a speech impediment and looked down when spoken to so may have seemed timid. Rebecca was neat and clean. They both had lighter "yellow" complexions. Neither had surnames sanctioned by their enslaver.

Important details on why the sisters fled from the Sommers can also be found in the ad. Sarah and Rebecca were "house servants" near what is now Hall's Hill in Arlington, and "absconded" from their

enslavers, reportedly "without any just provocation". The ad shows us that they fled not just in the pursuit of liberty, but also to find a loved one—their mother, Maria Simpson.

Ads for runaway slaves often mentioned that those fleeing enslavement were searching for friends and family. Enslavers who highlighted this belief shows their awareness of bondspeople's love for their families and the depravity of separating families, usually for financial gain. They must also have understood the personal trauma of being forcibly separated from one's parents or siblings. Not only did Sarah and Rebecca hope to rejoin their mother, but they also had the opportunity to lose themselves in a city if they were unsuccessful. With 21st century hindsight, it is ironic that the sisters' enslaver, S. Sommers stated his belief that the two left his home without "provocation."

This ad also shines a light on how slavery in the Arlington region was enforced. Arlington's runaways, often young adults like these two sisters who were trying to reach loved ones, commonly fled to nearby DC. From 1800-1846, Arlington was part of the capital city, so their flight was not to a different jurisdiction with different laws. By 1847, Arlington and Alexandria City were returned to Virginia, yet legal codes were designed to keep runaways from fleeing into DC or further North. A network of law enforcement officials or bounty hunters would have "apprehended and secured" unattended blacks without proper papers regardless of enslavement status. Enslavers offered rewards such as the \$40 advertised by S. Sommers to officials or jailers. The reverse also commonly occurred. Jailers advertised runaways they had captured and asked enslavers to collect them. If left unclaimed, the captives were generally auctioned to the highest bidder and the funds used for the jurisdiction. The system worked well in efforts to stem the flow of "absconding" individuals.

It's unclear whether Sommers apprehended Sarah and Rebecca. One can only hope the sisters evaded capture. You can learn more about the "Memorializing the Enslaved" project being conducted in collaboration with the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington on the AHS website:

<https://arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org/2022/04/memorizing-the-enslaved-in-arlington/>

Salute to the Aurora Hills Women's Club

Over the years, the Arlington Historical Society has received support from many organizations. One of our most faithful has been the Aurora Hills Women's Club.



This club, in the Aurora Hills neighborhood, has always had as a main goal, the support of the Hume School. Founded in 1958, this club has been active in the community, meeting monthly for informational lunch meetings and to plan service projects.

AHS Board members have fondly enjoyed the annual tea they host each year, sometimes on the grounds of the Hume School. One of their most successful projects is their annual wreath sale. This enables them to not only support AHS but also to regularly support other non-profits in the county. The club has donated over \$160,000 to Arlington non-profits, including over \$80,000.00 to Hume School preservation.



This year, the club was unable to run its annual wreath sale. As an act of generosity, they helped AHS launch it as a fundraiser. The AHS wreath sale garnered \$2018 to support preservation and refurbishment of the

Arlington Historical Museum, previously the historic Hume School. AHCW is a great club and we are thankful for all they do for AHS and other Arlington non-profits.

Thank you to everyone who purchased wreaths and other holiday décor through our online wreath sale.

AHS Visits Crystal City BID

On October 14, in a collaboration with the Crystal City Civic Association (CCCA), National Landing Business Improvement District (BID), and AHS, a happy hour information session was organized on changes in National Landing (also known as Crystal City, Pentagon City, and Potomac Yards).

Unlike the typical happy hour where people might mingle over drinks or an information session where people view decks of PowerPoint slides, the organizers opted for an interactive evening.

Some 175 attendees were also able to ask questions of BID and JBG professionals as well as of County Board Member Christian Dorsey and Delegate Patrick Hope. The event was also a chance to raise concerns and learn about National Landing's past. This was one of CCCA's first in person meetings since 2020. Most of its members live in apartment buildings and several commented on rising rents and lack of amenities.

There were also many questions about National Landing's history. AHS President Cathy Hix (see photo below) provided an overview of the area from Native Americans settle on the Potomac, the Abington Plantation (its ruins within the airport), to the transformation from industrial land to a commercial and residential district. AHS Secretary Sean Denniston explained current AHS projects including *Memorializing the Enslaved*, to identify people and places where slavery occurred in Arlington County.

The BID provided drinks and a popular new restaurant "The Freshman" catered the food. The event was well received by all present, not only for discussing the future of National Landing but its past and how one may guide the other.



AHS in the Community: October - December 2022

AHS operates two local museums, the Arlington Historical Museum at Hume School and the Ball-Sellers House. We are also active in the community with the following events:

October

- AHS hosted the launch of Martin Suydam's 55+ course **Walks With Charley** which started its route at the Arlington Historical Museum
- The AHS free public event this month was **Arlington Mills: A Forgotten History** with Beth DeFrancis Sun who shared her groundbreaking research on mills in Arlington County.
- Cathy Hix and Sean Denniston presented a brief history of Crystal City during an event hosted by the local Business Improvement District and three community organizations.
- The Ball-Sellers House hosted **Bee Day** featuring the installation of an Eagle Scout project of a life-size model of bee *skeps* and a talk by Virginia Johnson on her recent book **Virginia Honey: A Sweet History**.

November

- The AHS free public event this month was a **1920 Photographic Tour of Arlington** featuring unique photographs of Arlington narrated by Peter Penczer. The photos, most of which had never been seen by attendees, helped tell the story of Arlington's past.
- On election day, AHS hosted a visit by an Arlington Girl Scout Troop who had a conversation with Charlie Clark about the history of county government. They also got a chance to visit the museum's 1890-era classroom, ring the school bell, and create campaign posters for when they run for office.
- The Ball-Sellers and a team of docents hosted a visit by 60 kindergarteners from Campbell Elementary School. The kids learned about life in the past and most were glad they didn't have to do all those colonial-era chores!
- Charlie Clark represented AHS at a dedication ceremony for a new historical marker at Mt. Salvation Baptist Cemetery.

December

- The AHS free public event this month was **Trooper Pride: Buffalo Soldier, Patriot, and Pawn** presented by AHS member Dr. Alfred O. Taylor. In his presentation, Dr. Taylor told the story of his great-grandfather's experiences as a buffalo soldier in the west. C-SPAN recorded the event and we are waiting for word of a broadcast date.
- The Ball-Sellers House committee hosted a celebration for the long-time volunteers Jane and Eric Casey, who have been docents for more than 30 years. Jane led the committee at the beginning of 2000 and helped AHS plan more strategically. Eric was the first to turn the vegetable garden into a colonial era garden that has since become part of the Ball-Sellers House tour. Jane and Eric are moving away and will not be docents next year.

Stewardship of Your Money

The 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:

- Heating and air conditioning installation at the AHS Museum
- Bathroom and electrical repairs at the Ball-Sellers house
- The management of a Zoom account that we now use to live stream events so we can have both in-person and virtual presentations.

Thank you to our business/organization members

Aurora Hills Women's Club

John Marshall Bank

JBG Smith Cares

Fairlington Historical Society

Marymount University

MTFA



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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 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 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