



# Alexandria Times

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## Out of the Attic

### Freedom House Museum: A treasure worth visiting

*Alexandria Times, December 15, 2022*

In September 2021, Historic Alexandria won a Save America's Treasures grant from the National Park Service. The museum, located at 1315 Duke St., joined the Bok Mountain Lake Sanctuary and Singing Tower in Florida, the National Building Museum in D.C.'s Architectural Toy Collection, and the Alaska Native Heritage Center and others as winners of the 2022 awards. The \$500,000 grant will be used to support the exterior restoration of the museum building, which was once the

Alexandria Slave Pen, and the offices of several slave traders, including the notorious slave-trading firm, Franklin and Armfield.

The overall preservation plan for the building includes re-pointing; repairing or replacing windows, doors, woodwork, and wood siding; improving the gutter and downspout system, and waterproofing the foundation. These steps will seal the building envelope, correcting and preventing further degradation. This work is prioritized based on a Historical Structure Report conducted by SmithGroup in 2021 for Historic Alexandria.

"Through private and public investments, the Save America's Treasures program supports community-based preservation and conservation work on some of our nation's most important collections, artifacts, structures, and sites for the benefit of future generations," NPS Director Chuck Sams said.

Save America's Treasures, funded through the Historic Preservation Fund, provided \$356 million to more than 1,326 projects between 1999 and 2020. Requiring a dollar-for-dollar private match, these grants have leveraged more than \$500 million in private investment and contributed more than 16,000 jobs to local and state economies.

Historians nominated the Franklin and Armfield Office to the National Register in 1976 because it is one of the few surviving buildings through which the second middle passage took place. Significant archaeological work took place in the building complex in the 1980s as the owners redeveloped the property. Black Alexandrians advocated for the preservation of this space in a city whose identity was steeped in colonial history. Recently, researchers have amassed an incredible volume of sources – photos, maps, 3D laser scans, business records, abolitionist accounts – and research continues as connections are made throughout the network of the domestic slave trade sites and with scholars across the country.

The building was purchased in 1996 by the Northern Virginia Urban League and renovated in 2005 as an office, conference and programming space. A small, two-room basement exhibit known as the Freedom House Museum was professionally researched, designed and opened on Feb. 12, 2008 – President Abraham Lincoln's Birthday – to interpret the site's history as a slave pen. NVUL saw this as their gift to the City of Alexandria. The building was named Freedom House by an earlier occupant in



*The front of the Freedom House Museum. Photo, R. Kennedy/Visit Alexandria.*



## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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1988 in honor of Rev. Lewis Henry Bailey – a formerly enslaved person sold through the Alexandria Slave Pen.

On March 25, 2020, the City of Alexandria purchased 1315 Duke St. in “as is” condition with the clear understanding that the building would require extensive renovation to open as a museum. The Save America’s Treasures Grant is a big part of the more than \$2.5 million needed to preserve this essential part of American history.

*“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.*

*These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria and invited guests.*