

Alexandria Times

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Mapping Alexandria: Stories of a Changing City

Historic Alexandria is proud to announce the opening of its new exhibition “Mapping Alexandria: Stories of a Changing City,” at the Alexandria History Museum at The Lyceum. The exhibition celebrates the 275th anniversary of Alexandria’s founding by exploring the evolution and history of our city through the words of its residents.

“Mapping Alexandria” centers the stories members of our community have shared with volunteers and staff of Historic Alexandria in more than 450 oral history interviews. The people and places that have shaped our city, from Old Town to the West End, are memorialized in the text, images, artifacts and recordings now on display.

“This exhibit is a first for Historic Alexandria. We are capturing the story of Alexandria through the individual stories and experiences that residents in our community are sharing with us,” Susan Cumbe, director of the Department of Collections and Exhibitions at Historic Alexandria, said.

“Mapping Alexandria” follows a chronological timeline to recognize the evolution of Alexandria’s 275 years, focusing on the historical arc of many of the city’s neighborhoods. From Native American artifacts and some of the city’s earliest maps, the exhibit explores how the Potomac River and the land next to it shaped Alexandria. While early Alexandrians built along the city’s natural features, they also altered the natural landscape, with projects such as filling the Potomac River to shape Alexandria’s current waterfront, constructing canals and railways and paving the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Projects like these expedited the transportation of people and goods. They established and destroyed neighborhoods, with and without the consent of their residents. The exhibit chronicles how segregation made discrimination a

part of life for Alexandrians. It also celebrates the African American residents who created their own communities, where they worshiped, shopped, attended school and buried their dead.

Moving into the 20th century, “Mapping Alexandria” discusses the mixed legacy of urban renewal in Alexandria.

“The intent of sparking economic activity and beautification came at the cost of uprooting residents and demolishing historic buildings,” the exhibit notes.

A section of the exhibition focuses on interviews with new arrivals to Alexandria, whether from another part of the United States or a different country. “Mapping Alexandria” seeks to tell the stories of the Central American culture of Chirilagua in Arlandria to the Afghan and Ethiopian communities in the West End. These stories show resilience, determination and how multicultural backgrounds have enriched the character of Alexandria’s neighborhoods.

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PHOTO/HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

Come celebrate the city’s 275th anniversary by exploring the new “Mapping Alexandria” exhibit.

exandria’s neighborhoods.

The exhibit concludes with residents’ memories of growing up in different neighborhoods in Alexandria, school experiences and pillars of Alexandria that made neighborhoods what they are today. Text for the exhibit is available in both English and Spanish.

We hope you can join us to hear the story of Alexandria’s neighborhoods, from the people who grew up and lived here.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.