

Alexandria Times

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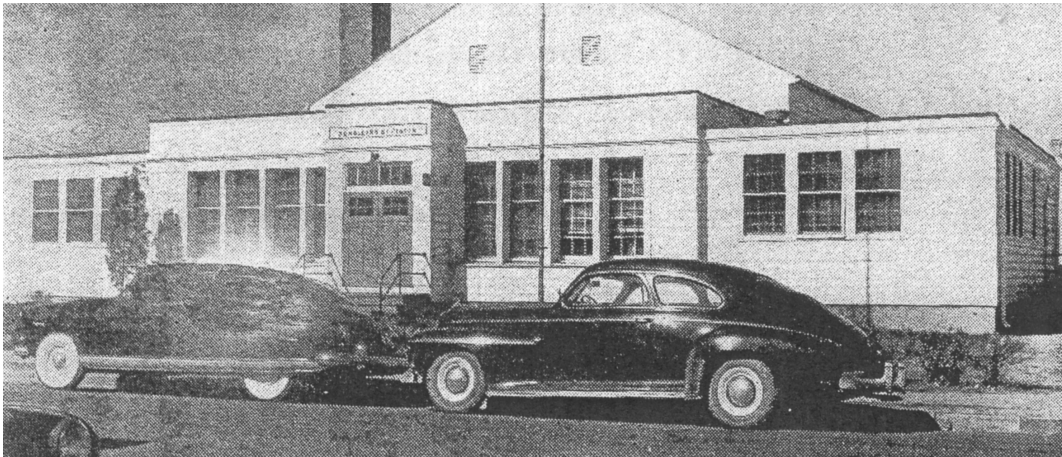
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The Pendleton Street USO

In honor of Veteran’s Day, Historic Alexandria highlights the former USO Center on Pendleton Street. During World War II, the United Service Organizations opened up centers for the entertainment and recreation of service members. Centers in the American South were segregated, and the white frame building built on the northwest corner of Pendleton and North Patrick streets served African American members of the military. Opened in 1942, the center replaced an older center on North Henry Street.

After a multi-day opening event, the center hosted dances, musicals and other live performances for service members. Attendees also received special meals. By early 1944, the decrease in attendance caused by a decline in military numbers stationed in the area required that the Pendleton Center open for civilian use.



The Pendleton Street USO Center.

PHOTO/ALEXANDRIA LOCAL HISTORY/SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY

The City of Alexandria initially gained access to the center twice a week, and the recreation department used the facility for basketball games.

After the end of the war in 1945, the city bought the building to use as a community and recreation center for African American residents, as community centers stayed as segregated as the USO centers. The

Center offered activities such as dancing, singing, boxing, basketball, drama and crafts.

Local organizations also used it for meetings, and Parker-Gray School used it for basketball games and commencement ceremonies. According to the Alexandria African American Hall of Fame, the school also used the Center for classroom space and as a cafeteria.

The opening of the Charles Houston Recreation Center in 1976 – a different building than the one today – made the Pendleton Street Recreation Center redundant. The city demolished the Pendleton Center, and a private residence sits on the location today.

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