

Alexandria Times

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The Alexandria Archaeological Commission at 50

On Feb. 25, 1975, Alexandria City Council adopted Resolution No. 371 establishing an Alexandria Archaeological Commission. The Commission was the first of its kind, not only in Alexandria, but in the country. With that step, the City of Alexandria became a national model of community archaeology.

Over the past 50 years, more than 100 Alexandria residents have served as members of the AAC representing planning districts, history and archaeology organizations and the business and tourism community.

The original resolution captures Alexandria’s goal to expand the existing archaeological program and prioritize the preservation, promotion and display of the extraordinary artifacts excavated from current and future archaeological sites. The goals of the AAC also included expanding the work of archaeologists from a few individuals to an entire community as represented by commission members.

The Alexandria Archae-

ological Commission works closely with the city’s archaeologists and is the heart of the community-driven approach to archaeology. They meet monthly to discuss current issues and develop priorities for the preservation and interpretation of archaeological resources and collections.

Most recently, the AAC successfully nominated Alexandria’s Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery Memorial to the National Park Service’s African American Civil Rights Network, the oldest site to be listed and the first from Virginia. This honor helps to ensure that this site will be recognized and preserved in perpetuity for generations to come. It also reflects the AAC’s commitment to studying and sharing all of Alexandria’s history.

For nearly 20 years, the Alexandria Archaeological Commission has encouraged community preservation efforts through its annual awards program; including the Ben Brenman Award, named for the first AAC Chair, and,

more recently, the Del Pepper Archaeology Award, named for former City Council member and archaeology advocate, Redella “Del” Pepper.

Given at a City Council meeting every October to celebrate Virginia Archaeology Month, the AAC has recognized dozens of residents, homeowners, organizations, developers, professional archaeologists and students. Awardees have all demonstrated high quality work, innovation, commitment or extraordinary efforts in preservation, research, protection, enhancement, education, public appreciation and advocacy in relation to the archaeology of historic Alexandria.

Following the discovery of four ship hull remnants along the Potomac River’s edge in Old Town during excavation for building projects this past decade, the AAC formed the Ships Subcommittee. The group worked tirelessly alongside Alexandria Archaeology staff to chart the ships’ course from discovery to documentation to conservation and inno-

vative preservation. The AAC has continuously educated the public about waterfront archaeology and advocated for permanent space for both storage and exhibition.

Alexandria is a national leader in local government archaeology because of this group of volunteers and citizen preservationists. In January, the AAC received statewide commendation through House Joint Resolution No. 433 for 50 years of contributions to the city’s history and archaeology and for “its work to foster a community that is well-informed about its past and better prepared to meet the challenges of the present and future.”

Looking forward 50 years, the Alexandria Archaeological Commission remains committed to advancing archaeological research and ensuring that Alexandria’s archaeological past is shared with the next generation.

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