

building on history

This city's streets are steeped in the past.

TO LIVE IN ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA, IS TO LIVE IN a thriving modern city that is steeped in history. Just minutes from Washington, DC, Alexandria is a showcase of 18th- and 19th-century architecture, the home of some of the most important U.S. historical events, and a popular destination for eclectic shops, award-winning restaurants, fine hotels, and cultural attractions.

Though Alexandria's proximity to the nation's capital is a draw for many residents and visitors, the city offers much more, says Amy Bertsch, a public information specialist at the Office of Historic Alexandria. "It's an independent city, a destination of its own."

People often think of historic Alexandria as an old Colonial seaport, but it has elements of many time periods, says Jim Mackay, acting director of the Office of Historic Alexandria.

The story of Alexandria parallels the country's, says Bertsch. In the early days, it served as a key port for the Colonies because of its prime location on the Potomac River. Later, when the railroad was in its heyday, the Del Ray neighborhood grew up near the city's Potomac Yard, a railway hub for the eastern seaboard. During the atomic age, when suburban living became popular, people bought homes in Alexandria because of the easy commute to the District.

Modern-day Alexandria is both a suburb and a city, with its own government, school system, universities, hospitals, and city library, as well as

thriving neighborhoods—Old Town, Del Ray, Arlandria, the West End, and the up-and-coming Eisenhower Valley.

Inova Alexandria Hospital provides a full line of health-care services. George Washington University has a campus in Alexandria attended by adult professionals pursuing advanced degrees. Virginia Tech also has a campus here with a variety of programs, including architecture, landscape architecture, public administration and policy, and urban and regional planning.

Homes range from the stately older

houses of Old Town to new developments such as Potomac Yard, a multiuse community being built where the old railroad yard used to be. It will have businesses, shops, hotels, and residences.

Potomac Yard will offer "a wide range of products to meet different income levels and consumer groups," says Jon Lindgren, land acquisitions manager for Pulte Homes, one of the developers. "There will be ... a small condo for someone who's just getting out of college or a 2,500-square-foot townhouse for a family."



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"One of the things that makes Alexandria a pretty distinctive place is the history embedded in daily living," says city archaeologist Pam Cressey (above). "People often come here who want a sense of place." Opposite page: Townhomes in Old Town (top); the Carlyle House, once headquarters of a British general and now a museum site (right).

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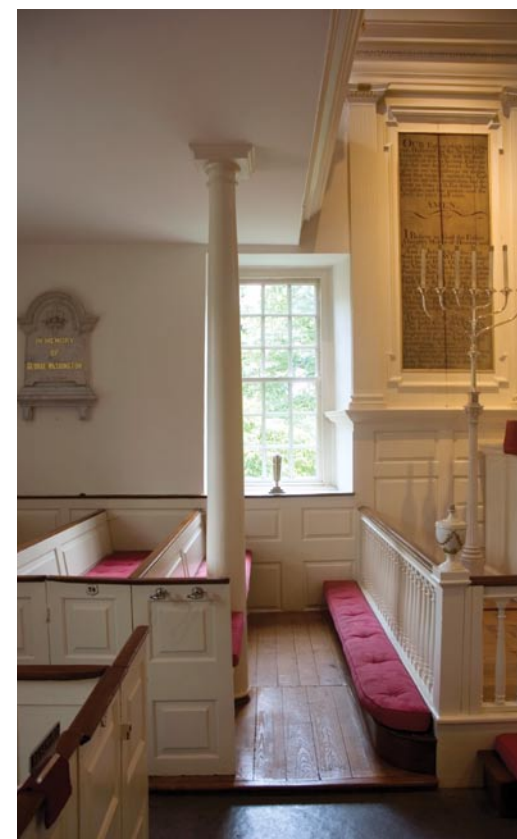


A E D P

The city hosts a range of recreational activities, including museums, art galleries, antique shops, and historical homes. The Birchmere is a popular destination for live music, featuring artists such as Mary Chapin Carpenter, Lyle Lovett, and Dave Matthews. For outdoor recreation, the city boasts miles of paved jogging and bicycle paths.

Old and new mingle comfortably in Alexandria. For example, Christ Church, the first Episcopal church in the city, where George Washington and Robert E. Lee both worshiped, today has an active congregation of more than 2,400 people and is open to historical tours seven days a week. Exhibits at Gadsby's Tavern Museum show how Washington and his contemporaries lived; visitors can then enjoy a Colonial-style meal at the tavern next door.

A sense of history permeates everything in town, says Pam Cressey, the city archaeologist. "It's the whole place, not just the part that looks like Old Town," she says.



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Unique & Memorable!



The new T.C. Williams High School boasts additional space and green building features. Above, front entrance; right, an artist's rendering of the finished project.



Titans' New Home

In 1971, Alexandria's T.C. Williams High School made history when its newly integrated football team won the state championship. The story of that season is immortalized in the 2000 film *Remember the Titans*.

Now the school is drawing attention for an entirely different reason. This fall semester, students will walk through the doors of a brand-new "green" building, with a roof garden, a system to collect rainwater for flushing toilets, and a "dashboard" to monitor energy use. Students have participated in the planning and construction, and lessons about conservation are being worked into the curriculum.

The new building is about 100,000 square feet larger than the old one, says Amy Carlini, executive director of information and outreach for the Alexandria City Public Schools, "but we're hoping it will seem smaller." Educational programs are divided into "learning communities" in which teachers will work with groups of students throughout their high school careers, "so they won't get lost in the system," she says.



Freedmen gather at the Quartersmaster Wharf on the Potomac River. After the Civil War, freed slaves flocked to the city in search of work and homes. Many died in deplorable conditions; an archaeological team is excavating the site where they're buried.

Her team is exploring a freedmen's cemetery, which dates back to Civil War days, when Alexandria was occupied by the federal government and slaves escaped to the city hoping to start new lives. But so many of them arrived—8,000 or 10,000 in a city whose population was only 12,000—that the living conditions were deplorable and most of them died. They were buried in this cemetery, where in modern times a gas station stood for more than 50 years.

But now the gas station is gone and Cressey's team is excavating the area to find the graves—not to dig them up but to explore what's there and eventually to build a park to honor those who died.

"One of the things that makes Alexandria a pretty distinctive place is the history embedded in daily living," she says. "Neighborhoods are historic; churches and organizations are historic. So are the buildings, the streetscapes, the names. It creates a different kind of feeling. People often come here who want a sense of place."

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