

Alexandria Presidential History Bike Tour 2021

Overview

- This tour explores some of the sites in Alexandria associated with U.S. presidents.
- Please note that this is just a sampling of the presidential history sites in Alexandria.
- The route is about 14 miles long, with stops at nine sites.
- Go to <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/36412299> for cuesheets or turn-by-turn directions.

1. Starting point: 2301 Mount Vernon Avenue, diagonally across from Del Ray Pizzeria at 2218 Mount Vernon Avenue

President **Barack Obama** was out Christmas shopping at Potomac Yard on December 21, 2011, and he made a stop at Del Ray Pizzeria on his way back to the White House. Obama's food order included three large pizzas—one with pepperoni and sausage, one with onions and green peppers and one supreme. "I had no idea he was coming here," Del Ray Pizzeria chef Eric Reid said. "I got a call from someone asking why he was being patted down to come in [the restaurant]."



Del Ray Pizzeria's menu options now include a "Barack My World" pizza, named after one of the pizzas that the president ordered. The pizza comes with red sauce, shredded mozzarella, pepperoni, and sausage.

Source: <https://patch.com/virginia/delray/obamas-dined-these-alexandria-restaurants-how-many-have-you-visited>.

Start your ride by heading east on E. Del Ray Avenue. Turn right onto Dewitt Avenue, then turn right onto E. Howell Ave. At the traffic light, turn left onto Mount Vernon Ave. Turn left into the parking lot for George Washington Middle School, then stop in the parking lot.

2. George Washington Middle School, 1005 Mount Vernon Avenue Stopping point: in the parking lot.

Although now a middle school, this site used to be George Washington High School, complete with a football stadium that could seat 15,000 people. In 1949, a game between Quantico Marine base and Virginia Tech was attended by President **Harry Truman** and other notable figures. Truman was ostensibly in town to participate in Alexandria's Bicentennial Anniversary festivities.

Then-candidate **John F. Kennedy** also made a campaign stop here in 1960, shortly after receiving the Democratic Party's nomination for president. His rally was held on August 24, 1960, as part of a push to keep southern electoral votes. Accompanying the future president was his running mate **Lyndon B.**

Johnson, who would later become president himself, along with Johnson's wife, Claudia Alta "Lady Bird" Johnson, and Virginia Governor J. Lindsay Almond.

An estimated 15,000 people came to the event, requiring the arrangement of buses from McLean and Seven Corners, the erection of a platform, a special sound system, and the installation of Klieg lights, which were used for television lighting.

Kennedy argued that under the Eisenhower and Nixon administration: "Never before have we experienced treatment at the hands of our enemy. Never before have we experienced such a decline in our prestige, driving our friends to neutralism, and neutrals to outright hostility." He dismissed Nixon's foreign policy experience of personal meetings with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev by asking listeners to point to one change in Soviet policy as a result of Nixon meeting with the Soviet Premier. Kennedy contrasted his vision of the United States with that of the Republicans by saying voters should vote for the then vice-president if they liked "the previous eight years of nothing ever happens."

His rally in Alexandria showed his political power in the state and ability to unify the different factions of the party behind him. His speech, focused on the sometimes-dry topic of foreign policy, nevertheless electrified the audience. Despite the enthusiasm he generated in Alexandria, Kennedy lost Virginia by approximately six percentage points in the November 1960 presidential election.

Sources:

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/attic/2020/Attic20200102Namath.pdf>;
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/attic/2020/Attic20200109Kennedy.pdf>.

Continue east through the parking lot and use the small ramp to connect to the Potomac Yard Trail. Head south on the trail. At the end of the trail, use the crosswalk to cross E. Braddock Road (watch out for cars in both directions). Turn left onto E. Braddock Road, then turn right onto N. West Street. Turn right onto Cameron Street. At the King Street metro station, turn right onto Commonwealth Avenue and go under the train tracks. Turn left onto W. Rosemont Avenue. At the intersection of W. Rosemont Avenue and N. View Terrace, stop to talk about the George Washington Masonic National Memorial.

3. George Washington Masonic National Memorial, 101 Callahan Drive
Stopping point: at the intersection of W. Rosemont Avenue and N. Terrace View.

On February 22, 1950, President **Harry Truman** led fellow Masons in dedicating a 17-foot heroic statue of the first President at the George Washington Masonic National Memorial.

The President, as he helped to pull a crimson rope to remove the cloth, wore the embellished apron of a past grand master of the Missouri Grand Lodge of Masons. Uncovered, the bronze Washington wore similar garb, as master of the Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 more than 150 years



ago. About 800 people attended the ceremony, including representatives of the young men's Masonic order, whose 2,000,000 members provided the \$90,000 to build the statue.

President Truman chose the unveiling as the occasion for a major declaration on American foreign policy. He said that the United States and other democracies must stick to the "hard path" of building up the strength of the free world in its struggle with Communism. In his speech, Mr. Truman spoke out against any "sham agreement" on atomic controls, and attacked communism as "an instrument of an armed imperialism which seeks to extend its influence by force." The President said George Washington knew "there were times when the use of force to defend democracy could not be avoided." He added: "The task of Americans today is fundamentally the same as it was in Washington's time. We, too, must make democracy work and we must defend it against its enemies."

Source: The Evening Star, Feb. 23, 1950.

Continue west on W. Rosemont Avenue, then turn right onto King Street. Climb the hill, then turn left onto Janneys Lane. Turn left onto Cloverway Drive, then turn left onto Crown View Drive. Stop across the street from 514 Crown View Drive.

4. The Fords' house at 514 Crown View Drive

Stopping point: across the street

Gerald R. Ford (R-Michigan) and his family moved into their newly completed four-bedroom, two bath Colonial house at 514 Crown View Drive in 1955, during his fourth term in Congress. Built on a quarter-acre lot, the brick and wood-siding house had four bedrooms, a finished rec room in the basement, and a two-car garage. The Fords later added a backyard pool.



The neighbors remember Ford as a good neighbor and an involved parent. They heard the splash each fine morning as he swam in the pool. And they saw him playing with the children and mowing the lawn. The children walked to school and rode their bikes through the neighborhood.

Ford became Vice President on December 6, 1973, after the resignation of Spiro T. Agnew. At the time, the U.S. Naval Observatory was being readied as a new Vice President's residence, but the Ford family remained at Crown View Drive, living in their own home, as had former Vice Presidents. Alterations were quickly made to the house to accommodate Secret Service protection. The garage was converted into a room for use by the Secret Service, numerous phone lines were installed, bulletproof glass was placed in the master bedroom windows, and steel rods were placed under the driveway to support the armored limousine.

After Nixon announced his resignation on August 8, 1974, crowds gathered outside the Fords' home. Neighbor Louise Abbruzzese allowed reporters to use her telephone, television, and bathroom as they

waited hours for Ford to arrive home. Her husband Peter provided a pitcher of martinis in their garage, as a way for reporters to get out of the rain. In thanks, the press presented the Abbruzzese family with a plaque for their garage, which reads “First press room of President Gerald R. Ford, August 8, 1974.”

The President commuted down I-395 from Alexandria to the White House for the first ten days of his term. According to Time Magazine: “Preceded by a police car and trailed by four other vehicles, including a Secret Service station wagon and a press van, his limousine was hard to miss. Many motorists waved a cheerful if somewhat bemused good-morning as the Chief Executive, immersed in his morning newspapers, sailed past them in the lane reserved for buses and car pools.”

Betty Ford later wrote: “For me, leaving the White House wasn’t nearly so much of a wrench as leaving our house in Alexandria.”

Soon after the Fords' departure, their home became a rental property and has remained as one, changing hands twice. Ford wrote to one former tenant, Brewster Thackeray: “You have our very best wishes as current occupants of the home we built and loved...We were proud of it when we moved in March 1955. Thanks for enjoying it also.”

The former President’s home was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1985.

Source: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/Ford>.

Make a u-turn, and retrace your way back to Janneys Lane. Turn left to continue east on Janneys Lane. Cross N. Quaker Lane and continue onto Seminary Road. Turn right into Virginia Theological Seminary and stop in the parking lot in front of the visitor center.

5. Virginia Theological Seminary, 3737 Seminary Road

Stopping point: parking lot in front of the visitor center.

President **Joe Biden** visited the Neighborhood Health vaccine site at Virginia Theological Seminary on April 6, 2021, just before he was scheduled to announce that states should open COVID-19 vaccination appointments to all adults by April 19. On a tour of the site in Immanuel Chapel, the president spoke with staff and patients.



“We passed 150 million (vaccine doses distributed) yesterday,” Biden said. “When you go home, get all your friends and tell them, ‘Get a shot when they can.’ We’re going to be able to do this, everyone’s going to be able to before the month is out.”

Neighborhood Health Executive Director Dr. Basim Khan toured Biden around the facility, and the president watched residents get inoculated.

“Mr. President, the whole focus of our program is on equity,” Khan said. “We’re trying to increase equity by vaccinating our own patient population and primarily low-income, uninsured, under-insured, and a

lot of people of color.” At that time, Neighborhood Health had set up seven vaccination sites in areas accessible to underserved communities in Alexandria, Arlington and Fairfax County. The sites were located in churches, community centers, and retail areas. The vaccine program was not open to the general public. Instead, it was focused on its low-income patient population as well as individuals referred from approximately 100 partner organizations that serve low-income communities and people of color who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

Biden said that Neighborhood Health has done good work, and that within a month the U.S. would be in excess of 200 million vaccines distributed.

Virginia Theological Seminary was the first location in the city where a COVID-19 infection was detected — on March 11, 2020.

Sources: <https://www.alxnow.com/2021/04/06/just-in-president-biden-visits-covid-19-vaccine-site-at-virginia-theological-seminary/>; <http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2021/apr/11/biden-visits-alexandria-vaccination-site/>.

Make a u-turn and retrace your way back to Seminary Road. Turn right to continue west on Seminary Road. Turn left onto N. Howard Street. Turn right onto Taney Avenue, then turn right onto N. Pegram Street. Turn right onto Polk Avenue, then stop at James Polk Elementary School.

6. James Polk Elementary School

Stopping point: in the drop-off zone in front of the school, on Polk Avenue.

The 100-square-mile block that originally constituted the District of Columbia was made up of 69 square miles of territory from Maryland and another 31 square miles from Virginia. The District of Columbia Organic Act of 1801 was enacted on February 27, 1801, and almost from the moment of its passage, Virginia was looking for a way to get its territory back.

The cession of territory from Virginia resulted in the town of Alexandria being absorbed into the District. Alexandria had previously been the county seat of Fairfax County, so the state of Virginia had to move the county seat and courthouse further inland, away from the District. Additionally, Alexandria residents lost their Virginia state citizenship, and, after 1802, could no longer vote in Congressional or presidential elections.

Additionally, an amendment to the Residence Act in 1791 prohibited the construction of public buildings anywhere other than on the Maryland side of the Potomac River. This had the effect of essentially keeping the Alexandria area of D.C. as rural farmland while the Maryland side would reap much of the commercial benefits of hosting the nation’s capital.

Alexandria could not compete with nearby Georgetown or other ports for widespread commercial traffic, but it did have a thriving commercial hub for the slave trade. This terrible fact was a blight on the nation’s capital in the eyes of abolitionists in the 1820s and 1830s. Just as abolitionists wanted to kick Alexandria out of the District because of slavery, pro-slavery advocates from Virginia wanted the territory back because it would add two sympathetic representatives to the state assembly.

Debate raged for years, with some concerned that the District could not be fundamentally changed unless the Constitution was amended. Alexandria citizens repeatedly petitioned the Virginia state government and Congress to come up with a solution to the situation.

On July 9, 1846, the U.S. Congress voted to permit Alexandria and Alexandria County to retrocede to Virginia upon referendum. A vote was held on September 1-2 at the Alexandria Courthouse. "A total of 985 votes were cast; of this number, 763 votes for retrocession and 222 were against.... On September 7, 1846, President **James Polk** issued the result of the vote and declared the retrocession in full force and effect." Virginia formally accepted the territory on March 13, 1847, and Alexandrians celebrated the occasion with a huge parade on the 19th.

Sources: <https://boundarystones.weta.org/2016/07/08/alexandria-retrocession-1846>;
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic/info/default.aspx?id=28402>.

Make a u-turn and retrace your way back to N. Pegram Street. Turn right to continue north on N. Pegram Street. Turn left onto N. Pickett Street. Turn left onto Seminary Road. Turn right onto Library Lane. Take the first left to go through the parking lot. Head toward Kenmore Avenue, then turn right onto Kenmore Ave. Merge onto N. Van Dorn Street. Turn left onto Menokin Drive. Turn right onto the King Street service road. At the traffic light, turn left onto N. Dearing St, cross King Street, and continue onto S. Wakefield Street. Take a slight right onto 36th Street South. Turn left onto S. Utah Street. Turn right onto 35th Street South. Continue straight onto the narrow sidewalk to the left of the bus stop. Follow the narrow sidewalk left and around the tennis court. Stop at the sidewalk on Quaker Lane, and look across the street toward Presto Valet.

7. Presto Valet, 1623 N. Quaker Lane.

Stopping point: across the street, on the Quaker Lane sidewalk.

In the middle of the night on August 8, 1974, Buddy Gritz got a call from the U.S. Naval Observatory. It was then-Vice President **Gerald Ford**, who had some top-secret information. In just a few hours, President Richard Nixon would resign and he, Ford, would be sworn in as the 38th President of the United States. There was one pressing problem, so to speak. Ford needed his suit dry cleaned.

"[Ford] called me up and said, 'Buddy, I know you had top secret clearance. Nobody knows this. The news media doesn't know Richard Nixon is resigning, and I'm going to be the president in the morning. I need you to come to the Naval Observatory,' Buddy said. 'Get my suit, go back to the house in Alexandria and get the kids' clothes. I need them back by 4 a.m.'"



The rest is history. The Ford family looked stoic, but sharp, waving goodbye on the South Lawn of the White House at the finality of Nixon famously thrusting his hands into peace signs and flying away from the public eye on Army One.

Buddy, 77, married into the 5,500 square foot the business at 1623 N. Quaker Lane and took over the operation in 1967. He and his wife, Janet, have been married for 56 years. It was Janet's father, Harold Weisblut, who opened the store in 1951.

"Everyone is a customer," Buddy said. "President **Bill Clinton**, Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, former Vice President Al Gore... The list goes on and on. The bottom line is that we are a customer service business that happens to do dry cleaning, and customers come in here because we know they are important."

He and his staff recently signed non-disclosure agreements that keep them from talking about cleaning all of the costumes for the upcoming Wonder Woman 1984, which was partially filmed in Alexandria. His shop also cleans the costumes for the Kennedy Center, the Washington Opera, Signature Theatre, Arena Stage, National Theatre, Ford's Theatre, the Warner Theatre, and the Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company.

"They won't let anyone else do the costumes, because we're the best," Buddy said. "That started 25 years ago when I was called by the Washington Opera, and they were complaining because their performers were fainting onstage. So, what they were doing was cleaning the dresses in rancid cleaning solvent and when they got under the hot lights the fumes would come out and they'd fall over. We cleaned the outfit the right way, and they said, 'Oh. You're our dry cleaner now.'"

The dry cleaner prides itself on its cleanliness as a 100 percent certified Environmental Dry Cleaner, which uses GreenEarth cleaning solution.

"I am so proud of this place I can't express it," Buddy said. "We do about 400 pieces of dry cleaning and about 400 to 600 shirts a day. Our philosophy is to be nice to people and do something nice for someone every single day."

Source: <https://thezebra.org/2019/06/03/did-you-know-president-ford-was-sworn-in-wearing-a-suit-cleaned-by-presto-valet/>.

Make a u-turn and retrace your way back to S. Stafford Street. Turn right to continue south on S. Stafford Street. At the traffic circle, continue straight to stay on S. Stafford Street. Turn left to stay on S. Stafford Street. Turn right onto 32nd Road South/S. Stafford Street. Turn right onto 32nd Road South. Cross N. Quaker Lane at the traffic light and continue onto Preston Road. Turn left onto Valley Drive, then stop at the southwest corner of Valley Drive and Gunston Road.

8. Richard Nixon's Parkfairfax homes, 3538 Gunston Road and 3426 Gunston Road

Stopping point: at the SW corner of Valley Drive and Gunston Road.



Richard Nixon (b. January 9, 1913; d. April 22, 1994) was the 37th President and 36th Vice President of the United States. While President, from 1969 to 1974, he was credited with both escalating and ending U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, creating a more robust federal environmental program, and ending the draft. The U.S. also saw the first moon landing while he was in office in 1969. Midway through Nixon's second term, revelations around the Watergate scandal led to his 1974 resignation.

Nixon lived at 3538 Gunston Road from April 1957 to June 1951 while serving as a U.S. senator and representative of California. He also lived at 3426 Gunston Road (further up the hill) between October 1943 and June 1944. In 2019, you could have rented his 2 bedroom, 1 bath apartment (930 square feet) for \$1850/month.

This neighborhood is Parkfairfax, a community on 132 acres of land that was once also home to President **Gerald Ford**.

In the early 1940s, just prior to World War II, the Washington, D.C. area experienced an acute housing shortage as the federal government expanded to prepare for war, hiring thousands of defense and military workers. According to rumor, President Roosevelt requested help from his friend Frederick Ecker, the Chairman of the Board for Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (MetLife), in building "defense housing" to alleviate the housing crisis.

MetLife engaged architect Leonard Schultze and Associates, who had served as Chief of Design for New York's Grand Central Station. MetLife also hired builder Starrett Brothers and Eken, who had constructed the Empire State Building and the Lincoln Memorial. In less than three years, for a cost of \$8.5 million, Parkfairfax had 1,684 townhouse-style apartments, housed in 285 buildings.

Upon its completion in 1943, the community filled up immediately, with a waiting list hundreds long. Original rents averaged \$61.25 for a one bedroom, \$78.75 for a two bedroom, and \$90.00 for a three bedroom. Rules were strict: no dogs, no cats, and no vegetable gardens, which were popular at the time. Like many similar apartment communities, Parkfairfax did not rent to African Americans or Jewish people. Parkfairfax was converted to a condo complex in the late 1970s.

Sources: <http://www.bigwigdigs.com/homes/richard-nixon>;
<https://www.longandfoster.com/rentals/3426-Gunston-Road-Alexandria-VA-22302-275686552>;
<http://www.localkicks.com/community/news/backyard-history-parkfairfax---defense-housing-that-stands-the-test-of-time->.

Continue south on Valley Drive. Turn right onto Tennessee Avenue. Turn left onto Old Dominion Boulevard. At the W. Glebe Road intersection, press the pedestrian beg button to activate the traffic light. Turn left onto W. Glebe Road, then immediately turn right onto Old Dominion Boulevard. Turn left onto Notabene Drive, then continue straight onto Four Mile Road. At the traffic light, turn left onto Mount Vernon Avenue, then immediately turn right to get onto the Four Mile Run Trail. Follow the trail around past the baseball field, then turn right onto Commonwealth Avenue. Turn left onto E. Del Ray

Avenue. Turn left onto Clyde Avenue, then turn right onto E. Oxford Avenue. Turn right onto Mount Vernon Avenue and stop in front of the Dairy Godmother.

9. Dairy Godmother, 2310 Mount Vernon Avenue

Stopping point: in front of the store.

On the eve of Father's Day, the First Father showed how it's done, taking his daughters Malia and Sasha for some frozen treats at The Dairy Godmother, a boutique custard parlor in Alexandria.

President **Barack Obama** and his girls motorcaded over to Alexandria from the White House on June 20, 2009. Malia had a waffle cone of vanilla custard and Sasha had her vanilla custard in a cup. The president enjoyed a cup of vanilla custard with hot fudge and toasted almonds, a pool reporter was told by the shopkeeper. The three were in the shop for about 15 minutes, where they sat at a table to enjoy their snacks.

As they left, the trio received applause from the staff and customers inside and a small crowd outside. Carrying a bag of frozen "puppy pops" for the First Dog, Bo, Obama waved to the crowd before stepping into his SUV for the short jaunt back to the White House.



Source: http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2009/06/20/obama_takes_the_girls_for_froz.html.

Continue south on Mount Vernon Avenue for one block and you'll be back at the ride start.