

Alexandria Presidential History Walking Tour 2021

Overview

- This tour explores some of the sites in Old Town 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 two miles long, with stops at ten sites.
- Go to <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/36412160> for cuesheets or turn-by-turn directions.

0. Starting point: 132 N. Royal Street, in the courtyard between the Alexandria Voter Registration Office and Weichert, Realtors.

Start your walk by turning left out of the courtyard and heading north along the westside sidewalk of N. Royal Street. Stop in front of Gadsby's Tavern.

1. Gadsby's Tavern, 138 N. Royal Street
Stopping point: in front of the tavern.

Gadsby's Tavern consists of two buildings, a tavern that was built around 1785 and the 1792 City Hotel. Taverns provided travelers with much needed rest, food and drink, the latest news, a place to make business deals and to hold political discussions, and a variety of entertainment. Named after Englishman John Gadsby, an entrepreneur who leased the buildings and operated them as tavern keeper from 1796 until 1808, this tavern was the center of Alexandria's economic, political and social life in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The first five U.S. presidents all visited Gadsby's Tavern: **George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe.**



After Washington retired from the presidency, he celebrated his birthday here at the Birthnight Ball in 1798 and 1799. Martha Washington's granddaughter, Nellie Custis, attended the 1798 celebration with her grandparents. She later wrote to a friend that she had danced until 2 a.m. and then stayed up at a friend's house until 5 a.m. After Washington died in December 1799, the ball continued in his honor. Gadsby's Tavern Museum now hosts the Birthnight Banquet and Ball on the Saturday before President's Day each February.

Jefferson also stayed at the tavern in 1801 on his way back from visiting Martha Washington at Mount Vernon. Lodging and dinner cost him \$5.50 – a very large sum, considering the average room rate was \$1.50. Jefferson also tipped 75 cents to the enslaved servants.

Sources: <https://gadsbystavernrestaurant.com/history/>;
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/attic/2019/Attic20190207BirthnightBall.pdf>;
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/attic/2018/Attic20180705Jefferson.pdf>.

Continue north on N. Royal Street. At the next intersection, turn right onto Cameron Street. Walk half a block on the northside sidewalk of Cameron Street to Duvall House.

2. Duvall House, 305 Cameron Street

Stopping point: by the George Washington bench.

Leading citizens of Alexandria hosted a banquet for **George Washington** at Duvall's Tavern on New Year's Eve in 1783, after he retired as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. After dinner, thirteen Madeira wine toasts were given – "To the United States! To the Army! To an uninterrupted trade with all the world!" Each toast was accompanied by "huzzahs" and the firing of a cannon in Market Square across the street. Washington later wrote to Mayor Richard Conway, "Nothing could have contributed more essentially to increase the satisfaction I experience on my return from a successful War, to the Tranquility of domestic life than your affectionate Congratulations."



Duvall House is now available for short-term rental on Airbnb and HomeAway/VRBO. The current owners commissioned and imported a custom bronze statue of a youthful Lieutenant Colonel George Washington sitting on a bench, taking a breather in the Ohio Valley from his exploits – and learning experiences – during the French and Indian War.

Sources:

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/attic/2021/Attic20210218Washington.pdf>;
<https://www.facebook.com/305CameronStreet/>.

Continue east on Cameron Street. At the next intersection, turn right onto N. Fairfax Street. At the next intersection, turn left onto King Street. Take King Street all the way to the waterfront and stop in Waterfront Park.

3. Waterfront Park, 1 Prince Street

Starting point: in the park.

As reported in The Evening Star, June 21, 1902:

President **[Theodore] Roosevelt** caused a ripple of excitement here yesterday afternoon by paying the city an informal visit. Accompanied by General Wood he reached here about 5 o'clock on the ferry boat. Landing at the foot of King street they walked up that thoroughfare until they reached Washington street, out which they turned. At the head of this street they turned toward St. Asaph. When last seen by citizens here the two pedestrians were hitting the pike for Washington. It was presumed here that they returned to that city over the old Washington and Alexandria turnpike. Few citizens recognized them and none knew of the object of their visit, but the news of their passage through Alexandria soon became generally known on the streets. One interested citizen mounted his bicycle and made a dash after the President and his companion.

President **Andrew Jackson** also visited Alexandria's waterfront, and he was actually attacked while his ship was docked here in 1833. Navy Lt. Robert Randolph had been accused of financial misconduct. The evidence appears to have been somewhat mixed, but Jackson fired him anyway. Randolph felt personally aggrieved and confronted the president while Jackson was entertaining visitors in his cabin. Historical accounts differ on whether Randolph punched Jackson in the face or grabbed his nose. A confused melee followed, with Jackson's friends and the ship's crew all pummeling Randolph. The 66-year-old president, who was suffering pain from an old war injury, tried to pursue Randolph with cane upraised, but Jackson's friends prevented him from following.

Alexandria became embroiled in controversy. Outraged citizens descended on Market Square to demand action. The mayor convened a town meeting and presented a resolution condemning Randolph's assault as "a flagrant violation of the public peace," an "outrage," and a violation of "the principles of our Free Institutions." But Randolph had escaped to Fairfax County – which was outside of Alexandria's jurisdiction, because Alexandria was part of D.C. at that time – and the arrest warrant could not be served. Jackson chose not to pursue the matter, and the issue was subsequently dropped.

Sources: Michael Lee Pope, *Hidden History of Alexandria, D.C.* (2011); <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27547834>.

Walk south through the park. Turn right on Prince Street. Turn left on S. Royal Street. Walk half a block on the eastside sidewalk of S. Royal Street to the Armory Tot Lot.

4. Armory Tot Lot, 208 S. Royal Street **Stopping point: outside the tot lot.**

An armory was built on this site for Alexandria Light Infantry in 1880. The armory hall was a popular site for expositions, musical and dance performances, and bazaars. In February 1912, President **William Taft** and 500 others attended the Alexandria-Washington Lodge of Masons' annual banquet to celebrate Washington's birthday. Taft occupied the same chair used by Washington when he was worshipful master of the Alexandria-Washington Lodge.

In 1953, a fire broke out in the armory, but a steel and concrete vault prevented hundreds of ammunition rounds stored there from exploding and causing damage to other nearby properties. The armory was never rebuilt, and today the Armory Tot Lot park stands on the site.



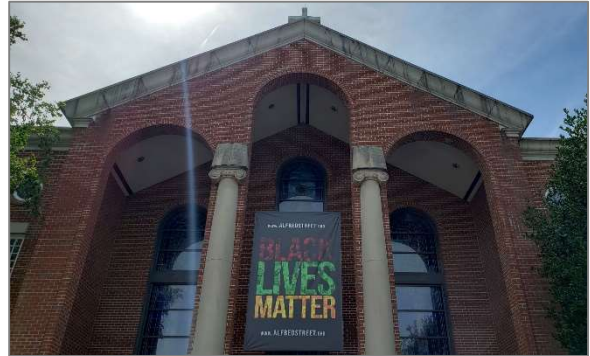
Sources: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/attic/2010/Attic20100128Armory.pdf>; The Evening Star, Feb. 23, 1912.

Continue south on S. Royal Street. Turn right onto Wolfe Street and stay on the northside sidewalk of Wolfe Street. Cross Route 1 and continue on Wolfe Street. Turn right onto S. Alfred Street and use the

westside sidewalk of S. Alfred Street. Stop in front of the Alfred Street Baptist Church, just before Duke Street.

5. Alfred Street Baptist Church, 301 S. Alfred Street
Stopping point: in front of the church.

The Alfred Street Baptist Church traces its origins back to 1803, when the Alexandria Baptist Society was formed and Susan Black, an enslaved woman, was baptized as the Society's first black member. The church purchased this site in September 1842. The building now known as the "old church" was built between 1881 and 1884, probably by Black craftsmen. The adjacent "new" church was built in 1981 and expanded in 1994.



A number of historical firsts are associated with the church. The church created a library in the 1920s to serve the city's African-American population; Pastor Adkins helped found and taught at Parker-Gray, the first high school for African-Americans in Alexandria; the church was among the first churches to ordain women as deacons (1979); and it was the first in Virginia to ordain an African American woman minister (1980).

President **Bill Clinton** attended service in 2000, a few days before the November election. He sang with the gospel choir and appealed to Black voters to turn out for Vice President Al Gore.

President **Barack Obama** and his family attended Easter service in 2015. Pastor Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley joked: "This is not selfie time. Let the brother worship in the house of God."

Sources: <http://www.alfredstreet.org/our-church/church-history/>;
<https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/obama-family-worships-at-historic-baptist-church-in-virginia/120176/>.

Continue north on S. Alfred Street, staying on the westside sidewalk. Just before you get to King Street, stop at the Friendship Firehouse.

6. Friendship Firehouse Museum, 107 S. Alfred Street
Stopping point: in front of the museum

In the 1950s, Alexandria Mayor Marshall J. Beverley became interested in trying to get back an old fire engine that he claimed had been stolen from his city by Yankee troops during the Civil War. His efforts



to get it back took him to the State capital at Albany and to an appearance on Ed Murrow's "See It Now" national television program. He did not get the engine back, but in the course of seeking the Hudson fire engine, another piece of fire fighting apparatus caught Mayor Beverley's fancy. It was the original pumper given to Alexandria's Friendship Company by **George Washington**. The mayor learned it was in Baltimore and fast-talked officials of that city into loaning it to Alexandria for display.

Somehow Mayor Beverley got President **Dwight Eisenhower** interested in the fire engine situation. The mayor was granted an audience at the White House, where he made the President an honorary member of Friendship Firehouse.

Source: The Sunday Star, June 26, 1955.

Continue north on S. Alfred Street, then turn right onto King Street. At the next intersection, turn left onto N. Columbus Street. Walk one block on the eastside sidewalk of N. Columbus Street, then stop in front of Christ Church.

7. Christ Church, 118 N. Washington Street

Stopping point: in the churchyard

Christ Church opened its doors in 1773 to serve the Church of England's Fairfax Parish. Members of the community "bought" pews so their entire family could sit together, and as a way to defray construction expenses. **George Washington** supplied the greatest amount for his family's pew, £36 10s. After his death, Washington's personal bible was presented to the parishioners of Christ Church in 1804, by Martha's grandson George Washington Parke Custis.



Eleven sitting or future presidents have attended services: Washington, **Calvin Coolidge**, **Franklin Roosevelt**, **Harry Truman**, **Dwight Eisenhower**, **Lyndon Johnson**, **Gerald Ford**, **Jimmy Carter**, **George H.W. Bush**, **Ronald Reagan**, and **George W. Bush**. On January 1, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill worshipped at Christ Church for the National Day of Prayer following the United States' entry into World War II.

Sources:

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/attic/2014/Attic20140109ChristChurch.pdf>;
<https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/christ-church-alexandria/>; <https://www.historicchristchurch.org/about-us/history/>.

Continue north on N. Columbus Street. Turn right onto Queen Street, staying on the southside sidewalk. Turn right onto N. Washington Street, then stop in front of the Lloyd House.

8. Lloyd House, 220 N. Washington Street

Stopping point: on the sidewalk on the Washington Street side

The Lloyd House was built in 1797 by John Wise, Alexandria's tavern King, and is a fine example of late Georgian architecture. John Lloyd, who had married Ann Harriotte Lee, Robert E. Lee's first cousin, purchased the real estate in 1832. His family occupied the home until 1918 when it was subsequently sold to William Albert Smoot.

Mayor Smoot entertained President **Herbert Hoover** at his home in 1930, when Hoover was visiting for the George Washington birthday parade. The parade included army troops, National Guardsmen, posts of the American Legion, representatives of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and of the Spanish-American War, the Third Cavalry from Fort Meyer, the historic Richmond Blues in tall tin helmets with horsehair plumes, Girl Scouts, marines from Quantico, Confederate Veterans, and high school cadets.

The Lloyd House now houses the Office of Historic Alexandria.

Sources: William Francis Smith, *A Seaport Saga: Portrait of Old Alexandria, Virginia* (1989); N.Y. Times, Feb. 23, 1930.

Continue south on N. Washington Street. At the intersection of Washington and King Streets, stop to talk about President Hayes.

9. Intersection of Washington and King

Stopping point: any corner of the intersection

President **Rutherford Hayes** visited Alexandria in February 1881 for Washington's birthday celebration. Hayes and several hundred other people were sitting in a grandstand at this intersection when the grandstand collapsed. Hayes wasn't hurt, but Sen. Robert Withers of Virginia was injured and had to be taken to his home to recover. Hayes was on a farewell tour at the time, having decided not to run for re-election. According to one newspaper account, Hayes joked that the collapse must have been punishments for past imperfections on his part.

Source:

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/attic/2021/Attic20210121PresidentHayes.pdf>.

Continue east on King Street, using the southside sidewalk. Stop at the corner of King and Pitt Streets, near the historical marker at the southwest corner of the intersection.

10. Former site of the Marshall House (now the Alexandrian Old Town Hotel, 480 King Street)

Stopping point: by the historical marker

Marshall House, a type of boarding house and tavern, used to stand where the Alexandrian Old Town Hotel is now. Proprietor James Jackson raised a huge secession flag over the Marshall House after Virginia voted to secede. The flag supposedly could be seen from southern portions of D.C. or even the White House.

President Lincoln's friend and confidant, Elmer Ellsworth, commanded the 11th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment. Ellsworth volunteered to take his troops to Alexandria and cut down the flag. Ellsworth successfully removed the flag, but as he came downstairs, Jackson killed him with a shotgun blast to the chest. One of Ellsworth's troops then immediately killed Jackson. Their deaths were



the first two deaths from violence during the Civil War. Northern and Southern leaders used rallying cries of “Remember Ellsworth!” or “Remember Jackson!” to recruit enlistments and support.

Lincoln was deeply saddened by his friend’s death and ordered an honor guard to bring his friend’s body to the White House, where he lay in honor in the East Room. Artifacts associated with this event, including architectural items from the Marshall House, a piece of the controversial flag, and the “kepi” cap Ellsworth wore that morning are on view at Alexandria’s Fort Ward Museum.

Sources: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic/info/default.aspx?id=101305>;
<http://www.localkicks.com/community/news/is-the-memorial-plaque-on-the-wall-of-the-monaco-hotel-controversial>.

Continue east on King Street for one block. At the next intersection, turn left onto N. Royal Street to return to the starting point.