

Alexandria Veterans' History Walking Tour 2021

Overview

- This tour explores some of the sites in Old Town Alexandria associated with wars and military veterans.
- Please note that this is just a sampling of the historical sites in Alexandria related to wars and military veterans.
- The route is about 1.2 miles long, with stops at 10 sites.
- Go to <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/37929642> 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. Turn left onto Cameron Street, staying on the southside sidewalk. Stop at 400 Cameron Street.

1. World War I memorial plaques, 400 Cameron Street

Stopping point: sidewalk on south side of Cameron Street, between N. Pitt and N. Royal Streets

There are actually two plaques here. The one on Cameron Street was placed on November 11, 2018, to mark the centennial of the armistice that ended World War I. The other one, around the corner and nearer to the doorway, was presented to Alexandria Post No. 24, the American Legion, in memory of the Alexandrians who gave their lives during that war.

After serving in World War I, returning citizen-soldiers used their community standing and political influence to improve the lives of veterans, banding together to form the American Legion in 1919. Through its lobbying efforts in 1919, the Legion increased government payments to disabled soldiers from \$30 per month to \$80, the equivalent of a living wage. Their national influence also led to the creation of the U.S. Veterans Bureau, the forerunner of the Veterans Administration.



Many returning veterans formed local Posts of the American Legion to pool their efforts and continue their camaraderie formed in war. While the American Legion's charter opened membership to all who honorably served during the war, it allowed Departments and Posts to impose segregation by race. Segregated posts across the South opened, including the chartering of two Posts in Alexandria.

Alexandria's American Legion Post 24 was chartered in 1920, limiting membership to white males in military or naval service of the United States between April 6, 1917, and November 11, 1918. Post 24 purchased and restored the buildings of Gadsby's Tavern, deciding that the buildings' connections to George Washington made them an ideal location for the Post and its civic activities.



Local Black veterans, not permitted to join Post 24, formed their own post. Post 129 was chartered in 1931 and named after Private William Thomas, the first Black man from Alexandria to die in WWI. Thomas was drafted at the age of 30 into the 369th Infantry Regiment in the 93rd Division, one of only two U.S. Army Divisions to arm and train African Americans. Pvt. Thomas was killed in action in the fall of 1918, only months before the armistice.

Source: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/gadsbys/GTResearchWWILegion.pdf>.

Do a u-turn and head east on Cameron Street. At the intersection with N. Royal Street, cross over to the northside sidewalk and continue walking east on Cameron Street. Stop in front of 305 Cameron Street.

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 walking east on Cameron Street. At the intersection with N. Fairfax Street, cross both crosswalks so that you end up at the southeast corner of the intersection. Head south on N. Fairfax Street, then stop in front of 121 N. Fairfax Street.

3. Carlyle House, 121 N. Fairfax St.

Stopping point: sidewalk in front of the house

In the spring of 1749, the Virginia legislature granted a charter for creating a town on the Potomac not far from Hunting Creek. John Carlyle, who owned land at the site, was named one of the trustees of the new town of Alexandria. In 1751, Carlyle began work on his stone house in Alexandria, which took about two years to build.



General Edward Braddock, along with his servants and aides de camp, lived in Carlyle House for nearly a month in spring 1755 while planning the opening campaign of the French and Indian War. John Carlyle wrote to his brother that General Braddock was a man “too fond of his passions, women and wine” and that while in his house the general had “abused his house and furnishings.” Braddock was commander in chief of the British forces in North America, and he met in Carlyle House with the colonial governors of Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia to plan a grand scheme for striking against the French at four widely separated points.

Braddock left Alexandria on April 20, with about 2,000 British regulars and 700 colonial militiamen, along with a long train of supplies. He also invited then-Colonel Washington to become a special aide, which made Washington the senior militia officer. Braddock proceeded westward out of Alexandria on what is now Braddock Road. His immediate objective was the French stronghold at Ft. Duquesne (now Pittsburgh). Braddock, accustomed only to European tactics, was taken by surprise by an ambush, even though Washington and others had tried to warn him. The British regulars were unable to properly respond and were cut down brutally: 977 were killed or wounded out of the 1,475 who participated in the battle, and Braddock himself was mortally wounded. But the colonial militia under Washington broke column and fought “Indian Style” and suffered proportionately fewer losses. Washington had two horses shot from under him, and four bullets went through his clothes, but he was instrumental in saving the remaining army. This led to him being named commander in chief of a new militia regiment raised in Virginia, even though he was only 23 years old. His continued exploits and service in the war made him a logical choice to lead the American Revolutionary Army years later.

Sources: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4249071>,
<http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2016/feb/12/alexandria-history-braddocks-defeat-solidifies-was/>

Continue south on N. Fairfax Street, staying on the eastside sidewalk. Stop at the intersection with King Street.

4. Ramsey House, 221 King Street

Stopping point: sidewalk on northeast corner of King and Fairfax Streets

Ramsay House was the home of William and Ann McCarthy Ramsay, two key figures in Alexandria history. William Ramsay was a Scottish merchant who settled here, and was one of the City’s founders.

Ann McCarthy was the daughter of Alexandria Mayor Dennis McCarthy and Sarah Ball (George Washington's cousin). Ann married William Ramsay and had five daughters and three sons, and in her spare time became one of the most effective fundraisers for the Revolutionary War. She became Treasurer of Alexandria and Fairfax County and led a fundraising drive that collected more than \$75,000 (this would be millions today) to help support the Continental Army. This small house is a replica of part of the original house, and today serves as Alexandria's Visitors Center. George Washington attended Mrs. Ramsey's funeral in 1785, and one of the Ramsey sons was a pallbearer at Washington's own funeral.

Sources: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/dchs/info/WomenTourWebsite.pdf>,
<https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/pallbearers/>.

Turn left onto King Street, staying on the northside sidewalk. Keep heading east until you reach the intersection with Union Street.

5. Torpedo Factory, 105 North Union Street

Stopping point: covered area at the northeast corner of King and Union Streets

Construction on the Alexandria Naval Torpedo Station began on November 12, 1918, one day after Armistice Day ended hostilities in World War I. Early on, Alexandria shared its responsibilities for manufacturing and maintaining torpedoes and weapon ordnance with the primary Naval Torpedo Station located on Goat Island in Newport, Rhode Island. Congressional delegations from several New England states convinced Congress to cease production at Alexandria and focus all resources toward Goat Island and the Bureau of Ordnance. In 1923, Alexandria ceased production, becoming a munitions storage facility for close to twenty years.

Alexandria would be called upon once again to produce weapons when the United States entered World War II. Torpedoes were in short supply in the early stages of the war, and Alexandria's Naval Torpedo Station worked around the clock. At its busiest period, The Washington Post estimates over 5,050 workers were employed in four different buildings of the station. Chinquapin Village, today the Chinquapin Recreation Center, was created in 1940 to house some of these workers. 150 wooden duplexes were built to accommodate factory employees, who would be bused to and from the factory each day for work. Once construction was completed, Chinquapin housed over 300 families.

By the end of the war, Alexandria's Torpedo Station manufactured almost 10,000 torpedoes that were estimated to be responsible for damaging or sinking almost 1,500 ships. With wartime manufacturing coming to a standstill, the Alexandria Torpedo Station closed its doors in 1946 and became a neglected waterfront landmark for years. That changed in the early 1970s when a group of local artists led by retired Army Lieutenant Colonel Zetta Jones persuaded the



Alexandria City Council to convert the old torpedo factory into a working art studio. Years spent cleaning out decades of dirt, decay, and pigeon droppings paid off on Sept. 15, 1974 when the new Torpedo Factory Art Center opened to the public.

Source: <https://boundarystones.weta.org/2015/10/20/torpedo-factory-art-center-alexandrias-world-war-ii-landmark>

Continue one block east on King Street and stop in Waterfront Park.

6. Waterfront Park, 1 Prince Street

Stopping point: in the park

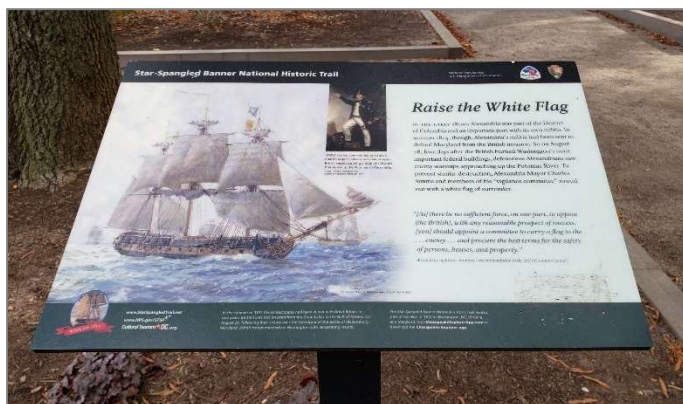
Since Colonial times, Alexandria has played a vital role in the defense of our nation through its strategic location, people and resources. More than once, important facilities and infrastructure were completed very late in the conflicts, just missing the primary role for which they were intended. Such was the case with the Torpedo Factory, which was completed just as World War I ended.

The situation repeated itself in World War II. The first U.S. Navy ship named for Alexandria, the Tacoma-class frigate USS Alexandria (PF-18), was built in Lorain, Ohio. The ship was finally commissioned and ready for her intended mission, to assist the Battle of the Atlantic in pursuit of German U-boats traversing America's eastern shores, in March 1945. Upon completion of shakedown exercises in late April 1945, she was moved to Norfolk for repairs. Three days later, the war in Europe ended. When the ship finally arrived to serve with the Atlantic fleet May 15, her mission was reassigned, and she was sent back to Charleston, S.C., to be retrofitted as a weather ship. In June 1945 she began her only patrol service off the Newfoundland coast, interrupted only by a brief visit to Alexandria in October. In February 1946 she was declared surplus and sold for scrap the following year.

Source: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/attic/2012/Attic20120412USSAlexandria.pdf>.

In the early 1800s Alexandria was part of the District of Columbia and an important port with its own militia. In summer 1814, though, Alexandria's militia had been sent to defend Maryland from the British invasion. On August 24 and 25, the British burned nearly every public building in Washington. From downstream on the Potomac River, the people of Alexandria could see the flames.

On August 28, Alexandrians found seven warships with a total of over 100 cannons plus mortars and rockets approaching the town or moored "but a few hundred yards from the wharves, and the houses so situated that they might have been laid in ashes in a few minutes," according to one report. The British commander sent Mayor Simms his terms. He would not destroy the town nor molest its inhabitants if the Alexandrians would not fight and would surrender all naval stores, shipping in the



harbor, and merchandise in town intended for export. He gave the town one hour to reply. The Council, having no other choice, agreed.

The British occupied Alexandria for five days, from August 29 through September 2. They sailed away with a hefty load, including 16,000 barrels of flour, 1,000 hogsheads of tobacco, 150 bales of cotton, and some \$5,000 worth of wine, sugar, and other items.

Sources: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic/info/default.aspx?id=78241>;
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/oha/info/TrailSignWarOf1812RaiseTheWhiteFlag.pdf>;
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/archaeology/War1812Pulliam.pdf>.

Head south through the park, then turn right on Prince Street, staying on the northside sidewalk of Prince Street. Stop at the intersection with Union Street.

7. Prince Street and Union Street

Stopping point: on the sidewalk at the northeast corner of Prince and Union Streets

One of the most infamous incidents of the British occupation of Alexandria came when three U.S. Navy officers attempted to capture a young British midshipman at the foot of Prince Street. The three officers seem to have ridden into Alexandria looking for trouble. They saw British midshipman John Fraser, no older than his early teens, “sauntering leisurely” back to a ship’s barge tied to the wharf at the foot of Prince Street. One of the officers immediately spurred his horse, grabbed the midshipman by a handkerchief tied around his neck, and began pulling him onto his horse’s back. “The youngster, quite astonished, kicked and squalled most lustily,” relates one account. The attempted abduction failed, however, when the midshipman’s neckerchief came untied, and the midshipman fell to the ground. The Americans rode rapidly down Union Street, up Duke, and out of town while the midshipman ran to the barge, whose men rowed him quickly back to their ship.

The British commander, Captain Gordon, was informed of what had happened. Immediately he ordered the warships’ portholes opened and cannons run out. Throughout the town women and children fled “screaming through the streets,” Mayor Simms later wrote. Simms, however, acted quickly. He informed Gordon the town lacked control over the three naval officers, and the crisis was averted.

Source: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/history/War1812WalkingTour.pdf>;
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic/info/default.aspx?id=78241>;
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/archaeology/War1812Pulliam.pdf>.

Continue heading west on Prince Street. Turn left onto S. Fairfax Street. Using the westside sidewalk, head south for a block and a half.

8. Old Presbyterian Meeting House, 323 S. Fairfax Street

Stopping point: sidewalk in front of the church entrance.

In 1826, the remains of an unknown man buried in a Revolutionary uniform were unearthed as the sanctuary of St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Church (next door to the Old Presbyterian Meeting House) was undergoing an expansion. The soldier was reburied in the Meeting House burial ground, but the grave remained unmarked, living on only in the memory of members of the congregation.

The Daughters of the American Revolution took up the cause of the nameless Revolutionary soldier in the 1920s. On April 19, 1929 (not coincidentally Lexington-Concord Day), the current table-top memorial was formally dedicated at a service attended by the Secretary of War, James W. Good. Secretary Good read aloud the epitaph that now adorns the stone:

Here lies a soldier of the Revolution whose identity is known but to God. His was an idealism that recognized a Supreme Being, that planted religious liberty on our shores, that overthrew despotism, that established a people's government, that wrote a Constitution setting metes and bounds of delegated authority, that fixed a standard of value upon men above gold and lifted high the torch of civil liberty along the pathway of mankind. In ourselves his soul exists as part of ours, his memory's mansion.

Source: <https://boundarystones.weta.org/2012/11/13/less-known-unknown>.

Continue heading south on S. Fairfax Street. Turn right onto Wolfe Street, staying on the northside sidewalk. Turn right onto S. Royal Street. Staying on the eastside sidewalk, head north for a block and half.

9. Armory Tot Lot, 208 S. Royal Street

Stopping point: outside the tot lot.

After the Alexandria Light Infantry was organized in 1878, it began planning a new armory on the east side of the 200 block of South Royal Street. When completed later that spring, the armory hall measured by 90 feet by 40 feet and held 700 people. The armory was enlarged in 1888, in time for the expanded structure to host a military ball in honor of George Washington's birthday. The impressive building had a slate gabled roof and a front façade highlighted by four brick turrets.

The armory hall was a popular site for expositions, musical and dance performances and bazaars. In 1898, during the Spanish-American War, a crowd gathered to see the Alexandria Light Infantry off from the armory to a train station en route to training in Richmond, and a few months later, the armory became a rest camp for other soldiers passing through Alexandria.

After World War I, the city took over the armory and used it as a recreation center for basketball and volleyball, but also made it available to the guard unit for drills and equipment storage. In 1941, the armory served as a USO center, providing service members during World War II with social and recreation activities until a new club opened on Cameron Street.

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.

Source: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/attic/2010/Attic20100128Armory.pdf>.

Continue heading north on S. Fairfax Street. Turn left onto Prince Street. Turn right onto S. Pitt Street. Staying on the eastside sidewalk, head north on S. Pitt Street for one block.

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.

