



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Preservation easements: The Lord Fairfax House

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May is Preservation Month nationally. What started in 1973 as National Preservation Week became National Preservation Month in 2005.

Alexandria's history of historic preservation extends back to 1946, as its Old and Historic District was the third historic district to be designated nationally, behind Charleston and New Orleans. On behalf of the Alexandria Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission, we want to introduce you to our efforts to protect and preserve our community's historic fabric as represented in our domestic and public buildings. Several city and private organizations are engaged in this effort. The unique mandate given to the AHRPC is to encourage, hold and monitor easements on properties. This column focuses on interior easements.

The commission holds a number of interior easements. What does that mean? Can I alter my home if it has an easement on it, or do I have to live with an 18th or 19th century bathroom or kitchen? What about that old door that won't work or the dirty coal chute? Typically, the answer is no. Houses have to be livable and brought up to a modern standard. A historic easement on an interior can be very specific. It usually designates moldings, mantles, doors, windows and sometimes flooring to be cleaned but not destroyed. We're fortunate to have homes that date from the late 18th century through the Victorian era that remain relatively intact. In this column, we feature the home known as the Lord Fairfax House on the 600 block of Cameron Street. It was built in the early 19th century and is one of the most spectacular homes in the city. Its successive owners have cherished the house and been respectful caretakers, spending time to research and restore its magnificent moldings, doors, windows and fireplaces. The current owners proudly tell us of new discoveries they've uncovered as decades of paint and ill-adapted alterations are removed. Though it is a beautiful historic home, it is also a cozy family home full of sunshine and graceful spaces with a lovely garden to the east. The first historic preservation easement on the property was donated in 1980. Supplemental easements were added in 1994 and 2005.

You don't need to have an interior as magnificent as the inside of the Lord Fairfax House to have features worth preserving with a historic easement. If you have moldings, doors, windows, fireplaces or another interior feature that you think might contribute to Alexandria's historic and architectural fabric, please contact the Alexandria Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission at HistoricAlexandria@alexandriava.gov.



A fireplace in the Lord Fairfax house on Cameron Street. Photo, Alexandria Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria and invited guests.