

Alexandria Times

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Alexandria's birthday (sort of)

For centuries, Native Americans lived in and traveled through the land that now makes up Alexandria. Today's indigenous groups, state and federally recognized tribes and nations of Virginia include the Cheroenhaka (Nottoway), Chickahominy, Chickahominy Eastern Division, Mattaponi, Upper Mattaponi, Monacan, Nansemond, Nottoway, Pamunkey, Patawomeck and Rappahannock.

The English who colonized Virginia claimed ownership of that occupied land (or of those ancestral homelands). In 1654, Dame Margaret Brent received a patent for 700 acres which included a large part of today's Alexandria. In May of 1749, the town received a charter from the House of Burgesses. John West, Fairfax County surveyor, and by tradition assisted by a 17-year-old George Washington, laid-out 60 acres of plots. The plots were auctioned off on July 13 and 14, 1749. This led to the tradition of celebrating Alexandria's birthday on July 13.

Washington created a new map of the lots sold between July and September 1749, which is shown below.

The map lists 58 lots and their owners on the right side of the map. Some of the prominent names on the map include Washington's brother Lawrence, John Carlyle and



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1749 map of Alexandria drawn by George Washington.

John Alexander. Washington also listed the price paid for each lot.

Interestingly, the prices were in Spanish "pistoles" rather than English currency. The pistole was a gold coin worth almost a pound,

but common in Virginia before 1760. Since English colonists weren't allowed to mint their coins, Spanish currency was common on this side of the Atlantic.

Alexandria, which dropped the name Belhaven, is very dif-

ferent from the map of lots auctioned off 274 years ago. How different will a map of our city look even 75 years from today?

Out of the Attic is provided by The Office of Historic Alexandria.