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# Friendship Fire Company celebrates 250 years

In 1774, Alexandria's first firefighters formed the volunteer Friendship Fire Company. Today, the company lives on as the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association, dedicated to preserving the past and supporting the future of firefighting in Alexandria.

Friendship went from a handful of early volunteers to hundreds of members, from a small engine shed at the corner of King and Royal Streets to the sturdy firehouse on St. Asaph Street. The building, constructed in 1855, housed the fire apparatus and hose, and the second floor served as a meeting hall.

Friendship volunteers fought fire but also met to ballot new members, elect officers and plan big events, like visits

to other cities and local parades. New prospects paid \$1 to join and \$1 in annual dues. These funds allowed the company to buy equipment and keep their firehouse and vehicles in good working order.

Recruits also signed an oath of allegiance to the Friendship Fire Company against all others in the city as rivalries between fire companies were prevalent. Finally, members supplied their own uniforms and two leather buckets at each fire.

The group's firefighting duties ended after the Civil War, but the company continued. At first, Friendship was an independent auxiliary to the city's first paid department, which was formed in 1866. Unable to keep up with new technology, it shifted to boosterism. Mem-

bers in old-style uniforms paraded the 1850s suction engine on special occasions.

By 1904, Friendship shifted focus again, this time to preservation. The new FVFEA "was determined to repair and improve the company's house." The Association undertook repairs and renovations, including swapping packed earth for brick floors on the first level.

In 1921, it opened the firehouse doors to the public, hoping it would be, as an Alexandria Gazette headline proclaimed, a "Mecca for hundreds of tourists visiting this city." The Association operated the firehouse as a historic site until 1988, when the museum was gifted to the city. Today, it serves as one of the many museums under the Office of His-

toric Alexandria.

Members of the Friendship Fire Company were volunteers motivated by their concern for safety and property. Now as the FVFEA, the organization continues to support the Alexandria community.

The FVFEA celebrates the 250th Anniversary of the Friendship Fire Company on Sunday by hosting the "Alexandria Fire History Symposium." From 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., experts will discuss Alexandria's firefighting history. Registration is free, although prior registration is requested. Please email [jimmiermcclellan@gmail.com](mailto:jimmiermcclellan@gmail.com) for more information.

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