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Celebrating Virginia Archaeology month

In the 1960s and 1970s, Alexandria residents joined together to lay the groundwork for one of the first archaeological protection codes in the country, which was part of an archaeology program that remains unique in this country to this day. As urban renewal efforts demolished and rebuilt the blocks in and around Market Square, Old Town residents witnessed artifacts destroyed in the wake of the redevelopment.

They urged the Smithsonian Institution to conduct rescue excavations ahead of the bulldozers, which led to the creation of an archaeology lab in one of the old Torpedo Factory buildings, directly to the north of today's Art Center. The Alexandria Archaeology Research Museum set up shop in the building shortly after, providing the public with a chance to see archaeology in action.

The work of these original Alexandria archaeology supporters continued with the formation of the oldest continuous Archaeological Commission in the country in 1975, the hiring of Pamela Cressey, Ph.D., as the first city archaeologist in 1977 and with the development of the Archaeological Protection Ordinance in 1989.

Today, Alexandria is an example of community archaeology in action. The support of residents can be seen in the work of the African American Waterfront Heritage Trail committee members, by visiting the Alexandria Archaeology Museum on the third floor of the Torpedo Factory Art Center and through the many volunteers that form the backbone of the program.

"Citizen preservationists" also play a significant role in helping to preserve our buried

past. Just last week, a woman walking her dog near Miracle Field at the Lee Center noticed that a large hole had formed in the grass. Upon closer inspection, it proved to be an old well shaft. She alerted Alexandria Archaeology, and with the help of the city surveyors, staff were able to geolocate the exact location of the well.

Photographs and measurements were taken and subsequent research suggests that the well dates to the mid-19th century. The well has now been backfilled to make the area safe again. Thanks to resident involvement, archaeologists of the future will have an opportunity to excavate a historic well that this generation preserved for them.

These "citizen preservationist" efforts are celebrated each October during Virginia Archaeology Month. This year, Alexandria Archaeology

is hosting several events and programs highlighting important archaeological sites and preservation efforts across the city.

Step inside the temporary "Buried Ships of Robinson Landing" exhibit during "Pop-Up Archaeology" on Friday, experiment with 19th century slip designs during "Slip Into the Past" in the Alexandria Archaeology Museum on Oct. 19 or navigate through the online Alexandria Archaeology Report Finder – nicknamed AARF for the dog-lovers among us – to explore archaeological and historical research conducted throughout the city.

A full list of Virginia Archaeology Month events and more can be found at AlexandriaArchaeology.org.

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