

Alexandria Times

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New digital offerings from Historic Alexandria

During the COVID-19 pandemic, museums and other public institutions scrambled to make more of their collections and content accessible to the public and scholars. The city's Division of African American History and its Black History Museum were no exception.

A desire to make more of its collections publicly available led the Office of Historic Alexandria to apply for grant funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The Black History Museum was awarded two grants to aid in the digitization of the Museum's collections.

The first IMLS grant, awarded in 2021, provided the opportunity to work on digitizing four archival collections: Ferdinand T. Day, Annie B. Rose, Ben Holt and Moss H. Kendrix. Much of these archival collections are available on Historic Alexandria Collections Online. The exhibition that resulted from the grant project, "Moss H. Kendrix: Reframing the Black Image," is currently on display in the Museum.

The Museum won a second IMLS grant in 2024. This grant permitted Collections Curators Deborah Coblenz and Fay Winkle to build on their successes during the first grant; in turn, the pair established more robust cataloguing, photography, location control and standard-



PHOTO/ANDREW MCCABE

The Black History Museum in Alexandria has won grants to digitize historical records.

ization of accession/catalog numbering of the Museum's object collection.

A physical inventory was conducted of all collections storage spaces and items on display in the Division of African American History's exhibitions. This inventory included those items on loan to other OHA museums and City of Alexandria facilities. The Museum's documentation was reviewed, records were created and photographs were taken for objects as necessary.

The project also addressed the needs of the Watson Reading Room collection, established in 1995. The Watson Reading Room's non-circu-

lating collection's database was both incomplete and only available internally. In response to increased requests for a publicly accessible catalog of the Watson Reading Room holdings, this project included a review of all existing library records and the creation of new records for previously unprocessed volumes.

Today, visitors can search the Historic Alexandria Collections Online database to access close to 12,000 records for artifacts, photographs, books and documents, including more than 4,000 volumes in the Watson Reading Room. Later this month, a library button will be added to

the Historic Alexandria Collections Online homepage, enabling easier searches of the Watson Reading Room Book Collection.

The IMLS grant projects have provided a substantial base of publicly available records that will aid in research, planning family reunions and other events and expand knowledge of Alexandria's Black history. Hopefully, future efforts will expand the catalog presence, providing more documentation and interpretive material.

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