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Alexandria Community Media

An Alexandria lens in America250

The American Revolution in Virginia was more than a military conflict – it was a Revolution of Ideas that continues today. Alexandria played a distinct role in the birth of the new nation, from the creation of the Fairfax Resolves to being the hometown of George Washington.

The Alexandria Forum, in partnership with Emerging Revolutionary War, shares the history of Alexandria and Northern Virginia during this critical moment in history, showcasing how these pivotal events reverberate today. The forum begins with coffee, tea and breakfast at 8:30 a.m., followed by welcome remarks, on March 21.

PHOTO/HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

America250's Alexandria Forum, remembering Alexandria's role in the Revolutionary War, will be held on March 21 at The Lyceum.

Two morning keynote addresses include "A Tory in Old Town, The Revolutionary War Journal of Nicholas Cresswell" by public historian Ken Bancroft and "The 25 Who Signed: Researching the Fairfax Resolves Signers" by Kerry Mitchell, historic site specialist at Carlyle House Historic Park.

After participants have lunch on their own in Old Town, four speakers will share recent research highlights. The final keynote will be "Prelude to Yorktown: Lafayette and the 1781 Virginia Campaign" by John Maass, Ph.D., education specialist at the National Museum of the United States Army.

The Alexandria History Museum at The Lyceum is a fitting setting for this exchange of ideas. For two decades before the Civil War, The Lyceum was the intellectual and cultural center of Alexandria. The war interrupted its educational activities. Like most of the other large structures in town, the building was seized in the spring of 1861 for use as a hospital by the Union Army.

In 1868, John B. Daingerfield bought The Lyceum and remodeled it into a fashionable residence for his daughter, Mary Helen. After the death of its last residential owner, Dr. Hugh McGuire, in 1938, the building was sold again and became an office building. By the late 1960s, the once elegant Lyceum had deteriorated to the point that plans were underway to demolish it.

A major effort was mounted by Jean Keith and other local preservationists to save the structure, capped by a dramatic 4-3 vote in favor of purchase by Alexandria's City Council in 1969. Renovated and refurnished, The Lyceum reopened as Virginia's first Bicentennial Center in 1974 and became the city's history museum in 1985.

Today, the City of Alexandria owns and operates the Alexandria History Museum at The Lyceum. The building has returned to nearly the same role for which it was constructed – serving the community as a center for historical education and cultural activities.

For updates on the Alexandria Forum and other America250 events in Alexandria, please visit alexandriava.gov/america250. The Alexandria Forum is on March 21 at the Alexandria History Museum at The Lyceum from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. General admission is $60 and $40 for OHA members and students. Tickets are available at shop.alexandriava.gov.

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