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PHOTO/PATRICK BURCHETTE

The Fairfax-Moore House.

## Preserving Alexandria's charm

### Historic Alexandria Foundation legacy endures

BY PATRICK BURCHETTE  
AND BRIAN BRANTON

Walking along the 200 block of Prince Street, many a passerby has probably noticed the beautiful four-story 18th century Georgian known as the Fairfax-Moore house. What many likely don't know is that the house is regarded by historians as a landmark of the American preservation movement and the catalyst for the Historic Alexandria Foundation's birth almost 70 years ago.

In the first half of the 20th century, Old Town was something of a time capsule. Although most of the buildings and homes were derelict given poor economic conditions, the town survived largely intact with vast

streetscapes of 18th and 19th century structures.

Enter Gay Montague Moore, daughter of Andrew Jackson Montague, governor of Virginia from 1902 to 1906. Moore purchased the large brick home on Prince Street in 1929.

Originally owned by George William Fairfax, a friend of George Washington, the property was painstakingly restored by Moore to its 18th century character. Her efforts soon led other preservation-minded activists to purchase and restore historic houses throughout Alexandria.

By making restoration fashionable in what had become a decaying town, Moore's rescue of the deteriorated historic home on Prince Street signaled the dawn of the preservation movement in Alexandria.

In addition to founding the Alexandria Association, she published the acclaimed "Sea-

port in Virginia: George Washington's Alexandria" in 1949. A few years later, Moore was a founding Trustee of the Historic Alexandria Foundation.

The HAF was formed in 1956 "to preserve, protect and restore structures and sites of historic or architectural interest in and associated with the City of Alexandria, Virginia, to preserve antiquities and generally to foster and promote interest in Alexandria's historic heritage," according to the Foundation's original mission statement.

Although City Council had adopted an "Old and Historic District" ordinance in 1946 modeled after the one enacted to protect Charleston, South Carolina, preservationists in Alexandria felt the need for a more robust organization governed by a Board of Trustees.

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The HAF mounted a plaque program to mark and identify historic structures.

PHOTO/PATRICK BURCHETTE

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The HAF was established to promote public awareness of the importance of the city's early architecture and heritage, including a mandate to acquire and hold title to historic buildings.

The biggest challenge to historic preservation in Alexandria began in the late 1950s when a wave of urban renewal proposals spread nationwide. Entire blocks were demolished and new buildings erected.

The initial urban renewal plans for Alexandria would have destroyed most of the downtown historic district and called for apartment and office buildings to line the waterfront and Washington Street.

In response, the HAF initiated a comprehensive survey of historic buildings and mounted a plaque program to mark and identify historic structures.

By raising public awareness of the town's threatened early architecture, the HAF helped to identify more than 773 structures before the end

of the 1950s. The HAF also created an easement program which afforded greater legal protection against demolition of buildings and sites.

As a result of the Foundation's efforts and enhanced public awareness, urban renewal proposals were pared to only a few blocks along King Street. The overall tide of public opinion eventually shifted in favor of preservation.

"The unique character of our town is defined by this architectural ensemble," Historic Alexandria Foundation President Morgan Delaney said. "The whole is much more than the sum of its individual parts."

The HAF has spearheaded and aided the preservation, restoration and repair of numerous significant historic structures, including the Lyceum, Lloyd House, Gadsby's Tavern and Murray-Dick-Fawcett House.

The HAF has purchased and restored the ownership of the Alexandria Academy building, which was constructed in 1785 and is recognized as one of the first public schools in Virginia.

In helping to get Alexandria listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the HAF was instrumental in enlarging preservation to encompass neighborhoods outside of Old Town. Rosemont and Del Ray were established as historic districts in 1992. Historic African American sites such as the Alfred Street Baptist Church, Beulah Baptist Church and the George Lewis Seaton House have also received historical designations.

HAF's preservation ethic has been expanded in recent decades to include preservation awards and a generous annual grants program through the Historic Alexandria Preservation Fund.

Notable grant recipients have included the Alexandria Black History Museum, the Athenaeum, the Carlyle House Museum, Friends of Historic

Christ Church, the Friendship Fire House Museum, the Jones Point Lighthouse, the Old Presbyterian Meeting House, Saint Mary's School, Saint Paul's Episcopal Church and the Stabler Leadbeater Apothecary Shop Museum.

Today, the historic districts of Alexandria receive national and international recognition for their beauty, charm and scale and the city consistently ranks as one of the best places in the country to reside and visit.

The preservation of the city's historic homes and buildings, as well as the promotion of its heritage, has undoubtedly contributed to Alexandria's recent economic success and broader appeal.

HAF leaders, however, do not consider their work done.

"HAF has always had an important role in educating the public about historic architecture and fostering interest in Alexandria's heritage. Our advocacy for sensitive restoration and preservation of our surviving relics from the past will continue unabated," Delaney said.

Next month Historic Alexandria will be holding its annual garden party at the Fairfax-Moore House, which is now the home of Moore's grandnephew, Latane Montague, who also serves on the HAF's board of trustees. Montague, along with his sister Mason Montague Bavin, continue their family's strong legacy of preservation and civic activism in Alexandria.

In charting a course for the future, it seems appropriate the Foundation would host an event at the Old Town home regarded as a landmark in the American preservation movement.

For more information, visit [historicalalexandriafoundation.org](http://historicalalexandriafoundation.org)

*The writers are members of the Historic Alexandria Foundation board of trustees.*

## Obituary

### Joseph Vincent McKenna



Joseph Vincent McKenna, 40, of Alexandria passed away of natural causes on May 3, 2023. He was born to Antoinette McKenna on November 4, 1982 in Alexandria. Joseph was a lifelong Alexandrian.

Joseph is survived by his identical twin brother, Edward McKenna; sister-in-law,

Nanette McKenna; stepnephew, Gavin Newell; mother, Antoinette McKenna; stepfather, Kiernan Corbett; sister Genevieve "Nina" McKenna; and brother-in-law, Max Rickard.

A viewing will be held at Everly Wheatley Funeral Home at 1500 W. Braddock Road, Alexandria on May 22 from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. A funeral mass will take place at St. Rita's Catholic Church at 3815 Russell Road, Alexandria on May 23 at 11:30 a.m. the interment to follow at Ivy Hill Cemetery at 2823 King St., Alexandria at 2 p.m.

All are welcome to a reception following the interment at Sheraton Suites Old Town at 801 N. St. Asaph St., Alexandria from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Flowers and condolences may be sent to Everly-Wheatley Funeral Home, 1500 W. Braddock Rd, Alexandria, 22302. Donations may be sent to Habitat for Humanity in Joseph's name at [everlywheatley.com/tributes/Joseph-McKenna](http://everlywheatley.com/tributes/Joseph-McKenna)