

The Old Town Crier

The Monthly Newsletter of the Old Town Civic Association, Inc.

Announcing the March Program and Notice of the Meeting

DATE: Wednesday, March 12, 2008
TIME: 7:00 p.m., Socializing with Neighbors; 7:30 p.m., Program
LOCATION: The Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street

PROGRAM AGENDA:

- (1) **POLICE REPORT: LT. JAMIE BARTLETT**
- (2) **GEORGE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL PARKWAY: POUL HERTEL**
- (3) **NATIONAL HARBOR'S OLD TOWN ADS: STEPHANIE BROWN**

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL PARKWAY

As one of the nation's premiere parkways, the George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP) comprises 7,146 acres and extends 38.3 miles in association with the Potomac River. The initial or southern section of the parkway, (the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, which opened in November 1932), extends 15.2 miles from the Arlington Memorial Bridge to the Gateway to President George Washington's home at Mt. Vernon. The parkway commemorates the First President, preserves the natural setting, and provides a quality entryway for visitors to the Nation's Capital.

George Washington's residence at Mount Vernon and the city that bore his name could be dismissed as cultural icons if it were not for his importance to American heritage. The two became intertwined, through not only George Washington, but also the road connecting the two. Thus, "every patriotic American who visits Washington makes a pious pilgrimage to the home and tomb of the Father of his Country".

Although Alexandria had receded to the Commonwealth in 1846, the Citizens recognized the significance of a National Road connecting, Washington D.C. to Mount Vernon, and on September 18, 1887 formed the Mt. Vernon Avenue Association to promulgate the "patriotic enterprise" enacting the construction of a direct road. Although, roads existed to Mount Vernon, they were neither the original nor ones that lend themselves to contemplative or pleasurable drives.

Early references to a system of parks connected by parkways, in Washington, D.C., and surrounding area, laid the groundwork for implementation of the McMillan Plan proposed in 1902. Members of the McMillan Commission envisioned drives along the palisades of the Potomac above Georgetown to Great Falls and down the River to Mount Vernon. "These drives had certain definitions: Parkway or ways through or between parks; distinguished from highways or ordinary streets by the dominant purpose of recreation rather than movement; restricted to pleasure vehicles, and arranged with regard for scenery, topography and similar features rather than for directness."

Congress set up a Bicentennial Commission in 1924, headed by the Vice President to commemorate the Bicentennial of the birth of George Washington, even though the event was some years in the future, 1932. After lingering since the McMillan Commission Report, the National Road regained prominence. As a result, in 1928, Congress authorized the building of a “suitable memorial highway” on a route determined by the commission. In January 1929, the Commission determined that the “Potomac Route,” running through Washington Street, was preferable. Consequently, the City and the Federal Government entered into an agreement governing the disposition of Washington Street on June 20, 1929, commonly referred to as the 1929 Agreement.

A CORRECTION REGARDING 214A PITT STREET

In the last edition of the Old Town Crier, an article entitled “A Vanishing Breed”, brought to your attention some information about a carriage house in the rear of 206 N. Pitt Street. The article stated that “evidence strongly suggests” that the carriage house was built by Moses Hepburn, a prominent and important African American who lived in Alexandria in the first half of the 19th century. Since the publication of that article, evidence has been uncovered showing that Hepburn did not build the carriage house or the home now at 206 N. Pitt Street.

Here is what happened. The original research relied on what was thought to be an unimpeachable source, the National Register of Historic Places nomination for 206 N. Pitt. This nomination showed clearly that Hepburn built 206, 208, 210, and 212 N. Pitt. A physical examination of the masonry construction techniques used in those buildings and in the carriage house led to the seemingly inescapable conclusion that all the buildings were built at the same time.

Since the publication of “A Vanishing Breed”, the Old Town Civic Association undertook further research to nail down the carriage house’s exact date of construction. Ted Pulliam, a wonderfully talented researcher, was asked to help and he generously donated his time toward the project. Fully expecting that Ted would verify Hepburn’s status as the builder and resident, he instead surprised everyone. Ted was able to determine that Hepburn did build and live in a small wood frame structure on the property (he owned) but that the carriage house and homes now on the property were actually built between 1869 and 1877, a decade or more after Hepburn’s death.

It was disappointing to learn that a document as vaunted as a National Register nomination could prove inaccurate, but the good news is that Ted, at the behest of the Old Town Civic Association, was able to uncover the true facts. The nomination of 206 N. Pitt will now need to be amended and unless there is historic evidence calling for it to remain on the Register, it will have to be delisted.

None of this new information changes the fact that the carriage house is still a wonderful piece of original 19th century architecture at risk. Although Hepburn’s legacy won’t be impacted by the changes proposed for the building, the structure still deserves to be sensitively developed. The decision to do that is now in the hands of the developer and the City Council who will hear our appeal on the 15th of March.

PREVENT LARCENIES FROM AUTOS

The Alexandria Police Department has noted a significant increase in the number of portable electronic equipment stolen from vehicles over the past few months. During January 2008, a total of 60 electronic devices were stolen from 116 vehicles that were broken into. In all of these cases, the items were left in plain view. Additionally, in 17% of the cases the cars were unlocked!

These thefts are occurring almost exclusively among the portable electronic equipment (i.e., portable GPS devices, iPods, laptop computers, satellite radio, cell phones, etc.) that can be purchased separately and added to a vehicle. Most of these devices can be easily installed in a vehicle with no complicated wiring procedures. All that is required is to install a cradle in which a unit sits. These devices are portable and highly desirable. Alexandria Police urge motorists to take precautions to deter thieves from stealing electronic equipment from their vehicles. For further information, please contact the Alexandria Police Department's Crime Prevention Unit at 703.838.4520. (Chamber of Commerce Headlines 2/27/2008)

ALEXANDRIA'S HISTORY: PRESERVE IT, PROMOTE IT, OR PAVE IT?

Almost as many people in Alexandria talk about historic preservation as they do about the weather—but is anybody really doing anything about it? Are we doing enough to preserve the historic heritage that gives Alexandria its unique character, or are we only paying it lip service? Is “historic preservation” a cover for a morass of regulations that are strangling our small businesses, or is it part of the bedrock that gives Alexandria businesses an essential advantage over competitors in the surrounding suburban sprawl? Are the city's historic buildings an asset to be exploited, an endangered species, or static museum pieces? What is the proper balance between historic preservation and economic vitality, or are they in conflict?

OTCA Past President, Mike Hobbs, is co-producing Agenda Alexandria's March 17th program, which will ask four guests to share their views on the present and future of historic preservation in Alexandria: Lance Mallamo, the new Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria, the office that manages the City's historic properties; Stephanie Brown, the new President of the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association, the public-private partnership that promotes tourism in Alexandria; Tom Hulfish, Chairman of the Board of Architectural Review, the agency responsible for preserving the historic buildings and architecture of Old Town; and Dr. Morgan Delaney, President of the Historic Alexandria Foundation, a private nonprofit that plays a lead role in advocating for Alexandria's heritage.

The reception is at 6:30 p.m., buffet dinner at 6:45, and the program starts at 7:15 in the Holiday Inn at Eisenhower Metro Center, 2460 Eisenhower Avenue. For dinner reservations (\$20 for members, \$25 for non-members; program only is \$5 for nonmembers, free to members) or questions contact Sherry Brown at 703-549-4696 or agendaalexandria@aol.com.

UPDATE ON THE HUNTING TERRACE DEVELOPMENT

As most of you are aware, the Planning Commission DEFERRED IDI's Development until such time as VDOT and IDI sign a formal contract on Hunting Towers. In addition, the deferral was based upon two critical elements: the first being an unsatisfactory extraordinary workforce housing plan which was required to attain IDI's desired density and secondly that the development failed to meet the Washington Street Standards. On the 27th of February, at the Federation of Civic Association's meeting, Jeff Farnar of P&Z, as part of his monthly report on developmental projects, said that the Cecchi group is now talking to the planning staff about presenting a by-right project for the Hunting Terrace site. A by-right project would have to be approved by the Planning Commission and the BAR, but it would not go to Council unless the applicant wanted to appeal a decision of either of those bodies. Any by-right project could be no taller than 50 feet. A large number of buildings could be squeezed onto that site to meet the maximum allowable density, but all by-right projects are less dense than what could be built on the same site with a special use permit. For a by-right project the applicant is "asked" to make a donation to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund based on square footage, but not a contribution of units. Stay tuned!

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN

Met with City Staff regarding the atrocious frontage of the Monaco Hotel. The Board is drafting a letter to the Mayor regarding the unacceptable historic preservation practices used by the Planning Staff and the BAR.....We continue to brief other Civic Associations regarding OTCA's Waterfront Standards. Founders Park has endorsed our standards and we are awaiting a reply from Rivergate. Others to follow.....The BAR will have two (2) citizen positions open for appointment or reappointment in June. In addition, there will be one Parks and Recreation Commission appointment in our district available to fill a vacancy created by the resignation of William Conkey. If anyone is interested in filling any of these vacancies please contact me at your earliest convenience.....OTCA automobile stickers are forthcoming, hopefully in the next week or so. These will be given free to each member.....

Townsend A. Van Fleet
President

NEXT OTCA MEMBERSHIP MEETING WILL BE ON THE 9th OF APRIL

OTCA OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS FOR 2007-2008

OFFICERS:

President

Townsend "Van" Van Fleet, yvanfleet@oldtowncivic.org

Vice-President

Linda Couture, lcouture@oldtowncivic.org

Corresponding Secretary

Susan Brita, sbrita@oldtowncivic.org

Treasurer

Michael Zarlenga, mzarlenga@oldtowncivic.org

Recording Secretary

Douglas Thurman, dthurman@oldtowncivic.org

DIRECTORS:

At Large

John A. Johansen, jjohansen@oldtowncivic.org

North of King, East of Washington

Jon Aaronsohn, jaaronsohn@oldtowncivic.org

Central - East of Washington, North of Franklin, South of King

Timothy S. Elliott, telliott@oldtowncivic.org

South of Franklin

Michael Adams, madams@oldtowncivic.org

North of King, West of Washington

Poul Hertel, phortel@oldtowncivic.org

South of King, West of Washington

J. Russell George, rgeorge@oldtowncivic.org

Immediate Past President:

Michael Hobbs, mhobbs@oldtowncivic.org

Police Liaison:

James Bartlett, james.bartlett@alexandriava.gov