



PHOTO/OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

The Lord Fairfax House is one of the most intact homes of the colonial federal period.

Century hopping

How easements preserve times past

BY SUSAN HORNE

The Alexandria Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission can help residents become preservationists while living a comfortable life with all the modern amenities.

The commission was established in 1962 to preserve the City of Alexandria's built heritage by taking and holding easements on the interiors of historic homes, on facades and on open spaces in the Old and Historic District. An easement essentially prevents the destruction of significant in-

terior elements of a home or its façade.

An open space easement protects the gardens surrounding a historic home from encroachment. There are many places in the city that introduce the concept of successful preservation. Some homes date to the late 18th century, while other interiors reveal a fully preserved Victorian home.

Alexandria is a historic and longstanding community, with its earliest homes and churches dating to the late 18th century. While some houses are quite grand and others modest but

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charming, they all have a story to tell. Perhaps the grandest home and garden is on Cameron Street. It is nicknamed the Lord Fairfax House, which honors Thomas, the ninth Lord Fairfax who lived in it from 1830 to 1846 when it passed to his son.

The house has been fortunate in its subsequent owners and boasts original moldings, mantles, floors, windows and doors. The house and the gar-

den have been under a historic easement since 1980. Within the easement owners have expanded the kitchen and updated the bathrooms to create a truly gracious home. Some might even argue that Lord Fairfax would doubtlessly approve.

Other notable homes in the city are located on Cameron Street and on Lee Street. Both date from the late 1700s and have been modified over the years with careful attention to preserving historic architec-

tural features.

On Lee Street a set of attic stairs is termed “suicide stairs.” They lead to the attic where household help probably slept. The steep stairs presented a challenge both then and now. The interior of this three-story townhouse is sunny and welcoming. Now and in times past, the rooms often hold the sound of friends and laughter. On Cameron Street the owners have been devoted pres-

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PHOTO/OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

This house on South Royal Street retains its Victorian splendor in its fireplaces, moldings and lace woodwork.





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The Lord Fairfax House boasts original moldings, mantles, floors, windows and doors.



PHOTO/OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

This Cameron Street home is nicknamed the Lord Fairfax House, in honor of the ninth Lord Fairfax who lived in it from 1830 to 1846.

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ervationists. There are stories of ceilings that were about to fall and substantial restoration with new discoveries. A carriage house in the back now contains living space as the horse is long gone.

Last but not least among the houses with interior easements is a Victorian home on Royal Street. Its neighbors have been updated be-

yond recognition. This house retains its Victorian splendor in its fireplaces, moldings and lace woodwork. The present owners are collectors of craftsman furniture which fits right in with the colors and sensitivities of the Victorian building. One particular delight is a bread oven built into a radiator in the kitchen. Attention to detail here is evident even in the wonderful curtains straight from Scotland.

The Alexandria Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission seeks to expand Alexandria's preservation of its historic buildings and spaces. For more information about preserving an interior through a preservation easement, contact the Office of Historic Alexandria at 703-746-4554.

The writer is chair of the Alexandria Historic Restoration and Preservation Commission.

