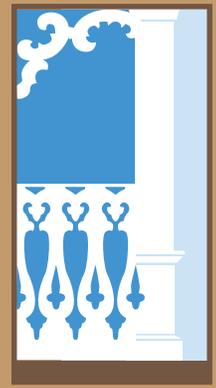


# Lee-Fendall House

## MUSEUM NEWSLETTER



Spring 2018

### Stories in the Architecture: The Staircase

For nearly two hundred years, the Lee-Fendall House served as a family home. Over time as styles and technologies changed, history layered upon itself crafting the house into the perfect subject for fascinating architectural study. One of the most iconic features of the Lee-Fendall House is its cantilvered, spiral staircase – a grand feature that serves both to impress and bewilder visitors passing through the home’s interior.

Since the house’s opening as a museum, a debate has long raged over whether or not the staircase dates to the original 1785 construction of the home. While no plans of the original house or the major 1850 renovation have yet been found, architectural clues seem to indicate that the staircase was reconstructed in 1850. Support for this comes from the staircase’s visible nails, all of which are machine-cut — a process that post-dates 1785. The width and rise of the staircase are also much more typical of mid-nineteenth century staircases. Additionally, the stairs reach all the way up to the house’s third floor which, prior to the 1850 expansion, was merely an attic space. While these observations help substantiate the 1850 reconstruction theory, confusion is created by an older source from 1980 claiming that when the second-floor landing was taken apart to reinforce the staircase, workers uncovered late-eighteenth century (presumably hand-wrought) nails.

For all the questions we have about the staircase, there are things we do know. The newel post at the base of the stairs is a mid-nineteenth century replacement. The second and third floor landings have gates cut into the railing that were added for accessing a twentieth century elevator installed by the last owner of the home. As would be expected, the staircase has been changed over the years to suit the needs and tastes of the people who lived in the house. And this leads us to what is perhaps a more interesting line of questioning than whether or not the staircase is “original” – what did the staircase mean to the people who lived in the home over the years? Was it a status symbol, a barrier, a cherished memory?

One man, who lived in the house as a young boy in 1903, recalled the feeling of running down the stairs from the third floor on Christmas morning to find the Christmas tree, decorated with toys and tinsel, standing in the entrance hall below. One thing is certain, these stairs have many stories to tell.



A view looking upwards through the center of the staircase from the first floor hallway.

### Wedded Bliss!

We want to thank all the couples who visited the Lee-Fendall House table at the 2nd Annual Alexandria Wedding Showcase on February 18th. We met lots of potential couples looking to book the museum for wedding ceremonies, receptions, and photography sessions. We look forward to being a part of many beautiful wedding celebrations in 2018!



### Lee-Fendall House Museum & Garden

614 Oronoco Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314

703-548-1789  
contact@leefendallhouse.org  
www.leefendallhouse.org

### Museum Hours:

Wed-Sat: 10 am - 4 pm  
Sun: 1 - 4 pm

Guided tours offered on the hour.

Self-guided tours also available.



Did you know that you can host special events, parties, and meetings at the Lee-Fendall House?

Visit our website at [www.leefendallhouse.org](http://www.leefendallhouse.org) for rental details.

## Spring2ACTion: Fixin' Up the Foundation!

Looking for a way to contribute to Lee-Fendall House? Join us April 25th for Spring2ACTion – the annual Alexandria Giving Day! For 24 hours straight on April 25th, Alexandria-area non-profits will come together and encourage the community to make contributions to the organization of their choice.

For 2018, Lee-Fendall House is focused on raising money to stabilize and repaint the home's foundation. Having had a front row seat on North Washington Street since 1785, the Lee-Fendall House has experienced much of both Alexandria's and the nation's great history. The passage of time and the rumble of constant traffic alongside the home have unfortunately taken their toll, leaving the house's historic foundation in distress and at risk. We are asking you to join us for this year's Spring2ACTion and help our efforts to stabilize our basement and keep the museum standing strong!



### the Real Volunteers OF LEE-FENDALL HOUSE



Volunteer, Mary Almond, working with the Lewis family cookbook.

*The Lee-Fendall House offers many different types of volunteer roles from giving house tours to conducting collection research to tending to the museum's garden.*

*Interested in volunteering?  
Email: [manager@leefendallhouse.org](mailto:manager@leefendallhouse.org)*

### The Lewis Family Cookbook: A Labor of Love

There's no shortage of projects to dive into at the Lee-Fendall House, but docent Mary Almond has taken on a true labor of love in transcribing a valued Lewis family heirloom – the family cookbook. Prominent labor leader John L. Lewis and his family moved to Alexandria, Virginia, from Springfield, Illinois, and made the Lee-Fendall House their home from 1937-1969. Recently donated to the museum by descendants of James Lewis, John L. Lewis' house steward, the cookbook is a fulsome collection of recipes put together by Myrta, John L. Lewis' wife, prior to their move into the home.

When the cookbook returned to the Lee-Fendall House, Mary knew it was the perfect project for her to undertake during her volunteer shifts. Raised with a love for cooking and a penchant for old cookbooks, Mary carefully sorts through and deciphers the handwritten recipes in order to produce versions that can readily be used by culinary enthusiasts today. Oftentimes this process requires a considerable amount of research, particularly when certain recipes reference items or cookware that are not commonly used in kitchens today. Other times, the recipes call for a little experimentation. Mary notes that many of the recipes call for adding "a bit of this" or "some of that" without specifying actual quantities. The same goes for cook times, leaving her with a need to fill in a lot of the blanks. Fortunately, she enjoys a challenge and when in doubt, bakes up samples of different things to help gauge the accuracy of a given recipe. It's a labor-intensive process that holds great value for the museum's community and hopefully soon for its visitors. Mary is working with museum staff to eventually assemble a booklet of the Lewis family's favorite recipes that can be purchased from the museum.

As Mary continues to work through the pages of the cookbook, she also comes across fun finds that help shed a little light on the life of Myrta Lewis. Mary has found old advertisements tucked between pages including one for an ice cream maker – perhaps a wishlist item of Myrta's? The cookbook also includes four different recipes for Sally Lunn Bread – a possible family favorite? There's a lot of room for interpretation behind the meanings of these small things, but when it comes to the recipes, Mary's determined to make sure we're going to be savoring the same great tastes that the Lewis family dined on years ago.

Saturday, March 10 at 2:00 PM

#### Stories in the Architecture Tour

The way a home is built and changed reveals a lot about the people who lived there. Delve into the details of the Lee-Fendall House on this special tour and discover the history of the property through its architecture.

Saturday, March 24 at 10:00 AM

#### Beyond the Battlefield - Civil War Walking Tour of Alexandria

This 2.5-hour walking tour will begin outside The Lyceum at 201 South Washington Street. Participants will see locations and stories associated with soldiers, citizens, and the enslaved, living in wartime Alexandria.

Friday, March 30, Saturday, March 31, & Sunday, April 1

#### Easter Egg Hunt

Our garden will be filled with hundreds of colorful toy-filled Easter eggs! Other activities include games, crafts, refreshments, and photos with the Easter Bunny.

Saturday, April 14 at 2:00 PM

#### Chocolate Through Time

Enjoy an interactive presentation by Joyce White about the history of chocolate followed by a chance to taste an assortment of historic chocolate recipes.

Wednesday, April 25

#### Spring2ACTion

Support the Lee-Fendall House's efforts to repair its damaged house foundation by participating in this 24-hour giving day designed to help support Alexandria-area non-profits.

Sunday, May 13

#### Tours & Treats for Mom!

Moms and grandmas enjoy free house tours and tasty treats at the Lee-Fendall House in honor of Mother's Day!

Saturday, May 19, 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM

#### Royal Wedding Garden Party

Celebrate the British Royal Wedding in style at our traditional garden party. Watch the ceremony coverage while you enjoy food and drinks. Don't forget to wear your best fascinator!

Visit [www.leefendallhouse.org](http://www.leefendallhouse.org):

- View the most up-to-date list of upcoming programs
- Get full event details and ticket information
- Purchase tickets for your favorite events