

Fall 2022

# Lee-Fendall House

## MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

### The Stories Behind the Stones

Many of the people historically associated with the Lee-Fendall House, including members of the Fendall, Lee, Cazenove, Fleming, and Downham families, are buried in the cemeteries that make up the Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex as well as Ivy Hill Cemetery. Alexandria's yellow fever epidemic of 1803 led the town's Common Council to decree that no additional burial grounds could be located within the town limits. This led churches and other groups to establish burial grounds in areas of neighboring Fairfax County. These cemeteries formed part of the land eventually annexed by the City of Alexandria in 1915.



*Gravestones of Philip Fendall, Jr. who grew up in the Lee-Fendall House (left) and Private George Richmond who died in the house when it served as a Civil War hospital (right).*

An obelisk in the Presbyterian Cemetery marks the grave of Philip Fendall, Jr., the first child born and raised in the Lee-Fendall House. Fendall was a well-known lawyer in the antebellum period working as a clerk under Secretary of State Henry Clay and later serving as the District Attorney for Washington, D.C. Fendall was a major supporter behind the building of a much larger obelisk in honor of his father's close friend, George Washington, in the nation's capital.

When Louis Cazenove died suddenly in 1852, shortly after moving into the Lee-Fendall House, his body was displayed for several days in the front parlor as mourners came to pay their respects to one of the wealthiest men in Alexandria. His body eventually made its way to the Presbyterian Cemetery where it was laid to rest under a chest tomb with a lengthy inscription, now mostly faded. His widow and son rest nearby.

There is another cemetery in the same complex where the headstones are all the same size, most are marked with the simple shield, name, and state indicating the graves of U.S. soldiers from the Civil War. This is the Alexandria National Cemetery. Museum staff and volunteers are continuing to identify the soldiers buried here who died at Lee-Fendall when it served as the Grosvenor Branch Hospital (1863-65). One of these soldiers was 36-year-old George Richmond. A husband and father from New York, he enlisted in the 111th NY Infantry in 1862. He survived the Battle of Gettysburg, only to be wounded a few months later at the Battle of Bristoe Station. He was transported to the Grosvenor Branch Hospital where his leg wound turned gangrenous, and he died on October 21, 1863.

The burial sites of some of Lee-Fendall's later residents can be found in the Ivy Hill Cemetery, including Mai Greenwell Downham, a local singer and suffragist, who lived in the Lee-Fendall House with her husband, liquor dealer Robert Downham, in the early twentieth century.

Discover more stories behind the stones at our upcoming walking tour of the Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex on **September 24**. We'll be teaming up with the Superintendent of the Presbyterian Cemetery, David Heiby, to share the stories of Alexandrians who shaped the city we live in today, including many of the families connected with the Lee-Fendall House.

## Lee-Fendall House Museum & Garden

614 Oronoco St.  
Alexandria, VA 22314

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

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 Lee-Fendall House Museum

## Museum

### Hours:

Wed-Sat: 10am - 4pm

Sun: 1 - 4pm

Guided tours offered on the hour.

Self-guided tours also available.



# OBJECT SPOTLIGHT



You've probably heard the saying "they don't make them like they used to." While many use this adage when referring to products like vehicles, phones, washing machines and the like, it also applies to the homes we live in. If you take a look at a modern-day interior wall being built, you'd probably be surprised to see horsehair sticking out of the drywall, but when the Lee-Fendall House was built, this was considered best practice to strengthen the plaster being applied to the walls. The enslaved and free craftsmen at Lee-Fendall would have applied three coats of plaster—the scratch coat, brown coat, and finish coat, which could then be painted. Animal hair, sometimes from a horse, but also from cows or pigs, was used as a binder and strengthener to the plaster, which was usually a mix of lime, sand, and water. Lee-Fendall has a few examples of plaster with visible animal hair, showing the detailed and time-consuming work that went into building the house. Through the Historic Structure Report we hope to begin in 2023, we can make sure this delicate plasterwork and other unique architectural details at Lee-Fendall are documented, protected, and preserved.

## An Ongoing Partnership

LFH Treasurer Laura Lieberman recently caught up with Surayyah Colbert, the new chair of the Junior League of Washington's Historic Alexandria Docents (HAD) committee. This committee provides the Lee-Fendall House Museum, as well as other museums in Alexandria, with volunteer support throughout the year. Here's what Surayyah had to say!

**1) How long have you served on the Historic Alexandria Docents committee?**

*I was on the HAD committee from 2016-2020, and recently rejoined the committee as its chair in June 2022.*

**2) What are your favorite events to help out with at the Lee-Fendall House?**

*I've enjoyed helping out with prohibition party fundraisers at Lee-Fendall. It's always lovely to spend time in the property's garden. The mixture of history, music, and dancing is such a joy to see! Although I have not yet assisted with some of the archaeology and civil rights themed events, I am very supportive of Lee-Fendall House offering such a wide array of programming. There truly is something for everyone.*

**3) What is the most rewarding part of serving with HAD?**

*The most rewarding part of serving with HAD is experiencing an intersection of history, community, relevant topics, learning, and entertainment. Serving with HAD has afforded me with opportunities to get to know other members of the Junior League of Washington (JLW), as well as staff and volunteers at the properties. I've interacted with tourists and members of the surrounding communities during a myriad of events. Training and programming provided at the properties has enabled me to learn so much about our local history, as well as to be able to link the past to the present.*

**4) What are some interesting facts you enjoy sharing about the Lee-Fendall House?**

*It is fascinating that one of the first successful transfusions was performed at Lee-Fendall House during the Civil War! That is a fact that I will not soon forget.*

**5) Do you have any specific goals for HAD for the 2022-2023 year?**

*Some of my goals for the 2022-2023 HAD year are for the members of the HAD committee to experience a sense of belonging--I hope that they feel embraced by the committee, and that they have a sense of kinship with at least one of the properties that HAD supports. It would be great to offer a lecture, and/or some other type of event for members of the JLW that are part of other committees in the League. If the members of the HAD committee are able to provide needed help in a meaningful way at the various properties that we support, the year will be a success.*



**JUNIOR LEAGUE OF WASHINGTON**



Surayyah Colbert

## NEW EXHIBIT - Trash to Treasure: Uncovering the Downhams

A 1986 excavation of the old well/privy on the Lee-Fendall property yielded many artifacts from when the Downham family lived on the site in the early twentieth century. These artifacts reveal a lot about both the public and private lives of the family.

Robert Downham purchased the Lee-Fendall House in 1903 and moved in with his new wife, Mai Greenwell Downham, in 1906. His new house was just two doors down from his childhood home at 411 N. Washington Street where he was raised by his mother, Sarah and his father, E.E. Downham along with his many siblings. E.E. Downham was a colorful figure in local business and politics and served as Mayor of Alexandria from 1887 to 1891. Robert inherited his father's successful liquor business, E.E. Downham & Co. which was famous for its many varieties of whiskey. Robert's brother, Frank, was an agent for the nearby Portner Brewing Company. Many of the artifacts excavated include bottles and items connected to the liquor trade. When Virginia passed statewide Prohibition in 1916, it threatened the livelihoods of many people in Alexandria, including the Downhams.

The artifacts on display also include items of a personal nature, from toothbrush handles to a pair of bifocal lenses. Our new exhibit, opening September 21, explores what we can learn from these pieces, once discarded as trash but now a treasure trove of information for historians. Our exhibit team collaborated with **Alexandria Archaeology** staff to bring these artifacts back to the house to help tell the story of the Downham family.



*All artifacts are on loan from Alexandria Archaeology, City of Alexandria, Virginia*

## Welcome to our new Board & Staff Members!

### James Lewis, III Board Member

The Lee-Fendall House Museum & Garden is proud to welcome James "Jimmy" Lewis, III to our Board of Directors.

Jimmy holds a Bachelors degree in Journalism from West Virginia University (1968) and a Masters degree in Physical Education from Tennessee State University (1970). He is a retired basketball coach of (50) years from every level including High School, College, Professional, USA National and International competition. He serves on the Alexandria Athletic Hall of Fame Committee and the Virginia Interscholastic Association Hall of Fame Board and has been inducted into both.

Jimmy is the son of Eunice Quander Lewis and James Lewis, Jr., who worked as a chauffeur and personal assistant for labor organizer John L. Lewis, the last resident owner of the Lee-Fendall House (1937-1969). Jimmy brings a wealth of first hand knowledge about the history of his family, the house and Alexandria during this important period in modern American history. In his spare time, he enjoys golfing, traveling and singing in one of the Alfred Street Baptist Church choirs alongside his wife, Karen. They are the proud parents to Dr. Jennifer Lewis and Christopher Lewis.



### Hannah Wood Collections Intern

Hannah Wood is working as our Collections Management Intern here at the Lee-Fendall House Museum this fall. Hannah is excited to be working in such a historic home, "I can't wait to learn all sorts of new things about how to care for and catalog a museum's collections. So far at Lee-Fendall, I have learned how to properly photograph and handle historical artifacts and prepare them for an exhibit." After her graduation from Liberty University's history department in Spring 2023, Hannah plans to pursue a career in the museum field.



# Mark Your Calendars!

★ = free event for Lee-Fendall House Members!  
Become a member at: [www.leefendallhouse.org/membership](http://www.leefendallhouse.org/membership)

Saturdays, September 10 & October 8, 10:00 AM

## **Prohibition in Alexandria: A Walking Tour** ★

Discover the forgotten stories of teetotalers and bootleggers on this walking tour of Prohibition-era Alexandria. Learn about the dramatic campaign to ban alcohol in Virginia and its threat to the livelihood of families like the Downhams.

## Cemetery Tours

Saturday, September 24

1:00 PM & 3:00 PM

### **Presbyterian Cemetery Tours**

Join staff from the Presbyterian Cemetery and the Lee-Fendall House Museum for a tour of one of Alexandria's most fascinating places and the neighboring Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex. Hear stories of people historically connected to Lee-Fendall and other Alexandrians who shaped the city we live in today, whose lives were often stranger than fiction.



Friday, October 7, 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

### **Homeschool Day: Archaeology**

Homeschool families are invited to experience interactive, educational activities that explore American history. Our theme this fall will explore ways that archaeology can tell us about life in the past.

Saturdays, October 22 & November 5, 10:00 AM

### **Beyond the Battlefield: A Civil War Walking Tour of Alexandria** ★

This walking tour shares the stories of soldiers, citizens, and self-liberated African Americans in Civil War Alexandria. It covers the military occupation, the conversion of public and private buildings into hospitals, and emancipation.

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

*Space at our popular seasonal programs is limited and fills up quickly – advanced purchase of tickets is highly recommended.*

Fridays & Saturdays, October 21 & 22 and 28 & 29 | Tours at 7:00, 7:30, 8:00, 8:30, & 9:00 PM

### **Grief & Ghost Tours**

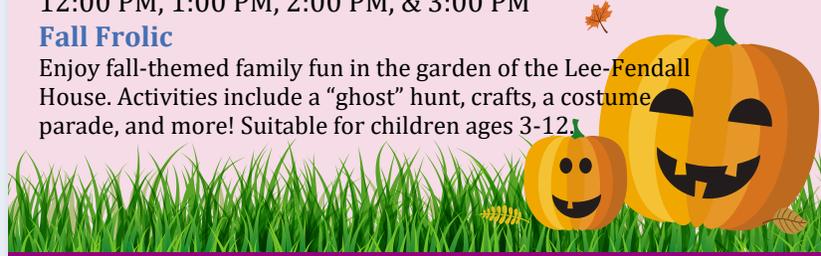
Learn about Victorian mourning traditions coupled with stories of tragic deaths and mysterious occurrences at the Lee-Fendall House on these special evening tours.



Saturday, October 22 | Sessions at 10:00 AM, 11:00 AM, 12:00 PM, 1:00 PM, 2:00 PM, & 3:00 PM

### **Fall Frolic**

Enjoy fall-themed family fun in the garden of the Lee-Fendall House. Activities include a "ghost" hunt, crafts, a costume parade, and more! Suitable for children ages 3-12.



Saturday, November 11, 6:00 PM

### **Hidden Heroes: African and African American Legacies** ★

As part of our June exhibit "Lives Worth Celebrating: Stories of Resilience, Rebellion and Freedom", join Dina Farouny-Webber, the exhibit curator, as she provides an in-depth look into the legacies of Africans and African Americans, who were part of the African diaspora, many of whom are not well known.

Saturday, November 12, 2:00 PM

### **Under the Same Roof: Enslaved and Free Workers at the Lee-Fendall House** ★

Learn about the enslaved and free African Americans who lived and worked in the home, both before and after the Civil War. Hear the stories of their experiences and their contributions to the site and its history.

Saturday, November 26, 2:00 PM

### **Stories in the Architecture** ★

Explore the history of the Lee-Fendall House through its architecture and visit parts of the house that are not regularly open to the public. See how changes in style and home technology have left their mark on the home, from when it was built in 1785 through the twentieth century.