# Looking Back to Move Forward: Urban Renewal, Salvage Archaeology, and Historical Reckoning in Alexandria, Virginia

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**Abstract** Dissent over what merits preservation and constitutes progress undergirds Alexandria Archaeology's establishment. This program is rooted in mid-20th-century urban renewal. In demolishing several blocks and removing people of color and poor whites from the city's downtown, officials hoped to reinvent this area as a haven for white, middle-class residents and tourists drawn to Alexandria by its historic character. During demolition, a group of concerned citizens noted that bulldozers were removing archaeological resources as well as "blight" in the name of progress. They established an archaeology program dedicated to mitigating these effects. These early archaeological projects privileged some histories, however, focusing on 18th-century, elite, white history instead of on the diverse 19th-century community that had once existed on the blocks. These archaeological collections provide insight into the dissonance of historical interpretation. This article explores how new analyses of older collections give voice to some of these lesser-known histories

**Keywords** archaeology · German Jewish history · urban renewal · curation

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## Introduction

In 1961 Jane Jacobs (1961:238) astutely observed that "[c]ities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created for everybody," hinting at the inherent tension within many cities. They are home to many, but are they truly a "home" to all? Cities are complex entities, serving as both backdrop and active agent in driving political, social, environmental, or economic change (Roberts 2017:21). These transitions can be sources of friction among competing interests. Often there is a dissonance between the dominant narrative of these spaces and the stories of the people who once walked a city's streets.

In Alexandria, Virginia, a city defined by its historic character and charm, debate over what constitutes progress and what merits preservation is ongoing. As a tourist destination right outside Washington, D.C., the city draws on its colonial- and Revolutionary War–era heritage to bring in revenue. However, Alexandria was affected by mid-20th-century urban-renewal projects that were nominally intended to create vibrant, modern urban cores, but these projects also created and perpetuated harmful class and racial divisions while erasing important parts of the city's history. In fact, the city's already existing historic preservation program was spurred on by these large-scale urban-renewal projects. Alexandria Archaeology sprang out of the tension between modernity and history as part of the historic preservation push.

Archaeological collections produced by urban-renewal activity provide insight into the dissonance of historical interpretation (Gray 2020). The material culture excavated in the wake of these mid-century urban-renewal projects did not always fit the dominant historical narratives of the time, and new analyses of these sites help undermine the original ideological interests of earlier preservationists (Ryzewski 2021).

Today, Visit Alexandria, the city's tourism board, has expanded the opportunities it promotes, and the city is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all parts of its operations (Alexandria 2021). Visitors still flock to the city for colonial heritage, but they can also learn about the lives of all past Alexandrians or explore Black-owned businesses of the present. This sea change since the 1960s is a marked difference from mid-20th-century promotions of Alexandria as the hometown of George Washington and Robert E. Lee. One example is the north route of the African American Heritage Trail (2020), developed by community volunteers with support from the Office of Historic Alexandria (parent department of Alexandria Archaeology) and launched during the pandemic. This GIS-based StoryMap was designed to be used both by visitors walking the shores of the Potomac or remotely by those interested in the diverse stories of the city's African American communities. The African American Heritage Trail and many other experiences and sites like it around the city are the product of decades of work by historians, archaeologists, community leaders, and everyday citizens who saw the gaps in the historical record and heritage-tourism space. The renewed tourism focus on the experiences of Black or immigrant Alexandrians does not erase the past or fix current inequities and injustices, but it is one start.

To work toward a more equitable future, we archaeologists need to grapple with the roots of our profession and our institutions. This article explores both the archive of Alexandria's historic preservation movement and the Alexandria Archaeology collection to better understand the past and to create a solid foundation for the future. Looking backward helps us move forward as scholars and informed citizens interested in creating a more equitable future for both archaeology and our society more broadly. One way of doing this is by closely examining how archaeology has upheld homogenous narratives of the urban past, narratives that do not critically question white privilege and do not provide adequate space for other voices.

First, this article explores how mid-20th-century historic preservation was intimately entangled with urban renewal and changing understandings of race and whiteness. It then discusses how archaeological salvage work ahead of the Gadsby's Commercial Urban Renewal Project privileged Anglo-American narratives over those of racial or ethnic minorities. Finally, this work examines how new analyses of older collections from the 500 block of King Street elevate some of the city's lesser-known immigrant histories.

By reexamining one site associated with a late 19th-century German Jewish household, this research complicates and expands the history of the city. Today, both visitors and residents are interested in nuanced stories about the past and having unique cultural experiences. Alexandria was and is home to people of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, and the city's archaeological heritage speaks directly to these experiences in ways that were perhaps unanticipated when the 500 block of King Street was originally excavated in the 1970s. Modern analyses of previously excavated collections can answer new anthropologically engaged questions that critically interrogate the concept of whiteness at a moment in American life when there has been a resurgence in racially motivated violence and white supremacy. This reanalysis also provides the material for designing new exhibits and interpretive programs that complicate the ideological interests of previous preservationists and meet the needs of today's visitors and the City of Alexandria's equity goals.

## Navigating History and Progress: Historic Preservation, Urban Renewal, and Race

Sweeping demolition and construction projects altered the face of American cities in the 20th century. Entire blocks disappeared as bulldozers and wrecking balls moved in. Urban-renewal projects in Alexandria and across the United States changed the built environment and the racial and social fabric of many American cities.

Urban renewal sprang out of the federal government's attempts to nominally alleviate poverty

and housing shortages in the mid-20th century and address the perceived health and social ills associated with both (Moon 2016a:38; Blessett 2020:842). As part of the New Deal, the Housing Act of 1937 allotted federal funds for slum clearance, the production of federally funded public housing, and programs to stabilize neighborhoods and prevent foreclosures (A. Smith and Scarpato 2010:154; Appler 2017). World War II further exacerbated an existing housing shortage, particularly in areas critical to the war effort, such as the greater Washington, D.C., area. The Housing Act of 1949 attempted to address this problem by expanding federal involvement in mortgage underwriting, public housing, and slum clearance (Jaffee 1977:81), while a 1954 amendment allowed many municipalities, including Alexandria, to use building rehabilitation as a viable renewal strategy (Ryberg 2012:196; Appler 2017; Poole and Appler 2020:386). Both pieces of legislation worked to provide federal funds to revitalize "blighted" urban areas. After local authorities designated an area an urban-renewal project, they could use eminent domain and federal dollars to purchase property at "fair value" and then sell it to private developers to rebuild (M. Anderson 1967; Cord 1974:184; Jaffee 1977:82).

Urban renewal hinged on clearing slums to remedy "blight," defined by historian Jon C. Teaford (1990:11) as the "process of physical deterioration that destroyed property values and undermined the quality of urban life." Blight was evident in groups of houses ("slums") not considered decent, safe, or sanitary because officials perceived them as "dilapidated, overcrowded, filthy, vermin infested fire traps" (Jaffee 1977:84). Local officials often demonstrated their point with carefully curated and staged photographs and statistics that appealed to modernist tendencies that preferred clean lines and order (Chronopoulos 2014:208). The only way to remedy blight was to improve these conditions and start fresh, using local and federal governmental intervention (Jaffee 1977:84). New roads, sewers, and buildings would attract families away from the suburbs and back into the city, making cities more economically viable (Greer 1965; Hyra 2012:502). The unspoken but clear intention was to attract white families specifically. Urban-renewal projects fantasized about a blank urban canvas on which to redesign postwar cities without proactively remedying underlying problems caused by broken systems.

Urban renewal and historic preservation were linked and not necessarily oppositional forces (United States Conference of Mayors 1966; Page and Mason 2004; Ryberg 2012; Appler 2017:202). Both had the goal of reinvigorating city centers perceived as having fallen into disrepair. Appler (2017:202) argues that in many cities urban renewal "fanned the flames of nascent local preservation movements, resulting in rehabilitation and profitable reuse of individual buildings or entire districts." Impending urban renewal catalyzed historic preservation movements in some places (Poole and Appler 2020:383), while in others, notably New Orleans and Charleston, the historic preservation movement predated large-scale urban-renewal efforts.

Unfortunately, despite their lofty goals, strategies to alleviate blight and promote historic preservation were also enmeshed in white supremacy (Hirsch 2000; Mohl 2000; Fullilove 2005; Rast 2009; Highsmith 2015; Appler 2017; Blessett 2020). Municipalities spent federal urban-renewal funding according to local plans and priorities, providing a "window into the aspirations, biases, beliefs, and fears of local political actors" (Appler 2017:202). Following the money shows the implicit biases of many local leaders in the mid-20th century. Using a critical race theory lens, Blessett (2020:838) argues that, for local officials, business leaders, and the broader white public, racial justice was not a priority for urban renewal. By taking a racially neutral approach, nominally focused on measurable outcomes and efficiency, local administrators rarely considered the disproportionate outcomes for marginalized groups.

Historian Karen Ferguson (2002:166–167) argues that urban-renewal projects constituted "a massive twentieth-century public works program that would reconfigure the racial geography of American cities." The neighborhoods targeted for demolition, dispersal, and rehabilitation were largely populated by people of color, immigrants, or others on the margins of white society, individuals often seen as expendable to the larger endeavor (Cord 1974; Jaffee 1977:86; Hirsch 1998; Zipp 2010; Hyra 2012:502). The perceived economic value of rehabilitating large swathes of cities outweighed the interests of Black people and other marginalized individuals (Blessett 2020:838). By one estimate (Cord 1974:184), two-thirds of those displaced were Black and Puerto Rican Americans. Of the 2,500 neighborhoods demolished as part of urban

renewal, 1,600 were predominantly African American (Fullilove 2005; Hyra 2012:502), sending ripple effects into Black communities beyond those directly affected.

The forced removal of whole communities took a serious social, economic, and psychological toll. Local officials, lending agencies, and neighborhood associations made it difficult for displaced people to return to the neighborhoods they left, citing concerns of depreciating property values and neighborhood instability (Massey and Denton 1993; Sugrue 1996; Mohl 2000). Black residents found themselves with few options because they were simultaneously excluded from the private housing market and denied access to integrated or all-white communities (Blessett 2020:842). The strategies used to remediate blight never addressed underlying social and economic inequalities, and perhaps were never even designed to do so. Instead of creating affordable housing, many of these projects reduced the number of affordable units (Jaffee 1977:87). This forced already-marginalized groups into subpar and increasingly crowded housing elsewhere, often paying more for the privilege and facing the same challenges as before (Massey and Denton 1993; Hirsch 1998; Turner et al. 2009; Zipp 2010; Hyra 2012). Beyond losing their homes, those displaced also lost their community structures and businesses. Urban renewal destroyed the social and economic networks on which residents of so-called slums relied (Jaffee 1977:88).

The public/private urban-renewal partnership also served to exacerbate existing economic disparities. In the 1930s, the Federal Housing Administration actively advocated for using the Home Owners' Loan Corporation's neighborhood rating system as a means of determining refinancing eligibility (A. Smith and Scarpato 2010:154). This system was overtly racist, with new, all-white neighborhoods being rated the highest and African American neighborhoods rated the lowest. Older neighborhoods, those occupied by Jews, and those adjacent to African American neighborhoods were in the middle (Gotham 2001:307). This system served to drive down property values in neighborhoods with lower ratings. As soon as local leaders classified neighborhoods as slums, property values dropped, making it cheaper for local authorities to purchase via eminent domain (Rothstein 2017:106). Those displaced were often injured twice—their homes and communities were destroyed

and many were never compensated because they were renters, making it even more difficult to find adequate housing (Blessett 2020:845). Additionally, private developers no longer bore the cost of demolishing existing structures and instead could focus their efforts on building new commercial and residential structures that sold or rented for a much higher price than the structures they replaced. Developers essentially received a federal subsidy on the backs of marginalized communities forced out of their homes by public authority (Cord 1974:184). Most of the financial benefits of urban-renewal development went to white property owners, firms, and companies (Hirsch 1998; Zipp 2010; Hyra 2012:503–504).

Dominant ideas about race shaped the historic preservation movement, which, in turn, served as an active participant in upholding the American racial system (Babiarz 2011:49). Traditionally, historic preservation in the United States sought to protect the sites and values of white, Northern and Western European culture, leading to a whitewashed and often sanitized version of American history that focused on important landmarks of national significance (Babiarz 2011; Poole and Appler 2020:383). Dominant Western European ideals of what constituted history, architecture, and culture shaped the historic preservation laws that determined what resources deserved protection and were deemed significant (Matthews 2020:48; Irwin 2021). Urban-renewal projects provided the backdrop for historic preservation movements focused on telling the stories of white elites while leaving a large swathe of urban dwellers out of the picture.

Several examples illustrate the complex interplay and dissonance among progress, history, and selective memory. In Philadelphia, local planners and business and professional leaders came together with the National Park Service to rehabilitate the area around Independence Hall. This coalition capitalized on the historical importance of the city and its role in national memory work to spur on urban-renewal efforts (Hunter et al. 2018:333–335). In 1948, the area around Independence Hall became a national historic park, and the Department of the Interior was authorized to use eminent domain to acquire property in the vicinity, eventually demolishing approximately 150 buildings (Greiff 1987:63–68; Hunter et al. 2018:338). Development efforts then extended to the adjacent Society Hill residential area, where planners

employed a conservative approach to renewal, rehabilitating colonial-era row houses deemed architecturally significant, while infilling the area with modern buildings (Ryberg 2012). Once cleared of their existing (low-income) residents through the power of eminent domain, the historical buildings were sold and rehabbed to meet the city's standards and better match the cleaned-up area around Independence Hall (Ryberg 2012:204; Hunter et al. 2018:341). This strategy lined up with the interests of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, which, at the time, took a narrow view of what was considered historical. Namely, it sought to preserve and capitalize on colonial-era heritage at the expense of other periods, building styles, and neighborhoods (Ryberg 2012:196). Limited urban renewal cleared out undesirable communities while allowing for the rehabilitation of properties of historic value (Blessett 2020:845). Ultimately, mid-century Philadelphia planners were able to embalm "a vision of an eighteenth-century landscape" in Society Hill and the area around Independence Hall by leveraging federal dollars, the mnemonic power of the city's colonial history, and the participation of the National Park Service (Hunter et al. 2018:344). In Danville, Kentucky, historic preservation, tourism, and urban renewal merged to clear out a central business district and transform it into "a patriotic shrine to the state's pioneer forefathers" (Appler 2017:214). All these examples preserved certain stories at the expense of others.

## Alexandria, Virginia

National controversies surrounding urban development and historic preservation also played out in microcosm in Alexandria. In the 1930s and 1940s, the Works Projects Administration (formerly the Works Progress Administration) estimated that about 23% of the city's dwellings were substandard (Harper 1939; Moon 2016a:37). By 1968, the federal government had already approved the city for over $6 million in funding for urban-renewal projects (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 1968). One of these projects, the Gadsby's Commercial Urban Renewal Project, transformed several blocks of King Street near the Potomac River.

By the 1950s, what had been a bustling commercial district along King Street in the 19th and early 20th centuries had turned into what many Alexandrians considered to be urban blight. The area had fallen victim to several coalescing forces that deteriorated urban centers in the mid-20th century and made modern, suburban shopping districts more inviting. These forces included a lack of investment during the Great Depression and World War II, the GI Bill that made suburbia more affordable for white families, the new federal highway system that funneled people away from urban centers, and the rise of shopping centers that were easily accessible by car and located on more affordable land (Jaffee 1977:83; Ryberg 2012:197; Poole and Appler 2020:385–386).

Though never an industrial city like those in the Northeast and Midwest, Alexandria also suffered from deindustrialization. Like many other once-thriving ports (Foster 2013:891), the city's formerly bustling waterfront had become a series of derelict, underused, or outright abandoned warehouses. In 2015, during debate over a new waterfront development at the location of one of those warehouse sites, then-mayor William Euille remembered growing up in Alexandria when children played on the train tracks and the waterfront was lined with "boarded up, dilapidated warehouses and vacant lots" (The Connection 2015). Alexandria resident Lillian Patterson (2021) remembers King Street down by the water as being a pretty tough area and not really safe in the mid-20th century. The area surrounding the Torpedo Factory along King Street was an ugly industrial landscape that residents and officials in the 1950s and 1960s considered filthy, unsafe, and certainly not inviting.

According to local officials, owners along King Street were absentee landlords who did not reinvest in the area or maintain their properties. This ignored the fact that some individual property owners made improvements to their supposed "slum" properties throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, and homes deemed substandard may have been in good condition, a common tactic in other cities (Chronopoulos 2014; Moon 2016a:37). Though the 1940 census identified roughly three-quarters of the residents on the 300–500 blocks of King Street as renters, this does not tell the full story (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1940). Many of these buildings were subdivided into apartments, with one of the units often occupied by the property owner. Landlords were not always absentee, but the buildings had transitioned from single-family homes and businesses to multifamily structures. Some owners even made improvements to

**Fig. 1** Originally proposed footprint of the Gadsby's Commercial Urban Renewal Project covering 22 city blocks (not to scale) (City of Alexandria 1960).
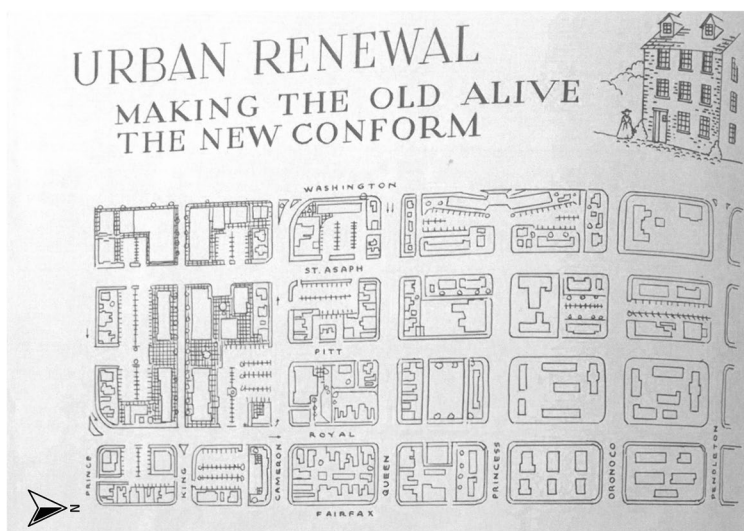


their properties during this time. In fact, the property owners of 518–520 King Street submitted at least five renovation and construction permits between 1931 and 1948, suggesting a continued investment into the physical structure on this lot (Office of Historic Alexandria, Archives and Records Center 1931, 1933, 1938, 1948, 1955). However, officials saw what they wanted to see to meet their political objectives. Seemingly overcrowded and dilapidated, Alexandria's urban core was something city leaders thought best to bulldoze and replace with new commercial and municipal buildings (Jackson 1985; Hayden 2004; Moon 2016a).

Historian Krystyn Moon (2016a:28) outlines several interlocking strategies Alexandria officials used to navigate between progress and tradition in the middle of the 20th century: annexing neighboring parts of Fairfax County, introducing hygiene codes, public-housing initiatives, urban renewal, and historic preservation. These strategies worked in tandem to "clean up" the city. Initiated in 1959, the Gadsby's Commercial Urban Renewal Project illustrates how these strategies worked together. Newly introduced hygiene and building codes provided benchmarks for determining whether structures were safe or if the city could condemn them (City of Alexandria 1966). Officials initially slated the project to demolish 44 blocks, then roughly 20 blocks (Fig. 1). Public outcry eventually led to a reimagined project that focused on six blocks surrounding city hall: the 300, 400, and 500 blocks of King Street. Using the power of eminent domain, the city condemned and purchased these lots.

However, though historic preservationists supported slum clearance, they opposed the sweeping demolition initially proposed. By the time the city introduced the Gadsby's Commercial Urban Renewal Project, the historic preservation movement was well established in Alexandria and carried a fair amount of political power (Fenwick 1969; P. Smith 1996). Individuals and local organizations had attempted to rehabilitate historic buildings since before World War II. For example, American Legion Post 24 purchased the Gadsby's Tavern buildings in 1929 in an effort to preserve and restore them (City of Alexandria Virginia 2023). In 1946, the city council designated much of the urban core as the "Old and Historic District," the third-oldest such district in the country after Charleston and New Orleans. The ordinance protected the buildings in the project area, making change more difficult, as all development was now subject to Board of Architectural Review scrutiny. Organizations such as the Historic Alexandria Foundation, incorporated in 1954, and the Alexandria Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission advocated for the preservation of historic resources before urban renewal began in earnest in Alexandria.

During urban renewal, preservationists argued that clear-cutting Old Town did not consider the potential for rehabilitation, would damage Alexandria's historic architectural character, and impede a growing tourism market. In 1966, some members of the Old

Town Civic Association called the proposed Gadsby's Urban Renewal Project "an encroachment of cancer" in the city (McLaughlin 1966:B2). Preservationists also successfully lobbied the city council to require all new construction in the area to match the district's colonial style (*Washington Post* 1962:A16; Moon 2016a:48), while, in the words of Harry Graef, an architect for the Gadsby's Commercial Urban Renewal Project, not looking like a "Colonial Disneyland" (Robbins 1968:R1). In Alexandria, the interests of the historic preservation community were simultaneously at odds and in agreement with those pushing for progress in the form of urban renewal. For example, in 1971, the Historic Alexandria Foundation was able to save the Lyceum, a neoclassical building built in 1839, from demolition. Robert Montague III (2006:5), nephew of pioneering Alexandria preservationist Mrs. Gay Montague Moore, recalls that it "was the first time in the history of Virginia that eminent domain had ever been used to save an historical building from demolition." Preservationists managed to use the same tools deployed for slum clearance to save an historic structure.

The city's reputation and burgeoning tourism industry relied on its historic character, but progress required change that was sometimes difficult to achieve within the strictures of the historic district. Leroy S. Bendheim, vice-mayor and the grandson of German Jewish merchants whose shops once lined King Street (Terrie 1979), stated the tension clearly in the 1950s: "Those who cling to ancient customs and moorings in the face of insistent progress will awake someday to find themselves living in a dead city" (Alexandria City Council 1954). His rhetoric was clearly influenced by the modernist reform movement that advocated starting fresh to reinvigorate city centers.

The racial dynamics surrounding the Gadsby's Commercial Urban Renewal Project were slightly different than those in some other cities. Most studies of urban renewal have focused on the Black/white racial dyad and the disproportionate effects of these projects on Black individuals and communities. However, slum clearance projects, some as far back as the 19th century, also targeted other racial and ethnic neighborhoods (A. Smith and Scarpato 2010; Rothstein 2017; McGrew 2018:1028; Vitiello and Blickenderfer 2020). Alexandria provides a case study for how urban renewal worked in subtle ways to reinforce and perpetuate white supremacy. Until the 1940s, a diverse community lived in Alexandria's urban downtown. Black and white, native born and foreign families lived next door to each other in the commercial district, a stark contrast to more racially segregated cities in the South (Moon 2016a:34).

The initial 22 blocks of the Gadsby's Commercial Urban Renewal Project did not explicitly target predominantly African American neighborhoods. The 1940 census indicates that 20 of the 210 households living on the six blocks eventually impacted by the development project had a foreign-born head of household. Roughly 10% of households living around the commercial core at that time consisted of Russian, Lithuanian, Chinese, and Greek immigrants (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1940). Of the residents eventually displaced by this project in the 1960s, 75% needed municipal housing—including 29 white families and 46 Black ones (Moon 2016a:49). The original 1957 housing code used as a step toward urban renewal contained exemptions for owner-occupied properties (Moore 1957:B1), disproportionally disadvantaging Black Alexandrians, who often did not own their homes, while allowing white Alexandrians to opt out of the proposed housing code.

Clearing a mixed-use, racially and ethnically diverse, central business district worked to (re)establish the segregated racial order that many white leaders and officials either consciously or subconsciously sought in the name of modernity (Rothstein 2017:22–23). Their goal was to introduce modern spatial and social order to an area perceived as disorganized, inefficient, and potentially dangerous (Chronopoulos 2014:211). The Gadsby's Commercial Urban Renewal Project would rehabilitate the area, preventing its decline into "creeping seediness" (*Washington Post* 1962:A16), while also removing perceived racial messiness and its supposed threats, such as miscegenation and school integration (Pascoe 2009; Moon 2016a:31–32). Forced displacement of immigrants, particularly those from Eastern and Southern Europe who were often marked as provisionally white on arrival (Brodkin 1998; Jacobsen 1998; Goldstein 2006), helped push these individuals out of the urban core and toward whiteness. Unlike their Black neighbors (Blessett 2020:842), by the mid-20th century most white immigrants, even if suspiciously or newly white, had access to the private housing market and could integrate into broader white

America. The American dream opened up to many of these individuals in ways that were impossible for Black residents. Urban renewal broke up the closest thing Alexandria had to an ethnic neighborhood and replaced it with municipal and commercial buildings that fit into the ideological frameworks of city planners and historic preservationists that privileged the histories of people of English and Scottish descent over all others (Moon 2016b). Many older, independent, locally owned businesses never reopened (B. Hayman and J. Hayman 2001:31), and the ethnically diverse neighborhood that had existed along King Street since the mid-19th century disappeared.

In an oral-history interview, Ben Hayman, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants who lived on King Street in the early 20th century, discusses the economic effects of the Gadsby's Commercial Urban Renewal Project. He recalls that the city would "come in and buy these buildings for free, for almost nothing—they stole it—and they would sell them to the developers for very low prices of land, the developers would put property up, the right kind of property" (B. Hayman and J. Hayman 2001:18). This strategy dispossessed racial minorities, immigrants, and children of immigrants of their properties without fairly financially compensating them. Hayman's use of the phrase "the right kind of property" suggests that city leaders had a vision for a modern version of history that excluded Black or immigrant experiences.

National trends regarding what history deserved preservation also played out in Alexandria. The city zoning code's criteria for demolition (City of Alexandria 1992:sec. 10-105.A.2.j) consider whether a structure could be used to educate "citizens in American culture and heritage." The original developers of this code and the associated Board of Architectural Review likely understood American culture and heritage to mean a very particular subset of American experiences—those of elite 18th- and early 19th-century Anglo-Americans (Ryberg 2012; Appler 2017). These narratives typically avoided painful histories and did not critically question race or state power (Irwin 2021).

Alexandria's limited urban renewal along King Street worked alongside historic preservation to commemorate and rehabilitate particular histories that fit into the agendas of local officials, leaders, and citizens. In the mid-20th century, this meant leaning into stories of convivial taverns and gentile townhomes occupied by Virginia gentleman and ladies, while turning a blind eye to evidence of the domestic slave trade, African American neighborhoods, or urban immigrant communities. For example, when considering plans for a later urban-renewal project in the primarily African American Dip neighborhood, the city council rejected councilman John Ticer's suggestion that planners identify historic structures in the area and "incorporate them in future development plans" (*Washington Post* 1968:B4). According to most members of the city council in 1968, this Black neighborhood held no resources of historic value. Only recently have the experiences of immigrants become part of the story of Alexandria via the Immigrant Alexandria: Past, Present, and Future oral-history project (Office of Historic Alexandria 2015) and the Immigrant Alexandria history project through the University of Mary Washington (2014), headed by Dr. Krystyn Moon.

By demolishing (Fig. 2) several blocks and removing their inhabitants, officials in the 1960s hoped to reinvent Old Town Alexandria as a haven for white, middle-class residents and tourists drawn to the city by its historic character and promise of gentile Southern hospitality. City leaders chose to emphasize the city's English and Scottish roots while simultaneously erasing African American and immigrant communities both physically and metaphorically (Moon 2016b:61). Though historic preservationists lamented the physical loss, they were less concerned with the loss of an established neighborhood. Preservationists and city leaders welcomed the development of a newly sanitized but still-historic commercial corridor along King Street.

Today, echoes of mid-century preservation interests still linger in interesting ways in Alexandria, illustrating the ways in which historical significance is in the eye of the beholder and subject to broader social or economic biases and goals. In the early 2010s, the same waterfront warehouses that were called ugly, blighted, and dangerous in the 1960s found themselves at the center of a new debate as a fresh wave of development hit Alexandria (Sullivan 2013). Some Old Town residents opposed new construction projects slated to demolish the warehouses, claiming that these new plans were out of character with the city's colonial heritage (Teale 2015). These individuals were willing to live near derelict warehouses, but not in the midst of new mixed-use developments that

**Fig. 2** 518–532 King Street during demolition in the 1960s. (Photo courtesy of Alexandria Archaeology.)

would draw new types of visitors and, unfortunately, their cars. Ironically, these development projects are what ultimately led to the archaeological excavation of several important pieces of Alexandria's 18th-century maritime heritage at the Robinson Landing (44AX235) and Hotel Indigo (44AX229) sites. If the development opponents had succeeded, these remarkable pieces of Alexandria's history would have remained preserved beneath the ground and would not have contributed to the bigger story of the port city. Today, as in the past, individuals can try to further their own political, social, or economic agendas in the name of historical preservation.

**Early Salvage Archaeology in 1960s Alexandria**

Archaeology is inherently tainted by selection biases, often gravitating toward the oldest, rarest, or most eye-catching items (Babiarz 2011:51–52). These biases are reinforced by the social and political currents of the time. For example, historical archaeology projects before the 1970s primarily told the stories of elite, Anglo-American men—the founding fathers and their ilk. The rise of cultural-resource management after the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (1966) tied archaeology more closely to legislation and policy priorities. These policies and how they are implemented are in turn shaped by dominant social, political, and economic environments (Blessett 2020:843). Communities of color suffer disproportionately within this meshwork, experiencing

both physical erasure and metaphorical erasure from the historical and archaeological record.

Historic preservation interest in the Gadsby's Commercial Urban Renewal Project did not end as construction began. During demolition of the 300–500 blocks of King Street in the 1960s, a group of concerned citizens noted that the bulldozers were removing archaeological resources in the name of progress. They rallied to save the city's buried heritage, drawing direct connections between urban renewal and the founding of Alexandria Archaeology (Appler 2015, 2017:203).

Poole and Appler (2020:384) hail urban renewal and the resulting enthusiasm for historic preservation in Alexandria as the "seeds of what would become the nation's premier public archaeology program." Often cited as one of the oldest and most successful such programs run by municipal government (Sprinkle 2003:257; Hurley 2010:50–51; Appler 2015), Alexandria Archaeology provides a model for doing archaeology at the community level. However, this praise also needs to be contextualized. White business, political, and community leaders in Alexandria poured money and social pressure into promoting and implementing an archaeological program (Appler 2015), but did not expend the same energy in promoting the interests of their marginalized fellow citizens. Archaeology at the local level means that the program was affected by the local political, economic, and social currents of the time. Though not always explicitly stated, the heritage to be preserved in the early years skewed elite and white. Urban archaeological

Fig. 3 City leaders sought to highlight Alexandria's colonial and maritime heritage in the mid-20th century (City of Alexandria 1960).
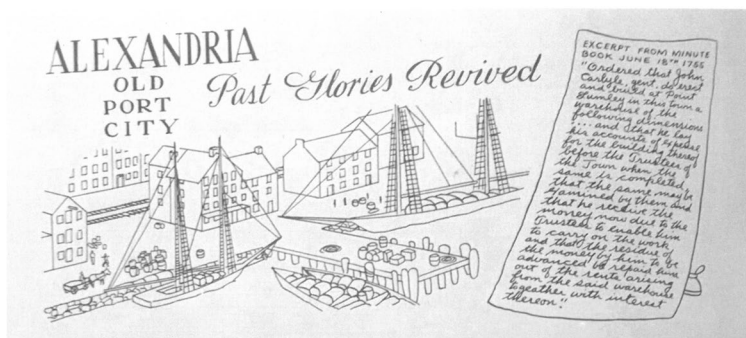


investigations of the time were typically associated with buildings of historic significance without considering the broader urban context in which they were situated (Cressey 1979b). The material recovered in Alexandria would inform the upcoming Bicentennial celebrations in 1976, serving as the physical remains of "Colonial seaport America" (W. Anderson 1971) (Fig. 3). These artifacts would help develop the image of Alexandria as an historic and patriotic city. Those wishing to draw visitors to the city embraced the myth of antebellum Southern hospitality and now had the tea sets to show it. Colonial- and federal-period heritage outweighed the more diverse urban stories the city's archaeological resources could tell (Appler 2015:25).

In 1964, as urban renewal began along King Street, former city-council member John Pickens reached out to Colonial Williamsburg's Ivor Noël Hume for advice on conducting salvage-archaeology work (Appler 2015:27). Pickens hoped to squeeze in some archaeology in the six-month gap between demolition and construction. Two years before the National Historic Preservation Act was passed, Alexandrians saw the value of preservation by excavating and documenting lots inhabited by the city's earliest (white) inhabitants. This was at a time when urban anthropology and archaeology were in their infancy (Fox 1977:8). Scholars were still trying to figure out research designs and methods appropriate for the constraints and opportunities of the urban environment. They were also operating within the social and political currents of their time that were intently focused on colonial history leading up to the Bicentennial.

Between 1965 and 1972, Richard Muzzrole, a Smithsonian technician, worked to salvage the city's buried history along King Street (Figs. 4, 5). Many of the features of today's Alexandria Archaeology began

at this time, including a city-funded program (after the Smithsonian ceased funding), a public appreciation of archaeology, and a lab space in the old Torpedo Factory. However, this salvage work was heavily biased toward museum-display quality, pre-1820 material (Appler 2015:28). Early work focused on recovering and reconstructing aesthetically pleasing pieces and not on answering anthropological questions. For example, Ivor Noël Hume (1969:1) once claimed that Alexandria had the "finest collection of late 18th century and early 19th century Staffordshire pottery outside Staffordshire's own Hunley Museum." This glowing statement may even be true, but it is not the whole story of this city or the King Street corridor. Unfortunately, it is the whole story of what was ultimately recovered from most of these blocks (Fig. 5). Muzzrole had to make hard choices in the field about which features to explore and which to sacrifice. In a letter to the city council and the mayor, John Pickens (1974) estimated that about 80% of the



Fig. 4 Richard Muzzrole excavating a Feature on the 300 block of King Street (44AX94). (Photo courtesy of Alexandria Archaeology, 1967.)

**Fig. 5** Archaeological excavations of the 300–500 blocks of King Street (not to scale). (Drawing by Alexandria Archaeology, 1970s–1980s.)
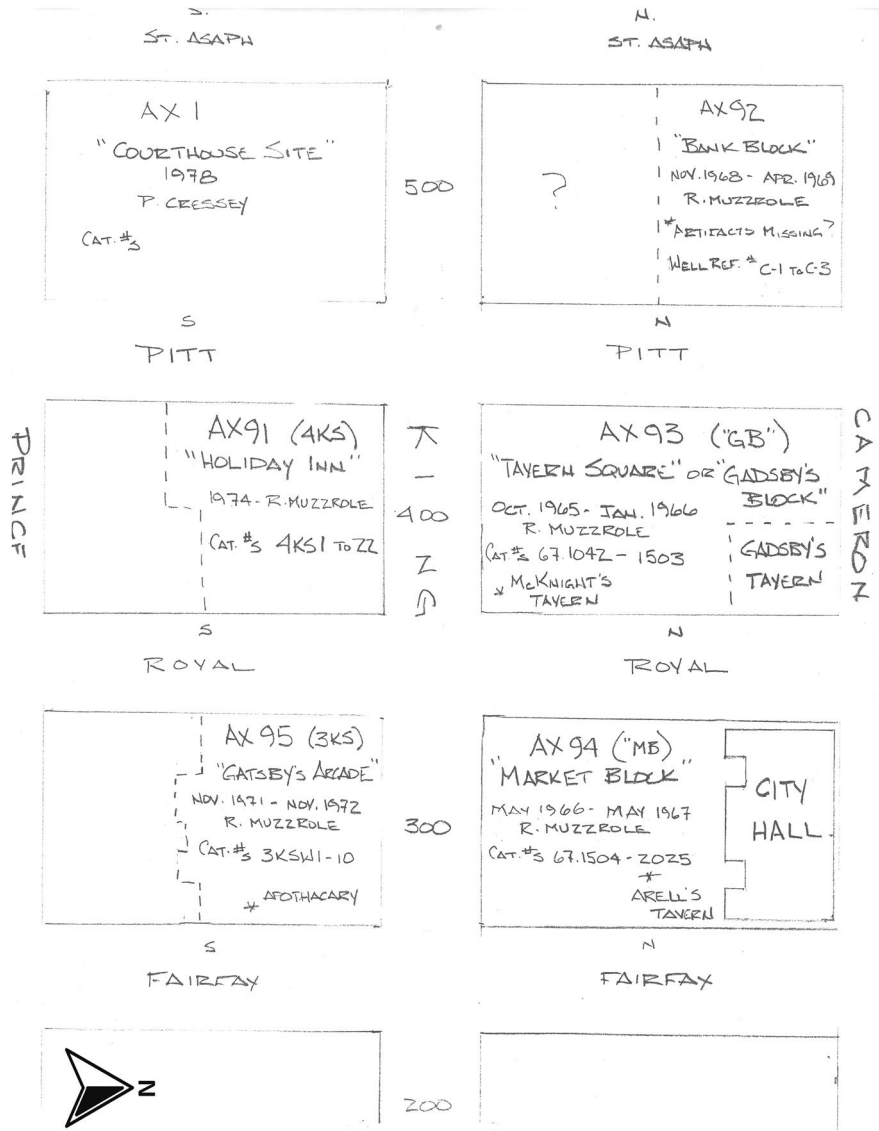


artifacts from the 300 block of King Street were not recovered. Based on the dominant historical interest at the time, Muzzrole, with the support of city leaders and local preservationists, prioritized recovering pre-1820 material. Of the eight analyzed features from this site, only one is noted as containing material from after 1840. The ever-looming urban-renewal bulldozers likely obliterated the later remains of 19th-century life on the 300 and 400 blocks of King Street, though it is difficult to know what was lost because few field records exist from this work.

Additionally, the material was not recovered systematically, and the assemblages reflect the overall state of the discipline in the 1960s before the influence of processualism and the application of scientific methodologies. In 1970, when the Smithsonian proposed ending funding for Muzzrole's position primarily for financial reasons, it also raised concerns over the methodology of the salvage work (Edwards 1970) and the fact that Muzzrole was not a trained archaeologist (Taylor 1970). He kept very few field notes and did not publish his work (Pickens 1976). Though important artifacts were saved by this salvage archaeology, there was little stratigraphic control, soil was not screened, and not all artifacts were saved. Muzzrole estimated that he recovered about

85% of the ceramics but only 15% of the glass from these early excavations (Magid 2003:2). This early work did not recover important parts of the historical record, including bones, shell, seeds, or structural remains, such as nails. These assemblages produced beautiful museum pieces, useful for providing qualitative information and serving as study-collection pieces. However, these collections cannot be used for quantitative analyses or be easily compared with those of other sites.

## The 500 Block of King, 1977

Pamela Cressey's arrival in 1977 as city archaeologist began to professionalize the Alexandria Archaeology program. She introduced systematic excavation strategies built on anthropologically derived research questions; there would be no more picking and choosing of only pre-1820 material to meet construction pressures and ideological biases. Cressey and her team sought to tell the stories of all Alexandrians, including the city's free and enslaved Black residents, shifting the emphasis from the elite few (Cressey 1979a). In the process she created a robust community archaeology program that utilized oral histories and partnerships with organizations, such as the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage, to expand the way the city's history was studied and interpreted (Cressey 1985a:viii). In 1975 the city council appointed the Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC) and tasked this group with promoting archaeology and establishing the city's archaeological policies (Appler 2015). The AAC largely supported Cressey's efforts to focus on African American Alexandrians. At least one individual left the commission due to the new focus on telling more inclusive stories, however, highlighting the fraught nature of historical interpretation in Alexandria. This tension within the AAC in the late 1970s hints at the dissonance among the emerging field of historical archaeology, local historical preservationists, and the actual archaeological record.

In June 1977, salvage archaeology began on the 500 block of King Street (Site 44AX1), the last block the Gadsby's Commercial Urban Renewal Project developed (Fig. 5). The block had been demolished in the 1960s, but the new courthouse was not constructed until the late 1970s (Van Landingham

2010). It is the best-documented site, both archaeologically and historically, of those excavated as part of the Gadsby's project. Beginning in the 1780s, Adam Lynn, a merchant and silversmith, and his successors owned and occupied most of the block (Terrie 1979). By the second half of the 19th century, however, many of the block's residents, particularly those living on the northwest quadrant, were renters, and many were immigrants. In 1850, the King Street frontage consisted of seven renters and one owner/occupant, and in 1870 three of the five heads of household on this block face were foreign born (Terrie 1979:46–47).

Unfortunately, some of the archaeological material from 44AX1, particularly that dating to the late 19th century, was never fully analyzed, and no comprehensive report exists. The prioritization of material from the Civil War period and before reflects the research questions popular at the time and a lingering bias toward earlier time periods and nationally significant events. The efforts of archaeologists and volunteers helped to fully or partially recover data from 25 shaft features, 2 trash pits, and 1 cistern—including all the features found in the northwest quadrant of the block (Van Landingham 2010:94). The site is partially documented via the Alexandria Archaeology Website,[1] unpublished manuscripts and student papers, and one dissertation (Shephard 1984). Over the years, staff made several attempts to corral the data to tell the diverse stories of block's inhabitants, but due to time constraints and other priorities were never able to produce one definitive final report that could help challenge dominant narratives that focused on the accomplishments of Anglo-American Alexandrians.

## Asking New Questions of Old Collections

Archaeological collections produced by urban-renewal activity provide insight into the dissonance of historical interpretation. Urban archaeological sites are often complex, with multiple layers of human activity sedimented on top of each other. The challenge of deciphering the archaeological record is compounded when there is a larger historic preservation or tourism agenda. Reanalyzing old collections

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[1] <https://www.alexandriava.gov/Archaeology>.

allows a critical examination of the historical past by asking new questions of the data that are no longer bound by the social and political constraints and interests of 50 years ago. These questions are informed by more recent theoretical and methodological advances. In Alexandria, these questions can help provide nuance to the understanding and interpretation of the city's past, shedding light on the experiences of immigrants and religious minorities, and expanding the definition of what it meant in the past to be an Alexandrian. My research uses these older collections (Niculescu 2022) to further understand the Diasporic connections Jewish Alexandrians maintained, how households managed their cultural and religious obligations in a resource-poor city, and how these families navigated the American racial system in which they were both outsiders and insiders.

In 1977, archaeologists uncovered a brick-lined shaft feature (Feature 4) at 518–520 King Street whose fill dates to the late 19th/early 20th centuries, the contents associated with the lot's German Jewish occupants—the Schwarz and Rosenfeld families. This feature, like many others around Alexandria, was probably initially constructed as a well and then used as a convenient privy when the well ran dry or the building gained access to municipal water (Van Landingham 2010:4). This feature was never fully processed or analyzed due to time and resource constraints that required triaging assemblages. Features containing material from the Civil War period or earlier were of higher priority.

By the late 1970s, Alexandria Archaeology was guided by a rigorous archaeological and historical research agenda focused on exploring the stories of all Alexandrians, including urban African Americans, both free and enslaved (Cressey 1980, 1985a, 1985b). In her dissertation, Cressey (1985a:2) argues that her city-site approach to urban archaeology "offers an opportunity to examine historic Afro-American culture as part of an urban system rather than as a series of individual trash middens and cellar holes." In this framework, the history and archaeology of African American sites is intimately and necessarily linked to those of Alexandria more broadly. However, this focus meant that sites associated with European immigrants, who by 1970s standards were considered white, were not a research priority. At the time, historical and archaeological studies simply lumped immigrant households with their Anglo-American

neighbors into a monolithic white racial category, ignoring the reality that German Jewish immigrants in the 19th century navigated a significantly different racial landscape than that in which the excavators lived (Brodkin 1998; Jacobsen 1998; Goldstein 2006; Roediger 2018). Their work did not consider the unique experiences of the immigrant and religious minority households that occupied 518–520 King Street in the 19th and 20th centuries. Alexandria's German Jewish citizens' social, economic, political, and racial place was different than that of their Anglo-American neighbors. The experiences of Jewish individuals and their positionality within American society were influenced by government policy, social attitudes toward immigrants, and the racial milieu in which they found themselves. These residents were both religious minorities and provisionally white. Jewish immigrants had to learn and claim whiteness, and, in turn, this process shaped new interpretations of Jewish identity.

Studies focused on complicating whiteness and destabilizing the term did not become common until the 1990s (Allen 1994; Ignatiev 1995; Hartigan 1997; Brodkin 1998; Roediger 2002). This scholarship strives to take what had previously been an unmarked, unquestioned category and critically explore its origins and effects. Just like race, whiteness is a social construct, a category whose bounds can and do change over time and are context specific (Epperson 1990, 1997:10; Roediger 2018:13). As a category it is defined by who gets to partake in the legal, economic, and social privileges of white skin in American society (Ignatiev 1995). Whiteness is historically situated and often politically motivated, formed, and reinforced as a relevant category by the exercise of power through laws, immigration policies, and outright terror (Roediger 2002). It is not seen just through overt displays of power, but also in seemingly neutral social dynamics and institutional procedures and policies, like urban renewal, permeating all aspects of culture (Hartigan 1997:496).

New immigrant groups needed to enter into a "political alliance" of whiteness to access opportunities, but this often came at a certain cost (Three Rivers 1991; Roediger 2018:xi). Even immigrants categorized as white on arrival were still foreign born, an analytical category that did not disappear in official documentation until about the third

generation, as foreign-born parents disappeared from census documents and individuals slipped into white America (Roediger 2018:20). Being labeled a "new immigrant" brought one's race and racial loyalty into question, marking one provisionally white and questionably assimilable. American society increasingly racialized Jewish individuals, both foreign and native born, after the Civil War and through World War II. Racialized depictions focused on physical features that were, in turn, used as shorthand for perceived moral corruption, lack of assimilability, and general incompatibility with American political culture (Jacobson 1998:178). Anti-Jewish panic peaked in the 1880s and 1890s as immigration from Eastern Europe increased (Brodkin 1998; Jacobson 1998:184).

Family History

Families that occupied 518–520 King Street, like Isaac and Lena Schwarz and Max and Jennie Rosenfeld, lived in this particular social and racial environment in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Their experiences were further compounded by the fact that they lived in a smaller Southern city with fewer Jewish religious and community resources. The Rosenfelds and Schwarzes became successful, prominent citizens by the time they died, but they were also German, Jewish, and formerly working class. As demonstrated by archaeological projects elsewhere, these aspects of immigrant and Diasporic identity mattered and are recoverable archaeologically (Stewart-Abernathy and Ruff 1989; Milne and Crabtree 2000, 2001; Terrell 2005; Praetzellis 2021)

Some time in the 1850s, a young Bavarian-born Henry Schwarz arrived in Alexandria and began living and working in the three-story brick building at 518–520 King Street. Henry advertised "new and cheap goods" from New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore auction houses. Schwarz's business is listed at this King Street address in the former storefront occupied by Myenberg and Brother (*Alexandria Gazette* 1854:3), suggesting that this lot was perhaps occupied by German Jews even before the Schwarzes. By 1860, Henry's brother Isaac had joined him and together they ran a dry-goods business. Henry eventually moved to Philadelphia, leaving the business to Isaac. In 1884, Isaac purchased the property, living there until his death in 1898.

After Isaac passed away, his son Samuel continued his father's business until about 1903, when he rented out the lot to Max Rosenfeld, another German Jewish immigrant. Max Rosenfeld and Samuel Schwarz were related by marriage. Samuel Schwarz and Max's wife Jennie Rosenfeld (née Eichberg) were cousins. The rental arrangement between the Schwarzes and Rosenfelds was reinforced by familial connections running along female lines that were not previously noted in existing histories of Beth El Hebrew Congregation or the property (Silver 1984; Baker 1990; Beth El Hebrew Congregation 2009; Niculescu 2022:199–200). This connection also suggests that the change of occupants of 518–520 King Street is more of a continuity than a break with the past. Max Rosenfeld continued the residential pattern established by the Schwarzes. He and his family established a dry-goods business on the first floor of the building and lived above it. At the time of its grand opening in October 1903, Max advertised his business as being in "Schwarz's Old Stand" (*Alexandria Gazette* 1903:3).

The lowest levels of Feature 4, a deep shaft feature in the backyard of 518–520 King Street (Fig. 6), were filled some time after 1886 (Fincham 2013) and likely within the first two decades of the 20th century (Barber 1904; Lehner 1988:501). The remainder of the feature was filled and capped in the mid-20th century. Taking a closer look at the material from Feature 4 sheds some light on the lived experiences of Alexandria's German Jewish immigrants, providing nuance to the already-existing picture of the American Jewish experience and the usual interpretation of Alexandria's history (Diner 2000; Weissbach 2005; Goldstein 2006; Goldstein and Weiner 2018). Two artifacts embody the Diasporic experience and speak to regional connections.

Artifact 1

The first is a square, amber bottle that is embossed: ANGELO MYERS\PURE\MALT WHISKEY and was found in Level 35 of the feature (Fig. 7). This distillery operated in Philadelphia between about 1874 and 1918. More interestingly, the elder Angelo Myers shared a few similarities with Isaac Schwarz, the man whose household likely used this bottle. Angelo Myers, Sr., was Jewish, financially supporting Hebrew Union College programs, as noted in

**Fig. 6** Map of the northern half of the 500 block of King Street with handwritten annotations. Feature 4 is indicated by a triangle. (Map by Alexandria Archaeology, ca. 1980.)

the *American Jewish Year Book for 5664* (i.e., 1904) (Adler 1903), and hailed from the same region of Germany (Bavaria). In addition, Isaac's brother Henry had relocated to Philadelphia in the late 1880s (appearing in both Alexandria and Philadelphia city directories between 1881 and 1889) and resided for a period in the general vicinity of the A & H Myers



**Fig. 7** Angelo Myers whiskey bottle from Feature 4. (Photo by author, 2021.)

storefront at 313 N. 3rd Street (Chataigne 1881, 1887; Gopsill 1886). Alternatively, Max Rosenfeld and family lived in Trenton, New Jersey, which is only about 30 mi. northeast of Philadelphia across the Delaware River. Max may have developed a taste for Angelo Myers's products while living near the source (New Jersey Department of State 1895).

All these things may be coincidence: Philadelphia is a major city and manufacturing center with deep ties to Alexandria, or they could point to Diasporic connections working in conjunction with standard trade networks. No advertisements in the *Alexandria Gazette* mention Angelo Myers or any of the brands the company produced and promoted, though the brand appears in many other newspapers. One of the first and few advertisements in the D.C. area for Myer's Pure Malt Whiskey appears in an 9 April 1901 edition of the *Evening Star* (1901:16). The product was available for purchase at Frank Hume's store at 454 Pennsylvania Avenue, indicating that it was somewhat readily available in the broader area, but may not have been as available in Alexandria proper.

A review of the Alexandria Archaeology artifact database indicates that one other Angelo Myers bottle has been found in Alexandria. It was found in a trash pit (Feature 199) at Shuter's Hill (44AX175). This bottle is made of clear glass and dates to a slightly later period. Myers's whiskey does not seem to have been particularly popular with most Alexandrians, based on its relative absence from the written and material record of the city, but Max Rosenfeld or Isaac Schwarz may have chosen to consume it due to Diasporic connections, a sense of German kinship, or simply because he liked it. He may also have had to go slightly out of his way to procure Angelo Myers's whiskey.

Artifact 2

The second artifact points to connections to the Shenandoah Valley. The small rubber stamp fragment was recovered from Level 29. It is marked: BOSTON RACKET STORE\DEALERS IN DRY GOODS, NOTIONS, CARPETS, CLOTHES, BOOKS, SHOES\HATS & CAPS, BOYS & MENS CLOTHING, ETC\WOODSTOCK, VA. The earliest advertisement for this business appeared in the *Shenandoah Herald* (1891a:3) on 30 January 1891, but suggests that the Boston Racket Company had already been in operation for some time. It urges customers to take advantage of low prices as the company moves and rebuilds its store. Later advertisements indicate that the Boston Racket Company was operated by I. Marks and had opened its new storefront in June 1891 (*Shenandoah Herald* 1891b:3, 1891c:3). However, a 17 March 1893 *Shenandoah Herald* (1893a:3) advertisement indicates that the Boston Racket Store's success was short lived, and Marks liquidated his Woodstock store when the lease ran out. This closure may be due to the failing health of Mrs. I. Marks, who had to undergo treatment in Baltimore for a nonspecific ailment. The liquidation of the business may also have been a result of the Panic of 1893, which affected Jewish retailers in the Shenandoah Valley (Bly 2016:57). By 6 October 1893, Mr. I. Marks is reported as unfortunately being ill with typhoid fever at the Washington Hospital, and by December the *Shenandoah Herald* (1893b:3) reports that he moved to Florida for his health.

A 2 March 1892 article from the *Shenandoah Herald* (1892:3) strongly suggests that Marks was Jewish.

The piece reports on the dedication of the Harrisonburg synagogue. Mrs. I. Marks, as well as Rabbi Shanbarger from Baltimore and Major Alexander Hart of Staunton, attended the event, showing a broad Diasporic network stretching from Virginia's backcountry to one of the busiest Eastern ports at the time.

The presence of the rubber stamp part from Woodstock, Virginia, is difficult to explain without considering Jewish social and economic networks in the Diaspora. It comes from a late 19th-/early 20th-century context and would not have arrived in Alexandria via regular trade networks. Woodstock, the county seat of Shenandoah County, is located over the Blue Ridge Mountains, a little over 100 mi. from Alexandria. In the late 19th century, the port city was connected to the backcountry via a series of roads (Routes 7 and 11) and the railroad (Crowl 2002). In 1890, Woodstock was home to about 1,000 inhabitants. Small-town dry-goods stores like the Boston Racket Company drew on established trade networks within the Jewish community to supply local customers with consumer goods. An 30 October 1891 advertisement hints at these connections, proclaiming that the Boston Racket Store's "wide-awake merchant" was busy shopping the Eastern markets for bargains (*Shenandoah Herald* 1891d:3).

A stamp like this one would likely not have traveled along established trade routes. It is not the type of thing one would buy from another dry-goods business in the course of regular business. It may exist in this context because of a trade connection between Isaac Schwarz or Max Rosenfeld of Alexandria and I. Marks of Woodstock. Schwarz may have been Marks's supplier in the 1890s, as it was common that coastal ports supplied smaller shops in the backcountry, though, typically, Baltimore served as the wholesale hub (Bly 2016). Schwarz may have bought out Marks when the latter liquidated his store in 1893. Deeds of trust were common among merchants at that time, and these arrangements essentially allowed one individual to bail out another merchant (Bly 2016:59). It is also possible that Max had spent some time in Woodstock between his time living in Trenton and Alexandria. Working as a clerk he would have learned the trade and forged connections. In any of these scenarios, economic connections were forged and reinforced by a shared Diasporic identity based on common religious and ethnic traditions.

One bottle or one stamp do not tell the whole story, but they do provide evocative examples of Jewish Alexandrian households' consumption and use patterns. The remainder of the assemblage also speaks, however subtly, to the use of material culture in the construction of immigrant and Diasporic identity in a smaller Southern city. My research seeks to further understand the Diasporic connections Jewish Alexandrians maintained, how the Schwarzes and Rosenfelds managed their religious obligations in a resource-poor city, how these families navigated the American racial system in which they were both outsiders and insiders, and how they went from working-class immigrants to middle-class businessmen.

Early on in this research, Max and Norman Rosenfeld's death certificates from the mid- to late 1920s emerged from the archives. This would not be unusual or noteworthy, except for the fact that both include the distinction "Jewish" in the race/color field. Max's certificate (filed 29 May 1926) is typewritten and lists his race as "White, Jew" (Virginia Bureau of Vital Statistics 1926). Norman's certificate (filed 22 January 1929) reads "white," typewritten, with "Jewish" handwritten over it (Virginia Bureau of Vital Statistics 1929). Clearly the racial dynamics at play went beyond the Black/white dyad, suggesting the fluidity of the whiteness concept itself. At a time when Virginia's state registrar of vital records was obsessed with defending the purity of the white race (Pascoe 2009:141) and the American eugenics movement began focusing on interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish individuals (Dorr 2000), the Rosenfeld's immigrant and first-generation German Jewish identity was clearly being filed along racial lines by either themselves or bureaucrats reproducing state policy. They were not just white, they were white *and* Jewish, and the latter was an important racial caveat in Virginia in the 1920s.

The world Max and Norman lived in was different from that of just 50 years later, when archaeologists excavated the material remains of their lives in Feature 4. The Rosenfelds, like many other immigrants, navigated a different racial landscape that likely shaped the material dimensions of their lives. The archaeological remains of these lives cannot be lumped in with the homogeneous white experience.

It is possible that the most tangible evidence of Jewishness in Alexandria is less about the ever-problematic ethnic marker or even about set consumption patterns related to religious practice. It may be more about the human connections American Jews made across space and time (Niculescu 2022). These connections are dynamic and fleeting, changing based on local and national conditions and on individual needs and affinity. For 40 years this liquor bottle and stamp fragment sat, fully cataloged, waiting to be paired with new research questions focused on the diversity of Diasporic experiences that explore how people made and remade relationships and identities.

This work is one example of the rich possibilities provided by material previously excavated during urban renewal in Alexandria. There are other features associated with immigrants, free and enslaved African Americans, or working-class individuals within Alexandria Archaeology's nearly 3 million artifacts from over 250 archaeological sites. These histories risk remaining concealed, despite the material being salvaged in the 1970s, unless a fresh crop of theoretically and historically minded archaeologists explore the repository, pose novel research questions, and reexamine these older collections. As my work has shown (Niculescu 2022), previously excavated collections do not just provide information about the households that used the material, but also shed light on the social, economic, and political conditions surrounding the archaeological work itself. The repository provides endless opportunities for new research that is unmoored from the prevailing historical narratives and ideologies of 50 years ago, no soil screening needed.

## Conclusion: Reanalysis and Reckoning

This work explored the racial dynamics of urban renewal and historic preservation in Alexandria. The Gadsby's Commercial Urban Renewal Project cleared six blocks of a racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood, serving to reestablish racial order and propel Eastern and Southern European immigrants toward whiteness. In turn, the historic preservation movement spurred by urban renewal focused on the late 18th century, celebrating the life and times of George Washington and other founding fathers, and the accomplishments of the Scottish founding elite (Moon 2016b:59), giving short shrift to the stories of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities who also called Alexandria home. Urban renewal and historic

preservation reinforced dominant narratives of the past, and displacement served to reestablish racial segregation in a messy commercial core.

This article assessed the position of early salvage archaeology within the broader historic preservation and urban-renewal context of the time. Archaeologists worked under immense pressure, on tight timelines, and with few resources to save Alexandria's archaeological heritage. Work in the 1960s and early 1970s produced amazing collections used to promote Alexandria during the Bicentennial in 1976. Today these collections form the core of the program's type collection. Archaeological work in the late 1970s was more anthropologically engaged and helped recover the remains of free and enslaved Black Alexandrians. Examining the roots of Alexandria Archaeology and the particular social and political circumstances of the time of its founding provides context for where the program is now and helps inform future work that strives for a more equitable world, both within and outside the discipline. This requires acknowledging and grappling with Alexandria Archaeology's institutional past and with the development of historical archaeology more broadly.

This work also provided a brief reanalysis of portions of the 500 block of King Street, explicitly focused on households that were not a research priority for earlier archaeologists in Alexandria. Revisiting these collections with new research questions helps provide nuance to the understanding of the city's past, incorporating the experiences of immigrants and religious minorities. Critically examining the concept of whiteness and the racial odyssey of many immigrant groups is vital to understanding these experiences more fully. German Jewish households like the Schwarzes and Rosenfelds did not always fall neatly into the white/Black dyad of the American racial system. The reanalysis of portions of the 500 block of King Street seeks to answer more nuanced questions regarding the Jewish Diasporic experience and the creation of whiteness in America.

Alexandria's urban-renewal program and resulting historic preservation movement constituted both a physical erasure of properties from King Street and a metaphorical erasure of people and stories from the historical record. Archaeological collections produced by urban-renewal activity provide insight into the dissonance of historical interpretation. What was

recovered from a site and what the dominant historical narrative promoted do not always neatly line up, especially if there is a larger historic preservation or tourism agenda involved. There was dissonance between the archaeological data and interpretative goals of preservationists at the time. Reanalyzing collections produced as the result of urban-renewal projects provides space in which to examine the historical past critically by asking new questions of the data. The resulting research and interpretation serve to complicate the ideological interests of previous historic preservationists and better meet the needs of today's public, which is more interested in diverse stories and racial equity.

### Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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