

*This year **Cooperative Living** is taking a road trip along the length of U.S. Route 1 as it crosses Virginia from the North Carolina border to Washington, D.C. In each issue, correspondent Deborah Huso will relate her experiences along the way.*



by Deborah Huso,
Contributing Writer

Art & Archaeology in Alexandria's Old Town

Get your kicks on King Street. By trolley or on foot, there's a wealth of things to explore along this historic and trendy Alexandria street.



Old Town Alexandria is one of the best-preserved 18th-century cities in America. The historic area around King Street, just off the Route 1 corridor, boasts more than 4,200 historic buildings.

As I reach the close of my journey along Virginia's Route 1, I find myself in Old Town Alexandria, one of the best-preserved 18th-century cities in America. The historic area around King Street, just off the Route 1 corridor, boasts more than 4,200 historic buildings.

The preservation efforts in Old Town are largely the result of an active citizenry, believe it or not. Fran Bromberg, acting city archaeologist, says locals began to call for preservation efforts back in the 1960s when they saw historic artifacts turning up with work around Market Square, where you'll find a lively Farmer's Market on Saturday mornings.

"At the urging of citizens, the city government formed the Alexandria Archaeology Commission," Bromberg explains. "It's a unique commission for city government. Citizens advise the government on archaeology matters."

You can explore some of the artifacts that have been uncovered around the city at the Alexandria Archaeology Museum,

located on the third floor of the Torpedo Factory Art Center on the corner of King and Union streets. The museum has been here since 1986. Bromberg says it might seem a little odd for an archaeology museum to exist in the midst of artists' studios and galleries, but she remarks, "The creating of artifacts is going on in this building, and we're uncovering artifacts from the past."

It's a bit of a treat for me to have caught Bromberg at the museum today. Normally, it's staffed by one of the archaeology commission's hundreds of volunteers. "That's been the strongest part of this program," Bromberg says, "the citizens' interest. Our citizens see city history as such an asset to what Alexandria is."

It's easy to get involved in city history, too. The commission runs educational programs on archaeology, as well as summer camps for kids, on actual digs around the city. Right now Bromberg says local students are digging at a sugar factory site. "They see what artifacts were used for," she explains, "and it fits into their school curriculum as they work on understanding Triangular Trade."

SERIOUS ABOUT HISTORY

Alexandria is so serious about its history that the city government passed an ordinance in 1989 requiring developers to perform archaeological work if they plan to develop a site that has potential for historic resources being uncovered or disturbed.

"A lot of our recent work," Bromberg says, "has been saving information from the past because of ongoing development in the city." The commission reviews all city building permits.

The Torpedo Factory Art Center is also home to the city's Art League Gallery. In fact, it was the now-1,000-member league that founded the art center 40 years ago. One of the largest visual arts centers in the nation, the building actually served as a torpedo factory in the years following World War I. Today it is home to the work of more than 165 visual artists, 80 of whom have working studios on site.

Erica Fortwengler, the art league's director of communications and a photographer



The Torpedo Factory Art Center houses the Alexandria Archaeology Museum and the city's Art League Gallery.



Fran Bromberg is acting city archaeologist.



(Above) You can explore some of the artifacts that have been uncovered around the city at the museum, and (left) see the work of more than 165 artists at the gallery.



The building actually served as a torpedo factory in the years following World War I.

in her own right, says the league's is the largest gallery at the Torpedo Factory and features a new juried exhibit each month.

"We get about 600 submissions every month," she says. "About 100 or so get selected for the show." Many of the Torpedo Factory's studios and galleries belong to art league members.

TRY YOUR HAND

The league also offers classes to the general public in painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, just about anything you could imagine. You don't have to be a professional to take a class, though you might find yourself sitting next to one who has come to tweak his skills. The league teaches students as young as age 5.

Fortwengler admits to taking a rather circuitous route to her present job. "I'm actually a former ballet dancer," she says. "My mother is an artist, so I grew up in a very artistic environment. I always wanted to work in arts administration, but I majored in political science," she adds with a laugh.

James Steele, a league member and fine-art photographer, came to the Torpedo Factory through an equally odd route. "How I got into photography is unknown," he chuckles, as I admire his unusual work in his third-floor studio.

He grew up in a town of 1,500 in Missouri and acquired an interest in photography when the town librarian gave him an old camera. But he went on to become an engineer for Boeing.

"Photography was not my day job," he says, "but it is now." He's had a studio and gallery at the Torpedo Factory for 30 years. While he currently works in digital photography and uses computers to do

some very cool things, he started out in the darkroom.

"The darkroom background gives you a way to think about what you want an image to look like," he says, "though we have a lot more control with today's technology."

DID YOU KNOW?

- As a young surveyor, George Washington helped lay out the original village of Alexandria, which was founded by Scottish traders in 1749.
- One of the reasons Old Town Alexandria's architecture remains so wonderfully intact is because the city fathers surrendered to the British in the War of 1812 rather than let the city be torched as the District of Columbia was.
- Alexandria was the longest-occupied city of the Civil War, with Federal troops invading it in 1862.



Erica Fortwengler (left) is the art league's director of communications. Photographer James Steele (below) has had a studio and gallery at the Torpedo Factory for 30 years.



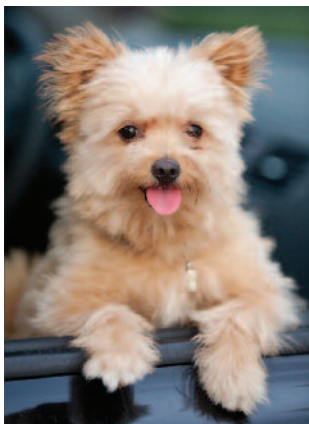
You may, for example, think his eye-catching portraits of women show models artfully decorated in body paint. Look again, however. They are actually two photographs melded into one, where Steele has taken a picture of tree roots or even trash, and then imposed those patterns on another portrait of a woman. "I wanted to see if I could do digitally what one does with body paint," he explains.

This isn't all he does, though. He also takes some Ansel Adams-esque landscape shots.

"I do what I do until I get bored," Steele remarks. ■

BRING YOUR POOCH

Alexandria is dog-friendly with 12 off-leash city parks. Bike and Roll (202-842-2453, www.bikethesites.com) even rents out bikes with dog trailers (no kidding). Think your hound would like a cocktail? Head over to pooch-friendly happy hour on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. April through October at the Hotel Monaco (480 King St., 703-549-6080, www.monaco-alexandria.com). You'll also find a number of restaurants and shops that let your four-legged friend escort you.



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(Left) Enjoy a Saturday morning perusing the goods at the Farmer's Market in Market Square. (Below) Catch the King Street Trolley to the Torpedo Factory Art Center.

IF YOU GO ...

Get your bearings in Old Town at the **Alexandria Visitors Center** (221 King St., 703-746-3301, www.VisitAlexandriaVA.com), and then take advantage of the free **King Street Trolley**, which offers transportation between the Old Town Metro Station and the Potomac River waterfront with several hop-on/hop-off stops along the way. You can also pick up free 24-hour visitor parking passes at the visitor center. If you're interested in the city's history and archaeology, be sure to pick up a guidebook for the **Alexandria Heritage Trail**, a 22-mile urban trail with a focus on the city's history.

The **Potomac Riverboat Company** (205 The Strand, 703-684-0580, www.potomacriverboatco.com) operates the **Alexandria-National Harbor Water Taxi** across the Potomac, March through December, and also offers boat trips to Georgetown and Mount Vernon. If you're visiting during the Christmas season, check out the **Holiday Boat Parade of Lights** on the Old Town waterfront, Dec. 7.

Also near the waterfront is the **Torpedo Factory Art Center** (105 N. Union St., 703-838-4565, www.torpedofactory.org). Inside you'll find three floors of galleries and working artists as well as the **Alexandria Archaeology Museum** (703-746-4399, www.alexandriaarchaeology.com). After a morning of exploring the center's galleries and studios, you can grab a



quick lunch at the on-site café **Bread and Chocolate**, which serves up some divine empanadas.

Other must-see sites in Old Town include the **Carlyle House** (121 N. Fairfax St., 703-549-2997, www.carlylehouse.org), a Georgian Palladian manor house built by the city's founder, John Carlyle. It also served as headquarters for General Edward Braddock in 1755, as he planned strategy for the French and Indian War.

Old Town has more than 80 restaurants, so it's nearly impossible to single out just one or two. Locals swear by **Hank's Oyster Bar** (1026 King St., 703-739-4265, www.hanksdc.com), which is known, of course, for its oysters as well as its short ribs. **Virtue Feed & Grain** (106 S. Union St., 571-970-3669, www.virtuefeedgrain.com) is a must-eat. Chef Cathal Armstrong has fed the President and First Lady. Think old warehouse turned into hip tavern with Irish-infused eats and great drinks from mixologist Todd Thrasher. Another good one is

The Warehouse Bar & Grill (214 King St., 703-683-6868, www.warehousebarandgrill.com), which serves up steak and seafood. Be sure to spend some time checking out the caricatures of local gentry all over the walls here, too! ■



(Above) If you're visiting during the Christmas season, check out the Holiday Boat Parade of Lights on the Old Town waterfront. (Right) Other must-see sites in Old Town include the Carlyle House.

