

Seeking Historic Recognition for the Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex

More than fifty buildings and other locations in Alexandria are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and administered by the National Park Service, the Register is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources.



(Left to right) Benjamin Skolnik, Alexandria Archaeology; Eleanor Breen, Alexandria Archaeology; Paula Whitacre, Historian and Alexandria Archaeological Commission Member; Aubrey Von Lindern, Virginia Department of Historic Resources; Ivy Whitlatch, Alexandria Archaeological Commission Chair; David Heiby, Gravestone Stories and Superintendent, Presbyterian Cemetery.

Alexandria Archaeology received a grant from the Historic Alexandria Foundation to prepare the documentation for the next step in the process to list the Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex on the National Register. Paula Whitacre, with support from Alexandria Archaeology, is now preparing a nomination for the thirteen cemeteries located on and near Wilkes Street to be listed together on the Register as an historic district. The cemeteries, which were established between 1796 and 1933, represent a rich and diverse urban cultural landscape that embodies the historical processes at work in Alexandria from the late 18th through the 20th century.

As an important first step, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) recommended in June 2026 that the site be considered eligible for nomination to the National Register and to the Virginia Landmarks Register. This was the culmination of efforts by the Alexandria Archaeological Commission's Cemetery Committee which included drafting the preliminary nomination, photo documenting the cemeteries, and holding public meetings with all cemetery owners and stewards. Consultation with the stewards of the cemeteries has taken place since the beginning of the process in 2024 and is ongoing.

While listing on the National Register of Historic Places is honorific, the recognition of a site's significance makes it eligible for federal and state grants and protective planning measures against federal projects. Nominating a property to the National Register brings public awareness and community pride to Alexandria's history, enhances prestige, and encourages preservation.

On August 24, Alexandria Archaeology and the Alexandria Archaeological Commission welcomed Aubrey Von Lindern, DHR's Northern Region Architectural Historian, for a tour of the cemetery complex.