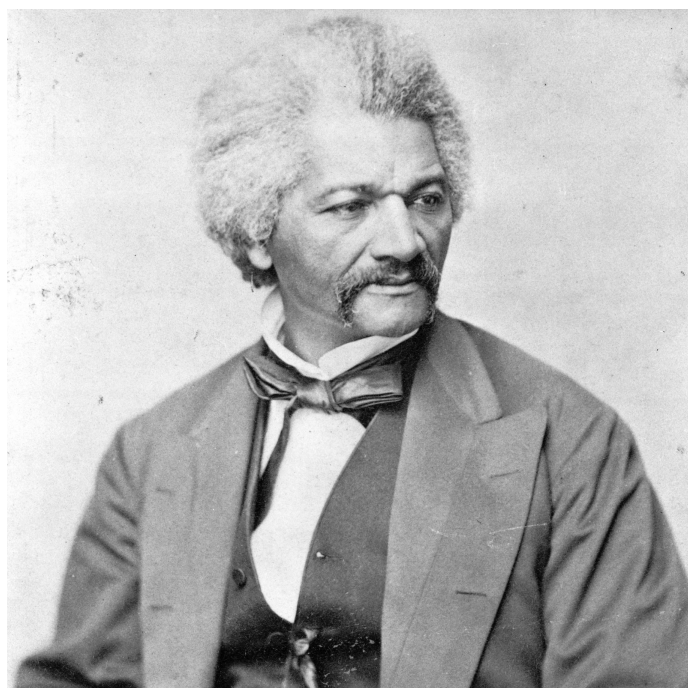# Alexandria reflects, rejoices on Juneteenth

On June 19, we celebrate Juneteenth – June + 19th – commemorating the end of slavery in the United States. On June 19, 1865, Gen. Gordon Granger of the Union Army and his troops arrived in Galveston and announced that the enslaved people in Texas were free. Granger declared that: "… rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired laborer."

Approximately 2 ½ years after President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the news reached the enslaved people in Texas that those enslaved in the rebellious states were free. It also took that long for a sufficient number of soldiers to be in this remote area to enforce the executive order.

Texans began celebrating Juneteenth in 1866 and it was proclaimed an official state holiday in 1980. Emancipation celebrations throughout the years included picnics and barbecues, family reunions, parades, music and dancing, speeches and stories, prayer services and learning, rodeos and horseback riding, carnivals and bazaars, beauty pageants, fishing, baseball games and races.

While Texas chose June 19

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Frederick Douglass was keynote speaker at the 31st anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation on Sept. 24, 1894.

as its Emancipation Day, other localities used the date when its enslaved population received the news of liberation. Others preferred Jan. 1, the date the Emancipation Proclamation took effect in 1863, or Sept. 22 when President Lincoln first announced the Proclamation in 1862.

Alexandria discussed observing Emancipation Day on April 7, the date that enslaved people were emancipated in Virginia. With a rich history of observance beginning in 1889, Alexandrians celebrated

on different days of the year and in different months. The first decade featured two eminent and renowned speakers, Frederick Douglass and John Mercer Langston. Douglass, abolitionist and orator, gave the keynote speech at the 31st anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation on Sept. 24, 1894. Langston, the first African American elected to the United States Congress from Virginia, delivered keynote speeches in 1895 and 1897.

For almost 30 years, the Alexandria Black History

Museum has celebrated Juneteenth. Small festivals began with a mayoral reading of the Emancipation Proclamation followed by food, vendors, performances and children's games and crafts. Later observances included film screenings, children's programming, an open house featuring doll houses of historic Alexandria and lectures by notable speakers, such as U.S. Senate Chaplain Barry Black, co-sponsored by the Northern Virginia Urban League, and historian C.R. Gibbs.

Although different localities may have varying Emancipation dates with diverse activities and programs, Juneteenth has come to symbolize emancipation, recognized in almost every state and the District of Columbia, incorporating African traditions with themes of freedom, hope, achievement, education and respect for all cultures.

Historic Alexandria invites you to celebrate the National Juneteenth Holiday on June 19 at 1:30 p.m. on Market Square, 301 King St. The event is free. Find out about other Juneteenth events at alexandriava.gov/museums/juneteenth-a-time-of-reflection-and-rejoicing.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.