

Denise Dunbar  
 Publisher & Editor  
 ddunbar@alextimes.com

Missy Schrott  
 Managing Editor  
 mschrott@alextimes.com

Margaret Stevens  
 Sales Director  
 mstevens@alextimes.com

Patrice V. Culligan  
 Publisher Emerita  
 pculligan@alextimes.com

## EDITORIAL

Cody Mello-Klein  
 Reporter & Photographer  
 cmelloklein@alextimes.com

Hannah Himes  
 Intern  
 hhimes@alextimes.com

## ADVERTISING

Deb Riley  
 driley@alextimes.com

Marty DeVine  
 mdevine@alextimes.com

Margaret Stevens  
 mstevens@alextimes.com

Patrice V. Culligan  
 pculligan@alextimes.com

Tina Franco  
 Office Administrator  
 tfranco@alextimes.com

## ART DIRECTOR

Aleksandra (Sasha)  
 Kochurova  
 graphics@alextimes.com

## CONTRIBUTORS

Alexa Epitropoulos  
 Kim Gilliam  
 Elizabeth Holm  
 Louise Krafft  
 Jim McElhatton  
 Dr. Vivek Sinha  
 Jordan Wright

## ALEXTIMES LLC

Denise Dunbar  
 Managing Partner

The Ariail family  
 Suzanne Brock  
 William Dunbar

## HOW TO REACH US

110 S. Pitt St.  
 Alexandria, VA 22314  
 703-739-0001 (main)  
 703-739-0120 (fax)  
 www.alextimes.com

## OUT OF THE ATTIC

# Samuel Tucker's 1939 library sit-in

This year's Black History Month holds special meaning to Alexandrians as we celebrate two seminal moments in local black history. Aug. 21 will be the 80th anniversary of the library sit-in, a precursor to the events and tactics of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 60s. In September, our city celebrates the fifth anniversary of the opening of the Freedmen and Contrabands Cemetery Memorial. This week's "Attic" will focus on the 1939 sit-in.

On Aug. 21, 1939, five young men walked in separately to the new Kate Waller Barrett Branch Library on Queen Street and asked for a library card. Their names were Otto Tucker, William "Buddy" Evans, Edward Gaddis, Morris Murray and Clarence "Buck" Strange. Fourteen-year-old Bobby Strange kept a lookout for the leader of the group, the lawyer Samuel W. Tucker.

Each of the five men were told that they would not be issued a library card because they were black. Each one then went quietly to a shelf, pulled out a book and read quietly. When asked by the library staff to leave, they asked as they had been instructed, "What would happen if we don't leave?"

Tucker waited to call the local press until Bobby informed him that the police were on their way to arrest the young men. He notified The Washington Post, The Times Herald, The Washington Tribune and The African-American. The five men were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct, probably because they



PHOTO / OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

couldn't be charged with anything else.

In court, Tucker made two points. First, that the young men had been anything but disorderly. Second, that it was illegal for the Alexandria Library to deny residents library cards, regardless of race. Rather than siding for or against Tucker, the judge avoided issuing a ruling, which prevented Tucker from declaring a victory, but also saved the young men from fines or imprisonment.

Rather than allow African Americans to use the new library, the all-white Library Board hurriedly built the Robert Robinson Library. Samuel Tucker refused to ever set foot in the library his legal arguments built, insisting that having a library to read in wasn't the same as being treat-

ed equally. The letter where Tucker states his reason for refusing to use the Robert Robinson Library is part of the collection at Special Collections as are the annual reports for the Robinson Library.

Unlike Tucker, many African Americans went to the Robinson Library to utilize the only library they had access to. Some of the library patrons surely used it as a starting point in order to insist on greater rights in the decades to come, despite the humbleness of the hastily constructed building.

Gladys Davis, who retired from the library system with more than 50 years of service, was one of the early librarians at the Robinson Library. In 2007, city council honored her for her 60 years of service to the Alexandria Library System.

Today, the Robinson Library is a gallery in the Alexandria Black History Museum. Like the young men whose brave actions created the city's demand for a segregated library, the Robinson Library saw big changes in Alexandria's Black History over the coming decades. It remains a reminder of Alexandria's segregated past, and the brave men and women who worked to end it.

Celebrations of the 1939 sit-in will be organized by the Alexandria Library, which is also running its own Black History Month events. For more information, please check out <https://alexlibraryva.org>.

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

## Weekly Poll

### Last Week

**What do you think of the city's permanent takeover of and plans for the Torpedo Factory?**

**35%** - I'm glad the city's in control. The TF needs to be more vibrant.

**24%** - I'm opposed. Artists created the TF and should always be in control of it.

**23%** - I don't care.

**18%** - I'm conflicted. The TF needs to change but member artists should always have the final say.

### This Week

*Take the poll at [alextimes.com](http://alextimes.com)*

**Do you plan to attend any of the upcoming events celebrating George Washington's birthday?**

**A) I plan to attend the parade in Old Town.**

**B) I plan to attend the Birthnight Ball.**

**C) I plan to attend another George Washington-related event.**

**D) I won't be attending any events.**