



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

Alexandria's July 4 celebrations

Alexandria Times, July 04, 2019

Image: Aerial view of Warwick, 1937, built as the summer home of Frank Hume. National Archives and Records Administration.

As we prepare to celebrate our nation's birthday, the Office of Historic Alexandria would like to highlight July 4 celebrations in this city through the years. Interestingly, it seems that the first time the city commemorated the anniversary of our nation's independence wasn't until 1793, four years after the signing of the Constitution.

George Washington spent the last Independence Day celebration of his life in 1799 reviewing a military procession in Alexandria, which included a parade of horses on King Street. Forty-nine years later, no celebration took place in order to accommodate the military companies, local societies and local residents who traveled into the District of Columbia to attend the cornerstone laying ceremony for the Washington Monument.

The Civil War didn't prevent Alexandria and its occupiers from celebrating the holiday. In fact, in 1862, national salutes were fired in town and by nearby forts. Quartermaster employees even gave the residents still in Alexandria a show of "fire rockets."

In the late 1800s, Frank Hume hosted fourth of July celebrations at his estate, Warwick, which can be seen above.

Warwick Village stands there today. The grounds were decorated with U.S. flags and at twilight, guests enjoyed pyrotechnics and the firing of a cannon on the front lawn.

The City permitted fireworks only on July 4 during the 1920s and 30s, but prohibited them on the intersection of King and Washington and near Alexandria Hospital, which was on Duke Street. In 1924, Alexandria celebrated with a parade along King Street with floats and cars decorated with flags and bunting. Four young women representing Columbia, liberty, justice and history sang patriotic songs.

Alexandria held its bicentennial celebration a couple of days early in 1976. July 2 was the date that colonial and military regiments, music and antique vehicles paraded down the streets.

This year, the city will wait until July 13 to celebrate both the nation's 243rd birthday, and the city's 270th.



"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.



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These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.