

Adam Lynn Jr., a Prominent Merchant in Alexandria (518-520 King Street)

Adam Lynn Jr. was a prominent citizen in Alexandria. In addition to being a successful silversmith and merchant, he also held a number of public and military offices during the course of his life. His father, Adam Lynn Sr., had been one of the first inhabitants of the 500 block. In 1774, Lynn Sr. had purchased the entire NW quadrant of the block and by 1785, he and his family were living in a frame house at 518-520 King Street and operating a bakery at the same address (Terrie 1979).



Fig. 1: Portrait of Adam Lynn, 1805 (Ref pending)



Fig. 2: Sugar Basket by Adam Lynn Jr., ca. 1796 (Courtesy of the Lyceum, Collection of May and Howard Joint)

[Learn more about Adam Lynn Jr. as a silversmith](#)

Aside from being a successful businessman, Lynn was very much involved in the public life of Alexandria. He was appointed Justice of the Peace from 1817 to 1835, magistrate in 1834, and was serving as a General in the county militia by 1819. He was also a vestryman on the first vestry of St. Paul's Church, and the secretary and treasurer of the local Mason's lodge (Hollan 1994). In other words, young Lynn had a foot in almost every door.

At the death of his father in 1785, Adam Lynn inherited two property lots on the 500 block and by 1795 he had begun his career as a silver and gold smith, and engraver. How or where Lynn learned his trade is unknown, but his craftsmanship was extremely fine. In the words of one researcher, "he was the early nineteenth century Tiffany's of Alexandria" (Munson 1979). By 1815 he was among the wealthiest men in Alexandria and owned five lots on the 500 block, as well as some property near Orange, Virginia and in Washington DC.

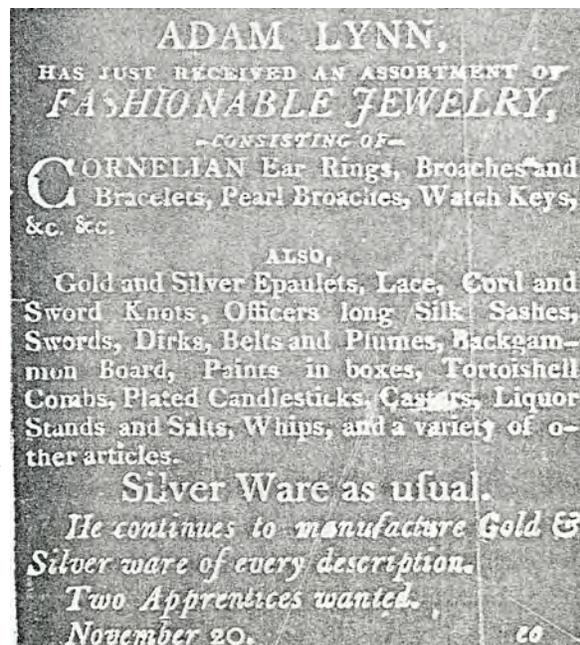


Fig. 3: Advertisement placed by Lynn in the *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial and Political*, Nov. 20th 1809.



Fig. 4: Adam Lynn's house on the left, before demolition, 518-522 King St. (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION).

After living in the frame house at 518-520 King Street with his mother for a few years, Lynn purchased it from her in 1801. In 1811, the frame house was razed and replaced with a three-storey "Federal style" brick house (see Fig. 4). Though it was not ostentatious, architectural features such as the four-bay expanse and the inside and outside paneling of doors and windows certainly bolstered his image as a high status individual in the community (Munson 1979).

Despite his initial success, the economic depression of 1819 hit Lynn hard. In 1820 he was forced to sell the lot on which he lived, though he continued to occupy it as a renter until his death in 1836. Though he was never reduced to living in abject poverty, by 1822 Adam Lynn had lost all of his real estate properties on the 500 block (Hollan 1994). Despite this reversal of fortune however, Lynn seems to have continued to hold an important and respected place within the community (Terrie 1979).

Learn more about Adam Lynn Jr. on pages 20-29 of the [Social History](#)

It was in the back yard of what was once the home of Adam Lynn that archaeologists found the remains of a 5 ft. wide and deep brick lined shaft that had the unique peculiarity of being intersected by a wall from top to bottom (see Fig. 5). [Site Map](#)

The feature (designated "Feature 5") was too shallow to have been a well and since it lacked any signs of a filtration system it could not have been a cistern either. One possibility is that it was used as a cooler, even though rectangular pits, sand filled boxes, and buried barrels were easier to use for such purposes (Munson 1979).



Fig. 5: "Feature 5": the cooler in Adam Lynn's backyard (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)



Fig. 6: Feature 5 Level 5, approximately 20 inches below the surface (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

Although the purpose of its original construction remains unclear, what is certain is that it was last used as a trash pit and filled with domestic refuse (Fig. 6.).

After a preliminary analysis of the artifacts, the trash pit was concluded to have been in use between 1780 and 1820, dates which correspond to the Lynns' occupation of the site.

As such, the finds from Feature 5 provide us with the unique opportunity to discover the Lynn family on another level than that provided by historical documents.

The majority of finds consisted of glass and ceramic objects. Glass artifacts found within this feature included wine, snuff, and apothecary bottles made from the early 1750's into the early 1800's. Tumblers, flip glasses, and wine glasses, some of which were etched or engraved, were also found in Feature 5 (Munson 1979).



Fig. 7: Glass Bottles, AX 1 Ft.5 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)



Fig. 8: Wine glasses and tumblers, AX 1 Ft.5 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

Before 1800 glass was rather expensive and mostly imported from England. Decorations and engravings further raised the price of glass objects and window glass came in two varieties, "cylinder" and "crown". The latter was clearer, stronger, and therefore more expensive than the former. Both kinds were found in the Lynns' backyard pit (Munson 1979). The glass and tumblers featured in Figure 8 were originally clear, but darkened because of their exposure to privy material.

Just as the glass artifacts suggest a relatively wealthy and well-to-do family was living on the lot, so do the ceramics. All the newest and most fashionable types were found in the pit, including pearlware, creamware, stoneware, and porcelain. This family diligently kept up with the latest trends at times when they would have been most highly priced. Among these were hand painted pearlware bowls, tea bowls, and saucers with blue on white Chinese patterns (see Fig. 9). Pearlware was invented by the English in 1779 and produced until 1820. Its bluish glaze sought to imitate Chinese export porcelain and was thus extremely popular (Magid 1982).



Fig. 9: Pearlware bowl, tea bowls, and saucer, AX 1 Ft.5 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)



Fig. 10: Utilitarian wares, AX 1 Ft.5 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

Having the means to buy finer ceramics did not exclude upper middle class families like the Lynns from the necessity of possessing bulkier ceramics for every day usage and activities. Figure 11 features a number of unrefined red earthenware vessels. In the background, from left to right, are a chamber pot, and two food storage jars. In the foreground are three serving bowls, a porringer (with a handle for pouring soup or porridge), a small pitcher, and a salt dish.

Unlike other features found on the 500 Block site, the shallowness of Feature 5 did not provide ideal conditions for preserving organic materials such as floral remains, textiles, leather, and wooden artifacts. Faunal remains on the other hand did survive the passage of time. Numerous bones and shells were found inside the pit, giving us insight into the kinds of foods that the Lynns were consuming. Faunal analyses showed that their diet consisted of pork, chicken, beef, supplemented with fish and shellfish (clams and oysters) (Munson 1979).



Fig. 11: Various artifacts, including ceramic and glass table ware, animal bones, and a clay smoking pipe, AX 1 Ft.5 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION).

(Written by Amanda Iacobelli, 2006)

References

Unless otherwise indicated, historical information was extracted from the Alexandria Archaeology Files (AAF), mostly compiled by Ruth Sinberg Baker, Vivienne Mitchell, and Nancy Sennewald.

Magid, Barbara H. "Alexandria Archaeology: Evidence of the China Trade." In The 27th Annual Washington Antiques Show, 1982.

Munson, James D. "The Several Alexandrias." Student Paper, 1979.

Terrie, Phillip. "Alexandria's Main Street Residents: A Social History of the 500 Block of King Street." Alexandria Archaeology Manuscript, 1979.