



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Seminary Hill Stakeout

Alexandria Times, June 4, 2009

Image: Reporters waiting for Justice Black, October 1, 1937. Photo, Library of Congress, Harris & Ewing.

On August 12, 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt nominated Senator Hugo L. Black of Alabama to the Supreme Court. Rumors surfaced that Black may have been involved with the Ku Klux Klan, but a week later he was sworn in as Associate Justice.

The following week, Justice Black and his wife Josephine left for a month's vacation abroad. Journalists continued to pursue Black's connection to the KKK and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette published a series of articles documenting Black's membership in the Klan. The new justice refused to speak with reporters in Europe, and upon arriving in Norfolk on September 29, he said, "When I have any statement to make, it will be made in such a way that I cannot be misquoted."

From Norfolk, the Blacks drove to Alexandria where they stayed with relatives on Seminary Hill. Josephine Black's sister and brother-in-law lived in a farmhouse on Seminary Road, and the Blacks planned to stay with them for a few weeks until moving into a new home. Several journalists staked out the Seminary Hill home, including the reporters and photographers in this September 30 image who, with food and beverages, were prepared to wait.

Black left the house and traveled to Washington, where he delivered a speech by radio to a nationwide audience on October 1. He admitted he had been a member of the Klan 15 years earlier but resigned in 1925 before becoming a senator. He offered no explanation and the next week, he began his first term with the Supreme Court.

Hugo Black served until 1971, the fourth longest-serving Supreme Court justice. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette won a Pulitzer for their coverage of Black's Klan affiliation.



"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.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.