



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

A unique example of American architecture on Fairfax Street

Alexandria Times, September 23, 2010

Image: The loggia at the Jonah-Thompson House, 200 block North Fairfax Street. Photo, Library of Congress.

The two houses on the south side of Thompson's Alley have been linked in history for nearly 200 years. Built between 1800 and 1805 by Jonah Thompson, the three-story house fronting North Fairfax Street was followed about 10 years later by a second home directly behind the first. These homes, on the east side of North Fairfax Street between Cameron and Queen, had been joined by a passage and were sometimes called "married houses."

The later home, seen in this photograph, shows the unusual eastern façade. The unique Italian loggia features five arches and would have originally been open on one side, although windows enclosed part of it for many years. After serving as private homes, the property became a school for girls. James Hallowell operated the Alexandria Female Seminary from 1848 to 1860, where pupils studied English, Latin, French, mathematics and bookkeeping, chemistry, philosophy and rhetoric. In the late 1860s, St. Mary's Academy opened there, and in 1861, offered courses in English, music and art, with tuition and board starting at \$200 per year.



After St. Mary's moved to a new location in the early 1900s, the buildings were used as apartments. Under the ownership of the Marshburn family, the property was included on historic home tours in the 1930s. A 1935 newspaper account did not mince words when describing it: "Battered, weather beaten, stripped of nearly all its exquisite woodwork, it challenges the attention of all lovers of early American architecture. Standing on a slight incline above the Potomac, it still boasts of a fine stairway and some arches. The loggia at the back overlooking the river is beautiful in proportion and design."

Both buildings still stand today and are private residences. The loggia is visible from Thompson's Alley.

"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.



**Office of Historic Alexandria
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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.