



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

From hogs to Hitler's advisor, Bush Hill saw it all

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Image: Bush Hill, 4800 Eisenhower Avenue, burned in 1977. Photo, Fairfax County Public Library Photographic Archive.

Alexandria merchant Josiah Watson acquired the 272-acre Bush Hill estate in 1791, and four years later documented the main house and a barn in an insurance policy. The house was described as a two-story brick structure measuring 38 feet by 33 feet with an attached brick kitchen. Bush Hill was purchased by Richard Marshall Scott in 1797, and the property would remain with descendants of the Scott-Gunnell family for the next 200 years.

Scott made significant improvements to the property including quarters for his slaves, a gardener's house, barn, ice house, blacksmith shop and other outbuildings. After Scott's death, his son and namesake lived at Bush Hill with his wife Virginia Gunnell. By 1850, their holdings included six horses, 15 oxen, and 20 slaves. Bush Hill yielded wheat, rye, corn, chickens, and hogs.

In the 1850s, railroad right-of-ways claimed part of the Bush Hill estate, first by Orange and Alexandria in 1850 and then by the Manassas Gap Railroad in 1855. During the Civil War, Union officers used Bush Hill as their headquarters, while Virginia Scott, then a widow, remained in her home.

During World War II, the federal government once again used Bush Hill for military purposes, leasing it from the Gunnell family to hold Ernst "Putzi" Hanfstaengl, Adolf Hitler's former counselor of foreign affairs, who was assisting the U.S. by providing information about Hitler.

After the war, the Bush Hill home became a private school called Holly Hill. In March 1977, vandals set fire to Bush Hill, destroying it. Though it had a Bush Hill Road address, it was located on the south side of the 4800 block of Eisenhower Avenue. Today a condominium complex occupies the site where Bush Hill once stood.



"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 Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.