



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

St. Paul's Church and a rebel reverend

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Image: St. Paul's Church, ca. 1860s. Photo, Alexandria Library Special Collections.

The congregation of St. Paul's Episcopal Church was established in 1809 and worshipped in another building before its church on South Pitt Street was erected. After acquiring lots on South Pitt between Duke and Prince streets, St. Paul's hired noted architect Benjamin Latrobe to design a new building that could accommodate its growing congregation. Masons with the Alexandria-Washington Lodge laid the cornerstone on June 21, 1817.

Builder Jeremiah Bosworth made modifications to Latrobe's design, and the architect wrote to Rev. William Wilmer to protest these changes. The church's building committee had a dispute with the builder over money and dismissed him before the church was consecrated in the spring of 1818.

Early in the Civil War, around the time this photograph was taken a minister at St. Paul's was arrested by Union troops when he omitted a prayer for the president of the United States. On February 9, 1862, at services attended by armed Union troops, Rev. Kensey J. Stewart was taken into custody and forcibly removed from the church after ignoring demands that the prayer for the president be given. The minister was soon released, but after this incident, the church was closed for the duration of the war.

In June 1862, federal authorities took over the church and converted it to a hospital. St. Paul's had a 120-bed capacity and more than 600 people were treated there by year's end. When the war ended, the church was returned to the St. Paul's vestry, which noted damage to the pews, gas fixtures, plaster, fencing and other property.

St. Paul's, an excellent example of early 19th-century Gothic Revival architecture, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985.



"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
City of Alexandria, Virginia**

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.