



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### A Changing of hands at the French-Lawler House

*Alexandria Times, February 24, 2011*

*Image: 517 S. Washington Street, mid-1970s. Photo, Alexandria Library Special Collections.*

Considered one of Alexandria's finest examples of Queen Ann architecture, the French-Lawler House at 517 South Washington bears the names of the two families who once called it home. An earlier structure at that location had been the home of bookseller George E. French, but after his death in 1890, the old home was demolished.

Around 1893, this brick residence with neoclassical detail and a wrap-around porch was erected on the same lot, and became the home of French's son Robert. A second home built just to the north on the corner of Wilkes and South Washington streets resembled the one at 517 and was the residence of another son French son. It was demolished around 1930 and a gas station was built on the site.

In 1903 the home at 517 was sold at auction to Martin Lawler, and Robert French sued him over the sale. The legal dispute was eventually resolved in favor of Lawler. A native of Ireland who became a successful merchant, Lawler had had it renovated and repainted in 1909, prompting a local paper to describe it as "one of the handsomest in the city surrounded by a pretty and well kept lawn."

He died in 1916, and one of his sons, Nicholas, an Alexandria City Council member, later assumed ownership.

The home and a carriage house in the rear remained in the Lawler family into the mid-1970s, shortly before this photograph was taken. Since then it has served as an office building, home to a variety of businesses including a real estate company in the 1980s and counseling service in the early 1990s. Its most recent renovation was completed in 2001.



*"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.*