



# Alexandria Times

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## Out of the Attic

### 510 Wolfe Street: deserted and reclaimed

*Alexandria Times, April 21, 2011*

*Image: Vowell-Smith House, 510 Wolfe Street, 1979. Photo, Alexandria Library Special Collections.*

**F**rancis L. Smith, a prominent Alexandria attorney, had this large Italianate structure built in 1854 on a lot that his wife, Sarah Vowell, had inherited. Sometimes called the Vowell-Smith House, it sits on the southeast corner of St. Asaph and Wolfe streets with the entrance on Wolfe.

The design of the house was likely based on one from the pattern book “The Model Architect” by Samuel Sloan, first published in 1852. Sloan’s design for “A Suburban Residence” and the Vowell-Smith House both have a three-part facade with a projecting central bay, as well as a shallow gable, paired brackets and on the front elevation, paired windows. The Ashton Villa in Galveston, Texas, was built in the late 1850s and appears to have also been patterned from the same design, although there is some variation to the front windows.

During the Civil War, Francis L. Smith and his family left Alexandria. The Union army seized the three-story mansion and used it for a hospital with a 100-bed capacity. This house and a second large one in the adjacent lot to the east were known as the Wolfe Street Hospital.

After the war, Smith and his family returned to their home, which remained in their family until the 1920s. In the 1930s, Harrison and Zerelda McConnell acquired 510 Wolfe St., and soon Zerelda McConnell converted some of the rooms into apartments. This photograph of the McConnell Mansion, as it was sometimes called, was taken in 1979. The McConnell family sold it in the 1980s and it remains a private home.



*“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**

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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.*