



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

Home, home on the Union's fortress

Alexandria Times, October 27, 2011

Image: Fort Ellsworth. Photo, National Archives & Records Administration..

During the first days of Alexandria's Civil War occupation, the Union established a presence on Shuter's Hill, where the Masonic temple currently stands. This location was not only desirable because of its height but because of the position above two major roads coming into Alexandria: Leesburg Pike to the north and the Little River Turnpike to the south, as well as nearby railroad lines.

The day after Col. Elmer Ellsworth was killed at the Marshall House on the corner of King and Pitt streets on May 24, 1861, work began on the fort that would be named in his honor.

Members of the Dulany family had owned the property since 1799 and although their mansion house burned down in 1842, another home had been constructed since then. Union troops took over this building and the grounds to construct Fort Ellsworth shown in this photograph taken during the Civil War.

Fort Ellsworth had four bastions, a perimeter of more than 600 yards and emplacements for 29 guns. Its armament included three 24-pounder siege guns, nine eight-inch seacoast howitzers, a 100-pounder Parrott gun and two 24-pounder Coehorn mortars. The Dulany's home was put into use as headquarters and hospital and the Army constructed other buildings including officers' quarters and two barracks. Hundreds of soldiers camped on Shuter's Hill, some not far from the Dulany family cemetery. Fort Dahlgren, a smaller earthwork battery, was constructed on Shuter's Hill, northeast of Fort Ellsworth.

After the war, the forts were dismantled and the Dulany family reclaimed their property. But evidence of Fort Ellsworth is present today with angles of its northeast bastion still visible from the observation deck of the George Washington Masonic Memorial.



"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.

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.