



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Strawberry fields, but not forever

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Image: Strawberry Hill, Duke Street and Fendall Avenue. Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.

Before the annexation of land from Fairfax County by the City of Alexandria in 1952, the area west of Quaker Lane and south of Duke Street was still largely rural, filled with farms, fine country homes and large estates. One property, Strawberry Hill, shown in this photograph, stood on a rise south of Duke Street where Fendall Avenue is now located. Taken about 1960, the photo's background documents the rapid conversion of adjacent farm fields to suburban home sites during the post-annexation period.

Architectural details suggest the gracious country house may have been built during the 1850s as a five-bay, center-hall dwelling that was

later enlarged with a three-bay extension to the south. A later Victorian addition, with a first-story bay window, was built on the rear. During the Civil War, the home was owned by David G. Watkins, who resided there for many years with his wife Elizabeth and their 15 children.

The genial Watkins, affectionately known as "Uncle Davy" to Alexandria merchants, was a butcher in his early life but at Strawberry Hill owned and operated a nearby grist mill until his death in 1887.

After the death of Elizabeth in 1900, 10 acres of Watkins' property, including the hilltop residence, was sold to Charles Branner Cockrell, a corn farmer who took over operation of the Old Dominion Mill. The home passed through several generations of the Cockrell family until 1972, when William Walter Cockrell died there and his wife Mary Chauncey Cockrell, proprietor of Strawberry Hill Antiques at the site since 1947, retired and sold the property to developers. The house was demolished about 1973 to make way for the Cameron Knoll townhomes.



"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.