



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Silver shop shined and then faded in downtown

*Alexandria Times, June 14, 2012*

Image: John Adam, Silversmith, 318 King Street. Photo, Library of Congress.

In early 19th-century Alexandria, the city's fortunes grew as international trade and construction of the nation's capital brought increasing prosperity to the region. Artisans flourished in shops along King Street and provided fine decorative and domestic art forms — such as china, furniture and silver — to a discriminating clientele.

Among the highest of the artisan trades was the silversmith, who specialized in a wide variety of unique household and personal items designed to become cherished family heirlooms. Sterling flatware plus serving pieces, ornate tea services and monogrammed trays — each was a piece of usable artwork passed on to future generations. John Adam was one of the most-sought-after Alexandria silversmiths. He held court in an elegant shop at 318 King St., just opposite of Market Square.

Though the building was constructed several years earlier, Adam occupied it from 1823 to 1848 — a period when the city's population grew rapidly. Adam also maintained a workshop to the rear of the property, in which he designed and created his beautiful pieces.

During and after the Civil War, the former silver shop became deteriorated, and a late 19th-century. Remodeling enlarged the structure as well as added Victorian ornamentation to the earlier Federal facade. But by the 1960s the building was again in forlorn condition and razed for what became the Gadsby's Arcade. A close look at the sign in the first-floor window reads: "Progress through Urban Renewal." That was a familiar slogan in American cities during the mid-20th century.

Interestingly, after demolition an archaeological survey of the site by Richard Muzzerole of the Smithsonian provided clues to Adam's occupancy. Four earthenware crucibles, used to hold metal during the melting stage, were unearthed in a brick well shaft. China merchant Robert H. Miller, whose shop stood across the street from the silversmith's workshop, advertised crucibles at least seven times between 1822 and 1847.





## **Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia**

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*“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.*