



# Alexandria Times

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## Out of the Attic

### Summering with the Washingtons – yes, those Washingtons

*Alexandria Times, July 19, 2012*

*Image: Arch Hall, Franklin Street. Photo, Library of Congress.*

One of the more interesting homes built in early 19th-century Alexandria was Arch Hall on the north side of Franklin Street between South Alfred and Columbus. The one-story, five-bay dwelling with a gabled pediment over the central doorway was constructed around 1816 in the classic revival style espoused by Thomas Jefferson. The house was undoubtedly named for the huge arched fanlight, in a sunburst pattern, that adorned the double doors and sidelights. The home stood on a large lot, surrounded by an ornate picket fence, mature trees and formal landscaping.

Arch Hall was built as the winter home of Major Lawrence Lewis, nephew of George Washington, and his wife Eleanor “Nelly” Parke Custis, the granddaughter of Martha Washington. The two had met in 1797 at Mount Vernon after Lewis became personal secretary to the nation’s first president. Nelly, having been informally adopted by the Washingtons on the death of her parents, had become a sort of social director of the estate, entertaining the many guests to the property.

Lawrence and Nelly married in 1799 and continued to live at Mount Vernon until they built the magnificent Woodlawn Plantation on 2,000 adjacent acres that the Washingtons presented as a wedding gift. Although the architect of Arch Hall is unknown, the classical fenestration, large windows and central rooftop pediment are remarkably similar to the west façade of Woodlawn, which was designed by the physician and architect William Thornton. Thornton also designed the original United States Capitol.

In 1830 the Lewis family left Woodlawn and built a new home in Clarke County, Va., but they retained the small winter home in Alexandria. At his death in 1839, Lawrence left Arch Hall to his brother Robert’s widow and four children. Although recognized as having historical and architectural significance by the 1940’s, the property was somehow left out of the Old and Historic Alexandria District designated in 1946, and was demolished in 1950.



*“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.*