



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

The parkway that never was

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Image: Souvenir Virginia Tercentennial brochure. Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.

The idea for the George Washington Memorial Parkway, a federal roadway built in the early 1930s to honor the 200th birthday of the nation's first president, originated decades earlier in Alexandria. Local businessman and real estate developer M.B. Harlow, who served as Alexandria treasurer for several years, conceptualized the parkway. He was also secretary of the Washington Monuments Association in the early 1900s.

Nearly 30 years before the parkway was built, Harlow proposed a 17-mile roadway to connect the U.S. Capitol with George Washington's Mount Vernon estate, passing Arlington, Alexandria and on through Fairfax County. The 250-foot wide divided boulevard was tentatively named Mount Vernon Avenue.

South of Alexandria, sections of the new roadway were to be dedicated to the states of the American Union, with permanent buildings representing each state lining a segment of the roadway. Each building would feature information on that state's products, industries, topography, heroes and monuments and would be designed to represent the state's contemporary building style. Harlow described the concept as "a combination between Westminster Abbey and the Appian Way." The project was quickly supported for its patriotic significance, inter-modal transportation amenities and strategic military importance.

A view of the proposed roadway can be seen in this photograph, which served also as the cover of a commemorative brochure honoring the 300th anniversary of Virginia in 1907. Starting at the U. S. Capitol in the upper left-hand corner, the proposed roadway slices on a diagonal across the cover and through Alexandria to Mount Vernon at the lower right.



"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.