



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Funerals, jockeys, horses and George Washington

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Image: The Alexandria Jockey Club, 815 Franklin Street. Photo, Library of Congress.

Few might recognize it, but among the hidden treasures of Alexandria is a section of 815 Franklin St., home of the family-owned Greene Funeral Home since 1959.

Amazingly, the center portion of what appears to be a plain, utilitarian 1950s building is actually a much earlier structure once used as the Alexandria Jockey Club. The club, organized in the latter half of the 18th century, sponsored races for the finest horses in the Old Dominion and attracted competitors from as far away as Maryland and the Tidewater. Jockey Club members were among the Northern Virginia gentry, including the Carlyles, who brought blooded horses to Alexandria as early as 1762, and George Washington, who acted as the club's steward.



In the early years, the club used Gadsby's Tavern to organize races, socialize, share news or leave mail for the next outbound ship. After the races, probably held in an open area northwest of town, members would return to Gadsby's and enjoy a meal together, with entertainment provided by stage players or a troupe of jugglers and tumblers.

John Gill, who bought the property in 1794, probably built the structure seen in this 1937 photograph. Soon after, horse races were likely held on a racetrack erected behind the clubhouse. Although the club catered only to men, women and children loved watching the races from the sides of the track.

Beginning about 1803, the club went through a quick succession of owners, including Washington's physician, Elisha C. Dick, Robert Jamesson and Dr. Frederick May. In 1817, a year after horse racing and cock fighting were banned from the city, James H. Hooe bought the structure for \$7,000.

"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.