



# Alexandria Times

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## Out of the Attic

### Old Town fountain didn't hold water with residents

*Alexandria Times, October 11, 2012*

*Image: Fountain, Cameron and N. Royal Streets. Photo, Library of Congress.*

**T**ucked away in a small courtyard alongside Gadsby's Tavern, at 134 N. Royal St., rests the Alexandria Memorial Drinking Fountain — one of the city's most interesting but largely overlooked civic artifacts.

When it was dedicated in May 1912, the beautiful bronze-and-iron piece served not only as a public ornament and work of art, but also provided a much-needed function that was cause for great celebration and fanfare in the city.

The story of the Alexandria Memorial Drinking Fountain began in 1908 with the discovery of four cannons buried along The Strand between King and Prince streets. Residents speculated whether the cannons dated from the mid-18th century, left behind by Gen. Edward Braddock on his 1755 march to the Monongahela, or the War of 1812, when the city surrendered to British forces sailing up the Potomac in August 1814.

Ultimately, the cannons found their way into the custody of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The group decided to fashion one of the artillery pieces into a much-needed drinking fountain with the hopes of erecting it near the Alexandria Market.

Interestingly, the design and fabrication of the fountain fell to a fashionable Philadelphia jeweler, J.E. Caldwell and Co. In the final design selected, seen in this sketch, the cannon supports four water bowls fed by spouting dolphins: the top for birds, the middle two for humans, and a lower trough for horses and livestock.

The need for such a fountain in early 20th century Alexandria had become quite acute. After the introduction of public water in 1852, long-used, street-corner hand-pumps gradually disappeared. By 1910, Market Square was devoid of an outside water source.

The new fountain was installed at the corner of Cameron and North Royal streets but was soon declared a public nuisance by neighbors, motorists and officials with the city's recently created health department. It was relocated after several accidents. In 1967, it was moved again, this time permanently.



*“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.*