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Out of the Attic

Love blossoms on Oronoco street

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Image: 607 Oronoco Street. Photo, Library of Congress.

The elegant home at 607 Oronoco St., one of a pair built by John Potts in 1795, was sold to Col. William Fitzhugh in 1799. Fitzhugh previously resided at Chatham Manor, near Fredericksburg, which he sold after the Revolutionary War. He also lived at Ravensworth, developed north of Springfield about 1796, which he used as a country home after he purchased the Oronoco Street property.

It is said that Fitzhugh's Alexandria home was the last place George Washington dined as a guest. On November 17, 1799, Washington came to church in town and afterward was invited to share a meal with his longtime friend and comrade. Several weeks later the nation's first president lay dead at Mount Vernon following a brief battle with illness.

The house at 607 Oronoco St. also has interesting ties to Arlington, the estate George Washington Parke Custis built on the hills north of Alexandria in 1802. Fitzhugh's daughter, Mary Lee, married Custis on July 7, 1804, and left Oronoco Street for the new mansion, which remained unfinished. In 1808, Mary Anna Randolph Custis was born, the couple's only child to survive to adulthood.

That same year Fitzhugh died and the Oronoco Street house passed to his son, William Henry Fitzhugh, who rented it out. By 1818, Mrs. Henry Lee, the widow of "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, a cavalry officer in the Continental Army, came to live at the house with her 11-year-old son, Robert Edward Lee.

Lee was a cousin to Mary Lee Custis and the families were very close, often visiting each other at their respective homes. A deep love blossomed between Robert and Mary Anna, and the two were married at Arlington House in 1831. Years after the Civil War, the Oronoco Street house would become immortalized as the Robert E. Lee Boyhood Home.



"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.



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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.