



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

The Old Club served up fine dining in a city hungry for choices

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Image: The Old Club, 555 S. Washington St. Office of Historic Alexandria.

Alexandria's restaurant scene is an epicurean's dream, so it is hard to imagine that dining options in the mid-20th century were few and far between.

Aside from small luncheonettes and cafes near City Hall, quick, chain restaurants like Hot Shoppes and Howard Johnson's, and large banquet facilities like the George Mason Hotel, there were limited options for a restive meal in a high-quality environment. Restrictive liquor laws and a focus on feeding government workers, shoppers and tourists left residents little choice in their search for a higher standard of dining options.



One exception was The Old Club restaurant, located at 555 S. Washington St., which featured an afternoon teahouse and boasted fine dining served in an authentic colonial atmosphere by night. Legend has it that the building was named for its original 18th-century use as a social club, of which George Washington was a member.

The two-story building with exterior end chimneys and a front portico supported by six square columns was said to have been moved from its early location at Broomilawn Point to the corner of Gibbon Street in the late 19th century. However, this fact, like so much of the building's history and original purpose, has never been fully documented.

Yet Broomilawn Point, located at the convergence of the Potomac River and Great Hunting Creek, was a perfect site for recreation and social gatherings. Now the site of the Hunting Point apartment towers and Woodrow Wilson Bridge approach, the site was for decades routinely used as an unofficial passive recreation and picnic ground by city residents. Laura Lee, who served foods in the Virginia style with an emphasis on Southern favorites, operated The Old Club for many years. The building accommodated up to 250 guests in its dining rooms and was one of the first buildings in Alexandria to be fully air-conditioned.

The building was recently restored for its new use as the General Washington Club condominiums.

"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



**Office of Historic Alexandria
City of Alexandria, Virginia**

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.