



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

After devastating fire, Alexandria's Masons rebuild in grand fashion

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Image: Calvin Coolidge at dedication ceremony, 1923. Library of Congress.

In 1752, a 20-year-old George Washington was initiated as an entered apprentice of the newly formed Fredericksburg Masonic Lodge, created under a dispensation from the Provincial Grand Lodge of the Colony of Massachusetts.

More than three decades later, a lodge was formed in Alexandria and Washington was made an honorary member.

In 1788, the lodge received a charter from the Grand Lodge of Virginia as Alexandria Lodge No. 22, and Washington agreed to be its charter master. When he became president a year later, he still was serving as master of the Alexandria Lodge.

When Washington died in December 1799, the lodge was renamed Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 by the Grand Lodge of Virginia. The lodge soon became the recipient of a great many artifacts associated with the first president and his family. The pieces were put on display in the lodge rooms at City Hall.

But tragedy struck in 1871. A major fire destroyed much of City Hall, including many of the donated items. Lodge officials quickly recognized the need to construct a new, fireproof facility. Charles H. Callahan, senior warden of the Alexandria-Washington Lodge of Masons, purchased several lots atop what was historically called "Shuter's Hill" in 1909. It was named either for an early Alexandrian with the last name of Shuter or for "Shooter's Hill" in London.

Callahan presented the site as a home for a new hall, and — on what would have been Washington's 178th birthday — grand masters throughout the country were asked to assemble in Alexandria to consider a new association to construct a monumental memorial to Washington, the Mason, in his hometown.

The proposal garnered enthusiastic support, and fundraising began soon after. Former President Calvin Coolidge laid the cornerstone of the new building November 1, 1923, as recorded in this photograph. Chief Justice William H. Taft, Gov. Lee Tinkle and scores of other dignitaries attended the dedication ceremony, witnessed by a crowd of thousands. In next week's column, we will continue to document the rise of the iconic memorial.



"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.



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

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.