



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

Alexandria's tribute to George Washington takes shape

Alexandria Times, June 6, 2013

Image: Building the George Washington Masonic National Memorial, 1923. Library of Congress.

After laying the cornerstone in November 1923, construction on the George Washington Masonic National Memorial proceeded slowly. To ensure that climatic conditions were acceptable — anticipating the inevitable freezing and thaw that is routine in Alexandria — the massive building project stopped each winter and resumed the following spring.

By 1925, as seen in this photograph taken around that time, construction on the second-floor memorial hall had begun and preparations were made to begin erection of the tower above.

Sixteen marble columns were installed to support the auditorium roof. Once they were set up, a massive, five-story jack arch was

constructed above the structure to raise it skyward. The jack arch was held in place by an extensive system of guide wires and structural supports put in across the site.

By 1927 the lower roof covering the lower floors of the structure had been completed of poured concrete and was believed to be the largest concrete roof ever constructed. The scale and enormity of the project overwhelmed Alexandrians: Massive amounts of marble, stone, concrete and rebar were delivered daily to Alexandria Union Station.

Building materials for the structure were delivered from across the United States, apparently aided by cooperation from the Southern Railway System, as promoted on the sign announcing construction of the memorial on the lower-left side of the photo. Interestingly, the sign highlights the verticality of what would become Alexandria's tallest structure at the time, with the image of the building's tower projecting well above the rectangular, two-dimensional limits of the billboard.

While construction of the tower proceeded in the late 1920s, fabrication of interior artistic elements, exterior terracing and landscaping continued as well. Although donations to the project kept pace with expenses, national fundraising continued throughout the nearly 10-year period of development.

In next week's column, the project is completed just in time for George Washington's 200th birthday.





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

"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.