



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Towering ode to first president finally completed

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Image: Dedication of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial, 1932. Library of Congress

By early 1931, the exterior construction of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial was largely complete, and work turned to interior spaces.

Though the advent of the Great Depression was taxing the nation, the massive building project in Alexandria continued without delay. Donations poured in from Masonic lodges throughout the country.

The lack of major building projects in the region allowed for the purchase of supplies and hiring of additional skilled craftsmen at costs greatly reduced from the 1920s. Amazingly, throughout the building's construction period, no loan or debt was ever incurred.

The 200th anniversary of George Washington's birth was to be celebrated in 1932. The George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association initially planned to dedicate the building on his actual birthday: February 22. But because of the many ceremonies planned on that day in the nation's capital — as well as across America — organizers decided to delay the dedication until mid-May, which also allowed for more time to prepare the site and building for public access.

Other projects in Alexandria, such as completion of the George Washington Memorial Highway that same year, supported the view that it was the anniversary year — rather than the actual birth date — that was more significant for recognizing the legacy of the nation's first president.

Finally, on May 12, 1932, the memorial atop Shooter's Hill was ready for dedication. Thousands of participants from across the globe came to Alexandria for the ceremony, many sleeping in railroad cars because of lack of accommodations.

Unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate with planners. A heavy, cold rain poured down on the city. Although a two-hour parade on King Street proceeded — as seen in this photograph — after the arrival of former President Herbert Hoover, the rain became so heavy that the ceremony was moved indoors to the barely finished auditorium.

Though uncomfortable, the weather did not dampen spirits. The three-decade dream of building a proper, neoclassical memorial to Alexandria's favorite son could be proudly viewed from miles away.





**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.