



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

From paperboy to politician

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Image: Caton House, 111 South Fairfax St. Library of Congress

The handsome late-Victorian residence in this photograph — pictured a year before it was demolished for an urban renewal project in 1969 — was once the home of James Randall Caton, one of Alexandria's most prominent lawyers in the early 20th century.

The two-bay, brick house, with decorative pressed brick ornament and cornice, was located at 111 S. Fairfax St. It was built around 1893 after Caton and a business partner acquired the lot from Jeanette Bernheimer for \$1,200. Caton was born in Centreville in 1851 and moved to Alexandria several years later. During the Civil War, he worked as a paperboy for the *Alexandria Gazette*, whose editor, Edgar Snowden, supported the Confederate cause.

As a young, little-noticed lad, Caton easily slipped through established Union lines and put the paper in the hands of Confederate soldiers eager to learn of the latest news and events in the city. Publication of the paper was abruptly halted in October 1864. After members of "Mosby's Rangers" raided Union trains, Snowden was forced to serve as a hostage on such trains in the belief that Southern troops would not want him harmed.

After the war, Caton was educated at St. John's Military Academy in Alexandria and later graduated from the National University of Washington, allowing him to begin the practice of law in 1880. A lifelong member and one-time vice president of the American Bar Association, he became a dean of the Alexandria Bar Association and a charter member of the Virginia Bar. He also served as Alexandria's deputy treasurer and represented the Port City in the Virginia Legislature from 1901 until 1912.

In his later years, Caton served on the Alexandria City Council, and it was through his initiative that the city manager form of government was ultimately adopted in 1921. He died in 1935, at age 84, after a brief illness.



"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.