



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

City's first mayor considered Washington a close friend

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Image: Robert Townsend Hooe House. Library of Congress.

This early Georgian-era building, built about 1780 at the intersection of Prince and South Water (now Lee) streets, was the home of Col. Robert Townsend Hooe, a wheat and flour “merchant prince.”

Hooe arrived in Alexandria around the time of the Revolutionary War. A provider of grain stuffs to the Continental Army, he used at least part of this building for his business interests. He partnered in several commercial enterprises in the city, including Hooe, Stone and Co. as well as Jennifer and Hooe.

Also a successful real estate investor, Hooe owned large wharfs and warehouses along Union Street as well as other holdings in the new town. In 1780, he became Alexandria's first mayor.

As one of Alexandria's most prestigious residents, Hooe used his elegant home for entertaining prosperous merchants and landed gentry in 18th-century Alexandria. (The woodwork and paneling in the second-floor drawing room was so elegant and unusual that a portion of it was removed and reinstalled at the St. Louis Art Museum during the 20th century).

Hooe also counted George Washington as a close friend and confidant. “Dined at Col. Hooe's” was a frequent entry in the former president's diary. It is believed that Washington's relationship with Mayor Hooe resulted in the town's designation as a collection point for Virginia's quota of war supplies.

In 1811, the imposing Hooe residence was acquired by the Farmer's Bank of Alexandria, which merged with the Exchange Bank of Alexandria in 1848. Although closed at the start of the Civil War, a newly formed banking house reopened at this location in late 1864 and lasted until 1910, when the First National Bank relocated to a new building at 500 King St.

Originally, the entryways to the Hooe residence and business were set back well away from Prince Street. But this photograph, taken about 1933, shows three additional entrances cut into the building nearer to the street corner.

Except for the lack of dormers — and one additional bay along Prince Street — the three-and-a-half story building is remarkably similar to another row-end house, built by John Gordon in the late 1790s. That building still stands on the northeast corner of North Washington and King streets.





**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.