



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

How a bank building became a hotel and Civil War hospital

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Image: Mansion House during the Civil War. Library of Congress.

The Bank of Alexandria was founded in 1792 and spent fourteen years in the old Duvall's Tavern building at 305 Cameron St. In 1807, the bank moved to a new building at the corner of Cameron and North Fairfax streets — at the time the intersection of the Port City's two primary roadways.

A year after construction, Capt. Henry Massie apparently referred to the stateliness of the new structure in a description of Alexandria's appearance: "The buildings are chiefly of brick, some of them very stately and elegant. The banks are kept in houses quite magnificent."

Unfortunately, the bank failed during the Panic of 1834, and soon after, Robert Mills considered converting the building into a federal courthouse for Alexandria, when the city was still within the District of Columbia. However, this idea was ultimately rejected, and a new, larger building was constructed several blocks from City Hall, at Queen and North Columbus streets, for that purpose.

The bank building sat empty for some time until James Green purchased it in 1848, a year after Alexandria was retroceded to Virginia.

Agreeing with other residents that the city would prosper economically after the retrocession, Green incorporated the structure within a much larger hostelry he built southward along North Fairfax Street, called Green's Mansion House Hotel. This new hostelry was constructed directly in front of the early home of John Carlyle, which remained hidden and neglected for more than 120 years.

During the Civil War, the mansion house was converted into a [hospital for wounded Union soldiers](#), who were often cared for on the sidewalks surrounding the building until room could be found inside. This photograph shows the mansion house during the war, with the original bank building to the left, adjacent to the Cameron Street stockade. After the war, the structure was converted back into a hotel.

Acquired by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority in the 1970s, the 1848 addition was demolished as part of the Carlyle House restoration, and the 1807 bank building was restored to its original appearance. The bank building is believed to be the second oldest bank building built specifically for that purpose that survives in the United States.



"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.



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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.