



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Unique example of architecture sacrificed for urban renewal

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Image: 312 King Street, 1960s. Library of Congress.

The charming building seen here — in a mid-1960s photograph — was situated in a row of architecturally interesting buildings along the 300 block of King St. that were demolished as part of [urban renewal](#) around 1968.

Located at 312 King St., the structure, complete with two small stores and a dwelling above, was built by William Harper soon after he acquired the property in 1836. At the time, the parcel already included a small structure to the rear of the lot.

The properties to the east and west were transitioning rapidly from one-family residential dwellings to more intense commercial uses — often with housing above — in the rapidly growing city. Harper already was well known as a successful physician and druggist in Alexandria, having maintained offices on nearby South Fairfax Street for several years.

By the time of Harper's death in October 1852, the shops of stationer C.C. Berry and tobacconist A.D. Collinsworth occupied this structure. In February 1853, the property — described as “a certain tenement and lot of ground” — was transferred by Harper's heirs to local investor Isaac Buckingham, who sold the east side of the property to Collinsworth the following day.

Buckingham sold the west side to Berry at a substantially higher price about a year later. Berry held on to his portion of the property until his death in 1891.

The building's architecture served as a high-quality addition to Alexandria's primary commercial thoroughfare in the mid-19th century. Although only two stories high, the brick building was adorned with prominent ornamental woodwork, defined by an elaborately bracketed and denticulated gabled cornice.

Two projecting front shop window bays framed the central entryway. A pedimented cornice, supported by brackets and distinctive wood drapery, unified the first-floor details. The elongated, peaked windows on the second story were especially striking, with bracketed lintels above.

In the late 1950s, city officials struggled with controversial recommendations on how to revitalize King Street's declining economic importance. The commercial thoroughfare was competing with large-scale suburban development projects, offering easy access by automobile.

The loss of this structure and many others that surrounded it was the unfortunate cost of a plan that ultimately did modernize and help restore economic vibrancy to the city's downtown core.



“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.