



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

The house that George didn't build

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Image: *Washington's Townhouse. Library of Congress.*

Originally built by former President George Washington, the small house at 508 Cameron St. still pays homage to its 18th-century heritage — down to the last detail. The work is good enough that few realize the one-and-a-half-story, dormered townhouse is actually Alexandria's only 20th-century architectural replica of a historic building, rebuilt on its original site as a symbol of the revitalization of the area now called Old Town.

Washington bought one of the original town lots, known as No. 118, soon after Alexandria's founding and built a house on the property in 1765. He stayed at the residence when he was held up in Alexandria — then an hours-long horseback ride from his Mount Vernon home — and enjoyed meals and conversation at nearby taverns.

Often, he let friends and family members use the house for temporary living arrangements. After the general's death in 1799, it remained in the Washington family and eventually passed to Martha Washington's nephew, who ultimately sold it.

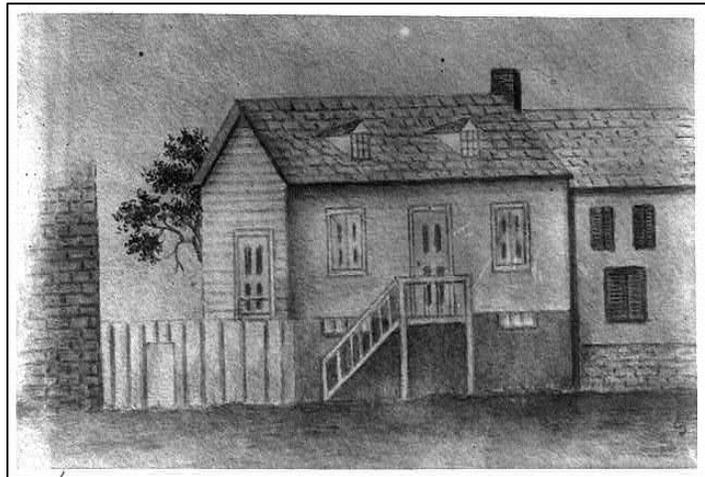
But by the mid-1850s, the long-neglected dwelling was in such poor condition that it was demolished and replaced by a garden. As seen here, neighbor Mary Jane Stewart penned a rough drawing and written description of the forlorn landmark — “for posterity” — and kept it among her prized possessions.

Nearly a century later, Stewart's drawing and other records found by Mount Vernon estate curators gave Deering Davis, a Washington architect, enough information to prepare drawings for a rebuilt house.

It was not until 1960 that work began, through the efforts of Richard Barrett Lowe and his wife, Emmy Lou. Known locally as Barry, Richard Lowe was the well-respected governor of Guam from 1956 to '59, appointed to the post by President Dwight Eisenhower. He retired to Alexandria with a desire to restore historic homes in the city.

The couple's detailed research and demand for high-quality craftsmanship resulted in a restoration project that rivaled those in Colonial Williamsburg. Unfortunately, their contributions to Alexandria's architectural heritage ended all too soon.

Richard Lowe died in 1962.





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

The stern plaster bust of “GW” now ensconced in the first-floor window — and lovingly clothed for special holidays and events — reminds us daily of those who built, and rebuilt, our great city.

“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.