



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### What happened to one of Washington's watering holes?

*Alexandria Times*, February 17, 2014

Image: Market Square, 1960s. Library of Congress.

The public open space today known as Market Square was a jumble of buildings in the 19th and early 20th centuries and bisected by two alleyways.

Sharpskin Alley connected North Fairfax and Royal streets, parallel to the south facing archways of Alexandria City Hall. Market Alley (also known as Shinbone Alley) pierced the center of the block from King Street northward, ending at the market stalls of City Hall. On the southeast corner of the two alleys was lot 48, first acquired in the 1760s by Richard Arell, who ran a tavern and other businesses on the property until 1774.

Historians are unsure whether the building seen in this 1960s-era photograph — taken through one of City Hall's archways — was the actual tavern building or whether the tavern was operated out of one of the other buildings constructed by Arell on the same lot. However, the large size and construction suggests that this structure always was used for a major purpose.

The building appears to have been built about 1800 in an unusual style known as the “flounder,” in which the end-wall, half-gable profile resembled that of the narrow fish. Soon after construction, the building was enlarged as a “double-flounder,” with an identical addition added to the south side. The faint line descending from the gable peak marks the division between each section.

From 1903 to 1919, the building was well known as Zimmerman's Oyster House and later became part of the Worth Hulfish and Sons Hardware complex. In the early 1960s, officials weighed demolishing the building to create the fountain and open plaza at Market Square as part of an urban renewal project.

But the idea quickly became controversial. Preservationists argued that the site's association with a tavern where George Washington had dined on at least 16 occasions — and where, in 1774, he chaired a committee that adopted the Fairfax Resolves, which later was incorporated into the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution — warranted protection.

Unfortunately, the precise location of the tavern within this structure could never be fully documented, and demolition proceeded on schedule. Later, documents were discovered that suggested the Arell's tavern building actually was located in a nearby structure that vanished by 1811.





## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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*“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.*