



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### A Building Where a President and Chief Justice Once Trod

*Alexandria Times, May 22, 2014*

Image: 200 N. Fairfax Street, ca. 1940. Photo, Library of Congress.

The large, three-story L-shaped building at 200 North Fairfax St., seen in this photograph from approximately 1940, is one of the earliest structures in Alexandria. An Historic American Buildings Survey report, prepared by Thomas Waterman in 1944, claims the building was assembled by combining two adjacent townhouses from the mid-18th century into one building in about 1800.

Meanwhile, a plaque on the building appears to indicate a construction date of 1788.

However, we now believe that construction of the building actually began in the mid-1770s by John Dalton and finished after his death in 1777 by his son-in-law, Thomas Herbert, for lease as a tavern. Cameron and Fairfax streets were the two primary streets in colonial Alexandria, and this corner almost certainly would have been at the most important intersection in Northern Virginia. The property included a large carriage house and stables for 28 horses in the rear.

As a tavern, the building was operated by several keepers over the years under different names including the Globe, the Bunch of Grapes and Abert's Tavern. But it was between 1788 and 1792, when operated by John Wise — who also built the buildings known today as Gadsby's Tavern and the Lloyd House — that perhaps the largest public reception of its time was held in the city, settled just 40 years earlier.

On April 16 1789, Wise's Tavern hosted Alexandria's favorite son, George Washington, to bid him farewell as he left Virginia on the way to his inauguration as America's first president in New York City. The building was filled with well-wishers, while a huge crowd of townspeople remained outside on the sidewalks surrounding the structure. An address, written by Col. Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee, was provided by Mayor Dennis Ramsay. Washington's eloquent response was delivered to an audience who listened in complete silence despite it being longer than Ramsay's speech. In the end, Washington's heartfelt farewell to his fellow Alexandrians moved virtually all who heard it to tears.

In 1792, Fairfax Street was re-graded and lowered to provide a more gradual slope to the growing wharves along the Potomac River, raising the tavern's facades and stone water table as well as exposing





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the subterranean foundation, leaving one Cameron Street doorway “high and dry” for years. Vestiges of these features can still be noted by the careful eye.

In the ensuing years, the building continued to be a hub for Alexandria’s major public events and festivities. In 1798, a dinner was hosted to honor John Marshall, who became Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. By the early 19th century, Herbert converted the building into two residences, keeping the corner one for himself and the other for his son Noblett. In 1916, the building was converted again into the Anne Lee Memorial Home for elderly women.

At that time, the steep steps on Fairfax Street and the plain entryway were replaced by a large porch and entry fenestration in the Colonial Revival Style.

*“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.*