



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

Taking inventory of Market Square

Alexandria Times, November 13, 2014

Image: Market Square, from 1919 aerial photograph. Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.

This detail from a much larger aerial photo of downtown

Alexandria, taken in 1919, shows the block framed by Cameron, Royal, Fairfax and King streets. To the left of center is the formidable City Hall, then fronting Cameron Street, with its steepled clock tower originally designed by Benjamin Latrobe.



Although the earlier City Hall was destroyed in a disastrous fire in 1870, the tower largely survived, and the government complex was rebuilt the following year. It was designed by Adolf Cluss, a German-born architect, who immigrated to Washington in 1848, after the failure of the German revolutionary movement that year. Before coming to the United States, Cluss was an avowed Communist and close friend of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Once in America, he established himself as an important designer of public buildings and schools in the national capital region.

Directly across the street from the tower, the rear of Gadsby's Tavern on North Royal Street can be seen at the left end of the group of buildings along the lower edge of the photo. On the east side of City Hall, along the top edge, is the four-story Mansion House Hotel, later known as the Braddock House, built in 1845 by James Green, directly in front of the old Carlyle homestead. At the south end of the same block is a group of buildings that still survive, including the gambrel-roofed Ramsay House that now serves as the city's Visitor Center.

The area outlined in red is the site of Market Square, laid out in the early 1750s as the public center of the city, where the sale of everything from produce to slaves took place, and where George Washington drilled the city's militia. By the time of the Civil War, Market Square largely had been developed with taverns and warehouse buildings, and after the war it filled in further with stores, restaurants, offices, and the four-story Alexandria National Bank, located at the corner of King and North Royal streets. In the direct center of the image is Sharpskin Alley, linking Royal and Fairfax streets, which intersected with Market Alley at the block's center to connect with King Street a half block to the south. On the left side of Sharpskin, within the U-shaped City Hall confines, can be seen the covered stalls of what remained of the earlier market area.



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

During Alexandria's 1960s urban renewal project, the covered stalls were replaced by an expanded City Hall, and the buildings that covered the original square were taken down and replaced by a public parking garage, topped by a public plaza and fountain.

Many residents still lament the destruction of hundreds of historic buildings to make way for the Gadsby's [Urban Renewal](#) Project. But the return of the Market Square site as a public gathering place helped to revitalize the city's downtown core and set Alexandria on a path to economic prosperity at a time when other American downtown centers were in steep decline.

"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.