



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

The Masonic influence at City Hall

Alexandria Times, June 11, 2015

Image: Masonic Lodge Room in City Hall, ca. 1920. Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.

One of the more interesting elements associated with the rebuilding of the Alexandria City hall after the disastrous fire of 1871 was the flexibility incorporated into the design to accommodate uses not normally associated with government office buildings. Certainly the inclusion of vendor stalls to serve purveyors at the adjacent market place was not typical in the construction of American town halls, but these areas provided an ongoing revenue stream of rental income to the city, and sustained an essential retail element of community life.

But it is the allocation of space for the local Masonic Lodge that is perhaps most peculiar, but the special relationship within between City government and the Masons within the center of municipal governance had been maintained for decades, and many Council members were Lodge members themselves.

Interestingly, the second floor space set-aside for Masonic use in the new City Hall was planned from the outset of building design process, and the local lodge was given wide latitude in determining the improvements required to meet their needs. This included not only meeting space, but also a museum room to display an unusual collection of historical artifacts -- called "relics" by the Lodge members -- that were associated with George Washington and other important Alexandria Masons. As with the City leaders, their major concern was fire protection, as a number of items within their holdings had been destroyed in the recent conflagration.

While the architectural plan proposed by D.C. architect Adolf Cluss was quickly accepted by city council only weeks after the May 1871 fire, the lodge members were far more determined to consider all options available to them in laying out their new space. The approval for their portion of the building, directly above the main entrance on Cameron Street, was not official until April 2, 1872 when they finally approved Cluss's plans and awarded a bid to local contractor E.H. Delahay about one month later. On





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

October 15, 1872 a “topping off” ceremony was held to mark completion of the Masonic rooms, but interior decorating and furnishing took another 13 months before formal occupancy was accomplished.

The Masonic lodge occupied the space well into the 20th century, leaving City Hall only after the decade-long construction of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial was completed at the top of Shuter’s Hill. At that time all artifacts were moved to that location, where they remain on display.

Over time the beautiful space once occupied by the Masonic Lodge, seen here in a photograph from approximately 1920 taken by professional photographer Herbert A. French, was retrofitted for a variety of office uses. Today, the space is occupied by the Avery Conference Room, one of the most unadorned rooms in in the entire building. Only the Masonic symbols on the exterior trim of the room remain to trace its original function.

“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.