



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Expansion of City Hall to reflect changing uses in new century

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Image: Market Square, as seen from the arcade in City Hall, 1960s. Photo, Library of Congress, HABS/HAER.

After the completion of the 1872 City Hall designed by Adolf Cluss, few changes were made to the building over the next few decades. However, by the early 20th century, the fire department had moved out of its location at the southeast corner of the building along Fairfax Street to allow for the expansion of the adjacent police headquarters into that space, and the construction of new jail cells on the first floor. At this time, bathrooms were also added throughout the building. Gradually, market stalls within the courtyard south of the Cameron Street entrance were enclosed and subdivided into government offices for the growing city.



By the time World War II had begun, a massive influx of defense and federal government workers to the nation's capital caused a severe housing shortage in the region. To service the huge population increase in Alexandria, major alterations were needed to accommodate an increase in government services, and serious thought was given to constructing a new City Hall on St. Asaph Street. Architect Ward Brown prepared a number of plans for city leaders to evaluate including both a new center for municipal government, as well as renovations to the existing City Hall.

Ultimately due to cost considerations and the limited availability of building materials, most options were rejected or deferred, with only minor interiors renovations and a concrete boiler room added during the 1940s. In about 1945, the Masonic Lodge moved from the building to its new location atop Shuter's Hill, which allowed the former lodge space to be converted to city offices on the upper floors. In 1952, a stairway core adjacent to the Cameron Street lobby was replaced by elevators, to the design of architect Richard A. Willgoos, and major renovation and enlargement of the building was again considered.

Over the course of the next several years, Willgoos partnered with architect Dwight G. Chase to design a new addition to City Hall, filling in the old u-shaped courtyard used for the market place and reorienting the main entryway southward towards King Street. This new addition was constructed in 1961, several years before the construction of the plaza and fountain, now known as Market Square, during the urban renewal projects of the 1960s.

Before the new plaza was built, with a multi-level parking garage underneath, the City Hall façade to the south faced the crowded blocks of buildings that had once been the only public open space in the original 18th-century town. This early 1960's image looking across Sharpskin and Market Alleys, towards



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what is currently the Market Square covered stage and fountain, just captures the corner of a brick archway on the new City Hall addition. After the completion of the formal Market Square plaza, the primary entrance and address of City Hall was changed from Cameron Street to 301 King St., which had formerly been the address of the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company building that stood at the northwest corner of King and Fairfax streets.

“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.