



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

A renovated City Hall for expanding city services

Alexandria Times, July 9, 2015

Image: Alexandria City Hall, 1980s. Photo, Library of Congress.

On May 1, 1981, the City of Alexandria dedicated a new courthouse at 520 King St., prompting a massive renovation of the interior of City Hall, which included the removal of most walls, ceilings and floors that existed within the building at that time. With the relocation of the main courtrooms, judicial chambers, clerk offices, jury rooms, holding cells and witness rooms, a huge amount of space was made available for growing city departments, now occupied by planning and zoning and the human resources departments. To accommodate such a massive renovation within the 1872 portion of the building, city offices were temporarily condensed into the 1961 addition built within the former market area.



The designs for the renovation project were prepared by Neer and Graef Architects Group Practice and Associates Architects of Alexandria. The new plans developed a perimeter loop through and around each floor of the combined buildings, eliminating the hallway dead-ends that had previously isolated departments from one another. Access was further enhanced by the installation of new stairways, elevators and corridors at strategic locations that enhanced vertical access at both the edges and center of the structure.

The second floor was extended southward between the former northwest and southeast pavilions laid out 109 years earlier by architect Adolf Cluss, and this expansion connected seamlessly to the new addition. On the third level a mezzanine was added on the north side to make additional space for city offices, while still retaining the distinctive windows, brick walls and archways from the structure's original exterior facades. Throughout the renovated building, office spaces were intentionally left open to provide flexibility of use and function.

On the first floor, steel reinforcement allowed for the elimination of most original cast iron columns, except those that were allowed to remain for preservation purposes in the Cameron Street lobby. A recessed vestibule was then added to the Cameron Street entryway to provide an energy efficient weather break. Although this reduced the size of Cluss' original building lobby, a new, larger one constructed on the Market Square side that was connected by a wide corridor enhanced the revised City Hall address of 301 King St. and provided open space for public receptions and temporary exhibits. The formal entrance of City Hall, at the new address, is seen here in this 1980s view of the Market Square facade.



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

After more than 260 years, through multiple buildings and renovations, Alexandria's seat of government still serves city residents from the same location, immediately adjacent to what has long been the public square for social discourse and events.

But throughout its history, discussions have always been held on how best to serve the municipal needs of the people of Alexandria, either through construction of a new building, major renovation or a move to a new location. As the city continues to grow and special needs change due to evolving government services, such a debate is likely to continue for many years ahead.

"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.