



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

From grand old homestead to local bank

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Image: 700 Duke Street, ca. 1960. Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.

The handsome federal-style building located at 700 Duke St. was built as the private residence of Jonathan Janney in 1820, a descendant of an early Alexandria family whose name still features prominently in the city. Janney, a local importer and hardware merchant, also dabbled in local real estate speculation in the early 19th century, allowing him to increase his fortune and build a refined home on what was then the outskirts of town just west of Washington Street, the widest street planned for the city when it was laid out in 1749.

The two-and-a-half-story brick house is notable for its turned iron entry steps and balustrade, the rooftop “Widows Walk,” which offered fine views of the Potomac River to the east, and the high point of Shuter’s Hill to the west. The house was built in a symmetrical “half-house” design, with windows, dormers, and the two interior end chimneys carefully aligned.

This layout allowed for a future addition to the west, which, if needed, would have provided a perfect balance of architectural symmetry to the structure. However, by the time that addition was necessary, styles had changed and a recessed, flat roofed addition with taller arched windows was chosen. In the mid-1830s Janney became seriously ill with a terminal disease, and he was cared for at the house for several years until his death. His will, prepared in March 1838, specified that upon his demise, all his real estate holdings were to be sold, with any remaining balance provided to his wife.

But he sadly opined that he was filled with “great fear that there will be nothing as my losses and expenses arising in part from my long confinement from disease have been heavy.” He died soon after and in 1839, true to his instructions, the house and his other properties were sold. This photograph, taken around 1960, shows the house after it had been converted into a guest house for overnight lodgers called “The Cornwall Arms.” A rear basement, accessed further south on Washington Street under a striped awning was further converted into commercial retail space for a maternity store called “Kay’s Stork Shop.”

A decade later, the structure received a major exterior restoration and was converted into a bank. The building is still one of Alexandria’s best examples of the adaptive reuse of an historic structure, and is a primary visual asset along the section of the George Washington Memorial Parkway that passes through Old Town.





**Office of Historic Alexandria
City of Alexandria, Virginia**

“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.