



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

The south of the city starts to grow

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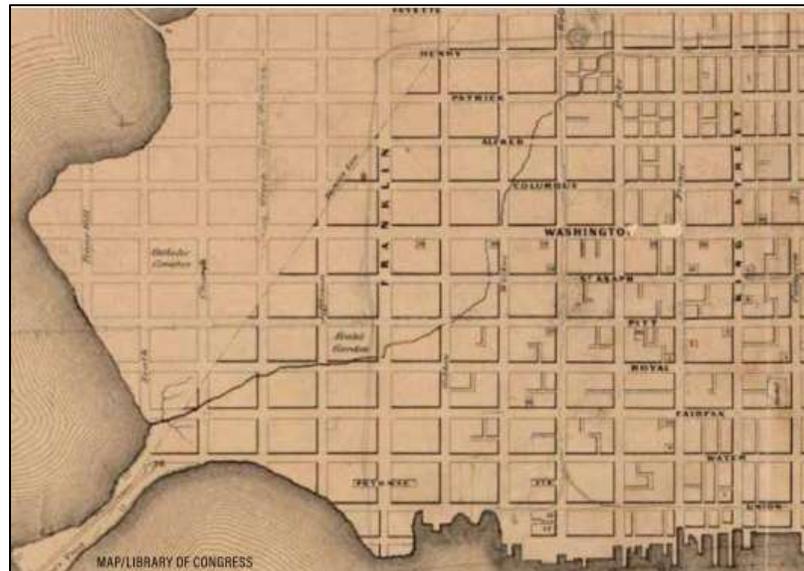
Image: Maskell C. Ewing map of Alexandria, 1845. Library of Congress.

This section of a map prepared by Maskell C. Ewing in 1845 documents the southern half of Alexandria as it existed just a year before Congress authorized the retrocession of District of Columbia lands formerly within Virginia back to the commonwealth in 1846. This view documents Alexandria from Cameron Street on the right southward to Penny Hill Lane on the left, at what was the dead end of Washington Street at Great Hunting Creek.

The dotted D.C. border is just left of center, cutting on a diagonal across the gridded square blocks with the dark blocks within the district and faded blocks outside the boundary in what was then Fairfax County. It appears that the only major feature in this area is the old Catholic cemetery at Church and South Washington streets, site of St. Mary's Catholic Church, Virginia's first Catholic house of worship. It was established in 1795 and moved to its South Royal Street location in 1810.

On the upper left hand side near Henry Street is the causeway built across the creek in 1809 to connect to Fredericksburg and ultimately Richmond. The thin peninsula to the south is the original outline of the Jones Point shoreline, which was used at this time for a long rope walk. There is a meandering stream heading east from Henry and Duke streets, which then turns southward along Royal Street and empties into Great Hunting Creek just at the base of Jones Point.

For many years the low level of this stream and its headwaters delayed development in the southwest quadrant of Alexandria due to swampy and unstable land conditions. However, with the arrival of Contraband refugees within the following two decades, the area west of South Washington Street developed rapidly, but even with moderate fill was known as "The Bottoms" due to its geographical land level and semi-permanent wetness of the soil.





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

On the east side of South Washington Street, two other African-American neighborhoods sprang up. The “Hayti” community formed on the south side of Franklin Street, and “The Hill” on the north side. The new residents from these areas helped to form Beulah Baptist Church in 1863, the first black church formed in Alexandria after the Union occupation of the city began two years earlier at the start of the Civil War.

The careful viewer will also note a circular pencil mark at South Henry and Wolfe streets with pencil lines emanating from it which appear to indicate that at some point additions were hand drawn on this copy of the map indicating the railroad roundhouse and adjacent rail lines.

Another interesting notation on this map is the Yeate’s Gardens at Franklin Street, between South Pitt and South Royal streets. During the early 19th century, this was one of Alexandria’s primary pleasure grounds, offering space for outdoor picnics and public entertainment. A century later, this entire area would be renamed Yates Gardens, one of Alexandria’s first planned 20th century townhouse developments that promoted the revival of this city’s colonial heritage and architectural renaissance after John D. Rockefeller began his restoration of Colonial Williamsburg.

Interestingly, early news articles and photo essays of the Yates Gardens townhomes soon after their construction celebrated the new appreciation of Alexandria’s heritage by the young families moving in to the new community, right down to the modest reproduction furniture and accessories with which they were decorated.

“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.