



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

When Alexandria had a jockey club

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Image: Jockey Club, 814 Franklin Street. Photo, Library of Congress.

By the time of Alexandria's founding in 1749, horse racing had become part of the fabric of Virginia society. In 1674, a York County tailor was fined 100 pounds of tobacco for wagering 2,000 pounds of tobacco on his mare beating his neighbor's horse in a race. The court declared "it being contrary to Law for a Labourer [sic] to make a race being a Sport only for Gentlemen." Saturday afternoons were often devoted to horse racing, with court houses, churches, or taverns the most common



venues for such entertainment. Short sprints were the most common form of racing, with a quarter-mile the preferred distance. Horses specifically bred for racing that distance became known as quarter horses, and they are still raced today in the Southwest.

Gadsby's Tavern was the headquarters of the Alexandria Jockey Club when it was founded in the second half of the 18th century. Prominent members of the club included John Carlyle, who brought horses bred for racing over from England as early as 1762, George Washington and Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick, who served as Washington's physician.

By the end of the 18th century, the members of the Alexandria Jockey Club wanted a venue and clubhouse of their own. John Gill bought property on the 800 block of Franklin St., and a new clubhouse was built on what is now 814 Franklin St.

You can see that despite the utilitarian appearance of the current structure, which has been owned by the Greene Funeral Home since 1959, the detailing of the doorway, which is part of the original structure, is very ornate.

The Alexandria Jockey Club erected a racetrack behind the clubhouse, which allowed its male members as well as non-members including women and children to view the races from the side of the track.

Alexandria banned horse racing and cock fighting within the city limits in 1816. The club sold its property to James H. Hooe for \$7,000 that same year.



**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.