



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

A fine home with a long history

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Image: 601 Duke Street, 1966. Photo, Library of Congress.

In 1949, Richard Pratt authored “A Treasury of Early American Homes,” one of the great coffee table books of the post-World War II period. Pratt traced the evolution of fine homes from New England to the Deep South, dedicating an extended chapter on Alexandria and the preservation of the once-neglected neighborhood now called Old Town.

One home in particular caught Pratt’s attention, and he described the stately dwelling at 601 Duke St. as “one of the choice examples of Early American elegance in the United States.”

The home revered by Pratt, as seen in this 1966 image, was completed at the northwest corner of Duke and St. Asaph streets in 1784 by Benjamin Dulany, who in 1799 acquired a large summer residence atop Shuter’s Hill from Ludwell Lee. Soon after, he rented the Duke Street property to several prominent Alexandria families, including Edward Stabler, who operated the Apothecary at 105-107 S. Fairfax St.

Dulany’s wife, the former Elizabeth French, was the daughter of Daniel French, who lived at “Rose Hill” in Fairfax County just off Franconia Road. French was a builder who worked closely with craftsman John Ariss and architect William Buckland, and he died while overseeing construction of the Pohick Church.

Although no direct link connecting this triumvirate to 601 Duke St. has yet been established, Mrs. Dulany’s access to her father’s architectural library, dominated by Georgian plans and woodwork, undoubtedly influenced the design of the house.

In 1810, Benjamin Dulany sold the Duke Street property to Robert Taylor, who left it to his wife upon his death in 1840. Taylor was a prominent local attorney who was also a vestryman at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, where Benjamin Latrobe was the church architect. It is suspected that Taylor may have enlisted Latrobe’s guidance in adding the pedimented front entryway and the rear hyphen with arched pilasters connecting the kitchen to the main house.

Among the many famous visitors to 601 Duke St. were Martha and George Washington, close friends of the Dulany family, and the Marquis de Lafayette, who spent a month during the fall of 1824 living directly across the street as a guest of the city. Taylor’s daughter, Rosalie, was selected from over





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100 “females in white, with blue sashes” to provide a welcoming recitation in honor of the Marquis at a reception held on the evening of October 16 that year.”

“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.