



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

World War II and Redevelopment in the west

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Image: Aerial map, Office of Historic Alexandria.

Two aerial photographs taken 12 years apart of the West End of Alexandria show the massive change that occurred in the community in the years before and after World War II.

A 1949 aerial view recently discussed in this column traced the early suburban transformation of the region, but this 1937 view of the same area provides a last glimpse of the rural nature of the area before war began.

The diagonal highway that bisects the image is the two-lane King Street, which at the time formed the border between Fairfax County to the south and Arlington County to the north. Braddock Road runs along the lower portion of the view, with a north-south route named Seminary Road, now realigned as North Quaker Lane and Radford Street, running from north to south along the right side.

In 1937, only the sliver of land to the east of that Seminary Road was included within the city limits. The two major properties of landed gentry located within this zone were Menokin, the country home of Robert E. Lee's cousin Cassius Lee, who fled to Long Island, N.Y. during the American Civil War, and Hampton, built by Alexandria founder John Carlyle in 1770. Menokin occupied the triangular property between King Street and Braddock Road and Hampton on the north side of King Street, with the manor house in the upper left corner at the western edge of a huge open field. To the west of these early plantations, populated areas dropped off dramatically, with massive virgin forests extending for miles, still intact from the days when Native Americans occupied a Necostin Indian village nearby.





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

The Hampton property was in the hands of John Carlyle by 1756, just a few years after he built a downtown manor house on North Fairfax Street that now operates as a museum. Carlyle was one of several Scottish founders of the city who dabbled in real estate on the western outskirts of the new town for seasonal respite and agricultural pursuits.

When Carlyle built a plantation on the property in 1770, he cleared a substantial portion of the land to the southeast for a stud farm. Originally the 534- acre Carlyle tract was named Torthorwald, after the castle of the same name in Dumfries, Scotland, but later it was renamed Morven by his heirs after a site in the western highlands of Northern Scotland. The estate remained in the Carlyle family for over a century.

In 1879, the estate was acquired by Hawkins Smith, who renamed the site Hampton, and whose son maintained a notable horse farm on the site until the mid-1920s. Under new ownership, the property began to be subdivided and used for other purposes. The careful viewer will note a recreational baseball diamond adjacent to the infamous King Street crossroads and the darkened slash across the upper field indicates a grass landing strip for small airplanes.

In the early summer of 1941, just four years after this image was taken, Virginia Department of Highways director Henry G. Shirley authorized construction of a new highway linking the new Pentagon office building to be built just to the north and U.S. Route 1 at Woodbridge, Va. Construction of the Shirley Highway began only three months later, and the Hampton manor house was one of the first to be demolished for the four-lane superhighway built directly through the structure's footprint.

When the first leg of the freeway opened in October 1943, the once remote lands along its right-of-way were immediately targeted for dense development. Responding to orders of President Franklin Roosevelt, Hampton's remaining 340 acres of open fields and woodlands were replaced by the 3,439-unit housing development known as Fairlington, the nation's largest housing development at the time. Within a decade almost every empty land area within this view would be developed.

"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.