



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Historic Tree located in Old Town

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Image: The Lloyd House, Courtesy Alexandria Library.

On July 1, 1832, John Lloyd purchased the house at Queen and North Washington Streets used by Quaker schoolmaster Benjamin Hallowell for the sum of \$3,450. Lloyd was the successful bidder when the property was put up for sale at an auction by the heirs of Elizabeth Hooe, who actually owned the house, but rented it for years to Hallowell.

It was a surprising turn of events, as most Alexandrians had expected the title to finally pass to the financially-pressed Hallowell with little competition. But Lloyd's dark horse entry into the auction to outbid all offers thwarted Hallowell's aspirations, and he was forced to move his school facilities to a hastily prepared complex of buildings next door, assembled from an old tobacco warehouse and the former Hoffman sugar mill.



Almost as soon as Lloyd acquired the Georgian-style dwelling that now bears his name, he embarked on an extensive program of upgrades, both inside and out. In addition to the traditional improvements of painting and decorating, Lloyd ordered new marble mantels, interior built-in shutters and a sophisticated "bell system" to alert house servants when members of his family needed assistance.

On the exterior, new brick pavers were installed on the sidewalks around the dwelling by John Hollinsbury at a cost of \$7.50 per yard. The old pavers were then reused to build a wall along the property boundary on the south side, insulating his elegant homestead from the schoolboy noise and spirited antics of Hallowell's students, who had nicknamed their new school "Brimstone Castle".

As evidenced by purchase logs now in the collections of the Alexandria Library, in 1834, Lloyd ordered twelve linden trees to be planted along North Washington Street, stretching more than half-a-block southward from Queen Street. Amazingly, recent research has confirmed that one of those early trees has survived the past 183 years at the corner of the two main thoroughfares, as seen at the center of this image taken about 1940.

Of the twelve trees planted, by 1940 only two remained and the growth of the corner tree was permanently stunted due to its northernmost placement, and constant compactions of soil from pedestrian and vehicular traffic along both streets. A carriage stop immediately adjacent to the tree, and still marked



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by the granite “stepping stone” just to the right, used to assist passengers in horse drawn vehicles, further impacted the tree’s roots.

As the decades wore on, one-by-one Lloyd’s trees succumbed to blight, disease, damage or removal for infrastructure improvements. But in reviewing photographs of Lloyd House during the 19th and 20th centuries, it was suggested the last tree at the corner, identified by species, limb placement and southern lean reaching for the sun might, in spite of its small size, just be the sole survivor of the Lloyd era landscape.

The final clue was confirmed by a gash to the tree, which had apparently occurred before the advent of photography. Before or during the Civil War, the tree was damaged at its base, resulting in a large horizontal scar still clearly visible on the Washington Street side. Close-up enlargements of the damaged area, and gradual healing of the gash evidenced over time have been compared the extant tree, and convinced local historians that they are indeed one and the same. Lloyd’s decision to add street trees in front of his property is perhaps one of the earliest civic landscaping decisions made in old Alexandria.

“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.