



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Yates Gardens design and cohesiveness were carefully planned

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The Yates Gardens townhouse complex, 1941. Photo, Theodore Horydczak, for Edward Carr.

When Edward Carr purchased the former Yeates family property to build the Yates Gardens townhouse complex in 1939, his vision was not only to increase affordable homeownership opportunities for young families in Alexandria, but also to base design and marketing decisions on the city's proud history and architectural heritage.

From the outset, Carr rejected cost-cutting proposals that would have substantially increased profit margins by not using mass produced building materials or less authentic design models. Immediately after acquiring the site, Carr directed architect Louis R. Moss to study historical examples of extant 18th Alexandria structures, and use similar design features and building supplies in the new community. Buildings such as the Lloyd House, Gadsby's Tavern, and even the Yeates family homestead itself, built at 414 Franklin St., served as models for the new community.

Moss was already a noted Washington architect known in the region for designing banks, apartment houses and commercial structures. One of his best-known buildings was the classical Chevy Chase Arcade on Connecticut Avenue. He applied his sense of authenticity to replicate Alexandria's built environment by using the community's traditional building supplies including brick, stone, slate and wood.

His keen sense of detail noted differing brick bond styles, window fenestration, cornice arrangements and staggered floor heights associated with Alexandria's past, grown out of the evolving development of the city over time. Both Moss and his patron wanted to ensure the comfort and functionality of each townhome for 20th century occupancy, so some flexibility was allowed. The size and placement of windows were determined on specific room use rather than principles of exterior symmetry or alignment.

Even the name of the community relied on this model. Concerned that new residents would hesitate in pronouncing "Yeates" correctly, Carr changed it to "Yates," spelled phonetically, with "Gardens" based on the historical usage of the property and the landscaped areas provided around each dwelling.

This image of a block of townhomes, taken for Carr by Theodore Horydczak in 1941, demonstrates not only the great care taken in the design of each individual home, but the greater





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

cohesiveness achieved in relationship to its neighbors. Each separate home clearly has a precedent in the Old Town of Alexandria, and the collective block echoed the hallowed streets of the important colonial city.

The overall sense of authenticity was so complete, that when the historic Ramsay House was threatened by neglect in the late 1940's, Yates Gardens residents suggested that the most appropriate solution was to move it from its original location on the northeast corner of North Fairfax and King Streets to their neighborhood, where it could be restored and used a community meeting center.

“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.