



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Reese led early preservation efforts

*Alexandria Times, March 15, 2018*

*Image: Postcard depicting portion of the reproduced Gadsby's Tavern ballroom woodwork. Courtesy Alexandria Library Special Collections.*

In the early 1900s, women in upper class families were known for taking up causes that they believed would benefit the common good. In Alexandria, Rebecca Ramsay Reese embodied this spirit as a prominent activist in historic preservation. While the newspapers provide only occasional glimpses into Reese's life, her efforts touched many of the historic buildings tourists are drawn to today: Gadsby's Tavern Museum, the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum, Ramsay House, Christ Church and the Old Presbyterian Meeting House.

Reese used her influence in her social circles and organizations, especially the Mount Vernon Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Alexandria Garden Club, to raise awareness and money for preservation projects around Alexandria. Her efforts allowed the American Legion Post 24, which had purchased Gadsby's Tavern just before the Great Depression, to complete the restoration of the 1792 tavern.

Not only did Reese help raise money, but she also personally oversaw the restoration effort. Reese corresponded with Milton Grigg, an architect best known for his restoration work at Colonial Williamsburg and Monticello. She was determined to accurately restore the building. She walked to the tavern from her nearby home multiple times a day to personally oversee the workmen. The postcard depicted shows a portion of the reproduced ballroom woodwork Reese meticulously oversaw.

As quoted in the Washington Evening Star newspaper, she believed "Alexandria must maintain its historic landmarks if it is to retain its character ... [and not] become a mere suburb of Washington." In the final years of her life, she advocated for permanent protections of the historic character of the city.

This resulted in the creation of the Old and Historic Alexandria District in 1946, which codified protections of historic buildings by the Board of Architectural Review. Reese, recognized as a prominent local preservationist, served on the board from 1946 until she died in 1955.



*"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.*



## **Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia**

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