



City of Alexandria  
Office of Historic Alexandria  
*Alexandria Legacies*  
**Oral History Program**



**Project Name:** *Alexandria Legacies*

**Title:** *Interview with Ethel Abramson*

**Date of Interview:** *August 10, 1981*

**Location of Interview:** *Dr. Abramson's office @ 312 S. Washington St., Alexandria.*

**Interviewer:** *Claudine Weatherford*

**Transcriber:** *Claudine Weatherford*

**Abstract:** *Ethel Abramson grew up at 711 King Street in Old Town Alexandria. Her family lived above the business her father ran from 1927 to 1947. The interview took place at her husband's office at 312 S. Washington Street. In this interview, Mrs. Abramson describes what Old Town was like when she was younger, namely who lived where, what businesses existed there, and so on.*



*Ethel and Sidney Abramson with Claudine Weatherford, 1981*

<b>Claudine Weatherford:</b>	Do you have any pictures of King Street where you lived?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	No, but they do at the Chamber of Commerce down there.
<b>CW:</b>	Good, I'll check down there.
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	I was trying to remember...now on the 700 block on King and Washington streets on the southside corner going west...on the corner was fruit and vegetable [inaudible]. That was run by Jim Constantino...
<b>Sidney Abramson:</b>	[From the back room] Constantinople!
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Constantinople. I beg your pardon. That was a fruit and vegetable stand. And he lived across the street above Carne's. And that's the one I remember when Greek royalty, when they were visiting. Would stop and visit them. A prince or a king, or somebody would stop and visit them. Now what he had to do with the royal family, I don't know.
<b>CW:</b>	So you actually saw these folks?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	The big limousine, yeah. Several times. Now next door to Constantinople was....
<b>Sidney Abramson:</b>	It was the other way around, but that's all right.
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	No, it wasn't. It was Clifton and Frank Howard Grocery Store. Heading west. 700...702, I guess they took up 702 and 704, I don't know. Then there was a Erzine Dress Shop, at 706 King Street. I remember that because when we first moved to Alexandria, we lived above that place; but you never saw such an apartment before in your life with parquet floors. You know the upstairs...most people in those days lived downtown. And it was wonderful. We used to come sit on our benches in the evening. Everybody in town knew each other, both black and white. We were all friendly, we all knew each other. But the upstairs quarters were so lovely because originally all these stores used to be homes. Now this Erzine dress shop, 706, later became a pool hall. That was also run by one of the Erzines. It was run by Morris Erzine who's now deceased. It was a dress shop in the twenties.

	There was a candy store that was in there. Sidney. Because they were Mormons. I remember their blond hair. At 706 also...they had like an ice cream...after the pool parlor there was a...I can't remember the family's name, but I remember they were Mormons. Ok, now next door to that...
<b>CW:</b>	So the dress shop was in the twenties, and the pool parlor in the thirties and forties?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Yeah, probably...next door to that was Vozeolas. Shoe shine and hat cleaning. That was at 708. And then next door to that, that's when my folks moved here in the twenties, and my father...it was the Alexandria Cleaners. Run by the Berkows—B-E-R-K-O-W. They later moved across the street to 711 King.
<b>CW:</b>	So they were at 710?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Yeah, but then they bought the building across the street, and moved over there. Next door to the Alexandria Cleaners...was a Mr. Max Needle, who had a clothing store. Now I may have this backwards.
<b>Sidney Abramson:</b>	Yeah, it was Ladd's...
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Ladd's...Ladd's was next door to that. All right...next door to the Alexandria Cleaners was Mr. Baker; he did alterations and repairs.
<b>CW:</b>	Clothing?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Yes. I'm glad you thought of that, Sidney. Then next door to him [Baker] was Max Needle, no, no, I think Ladd's was before Max Needle...Sidney?
<b>Sidney Abramson:</b>	Ok, whatever [from the back-room still].
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	I may have it backwards. All right, I think the Ladd Electric Shop--- electrical repairs and shop. Now I get very hazy after Ladd's. Because I know there was something there besides that hot dog place and Williams delicatessen.
<b>Sidney Abramson:</b>	There was a chain store...Woodward, or something...used to sell men's stuff. Woodward?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	That came later.
<b>CW:</b>	[Looking at the information from 1921 map] Remember anything about a millinery or shoe shop?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	That was later. When was that -in '21?
<b>CW:</b>	Yes. But sometimes the maps make mistakes. What do you remember? How about at 722...a dentist?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Upstairs. Upstairs was the dentist. Sidney? Who was underneath Dr. Cochran the dentist?
<b>Sidney Abramson:</b>	Ladd's?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	No, I know there was something in between Ladd's and that hot dog place. But the dentist was upstairs on the second floor. All dentists were upstairs on the second floor. Well, anyway I know there was a hot dog place there which is now

	that fancy Italian restaurant.
<b>CW:</b>	Was that at 726, do you think? Because there was a restaurant at 726.
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Oh, Apter's. Apter's Restaurant. That's who it was...near the corner. Apter's Restaurant...by golly, I spent so much time there...I should have remembered. It was where the junior shoe store is now, I think...I'm really not certain. But Apter's ran a restaurant there for years.
<b>CW:</b>	Then a doctor's office on the very corner? At 728?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Is that the last building? Well, the last building was a William's delicatessen. And subsequently became William's gift shop. Sidney –do you ever remember a doctor also being on the corner there?
<b>Sidney Abramson:</b>	No.
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	I think I've left a few out...I'm not sure.
<b>CW:</b>	That's ok. We've only got this one little space.
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Now –across the street on King and Washington streets, on the north side going west...and they're still in business around the corner. [To Sidney] Is Mister....Doctor Timberman still living, Sidney?
<b>Sidney Abramson:</b>	Who?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Dr. Timberman. He would remember. On the corner of King and Washington was Timberman's drug store. Then next door to him where the optometrist is now was Carnes. The Carnes sold newspapers and penny candy.
<b>CW:</b>	And Constantinople lived upstairs?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Right. And 707 was People's Drug Store.
<b>CW:</b>	It's still there, isn't it?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	No, that one's up on the corner.
<b>CW:</b>	So People's existed in the thirties?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Oh, yeah. I have a picture of myself from Hopewell, Virginia, in 1917 standing in front of the People's Drug Store.
<b>Sidney Abramson:</b>	That used to be People's Service Drugs.
<b>CW:</b>	People's <u>Service</u> Drugs...so that's at 707?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Yes. Then 709 and 711, I don't know what was in there before my folks took that over, I don't know. I mean, 'cause we took it over around 1930. You're going to have to do some research.
<b>CW:</b>	The 1921 map says there was a tobacco and confectionary shop.
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Yeah, that's right. That is correct. Yeah, because we used to have to walk upstairs. I mean there were a few steps to go to the rear. Now around 1930 or '31, the Alexandria Cleaning and Palace Laundry Agency. That's my mother's. And it had shoe repairing, shoe shine, cleaning, laundry, and Morris and Lilly Berkow ran it and they lived upstairs. We had a

	<p>beautiful upstairs with a double drawing room...it was famous...I think one of George Washington's relatives used to live in that building. It's one of the oldest in Alexandria. We had about five bedrooms and the door was never locked. And in those days the buses and streetcars used to stop running around midnight, and all the Washington boys who used to date girls over here. If they missed their bus, they could walk up to the Berkows and get a bed. That's true! [Laughs] It had a real long hall about as wide as this [points to a space about eight feet wide] with a beautiful archway, and then adjacent to the long hall was a double drawing room they used to have. And in those days you had to go down steps and up steps to get to the back where the kitchen and dining room was.</p>
<b>CW:</b>	How long did you live there?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	They were in business until World War II. About 1947. And that place continued as a cleaning place—they sold it to another man, I forget his name. [To Sidney] What was the name of that man who bought that cleaning place from my mother?
<b>Sidney Abramson:</b>	[Mumbles his answer –basically doesn't know]
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Now next door to 709 and 711, 713 was Parker's grocery store. Hey, you might call Parkers---Richard Parker. I'll give you his phone number [gives it—see contact file]. Now that became Graham's Men's Shop.
<b>CW:</b>	In the forties?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Yeah, because during the war, Brown's Men's shop was on the corner-- we didn't give you this because it was so late --on the north, where Burke and Herbert bank on the corner there>
<b>CW:</b>	Right.
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Well, during the war, Graham's Men's Shop was there. Then they moved to...it would be in the forties...they moved into...the Parkers grocery store closed and they rented it to Mr. Graham. Yeah, they retired. Now, I think next door to them was Metropole Restaurant—you might want to check that...
<b>CW:</b>	[Checks the 1921 map---reads off land use as indicated on it]
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	The bakery was first, and then that became the Metropol Restaurant. Now you left out Charlie Valentine's barber shop
<b>CW:</b>	Oh, well, I have a barber shop in the other direction, at 707-705.
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Well, I know he used to be further up the street later. But he's still living, Mr. Valentine. Why don't you call him? Charles. I think he's still living. [Turns to Sidney] Sidney, did Charlie Valentine die?
<b>Sidney Abramson:</b>	No, he's still living.

<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	He might remember though...but he moved further up the street. Now there was a Lipp's Restaurant. L-I-P-P.
<b>CW:</b>	That must have been at 721?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Yeah, Lipp's.
<b>CW:</b>	You know that Metropole was later.
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	It was later? Well, she'll have to find out.
<b>CW:</b>	Do you know if there was a bakery at 717?
<b>Sidney Abramson:</b>	I don't recall any bakery there.
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Now, on the corner there was a store that sold newspapers, magazines, cigarettes, cigars, and candy. Millers.
<b>Sidney Abramson:</b>	No, it was Doniphans.
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Oh, that's where the Doniphan building is...that's where People's Drug Store is now on the corner, and they just sold that building. About six or seven months ago, Doniphan sold that building.
<b>CW:</b>	So that would be at 727 and 723. Does Miller fit in here someplace?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Millers had a little stand in that corner there where he probably rented a small corner or something. Millers is presently on the south...it's Miller's Hardware. Same thing. See, they had a fire and it burned. So Miller bought the place across the street there that's on the corner. He's still there. His son runs the place now.
<b>CW:</b>	So that's that, huh?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	That's all I can remember. I think Mr. Parker can help you.
<b>CW:</b>	When did all those elegant apartments disappear? Did they last past the end of the war?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	Oh, yeah. Well, my mother converted it into apartments and that's when it became ruined. It was three floors, you know? Second, third, and fourth floor. And we had a fire in the fifties of that building, and when he had to gut the store downstairs we found an, um, old tremendous fireplace where they used to do their cooking...that was in the back of the store. When we went into the walls. A great big one...it must have been as big as that part of the wall there [pointing to a seven to eight feet space]. We had to renovate the whole place. But all these businesses on King Street were originally homes. They became more industrial. They made them stores, you know.
<b>CW:</b>	What is that now?
<b>Ethel Abramson:</b>	It's closed up. Of course, it was ruined so... and very low caliber people moved in. We sold the building; it was too much for us to take care of. And now there's a merchandise store, I think, at 709 and 711. I know beginning on the 800 block was a grocery store. I think it was Helmuth's. I don't remember much about the 800 block. [Searching for names

	<p>of other contacts] There weren't too many of the suburbs in the thirties. So almost everyone lived downtown. And it was nice 'cause we used to sit on our benches and sit outside and say "Hello" to everybody. Halloween we used to have a parade and walk up and down—everybody in their costumes. It was a very friendly, nice town, it really was. I know my mother for the eleven years she owned that cleaning place, she was an angel. If she'd see somebody outside who looked ragged, she'd pull them in and give them some clothes that were left over, and sheets and pillows. She'd see someone—it used to annoy me—with impetigo, and take them upstairs and treat them with something, you know. That was the kind of town it was. She was quite a woman. Beautiful woman. Everybody in town remembers my mother.</p>
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