



A History of Lloyd House, Part I The Early Years: 1796-1832



A late nineteenth-century photograph of the Lloyd House showing the brick kitchen at rear. Photo, Alexandria Library vertical files.

Lloyd House, located at 220 North Washington Street, recently re-opened to the public after more than a year of renovations. The history of Lloyd House was written by Tim Dennée for the Historic Structures Report (HSR), prepared by Eleanor Krause of RKTects Studio, Inc. This edition of the Historic Alexandria Quarterly is taken directly from the HSR.

The Lloyd House, also known as the John Wise House or the Wise-Hooe-Lloyd House, is one of the best examples of Alexandria's late eighteenth-century town homes built for the community's merchant class. Erected about 1796-1797, it is also a particularly late expression of the Georgian style in a town which was very conservative in its architecture.

Located on the west side of Washington Street, the property on which the Lloyd House stands was annexed to the town of Alexandria during the American Revolution. That formerly unincorporated land was still under the ownership of the Alexander family, whose patriarch had purchased 6,000 acres on the Potomac from the original royal patentee, Robert Howson, in 1669. It was Charles Alexander, the great-great-great-grandson of this seventeenth-century John Alexander, who conveyed a half acre on the southwest corner of Washington and Queen Streets to Richard Ratcliffe in

December 1785. Ratcliffe's purchase consisted of one quarter of a town block or "square," measuring 176 feet 7 inches frontage on Washington Street and 123 feet 5 inches on Queen. The parcel remained subject to an annual ground rent of thirty pounds payable to Alexander each December.¹ Richard Ratcliffe or Ratcliff was born in 1750 and became a justice, coroner, deputy sheriff, and a commissioner of taxes in Fairfax County by the early nineteenth century. He was a real estate speculator, buying, selling and renting numerous properties in Alexandria and Fairfax, and even as far away as Kentucky.²

Early tax assessment data is often difficult to analyze, as various structures and lots are commonly aggregated, with minimal description, making the identification and dating of individual lots or structures difficult amidst large holdings. It seems certain, however, that there was a large dwelling—now known as the Lloyd House—erected on the last Ratcliffe lot circa 1796-1797 by Alexandria's "Tavern King" John Wise. A newspaper advertisement of October 1798 offered for rent:

The Property I occupy at present, at the corner of Washington and Queen Streets. THE situation and conveniences of this property is equal to any in town—I also wish to Rent or Sell in Fee Simple, five and a half Acres of rich land well enclosed, the greater part fronting on Henry Street. For terms apply to JOHN WISE.³

Wise had purchased from Ratcliffe three quarters of the block (totaling one and a half acres) bounded by Washington, Columbus, Queen and Cameron Streets on November 10, 1797, but no deed to the Washington and Queen corner lot was recorded until March 16, 1800. As unlikely as it may seem, Wise may have proceeded to build and occupy a house on this lot despite the fact that the land transfer was not formalized. Tax assessments tend to bear out this theory, as Richard Ratcliffe was no longer paying property taxes on the Washington Street property during the 1797-1800 period. Indeed, these records indicate that Wise's real estate holdings

increased in value about \$2,000 between 1796 and 1797, possibly suggesting new construction or at least land acquisition.⁴ The “five and a half Acres of rich lands” for sale also seem to conform to the available evidence, as before 1800 Wise owned two entire vacant blocks, totaling four acres, in addition to his one and a half acres of “Lotts by the Church” (i.e., Christ Church) and sundry other properties.

Certainly, the design of what came to be known as the Lloyd House would not suggest a date later than 1796-1797. With its center hall plan and strict symmetry, heavy dentiled cornice and rake boards, and highly decorated and pedimented entrance architrave make the house a very late example of the Renaissance-influenced Georgian style. Nods to the emerging, more refined “Federal” style on the exterior include the lack of the characteristically Georgian, projecting masonry string course or belt course to visually separate the first and second stories and the absence of a projecting water table at the base. The six-over-six double-hung windows with large panes of glass and narrow muntins are characteristic of Federal buildings, but this is more a matter of evolving technology than of style. There was physical evidence, as late as the 1950s, of a wood shingle roof, typical of the period of the building’s construction.⁵

John Wise was likely born in Montgomery County, Maryland; he spent the early years of adulthood as a tanner in Georgetown, which was still a Maryland port. Of German ancestry, he was first known as Johann Weis. He began a career as a tavernkeeper in Georgetown during the late 1770s, when he purchased a High Street (now Wisconsin Avenue) lot and opened an ordinary. He sold this tavern by December 1782 and relocated to Alexandria, where he and his brother, Peter, established a tannery on Oronoco Creek at Point West. John remained an innkeeper too, operating in succession the Fountain Tavern, the “Sign of the Grapes,” and the City Hotel (a.k.a. Gadsby’s Tavern), as well as temporarily owning the former Lomax Tavern.⁶

While the builders of both edifices are now anonymous, Wise’s City Hotel building of 1792 bears some resemblance to the Lloyd House. They have similar main entrances, similar cornices, and similar pediments on the street-facing side gables (although on the much larger hotel building, the cornices and rake molds are proportionately much lighter). The stair balusters of the house are similar in proportion and profile to those of the musicians’ gallery of the hotel ballroom. The hotel is actually the more progressive and functional of the two, possessing an off-center doorway, irregular plan, and very simple planar wall surfaces without even the typical Georgian stone jack arches over its window openings. The Lloyd House’s interior is somewhat more Federal than its exterior, with attenuated stair balusters and simple (but still Georgian-influenced) mantels, but with typically Georgian crosssetted doorjambs.

Why was the Lloyd House so *rétardataire*? Perhaps it was a matter of John Wise’s personal taste, formed in the 1770s. On the other hand, since he so quickly leased out the home, perhaps he intended to suit the average taste of Alexandria’s conservative established merchants. His hotel, on the other hand, was meant to attract cosmopolitan visitors and meant to compare with the best inns of Philadelphia.

One of the greatest questions about the house is the date of construction of freestanding brick kitchen which stood at the southwest corner of the building until the 1910s. Measuring approximately 18 by 26 feet, the two-and-a-half-story structure is depicted in early photographs and maps. The house certainly had a kitchen outbuilding to begin with, as there was no adequate cooking space within the main block. Such a kitchen could have been of brick or frame construction, and would have been erected behind the house—separated from the dwelling areas to prevent the spread of fires and to keep out excess heat in the summer, but perhaps connected by a covered walkway for the shelter, convenience, and cleanliness of residents and servants alike. Unfortunately, there is no extant insurance policy which depicts or describes the house at this early period, so we cannot be certain precisely when the brick kitchen was erected. Although *circa* 1797 may be the likeliest date, it may have been as late as the early 1830s, about which more will be said later.

The kitchen’s location strongly suggests that one of the rooms adjoining the small southwest ground-floor room served as the home’s dining room. The southwest room may have functioned as a passage, a morning room, and storage for items used in the dining room, as it was too small to have been a dining room. The southeast room connected directly to this room and could have been used for dining, although it may have been more appropriate to use such a front room for a more public function. The northwest room may have actually been the dining room, with the front rooms as a parlor and office, perhaps.

John Wise moved to Washington Street after he leased his City Hotel to English-born innkeeper John Gadsby in 1796. From that time he retired as an innkeeper, becoming a veritable gentleman, living off the rents of his real estate. The personal property assessment of 1796 suggests that he may have already been in residence on Washington Street, as he was taxed for a household containing five adult white males and four “servants” at his dwelling and “Lotts by the Church.” Wise and his wife, Elizabeth, had at least five children—Nathaniel, Francis, John, Catharine and Anne—most of whom would have lived with the family on Washington Street. Nathaniel, born 1789, grew up to be a successful lawyer. He was also an art enthusiast, serving as first president of Alexandria’s Periclean Society in 1821. He married Jane Caroline McKinney of Caroline County.

The youngest Wise son, John, Jr., drowned at a riverfront wharf after a fall brought on by an apparent epileptic fit. Catharine Wise married James McCrea, a merchant and one-time postmaster who had several real estate deals with his father-in-law. Wise's youngest daughter, Anne, married Baltimore merchant John Seton in 1800, but the couple later returned to Alexandria.⁷

Owning up to ten slaves during his tavern-keeping days, Wise retained a large number of enslaved servants in later years to run his household and other business interests. From a trust instituted to ensure his wife's financial security in the event of his demise, we have a partial list of Wise property, including the names of several of their slaves: Peggy, Dick, Kitty, Harriot, Benjamin, Lewis, Jesse and Betsey. The Washington Street house's slave quarters were likely concentrated in the house's basement and in the upper floor of the kitchen outbuilding, although Wise may have had stable hands living over a carriage house/stable. There is no inventory of the house furnishings during the Wise tenure, only mention of a silver service and a clock.⁸

When the Wises moved into their new Washington Street house, Charles Alexander's huge ropewalk still stood behind the house, stretching blocks westward. In fact, Alexander's conveyance of this block to Ratcliffe reserved the right to keep this enterprise in place. A ropewalk was used for manufacturing cordage for sailing ships, fish nets, etc., and consisted of at least one shed, containing a reel upon which the ends of the lines were held and wound. From this terminal shed extended another extremely long shed to shelter and enclose the laborers and the lengths of rope in the making. In total, it appeared as a "long, low building, sometimes 1,200 feet in length in which the rope maker walked backward, paying out the fiber from a bundle tied around his waist spinning it into yarn as he went." Alexandria had three ropewalks by 1810, producing a total of 400 tons of cordage. Built before the annexation of the westernmost section of what is now "Old Town," Alexander's ropewalk lot was at least 400 yards long, with a 650-foot-long shed, stretching west across Columbus, Alfred, Patrick, Henry and Fayette Streets and impeding north-south traffic on these new streets. Alexander first leased the manufactory to James Irvin in 1791, then to Samuel and Joseph Harper. The latter later advertised "at his house on Washington-street, opposite Jacob Hoffman's sugar refinery, Seine and Hauling Rope of all sizes; Seine & Sewing Twine; Shad & Herring Twine; Sacking and Bed Cords; Plough Lines & Traces. Also, Tarr'd Rope and other Cords." Because of its position blocking so many streets, many residents opposed the continuation of the ropewalk by 1794. In 1799, the town's council finally approved condemnation proceedings. While the building may not have been removed immediately, it was certainly taken down within a few years.⁹



Charles and Ann Lee. Original oil portraits as reproduced in The Lees of Virginia.

The Wise family removed to the northwest corner of King and West Streets around the turn of the century and, as we have seen, put the still new Washington Street home on the rental market. The first lessee was Charles Lee, born 1758, the second son of Henry Lee of Leesylvania and Lucy Grymes, "the Lowland Beauty." Charles Lee was a younger brother of Revolutionary War hero "Light-Horse Harry" Lee and uncle of the great Confederate general, Robert E. Lee. He graduated from Princeton in 1775, and in 1777 was appointed Naval Officer of the South Potomac. Mindful of his future or preferring school to war, however, he returned to Princeton then went to Philadelphia to study law in 1779. He was said to have had expensive habits, at least as a young man. Appointed Collector of the Port of Alexandria in 1789, he served in that capacity until 1793. He briefly held a seat in the Virginia General Assembly, representing Fairfax County from 1793 to 1795. Lee was finally admitted to the Philadelphia bar in 1794. A newly minted lawyer, he shot to the top of the profession when, in November 1795, George Washington appointed him the third Attorney General of the United States. Lee undoubtedly owed his position to Washington's fondness for the Lee family and his own closeness to the President. In fact, Charles Lee was a frequent guest at Mount Vernon, visiting seventeen times in 1785-1788 and 1797-1799, and he performed some legal work for Washington. He retained his cabinet position during the Adams administration and, nearing the end of his service, he was also appointed Secretary of State *ad interim*, running the State Department for three weeks in May and June 1800, after the resignation of Timothy Pickering.¹⁰

The Lees resided in the Alexandria house about 1798-1800, while Charles was serving in the Adams administration. Charles had married Anne Lee, the eighteen-year-old daughter of Richard Henry Lee, in 1789. They had six children, two of whom died as infants in the early 1790s. The others, Anne Lucinda (born 1790), Charles Henry (born 1794), William Arthur (born 1796), and Alfred (born 1799) would all have resided at the Washington Street house, and Alfred was likely born there. It was about 1800 that Anne

Lee contracted an “illness of the consumptive kind,” which finally killed her in 1804. While caring for his wife, Charles Lee also experienced career difficulties. A staunch Federalist from his association with Washington, Hamilton, and the founding fathers in Philadelphia, Lee’s political fortunes, like his party’s, were fading. He was one of many Federalist judges appointed by John Adams during the last hours of the administration, but the Republican-dominated Congress nullified this attempt to pack the federal courts with such “Midnight Judges” in 1802. Lee returned to private law practice, serving as counsel for the plaintiffs in the landmark Supreme Court case, *Marbury vs. Madison*, and with the defense in the impeachment trial of Justice Samuel Chase and the treason trial of Aaron Burr.¹¹ All of these cases had a partisan taint.

Marbury vs. Madison had particular personal and political significance to Lee, as it involved the failure of the incoming Secretary of State, James Madison, to deliver the commissions of last-minute Adams administration appointees. The plaintiffs were a handful of the 42 justice of the peace appointees for Washington County and Alexandria County in the District of Columbia. The list of these magistrates was a veritable “who’s who” of prominent local men.¹² A Federalist, Chief Justice John Marshall nonetheless wanted to insulate the Supreme Court from politics as much as possible. Marshall was himself culpable for not speeding along these same appointments when he was still Adams’s Secretary of State. In his opinion, he ruled that the men should have been permitted to take office, but he also decided that the statute which required the Supreme Court to hear the case was unconstitutional—thus establishing the principle of judicial review of Congressional legislation. The frustration of his clients’ hopes must have been a disappointment for Marshall’s old friend, Charles Lee, but as a fervent active strict constructionist, the latter had been prodding the courts toward just this sort of restraint of the increasingly Republican Congress.

The Lees moved from Washington Street in 1802, the year before the *Marbury vs. Madison* case was heard. Lee remarried about five years after his wife’s death. The couple had three children, before Charles passed away in 1815. As we shall see, John Wise’s former home continued a remarkable association with the “Midnight Judges” and figures related to *Marbury vs. Madison*.

John Wise’s next tenant was James Marshall, who was in residence by 1802.¹³ James Markham Marshall was born March 12, 1764 in Fauquier County, Virginia, the fifth of thirteen children of Col. Thomas Marshall and Mary Randolph Keith. Col. Marshall was superintendent of the estate of Thomas, the Sixth Lord Fairfax and, like many of the prominent men of the time, was trained as surveyor. He was an officer in the French and Indian War and served as

the county’s high sheriff from 1767. The elder Marshall organized the Culpeper Minutemen, was a member of the 1776 Virginia Convention and of the Virginia House of Burgesses. “He served at Valley Forge and succeeded to Gen. Mercer’s command when Mercer was killed at Battle of Germantown. He fought at the Battle of Brandywine where he commanded the Third Virginia Regiment.... He was a member of the Virginia Legislature in 1787.”¹⁴ Col. Marshall’s eldest son, John, became even more prominent—as Congressman, envoy to France during the XYZ affair, Secretary of State, and finally, the second and most influential Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court.¹⁵

Like his father, James Marshall was a Revolutionary War veteran. At the Battle of Yorktown, he was a recently elected seventeen-year-old lieutenant serving in one of the companies of Alexander Hamilton’s regiment. Like his elder brother, Marshall pursued a career in law, studying and first practicing in Winchester, Virginia. While a resident of Alexandria, James served as Assistant Judge of the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia for Alexandria County. In April 1795, he married Hester Morris, the lovely daughter of Robert Morris, the financier of the Revolution. A “handsome, dignified...gentleman,” Marshall stood six feet two inches tall, weighed about 200 pounds, raw-boned, and he wore a cue, stockings and knee buckles” even when such clothing faded from fashion in the early nineteenth century. The year of his marriage, Marshall was dispatched to Europe by President Washington to negotiate the release of the Marquis de Lafayette from an Austrian prison.¹⁶

[W]hile in Paris, [Marshall] witnessed the outrages of the Reign of Terror. Several years were spent abroad, and his two eldest children were born on ships of war, on the British coast. While in England, he purchased of the heirs of Lord Fairfax, all their estates in...the Northern Neck of Virginia. This purchase was made in the names of John Marshall (Chief Justice,) Rawleigh Colston, Harry (Light-Horse) Lee and James M. Marshall. But the State of Virginia set up title to the lands by confiscation, and a compromise was effected, whereby the company received all the Fairfax lands in Leeds Manor and some other smaller tracts. Their portion embraced about 180,000 acres, and the cost to them was something less than one dollar per acre. James M. Marshall purchased the share of Harry Lee, and Mr. Colston took lands on the Potomac.¹⁷

Marshall certainly knew Charles Lee through his business association with Lee’s brother, “Light-Horse Harry,” and through Lee’s close friendship with John Marshall. In fact, the two families were related by marriage, and both men were prominent Federalists. James Marshall was another of Adams’s Midnight Judges, and Lee submitted as evidence

in *Marbury vs. Madison* James Marshall's affidavit testifying to the existence of the commissions of the frustrated justices of the peace. According to Marshall, he had actually tried, without success, to deliver some of the commissions in Alexandria in 1801, and had returned them to the office of his brother, the Secretary of State.¹⁸ Marshall likely rented the Washington Street house on Lee's recommendation. One of the Marshalls' slaves, James, purchased from George Pickett of Richmond, was set free while the couple lived on Washington Street. The family left the house in 1802 or 1803, and soon departed for their new Warren County estate, "Happy Creek." Hester Marshall died in 1816, and James later remarried. He died at "Fairfield," his Fauquier County property, in 1848, at age 84.¹⁹

By 1804, there was a new occupant of John Wise's Washington Street house, Lewis Dublois or Deblois. According to Alexandria historian Ethelyn Cox, Dublois "came to Alexandria after the...Revolution, and moved in the best social circles."²⁰ While of obvious French extraction, he was probably not a first-generation American. A relative, perhaps Lewis's son or brother, served as purser on the *U.S.S. Constitution* shortly after the naval "Quasi-War" with France. Dublois was a commission merchant, carrying a remarkable variety of imported goods in a succession of stores on the Alexandria waterfront. He held a high position with the Bank of the United States in Washington and was appointed as consul for Portugal in 1807.²¹ In fact, he probably resided in Washington City for some time prior to 1804, and apparently kept only one foot in Alexandria. While he owned a third interest in a commercial property at Prince and Lee Streets, there is no record of him ever purchasing a home in town. And, although he first arrived by 1786, he returned in 1803, bringing with him slaves from outside of the District. He was one of the justices of the peace appointed by John Adams for Washington County, D.C. but was never seated. While not a plaintiff in *Marbury vs. Madison*, Dublois must have followed the case with keen interest while living in the Washington Street house. He moved out by early 1805, to be replaced by Nicholas Fitzhugh.²²

In November 1803, Thomas Jefferson appointed Nicholas Fitzhugh Assistant Judge of the Alexandria Circuit Court—a Republican successor to the Federalist Marshall. The Fitzhughs were already an old planter family of Maryland and Virginia. Nicholas was the son of Major Henry Fitzhugh of "Ravensworth," in Fairfax County near Accotink Creek. His cousin William owned the elegant "Lee Boyhood Home" at 607 Oronoco Street and was, incidentally, one of the "Midnight Judges" of Alexandria County. Nicholas and Sarah Fitzhugh had a huge family; twelve children are mentioned in their father's will: Henrietta Sarah, Lucy Bataille, Ann Elizabeth Jane, Mary Conway (Mason), Sophia, Sarah Nicholas, Augustine, Edmund, Burdett, Henry William, Charles and Laurence. Many of these were likely

still minors when Nicholas died at the end of 1814. The Fitzhughs probably remained in the house until 1806, before relocating to Duke and Royal Streets. It was during the Fitzhugh tenure that tax records make the first direct reference to a garden at the house. There also must have been at least two outbuildings—the kitchen, and a stable/carriage house to shelter first Wise's, then Dublois's, then Fitzhugh's carriages, carts, horses and cows. A well house was added sometime during the nineteenth century.²³

At the turn of the nineteenth century, as at the turn of the twenty-first, the rental of such an elegant large house was not uncommon for a person of means who was only a temporary resident of town. Then as now, federal and local officials, with the means to purchase their own homes but uncertain of their next career move, often rented, as did Lee, Marshall and Fitzhugh. The next lessee, however, would turn out to be rather more permanent.

Jacob Hoffman was a merchant with a shop on Fairfax Street during the late 1790s. He may have been among the earliest group of German-Americans to migrate from Pennsylvania to Alexandria during the late eighteenth-century. Before 1807, Hoffman's primary business was dry goods, particularly the sale of imported fabrics. He rose to local prominence and leadership, serving as director of the Alexandria Library Company in 1803; as mayor 1803-1804; tax collector, 1804-1805; councilman, 1805-1806, 1811-1813, and 1816-1817; and mayor again 1818-1821. Hoffman was yet another of the Federalist "Midnight Judges," appointed by John Adams to serve as a justice of the peace for Alexandria County in 1801, but as with the others, his appointment was nullified by the Jefferson administration and Congress.²⁴

In 1802, Hoffman began to acquire an interest in the Wise properties on the north half of the block bounded by Washington, Columbus, Queen and Cameron Streets. That year, Wise conveyed a 66-foot-wide strip running from Washington to Columbus along the north side of the center line of the block and a 23-foot-wide lot just north of it on Columbus Street. The acquisitions were subject to an annual ground rent.²⁵ Hoffman continued to purchase pieces as he was able, or as the Wises made them available. He purchased another Columbus Street lot in 1806, and the Columbus/Queen corner lot and one immediately east of it in 1809. The entire northwest quadrant of the block was confirmed to Hoffman in 1810, costing him a total of \$5,000, plus an annual rent of \$41.66.²⁶ By 1807, Hoffman was also leasing Wise's old house at the corner of Washington and Queen as his own residence. Finally, the Wises put the house up for sale, probably expecting that Hoffman would be the high bidder. "I will sell...the House and Lot, with all its improvements, situated at the corner of Washington and Queen streets, at present occupied by Mr. Jacob Hoffman."²⁷

Jacob Hoffman did buy the house and its nearly half-acre lot for \$5,000, plus a ground rent, on January 8, 1810. Hoffman now controlled the entire half-block, except for two portions on Washington Street which had been rented in perpetuity by Ratcliffe to John Dowdell and George Summers, whose rights Hoffman was bound to respect.²⁸ In 1813 he added a final strip between Washington and Columbus and adjoining his acre on the south.²⁹

Hoffman was not merely speculating in real estate. He had a real purpose and need for such a large parcel. By 1807, he had completed the construction of a sugar refinery to the south of his house, but made additions and alterations to it as late as 1818. The sugar house was later described as “A SUGAR REFINERY...connected by a brick wall and shed with a large two story Brick Warehouse and Smokehouse, all built within a few years...”³⁰ The refinery was essentially a large house—brick, with Federal details, standing four stories tall, and with a sizeable rear ell. The warehouse was later used to store tobacco.

It was quite a leap for Hoffman to move from dry goods sales to manufacturing at a significant scale. Most of the sugar produced could not be sold locally. This meant that it was “exported” regionally and nationally, and possibly even to Europe. There was nothing unusual about such an industrial use in proximity to housing, however; after all, there had been a ropewalk there only a few years before. At the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the small scale of operations and limitations of travel made it common—in fact, normal—for the owner of a small factory to live next to it in order to supervise his business. Undoubtedly, there were some drawbacks to this, including smoke and noise, but eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century people had no conception of an inconvenient separation of home, commercial and industrial uses. The idea of zoning was still a century away; only enterprises, such as tanneries, which produced noxious effluent were forced to locate apart from residential and commercial uses, in the outskirts of town.

Jacob Hoffman’s sugar house was actually the second in Alexandria, the first being established in 1803-1804 by William Moore and Andrew Brunner of Baltimore, near the southeast corner of Alfred and Cameron Streets.³¹ By today’s standards, sugar refining was then quite primitive. U.S. sugar came primarily from Cuba and the other West Indies. Before being shipped, the cane was crushed, much of the vegetable matter was removed, and the remainder, termed “muscavado” (from the Spanish, *mas acevado*, “more refined”), was put in large hogsheads. At the American refineries, the muscavado was boiled multiple times in large vats. Impurities were removed by adding and then skimming off sticky bull’s blood or egg albumen. Rows of large earthenware cones were then filled with the sugar, allowing it to cool and the water to evaporate. A by-product, molasses,

was drained off through an aperture at the bottom of each cone and into earthenware jars. The white sugar remaining in the cone was drilled out and generally packaged in paper as is, retaining its cone shape.

Sugar was very expensive in the early nineteenth century, largely because of the labor-intensity of its cultivation, transport and processing. Much of this labor, including in America, was performed by African slaves. Alexandria’s two refineries produced a total of 800,000 pounds of sugar in 1810. The tending of fires, boiling, stirring, skimming, hauling, etc. in the refineries was the responsibility of slaves. It was undoubtedly hot, hard work, in one of the earliest true factories of proto-industrial Alexandria. In 1810, Jacob Hoffman’s household contained thirteen slaves. Some of these were undoubtedly household servants; the 1820 census of manufactures indicates that seven slaves were actually employed in the sugar house, some as young as eight years old.³² The names of these men and boys are unknown, but some of Hoffman’s slaves *have* been identified. At the end of 1809 Hoffman manumitted three servants—Samuel, age 42; Benjamin Cryer, 40; and Cryer’s wife, Beck—all of whom had been left to him by Gabriel Childs of Fairfax County. It is a good chance that these were household slaves. But in the early 1820s, Hoffman also set free Anthony Minor, age 30; Fortune Ann Minor, 32; Pleasant James, 38; William Brannan, 36, and James Minor, born *circa* 1782.³³ Some of these may have been sugar house laborers. It is not clear why Hoffman released them. It is possible that the sugar refinery was no longer prospering, and that Hoffman cut back on his labor force. They may have purchased their own freedom, alleviating Hoffman’s debt situation somewhat.

Hoffman did not use his lots wholly for his home and business. He ended up subdividing it and constructing at least one brick house on Queen Street, probably in 1822-1823. There were two other frame houses standing at this time—one probably at the corner of Columbus and Queen Streets, and the other on Queen or north of the sugar house on Washington.³⁴

One can imagine that, regardless of the magnitude of the profits from his industrial and commercial enterprises, the purchase of his property, the improvements, and operations left Hoffman with considerable debts. Cities farther north were edging Alexandria out of the sugar business. Jacob Hoffman had placed his real estate in trust to Robert J. Taylor in 1823, and was forced to sell the property less than two years later. First offered in October 1824, the parcel was still for sale eight months later. It now measured 206 feet by 246 feet ten inches and contained the sugar refinery, its warehouse, smokehouse and shed, and the “two-story Brick Dwelling House, lately erected on Queen Street, and two dwelling houses rented at a rent of \$30 per annum forever.” The former John Wise house was described as “a spacious

well-built dwelling house, with all necessary outhouses, built of brick, a good Garden and a large Ice House.”³⁵ Conspicuously absent is any reference to a kitchen. It may have been neglected because it was naturally assumed that a house would have a kitchen or because the kitchen appeared sufficiently “attached” to the dwelling as to not require separate mention.

There was no particular reason to keep the entire lot and its diverse collection of structures together. In fact, the parts were likely to garner a larger return than the whole. However, at auction June 7, 1825, the Hoffman house and its garden—measuring 110 feet 7 inches on Washington Street and 123 feet 5 inches on Queen—and all of the other Hoffman lots brought a high bid of \$8,965 from Elizabeth Thacker Hooe, wife of the late James H. Hooe.³⁶

James Hewitt Hooe was born in 1772. He was a close relative and business partner of Col. Robert Townsend Hooe, a mayor of Alexandria, sheriff of Fairfax County, and one of the plaintiff justice of the peace appointees represented by Charles Lee in *Marbury vs. Madison*. James Hooe studied law and became a partner in Robert T. Hooe’s mercantile firm, before leaving to set up his own store in 1808. Hooe may have had business dealings with Jacob Hoffman, as the former was known to import some “muscavado,” the crushed, unrefined cane sugar. He served as a Councilman in later life and also as a director of the Great Hunting Creek Bridge Company. He married Elizabeth Thacker Hooe, daughter of Bernard Hooe of Prince William County. James and Elizabeth had two daughters, Eliza T. and Margaretta. In January 1825, Hooe died at the age of 52 at his country seat, “Burgundy,” in Fairfax County, south of Cameron Run.³⁷

Mrs. Hooe was apparently a formidable businesswoman in her own right. She bought the former Wise house within three and a half months of her husband’s death, leveraging her considerable inheritance for the necessary capital. Initially, she rented it to Cocke & May, a firm with tailor Jonathan C. May as junior partner. Mrs. Hooe never occupied the house, but the association with her name is surely the source of the idea that James Hooe constructed it in 1793, a myth which persisted until about 1970.³⁸

The other lots were not long vacant either; during Mrs. Hooe’s ownership, tenants of portions of the sugar house buildings and two Queen Street dwellings included: watchmaker John Rodgers (ca. 1828-1831); Sephia Coole, J.J. and Thomas Sanford, and Mark Butts, Jr., the son of a sea captain (ca. 1829); Nancy Henderson (ca. 1829-1832); Susan Evans (ca. 1831); and Thomas Merchant, Lewis Piles, and Resin Ogden (ca. 1831-1832). Other residents, about 1829, included free blacks Griffin Graham and Eliza Miner, the latter a likely relative of Jacob Hoffman’s former slaves Anthony, Fortune and James Minor.³⁹

In 1826, Mrs. Hooe invited Quaker educator Benjamin Hallowell to move his little school to the site. Hallowell was born in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania in 1799. Taking an early interest in geometry, he learned the trade of carpentry and joinery. Seriously injured on the job, however, he turned to teaching and found that he had a particular aptitude for it. Hallowell was hand-picked to teach at the Society of Friends’ new Fair Hill school near Olney, Maryland in 1816. He relocated to run the Westtown school in Philadelphia in 1821. In 1825, he decided to seek again a new situation. He consulted fellow Quaker Deborah Stabler of Sandy Spring, Maryland about the proper location for a new school. When Benjamin asked about the Virginia capital, she replied, “Benjamin, Friends do not thrive in Richmond,” and recommended Alexandria instead. Alexandria already had a sizeable Quaker community and its own meeting house. Hallowell was acquainted with many of the Friends in the town; many had sent their children to study with him. He first rented a brick house at 609 Oronoco Street, the former home of John Hopkins and Cornelia Lee Hopkins and next door to the boyhood home of Robert E. Lee. With his savings and some contributions from relatives, he purchased the books and equipment he needed.⁴⁰



Benjamin Hallowell, young and old. From Our Town, 1749-1865 and Hallowell's autobiography and 1845 school circular.

Shortly after his arrival in Alexandria, Benjamin Hallowell married Margaret Farquhar, to whom he had been engaged since 1821. The couple hired a free African American woman, Nancy Gordon, as a servant. She would work for the family for 36 years, their entire stay in Alexandria. A former slave, she ““was a woman of all work,’ washing, ironing, cleaning house, early and late. She was reliable and energetic, doing as much in one of her long days, and with her quick step, as almost any one else would do in two.” She married a man named Franklin and had several children. Thrifty with her earnings, she eventually bought three Alexandria lots and erected houses upon them.⁴¹

The school was quickly a success, as the young Hallowell was already considered a talented educator and man of

science. Hallowell specialized in scientific lectures and demonstrations. He authored several articles on astronomy while resident at the house; “calculated” the *Alexandria Almanac* for William A. Morrison; revised *Blair’s Philosophy*; and lectured at the Smithsonian. Concerned about the spread of disease from contaminated water sources, he established the Alexander Water Company in 1850 and served as its first president. He was particularly affected by the sudden death of a man stricken with cholera outside his Washington Street school in 1831. Appointed the City Surveyor in 1831, he took no pay, but used the opportunity to instruct his young men in the use of the theodolite and level.⁴² Nor did the school bring much material profit to its superintendent.

After some time I was offered by the widow Hooe the commodious brick house at the corner of Washington and Queen streets, a healthy situation, and admirably adapted to our purpose, and I immediately engaged it. We moved in the spring vacation, 1826.⁴³

This was the former Wise-Hoffman house, of course, and this move entailed the first documented alteration to the structure.

My school-room was on the first floor, north end, all across the house, I having obtained permission of my landlady, in our arrangements, to remove the partition on condition of replacing it by one with folding doors, when I should leave the property, which was done. My lecture-room was the back room over the school-room. The school-room was considerably larger than the one on Orinoco street, so that we could now take more day scholars, and the lecture-room was about the same size as the other one....⁴⁴

Hallowell brought along his scientific equipment: “some chemicals and chemical apparatus...an air pump, with its appendages, an electrical machine and its appendages, the



The Hoffman sugar refinery as a school. From Our Town, 1749-1865 and Hallowell’s autobiography and 1845 school circular.

mechanical powers, and hydrostatic apparatus...a large magic lantern, with astronomical slides, etc., etc....[and] a pneumatic trough or cistern, with gasometers for the compound blow-pipe...”—and wood and glass cases to hold it all.⁴⁵ The house was also quarters for his small group of boarding students sent by Quaker families in the surrounding region. His day students were not solely Quakers, particularly as his reputation spread. He taught the children of many prominent families; while at his first schoolhouse on Oronoco Street, Hallowell tutored Robert E. Lee in mathematics prior to the young man’s appointment to West Point.⁴⁶

The Hallowells had a cordial relationship with their landlady.

The very day the quarter’s rent was due the widow Hooe’s carriage was at the door, and this continued to be her custom as long as she lived. If I had not the money, which was generally the case, I would frankly tell her so, and add that the first money I should get, and could possibly spare, I would take to her, with which she was always satisfied. She never said a word like urging me or being disappointed in not getting the rent due, and I *did* take to her the very first I received, never permitting it to be in my possession over night.... She was a truly good landlady, and I possessed her confidence.⁴⁷

Mary Hallowell was quite ill for a time after the couple arrived at their new home. She recovered, however, and, as the couple needed the extra money, accepted a suggestion to establish a school for young ladies.

[I]n the front room, over my school-room,...she soon had the school full of nice girls. They attended my lectures, as did also a class from Eliza Porter’s and Rachel Waugh’s schools.... I could not afford to buy a stove for the lecture-room, so I carried the one from Margaret’s school-room to the lecture-room, with faithful Nancy’s aid, every lecture-night the whole winter, and back again the next morning...

[About 1830] Widow Hooe offered me the tobacco warehouse, just south of the sugar-house, and but a little way from my residence, for fifty dollars a year, which I agreed to take. This enabled me to accommodate more day-scholars, the school-room where I was being full, and gave me a fine large lecture-room, besides [freeing up] four more rooms in our dwelling house. This was a fine and very unexpected movement in my favor.⁴⁸

Mary Hallowell, busy with her own school and with the raising two children—James, born 1825, and Charles, born 1827—nonetheless became pregnant again in 1828. Twins

Mary Jane and Henry were born in June 1829. Tragedy struck the family in mid 1831, when all of the children but Henry died suddenly, two by scarlet fever. Through all of this, Mary was again with child, and, on August 20, 1831, the couple's daughter Caroline was born. They had three more children by 1839, Elgar, Benjamin and Mary.⁴⁹

Shortly before the end of their residence at the corner, the Hallowells engaged another African American servant, Nathaniel Lucas. Lucas had bought his way out of slavery, then worked for Quaker merchant Edward Stabler, until the latter's death in 1831. In time, he also bought the freedom of his wife, Monica, and their granddaughter.⁵⁰

The entire household was soon to be uprooted.

About the Eighth month, 1831...my good landlady and true friend, Elizabeth T. Hooe, died. I had formed a warm friendship for her. She was a good, true, and honorable lady, and, although she was regarded as particular in pecuniary matters, the condition in which her husband had left the estate, which she had to settle, rendered this necessary....⁵¹

In fact, Mrs. Hooe, as heir and executrix of her husband's estate, passed away with debts totaling more than \$18,000.⁵²

I was just getting my school under good way, and now the property, both my residence and the house containing my school and lecture-rooms, would have to be sold. It was a great derangement of my plans.

The sale was not to be till the following spring, 1832, so I resolved to lay up all I could by that time for a first payment, and endeavor to buy it, in which proposition Phineas Janney and Robert I. Taylor, two of the trustees that had the selling of the property, encouraged me. They told me how high they thought I might safely go in my bids. The day of the sale came. I felt anxious. It was a new scene to me. The house where I lived was first offered, and I ran it up to what Phineas Janney and Robert I. Taylor had thought was a fair price, but the bidding kept on above that. I did not know who was bidding against me. I reflected that moving would be attended with a great deal of expense, as well as inconvenience, and as I was already nicely fixed there, I concluded to run it up to one thousand dollars beyond the limits these friends had named, and if the bidding went above that I would think it was not best for me to have it, and let it go. It did go beyond the extra one thousand dollars, and was struck off to John Lloyd. It was a great disappointment to me, my thoughts having been running on it for so long.⁵³

The auction took place in July 1832, in front of the former Hoffman sugar house. Although Hallowell paid rent quarterly, he rented by the year and could not be put out without three weeks notice before the year was up. Spurred by the upsetting outcome of the sale, Hallowell conceived of a solution. The Bank of Potomac, Mr. and Mrs. Hooe's creditor, had purchased the lot upon which the sugar house and warehouse/schoolhouse stood. The schoolmaster offered to pay for the buildings at the price bid, and his offer was accepted. Hallowell set out to convert the sugar house to a residence and dormitory for his boarding school. The work was complete in May 1833, and the Hallowells removed from their home at the corner.⁵⁴

Benjamin Hallowell would continue his school in the former warehouse until 1842, ultimately employing a total of 29 teachers during his career in Alexandria, educating hundreds of children, and presenting scientific lectures to their parents. Hallowell left Alexandria for several years, leaving the school in the charge of his nephews, Caleb and James S. Hallowell. Benjamin's son, Henry, and son-in-law, Francis Miller, taught from 1854, but gave up the school a few years later, partly for health reasons. William S. Kemper bought the school in 1858 and operated it until the Civil War. Richard L. Carne took it over after the war, until he became principal of St. John's Academy on Columbus Street. Finally, John S. Blackwell established his "Potomac Academy" in the old warehouse in the mid 1870s and remained its schoolmaster until his death in 1911.⁵⁵

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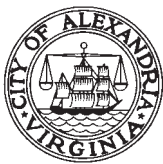
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