

Lewis McKenzie: First Mayor of Alexandria (522-524 King Street)

Lewis McKenzie is an important and controversial figure in the history of Alexandria. A native of the town, McKenzie contributed to both its economic and political development. He worked in the shipping and commission business for most of his life and was instrumental in the creation of the Alexandria, Loudoun, and Hampshire Railroad, of which he was the first president (Smith and Miller 1989: 75). He was also President of the Alexandria and Harpers Ferry Railroad (Terrie 1979).

Unlike many of his townsmen, McKenzie sided with the Union during the Civil War, and in 1861 he was appointed acting Mayor of Alexandria. After being defeated once in 1865, he was elected to the House of Representatives in 1869. Being a Republican in a growing Democratic climate, he served for only one year and was never re-elected. He was however appointed postmaster in the early 1880's and then elected to the Board of Aldermen toward the end of his life (Smith and Miller 1989: 75).

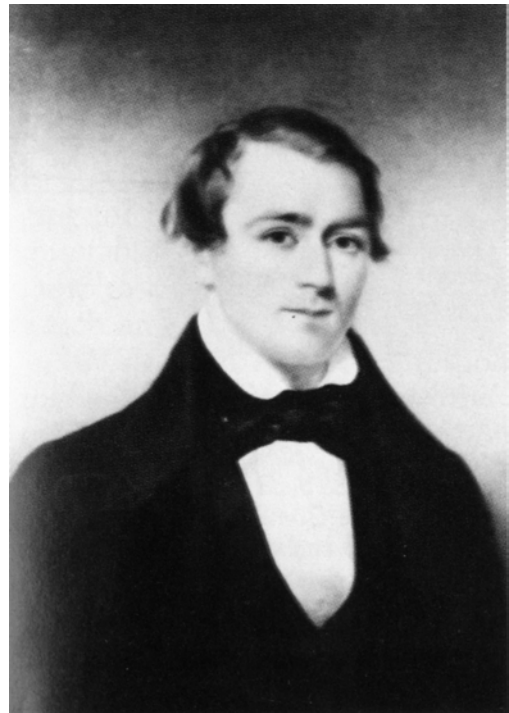


Fig. 1: Portrait of Lewis McKenzie (Ames W. Williams Collection, Alexandria Library)



Fig. 2: 522-524 King Street in 1967 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

In 1835, McKenzie moved into the second and third floors of the house at 522-524 King Street and remained there with his family and two slaves until 1843 (Fig.2).

McKenzie rented his lodgings from Catherine Coryton, the sister of [Adam Lynn Jr.](#), a prominent silversmith and merchant who lived just next door at 518-520 King Street until his death in 1836. Catherine inherited the lot from her father, Adam Lynn Sr., in 1785, and by 1799 at the latest, she and her husband, Josiah Coryton, were living on the lot. They remained in the house until 1801.

A new brick house had been built on the lot in 1812, replacing the two-story frame house that had preceded it. It was modeled after Adam Lynn's house next door, albeit with a three window expanse rather than four (Fig.2). The house remained there until it was demolished in 1967.

At the time of McKenzie's occupation, the ground floor shop was being rented by a tailor named William Atwell.

Within the first few weeks of beginning the excavation, the remains of a well were discovered in the area that was once the backyard of the house (Fig.3). See Site Map Unfortunately, half of the well was covered with asphalt from the area of the parking lot that archaeologists were not yet allowed to dig (see Project Overview). Because of this, field workers had to wait almost a month before being able to uncover and excavate the entire feature (designated Feature6). Work on the well finally began in August of 1977. The brick-lined structure averaged



Fig. 3: Top of Feature 6 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)



Fig. 4: One volunteer excavates Ft 6 while two others screen the dirt for artifacts (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

about 6.5 ft. in diameter and was excavated to a depth of almost 25 ft. Originally it would have been slightly deeper, as a few of the top brick courses seemed to have been scraped off when the site was graded after demolition.

The well was filled with human fecal material and refuse. It seems it was converted into a privy early in the 19th century, since most of the artifacts dated from the 1820s to the 1890s.

Artifacts of all sorts were found in the airless, water-logged environment of the privy. Not only were there quantities of ceramics and glass, but faunal, floral, and other organic remains were also preserved extremely well in these ideal conditions.



Fig. 5: Screening through the muck (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)



Fig. 6: Screening for artifacts (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

A few of the artifacts found in the privy are illustrated below (all artifact identifications were made by Barbara H. Magid, Alexandria Archaeology). Figure 7 features two so-called London-shape teacups and a saucer. The two pearlware cups were hand painted and produced some time around the 1810's and 1820's. The saucer, also a pearlware hand painted item, could have been manufactured any time between 1795 to 1830. Figure 8 features a whiteware London-shaped bowl, produced sometime between 1830 and 1860.



Fig. 7: Pearlware tea cups and saucer, AX 1 Ft.5 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)



Fig. 8: Whiteware bowl, AX 1 Ft.5 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

These items were deposited in the well around the time of McKenzie's occupation of the site and it is likely that they were used by him and his family. William Atwell is an unlikely candidate, if only because he did not actually live in the house but instead operated a tailor store on the ground floor. These objects are clearly household items and would have been used fairly frequently.

(Written by Amanda Iacobelli, 2006)

References

Unless otherwise indicated, all artifact identifications were made by Barbara H. Magid, Alexandria Archaeology. Historical information was extracted from the Alexandria Archaeology Files (AAF), mostly compiled by Ruth Sinberg Baker, Vivienne Mitchell, and Nancy Sennewald.

Smith, William F. and T. Michael Miller. A Seaport Saga: Portrait of Old Alexandria, Virginia. Norfolk/Virginia Beach: The Downing Company Publishers, 1989.

Terrie, Phillip. "Alexandria's Main Street Residents: A Social History of the 500 Block of King Street." Alexandria Archaeology Manuscript, 1979.