



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

From Cutting Edge to Obsolete in a Decade: Hotel George Mason

Alexandria Times, May 1, 2014

Image: Hotel George Mason .Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.

In the mid-20th century, the primary lodging house in Alexandria was the elegant Hotel George Mason, built in 1929 on South Washington Street. It was just across Prince Street from the U.S. Courthouse and Post Office, which were built the same year.

William Lee Stoddart, who was born in Tenafly, N.J. in 1868, designed the hotel. He studied at New York's Columbia University before joining the architectural firm of George B. Post.

Post, a student of American architect Richard Morris Hunt, actually was a civil engineer. He maintained an architectural practice in New York focused on commissions done in the Beaux Arts style.

After 10 years with Post, Stoddart established his own architectural firm that specialized in the design of urban hotels, particularly in southern cities. His projects drew upon the principles of the theory of scientific management to maximize efficiency and profit.

Scientific management was the name given by Louis Brandeis in 1910 to the theory of management principles first developed by mechanical engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor. Taylor's concepts applied scientific methodology to labor productivity and management practices, synthesizing workflows and processes to emphasize the efficient use of time and resources.

Stoddart's hotel designs were similar — but on a lesser scale — to those of noted hotelier Ellsworth M. Statler, whose Statler Hotel in Buffalo, N.Y. was the first in the world to include a private bath or shower in every room. Stoddart's hotels tended to be less extravagant than Statler's and were located in smaller cities that were just emerging as urban centers.

For example, although the six-story Hotel George Mason featured 106 rooms, all with running water, most were quite small and included only a toilet and sink. Even so, the hotel ballroom was famous for decades as “the” place to hold a major social event in Alexandria.

Stoddart's design for the George Mason came at the end of his career. Within a decade of the hotel's construction, the scientific management principles behind it were obsolete. By the mid 1930s — before this 1949 image of the hotel was photographed — three enormous neon signs went up onto the roof of the hotel, promoting the lodging house to motorists passing through Alexandria on the new George





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

Washington Memorial Parkway and to those visiting City Hall, which was several blocks away. The former hotel has now been converted into an office building.

“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.