# Alexandria Times

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## Out of the Attic

### Rebel homes, confiscated for Union wounded

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*Image: The entry hall. Courtesy, Lee Fendall House Museum.*



After the initial occupation of Alexandria by Union troops in 1861 at the start of the Civil War, the First Battle at Bull Run two months later elevated Confederate hopes that the conflict might be short-lived.

But as the months dragged on, and casualties returning to Alexandria for treatment escalated, the need for medical facilities became crucial. At first, the city's largest buildings were confiscated for hospital use, and quickly outfitted with crude cots to provide only the most basic comforts.

Unfortunately, the wounded kept coming, and, coupled with poor sanitation across the city, polluted water and spreading infectious diseases, soldiers were soon joined by even larger hordes of sick patients suffering from a wide variety of illnesses. The most common was dysentery, but the annual epidemics common to Alexandria were of epic proportions during the war years.

As the need for medical space grew, churches, schools and even private homes were taken over by Union authorities on a moment's notice. Particularly vulnerable were homes vacated by supporters of the Confederacy.

Although locked up and often left in the care of family servants, these barriers crumbled in the face of directives to confiscate properties for military use. Two such properties were elegant homes near the famous Lee Corner at North Washington and Oronoco streets, which became known as the Grosvenor Hospital and its annex, the Grosvenor Branch Hospital.

The main building at 414 N. Washington St. opened on August 17, 1862, in the home built in 1830 for Anthony Cazenove, one of Alexandria's most illustrious citizens who, due to his fluent French, was the personal representative to the Marquis de Lafayette during his 1824 visit to the city.

Once in military hands, the stately gardens behind the home were immediately replaced by a two story, 20-foot-by-100-foot hospital ward, a laundry facility, privies and a so-called "dead house" for the storage of corpses awaiting burial.

The hospital included space for 160 patients, but was filled to capacity within a year. In response, authorities seized the Oronoco Street home across the street, built in 1785 by Lee family relative Philip Fendall. The dwelling's entry hall, seen here, served as a smaller annex to Grosvenor, handling the overflow of patients and those in need of special care. It was at this location that Dr. Edwin Bentley, director of the U.S. Army General Hospital complex in Alexandria, performed the first blood transfusion in North America.

Grosvenor Hospital closed just days after the Confederates' surrender at Appomattox, and in the years after the war, both buildings were restored to residential use. Confederate Brig. Gen. Montgomery D. Morse returned to his native Alexandria and purchased 414 N. Washington St., where he lived with his wife until 1895, continuing to call the residence Grosvenor House.

The Lee family returned to the Grosvenor Branch on Oronoco Street, remaining there until 1903, when the home was purchased by Robert Downham. That site is now operated as the Lee-Fendall House Museum and Garden.

*"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.*