



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Revisiting another Civil War era hospital

*Alexandria Times*, April 27, 2017



Image: Washington and King Streets, 1921. Office of Historic Alexandria.

Another large Alexandria building used as a hospital during the Civil War was the commodious Washington Hall, located at 622-626 King Street. Originally built for a meeting hall, the building, 44 feet wide and 80 feet deep, was constructed in 1854, and formally opened on Jan. 5 of the following year, when it was leased to a group of gentlemen who had transformed the building into a 600-seat theatre.

The opening night presentation was a musicale by the Swiss Bell Ringers, which provided an elegant melodic finale to the holiday season and the start of the drab winter months to come. The audience was captivated by the luxurious décor and unobstructed views of the stage.

At the time the building was certainly one of the larger buildings on King Street, extending five bays across and standing three stories high. From the front, the theatre appeared to be flat-roofed, with an ornamental cornice projecting over the sidewalk. But, as seen on the right side of the street in this 1921 photo, the slight pitch of the roof is barely visible on the westerly façade just behind the chimney



## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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seen to the right. Routinely confused with the earlier structure on the corner of King and Washington Streets, Washington Hall was actually next to that structure, one lot east of Washington Street. However, to the rear of the building, the property stretched eastward behind other buildings on King and then westward to Washington Street.

During the war years, when the building was taken and renamed Washington Hall General Hospital, a branch of the Second Division General Hospital, this rear yard was used for laundry purposes, with hospital offices and a small coal house on the Washington Street frontage. The Washington Hall General Hospital contained 100 beds and was one of many hospitals serving Union soldiers in the Washington Street corridor.

After the war ended, the building struggled for decades, along with the rest of Alexandria, to regain its vitality and purpose. By the time this photograph was taken, the first floor was used as a laundry occupied by Charles Lee, and the second floor as offices for the Citizen Home Insurance Company.

Several years later a fire consumed most of the building, as well as the one at the corner. The two lots were then combined and a new structure on the site was built for retail purposes, a Lerner's store which prospered well into the mid-twentieth century when downtown Alexandria was the center of shopping in Northern Virginia. Today the building houses branch stores of Banana Republic and The Gap.

*“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.*