



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### City Hall's Last Century

*Alexandria Times, September 17, 2020*

*Image: City hall from the 1970s. Courtesy, Office of Historic Alexandria*

Following the fire that destroyed city hall in 1871 and its subsequent redesign by Adolf Cluss that resulted in a new city hall in 1873, changes in the building's architecture slowed during the subsequent century. This doesn't mean that nothing changed. There were at least four major alterations to the building during the 20th century. Let us take a brief look at what changed in the building during the past 100 years.

The 1940s and 50s included the first major efforts toward updating the building. The courtyard was temporarily closed and excavated to house boilers for a more modern radiator heating system and the terra cotta smokestack was constructed. An elevator was added to the courtyard side of the building as part of this modernizing effort. Many of the market stalls on the first floor had been converted into office space by then.



In the 1960s, city hall needed more office space and modernization. Architects Robert A. Willgoos and Dwight G. Chase were commissioned to design a T-shaped addition that would infill the courtyard. Changes included modernizing the bathrooms, adding stairways and another elevator.

By 1967, the city had acquired the full northern side of the 300 block of King Street. Construction of an underground garage with a plaza and fountain on top was completed as part of the Gadsby Commercial Urban Renewal Project, reorienting the main entrance of city hall from Cameron Street to Market Square Plaza.

In 1982, the city commissioned architects Neer and Graef to plan a major renovation of the interior of city hall. All of the windows in the original 1873 building were replaced, as were the two elevators, and two new floors were built to fully integrate the original building and the 1960 addition. Over the decades, attempts to keep up with a growing government and changing technology have resulted in many alterations to the interior of city hall but the outside of the building has not undergone any major renovations since the 1980s. Many of the heating and cooling and life safety systems are outdated and past their life cycles.

Structural repairs are necessary on the more than 140-year-old building. In 2014, the city identified the need for and planned a major renovation. The City Hall Renovation Project will provide a revitalized, safe and sustainable environment to better serve city staff, Alexandria residents and visitors well into the future.



## **Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia**

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*“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 staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria and invited guests.*