

Gadsby's during the Civil War

By the time Virginia had seceded from the Union on May 23, 1861, many Alexandrians had already left the city and traveled either north or south depending on where their loyalties lay. Those that remained witnessed the occupation of the city by Union troops less than 24 hours after secession was announced. Alexandria was run by a military governor and city mayor, who worked together to establish law and order on the civilian and military side, respectively. To conduct business in the city, all merchants had to sign an oath of allegiance to the Union.

The Hotel Business

The [Marshall House](#) may be the most well-known of the hotels during the war. The first day of the city's occupation, hotel's proprietor James Jackson shot and killed Colonel Ellsworth for removing the hotel's confederate flag. In what became known as the Marshall House Incident, both sides had their first martyrs and the incident was depicted in Harper's Weekly. After the shooting, souvenir hunters took away parts of the hotel, including pieces of banisters and wallpaper. Marshall House remained closed for business until 1863. (*Marshall House, top right, courtesy of the Library of Congress. The Marshall House was located where the Hotel Alexandrian is today.*)



The [Mansion House Hotel](#) was the newest and fanciest of the city's hotels, built over several years by James Green, of the Green Brothers Furniture, and enlarged in 1855. It was the largest hotel in Alexandria at the beginning of the war. Due to its size and modern amenities, the hotel was commandeered by the Union Army in November 1861 and used as a hospital for much for the war. (*Mansion House Hotel, middle, courtesy of the Library of Congress. The hotel was located in front of where Carlyle House is today.*)



The [City Hotel](#), most well-known for its connection to George Washington, was still a reputable, if dated, hotel. It offered comfortable rooms, a restaurant, and omnibus services (a carriage pulled by horses) to and from the river and train stations. (*City Hotel, bottom right, courtesy of the Library of Congress. City Hotel is part of the complex known as Gadsby's Tavern Museum today.*)



The Tavernkeepers of the City Hotel

In the 1850s, a small addition was added to the back of the City Hotel and the historic ballroom was subdivided into 3 hotel rooms. Samuel Heflebower leased the tavern from September 1857 through July 1863. While he changed his marketing to emphasize its proximity to forts, parole camps, and convalescent camps, he continued to offer the omnibus service, food, drink, and lodgings. All this was accomplished in spite of the blockade, occupation, and eventual city-wide prohibition. An ad from May 1861 supports these feats:

He provides for his guests like a prince, and not withstanding the proclamations excluding supplies from Virginia, the tables of the City Hotel find means to run the blockade, and bring green peas from the beleaguered Norfolk, spring lamb from the pastures near Harper's Ferry.

Alexandria Gazette, May 17, 1861

An account by George Alfred Townsend suggests Heflebower was able to make a great deal of profit by operating a secret bar during prohibition.

The proprietor of the place had voluntarily taken the oath of allegiance, and had made more money since the date of the Federal occupation that during his whole life previously...He employed a smart barkeeper, who led guests by a retired way to the drinking rooms. Here, with the gas burning at a taper point, cobblers, cocktails, and juleps were mixed stealthily and swallowed in the darkness. The bar was like a mint to the proprietor; he only feared discovery and prohibition.

Excerpts from *Campaigns of a Non-Combatant, and his romances abroad during the War*, by George Alfred Townsend, 1866.

By early 1862, Heflebower was ready to retire from the hotel business and began advertising the sale of the remainder of his lease along with all the furnishings and fixtures in the hotel. Robert McClure purchased the lease in July 1863.

McClure operated the Quaker City Hotel in Philadelphia, where he was also a Lieutenant Colonel in the 4th Pennsylvania Regiment. Shortly after taking over the City Hotel, the Provisional Governor of Virginia, Francis Pierpont, appointed McClure to be a Colonel of the Cavalry, allowing him to continue his military career during his tenure.

It was during this time that Governor Pierpont stayed at the City Hotel before moving to the new government headquarters at 415 Prince Street. Shortly after arriving in Alexandria, Confederate Ranger John Mosby attempted to kidnap Pierpont from the hotel in September 1863.



Officers of the 1st District Volunteers, posing for a photo outside of the City Hotel. ca. 1863

Robert McClure continued to operate the City Hotel for the duration of the war, but began to advertise for the sale of the lease and contents in February 1866. He was out of the hotel business by mid-May of 1866.

Labor at the City Hotel

Prior to the Civil, Heflebower operated the City Hotel with enslaved labor. A census (see below) shows five enslaved individuals associated with his name, but its unclear who, if anyone, were owned by Heflebower directly or if he was supplementing his workforce by renting enslaved people from others.

Emancipation came in stages during the Civil War and the status of enslaved people in town was fluid as new regulations were established. The First Confiscation Act of August 1861 freed enslaved people who had been helping with the Confederate war effort. The Second Confiscation Act of July 1862 freed people enslaved by Confederate military and civilian officials. While the Emancipation Proclamation freed those enslaved in territories declared in rebellion in January 1863, it did not apply to Union-occupied areas like Alexandria. It wasn't until the 13th amendment, formally abolishing slavery in the United States, was ratified by the required number of states in December 1865 that the remaining enslaved people were formally freed.

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SCHEDULE 2 - Slave Inhabitants in Alexandria in the County of Alexandria State
 of Va., enumerated by me, on the 11 day of June, 1860. D. McFarland Ass't Marshal.

1	2				3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10				11	12	13	
	NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS.											DESCRIPTION.							NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS.
	Number of Slaves.	Age.	Sex.	Color.	Number enumerated.	Deaf & dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic.	No. of Slave Inhabitants.					Number of Slaves.	Age.	Sex.	Color.	Number enumerated.	Deaf & dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic.	No. of Slave Inhabitants.	
1	1	25	M	B								Sam. Howell	1	45	M	B			
2	1	7	F	B								Mr. J. C. Lane	1	18	F	B			
3	1	64	F	B								W. L. Lally	1	65	F	B			
4	1	60	F	B								Sam. Heflebower	1	30	F	B			
5	1	20	F	B									1	65	M	B			
6	1	15	F	B								Mr. H. J. J. J. J.	1	26	M	B			
7	1	28	F	M								Same	1	27	M	M			
8	1	26	F	B								Mr. R. L. L.	1	15	M	M			
9	1	26	F	B								Same	1	18	M	M			
10	1	18	F	B								Same	1	30	F	B			
11	1	12	M	M								Same	1	15	M	M			
12	1	3	F	B								Same	1	25	F	B			
13	1	1	F	B								Same	1	17	F	B			
14	1	23	F	B								Same	1	18	M	B			
15	1	1	M	B								Same	1	27	F	B			

Exactly when the tavernkeepers shifted from enslaved to paid labor is unclear. There was, however, no shortage of labor to hire for hotel work between the newly freed African Americans and the steady arrival of contraband, enslaved people who had fled to the Union-occupied city.