

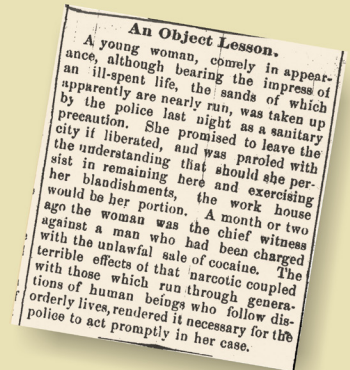
# The Alexandria Almshouse

The Alexandria Almshouse was a publicly funded poorhouse and workhouse, in which the needy could find refuge and the courts often sentenced people for vagrancy or indebtedness. Tenants worked hard for their sustenance. The Almshouse was built about 1801, and included almost twenty acres of land, which the residents farmed for food. In 1850, among the forty-one occupants were two elderly African-American women, Eve Dorsey, age 102, and Rachel Hodges, age 100. This building remained in use as a poorhouse until a larger, modern facility was built outside of Manassas in 1926, for the joint use of Alexandria and four nearby counties of Northern Virginia.



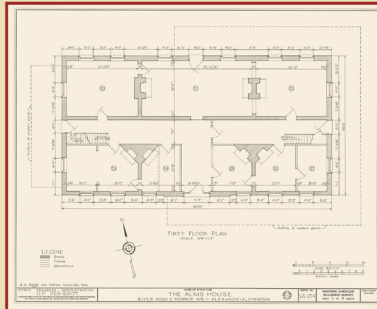
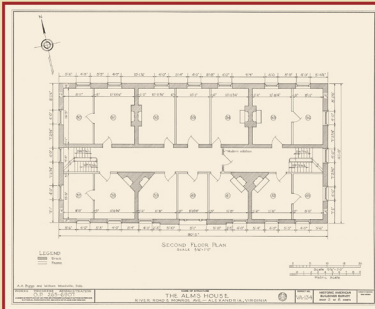
The Civil War had little effect on the crowded Almshouse, and in January 1862, the keeper recorded thirty-eight residents (plus 8 members of his own family), along with 3 horses, 2 cows, 1 bull, 19 hogs, 20 hens, 4 roosters and 5 ducks. After the war, the land was also used by the City for other purposes, such as a dog kennel.

Special Collections, Alexandria Library



The Almshouse served many purposes: shelter for the needy, a work facility for petty criminals, and even a holding place for undesirables.

Alexandria Gazette, September 22, 1904



The Almshouse was a two-and-a-half story, Georgian-style brick building with a full basement. Each floor was 3,350 square feet. For heat, the house originally had 18 fireplaces, but modern plumbing and boilers were eventually added. The June 1900 census showed superintendent William Smith and his wife residing there, along with 13 men and 15 women (totaling 15 whites and 13 blacks) as residents. The January 1920 census showed Joshua Sherwood, 70, as the head keeper, along with his wife, Mary, and only 14 residents, six of them men aged 44 to 58, and seven women aged 47 to 78, along with one young woman of 23.

Library of Congress



The Almshouse was originally situated in a vacant portion of the county outside the city limits. The Town of Potomac (today's Del Ray) and the Potomac Yard railroad facility built up around it at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This view looks north in 1923, with the Almshouse in the foreground, near the intersection of Monroe Avenue and Jefferson Davis Highway (U. S. Route 1).

Special Collections, Alexandria Library

Alexandria purchased a large tract of land outside the city in 1800, and built the Almshouse over the next two years. The building served the needy for almost 125 years and provided temporary shelter during a tornado in 1927. The house was sold to Robert C. Frame in August 1928, and he re-opened it as a six-room tourist hotel. When Frame defaulted on the mortgage, the City purchased the property back in March 1935. Eugene Simpson Stadium was built on the land, and the Recreation Department used the building for storage. The original Almshouse building was torn down in 1952.



1908

TOWN OF POTOMAC

1929

Produced for the Town of Potomac Centennial in 2008 by the City of Alexandria. Research and text by Lee Pernal Leland Ness

