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The Work of Marianne (Polly) Hulfish in the Old and Historic Alexandria District

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Alexandria's colonial image is, in large measure, a product, not a legacy. Central among the Colonial manufactory magnates was Marianne Hulfish (1906-1981). Polly, as she was affectionately and universally known, was one of the instrumental forces in securing Alexandria's historic past. Without her and many like her, undoubtedly there would be no preservation there today. The visual impression of Alexandria in

the 1990s is the handiwork of a band of dedicated and committed historic preservationists beginning a generation ago. Their foresight and financial resources created what we celebrate today. Polly Hulfish was personally responsible for the "preservation" of over fifty residential and commercial structures in the Old and Historic Alexandria District beginning in 1960 and lasting until 1971.

Central to the philosophy of

historic preservation is the scrape versus anti-scrape debate that is most widely known through the writings and works of Viollet LeDuc and John Ruskin. In essence, this debate has as its tenets: should buildings be left as they are or should buildings be "restored", shorn of their modern accretions and made to resemble something they might have looked like in the past? In this philosophical debate, Polly was definitely in the LeDuc camp. Clearly it was her decided intention to create something that might have been. In doing so, she was widely celebrated. Her remarkable legacy, the image of preservation in Alexandria, is less widely praised. Alexandria's preservation efforts have been widely criticized as celebrating the eighteenth century at the expense of the twentieth century. This image reaffirmed by professional writers, including native sons, neglects the path breaking record of historic preservation in the City and distorts the possible.

Polly was instrumental in the creation of Old Alexandria Restoration, Inc. The work of this organization was quite extraordinary. Old Alexandria Restoration functioned as a

historic preservation revolving fund -- that is, the Corporation bought houses, fixed them up and resold them, hopefully, for at least a small profit and then re-used the profits to carry out other projects. Old Alexandria Restoration was established with Polly as its President in 1962. During the 1970s preservation revolving funds were hailed as one of the most innovative and successful preservation tools that could be used to revitalize a historic district. Like much of her career in preservation, Polly was many years ahead of everyone. It was not until nearly a decade after the establishment of Old Alexandria Restoration that preservation revolving funds were in wide use in preservation districts in such places as Annapolis, Charleston and Pittsburgh. But in one sense, the revolving fund that was Old Alexandria Restoration was like every other revolving fund -- it revolved down, not up. The corporation was dissolved in 1975 and returned 10 cents on the dollar to the original investors. However, the corporation was quite successful in what it did. By the time of its dissolution, the corporation had bought and sold nearly twenty properties, assuring them of preservation and a

continued life in the Old and Historic Alexandria District.

At the time of her death in 1981, the Gazette Packet wrote, she "was a leader of a tiny handful of citizens who proved that restoration of old homes was basically better and more profitable than demolition and new construction in Alexandria's historic area...In 1960 Mrs. Hulfish formed Old Alexandria Restoration, Inc. which led to the restoration of over 45 houses in Alexandria primarily in the historic district. These houses remain distinctive for their unique beauty, warmth and charm. Mrs. Hulfish's touch is so apparent in her work that the homes are often advertised as 'Polly houses.'" In addition to her restoration work, Mrs. Hulfish was a member of the Board for 9 years. The Alexandria Association gave her awards for outstanding restoration work in 1962 and 1968. In July 1981 she was honored with an award from the Alexandria City Council for her contributions to Alexandria preservation. Her husband, Thomas A. Hulfish, Jr. was a member of the City Council in the mid-1940s and was a principal sponsor of the ordinance which created the Old and Historic

Alexandria District in 1946. Today, her son, Thomas A. Hulfish, III, serves as the Chairman of the Old and Historic Alexandria District Board of Architectural Review.

Polly houses, or buildings which have been "Polly-ized" to use Al Cox's felicitous phrase, are plainly recognizable. They have their own iconography. Their exterior characteristics are on plain view and easily decipherable with but few clues. Polly houses and their progeny, "Son of Polly Houses," have the following characteristics: 8" beaded siding, six-over-six true divided light wood windows, a gable roof form with asphalt shingles, usually a single gable dormer and a uniform front facade.

632 S. St. Asaph Street is the only residence Polly is known to have created in its entirety. The former house existing on the site was condemned and torn down ca. 1966. In its place, OARI and its architects Gotteshall & Ayers (Hamilton Morton, project architect) created a Colonial Revival house unlike any other in the Old and Historic Alexandria District. The house with its first floor overhanging pent roof recalls Pennsylvania colonial

architecture. But, more vividly it bespeaks the Colonial architecture ideal of *Better Homes and Gardens* of the late 1960s. This is a rowhouse that looks in elevation as it more rightly belongs in Bethesda. In short, it has no antecedents in the architectural heritage of Alexandria. Yet, there it sits as part of a row of mid-nineteenth century structures.



200 Duke Street
Polly & Thomas Hulfish's
Residence

A CHECKLIST OF THE WORK OF MARIANNE HULFISH IN THE OLD AND HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA HISTORIC DISTRICT by Peter H. Smith

Source: Old and Historic Alexandria District Board of Architectural Review Minute Books

Tabulation of Applications:

Total Number of Applications 88 (includes withdrawn applications)

Abbreviations:

MH = Marianne Hulfish

OARI = Old Alexandria Restoration, Inc.

MH 46

OARI by MH 27

OARI 5

OARI by others 3

MH for others 7

Number of different addresses: 49

ADDRESS (Alphabetically by address)	WORK DESCRIPTION	DATE	APPLICANT
501 Cameron	Alter steps and rear entrance	8/10/66	MH for OARI
	Approved porch and columns Alter fence on Pitt & Cameron St.	2/8/67	MH for OARI
200 Duke	Shed for garden tools	9/12/62	MH
	Enlarge kitchen and install new windows	10/23/63	MH
	Eliminate proposed chimney and substitute a large small paned window	2/10/65	MH
201 Duke	Alter front steps	4/24/63	MH
	Erect a brick wall	7/13/66	MH for W.H. Dempsey
304 Duke	Remove chimney and add windows to east side	11/4/70	MH for Society of St. Vincent de Paul

321 Duke	Alter roof, install 8" beaded siding and install windows and alter entrance Retain facade, particularly cornice and retain Victorian character	11/4/70 12/16/70	de Paul MH for St. Mary's
	Alter windows (to have shutters)	8/18/71	MH for Society of St. Vincent de Paul
516 Duke	Brick addition to rear of residence	1/23/63	MH
514-16 Duke	Change previous approval for addition	3/20/63	MH for Andrew Clarke
809 Duke	New siding, alter windows and steps Steps to have nosing of molded brick Similar to 7/67	7/12/67 8/9/67	MH MH
	Metal to wood rail	12/13/67	MH
312 S. Fairfax	Install 10" beaded siding alter windows	8/10/66	MH for Fred Renner, Jr.
310 Gibbon	Alterations Masonry addition on rear Move front door to west side	6/14/61 4/11/62 5/23/62	MH OARI MH for OARI
205 King	Alterations to exterior	9/12/62	MH
207 King	Alterations to exterior	9/12/62	MH
211 S. Lee	Alter roof and windows Replace a porch	11/13/63 4/8/64	MH MH
226 S. Lee	Alterations Relocate front door to south side	6/14/61 9/26/62	MH MH
315 S. Pitt	Addition, window changes and clapboard siding to be painted white	12/14/60	MH
316 S. Pitt	Remodel residence (Architect: Thomas Darnall) Approval of materials Enlarge and alter Alterations to the exterior	10/9/63 12/4/63 3/10/65 8/11/65	MH MH MH MH
320 S. Pitt	Change windows and front door	10/10/62	MH
322 S. Pitt	Remodel residence	8/14/63	MH
323 S. Pitt	Apply wood siding over imitation brick siding	8/14/63	MH
324 S. Pitt	Alter the front of the residence	2/13/63	MH
326 S. Pitt	Change windows and front door	10/10/62	MH
421 S. Pitt	Remove asphalt siding and replace with wood siding and add room to rear	5/11/66	MH for Wm. Barwick
300 Queen	Remove extra door, alter store windows and extend brick wall	12/14/66	MH for Ralph Marker
508 Queen	New front for building	10/10/62	MH
(probably 518)			
519 Queen	5' high board fence	5/23/62	MH
524 Queen	Alter the front Remove wooden enclosure and rebuild masonry addition	11/4/64 3/13/68	OARI OARI by Edw. Baldrige
307-309 S. Royal	Alter entrance details and replace front steps	11/4/70	MH for St. Mary's Catholic Church
307 N. St. Asaph	Alterations to the exterior	8/11/65	MH

	and garden supply house			
309 N. St. Asaph	Alterations to the exterior	8/11/65	MH	
329 N. St. Asaph	Replace siding with 8" redwood siding and otherwise alter the front	10/13/65	MH for OARI	
331 N. St. Asaph	Remodel and alter	4/13/66	MH	
333 N. St. Asaph	Remodel and alter	4/13/66	MH for OARI	
418 S. St. Asaph	Addition	2/8/67		OARI by D a v i d Rosenthal Architect
	Construct new residence	8/18/71	OARI	
623 S. St. Asaph	Erect a residence	3/8/67	MH for OARI	
625 S. St. Asaph	Repair front and erect addition	8/9/67	MH for OARI	
623-25 S. St. Asaph	Erect fence and steps	3/13/68	MH for OARI	
630 S. St. Asaph	Alterations	5/13/70	OARI by Eugene Cullinane	
	New addition	7/8/70		
631 S. St. Asaph	Install 8" beaded siding and alter front door frame and windows	5/14/69	MH for OARI	
632 St. St. Asaph	New residence	5/13/70	OARI by Eugene Cullinane	
635 S. St. Asaph	Remove front porch, replace some siding, install 6/6 windows and shutters and one story addition	3/8/67	MH for OARI	
637 S. St. Asaph	Replace steps, erect fence and install new front door	12/13/67	MH for OARI	
(627 in minutes)	Retaining wall at side and rear	3/13/68	MH for OARI	
	To modify previous request to alter	8/14/68	MH	
	Rear addition	7/9/69	MH for OARI	
639 S. St. Asaph	Alter siding and make addition	7/12/67	MH for OARI	
	Brick retaining wall and steps	3/13/68	MH for OARI	
	Alter height of rear garden wall	5/14/69	MH for OARI	
419 Wolfe	Alter	9/13/61	OARI	
428 Wolfe	Alterations	6/14/61	MH	
430 Wolfe	New window and door openings	12/14/60	MH	
507 Wolfe	Alter front	8/26/60	MH	
716 Wolfe	Alter a false front roof line	3/11/64	MH	

Vignettes from the Pages of the Alexandria Gazette

DISORDERLY CONDUCT:

Alexandria has always been noted for her noisy boys, and there are no indications that she will lose that cause of notoriety. The time for the fuss to

begin is usually after school hours in the evening, and from then till after dark, in some sections of the city, the din is continued, to the great

annoyance of the sick and nervous. The whole of north Royal street was in a lively ferment yesterday evening from the above mentioned cause, and to such an extent did it proceed that some of the sufferers complained at police headquarters; and instructions were issued accordingly to arrest all noisy boys caught in any part of the city. [Alexandria Gazette: 4/27/1875]

DEBUT OF THE PHONOGRAPH:

Many business men were in Captain Mushbach's office this morning for the purpose of witnessing the performances of the phonograph and phonograph-graphophone. All present were pleased with the exhibition, and there is no doubt that the proposed company will be formed, and that in the near future the little talking machines will be in every lawyer's office and business house in the States covered by the proposed organization. ...Of the music repeated by the phonograph, Morsell's rendition of "The Song That Reached My Heart" was particularly fine and could be heard over the entire room. [Alexandria Gazette: 5/25/1889]--Capt. Mushbach, one of Alexandria's leading attorneys, had his office at 109 N. Fairfax Street.

ALEXANDRIA--is fast becoming one of the most compactly built cities in the country and now has but few eligible building lots that are to be had for love or money within what a few years since was considered the city proper. Many yards and gardens have recently become the sites for residences, old houses have given way to more pretentious buildings, and what but a

few years since were the commons are now being rapidly built upon. The city is rapidly growing to the north and northwest, the city's centre of population is fast moving thither, and that the property valuations in those sections are increasing in a ratio proportionate with the city's advancing strides is attested by the recent real estate sales reported in the GAZETTE. As heretofore stated, the advantages of Alexandria as a place of residence are becoming more and more appreciated and are attracting attention on all sides. There being so few desirable building lots within what is considered the city proper, from sheer necessity the naturally well drained and conveniently located lands lying to the north and west are rapidly being utilized for such purposes, and ere long the local depot which but a few years since was considered "out of town," will be it is believed, in the heart of the city. The growth of Alexandria is gradual, natural and healthy--the effect of no "boom"--and those purchasing property here will find that they have made safe investments which will profit them much in the near future. [Alexandria Gazette: 5/23/1891]

THE LINCOLN RAILROAD car which is generally supposed to have been built in this city during the war for the late President Lincoln, and which is to be taken to Chicago for exhibition is about to have its tradition spoiled. Last night while waiting for a quorum to appear in the chamber of the Common Council Messrs. Paul R. Evans and John Harrison, who worked at the government shops in this city during the war, engaged in a conversation

with others concerning this coach, during which they stated emphatically that this car was never built for Mr. Lincoln, but was constructed for Brigadier General McCallum, who during the closing days of the war had charge of the reserves and government workmen here. While the car was being constructed the General was questioned incessantly as to its disposition and growing weary of making explanations finally said it was for President Lincoln. His words proved prophetic, however, as the first service it performed when put on the rails was to transport the late President's remains to Springfield, Illinois. [Alexandria Gazette: 5/17/1893] President Lincoln who was supposed to have ridden in his new car the first time on April 15, 1865, was assassinated at Ford's Theater on April 14th by John Wilkes Booth. [For a different view of the circumstances surrounding the construction of Lincoln's railroad car see: H. Robert Slusser, "President Lincoln's Railroad Car," in The Alexandria Chronicle (Spring 1995), Vol. 3, No. 1.]

ALEXANDRIA'S SUBURBAN VILLAGES:

The Alexandria correspondent of the Baltimore Sun says: The city of Alexandria has of late developed a number of projects for suburban towns in its neighborhood. There has always been a suburb known as "West End" on its west boundary and a suburb known as "The Village" on its south west edge. Later, "New Alexandria," established by the Land and River Improvement Co. and connected by a bridge across Hunting Creek, has been pushed forward with vigor. Northwest

Alexandria has been laid out as a villa town with drives and surface gutters. "Spring Park," on the west edge of the city has been mapped off into town lots and large improvements are promised. The Potomac end of the Baltimore Railroad at Shepherd's opposite this city, and connected by a railway ferry, is slow in improvement, but is said to be destined to become a village of considerable importance. [Alexandria Gazette: 5/17/1893]

A Conversation with the Penny Hill Grave Digger**

The very last house on the western side of the southern end of Pitt street is an unpretentious board shanty, architecturally of that pattern improvised for the habitation of the Government's wards during the four years of civil conflict. The surroundings consist of an enclosure formed mostly of hoghead staves and rusty sheet iron, torn probably from old freight cars, in which a few onion or beet tops can be seen protruding from the soil. From this humble abode there emerges a decrepit colored man, believed now to be eighty-five years old, with a stick in each hand and a haversack over his right shoulder. At the very slowest gait possible for human being attempting to use his pedal extremities does this Black man wind his way through the city, humbly saluting every one he meets and soliciting pennies. The majority of those he accosts, being unacquainted with his history, look upon him as a fraud, or some more charitable, with suspicion at least; but, in justice to

him, it may be stated that he labored faithfully for the support of himself as long as nature gave him strength. Lewis Dudley is the name of this antiquated individual, and before the war he was a slave in Prince William County, from which place he came with his wife twenty odd years ago. Upon locating in this city he sought and found employment for a number of years in digging graves in Penny Hill burying ground, by which labor and exposure he contracted a severe case of rheumatism, rendering him an invalid for life. His wife died some years ago, and was put away in old Penny Hill, on the western side of the carriageway through that ground. A fence composed of some thin strips and a border of clam shells surround the grave, and to this lot the old man drags himself on Sundays to muse over his bye-gone days and speculate on that universal reunion in which he is a firm believer. Dudley was asked by a merchant, at whose store he called the other day, why he did not go to the Poor's House, where he would be taken care of. Just at this time a reporter of the Gazette entered the store when the old fellow replied by telling the following story: "When I was a younger man I used to dig graves in Penny Hill, and often assisted at the burial of paupers who died at the Poor's House. At the first burials of the kind at which I was present I heard the keeper of the burying ground ask the man from the Poor's House who brought the corpse who he would bring next. The man replied quickly, 'Old aunt Nancy,' and soon enough in less than two weeks I had to dig a grave for Nancy and helped to bury her. After

the funeral, and just as the man who had brought Nancy's body was driving off, the keeper called to him and asked the same question, 'Who will you bring next?' and the man, without even stopping his horse, ballooned back, 'Uncle Jack,' and, sir, uncle Jack died and was brought to Penny Hill inside of ten days, and I dug his grave. Now, sir, you ask me why I don't go to the Poor's House to be well taken care and I tell you the reason is because I don't want to go to any place where they know beforehand exactly when a man is going to die; and, besides, the people at the Poor's House are smart and are proud of their reputation, and if I were to go there and they were to fix a day for me to die and be sent to penny Hill, and I might not happen to die that very day, they might send me there any way. So I will just keep going about asking gentlemen to give me five cents to buy something to eat till the Old Master calls me, and then I will be willing to go; but I don't want any one else to call me, because I might not be ready. After telling his story he got his nickel and went on his way rejoicing." [Alexandria Gazette: July 21, 1885]

****Penny Hill Cemetery - 1795**

Two acres bounded by West, Jefferson, Payne and Franklin Streets

As early as August 1795, the Common Council ordered that "Francis Peyton, George Deneale & James Keith (be) appointed a committee, to purchase a piece of ground for a general burying ground containing not less than two acres, nor exceeding four nor nearer to any part of the town, than one-half a mile from the well line

of Washington Street."

During the 19th and 20th centuries, indigent paupers and the poor were interred at Penny Hill. Few records remain, however, except for those compiled by Walter Sanford which date from 1912 to 1976. Unfortunately, tombstones at the cemetery have been demolished and some even thrown down a well which existed on the property. As early as August 14, 1865, the sextant at Penny Hill complained that he would dig up skulls every time he attempted to open a grave.

Early 19th century City Alms House records document the burial of many of Alexandria's poor at Penny Hill. In 1927 and 1929, City Council conveyed the northern portion of Penny Hill Cemetery to the Hebrew Benevolent Society for expansion of the "Home of Peace Cemetery." In 1932 and 1943, Council once again sold a portion of the old pauper's burial ground to the Agudas Achim Congregation for use as a cemetery. On January 27, 1976, after vocal opposition from some members of the community, Council decided to preserve all of the remaining site of Penny Hill, and, simultaneously, to ban further burials. [Contributed by T. Michael Miller]

Businesses Along King Street

The **Service Drug Store 706 King Street**, is the store that serves the customer. Rock bottom prices, fresh goods and a varied assortment as is to be found in any store in the state have so popularized this establishment there is a continuous stream of customers from opening until closing time.

Eighteen months ago [1925] this firm announced its opening and its first day was marked by a big attendance of customers. Ever since its business has been on the increase and its customers realize the vast savings made by dealing with this firm. ...Whether it is a penny transaction or something far greater, the officials of the store are always courteous and service is the watchword of everyone of the eleven employees in addition to the three members of the firm, which includes O.H. Whittlesey, K. O. Mentzel and R.F. Mentzel.

Here are to be found drugs of all sorts and competent men to compound the prescriptions and also a varied line of candy, cigars, toilet articles, hospital supplies, supplies for the sick room, a host of novelties and an up-to-date soda fountain where a great variety of soft drinks are sold. ... [AG: 1/1/1926]

Henry Kandler, 1000 King Street, operates one of the

leading candy stores in the city better known as the Oriole in addition he carries a varied assortment of novelties and toys. He is the exclusive agent for Martha Washington candies. He also carries a good assortment of other candies. Mr. Kandler makes a point to please his customers and since assuming the business it is rapidly growing. [AG: 1/1/1926]

Abel Cohen, 1104-1106 King Street -- The progressive eleven hundred block of King Street was given that name by Abe L. Cohen immediately on his moving to 1104-1106 King Street and soon his slogan became a reality. He remodeled the building he now occupies and moved from 418 King Street and put in a full line of men and women's wear. In April of the past year he launched an apex carrying a full line of millinery, which is stocked with goods to meet the demands of the most fastidious. Mr. Cohen carries in his large store a full line of clothing, boots and shoes for men and also coats, suits, dresses for the women.

Since the coming of the Cohen establishment to this block practically the entire square, formerly dwelling houses, has been converted into store buildings and Mr. Cohen reports that he is meeting with much success and expects a big increase in business in 1926.

Good goods and reasonable prices is Mr. Cohen's motto, who aims to serve the buying public. The generous patronage

accorded him is a testimonial from his many satisfied customers who are legion. [AG: 1/1/1926]

G.G. Wolt, Florist, 901 King Street --When but fourteen years old, G.G. Wolt, florist, whose shop is located at 901 King Street, started in the flower business. He learned the business thoroughly and at his establishment there are flowers of all kinds to suit the most fastidious. Five years ago he started this business. He specializes in cut flowers, potted plants, and corsage bouquets. For weddings and funerals flowers are prepared on short notice and his aim is to serve the public at the best prices possible with such service. Mr. Wolt through good quantity of his stock has steadily built up his business and he also is sanguine over the success of his business during the New Year. [AG: 1/1/1926]

The Purcell Shop, 1019 King Street -- The unique distinction of being the first and only shop of its character ever started in the city goes to the business operated by Elizabeth Purcell. Here are to be found dresses of the latest design, millinery in all its branches, and also this establishment specializes in pleating and manufacturing of buttons.

The need for such a shop was Mrs. Purcell's thought in 1920 and soon afterward she put her ideas into execution which has resulted in a steady and even increasing trade ...[1926]



**Early 1900's view of Mr. George Wells Neighborhood Grocery
429 Queen Street [N.E. corner of Queen & Pitt Street]**

Diagonally across from Mr. Well's at 500-502 was an upholstery store and later a general store (Sanitary Grocery, later known as Safeway.) Many other buildings remain today which were once groceries: 508 Queen; at 300 Queen was Henry Cheshires grocery; others at various times were S.E. corner of Queen and Royal; N.W. corner of Queen and Royal; 413 Queen; and 601 Queen Street. Courtesy of Marilyn W. Burke


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