



ALEXANDRIA HISTORY

George Washington in the Eyes of a Contemporary

The Washington Society of Alexandria

Montgomery Dent Corse

Town of Potomac

AB&W Transit Company

How to Research a House History in Alexandria, Virginia

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ALEXANDRIA HISTORY

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The Alexandria Historical Society

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The Alexandria Historical Society, meets at 8:00 P.M. on the fourth Wednesday in the months of September, October, and January through June in the Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314. Visitors and prospective members are welcome. Address inquiries to the Society at the Washington Street address.

George Washington in the Eyes of a Contemporary

by Elizabeth Hambleton

On 1 September 1786 Olney Winsor and his partner, Joseph Jenckes, both of Providence, Rhode Island, sailed into Alexandria to start a business.¹ They built a two-story frame building on the southeast corner of King and Water (now Lee) streets where they sold a miscellaneous cargo brought in from the West Indies—coffee and cocoa, sugar and molasses, cotton, oranges, and other products.²

In an interesting series of letters written to his wife, Hope, in Providence between 2 September 1786 and 10 June 1788, Winsor described his life in Alexandria. A letter dated 31 March 1788 is of special interest in this 250th anniversary year of George Washington's birth:

My Dear,

... Saturday morning last Mr. Jenckes and myself received a very polite Card from General Washington, requesting our company to dine with him on Sunday, in Company with several other Gentlemen from this town—accordingly we set out from the Store yesterday Morning half past 11 o'clock and arrived at Mount Vernon on about one—where we were received by the General and his family with great freedom and politeness, at the same time without any ceremonious parade. The general converses with great deliberation and with ease, except in pronouncing some few words, in which he has a hesitancy of speech—He was dressed in a plain drab Coat, red Jacket, buff Breeches and white Hose.

Mrs. Washington is an elegant figure for a person of her years, perhaps 45.—she is rather fleshy, of good complexion, has a large portly double chin, and an open and engaging Countenance, on which a pleasing smile sits during Conversation, in which she bears an agreeable part.—She was dressed in a plain black Sattin Gown, with long sleeves, figured lawn Apron and Handkf, guaze (sic) french night Cap with black bowes—all very neat—but not gaudy.

From this description you will conduce that your *plain* Husband was pleased with his reception, and felt himself perfectly at ease in this agreeable and improveing Company.

We had an exceeding good Dinner, which was served in excellent order. After Dinner the new Constitution was introduced as the subject of conversation, and sundry questions asked me by the General, and Mr. Humphreys, from Connecticut, who now resides at the Generals, respecting the part I expected your State would take—I wish I could have given them more pleasing and encouraging answers—but we all hoped for

the best—the General expressed himself on the Subject with such real concern for the united happiness of the States, and at the same time with such clearness on those parts of the Constitution which have been objected to, as not being sufficiently explicit, that I was as much pleased with him, as a private man, a former of a System for the United States, as I have heretofore been in his military character—in which all agree that he was the Saviour of America—Then, how preposterous a part do those now act, who charge him with being a Conspirator against the liberties of that very Country which he so lately saved from the all grasping hand of a haughty Tyrant.—to start the Idea is ungrateful—to divulge it, is black infernal ingratitude! . . .³

In George Washington's diaries, the general's entry for Saturday, 29 March reads:

A Mr. Cay, Undertaker of the Plaistering of the Capitol, came here...to look at my New Room. He dined and went away afterwards, and in the evening Mr. Fendal [Philip Fendall] came. Colonels Hanson and Ramsay [Dennis], Mr. Powell [Leven Powell] and Messrs. Jenks and Winsor dined here...⁴

FOOTNOTES

1. *Letters of Olney Winsor of Providence, R.I., to his wife, Mrs. Hope Winsor, written in Alexandria, 1786-1788*. Originals at the Virginia State Library, Manuscript Division, Richmond, Va.

2. Alexandria Deed Book D:234-5, 241. In the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court, Alexandria, Virginia.

3. This letter was published in the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, *Annual Report*, 1943 (Mount Vernon, Va., 1943), p. 14.

4. John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Diaries of George Washington, 1748-1799*, 4 vols. (Boston and New York: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, 1925) 3:317-318.

A preliminary version of the letter also exists in which Winsor abbreviated and crossed out words and revised many phrases. He was evidently trying to record the event in as impressive a manner as possible, and the finished product is carefully written in his best handwriting. - Editor's note.

The Washington Society of Alexandria

By Robert G. Whitton

The formation of the Washington Society of Alexandria one month after the death of George Washington was a natural consequence of his long, continuous, and respected connection with his home town, Alexandria. This association began in 1749 when, as a young man, George Washington assisted in surveying and laying out the Town of Alexandria, helping John West, Jr., surveyor of Fairfax County. It culminated with his funeral services, which were planned, directed, and attended by his many friends and compatriots in Alexandria.

George Washington died at 10:20 P.M., 14 December 1799, at Mount Vernon, attended by two Alexandria physicians, Drs. James Craik and Elisha C. Dick, and Dr. Gustavus Brown of Maryland.

Alexandria was well aware of the grave illness of its illustrious friend. During the entire day messengers went back and forth bringing reports of his condition. His death was widely known in Alexandria within an hour or so after it occurred, whereas it was not until 18 December that Chief Justice John Marshall made the announcement to the Congress at Philadelphia.

Plans for his Masonic funeral service and interment at Mount Vernon on 18 December were made at a funeral lodge held by the Masons of Alexandria on 16 December. "Anyone who reads the description of Washington's funeral will realize that it was, practically, an Alexandria demonstration; that it was conducted with striking dignity and solemnity, and that but for the people of that town, it would have been a very simple ceremony indeed."¹

At this same meeting a proposal to form an organization to perpetuate Washington's memory and to carry on his charities was made. On 14 January 1800 the following notice appeared in the *Columbia Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*:

The Washington Society of Alexandria

Those gentlemen who have subscribed to the establishing of a WASHINGTON SOCIETY are informed that there will be a meeting of subscribers at Gadsby's Hotel this evening at 6 o'clock January 14th.

On 30 January the paper announced the results of two meetings held by the society that month: on the 14th a committee was appointed to prepare a constitution and rules and regulations; on 28 January officers were elected at an adjourned meeting. They were: William Fitzhugh, president; E.C. Dick and R. West, vice-presidents; Rev. W. Maffitt, chaplain; Johnathan Swift, treasurer; George Deneale, secretary; William Herbert, James Keith, the Rev. J. Muir, and Charles Simms, standing committee.

The names of members gleaned from surviving records and newspaper announcements are John C. Herbert, Thomas Marshall, Walter Jones, the Rev. Thomas Davis, Thomas Porter, Jacob Hoffman, Charles H. Mercer, George A.

Thornton, Anthony C. Cazenove, Augustine Fitzhugh, Robert J. Taylor, William Veitch, Thomas Preston, Thomas Mount, John A. Stewart, John Muncaster, James Harper, Edmund Jennings Lee, Charles J. Catlett, Jacob Morgan, Craven P. Thompson, Ephraim Gilman, John Lloyd, James B. Nickolls, Lewis Hipkins, Benjamin Waters, Jr., John M. McCarty, Bladen Dulany, David H. Allen, Philip R. Fendall, David Hoffman, Francis Scott Key, George Washington Parke Custis, General Henry (Light Horse Harry) Lee. Chief Justice John Marshall was vice-president of the society.

Inspection of the records that still exist indicate that the society raised money for the Washington Free School, and celebrated Washington's birthday on the 22nd of February each year and the birth of the nation on the 4th of July. On such celebrations the society led a parade to the Presbyterian church for prayer and an oration. After the oration the society would proceed to a suitable tavern or hotel for dinner and toasts to Washington. The orations were delivered by a member selected by ballot. Some of the more famous orator members were Richard Bland Lee, Chief Justice John Marshall, David Hoffman, and Francis Scott Key.

From references to the society in the *Alexandria Gazette*, it appears that the Washington Society of Alexandria was active from its founding in 1800 until 1843. An earlier Washington Society of Alexandria was in existence during Washington's lifetime. Both Mary G. Powell and Charles Callahan refer to the society in their histories. Charles Callahan writes:

... It was in the hotel also that the assemblies or balls under the auspices of the "Washington Society of Alexandria," were held during the winter months, and the following letter, dated a few days after he held a review, addressed to the Committee on Arrangements for these assemblies, is among the last letters Washington ever wrote. The original of this letter, now in the possession of Alexandria-Washington Lodge of Masons, is a priceless heirloom:

Mt. Vernon, 12th November, 1799

"Gentlemen: Mrs. Washington and myself have been honored with your polite invitation to the Assemblies in Alexandria, this winter, and thank you for this mark of your attention. But alas! our dancing days are no more. We wish, however, all those whose relish for so agreeable and innocent an amusement, all the pleasure the season will afford them. And I am, Gentlemen,

Your most obedient and obliged
servant,
Geo. Washington

Jonathan Swift,
George Denale,
William Newton,
Robert Young, Managers²
Charles Alexander,
James H. Hooe,

Mrs. Powell quotes from the proceedings of the Washington Society: Tomorrow February 22nd, 1799, being the nativity of Washington,—a day commemorated by all, and the day on which this Society, founded for aiding certain charitable institutions commenced by him, have their anniversary meetings.—We are desirous that the day may be announced by a discharge of guns, sixteen rounds, from the Market Square, and request you to aid us in that object. The powder will be delivered to your ordering.

Your very humble servant

George Deneale³

Credit must be given to William B. McGroarty and Charles Callahan for their efforts in 1927, which resulted in the reorganization of the Washington Society of Alexandria. Mr. McGroarty did considerable research on the society and circulated a history of it to a number of Alexandria men. Mr. Callahan, known for his efforts in establishing the George Washington National Masonic Memorial on Shuter's Hill and as a historian with knowledge of George Washington, wrote the preface to the paper.

Later, pursuant to a call issued by McGroarty and Callahan for the purpose of reorganizing the society, the following persons assembled at Gadsby's Tavern on Saturday, 14 January 1928, at 7:30 P.M.:

Robert S. Barrett	Edward S. Kemper
Wm. P. Woolls	James T. Preston
Harry R. Burke	Edward S. Leadbeater
L.P. Woodward	W.E. Latham
Charles H. Callahan	William B. McGroarty
Robert S. Jones	William H. Sweeney
John B. Gordon	William A. Moore, Jr.
D. McC. Ramsay	C. Page Waller
Arthur Herbert	Rev. William J. Morton
W.L. Norford	Geo. W. Zachary
Elliott Hoffman	Joseph H. Newell
Ernest M. Delaney	Hannon E. Norris
Mauchlin Niven	John B. Phillips
Dr. Llewellyn Powell	Robert M. Reese
Leopold Rubin	Richard Ruffner
Howard W. Smith	Henry P. Thomas
J.E.W. Timberman	

McGroarty related that 128 years ago to the day, and probably to the hour, certain personal and intimate friends of Washington assembled in the tavern and organized the Washington Society of Alexandria which functioned for nearly half a century. He said that he thought it fitting that the setting for the reorganization of the society should be at the place of the birth of the original one. At the

conclusion of his remarks, those assembled formed in procession and marched to the Old Presbyterian Meeting House on South Fairfax Street.⁴

After the revival of the society lectures similar to those held in the 1800s were presented to its members and their friends. Among the speakers on 22 February 1929 were Simeon D. Fees, vice-chairman, George Washington Bicentennial Commission; Dr. Albert Bushnell Hart, historian for the commission; and William Tyler Page, executive secretary of the commission. On 14 January 1931 James M. Beck spoke on "Washington and the Constitution."

Richard M. Dow states in his book that: "The Washington Society of Alexandria, through the efforts of J.B. Gordon and W. B. McGroarty, took an active interest in rediscovering the historical associations of the [Old Presbyterian Meeting House] church, and in 1933 it sponsored the planting of four memorial trees at exercises which were broadcast over the radio. The Chief Forester of the United States, F.A. Silcox, gave the principal oration. The trees were planted in memory of John Carlyle, John Duffey, A.C. Cazenove, and Col. George Deneale."⁵

The Washington Society presented a memorial tablet to the Meeting House. The unveiling took place on 9 May 1938. It read:

MAY 9, 1798
HAVING BEEN PROCLAIMED A DAY
OF FASTING AND PRAYER BY THE
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
BECAUSE OF THE DANGER OF
WAR WITH FRANCE
GEORGE WASHINGTON
ATTENDED, IN THIS CHURCH,
THE PROCLAMATION SERMON
PREACHED THAT DAY BY
REVEREND JAMES MUIR, D.D.

Erected by
the Washington Society of Alexandria
May 9, 1938

The society is now dormant, not dead, but it needs rejuvenation, if it is to resume its role in recognizing the intimacy of George Washington's relationship with Alexandria, his home town.⁶

1. William Buckner McGroarty, "The Washington Society of Alexandria," *Tyler's Quarterly* 9 (1928): pp. 147-163.

2. Charles H. Callahan, *Washington the Man and the Mason* (Alexandria: Memorial Temple Committee of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association, 1913), p. 186

3. Mary G. Powell, *The History of Old Alexandria, Virginia* (Richmond: William Byrd Press, 1928), p. 139.
4. Minute book of the Washington Society of Alexandria, Alexandria Library, Lloyd House, p. 1.
5. Richard B. Dow, *A History of Second Presbyterian Church* (Alexandria: The Second Presbyterian Church, 1952) p. 109.
6. Of the charter members of the reorganized society and the last known list of members, dated in 1935, there were only three known survivors in April 1982. They were the Honorable Albert V. Bryan, retired judge of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals; Cecil Wall, retired director of the Mount Vernon estate; and the author, Robert G. Whitton, who is still active in an investment firm in Leesburg, Virginia. The author's home is at Arellton, Round Hill, Virginia.

Montgomery Dent Corse

By William B. Hurd

Montgomery Dent Corse was born at Alexandria, then a part of the District of Columbia, on 14 March 1816, the eldest son of John and Julia Corse.¹ He attended Major Bradley Lowe's military school at Colross and Benjamin Hallowell's school on Washington Street.

His early recollections were of Lafayette during his visit to the city in 1825 and of taking part, as a member of Lowe's student battery, in the inauguration of President Jackson in 1829. At an early age he entered his father's banking business.

In 1846 Corse raised a company of volunteers for service in Mexico. Because the District of Columbia quota was filled, the company was reformed and mustered in at Richmond as Company B, 1st Virginia Volunteers, Montgomery D. Corse, captain.

Although Company B served under General Taylor on the Rio Grande and in garrisons around Monterey, it did not take part in any of the important engagements of the war. The company was mustered out at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, in August 1848.

Corse stayed at home for a few months and then, in February 1849, sailed from New York to Panama and thence on to California. He lived in the Sacramento area, mined for a while and, after accumulating \$500, opened a store on the north fork of the Sacramento River. He later returned to Sacramento, where he was a steamboat agent, customs officer, deputy marshal, and hotelkeeper. While at Sacramento in 1852, he was elected captain of the newly formed Sutter's Rifles, which was organized as an anti-vigilante force.

During his first week as a Forty-niner, Corse made \$6.40. He wrote home that "no man has an idea of the labor of getting gold out of the earth until he tries it...I have handled boulders enough to pave King Street from one end to the other."

In the winter of 1855 Corse returned briefly to Alexandria, where he met for the first time his future wife, Elizabeth Beverley.² Elizabeth was born on 10 September 1825, at Avenel, near The Plains, Virginia, the daughter of James and Jane Beverley. In 1853 the children, as heirs of James Beverley, bought for the use of Jane during her lifetime the house and five lots owned by William G. Cazenove on the west side of the 400 block of North Washington Street.³

Corse went back to California for a few months, before returning permanently to Alexandria in December 1856. He soon thereafter was employed in the banking business carried on by the partnership of two younger brothers—John D. and Wilmer D. Corse—and Edward Snowden, trading as Corse, Snowden and Corse.⁴ The 1860 census lists him as living with John D. Corse.

During the unrest that followed John Brown's raid in 1859, a Home Guard was formed at Alexandria, in which Corse served as first lieutenant.⁵

On 7 January 1861 the Old Dominion Rifles was organized at Alexandria, and Corse was elected captain. On 19 February the five militia companies in the city were formed into the Alexandria battalion, with Corse as major. He later served as adjutant to the military commanders at Alexandria and accompanied the garrison to Manassas Junction when the city was evacuated on 24 May 1861. There, on 10 July, the 17th Virginia Regiment was activated from among the Northern Virginia militia companies, and Corse was commissioned as its colonel.

The 17th Virginia took part in the major battles of the Army of Northern Virginia in 1861 and 1862. Corse was wounded at Second Manassas, South Mountain, and Antietam. Following Antietam he was promoted brigadier general and given command of a brigade consisting of the 15th, 17th, 30th, and 32 Virginia regiments, in Pickett's division. General Longstreet wrote that "Colonel Corse is one of the most gallant and worthy officers in this army. He and his regiment have been distinguished in at least ten of the severest battles of the war."

Before assuming his new command, Corse obtained leave and, at Charlottesville on 22 November 1862, married Elizabeth Beverley.⁶ Elizabeth stayed at Richmond and Charlottesville for the remainder of the war, except for a period in the winter of 1863-64, when she was with her husband in Southwestern Virginia, Eastern Tennessee, and North Carolina.⁷ Their first child, Virginia Beverley Corse, was born in 1863 or 1864.⁸

Corse's brigade was on detached service in the Blackwater River area southeast of Petersburg and along the North and South Anna Rivers in the winter and spring of 1863, returning to the Army of Northern Virginia after the battle of Gettysburg. Corse wrote to Elizabeth from Winchester on 14 July 1863, "God has spared me from taking part in the bloody contests of this campaign so far, for which I am truly thankful, yet I am ready to take my part and share the fate of Gen'l Lee and the great army...."⁹

The brigade returned to Eastern Tennessee in the fall of 1863 and then took part in the attempt to retake New Bern, North Carolina. When Grant moved south of the James in the summer of 1864, Corse's brigade returned to Lee and was posted on Howlett's Line, between Petersburg and Richmond. Here Corse was wounded for the fourth, and last, time.

On 1 April 1865 Pickett's division was at Five Forks. Douglas Southall Freeman, in *Lee's Lieutenants* (p. 671), says that "Except for Corse's stalwarts, those of Pickett's men who escaped the field were reduced to panic and were pursued by Sheridan till night forced recall." Three days later one-half of the Army of Northern Virginia was destroyed at Saylor's Creek. General Corse was among those captured, and he was held prisoner-of-war at Fort Warren, Massachusetts, until paroled on 24 July 1865.¹⁰

Corse returned to Alexandria and went into business as a partner with his brother Wilmer, trading as W.D. Corse & Co. The firm was principally engaged in the exchange of securities, although a few cash loans, secured by mortgages, are recorded in the court records.¹¹

It is probable that Montgomery D. Corse, Elizabeth, and their children lived with Elizabeth's mother in the Washington Street house until she died.¹² On 8 February 1871, Corse bought this house, as trustee for his wife, for her use during her lifetime and then for the use of her children and their heirs, from Elizabeth's brothers and sisters. The purchase price was \$14,000.¹³ The trust funds used for this purpose were part of a legacy from Elizabeth's uncle, William Beverley, of Essex County, Virginia. William Beverley (1791-1866), a bachelor, was the owner of Blandfield Plantation.¹⁴

Not very much is known about the details of Corse's life after the war. He was a partner in W.D. Corse & Co. until that firm was dissolved in 1874, when he retired from business. He was a vestryman at St. Paul's Episcopal Church from 1876 to 1894 and a member of the Virginia Military Institute board of visitors from 1876 to 1882.¹⁵ He and Elizabeth had four children.

- *Virginia Beverley Corse* was born during the war. Sometime after her father's death she moved to The Plains. She died, unmarried, in 1919.¹⁶
- *Montgomery Beverley Corse* was born in 1866. He graduated from VMI in 1885 and then studied pharmacy at the University of Virginia. He became a druggist at Lexington, served on the VMI faculty from 1893 to 1896, donated his services as graduate manager of athletics from 1902 to 1910, and served on the board of visitors from 1911 to 1916 and from 1922 until his death in 1931.¹⁷
- *William Beverley Corse* was born in 1867. He also attended VMI, from which he graduated in 1887. He was a civil engineer, first for a railroad and then for the U.S. Geological Survey. He was a resident engineer on the Panama Canal project. He died at Baltimore in 1911.¹⁸
- *Elizabeth Beverley Corse* was born in 1871. She married Albert C. Murdaugh of Alexandria in 1897 and died in 1933.¹⁹

On 27 April 1870 Corse was at Richmond to hear arguments before the Supreme Court of Appeals over the selection of Richmond's mayor. As the proceedings were about to begin, an overcrowded gallery gave way and, in turn, caused a portion of the third floor of the capitol building to collapse into the floor below. Sixty-two men were killed and 251 injured. Corse, T. A. Brewis, an Alexandria merchant, and Robert Beverley of Fauquier County, Elizabeth's brother, were talking together at the time. Brewis was killed, Corse and Beverley slightly bruised. Another Alexandrian, Colonel George W. Brent, was seriously injured.²⁰

In March 1873, while watching President Grant's second inaugural, Corse first became aware that his sight was impaired. He was operated on for a cataract and, as a result, lost the sight of an eye. A cataract formed on the other eye and, after he became totally blind, an operation in 1887 restored vision in that eye sufficiently that he could see to get about. He was, however, unable to read or write without great difficulty.²¹

General Corse was a charter member of the R.E. Lee Camp, United Confederate Veterans, organized at Alexandria on 7 July 1884. The first commander of the camp was Corse's wartime adjutant, Captain Philip B. Hooe, who was followed from 1886 through 1895 by W. A. Smoot. Although Corse was active in veterans functions, he never held office in the Confederate veterans organization.²²

On 24 May 1889 General Corse was a distinguished guest, with Governor Fitzhugh Lee and General Joseph E. Johnston, at the dedication of the Confederate monument at Washington and Prince streets. The statue, designed by John Elder of Fredericksburg after his painting "Appomattox," was unveiled by Virginia Corse. General Corse enjoyed telling people that, thanks to him, the Yankee government had helped pay for the statue, for he had donated his Mexican War survivor's pension of \$8 a month to the monument fund.²³

After his retirement Corse started each day with a trip to the market, where he met and talked with old friends. He usually stopped in at the Burke and Herbert bank to see his successor as captain of the Old Dominion Rifles and colonel of the 17th Virginia, Arthur Herbert, and at Warfield and Hall's drugstore at 302 Prince Street to chat with Edgar Warfield, another old soldier.²⁴

Gradually, however, his walks shortened, until he was hardly able to go farther than the King and Washington street corner, and in the winter of 1894-95 he was mostly confined to his home.²⁵

Elizabeth Beverley Corse died on 31 December 1894.²⁶ She left her estate to her children, in accordance with William Beverley's bequest, reciting that "In case my husband survives me I leave him a comfortable support and maintenance for his life, out of the increase and revenues from my estate."²⁷

General Corse died on 11 February 1895, at the age of 79. His funeral was held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, the coffin draped with the colors of the 17th Virginia Regiment, and interment was in the family plot at St. Paul's cemetery.²⁸

Among the organizations expressing their regret in the pages of the *Alexandria Gazette* were the R.E. Lee Camp of the United Confederate Veterans and *Alexandria Post* No. 46 of the Grand Army of the Republic.

FOOTNOTES

1. Except as noted, the information about Corse's early life, until his return from California in 1856, is from Montgomery B. Corse, *Biography of General Montgomery D. Corse*, manuscript, Alexandria Library, Lloyd House, Alexandria, Va., Cited as M.B. Corse manuscript.

2. M.B. Corse manuscript; Alexandria Deeds R3:503.

3. Alexandria Deeds P3:212, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Alexandria, Virginia.

4. Alexandria Deeds R3:503.

5. Except as noted, the information about Corse's military career from 1859 to 1865 is from William B. Hurd, *Alexandria, Virginia, 1861-1865* (Alexandria, Va.: City of Alexandria, Va., 1970).

6. M. B. Corse manuscript.
7. M. B. Corse manuscript.
8. M.D. Corse letters to his wife, in Corse Papers, Alexandria Library, Lloyd House, Alexandria, Va.
9. Corse Papers.
10. Corse Papers.
11. Alexandria Deeds A4:58 et al.
12. Alexandria directory, 1870, Alexandria Library, Lloyd House.
13. Alexandria Deeds 2:3, also 1:421 and 5:405.
14. A copy of his will is in Alexandria Wills 2:260. Blandfield Plantation and its owners are described in an article by Ulrich Troubetzkoy, "Blandfield Plantation," *Virginia Cavalcade* Vol. XI, No. 4 (Spring 1962).
15. St. Paul's vestry records, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Alexandria, Va.; letter of 2 February 1982, from the assistant public information officer, VML, to the author.
16. St. Paul's vital records.
17. Letter of 2 Feb. 1982, from the assistant public information officer, VML, to the author.
18. Letter of 2 Feb. 1982, from the assistant public information officer, VML, to the author; St. Paul's cemetery records.
19. St. Paul's vital and cemetery records.
20. *Alexandria Gazette*, 28 April 1870.
21. M.B. Corse manuscript, pp 68-69, 71.
22. *R.E. Lee Camp, Confederate Veterans, Alexandria, Va.* by Mary Custis Lee—17th Virginia Regiment Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy. Copy in Alexandria Library, Lloyd House.
23. Mariette B. Hurd, "Statue of Confederate Soldier was dedicated 70 years ago Sunday," *Alexandria Gazette*, 23 May 1959. The story about Corse's contribution to the monument fund was probably related to the author of this article by Rebecca Ramsay Reese (1870-1955).
24. M.B. Corse manuscript, p. 70; Edgar Watfield, *A Confederate Soldier's Memoirs* (Richmond, Va.: Masonic Home Press, 1936).
25. M.B. Corse manuscript.
26. *Alexandria Gazette*, 31 Dec. 1894.
27. Alexandria Wills 2:108.
28. *Alexandria Gazette*, 11, 12, and 13 Feb. 1895. There is no record of a will.

Town of Potomac

1908 - 1930

By Robert L. Crabill

In 1907 residents of Del Ray and Saint Elmo petitioned the Virginia General Assembly to incorporate these areas as the Town of Potomac. The charter, granted 13 March 1908, authorized the establishment of a local government, with a six-member council and a mayor. J.A. Suplee was mayor; George W. Zachary, clerk; Richard H. Roberts, sergeant; Walter U. Varney, treasurer; and J.V. Barrett, Charles A. Campbell, J.A. Carpenter, W.T. Emerson, William Kidwell, and H.H. Powell were councilmen.

By 1925 the town had a combination town hall and fire station; a public high school with a gymnasium; a fire department with motorized equipment and two volunteer companies of fifty men each; and a sewer system.

The 1928 budget estimated revenues of \$17,600, of which \$4,400 would come from property taxes, \$3,500 from licenses, \$1,500 from rent of the town hall and \$7,500 from the mayor's court. Expenditures included: police department \$7,470, fire department \$2,725, town hall \$2,460, public works \$3,350, and salaries \$620.

The Town of Potomac was known as a railroad community because of the large number of railroad workers among its residents. The Washington & Old Dominion Railroad ran through the heart of town on its way from Alexandria Junction to Bluemont, Virginia. Its station on Commonwealth Avenue was a transfer point with the Washington, Alexandria, and Mount Vernon Railway, a streetcar line that stopped at Saint Elmo, Saint Asaph, Del Ray, and Lloyd along Commonwealth Avenue in the Town of Potomac. Potomac Yard lay along the eastern boundary of the town. Its main entrance was at Hume Avenue in the Saint Elmo section. Two factors helped the town grow: the streetcar line provided rapid transportation to either Washington or Alexandria and the Potomac Yard provided job opportunities.

In 1915 there were two clusters of houses. The one at Saint Elmo, near the entrance to Potomac Yard, was occupied mostly by railroad workers. The other, near Commonwealth Avenue, between Bellefonte Avenue and Del Ray Avenue, was occupied by people who worked in Washington or Alexandria and commuted on the trolley line.

Potomac was a self-sufficient community, whose industrious citizens were concerned about the proper growth and character of their town. The neighborhoods worked together to develop both public and commercial facilities including churches, schools, the Bank of Del Ray, a post office, and a telegraph office. The main business thoroughfare was Mount Vernon Avenue which had a variety of retail shops and a movie theater named the *Palm*.

The 1927 directors of the Bank of Del Ray were local citizens whose family

names are still familiar to Alexandrians: Clay Brittle, Carl Budwesky, John Cary, Edward Duncan, Anthony Guiffre, John Harding, Nelson Snyder, and William Woolls.

Religious activities played a major role in the lives of Potomac residents. The Del Ray United Methodist Church started in 1893 at Isaac Arnold's house at Leslie and Windsor avenues. The first small frame church was built on lots located at Windsor Avenue and Clyde Street donated by Harmon Wood Realty, and was dedicated in 1894. It still meets at the same location, but the little frame church has long since been replaced.

In 1898 thirteen town residents started the Del Ray Baptist Church at the Nall's house, also at the corner of Leslie and Windsor avenues. This church is now located on Russell Road.

After the end of the nineteenth century, there were many members of the Roman Catholic faith residing in the part of Alexandria County in which the Town of Potomac was organized. They attended church either at Saint Mary's in Alexandria or at Saint James in Falls Church. Mass was first celebrated in 1913 in Saint Rita's missionary parish in a cobbler's shop at 213 East Custis Avenue, which had been rented in 1912 for a Sunday school. The first church was built on Hickory Street in the Mount Ida neighborhood. It was dedicated 18 October 1914. The present church at Russell Road and Glebe Road was dedicated on 18 December 1949.

Public education began in two rooms of a private dwelling. In 1899, Joseph Suplee of Del Ray and William Garrett of Washington, the acting school trustee for the Jefferson School District of Alexandria County, purchased five lots on Mount Vernon Avenue for a new school building. The colonial revival school building was built in 1900, and an addition to the rear was added in 1928. This original building was demolished in the mid 1960s to make way for the present school, which was built in 1967. In 1925 Potomac built its George Mason High School, which now forms the three-story part of the Mount Vernon Elementary School.

The Henry Knox Field Lodge of the Masonic Order was organized in 1925. It was named for the owner of Henry K. Field & Company, a major lumber, milling, and building supply business on Union Street in Alexandria. The lodge met in rooms over the fire station. Its present quarters are in a building on the corner of Mount Vernon Avenue and Howell Avenue, which the Masons built in 1946.

The combination fire station and town hall was built in 1926. This building, on Windsor Avenue east of Mount Vernon Avenue, is still used by the Alexandria Fire Department as Fire Station No. 52. It is surprising that only 100 residents were volunteers, since much of the town's social life revolved around the volunteer fire company.

On 23 September 1927 the City Council of Alexandria passed a resolution to start annexation proceedings for a large section of Fairfax and Arlington (formerly Alexandria) counties including the Town of Potomac. The annexa-

tion of Potomac was hotly contested both in court and in print. However, Alexandria won its case and the annexation was effective 1 January 1930.

Very few official records of the Town of Potomac have survived. One widely-held belief is that many of them were burned to avoid having to turn them over to the City of Alexandria.

In spite of the intense feeling against annexation, the citizens of Potomac quickly became active in all aspects of the life of the city. They still take pride in their community and with dignity have maintained their neighborhood as an asset to the City of Alexandria.

AB&W Transit Company

By B.C. May

Robert Lee May and Lulu Barr were both Virginians. Bob was born in Spotsylvania County, 13 March 1880. He came to Washington, D.C. with a sixth grade education and went to work as a streetcar motorman. He later joined the Metropolitan Police Department, where he advanced to the rank of captain, and served with the Secret Service detail during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. Lulu, born on 28 January 1880, came from Winchester. They met in Washington where she was working as a registered nurse. They were married in 1904 and had two children, a son, Beverly and a daughter, Alice. They lived at Barcroft, not far from Bailey's Crossroads.

By 1920 the Mays saw the growing need for some kind of public transportation between Northern Virginia and Washington. His friends called him "Crazy Bob" when he decided to retire from the police department and go into business for himself, but Lulu encouraged him. He purchased a 1921 Reo Speedwagon, which was converted into a bus by equipping the truck bed with bench seats and a protective canvas canopy. Fold-down steps gave the vehicle the look of a police paddy wagon.

On 21 June 1921 Lulu, Beverly, and Alice pushed the Reo with "Crazy Bob" at the wheel out of their driveway onto the dirt road that was Columbia Pike, and he drove into Washington—with no passengers. On the third trip of the day a man waved him down and paid him fifteen cents for a ride into town. The "Columbia Pike Line" was in business.

Despite the fact that Columbia Pike was frequently a river of mud, and the passengers might have to get out and push, the little bus line flourished. Within three weeks another vehicle had to be purchased. Lulu May became the first licensed female bus driver in the District of Columbia. She was also the bookkeeper and at night held a kerosene lantern while her husband repaired their buses. Although Lulu was deeply religious, she soon found that Bob's desire to expand was more than the simple truth could handle. She revealed, in later years, that on one occasion when her husband wanted to purchase new equipment, she told him that a \$30,000 bank balance was only \$10,000.

In May 1921 L.W. Selfe started the Alexandria Motor Bus Line between Alexandria and Washington. In 1923 when the Virginia Corporation Commission began to regulate motor bus carriers, Selfe and the Mays were both given franchises. However, the letter of authorization never reached Selfe, he ceased operations, and his subsequent application for a franchise was denied. The Mays offered to purchase the company and, despite a protest from the Washington, Alexandria, and Mount Vernon Railway (the streetcar operators), the franchise was awarded to them.

With four buses operating along Columbia Pike, the Mays placed six new Reo buses in operation in Alexandria on 1 July 1924. The offices were moved from

their home to the Del Ray section of Arlington County and the company was renamed the Alexandria, Barcroft, and Washington Rapid Transit Company—afterwards known as the “AB&W”.

In 1925 the street railway company purchased a fleet of buses and began service between Alexandria and Washington, with the Alexandria terminus at the Episcopal Seminary on Quaker Lane. AB&W purchased this line in March 1927. Service was subsequently extended to Fort Humphreys (now Fort Belvoir) and Mount Vernon.

Bob May constantly attempted to expand the company, often over the protests of his conservative wife and son. But his efforts outside Northern Virginia were not successful. In 1927, along with three other stockholders, he started the Richmond-Washington Motor Coaches, Inc., which was designed to provide a bridge service between Greyhound's northern line at Washington and its southern lines in Richmond. Greyhound, in partnership with the R.F. & P. Railroad, soon began to compete with the new line, and purchased it in 1930. May's only other attempt to operate outside of Northern Virginia was the purchase of the Hyattsville Hills Bus Line in 1928. This line ran from 9th and Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest, to Hyattsville, Maryland. The operation proved to be too far away from AB&W's primary routes and it was sold to the Washington Railway and Electric Company in the same year.

The Washington, Alexandria, and Mount Vernon Railway continued to operate its streetcars during the late twenties despite obsolete equipment and heavy bus competition along all of its routes. Bob May purchased the railway company in January 1930 and began coordinated rail and bus service. Streetcars were used during peak hours to complement the buses, while buses alone provided service when patronage was light. Two federal projects finally forced the railway to cease operations. Its tracks between Alexandria and Mount Vernon lay along the route of the new George Washington Memorial Parkway. When the right-of-way was acquired for the parkway, substitute service was provided by buses operating along Fort Hunt Road. The Washington terminal of the railway was located in the middle of the area that became the Federal Triangle. The last streetcars ran on 19 November 1932.

The acquisition of the street railway brought to AB&W two employees who became vital to its future. Robert T. Mitchell eventually became executive vice president and general manager, and Gertrude M. Casson, following the example set by Lulu May, became secretary-treasurer and a member of the board of directors. Mrs. Casson recalled her early days with AB&W with a wry smile. As she remembered it, in 1931 a company called Alexandria-Washington Buses, Inc., but known as the “Blue Line,” began an unfranchised competition with AB&W by picking up passengers waiting for AB&W buses. Mrs. Casson would drive her car in front of one of the “Blue Line” buses and pretend to break down, while the AB&W bus picked up its rightful passengers. The State Corporation Commission cited the “Blue Line” for numerous violations of its rules and imposed heavy fines. It soon went bankrupt.

The New Deal, beginning with the inauguration of President Roosevelt in 1933, brought thousands of federal employees to Washington and new residents to the rapidly-expanding Virginia suburbs. This greatly increased the need for public transportation, and, in December 1934, the bus line was incorporated as the Alexandria, Barcroft and Washington Transit Company with general offices at 119-131 North Pitt Street, Alexandria. Bob was president, Lulu was vice-president, and Beverly May was secretary-treasurer. The routes at that time were:

Washington-Bailey's Crossroads

Washington-Mount Vernon

Washington-Virginia Theological Seminary

Washington-Alexandria, by way of Potomac Yard, Russell Road, and Arlington Ridge Road

Washington-Fort Humphreys

Washington-Fort Hunt

Washington and the Northern Virginia suburbs grew even faster during World War II. National Airport was constructed on reclaimed land at Gravelly Point. AB&W buses transported the construction workers and then opened a route to service the airport. In 1943 the Pentagon was built. It was the largest office building in the world and eventually housed over 37,000 people. Homes for these people and other new residents were being constructed just as rapidly. The huge Fairlington apartments were the first to be occupied. AB&W began service there in 1943 over the newly constructed Shirley Highway. As other residential areas were opened, AB&W increased its service to meet the demand for public transportation.

After World War II that part of Fairfax County lying south of Alexandria began to grow. AB&W extended service to Hollin Hall, Bucknell Manor, Belle View, Lincolnia, Springfield, and out Franconia Road. The original Columbia Pike line now went all the way to Annandale and back to Alexandria by way of Duke Street. In 1943 the general offices were moved to a new building at 600 North Royal Street in Alexandria. Central maintenance facilities were at Glebe Road and Jefferson Davis Highway on the site of the Washington, Alexandria, and Mount Vernon car barns. Charter and sightseeing services began to play major roles in the off-peak periods when buses would otherwise be idle. Washington, Alexandria, and Mount Vernon were popular tourist attractions and some AB&W bus drivers were trained as tour guides.

When, in the 1950s, Congress decided to award a new franchise for transit service in the District of Columbia, several Virginia congressmen urged Beverly May, who had succeeded his father as president of AB&W, to acquire that franchise in partnership with other Alexandria businessmen. May rejected the partnership idea because AB&W remained a family corporation. He also thought that the Washington system had too many problems to be operated efficiently. His response was simple, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

In the 1960s express bus lanes were built in the median of Shirley Highway, and AB&W operated over these lanes with buses owned by the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission. The initial service was supported by a demonstration grant under the 1961 federal urban mass transportation program.

By 1971, when AB&W celebrated its 50th anniversary, it had a modern fleet of 290 air-conditioned buses, carrying over 16 million passengers annually, with the best safety record in the United States. The company, with 590 employees, was the largest employer in Alexandria.

But a company is more than equipment, shops, routes, and schedules—a company is people. From the beginning of their bus company until their deaths in 1962, Bob and Lulu May were known as “the Captain” and “Mom.” They made AB&W not just a place to work, but an extended family circle. Ignoring the advice of management specialists, Bob May was quick to share his good fortune with family and friends. He was always finding a job for a cousin from Spotsylvania County or a friend who was down on his luck. At the end of World War II ninety-five percent of the AB&W employees who had gone to war returned to the company. As the company grew larger, relatives of existing employees were hired. There were Johnsons, Borans, Mitchells, Thomases, Joneses, Smiths, and Burkes. At one time, six Cockrells were employed by AB&W. Bob May always said that, if a man was a good employee, his brother would probably make a good one too.

In 1973 AB&W was acquired by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (METRO). The automobile, scattered subdivisions, and rising costs had already taken their toll of most privately-owned U.S. transit systems. AB&W was one of the last survivors, because it ran a friendly service, with good management and good employees. In the end it had to give way to the harsh realities of the post-war era. Facing a deficit that could only grow larger, AB&W agreed to sell its physical assets to the regional transportation agency.

One hundred two of the 590 employees had been with the company for more than twenty-five years. On the night of the final agreement between AB&W and METRO, a METRO official asked John D. Johnson, Beverly May's son-in-law, who was then president of AB&W, if he was aware of METRO's nepotism policy. Johnson signed the last title to the last bus and then looked at the man, “You know that company you just bought—well, you just lost most of it.” The regulations were waived, and many of those employees still provide Northern Virginians with what became the AB&W motto four decades earlier: *Safe, Dependable Service.*

How to Research a House History in Alexandria, Virginia

by T. Michael Miller

Alexandria, Virginia, is a town of brick-lined streets, ivy-covered walls, and stately Federalist and Georgian architecture. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case. The Civil War and the Reconstruction eras blighted the community's economy and many of the finely-crafted buildings fell into a state of disrepair. It was not until the 1930s that the current restoration movement began to germinate. More and more people became interested in the history of their houses and scoured the archives of Fairfax and Alexandria courthouses for clues that would unlock the secrets of the past. Local historians and scholars still spend much of their time writing and researching the events of a bygone era. Yet, in spite of this interest, no single pamphlet or booklet has been written that would help a researcher execute a systematic investigation of a historic house in Alexandria. This article attempts to fill this need by describing a series of archival source materials to be used by those interested in developing a history of eighteenth and nineteenth century structures. It is hoped that it will be of some assistance to other scholars as well.

In the Alexandria Library, Lloyd House, Miller's *Annotative Guide to Historical Source Material on Alexandria, Virginia*¹ contains information on many houses, arranged by street address, and referenced to materials in the vertical file, manuscript, or Virginiana collections. In Ethelyn Cox's excellent book entitled, *Alexandria, Virginia—Street By Street*,² the names of the early property owners and possibly the date the structure was built may be included. Mrs. Cox's comments are terse, however, and further information may be available in Miller about the history of the house being researched.

In 1979 Penny Morrill, of the Carlyle House Historic Park, published an excellent treatise on Alexandria builders and architects and the houses which they constructed. This book is entitled *Who Built Alexandria?—Architects in Alexandria 1750-1900*,³ and it is extremely thorough and well researched. It contains numerous drawings and architectural sketches of Alexandria houses and public buildings. A compilation of the names and buildings mentioned in the text, plus the page number on which they appear, has been prepared and is incorporated in Miller's *Guide*.⁴

The house may appear in the 1877 *City Atlas of Alexandria, Va.*,⁵ by G. M. Hopkins. If it does, its exterior shape and size may be discernible. The house numbering system in 1877, however, was different from that of today.

If the house is located within the original boundaries of Alexandria, it may be advantageous to consult *Title Search*, by T. Michael Miller and James Woolls.⁶ This book is useful for determining the chain of title to early properties in town,

beginning with the grant of 700 acres to Margaret Brent by Governor Bennett in 1654 and continuing to 1790. From its inception, Alexandria was a vital, dynamic town where real estate was constantly being bought, sold, leased, or mortgaged. This vitality is presented by a series of maps which graphically illustrate the changing boundary lines of the early lots. By knowing the lot number of the property concerned, the original price, owner, and date of sale of the property can be found.

Research at the Fairfax or Alexandria courthouses may also be helpful. The Record Room of the Alexandria Courthouse, on the third floor of the building at St. Asaph and King streets, contains several archival sources essential to a successful search. First, there are the indexes to deeds—1783 to the present—and the deed books themselves. Before going to the courthouse, it is important to know an owner of the real estate in question. It doesn't matter that it is not the first owner. For any property owner's name, the surname entry can be found in the deed book index. The index will furnish the number of the deed book and the page on which the individual's deed appears. For example: Carlyle, John. First turn to the "C" section of the index and then look for the page on which appear the "C's" with a first initial or name beginning with "J". Within each alphabetical section the names are alphabetized by the first name of the owner. Thus, all first names beginning with "J" will appear on the same page. For example, there might be: Carlyle, John; Craig, James; Cogan, John. Other last names which begin with "C" but have a different first name will be grouped on another page. For instance: the name Nathaniel Chapman would also be in the "C" section of the index, but will be grouped with all other first names beginning with the letter "N". After finding the owner, copy the deed book number and page. Usually, an individual will have owned more than one piece of real estate; so all the references should be checked. If the date when the property was purchased is not known, check all the references under the owner's name until the one which matches the geographic coordinates of the property is located.

The deed will specify when the property was sold; who was the grantor; who was the grantee; how much the property sold for; a metes and bounds description of the tract; when the deed was recorded; a list of those persons who witnessed the deed; other special provisions such as mortgages and trusts. After finishing one transaction, continue the same process with the next owner of the house.

It is easier to work from the most recent name backward rather than vice versa. Many times the deed will include information on earlier transactions and refer to earlier deed books. This makes the task much simpler than having to check every parcel of property an individual may have owned in town. On occasion, the title to a lot may disappear or be difficult to trace. If the name of the owner is not present, check the will books. A father, on occasion, would devise property to his daughter who, if she married, might have an entirely different surname. When abstracting deeds, be sure to record pertinent pieces of information. The following form is a sample of the way to abstract deed

information:

Deed book:
Date:
Persons Involved:
Price:

Conditions:
Witnesses:
Signatures:
Date Recorded:

Many early deeds will not mention that there was a house on the lot. They indicate only that the land was sold, and include such standard legal phraseology as "all land, chattels, and tenements which may lie upon said property." The main purpose of doing a title search is to construct a list of names of the property owners. Ownership of a property does not mean, however, that the owners themselves actually resided on it. In order to find out who lived on a particular lot, the land and personal property tax records should be researched.

Tax records indicate the name of the proprietor, the occupier of the lot, its assessed value, the number of male tithables, and the number of horses, dogs, cows, riding chairs, four wheeled carriages, and clocks. The Lloyd House library has microfilm copies of Alexandria tax records dating from 1787-1855. There are a few loose records for the 1870s and a complete run of items from 1895 to 1960. It is extremely difficult to determine whether a house was built prior to 1785, since documentary evidence for this period is scarce. Evidence which might substantiate that a house was built prior to 1785 would include:

1. architectural evidence - analysis of nails, latches, hinges
2. archival material such as letters, diaries and account books.

Many people have been under the impression that there was a requirement to build a house on a lot after the property was purchased from the town trustees in 1749. Initially this was so, but the requirements became such a nuisance that the law was not consistently enforced and on occasion was entirely ignored. When the trustees wanted to spur development, they enforced the law. At other times, they were lax in doing so.

Thomas Preisser in his dissertation, "Eighteenth Century Alexandria, Virginia, Before the Revolution, 1749-1776" states:

Each purchaser had to build a twenty-square-foot house, with a nine-foot pitch and a stone or brick chimney, on his lot within two years or forfeit his title...

Several of those who held town lots seemed content with the mere fact of ownership. Their refusal to build conflicted with the requirement that a house be erected on each lot within two years. The law eventually became a nuisance that plagued the citizenry. In 1752 the trustees and a number of townspeople petitioned the burgesses requesting that the building clause be revoked. The government acceded to their wishes later in the year. The same process was repeated in 1764 when a similar clause in the 1762 Act for *Enlarging the Town of Alexandria* was repealed. However, the trustees occasionally invoked the two-year clauses even after their annulment.

Their selective invocation of the ordinances was apparently designed to force development of the town.⁷

Most of the early houses built in Alexandria were made of wood or logs and few of them have survived. It was not until the Federalist era of the 1790s that many fine brick mansions were constructed. If a researcher can verify that a house was built on an early lot, this does not mean that the same house still occupies the site. Fire, war, floods, pestilence, urban renewal, all have taken their toll. A house supposedly built in the eighteenth century may actually have been constructed during the early part of the nineteenth.

Tax records are also useful in determining when a house was built. If the taxes on a piece of property are relatively low, the lot was probably vacant when bought. A sudden increase in its value probably infers that the owner made improvements on the lot and may have constructed a house or other buildings on it. However, a check of some similar properties may indicate a general tax increase that year.

Another valuable source of information on early houses is the records of fire assurance companies. The Lloyd House library possesses a large collection of copies of these documents dating from 1796 to 1846. The policies provide graphic information on the physical dimensions and locations of the structures. Also noted are the types of buildings which surround the main structure, such as privies, stables, pigeon houses, rabbit hutches. These records should be utilized with care since they are subject to misinterpretation.

City directories are the most frequently utilized resources for researching the occupants of Alexandria houses. Lloyd House has a number of these sources dating from 1791 to 1938. More recent directories are available at the main library, 717 Queen street.

Early directories contain the name and occupation of the owner but do not give house numbers. As an example, the directory may indicate only that John Wise resided on Prince Street near Pitt. One way of overcoming this difficulty is to use the land records which provide the exact dimensions of the lots.

Directories of the 1870s have numerical addresses. These can be confusing, however, in that they do not represent current street addresses. The *Charter and Laws of the City of Alexandria* for the year 1874 states that:

All the streets running east and west shall be commenced at their eastern extremity, and numbered to their western termination, and all those streets running north and south shall be commenced at King street as a centre; and all those streets running north from King street shall be numbered from King street through to their northern termination, and those streets running south from King street shall be numbered from King street south to their southern termination, always placing the odd numbers on the right hand and the even numbers on the left hand from the place of beginning...⁸

Using this method of numbering, the blocks made no difference in the house

numbers. In 1888, when the Post Office introduced delivery service, it became necessary to be able to locate the block in which an address was located. So the numbering system was changed to the present method of assigning a sequence of hundreds to each block of a street beginning with 100 for the first block, 200 for the second, etc. Even numbers were still assigned to the left and odd numbers to the right. The Hopkins Atlas provides a key to the old numbering system.⁹

For the second half of the nineteenth century, the Sanborn fire insurance maps are an excellent and detailed source of information on the composition of old houses. These maps provide information on the composition of the building—wood or brick, the number of windows, location of fire walls, and types of material utilized in the construction of the building. The maps date from 1885 to 1921 and are on microfilm at the Lloyd House. The Library of Congress and the Alexandria Department of Planning and Community Development have a copies of a 1941 Sanborn map with corrections. Of particular interest is the fact that these maps are useful in determining when portions of buildings have been added or razed. Many of the ell on houses in Alexandria, thought to have been built in the eighteenth century, are not of that period but were added later. Many changes that occurred on the block in which a house is situated can be noted by comparing one map with another.

Building permits were first issued in Alexandria in 1891. These documents give much more than the construction date of the building. They provide information on the architect, the owner, the builder, the dimensions, and the types of materials used in the construction. Lloyd House has a collection of 4,000 building permits dating from 1891 to 1930. They are indexed according to address and owner in *Miller's Guide*. Building permits dating from the 1930s to the early 1970s were housed at the Torpedo Factory but have been recently moved to Parker-Gray School (March 1982) and are generally inaccessible to the public. It is hoped that these documents will be placed in a permanent storage area or will be microfilmed. There are two types of permits in this group—the actual building permit for the construction of new structures, and the alteration and repair permits. These detail thousands of alterations that have been made to buildings in Alexandria. They are very useful because they show when partitions, windows, doors, and other minor repairs were executed.

In reconstructing the history of a house, one must consider the owner's comments on his culture, lifestyle, and social milieu. Letters occasionally mention construction activities and reasons for undertaking them. Diaries are looking glasses through which to view the past and explore the social and cultural activities of the society. Photographs of a historic house can be very illuminating. As the old adage says, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Many questions about a house can be answered by studying old photographs of the house and its neighborhood. There are several collections of pictures in Alexandria in private hands, and the Alexandria Library, Lloyd House has a good one. Efforts should also be made to contact former owners of the house. Frequently they possess photographs and other archival materials that might be

helpful.

After compiling a list of owners and occupants of a house, it is sometimes possible to flesh out the Alexandrians who lived there. Several finding aids will help to uncover sources of such information. Local libraries have books on family history research. The *Virginia Genealogist* contains much information. This kind of investigation will be rewarding in making the history of a house meaningful and in understanding the history of Alexandria.

FOOTNOTES

1. T. Michael Miller, *Miller's Annotative Guide to Historical Source Material on Alexandria, Virginia*, Alexandria Library, Lloyd House, Alexandria, Va., p. 432.
2. Ethelyn Cox, *Historic Alexandria, Virginia, Street by Street* (Alexandria, Va.: Historic Alexandria Foundation, 1976).
3. Penny Morrill, *Who Built Alexandria?* (Fairfax, Va: Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, 1979).
4. Miller, p. 214.
5. G.M. Hopkins, *City Atlas of Alexandria, Va.* (Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins, 1877).
6. T. Michael Miller and James Woolls, *Title Search*, Alexandria Library, Lloyd House, Alexandria, Virginia.
7. Thomas Preisser, "Eighteenth-Century Alexandria, Virginia, Before the Revolution, 1749-1776", Microfilm-xerography ed. (Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms, 1978) pp. 41 and 48.
8. *Charter and Laws of the City of Alexandria, Va.* (Alexandria Va.: City Council, 1874) p. 34.
9. Hopkins.