

The John Gordon House
631 King Street at King & Washington
Alexandria, Virginia

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE JOHN GORDON HOUSE
(ALFRIEND BUILDING)

- Location: NE. corner of King and Washington Streets, Alexandria Virginia; 631 King Street, and 100-109 North Washington Street
- Present Owner: The Alfriend Family
- Present Use: Commercial; Burke & Herbert Bank & Trust Company, Thomas Watch Repair Shop, Greyhound Bus Depot, and Jules Hair Stylist.
- Significance: The building which was partially restored in 1955 stands as an excellent example of the late 18th century "row-end" house in Alexandria.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The John Gordon House (Alfriend Building) is a 3½ story brick building located on the NE corner of King and Washington Streets in Alexandria, Virginia. It is one of the few remaining 18th century "row-end" houses (cornice continued across the exposed side) in Alexandria.

The house was built between 1797 and 1799 by John Gordon. The north wing was constructed at a later date. Gordon sold the house to Amos Alexander, August 23, 1799 for a sum of \$800 plus annual ground rent of \$88.84. Alexander lived there until June 13, 1805 when he sold it to James Bacon. On September 2, 1806 General Robert Young purchased the property which he held until July 12, 1819, when it was forfeited to the Mechanics Bank of Alexandria to cover a debt of \$20,000. The property remained in possession of the Mechanics Bank until it failed on October 13, 1832. It was subsequently sold to Judge Christopher Neale, a former mayor of Alexandria, on April 10, 1836. Because of the financial panic at that time the sale price was only \$2,500. When Judge Neale died on October 6, 1863 the building passed into the hands of his wife, Virginia Chapman Neale, and his son, Sidney Chapman Neale.

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On January 19, 1882 the house was sold to Robert M. Kent of Louisa County, Virginia, a relative of Sidney Nsale's law partner. Kent sold the house to John D. H. Lunt on July 3, 1893, and Lunt sold it to Richard Gibson on November 30, 1904. On November 10, 1906 the property was acquired by Judge Charles E. Nicol and remained in his possession until his death in 1924. As he left no will, the property remained in the hands of the Nicol family. When the estate was finally settled in 1940 the property was offered up for sale and subsequently sold to Dr. Robert South Barret on May 24, 1940 for \$40,000. Mrs. Lila Alfriend, the present owner, acquired the property from her brother, Dr. Barret, on September 11, 1940.

The first floor of the building has been used continuously during recent years for small shops and other commercial enterprises. The present occupants consist of a bank, Burke & Herbert Bank & Trust Company, a watch repair shop, Thomas Watch Repair, a bus depot, Greyhound Lines, and a beauty parlor, Jules Hair Stylists. The upper floors are considered unsafe and have not been occupied for some time. In 1955 the exterior of the building was restored and except for the ground floor, it appears much the same as when it was built in 1799.

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The John Gordon House (Alfriend Building) was built as a residence by John Gordon between the years 1797 and 1799. It is referred to as a "row-and" house because of the cornice which extends across the front and continues around the corner running the full length of the other exposed side which faces on Washington Street. The north section was added later giving the building an exaggeratedly long and narrow form. It has an irregular plan with the overall dimensions as follows: 20'-5" on King Street, 87'-0" on Washington Street, from Washington Street the north wall runs 60'-5" to the east, then south 17'0", west 40'-0", and south again to King Street 70'-0".

The exterior was completely restored (except for the ground floor) by the Alfriends in 1955, returning it to the way it is believed to have appeared when it was occupied by John Gordon in 1799. The ground floor, of course, has been extensively remodeled as it is presently occupied by a bank, watch repair shop, bus terminal, and a beauty parlor. The beauty parlor also occupies a small portion of the second floor.

The upper floors are vacant except for the portion of the second floor occupied by Jules Hair Stylists, they are considered to be unsafe and it is for this reason that they are not being used. The interiors are generally in a state of disrepair and appear to have undergone extensive changes over the years.

The building is constructed of brick with timbers supporting the roof and floors. The foundation and chimneys are also of brick construction.

The openings on the ground floor have all been extensively revised due to the present commercial use. On the 2nd floor, 3rd floor, and attic, the openings are acclaimed to be identical to the originals, with stone sills, flat stone arches above, and 6/6 double-hung windows with wooden casings. A circular window (Oeil-de-Boeuf) is situated near the peak of the west gable. The dormer windows are of wooden construction, double hung, with 4 plus a fanlight /4.

The roof, which has obviously been reconditioned, has a bituminous type of covering. The portion covering the north wing has a ridge running north-south, low pitch, and a gable on the north end. The south end of the roof butts into the north wall of the south portion of the building. The roof over the south portion of the building is gabled on each and with the ridge running from east to west. The south side of this roof, which faces King Street, is shingled. There are also two dormers on this side which are pedimented and identical to each other in appearance.

The exterior, which as stated previously, was restored in 1955 presents to the eye a typical Georgian facade; brick walls, stone sills, flat stone arches over window openings, which are uniform in size and spacing, white wooden trim, and salmon colored brick laid in the Flemish bond pattern. The southern part of the building has modified gables on the east and west. The modification of the gable occurs near the peak where the pitch of the roof changes abruptly giving the peak a rounded appearance.

The floor plans which may have been extensively altered over the years are as follows: The 2nd floor contains three principal rooms, rectangular and running on a line from north to south. The two large rooms in the south portion are separated from the north by the stairway which rises up through the center of the building but is in the north end of the south (original) portion of the building. The small portion of the 2nd floor occupied by Jules Hair Stylists is in the north part of the building directly adjacent to the north wall of the south part. The 3rd floor consists of one large room facing south, the stairwell with one small room behind it, and two large rectangular rooms in the north section. The south (original) portion of the building has an attic containing two small rooms facing south (each illuminated by a dormer window) opposite two small rooms, one on each side of the stair, neither of which contains any opening or other form of illumination.

The stairway which rises from the first to the second floor is a modern replacement. The stairs between the second and third floor and the third floor and the attic are believed to be in their original position but it is quite possible that the woodwork was replaced at sometime during the 19th century. The newell posts are turned but the balusters are rectangular and quite slender. The stairwell is open.

The flooring consists of boards approximately 6" wide and laid from north to south. It is the same on all of the upper floors.

The walls are plastered and covered with wall paper which probably dates from the 19th century. Their general condition is very poor.

In the middle room of the south wing, on the second floor, there is an indication that there were two arched cases flanking the fireplace on the east wall. In each room there is a heavy moulded plaster cornice running around the perimeter of the ceiling. Each room also contains a wainscot topped by a chair rail molding approximately two feet off the floor.

The fourth floor or attic is believed to be intact. There is no interior trim. The dormer windows are equipped with new sash dating from the 1955 restoration but there is no trim on their interiors. Other interior trim consists of heavy wooden moldings around the door and window openings on the 2nd and 3rd floors. It is likely that all this interior trim dates from the 19th century.

The hardware is all 19th century or relatively modern. The lighting and heating (hot air) are both modern systems but the original fireplaces are still apparent on the 2nd and 3rd floors.

The building occupies the entire site which is situated on the NE. corner of King and Washington Streets, Alexandria's principal intersection.

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