

Adam Lynn House
518-20 King Street
Alexandria
Virginia

HABS No. VA-676

HABS
VA
7-ALEX,
149-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ADAM LYNN HOUSE

HABS
VA
7-ALEX
149-

Location: 518-20 King Street, Alexandria, Virginia

Present Owner: Demolished after 1969 by the Alexandria Redevelopment Housing Authority as part of an urban renewal project in the old commercial center of Alexandria.

Statement of Significance: The namesake of this building was a prominent and successful Alexandria merchant whose life was colored by notable military service. Architecturally, the building is in keeping with the town's long affection for the Federal style. It is one of four buildings on this block owned by or associated with Adam Lynn, Jr.; see HABS reports VA-686, VA-687, and VA-688.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: circa 1811

The death of Adam Lynn, Sr., was announced in the Virginia Journal and the Alexandria Advertiser on June 15, 1786. A year earlier, on April 7, 1785, the Advertiser carried the following advertisement:

"The Subscriber . . . wishes to inform his former Customers and Masters of Vessels that he has lately built a BAKE-HOUSE near his Dwelling House on King Street, the second door from Captain Jesse Taylor's, where he again carries on the Biscuit Baking Business, and has now some good Bread on hand. ADAM LYNN"

Adam Lynn, Sr., in his will, cited in a deed of May 1, 1801, devised "the lot whereon my dwelling house stands" to his dearly beloved wife during her natural life; after her death, "to be sold to best advantage, and the money arising from the sale equally divided among the surviving children." That the lot Adam Lynn, Sr., left to his widow also contained a bake-house is shown by an advertisement of Catharine Lynn, on November 16, 1786, offering "a store in King Street suitable for a small family and a convenient Bake-House." This lot, or rather its boundaries, is established in the deed of May 1, 1801, in which three sisters of Adam Lynn, Jr., and their husbands, convey to Lynn, Jr., for \$100 paid

by him to each of the three couples, their rights and interest, after their mother's death, in the dwelling house and lot, with all appurtenances, occupied by the senior Lynn. The boundaries of this lot are described as:

"Beginning at the northwest corner of William Halley's line (123 feet 5 inches west of Pitt Street); West on King Street 31 feet (actually 32 feet); South parallel to St. Asaph Street 176 feet 8 inches; East parallel to King Street 31 feet (actually 32 feet); North parallel to St. Asaph Street to the Beginning."

The Alexandria Advertiser of Saturday, January 9, 1808, carried this notice: "DIED, this morning, Mrs. Catharine Lynn, relict of Adam Lynn, in the 61st year of her age . . ." Friends and acquaintances were invited to her funeral from her "late dwelling house in King Street."

Lynn waited about three years after his mother's death before building his three-story brick house on this site. Since it was completed by March 11, 1812, construction was probably underway in 1811.

On September 24, 1816, Lynn announced that he had moved to the corner of King and St. Asaph Streets (later 532 King Street). Apparently he had rented the building at 518-20 King Street, and on April 2, 1818, he advertised: "TO LET - The store and cellar lately occupied by Mr. Thomas F. Herbert, opposite the Mechanics Bank; or if preferred, the store at the corner of King and St. Asaph Streets occupied by the Subscriber as a hardware store."

By October 9th, 1818, Lynn was back at 518-20 King Street. Possibly he remained there until the United States Marshal, under court order, sold the property at public auction on January 22, 1822. In conveying the property, the Marshal describes it as "the lot of ground on which Adam Lynn now resides." The house and lot were sold for \$1,900.

2. Architect: Not known
3. Original and subsequent owners: Adam Lynn was the original owner; subsequent owners not known.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Adam Lynn was born in 1775 and died December 6, 1836, aged sixty-one. Thus Saint-Memin's 1805 portrait of Lynn, now in the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C., shows him at the age of thirty. In 1805 Adam Lynn was a success-

ful silversmith, jeweller, clock-maker and hardware merchant in Alexandria. Also at this time, and for some time to come, Lynn was one of the leading citizens of the town.

Lynn's military career may be followed in notices appearing in early Alexandria newspapers:

April 13, 1799: Adam Lynn, Lieutenant, signs the "Parade Order" for "Captain John Muncaster's Company."

February 22, 1800: "Captain Lynn's Uniform Company" was among the military units which participated in the first celebration of George Washington's birthday.

January 1, 1806: The President of the United States appointed Lynn a Captain of Light Infantry in the second legion of militia of the District of Columbia.

March 12, 1810: Lynn was appointed Major of the second legion, replacing Walter Jones, who resigned.

May 13, 1813: Lynn was advanced to Lieutenant Colonel in the "new organization of the militia of the District of Columbia."

January 4, 1817: Lynn was appointed Brigadier General of the second brigade of the Militia of the District of Columbia.

About two months after Lynn's promotion to Lieutenant Colonel on May 13, 1813, the Alexandria Gazette announced: The citizens of this place were yesterday under arms, in consequence of Brigadier General Young (also of Alexandria) having received news, by express . . . that the enemy's squadron had entered the Potomac and were proceeding up . . ." Apparently this was a false alarm. A year later, on July 7, 1814, the Gazette reported: "We learn . . . that . . . the executive has determined to call from the states of Maryland and Virginia, a body of Militia amounting to ten thousand, which together with two thousand regular troops are to be exclusively employed in the defence of this district and vicinity." Three weeks later the Alexandria militia officers met and agreed to assemble "(with as many non-commissioned and privates as may choose) on the commons opposite to Pike's Garden (in civilian clothes, but with a gun) every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 5 P.M. for drill and training." On Saturday, August 20th, the Gazette announced that "the Military of this town, en masse, were called out yesterday afternoon, preparatory to an encampment." What part the Alexandria militia, and Adam Lynn in particular, played in the defense of Washington is not explained in the Alexandria

newspapers. That Lynn's services were satisfactory is implicit in his later promotion to head the Alexandria contingent of the Militia of the District.

A footnote in the Lodge of Washington reprints from the National Intelligencer an account of a duel, sometime in the year 1825, between Adam Lynn and James McGuire, another "military" Alexandrian. The cause of the duel is not explained, but it may have had something to do with the fact that (although it seems a bit late for recriminations) "Captain McGuire's company of Volunteers from this place, consisting of sixty men, embarked yesterday forenoon for Fort Washington . . . where they are to await further orders . . ." This notice appeared in the Gazette of October 14, 1812, almost two years before Lynn embarked on active service. The account of the duel, which cannot be condensed without losing its flavor, follows:

"The difficulty which has for some days existed between Captain McGuire and Colonel Lynn, culminated in a duel, which was fought at sunrise this morning near 'Oxon Hill,' opposite Alexandria. Both of these gentlemen held commands in the war of 1812, and are deservedly popular. Their purpose to settle the matter by an appeal to 'the code' became known to quite a number of their mutual friends, and among others, your correspondent, was early on the ground. Dr. Semmes attended Colonel Lynn, as surgeon; and Dr. Washington, Captain McGuire. The choice of positions was won by Colonel Lynn, who faced the west; the distance forty yards; the weapons double-barrelled shot-guns, of long range, as will be seen. Among the spectators was Officer Slatford, a police constable of Alexandria, who selected a position on a fence, at a distance of four hundred yards from the field, and in an opposite direction.

"Just as the gentlemen had taken their stations, the sun made its appearance in all its glory, and glaring in the eyes of Captain McGuire, rendered his aim uncertain, from which cause, doubtless, the ball from the Captain's gun struck the rail upon which Slatford was sitting. This accidental shot, however, was not relished by Slatford, who, fearing personal injury, changed his position to a gully, and with his head partly exposed above the bank awaited the next round. The arrangements for a renewal of the combat were speedily made, and, at the second shot, in consequence of the sun shining directly into the eyes of Captain McGuire, his ball struck the bank, in such close proximity to Slatford, as to throw dust in his eyes. Perplexed at the singular circumstance, which had already twice occurred, and half inclined to repair to

the field and command the peace, he concluded to witness another shot, and then to execute his office as a conservator of the peace, should his life be spared, and either of the gentlemen demand a fourth fire. Uncertain as to a place of safety, from which he could witness a continuation of the duel, he decided to take his chances, and boldly standing upon the bank (though not without forebodings of evil) awaited the next round.

"Slatford states that 'the sight was one long to be remembered.' Before him stood two gallant and popular gentlemen, facing each other in a deadly array. Each had served his country on the 'tented field,' the one demanding and the other according the satisfaction due to 'wounded honor.' The parties being ready for the strife, the word was given, and so near to Slatford did Colonel Lynn's ball come that he swears it 'singed the hair of his wig!' Recovering from his fright, and finding himself uninjured, he repaired at once to the field, just as Captain McGuire had demanded another fire; but this faithful guardian of the public peace, swearing that his life was in danger, and that instead of firing at each other, they took deliberate aim at him, demanded a cessation of hostilities, and commanding the peace in the name of the Commonwealth, threatened to have both arrested if they did not at once abandon their purpose to continue the strife. This ended the duel, neither of the principals having been injured.

"Recounting the dangers to which he had been subjected, from the reckless fire of the gentlemen, Slatford stated that, as a member of Sangster's Company, he was in the thickest of the fight at 'Lundy's Lane,' but in that fight his life was in far less danger than as an innocent spectator of this duel."

To this account Brockett adds: ". . . officer Slatford always stoutly maintained, that on going home that night he took from his pocket a bullet, which he stated was fired by Captain McGuire, and which he caught in his hand--not the least interesting incident of this extraordinary affair."

Lynn's participation in community affairs was not entirely military. In 1807 and 1809, he was elected to the Common Council, the governing body of the town of Alexandria, and in 1810 he served as Clerk of the Council. In 1807, he was Secretary, and in 1811-12, Treasurer, of Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22. He also served, in 1810, on the first Vestry of St. Paul's Church in Alexandria.

Lynn's activities as a merchant in Alexandria may also be traced through the early Alexandria newspapers:

June 20, 1795: Coryton and Lynn opened a shop in Fairfax Street, opposite Mordecai Miller (another Alexandria merchant who began as a silversmith) where, they announced they intended "carrying on the different branches of Clock and Watch-Making, Gold and Silver Smithing."

October 27, 1795: The partnership is dissolved, after about six months. The same issue of the newspaper announced the marriage of Adam's sister, Miss Kitty Lynn, to Josiah Coryton.

April 14, 1796: Adam Lynn announced the opening of a "shop in King Street, next door to Mr. Peter Wise's, where he makes, in the most fashionable manner, all kinds of gold and silver work."

August 13, 1796: Adam Lynn informs his customers he has moved to Prince Street, "two doors above Colonel Hooe's." (A frame building, demolished many years ago, to the east of the brick building today known as 210 Prince Street.)

November 13, 1800: Adam Lynn announces he is back on King Street, opposite McKnight's Tavern the tavern being on the northwest corner of King and Royal Streets. In November 1801, apparently at the same location, he advertises that he has added clock and watch-making to his business. On January 1, 1803, he had "just received a handsome assortment of Jewelry, Plate, Japaned and fancy Goods, of superior quality and of the newest Patterns." In November 1803, Lynn advertised hardware items for the first time.

November 6, 1804: Still another move, to "below Royal Street, next door to William Oxley's store," a frame building later replaced by what was recently known as 320 King Street. He continued to offer jewelry, silver, tortoise shell combs, and on April 25, 1808, "Epaulets, Lace, Swords and Plumes."

January 16, 1810 (Notice dated December 11, 1809): Adam Lynn & Company announced the establishment of a "New Hardware Store--Ironmongery, Cutlery, etc." in a building at King and Royal Streets "lately occupied by Peter Sherron." (Probably on the northeast corner.) The "and Company" was Adam L. Webster, and on February 2, 1811, the partnership was dissolved, Adam Lynn continuing in the business. Adam L. Webster was undoubtedly Adam Lynn's nephew; two of Adam's sisters married Websters.

January 28, 1812: Lynn offered the shop then occupied by him for rent, "intending to remove his Jewelry business to his new store in a few weeks." And on the following March 11th, notice of his removal "to his new house, opposite the Domestic Warehouse, King Street," appeared. This was the building later known as 518-20 King Street.

By 1822, Lynn had lost all his property. A check of the Alexandria newspapers in late 1836 (The Lodge of Washington says he died on December 6 of that year) has produced no notice of his death--but this is not unusual in the case of a leading citizen whose later years had not been rosy. The deed books show that in 1832 he was renting a tiny office in the 100 block of South St. Asaph Street (on the west side, across from his former holdings) for \$50 a year; and that in the spring of 1836 he executed a bond as a Notary Public.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources: Early Alexandria newspapers, as cited; Alexandria Deed Books (Circuit Court of the District of Columbia for the County of Alexandria) A, p. 89, 201 and 105; L, p. 17; V, p. 222; F-2, p. 203; G-2, p. 304; K-2, p. 377; M-2, p. 83 and 84; T-2, p. 353, and 8, p. 445.
 - b. Secondary and published sources: Brockett, F. L. The Lodge of Washington, A History of Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22. Alexandria: G. H. Ramey & Son, 1876.
2. Likely sources not yet investigated: The Alexandria newspapers after 1822 have not been thoroughly scanned, and later research may tell us more about the last years of Lynn's life.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

Architectural character: This restrained three-storied Federal brick building was of a style characteristic of Alexandria in its heyday as a bustling port city. The fine exterior detailing as seen in the doorway and window detail testifies to the residential use of the upper stories while the first was devoted to commercial functions.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Three stories, four bays.

2. Wall construction: Brick, Flemish bond. Windows defined by flat stone lintels with key and stone sills. Stone arched doorway with fluted pilasters and key.
 3. Chimneys: Two interior end chimneys forward of ridge of roof.
 4. Openings:
 - a. Doorways: The main entrance is to the right of the four-bayed structure. The keystone exhibits fine reeding as do the pilasters flanking the opening. The jambs are paneled and the door itself restates the arch of the outer wall surface and is deeply paneled. An arched passageway runs between Lynn House and the building to the east.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The windows of the first story have been obliterated by a modern commercial facade. At the second story, the upper sash of six-over-six light was originally matched in the lower sash. The windows at the third story are much reduced in size, consisting of a three-over-three double-hung sash. The windows are crowned by flat stone arches with keystones.
 5. Roof:
 - a. Shape: Gable roof.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: The cornice line is marked by several rows of projecting molded bricks.
- C. Description of Interior:
1. Floor plan: Side-hall plan.
 2. Stairways: From the four interior photographs, a simple stairway with square balusters rises from the first floor. A dado of vertical beaded boards traces the stairway.
 3. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls appear to be of plaster and marked at the floor with simple molded baseboards.
 4. Doorways and doors: The doorway separating the front entrance from the stairhall is arched and supported by paneled pilasters. The doors throughout are six-paneled. The second floor windows have deep paneled jambs.
 5. Special decorative features, trim, cabinet work: The doors and windows have molded trim with bull's-eye corner blocks.

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: The structure faces northward on King Street and sits flush with the other buildings along King Street. The Catharine Coryton House (VA-686) is immediately to the west.

Prepared by Mrs. Hugh B. Cox of
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Edited by
Antoinette J. Lee
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken in 1968 to document the commercial and residential buildings of downtown Alexandria which were to be demolished in an urban renewal project. The project was cosponsored by the Historic Alexandria Foundation and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Mrs. Hugh B. Cox was the historian and George Eisenman supplied the photographs. The material was edited and updated in 1975 by Antoinette J. Lee, working on contract for HABS.