Alexandria's Armory Hall

As early as its founding in 1878, the Alexandria Light Infantry planned to build a new armory. It found space on the east side of the 200 block of South Royal Street. Local architect Benjamin F. Price drew plans for the building in 1880. Construction was finished in the spring of 1880, and the new Armory Hall measured 90 feet by 40 feet, with a capacity of 700 people.

Seven years later, the Light Infantry hired Alexandria architect Glenn Brown to enlarge the Armory Hall. The expansion was completed by February of the following year, in time to host a military ball in honor of George Washington's birthday. The building now had a slate-gabled roof and a facade including four brick turrets.

On top of its primary purpose of safely storing munitions, the Alexandria Armory hosted bazaars, expositions and performances. The Alexandria Light Infantry marched off to the Spanish-American War in 1898 from the armory to Union Station en route to the train in Richmond. The military later used the armory as a rest camp for soldiers on their way to or from Cuba.

The City of Alexandria took over operations of the Armory Hall after World War I. It prioritized using the building for recreational purposes, such as basketball and volleyball but continued to use it for military purposes, such as drills and storing munitions. During World War II, the USO used the building as a center, with social and recreational activities, until it completed a new USO Center on Cameron Street.

In 1953, a fire destroyed the building. Fortunately, a steel and concrete vault prevented the ammunition stored in the armory from exploding, which would surely have damaged surrounding properties.

Instead of rebuilding the armory, the city built a children's playground on the site in the 1950s, and today, residents can visit the Armory Tot Lot at 208 South Royal St.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.

PHOTO/ALEXANDRIA LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
Armory Hall in Old Town was built in 1880 and burned down in 1953.

PHOTO/CITY OF ALEXANDRIA
The Amory Tot Lot is a pocket park in Old Town on the site of the former Armory Hall.