cigar factory, antique shop(s), apartments and a tea room.[3] Reportedly the building was also popular as a house of ill repute during the early years of World War II that catered to the workers at the Navy's Torpedo Factory less than a block away. Thus, by the mid-1940s the building's history was known, but certainly not celebrated. It was just part of the collection of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century buildings on the lower blocks of King Street that were slowly deteriorating and primarily industrial in use. Unlike Gadsby's Tavern or the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Shop, both of which were restored during the 1930s, Ramsay House never garnered the same type of interest or attention.[4] [Illustration #2]

By 1931, an article in the *Alexandria Gazette* noted that the house was little known by the people of the City and, furthermore, that "Various architectural changes...have almost destroyed the original and quaint appearance of the building...However, those who know it picture it an ancient and charming residence...The spot remains hallowed by memories of the immortal Washington. It was here that his cousin, Anne McCarty resided with her husband William Ramsay who built the house....[5]

In late 1942, Ramsay House suffered a devastating fire that swept the whole building from basement to attic.[6] Because of the marginal economy of the immediate neighborhood, the building was left vacant and boarded up. However, the Alexandria fire department did not condemn the building precisely because its historic importance was well known. The fire department chief was even quoted as saying "I should like to see the Ramsay House restored as a museum." There had been sporadic efforts in the late 1930s and early 1940s to seek to restore the building but nothing became of them because there was no funding. The principal leader of these efforts was Rebecca Ramsay Reese, the great-great-granddaughter of William Ramsay, who was quoted as saying that the only obstacle to the

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[3] Tea rooms were a popular phenomenon of the first three decades of the 20th century. They were "part-home, part-business" that were operated by women and provided a very real alternative to eating in hotels and bars and often served as a means for the preservation of historic buildings. On the tea room phenomenon, see, Cynthia A. Brandimarte, "'To Make the Whole World Homelike' Gender, Space, and America's Tea Room Movement," Winterthur Portfolio, v. 30, no.1, Spring 1995, pp.1-19.

[4] Indicative of this lack of recognition is the fact that one standard, though outdated, reference work on Alexandria architecture makes no mention of the Ramsay House and it is not included as an extant pre-1830 building in the list that is provided. See, Deering Davis, Stephen P. Dorsey, and Ralph Cole Hall, Alexandria Houses, 1750-1830, (New York, New York, Bonanza Books, 1946).

[5] F.A. Long, "Washington's Cousin Lived in Old House", *Alexandria Gazette*, 1/1/1931, p.10. Hereafter, AG.

[6] "Posey Rescues Woman as Fire Sweeps Ancient Ramsay House", AG, 12/8/1942, p.1.

restoration "was the lack of adequate money to buy and repair the old building."

Then on April 17, 1944 the *Alexandria Gazette* printed the astounding announcement that the Ramsay House was to be demolished within two weeks for "an air-conditioned office building." The newspaper characterized the possible demolition of the building as a "catastrophe".[7] The new owner of the property, Frank Koplin a builder from Washington, clearly knew that the proposed demolition would create widespread opposition and sought to deflect some of it by offering to give the building "to any person or group who will move it from its present site."

There was immediate reaction to the *Gazette's* front page article. By the following day, three organizations expressed interest in saving the building. The Kiwanis Club was interested in the building for meeting rooms; residents in Yates Garden expressed an interest in moving the building to that section of the city for use for community meetings and recreation space; and, the Thornton Society, an early national preservation organization, discussed the importance of the building and sought ways to save it. Additionally, members of the City Council were approached about the City of Alexandria acquiring the building.[8] At the City Council meeting the night following the publication of the *Gazette* article "one of the largest delegations of recent times" urged the City to take some action to save the building. All sorts of hyperbole was used in an effort to convince Council of the importance of the building with the spokeswoman for the Colonial Dames saying that the building had "greater historical significance than the Betsey Ross House in Philadelphia." The *Gazette* printed an open letter from nationally known restoration architect Thomas Tileston Waterman urging action to save the building. He wrote: "During the 16 years in which I have been making an intensive study of Virginia's early buildings, I have never encountered another example of its type, with as many curious and foreign qualities... The house royally deserves sympathetic consideration in its present plight."[9]

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[7] "Ramsay House to be Torn Down", AG, 4/17/1944, p.1.

[8] "3 Groups Act Here to Save Ramsay House", AG, 4/18/1944, p.1.

[9] "Council Studying Request to Save Old Ramsay House", AG, 4/19/1944, p.1. Fay Campbell Kaynor, "Thomas Tileston Waterman, Student of American Colonial Architecture," Winterthur Portfolio, v. 20, nos. 2 & 3, Autumn 1985, p. 103. He was one of the original architects for the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg beginning in 1928 and was responsible for the restoration or reconstruction of such buildings as the Governor's Palace. Waterman (1900-1951) "became involved in most of the key projects in the eastern seaboard states that affected buildings of the colonial period and the early Republic. His attitudes and opinions influenced many decisions bearing on the treatment or recording of historic American buildings." He was the author of a number of influential architectural books including Domestic Colonial Architecture of Tidewater Virginia (1932) with John Barrows; Mansions of Virginia (1946); and, The Dwellings of Colonial America (1950). Waterman was likely the individual who was responsible for ensuring that the Ramsay House was recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in 1936. Beginning in 1933 he became the

Waterman also quickly took private action to help save the Ramsay House. He wrote to William Sumner Appleton, Director of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities in Boston and urged him to write to the Mayor urging preservation of the building. Appleton was one of the most influential preservationists of the first half of the twentieth century. [10]

Realizing the vehement opposition to the proposed demolition, the owner voluntarily agreed to halt action three days after the *Gazette* had published its first article about the impending demolition. Even after Mr. Koplin withdrew his plans, the newspaper remained the leading voice for the preservation of the building and went so far as to commission a drawing that depicted what the restored Ramsay House might look like. At the same time, the American Legion which had saved Gadsby's Tavern, pledged $500 toward the restoration of the Ramsay House with the assumption that there would be some organization formed for that purpose. City Treasurer Roger Sullivan agreed to hold the monies for the expected restoration effort. [11]

The following week organizational efforts began in earnest. A formal committee from numerous citizen associations was established and Sullivan was named chairman of the "Committee to Save Ramsay House." Meanwhile, the City Council in an executive session the previous week had voted to explore purchasing the property and had entered into private discussions with the owner. City Council received numerous telegrams from national and state historic preservation organizations urging them to take action to save the building. At the same time both the Alexandria Association and the *Gazette* pledged money to the fledgling drive.[12] With all the interest and pressure, what the paper characterized as

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assistant architect in the National Park Service who was responsible for review of all HABS documentation and was a resident of Alexandria residing in an apartment in Rebecca Ramsay Reese's house at 517 Cameron Street.

[10] Thomas Waterman to William Sumner Appleton, April 21, 1944. Alexandria Library Special Collections. On Appleton see, Jane Brown Gillette, "Appleton's Legacy," Historic Preservation, v.46, no.4, July/August 1994, pp.32ff. and Charles B. Hosmer, Presence of the Past, (New York, New York, G.P. Putnam Sons, 1965), pp.115ff.

[11] "Demolition Halted Pending Issue on Old Ramsay House", AG, 4/20/1944, p.1 and AG, 4/21/1944, p.1; "Legion Pledges $500 to Open Drive for Ramsay House", AG, 4/21/1944, p.1

[12] "City Groups Meeting Today to Map Ramsay House Drive", AG, 4/24/1944, p.1; "Ramsay House Unit Organizes", AG, 4/25/1944, p.1. The civic groups that were involved included Post 24 of the American Legion, Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club, Lions Club, Women's Club, Garden Club, United Daughters of the Confederacy, Kate Waller Barrett Chapter and Alexander Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Alexandria Association. "Thornton Society Appeals for Action on Ramsay House", AG, 4/26/1944, p.1. It is perhaps testament to the community's sentiment about Ramsay House that all these groups could coalesce within a period of days, it is even more remarkable that they did, because most of the organizations had discontinued activities for the duration of World War II. Council received telegrams not only from the

"frantic citizen efforts," City Council really had little choice other than to acquiesce to the demands of the citizens. By May 2, 1944 the Council had concluded negotiations with the owner of the property to purchase the building for $9,500 with the understanding that a private organization would undertake the restoration of the building. The Council action came only two weeks after the *Gazette* had broken the story of the proposed demolition. Sullivan was quoted as saying: "The City will never regret purchasing this sacred landmark...." Council justified the purchase as creating a landmark that would lead to increased tourism in the City after the end of World War II and as a centerpiece for the bicentennial celebrations that would mark the two hundredth anniversary of the founding of the City in 1949.[13]

Obviously the next step was the formation of an actual organization that would have as its central focus the restoration of the building and efforts to do so began the following week. The new organization was named the Ramsay House Restoration Association and Sullivan was again elected president. Things seemed to be off to a fast start when within the week, Mrs. T.S. Taliaferro, a sister of Rebecca Ramsay Reese, pledged $500 to the effort. At the same time the Mount Vernon Chapter of the DAR pledged that it would "do everything in our power" to

***Illustration #3**–Conjectural sketch of the restored Ramsay House by William Haussmann that was used in the fundraising brochure printed by the Alexandria Historical Society in 1944. According to published accounts, Thomas Tileston Waterman, a well known authority on eighteenth century architecture, was consulted as to its accuracy. In this rendition the front door opens onto North Fairfax Street and the chimney on the south side of the building is internal to the structure. Source: Alexandria Association MMS Collection, Special Collections, Alexandria Library.*

Thornton Society but also from Milton Grigg, the president of the Northern Virginia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects as well as the president of the Columbia Historical Society in Washington, DC; "Ramsay Action Assured", AG, 4/26/1944, p.1.

[13] "City Completes Deal to Buy Ramsay House", AG, 5/3/1944, p.1; "Landmark Purchase Up Tonight", AG, 5/5/1944, p.1; "Committee to Map Campaign", AG, 5/10/1944, p.1.