

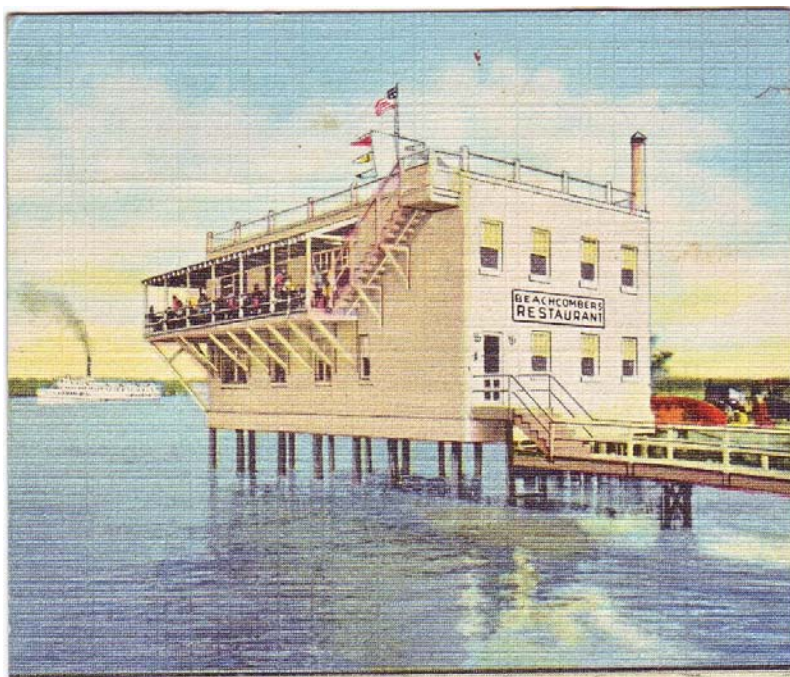


City of Alexandria  
Office of Historic Alexandria  
Alexandria Archaeology  
**Studies of the Old Waterfront**



## **0 Prince Street: A Timeline**

By Diane Riker  
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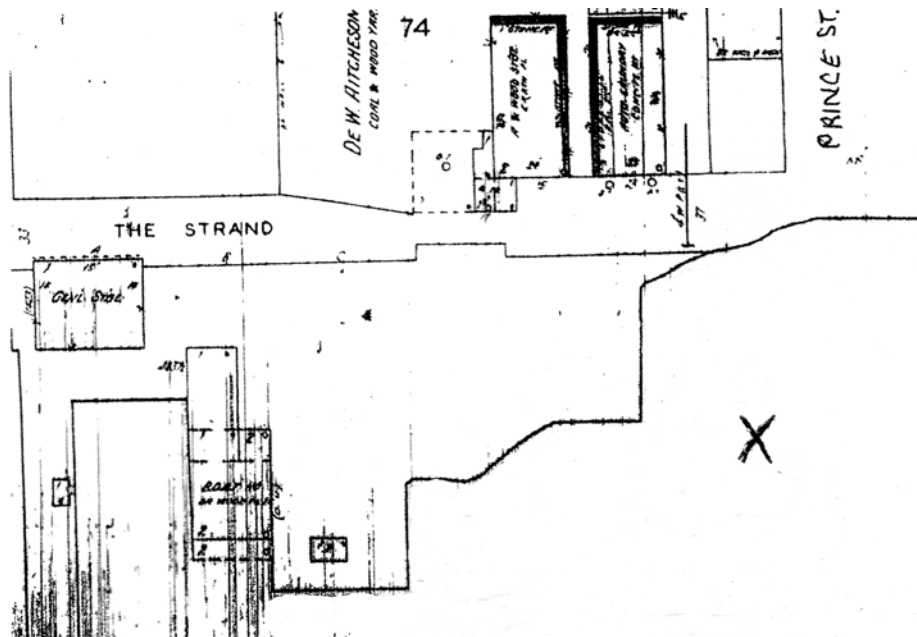


*John C. Richards Collection, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections*

## 0 Prince Street: A Timeline

A key piece of the city's 2006 waterfront plans was not waterfront – but well offshore –until the 1950s.

In 1941, when the “property” to be known as O Prince St. changes hands, the Sanborn Fire Insurance map indicates a jagged shoreline and open water where the Beachcombers Restaurant, later Potomac Arms, will stand (“X”). An automatic laundry and wood-storage facility are across the Strand.



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map 1941, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections

**1945** Aug. 24 — Harry J. Callow, receiver of the Wagar Land Co., a Michigan corporation, deeds to Clarence J. Robinson property lying west of the Strand near the foot of Prince Street and running east into the river, described as follows:

*Beginning on the South side of Prince Street, 118 feet, 1 inch. East of Union Street, be the same more or less, so as to embrace the entire west wall of the warehouse lately occupied by Hooe,<sup>1</sup> thence running East with the line of Prince Street into the Potomac River; thence returning to the point of beginning and running South Parallel to Union Street 43 feet more or less to the middle of an alley 19 feet 8 inches, more or less, wide, running from Union Street into the River; thence East with the middle of said alley into the Potomac River; thence north to intersect the first line; and thence west to the point of*

<sup>1</sup> Hooe's warehouse, long defunct, was located at the southwest corner of Prince St. and the Strand.

*beginning with the use of said alley in common with others entitled thereto, and with docks, right of way, and water rights to the same in any way belonging.*<sup>2</sup>

Two weeks later, Clarence J. Robinson and Abbie H. Robinson lease to Edward C. Wayne, John G. Bethea, and Thomas A. Hulfish, Jr.:

*all that parcel of ground conveyed to Clarence J. Robinson by Harry J. Callow, lying east of the Strand for a term of 20 years...paying there from during said term the sum of \$40.00 per month.... It is mutually agreed, however, that the rent period shall begin at such time as the said parties...start building operations upon said premises.*<sup>3</sup>

Wayne is from Arlington; Bethea, from Maryland; Hulfish is a fourth-generation Alexandrian, living on Duke Street.

**1945** On Nov. 26, the trio applies to the City of Alexandria for a permit to build a two-story cinder-block restaurant on concrete piles, with a stairway to the roof. Estimated cost of the project is \$1,900.<sup>4</sup>

**1946** Wayne, Bethea, and Hulfish open the Beachcombers Restaurant. “Ed” Wayne is manager.<sup>5</sup>

The 3,630-square-foot structure erected on fluted concrete pilings, with its wraparound wooden porches, is basically the same as survives in 2006 (a truck-loading dock has replaced one front window). But in 1945, the building is surrounded by water and a walkway/pier connects it to the shoreline and parking lot.



**The Beachcombers Restaurant Before the Sign Goes Up**

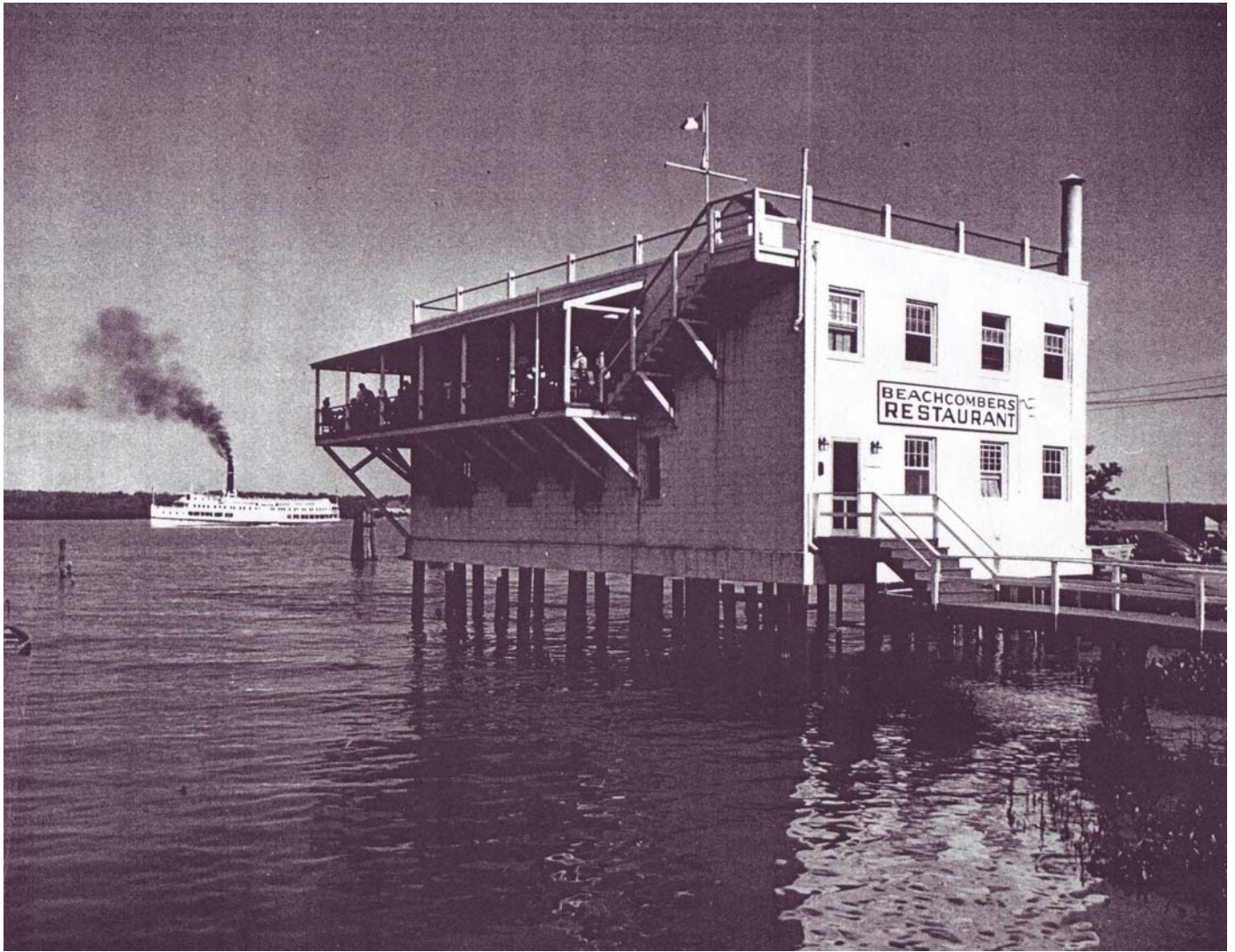
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<sup>2</sup> *Alexandria Deed Book 218*, page 88.

<sup>3</sup> *Alexandria Deed Book 224*, page 465.

<sup>4</sup> *Building Permit # 3737*, City of Alexandria Archives, Payne St.

<sup>5</sup> “Know Your Merchants.” Chamber of Commerce, ca. 1948.



**The Beachcombers with a Full House**

*John C. Richards Collection, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections*





## TREAT YOUR APPETITE

. . . to a change of scenery. Drive over to the famous **BEACHCOMBERS** restaurant built right on the river in Alexandria, Va. Here you'll find many dishes to please the eye as well as the palate. Enjoy the nautical atmosphere—the courteous service you'll receive and be assured this is a place you can bring the family or friends with complete assurance they'll be served only the freshest seafood, the finest quality, full flavored meats. Open daily, including Sunday, from 11 a. m. to 11 p. m. Phone **Alex. 3200** for reservations. Located at **Prince and Strand Sts.** on the river, Alexandria, Va.

This advertisement appears on page 14 of the Feb. 1, 1948, edition of *The Washington Post*<sup>6</sup>

*Besides its other features, the restaurant offers "music by Musak."*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See also *The Washington Post*, Oct. 17, 1947; Jan. 4, 1948, p. S14; Jan. 18, 1948, p. S 11; Feb. 15, 1948, p. 16.



**The Beachcombers interior, showing the bar, dumbwaiter, and the restaurant's hanging heaters, all of which were still there in early 2006.**

*John C. Richards Collection, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections*

Thomas Hulfish III, the owner's son, recalls that "*all Alexandria came out at 7 to watch the Norfolk boat load [at the Prince Street dock]. The stevedores sang sea chanties.*" On summer nights, pre-air-conditioning, "*the dumb waiter took hard-shell crabs up to the roof, which was very attractive, decorated with lights.*"<sup>8</sup>

In a 2002 interview,<sup>9</sup> a local doctor remembers that roof:

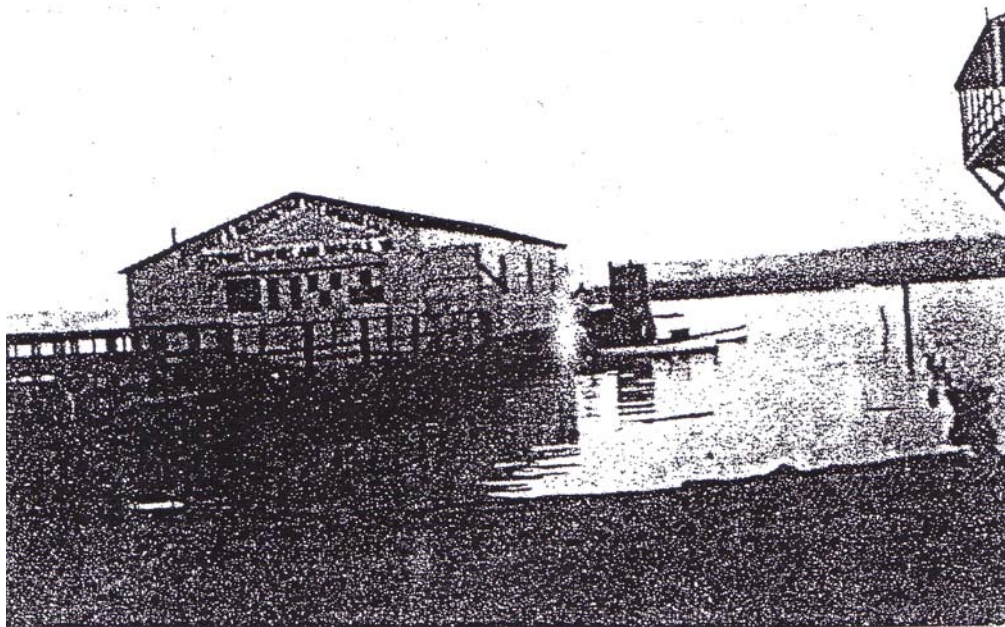
*We used to enjoy eating outside with our parents on the high terrace of the Beachcomber Restaurant.... The lights on the Maryland shore were few, and the silence was broken only by the distant hum of the infrequent cabin cruiser passing by with its blue-green and red navigation lamps glowing in the deep darkness. The rhythmic lapping of the small waves onto the riverbank was just about the only other sound, since there was no Wilson Bridge then with its noisy trucks. Air traffic was just beginning to increase from National Airport, but the sight of aircraft taking off at night was unusual. I can barely recall the*

<sup>7</sup> Advertisement in the *Middle States Regatta Assn.'s 57<sup>th</sup> Annual Regatta Program*, Sept. 5, 1948. *Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections*

<sup>8</sup> Hulfish, Thomas III. *Phone interview with D. Riker*, May 2, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, Stephen, M.D. "A Nostalgic Account of Growing Up in Old Alexandria and Area in the 1950s" in *Historic Alexandria Quarterly*, Fall 2002, p. 6.

*sight of seaplanes, bobbing on their pontoons, tied up at the old ferry dock on Strand Street where the Norfolk-Washington steamboat used to call.*



**Prince Street dock and wharf, with corner of Beachcombers' porch, showing proximity to the dock.**

The Washington and Norfolk Steamboat Company ceases operations in 1948.<sup>10</sup>

By the early 60s, the old wharf building has collapsed. (See following page.)

*Ames Williams Mss. Collection, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections*

The front door was reached by a gangplank from the seawall at the Strand. A frequent visitor was Alice Roosevelt, daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>11</sup>

The restaurant is the setting for long-range plans to develop the Potomac waterfront. On April 20, 1950, owner Tom Hulfish, chairman of the waterfront survey subcommittee of the River and Harbor Committee, Washington Board of Trade, hosts a meeting here for the \$60 million project.<sup>12</sup>

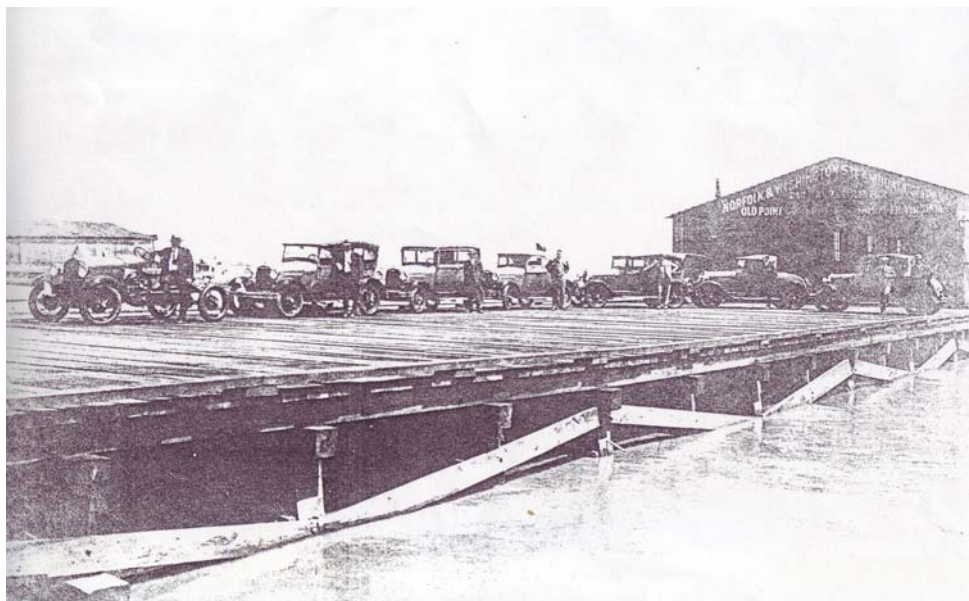
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<sup>10</sup> Shomette, Donald G. *Maritime Alexandria*. Heritage Books, 2003, p. 231.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, T. Michael. "The Prince to Duke Street Waterfront," *Fireside Sentinel*, 1994, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Post*, April 21, 1950, p. B5.

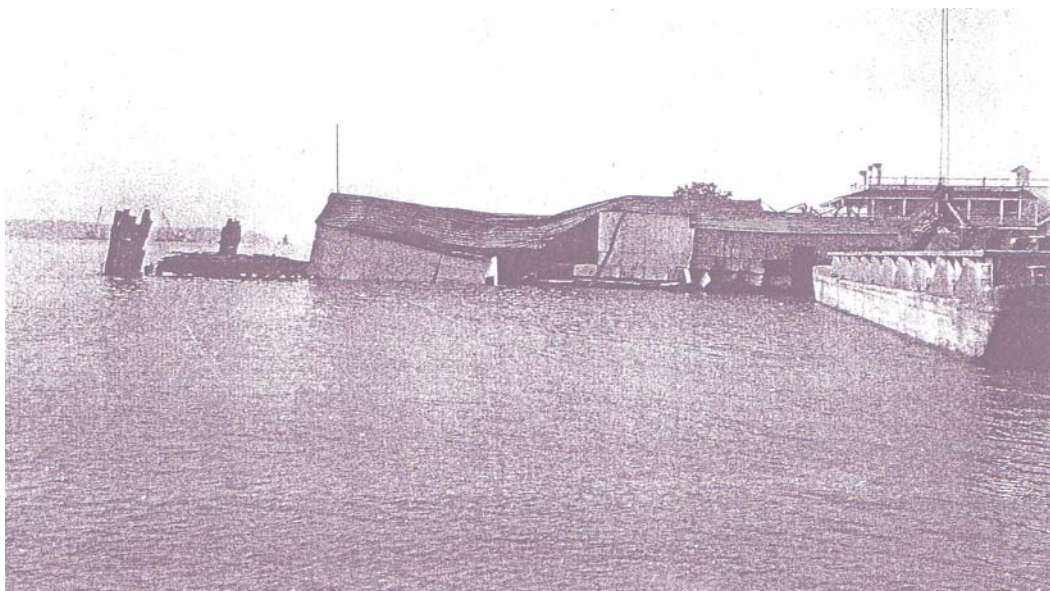




**The Prince Street Wharf in its heyday, 1921.**

*Loeb Collection, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections*

**(There had been a dock and successive wharves at the foot of Prince Street from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This one was built in 1899.)<sup>13</sup>**



**The Crumbling Wharf Building ca. 1961.**

*Sampson Collection, Alexandria Library — Local History/Special Collections*

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<sup>13</sup> Miller, T. Michael. "The Prince to Duke Street Waterfront Part II," in *The Fireside Sentinel*, Nov./Dec. 1993, p. 189.



**1949** In October, George Robinson's Sons, Inc., sells to Thomas G. and Agnes B. Sykes that portion of the Callow lot lying west of the Strand.<sup>14</sup> All that remains of the Hooe warehouse in 1949 is "an old stone foundation."

By fall 1950, the Beachcombers' leaping swordfish has metamorphosed into a sketch of the restaurant.



**WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE! . . . yes, you're completely surrounded by the Potomac when dining at the romantic BEACHCOMBERS Restaurant. The catch of seafood served in picture window glamour is received abundantly and intensely fresh each day. Where else but the Beachcombers can your taste buds thrill to memorable Lobster Supreme, rich inches thick beef, full bodied shrimp? Over the Potomac at Prince. Alexandria. AL. 3200.**

The Beachcombers runs this ad in *The Washington Post*, October 27, 1950, p. C8.<sup>15</sup>

**1954** On Jan. 23, fire damages the first floor and part of the second floor of the Beachcombers. Firemen fight the smoky blaze for an hour and a half. The building is vacant at the time.<sup>16</sup> According to Tom Hulfish III, the owners have already decided to give up the business.<sup>17</sup>

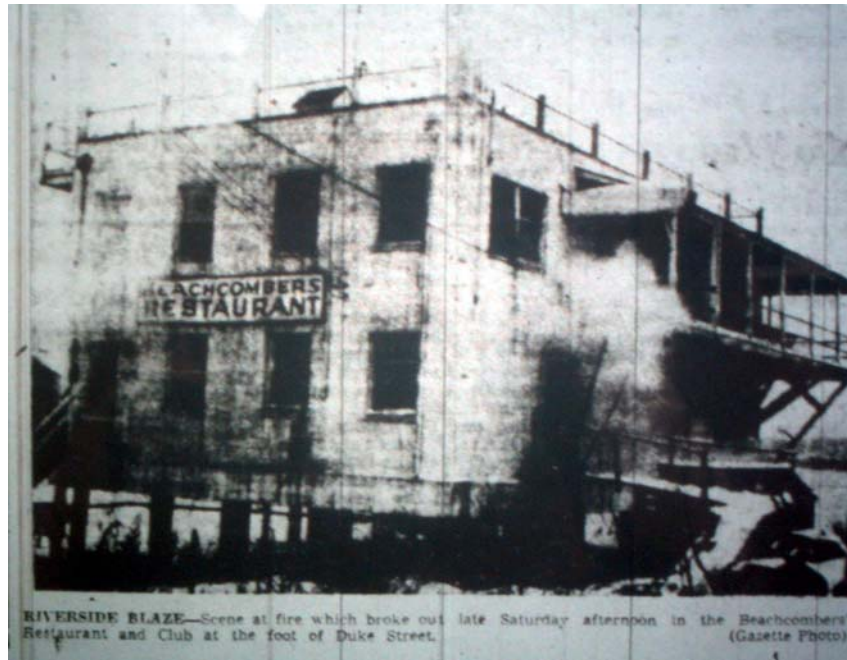
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<sup>14</sup> *Alexandria Deed Book* 292, p. 75.

<sup>15</sup> See also *The Washington Post*, Oct. 20, p. C6; Nov. 10 and Dec. 1, 1950.

<sup>16</sup> *Post*, Jan. 24, 1954, p. M6.

<sup>17</sup> T. Hulfish phone interview with D. Riker, May 2, 2006.



**The Beachcombers on Fire. (Note wrong street name.)**

*Alexandria Gazette*, Jan. 25, 1954, p. 2.

**1954** Dec. 9 — Thomas A. Hulfish, Jr., Marianne M. Hulfish, and Dorothy Bethea, John Bethea's widow, and Beachcombers Restaurant, a Delaware corporation, convey to George Robinson's Sons, Inc., a Virginia corporation, the improvements erected above the water in 1946.<sup>18</sup>

Hulfish recalls that the water between the Strand and the restaurant is being gradually filled in by cement trucks returning to the Robinson plant at the end of the day and flushing their mixers over the bulkhead. He says that the company's secretary, John Richards, supervises the operation.

International Armaments Corp. (also known as Interarmco or Interarms), the world's largest handlers of foreign army surplus and founded by an ex-CIA agent,<sup>19</sup> begins to use the building or storage.<sup>20</sup> Eventually, Interarms will have 100,000 square feet of storage on Union Street. Its merchandise is reputed to be involved in revolutions in Latin America and Cuba.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Alexandria Deed Book* 395, p. 566. (Later that day, Robinson's Sons, Inc. puts up the property originally leased to Hulfish, et al., less that portion sold to the Sykeses, as collateral for a loan of \$18,000 from the Burke and Herbert Bank. A note in the deed's margin shows that the loan is repaid in full by 2/17/1960.)

<sup>19</sup> "Old Weapons Turned to Gold by Ex-CIA Man," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 16, 1966, p. E4.

<sup>20</sup> Richards, Mark and Stephen, *Interview with R. Holz*, May 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Brogan, Patrick, and Albert Zarca. *Deadly Business: Sam Cummings, Interarms, and the Arms Trade*. <http://www.namebase.org/books40.html>

**1958** The 1958 addition to the Sanborn Map of 1941 labels the site as “guns and ammunition storage” and a contemporary photo shows the building as a “Gun Museum.”<sup>22</sup>



**Water once again laps at the concrete pilings in a late 50s or early 60s  
photo of flooding at Prince and the Strand.**

*John C. Richards Collection, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections*

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<sup>22</sup> *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map 1941, with addenda, and Gamble photo collection, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections.*

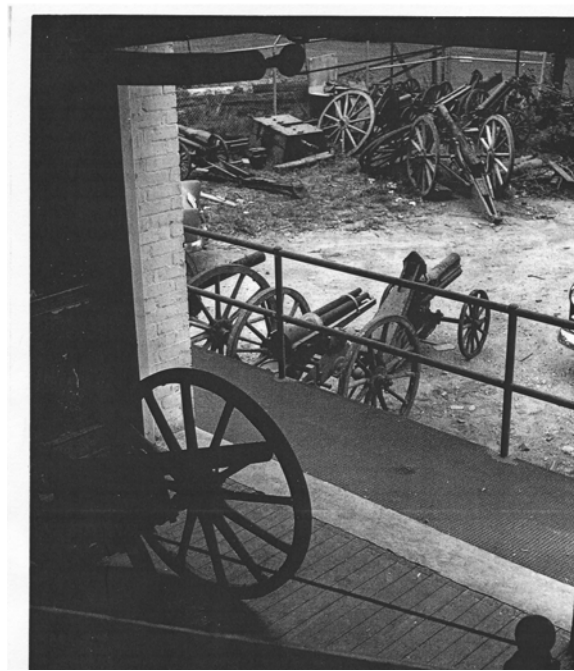


**A truck dock has replaced one restaurant window  
in this early view with howitzer.**

*John C. Richards Collection, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections*



**1963** Oct. 14, Robinson Realty, formerly George H. Robinson's Sons, Inc., deeds to the Potomac Arms Corp. the southeast corner of Prince Street and the Strand, including the restaurant building.<sup>23</sup> A number of sporting-goods stores, including Ye Old Hunter, Hunter's Haven, and later Full Metal Jacket will occupy the first floor.<sup>24</sup> Potomac Arms is the retail outlet for Interarmco.



**A view from the doorway looking west ca. 1960**

*John C. Richards Collection, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections*

**1965** Potomac Arms plays an uneasy role in the sale of two antitank guns – seven-foot-long Finnish weapons – and 200 rounds of ammunition, subsequently used to blast through the 20-inch-thick walls of a Brink's vault in Syracuse, N.Y., where the thieves make off with \$418,028.

*The Washington Post* reports on page one:

*It all began [March 30] when a well-dressed man in his late 30s walked into a second-floor gun shop in Alexandria, Va. The owner, graying, crew cut Johnny Richards, hardly missed a puff on his pipe [when the customer asked for the guns].... But what did raise Richards' eyebrows were the name and address the man gave - John Finch, 620 Oronoco, Alexandria. Richards – a lifelong Alexandria resident – doubted the authenticity of the address.<sup>25</sup>*

<sup>23</sup> *Alexandria Deed Book* 587 , p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> *Alexandria City Directories* 1958-1970 and Holtz interview with Richards brothers.

<sup>25</sup> *The Washington Post*, Oct. 30, 1965, p. A1.



**John Richards at his desk.** (Even the lampshade has a firearms theme.)  
*John C. Richards Collection, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections*

Richards stalls the customer and calls the FBI, who make plans to follow the guns to their destination at the Railway Express office in Plattsburgh, New York, near the Canadian border. Unfortunately, the pickup is made by a break-in after hours, when the FBI, state police, and Mounties have all left their watch and retired for the night.

When the Syracuse vault is blown in October, Brink's sues Potomac Arms for more than \$1 million, charging the store with negligence.<sup>26</sup>

As soon as he learns of the heist, Richards cuts off sales of antitank guns and "other unusual, questionable" weapons, but it is not enough for *The Washington Post*. "*The Potomac Arms Corp. is a dealer in devices... suitable for assassinating presidents, slaughtering one's children or blasting open safes and bank vaults,*" charges a Dec. 26 editorial, headlined "*Brinksmanship.*"<sup>27</sup>

**1967** The corporation is again a focus of the media when, on April 25, federal agents in Oakland, CA., find eight tons of ammunition from the Potomac Arms in a shipment addressed to

<sup>26</sup> *Post*, Dec. 22, 1965, p. A3.

<sup>27</sup> *Post*, Dec. 24, 1965, p. A6.

William Thoresen III, an ex-convict. The Thoresens, husband and wife, own a home in Pacific Heights, where authorities have already uncovered 17½ tons of arms, including an antitank gun.<sup>28</sup>

**1968** Until this year, the building's address has been South Strand or 200 Strand Street. From now on, the southeast corner of Prince and the Strand will be known as "O Prince Street."<sup>29</sup> Shortly, the gun shop will share the address with a seafood retailer and a cruise boat.

**1972** On Sept. 27, City Council approves a special use permit to The Port of Alexandria Company (Frank E. Mann, John C. Richards, and Robert J. Sweeney) to operate a restaurant ship, *Le Bateau Alexandria*, from the wood pier at the rear of Potomac Arms.<sup>30</sup> *Le Bateau* and her successors will have the low-slung lines of a Parisian tour boat.

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<sup>28</sup> *Post*, April 26, 1967, p. A6.

<sup>29</sup> *Hill's Alexandria City Directories*, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections.

<sup>30</sup> *Special Use Permit # 888*, Planning Commission Meeting of Sept. 5, 1972, Alexandria City Archives.



**An undated aerial photograph shows the pier Richards builds for restaurant boats, with a floatplane alongside.**

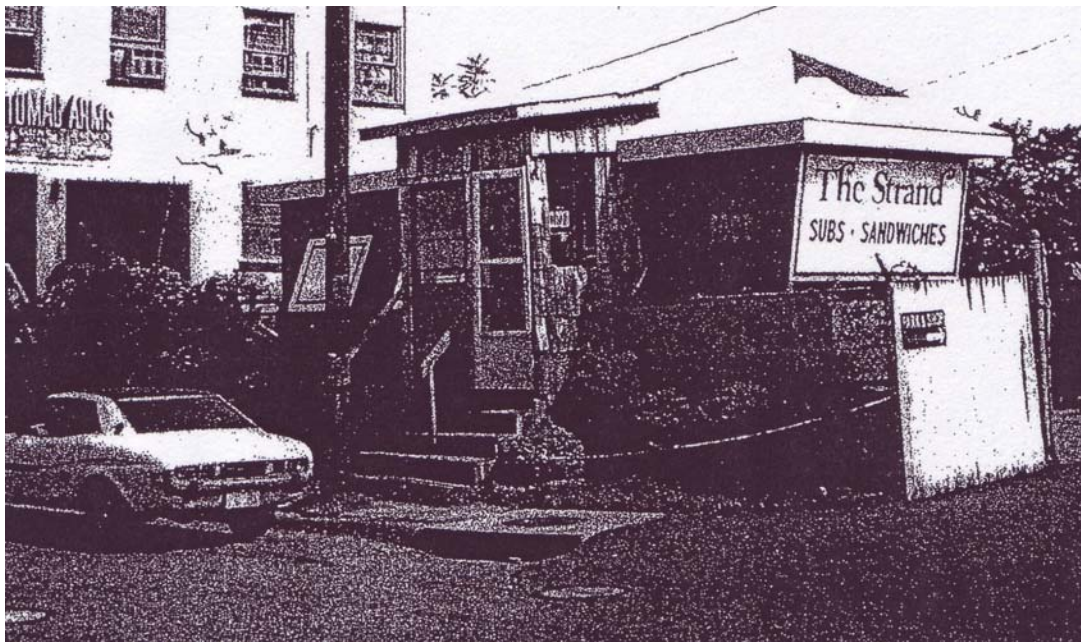
*John C. Richards Collection, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections*



**1973** *The Washington Post* reports on *Le Bateau*'s commissioning cruise: "What [Roger] Hilton and his associates — former Alexandria Mayor Frank Mann and his partners Robert Sweeney and John Richards — are after is a network of floating restaurants...the ship was built in Rhode Island for \$350,000."<sup>31</sup>

But, despite patronage like that of Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey, who holds a fund-raiser on the boat,<sup>32</sup> *Le Bateau Alexandria* and her sister ship, *Le Bateau Fort Lauderdale*, file for bankruptcy after one summer and Mann attributes the failure to premature efforts to build a third floating restaurant in Miami.<sup>33</sup>

**1973** Norwood Lee Carroll, of 407 Duke Street, applies for a two-year permit for a trailer to be located just west of the Potomac Arms building. He intends to sell seafood. The application is approved on June 20<sup>34</sup> and subsequently extended.



**The Seafood Trailer in Potomac Arms' front yard photographed in 1980**  
*Alexandria Gazette Collection II, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections*

In 1980, the trailer has the distinction of winning an "Onion" award for bad architecture from the American Institute of Architects.<sup>35</sup> (In 2006, the trailer can still be seen on the river side of the gun store.)

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<sup>31</sup> Rice, William. "A Movable Feast," *The Washington Post*, May 12, 1973, p. B3. *The Post* gives a mixed review to *Le Bateau*'s "commissioning cruise."

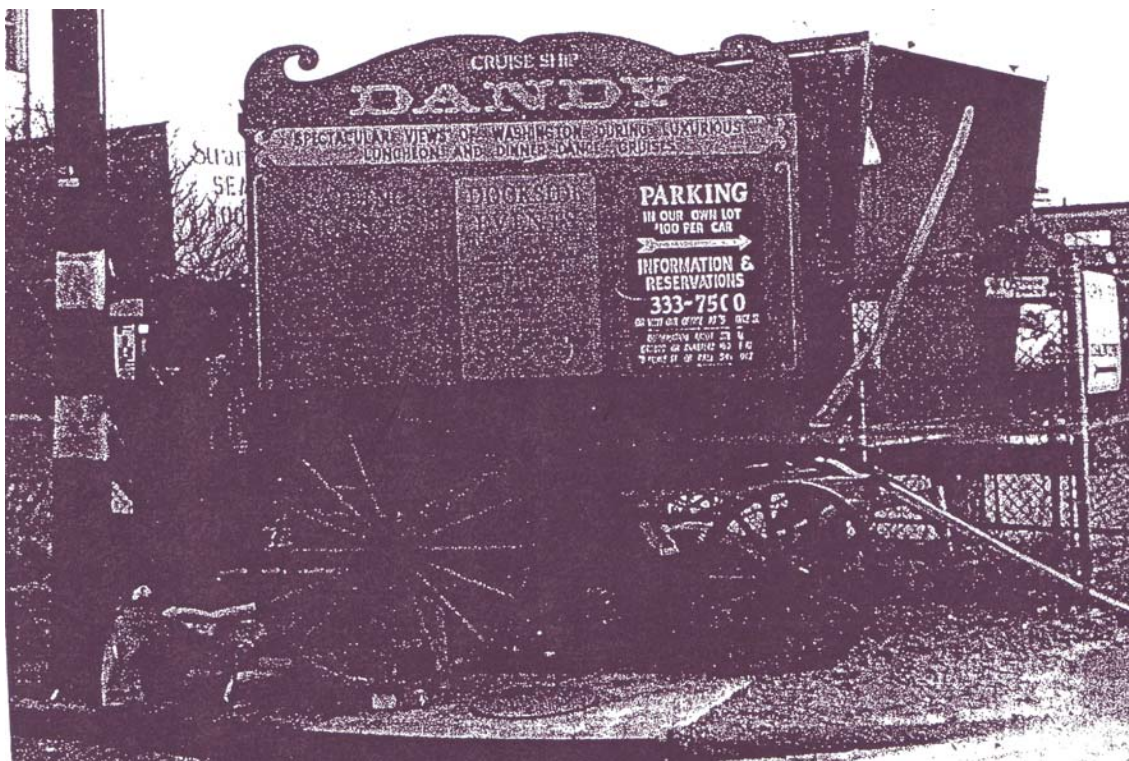
<sup>32</sup> *Post*, Sept. 25, 1973, p. B3.

<sup>33</sup> *Post*, May 3, 1974, p. B5.

<sup>34</sup> Board of Architectural Review, Folder 38, Prince St., 0. Mss 286A, Alexandria City Archives.

“The Strand...hidden down by the waterfront, is merely a trailer and easy to overlook [but]...worth finding,” says a writer for *The Charm of Old Town Alexandria*, an undated newspaper insert. “The salmon come from Oregon, the oysters from Long Island, the scallops from Canada, and the sole from Boston.”<sup>36</sup>

**1975** In June 1975, the 100-ton, 100-foot *Le Bateau Fort Lauderdale* is brought to Alexandria by The Chesapeake Bay & Potomac River Steamship Co., owned by Donald S. Davis.<sup>37</sup> The boat is renamed the *Dandy* after an early-19<sup>th</sup>-century vessel that which carried passengers between Alexandria and Georgetown. At first, the dinner cruise runs year-round. (“The tinkle of cutting through thin ice in winter encourages people to order more drinks,” Davis tells a reporter.)<sup>38</sup> Nancy Kissinger entertains the wife of the Israeli prime minister on board. (For the 1977 season, mid-March to the end of October, the company will report 55,000 passengers.)<sup>39</sup>



<sup>35</sup> *Alexandria Gazette*, June 2, 1980, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Business Collection, *Alexandria Library — Local History VF*.

<sup>37</sup> Martin, Judith. “Aboard the ‘Dandy’” *The Washington Post*, May 23, 1976, p. 144 and Wilson, Nina. *Email to D. Riker*, June 7, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Martin, op. cit.

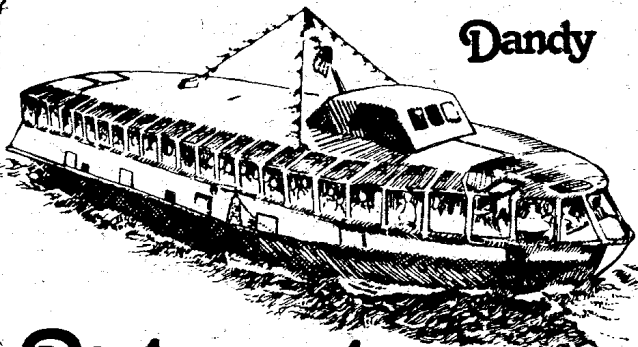
<sup>39</sup> Bain, Sandy K. Weekend Getaways, *Post*, p. 8. And see also Richmond, Phyllis C. “Shrimp Ahoy,” *Post*, July 11, 1976, and “Cruising Up the River,” *Post*, April 28, 1978, p. 8.

**In this 1976 photo, the *Dandy* has an eye-catching wagon  
at the corner of Prince and the Strand.**

*Alexandria Gazette Collection II, Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections*

**1976** On Jan. 14, Thomas A. Hulfish, Jr. dies. Among other accomplishments, he has been instrumental in proposing and securing passage of Alexandria's original Charleston Ordinance for the protection of the city's old houses.<sup>40</sup>

**1981** This spring, the *Dandy* changes ownership and is joined by a smaller boat, the *Marianne*. Nina Wilson and the *Dandy*'s captain, Alvin F. Futrell,<sup>41</sup> incorporate as Potomac Party Cruises.



**Dandy**

**Restaurant  
Cruise Ship**

For a romantic dinner for two,  
a small group for any occasion,  
or as many as 150,  
welcome aboard the Dandy!

**Dinner & Luncheon Cruises  
Year-Round**

Private Charters Available  
**Reservations Required (703) 683-6076**

**POTOMAC PARTY CRUISES, INC.**  
Zero Prince Street, Old Town Alexandria  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

The new company is named in an April advertisement in the  
1981 Buyer's Guide of the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *Alexandria Gazette*, Jan 15, 1976, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> *The Washington Post*, Dec. 17, 1981, p. VA1.

**1986** John Bethea dies in Baltimore.<sup>43</sup>

**1989** Potomac Party Cruises weathers some rough waters this year. After the boat runs aground in April and strikes the 14th Street railroad bridge in May, Al Futrell (the “singing captain,” as he is billed) is charged by the Coast Guard with 16 instances of negligence, among them turning over the helm to unlicensed crew (“probably waiters”) and eight near-collisions.<sup>44</sup> Futrell surrenders his captain’s license in September. Ms. Wilson hires other captains.<sup>45</sup>

**1998** Samuel Cummings, the ex-CIA agent who founded and led Interarms, dies.

**1999** March 30, Potomac Arms deeds the property to Stephen and Mark Richards, John Richards’ sons, for \$425,000.<sup>46</sup> The brothers continue its use as a gun shop.

In September, John Richards further subdivides his holdings, deeding the center portion of the current (2006) parking area, lot 502, to Frank E. and Anita L. Mann and the southerly portion, Lot 501, to Robert J. Sweeney.<sup>47</sup>

**1999-2000** *Nina’s Dandy*, a 129-foot vessel qualified to hold 300 passengers and crew, joins the *Dandy* at O Prince. The boat makes its festive debut on the eve of the millennium and continues as a popular venue.

**2004** On March 26, John C. Richards, 78, dies.<sup>48</sup>

**2006** Jan. 21, Alexandria City Council votes to acquire O Prince Street.

**2006** Feb. 27, Stephen D. Richards, Mark G. Richards, and Patrice A. Richards, “known of record as Patrice R. Clancy,” sell the land and building at O Prince Street to the City of Alexandria for \$1,135,000.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Alexandria Library – Local History/Special Collections. Mss. 202, Folder: “*Other Groups Promotions.*” And see *Alexandria Gazette*, April 4, 1981; “Dining With a View,” *Post*, Dec. 17, 1981, p. VA1; MacKinnon, Dorothy: “Breaking Brew Upon the Water,” *Post*, June 8, 1984, p. W9.

<sup>43</sup> *Social Security Administration Death Files.*

<sup>44</sup> *Post*, Aug. 19, 1989, p. B1.

<sup>45</sup> “Dandy Loses a Captain,” *Post*, Sept. 8, 1989, p. C3.

<sup>46</sup> *Alexandria Deed Book* 587, p. 33.

<sup>47</sup> *Alexandria Tax Map* 75.03-03-13.

<sup>48</sup> *Alexandria Gazette*, March 28, 2004.

<sup>49</sup> *City of Alexandria Department of Real Estate Assessment.* Map: 075.03-03-11 Databank #12715000.