

Alexandria Times

Denise Dunbar

Publisher & Executive Editor
ddunbar@alextimes.com

Margaret Stevens

Sales Director
mstevens@alextimes.com

Caitlyn Meisner

Editor
cmeisner@alextimes.com

Sydney Kodama

Reporter/Photographer
skodama@alextimes.com

Andrew McCabe

Photo Intern
amccabe@alextimes.com

Hannah Shiblaq

Reporting Intern
hshiblaq@alextimes.com

ADVERTISING

Margaret Stevens

mstevens@alextimes.com

Marty DeVine

mdevine@alextimes.com

Patrice V. Culligan

pculligan@alextimes.com

Tina Franco

Office Administrator
tfranco@alextimes.com

DIRECTOR OF ART & DESIGN

Jessica Kim

graphics@alextimes.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Kim Davis

Mark Eaton

Mark Edelman

Thompson Eskew

Kim Gilliam

Ryan Hopper

Lexie Jordan

Louise Krafft

Brianne McConnell

Jim McGrath

Erin Shackelford

Dr. Vivek Sinha

Kathryn Ziemer

ALEXTIMES LLC

Denise Dunbar

Managing Partner

The Ariail family

Suzanne Brock

William Dunbar

The Old Dominion Glass Factory and the labor movement

In 1911, sociologist and photographer Lewis Wickes Hine visited the Old Dominion Glass Factory as part of his documentation of child labor in the rapidly industrializing American South. Despite the declaration of Labor Day as a national holiday by President Grover Cleveland in 1894, child labor was still legal in this country until the 1930s.

The Old Dominion Glass Company opened its doors on either side of Montgomery Street between North Fairfax and North Lee Streets. The factory produced high-quality soda, beer and medicine bottles. It was one of four bottle and glass companies in Alexandria at the time, and became one of the largest employers in the city.

The factory only hired white men as professional glassblowers, but it employed hundreds of Black and white laborers to run the factory both day and night. Many of these laborers were women and children. Glass factories were particularly hazardous work environments for children, who were hired as early as the age of 7 to work shifts up to 16 hours for a fraction of the pay of an adult.

A trained sociologist, Hine was on a contract for the National Child Labor Committee when he came to Alexandria. He took a series



PHOTO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

'Carrying-in' boy in Alexandria Glass Factory by Lewis Wickes Hine.

of photographs, including this one of Robert Ellis "Rob" Kidd, a 12-year-old boy employed at the Old Dominion Glass Company Factory as a "carrying-in" boy. The job required Rob to move bottles of molded glass from a blowing room to extremely hot ovens to strengthen the glass.

Hine's photograph captures other work hazards, such as strewn glass shards, poor ventilation and large tools on the workfloor that "carrying-in" boys such as Rob needed to avoid. Hine noted on the photo that Rob, "Works on day shift one week and night shift next week." That schedule surely made it difficult for him to at-

tend school, which was available to children his age.

Glass factories operated on the assumption that fire was inevitable, and their buildings were made of wood for easy repair or replacement. The Old Dominion Glass Company factory experienced its first major fire in 1901, another in November 1920 and a third in 1925. The last fire, along with a decline in demand for bottles due to Prohibition, led the factory to close its doors.

It wasn't until 1938 that the Fair Labor Standards Act set a minimum age of 14 for employment outside of school hours and 16 during school hours. Positions deemed "haz-

ardous" required employees to be 18. The new laws gained the approval of not only people opposed to child labor, but also previously unemployed adults who were not sought in the workforce. The photographs of Lewis Wicks Hine, including those of the Old Dominion Glass Company, played a fundamental role in bringing that change.

The National Child Labor Committee Collection is kept at the Library of Congress and is available digitally at loc.gov/pictures/collection/nclc.

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