



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Marking Time

The Alexandria Canal Tide Lock

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Image: The Alexandria Canal Lock and Pool No. 1 on the Potomac River (circa 1861-1865). Photo, National Archives.

The Alexandria Canal tide lock and holding basin are the only locally remaining portions of the Alexandria Canal, which played an important part in the history of commercial navigation on the Potomac River.

Congress granted a charter to the Alexandria Canal Co. on May 26, 1830. When completed in 1845, the canal ran from a terminal in Georgetown and crossed the Potomac on an aqueduct near the current Key Bridge. The canal continued along the west side of the Virginia shore, over Four Mile Run on another aqueduct, entered Alexandria, and descended to the Potomac by means of three lift locks that lowered barges to the river.



The entire canal system was about seven miles long. Business flourished and in 1850, the C&O Canal was completed to Cumberland, Md. From then on, coal from the western Maryland mines became the most important commodity to be shipped via the canals to the wharves in Alexandria. Other typical products shipped by canal to Alexandria were wheat, corn, whiskey, corn meal and flour; products shipped from Alexandria by canal included fish, salt, plaster and lumber.

The steady shipments were interrupted only by the Civil War and then resumed until 1886 when a break in the aqueduct occurred. This coincided with the demand for a toll-free bridge across the Potomac, and thus the operation of the Alexandria Canal came to an end. The tide lock and holding basin were excavated in 1982, and a restoration is now accessible to the public at Canal Center Plaza.

“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.