



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

Alexandria's Roller Rink

Alexandria Times, October 2, 2008

Image: The roller rink. Photo, Alexandria Library Special Collections.

The Alexandria roller rink, also known as the Alexandria Arena, opened on November 23, 1948, at the corner of Madison and North St. Asaph streets. Originally an affiliate of the national chain America on Wheels, the Alexandria rink had maple floors and a huge Wurlitzer organ. It was a massive structure that could accommodate 3,000 skaters at one time, and dozens of skating exhibitions and speed skating competitions were held there.

The venue was so large that it soon served other purposes. The arena functioned as a dance hall and also hosted conferences, dog shows, boxing matches and even performing horses. But beyond roller skating, the rink was best known as a concert hall.

In its earliest days Guy Lombardo and his orchestra performed there, and in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it became a very popular stage for rock acts. Top stars including Janis Joplin, Jethro Tull and Alice Cooper – and his boa constrictor – played the roller rink, which was advertised as a “psychedelic ballroom” or the “Alexandria Rock Arena.” Fans paid \$4 or \$5 for general admission and sat on the floor, and most bands played two shows a night.

The roller rink later had financial problems and closed in 1979. It re-opened with different owners in the 1980s, but closed for good in 1986. The roller rink, which had occupied half a block, was demolished, and a new office and hotel complex was built on the site.



“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.