



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Alexandria Almshouse

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Image: The old Almshouse on Monroe Street. Photo, Alexandria Library Special Collections.

For more than 125 years, the Alexandria Almshouse provided refuge for the city's poor. Records indicate that in 1800, Alexandria acquired a large parcel outside the city limits and built a Georgian-style home there to house the poor.

The two-and-a-half-story brick structure had a full basement and 18 fireplaces, and stood at the northwest corner of present-day Monroe Avenue and Route 1, a location once known as Poor House Lane and the River Road. The tract

included more than a dozen acres where tenants farmed their own food. Almshouse residents included those convicted by the courts of vagrancy and indebtedness. Some tenants were identified in census records as blind and mentally ill, and residents aged in range from young children to the very elderly.

A new facility to house Northern Virginia's poor opened in Manassas in 1926, and in early 1927, the Almshouse tenants were relocated there. But the old house was occupied again later that year when a tornado destroyed dozens of Alexandria homes and some displaced families were temporarily sheltered at the Almshouse.

The property was sold in 1928 to a man who opened a hotel there but he was unable to pay the mortgage and the city government took it over in the 1930s. Simpson Stadium was later built on the grounds and the house was torn down in the 1950s. A historical marker was installed on the site this spring in honor of the Town of Potomac centennial.



“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.