



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Old Custom House and Post Office

*Alexandria Times, April 30, 2009*

*Image: The Old Custom House, southwest corner of Prince and St. Asaph streets. Photo, Library of Congress.*

In 1858, the Alexandria Custom House and Post Office was built at the southwest corner of Prince and St. Asaph streets. Designed by Ammi B. Young, the first Supervising Architect of the U.S.

Treasury, it was produced around the same time as Young's custom houses in Georgetown, Richmond and Norfolk. It was a fireproof structure, made of granite with cast iron doors, window frames and stairways, and in 1902 when a fire broke out in the basement, there was significant smoke but no damage to the building.

The post office occupied the first floor, the customs rooms were on the second, and a courtroom for the federal court was on the third. When it was originally constructed, it had three bays on both street facades, but it was later enlarged to five bays on the St. Asaph Street side. The expansion began in 1903, costing an estimated \$70,000 and a cornice worker's life when he fell from the scaffolding.

After the expansion was completed in 1904, the building was one-third larger and fitted with modern upgrades including electrical wiring and steam heating. But with the continued growth of Alexandria, the renovated building could not meet the demands of the community and plans to build a new custom house and post office began in the 1920s.

The new facility would be located in the same block of Prince Street as the old one but would face Washington Street. In the fall of 1930, 72 years after it was built, the old custom house was razed and in February 1931, the cornerstone of the new building was set.



*“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.*