



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

The Doniphan Building

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Image: The Doniphan Building, King and Columbus streets. Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.

Alexander S. Doniphan, a newspaper agent and real estate investor, announced plans for a mixed-use building on the northeast corner of King and Columbus streets in 1907. Stock sales would fund construction of the four-story Fairfax Apartment House, which would be Alexandria's first apartment building and cost an estimated \$50,000. Although it was also known as the Doniphan Building, Doniphan did have several partners, including W.A. Smoot, Jr., architect M. Dana Morrill, and three members of the Leadbeater family.



The plans called for 14 apartments on the top three levels, with retail and commercial space on the first floor. Under the direction of contractor J.D. Knight, the Doniphan Building was completed in early 1908 and this photograph was likely taken the following summer. The main entrance to the apartments faced North Columbus Street, and street-level storefronts with large windows welcomed shoppers along King Street.

On January 2, 1929, a devastating fire swept through the building, nearly gutting it entirely and causing about \$100,000 in damage. Firefighters from Washington and Arlington joined in the effort but low water pressure made putting the fire out very difficult. At one point, firefighters had to run a hose from the Potomac seven blocks down the street to the conflagration. The apartments were destroyed but everyone made it to safety.

Over the next year, the Doniphan Building was remodeled, with upper levels being converted to office space. Around the same time, Peoples Drugstore opened on the ground floor and remained an anchor at the site for several decades. Today, offices upstairs and a Bertucci's restaurant on the first floor occupy the commercial condo building.

"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.



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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.