



Office of Historic Alexandria  
City of Alexandria, Virginia

# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Great Blizzard of 1899

*Alexandria Times*, August 6, 2009

Image: *The Alexandria Waterfront, 1899*. Photo, Alexandria Library Special Collections, McKenney Collection.



**S**now fell steadily on Alexandria for nearly three days in February 1899, leaving snowfall totaling 30 inches or more around the area and affecting nearly the entire east coast. But the severe impact of the Great Blizzard of 1899 came from sub-zero temperatures and high winds that generated massive snow drifts.

Alexandria's train lines and waterfront, the latter seen in this photograph, suffered significantly, with snowdrifts as high as 15 feet covering parts of the rail line and the Potomac River frozen from bank to bank. People were unable to travel and the few who tried risked their lives. A mail carrier was found nearly frozen to death in a drift just beyond the old northwest city limits. Another worker trying to remove huge drifts from the tracks near Four Mile Run was thrown from his plow and sustained multiple broken bones.



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Not all who sheltered in place were safe, however. Three women who worked as domestics at the Exchange Hotel on North Royal Street stayed there together in a room rather than risk walking to their homes about a mile away. The next morning they were found in their room, two deceased and one unconscious, overcome by carbon monoxide created by the fumes of the coal stove in their room.

Fire consumed two homes because firefighters, working in conditions where temperatures fell to 7 below zero degrees, were unable to immediately access a water supply. After removing deep snow from around the fireplugs, firefighters discovered the plugs were frozen and had to heat them with steam to thaw the water supply.

Later there was fear that, as temperatures finally warmed, the melting snow would cause the thawing Potomac River to flood, but no serious flooding occurred in Alexandria.

*“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.*