



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### First City Pools

*Alexandria Times, November 24, 2009*

*Image: Alexandria Municipal Pool, ca. 1930. Photo, Alexandria Library Special Collections.*

Alexandria's first public pool came to fruition through the financial problems of the local YMCA and the generosity of a successful businessman. In 1924, the YMCA had plans for a pool at a site on Cameron Street, but construction was interrupted when funding problems emerged.

Two years later, the City acquired the YMCA property after Leopold Ruben, a retired merchant and civic leader, offered to pay for the construction of a pool, estimated to cost \$10,000. In the summer

of 1926, excavation began and on September 1, the Alexandria Municipal Pool opened with hundreds of swimmers eager to take a dip. The pool measured 150 feet by 60 feet, with depths between 4 and 10 feet and an elevated diving platform. A shallow pool for toddlers and a building with dressing rooms and lockers completed the complex.

Lifeguards, seen in this photograph taken around 1930, were on duty at all times, and swim lessons and lifesaving classes were offered. Guests paid a small fee to rent towels and bathing suits, and on special occasions, swimmers could compete in races. Thousands of visitors enjoyed the public pool on Cameron Street, but Alexandria's African American residents were not permitted to join them.

Children of color seeking relief from the summer heat swam in the Potomac River, Hunting Creek, Four Mile Run and other waterways. These young people, swimming without the watchful eyes of lifeguards, encountered dangerous currents and debris. At least ten African American children drowned between 1933 and 1951. In 1952, the City opened the Johnson Memorial Pool, named for two brothers who had drowned the year before, for its black residents to use. Located at First and North Payne streets, it closed in the mid-1960s after desegregation of public facilities.





**Office of Historic Alexandria  
City of Alexandria, Virginia**

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*"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.*