



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Shirley-Duke

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Image: Shirley-Duke in the 1970s. Photo, Alexandria Library Special Collections.

Plans for the Shirley-Duke shopping center and apartments were announced in early 1949 in anticipation of the high-speed Shirley Highway being completed. The 2100-unit complex would soon occupy more than 80 acres on a plot the Washington Post described as “undeveloped country acreage.”

Shirley-Duke opened in 1950 and was advertised as the largest low-rent apartment development in the United States. More than 1.5 million square feet of concrete floors, 4.2 million square feet of plastering, three miles each of water mains and gas lines and an electric substation would be installed before the complex was complete.



The shopping center opened in 1951, featuring a Drug Fair and a Shirley Food Store, which was acquired a few years later by Grand Union. Following the annexation of the West End, Shirley Duke’s streets were renamed, with Imboden, Jordan and Taney replacing Bertland, Briland and Donmanton.

In the mid-1970s, when this photograph of the shopping center entrance was taken, the quality of life at Shirley Duke had deteriorated. Broken windows, roaches, and hallways littered with beer cans were common complaints, and damaged curbs and storm sewers posed dangers. At the same time, development of upscale hi-rises in the West End was underway, as evidenced by the cranes visible in the background of this image. In 1976, Shirley-Duke was foreclosed on, and after a new owner took over in 1978, all residents moved out so the property could be completely renovated.

The new community, renamed Foxchase, opened two years later and featured apartments with balconies and dishwashers, and recreational amenities like tennis courts and swimming pools. The shopping center was also renamed and given a new façade. The Shoppes of Foxchase were upgraded again in 2006.



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

“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.