



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Alexandria plane crash

*Alexandria Times, January 7, 2010*

Image: Plane crash. Photo, Alexandria Police Department.



**B**efore National Airport opened in 1941, several air fields operated around Alexandria, like Beacon Field along Route 1, just south of the city limits, and a strip at Donaldson's Corner near King Street and Quaker Lane. Crashes occasionally occurred in what were mostly rural areas outside Alexandria, but within the first decade of National's opening, a large commercial crash impacted the Alexandria community.

On November 1, 1949, Eastern Air Lines flight 537 en route to National collided with a plane being test-flown for the Bolivian government, sending both planes down along the banks of the Potomac just south of the airport, with some wreckage falling at Potomac Yard. All 55 passengers and crew of the Eastern flight were killed, and the Alexandria Armory served as a temporary morgue. The lone survivor, the pilot of the other plane, was taken to Alexandria Hospital where he recovered. At the time, it was the worst commercial crash in U.S. history.

At least one small plane actually crashed in Alexandria, as this photograph of the initial investigation shows. On May 12, 1977, the pilot of a single-engine plane received permission from air traffic controllers at National to land there but his plane crashed at Simpson Field, about five miles south of the airport. The pilot's only passenger – his own wife – was killed after the plane ran out of gas, struck a light tower over the baseball field and crashed into the grass. The pilot was treated at Alexandria Hospital and later recovered.

*"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.*



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

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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.*