



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

Pendleton Street Center

Alexandria Times, February 4, 2010

Image: Pendleton and N. Patrick Steets. Photos, Alexandria Library Special Collections (then); David Sachs (now).



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During World War II, the United Service Organizations operated centers where service members could enjoy entertainment and recreational activities. In the South, the USO centers were segregated, and the first USO for African Americans in Alexandria opened in 1941 at the Elks' Home on North Henry Street. In early 1942, a new USO center, a white frame building with an auditorium, was erected at the northwest corner of Pendleton and North Patrick streets.

The new center was opened to accommodate African American soldiers stationed at Fort Belvoir. At its dedication, city and military officials and members of the clergy took part in several days of events, including a dinner, dance and devotional services.

Over the next few years, service members attended dances, musicals and other live performances at the USO club. They enjoyed special meals, recreation and leisure time, as well as the company of junior hostesses, the young women who worked at the center.

Beginning in early 1944, as attendance declined with fewer soldiers remaining in the area, the club was opened up for civilian use. The city was permitted to use the center two nights a week and the recreation department began sponsoring basketball games there.

After the war ended, the city acquired the building and operated a community and recreation center for black residents. The Pendleton Street Center offered a place for traditional recreational activities, like dancing, singing, boxing, basketball, drama, crafts and hobbies. It also served as a meeting



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

place for local organizations and hosted basketball games and commencement ceremonies for Parker-Gray School.

The Pendleton Street Center served the community into the 1970s and was demolished after Charles Houston Recreation Center opened a block away.

“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.