



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Richmond Theater

*Alexandria Times, March 11, 2010*

*Image: Richmond Theater, King Street, 1929. Photo, Collection of Bob Collins.*

In April 1914, Ralph A. Steele and W. Harmon Reed obtained a permit to build a new theater on King Street between Columbus and Alfred streets. The establishment would offer “moving pictures,” bowling and billiards, and plans called for the new building to be two stories high with a brick front and a flat roof at an estimated cost of \$7,500.

The proposed theater met with protest from some neighbors, such as the Demaine Funeral Home located next door, but construction proceeded and the Richmond Theater opened that summer.

The Richmond was not only a place for entertainment but also served as a community hall, hosting bazaars, benefit shows and meetings, including an assembly of labor organizers led by Mary Harris “Mother” Jones in 1916. It also served as overflow classroom space for local students in 1915, and in 1917 as an impromptu meeting place for students who walked out of Alexandria High School to protest conditions there.

In 1929, theater operators announced renovations for the Richmond, including a 21-foot electric sign and interior improvements like new seats and drapes. This photograph was likely taken shortly after renovations were completed, as a poster for the talking film *The Rainbow Man*, released that year, is visible.

The theater became the Richmond Playhouse in the early 1960s but closed in 1972. In 1976, it became a puppet theater, and reopened as a twin movie theater in 1980, operating as the Old Town. The Old Town Theater closed in the late 1990s but reopened once again and today shows first-run films.



*“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.*