



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### The dawn of public transit

*Alexandria Times, October 21, 2010*

Image: AB&W Bus, 1960s. Courtesy photo.

The Alexandria, Barcroft and Washington Transit Company operated a local bus service for more than 50 years. What became the AB&W began as the Columbia Pike Line in 1921 with a single vehicle.

Retired D.C. police officer Robert L. May and his wife Lulu were residents of the Barcroft community along Columbia Pike near Bailey's Crossroads, and they recognized the need for public transportation between Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C.

Columbia Pike was still a dirt road when they purchased an REO Speed Wagon, and in June 1921, Rob May drove it along Columbia Pike into Washington and back. In the third trip, he picked up his first passenger, who flagged hi down for a ride and paid 15 cents to travel into the District.

Business picked up quickly and with the first month the Mays had to purchase a second vehicle. A few years later, they acquired the Alexandria Motor Bus Line, which ran between Alexandria and Washington, and in 1924 had four buses serving Columbia Pike and six serving Alexandria. The newly expanded business was renamed the Alexandria, Barcroft and Washington Rapid Transit Company.

The company was incorporated in 1934 and had 1,000 shares of capital stock. At the same time, demand for service grew with the increase of federal employees who came as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal administration. The company continued to grow and in 1943 moved into new offices at 600 North Royal St.

In the early 1960s, when both Bob and Lulu died, the company had 495 employees and 250 buses, like the one above at the 100 block of South Washington Street. In 1973 the new Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority acquired AB&W.



*"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.*