



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Walking through history with the Paff Shoe Company

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Image: Paff Shoe Factory, 520 S. Washington Street, now Demaine Funeral Home. Photo, Souvenir Virginia Tercentennial of Historic Alexandria, 1907..

In the 19th century, Alexandria had several shoe and boot makers, but they were generally small operations. One of them, Frederick Paff's business along King Street, dated to the time of the Civil War. In 1890, with support from other Alexandria businessmen, Paff, a German immigrant, opened the Potomac Shoe Factory.

Located in the old Green Steam Furniture building at Prince and South Fairfax streets, the shoe factory was a success, employing 50 people and producing more than 1,000 pairs of shoes each week within a year of opening.

Paff's sons, Frederick and Charles, were also involved in the shoe business, and after the senior Paff retired, the company expanded. In 1902, seeking new space for their business (which was now the Paff Shoe Company) the Paffs chose to build a new factory on the northeast corner of South Washington and Gibbon streets. Frederick served as president, and his younger brother was superintendent.

In 1906, Paff Shoe consolidated with the Union Shoe Manufacturing Company but kept its name and remained in the same location, where this photograph was taken the following year. During this same time, Frederick Paff was also very active in civic affairs, serving two terms as Alexandria's mayor between 1904 and 1912.

The shoe factory at 520 South Washington closed during World War I and the property had several occupants over the next 25 years. Roberts Memorial Chapel used the former factory building as a church annex in the 1920s, and in the early 1940s, a furniture store was located there. Since the late 1940s, it has been the home of Demaine Funeral Home.



"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.



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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.