



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Alexandria's mom-and-pop grocery stores

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Image: A corner store at Princess and Payne streets, 1959. Photo, Alexandria Police Department.

In the early 20th century, in addition to the meat and produce stalls at Market Square, dozens of grocers were open for business throughout Alexandria. These were often family businesses, and it was not unusual for a family to live above their grocery store. Because of the family involvement, these neighborhood stores were often called “mom-and-pop” shops.

When chain stores like the Sanitary Grocery Company and A&P Food Stores began expanding in Alexandria in the 1920s and '30s, some mom-and-pop stores joined a Washington-based cooperative to remain competitive. The District Grocery Stores had been organized in 1922 and allowed members to buy directly from large manufacturers like the chains did.

Among Alexandria's District Grocery Stores were located on Gibbon Street, Mount Vernon Avenue and King Street, among other locales, and at the southwest corner of Princess and Payne streets (pictured). This corner store changed hands several times, and one of the operators was Reuben Chasen who later served on the DGS board of directors.

By 1938, Alexandria had nearly 100 neighborhood groceries and most, but not all, were simply known by their owners' names. The Rainbow and Sunshine groceries were only a block apart on North Columbus Street, the Certified Cash Market was on Wolfe Street and the Standard Cash Market called Glebe Road home. The New Deal grocery store on North Alfred Street tried capitalizing on the Roosevelt administration's policies with its name.

After World War II, when the suburbs and the motor vehicle changed American consumerism forever, chain groceries grew into supermarkets. Many of Alexandria's mom-and-pop stores closed down, and in the early 1970s, DGS was dissolved. The corner store at Princess and Payne streets was demolished in 1962, three years after this photo was taken.



“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.