



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Zion Church's anti-establishment past

*Alexandria Times, August 4, 2011*

*Image: Zion Church, S. Lee Street, around 1970. Photo, Alexandria Archives and Records Center.*

**D**uring the Civil War, thousands of blacks came to Alexandria seeking freedom behind the security of Union lines. They established settlements including one at Windmill Hill near South Lee Street called Zion Bottom. The neighborhood had its own house of worship located at the east end of the railroad tunnel.

From the late 1860s to early 1870s, Little Zion Church, as it was first called, was the meeting place of Radical Republicans in the First Ward, and by 1872, the church had 84 members. The following year, the church and the community had to relocate when the railroad company that owned the Zion Bottom land announced plans for the property.

By 1874, Zion Church was established in a frame structure on South Lee Street. It became the site of meetings and social events, some lasting beyond midnight. The congregation pursued plans to construct a brick building along South Lee Street between Franklin and Jefferson streets. In 1880, a large crowd attended the cornerstone-laying ceremony, overseen by members of the black Masonic societies.

Construction took more than two years, as money had to be raised to cover costs, and for a time, services were held in the basement of the unfinished church. In October 1882, with construction completed, the church was officially dedicated with a pastor from Washington D.C. presiding.

Twenty years later, another pastor traveling from Washington was arrested on his way to deliver a sermon at Zion. Upon crossing into Virginia on a train, the Rev. Pinkney Samuel refused to move to the section for black passengers. He was arrested and later fined \$5.

In the 20th century, Zion Baptist Church underwent several renovations. This photo was taken around 1970, before a small addition was made to the north side.



*“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.*