



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Iron mill ornamented the White House, Masonic temple before becoming Safeway

*Alexandria Times, August 18, 2011*

Image: Alexandria Iron Works, ca. 1960. Photo, Russel Jones, Courtesy Alexandria Library Special Collections.

As early as the mid-19th century, a foundry existed at South Royal and Wilkes streets. In the 1850s, Thomas S. Jamieson advertised himself as a “general machinist” and “iron founder” working there. In 1858, he was granted a patent for an improved mode of operating valves in steam engines, and just before the Civil War broke out in the spring of 1861, he announced he was able to produce stationary steam engines, boilers, mill gearing, pulleys and hangers, drill presses, wrought and case iron railing, pipes and “machinery of every description.”



Thomas died the following year and in the late 1860s his brother was operating the foundry. G.W. Jamieson and C.H. Collins advertised as iron and brass founders and later used the name Alexandria Iron Works. In 1880 they reported employing up to 27 people, and in 1883 they promoted the business as having the largest collection of patterns “this side of Philadelphia.”

In 1890, the firm of Curtin & Butts purchased the Jamieson & Collins foundry, and in 1902 incorporated the business in Virginia as Alexandria Iron Works. The factory expanded in 1903, when fire destroyed a sash factory that had occupied a lot to the north.

This photograph, taken around 1960, shows the building constructed on that corner, close to the entrance of the Wilkes Street railroad tunnel.

During the early 20th century, Alexandria Iron Works contributed to projects that supported the war efforts and to noteworthy pursuits locally. Alexandria Iron Works produced ornamental grillwork for apartment buildings and stylish homes built by Morris Cafritz in Washington, as well as for the White House and George Washington Masonic Memorial.

After the iron mill shut down, the buildings were demolished in 1961 and a Safeway supermarket was built on the site.

*“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**

---

*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.*