



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

Soldiers' Rest: a respite for troops of the Civil War

Alexandria Times, August 25, 2011

Image: Soldiers' Rest. Photo, Library of Congress.

During the Civil War, thousands of Union soldiers came into Alexandria, some remaining for assignments locally but most passing through on their way to other destinations.

Soldiers needed food and shelter during their brief stays in Alexandria before departing on trains, boats and foot.

In 1862, to accommodate these troops, the Army initially modified a large warehouse at the corner of Duke and Union streets to be used as a "rest and retreat." But the following year, a much larger facility was constructed further west on the south side of Duke Street near the Orange & Alexandria Railroad yard being used by the U.S. Military Railroad. The Soldiers' Rest compound included a dormitory, kitchen, dining hall, bath house and guard house.

The dormitory, the largest building in Soldiers' Rest, was divided into four areas, one of which was used as a sitting room for writing and reading. Large stoves heated the dormitory, which was surrounded by a verandah. The kitchen was equipped with six 80-gallon cauldrons and had brick floors to protect the structure from fire. Two rows of tables ran the length of the dining hall, which measured about 180 feet long and 30 feet wide. Construction of Soldiers' Rest, seen just beyond the railroad cars in this photograph, cost an estimated \$50,000.

In addition to offering a temporary residence for troops, Soldiers' Rest also served as a hospital in 1864, and at times, provided quarters for captured Confederate deserters who pledged an oath of loyalty to the Union. After the war ended some members of the U.S. Colored Troops were quartered there. But by the end of 1866 Soldiers' Rest was closed down and the buildings and fencing were sold at public auction.



"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.