



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Reed Theater: from community venue to x-rated movie house

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Image: Reed Theater, 1700 block King Street, 1937. Photo, Collection of Bob Collins.

In the 1930s, the Alexandria Amusement Corporation operated two movie theaters on King Street: the Richmond and the Ingomar. The company's president, W. Harmon Reed, managed both. In late 1936, Alexandria Amusement obtained a permit to build a new and larger theater on upper King Street on the former site of a baseball park.

Architect John J. Zink designed the new theater in the art deco style, one of dozens of theaters he designed in the Baltimore and Washington areas. The new theater was named the Reed and featured a neon, vertical sign and marquee. The interior lobby had mirrors and walnut wood finishes, and the theater was decorated with murals showing scenes from Virginia's history. The Reeds storefronts on the 1700 block of King Street offered retail space to a clothing store, drug store, car sales office and, later, a restaurant.



When it opened on April 5, 1937, a few months before this photograph was taken, the Reed was one of the largest theaters in Virginia with about 1,400 seats and an estimated 1,000 parking spaces. The Reed showed first-run films and news reels but also served as an auditorium for large special events including high school graduations and a live musical performance to raise money for war bonds.

By 1970, attendance at Alexandria's older theaters had declined significantly and the Reed attempted to draw customers with \$1 tickets on Mondays and Tuesdays. The next year the Reed began showing X-rated films. When that failed, it offered movie classics like "War and Peace." The Reed closed down a few years later and was demolished in the winter of 1979-80.

"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.

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.



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