



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Flooding is an old problem in Alexandria

Alexandria Times, September 15, 2011

Image: Flooding in Hume Springs, 1975. Photo, Northern Virginia Regional Commission.

Located along Alexandria's northern boundary, Four Mile Run is a nine-mile-long stream that empties into the Potomac River. Its watershed covers 19 square miles and includes parts of the cities of Alexandria and Falls Church as well as Arlington and Fairfax counties. During heavy rains, lower Four Mile Run in particular was prone to overrunning its banks and flooding the surrounding area.

As Alexandria and Arlington grew in the mid-20th century, residential and commercial development expanded along lower Four Mile Run. To the south, concentrated development included apartments like Presidential Gardens built in 1939, the Arlandria Shopping Center opened in 1947 and homes in Hume Springs constructed in the early 1950s. These new neighborhoods and businesses were especially susceptible to flooding.



Following floods in the late 1930s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers attempted to alleviate problems by shooting pressured water through a mud bank that had partially dammed the run. As flooding continued, the city made plans to drain the swamp in 1955 but problems persisted. When serious flooding damaged more than 30 businesses in August 1963, heavy rains, narrow and clogged pipes, and high tide were all identified as contributing factors.

Serious flooding displaced residents, closed businesses and caused millions of dollars in damages with storms in 1967, Hurricane Camille in 1969 and Hurricane Agnes in 1972. Flooding linked to Hurricane Eloise in September 1975, when this photograph of Hume Springs was likely taken, caused Cora Kelly School to be shut down the rest of the year.

To address this problem, local governments and the Army Corps of Engineers agreed to build a hardened flood control channel in the lower part of the run. The \$50 million flood protection project was completed several years later and successfully prevented flooding in the adjacent communities.



**Office of Historic Alexandria
City of Alexandria, Virginia**

“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.