



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Friendship and fires have gone hand in hand for 173 years

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Image: Friendship Fire Company, early 20th century. Photo, Library of Congress.

Established in 1774, the Friendship Fire Company was the first volunteer fire company in Alexandria. In its early years, Friendship's engine was housed in a small structure on Royal Street near Market Square. In 1838, Friendship invited members of the Crescent Fire Company to join and the consolidated brigade operated out of Friendship's new engine house, a two-story frame building located on King Street near Columbus Street.

Friendship moved to the 100 block of S. Alfred Street in 1851 and acquired a new engine. The engine house was heavily damaged by a fire in March 1855, but the equipment was saved and the company began planning a new firehouse. A two-story brick structure was erected at the same site at a cost of \$2,000. At the end of October, Friendship held its first meeting in its new engine house. The next month, seven firefighters, including Friendship member James Keene, were killed in the line of duty while battling a blaze on King Street.

During the Civil War, the firefighting ability of Friendship and other companies deteriorated and the firehouse desperately needed repairs and new equipment. In 1871, the firehouse was renovated but in the years that followed, the company was unable to effectively respond to fight fires. By the mid-1880s, the Friendship Fire Company was no longer responding to fire calls but continued as a ceremonial company.

The Friendship Firehouse remained in use as a meeting place for its veterans and in the early 20th century, when this photograph was taken, the firehouse was a popular attraction. In the early 1990s, the Friendship Firehouse was restored and today it operates as a museum and the headquarters of the Friendship Engine Fire Veterans Association, a philanthropic organization.



“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.