



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Alexandria: once the best place for thieves to make a buck (or several)

*Alexandria Times, November 17, 2011*

Image: Pawnbrokers at 320 King St., ca. 1968. Photo, Library of Congress.

This pawn shop was one of several along King Street during the mid-20th century, but the pawn business got its start centuries earlier when people in need of money received loans in exchange for a pledge or pawn of property as collateral.

In 1910, Alexandria pawnbroker Jacob Rose, who would later occupy 320 King St., advertised a sale of pawned goods including clothing, watches, rings, clock rifles and musical instruments.

In Alexandria, pawnbrokers have been required to be licensed since at least the mid-19th century, with their businesses having to pay a tax or license fee. In 1871, the state required pawnbrokers to pay an annual fee of \$250, and the following year, Alexandria set its local license fee at \$25. Thirty years later, Alexandria's fee had risen to \$100 a year, and in 1914, it cost \$150.

Around this same time, Alexandria's pawn business grew and gained the attention of police in Washington, D.C. When Congress passed legislation in 1913 that greatly restricted District pawnbrokers by limiting the amount of interest they could charge on loans, legitimate pawn businesses in the District closed down. As a result, people with property to pawn, particularly thieves with stolen property, came to Alexandria. Local pawnbrokers were required to report all property they collected to police, and in a two-year span, D.C. police reviewed these reports and recovered nearly \$5,000 worth of stolen property in Alexandria.

By the end of World War II, King Street was home to at least five pawnshops, including Alexandria Pawnbrokers at 320 King St. Its sign, featuring three gold balls, the universal pawn symbol, is visible in this photograph taken shortly before it was demolished in 1968 as part of urban renewal.



*"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*



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

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*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.*