



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

The Order of the Knights of Pythias

Alexandria Times, December 8, 2011

Image: 319 Cameron Street. Photo, Library of Congress.

In 1863, Justus H. Rathbone, a New York native, moved to Washington, D.C., to work as a clerk for the federal government. The following year, in response to the feelings of hatred and anger associated with the Civil War, Rathbone established a new fraternal organization, the Order of the Knights of Pythias.

The order took its name and inspiration from Pythias and Damon, two friends in Greek mythology. Rathbone intended for the new order to promote friendship, charity and benevolence.

After the war ended, the Knights of Pythias established the Mechanics Lodge No. 3 and the Oriental Lodge No. 6 in Alexandria. By 1868, these lodges held regular meetings in local halls where they shared space with other fraternal organizations, and by 1870, the Oriental Lodge had grown to about 100 members.

Rathbone, the order's founder, later moved to Alexandria and was living on Prince Street with his wife and children in the late 1880s. In 1889, while traveling in Ohio, Rathbone became sick and died. Years later the Oriental Lodge would name its new temple for him.

In 1917, after purchasing a mid-19th century three-story building at 319 Cameron St. for use as its temple, the lodge arranged for it to be extensively remodeled. The ground floor had a lobby, the second floor had a 50-foot long lodge room and the third floor provided a parlor for meeting of degree teams. The temple, seen in this 1936 photograph, was named the Rathbone Memorial Pythian Temple.

In the late 1930s, the Pythian Temple closed and the lodge held its meetings in shared space on Prince Street. Participation in the Knights of Pythias waned in Alexandria and the lodge closed during World War II. Today the former temple building is home to a clothing boutique.



“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.



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

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.