



# Alexandria Times

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## Out of the Attic

### The mysterious '57' monument

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*Image: 1937 aerial photo showing the '57' Monument, Wheeler Avenue. Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.*

Strawberry Hill, the country home of the Watkins and Cockrell families featured in last week's column, contains an interesting tidbit of Alexandria's commercial history.

Several pre-1950 aerial photos of Strawberry Hill indicate the number "57" visible three times in a particular area of each photograph. At first it was assumed the photographer placed the large numbers on each photo. But it soon became apparent that although the photos were different, the numbers always appeared at the same location on the property.



Closer inspection revealed 57 was in fact etched on three sides of a hillside on the Cockrell property adjacent to the line of what is now the Norfolk Southern railway. The number facing west had the name "Heinz" added above it, and the south-facing example was further enhanced as Heinz 57 Varieties.

A 2001 oral history from a Cockrell family member solves the mystery. In the transcription, the huge cement artwork along the train tracks was described as one of two nationwide advertising attractions for the Pittsburgh-based H.J. Heinz Co., known for its ketchup since 1869. The company had apparently adapted its logo into a hill-figure design, similar to the famous "White Horse" on England's White Horse Hill, to promote its condiments to train passengers along the Mid-Atlantic coast.

The Cockrell family had a multiyear contract with Heinz to host and maintain the huge cement advertisement on their property, which appears to have been discontinued by the late 1940s when the display appears neglected. In this 1937 aerial photograph, the Strawberry Hill home can be seen on the left side, south of Duke Street with the Heinz attraction visible at the bottom center, just north of the railway. The site of the unusual commercial monument is now an industrial park building on the north side of Wheeler Avenue.

*"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.*