



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Child labor laws were too late for Alexandria Glass employees

*Alexandria Times, June 28, 2012*

Image: Alexandria Glass Company. Photo, Library of Congress.

On June 23, 1911, photographer and social reformer Lewis Wickes Hine arrived at the Alexandria Glass Factory, located on the northwest corner of Henry and Montgomery streets, as part of a nationwide project to document the horrendous issue of child labor in the United States. Under contract from the National Child Labor Committee, Hine trained as a sociologist at the University of Chicago and Columbia and New York universities. As an instructor of New York's School of Ethical Culture, he often took his classes to Ellis Island to record the faces of impoverished immigrants arriving daily at America's "golden door."

Once in Alexandria, one of Hine's first encounters was with Robert Ellis "Rob" Kidd, a young lad about 12, who was employed as a "carrying-in" boy. This dangerous occupation involved moving bottles of molded glass from a blowing room to extremely hot ovens where the glass became stronger through a process of extreme heating followed by a slow cool-down. A closer look at the photograph reveals other obvious hazards associated with glass manufacturing, including broken shards on the floor, poor ventilation, and man-sized tools and implements strewn throughout the workspace. In addition to the obvious physical challenges, alternating work shifts that changed weekly from day to night must have had a huge impact on the young boys who worked in the factory.

Ultimately, Hine's photo record set the stage for new child labor laws in the United States but not in time for those working at Alexandria Glass. In 1916, a fire broke out at the complex, raging uncontrollably within minutes. The factory was completely destroyed, causing more than \$75,000 in damage and the jobs of more than 175 men.



*"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.*