



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

Alexandria's floral companies in full bloom

Alexandria Times, July 26, 2012

Image: 114 N. Fayette Street. Photo, Library of Congress.

Alexandria's industrial sector blossomed around the turn of the 20th century, including the rise of several floral wholesalers who kept Washington, D.C., and Northern Virginia stocked with fresh cut flowers for personal and commercial use.

The Washington Florist Co., one of the busier florists with roots in Alexandria, quickly added two larger establishments in the District. Its operation eventually covered nearly 12 acres and employed 16 men.

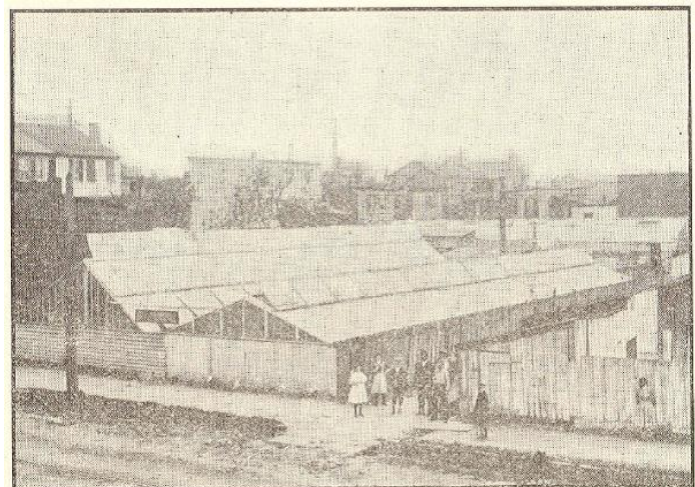
The Mrs. Kramer Floral Co., named for the wife of Charles Kramer and managed by his family for many years, emerged as another prominent local flower wholesaler and retailer. The large glass-walled greenhouses of the Kramer operation covered nearly 12,000 square feet and were situated on a halfblock of real estate at 114 N. Fayette St.

By 1907, the company was described as a "large and profitable business, and their greenhouses being centrally located are easily reached."

Part of the Kramer floral compound was previously used as a wagonyard for the building and repairing of horse-drawn vehicles. Kramer's operation later grew to incorporate former slave Henry Ditcher's past home.

Ditcher, a trusted servant of George Washington, was 12 years old when the former president died in 1799. The terms of Washington's will allowed for his freedom and that of many other slaves at Mount Vernon as well as their education in reading and writing. Washington also directed they be "brought up to some useful occupation."

After the death of Martha Washington in 1802, Ditcher moved to Alexandria, where he died circa 1887 at almost 100 years of age. In his later years he was celebrated and respected as one of the city's most eccentric characters.



"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.