



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Friendship Fire Co. celebrates 238-year anniversary

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Image: Friendship Firehouse Museum, 107 S. Alfred Street. Photo, Library of Congress.

Fires in early Alexandria were frequent and often disastrous. Even small, domestic hearth fires could become conflagrations and spread quickly from building to building and street to street.

In response to Alexandria's ever-increasing vulnerability, Friendship Fire Co. became the community's first volunteer fire company in 1774. By 1838, after a merger with the Crescent Fire Co., city council awarded \$150 to Friendship Fire Co. to build a large shed along King Street between Columbus and Alfred streets.

In 1851 the city approved funds to purchase a lot for the company along South Alfred Street. An additional \$50 was approved to move the fire shed to that location.

Ironically, in March 1855 the fire shed was destroyed by fire, but the company's engine and all fire apparatus was saved. Work started almost immediately on a replacement building, topped by a massive pointed steeple, and was largely finished by fall 1855. A bronze bell, cast by the Baltimore firm of Register and Webb, was added in 1857 for \$300.

During the Civil War, Union troops caused severe damage to the building and its fire equipment, requiring a major reconstruction that started in 1871. A serious problem involved severe weather infiltration at the base of the steeple, probably caused by building neglect and exacerbated by movement from strong wind forces as well as the swaying of the large fire bell when it was rung.

This rare, unfocused photograph was taken before the renovations. A close look reveals the somewhat off-kilter steeple before it was replaced by the lower cupola that still crowns the building today.

On Saturday, the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association will celebrate the 238th birthday of the Friendship Fire Co. from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. during the Friendship Firehouse Festival at 107 S. Alfred St. Everyone is welcome to enjoy birthday cake, free fire hats for children, and displays of antique and modern fire equipment.



"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.