



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

The Union Army's bread and butter

Alexandria Times, August 9, 2012

Image: Bakery, Princess and Fayette Streets. Photo, Library of Congress.

Last week's "Out of the Attic" commented on the original steeple that topped the Friendship Firehouse before 1871. The photograph that accompanied the article was actually a closeup segment of this larger photo, which documents the government bakery built by the Union Army during its occupation of Alexandria in the Civil War.

Built at a cost of more than \$23,000, the massive bakery complex occupied the entire northeast block of Princess and Fayette streets and could produce thousands of loaves of fresh bread daily for Union troops fighting the Confederacy.

Early in the war, Alexandria was transformed almost overnight into a command and supply center for the Union Army. Thousands of troops were stationed in or passed

through the city, dramatically changing the face of the once gracious and prosperous southern seaport into a filthy, dangerous place, cluttered with warehouses and other facilities in support of the military presence.

Wharfs at the end of King Street were laden with soldiers' food and personal rations — including barrels of coffee, tea, flour, sugar, hardtack, beef, and pork — and stacked so high that they dwarfed the height of some nearby buildings. Several slaughterhouses were built in the city, including one at the west end of King Street that processed more than 100 livestock per day.

As the war progressed, Alexandria also became a major center of medical services for troops. Medical supplies poured into the city to aid soldiers, but military doctors and nurses were ill-equipped to handle the sheer number of injured men, who were often left to be cared for on city sidewalks.

The health care system and food supplies were further overwhelmed by the vast number of refugees fleeing to Alexandria for protection behind Union lines. The four year period from 1861 to 1865 was clearly the most difficult in the history of the city.



"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.