



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Savvy marketing to a motorized society

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Image: The Gateway Market, 701 S. Patrick Street. Photo, Library of Congress.

In 1944, Sidney Spivak and Morris Medress opened a small grocery market at 701 S. Patrick St. Appropriately named the Gateway Market, the location was strategic in mid-20th-century Alexandria because the intersection was an important nexus between the city and its rural neighbors to the south in Fairfax County.

Before 1950, the southern section of what is now Old Town was still somewhat rural, and several streets, though platted for decades, remained little more than walking trails. Thus, the unconstructed sections of Franklin, Gibbon and South Henry streets required a quick series of maddening right-angle turns to enter or leave the city. A 1949 aerial photograph of the area documents the heavy tire stains on roadway corners as cars proceeded around the dog-leg turns at a higher-than-normal speed.

Before I-95 and the Beltway were built, motorists entering or leaving Alexandria took the Richmond Highway, crossing Hunting Creek over a long causeway. On the city's southern edge, the Gateway Market was situated so that virtually every vehicle in both directions had to pass its homey facade. Depending upon direction, it also was the first or last grocery in the city limits from which to purchase last-minute provisions.

The roadside design of the Gateway Market was an early example of how an independent urban grocer could attract increasingly motorized consumers while still maintaining local architectural traditions. The clapboard, gable-roofed structure, seen in this 1948 photograph with new owners Benjamin and Jennie Terl, is fenestrated with double hung windows and an arched doorway with sidelight. The outlandish, illuminated billboard atop the roof was humbled by flanking pilasters and latticework that recalled Alexandria's Colonial roots. By 1952, the Terls relocated the business to a building at 631 S. Patrick St., and it finally closed in 1967. The original Gateway site is now occupied by the Lee Center ball fields.



“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.