



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Historic photograph captures the signs of the time

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Image: 300 block King Street, north side. Photo, Library of Congress.

The amazing photograph reprinted here captures the north side of the 300 block of King St., before it was leveled to create the City Hall plaza at Market Square in the 1960s. The imposing building in the foreground was built at the corner of North Royal and King Streets in 1866, just a year after the Civil War ended.

Kemp's Hardware Store and the fancy dry goods emporium of Charles W. Green originally occupied the structure. Later it housed the Alexandria National Bank, founded in 1904, which continued to maintain its offices here until the city acquired the property in 1961 for \$135,000.



On the left side of the bank building – running up Royal Street toward City Hall's Steeple – was a sandwich shop called Liberty Lunch, then Steve's Royal Shoe Shop, a photography store and the famous Royal Cafe, a favorite of shoppers, politicians and in-the-know Alexandrians.

On the King Street side, the Alexandria Gazette occupied the third building to the right of the bank. A hardware store and the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. were situated just out of view. The address of the telephone building – 301 King St. – was assumed by City Hall after it was demolished in the mid-60s.

Close observers will notice the extent and variety of vertical signage used along a congested King Street in the mid-20th century. The painted 315 Hardware to the far right is a holdover modeled after 19th-century building broadsides. The neon Royal Cafe marquee to the left is a modern architectural shout-out that belies the 18th-century roots of the Federal style building.

Perhaps the most commanding sign on all of King Street is almost totally hidden by the photograph's three-dimensional perspective. That is the double-sided, three-store Alexandria National Bank sign on the corner of the building, one that could almost certainly be viewed from many blocks away.

"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



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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.