



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Calling all Alexandrians

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Image: C & P Telephone Co. Building, 1306 Mount Vernon Avenue. Photo, Library of Congress.

The Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. was founded in 1883 to provide telephone service to Washington and expanded coverage to Maryland in 1884. But it was another 20 years before service finally extended to Virginia and later still to West Virginia.

In 1969, the names of the separate — but affiliated — companies in each state and the District were shortened to C and P Telephone. By 1994 all had become part of Bell Atlantic. After Bell Atlantic's merger with GTE in 2000, the companies were finally absorbed into Verizon's network.

But during the mid-20th century, the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. of Virginia maintained several buildings in Alexandria, including an office at 301 King St. — reflecting the colonial roots of Old Town — and a telephone exchange built in a refined Art Deco style at 1306 Mount Vernon Ave. in Del Ray.

The Del Ray exchange, seen here in a 1947 picture by renowned photographer Theodore Horydczak, was built in 1940. It was expanded in 1947 because of Alexandria's tremendous post-war population boom, aided in part by the construction of the Parkfairfax and Fairlington communities.

The architect of the building was Merrill C. Lee of Richmond, associated with the firm of Lee, Smith and Vandervoort. The company's portfolio included buildings at the University of Richmond, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and a sleek but never-constructed state government complex in Richmond. The elegant building in Del Ray was constructed of light brick with limestone trim and aluminum accents. The building continues to serve Alexandria's communication needs, true to its original purpose.

For more information on Del Ray's significant historic and architectural heritage, be sure to attend the Del Ray Historic Preservation Conference from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. November 10. The free event will take place in the cafeteria at George Washington Middle School along Mount Vernon Avenue.



"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.