



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

'California dreamin' rock stars once called Alexandria home

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Image: George Washington High School, 1005 Mount Vernon Avenue. Photo, Library of Congress.

The inaugural Del Ray Historic Preservation Conference at George Washington Middle School Saturday was a great success. Thanks to everyone who turned out for this standing-room-only event.

For those of you who missed it, the day was an opportunity to learn about the significant architecture and historic resources of the neighborhood, which until 1930 was the independent Town of Potomac, as well as the unique heritage associated with the area. The school building itself, illustrated here soon after it was built in 1935, was discussed in several presentations focused on Del Ray's important Art Deco and Streamline Moderne buildings, as well as the famous rock stars that attended classes at the former high school in the mid-20th century.



Among the topics discussed at the conference was the significant role Alexandria's young musicians played in the development of American popular music and the worldwide counterculture revolution of the late 1960s. The roots of this social phenomenon can be traced largely to Southern California, San Francisco, and New York's East Village, and it was to these locations that John Phillips, Ellen Cohen (Mama Cass Elliott), Jim Morrison and Philip Blondheim (Scott McKenzie) -- among others -- migrated after attending high school in Alexandria.

Their mutual connection to Alexandria brought them together in major hippie destinations well after their high school years and as these young rockers rocketed to super-stardom in their early 20s. Yet, the stars' sudden wealth -- combined with an explosion in the availability of mind-altering drugs, casual sexual relationships and the impact of celebrity status -- took a huge and quick toll on them. Many died early or suffered from serious addictions throughout their lives. Nevertheless, the shared background of these young Alexandrians of the '50s and early '60s certainly had a profound influence on American youth and popular culture of the time.

"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.



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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.