



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

When 'Broadway Joe' came to town

Alexandria Times, December 20, 2012

Image: Joe Namath. Photo, Library of Congress.

Following up the November 15 article in this column about the amazing rock 'n' roll history of Alexandria's former George Washington High School, "GW" has an intriguing sports heritage as well. The year 1965 was particularly interesting, with the graduation that year of Harley E. "Skeeter" Swift, a football and basketball legend at the school, who played five seasons for the New Orleans Buccaneers.

But the school also hosted an American Football League game that year between the New York Jets and the Houston Oilers, introducing the city to a 22-year-old player, pictured here, who had recently signed the largest professional contract in football history. Joseph William Namath had been selected by the New York Jets in November 1964 as the first overall pick of the AFL, and given a record salary of \$427,000.



In August, 1965, the local Kena Temple sponsored the first pre-season game of the AFL season as part of the city's Alexandria Days celebration at the expanded high school stadium. Namath, who became the AFL Rookie of the Year and an all-star later that year, was a huge draw. He had led the University of Alabama Crimson Tide to a national championship the year before. At Alabama, his coach Paul "Bear" Bryant called Namath "the greatest athlete I ever coached."

The game was a major attraction, with players even walking in a parade down King Street while tossing miniature footballs to the crowd. Half-time entertainment was provided by Shriner members, including a color guard, musical band and of course, the famous Kena Klowns. Though the Oilers prevailed over the Jets by a score of 21-16, Namath's performance did not disappoint. He led the Jets to 13 points. Within four years, Namath would go on to be named most valuable player of Super Bowl III.

"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.