



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### The mysterious origins of the seminary post office

*Alexandria Times, February 14, 2013*

*Image: Seminary Post Office. Photo, Alexandria Library Special Collections..*

The history of the small post office along Seminary Road, located on the grounds of the Virginia Theological Seminary, has been the subject of considerable discussion in recent years. Unfortunately, no known records document the exact age of the structure, seen here in a photograph taken about 1976. The visible siding and windows in place today may have replaced earlier building fabric, concealing the building's true architectural heritage.

In the mid-19th century, when the seminary first moved out to what was then the wilds of Fairfax County, mail delivery did not extend to the area. Instead, seminary students took turns making the long journey into town to pick up and deliver mail for the institution. Throughout the 1850s, a number of major building projects were started on the seminary's grounds, and it is possible that a post office was built during that time.

Soon after, during the Civil War, Union forces occupied the seminary, and many temporary buildings also were constructed on the site. Documentation of a seminary post office building is clearly referenced on a military map of northeast Virginia, dated 1865. Although slightly north of the current location — close to the roadside — the building footprint and scale of that structure is almost identical to that of the present post office. The presence of a post office at Virginia Theological Seminary is also confirmed on a census of postal locations in 1868.

Keating Karig Carrier, who moved to Alexandria in 1934, recalled in a 2005 oral history that the seminary postal facility was a pre-Civil War building and was moved twice. While still a youth, Carrier became the seasonal postmaster, replacing Postmistress Blanche Hall in the early 1940s. Carrier stated that she sorted mail and sold stamps for about five families, adding: "Well, it was such an important post office that they'd let any 14- [or] 15-year-old child run it."



*"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*



**Office of Historic Alexandria  
City of Alexandria, Virginia**

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*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.*