



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### From trash to ash

*Alexandria Times, April 11, 2013*

*Image: Old City incinerator, 801 S. Payne Street. Office of Historic Alexandria.*

In the early 1950s, increasing development in Washington's suburbs prompted Alexandria officials to almost double the city's size by annexing the land west of Quaker Lane from Fairfax County.

Through the introduction of new infrastructure, this formerly rural area was quickly transformed into picturesque subdivisions and automobile-centered shopping areas as well as garden and high-rise apartments near the Shirley Highway.

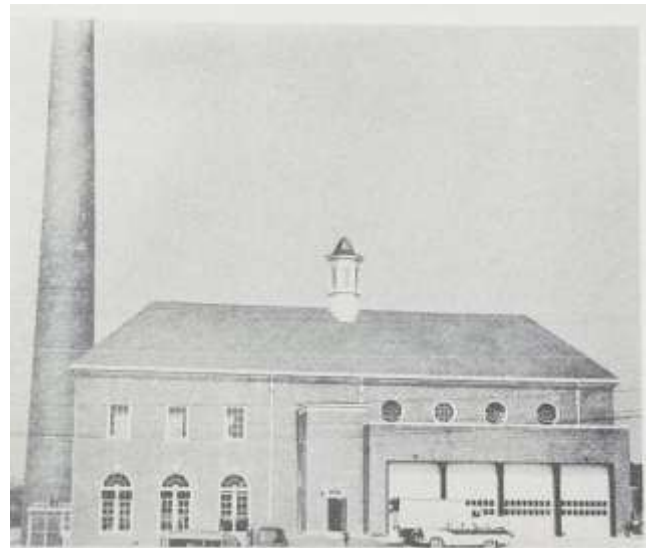
However, this westward expansion placed an increased burden on the city's services. New public facilities were needed to meet the demands of a burgeoning population.

At the time, responsibility for most of Alexandria's public improvements — including buildings, roads, sanitation and sewers — was overseen by the department of public works. By 1955, the department had contracted out much of the work formerly done by its staff, although it still maintained a separate engineering division with employees specifically assigned to surveying, drafting and design services.

In that year, because of the ever-increasing volume of solid waste collected across the city, plans were developed to construct a new incinerator along South Payne Street near Cameron Run. This new facility was designed to fully accommodate a new garbage collection policy, which replaced a thrice-weekly household collection cycle with a single pickup each week.

In June 1956, the new city incinerator opened, incorporating the most efficient burn equipment known at the time for the disposal of garbage, reducing trash to ash at one-tenth its original volume. This facility easily handled the 17,500 tons of garbage that year, an increase of 800 tons from only a year before.

The 18th-century architectural style and details of the new incinerator were somewhat similar to Colonial Williamsburg's Wren Building, echoing Alexandria's mid-century vision to be the colonial capital's northern competitor. Only the massive smokestack and garage doors belied its true function and date of construction.





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

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*"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.*