



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Curtains closed on Virginia Theatre after 29-year run

*Alexandria Times, May 16, 2013*

Image: Virginia Theatre. Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.

Alexandria's largest motion picture palace, the Virginia Theatre at 601 First St., opened May 22, 1947, and featured presentation "Carnival in Costa Rica," starring Dick Haymes, provided the opening-night draw.

The new building boasted 1,200 seats, far surpassing its closest competitors: the Reed Theatre at 1,100 and the Vernon at 980 seats. As a result, it lifted the city's total supply of theater seats to 9,000. Designed by architects John and Drew Ebersson, Virginia Theatre reportedly had the largest stage and screen in the Washington metropolitan area.

The exterior facade of the theater was crafted in the Art Deco style and featured streamlined detailing, vertical fenestration and aluminum trim. But in a nod to monumentality, a narrow vertical sign — cresting in a semi-arch — towered a full story above the two-story building, proclaiming "VIRGINIA" in vibrant neon.



Inside, the tray ceiling radiated outward from the stage in a series of concentric circles. Sidewalls were emblazoned with fluted vertical panels and a bold wallpaper of metallic chevrons. Adjacent to each side of the stage, two wall niches above the exit doors were adorned with murals of exotic birds. Fashioned with luminescent paints, they were created by the renowned Maragliotti Studios of New York. A new type of hidden "black light" illumination further enhanced these luminous scenes. Developed by General Electric Co., the lighting made the murals shimmer at a low level during the feature film but dazzle in bright tones at other times. Three other GE lighting product innovations also were incorporated into the theater and designed to speed seating, enhance movement at intermission and during exiting, and highlight stage curtains as well as architectural details.

By 1966, though, Virginia Theatre attendance was waning. The facility was rehabilitated and expanded to offer live shows and rock concerts. However, these changes did not enhance revenue opportunities, and the building was demolished December 31, 1976.



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

---

*"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.*