



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

Got milk? Alexandria did

Alexandria Times, July 7, 2013

Image: Alexandria Dairy. Library of Congress.

It was not until the 1920s that electrical refrigeration began taking hold in the United States. And it was not until well after World War II when larger refrigerators became commonplace in American homes, replacing the traditional icebox.

Before the popular advent of refrigeration, food shopping was done on an almost daily basis, often at several markets. Fresh meat, dairy, fruit and vegetables were bought each morning and usually consumed by dinnertime.

In Alexandria, residents had something of an advantage with the large market adjacent to City Hall and the nearby presence of ice houses, fruit distributors and glass bottle factories that developed around Potomac Yard to service consumers along the entire East Coast.

The lives of residents became even easier in 1930 when the Alexandria Dairy Products Co. was organized in a new facility at the southwest corner of North Pitt and Princess streets. Seen in this photograph taken circa 1948, the ultra-modern facility boasted cutting-edge scientific equipment to process more than 10,000 gallons of milk daily for families in the region, replacing the unsanitary task of spooning personal quantities of milk and butter from open metal casks in a local market.

A leader in innovation, Alexandria Dairy appears to be the first American producer to use the then newly developed square glass bottles to increase efficiency in the shipping and storage process. Before 1940, round glass bottles had been used for home deliveries, as the even thickness of a glass cylinder allowed for greatest overall strength.

But in April 1941, the Buck Glass Co. of Baltimore announced the firm had developed — and successfully marketed to Alexandria Dairy — a square-shaped “Space Saving Milk Bottle” that by then had been increasing capacity in area refrigerators for more than six months.

By 1950, Alexandria Dairy was one of the largest dairies in Virginia, serving more than 30,000 families in Arlington and Fairfax with daily home deliveries, via 80 modern trucks that were housed at the site. In addition to offices, the site contained a processing plant, garage, bottle storage rooms and huge boilers that emitted smoke from a tall, white stack labeled “Alexandria Dairy.”

The facility was replaced by townhouses in the 1970s.





**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.