



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Post-war shopping center gave Arlandria its name

*Alexandria Times, July 25, 2013*

*Image: Arlandria shopping center, 1949. Office of Historic Alexandria.*

The early shopping center seen in this photograph, taken soon after it was built in 1947, is slated for demolition. The site, scheduled for redevelopment in the near future, sits in Alexandria's Arlandria neighborhood, a name that originated with the shopping center.

Built just south of the intersection of Mount Vernon Avenue and South Glebe Road, the center is close to the municipal border of Arlington and Alexandria — hence the combination of the two names to form Arlandria.

The streamlined design — by architects Frank Grad and Sons of Newark and Washington — featured a sleek, carefully planned, modern structure that unified a variety of stores and services under one roof. Initially touted as “A City Block in the Suburbs,” the early marketing strategy urged traditional urban pedestrian shoppers to acclimate themselves to a new automobile-centered marketplace.

An early example of suburban strip development in Northern Virginia, the one-stop retail destination was set well back from the street. Though marketers boasted “unlimited free parking,” the lot was limited to 500 cars. The center was built with reinforced concrete by the firm of Cramer-Vollmerhausen and adorned with Indiana limestone, bright fluorescent lighting, expansive use of glass panels with aluminum trim and colorful neon signs.

The developers of the Arlandria Shopping Center were Godden and Small, who sought tenants representing high-quality merchandise at sensible prices. Among the early tenants appealing to the area's estimated population of 100,000 were a Giant supermarket, an H.L. Green variety store, Whelan Drugs, Kinney's Shoes and a three-level department store marked by a vertical neon band, simply identified as “Charles.”

In an early nod to Alexandria's post-war fashionistas, Ann Lewis also opened a fine dress and millinery shop next door to the Louis Klaff gift shop and just down the promenade from a dry cleaner featuring special “sudden service” for same-day cleaning emergencies.

Although the first of 16 stores began to open by August 1, 1947, it was not until the weekend of November 13 that the retail alternative to downtown was deemed complete. An official three-day opening celebration at that time promised bargains, thrills and surprises. It was supplemented by the music of the Air Force School Band from Bolling Field as well as a nightly presentation and searchlight display by the U.S. Army and D.C. National Guard.



*“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.*



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

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*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.*