



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

National Fruit Product Co. goes up in flames

Alexandria Times, November 26, 2013

Image: Fire at National Fruit Product Co., 1925. Library of Congress.

The National Fruit Product Co.'s origins began with the Board-Armstrong Co., which had a vinegar and cider business at the corner of Prince and Union streets in the early 1900s. In 1909, Board-Armstrong purchased property south of Wythe Street between the railroad tracks on Henry and Fayette streets, and began construction on a new vinegar plant that fall.

The factory processed apples into cider vinegar, with apples ground and pressed on separate floors in one building, functioning as a mill. Another building housed storage tanks, and the packing and shipping operations occupied a third building. After Benjamin Fleet Board, one of the partners, died suddenly in 1912, Frank Armstrong organized the National Fruit Product Co., which received a charter from the Commonwealth of Virginia in early 1913.

Two years later the company opened a plant in Winchester near the apple orchards of Shenandoah Valley. The new company used clear bottles and the White House brand name for its product. The Alexandria operations expanded, too, and by 1921, occupied the southern part of the block along Pendleton Street and the northwest corner of Pendleton and Patrick Street where more than a dozen wooden vats were located.

In 1922, a teenage employee was killed at the Alexandria factory after being overcome by poisonous gases, and on July 8, 1925, another tragedy struck when a fire destroyed the entire plant. Several fire companies responded and city officials, including the mayor, assisted them in putting the fire out. The intense fire attracted a large crowd of spectators seen in this photograph and left several firefighters in need of medical treatment.

The National Fruit Product Co. continued to produce vinegar, and later apple sauce, out of the Winchester plant, but the Alexandria factory was never rebuilt.



“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.