



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Capitol Theatre Once Served as Sole Black Movie Theatre

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Image: Capitol Theatre. Photo, Alexandria Black History Museum.

As we During segregation, the first movie theater in Alexandria for black patrons was located at the northwest corner of Queen and Henry streets.

In the fall of 1920, despite protests, Harry Bramow was issued a permit to enlarge an existing structure at 1101 Queen St. for use as a theater for “moving pictures.” The Lincoln Theater opened soon after and, in the spring of 1921, featured the silent film “Symbol of the Unconquered,” written, directed and produced by Oscar Micheaux in response to “Birth of a Nation.”

Around 1930, Abe Lichtman took over the theater, one of several he owned in the metropolitan area that served the black community. He renamed it the Olympic. It closed in 1932, but not long after, a new operator, Harry Wasserman, took over. He reopened the theater as the Capitol in the following year. In 1939, Wasserman built a new theater on the same site. Designed by theater architect John J. Zink, the new Capitol Theatre faced the corner of Queen and Henry streets with a stainless steel canopy over the ticket window and doors. The Art Deco-inspired building was covered with brick, mostly yellow but contrasted with courses of red at the second level and just above the roof. The Capitol was the only theater in Alexandria for blacks until the Carver opened at Queen and Fayette streets in 1948.

The Capitol became a pool hall and amusement center around 1950, about the same time this photo of a parade was taken. The pool hall remained open through the ‘60s, and in the ‘70s it became home to Sykes Warehouse, an automotive parts business. New owners completed renovation of it in 2008 and today the property is used for offices and retail space.



“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



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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.