



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### A Bland Building with Rich Commercial History

*Alexandria Times*, July 17, 2014

Image: 420 King Street. Photo, HABS/HAER Survey, Library of Congress

The humble commercial building pictured here, just before its 1968 demolition as part of Alexandria's controversial [urban renewal](#) program, was never one of the Port City's architectural gems.

Ignoring the unsympathetic renovations over many decades for a moment, the simple storefront at 420 King St. was built in the middle of the 19th century in a purely utilitarian fashion for commerce. It suffered from poorly designed windows, awkward proportions and a lack of serious ornamentation. The only major architectural elements consisted of a modillioned cornice and second-floor windows with splayed lintels and keystones. Though it lacked the pre-Civil War architectural elegance of many nearby emporiums in what was a prospering city, it nevertheless contributed to the overall streetscape and vitality of King Street in the 19th century.

For many years after its construction the structure was more commonly known as the Samuel Miller Building. Miller acquired the property in 1838 for \$2,000 through the will of merchant Robert McCrea. McCrea and William Gregory, two Scotsmen who had immigrated to Alexandria in the late 18th century, purchased the property in 1816 from Isaac Edmondson.

After McCrea acquired sole interest in the title to the property in 1827, he moved north to New York, where he died. His will described the property as a "tenement and lot of ground."

When Miller replaced the tenement with the new store in 1850, it was one of two identical buildings built by him. The other was at 422 King St. By the time of his death in 1877, the property had been subdivided and the twin building was sold.



*"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**

---

*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.*