



# Alexandria Times

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## Out of the Attic

### Under a Football Field, a Reminder of Alexandria's Past

*Alexandria Times, September 18, 2014*

*Image: Harry Truman at George Washington High School. Photo, City of Alexandria.*

**M**ark your calendars — it is only 35 years until the opening of the time capsule at George Washington Middle School.

The capsule was installed on September 17, 1949 as part of Alexandria's bicentennial celebration to mark the settlement of the city, and its burial at the north football goal near the school flagpole was the final event of a year-long commemoration. Although it was placed there two months after the official anniversary, the September date was chosen to accommodate the schedules of invited officials and to coincide with the start of the new football season, which guaranteed a large crowd would witness and celebrate the event.



The installation took place at what was then the high school football stadium, before the big game between Virginia Polytechnic Institute and Quantico Marines. President Harry S. Truman was on hand that day for the capsule festivities and stayed for the game as well, which means Barack Obama wasn't the first U.S. President to spend some quality time along Mount Vernon Avenue. In this photo, President Truman has just thrown a silver dollar coin skyward. VPI won the toss just before the start of the game.

The time capsule installed at the school was a tube-shaped cylinder made of stainless steel, 4 feet in length and 8 inches in diameter, similar to one installed a decade earlier at the New York World's Fair. Unlike Gotham's version, set to be opened in the year 6939, the Alexandria model was more realistic in that it would be only 100 years before being opened. The capsule was stuffed largely with paper items, including maps of the city, phone books, newspapers of the day and rosters of local civic organizations.

Although no official record of the capsule's contents has been located, it almost certainly contains a copy of "200 Years of Progress," printed by City Hall to record the greatest moments of Alexandria from its founding until its bicentennial. The heavily illustrated publication could not be a more perfect documentary record of Alexandria's appearance and aspirations in 1949.

Interestingly, the booklet promotes Alexandria's success in increasing industrial development, and lauds the strategic location of Alexandria and its ability to handle massive quantities of freight at local rail yards and in warehouses along the Potomac River. In a twist of irony, the now-closed GenOn plant is recorded as a major asset to the city, as it met the regional power needs of Northern Virginia's economy.



## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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After the time capsule was placed, the marker designating its location deteriorated. By 1983, it was completely lost. Then, in about 1999, the class of middle school teacher Therese Johnston went on an expedition to locate the capsule and found the original marker under the ground surface, though by then it was almost unrecognizable. Fortunately, the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce funded a new base and plaque to mark the spot so that city leaders will have no problem locating it in time for the city's tercentenary celebrations in the year 2049.

*“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.*