



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### Concrete solutions to growing traffic congestion

*Alexandria Times, February 12, 2015*

Image: *The Parkway at Hunting Creek. Ca. 1960. Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.*

It was almost two centuries after Alexandria's founding that the city's most significant "dead end" at the southern end of Washington Street, where it reached Great Hunting Creek, was eliminated by the construction of the George Washington Memorial Parkway into Fairfax County in 1931. The parkway route that was selected resulted in a lengthy causeway in the Potomac riverbed that closed a large swath of the mouth of the creek, which resulted in silting of large parts of the creek and in a westerly direction to Cameron Run far upstream. But by the mid-1950s, planning for even larger construction projects would further exacerbate the creek currents.



After the end of World War II and the advent of America's motorized suburbs, the Washington metropolitan area was particularly susceptible to traffic gridlock. In addition to the ever-increasing volume of commuter traffic passing from the nation's capital to Maryland and Virginia, virtually all traffic moving from one side of the city to the other had to pass through the downtown area. One of the nation's oldest north-south routes, U.S. Route 1, barely moved traffic passing up and down the East Coast, and any vehicle moving between Maine and Florida had to journey through Alexandria and Washington.

By the 1950s, with the creation of the Interstate Highway System by President Dwight Eisenhower, funds were finally available to build express highways to both connect and avert American cities. In Virginia, an early highway was proposed on the west side of Washington, moving through rural Tyson's Corner to an area near Gum Springs. That plan eventually developed into a plan for the Washington Circumferential Highway, later shorted to the capital Beltway, which skirted just to the south of Alexandria along Cameron Run and crossed the Potomac on a low bridge that just skimmed the surface of the water.

The original Woodrow Wilson Bridge was built in the early 1960s, and used an old railroad right-of-way whose original stone wall on the north side is still visible from the pedestrian walkway of the recently rebuilt bridge. From Maryland, the bridge approach sliced through the old Virginia Shipbuilding Company yard on the waterfront, passing under Washington Street where it intersected with Route 1 — known as Richmond Highway — to the west.



## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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As seen in the upper lefthand corner of this image, taken in about 1990, the interchange between the two major roadways was elevated high above Great Hunting Creek, in a series of “flyover” ramps whose concrete abutments were placed in the creek on acres of landfill that further clogged the tributary. These actions, combined with intense development in western Alexandria, interrupted the natural flow of the creek, causing tremendous flooding along Cameron Run during periods of heavy rain. Ultimately, the natural creek bed that wandered from Springfield through Alexandria was eliminated, and the waterway was straightened in a manmade trench that paralleled the Beltway. But even today, when massive precipitation is predicted, the trickle of Cameron Run and Great Hunting Creek becomes a raging torrent.

*“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.*