



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### A model Alexandrian for the Model T coupe

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*Image: Miss Ramey and her Model T., 1924. Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.*

In 1924, 28-year-old teacher Elizabeth Margaret Ramey was one of the first women in Alexandria to acquire a new Ford Model T coupe. The Model T had been in production since 1908 and the first year it was produced, 10,000 vehicles were manufactured at a retail cost of \$950. By the time of Ramey's acquisition, mass production techniques had exploded and at a total cost of \$525, payable in monthly instalments per Ford's "Pay as You Play" time payment plan, even a teacher could afford one of the 2 million cars produced that year.



The car was in such demand that in the years after its initial introduction, Ford saw no need to advertise, as word of mouth was all that was need to ensure success. But by the early 1920s, Ford's market share in vehicle sales had dwindled and a new sales strategy was warranted.

The 1924 Model T coupe was unusual in that it was one of the first vehicles marketed towards women, particularly working women and busy housewives, and advocated the freedom and independence afforded to those females willing to drive their own personal car. Ford's campaign rebelled against the traditional role of females as dependent on men for their daily needs, and supported the newly emerging philosophy of the independent woman that developed in the period following World War I.

Such untraditional thought challenged women to learn how to drive; pursue travel when and where they liked; and to develop business and professional careers. Such women stepped beyond what were then the accepted social norms, and explored their own needs and interests as a counterpoint to the inevitable pursuit of marriage.

Ford's advertisers put it succinctly: "Her habit of measuring time in terms of dollars gives the woman in business keen insight into the true value of a Ford closed car for her personal use. This car enables her to conserve minutes, to expedite her affairs, to widen the scope of her activities." Advertised as a "closed" car, meaning it could be sealed from the extremes of the weather, the new advertising campaign appealed to the sophisticated young woman of the 1920s, as epitomized by this photograph of Ramey, dressed to the nines as she admires her newly acquired vehicle of freedom.

Apparently, Ramey so well projected the stylized version of the modern woman for Ford, that she was selected to participate in a series of marketing photographs, taken by the National Photo Company to promote the 1924 vehicle.

The small black car was photographed adjacent to several Alexandria landmarks and staged with Ramey herself, including one shot of her alone at her classroom desk, with complicated math problems



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and a long-hand copy of the Star-Spangled Banner on the blackboard behind her. These photos clearly intended to convey the idea that this was a woman to be taken seriously.

Ramey's father Herbert was a native of Pennsylvania who had come to the nation's capital to accept a job as a clerk at the U.S. Patent Office. He settled in Alexandria with his wife Jenne, and they had two daughters, Gladys and Elizabeth, both of whom projected an independent streak and never married. Gladys, the elder daughter, became a clerk for the federal government and through the 1930s she took annual cruise vacations alone to Bermuda. At age 21, Elizabeth took a job as a teacher in the D.C. public schools system, and by 1927 had earned her Bachelor of Arts at George Washington University. After 40 years in public education, she retired in 1957 as principal of the Peabody Elementary school in Northeast Washington.

She remained in Alexandria throughout her life, participating in women's professional organizations, the Little Theatre and supporting the National Symphony. Upon her death in 1974, she was buried with the rest of her family at Ivy Hill Cemetery.

*"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.*