



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### The economic recovery from Civil War begins

*Alexandria Times, February 25, 2016*

*Image, General John Schofield. Photo, Library of Congress.*

When the Civil War ended, the period of Reconstruction began in the South, and Alexandrians shared feelings of uncertainty and apprehension with their fellow Virginians. In the wake of Abraham Lincoln's assassination, many people realized that the steady hand that had guided the country through the war was now gone.

Even defeated Gen. Robert E. Lee expressed his regret to a reporter from the *Washington Chronicle* when he said that "he had surrendered as much to Mr. Lincoln's kind promises and benign heart as to Gen. Grant's bayonets, and that in his opinion the best friend of peace and humanity had departed."

Historians have generally agreed that President Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction philosophy and policies differed significantly from those that Lincoln and Congress would have implemented if he had lived. Johnson, from Tennessee, was a Unionist but also a dedicated supporter of states' rights, and sympathized with the plight of the defeated South.

This put him on a collision course with the Radical Republican-dominated Congress that sought to punish the former Confederacy for the war, and led to the friction which would result in Johnson's impeachment trial before the end of his term.

In the meantime, Johnson's lenient terms for the restoration of Southern governments allowed many of them to enact "black codes" which attempted to preserve white supremacy in Southern society. Locally, the elections of 1866 and 1867 returned many former Confederates to city government, when more than 1,400 votes by African Americans went uncounted.

In 1868, Congress reasserted its authority; the South was divided into military districts, and a new Alexandria City Council was appointed by General John Schofield, pictured here, in April of that year. The council faced a daunting task in bringing the city out of its post-war malaise. Activity along Alexandria's wharves was nearly non-existent, the canal needed major repairs, and several large factories had closed. King Street and other main retail thoroughfares were dotted with closed storefronts. City debt exceeded \$1 million.

What inevitably helped Alexandrians recover was the same impetus that originally placed the town here in the 18th century: its regional value as a land and water transportation center. The *Alexandria Gazette* stated optimistically in 1866 that "here, in Alexandria, there is room, space, facilities, houses,





## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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depth of water, excellence of harbor, extent of wharves and docks, for an increased and profitable commerce," all of which would "invite the attention of capitalists and business men."

Rebuilding the city's economy took time and a lot of financial investment, both from moneyed interests in the North and from determined locals who established small businesses, once again betting on Alexandria's potential.

*"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.*