



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### The Great Fire of Alexandria

*Alexandria Times, October 25, 2018*

*Image: 1870s Furniture made by the Green Furniture Factory can be seen in the Friendship Firehouse Museum. Office of Historic Alexandria.*

**M**ost cities have had a great fire. Alexandria's was Jan. 18, 1827. Beginning in the warehouse of Green's Furniture Factory, on Royal Street, it moved over to Price Street, all the way down to Union Street. Imagine the fire catching on the contents in a furniture factory – sawdust, wood, fabric, glue – all very combustible and capable of feeding a rapidly spreading fire.

The temperature was 13 degrees when the alarm rang out. A circus was in town and the manager, a Mr. Brown, rode to get help from D.C. (which Alexandria was still a part of) and Georgetown. Along with the Library of Congress, the Navy Yard closed to assist with this conflagration.

Michael Shiner, a slave owned by Navy Yard Chief Clerk Thomas Howard, who leased Shiner to the yard, kept a journal and wrote this, [sic]: "Washington navy yard commender thomas tingey [was ordered] to send every Mercanic and laborers and engines out of the yard and every man that Wher able to travel and orders Wher obeyed promptly by commanders and the men Wher dispatched in Double quick time and the people of Washington and george town Went hand to hand to assist them in putting fiers out."

There were about 300 employees who assisted that day from the Navy Yard.

The Jan. 23, 1827 Alexandria Gazette contained the following in its coverage of the fire:

"It would be fruitless, if not invidious, to distinguish between the services of our friends of Washington and Georgetown; suffice it to say that every engine and hose was sent to our aid and every man that could be spared, was with us. Congress adjourned-the Navy Yard and public offices were closed-the Marine Corp under Captain Howle, came down in a body-Artificers from the War Department were sent with their implements to blow up and pull down houses-the Secretary of War and many members of Congress worked in our ranks-the toll gates at the bridges were thrown open- and in fact, everything was done for us which moral power could suggest, or physical accomplish."

Beginning at nine in the morning, "For five hours the flames were rushing from house to house with increasing fury-furniture and goods were scattered in every direction, women and children were flying





## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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for safety, and houses that were not burnt were often on fire, sometimes a dozen at once. Language cannot paint so distressing a picture, nor will those who did not see the original, ever be able to paint it in their imagination.”

Surprisingly, there was only one fatality in the fire. However, 53 buildings were destroyed and final damage totaled \$107, 277.

Fire Prevention Week is observed each year during the week of Oct. 9 in commemoration of the Great Chicago Fire, which began on Oct. 8, 1871, and caused devastating damage. This horrific conflagration killed more than 250 people, left 100,000 homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures and burned more than 2,000 acres of land.

*“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 staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.*