



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

Alexandria and ice cream

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Image: Gadsby's Tavern Ice Well, courtesy Office of Historic Alexandria.

Much like it does with firefighting, Alexandria has a long relationship with ice cream. Given the rarity of freezing methods and sugar, it might not surprise readers to learn that ice cream in the 18th century was very different from the sweet confections of today. Gadsby's Tavern records include a recipe for asparagus ice cream.

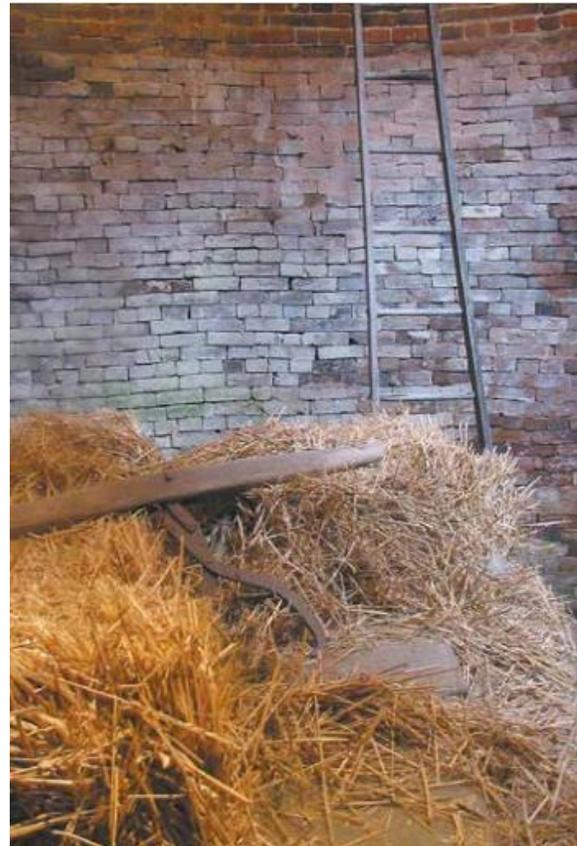
Icehouses and wells were a luxury in early Alexandria. Some early Virginians able to afford one included George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. The City Tavern, now known as Gadsby's Tavern, also had an ice well, which has been restored. Visitors and residents are welcome to view the well on the corner of Royal and Cameron. John Gadsby also sold ice kept in the well in the summer months.

Louis Beeler was mentioned in a May 1821 Alexandria Gazette article as having "commenced making ice creams for the season." Beeler also offered lemonade, punch and ice for sale. He is listed in the Alexandria Business Directory as occupying a two-story frame dwelling and confectioners store on the south side of King Street between Royal and Fairfax streets. Other advertisements list exotic products at his store, such as "Spanish segars" and "Malaga grapes, cocoa nuts, and pine apples."

The July 20, 1841 edition republished a blurb from the New York Express announcing the invention of a machine that made ice cream. The machine was supposedly so simple that a child could turn an attached wheel for 15 to 20 minutes and "make a large quantity of cream, frozen in the most beautiful manner."

Christian Schafer advertised his ability to make ice cream along with his "general assortment of candies, fruits, pickles, etc." in the May 14, 1845 Alexandria Gazette, which indicates that tastes in ice cream had moved to the sweet by then.

Immediately following the Civil War in 1865, competitors Brengle's Ice Cream Saloon at 129 King Street and Bossart's Ice Cream Saloon at 25 South Fairfax Street ran almost identical advertisements,





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

emphasizing their ability to sell wholesale to dealers, or “retail, at the saloon, which is fitted up for the accommodation of ladies and gentlemen.”

These intermittent reports and advertisements show us that ice cream has been in demand since Alexandria’s earliest days. But they also show us that technology, manufacturing methods and consumer tastes have changed since the first generation of Alexandria residents.

“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.