



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

GW High School: Now a state landmark

Alexandria Times, July 21, 2022

On Saturday, the George Washington High School Alumni Association will unveil a Virginia Historical Marker, recognizing the school's importance to both state and national history. The school opened in 1935 and was the only Alexandria public high school for white students for 20 years. The city's African American students attended Parker-Gray School.

George Washington High School had an all-white student body until 1965, when the Alexandria public school system finished integration began in 1959 after a court ordered that nine African American students would be allowed to attend city schools with whites. GW remained a high school until 1971, when it was converted into the middle school it remains today.

George Washington High School's famous former students include Willard Scott, who recently passed away, two of the Mamas and Papas – John Phillips and Ellen Cohen, also known as “Mama Cass” Elliott. Perhaps GW High School's most famous student was Jim Morrison of the Doors. Two other alumni were astronaut Guy Gardner and military hero Francis Hammond, who lost his life during the Korean War and for whom a naval ship and another high school were named.

Besides its famous students, George Washington High School's field was the site of two events of historical significance. On Aug. 24, 1960, then-Sen. John F. Kennedy kicked off his tour of southern states in Alexandria at the field after gaining the Democratic presidential nomination. Kennedy went on to lose Virginia but win the presidency.

In August 1965, Joe Namath played the first game of his professional career on the field in an exhibition game between the New York Jets and the Houston Oilers. Houston won the game 21-16. Less than four years later, Namath led the Jets to a stunning upset of the Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl III. The field also is home to a time capsule, buried in 1949 by President Harry Truman and others to celebrate Alexandria's 200th birthday. It is to be opened in 2049 when the city turns 300.

The new plaque reads:

The City of Alexandria purchased 15.5 acres in 1933 and opened George Washington High School in 1935. For two decades this was the city's only public high school for white students. The Art Deco-style building was constructed with funding from the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, a New Deal agency that helped modernize the nation's infrastructure during the Great Depression. Later expanded, the school served as an important community gathering place for the arts



President Harry Truman at George Washington High School in 1949. *Courtesy City of Alexandria.*



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

and athletics. Alexandria's school system was desegregated in 1965. This campus, which closed as a four-year high school in 1971 and later became a middle school, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"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 and invited guests.