

Out of the Attic

Columbia Firehouse

In 1871, after the City of Alexandria acquired a second steam fire engine, a new company formed to become the Columbia Steam Engine Fire Company. Initially it occupied the old Star Firehouse on the east side of the 100 block of South St. Asaph Street, and in 1883, a new station across the street at 109 South St. Asaph was built for Columbia No. 4.

The front façade of the Columbia firehouse featured rounded arches typical of Richardsonian Romanesque design that was in style at the time, as well as quoining on the corners and around the lower arches. These bays would be squared off in later decades to accommodate motorized equipment and other apparatus.

A year after Columbia moved in, a brick tower reaching about 75 feet high was constructed above the adjacent alley to the north.

The tower, which housed hosing and a bell, is seen in this restored photograph taken around 1919. In the early 1930s, the top of the tower — made of wood covered in sheet metal — had to be removed for safety reasons. A couple decades later, the old tower was removed and replaced with a smaller one to the rear.

The company moved into a modern facility on Second Street in the early 1960s, and in 1978, the old Columbia Firehouse was sold with the condition that it not be demolished or its historic façade destroyed. Since then it has been home to popular restaurants like Portner's and Bookbinder's, and now plans are underway for a steakhouse called Columbia Firehouse to open there next month.

Out of the Attic is supplied by the Office of Historic Alexandria.



Photo/Library of Congress