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Out of the Attic

Before the Doors, and possibly after

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Image: Jim Morrison's yearbook photo. Office of Historic Alexandria.

Before gaining fame as the lead singer of The Doors, Jim Morrison was a high school student in Alexandria. While classmates and friends remembered him as extremely intelligent, they also remember a side of him in which he deliberately sought to push people's buttons. According to Mark Opsasnick's book "The Lizard King Was Here," Morrison, pictured here in his senior yearbook, already showed signs as a high schooler of becoming the person known to the world as a rock star.

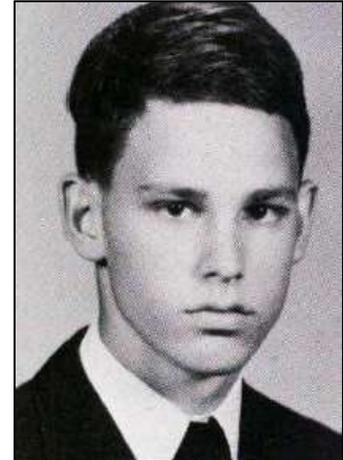
One thing about Morrison that people remembered years later was his love of books, to the point that he bought used clothing and got cheap haircuts in order to be able to buy more literature. His younger brother went into his basement room after he left for Florida after high school and found over 1,000 books. Morrison had arrived in Alexandria with only four or five.

Morrison had commandeered the basement as his room on Woodland Terrace in Jefferson Park after he had learned that one of the previous residents had committed suicide there. Eerily, a former resident of one of the houses Morrison had lived in in Arlington claimed that his spirit visited her after his death in 1971.

Perhaps Morrison's biggest act of high school rebellion was his last. He didn't show up to his graduation ceremony at what was then George Washington High School. At a time in which many Americans did not go on to college, this simply wasn't done. And while Morrison's eccentricities during high school were remembered by many, none of his contemporaries interviewed by Opsasnick remembered him having any interest in being a musician.

In fact, one of his high school friends recalled that the only music he heard the future Doors singer make was to hum in the city libraries to annoy the librarian. Rather, his classmates remember Ellen Naomi Cohen, who later gained fame as Cass Elliot or "Mama Cass" with The Mamas and Papas, as the vocal talent at George Washington High School from the class of 1961.

After he graduated from high school, Morrison moved to Clearwater, Fla., where he stayed with his grandparents and attended St. Petersburg Junior College. He returned once to the Port City as the lead singer of The Doors in a rather raucous concert at the Alexandria Roller Arena in 1967.



"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.



**Office of Historic Alexandria
City of Alexandria, Virginia**

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.