

Looking Back to 1879

By Chuck Mauro

On January 14, 1879, Herndon became an incorporated Town. One reason for the incorporation, according to Nan Netherton's *Fairfax County Virginia: A History*, may have been so that "saloons could not be established within easy walking distance of the railroad station and so create a town nuisance."

Located 27 miles from the Nation's Capital, the new Town of Herndon had no paved streets, no sewers, and no electricity. Homes were lighted by candles and oil lamps, which were cleaned daily and filled with great care. For some years, a watchman went about the streets at evening time to light the oil-burning street lamps.

The Town charter required the election of seven Councilmen every year; this was later amended to every two years. The members of the first Town Council were mostly northerners. They included C. H. Hathaway, Lawrence Hindle, William D. Sweetzer, Steven Killam, William Ulrich, Ancel St. John, and Isaiah Bready. The Council selected Isaiah Bready as Herndon's first Mayor after Ancel St. John declined the nomination (see our November 14 column, "Who Is Ancel St. John?"). He was sworn in on February 8. The Council appointed Howard W. Blanchard as the first Town Clerk and C. M. Burton as the first Town Sergeant and sole member of the police force.

The early Council meetings focused on expanding and caring for roads; the first ordinance, enacted on March 29, dealt directly with the issue of opening new streets. Next came ordinances designed "to preserve property and order." It was proclaimed unlawful "to damage shade trees on public or private property, to loiter on public walkways, to insult passersby, to disturb religious congregations, to deface property, or to throw missiles." Ensuing ordinances prohibited "profanity, indecency in dress, manner or speech, carrying concealed weapons, and trespassing."

Herndon was a farming community, and ordinances governing the free range of cattle, goats, mules, hogs, horses, sheep, and geese were enacted, amended, posted, withdrawn, rewritten, and argued over continuously. At its May 10 meeting the Council decided that, "It shall not be lawful for cows, ox, bulls, or young cattle to graze or run at large." The Town Sergeant built a pound to hold any wayward animals that ventured into the "built-up" areas of the Town. Because the owners of some of the impounded animals began surreptitiously liberating their property, the Council quickly voted to spend 25 cents for a padlock for the pound. They also decided that, "Ball playing shall not be lawful anywhere within a radius of 300 feet of the Post Office."

While Herndon today—as it was in 1879—is just four and one-third square miles, other things have changed. The population has grown from 442 to more than 23,000 residents, there are taverns and pubs within easy walking distance of the Depot, and we no longer worry about livestock running at large in the streets.