

The Herndon Fortnightly Library

By Carol Bruce

“Along with the coming of Dulles International Airport and Reston there came to our quiet little village a great influx of people and the need, it was thought, for a county library.”

The little building at 660 Spring Street that now houses the Herndon Friends Meeting has quite a history. The Herndon Fortnightly Club—an organization that was formed in 1889, when a group of nine ladies met at the Herndon Seminary on Grace Street (now a private home) and organized as the Fortnightly Club of Herndon, so named because they met every two weeks—built the original section in 1927.

The club’s purpose was, “the mutual improvement of its members in literature, art, science, and vital interests of the day.” To further that goal, they began collecting books—and collect they did. They soon had more than 1,000 volumes. In 1910, one of the members, Miss Virginia Castleman, took a course in library science and offered to catalog the collection so the group could open a public library.

The library was located in various rented rooms around town until 1917, when the entire collection and most of the club’s records were lost in the great fire. (See the April 3 *Patch* column for information about the great fire of 1917.) Undaunted, the ladies began collecting books again. In 1925, the club was incorporated and the name was changed to The Fortnightly Club and Library Association of Herndon, Virginia.

In July, 1926, the club purchased a parcel of land and, to finance construction of the building, took the \$800 insurance money from the books lost in the fire, raised \$200 more, and borrowed the rest from the local bank. They moved into their new building on Wednesday, January 5, 1927, and the Herndon Fortnightly Library was in constant use from 1927 until 1952. It served as a repository for books and as a meeting place for all kinds of community activities. In 1952, the building was deemed to be too small and an addition that housed a meeting room and a small kitchenette was constructed at the back.

The Fairfax County Public Library was established in 1939, and began sending rotating collections of books to Herndon and other small community libraries. Following community requests to establish a branch in Herndon, the Fairfax Library leased the building from the club in 1972 and took over the operation of the Herndon library.

The Club minutes detail what happened:

The year 1971 found the Herndon Fortnightly Club entering a period of great change. Along with the coming of Dulles International Airport and Reston there

came to our quiet little village a great influx of people and the need, it was thought, for a county library... It was a difficult decision to those members who had spent many years working in the library but once the offer was accepted, all that could undertake the monumental task of clearing the shelves and getting the library ready for the new tenants.

The new Herndon branch of the Fairfax County Library opened its doors on March 7, 1972. The dedication booklet said: "Except for donations from interested citizens and allocations from the Town Council of Herndon, the ladies of the club operated the library from their own fundraising efforts and volunteer services for over 80 years. In honor of the club, the Fairfax County Public Library Board of Trustees has named its newest branch the Herndon Fortnightly Library."

The library continued to operate at the Spring Street site until 1995, when the new library on Center Street—once again named for the club that had operated it for so many years—opened its doors. That same year, the club sold the building on Spring Street to the Reston Friends Meeting, a group that soon changed its name to reflect its new home. It was the end of one era and the beginning of an exciting new one for that little building on Spring Street.