

## **Herndon's Early Public Schools**

By Barbara Glakas

Herndon has a rich history when it comes to public education. In fact, this year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Herndon High School.

Our last column (“Herndon’s Historic Homes Registry”) made mention of the home at 725 Center Street. This home is not only significant for its age, but also because it originally housed one of Herndon’s earliest public schools.

In the mid 1860s, Robert and Matilda Matthews sold 401 acres of land to J. H. Thompson and Ancel St. John (see our November 14, 2010 column, “Who Is Ancel St. John?”). This land included the parcel where the house at 725 Center Street now sits. St. John and Thompson divided the land, and St. John subsequently gave half an acre to the Herndon School Association to be used for a school.

The deed for the land, signed by St. John and the school trustees (but interestingly not signed until after the school was built in 1868) was rather explicit in its purpose. The land was:

... for the maintenance, support and perpetuity of a Public School for the diffusion of knowledge among the children of men.

The members of the School Association displayed a clear intention of making its school public and nondenominational, with the deed stating that the premises was to be used for:

... a Public School for the diffusion of knowledge among the progeny of men regardless of any particular religious faith.

The three-room schoolhouse at 725 Center Street was built in two sections. The rear section with its east-west axis was built in 1868. The front section, perpendicular to the rear section, is thought to have been built in 1876. It appears that most of the structural framework was done by August 1868, and it was fully completed by December 1868.

Books and school supplies were being purchased by November 1868. A meeting of the School Association was held in the schoolhouse the following month, but there is no record in the minutes of when the students actually started attending the school.

In 1875, Herndon and Fairfax County agreed that the school would become part of the Dranesville District School System, and the School Association agreed to transfer its interest in the school lot to the District trustee.

In about 1910 or 1911, Fairfax County officials decided that the Center Street structure was inadequate for the future needs of the Town. They bought several acres of land on Locust Street and began building a new school. Classes began at that site in 1912.

Fairfax County auctioned off 725 Center Street, and it was purchased by Russell Lynn. Mr. Lynn (who served as Mayor from 1937-1945) never lived in the structure, as he already resided at 809 Elden Street. In 1912, he sold the property to A. A. Chamblin, who remodeled it into a residence as a wedding gift for his daughter. When Mr. Chamblin converted the house to a residence, he somehow lifted the house and rolled it forward, closer to Center Street. Someone removed the schoolhouse bell tower— probably Mr. Chamblin, but this is not certain.

Subsequent owners of the old schoolhouse have included the Moreheads, the Norths, the Breckenridges, the Bishops, and the LeVines. (Walter Bishop was Herndon's second Chief of Police, serving from 1972 until 1983.) The building continues to be a private residence today.

As for that school built on Locust Street in 1910-11, the original structure was destroyed in a fire during the 1927-28 school year, but it was quickly rebuilt. Construction of a separate new building began in 1952, and the school continued to house all 12 grades until Herndon Elementary School was constructed in 1961. The old building was used for storage until its demolition in the 1970s, and the intermediate and high school grades remained until the new high school—which began operating in 1967—was built on Bennett Street in the 1960s. The middle grades have been housed at the Locust Street location since the high school was relocated, and a major renovation and expansion was completed in the 1990s.