

## **Historic Haunted Herndon**

By Chuck Mauro

The little house at 610 Spring Street has quite a history, and the current owners are adding to it each year with their “spirited” take on Halloween decor. Drive by and see it for yourself!

When Bob Matthews and Colleen Delawder purchased the house at 610 Spring Street in 2005, they knew it was old and they loved its charm, but they had no idea of its history. Built as a one-story, one-room structure in 1898, additions included a second story in 1910 and further enlargements in 1925, 1930, and 1948. The house passed through a series of owners and, by the time Bob and Nancy Burk purchased it in 1976, it had fallen into serious disrepair.

The living room was the only room with electricity; extension cords served the rest of the house. Plumbing was almost nonexistent and the only heat was an open gas furnace in the living room floor. The kitchen walls were lined with large tin cans that had been cut open and nailed flat. What was painted was a flat pink. And that was just the interior...

The yard was heavily overgrown. The walkway from the house to the garage was made of rubber from old tires. Plastic flowers were “planted” to disguise the piles of trash in the yard. And, the property was inhabited by about 60 cats that took shelter in in a 1949 Plymouth with a door that was left open for them.

The Burks and subsequent owners did a major job of refurbishing the house and the property. The Burks also researched the history of the house and applied to have it included on the Town’s historic registry. The registry, which is administered by the Historical Society, is designed to increase public awareness of Herndon’s older homes and buildings and their contribution to the Town’s distinctive character and spirit; it now includes 23 structures. In order to be included, properties must meet certain criteria, such as the original structure being 50 or more years old and compatible with the character of Herndon, and being of historical or architectural significance to the Town.

Moving from a townhouse where they never had trick or treaters on Halloween, Bob and Colleen put out a few Halloween decorations in 2005 and were looking forward to some fun. They had just two or three visitors. Undaunted, Bob, who works in commercial construction, started to build some decorations that Colleen had designed, including the “gravestones” that now fill a portion of the front yard. They added more lights to attract more attention, and the next year they had 15 visitors. They added yet more decorations and, in 2007, there were 40 visitors. They were sold!

They continue to add more of their own innovative decorations each year, including the new sign post with directions and mileage to 36 actual spooky locations such Sleepy Hollow, New York (Colleen looked them all up), and they now welcome up to 250 children each year. Bob turns on the lights for a couple hours each night starting after Labor Day, so people have plenty of time to enjoy their handiwork. On Halloween night itself, parents make a special trip to drop their kids off to see the decorations.

Bob also loves to dress up to hand out the treats on the big night. Last year, as the Cat in the Hat, he was told that he was not scary enough for the house, so he's looking forward to something a little scarier this year. What will he be? We'll all just have to wait until the 31<sup>st</sup> to find out!