

Walter Wiley's Herndon

By Chuck Mauro

In the Herndon Historical Society's library in the Depot is a short, unpublished paper entitled "My Home Town," by Walter "Bud" Wiley, Jr. It provides a glimpse of the Town of Herndon in the early to mid-1900s.

Walter Wiley ran a watch repair, news stand, and candy store out of a building next to Nachman's on Lynn Street in downtown Herndon. He was a clockmaker and a watchmaker, but to the children of Herndon, his store was the source for many of their most cherished delights, candy.

In writing about his beloved hometown in Herndon, Wiley reflected on the changes he witnessed during his life. His paper provides a glimpse into a period of time some of us may yet remember; for others, it is a glimpse into a way of life that is hard to imagine as we view the town today:

The history of a town is written by the people who lived there. Those who were born, grew up, lived, worked and died there were the authors.

The town square noisy or quiet seemed a living and breathing entity. The train arriving, loading and unloading passengers, milk freight and mail. Activity at the post office as the rural route mail men prepared again to again traverse the dusty or muddy or snowy back roads in assorted vehicles according to the season such as sleighs, mud splattered cars with tire chains or their summer cars all packed full of letters, packages, seeds, catalogues and even baby chicks in the springtime.

Long lines of children slowly wending their way up the long hill to the school. The freight wagon loaded with newly arrived freight at the depot, pulled by one man and pushed by another in straw hat and bib overalls as summer uniform, heavier clothing in the winter delivering to this store and that store.

People arriving to shop for groceries in the forenoon stopping on the street to exchange friendly greetings and ask about other members of our families as they go about their errands. Then suddenly, the noon siren and a pause. The track repair crew arrives on the little flat car powered by an old Model T engine stopping on the siding to purchase cheese and crackers or beans and bread [sic] to eat in the shade of the depot. The noon freight train stops long enough for the crew to buy lunch at the drug store or buy sandwiches and pop. Stores close for the noon hour while the proprietors go home for lunch and quiet descends.

After an hour or two things stir again with activity increasing as the schools disgorge the children who walk down the hill to the drugstore for cokes and ice-cream and other stores for school supplies and sundry items. Evening newspapers are in and ready to be delivered... hurried trips to the market for a forgotten supper item... and train time and autos arrive to pick up arriving townspeople who work in Washington, Arlington and Falls Church.

After supper people move through the square going to choir practice, PTA meetings, lodge meetings, the movie house, visiting or just out for an evening stroll. Friday and Saturday nights our town swarmed with people from the surrounding farms who came to town to sell some butter, a few eggs, buy groceries, clothes, hardware, farm feed and equipment, gossip, see friends and see double features at the movie house. About midnight the quiet descends again on the town.

Sunday morning, my father liked to be out early on the town square, waiting for the Sunday morning newspapers to come out for delivery, but he would walk the square as one would walk on an early morning beach after the tide had gone out, curiously inspecting the flotsam and jetsam left by the multitude of the previous night. Sundays in my hometown the bells of over a half dozen churches called the young and old to Sunday School and again tolled to announce Church Service. All in their Sunday best and fresh faces trooping to church, stopping for a newspaper, candy or ice cream, a drug item or the post office for mail before going home to that big Sunday dinner which required some time to recover from but allowing enough time for a visit with friends or relatives or a drive, then home for supper and a church youth meeting, choir meeting or a church service, then home and bed for Monday brings another week of activity.

To expect our hometown not to change is not practical, is fanciful and really not using one's head... but let's face it... the strings that bind us to our hometown are our heartstrings. (And if we leave), when we return to visit, we seek familiar names, faces and places, for home is the fancied light burning in a remembered window surrounded by sights, sounds and people we once knew so well in our hometown.