

## **Herndon's 1979 Centennial Celebration**

By Barbara Glakas

January of 2019 marks the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Town of Herndon.

The town initially grew around the railroad and the train depot which opened c. 1857. The town post office opened in the depot in 1858 and was named after Navy Commander William Lewis Herndon. The town was formally incorporated in 1879, governed by a mayor and six councilmembers.

Once the heart of Northern Virginia's important dairy farming country, Herndon remained a quiet country village up until the 1960s, when significant changes were brought about by the construction of Dulles International Airport. The 1960s and 1970s brought new housing developments, apartment buildings and shopping centers. Herndon's population in 1960 was 1,900. By 1970 it was 4,300. By its 100<sup>th</sup> year in 1979 the town's population had tripled with approximately 12,000 people (about half of our current population).

In 1979, one hundred years after the town's official inception, a Herndon Centennial Committee was formed in order to plan events to celebrate the town's 100<sup>th</sup> year. Committee members included: Lee Powell (Chairperson), Art Anselene, Kathy Burge, Tony Debenedittis, Delroy Gochnauer, Ruth Gerbec, Virginia Greear, Louise Gross, Holden Harrison, Bobbie Keys, Earl Lazarus, and Patsy Rust. The committee proceeded to plan a town celebration, with a series of celebratory events that would occur throughout the year. A Centennial Town Calendar was published with pictures from Herndon's past on each page.

Many organizations got involved in the planning and preparation of the centennial events, including Herndon High School students who created floats, artwork and a life-size papier-mache model of Commander Herndon, which is currently on display in the Herndon Historical Society's Depot museum. Commemorative souvenir items were produced, such as commemorative Herndon license plates and books about Herndon's history.

The celebration officially started in January of 1979 with an ecumenical service in the Hoover Building on Crestview Drive. All town citizens were invited to attend. Prayers, remarks, bible readings and lessons were read by various ministers from eight different local churches. Mayor Thomas Rust and Centennial Committee Chairperson Lee Powell recognized all former town mayors and town councilmembers who still lived in the area. They were presented with lapel pins which portrayed the town seal, specially cast for the centennial. Virginia State Senator Charles Waddell and State Delegate Raymond Vickery were in attendance. At the end of the service Rust and Powell cut a large birthday cake, decorated with a depiction of the town seal. President Jimmy Carter sent a letter to the town, wishing Herndon a happy birthday.

The last week of April in 1979 was proclaimed Centennial Week during which a variety of events took place. On April 20<sup>th</sup> a Centennial Ball was held in the town's newly opened Community Center. The near capacity crowd enjoyed the finger food and dancing. The music was provided by a band called The Confection.

On April 28<sup>th</sup> a Centennial Parade was held which included horse-drawn floats, gymnasts, Model-T cars, and a fife and drum corp. That same day old time games were held at Bruin Park.

On April 29<sup>th</sup> there was a Centennial Arts and Crafts Show held in the town square. Music was provided by the Spence family and their "Grass Reflection" bluegrass tunes. Throughout that same weekend, the Herndon depot was also open in which some exhibits were displayed. Exhibits included a scale model of the depot created by Richard Peck, a scale model of the *S.S. Central America* (captained by Commander William L. Herndon in 1857), as well as other artifacts from Herndon's past. There was also a fashion show on the town square that day, during which clothes of yesteryear were shown.

Unofficial town historian, Virginia Greear, gave a talk about the town's history. Mrs. Greear – a long-time Herndon and Floris resident - was born in 1893. She spoke of her memories of living on a small farm and how everyone in town kept a garden and livestock around – usually a cow, a hog and a few chickens. She recalled when all the roads in Herndon were dirt and how the first sidewalks were timber with boards laid across them. She also recalled shopping for groceries and dry goods at Wilkins Store (now Jimmy's Old Town Tavern), and shopping for clothes at Cohen's Store (now Green Lizard Cycling). She spoke of doctors Ed and Ben Detwiler, who owned the first two cars in town. "You could hear them coming down the road and everyone would run out to see them. People had to hold onto their horses to keep them from running away."

On May 20<sup>th</sup> the town had a Centennial Homes Tour and Tea. Eight homes were on the tour and, in keeping with the centennial theme, the tour included homes that were built in different decades to reflect how Herndon homes had changed over its 100 years. The homes on the tour ranged from the 1780s to the 1970s. They were:

- 744 Dranesville Road
- 808 Elden Street
- 825 Elden Street
- 953 Locust Street
- 1000 Monroe Street
- 951 Locust Street
- 431 Van Buren Street
- 1020 Monroe Street.

Tickets for the tour were sold at the old Citizens National Bank building on Station Street. Members of the Woman's Club served tea at the bank building after the tour.

After the centennial events were over, a commemorative booklet entitled “Celebrating the First Hundred Years” was published, which included historic information about the town as well as pictures from the various centennial events that had occurred that year.

At the conclusion of the events, Mayor Rust issued a statement:

“To the Citizens of Herndon,

“On January 14, 1979, the Town of Herndon celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. When 13,000 people decide to celebrate a birthday, their efforts are wonderfully diverse, yet flavored by the Herndon character, which is common to our Town, but adapted to each.

“During 1979, citizens of Herndon have feasted, matched, danced, played and worshipped to commemorate our 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Now the party is over. The picnic area, the parade grounds and the streets have been cleared. The celebrants have gone home, happy and weary. But a birthday is more than a time for celebration. It is a time for reflection, for taking stock of where we are and where we are going. Thousands of thoughtful Herndon citizens considered these questions during this past celebration. The answers are many, because we Herndonites are many. Our Forefathers under the Act of the General Assembly of Virginia in January 14, 1879, subscribed to the principles that we recognize and accept the civil and political equality of all men before the law.

“So, the promise remains unchanged, ringing in these words from our Declaration: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.’

“We have looked back during this celebration; now, it is time to look forward – forward to a future of bright hopes and expectations. A future each of us can help to shape and mold, therefore, let us all pledge to work together to [e]nsure that great future for the generations yet to come to Herndon.”

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*About this column: “Remembering Herndon’s History” is a regular Herndon Patch feature offering stories and anecdotes about Herndon’s past. The articles are written by members of the Herndon Historical Society. Barbara Glakas is a member. A complete list of “Remembering Herndon’s History” columns is available on the Historical Society website at [www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org).*

*The Herndon Historical Society operates a small museum that focuses on local history. It is housed in the Herndon Depot in downtown Herndon on Lynn Street and is open every Sunday from noon until 3:00. Visit the Society’s website at [www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org), and the Historical Society’s Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/HerndonHistory> for more information.*

*Note: The Historical Society is seeking volunteers to help keep the museum open each Sunday. If you have an interest in local history and would like to help, contact [HerndonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com](mailto:HerndonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com).*