**Herndon Day!**

*The Big Community Event of the 1920’s*

By Barbara Glakas

Long before there was the Herndon Festival there was another town-wide celebration that dates back to 1919 – Herndon Day!

Like our current Herndon Festival, Herndon Day was a large-scale outdoor event that drew crowds from all around Fairfax County as well as from other surrounding counties. There was a wide variety of games, food, contests and entertainment.

J.J. Darlington’s granddaughter, Frances, who spent summers in Herndon, described the event this way:

*“Every year, usually in July, ‘Herndon Day’ was held in the school grounds. This was the highlight if the summer and a red letter day! There were contests, prizes, a poor greased pig to be caught, a baseball game and rows and rows of booths selling the most mouth-watering things, all home made from fired chicken, country ham sandwiches, potatoes salad and pies of all kinds and sizes, shape and flavor of homemade cakes imaginable.”*

There are many articles and ads in local newspapers of the time, ranging from the years 1919 to 1933, which described Herndon Day. A 1920 *Fairfax Herald* ad boasted that there would be “Something Doing Every Minute” at Herndon Day.

A quarter page ad in a 1925 issue of the *Herndon News-Observer* newspaper said the sixth annual Herndon Day would be “Bigger and Better in Every Way.” It listed many of the activities and attractions that were planned for the big day. It included baseball and tennis tournaments, agricultural and mechanical exhibits, a band, a minstrel troupe, a musical club, a fortune teller and a horse shoe contest. A barrel of flour would be given to the largest family on the grounds. It also boasted prizes for the prettiest baby, and for the boy or girl with the most freckles. There would be a dance in the evening. Admission to the Herndon Day event was 25 cents for adults and 15 cents for children.

Additional articles show that other attractions at Herndon Day included Bingo, gypsy tents, clowns, trap shooting, races, Tug O’ War, beauty pageants, wrestling matches, vaudeville sketches, horse shoe contests, Ku Klux Klan ceremonies, baby carriage shows, and a calithumpian parade. Herndon Town Council minutes from 1924 indicate that the town paid $4 for police duty for Herndon Day that year. The Town only had one police officer at that time.

Herndon Day was sponsored by a group called the Citizen’s Association and Community School League, a group that supported Herndon schools and later became the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). It raised money to pay for school bonds. One 1925 *News-Observer* article, explained how the group was busy planning that year’s event. It described all the fun activities that would occur at the upcoming Herndon Day and then said:

*“Everyone in town and vicinity is urged to co-operate and make this day a success from all standpoints. Two bonds on the school building were paid last year by the Citizens’ Association and Community School League and this year it is hoped to do even better. To work for Herndon Day and retire bonds will prevent another bond issue for school purposes.”*

A 1924 *Fairfax Herald* article said the Herndon Day money would be *“used to aid in the erection of the addition to the school building.”* Herndon Day typically netted between $800 -$1,200. The school they referred to was the school on Locust Street that was relatively new at that time and housed all twelve grades, until separate buildings for the elementary and high school students were later built in the 1960’s.

In addition to Herndon Day, another big event that happened in Herndon during that time period was the Herndon Carnival, which was held in the fall and sponsored by the Herndon Chamber of Commerce. A 1925 news article said the third annual carnival would be a “*very enjoyable affair*” and would be held on a Friday and Saturday in October. It too had a variety of attractions, including a trade parade, a kiddie parade, dancers, music, wholesome amusements and good eats. Town Council minutes from 1923 showed that the town paid $30 for four “Carnival police” for three nights.

Former resident, Ruth Updike, who was once interviewed by Kate O’Connor, recalled:

*“The Firemen of Herndon had a fireman’s carnival or fireman’s day; it must have been in the mid- 1920s. It was held where the town hall is now, that was a park, and it as Halloween at the time. There were contests for businesses and for people. I remember one time there was one for costumes and Mom won because she was dressed as a bride – that must have been ’23 or something like that. There was a contest for the store or business house decorated for the keeping of the holiday and it seemed Daddy did because he won a prize of twenty dollars.”*

A 1927 news article reported that the Citizen’s Association held a special meeting at which they decided not to have a Herndon Day event that year but to have a three-day carnival later. The Chamber of Commerce supported the event.

Carnivals were common throughout the 1930’s. Herndon’s fire station was built in 1929. The Herndon Volunteer Fire department was chartered that same year and the women’s auxiliary was established a year later. The fire department held carnivals to raise money to pay off its debts.

Carnivals continue in Herndon today. In 2013 the Herndon Rotary Club, in partnership with the Town, held a Fall Carnival which ran for four days and helped raise money for the Herndon High School Marching Band.

The Herndon Festival, which started as an arts and craft show in 1981, eventually added a carnival and many other forms of entertainment, attractions which harken back to Herndon Day.

Herndon has had a long-standing tradition of outdoor, town-wide events that have included The Herndon Festival, The Hispanic Heritage Festival, The Labor Day Festival, July 4th events, and Friday Night Live! summer concerts. These events make Herndon unique, bring the townspeople together, are fun for all and help raise money for worthy causes.

*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 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 Charlie Waddell at 703-435-2520 or charliewaddell@cox.net.*