

The Town's First Hotel

By Barbara Glakas

On Lynn Street in downtown Herndon, next to the Nachman building that houses the Green Lizard Cycle Shop, there are three small businesses located inside a one-story brick building. However, before that brick building was constructed, that lot boasted another important Herndon amenity – The Herndon Hotel. This is known to be the town's first hotel. In Herndon's earlier years, travelers boarded in other residents' homes or in rooming houses. The Herndon Hotel was a well-known asset to the community in the early 1900s, an ideal stopping place for travelers, as well as a home-like abode for permanent guests.

In 1865, the land along this Lynn Street block was once owned by Ancel St. John, a man from New England who moved to Herndon after the Civil War and later served on Herndon's first Town Council in 1879. Donald LeVine's book, "*Herndon, The Land: 1649-1900*," shows that in 1871, St. John sold a 20,000 square foot piece of land, located to the east of the Nachman building, to William A. Moore for \$150. In 1879, Moore sold the land to Benjamin A. Mankin (b. 1849), also for \$150.

Herndon's first map, dated 1878 and drawn by cartographer G.M. Hopkins, shows a building on Mankin's lot. The building was labelled, "Store, B.A. Mankin." This is the lot where the Herndon Hotel would later be located. The store was apparently the first section of the hotel, which was later expanded and added on to.

Mankin was a general merchant. But in 1904 he sold the business to Albert T. Walker for \$4,500. LeVine's records indicate that Benjamin Mankin and his wife, Fennie, sold "all stocks in trade, fixtures and paraphernalia of trade (excepting shelving, counter and tables) now in and upon and used by the said Benj. A. Mankin in the general merchandise business, conducted by him at store and premises."

In 1909 Sallie Lee Holtzclaw (b. 1861) – a widow formerly from Loudoun County - bought the lot and the buildings for \$4,800. The 1910 census shows that Holtzclaw was living in Herndon, but her occupation was listed as a poultry farmer. Thereafter, she was listed as a hotel keeper. We believe the Herndon Hotel came about as a business sometime between 1909 and 1912.

The hotel building, which sat next to the Nachman (Green Lizard Cycling) building, jugged out southward toward the railroad track, into what is now Lynn Street. Hotel guests could look out onto the "plaza" on Lynn Street, as well as the train depot which was just a few yards away. Much like the way hotels pop up around modern Metrorail stations today, hotels of 100 years ago popped up around train stations.

Stories about the Herndon Hotel appeared in the two local newspapers – the *Fairfax Herald* and the *News-Observer*. In March of 1920, the *Fairfax Herald* reported that Mrs. Ellen M. Buell

purchased the Herndon Hotel from Mrs. S. L. Holtzclaw. Mrs. Ellen Buell, in turn, leased it to Mr. and Mrs. DeWitt Morgan of Washington, D.C. The Morgans would operate the hotel. The article also said that Mr. Morgan would be in charge of the offices of the Buell Farm Agency, which was located inside the hotel building.

The Buell's made extensive improvements to the hotel, adding to the size of the dining room and parlor, putting an addition on the front of the building that included an attractive veranda. There were new light fixtures and an improved water system that included a deep well on premises with an "unlimited supply of pure water for all." The interior was re-decorated and the outside was re-painted. It was considered an attractive hostelry, with the newspaper reporting, "It will compare favorably with hotels in large cities."

To celebrate the re-opening of the improved hotel, the management invited the public to walk through the hotel, opening their doors all day long on July 1, 1920. The hotel also held a dinner dance for the public from 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM that same evening. Many people attended the event.

By July of 1921 the newspaper reported that the hotel was under new management. The new manager would be Michael Jacobson, a well-known caterer who had previously been associated with the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C., and the Powhatan hotel of Baltimore. He specialized in catering and he guaranteed that business at the hotel would be conducted "in a first-class manner." The Herndon Hotel is described as "one of the most modernly equipped hostelries in Northern Virginia."

The ownership of the hotel in the 1920s and 1930s is rather confusing. Newspapers indicate in 1922 that George O. Coberth bought the hotel. Mr. and Mrs. George Coberth of Pleasant Valley were described as having considerable experience in the hotel business. They too made improvements to the hotel. An ad in the *News-Observer* advertised that the hotel had a delicatessen which sold roast beef, baked ham, fried oysters, various soups, hot biscuits, salads, pies and breads. In the J. Berkley-Green photograph, a small sign can be seen off the front porch of the hotel which says "Lunch Room." Various events were also held at the hotel, including a hunting dog field trial, Fortnightly Club benefit food sales, church supper events and dances. Newspaper ads which appeared from 1928 to 1931 indicated that John Mills was the hotel barber.

In early 1925, newspapers indicate that the Coberths are still operating the hotel. However, by August of 1925 the hotel closed, saying that the Coberths were now "former owners," and "will be missed." A 1925 for sale ad in the *Fairfax Herald* described the hotel as being a "15-room commercial hotel, well adapted as a tourist inn," which had a "bright dining room [which] seats 50 people." It also noted that it was "the only hotel between Washington and Leesburg." The ad priced the hotel at \$18,000. Buyers were to apply to the Buell Farm Agency. A 1926 Trustee's

Sale ad in the *Fairfax Herald* showed that Mrs. Buell, by then a widow, was selling 19,760 square feet of land at a public auction, which included the hotel building.

However, a March 1931 newspaper article in the *Herndon Observer* indicated that George Coberth was again the hotel manager.

In 1931 the *Fairfax County Independent* newspaper wrote a glowing recommendation for the Herndon Hotel:

“Herndon is one of the few towns in the section having a modern, up-to-date hotel. The Herndon Hotel is being managed and operated in the thorough keeping with the best principles of the art of hotel-keeping. This hotel is gaining daily in popularity and is known as the place where the transient guest or the regular resident is well cared for and fed.

“Rooms at the Herndon Hotel are large, clean and airy. They are attractively furnished and kept in scrupulous good order. The hotel has a comfortable large lobby and a home-like atmosphere is found throughout the hostelry.

“Meals here are home cooked and provide a wide choice of well-balanced menus. Prices are reasonable and less than those in larger cities.”

By 1932 it is announced that the hotel once again had a new manager, Mr. Arthur Church. Mr. Church was from the Lee House and Hamilton Hotel in Washington, D.C., and prior to that he was an assistant manager of the Washington Golf and Country Club. He did another complete renovation of the building.

News articles about the hotel diminished in the mid-1930s. Both Mrs. Buell and Mr. Coberth passed away in that same decade. It appears that from the mid-1930s through the early 1960s, the old hotel building was used for many different purposes.

A February 1935 *News-Observer* article described how Dr. Ernest Martz opened a new Herndon Drug store in “the old hotel building.” That same year another news article indicated that the Herndon Town Council moved its office from the bank building to the old hotel building.

In her book *Around Herndon*, Margaret Peck indicated that the hotel was later used for business and office space. Another long-time resident remembers a dry cleaners store being in the building, called Fortneys Cleaners. Yet another resident remembers registering to vote there. A local business owner confirmed that a barber shop, and later a flower shop, once operated out of the building. In the 1950s Francis Sevila operated the Herndon Furniture Mart store on the first floor while she and her children lived upstairs. Also operating in the building in the 1950s and 60s was the insurance agency, HRI Associates, founded by Graham James and Bill Hoofnagle, as the insurance branch of Herndon Realty. The book, *Herndon, A History in Images*, by Chuck

Mauro, indicates that the hotel operated as an apartment building in 1961. He also wrote that the building once housed Community Cleaners.

According to Howard and Arthur Nachman, their father, Philip “Melvin” Nachman, bought the hotel building sometime between 1955-1965 and had it taken down sometime around 1966. Melvin Nachman, who operated the Nachman’s clothing store next door, had bought the hotel building, with the intent of wanting to create a mini-strip shopping center there in order to attract more people to the downtown area. He had a one-story brick building constructed, that still stands today, which housed various small businesses. A High’s Dairy Store and the Herndon Florist were a couple of the early occupants of the new brick shops.

The rise and demise of the Herndon Hotel correlated with the changing modes of transportation in western Fairfax County.

The railroad arrived in Herndon in the late 1850s, and started running a full schedule in 1860. With the rail also came city families looking to take the hour-long train ride from Washington, D.C., to Herndon, to spend weekends or summers in the “country.” Some summer homes were built in Herndon and there were also a number of boarding houses. The electric trolley cars started operating on the railroad in 1912. The Herndon Hotel may have come about out of the increasing demand to house those people who came to Herndon by train.

The first automobiles started arriving in Herndon in the early 1900s, slowly replacing the horse and buggy. Passenger service on the train declined in the 1950s. Dulles International Airport was dedicated in 1962. And the last train ran on the Washington & Old Dominion railroad in 1968. It was during that 1960s decade that the Herndon Hotel building was torn down.

Since then, many new hotels have popped up along the Dulles Corridor as air travel has increased, as Dulles Airport has expanded, and as the Silver Line of the Metrorail project started coming under construction. With recent the arrival of the new Herndon Metrorail station in November of 2022, maybe we will find the emergence of a new “Herndon Hotel.”

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.

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, 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.

