

Mr. Kidwell's Love Poem

There is no better month than February to write about a love poem.

Leona Eveline Crouse was a member of a prominent Herndon family. Her father, Amos Crouse, was a Civil War veteran who was born in New York. He and his wife, Isabelle, moved to Virginia after the war, first to Sterling and soon after settling in the town of Herndon. Amos served on the Herndon Town Council from 1880 to 1883. He also worked for the Treasury Department, commuting to Washington, D.C., on the train. The Crouse family house still stands today at 642 Madison Street.

Amos and Isabelle had ten children. One of them was Leona who was born in 1871. Leona attended the Herndon School on Center Street.

Edgar E. Kidwell was born in 1854. He was the son of William and Sarah Kidwell, a farming family in Centreville, Virginia. Up until the age of 25, Edgar worked on the family farm. Ultimately, he became a teacher. At different points in time Edgar served as a principal at Edinburg Graded School and also at a school in Woodstock. He was also known to have assisted in a normal school (a college for teachers) in Edinburg where he was "highly esteemed by all the pedagogues in Shenandoah." He later taught at the Herndon School on Center Street, the same school where Leona attended as a student.

There was a 17-year age difference between Edgar and Leona. Nevertheless, family lore has it that when Leona was just 10, Edgar declared that he was going to marry her when she was old enough.

Leona was a studious student. On her Herndon School report card, dated 1887, she got high marks ranging from 98% to 100% on topics such as Spelling, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography, Composition, History and Algebra. She also got high grades for attendance and deportment. That year she would have been 16 years old. Mr. Kidwell signed the report card as the principal.

It is not clear exactly when Edgar Kidwell first started courting Leona. In February of 1887, during the courting period, Edgar wrote a letter to Leona inviting her to accompany him to church. He wrote:

"My dear Leona,

"If the weather be favorable this evening, I shall come up to your house and if it be your pleasure to accompany me to church, I shall be glad to have you go.... [] .

“Ever Yours, E.E. Kidwell.”

Soon after, in that same year, Edgar and Leona were married. It is not known where they lived in the first year of their marriage. Leona became pregnant in 1888. Descendants told tales saying when Edgar was out of town, he would ride horseback through the rain in a hurry to get back to his young wife.

In an undated letter, Edgar wrote a love poem to Leona:

“Why I Love Thee

“In thy face I read thy sweetness,
In thy voice I hear thy gentleness,
And in thy ways I see thy goodness.
I love thy looks, for they tell me
Thy mind from evil thoughts is ever free,
I love thy voice, for it tells me
Thy tongue from unkind speaking always keeps,
I love thy ways, for they tell me
Thou art good and true and kind.
And I love thee, because in thee
I all this goodness find.”

Sadly, Edgar soon fell victim to typhoid fever. He died at the age of 34 in September of 1888, leaving Leona a widow at the age of 18. His obituary said:

“Gone to the grave in all his glorious prime,
In full activity of zeal and power;
But a christian cannot die before his time,
The Lord’s appointment is the servant’s hour.”

Edgar and Leona’s daughter, Leona Edgar Kidwell, never met her father as she was born in March of 1889, five months after her father’s death.

Edgar’s wife, Leona, would never remarry. She eventually moved to Washington, D.C., where she got a job at the Treasury Department. Leona Eveline Crouse Kidwell died in 1956. She and her beloved husband, Edgar, are buried next to each other in Herndon’s Chestnut Grove Cemetery.

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.