

Notable Herndon Women

By Barbara Glakas

March is Women's History Month so we thought we would take this opportunity to look back on some female movers and shakers from Herndon's early history.

Mary Adelaide White Adamson Neily (1915-2006) - Mrs. Adelaide Adamson began teaching Home Economics at Herndon High School in the 1940s when the school was located on Locust Street. She and her son lived in an apartment in Mrs. Emma Buell's home on Elden Street. In 1942 Herndon High School, under the leadership of Principal J.H. Rice, opened the first school cafeteria in Fairfax County. Mrs. Adamson later became Fairfax County's School Lunch Director and was widely credited as the originator of Fairfax County's school lunch program. She retired as the Director of Fairfax County Public Schools Food Service Department. Mrs. Adams got her Bachelor's degree from State Teachers College at Harrisonburg (now James Madison University) and her master's degree from Virginia Tech. She was the National Secretary of American Food Service Association and she was an active member of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Eudora Caphall Armfield (1889- 1962) - Mrs. Eudora Armfield was the first President of the Herndon's Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary group. The Auxiliary was responsible for fundraising in order to pay off the debt for Herndon's first permanent fire house, once located on Station Street. The funds they raised also paid for fire trucks and large equipment, as well as other items such as helmets and boots. For many years social activities in the Town revolved around the activities that were planned by the Ladies Auxiliary. In addition to a carnival, the Ladies Auxiliary sponsored dances, vaudeville shows, plays, card parties, dinners and food sales. In addition to her work with the Ladies Auxiliary group, Mrs. Armfield was an officer in the Order of the Eastern Star and was a Voter Registrar. She was a seamstress and lived on Jefferson Street.

Mary Lee Castleman (1830 – 1891) - Mrs. Mary Castleman, a cousin of Robert E. Lee, came to Herndon in circa 1874 after the untimely death of her husband. She established the Herndon Seminary on Grace Street, a private boarding and day school for young girls. She and her daughters ran the seminary. She was also one of the key people responsible for the establishment of St. Timothy's Episcopal Church. She was one of the organizers of "The Gleaners," a society of church women instrumental in raising money to pay for the construction of the church that was originally built at the corner of Elden and Grace Streets.

Virginia Castleman (1864-1937) - Miss Virginia Castleman was the youngest daughter of Mrs. Mary Lee Castleman. Virginia taught at the Herndon Seminary along with her sisters. She was one of the founders of a study club of eleven Herndon ladies that formed in 1889. They met every two weeks for the purpose of "the mutual improvement of its members in literature, art, science, and the vital interests of the day," later calling their club the "The Fortnightly Club." They started collecting books for their research and self-improvement. Virginia Castleman studied Library Science at Drexel Institute in Philadelphia and later suggested that the Fortnightly Club start a public library for the people of Herndon. This was the genesis of the Fortnightly Library, the first lending library in Fairfax County. She authored the book, "Pocahontas: A Poem." In 1905-1906 Miss Castleman interviewed Herndon resident, Kathryn

“Kitty” Kitchen Hanna (1830-1907), resulting in a manuscript entitled *Reminiscences of an Oldest Inhabitant, A Nineteenth Century Chronicle*, a firsthand account of 19th century Herndon.

Evelyn Davis (1904-1983) - Ms. Evelyn Davis was a pioneering modern dancer, choreographer and dance instructor. Davis studied dance in Germany, graduated from George Washington University and did her graduate work at Catholic University. In 1939 she formed the Dance Playhouse Group to increase interest in dance. She later founded the Evelyn Davis Dance Playhouse, a studio theater in Washington, D.C., the only theatre in Washington devoted exclusively to dance. The theatre was in the Church Street Theatre, now called the Keegan Theatre. She also lectured, authored books, and established studios and summer dance programs at American University, the University of Maryland, and other locations around the Metro area. In the latter part of her life she lived in Herndon off of Stuart Road.

Sarah “Sadie” Catherine Detwiler (1871- 1944) – Miss Sadie Detwiler attended the Herndon School on Center Street and later became a popular Herndon educator. In her 20s she lived on Elden Street with her brother Benjamin Detwiler. She later bought her own house on Elden Street where she lived for most of her life. As a young teacher Miss Detwiler taught at various schools in the Dranesville District. She later became a principal of the Floris School and the Herndon School. She was an active citizen and was a member of the Fortnightly Club, the Order of the Eastern Star, and the Herndon School Board. She was also an election clerk, a member of the Herndon Business and Civic League, a Methodist Church official, and served on a Red Cross chapter committee.

Belle Smith Dudding (1878- 1968) - Mrs. Belle Dudding and her husband, Charles, bought the hardware store on Lynn Street from Robert Schneider in 1920. Mr. Dudding died shortly thereafter, in 1924. Mrs. Dudding continued to run the popular hardware store until the late 1960s, living in the apartment above the store.

Hilda Middleton Peck Gillette (1914-1992) – Mrs. Hilda Gillette grew up on a dairy farm in the Dranesville District. She was the first woman elected to the Herndon Town Council, elected in 1953. A *Herndon Observer* newspaper article said that she refused to campaign and was elected by write-in ballot. She lived on Vine Street.

Virginia Pauline McFarland Greear (1893-1991) - Mrs. Virginia Greear was widely known as the Town of Herndon’s unofficial historian, called a “walking encyclopedia” by some. She came to Floris in 1896, graduating from Floris High School in 1911. Later, she and her husband moved to Oak Street in Herndon. She was a founding member of the Herndon Historical Society, leading an innumerable number of tours in the Depot Museum, sharing her love of history, re-creating the flavor of small town life from years ago. She often recalled meeting Colonel John Mosby, remembered the first radio, and remembered when the first two cars came to Herndon. She worked for the Rationing Board during WWII and was an active member of the Herndon United Methodist Church. The *Herndon Times* newspaper named Mrs. Greear its 1984 Citizen of the Year for her contributions as an informal historian.

Elizabeth Leonhardt (1867-1953) - Miss Elizabeth Leonhardt was one of the “Sacred Twenty,” the first twenty nurses in the United States Navy Nurse Corps during World War I. In 1919 Leonhardt was the Chief Nurse of the U.S. Navy Nurse Corps and was assigned to the Naval Hospital in Norfolk, Virginia. She served the U.S. Navy for 20 years at various locations,

including Guam, naval hospitals in Virginia and the state of Washington, and aboard the hospital ship *USS Mercy*. Elizabeth lived at a home that was formerly located near the intersection of Elden and Lynn Streets. She was a member of the Herndon Fortnightly Club, the Order of Eastern Star, and the Herndon Citizen's Association.

Mrs. Lillian E. Simpson Lynn (1865-1953) - Mrs. Lillian Lynn was an active Herndon and Fairfax County resident, fulfilling many leadership roles. She served for many years as the Chairman of the Fairfax County Chapter of the American Red Cross. She served as Chairman of the County Board of Public Welfare. She also served as the Superintendent of the Fairfax County Fair. When the Fortnightly Club and Library Association of Herndon first incorporated, she was elected as a Trustee. She also served as the Librarian of the Herndon Fortnightly Library in the 1920s and 1930s. She was a founding member of the Herndon Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary group, serving on its publicity committee.

Edith L. Reed Patton (1903-1990) - Mrs. Edith Reed Patton, began working as a C&P telephone operator in Herndon as a young teenager. She became a well-known telephone switchboard operator who later worked out of her home at 715 Pine Street, up until the 1940s. She would often wear a head set over her ears while working in her front yard, enabling her to hear calls coming into the switchboard as she tended to her garden. Doctors and many private residents alike would share their whereabouts with Mrs. Patton so that she would always know how to find them when calls came into the switchboard.

Laura Ratcliffe Hanna (1836 – 1923) - Laura Ratcliffe was the great granddaughter of Richard Ratcliffe, the founder of Providence, now Fairfax. Laura was born in Fairfax City. She later moved to the Frying Pan area of greater Herndon. Laura was a southern sympathizer and acted as a spy during the Civil War. She had a close friendship with General J.E.B. Stuart. She also provided Col. John S. Mosby with helpful intelligence about Union troop movements and activities. The house she lived in after the war with her husband still stands on Centreville Road just south of the Dulles Toll Road and is called "Merrybrook." Her gravesite is located on the property of the Worldgate Centre in Herndon.

Kathryn J. Humme Robinson (1895 – 1988) - Mrs. Kathryn Robinson was President of the Herndon Fortnightly Club and served as the club's library manager for many years. She was later appointed to the first Fairfax County Library Board of Trustees, c. 1939, which was established to manage and control the county's free library system. Mrs. Robinson was a founding member of Herndon Presbyterian Church, which later became part of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Herndon where she served as the organist and choir director and president of the church's women's organization. She was also an officer of the Ladies Auxiliary for the Herndon Volunteer fire department, and was a member of the Home Interest Club.

Edith Rogers (1887-1978) - Miss Edith Rogers was a dairy farmer and an educator. She was one of twelve children and her family lived in the Floris area on a farm called Blossom Hill. She attended the State Teacher's College in Farmville, Virginia, (now Longwood University) and also attended American University in Washington, D.C. She taught and served as principal to various schools around the area. She resigned from her position as principal at Herndon High School to serve overseas in the Red Cross during WWI, serving in France. She was the first woman to be elected to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, representing the Dranesville District from 1935-1940 and serving as the Chairman of the County Board of Public Welfare.

She also served as an officer and organizer of local grange organizations, which were farmer's associations, promoting the social and economic needs of farmers. A very active member of the community, Miss Rogers served as a census enumerator, was the Superintendent of the Floris Fair, became the chairperson of the Red Cross Roll Call (a fundraising drive), became a Democratic Primary official, and served on the Civil Defense Council. She was a Scouting Mistress with a Girl Scout Troop, and a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Business Woman's Professional Club, and The Home and Interest Garden Club.

Lottie Dyer Schneider (1879 - 1967) - Mrs. Lottie Schneider was born the year the Town of incorporated in 1879. Her father was an early Town Sergeant and Herndon Mayor, Elisha Dyer. She graduated from the Herndon School on Center Street in 1919 and later married a Herndon hardware store owner, Robert Schneider. She attended the state Female Normal School at Farmville (now Longwood University). She was among the first Supervisors of Fairfax County Public Schools. She taught at Shepherd College for several years and also taught teacher training programs at the Johnson's Publishing Company in Richmond. She wrote public school readers that were widely adopted in many southern and mid-western states. She also wrote a memoir entitled *Memories of Herndon, Virginia*. Her memoir described life in Herndon spanning from 1879 to 1920. She stated that she wrote the memoir for the purpose of "preserving, if possible, for those who come after me, the atmosphere of the village which characterized Herndon at that period - an atmosphere that is rapidly ceasing to exist and by many scarcely remembered."

Elizabeth Greeley Sweetser (1831 – 1912) - Mrs. Elizabeth Sweetser served as Herndon's first female postmaster. She served in that position from 1902 to 1907. The post office was located in her home on Station Street, at the west end of Pine Street.

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.