

## Herndon's Post Office History

By Barbara Glakas

Many are familiar with the story of how Herndon's post office was first established: As the railroad was built out to the area we now call Herndon, a village started evolving around the train Depot – built circa 1857 – giving rise to the need for a post office. The village people gathered to select a name for the post office. At a meeting the townspeople heard the story of the brave Captain of the *S.S. Central America* who had recently died with his sunken ship in the midst of a hurricane after saving all the women and children, making valiant efforts to keep the ship afloat until rescuers arrived. Taken with the story of this heroic ship captain, the townspeople opted to name the new post office after Commander William Lewis Herndon. The town's incorporation followed under that same name in 1879.

Kitty Kitchen, who lived in Herndon during this time period, explained:

“When the first depot was build, jes’ after Purdies lef’, there was much talk an’ choosin’ of names, an’ many a name was spoke of by one another; but Mr. Hollin’sworth, him married a Dunn – her father’d bought the millworks – Mister Hollins’worth chose the name an’ it stuck to the place ‘midst all the changes, even when the people that named it’s dead an’ gone.”

Mr. William W. Hollingsworth was Herndon's first Postmaster. Kitty explained further:

“It was the story of the brave Captain who went down with his ship after savin’ so many lives that won all hearts. So ‘twas Herndon the town’s called.”

Mr. Hollingsworth was appointed as Herndon's first postmaster in July of 1858 and he went on to serve until 1865. The post office operated out of the Depot.

The post office, however, was not always located in the Depot. Based on early photographs, land deeds and first-hand accounts, we know that the Herndon Post office was located in a variety of places about the town, over the course of years. Some of these locations included public buildings, private buildings and homes.

Madison Whipple served as Postmaster in 1866. For a time he lived in the infamous “Yellow House,” a Civil War era home that is now located at the corner of Pearl and Oak Streets. This home is also known as the former residence of Thomas E. Reed, Herndon's first undertaker who established his business in 1885. Mr. Whipple lived in the Yellow House before the Reeds and the house has been moved twice. Its original location is the present location of the Adams-Green Funeral home at 721 Elden Street. When the home was being renovated in the early 2000s, an old wooden sign was found inside the living room wall. The sign said, “M. Whipple, Herndon Station, Fairfax Co., VA.” It is unclear if Mr. Whipple operated the post office out of his home, or if he operated it out of the Depot and later saved the sign with his name on it as a souvenir.

Mr. William Sweetser, and his wife, Elizabeth, served as the Herndon postmasters on and off between the years 1882 and 1906. They lived on the west side of Station Street at the intersection of Pine Street. An old photograph of their home, presumed to be dated circa 1890s, shows a sign hanging by one of their doors which says, "Post Office."

Two early Herndon residents -- Lottie Dyer (born 1879) and Virgie Wynkoop (born 1878) -- explained one of the reasons why the location of the Herndon post office changed so often. Virgie Wynkoop said,

"The Post office was opened in 1858. At that time when a Republican president was in power the Government rented space for the office on north side of the RR and on the south side when a Democrat was elected. It would be on the south side until 1961 [when] a permanent building was built at 645 Elden Street. Since that time only the Postmasters were changed."

Lottie verified this method of postmaster appointments and locations, saying,

"My first memories of Mr. Sweetzer were when he was Postmaster. During the Republican Administrations he held this office but when the Democrats were in power Mr. Andrew Hutchison across the tracks was in charge of the mail."

Indeed, this recollection turned out to be true, as Mr. and Mrs. Sweetser were appointed as Postmasters in 1882, 1889, 1897 and 1902 when Republican Presidents were in office (Presidents Arthur, Harrison, McKinley and T. Roosevelt). Mr. Andrew Hutchison was appointed as Herndon Postmaster in the years 1886 and 1893 when a Democrat was in office (President Cleveland).

The Herndon post office also spent some time on the north side of Lynn Street, across the street from the train Depot. In 1909 Robert and Lottie Schneider, hardware store proprietors who owned 20,000 square feet of land and buildings on that block, made an agreement with Frank H. Hitchcock, U.S. Postmaster General, to house the post office in one of their buildings. The agreement said in part that the post office would be housed in:

"all that certain room fifteen feet (15') by forty five feet (45') inside measurement, (less an offset for a rear hall way), on the first floor of the two story and basement frame (wooden) premises, known as Schneider's Building situated on the Northeast side of the right of way of the Bluemont Division of the Southern Railway, opposite the RR Depot (with additional entrances in the rear, and an additional windows on the N.W. Side) in Herndon, Fairfax County, Virginia."

The term of the agreement was for ten years and the rent was an "annual rate of \$280.00 in quarter yearly payments."

Donald LeVine, author of *Herndon, the Land: 1649-1900*, believes that the building that housed the post office on Lynn Street is in what is now the Nachman building at 718 Lynn Street (now the home of Green Lizard Cycling), and not the former Schneider Hardware store which burned down on that same block around 1980.

Marcus and Celia Cohen, clothing store proprietors, would later buy this Nachman building and the post office lease was transferred to them. The Cohens would later sell their land and building to Julius and Anna Nachman. As with the Schneider's sale to Cohen, the Nachmans also took over the post office lease.

Herndon's first municipal building, now called the Town Hall, was built in 1938 next to the Depot. The post office moved into its first floor in 1939. It stayed there until a new building was built at 645 Elden Street in 1961 (now the home of Angeethi Indian Cuisine Restaurant). Even later, in the mid-1980s, a new post office was built at the corner of Grove and Van Buren Streets, where it remains today.

According the Fairfax County government's website, the Herndon Post office was the eleventh post office to be established in the county. Since that time we have had many postmasters. A list of Herndon postmasters up to the year 2000 is outlined below.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date Appointed</u>
William W. Hollingsworth	Postmaster	07/13/1858
Octavus Torry	Postmaster	09/06/1865
Madison Whipple	Postmaster	03/26/1866
E. L. Garrett	Postmaster	07/23/1867
George D. Brown	Postmaster	09/25/1867
Stephen Killam	Postmaster	07/31/1868
William D. Sweetser	Postmaster	06/22/1882
Andrew G. Hutchison	Postmaster	06/29/1886
William D. Sweetser	Postmaster	06/11/1889
Andrew G. Hutchison	Postmaster	06/02/1893
William D. Sweetser	Postmaster	05/03/1897
Elizabeth G. Sweetser	Postmaster	04/02/1902
Ernest L. Howard	Postmaster	02/12/1907
Harry A. Sager	Postmaster	01/03/1908
Charles F. Russell	Postmaster	06/05/1913
Benjamin W. Middleton	Acting Postmaster	07/01/1921
Harold H. Hoyt	Postmaster	01/17/1922
Harry A. Sager	Postmaster	06/16/1926
Mrs. Annie R. Walker	Acting Postmaster	09/30/1934

Mrs. Annie R. Walker	Postmaster	01/18/1935
Silas Franklin Hutchison	Acting Postmaster	09/30/1943
Silas Franklin Hutchison	Postmaster	12/01/1944
James R. McLearn	Acting Postmaster	10/31/1956
James R. McLearn	Postmaster	03/19/1958
William H. Ireland	Acting Postmaster	05/12/1961
William H. Ireland	Postmaster	09/23/1961
Philip G. Burrows	Officer-In-Charge	11/24/1972
Philip G. Burrows	Postmaster	08/25/1973
John E. Hurley	Officer-In-Charge	05/19/1978
Richard J. Klare Jr.	Postmaster	01/13/1979
Dennis E. Voorhees	Officer-In-Charge	04/02/1993
Dennis E. Voorhees	Postmaster	06/12/1993
Shoshana M. Grove	Postmaster	05/11/1996

(ZIP Code changed from 22070 to 20170 on July 1, 1996).

Greg J. Coutry	Postmaster	08/14/1999 D. Clinton
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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).*