**A Mayor, His Daughter and a Memorable Herndon Businessman**

*The Dyer-Schneider Families and the Schneider Hardware Store*

By Barbara Glakas

On the west side of the Nachman building in downtown Herndon is a small parking lot at the corner of Station and Lynn Streets which conveniently serves the patrons of surrounding stores. There was once a hardware store on that small parcel of land. The beginning of that story takes us back to 1838.

Elisha Dyer was born in Fairfax County, Virginia, in 1838. Information was unearthed by a Dyer family member indicated that Elisha had joined the Confederate Army before deserting to the Union Army. Muster rolls and War Department records show that in September of 1862, an Elisha Dyer was found to have enlisted in the Confederate Army in North Carolina’s 62nd Infantry Regiment. By March of 1863 Elisha went absent without leave, ultimately deserted and, later that same year, joined a Union unit, the 21st Pennsylvania Calvary Volunteers. When he joined the Pennsylvania unit he was classified as a deserter from the rebel army. Elisha was known to have been involved in the Battle of Cold Harbor and the First and Second Battles of the Wilderness. He once reminisced to his son that he would switch sides to “wherever the action was.”

It was not necessarily unusual for people to have deserted units. Another Dyer family member indicated that there were many conflicted citizens and families in the Herndon area, and Mosby’s Raiders were known to have frightened citizens and farmers who were thought to be Northern sympathizers.

Elisha married Mildred Harris Johnson in 1865. An 1870 census document indicated he was listed as living in Herndon and his occupation was “wagon maker.” The 1880 census listed his occupation as a “Huxter.” (At the time, a huckster was someone who sold goods door-to-door). By 1890 his occupation was “Butcher,” and by the 1910 his occupation is listed as “Sergeant.”

A well-respected man in town, Elisha served as Herndon’s Mayor and as Town Sergeant over the course of several years in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. Town records are missing for some of this time period, but the headlines of archived *Fairfax Herald* newspapers show that Elisha was *re*-elected as Mayor in 1891, indicating that he must have served as Mayor in a previous term. Elisha resigned later that year. He indicated he had “*too much to attend to*.” The newspaper reported that the loss of him as Mayor was considered *“a calamity*.” Later, the *Fairfax Herald* reported that Elisha Dyer was elected Mayor again in 1907.

One of Elisha’s daughters remembers him studying large law books and enforcing the law with great vigor. He sometimes wore a pistol in his belt, as he once received a threatening note after he impounded someone’s cattle that were roaming the Herndon streets. Elisha enjoyed checkers, fishing and taking trips to old battlefields. He also apparently had a good sense of humor. A story in a book entitled, “*A Chronicle of the Dyer-Johnson Family,*” indicated how one of Elisha’s neighbors would let their chickens wander into his garden. In response, Elisha “…*scattered some corn with labels fastened securely to the grains. So the chickens went home with the string and labels hanging out of their mouths, bearing such messages as,* ‘*Please keep me home*’ *and* ‘*I’ve been in the neighbors’ garden*.’ ”

Elisha and Mildred lived in a house on Monroe Street, across from the Pines Shopping Center, in the vicinity of where Busch Motors now sits. They had seven children, but not all survived their youth. Two died as young children. Another died at the age of 20 in a train accident.

One of their children was Lottie Dyer, born in 1879, the year the Town of Herndon was incorporated. Lottie grew up in Herndon, attending school as well as Herndon’s first church, The Northern Methodist Episcopal Church at the corner of Elden and Grace Streets. Prior to marrying, Lottie taught in Princeton, Massachusetts, and in Falls Church, Virginia. She became one of the first supervisors of Fairfax County schools. Lottie became acquainted with a businessman in town named Robert Schneider, whom she would later marry.

Born in Germany to German parents in 1852, Robert Schneider came to America on a six week voyage at the age of sixteen in 1868. While living in Pennsylvania, repairing bicycles, he decided to move in order to look for greater business opportunities. He read a letter from a subscriber in a German newspaper. A tinsmith named Mr. Bushwald wrote about how the opportunities were great in Herndon, Virginia. Robert moved to Herndon and made a one-year partnership with Mr. Bushwald, operating a combination tinsmith and hardware store. Learning that Mr. Bushwald was of questionable character which negatively affected business, Robert bought him out at the end of the one year contract. Robert started adding more goods to his store and grew a successful business, drawing trades from Alexandria to Bluemont. He bought the house he once rented.

Lottie Dyer married Robert Schneider in 1903. Despite a significant age difference, Robert and Lottie lived happily together and had two children in 1906 and 1909. They built a substantial new home and owned a successful general hardware and merchandize store on the town’s plaza. Robert served on the Herndon Town Council in 1911.

The Schneider Hardware Store was a large building at the north-east corner of Station and Lynn Streets. It was built by a Herndon carpenter, Charlie Reed. Lottie recalled in her *Memories of Herndon, Virginia* book, “I have never seen such heavy timbers as he used.” It is unclear if Robert began his Herndon business at that same location, however, that store opened in about 1909 and was run by the Schneiders until about 1919.

Once WWI came about, anti-German sentiment abounded. In his memoir, Robert wrote:

*“I often wondered what happened to the generous, friendly American people, for whom I had always had a deep admiration. How could they become so quickly hysterical and narrow in their thinking? Customers that had traded with me for more than 20 years withdrew their trade. I received threatening letters, predicting what would happen to me if I did not show more patriotism. As it was I was buying all the Liberty Bonds I could possibly afford. They did not consider that I had been a citizen of this country before many of them were born, for I had voted in every presidential election since Grant’s second term…I loved America as fervently as did these enthusiasts for war.”*

As a result of distress and protracted worry, Robert’s health failed. The Schneiders sold their store to Charles Dudding in 1920 and then moved to Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Lottie taught at Shepherd’s College and later taught in Richmond, Virginia.

Robert died in 1937 and Lottie died in 1967. They, along with Elisha Dyer (d. 1919) and his wife, Mildred Dyer (d. 1923), are buried in Herndon’s Chestnut Grove Cemetery.

Mr. Dudding, who bought the Schneider’s store in 1920, died in 1924, but his wife, Belle, continued to operate Dudding’s Hardware Store until the 1960’s. The store was subsequently occupied by other similar businesses such as the Herndon Farm and Garden Center and the Taylor Rental Center. In 1980 the building had an accidental fire and was subsequently torn down. Today we see only a small parking lot where the Schneider Hardware Store once stood.