

## **The Gas House**

By Carol Bruce

Have you ever wondered about that little concrete building across the street from the Herndon Municipal Center?

It's an acetylene gas generating station—one of several that used to be located throughout Herndon. It dates to about 1900, when two brothers and prominent members of the Herndon community—Edward and Benjamin Detwiler (we'll tell you more about them in a later column)—founded the Herndon Gas Company. The company provided gas for the streetlights in the downtown and for the lights in a few of the Town's more affluent households. It operated until about 1917, when electric lighting replaced gas.

When you have a few minutes to spare, stop by and take a look inside. You'll find a replica of the original acetylene generator along with an explanation of how the process worked. The display and the marker on the side of the building were installed by the Herndon Historical Society, which funded the building's restoration in 1999.

There are several reasons why it's remarkable that this little building still stands. First, as is the case with many old structures, there were a number of people in Town who considered it an eyesore and pushed for its demolition when the Municipal Center complex was constructed in the mid 1990s.

And then, of course, there is the fact that the gas generating process was quite dangerous and explosions were not uncommon. To minimize the risk, these little generating buildings were made of concrete and designed to implode if an explosion did occur.

The Society had the landscaping and benches for the adjacent mini-park installed at the same time the building was restored. The park is dedicated in memory of former Society president Larry Clarity, who spearheaded the restoration effort, and the benches it contains were donated in memory of another longtime member, Bill Moffett.

If you look carefully at the back edge of the park you will see the foundation of the blacksmith shop that Bill's father, William H. Moffett, operated on the site from 1905 until 1965. The shop was relocated to Frying Pan Park in 1975, and it remains on display there today. Moffett Forge Road in the Barker Hill subdivision is named for the Moffett family, who farmed that area for many years.