

## **The Great Fire of 1917**

By Chuck Mauro

Most of the structures we see today along Station and Pine Streets were built following The Great Fire of 1917

On a Thursday in March 1917, a fire started at Harrison's Livery Stable on the east side of Station Street north of Pine Street. It spread rapidly toward the Depot, destroying most of the businesses on Pine and Station Streets.

Because the Town had no fire department, two houses on Pine Street were dynamited in order to check the flames. The explosion was heard for miles around and broke many windows within a radius of several blocks.

After several hours of hard work the Town residents, along with firefighters who had come from as far away as Cherrydale and Clarendon in Arlington County, managed to extinguish the flames.

Although the fire destroyed most of the Town's business section, the merchants and others quickly secured new locations and were open before Saturday. On Friday morning a temporary telephone was fixed to a pole on Station Street, allowing residents in the affected area to once again communicate with the outside world.

Despite the trauma and the damage, the fire did not succeed in daunting the spirits of the people in Herndon. Instead, people shared many amusing stories about their experiences.

For example, one man—who had used his hat as a receptacle when he gathered eggs—hurriedly donned that hat when he rushed out to help fight the fire. His vision was quickly obscured as the eggs broke and ran down his face.

When young Henry Moffett—son of blacksmith William H. Moffett, whose shop was the last building to burn and the first to be rebuilt after the fire—heard about the fire, he jumped on his mare and rode, bareback and without a bridle, to help fight the flames.

The mare stumbled on a mud hole in the street and Henry was thrown. The fall knocked him unconscious and he broke his collarbone. The story, as reported two days later in the local newspaper, was that, "young Henry Moffett broke his collarbone jumping from the third story of the Walker Building during the fire."

It also was reported at the time that Herndon would "arise from its ashes, better and more handsome than ever." That report proved to be true, as most of the structures we see today along Station and Spring Streets were built after the fire.

It would seem that The Great Fire of 1917 would have pointed to the immediate need for a fire department in Herndon. Surprisingly, however, it wasn't until 1920—after much debate and discussion—that the Town Council, in cooperation with the Citizens Association, secured a Model T fire truck for the Town.