

A Trip Back in Time

By Chuck Mauro

Along with a little exercise and fresh air, a scarce quarter mile journey along the W&OD Trail provides the opportunity to take a trip through close to 150 years of Herndon history.

Each day, walkers, runners, bikers, and in-line skaters pass through Herndon as they traverse the Washington and Old Dominion (W&OD) Regional Park—more commonly known as the W&OD Trail. And, as they travel along the site of the former railroad line whose name it carries, they take a trip through Herndon history.

The 45-mile-long trail, which stretches from Shirlington to Purcellville, runs east-west through the town. It has markers every half-mile, allowing those who use it to keep track of how far they want to go. Our virtual trip in this column begins at about mile 20, in the Municipal Parking Lot on Station Street.

The very first piece of history that we pass just east of mile marker 20 is the red caboose. Although the caboose did not actually come from the W&OD Railroad, it serves as a reminder of the role the railroad played in the development of the town. The caboose arrived in Herndon in 1989, the culmination of an effort led by local resident and railroad aficionado George Moore. (For more about the railroad and Herndon's red caboose, see our October 17, 2010 column, "More Than a Local Landmark.")

In 1857, the Alexandria, Loudoun and Hampshire Railroad laid the railroad bed and constructed a 20' x 55' passenger and freight house (depot) on what was known as Section 23, so named because it was 23 miles from the line's origin in Alexandria. Interrupted only during the Civil War when the track through the town was destroyed, trains ran through Herndon until 1968.

In 1858, a post office was planned for the area, and a name was needed. The first two names suggested by local residents were rejected as they were already in use elsewhere in the state. The headlines of the day were filled with news of the great maritime tragedy of the *S.S. Central America*, which sank in a hurricane off the coast of Cape Hatteras on September 12, 1857. The brave captain—William Lewis Herndon—perished with the ship after doing all he could to save both the ship and the passengers. Legend holds that a survivor of the shipwreck came forth at a meeting held to discuss possible post office names and suggested it be named for the ship's heroic captain. As a result, the post office—which was located in the depot—and subsequently the town itself became known as Herndon. (For more about the depot see our December 12 column, "If Walls Could Talk.")

Just to the right of the depot is Herndon Town Hall. Built in 1938 as a public works project for FDR's Work Projects Administration, the building provided space for a new, larger post office on the first floor. There were offices for the mayor and town treasurer on the second floor, and a jail was located in the basement. The three original jail cells

remain today, and now are used for storage. In time, additional offices were added for the town manager and the police and several other town departments. Today, Town Hall has offices for the mayor and the town attorney along with constituent service offices for Dranesville District Supervisor John Foust and State Delegate Tom Rust and space for several community organizations.

Continuing east across Elden Street we pass another landmark in Herndon's history. Now known as the Adams-Green Funeral Home, the funeral home was established in 1885 by Thomas E. Reed. In later years it was operated by his son, Thomas E. Reed II. J. Berkley Green purchased the property and the business in 1954.

Several years later, Green began acquiring copies of old pictures of Herndon and the surrounding area. He placed them in a room in the funeral home that became known as the Herndon Room. Upon his death, the Herndon Historical Society received the 200+ image collection, which is now located in the Society's depot museum. Copies of some of these pictures also are still displayed in the Herndon Room in the funeral home, which is now owned by Chris and Kathryn Adams.

We find another pair of historic structures—the Kitty Kitchen house and the First Baptist Church of Herndon—as we approach mile marker 20.5. The Kitty Kitchen house, which is named for the colorful resident whose memories of Herndon are documented in the book, *Reminiscences of the Oldest Inhabitant, A Nineteenth Century Chronicle*, was built in 1861, at the outbreak of the Civil War. (For more about Kitty Kitchen, see our September 16, 2010 column, “Servin’ the Pies.”)

Just behind the Kitty Kitchen house is the First Baptist Church, which was built in 1900 with stone quarried on the property of Joseph J. Darlington, a prominent summer resident who donated the land for the church. (For more about J.J. Darlington, see our column of March 20, 2011, “Herndon’s Most Prominent Local Resident.”) A vanity dresser from Darlington’s home is on display in the depot museum.

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