

## **Sadie: Herndon's Most Famous Lady**

By Chuck Mauro

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In 1900, most of Fairfax County's 18,850 residents lived on farms, and the County was the state leader when it came to dairy products. Dairy farming continued to be the area's primary industry during the 1920s and 1930s, and it survived well into the 1950s. Until the dramatic influx of urban workers into the area in the second half of the century, the dairy farmer's life set the style and pace of life in the county.

One important factor in the success of dairy farming in the area around Herndon was the land itself. Its gently undulating terrain, which formed natural water depressions, coupled with the abundance of small streams or runs, made water easily available. This was essential to farmers who had to water their stock regardless of seasonal conditions.

In the late nineteenth century, reliance on the horse and wagon limited the distance that farmers could travel to deliver their milk by for processing. The advent of the morning "milk train" on the Washington & Old Dominion Railroad in 1912-13 extended the distance that milk from farms within a five-mile radius of Town could be transported. Every morning the milk train took the milk from the Herndon Depot to the D.C. area and returned the empty cans from the day before.

A symbol of the dominance of dairy farming in the Herndon area was the recognition of Ben Middleton's prize cow, Sadie, as "the best known Holstein in the world." Requiring three milkings a day, in three years she produced more than 30 tons of milk and 1 ton of butterfat. This was a truly impressive accomplishment, considering the fact that, in 1923—according to the Milk Producer's Association—the average milk cow in the state produced 2,511 pounds of milk per year and the average annual output for Fairfax County cows was 8,066 pounds.\*

Sadly, Sadie's fame was fleeting. Like Herndon's dairy farming days, it did not last. Sadie was struck and killed by a bolt of lightning in September 1925. The Middleton Farm—which was located just off of Centerville Road outside of Town—was lost during the intense redevelopment of that area in recent years.

\* Are you wondering why milk is measured in pounds rather than gallons? According to the *Illinois Partners Dairy Farm Fun Facts* website, milk is measured in pounds, not gallons, for the purpose of accuracy. It's difficult to total different measurements of volume. Cows are milked 2-3 times a day, so imagine having to add together 4 gallons, 3 quarts and 2 tablespoons in the morning, and 6 gallons, 1 quart, 3 pints and 2 teaspoons in the evening!