

Herndon's First Church

By Barbara Glakas

The first church to be built in Herndon remains today, at the corner of Center and Elden Streets.

The first church to be built in Herndon was the Northern Methodist Episcopal (M.E.) Church. It was built in 1872 on a tract of land formerly owned by Ancel St. John, a member of Herndon's first Town Council, and is still located at 800 Elden Street, at the corner of Elden and Center Streets. St. John was generally credited with founding the church.

In the mid-1800s, a number of New England families moved into the Herndon area, drawn by the milder climate and ease of access to Washington and Alexandria. As these various settlers began to move into the area, they began to form churches. The Methodists were the first. In 1857–1858, a few families organized the first Methodist congregation in the Herndon area. They worshipped in homes, in the Rocky Hill School House (which was either on Rock Hill Road or Ox Road, now Sterling) and, in good weather, in a grove of trees.

An effort was made in 1860 to build a church. Unfortunately, before the structure could be completed a severe windstorm blew it down and no further efforts were made for several years. After the Civil War, the congregation made another effort to build a church. Jacob Leonhardt gave the pulpit, and the pews were made by John Hough of Waterford, Virginia. A Sunday school had been organized by 1873, and the church was officially dedicated in 1882.

Herndon's Northern M.E. Church originally fell under the Baltimore Conference. Ministers were transferred every 3–5 years. Between 1875 and 1939, about 28 ministers served at the church. They lived at a parsonage located at what is now 808 Elden Street. In 1872, Daniel and Maria Cayler deeded that property to the Trustees of the church for \$50, with the contingency that it should be "kept, maintained and disposed of as a place of divine worship for the use of the ministry and membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church..." and, "...further trust that said premises or any part thereof may be used, kept, maintained and disposed of as a place of Parsonage for the use of the ministry of the said Church..."

The congregation used the church until about 1939. After the union of the branches of Methodism in 1939, the two Methodist congregations in Herndon decided to use the larger church building at 655 Spring Street, which was built in 1915. It became the Herndon United Methodist Church.

The Elden Street church and the parsonage were sold in about 1941. At a 1940 Board meeting, the decision was made to use the money from the sale to enlarge the church on Spring Street. The pulpit and pulpit furniture from the former Northern M.E. Church were refinished and used as an altar in the newly united church. In 1987, the United

Methodist congregation moved from its Spring Street location to a new location on Bennett Street.

The church building at 800 Elden Street later was used by American Legion Post #91. At one point it was a warehouse. In 1976, The Church of Jesus Christ purchased the building, and that congregation continues to meet there today. The structure at 808 Elden Street is a private residence.