

Old Town Council Minute Books: Part 2

By Carol Bruce

In our last column we shared some of the interesting—and occasionally amusing—insights into Herndon's past that can be found in the old Town Council minute books. Here are a few more. Once again, thank you to Town Clerk Viki Wellershaus and her staff for their assistance with this column.

There must have been some attendance issues at those early Council meetings, because on January 12, 1882, a resolution was approved stating that any member of the Council failing to attend a regular meeting “shall pay a fine of twenty-five cents for each failure, unless excused by unanimous vote of the Council at its next regular meeting.”

Today, the Herndon Department of Public Works is responsible for refuse and recycling collection, street maintenance, snow removal, and a host of other things. An action taken by the Town Council on March 6, 1886, marked what may well have been the beginning of the Town's public works efforts. At that meeting, a committee of three was appointed “to investigate the distance shade trees and hitching posts should be from the side of a street.”

Also in the public works department, on August 22, 1910, the Council hired Temple Jackson to act as Town Scavenger at a salary of \$25 per month. While that job title might evoke all kinds of interesting images, Mr. Jackson's job actually was to keep the streets clean. Apparently he wasn't too good at it; just seven months later, at their meeting of March 31, 1911, the Council removed him from his position and directed the mayor to employ a new Town Scavenger.

Issues associated with the behavior of teenage drivers are well documented today. Even the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has weighed in with a Teen Drivers Fact Sheet. That Fact Sheet says, among other things, “Teens are more likely than older drivers to speed and allow shorter headways (the distance from the front of one vehicle to the front of the next).” In the Town of Herndon, such concerns date back to 1920. Things apparently got so bad that, on November 20 of that year, the Town Clerk was instructed to write a letter to the principal of the public school, “requesting her to caution her pupils against fast or reckless driving and running of automobiles and other vehicles through the Town of Herndon, for there has [sic] been many complaints of their conduct on the streets of said Town.”

Teens weren't the only ones guilty of speeding, however; at a special meeting held on June 27, 1932, the Town Council approved a motion for the Mayor to appoint a committee “to hire a man, with car, to assist Sergeant Cockerille in checking fast and reckless driving in the corporation.” (*Vernon Cockerille, who served as the Town's sole law enforcement officer from 1924 until 1952, did not own or drive a car.*)

Sidewalk safety was another concern: On August 22, 1910, the Council passed an ordinance that restricted people from riding horses on the sidewalk except “at the regular crossing.” (A sidewalk was defined as “a walking place for pedestrians.”) And, on October 16, 1913, the Council approved a motion to strictly forbid roller skating on the sidewalk between the Methodist and Congregational churches.

Finally, issues associated with the behavior of the Town’s younger residents were not beyond the purview of those early Councils. On June 30, 1883, the Council passed a general Sunday ordinance that stated, in part, “[if] any collection of boys or other persons shall be found at any time within the limits of Herndon corporation playing at any game, or engaged in any act dangerous to themselves others, or which shall disturb the peace or quiet of the inhabitants therein, they shall if requested by any officer of, or person living within said corporation to discontinue such game and disturbance, if refuse or neglect to comply with such request be apprehended and taken before the Mayor...”

Apparently the problems persisted, because on August 2, 1915, the Council passed an ordinance specifying a 10:00 p.m. curfew for minors because, “the good order and peace of the community has been greatly disturbed.”