

Let There Be Light...And Clean Closets

By Carol Bruce

This is another in an occasional series of columns that looks at some of the interesting—and sometimes amusing—insights into Herndon’s past that can be found in the old Town Council minute books.

Exactly 100 years ago last month the Town began moving toward providing public utilities for its residents. On August 5, 1912, the Town Council passed the Electric Light Ordinance. It said, “it is deemed desirable by the Town Council of the Town of Herndon, Va. that electricity may be introduced into the said Town.” We’re not sure exactly when the contract to the first provider—the Herndon Light and Power Company—was awarded, but on January 7, 1916, the Town Sergeant reported that 16 lamps were lighted “every night when it is necessary and that it would be well to procure more.”

Street lamps were a matter of considerable interest. At the October 5, 1917, meeting it was agreed that they would be lit only until 11:00 p.m. rather than all night. Then, in April 1919, the Council decided that streets would be lit “from daylight-down till midnight; and morning service to begin at 4:30 a.m.” At the same meeting a delegation from Herndon Light and Power meet with the Council “for the purpose of arranging for additional Street-lights,” and a committee was appointed “to confer with the said Light and Power Co., or a delegation of the same, and select points or places for additional Street Lights.”

Three years later, a new contract was awarded. On August 15, 1922, the Town Council accepted a bid from Fairfax and Loudoun Light and Power Company to use the streets and highways, avenues and alleys of the Town “for the purpose of constructing, operating and maintaining, over, under and upon the same a system for the supply, transmission and distribution of electricity for light, heat, power and such other uses as the progress of the art may develop from time to time.”

On August 9, 1915, the Town Council passed an ordinance to grant a franchise to install a water system in the Town. The ordinance was, “ To provide for the granting by the Town of Herndon, Virginia, to a person or corporation hereafter to be ascertained in mode prescribed by law, the right to use the streets, alleys and avenues and all public places in the Town of Herndon, County of Fairfax and State of Virginia, for the purpose of placing therein or thereunder all pipes, conduits and tubes for a complete water and sewerage system, including manholes and all appliances necessary for a modern water and sewerage system, and to construct, operate and maintain the same, together with all necessary appliances, plants and power houses therefore.” The franchisee also was responsible for replacing and relaying or rebuilding any sidewalk or street “that may be disturbed by reason of the laying of such pipes....”

Speaking of streets, at the meeting of September 12, 1919, it was “unanimously agreed that the Road Committee employ a Tractor and Road-machine for one week to open up

all Side-ditches and smooth the main roads.” There were fewer roads back then and few if any were paved, but that one-week time frame still sounds pretty ambitious!

More on That Dilapidated Jail

In our August 19 column we noted that, on December 10, 1915, the Town Sergeant reported that the jail was in very bad condition and “not fit to incarcerate any prisoner.” We said at that time we were unsure if anything was ever done to correct the situation. In the course of additional reading we discovered that the Mayor did appoint a committee “to examine said building and make a report at the next meeting of the Council.” On January 7, 1916, the committee chairman reported that the present structure “is worthless, and not fit for repair.” Apparently they changed their minds, however, because at the January 11, 1918, meeting the Council appropriated \$3.25 for “repair work on the jail.”

And Last But Not Least...

Today, Town residents look forward to the fall and spring cleanup weeks, when they can put pretty much anything except hazardous waste out on their regular weekly trash collection day. It’s a great service, but nothing compared to what was available to residents in years past: On January 22, 1912, “It was decided that all Persons wishing their Closets cleaned should notify the Town Sergeant.” (Okay, in the interest of full disclosure, we suspect they may have been talking about outdoor privies—or “earth closets”—rather than linen closets, but we think it was still a pretty darn great service.)

Once again, thank you to Town Clerk Viki Wellershaus and her staff for their assistance in compiling much of the information we’ve used in these columns.