

## **Back to the Future: Herndon's first Metro...100 Years Ago!**

By Richard Downer

A 100-year-old newspaper article provides a glimpse back at the origins of Herndon's 21st century reality.

At the Herndon Depot Museum there is a 100-year-old copy of *The Observer* newspaper, dated October 12, 1912. (*The Observer* name of 1912 was the inspiration for the name of the more recent *Herndon Observer* newspaper that served Herndon from 1976 until 2010.) The headline on a front-page article read, "Electric Cars In Operation - New Schedule Convenient and Satisfactory—Some Operating Troubles—Changes in Mail Service."

With Metro opening at the Wiehle Avenue station in 2013 and scheduled to reach Herndon and beyond in 2017-18, this document gives new meaning to the old saying, "History repeats itself," and the more recent expression, "Back to the future!"

Following is an abbreviated version of the article that appeared in *The Observer*.

ELECTRIC CARS IN OPERATION - Intense interest has been shown by people of this section in the operation of the new electric service on the Bluemont division [Georgetown through Herndon to Leesburg]. On Sunday the Washington & Old Dominion put into effect an entirely new schedule, operating five electric trains each way. Everything worked smoothly, and crowds turned out at each station to see the novelty of electric cars on the old steam road. Monday, eleven electric trains were put into operation, and the troubles began to develop. Nearly all the cars were behind time, especially those bringing people home from the city, the Herndon commuters not reaching home until late at night, an accidental turning off of the current stopping the entire system for several hours. There was some improvement in the running of the cars on Tuesday, and on Wednesday the schedule was much better maintained.

The eleven-train schedule seems to give general satisfaction, and when the operating department has mastered the situation and the force is fully trained, the service will undoubtedly far surpass anything heretofore offered [in] this part of the state. Baggage, express and mail are handled by separate electric trains, and milk now goes in at 8:44[AM]. Below is a condensed schedule showing the times of trains at Herndon:

Eastbound, daily - 5.45, 6.30, 7.05, 7.35, 8.22, 8.44, 10.55, 11.54, 3.15, 5.05, 7.25. Sunday - 8.44, 10.05, 1.45, 3.35, 5.51.

Westbound, daily - 6.54, 8.44, 9.13, 11.08, 2.55, 3.45, 5.49, 6.05, 6.35, 7.05, 7.36.

The 6.30 and 7.05 cars are Herndon specials, starting at Herndon in the morning and they return in the evening but go no further than Herndon. All trains are scheduled to stop at Falls Church, Herndon, and Leesburg, but stop at all other stations only on signal. The Herndon

specials are scheduled to make the run to and from Georgetown in 55 minutes, and the one car, leaving at 8.22, is given 48 minutes to make the run to Georgetown.

Earlier arrival of the morning mail permits the prompt departure of the rural carriers and facilitates the rural delivery service. The lateness of the evening mail, however, has proved a serious inconvenience in the distribution of the Washington evening papers.

This article gives us a glimpse back at the origins of Herndon's 21st century reality. In 1912, Herndon's major export was milk from the many dairy farms in and around the town. While most residents shopped in Washington, commuting to work in DC was just beginning. With the arrival of Metro, history will repeat itself and take Herndon "Back to the Future." But, in 2018, will we be able to make it from Herndon to Georgetown in 48 minutes?

We invite you to read the entire front page from that October 12, 1912 paper and view hundreds of photos and artifacts of Herndon's past at the Depot Museum. It is open every Sunday from noon to 3:00 p.m.