

The Eldenwood Fruit Farm

By Barbara Glakas

Dotted on various properties, which lay between Elden Street and Locust Street, are a few old red barns, big and stately, some with a slight lean, showing their age.

These red barns sit in an area of Herndon known as The Eldenwood Fruit Farm, a farm dating back to the late 1800's. This area is a 12.5 acre section of land that sits between Elden and Locust Streets, and extends from Center Street to the intersection of Locust Street and Sterling Road.

In about 1803-04, Fernando Fairfax sold 370 acres of land in the downtown Herndon area to James and John Coleman. John Coleman – a Revolutionary War veteran -- built the first house in Herndon in the vicinity of the present day Lifestyle Condominiums along Center Street. Coleman's house was known as Elden (or Eldon), or the Elden Plantation House.

The origins of the name "Elden" or "Eldon" are not fully clear. Some early references show the spelling as "Eldon" but the first official map of Herndon published in 1878 showed the main thoroughfare through Herndon as being "Elden Street." Some speculate that the name could have been derived from John and Mary McKeldon, who owned the Coleman house from 1856-1866. But it was most likely derived from John Coleman himself.

Kitty Kitchen Hanna (1830-1907), who wrote a first-hand account of her life in Herndon, is quoted as saying:

"Susan Critcher, my great grandmother's stepdaughter, married John Coleman, same as built Elden place years ago, and named the main street of this town."

The Coleman land passed down through members of the Coleman family, including James and Sarah Bland, and Samuel and Sara Coleman. Later, portions of this land passed to Thomas Carper, Thomas and Elizabeth Cox, John McKeldon, Ulysses and Susan Curtis, Anna Gilbert Ward, Thomas King, and Richard and Elizabeth Cissell.

In 1886 the Cissells sold a 165-acre parcel to J. [John] Luther Bowers, trustee for his wife, Alice Bowers. This land encompassed a large swath of downtown Herndon, a section south of Elden Street, including the Spring Street area, the south end of Center Street (including the Jefferson Mews and Life Style Condominiums) and the Herndon Middle School area.

Donald Le Vine, who wrote an extensive history of Herndon's early land use ("*Herndon, The Land: 1649-1900*") noted that the relationship between J. Luther and Alice Bowers seemed to be intriguing or unusual, surmising that either there was distrust or friction between them, or that Alice may not have been totally capable of taking care of herself. As the deed was written, J. Luther Bowers did not really own any of the land, but was the trustee for Alice.

According to the deeds, a majority of the land was in, *“Trust for sole and separate use of the said Alice C. Bowers, for and during the term of her natural life, free from control of her husband and from all liability for his debts, contracts, engagements and at [her]... death,, to pass to her children...”* Mr. and Mrs. Bowers had six children.

Another section of the land – a long rectangular area of about 12.5 acres – was to be held *“in trust for the sole and separate use of the said Alice C. Bowers free from the control of her husband and from all liability for his debts, contracts and engagement, with power and authority in the said Trustee [J. Luther] to sell and convey by deed in which Alice C. Bowers shall unite the said land as a whole or in parcels.”* Therefore, J. Luther is excluded from real control of the land, but was expected to participate in any sale of the land.

Mr. Bowers experimented with fruit farming on this part of the Elden Farm between Elden and Locust Streets. It is what he called The Eldenwood Fruit Farm.

What types of fruit were grown on the fruit farm? If we only had to guess we might conclude that some hints are given in some of the nearby street names. School Street was once named Mulberry Street. There is also the nearby Peach Tree Street. There are wild black berry bushes that still grow near the Middle School, and one current resident remembers apple trees standing near the intersection of Locust and Center Streets.

But the real evidence came in a USDA bulletin called *“Insect Life,”* published in 1889-89, that talked about the effects of insects on agriculture. One article in this bulletin spoke about the problems Mr. J. Luther Bowers of Herndon was having with the defoliation of this plum and cherry trees, apparently caused by attacks of a type of beetle called *Diabrotica*. While the beetle partly devastated these trees, he indicated they had not attacked his apple and pear trees. It was also mentioned that his land had melons the previous year. As a result of his consultation with the USDA, Mr. Bowers said he sprayed 650 plum and cherry trees, as well as his Hansel raspberries, which reportedly helped decrease the number of beetles. In a subsequent USDA bulletin published in 1891 Mr. Bowers referred to his apricots and peaches.

In 1890 Mr. Bowers subdivided the 12.5 acres of his Eldenwood Fruit Farm property into 27 lots, and started selling the parcels. Shortly thereafter several houses were built on these lots which still stand today.

The red barns harken back to this era, but it is unknown whether the barns were part of the Bowers’s fruit farm, or whether they were built along with the first homes on these lots. It is surmised that the barns were most likely used to house the horse and carriages of these early home owners.

- The red barn behind the home at 940 Locust Street originally belonged to the house at 650 School Street, which was built in about 1893.
- The red barn on Spruce Street, which now belongs to the house at 826 Locust Street, originally belonged to the house at 825 Elden Street, which was built in 1890.

- Another red barn belongs to the house 911 Elden Street, which was built in about 1895.

By the mid-1890's Mr. Bowers's name is seen on voter registration documents in Willits, California -- and later in Uriah, California -- both north of San Francisco. He is listed on those documents as a native of Virginia with his occupation being "Fruitman." Herndon resident, Virginia Wynkoop, who died in 1979 at the age of 100, said Mr. Bowers "*went back to California where he had owned a home and raised his family up until 1886.*" He died in 1917 at the age of 67 and is buried in Morgan Hill, California.

Alice Bowers stayed in Herndon and died in 1939. The children divided and disposed of the property. Mrs. Bowers was buried in Berryville, Virginia. Her tombstone says that she was the daughter of Sarah and Henry Huyett, but there is no mention of her husband.

Today, the legal description -- for tax and real estate purposes -- of the 12.5 acre strip of land between Elden Street and Locust Street, is still referred to today as The Eldenwood Fruit Farm.