

50 Years of the Herndon Historical Society

By Barbara Glakas

In this year, 2021, we have decided to take moment to toot our own horn and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Herndon Historical Society.

The whole effort started in 1970 when the Town of Herndon government started discussing what to do with the Herndon depot, which had been abandoned after the trains stopped running on the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad in 1968. On the table was a discussion about tearing down the building to make room for additional parking for the businesses along Lynn and Station Streets.

Believing that the depot was a historic structure, and the reason the town of Herndon existed, a group of concerned residents, organized by resident Richard Downer, began meeting and campaigning to save the depot. Their campaign worked and, by a close one-vote margin of the Herndon Town Council, the depot was saved. Shortly afterwards, the group of residents filed incorporation papers and the Herndon Historical Society was born on 1971. Allen Smith was elected as its first President. Other initial Board members included Richard Peck, Elizabeth Bennett, Holden Harrison, William Jackson, Charles Liddle and Phillip Thienel.

The next major task was for the Society to work with the Town government to determine what to do with the depot. The Town owned the building but the land it sat on belonged to the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority. In 1979 the Town nominated the depot building for inclusion on the Virginia and National Registers of Historic Places. And in 1982 the Town entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Park Authority in which it was agreed that the depot building could only be used for “public recreational, historical or cultural purposes consistent with the Historic Landmark designation of the Depot Building.”

The Historical Society worked with the Town to renovate the building and moved forward with plans to sublease the building in order to turn the depot into a museum. The museum officially opened in 1981.

After 40 years, the Herndon Depot Museum is still going strong, but the Herndon Historical Society is much more than just a museum. Part of the Society’s organizational mission is to discover, collect, document and preserve selected materials that may help to establish, educate or illustrate the history of Herndon. We also bring together those people who are interested in our history. And we collaborate with Town officials to support the preservation of historic records, buildings, monuments, and markers.

Over the course of the last 50 years, we have done that in a variety of ways. The early years were very busy. As mentioned earlier, those who were to first form the Society saved the Herndon Depot from being destroyed and made it into a town museum. Society members also either led or assisted in the effort to save the historic gas house on Lynn Street, and the historic well house on the golf course. The Society was also involved in advocating for the town’s historic preservation district, which was later included on the National Registry of Historic Places. And the Society also led the effort to bring the red caboose to town.

The Society established a Historic Home Registry program in order to document and highlight historic homes and buildings. We established a website that has a wealth of archived information on it about Herndon's history. We host guest speakers at our public meetings who talk about local history. We have organized reenactments of Mosby's Raid, the only Civil War action to occur in the town of Herndon. And we have hosted ship reunions of veterans from the WWII ship, the *USS Herndon*, the ship that led the armada in the Normandy invasion.

Over the course of many years, we have continued with our mission. We continue to open our museum to the public, having added many new or improved exhibits. We were involved in saving the historic stone Carroll House in Runnymede Park from being demolished, and we continue to make improvements to the grounds of that house and to document and promote its history. We also conduct a variety of tours – for school groups, scout groups, family groups, friend groups and any other groups - of the Herndon Depot Museum, the Carroll House, the caboose, and the historic district of downtown Herndon.

On our Facebook page (www.Facebook.com/HerndonHistory) we post monthly stories about Herndon's history as well as many other articles and historic photographs. We conduct train shows twice per year. We were part of the town's Historic Marker committee, which resulted in signs being erected around town that commemorate various historic sites. We also sell a variety of Herndon-related merchandise.

In addition, we have collaborated with many other non-profit groups. We participate in the annual NatureFest to educate the public about the history of Runnymede Park. We have participated in the Third-Thursdays Arts Crawls, the Annual Holiday Homes Tour and the WinterMarkt. We also represent Herndon at the Fairfax County History Commission's annual conference. And we act as a clearinghouse of historical information for residents who are researching their properties or Herndon ancestors, or for town staff who need historical information for comprehensive planning.

Join us! [Membership form, 2021.pdf \(herndonhistoricalsociety.org\)](#) . We are very proud of our accomplishments. We love history and love sharing history. And we look forward to the next 50 years!

About this column: "Remembering Herndon's History" is a regular Herndon Patch feature offering stories and anecdotes about Herndon's past. The articles are written by members of the Herndon Historical Society. Barbara Glakas is a member. A complete list of "Remembering Herndon's History" columns is available on the Historical Society website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org.

The Herndon Historical Society operates a small museum that focuses on local history. It is housed in the Herndon Depot in downtown Herndon on Lynn Street and is open every Sunday from noon until 3:00. Visit the Society's website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org, and the Historical Society's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/HerndonHistory> for more information.

Note: The Historical Society is seeking volunteers to help keep the museum open each Sunday. If you have an interest in local history and would like to help, contact HerndonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com.