

## Herndon's 1918 Bastille Day Celebration

By Barbara Glakas

When the First World War erupted in Europe in 1914, President Wilson pledged neutrality for the United States, a position that many Americans favored at the time. However, several U.S. ships traveling to Britain were eventually damaged or sunk by German mines. By 1915, Germany announced unrestricted warfare against all ships that entered the waters around Britain, a close U.S. ally and trading partner. Shortly thereafter, a German ship sunk an American vessel, the *William P. Frye*. Subsequently, a British-owned ocean liner, the *RMS Lusitania*, was torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Ireland, killing 1,198 passengers, including 128 Americans. In April of 1917, the U.S. House and Senate voted overwhelmingly to declare war against Germany, marking America's formal entrance into WWI.

Bastille Day is a French National Day - also known as The *Fête de la Fédération* - and is celebrated in France on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July each year. It commemorates the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille in 1789, which marked a turning point in the French Revolution.

With war tensions and feelings of patriotism high, a Bastille Day celebration was held in Herndon in July of 1918, in support of our French allies. A July issue of *The Observer* newspaper covered the event, describing how over two thousand Virginians from Fairfax, neighboring counties, and from Washington D.C., attended the great celebration.

Speakers at the event included Fairfax County resident and Virginia State Senator, Robert Walton Moore, and former Virginia Governor, Andrew Jackson Montague. Also present were two Lieutenants from the French High Commission.

The speakers were met at the entrance to Darlington's Grove, a property with a Victorian home and a large stand of trees, formerly located near the intersection of Monroe and Van Buren Streets, once owned by prominent Herndon summer resident, Joseph J. Darlington. The speakers were met there by a Marine Band from Quantico and Sunday school children. The band played the Marseillaise - the national anthem of France - while the children presented flowers as they wore the colors of France. "America" was then sung as the band played.

Glorious speeches were made. Mr. Moore told a poetic story of Colonial days, how the young Lafayette left his family and career to bring his fortune and sword to help the American colonists who were struggling against tyranny. He noted how in the American fight for freedom there were more Frenchmen than Americans fighting. As Mr. Moore completed his speech he left his audience glowing, in gratitude toward the Frenchmen who spoke next.

As one of the French lieutenants stood wearing his Cross of Legion of Honor, the English Military Cross, as well as other distinguished awards, his colleague translated one of his citations.

“Lieutenant Levier, 110<sup>th</sup> Regiment, an officer of admirable bearing, who though unrecovered from two serious wounds, insisted upon returning to the front. Then, paralyzed in the right arm, blinded by a grenade, he held to his post until the last moment. Lieutenant Levier was like the spirit of France – cruelly wounded but undaunted, with more radiant vision than the sighted, with greater strength than the unwounded.”

He spoke of the need among the farmers of his own country for the food that the Americans were sending, due to the depletion in production and to the increased population that had entered their country. He told the mothers that French and American boys were already brothers in arms, and how there was no doubt that if all the allies “stood hand in hand, heart to heart, soul to soul, there could come only victory.”

Virginia’s former Governor Montague told how, when France came into the war, “she had not begged for help, but had smiled her need into our faces and hearts.”

After the speeches were concluded, a blessing was made, and parents gathered their children around the speaker’s stand to shake hands with the guests. The band then played the Star Spangled Banner, and the Sunday school escort led the way to the rail car at Herndon’s Depot station. Local citizens had appropriately decorated the speaker stand and rail car in the colors of France and America which created a patriotic setting. Trucks of flour had been donated by the citizens of Herndon and others in the vicinity. The Herndon Milling Company ground some of the donated flour. The first sack was loaded by Governor Montague.

Members of the reception committee included prominent Herndon residents, Dr. Charles Russell, Dr. Ernest Robey and Mr. Russell Lynn, “assisted by the whole town, kept open house for the multitude of guests from afar.” Mrs. Harry Bready and Mrs. Russell Lynn had a reception for the twenty four men in the Quantico’s Marine band. “They were fought for to be entertained in the homes of Herndon.”

With spontaneity and enthusiasm, Herndon responded to the call of need with great pride.

-----  
*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](http://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](http://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](mailto:HerndonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com).*