

Local Fraternal Organizations

By Barbara Glakas

There is evidence of some fraternal organizations that used to exist in Herndon's early history, with one that still exists today.

The Good Templars

On Herndon's first known map - an 1878 map drawn by cartographer G.M. Hopkins – there is a building marked “Good Tem. Hall.” This was located on the west side Station Street, at the intersection of Pine Street. This is currently the spot where the parking lot is located between the Great Harvest Bread Company and the Dominion Animal Hospital. “Good Tem.” refers to Good Templar.

An old 1893 land deed referred to that lot as “the lot of Mrs. W. D. Sweetzer and known as the ‘Good Templar’ lot.” William Drinkwater Sweetzer once had a house on that lot. He was known to be one of Herndon's early teachers. He also served on Herndon's first Town Council in 1879. Additionally, he served, off and on, as the town's postmaster between the years 1882 and 1901, and he also kept a store in the Herndon train station house. Old photos show a Post Office sign on his house. Sweetzer had bought this lot in 1887.

Well before Sweetzer owned this lot it was owned by Ancel St. John. St. John and man named J.H. Thompson had bought over 400 acres of land in Herndon back in 1865. They divided it up into two 200-acre tracts. Most of St. John's tract was in downtown Herndon. St. John divided his land into smaller lots and sold them off in the 1860s and 70s.

In 1878, St. John sold "1 village lot to Thomas Van Deusen, Howard W. Blanchard and Benjamin H. Bready, trustees of the Sweet Home Lodge No. 12, Independent Order of Good Templ[ar]s of Herndon, for \$50.” Thomas Van Duesen was a farmer and land owner on the northeast side of town. Howard W. Blanchard was the Herndon's first Town Clerk in 1879. And Benjamin H. Bready was a farmer and the older brother of Herndon's first Mayor, Isaiah Bready. Another Herndon gentleman who was mentioned in an 1889 newspaper as a Herndon Templar was Lycurgus E. Hutchison, also a farmer – as many were back then – and a Civil War veteran, who rode with Col. Mosby during the Civil War, and lived on Dranesville Road.

This organization – the Independent Order of Good Templars – was not the same as the Knights Templars, the ancient Catholic crusaders allegiant to the Pope. Instead, this group was an International Temperance Brotherhood. Members had to believe in the existence of God and had to be willing to take a lifelong pledge. The pledge involved, a) rendering a cheerful obedience to the rules of the Order, b) keeping the secret the private work of the Order, c) acting in a brotherly way to his fellow members, and 4) doing all in his power to advance the cause of Temperance.

The unnamed village of Herndon was coming into its own in the 1850s and 60s. There was a strong temperance movement during that time. The Virginia General Assembly passed a local

option act which allowed each local jurisdiction to could vote on whether to issue liquor licenses within its own boundaries. In 1879, the same year the Town of Herndon was incorporated, the Dranesville District, of which Herndon is a part, voted again the sale of liquor by a vote of 146-117.

No minutes of Herndon's Sweet Home Lodge #12 have been found, so it is unknown what specific activities they may have engaged in. Good Templar activities around Fairfax County can be seen in historic newspaper listings up through the late 1920s. No doubt the 21st Amendment which repealed prohibition must have impacted the activities of these organizations.

The Herndon lodge may have folded or changed location earlier. This assumption is made because the trustees of the Sweet Home Lodge divided their land in two portions, selling the two portions of their lot to W.D. Sweetzer and Alonzo Downing in 1887. Sweetzer later bought Downing's portion in 1891.

However, the Station Street lot was not the only lot that the Herndon Good Templars owned. Another 1890 deed showed that three trustees of Herndon's Sweet Home Lodge – James W. Taylor, Benjamin H. Bready and George A. Williams – bought a lot on Spring Street. The deed said that the land was "to be held by them for the use and purpose of said organization." It is not believed that they ever constructed a building on that lot, because in 1926 Blanchard – evidently still associated with the Templars – sold the land to the Herndon Fortnightly Club and Library Association. The Fortnightly Club built a new library on that lot soon after.

The Freemasons

The next fraternal organization in Herndon was the Masonic Lodge. Freemasonry – often referred to as “Masonry” – is one of the world's oldest fraternal organizations. Nine separate Virginia Lodges came together to establish The Grand Lodge of Virginia in 1778. Its current website states that its mission is to “teach and perpetuate a way of life that promotes the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God and to assist Lodges to grow and prosper,” with the vision of being a “premier organization composed of men of integrity and character, who are honest, true to their word, believe in God, are devoted to family, charitable in their community, and courteous and helpful to each other.”

The first record of Masons living in Northern Virginia dates to 1769, with a record of two Masons who lived in Prince William County and were members of a Fredericksburg Masonic Lodge, which had existed since 1752. The first Lodge in Prince William County was chartered in 1797 as the Dumfries Lodge #50.

Herndon's Masonic Lodge was first organized as Freedom Lodge #264 in 1896. A year later it was officially chartered as Herndon Lodge #264 on December 9, 1897. There were 27 charter members of the Herndon Lodge. For seventy years, meetings of the Herndon Lodge were conducted in a variety of places around town. The first meeting room for the Lodge in 1896 was

in the Garrett building (formerly located on the northeast corner of Elden and Center Streets). In 1907 the Lodge moved to the Walker Building (formerly located at the corner of Station and Pine Streets), which burned in 1917 in a big fire in Herndon's downtown business district. That fire destroyed many Lodge records. They then moved to a building owned by Thomas Reed in 1918.

The Herndon Lodge was dormant during the 1918 time period, as the Master and all the officers of the Lodge were at war during WWI. The years 1920-1923 became a very active period in which 35 new members became Masons. The Lodge moved to Chamblin's Drug Store (formerly located at the corner of Station and Lynn Streets) in 1921. There was another membership surge in 1928 with 113 new members. The Lodge continued to grow. They started a building fund in hopes that they would one day have a permanent home. Their dream came true in 1969 when they purchased the former St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, located at 820 Elden Street, at the northwest corner of Elden and Grace Streets.

The Herndon Masonic Lodge continues to be active today, promoting brotherhood and doing other good works such as blood drives and work to support Shriners Hospitals for Children.

The Odd Fellows

Another fraternal organization that was once located in Herndon was the Odd Fellows. The Odd Fellows, or Odd Fellowship, were known to be in England as early as the 1700s. An Independent Order of Odd Fellows was officially organized in the United States in 1819.

According to the current Odd Fellow's organizational website, they promote Friendship, Love and Truth, and their mission is to,

“provide a framework that promotes personal and social development. Lodge degrees and activities aim to improve and elevate every person to a higher, nobler plane; to extend sympathy and aid to those in need, making their burdens lighter, relieving the darkness of despair; to war against vice in every form, and to be a great moral power and influence for the good of humanity.”

Some sources say the Odd Fellows were formed as a way to “care for their membership in a time when there were no systems in place to insure one's welfare, health or job protection.” Other sources say the Lodges were originally formed “by working men for social purposes, and for giving the brethren aid and assisting them to obtain employment when out of work.”

There are also varying explanations for the name “Odd Fellows.” One explanation is, “that common laboring men should associate themselves together and form a fraternity for social unity and fellowship and for mutual help was such a marked violation of the trends of the times (England in the 1700's) that they became known as ‘peculiar’ or ‘odd,’ and hence they were derided as ‘Odd Fellows.’”

An alternate explanation is that “the original Odd Fellows were men who were engaged in various or odd trades that did not have the numbers to form the security provided by a trade guild or union like the Masons. These workers of ‘odd jobs’ banded together and initially met in the back rooms of pubs, paying a penny per week in dues that would help members who fell ill or had passed away.”

Historical newspaper indexes show that there were Odd Fellow Lodges around the Northern Virginia region as early as the 1850s, including in Alexandria, Falls Church, Fairfax County, and Herndon.

According to AfroVirginia.org:

“Black fraternal orders like the Odd Fellows were popular during the 19th century as places where blacks could hone their business and economic skills, as well as socialize. White Odd Fellows, however, objected to black chapters, and the first black lodge in 1843 had to get its charter from the older organization based in England. The English order also granted a charter to the first black Odd Fellows of Alexandria, in 1846. Membership soared after the Civil War when restrictions on gatherings of African Americans were lifted.”

In 1902, Charles H. Brooks wrote a book entitled, *The Official History and Manual of the Grand Order of Odd Fellows in American*. He explained that Odd Fellowship did not spring out of Free Masonry:

“The Order of Odd Fellows is truly a ‘Friendly Society,’ and always has been. Its fundamental principles and distinguishing characteristics are as different from those of Masonry as chalk is from cheese. The rich and poor, the high and low, the Prince and Peasant, men of very rank and station in life are, and always have been, admitted to Odd Fellowship on equal footing.”

Brooks also stated:

“The free colored men residing in New York City and Philadelphia organized and maintained societies for literary improvement and social pleasures many years before the Civil War. The thinking in these societies soon saw the need of societies for mutual aid and protection in case of sickness and distress.”

One thing we do know is that Herndon’s Odd Fellows Hall was located on the western edge of town in Oak Grove, then one of Herndon’s African American neighborhoods. Its building was located directly across the street from the current location of the Oak Grove Baptist Church, on Dominion Lane, near the intersection of Hall Road. Due to boundary changes, this location is now considered to be part of Sterling.

The Herndon chapter of the Odd Fellows, called the Autumnal Lodge #3571, was formed in 1892. A man named Lewis James bought the .7-acre lot where the Herndon Odd Fellows Hall was located, and presumably built the hall as well, a wood-framed building. The known early trustees of the lodge included James F. Jackson, Silas Walker, and Archie T. Shirley.

One former African American Herndon resident named Frederick Washington, who was born in 1926 and spent much time in Oak Grove, remembered the Odd Fellow Hall there:

“They [Oak Grove] also had an “Odd Fellows Hall,” a fraternity of odd fellows, like the Lyons or Masons or whatever. They had a big hall right from Oak Grove Church, which rotted down. But we used to have dances in that place, it was a big building and they would have dances in there and that’s where everybody gathered in Oak Grove, young people danced and had a good time.

“The county line goes down Rock Hill Road by the Police Department [now Herndon’s Zoning Enforcement Office]. But they changed the county line [in 1954]. Oak Grove Church used to be in Fairfax County. Now its in Loudoun County. Right across from the new [Oak Grove] church used to be Odd Fellows Hall. At one time that straddled the county line. The kitchen in the back of that was in Loudoun, and the rest of the hall was in Fairfax. They changed the county line all the way through there.”

The activity of Herndon’s Odd Fellows lodge had waned to a near halt during World War II. One Oak Grove Church member believed that after the war, some of the Odd Fellows had either died, were injured, or moved away and never returned. However, the Odd Fellows stayed together as a group, even after their lodge building was gone, meeting inside the church building instead. In 2018 the Oak Grove Baptist Church sold the former Odd Fellows land to a developer.

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.

