

A Story of Yankeetown

By Barbara Glakas

The Weekly Comet was a newspaper that was briefly published in Herndon in the mid-1880s. It published news, editorials, poetry, stories, puzzles and word games. In the January 1886 edition of this newspaper we found an interesting allegory that had no other title other than “Chronicles, Chapter 2.” Unfortunately, we were unable to find Chapter 1.

By 1886 the Civil War had been over for eleven years. After the war many northerners came south and bought up affordable land in Herndon. (One notable exception was Mayor Isaiah Bready, whose father had first invested in Herndon land in the 1850s). The writer of this 1886 tale characterizes parts of the story in northern and southern terms. It speaks of people from “Yankeeland,” described as people from the “north country,” and how they are now living in a city called “Yankeetown,” an obvious reference to the town of Herndon.

In Herndon’s early days there was somewhat of a power struggle between the long-time Herndon area farmers, and the post-Civil War northern transplants. When the Town was incorporated in 1879 the men who sat on the first Town Council were all northern transplants. It appears the story reflects some power struggles and cultural differences going on in town. Some Herndon farmers may have also experienced some feelings of resentment, in that the northerners had a different way of life, were now controlling things, and were perceived to look down on the Virginians.

Some of the people named in the story - who were described as coming from certain households or “tribes” - were men who sat on Herndon’s first Town Council: Mayor Isaiah Bready, Councilmen Stephen Killam and Councilman Ancel St. John. Also mentioned was Herndon’s first Town Clerk, Howard Blanchard, as well as Herndon’s first Town Sergeant, Charles Burton. Elisha Dyer was also mentioned, the Town Sergeant who took over after Burton’s short stint, and was known for locking up livestock that got loose and roamed the streets of Herndon. Animal owners had to pay a fee to retrieve their animals from the Town Sergeant’s pound. Elisha’s daughter once recalled how the whole contentious affair caused her father to start carrying a side arm.

Other gentlemen who were mentioned in the story include large landowners such as Lyman Ballou, Alonzo Downing and Edwin Farnham, the latter two having come from Washington, D.C.

The story talks about the construction of a synagogue. There are no records of a synagogue being constructed in Herndon, so we surmise that it might be a metaphor for Herndon’s Congregational Church which was constructed in 1873 at the corner of Pine and Monroe Streets. The Farnhams, Burtons and St. Johns were instrumental in helping to organize that church. The name Lysander in the story is a reference to Reverend Lysander Burbank, who was known to be associated with

the Congregational Church. The church had a steep roof and a high spire atop its church tower, which fit the description in the story. In time, Herndon's Congregational Church merged with the Herndon and Floris Presbyterian Churches, to become what is now the Trinity Presbyterian Church. The old Congregational Church building on Pine Street burned down in 1980.

This story about Yankeetown is reprinted in full below. We will leave it up to you to interpret the meaning of this allegory.

"Chronicles, Chapter 2.

"Now those who came from the north country which is called Yankeeland, and did abide in the borders of Dixie, even in the city which is called Yankeetown, there were Curtis of the house of Burton and his sons. Stephen of the house of Killam, whose birthplace was in a far country, even the country by the great salt sea, which inhabitants are called Bluenoses, and Isaac his son; Alonzo of the tribe of Downing and his sons; Ozias the son of Jeremiah, the son of Ozias and his sons; William the tribe of Benjamin. (He was a mighty man in singing); Edward the son of Silas of the tribe of Rueben, George, whose surname was Lincoln; Ancel of the tribe of St. John; Lyman whose surname was Ballou and Hannah his wife. Daniel whose surname was Wells, and his sons Myron of the tribe of Headbreakers.

"These are but a few of the chief of those Yankees who did build Yankeetown. Now they feared the Lord greatly and said to one another, let us build a synagogue, that we may worship the Lord after the manner of our fathers. So they called a solemn assembly and they chose three men to have oversight of the building of the house of the Lord. Now the three chosen were Edward the son of Silas of the tribe of Rueben, and Edwin the son of Ozias, and Edwin the son whose surname was Farnham; men who were skilled in all kinds of cunning workmanship of beams and braces especially. So they had the oversight of the house of the Lord and all the people brought their substance to build withal. Moreover, no account was kept with the three overseers because they dealt faithfully. So the synagogue was completed within and without, with windows of glass, and the roof was steep so that no boys might climb thereon. Moreover they did build a high tower on the one end thereof. So when it was done they called another solemn assembly, and dedicated the house to the worship of God and their fathers, but they said nothing about oyster suppers or strawberry festivals.

"Now when the synagogue was finished and all things were ready, they sent to the Chief Priest of the country whence they came to send them a priest. And he sent them a priest, one Lysander, a godly man, and well versed in the scriptures. So they worshipped the Lord God after the manner of their fathers.

“Now it was so that the young men of Yankeetown would not take the wives of the daughters of Dixie, so they took wives from among their own people, because the maidens of Yankeetown were fair to look upon, moreover they were skilled to make brown bread and beans, doughnuts and pumpkin pies and to play all kinds of instruments of music, such as piano, the organ, the sewing machine, the washboard and the tomboy.

“Moreover they spoke with tongues, so they said to their fathers do not give us the sons of Dixie to wife, and it came to pass that the people of Dixie said one to another, These Yankees are too big for their breeches, let us take them down a peg. So they turned out their hogs which did devour the standing corn of the Yankees. Now the Yankees were exceedingly subtle, above all the people upon the face of the earth, and it came to pass that the swine which did eat their standing corn did no more return to their owners. Then it was fulfilled the saying: The hog that eateth the Yankees standing corn is as the beasts that perish, but the people of Dixie know not what become of them, nor why the grapevines of the Yankees did bear much fruit.

“So the Yankees did increase and multiply greatly and did possess the regions around Yankeetown. And Charles the son of Curtis of the house of Burton took to wife Anna the daughter of George of the house of Lincoln, and Howard the son of Ozias the son of Jeremiah, said to Stephen of the house of Killam of the tribe of the Bluenoses, give me your daughter to wife. But Stephen said I will not, except thou abide with me, so he abode with him.

“Now in those days the people of Yankeetown said, because of the hogs and the cattle of the uncircumcised round about our city and have gates thereto and whatever four-footed beast from the country round about shall come through the gates or whatever one from within the city shall run at large shall be in durance vile until its owner pay tribute. So we will become rich and mighty. So they built them a pound. And they chose a wise man, one Isaiah of the house of Bready who was learned in the law because he had been long in the land, him they chose to be their Chief Magistrate and Howard, the son of Ozias was his scribe, and they chose Elisha to be pound keeper and keeper of the gates of the city.

“And it came to pass that certain men of Belial did turn their swine within the city wall and Elisha the pound keeper put them in the pound and held them in durance vile until their owners should pay the uttermost farthing. But those men of Belial did come with strong men armed even with stones and staves and did break down the pound and take away the swine and others did likewise, where upon Isaiah, the Chief Magistrate, did bring them to judgment even unto the judgment seat of all Fairfax and the Chief Magistrate, even Isaiah was said to be a righteous judge, and the great judge did declare and proclaim that the people around about Yankeetown should obey the decrees of Isaiah because his wisdom was like unto the wisdom of Solomon.

“Now the rest of the acts of Isaiah and the highways that he built and the sidewalks that he made and the streetlamps that he set up are they not recorded in the book of Chronicles of the Magistrates of Yankeetown in the borders of Dixie.”

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.