

Narciso Gonzales and St. Timothy's Home School for Boys

Letters from Herndon's Rawson Lodge

By Barbara Glakas

Herndon's St. Timothy's Episcopal Mission had its beginnings in 1868. The first service was held in Lawrence Hindle's home, a farmer who would later serve as one of Herndon's first Town Councilmen. The service was read by David S.L. Johnson. The first St. Timothy's Church building – located at the corner of Elden and Grace Streets (now Herndon's Masonic Lodge) – would later be built and subsequently consecrated in 1881.

Prior to the church being built, David Johnson organized the St. Timothy's Home School for Boys which was called Rawson Lodge. We believe this school was in a small mission building formerly located near the northwest corner of Grace and Vine Streets. This mission building can be seen on the 1878 G.M. Hopkins map, marked "Episl. Chapel."

One boy who attended this school was Narciso Gener Gonzales. According to Antonio de la Cova, Assistant Professor of Latin American Studies at the Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Narciso was born in 1858 in South Carolina. He was the son of General Ambrosio Jose Gonzales, a leader in the Cuban independent movement of 1848-1851. Ambrosio later became a Colonel in the Confederacy in the American Civil War where he served as an artillery officer.

During the war, and after the death of his mother, Harriett Rutledge Elliott Gonzales in 1869, Narciso and his siblings lived with his aristocrat grandmother, Ann Hutchinson Smith Elliott, and their aunts, Ann and Emily Elliott.

Mrs. Elliott made arrangements for Narciso to attend school at the Rawson Lodge in Herndon in 1873. In a letter to the Elliotts, David Johnson described his school as a "homeschool" which he limited to twelve boys so that they could be treated individually. An 1874 bill to Mrs. Elliott showed that books and stationary cost \$6.88 and tuition and board cost \$37.50.

Narciso wrote to family members in 1873 and 1874, while he was a teenager attending the school at Rawson Lodge. Below are some excerpts from these letters which gives a glimpse of the school and life in the Town of Herndon during that time period:

"Herndon, VA, Nov. 4, 1873

"My dear Grandmother,

"I arrived here yesterday morning and will now give an account of my miserable travelling experiences. I got to the steamer all right & she did not leave till 12. She had very light cargo

(consisting of cotton, lumber & rice)... & when out of Cape Lookout, she rolled & pitched so that I was rather seasick, and felt miserably, had to keep my berth all day.

“When we got to the Chesapeake Bay – there was cutting wind blowing & I couldn’t sleep for the cold. Before the steamer touched the wharf, I was off with my trunk, got a hack & started for the [railroad]... I went to Alexandria junction – took the Washington & Ohio R.R. [future Washington & Old Dominion R.R].... and arrived at Herndon Station – an hour after.

“Now for Herndon? Mr. Johnson is between 40 & 50 but doesn’t look as old, is very religious, very kind & attentive to his boys, whom seem very fond of him. Mrs. J. is ‘fair, fat & forty.’ The boys are 5 in number – 3 from Washington, 1 from Del., & 1 from Alabama, most of them younger than I am, seem very gentlemanly. Herndon is a small village, with two churches, and Mr. J. superintends a chapel & LL... Herndon is 27 miles from Washington & is slightly hilly, & has very few trees. Rawson Lodge is a few hundred yards from the station...”

“Rawson Lodge, Saturday, Nov. 8, 1873

“My dear Brother,

“Your kind letter of the 4th has just been recd. ... When I got to Herndon I found several of the boys waiting for me.

“Mr. Johnson is very kind, as are his family, which consists of his wife & aunt. Mr. J. is 35 years of age... Herndon is a small village scattered around promiscuously. Mr. Johnson is religious in the extreme & is peculiar in some things. He is not very strict as to study but is very particular about manners, general deportment, and tidiness. I have just got my books from Wash. They are Maury’s Geography, Robinson’s Arithmetic, Holmes’s Speller, & Southern 5th reader...

“[Mr. J.] is very persuasive with the boys (who study very little), his punishments consist of the boys staying in the ho[me] 15 minutes for every bad mark on Saturday. He seems fond of them and they of him. He never scolds or gets angry. The boys are well-behaved & aren’t up to anything worse than moving the hands of the clock a half hour or so...I commenced studying Wednesday morning & so far have a perfect report.

“3 boys sleep in the room with me. The inhabitants say that there is an average of 9 inches of snow on the ground here through the winter & splendid sleighing.

“There is some pleasant company about here, some pretty girl, & especially a pretty Post Mistress. Therefore, I will be & am, prompt in getting mail...”

“Rawson Lodge, Dec.23, 1873

"Dear Grandma,

"...Mr. Davy has just gotten his bell and is as happy as he can be over it. It is 26 inches diameter and cost \$25,000; he will have it on top of the Mission in a little belfry and expects to ring it the first time Xmas Eve midnight.

"The next thing he'll do, will be to get a 'Cabinet pipe Organ' for the chapel, on credit, & pay for it next year. He gives a tenth of his funds to the Mission, & seems devoted to it. He had the first Episcopal services, ever held in Herndon, 5 years ago. Bishop Johns visited him last year and confirmed several persons.

"Herndon contained only 2 or 3 houses 6 years ago, now it numbers some 50 houses, 3 or 4 stores, a blacksmith shop, carpenters shop, saw & grain mill & 2 churches & the Mission.

"Don't you think the inhabitants have reason to hope (as they do) that, it will 'one day' be a metropolis?"

"Feb. 17, 1874

"Dear Emmie,

"... The St. Timotheans & a select few outsiders held a meeting last night in the Mission & organized a Base Ball Club, & officers. Have made fine ground & expect much fun.

"Things are as usual; in about 2 weeks the public school breaks up & we will have school hours there & the eldest will sleep above the stairs there, where we expect to kick up 'heaven.' In the words of my fraternal predecessor, 'I am penniless.' I get very few articles here, and they are very high, so, as I can't get them any where else, it sends the tin up the spout. My clothes are getting rather dilapidated. Mr. J says he thinks that at the end of the term I can either keep books, or teach school; or study draughting & get a good living, or be a reporter...

"We have organized a newspaper, something in the style of the 'Yellow Jacket,' & the members of St. Timothy's are to contribute in it. We are to edit it by turns.... This you see that Herndon is progressing under our supervision."

"Herndon VA, Sat, Feb. 21, 1874

"My dear Brother,

"...I am directing my study to only useful ends. I like Book-keeping, & am making good progress in it, as Mr. D. says he can get me a place, with the folk's permission, I will take it.

“...Nothing of any account has occurred last week, except the first issue for our paper (S. Timothy’s Home Journal) & the formation of a Base Ball Club. The journal is composed of article for the boys (day & boarding) on different subject. Everyone has a hit at another & it is quite a success...”

“March 12, 1874

“My dear Bory,

“There are some fine farms around here... as I go sometimes & help work, ‘for the fun of the thing.’ They have orchards around them (the houses I mean), & outside of that are the fields. They plant them in different things each year.

“The cows are housed in winter, & fed on wheat straw, bran & flour wetted & in Summer they pasture out.

“They have Spring houses, where they keep the milk in cold weather, then skim it & send the cream to town, in large cans with covers and locks. They sell all their calves, young, & raise a good man horse, of which there are some fine ones around. The farmers go to Washington every week in big wagons with farm produce, which they sell in market...”

In June of 1874, David Johnson wrote to Mrs. Elliott, to explain that an arrangement had been made for Narciso to stay at “Whitehall” with Mr. Nathaniel Fitzhugh’s family. Johnson explained that the Fitzhughs were “one of our most reputable families, living in the same place their ancestor, Major John Fitzhugh, (of General Washington’s staff) lived. Of course, like all Southern gentle people, they are terribly reduced but they are emphatically, *Fitzhughs*.” Narciso would be teaching the Fitzhugh’s two young boys for part of the day and then would learn what he liked of farming the other part of the day. The Fitzhughs also had a 20 year old nephew with them – “one of my model young men.” Johnson expected that he and Narciso would be of “mutual comfort & benefit to each other.”

“Ridgefield, Fairfax County, VA, July 5, 1874.

“My dear Aunt,

“... Last Tuesday evening I came here [Fitzhugh farm] from Herndon, which is 3 ½ miles distant... my house are, viz; I work ½ day; have the rest of the time to myself; have my board and washing, but no pay. My work is varied, fruit picking, hoeing, waggoning, wheat stacking & innumerable other farm occupations. Mr. D. has been wanting me to follow teaching as a

profession which I abhor and finding me resolved not to, when he spoke to Henry Fitz for me, agreed that I should teach a couple of the boy brats entirely without my knowledge or consent. Of course I have to keep an agreement made in my name, but don't thank Mr. D. for it. One of my pupils is very sick, the other is a small sized Satan & all my spare time is taken up spanking him.

"The farm is 598 acres, the best land around. There are five horses, a good many cows, pigs, etc.

"The people are very kind, & don't give me near enough to do, so that I have to hunt about for work... The Fourth was celebrated by several very large pic-nics, near here. Some 'loyal' chap hoisted a Yankee flag on his carriage, where upon some good rebs who were near had their equipage driven away from it, as it 'made them mad' to behold it. We are great rebs here, especially Miss Eliza. I rode through Herndon yesterday, visited Mrs. D., & attended a Methodist prayer meeting at night and had a good time...

"You must excuse writing; I am just from the wheat field, having been some 5 hours, replacing the caps on 20 acres of wheat shocks, which were blown off by a small gale of wind Saturday night & my paws are scratched.

"However, if I lessen your worry in the least, I am perfectly content. I have an abundance of clothes, thank you, & have no need for any here. The place is so isolated, I can actually luxuriate, in being minus collar, coat, & vest, most of the time, which is a great relief these hot times.

"Your fond Nephew... N.G.G."

It is believed that Narciso concluded his education in Herndon circa 1875 at the age of seventeen. Shortly afterwards he worked as a telegraph operator in railroad depots in South Carolina and Georgia. He developed an interest in journalism and state politics and by 1880 he became a reporter at the *Daily News* in Greenville, South Carolina. He later took a job as a correspondent for the *News and Courier*, in Columbia, South Carolina, where he worked for several years.

In 1891 Narciso and his brother, Ambrose, founded *The State* newspaper in Columbia. Narciso made his political views known in his newspaper. And he was also a vocal opponent of Benjamin Tillman, who had been elected governor of South Carolina in 1890. Gonzales mocked Tillman and opposed many causes that were dear to Tillman, his editorials often acerbic and scathing.

Tillman's nephew, James Tillman - South Carolina's Lieutenant Governor from 1901 to 1903 - ran for governor in 1902. Narciso attacked James in the press throughout the gubernatorial campaign, helping to ensure James's defeat.

In 1903 James Tillman shot Narciso Gonzales in broad daylight on a busy street corner in Columbia. Narciso died four days later. James was charged with murder and the trial, was considered by some as South Carolina's "crime of the century," covered by several national newspapers.

Shockingly, James was acquitted of the crime, despite the fact that it occurred in the presence of many eye-witnesses who said that there was no provocation. The defense argued that Narciso's fierce indictments on James's character were just cause for the shooting, although there was public outcry at the verdict.

Narciso died at age 44. A memorial obelisk was later erected in his memory on Senate Street near South Carolina's State House. The obelisk is inscribed in part:

"Erected by popular demand, A Tribute to the worth and service of N. G. Gonzales. A great editor. An eminent citizen. An honest man. Without fear and without reproach his fellow citizens bear this monument to perpetuate his memory."

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.