

# Historic Franconia Legacies

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Franconia Museum, Inc.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE FRANCONIA MUSEUM

Last summer a small group of Franconia citizens, concerned that the fabric of their community was in danger of being swallowed up by the growth of Springfield and Kingstowne, began planning for a Franconia Museum.

Since then we have incorporated and have sponsored four popular "story swaps", one at the Helen Wilson Room in the Lee District Government Center, others at the Fire Station, the Laurel Grove Baptist Church and at All Saints Episcopal Church. Each session featured a panel of knowledgeable local residents as well as enthusi-

astic audience participation.

On June 15<sup>th</sup>, the first tour of Civil War and Historic Landmarks in the Franconia area was led by Board members Don Hakenson and Gregg Dudding. Morning and afternoon tours were filled to capacity, and some latecomers were disappointed by their failure to have made advance reservations.

We are planning ahead for October, which will launch "The Spirit of Franconia" Month, with events each weekend. Ideas and volunteers are welcome.

*Edith Sprouse*



*The Founding Board Members of the Franconia Museum.*

## EVERGREEN—THE OTHER LEE HOUSE

Once located on Franconia Road on the Burgundy plantation, this mid-nineteenth century house, distinguished by its Italian Villa style design, was moved from the original site in 1969 by Rufus B. Cooley (then principal of the Bucknell Elementary School) before a housing development was built on the land. Evergreen's chief claim to fame is its association with General Fitzhugh Lee, a former Governor of Virginia.

While he was running for Governor of Virginia, Lee rented Evergreen. His wife Ellen was a daughter of George D. Fowle who had owned the Burgundy tract for many years.

Fitzhugh Lee was the son of Sidney Smith Lee and the nephew of two Confederate Generals, Robert E. Lee and Samuel Cooper. Lee has the distinction of being the only governor of Virginia who was a native of Fairfax County. Lee was born at Clermont, his mother's family plantation, on Nov. 19, 1835. Before the advent of the Capital Beltway, the

present Clermont Drive ran north from Franconia Road past the site of his birthplace. Lee graduated from West Point in 1856. As his obituary later reported, "from early manhood his life was one of constant activity."

Lee fought Indians on the western plains and later returned to West Point to become an instructor. At the outbreak of the Civil war he resigned his commission and joined the Confederacy to become Chief of Cavalry in the Army of Northern Virginia.

After the war, with no resources at his command, he returned to his Richland tract in Stafford County and farmed, "with his old war horse hitched to the plow."

On April 19, 1871 the Alexandria Gazette reported that, "Gen. Fitz Lee was married in this city this evening, to Miss Nellie, daughter of the late George D. Fowle. Several ex-Confederate Generals were in attendance at the ceremony." In an account of a New Years Eve ball in Alexandria, the newspaper stated on

Jan. 5, 1875: "Among the ladies present were Mrs. Lee, the beautiful and accomplished wife of General Fitz Lee, who was very elegantly attired in orange silk flounced with black lace."

The issue of May 26<sup>th</sup> stated, "At Richland, the residence of Gen. Fitz Lee, we were most forcibly struck with the air of general improvements and prosperity. This genial gentleman has gone to work in earnest since the war, by his example and advice, to restore Virginia again to her former position among the states."

In June of that year he was the speaker at the Bunker Hill Centennial celebration. At ceremonies on July 4, 1876 he was described, at age forty, as a man 5'5" tall, with brown hair and a red beard. The Lees had five children who survived infancy – Virginia, Ellen, Annie, and their brothers George and Fitzhugh. While the family was living at Evergreen, an infant died at that place.

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