



THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY STORY

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KNOWLES STATION

and

THE TOWN OF KENSINGTON

BY

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Part II

NOYES LIBRARY:

It is difficult to estimate the influence on the life of Kensington of the establishment in 1893 of the first public library anywhere in the Washington area. Crosby Noyes, editor and publisher of the Washington Evening Star, was a close personal friend of Mr. Warner, and was deeply interested in the developing movement for public libraries, there being none in Washington. These two gentlemen collaborated in the establishment of a library in Kensington. Mr. Warner built a library building on a small lot near his home, on Carroll Place and Montgomery Avenue, and Mr. Noyes stocked the library with books. A board of Trustees was organized under the name of Trustees of the Noyes Library Association. Mr. Noyes continued to support the library with annual small subsidies and, in addition, furnished books from those sent to his newspaper for review. The library was open each evening under the volunteer and poorly paid librarian from the local community. Reading rooms were free, and members, for a small fee of \$1.00 per year, could withdraw books. The reference books were a great help to the school children (who had no access to school libraries, if any existed), and its fiction library was a boon to all.

After the death of Crosby Noyes, his family continued annual subsidies toward support of the library, and provided a trust fund for the purpose. The continuing Trustees have conducted its affairs for many years, with meager funds supplemented by assistance from the Women's Club and other local groups, and with modest help from the Town. This little library played a most important part in the early life of the community, not only as a library, but as a place for social and public meetings, and as a center of the intellectual life of the community. The Presbyterian church met here prior to the erection of its own building. The Montgomery County Library is now operating a public library on the premises, but the Trustees administer a small trust fund for the maintenance of the property.

PUBLIC SCHOOL:

When the town was incorporated, the public school was a two-room building located on the southeast corner of original Connecticut Avenue and Mitchell Street, on the site now occupied by the National Guard Armory. This building was supplemented about 1904 with a larger, four room (and service rooms) frame structure, considered quite modern and ample for the needs of the community. However, within ten years this school and the old school were heavily overcrowded, and Dr. Eugene Jones, who was prominent in local politics, procured passage by the legislature of a bill providing funds for the construction of an eight room brick school at the south end of Detrick Street, on a large piece of ground running over to the county road. However, the legislation contained a condition that the old school property must be sold for not less than \$2,500. There being no market for old school houses at that time, the problem was resolved by the Town, which, in order to get the new school, purchased the property for the municipality, despite some violent objections from some taxpayers.

The old school property proved quite useful as an office for the town government, quarters for the volunteer fire department, and as an armory for the National Guard company organized after World War I. The project finally justified itself financially when the town fathers insured the building for its replacement value, about \$12,000, and then sustained a fire which totally consumed the building, fire department and all, and thus produced a handsome profit. Incidentally, Dr. Jones promptly secured legislation requiring the Town to expend this money on the streets before the council got any fancy ideas of rebuilding a town office.

The "new" public school has been enlarged several times, and is now supplemented by additional grade, junior high, and senior high schools in the area around Kensington.

THE MONTGOMERY PRESS:

Although he had a home in Washington at 2100 Massachusetts Ave., Mr. Warner after 1890 spent more than half of the year in his new home in Kensington. He was deeply interested in Republican politics, and saw the need for a county paper with a Republican flavor, since the only county paper, the old established Sentinel, was devoted to the Democratic party, as were all such county-seat papers in rural Maryland, dependant as they were on Court House printing and advertising.

Along about 1895 Mr. Warner started the Montgomery Press as a weekly paper, and built and equipped a printing office adjacent to and west of the Town Hall. He arranged with Cornelius W. Clum to manage and operate the paper and the job printing establishment. After a number of years, Mr. Clum acquired the paper and the property and operated it until his death in 1935.

The experiment of starting a Republican paper was a gamble, as Montgomery County in the 1890's was a rural, heavily Democratic county, with a few pockets of Republicans in Sandy Spring,

Damascus and Rockville. With the growth of the suburban area, and advertising from Washington, the paper was successful and for many years was the only newspaper, other than the Sentinel, published in the County. As Chevy Chase, Takoma Park and other suburban areas brought in new people, there came some change in the political atmosphere, and less social stigma attached to party affiliation other than Democratic. Then the Montgomery Press prospered. By 1920 the increased suburban development brought the start of additional county papers in Silver Spring, Takoma Park and Bethesda, and the Montgomery Press met with more competition. Throughout its history, the Montgomery Press faithfully recorded the news, and the political and social life of the community and of other parts of the county. Its complete file is on record in the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore.

The office building of the Montgomery Press is now owned and occupied by two of our local physicians, one of whom is a grandson of A. C. Warthen who probably built the printing office after the original was destroyed by fire in 1899.

Mr. Clum was not only the editor and publisher of the Montgomery Press, but otherwise contributed greatly to the early life of the community. He was elected Mayor and served for the 1900-1902 term, and was one of the early vestrymen of Christ Episcopal Church, of which he was a charter member. Three of his daughters are keeping up the family home on Prince Georges Ave. and contributing, as did their father, to the life of the community.

POST OFFICE:

Joshua Corrick is listed in Boyd's History as the postmaster at Knowles Station in 1880. Tradition has it that the post office was in Mannakee's store, near the station, then north of the track, on the Wheaton road, and remained in that building until the early 1890's when it moved to the rear of the newly erected Town Hall, south of the railroad crossing. It appears in the rear of the rebuilt town hall in photographs of 1900. This was a rather small room in the rear of the drug store, at the entrance to the stairway to the second story hall room. It remained here until the early 1930's when it moved to the front store room adjacent to the drug store. It soon outgrew these premises, and in 1950 moved to the new building across from the bank erected especially for the purpose. By 1963 it had outgrown this building and in August moved into the new building on Kensington Parkway. For over sixty years, our "postmasters" have been feminine, including Mrs. Little, Mrs. Exley, Mrs. Bowis, and currently Mrs. Tierney.

In our early days, the trip to the post office to get the mail was a daily social experience, and coupled with shopping at Hopkins grocery store, the drug store, and Fawcett department store, was a much more exciting way to spend the morning than sitting home waiting for the mail and telephoning for the other necessities.

VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT:

From the very beginning of the town government there existed a loosely organized volunteer fire department, under the direction of the town appointed Fire Marshal. There was no water system or fire hydrants, and fire fighting was a matter of bucket brigades and furniture salvage. The citizens watched helplessly while the town hall, its stores, and the adjacent building of the Montgomery Press burned to the ground. A special fire bell was installed with the bell of the Methodist Church, and when the alarm sounded all able-bodied citizens were expected to respond, bringing along buckets, ladders, and home fire extinguishers.

When the town acquired the school property on Mitchell street, quarters were provided for the volunteer fire department, which by then had acquired a hand drawn hose reel and pump, and some other equipment. With the destruction of the building by fire, the equipment was mostly lost.

With the installation of water mains and fire hydrants, and the erection of the National Guard Armory, the volunteer fire department entered into a new period. Quarters were provided in the Armory building, and through the contributions of citizens as honorary members, and of the devoted and conscientious men and women who worked so hard to build the company, the first mechanized fire engine was acquired. In those days there were no county funds for fire fighting and no special taxing areas. The town, with its limited tax income, could make but a modest contribution, but the firemen, and the ladies auxilliary, with dinners, fairs, and bingo managed to finance the initial equipment.

When the town deeded the old school lot to the State for the Armory, provision was made for quarters for the fire department, and it remained in these quarters until the construction of its handsome building at Connecticut Avenue and Plyers Mill Road. Since then it has built an additional fire station on Georgia Avenue in Wheaton, and a third at Viers Mill.

This modern, efficient fire company is a long way from the beginnings of fire protection in Kensington, and is a tribute to the men who, more than sixty years ago, donated their time as volunteer firemen.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS:

In 1904 several progressive citizens of Kensington organized a Building and Loan Association, the first such financial institution in the neighborhood and in the county. Among the first directors of this Montgomery Mutual Building and Loan Association were Dr. Eugene Jones, Albert Gatley (an official of Lincoln National Bank), H. O. Trowbridge, Alfred S. Dalton, B. H. Warner, Jr., W. M. Terrell, F. M. Webster, Parker L. Weller and Herbert Wright. This institution was developed as a local, community affair, although it had many depositors from Chevy Chase and Washington. It served the community for over fifty years until its merger with the Citizens Building and Loan Association in 1959.

The Kensington Bank was opened in 1908 as a branch of Farmers Banking and Trust Company of Rockville, at a time when banking facilities in the county were quite limited. From small beginnings it has grown into an important banking institution. The early managers and cashiers were from old county families; Floyd Cissel, William Kelley, Hilliary Offutt, George Peter, Arthur Williams, and succeeding these, Richard F. Green, who, after many years service, became president of the parent bank.

THE TOWN HALL:

A major contribution to the early life of the community was the construction by Mr. Warner of the Town Hall, a large edifice facing the railroad near the B. & O. station. The first floor was occupied by a drug store and a grocery store, the second floor by a large auditorium with stage and dressing rooms, and the third floor by a room later occupied by the masonic lodge. The post office occupied a room in the rear. Destroyed by fire in 1899 the building was rebuilt along the original lines. The hall was used for dances, theatricals, political meetings and lectures, and was a real center of life in the growing town. Recently, the building, owned by the masonic temple association, has been faced with brick, enlarged to provide additional quarters for the masonic bodies, and space for the expansion of the Kensington bank. The west facade is unchanged.

SOCIAL LIFE:

As could be expected in a small, rather isolated community, the social life in Kensington, at least up to the turn of the century, was centered around the churches, where all participated in

oyster suppers, strawberry and ice cream festivals, and other fund-raising enterprises of the ladies organizations. Mr. Corrick had the reputation of providing the best fried oysters in the County. The churches all participated in each other's benefits (with much good natured rivalry) and joined in Memorial Day and Thanksgiving union services. The women's organizations provided a welcome social outlet; calling on newcomers was customary, and neighborhood porch parties were frequent in the summer. Absence of adequate street lights did not keep everyone at home, but attendance at after-dark social and church events involved carrying oil lanterns, each of which had its owner's name painted on it. Although not a heavy card-playing community, there was a gentlemen's whist group and some euchre and flinch. No liquor was customarily served, as it was primarily a sober community in a dry county. There was an occasional lecture at the town hall, and, on election years, spirited political meetings and torch light parades.

Very rarely did families go to the theatre in Washington, which necessitated leaving before the final act in order to catch the "owl" train at the old B. & O. station on New Jersey Avenue. With the coming of the trolley line in 1895, shopping trips to Washington were easier, but there was no delivery service other than by railway express, so most packages were toted home.

In 1899 two events occurred which had an immediate effect on the life of the community. One was the organization of a women's club, and the other the organization of a masonic lodge.

WOMEN'S CLUB:

The women's club movement was just getting under way in Maryland in the 1890's and was mostly centered in and around Baltimore. However, the Mutual Improvement Association of Sandy Spring had been organized in 1857. In 1897 the Home Interest Club of Forest Glen was started, as was the Women's Club of Darnestown, and, in 1898, the Women's Club of Dawsonville.

In 1899, under the dynamic leadership of Eliza Bennett Hartshorn (Mrs. J. Elden Hartshorn), who had been a club woman in Iowa, a women's club was organized in October, at the home of Mrs. J. Harry Cunningham, in the Fawcett house then at the corner of Howard and Fawcett. At this first organization meeting in addition to Mrs. Hartshorn, were Mrs. Harry Armstrong, Mrs. William L. Lewis, Mrs. James T. Marshall, wife of the Presbyterian minister, Mrs. A. H. Thompson, wife of the Methodist minister, Mrs. J. Wilson Townsend and her sister, Miss Annie F. Gayley. This nucleus organized a club limited to thirty members, and its contribution to the literary, social and civic life of the community was outstanding. Members were required to prepare and present papers on art, literature, current events or history, and so stimulated not only their own but their families' education. The contribution of the club to the civic life included support of the Noyes Library, promotion of parks, especially the planting at what is now Kensington Playground, and support of the public school long before there was a P. T. A.

The Women's Club took an active part in the organization of the Montgomery County Federation in 1905, after joining the State Federation in 1900. Through its more than sixty years this club has contributed much to the civic and cultural life of the Town, despite its limited membership. It has become a real town institution, and many of its early presidents have been succeeded by the next generation in the family. Among these were Mrs. H. P. Hartshorn (1947) daughter-in-law of the first president; Mrs. Wilson L. Townsend (1936) daughter of Mrs. J. Frank Wilson (1918) and daughter-in-law of Mrs. J. Wilson Townsend (1909); Mrs. Charles A. H. Thomson (1955), daughter of Mrs. Lewis Meriam (1924), and Mrs. Justin Farrell (1963), daughter-in-law of Mrs. Edward A. Farrell (1952).

WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CLUB:

With the rapid growth of the community by 1920 the Women's Club (with its limited membership meeting in private homes) was not able to fill the need for active feminine participation in community life. A new club was organized with unlimited membership, divided into various civic and cultural departments. The organization of this new club, The Women's Community Club, was facilitated by the experienced members of the Women's Club, from whose ranks came the first president, Mrs. B. W. Kumler, 1924-26, and the fourth, Mrs. Lewis Meriam, 1930-32. While this club covers in its membership and activities a much larger area than the limits of the Town of Kensington, its contribution to the cultural, civic and intellectual life of greater Kensington has been outstanding.

In 1915 a group of about fifteen teenage girls organized a Girls Club of Kensington, which in the following year was accepted into membership by the Montgomery County Federation of Women's Clubs as its first junior club. While their activities were largely social, they engaged in many fund-raising activities, organizing theatricals and dances for the benefit of the Red Cross, the Noyes Library, and the Montgomery County General Hospital. This club functioned for about six years and was disbanded after the first World War.

MASONIC LODGE:

By 1896 members of the masonic order living in the Kensington area began meeting to initiate the organization of a lodge in Kensington. Initial meetings were held in the home of J. Wilson Townsend, on Montgomery Ave. at Kent Street, and, upon petition to the Grand Lodge of Maryland, Kensington Lodge No. 198 was chartered May 11, 1897. Meetings were held in the lodge room on the third floor of the town hall building. The first worshipful master was Brainard H. Warner, followed by Wm. R. Russell, Dr. William L. Lewis, Dr. George H. Wright, and E. A. Van Vleck, through 1903.

The lodge continued its growth and by the end of World War I was seriously in need of larger quarters to accommodate its own activities and those of its affiliated organizations. A Masonic Temple Association was organized and, under the leadership of P. M. W. Perry Hay, arrangements were made to acquire the Town Hall building through acquisition of the capital stock of the Town Hall Company, all of which was held by the B. H. Warner Estate. This move made the second floor auditorium available, and, with the rentals from the drug store, grocery store and post office the building was self supporting. The continued growth of the lodge and its affiliated organizations required additional space and the new brick building adjacent to the Hall was constructed, and the old town hall was faced with matching brick.

Kensington Lodge has made a great contribution to the spiritual and social life of the community, and on its roster of past masters appear the names of those who served Kensington as members of the Town Council, as Mayor, and in every civic activity.

MUSIC

KENSINGTON BAND:

Along about 1900 some of the local citizens organized a brass band (with more enthusiasm than ability!) and started rehearsals in the old school house on Mitchell Street. This created some problems to the neighbors at first. Mr. Marshall, the Presbyterian minister and an amateur trombonist, tried to help out. Col. Brady, who lived next to the school, on Fawcett Street, threatened a law suit, claiming the rehearsals had ruined a setting of eggs, and otherwise

disturbed his chickens. The band improved with time, and serenaded Mr. Eckhart (the successful candidate for mayor in a hard fought contest) by parading to his residence on Fawcett Street playing "Hold the Fort for I am Coming", and, on arrival, the only other selection they had practiced "Safe in the Arms of Jesus". The band later moved its operations to Forest Glen, where it became quite proficient.

KENSINGTON ORCHESTRA:

After the band left the town, a group of music lovers, under the direction of Dr. King, a prominent organist in Washington and a resident of Kensington, organized a small orchestra. Dr. King's untimely death in the wreck of the Sunday evening local at Terra Cotta station left a blank which was later filled when Prof. Leike volunteered to lead. There were a dozen to fifteen musicians participating, including Miss Alice Terrell, piano accompanist, several violins, a viola, cellos, cornets, trombone, flute, and drums. This amateur orchestra worked hard on the classics and light opera, but avoided the heavier symphony. It held several concerts a year, usually at one or the other of the local churches, and also did the music for a number of school graduations in the neighborhood. This small amateur orchestra added much to life in Kensington for four or five years, before the days of radio, and when the phonograph was in its infancy.

Music was provided also by the church choirs, and in every family some member played the piano, mandolin, or some other instrument. With the development of radio and record players after World War I the need for local music in the community faded, and one more facet of the community life created at the turn of the century vanished.

SOCIAL LIFE

DRAMATICS AND DANCES:

In the years before it was acquired by the Masonic Lodge, the Town Hall, with its comparatively large auditorium on the second floor (containing a stage, with dressing rooms) was the center of much group activity. In it were held political meetings, amateur dramatics, lectures (some with "magic lantern" slides) and occasional dances. In the days before World War I the young people of Kensington, Rockville, and some of the other county communities each year organized a local "Assembly" dance or ball, to which were invited groups from the other communities. One recollection of the Rockville Assembly is coming home to Kensington via the last trolley car from Rockville, getting off at Offutts (back of the present Georgetown Preparatory School) and walking home over a dirt road through Garrett Park.

The Kensington group usually held the Kensington Assembly dance during the Christmas holidays. An account book of the dance held December 29, 1915, shows a total cost of \$30.00, including \$8.00 for rental of the Town Hall, \$11.00 for Len Meades and Bluejay, the colored piano and drum music from Rockville, and the remainder for printing, postage, coffee, and maid service. The dances were quite formal, many with white tie. They started about 8 o'clock and closed by midnight so that our guests from Rockville could get the owl train, which also had to take the musicians. Some of the guests would spend the night, and this hospitality was reciprocated when some of us were not able to get home from Rockville.

Among the contributors listed in the 1915 dance record are Orren J. Field, Dr. Eugene Jones, J. Dawson Williams, Wilson L. Townsend, W. W. Skinner, Dr. Warren Price, R. H. Chappell, William Duvall, Graham West, W. A. Roberts, and Gordon Chance. Contributors invited guests, and the whole affair was most formal. The floor committee was prepared to request anyone coming with liquor on him or on his breath to leave.

A number of most entertaining plays, entertainments, and musicals were held in the Town Hall. Mr. Filer, who organized a boys club before the days of the Boy Scouts, had a fine junior baseball team, and his group held successful fund-raising entertainments in the hall. These were very popular and an annual treat. The ball ground was the "ten acre lot" between the county road and Detrick street, north of Warner street.

Political meetings in the hall were quite spirited. It is reported that at a Republican meeting in 1900 the Ray boys and other Democratic sympathizers stole all of the literature before it could be distributed to the faithful, and with no desire to read it themselves.

POLITICS:

Knowles station, and Kensington, were located in the 13th election district, as at present, but this large area had only two polling precincts, No. 1 at Wheaton and No. 2 at Silver Spring, which, before the days of women's suffrage, and in a purely rural community, sufficed.

By 1900, with the suburban growth in Kensington, Takoma Park and Woodside, this limited polling facility created a serious problem, which discouraged voting by residents of these communities, and made it difficult for local precinct leaders to get out the vote. Residents of Kensington, which by 1900 had a population of 1,000, had to get to Wheaton to register and to vote, and, before the days of the automobile, this required the party leaders to arrange to meet the evening trains out of Washington with horse-drawn vehicles and get up the hill at the gallop in order to get in more than one trip. Even when the horse-drawn carriages were supplanted by the early automobiles the situation was most difficult. A personal recollection is that of walking the nearly two miles from Kensington to Wheaton to register, just before the 1912 election.

By 1917 our representative in the legislature, with others from the suburban areas, succeeded in securing legislation creating two new precincts, No. 3 in Kensington and No. 4 in Takoma Park, with similar relief for the Chevy Chase-Bethesda district. Our first polling place was in the store where Mizell's is now located, succeeded by the store at the corner of Fawcett where the DGS is now, and, later, in the school house and the Armory. Before the use of voting machines, the use of paper ballots kept party workers up all night watching the count, arguing over misplaced X marks and errors in the tally sheets. This had its lighter side, as when one ballot showed up on which a good lady had signed her name and expressed her desire for good roads. One zealous precinct worker spent the day checking off voters' names on his list as they appeared, marking "D" or "P" after each name. On inquiry he stated that this meant Democrat or Republican, which indicated his party loyalty, and his equation of Republicans with sinners, as in the Bible.

IN CONCLUSION:

With the end of World War I and the resulting increasing housing development of the farms which surrounded it, the story of Kensington after 1920 merges into the story of the development of suburban Montgomery County. The creation of the Sanitary Commission, the Park and Planning Commission, and the chartered county government have reduced the importance of the small towns as a means of acquiring municipal services, but they continue to play an important role in developing local government, and in preserving some individuality in the face of much mediocrity.

Much of the charm of this mid-victorian village in the midst of booming Montgomery County remains, in its large, comfortable homes on their ample lots, with their well kept lawns and

gardens, and in its shady, tree lined streets and brick sidewalks. How long it can withstand the pressures of those who would destroy this and substitute gasoline stations, apartment houses, shopping centers, office buildings and warehouses in the name of progress is a matter of deep concern to its citizens. Small communities, such as Kensington, Garrett Park, Somerset and Washington Grove, contribute to the charm of Montgomery County, and bring memories of an earlier day. They are by no means blighted areas, and their surrender to commercialism would forever remove all trace of a way of life which meant much to the county.

To paraphrase Daniel Webster's argument in the famous Dartmouth College case; "'tis a small community, but there are those who love it."



TOWN HALL BUILDING, "Circa 1900"

Note drug store, with druggist, Trowbridge, Hopkins grocery store, Post Office in rear. Oil lamp posts, hitching rail. Montgomery Press building on right. Wind mill in rear of Arthur Williams.



SCHOOL BUILDINGS, on right 1890 two room school, in front, new four room school. Location now occupied by Armory.