



# ABOUT TOWN

## *The Kensington Historical Society Newsletter*

### WARNER MANOR: A PIECE OF KENSINGTON HISTORY

~Julie O'Malley

In 1689 William Joseph, the Deputy Governor of Maryland for Charles Calvert, Lord Baltimore, patented 4,200 acres from Rock Creek to Georgia Avenue, naming it Joseph's Park. This area was divided into multiple farms during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Major land owners in the area included George Knowles, Alfred Ray, and George Duvall. In 1873, the B & O Railroad completed a line running through this area which included a stop, known as Knowles Station, on George Knowles' property. The population then was around 70. T.H.S. Boyd's 1880 *History of Montgomery County* listed a postmaster, blacksmith, bricklayers and plasterers, carpenters, a merchant and farmers living in the area then.

In 1850, farmer Robert Brown began dividing his land among his children. One portion fell to his son, Daniel Brown (1844-1901) who built himself a farmhouse. The Brown Farm was later sold to Spencer C. Jones, from whom Brainard H. Warner acquired about 125 acres in 1890. Mr. Warner was a prominent Washington financier and developer, who established and ran two banks in D.C. as well as his own company. He was on the board of trustees for American and Howard Universities, the National Park Seminary and others. He helped to found the D.C. Public Library and was on the D.C. Board of

Education. Now he needed a summer home in the country in which to entertain; a cooler place, with an elevation of 325 feet above downtown Washington, with fresh air and soft breezes.

After purchasing 125 acres south of the railroad, he laid out a subdivision, Kensington Park, to create a summer retreat from Washington, D.C. His subdivision, thought to be named for Kensington, England's Victorian garden district, was laid out in a curvilinear fashion. Earlier development in what became the Town of Kensington was laid out in the traditional pattern with streets intersecting at right angles. Mr. Warner chose a four and a half acre site at the center of the oval for his own home, and by 1893 had replaced the original farmhouse with a grand Victorian residence. He named it Hadley Hall in memory of his second wife's childhood home in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Once the Warner summer residence was established, many prominent Washington business and society families followed him purchasing two, three and five lots on which to build their homes. With the railroad and the new development there was a cry for an incorporated town to be formed. They needed streets, sidewalks, lighting and more. The muddy streets at that time were not paved and there were

only wooden board sidewalks. In 1894 the Town was incorporated and Brainard Warner's wishes prevailed... the Town was called Kensington.

Mr. Warner took special pride in the development and welfare of Kensington. He is credited with having been responsible for the construction of Noyes Library, the Montgomery Press building (now Prevention of Blindness building), and donating land for the Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church. He also constructed houses in Kensington to be sold. For perspective: at the time Noyes (1893) was built, it was the largest public building in Kensington other than the two room schoolhouse where the Armory (1927) now sits.

He enjoyed his time in Kensington, often holding lawn parties in support of Noyes Library as well as church meetings. He also entertained such notables as the Vice President of the US under Grover Cleveland, Adlai Stevenson I, as well as a special Fourth of July Celebration with President William Howard Taft and a covey of senators. Warner kept his carriages in the barn to fetch guests from the train station.

In 1913 the house and property were sold to Frederic Duncan McKenney of Washington D.C. He was a prominent lawyer in

Washington, specializing in international arbitration affairs. Mr. McKenney had the house enlarged with two substantial additions to the west and the south. During his period of ownership, the house became known as Handley Hall: his wife's maiden name was Kathleen Handley. The McKenneys also enjoyed using the house and grounds for entertainment events such as their daughters' garden party and tea dance, and dinner parties honoring such notables as Navy Commander and Mrs. Timothy Keleher. After Mrs. McKenney's death in 1938 and Frederic's in 1949, the two daughters kept the 18 room house and grounds until 1956 when they sold it to Dr. Henry M. Lowden.

Dr. Lowden sought to enlarge the house for the purpose of expanding the nursing home he had established, and for which he served as the principal physician. He added a kitchen wing on the south side and the 2 story concrete nursing wing to the rear, followed later by a solarium. This nursing home was known over time as the Carroll Hall Sanitarium, the Carroll Hall Nursing Home, the Circle Manor Nursing Home, and Manor Care Nursing Home. Many in the community worked, volunteered, or had relatives in the nursing home over the years. They even had their own part of history with the visit from Barbara Bush, the wife of then President George H.W. Bush.

In 1980 the Kensington Historical Society nominated this area of Kensington to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1986, the Kensington Historic District came under the protection of the Montgomery County Historic

Preservation Commission. Designation was key in protecting the District and the Warner home.

The nursing home closed in July 2005 and the property was sold to Bristol Capital Management. At this point a community support group, Citizens United to Save the Circle, formed and advocated for the preservation of the estate circulating a petition signed by over 700 citizens. A community workshop was held to discuss what might be an acceptable use for the property. The Town of Kensington worked with the County and plans called for restoration, preservation and use of the manor and carriage barn as historic buildings, and preservation of the grounds as a public open space park in perpetuity.

This property is considered a very important part of Kensington's history, and the Montgomery County Legacy Open Space Program was anxious to help acquire it to preserve that history. A partial purchase of the property was initiated in 2006 with the final sale concluded in 2007. An effort to find a private public partner for the property failed. Efforts by Mayor Fosselman and the Kensington Town Council, Delagates Al Carr, Jeff Waldstreicher, Ana Sol Guiterrez, Senator Rich Madeleno, the Kensington Land Trust, Citizens United to Save the Circle, the Kensington Historical Society and many others resulted in state bonds being issued to match spending by the Montgomery County Parks Department. These monies have allowed for the first phase of the restoration of the property. The Parks Dept. has worked to achieve repainting in the original colors, roof repairs, planting and maintenance of the grounds, and finally the removal of the nursing home additions. The

exterior is now back to its 1914 rendition. We have reached a *Milestone on the Road to Restoration!* Let's celebrate!! Everyone in the greater Kensington Community is invited to enjoy the party May 17<sup>th</sup> (rain date May 18<sup>th</sup>) from 2 to 4. There will be a program, refreshments, music and games. No reservations needed. To volunteer, please email [info@kensingtonhistory.org](mailto:info@kensingtonhistory.org)

**WELCOME NEW MEMBERS**

Janet Camillo  
Martha and John Giovanelli  
Larry Johnson  
Stephanie and Kevin Kolevar  
Constance Witherspoon  
Linda and Scott Wolpert

**CONGRATULATIONS**

To  
Dr. Reed Shnider & Judi Glickman-Shnider  
on their AWARD from  
Montgomery Preservation for  
their sensitive rear addition to an  
historic resource!

**NOYES LIBRARY CELEBRATES  
WARNER MANSION RENOVATIONS**  
~Jan Jablonski  
The Noyes Library owes its existence to two Victorian era gentlemen, Brainard Warner and Crosby Noyes. A real estate broker and banker, Warner chose and donated the land and built the library while his friend Noyes, who was the editor and publisher of the newspaper Washington Evening Star, filled the library with books, many that he had reviewed for his paper. In the early years of the library, both men contributed annual subsidies and continued donating books to the library through the Noyes Library

Association, which was formed to run the library.

One of the most prominent and treasured features of the Noyes Library is the owl on the pediment above the entrance. The Noyes owl has a twin carved into the mantle of a fireplace in the front parlor of the Warner Mansion.

Little is currently known about the involvement of the Warner family with the Noyes Library between about 1900 and the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, except that Warner's six requirements for the library, enumerated when it was initially opened, generally continued to be met. They are:

1. It would be open 250 days of the year (currently 210 days per year);
2. It would be well maintained;
3. If ruined by a fire, it would be rebuilt;
4. There would be no sale or use of alcohol on the premises;
5. "No privy, well, drain, or cesspool was to be built unless it was built of a very durable material"; and
6. The path in front of the library building would be maintained

In 1991, when Montgomery County proposed to close Noyes due to budget cuts, one of the community members who worked hard to keep the library open and was a founding member of the Noyes Children's Library Association was Karen Warner, wife of Brainard Warner IV. Their son Brainard Warner V was among the children who received medals for reading 100 books during the centennial year of the library, 1993. His younger sister Mimi also became a Noyes patron.

Karen Warner continues her involvement with the Noyes Library and the Foundation today, volunteering for such activities as driving storybook character Madeline in the Foundation's 2010 Storybook Parade.



**APRIL 30 PANEL PRESENTATION**  
~Trammel Maury

On a cold rainy Sunday afternoon three long time residents of Kensington – Joanne Feeney Lynn, Larry Stubbs and Toni Ward – kept the audience at the KHS meeting enthralled with their stories of family, church, school and social events. Picnics in Rock Creek Park, walking to school, sleigh riding down Plyers Mill Road, dance lessons, and trail riding were just a few of their happy memories. Getting to high school in Rockville or DC meant traveling by train or the trolley. Mr. Stubbs talked of his interest in the trains and Kensington Fire Hall and he organized dances held there. Toni shared some experiences in Kensington Junior High and BCC High School, earning money delivering papers and spending her money at McKeever's after school. She keeps up many connections with former teachers and fellow students. Larry Stubbs wrapped up the meeting with a couple of tunes played on the violin he had built himself. Thanks to our panelists and Antoinette Kranenburg who moderated!

**DONATIONS**

Thanks to STEVE HASH for several plats of Kensington and the surrounds.

Thanks to DAN BODKISS for his oral history and papers on the donation of the Churchill Oaks.

The Kensington Historical Society is a 501 C3 and accepts all donations. If you have pictures, we can scan them so they never are out of your sight!

KHS PRESENTS our annual Saturday morning concert series on Howard Avenue across from the Farmers' market at the Train Station from 10 to 11 a.m.

- June 7 Scrub Pines
- June 14 Dixieland Express
- June 21 Rita Clarke & the Naturals
- June 28 Janine Wilson & Max Evans
- July 5 Esther Haynes & Keith Grimes
- July 12 Ellen Cherry
- July 19 David Meredith & Friends
- July 26 Scott & Cindy
- August 2 TBA
- August 9 Side By Side
- August 16 TBA
- August 23 TBA
- August 23 TBA
- August 30 2<sup>nd</sup> Story Band
- Sept. 6 Garrett Park Jams
- Sept. 13 Blue Book Value
- Sept. 20 Silver Creek
- Sept. 27 TBA

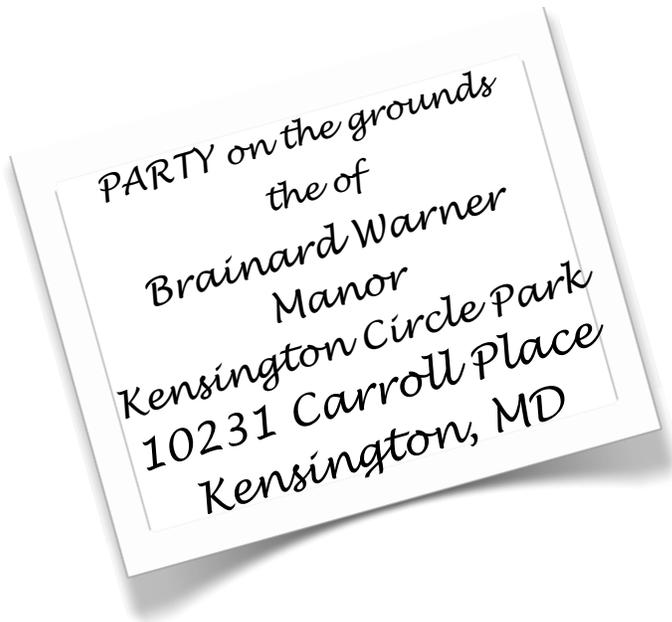
More information will be posted on [www.kensingtonhistory.org](http://www.kensingtonhistory.org)

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The Story Behind  
WARNER CIRCLE  
MAY 17<sup>th</sup> 2 to 4 pm

**A MILESTONE  
ON THE ROAD TO RESTORATION**

The Montgomery County Parks Dept. & the Kensington Historical Society invite you to join us on the grounds for a grand community celebration at the Historic Brainard Warner Manor. The program will be followed by music, refreshments and games.

Watch for more information on [www.kensingtonhistory.org](http://www.kensingtonhistory.org)

Rain date 18<sup>th</sup>