



About Town

The Kensington Historical Society Newsletter

KHS PROGRAM Tuesday, 10/14

Local Author, JOHN FARRELL

John Farrell writes biographies from his home in Kensington. He is the author of award-winning books on former House Speaker Tip O'Neill and the great American lawyer, Clarence Darrow, and is currently working on a biography of Richard Nixon. He is a contributing editor to Politico Magazine, and a contributor to the Atlantic, US News and National Journal. He has also labored as a newspaperman in Washington, honored for his coverage of the White House and of Congress for The Boston Globe. He has probably apologized to most of you at one time or the other for the behavior of his moronic Australian Shepherd, Charlie.

Kensington was an idyllic, shady village on the heights above Rock Creek in the Victorian and Edwardian era, but great social forces were tearing the rest of the country apart. What was it like in the working class tenements of Chicago during the Gilded Age? Or in the coal mines of Appalachia, the hard rock mining towns of Colorado and Idaho, or the streets of Los Angeles and San Francisco where the clash between labor and management was fought with dynamite and rifle fire? One American lawyer - Clarence Darrow - made his name in those struggles, and went on to champion the little guy in landmark cases concerning capital punishment, civil rights and scientific freedom.

Please join us on October 14th at the Kensington Town Hall, 3710 Mitchell Street, Lower Level. Coffee at 7:00 and Program at 7:30. All are welcome!

GOD'S ACRE: HIGGINS CEMETERY

~ Luis Blandon

HIGGINS CEMETERY

The dawn of 19th century in the United States represented the Jeffersonian ideal of the rural and agrarian landscape. In Montgomery County, Maryland, what later became Rockville, Twinbrook, Wheaton, and Kensington had communities of large family farms, including a few who owned slaves. One such landowner was James William Higgins, a Revolutionary War militiaman. His burial, following his death on January 18, 1816, was the first recorded burial at the Higgins Cemetery. Eleven more recorded burials followed, with the last occurring in 1891. There may be additional interments which could eventually be discovered by future archaeological surveys and as-yet unknown diaries and documents.

Today, the 1/3 acre cemetery sits alone at 4709 Arundel Avenue, all that remains from Higgins' landed holdings. Once a genteel preserve among fields of crops and farming activities, the cemetery resolutely survives among one-story concrete block warehouses, storage facilities, an alley and a retaining wall for Twinbrook Parkway.

The cemetery appears tired and forlorn, with missing stones and one large marker. The family who owned the land slowly sold off the property and the cemetery was abandoned over time. The Higgins Manor was razed in the 1930s, and the plot was erroneously assessed and sold for back taxes. Through the last decades, the cemetery has been vandalized and allowed to become overgrown. It became a playground for children, then a dumping ground for trash. The hallowed ground was all but forgotten to the public until 1997 when a working group, including Higgins descendants, the Kensington Historical Society, and Mayor Jack Jones was formed to preserve it. In 1999, the nonprofit Higgins Cemetery Historic Preservation Association (HCHPA) was established to restore and preserve the site. The HCHPA has conducted several clean-up sessions, removing about 12 inches of trash and debris from the site, creating paths and making the little plot presentable. Three gravestones for the 12 recorded graves have been located.

Each grave in the Higgins Cemetery represents a tie to the history of Kensington. The little parcel of land serves as the final resting place for representatives of many Kensington founding families, including the Higgins, Mannakees, Becrafts and Knowles. In future generations, these town founders spawned several more surnames synonymous with Kensington: Welsh, Baruch, Talbott, Jones, Wilson, Betts, Cromwell, Little, and Prather. What follows is the story of a forgotten resting place and its connections with the Town of Kensington.

THE INITIAL FARMERS: James William and Luraner Becraft Higgins, James Becraft and Mary Higgins

James William Higgins (1733-1816) was the son of John Higgins and Johannah Sarah McGruder Higgins. On November 11, 1760, he married Luraner Becraft (1744-1819), daughter of Benjamin Becraft and Deborah Oliver. Upon his marriage, James acquired his initial plot of land from his father-in-law, Benjamin Becraft, in an area along Rockville Pike in today's Twinbrook neighborhood. In August 1777, James William enlisted as a private in the 5th Company, Lower Battalion, Militia for Montgomery County. Records show he also served in 2nd Company, Lower Battalion, Militia in 1780. According to existing records and family histories, James William and Luraner had twelve children. Several of the children married into the Prather and Soper families, and moved to Kentucky. Others married into the Swearingen and Becraft families, and moved to Illinois.

The family bought additional land following the Revolutionary War. They were part of the landed elite who owned slaves. At the time of his death in 1816, James William owned 769 acres of land spread across several tracts. One such tract now comprises the business portion of modern Kensington, including the train station and Knowles Avenue. "The Lost Coat," part of Joseph's Park (a small portion of which now remains at the corner of Plyers Mill Road and Wheatley Street) was acquired by James William from his father-in-law. Higgins also owned the land that became Knowles Station, today's Kensington. A tiny cemetery was built on their farm near the plantation house. The 1/3 acre graveyard is documented on maps and deeds of the mid-19th century.

James Becraft Higgins (1772-1848) was the eighth child of James William and Luraner. He married two sisters, first Virlinda Wilcoxon in 1797, with whom he had one known child, Ruth Wilcoxon Higgins. Upon Virlinda's death, he married Mary Eleanor Wilcoxon, with whom he raised a large family of 13. He was of age to participate in the War of 1812, and there are records showing several James Higgins in the 1812 Pension Applications. He died in 1848 at age 75 and is buried in Higgins Cemetery. Mary Eleanor and five of the children are also buried at the Higgins Cemetery -- Darius, Elizabeth, Luraner, Horatio and Mary -- as are two grandchildren: Mary and Daisy. The Plat of the Lands of James B. Higgins of 1851 is the first time the graveyard appears on a map.

The four-sided Higgins Family Monument is the centerpiece of what remains of the cemetery. The exact location of where James William and Luraner Becraft Higgins and their son James and his wife Mary are buried in Higgins Cemetery is unknown. Fifty years after the death of James William Higgins, his grandchildren erected a large sandstone monument memorializing James William and Luraner and their son, James and Mary Eleanor. A 1970 memorandum in the Montgomery County Historical Society archives on the condition of the cemetery states that two stones were toppled, one of which was a large stone with HIGGINS inscribed on it. One Higgins stone was face down to the other Higgins stone. There may have also been an obelisk. A bronze marker from the Chevy Chase Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution was placed at the base of the monument to commemorate the Revolutionary War service of James William Higgins.

THE KNOWLES

The Knowles name is crucial to understanding the development of Kensington. George Knowles was born in Georgetown, DC on January 16, 1805 to Henry Knowles (1764-1850) and Florence Knowles. In 1830, he married Luraner Higgins in Montgomery County, MD. They had seven children: Columbia, Florida, Irene, Ida Ellen, Wilmot, Mary E. and Georgiana. Knowles received land from his father-in-law, James Becraft Higgins, including what became Knowles Station, the precursor to today's Kensington. He became a prosperous farmer, eventually owning 224 acres in Knowles Station, and was appointed postmaster for Knowles Station.

By 1890, the community in which George Knowles lived and raised his family would succumb to the fast development boom that was occurring outside the city. By 1880, the population of Knowles Station was about eighty souls. In 1869, the Knowles family deeded seven acres of land to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company. Additional land was deeded to link county roads together. The railroads that exist in 1870 crossed a dirt road owned by George Knowles. When the Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad opened in Montgomery County, MD, in 1873, the train stop was established on George and Luraner's land, becoming known as Knowles Station, and later became the Kensington Station which is foundation for modern-day Kensington. The B & O served the local farmers who were now able to send their products to the citizens of Washington. The few who worked in Washington were able to commute into the city. By then, the Knowles were considered one of the largest landowners in Montgomery County, successful farmers and a prominent family.

CALENDARS & MUGS!

KHS will have their 2015 Calendar: Working Together, AND brand new mugs with our "Where the Train Still Stops And the People Still Walk" logo available at the KHS table at the Labor Day Parade, at the Train Show and at our October meeting. Calendars are \$5 and mugs are \$7. Please remember that if your dues are paid through 2014 or 2015 the calendars are free.

In 1890, Brainard Warner bought several parcels of land and created a subdivision that was known as Kensington Park, which became part of the Town of Kensington as incorporated in 1894. However, the land that George Knowles owned and was known as Knowles Station was the foundation of Kensington.

On November 30, 1881, George Knowles died in Knowles Station, most likely in his since-demolished home on modern-day Knowles Avenue. The Sentinel obituary of December 9, 1881 states that he was buried at "God's Acre of the Higgins family." Almost two years later on October 29, 1883, Luraner Higgins Knowles passed away. They are both interred at Higgins Cemetery. George's stone marker was found buried in trash debris and overgrowth during a cleanup in 1999. Along with the stone markers for Mary E. Gott Higgins and Darius Higgins, the George Knowles stone is kept in storage waiting for the needed money to be raised to restore the stone and place it back next to Luraner's grave. The inscription on the stone gives a little view to Luraner's feelings about her husband: "Sacred to the Memory of My Husband, GEORGE KNOWLES, Born Jan. 16, 1805, Died Nov. 30, 1881. Aged 76 Yrs, 10 Mo's, 14 Ds. He was a Good Citizen, a Kind Neighbor, a Trusted Friend, a Devoted Husband and Father. And above all an humble Christian." Luraner's stone has vanished.

A baby, Mary L. Knowles, is buried at the cemetery. Little is known about her. She did not make it to her first birthday (7/23/1873 - 7/3/1874). Records at the Montgomery County Historical Society show that she is daughter of W. and Sarah Knowles. "W" may be for Wilmut, George Knowles' son. Census records for 1870 show that Wilmut Knowles lived in Georgetown with his wife, Sarah, age 22, and their 11-month old son Charles. It shows that Sarah and Charles were both born in Washington. He worked in a flour mill, probably along the canal in Georgetown. A domestic servant lived with the family. The Sentinel obituary notice of September 1, 1876 indicated that he was buried at Grace Church in Silver Spring. A 1878 Washington city directory indicates that Sarah Knowles lived in Tenallytown (the post Civil War spelling of Tenleytown) and was a widow. The Will of Luraner Knowles dated October 23, 1883 appointed her brother Charles Alexander Higgins as executor. Luraner bequeathed sums to "my two grandsons, sons of the late Wilmut Knowles."

A daughter born in 1838 was given the middle name of Higgins. Florida Higgins Hurdle died on September 8, 1933 in Spring Lake Park, MD, on land that was most likely was part of her great-grandfather's and grandfather's farm which became part of the 1892 development. Another daughter, Mary E. White, born on October 28, 1832, died on October 27, 1909 and is buried in Rock Creek Cemetery with her husband. In her memoriam notice, it was stated that both her husband and father were large slave owners and that plantation life "in its flower was the rule upon the estate before the civil war." Those words give a focused snapshot of life in sparsely populated pre-Kensington.

Another daughter, Irene was born in 1854, George and Luraner's last child. She may be interred at Higgins Cemetery. District of Columbia death records from 1840-1964 indicate that an Irene Y. Knowles died in Washington, DC on January 31, 1895 and was buried in Halpine Station, Montgomery County on February 2, 1895. Does Halpine Station mean Higgins Cemetery? Halpine Station was the train stop on the Metropolitan Line near the Cemetery, south of the current Twinbrook Metro Station.

Other than the Kensington Train Station, there are no physical reminders of George and Luraner Knowles. For decades, the Knowles House stood at 3814 Knowles Street on the south side of modern day Knowles Avenue. It was razed prior to 1938 to make way for the expansion of Connecticut Avenue. We do know how George and Luraner looked: in the archives of the Kensington Historical Society are two portrait pictures, circa 1870, of George and Luraner. George's stone is a reminder, but sadly it is in storage. ~ Blandon Creative Research LLC

TO BE CONTINUED! Please see our next newsletter for more about the Mannakees and Higgins families. We welcome any additional information you wish to share at info@kensingtonhistory.org.

POSTSCRIPT

There is a ceremony being planned to honor war veterans sometime in November, 2014. The date and time will be posted on the Higgins Cemetery website: <http://www.higginscemeterymaryland.org>.

Thank You Sponsors! Ayoub N & H Carpet & Rugs, Catch Can, Benchmark Painting & Cabinetry, The Ditto Group, David Gregg's Tree Service & Garden Maintenance, Frankly...Pizza, Hardware City, The Hope Chest, JennyCakes Bakery, JSA Cardozo Home Remodeling, Jubilee Association of MD, Kensington Caboose, Kensington Pharmacy, Kensington Row Bookshop, Kensington Service Center, Knowles Printing Services, Logan's Automotive, Moose, Green & Korom, PA, One-Stop Tax & Business Service, Patrick Realty Co, Inc., Precious Pals, Safeway, Sage Eclectic Consignment, sub*urban trading, Sunflowers, Susan I. Wranik Associates, LLC, Textile & Rug Museum, Bonny Cochran & Sheila Dunn.

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KENSINGTON CABIN NEWS

The Montgomery Parks Dept. has acquired enough funding to start on the rehabilitation of the Cabin! It was closed down in 1991, when the county no longer had funds to maintain it. The Parks Dept. would like to hear from the community about their ideas for uses of the cabin. Please email ygurney1@verizon.net with your suggestions.

Temple Bachschmid Says Goodbye to Lovely Kensington

~ Stuart Freeman

Temple Bachschmid, a long time resident of Kensington, headed west this June. He joins his daughter, grandchildren, and great grand children in Independence, Missouri.

He spent his early youth in northwest Washington DC. where he became a horse wrangler, riding throughout the Rock Creek Trails. When WWII erupted, Temple (age seventeen) entered the Merchant Marine Academy, becoming the youngest officer in that branch. As the war raged, Temple was transferred to the regular navy, where he established a distinguished career.

After his naval service Mr. Bachschmid moved back to Washington, DC where he entered into the world of insurance. Eventually, settling in Kensington he served on the Town Council, helping to establish parks and making Walter Johnson the Kensington cluster high school. He spent as much time as possible on the golf course. Temple is happy that his house will remain, and that a young family will get to enjoy the benefits of living in the "paradise" of Kensington. He is a Charter Member of the Historical Society and was always an enthusiastic volunteer at the Socials. Hope he'll be back to visit!

Model Trains on Track for September Show

ALL ABOARD KENSINGTON

WHEN: Saturday & Sunday – September 6 and 7, 2014, from 11am-5pm

WHERE Kensington Armory/Town Hall – 3710 Mitchell Street, Kensington, MD

ADMISSION: \$5 adults; \$2 children; \$10 family

Special guest performances: Dixie Land Express Band will perform on Saturday from 11am-12:30 pm; Matthew Dodd will present railroad songs and stories on Sunday from 1-4pm. ALL ABOARD KENSINGTON

is a benefit for the Noyes Children's Library Foundation

(www.noyeslibraryfoundation.org) and the Kensington Historical Society (www.kensingtonhistory.org), and is sponsored by Gary &

Diana Ditto, the Town of Kensington, and the National Capital Trackers.

FAMILY HISTORY & GENEALOGY FESTIVAL

WHERE: Maryland State Archives, 350 Rowe Blvd. Annapolis

WHEN: October 4 10am ~ 4pm FREE
Brick Wall Sessions, Lectures, Archives
Tours, Hands On Workshop, Children's
Activities, Exhibitors

www.msa.maryland.gov