



# ABOUT TOWN

News, events and resources for Kensington Historical Society members and friends

PO Box 453, Kensington MD 20895

March 2012

**Kensington 1946-1950**

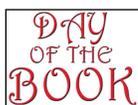
Bill Maury resurrects an article from long ago.

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**Celebrate Books!**

Enjoy a weekend of celebrations - Noyes fundraiser at Two Pears & Day of the Book Street Festival

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**Historical District?**

Information on permits for those in Kensington's historical district.

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**Save the Date!**

May 22-for author/historian Mr. Anthony Pitch.

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**KHS Membership**

Join today! Membership form for new & returning members.

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## Next Meeting: Tuesday, March 6 JOAN PAULIN DAVID on Growing Up in Kensington

We are delighted to present Joan Paulin David to speak at the March 6, 2012 Kensington Historical Society meeting. She will share with us memories from the late 1940's to 1960, when her family lived on Washington Street at the corner of Connecticut Avenue. At that time, the lower garden of her home was a wonderful neighborhood gathering place. We'll hear about community events, local shops, and activities at Noyes. Come early for refreshments and share your reflections on life in Kensington. The Kensington Historical Society's March meeting is on Tuesday, March 6; refreshments at 7, program at 7:30, followed by the business meeting. The meeting is open to all and will be held at the Kensington Town Hall, 3710 Mitchell Street, lower level. We will have a display of photos and slides showing Kensington in the fifties!

### CELEBRATE THE BOOK WITH NOYES!

Saturday, April 21, 2012 from 7 -9 p.m.  
*Two Pears Restaurant*  
10417 Armory Avenue, Kensington

*Music! Wine! Savories and Sweets!*

Come for a delightful and delicious evening at the Two Pears Restaurant in Kensington.

*Dance! Mingle! Celebrate!*

Enjoy the vibrant company of others who love a good time, love good books, and love Noyes Children's Library.

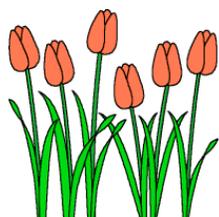
\$40 per person.

For more information or to R.S.V.P., go to [www.noyeslibraryfoundation.org](http://www.noyeslibraryfoundation.org).



### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Dr. Sue Bailey  
Jan and James Clarkson  
Ellen Joyce  
Steven Warner  
Nancy Shoemaker Werner



Coming in May...Another wonderful Garden Tour and Party sponsored by the Kensington Historical Society. Details to follow.

# Kensington 1946-1950: A Giant Step Toward Modern Times

By Bill Maury

*In 1994, Bill Maury interviewed Philip McCurdy and what follows is a wonderfully captured period of Kensington history. (Taken with permission from the Newspaper TOWNE, February 1994: KENSINGTON 1946 – 1950: A GIANT STEP TOWARD MODERN TIMES.*

Fit and hale the octogenarian Philip McCurdy smiles a bit tentatively when he says it, but he admits that in 1946 he sold his home on Washington Street in Kensington. Sensing, as many did, that area real estate prices would decline after the war and the ensuing departure of Washington's army of war workers, McCurdy felt he could use his money to better advantage in his new Kensington based plumbing business.

Surprisingly, McCurdy's decision was, at worst, a wash in pure economic terms. In 1951, with his business on fairly sure footing, McCurdy built a thoroughly modern rambler on a double lot across Detrick Avenue from Kensington Elementary School. His total cost (lots included) was less than \$11,000.

McCurdy's twin transactions that roughly bracket the period comprise a case study of lower Montgomery County real estate economics in the last half of the 1940s – an era that should confuse any but the most committed supply side economist.

In this five year period, [1946-1951] the down county population and housing stock roughly doubled. And yet, in 1950 housing and land prices differed only marginally from those of 1946. This seeming contradiction is explained, at least in part, by the very low base population, the tremendous availability of unused, low priced farmland and an infrastructure that could both accommodate substantial growth and be expanded relatively easily. Few at the time likely realized that this confluence of attributes for growth were unique.

After settling his family in a Silver Spring apartment, young Phil McCurdy used the money from the sale of his home on Washington Street to purchase William Walker's small tin shop at the corner of Connecticut (now Armory) and Howard Avenues [Whippo's Clock Shop building]. He gutted the structure, added a basement, named it Number 1 Connecticut Avenue and made it the office of his new plumbing business (one of six or seven such businesses in the small town of Kensington).

From his shop's front door, McCurdy had a clear view of Kensington's one and only shopping district. This primarily consisted of a series of mostly one story buildings on Howard Avenue facing the tracks. Recalling this view almost a half century later, McCurdy can still remember the location of most of the business heading down Howard from its intersection with Connecticut.

The ESSO Station stood on the corner. Next to it was Dick Wolfe's Diner, then the Nehri brothers had their barbershop and show repair businesses.

According to McCurdy, Howard Avenue was home to three grocery stores in 1946. Safeway, still thought of by many as "Sanitary" had moved from the Masonic Building it shared with the Post Office and Trowbridge's Pharmacy during the war years and occupied a new building next door to Nehri's Barber Shop. The DGS, a small franchise operation stood at the corner of Howard and Fawcett. Across Howard and just down from the train depot, stood Hopkin's Meats, which still offered the area's finest selections of meats and poultry. [near the M&T drive-through].

Continuing down Howard, Novick's General Merchandise, operated by the redoubtable Mr. Victor for his ailing father-in-law, occupied Kensington's longest in service commercial structure. Next came Trowbridge's Pharmacy and

the Post Office, which occupied adjoining space on the ground floor of the Masonic Building. Next door stood Kensington's bank. The commercial drag was capped by McKeever's, which had only recently begun serving breakfast and lunch in addition to its famous home made ice-cream.

Mizell's Lumber and Hardware and Carmack's service station, which stood on land rented from Mizell, were across the tracks on St. Paul's and were reached via the grade crossing.

In the same year that McCurdy opened his business, Kensington gained its first dentist, Richard Mehring. Fresh from the navy, Mehring selected Kensington as the spot to open his practice despite warnings from friends and relatives that the town could not support a dentist.

After scouting out the town for a day or so, Mehring found that the only site vaguely fitting his requirements was the 13' x 10' unused parlor of a small house next to the general merchandise store. He rented it on the spot and immediately set about fitting it out as a dental office complete with a miniscule lab and very cozy waiting room.

Mehring recalls that he opened for business on April 1, 1946 and from the start began to prove that Kensington could well support a dentist. The town was friendly, and Mehring, who briefly called the attic space above his shop home (the bathroom was on the first floor) quickly got into the small town pace, including a regular lunch at McKeever's with others among Kensington's young business and professional types. The only other lunch spot in 1946 was Wolfe's Diner and Mehring found its barbecue distinctly inferior to McKeever's.

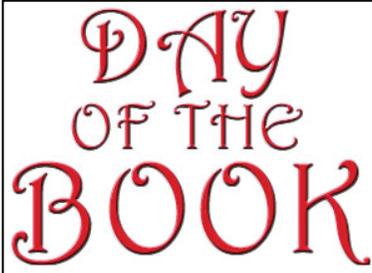
At McKeever's, Mehring and his friend Phil McCurdy (the two met within a day of Mehring's decision to locate in Kensington and are close

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## Day of the Book Festival

The 7th annual Kensington Day of the Book Festival will be held on Sunday, April 22, 2012, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. along Howard Avenue in historic Old Town Kensington. This afternoon street festival celebrates the International Day of the Book with live music, author readings, activities for children and adults, storytellers, and more! Local authors, bookartists, publishers, booksellers, and literary and community groups line Howard Ave in Historic Old Town Kensington to show, sell, and discuss their works. All



activities are free, rain or shine. For more information please visit the website at [www.dayofthebook.com](http://www.dayofthebook.com) or call Eli at 301-949-9416. Authors, artists, and community groups can still sign up to participate!

This year, in conjunction with the book festival, the artists of Antique Village will present the 1st Annual Morris L. Parker Art Festival in the Antique Village courtyard. This is a Juried Art show presenting the work of artists from the metro DC/ Md area. This Art Festival is dedicated to the memory of Morris L. Parker, creator and owner of Antique Village, who initiated the Great Arts tradition in Kensington by providing affordable studios for area artists and encouraging their creativity.

## Historic Area Work Permits in the Kensington Historic District

By Leanne Pfautz

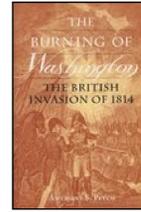
When reviewing applications for alterations to homes in the Kensington Historic District, the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) uses the Vision of Kensington: A Long Range Preservation Plan and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation as guidelines to assist the Commission in developing their decision. Both documents can be found on the KHS website: [www.kensingtonhistory.org](http://www.kensingtonhistory.org).

In the past month, the HPC reviewed an historic area work permit (HAWP) for 10600 St. Paul Street. This was for a rear addition and was approved with a condition.

The HPC also reviewed a retroactive HAWP for 10200 Kensington Parkway. The HAWP was for revisions to approved fencing and pool installations and other alterations and was approved with two conditions.

A copy of these HAWPs can be accessed at the KHS Archives.

Save the Date! May 22,  
Author/Historian Mr. Anthony Pitch  
By Steve Cohen



On May 22, Author/Historian Mr. Anthony Pitch, will be speaking to the Society about his book "Burning of Washington, The British Invasion of 1814." This is Mr Pitch's second presentation to the Society. He last spoke about his book on the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, "They Have Killed Papa Dead." The Society is delighted to have him back for what promises to be another very informative and entertaining evening. The presentation is very topical in this bicentennial year of the War of 1812.



*Thank You!*

The Kensington Historical Society is a nonprofit organization and relies on the generosity of residents and businesses. Your tax-deductible contribution directly supports the Society and our many programs, exhibits, archives, and daily operations. We gratefully acknowledge contributions in 2011 from the following:

Janet Bailey  
Mabel Baker  
Sheila and Scott Dinn  
Kensington House Apartments  
Sue and James Mathias  
Charles Middleton, Jr.

Kensington 1946-1950 *Continued from Page 2*

friends to this day) heard all the town news and gossip, which mostly consisted of real estate developments in and around the town.

These developments provided a sort of boom town mentality around the little town. And, despite the fact that most new developments were controlled by out of towners, two Kensington natives were mentioned regularly in the conversation at McKeevers. One, Eugene Rainey, would prosper mightily over the next five years. The other, O.L. Murdock would fare considerably less well.

With a fine eye for the commercial potential of Connecticut Avenue (then Lincoln Avenue), wide spread business contacts stemming from his work as founder and long time leader of Kensington's volunteer fire department and with political connections that included close friendship with Maryland's governor, Millard Tawes, Rainey was ideally set to capitalize on the new growth industry of development. The March 1946 ground breaking ceremony of the new Kensington Volunteer Fire Department at the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Bladensburg (now Plyers Mill) certified Rainey's position as a major player.

As fire chief, Rainey worked with separate property owners and state and local officials to consolidate the projected site into a single piece of property. He obtained all the required building permits and zoning change requirements and made final decisions on architectural matters. Though his plans to include a small shopping center, complete with a bowling alley, on the site of the fire department were rejected by town residents, he did succeed in establishing the commercial foothold on Connecticut Avenue, that within a decade would change the face of Kensington and make him a wealthy man.

O.L. Murdock owned the property diagonally across from the site of the new firehouse. An investor of sorts and a real estate agent/broker who worked out of

his house on the corner of Lincoln and Bladensburg, Murdock also heard the siren call promising wealth to developers. Considerable less well connected than Rainey, Murdock also seems to have been less focused through perhaps unfortunately, a bit more creative. He was, according to Phil McCurdy, a bit too much of a dreamer.

One of the things Murdock dreamed of was a hamburger joint in Kensington. Perhaps thinking of the money made by drive in successes like Hot Shoppes (with their cute little curb service girls), Murdock erected what in essence was a lean-to right next to the tracks, at the edge of his property. He named his creation the Mark Eat and bean turning out some of the best hamburgers in the area.

An unusual establishment even for those days, the Mark Eat offered its patrons no tables, a dirt floor and an unpaved parking lot. But, because it was good and was the only carry out around, it did a land office business. Unfulfilled with the success of his first venture, Murdock sold the business within a couple of years in order to try his hand as a residential builder.

According to Phil McCurdy, in those boom years, all permits and licenses for construction in Montgomery County were handled by a one person agency housed in the basement of a Silver Spring building. It was to this agency the O.L. Murdock took his plans for the construction of some fifteen small houses on a parcel of land off Newport Mill Road. According to McCurdy, Murdock's plan included a very small profit margin and required all houses to come in on budget and to sell immediately. Perhaps a more thorough review of his plans would have revealed easily resolved flaws in Murdock's plan for development, perhaps not. Suffice it to say, the plans were approved.

Murdock worked hard but a combination of inexperience, theft and bad luck resulted in him not quite meeting his

goals. Soon thereafter, Murdock and his energetic family left Kensington.

If Rainey and Murdock represented either end of the success spectrum for Kensington residents, others occupied the vast middle ground.

Taking advantage of zoning changes obtained by Gene Rainey, Dick Wolfe sold his diner on Howard Avenue to Tom Dabs and used the money to erect a series of small buildings behind the Fire Department. Quickly purchased, these buildings became the heart of Kensington's evolving auto repair industry.

The Stubbs family got in the act late in the decade, building Kensington's first strip mall on University Boulevard between Perry and Farragut. With McIntyre Hardware as its anchor the mall was an instant success. Harold Huggins a Murdock associate, purchased his holdings at the corner of Bladensburg and Lincoln and constructed Kensington's fourth gas/service station.

While Murdock, Rainey et al provided plenty of topics for the McKeevers lunch bunch, most construction involved tract style developments that began to spring up just outside Kensington's corporate borders.

Five Star, an early practitioner of pre-fab construction bought land south of Knowles Avenue and just east of Rock Creek and in 1948 began constructing a number of small homes along a street they named Parkwood Drive. Totalling around fifty houses when finished, Five Star houses featured two bedrooms and modular kitchens and baths. Dentist Richard Mehring, remembers them selling for around \$10,000 with \$500 down and payments of \$90.00 a month.

The little development, called Kensington Estates, proved successful. Even before Five Star completed its project, another builder, Campanelli and Korth, began construction on a nearby tract. Before they were finished according to McCurdy, Campanelli and Korth built some 100 small brick one story

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**Kensington Historical Society**  
**PO Box 453**  
**Kensington, MD 20895**

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**KHS MEETING**  
**Tuesday, March 6, 2012**  
**JOAN PAULIN DAVID**

7:00 p.m. Refreshments  
7:30 p.m. Presentation

Kensington Town Hall  
3710 Mitchell Street  
Lower Level

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homes selling for roughly the same amount as the Five Star homes.

Meanwhile, to the north along University Boulevard, Kensington View began to take shape. McCurdy remembers that the Kensington View developer sold both homes and lots. People who could not afford to purchase a house could buy the lot and build their own home over time.

The incredible pace of construction inevitably led to some slipshod construction practices. In fact the developers of nearby Twinbrook were the focus of a number of congressional hearings in 1950 regarding poor quality housing being sold to veterans. But the long pent up passion of Americans to own their own home was probably as much to blame as anything else.

Many first time buyers were only too happy to disregard warning signs as long as they could have their own little piece of the pie.

By 1951, Philip McCurdy recognized that the real estate market was not likely to go down the tubes and decided to become a home owner once again.

A civil engineer by training and a plumbing contractor by vocation, McCurdy purchased a couple of lots on Detrick Avenue and drew up the plans for his house. He figured it would cost about \$6,000 to build. He chose to borrow the money from Montgomery Mutual, a Kensington based building and loan company.

Like something out of "It's a Good Life," Montgomery Mutual consisted of about six of Kensington's leading businessmen who, since the mid-1930s, had been meeting once a week at McKeever's to review loan applications.

McCurdy remembers the loan application being about the size of a current day deposit slip. Requesting a 5 ½ percent loan rate, McCurdy was told "We are all out of 5 ½ percent money. It will have to be 6 percent." He accepted and took the plans for his house with him when he went to meet with the officers of the association. At this meeting he did not recognize that this way of doing business was fast becoming a thing of the past. But at least for that moment the old way of doing business in Kensington still held sway.

*Curious about the places you just read about?  
Come to the KHS Meeting March 6th!*