

IV. CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Development of the Town of Kensington

Historically, Kensington was a farming, crossroads settlement along the Bladensburg Turnpike, an early market road between Georgetown and the port of Bladensburg on the Anacostia River. An 1865 map shows five large landholders in the Kensington area, with the Knowles family owning a large portion of the land. At the time of the Centennial of America, Kensington had

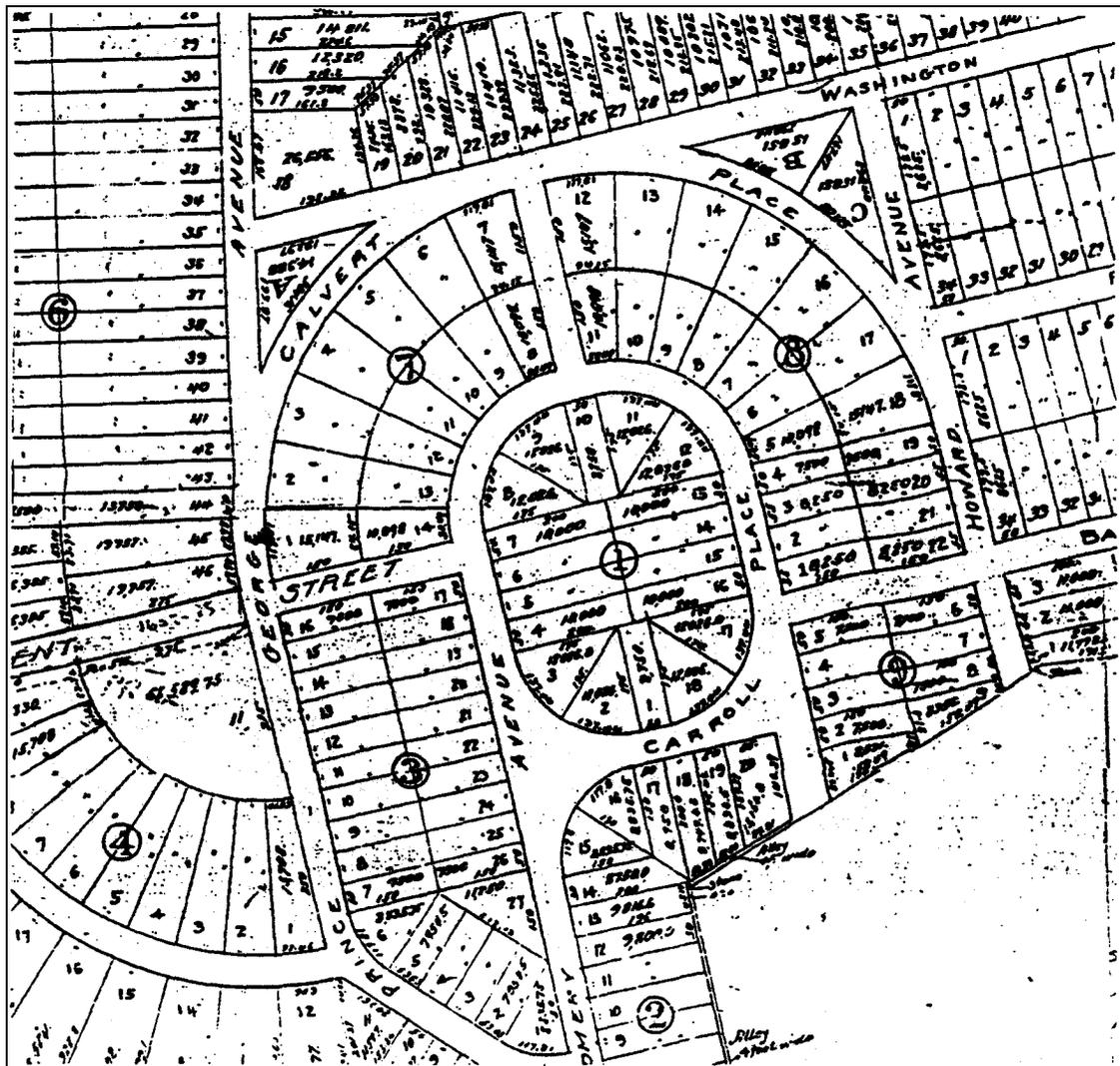


Figure 2: Original Subdivision Plat Map of Kensington Park, Maryland, 1890.

a population of seventy. The construction of the railroad in the 1870s, and the opening of a stop known as Knowles Station after the Knowles' family landholdings, began the transformation from a small crossroads to an important mail and passenger stop. In 1890, large tracts of land owned by Brainard Warner a noted Washingtonian, south of the railroad were subdivided. Warner's subdivisions were modeled after Victorian suburbs in England, like Kensington, with ample sized lots and a curvilinear street pattern.



Figure 3: Studio House for Marcus Stone, Kensington, England by Norman Shaw.

The town of Kensington evolved in the late 19th century as a summer residential community offering Washingtonians an escape from the heat and humidity of the city. Brainard Warner came to Knowles Station in 1890, purchasing about 125 acres at first, and then acquiring additional land that allowed him access to the railroad. In November 1890, he filed a plat map under the name of “Kensington Park.” Warner incorporated a pre-existing farmhouse for his summer residence on a large parcel of land at the heart of the community, and urged his friends to join him in the verdant, park-like environment. The Warner residence, currently occupied by the Carroll Manor Nursing Home, and is sited on the large, circular parcel of land at the southern end of the historic district.

In the 1890s, Kensington’s character began to change with rapid population growth, and increasing private and public development. In the early 1890s, Kensington constructed its railroad station, and opened the first public library in the Metropolitan Washington area. Kensington was incorporated as a town in 1894, with its own governing body. In 1895, the street car line was extended from Chevy Chase, strengthening the appeal of Kensington as an easily assessable suburb of Washington, D.C.

The Kensington Railroad station was designed in 1891 by the noted Baltimore architect E. Francis Baldwin. Baldwin’s stations reflect the influence of Henry Hobson Richardson, and the shingle style of architecture. The Kensington Station is a good example of the style. The building is anchored by its over-hanging gambrel roof that emphasizes the building’s horizontality. The shingled roof and siding, and the earth tones heighten the sense of rusticity.



Figure 4: Illustration of Kensington Railroad Station.

The library was the inspiration of Warner and Crosby Noyes, editor and publisher of the Washington Evening Star, who wanted to promote the moral, intellectual and scientific improvement of the surrounding community. Warner donated the land and constructed the building, while Noyes filled the shelves with books. The library became the social and educational hub of Kensington. Originally designed in the shingle style with an overhanging gambrel roof with shingles covering a full-width front porch, the Noyes Library remains in operation today.

Between 1908 and 1920, a large portion of the undeveloped land in Kensington was acquired for residential construction. By the end of World War H the major development in the town had been completed. Development was slowed during the Great Depression, yet in the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s, the town began to grow again. Vast sections of the town that were still vacant were further subdivided and filled in with ranch and split level dwellings that contrast with the earlier buildings in Kensington.

The town consists of 304 acres and contains a library, schools, small industries, a town hall, churches, a World War II memorial, residences, and a complex of antique shops. The Kensington Historic District retains much of its late 19th century suburban appeal in well-preserved Victorian styled residences with picturesque streets and gardens.



Figure 5: Historic Photograph of Noyes Library, undated.