

Gary Ditto's Newsletter

February 2005

A Tour of Historic Capitol View

by Sara Elise Phang

Many people in this area are familiar with the winding road called Capitol View Avenue, and the area itself, located between Kensington and Silver Spring, has a charming "country" atmosphere and interesting history.

Sited between Kensington and Forest Glen, Capitol View contains 350 homes, while retaining a small-town and rural atmosphere.

The area now known as Capitol View was originally owned by Daniel Carroll, a member of a prominent Maryland family. The farmer Robert Brown bought much of the land, then a farm, in 1829. His son sold it to Oliver and Mary Harr in 1882 after the Metropolitan branch of the B&O Railroad reached the area in the 1870s. Then Messrs. Harr, Burgdorf, and Washington real estate broker Pratt subdivided the property. The first houses were built by the Harrs.

The region is named Capitol View because the Capitol building was reportedly once visible from the third floor of one of the early homes on Capitol View Avenue, built before forests and taller buildings filled the miles in between.

—continued on page 2



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A Tour of Historic Capitol View

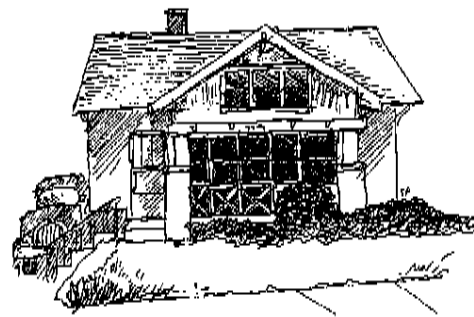
—cont.

At this time, Capitol View was truly “in the country,” reached by rail from Washington, D.C. It even had its own railroad platform, now no longer in existence.

Metropolitan Avenue, which turns into Capitol View Avenue and runs parallel to the railroad tracks until it joins Forest Glen Road and Seminary Road, is still a two-lane road. With its nineteenth-century houses on each side, it more resembles a country road in rural Maryland than a major road in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. “You really feel like you’re in another time and place,” said County Planning Board chairman Deric P. Berlage, concerning the action by the Legacy Open Space commission’s action to save some of the Capitol View area from development. “It has a feeling of country, of spaciousness. That’s why we were happy the county took advantage of this open space,” said Carol Ireland, a Capitol View activist.

Freight and passenger trains pass regularly along the railroad tracks, and the MARC train stops at the Kensington train station. Walkers in the Capitol View area can imagine that they are still in the age when trains rather than automobiles dominated American travel.

The atmosphere was long maintained by the Forest Glen Country Store, built in 1885 at the juncture of Seminary Road and Capitol View Avenue. The store and neighboring post office, now discontinued, adjoin the former Walter Reed Annex, also called the “Castle.” The Forest Glen Country Store was operated by the Harrs from the 1880s as an attempt to make ends meet. They sold the store in 1908. It continued to sell antiques, sundries, and penny candy and featured a small tea room until closed by the county in 1999.



Drivers on Capitol View Avenue/Seminary Road notice the vast, cream-colored, crumbling building complex known locally as the “Castle” and wonder what it is. The buildings feature a Dutch windmill, a Swiss chalet, a Japanese pagoda, an Italian villa, and an English castle, and have even been rumored to be “haunted.”

The real story is that the Forest Glen Improvement Company built the main structure as a resort hotel, named Ye Forest Inne, in 1887. However, it was too far out of the way to attract many guests. Converting the Inne into a casino did not revive flagging business.

The Cassidys acquired the property in 1894 and turned it into a girls’ finishing school, the National Park Seminary, replacing the bars, gambling halls, and pool rooms with dormitories and classrooms. The school opened with 48 students and increased to 230 students in 1911. The complex grew accordingly, adding the Greek temple, Japanese pagoda, and other structures representing cultures around the world.

John Cassidy sold the NPS in 1916 to Joseph Trees and James P. Ament. They continued to run the Seminary until it began to fail in the Great Depression.

In 1937 a new owner, Roy Tasco Davis, renamed it the National Park College and changed the orientation from finishing school to practical skills training. In 1942 the U.S. Army acquired the property to house wounded and recovering soldiers.

The “Castle” has been part of the Annex of the Walter Reed Naval Medical Center since 1942. The site has since been designated a Historic District and has been entered in the National Register of Historic Places.

(To be continued in a future issue of this newsletter. The drawings for this article are by Sara Elise Phang. Our special thanks to Carol Ireland of the Capitol View Historical Society, 10023 N. Menlo Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20910, (301) 588-4420. The Historical Society provides a pamphlet for self-guided walking tours, containing a short history of the community and details on individual historic houses. Pedestrians are advised to visit on a weekend when traffic is lighter, since Capitol View Avenue has several sharp bends and no shoulders.)



Memories of Marian Jean Ronsaville

by Sara Elise Phang

Marian Jean Ronsaville was one of Kensington's longest-term residents. She was born on June 25, 1907, and moved to Kensington with her family in 1910, when the neighborhood was still quite young. Though she traveled extensively around the world, she chose never to leave Kensington, residing in her family's house until her death on January 11, 2005, at the age of 97.

Marian Ronsaville reminisced about her life in Kensington in *Gary Ditto's Newsletter* in 1998, recalling days when there was a tennis court on her block and you could still catch the streetcar on the nearby line.

Her life spanned a century of changes. A graduate of Central High School, she received a degree in education from George Washington University. She began a teaching career in 1939, first teaching French, then working as a special education teacher in the Washington, D.C., public school system from 1940 until her retirement in 1967. She worked mainly in Georgetown and recalled her efforts to raise the test scores of students.

"The Lord's been really good to me. I've just been lucky, I guess," she told Francesca Skelton, who interviewed her for the newsletter article. Francesca described Marian as a "cheery, lively woman" who told wonderful stories about her parents, siblings, and nephews. She enjoyed travels to many parts of the world with her sister Virginia, whose career was also in education.

Her family home, one of Kensington's noted Victorian houses, was built in 1895; she lived in it with her sister, who died in 1969. She is survived by nephews William S. Ronsaville of Washington, D.C., and Edwin Waugh Ronsaville, of Front Royal, Va.

Kensington Arts Theatre Presents...

Each Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m., starting March 11 and going through April 2, the Kensington Arts Theatre proudly presents "Closer than Ever," with music by David Shinc and lyrics by Richard Maltby, Jr. There's also a Thursday evening performance on March 31 and a Sunday matinee at 3 p.m. on March 13. As with the songs in their earlier revue titled "Starting Now," each song in this production is a story — about love, security, happiness, and holding onto them amid being working couples, mid-life crisis, aging, role reversals with parents, and more. The shows take place at the Kensington Town Center, 3710 Mitchell St., Kensington, MD 20895. Phone 301-547-7101 or visit www.katonline.org.



At the Kensington Park Library

Tuesday, February 22, at 11 a.m. **Book Talk.** Librarian Lisa Navidi discusses *The Jane Austen Book Club* by Karen Joy Fowler. Adults.

Saturday, February 26 and Monday, February 28 at 10:30 a.m. **Small One-Ders.** Short flannel board stories, rhymes, and music for you and your child. Ages 12-24 months.

The Bethesda Art Walk

On the second Friday each month, 17 downtown Bethesda galleries and studios open their doors from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. The March 11 Bethesda Art Walk will feature free guided tours to participating galleries. You can meet the tour guide at the Bethesda Metro Center (corner of Old Georgetown Road and Wisconsin Avenue), at 7 p.m. For information, call Heather Blum at 301-215-6660 or visit www.bethesda.org.



Yoga Classes in Kensington

Kathleen Holmay of Kensington sent us news about the Yoga Classes she teaches in Old Town Kensington. For schedules and further details, contact Kathleen at 301-942-9595.

Tasty Breakfasts

On the first Saturday of most months, St. Paul's United Methodist Church holds an all-you-can-eat pancake breakfast from 8 a.m.-10:30 a.m. Enjoy a fun social time with a delicious meal. The proceeds from pancake breakfasts benefit youth activities and other projects. Location: Heavener Hall, corner of Fawcett & Mitchell Streets in Old Town Kensington. Watch for announcements on the sign by the church parking lot on Armory Avenue. For information, call 301-933-7933.

Gary Ditto's Newsletter welcomes ideas and news items from community members. Some of the community events and past features also appear on Gary Ditto's web site. The newsletter writers and editors are from Kensington Communications. Sara Phang helped with this issue.



3616 Saul Road
Kensington
For Sale - \$ 1,600,000



3942 Washington Street
Kensington
For Sale - \$ 1,150,000



3708 Kenilworth Driveway
Chevy Chase
For Sale - \$975,000



9820 Old Spring Road
Kensington
For Sale - \$800,000



9618 Hillridge Drive
Kensington
For Sale - \$ 699,000



10127 Cedar Lane
Kensington
For Sale - \$ 549,000



10104 Cedar Lane
Kensington
For Sale - \$ 475,000



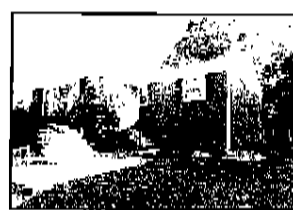
2907 W. Combs Avenue
Kensington
For Sale - \$ 439,000



4312 Glenridge Street
Kensington
For Rent - \$ 2,900 a month



4519 Everett Street
Kensington
For Rent - \$ 1,800 a month



10113 Madison Street
Kensington
For Rent - \$ 1,595 a month



8602 Hillridge Street, Kensington
Sold - \$ 850,000
January 31, 2005



9819 Haverhill Drive, Kensington
Under Contract
List Price: \$ 795,000



4221 Dresden Street, Kensington
Sold - \$ 711,000
February 1, 2005



1506 33rd Street, NW, Washington
Under Contract
List Price: \$650,000



4420 Ambler Drive, Kensington
Under Contract
List Price: \$ 599,000

Gary H. Ditto

Long & Foster
4650 East West Highway
Bethesda, MD 20814

Office: 301-215-6834
Email: gd@garyditto.com
Website: www.garyditto.com

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