

## **The Kensington Trolley Line – 1895 – 1933**

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Streetcars are now a distant memory for the Kensington area, though for nearly 40 years beginning in 1895, they were a familiar part of community life.

The line that ran from Chevy Chase Lake through Kensington was one of several that businesses built and operated in the county, as told some years back in a newspaper called Towne. The name “trolley” came from the word troller, a small metal wheel that conducted power from a wire to the car.

Before the trolley came, people reached Kensington by journeying on the railroad or on a “County Road” that curved between Rockville Pike and Bladensburg. The trolley companies saw their lines as a solution to the county’s few roads, unpaved and rutted or muddy, that travelers used in the late 19th century.

The trolley line called the Kensington Railway opened in 1895 as an extension of the Rock Creek Railway, which had begun in 1892 and went from Washington, D.C. to Chevy Chase Lake. The beginning of the Kensington Railway encouraged year-round residence and the opening of businesses in Kensington, which had begun as a summer retreat.

The Kensington Railway was one of the smaller lines. It ran about three miles to a point northeast of what is now the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Plyer’s Mill Road. Its tracks ran approximately parallel with the current Kensington Parkway and ended at a “turn- around” at a building named Norris Station.

The Rock Creek Railway, later named Capital Traction, provided power, road maintenance, and some of the cars for the Kensington Railway. The railway’s first car was named “Dinky.” Orange and cream on the outside, Dinky had red plush seats. The car had no heat or cooling.

The streetcars carried passengers and sometimes cargo and mail as well. People might order ice cream from Kensington’s McKeever’s, where the staff would pack it in a pail with salted ice to keep the ice cream frozen.

Motorman George Johnson used the Norris Station house, the waiting station located at what is now the corner of Howard and Summit Avenues, as his home.

The morning car that ran at 7:45 a.m. carried both adult commuters and high school students traveling to school in the District of Columbia. The cars moved slowly, sometimes slowing down to only 5 miles per hour while the motorman collected fares.

Owner R. Henry Phillips, who had purchased the line from the founders around the turn of the century, sold the line to the company Capital Traction in 1925. The cars of Capital Traction, also known as “Big Green” because of the color it used, were more comfortable than the earlier ones. However, by the mid-1930’s, Connecticut Avenue had been paved all the way to Kensington. Buses could now serve more customers.