

Joseph's Park: A History of Kensington Part 3

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More About the Early History of the Kensington Area

This third and final installment of Edith Ray Saul's history of Joseph's Park takes us from the Civil War to the mid-20th century.

When the Civil war broke out, my grandmother's youngest brother was studying medicine at Columbian College – what is now George Washington University School of Medicine. Feeling a strong allegiance to the Confederacy, he took a bag of gold, my grandmother's horse and went across the Potomac River to join the Confederate forces. Well, he was from Baltimore, so he was well received over there by the Maryland troops.

At the time, my grandfather was a captain of a militia company in the District. When the young men from his company crossed the river to Virginia, they weren't well received since nobody knew them. They had to be vouched for, so my grandfather vouched for them. But because he was a Marylander, he couldn't imagine going over to Virginia. Given the circumstances, he thought it would be better to leave the District and come out to the wilds of Joseph's Park. He sold his farm in the District and bought a Highlands Farm.

In those days there was no secret service or F.B.I. But the government hired the Pinkerton Agency, a private detective agency, to act as a secret service. Their job was to turn in anyone suspected of aiding the Confederacy. My grandfather, along with several other local farmers, was arrested by them. He was eventually found guilty of couching for those boys in his old militia. He was imprisoned at the Capitol Prison in the District. This was the summer of 1864, a very difficult time for a farmer to be away from his farm. When my grandfather was in prison, my grandmother was at the Highlands Farm with just two of three little babies and her 13 year-old brother-in-law who was the "man" of the estate.

During that time, my grandmother got word that the Confederate General Jubal Early was getting ready to send his infantry down what is now Georgia Avenue and his cavalry down Wisconsin Avenue in order to capture the capitol. When he and his men showed up at the Highland's Farm, she had hot water ready for the men. She figured that if they were going to capture Washington, they should really fix themselves to look handsome. They soon came back. They hadn't conquered Washington. Before they left again, they took ham, coffee, quinine, and two mules.

I am told that my grandmother's brother was a cavalry officer with Jubal Early. He was captured on his way back across the border. As a child, I always wondered what became of the ham and the coffee and the quinine.

After a few months, my grandfather was released from prison. His friend, Frances Preston Blair, had used his influences to get my grandfather released. Out of gratitude, my grandparents named my uncle, Frances Preston Blair Ray, after him.

When my grandfather died, his heirs sold the Highlands Farm to Clarence Moore. Clarence Moore was a master of foxhounds, for the Chevy Chase Club started as a foxhunting club before the golfers took over. They had the hounds and the horses, too, where the club is now. Chevy Chase was filling up with high price homes and the owners didn't like the baying of the hounds and the smell of the stables. So Clarence Moore moved the hunt up to the Highlands Farm. And the gentlemen from the club and the local farmers would take out after the poor fox.

In the summer of 1912 Clarence Moore was abroad and he bought a pack of hounds to send home. The hounds got sent home on one ship, but Clarence Moore got on the Titanic ship, and was lost.

Clarence Moore was crazy about the Highlands Farm and he left in his will that it shouldn't be sold until his two infant children were of age. By 1929 they were of age, so it was sold and Rock Creek Hills was

developed. I think the charm of Rock Creek Hills was that it was developed, more or less, all of a piece, a very harmonious development.

I don't remember the farm when my family lived there. But the Curran Family lives there and everyone knew them. They were very generous. We spent half of our time playing around the farm- particularly, the Clum girls. Highlands Farm was their home away from home. I think some of these Currans are around now.

In the meantime, B.H. Warner came here in 1890. Mr. Warner had very high ideals for his development. He wanted to make it an ideal community. But that's another story.

Mr. Warner was determined that Kensington Park was going to be a deluxe summer place for people to live. Well, actually, only a few people went home in winter, including me. I always had to go back to our home in the District and I wept when I had to leave Kensington.

According to my oversimplifications, we've had three real changes in this part of the world. The first was when the European settlers took possession of Joseph's Park. The second was when the railroad came through and transformed the agricultural community. The final major change was when the extension of Connecticut Avenue cut the town into three parts.

History is really a dynamic subject. it treats continuity and change, and not just the past. I don't know what is going to happen to us in the future.