

**From Armory to Town Hall, Part 2**  
**February 1987**  
**Part 2**

(The first part of this article described the Kensington Armory's early history, starting in 1927 – its years as the town fire station, its bowling alley, and its use by the state's motor vehicle department. This article brings the story to present.)

Some neighbors remember the Armory's special role in June of 1972. Hurricane Agnes had come to the area. One night the Armory served as a temporary haven for area residents who were asked to go there by local officials concerned that a major flood might occur (it didn't). Some neighbors remember bundling up their important papers, along with their dogs, cats, and gerbils, and having a middle-of-the-night party at the Armory with their neighbors.

In 1974 the Town of Kensington purchased the Armory back from the state for \$65,000. According to Edith Ray Saul of the Kensington Historical Society, the state agreed to sell the property back to the Town with a Major stipulation: the Town could rent the space out to groups for exhibits, classes, and meetings, but could not lease space for private shops that would compete with local business.

By 1975, workers were busy repairing and renovating the Armory. A new triple-arcaded brick front was added just about where the soldiers stood for the 1927 dedication. The new front corrected a structural problem and provided direct access to both the lower level and the drill hall above. The re-dedication ceremony was held in October 1976, and the Armory officially became the Kensington Town Hall (but how difficult it is not to refer to it as "The Armory" – as it was for nearly 50 years!)

You have probably driven by "The Armory" many times. Take time someday to stop and walk around the building. If you cross Mitchell Street and stand with your back to St. Paul's Methodist Church, you will have a good view of the façade. The multi-paned windows are of varying widths. Green window frames are set against dark brick. The lower level is painted cream, with white or red doors to contrast. Grey, granite-like blocks serve as windowsills, marking the stories and trimming the crenellated top. In the upper center is a square bas-relief of the same material with the Maryland coast arms.

Depending on the time of day, your visit might coincide with a session of Town Meeting or a meeting of the Kensington Historical Society or the Women's Community Club. Upstairs in the drill hall you might encounter an aerobic class, a session of the Capital Dog Training Club, or an art exhibit.

Next, turn your back on the drill hall and stand on the arcaded terrace, looking out over St. Paul's Methodist, the Safeway, and the most recent arrival that part of Kensington – the Bakery, Confectionery, and Tobacco Workers International Union building. Then imagine that by turning around and going back through the large doors, you would enter another world, in another time. Actually, you can go to that other time even today, if you make arrangements well ahead of time.

Through a door on your right you would enter the Victorian Room, so convincingly done that you might expect a turn-of-the-century Kensingtonian to materialize out of the woodwork. And if you opened the door across the hall from the Victorian Room, you would find two-room Children's Museum, filled with circus wagons and animals of every possible size, as well as houses and dolls of various periods and scales.

And if you could travel back in time on the same spot, to the turn of the century, you would find not a Victorian Room or a Children's Museum, but a two-room schoolhouse, the first public school in the town of Kensington. But all of that is another story, and we hope to tell it and the stories of the Victorian Room and the Children's Museum in future issues of this Report.

Meanwhile, you will find the Town Offices on the lower level open Monday through Friday, 9-1 and 2-5. And if you're still lacking a proper calendar for 1987, you might want to purchase a copy of the Annual Historical Society Calendar. Valerie Kellogg, Town Clerk-Treasurer, even has some back issues for the calendar, all with fascinating pictures of old Kensington, and some booklets on Kensington history.

-Martha Lawrenz