

## **Bringing Beauty to All Seasons Part 1**

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#### Part 1: The Early Years

Some of the prettiest flowers you'll see in bouquets and florist shops in this area, around the nation, and in several European countries come from the creative and careful tending by three generations of one local family. And from a three-acre farm and nursery that have a history spanning close to a century that are tucked into a gentle slope near Rock Creek Park in Chevy Chase.

The flowers are snapdragons – named for the way they suggest the mouth of a dragon, and distinguished by their showy clusters of “two-lipped” flower in many colors. And the family is the Winklers, some of the first settlers in the northern part of Chevy Chase.

The story began in Switzerland around the turn of the century. Bernhard Winkler had been raised near Zurich, where his family was farmers. At one time he considered becoming a cobbler – a maker of shoes – but his greater interest was in growing flowers. This interest took him to France and work in nurseries there. In 1904 the young man voyaged to the United States on a German ship, arriving at Ellis Island. In those days Long Island was a major center for horticulture, so he found a job there. He then moved to Chevy Chase, where he roomed in a home and worked in partnership with a flower grower on Rosemary Street.

After two years Bernhard Winkler returned to Switzerland to marry Hermine Thalman. They soon came back to Chevy Chase, where their daughters Margaret and Helen were born. After two more years he bought out his partners share of the flower business and bought two acres of woodland near Rock Creek. After clearing the area of trees, he dismantled and moves both the wooden house and the large original greenhouse to his location – a tremendous feat in an era horses and wagons.

Both the flower business and the family thrived. Another daughter, Barbara, and the twins Elsie and Fred were born in the home next to the greenhouse. Later Bernhard expanded the farm by another acre. Surrounding the flower business were wheat and cornfields, and later cattle grazed nearby.

The site was ideal for a greenhouse because Rock Creek was so close by. The family pumped water directly from the creek for the flowers and used a well for the family's household needs.

Near greenhouses and garden land was another water source that had historical significance – a spring that supplied water at 52 degrees around the year. The spring was named “Clean Drinking,” reportedly by George Washington in the late 1700's when he visited the Jones family manor house on what is now the corner of Jones Bridge and Jones Mill Roads. The Bethesda Retirement and Nursing Center occupy this site today. Another legend reported by Doree Germain Holman in “Old Bethesda,” has the name originating from the group of surveyors who in 1699 had “drunk clean” the supplies at the manor house and so headed for the spring. That the spring had also refreshed Indian settlers is shown by a small but prized collection of arrowheads gathered over the years as the Winklers tilled the soil. A small building and plaque mark the site of the spring today.

“Clean Drinking” was also the early name of the fourteen-hundred-acre manor around the spring and manor house and bounded on the east and north by Joseph's Park, the subject of last year's series of articles on the early history of Kensington. Rock Creek was formed the boundary between these two land tracts, and the Winkler greenhouses are just across Rock Creek from the southern part of the original “Joseph's Park.”

The Winkler family lived right next to the greenhouse through the 1920's, and all the children pitched in with the chores. An outdoor garden supplied plenty of fresh vegetables for summer and for canning for the winter, and there were also a cow and chickens.

Bernhard Winkler used a horse and wagon and the streetcar for supplies and to carry the flowers to the Washington market. A small and sturdy man, he also carried bundles of flowers himself and walked to Connecticut Avenue to catch the streetcar – an uphill route of three-quarters of a mile. He raised flowers of many kinds – including gladioli, asters, chrysanthemums, and snapdragons. And the snapdragons would later become the focus of pioneering work at the Winkler greenhouse.

(This story will continue in a coming spring issue. Many thanks to Fred, Sally, and Kathy Winkler for their information and photographs.)

–Charlotte Wunderlich