

The Beginnings of Kensington, Maryland
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Like many other places, Kensington has a history linked to the building of the railroads in the last century.

If you drive along Howard Avenue toward the Kensington Post Office, you'll see the train station building that's more than 100 years old and that's still being used by commuters today. Its story goes back even further, to the years before there was a town.

Before the Civil War, the B and O Railroad Company decided to build a "metropolitan branch." The new branch would go from the city of Washington across the Maryland farmland to Point of Rocks, some 40 miles away to the northwest, near the Potomac River. The planners decided on a total of 20 stops. One would be where the railroad would cross the Bethesda-Bladensburg road. That stop we now know as the Kensington Train Station on Howard Avenue.

Construction on the new rail line started in 1866. By 1873, more than 42 miles of track were in place.

Passenger service began when a train made its first run through the county on May 25, 1873. A local newspaper commented on the event:

"Well, the Metropolitan Branch Railroad is at last completed and the regular passenger trains have commenced running. Many...assembled at the depot to witness the iron-horse as he went dashing by....the great work has been accomplished, and our people may bid farewell to slow coaches and muddy roads-they can now go to Washington in 45 minutes at a cost of 60 cents."

By 1880, twelve trains made the run each day. People were building homes on the Knowles farm near the train station, then called Knowles Station. The growing settlement soon had two stores, a post office, and a blacksmith shop.

Like trains today, the trains of that early era offered passengers some choices of tickets and rates. A ticket for the 11-mile trip from Knowles Station to downtown Washington cost 35 cents. Or you could buy an excursion ticket, a monthly ticket, a school ticket, a quarterly ticket, or a family ticket.