

Published
Since 1983

Gary & Diana Ditto's Newsletter

May 2012

Good Neighbors Remembered: *A Gracious Welcome to the Neighborhood*

By Antoinette Kranenburg

For more than thirty years, Ed and Connie Kelly have made their home in one of Old Town Kensington's historic houses, a white Queen Anne-style house on Kensington Parkway. Their home has long been known as the Fowler House, named for its original owners.

It is a house full of character. A little front gate in the white picket fence opens to the beautiful front garden. Wide wooden steps lead to the spacious screened-in porch, which wraps around the front and side. A multisided tower with a variety of windows shapes one of the corners of the house, each of the floors distinct.



Mr. Kelly shows me into the cozy kitchen and through to the living room. The far corner is made up of the sides of the tower, and has tall windows in three of the sides. On the second floor, the tower also has three windows, but off the attic there are six square windows, one in each of the tower's sides.

Visiting Kensington one Sunday in 1978, the Kellys saw the house for sale. Immediately they knew they wanted to make it their home. At the time, they lived in Gaithersburg and, with four young children, were looking for a bigger house. They made a full-price offer, and were disappointed when their offer was rejected because it was contingent on selling their house in Gaithersburg.

A Kensington Queen Anne home. Illustration by Sara Phang

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Ed remembers that they put their house on the market on Tuesday and it sold on Saturday. Then, after a home inspection found a minor defect in the Fowler house, the competing offer was withdrawn and the Fowler house became theirs. They moved into their Kensington home in July of 1978 and have lived there ever since.

Their home is across from what is now Johnson's Florist and Garden Center. When the Kellys moved here in 1978, there was a Laundromat at the site of Johnson's.

Almost every house at that time had elderly owners, except for the Morris family, who also had four children. Ed and Connie have fond memories of their neighbors.

On the Kellys' first day in their new home, Ed Kelly discovered that someone had mowed the lawn and had kept the tomatoes watered for them. It was their neighbor on Montgomery Avenue, Frank Kennedy, an avid gardener.

In addition, Connie remembers vividly how Bertha Clum showed up at their door on that first day, white haired and bearing a coffee can filled with flowers. She did not want to come in, saying, "No, no, no. I know how busy you are. I just want you to know how welcome you are!"

The three Clum sisters, Helen, Mary and Bertha Clum, lived next door. Their father, Cornelius Clum, was the editor of the Montgomery Press. He ran the newspaper in the nearby building at 3716 Howard Avenue, which now houses the Society for the Prevention of Blindness Antique Shop.

Originally, the land in Kensington was sold in parcels of three lots each. The Kellys' house found its start in 1883, when the Fowlers bought the land as a wedding gift for a daughter.

The house was built in the imaginative Queen Anne style, which was popular between 1880 and 1910, with its varied rooflines, gables, porches, and towers. According to "A Walking Tour of Kensington," published by the Kensington Historical Society, the front gable with its half-timbering is in the ornamental Stick style.

In 1915 Mr. Clum bought the lot that adjoined his property for a driveway, so the Kellys' house sits on two lots rather than the original three.

The Clums also bought land across Kensington Parkway—land that was unusable because of the creek. The sisters told the Kellys that it took 300 loads of soil to turn that land into a garden. At one time it had a hothouse and tennis courts, and it became the setting for many lovely gatherings.

When Mr. Clum died, his three daughters inherited the house, which was in need of care. A local banker gave Bertha, the youngest of the three, a job, even though she did not think she had the right skills. However, she learned on the job and worked there till she retired.

Helen Clum, the middle sister, worked in Silver Spring. The oldest sister, Mary, kept the house and made it very nice. The sisters did everything themselves. They were avid gardeners. At one time, they sold flowers from their garden from a cart in front of their house.

As the sisters grew older, their neighbor Frank Kennedy helped them maintain the garden for many years. After her two sisters died, Bertha sold the garden along the creek to the Town of Kensington and stipulated that it would be named in honor of Frank Kennedy. When Bertha died in 1987, the Town renamed it the Clum-Kennedy Garden, in honor of the longtime friends and neighbors.

The sisters' uncle, John P. Clum, lived an eventful life out in the West. Connie brought in an old illustrated history book of the American West, with a striking photo of a handsome John P. Clum, posing in full Western gear with a rifle and some companions. John Clum founded the *Tombstone Epitaph*, a newspaper that is still in print, and was also the first mayor of Tombstone. It was John Clum who wrote the legendary story of Wyatt Earp and the shootout at the OK Corral, an event that might otherwise not have become known.

Having been told the story, the Kellys visited Tombstone in a 1983 cross-country trip and brought back a current issue of the *Tombstone Epitaph* for the Clum sisters.

They were real southern ladies, describes Connie. Late in the afternoon each day, they would change out of their work clothes, put on their earrings and fresh lipstick, and sit on the porch to have a drink before dinner. Ed said that, if he were stopping over, he would be sure to still be wearing his suit.



Connie remembers a time when it had snowed heavily and they were concerned about their elderly neighbors. The Kellys made their way through the deep snow to the Clums' house, only to find the sisters sitting down to breakfast. Each place was set with a beautiful placemat, a full set of silver, a breakfast plate, a separate plate for toast, and a cereal bowl.

The Clum sisters hosted Kensington's Spring Garden Party, and another neighbor would host the winter holiday party. They served the best old-fashioned in town, says Ed Kelly, with a syrup that they made themselves.

Another neighbor was Mr. Brazelton, a biologist and botanist, who taught at Roosevelt High School. He added a greenhouse to his house right outside his dining room, and grew orchids there. Connie believes that you entered by way of the window. Mr. Brazelton was a bachelor and would go over to the Clums to play cards.

Frank Kennedy would walk his dog around the neighborhood and often would pick up things that people had discarded and put outside. He would bring them home and repair them, and then give them away.

The Kennedys met during the war. She was an 'Aussie,' an excellent ice skater and had trained for the Olympics at one time. One winter, the Kellys flooded their concrete driveway to make a small skating rink for the children and the Morrison kids.

Good Neighbors – *continued*

They remember that Mrs. Kennedy, who must have been in her seventies at the time, came over and out-skated everyone!

Their house gives the Kellys a front-row seat for community events such as the Kensington Labor Day Parade, when they pull the chairs out and enjoy meeting friends and neighbors. In addition, for many years Ed Kelly was a volunteer marshal for the Kensington 8k Run.

The Kellys are active volunteers in other ways. Though Connie brushes by it, she volunteers with the food pantry for St. Camillus Church, which serves some 500 families; and she cooks for the Dorothy Day shelter and for SOME (So Others May Eat).

Now a youthful 84, Ed Kelly recently returned from the Dominican Republic, where he worked on a Habitat for Humanity Project with a group of volunteers. The foundation of the house had been built, nine cinderblocks high. The volunteers' job was to fill it with dirt, to counteract flooding. With a cement floor and roof, the house is designed to withstand hurricanes.

Ed Kelly also volunteers for Montgomery County Habitat. He brings a crew together, professionals show them what to do, and, he reports, they "do what they are told." Montgomery County Habitat received a \$1 million dollar grant and bought 15 houses for renovation. Families are selected for the program based on need, stability, and ability to pay the mortgage; they take classes and are tutored about budgeting among others. Over the years, there has been only one default.

We are grateful to the Kellys for sharing their stories with us. They illustrate a different pace of life and the many thoughtful acts of good neighbors that build a community, something that continues in Kensington.



International Day of the Book

Kudos to organizer Elisenda Sola-Sole of the *Kensington Row Bookshop*, 3786 Howard Avenue. Old Town Kensington's afternoon street festival went ahead in spite of showers and celebrated the International Day of the Book with live music, author readings, open mic, activities for children and adults, storytellers, ...and books, books, books!

The Bookshop's next monthly poetry reading on Wednesday, May 30 at 7 p.m. features Nancy Naomi Carlson and Kirk Nessel. Visit www.kensingtonrowbookshop.com for more or call 301-949-9416.

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www.thedittogroup.com

Gary and Diana Ditto's Newsletter welcomes ideas and news items from community members. The editor is Antoinette Kranenburg of Kensington, assisted by Cherry Wunderlich. Many thanks to Connie and Ed Kelly for sharing their stories.



Spring Yard Sale

Friday, May 11th, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Saturday, May 12th, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.
St. Paul's United Methodist Church
10401 Armory Avenue

Heavener Hall, Corner of Mitchell and Fawcett Streets

Hunt for treasures and good deals at St. Paul's annual Spring Yard Sale, sponsored by the United Methodist Men.

Donations of sellable items are welcome (but no computer equipment, exercise equipment, or heavy upholstered furniture, please!) and should be brought to the church on Thursday, May 10th. Use the entrance at corner of Mitchell and Fawcett Streets. For more information, please call 301-933-7933.

Now Open: JennyCakes Bakery!

JennyCakes Bakery had its grand opening Thursday, April 5 and sold out all its treats. The colorful tiny bakery is at 10419-B Armory Avenue in Old Town Kensington and features scrumptious cakes and cupcakes, muffins, cookies, pies, breads and quiches, all baked from scratch. The hours are Thursday, Friday and Saturday 8 to 5 p.m. and 1 to 4 p.m. on Sunday. Every third Thursday of the month, when Frankly Pizza sets up its mobile pizza oven out front, JennyCakes will be open till 8 p.m.

Kensington resident, Jenny Smith, explains that the Itsy Bitsy Bakery had become a favorite after school destination for her daughters Geneva and Lily and their friends. When it closed in early January, Geneva and Lily (4th and 6th grade) campaigned 'relentlessly' for her to open her own bakery in that space. From baking, to folding boxes, and to staffing the counter, the bakery is a family venture.

Orders can be placed on line for pick up on Thursday, Friday and Saturday at www.jennycakesbakery.net
Phone: 240-388-9989.

Kensington Garden Tour

Sunday, May 20, 2012

The Kensington Historical Society hosts its annual Spring Garden Tour on Sunday afternoon, May 20, 2012. Details will be posted soon at the society's website: www.kensingtonhistory.org.

More upcoming events:

On Tuesday, May 22, Historian Anthony Pitch will speak about his book "Burning of Washington, The British Invasion of 1814." The Historical Society's meeting is open to all and will be held at the Kensington Town Hall, 3710 Mitchell Street, lower level. Refreshments served at 7 p.m. followed at 7:30 p.m. by the presentation.

The *Summer Concert Series* sponsored by the Historical Society starts Saturday, June 2, 2012. The popular FREE outdoor concerts are held Saturdays through September from 10 to 11 a.m. in the Howard Avenue Park across from the Kensington Train Station. Check the website for the concert schedule.



