

Journey of the Big Train
September-October 1990
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The Story Behind a Historic House – Part 1

Kensington's pride in its history found vivid expression in the watercolors and oil paintings that filled one end of the Town Hall on Labor Day.

Outdoors that same Monday morning, the tall trees and historic homes that inspires the community's artists formed the backdrop for a parade of marching bands and floats, together with antique and modern cars carrying candidates for school board, Congress, and many other positions.

The Paint the Town Art Show highlighted the results of the community's dedication to historic preservation. And November 6th, the date on which voters will decide on those candidates' futures, will mark the 103rd anniversary of an event that led to another nearby success in historic preservation.

As you drive along Cedar Lane past the National Institute of Health and reach the intersection with Old Georgetown Road, you can spot a large, wooden frame gray-green house. Now the home of the Teaching Team a tutorial service, the colonial revival house at 9100 Old Georgetown Road was added to the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation in March. Its story began more than a century ago.

It was on November 6, 1987 that Kansas farmers Frank and Minnie Perry Johnson welcomed their second child whom they named Walter Perry Johnson. During his early years, Walter helped out with the work on the family farm near the town of Humboldt.

He was 14 years old when a move brought him to Fullerton, California, where he received his introduction to baseball. His first game with his high school team proved to be a rough beginning, or as they say, "a long afternoon." No doubt his hopes were high, although he was only a "sub" for that game. But when the last out finally came, the score sounded more like football than baseball. The Fullerton High School team had been trounced, 21-0.

The coach decided to make a change. He asked the boy from Kansas to pitch the next game, against Santa Ana. So the youth pitched...and pitched... for a total of 15 innings. And the game finally ended – in a 0-0 tie. A turnaround for the team, and a major triumph for Walter Johnson. In his first start, Fullerton High School's new pitcher had recorded 27 strikeouts. And in the process he had shown the first signs of the talent that would lead to a journey east, some enduring baseball records, the nickname The Big Train, and some pages in Montgomery County history.

(This is the first part of a two-part article written by Charlotte Wunderlich. Information and help for this article were provided by Charles Rideout, assistant principal at Walter Johnson High School, and by the staff of public libraries.)