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The Kensington Cabin

by Laura Kramer

The Kensington Cabin is one of Kensington's longtime landmarks. A park and playground along Kensington Parkway are named for the cabin. And now this little log building is the focus of a community effort to renovate and restore it. In this issue we tell some history, community members' memories of Kensington recreation programs, and the current project.

The Early History

In 1949, Anna Farrell wrote a delightful history of the Woman's Club of Kensington and told of the efforts of a devoted member to provide this special place.

"In 1925, Mrs. Armstrong began her campaign to keep for the pleasure of the townspeople that piece of ground which she named 'Kensington Meadows' but now known as the 'Playground' and the site of the 'Kensington Cabin.' A landscape artist drew plans; shrubbery and memorial trees were planted. Tennis courts were planned and Mrs. Wilson Townsend, with the help of her committee and friends, built a stone fireplace and planted one hundred and eleven small evergreen trees which the club paid for. But this expenditure of money was infinitesimal compared with her work in planting those trees and then trying to keep them alive..."

Kensington Memories from the 1940's

Several years ago, Mab Cantril met with four former and current Kensington residents, who reminisced about their good times growing up in Kensington in the 1940's. The common link that originally brought Esther Mizell, Jack and Jackie Jones, and Jackie's sister Pat Bellamy together, they recalled, was their involvement in the Maryland Park and Planning program for the children and families of Kensington.

Esther Mizell was regarded as the driving force behind the recreation programs that drew the families of Kensington together as a community in the 1940's. Through her positive attitude and her development of the recreation program, Esther became a role model to the young people who were fortunate to take part in her programs.

Growing up in the 1940's, Pat and Jackie recalled that their mother kept them busy with gardening and cooking beginning at the age of 10. Both parents worked when they were growing up. Each child in the family took turns planning and cooking the meals for a week, while the other children kept up with the laundry and cleaning.

Recreation Programs

Pat and Jackie's childhood home on Washington Street backed up to the playground where Esther's recreation program took place. The program ran six days a week, in the summer as well as during the school year. All that was required for children to attend was a parent's signature on the release form.

Since sports was their favorite hobby, Pat and Jackie fit right into the recreation program. Besides a wide range of sports, the program offered arts and crafts, story hours, and sing-alongs with Esther's accompaniment on the accordion. According to Jack, "there was real pride in everyone's involvement, children and parents alike."

Soon the junior high school age children began putting on dramas four nights a week in the Armory. Esther commented, "Everyone knew everyone. There was a sense of community. Everyone was proud of where they lived. We looked out for each other; took care of each other."

In 1958, after several years in Europe, Esther returned to the recreation department to run the teen club. Her longtime friends Jack and Jackie Jones were on hand to chaperone the dances at the clubhouse. Children came from all over the county to take part in the teen program. Special instructors were brought in to teach arts and crafts, archery, rhythm, and singing. Softball games were held where the post office is now located. Jack commented that "kids moved from place to place to play badminton, football, volleyball, and tennis. The strong and weak played together-everyone could participate."

Kensington's elementary school was "marvelous." Mrs. Flynn, a third grade teacher, and Mrs. Duvall were two teachers who were fondly remembered as living in town and participating in community activities.

McKeever's for Treats

High on the list of local Kensington establishments remembered was McKeever's ice cream store. Located next to the bank on Montgomery Avenue, McKeever's was a popular place for ice cream sodas and candy. Esther recalled that you could buy two candies for a penny. Not only was the homemade ice cream delicious, but it also was irresistible to Pat. In fact, it became such a daily habit that Pat's mother often phoned McKeever to warn him ahead of time not to give Pat anything too rich. McKeever often treated winning sports teams and children on their birthdays.

Traditions

One of the many town traditions was the annual Pet Show. It brought everyone and their pet to the playground, including dogs, cats, turtles, and snakes. One year Esther's brother was taken to the Pet Show on a leash! Yearly parades were also sure to draw a crowd, and the church community became known for sponsoring hay rides.

Thanks to these and other friends who kept their memories fresh in their minds, we can learn much about Kensington's traditions in an earlier time.