

A Boyhood Remembrance – Alfred D. Noyes

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A special holiday gift for us to all, one of our neighbors is sharing a memory of a long ago Kensington not many of us have known. But most of us have tried to imagine as we hurry through our lives well over 75 years after the summer of 1915. Our correspondent is Alfred D. Noyes. Mr. Noyes has lived in Kensington for many years, and has been a resident of Montgomery County for 80 years.

A BOYHOOD REMEMBRANCE

The New Sewer Line for Kensington

In the summer of 1915, the First World War was going on and Kensington was getting a new sewer system.

I remember the ditch digger coming slowly up Washington Street. For an eight-year-old it was an exciting event. This digger looked like a huge mechanical monster ripping up the dirt street and making a narrow, deep hole in the earth. At the bottom, the new pipes were to be laid.

The men were all Italians who worked behind the digger. They had to shore up the sides with wooden boards and make the bottom smooth for the pipes. I don't think the men had been in our country very long as they spoke very little English.

Among the group was a young boy fifteen or maybe sixteen, named Sam. Sam was the water boy. He was a happy, handsome and smiling fellow. He quickly won the affection of everyone, especially us young kids.

Sam was dark complexioned, of medium height, and very muscular. I remember asking him to show his muscle. He would flex his biceps and let us feel his big, hard muscle.

The men were constantly hollering "Water," and Sam would run with the three-gallon bucket and tin dipper. The ladies who live on the street would let him fill his bucket from the well each house had.

One day there was great excitement and a near tragedy. I recall hearing someone shouting, "Cave-in! Cave-in!" One of the men who was working in the ditch on South Washington Street in front of the Linton home, which was the second on the right going down the street from Connecticut Avenue. The sides of the ditch fell in and trapped him. When I got there he had been rescued and apparently did not need medical care.

I don't know how many men were in the working crew. My guess is that there were fifteen to twenty. The men lived in a two-story house located at the northeast corner of Prospect Street and County Road (now Summit Avenue).

In the evening after supper the men would sing Italian songs accompanied by mandolins and, I think, guitars. They could be heard quite a distance. Some of us youngsters would stand on Prospect Street and listen. Our parents wouldn't allow us to go to the house where we were welcomed to by, the reason, I remember, was that they drank a lot of wine.

Sam soon became the favorite of everyone young and old. His pleasant personality and friendly ways made him a special person to all of us.

The work progressed through the hot summer days until the shock occurred. The men of age for military service received a letter from the King of Italy telling them to come home to serve their country.

My recollection is that they all were willing, as they said, "to serve their King." The saddest part of it all that Sam was to go. He was very willing to serve his King and country, but we who had grown to love him felt a great loss. I remember my mother saying, "He is so young to go to war."

The day the men left they came down to Washington Street with their suitcases to take the streetcar to Washington. They were in a gay mood. Everyone stood on the street waving them. They waved back and said goodbye,

I have often wondered what happened to those brace men who went "to serve their King," and especially Sam, the water boy and our special friend.

Alfred D. Noyes

Age 84

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