

Published  
Since 1983

# Gary & Diana Ditto's Newsletter

September 2019

## Jayne H. Plank Remembers

by Antoinette Kranenburg

Jayne Harper Plank served as a public servant for decades and continues to be active and engaged. Plank served on the Kensington's Town Council from 1967 to 1974, She was the first woman elected mayor of Kensington and served four terms, from 1974 to 1982. Plank was director of intergovernmental affairs of the U.S. Department of State under President Ronald Reagan. After graduate studies at Georgetown University in Middle Eastern studies, she worked as a cryptologic linguist for the National Security Agency.

Jayne Plank has lived in Kensington since 1962, for 57 years and counting. The house is set back from the street by a deep front lawn, shaded by a grand old black walnut tree. It is that same tree in the front yard that sold Jayne and her husband on the house.



The spacious front porch with white wicker furniture is Jayne's favorite spot in the summer. She enjoys having her breakfast there, reading, and meeting with friends.

Jayne's longtime neighbor and friend Julie O'Malley joins us. As president of the Kensington Historical Society, she wants to be sure to capture the conversation for the Town Archive.

— Continued on page 2

Mayor Jayne Plank at her office with her son Kevin.  
Photo taken by Bob Humphreys

Long & Foster Real Estate, Inc.  
Bethesda Gateway Office  
4650 East-West Highway  
Bethesda, MD 20814  
301-907-7600

THE DITTO GROUP  
experience • knowledge • community



Gary Ditto 301-215-6834  
Diana Ditto 301-215-6904  
gd@thedittogroup.com  
diana@thedittogroup.com  
www.thedittogroup.com

— Jayne Plank continued

We meet in the family room addition, where we have the records of Jayne's many years of public service handy. These are clearly organized by year in binders and securely stored. Several years of records for Kensington were destroyed, which bothers Jayne greatly, but fortunately her memory is excellent.

"Well I have so many memories!" Jayne grew up in Georgetown, but her memories of Kensington go back to the 1930s.

As a little girl she would come out to Kensington with her mother, to visit her mother's cousin, Edna Kengla Raney, who lived on Plyers Mill Road.

"That was a big thing! We would drive grandma, and come out and visit." Washington was a very small city then and Kensington was the country. "It was all a little two-lane road with pretty trees. It was a lovely way to go."

She was a city girl, "I came out here and they had chickens in the back yard and corn growing! I had never seen that!"

Jayne found out that cousin Edna's husband was Gene Raney, the first fire chief of the Kensington Volunteer Fire Department. Jayne got to go up in an ambulance. "I did get to ride in the front, before I rode in the back!"

Along Plyers Mill at the time were all original old Kensington houses—not farmhouses, but Victorian houses. "You come up on a little porch, and you go in and there is a little stair up and then up that way a stained glass window, and then the little living room and behind that was the little dining room and then the kitchen." Edna Raney was a local beautician and had her hair studio in the back.

When Plank came on the Town Council in 1967, the town office was either Edna Raney's house, or the house next door on Plyers Mill Road, where the self-storage is now.

Jayne's mother was Lillian Kengla Harper, a realtor. Jayne has two younger sisters. Her father, Raymond Harper, died in 1944 when Jayne was 11. Her mother went to work. In summertime her mother had worked with her uncles, who were in real estate. "Real estate was what she knew."

Jayne is a seventh-generation Washingtonian, going back to the 1750s. Earlier generations were farmers, cattlemen and butchers. They had a big farm. They raised cattle all along Wisconsin and Massachusetts Avenue all the way back to Tunlaw Road and all the way down.

They drove cattle down to Georgetown to the rendering plant and the slaughterhouse. Jayne remembers the Sottlemeyers rendering plant—"Oh, it smelled to high heaven. It was awful, awful!"

Family lived all the way up and down Wisconsin Avenue. Where Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Cathedral Avenues come together, one of the houses, called Liberty Hall, was torn down in the twenties. Alban Towers was built there. The Westchester on Cathedral Avenue is where the Kengla Kennedy house used to be.

Even when Jayne was a child, there were many houses in Georgetown without indoor plumbing. They had "a bath with a path," as Jayne's mother used to say — an outhouse, in other words.

When Jayne came back from living overseas in Iran and Pakistan, they wanted a house. Her mother, who was in real estate, had heard at a lunch about a house in Kensington. They came to look at it. The price was right: \$25,000 with all the land. The location was right, and it had a tree in the front yard. After living in the desert for two and a half years, they wanted anything with a tree. But "they wouldn't sell it to us and made us wait till the open house."

They loved living here and loved the park. "We had everything we needed here. We had our churches here. My kids walked to school; they weren't transported. They had their bike places, and the park nearby."

She used to keep a jar of quarters at the front door for her five boys. It took a quarter for the lights every half hour to play basketball in the park. Now Park and Planning provides the lighting free, but that changed only recently when Kensington Cabin Park was renovated.



A framed photo of the Plank home in 1902, taken by Dr. Chapman's father, hangs in the family room addition. It shows a farmhouse with a young tree in the yard, the same black walnut tree that sold the Planks on the house. The house was built in 1892 and had a "bath with a path" in the back.

Dr. Chapman liked taking photographs around Kensington in the early 1900s. Bob Humphreys created pictures of the 1900-1902 houses, from Dr. Chapman's father's negatives, for a display for the 1976 Bicentennial celebration. Residents could find their house among the historic photos and take a copy home. That is how Jayne came to have the photo.

In 1967, when Jayne first was elected to the Town Council, she worked with Avis Birely, the Chair of Park & Planning, on Beach Drive and the bike path all the way downtown.

— Jayne Plank continued

At the same time they started work on the new master plan, which was finished in 1977.

They revived Kensington's Labor Day Parade. Jayne had heard of the old Labor Day Parade that they used to have before her time. The Parade started at the Kensington Cabin then.

*Photo: Jayne with her boys & a Lincoln impersonator, 1975.*



One of the Zusy girls, next door, was working on the Hill as an intern for the summer and invited the Lincoln impersonator to come out and be in the parade. He did! "We brought him down to the Cabin to show him off."

Now in its 52nd year, Kensington's Labor Day parade has become an area-wide tradition, and has kept its small town feel.

*(To be continued in the next newsletter)*

## Opera in the Circle

Saturday, September 14, 6 – 8 p.m.  
Warner Circle Park,  
10231 Carroll Place, Kensington



Bring your friends and family for an evening of opera outdoors at Warner Circle Park. The Friends of Warner Circle are the hosts of this special evening of arias and duets from well-loved operas. This event is free. Don't forget your chairs, blankets, and picnic!



## 26th Kensington 8K Race

Saturday, September 21, 7:45 a.m.

The Kensington 8K Race, 2-Mile Challenge, and 1K Fun Run Race is a true community event. The race proceeds benefit four local schools: Kensington Parkwood ES, North Bethesda MS, Silver Creek MS, and Walter Johnson HS.

For more information and registration go to  
[www.kensington8k.org](http://www.kensington8k.org).

Gary and Diana Ditto's Newsletter welcomes ideas and news items from community members. We are grateful to Jayne Plank for sharing her memories. The editor is Antoinette Kranenburg of Kensington, assisted by Cherry Wunderlich.

## Coming up in Kensington:

September 14 — Opera in the Circle

September 21 — Kensington 8K Race

October 5 — Family Game Day, Noyes Library Foundation

October 26 — Pumpkin Rock N' Roll

October 26 — Art and Craft Fair, Woman's Club

## Kensington Arts Theatre New Season:

KAT's 17th season brings three great shows to the Kensington Town Hall stage:

***Guys and Dolls*** – November 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 22, 23, 24, 2019

***No Sex Please, We're British.*** – February 21, 22, 23, 28, 29; March 1, 6, 7, 8, 2020

***Agatha Christie's And Then There Were None*** – May 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 2020

You can purchase your Season Packages and individual tickets online at [www.katonline.org](http://www.katonline.org).

## Annual Art and Craft Fair

Saturday, October 26, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The Woman's Club of Chevy Chase  
7931 Connecticut Avenue, Chevy Chase

Over 40 local artisans will exhibit and sell unique handmade items. Come to be inspired and make a start on your holiday shopping! Think handmade jewelry and accessories, painted glassware, fused glass creations, pottery, wool purses, baby and toddler clothes, quilts, handmade sweaters, oil and water color paintings, notecards, painted furniture, and other beautiful items.

A light breakfast and lunch will be served!  
Admission and parking are free.

Proceeds of the fair will benefit local charities as well as building preservation. More information at [www.wccmaryland.org](http://www.wccmaryland.org) or call 301-652-8480.

## Summer Concert Series

Saturdays, 10 to 11 a.m.

Howard Avenue Park

The summer concerts continue through the month of September, presented by the Kensington Historical Society. For details visit [www.kensingtonhistory.org](http://www.kensingtonhistory.org).

September 7 — Esther Haynes & Keith Grimes

September 14 — Ruthie Logsdon

September 21 — Silver Creek (the O'Malleys)

September 28 — SmithJackson

**QUESTION: Would you like to receive the Ditto Group's newsletter by email?**

Send your request to [gary@thedittogroup.com](mailto:gary@thedittogroup.com).

