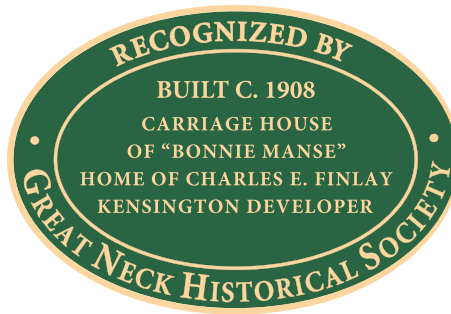


HERITAGE RECOGNITION PROGRAM

To Identify and Honor Great Neck's Most Notable Homes & Buildings



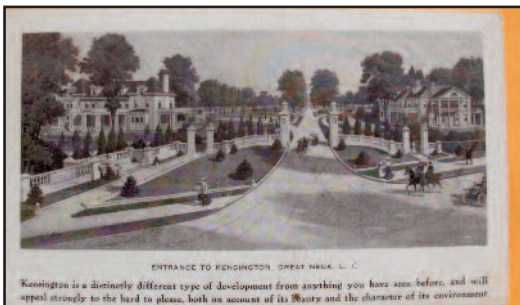
KENSINGTON VILLAGE HALL, GREAT NECK, N.Y.

The Kensington Village Hall was built c. 1908 as the carriage house for the mansion of Charles E. Finlay, founder and president of the Aetna National Bank in New York and, with his partner, R.J. Rickert, the developer of Kensington. The carriage house is the sole structure that remains on the original property. Finlay's handsome colonial-style home, "Bonnie Manse," designed by the architectural firm Little & Brown,



was surrounded by a formal garden, tennis court and a number of outbuildings. It was situated off Middle Neck Road at the entrance to Kensington, to the right (south) side of the community's formal gates and main street. To the left (north) of the gates was another exquisite home, this one belonging to Rickert. The gates were copied from London's Kensington Gardens. No conclusive documentation tells exactly when Finlay's house was razed, but it likely occurred by the 1930s.

The large tract of land purchased by the Rickert-Finlay Realty Company was originally owned by the Allen family, original settlers of Great Neck. A portion of it then became Deering Farm and another portion, Thorne farmland. The dream of the real estate partners was to create a planned, suburban community of elegant homes with all the latest amenities, situated near the railroad station as well as Manhasset Bay. The homes would be unique and have character; the residents would be "desirable" and congenial. Wealth was not the number one require-



ment; Rickert stated that they were seeking "to make it exceedingly desirable for the man who wishes to make a moderate investment in a home."

Their plan was a grand success. An article in *House Beautiful*, September 1911, said "[The prevailing prices] of property in Kensington [seemed) exceedingly low in price for so beautiful a place, and no higher than those asked in many of the inferior developments which I have seen."

Bonnie Manse and its three acres were sold to a local physician, George H. Dowsey, in July 1918. Several years later, his widow wanted to sell the property for commercial purposes, but a lawsuit and Village ordinance prevented that. In July 1937 the Kensington Board of Trustees proposed an \$80,000 bond issue to purchase the property and improve it as park land.

During World War II, from 1941 to 1946, the Kensington Village Hall served as the registration office for Draft Board 413. Registration took place there again in 1950 when it was the headquarters for Draft Board 3.