



# THE LITTLE ACORN

## NEWS IN A NUTSHELL

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## Darnestown in the Past

### PLEASANT HILLS FROM THE GASSAWAYS TO THE KELLEYS

The gem of Darnestown's historic past has been listed for sale. This is Pleasant Hills, built about 223 years ago, and home of the Kelley family for almost 120 years. It is one of the oldest homes in Montgomery County and is included in Farquhar's book of Historic Montgomery County Homes. It is the only house in the Darnestown area to be listed on Montgomery County's Master Plan for Historic Preservation and also on the Maryland Historical Registry. The house has 5,500 square feet, which includes six fireplaces, four baths, and seven bedrooms.

Though the exact date is uncertain, the main section of the house was probably built by Charles Gassaway between 1760 and 1765. One of the earliest families to settle in Montgomery County, the Gassaways became quite prominent. By mid-18th century, Charles owned several large tracts of land in this area. In 1799 he requested a new patent for about 1700 acres to be made up of parts of several older tracts. He called this new estate "Pleasant Hills". Charles Gassaway's daughter, Elizabeth, married William Darne, for whom Darnestown was named, in 1798, and they lived on the neighboring land, Mt. Pleasant.

Charles Gassaway died in 1810, and the estate was left to his sons. The sons, first Thomas and then Charles, continued to manage the plantation until 1829, when the house and 425 acres was sold to James Hawkins and his son, James, Jr., for \$4,677.75. The son, James, Jr., died in 1855, and then the property was owned briefly by Hawkins' son-in-law, William Offutt. The Civil War disrupted operation of the farm, as Union troops from Massachusetts were quartered in the house and camped on the grounds. About 1868, John T. Kelley purchased the house and 272 acres for \$10,000. An adjoining farm was later purchased, making a total of 540 acres. Pleasant Hills is still owned by the Kelley Family.

The house, of Georgian style architecture, is of a plan and has details typical of Maryland and Virginia manor houses of the Colonial period. It had two fronts of equal importance, the driveway elevation and the garden facade. Not so many years ago, the long entrance drive from Route was bordered by a double line of trees. But over the years, storms have taken them all. And at one time, the lawns on the garden side had several terraced gardens to the south.

The three-story center section, with white portico and large end chimneys, dates from about 1763, is on a fieldstone foundation, and is built of red brick laid in Flemish-bond pattern. Tradition states that the bricks were made on the plantation by the Gassaway slaves. The "front" door on the driveway (north) side of the house enters into a modified center stairhall, the stairs here going up three flights. The "front" door of the garden (south) side of the house is directly opposite the north door. On the left of the hall is a living room and a dining room, each with a fireplace which share the same chimney. On the right is an office and behind that is a parlor. The parlor also has a fireplace. There are chair rails in the three main rooms here, every window has solid-panel inside shutters, and the floors are of random-width pine. All these chair rails, shutters and floors are original, as are the moldings, fireplace mantels, and most of the six-panel doors. The ceilings are ten foot high.

The original colonial kitchen was detached from the house, as was the custom at the time. It stood where the east wing was later built. It had a mammoth fireplace that would take "cord wood logs". "It was so large that people could sit at either end of it to keep warm without being hurt by the fire". In the living room of the main section (which once was the dining room), there is a narrow window that was used to pass food into the dining room from the old detached kitchen.



The two symmetrical wings on each side of the house were constructed of bricks also laid up in Flemish-bond pattern. Many of the bricks used in these additions were taken from the old slave quarters on the property. The lower floor of the east wing was added by John T. Kelley, Jr., the first of the resident Kelleys, about 1870, to accommodate an invalid wife. This wing now contains the kitchen. His son, J. Thomas Kelley, Jr., added the second floor of the east wing and also built the west wing about 1918. This west wing now has a family room. The second floor has six bedrooms, two of which have fireplaces, and two baths. The third floor has one large bedroom, plus a bath. Each of the wings has a screened porch on the north side, and the west wing also has a 2-story porch on the south. The gabled roof has slate shingles, and there is an in-ground swimming pool.

J. Thomas Kelley, Jr., was a noted surgeon in Washington during the early part of the 1900's. His son, Thomas C. Kelley, was a lawyer in Rockville, Judge of the Orphans Court from 1934 to 1938, and a member of the first County Council in 1948. He was also chairman of the Upper Montgomery County Planning Commission in 1951. He died in 1962. In 1964 and 1967, his widow, Catherine, sold a total of 520 acres of Pleasant Hills to W. D. and A. N. Miller, the builders of Spring Meadows. The lovely old house, with numerous outbuildings, remains on the surrounding 20 acres. It is a showcase among Montgomery County mansions and has been seen on home tours. We all wish for the best of TLC for wonderful Pleasant Hills.

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Information from:

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