

"A Memory"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

The Historical Society's Kimmey House at 210 E. Main St. in Westminster takes its name from the last family who lived in the house. Although we now use the property for our administrative offices, we are always reminded that the building was a family home for more than a century and a half. As such, it was the place where family members lived, worked, socialized and shared in life's ups and downs. The untimely death of Harry M. Kimmey in 1932 was a great tragedy to the family and community. A former neighbor, Miss Mary B. Shellman, wrote to this paper regarding Mr. Kimmey's death. Her letter was published in September 30 issue:

"When the word reached me, that my good friend and neighbor, Harry M. Kimmey, had passed away, a wave of homesickness passed over me that was almost overwhelming. I was alone, Rev. and Mrs. Paul Reese having gone to Sweetwater, a day's ride from San Angelo, to attend a clergy conference of the Episcopal Church, and naturally my thought turned back to the many years spent in the old home in Westminster and the many changes of the past few years. The broken homes, the vanishing faces, and the absence of the old friendly handclasp of those who are gone.

My mother purchased the house, 206 E. Main street, in 1863, from the estate of John Fisher, banker, who had bought it from the estate of Jacob Sherman, a German farmer, who had purchased the land from William Winchester, founder of the town, and built the house in 1807 which is still standing in a good state of preservation, 125 years old. The wall paper in the hall was on when the house was built and represented Brazilian and Indian scenes and was in good condition when I had it removed from the wall and stored away before I left Westminster for Texas. The property at the time my mother purchased it, included also the property adjoining, now occupied by the residence of the late Ex-Judge James A.C. Bond, which he purchased from her a few years later, and also a number of outbuildings, including an old loom house, where in early years, linen was woven from the flax, grown on the property now owned by Mrs. Dora Edwards, corner of Sycamore and Green streets, also a small engine house facing on Main street, where was stored, even in my memory a small hand worked engine used on the rare occasions of fire in any of the buildings occupied by the careful and thrifty citizens of our little town. Also a brick dairy and corn crib and other small buildings,, and the old well, known as "God's Well," of which the beautiful old legend of early days was told. In 1864, Nathan I. Gorsuch, of blessed memory, grandfather of Mrs. Kimmey, purchased the residence on the opposite corner, used as a lodging house and bowling alley, and having altered and changed it into a comfortable dwelling, moved into it in the Fall of 1864. It may be of interest to the younger generation to know how Sycamore street got its name. Needing another entrance into the newly opened Green street, the alley separating our two properties was converted into a street by taking the two narrow yards on either side and adding to it, making it wide enough for two vehicles to pass. Although 12 years old, I was considered, and acted as a child, although girls of the present generation consider themselves "grown up" when they reach their teens and I had a play house under the large sycamore tree standing just inside our gate. When I returned, one day, from school, the tree had been cut down and my cherished bits of broken china, called by us children, "chanies", were covered up by chips. I am not ashamed to say, I cried, and the Mayor hearing of it, sent for me and asked me to name the street, and I called it Sycamore street, after my dearly beloved tree. The following year, 1865, Col. John Brooke Boyle, well known as one of the old political war horses of the day, purchased the old "Westminster Hotel," and converted it into two dwelling houses, occupying the one now owned by Mr. Frank Hoffman, and giving the other to his daughter, Mrs.

P. H. Irwin. And so through all the years we lived neighbors and friends, sharing each others joys and sorrows, without a single episode to mar the memory of the childhood and womanhood of my life in Westminster. As the children grew up and married they occupied homes in the same neighborhood. From Court street to Church street, all the old familiar homes are occupied by others. The old families are all gone, the older ones to better homes "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The younger ones, some to join them where partings and sorrows are unknown, and others to fields of labor in distant parts of our great Country. I can name them all - Mrs. John F. Reese, Ex-Judge J. A. C. Bond, Mrs. Katherine Shellman, Nathan I. Gorsuch, Col. John Brooke Boyle, D. H. Irwin, Wm. Moore, Mrs. Elizabeth Roop, Mrs. Abner Neale, Charles T. Reifsnider, Isaac E. Pearson, Sr., Mrs. Zollickoffer, Joshua Smith, Judge John E. Smith, and in later years the crowd of happy young people born and reared there - Jim and Eloise and Alice Bond, Paul Reese, Emory and Tess Buckingham, the Finks, Irwins, Ralph Reifsnider, and Guy Smith, who spent many happy hours together in each others homes.

'Westward the tide of emigration takes its way' is a well known saying and Westward the march of improvements seems to be equally true of towns and cities. Westminster has moved as far West as possible even to the very foot of College Hill, and now the line of march is turning and business is slowly but surely moving eastward on Main street. Once a strictly residential portion of the town, the original village of Winchester, it is slowly changing as is to be expected, into a busy business section, and before long the old residences with their occupants will be only a sacred memory. While many splendid people, worthy followers of the old stock, have taken their places, of those who for so many years lived as neighbors in the truest sense of the word, Mrs. Harry Kimmey is the only one left in the home once occupied by her grandparents, parents and herself.

Harry Kimmey will be sadly missed in his church, his choir, the Rotary, on Memorial Day, and on all occasions where his rich bass voice which he so freely gave, was heard. But while -

No more on Earth we hear his happy song -
No more we list to his melodious tone;
For he has joined the Choir Invisible,
And sings God's praise before his Father's throne.
Still he is with us as our voices join,
In songs and anthems to our God and King -
And tho' we can not see him, yet we feel
That he is here, and we can hear him sing.

Mary Bostwick Shellman"

Several years after Mr. Kimmey's death, his widow was instrumental in founding the Historical Society to purchase and preserve Miss Shellman's former home.

Photo caption: Harry M. Kimmey posed in a corn field at the Herr Farm near Westminster in 1925. His death in 1935 inspired a neighbor to write an interesting memorial. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Henry B. Kimmey, 1993.