

The bright watercolors of this painting depict Kimberly, a small neighborhood and bridge of Suffolk, Virginia. The bridge still connects the end of the peninsula where the Nansemond River wraps around it. Kimberly was a lively part of town with a variety of businesses, houses, and farms (Blair-Greene 2017).

Dr. Challis Haddon Dawson lived at 137 Bank St., just over a mile from the bridge. This is where he and his wife, Yvonne, raised their son, Gerard, Yvonne gave piano lessons to local school children, and where Challis started his private medical practice in the 1940s (Clancy n.d.).

As a young school boy, Dr. Dawson had a composition book full of imaginative drawings that he created (Johnston n.d.). No other mention of drawing is noted until he had practiced medicine for 36 years and took up painting for mental relaxation (Suffolk News Herald 1949).

In 1947, while his son Gerard was at Harvard, Dr. Dawson began a manuscript titled “Random Thoughts at 4:00 AM” that he regularly mailed to his son that year. This consisted of his personal stories growing up intertwined with current happenings. He wrote:

I have recognized for sometime [sic] that eventually an epoch would come when I would need to occupy my mind. I have always loved paintings, or rather art exhibitions of all kinds, so this idea came to me when I, by accident, noticed advertised Willy Pogany’s lessons in drawing. I ordered the book (Dawson 1947).

Being completely self-taught, and after only one and a half years, Dr. Dawson started exhibiting his work and winning awards. He became president and co-founder of the Suffolk Art Club and a member of the Tidewater Artists of Norfolk, Virginia (Wellons Gallery 1953).

By the time Dr. Dawson painted Kimberly, he had been a medical doctor during WWI and a Public Health Services doctor at the Ellis Island Hospital in New York (Dawson 1947). He accepted another Public Health Services position in Suffolk, Virginia during a typhoid fever outbreak in the late 1930’s (Clancy n.d.). When the family decided to stay in Suffolk, he opened his private practice in the house on Bank St.

Dr. Dawson’s service to his country and community propelled him through life, revealing his deep compassion and commitment for medicine, and later, his dedication to art. His medical career helped thousands of people, and now his artistic talent is serving the community again, by showing not only his interpretation of the rich history of Suffolk, Virginia but also reflects his humanity and service of his era.

## References

Blair-Greene, Kimberly. 2017. “Kimberly.” Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society Newsletter 27, no. 2 (October): 1-5.

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