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OLD CHEVY CHASE VILLAGE

by

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Chevy Chase is a more or less indefinite area bounded on the west by Bethesda, on the north by Kensington, and on the east by Silver Spring. On the south it includes a portion of the District of Columbia, adjacent to Connecticut Avenue as far south as Ellicott Street.

The original Chevy Chase was a specific area developed by the Chevy Chase Land Company. This original development is now known as Chevy Chase Village. Its roots go back to 1890.

At that time the city of Washington - population, 188,932 - did not extend even as far as Dupont Circle. Grover Cleveland was the President of the United States. The period has been called, "The Second Industrial Revolution." It was an era just following the development and world-shaking activities of the great corporations, such as the United States Steel Corporation and the Standard Oil Company. The railroads were pressing into the West, the great mining companies were on a rampage. Thomas Edison had invented the incandescent light bulb and was experimenting with the first electric railway; automobiles were beginning to be manufactured, Langley was making history with powered flight, telephones were becoming an absolute necessity. Mark Twain was in his prime, William Jennings Bryan was at the pinnacle of his oratorical supremacy; the Rockefellers, the Carnegies and J. P. Morgan were striking it rich. Oklahoma was Indian Territory, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah were not yet states of the Union. Yes, it was in truth, a glorious, spectacular and melodramatic age and at this time, Washington, D.C. was a Boom town!

Living there at that time was a retired Colonel of the United States Army who was in the real estate business. He was mindful of the need for a well-organized extension of the City of Washington. This gentleman had vision and a flair for the dramatic. This Colonel George Argustus Armes dreamed up the idea of extending Connecticut Avenue right through his own property, called "Fairfield", which was situated on the present site of Connecticut Avenue and Ellicott Street. It was his idea that the Avenue should extend out to the Maryland line and beyond. At that time, Connecticut Avenue ended at Florida Avenue, or Boundary Street, as it was then called. Failing in his attempts to have a Bill passed by Congress, the undaunted Colonel consulted with his neighbors in the hope that they would donate a strip for the continuation of the Avenue out to the Maryland line. This, too, failed. Then he began to contact several wealthy Congressmen and laid before them a really stupendous idea, calling for an expenditure of some \$3,500,000. The story goes that he gathered these gentlemen together at his home, "Fairfield", and pointing to the north with a sweeping motion said: "Here, Gentlemen, is where you should develop the finest suburb in America." His plan included the building of a cable or electric railway, the construction of two bridges and the sub-dividing of lots for a new community.

Along with his personal ambitions, Col. Armes was a far-sighted person and a very superior salesman! One of his first contacts was with Senator William Stewart of Nevada. Senator Stewart had built "Stewart's Castle" on the site of the present Riggs Bank Branch at Dupont Circle. This caused his friends to laugh and scoff at his burying himself in the country, calling his lovely home, "Stewart's Folly". But soon after, other elaborate homes were built in this later-to-be fashionable neighborhood.

Senator Stewart was more than mildly enthused over the proposal. He called the Colonel to his home one evening and it was past 3 A.M. when the Colonel took his leave, only to be called back in the early evening of the next day, at which time another Congressman was present. This was Congressman Francis G. Newlands, who later became Senator, also from Nevada. He had married into the famous Sharon family of California, known for their vast holdings in railroad developments, as well as in the great Comstock Lode interests.

At first, all was to be very secret. Colonel Armes was delegated to purchase large tracts of land in his own name, as trustee. What a hey-day he must have had, spending other people's money - going from farmer to farmer, bargaining and making settlements left and right. Prices ranged from \$275 per acre to \$6000 per acre and more. Roughly speaking, the lands purchased extended along Calvert Street to Wisconsin Avenue, then on to Bethesda, then north-easterly to the estate of the Dunlop family, known as "Hayes", built in the early 18th Century. From here the boundary went along the old Jones Bridge Road over to Rock Creek.

This all happened in 1890, but it was not long before the news of the venture leaked out. The newspapers of the day really splurged on the details as each deed of sale was recorded! The Chevy Chase Land Company came into being, having as its officers: Mr. Francis G. Newlands, President; Mr. Edward J. Stellwagen, Vice-president; Mr. Thomas Gale, Treasurer; and Mr. Howard Nyman, Secretary. Mr. Morris Hacker was the first Village Engineer. The real estate firm, known as the Thomas J. Fisher Co., was formed as a subsidiary of the Chevy Chase Land Company. From then on the services of the Colonel were no longer needed, but credit must be given him for instigating this mammoth venture!

The name of Chevy Chase was used because one of the tracts of land purchased was identified in its proprietary patent, dated 1751, as "Cheivy Chace". This area of more than 200 acres was a part of a much larger grant, first owned by Colonel Joseph Belt. It was later owned by Abraham Bradley, the Assistant Postmaster General in 1814. It is said that when the British burned the White House, several members of the Cabinet took refuge at the Bradley Farm, carrying with them valuable documents of the Government. Part of it is now the Chevy Chase Club.

The origin of the name is interesting. It was derived from a French word, "Chevauchee", a word used in Scotland to describe a border raid. As there were many such raids between the English and the Scots in the Cheviot Hills of Northumberland and Otterburn, the term "Chevauchee" and "Cheviot" became interchangeable in the popular mind. Thus, Chevy Chase was described in a ballad of 64 stanzas called, "The Hunting of the Cheviot", giving full details of the "Battle of Chevy Chase" in 1388.

Chevy Chase was one of the first planned suburbs in the United States. Called Chevy Chase Village, it was located just over the D.C. line so that the privilege of voting in Maryland would be possible. Elaborate and beautiful plans were drawn by a famous New York landscape architect, Mr. Nathan Barrett. Not all of his ideas were carried out, but the over-all picture is as he planned. Wide streets were designed with an eye for beauty and simplicity. No alleys were to be allowed. The streets were given English and Scottish names, such as Oxford, Primrose, Melrose, Kirke, etc. Hesketh Street was named after a Lord Hesketh, an English gentleman who was married to Mrs. Newlands' sister. Even the Chevy Chase Circle was planned at this time and it eventually became a memorial to Senator Newlands. The Circle was deeded to the District of Columbia Government so that it could become a part of the system of parks in the District. The memorial fountain was dedicated to Senator Newlands by the second Mrs. Newlands in 1933. One of the features of the Village today is the extensive use of lovely shade trees and ornamental shrubbery. Many trees were imported from out of the country, particularly the maples from Norway and the dwarf Japanese box. The principal varieties used for shade trees were the elm, pin-oak, linden, sycamore and maple. The native trees were disturbed as little as possible and used to their best advantage. Among these were the tulip poplar, white and black oak, locust, dogwood and judas.

Chevy Chase became known for its delightfully pure drinking water, for the Land Company had drilled more than twenty artesian wells throughout the area and had built a very artistic standpipe just north of Bradley Lane on Rosemary Street. Unfortunately, this structure is no longer there and the Village water supply now comes from the District of Columbia system.

The electric railway, known as the Rock Creek Railroad, was incorporated, with stock owned by the Chevy Chase Land Company. It started at 7th and U Streets, N.W. in Washington and went west along U Street to 18th Street, then north to Calvert Street. Here the Calvert Bridge was built, an important accomplishment in that day. The railway went across this bridge to Connecticut Avenue, then north to the Chevy Chase Circle. After rounding the Circle at Chevy Chase, this railway continued another two miles to the Chevy Chase Lake. This railway became a part of the Capital Traction Company, which later was incorporated into D. C. Transit.

The building of the Chevy Chase Lake is a story in itself, and few people know the reasons behind it. The Chevy Chase Land Company naturally wanted to sell lots and houses and, in order to have people see the section conveniently, it was decided

to construct a lake as an attraction at the end of the railway line! An amusement park was designed around the lake and on hot summer evenings the open streetcars were filled to capacity; the passengers, unwittingly, were potential buyers of lots and houses in the Village! A bandstand was constructed which was a masterpiece of beauty and glamour! Its design was that of a mammoth seashell, with hundreds of electric lights sparkling from its interior, which was painted a pale and delicate blue. Some thirty or forty musicians of the United States Marine Band appeared each evening in full and colorful regalia. They played semi-classical numbers much like the pop-concerts of Boston and the Water-Gate music of today. For the last half of the program, which was dance music only, the musicians had walked down the hill from the bandstand to a large, rustic dance pavillion, overlooking the Lake. The Lake, with its innumerable colored lights strung around its circumference, presented a fairy-like atmosphere. Irene and Vernon Castle introduced some of their new dances here!

In addition to the concerts, which were free, there were other paid attractions, such as boating, bowling, horseback and pony riding. There was a gaily decorated merry-go-'round for the children, a shooting gallery for the grown-ups, and enormous boat-swings that went high in the air. There were no games of chance, no rowdyism, but rather an atmosphere of dignity and quiet pleasure.

The first four houses in the Village were built by the Chevy Chase Land Company for their own Executive Board members. They were designed by good architects and built as a pattern for other houses to follow. Mr. Newlands' home overlooked the Circle, on the right as one enters Maryland. Later it was the Corby residence. Mr. Stellwagen's house was across Connecticut Avenue; however, he never lived there. Mr. Nyman's house faced the Avenue at Irving Street, while opposite that, the Claude family, who came from Annapolis, lived. Here, "Judge" Claude had charge of the first Post Office of the Village. This house was later owned by Judge Peele, who lived there for many years with his family. Building regulations were strict and demanded that no lots could be less than sixty feet wide and that the houses cost no less than a certain amount. The construction of row-houses, stores or apartments was forbidden.

The Bradley Farm was left pretty much intact, until developed later as a country club. For a long time fox-hunting was a popular sport; the Chevy Chase Club was started as a Hunt Club. Mr. Newlands was its first President; Mr. Henry Earle, the first Master of Hounds. Today this club is known far and wide and numbers among its members more men of distinction and renown, perhaps, than any social club in America.

Beginning at the Circle and passing through the Village, a block east of Connecticut Avenue, there is a most charming and picturesque road known as Brookeville Road. This lane was there many, many years before the Village was even a gleam in the eye of Colonel Armes! Originally it wound through beautiful Montgomery County, following the contours of the land for some fifteen or sixteen miles to the historic little town of Brookeville. On this road was "Clean Drinking Manor", the early manor house of the Jones family. Also, this road is said to have been the route taken by Dolley Madison in her flight from the White House which the British so rudely burned in 1814. However, this lovely lane, with its old and stately trees, along with the original part of the old Bradley farmhouse, now the Chevy Chase Club, are the only visible links that the Village has with the 18th Century.

The Chevy Chase Land Company did all that it could for the comfort and convenience of the residents of the Village, even to the extent of allowing their

groceries and other purchases from the City to be brought out on the old green freight-car each day, free of charge! This was to compensate, in some measure, for the restrictions about the building of stores in the Village. The one mail-bag, scarcely half-filled, arrived in this way twice each day and the first mail-carrier, named Joe, would carry it into the Post Office.

The first church in the Village was All Saints Episcopal Church, on the southwestern arc of the Chevy Chase Circle. The organization of this church began in 1897 at a meeting held in a little school-house (no longer there) across the street from the present church. Here services were held until 1901 when the Chevy Chase Land Company donated the land for the present old part of the Church. The first rector was the Rev. Thomas S. Childs, who lived on the east side of Connecticut Avenue at Irving Street. He was dearly beloved by his parishioners and served them long and well. His house was torn down in recent years to make way for four others!

Several churches have had their beginnings in the Village Hall. The Catholic Church held Sunday services there for many months before their first little church on Patterson Street, near the Circle, was built. The Christian Scientists held their meetings and services there for many years before building further out on Connecticut Avenue, near the Lake.

In 1896 two of the daughters of Senator Newlands and Miss Aloncita White (later Mrs. Harold Walker) founded a library. Social gatherings and benefits were held, books were bought and finally a library building erected. The south end of this building was reserved for the new Post Office. Miss Jessie Claude, daughter of the "Judge", was appointed the first Postmistress.

The Library became the center of all civic activities. Besides political meetings, amateur dramatics were performed, minstrel shows were given and on each Saturday morning a dancing class for the children of the Village was held by Professor Zebele. How the little girls giggled when he raised the tails of his frock-coat in teaching them to curtsy!

A hand-drawn fire-truck was kept beneath the Library building and when the fire-bell tolled, some of the men of the Village would rush off on foot, pushing and pulling this strange little vehicle.

Although strictly speaking not in the Village, I feel that Miss MacTeer's little French school, at the corner of Connecticut Avenue and Bradley Lane, should be mentioned here. Many of the Village children attended this little school. It may be dubious as to how much French we learned, but the cookie-jar which Miss MacTeer kept filled on the side-board remains in my memory more significantly than the French I absorbed!

Two doors from this little school the fabulous Devereux family lived. Their lovely home was the favorite gathering place for the teenagers of the day. The Devereux pony, "Dynamite", was a chief attraction for several generations of Chevy Chase children. The Village claims Jimmie Devereux, the hero of Wake Island, as their own.

This chronicle would be incomplete and sadly lacking if it failed to mention a few of the early "Characters". Spencer Hayes, the colored-man-of-all-jobs, cleared the sidewalks of snow, riding upon a little home-made snow-plow, drawn by an amiable horse. The straightness of the path he left may have depended upon the quantity of alcohol inside of Spencer!

"Capt." Springirth, the Village watchman, was a figure none of us could ever forget. As a young lad, he had been an apprentice sailor on the Frigate "Constellation". He first came to the Village as an employee of the electric railway. He often told how some of his passengers from the city brought empty bottles out on the street cars and filled them with the clear, sparkling water at the public pump at the corner of Irving Street and Connecticut Avenue. Later, he became a deputy of the law in the Village, although his most strenuous duties were hardly more than attempts to catch up with the Hallowe'en pranksters, lighting the street lights each evening with the use of a small ladder, and keeping an eye on the vacant houses in the summer months.

Miss Jessie Claude, the first Postmistress, proper and prim, hardly missed a day in more than thirty years. Even the deep snow-drifts presented no barrier to her opening of the office each day at 7 A.M., especially if the postman, Joe, pulled her the two blocks from her home on a small sled. Her one defeat concerned a goat, belonging to Constance Grey - and Constance should have known better! Miss Jessie was chased by this butting animal (to the great glee of Constance and her friends) as she was leaving her office one evening in the twilight.

Mr. Herbert Claude, the brother of Miss Jessie, was a kind of liaison officer between the Chevy Chase Land Company, the Capital Traction Company, and the citizens of the Village. Complaints were brought to him and no matter was too small for his exclusive attention. He was known for his loyalty to his employers and for his kindness to everyone in the Village.

One of the earliest residents of Chevy Chase was Miss Janet Richards, who gained such fame as a commentator on current affairs. Another person of note was Dr. Gates, an inventor, who had very advanced scientific ideas, and whose steel-lined, sound-proof room was a great mystery in the neighborhood.

In more recent years, a beloved person of the Village was Mr. Allison McQuinn, or "Mac" the whistling Postman. His particular whistle at each and every house could never be imitated; much less, his cheery words and wonderful disposition, which will long be remembered by several generations. When he retired in 1949 the Village Hall was packed for the ceremonies held in his honor.

Among those who have steered the affairs of our own little government, I would mention Mr. William T. S. Curtis, who, as the first Mayor, served until the original charter was declared invalid in 1914. At that time the form of government was changed to our present system of electing a Board of Managers numbering seven. Such capable men as George P. Hoover, Dr. C. C. Clarke, Col. Walter Clephane, Mr. Arthur Defenderfer, and Mr. George Ferris all were Chairmen or members of the Board.

Perhaps no one has a greater love and loyalty for Chevy Chase Village than our former State Senator, Edward Northrop, now a Federal Judge. He was born in the Village and was its wise councillor for many years. Mr. William Austin has held the position of Superintendent of Public Works for more than thirty years.

Yes, the women of the Village are not without glory. Mrs. Mollie Nicholson, along with her many accomplishments in National affairs, started the first Chevy Chase Chapter of the American Red Cross during World War I. She also founded the National Society of Arts and Letters and was a most able President of the Montgomery County Historical Society. Beatrice Clephane was the first feminine member of the Board of Managers and was followed by Mrs. James C. Ord, Mrs. Barbara Hayes, Mrs. Virginia Platt, Mrs. William Jarvis, and Mrs. Calvin Cobb.

It is interesting to note that one of the oldest women's clubs in continuous existence in the Washington area is the "Ladies Reading Class" of Chevy Chase. Founded more than 65 years ago, it still is in existence.

The Chevy Chase Garden Club is another group of enterprising, intelligent and dignified ladies, interested in maintaining the charm of the Village. Mrs. Hugh Southgate was their first president, more than 40 years ago. Their achievements in garden club national competitions have been great.

With so much in their past to be proud of, the people of Chevy Chase Village today cherish as one of their greatest blessings the relative quiet and independence they enjoy.

May their brick sidewalks forever know and feel the footsteps of the finest type of American citizen.

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