

## Automobiles in Early Twentieth Century Montgomery County

*By Patricia Abelard Andersen*

One hundred years ago, we were living through a period of rapid changes. Electricity, the telephone, and the motorcar were all seen as marvelous new improvements for the average family. The automobile, after Ford made it affordable in the early 1900s, was thought to improve the quality of life. Many of the problems associated with the automobile today “were common to the horse and carriage in the 1890s: traffic jams, parking problems, noise, accidents, pollution. Of these, the most distressing was the last. While the horse emitted no exhaust, it did emit. A typical horse produced more than 30 pounds of dung each day.”<sup>1</sup>

The Montgomery County Historical Society (MCHS) archives holds a manuscript collection from the Montgomery Mutual Insurance Company. The corporate charter of the company was granted by the Maryland General Assembly under date of March 10, 1848, with the formal name of Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Montgomery County. Initially the insurance was for protection only against the hazard of fire, a direct response to the burning of a new bank barn belonging to Joshua Peirce in the neighborhood of Sandy Spring in 1841. Policy Number 1 was issued on May 17, 1848, to Edward Stabler, the company’s first president.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of papers in this MCHS collection are general policies for houses and their outbuildings, with additional log books, correspondence, claims, and a small collection of automobile policies, the subject of this paper.<sup>3</sup>

As early as 1905 the company had recognized the automobile’s growing presence, including it in a list of insurable items but only as property, as another piece of stationery machinery – and only if kept 45 feet or more away from the dwelling. . . . By the 1910s, however, the auto had ingratiated itself into everyday life. . . . In 1913, the Company introduced its first separate line of automobile insurance. Although still only covering the vehicle from destruction by fire or lightning, significantly the policy insured a vehicle when outside the home place.<sup>4</sup>



**Gasoline- and horse-powered vehicles side by side on East Montgomery Avenue, Rockville, circa 1914. MCHS Library.**

The Historical Society’s collection of automobile policies covers the years 1913 to 1920, a period when the number of motorcars was rising rapidly throughout Maryland. They provide information about some of the earliest automobiles on the roads of Montgomery County, their owners, from whom they were purchased, and how they were used, giving us insight into an important aspect of the everyday lives of County residents. The first automobile insurance policy in the collection is Policy No. 2, dated August 21, 1913, for Raymond E. Case of Silver Spring, who insured his Ford automobile with an estimated value of \$525. Policy No. 3, dated

August 16, 1913, was issued to F. P. Chaney of Burtonsville, who insured a 1913 Studebaker five seat Touring Car with the following equipment: two tires, two tubes, tire cover, foot rest, two hangers, tire tester, battery tester and vulcanizer. The new car was valued at \$957. Policy No. 4 was for Jos. O. Murray for a Model D Franklin, 4 cylinder, gasoline powered car built in 1908 and bought used from C. C. Murray, 1807 18th St. NW, Washington, D.C.; the value was listed as \$800. Policy No. 5 was issued to U. S. Walters; the car is a 1912 Model T Town Car, purchased for \$300 on November 19, 1913, from Jos. Kelchener [undoubtedly Kelchener] in Rockville with a value of \$450. According to his policy, the owner kept his car in warehouse #2, south of the store house at Derwood.

In 1909 J. F. Kelchener advertised in *The Montgomery County Sentinel* a 1909 Ford for \$850.<sup>5</sup> His father, John Kelchener, ran a hotel/stable business in Rockville in 1900, so the family was well positioned to move to a new technology. On the 1920 U. S. Census, James F. Kelchener was a Ford car salesman who owned his own garage. Lewis Reed lived a few doors away and was a mechanic working in a garage. Harry Poss, a near neighbor, operated the livery stable; Poss also frequently advertised his horses and mules during this period.<sup>6</sup>



**Rockville Garage, circa 1915.** A Lewis Reed photo, donated to MCHS by Charles Shoup.

Today the only name of those above that remains familiar to Rockville car buyers is Lewis Reed. An employee of Rockville Garage in 1915, Reed purchased a one-third interest from brothers Robert and Clarence Warfield in January 1916. Three years later, the Warfields conveyed the balance of the property. The deed was delivered to Edgar Reed in 1925.<sup>7</sup> Lewis and his brother Edgar added a sales division, selling Oldsmobile, Dodge, and Hudson cars. Reed Brothers Dodge was one of the longest running automobile dealers in Montgomery County, selling cars until the industry down-sizing in 2009. Lewis Reed was also an amateur photographer, and his collection of glass plate negatives is housed at the Montgomery County Historical Society.

Kelchener continued to advertise regularly for Ford cars, and the prices kept dropping. In 1912, Kelchener listed a telephone number, and the price had lowered to \$690 for the Model T.<sup>8</sup> From August 1913 through August 1914, he ran an ad with a price guarantee, promising a rebate if prices declined further. Kelchener also provided gasoline, oil, and all accessories for motor vehicles.

Advertisements in the *Sentinel* also tell us quite a bit about the early automobile industry in Montgomery County as well as those who sold and maintained these vehicles. During the first decade of the 20th century, the most common vehicle advertised in the *Sentinel* was "Probey's Special Top Buggy" for \$50, probably a

typical 19th century horse-drawn buggy. Probey Carriage Co. was located at 1230 32<sup>nd</sup> St., NW, in Washington, D.C. Other vehicles advertised included Fords, Overlands, Hupmobiles, the Krit, Oldsmobiles, the Saxon, and the Pullman.

**KRIT \$950**

WITH ELECTRIC STARTER \$1050  
P.O.B. Detroit

THESE RECORDS PROVE THE STERLING QUALITY OF THE KRIT.  
Though new in those features that produce style, comfort and convenience, there is nothing freakish or experimental about the KRIT. It is a real, artistic achievement in motor car building. And mechanically, it possesses all the sterling qualities that have endeared KRIT cars to owners for five years; qualities that have made possible records of 25,000, 50,000 and 100,000 miles in the service of these owners.  
In the KRIT, at \$950 or \$1050, you find all you can demand in appearance, in comfort, in convenience—and more than you expect in the way of economy. Not only is it moderate in initial cost, but because of its light weight, its sturdy construction and its well-balanced design, the KRIT keeps down the fuel and tire bills. These are reasons why this car is making sensational sales records the country over.  
Take a KRIT ride, let the car itself win you.

N. E. HAWKINS & CO.,  
ETCHISON, MD.  
S. C. JONES, Co-Agent,  
Dickerson, Md.

Phone—Damascus 14-12  
May 15-6m

**The Krit was advertised in the *Sentinel* beginning on May 15, 1914, and continued for six months.**

One of the more elegant ads in the *Sentinel* featured the Krit automobile. The advertisement appeared in the paper on May 15, 1914, and featured a vehicle for \$950, or \$100 more with an electric starter. It was offered by N. E. Hawkins & Co., of Etchison, Maryland. Gaithersburg seemed to have several car dealers. C.A. Fulks & Bro. of Gaithersburg advertised the Overland. Charles Algernon Fulks (1879-1944) is buried in Forest Oak Cemetery, Gaithersburg.

Ten of the policies in the collection were issued to Dr. Jacob W. Bird, a beloved physician in the mid-county area.

Arriving in the community in 1909, Dr. Bird soon set up an office in his home on a narrow byway that today bears the name of Dr. Bird Road. The accounts of the time noted that Dr. Bird arrived in a horse drawn buggy equipped with brand new rubber tires. In the next year he shifted to a car, for mobility was essential. In a career that spanned half a century, the indefatigable doctor would wear out 35 automobiles making house calls.<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Bird, who was born in Anne Arundel County in 1885, came to Montgomery County at age 23. He attended St. Johns College in Annapolis for two years, and completed a medical degree at the University of Maryland, Baltimore in 1907. He established the first hospital in Montgomery County, which is still operating today as Montgomery General Hospital. Ironically, Dr. Bird and his wife died in an automobile accident in Alabama on October 25, 1959.<sup>10</sup>

In these early policies are six that were issued to women, all members of the Quaker community of Sandy Spring. One of them, Margaret C. Moore Bancroft, was born in 1873, the daughter of the farmer and capitalist Joseph Moore. She was living in his household in 1900, along with her four year old son, John, who was born in France. Margaret C. Moore attended Strathmore College, where she married art teacher Milton Bancroft. They then went to France where he studied impressionist paintings for two years. In 1910, she was still in her parents' home, along with two additional children who were born in Maryland. Milton taught art in Philadelphia, maintained a studio in New York, and worked in San Francisco during this period and through the early 1920s. In June 1918, she insured a Saxon automobile. On the 1920 census, Margaret C. Bancroft is head of household. The 1930 census finds the couple living together in Sandy Spring.<sup>11</sup>

Mrs. Estelle T. Moore was the widow of J. T. Moore, Jr., a miller and farmer of Sandy Spring, who had died in 1906. She maintained insurance on a Ford vehicle, having three policies issued between 1917 and 1919. Estelle, born in Baltimore in 1861, was the sister-in-law of Margaret C. Bancroft and the daughter of Henry Tyson.<sup>12</sup>



**Dr. Jacob Bird with one of his many automobiles outside Montgomery General Hospital in Olney, 1918.**

*Donated to MCHS by Montgomery Mutual Insurance Co.*

Another insured woman driver in the Sandy Spring-Olney area was Helen Hallowell, daughter of Alban Gilpin Thomas and born in May 1876. Frank Hallowell her husband, was shot and killed during a robbery at the First National Bank, Sandy Spring, on April 26, 1920.<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Hallowell insured a Saxon Touring vehicle in June 1921. Her sister-in-law, Eliza B. [or Elza Bentley] Thomas, wife of Frederick Legett Thomas (Helen's brother) of Sandy Spring insured a Ford automobile. Unlike the other insured ladies in this time period, it appears that Mrs. Thomas (1890-1961) was married and living with her husband at the time of the policy.<sup>14</sup> There is also a policy for Eliza M. H. Chichester of Olney, who insured a 1917 Dodge, bought second hand and stored in a garage on the farm.

Elizabeth G. Hogg, of Brighton, insured a Ford on July 21, 1915. At the time, she would have been about 60 years old, perhaps the oldest new female driver. On the application she indicated that the car was to be stored in a garage insured by Policy No. 54180.<sup>15</sup> She was the widow of Nathaniel B. Hogg and daughter of Edward and Anna Gilpin of Sandy Spring. She died in 1927 in Western Pennsylvania and was memorialized in the Annals of Sandy Spring. She left married daughters in New York and in Pennsylvania, where she apparently lived much of her married life.<sup>16</sup>

Charles F. Kirk of Olney, also a Quaker and the owner of a Ford automobile, was a Montgomery County School Commissioner.<sup>17</sup> Tarlton B. Stabler (1868-1939) of Sandy Spring insured a Stevens-Duryea. He was a director of the Montgomery Fire Insurance Company, as well as a farmer and active member of the Quaker community. His wife was Rebecca Thomas Moore, daughter of William Moore. John N. Bentley of Sandy Spring insured a Studebaker Roadster in 1917. Roger B. Farquhar also acquired a 4 cylinder Ford Touring Car and insured it with Policy No. 25. A. D. Farquhar insured a 1915 Dodge Brothers Touring Car through Policy No. 48, on April 16, 1915, which was kept in a garage insured by Policy No. 42149.

The fact that the Montgomery Mutual Insurance Company was headquartered in Sandy Spring may only be part of the reason why so many of the policies were issued to drivers in the Sandy Spring, Olney, and Spencer-ville areas; good roads may also have played a role.

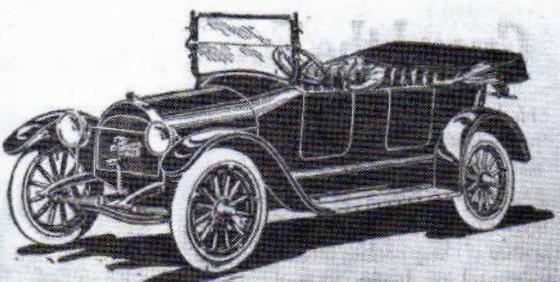
Montgomery County had 790 miles of unimproved dirt roads in 1899 and only 45 miles of stone, gravel, or macadam roads. The only good roads in the County were the turnpikes in the northeast; they accounted for all but 8 miles of the improved highways. The Union Turnpike-Company operated from the District line at Silver Spring to Brookeville, from Olney to Ashton, and from Sandy Spring to Glenmont. The Washington, Colesville, and Ashton Turnpike Company maintained Colesville Road from Ashton to Silver Spring.<sup>18</sup>

Improvement was gradual in the early years of the 20th century. In 1904 the Maryland General Assembly enacted a bill providing \$200,000 annually to counties on a matching basis for the construction of modern macadam roads. However the roads remained County property, and the County was responsible for their upkeep. Montgomery County constructed six miles of roads under this plan in 1905 and 1906. "There was no overall plan, and the first efforts were essentially to patch and mend existing roadways."<sup>19</sup>

In 1908, the General Assembly created a State Roads Commission to oversee creation of a modern highway system. Senator Blair Lee of Montgomery County managed the bill. ... Francis Clopper Hutton of "The Woodlands" in Montgomery County, a civil engineer of considerable ability, was one of the original commissioners. Under the guidance of the first State Roads Commission, Maryland devised the first well-conceived plan for a system of state highways. Designed to connect Baltimore with the county seat of each of the 23 counties and interconnect the county seats themselves, the road system comprised 1,305 miles of state roads constructed between 1910 and 1915.<sup>20</sup>

The increasing affordability of automobiles, plus the new road system, which was funded through fees for driver registrations and auto license plates, had an immediate impact on suburban growth here. Automobile owners could be found in all parts of the County. Alfred Wilson, who was married to Winnie Poole of Poolesville, insured a 1914 H-4 Baby Grand Chevrolet, to be kept in the barn behind his grocery store and dwelling in Bethesda. Vernon Hempstone, a 62-year-old farmer of Poolesville married to Ann Elizabeth Poole, also insured a Baby Grand Chevrolet on the same day in 1914.

Lee Offutt (born in 1864) insured a Studebaker in 1915. He lived near St. Mary's Church in Rockville, where he served six terms as mayor. A picture in the MCHS photograph collection shows him driving a horse and buggy. Thomas Lamar Jackson ran a dairy farm on the Colesville/Ashton Turnpike.<sup>21</sup> He insured a 1910 Stevens Duryea Roadster 4 cylinder car beginning in February 1914, Policy No. 7. At the time, this was a car with a "fast" reputation, as the first automobile cross country race was won by its creator.<sup>22</sup> Jackson may have decided this was a sound business strategy to get his dairy products into town more quickly.



**Pullman Junior.**

**Price \$740, fully equip't.**

The car you have long been waiting for. The most sensational light car upon the American market.

For demonstration, write or phone

ROCKVILLE GARAGE, Rockville, Md.

**ALVA RICKETTS,**  
**MANAGER**

Phone 67  
apr 30-tf

**"The car you have long been waiting for,"**  
advertised in the *Sentinel* from April 30  
through October 1915.

Porter G. Ward insured a 1914 Royal Mail Roadster manufactured by the Chevrolet Motor Company, which was kept in Barn #2 insured by Policy No. 47107, located at Hunting Hill.<sup>23</sup> Porter Ward also operated a store at Hunting Hill. T. Alexander Barnesley of Rockville insured a Pullman Company Touring Car Junior, with an extra tire, on April 17, 1915. Lacy Shaw (1885-1951) of Takoma Park insured a Ford automobile. He became a County Commissioner in 1921 and was designated by that body to look after the almshouse.<sup>24</sup> William L. Shaffer of Seneca insured a 1910 Hupmobile.

The availability of motor trucks at reasonable cost allowed for the expansion of the dairy industry and other agricultural pursuits in Montgomery County, where farmers were no longer dependent on locations in the immediate neighborhood of the Metropolitan Branch Railroad. "Andrew Baker built the Cider Barrel, in 1926, to advertise his apple and cider business. Seeking customers among the car travelers heading out of Washington, Baker carefully selected the Frederick Road site for his retail store, though his orchard was near the railroad community of Germantown."<sup>25</sup>

Bohrer & Mattingly of Bethesda insured a Wilcox Truck, by Policy No. 9, signed by both Ralph W. Bohrer and Royal L. Mattingly. The vehicle was described as an open body, cab front, with lamps, etc. The motor was manufactured March 14, 1912, and the vehicle purchased March 4, 1914 for \$1,500 from Congressional

Garage, on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. It was purchased second hand, rebuilt with a new body, to be used for general hauling by owners, and to be stored in the shed owned by C.C. Bohrer in Bethesda. Then, on September 30, 1914, Thomas W. Perry purchased for \$1,500 from Bohrer & Mattingly a 1911 Wilcox truck, Model K, 30 horsepower, to use for hire and in his business; Perry was keeping the truck at Chevy Chase Lake.<sup>26</sup> Charles G. Willson of Silver Spring bought and insured a John Deere Co. one ton truck on June 5, 1914, to be kept on his farm.

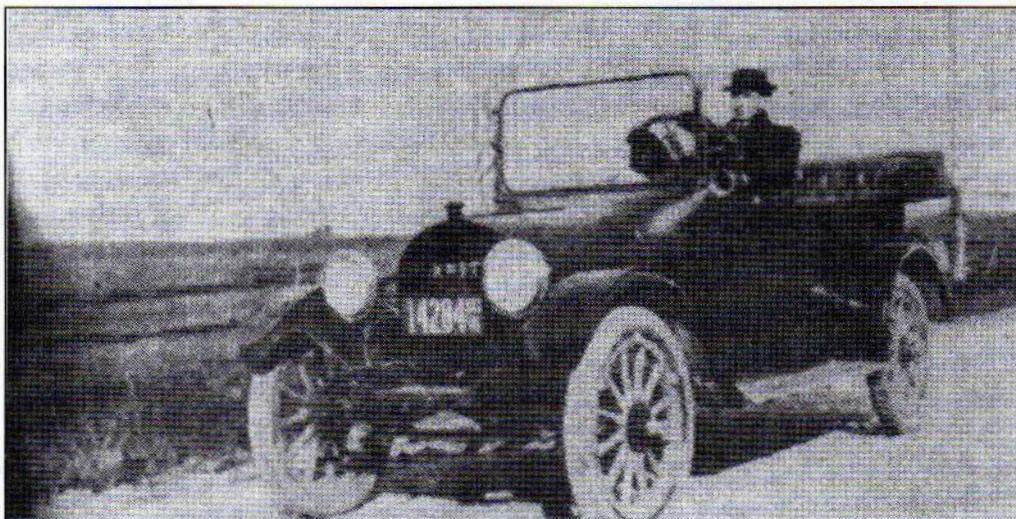
Leonard C. Burns insured a one ton truck manufactured by the Witt-Will Co. built in 1915. It was to be used as a "stage" and stored on the Olney premises of the applicant. Loss if any was to be payable to the Witt-Will Co., which was located at 52 N Street, Washington, D.C. The business was begun here by W. W. Griffith in 1911 as an automobile manufacturer that began manufacturing trucks in 1914. W. W. Griffith, "well-known as a large coal and ice dealer, is president of the company."<sup>27</sup> Witt-Will folded in 1933.

At some point between 1921 and 1925, the Montgomery Mutual Insurance Company decided to discontinue offering an automobile insurance line. The last automobile policy in the MCHS collection is dated 1921. It would appear that the demand had shifted to insuring liability from accidents, and this does not seem to be the type of business in which Montgomery Mutual wished to engage. It certainly could not have been for lack of automobiles in the County. American car ownership was growing by huge leaps and bounds. One interesting statistic to close: In 1900 there were 4,192 motor vehicle factory sales in the United States, with 181,000 in 1910 and 1,525,578 in 1916.<sup>28</sup>

#### Notes

1. Frank Coffey and Joseph Layden, *America on Wheels, the First 100 Years: 1896-1996, the Companion to the PBS Special*, Santa Monica, Ca., General Publishing Group, Inc., 1996, p. 17.
2. For more information about this company's history, see *Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Montgomery County, Maryland, the Eightieth Anniversary, 1848-1928*, a commemorative booklet, n.d.; A. D. Farquhar, President, *The Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Montgomery County, Maryland, One Hundred Years of Progress, 1848 100th Anniversary 1948, Sandy Spring, Maryland*; and F. David Rowling, President and CEO, *Montgomery Mutual Insurance Company, 1848-1998, One Hundred Fifty Years*, all published by the company.
3. A listing of all holders of automobile policies, and cars they owned, can be found on the Montgomery County Historical Society's website, in the library reference section, [http://www.montgomeryhistory.org/sites/default/files/Automobile\\_Policies.pdf](http://www.montgomeryhistory.org/sites/default/files/Automobile_Policies.pdf)
4. F. David Rowling, *op.cit.*, p. 36.
5. *The Montgomery County Sentinel*, March 26, 1909, page 2, col. 5-6.
6. 1920 U.S. Census, Montgomery County, Maryland, Precinct #II, Rockville, ED 126, sheet 1A.
7. "After 74 years, the customer is still right at Reed Brothers Dodge," clipping in vertical files at MCHS, dated Sept. 19, 1989, from Special Gaithersburg Edition, probably the *Gazette*. Montgomery County Land Records, Liber 254, folio 89-90. Interestingly, a neighboring tract owner was James F. Kelchner. Liber 278, folio 92 recorded Feb. 19, 1919.
8. *The Montgomery County Sentinel*, February 10, 1912, and weekly thereafter until 1913, when a new ad appeared.
9. Thomas Y. Canby, "Montgomery General - America's Most Rural Hospital," *Montgomery County Story*, Vol. 23, No. 1, February 1980, p. 2; and "Family Doctor for 50 years," *Washington Star*, June 28, 1959. Clippings file, Montgomery County Historical Society.
10. "Sandy Spring to Honor One of Its Most Beloved Institutions – Dr. Jacob Bird," *The Record*, May 21, 1959. Obituary, "Death of Dr. J. W. Bird Shocks Community," *Sentinel*, Oct. 29, 1959. Clippings file, Montgomery County Historical Society.
11. Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Finding Aid for Milton Bancroft Manuscript Collection. A tremendous volume of correspondence between family members exists and is archived at this institution.
12. Moore Family Files, Montgomery County Historical Society Library.
13. Death notice, Frank M. Hallowell, *Montgomery County Sentinel*, April 30, 1920.
14. Cemetery card file, Montgomery County Historical Society Library.
15. Automobile Insurance Policy No. 68. Montgomery Mutual Insurance Policy No. 54180 was issued to Elizab. G. Hogg and Mary A. Gillpin for property ½ mile south of Brighton and Ashton Roads. It was dated Dec. 29, 1913, and renewed through 1926.
16. Death notice, Elizabeth G. Hogg, *Montgomery County Sentinel*, August 5, 1927 and *Annals of Sandy Spring, Volume IV*, p. 536, copyright 1929 by Anne B. Kirk.

17. *Annals of Sandy Spring, Volume IV*, p. 82, copyright 1929 by Anne B. Kirk.
18. Hiebert, Ray Eldon and Richard K. MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance, the Story of Montgomery County, Maryland*, Rockville, Maryland, Montgomery County Government and the Montgomery County Historical Society, 1976, p. 236. The authors are citing an 1899 *Report on the Highways of Maryland*, Maryland Geological Survey, Baltimore, 1902.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 238-239.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
21. 1910 U.S. Census, Montgomery County, Maryland, 5<sup>th</sup> District, Roll T624-566, p. 24; ED 0110, Image 697, FHL #1374579, from Ancestry.com. Also found on 1920 census, same occupation.
22. Coffey, Frank, *op.cit.*, p. 20, "Race for the Century" held on Thanksgiving Day, 1895, was a 54 mile course from Jackson Park in Chicago to Evanston, Illinois and back. The Duryea Motor Wagon won the race with an actual road time of 7 hours 53 minutes, at an average speed of 5 miles per hour. Handicapping participants was the weather; more than a foot of snow had fallen the day before.
23. Automobile Insurance Policy No. 8, Montgomery Mutual Insurance Papers. MCHS holds several ledgers from this store, in manuscript collection from the late Elizabeth Beall Banks of Belward Farm.
24. *Montgomery County Story*, Vol. 41, #2, p. 32.
25. Clare Lise Cavigchi, *Places from the Past, the Tradition of Gardez Bien in Montgomery County, Maryland*, M-NCPPC, 2001, p. 45.



**Ernest Hawkins, of N.E. Hawkins & Co., Etchison, in a 1914 Krit.**  
Courtesy Steven Hawkins.

### *About the Authors*

**Patricia Abelard Andersen** is the librarian at the Montgomery County Historical Society Library. She is a past editor and publisher of *Western Maryland Genealogy*, and a contributor of several articles for the *Montgomery County Story* and the *Maryland Genealogical Society Journal*. She has also published 11 volumes of Frederick County Land Record Abstracts, and one volume of Montgomery County, Maryland, Land Record Abstracts, the last three volumes with Colonial Roots Publishers.

**William Offutt** is a native of Montgomery County, a retired public school and Montgomery College teacher, and the author of *Bethesda: A Social History*. He added to Jane Sween's *A History of Montgomery County: Centuries of Change* and has contributed numerous articles for local newspapers and the Montgomery County Historical Society. His newest novel is a romance called *Tory Daughter*. An active member of the MCHS Speakers Bureau, Bill and his wife live in Bethesda.

## White Flint Golf Course

*By William Offutt*

There was a time, not so awfully long ago, when for only fifty cents a duffer could play golf all day, round after round, on a hilly, nine-hole Montgomery County golf course. Not miniature golf, but real golf on a real golf course, and a challenging and well-maintained one at that. These days, on our public courses, it's hard to find a place to play a round for less than thirty dollars!

The place was White Flint, long a mecca of high-end shopping and now the center of long-planned revitalization and development. But back toward the end of the golfing boom of the Roaring Twenties, White Flint had tried hard to be a country club. Born in trying times, it ended up by making do as a more-or-less public course that attracted hundreds of golfers each month for a couple of generations.

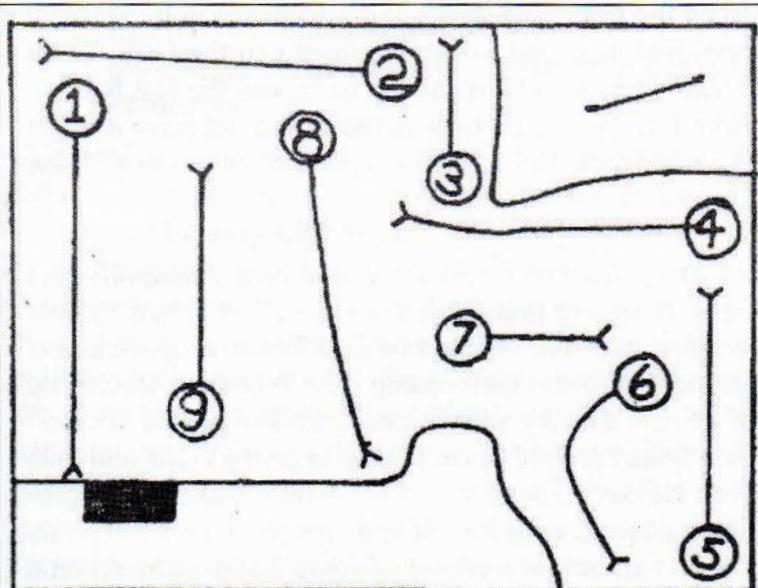
It came to life in 1927, on what had been known locally as the Flack estate, as the Harper Country Club under the leadership of one Col. Robert W. Harper, with the "Silver Fox," Glen Echo-born PGA Hall of Famer Al Houghton, as its pro. Then in 1930, after the chaos of the stock market crash, the property was leased with an option to buy to a local group led by Walter McEachern, his son, and Harry P. Kenna, the club's attorney and secretary. They renamed it for the stony knob it sat on, hired Leo McNerhany away from the two-year-old Kenwood Country Club as their pro, and set annual dues at \$60. The men sent out dozens of announcements and invitations, began staging dances in the unfinished clubhouse at the top of the hill, announced that ladies could play for free on Tuesdays, and worked hard to improve the hilly 2,750-yard layout on about half of its 104 acres, buying new pumps for the watering system and planting more shrubbery.<sup>1</sup>

The course struggled on in a semi-public mode and soon attracted a growing stream of golfers, often more than a hundred on sunny weekends. In June 1931 Cliff McKimmie, who had defeated Burning Tree's Walter Tuckerman for the Middle Atlantic amateur championship in 1924, became the club pro and announced that the locker room and showers were nearing completion and that work was continuing to improve the condition of the greens. He also noted that George King, who had worked at both Manor Club and Rock Creek, had become assistant manager.<sup>2</sup>

Soon various social and civic clubs were staging tourneys and holding dances, parties, and contests at the new club, including one to honor McKimmie when he won the Middle Atlantic PGA trophy. Early in 1932 White Flint Club, Inc., still striving to maintain its country club image, created a steering committee to plan its spring and summer activities. The committee agreed that guest fees would continue to be fifty cents on weekdays but increased them to one dollar on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. Ladies Day on Tuesday would be continued, but the question of creating an initiation fee for membership was tabled. The committee promised many improvements and announced that a new green for the dog-legged sixth hole was under construction. Meanwhile Rockville Pike, by far the County's busiest road, was stretched to thirty feet by adding five-foot concrete shoulders on each side, making the trip to White Flint's bluestone driveway easier and faster.<sup>3</sup>

The sport had become, for a variety of reasons, very popular among the smart set in the boom of the 1920s and, despite the failure of many golfing enterprises, continued to attract ambitious middle-class men and women. Bobby Jones, with his amazing four-tourney Grand Slam in 1930, and the exploits of Walter Hagan and Gene Sarazan helped popularize the game. Humor magazines, especially *Life* and *Judge*, featured dozens of golf cartoons, and the niblick-swinging flappers of John Held, Jr. became a sexy symbol of the times. Some men continued to play in long knickers called plus-fours, but floppy trousers soon became more popular and for women, the shirtwaist dress was *de rigueur*. Country clubs, some as adjuncts of real estate developments such as Kenwood, multiplied in Montgomery County. Membership was obviously a symbol of success, and many men claimed that they conducted a lot of business on the course or at what was generally called the "nineteenth hole."

In 1930 Bill Leverton, a first-class greenskeeper, became the manager and pro at White Flint, and in June of 1936 made a hole-in-one on the third hole. It was that hole, he later decided for a twenty-part *Washington Post* series, that was the links' most difficult and the one least likely to be played in par. Over the years a number of golfers managed to score holes-in-one on the seventh hole at White Flint but few managed to ace the straight, level, but well-guarded third despite both being well under two hundred yards. Judging from the newspapers, every hole-in-one was worth an inch or so of type, and dozens were reported from Rockville Pike.



**Map of the greens at White Flint, from a scorecard, circa 1950s. Courtesy the USGA.**

In early March 1933 a plane crash on the golf course attracted a great deal of attention. The Rockville Flying Club's 12-year-old biplane was headed for Congressional Airport, the grass strip just north of White Flint, when the motor suddenly quit and refused to restart. Below lay a lot of trees, a few houses, Ed Offutt's general store, the busy road, and the undulating golf course. The pilot, Paul Preston of D.C., chose the links. As the plane quietly glided down toward the fairways, the flier noted that there were a number of golfers at play and that he had not attracted any attention. So he headed for the fence, lost a wing to a telephone pole, tangled in its electric wires, and guided what was left as it crumpled to the ground. The pilot emerged, unhurt, as a small crowd gathered. Within an hour Congressional sent a tow truck to drag the wreckage away. The *Post* reported that the pilot trudged after it "guiding the tail of the fuselage."<sup>4</sup>

White Flint became the popular site for schoolboy golf matches and tourneys. A surprising number of high schools, both private ones such as Georgetown Prep, which had its own golf course, and public schools such as Bethesda-Chevy Chase, fielded teams before World War II. The New Deal swelled the local population and by the late 1930s there were some thirteen private courses in the D.C. area with almost an equal number of public and semi-public operations. The three Washington, D.C. public links -- Rock Creek, East Potomac, and Anacostia -- charged only five or ten cents to play on weekdays, and White Flint soon offered discounts to golfers who teed up after 4:30 p.m.

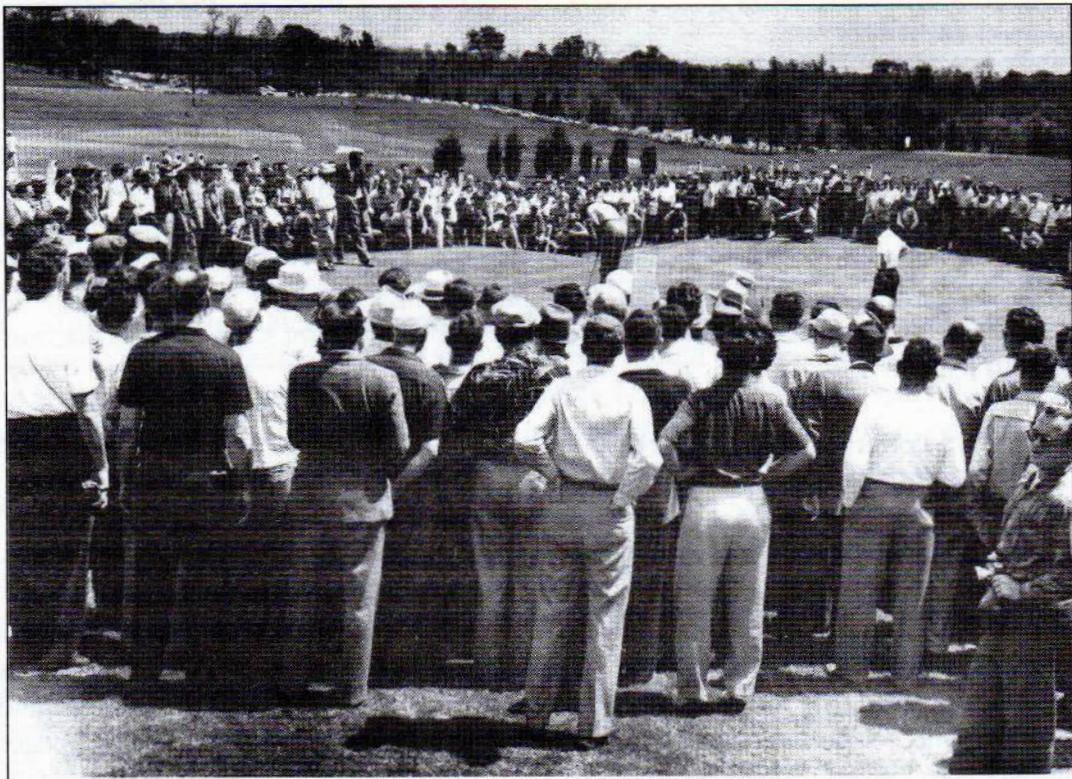
In 1938 more than 18,000 golfers played some 40,000 rounds at White Flint. The following year Leverton, in his eighth year as pro and greenskeeper, enlarged the sloping second green and placed new sand traps at the seventh hole to practically force the approach shot to carry to the pin. His ambitious plans were to extend several holes and make the course about 3,000 yards long. Asked about records, Leverton said there was no official one but that he and a friend had played twice around the course in 65 strokes several times.<sup>5</sup> Once in a while the tight fairways, fenced out-of-bounds, and small greens led to confusion and loud altercations. The *Post*'s Merrell Whittlesey reported that in June 1939 a two-some on the eighth tee yelled at and then cursed a three-some on the ninth green. This led to one of the irate golfers coming into the clubhouse and hitting another man in the mouth, only to discover he had assaulted the wrong golfer. Cooler heads managed to prevail, and apologies followed, of course.<sup>6</sup>

Into the 1940s White Flint continued to be popular as well as very inexpensive. Leverton continued to attract golfers with tournaments of the blind bogey type (in which the winning score is kept secret until the end); 82 signed up for one in April 1940. Later that spring there was a tourney for Leland Junior High School boys and

girls which was won by a 13-year-old who shot an 87. The price of golf at White Flint rose to sixty cents on weekdays and \$1.25 on weekends, and the course was attracting more than 20,000 players annually just before the war.

World War II seriously impacted life in the D.C. area as well as golf and other forms of entertainment. After gas rationing began and a ban on pleasure driving was instituted, some golfers got in trouble after having their tag numbers taken at their country clubs or golf courses; this was called joy riding, and it was illegal. White Flint was fortunate to be on a bus line which had replaced the trolleys in 1935, but attendance plummeted; it and almost all golf courses struggled, although Congressional managed to survive thanks to the OSS. There was a shortage of golf balls; many rounds were played with damaged and repainted balls, and the lost ball became practically unknown. Some folks said one of White Flint's attractions was that it did not have a water hazard. In 1943, after operating the course for about thirteen years, Bill Leverton signed a "substantial" lease with Jack Harper, son of the founder.<sup>7</sup>

At war's end twins Ray and Roy Shields returned from Army Air Force service to find their Annapolis-area golf club vandalized and overgrown. They worked hard to restore that facility and in 1950 leased the old White Flint layout to begin a series of first-class promotions with Fred Seaton of East Potomac as their pro. On a Sunday afternoon in April 1952, local hero and former National Open champ Lew Worsham teamed up with Woodmont pro Freddie Bolton against White Flint's Frank Tenney and nationally known pro Ed "Porky" Oliver, who agreed to stage a clinic before the match. Sam Snead arrived in early May to give a clinic and then play a match with Tenney against Porky Oliver and Fred Bolton. Snead shot a 62, which was quickly proclaimed the course record. That was followed by a driving contest, with Ray Shields putting up a \$100 prize. In May of 1952 the twins brought in Ben Hogan to play an exhibition; a crowd of some 2,500 gathered on a hot July afternoon to watch Bantam Ben shoot a 60, with eight birdies and an eagle on the sixth hole.<sup>8</sup>



**Sam Snead playing at White Flint, 1952. Courtesy R. John Shields.**

R. John Shields is now part-owner and president of the Glenn Dale golf club that his father, Ray Shields, built about 1960. He and his family lived in the wooden clubhouse at White Flint when he was young, and he attended first grade at Garrett Park Elementary. His mother, who was called Hinky, gave birth to his sister Pam

while they lived there. John Shields remembered the place well enough to describe the property some sixty years later:

The clubhouse was quite large, and it had a lot of heavy furniture in the three large rooms downstairs. There were two fireplaces but we used kerosene heaters. There were a lot of upstairs rooms; I'm not sure what they were intended for but some clubs did rent out bedrooms. The place leaked like a sieve, and when it rained there was a mad dash to find the pots and pans. In the wintertime, we were always thawing out frozen pipes. . . . It was a very poor period in my life. We had one car and it didn't always run. There was no refrigerator, but the ice truck came every day. I remember getting in trouble by driving a tractor through the back wall of the shed.<sup>9</sup>

Shields also recalled that there was a gas pump and a big pile of sand by the barn-like maintenance shed. His father's twin brother, Roy, stayed at the Annapolis golf course, and his uncle Bob became the manager at Woodmont Country Club after it moved from Bethesda to Rockville, a job he held for a generation.

Business improved but competition grew as a number of new clubs prospered after the war and Georgetown Prep opened its beautiful course in the summer. Until the Maryland-National Park & Planning Commission built the Falls Road course, the County's only public courses were Sligo, Silver Spring (née Indian Springs), White Flint, and what had been Woodmont and was now Glenmont and rented from the GSA by the parks department until it became the site of the medical library at NIH. In 1954 pro Frank Tenney moved over to the Annapolis Roads links and Fred Bolton left Woodmont for the White Flint job, saying he hoped to improve his game enough to go on the professional tour again. That was the same year that a badly hooked drive on the second hole crossed the Pike, bounced off a stone and hit the driver of a car headed north. She braked quickly, and the three cars behind her managed to pile into her and each other. Several people were treated for cuts and bruises, but no one appeared at the Rockville police station to claim the Spaulding Kro-Flite.<sup>10</sup>

Porky Oliver returned in 1953 at the start of the Bethesda Civitan Club's hole-in-one contest, which ran every Sunday that summer. The next year when a Kenwood golfer won a new Plymouth in a similar contest at White Flint, the USGA declared him a pro. In 1954 the Kiwanis Club held a weekly hole-in-one contest with five shots for a dollar. In the mid Fifties the Shields twins hired Ed Marshall from East Potomac to run the course and their popular driving range, which was in the back of the property facing the B&O railroad tracks. The new pro planned both individual and group lessons and said he intended to hold many blind bogey tourneys with all the entry fees going into prizes.<sup>11</sup>

Marshall only lasted a year, and in 1956 Frank Tenney returned as the pro. But change was coming to the Rockville Pike, and in the late Fifties Congressional Airport became a shopping center and its big hanger a roller skating rink. Property all around the course was being rezoned, and in 1959 it was White Flint's turn. Most of the golf course fronting on the Pike was approved by the Montgomery County Planning Board for apartment construction, while 21 acres between the Waverley Sanitarium just to the north and the B&O tracks were rezoned for industrial use. When



**The Shields twins with Porky Oliver (center), 1950s. Courtesy R. John Shields.**

the County Council took up the case, many thought there were already too many apartment buildings going up, and a standing-room-only crowd came to support single-family use of the 55 acres still a golf course. The developers lost and play continued. In June Tenney broke Hogan's record by shooting an 11-under par 59.<sup>12</sup>

Growing up in Bethesda, Pete Iimirie (B-CC '59) and many of the author's high school and college friends often played there in the course's last days. He remembered it fondly:

Outfitted with my dad's old leather bag, persimmon clubs, and an official looking Sam Snead brimmed hat with a fancy band and having learned the art of electrical tape repair (through broken bats and dry-rotted baseball covers), I could fasten the club head binding-string that had begun to unravel. Athletes in those days had to first conquer the physical demand of old time sports equipment (wish I knew where those old persimmon clubs were).

White Flint had no world-class challenging holes, but certainly had home court advantages for the regulars. Holes 2, 3, and 6 come to mind. #2 went along the Rockville Pike. It had a unique two-level green. Most importantly, if you attempted to crush the tee shot and ripped a duck hook for a righthander, you could reach the north-bound lane of outgoing traffic on the Pike.

Number 4 offered the most important legend. A dogleg left, the local story told of a home that housed the criminally insane along the left hand fairway rough. A well-briefed local would quickly declare his ball as unplayable; take the penalty, drop a new ball, and move on in great dispatch.

Six's tee box just nestled in the woods' edge on a hill. It was a dogleg right with a blind shot to the green from the fairway. Possessing a natural fade (okay, slice), I could position well for my second shot (actually third or fourth) from the hilltop.

The course, by today's standards, was quite short. However, based on the old technology, you could get in a lot of swings. To this day, no matter how many different structures they place over the old course, I still get the feeling when I drive by that I am late for a quick round.<sup>13</sup>

In 1960 the golf course was still alive. The *Post's* Maury Fitzgerald declared White Flint the "comeback" champion of the year, in a later column announcing that it had applied for rezoning to allow lights to be installed for night play. By then the course was 2,300 yards long with four par fours and five par threes. In 1962 a rezoning for an office building on the site was rejected, but the pressure was growing and most realized that the end was near.<sup>14</sup>

The lighting never happened. In 1963 Albert Abrahamson and his Tower Construction Company purchased the property for a reported \$20 million, then sought commercial rezoning. When the last round of golf was played is unknown. The property stood empty for some time and became the playground for young men on motorcycles and RVs, much to the displeasure of nearby home owners. In 1972 Bloomingdale's, having been rejected by Chevy Chase, applied for a permit for the construction of a large exclusive fashion mall on the 43-acre White Flint site. Construction, for a variety of reasons, did not begin until the shopping-center-maven Lerners got involved. The project was slowed by a number of problems but finally opened with a flourish in 1977. While immediately successful, it also immediately became a problem to its neighbors because of the bright lights, increased traffic, and discarded trash. Metro's Red Line arrived in 1984 and, while there have been many changes since and some deterioration, White Flint remains a popular shopping mall with a somewhat uncertain future. If planners and promoters get their way and the economy recovers, White Flint may thrive again as an urban center to rival downtown Bethesda with some 20,000 new jobs and at least that many residents.

## LOCAL RULES

1. U. S. G. A. Rules govern, except where local rules apply.
2. Out of bounds—To left on Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5—Penalty, loss of distance only.
3. Lost ball—Penalty, one stroke and distance.
4. Level sand in all traps.
5. No player should play from the tee until the party in front have played their second stroke and are out of range, nor play up to the putting green until the party in front have holed out and moved away.
6. Players after holing out shall move off of green promptly.
7. Players on all Par 3 holes, before putting out, will signal players following to drive.
8. All matches losing one clear hole on matches ahead, MUST give way on request of players following.
9. Players looking for a lost ball MUST allow other players to pass through promptly, after which they may not play their next shot until such matches as have passed through are safely out of range.
10. A single player must use only one ball and always give way to a properly constituted match.
11. Turf cut or displaced by a player should be at once replaced and pressed down with the foot.

White Flint

Golf Club, Inc.



ROCKVILLE PIKE

AND

EDSON LANE

*Washington  
Maryland*

TELEPHONE KENS. 315

White Flint Golf Course rules as printed on the back of the scorecard, circa 1930s. Courtesy the USGA.

## Notes

1. Henry Litchfield West, "From Tee to Green," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 1, 1931, and Sept. 28 and Oct. 19, 1930.
2. *Post*, June 2 and 21 and July 21, 1931.
3. *Post*, Jan. 22, 1933.
4. *Post*, March 7, 1933.
5. *Post*, May 20, 1938 and April 6, 1939.
6. Merrell Whittlesey, "Tee to Green," *Post*, June 18, 1939.
7. *Post*, April 5, 1940, April 17, 1941, and July 25, 1943.
8. *Post*, July 27, 1951, and April 17, May 4 and 5, 1952.
9. John Shields, interview with author, August 12, 2011.
10. *Post*, June 31 and Sept. 14, 1954.
11. *Post*, Sept 1, 1952, April 26, 1953, July 10, 1954, and March 16, 1956.
12. *Post*, Feb. 14 and 19, and June 1 and 20, 1959.
13. Pete Imirie, interview with author via email, March 2011.
14. *Post*, March 6, June 6, and Nov. 6, 1960, and June 20, 1962.