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EARLY DAYS AT THE CHEVY CHASE CLUB

by Joan F. Marsh

The harried commuter heading north out of Washington into Montgomery County on Connecticut Avenue may not take time to notice the green and white gazebo on the west side of the avenue just north of Chevy Chase Circle, which is at the Maryland/District of Columbia line. The gazebo marks the spot where the old trolley line stopped at the Chevy Chase Club, and is a symbol of the many ties that the club has with a quieter rural past.

The history of the Chevy Chase Club begins in 1885 with a gentleman named S. S. Howland, who had moved to Washington from the Genesee Valley in New York, organized a fox hunt and named it the Dumblane Hunt. Some of northwest Washington and much of lower Montgomery County were still rolling farmland and fox hunting was a popular pastime in the area around what is now Chevy Chase. It was this sport, not golf, which was the inspiration for founding a country club.

The Dumblane Hunt was based on the 75-acre Dumblane Farm on the north side of Loughborough Road in Tennally Town. Tennally Town (the modern-day Tenlytown stop on the Metro) was a small village that grew up around the tavern of John Tennally, which was built in 1789 on the west side of the old Georgetown-Fredericktown Road, just beyond the fork where River Road veered off toward the Potomac River. The tavern was about a mile south of the District of Columbia line and at the time was the first place north of Georgetown where travelers could get a meal.

Dumblane Hall, the manor house on Dumblane Farm in 1885, was probably built before 1855.¹ It still stands off Yuma Street behind Immaculata Seminary, and is part of the Tenley Campus of American University. It is rather severe in appearance, a square stucco house with cupola in the center of the hip roof. West of the manor house on 42nd Street, the name Dumblane is preserved on the fieldstone gateposts that mark the entrance to an equally interesting later 19th-century craftsman-style house that was designed by Gustav Stickley. The hunt continued to operate on the Dumblane farm until 1891. It struggled through the next year at another location, but by 1892 the sportsmen were looking for a new and more permanent home.

By happy coincidence, a group of men from the Metropolitan Club of Washington had been talking of founding a country club, and were delighted at the idea of including the fox hunt in their plans. One of the men most prominent in organizing the new club was Francis G. Newlands. Newlands had been elected to Congress in 1892, and served as representative and later senator from Nevada. He was a man of considerable wealth, which he had inherited from the estate of his father-in-law, William Sharon. Sharon had preceded Newlands as senator from Nevada and his fortune had been made from the famous Comstock Lode in that state.²

In 1892 Washington had a population of a little over 230,000 and was growing rapidly. Street paving was extending beyond the old Boundary Street (renamed Florida Avenue), which was the northern limit of the City of Washington as laid out by Pierre L'Enfant in 1791.³ Ambitious and farsighted, Mr. Newlands saw that if Connecticut Avenue were extended north from its terminus at Florida Avenue, it would become the avenue of a great suburban expansion of the Capital to the north. He began acquiring land on both sides of this future road, and through his agents gradually accumulated 1712 acres. In addition, he became the president and chief stockholder of the Rock Creek Railway. Its trolley cars, which ran out Connecticut Avenue, became the lifeline for his crowning achievement: a planned suburb just over the District line to be called Chevy Chase. Chevy Chase has been called "the most significant real estate development since George Washington 'persuaded' the local farmers to go along with his scheme for the capital."⁴

In tying a country club to his development, Newlands was following a successful marketing pattern which continues to this day. Again his foresight is to be commended, for he was living at the very beginning of the country club movement. The first half of the 19th century saw the emergence of a new wealthy urban class of businessmen, who began to imitate the British example of forming downtown clubs for dining and social prestige. By the middle of the century, however, industrialism was taking its toll on the livability of the city. Historian Edward K. Spann writes of New York City: "In striking contrast to the city's commerce, its domain reeked of decay: Decrepit, dirty, cluttered public docks and market; dusty, muddy, garbage laden, stinking disorderly streets."⁵ Although Washington probably did not suffer to this extent, it surely had its share of manure-filled streets, smelly garbage and open sewers. Those who could afford it retreated to the mountains or the seaside in the summer, and became devotees of sports like fox hunting, yachting and coaching. By the end of the 19th century, the popularity of resorts such as Saratoga and White Sulphur Springs led to the desire for a year-round availability for enjoying these activities. The introduction of commuter trains and trolleys made access to the suburbs and a kind of organized country life accessible. Moreover, they filled another need for the middle class: a substitute for the country estate so much admired by Anglophiles.

The first country club in the United States may have been the Myopia Club, near Boston, which was founded in 1879, although the Elkridge Club in Baltimore claims a date of 1878. Three years later the Country Club in Brookline, Massachusetts, was organized according to the following plan: "The general idea is to have a comfortable clubhouse for the use of members with their families, a simple restaurant, bed-rooms, bowling alley, lawn tennis grounds, etc.; also to have race meetings and, occasionally, music in

the afternoon, and it is probable that a few gentlemen will club together to run a coach out every afternoon during season, to convey members and their friends at a fixed charge."⁶ This outline became the model for future country clubs. A later decision, and an important one, was to include women and children in their activities, though as a rule only men were the actual members. The movement continued to grow, and by 1900 all the states in the Union had at least one country club. Although equestrian sports came first, they were soon to be eclipsed by the overwhelming popularity of golf.

In the fall of 1892 a group of men met at the offices of Washington architect Harvey Page to formalize plans for the Chevy Chase Club. Most of the men were members of the Metropolitan Club. To further his plan to have the club in his new development, Newlands promised that his Chevy Chase Land Company would help the founders to acquire a permanent home at a price which they could afford. A temporary home was offered to them on the "Goldsborough Place," which was a farm of about 100 acres called Belmont. It had a farmhouse and some outbuildings, and was located in what is now Section One of Chevy Chase Village, adjacent to Chevy Chase Center on Western Avenue. At this point the emphasis was entirely on fox hunting, and in fact a Master of Fox Hounds was elected before the first club officers had been chosen. Until the club moved to its permanent location it was



The Chevy Chase Hunt, ca. 1900

referred to both as the Chevy Chase Hunt and as the Dumblane Hunt. Newlands again showed his support for the organization by advancing a sum of \$1000 from his Land Company.

In the Spring of 1893 the first general membership meeting was held. A constitution was adopted and articles of incorporation were drawn up. Officers were elected, with Newlands becoming the first president. Among the new rules: no initiation fee and no smoking allowed in the dining room or when ladies were present. At this time the Club had 82 members.⁷

A big step forward was taken in 1894. Although the Chevy Chase Land Company had acquired almost all the land on both sides of Connecticut Avenue north of Chevy Chase Circle, one small piece of 9.36 acres was still in private hands. This was the old Bradley Farm, just south of what is now Bradley Lane on the west side of Connecticut Avenue. Newlands saw that this would make the ideal home for the new club, and negotiated a two-year lease with its owners, John C. Bullitt of Philadelphia, and Tiny Speed Rodgers, who was the wife of a Navy captain. The property was immediately sublet to the club by the Land Company.

The Bradley Farm came with an interesting history. It was part of a grant of 560 acres patented by Colonel Joseph Belt in 1725 when the area was still part of Prince George's County. He named his grant "Cheivy Chase," after the old border ballad of the same name, which commemorated a famous battle between the Scots and the English in 1388. It is not known whether Belt was in fact Scottish or English, but we do know that he was married to the daughter of that famous Scottish immigrant, Ninian Beall. Colonel Belt's fine brick house was in what is now Chevy Chase, D.C. on Oliver Street. On the boundary of Maryland and the District of Columbia at Chevy Chase Circle, a large boulder can be found which commemorates the achievements of this public-spirited citizen. Belt was a surveyor, a colonel in the Prince George's County militia, a founder of Rock Creek Parish and a member of the Maryland House of Burgesses.⁸

After Belt's death, the original tract was divided by his son Thomas, and the Bradley Farm portion passed through several owners before being purchased on January 23, 1815 by Abraham Bradley the Fourth. It was not a permanent home for a member of the Bradley family until Joseph Habersham Bradley, the fourth child of Abraham the Fifth, inherited the farm. Joseph Bradley, a graduate of Yale and a well-known lawyer in the city, lived on the Chevy Chase property his entire life, according to historian Roger Brooke Farquhar.

The farmhouse on the Bradley property, which served as a clubhouse for many years, seems to have been built some time before 1760 by Colonel Belt. The date on the chimney, the only portion of the original house still standing, is 1747. When the Club acquired the farmhouse they made a new large clubroom out of several of the first floor rooms and built locker rooms on the east end.⁹ The year after the Club leased the farm, stables and kennels were provided for the fox hunters, and the old Dumblane Hunt disappeared from history.

With so much invested in their new property, the Board of Governors of the Chevy Chase Club realized that they should consider purchasing it.

The asking price was \$30,000, which was too high for the corporation, but the purchasing committee succeeded in having the amount reduced to \$22,500 and the property was conveyed to the Club on May 12, 1897. The first improvement made was the installation of steam heating, and architect Walter Peter was employed to make further additions to the old farmhouse. Among the many changes made in the next few years was the construction of the "Bungalow," a small house built to house members and their families when they wished to spend the night. Its most famous resident was President William Howard Taft, for whom a special room was provided, complete with an out-sized bathtub. The Bungalow was at the northeast corner of the Club property until it was razed in 1959 to make room for a new swimming pool.

During these early years, fox hunting was the centerpiece of the Club's activities. Its members hunted not only in the neighborhood of the club, but also in nearby locations in Maryland and Virginia. There were meetings twice a week, and joint meets were held with local farmers. The hunt met at such far-flung locations as Forest Glen, Silver Spring, Kensington, Four Corners and Rockville in Montgomery County and Pierce's Mill in the District of Columbia. At this time the hounds were kept on the Club property along with the horses. However, by 1906 the local residents had started to complain about the noise generated by the hounds, and the pack was moved to Rock Creek Farms in Kensington, which was owned by Clarence Moore.

Of the four permanent Masters of Fox Hounds, Clarence Moore had the longest tenure, serving from 1899 to 1912. He was a devoted equestrian and kept 90 horses and 240 hounds on his estate. He preferred English hounds, and it was on a trip to England in search of more foxhounds that he met his tragic death on the "Titanic" on his return journey. It was a great loss to the new club, for he had acted as a governor and secretary in addition to being an outstanding Master of Fox Hounds. His portrait, in full hunting dress, hangs over one of the two mantels in the large assembly room at the Club. The end of fox hunting at Chevy Chase came soon after his death, due partly to the loss of his leadership and partly to the growth of the surrounding area, which severely limited the open ground available for hunting.

In addition to the hunt and various horseshows and races, the Club had from its inception provided for other sports such as bowling, baseball and tennis. Like many other country clubs, Chevy Chase at this time restricted its membership to men, but women and children were encouraged to join in many of their activities. Today this policy would of course be considered discriminatory, but at the time many observers considered it a very positive step for the ladies. "[The Country Club] has brought our women out of stuffy houses and out of their hopeless, aimless selves, has given color to their cheeks, vivacity to their movements, charm and intelligence to their conversation..." enthused Frank S. Arnett in Munsey's Magazine in 1902.¹⁰

Longtime Chevy Chase resident Don Caffery Glassie, who was born in 1908, moved with his family to Bradley Lane in 1910. In his memoirs, he said that his mother enjoyed the "ma jong" games that were held in the Club's card room, and he would drive her to her destination in the family pony cart. Mr. Glassie remembered that at that time all the land north of

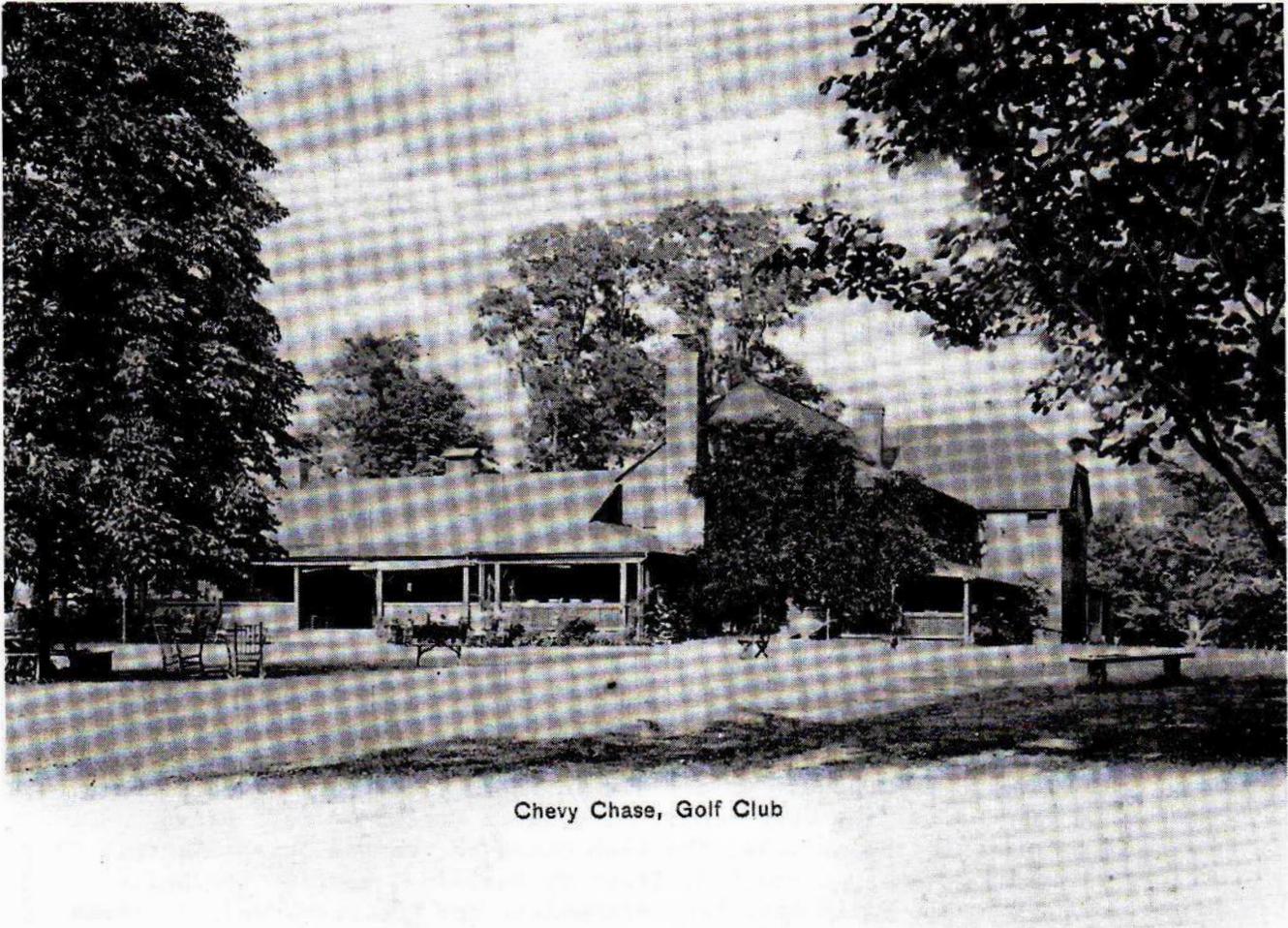
the Club was still dotted with farms, and there were only a few houses on Bradley Lane. Everybody had barns for their horses and chickens and cows. Their family barn was converted into a garage when automobiles became popular. The old carriage house, built on the grounds of the Club in 1909, is an interesting relic of this transitional period when automobiles were beginning to replace horses. Like many others of the period, it was designed to house horses on the ground floor and carriages and automobiles above. One wonders how well the horses fared with the smell of gasoline drifting down through the floor.

Mr. Glassie also had fond memories of playing tennis with his young friends. Tennis courts had been part of the Club from the very beginning. In 1910 they were moved to their present location along Bradley Lane, and by 1916 sixteen courts were available for play. One of the most distinguished players among the members was ~~Ambassador~~ Dwight F. Davis, the man for whom the Davis Cup is named. He played at Chevy Chase often, and many times some of the boys who were learning the game played with him. Since Ambassador Davis had established the Davis Cup, the Cup's matches were held at the Club, and players from all over the world came there to compete. The best-known individual player was the famous Bill Tilden.¹¹

cf. p. 20
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As popular as tennis was to remain, it was the introduction of golf in 1895 that made the biggest change in the emphasis of the Club. The organizers of the Chevy Chase Club had made no provision for the land necessary to lay out a golf course when the club was founded in 1892, probably because golf was such a new sport in this country. Courses consisted of many fewer holes than is standard today and the first courses only had from four to seven holes. Eventually this was extended to nine, and finally eighteen became the norm.¹² There was a dress code for the game, which in many cases consisted of a scarlet coat like the one used for fox hunting, with the club colors on the collar. A portrait in the assembly room of the Club today shows an early Board member in what appears to be hunting dress, but in fact he is wearing the golf uniform of the day.¹³

Chevy Chase cannot claim the distinction of having had the first golf course in the Washington area. The Washington Golf Club, now the Washington Golf and Country Club, laid out their first nine-hole course in 1894 in Arlington County, Virginia. However, Chevy Chase can say that they introduced the sport the same year that the United States Golf Association was formed, when there were only five golf clubs in the entire country. One of the prime movers in starting the game was G. Thomas Dunlop, owner of "Hayes Manor," the beautiful 18th century house on Manor Road in Chevy Chase. While visiting a friend during the summer of 1895, Dunlop heard about a new game called "golf." His friend had been to St. Andrews, in Scotland, and brought home several golf clubs, some gutta-percha balls and some of the older leather-covered feather balls. He took Dunlop out on the fields of his farm to give him an idea of how the game was played. Even with this probably somewhat crude initiation, Dunlop was smitten. When he returned to Chevy Chase he spread the word among his friends. By chance, Henry May, who was the President of the Washington Golf Club, heard him and volunteered to help start the game at Chevy Chase. The new course, boasting six holes, was opened on September 25, 1895, Dunlop's birthday.



Chevy Chase, Golf Club

"Chevy Chase Golf Club" as pictured on a Postcard dated January 26, 1906

John Lynham, in his book "The Chevy Chase Club, A History" describes the first course:

"The first tee was on the west side of Connecticut Avenue in front of the old Clubhouse, and from there the golfers drove across Connecticut Avenue with its tracks and overhead trolley [wires] to the first green on the other side. The next four holes were played over the open fields of the Chevy Chase Land Company and the sixth and last hole was played back across Connecticut Avenue from a tee about where the residence of Carroll Morgan is now located at No. 1 Quincy Street, to a green on the site of the Bungalow." ¹⁴

This course soon became too small for the enthusiasm of the golfers, and a nine-hole course was laid out which extended over the property of the Chevy Chase Land Company to the west of the Club. By 1898 an 18-hole course was already being contemplated. The Club leased the tract from the Land Company on which the first nine holes were being played, and also rented the "Dodge Tract" from Joseph Bradley. The grounds of the Club now went all the way from Connecticut Avenue to Wisconsin Avenue on the west, with Bradley Lane as its northern boundary. The two tracts had been purchased by 1909

and golf course architect Donald Ross was engaged to design a truly professional course. The new course opened in October of 1910 and the golf shop, built at the same time, is still used today.

In spite of the many additions that had been made to it, the Bradley farmhouse had been outgrown. A committee was formed to study the matter, and as a result architect Jules Henri de Sibour was selected to draw up the plans. After 17 sets of drawings had been carefully studied, the final plans were selected and the large stone clubhouse was finished by June 7, 1911. The old farmhouse was restored to its original appearance and outfitted as bedrooms for members and servants. A room and bath was set aside on the first floor for President Taft, who had been staying in the Bungalow. Perhaps the President was a bit grumpy about being moved into new quarters. When one of the President's aides asked him how he liked the new clubhouse, he replied bluntly, "Excellent. It is the finest example of early penitentiary colonial architecture I have ever seen."¹⁵ An early photograph of the new building from the Washington Star shows a long expanse of Potomac bluestone unrelieved by trees or bushes. It does indeed look a bit forbidding, but abundant planting and the white porte-cochere which was added a short time later soften the facade and give it a feeling of stately charm.

The Club had always extended honorary memberships to the President and Vice-President of the United States and Taft was the first of many to enjoy golfing at Chevy Chase. An article in The American Golfer magazine of March 1910 was titled "The Chevy Chase Club Where President Taft Plays Golf." According to the article, the Club could be reached by an electric trolley line which ran from the U.S. Treasury Building, next to the White House. Although this would have been convenient for the President, it seems unlikely that he took the trolley, even in those less security conscious days. The article also stated that all of the cabinet officers and Justices of the Supreme Court were members.

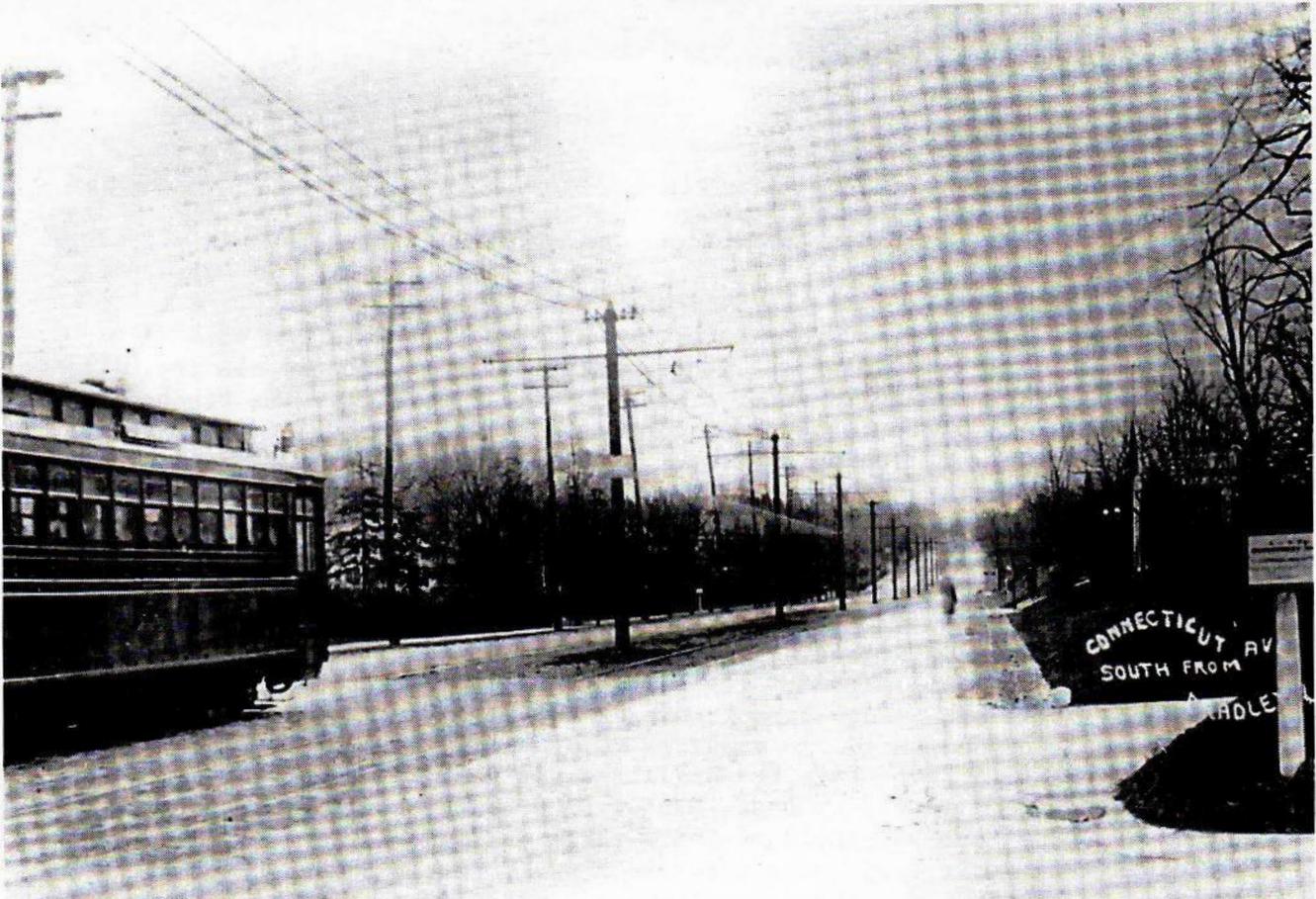
An earlier article in the same magazine described a match between the President and the editor of the magazine. There followed a tactful analysis of Taft's game, which the President modestly described "as being of the bumble-puppy order."¹⁶ That term may have originated with writer D. B. Macpyke. In a short story published in Harpers Weekly on July 3, 1909, he described a game by the two worst players at a fictional golf club. Their names were Bumblepuppy and Blunderby. The former is described as the "fattest and scantest of breath," but turns out to be the cleverest by far.

Taft's successor, President Woodrow Wilson, has the distinction of being the only President in the early days to turn down the proffered honorary membership. He is said to have announced quite bluntly when he first came to Washington that he had come to work, not to play golf. However, his physician, Rear Admiral Cary Grayson, soon persuaded him to join the Washington Golf Club in Arlington. He was not the golfer that Taft was, but whipped around the course in an hour or hour and a half. In later years he could be seen occasionally at Chevy Chase, but his affection for the Virginia links remained unabated.¹⁷

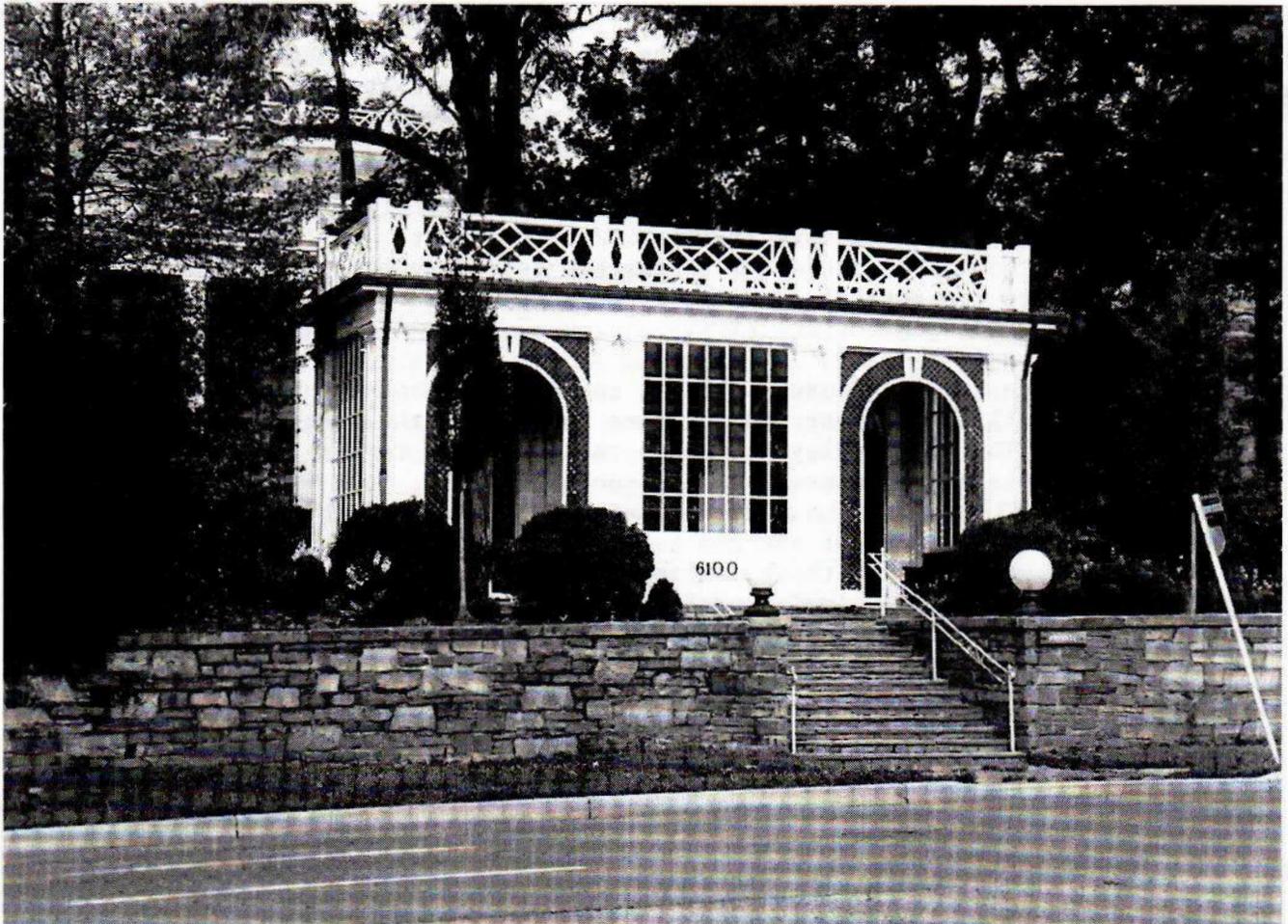
In 1915 another addition was made to the new clubhouse in the form of a large porch and a bay overlooking the golf course. This was also the year

that the gazebo was built opposite the trolley stop on Connecticut Avenue. In 1918 the Board of Governors had reason to congratulate themselves on building a new clubhouse. A fire started in the laundry, which was attached to the old clubhouse then being used to house members and guests. A large part of the building burned to the ground, but the section of the building that had been the original Bradley farmhouse fortunately escaped the fire and it was decided to restore it in spite of the cost. By 1926, however, the building committee decided that further necessary repairs to the old clubhouse were impractical, and architect Waddy B. Wood was engaged to design a new building for the site.

The new Bradley House, as it is now called, contains bedrooms with bath facilities and served the same purpose as the Bungalow had originally. The old Bradley farmhouse ran from east to west, but the architect positioned the new building south to north, on a line with the new clubhouse. However, he cleverly managed to preserve the chimney from the farmhouse as a part of the new building by creating a small wing to include it. Inspired by these new improvements, the Board approved the building of the first swimming pool. Other additions such as locker rooms and provision for parking places necessitated by the popularity of automobiles made the club begin to resemble its modern form.



Connecticut Avenue in the Early 1900's, Looking South from Bradley Lane
(It was a dirt road until 1913, when brick paving was installed.)



The Gazebo on Connecticut Avenue, Built in 1915

The Chevy Chase Club has been fortunate to be maintained on a firm financial footing throughout the years. Many clubs around the country suffered from the upheavals later of the twentieth century. The financial depression of the 1930s caused some clubs to fail and World War II, with the advent of gasoline rationing and labor shortages, brought other problems to the clubs.¹⁸ In more modern times, it has been a challenge for many clubs to maintain their presence in neighborhoods that have become increasingly urbanized. Chevy Chase Village has been an incorporated municipality since 1951, with its own ability to pass local laws and tax its residents. The Chevy Chase Club has never been under the jurisdiction of the Village, but the controls exercised by the Village Board have helped to protect the Club's presence in the area and the Club undoubtedly enhances the residential area.

In March of 1998 Chevy Chase Village was designated an Historic District under Montgomery County's Master Plan for Historic Preservation. The Chevy Chase Club was included in the area designated, but only three buildings were determined to have remained sufficiently unchanged to be included under the plan: the main clubhouse, the old carriage house, and of course the green and white gazebo that looks down, a bit aloof as befits an old lady, on the hum of traffic below.

NOTES

- (1) Judith Beck Helm, "Tenleytown, D.C." (Tennally Press, Kutztown Publishing Company, 2000), p. 17.
- (2) Judith Helm Robinson, "Washington At Home," (Windsor Publications, 1988), p. 192 in the chapter entitled "Chevy Chase, A Bold Idea, A Comprehensive Plan." Although he is generally known as Senator Newlands for his distinguished service in that position, he was not a senator at the time of the founding of the Chevy Chase Land Company. He is therefore referred to in this article simply as Mr. Newlands.
- (3) Constance McLaughlin Green, "Washington, A History of the Capital, 1800-1950" (Princeton, 1962), pp. 47, 89.
- (4) Roderick S. French, "Chevy Chase Village in the Context of the National Suburban Movement, 1870-1900" (Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Vol. 49, 1973-1974), pp. 320-321, 318.
- (5) James M. Mayo, "The American Country Club" (Rutgers University Press, 1998), pp. 35-42.
- (6) Ibid., p. 64.
- (7) John M. Lynham, "The Chevy Chase Club, A History, 1885-1957" (Chevy Chase, Maryland, 1958). Unless otherwise noted, all the details of the early history of the Chevy Chase Club in this article may be found in this excellent history.
- (8) Roger Brooke Farquhar, "Old Homes and History of Montgomery County, Maryland" (American History Research Association, Brookeville, 1981), p. 120.
- (9) Ibid.
- (10) Mayo, op.cit., p. 83.
- (11) Donald Caffrey Glassie. These recollections of Mr. Glassie are found in a short memoir donated to the Chevy Chase Historical Society by his sister, Gertrude Pewett, and in an oral history taken by the Chevy Chase Historical Society in March 1988.
- (12) Mayo, op.cit., p. 72.
- (13) Tim Hackler and Amanda Robb, "A History of Washington Golf and Country Club" (copyright by the Club, 1944), p. 7. Lynham, op.cit., p. 85.
- (14) Lynham, op.cit., pp. 55-56.
- (15) Ibid., pp. 88-89.
- (16) American Golfer, June 1909, Vol. 1, pp. 364-366, and March 1910, Vol. 3, pp. 501-506.
- (17) Charles Phelps Cushing, "Country Clubs of America," January 1920. Hackler and Robb, op.cit., p. 15.
- (18) Mayo, op.cit., pp. 157-158, 165.

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