

# THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY STORY

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John T. Beaty  
President



Eleanor M. V. Cook  
Editor

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CAROL STUART MATSON

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## THE BETHESDA USO

by William M. Offutt

Within a year after the shock of Pearl Harbor, the Capital area was becoming inured to whimsical shortages, unannounced blackouts, overcrowded buses, men in uniform and disappearing living space. By then the long-expected war had deeply affected the lives of thousands of local men and at least as many women. Hundreds of young ladies and mature matrons took jobs with the government or had become war workers in business and industry and trudged off each morning to the nearest bus or streetcar stop. They worked five and half days every week in underheated offices or makeshift defense plants to help win the war and most pledged enough from their OPA-frozen paychecks to buy at least one \$18.75 War Bond every month.<sup>1</sup>

Those women who listed themselves as "just a housewife," unless they were new to the area, did not have to worry about finding a place to live, but they were as aware as employed women that there was a war on. They had to manage ration books for gasoline, fuel oil, tires, shoes, sugar, meat, canned goods, coffee and butter. There were shortages - of soap, facial tissue, silk stockings and nylons, among other things - and lines formed at stores when it was rumored that a supply had come in. To supplement their butter ration, they kneaded yellow vegetable coloring into white margarine.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes they had the ration coupons and the money to buy meat, but none was available and they resorted to following meat delivery trucks to the butcher shops. As the men went into the armed forces, women at home found they had to juggle the oft-strained family budget and deal with unfamiliar checkbooks, insurance payments, car maintenance and a multitude of other tiresome tasks. Factories shifted to making war goods and new washing machines, refrigerators or other household appliances were not available, which meant keep them running or do without.

The draft had begun in late 1940, at first taking only single men between the ages of 21 and 35 who were in good health, but as time went on the age range widened and the draft included married men with no children and finally married men with children. Reserves were called up, many men joined the Navy, and men with slight problems, such as flat feet, were drafted so that the more able-bodied servicemen in this country could be sent overseas. A great many women joined the Navy as WAVES or the Army as WACs and served both in this country and overseas.

Any shipping on the Pacific or Atlantic was subject to attack, cutting down our supply of natural rubber, silk, coffee, sugar and other imported items. Bananas disappeared from the grocery stores. Three days after war was declared, December 12, 1941, the sale of new automobile tires was banned and the rationing board that was established which allocated just 81 car tires for the month of January for the entire county. Silk and nylon was being used at that time for parachutes and for women's hosiery, with the result that silk stockings and nylons were in very short supply. Some girls and women resorted to using leg makeup, calling it "a miracle," and saying, "It comes in many flattering shades but Oh the streaks when it rains!"

Sugar rationing began in late April 1942 and it was soon followed by gas rationing for the East Coast, mainly to save rubber but also because of the U-boats' successes in sinking tankers. "Normally," the OPA's Leon Henderson noted, "more than 90 percent of the 1,500,000 barrels of the petroleum products we consume daily in the East is brought in by tanker." Later, all pleasure driving was banned.

Shortly after the war began, hundreds and eventually thousands of local women began volunteering their services to the war effort. They folded bandages at their clubs; they gave blood and "manned" the mobile canteens that visited the smaller Army camps; they collected scrap metal, rubber, old newspapers and even cooking grease. They invented day-car programs and nursery school; they knitted and sewed and signed up as nurses' aides and Grey Ladies at the hospitals. Many of them became daytime air raid wardens, aircraft spotters and auxiliary firemen. They made blackout curtains for their windows and stocked their cellars with emergency rations. They kept a bucket of sand on the back porch and read about how to put out incendiary bombs. And they wrote letters to their husbands, brothers, father, sweethearts and friends - lots and lots of letters. Victory Gardens were established on home plots and in community garden space, producing a significant amount of produce.

Bethesda, then a town of some 20,000 according to ration book registration figures, was probably typical of the Washington suburbs then. Men headed the ration board and the local draft board, but women did almost all the work. Women ran the blood donor programs and the scrap drives, volunteered at both the Navy Medical Center and Suburban Hospital, and took night classes in metal work and machine assembly at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School so they could join the almost entirely-female production corps in Bethesda's fast-growing war industries, one of which produced the super-secret radio proximity fuse. Long-time storekeeper Walter Perry had often noted that while the men ran Bethesda's businesses, the women ran everything else.

Then came the USO, as the recreational facilities of United Service Organization were universally known. Bethesda's very popular USO was quite typical of those in small towns near military bases all over the country. It began with a meeting in January 1943 at the County Building at which a representative from the year-old Naval Hospital explained the need for additional recreational facilities for some nine hundred enlisted men, as well as the officers, nurses and a hundred WAVES on the base.

Albert Brault, who was Montgomery County Civil Defense director, appointed George Mathews, one of the Montgomery Players, to head the War Recreation and Hospitality Committee for Bethesda and that group quickly agreed to make application to the national United Service Organization and to begin planning for a "drop-in" center. Mathews named to his committee Mrs. William N. Morell (B. Louise Cox Morell), political and church activist Stella Werner, local weekly newspaper editors Gertrude Bradley of the *Journal* and William Prescott Allen of the *Tribune*, as well as a pharmacist's mate and the welfare and recreation officer at National Naval Medical Center, as the towering Naval Hospital was now being called.

During the week of January 20, the committee applied for a USO center and filed a list of suitable Bethesda properties. From that point on, the USO in Bethesda became an almost entirely female operation and, for many women, the most tiring, exciting and rewarding work of the war. Mrs. Morrell, a mother of five and leader of many organizations, soon took over the project, with Mrs. Werner heading the hospitality committee and acting as a clearinghouse for entertainment ideas.

By mid-February 1943, USO headquarters had approved the Bethesda group's use of the long-vacant Sanitary grocery store at 7808 Old Georgetown Road, near the intersection with Wilson Lane, and appropriated \$6000 to convert it. The site was considered excellent because of the nearby school playground and church halls and the generously low rent.<sup>3</sup>

The YWCA of Washington, D.C., which supervised several United Service Organization sites in the Capital, appointed Mrs. William J. Sholar (Virginia Sholar) director of the local center, and she began signing up hostesses in April. Within two weeks, 116 senior hostesses, who were to serve not only as hostesses but as chaperons, and 126 junior hostesses (ages 18 to 30) registered and then attended lectures at Bethesda Elementary School on wartime psychology. In May, 50 of Bethesda's junior hostesses went to a charm school at the National Theater that featured tennis star Alice Marble and *Harpers Bazaar* editor Carmel Snow.

Following a cookout for two dozen National Naval Medical Center men and junior hostesses at the end of May, the first Bethesda USO social event took place at Woodmont Country Club on Friday evening June 4. It was an informal dance for WAVES, corpsmen and junior hostesses, with music by the Navy School of Music band.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after that, Virginia Sholar and her two young assistants moved their office into the unfinished USO center on Old Georgetown Road. From then on there were

picnics almost every Sunday, with tennis, softball and other games, and on the last Friday of June a dance was held in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School gym. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July the USO staged a picnic for all servicemen and women in uniform.

The USO signed up more junior hostesses and continued with its dances at country clubs and weekend picnic in the park while the dry summer heat seared the Capital area's lawns and wilted the Victory Gardens. The board of directors of the Woodmont Country Club gave their facilities to the USO for five dances during the summer and contributed food and refreshments at one of them. Picnics took place not only at the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Recreation Center, but also at the Rockville Pike estate of Mrs. Luke I. Wilson and other places. Some of the junior hostesses helped show servicemen around the Smithsonian museums on weekends. The senior hostesses and the Red Cross Canteen Corps provided food and transportation for all of these activities.

Up on Old Georgetown Road, Virginia Sholar struggled all summer to get the USO center finished, while the hostesses enjoyed the picnics and dances. Wartime shortages and the slow process of having building-material priorities approved delayed the work planned by architect Maurice May and local builder Henry Connor. When materials finally arrived in early September, the contractor quickly installed two bathrooms, a new heating plant, a kitchen and a snack bar and built a checkroom and office in the old grocery store. His workers patched and cleaned the terrazzo floor, built a small wooden stage, put two coats of paint on the interior and produced a usable space of 612 square feet with a 13-foot ceiling. Dozens of Bethesda businesses and individuals contributed to the work and local women made the curtains, pillows and chair covers to add color to the green, brick and yellow walls. One women's group contributed a lending library of 800 volumes and another donated a record player. The American Legion gave a radio and record storeowner Adlai Magee contributed an old-fashioned organ from the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Corpsmen and WAVES helped junior hostesses uncrate furniture and get the place ready.

Finally on the evening of Saturday, September 25, 1943, with the regional USO brass and Admiral C. W. Bunker, commanding officer of the National Naval Medical Center, in the receiving line, the Bethesda USO had a formal dedication and the next afternoon held an open house for the public. Hundreds attended. Thanks and congratulations went to Virginia Sholar and Louise Morell, who started it all, and to Stella Werner, the recreation chairman of the Office of Civilian Defense. Mrs. Werner greeted guests at the door during the grand opening and then took over as room-registry chairman, registering rooms in Bethesda that people were willing to rent out to workers or people visiting local servicemen and women.

Once the hoopla was over, Bethesda's USO "drop-in" club operated every day from 10 a.m. until 11 p.m., with table tennis, bridge and other games available and dancing featured on Monday, Thursday and Saturday. Two or three senior hostesses were always there, and junior hostesses worked 5 to 7 or 7 to 11 shifts.<sup>5</sup> By October the USO was staging supper parties for groups of convalescing patients brought to the center by bus.

Laundryman Leslie Bell's daughter Ellen, who graduated from Immaculata High School in 1942 and was one of the younger junior hostesses, said:

"I must have danced ten times around the world at that USO. They just pitched us in, and we fended for ourselves. It was great. They always had special dances at Christmastime and Easter and parties at Wilson's cabin, but our principal place was in Bethesda, in that triangle. We got the sailors from the Naval Hospital, but also, what a lot of people didn't know, there were anti-aircraft batteries in a circle, well hidden around Bethesda.

"USO rules said you didn't leave with a sailor, but that didn't mean you didn't meet them later. They came in buses, and if they didn't go back on the bus, it was a fairly long hike.

"The USO was a lot of fun, and that's where I learned to play bridge. All of the girls went. Everybody assumed you knew what to do with a boy. Sometimes they would pick up a group of us and take us down to the Stage Door Canteen and to the dances at Walter Reed and the annex at Forest Glen. We didn't always dance over there; we sat and talked with them. You never suggested dancing. We did get enough training not to ask what was wrong with them.

"We were helping to win the war. That's how we felt." <sup>6</sup>

"I was there one day a week," said Virginia Simmons, wife of the local Dodge dealer whose showroom and shop had been taken over by the Office of Strategic Services. She seemed to feel that what she did was the norm. "I went up there like all the other women. And we had snacks and things for them and a radio. We listened to their stories. It was nothing fancy, just like a big store. We wore a little name tag. During that war everybody jumped in and helped the other person. Most of them were from the Naval Hospital, but they came from all over the country. And once in a while the families of the sailors in the hospital would come, and, of course, there was no place for them to stay, so we had an extra bedroom and I'd take them home and keep them overnight." <sup>7</sup>

By Thanksgiving the USO was accepted as a busy aspect of Bethesda's everyday life and an important part of the war effort. The USO planned a big, formal Christmas dance at Woodmont and on Christmas Eve 1943 groups of sailors, Marines and young women, carolers from the USO, strolled through the streets of Bethesda.

The weekly *Record* carried a chatty column under the title "Scuttlebutt of the USO," and the other local papers also ran news items and press releases of activities such as the Sadie Hawkins leap-year dance (in a role reversal, the girls asked the boys to dance) and weekly bingo sessions on Thursday nights with a long-distance call as the big prize. In March 1944 the USO sponsored another dance at Woodmont Country Club with music by Jack Morton's orchestra.

Almost every Sunday night the church group or women's club which prepared and served the supper also presented a program. Mrs. Morrell brought author Marquis Childs as the guest speaker when she was the hostess and on another evening Mrs. Milton Miles, whose admiral-husband was leading guerrilla bands in China, showed slides of her

family's escape through Burma. Rationing limited the menu, but K. O. Lehman, owner of the neighboring District Grocery Store, donated the food for one extra-good supper. On March 19, despite a wet and unexpected snow, seventy servicemen and women assembled for a dinner served by the Woman's Club of Chevy Chase. The clubwomen left behind four dozen cups and saucers as a donation to the USO.

When the Advisory Committee served supper that spring, baked ham and potato salad were on the menu. After supper, a quartet composed of sailor Bill Riggins on guitar, music director Greta Kaylor at the piano, "Little Stella" Werner with her boogie-woogie accordion, and her father on drums entertained the group. Young Stella was there at least once a month and her mother much more regularly. Mrs. Werner's contribution to entertainment was a palm reading act. "Boy, I would pair them off," she said. "I would describe to the boy the girl over there and ..." But her older daughter said that sometimes her mother would not tell a young man what she "saw" in hand, especially if his life line seemed rather short.<sup>8</sup>

Bethesda's USO found a new leader early in 1944 when Mrs. Sholar retired and Marjorie Traves replaced her. Mrs. Bradley, now editor-publisher of her own newspaper, the *Record*, praised Virginia Sholar for doing "a swell job" in creating a friendly home-like atmosphere." In April 1944, the Rock Creek Council of the Knights of Columbus sponsored the USO dance at Woodmont with the country club again providing refreshments. Mrs. Bradley recognized Woodmont's generosity in an editorial, which concluded, "Not many clubs have been so generous during the war emergency. The community should be proud to have in its midst a club that takes such an active interest in servicemen."<sup>9</sup>

Donations came in regularly. Layer cakes, cookies made by the Camp Fire Girls or Girl Scouts, and Mrs. Wilson's big box of candies were among the favorites. Just inside the door on the left was a quiet place to write letters and on the right was a small library filled with mysteries and piles of magazines. Tickets to plays, ball games and dances were often available and sometimes became prizes in various games and contests. The snack bar was always open. The hostesses invited visitors to stick a pin in their hometown on a big U.S. map in the lounge and sign up in a notebook arranged by states. Soon almost every state had at least one pin in it.

In a feature article headlined "A Peak Behind the Orange Curtains of the Local USO," Mrs. Bradley urged her readers to visit the club and to contribute. "While the club is for enlisted service folks," she wrote, "it cannot possibly be 'a home away from home' unless the people of the community cooperate in making it such. How? First by dropping in occasionally at the club and finding out just what the routine is there. You'll probably see a uniformed lad drinking a cup of coffee at the snack bar, or shining their shoes, wrapping a package, listening to the radio, reading a book, frying an egg or airing their views with a senior hostess who looks and talks like their Aunt Jane."<sup>10</sup>

Betty Hynes of the *Times Herald* enthused, "Of all the excellent servicemen's clubs we had visited, none has so completely fulfilled the boys' ever present wish for

'something like home.'" She found it serving 3000 enlisted men and women a month, with twenty-two junior and three senior hostesses on duty every night. "The huge living room, which extends from street to street, airy with wide open windows, doors and spinning fans, is full of flowers brought in by the neighbors." She wrote that the "habitues" called Marjorie Traves "Buddy" and that the servicemen bragged about having the "prettiest girls of any canteen in the country."<sup>11</sup>

Early in 1944, the USO advisory committee met at the home of Mrs. William Morrell, its chairman. That meeting was followed by one for all senior hostesses at the County Building and then a retraining session for the junior hostesses. Some problems had developed as the number of badly burned and wounded men recuperating at the Naval Hospital increased. Mrs. Arthur Hilland (Dorothy Sheiry Hilland), then a senior hostess, recalled:

"Two boys brought in a friend who had been terribly burned. It was his first time out, and he still had a long way to go. One side of his face was livid with scar tissue, but the junior hostesses smiled, talked with him, and he had a wonderful time.

"Then when we closed, a group of them decided to take him up to the Hot Shoppe. I tried to talk them out of it. He really wasn't ready for that, I told them, but off they went. Well, they went in and sat down, but when a waitress saw him, she dropped a whole tray of dishes right at his feet."<sup>12</sup>

Mary Zimmerli Brown, who graduated from Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School in 1944, said that some of the junior hostesses, especially high school girls recruited for the dances, had no training at all. "They would just call on you. It was just kind of to have some females around. I think it would have been better if they had given us some indoctrination. The boys were a bit older than we were. I was always at the dances, but I was not on a schedule." According to her yearbook, Barbara Macy (B-CC HS '43) was seen weekly "serving doughnuts to servicemen," and her friend Mary recalled that Barbara married a young man she met at the USO.<sup>13</sup>

In the spring of 1944, the sailors, Marines and junior hostesses built window boxes and benches to put out on the sidewalk under a big awning and then painted them and the outside of the building. As soon as the weather warmed, the junior hostesses organized a softball team and practiced on Bethesda Elementary School's playground. In May, fifty-five girls signed up for the fifth Junior Hostess course taught at the County Building by several Naval Hospital doctors, who talked to them about dealing with the returning wounded. In June, the weekend picnics began.

As the Naval Hospital's patient list and staff increased in 1944, the hospital administration asked more and more corpsmen to find rooms "on shore." Wives and families arrived to visit injured relatives or those about to be shipped out, and some men stationed in Bethesda wanted to have their family with them. Stella Werner's room registry tried to meet a growing volume of requests. The USO set maximum rates, ranging from \$30 a month for a single bed with a shared bath to \$50 for a double room with a private bath, and urged those with rooms to list them.

By the war's third year, there were very few vacant beds in Bethesda, and a lot of backyards had sailor's white uniforms flying from their clotheslines. At a time when a popular song echoed the girl's lament about the scarcity of men, "They're either too young or too old," a few blue-noses and scandal-mongers sniffed and gossiped about the young men staying with widows or women whose husbands were overseas. Nevertheless, most of those providing sailors with rooms, and often breakfast, saw what they did as part of the war effort and ignored their nosy neighbors. Probably a majority of homeowners in the Bethesda area gave or rented rooms to servicemen or government employees during the war. In many cases relationships developed which lasted, at least in the exchange of Christmas cards and baby pictures, long after the war ended.

Former CIA officer Bill Snape of Chevy Chase, then a high school senior, recalled the Iowa couple, a pharmacist's mate and his wife, who lived with his family in Chevy Chase while his father served as a Navy chaplain out in the Pacific. "They came from Iowa," Snape said with a smile, "so there were chickens out by our Victory Garden in the back yard. You could do that in the war." <sup>14</sup>

Sunday night, June 4, 1944, while news of the fall of Rome was still spreading, men served the weekly supper at the USO. Under the leadership of Anthony Gould of *U.S. News*, they planned on having waffles and sausages with homemade jellies, jams and Maryland maple syrup, and they gathered up all the waffle irons they could find and even arranged to have additional electric circuits installed. The guest of honor was Eleanor Roosevelt, who visited all the tables, chatted with the servicemen and women, posed for snapshots and signed autographs before sitting down to her waffle and coffee. After supper, the President's well-traveled wife spoke briefly about post-war responsibilities and the exciting possibilities that lay ahead. She warned that all the world's problems would not be over at war's end. <sup>15</sup>

Two days later, Bethesdians awoke to the news of D-Day, as British, Canadian and American troops stormed ashore on the beaches of France. Since the "Blue and Gray" 29<sup>th</sup> Division was deeply involved in the invasion, many Bethesda-area families took special interest in the news. Thousands went to church throughout the area.

On a Wednesday night at the end of June, the USO staged another Woodmont dance and followed that with a barn dance on Saturday and a berry-picking expedition on Sunday. The next Sunday, the Girls Friendly Society and the Women's guild held a picnic supper for the USO on the lawn of St. John's Church, with U.S. Senator George Radcliff's the guest of honor. The next weekend featured a boat trip to Mount Vernon, followed by a supper of fried chicken and homemade apple, chocolate and lemon pies sponsored by the ten-year-old Farm Women's Cooperative Market.

Bonnie Mason Throckmorton (B-CC HS '43) began coming to the USO every Friday evening and making portrait sketches, a service she had been performing at the D.C. Stage Door Canteen for some time. High school table tennis champ Caroline Wilson (B-CC HS '43) put on an exhibition and then played against all the servicemen and women willing to challenge her. Battery Park made its tennis courts available every

Tuesday, free bingo games took place out on the sidewalk "terrace" on Thursday nights, and Georgetown Prep opened its golf course to servicemen through the USO. The center also acquired a mascot, a red cocker spaniel called Butch, who became the focus of attention, with a "work detail" list posted for those wishing to take him for walks.

The USO celebrated its first birthday with deejay Arthur Godfrey honoring it on his WTOP morning radio show and playing requests from National Naval Medical Center patients. The USO room registry, which was handling more than a hundred requests each month, had a part-time paid secretary assigned to it because of the growing need for that service. By then the USO had entertained 35,000 men and women and had 75 senior and 160 junior hostesses on regular shifts. Stella Werner, long active in local Democratic politics as well as Methodist church activities, became deeply involved in the bitter County Charter fight, but her replacement, whose naval officer husband had been missing and presumed lost since his minesweeper was sunk off the coast of France, handled up to 300 housing requests each week and soon had 250 rooms in her registry.

Commander Jack Dempsey, the renowned prizefighter, visited the Bethesda USO for a cup of coffee and some handshaking one Sunday in mid-November and stirred up some excitement. During its annual meeting at Mrs. Morell's home, the USO elected Mrs. Maurice Davidson as chairman of the operating committee for 1945. The Hot Shoppe cooked the turkeys and the regular Thursday hostesses served Thanksgiving dinner buffet style, with candles on the tables. A local minister asked the blessing and the *Journal's* new editor, Craddock Goins, told Southern stories after the meal.<sup>15</sup>

The outbreak of the Battle of the Bulge in Europe dampened many celebrations that Christmas season, but the electric trains in the front window of the USO and the big, flickering Christmas tree in back of the lounge helped some men and women forget the war for a while. Mrs. Hilland led a mob of cookie bakers on the Thursday before Christmas, while servicemen and women decorated the tree and built a big snowman. On Christmas Eve members of the Junior Woman's Club of Chevy Chase, several of whom were regular USO hostesses, served a candlelight supper of ham and sweet potatoes and on Christmas Day Santa gave out presents at an open house, which started with waffles and was crowned by Mrs. George Mathews' huge, blazing plum pudding.

The USO started the New Year in 1945 with a taffy pull. Skylights helped brighten the interior of the old Safeway and a new storm door was very popular with the senior hostesses who staffed the desk by the front entrance.

A committee of the Jewish Community Group, headed by Mrs. Albert Lyman, served one of the first dinners of the year – fruit cup, chop suey, tossed salad and homemade pies. It was followed by Gershwin songs by a mother-daughter duet and then Abe Lerner and his accordion had everyone singing along while four prominent local businessmen washed the dishes. For another USO supper, the Kiwanis Club had the Hot Shoppe roast a 175-pound pig from Malcom Scates' farm and then they put on a talent show featuring solos by servicemen and women with disc jockey Art Brown at the piano. The Chevy Chase Chanters, still forty voices strong despite having fourteen members in

the service, entertained after one of the usual Sunday suppers. The USO enjoyed another spring of picnics in the park, bicycle tours to Hains Point and training sessions for new hostesses.

On May 8, 1945, came the long-anticipated V-E Day marking Victory in Europe, but it was almost an anti-climax, celebrated quietly in the Washington area as just another workday. The USO stuck to its schedule. The May 15 dance at Woodmont featured the debut of the National Naval Medical Center orchestra. On the last Saturday of the month, Bethesda Elementary School students entertained servicemen with a May Pole dance and Jack Morton's band played for a "May Frolics" evening, which included the crowning of a king and queen and the usual grand prize of a free phone call home.

On Sunday afternoon, June 3, the USO celebrated the opening of the Wilson Cabin on Rockville Pike, a gift from Mrs. Luke I. Wilson. When she donated her land to the National Institute of Health and National Cancer Research Institute, she had kept two acres for her home, called "Tree Tops," and a small guest house. She had held a number of receptions and parties for servicemen and women in her home during the war and now decided that the guest house would provide more opportunities for USO activities. The "cabin," all on one floor, had a large main room furnished with arm chairs and couches plus a piano, a radio-phonograph and plenty of dancing room. There were also shelves of books, a screened-in porch, a kitchen, an outdoor grill and several tables and chairs. Mrs. Wilson came down to speak briefly at the dedication, but did not stay for the baked bean supper, horseshoe pitching, softball game and dancing that followed. Music programs filled the cabin on Tuesdays and Thursdays and there was an open house every Sunday. Parties and picnics for special groups were scheduled on the other days and the Wilson Cabin was soon almost as popular as the revamped grocery store on Old Georgetown Road. That summer, in addition to its usual programs on Old Georgetown Road and dancing outdoors at the Wilson Cabin, the Bethesda USO offered Saturday night horseback rides and Sunday beach parties on the Bay in cooperation with the Annapolis USO.<sup>17</sup>

V-J Day, August 15, 1945, when the war with Japan ended suddenly, was met with wild rejoicing in our country. On a September Sunday afternoon, the Woman's Club of Bethesda served a "thank you" supper for the USO at their clubhouse. Brooke Johns was master of ceremonies and an all-girl orchestra provided the dance music. In response to many questions, Marjorie M. Trayes issued a statement from USO headquarters that said, "It is abundantly evident that our mission has not yet been wholly fulfilled." She estimated that 80,000 service personnel had been entertained over the last two years.

Trayes thanked the community for "Hundreds of cakes and pies, thousands of cookies, baskets of homemade jellies and other goodies, Sunday night suppers, thousands of magazines, records, hundreds of books, sports equipment, afghans, lamps, pillows, musical instruments, sheet music, dozens of eggs, gallons of milk, beautiful flowers, potted plants and room registry service." She concluded with thanks to the "Many of you who have extended the hospitality of your own homes to our service folk."<sup>18</sup>

The "drop-in" center on Old Georgetown Road closed, but Bethesda's USO continued on after the war at the "Wilson Cabin" on Wisconsin Avenue near Battery Lane. Later the YMCA took over this operation. For many women, both the young and the not so young, an important and exciting part of their lives ended when it closed.

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William Offutt is the author of "Bethesda: A Social History," published in 1995 and available at our Historical Society Library.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Office of Price Administration, established during the war to keep prices and salaries down in order to prevent shortages from causing massive inflation.

<sup>2</sup> Margarine had been developed in the 1870s, but dairymen protested that it would ruin the butter market. Laws, still in effect during World War II, imposed high taxes on colored margarine, so the margarine sold was white with a packet of coloring.

<sup>3</sup> After being vacated by Sanitary/Safeway grocery store, the building had been a revivalist church, a car dealership, and the home of the Women's Farm Market and still stands as a vacuum cleaner store and consignment antique shop. It is Bethesda's "flatiron" building.

<sup>4</sup> Woodmont Country Club was then located where the National Library of Medicine now stands, just south of the National Institute of Health.

<sup>5</sup> Bethesda-Chevy Chase *Tribune*, September 17 and October 1, 1943, and Bethesda *Journal*, September 24, 1943, contain lists of all the original hostesses and contributors.

<sup>6</sup> Author's 1994 interview. Forest Glen Seminary was taken over by Walter Reed in 1942 and used for amputees and "shell shock" patients.

<sup>7</sup> Author's 1994 interview.

<sup>8</sup> Quote from Stella's Werner's oral biography in the Rockville Public Library.

<sup>9</sup> *The Record*, April 29, 1944. Woodmont was unique. Other country clubs staged war bond golf tournaments and charity affairs, or let flag rank officers play, but Woodmont opened its doors and treasury in unparalleled hospitality.

<sup>10</sup> *The Record*, April 22, 1944.

<sup>11</sup> *Journal*, July 21, 1944, reprinted from the Washington, D.C. *Times Herald*.

<sup>12</sup> The committee included Mrs. Maurice Davidson, Mrs. Theodore Peyser, Mrs. John H. Werner, Randolph Bishop, Carroll Murnane, Jo V. Morgan, and Mrs. George N. Matthews. Quote from author's telephone interview in 1992.

<sup>13</sup> Author's 1933 interview.

<sup>14</sup> Author's 1993 interview.

<sup>15</sup> Washington, D.C. *Star*, June 5, 1944. *Montgomery County Journal*, June 9 and *Record*, June 10 and 17, 1944.

<sup>16</sup> Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School counselor Dorothy Young was elected vice-chairman; *U.S. News* vice-president Anthony Gould was chosen secretary, and attorney Jo V. Morgan, treasurer. The other committee members were Carroll Murnane and Mrs. Morell, Mrs. Werner, Mrs. Mathews, and Mrs. Gilbert Grosvenor.

<sup>17</sup> *Journal*, May 25, 1945. *Tribune*, June 15, 1945. *Tribune*, August 3, 1945.

<sup>18</sup> In 1945 the other two paid employees were Louise Meroney and Clare Arnold. Mrs. Maurice Davidson headed the Operating Committee, and there were 100 senior hostesses and 250 junior hostesses, who had given over 50,000 hours of volunteer work. *Tribune*, September 21, 1945.

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