

Chevy Chase Citizens Association 100+ Years of Service

In this revised publication, information about the early years is taken from Edward T. Stafford's history, *Fifty Years in Chevy Chase 1909-1959*, published by the association on its 50th anniversary in 1959. Walter E. Beach, great-grandson of A.J. Warner, Superintendent of the Rock Creek Railway Company, supplied information on the construction of the Chevy Chase Trolley line. Much of the other content is taken from the 75th anniversary of the association, published in 1984.

We thank many contributors to the 2010 update that brings us through the association's 100th anniversary and beyond. These include Margaret Bacon, Allen Beach, Bob Gray, Ed Hayes, Tammy Horn, Jon Lawlor, Ursula McManus, Samantha Nolan, Sarah Pokempner, Anne Renshaw, and Nancy Wilson. Special thanks to Kathy Echave, a teacher at Lafayette Elementary School, for organizing a gathering of veteran teachers and staff members in May 2010 to discuss their recollections of Lafayette's history in recent years.

This updated edition is dedicated to the men and women whose loyalty, hard work, and cooperation during the past 100 years have contributed to the progress of the Chevy Chase community.

--Ted Gest

Contents

Origins

- The Founding of Chevy Chase**
- The Chevy Chase Land Company**
- The Rock Creek Railway Company**
- The Elizabeth V. Brown School The Religious Community**

The Chevy Chase Citizens Association

- The Early Days**
- Interview with P.L. Ricker**
- Interview with Edward F. Colladay**
- Boundary Changes**
- Association Governance**

Relations With Other Organizations

- The Hawthorn Citizens Association**
- Chevy Chase and the Two Federations**
- Chevy Chase and the Government of the District of Columbia**

Activities of the Chevy Chase Citizens Association

- The Chevy Chase Community Council and Community Centers**
- Street and Park Beautification and the Chevy Chase Foundation**
- Land Use Planning**
- Transportation**
- Property Assessments and Taxes**
- Public Safety**
- Fire**
- Emergency Services**
- Crime Prevention**
- Public Utilities**
- Business community**
- A Look to the Future**
- Past Presidents**

Origins

The Founding of Chevy Chase

A bronze plaque on a boulder at Chevy Chase Circle, near All Saints Episcopal Church, has the inscription:

*Colonel Joseph Belt
1680 Maryland 1761
Patentee of “Cheivy Chace”
Trustee of First Five Schools in Maryland
One of the Founders of Rock Creek Parish
Member of the House of Burgesses
Colonel of Prince George’s County Militia
During French and Indian Wars*

On July 10, 1725, Joseph Belt received a patent for 560 acres of land called “Cheivy Chace” from Charles Absolute Lord Proprietary of the Province of Maryland. He married Esther Beall, daughter of Colonel Ninian Beall, and built the Belt Manor House, which stood at the site of what is now 3734 Oliver Street; Belt Road led to the house. When the house was torn down about 1907 by Simpson Brothers, the thick English ivy that covered the north wall stood as firm as a board fence. The B.W. Parker house was built on the foundations of the Belt house.

The name Chevy Chase has historical significance. The Cheviot Hills in Northumberland mark the boundary between England and Scotland and were the site of many skirmishes between the two countries before they were united. In August 1388 there was a skirmish in the forest of Cheviat Chays. Lord Percy of England fought Earl Douglass of Scotland over the hunting grounds or “chace” in the Cheviot Hills. An ancestor of George Washington, Sir William de Washington, fought in the battle. The “Dougheti Douglass” was killed, but Hotspur Percy and his brother were taken prisoner and about 1,500 of his men were killed. In later centuries, the Battle of Otterburn, or Chevy Chase, became famous and was immortalized in the English ballad “Ye Cheviat Chays Ballade” and the Scottish ballad “The Battle of Otterburn.” A former streetcar shelter at Connecticut Avenue and Thornapple Street in Maryland was called Otterburn Station.

Why did Joseph Belt choose this name for his estate? The Potomac Valley was inhabited mainly by Scottish settlers. To the north, including Baltimore, English settlers prevailed. Chevy Chase seemed to form a borderline hunting ground, with the Scots on one side and the English on the other, as did the chase in the Cheviot Hills of Britain. It is also significant that Belt's wife was of pure Scottish blood, while he himself was English.

About a hundred years ago, the farmlands and homestead of the Belt Estate were brought from the heirs of Joseph Belt by businessmen and speculators. The land was eventually acquired by the Chevy Chase Land Company for development. The village of Chevy Chase, Maryland, was founded in 1890, at which time it was surrounded by a fairly well-settled farming community. About 1903 the village had only forty-nine families, and the area that is Chevy Chase, D.C., had no residents. Four years later, development in D.C. began. Francis Griffith Newlands, a U.S. Senator from Nevada, was the principal owner of the Chevy Chase Land Company. Nevada Avenue and Newlands Street were named for him, and in the stonework of the fountain at Chevy Chase Circle was carved the inscription: "Francis Griffith Newlands, 1848-1917, Senator from Nevada, Founder of Chevy Chase."

Colonel Belt founded Chevy Chase; Senator Newlands developed it.

The Chevy Chase Land Company

The Chevy Chase Land Company was largely responsible for the development of Chevy Chase in both the District and Maryland. Starting in the early 1890s, the company bought 1,750 acres of land along the planned Connecticut Avenue. Colonel G.A. Armes conceived the idea of extending Connecticut Avenue beyond Florida Avenue, then the northern boundary of the city. He interested the two senators from Nevada in the projects. Senator Newlands, whose wife had substantial investment in the Comstock Lode, became the principal stockholder in the Company. Originally, Connecticut Avenue was to extend in a straight line through the District and Maryland until it intersected the Rockville Turnpike (Wisconsin Avenue). This plan was changed and Connecticut Avenue was diverted from a northwesterly direction to run due north at Chevy Chase Circle. Connecticut Avenue from Calvert Street to the Circle was dedicated to the District of Columbia, and the portion north of the Circle was dedicated to Maryland.

The Avenue was graded and improved by the company for the entire distance to Chevy Chase Lake. The company financed the construction of the Calvert Street and Klinge Valley bridges as well as a trolley line from downtown Washington to Chevy Chase Lake in Maryland. Neither the District nor the federal government paid any of the cost. About two miles north of the Circle, the Company constructed Chevy Chase Lake, a large cement swimming pool, to attract downtown residents to Chevy Chase. Across the avenue from the pool was a real lake, in which no swimming was permitted but rowboats could be rented. Adjacent to the lake was an amusement park built and operated by the company.

Many of the first houses in Chevy Chase, Maryland, were built for officers of the Chevy Chase Land Company. The Corby mansion at Chevy Chase Circle was originally occupied by Senator Newlands, but he soon moved because his guests were forced to leave before midnight, when the electricity was shut off for the night. The company donated the land for the Chevy Chase School, which was built in 1898. In 1907 the company began to develop Chevy Chase, D.C. The object was to “provide for the National Capital a home suburb, a community where every residence would bear a touch of the individuality of the owner.” The company still owns property in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia, including some in the Friendship Heights development at Western and Wisconsin Avenues. A 20-acre parcel on the east side of Jones Bridge Road and Connecticut Avenue in Maryland that was sold in 1997 was the last large, undeveloped parcel in the company's portfolio remaining from the original Newlands purchase in the 1890s. With the proceeds from that sale, the company acquired the building site at Woodmont Avenue and Montgomery Lane in Bethesda, and opened the Senator Francis G. Newlands Building, a 15-story mixed-use office project, in 1999.

The Rock Creek Railway Company

The successful development of Chevy Chase depended on reliable transportation to and from downtown. Before the automobile era, this service was provided by the Rock Creek Railway Company, formed by Senator Newlands and chartered in 1888. The railway was built between 1890 and 1893 under A.J. Warner, superintendent of the Company. It was financed by the Chevy Chase Land Company and cost \$1,500,000. The route began at Seventh and U Streets, N.W. and went along U Street to 18th Street, where it turned north to Calvert Street, then across the Calvert Street bridge to Connecticut Avenue, turning north on Connecticut Avenue and proceeding to the end of the Chevy Chase Land Company's property at Chevy Chase Lake.

Construction of the railway was a formidable task requiring the building of the Calvert Street and Klinge Valley bridges, the grading of Connecticut Avenue, and the construction of two steam plants to generate electricity, one at each end of the line. The difficult job of grading Connecticut Avenue was described by Edward Hillyer, an officer of the Rock Creek Railway Company: “The hills had be be cut down by pick and shovel and the valleys filled by horse-drawn carts. A good illustration of that operation was the cutting down of what was known as Soapstone Hill on the west side of the Avenue at Albemarle Street and the earth was taken across the Avenue and filled in . . . a fill of 40 to 50 feet. In some places a train of small dumping cars with a donkey engine carried the dirt in the narrow gauge rails” An underground conduit was used for the portion of the line along U Street since overhead wires were not permitted in the “city” (the area south of Florida Avenue).

When the railway was completed in April 1893, Superintendent Warner wrote to Senator Newlands:

The electric conduit on U Street is now completed and, I think, may be pronounced a success. The Rock Creek Road from the Boundary to Chevy Chase is well ballasted and has been much improved by cutting down summits and raising low places, and the track I consider now in first line, but 4,400 pounds were consumed in twelve hours. For economy in coal consumption, I do not think this showing can be surpassed anywhere, if it can be anywhere equalled. The electric equipment is working satisfactorily. I see nothing therefore now in the way of the safe operation of the entire line, including U street and the line to the Zoo Park. Special cars will be required in the operation of the Zoo Branch, and I suggest that to insure entire safety, the speed of the cars when descending the grade should be limited to 3, or at most 4, miles an hour.

A.J. Warner was a close friend and political ally of Senator Newlands and was also ably qualified to build the railway. He was a Union officer in the Civil War and reached the rank of Brigadier General. He spent the postwar period in southeastern Ohio engaged in coal mining operations and the construction of two railroads. Although successful in these ventures, he suffered losses, in his view, from the law demonetizing silver and turned to national politics. In 1878 he was elected to Congress. His interest now merged with his fellow Democrat, the senator from Nevada, Francis G. Newlands. It was natural for the senator to select his able friend A.J. Warner to build the Chevy Chase trolley line.