



Chevy Chase Historical Society

Newsletter

II Spring 2000

Annual Meeting to Feature Spring Lecture on *Washington's Main Street, The Capital Beltway*

Before there was a Beltway, was there an "inside the Beltway" mentality? How important are those "inside the Beltway" people, anyway? Is it really a coincidence that the 1725 patentee of a land grant named Chevy Chase was Colonel Joseph Belt?

The Colonel was a member of the Prince Georges County Militia. He is memorialized on the bronze plaque on the large boulder in front of All Saints Episcopal Church on Chevy Chase Circle. His 560 acre parcel was the largest in the area and had been granted to him by Lord Baltimore. Like most neighboring grants, his property was a tobacco farm. The area that became Montgomery County in 1776 was an agrarian society, and remained one until well into the twentieth century. As Jane Sween relates in her book, *Montgomery County: Two Centuries of Change* (p. 104), even in 1900, "[T]he average [Montgomery County] farm was slightly over 100 acres and 90 percent of [county residents] were still engaged in agriculturally related occupations."

In this issue, we are pleased to carry the second part of the excellent lecture delivered by local historian William Offut at the Chevy Chase Historical Society's Fall 1999 meeting. Additional copies of Part Two, and of Part One (printed in the Spring 2000 issue of the CCHS Newsletter) are available for students and teachers.

With post World War II growth, the population of the county nearly doubled in the 1940s, and by 1950 most farms had disappeared from the lower county. As farmland turned to housing, another indication of change was the appearance of the first shopping malls: Wheaton Plaza in 1960 and Montgomery Mall in 1968.

What might, perhaps be thought of as the original "Beltroadway" was part of an old Piscataway Indian trail on Colonel Belt's land grant. It originally extended from the Colonel's house, near the present intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Oliver Street, to Tenley Circle. The route continued to be used and eventually was paved and named Belt Road. Many roads on maps as early as 1796 still exist as a major portion of the county's current highway network, so it is interesting to compare the long history of an old Indian trail that became Belt Road with the Capital Beltway. It took centuries for Belt Road, that connected two destinations, to be severed into a bewildering number of separated segments by new development. In contrast, the short time it took to construct the continuous loop of the Capital Beltway, a road built to connect to other roads, divided existing communities almost overnight.

Now we are bombarded with tales of the Beltway in newspapers, magazines, and on television almost daily. This highway encircling the capital is integral to an understanding of the history of the county.

(cont..)



The Civil War in the Chevy Chase Area

Therefore, it is with great pleasure that we announce our Spring lecturer, who already has made presentations at locally and nationally recognized conferences and at the Montgomery County Historical Society on this very subject.

Jeremy Korr is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of American Studies at the University of Maryland. His dissertation is titled, "Washington's Main Street: Consensus and Conflict on the Capital Beltway, 1952-2001." He is assistant director for the College Park Scholars Program in American Cultures, an undergraduate honors program, and a fifth year faculty member at the Children's School of Science in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. Mr. Korr describes himself as "a lifelong resident of the vicinity." His grandparents resided in Chevy Chase, at 4 Laurel Parkway.

His lecture will emphasize the effect of the Beltway on Montgomery County. A discussion will follow, for, as he notes, "This is a topic on which everyone has some experience to share!"

The Chevy Chase Historical Society's annual meeting will immediately precede the lecture. The Nominating Committee of CCHS' Board of Directors has asked Mary Sheehan to serve as Director-at-Large, and has asked Julie Thomas to continue as Director-at-Large. Both have agreed to serve. Nominations for these positions may be made from the floor. Election of this slate will be held at 8:00 p.m. on May 20, 2000, in the Chevy Chase Village Hall at 5906 Connecticut Avenue, followed by the spring lecture. Light refreshments will be served.

CCHS To Participate in Popular *Montgomery County History Day*

On Sunday, July 9, 2000, the Chevy Chase Historical Society once again will take part in the annual "Montgomery County Historical Day." Historic sites county-wide will be open for this event that has attracted an increasing number of visitors each year. CCHS will present an exhibit of photographs gleaned from its collection, accompanied by explanatory text. CCHS members will be on hand to answer questions and to talk with visitors about the society's work.

CCHS also will mount an exhibit at the Happy Birthday Montgomery County celebration in September 2000. Members will be present to talk with the public.

After the battle of Antietam in 1862, the war moved closer to this area.

By moonlight on Saturday, June 27, 1863, James Ewell Brown Stuart with three Rebel cavalry brigades crossed the dangerously high river near Seneca and paused to burn and loot some canal boats and damage the locks as much as possible. On Sunday morning in Rockville "flocks of pretty maidens congregated on the front to greet us, showing strong sympathy for our cause, and cutting off all the buttons they could get hold of from our uniforms as souvenirs."

Stuart surprised a forage train that contained 150 new wagons each drawn by six sturdy mules. Most carried bags of grain and bales of hay, but they were also hauling every imaginable type of provender to Federal officers at Frederick. When the head of the column reached Rockville and the rebels, the tail of the long line was just entering Bethesda as young Mrs. Moore and her husband went to church.

Everything being peaceful and quiet on the road – with Pickets at the gates as usual. Suddenly, in the midst of the service, a Federal Officer burst into the church, calling out: "Get these horses away from here and get to your homes – the Rebs are coming." Rushing to our horses we galloped off, fearing we might be caught in a clash and prevented from getting to our children. Reaching our gate we found the pickets had gone, falling back to Fort Reno – two miles below – and wagons before our place loaded with supplies for the Federal Army were being hurriedly fired by their soldiers to prevent their seizure by the Confederates, the horses having been cut loose and sent toward Washington for safety.

The folks who lived in this area at the time of the Civil War were not all Southern sympathizers, of course, but most of them were. Union soliders camped and trained all over this area, crossed and recrossed the region numberless times, and raided local farms for food and fodder with almost complete abandon. The men at the forts practiced with their giant cannon, and cavalry units rode out from time to time when Confederate horse-stealing expeditions crossed into the County. Few days passed without some sort of disturbance or alarm.

Then in the summer of 1864, Jubal Early nearly tipped the scales. As Grant hammered his bloody army on Petersburg and Richmond, Early and what was left of Stonewall Jackson's corps moved down the valley, took Hagerstown and Frederick, brushed aside a Union force on the Monocacy and spent the evening of July 10-11, 1864, in the fields of Gaitherburg and Rockville.

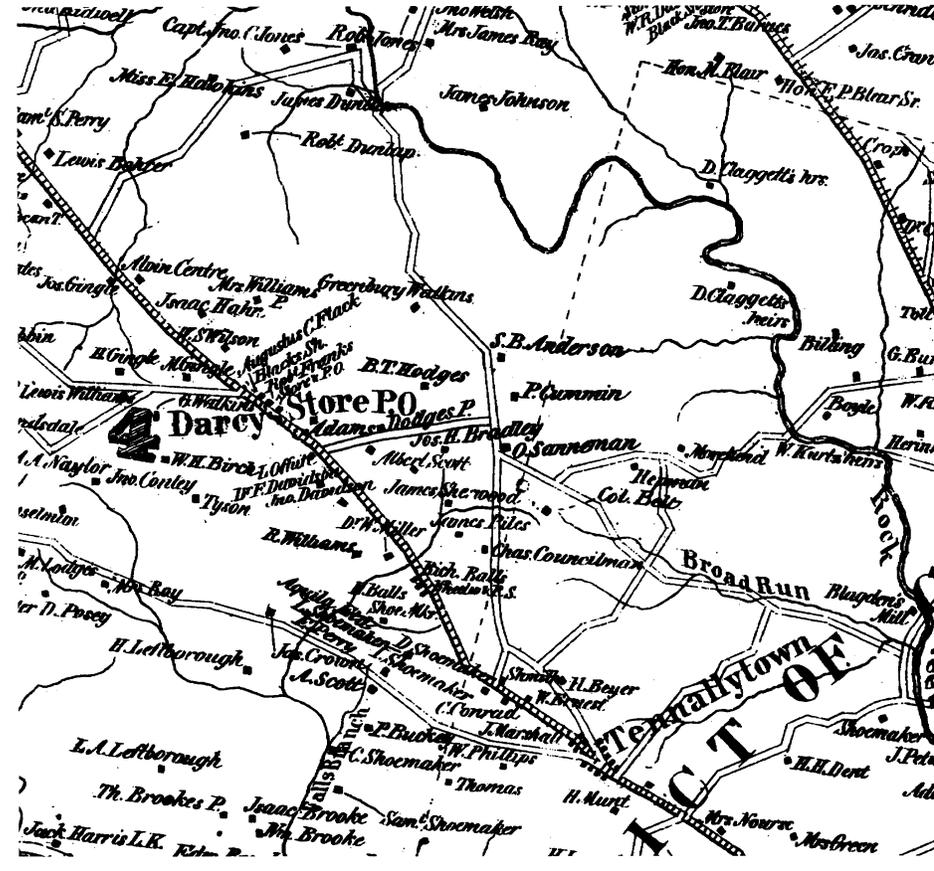
Ahead of them ran panic. Many farmers in this area packed their valuables and their families on wagons and fled the countryside, driving their cattle before them, to get within the line of forts that had made a treeless arc a mile wide and fifteen miles long from Chain Bridge to the Eastern Branch.

The size of Early's army grew with every telling, and in Tennytown people began to notice that the forts' garrisons contained invalids and convalescents, untested militia and recent draftees. Even to frightened civilians, the difference was obvious. Instead of the 34,000 needed, the defenses of Washington were manned by 9,600 men, and about half of them were in no condition to march or fight. Grant had stripped the forts and thrown the men at Richmond. Adjutant General Montgomery Meigs organized more than 2,500 clerks and bookkeepers and sent them into the trenches. The canal boats huddled together in Georgetown. And the thrilling panic spread.

From Petersburg, Grant wired that he was sending help. The District of Columbia Militia was called up, a sure sign of desperation.

Under pressure from Stanton, Lincoln and his family returned that night from their summer retreat at the Soldier's Home to the fetid White House. At the Treasury, clerks spent the evening filling canvas bags with bank notes and other securities and kept a small steamer ready at the docks. The history-minded recalled that it had only been fifty years since the British scattered the Capital's defenders and burned many of the public buildings. In some homes, long-hidden rebel flags were unfurled.

July 11, 1864, dawned bright and hot as had every day so far that month. "Early's rag-tag army was only a



Chevy Chase, "Tennytown" and Rock Creek as shown in Martenet & Bond's 1865 map of Montgomery County, with locations of farms and houses of prominent families.

hair's breadth from achieving the greatest Confederate triumph of the whole war. It all depended on the events of that Monday morning," says historian Benjamin Franklin Cooling who has written much on the defenses of Washington. It had not rained in the Washington area for forty-seven days.

McCausland's cavalry went south on the Pike to test the defenses from Fort Reno to the river. The rest of the Confederate force marched toward Veir's mill raising a towering cloud of dust visible to the lookouts high on the signal towers. Rebel cavalry struck sparks from the turnpike's white stone as they jangled into Bethesda, rummaged through the abandoned homes and the empty toll house and cleaned out Postmaster William Darcy's store and Mr. Franck's blacksmith shop.

The big guns at Forts Bayard and Reno opened up at long range and soon other cannon joined the fray. Many of the rounds, stored too long, did not explode, but enough did to keep the few left-behind Bethesdians, like the Moore family at what is now NIH, in their cellars worrying about their horses. The rebels made their headquarters on the Bohrer farm where the Naval Hospital now stands and took over the Presbyterians' meeting house for a barracks. The guns' heavy shells whirred and hissed over Bethesda

and what became Chevy Chase to land in the fields beyond. Late in the day a shell from Reno killed four Rebels who had camped across from the Moores' plantation.

Early slowed the pace as his vanguard reached Silver Spring, the Blair family's handsome farm. He could see the Capitol's new dome. His men moved across the District Line and toward the cleared fields around Fort Stevens driving the Union skirmish line back into the ramparts. Beyond lay the Treasury and tons of supplies. "General Early," wrote Margaret Leech, "hunched in his saddle before Fort Stevens, knew a flash of hope more dazzling than the noonday sun."

But it was too hot; they were too tired. Many soldiers were busy looting houses or just resting in the shade, avoiding the noncoms and waiting for the heat of the day to pass.

One of the farms the soldiers picked clean was "Highlands," owned by a man who had just been jailed as a Confederate sympathizer, Alfred Ray. Mr. Ray had sold his land in the city and bought property far out into the country shortly after the war began. When the cavalrymen arrived on her front lawn, Mrs. Ray provided them with welcoming buckets of water. Early's men requisitioned hams, quinine, and two mules and left behind a flimsy quartermaster's receipt. (The Ray home was about where the Mormon Temple is today. The late Edith Ray Saul, Alfred Ray's granddaughter, prized the quartermaster's receipt all her long life.)

Nearer the District Line Kyd Douglas took possession of "Silver Spring," the elder Blair's house, and chased out the stragglers who were tearing it apart looking for food and whiskey. Early made the large home his headquarters.

On the wharves at Sixth Street Lincoln watched from his carriage as soldiers in faded blue, their caps marked with the Greek cross, clambered from the steamers and assembled in the dusty streets. The Sixth Corps had been here before. By mid-afternoon Early could watch the dusty blue riflemen filing into Stevens and taking over the rifle pits. His curses were long remembered.

All night, in front of the forts, houses burned brightly near Silver Spring and Bethesda. Newspaper extras were gobbled up as fast as they were printed in the city. Many people believed that there were spies sig-

naling the rebels about weak places in the defenses, but the curious clogged the roads trying to get to Fort Stevens and Tenallytown to see the rebel horde, and in many places business went on as usual. James Loughborough, a member of Early's staff, made his way through Union lines to dine with his family well inside the District Line.

There was some desultory fighting near Fort Reno and along 7th Street in the morning, but it was little more than probing. About 6 pm guns from Stevens and DeRussy pulverized the fields between Fort Stevens and Silver Spring. Then Union soliders moved out to attack the Rebels' skirmish line. Early sent in reinforcements, and a fierce, concentrated, fire fight ensued.

Near Lincoln on the wall of Fort Stevens a doctor was wounded, and General Wright ordered the President down and the parapet cleared. Lincoln, an inviting target for sharpshooters in his black coat and tall hat, watched the soldiers move forward in the fading light for a moment more and then stepped down, much to Wright's relief. The President sat on an ammunition box and bobbed up now and then to peer over the wall.

Early described the Battle of Fort Stevens as "quite a brisk engagement" and stated that it "was in that affair that nearly my whole loss in front of Washington was sustained." The fighting went on until 10 pm with some eighty Confederate casualties and more than 200 Union killed and wounded. The skill of Early's sharpshooters resulted in the death or wounding of every Union regimental commander involved.

Forty of the Union soldiers killed in this battle, mostly Pennsylvanians and New Yorkers, were reburied in the little Battleground National Cemetery on Georgia Avenue. Thirty years after the fight, sixteen or seventeen of the Confederate dead were reinterred in the cemetery at Grace Episcopal Church on Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring and some years later, a marker was erected. Early sent a \$100 check to help in this work.

In *Reveille in Washington* Margaret Leech wrote that the capital was "too sophisticated for panic." But it had been a near thing

. McCausland's men were still looking for horses

in Bethesda. They ransacked the old stone tavern near the crossroad, the No Gain farm, the Bethesda Meeting House on the hill and the nearby school house. At many area farms, clothes and books were scattered about the yards, windows and doors were shattered. Pots and pans had disappeared, sheets and other linens had been torn up for bandages, and little was left in the pantries, cellars or chicken coop] CE In some homes the destruction was wanton with all the crockery broken, obscene messages scrawled on walls, furniture and pianos smashed.

Mrs. Moore at her home on the Pike was much involved with Early's raid.

The Confederates appeared, played "Dixie" under the guns of Fort Reno and for two days and nights after, we slept in Confederate lines, breakfasted in Federal lines, dined in those of the Confederates and so on until the Sixth Federal Army Corps was rushed to Washington and the Confederates were compelled to retreat.

There were constant skirmishes going on and the balls were flying so fast and shells bursting so near our house, that we collected the family in the cellar for safety, a ball having passed through the house of a neighbor. Soon Grandfather went out to watch the bursting of a shell, as it described in its fall a perfect letter "S" and seeing him between the well and the tree nearby, I too slipped out and soon all were watching except the children who were young enough for Mammy to hold on to! The excitement of these times was so great that we thought not of danger.

Soon a powder blackened Confederate dashed up to the well for water and told us they must fall back as strong reinforcements were coming up from Washington which they could not meet. We had kept our table spread and always had food ready when they came to the well for water.

That night they recrossed the river and the next day the "Yanks" were coming to ask for milk and "pie." They got the milk only for we had little left to give them.

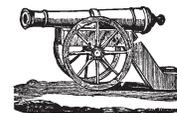
The most thrilling of our War adventures occurred just at this time. After the Army had all passed up, as we thought, he walked around the plantation to see if the fences had been destroyed and was met by the Overseer of Mr. Dick's place adjoining and asked to come over to his house where lay a wounded Confederate. A ball had passed through his body above the hips, he was bleeding profusely and they had no proper bandages.

There were no telephones in those days and no Doctor could be reached until the road was cleared of troops, so Grandfather came home for lint, bandages, ice and whatever was needed and started back to the Overseer's house near the dividing line. Just before reaching the fence in an effort to put the barn between himself and the road from which the firing came, but when about springing over, a ball came between the fence rails, fortunately not striking him. He quickly dropped to the ground and crawled to the shelter of a large tree, where he sat, waving with both hands the white bandages he carried.

Finally the firing ceased and he was soon surrounded by a squad of armed men, demanding who he was. He told them a "Citizen." By this time an Officer rode up and asked the men "what they got." "He says he's a Citizen but he looks mighty like a 'Johnny,'" was the reply. The Officer after questioning Grandfather told him to go on to do what he could for the wounded man who of course was his prisoner, and at Grandfather's request, sent a soldier to the house with him, whose blue coat protected him from further danger from balls from the road. In a few hours an ambulance was brought and the poor wounded prisoner was carried to the Hospital on Judiciary Square in Washington, where in a few days he died.

The nerve shock told heavily on Grandfather, and indeed on all of us as you might imagine. As the last of the Sixth Army Corps passed up, two of its men appeared, leading a comrade who had dropped in the road and asked if he might lie in our barn and rest as he was too ill to go on. So we made him a comfortable bed of straw and hay, covered him with a blanket and for two or three days fed him with such food as he could eat, milk and cold, ripe tomatoes being his great desire. Finally we were able to report the case to one of the Hospitals in Washington and they sent an ambulance for him but we heard that he lived only a short time, being far gone with tuberculosis.

The news of the war's end came to many in what became Chevy Chase with the shock of cannon fire. One after another the big guns in the forts and the lighter field artillery in the redoubts between them fired their salutes. The wave of thunder went around and around the city for several hours, always in the same direction, fading away and then approaching again from the river until the booming changed to crashing bangs with clouds of acrid smoke and then the sharp, flashing cracks from the rifled cannon.





THEN . . .

2 Magnolia Parkway
April 1993

. . . AND NOW

2 Magnolia Parkway
March 1996

