



CHEVY CHASE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 1998

Spring Meeting Scheduled for May 20

Edward Heller will present *The Comstock Lode and Chevy Chase*

Meeting and slide show will be at Chevy Chase Village Hall, 5908 Connecticut Ave, at 8:00 pm on Wed. May 20 '98. Admission is free and light refreshments will be served.

How can there be any connection between the Comstock Lode and Chevy Chase? What's so special about the development of Nevada's great silver and gold mines?

Looking at a map of Chevy Chase for clues, perhaps it's a coincidence, but Nevada is the only state with a street named for it in Chevy Chase Village. Then there is Newlands Street, which has kept the name of Senator Francis Newlands familiar if not well recognized. Francis Newlands was first elected to Congress to represent the state of Nevada in 1892 and after serving as representative for ten years, he was elected Senator. He served his state with great distinction until his death in 1917. There are no other obvious clues to be found from studying the map, which still leaves the question of a connection unanswered.

The Chevy Chase Land Company is the missing link. It was incorporated in 1890 by a group of men including Francis Newlands. Senator Newlands was the son-in-law of another Nevada Senator, William Sharon, who served from 1875 to 1882. Their deep understanding and appreciation of mining and life out west gave them a unique perspective, which they brought east to great effect. Without their experience and without the substantial fortune Newlands inherited from Sharon, it is unlikely that Chevy Chase would have gained fame as one of the first planned communities in the United States.

Mr. William Stewart was the dominant figure in the early development of the Comstock Lode. He was elected Senator for the brand new state of Nevada in 1862. Mr. Sharon, as agent for the Bank of California, defined the succeeding years. His brilliant management of the Bank's investments included many daring decisions. One of the most dramatic and definitive steps was taken in December 1868. This is how it was described in Eliot Lord's *Comstock, Mining and Miners*, published in 1883:

(continued on page2)

Trolley on Connecticut Ave between
Newark and Ordway, circa 1903

View is from the stone quarry looking west toward Newark St. This section of Connecticut Ave and others were built using earth hauled in by horse and wagon. The know-how and much of the money to build the trolley line—from Florida Ave. to Chevy Chase Lake—came from the historic Comstock Lode.

Picture courtesy of Robert A Truax



(Mr. Sharon) sent for Mr. I.E. James, the leading mine surveyor of the district, and said to him curtly, without any preface: "Can you run a road from Virginia City to the Carson River?" "Yes!" said Mr. James; and the surveyor began work immediately to carry out the direction without further instructions. This characteristic interview has an apocryphal flavor as thus related, but is unquestionably a fact. About occurrences on the Comstock Lode, if anywhere in the world, truth often appears stranger than fiction.

The design of that road was a spectacular feat of engineering, yet in less than one year it had been completed, track had been laid and a locomotive was running. Roads, railroads, flumes, water tunnels, water rights, logging, lumber mills. . . mining on the scale of the Comstock Lode involves many industries, not to mention the management of thousands of employees. In other words, the development of that mining system was the development of a supply processing and transport network, and the quality and effectiveness of the plans as well as the quality and speed of their execution determined the profit to be made.

In fact, it is the essential scale and structure of the plan for Chevy Chase which describes a connection with the Comstock Lode development, and it was in part the proceeds from the Comstock mining which financed the building of Chevy Chase. The construction of the extension of Connecticut Avenue and the distribution of residential areas, parks, churches and schools, tell a story, almost unique for its time.

We are very fortunate that Ed Heller, who spoke at our Spring lecture in 1992 on "Trains, Trolleys and J.P.Morgan", has both historical and professional understanding of his topic. He has a B.S. degree in mining engineering from Lehigh University and received his M.B.A. with distinction in transportation from Harvard Business School. Early in his career he was a mining engineer and later held various positions in the industry. He became the Assistant Inspector General for Inspections of the US Department of Energy and retired from that post. Since his retirement he has been a volunteer at the Smithsonian Institution working on industrial history projects.

Please come to this slide presentation about a little understood but truly fascinating part of our national history, which is essential to understanding the background of Chevy Chase as one of the nation's first planned communities.

Light refreshments will be served.

Two hundred attend Gala Spring Dinner

Daniel Korengold and Martha Dippell were the gracious hosts of the 1998 CCHS champagne supper. Their meticulously restored home at 101 East Melrose Street was filled with more than two hundred guests who enjoyed touring the house and garden in the late afternoon hours. The beauty of the house is a treat in itself and is underscored by the respect the owners have shown to the original part of the house in their very sensitive renovations.

Champagne was served as guests arrived, and the music of a harp created an elegant and festive atmosphere. The delicious supper of salmon, beef Stroganoff, a melange of marinated vegetables, and of course, the CCHS signature, cold asparagus was beautifully presented by Delissima caterers. The desserts, presided over by Janet Creamens featured a buffet of home-made confections prepared by society members.

The exhibit on the history of the house was mounted by Julie Thomas and provided fascinating photographs and other documentation of the house in its many incarnations. Our hosts shared many interesting facts concerning the renovation process.

We thank Martha Dippell and Daniel Korengold for their warmth and generosity. Thank you to Alice Kinter and Carol Coffin who chaired the event, to Mary Anne Tuohey who supervised the cooking and to all the other board members, committee chairpersons and members who gave their time, hard work and talent. And to our guests: what would a party be without a great crowd? Thanks for your high spirits, your support, friendship and many kind words.

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Help is available for those wishing to research their own house history

Have you been curious about the history of your house? When it was built, who lived in it and when it was bought and sold? Excellent help is available, if you yourself do not have the time or inclination to go search the land records.

Nora Silver, a longtime friend and invaluable adviser to the CCHS has worked at the Montgomery County Land Records office tracing property deeds for many years. She is highly professional and efficient and is available on weekends to trace house and property deeds for our members. Her home phone is 301-774-4804. If you have any questions about house research please call Alice Kinter at 301-656-3642.

CHEVY CHASE HISTORY

Last issue we discussed the land-grant system in Maryland. In this issue the focus is on the land-grant Chevy Chase.

The early history of Maryland centers about the tiny capital of St. Mary's City. The waterways of Chesapeake Bay were vital arteries of transportation, for roads developed slowly in the colony. New counties were formed as the population grew, but the forested interior was settled more slowly than the coast. In 1725 when Joseph Belt patented the grant he called "Chevy Chase" Montgomery County was still part of Prince George's County. It encompassed 560 acres and had the irregular shape characteristic of most early grants. Neighboring properties were "Charles and Thomas", "Labyrinth" and "Clean Drinking" on the north, and "Friendship" on the west.



Trying to fit the boundaries of "Chevy Chase" over a modern street map is a challenge for both eye and patience. Starting at the northwest corner, the northern boundary starts at Wisconsin Avenue and East West Highway and jogs down on an uneven line to Rosemary Street, then across Connecticut Avenue east almost to Brookeville Road. The eastern boundary runs south to Quincy Street, then jogs west to West Kirke Street at Laurel Parkway then straight south through Chevy Chase Circle to about Oliver Street, then east a bit and finally south to a spot between Morrison and Livingston Streets. The southern edge runs slightly south-west on a straight line, crossing Wisconsin Avenue and continuing almost to Friendship Boulevard. Finally, the western boundary runs north, crossing Wisconsin Avenue to about Belmont Street, then jogging

west before continuing north to Walsh Street, where it turns west once more and then north again to complete the odd triangular bit at the northwestern corner. We are indebted to Montgomery County Historical Society for locating the grant for us as a part of their County mapping project.

The name of *Chevy Chase* is clothed in romance. During the Middle Ages, the Cheviot Hills formed the border between Scotland and England. Ownership of the area was disputed between the two countries, and in 1388 trouble erupted in a clash between Earl Douglas of Scotland and Lord Percy of England over the hunting grounds in the hills. An ancient ballad, "The Hunting in Chevy Chase" describes the scene in gripping terms. Earl Percy, determined to hunt in the woods that he knew belonged to Douglas, set forth with 1500 bowmen, surely an adequate number for a day's deer hunting. When Douglas heard of the intrusion, he mounted his "milk-white steed" and came to meet Percy with 2,000 armed men of his own. Douglas challenged Percy with these words:

*Show me, said he, whose men you be,
That hunt so boldly here;
That, without my consent, do chase
And kill my fallow deer!*

One suspects that he already knew the answer to his question, and before long the battle was joined. It was a wild and ferocious contest. Both earls were slain, and according to the ballad, only about fifty men on each side survived.

Why did Joseph Belt choose this name for the tract that was to be his home? Many grants have names that are chosen at random, but this one seems to have some special significance for him. It is interesting to note that another of his properties was called "Otterburne", which is an alternative name for the famous battle.

We know quite a bit about Joseph Belt because of his prominence in the public life of the time. He was born in 1680, the second son of John and Elizabeth Tydings Belt. In 1701, when he came of age, he settled in the new county of Prince George's on a piece of land deeded to him by his mother. In 1706 he married Esther Beall, the daughter of Ninian Beall, thereby uniting himself to one of the most colorful of early Maryland immigrants. Beall had come from Scotland as an indentured servant and eventually accumulated thousands of acres of land. His most famous grant is probably "Rock of Dumbarton", the huge piece that encompasses most of Georgetown and gives its name to Dumbarton Oaks and Dumbarton House. His son-in-law Joseph seems to have

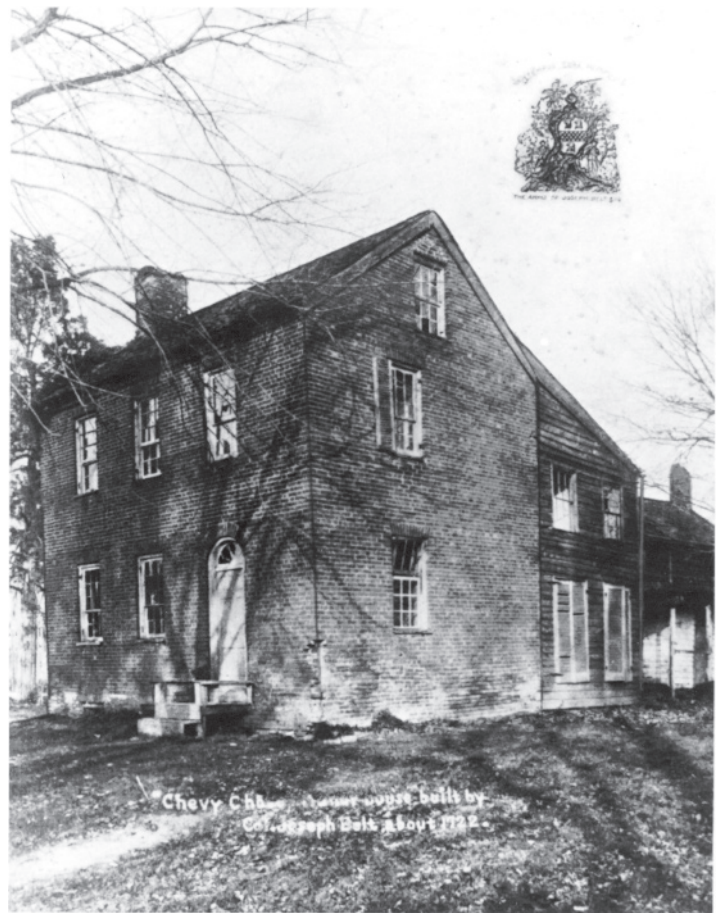
been a favorite. He willed him 245 acres of land at his death, and made him a guardian of his orphaned grandson Samuel.

Joseph Belt had a distinguished career in Prince George's County. He served as a Provincial Court Justice from 1732-1734, and was one of the burgesses in the County Assembly from 1725-1737. When the first free school was founded in Prince George's County, Belt was one of its trustees. In addition, he was Commander-in-Chief of the Prince George's Militia, which helped to defend Fort Frederick during the French and Indian War.

Belt's first wife, Esther, died after the birth of her eighth child, James. He then married the widowed Marjorie Sprigg, by whom he had two more children. Interestingly, two of Marjorie's daughters by her previous marriage married Belt sons. In 1761 Joseph Belt's namesake Joseph died. His father's death a few weeks later was attributed to his grief on losing a favorite son. Belt's prosperity is attested by his will, which left 2,861 acres of land in Prince George's and Frederick counties.

His manor house, which he called Chevy Chase, was a fine brick building two and one half stories high with a hip roof. It stood just south of Chevy Chase Circle until 1907, when it was torn down to make way for new development in the area. The house at 3734 Oliver Street in Chevy Chase, D.C. covers the spot where the manor house once stood, and is said to incorporate bricks from the old foundation. The Belt graveyard lay at the bottom of the hill, and some of the tombstones were still there in the 1920's. The small triangular park on Chevy Chase Parkway nearby, which was once a part of the cemetery, has been preserved due to the efforts of interested neighbors.

As you drive around the corner from Chevy Chase Circle onto Western Avenue, take a quick glance to the right. There you will see a large boulder standing near All Saints Church that bears a plaque honoring Joseph Belt. It was erected by



Chevy Chase Manor circa 1907

the Society of Colonial Wars in the District of Columbia on November 12, 1901. Together with the short strip of Belt Road which runs south from the the Circle to 41st Street, it is all we have to remind us of this distinguished early settler.

Sources:

Adams, Katherine Beall: *Maryland Heritage, A Family History*, 1983

Magruder, Caleb Clark, Jr: *Colonel Joseph Belt*, Paper #5, 1909, Historic Papers of the Society of Colonial Wars

ORIGINS II - published by the Neighborhood Planning Council, Washington, D.C. 1976

A Select Collection of English Songs, London, 1783

Two Directors-at-Large Continue

Two directors-at-large have been nominated to continue to serve in their positions on the board of the Chevy Chase Historical Society. Election of the slate will be held at the CCHS annual meeting on May 20th, at 8:00 pm at 5906 Connecticut Avenue.

Director-at-Large: Susan W. Kilborn

Director-at-Large: Corbin C. Harwood

Benches for Chevy Chase, DC

Main Street Chevy Chase, a project of Historic Chevy Chase, D.C., continues with its successful "Benches for Chevy Chase" campaign. A number of the attractive ribbon-seated, cast iron benches with dark green epoxy coating have been purchased by Chevy Chase residents and placed along Connecticut Avenue between Livingston and Oliver Streets. Benches, as well as matching trash receptacles and ashtrays, are available from Main Street Chevy Chase. Bronze memorial or donor plaques can be placed on any of these pieces. Call Colleen Girouard at (202) 244-3801.

A 75th Anniversary Celebration

Saturday, May 23, Memorial Day Weekend, the community will celebrate the inception of the Chevy Chase Playground much as our neighbors did seventy-five years ago.

Seventy-five years ago this May, led by the Navy Band, 1000 costumed children paraded around Chevy Chase Circle, down Western Avenue and into the playground at Livingston and 41st in the District to celebrate the playground's grand opening and to kick-off a huge fund raising effort. There were Maypole dancers and baseball games, the flag was raised and the prerequisite smattering of officialdom all joined in on the fun. The "Chevy Chase News", published by the Citizens Association of Chevy Chase, D.C., and the Connecticut Avenue Citizens Association, detailed the events of the day and the neighborhood's high hopes for the future of the park.

Concern had been rising with the development of more roads and homes and the disappearance of open space for play fields and tennis courts, the very reason so many had moved to the Chevy Chase area in the first place. Thus, negotiations for property for park land had been initiated with Edward Stollwage and Harold Doyle, the president and vice-president of the Chevy Chase Land Company. A deal was worked out whereby the ballfields and playground and the anticipated tennis courts, basketball court and cinder track would all be in the District and a hoped for "community house" that would include a gymnasium, a swimming pool, a bowling alley, meeting rooms and a dance floor and stage would be on the north side of Western Avenue in Maryland.

Raising the \$125,000 for the building and endowment of the park and clubhouse was a daunting task in 1923. The Chevy Chase Recreation Club was organized for just that purpose and it was their goal to go door to door to every family in Chevy Chase, Maryland and the District, from Chevy Chase Lake to Ablemarle Street and from Wisconsin Avenue across to Rock Creek Park to solicit donations. They urged each family to give to the effort in accord with their means because, "Leisure time was dangerous time" and "Juvenile offenses increase with the distance from a playground", a sales pitch that may not have the same panache now as it did then. Enthusiasm, however it was sold, ran high for the project and Senators to local businesses all pitched in.

A Re-creation and a Celebration

Today, the Chevy Chase Playground, thanks to the hard work of our neighborhood forebears, remains as a vital part of the neighborhood landscape and again thanks to the efforts of

District and Maryland residents and a neighborhood coalition called the Chevy Chase Playground Committee, the park is now going through a revitalization that has brought in new trees and landscaping and play equipment. There are plans afoot for yet more landscaping and trees and the introduction of a modified basketball game applicable to all ages and skills called, "Bankshot Basketball." Now, as it was seventy-five years ago, the park will only grow and prosper with the backing and continued interest of the community.

The event on Saturday, May 23, will honor our forebears' foresight, celebrate the park and demonstrate the neighborhood's continued support and enthusiasm for the playground. The day will start as it did then with a children's costume parade. There will be a marching band and once again, there will be Maypole dancers and baseball games and plenty of food and fun. The whole family will get a chance to play, "Bankshot Basketball". One and all are invited to share in the festivities. Be sure to look for details and times in local publications as the big day approaches!

The Chevy Chase Playground Committee is particularly interested in hearing from longtime residents who may have special memories or stories about the park. Pictures would be particularly welcome. To get involved in the celebration (Volunteers are needed!) or to help support the park, please call the Anniversary Hotline at 301-907-3056 for details.

Part of Chevy Chase Added to Master Plan for Historic Preservation

The Montgomery County Council approved an amendment to the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* to designate a portion of Chevy Chase Village as a Master Plan historic district. The designation took effect April 15, 1998. The Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers is selecting a panel of neighborhood residents for the Local Advisory Panel to the Historic Preservation Commission. Guidelines for the Chevy Chase Historic District written by Village residents have been included as part of the law.

Certain significant tax benefits are available for work done on historic property. Approval of these tax benefits is obtained by receiving an Historic Area Work Permit from the Historic Preservation Commission. Historic designation recognizes the County's most important and special historic places. As a way of highlighting historic sites, plaques are available for purchase through Montgomery Preservation Inc.

Then . . .



Chevy Chase Circle looking north before the turn of the century

Slide donated by Robert A. Truax

. . . and Now

Chevy Chase Circle looking north, 1992



Photo by Julie Thomas