



## Chevy Chase Historical Society

Newsletter

Fall 2000

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### Fall Lecture: The Relation of Packard Automobiles (1889–1929) to Chevy Chase Architecture and Interior Design

In 1895 Thomas Edison was interviewed about the future of horseless carriages. He said “It is only a question of a short time when the carriages and trucks of every large city will be run with motors. The expense of keeping and feeding horses is very great and all this will be done away with just as the cable and trolley cars have dispersed the horses. You must remember that every invention of this kind which is made adds to the general wealth by introducing a system of greater economy of force. A great invention which facilitates commerce enriches a country just as much as the discovery of vast hordes of gold.”

For centuries inventive men have worked on designs for self propelled land vehicles, and on May 19th, 1787 the State of Maryland was the first to grant Oliver Evans of Newcastle a patent for a steam powered land carriage. Despite all the articles about the new phenomenon of road rage, it is irresistible to quote L. Scott Bailey, in an article in *The American Car* since 1775 by the editors of *Automobile Quarterly*, who vividly describes an incident during the application process: “Evans was baited repeatedly by one rudely skeptical committeeman. How, he scoffed, would Evans’ self-propelled vehicle get out of the way of other wagons? The inventor’s reply came quickly: “Why Sir, were you the wagoner, and did not give room for me to pass, I would crush you and your wagon to the earth.”

The first Packard was built in Warren, Ohio in 1899 by James Ward Packard and his brother, William Dowd Packard. The firm moved to Detroit in 1902, and was

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Included in this issue are a colorful memoir of Chevy Chase Village’s one and only town policeman, William C. Austin, as transcribed by area historian William C. Offut, as well as articles about long-time Village residents and CCHS Charter Members Helen Wolcott and Professor William Turner. Additional copies are available for students and teachers from Newsletter Editor, Wendy Adams, 202-244-8021.

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1904 Packard Touring Car

an active part of the production race. By 1912 production rate leaders were Ford (170,211), Willys-Overland (28,572), Studebaker (28,032), Buick (19,812), and Cadillac (12,708). Packard (2,320) was thirteenth after Hupmobile, Reo, Oakland, Brush, Hudson, Rambler, and Chevrolet.

Henry B. Joy became president of the Packard Motor Car Company in 1913 and directed the company specifically toward the high-priced market, although Packards never had been cheap. In 1909, when a Ford Model T sold for \$850, Packard models sold for prices between \$3,200 and \$4260. While Ford produced a single model for the masses, Packard, in 1911, had seven different body styles just for their Model 30. The style names, still used by car manufacturers today to conjure the elegant and romantic images of the past, were touring, runabout, phaeton, brougham, limousine, and regal limousine imperial. The top of the line was \$5600.

During the 1920s the company was the most successful of the independent American manufacturers of luxury cars, and although it was generally unknown in Europe, Packards have been called the most prestigious and best motorcars produced in the United States during the first 50 years of the motor age. They had a reputation for advanced engineering—they were the first American car with a steering wheel—and high quality.

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Confidence in their quality was reflected in the sales slogan "Ask the man who owns one." Men asked, and they bought. When an escapee from the New York State Asylum for the Criminally Insane made his getaway in a Packard, going 80 miles per hour, Packard's advertising company picked up on the news and wrote, "When high speed is necessary, ask the man who owns one."

We are pleased to announce that C. Dudley Brown, F.A.S.I.D., one of the most senior members of the greater Washington Interior Design and Historic Preservation communities, and a wonderfully informed and entertaining speaker, is returning to present a talk on one of his newest areas of interest and expertise: Packard automobiles. Mr. Brown is a member of the Old Dominion Packard Club. He will discuss the Packards manufactured between 1899 and 1929 in relation to the architecture and interior design of the period, particularly those of Chevy Chase.

Mr. Brown, who was born in Ohio, came to Washington in 1948, where he worked in the drapery department of the then famous and now defunct Lansburgh's Department Store on Seventh Street, N.W. He established his private practice, C. Dudley Brown & Associates, Inc. in 1964. His extensive work has included the executive offices of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, portions of Woodrow Wilson House, Woodlawn Plantation, Decatur House, and, of course, some of the most beautiful homes in Chevy Chase.

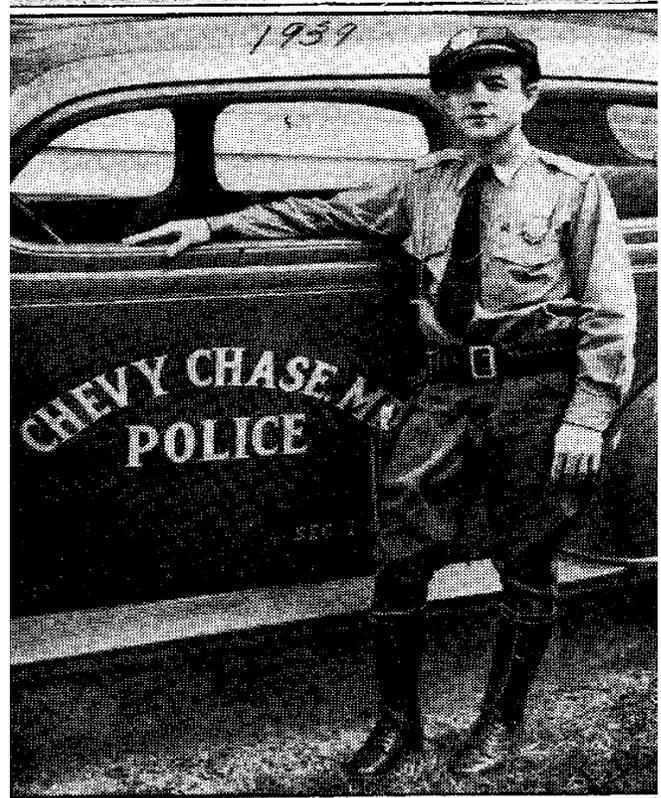
The lecture will be held on Tuesday, October 17, 2000 at 8:00 p.m., in the Chevy Chase Village Hall at 5906 Connecticut Avenue. Light refreshments will be served.

—Susan Eig

#### RETROSPECTIVE ON MARYLAND LICENSE PLATES

Maryland required automobile owners to be responsible for their own plates beginning in 1904. The state required that the first homemade plates display numbers at least three inches high, but made no further stipulation regarding color, material, or inclusion of state abbreviation. An act approved in 1906 required that all plates be white on black, so most owners made plates with numbers made of metal or black leather pads. The majority of these tags carried the state abbreviation.

Standardized state issued plates appeared July 1, 1910 (the first state to issue license plates was Massachusetts in 1903), and were black on deep yellow embossed metal. These were replaced by porcelain-enamel markers from 1911 through 1914. Maryland reverted to embossed metal in 1915. All state plates since 1910 have been dated.



**NEW CHEVY CHASE (MD.) POLICE CRUISER**—William Austin, recently named Chevy Chase policeman, is shown with the new cruiser purchased by citizens' association of Sections 1 and 2 guard against speeders and prowlers. On duty from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., with headquarters at the old Chevy Chase Post Office Building on Connecticut Avenue, Mr. Austin patrols the entire Chevy Chase area, supplementing the Montgomery County police. The new car was added to improve police service, officials said. —Star Staff Photo

#### CHEVY CHASE POLICEMAN WILLIAM C. AUSTIN By William C. Offut

Bill Austin went to work as the one and only Chevy Chase policeman in 1939, and 42 years later retired as the Village's well-respected town manager. In February 1993 I talked with Mr. Austin at his hillside home in Boyds. Here is some of what he said. It's the next best thing to a time machine.

We were three orphans. The two older girls, when our parents died, were adopted by different families. An old maiden lady who had known my mother took me to Knoxville (I was one-and-a-half) to a sister. I wouldn't go to school any more than I had to, and in 1930 I quit school in the 8th grade and worked in a cotton mill. I was a small fellow, weighed 120 when I went in the Navy, about 5-6. I was almost 17 when I joined.

My wife's father worked for Sugarloaf Mountain; he did all that stone work up there. My wife is a Warfield and six weeks after we met, we got married. We've been married 60 years. We first lived down around the Dupont Circle area. When Mildred was pregnant with our first child, we moved out and rented this house in the Woodmont Triangle. She worked for Tolman Laundry as a seamstress; made \$10 a week. I went to work first for Gordon Burrows for \$14.50 a week, ten-hour days, pumping gas and greasing cars.

I was living in a house on Wisconsin Avenue that had belonged to old Dr. Perry, a little shotgun house right across from the golf driving range and next to the Whippet Tavern. I used to wake up, this house had a swing on the front porch, the drunks used to come out of the tavern and end up on my porch, and I'm trying to go to sleep and hear that swing creaking. So we moved to Del Ray Avenue, and rented from Earle Hampton. He was a good man, grumpy, a lot of people never got to know him. The average person in Woodmont owned more of his house than they did in Chevy Chase Village. They were good, middle class people, honest most of them with a few real characters.

A fellow down at Burrows had been a slater's helper, and we talked, and he said, "I'm going down to the man I used to work for," and he says, "If you want, I'll see if I can get you a job with him." So I went and got a job carrying slate. You carry slate for a mechanic, and if you get ahead good, you can tack some slate on, and he'll watch you and make sure you do it right, and that's how you get to be a slater. I did stay there enough to learn a little bit, and then I went to work for a guy named Bill Griffin. I only got 40 cents an hour at that time.

A friend of my sister's was a desk clerk at the Bethesda police station, and I heard Chevy Chase Village was looking for somebody. Ed Northrop was a young man that was manager of the Village. They were trying to replace old man Springirth, their night policeman. Right on the corner across from the post office, a woman that was on the board caught a burglar in their house. The man had him under a gun, and she called Springirth, who was in that little room where he could go to sleep. She said, "I've got a man here. We caught a burglar. Come over here." Old man Springirth said, "What do you want me to do?" "I want you to get over here and take him." He said, "To hell with that," and went back to sleep.

So they woke up and found out that he had been going to movies and walked up and down the street and said hello to a few people and went back to bed. So they decided to replace him. They felt a little bit guilty themselves; it wasn't all his fault, so they decided to make a job for him and called it the night watchman for the building, and then this desk clerk who'd come from up around Sugarloaf told me about this job so I went over and talked to Mr. Northrop. His was kind of a part-time job, called Superintendent of Public Service. He asked me to come and meet the board. It got down to me and another fellow. They talked to us both, and a couple of days later he called me in and said, "You've got the job." It was \$125 a month and furnish your own car; they'd pay the gas and tires. I had this old Oldsmobile I'd bought from Burrell Marsh, a 1930 I think, a two-door.

So in March 1939 they gave me a gun and a uniform. I worked from six to two, then I could go to bed if I wanted to. Half the time, after two, if I wasn't sleepy, I'd ride around with the Bethesda guys. When I was hired, they got permission for me to ride in a County car for about two weeks. Les Thompson, I was with him a couple of times, he was a character. One time I stopped this guy for driving drunk, and he had his hands down through the steering wheel, and I

couldn't get him out of the car. This was right on Connecticut Avenue. So I didn't want to hit him in the face. He was turned toward me, so I took my blackjack and put it out toward the windshield and hit up along the side of the head. I just tapped him a couple of times, and he calmed down and got out the car, and I put him in my police car and took him over to Bethesda, and old Les was in there, and I was explaining to the sergeant about putting the guy in jail, and I said he isn't hurt, I just tapped him a little, and after I come upstairs from putting the guy in the cells, Les said, "Austin, gawdamn it, when you're going to hit a guy with a blackjack, hit him! None of this damn prissy-footing." He gave me a hell of a lecture.

When I went to work for Chevy Chase, one of my duties was, and Springirth used to do this too, there's room under that circle about ten by twelve, and machinery down there to pump that water. The reason those willow oaks did so well is that thing leaked out every day, and they grew like crazy. Nothing else could have been better for a willow oak. But this manhole, I had to go down it on an iron ladder. Every night I had to turn on the water, turn off the pump and fill the fountain and go off somewhere for an hour or so and then turn it off. I was in a clean uniform climbing up and down in rain and snow, and I used to cuss out that thing.

Part of my job was to go around to all the vacant houses. Springirth was supposed to be doing that, but he'd never gone to nobody. They called in and I had a list of them. The old man hated my guts. He blamed me; he'd just bitch and bitch. All he had to do was keep the coal furnace fired. He wouldn't even take messages for me. Before he died he got



**Not only for driving.** In 1920 Albert Alexander and Hank Higgins found another use for the spare tire. Photo lent by Robert J. Stevens

a different attitude toward me; he was a widower; he went blind, and I visited him.

I patrolled around. They decided they wanted a police car, and they bought a demonstrator, a blue Plymouth off the floor over in Silver Spring somewhere and had a sign put on the side and a siren and all that business. That Plymouth was a doozy; it could go a hundred miles an hour. They decided hiring me was a success.

I remember an old house over there on Brookeville at Melrose had been robbed. I saw this guy right across from the village office in front of a kind of modern Tudor house, saw this guy with a lawnmower that looked like the one that had been stolen. I went over to the house, and this guy was in the garage, and I arrested him. He was dragging back, and I was pulling him across that front lawn, and this woman come out and give me hell. "What are doing, Mr. Austin?" I told her, and she said, "Oh, he wouldn't do anything like that," so I got the Bethesda police and looked in her garage. He had that thing full of stuff he had stolen.

I got the other job because of the war. Ed Northrop, I didn't know he was in ONI, Naval Intelligence, that's the spy end of it, he was still going to school. Before the war ever broke out, he said to me, he was in this thing, he said, "I expect to be called whether we get in this war or not, and we're going to get in this war." He said, "I'm going to recommend you for my job."

Ed was called before Pearl Harbor; I'm sure it was. They called me in and said, "Mr. Austin, you know we only have one job and legally it's Mr. Northrop's job, and if he wants it, it's his." But he had told me, and he was a neighbor and friend who grew up with most of them and was doing a little sundown law before I took over, he told me, "You take the job, I'm not coming back here, win or lose." So they said, "We'll call this Assistant Superintendent of Public Safety." I said, "I don't care what kind of title this is, but I sure would like to have the salary." It was a boost to what I had.

Then they wanted me to get another policeman. I hired several guys, but the draft kept getting them. They went to the draft board to keep me there, but every time I got a policeman they took him. They got them to leave me alone until almost the end of the war. I got called to go to Baltimore to go for a physical, and I said, "Damn, we must be losing if they got down to me." I was always over at the ration board for gas and tires and such.

The upper crust over there, if you missed their trash or anything happened, they'd call and say, "Mr. Austin, I'm sorry to bother you, but nobody got my trash today," but somebody else, when you'd pick up the phone, she'd say, "I am Colonel Brown's wife and blah blah blah," and read you off. Mrs. Corby and I had our little discussions. She'd call me, and I'd go down there and she'd say, "Mr. Austin, you've got to do a better job of keeping Connecticut Avenue clear." I'd say, "Mrs. Corby, I've got just so much help, and I clean Connecticut Avenue just as I clean Grafton. I have a

street program." She'd say, "But we're on Connecticut, and you should clean it twice as much."

You're always on duty, you know. The bad part was when those people had a problem, you had to go to their house and talk about it after supper, in the evening. I was loyal to those people over there. It was mostly Republican, conservative, but they let me dabble in politics. They couldn't help it noway, it was always on in Bethesda. Number 8 was my precinct. I couldn't get anybody to work the polls, but I could carry it.

One day I said to the Board, "This title is should be changed because when you answer the phone, the guy says what's that." I'd have to explain that I'm town manager, and when I went to open an account, they'd say the same thing. They finally changed it. I didn't try to guide them too much until after the war.

*One more story that sheds some light on the man and the times: During the war Bill Austin received a request from 10-year-old Bobby Green of Grafton Street to keep a "nanny goat." Bobby assured the Village manager that the goat would "eat weeds and poison ivy and furnish fertilizer for our Victory garden" and that "she would not be as noisy as barking dogs in our neighborhood and far safer than these mad dogs." Austin had to turn Bobby down because of Village regulations.*

*He wrote: "As a boy I owned a goat and know the disappointment of having to give up my goat due to rules and regulations, which at that time I did not understand; however as you grow older you will find that the game should always be played by the rules, whether it be life or sports, and the closer we stay to the rules the more we enjoy the game, and our part in it."*

## **CHARTER MEMBERS OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED MUCH TO CHEVY CHASE VILLAGE LIFE**

### **Helen Wolcott Moving to Ingleside**

Helen Wolcott came to Chevy Chase on the streetcar when she was three months old. Her parents, Clinton Leroy Wolcott and Mallie Lou Johns Wolcott, were moving from the District of Columbia to their new American four-square style house at 19 West Kirke Street. Her father was an Examiner at the United States Patent Office where he later became one of four Supervisory Examiners and authored several revisions of the Manual of Patent Office Procedure. During the Second World War he was called out of retirement to head the Patent Office in Richmond, Virginia.

Miss Wolcott graduated from the E.V. Brown school on Connecticut Avenue, N.W. in Northwest D.C., and from Western High School in Georgetown, now the Duke

Ellington School of the Arts. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Sweet Briar College and honed her business skills at the Temple Secretarial School. Following graduation, she worked for the D.C. School System before moving to the United States Federal Reserve Board. She began her career at the Board as a stenographer and ended her 37 year career as manager of the Board's Freedom of Information Office. One of her most cherished assignments was that of secretary to the Vice-Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, C. Canby Balderston.

Miss Wolcott has been a member of the Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church for 74 years. During that time, she served on the Board of Trustees and was ordained as an Elder. She has been a member of the Chevy Chase Church Committee of the Women's Board of the Presbyterian Home for the past 21 years.

A Charter Member of CCHS, Miss Wolcott gave the first oral history to the society; it became part of CCHS' archives. In it she recalled her childhood, describing tobogganing on the old Kirkside Golf Course, catching tadpoles in the creek that ran through the Chevy Chase Club grounds (and returning them when they grew legs), and riding the trolley downtown to shop.

In 1979, a tragic fire in the house took the life of her only brother, Jack. Gallantly, Miss Wolcott carried on and superintended the restoration of the house to its original condition and appearance.

This fall, Miss Wolcott will be moving to the Ingleside Retirement Community. She will be accompanied by her black cat, Samson, one of the many felines who have found a happy home with her over the years. We will miss seeing her as often as we do now, but we are sure she will be returning often to visit her friends in Chevy Chase.

—Mary Anne Tuohey

## William Turner Departing Lenox Street

Professor William Turner has lived at 108 Lenox Street for more than 50 years. Prof. Turner has long been one of CCHS' strongest supporters. He also has taken an active part in the governance of Chevy Chase Village as a member of the Personnel Committee.

Originally from Philadelphia, Prof. Turner received his masters degree from the University of Pennsylvania before entering the United States Navy, in which he served from 1941 until 1946. After World War II, he obtained his doctorate from the same university. He served for many years as Dean of the The George Washington University's Columbian College of Humanities. Now retired, he is Associate Professor of English, Emeritus at the university.

A staunch Presbyterian, Prof. Turner has served as a Deacon and an Elder at the Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church, and was the church's last Superintendent of the Church School. He also served two terms on the Building Committee of the National Cathedral. For 25 years, he was a docent at Hillwood.

Prof. Turner presently is planning a move to Ingleside Retirement Community, from which he intends to continue his connection with Hillwood. We wish him the best of luck in his new home, and hope that he does not forget his promise to "keep one foot" in Chevy Chase.

—Joan Marsh



### Heading for the open road.

Olive Imirie and a friend start out from 125 Bradley Lane (now 4209) in a 1915 Hupmobile convertible.

Photo lent by Betty and Scott Imirie

