

SPRING GALA TO BE HELD IN 1895 HOUSE



8 West Irving Street

William and Valerie Grace have agreed to host CCHS' annual spring gala, on Sunday, May 6th, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. The gracious interior and exterior spaces of Mr. and Mrs. Grace's impeccably renovated home at 8 West Irving Street will provide a beautiful as well as an historic setting for this year's event.

One of the earliest houses in Chevy Chase, 8 West Irving Street is a large 1895 country Victorian sitting on a double lot in the West Village. The materials used in its construction are an eclectic and noteworthy combination from ground to roof. The two foot wide stone foundation gives way to a cedar shingled first level, with double-layered thick shingles cut in a sawtooth pattern. The second floor consists of distinctive pebbledash stucco topped by an ornate English half-timbered frieze surrounding the house just under the overhanging roof. The roof has very elongated eaves supported by more than one hundred soffits, up to five feet long, which are carved into fanciful animal-like figures.

Inside the house are expansive upper and lower foyers, connected by a curved double staircase. Ornate woodwork, including wainscoting and abundant molding, is found everywhere. The interior was designed to enhance musical acoustics and in the 1920s the house was known as the "Chevy Chase Music Hall," because it hosted many performances in that period.

The original 8,000 square foot structure underwent a major top-to-bottom renovation for its hundredth anniversary, including a sunny expansion in the back and an excavation of the basement. The south-facing yard has been landscaped extensively and includes many new plantings, elaborate stonework, a large re-built garage and driveway, and a whimsical tree house attached to an enormous elm stump.

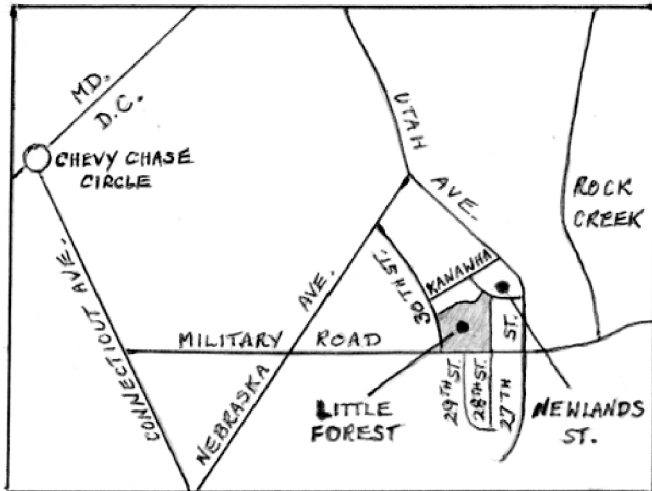
The outstanding neighborhood restaurant La Ferme will cater the champagne supper at the gala. Pianist Colton Howard will provide musical entertainment, including performance of "The Chevy Chase Two-Step" by W.G. Wilmarth and "The Chevy Chase" by Eubie Blake. An exhibit of historical interest will be featured. Invitations to the gala will be sent to CCHS members and others who have expressed interest in the society. Reservations are by mail only. For more information, please call Helen Secrest, (301) 652-4878.

**The Chevy Chase Historical Society will
hold its annual meeting and Spring Lecture
on April 24 at the newly renovated
Chevy Chase Elementary School.
See page 7 for details**

Little Forest

by Paul Magid

Residents of Chevy Chase, Maryland are familiar with the Newlands Street in their own neighborhood. They may not be aware that there is another Newlands Street in the District of Columbia at the site of what was, in the 1920s, a home of Edith McAllister Newlands, widow of Francis G. Newlands, the original developer of Chevy Chase. The history:



The headline in the Washington Business Journal read "District to sell off unused real estate." The lead paragraph of the article in the June 14-20, 1996 issue stated that District officials in Mayor Marion Barry's administration were planning to sell and lease "hundreds of pieces of unused, city-owned real estate" to "scare up new revenue and spur economic development in D.C." Among examples of holdings offered, the article said, was a "nine-acre piece of land at 5420 28th Street, N.W. assessed at almost \$3 million."

It did not take Ann Renshaw, a long time resident and member of the Advisory Neighborhood Commission, long to recognize the piece of land referred to. A feisty, tenacious urban activist who knows how to grab an issue and shake it until her adversaries beg for compromise, Ms. Renshaw is very familiar with this 8.77 acre patch of woods known as Little Forest, a tiny enclave in the National Park system. For

years, she and her neighbors have been strolling its trails and looking after its needs. This was their park and they were not about to sit still and let the District dispose of it as excess property.

Commuters hurtling down Military Road, N.W. during rush hour, hands gripping steering wheels, eyes riveted on the cars in front of them, are unlikely to notice the small stretch of woods on a low bluff on the north side of the road between 28th and 30th Streets, N.W. They are even less likely to see the small brown sign with the National Park Service logo and the words "Little Forest" in the high grass on the corner of 28th Street, N.W. and Military Road, N.W.



"Little Forest " Sign at Corner of Military Rd. & 28TH St.

Until the late 1880s, this section of Washington was farmland. Farmers raised wheat and tobacco on the gentle hills surrounding the Military Road, a rutted lane connecting the string of forts built to protect the city during the Civil War. Little Forest, on land too steep and broken for cropping, was probably a wood lot on one of the farms.

According to Eleanor Ford, a Chevy Chase historian, beginning in 1887, at about the same time that Congress was appropriating funds for the acquisition of Rock Creek Park, Francis G. Newlands and William Stewart, future partners in the soon to be founded Chevy Chase Land Company, began to buy many of these farms as part of an "accumulation of property for the building of Connecticut Avenue and an electric railway." Newlands and Stewart hoped that building the avenue and railway would stimulate the rapid growth of a high quality suburb they planned to create on tracts of land they were buying up on the District-Montgomery County line.

To avoid an escalation of land prices, Newlands used straw men like Stewart to buy a patchwork of parcels along what is the present day Military Road, N.W., that then were transferred to the company. The purchases included Little Forest. Eventually Newlands determined that this parcel was too far from the Connecticut Avenue route to be useful to his land company's development plans, so he acquired it from Stewart, together with several other parcels, and held it in his own name rather than turn it over to the company.



Utah & Newlands Streets

**Francis G.
Newlands**



Newlands had early roots in Washington. His family moved to the city when he was a boy, and aside from a brief stint at Yale, he remained in the District until he was admitted to the bar in 1869 at age 21. He then promptly moved to San Francisco to hang out his shingle. In California, he acquired a fortune, not from the practice of law, although he was very successful at it, but from his marriage in 1874 to Clara Sharon, the daughter of California land and mining speculator, William Sharon.

Clara died in 1882, leaving her husband a 34 year old widower with three young daughters. Then, in 1885, Clara's father died, making Newlands the trustee and 1/12th owner of Sharon's enormous estate. The extent of this inheritance can be measured by the fact that only a modest portion of it made Newlands the second largest property owner in Nevada.



Edith McAllister Newlands

In 1887, the wealthy widower took a European vacation. At a dinner party in Paris, according to Mrs. Ford, who is not only an historian but a relative of the family, he met Edith **McAllister**, also from California. After their return from Europe on separate ships, they met again at a dinner party in New York, completely by coincidence according to Newlands, just before both of them boarded the same train for the five day trip to San Francisco. "She was a handsome lady, very much liked by the rest of the family," says Mrs. Ford. The leisurely train trip afforded the couple an opportunity to get to know one another better, and a year later they married.



Edith Newlands Johnston

While maintaining his legal residence in Nevada for political and legal purposes, Newlands spent much of his time shuttling back and forth between California and Washington, D.C., looking after the interests of the Sharon estate and providing services to his clients. An extremely energetic man, he somehow found the time in the midst of his other endeavors to use some of his wealth and a great deal of borrowed money—a total of at least \$3 million—to accumulate his Washington and Chevy Chase holdings.

His ties to the city were strengthened when he was elected to represent Nevada in the House of Representatives and later the Senate, eventually serving a total of 22 years in Congress. When he died in 1917, among his legacies were numerous parcels of Washington land, including Little Forest. The latter was divided into shares, a third going to his widow, Edith McAllister Newlands, and the remaining two thirds to Edith and Janet Newlands Johnston, his two surviving daughters by his first wife Clara. (The sisters had married



Janet Newlands Johnston

A comparison of maps of the area shows that sometime between 1925 and 1931 Mrs. Newlands built a house at the east end of the property that she used as a country

residence—perhaps a quiet place to retreat to when her social life at her primary home downtown became too hectic. Today a white, wood frame house with a stone chimney stands behind a high chain link fence in approximately the same location. Some neighborhood residents think it was hers. But, says Mrs. Ford, “I was told by Senator Newlands’ granddaughter that [hers] was torn down.” A surviving family member who actually saw the place says that it was built of stone, rather than wood. She recalls that the stonework was similar to that of the present chimney. Whether or not the present house is the one that the widow Newlands built, the remainder of the land—Little Forest, today separated from the white house by a short stretch of 28th Street, N.W. built in the 1940s—formed its grounds, a wooded and private parkland.

When Mrs. Newlands died in 1939 at the age of 79, her will directed her executors to set aside “three acres of my forest lands in the District of Columbia, designated by me as ‘Little Forest,’” as a memorial to her husband. She further ordered that the land be transferred to the District of Columbia to be used as a park, with the proviso that if it were not kept as a memorial to her husband, it would revert to her heirs.

In June 1942, the trustees of her estate conveyed the acreage to the District in compliance with her instructions. At the same time, Edith and Janet Newlands Johnston also conveyed their 5.7-acre portion of the parcel to the District under the identical conditions.

In December 1948, the District transferred the land to the National Park Service under the same conditions: that it be used as a park in memory of Senator Newlands, and that if it were not, it would revert to the heirs. So it remains today.

The land now bears only faint signs of its former life as the grounds of a country home. It is accessible from both its east and west ends. On the west, a ravine parallels 30th Street, N.W. It is possible to climb up its slope on one of two paths worn by visitors over the years. Exposed tree roots make a natural

staircase up the steep sides of the hills. Access to this trail is marked by a wooden pedestal containing a poem to Little Forest mounted under Plexiglas. It appeared without fanfare one morning a couple of years ago, a spontaneous offering from the son of one of the Forest’s patrons, Kit Paddack.

Regular users, mostly dog walkers, usually enter the Forest on its eastern side, from 28th Street, N.W., across the road from where Mrs. Newlands built her country retreat. Here, by a brown

plastic trash bin set on a concrete slab and a flat rock on which teenagers have scrawled a few mildly obscene comments, a narrow path can be seen meandering through the underbrush. It is still bordered in places with white quartz and is strewn with pieces of broken slate, probably the remnants of a more formal walkway. About a hundred feet down the path, a collection of small stone monoliths appears out of the surrounding leaf mold. At first glance they appear to signal the presence of Druids in the wood. Closer inspection suggests, somewhat less romantically, that they were actually cement supports for a picnic table and two benches, possibly built by the National Park Service in a short lived burst of interest in improving its newly acquired property.

The path divides beyond the monoliths and divides again at several points, crisscrossed by smaller trails, some man-made and others worn by the families of deer that often inhabit the Forest at night, vacating it for the less accessible reaches of Rock Creek Park during the day. The main path dips and rises again, circling the highest point in the Forest, an ivy and periwinkle covered hillock framed at its base by stone slabs, before descending at last into the ravine at 30th Street, N.W.

Non-native flora abound in this small area, further evidence of Little Forest’s domesticated past. Park Service naturalist Sue Salmon points out examples: the English ivy that covers the ground and swarms up the sides of some of the larger trees, the multi-floral rose bushes once used as root stock for their ornamental cousins, and a few remaining rhododendron. She adds the bush honeysuckle, and the odd bedraggled hemlock and cedar, to the list. The presence of tulip poplar trees, tall with straight trunks, and a number of silver beeches, are clear “indications that the area has been disturbed,” she says. In National Park Service parlance, this means it was once cut over, probably during the Civil War, when much of this area was cleared for defense, firewood, and building material. Beech and tulip poplar are among the first hardwood trees to grow back. Most of the other vegetation, including red and white oak, dogwood, black cherry, mountain laurel, and even the American holly, is native to the area.

Little Forest has been a playground over the years for several



28TH Street Entrance

generations of neighborhood children. They built forts on the hillsides, hid their Playboy magazines in tree hollows, and played hide and seek in the underbrush. The Forest was also a haunt for students from nearby St. Johns School who roasted hot dogs and marshmallows over campfires they made in a small clearing not far from the monoliths, and drank their beer and smoked their pot, leaving teenage artifacts for others to find. A homeless man once lived in the Forest until a neighbor, fearing for the children, somehow had him removed from the scene.

Now the children have grown and moved away, and the St. Johns students have lost interest, or perhaps are under firmer school control. Little Forest stands alone. It does not grow old and shabby from neglect, though. The park is well cared for.

In 1979, upset by a proliferation of trash along the Forest's borders, a group of neighbors, under the leadership of Sheila Loftus, a vigorous and plain spoken neighborhood resident, decided to take action. They formed an organization proclaimed on its letterhead as the Friends of the Little Forest. Since she knew full well "that trash begets trash," Ms. Loftus says that she, Kit Paddack, the organization's Secretary, and Ann Renshaw began to lobby the newly appointed National Park Service director, Robert Stanton, to take care of the problem.

We invited him to tea," Ms. Loftus says. "He didn't come, but they finally cleaned up the mess." Further lobbying resulted in the installation of the trash container on 28th Street, N.W. Now, weekly trash pickups by the Park Service empty not only the container on 28th Street, N.W., but another installed personally by Ms. Loftus on 30th Street, N.W., near the poem pedestal.

The interior of Little Forest is strewn with fallen trees, many the result of a vicious windstorm that swept the neighborhood in 1989. The policy of the Park Service, as explained by Ms. Salmon is "to leave the trees where they fall unless they block trails." They return important nutrients to the soil and provide cover for wildlife and birds. Human trash is not left behind, though. Mr. Paddack walks his sturdy old retriever, Thunder, along the trails each day, carrying a plastic grocery bag that he fills with the cans, bottles, and crushed cigarette packs that children and passing motorists have tossed into the woods

The Friends have thrown their energy into other projects to keep Little Forest safe and healthy. A small stream skirts the edge of the Forest and its waters used to pool at the Kanawha and 30th Street, N.W. corner of the Forest. "The water was high enough to have ducks on it," Ms. Loftus says. Although there was some division among the neighbors as to whether the pond was a desirable feature, the pro-salamander faction

was outgunned by those who were bothered by the algae stench of the stagnant water. After much effort, the District finally was induced to put in a culvert that drained the marshy area. When the sides of the drainage area began to show signs of collapse, one of the elderly neighbors whose house bordered the area was seen working with his shovel to repair the damage. "He passed away soon after that," Mr. Paddack says, perhaps from the strain of the work. If so, he was the first casualty in the ongoing battle to preserve Little Forest.

When Ms. Renshaw read in the Washington Business Journal that the Barry administration planned to sell the park as "surplus property," she and the Friends of the Little Forest took immediate action. She recalls that, "I phoned D.C.'s Housing and Community Development Department and Rock Creek Park to inquire about the property [listed as 5420 28th Street, N.W.] that I knew was the Little Forest Park." She also contacted William Shields, then Superintendent of Rock Creek Park, who was ready to help. He provided Ms. Renshaw with copies of the District's own documents confirming the 1948 transfer of the land to the jurisdiction of the National Capital Parks System, as well as the covenant that it be kept as parkland.

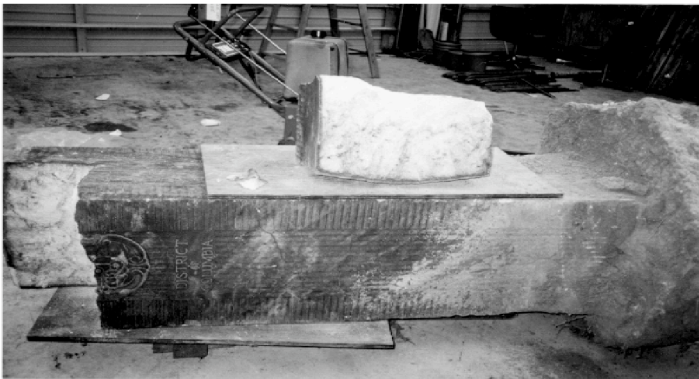
When confronted with the documentation of the transfer, the District removed the For Sale sign from the Forest. Despite Ms. Renshaw's repeated inquiries, though, they never provided written confirmation that they had removed the land from their surplus property list.

A Spring 1999 call to Ms. Dorothy Tolso in the District's Office of Property Management confirmed that the District now has, indeed, removed Little Forest from the List. According to Ms. Tolson, though, the property now is registered under D.C. Recreation and Parks. "It belongs to the District," she says. "They have jurisdiction. They are in charge of it." That would be news to the staff at the Rock Creek Nature Center and to the National Park Service publications people, who distribute a brochure and map of Rock Creek Park that clearly shows Little Forest as federal parkland.

The people who live around Little Forest know that, as a technical and legal matter, the land is under the jurisdiction of the Park Service. They have read the transfer documents that are readily available at the District Surveyor's office. And, after all, it is the Park Service, not the District, that empties the trash bins (although, in fairness, the District did build the culvert). Unless the District attempts to sell the Forest or turn it into basketball courts, though, the question of jurisdiction does not seem to be a matter of immediate concern. In reality, Little Forest is an orphan: Too small to really capture the attention of either the federal or the District governments. It is up to the people that use it and live

Contributions Sought to Repair and Re-site "Entrance Markers" at Chevy Chase Circle

Last April, a motorist struck the obelisk located in the planted "triangle" on the south side of Chevy Chase Circle, knocking it askew. When the National Park Service later attempted to move the obelisk, a piece of it broke away. It now resides in the Rock Creek maintenance facility, with a matching obelisk that formerly was located on the northern side of the circle, then disappeared, and later was found in the yard of a D.C. resident. The matching obelisk is damaged as well.



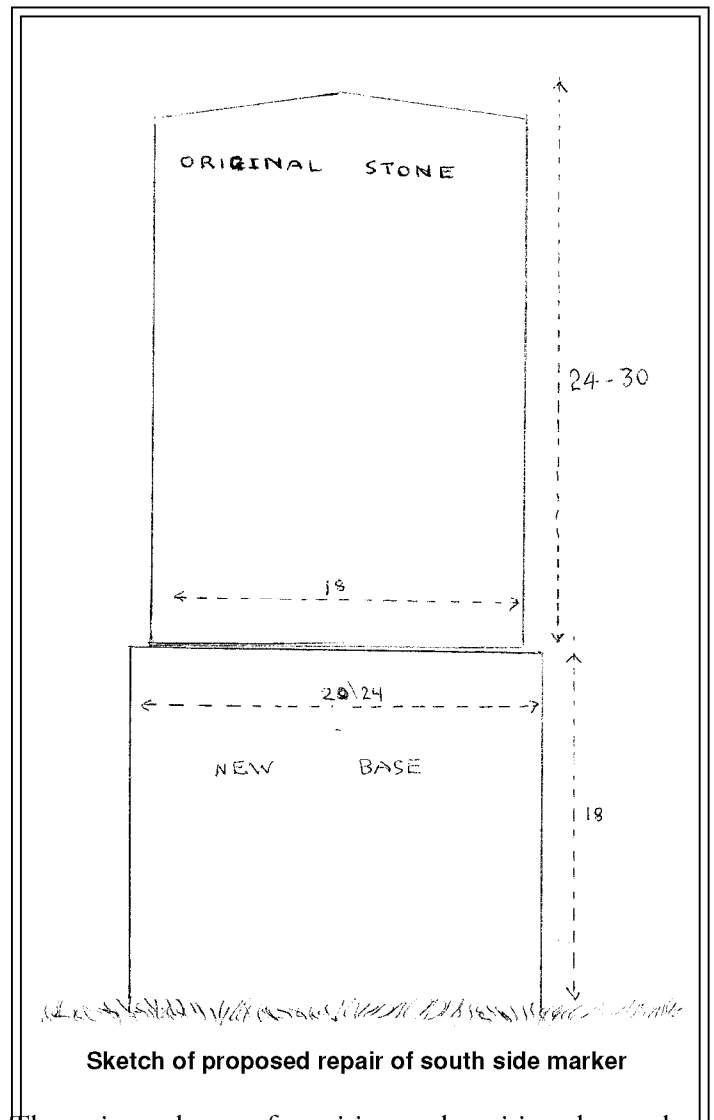
Broken G.C.A. marker from Connecticut Avenue on the south side of Chevy Chase Circle

Dedicated on the same October, 1933 afternoon as the Newlands Memorial Fountain in Chevy Chase Circle, this pair of obelisks was the sixth set to be placed by the Garden Club of America at the city's important gateways in 1932 and 1933, to commemorate the bicentennial of George Washington's birthday. Like Newlands Fountain, they were an integral part of the effort to develop impressive entrances to the capital.

The Garden Club of Chevy Chase is engaged in an effort to repair the markers and to re-site them in safe locations at the circle. Alicia Ravenel, former president of the Garden Club and member of the Board of Directors, Friends of Chevy Chase Circle, has obtained a rendering by sculptor Constantine Seferlis and his son Andy of how the damaged portion of the south side marker can be removed, and the marker placed on a new base so that it will have its original height. Mr. Seferlis has performed sculpture in stone for the National Cathedral, Hillwood, and other notable patrons.

generous donation toward this goal from the Washington National Monument Association. The club welcomes further contributions to this restoration of part of Chevy Chase's heritage. Contributions are tax deductible, and may be sent to:

Garden Club of Chevy Chase (Markers)
Mrs. J. Michael McGarry
5910 Cedar Parkway
Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815



The estimated cost of repairing and re-siting the markers is \$8,000. The Garden Club of Chevy Chase has received a

The club and the Friends of Chevy Chase Circle also urge citizens of Chevy Chase to encourage preservation of the circle, including the fountain, both of which were damaged by another motorist in January 2001, by writing to:

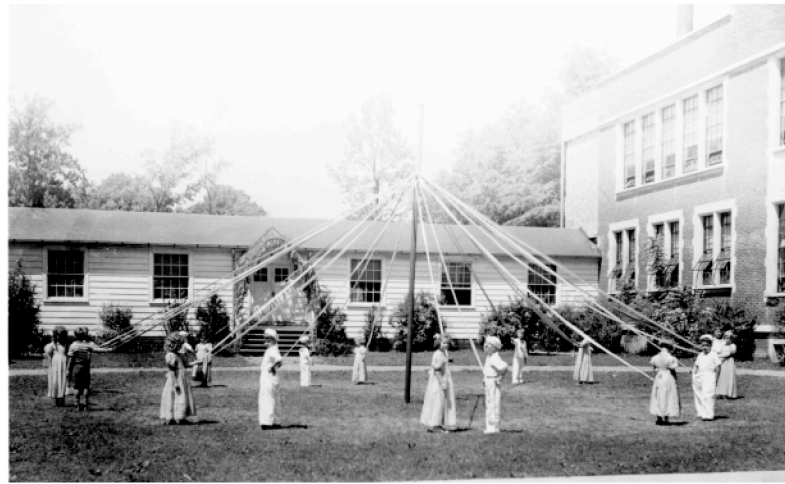
SPRING PROGRAM: RENOVATION IS IN THE AIR

CCHS will hold its 2001 Spring Program on Tuesday, April 24th at 8:00 p.m., at the freshly renovated and expanded Chevy Chase Elementary School. This change in location from the usual venue, the Chevy Chase Village Hall, is occasioned by the closing of the Village Hall for its own renovation.

The Society invites area residents to join in an evening that will take advantage of the location at Chevy Chase Elementary to feature the history as well as the refurbishment of this important and interesting Chevy Chase institution. Instead of a single speaker, the program will include a guided tour of the school with brief, informal talks on the “nuts and bolts” of the renovation project. In addition, CCHS will mount several

CCHS board member Julie Thomas will share some of her personal memories of long gone Chevy Chase schools such as Miss Libbey’s Nursery School and Leland Junior High School, as well as Mrs. Thomas’ remarkable discovery, in Texas, of a scrapbook filled with photos and mementos of the Chevy Chase College for Young Ladies that was located on the current site of the National 4-H Conference Center on Connecticut Avenue. Others’ recollections of these old schools will be most welcome.

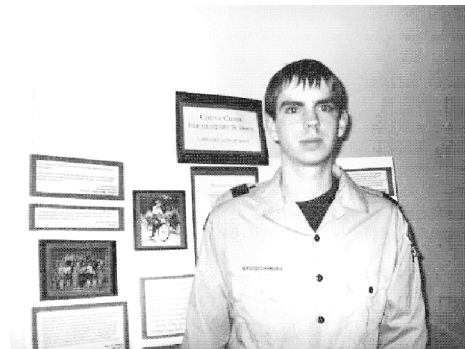
A brief Annual Meeting, including election of officers, will be held at the beginning of the evening. The slate of nominees can be found on page eight of this newsletter. Light refreshments will be served.



“Long Hall” and courtyard

Scouting Out History

Chevy Chase Elementary School alumnus Tom Hartman’s Eagle Scout project is creation of a history of his alma mater through oral and written interviews of those connected with the school. A member of Boy Scout Troup 255 and now a senior at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School, Tom attended Chevy Chase Elementary from 1991 to 1995. “My four years at Chevy Chase gave me a great education and left me with many memories, like Mrs. Marsteller’s egg drop competition in sixth grade,” he relates. “The school is also a community center for many of us in the neighborhood. Many of my summers were spent at Chevy Chase at the county’s playground camp. My first volunteer job was a camp counselor at



Historian Tom Hartman

Now that the school has been renovated, with much of it torn down and rebuilt, Tom wants to capture memories of the old Chevy Chase Elementary and events that took place there. He is working with Troop 255 and other alumni to present his project as an exhibit at the dedication of the renovated school on April 29, 2001. As he observes, this snapshot of the school’s rich history not only will help him reach his goal of becoming an Eagle Scout, but will preserve part of Chevy Chase Elementary’s past for future students and friends of the school. Those with questions or information about this project can reach Tom at Ridgewood@aol.com.



Chevy Chase Elementary West wing 1936—present

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