



## “The Lost Farms and Estates of Washington, D.C.” is Spring Lecture Topic



**Architectural historian Kim Prothro Williams will speak on Washington’s rural past**

Try to imagine vineyards in Cleveland Park, and barrels of tobacco being rolled down Wisconsin Avenue to the port at Georgetown. Like the rest of America, the bustling, urban, Washington area was once rural, once home to agrarian landscapes and country estates. The story of the period just before the establishment, urbanization and suburbanization of our area will be told at the CCHS Spring Lecture, “The Lost Farms and Estates of

Washington, D.C.” The illustrated lecture will be presented by Kim Prothro Williams, veteran architectural historian and recognized expert on the history of Washington and Chevy Chase. The program will be at 4:00 p.m. on Sunday, March 10, at the Chevy Chase Village Hall, 5906 Connecticut Ave., Chevy Chase, Maryland. The program is free and open to the public.

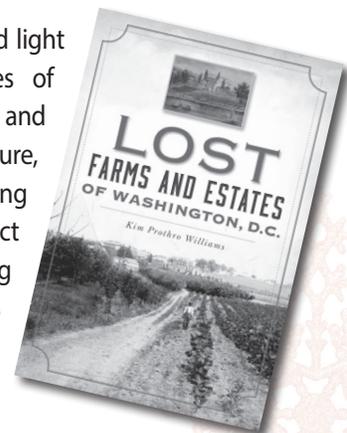
The discovery of a springhouse from a mid-1800s farm just two blocks off Wisconsin Avenue launched Williams on a search for other remnants of Washington’s rural past. After much effort and research, she and her team from the D.C. Historic Preservation Office identified some 84 structures that have survived to tell the tale of rural Washington. Though but a fraction of the structures that once stood in this landscape, these remaining buildings, together with the history of their owners and records concerning now-demolished buildings, tell a fascinating tale of life in our region before it became the seat of our national government. That story is told in Williams’ new book, *Lost Farms and Estates of Washington, D.C.* In addition, her book relates how the new capital area grew, landscaped its

parks and gardens, and fed its growing population, including the role of slavery and the devastation of the Civil War.

Williams is an architectural historian with the D.C. Historic Preservation Office. For more than twenty-five years, she has been researching and writing about historic building and communities in D.C., Virginia and Maryland, with her primary focus being to evaluate buildings for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Most recently, she has been identifying the area’s historic alleyways and alley buildings, rural buildings and other outliers that survived late 19th century and early 20th century urban and social reform efforts, suburbanization and later development. She has been involved in the study and documentation of a range of individual buildings and building types, as well as many neighborhood and institutional historic districts, including the historic district in Chevy Chase Village.

Williams is a long-time friend of CCHS. In 2006, she appeared in, and assisted with the research for, CCHS’ award winning documentary, *Chevy Chase Maryland: A Streetcar to Home*. In 1988, she co-authored (with Elizabeth Jo Lampl) the most comprehensive and definitive history of Chevy Chase to date, *Chevy Chase: A Home Suburb for the Nation’s Capital*. In addition, she has published other books, articles and heritage trail brochures dealing with the built environment, and she is a sought-after speaker.

A reception will follow the lecture, and light refreshments will be served. Copies of Williams’ book will be available for sale and signing by the author. Prior to the lecture, CCHS will hold a brief annual meeting at which the membership will elect directors-at-large. Questions concerning the program may be directed to CCHS at [info@chevychasehistory.org](mailto:info@chevychasehistory.org) or 301-656-6141.





## Mansions Made From Bread – Part II

By Bob Andrews

*The stately mansion on Rockville Pike in North Bethesda, now known as the “Mansion at Strathmore,” was once owned by Charles Corby. At the same time, his brother, William, owned the imposing “Corby Mansion” or “Ishpiming” on the northeast portion of Chevy Chase Circle. The brothers made their fortunes by producing bread, cakes and other baked goods. William’s story was told in Part I of this article, featured in the CCHS Fall 2018 Newsletter. The story of Charles, his home, and his family is told below.*

In the early days of the 20th century, with an economy dominated by railroads, oil, and steel—and moguls such as Rockefeller and Carnegie—two of the most elegant mansions in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase area were owned by brothers whose fortunes rose from the sweet smell of freshly-baked bread.

Charles Israel Corby was born in 1871, the son of Israel Corby, a small town baker in Binghamton, New York. At about 10 years of age, he began running errands for a local clothier for one dollar a week. In his late teens, he went to work for the M. W.

Quick bakery in Ithaca. In 1892, Charles married 16-year-old Hattie Casterlin, daughter of Ithaca’s Western Union manager. The same year, the couple moved to Washington to join Charles’ brother, William, who had moved to the nation’s capital in 1890. Together, William

and Charles formed the Corby Brothers Baking Company. Their parents soon joined the brothers in Washington, along with 17-year-old brother Robert. Robert had just completed his studies at the Chidlow Institute of Baking and Milling Technology in Chicago, specializing in the chemical side of baking, studying mold and bacteria. The year after they arrived in Washington, Charles and Hattie became parents of a son, Karl William Corby.

The Corby brothers baking business was headquartered in a large facility on Brightwood Avenue, later renamed Georgia Avenue, in northwest D.C., near Howard University. The company grew rapidly, due in large part to the Corby’s focus on automation. They received patents for high-

speed mixers and a dough molding machine, inventions that they licensed to other bakeries throughout the nation. Thanks to Robert’s knowledge of chemistry, the company was among the first to install a laboratory and on-site refrigeration in its plant, leading to the creation of new ways to make and sell cultivated yeast. They established a baking and delivery schedule that enabled the company to advertise the delivery of hot bread and fresh cakes to local stores three times a day. The Corbys were also the first to wrap their loaves in waxed paper. As their business expanded, the brothers opened additional plants

in Alexandria and Richmond. The company eventually employed more than 450 workers, and produced more than 90,000 loaves of bread and two-and-a-half tons of cakes each day.

As his fortunes rose, Charles decided to buy a summer home outside the city. In 1908, he paid \$35,000 for the 99-acre farm of James Oyster, located on Rockville Pike near Garret Park,

Maryland. After several renovations over the next six years, the Corbys made the now-40-room home their permanent residence in 1914. Charles continued to buy up surrounding land until the farm grew to nearly 400 acres that included 21 buildings, a dairy barn, a private golf course, pasture for raising prize-winning cattle and chickens, and what was reputed to be the largest private greenhouse in the area. By combining his own name and that of his son Karl and wife Hattie, Charles often referred to his estate as “Chakarlhath.”

The Corbys marketed their products masterfully. In February 1904, the company advertised in the *Alexandria*



**Charles and Hattie Corby**  
*Photo courtesy of Strathmore*



**The Mansion at Strathmore in the late 1980s.**

*Gazette* that a free hatchet would be given to purchasers of Corby bread on February 22, birthday of George Washington, who legend has it, famously chopped down a cherry tree. In the summer of 1915, *The Evening Star* reported that the Corby Baking Company was donating over 60,000 fly swatters for the customers of businesses that carried their bread. "There can be no more important work," said Charles, "than that of combating the fly nuisance."

In 1916, as Congress began debate on the prohibition of alcohol, the Corby brothers argued for an exemption on their \$2 million annual production of grain alcohol as a by-product of yeast production. By the time Prohibition went into effect, however, the company had sold its yeast business to Fleischmann.

Charles and Hattie welcomed notable visitors to their estate. In 1916, Charles hosted the governor of Pennsylvania, Martin G. Brumbaugh, at Chakarlahat. While there, the governor suffered a serious attack of gall stones and remained bedridden for several days. The Corby estate made news again six years later, when it was reported in *The Washington Post* on June 11, 1922, that the aviation pioneer, Henry A. Berliner, had successfully launched a prototype helicopter off the estate grounds. Another important visitor to the mansion in 1924 was first lady Mrs. Calvin Coolidge, who attended a meeting of the Montgomery County Women's Republican Club held at the estate.

One of the most important—and most popular—renovations Charles made to the mansion was the

installation of a music room that housed a full pipe organ. The house became the frequent scene of musical concerts, one of which, in 1924, hosted a crowd of 400 guests.

In 1925, the Corby Baking Company was sold to Continental Baking Company, new owners of the Indianapolis-based Taggart Baking Company, creators of Wonder Bread, and shortly later, Twinkies. Contrary to an old urban myth, the Corbys did not invent Wonder Bread. Charles retired that same year and spent the winter in Miami Beach, where he and Hattie loved to watch polo games. While sitting in the stands of the Nautilus Polo Fields on February 13, 1926, Charles died suddenly of a heart attack. He was 54

**Corby Cakes**

**It's just simply delicious--and as healthful as it is tasty.**

Corby Cake is made so absolutely pure that no matter how much you are tempted to eat it won't harm the most delicate digestion. That's why it is so safe to give the kiddies all the Corby Cake they want.

You can almost serve a different Corby Cake each day for a month--so varied is the assortment--but whichever it may be--the cake in the carton; or the rich loaf; or the luscious layer--you may know that--

**It is 100% Pure--and--100% satisfying.**

Send to your grocer or delicatessen for the kind of a Corby Cake you want--in the size you want--and he will deliver it fresh from our ovens.

**The Corby Baking Company**

**A typical ad for Corby cakes. *The Evening Star*, Washington, D.C., September 2, 1919**

years old. At the time of his death, his estate was valued at \$1 million, or about \$14 million today. He left the mansion and 107 acres to his wife, Hattie, along with “all the farm equipment, automobiles, and personal effects.”

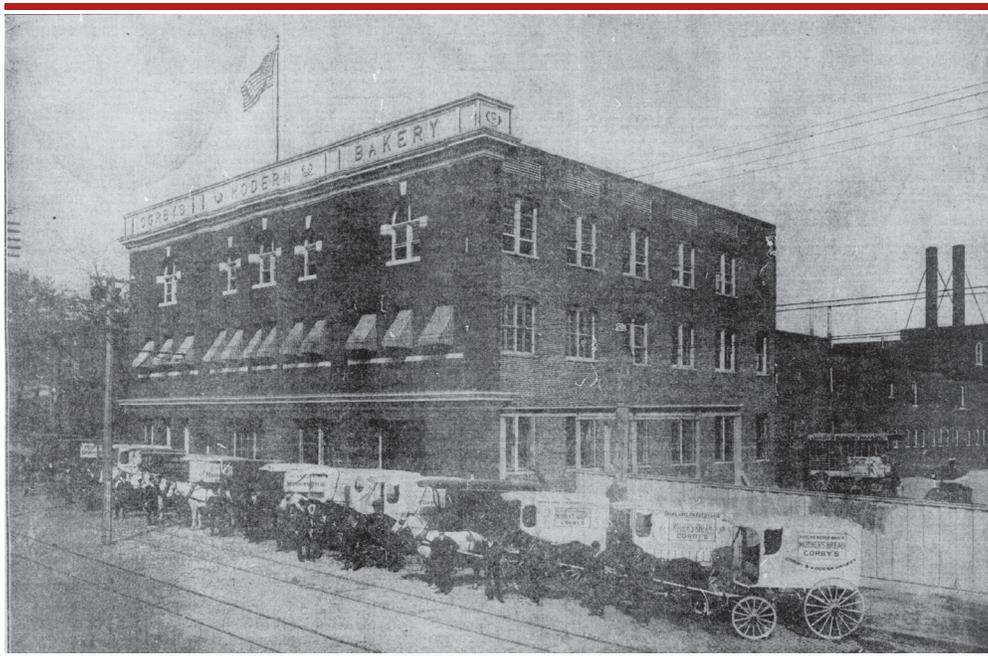
In 1925 and 1926, Charles had purchased an additional 300 acres west of Rockville Pike from Washington banker and chair of the National Geographic Society, John Joy Edson. Shortly before his unexpected death in 1926, Charles gave this land to his son, Karl, who named it Timberlawn. Karl, though a lawyer and banker, had also been a key figure in the Corby Baking Company. After acquiring the Timberlawn estate, he became well-known as a civic leader and philanthropist in Washington and the host of prestigious horse shows on his property. Like his parents, he and his wife, Mary, enjoyed spending their winters in Miami. While there in February 1937, at the age of 43, Karl died suddenly, like his father had 11 years earlier.

After losing both her husband and her son, Hattie continued to live in the mansion, where she died on October 3, 1941. In 1943, two parcels of the original estate, including the mansion, were transferred to St. Mary’s Academy and became a convent and school known as St. Angela Hall. In 1977, the mansion and an additional 30 acres were sold to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association for its headquarters. Two years later, in 1979, the mansion and

eleven acres were deeded over to Montgomery County in connection with plans to create an arts center for the Bethesda area. The mansion was renamed Strathmore Hall after the road that borders the property. Today, it is known as the Mansion at Strathmore and continues to function as a center for the arts, hosting intimate musical performances and rotating art exhibitions.

In 2001, work began on a new building on the grounds of the former estate—the Music Center at Strathmore, a concert hall seating almost 2,000 people and an education center. A public/private venture among the State of Maryland, Montgomery County and private philanthropists, the Music Center opened in 2005 and presents world-class performances by major international musicians from a wide variety of musical genres.

Karl Corby’s widow, Mary Ray Graff Corby, later married George Calvert Bowie, a descendent of the original Lord Calvert. The couple continued to live in the house at Timberlawn until 1961 when it was leased to the first director of the newly-established Peace Corps, Sargent Shriver, and his wife Eunice Kennedy. It was on these grounds that Mrs. Shriver began the Special Olympics in 1962. As land was sold off to developers, the Shrivens moved out in 1979.



**The Corby Baking Company plant and its horse-drawn delivery wagons.**  
*The Washington Times, Washington, D.C., January 28, 1906*



## CCHS Salutes *Chevy Chase at Home* on its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!

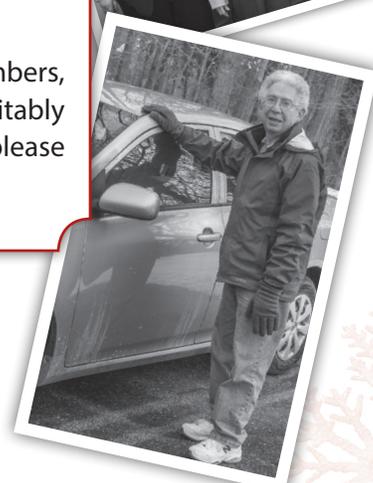
This year marks the 10th anniversary of the founding of *Chevy Chase At Home* (CC@H), the organization of neighbors helping neighbors to continue to live at home as long as they wish, while staying connected to the community. This important milestone is cause for celebration! Plans are in the works for a festive champagne reception and silent auction in May.

It all started back in 2008 with a conversation that two Town of Chevy Chase neighbors, Naomi Kaminsky and Joan Urban, had while walking their dogs. They gathered a group of neighbors who were interested in starting an organization, or "village," to provide volunteer services and activities for older adults so they can continue to live in their own homes.

Over these ten years, 150 volunteers of all ages have provided over 10,000 services including rides to medical appointments, computer/tech assistance, minor household repairs, friendly visits, walks in the neighborhood, informal get-togethers, lectures, and much more. CC@H has innovated with home security checks done in cooperation with the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service, a Storm Buddies program, a Music and Movement class, and a volunteer training program that has become a model for similar villages forming nearby.

CC@H has sponsored programs on numerous topics featuring well-known writers and speakers including Mark Shields, Judith Viorst, Geraldine Brooks, Guy Raz, Alexandra Zapruder, Marvin Kalb, Mark Shriver, Charlie Cook and Judith Martin.

CC@H continues to benefit from the support of its members, local municipalities, Montgomery County, and charitably minded individuals in the community. To learn more, please visit [www.chevychaseathome.org](http://www.chevychaseathome.org).



## The Great Blizzard of '99

The sketch below is one of 45 entertaining stories about fascinating people, places and events in Chevy Chase history included in CCHS' most recent book, "The Wizard of Chevy Chase". Written by Diane Riker, the book is available for purchase on the CCHS website, [chevychasehistory.org](http://chevychasehistory.org).

It started snowing on February 5, 1899, and did not let up entirely until Valentine's Day. At first the snowfall was greeted with enthusiasm. It was "fine sleigh riding weather." But as days wore on, and fuel supplies dwindled and the mailman did not come and neither did the trolley cars, delight waned.

### CHEVY CHASE CUT OFF.

The Suburb Literally Buried in  
Mammoth Snowdrifts.

Headline from *The Washington Times*, Washington, D.C.,  
February 14, 1899

At the time, Chevy Chase counted only 30 households, building sales having been set back by the Depression of 1893. The population included not just the houses in the new development, but the sprawling farmsteads from which new lots would later be cut.

Snow fell for 51 hours from February 11 to 14, as the storm which had begun as the "Great Arctic Outbreak of '99" was immediately followed by the "Great Eastern Blizzard of '99" with winds of hurricane force.

In southern Maryland, accumulations exceeded 50 inches and the winds whipped the snow into drifts 20 feet high. *The Washington Times* reported that at the Chevy Chase Club and nearly all the houses here, the view from the ground floor windows was "entirely obstructed."

"The suffering from the cold in this suburb is not as great as in other sections [since] most of the families had put in large supplies of coal." But the real fear was that, had the storm not let up, the supply of food would run short and "there are no stores within several miles."

The Weather Bureau, established in 1870, was in for a bit of ribbing. The county newspaper said that partridges and rabbits were the better predictors. And these had fled to cover on the 4th.

"We didn't think on Saturday night that we would have such a storm, but the birds knew it to a nicety and each covey sought shelter as best it could," a reporter for the *Montgomery County Sentinel* wrote on Feb. 10, 1899.

And though the thermometer on the roof of the Weather Bureau building, then at 24th and M Streets NW, registered one degree below zero, it was said to be 12 below at the Navy Yard. The Bureau's thermometer must be "swaddled in felt or like material," said a Navy man.

A "vast army of shovelers" was removing snow from city streets. In deference to their exposure to bitter cold, their daily pay was increased from \$1.00 to \$1.25.

The storm affected the entire east coast, moving in from the north and west. Chunks of ice were seen floating down the Mississippi River and out into the Gulf of Mexico.

Weather trumped politics as a focus of interest at the Capitol. A weather map was located in the lobby of each house of Congress and, during the morning, congressmen and senators crowded about them, looking for news from their districts. Even an eloquent speaker could not lure them from the lobbies.

The Post Office, understandably, failed in its appointed mission. And that left people lamenting the loss of Valentine's Day cards. No one, no matter how motivated, could get to your door with paper lace and cupids.



Almost Frozen.  
*The Evening Times*, Washington, D.C.,  
February 14, 1899



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