



CHEVY CHASE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1981-2021 Celebrating 40 Years!

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2021

“A Closer Look at Chevy Chase Founder Francis Newlands”

April 28, 2021, at 7:30 pm
Register at chevychasehistory.org



Nevada Senator
Francis G. Newlands

It is well known in our community that Francis G. Newlands was the founder of Chevy Chase. He and his associates conceived the idea to transform farmland on the outskirts of the nation's capital into a bucolic residential community that became one of America's first streetcar suburbs. First a Congressman and then a Senator, Newlands represented Nevada in the US Congress for 24 years. Among his accomplishments was the

passage of the Newlands Reclamation Act, which funded irrigation projects for the arid lands in 20 western states. What is perhaps less well known is that Newlands held and espoused racist views that we find abhorrent today.

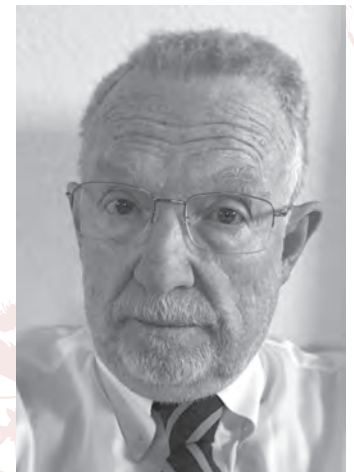
The complete story of Newlands will be told by historian and author William Rowley at the CCHS 2021 Spring lecture, “A Closer Look at Chevy Chase Founder Francis Newlands.” The program will be held virtually, via Zoom, on Wednesday, April 28, at 7:30 pm. **The program is free and open to the public, but advance registration is required on the CCHS website, chevychasehistory.org.** Registrants will be emailed a link to join the program from the comfort of home.

While Newlands achieved much and was progressive on many issues of his day, it is important to acknowledge that he also held racist views that were extreme even in his own time. Though Newlands' views on race are a matter of public record and have been well-documented over the years, the social justice and racial reckoning presently occurring in both our nation and our community have caused greater public attention to be paid to his egregious racism. Among

other things, Newlands sought to limit immigration to whites only and to deny Black Americans the right to vote.

Professor Rowley is an authoritative voice on the paradox that is Newlands—that he could be a leading Progressive on many issues and at the same time have such repugnant beliefs on matters of race. Rowley is Emeritus Professor at the University of Nevada, Reno, where he joined the faculty more than four decades ago. Following an undergraduate degree from the University of Puget Sound, he earned both a Master's degree and Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska.

The American West, Nevada history, and American environmental history have been the focus of Professor Rowley's teaching. His research has produced numerous articles and books, including the definitive biography of Newlands, *Reclaiming the Arid West: The Career of Francis G. Newlands*. In addition to books and articles, Professor Rowley has presented numerous papers at academic conferences, written almost a hundred book reviews for academic journals, and served as editor of the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* for almost two decades. Professor Rowley also served as Chair of the History Department at the University of Nevada, Reno, and as Executive Secretary of the Western History Association from 1974 to 1991. In addition, he has served on the governing boards of several national history societies and as the local coordinator for federal grants to promote the teaching of history and provide professional development for US history teachers.



Professor William Rowley will
speak on Francis Newlands

For further information about the program, contact CCHS at 301-656-6141 or at info@chevychasehistory.org.

Celebrating One of America's First Streetcar Suburbs



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Open 10 a.m. to 12 noon, and 1 to 3 p.m.
on Tuesday and by appointment

The Chevy Chase Historical Society collects, records, interprets and shares materials relating to the history of Chevy Chase, Maryland, one of America's first streetcar suburbs. The organization provides resources for historical research and sponsors a variety of programs and activities to foster knowledge and appreciation of the community's history.

**CCHS 40th Anniversary
Virtual Spring Gala**

**Party on
the Porch!**

In celebration of its 40th Anniversary the Chevy Chase Historical Society is hosting its first-ever virtual Spring Gala, **Party on the Porch!**

Thursday, May 20, at 6:30

Party on the Porch celebrates the porch, a prominent and beloved feature of so many Chevy Chase homes.

Doug Kammerer, News4's Chief Meteorologist and Chevy Chase resident, will join the fun as our neighborhood host.

Architectural Historian Sandy Heiler will lead a virtual tour through the surprising history of the porch.

Chevy Chase designers, Katy Anderson, Sarah Hayes, and Deborah Scheck will demonstrate ideas for hosting a party on your porch.

Guests will receive an access link for their households to view the event and a party basket for two filled with libations and hors d'oeuvres from Chevy Chase favorite La Ferme Restaurant.

Invitations will be sent by email.

To receive an invitation, please send your email address to CCHS at info@chevychasehistory.org or call 301-656-6141

Get ready to Party on the Porch!

The Circle, the Fountain, and Francis G. Newlands



The Newlands fountain in Chevy Chase Circle

CCHS is pleased to be working with the National Park Service to prepare one or two wayside exhibits to be placed at Chevy Chase Circle. The exhibits will provide a historic context for, and educational information about, the founder of Chevy Chase, Nevada Senator Francis G. Newlands. The project came about as a result of actions by the DC Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3/4G, which covers the area south and east of Chevy Chase Circle, including Chevy Chase DC. The story involves the Circle, the fountain at its center, and Chevy Chase founder Francis Newlands, as described below.

Chevy Chase Circle

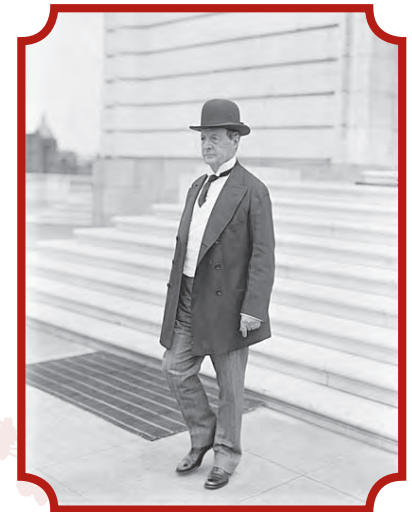
Chevy Chase Circle is not only a beloved local landmark, but also forms a historic gateway between Chevy Chase, Maryland, and the nation's capital. It is often assumed that the Circle is split evenly between Maryland and DC, but in fact, most of the Circle and virtually the entire fountain lie on the DC side of the border. The Circle and the fountain are actually owned by the federal government. They are part of the US National Park Service system, and are managed and maintained by the Park Service through its Rock Creek Park operations. The fountain at the center of the Circle is a national monument, authorized by the US Congress to honor Francis Newlands.

In 1992, the Friends of Chevy Chase Circle was established and initially funded as a committee of CCHS in cooperation with the National Park Service. In 2013, the Friends was revitalized with new leadership, new energy, and new status as an independent nonprofit organization. The mission of the volunteer organization is "working with the National Park Service to renew, beautify, maintain and protect Chevy Chase Circle, a historic landmark and a gateway to the Nation's Capital." The

group now works more closely than ever with the National Park Service to keep the Circle both beautiful and safe.

Francis G. Newlands

In the 1890s, Francis Newlands was an heir to the Comstock Lode fortune, a US Congressman from Nevada, and a visionary real estate developer. As newly-invented electric streetcars began making it possible for city dwellers to live away from their place of work, Newlands had the foresight to see how farmland on the outskirts of the nation's capital could become a bucolic residential community.



Francis G. Newlands

Newlands and his associates quietly bought up several thousand acres along the route that would become Connecticut Avenue. Through their Chevy Chase Land Company they sold lots, where buyers with sufficient means would build handsome homes along broad, artfully landscaped streets. In 1892, the Land Company opened a streetcar line from Washington to Chevy Chase Lake, providing easy transit to the new suburb. To further attract residents, they provided amenities including a man-made lake and amusement park, schools and churches. This "streetcar suburb" was among the first in the nation and embodied the new suburban ideal of the late nineteenth century.



**Francis Newlands
as a young man.**

Act, which provided for large-scale irrigation projects that enabled agriculture and economic development in the arid West. He sponsored the Newlands Resolution, which supported the annexation of Hawaii as a US territory and was passed by both houses of Congress. He supported the movement for women's suffrage.

But while Newlands was a progressive on most issues of his day, he also held and espoused racist views that we find abhorrent today. He saw the US as a nation for whites only, and advocated for restricting immigration to white people. He opposed Chinese immigration to Hawaii. He advocated for the resettlement

of Black people to Cuba or Africa. In his view, children of "an inferior race" should be educated only in the industrial trades, to the exclusion of more intellectual pursuits. He wrote that the mixing of races on American soil was "the greatest menace to American civilization..."

Newlands advocated for denying political rights, and even citizenship, to people of color. At the Democratic National Convention in Baltimore in 1912, he drafted a plank for the party's platform that would disenfranchise Black Americans by repealing the 15th Amendment; the plank was not included in the final party platform. In 1916, he was the only Democratic senator to vote against confirmation of Louis Brandeis, the first Jewish nominee to the Supreme Court.

The Fountain

Newlands died suddenly on Christmas Eve 1917 at his home in Washington. Some ten years later, between 1927 and 1932, residents of Chevy Chase Village sought to improve Chevy Chase Circle, which until then had been just open land. At the same time, the Garden Club of America was working on a project to beautify the various entrances to Washington, DC in preparation for the George Washington Bicentennial Celebration in 1932. Because Chevy Chase Circle marked an entrance to Washington, the two projects coalesced and the Garden Club joined in the effort to beautify the Circle.

In 1932, Congress passed a joint resolution authorizing the construction of a fountain in Chevy Chase Circle to memorialize Senator Newlands. Mrs. Newlands hired family friend and distinguished architect Edward Wilton Donn, Jr. to



A streetcar rounds Chevy Chase Circle in the early 1900s.

design a memorial fountain and conceptualize an appropriate setting for the fountain in Chevy Chase Circle. Mrs. Newlands provided \$11,000 to fund the project. The choice of a fountain was intended to symbolize Newlands' connection with irrigation in the West.

In 1933, the memorial fountain, the two Garden Club of America boundary markers, a ring of thirty willow oaks, the Potomac bluestone walkway, and clusters of yews were installed at Chevy Chase Circle. On October 12, 1933, senators, other government officials, family, friends, and local residents gathered to dedicate both the Newlands memorial fountain and the improved Chevy Chase Circle.



Inscription on the Newlands fountain.

The wall surrounding the south end of the fountain basin bears an inscription honoring Newlands, though over time it has become largely illegible. In 1990, the Chevy Chase Land Company funded a major restoration of the fountain to mark the 100th anniversary of the Company's founding in 1890. At that time, the company rededicated the fountain to Newlands with a new bronze plaque set into the pavement just below the original inscription. Because of its historic and artistic merit, the fountain was included on the US Department of the Interior's National Register of Historic Places in 2007.

ANC Action and "Renaming" the Fountain

The death of George Floyd on a Minneapolis street in May 2020 brought issues of racism and social justice to center stage. States, cities, other governmental entities, universities, businesses, and institutions of all sorts began taking action to rename buildings, streets, parks, and other locations that had been named to honor people found to have supported racial segregation and white supremacy. Our community was no different.

Though Newlands' views on race are a matter of public record and have been well-documented over the decades, the events of summer 2020 brought them into sharper focus and triggered a greater public awareness of his white supremacist beliefs. Public pressure grew to remove Newlands' name from the fountain. Through social media and other means, more than two thousand local residents supported the effort to change the name of the fountain. At its two meetings in June 2020, the ANC established a Task Force on Racism charged with identifying equity and justice issues within the community and proposing concrete solutions, including recommendations concerning the name of the fountain.

In recognition of these developments in the community, on June 19, 2020, the Chevy Chase Land Company issued a public statement acknowledging Newlands' views on race and recognizing "that the Francis Griffith Newlands Memorial Fountain has a divisive impact." The company stated that if the community voted to rename the fountain, it would "wholeheartedly support their decision and commit to supporting the necessary steps required to make the change." (See the entire Land Company statement on page 6.)

At its July 27 meeting, the ANC discussed a proposed resolution concerning the name of the fountain. As part of the discussion, Julia Washburn, Superintendent of Rock Creek Park, and Brad Krueger, Cultural Resources Program Manager at the National Park Service, described the relevant laws and regulations governing national monuments on National Park Service land and the process for renaming or removing such monuments—a very complicated process requiring action by Congress and a variety of federal and local government agencies. Among other speakers was William Rowley, Emeritus Professor at the University of Nevada, Reno, a historian and author of a biography of Newlands. (See announcement of Professor Rowley's lecture on page 1.)

After discussion, the ANC unanimously adopted a resolution that (1) called for the removal of the plaque bearing the name of Francis Newlands from the fountain; (2) requested the National Park Service to work with community members and organizations, specifically including CCHS and Historic Chevy Chase DC, to create a wayside exhibit near the fountain to provide accurate historical context for Newlands and racial discrimination; (3) asked the ANC's Task Force on Racism to

make recommendations for the renaming of the fountain; and (4) committed to consider such recommendations and vote on next steps.

Bordering the circle to the north is Chevy Chase Village. On September 14, 2020, the Village Board of Managers, citing Newlands' "white supremacist and segregationist beliefs", approved a resolution "to urge the [National] Park Service to take immediate action to remove the plaque honoring Francis G. Newlands...and to urge the Congress of the United States to take immediate action to remove the name of, and dedication to, Francis G. Newlands from the memorial fountain within Chevy Chase Circle."

After assessing the complexity of the numerous federal and local approvals required to make any change to the name of the fountain, it was determined that the most expeditious approach was to have Congress pass a single overriding bill authorizing the name change. On September 11, 2020, DC Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton, Maryland Representative Jamie Raskin, and Nevada Representative Dina Titus, introduced H.R. 822. Named the "Francis G. Newlands Memorial Removal Act", the bill directed the National Park Service to remove both the original inscription on the side of

the fountain and the bronze plaque from 1990.

That bill lapsed in January 2021 with the end of the 116th Congress. On February 23, 2021, the bill was introduced again in the 117th Congress by Representatives Norton and Raskin. Raskin stated: "Newlands worked to institutionalize his beliefs in white supremacy and did what he could to increase the racism that continues to plague our country and our people.... Newlands called for the repeal of the 15th Amendment, which invalidated race discrimination in voting rights; advocated racist and anti-immigrant policies; and backed efforts to deprive African Americans, Jews, and other minorities of basic human rights....But the people of Maryland and Washington can move on. We should stop rewarding racist ideology and politics with a public memorial on public property. It is time to write a new story for the new century."

As called for in both the ANC and Chevy Chase Village resolutions, the National Park Service has launched the project to create wayside exhibits near the Circle to put Francis Newlands and the fountain that honored him into a historically complete and accurate context. CCHS is honored to be participating in that project, and looks forward to continuing this important work to create a gateway to Chevy Chase that is welcoming to all.

Statement of the Chevy Chase Land Company, June 19, 2020:

Coming Together To Build A More Inclusive Community

The recent racially motivated incidents across the country have created a wave of hurt, outrage and protest. We empathize with those individuals and families directly impacted, and with community members who have gone through their day-to-day lives in our world where these events are a reality. The Chevy Chase Land Company of today stands for the ideals of diversity and inclusion and continues to actively support our community as it strives for greater equality. However, to truly move forward, we must acknowledge our past and come together to build an inclusive community.

Established in 1890 by Senator Francis G. Newlands, The Chevy Chase Land Company has played a vital role in the development and growth of the Chevy Chase community and Washington Metropolitan region. Our Board of Directors recognizes that despite Senator Newlands' accomplishments, his views on race contradict the ideals of our company fabric. We are committed to taking a collaborative, community-first approach to investing in our neighborhoods, and we recognize that the Francis Griffith Newlands Memorial Fountain has a divisive impact. Should the community vote to rename the fountain, we wholeheartedly support their decision and commit to supporting the necessary steps required to make the change.

The Chevy Chase Land Company is committed to a brighter and more inclusive future. It is our hope that by announcing our support for a community vote to rename the Chevy Chase Circle Fountain, we send a clear message that we will continue collaborating with and supporting the neighborhoods in which we work and live to create a safe and diverse community filled with opportunities for all.

CCHS Corona Chronicles

CCHS continues to capture stories and images of life during the pandemic through its Corona Chronicles project. Help future researchers understand the continuing impact of COVID-19 by adding your story to the CCHS Corona Chronicles.

We encourage you to share your experiences during this unprecedented time. Have you or your family members received a vaccine? If so, what was the experience like? Have you helped friends or neighbors navigate the vaccine system? Show and tell us how everyday life in our community has changed as we preserve the history we all are making. Remember, what might currently feel mundane to us is exactly what future generations will want to know!

CCHS welcomes your photos, videos, journal entries, voice and audio recordings and other digital evidence of life during the COVID-19 pandemic. You can email your contribution to CoronaChronicles@chevychasehistory.org.

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CCHS Out and About

Out and About is an occasional feature in the Newsletter, highlighting CCHS's participation in community events. If your organization is holding an event, we'd love to be part of it. Contact CCHS at info@chevychasehistory.org or 301-656-6141.

Beth Huffer, Director of the CCHS Archive and Research Center, presented a virtual "History Conversation" for Montgomery History on September 29, 2020. She explored the history of the Chevy Chase Lake Amusement Park and the whites-only policy of the park. It was a live event, held on Zoom and Facebook Live, and she received many excellent questions from the engaged audience of over 120 participants.

Beth also served as a finals judge for Montgomery County's National History Day Competition during the week of March 16, 2021. For the competition, middle and high school students use primary and secondary sources to create projects focused on this year's theme, "Communication in History—The Key to Understanding." Projects were submitted digitally in one of five formats: paper, exhibit, documentary, performance, or website. Congratulations to all the winners!

Finally, Beth will present an online class for Washington Metro Oasis titled "Chevy Chase Lake Amusement Park: Montgomery County's Past" on April 26, 2021. The class will build on earlier presentations on the same subject and will also include a detailed discussion of the development of Chevy Chase and its place in the history of suburbs. Oasis is an educational program for seniors who want to continue learning, open to adults age 50 and over.



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Join CCHS for 2021!

If you have not joined CCHS or renewed your membership for 2021, please do so today. We very much want and need your support. It's because of you that we are able to operate the Archive and Research Center that houses our collection, library, and office. Your support enables us to collect and preserve historical documents, photographs, and maps, to take and transcribe oral histories, and to research house histories. We share the stories of our local history through twice-yearly, free public lectures on topics of historical interest, and through online exhibits on our website, chevychasehistory.org. Your dues also help us publish this Newsletter. Can we count on your help and support?

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