



## “David Fairchild: The Chevy Chase Food Explorer”

Spring Lecture to be held on Wednesday, March 20, at 7:30 p.m. on Zoom

Register at [chevychasehistory.org](http://chevychasehistory.org)

The next time you walk through the produce section of your grocery store, look around. You will be surrounded by the legacy of one-time Chevy Chase resident David Fairchild. Many of the colorful and healthy foods you’ll see were brought to the US from over 50 foreign countries by Fairchild. Kale from Croatia, mangoes from India, peaches from China, nectarines from Pakistan, avocados from Chile, pomegranates from Malta—they are available to us thanks to him.

As a young botanist with the US Department of Agriculture, Fairchild repeatedly traveled the globe in the late 1800s in search of foods that would both enrich the American farmer and expand the American palate. He ultimately transported to America thousands of plant varieties that were either new to the US or improvements on crops grown here. Fairchild’s finds weren’t limited to food. From Egypt he sent back a variety of cotton that revolutionized the textile industry, and from Japan he introduced the cherry trees whose blossoms blanket the nation’s capital each spring. Along the way he caught diseases, got arrested, performed some espionage, and bargained with island tribes.

Fairchild’s life and work will be the topic of the second lecture in the CCHS series, the Hidden Histories of Chevy Chase. This fascinating story will be told by Daniel Stone, author of the Fairchild biography *The Food Explorer, the True Adventures of the Globe-Trotting Botanist Who Transformed What America Eats*. The program is free and open to the public, but advance registra-



Author Daniel Stone



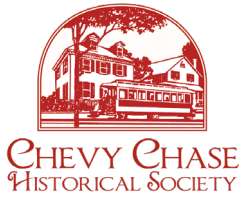
Botanist David Fairchild

tion is required on the CCHS website at [chevychasehistory.org](http://chevychasehistory.org). Registrants will be emailed a link to join the program from the comfort of home.

In 1905, Fairchild married the daughter of Alexander Graham Bell. Trading globe-trotting for domesticity, he acquired 34 acres on Spring Valley Road in Chevy Chase where the couple built a house and expansive garden. In the garden, Fairchild planted rare and exotic trees and plants gathered from all over the world, including some of the earliest Japanese cherry trees in the US. The property, which they named “In the Woods,” was noted for its unusual openness to the outdoors and its oriental influence. In 1918, Herbert Hoover rented the house to protect his family from the influenza epidemic.

In the 1950s, a portion of the garden became home to the Chevy Chase Recreation Association and its community swimming pools, tennis courts and related facilities. At the same time, the house was rented to the Outdoor Nursery School where it operates to this day, having educated generations of Chevy Chase children.

Daniel Stone is a professor of environmental science and history at Johns Hopkins University. He has written extensively on science, history, and adventure. He is a contributing editor for National Geographic Magazine, where he spent eight years as a senior editor, and a former White House correspondent for Newsweek. His work has appeared in the Washington Post, Scientific American, Time, and on CBS’s Sixty Minutes.



**Officers**

President.....Susan Bollendorf  
 Vice-President.....Carolyn Greis  
 Second Vice-President.....John Higgins  
 Recording Secretary.....Natasha Saifee  
 Corresponding Secretary.....Helene Sacks  
 Treasurer.....Karoline Shannon

**Directors-at-Large**

Dima Fayyad Alison Mandell  
 Kelly Basheer Garrett Gail Sansbury  
 Debbie Glynn Mary Sheehan  
 Jessica Johnson Kirsten Williams  
 Angela Lancaster

**Directors Emeritus**

Eleanor Ford (deceased)  
 Mary Anne Tuohey

**Committees**

Communications	Lectures and Tours
Development	Membership
Finance	Nominations
Gala	Oral Histories
Governance	Technology

**Archive and Research Center**

Renata Lisowski, Director

8401 Connecticut Avenue  
 Suite 1010  
 Chevy Chase, MD 20815  
 Tel: 301.656.6141

[www.chevychasehistory.org](http://www.chevychasehistory.org)  
[info@chevychasehistory.org](mailto:info@chevychasehistory.org)

[www.facebook.com/chevychasehistory](https://www.facebook.com/chevychasehistory)

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.

Chevy Chase Historical Society is supported in part by funding from the Montgomery County Government and the Arts & Humanities Council of Montgomery County.

## Village of North Chevy Chase Celebrates Its Centennial

On April 27, the Village of North Chevy Chase will celebrate the 100 year anniversary of the community’s establishment in 1924. The area which is now the Village of North Chevy Chase, located between Connecticut Avenue, Jones Mill Road, Clifford Avenue, and the Capital Beltway, was originally a part of Clean Drinking Manor, one of the earliest land grants in colonial Maryland.

Throughout the 19th century, the land was owned by the Jones family, the namesake for Jones Bridge and Jones Mill Roads. In 1895 it was laid out and platted by Redford W. Walker and called “Kenilworth.” The development was situated conveniently along the Chevy Chase Lake and Kensington Railway, a prime location for a new suburban development.

By the 1930s, over 30 houses had been built on the subdivided lots, and, despite the railway ceasing operations in 1935, there were nearly 100 houses in the community by the 1950s. Today there are 211 single-family homes in the neighborhood.



Streetcar that ran on the Chevy Chase, Kenilworth, Kensington trolley line.

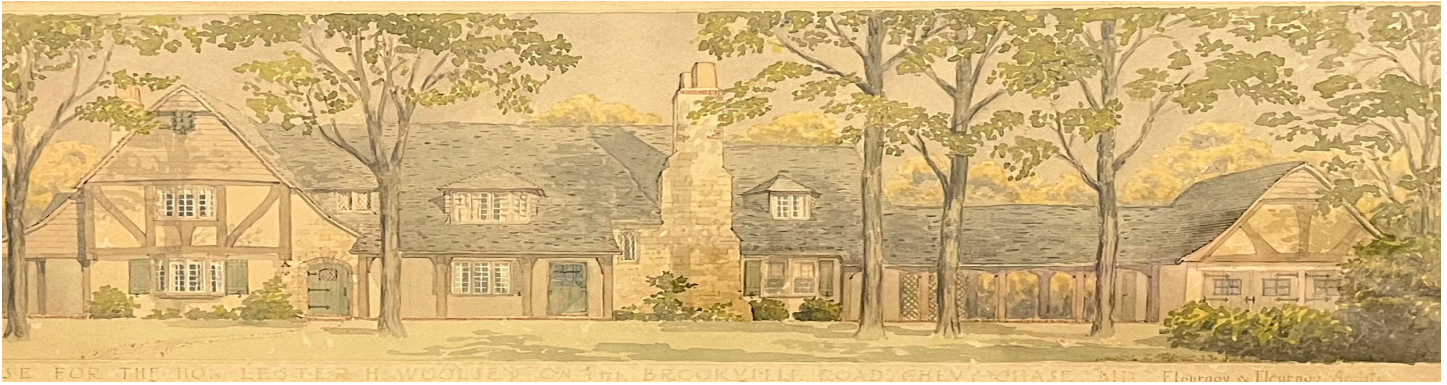
## Rollingwood Burial Ground Memorialization Effort Advances

Thanks to the efforts of residents Rachel Peric and Nadine Chapman, along with the support of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, plans are being made to place a historic marker in Meadowbrook Park as a memorial to those interred in the Rollingwood Burial Ground for Enslaved People. Peric and Chapman remark, “We appreciate the partnership of the Chevy Chase Historical Society in helping our community honor with dignity the lives of those enslaved and buried here and look forward to continuing to work together to educate and engage our neighbors, especially young people.”

A video recording of the 2023 Fall Lecture covering the history of the burial ground is now available on the CCHS website home page.

# Recent Acquisitions

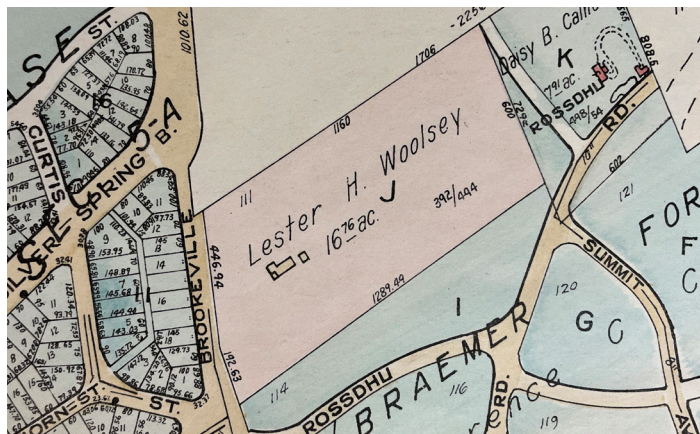
“Recent Acquisitions” is a regular feature in the Newsletter, describing documents and other items acquired for the CCHS Archive and Research Center.



A watercolor painting of the Woolsey House on Brookville Road, painted by Benjamin Cortland Flournoy in 1926.

CCHS has recently acquired a watercolor painting of the Woolsey House on Brookville Road, designed by Flournoy & Flournoy Architects in 1926 for Lester Hood Woolsey. The painting was graciously donated by Eric Murtagh because he felt it was “the right thing to do” for the community. He recalled learning from the scout slogan in Scout Troop 255 of Chevy Chase, “It is important to do a good turn daily!” CCHS is grateful for his generous donation.

The watercolor was painted by Benjamin Cortland Flournoy (1876-1939), of Flournoy & Flournoy Architects, possibly as a proposed redesign of an already existing home on the property. The structure depicted in the painting shows the home as it exists today, but contemporary maps suggest that at the time there was a much smaller house with detached garage on the property. At the time of the painting, the house was situated on a large lot, but in 1954 the entire lot was subdivided into Rollingwood Terrace and developed into a new residential neighborhood.



1931 atlas showing the property of Lester H. Woolsey on Brookville Road with a house and detached garage.

Flournoy & Flournoy Architects consisted of Benjamin C., Addison H., and Parke P. Jr., sons of Parke Poindexter Flournoy, the Reverend of the Bethesda Meeting House. The company designed many residences, including a large number of houses in what is now the Oakenshawe Historic District in Baltimore. Benjamin also designed the Presbyterian Church of the Pilgrims in D.C., and multiple buildings at Washington and Lee University in Virginia and the University of Maryland.

Lester Hood Woolsey (1877-1961) was a lawyer, diplomat, and geologist, originally from Rhode Island. After graduating with a bachelor of arts degree from Harvard University, he relocated in to Washington, D.C. in 1908, where he earned a law degree from George Washington University. Throughout his career, Woolsey served with the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Land Office, Department of State, and the U.S. Peace Conference. He lived at the house with his wife, Grace Hamblin, and his daughters, Elizabeth and Ruth.



1954 plat map showing the Woolsey house alongside the new subdivision of Rollingwood Terrace.

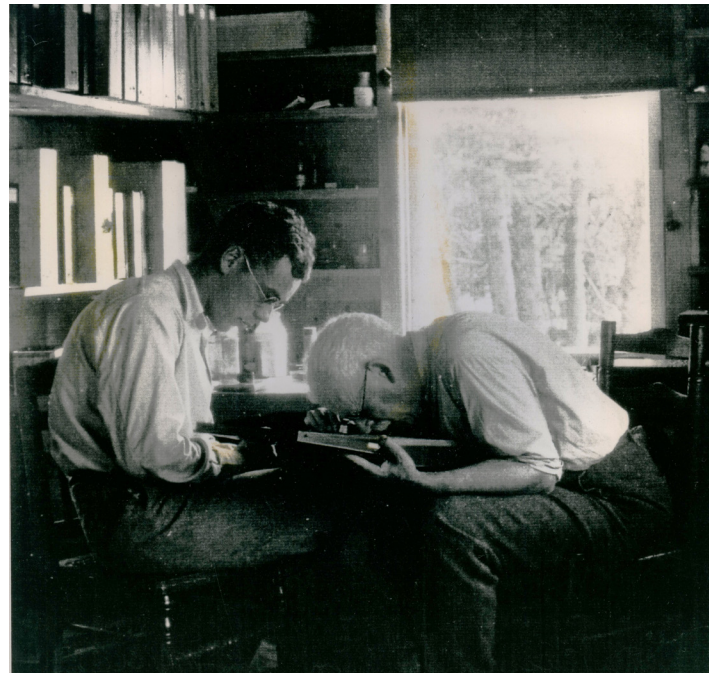
# Oral History of Alexander Graham Bell Fairchild

Alexander Graham Bell Fairchild (1916-1994), son of David Fairchild and grandson of Alexander Graham Bell, was interviewed in 1991 for the CCHS oral history collection. His narrative provides valuable insight into life at Fairchild's "In The Woods" estate and growing up in Chevy Chase. Read an excerpt from his interview below.

"My father was working in the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C., and my mother lived in Washington. They both liked country life, and my father wanted a place where he could have a garden. Primarily, at first, we lived with my grandparents in Washington, on Connecticut Avenue. But they didn't want to impose on my grandparents. They wanted their own place and they didn't want to live in town. They bought land in the woods in 1905 and built a house there, started it, I guess, shortly thereafter. My father wanted a place where he could plant stuff. His job was introducing new plants to the United States, and he did quite a little experimental gardening. He'd try various things and see if they'd grow under Maryland conditions.

I know they lived in the first house from 1905 until 1910. I don't know if there's anything left of that old house now. It was a wooden house, and an interesting one, because it was made of unfinished lumber, rather woolly on the outside, and double walled with glass fiber between the walls. It was insulated, which was rather new in those days. They didn't live out there much in the wintertime, but mostly in the summer.

In 1910, the year of Halley's Comet, the present house was built, and the old house was divided up. The main part of it was used as a gardener's cottage, a little downhill from the site of the present house. One section con-



David Fairchild examines something very closely with a magnifying glass with his son Alexander Graham Bell Fairchild.

taining one big room and a small kitchen and bathroom was moved down in the woods to, well, it's all gone now, but it's where the Beltway goes now. And that was my grandfather's retreat. In Washington in the summertime, he'd like to go out there and spend weekends...

...And then another single room was divided off and put down; I can't give you the compass directions, I just don't remember them. But, again, downhill in another direction from the present house was my father's study. He had a microscope there, a small library and a photographic darkroom. When he'd get a chance to get away from the office, he'd go down there...

I had my own room. There was a wing on the ground floor which had three bedrooms and a bath. My parents had one bedroom, and off of that there was a sleeping porch with a glass roof, so that they could lie in bed Sunday morning and look up at the sky or see the stars at night, whatever. Very romantic. Then my sister's room was across the hall from mine.

And I had my collections and stuff, squirrels and mice and things like that, which were the only thing in my



The Fairchild property "In The Woods" shown on a 1931 atlas.

first collection, and books and so on. All these ground floor rooms had their own doors to the outside, and they were Dutch doors so that you would open either at the top or the bottom or both. And for little kids that was fine, because you could open the top and the kids couldn't get out, but they had good fresh air...

...Now, you see, when we first moved out there, it was real country, with little farms around us. A farm across the road belonged to a Mr. Welch; from whom we got milk. There were two or three houses in a little settlement, so to speak. I don't know how many people lived there. It wasn't very big and was on top of the hill above the Chevy Chase Lake. They didn't have street lights. Kensington then was a little distance away. There was a "Toonerville Trolley" that ran from Chevy Chase Lake, where the end of the Connecticut Avenue trolley was, to Kensington. I think we had electricity from outside, but I'm not even sure. We may have had our own electric plant. I think we had our own well...

The Lake was a favorite place of mine. My most naturalistic beginning was polliwogs and turtles and salamanders and snakes and so on. I went through all those phases, and one of them was centered in Chevy Chase Lake, I think for more than one attraction. If I could lay my hands on a nickel or a dime, I could get an ice cream cone down there. But usually I'd go down with a butterfly net and a dip net of some sort or other and try to catch turtles. It was quite a nice little place...

...Sometimes Pa would take us and drop us off at school, but we had to find our own way home because he couldn't get off early. In those days, the government worked six days a week, nine to five. There was no time off for lunch. The only time we saw Pa was Sunday, and then he didn't want us to go to church because he said, "It was the only time I have to see my children." In all events, we got to use, I did, anyway, the trolley pretty regularly. It wasn't too far, three-quarters of a mile, perhaps, from our place down to the Chevy Chase Lake where the main streetcars turned around. It was a circle that went back to Washington, and then we changed in Mount Pleasant. And at the time, the streetcars went downtown, right across the old iron bridge across Rock Creek and, more or less, out Connecticut Avenue...

...The house was rented for quite a number of years before we sold it. So actually we only really lived there from 1905 until about 1916."

## Fairchild's Cherry Blossoms



Close up photo of cherry blossoms by David Fairchild.

David Fairchild first visited Japan in the fall of 1902, and he was instantly enamored with the character, spirit, and beauty of the abundant sakura cherry trees and their ethereal pink blossoms. He became determined to introduce these remarkable trees to the United States.

When Fairchild purchased his home, "In the Woods," he imported several shipments of cherry trees to grow in his own garden. With the help of a Japanese gardener named Mori, they successfully cultivated twenty-five different varieties of the iconic trees. The trees attracted much local interest, and on Arbor Day in 1908, Fairchild invited one boy from each local school to come and receive a tree to be planted in his schoolyard.

Following a visit to see Fairchild's trees, journalist and travel writer Eliza Scidmore joined forces with Fairchild in an effort to get the trees planted around the Tidal Basin. Thanks to diplomacy and the support of President and Mrs. Taft, a shipment of some 2,000 cherry trees arrived in the US from Japan in 1909. Sadly, the trees were found to be infested with dangerous insects and disease after their long trip from Japan. All of the trees and their crates had to be burned.

Japan offered to send another shipment. This time, more than 3,000 trees were carefully selected, fumigated, packaged, placed in cold storage and transported in a larger ship that could cross the Pacific faster. After painstaking inspection upon arrival in 1912, the trees were found to be clean and healthy. Soon, Fairchild and Scidmore joined Mrs. Taft and the wife of the Japanese ambassador in a ceremonial planting of the first trees around the Tidal Basin. The trees and their progeny have produced their glorious blooms ever since.



## CHEVY CHASE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

8401 Connecticut Avenue  
Suite 1010  
Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815

NON PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
CHEVY CHASE, MD  
PERMIT NO. 5513

### Address Correction Requested

## Join CCHS for 2024!

If you have not joined CCHS or renewed your membership for 2024, 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](http://chevychasehistory.org). Your dues also help us publish this Newsletter. Can we count on your help and support?

## I want to be a supporter!

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Street City State Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email

### 2024 Annual Membership Dues

*(Make checks payable to CCHS)*

- Friend \$40    Patron \$125    Benefactor \$250
- Additional Contribution \_\_\_\_\_
- Contact me about volunteering at the Archive and Research Center or helping with a program

Mail this to:  
CCHS, 8401 Connecticut Avenue, Suite 1010  
Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815

Or join online at  
[chevychasehistory.org/chevychase/join](http://chevychasehistory.org/chevychase/join)