



CHEVY CHASE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

FALL 2017

“The Kit Houses of Chevy Chase, Maryland: The American Dream by Mail and Rail” is November 5 Lecture Topic

Nationally recognized kit house scholar Kathryn Holt Springston will cap four months of studying local catalog house candidates on Sunday, November 5, when she presents the Chevy Chase Historical Society’s fall lecture, “The Kit Houses of Chevy Chase, Maryland: The American Dream by Mail and Rail.” Her illustrated talk at 4 p.m. at the Lawton Community Center, 4301 Willow Lane in the Town of Chevy Chase, is free and open to the public.

In May 2017, CCHS launched a search for kit houses, the well-built and enduring pre-cut homes offered by companies such as Sears & Roebuck, Montgomery Ward, Sterling, Aladdin, and Lewis in the first half of the 20th century. Americans could order a complete “home by mail” from catalogs offering hundreds of styles. Virtually everything needed to build the chosen style would be delivered to the nearest railroad station, then transported by wagon or truck to the building site where contractors assembled them into inviting family homes. Kit houses, extremely popular in the 1920s and 1930s, are treasured today for their solid construction and vintage charm.

When CCHS invited homeowners who thought they might have a kit house to send house photos for Springston to review, 40 Chevy Chase households responded. Using her years of experience in authenticating kit houses,



Scott and Dakota Springston measured studs and joists in 30 houses to authenticate their kit house origins.

and her personal library of catalogs from various house manufacturers, she identified 30 houses in Chevy Chase, Maryland, that she deemed to merit further examination. See page 3 for photos of several kit house candidates.

“Short of having actual blueprints, a deed or numbers stamped on lumber, the best way to confirm a kit house’s manufacturer and style is to measure the distance between the joists and studs and then match those dimensions with a catalog model,” says Springston. So she, and her husband-and-son-measuring-team, came to Chevy Chase from Arlington, Virginia, on three different days this summer, heading to basements and attics with flashlights and measuring tape in search of the telltale dimensions.



Photo by Greg Embree

Kathryn Holt Springston will share results of her four-month-long Chevy Chase kit house survey.

The results of their search, as well as an introduction to the broader history of American kit houses, will be the focus of Springston’s presentation. At the conclusion of her talk, she will present Certificates of Authentication to homeowners whose kit house origins she has been able to confirm.

Springston’s fascination with Sears and other kit houses was sparked in her childhood, when the son of a house carpenter began pointing out those homes to her. She spent the next decades researching and developing tours of Arlington’s architectural and social history, in which kit houses prominently featured. She became a popular lecturer for the Smithsonian Associates program and a frequently quoted Sears house expert in the national media. She has fielded calls from homeowners across the nation wanting to know if they have a kit house. And on November 5, inquiring Chevy Chase homeowners will get their answer.

No reservations are necessary for the November 5 lecture, and signature Historical Society refreshments will be served.

Celebrating One of America’s First Streetcar Suburbs



CHEVY CHASE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 15145

CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20825

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Open 10 a.m. to noon, 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 Archive and Research Center to Relocate

Capital Campaign Launched

CCHS is on the move! After calling the Chevy Chase Library home for more than 15 years, the CCHS Archive and Research Center is moving to larger quarters. We are thrilled to announce that we have obtained new space at 8401 Connecticut Avenue in historic Chevy Chase Lake. We will be moving the Center later this year, fulfilling a long-held dream to provide the community with ready access to our archive, expanded space for research and the study of local history, and a climate-controlled environment for our collection.

The Chevy Chase Library has been a most generous and accommodating landlord since 2002, when CCHS moved into the lower level. Since that time, the CCHS collection has grown significantly as documents and photos have been donated, house histories have been compiled, oral histories have been conducted, and exhibits have been produced for public use. The Center is now bursting at the seams.

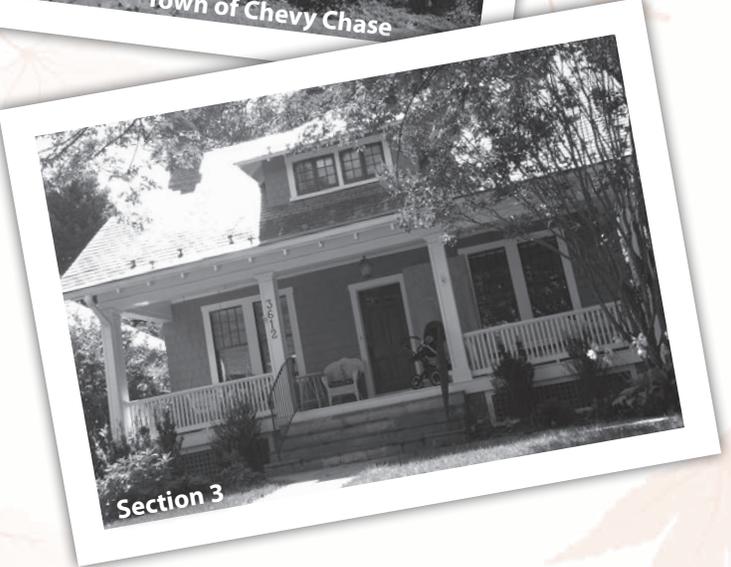
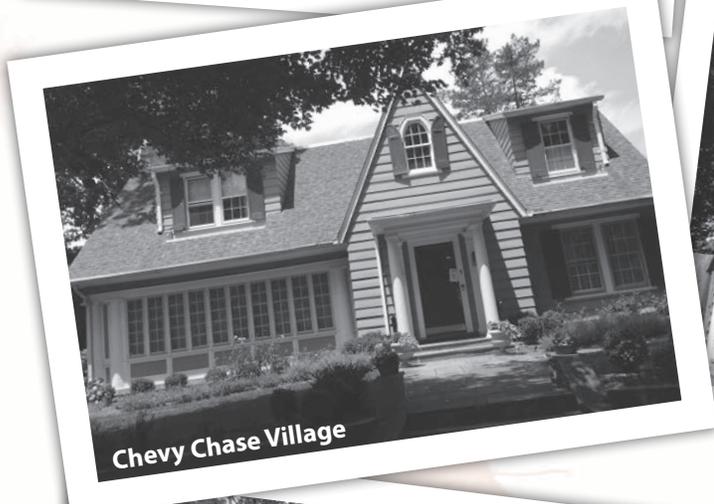
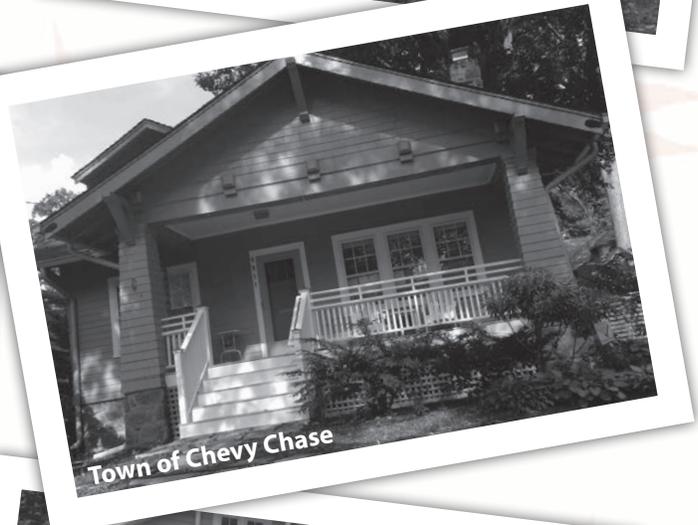
Recognizing the current size of the collection and its anticipated growth, CCHS conducted a lengthy search for new space. The Chevy Chase Land Company has agreed to provide such space under a reduced rent arrangement at 8401 Connecticut Avenue. The new site will double the size of the Center. It will feature a separate, secure, climate-controlled room for storage of the archival materials in the collection. A reading room for use by researchers, residents and students will be dedicated to the memory of long-time CCHS board member Eleanor Ford. Expanded work space for the Director of the Center and other staff members and interns will enable them to assist patrons more efficiently and effectively.

In order to build-out and furnish the new Center, CCHS has launched **Investing in History**, a capital campaign with the goal of \$200,000. Substantial progress toward that goal has already been made during the silent phase of the campaign, including 100 percent participation by the CCHS board of directors. As the campaign enters its public phase, we will be asking the community for its support. Watch for further information about **Investing in History** and ways you can help make the new Archive and Research Center a reality!



Kit House Candidates Show Chevy Chase's Architectural Variety

Here are seven of the forty houses local homeowners have sent to the Chevy Chase Historical Society since May, asking that kit house scholar Kathryn Holt Springston tell them whether theirs is an authentic catalog house. The results of Springston's research will be the heart of her illustrated lecture at the Lawton Community Center on November 5 and will become a permanent part of CCHS archives.



A Stone-Cold Case

by Diane Riker

Can you help us solve this one? In the woods along the Capital Crescent Trail in Chevy Chase, west of Connecticut Avenue, lies a mystery.

Just 45 feet short of the fence at the Columbia Country Club, approximately 40 cut stones have been abandoned. Coated with moss and strangled in vines, they have clearly been there for some time. The majority are heaped in a high and weighty pile, others randomly scattered nearby. Some bear the distinctive marks of a mason-carver. One is a triangle. Most are blocks of differing sizes. The stones lie close to what is left of a passing track on the B & O's Georgetown Branch line, which ceased operation in 1989.



Mysterious cut stones piled along the Capital Crescent Trail

Although most of those who walk/run/bike the trail pass this remarkable deposit totally unaware, others have seen them and come up with various explanations. An Internet blogger whose interesting website traces the history of the branch line and photographs its remains believes they may have been part of a shipment of Indiana limestone intended for construction of the Washington National Cathedral at Massachusetts and Wisconsin Avenues. Building the Cathedral began in 1907 and continued into the 1990s. Could the railroad have expected a truck to pick them up there? Or could the stones have fallen from a flatcar?

Others have compared them to the old stones from the U.S. Capitol which probably date to that building's reconstruction following the War of 1812. These were unceremoniously dumped near the horse trail in Rock Creek Park about 1959, when the Capitol again underwent renovation. Or could the mystery stones be simply leftovers from a local private building project?

Meet The Wizard of Chevy Chase

More entertaining sketches like the one above will be available to the public soon! The author, Diane Riker, writes a monthly column on Chevy Chase history for *The Clarion*, the journal of the Five Star Premier Residences at 8100 Connecticut Ave., where she and her husband have lived since 2011. CCHS is publishing a collection of 45 of her articles, exploring fascinating, and often little-known, people, places and events from the community's colorful past. Her research drew significantly from the CCHS archive. Titled *The Wizard of Chevy Chase*, the moniker of one resident profiled by Mrs. Riker, the book will be available later this fall, in time for holiday gift-giving. Watch for publication updates on our website, www.chevychasehistory.org.

Camping on Connecticut Avenue!

In celebration of the centennial of World War I, we tip our hats to the ladies who camped out on Connecticut Avenue at the National Service School. At a time before American women had won the right to vote, a women's preparedness camp was established in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

On May 1, 1916, the first National Service School (NSS) for young women opened. Senator Francis Newlands, co-founder and developer of Chevy Chase, lent 10 acres of prime, undeveloped land along the trolley line for the site. This school was not made of bricks and mortar but of canvas. Specifically, 71 tan canvas tents were situated on the east side of Connecticut Avenue between Underwood and Thornapple Streets, stretching east to Dalkeith Street.

The school's main objective was "to train women to be of real national service along the lines to which they can best serve and ... give impetus to the movement for national service among young women". President Woodrow Wilson presided over the opening ceremonies with the rallying cry, "The nation is awake!"



NSS students making Red Cross sponges

Young women age 18 and older, many from elite backgrounds, came from around the county to the school. They rolled up their sleeves and dug in, performing duties they never would have dreamed of doing in their own privileged homes, like making their own beds and polishing their own shoes. They enrolled for two weeks sessions. For many, it was their first lesson in real preparedness. They contended with rain, mud, and especially the Washington summer heat, even though Chevy Chase was known as "the air conditioned suburbs" due to its natural underground springs.

The NSS offer three courses of study, including knitting sponges and sewing. Students also could take classes in the basics of military life, including calisthenics, telegraphy, and drills with guns. Red Cross nurses offered training in elementary hygiene. Distinguished personalities lectured on such topics as national defense, good citizenship and American history.

By the time the NSS closed its tent flaps on May 31, 1,000 students had completed the course of study. According to the Washington Post, as they returned home, were "heralded as heroines".

(This article is based on a more detailed Newsletter article about the National Service School written ten years ago by former CCHS board member Julie Rude Thomas.)

2018 Membership Reminder:

If you have not renewed your membership, please do so today. We very much want and need your support. It's because of you that we are able to maintain the Archive and Research Center and are able to collect and preserve historical documents, photographs, and maps, and to take oral histories and house histories. We share the story of our local history through twice-yearly, public lectures on topics of historical interest, and through online exhibits on our website, www.chevyCHASEhistory.org. You also help us publish these newsletters. Can we count on you to help and continue your support?



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Chevy Chase: A Home Suburb for the Nation's Capital, the definitive reference book on our historic community, has been reprinted and is now available in a handsome hardcover format.

Written by historians and former Montgomery County Planning Department staffers Elizabeth Jo Lampl and Kimberly Prothro Williams, the book was originally published by the Montgomery County in 1998 and has been out of print for some years.

More than a simple land venture, Chevy Chase defined the turn-of-the-century suburban archetype. It was planned as a comprehensive, ideal community that incorporated the latest principles in transportation, infrastructure and public institutions, together with high standards for landscape and architectural design.

This 184-page, richly illustrated volume chronicles the history and architecture of Chevy Chase, Maryland, documenting the fascinating history of a developer's vision for a model streetcar community and its far-reaching impact on suburban development. In doing so, the book reveals the importance of the suburban ideal, a novel concept in the 1890s, to our national culture.

Information on how to purchase the book online for \$20 from Lulu publishing may be found at:

<http://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/historic/resources/chevy-chase/>

