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Chevy Chase

CHEVY CHASE LAKE

by

JAMES H. PUGH

October, 1976

REFERENCE

Chevy Chase Library
8005 Connecticut Avenue
Chevy Chase, MD 20815

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Forward

Chevy Chase Lake as written by a personal and actual view of one who saw it and experienced it in the early 1908 to 1916 time period. A few pictures of the lake and a sketch of the lake as it was in and around the years 1908 to 1920 A.D. There are so many new people in the area of Chevy Chase, Maryland, where Chevy Chase Lake used to be, that I, as a native and one of the knowledgeable remaining residents of Chevy Chase since 1906 when my family settled in North Chevy Chase, I felt that, as an old timer I should record my knowledge of the lake and the amusement park, attached to it. I am therefore recording herewith my personal knowledge of the early years of Chevy Chase Lake.

My family moved to North Chevy Chase in the year 1906. As a young boy about 4 years of age I grew up a short distance from Chevy Chase Lake. In those early years and later as I reached the age of 10 years I visited and worked in the evenings at the amusement park in the summer. My duties were to row the boats on the lake, set up bowling pins on the bowling alleys, attend the shooting gallery, attend the boat swings (on shore) was the ring boy on the merry-go-round (the carousel), was the hat check boy on the dancing pavilion, along with my four brothers, Mike, Ed, Charlie, and Robbie. I feel that the new generation should know something about Chevy Chase Lake when it was operated as an amusement park. The lake was an artificial one about 3.5 acres built by the Chevy Chase Land Company about the year 1890. The main purpose of the lake was to furnish water to a power house which adjoined it. The power house was built to generate electricity for the street cars which were housed in a large car barn adjoining the power house. The power house used the water from the lake and returned it to the lake. There was a dam at the most eastern end of the lake. The amusement park was built to attract people from Washington, D.C. to Chevy Chase Maryland. The street cars of the Capital Traction Company would turn around at Chevy Chase Lake. The conductors would turn in their fares at the ticket office. The street cars would also be housed in the car barn, where they were swept out and cleaned and

repaired for the next days run to the 7th street wharfs and 15th and New York Avenue in D.C.

The amusement park consisted of many amusements. To reach the amusement park people would have to cross, by foot, a large wooden bridge. There was a second wooden bridge which was seldom used.

In the park there was a cafe where ice cream was served, boat swings, pulled by long ropes to make them swing, a band stand, where the Marine Band played and also where John Philip Sousa led the Marine Band a few times.

A merry go round, as it was called in those days (1910), but now known as a carousel, a shooting gallery, three bowling alleys, row boats for hire on the lake, at 5 cents for 1/2 hour and a large dancing pavilion. In the open air dancing pavilion the Meyer Davis Orchestra played for many years and Kate Smith got her start there as a singer and Irene Castle danced there many times.

In the early days, just after the turn of the century in 1900, there was a small pony track at the upper end of the amusement park and a band stand. The ponies were housed by Mr. Herbert Claude, superintendent of the Capital Traction Street Car Co. which operated the car line from D.C. to Chevy Chase Lake. In 1910 Mr. Claude's house on Manor Road burned down to the ground and that was the end of ponies and the tract at the amusement park. The track was replaced by the merry-go-round (the carousel) which was operated by Harry Mullendorf. The red, white and blue

lights that surrounded the lake gave it a beautiful outline. As young boys we would "gig" bull frogs around the edges of Chevy Chase Lake at night after the amusement park closed, using flash lights we caught frogs and we sold the frog legs to the Columbia Country Club nearby for 10 cents a pair.

The lake had one bad fatality in the winter of about 1916. The lake was partially frozen over from the cold weather but part of it would not freeze because the hot water from the power house would prevent it. A teenage couple was skating on the frozen part of the lake at night, not aware of the part of the lake was not frozen. Both were drowned. Swimming was never permitted in the lake.

Chevy Chase Lake and the amusement park had a wonderful reputation as a high class amusement park, no rowdyism, no drinking or smoking or carousing. Attached to this paper are two sketches of the lake, two pictures of the Wingate boys in a row boat on the lake, a picture of my brother Ed under the lights around the lake.

I want this sketch to be recorded in the Chevy Chase Maryland Library as part of the history of Chevy Chase Lake as I witnessed it in my early childhood. The sketches are by hand.

October 1976

James H. Pugh - Aug. 7, 1988
James H. Pugh

Residing in North Chevy Chase, Md. from 1906-1926, and in Chevy Chase Md. at 3904 Rosemary Street until 1978