

## **Ninetieth Anniversary of the Woman's Club of Chevy Chase, Maryland**

**October 2003**

### **Ninetieth Anniversary of the Woman's Club of Chevy Chase, Maryland by Sara Phang**

The Woman's Club of Chevy Chase (WCCC) celebrates its ninetieth anniversary this October. Founded October 13, 1913, the WCCC's goal is to promote the welfare of the community and the state of Maryland. The WCCC is a member of the Montgomery County Federation of Women's Clubs, part of the Maryland Federation and the General Federation of Woman's Clubs, a nondenominational, nonpartisan, international volunteer service organization. The WCCC both focuses on improving and benefiting the community of Chevy Chase and raising awareness of important social issues.

For over fifty years the WCCC has occupied the present Clubhouse, a gracious white-painted brick Cape Cod residence on Connecticut Avenue at Dunlop Street, near the Chevy Chase Library and Fire Department. The clubhouse property was acquired in 1937 and opened October 17, 1938.

The Clubhouse is both the location of club meetings and social activities and serves as a meeting space for community service organizations at no charge.

#### **History and Purpose**

The general purpose of the Maryland Federation of Women's Clubs, of which the WCCC is a member, is to benefit the communities of Maryland by supporting the arts, preserving natural resources and local communities, promoting education, encouraging healthy lifestyles, promoting civic involvement, and working towards world peace and understanding.

The WCCC was founded on October 13, 1913, by three young homemakers in Chevy Chase, Mrs. Ada Burkhart, Milly Bielaski and Norah Beattie (known as the "three busy B's") with a charter membership of twelve.

At first club activity was local; the first efforts of the club members raised money to provide much-needed window shades, pencils, paper and other supplies for a local school.

The club expanded to include literary, artistic, and other community service activities. Club members originally met in each other's homes and at the Chevy Chase Methodist Church and Chevy Chase Circle Presbyterian Church.

The activities of the WCCC also engaged the most memorable events and issues of those times. During World War II the WCCC sold war bonds and stamps and was honored with an aircraft dedicated in its name.

Members also knitted, sewed, and rolled surgical dressings for wounded soldiers, and even took turns as aircraft spotters, raising the alarm when a Mitsubishi Japanese-made aircraft was sighted over Washington, D.C. To everyone's relief, the plane belonged to a private American owner!

In 1943 the WCCC began its Operation Santa Claus Christmas Eve gifts for WAVES who were patients at Bethesda Naval Hospital; extended to all military patients, this tradition is now in its 60th year.

In peacetime, the WCCC continued its volunteer activities, supporting public television and education, developing a large-print cookbook still being distributed worldwide, and aiding local health programs. For its 75th anniversary, the Club received recognition from the White House in 1988; the Governor of Maryland in 1988 proclaimed October of that year as Woman's Club of Chevy Chase Month.

#### **Local Organizations Benefited**

The club, of course, also works to benefit the local community. The club provides yearly academic, art, and music scholarships for students through the Montgomery County Education Loan Fund. Volunteers tutor young children at Chevy Chase Elementary School.

The WCCC has benefited such local community service organizations as the B-CC Rescue Squad, Bethesda Cares, Suburban Hospital's Lifeline Unit, and Youth Services of YMCA Bethesda. Scholarships benefit, among others, students in the University of Maryland Department of Music, and mature students returning to school at Montgomery College.

### Antiques Show

Early in September the club hosted its 43rd Chevy Chase Antiques Show in the Clubhouse, featuring English and American colonial and nineteenth-century furniture, silver, glassware, ceramics, ornaments, carpets, and art works. As you approach the entrance to the Clubhouse, the elegant Colonial exterior of the building, surrounded by green ivy and shrubbery, prepares you for the gracious furnishings of a bygone world.

The show was held September 5-7, 2003, with a special fundraising gala preview and treasure hunt. Attendees brought in their attic treasures for appraisal on Friday, hoping to discover the true worth of family homely heirlooms. On Saturday the show featured dealers' talks about their collections.

The show featured the collections of antiques dealers located in the New England and Mid-Atlantic states, and as far afield as Michigan. Organizations supported by the proceeds included Bethesda Fellowship House, which provides adult day care; the Chesapeake Bay Foundation; Crossway Community in Kensington; Montgomery Hospice Foundation; and The National Center for Children and Families, among others.

Connoisseurs of fine antique furniture, glass and china, silver, and jewelry were in their element at this show.

Among the most unusual collections were those of Charles Edwin Puckett of Akron, Ohio, a specialist in ancient Roman and medieval artifacts and manuscripts as well as 18th and 19th century maps and prints. For sale were ancient Roman glass and bronze bracelets and rings, ancient Greek and Roman coins, and early Christian crosses, as well as illuminated manuscript pages from medieval Europe.

Winning the prize for "most unusual" would be the collection of nineteenth-century canes or walking sticks at To the Point, a shop run by Ray Van Orden of Richmond, VA. Van Orden said that he first began to collect these sticks when he broke his own hip 27 years ago and had to use a cane. However, in the nineteenth century, a walking stick was a must-have accessory for the fashionable gentleman (or lady) whether or not he or she needed one.

Furthermore, Van Orden's walking sticks were more than they seemed. They had useful implements hidden in the handle or body: individual canes featured corkscrews, pens, a slide rule, a container for matches or toothpicks, binoculars, and of course daggers and swords. The sword cane was an accessory for a Victorian James Bond, who could whip out his hidden sword to defend himself from an assailant.

Van Orden's collection even featured a walking stick that concealed earplugs for an artillery officer to use when he fired his cannon – and if his hearing was damaged anyway, another walking stick contained an old-fashioned trumpet hearing aid built into the handle.