



CHEVY CHASE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2020

“Perfectly Terrible”: The 1918 Influenza Pandemic

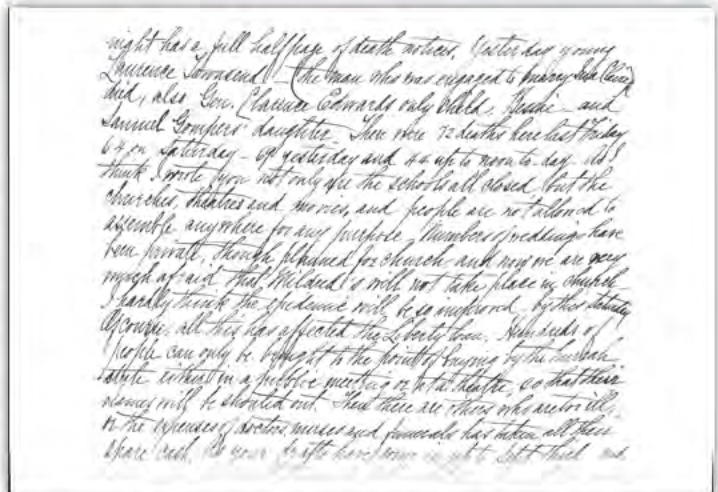
COVID-19 is not the first global health crisis the Chevy Chase area has experienced. The 1918 influenza pandemic, which came to be known as the “Spanish Flu”, arrived in Washington, D.C. in the fall of that year. It killed a stunning 3,500 local residents between October 1918 and February 1919. Officials and citizens used many of the same tactics to fight the pandemic that we are using today to combat COVID-19, including face coverings, banning mass gatherings, and closing schools, churches, and theaters.

The CCHS archival collection includes a letter written by Cora Deeble to her daughter, Elizabeth, in October 1918 during the peak of the flu pandemic in the D.C. area. Elizabeth was in Paris with the Red Cross, making surgical dressings for the wounded during World War I. Before the war, Elizabeth had attended the National Service School held in Chevy Chase in May 1916. The month-long program, housed in 71 canvas tents along Connecticut Avenue between Thornapple and Underwood Streets, was established to train women to be of meaningful national service during the war. There, Elizabeth learned the skills she took with her to Europe, including to how make surgical dressings, sponges, and bed socks.

In her letter, Cora vividly describes the escalation of the flu pandemic, including the scores of death notices published in the newspapers and the deaths of several family friends. Echoing the current COVID-19 situation, she mentions closed institutions, rules for gatherings, and even the effect on weddings.

The letter also mentions how the pandemic affected life on the home front during World War I. Cora was very active in selling Liberty loans, bonds issued by the government for the war effort, and she laments the lack of “spare cash” for the bonds due to the crisis.

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Above is an excerpt from Cora Deeble's 1918 letter to her daughter about the impact of the Spanish Flu in the Washington area. Below is a transcript of the excerpt.

1302 Eighteenth St.
Washington, DC
October 14, 1918

My dear Elizabeth -

....Our epidemic of influenza - or “flu” as it is called - is perfectly terrible. Thousands of new cases every day, and the [Evening] “Star” each night has a full half page of death notices. Yesterday young Laurence Townsend (the man who was engaged to marry Sue Claire) died, also Gen. Clarence Edwards’ only child, Bessie, and Samuel Gompers’ daughter. There were 72 deaths here last Friday, 64 on Saturday, 69 yesterday and 44 up to noon today. As I think I wrote you, not only are the schools all closed, but the churches, theatres and movies, and people are not allowed to assemble anywhere for any purpose. Numbers of weddings have been private, though planned for church, and now we are very much afraid that Mildred’s will not take place in church. I hardly think the epidemic will be so improved by this Saturday. Of course, all this has affected the Liberty loan. Hundreds of people can only be brought to the point of buying by the hurrah style, either in a public meeting or at a theatre, so that their names will be shouted out. Then there are others who are too ill, or the expense of doctors, nurses and funerals has taken all their spare cash.....Lots of love always.

Devotedly,
Mother



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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.

June 11, 2020

A Message from CCHS:

Like so many of you, we at CCHS have been deeply affected by the death of George Floyd and the ensuing events across the country. We feel the same shock, sadness and anger that are reverberating across our community, our nation, and indeed the entire world. Even as we struggle with the public health and economic crises of the COVID pandemic, the racial injustice of our past and our present has been laid bare.

We at CCHS stand shoulder to shoulder with those fighting for human equality, social justice, and the dignity of every individual. Our community's history of accomplishment is accompanied by a history of racial and religious discrimination and inequity. Acknowledging that fact is part of CCHS' mission to collect, record, interpret and share our local history. We must learn from our history, and also unlearn the attitudes and behaviors that manifest injustice or bias.

Now more than ever, CCHS commits to the values of inclusion, empathy, humility, and respect for all persons. We will move forward with open hearts, open minds, and open arms.

Mary A. Sheehan
 President
 and the CCHS Board of Directors

CCHS Receives Inaugural Pathways Grant

CCHS is pleased to announce that it is one of 11 recipients of the Maryland Historical Society's inaugural Pathways Grant Program. The primary goal of the program is to build the long-term resiliency and efficacy of the museums, historic sites, and other history-focused organizations that make up Maryland's heritage community.

CCHS will receive \$7,500 each year of the two-year grant period to make our current oral histories more accessible, to expand and diversify the CCHS oral history collection with new interviews, and to engage with new audiences. CCHS plans to collect new oral histories, especially in neighborhoods developed in the 1940s through the 1960s such as Rollingwood, The Hamlet, and Chevy Chase Lake. We hope to expand our membership in these communities and engage with these residents through programming that includes oral histories. This project will enable CCHS to continue diversifying the voices in the oral history collection by including a wider range of local residents as well as those who work in the community.

Next year is the 40th anniversary of the Chevy Chase Historical Society. The Pathways grant will allow CCHS to mark this anniversary by engaging new audiences through showcasing existing community stories and highlighting new ones. Together, these stories make up the lived history of Chevy Chase, from its beginning as an exclusive streetcar suburb in the 1890s, through its growth as a post-World War II automobile-oriented suburb, to the current construction of a new high-density, transit-oriented development at Chevy Chase Lake.

The Spanish Flu in Chevy Chase



Architect Leon Dessez

Leon Dessez, notable Washington, D.C. and Chevy Chase architect, died of the flu during the influenza pandemic on December 25, 1918, at the age of 60. In a 1986 oral history interview with CCHS, his granddaughter, Sally Dessez Leon, remarked that, "Christmas day was always hard" for her father as it was the anniversary of his own father's death. Dessez was an officer of the Chevy Chase Land Company and

its chief architect. He designed several homes in the new suburb, including the Colonial Revival-style Birney House at 9 East Kirke Street and the foursquare houses at 5, 7, and 9 East Irving Street. He is perhaps best known for designing the spacious Queen Anne style home in Washington, known as Number One Observatory Circle, for the Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Observatory. In 1974, that home became the official residence of the Vice President of the United States.

In 1908, William Orme and his wife, Amelia, bought their home, located today at 3517 Cummings Lane, from Martin's Additions developer Harry Martin. The couple enlarged the house, almost doubling its size, to accommodate their growing family. A decade later, William traveled home from New York City on the train. Unfortunately, the man sitting next to him had the flu. William became ill and died at his home on December 4, 1918, at the age of 36.



The William Orme family, circa 1916



Herbert Hoover and family

When the flu pandemic hit Washington, future U.S. President Herbert Hoover was serving as head of the U.S. Food Administration. After his son contracted a severe case of the flu, Hoover and his family retreated to Chevy Chase to escape the city. The family rented "In The Woods", the estate of prominent botanist David Fairchild, presently located on the property of the Chevy Chase Recreation Association on Spring Valley Road. In 1924, Fairchild joked "The Food Administration escaped a bad handicap one night when Mr. Hoover nearly scratched an eye out on one of the rose bushes near the door."

"Perfectly Terrible": The 1918 Influenza Epidemic

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The Deeble family did not contract the dangerous flu and the city eventually recovered from the pandemic. In the 1930's, Elizabeth Deeble spent several years in Spain as a reporter covering the Spanish Civil War. She then returned to Washington to work for the federal government.

The CCHS archival collection contains 30 letters written to Elizabeth Deeble in Paris from members of her family. Many of these were written from their summer rental in Chevy Chase, D.C., where Cora and two of her daughters escaped the heat of their 18th Street home. To read them all, visit the CCHS archive online catalog and use the Keyword search function to search for "Deeble". The online catalog is available at <https://chevyCHASEhistory.pastperfectonline.com>.



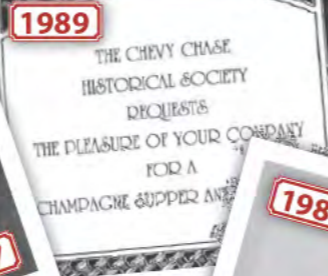
The Year There Was No Gala

The year was 1982. At 3:00 on Sunday, March 7, residents of Chevy Chase and other friends and history enthusiasts gathered at 7 West Kirke Street, the home of Joan and Bernard Hollander. Joan was a concert pianist and music teacher whose living room featured not one, but two, grand pianos. The event was a "Sunday Musicales and Victorian Tea," with Joan and Suzanne Ferrall playing the two pianos. The performance was followed by a reception with tea served from gleaming silver tea services and the table laden with homemade treats.

This was the first Chevy Chase Historical Society Spring Gala. In each of the 38 years since that gathering, CCHS has hosted a Spring Gala—most often a champagne supper in a Chevy Chase home to showcase a residence of architectural or historic significance. Every year, generous and gracious hosts have welcomed our guests into their homes. Hardworking and creative volunteers have chaired the Gala, orchestrating the myriad details involved in producing the event. At each Gala, CCHS mounts an exhibit highlighting the history and architecture of the home, and telling the stories of past residents and events from local history. It is CCHS' most important fundraising event of the year.

Another festive Gala was planned for spring 2020. Sponsors had committed their support, the invitations were ready to print, the piano had been tuned. Then an unwelcome guest arrived in town—the coronavirus. The health and safety of our supporters being foremost in our minds, we had no choice but to cancel the 2020 Gala.

Having no 2020 Gala photos to include in this Newsletter, CCHS offers instead a bit of Gala history. Photos from various Spring Galas from 1982 through 2019 are displayed on these pages. We can't wait to be able to party with our members and supporters once again!





CCHS is deeply grateful to the donors to the 2020 Spring Gala:

★ *Sponsors who maintained their donations despite the cancellation of the Gala due to COVID-19*

★ *Friends of the Gala*

★ *Others who contributed in varying amounts.*

These generous supporters have made it possible for CCHS to continue its work during these challenging times.

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CCHS Connects The Community During Quarantine

Corona Chronicles. During these difficult times, the Chevy Chase Historical Society has closed the Archive and Research Center to the public. The staff and board members have been working remotely, carrying on much of our business as usual. In addition, CCHS has been working hard to document the community's response to the coronavirus through our "Corona Chronicles" project. Since May, CCHS has been asking Chevy Chase residents to send in images, audio or video clips, or written statements to chronicle their experience during the pandemic. These items will become part of the broader history of Chevy Chase during this challenging time and a resource for future historians. We encourage all community members to submit materials about your life and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. You can email submissions to CoronaChronicles@chevychasehistory.org. See the back cover of this Newsletter for more information.



Evie Marvin visits her grandfather, Gary Cohen.

The Front Steps Project. As part of Corona Chronicles, CCHS is participating in "The Front Steps Project," a nationwide project to photograph families, sometimes with their pets or wearing masks, on the front steps of their homes to capture the faces of the community in this unprecedented time. The informal photo project reinforces community connections at a time when many feel isolated, and also raises money for local charities. CCHS has suggested that participating families make donations to either Manna Food Center or Here to Help, an organization started by a B-CC High School senior to help neighbors during the pandemic.

CCHS has recruited local photographers who have volunteered their time to take the photos. CCHS also provides families with free digital copies of their photos for their own memories. To date, photos have been taken

in Section 5, Section 3, and Martin's Additions, while always observing social distancing and other COVID precautions. CCHS looks forward to continuing this project in Chevy Chase Village, the Town of Chevy Chase, and Rollingwood when the weather is cooler and public health precautions allow.



The Dobbins family on their front steps in Section 3, June 2020.

History at Home. Since May, CCHS has been sending weekly "History at Home" emails featuring interesting but little-known stories and photos about notable people, places and events in our local history. Each email begins with a brief quiz on the featured topic with the answers found at end of the email. CCHS hopes these vignettes from our shared history will help maintain our sense of community and connection, even as we isolate to help thwart the coronavirus. If you do not already receive History at Home emails from CCHS with the heading shown below and would like to be added to the mailing list, please send your email contact information to info@chevychasehistory.org.



CHEVY CHASE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

History at Home

Chevy Chase History Quiz

Each week, we feature several questions related to Chevy Chase history. How many can you guess correctly? Find the answers to the quiz at the bottom of this email.



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The Corona Chronicles

Help CCHS record history in the making!

The Chevy Chase Historical Society is documenting the history Chevy Chase residents are making every day as we manage life during the COVID-19 pandemic. Help us by adding your story to the CCHS Corona Chronicles.

We are collecting photos, videos, journal and diary entries, voice and audio recordings, and other digital evidence of life in our community during this unprecedented time. Tell us about how you are coping, what has been most challenging, what you are thankful for, and the "silver linings" you've discovered.

Write to us about your experiences working from home, social distancing, attending school remotely, and more.

Your stories will become part of the broader history of Chevy Chase during this challenging time, and a resource for future historians. CCHS will feature select submissions in occasional emails and on social media.

Please email your submission to CoronaChronicles@chevychasehistory.org. If you have questions, contact CCHS at info@chevychasehistory.org or (301) 656-6141.