

Interview with Bill and Charlotte Duvall
Town of Chevy Chase Oral History Project
Interviewed by Carol Kramer-LeBlanc on March 30, 2004

CKL: This interview is with Charlotte and Bill Duvall. Thank you very much for agreeing to do this. We are talking on March 30th 2004 in the Duvall's home on Maple Avenue. This is the Chevy Chase Oral History Project. First of all, how long have you lived in the town?

CD: Since 1964.

CKL: Okay, so it's the 40-year anniversary of living in the town for you. How about you, Bill?

BD: Well, I first came here in 1940 with my parents. I lived here till 1950 and then I went away and Charlotte and I got married. Then my father died in 1963, which is why we decided to take over the house. We did that by 1964. So I've had two terms here beginning in 1940 to 1950 and from '64 to the present time.

CKL: And why did you decide to move back here? You liked the house and you liked the neighborhood, I gather?

BD: Exactly.

CKL: Were you an only child, or did you have other siblings who grew up here?

BD: I was an only child.

CKL: Oh, you were? Okay. And Charlotte, I gather you moved to town here because you had a new nice husband that you wanted to come live with. Isn't that right?

CD: We had been married for fourteen years.

CK: Where were you from originally?

CD: Well, I was born and raised in the District. And after that, after the war my family moved to Rockville. We lived at 103 West Montgomery Avenue in a house, which is now the Montgomery County Historical Society.

CKL: Interesting. And where were you (Bill) from before you came here?

BD: I was born in Georgetown Hospital and lived in Chevy Chase, Section 3 since 1922.

CKL: You both are real Washingtonians! Who were your neighbors when you first lived in your house?

BD: The Watkins lived next door at 7307. And the Holders lived at 7311 Maple.

CKL: Were they there both times that you lived here?

BD: No. The Watkins were still there but the Holders had moved away.

CKL: How about across the street? Were any of the same people still there?

BD: No.

CKL: Except my former next door neighbor, Mr. Hedges, who was around at that time, right?

BD: Oh, yes.

CKL: Who were some of the neighbors that you remember best, either one of you?

CD: Well, Mary Kelly lived next door.

CKL: She had children, didn't she?

CD: Well, she had five children—but just before she moved here, her husband came down with I think it was Alzheimer's but I'm not positive. He was not living at home. And the reason she moved here was her house on Battery Lane was being demolished. And she had --what was the doctor's name?

BD: Dr. Joyce.

CD: Dr. Joyce lived there. And she liked the house so she bought it. She had a son and four daughters.

BD: A son Bill and daughters Kathy, Terri, Denise and Cecilia.

CKL: Bill, how about you? Do you have any other neighbors that you remember well?

BD: Well, Mr. and Mrs. Fernold. And, you know where they lived?

CKL: No.

BD: In your house 7304 Maple.

CKL: Oh, is that right? Well that's interesting. What years, more or less?

BD: Well, I think they were the first occupants and owners of the house.

CKL: I think it was built in '48 if I go back—

BD: No, it was built a lot sooner than that. It was built in about '36.

CKL: Really?

BD: This house was built in 1940.

CKL: And that house was there.

BD: All those houses across the street from here were there.

CKL: Isn't that funny. I thought I had looked at an earlier deed --maybe it was the real estate sheet when I looked at it; maybe it was off by ten or twelve years?

BD: Well, maybe they just didn't have its early owner. I don't know.

CKL: Yes.

BD: We, we do think that the Fernolds were the first people that lived there.

CKL: And how long were they there?

BD: This would just be a wild guess, until about 1980, would you say, Charlotte?

CKL: Then it must have gone through a quite few people, I think, in the period since then. Well, how many families had lived in your house before you bought it?

BD: In this house? My parents were the first here.

CKL: Have you changed the house in any way since?

BD: Well, we haven't changed anything on the outside except to put glass doors on what was a screen porch. And we've made a few changes inside.

CKL: What kind of neighborhood events do you remember from the first years you lived in the town? Were there any special celebrations or picnics or that kind of thing?

BD: I don't really remember anything special. I had my own friends from other places, you know. We used to live over on Brookville Road by that shopping center. I had friends over there. So that was what we did.

CKL: Did they have the Fourth of July fireworks or any of those kinds of things? Was there a town hall? I know when I first moved here that it was in the 4-H Center.

BD: Yes, in Turner Hall.

CKL: Right. But the Town didn't organize the chili dinner or any of that kind of thing in the late 1980s.

BD: I think that's gradually grown in the last twenty-five years: the number of activities.

CKL: What sort of work did you do?

BD: Well, I was what they called a graphic artist. We prepared bar charts and curve charts and maps to brief the Chief of Staff in the Army. And also, some of the things went into publication. And we had to do the actual drawings for those kinds of things.

CKL: Oh, that sounds interesting. And Charlotte, when he was doing that were you around, you know, working around the house or did you have a job outside the house? You had children I know.

CD: Well, we met at work.

CKL: Oh, you did?

CD: Yes. Bill and I worked at the same place. And I had similar duties.

CKL: And did you continue to work?

CD: After we had our first child, then I stayed home with them.

CKL: And how many children do you have?

CD: We have four.

CKL: Four? I didn't know that. You have one with a cute car.

CD: One with a what?

CKL: A cute car. A little sports car or something.

BD: A little yellow car?

CKL: Yes, a little yellow car.

BD: My youngest boy. He has about four cars and they're all Mustangs.

CKL: So, he's a collector, huh? When was your first experience of the town government?

BD: Well, I guess it was in some time of conflict. And I can't remember what the conflict was. But everybody was coming to the town meeting because of the conflict. And that was over in the 4-H Center in the, I believe, the Ohio Room. It's in the, the, the--what's the name of the building ?

CD: The 4-H Center?

BD: Yes.

CKL: You had said Turner or something.

BD: Turner Hall is where the town office was. JC, JC—

CKL: Oh, Penney, the JC Penney Hall. They've endowed the 4-H Foundation at various points. So people had congregated there because they were upset about something?

BD: Yes. Sometimes people get very upset. When something goes wrong people start going to meetings.

CKL: Yes, that's right.

BD: If everything's going right why they don't go to the meetings.

CKL: That's true. That's true. So if there's a huge snowstorm and we lose our electricity, or if there's a zoning conflict or, you know, people start cutting down the trees, or don't cut down the trees or other issues. Well, what town issues have you been involved with over the years?

BD: Well, I was the Chairman of the History Committee starting in 1982, I guess it was. We worked for many years getting our history ready for publication. And the last couple of years I've been on the Construction Committee.

CKL: And, who else has been involved with those issues that you might have worked with? Are there any particular colleagues you had on those committees?

BD: Well, Eleanor Ford, for one. Do you know Eleanor?

CKL: I do, I do. Not well, but I know who she is.

BD: Jane Lawton.

CKL: Sure.

BD: And Jean Linehan and her husband, John Linehan. I'm talking about the history committee— And Susan Goodman - she was on the History Committee.

CKL: And what was the outcome? You mentioned the Chevy Chase, or the Town of Chevy Chase history. Was there a publication?

BD: It was published.

CKL: What year was that, do you remember?

BD: It was published about 1989 or '90.

CKL: And has it been updated since then?

BD: No. They would like to update it and they probably will. Actually, we worked on it so long and we gradually got so much together that I don't think they're going to find too much else to add.

CKL: That's probably true.

BD: Except maybe political issues that we have around here.

CKL: Yes. Well, there has been such a change in the neighborhoods in the last four or five years with all this building. So, it is fifteen years since '89. And in the last five I imagine there's been much talk about the sort of changes in the appearance in the neighborhood because of all these big houses that are going up. So what was the outcome of your involvement?

BD: What was the outcome of the history book? Oh, we got it published. Then the History Committee didn't have much to do and we decided to disband it. And now it's come back again in the last year.

CKL: Yes, yes. I got interested in learning more about the community. I thought the History Committee might be a way to do that. And so I suppose it's just people who want to make sure that nothing is lost or that they can share in learning about some of the history. Now, let me ask: What are some of your favorite memories of being outdoors in your neighborhood. What do you like about the town?

BD: I like it because it's in a convenient location. The neighbors are friendly and not too nosey. And, if you needed help, they'd help you.

CKL: Yes. And your four children, where did they go to school?

CD: Well, when we moved here, our oldest child started Leland Junior High. And then two others were at—

CKL: Elementary?

CD: Chevy Chase Elementary. And then our youngest son Bill went to Chevy Chase Elementary.

CKL: And Leland?

BD: Yes, he was in the last class that attended Leland in 1983. After that they started tearing it down.

CKL: So he's a homegrown boy, all the way through the schools.

BD: All the way through.

CKL: That's how my kids are too. And do you think the schools have been pretty good?

CD: I think so.

CKL: I do, too. Where did your kids go after they graduated from BCC? Did they stay in the area, or did they go away to college?

CD: Well, three of them went to Maryland and one went to the University of Virginia. Our second child went to the University of Virginia.

BD: Sound familiar?

CKL: Yes, it does. I have one child, the oldest is my daughter, Amanda, and she went to Goucher College. That's Baltimore. And then Peter went to the University of Maryland. But he's going to be graduating from NYU Law in another two months, May 14th or 15th, I guess.

CD: Oh, how exciting.

CKL: Yes. And then my stepson is in Maryland right now but he may transfer to Cornell. It kind of depends on his grades frankly. And then my second stepson is at the Waldorf School where his mother teaches. And then Vanessa's at BCC. So we, we've enjoyed the neighborhood, too.

But I think it's interesting that you say that the neighbors are friendly but not too nosey. I think that's exactly right. That's how I found it, too. It seems as though it takes a little while to get to know people because people are busy and--and not that many do their own lawn work I've noticed. My husband does but, you know, some of them just have all the service people come in and do it. So you don't see as many people out in the yards.

BD: Harry Marshall does it.

CKL: Right.

BD: He cuts his grass. And he does a lot of planting and tearing down of bushes and—

CKL: Right. Right. Right. Well, we do, too, and I kind of think that's fun. I find it relaxing myself.

CD: And we did when we were able.

CKL: How do you find the town as a more senior citizen? Do you find it responsive and easy to get around and all of that kind of thing now?

CD: I think so.

CKL: I mean, they've been doing the snowplowing and all that which I think is very user friendly. And they seem to do a good job on the trees. And so--did you lose electricity at all during the storms of the last couple of years?

BD: Oh, yes. What was the last one, was it Agnes or—

CKL: Isabelle?

BD: Isabelle. Yes.

CD: We lost a lot of trees —

BD: The electricity was off for about four days.

CKL: We did, too.

CKL: How do you think this town is going to change in the next few years? Can you predict the future?

BD: Well, I guess that we'll just get more automobiles and more automobiles. That's a big problem today. You have seen it; it has happened since you've been here. To cross Wisconsin Avenue or Connecticut Avenue, it's just almost impossible.

CKL: I know. How do you arrange your schedule? Do you wait till rush hour is over to go to the store and that kind of thing?

BD: Absolutely.

CKL: That's what I do when I'm not forced to go--if I don't have to go out in it I just try to minimize, you know. I think of going across Wisconsin as, you know, having to go across a border to another country or something.

BD: When you get into Bethesda.

CKL: Yes. It's tough, you know. I don't think it's quite reached equilibrium yet. Do you ever use any of the buses?

BD: I've ridden on them. But we don't use them because you'd have to probably drive your car over there and then find a place to park.

CKL: Defeats the purpose, doesn't it, in a way?

CKL: Where do your four kids live now?

CD: Well, all are in the area.

CKL: So they haven't gone far away. And do you have grandchildren?

CD: We have five grandchildren.

CKL: You've got a lot of sons and boys in your family. I can see that.

CD: I have only one granddaughter.

CKL: And how old is she, and where is she now?

CD: Well, she's just--she's going to college at Maryland. She lives there in a house off campus.

CKL: Do you have holiday get-togethers here still or do you go to the homes of your kids' or a little bit of both?

CD: Well, we celebrate all the children's birthdays and their wives—but not the grandchildren.

CKL: And husbands?

CD: And then we celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas.

CKL: That's a lot. You get together six times a year or more.

BD: Maybe a little more than that.

CKL: And you still cook and all that for this big group?

CD: Yes.

CKL: Good for you. So it's a nice time.

CD: At Thanksgiving and Christmas sometimes they bring—

CKL: Dishes.

CD: The daughters-in-law bring something.

CKL: Very good. Is there anything else that you would like to put in the record for the town that you can think of? Assuming this is recording like it's supposed to be.

BD: Well, I might talk about where I worked during World War II.

CKL: That would be interesting.

BD: I started work for what was then called the War Department in January of 1941. And that was about a year before Pearl Harbor. We worked first in the munitions building. It was a temporary building from World War I. And that was at 17th and Constitution Avenue. And then in 1941 in November, we moved over to what they called the new War Building. And that was part of what is now the State Department Building. The building is at 21st and Virginia Avenue. That was a beautiful building. But from the windows we could see the Pentagon being built. And in January of 1943 we were moved overnight, over to the Pentagon building, which was not quite finished really. We had huge open bays without partitions. You could look all over the place, and telephone wires were hanging from the ceilings. The grounds were just mud. But they got that under control pretty well.

CKL: That was '43 when you moved in there?

BD: January '43 we moved in: One of the first groups to move in.

So then we rocked along. And we had the European campaign. And Germany surrendered in 1945 in April, I think. And about that same time Franklin Roosevelt died. After Germany surrendered, some of the generals and the military officials from Europe started coming home.

And I think one of the nicest times was when General Eisenhower came home. He was driven through an entranceway to the Pentagon central courtyard and slowly circled around in an open vehicle. People really cheered because he was a big hero!

CKL: And you saw that?

BD: Oh, yes. Everybody went, you know, went to the windows of the center courtyard.

There was room for many people to stand around out there. And they cheered.

And then other generals came in like General Arnold who was head of what was then the Army Air Corps. He was very popular. Everybody called him Hap. And then the atomic bomb was dropped and Japan surrendered and things slowed down in the Pentagon. So I went over to the Veterans' Administration for three years. And then they got that program straightened out and under control. It got pretty boring over there so I went back to the Pentagon building in 1949 and stayed there till 1973 when I retired.

CKL: Were you a military employee?

BD: No. I was a civilian.

CKL: What was your training before you started?

BD: I took architectural drawing. U.S. Civil Service asked me if I could draw statistical charts and maps. I didn't know whether I could or not but it was easy enough.

CKL: So you've seen a lot of changes over your years in the military, I'm sure.

BD: Oh yes. Well, working for the military was pretty nice.

CKL: My grandfather did that. He was a civilian employee of the navy out in Bremerton, Washington for years and years. He ended up retiring in the fifties--he lived to be a hundred and three, and died around 1980. So he was retired most of the time since I was born after the war. But he was a civilian and I think he liked it pretty well.

BD: Well, why don't you tell us something about your career, Charlotte?

CD: Well, I just wanted to say I have two brothers. My father was in the World War I and World War II. And my two brothers, one was in the Army and the other in the Navy. But I first started to work at the War Department in, when was it?

BD: June of 1942.

CD: Yes, June of 1942. And then I went to the Veterans' Administration.

CKL: Really? You kind of took the same track there.

CD: Yes. And from there I went to the David Taylor Model Basin in Montgomery County. And then when our first child was born I stayed home.

CKL: Now did you do the same kind of drawing?

CD: I wasn't as advanced as he was.

CKL: I see. And when you came--when you stopped working, was that a big change for you, and did you enjoy staying home with the kids, or did you kind of wish you were still going to work every day?

CD: Oh, no. I enjoyed staying at home with the kids.

CKL: That's a pretty full-time job. I think a lot of young people my children's age now are thinking, it is too crazy to try and do the career and the kids. There's always something falling through the cracks! I think it is very good to have a chance to have a career. But it's also good to have a little more tranquility on the home front. So I don't know how you get all of that.

CD: I think it was good to be home.

CKL: Yes. I think it might make the kids feel a little bit more secure, you know. Even with cell phones and emails that we have now. I mean I travel a fair amount in my work and I can email from China or call from China on a cell phone, but still I know my kids would probably have me home.

CD: We don't have cell phones or email, but of course, all our kids call us.

CKL: Of course. Well that's very interesting. I'm sure you could tell me other stories about those times.

BD: Well, I was an air raid warden in World War II, and that started in 1942. We had an organization. There was a Mr. Miller who lived two houses up from where you are, in what is the Pollard house at 7300 Maple Avenue. And he was the head of all of them.

And we had blackout curtains in all the houses. And the air raid wardens would go out to make sure that everything was dark, that all the curtains were drawn. And you can't imagine how black it is out there when the streetlights are off and maybe there are no stars or moon showing up in the sky. It was just pitch dark.

CKL: Well, I can almost imagine, because we've had our electricity out a few times, you know. Until the generators start cranking in, you know it is shocking how dark it can be. So how long did that go on?

BD: Well, it went on till the end of the war. But, actually, we were beginning to realize in the last year or two that nobody was going to be able to get over here and bother us, at least, that's the way it seemed.

CKL: How much did--how did feelings of the people back then when World War II was threatening, how much did September 11th seem like that all over again? Did you have any of the same kind of momentary emotions?

BD: Well that was--of course that was directly on our soil. And that's the first time that's ever happened, you know.

BD: We were getting a little worried about the west coast because the Japanese landed in the Aleutians, off the north Pacific coast.

CKL: Is that off of Alaska?

BD: Yes. And it looked like they might get over here but they never did. The war turned around pretty fast because at the Battle of Midway the Japanese were pretty well beaten up.

CKL: Good thing. My dad was at Pearl Harbor; he was stationed there. They were out on a maneuver that morning. He used to tell the story of what happened when the captain came on the loudspeaker and said, "This is not a drill; this is not a drill! Pearl Harbor has been bombed!" So, they sailed in a new pattern and then came back and changed the ship over from peacetime to wartime condition. He was on the *Indianapolis*.

BD: That was a cruiser, wasn't it?

CKL: You know I just don't know those designations. You may be right. It had quite an interesting history because it had been used to transport FDR. It had an elevator in it, teak decks and fancy features like that. So they had to tear out the teak decks and get it ready for wartime.

And then it was also the ship that carried some of the bomb parts over for the atomic bombs for Japan. Because of that it was traveling under a blackout when it was torpedoed by the Japanese.

Fortunately my dad had come back to the States on a Medivac. So he was back in Bremerton when the Japanese torpedoed sank the *Indianapolis*. Some of the men were in the water for two or three days, you know. And they SOSed but they couldn't get through-- nobody could hear them because of the radio blackout.

And their captain later on was court-martialed. He was supposed to have zigzagged and he didn't. So it was quite a story. But anyway, that's not your history

BD: It's interesting.

CKL: Yes, it is! Did MacArthur ever come back to the Pentagon?

BD: Yes. Of course, MacArthur was pretty independent, but he was a hero. He left Battan and left a general named Skinny Wainwright in charge. And Wainwright was the general that surrendered over there. But Wainwright came back to a hero's welcome in the Pentagon. I can't remember whether MacArthur ever came to the Pentagon, or not. We've got a MacArthur Boulevard here in his honor.

CKL: We do. That's right. Well, I won't keep you all evening. But if there's anything else you'd like to input.

BD: When we found out we were at war my father and I were at Griffith Stadium which was the Redskins stadium at that time. And they had started making a public address

announcement for general so and so to report to his office, and D. C. officials, too. And it was kind of a murmur. But they never did announce over the public address system that—

CKL: That the bombing of Pearl Harbor had occurred.

BD: We were at war.

CKL: I see. What day of the week was that? That was Sunday, December 7. Sure, you were at the Sunday game Redskins game.

BD: So we came home, and turned on the radios and found out what was going on.

CKL: And did the President address the people that night?

BD: No, I think it was the next day.

CKL: It was the next day, at his fireside—

BD: No it was at noon on December 8. He said that the Japanese had attacked the Philippines without warning and they'd attacked Pearl Harbor without warning. He declared that a state of war existed between the Japanese and the United States of America.

CKL: What a time that must have been.

BD: It was.

CKL: I read David Brinkley's book, *Washington Goes to War*, which is very interesting. I'm not sure if you have read it--maybe you did.

BD: No, I didn't. I should.

CKL: Oh, you should! He tells some very interesting stories about that time and all the people flooding into Washington from all over the country to try to work and help. Roosevelt tried to build people's spirits with his different campaigns. It was a very good book with a lot of local history that is interesting as well. So, what was your dad's work?

BD: My father was budget officer in the House Appropriations Committee located in the U.S. Capitol Building.

CKL: Is that right?

BD: He worked with the congressmen. And he would mark up the budget for the Interior Department and some of the independent offices. And then the congressmen would get involved after that, after some of the groundwork had been laid by the Budget Office.

CKL: Did he have in his jurisdiction, the Bureau of Reclamation?

BD: No, I don't think he did. But he did have the Interior Department; that was a big piece of his work. And there were also other independent offices like the Veterans' Administration. On some of the bigger Departments like the Army and the Navy, well they had more than just one man working on them because it was a lot more work.

CKL: Now they've probably got a large squad for all of those different agencies. They're getting more elaborate I think.

Well, have you enjoyed being in Washington during the different elections over the years? Or is that something you'd just as soon avoid?

BD: Well, they used to have the swearing-in at the Capitol. And I can remember as a very young person being up on the roof of the Capitol looking down at them. For the Kennedy inauguration I took a couple of our boys. And we went down to Charlotte's father's office, which was on Fifteenth Street, Fifteenth and Pennsylvania Avenue.

CKL: That's a great vantage point, isn't it?

BD: Isn't it?

CKL: Yes. That was a really snowy one, wasn't it?

BD: It certainly was.

CKL: I remember Robert Frost was the poet laureate. I remember they made a big deal about how young President Kennedy stood there without a hat, remember, in the cold and took his vows. It was interesting. Well, I very much appreciate all of your information.

BD: We enjoyed it.

CKL: Well, I certainly hope this has recorded correctly but—

BD: Well, tell you what, we have an open house and you can come over and re-record it if you need to.

CKL: Okay. Well thank you very much. I hope that won't be necessary.

END OF INTERVIEW