Interview with Don Chapman
The Town of Chevy Chase Project
Interviewed by Frances Stickles on November 20, 2003

FRANCES STICKLES: You've lived here a long time, Don. When did you move to the Town of Chevy Chase?

DON CHAPMAN: We moved here in 1936, sixty-seven years ago when I was just five years old.

FS: What brought your parents here? Or had you lived in another part of town first?

DC: Well we did spend one summer down in Georgetown. My dad came down here in the New Deal to get a job in the government. And having spent the summer there, we were advised it would be a good idea to get all us kids in school in Maryland, so my dad was advised to find a place on the northwest side of town. He was tipped off to the availability of our present house at 3911 Blackthorn Street on a rental basis. That's how come we moved here.

FS: And you obviously had some brothers and sisters. There were more children than you.

DC: Yes. I had an older brother who was in high school, and he was about, a little more than, ten years older than I. And a sister who was ready to go into junior high, and still one other sister who would have entered third grade.

FS: So, she started in third grade. What grade did you start in?

DC: I started right in kindergarten.

FS: In kindergarten? And you went to Chevy Chase Elementary.

DC: That's right. Each of us went to the usual public schools here. I went to Chevy Chase. So did my younger sister, older than I. And the one that went to junior high went to Leland, and my brother went to BCC.

FS: And then you followed in their footsteps? Did the same educational track?

DC: Exactly. That's right. We all did. We went right through the system.

FS: You said you came here, down here. Where did you live before?

DC: We had lived in Cincinnati where my dad had an engineering job for a good many years. We began—it was the depression era, and his job there had run out so he had contacts that got him a job down here with the Federal government. That was in 1936.

FS: First your parents rented the house, and then eventually they bought the house. Is that correct?

DC: That's right. In 1942, the landlady moved out so dad bought the place.

FS: Have things changed at all, or is it pretty much the way it was when you first moved in?

DC: It's remarkably like it was when we first moved in. There has been very little change.

FS: And what about the yard?

DC: There's been some loss of trees and changing of landscaping, but I'd say except for paving the driveway, it's very much the way it was.

FS: The beech tree in the front yard. Is that still there?

DC: Still there.

FS: There was a whole series, was there not of beech trees down the block?

DC: There was a beech tree in each back yard of the lots on the north side of Blackthorn. Ours is also still there…."

DC: There were different trees at varying ages that over the years got to the point where they had to be taken out. But the big beech tree in the backyard and the other one in the front yard are my prize items.

FS: When you first moved in and you were making friends in the neighborhood, were there other children? What were the neighbors like?

DC: Well, the neighborhood and the people in it were very much like they are today. That is, very neighborly and young families and older folks both. In the house next door to you, where the Gardiners now live, was the family of Bogleys. A boy my age, also of kindergarten age, Gilbert, lived there, and he became very athletic as he grew up. And next door to them, if I can go on down the street, where the Brants now live, was a family named Maxfield. A couple, they were both osteopaths. Doctors married to each other.

And in the house next, where the Martins are now, that was Mr. Bensing, who I was told was the gentleman who first lived in our house and built it. And then he built the one over there on your side of the street and moved there. Then I guess a succession of renters, landladies, and families with some children.

Coming on down the street was Dr. Marstellar next down. Then beyond that a family named Richards. Then on the corner of Connecticut Avenue was a family named Pitts. Their young son was a good buddy of my brother. They were both high school age.

Stepping across the street where the Glews now live was a family named Varnell. An older couple. Then the stucco house where Mrs. Herring is now, that was Mr. Bowie and his wife. They were of the famous Bowie family of Maryland. He was a man of some status, a notary public among other things. Coming on up the street then where the Lyles are, that was Admiral Bell. He was quite a dignitary in the neighborhood. And his wife. And next door to us where the Joyces are now, that was a family named Fitts, Mr. and Mrs. Fitts. He was a government employee and his adult daughter, Eleanor, was living with them. They were a very informal couple, and very good friends of ours.

And then stepping past my place to the one on the corner where Jane Grapes and Harry Bilodeau, that was Svend and Ymer Yort. She was a daughter of, I believe, a former Irish ambassador. Svend, her husband, was a Norwegian fellow. I like to remember him as being a very good neighbor, very friendly, but also very short-tempered. [Chuckles] Then next door to you here on the corner of Meadow Lane, it was then a single story bungalow or cottage, and the owner there was Anthony Byrne and his wife. Mr. Byrne was an officer of the Munsey Trust Company downtown which later was bought out by Riggs Bank. That summarizes the street.

I could step on around the people along East-West Highway, but most notably in the old house at 3914 East-West Highway was a Mr. Hogan who was an interesting fellow, apparently a widower. He was most notable for driving in and out in an old 1915 Chevy he used to keep there. It was an antique even then, and so was he. [Chuckles] But the others were neighbors we just occasionally--

FS: What about in our house?

DC: And in your house, there was a Mrs. Yeumans and her husband. Mostly I remember them as a—they seemed to me like an older couple. He was kind of a dapper, wiry fellow. I mainly remember on summer days seeing him out in a straw boater hat. Very dignified looking. Suit and—just kind of nice, friendly people but we had very little contact with them because we were young folks then.

FS: Did you play in the street, in the backyards, what kind of games did you play?

DC: As far as when we grew up, when we first moved here I wasn't even allowed to cross the street. A close friend and I made acquaintance on the very first day just by yelling across the street at each other. Me seeing him on his little tricycle and I was—I guess I had a coaster wagon back then. But as we grew up, yeah we played in the street. There was very little traffic to worry about, and most of us kids were wise enough to the ways of traffic not to be source of a lot of worry about that.

As far as one of the comments I think has been made before here is that there were relatively few barrier fences between the yards and around the area, so we made pretty free of our neighbors yards playing around. Playing cops and robbers and things like that. And tag games. The amazing tolerance of the neighbors for kids running around the street was remarkable.

My favorite place to play ball when we got old enough to do so was in the broad paved area down at the corner of Aspen and Chatham Road, a wide intersection there. But now I'd say that much of our playing was done outside the neighborhood across

Connecticut Avenue where there was a large unbuilt block. There were no houses there on the block between Blackthorn and Leland Street and down to Glendale Road, and so that made a great playground for us. There were about four or five informally marked out ball fields over there. Sandlot ball, no organized playing at all. That was the character of the area. There were a few vacant lots within the town area, but mostly in the surrounding areas we found our places to play.

Anyway, the things I remember most were the open drainage courses that existed around the neighborhood. They're largely storm drains now. But those were open creeks, and they were great places for kids and little boys to play in. Chasing frogs, and shooting BB guns, and doing all the other naughty things we did. Parents never seemed to worry too much about whether we were going to get hurt or exposed to pollution, or anything like that. Police were very tolerant about things like BB guns and so on. And we all learned to behave ourselves not to shoot where we shouldn't shoot. That was sort of a fact of life. Every kid in the neighborhood probably had some kind of a BB gun. [Chuckles] But we also played ball.

I remember Gil Bogley next door was particularly athletic, and he sort of set the pace for the rest of us on his ability. I remember when he got into Landon School in high school and was tennis juniors champion three times. The Bogleys, they were quite proud of him with trophies in their living room and everything. We used to visit pretty freely back and forth between each other's houses, and we got to know upstairs and downstairs just about everywhere where there were kids our age to play with.

FS: What were the highlights of your school days. I mean not sports I'm talking about, but teachers or—

DC: Well, neighborhood activities were largely centered around schools because we didn't have much in the way of a town government then. There was just a special taxing area. There was no town hall or recreation center as such. So the grade school was of course my earliest focus when we first moved here.

One of the things I particularly remember was when they put on a school musical play on the big stage over at Leland Junior. Leland Junior was an awesome place for us because it was the old place that was built for BCC, up on 44th Street, and they had a huge auditorium. Theater style. The stage was enormous, and could have been combined with the gymnasium to make it big enough for an opera, I suppose. But this little show was a musical version of Pinocchio that was put on. Bill Offutt's book, "Bethesda: A Social History," has a photo of the play being put on. Well, I was among the kids from

about second to sixth grade who all got pulled into playing parts in that, so I had my little time on stage, too. [Chuckles]

Other things were we'd go over to that same auditorium to see more sophisticated productions. The Drama Club in high school and also the Montgomery Players organization put on regular plays of one kind or another. And the National Symphony Orchestra would have their children's concerts there, and they put the whole ninety piece symphony orchestra on that stage, which gives you an idea how big it was. As we went up through school that same facility was great because they had a couple of the teachers there who were big on having the students put on little informal things and made each class put on some kind of a talent show or something during each school year.

And going back to elementary school I remember mainly the kindergarten space that they had there, in the building that faced the playground. That's gone now. They rebuilt that whole section of that building, but that kindergarten space was a big play room with steps that went out to the playground. They let you play things like kickball and things that they don't let the kids play anymore. The older boys always had their softball game going over there and, by golly if you didn't play it right, they'd kick you off the team, you know. [Chuckles] It got very team-wise, team oriented there. And there was a play area which is still--it's been modernized, but it's still there at the corner of Meadow Lane and Valley Place where they had a jungle gym, and slides, and things like that. And we played over there.

Then going to and from school what I mainly remember is walking along the generous sidewalks that were there even then. And the business of dawdling on the way home around the various creeks and backyards and things which—I put a little piece together for the town a few years ago when they asked for contributions for a poetry and story booklet. There's a copy of that somewhere around, talking about that creek that we played in along Oak Lane, usually on the way home from school when we should have been home. [Chuckles] But that was the nature of my activities.

Of course, all the older siblings had their level of activities. My brother was oriented to chasing the girls over at high school and eventually wound up marrying one of them. And my oldest sister went from junior high into high school, and she was a beauty. She was chosen one of the three best-looking gals in class there. My next sister, just slightly older than I, had her time in social clubs through junior and high school too. So I'd say we all had our activities, but they were largely school oriented.

And parents, I remember my mother was active at the Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church, a group they called "the circle" there. And there was charitable activities and things. She collected in the neighborhood for people like the Red Cross and so on. Our next-door neighbor, Mrs. Betty Fitts, was eventually the Chairwoman of the Chevy Chase Women's Club. My mother got involved in those too, various community activities attached to the Women's Club, although mom was not really a member of the Club.

FS: How did your father get to the office? Was there a trolley out here then?

DC: The trolley had stopped operation two years before we moved here. Dad commuted by car. He usually drove down through Rock Creek Park to his office downtown. At various times he was in the Interior Department then later the Housing Authority was established in what they call the Longfellow Building just up in the block north of the Mayflower Hotel.

During the war, my dad had to take care to conserve gasoline, like we all did on "A" rationing cards, so he commuted by bus because that was the way he could do it. One thing I remember about that is that sometimes, waiting for the bus out here on the street, Admiral Forrestal would drive by and give him a lift. He would do that for government workers who were waiting down there and give them a lift downtown. He was a notable naval officer. And my dad, of course working down there in the Housing Authority, had to find different ways to get downtown. One of his ways was drive down through Rock Creek Park. Back then it wasn't that hard to find a parking place downtown cheaply. [Chuckles] But that was a big part of it.

He would get home in the evening, and like the usual "Brady Bunch" type family, mom would have dinner ready and when dad got home by golly, that was dinnertime. I mean, we kids better be home and cleaned up and ready to sit down to dinner. Because we sat at the dining room table and ate dinner. No order-in, fast-food meals for us. [Chuckles] And that's the way life was then. Families all did that presumably.

FS: Were you active in the church too? I mean was that part of your social life or not?

DC: Not really. We all went to Sunday school, and I think my sister a few years older than I, when she got married she became very active in church affairs. In fact, she married a minister. When I was growing up, I don't think church really played that big a role in our lives. And, when we finished our Sunday school days, we tended to drift away from the church somewhat.

FS: Talking now about neighborhood events, were there any Fourth of July picnics, or Halloween parades, or that sort of thing?

DC: As far as the Town of Chevy Chase goes, I don't remember any big organized events or things like that. There were, over in Bethesda and places around the area. I don't even remember the Village doing that much. We usually drove somewhere like downtown to the Mall if we wanted to see fireworks. I will say that on Fourth of July, back when regulations were pretty loose, we usually had firecrackers and fireworks in our backyard. And one neighbor actually used to shoot skyrockets out in the sky in spite of the fact that [chuckling] it was already somewhat of a built up neighborhood. Can you imagine doing that now?

One of the things I seem to remember more is the way we seemed to be out on the edge of development here. So Chevy Chase was you might call the rural suburb compared to downtown. And beyond Columbia Country Club, going out to the north and east especially, it was dairy farms in open country. So big town type events weren't really the thing until later. As we got into the 1950s, '60s and '70s we started having a little more organization. That was mostly for the young folks. We were already adults by then.

FS: When you got to college, what happened? Stay here or go away?

DC: Okay, I went out to my dad's old alma mater which was University of Cincinnati. Spent five years in a course there, a co-op course. Then that being my birthplace of course, I did quite a relearning--did a relearning of how it was there.

One of the things I remember is that the old neighborhood we lived in when I was a preschooler out there—it was known as Madisonville, a suburb of Cincinnati, was remarkably like our Chevy Chase neighborhood here. Good neighbors, friendly streets, and the kids just played around.

I will say this. It was mostly white neighborhoods. We didn't have the integration or the fair housing then and it was a strictly segregated lifestyle. I don't know what we missed out on by that. It was quite different from when we spent that summer down in Georgetown right near the Burleith neighborhood which was—the colored neighborhood, we called it. I learned a little bit of tolerance there because that was a good neighborhood too, even then. A little noisier than it was around here, but you know, friendly and full of activity.

One of the things around here this was very upscale, and so many of the folks here were older and dignified. And the fact that there were young families like us, found that that was no problem. We just all kind of ran around together.

FS: Then you came back here. You came back and lived with your parents and lived at their house.

DC: Yeah, I was one of those empty nester guys that they probably wanted to kick out of the house. [Laughs] But I got a job in a consulting engineering firm over in Silver Spring, Maddox and Hopkins. After a few years there doing design work, with my engineering degree from Cincinnati, I quit that because it was not very satisfactory employment, and then got the job with Prince Georges County Department of Public Works.

I stayed with that for thirty-one years, moving around up to where I was acting Bureau Chief for a while. It was a pretty responsible job. That was commuting back and forth eastward over there and then coming home. By getting home I mean sitting down with the folks to kind of just cool it in the house at nighttime. [Chuckles] I don't know. I guess I wasn't a very sociable type myself.

FS: You're saying, "cool it". Did you have air conditioning?

DC: No we didn't. Didn't, still don't. However for a lot of houses, right up through the Second World War, air conditioning had been a luxury nobody had. That brings up an interesting change, in the architecture you might say, of the neighborhood. Almost all the houses here had screen porches. In the summertime, windows were open and you could hear family activities going on, the radios playing and everything, because you had to get every breath of cool air you could. Most of the screen porches around the neighborhood have been converted into auxiliary rooms or one thing or another. We still have our screen porch, but—

FS: So do we.

DC: And I don't use mine, and I notice most of the screen porches don't get used around the neighborhood now. It is an architectural change and lifestyle change. Now we all tuck into our houses and close the windows. We don't have the openness of the summer evening.

FS: I think with your experience with Prince Georges County you were asked, once we got organized as a town, weren't you to help us with traffic?

DC: Well, I just got annoyed at the way the town government was operating at one point and just decided to kind of butt in. My first involvement with town government, such as it was, was back before we achieved town status. In the Citizen's Committee, I volunteered myself to the Traffic Committee. That was the first one that they'd ever had about in 1969. That was when we first undertook to put limited times of entry into the town to try to cut off some of the through traffic and install stop signs, and speed limit signs and things.

I remember the main thing was that some of the people from the surrounding neighborhoods were very upset over the town trying to do that, and actually sabotaged signs. Ripped them out and threw them on the town manager's front yard. Caused other mayhem. [Laughs] Because at that time, traffic wanted to come through here and they weren't about to be denied. But as it turned out, the later view of it was that our work was inadequate anyway, so—

More recently, just starting with last spring, I volunteered myself onto the town government's traffic committee again. And here—well, we were loaded now. We have authority as a town government to impose regulations and signs. We don't have to seek county permission to do these things. I'd say that what's happening now is the town is going all out to try to cut out any external neighborhood traffic. That's been my involvement.

I generally wasn't otherwise involved except for sitting in on town meetings and speaking up when there were people threatening to change the zoning in the town or nearby areas, or violating zoning regulations with various things. We all tended to speak up. Otherwise, we just kind of let the town walk along and let the Citizen's Committee do its business. And when the town government achieved town status, we attended town meetings to see that we elect people we like and see that the budget didn't get too far out of hand.

FS: I don't know how to interpret this question, but what are some your favorite places in the town?

DC: Oh boy. Well, going back to childhood as I mentioned before, playing along the area down along Oak Lane and Meadow Lane, which we kind of thought of as the main street of town. And down along Oak Lane there was the open creek there where they—Oak Lane up there toward the Meadow Lane end wasn't even paved, as I remember. It was a gravel surface, and the open creek ran from the edge of what we called the Dinwoodey property—if you go over onto Meadow Lane at the corner of Thornapple, the house on the corner is way up the slope, there's a little footbridge over the dale in the front yard. And at the—I guess it's the north property line--the pipes opened up into an open creek. Down through what we called the Warren property, down almost to where Oak Lane straightens out heading down toward Woodbine Street where the first houses were just being built, that was all open. And one of the things I remember is it was just a great place to get muddy and play around, throw rocks at the critters that were in the water, and do things little boys do. When I was a kid, that was one of my favorite places to be.

And likewise, as we got a little more adventuresome, the rest of the creek running on down Maple Avenue was open, and very interesting. Full of wildlife. And you could go on down below East-West Highway and all the way down to the Columbia Country Club. There were frogs and all kinds of things down there.

FS: But what about deer? And rabbits and bigger animals?

DC: Well we had a lot of wildlife, small stuff, like rabbits and turtles, and even a 'possum or two. A wild rabbit got in the neighborhood one time and intrigued everybody. Birds of all kinds. But large animals like deer would have been unheard of in the area. That would have been for forestland.

FS: They had plenty of places further out.

DC: That's probably part of it. And part of it, most of the game in the area had probably been run out in generations before. And until hunting stopped in the outer county, I guess they were pretty much decimated. But the small animals, we usually were interested because when they showed up we had chipmunks and hordes and herds of squirrels around here like we still do.

At times when you'd see--Oh and people let their dogs and cats run loose. There were no regulations against that. So the dogs always chased the squirrels, and that was always a thing for the kids to observe. You know how the squirrels were adept at getting up the trees to stay out of harms' way. [Chuckles] Lots of acorns from the pin oaks and oak trees around, and watching squirrels bury them. Yeah, it was a lively place, but mostly small stuff.

FS: Staying with growing up, were there any Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, or any of that activity?

DC: It's good that you reminded me of that. Yes. I joined when I was about twelve years old. I joined the Boy Scouts in a troop that met at the Methodist church down on Connecticut Avenue. Mr. Hill was our scoutmaster, and his son was assistant scoutmaster in the troop. And there were, teenage activities, and some of my schoolmates were also members of the troop. And yes, we went out hiking and had camping trips overnight usually out in Rock Creek Park somewhere. Or sometimes "way out" near Four Corners or over across the river near Fort Marcy we camped out sometimes.

And I spent one summer with them on a—our troop had the Kerlin's cabin. Kerlin was one of the family names that were active in the troop. But their cabin was out on Maryland Heights which is just this side of Harper's Ferry. And we found it to be a big

adventure, summer camping as a teenager. And it's of course a growing up process for boys. You know we teased each other and made plans to shape up, and so on.

My sisters were both active in Girl Scouts, not the Campfire Girls. Their troops met at different times at Camp Rockwood, which is over near the goldmine tract down McArthur Boulevard, which has since been sold out by the Girl Scouts. My oldest sister actually went camping up at the what they called Camp Catoctin which became Roosevelt's "Shangri-la" camp, and later Camp David. You couldn't go in there now, but the old lodge my sister remembers I believe is still there. It is up on the slopes above Thurmont.. As far as that goes, there was a Campfire Girls group, and the Cub Scouts we knew about. I didn't join that when I was a kid. Yeah, scouting was a pretty important thing for boys to be doing.

Another thing is boyhood activities. Almost every kid around here, at some time or other, had a newspaper route. I mean the *Washington Post* and *Star*, the *Evening Star* and the local newspapers, the *Shopping News* and so on, had kids do their deliveries for them. We were supposed to make sure the newspaper got on the front porch. And if you had a good arm and could throw it there, that was all right, but the *Shopping News* had to be tucked into the doorknob or into the mailbox. Man, you couldn't just throw it on the porch. That wasn't allowed. [Laughs]

Kids had to go collect the money, and of course that always led to a thing; this neighbor was a good payer and that neighbor wasn't. That was always a matter of some criticism. Some of the neighbors would even tip the kids who'd come around. That was one way of getting acquainted with your neighbors.

FS: What about mowing lawns, and shoveling snow?

DC: Well, some of us did. The junior high school kind of sponsored a neighborhood job corps you might call it, for kids, where you'd have a set fee that they'd arrange to go and mow your neighbor's lawn or something like that. Fifteen cents an hour. [Chuckles] Some of us did that at one time or another. But mostly kids were expected to attend to chores around their own family households. Lawns got mowed by their own kids. That was sort of like in return for getting an allowance, [chuckles] if you got one at all. An allowance was like twenty-five cents a week or something like that. I can't imagine having dollars to spend on clothes. Clothing allowances didn't exist then.

Of course during wartime there were shortages. One of the things was scrap drives to get--go around to where there were some local dumps in the area, pull out scrap iron and metal and so on, and bring it together to collection centers during the war. We'd

gather up newspapers and turn those in and get paid for them at the scrap yards. That was a way of raising money that you could spend on your hobbies or whatever, though we were all very low-key on that. During the war it was a pretty big thing to join in on these various drives for one thing or another.

FS: Were you aware of wartime activities downtown because it was the nation's capital, or--?

DC: Yeah, of course we were. It was in the news and everything, and I was growing up to the age where I was just beginning to get interested in what was going on with the war but not old enough to serve in it. My older brother went into the service. He volunteered right after Pearl Harbor. He was highly upset that those Japanese would dare attack our country, you know?

And like everybody else, it was a war that everybody supported, it seemed like. Patriotism was the big thing, and we started seeing the blue stars and the gold stars on the houses around the neighborhood. And there was a lot of auxiliary activity, voluntary activity going on, largely connected with people like the Red Cross and the churches and other groups in the neighborhood that would gather to put together what today you call care packages. USO packages and things.

My sister, the one who's closest to my age, served in a group they called JANGO, Joint Army Navy Government Organization or something. I forget what it was called, but it was sort of like young gals would go down just to be friends with the servicemen at the USO Club down at the old Belasco Theater on Lafayette Square. And it was all very nice and sweet and innocent, you know. And the GIs seemed to appreciate it.

The other thing was downtown there were security measures like guards on the water facilities around town and some of the government buildings. The White House was protected. And they started closing streets around the White House that had always been open to traffic. One angry episode I remember particularly was the closing of West Executive Avenue. Drivers today complain about street closings, which is sort of like how everybody was when they first closed that street off in the interest of security for the President.

The thing was, most of those public buildings were still wide open. There was no ban to walking up the Capitol steps from the east or the west side and going right into the Rotunda. Tours to the White House were still pretty wide open for kids and so on. You could even go through the White House with the tour guides. A butler or servant would keep you from going upstairs there into the living quarters [chuckles], but otherwise they were pretty much wide open even during the war.

But we were aware of troops being quartered down on the mall where the Navy Department and the War Department had auxiliary buildings. They were tempos being put up for the growing government. We were aware of the construction of the Pentagon building across the river. That was when they were going to consolidate all the military departments in that one building. Didn't quite make it. Someone still had to stay out. [Laughs] And they—

I remember one of the big things to me, I was oriented toward engineering early on I guess. I was very fascinated with the building of a floating bridge across the Potomac River as a supplement to the 14th Street bridge. Right across from the area—the mall where the polo ground was and a few things, and across to Columbia Island over there. They actually erected a floating bridge. It was between the Memorial Bridge and the Fourteenth Street Bridge.

And they had another one I learned about later. A railroad bridge was built on pilings across the Potomac River from Shepherds Landing near where Wilson Bridge is, across to the north side of Alexandria, near the power plant over there. That was because they realized that if the Nazis ever got their saboteurs over here and blew up the railroad bridge across here in Washington, they would cut off the railroads from north to south until you got clear west to West Virginia. So that was an emergency track that was there during the Second World War.

And there were various things like guards on the old Union Bridge, or the Arch Bridge, out at Cabin John. You couldn't get out of your car and walk around there anymore. They were so afraid saboteurs might blow up that water main that was on there. And down at the reservoir, Reservoir Road, they had guards on that. Later we found out that there were no saboteurs, but we were very worried that there would be I guess. [Laughs]

FS: You have been—lived here so long. Do you have friends that, like you, have lived here for their entire lives?

DC: Well, most of them have moved away of course, but there's one lady. Kathleen O'Brien still lives over on Stanford Street, who was a classmate of mine in elementary school. She remembered me at one of the town meetings and came over and said hi. I recognized her. I did not at first, but as soon she introduced herself, I remembered her very well

All the way through elementary and junior high and high school I had a close buddy, Donald Anderson, who still lives over in the Silver Spring area. He kept contact

with us. He used to live down on Oak Lane and Woodbine Street in a big brick house there.

And Andy, as I called him, was a nephew of the playwright Maxwell Anderson. He had rather interesting and varied interests. A very distinct fellow. Much smarter than I, although I didn't think so then. I thought I was the smartest in class. The older I got, the smarter he got. Right on up through until just a few years ago the last time I had much contact with him, he was still keeping track of our friends that went to high school.

FS: But they've all moved away?

DC: Yeah, most of them. Some—

FS: Donald Anderson and Mrs. O'Brien are the two stalwarts that are still in the town?

DC: Yeah, but I hadn't had any contact with her after elementary school until she introduced herself at one of our town meetings.

FS: When you were on the traffic committee these two times, did you have any special friends that—you know sometimes when you get on a committee you have a buddy that thinks the way you do or supports the same—

DC: Well I'd say that there is one lady. I can't think of her name right now, but she's one of the more conservative members of the traffic committee who seems to think a good bit the way I do, that we're going too far on all this traffic, speed humps, interruptions and so on and she would be, as I am, in favor of getting some kind of transit facility over here along the railroad right-of-way if we could keep the trail there. Most of the other members, they're younger, although we are agreeable to work with each other I found that their points of view and mine are different. We can work together, but I didn't find a whole lot in common. [Laughs]

FS: What about special things that happened? Calamities, or plusses or minuses?

DC: Okay. When I was a teenager, there was a family named Smith that lived in the stucco house right behind us. I used the room in the back of our house and I was studying there. I looked up and all at once the whole top roof of that house was on fire. They had an attic fire. What made me look out there was not the fire but the fact the firemen were already there. They responded very quickly from down here at Chevy Chase Fire Department. With two squirts of a fire hose they put that fire out, but it was a lot of excitement as you might imagine. But that was—to me it really shows you how good our fire protection service was. They saved that house with quick response. And I don't know whether the folks that lived there were even aware that they were having a fire. But some neighbor was alert to it.

FS: You were telling about the fire. What other kinds of calamities—?

DC: Well, there was another fire much more recently in the house at 3914 East-West Highway which you can see diagonally through here. That one was—the house was vacant. It had been vacant for almost a year. The guy that owned it had let his son have parties in there, and apparently after they departed from one of those they left something smoldering in the basement. That wasn't too severe but it was a very smoky fire and it did a lot of apparent damage to the house. But it was another year or so, after the fire was extinguished, before they finally rebuilt the house. That was not so much exciting as irritating to see that place neglected that way.

But I guess the big fire in town was really not in the town. It was the day that the BCC High School caught fire. It happened about 1941 or so, I think it was. Bill Offutt's book mentions it. What it was is we heard about the fire and saw the fire engines running back and forth across East-West Highway, and the word came out the high school is on fire. We could see from our—we climbed up on the porch roof across the way there and looked west, and the trees were low enough that you could see the roof of the high school over there. And it was ablaze like a major conflagration. Matter of fact, they took out the whole center of the roof and they almost lost a cupola up in the middle of it. It took them quite awhile, several hours, to get that fire extinguished. And fire engines from Bethesda and all over the place.

They had a terrible incident there where a club member leaving Columbia Country Club, apparently in his cups drove into the firefighting activity there and ran down one of the firemen in the middle of East-West Highway. That caused quite a bit of consternation. But that was probably the biggest fire that affected the neighborhood here because some of our kids were going there, you know. And then for months afterward they had the--that was the cafeteria up there on the top floor and they had to make do with temporary facilities, because it wasn't repaired for awhile. Wartime you know. Wartime coming on at least.

I remember my brother volunteered himself to go over there and act as a kind of citizens help to the firemen being an adventurous kid, you know. Hanging around there passing coffee cups to them and things like that, you know. [Chuckles] Just to be in the action.

But then there was another fire that probably most people don't remember over where an old street, or Thornapple Park it was later, at the cut-through between Leland Street and Thornapple Street. That and two or three of the surrounding lots there were

part of a parcel that was used by the Chevy Chase Transfer and Storage Company, a commercial operation. And we used to be able to cut through their property and to walk through there, but there was trespassing. It was the easy way to come from the elementary school to get over to Bethesda.

That property was kind of a misfit in the neighborhood. It was a non-conforming zoning use that just stayed there, but it was deteriorated. Old corrugated steel buildings and kind of disreputable looking. I don't know, maybe it was remnant of possibly something else that had been there before, like a livery stable or something like that. I don't know. But whatever, the outfit was acquired by Smith Transfer and Storage Company, which was a highly advertised moving and service company, which in turn was acquired by Mayflower, the Smith Mayflower Company.

Not long after that it caught fire. They said somebody was welding around one of those old tin buildings there, and set fire to the contents in the building. It burned out. I don't know how much property was lost, but they apparently couldn't rebuild because of the zoning changes. So they rebuilt their—went back to the original subdivision, and then re-subdivided it into three lots; One on one side and two on the other where houses were built.

The county made them dedicate the street through because that was still outside the town. The problem was that the county, in order to allow building permits for those houses, were going to require them to build a street through. The town got up in arms over that, and so I guess the next thing--that was one of the prime movers in the town actually annexing over into the Norwood Heights subdivision and Section 8, and the Bethesda subdivision, and bringing those into the town. They also brought in the people right across Meadow Lane, Section 4B, and the subdivisions of Tarrytown and Meadow Brook at Chevy Chase, up along East-West Highway, were also at the same time brought into the town.

Then we had the problem of what to do with all those places where the streets weren't up to town standards, you know. So the deal was in order to stave off zoning and encroachments of commercial and more streets and things they gave those people the incentive to join the town by paying for improving the streets and sidewalks and things. Of course we taxpayers had to pay for that. But I think on balance of course it made the town a lot more consolidated and larger in scope, and gave us some clout with the county government. But the fire was what sort of opened that whole possibility.

FS: Set it off. Well, you were going to talk a little about the town and its environs, Bethesda particularly.

DC: Yeah. Not to dwell on Bethesda necessarily, because I think that's already been thoroughly documented by Bill Offutt's book, but the thing that impressed me was that when we moved here to Chevy Chase, this was out in the country, well, very nearly so. Kensington was out there as a railroad community, and Garret Park, and Bethesda was still a kind of a—almost kind of a--dad used to call it a little one horse town. It was a commercial strip along there with auto dealers, and ice cream parlors, and things like that. The Hot Shoppe wasn't there yet. And going eastward it was all open country until you got over the Silver Spring which was also sort of a cow town. And you know, you'd see farm tractors come in from out in the country right into the middle of town. The big centers of activity seemed to be the farmers market and the Bank of Bethesda over there.

But what that meant was that in summer times when dad liked to--with his scarce, gas rationed gasoline, he'd save it for the family and take us out on country rides just to get away from summer heat. Our country ride was, wow, really out in the country. We drove out Wisconsin Avenue to Rockville, and down Veirs Mill Road, and over to Silver Spring, and across East-West Highway, which was still pretty new, to Chevy Chase. And except for those centers, or the big intersections, it was pretty much cow pastures and dairy farms, and crops and country homes, and maybe some bed-and-breakfasts here and there, and a few things. East-West Highway had only been built back about 1931 or '32, and it was still a pretty raw, little old two lane road that ran across to Silver Spring. They were still calling it the Bethesda-Silver Spring Highway then. But once you got past Columbia Country Club here, it was Chevy Chase Lake and then nothing it seemed like. You went out to Kensington via Connecticut Avenue a little two lane road. One of those things with blacktop and concrete strips on the sides of it.

I remember we used to, in high school days as kids when we got to where some of the kids had automobiles, which--not very many kids had cars then, but those who did—we'd get rousting around doing things that you wouldn't do now, like speeding up and down Wisconsin Avenue toward Rockville, playing hide and seek with our headlights out. Seeing how fast we could come down Veirs Mill Road past what's Park Lawn Cemetery down there now. My brother said that he and his buddy Harry Pitts down the street , exceeded a hundred miles an hour on Veirs Mill Road with an old clinker of a car which they hot-rodded. [Chuckles] I couldn't imagine doing that, but it's what he said they did.

The biggest thing that we could see from here looking northward was the old trolley car barn that still stood for years there next to the railroad at Chevy Chase Lake. And just beyond that Perry's lumber, coal and oil yard, and the hardware store. That was pretty much all that was there. The old car barn was used by various uses through the Second World War and for years afterward. A used car dealership, a lumber yard, and various uses. But down behind there was the Chevy Chase Lake, the lake, not the swimming pool. That was there, too. But across the way down there behind the car barn was what was really the remnant of the lake because it had been drained. Mostly just a swamp area. And boy if you wanted wildlife, that was the place to find it. Snakes and all kinds of things.

But much of the area from there up to East-West Highway was a dairy farm, overgrowing. It had been abandoned somewhat. Then further over toward Farmington area I guess it is, northeast of East-West Highway and Connecticut, there was a big dairy farm over there. Meadow Brook Farm I think it was called, with a big dairy barn that you could see from the East-West Highway. That whole area over there was country.

I remember when I was in Boy Scouts, we had a trail finding contest which left from the Methodist church and went back to the east along Taylor Street and Shepherd Street. As soon as we got across Brookville Road, we were tramping through, at night time, through farm pastures and haystacks, and down over to Rock Creek Park. There were no houses there. That's the way it was around here. Now there's all this development that you see from here on out to Rockville and beyond. It happened mostly after the Second World War.

FS: When you have more time, we will add it to this tape but right now, thank you very much Don. It's been an eye-opener.

DC: It's been fun. I think I could go on and on about little details that nobody would care about. [Chuckles]

FS: Well I think it's the little details that make history interesting.

END OF INTERVIEW