

CHEVY CHASE FIRE DEPARTMENT

During the early 1920s, there was a large steel frame next to the Post Office Building in Chevy Chase Village at Connecticut Avenue and Kirke Street. Hanging from it were a locomotive wheel rim and a sledge hammer. When a fire occurred, a citizen would swing the hammer to sound the alarm. Residents were expected to rush to the fire with their extinguishers or man a hand-drawn fire truck. A call was usually made to the District of Columbia fire companies about two miles away, and apparatus was dispatched. A periodic payment was also made to the Kensington Volunteer Fire Department in an agreement for protection.



The fire gong at the Village Hall
COURTESY, CHEVY CHASE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

During this same period, there was also a hand-pulled hose reel kept in a small shed on Cummings Lane near Brookville Road. Volunteers from Martin's Addition lugged it to the scene of the fire, where hopefully there would be a fire hydrant. The volunteers later moved their equipment to a steel shed on Georgia

Street near Taylor Street. The Chevy Chase Fire Board later provided them with a Chevrolet hose wagon.

Old-timers say that, except when personal injuries or substantial property damage occurred, these activities were "rather fun." They provided our quiet, sometimes boring, residential area with colorful local heroes and amusing news items.

But in 1926 the need for an organized and incorporated fire department was recognized. Representatives of the five sections of Chevy Chase held numerous meetings and gave careful attention to advice from a number of sources. The commissioner and fire chief of the District of Columbia pointed out that in the event of a large fire in downtown Washington there might not be enough equipment to respond to a simultaneous fire in Chevy Chase. They encouraged the establishment of a regularly-employed force with at least one piece of serviceable motorized apparatus.

In order to expedite the establishment of a fire department, a contribution of 15 cents per \$100 of taxable real property was solicited from homeowners. In Section Four this averaged out to about \$10.00 per year. A tax bill for fire protection with the same assessment was passed by the Maryland State Legislature shortly thereafter.

A chief and six firemen were employed in 1927. They were stationed in the Chevy Chase Post Office building. A new American La France pumper was purchased and put in service. The Martin's Addition Volunteers supplemented the regular force.

Better housing was needed, and the Fire Board authorized construction of the present building located at 8001 Connecticut Avenue. Firemen and equipment moved in during the winter of 1931. The American LaFrance pumper, the Chevrolet hose wagon, and a new Seagraves pumper were all located in this building in 1933.

The Department had an agreement with nearby companies in Maryland and the District of Columbia to respond to requests for help when major emergencies occurred. In 1942, they assisted at the scene of a train wreck at Dickerson, Maryland, where 25 people were killed. During World War II, they trained 200 auxiliary firemen and furnished them with equipment supplied by the Office of Civil Defense.

In September 1966, after considerable research into visual safety, chrome yellow was adopted as the fire engine color for the Chevy Chase Fire Department. Currently there is an ongoing fire prevention program,

with inspection of buildings and exhibits conducted by firemen at an annual open house.

Montgomery County Fire Station Number 6 was completed in 1970. Located at the intersection of Wisconsin Avenue and Bradley Boulevard, it has answered many emergency calls from the Town of Chevy Chase.

James H. Garrett

Mr. Garrett grew up in Chevy Chase and was appointed paid fireman in February of 1932. He became Chief of the Chevy Chase Fire Department in 1959 and retired in 1970.



1932 and 1940 Seagraves fire engines pose at the Chevy Chase Fire Station, 8001 Connecticut Avenue

PHOTO BY TOWN OF CHEVY CHASE