

# CHEVY CHASE LAKE

The name and location of "Chevy Chase Lake" is fading from the collective memory of local residents. For some 60 years, "The Lake" meant the general area 1.8 miles north of the District Line which included the junction of the trolley line and the Baltimore and Ohio Georgetown Branch, several business establishments, an amusement park, and a swimming pool. It served as a geographic reference point; the term "The Lake" enjoyed the same significance as the term "The Circle."

The body of water, the actual lake, began 40 yards east of Connecticut Avenue. Its northern boundary is now Chevy Chase Lake Drive. The lake was created by the construction of a small dam across Coquelin Run in the early 1890s. Its purpose was to impound a supply of water for the electric generating plant. The lake was no more than 160 yards wide by 240 yards long.

As viewed from the high elevation of its west end near Connecticut Avenue, the lake was a place of great natural charm. Here the Chevy Chase Land Company

built a first-class amusement park. It proved to be another successful venture to promote their real estate program. Many of the park's visitors rode the trolley line from downtown Washington and could not help being impressed by the fine homes that were being built.

Edith Claude Jarvis in her article, *Old Chevy Chase Village*, recalls that the park featured a merry-go-round, horse back riding, bowling, a shooting gallery, and boating on the lake. During warm evenings, the park became a profusion of soft-colored lights. Concerts were given by military bands from a seashell-shaped bandstand. People of all ages danced to popular bands of the day in a large dance pavilion. It is said that dancers Irene and Vernon Castle introduced the "Cake Walk" at Chevy Chase Lake.

When viewed from the dam at the low east end, the lake was not a pleasant setting. The surrounding banks and swamps were choked with underbrush, and the water was so muddy it was unfit for swimming. Young



*Boating on Chevy Chase Lake, circa 1920*

COURTESY, MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

daytime visitors came from nearby homes and found it to be a place of high adventure. The lake was frozen during much of the winter and provided an informal ice skating rink. It was best during the summer. As people approached, turtles hurried down the banks to safety and frogs plopped into the water. Small fish rippled the surface and tadpoles abounded along the shore. Snakes of questionable species sunned themselves and were viewed from a prudent distance. Pieces of wood were pushed out from the shore and became warships of fancy to be bombarded with an artillery barrage of stones.

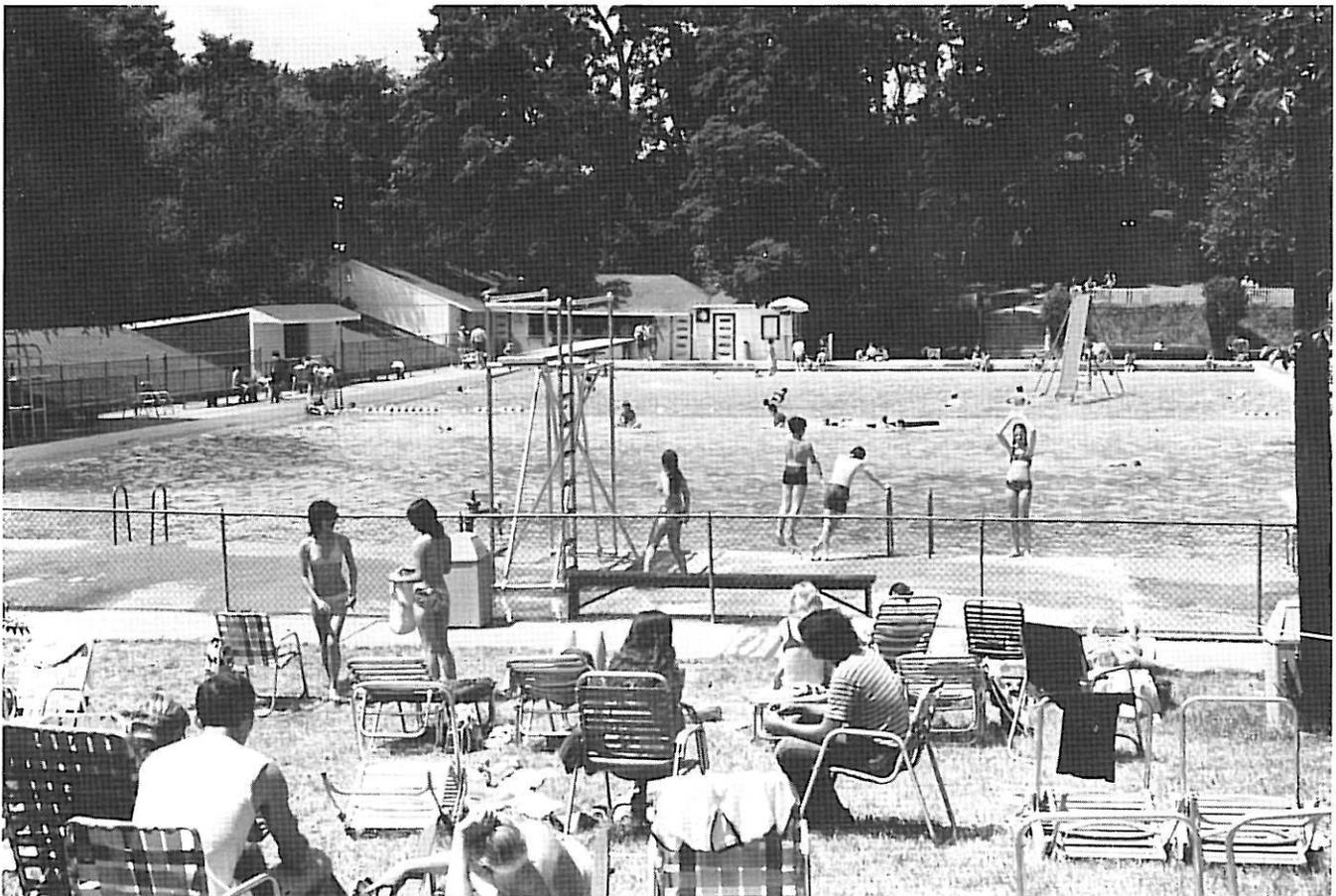
To the parents of these young explorers, the lake was a source of continuing despair. Children came home with muddy shoes and wet clothes. Frequently colds,

poison ivy, and insect bites were the negative results of such outings, but they continued.

The lake was drained about 1930. Today much of the site is unoccupied except for a large condominium which fronts on Connecticut Avenue. The terrain has changed little except for the growth of huge trees and dense underbrush.

The Chevy Chase Lake Swimming Pool was of a slightly later period. It was located on the west side of Connecticut Avenue across from the amusement park site. The *Washington Star* of June 21, 1972, states that it opened in 1925 as a public pool but in its later years became a private swimming club and survived until 1972.

*William Duvall*



*Chevy Chase Lake Swimming Pool was in use from 1925 to 1972.*

PHOTO BY TOWN OF CHEVY CHASE