

THE VILLAGE NEWS

Volume 30 No. 6

Serving the people of Cabin John and beyond

February 1997

Reinventing Local Democracy All Over Again

by Harry Rieckelman

Two years ago, when I was asked (begged would be more accurate) to consider running for president of the Cabin John Citizens Association, I couldn't help but feel like Groucho Marx. What kind of a community would have me as its president? More alarmingly, what hideous condition must the union be in for me to have any political position, no matter how tiny? Certainly my ambivalent ascension was yet another harbinger of the decline of the west.

After being assured that no one else was available, I thought that the worst thing that could happen would be the association's total disintegration and the best thing that could happen would be my doing my small part for the community. I might even meet a few people. So I took a crash course in Robert's Rules of Order and reluctantly consented.

As president, I have observed several things about local democracy. First, there are very few people who care enough to come to the meetings, although there are many people who have all kinds of ideas about what I should do and they don't hesitate to yell these ideas out as I walk on the canal or stop at the plaza to get a cup of coffee. "Harry, we need more speed bumps, when is the towpath going to be fixed? The airplanes are too loud," etc. But that's to be expected.

Recently a man came to a meeting for the first time in ten years — since the last time he had a tremendous economic stake in association matters. He said to me that he was disgusted the way he was spoken to by a small number of people at the meeting and he wondered if they really represented the people of Cabin John. These people had questioned his latest business project which would have serious ramifications for residents near his property.

When I reflected on his comments, I realized that he was referring to association members who always come to the meetings, always volunteer for emergency projects, and are extremely active in community affairs.

As I prepare to step down as president of the association, I wonder what is in store for our town. What kind of town do we want? Who are the people who are going to step forward and do the work it takes to fight inappropriate development, to keep track of the Bethesda-Chevy

Chase master plan, to run the annual crab feast which is our only source of funding, to organize volunteers when the river breaches the towpath, etc.

As a former resident of Silver Spring, I saw the effect that community associations can have. Bethesda has grown from a sleepy little town to what is becoming a mini-metropolis, while Silver Spring has deteriorated to the point that one can hardly feel safe downtown at night. The response of citizen associations had a lot to do with both of these developments.

Cabin John is a different town today than it was ten years ago. As a reluctant politico, I have come to appreciate all the work that people have done in the past to make and keep Cabin John an ideal place to live. It is going to take a steady effort to make certain that our town continues to reflect the attitudes of its residents and doesn't get

swallowed up by careless self interest and citizen neglect. To me, Silver Spring is an example of what can happen to a community that allows a tiny few members to try to handle large issues which affect thousands of residents.

While we should all be grateful to the small nucleus that always shows up for the meetings, I can't help but wonder what we could accomplish as a com-

munity if more people participated. Democracy is a fragile thing. Like muscle which atrophies with disuse, it's still there, it just doesn't work.

What do we want for McArthur Blvd., more business or no business? What do we want for the shopping center that is already too big for its parking capacity? Who is going to watch over these issues?

Wouldn't it be great if every street in Cabin John sent someone to the meeting each month? Why don't we have a Sunday afternoon meeting once or twice a year and encourage our kids to take part? Would any kids come?

I have gotten a lot from my participation and I truly hope that maybe the flip side of the Groucho Marx theory is also true. What a great process it is that would include someone like me and you? Maybe this is your year to volunteer your service to your community. It is truly a worthwhile endeavor and you might even meet a few neighbors. Give it a try.

It is going to take a steady effort to make certain that our town continues to reflect the attitudes of its residents...

**Citizens Association Meeting
February 25, 1997**

Looking Backward in Cabin John Some Old-Timer Reminiscences

While writing this "Looking Backward" column for The Village News for the past couple of years, I have relied frequently on material about Cabin John's history from Time Was: A Cabin John Memory Book. Published in 1976 as part of the community's celebration of the U.S. bicentennial — and now, alas, out of print — the book consists of interviews with 18 Cabin John old-timers carried out by Elizabeth Kyle. Elizabeth had the wonderful knack of encouraging these long-time residents — then in their 70's, 80's, and 90's — to reminisce about their early days in our community and then recording their memories in their own words.

Although Elizabeth has now moved from Cabin John and lives in North Carolina, she has graciously given permission to reproduce portions of Time Was in this paper so that a newer generation of Cabin Johners can catch a glimpse of our town's past. So the column below, and subsequent columns, will offer selections from this wonderful memory book.

— Andrew E. Rice

OTHO SWAIN: Born on a canal boat

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal has been an important part of life to Mr. Otho Swain and Swains before him. His grandfather, John Swain, helped build the canal. His father, Jess Swain, was both boatman and locktender. His uncles — John, Hen, and Bill Swain — were boatmen. His uncles-by-marriage — Clyde, Bill, and Otho Grove — were boatmen. Mr. Swain himself was a boatman.

He was born on a canal boat on July 24, 1901, at Stop Lock at Great Falls, Maryland. As a water baby, he was never in any real danger from the canal. "I can't recall a child that was born and raised on the canal that was ever drowned . . . When I was very little I was taught by my mother and father what the water could do to you, and they had us all swimming when we were six years old.

"I guess I stayed on the boat until my father went to tend a lock in 1909. So I was eight years old when my father quit boating, but I boated for other people from the time I was 15 or 16.

"A canal boat was about 90 to 95 feet long, and about 14 and a half feet wide — only a few inches less wide than the locks. The stable was in front. In the middle was the hay house. And at the back was what amounted to a little house on the boat — quarters for the captain and his wife and family. It had two bedrooms and a kitchen and a small dining room. The rooms were all small, because I'd say the whole cabin

was about 10 by 20 feet; but the bedrooms had bunk beds that didn't take up much space, and we were comfortable. After you put the cargo on, there were hatches that fit down over the top, went from one side of the boat to the other and fit tight so the water wouldn't go through. Each hatch was about four foot wide, and went all the way across the boat.

"In the morning you'd have cornbread, corncakes. We'd make them the night before. And you'd have coffee, and eggs and bacon. You ate a lot of ham, and lots of times you'd have fish. Fish that you'd catch yourself off the boat. You'd have catfish and bass — big mouth bass and black bass — out of the canal and the river. If you wanted to get off along the way, you had a running plank. You'd throw it out and you'd run the plank to shore. You'd have to run because the boat wasn't still and you'd have to get across before the plank would fall.

"My grandfather, he had boated coal down Constitution Avenue. There used to be a canal that crossed the Potomac there, and there's a little stone house still standing on the corner of 17th and Constitution Avenue. It was a lock house. My grandmother lived in that lock house, and that's where my grandfather met her."

MRS. EDWARD JONES: Planting by the moon

Gibson Grove AME Zion Church (founded in 1898) is the oldest church in Cabin John and Mrs. Edward Jones is its oldest member (81).

Mrs. Jones recalls, "I came right out here when I was married. We rented from Eddie's mother at first, right here on Seven Locks Road. Then we bought our home up here in 1919 and we've been living here ever since.

"Things are different, because then you had your garden and your hogs." (Mr. Jones — whom Mrs. Jones calls "Eddie" — murmured as if in fond remembrance, "Own meat and own garden.") We raised potatoes, cabbage, tomatoes. We had kale and corn. We made preserves and jellies and that helped out a whole lot in the winter.

"We planted by the moon. Now, say for instance, if you were going to plant potatoes, you'd plant them on the dark of the moon because they stay down in the ground. If you plant them on the light of the moon, they come up to the top of the ground and they'll be green. All of them won't come up, but some will and they won't be good to eat." For the benefit of urban types, Mrs. Jones explains that "light of the moon" means the first two quarters, "dark of the moon" the second two.

Gibson Grove Church is a short way up the road

from the Jones house. The land was given and the church built in 1898 by the family of Mrs. Sarah Gibson. The first building was a log cabin which served as church and school. Church and church work were a large part of Mrs. Jones's life.

"I have worked on the stewardess board. They have to see to the communion cloths and take care of them. And I taught Sunday School. Years ago, I was pastor's steward for a while. She sees to the pastor's salary. We had a small choir, and I sang soprano."

Mrs. Jones deploras the decline of good manners she observes in contemporary life. "Years ago, the younger people weren't forward with the older people like they are now. You had respect for older people, in the family and out of it. You had respect. And you said, 'Yes, ma'am' and 'Yes, sir' to your elders. And it wasn't any hardship on a child to be polite. You know, you had a nice time and you enjoyed yourself, but you didn't put yourself on equality with older people. You knew better."

WE HAVE A PIANO

Thanks to an alert Cabin John lady, Karen Mason, we were able to get a used piano from the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church in Oakton, Virginia. Reed Martin brought it in his trailer to the Clara Barton Center, and he will be repairing it this month. Kay, Ray and Brian Kemp were the "moving-in" crew. The piano is in the Senior lounge, and will be available for community events.

JIM PLUMB

Jim Plumb has died in Athens, Georgia of cardiovascular disease. Jim and Darris and their daughters Janet and Luann lived on Tomlinson Avenue for 25 years, moving to Georgia just last year. Jim was active in Cabin John efforts and events, and was a long-time member of St. Francis Episcopal Church in Potomac. You can write to Darris at 214 Ashbrook Drive, Athens GA 30605.

AN OVERLOOKED THANK YOU

Due to the inadvertent omission of some lines in the story (in the January Village News) about the Cabin John Holiday Party, two important contributors to the success of the party were not acknowledged: Mark Willcher for donating the handsome Christmas tree and Tina Cissel for providing the tree stand. Belatedly, but warmly, thanks to you both.

SEEKING NEW BUSINESS MANAGER FOR VILLAGE NEWS

After three years of taking care of the books for the Cabin John Village News, Jerry Rhodes will be giving up that position as of the end of the current fiscal year, i.e. August, 1997. Both he and his wife are now retired and will most likely be leaving the Cabin John area by this Fall. Anyone who may be interested in taking over this position is urged to give Jerry a call at 320-5219 to get an idea of what the position is all about.

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Cabin John Real Estate February News

by Eleanor Balaban

David Brown on 81 st St has two subdivided lots for sale on MacArthur Blvd. One lot has a structure on it and is 20,000 square feet and the other one is smaller with no structure. Call 229-1575 for details.

The Wild Bird Food Center has given up their lease and will be moving to Potomac and is looking for another location in Bethesda. They will be sorely missed! Their prior location is zoned C-1 and information can be obtained about the commercail space at 320-4770.

The Briefs former home on the comer on 75th Place and MacArthur is under complete renovation and expansion by Carter Construction. The existing home looks great with new walls, new rooms and lots of big sunny windows. It will be a wonderful addition to the neighborhood without tearing down the older home- my personal favorite kind of development. There will be a new home behind it on 75th Place.

There are lots of rosey predictions for 1997 in Real Estate but the inventory in the DC Metropolitan Area is high so it will take quite a while for the trend to turn around from a buyers market! We're hoping that we can clear out this inventory in the next year or two.

The Maryland agents are happy to be using our new MRIS Computer MLS System which is a dream come true for us and gives us so much more information so much more quickly. 1996 was a real year of technological advances in our business. The activity in the internet is growing by leaps and bounds daily and is lots of fun. Personally I enjoy the bulletin boards in AOL so that people can call me with a picture of my listings on their screens at home!

STATUS	ADDRESS	LIST PRICE	STYLE
Active	7505 Arden Rd'	269,900	Cape Cod
Active	7616 Cabin Rd	\$519,000	Contemporary
Sold	1 Carver Rd	\$90,000	Cottage
Active	8033 Cypress Grove Ln	\$375,000	Contemporary
Active	6416 Little Leigh Ct	\$435,000	Nine new homes off 82nd Place.
Contract	6410 78th St	\$259,900	Bungalow
Acuve	6412 79th St	\$570,000	Contemporary
Active	6416 79th St	\$685,000	Colonial
Active	6521 75th St	\$284,000	Rambler
Contingent	8101 Riverside Ave	\$199,000	Rambler
Active	7630 Tomlinson Ave	\$89,500	Condo
Active	6705 Tomlinson Terr	\$289,000	Rambler
Contract	6408 82nd St	\$225,000	Contemporary
Sold	3 Ericsson Road	\$165,000	Rambler
Sold	15 Froude Circle	\$149,950	Rambler
Sold	7719 Tomlinson Ave	\$485,000	Bungalow



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Bridge Replaced

The footbridge on the towpath near the Union Arch Bridge, swept away in last year's floods has been replaced. The C&O Canal National Historic Park has constructed a simple earth berm across the canal, slightly downstream from the original bridge. This temporary bridge will be replaced by a permanent one sometime in the future.



WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

The Village News would like to have a column reporting events in the lives of Cabin Johners. We want to know of births, deaths, marriages, people moving away, new neighbors – any items that will help us to strengthen the small town neighborliness we treasure in Cabin John. Please call Barbara Martin, 229-3482, with news from your family or from your street.

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Minutes of CJCA Meeting, January 28, 1997

1. The meeting was called to order by Harry Rieckelman at approximately 7:40 p.m. Approximately 23 people (list attached) were present.

2. Minutes from the previous meeting were read and approved. (Dave Murphy was reminded that he is to make a presentation on the watersheds of Crooked Creek and Cabin John Creek at the February 1997 CJCA meeting, and submit an article on the subject for publication in the February edition of the Cabin John Newsletter.

3. Chris Scanlon, Director of the Clara Barton Center, described the school and requested that CJCA write a letter to her by the end of March in support of the school's application to Montgomery County for an additional 4-year lease of the building. According to Chris, approx. one third of the children and one half of the staff are from Cabin John.

A motion was made and passed (no opposition) to have CJCA send a letter to Chris Scanlon, for submittal to Montgomery County, supporting the school and the school's request for an additional lease.

Trudy Bick, who is on the Board of the school, stated that the school was considering putting a banner on the school that would be apparent to motorists on MacArthur Blvd. to publicize the school. The sense of

the attendees was that they hoped it would be tastefully done and in accordance with the regulations for signs on MacArthur Blvd. The attendees hoped to see the actual proposal prior to giving any further input.

4. Jim Wilner described the proposed changes to the Wild Bird Center. He stated that he had done his best to keep the Wild Bird Center and had prepared plans to remodel and expand the facility (to 2500 sq. ft.) at the request of the Wild Bird Center. He indicated that the Wild Bird Center had decided to relocate despite his best efforts. (The purple martin bird houses are to be moved to the church across the street.) Jim then described his plans to double the size of the building and to lease it to a store, family restaurant, bank, or other commercial enterprise. Although he has obtained a construction permit (which he says took 6 months to get), Mr. Wilner said that he doesn't plan to build without a tenant. Several comments were made from the attendees (who's main concern was the traffic that would attend a restaurant, in particular) that they had thought that the agreement reached approximately 10 years ago between the local residents and Mr. Wilner, plus the language in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan, limited any new buildings to the footprints of the existing buildings. Wilner stated that this was not his interpretation, and that the area that is

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The next deadline is 10 AM Saturday March 15 for the issue mailing March 20.

People who make the Village News possible:

Barbara and Ger Quinn, Jerry Rhodes, Barbara and Reed Martin
Contributors: Bur Gray, Harry Rieckelman, Eleanor Balaban, Andy Rice

C-1 zoned is not limited to just to the footprints of the building.

5. The Citizens for the Abatement of Aircraft Noise (CAAN) (of which CJCA is a member) made a presentation and requested the following (1) that residents phone in complaints to the National Airport Complaint line (703-417-8020) when aircraft noise is bothersome and specifically request that the Airport personnel report back to them on the progress in resolving that particular matter, (2) that Cabin John residents have a phone tree to call Congress when necessary due to legislative proposals affecting aircraft noise, and (3) that contributions are welcome. Comments from the attendees focused on the noise and safety issues raised by helicopters which fly below 500 ft, while the aircraft are supposed to fly above 1500 ft. Susan Roberts agreed to be the CJCA point of contact for the CAAN.

6. Larry Heflin read a draft letter to Montgomery County DEP concerning the need to protect the various Cabin John watersheds, particularly from stormwater problems. A motion was made and passed to send the letter to Montgomery County DEP. (It should be noted that the same motion was passed in the October 1996 meeting.)

7. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 p.m.

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