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SUBURBAN SUMMER RESORTS, 1870-1910

by Andrea Price Stevens

PART I

Throughout history, resorts have provided a healthful location for rest and cure. In Europe, the wealthy had been taking the waters for centuries. The city of Bath, in England, was a fashionable watering-place in the 1700's, and it had been just as popular among the Romans living in England some 1500 years earlier.¹ The German word "Bad" means both bath and watering place and is part of hundreds of German place names.

Taking the waters became a popular practice in the United States also, and the first summer resorts were located by springs or beaches. Hot Springs, White Sulphur Springs, Saratoga Springs — hundreds of towns developed with "Springs" as part of their names. The idea of getting out of the city for a healthful summer retreat became a popular concept during the mid to later part of the nineteenth century.

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¹ Brendan Gill and Dudley Witney, *Summer Places* (New York: Methuen, 1978), p. 29.

Washington, D.C., had its share of suburban summer resorts, to which its residents flocked each summer on streetcars, trains, and private conveyances, from the late 1870's to the early part of the twentieth century. The majority of these resorts were located in Montgomery County. Montgomery County had a higher elevation than the other areas surrounding Washington, giving it cooler summers. The factors that made Montgomery County a suburban resort area - its elevated, healthy location, its lack of heavy industry, the availability of commuter trains and streetcars - appealed to land developers and home seekers as well. When and where these summer resorts ended, permanent suburbs began. Thus the story of the county's resorts is an important one. Not only were some of these built by suburban developers, but their popularity as resorts brought city dwellers into contact with new areas and paved the way for residential development.

A number of factors contributed to the growth of resorts in this country. Health remained high on the list. Oppressive heat, disease, and "bad air" of the cities provided personal reasons for escape. In New England, the salt air of Nahant acted as a magnet to those seeking relief, just as did the dry desert of southern California, to which "men go not to buy land, but to buy lungs."²

The second factor was the growth of the railroad and its involvement with the resort industry. Although steamships and ferryboats provided early transportation for vacationers to some seaside and lake resorts, the coming of railroads had an even more profound effect on the siting of summer places.³ The trains provided easy access to locations far beyond bodies of water. Almost from the beginning, the railroads were aware that they could increase passenger traffic by building resort hotels along their routes. In the 1850's, the Andover and Wilmington, one of the first railroads in Massachusetts, built one of the first hotels on Boston's North Shore as a means of salvaging some traffic for one of its commercially impotent branches.⁴

Similar invention, on a larger scale, was undertaken by the Canadian Pacific Railroad Company in its ingenious exploitation of the beauty - and isolation - of the Canadian Rockies. William Cornelius Van Horne employed artists, writers, and photographers to promote the location, saying "We can't export the scenery - we'll import the tourists!"⁵

And tourists were lured by the thousands, influenced by the third and most pervasive factor - the lure of nature. This was popularized by the nature writers and educators and epitomized by Liberty Hyde Bailey, who began publishing *Country Life in America* in 1901:

² Earl Pomeroy, *The Pacific Slope, A History of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, & Nevada* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), p. 335.

³ Gill and Witney, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁴ William M. Varrell, *Summer by-the-sea. The Golden Era of Victorian Beach Resorts* (Portsmouth, NH: Strawberry Bank Print Shop, 1972), p. 10.

⁵ Gill and Witney, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

"It is becoming more and more apparent that the ideal life is that which combines something of the social and intellectual advantages and physical comforts of the city with the inspiration and peaceful joys of the country... The greater part of the summer exodus countryward is the expression of a growing and genuine interest in the country and in nature, and is deeper and more far-reaching than merely fad or fashion."⁶

Bailey's credo was echoed by many, for it was this period which saw the blossoming of the "Arcadian myth in urban America."⁷ Along with the park planners like Frederick Law Olmstead came educators like G. Stanley Hall - both in their own ways bringing nature back to the attention of the city-dwellers. Camping for adults became popular as a device to return to nature; then it was applied to children. As early as 1886, Ernest Thompson Seton, a founder of the Boy Scouts of America, began to promote outdoor-oriented clubs for boys.

Thus popular journals and movements offered a subversive, yet positive influence on the potential resort-goer. And on the resort developer as well. For example, the promotional materials published by the Baltzley brothers for Glen Echo are filled with the prose of this literary Arcadia movement.

The fourth factor contributive to the growth of resorts in this country was the real-estate boom that was part of a national phenomenon from 1887 to 1893. Investment syndicates and improvement companies platted residential subdivisions and industrial cities around "almost every railroad junction from Baltimore to Birmingham."⁸ It was during this period that suburban resort hotels appeared across the country. Many were constructed by land developers to market their new subdivisions.

Washington's investors and developers capitalized on the national resort trend. The city's hot, sticky, and malaria-prone summers provided ample reasons for residents to vacation at suburban resorts, and later to establish permanent residences there. The Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad had opened in 1873, with frequent commuter service from Washington northwest through Montgomery County to Point of Rocks. The local streetcar lines were literally laid by suburban developers to provide easy access from the city. And familiar phrases from the national literary "back to nature" movement began to appear in local promotion brochures, intimating middle-class Washingtonians' familiarity with such terms as "Arcadian retreat."⁹

⁶ Roderick Nash (ed.), *The Call of the Wild (1900-1916)* (New York: George Braziller, 1970), pp. 63-64.

⁷ Peter Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

⁸ Ray Eldon Hiebert and Richard K. MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance, The Story of Montgomery County, Maryland* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Government and the Montgomery County Historical Society, 1976), p. 208.

⁹ Henry N. Copp, *How to Get Health, Wealth, Comfort: Peerless Rockville* (Washington, D.C.: Gibson Brothers, 1890), p. 16.

A final factor which figured heavily in the development of Washington's suburban resorts was the growth of the city itself. In 1860, the permanent population of Washington was only 75,000.¹⁰ Only the bankers, shopkeepers, laborers, and domestic servants remained in town while Federal employees, Congressmen, and lobbyists came and went. Job security in the Federal government was unknown before the passage of the Civil Service Act of 1883. The effect of this Act, combined with the growth of the post Civil War government, worked to increase the city's population to over 178,000 by the 1880's. As the idea of a stable, middle-class population in Washington became a reality, real-estate investors began developing suburban communities.¹¹

Over a brief period, Washington's suburbs, particularly those in Montgomery County, were promoted as healthful, accessible retreats, with accommodations ranging from rustic to elegant. The county's resorts met a middle-class¹² need for places "somewhere on the urban fringe, easily accessible and mildly wild."¹³

For convenience in making general statements and conclusions, the following descriptions of the county's summer resorts have been divided into three groups which reflect either their locations, 1) along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and Conduit Road and 2) along the Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, or 3) their development as part of land speculation. In some cases, where the hotel was secondary to the resort, information is given on both. In many other instances, the hotel was the resort.

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and Conduit Road

The C & O Canal (completed in 1850), the Cabin John Bridge (completed in 1863), and the Great Falls of the Potomac were the county's first tourist attractions. The hotels built along the Canal and Conduit Road capitalized on their scenic locations. Although the Canal's popularity declined with the introduction of the new rail line, the Cabin John Bridge remained a "wonder of the world" - the longest single-arch masonry bridge in the world - for 40 years.

Glen-Echo-on-the-Potomac, the Cabin John Bridge Hotel, the Rock Spring Hotel, and Crommelin House were popular suburban resorts along this stretch overlooking the Potomac.

Glen-Echo-on-the-Potomac. The most ambitious land development scheme in the Washington area was undertaken by brothers, Edwin and Edward Baltzley, for the Glen Echo area. Where other developers planned homes on tree-lined streets, the Baltzleys envisioned castles on the Potomac.

¹⁰ Hiebert and MacMaster, *op. cit.*, p. #207.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹² Washingtonians of means had frequented the "society" resorts - Newport, Saratoga Springs, etc. - since before the Civil War. The newspapers were full of accounts of their summer travel.

¹³ Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

"If we could bring the Rhine to Washington how proud, as a city and nation, we would be of it, and how the great people of the land would hasten to purchase its castles, and live upon its vine-covered banks.

"And yet Washington has a river more beautiful than the Rhine. Then why this discrimination against our own? It is because it has been practically unknown. The poet has not been here to sing it into the hearts of the people. The author has not had his steps led to it for his inspiration; neither has the traveler found his way hither to return among eager listeners with his tale of wonder and beauty. Here has it been dreaming in its unravished loveliness through the stagnation of slavery, the vicissitudes of war, and the struggling progress of city and national development, until now, the time of its propitious awakening.

"... Soon the Potomac will have its own castles; not those ancient, feudal expressions of strife and discomfort, but the modern home, the masterpieces of the architecture of comfort. And Glen-Echo, favored by Nature, cream of all, will have every one of its magnificent hills crowned with unrivalled buildings."¹⁴

In 1888 and 1889, and continuing through 1891, the Baltzleys purchased land along the Potomac River in Maryland from Cabin John Creek east of the Walhonding Road area overlooking Sycamore Island. The entire property was to be known as Glen-Echo-on-the-Potomac. The initial step to this goal was the development of a community of stone houses on the heights above Sycamore Island.¹⁵ The brothers built matching homes there as examples. Former President Grover Cleveland became an early investor.¹⁶

In addition to establishing a new residential community, the brothers intended to develop a resort similar to those along the Hudson and in the Catskills. Of the two major resort buildings planned, only one was completed. It was called the "Paw-taw-o-meck" and known as the Glen Echo Cafe.

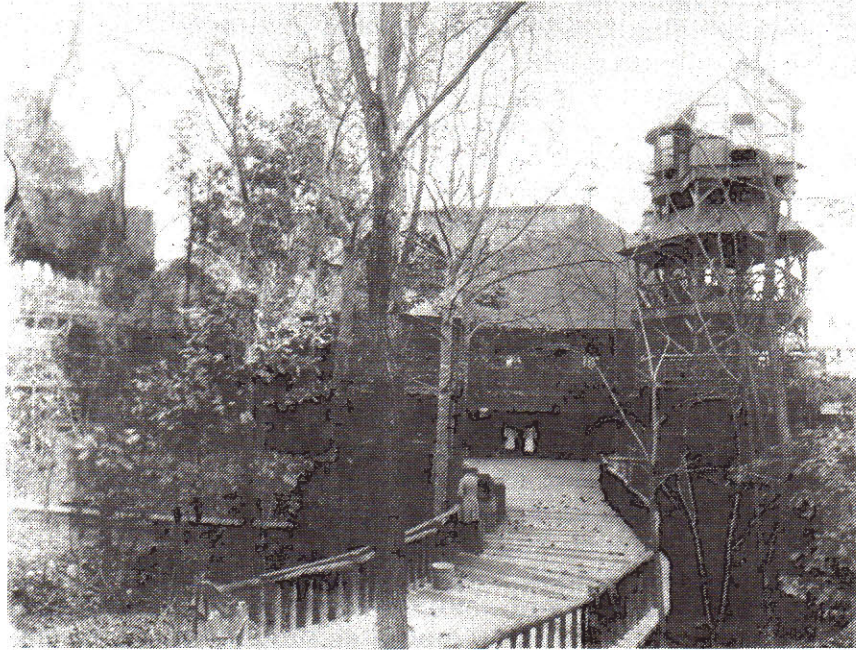
A temple to the Nature Movement, the Cafe was constructed of rough-hewn logs from 30,000 cedar trees. Indian names and names from nature and popular literature characterized each room: Wish-ton-wish, the Pow-wow Balcony, Pow-ha-tan, Po-ka-hun-tas, and so on. Each dining room and scenic overlook was christened like cabins at summer camp. The main dining room was immense, heavily decorated with cedar architectural detailing, and complete with electric fans and lights. Quotations from Captain John Smith, the first explorer to travel up the Potomac, provided diners with a sense of history. From every dining room, and there were many, balconies were built for viewing the scenery. From the "Owl's Roost," "sweeping your vision to all points of the compass from this eyrie, a grand panoramic view passes before you of roofs, lookouts, towers, gables, balconies, ascending and descending stairways, buildings, and bridges, together with the inspiring, outlying scenery of land, foliage and water."¹⁷

¹⁴ Edwin Baltzley, *Glen-Echo-on-the-Potomac* Philadelphia, PA: F. Gutenhurst, 1891), pp. 32 and 33.

¹⁵ Benjamin Levy, *Glen Echo, Chautauqua on the Potomac* (Glen Echo, MD: Town of Glen Echo, January 1, 1968), p. 3.

¹⁶ Baltzley, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.



Tower of Babel

(*Photograph donated by LeRoy O. King*)

Visitors could use private conveyances on the Conduit Road or take the Glen-Echo Railroad by way of Tenallytown. This streetcar was planned by the Baltzleys as a drawing card to prospective property owners.

Ladies were encouraged to use the private dining rooms to "entertain their friends, in parties however large or small, instead of at their own homes, and lend the fragrance of the woods, the river, the park, and this unique building to their entertainment."¹⁸ For open-air concerts there was the Choral Balcony and, for private affairs, exposed lofts like the "Cruso," so named because it resembled Robinson Crusoe's umbrella.

Rambles meandered about the grounds to river overlooks and sheltered turnouts. One could cross Walhonding Bridge to Monican Rock or Kingfisher's Watch. From the Watch guests could climb a tower of three stories, each with an evocative name - Council Fire, Jung Frau, and Canon Eyrie.

How Washington society reacted to the Cafe is not known. Surely it must have been worth a sight-seeing trip. But were there really open-air concerts? Were all those dining rooms utilized? After only one summer season, the Cafe was destroyed by fire on November 29, 1890.

Undaunted, the Baltzleys reissued their promotional brochure the next year with a footnote reference to the loss of the Cafe and a new chapter, "The Monican."

"This castellated hotel is to be built upon one of the most commanding hills on the Potomac. The view from it looks upon the river in both directions, and the Virginia hills beyond. Situated so near, and within such comfortable access to

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

the city, and in a country unsurpasses for beauty and variety, together with a salubrious climate, it is happily located for the people of Washington, and is destined to become the suburban seat of polite society, and a resort for national personages."

The description ended with this statement by the now-experienced developers: "It will be built of granite and made fire-proof."¹⁹

Unfortunately the Monican was never constructed. One million dollars worth of lots had been sold by 1892, and 300 masons were employed among the 900 men used in Baltzley's construction forces. But an outbreak of malaria caused serious disruptions and, finally, financial ruin when lot buyers allowed mortgages to lapse.²⁰

Thus the potential of the scenic resort was never completely fulfilled.²¹ Yet Glen Echo was the county's only true resort: it offered scenic splendor and unusual recreation. Perhaps different circumstances would have made it the "Washington Rhine."

Cabin John Bridge Hotel. The fabulous Cabin John Bridge Hotel, which catered to Washington's elite, began as a lunchroom near the construction site of the Cabin John Bridge.²²

Joseph Bobinger, a stone mason from Germany, emigrated to New York with his wife Rosa, then moved to Maryland to work on the bridge. Rosa began to cook meals for the workers and later the tourists who came to see what was, for 40 years, the largest single-span masonry bridge in the world, spanning a ravine 450 feet wide and 105 feet deep. The bridge carried a conduit which ran from Great Falls to Georgetown carrying the city's water supply. On both sides of the bridge the conduit was buried underground and the right-of-way above was kept smooth and free of rocks. This right-of-way became the Conduit Road, providing easy access to the sights of the Great Falls and the new bridge.²³

As the popularity of Rosa Bobinger's lunchroom increased, she and her husband began to build a hotel. The center part of the Hotel was constructed around 1870; it was mostly wood, painted creamy yellow. After several additions, the Hotel had become very ornate. The Bobingers' grandsons recall that "The Hotel was sort of Victorian in the front. It's the back that's so very elaborate."²⁴ It was done by a German architect, who copied an old German castle.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁰ Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²¹ The Baltzleys tried to recoup their losses by deeding 80 acres to the "National Chautauqua at Glen Echo." The Chautauqua heritage continues today in the old amusement park managed by the National Park Service as an arts and cultural education center.

²² The bridge was built between 1857 and 1863. Elizabeth Kytile, *Time Was ... A Cabin John Memory Book* (Cabin John, MD: Cabin John Citizens Association, 1976), p. 50.

²³ Conduit Road was renamed MacArthur Boulevard during World War II.

²⁴ Kytile, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

Eventually the Hotel had 40 bedrooms and two large banquet halls, each seating a hundred guests. Besides the banquet halls there were private dining rooms, a coffee shop, a music hall, two parlors, a barber shop, a pool room, a rathskeller, game rooms with pool tables and slot machines, three bars, and a glass housing for an orchestration.



Rear View of the Cabin John Bridge Hotel
Showing the Stained Glass Housing for the Orchestration

(Photograph donated by R. J. Achstetter)

Joseph Bobinger died in 1881, and Rosa ran the Hotel with her sons, William and George, until her death in 1893. The Management remained in the family after her death. William Bobinger, a grandson, described the Hotel's interior:

*"The main dining room was on the first floor; it went straight on back; almost the whole thing was the dining room. As you came in the door, there was a big round office - oh, as big as my whole house now. The hotel was an enormous place; it really was. And back from that big round office was a private dining room. Down the hall was a great big men's room, and to the right of it was a bar that ran the whole length of the hotel. My father had 17 bartenders and 40 waiters. They had a huge banquet table in a huge banquet room. Oh, my God, with lights all over - big chandeliers. Whew! And oak tables. Terrific long oak tables. The hotel was open in summertime only. It wouldn't have been too easy, with ice and snow and all, for people to come in carriages. Of course later there were automobiles."*²⁵

In the early days before Montgomery County passed local option,²⁶ the Hotel advertised its fine European wines as a house specialty. The Bobingers baked all their own bread. According to grandson Harry Bobinger, "The food was very good, and

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ In 1880, Montgomery County passed a local option bill eliminating the sale of alcoholic beverages. The County was dry until 1933.

the Hotel was really famous for Maryland fried chicken and Potomac black bass, and these special biscuits that Rosa Bobinger made. Maryland fried chicken is fried chicken in a white cream sauce, with curled strips of bacon on top. The dish, said to have originated at the Hotel, was advertised as 'fried spring chicken, Cabin John Style.'²⁷ The black bass were kept in enclosures, right in the river. Neither they nor the chickens were killed until they were needed, so the dishes were always fresh.

The food was the main drawing card to the Hotel, which developed a fine reputation with Washingtonians. *The Washington Post*, in an article about local outing places on Sunday, August 4, 1895, mentioned that, in addition to the standard Washington summer excursion of taking a steamer down to the sea, one could also go "out Conduit Road for breakfast or dinner at Cabin John, one of Washington's established amusements, which every visitor to the Nation's Capitol puts on his sightseeing programme together with drives to Arlington and the Soldier's Home."

There was more to do at the Cabin John Bridge Hotel than just eat. One of the attractions was the orchestrion, imported from Germany and housed in an octagonal glass house on the back of the Hotel. Its music could be heard for miles.²⁸ Selections ranged from light classics to popular music. Strauss was a favorite.

There were several summerhouses in the garden. The larger ones were used as bandstands. They were built for the Bobingers by a local craftsman, John Harper, and were constructed of cedar with intricate lattice work. Local historians claims that, in addition to giving concerts at the Hotel, John Philip Sousa and his band dedicated one of his own compositions to *The Washington Post* at a banquet held at the Hotel for the newspaper workers. This was the first time "Washington Post March" was performed.²⁹

For the convenience of the clientele and to make an inviting entrance to the 15 acres of hotel grounds, the Bobingers built a handsome cast-iron foot bridge in 1900. Colored electric lights were strung across the horseshoe-shaped arches. An arena theater was built by the Bobingers in 1900 and rented to a private manager. A small amusement park was also managed by a separate business concern in the early 1900's. Harry Bobinger said, "The amusement park crowd were welcome to use the gardens, and they were one reason for the rathskeller. After they'd been to the amusement park, they could go on down into the rathskeller and get beer and stuff. There wasn't much food served there, just a small buffet sort of thing."³⁰ The Hotel had its own gas house, stable, and grooms' quarters. It had its own water tower and ice house as well.

The Hotel's furnishings were expensive and comfortable. They were described by Harry Bobinger thusly: "Everything was beautiful. There were a lot of fine oriental rugs, Chinese and Persian. There was a lot of solid mahogany - sideboards, china closets, things like that. The dining room tables and chairs were all solid oak.

²⁷ Kytile; *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁹ Rev. Willis Bergen, "Cabin John and the Bobingers," *Montgomery County Story*, Vol. VII, No. 4 (August 1964), p. 6.

³⁰ Kytile, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

And tall porcelain vases and great potted palms all around."³¹ The ironstone dinnerware was designed especially for the Hotel and bore in the center a picture of the Cabin John Bridge. The glasses were Belgian crystal. Silver and silverplate services bore "BB" for Bobinger Brothers (Joseph Bobinger's sons, William and George).

Although Rosa and Joseph Bobinger depended mainly on the carriage trade in the Hotel's early days, guests by the 1890's were able to use the streetcar line owned by the Baltzley brothers. Bicyclists pedaled out the Conduit Road and stopped at the Hotel for rest and refreshment. By 1900, the Washington Railway and Electric built a line from Georgetown up the river, which brought the streetcar right up to Cabin John Creek. This convenience brought huge crowds to the Hotel.³² Among well-known guests at the Hotel were Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson.

The Hotel reached its peak of popularity from about 1895 to 1907. More luxurious hotels were built along Connecticut Avenue and in Rock Creek Park, and, by the early 1920's, the Cabin John Bridge Hotel was forgotten. William Bobinger managed the Hotel until about 1914, and then he rented it out and went into business at the Maryland Club in Prince George's County and elsewhere. The last year the Hotel was open was 1925. William Bobinger died in 1926, and the Hotel was locked up. Harry Bobinger recalled:

"And full of all that expensive stuff. And no insurance. We had had insurance, but then we couldn't get it renewed because the building was vacant and the company wouldn't insure a vacant building.

"We had a little house at the end of the car line. ... We had carried a little bit of the stuff from the hotel, and we sold some of the rugs, but the hotel could still be called completely furnished and equipped. ... We kept an eye on the hotel every day, and we thought it was safe.

"I remember looking out the window the night the hotel burned. (April 6, 1931) ... The fire started in the orchestrion, in the back part of the hotel."³³

In spite of 33 fire engines, some from as far away as Bethesda, no part of the frame building could be saved. Arson was suspected, but a culprit was never arrested.

The Rock Spring Club/Hotel. The Rock Spring Hotel was lesser known than its neighbors, and little documentation for it remains. Its owners were less flamboyant than the Baltzleys and much less successful than the Bobingers. Yet the 1896 photograph of the Club shows an attractive building, indicative of a flourishing business. The building was constructed in the shingle style and had awning-shaded verandas on two floors and another one and a half stories above those.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.



Rock Spring Hotel

(Photograph donated by Richard Cook)

The Hotel was located in the Cabin John/Glen Echo area, on the east side of the Conduit Road. The land records of this property, known as "The Rock Springs Hotel Lot," have been traced back to the early eighteenth century. In 1852, William Reading purchased over 1500 acres bordering the Canal from Little Falls to Seneca. Part of Reading's property was purchased by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1853 when work on the new aqueduct began. With the completion of the aqueduct and the Cabin John Bridge, and with the increasing popularity of the Bobingers' Hotel, commercial interest in the Cabin John area grew. In 1884, Reading sold 3/4 of an acre for \$100 to John Dugan of Georgetown who, in 1885, built the Rock Spring Hotel.

Dugan sold the Hotel and property for \$1200 in 1889. By 1891, the Hotel had been enlarged and stables added, and a quarter interest in the property was worth \$3000.³⁴ In 1895, a telephone was added, probably on the same cable as the Cabin John Hotel, making the two establishments the first Bethesda area telephone subscribers, and reflecting their stability and success.

The photograph of the Hotel identifies it as a Club. Whether this indicated a private men's gaming club is not known. The Chevy Chase Club was organized in 1895, but the majority of the Montgomery County clubs did not open until the 1920's. There is a strong likelihood that the Club was a casino, and not necessarily a gambling house. "Casino" is an Italian word for small summer house or house in a garden built for pleasure. In French and English it means a room for dancing and socializing. In the nineteenth century, resort casinos were built as sports houses and have been recorded in New England and as far west as Chicago. The first casino in America was built in Newport by McKim, Mead and White, in the shingle style. The Rock Spring Hotel

³⁴ Anne W. Cissel, "Research on property once known as the 'Rock Spring Hotel,' located on MacArthur Boulevard near Glen Echo Heights," unpublished paper on file at the Montgomery County Historical Society, August 1979, p. 3.

could very possibly have been converted into a "casino" by its owners in an effort to draw customers away from the Cabin John Hotel, or to attract new clientele from the city with the guise of recreation.

Hard times arrived by the turn of the century. The Hotel changed hands several times and finally burned on May 11, 1909.³⁵ Despite little information on this Hotel, its existence is an important indication of the popularity of the Cabin John/Glen Echo area, which supported several hotels and business ventures.

Crommelin House or Great Falls Tavern. One of the oldest hotels in the county, and one of few structures preserved from the period, the Crommelin House was built in December 1828 by the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company. It was designated as Lock House 12, a private residence, on the Little Falls to Seneca section of the Canal.

The C & O Canal was built to be a thoroughfare to the future. It stretches for 184½ miles along the Potomac River from the District of Columbia to Cumberland, Maryland. Begun in 1828 to follow a route west envisioned by George Washington, the Canal reached Cumberland in 1850 after many legal, financial, and human problems. By then, the railroad, against which it struggled for rights-of-way and transportation supremacy, had won the race west, and plans to take the canal route on to the Ohio Basin were abandoned.³⁶

The fate of Crommelin House followed that of the Canal. Northern and southern wings were added to the building in 1830 and, by 1831, the place was considered an established tavern by local residents. That same year, the Canal opened for trade from Georgetown to Seneca. The tavern was run by W.W. Fenlon, keeper of Locks 19 and 20, whose clientele consisted mainly of canal workers and a few overnight travelers. Some time during this period, the Great Falls Tavern was named Crommelin House by the Trustees of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company in honor of an Amsterdam banking concern which had loaned 1½ million dollars to Alexandria, Washington, and Georgetown for the purchase of stock in the C & O Canal.

In 1848, the Canal Company passed a ruling that a lockkeeper could no longer sell intoxicating beverages because of disorderly conduct among the laborers. With no liquor to sell the Hotel and tavern operated sporadically over the next 10 years. For a time it was leased as a grocery store. By 1859, nine years after the Canal was completed, the Company rescinded its ruling against alcohol, and the Hotel was opened "for the accommodation of visitors to the Great Falls."³⁷ The Civil War brought interruptions to the flow of goods on the Canal, but it was during this time that gold was discovered in a nearby creek, and gold mining was carried on in the hills behind the Hotel.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁶ John Parsons, *Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, National Historical Park, General Plan* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, Department of Interior, 1965), p. 3.

³⁷ Roger Brook Farquhar, *Historic Montgomery County, Maryland. Old Homes and History* (Silver Spring, MD: R.B. Farquhar, 1952), p. 175.

The Hotel's heyday was the period between 1870 and 1890. As many as 50 barges would pass the Hotel in a 24-hour period. The innkeepers would rent every available space to travellers and visitors. The Hotel was a favored honeymoon spot; the third floor was named the "Honeymoon Suite." The main public room on the ground floor was called the "Ballroom." The Crommelin House was also a popular spot for outings and picnics.

The decline of the Hotel followed the fate of the Canal. From 1900-1913, the building was used as a grocery store, and between 1913 and 1925, the "financially desperate" Canal Company leased it as a private club. In 1924, the C & O ceased navigational operation of the Canal. From 1925 to 1940, Crommelin House was run as a hotel again, but it was taken over in 1941 by Government Services, Inc., which used the building as a refreshment stand. For a time in the 1960's, it was vacant and was nearly torn down until local public pressure forced the National Park Service to restore it. Since January 1971, when the C & O Canal became a National Historic Park, the Great Falls Tavern as it is now called has been used as an information office and museum.

(To be continued, November 1981)

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