

A History of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association 1911-2011

By Gregory R. New

This history is mostly based on living memory and records supplied by recent officers. Several details on the early history have been added, thanks to research by Judy Hubbard in the Washingtoniana Division of the MLK Public Library. A partial list of CPCA presidents and a list of Grass Roots Awardees follow. Apologies are offered for the large gaps in the early history, and for the neglect of the legion of members and officers not named who have done so much to serve the association and the Cleveland Park neighborhood.

The Cleveland Park Citizens Association (CPCA) was founded late in 1911 as the Connecticut Avenue Citizens Association. Its first membership meeting was held on January 17, 1912, with an attendance of fifty charter members. Its purpose was “to promote the interests of that part of the District of Columbia lying between Chevy Chase Circle and the Connecticut Avenue Bridge, and the adjacent territory, as well as the interests of District of Columbia.” Dues were \$2.00 per year, and membership was open to residents and property owners in the designated area. The original committees were: Streets, Sidewalks and Lights; Sewer and Water Supply; Fire and Police Protection; Public Health; Parks and Parking; Public Utilities; Legislation; Membership; and Publicity.

It incorporated on October 8, 1964, and adopted its present name on February 28, 1966. At that time its boundaries stretched along Connecticut Avenue and Rock Creek Park from Massachusetts Avenue to Albenarle Street, with 34th Street and Reno Road as the western boundary. The name change reflected the reality that the citizens of Woodley Park, Forest Hills and Chevy Chase had long since organized themselves into their respective citizens’ associations. The boundaries, however, were not reconfigured to fit the Cleveland Park neighborhood where practically all the membership then lived until December 5, 1998. They now run roughly along Rock Creek between Cathedral Avenue and Tilden Street, west to Wisconsin Avenue.

Early Initiatives. The CPCA has a history of civic leadership in the area along Connecticut Avenue. By 1915 it had succeeded in obtaining additional police and fire protection; street and sidewalk improvements; new street lights and street trees; and assurances from the District Commission that it would press for appropriations to replace the old Calvert Street Bridge. The fire station at 3522 Connecticut Avenue (Engine Company No. 28), whose completion it celebrated in 1916, was the first structure built on the Avenue in Cleveland Park. During the 1920s and 1930s it could claim credit for helping spur development on the Connecticut Avenue corridor above the Taft Bridge. In 1938 its Traffic Committee succeeded in obtaining a traffic signal at the entrance of the National Zoo. In 1946 the Association helped promote a new public playground in Cleveland Park. In 1955 it joined forces with other organizations in blocking a parking lot in front of the Sheraton Park Hotel in Woodley Park.

In 1953, its initiatives and fund raising of the previous decade led to the establishment of the Cleveland Park branch of the D.C. Public Library. Credits go to Tommy (Mrs. Joseph) Miller, then president, and Barbara (Mrs. Noble) Robinson, who later became president. Fifty years later, in 2003, CPCA, the Friends of Cleveland Park Library, and the Cleveland Park Historical Society co-sponsored the semi-centennial of the library in a celebration emceed by comedian Mark Russell.

In 1958, a small group of members of CPCA met to find ways to help the National Zoo, which lies along the Association’s eastern boundary. The Zoo was facing severe budget problems, and simply supporting budget increases was not the real answer. These members became the nucleus of Friends of the National Zoo (FONZ), now a major fundraiser for the Zoo.

The Cleveland Park Citizens Association has also stepped into the larger political issues, although on a strictly nonpartisan basis. In 1916, it started working for voting representation in Congress, declaring “we have in the District of Columbia a form of Government unlike that found anywhere else on earth.” In 1954, when its membership had reached 1800 (making it the third largest citizens association in the District) it supported school integration. The next year it supported Bill 669, the Home Rule Act, in the House of Representatives. It was one of the few citizens’ associations consistently supporting home rule and voting representation in Congress.

Beginning about 1965, the CPCA has joined many initiatives supporting first the Washington Technical Institute, then its successor, the University of the District of Columbia, as it established itself at the Van Ness Campus.

Involvement in Citywide Federations. Through cooperation in the citywide federations, local citizens groups have a powerful voice in the affairs of the nation’s capital. Cleveland Park delegates have always been active in the committees and offices of the Federation of Citizens Associations of DC and (since May 28, 1965) of the DC Federation of Civic Associations. Three of CPCA’s past presidents (Meigs, Koczak, and New) have served as federation presidents and three have received awards as outstanding delegates of the Civic Federation. The awardees were Meigs (1974, 1995); New (eight times from 1976 to 2007), and Walker (1992). New also received an award for exemplary civic activism from the Citizens Federation in 2022 as he retired from civic activity.

When Mr. Meigs died in 1996, the Civic Federation dedicated the October 1996 Awards Luncheon in his honor. Mr. New was archivist of the Civic Federation 1980-2009, and has held numerous other offices in that organization. Mrs. Walker was its chaplain, and chair of its amenities committee. A vice president of CPCA, Ann Hume Loikow, has served as vice President of the Citizens Federation.

Events under Recent Presidents

Arthur Meigs. In 1968-71, during the first presidency of Mr. Meigs, CPCA vigorously supported the Civic Federation and many other organizations throughout the city in a successful campaign to block the Three Sisters Bridge and the inner-city freeways, one of which would have bisected Cleveland Park. Mr. Meigs served three more terms as CPCA president in 1979-82, for a total of six years. In 1980-82 he also served as the first white president of the DC Federation of Civic Associations. Later he served as CPCA secretary for nine years, 1985-94.

Steven Koczak. In 1970-71, delegates Stephen Koczak and Edmond de l’Ecluse led a successful campaign within the Citizens Federation to remove its color bar. Mr. Koczak went on to serve as president of CPCA 1971-75, 1976-79, 1982-85, and 1994-97 for a total of 13 years. During his last stint as president, he concentrated the efforts of the Association on public education, especially on the issue of ending social promotion. In the spring of 1998 the Association donated \$991, mostly raised by Brookville Supermarket on Mr. Koczak’s initiative, to buy a police patrol bicycle for PSA 204, the police service area that patrols Cleveland Park.

Mr. Koczak also served as president of the Citizens Federation for a total of 15 years, 1974-86 and 1992-95. During his second stint he was highly successful in bringing in new member associations that helped revitalize the organization.

Taft, Chesnut, Walker. Ambassador William Howard Taft, III, grandson of the president of the United States of the same name, served as president of CPCA 1985-88. He chose to close a long and distinguished career of service to the nation by dedicating his efforts to leading the citizens in his local neighborhood.

Under the presidency of Roberta Chesnut, 1988-91, the CPCA conducted a highly successful series of candidate forums for mayoral, council, and board of education elections. The practice has continued ever since.

Gilpin Walker, our first African-American president, served 1991-94. In her first year (1991) the CPCA received its first award as Outstanding Member Association of the Civic Federation. She sponsored programs that emphasized city-wide issues the wider community.

Gregory New. Mr. New was president 1997-2000, following Mr. Koczak's last stint, and concentrated on organizational matters. He persuaded the Association to update its Constitution: to incorporate amendments that had been adopted during the previous 20 years but not yet printed, to reconfigure its boundaries to fit the Cleveland Park community, and to provide for a corresponding secretary as well as a recording secretary. Shortly after stepping down as president of CPCA, Mr. New was elected president of the Civic Federation, where he continued to concentrate on organizational matters: obtaining its incorporation, establishing its web site, and reviving its directory.

Early in 2000, a task force chaired by Lois Forster persuaded Exxon and the DC Historical Preservation Review Board staff to scale down erroneously approved plans for the Exxon Station at 3535 Connecticut that included glaring signage and lighting. Later Mrs. Forster worked with Mr. New and Rick Bartel, chair of the CPCA business affairs committee, to promote enforcement of the Cleveland Park Commercial District Overlay Regulations adopted in 1989, but never applied in the following decade. (The overlay is a form of subzoning that seeks to moderate the number of restaurants and bars in a neighborhood based on the percentage they occupy of overall retail frontage.) After making an independent measurement, CPCA alerted the DC Zoning Office to errors in its calculation of the percentages.

Isabel Furlong. Mrs. Furlong was president 2000-02. Earlier, as chair of the zoning committee in 1999, she successfully negotiated a Usage Agreement with the National Cathedral School (NCS) to govern its proposed new athletic facility. The Agreement was attached to the Board of Zoning Adjustment order as a condition of granting the NCS petition for a zoning exception to build the facility. A multiparty liaison committee, provided for under the Agreement became operational when the facility was completed. During the next administration, CPCA, as party to the agreement, helped negotiate a settlement for damage to nearby homes during construction of the facility. Twice since then NCS has sought to reopen negotiations to allow more revenue-producing use of the facility, but subsequent CPCA boards have held to what they considered the agreement's reasonable provisions to limit the impact of the large athletic facility on the neighbors

In 2000 CPCA won its second award as Outstanding Member Association of the Civic Federation, in large part for the work of Mrs. Furlong and associates on the usage agreement. Mrs. Furlong also supported keeping Klingle Road closed so that Klingle Valley could be devoted to recreation, and in December 1999 CPCA voted to support her position.

In 2002, CPCA negotiated a letter of agreement with Giant Food respecting its plans to enlarge and remodel its store in the Wisconsin Avenue Friendship Shopping Center on CPCA's western boundary. In addition to Mrs. Furlong, the negotiating team included Nancy MacWood, chair of Advisory Neighborhood Council (ANC) 3C; and Diane Olsson, chair of an ad hoc committee of neighbors concerned that the proposed store would create a block long blank wall on Wisconsin Avenue where Murphy's used to be. In exchange for withdrawal of an application for historic landmark designation by CPCA then pending in the Historical Preservation Office (of the Office of Planning), GFS Realty, owner of the Center, agreed to various architectural and land use improvements deemed necessary to ensure that an expanded Giant was consistent with the character of neighborhood. The agreement also called for CPCA approval of new building plans, with the DC Office of Planning as mediator and co-signatory. Eager for a new supermarket, the community widely endorsed the agreement, and the mayor held a press conference applauding it.

George Idelson. Mr. Idelson served from 2002-09, a stint exceeded only by Harry Grove who served thirteen consecutive years after 1935. CPCA then embarked on a modernization plan that brought in new members, established a web site (ClevelandParkIsUs) and computerized its membership rolls.

An unparalleled series of monthly meetings, well reported by the Northwest Current, attracted CPCA members as well as guests from all parts of the city. Meetings ranged from candidate forums for DC elected offices, and panels on topics such as Aging in Place, Connecticut Avenue business vitality, and expansion of the National Mall. CPCA also testified more often than previously before the DC Council and

city agencies, on neighborhood and city issues on which the membership had taken positions. Examples of issues were Pepco rate increases, transfer of public property to private developers, preserving Jelleff Boys and Girls Club, and renovation of Engine Company No. 28.

CPCA continued to press for enforcement of commercial overlays on Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenues, even conducting a second independent measurement of the retail frontage. Mr. Idelson and Peter Espenschied submitted an amendment to the Zoning Code designed to facilitate enforcement and helped to formulate another that defined more clearly what constitutes a restaurant.

Meanwhile, Cleveland Park residents waited with growing impatience for action on the deteriorating Wisconsin Avenue Giant while the project was mired in corporate restructuring among Giant's holding companies. CPCA and ANC3C stepped up efforts to persuade Giant (by then part of Stop & Shop) to renew planning for a new supermarket that would meet the community's needs as well as its concerns. The effort succeeded, and discussions began among Giant, the ANC and CPCA. Finally, in early 2009, Giant submitted an application for a Planned Unit Development (PUD) for the two-block shopping center north and south of Newark Street and, notably, with a row of independent retail stores instead of a blank wall fronting on Wisconsin Avenue. The plan, however called for lifting of the overlay, and significant upzoning and departures from the city's Comprehensive Plan. Neighbors immediately raised issues about the impact on traffic and parking, perennial concerns of the community. After many public meetings and discussion on the Cleveland Park listserv, the CPCA voted by a large majority to challenge the PUD before the Zoning Commission. Its objection was based not on the new store, but on the impact of a five-story building proposed for the north block. CPCA's position triggered controversy, and vigorous response from many citizens who had not previously been very active within the association. That response led to a leadership challenge at CPCA's next election.

Two slates emerged, and the spirited engagement of candidates actively seeking office was in ironic contrast to the association's difficulty in recent years in filling out even a single slate. Each slate consisted of seven activists who had never held office in CPCA before. A "Reform" Slate led by Jeff Davis opposed CPCA's position on the PUD, and sought to steer CPCA in a new direction. A "Unity" Slate led by John Chelen sought to bridge the division in the community by accepting approval of Giant's PUD as a *fait accompli* while accepting the general tenor of policies adopted by recent CPCA leadership. A CPCA listserv initiated by Gabe Fineman of the "Reform" Slate was amicably adopted by the outgoing leadership of CPCA, and a dialog of well-thought-out postings in this medium captured the excitement of the campaign.

Enthusiasm for one slate or the other brought the membership up to some 840, more than twice anything that had been achieved recently (although far below the 1954 record). New election rules formulated by a committee led by Mark Rosenman, were accepted by both slates. They introduced many of the trappings of official precinct voting, as most voters picked up their ballots, voted, and left, neither taking part in the "business" part of the meeting nor waiting to hear the results. A record 471 members turned out to vote, over half the greatly enlarged membership. The Unity Slate won all offices by 55% to about 70% of the 471 the ballots cast.

Because both campaigns and the election itself were well conducted, they produced gracious losers and gracious winners, and a standing ovation for outgoing president, George Idelson.

John Chelen. With enthusiasm high, membership at record levels, and leaders of both groups agreeing that CPCA bylaws need to be overhauled, Mr. Chelen moved to capture the moment. His first order of business was to appoint a governance committee that includes members of the Reform Slate to write new bylaws. Other committees were charged with exploring ways to stimulate wider member participation in decision-making by both in-person and electronic means. Mr. Chelen's committees moved boldly to harness the volunteer enthusiasm, and took initiatives that bore fruit after his nine-month term (2009-10) was over.

Susie Taylor. With the election of Ms. Taylor (the previous first vice president) as president in 2010, the healing of the association appeared complete. Neither her 2010 election nor her 2011 reelection was contested. Mr. Jeff Davis, of the former "Reform" slate, served as recording secretary for her first term, and is an at-large member of the board for her second. Mr. Fineman, also of the former "Reform" slate, was

elected recording secretary, and planned to rebuild the CPCA web page. Ann Hamilton, chair of the governance committee, completed the task of revising articles of incorporation and replacing the former constitution and bylaws with new bylaws that were unanimously adopted. CPCA also sought and gained 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt status.

Volunteer enthusiasm and commitment to coalition building is bringing results. CPCA sparked an effort that united local commercial, residential, governmental and nonprofit groups to revive Cleveland Park Day in October 2010. This Community festival had last been celebrated in 1999, when CPCA had also been a key backer.

CPCA's long support for the rehabilitation of Engine Company No. 28 finally encouraged the DC Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department to prepare and submit a request for proposals to rehabilitate the building on July 2011.

The newly formed Connecticut Avenue Coalition Committee began working on revitalizing the Connecticut Avenue commercial area between Macomb and Porter streets. As part of its efforts, this CPCA sponsored committee sponsored a large community meeting in 2010 where residents sat at over a dozen tables to formulate recommendations on how to utilize a special grant of 1.5 million dollars to enhance pedestrian safety and convenience along the Connecticut Avenue commercial corridor in Cleveland Park.

Another important committee, the Cleveland Park Village Formation Committee, conducted a survey hand-delivered to over 2,000 households identified 400 people enthusiastic about an aging-in-place village, and is working to create a separate 501(c)(3) corporation to establish one. A third new committee is working on greening of Cleveland Park.

The CPCA Centennial is being celebrated on Cleveland Park Day, October 1. In addition the Council of the District of Columbia honored the Association by passing a four-page "Cleveland Park Citizens Association Centennial Recognition Resolution of 2011" introduced by Ward 3 Councilmember Mary Cheh.

September 18, 2011

Cleveland Park Citizens Association

A Partial List of Presidents

Years	President
1911-	Frank J. Hogan
1935-48	Harry C. Grove [Revived the association after a break.]
	Thomas E. Clark
19??-53	Tommy (Mrs. Joseph L.) Miller
1953-54	Elliott Moyer
1954-	Morris Kanfer
	Giles E. Dawson L. Noble Robinson Barbara (Mrs L. Noble) Robinson
196?-64	Homer J. McConnell
1964-65	Timothy V. A. Dillon
1965-66	Joseph Berlanstein
1966-68	John H. Monroe
1968-71	Arthur V. Meigs
1971-75	Stephen A. Koczak
1975-76	Homer J. McConnell
1976-79	Stephen A. Koczak
1979-82	Arthur V Meigs
1982-85	Stephen A. Koczak
1985-88	William H. Taft, III
1988-91	Roberta T. Chesnut
1991-94	Gilpin C. Walker
1994-97	Stephen A. Koczak
1997-2000	Gregory R. New
2000-02	Isabel M. Furlong
2002-09	George Idelson
2009-10	John Chelen
2010-	Susie Taylor

Cleveland Park Citizens Association

Grass Roots Honorees at Civic Federation Functions Since 1968

The honorees are selected by the Association, but are recognized at the Annual Awards functions of the D.C. Federation of Civic Associations. CPCA joined DCFCA in 1965, and began selecting grass Roots honorees in 1968.

Year	Honoree	Year	Honoree
1968	John H. Monroe	1990	Mike Shirazi
1969	Edmond H. de l'Ecluse	1991	Frank L. Bartak
		1992	Arthur V. Meigs
1970	Stephen A Koczak	1993	Jean van der Tak
1971	Arthur V. Meigs	1994	Ellen Lee Meigs
1972			
1973	Elizabeth C. Cawood	1995	Bob Abbo
1974	Joseph Berlanstein	1996	E. Marilyn Oberle
		1997	Dorothy B. Goodman
1975	Bessie D. Thrasher	1998	James O'Donnell
1976	Marjorie T. Britt	1999	Isabel M. Furlong
1977			
1978	Lyman W. Keefe	2000	Frank A. Stovicek
1979	Stephen A. Koczak	2001	Peter Espenschied
		2002	Diane Olsson
1980	Roberta T. Chesnut	2003	Gilpin C. Walker
1981	H. G. Torbert, Jr.	2004	Patricia Armbruster
1982	Roberta T. Chesnut		
1983	Elliott R. Strauss	2005	Jean van der Tak
1984	Shelden Holen	2006	Bonnie LePard
		2007	Wally Dickson
1985	E. Marilyn Oberle	2008	Leonard P. Oliver
1986	Cathya Stephenson	2009	George Idelson
1987	Gilpin C. Walker		
1988	William H. Taft, III	2010	
1989	Gregory R. New	2011	