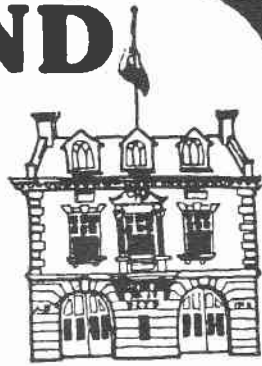


CLEVELAND PARK



Voices

VOL. 8, NO. 1

NEWSLETTER OF THE CLEVELAND PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRING 1994

CPHS Plantings Are Greening Cleveland Park

By **Sam Friedman**, *Community Projects Coordinator*
with **Eleni Constantine**, *President*
Cleveland Park Historical Society

Eight red oak saplings, ready to blossom and grow, were planted on the 3400 block of Lowell Street on Sunday, March 20th. Celebrating the first day of spring, Lowell Street neighbors worked along with volunteers from the service organization Garden Resources of Washington (GROW). This tree planting was coordinated by the Cleveland Park Historical Society's Tree Committee co-chairs, John Poole and Gordon Sheridan, the Johnny Appleseeds of Cleveland Park.

The Lowell Street planting was the most recent of several tree and garden plantings initiated by CPHS in the past three years. Starting with a tree-planting effort on Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenues in 1991, CPHS has developed both residential and commercial area planting and maintenance programs. To date, CPHS has sponsored five tree plantings—putting in more than 60 trees—and several land-

scaping projects in our neighborhood commercial areas.

Residential Tree Plantings

A CPHS tree planting is something like a barn raising. Tree plantings are scheduled for a Saturday or a Sunday during the early spring and late fall. Through the team effort of Gordon Sheridan and John Poole, CPHS arranges for the necessary D.C. permits, orders and delivers the trees, coordinates volunteers and block captains, participates in "tree walks" to identify locations and tree types, and provides on-site instruction and management on the day of the planting. Block captains organize their blocks and collect the money to pay for the trees. Residents of the block getting the trees purchase them at cost through CPHS and are responsible for participating in the planting—whether in the digging or providing refreshments—and for ongoing care of the trees. Everyone contributes in some way.

Gordon Sheridan, who grew up on Upton Street, reflects on the success of CPHS's tree-planting program: "I continue to be surprised by people's enthusiasm for planting trees. People love trees. Every tree planting becomes a neighborhood block party. People have fun, share food and drink, and have a sense of accomplishment."

CPHS tree plantings owe much of their success to John and Gordon's efforts. John Poole, a Cleveland Park resident since 1968, spearheaded CPHS's program to deal with neighborhood tree problems, beginning in 1989 with a campaign to save our trees from the gypsy moth and formation of the tree

committee. Gordon Sheridan, co-chair of the committee since 1992, is general manager of Johnson's Flower and Garden Center on Van Ness at Wisconsin. He began working at Johnson's in 1966 when he was a student at Wilson High School.

Gordon says of his colleague: "John does a tremendous amount of work and is responsible for the entire planting. He finds the people and provides instructions, along with lending a hand and a shovel on the planting day." John

Continued on next page

All are welcome!

Cleveland Park Historical Society 1994 ANNUAL MEETING

in the
Pilgrim Observation Gallery
of the Washington Cathedral
7th floor of the West Tower
Enter at the northwest cloister op-
posite the carvers' shed, North Road

Wednesday, April 27th
6:30 p.m., meeting
7:15 p.m., reception

CPHS members, neighbors and friends are invited to our Annual Meeting. Come hear an update on our activities and how you might participate. Then enjoy refreshments and the sunset from Washington's most spectacular viewpoint.

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CPHS Plantings

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says: "A constant program of replanting and caring for our trees is essential if we are going to keep the special character of our city and our neighborhood. We have been extremely fortunate in having Gordon Sheridan develop our program. He initiated the first block planting, on his own block of Newark Street. His technical knowledge of plants and trees and his readiness to work with the neighborhood and the city to work out program details have been absolutely invaluable."

Block captains for the tree plantings have included Ross Ain, Kay Kohl, Ann Marie Czulowski, Judy Peacock, and Ethel Scheman.

Ain said of his block's effort: "It was a lot of fun and we had great help from University of Maryland students volunteering with GROW. We dug holes and planted ten big trees in two hours. Lots of compliments were received from neighbors, especially those shopping at the local farmers' street market, who asked who we were and could we come to their blocks."

GROW, a D.C.-based nonprofit organization, assists groups starting food gardens and neighborhood beautification projects, and links volunteers to gardening projects. GROW Executive Director Judy Tiger says: "Our volunteers like the Cleveland Park tree

plantings and GROW welcomes the opportunity to support these plantings. Volunteers like seeing and contributing to different neighborhoods throughout the city."

The next CPHS tree planting is scheduled for November 1994. If you would like to participate, along with our neighbors on Springland Lane who have signed up for the November planting, contact John Poole (966-8329) or Gordon Sheridan (966-8205).

Plantings in Commercial Areas

While John and Gordon's energy has resulted in the planting of trees on residential streets in Cleveland Park, their fellow CPHS Board members Susan Hornbostel, Renata Jones and Cathy Armington lead the neighborhood in planting trees and shrubs in the Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenue commercial areas. Matching funds for these plantings have been provided by Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3C and the city-wide program Trees for the City.

Susan Hornbostel created CPHS's popular Adopt-a-Tree program, a partnership between neighbors and merchants to assure the watering of young, recently planted trees along the avenues. Most of these trees have been planted since 1991 by CPHS and by the city at the urging of CPHS. Susan says: "People's enthusiasm for caring for the

trees on Connecticut left me wishing for more neighbors willing to work with local merchants. People get to know a merchant, along with taking care of the tree. I'm looking for someone to become the tree mother or dad on Connecticut Avenue." If you would like to volunteer, please call Susan at 966-3107 or Sam Friedman at 363-6358.

On a cold, damp Saturday morning last November, 1993, several neighbors led by Cathy Armington and Renata Jones planted four trees and a bed of ornamental shrubs at the northwest corner of Connecticut and Newark Street. Brought together by Renata, many of these neighbors had previously taken on the maintenance or cleanup of plantings around the library and along Connecticut, as individuals. The new garden, overlooking the small parking lot in front of Artmaster Printers, was designed to provide passersby with a changing display of flowers and foliage. A special thanks goes to the property owners, the Kalvritinos family, who cooperated with us on this project. The appreciation of neighbors watching the team's work and interest of the library's staff resulted in a subsequent morning of maintenance work and planting on the library grounds. Renata says: "The bad weather did not dampen the spirits and enthusiasm of our volunteers." To participate in future CPHS community gardening projects, call Renata Jones at 686-0258.



This fall tree planting on Newark Street was one of CPHS's five tree plantings of the past three years, orchestrated by Tree Committee co-chairs John Poole and Gordon Sheridan.

IONA Directory for Seniors

IONA Senior Services' popular directory, *Resources for Older Residents of Northwest Washington, D.C.*, is an annotated listing, by category, of information, services and activities to help older persons maintain independence. Highly recommended for Cleveland Park seniors and their families and caretakers. Copies can be picked up at the Cleveland Park Library, Quebec House, Chevy Chase Community Center, or ordered from Marca Piehuta at IONA House (202-966-1055). A donation of \$2.50 per copy is requested.

Cleveland Park Personalities

Erika Oliver

By Jean van der Tak

"A true child of Cleveland Park" is how Eleanor and Len Oliver describe their elder daughter, Erika. A Cleveland Parker since her parents returned from Chicago when she was six months old, the tall, fresh-faced 22-year-old, now a senior at Bryn Mawr College, attended John Eaton Elementary, Alice Deal Junior High, and Wilson Senior High School. At Bryn Mawr, which she entered after an exchange year in Austria, Erika chose to major in the cities program, with a concentration in architectural history. Just before we met over the Christmas holidays in the Olivers' comfortable, big-front-porched home on 34th Place, she had completed her senior thesis, which tells the Park & Shop renovation story to demonstrate "The Use of Historic Preservations Laws to Resist Urban Evolution in Cleveland Park."

"I really appreciated growing up in Cleveland Park," Erika says. "I love the houses and the sense of community." As a result, she now plans a career in city planning and historic preservation.

One of her earliest memories is watching her mother paint a fire hydrant on Ordway Street, where they then lived, to resemble Baron von Steuben (inspector general of the American Revolutionary forces), in celebration of the 1976 Bicentennial. Eleanor Oliver has donated her artistic skills to many Cleveland Park projects (including the firehouse sketch, calligraphy, and design of this newsletter). Later in the summertimes on 34th Place, where they moved when she was six, Erika recalls, "My Mom would buy us big fat pieces of sidewalk chalk and we'd coat the street with drawings." She and her small friends rode their bikes, rollerskated, and "did little plays" in the alley behind.

She learned to swim at the Cleveland Park Club. "We'd walk there in the afternoons, five minutes down Ordway, and stay till Mom came at

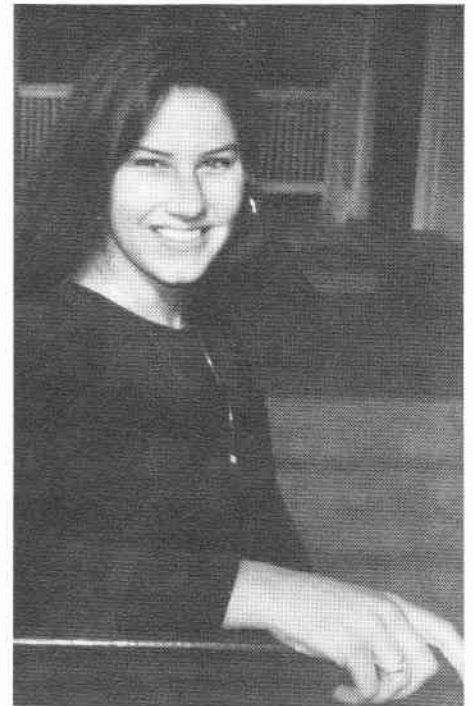
five: 'Okay, kids, time to go; you're turning into prunes.'" She and sister Britt-Karin, now a sophomore at Gettysburg College, attended Rives Carroll's summer camp at the club; Erika was a junior counselor by age ten. At eleven, after a get-acquainted party Dianne Boggs gave for young mothers and prospective babysitters, she got her first babysitting job, caring for the Stinchfields' 18-month-old son. That set off a neighborhood babysitting career—"mostly Saturday nights" but also daytimes in the summer—that lasted through high school.

Also in the summers there was the Summer Musical Theater Workshop, launched at John Eaton when Erika was in sixth grade and later shifted to Sidwell Friends; mother Eleanor painted many of the backdrops. Erika had "pretty decent parts" in the six musicals she did. Her favorite was Dolly in "Annie Get Your Gun," because "I could be a real bitch; it was neat for me because I've always been the good girl."

Singing has always been her favorite extracurricular activity. "I'm not non-athletic," she says, but neither is she an enthusiast, like sister Britt, who played three varsity sports at Wilson, or father Len, renowned coach of community soccer. "I quit soccer because I didn't want to do something he'd coach me in"—usually at Hearst, their favorite neighborhood playing field. So she did swimming at Wilson.

But academics have been Erika's forte throughout her school career, beginning with Mrs. Hannapel's pre-K class at John Eaton. At Wilson she made the National Honor Society and graduated 12th in a class of 419. She chose Bryn Mawr because "it was the best academically" of the colleges she was accepted to.

Asked if there was no question that she'd continue on to Deal and Wilson after John Eaton, Erika said, "My parents have faith in the public schools here and that carried over to me." Most of her Eaton class of 60 went on to Deal, but by Wilson there were just "15 or 20" left. Going to Wilson takes "a certain kind of independence," she says. Without the help one gets at a private school, "it's easy to fall between the cracks." But "if you've got that independence, you can get a good education. I had some good teachers." She remembers her German and history teachers appreciatively. Compared to Bryn Mawr classmates who came from private or



Erika Oliver

well-financed suburban high schools, she was at first behind in "study skills"—how to organize a term paper, for instance—but "Wilson had taught me enough skills to catch up quickly."

She also valued Wilson for its social education—"especially after I'd left. I was glad I'd gone to Deal and Wilson with people from different kinds of backgrounds—people who don't get three square meals a day or who can't afford to go on field trips"—as well as a broad racial and ethnic mix.

Erika's horizons were further broadened by the year she spent between Wilson and Bryn Mawr as an American Field Service exchange student in Klagenfurt, a small provincial city in southern Austria. The Olivers had learned of this program at a Wilson PTA meeting and hosted a Yugoslavian boy while Erika was in Austria and a girl from Berlin during her freshman year at Bryn Mawr. In Klagenfurt, Erika attended "the equivalent of our grade 10" with classmates "who'd known each other all their lives," while living with a mother and three daughters in a house heated by brick ovens and no dishwasher or car. "That was enlightening," she says. "It was far from roughing it, but I realized I'm a child of privilege."

Also enlightening were visits that year and later to Vienna, Belgrade,

Continued on page 5

Our Neighborhood Shopkeepers

Bobby Abbo and the Roma Restaurant

By Susan Zusy

Behind the Roma's red shutters, you will be greeted by a polar bear, a tiger, and Bobby Abbo. Bobby grew up in Cleveland Park. His father, Frank, opened the first Roma Restaurant at 707 12th Street N.W. in 1920 and relocated to the present site, 3419 Connecticut Avenue, in 1932. After returning Bobby's hello and paying proper respects to the bare-toothed animals, you will notice the many honors and awards that tell the story of Abbo civic activism. For instance, Frank Abbo was honored in 1969 by the producers of the National Cherry Blossom Festival for 15 years of civic support and continuous participation. Mrs. Anna Abbo has been honored by the American Legion Women's Auxiliary for her support of the Metropolitan Police Boys Club, by the D.C. Federation's Business and Professional Women's Club, and by the D.C. Federation of Civic Associations. The Roma explodes with Abbo personality.

Murals of exotic landscapes—African saharas, perhaps—cover the walls

of the original dining room. They are background to the 20 or so taxidermied safari trophies that Frank Abbo brought back from excursions around the world—lions, antelopes, baboons, and a moose, among others. Frank hunted rabbits in Cleveland Park during the 1920s. He took up big game in his seventies and traveled on safari nine times in ten years before he died after a tragic car accident on Connecticut Avenue in 1970. But Frank's spirit lives at the Roma. He commissioned the murals, beginning in the late 1950s. Mr. Reithar, a Czech artist, began painting over the wallpaper in the original room, and continued in the second dining room (acquired in 1950) with tranquil Mediterranean scenes overlooking the sea or overlooking the Italian Alps. The Venetian Room (acquired in 1958) is available for private parties; seating capacity is 60 or more. Guests dine on pink tablecloths surrounded by murals of Italian monuments, including the Leaning Tower of Pisa and the Roman Coliseum. Bobby remembers Mr. Reithar painting furiously, consuming only coffee and cigarettes, and occasionally

muttering "Geez, guys," between brusque strokes.

The last room with street frontage is the Roma Oyster Bay—opened in 1970—where the seafood dining atmosphere is enhanced by decorative fish tanks, hanging fishing nets, and fishing trophies. A large map of Chesapeake Bay adorns a wall.

Sandwiched between the Venetian Room and Oyster Bay is Poor Robert's Tavern, which opened in 1967 with a fundraiser for Eugene McCarthy. Leon, the daytime bartender, describes the Tavern architecturally as an "Italian galleon," with its wooden beams and hanging lanterns. The walls are covered with university pennants and paintings and posters of sporting events—some purchased, many given by customers and friends.

Roger Goldman, a used-to-be Tavern regular since he became a husband and a father, remains a major-league Abbo fan. He finds it "astounding" how many customers Bobby addresses by name. Large-screen televisions at either end of the bar provide what it takes to transform a quiet, friendly neighborhood bar into a raucous one during the football season.

In the Tavern, different trophies quietly acknowledge community appreciation for Bobby's civic activities. Behind the bar are trophies from the many successful sports teams Bobby has sponsored, like the Roma Restaurant Orioles. Twenty-five years ago, Bobby established the Poor Robert's Foundation. Of the friends he has made over the years, some have met with good fortune. With a twinkle in his eye, Bobby warns, "It's gonna cost you to be my friend." Assisting charitable organizations that require transportation to fulfill their mission, the Foundation has given 38 vans to a variety of organizations, including the Metropolitan Police Boys and Girls Club, Lydia House, Community Crossway, Mary House and IONA House. The Tuesday before last Thanksgiving, the Foundation donated and delivered 20,000 pounds of turkey to 21 different groups. Jim O'Donnell, a program director for IONA House, told me that Bobby was honored at Catholic University with an award (sponsored by the former Madison Bank) given to outstanding citizens who make life better in their communities.

Bobby has also served as president of the Cleveland Park Merchants Asso-



A Cleveland Park institution for over 60 years, the Roma is still owned by the Abbo family.

ciation. When the Park & Shop was empty and deteriorating in the mid-1980s, some of the merchants' views differed from those of the historic preservationists about the kind of development on that site that would be best for the community. The Merchants Association, led by Bobby, favored mixed-use, high-rise development. What was at issue for these merchants was the long-term fiscal strength of their businesses. Even steady business would not compensate for increasing taxes and other business costs, they thought. Bobby "fought desperately for an infusion of new customers" to the neighborhood. Six or seven hundred more people on the street during the daytime—office workers and others from the proposed ten-story Park & Shop redevelopment—would have made a difference for some of the nearby merchants who have closed shop since that proposal was defeated. In preserving the physical character of the neighborhood, did we put at risk a different, unique quality of Cleveland Park—the family-owned, community-based businesses? As with most interesting controversies, the battle over the establishment of Cleveland Park as an historic district was fought on both sides by community members who had the best interests of the neighborhood at heart.

Nestled behind the restaurant's dining rooms is the Roma Garden. My parents brought me and a brother to celebrate our birthdays here when I was

nine or so. I thought it didn't get more romantic than dining in the Garden—under the trellises, under the stars, with the flowers, the fountain, the candlelight, the violinist. It is far easier to discern the effect of time on me than on the Garden.

During the summer, the trellises support the weight of a crop of Concord grapes. There has been grape-stomping in the Roma Garden since 1952, before Lucille Ball popularized the notion in "I Love Lucy." At the annual harvest festival, the Abbos bring in professional "wine maidens" who demonstrate the delicacy of their art form in a vat full of grapes. Dancing to the rhythm of live musicians, the wine maidens entice diners to cast off their socks and relish the sensation of squashing grapes beneath their heels and between their toes. (You will need reservations for any evening of this four-day event during the second weekend in September.)

As for the food, the Roma offers a very nice, moderately priced menu with a variety of choices—pasta, pizza, veal, seafood, and an extensive wine list. A featured wine is always shown at the table.

Just the week before I interviewed Bobby, a family of long-time patrons visited, bringing with them a fourth generation. The Roma is an institution. For over 60 years, it has been a meeting place for neighbors and friends who know they can rely on the Abbos for a



Bobby Abbo

friendly welcome in a cozy place. Mrs. Abbo continues to greet customers and friends every day. "Come to the Roma, you'll get a smile," guarantees Bobby. Personally, I think a smile from Bobby Abbo is about as nourishing as any meal you can buy in Cleveland Park.

Susan Zusy, A CPHS Board member, directs various community relations projects for the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation.

Erika Oliver

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Budapest and Berlin, and exploring Philadelphia now with Bryn Mawr friends. "I realize how different every city is. Most cities have neighborhoods like this, but I think every neighborhood is different. That was one of the points of my thesis."

Erika's father Len—an independent consultant in adult education and "a student of the world," she says—encouraged her choice of "cities" as a major. Her concentration in architectural history—"I'd always liked architecture without wanting to be an architect"—has evolved into preservation and social issues. Charlie Atherton, a neighbor who works for the Fine Arts Commission, suggested the Park & Shop as an issue for her senior thesis.

Judy Hubbard Saul shared "all the research" she did on the Park & Shop history (see *Voices*, Spring 1993); Kathy Wood lent her back issues of *Voices* describing the community's struggle with developers and rezoning issues. Erika went on to explore "why Cleveland Park was important historically, what basis it had for historic preservation, and why we felt the need for an historic district." Now, she says, "I've gotten very interested in historic preservation and its impact." She's not sure where this will take her. "Ideally, I'd like to work with something like the Fine Arts Commission or the D.C. Planning Commission, but my options are very open right now."

Besides her own love for Cleveland Park's architecture and its sense of community—the block parties, the

Macomb Street Halloween Party, the small-town shopping areas within walking distance, "just sitting on the porch"—Erika says her parents "had a big part" in inspiring her chosen future. "They strongly believed in the preservation of this great neighborhood and told me it's important to be active for what you believe in." Whatever neighborhood or city Erika ends up in it will be lucky to have this child of Cleveland Park working in its behalf.

Jean van der Tak is Editor of Voices.



The charming, unpretentious Bungalow reflects the Craftsman ideals of "honesty" in building. Most Cleveland Park examples were built in different styles from 1907 to 1925. Drawing by John Wiebenson.

Architectural Corner

By Cherrie Anderson

Bungalow

This is the ninth in a Voices series of house styles to be featured in a planned CPHS Guide to Cleveland Park House Styles. Author Cherrie Anderson is an interior designer. Illustrator John Wiebenson is an architect.

The charming, unpretentious Bungalow is another house which was widely popular in the early 20th century. Though the basic form was realized in many different styles, it has come to be associated with the Craftsman philosophy. Most examples in Cleveland Park were built from 1907 to 1925. They reflect the Craftsman ideals of "honesty" in building, such as: unconcealed structural elements forming the decoration; simple, rustic, "hand-hewn" materials; and a close relationship between the house and its site. Fine examples can be seen at 2735 Macomb, 2908 Ordway, 3425 Porter, and 3522 Quebec.

Basic Form

- Low, symmetrical, one- or one-and-a-half-story massing;

- End gable roof, with front dormer in half story;
- Center or off-center front entrance, with irregularly placed windows;
- Usually a full front porch covered by an extension of the main roof; sometimes a partial front porch with front gable.

Materials

- Wood shingle, narrow wood clapboard, or pebble-dash stucco siding;
- Originally wood shingle roof;
- Wood porches, doors, windows and trim;
- Often fieldstone foundation, porch piers, and chimney (to emphasize house rising organically out of the soil).

Details

- Double-hung windows on first story, often with six-over-one sash (six panes above; one below);
- Often casement windows in half-story dormer;
- Rectangular windows trimmed with sloping-sided casing;
- Sturdy square porch piers with sloping sides, sometimes topped by Tuscan columns;
- Square or rectangular porch balusters (handrail supports);
- Low fieldstone walls capped by cement enclosing porch;
- Exposed rafter ends supporting eaves;
- Ornamental brackets at eaves.

Citizens Association Concludes Lively Speaker Series

R. David Hall, member and former president of the D.C. Board of Education and candidate for mayor in this year's November elections, is the featured speaker at the Cleveland Park Citizens Association meeting of Saturday, May 7, beginning at 10 a.m., in the Community Room of the Cleveland Park Library. To wind up its 1993-94 season, the Association will present a "surprise" speaker at its meeting of Saturday, June 4, followed by the Association's annual luncheon at the Roma Restaurant.

Founded in 1921 and one of the oldest civic associations in D.C., the Cleveland Park Citizens Association meets in the library at 10 a.m. on the first Saturday of the month from October through June. The current president, Mrs. Gilpin Walker, who will conclude her three-year tenure at the June meeting, has carried on the Association's distinguished record of attracting lively and informative speakers. Other speakers in the 1993-94 season have included D.C. Superior Court Judge Reggie Walton, radio commentator and D.C. historian John Daly, Metro Transit Police Captain Barry McDevitt, Lieutenant H.A. Berberich of the National Park Service Police, and Ward 3 D.C. School Board representative Erika Landberg. The meetings, which are open to all, usually also include a detailed neighborhood crime report by a police official and often a fire report from a member of the fire department. For further information, call Mrs. Walker at 362-0221.

The Uptown Theater

By Jean van der Tak

The big freeze of Friday, February 11th, may have shut down the federal government and the city, but the 1:30 matinee of *In the Name of the Father* at the Uptown Theater on Connecticut Avenue was crowded. "We do real well in bad weather," says manager Rodney Allen. "If you don't want to go to a museum on a rainy Saturday, there's always the movies." In Cleveland Park that means first-run, Academy-Award-contender films in the grand Art Deco, wide-screened, 1,010-seat theater that is our neighborhood movie house—the last of its kind in Washington.

Built by the Warner Brothers—their 14th theater in D.C. and the first not downtown—the Uptown opened October 29, 1936, with a gala premiere of *Cain and Mabel*, starring Clark Gable and Marion Davies. Records compiled by former CPHS president Kathy Wood report that the then-1,500 seats "were filled with city officials, civic leaders . . . and other hundreds milled up and down the brightly lighted land outside." D.C. Commissioner Melvin Hazen recalled the days before Connecticut Avenue was extended and Washington had only one small movie theater. "This new theater, modern in every respect (it had airconditioning), is a testimonial to the growth of this marvelous boulevard and also the movie industry," he declared.

The Uptown was designed by John Jacob Zink of Baltimore—"the most distinguished theater architect of his time"—in the popular commercial Art Deco style of the 1920s and 30s, echoed in the shops flanking the theater, also designed by Zink, the Macklin apartment house at Connecticut and Newark, the Roma Restaurant opposite, and the Klinge Valley bridge at the southern entrance to what is now the Cleveland Park Historic District. Richard Striner, former president of Washington's Art Deco Society, has called it "the centerpiece of a little Art Deco district" and "without question, in the best original condition of all Art Deco movie houses surviving in Washington."

Its exterior is red and yellow brick, with fluted stone panels below and a limestone-faced central protruding section. Kathy Wood writes: "The articulation of the facade into protruding and

receding sections reduces the impact of this rather massive structure and adds interest to it. The section closest to the street is one story, in keeping with the one-story shops to the south and the post office (built in 1941) to the north." She also notes the etched glass windows, the neon "UPTOWN" sign, the marquee with streamlined silver and red bands, and the "elegant" pink polished granite at the entrance, continuing into the lobby "where some of the original Scaviola marble is still evident."

That lobby now offers a choose-your-candy bank and the standard pop-and-popcorn stand. Most of the original interior furnishings are gone, but the now-1,010 seats still sprawl amply over the wide downstairs and balcony—in sharp contrast to the 200-seat caves of today's multiplexes. At a Friday matinee two weeks after the big freeze, my husband and I shared all this grandeur with about 30 others. The seats are filled Saturday nights at 7—"always our biggest time of the week," says Rodney Allen—and often other times too. Last July 4th weekend, all showtimes for *Jurassic Park* sold out by 3 p.m. the first day, Allen told me; *Dances with Wolves* and *Last of the Mohicans* had done nearly as well.

The Uptown's wide screen—installed in the late 1950s with the advent of Cinerama—and "state-of-the-art" digital sound system account for much of its popularity. People come from Pennsylvania, Baltimore and the Eastern Shore to relish blockbusters in a glory that's lost with multiplex or home video screens, Allen says. The Peadar Brothers, who bought the Uptown from RKO in 1977 during the year-long run of *Star Wars* and who still own the building, sold the business to Cineplex Odeon in 1987. But the Uptown was spared subsequent division into a multiplex warren.

Allen explains that exploding movie production and distribution costs make most large theaters unprofitable, but the Uptown, because of its setting and area, has "marketability." Distributors—who split gross proceeds 65/35 with the theater over the first weeks of a film's run—know the Uptown can guarantee them \$60,000 a weekend at first. "Distributors like 20th Century Fox approach us, rather than the other way round," he says. (Usually, I learned, theater chains must compete—and pay—for distribution rights.) With its size and discerning clientele—"We wouldn't play *House Party* here"—



The Uptown is a big draw on a wintry Saturday.

the Uptown can show a continuing profit from its single-film offering over several weeks as the distributor/theater cut shifts in favor of the theater. *Jurassic Park* holds the record for Allen's year and a half at the theater, grossing the theater \$656,000 in its 12-week run.

"We're in a crime-free area," he notes, citing another of the Uptown's attractions. He admits that parking is a problem, with meter limits and weekday rush-hour bans on Connecticut and only the Park & Shop's small parking lot nearby. Many patrons use Metro or just walk. When desperate car-riders hop out to ask, "Where can we park?" Allen tells them, "Drive west." We Cleveland Parkers know that strategy! My street two blocks north is parked out on weekends when a blockbuster is playing at the Uptown.

But that's a small price to pay for a friendly, round-the-corner movie house that shows panoramic greats like *Lawrence of Arabia* in full glory. Allen—a 14-year veteran of movie-house management, which he turned to when jobs for meteorologists dried up in a federal hiring freeze just as he got his degree in his native North Carolina—runs the theater with a staff of 31. So far as he knows, there are no plans for remodeling. We hope he's right. We love our splendid old dowager the way it is.

Jean van der Tak is Editor of Voices.

Join the Cleveland Park Historical Society

The Cleveland Park Historical Society, founded in 1985, achieved its initial aims to have our neighborhood declared a historic district and protect the low-rise commercial sections along Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenues.

Now we are focusing on increasing neighborhood interest in historic preservation and community projects like helping to revitalize our shopping areas and replanting trees.

If you are not a current member, please join us now. Membership includes our newsletter, *Cleveland Park Voices*, and invitations to special programs. Send your check for \$25, payable to Cleveland Park Historical Society, to:

Judy Hubbard Saul
CPHS Membership Chair
2938 Newark Street, N.W.,
Washington, D.C. 20008
Tel: 202-966-1995



Before and After:

Contemplative coffee-drinkers have replaced starched shirts in the windows of 3420 Connecticut Avenue, where an offshoot of the famed coffeehouse chain, Starbucks, recently succeeded International Valet. Starbucks's renovations carefully preserved the original low-key, streamlined, Art Deco design of the new location, next door to the Uptown Theater.

This is the northern anchor of a row of one-story shops opened with the theater in 1936 and designed by the Uptown's architect, John Jacob Zink, as an integral accompaniment to the theater. (See Uptown story, page 7.) The southern anchor, now Ireland's Four Provinces, rounds a corner to blend into the shops (including Artmaster Printers) at the base of the Art Deco Macklin apartment house on Newark at Connecticut.



CPHS Office and Phone Number

Sam Friedman, CPHS Community Projects Coordinator, has an office above the American Security Bank at 3401 Connecticut Avenue. He is usually there mornings, Monday-Thursday, and Friday afternoon.

For a recording on CPHS activities, call 202-363-6358. Eleni Constantine, CPHS President, and Sam Friedman welcome hearing from neighbors about their interests and concerns. Please leave your name and phone number to discuss your concerns and possible steps to action.

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