

A SOCIAL PICTURE OF CHEVY CHASE,

INDIANA COUNTY

by

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High upon a hill overlooking the borough of Indiana lies a small slum area known as Chevy Chase. Under ordinary circumstances this area would be the residential section for the townspeople's elite. Chevy Chase is geographically located to be such an area but, as we know, this is not the case. When Chevy Chase had first been planned, in the late teens and early twenties of the twentieth century, this was its original purpose. Chevy Chase was named after the Chevy Chase of Maryland and the Chevy Chase of Washington, D. C., where the wealthy aristocrats reside.¹ A great percentage of the land at this time was owned by Dr. Dodson, the Bryans and Ada^d Elkins. At the present time there is an Elkins Avenue in Chevy Chase named after Mrs. Ada^d Elkins. Elkins Hall, of Indiana State Teachers College, is also named after this same woman.² These plans to make Chevy Chase a restricted residential area were doomed to failure with the rise of the depression in the late twenties and early thirties. The depression forced many of these people to sell their land at very low prices. Those who did not have to sell their land

¹ Mr. Charles Sadler, Proprietor of Sadler's Bar, Chevy Chase, Indiana County.

² Miss Mary E. Bryan, Bryan Manor Farm, White Township.

because of economic reasons did so because of the lower classed people who were buying up the land. Thus, we have the Chevy Chase we know of today in Indiana County.³

Today Chevy Chase is shunned by the borough of Indiana. There have been several attempts to have Chevy Chase annexed as part of the borough but each attempt has been unsuccessful. This move would be very desirable for the residents of Chevy Chase because it would enable them to obtain such necessities as street lights, paved roads and sewage disposal systems. Chevy Chase, which is now deprived of the three previously mentioned utilities, is part of White Township. White Township, unfortunately, does not have the finances to undertake such projects as these. The borough, on the other hand, could more easily handle such proceedings. However, according to most indications the borough wants nothing to do with Chevy Chase.⁴

This attitude can be easily exemplified by an interview I had with a clerk in the Indiana Chamber of Commerce. I had hoped to obtain some useful information and statistics from the Chamber of Commerce, but all I received was the cold shoulder, which I feel, is the typical attitude of the average Indiana citizen. I explained to the clerk that I

³ Mr. Charles Sadler.

⁴ Mrs. Buela Altemus, tax collector for White Township, Indiana County.

was doing a research paper on Chevy Chase. I proceeded to ask her if I might obtain some statistics on the population of Chevy Chase. Her reply was very sarcastic and to the point, "Who in the world would want to know that?". I replied by saying that I did and that someone must know. Her second answer was even more cutting than the first, "Nobody knows. If you want to know go out and count them." The only other information I managed to obtain from the Chamber of Commerce was a pamphlet (an ideal community, Indiana, Pa.) telling its readers what an ideal community Indiana is. The pamphlet fails to point out to its readers the eyesore known as Chevy Chase, which is just outside of Indiana and which, for geographical reasons, should be part of the borough.⁵

A second indication of this attitude was given to me by a Miss Florence Peters of the Indiana Evening Gazette. I was hoping to receive some information from past editions of the Gazette, but Miss Peters informed me that I would find nothing of much value because the Gazette keeps the happenings of Chevy Chase rather quiet. Miss Peters did, however, refer me to a few individuals from whom I did receive some information.⁶

⁵ Indiana Chamber of Commerce, Indiana, Pa.

⁶ Miss Florence Peters, Indiana Evening Gazette, Indiana, Pa.

One of these individuals was Miss Mary E. Bryan of the Bryan Farm approximately one mile beyond Chevy Chase. Miss Bryan informed me that she had lived there all her life and had never had any trouble from either the Negroes or so called "white trash" of Chevy Chase. She recalled when White Township had only one colored family, the Johnsons. She supposed the recent migration of Negroes to White Township came about through the work offered to them in coal mines.

Miss Bryan is a former school teacher of the Reider School in White Township, but at that time, 1911, there were no Negro students. Miss Bryan also informed me that the closest contact she has had with the Negroes was allowing them to hunt on her property. Miss Bryan said they were always very respectful.⁷

The second person which Miss Peters referred me to was Mrs. Buella Altemus, a white woman who resides in Chevy Chase. Mrs. Altemus is one of the tax collectors of White Township. She knew of no statistics on the population of Chevy Chase. She told me that I could get the population of White Township, but reminded me that Chevy Chase was only a small part of the township.⁸

⁷ Miss Mary E. Bryan.

⁸ Mrs. Buella Altemus.

In the treasury office of the Indiana County Court House I was able to obtain the population of both White Township and Chevy Chase. According to the census of 1950 the population of White Township was 5,340. One thousand, one hundred sixty of these people lived in Chevy Chase.⁹ There was no indication as to the number of Negroes. However, according to An Economic Survey of Indiana County, Pa., 1950, there were 73,173 white residents and 597 Negroes living in Indiana County. In the borough there were 9,723 whites and 20 Negroes or 2 per cent.¹⁰

Mrs. Altemus told me that she had absolutely no trouble with the Negroes of Chevy Chase. She informed me that some of her very best friends were Negroes. According to her, Chevy Chase is composed of approximately fifty percent Negroes and fifty percent Caucasians. Mrs. Altemus said "If my husband and I had children at home perhaps there would be some conflict with the Negroes however, the way it is now we all get along fine." Mrs. Altemus went on to say, "The racial problem is becoming easier to cope with and someday the races will mix freely all over the world as they do in Chevy Chase."¹¹

⁹ Treasurer's Office, Indiana County Court House, The Pennsylvania Manual, Vol. 90, 1950.

¹⁰ An Economic Survey of Indiana County, 1950.

¹¹ Mrs. Buela Altemus.

This attitude is common with most of the residents of Chevy Chase. Mr. Charles Sadler, Negro proprietor of Sadler's Bar said "I think Chevy Chase is a pretty good part of the world to live in." Mr. Sadler, a native of Alabama, feels there is all the difference in the world between the North and the South. He said, "There is discrimination everywhere, but the law makes it worse in the South." Mr. Sadler does, however, feel that the Negro is slighted on the social side in Indiana. He says, "They are glad to get your money for a suit of clothes, but not too many places want your money for a meal in a restaurant." ¹²

Sadler's Bar is the only bar in Chevy Chase. There is an Elks Club, but Sadlers is the only privately owned bar. Mr. Sadler, known as Charley by his customers, says he gets all kinds of trade. He went on to say, "I get everything from college professors to coalminers and truckdrivers." Mr. Sadler claims his place is managed strictly according to the law. He doesn't discriminate between the races. If there is an argument between a Negro and a white, he will tell whoever is in the wrong to leave. So far he has only had to tell two whites and two Negroes to leave for discriminating against one another.¹³

¹² Mr. Charles Sadler

¹³ Mr. Charles Sadler

When Mr. Sadler opened his bar many of the townspeople were against it. They told him that his place would be torn apart in two weeks by the Negroes and "white trash." Mr. Sadler said "That was five years ago and today I am making over ten thousand dollars a year and there has never been a riot in my place."¹⁴

Mr. Sadler, who is quite a philosopher on racial problems, feels he is the greatest man in Indiana County for bringing the races closer together.¹⁵ This certainly seems to be true because the races mix very freely in Sadlers and there seems to be a minimum of discrimination.

Such is also the case in the Elks Club of Chevy Chase. It is not an uncommon sight to see a white woman dance with a colored man or vice versa. According to Mr. Fred Johnson, a Negro member of the Elks, any Elk member may come in regardless of color. He said, "In Chevy Chase a man is treated as a man regardless of color, in Indiana a white man is treated as a man, but a colored man is treated as an animal."¹⁶

Carl Sadler, sixteen year old son of Mr. Sadler, also notices the prejudices of the Indiana whites. He said he could not get on Indiana highschool's football team because the coach did not like Negroes.¹⁷

¹⁴ Mr. Charles Sadler

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Mr. Fred Johnson, Chevy Chase, Indiana Co.

¹⁷ Carl Sadler, Chevy Chase, Indiana Co.

The religious life in Chevy Chase is taken care of through three churches. Two of these are Churches of God Under Christ, the third is a Baptist Church. At least two of the ministers do not have high school educations. According to Reverend Elder Webb of the Church of God Under Christ, it is not necessary for a minister to have an education. He said the only requirements were first a calling from God and then placing all of one's faith in God. He told me that before he had become a minister he had been a wicked man who had smoked, drunk and told dirty stories. Then one day a friend of his took him to church and it was then that he received his calling. He said a voice told him to go to the pulpit and preach the word of God. He obeyed the command and since then has been a minister.¹⁸

When I visited Reverend Webb's church I did not tell him why I was there. Consequently, he told his congregation that I had been sent there by God. He explained that I could have gone to any church in Indiana, but God chose to send me to them.¹⁹

During the services, anyone in the congregation may rise and speak. This is usually done by giving thanks to God. There is much music during the three hour spectacle.²⁰

¹⁸ Reverend Elder Webb, Pastor of the Church of God Under Christ, Chevy Chase.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Church of God Under Christ.

At the Baptist Church the sermon is sung by the minister with vocal "hallelujahs," "Amens" and "say it again brothers" thrown in by members of the congregation.²¹

The congregations of the three churches are composed of both white and colored people, but all three ministers are colored. A very small percentage of the residents of Chevy Chase attend church and in many cases the ones that do appear to be mental cases. The Baptist Church is the most liberal of the two churches. I visited and therefore has the largest congregation. The other church prohibits smoking and drinking because they are supposed to be tools of the devil.

According to Reverend Elder Webb there are at least ten mixed marriages in Chevy Chase. His own wife is a white woman. Mixed marriages are considered neither uncommon nor undesirable.²²

Very few people in Chevy Chase ever come into Indiana. They do most of there shopping at Loblaw's Super Market. This cuts down on there being discriminated against by the townspeople.²³

Chevy Chase does not have street lights, paved roads, sewage disposal systems or playgrounds. Their recreation is

²¹ Baptist Church, Chevy Chase, Indiana Co.

²² Reverend Elder Webb

²³ Mr. Charles Sadler

limited to hunting in the wooded areas beyond Chevy Chase and in socializing at Sadlers or the Elks Club. Most of the homes are old and run down with a minimum of furniture although most of them do have television sets. Very few of the people have high school educations. The borough of Indiana could alleviate many of these problems but refuses to do so because it may soil the good name of Indiana. However, there are certain agencies that are attempting to ease the situation. One of these agencies is the Nurse's Home, associated with the State Clinic. Here, the residents of Chevy Chase may receive medical examinations and treatment. Surprisingly enough though the citizens of Chevy Chase are rather healthy. According to one of the nurses, there is no more disease in Chevy Chase than there is in other parts of the county. The nurse supposed that they had become immuned to many diseases such as typhoid and tuberculosis by living under these conditions for a long period of time.

The nurse said that the people of Chevy Chase complained the most on garbage being dumped on their land by McCreary's garbage disposal and the mistreatment of their children in Indiana high school. The State Clinic tries to alleviate these problems by having the garbage moved and getting a better understanding with the school officials.²⁴

²⁴ Nurses Home, State Clinic, Indiana, Pa.

Another agency which gives Chevy Chase a helping hand is the Indiana County Board of Assistance. Mrs. George Miller is the representative for Chevy Chase and according to her the only people eligible for assistance are those who request help and have a definite need. This need is based upon things such as unemployment, illness and mental or physical status. If the applicant is deserving of assistance he is allowed up to \$17.40 rent per month, \$5.40 for heating, cooking and lighting and \$34.20 for miscellaneous expenses or a total of \$59.00. Besides this they may obtain free medical, dental and burial services.

According to Mrs. Miller, at the present time there are twenty-seven white families and five Negro families receiving assistance in Chevy Chase. Mrs. Miller said the number varies and that it is slightly smaller at this time of the year because of the seasonal work offered at Musser's Nursery.²⁵

The Bureau of Employment Security of Indiana County informed me that there are no records on the number of people unemployed in Chevy Chase. It was explained that they do not keep records of different areas, but only on the county as a whole.²⁶

²⁵ Mrs. George Miller, Indiana County Board of Assistance, Indiana, Pa.

²⁶ The Bureau of Employment Security, Indiana County.

The Indiana County Loan and Thrift Corporation does not carry too many people from Chevy Chase because they are considered bad risks. They said that of the ones they are carrying they have both poor and good risks. No statistics were revealed.²⁷

Crime in Chevy Chase is evidently no worse than it is in other parts of the county. Although no statistics were available at either the Courthouse or the District Attorney's office Mr. Murray Buterbaugh, the District Attorney, said that generally speaking there was not an awful lot of crime in Chevy Chase. He said that two particular families, one white and one Negro, give Chevy Chase an unfavorable name by being involved in frequent criminal offences.

Mr. Buterbaugh said that the greatest number of criminal offences committed in Chevy Chase was petty larceny offences committed by Juveniles. He said they steal from the Country Club, which is not far from Chevy Chase, because they feel they are entitled to do so since the country club set has so much and they have so little.²⁸

²⁷ Indiana County Loan and Thrift Corporation, Indiana, Pa.

²⁸ Mr. Murray Buterbaugh, District Attorney, Indiana, Pa.

Mr. Buterbaugh, a prointegrationist, feels that something could be done about this by giving these people equality in education and work.²⁹

Even though these conditions exist and from most indications shall continue to exist, the people of Chevy Chase, both Caucasians and Negroes have learned to live with one another with a minimum of conflict. Few, if any, would live elsewhere.

²⁹ Mr. Murray Buterbaugh, District Attorney, Indiana County.

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