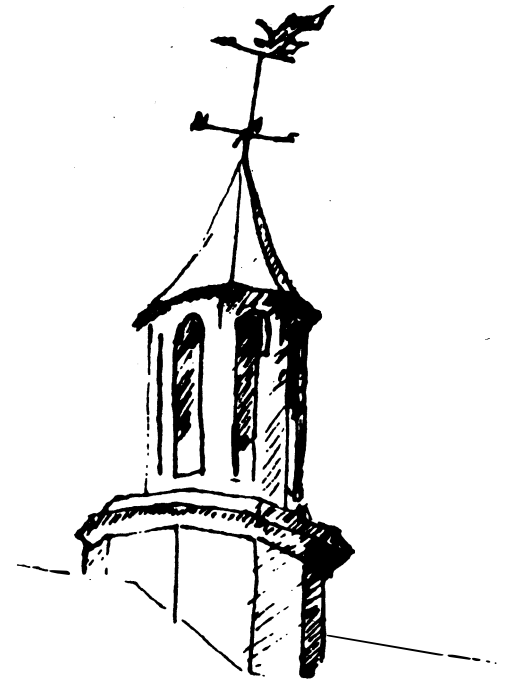


The Echo

The Town of
GLEN ECHO, MARYLAND
Chartered, 1904



January, 1990

RESIDENTS UP IN ARMS OVER PROPERTY ASSESSMENTS

By Peter Godfrey and Carlotta Anderson

Bonnie Whyte, representing a group of irate Glen Echo property owners, told the town council last month that it appeared that 6,000 sq. ft. of land—a relatively small lot—was being valued at \$205,000 to \$210,000 on the state assessment notices received by townspeople last month. This figure did not include the value of the house.

In many cases, town homeowners found their total assessments more than double the last valuation, done three years ago, with the land value sometimes tripled or more. The steep increases enraged homeowners throughout the county as well, according to news reports. Public reaction was being described as a taxpayers' revolt, and reportedly mass appeals were being organized.

Landowners have 45 days from the date of the assessment notice to appeal it. Ms. Whyte asked if the town council would be interested in taking an official position regarding the increase. In a letter to the town, Tom Kenney suggested that the town government start a class action appeal, solely on the land values, on behalf of all the town's taxpayers. He said he knew a professional appraiser who calculated that the proposed Glen Echo assessments worked out at around \$1.5 million per acre.

Councilwoman Beers questioned if the town should become involved so long as there was a 15 percent annual "cap" on the amount of increase that would be taxable. But Ms. Whyte pointed out that the cap was being removed by state law, and even if it were temporarily reinstated, the Maryland General Assembly might remove it at any time in the future (see article, page 3).

Councilwoman Long, who was acting mayor in the absence of George Borsari, suggested that there be a special town meeting to deal with the tax assessment issue. Councilman Shultz moved that the town invite Mr. Brennan of the tax assessment office to a meeting to explain the basis for the tax increases. The motion passed 3-0 (Councilman Odell was absent).

A meeting was not scheduled in time for the *Echo* deadline.

ASSESSORS CUT SURCHARGES ON 11 TOWN PROPERTIES

By Carlotta Anderson

Eleven Glen Echo properties overlooking the canal, which had been assessed a 50 percent surcharge for their "premium locations," were reassessed last month in response to an owner complaint. The surcharge was removed and revised notices are being sent out, according to Jack Brennan of the county office of the Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation. The new assessments will have the land value adjusted downwards by one-third.

The action was precipitated by a call from this reporter, whose Wellesley Circle property had been assessed originally at \$312,420 for the land value alone. This represented a more than 400 percent jump over the current land value of \$72,160, which represents the assessment made in 1984.

—continued on page 2

THE ECHO

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TOWN OF GLEN ECHO MARYLAND

208 12

Town Office 320-4041

6106 Harvard Avenue or Box 498, Glen Echo, MD.

208 12

Office Hours: Call to arrange an appointment.

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George Borsari, Jr. 229-4555

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Letters to the editor are welcomed. Letters are printed exactly as received except that the editor reserves the right to shorten them. Articles for publication are also solicited. Volunteer reporters are always needed. Call the editor at 229-3748.

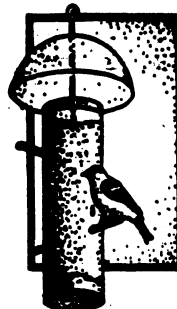
SURCHARGES (from page 1)

Mr. Brennan said that after studying the work sheets of Glen Echo properties that border park service property, he found that only 11 had been declared premium lots. He went through the sales data for Glen Echo properties in the past three years and found no information that would substantiate such a surcharge, he said, although homes in "similar locations" in other areas were indicating increased market values as a result.

He said the Glen Echo lots had been assigned a premium in 1981, 1984 and 1987, and "the assessor apparently picked upon what was done in the past." Properties are reassessed every three years in the state.

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LEGISLATORS PROPOSE EMERGENCY TAX RELIEF

By Carlotta Anderson

Led by County Executive Sidney Kramer, state legislators are proposing emergency legislation which would temporarily limit the increase in each property owner's real estate taxes to 15 percent per year, regardless of the value the property was assessed. This is the "cap" which was mandated by state law from 1976 until last year, when an across-the-board limit without reference to income was ruled unconstitutional by the state attorney general.

If approved, the emergency bill would be a welcome relief to Glen Echo residents who have just received their state property assessments and sometimes found them more than double the amount levied three years ago, the last time town properties were looked at.

Without the emergency legislation, property owners this year for the first time will be taxed on the basis of the full tax assessment if the family's combined incomes are \$70,000 or more. Under \$60,000, the fifteen percent cap would still apply. Some reduction would apply in the case of incomes between the two figures.

The cap was done away with for two reasons, according to Lou D'Ovidio, Public Advocate for Assessments and Taxation in Montgomery County. Until last year it seemed unnecessary, he said, because there were fewer than 1,000 properties in the entire county that were assessed higher than fifteen percent per year. In addition, the state attorney general argued that the law was unconstitutional because it provided preferential treatment for owners of very valuable real estate.

Then last year there was a sudden spurt in homes assessed that high, and this year there are more than 20,000. Since close to half the combined incomes of those living in owner-occupied homes in Montgomery County are over \$70,000 annually, that might mean that 10,000 families would lose the advantage of the cap, Mr. D'Ovidio said.

The county executive and local state delegates raised the issue with other state officials, and in November Sen. Laurence Levitan proposed to heads of committees in Annapolis that they take another look at the situation. A bill will be introduced this month to keep the fifteen percent cap for one year on an emergency basis while officials try to come up with some relief for those whose properties have leaped in market value, Mr. D'Ovidio said.

As a fall-back position, officials have filed legislation permitting local jurisdictions to apply the cap, he said.

SHOULD YOU APPEAL YOUR PROPERTY ASSESSMENT?

By Carlotta Anderson

If you feel that the recent notice of proposed assessment on your Glen Echo property is too high, you have the right to appeal it. This must be done promptly.

Your appeal must be **received** by the Department of Assessments and Taxation within 45 days from the date of the "Notice of Assessment." The last date for appeal is indicated in the upper right hand corner of your assessment notice.

To file an appeal, you must complete and sign the appeal copy of your notice. You may request a personal hearing with the assessor or attach a written appeal.

If your appeal is turned down on this first level, you may appeal further to the property tax assessment appeal board in Rockville within 30 days of the date of your final notice of tax assessment.

Several Glen Echo residents who have carried their appeals as far as the appeal board in the past have had their assessments lowered.

The new assessments on land values in town are "outrageous," according to former mayor Fred Kuster, who is a builder. He said all data indicates that a buildable lot in Glen Echo—no matter what its size—could be sold for no more than \$125,000. He advised all town property owners whose land (not including improvements) was valued higher than that figure to file an appeal.

However, one owner of a buildable lot in town overlooking the canal was reportedly offered \$175,000 for it.

In determining whether you should appeal your assessment, ask yourself if the "Proposed Full Value" at the bottom of the second column of your assessment notice is a reasonable estimate of what your property would bring on the market. Maryland state law requires that properties be assessed at their full cash value as of Jan. 1, 1990. If the stated value is no higher than what you think you could easily sell your house for, you do not have a good case for appealing the assessment.

—continued on page 4

TAX APPEAL MEETINGS

The following meetings explaining the property assessment process and how to prepare an appeal will be sponsored by the county public tax advocate's office:

Jan. 4, 7:30 p.m., Potomac Library, 10101 Glenolden Dr., Potomac

Jan. 11, 10 a.m., auditorium, Montgomery County Executive Office Bldg., 101 Monroe St., Rockville.



PROPERTY ASSESSMENT APPEALS (from page 3)

You should not pay any attention to what the prior assessment was, according to Jack Brennan of the county office of the Maryland State Dept. of Assessments and Taxation. "It makes no difference if the increase is two percent or 100 percent," he said. Every three years when the property is assessed, "we start at ground zero," he said. The only exception is if an allowance has been granted because the house has some serious defect, in which case the allowance will continue so long as the condition continues.

The current assessments were based on a study of home sales in 1987 and 1988, when the value of properties in the area skyrocketed. Glen Echo assessments are based entirely on sales within the town itself, Mr. Brennan said. Every house is assessed individually, he said. "We don't do anything automatically." He said that in the absence of specific data, assessors tend to be "conservative."

In calculating a property's market value, the assessor estimates what the house could sell for, then deducts the amount the improvements (structures) appear to be worth. The dollar amount remaining is assumed to be the value of the land, Mr. Brennan said.

It is valuable to get a copy of the assessor's worksheet for your property to learn how the assessment was calculated. This document lists the dimensions, age, description and condition of your house, as well as the assessor's notes as far back as 1979. You may get a worksheet by phoning 279-1387. Included with the worksheet are two brochures explaining the assessment process.

Bear in mind that the assessed full value is **not** the amount you will be taxed on. Maryland does not tax at full market value. Your assessment may have tripled or quadrupled, but that doesn't mean your taxes will.

A state law mandates that property assessments may not be increased more than six percent per year **on an average**. However, although the statewide average may not exceed six percent, the assessments are increasing as much as 30 percent in Montgomery County, while decreasing in other parts of the state, according to Mr. Brennan.

The "Proposed Assessment" (last column on assessment notice) indicates the actual amount your property will be taxed on, which is considerably less than the "Proposed Full Value."

Note that the statewide six percent restriction applies to **assessments**. It is not connected with the 15 percent "cap," which has been in place the past 12 years (see page 3) and which applies to **taxes**. This "cap" is not reflected in your assessment notice.

It is also unconnected with the tax rate, which is the real determination of what property taxes you will pay. The tax rate—or how much taxes you pay per \$100 real estate—is set by the county and by the town of Glen Echo, and can be reduced in relation to the increase in assessments.

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SANTA COMES TO PARTY; REVELERS DANCE LATER

Around 30 town children and a good turnout of adults enjoyed a festive town holiday party at the Town Hall on Sunday evening, Dec. 17.

A jolly Santa arrived just before 8 p.m. and gathered the children around him for stories. Each child received a present. Santa said he enjoyed the party so much he intends to come again next year.

Long after the children had gone home to bed, grown-ups were dancing to rock favorites chosen by D.J. Mark Johnson from Bristol Sounds.

Organizers of the party were Kate Horwitz and Debbie Beers. Kate decorated the hall with greens from Jane and Brockie Stevenson's yard, assisted by Daryl and Bill Kuster. Fred Kuster got the tree donated from the Glen Echo Fire Department. Jim Horwitz set it up.

Dorrit Green designed the flyer advertising the party, and Debbie Beers distributed it. Debbie also bought the presents.

Food was contributed by townspeople, and Don Dworsky made the punch. Other drinks were provided by the town.

Clean-up was taken care of by stragglers at the end of the party, including Mayor George Borsari and former mayor Fred Kuster.

—**Carlotta Anderson**

FOLKLORE SOCIETY WANTS DANCES AT TOWN HALL

By Peter Godfrey

The Washington Folklore Society would like to have regular contra dances at the Glen Echo Town Hall, a representative told the town council last month.

The non-profit society was hoping to hold the dances once or twice a month on weekday evenings, Robin Youngelman said. About 60-75 people would be expected to attend and townspeople would be welcome, she said. March, 1990 was mentioned as a possible start-up date.

In the past, the group has scheduled larger dances at the Glen Echo Park ballroom and giving a percentage of ticket sales to the park.

Councilman Shultz expressed concern over the parking impact on Harvard Ave. residents. Ms. Youngelman said the group could use the park parking lot.

Councilwoman Long suggested the arrangement be made on a trial basis and that the council discuss what fee to charge the group after their application was returned.

WALKING THROUGH TOWN IS A TREACHEROUS AFFAIR

Winter came early this year, and so did icy sidewalks and streets. For the last weeks in December, walking through town was so perilous that residents took to driving a block or two to visit their neighbors.

As is so often the case, it was necessary to shovel the snow soon after it fell, or it had already frozen. Some property owners managed to keep their sidewalks clear and some didn't. The breakdown was not related to age or physical condition or even length of residency. Some elderly residents shoveled long stretches of sidewalk; some younger residents shoveled only enough to get safely to their cars. There were also some who hired the town's young entrepreneurs.

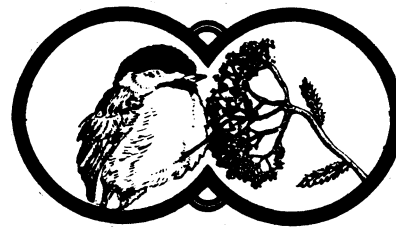
Mayor Borsari pointed out that according to state law, property owners, not the town, are liable for any injuries that occur if pedestrians slip on the sidewalk in front of their home. He said he is reluctant to have the town clear the sidewalks, because then it accepts that liability. The town had sidewalks cleared mechanically a couple years ago, but machines cannot clear down to the bare pavement, he said, and it was his concern that the machines could easily damage cars or property.

The only way to remove ice from the streets, the mayor said, is to salt them. He said it was his understanding that the council voted several years ago not to salt town streets, and that residents do not like the salt being tracked into their homes.

Although sanding the streets enables cars to operate, it does not necessarily remove the hazard for people walking in the streets, he said, since the sand is thrown off the back of trucks with shovels and doesn't uniformly cover the streets. "On steep slopes, sand on the ice won't even permit cars to operate," he said.

—**Carlotta Anderson**

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THE TOWN ARCHIVES: GLEN ECHO'S MOST NEGLECTED RESOURCE

PART II

By J. Manuel Espinosa

In 1981, Marguerite Burgess, the daughter of Nettie Mae Burgess, donated to the town archives an important part of her mother's large collection of historical materials on the area, including her mother's own writings, newspaper clippings, etc. Efforts to organize the town records as planned in 1966 continued to languish.

As the records of the town government's day-to-day activities continued to accumulate, they were moved about, often with the immediate purpose in mind of assuring a tidy public appearance for the official quarters of the town government.

In 1983, after completing a preliminary review of the records, town clerk-treasurer Paula Wolff prepared a four-page list of the contents of the archives. At the same time, she organized and filed some of the materials in folders. Mrs. Wolff is to be commended for this substantial contribution.

Later, during the tenure of the author as town historian, important additions to the town archives were donated from the private collections of Mrs. Burgess, through her daughter, and by Frank Corder, adding to their earlier donations. During the past several years, a substantial amount of basic materials on the history of Glen Echo was donated to the town archives by the author from his own private collection, accumulated over the past 39 years. Other donations were made from time to time by *The Echo* editor, Carlotta Anderson.

The town archives have been Glen Echo's most neglected resource. Until quite recently, and to some extent still, a serious searcher for a particular topic would be at a loss as to where to start looking. The inactive records had never been carefully examined as a basic source for recording the history of the town.

A few faltering steps have been taken in this direction in recent years, but with very limited success because of serious obstacles posed by inadequate storage space, the lack of organized filing and cataloguing systems, and the consequent difficulty in finding out where anything is located. The materials in some cardboard cartons and damaged file cabinets in the attic storeroom have not even been looked at.

The archives are inadequately housed, and in need of a few basic requirements that should not be beyond the reach of town government leadership and the town budget. What is needed right now are five steel filing cabinets, a few shelves, and additional storage space, which could be acquired by extending the second floor storeroom-closet next to the open kitchen-bar. I would also recommend the hiring for at least two years of a professionally trained librarian-cataloguer. With these relatively modest improvements, the archives would have breathing room and could be properly maintained for the use of those wishing to explore the history of Glen Echo.

—continued on page 7

BRIEFLY NOTED

- The C&O Canal information center at Great Falls says the reason the water was drained from the **canal below Glen Echo** was not to thwart ice skaters but because some construction is in the works...
- The **Bumper Car Pavilion** at Glen Echo Park is being repainted by volunteers, assisted by a \$1,000 grant from Montgomery County, according to the newsletter of the Glen Echo Park Foundation. The cars that once bumped each other under its roof were the first bumper cars in any U.S. amusement park, according to the newsletter...
- The 7.8 mile long parkway below Glen Echo has now been formally renamed the **Clara Barton Parkway**, thanks to the efforts of Rep. Constance A. Morella, who instigated the name change. It was formerly called the George Washington Memorial Parkway, the same name as the parkway along the Virginia side of the Potomac River, creating enormous confusion...
- Glen Echo Postmaster Ellen Nash reports that the postal service offers **stamps by phone**. Just call your order toll free to 1-800-STAMP-24, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and pay by VISA or MasterCard. The stamps will arrive within three to five business days, she says. There is a \$3 credit-card handling fee...
- The new **superintendent of the C&O National Historical Park** is Thomas O. Hobbs. He replaces Richard Stanton, who recently retired. For the last four years Mr. Hobbs has been superintendent of the Isle Royale National Park in Michigan...

CORRECTION

In last month's article about the town archives, the date of the building of the Town Hall was incorrect. It was 1957.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Carlotta,

You may want to note in *The Echo* that many of the surge protectors which got "zapped" on Nov. 21 may be repairable by just replacing a burned out varistor (typically Radio Shack part number 276-568B) for under \$2.

Tom Kenney

(Editor's Note: The power surge blew two circuit breakers and two surge protectors at Tom's house, but having them in place saved him great expense in potential repair bills. The Rodemeyers reported that their computer was damaged and Bea Smith's microwave was "blasted," making a total of seven homes that reported electrical damage to *The Echo*)

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WANTED: Resident to do occasional pen or pencil illustrations for *The Echo*. Please call the editor at 229-3748 to volunteer.

Classified ads are free to Glen Echo residents. Fee to non-residents: \$.75 per line. Display ads, \$3 per column inch. Ads may be left with or mailed to the editor at 38 Wellesley Circle, Glen Echo, MD 20812. Make checks payable to: Town of Glen Echo. Deadline: 24th of each month.

ARCHIVES (from page 6)

Meanwhile, town residents are urged to contribute materials to the archives. Second, third and fourth generation Glen Echoans, whose memories and papers on town history will otherwise be lost to posterity, are especially encouraged to contribute to the strengthening of the archives' holdings

(Editor: Mr. Espinosa, who holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of California, Berkeley, has submitted to the town council a detailed listing of recommendations for the future preservation and security of the town archives. He has also made available a general finder's guide to the present location and contents of the archival material in the Town Hall.

THE KEYHOLE

By Tillie McNoldy

Last month if you passed the Fessenden home and saw people going in with bird seed, you may have thought it had become a bird sanctuary.

Actually, it is a "fast food stop" for the various birds who frequent our area.

Thelma and David's children had a surprise 80th birthday gathering for Dave and instead of the usual gifts, everyone was asked to bring bird seed, since Dave has been feeding the birds for many years.

Not only were the guests treated to a luscious array of food, but the birds will be well-fed this winter, since Dave received 164 pounds of seed.

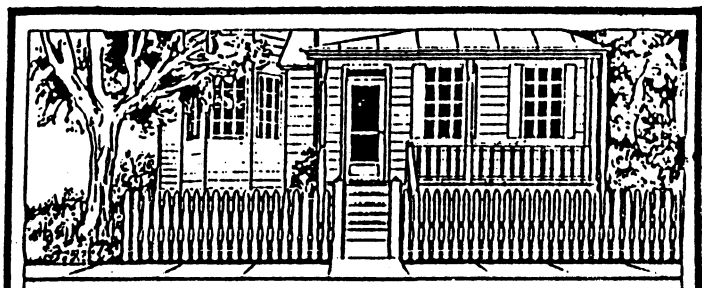
Know any hungry birds? Send them to 6005 Bryn Mawr Ave.

(Tillie may have somehow missed peeping through your keyhole recently. If there have been any events involving your family that you would like to share with your neighbors, please give Tillie a ring at 229-4119 or put a note in her mailbox at 6100 Princeton Ave.)

WELCOME NEWCOMERS

Welcome to the new residents at 6100 Harvard Ave.: **Sharon Lerner** and **John Morrow**, who moved here in November from Rockville. Sharon hails from Marin County, Calif., and John is from this area. They have four children: **Shannon**, 12, who lives here; and **Mark**, 13, **Holly**, 17, and **Romy**, 21, who live in California.

Sharon is a bereavement counselor with the chronically and terminally ill and their families at St. Francis Center in D.C. John is a senior project superintendent for Omni Construction Co. They both play the guitar and enjoy cross-country skiing and hiking.



REAL ESTATE? Tell a friend to call JANE STEVENSON at Shannon & Luchs. (O) 986-9292 (H) 229-3578

SHORT TAKES FROM THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING

- Resident Bea Smith brought up the recent **power outage**, when an electrical surge damaged residents' equipment. She suggested the town ask Pepco for an explanation. In the absence of Mayor Borsari, who called from California during the meeting, the council took no action...
- Councilwoman Long, serving as acting mayor, read aloud a letter from *Echo* editor Carlotta Anderson complaining that 1989 pet tags have not been issued and suggesting that the town consider making the office of **animal control officer** a paid position since there have been no volunteers. The council acknowledged that an animal control officer was needed and that the mayor should appoint one...
- Councilwoman Long said the mayor had sent a letter to the planning board expressing the town's concern over a proposed **resubdivision at 5900 Oxford Rd.** The letter was drafted by Councilman Odell and approved by the council at its November meeting...
- Councilwoman Long said credit was due Mr. Espinosa for his excellent report on the **town archives** (see page), in which he pointed out the need for a town archivist and additional space and equipment. The council agreed that the mayor should look into the matter...

—Peter Godfrey and Carlotta Anderson

NEXT TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

Monday, January 8—6:00 p.m.
 Glen Echo Town Hall
 Contact the mayor if you wish to add an item to the agenda

NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME WATCH

Dave Robinson reports that two new brown Rubbermaid trash cans were stolen from the top of the driveway in front of his garage at 49 Wellesley Circle at the end of November.

VASSAR RESUBDIVISION TO BE CONSIDERED SOON

Owners of property adjoining 13 Vassar Circle were informed last month of plans to resubdivide the former Espinosa property into two lots. A public hearing at which the resubdivision will be considered has not yet been scheduled by the Montgomery County Planning Board.

The proposed subdivision would create a corner lot at Vassar and Cornell Ave. measuring 6,000 sq. ft., which conforms to the minimum required under R-60 zoning. The other lot would face Vassar Circle and include the present house. The property line would divide at the garage, which would be demolished.

The property was purchased in June, 1988.

—Bonnie Whyte

PROPERTIES ON THE MARKET

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6108 Bryn Mawr Ave..	\$450,000



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