

THE CHEVY CHASE THEATRE

At the outset, the front wall of the new building was decorated with wrought iron letters 12 inches high. They proclaimed "Chevy Chase Theatre." It opened in 1922. Located on Connecticut Avenue south of the Chevy Chase Circle, it was within easy walking distance of a growing number of local movie goers.

The silent black-and-white films added a new dimension to the entertainment scene. There was no competition from television and very little from radio. An organist expertly accompanied the mood of the movie with music—sad, happy, or sinister. In 1928, the "talkies" arrived and the sound tracks phased out the organ.

Over the years, all the best films were shown. They opened downtown and took as long as two months to reach our neighborhood.

Evening performances were for adults and families, but Saturday matinees were for the kids. They were usually scheduled for 2:00 p.m., but on special occasions there were also morning shows—some of them fund-raisers for the Chevy Chase Elementary PTA. A

long line of expectant young patrons waited outside well in advance of film time. After purchasing a 15-cent ticket and selecting a seat, there was a second wait. The house lights finally dimmed to a thunderous roar of approval. A comedy, usually featuring Laurel and Hardy or Our Gang, got things off to a fast start. This was followed by a chapter of the current serial. You had to come back the next week to see the hero escape from his impossible predicament. The feature film was high adventure, frequently a western. Many viewers brought their own toy pistols and fired volleys when the bad guys appeared on screen. This practice became so disruptive that guns had to be checked in the lobby.

In 1930, the theatre was renamed the Avalon. Then in 1970, the upstairs area of the building, where many local students had studied piano with Madame Tamara Dimetrieff, was converted into a second theater. In an era of theater complexes, Avalon 1 and 2 was the obvious new designation.

William Duvall



The Chevy Chase Theatre, later the Avalon, opened in 1922.

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