



Historic Takoma

NEWSLETTER

House & Garden Tour Set for Sunday, May 6

North Takoma takes center stage for the 39th annual Takoma Park House and Garden Tour on Sunday May 6. A dozen houses, ranging from pre-1900 Victorians to a modern bungalow built in 1999, will be open from 1-5 pm for self-guided tours.

Tickets for *Next Stop: North Takoma!* are \$20 on the day of the tour, with advance tickets available for \$18 online or from local merchants (see box). Proceeds support Historic Takoma efforts to open its building this year.

Although the specific locations won't be revealed until the day of the tour, here's a little background on the neighborhood and a sneak peek at what awaits visitors.

Origins of North Takoma

The newly-established suburb of Takoma Park was barely six years old in 1889, when Benjamin Franklin Gilbert turned his attention to the farmland stretched along the B&O railroad line heading northwest toward Silver Spring.

Trains were key to the town's early development, providing federal workers with a direct link to their jobs in downtown Washington.

Gilbert wanted to capitalize on the railroad's presence and began laying out generous lots lining the tracks. He hoped the grand houses of Takoma Avenue might one day

entice passengers to settle here. Buyers were encouraged to purchase more than one lot (and many did).

Thinking ahead, he arranged for an additional whistle stop platform between the station at Cedar Street and the one at Silver Spring, so future residents could step off the train closer to their front door. Today this area is Zeigler Park.

The streets leading off Takoma Avenue evoked urban names like Baltimore, Buffalo and New York.

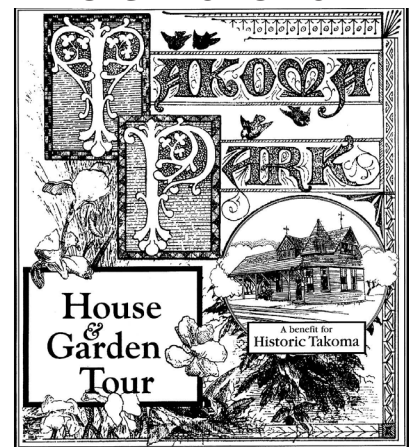
Earlier settlers along Chestnut Avenue on the edge of the subdivision welcomed the new arrivals. Rosetta Douglass, eldest daughter of Frederick Douglass, and her husband Nathan Sprague bought five lots the corner of newly created Baltimore and Takoma. Although their stay was short, the house was expanded by future owners.

Make Way for Cars

By 1930, however, the trains had lost dominance to the automobile. Engineers decided to extend Piney Branch Road north beyond Blair Road to accommodate traffic, radically altering Chestnut Avenue. New construction tunneled under the railroad tracks and took over several blocks of Chestnut on the way.

The houses on the east side of

Next Stop: North Takoma!



Sunday May 6 • 1-5 pm

Tickets available at North Portal Park (Piney Branch and Eastern Ave.) for \$20 on tour day

Advance tickets (\$18) available online at historictakoma.org or from *Now and Then* (6927 Laurel) *Mark's Kitchen* (7006 Carroll) *TPSS Co-op* (201 Ethan Allen) (cash or check)

Chestnut were safe, including the Victorian built by the Dorsey family in 1887 from plans drawn by Leon Dessez, the same architect who designed the Cady-Lee mansion up the street.

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HISTORIC TAKOMA NEWSLETTER



Historic Takoma, Inc.
PO Box 5781
Takoma Park, MD 20913
301-270-2831
www.historictakoma.org

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Historic Takoma Newsletter is a publication of Historic Takoma, Inc. Letters to the editor are encouraged.

HTI is a membership-based non-profit organization founded in 1979 to promote historic preservation, citizen involvement, and awareness of the community heritage of Takoma Park MD and DC. Membership is open to the public. Contributions are tax deductible. Federal ID No.: 52-1146960

Volunteers are welcome. Please contact HTI if you want to become more involved in the preservation of your community.

Visit us at
www.historictakoma.org

Reviving an 80-year-old DC Legacy



Young and old honor George Washington and his Bicentennial tree

On February 22, Historic Takoma gathered with several Takoma DC groups to celebrate Washington's Birthday at the site where a Washington Bicentennial tree had been planted 80 years ago.

The ceremony, co-sponsored by Friends of Takoma Recreation Center, North Washington Neighbors Inc., and Takoma DC Neighborhood Association, took place at the DC Recreation Center on Van Buren Street NW.

The event was spurred by the curiosity of Historic Takoma Board Member Jack Carson when he came upon a bronze marker in the park several years ago that proclaimed:

**COLORADO BLUE SPRUCE
TAKOMA PARK COMMUNITY TREE
COMMENORATING
GEORGE WASHINGTON BI-CENTENNIAL
DEDICATED BY CITIZENS' ASSOCIATION
OF TAKOMA D.C.
DECEMBER 22, 1931**

Further investigation turned up the history of the Bi-Centennial - a nationwide extravaganza celebrating the 200th birthday of George Washington. As part of the year-long festivities, citizens were encouraged to plant trees to honor the

country's first president.

The Citizens Association, which had lobbied to create the park at Van Buren and Fourth Streets NW, decided a tree would be a good addition.

According to a Takoma News account at the time, they transplanted a 40-foot blue spruce from a nearby yard, added the marker, and gathered to sing Christmas carols on December 22.

Sometime over the ensuing decades, the spruce disappeared, but the marker remained until Carson's discovery.

The mystery solved, Historic Takoma joined with the other local DC groups to replace the tree and rededicate the site.

Casey Trees helped plant a new blue spruce across from the Recreation Center building. Brian Mahan of Yard By Yard Makeovers reinstalled the old marker in time for Washington's birthday 2012.

First graders from Whittier Elementary sang. Marquise Lightfoot from Coolidge High School and neighbor Carolivia Herron read poetry. And a new marker was unveiled to ensure the tale will not be lost again.

House and Garden Tour Explores North Takoma on May 6

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However, several of the houses on Takoma Avenue closest to Chestnut were in the way and marked for demolition. One family, the Dawkins, took a novel approach. They jacked up the entire three-story house, transferred it onto rollers and used horses to slowly inch it two blocks up Takoma Avenue for installation on a new foundation. See the results for yourself on the tour.

Gilbert Memorial Park

The new road configuration left behind a small triangle park bound by Takoma, Eastern and Piney Branch. The townspeople turned it into a memorial park, complete with a 10-ton boulder, dragged out of Sligo Creek, as its centerpiece. On July 4, 1939, the newly-landscaped space was dedicated to Gilbert as town founder. The park will serve as “tour central” on May 6.

Meanwhile smaller houses filled

the neighborhood.

Mystery writer Martha Grimes moved onto Albany Avenue and began spinning out her Richard Jury mysteries. Frederick Meyer, a botanist at the USDA, who shared his work day and passion for azaleas with neighbor Benjamin Y. Morrison, took up residence in a Greek Revival house on Buffalo Avenue.

Thanks to the successful freeway fight of the 1960s, the neighborhood was spared. Historic District status in 1992 added further protections.

Some of the larger houses along Takoma Avenue were turned into multi-family dwellings. The rambling house at the corner of Baltimore spent several decades as a nursing home before new owners mounted a concerted makeover effort to restore its earlier splendor.

The 1990s brought a new round of construction - three new houses on what had been extra lots, delib-

erately designed to fit in.

The most valiant rescue came about in 2008, after fire severely damaged the interior of the old Dorsey house on Chestnut. A year of concerted effort recreated the mantels, woodwork, stained glass windows, and all the details that had disappeared.

In this and several other houses on the tour, architects and builders will be on hand to describe their work.

Support Historic Takoma

The House and Garden Tour began in 1973 as a way to show off the unique character of Takoma’s houses during the fierce anti-development fight.

It has since become a spring tradition, and proceeds from this year’s ticket sales and the generous donations from sponsors benefit Historic Takoma as it prepares its building for its grand opening.

Building Update: Last Round of Major Construction

In March, two different construction projects helped move Historic Takoma closer to an opening date for the building at 7328 Carroll Avenue.

First, the entire roof was replaced and the skylights repaired by Macon Construction of Kensington. Meanwhile, Heritage Building and Renovation began construction of a handicapped-accessible bathroom, and kitchenette, and enclosing the basement staircase.

Funding for the two construction projects comes from a Maryland Community Legacies grant, administered by the City of Takoma Park.

Meanwhile planning is underway to create storage space to house the



Bathroom addition

Historic Takoma archives, some of which date back to the founding of the Takoma Park Historical Society in 1912. In addition, a reading room will give visitors access to these files and the extensive collection of house pho-

tographs as well as a wealth of home building and architecture magazines, and guides to historic sites throughout the region. The proceeds from this year’s House and Garden Tour will be used to ready the building for opening.

Takoma Park History in Words and Pictures

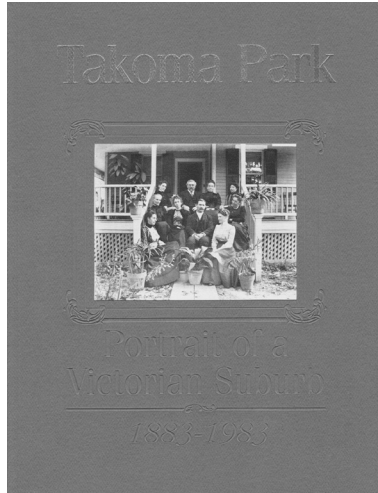
For those who want to learn more about Takoma Park's history, Historic Takoma offers two books - one old and one recent.

In 1983, Ellen Marsh and Mary Anne O'Boyle wrote *Portrait of a Victorian Suburb*. Published as part of the city's centennial celebration, this coffee table book was the first comprehensive survey of the town's history. Thanks to a second printing, it is still in print and available through our website.

Last year we released *Takoma Park* as part of Arcadia Publishing's "Images of America" series. Co-authored by Diana Kohn, Caroline Alderson and Susan Schreiber, this 180-page book built on the research that went into *Portrait*, and fills in the decades since. It is available on our website and also at Now & Then and the TPSS Co-op.

In both cases, the books greatly benefited from the archives dating back to the beginning of Takoma Park. Early settlers like William Hooker, the town's first chronicler, collected newspaper clippings, posters and memorabilia like the ballot from the first town election.

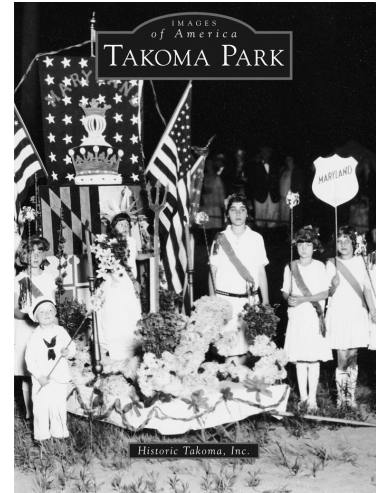
Two other settlers, Morris Bien and Arthur Colburn, were avid photographers and their images (many on glass negatives) are among the most valuable in the archives. Other photographers followed in their footsteps and expanded the collection.



Portrait of a Victorian Suburb
(1983) \$30 - online at
www.historictakoma.org.

Not surprisingly, local newspapers (ranging from 1906 to current day) provided a wealth of material. But we also took advantage of outside sources - the many archives of the Seventh-day Adventists, Bliss Electrical School, and Washingtoniana room at the DC Library.

Most gratifyingly, local residents shared their family photos and helped flesh out the human stories. Among our favorites was the 1929 Takoma Tigers baseball team, thanks to Chris Simpson and portraits from the Dawes and Jordans, two prominent African-American families.



Takoma Park (2011)
\$21.99 plus tax and shipping -
online or local merchants

Capturing the artistic and musical flowering as well as the expanding diversity presented a different problem. Most snapshots are too low-resolution to scan, but the Voice photographers helped fill the gaps.

Then came the tough part - culling the choices for 128 pages, no more, no less, balancing between the early years and more recent times. Finally the legacy of each photo had to be condensed into a 70-word caption.

We invite you to see the results for yourself.



Morris Bien captured his wife taken with a Brownie camera.



A 1950s sock hop at Takoma Park Presbyterian Church.



The day Park Pharmacy closed

2012 Board of Directors Adds Two New Faces

Historic Takoma's annual meeting in December 2011 elected officers for 2012 and new Board members to replace those whose three-year terms had expired. Diana Kohn, Lorraine Pearsall and Susan Robb were affirmed for new one-year terms as President, Vice President and Secretary, respectively, while Art McMurdie stepped in as the new Treasurer, replacing David Paris.

Three Board members were re-elected to three year-terms: Dorothy

Barnes, Jack B. Carson, Jr., and Ron Watson. In addition, Pierre Perrolle and Maribeth Oakes, both long time residents of Takoma Park, joined the Board for the first time.

Maribeth Oakes offers a glimpse of what goes on at a board meeting:

I attended my first board meeting in January 2012. What did I discover? Well, my initial reaction to the evening's assembly is that I have a lot to learn to get up-to-speed with my colleagues, who know so much about our community and who fight so hard to protect its historic character.

Each agenda item lent itself to a conversation in which I discovered some new detail or tidbit of information about a neighborhood park, parcel of land or house. There was easy conversation about builders who constructed local homes long-ago or of today's contractors working

"boots on the ground" to save houses allowed to deteriorate and suffering from years of neglect.

I'm thinking it won't take me long to be as conversant and active as everyone else. Why? Because Historic Takoma is involved in so many community projects, anyone could easily find their niche.

In addition to educating about, advocating on behalf of and archiving Takoma's history, there is the much admired House and Garden Tour, and projects like the planting at DC's Takoma Rec Center (page two), or the restoration of the Thomas-Siegler grounds on Cedar Avenue.

I look forward to the challenges ahead and the opportunity to lend my hand to preserve those characteristics that make Takoma Park such a special place to live.

Briefly Noted



You may have noticed the spruced up historic marker at the corner of Tulip and Cedar Aves. It tells the story of the Thomas-Siegler house and gardens, which are located at this intersection.

The marker was erected by Historic Takoma in 1986 to honor the first house completed in the new suburb in 1884. Over the years the weather had taken its toll.

Historic Takoma board member, Ron Watson, used his auto restoration skills to completely refurbish the old marker. In the coming year Ron plans to restore the historic marker on Laurel Avenue in Old Town as well as the one on Carroll Avenue near the Washington Adventist Hospital entrance. Thanks, Ron!

Join Historic Takoma Today!

Help Preserve Takoma's Heritage

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Sponsor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Household | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Benefactor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$40 Business | <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 B.F. Gilbert Club (Lifetime Membership) |

Membership contributions are tax-deductible.

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[We request your email so we can stay in touch via alerts and program updates. We will not share it with ANYONE.]

Mail to: Historic Takoma, PO Box 5781, Takoma Park, MD 20913
or join online at www.historictakoma.org.

Upcoming Events

April 28: Azalea Awards honor local volunteers, reception follows. 6:30-9 PM. Takoma Park Auditorium. Free. Details: www.takomafoundation.org.

May 6: 39th Annual Takoma Park House and Garden Tour. 1-5 PM. Full story, page 1.

May 19: Takoma Park Md Library Used Book Sale. 10 AM-3 PM. 301 Philadelphia Ave. Details: www.ftpml.org.

June 23-24: Montgomery County Heritage Days. Programs at historic sites across the county including Silver Spring B&O Station. Schedule: montgomerypreservation.org or www.heritagemontgomery.org.



Carolivia Herron reads her poem in honor of the DC Bicentennial Tree on February 22. Story on page 2.

*Learn More Online at
www.historictakoma.org*

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