

# May Day House and Garden Tour: Exploring early Takoma Park

BY DIANA KOHN

The Takoma Park of today, with 17,000 residents in close-standing houses and high-rise apartments, is a far cry from the fledgling settlement that began 125 years ago.

But time has not erased all traces of the spacious lots and homes that graced them. The oldest blocks of Cedar, Tulip and Maple Avenues still convey a sense of country living once considered the ideal. On Sunday, May 1st, Historic Takoma will showcase these first cottages and villas in its 38th annual House and Garden tour.

Benjamin Franklin Gilbert may have conceived the idea of a sylvan suburb, but the credit for carving a settlement out of the woodland next to the railroad tracks goes to the men and women who joined him on his adventure.

Only eight houses were completed by the end of 1884, with maybe a half dozen more under construction. These first residents spaced out their claims among the wooded lots, so that the intervening landscape maintained a sense of privacy.

Many, including Amanda Thomas, bought multiple lots. Her purchase of nine lots along Tulip and Cedar was Gilbert's first sale. The house she and her husband occupied on the corner and their carriage house in the center of the garden still stand as witness to the early era.

Thanks to a concerted community effort in the 1980s, the carriage house was saved from developers and turned into a city park. It will serve as ticket headquarters for the May 1st tour.

Gilbert's first brochure in 1886 extolled the virtues of semi-country living, citing "the picturesque scenery of the drives and avenues, and the deep and silent forests of its still unoccupied acres."

Gardens were also a big part of his pitch



Gardens like this one on the tour honor the legacy of the early settlers. Stained glass graces a porch.



to prospective residents. "All [residents] take great pleasure in beautifying their immediate grounds with lawns, walks, flower-beds and hedges."

Several of the finished houses were shown in pen and ink drawings, described as "beautiful villas and cottages, with well kept lawns, peek out invitingly from bowers of shade and flowers."

The spacious lots allowed for additional outbuildings like the Thomas carriage house. Many have survived and serve current residents as artist studios or children's play spaces.

Altogether the tour includes 11 houses plus gardens, including the home built by the woman who suggested the name "Takoma" for the new town.

Step back in time and experience the

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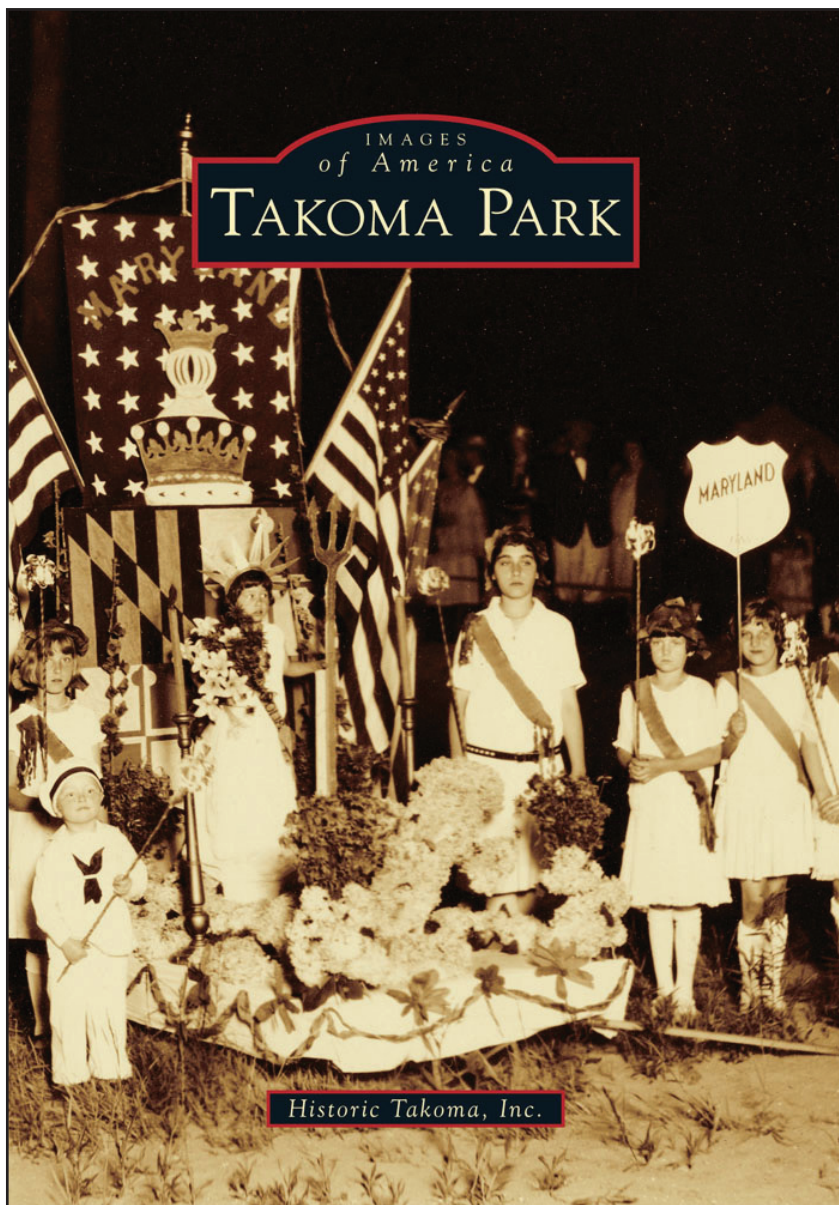
Completed in 1885, the Bliss House on Maple exemplifies the elegant living Gilbert proclaimed in his brochures.



The Thomas-Siegler Carriage House, set in the garden that fills much of the 200 block of Tulip Avenue, is the starting point for this year's House and Garden Tour on May 1st.



This white fence marks Gilbert's property at Tulip and Cedar. Although his house burned in 1916, the house pictured above sits on the same foundation.



## Photo history hot off the press

The May 1st House and Garden Tour will also mark the unveiling of Historic Takoma's new photo history. Part of Arcadia Publishing's *Images of America* series, the book traces the development of Takoma Park MD and Takoma Park DC from Gilbert's arrival in 1883 to current day. The book will be on sale for \$21.95 plus tax. To reserve your copy, pre-order at [historictakoma.org](http://historictakoma.org) for pick up on May 1st at the tour information table. Following the tour, the book will also be available at Now and Then in Old Takoma.

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## Tour: Early Takoma origins

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Takoma Park our ancestors knew.

Tickets for the self-guided tour are \$15 in advance or \$20 on the day of the tour. Purchases can be made online at [www.historictakoma.org](http://www.historictakoma.org) or at local merchants Now & Then, Mark's Kitchen or Takoma Park-Silver Spring Co-op in Takoma

Junction.

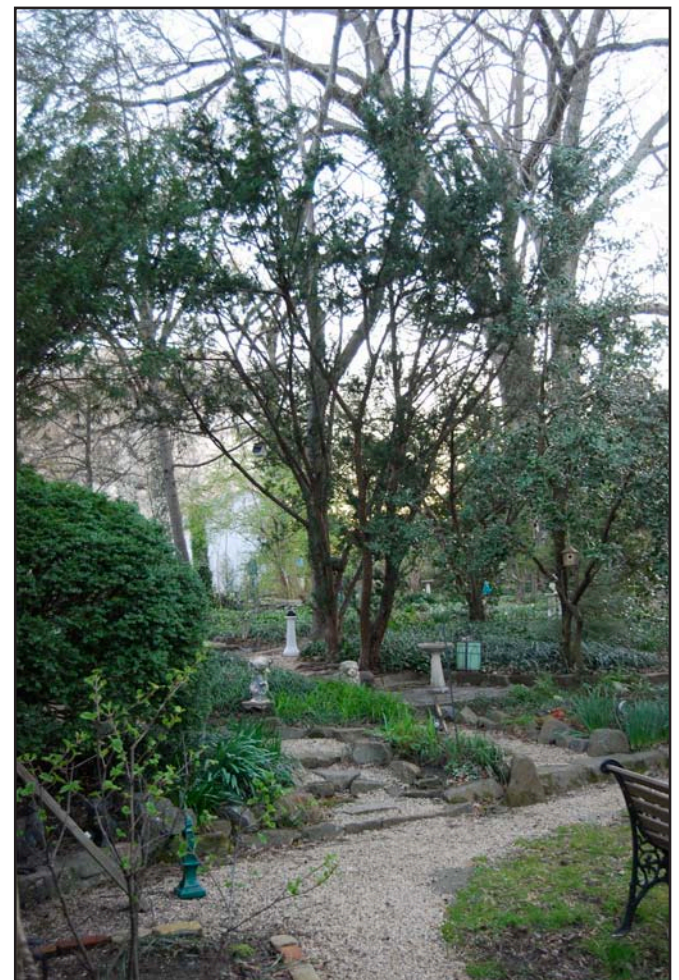
Proceeds from ticket sales will help Historic Takoma fund the final remodeling necessary to open its headquarters at 7328 Carroll Avenue.

*Diana Kohn is president of Historic Takoma and co-author, along with Caroline Alderson and Susan Schreiber, of the newly released photo history from Arcadia Publishing. The book will be on sale at the Tour.*



Outbuildings like those above survived to become modern-day studios and playhouses. Gardens continue to evolve over the decades, like this English garden on Tulip Avenue.

PHOTOS BY DIANA KOHN



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