

# Historic Takoma Takes Center Stage at the Junction

By Diana Kohn

On Saturday April 14, as part of Art Hop weekend, a witty, satiric lecturer and an audience of the same ilk laughed it up at the new permanent home of Historic Takoma. Henry Allen, Takoma Park's Pulitzer Prize winning *Washington Post* author-turned-painter, regaled friends and followers with tales of local life in the long-ago 1970s.

If you thought Historic Takoma was a force for preserving the proud history of Takoma and the producers of the annual House and Garden tour you would be correct, but Historic Takoma's new home at Takoma Junction is fast becoming a lively community gathering place hosting a range of events that speak to Takoma's past, present and future.

In the past few months numerous lectures, films and other slices of life have taken center stage at the airy, comfortable, high-ceilinged Historic Takoma headquarters at 7328 Carroll Ave. in Takoma Junction.

Beginning in 1964, this building was the location of the Barcelona Nut Company, until the company moved to Baltimore in the late 1980s. Then the building stood empty for most of the intervening years until Historic Takoma purchased it from owner Karl Kessler in 2006. Thanks to a state bond bill and matching funds from the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County, the sale went through. But that was only the beginning of a time-consuming restoration of the historic storefront.

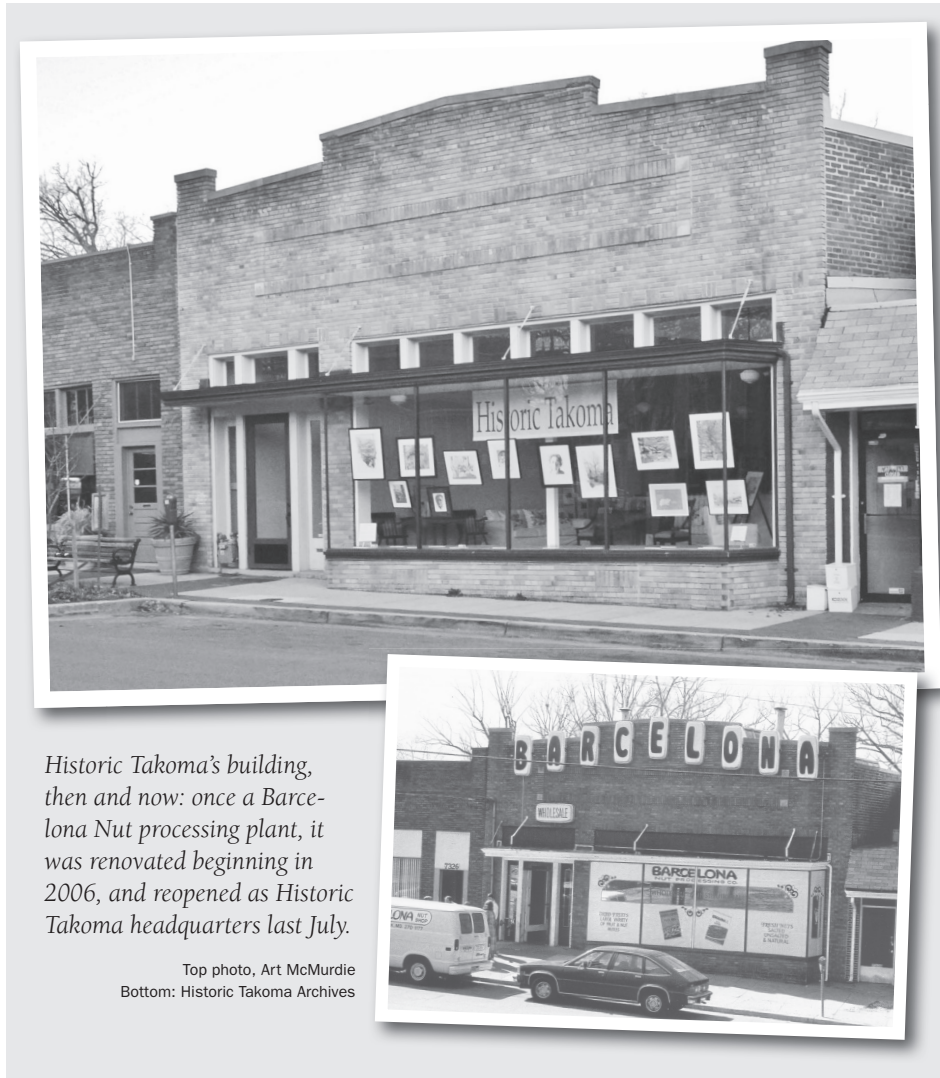
Over the next several years Historic Takoma raised money through its annual House and Garden Tour to match a succession of grants. Lorraine Pearsall, Historic Takoma's vice-president and the person in town perhaps most synonymous with historic preservation, managed the roof-to-basement restoration and fundraising to get it done.

Clearing away the obsolete machinery suspended from the tin ceiling revealed two original skylights that had been covered for at least 50 years. Craftsmen were found to replace damaged tin ceiling panels, and state-of-the-art upgrades were made to the heating, plumbing and electrical systems that had been barely altered since the building's first life in the 1930s as a Piggly Wiggly grocery store. The floor, greatly damaged from industrial use, became a handsome layout of tongue-and-groove recycled oak boards reclaimed from a 1930s warehouse.

The enormous glass display windows were a challenge to repair, but now look as they once did, and provide an attractive art gallery space in the heart of town. Soon after the renovation, window exhibits by Susan Robb, a member of the group's executive board, caught public attention, honoring local artists.

Finally, after installation of a handicap-accessible bathroom and a mini-kitchen, Historic Takoma opened its doors last July.

Over the winter the indoor space became a community gathering spot for an eclectic set of speakers. Talks like the recent "Is Your House a Kit House?" and



Historic Takoma's building, then and now: once a Barcelona Nut processing plant, it was renovated beginning in 2006, and reopened as Historic Takoma headquarters last July.

Top photo, Art McMurdie  
Bottom: Historic Takoma Archives

Henry Allen's remembrances are drawing appreciative audiences. Historic Takoma is also inaugurating a series on home renovation as well as one entitled, "Culture Shift: Connecting with Nature," to explore what cultural changes we need to protect all living things.

In addition, Historic Takoma is partnering with local groups on a wide range of issues.

Early in 2013, for example, the TPSS Co-op offered a six-week Saturday afternoon series on food policy that included the Young Activists Club warning of the hazards of styrofoam. Groups such as the Takoma Women's Business Network, Takoma Radio and the Takoma Park Horticulture Club use the space for meetings. And the Old Takoma Business Association partnered with Historic Takoma during Art Hop, as part of its mission to revitalize the Junction.

This commercial stretch, built as the halfway point on the trolley run between downtown Takoma and the Washington Adventist Hospital, once boasted two grocery stores and Jim's Butter Gems, the town's favorite bakery. After several decades of eclipse, the Junction is once again becoming a community center, with des-

tinuations like Bikram Yoga, the Takoma Animal Clinic and the Green Commuter. Special events like Food Truck Fridays, the recent day-long Earth Day celebration and the upcoming Grant Street Markets are also bringing more attention.

## A little history on Historic Takoma

Historic Takoma grew out of a tumultuous time when the proposed 10-lane North Central freeway, mass transit development, and Montgomery College expansion targeted blocks of Takoma Park for demolition. Activists who succeeded in stopping these threats established Historic Takoma in 1979 as an at-the-ready preservation corps.

Shortly after Historic Takoma was organized, a second mandate was added. The Takoma Park Historical Society, founded in 1912, asked the new group to assume custody of the community's valuable archives of photos and documents and merged into Historic Takoma.

For many years these archives were stored away, virtually inaccessible, in the basement of longtime member Dorothy Barnes until they were delivered in February to the new headquarters.

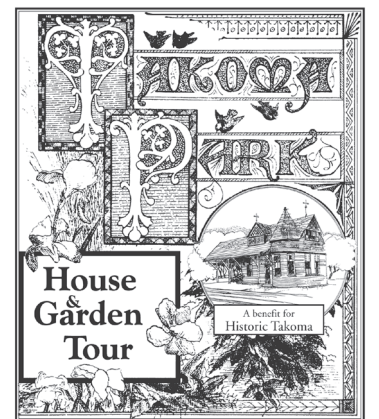
Historic Takoma's next step is to take advantage of technological advances to share this legacy with the general public – posting digitized photos and scans of early documents, as well as offering assistance to residents interested in their own historical research. (See the current exhibit at the Cultural Arts Center at Montgomery College for a sampling of artifacts from the archives, on display through June 5.)

Back at the Junction, visitors are welcome in the new headquarters; most events are free and open to the public, and the archives and exhibits are available whenever the building is staffed. Residents are encouraged also to make donations to the historical collection, to become members of Historic Takoma, or to volunteer to help keep the archives organized and current.

To get in touch with Historic Takoma, email [info@historictakoma.org](mailto:info@historictakoma.org) or call 301-270-2831. A calendar of events is posted at [historictakoma.org](http://historictakoma.org).

Diana Kohn is president of Historic Takoma, and chronicler of Takoma history for the *Takoma Voice* and Historic Takoma websites.

For the last 15 years she has led walking tours for the Piney Branch Elementary fourth graders, helping them discover local history. She is also co-author of *Takoma Park: Images of America*, one of two photo history books available for purchase at the Historic Takoma building or online.



## DON'T MISS IT!

### 40th Takoma Park House and Garden Tour

An Historic Takoma annual event "Pioneer to Present Day"

Sunday, May 5 from 1-5 pm.

Self guided tour starts at Carroll Avenue gazebo.

**Tickets: \$18/advance** (online or at local merchants), **\$20/day** of the tour [historictakoma.org](http://historictakoma.org)

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