



Evolution of Takoma Park's Volunteer Fire Department



PHOTO COURTESY OF HISTORIC TAKOMA

1895: Pumper #1, Takoma Park's first piece of firefighting equipment, shown in front of log cabin at Laurel & Carroll Avenues.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HISTORIC TAKOMA

1928: First permanent fire station completed. Built by volunteers on current site at 7201 Carroll Avenue.



PHOTO BY JULIE WIATT

2008: Remodeled in the mid-1980s, the station as it appears on the eve of its extreme makeover.

Over the last month, a gigantic half-dome white-canvas tent has sprouted up next to the Takoma Park Fire Station on Carroll Avenue. This signals a new stage in the ongoing drama that will eventually see a new fire station rise in place of the current 81-year-old building.

With the temporary tent-and-trailers station in place, construction is due to begin in mid-October. The official groundbreaking complete with government dignitaries is set for 1:30 p.m. on October 23, but don't be surprised if that timetable is delayed like every other step in this process.

Nonetheless, after 10 years of debate, the long-promised modernized fire station, large enough to accommodate today's ever-longer fire engines, is finally closer to reality.

What Takoma Park gains in up-to-date convenience, however, will be at the expense of losing one of its oldest landmarks. The station was built in 1928 by the Volunteer Fire Department as its first permanent home. The Department itself dates back to the earliest days of the town.

In 1893, a disastrous fire destroyed the three businesses that made up the core

of the city's commercial district (where the Takoma metro station now stands). New stores quickly replaced the lost Watkins Hotel, Birch's Store and Hall, and Favorite's Store, but more action was needed. Within a year, the Takoma Park citizens had formed a volunteer fire department – the first in Montgomery County – to serve both Maryland and District residents. Fittingly, the first fire chief was G.L. Favorite, who had lost his store.

A Howe Model 4 hand pumper was purchased and stored in the old log cabin built by city founder Benjamin Franklin Gilbert at the junction of Carroll and Laurel (where Video American stands today). When the cabin burned down in 1916, a temporary cinder block building was built nearby.

Officially incorporated in 1922, the volunteers began raising money for a real home. They picked the current site, several blocks northeast along Carroll Avenue in the open stretch before the intersection with Ethan Allen. Takoma Park Volunteer Fire Department bought the land, and boulders were hauled from Sligo Creek for the

façade.

Over the following decades, the building served as the center of Takoma Park activities. City Council meetings were held in the paneled room with a fireplace to the left of the truck bay, as were as innumerable award dinners for Boy Scouts and all manner of civic groups. Dorothy Barnes, the godmother of Historic Takoma, recalls that her father built glass cabinets to hold the European flags collected by returning World War II soldiers. (The flags have since disappeared.) Downstairs was a gym that generations of local youth used for basketball, indoor soccer, volleyball, and rollerskating.

Meanwhile, the city grew up around the station. In 1948, the fire department became a branch of the city government with volunteers serving alongside career firefighters. That remains the case today.

Many career firefighters volunteered in their off-time, but few have been as committed over the years as the Jarboes.

In October 1956, Ted Jarboe joined as a volunteer. Jim followed in December, then three more brothers (Bobby, Bill, John),

along with their father (A.J.), his brother (Steve) and Steve's son (Mike) until there were eight Jarboes in all. Jim Jarboe was honored in 2003 for 50 years of service as a firefighter. Currently Volunteer Chief, he is a familiar face at local events, the favorite teacher of babysitting classes, not to mention the keeper of the department archives and organizer of a recent reunion of volunteers, past and present.

The original 1928 building went through a renovation in the mid 1980s. Chief Jarboe remembers spending a year bunking in the basement while the building was remodeled. The triple-door entrance was reconfigured as one large door, leaving the left and right sections of the building intact. About the same time, the department was reorganized under county control.

Then ten years ago, the city and county began talking about the need for a major overhaul. One scenario would have moved the Fire Station permanently out of Takoma Park, a proposal which raised an alarm by local residents.

The county finally agreed to pay for replacing the building on site (there isn't

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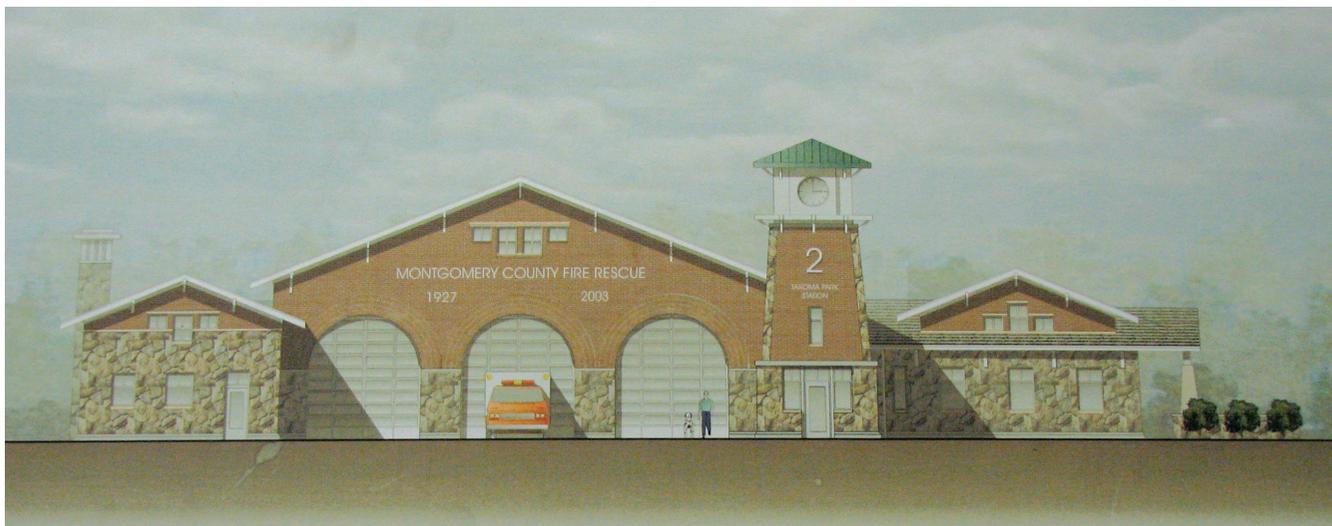
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COURTESY OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY

2008: Proposed design for the new Takoma Park Fire Station. Once completed the county will own the station and "Takoma Park Volunteer Fire Department" will no longer appear over the doors.

any other open space), in exchange for the volunteers and the city ceding title to the land and the building.

That solution faced more hurdles. The space limitations of the site are daunting. There is a steep dropoff directly behind the building with houses and businesses close on either side. The county proposed demolishing two neighboring houses to accommodate needed parking. Again citizens protested.

Finally a creative compromise was reached: only the nearest house would be taken, and the county agreed to purchase the second house at 7133 Carroll, renovate it, and give it to the Hevia family in exchange for demolishing the Hevia house at 7135 Carroll. That demolition and move happened this spring.

Enter the trailers and tent.

The fire station itself will be torn down to make way for the new building. Firefighters and residents will have to live with disruption and traffic jams for the next 18 to 24 months in the name of progress.

As projected now, it will cost the county \$11 million (up from \$4.1 million) to replace the original station built for \$45,000 in 1928. Chief Jarboe notes that current county plans call for retaining as much of the northeast wall and fireplace



1958
Jim Jarboe, Bill Flagg, Bill Wood, Stan Fickes, Glenn Minton, Steve LaSoda



PHOTO BY JULIE WIATT

The #2 signifies Takoma Park Volunteer Fire Department as the second to be incorporated (1922) after Silver Spring.

as possible. If all goes well, the boulders hauled up from Sligo Creek 90 years ago may continue to distinguish our firehouse.

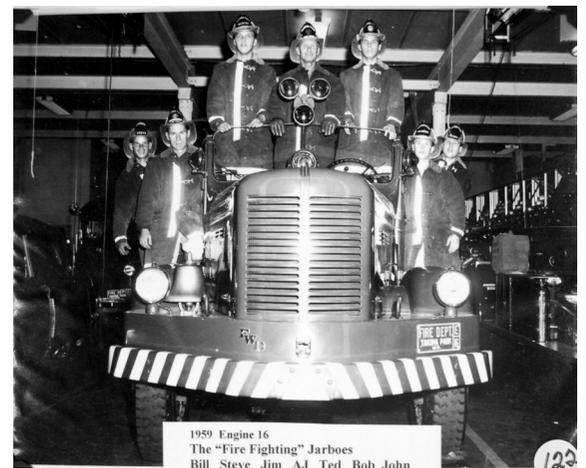
LOST TO THE FLAMES:

Despite the heroic efforts of the Volunteer Fire Department, some local landmarks have been lost to fire, including:

- 1893 Watkins Hotel, Favorite's Store and Birch Store and Hall in the central business district, Cedar Street at the railroad tracks.
- 1908 Bliss Electrical School (originally built by Gilbert as North Takoma Hotel), Takoma Avenue at Fenton Street.
- 1913 Log cabin at Laurel & Carroll Avenues.
- 1916 B.F. Gilbert mansion at Tulip and Cedar Avenues.
- 1967 Arson destroys Takoma Park's railroad station on northwest corner of the junction of Cedar Street and the tracks.
- 1970 Columbia Hall, Columbia Union College.

More history available online:

Previous stories from Takoma Archives can be found at www.takoma.com. The Silver Spring Voice features Then and Now by Jerry McCoy. These stories can be found at www.silverspringvoice.com, including this month's story about the opening of the Georgia Avenue underpass 60 years.



1959 Engine 16
The "Fire Fighting" Jarboes
Bill Steve Jim AJ Ted Bob John

FAMILY PHOTOS COURTESY OF JIM JARBOE

The Jarboe boys, then and now: Above right, a 1959 photo showing seven of the family members. (Steve's son Mike joined later.). At right, brothers Bob and Jim Jarboe at the September reunion for Takoma Park firefighters, past and present. At left, Jim Jarboe (extreme left) with fellow firefighters.



PHOTO BY JULIE WIATT

Champion trees named in Takoma Park

BY PAT HOWELL

The Takoma Park Tree Commission sponsored the first Annual Champion Tree contest this summer and two winners have been announced.

Applications were submitted for White Oaks and Beech.

A third category was for Sycamore, however, there were no entries.

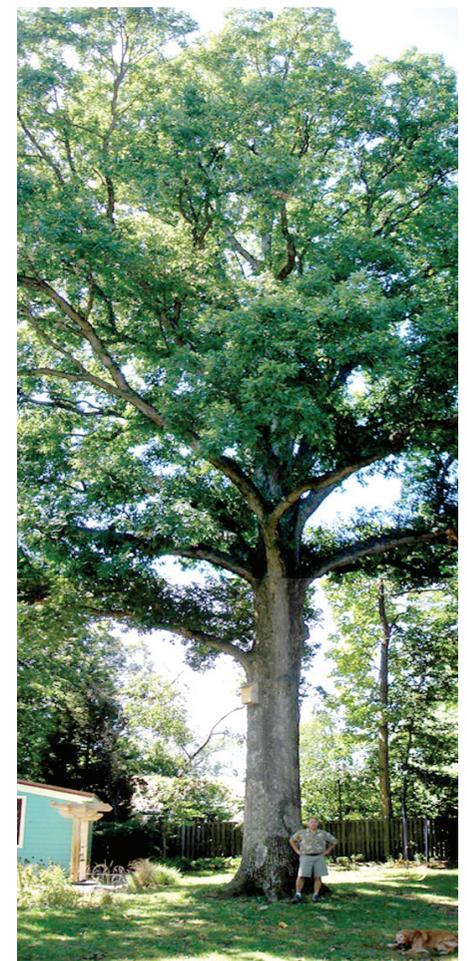
The White Oak winner was the Vitullo family on Woodland Avenue. The dimensions of their tree was a height of 110', girth of 148", and a canopy spread of 92'. The overall score was 281. The picture on the right gives some idea of this huge canopy tree.

The runner-up by a nose came in at an overall score of 279.75. The height measured 104', the girth was 156" and the canopy spread was 79'. The tree belongs to the Byers family on Albany Avenue.

The Beech award went to the Deneberg family on Elson Place. The height was 90' and the girth was 150". The canopy could not be accurately measured due to the location of the Beech, which was sandwiched between many other trees.

There will be a formal recognition at next year's Arbor Day celebration when the details of the Second Annual Tree Contest will be announced.

At last month's Folk Festival, there were tree giveaways at the Tree Commission booth. Approximately 100 free sapling trees were given away;



including White Oak, Swamp White Oak, Catalpa, Black Walnut and White Ash.

Watch for Arbor Day Spring 2009 for the next Tree Giveaways.