



Evolution of Takoma Park's Volunteer Fire Department

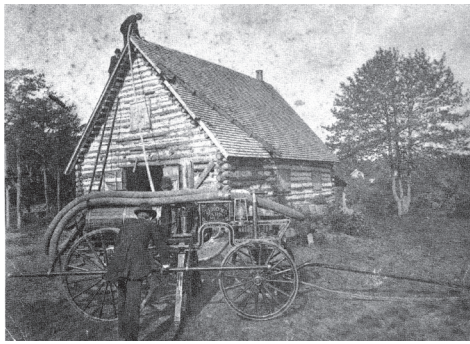


PHOTO COURTESY OF HISTORIC TAKOMA

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



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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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