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Famous Springs of Takoma Park

By Elizabeth Bentley

Before B. F. Gilbert took his grand plunge and began developing the suburb of Takoma Park, others recognized the attractive, natural advantages of its terrain. In addition to the well-known Preston Blair family of Silver Spring, property owners before 1883 included the Riggs, Bladens, Cockerilles, Jones, Naughton, Hodges, King, Carroll, and Rapley families.

These early homesteaders appreciated the somewhat hilly geological configuration that provided for a high water table, plentiful springs, and fresh breezes that set the area apart from the Potomac River lowlands. Residents of the new suburb took advantage of easily reached water, and for many years, even after the city water system was built, relied on wells and windmills or pumps for water.

Founder Gilbert further promoted two pure, fresh water springs as part of Takoma Park's heritage, and reportedly implied they would always belong to its citizens. When he abruptly sold the land around the springs to the Takoma Park Springs Company, who limited access to the water they bottle and sold as far north as New York, citizens were outraged.

Little Spring

Used by many families for potable water, the spring was located close to the old Takoma Park Station on the northwest side of the tracks behind what later became Feldman's department store. Today's Spring Place off Chestnut Street in the District is the only remaining evidence of its existence. A small portion of the former park, where tall tulip poplars and large boulders surrounded the spring, was usurped when Metro rails were laid in the 1970's, and the remaining land was buried beneath old tires and scrapped vehicles, including an old streetcar.

At the time of Takoma Park's 75th anniversary, an unsuccessful effort was made to locate Little Spring.

The Takoma or Big Spring

This spring occurred in a rocky outcrop at the bottom of the hillside near the corner of Poplar and Elm Avenues in Maryland. Gilbert dedicated an acre to preserve and beautify the Spring. Above the bottling works there was a bandstand. When Gilbert sold the spring and the new owners attempted to limit access to it, heated dissension from Takoma citizens arose.

Water rights were eventually settled in the citizens' favor, and the city bought the land. Frank Skinner reported in the *Takoma Enterprise* the town's use of the water during a drought in 1929.

Legend reports the spring was well known to American Indians for its excellent water, and this is corroborated by a discovery of Indian relics around the Spring. As recently as 1948 artifacts were found near the spring.

Other, and once well known, springs in the area include Foster's Spring, found approximately at the corner of Fifth and Aspen Streets, and of course, Silver Spring just off East West Highway between Georgia and Colesville Roads.

More of Elizabeth Bentley's history of Takoma Park, with a walking tour, will be in next month's House and Garden issue of the Takoma Voice.

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