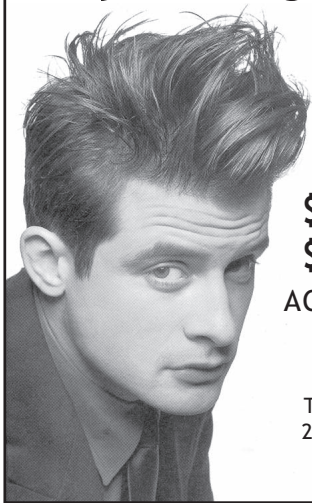


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White House Connections: Six Miles of Separation

The White House sits a little over six miles south of Takoma Park. So it's to be expected that our community would have some connections to the men who have lived there. In honor of President's Day, let's take look at some of those connections.

George Washington never slept here, but in 1791 he ordered Andrew Ellicott to survey the boundary line creating the District of Columbia. Granite boulders were placed one mile apart, marking the border. Today, one of the original boulders sits at the southern edge of 7001

Maple, protected by a wrought iron fence. Although it's much worn, you can still discern a "1791" carved on the face of the stone, making it nearly 100 years older than the rest of Takoma's landmarks.

Ironically, even with the boulder as a guide, the boundary between the District and Maryland is nearly invisible at this point. To trace the boundary line, you have to imagine Eastern Avenue as it deadends into Cedar (near Metro), continuing through several backyards past this boulder and diagonally across the front of the ten-story Business Center until you cross Carroll and pick up Eastern again. In all the years since Benjamin Franklin Gilbert first purchased land on both sides of the boundary, no one has suggested physically connecting the two sections of Eastern.



PHOTO: DIANA KOHN

7302 Maple Avenue - The sisters who built this house shared a connection with President Abraham Lincoln. Their grandfather was Lincoln's first vice-president but was replaced by Andrew Johnson for Lincoln's re-election campaign.

The bullet remained lodged internally and because Garfield was an important man, a whole bevy of doctors gathered around and poked at his wound. Dr. Bliss was unable to limit their continued attempts to find and retrieve the bullet. Unfortunately, the theory of sterilization was too new to be common practice. As a result of the constant probing, infection set in and Garfield died eight agonizing weeks later.

The next presidential connection stands 50 feet north of the boundary stone, at 7116 Maple. This fanciful Victorian was built in 1886 by Dr. D. Willard Bliss, Surgeon General of the Army. He was friend to both President John Tyler (from before Tyler was elected, when Bliss cured Tyler's 1844 bout of malaria) and President James Garfield.

On the ill-fated day in 1881 when Garfield was struck in the back by an assassin's bullet at the Washington train station, Dr. Bliss was the first physician on the scene and took charge of Garfield's care. The President survived the initial shooting but had two things working against him:

The collective of doctors billed Congress \$80,000 for their services, but only received \$10,000. Shortly afterward, Bliss began building his Takoma Park house. Note that at first glance the house appears to be made of brick, but a closer look reveals that the wooden exterior has been scored to resemble the mortar of brick construction, perhaps to make the house look more expensive.

(As a side note, a section of President Garfield's spine is preserved at the National Museum of Health and



PHOTO COURTESY OF COLUMBIA UNION COLLEGE.

7633 Carroll Avenue: The strongest Takoma Park connection to the White House was during the Administration of Warren G. Harding. His sister, Carolyn, and her husband Heber Votaw lived in this house across from the Adventist college and hospital. They both worked in the Harding Administration, a connection that ended when Harding died of a heart attack in 1923.

Medicine, on the campus of Walter Reed Army Medical Center, across Georgia Avenue from Takoma DC. The museum is open to the public, although Garfield's spine along with the skeleton belonging to his assassin are not on permanent display. Visitors must use the Elder Street gate to enter the campus and be prepared to show ID. Hours: daily, 10-5:30 p.m. Check out www.nmhm.washingtondc.museum.)

At 7302 Maple Avenue is another Queen Anne Victorian with Presidential connections, this time to Abraham Lincoln. The original owners were two sisters whose grandfather, Hannibal Hamlin, was Lincoln's vice president for the first term. Hamlin was replaced by Andrew Johnson for the 1864 election, and thereby missed his chance to ascend to the Presidency when Lincoln was assassinated. The yellow Victorian with its square tower is one of the best examples of the architecture of early Takoma.

Two of Lincoln's closest advisors were near neighbors of Takoma Park. Francis Preston Blair had his main residence across the street from the White House, but he built a summer home he called Silver Spring, just outside Takoma Park, while his son Montgomery Blair settled in what is now Blair Park. The Blair compound was technically in Silver Spring, but it was Francis Blair who first marked out a trail along Sligo Creek. The path is now Sligo Creek Parkway which runs through Takoma Park.

The most direct Takoma Park connection to a President, however, can be found on the other side of town where Carroll

and Flower Avenues meet. This edge of town has always been dominated by the Seventh-day Adventist college and sanitarium. Among the Adventists who settled there was Carolyn Harding, younger sister to President Warren G. Harding. Carolyn and her husband, Heber W. Votaw, built the grand house with white columns at 7633 Carroll facing Columbia Union College, where he was serving as provost. (The house which still serves as the official residence of the college president).

Although Warren Harding was the only member of his family who did not join the Adventists, he and his sister remained close. During Harding's political years, Mr. Votaw left his college position to work for his brother-in-law, first as clerk in Harding's Senate office and then as head of the Federal Prison System in the President's administration.

News clippings tell of Harding attending the college graduations of the two Votaw sons. The connection was cut short, however, when Harding succumbed to a heart attack in August 1923 less than three years after taking office. The Votaws turned their attention back to the college.

In the days since Harding, Takoma residents have continued to rub elbows with various Presidents, some among us serving as speech writers and press aides or in various levels of the Cabinet. Most recently, Carol Browner, who still lives on Westmoreland Avenue, served as President Clinton's director of the Environmental Protection Agency.



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