



Historic Takoma, Inc. Fact Sheet No. 1 May 1999

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Twenty Years of Service to the Takoma Community 1979-1999

The historic preservation movement in Takoma began over a quarter of a century ago. As the Washington metropolitan area expanded in the early 1970s, the Takoma community faced a number of development-related threats. The most controversial of the proposed developments was the planned construction of the North Central Freeway, which would have built an interstate highway through the city and dramatically changed its character. Two other events that led to the creation of an active historic preservation movement included the demolition of a large number of Victorian-era homes in order to expand the current Montgomery Community College campus, which is located in the city, and the planned creation of a large, commuter oriented Metro subway stop in the Takoma neighborhood of the District of Columbia.

In response to these events, an application was made in 1972 to create the current Takoma Park National Register Historic District. That nomination was ultimately approved and included on the National Register in 1976. The community learned, however, that National Register status did not, in and of itself, preserve endangered historic properties. As a result, in

1978 citizens began to meet and consider forming a non-profit organization to advocate for historic preservation in Takoma. These early meetings resulted in the creation of Historic Takoma, Inc., a non-profit organization representing Takoma Park, MD and Takoma, DC.

Historic Takoma, Inc. Formed

Historic Takoma, Inc. (HTI) was incorporated in Maryland on January 16, 1979. Its goals were to: (1) educate the public about the

value of historic preservation; (2) work to save endangered historic structures; and, (3) support rehabilitation efforts of historic structures which were in decline. These goals have been achieved through a variety of projects and programs, as described below.

1979-1984

To promote the re-use and rehabilitation of historic structures, in 1979 HTI supported one of the City of Takoma Park's earliest housing programs. Called "Operation Turn



Cartoon showing Takoma Park, MD Mayor, Sam Abbott, bulldozing downtown to make way for the North Central Freeway in 1964.

Around," the program purchased endangered and deteriorated properties, rehabilitated them, and sold them at below market prices to new homeowners, who agreed to stay in the houses for at least five years. The first houses to be acquired for this program were located in the city's oldest and most historic neighborhoods.

In 1980, the organization began to collect oral histories from some of the communities oldest residents. In 1981, HTI distributed "Takoma Park Historic Landmark" medalion plaques to homeowners of historic properties. These plaques were, and still are, prominently displayed on the fronts of houses in the historic district.

Using these newly marked properties, in 1982 HTI started work on creating the first self-guided walking tour of the historic areas of Takoma, and began the research on the first book on the historic area of the city. The self-guided Walking Tour was first published in 1983, and the book *Takoma Park, Portrait of a Victorian Suburb: 1883-1983* was published in 1984. Public education efforts of HTI continued in 1984 with the installation of four historic, interpretive markers at key intersections around the city.

1985-1989

In 1985, the carriage house of the city's first home was threatened with demolition. The property, located at Cedar and Tulip Avenues, was built in 1884. Saving the property, which became known as the Thomas-Siegler Carriage House and Garden, became the focus of efforts of HTI and neighborhood residents, who organized themselves as the "Friends of the Thomas-Siegler Historic Property." Through careful negotiations, the property was purchased by the Trust for Public Land and resold to the City of Takoma Park, MD in 1985.

Although the property was now in public ownership, its ultimate use had not been determined. Proposed uses of the property ranged from the clearance of the historic gardens and the creation of a recreational tot-lot, to the careful preservation of both the historic carriage house and the garden. Then-Mayor Sam Abbott favored the tot-lot approach, which was not favored by historic preservationists or HTI.

Realizing that the fate of the property would be determined at least in part by public opinion, in 1985 HTI prepared City Council

candidate questionnaires and published the results. Mayor Sam Abbott's opposition to the sensitive preservation of the Thomas-Siegler Carriage House and Garden was a significant issue in the campaign. Although Mayor Abbott had been enormously popular for many years, his opponent, Steve Del Giudice, who favored the preservation of the Thomas-Siegler property, narrowly won the election. Mr. Del Giudice was an ardent supporter of historic preservation throughout his term in office.

Because of HTI's leadership in historic preservation, the Takoma Park Historical Society, which was concerned with the preservation of individual and family histories of residents of the city, merged with Historic Takoma in 1986.

In 1988, efforts began to formalize Montgomery County's recognition of the National Register District in Takoma Park and expand the County's protections of historic properties beyond the federally recognized area. An Historic Preservation Task Force, chaired by Carl Iddings, was formed to advise in the process and Historic Takoma organized a petition drive in 1989 in support of the effort.

1990-1994

Although the expansion of the historic district had been a controversial issue, the Task Force reached consensus and recommended a significant enlargement of the district in 1990. A Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission staff report, in support of the expansion, was published in 1991. In 1992, the recommendation to dramatically enlarge the historic district in Takoma Park was approved by the Montgomery County Council. With this action, the Takoma Park Historic District became the largest single historic district in Montgomery County.

Once community consensus had been achieved on expanding the historic district in Montgomery County, HTI began work on a pro-



The Graybill-Davis house at 703 New York Avenue, coveted by Montgomery College in the early 1970s.

gram to permit owners of historic properties to make voluntary donations of easements to protect their properties. In 1991, this easement program was adopted by the organization. Also in 1991, HTI organized a fund raising drive to preserve and interpret the former Art Deco gas station at Carroll and Ethan Allen Avenues. The park now commemorates B. Y. Morrison, the city's renowned horticulturalist who was responsible for the creation of the "Glenn Dale" azaleas in the early 1900s. In 1992, HTI co-sponsored a program on how to make houses environmentally safe, and attracted Clint Good, author of the book, *Healthy Houses*, to conduct a seminar.

In 1993, the "Friends of the Thomas-Siegler Historic Property" merged with HTI, and the reconstituted organization began a concerted effort to complete the restoration of the historic carriage house and garden, which had been acquired eight years earlier. Through the efforts of HTI and with the leadership of then-Mayor Edward Sharp, every elected official which represented Takoma Park at the city, county, and state level signed on as an endorser of a fundraising effort to preserve the property. This unique showing of political unity was a first for the historic preservation movement in the Takoma Community. The fundraising drive was successful, and HTI raised all the money necessary to provide the City of Takoma Park's match to a Maryland Program Open Space grant to preserve the carriage house. Restoration work began in early 1994 and was completed in October, to much acclaim.

1995-1999

In recognition of HTI's contributions to historic preservation in Montgomery County, MD, in 1995 the City of Takoma Park, MD nominated HTI for the coveted "Montgomery Prize." This award is the top honor presented by Montgomery Preservation, Inc., the

countywide historic preservation organization for Montgomery County, MD. HTI won the award, which was presented during Historic Preservation Week in May 1995.

1996 was a very productive year for HTI, building on work begun in 1995. Enlarged photographs of past city living were produced and displayed in the Takoma Park, MD City Hall chamber. HTI hosted the Renovator's Round Table, a seminar on restoring old houses. The very popular slide show, *Takoma Park: The Early Years*, depicting life in the city at the turn of the century, was produced. The Thomas-Siegler Carriage House Museum was opened in May, and several events were held there throughout the rest of the year. Over the summer, HTI participated in Montgomery County's 220th birthday celebration, and Montgomery College's 50th Anniversary Reunion. A Memorandum of Understanding was negotiated with the City of Takoma Park, pertaining to the maintenance and administration of the Thomas-Siegler property.

1997 was a year of significant change and growth for HTI. The organization altered its internal structure, implemented many new operating procedures, and expand-

ed dramatically the scope of its activities. Work on the Thomas-Siegler Carriage House Museum progressed, including development of a draft collections management policy and the creation of an inventory of the hundreds of Siegler family artifacts. HTI's long-neglected archives were reviewed and a report prepared regarding their condition. HTI returned to its roots and renewed its commitment to the preservation of the architecture and physical environment of the Takoma Community. The newly created historic preservation committee became active in several areas pertaining to preservation, including the design of the proposed new firehouse on Carroll Avenue, the removal of an illegal addition to an historic structure on Carroll Ave., and a major new project to improve the physical appearance of the Carroll Ave. Metro gateway to the City. The committee established linkages with many of our sister organizations in the metropolitan area, including the DC Preservation League, the Montgomery County History Consortium, Montgomery Preservation Inc., the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission, and the Montgomery County Historical Society. Finally,



The Thomas-Siegler Carriage House Museum and Gardens today.

HTI was accepted into the United Way Campaign of the National Capital Area.

1998 saw HTI advance to new levels on several fronts. HTI's Preservation Easement Program was inaugurated through preparation of an interior and exterior easement on the historic Davis-Warner Inn. HTI implemented a new Restoration Award Program by recognizing developer Art McMurdie's work in restoring the Wilmer G. Platt house at 7705 Takoma Avenue. HTI mourned the loss of co-founder Phil Vogel, and honored his memory by establishing the Alfred P. Vogel Memorial Fund, which will be used to promote and defend historic preservation in the Takoma Community. In conjunction with the DC Preservation League and other sister organizations, HTI co-sponsored a seminar on preservation enforcement in the District. HTI participated in several groups designed to plan development in the Takoma Community, including the M-NCPPC Master Plan Advisory Group and The Takoma Junction Committee. HTI's museum committee negotiated an agreement with the Thrasher Carriage Museum to bring an Essex Trap

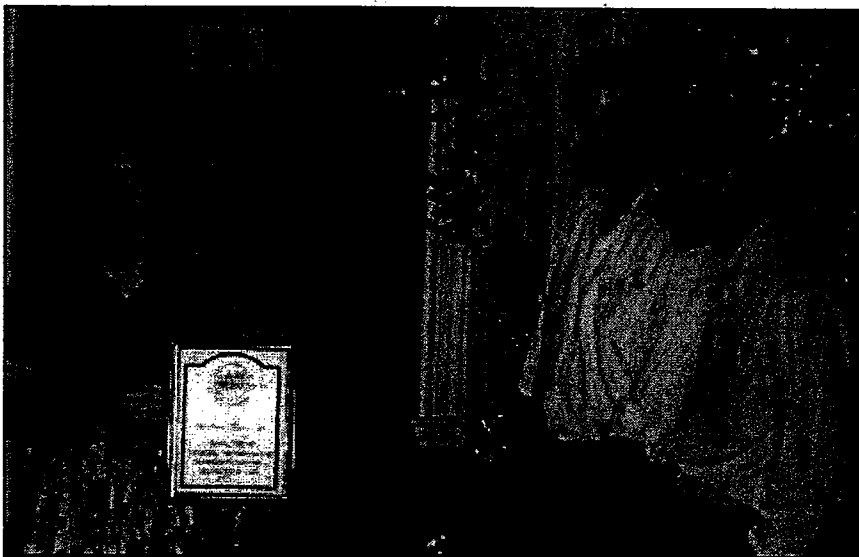
carriage to the Thomas-Siegler Carriage House Museum, and developed an in-depth collections management policy. Three new walking tours were developed, including the Dinky Line Tour which traces the route of the electric trolley through the city. HTI received a \$5,000 Community Development Block Grant to expand our educational program for fourth-graders at Piney Branch Elementary School. With the assistance of a \$1,000 grant from the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission, HTI created a new camera-ready copy of our popular book, *Takoma Park: Portrait of a Victorian Suburb*, to replace the original copy which had been discarded by the publisher. Another \$1,000 grant from the HPC and a \$500 grant from the Takoma Foundation allowed HTI to hire an archivist to inventory the archives in the Takoma Park, MD City Hall.

Historic Takoma's twentieth year of serving the community commenced with several significant accomplishments. A Program Open Space application for improvements to the Thomas-Siegler property was approved by the City of Takoma Park, MD and the Montgomery County government. The \$32,000 in

funds will be used to bring water and sewer services to the carriage house and to mitigate a longstanding water drainage problem on the property. A circa 1890 Essex Trap carriage and model wooden horse were installed in the Thomas-Siegler Carriage House Museum, as a result of the loan agreement negotiated in 1998 with the Thrasher Carriage Museum. HTI became incorporated in the District of Columbia on January 25, almost 20 years to the day after incorporating in the State of Maryland. Grant funds in the amount of \$3,000 from the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission and \$1,200 from the Montgomery Commission on the Humanities were awarded, to be used to help pay for reprinting *Takoma Park: Portrait of a Victorian Suburb*. The preservation easement on the Davis-Warner Inn was executed. HTI joined the City of Takoma Park, MD-sponsored Citizens Advisory Committee on Economic Development Strategies and the Community Development Block Grant Committee.

Conclusion

For two decades the large number of volunteers who organized and who have sustained HTI have devoted countless hours toward the preservation of the Takoma Community. This effort, which was not supported by the community's elected officials when it began in the 1970s, has grown into an effective movement with broad community and political support. Through the persistent efforts of HTI during this period, the Takoma Park, MD Historic District is now the largest historic district in Montgomery County, some of the city's most historic properties have been preserved, a museum of local history has been started, and the preservation of the diverse community which makes up Takoma is now widely supported.



HTI's President, Lorraine Pearsall, expresses the organization's appreciation to Doug Harbit and Robert Patenaude for their granting of an easement to HTI of their property, the Davis Warner Inn, at the 1998 Annual Meeting.