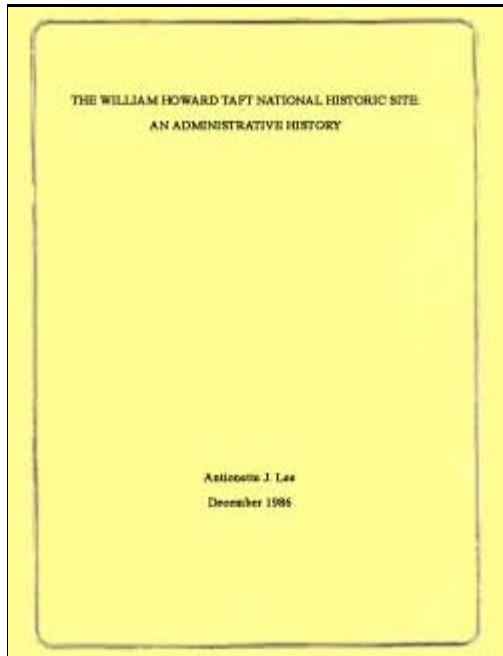


William Howard Taft

Administrative History



William Howard Taft

An Administrative History

Antoinette J. Lee

December 1986

National Park Service
Midwest Regional Office
Contract No. CX6000-5-0033

[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

[wiho/adhi/adhit.htm](#)

Last Updated: 27-Feb-2001

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Preface](#)

[Chapter 1: The Property: Its Development and Historical Associations](#)

[Chapter 2: The William Howard Taft Memorial Association: Early Efforts to Preserve the Taft Home](#)

[Chapter 3: Enter the National Park Service, 1968-1970](#)

[Chapter 4: The National Park Service's Stewardship of the Taft National Historic Site, 1971-1985](#)

[Chapter 5: Toward a Master Plan for the Taft National Historic Site](#)

[Chapter 6: The Land and Setting for the Taft National Historic Site](#)

[Chapter 7: The Structure's Exterior and Interior: Investigations and Development](#)

[Chapter 8: Furnishings and Collections](#)

[Chapter 9: Interpretation and Education](#)

[Chapter 10: The Taft National Historic Site and the Community](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Bibliography](#)

[Appendix A: Copy of Legislation](#)

[Appendix B: Principal Staff](#)

[Appendix C: Map of Site](#)

[Appendix D: Illustrations](#)

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



PREFACE

The story of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site in Cincinnati, Ohio, serves as a microcosm of the National Park Service during the years from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s. The legislation providing for Federal stewardship of the site was passed in 1969, the conclusion of a decade marked by a great expansion in the National Park Service's holdings and programs. In the following decade, the property evolved in an environment of retrenchment and intense competition for available funding. The changed circumstances took their toll on the property. It languished in the backwaters of National Park Service priorities. Not until fifteen years later, in the mid-1980s, was the restoration of the exterior completed.

In the years after the passage of the legislation creating the Taft National Historic Site, the civil rights and environmental movements figured heavily in the way the National Park Service conducted its programs and ultimately in the way the property was treated. For a bureau experienced in managing large expanses of land far removed from urban settings, the Taft National Historic Site provided a challenge in restoring and interpreting a small property located in an inner-city neighborhood. The property bore the scars of urban transition reflected in the many alterations since the period of greatest historical significance. It was located far from popular tourist destinations, promising modest visitation numbers. In addition, the way in which the National Park Service conducted its work in the 1970s differed from that of previous decades. The new wave of environmentalism subjected the work of the nation's foremost preservation bureau to public reviews of the impacts of its plans for properties.

During this period, the National Park Service's own internal policies and priorities moved in new directions. Approaches to protecting historic resources in an urban context had yet to be fully formulated. When were restoration and reconstruction to be undertaken by the bureau? Would the Taft property become another bureau-sponsored furnished historic house museum? Professional historians and historical architects questioned this approach in the absence of complete documentation. As the bureau examined its policies affecting historic properties, the demands of the Bicentennial of the nation placed extra demands upon it and siphoned off resources that might have been devoted to planning and maintenance.

While changes to the nation and to the larger mission of the National Park Service affected the development of the Taft National Historic Site, the property itself also presented a difficult set of conditions. Unlike many historic properties acquired by the National Park Service, the Taft home had been altered by a succession of owners. The last private owner turned the property into a rooming house. First impressions of the property by several of the bureau's professional staff were lasting. Its image as a "beat up old building" associated with what several staff members perceived to be a lesser United States President stalled efforts to move ahead with planning and development.

The National Park Service system for generating planning studies affected the progress of developing the Taft site. Early in the 1970s, the bureau commissioned two key documents from its professional staff, the historical data and the architectural data sections of the historic structure report. As the master planning process progressed, questions arose regarding how well the written record as cited in the historical data report related to the actual fabric of the building. The architectural data report was based on what the historical architect could see without removing building elements. The report proved to be insufficient and needed to be redone. However, the master planning process proceeded in the absence of more detailed analyses and became bogged down in a frustrating exercise in uncertainty and indecision.

Beyond the big picture of one bureau's attempts to cope with a changing world and with its own evolving policies, the Taft National Historic Site story raises issues pertinent to the treatment of all historic properties open to public visitation whether administered by the National Park Service, other government agencies, or private organizations. Such properties raise questions about purpose, interpretation, authenticity surviving historical fabric, public access, and financial feasibility. It is rare that a property arrives in the hands of an administrative body with its fabric, contents, setting, and endowment neatly in place. Rather, properties most often come to such agencies or organizations requiring upgrading or restoration. Less than sufficient financial resources with which to carry out its public functions is another common condition.

This administrative history was prepared under contract with the Midwest Regional Office of the National Park Service located in Omaha, Nebraska. The regional office has had direct administrative responsibility for the Taft National Historic Site since 1974.

The time frame for this report spans the period from the 1840s when the house that later became the focus of the Taft National Historic Site was built to mid-1985. The report covers in a summary fashion the historical evolution of the property up to the 1960s when efforts were initiated to restore the property. The report's major purpose is to present the development of the property since 1969 when the property was designated the William Howard Taft National Historic Site and conveyed to the National Park Service. The report carries the story of the National Park Service stewardship up to the arrival of Superintendent Kesselman in mid-1985. His arrival marked the beginning of new planning initiatives and actions which have not reached a point of conclusion.

In preparing this history, the author had the pleasure of working with the present staff of the Taft National Historic Site, most notably Ella Rayburn, Park Historian, and Steven Kesselman, Park Superintendent. The author was pleased to have the opportunity to interview past Taft National Historic Site employees Maxine Boyd and Samuel Witherup and current National Park Service employees Randall R. Pope, Hugh C. Miller, John Kawamoto, and Andy Ketterson. The hospitable staff of the Midwest Regional Office provided a temporary office and ready access to the property's files and relevant staff during a trip to Omaha. The National Park Service's offices in Washington, D.C. also provided cooperation, including the Office of Legislation, the Office of the Chief Historian and the Chief Historical Architect, the Central Files, and the Land Acquisition Office. The author is appreciative of the many instances of hospitality that far exceeded the call of duty.

[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

[CHAPTER 1](#) >>>

wiho/adhi/adhi0.htm

Last Updated: 27-Feb-2001

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



CHAPTER 1: THE PROPERTY: ITS DEVELOPMENT AND HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

The William Howard Taft National Historic Site consists of a single house and several tracts of land dotted over the northern portion of a city block. The grounds associated with the property today differ from those of the Taft era because of the process of urban change that occurred between 1899, when the Taft family sold the property and 1969, when the Taft National Historic Site was created. The grounds attached to the site also reflect National Park Service acquisitions in support of public visitation and interpretation. However, the house is the star attraction. It represents the family, birthplace, and boyhood home of William Howard Taft, the only man to serve his country as both President of the United States and Chief Justice of the United States.

The house stands close to the crest of the long hill that rises from the flat basin city. Its location was a product of the development of Cincinnati. In the 1850s, Cincinnati's thriving waterfront and development of commerce had pushed settlement to the edges of the flat peninsula that jutted out along the Ohio River. Looking for escape from the congestion and heat of the lowland, the city's affluent moved up into the surrounding hills. Mt. Auburn, just to the north, was one of the first to be settled. It was made accessible by omnibus. Mt. Auburn's aloofness from the central city provided an agreeable country-like suburban setting for substantial houses surrounded by spacious grounds. [1]

The original section of the house at 60 Auburn Street (now 2038 Auburn Avenue) was built in the 1840s by the Bowen family. It was a two-story square house constructed of brick. In 1851, Alphonso Taft purchased the house and 1.82 acres of land extending from Auburn Street eastward beyond the present location of Young Street for \$10,000. Alphonso had moved to Cincinnati in 1838 from Vermont. He was one of a large number of ambitious young men from New England who sought greater economic opportunities in the boom cities of the "American West" (as Ohio was then called). In 1841, Alphonso married Fanny Phelps, also of Vermont, and set up his first household in the flat central city. Over the next ten years, Fanny Taft bore five children, two of whom lived to adulthood. They were Charles Phelps, born in 1843, and Peter Rawson, in 1845. As Alphonso's fortunes rose and his wife's health declined he sought a new home in the healthier environment offered by Mt. Auburn. The house at 60 Auburn Street fitted his requirements. Other New Englanders occupied houses in Mt. Auburn.

Like many new home owners, Alphonso made alterations to his house: He built a brick ell to the rear. Because of the slope of the ground, the addition rose three stories and incorporated an entrance to the ground floor. Improvements were made in the house to accommodate the tastes of the new occupants, such as the addition of plumbing, the building of cupboards, and interior painting. Despite the move to Mt. Auburn, the health of Alphonso's wife continued to decline. She died in June 1852.

Alphonso married again in late 1853. His new bride, Louise Maria Torrey, was also from New England. Upon her arrival at Auburn Avenue, the new Mrs. Taft set about refurnishing the house. Alphonso and Louise had four sons and one daughter. The first son, Samuel, died of whooping cough at fourteen months of age. On September 15, 1857, their second son and the future President of the United States, William Howard, was born. William Howard was followed by Henry Waters, Horace Dutton, and finally, Frances Louise.

During the time William Howard and his siblings were growing up in Mt. Auburn, the Taft family was an integral part of the social, intellectual, and political elite of Cincinnati, if not of Ohio. The Tafts hosted many illustrious visitors and

participated in national movements, such as abolitionism and temperance. Discussions in the house focused on a wide range of topics covering national politics, social causes, and international events. In the house, the Tafts mingled with politicians, businessmen, and military leaders who later influenced the course of American history.

The home was also the setting for lessons for the Taft children. Here their characters and ambitions were shaped. The effect of the Taft parents on their children was later observed by Helen (Nellie) Herron, William Howard's wife. She wrote of the Tafts' confidence in their children, which impelled the latter to live up to their parents' expectations: "They [the Taft parents] had created an atmosphere in which the children absorbed high ideals and strove to meet the family standard of intellectual and moral effort." [2]

As the nation's Civil War came to a conclusion, Ohio as a "swing state" and one that contributed heavily to the Union cause stood ready to reap the political benefits. Alphonso's first step as a public servant was taken in late 1865, when he was appointed to the State Supreme Court. Later, he was elected to the position. In 1875, Alphonso became a candidate for governor of Ohio. However, he lost the Republican nomination to Rutherford B. Hayes. The following year, in 1876, he was named Secretary of War and later Attorney General in President Ulysses S. Grant's cabinet. In 1882, President Chester A. Arthur named Alphonso to the position of U.S. Minister to Austria-Hungary and in 1884, to Russia.

While Alphonso ascended the ladder of public service, his son William Howard grew up, attended Woodward High School and in 1874, entered Yale College. Although William Howard spent months at a time at the Taft home in Mt. Auburn between 1874 and 1886 when he married and set up his own home, for all practical purposes, his primary association with it concluded when he entered college. After graduation from Yale, William Howard attended Cincinnati Law School. During his law school years, he lived with his parents. Soon after his admission to the Ohio bar, he was appointed Assistant Prosecutor of Hamilton County. In 1886, William Howard married Nellie Herron and settled in Walnut Hills, another of the hills that surrounded Cincinnati's central area.

William Howard Taft moved rapidly through positions of higher responsibility, including Judge of Cincinnati's Superior Court, Solicitor General of the United States, service on the Federal Circuit Court, Governor General of the Philippine Islands, and Secretary of War in 1904 under President Theodore Roosevelt. In 1908, Taft won the Republican nomination for the U.S. presidency and was subsequently elected President. As President, Taft became identified as a trust-buster, dissolving such corporate heavyweights as the Standard Oil Company and the American Tobacco Company. In 1912, Taft and Roosevelt had a falling out and each ran separately for the presidency against Woodrow Wilson, thereby ensuring Wilson's victory. After leaving the White House, Taft returned to Yale as a professor of constitutional law. In 1921, President Warren G. Harding appointed Taft Chief Justice of the United States. Taft was thus the only man in United States history to serve as head of those two branches of the Federal Government. He died in 1930. Although Taft's illustrious career falls beyond the major story of the Taft home, its roots, early development, and ultimate destination can be explored through the property.

The story of the house beyond its association with William Howard Taft is also worth relating. In 1877, when the Alphonso Tafts returned from Washington, the house on Auburn Street caught fire. In repairing the damage to the house, the Tafts made several changes. The upper story was raised to eleven feet. A new iron cornice was placed around the house. New sills, sash, and shutters were added. Other changes were made to the 1851 east wing. New wallpaper and wall finishes were applied to the interior. New light fixtures were affixed. In subsequent years, the Tafts made other changes to the house. A mantle made by Heinrich Fry was placed in the parlor. Another mantle by Rogers was placed in the library.

In the late 1880s, Alphonso's health began to decline. He and his wife made one last trip to New England in 1889 and then headed to San Diego and a warmer climate. Alphonso died in San Diego in 1891. Louise spent her widowhood in her hometown of Millbury, Massachusetts.

By late 1889, the house at 60 Auburn Street had ceased to be occupied by a Taft. A succession of families rented the house until 1899 when the house was sold to Judge Albert C. Thompson. In the ten years between 1889 and 1899, the Tafts made several attempts to sell the house. The difficulty encountered in these attempts prompted Louise to consider razing the house and selling it to a developer interested in building apartment houses. [3]

The Thompsons occupied the property until 1910 when Judge Thompson died. In 1912, Mrs. Thompson sold the house (now addressed 2038 Auburn Avenue) to Colonel Ernest H. Ruffner of the U.S. Corps of Engineers who had served as district engineer in Cincinnati. Upon Colonel Ruffner's death in 1937, the property was again put up for sale, this time by Ruffner's daughter, Mrs. Louis K. (Violet) DeBus. By 1937, the house had gained the respect of age and of historical association with a now deceased President. The newly-incorporated William Howard Taft Memorial Association sprang into action and initiated the first efforts to preserve the property.

<<< [PREFACE](#)

[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

[CHAPTER 2](#) >>>

wiho/adhi/adhi1.htm

Last Updated: 27-Feb-2001

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



CHAPTER 2: THE WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION: EARLY EFFORTS TO PRESERVE THE TAFT HOME

The prospective sale of the Taft home did not go unnoticed by individuals interested in the life of William Howard Taft. The decision of Mrs. Louis K. DeBus to sell the property nearly coincided with the incorporation on July 7, 1937, of the William Howard Taft Memorial Association. The Memorial Association had been formed in 1934, but was unincorporated for three years. In the articles of incorporation, the stated purpose of the Memorial Association was "to plan, promote, erect, and collect funds for a national memorial in honor of William Howard Taft and to insure its perpetuation." [1] Memorial Association Vice President Carl Meier reported that the organization grew out of the Mt. Auburn Civic Association and the Taft School PTA. [2]

Once organized, the Memorial Association set about the task of acquiring the property. Well-publicized meetings were held to discuss methods for acquiring and maintaining the property. Buoyed by supportive gestures by private citizens and patriotic groups, the Memorial Association attracted the city's political and business leaders to its board. Even Mrs. DeBus advised her real estate agent, Mrs. Colter Rule, that she too was interested in the objectives of the Memorial Association and expressed a willingness to hold off sale of the property in order to cooperate with the organization's efforts.

Unfortunately for the Memorial Association, its plans to purchase the Taft home coincided with the efforts of Senator Robert A. Taft, eldest son of William Howard Taft, to seek the nomination as the Republican candidate for President of the United States. Key Taft family members decided that it would seem self-serving for the family to launch a fund raising effort for the Taft home at the same time that the Senator was attempting to secure the nomination. As Eric L. Schulte, Chairman of Taft's Campaign Committee put it, "There were fears that it [fund raising for Taft Memorial] might be construed as an effort to build up his political future." [3]

With the absence of the Taft family's support and the rising numbers of offers by prospective purchasers, Mrs. DeBus set April 4, 1940, as the deadline for the Memorial Association to produce the \$12,500 purchase price. The deadline passed without success on the part of the Memorial Association. Mrs. DeBus then sold the property on April 12, 1940, to Elbert R. Bellinger. Bellinger and his wife owned and occupied the adjoining house at 2030 Auburn Avenue, just to the south of the Taft home, formerly occupied by the Leopold Burkhardt family. Upon purchase of the property, Bellinger "notified the [Memorial] association that when it is able financially to negotiate the purchase, they are willing to negotiate the property." [4] Many years later, in 1970, Charles P. Taft II, youngest son of William Howard Taft, summed up his view of these events, "the property could have been acquired if they tried, but they didn't know how to do anything. . . . it cost about \$30,000 more than it would have if the ladies had been on the job." [5]

In the years following the purchase, Bellinger converted the home into apartments, claiming that he undertook the major conversion work in such a way that it could be removed without damaging the original features of the house. By the mid-1940s, the racial composition of Mt. Auburn changed. With weakening health, Bellinger considered alleviating some of his responsibilities by selling the Taft home to black undertakers who wanted to turn it into a funeral parlor. On the recommendation of his lawyer, however, Bellinger decided against the sale. In 1951, Bellinger sold the Burkhardt property to Hamilton County which razed it and constructed the Youth Detention Home. Bellinger and his wife then moved into the rear first floor apartment of the Taft home.

While the Taft home was in the secure, albeit not entirely sympathetic, hands of Bellinger, the Memorial Association and many Cincinnati citizens continued to harbor hope that someday they might be successful in acquiring the property as a memorial to Taft. One of the Memorial Association's members, Taft Public School principal Nelson L. Burbank, wrote in July 1948 to Waldo G. Leland, chairman of the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments of the Department of the Interior, asking for his advice as to how to raise funds in order to restore the Taft home. [6] A. E. Demaray, Acting Director of the National Park Service, responded by suggesting that Burbank contact the American Association of Museums for advice on organizing a fund raising effort for house museum organizations. [7]

In 1949, the Memorial Association sent letters to prominent citizens asking their advice on the project. Among the citizens contacted was prominent Cincinnati architect Charles F. Cellarius. He declared that the undertaking was commendable and "should do honor to our city, as well as a great man, and President whom we revere." [8] The approaching centennial of William Howard Taft's birthday in 1957 set off a series of commemorative events, but the long sought objective still seemed far off.

The continued lobbying of the Memorial Association members and their sympathizers began to have an effect by the late 1950s. In 1959, National Park Service Historian Roy E. Appleman received a telephone call from the office of Ohio Congressman Gordon H. Scherer asking that the Taft home be included in the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings. This request was made in response to Scherer's constituents who wished to have the Taft home established as "a national historic site or memorial." Appleman agreed to schedule the study for 1961. [9]

By the late 1950s, obstacles in the way of the Taft family's active participation in preserving the Taft home faded. Senator Robert A. Taft died in 1953, one year after he lost the nomination of the Republican Party to Dwight D. Eisenhower. Charles Taft's own political future that shone so bright in the 1940s dimmed considerably a decade later. Charles Taft warmed up to the Taft legacy inherent in the house at 2038 Auburn Avenue.

Charles Taft was a natural to take charge of the Memorial Association. Born in 1897, he grew up in the privileged circumstances that surround children of political leaders. After receiving his law degree from Yale University in 1921, he returned to Cincinnati to practice law and embark on a political career. He participated in the formation of the City Charter group formed in 1925 to give the city non-partisan government. He eventually won a seat on the Cincinnati City Council in 1938. With the exception of several years devoted to wartime service, he remained on the City Council until his retirement in 1977. In 1952, he ran unsuccessfully in the Ohio gubernatorial race, losing to Frank J. Lausche. From 1955 to 1957, he served as mayor of the city. Although Taft's political career was identified primarily with Cincinnati, he moved easily in the company of the nation's top figures of both major political parties. His national political connections proved pivotal in working with the Congress on the Taft home in the late 1960s. His high-level associations were not as useful in later dealings with the National Park Service staff. [10]

Until the late 1950s, Charles Taft had not taken an active role in the work of the Memorial Association, although he and his wife were listed as honorary members. In 1965, several years after taking charge of the Memorial Association, Charles Taft recorded the sequence of events that led to his involvement with the Taft home.

The group you see on the letterhead is the remnants of the old days when the good PTA ladies from the William H. Taft Elementary School on Southern Avenue started this whole enterprise. With the best of intentions they really got nowhere until Ben Schwartz moved his Youth Center up to become the next door neighbor of the Alphonso Taft house. He then needed me to get into it. I had been quite unwilling to be out in front, and I still don't like it. [11]

Coupled with the greater interest expressed by Charles Taft were Bellinger's own offers to sell the property. In 1958, at seventy-six years of age, Bellinger appeared ready to strike a quick bargain. However, he professed impatience with the Cincinnati community's inability to come up with the \$75,000 asking price, while the appraised value was \$35,000. [12]

Still operating in the background, Charles Taft in 1958 discussed with Juvenile Court Judge Benjamin Schwartz of the Youth Detention Center the possibility that Hamilton County Commissioners purchase the house as a memorial. The Memorial Association would operate the first floor, while the Juvenile Court would use the second floor for offices. In

Judge Schwartz's view, the connection between the Taft home and the Juvenile Court was mutually beneficial. He envisioned the house museum serving as "an inspiration for school children" who were served by the court. The maintenance of the house would benefit from the ongoing commitment of the county government. [13] To this scheme, Charles Taft offered the possibility that the family would pay for the rehabilitation.

Negotiations between the Taft family and the representatives of Bellinger's interests, Gordon Scherer and Leslie Cors, proceeded through 1959 and 1960. During that time, the role of Hamilton County as purchaser fell into abeyance. Charles Taft himself was prepared to offer Bellinger "a fair price for the property." Various family members offered a total of \$25,000 towards restoration of the property with the expectation that the County Commissioners would take title to the property from Charles Taft, construct a passageway between the Taft home and the Juvenile Detention Center, pave the rear of the Taft home for parking, and maintain the property "in such a manner as to be a credit to the community." The Juvenile Detention Center would occupy the second floor of the house and have access to space in the basement. The Memorial Association would handle the furnishing of the historical elements of the house and maintain the first floor as the Taft Family Memorial.[14]

After extended negotiations, Charles Taft and Bellinger agreed to a plan whereby Bellinger gave the Association a 100-year lease on the property. For a six-month period following Bellinger's death, the Memorial Association could purchase it from his heirs for \$35,000. He would maintain an apartment in the house for life and receive \$250 per month. The Memorial Association also agreed to pay all taxes and utilities. By mid-1960, the lease had been signed by Bellinger and Taft. In late 1961, Taft assigned the lease to the Memorial Association.

With the property under the control of the Memorial Association, Charles Taft, who had become president of the organization in July 1960, began the process of planning for the restoration of the property. The Memorial Association contracted with the architectural firm of Wood & Kock to prepare working drawings and specifications for the restoration of the house and the remodeling of the basement for the caretaker, and to provide an estimate of the cost of restoration. [15] Through the daily newspapers, Charles Taft solicited from the public photographs of the house that might be used in the architectural studies.

[CONTINUE](#) >>>

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



CHAPTER 3: ENTER THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, 1968-1970

As the bill to create the William Howard Taft National Historic Site made its way through the congressional maze, the National Park Service prepared to respond to the legislative initiative. In devising its response, several entities within the bureau played key roles. The first was the Washington Office, which represented the policy level of bureau deliberations. The next level was the Northeast Regional Office in Philadelphia which was then responsible for the administration of bureau properties in Ohio. The National Park Service Eastern Office of Design and Construction and the Planning and Service Center, both located in Philadelphia, provided teams of architects, historians, and other historic property professionals to study properties under or being considered for bureau control. The Design Office and Service Center were responsible for producing major studies and for providing planning, design, and contracting supervision. Finally, the staff at Mound City Group National Monument, located at Chillicothe, Ohio, was dispatched to assist with the planning process and report writing. In the late 1960s, Mound City Group fell within a larger organization called the Ohio Group, an administrative entity that served as a go-between for the individual Ohio National Park Service properties and the regional office in Philadelphia. (The Ohio Group also included Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial at Put-In-Bay.)

By late 1967, Historian David A. Kimball and Architect Meir S. Sofair, from the Office of Resource Planning of the Philadelphia Service Center, had made initial visits to Cincinnati to inspect the Taft home. By early 1968, the planning team submitted the "alternatives study" for review. As John M. Brigle of the Division of New Area Studies and Master Planning in Washington advised Charles Taft, "The report considers several alternatives for management and development" of the property. [1]

With the review of the alternative report completed by March 1968, Raymond L. Freeman, Deputy Assistant Director of the National Park Service, reported to Charles Taft that the bureau had decided to proceed with the preparation of a master plan study for the property as a unit of the National Park System. The purpose of the master plan was to provide management and development objectives for the site. The bureau intended to create "a historically accurate scene of the time of William Howard Taft's occupancy. " However, two major obstacles stood in the way of bureau support for the property. One was the need for visitor parking and access to be provided by Hamilton County Juvenile Court. The other was the need to raze the Cross property, then used as an apartment house, to the north of the Taft home. In both cases, Freeman stated that the bureau would not support the use of federal funds to acquire the property. Freeman asked Taft to supply information on the cost of restoration of the house and a clearer picture of the capacity of the Memorial Association to assist in the entire effort. Pending resolution of these issues, the bureau was not in a position to commit itself to a position on the legislation. [2]

Freeman's letter was received by a puzzled Charles Taft. In Taft's mind, "a historically accurate scene of the time of William Howard Taft's occupancy" meant the rebuilding of the Burkhardt property to the south, which had been demolished to make way for the Hamilton County Juvenile Court. Taft felt this notion to be "wholly impractical." Taft thought that the property to the north might be cleared in order to recreate what he thought was a "rolling piece of ground, without any structure on it, going down in the gully to the north" at the time William Howard Taft was associated with the house. Taft also informed Freeman that restoration would cost approximately \$200,000 and that the Association had no assets. [3] Taft then sent copies of his correspondence with Freeman to Secretary of the Interior Udall and interested congressmen and senators for all to see.

In a reply to Taft, the National Park Service clarified its position on the point of the authenticity of the scene. Assistant Director of the National Park Service, Theodor R. Swem, wrote, "it would be appropriate to re-create the historic scene" of the property on which the house was located. This was in keeping with the established procedures regarding other Presidential homes proposed for inclusion in the National Park System. Swem concluded his letter with a statement, the echoes of which would follow Taft in correspondence with the agency through his death in 1983. When pressed about completing the planning studies at the earliest possible date, Swem wrote, "It must be recognized that each of our planning studies has to compete with many other high-priority projects." [4] While Taft did not wrest a pledge out of Swem to complete the studies by a fixed date, he wrote to Senator Everett McKinley Dirksen of Illinois, "I think we have stirred them up effectively to move a little bit faster, which was my main objective." [5]

Within a few days, Udall informed Congressman Schwengel that the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments had endorsed the proposal "to establish the birthplace and boyhood home of William Howard Taft in Cincinnati, Ohio, as the William Howard Taft National Historic Site." According to Udall, this endorsement supported the bill introduced by Schwengel for the establishment of the Taft home as a unit of the National Park System. [6]

While encouraged by the endorsement of the high-level agency board, Taft worried about the National Park Service which "apparently must take a lot of time to make a study all by their little lonesomes without taking into account the local situation, as well as the increasing cost of rehabilitation." [7] The visits by "outside experts," even though representatives of the bureau Taft wished to manage the property in perpetuity, struck him as time consuming. The experts also appeared to him to be far removed from the Cincinnati and Mt. Auburn scene and disinclined to consult with Cincinnati-based experts.

In late September 1968, the master planning team, headed by David A. Kimball, arrived in Cincinnati to study the Taft home. Accompanying the team was George F. Schesventer superintendent at the Mound City Group National Monument. Because of the proximity of the Mound City Group to Cincinnati, he would also serve as superintendent of the Taft home (following authorization by Congress) until it was staffed separately. By late 1968, the master plan was completed and received approval by all levels of the National Park Service with some suggestions for modification. For example, the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, headed by Ernest Allen Connally, pointed out that the house had been subjected to numerous exterior and interior alterations since William Howard Taft left it in the 1870s. Connally also noted that the Memorial Association had restored elements of the house to various periods, such as the roof line, which was restored to its original appearance pre-William Howard Taft. [8]

In early 1969, Senators Bible and Dirksen reintroduced the bill to establish the William Howard Taft National Historic Site in the Senate. Congressmen Schwengel and Clancy served as cosponsors of the reintroduction of the bill in the House. Charles Taft thought it was appropriate for Schwengel to take the lead in the House because "there is tremendous value in having a person with your background in American history." Taft also thought that Schwengel had more influence with Wayne H. Aspinall, chairman of the House Interior Committee, than Clancy did. [9]

The one unanswered question that stood in the way of full support of the National Park Service for the bill was the need for a plan for the relocation of the tenants in the Cross property to the north of the site. In early 1969, sixteen of the twenty-two units were occupied. The city of Cincinnati's Department of Urban Development issued the opinion that the occupants could be satisfactorily relocated because all were eligible for relocation benefits provided to residents in a Concentrated Code Enforcement area. [10] A Concentrated Code Project was a federally-assisted program intended to bring buildings up to code. One of the provisions of the program was an option for the owner of structures to vacate and demolish a structure rather than repair it. In such instances, relocation assistance was provided. [11] While the National Park Service found the city's letter encouraging, it thought that the bureau needed to have in hand "a plan for relocation of the tenants and assurances from the city officials that this will be done without creating major friction." [12]

The Mt. Auburn Community Council was supportive of the efforts of Charles Taft to resolve the relocation problem. Although Council President John Dunn characterized the proposed demolition of the Cross property as causing "extreme problems on the part of the residents to that property," he offered to make available sixteen apartments in a building at Park Place for the displaced residents. [13]

By July 1969, the National Park Service stood ready to support the legislation to create the William Howard Taft National Historic Site. The bureau expected to have the Taft home donated to the Federal Government. The adjacent 0.28 acre of land would be acquired for visitor parking. The government would be responsible for the restoration of the house and the development of the grounds and parking. The cost of restoration was now estimated at \$318,000. Annual operating costs were estimated at \$62,600. [14] A few days later, the Interior Department endorsed the bill and its provisions. [15] (To facilitate the acquisition of the Cross property, Charles Taft in mid-1969 offered to purchase the property and then donate it to the federal government.)

In early September 1969, the House and Senate Committees on Interior and Insular Affairs submitted reports to accompany the legislation. In the House report, Congressman Roy A. Taylor of North Carolina reported that establishment of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site should:

give visitors an understanding of the environment in which his character was shaped during his formative years, but more importantly, it should reflect the numerous accomplishments which he achieved in his adult life. The authentic restoration of the house and its immediate grounds will help accomplish the first objective, but creative imagination will be necessary to portray the many contributions which he made to our society throughout his lifetime. [16]

On the matter of the authorization of \$318,000 for land acquisition and for "restoration and development," the report justified the amount based on the need "to stabilize, restore, and refurnish the Taft home and grounds." The funds were also intended for the development of necessary visitor accommodations, such as parking facilities and walkways. The cost of refurnishing might be reduced through the efforts of the Memorial Association to collect and donate "some of the original furnishings of the home." [17] The Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs prepared a similar report, noting that the National Park Service would "restore the house as it was when William Howard Taft lived there and . . . interpret his early life and environment." [18]

In the Congressional Record, Congressman Gerald R. Ford observed:

It is strange that the Congress should have waited so long to pay tribute to President Taft because he was, in truth, a most distinguished American. His great gifts are readily apparent in that he is the only American ever to serve both as President of the United States and as Chief Justice. But the quality which most strikes me about William Howard Taft is that he was one of the most loved Presidents ever to guide the destinies of our nation. [19]

It fell to Congressman Schwengel, however, to carry the weight of the historical argument. Schwengel outlined Taft's career, noting his role as a "trust buster," his foreign policy, his work as first Governor General of the Philippines, and his position as Secretary of War. Schwengel urged his colleagues to support the bill "so that his [Taft's] memory and fine deeds and inspiration will never be lost to the American people." [20]

On September 15, 1969, William Howard Taft's birthday, the House passed the bill. A few days later on September 24, the Senate passed the bill. On November 18 and 19, both houses concurred on an amendment dealing with authorizing \$318,000 for restoration and development work. On December 2, 1969, President Nixon signed into law the act to provide for the establishment of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site "in order to preserve in public ownership historically significant properties associated with the life of William Howard Taft." [21]

Soon after the passage of the legislation, George Schesventer, superintendent of the Mound City Group, circulated the first "Statement for Management and Planning." According to Schesventer, the purpose of the site was "to present this building in such a way as to enable the visitor to understand the domestic environment in which William Howard Taft grew to manhood, set in the context of the national cultural patterns of the time." [22] At that time, he outlined the administration of the property from a "cluster" headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio, and its administration along with the Mound City Group National Monument in Chillicothe. A park manager, accountable to Schesventer, would be assigned to Cincinnati to administer the Taft National Historic Site. [23] The Memorial Association was expected to continue as an advisory group attached to the site.

In the early months of 1970, Charles Taft made preparations for the donation of the Taft home site to the Federal Government. He initiated the process of registering the title by the State of Ohio in order to perfect it. On the matter of the Cross property, Taft reached no accord with the owners on its purchase. In face of this situation, he once again appealed to the National Park Service to condemn the site. Although he stated his willingness to compensate the agency for any cost, the National Park Service did not feel equipped to handle the relocation of the tenants.

On November 1, 1970, the U.S. Government took title to the Taft home. With this transfer, Schesventer notified the utility companies that all future bills be directed to the Mound City Group National Monument. The decade-long chapter in Charles Taft's efforts to preserve his father's birthplace and boyhood home reached a turning point. The nation's primary preservation organization, the National Park Service, had taken control of the property. To Taft, the future of the property seemed assured.

<<< [CHAPTER 2](#)

[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

[CHAPTER 4](#) >>>

wiho/adhi/adhi3.htm

Last Updated: 27-Feb-2001

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



CHAPTER 4: THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE'S STEWARDSHIP OF THE TAFT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, 1971-1985

In order to provide onsite, daily care of the Taft National Historic Site, the National Park Service hired a staff consisting of a park manager (the position of park manager was superseded by superintendent in 1975), park aids and technicians, and support and maintenance personnel. Later, a park historian was added to the staff. Because of the site's small size, the superintendency was generally regarded by the National Park Service as a testing ground for "rising stars" from other sites. If the superintendent performed well, he or she could move on to superintendencies of larger sites and so on up the bureau ladder.

The life of professional personnel assigned to National Park Service sites can sometimes be compared to that of gypsies, resulting in its own unique "professional culture." Many staff members feel compelled to move on every few years in order to obtain a higher grade level and, thus salary. This career pattern is followed at many sites, with the exception of those in Washington, D.C., or some other large cities, where the National Park Service establishment is so large that staff can move from one position to another within one urban area. The size of regional offices and service centers is also large enough to provide staff members with opportunities for advancement at a single location. The turnover of staff at National Park Service sites is a beneficial way in which staff can gain experience "in the field" and then apply the lessons to sites of greater complexity elsewhere. However, the turnover of personnel can also result in a multitude of views that can influence and thus affect the planning and development process. The turnover of staff had this effect at the Taft National Historic Site.

Staffing the Taft National Historic Site began in late 1970 with the preparation of a position description for the park manager. The manager was to work under the supervision of the superintendent of the Mound City Group National Monument. As prepared by Superintendent Schesventer, the position description listed the park manager's responsibilities to include interpretive and visitor services, curatorial, public relations, protection of the property, and administration. [1]

By March 1971, however, Schesventer was transferred to Castillo de San Marcos National Monument in St. Augustine, Florida. He was replaced by William C. Birdsell who was given the position of General Superintendent of the Ohio Group of the National Park Service, headquartered at the Mound City Group National Monument in Chillicothe, Ohio.

Selecting the first professional staff member of the Taft National Historic Site was a matter that required special consideration. Birdsell was sensitive to the location of the site in an inner city neighborhood populated largely by black residents. Birdsell's selection of the first individual for the park manager position reflected his belief that a black professional would be best able to handle the situation. As he stated several years later in a 1974 synopsis of the site, "As WIHO is located in a predominantly black community, it is important that this staff be well-balanced with black and white employees." [2] Birdsell tapped John T. (Troy) Lissimore, a young black National Park Service employee who previously had worked at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C.

Upon accepting the position, Lissimore oversaw the opening of the house on a limited basis in the summer of 1971 and worked with the historians, archeologists, and architects who visited the site in the course of preparing research reports on the property. In August 1971, Lissimore inaugurated tours of the exterior of the Taft home and organized a temporary exhibit of the Bible on which William Howard Taft took the oath of office as President of the United States.

Lissimore was also involved with discussions regarding the designation of Mt. Auburn as a National Register historic district.

By the summer of 1972, Lissimore hired RuthAnne Heriot as an interpretive specialist. Heriot's position was split between the Taft site during the summer months and the Lincoln Home National Historic Site in the winter months. Her major responsibility at the Taft site included the organization of interpretive programs for the site, including tours, slide shows, lectures, and other events. She was also charged with acquiring items for furnishing the house. [3] In the summer of 1972, tours of the interior of the house were inaugurated.

Interpretive programs under Lissimore's period as park manager included tours of the house and temporary exhibits. He also oversaw the development of brochures, information sheets, and postcards and the selection of books about William Howard Taft for sale. The first information sheet, "The William Howard Taft National Historic Site," was two pages in length and provided information on the Taft family and the house and grounds after Taft. [4] Lissimore also arranged with the National Park Service Division of Audiovisual Arts to prepare a taped interview with Charles Taft in November 1971.

In the summer of 1972, the solarium, dating from the occupancy of Judge Albert C. Thompson, was open for public visitation from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. seven days a week. The solarium was outfitted as an information booth and exhibit area. Tours were offered of the grounds and the solarium. The small size of the visitors' facilities led Lissimore to remark, "people are not elbowing anyone out of the way to get through the door but it may come to that, considering the size of the solarium." [5] Staff was available to offer programs offsite at schools throughout the Cincinnati area. Lecture series were organized on aspects of local history related to Cincinnati and the nineteenth century.

As the property modestly moved toward the accommodation of visitors, Lissimore and Heriot continued their own studies of the property and historical documents to assist with the interpretive programs and with the eventual restoration of the property. In order to facilitate the research process, the William Howard Taft Memorial Association's collection was moved from storage to the Taft site.

To enhance the appearance and interpretation of the site, Lissimore persuaded the city of Cincinnati to remove a street sign that blocked a clear view of the front of the Taft home. A temporary site identification sign was erected in front of the property, as was an aluminum flag pole.

Although no major development work was undertaken during Lissimore's tenure, several maintenance measures were taken to prevent further deterioration of the historic resource. New roofing and flashing were placed over the solarium. New downspouts were installed and sidewalks were patched. Plastic sheeting was wrapped around the rear wall of the rear wing to ward off the effects of weather. In order to prevent further settling of the rear wing, holding braces or jacks were installed on each floor.

By the end of 1972, the staff at the Taft National Historic Site numbered five. They included Lissimore, Heriot, two park aids, and a clerk- typist. Through the Neighborhood Youth Corps Program, high school students were employed on the site to handle routine maintenance. To supplement the students' services, maintenance staff at Mound City National Monument handled more technical maintenance problems. Pinkerton Security Services provided after-hours security, following the departure of Everett Inman, the caretaker of the house for the Memorial Association. The staff was located in offices on the first floor fashioned out of the rooms in the rear wing.

With the necessary research reports apparently progressing at a fast pace, the Taft home was scheduled for restoration and opening to the public by 1976. [6] However, by July 1972, several impediments to this schedule loomed on the horizon. After a meeting with Senator Robert A. Taft, Jr., Lissimore reported that the Senator thought that the amount authorized to restore the house, \$318,000, "seemed inadequate." [7] Charles Taft determined that the delay in development activity was not for the want of an appropriation, but "the only hold up is the assignment of the proper personnel to get the contract let and supervise the work." He wrote to Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton urging that the restoration of the Taft home be given priority as a Bicentennial project. [8]

Much to Taft's dismay, he received a letter from George A. Palmer of the Northeast Regional Office of the National Park Service citing "current fiscal restrictions." Palmer added:

New project (construction) funds are allocated separately within a fiscal year, but can be carried over if the situation warrants. Such funds have not yet been noted for William Howard Taft and unfortunately with this pressure of the Bicentennial program will probably not be available until fiscal year 1976 or 77. [9]

Taft was infuriated. He contacted Senator Taft, stating, "To have this hold up [sic] by the Interior Department is simply outrageous. How about let's organize an attack on the White House and Rogers Morton?" [10]

Park Manager Lissimore, too, was disturbed by the postponement in funding. As he wrote to Superintendent Birdsell, "We inch forward on the calendar, but get kicked back on paper, as far as FY development of this site is concerned. . . . Any FY wins after the Bicentennial." Lissimore also wondered about the public relations fallout of the delay. "This is a hellish paradox to our community relations image, part of which rested on our concern to restore this site as a catalyst for the Mt. Auburn community to upgrade personal properties. The tail is now wagging the dog, so to speak." [11]

Taft was further disheartened to learn that Lissimore was moved to a new assignment effective September 8, 1973, graduate training in environmental education at George Williams College at Downers Grove, Illinois. In a synopsis of the Taft National Historic Site dated March 1974, Birdsell described Lissimore as "inexperienced and incapable of assuming responsibility of on-site management of WIHO." [12] On the other hand, Taft observed Lissimore's energetic work with the community and regretted his departure. "Troy has done a swell job with the community, a most important element in the Park Manager. I hope you get us somebody anything like as good. It would help if he's black." [13]

On November 25, 1973, Lissimore was assigned to Gateway National Recreation Area in the New York City area. [14] In the interim between Lissimore's departure and the arrival of his successor, Administrative Clerk Charlesetta Spurlock served as acting park manager. Spurlock had arrived at the site only a few months earlier.

Before leaving Cincinnati in June 1973, Lissimore hired Samuel H. Witherup as a temporary park aid. Witherup stayed with the Taft National Historic Site until 1984 and was the one element of stability through the next decade. During several gaps in the appointment of superintendents, Witherup served as acting superintendent.

CONTINUE >>>

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



CHAPTER 5: TOWARD A MASTER PLAN FOR THE TAFT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

The development of a master plan for the Taft National Historic Site was a process wrapped in controversy from the time of the issuance of the first master plan in 1970. Almost as soon as it was read by the National Park Service historical architects and historians who undertook specialized research studies in the early 1970s, the first master plan was condemned. The process of preparing a revised master plan began in earnest in 1974. While the major parties agreed to a compromise master plan in 1978, the final version of the plan was not published until 1981. Even then, controversy continued.

To an outsider, the years devoted to preparing a new master plan for the Taft home can be viewed as an exercise that only a governmental bureaucracy could invent to keep its professional staff occupied. But, in practice, the bureau argued that funds could not be intelligently spent on the development, refurbishing, and interpretation of the property until a plan had been formulated. Otherwise, costly mistakes could be made and valuable information could be lost in the process.

The succession of events that make up the story of the site's master plan dispels any notion that the National Park Service is "monolithic" in its professional approach to history and historic resources. Rather, the bureau is populated by historians, historical architects, interpretive specialists, and other professionals whose experience and points of view cover the spectrum of possibilities. This range of professional opinion accounts for the lack of consensus that plagued the planning process.

The essential obstacle in the master plan effort was the lack of sufficient information upon which to base decisions. When the effort to develop a new master plan was launched in 1974, four key reports had been completed and approved: the historical data report prepared by Historian Edwin C. Bearss, the architectural data report by Architect Norman M. Souder, and the two archeological studies prepared by Major Charles Ross McCollough. As the process proceeded, members of the master plan team had difficulty relating the historical record to the building fabric. The architectural study performed by Souder focused on what he could see on the surface of the interior. His investigations did not involve stripping away walls to determine what elements dated from Taft's boyhood period and what dated from later periods. In the absence of a more thorough investigation of the building's fabric, members of the study team thought that recommendations on which rooms to restore were speculative. The lack of a thorough furnishings study was an impediment to resolving questions about which rooms could be refurbished.

The preparation of the master plan in the 1970s also was affected by the recently passed National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and the indecision on the part of the National Park Service on how to incorporate its provisions into the master planning process. In the early years, federal agencies groped for guidance on standards for environmental impact analyses. Some environmental impact statements were a few pages in length, while others were book-length. Analyses of environmental impacts required the consideration of a range of alternatives. At times, alternatives presented were not feasible under any circumstances. They were subjected to analysis anyway.

At the same time, the National Park Service's own policies regarding the treatment of historic resources were evolving. Where one level of historical documentation was considered sufficient for restoration and refurbishing in the early 1970s, the same level was considered insufficient in the latter part of that decade. The clash of the new and the old

policies was played out during the seven-year effort toward a new master plan for the Taft National Historic Site.

The situation was further complicated by the various centers of decision-making of the National Park Service. The bureau is set up so that all interested parties can interact in the process. These parties included the Washington Office, the Midwest Regional Office, and the Taft National Historic Site. The specialized professional staff, once located in Washington, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, were reorganized. The curatorial and exhibit staff resided in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, site of a major National Park Service presence. Much of the architectural historical, and interpretive staff was shifted to the Denver Service Center. In theory, the Denver Service Center undertakes consulting services for the regions much in the same way that a contractor serves a client. However, in practice, the scheduling of work often is thrown off by shifting priorities. Thus, it was sometimes the case with the Taft National Historic Site that the master plan delays could be ascribed to the assignment of relevant staff to other, more pressing projects.

Despite the difficulties encountered by the National Park Service in resolving the varying points of view in the master planning process, the exercise was similar in substance to that experienced by organizations and agencies responsible for historic buildings throughout the nation. The difference between the National Park Service's approach and that of other administrative bodies was one of form. Few other organizations or agencies have developed such a sophisticated system for conducting research studies and for devising plans. All organizations and agencies face common problems of a property's purpose and message, how the property can be restored and furnished to convey this message, and the need to rethink the presentation of the house as new information emerges or as preservation practice evolves. Because there is no one approach to presenting a historic house that will endure forever, it is not surprising then that highly respected historical organizations, such as Colonial Williamsburg, periodically restudy their historic buildings and revamp restoration and interior furnishings.

In the late 1960s, when the Taft National Historic Site "study of alternatives" and the 1970 master plan were being formulated, the term "restoration" was one that was widely accepted without serious thought as to what it encompassed. The 1968 alternatives study recommended "a plan of development under which the house and grounds would be restored." [1] The assumption of restoration and refurnishing was conveyed by the Interior Department to the appropriate House and Senate committees and was an underlying justification for the development funds authorized for the property.

The 1970 master plan also included "restoration" as one of the objectives of the National Park Service in developing the site. However, in this plan, the term was used much more loosely. As the report stated, the bureau should "restore the exterior of the William Howard Taft house, limiting interior restoration to that needed to support effective interpretation and suggest the 19th century decor." [2] In the specifics, the plan recommended restoration of rooms according to the interpretive objectives rather than to the availability of sufficient information to support restoration. The plan called for the restoration of the hall, south parlor, dining room, and first floor bedroom. The north parlors would be "restored in period style to serve adaptive use. They will be the location of an audio-visual facility." [3]

For the second floor, the 1970 plan recommended that it be "fully preserved and selectively restored." The south rooms would be "restored in period style for adaptive use as a meeting and social gathering area." The north section would be "similarly restored to accommodate an appropriate library facility, furnished in the manner of the period of the house's interpretation." For the rear wing, the 1970 plan suggested administrative uses and a small kitchen facility. The plan went on to prescribe that if future research revealed that one of the second floor rooms served as the Tafts' bedroom, consideration might be given to fully restoring and historically furnishing that room. No mention was made of where the displaced functions would be located. [4] On the ground floor, the plan suggested restrooms and curatorial, maintenance, and storage spaces in the rear wing, to the east of the mechanical and boiler rooms under the main section of the house.

According to the 1970 plan, the interpretation of the property could be handled primarily through a series of audiovisual facilities. "Because of the low-key but substantial character of the subject's life . . . more than one audio-visual program should exist." [5] The plan also presented a general scheme whereby sixteen parking spaces would be provided on the adjoining Cross property with access provided by a ramped drive leading to and from Auburn Avenue, down the 25-foot drop from street level.

The first serious questions about the 1970 master plan were raised by Historical Architect Hugh C. Miller and Historian Edwin C. Bearss, both of the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation. Miller and Bearss thought that the scope of the historically furnished rooms could be enlarged because surviving records and letters provided a good source of documentary evidence. Bearss wrote, "Available documents as to Taft lifestyles, furnishings, and room arrangements point toward the restoration and refurnishing of the entire first floor and the basement rooms built in 1851 as a historic house museum." Based on this observation, Bearss recommended that the site's general development plan be changed. [6] Miller raised the question of the feasibility of using the second floor for public gatherings given the structural condition of the house and the lack of a fireproof stair. The impending demolition of the structure on the Cross property, as recommended in the 1970 plan, was also questioned. [7] A photograph of the building on the Cross property had not been included in the 1970 master plan. When Miller and Bearss saw the building, they noted that it dated from the 1880s and contributed to the character of the historic Mt. Auburn area. The property might be useful for National Park Services offices and for visitor services.

Following the Miller and Bearss visit of late 1971, a rising chorus of objections to the 1970 master plan engulfed planning activities of the next two years. In early 1973, Robert M. Utley, Director of the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, recommended that a new study of the resource be undertaken, adding "without such a study, we fear that the development of Taft will result in an operational disaster in which the intrinsic value of [the] Taft House will be destroyed." [8] Birdsell characterized the 1970 master plan as "completed and approved before any in-house research was undertaken, and as a result the plan has proved to be premature, shallow, and incomplete." [9]

The anticipated need to revise the site's master plan was provided by the Department of the Interior as a reason for not beginning development work in 1973. However, the various documents required appeared excessive in the eyes of the Taft family. When Senator Robert A. Taft, Jr., wrote to Interior Secretary Rogers C. B. Morton complaining about the delay in development, he stated:

I can appreciate that the Environmental Impact Statement, Master Plan and Resource Management Plan may be pre-requisite for starting the restoration and development. With an old single family residence and the small surrounding grounds involved, however, it is hard to conceive how any of these should present any difficulty of major importance. Meanwhile, part of the building is falling down or about to. [10]

In response to Robert Taft's letter, Regional Director Chester L. Brooks assured him that the reports represented "an essential and orderly programming process which, subject to fiscal constraints and the Bicentennial Program, will form the basis of the highly technical and complex restoration of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site." Although time-consuming, the effort promised "optimum results." [11]

CONTINUE >>>

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



CHAPTER 6: THE LAND AND SETTING FOR THE TAFT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

In 1970, the land turned over to the National Park Service from the Memorial Association constituted just over a half-acre. The house faced onto Auburn Avenue, a major north-south thoroughfare through Mt. Auburn. To its south and east stood the sprawling Hamilton County Detention Center. To the north was the five story apartment house owned by the Cross Construction Company. North of the Cross property at the corner of Auburn and Southern Avenues stood an apartment house of recent vintage. Along Southern Avenue east to Young Street were two apartment houses. At the corner of Southern Avenue and Young Street was an empty lot, later proposed for a bus staging area or parking area.

The original lot as it existed during the period when William Howard Taft occupied the house covered 1.8 acres. The original plot stretched eastward beyond Young Street (which lies parallel and to the east of Auburn Avenue). During the succession of owners from the late nineteenth century to 1967, the land holdings were chopped away. A major portion of the land to the east was sold in 1951 by Bellinger to Hamilton County for the Youth Detention Center, thereby cutting off access to the house from Young Street.

The grounds immediately surrounding the house present obstacles to making the Taft home accessible. The house stands on a slope that drops precipitously to the east and north. A narrow driveway to the north is connected to the driveway on the south, forming a "U," and provides access to a limited number of parking spaces at the rear of the house. However, this parking area is insufficient for visitor use. In addition, development of the immediate grounds to accommodate visitors would adversely affect the setting for the house and cause unnecessary vibrations to the fragile resource.

Site plans for the Taft National Historic Site were guided by two major considerations. In the early years, Charles P. Taft and the National Park Service were intent on providing what they considered an appropriate setting for the house. This effort was pursued with the hope that the historic setting for the house during William Howard Taft's occupancy could be recreated. The other consideration was that of providing visitor access and services. This factor entailed studies of parking facilities, both on and off street, and a possible visitors' reception center. The latter facility would be similar to such centers located at other National Park Service sites.

The first issue, that of a historically plausible setting for the site, was one that was severely hampered by the changes to the site since the departure of the Tafts in the 1890s and the development of the land included within the historical boundaries by the Hamilton County Detention Center. The ability to restore the original setting was effectively blocked by the urbanization and development of the block. The vision of an authentic site was also spurred by remembrances of National Park Service properties located in splendid isolation. A historic site situated in an urban setting with buildings dating from several periods was not yet a concept which had seeped into general historic park planning. The desire to achieve an authentic setting was also a driving force behind the several landscape and archeological studies that were important to the interpretation of the site.

The authenticity and visitor access issues arose almost as soon as the National Park Service began to study the property. It is unclear as to whether some of the early proposed solutions can be ascribed to the bureau's staff or to Charles Taft. In late 1967, in a letter to members of his family, Charles Taft reported on the visit by National Park Service staff to the property in June of that year. Taft wrote, "The Interior people may well recommend that we

purchase the two apartment houses to the north and expand the grounds." [1]

In the 1968 report, "A Study of Alternatives," the National Park Service offered three development alternatives that addressed the setting of the Taft home. Alternative Plan I provided for visitor parking on the grounds of Hamilton County Detention Center through an agreement with the county. Even though one wing of the Detention Center stretched out into the land that was once attached to the Taft home, the report stated that this alternative had "the advantage of permitting restoration of the grounds around the Taft Home, thereby providing an effective setting for the house." [2] Alternative Plan II called for visitor parking and access provided only on the half-acre Taft property, made accessible by the driveway on the north, which at that time terminated behind the house on a ungraded and unsurfaced area. This alternative required that some visitors seek on- street parking. Alternative Plan III provided for parking on the Cross property just to the north of the Taft site, if it could be acquired by the National Park Service. This plan would keep parking off the Taft property, leaving the entire historic site free for preservation and restoration. [3]

In the 1970 master plan, the section devoted to "Factors Affecting Resources and Use," the 1968 Alternative Plan III emerged as the plan for development of the site. The 1970 master plan called for the acquisition by donation of the 0.28 acre (later determined to be 0.32 acre) lot to the north of the Taft property. The plan cited potential access to the property through the Hamilton County Detention Center as a future possibility, as well as the restoration of the southern view should the facility be removed to another location. The plan also noted that the lot to the north of the Taft property dropped some 25 feet below Auburn Avenue. "While this could present a problem in providing a connection to the Taft grounds, it would help set the parking on a lower level and thus makes it easier to screen. It is a challenging situation for an imaginative designer." [4]

During 1971, final arrangements were made toward the acquisition of the Cross property and the demolition of the building on the site. The path to this objective was a rocky one, but in the end, the mission was accomplished.

One of the stumbling blocks to demolition of the Cross building was the potential cost of relocating the families residing in the apartment house. On July 9, 1971, Charles R. Rinaldi of the National Park Service's Office of Land Acquisition and Water Resources informed Charles Taft that under the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Land Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (passed on January 2, 1971), the cost of relocation would be \$4,000 per family or \$64,000 for the remaining 16 families. The Federal Government would be required to bear the cost if it needed to condemn the property. Therefore, Rinaldi recommended that Taft purchase the property from the owners, the Gerbus brothers, and donate the land to the National Park Service. Alternatively, the Federal Government could proceed with condemnation should Taft be unable to cover the expenses incurred by such a process. [5]

Taft initially balked at a direct purchase of the Cross property because of the high price he expected the Gerbus brothers to ask. Although the appraised value of the house was \$35,000 to \$37,000, Taft eventually purchased the property for \$50,000 because the Gerbus brothers had a mortgage on the property at the higher price. [6]

While Taft was making final arrangements for the purchase of the Cross property, new objections to the plan were heard from another section of the National Park Service. During a visit in late 1971, two professional staff from the bureau's Washington Office, Historical Architect Hugh Miller and Historian Edwin Bearss, observed the site and were dismayed at the impending demolition of the apartment house. Miller, noting that the building dated from about 1885, thought that it was a typical building of its period and "thus is an important background building. It forms a buffer between the Taft house and a less distinguished modern building whose uninspired side elevation would be exposed to general view when the Cross property is removed." Miller cited the

present rhythm of building facades that establishes the residential scale of Auburn Avenue. The removal of the Cross building by the National Park Service would also create an unfortunate precedent at the time the community is attempting to create a historic district to preserve the historic quality of the neighborhood near the Historic Site.

Because the 1970 master plan gave no indication of the appearance or vintage of the house proposed for demolition, Miller suggested that as a matter of bureau policy, "photographs of buildings proposed to be removed and their environs should be submitted when master plans are reviewed." Miller further suggested that the Cross building, if adaptively refurbished, serve visitor, community and park support functions. [7]

Miller's views were confirmed by those of Historian Bearss, who voiced the opinion that if the Cross property was demolished, the National Park Service's position as "a champion of historic preservation will be compromised locally." [8] The Director of the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, Ernest Allen Connally, urged that the Cross building be studied for adaptive use before any request to demolish was submitted. [9]

In conveying the reports of Miller and Bearss to Park Manager Lissimore, Superintendent Birdsell suggested that Charles Taft not be shown the report. Birdsell recommended that Lissimore cover only the key points.

Despite the pleas of Miller and Bearss, the plans for the Cross building had progressed too far to be turned back. As Chester L. Brooks, Regional Director of the Northeast Regional Office, wrote to Connally, "The situation re the Cross Building is almost beyond recall because of arrangements previously worked out between the Director and Mr. Taft in accordance with master plan determination that the Cross building must be demolished." [10] In addition, Charles Taft arranged with the Mt. Auburn Good Housing Foundation and the City Redevelopment Department to find new residences for the tenants.

The National Park Service washed its hands of the affair. As Park Manager Lissimore stated to Charles Taft, "The acquisition and removal of the building under discussion is not an action of the Department of the Interior or its bureau, the National Park Service. " According to Lissimore, the "hands-off" role would continue to be its position until the Cross property had actually been "deeded over to the federal government for the completion of improvements necessary to properly interpret the birthplace." [11]

Coincident with the Cross property developments, the National Park Service contracted with the Ohio Historical Society to study the grounds and to conduct archeological investigations of the Taft property. In the summer of 1971, the Ohio Historical Society dispatched 29-year-old Major Charles Ross McCollough, Ph.D. to perform this work.

[CONTINUE](#) >>>

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



CHAPTER 7: THE STRUCTURE'S EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR: INVESTIGATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

Unlike many historic properties which come into the ownership of the National Park Service, the Taft home had been radically altered from its appearance at the time of its greatest historical significance. The condition of the home was further complicated by the 1964 "restoration" of the front facade that had been carried out under the auspices of the Memorial Association. The problem faced by the National Park Service staff was to determine the appearance of the building during the birth and residency of William Howard Taft. The answer lay behind the many later additions and partitions that had been erected. The architectural investigative process, therefore, required that the National Park Service staff be willing to tear apart portions of the house in the search for clues. The destructive nature of the investigations was necessary in order to trace the changes wrought by the property's many occupants. By the time the architectural investigations were completed, the interior lay in considerable ruin.

The two story square brick building with basement purchased by Alphonso Taft in June 1851 was altered within a few months of purchase. A three story 41 x 23 foot brick ell was commenced in September 1851. This addition contained bedrooms on the upper stories and a kitchen and dining room on the ground floor. During the following year, carpenters and painters completed the interior work and painting. Additional work in 1851-52 provided for interior plumbing and hot water. When Alphonso's second wife, Louise, moved into the house in early 1854, she set about refurbishing the house. However, she did not make major changes to the exterior or interior except for occasional repapering and repainting. [1]

The second major change to the Taft home while still in Taft ownership occurred after the fire of April 4, 1877. The fire destroyed the roof and gutted the entire second story. Rebuilding the house involved raising the upper story to a height of eleven feet and placing a galvanized iron cornice around the roof line. The windows at the second floor were lengthened and capped with wooden heads. A bay window was added to the south elevation. Other changes were made to rooms on the other floors as well, such as laying black walnut floor boards in the dining room. The rooms on the second floor were repapered and repainted. The parlor was given new frescoes and paint. The heating system was refurbished and rehabilitated. In 1878, Louise Taft placed a new mantle by Heinrich Fry in the parlor and a Rogers mantle in the library.

During the years when Alphonso Taft served as United States Minister to Austria—Hungary and later Russia, the house was repainted and repapered to suit the various tenants. Similar alterations were made to the interior finishes of the house for tenants after Alphonso Taft's death and when Louise Taft had taken up residence in Massachusetts. When Louise Taft sold the property in 1899, its appearance then was different from that of the period from 1857 to 1874, between the birth of William Howard Taft and his departure for Yale.

The next owners of the house, the Thompsons, made several changes to the house. One was the replacement of the original porch with a full-width porch. Another was the removal of the two-story wooden piazza in the angle between the original house and the ell addition and its replacement by a single-story conservatory. The next owner, the Ruffners, changed the uses of the rooms, especially on the first floor, and placed a wooden addition onto the north elevation of the house. By the time Bellinger purchased the house in 1940, the 1851 addition was already showing structural damage. He converted the house into at least seven apartments, three on each of the upper floors and one on the ground floor. In the conversion, he claimed that he had "stabilized the house" and undertaken the conversion in

such a way that the "original formation of the house" was unspoiled. [2]

The 1964 restoration shortened or closed up several of the windows on all elevations and restored the original roofline of the house. The 1964 work substituted a brick parapet in place of the Taft period wood panelled parapet. The restored porch posts were not chamfered, while the Taft period ones were. The jigsaw decoration on the original house was more robust and had a deeper frieze than on the 1964 version. In addition, the basement windows on the north side of the Taft period house were not restored in 1964. In fact, they were closed up. The 1964 front door was an eight-panel "colonial" type rather than the original four vertical panel type with a three-light transom. The entrance steps rebuilt in 1964 were of limestone and brick, a combination that later architects found questionable. The observation platform was restored in 1964, although the observatory railing of 1964 was not of the same design as the railing of the Taft period. When the roof of the house was lowered to its original level, the stairs to the attic were removed, thereby obliterating evidence of the previous opening under these stairs.

When the National Park Service staff studied the house in preparation for the 1968 "Study of Alternatives," the house was described as painted in grey. The rear of the house was unpainted and in bad repair. Bellinger's first floor apartment was in a habitable state, but the rest of the house was described as being in poor condition. A recent fire had damaged the roof over the rear addition. [3] The 1970 master plan reiterated the poor condition of the house.

The first professional architectural investigation of the house was made in late 1971 by National Park Service Historical Architect Hugh Miller. He observed that the 1964 restoration, while executed to resemble the appearance of the house during William Howard Taft's boyhood, was "incomplete and not entirely accurate." The 1851 addition exhibited serious structural cracking, a condition he thought would require a concrete footing and grouting. At that time, Miller reported, "the architectural repercussions of restoration for the house museum would not be serious since the post-Taft addition and alterations should be removed as part of the structural rehabilitation of the house and the interior finish of the Taft period seems to be modest." [4]

By 1971, Architect Norman M. Souder of the Denver Service Center was assigned to prepare the architectural data section of the historic structure report, the companion to Edwin C. Bearss's historical data report. As issued in 1973, Souder's report dealt primarily with a detailed description of the existing conditions of the property and a discussion of the proposed restoration of the house to the 1851-1877 period. The report also presented a detailed photographic document of the house as it appeared in 1972 and commentary in each accompanying caption. Among Souder's recommendations was the removal of the Fry mantel in the parlor, purchased by Louise Taft in 1878, because it post-dated the 1877 cut-off period for the National Park Service interpretation of the property. Souder's configuration of the first floor during the historical period showed the south parlor sections separated by partitions, the nursery at the rear of the 1851 wing, and the dining room in the 1851 wing closest to the wall of the pre-1851 house.

Souder characterized his report as being more extensive than the "usual Historic Structures Reports for comparable structures." [5] This opinion was not shared by his successor Anthony Crosby, also of the Denver Service Center, who noted that the report had been "based on minimal fabric investigation conducted during a short period of time. . . . He assumed that a complete restoration was possible because he mistook many architectural features for the 1857-1874 period when they were in fact from the period after the fire in 1877." [6] Crosby's own investigations followed those of Gordie Whittington, a Denver Service Center exhibit specialist, who in 1977 investigated the seven rooms on the first floor then intended for restoration.

In the course of his investigations, Crosby revealed that the parlor rooms 101 and 102 constituted a single room during most of the historic period, although the room had originally been divided into two rooms by a partition with large swinging doors. [7] The partition was probably removed before 1857 when a mirror was hung over the piano between the two doors in the parlor. Crosby also determined the original configuration of the first floor of the 1851 addition. Now the nursery was placed between two small rooms that abutted the east wall of the pre-1851 structure and two closets opening onto room 109, the bedroom/sitting room. This floor configuration was discovered by an investigation of the "ghosts" still visible on floors, ceilings, and walls. Crosby had no doubt that the entire east end of the 1851 wing, room 109, was one large room until the twentieth century. [8]

Although Crosby's recommendations for partial restoration did not exactly conform to the plans as detailed in the 1981

master plan (for example Crosby's room 104 is devoted to exhibit space while in the 1981 master plan, room 104 is designated for refurbishing), it represented a great leap forward from the 1973 architectural study. The original configuration of the rooms, especially those on the first floor, was established, as were the probable wall finishes.

As the architectural investigations and master plan inched toward resolution in 1978, the Denver Service Center provided an estimate of the restoration of the Taft National Historic Site. The projected total development cost was set at \$3,153,000. (The 1981 Master Plan revised this amount to \$3,985,000, of which \$1,024,000 was devoted to the visitor contact station. Other costs included \$331,000 for structural stabilization, \$438,000 for the restoration of the exterior and grounds, \$1,200,000 for interior restoration, and \$253,000 for furnishings.)

In order to implement the work at this level, the authorization level for the site had to be raised above the \$318,000 amount in the 1969 legislation. [9] In the end, the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 provided for a new ceiling of only \$1,888,000. The spending level was lowered because as Robert Taft, Jr., reported, "[Senator] Hatfield got in a position where, because of sponsoring other amendments and the general Committee situation, he did not feel this was wise at this time, although he is in our corner." Robert Taft, Jr., thought that the balance might be forthcoming the following year. [10]

While in theory restoration work could not begin until the completion of the architectural investigations, human and natural forces conspired to allow for development work to commence. In 1974, after intense lobbying on the part of Charles Taft, \$58,500 was made available to stabilize the house after plans and specifications prepared by Cincinnati architect William J. Miller. Completed in a matter of months, Miller's historic structures and site report encompassed a study of the land surrounding the site, a boundary survey, a discussion of the interior restoration of the house, a structural evaluation of the house, and a survey of existing conditions. Stabilization work, undertaken by the Fred L. Schille Co. of Cincinnati in the summer of 1974, addressed the property's most critical problems. Much of the foundation walls of the original block, including the north, south, and west (except for the porch), was encased in concrete. The brick of the original block was tuckpointed and painted, the west boundary wall and fence were restored, and the domestic water service was replaced. In addition, the rear wing was encased in a temporary plywood shell. The encasement stayed up until 1982. The location of the windows in the east wing was painted on the plywood so that viewers could get a sense of the appearance of that portion of the house.

CONTINUE >>>

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



CHAPTER 8: FURNISHINGS AND COLLECTIONS

Furnishing the Taft home will be a challenge because the items in the house during the period of historical significance were dispersed in 1899 when the house was sold. When the house is completed and open to the public, the four rooms identified for complete restoration will be furnished with period pieces, selected on the basis of an analysis of the voluminous Taft family correspondence concerning domestic matters and a knowledge of furniture available at the time to a family of Alphonso Taft's position.

A core of Taft memorabilia was collected by the Memorial Association before 1960. Some of these items may be useful for furnishing the house. However, it is likely that such memorabilia will be best used in exhibit rooms interpreting the mature career and times of William Howard Taft.

The items included in the collection of the Memorial Association were not assembled in a systematic manner. As publicity swept through the Cincinnati newspapers in the 1960s regarding the impending lease of the Taft home by the Memorial Association, various individuals spontaneously sent Charles P. Taft items that related to his father. When Willa Beall was hired as executive director of the Memorial Association, Taft put out a clarion call for letters, photographs, and other memorabilia. He hoped that "some of these documents will have information about the appearance and decorations of the home during President Taft's boyhood." [1] Both the pre 1960 items and those accumulated during Charles Taft's period constitute the collection of the Memorial Association. Although the collection was available for inspection by the National Park Service in the late 1960s, it was not addressed in early plans.

The route to refurnishing the Taft home began in abstractions, but through subsequent research, gained greater detail and substance. The 1970 master plan for the Taft National Historic Site reflected congressional intent that the home would be restored and refurnished. The report recommended that the first floor south parlor, dining room, and bedroom be "accurately refurnished" and that the second floor parlor and library be "furnished in keeping with the period." [2] However, no guidance was provided on why these rooms were selected or how accuracy would be achieved.

The first serious endeavor to ascertain the nature of the furnishings in the house during the Taft occupancy was undertaken by National Park Service historian Edwin C. Bearss as part of his 1972 report, 'Historical Data--Home.' Having plowed through sheafs of the Taft correspondence at the Library of Congress, Bearss provided excerpts from the letters regarding some of the rooms and their uses. He also extracted excerpts on furnishings and fixtures throughout the house as well as housekeeping and maintenance practices.

In 1974, as the new master planning process was launched, Superintendent Jerry Licari asked that the proposed furnishing plan be expedited in order to facilitate the preparation of a taped tour of the Taft home to be narrated by Charles P. Taft. Licari thought that Taft's age of seventy-six years and weakening health were factors in speeding up this plan. [3]

By May 1975, contract historian Sarah Olson completed the first draft furnishings report. Ellsworth R. Swift of the Harpers Ferry Center thought that the report provided "the known facts about the house furnishings, but ignores the gaps that must be filled in with intelligent guesswork." It was Swift's opinion that the draft report would facilitate the Charles Taft recorded tour, which would be similar to the recorded tours provided by Eleanor Roosevelt for Hyde Park

and Rose Kennedy for the John F. Kennedy Birthplace. [4]

The 1975 furnishings study was regarded by Olson as a preliminary study based primarily on a resorting of key sections from the Bearss report to describe "every item of furniture documented as having been within these rooms." Based on her review of items from the Memorial Association collection, the only items that could be related to the pre-1877 occupancy of the house were family portraits. [5] As this preliminary report was integrated into the master planning process, Historian Bearss noted that "we know considerably more about the use and furnishings of most of the Taft house rooms in the period 1851-1877 than we do of those in the Lincoln Home and the Hoover Cottage." He also pointed out that David H. Wallace of the Harpers Ferry Center stated that "there was sufficient evidence available to refurnish the house to meet National Park Service standards." [6] Bearss's views were not universally held, as Historical Architect Hugh Miller referred to the "unknown historic furnishings and objects." [7]

As the master planning process proceeded, Sarah Olson, now staff curator at Harpers Ferry Center, made a more detailed search through the Taft correspondence at the Library of Congress. Based on this research, she drafted a report in 1979 that contained two sections: an analysis of historical occupancy and evidence of original furnishings, as documented in Taft family correspondence. [8] However, the "furnishings plan" detailing precise furnishings to be obtained and their location would not be completed until 1985. After reviewing the report, Historian Bearss restated his position on the adequacy of documentation for the Taft home furnishings. He noted that he recommended that more rooms be refurnished in the home than had been anticipated by the master planning team in 1979. "Although this recommendation may not accord with current National Park Service policy, this was not the dogma in 1971 when a decision was made to furnish the lower story, certain basement rooms, and the widow's walk. We should recall that ex post facto laws are unconstitutional." [9]

The indecision among National Park Service staff members regarding the refurnishing of the Taft home threatened to be reflected in the master plan. Acting Regional Director Randall R. Pope wrote to the Associate Director of Management and Operations in the Washington Office, Daniel J. Tobin, that "the master plan should clearly state which rooms we will furnish and which ones we won't. To do otherwise would put us in the position of not being candid as to what our plans are relative to furnishing." Pope reminded Tobin of congressional intent regarding the property and voiced the opinion that a "slightly liberal interpretation" of management policies on the subject of refurnishing could result in the draft master plan (which called for several rooms to be furnished) meeting policy. [10]

Tobin responded to Pope by stating that "we are strongly of the opinion that the house cannot be furnished within the framework of Management Policies." It was his understanding that congressional intent of the late 1960s was based on the belief of National Park Service staff at that time that sufficient information was available. Tobin asked Pope to furnish him with an indication of which rooms ought to be furnished, the level of accuracy available for each room, and whether or not the recommendations were in accordance with management policies. If they did not meet the policies, exemptions should be justified. The complexity of the issue led Tobin to add, "Because of the passage of time and our remoteness from the site, we find it difficult to keep the facts in this matter in focus." [11]

In order to resolve the quandary over refurnishing, John Demer and Sarah Olson of Harpers Ferry Center met with Chief Historian Harry Pfanz, Historical Architect Hugh Miller, and Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services David Dame of the Washington Office on March 11, 1980. The sense of the meeting was that documentation was sufficient only for the hallway (room 103), the nursery (room 106), the parlor (rooms 101 and 102), and the sitting room/library (room 104). Documentation was not sufficient for the dining room and kitchen on the ground floor. The group also recommended that 1861 serve as the "logical beginning date by which refurnishing should be guided." Documentation for gas fixtures installed in 1864 was available (and earlier light fixtures were undocumented). In addition, 1861 was the date when Louise and Alphonso Taft moved their quarters to the front of the house. [12]

Upon reading the summary of the March 11 meeting, Superintendent Fahy Whitaker urged that the bedroom and sitting room (room 109) be furnished rather than the library (room 104). "Since the exhibitry planned for rooms 104 and 105 will introduce the visitor to the Taft family and life style, this would be the ideal starting place." Room 104 could also serve as a holding room for visitors awaiting an interpreter. "From there, the visitors will enter the historic environment," which would be continuous and cohesive. "Since the Congressional intent clearly mandates recreating this historic environment, it should be done effectively. A fragmented tour would be ineffective and unsatisfactory."

[13]

On several occasions throughout the balance of 1980, Whitaker restated her position. On October 27, 1980, she wrote:

We are probably more anxious than anyone to have the entire matter settled and to see development take place at William Howard Taft. However, not if it means a disservice to the public simply because we are afraid to talk with the Washington Office policy division again. [14]

In January 1981, Acting Regional Director Pope concluded the debate by stating that the four rooms recommended in the March 11, 1980, meeting would be refurnished. The master plan and historic structure report, both being revised, incorporated these recommendations. [15] With this resolution, the Harpers Ferry Center staff proceeded with the development of a detailed plan for the rooms to be refurnished.

The 1985 historic furnishings report prepared by Olson provided an edited version of her 1979 furnishings report plus a section, "furnishings plan," that listed items to be acquired and their location in each of the rooms to be furnished. She also provided floor plans and elevations showing the arrangement of the items in each room. In the report, she noted that implementation of the furnishings plan would require an assessment of the collection of objects accumulated by the Memorial Association. Recommendations would need to be made concerning the other items in the collection that bore no direct association to the home. [16]

The objects collected by the Memorial Association number in the thousands. Most of the items were received with no records of the donor or the source. Thus, any records of the Memorial Association retained by the National Park Service or elsewhere gain added significance for the information they may hold pertaining to the objects. The complexity of the collections is further enhanced by the National Park Service, which since 1970 has added new items. Few of the National Park Service acquisitions were accompanied by records. Both collections were commingled, adding to the confusion and lack of provenance. An initial "scope of collections statement" was not prepared until 1983 and a museum cataloguing system was not instituted until 1984. The greater part of the combined items are stored in two locations. A storage warehouse in Harrison, Ohio, holds architectural elements removed during the restoration process. The balance of the objects is stored in a warehouse in Cincinnati.

In order to evaluate the relevance of these objects to the Taft site, the current collections policy for the site states that they will need to be accessioned, evaluated for their possible use in the interpretation of the property, and then retained or deaccessioned. The objects retained for their relevance to the Taft home are those that are associated with one of five categories: 1) furnishings and objects actually used in the Taft home between 1857 and 1877, 2) objects directly related to the career of William Howard Taft, for exhibit and research purposes, 3) archival materials related to the historic period of the home or of Taft's career as well as the records of the Memorial Association, 4) architectural elements removed during the restoration of the house and not intended to be placed back in the house, and 5) a library of Taft and Ohio-related publications. [17]

Although the massive collection of furnishings and objects will likely yield some items useful to the purposes of the Taft home, a great number of items will need to be acquired by the National Park Service. Many of these items were identified in the 1985 historic furnishings report and were included in the "Gifts Catalogue" of the Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace. Included among the items to be acquired are rosewood chairs and sofas, a rosewood square piano, a Gothic Revival walnut chair, and mirrors. When the appropriate furnishings are assembled and placed in the rooms to be recreated, the gifts catalogue promised that "visitors will glimpse the same formal setting the Taft guest experienced more than a hundred years ago!" [18]

<<< [CHAPTER 7](#)

[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

[CHAPTER 9](#) >>>

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



CHAPTER 9: INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION

The bottom line in any "restoration" project intended for public visitation is its interpretive value. A property's historical message is the single factor which transcends all other considerations--a property with little or no interpretive value would hardly be worth a massive effort to protect, rehabilitate, and preserve it. How the property's historical message is presented is thus of great importance and is the motivating force behind decisions about documentation, furnishings, architectural restoration, and use. A property's message is conveyed through the appearance of the property in its setting, through the restoration of seemingly minor details, through the placement of furnishings in a room, and through exhibits, brochures, and other publications. Interpretation at many historic properties is further enhanced by guides, sometimes costumed, who verbalize the importance of features encountered in a tour.

The Taft home evokes a strong message about a birth and boyhood in an influential family that led to a career of remarkable achievement. While properties associated with the childhood years of famous people may strike some as less important than properties associated with an individual's mature years, the origins of the nation's leaders have always riveted the public's attention. Such properties have provided physical sustenance to the lesson of the American dream where a baby born in a log cabin could become President of the United States. While Taft's boyhood was certainly played out in an atmosphere of affluence and ready political connections, the circumstances alone could not foretell a career of national leadership. Thus, the public is drawn to the story of Taft's parents and the special family life they created for their children.

The chronology of Taft's career was recounted in the 1968 master plan produced by the staff of the Philadelphia Service Center. However, in the "resource evaluation" section, the report was decidedly negative in its "evaluation" of Taft's career. "Taft was not an innovator, nor did he have the charisma marked in many of our greatest political leaders and statesmen. He was neither a great president nor a great chief justice; in both positions his record was one of solid, if unspectacular accomplishment." [1] There was little other interpretive material provided in the 1968 report.

The 1968 report's disparaging view of Taft evidently had no effect on congressional support for the legislation creating the William Howard Taft National Historic Site. The speeches given by the congressional supporters were filled with admiration for Taft. In the congressional reports that accompanied the legislation, the purpose of the site was to interpret the environment in which Taft spent his formative years as well as his accomplishments as an adult. The interpretive mandate was a broad one that exceeded the boyhood focus, to include the Taft family, as constituting Taft's early environment, and Taft's career.

The 1970 master plan repeated the negative evaluation of Taft's career found in the 1968 report as it set out the educational purposes of the property: "To communicate effectively the story of William Howard Taft's life here, and the role of this total environment in molding his character and philosophy, thereby shaping his career and accomplishments in public service." The property would provide "the visual setting and the intangible climate of family in which the future President was brought up, and to achieve interpretation of the life and importance of William Howard Taft through a combination of interpretive media." [2] The negative evaluation of William Howard Taft's career may have influenced the thinking of National Park Service personnel who were not historians and who wondered why so much effort should be invested in the planning and development of the birthplace of an individual perceived to be one of the country's lesser Presidents.

In response to the 1974 management objectives for the Taft National Historic Site, Denver Service Center staff members Nan V. Rickey and James L. Massey prepared several drafts of an interpretive plan. The July 1976 interpretive prospectus covered William Howard Taft's parents, his boyhood environment, and his later career as Governor of the Philippines, President, and Chief Justice. In depicting the times during which Taft lived, the report stated, "It was Taft's misfortune to be born in a generation that was to experience the most halcyon days of this nation's history. The years between 1877 and 1912 were not marked by issues of watershed importance." [3] The visitor contact facility was intended to provide information on Taft's national political career.

In the late 1970s, an undated interim interpretive prospectus was produced to serve as the interpretive guide for the site until restoration. The report outlined six interpretive themes that could be communicated to visitors: Taft's boyhood and family life, Taft's character, Taft's national prominence, history of the period spanning Taft's life, the National Park Service and its mission, and environmental education. This report incorporated all of the possible angles on the property that were discussed in the draft master plan.

A complimentary view of Taft's career finally was presented in the 1981 master plan. "William Howard Taft brought a special brand of conservatism, integrity, and respect to all the posts he held. These admirable qualities were bred into him as a child and were nurtured by the traditions of his family during the years of his youth." [4] The interpretive program as outlined in the 1981 plan was premised on the construction of a visitor contact station on the adjacent property to the north, formerly referred to as the Cross property. According to the plan, the house itself "offers a physical setting for illustrating the values assimilated by Taft during his youth." All other aspects of Taft's life were to be interpreted in the visitor contact station "to avoid the implication that this was a president's home, or that Taft lived here during any part of his career." [5]

The 1981 plan's interpretive outline placed greater reliance on the guided tours and audiotours narrated by Charles P. Taft. The audiotape would be anecdotal in character, cover the Taft family life, and allow visitor to "feel as if they really know the family and understand their values and goals." This reliance on guided and audiotours relegated the house and furnishings "as the backdrop to enhance the theme." [6]

The "interpretive prospectus" published by the National Park Service in 1982 again designated the planned visitor contact station as the primary point of interpretation of Taft's career. Until a permanent structure could be built, the report recommended a wayside exhibit shelter. The historic resource, the house, was to be the location of the interpretation of the environment into which Taft was born and raised. The report set forth the values embraced in the house, such as high standards, expectations of excellence, atmosphere of love and understanding, joy of living, and enthusiasm for recreation. The report went on to contend that Taft's life extended over a "tranquil" period of American history, which was "not marked by great issues." [7]

As outlined in the plan, the interpretive objectives included an understanding of the William Howard Taft boyhood and family life, Taft's career, the impact of Taft's public service on the nation, the continuing role of members of the Taft family in American life, and the preservation process as exemplified by the property itself. Out of these objectives, the report recommended that the visitor carry away two essential lessons: that Taft's adult life was influenced by his boyhood and that the values he received from his family were applied throughout his career. [8] The report then traced the visitor's path through the first floor, suggesting the nature of the oral presentation or exhibits at various locations throughout the route. The report concluded with a discussion of the various types of groups that might be interested in the property, a general outline of the planned visitor contact station, and suggested interpretive publications to be distributed or sold at the site.

The broad interpretive mandate for the Taft National Historic Site allows for the site to transcend the boyhood story. It provides for a discussion of nearly a century of American history, from the westward movement of ambitious New Englanders in the 1830s to the onset of the Great Depression in 1930. Contrary to planning documents, this era is filled with social upheaval, wars, strife, and aggression. When viewed in this way, the property becomes a vehicle for the exploration of major events in American history through a single family and its best known member. Because of the location of the property, it can also be related to the growth of the Mt. Auburn neighborhood and other aspects of local history. The role of the Taft family in Ohio politics is a window on state history. If carefully presented and interpreted to the public, the Taft National Historic Site has the potential for becoming a powerful communicator of American

history from 1830 to 1930.

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



CHAPTER 10: THE TAFT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE AND THE COMMUNITY

Unlike many National Park Service sites, the William Howard Taft National Historic Site is located in a complex urban environment. Its most immediate neighbor is the Juvenile Detention Center, a factor which brings the site into contact with Hamilton County officials. The site is located in Mt. Auburn, a historically suburban settlement now viewed as "inner city," with a stable and politically active population of predominantly black residents. Mt. Auburn is also ringed with large institutions, such as major hospitals, which provide sources of employment but which also generate traffic and other urban impacts on the surrounding residential area. Several blocks to the northwest is the dense campus of the University of Cincinnati, a leading center of learning which has yet to be fully utilized as a resource for the development and interpretation of the Taft home. In addition, the Taft site is logically tied to the city's historical and cultural institutions, most notably the Cincinnati Historical Society.

Charles Taft's early visions for the Taft home included a close tie with the Hamilton County Detention Center. Plans of the early 1960's called for some center functions to be located on the second floor of the house. As the project evolved, the county facility faded into the background. A flurry of activity in 1968 resulted from the prospective enlargement of the facility. Designs for the enlargement called for doubling the facility's size with additions to the front of the building facing onto Auburn Avenue. After vigorous protests by Charles Taft and the National Park Service, the plans were dropped.

In the 1970s and the early 1980s, the major dealings between the National Park Service and Hamilton County involved parcels of land on the block which supported development of the Taft home by providing accommodations for increased visitation. The discussions also revolved around the possibility that the Detention Center might be moved entirely from the block and that the county might cede the land associated with the house when occupied by William Howard Taft. The granting of a perpetual easement on the sixteen-foot strip of land along the southern boundary of the Taft home for screening purposes in December 1969 was the easiest transaction to consummate. (It was later conveyed to the National Park Service in September 1979.) As the master planning process evolved in the 1970s, the National Park Service looked to other parcels that might be added to the site. The parcel at the corner of Southern Avenue and Young Street, acquired by Hamilton County in 1973, was conveyed to the Federal government in October 1985. This lot was included in the 1981 master plan as a bus staging area and an overflow lot for automobile parking. The National Park Service also considered the parcel of land to the east of the Taft home grounds, occupied by the north wing of the Detention Center, as a logical addition to the site. As the 1981 master plan stated, "Full restoration of the remainder of the historic property may be considered if other Taft lands, now owned by Hamilton County, become available; however, the National Park Service is not actively seeking to acquire that portion of the historic property."^[1]

One of the most enduring associations between the Taft National Historic Site and the community has revolved around the Mt. Auburn Community Council and its progeny, the Good Housing Foundation. The Mt. Auburn neighborhood has been blessed with an active, well-organized, and politically astute population. The Mt. Auburn Community Council has worked to improve the quality of housing and services in an era when inner city areas were abandoned by the affluent and influential. In its efforts to maintain the quality of life in the neighborhood, the Council created the Mt. Auburn Good Housing Foundation, a community based corporation. The Foundation owns and develops housing projects that complement the surroundings and accommodate residents of moderate means.

The Mt. Auburn Community Council and its housing arm have taken a great interest in the area's older buildings. The organizations sponsored the nomination of the Mt. Auburn Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places. They regard the retention of older buildings as a means to maintain the area's historic character and as a vehicle for providing desirable housing. The identification of the community efforts with historic preservation is so strong that Mt. Auburn's leaders have become nationally recognized in the historic preservation field.

The acquisition of the Taft home by the National Park Service and the subsequent expansion of the site might have been viewed by the surrounding neighborhood with great suspicion. However the community recognizes that the maintenance and development of the Taft home is an activity that contributes in a positive way to the area. It is one of the community's attractions and a potentially powerful educational force. Thus, the staff at the Taft National Historic Site and the community have enjoyed a cooperative working relationship almost from the start.

The city's other institutions have played a more peripheral role in the evolution of the Taft National Historic Site. Relations with the Christ Hospital, located across Auburn Avenue from the Taft home, have focused primarily on parking and traffic questions. Any expansion of the hospital could place added demands on both on-street parking and traffic volume, factors that could affect visitor access to the Taft home.

Academics associated with the University of Cincinnati have not played a major role in the development of the site except to review versions of the master plan. The master plan revision, initiated in 1974, was carried out in a manner similar to that of many other National Park Service documents. Only agency personnel were included on the "working team." Outside experts, such as educators, historians, and architects from the community surrounding the site, are normally involved when the agency solicits public response to its proposed plans. This method of organizing work and response places potentially knowledgeable local individuals on the periphery of the process. Their advice can be ignored. For example, when Professor Rogers Daniels of the University of Cincinnati history department made substantive comments on the draft master plan, his comments were not conveyed by Superintendent Whitaker to the Midwest Regional Office.

The Cincinnati Historical Society, generally regarded as among the nation's top city-wide historical societies, has also played only a minor role in the development of the site. During a brief period in the early 1960s, Charles Taft considered turning over the management of the historical aspects of the property to the Historical Society. This arrangement would have been made possible through an annual appropriation from Hamilton County to the Historical Society for this purpose. However, the appropriation did not materialize and the organization's role was limited to that of reviewing master plan drafts.

In the creation of the Taft National Historic Site, the Memorial Association was envisioned by both the National Park Service and Charles Taft as the private support group that could provide advice and sources of private funds. As Taft assured Superintendent Schesvener in 1970, the members of the Memorial Association were expecting "to facilitate, stimulate, cooperate in any of the operations in the house in which they can be of help." In fact, Taft anticipated that the organization would be expanded "by getting more new board members, setting up special committees for various phases. . . like furniture, colors, and other elements of that sort. This hasn't been done before because they didn't want committees set up with nothing to do." [2] However, as the 1970s wore on, Taft and the Memorial Association became synonymous. When Taft's health declined and his involvement in the Taft home became more remote, the Memorial Association faded as well.

In late 1983, a new organization, the Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace, was created. Superintendent Boyd patterned the Friends group after the example of the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association, the private support group attached to the National Park Service-administered Frederick Douglass Home in Washington, D.C., with which she was familiar. Boyd recruited Hope Taft, wife of Robert Taft II and an active volunteer on community projects; Jane Goetzman, wife of well-known Cincinnati architect Bruce Goetzman and a preservation activist; and Lloyd Taft, son of Robert A. Taft, as the organization's first three trustees. This core of founding trustees recruited others, including Mary Heller, another Cincinnati preservation activist, as president of the Friends. The Friends group envisioned itself as a broad based organization and maintained a modest dues for membership. Its purpose was to support the Taft National Historic Site through public awareness, fundraising,

lobbying, donations of objects for the furnishing of the house, and educational programs.

When the Friends group was formed, Superintendent Boyd offered the services of the site staff to administer the organization. During May 1985, the site staff, in conjunction with members of the Friends Board, determined that it was not feasible for the park to continue providing administrative support for the Friends. In the following month, the Friends trustees hired its own part-time staff person to handle membership, newsletter mailings, and other administrative matters. This change brought both groups into compliance with their Memorandum of Agreement and Government policy. In 1984 and 1985, as the construction work proceeded on the site, membership in the Friends group grew.

After its founding, the Friends group solicited donations for the property through the "Gifts Catalogue" which was initiated by Superintendent Boyd and published with the financial assistance of the Taft family. The Taft gifts catalogue was modeled on a similar catalogue produced by the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area in 1982 which listed material goods and projects needed, prices, and ways in which individuals and organizations could participate in the program. The Friends also organized several fundraising activities, such as the William Howard Taft Commemorative Ball held March 2, 1985. Other activities included the production of a videotape on William Howard Taft, called "The Reluctant Politician," and high visibility public programs.

The amount of fundraising required was greater than initially anticipated. The group raised nearly \$190,000 as of mid-1985, a sum that exceeds that raised by most private support groups attached to National Park Service sites. Through the funds raised by the group since 1983, objects for the house have been acquired and repaired and supporting activities funded. Although the National Park Service staff provided the initial impetus for the formation of the Friends group, the latter organization has achieved a high degree of independence and performs the kind of lobbying and local support work that cannot be carried out by a Federal Government agency.

A private support group tied to a government-owned historic site is a common development today. In an era of fiscal constraints, few public agencies are able to develop their historic properties to their maximum level with public funds alone. A private support organization like a "friends group" provides that extra reservoir of community and financial support that is essential if a historic property is to compete effectively for scarce funds. Such groups also inspire good will between governmental agencies and the general public.

<<< [CHAPTER 9](#)

[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

[EPILOGUE](#) >>>

wiho/adhi/adhi10.htm

Last Updated: 27-Feb-2001

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



EPILOGUE

For historic properties everywhere, there is no such thing as "a finished building." Although a property may be restored, furnished, and open for public visitation, the process of planning is a continuous one. New research investigations and findings may shed new light on the way a property is restored, furnished, and thus interpreted. Likewise, new methods of preservation, either technological or philosophical, may also affect the appearance and presentation of the property. The unfinished nature of historic properties is especially applicable to the William Howard Taft National Historic Site. Not only is the property currently unfinished, its "compromise" master plan also leaves open many avenues for future revision.

The story of the Taft National Historic Site illuminates the necessary and universal steps that any historic property must encounter as it is transformed from a property used for normal residential, commercial, and institutional uses to a property intended for public visitation. Studies undertaken on the site revealed its significance, physical makeup, evolution, and interpretive message. Plans for its development were devised, funds were budgeted and expended for construction work, and staff put in place to administer the property and its programs.

The development of the Taft National Historic Site also is revealing of the way in which its administering organization evolved during the 1960s and 1970s. The acquisition of the property by the National Park Service folded the property into a large and complex organization which responds to both external and internal forces. The civil rights and environmental movements affected the way in which the bureau staffed its sites, handled community relations, and evaluated impacts of its plans on properties under its control. The property suffered from its low priority status in the eyes of several bureau staff members who viewed it as lacking architectural integrity, in hopelessly poor repair, associated with a lesser United States President, and located in a kind of urban setting that was foreign to their experience. Year after year, the property was shifted to the back burner in favor of other National Park Service units that enjoyed greater visibility and political support.

While organizational inertia can account for some of the delay that held the Taft site back from the construction program, the essential obstacle was the honest disagreement among National Park Service personnel regarding management policy. Policy covering restoration and refurnishing in the late 1960s and early 1970s differed from that of the mid-1970s. In the earlier period, restorations and refurnishings were undertaken with what was then considered sufficient information. By the mid-1970s, the policy stated that "sufficient historical, architectural, and archeological data must exist to permit accurate restoration, with a minimum of conjecture."

Plans prepared by the National Park Service staff for the Taft site in the earlier period called for restoration and refurnishing. This expectation was absorbed into Interior Department correspondence with the appropriate congressional committees and into the congressional reports that accompanied the legislation to create the William Howard Taft National Historic Site. Congressional intent versus National Park Service management policy produced a lock on the planning process that was resolved only through a compromise hammered out in 1978 and then refined somewhat through additional research until the issuance of the revised master plan in 1981.

A juxtaposition of events yanked the Taft National Historic Site to the forefront of National Park Service attention. The initial impetus was the 1980 earthquake. The Midwest Regional Office determined to invest funds in the property in order to stabilize it, despite its being dropped from the servicewide construction program. When the Cincinnati

community observed the long-delayed construction work finally proceeding, residents lobbied the National Park Service and the United States Congress for funds to complete the interior restoration and refurnishing. By the mid-1980s, the impending Bicentennial of the City of Cincinnati, scheduled for 1988, served as an incentive to maintain the momentum.

As the Taft National Historic Site nears the final bend in the long road towards restoration and public visitation, all parties involved in the project will likely perceive that the property is reaching a state of finality. No doubt the "completion" of the physical restoration and refurnishing of the Taft home will be declared in the next few years and the staff will then turn its attention to receiving and educating visitors. However, the story of the property will continue, through new plans, new research, new discoveries, new opportunities to acquire nearby property, and new professional points of view. The continuing story contradicts the view held by many that historic properties open for public visitation are frozen in time and therefore essentially "dead." In actuality, they are dynamic places. The physical fabric will continue to evolve. The interpretive programs will grow and develop. The Taft National Historic Site will continue its evolution from its starting point in the 1840s. How it evolves from 1985 onward will provide the basis of a telling story, not only of its essential historical associations but of the National Park Service and of the practice of historic property stewardship itself.

<<< [CHAPTER 10](#)

[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

wiho/adhi/adhi11.htm

Last Updated: 27-Feb-2001

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Major Reports

1. Bearss, Edwin C. "Historical Data--Home, William Howard Taft National Historic Site." Denver Service Center, National Park Service, October 1972.
2. Crosby, Anthony. "Historic Structures Report, Architectural Data Section. " National Park Service, 1979.
3. Interpretive Prospectus for the William Howard Taft National Historic Site. National Park Service, October 1982.
4. Master Plan for the William Howard Taft National Historic Site. National Park Service, 1970.
5. Master Plan for the William Howard Taft National Historic Site. National Park Service, 1981.
6. McCollough, Major Charles Ross. "William Howard Taft National Historic Site: Historic Grounds Report." Ohio Historical Society, October 1, 1971.
7. McCollough, Major Charles Ross. "William Howard Taft National Historic Site: Archeological Investigations of Grounds." Ohio Historical Society, June 1, 1972.
8. Olson, Sarah. "Furnishing Study, William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Phase I," 1975.
9. Olson, Sarah. "Sections C & D, Historic Furnishings Plan, William Howard Taft Home, William Howard Taft National Historic Site." April 1979.
10. Olson, Sarah. "Historic Furnishings Report, William Howard Taft Home, William Howard Taft National Historic Site." Harpers Ferry Center. 1985.
11. Souder, Norman M. "Historic Structures Report, Architectural Data Section on the Taft House." Denver Service Center, National Park Service, 1973.
12. "A Study of Alternatives for the Proposed William Howard Taft National Historic Site." National Park Service, March 1968.

Other

In addition to the reports cited above, the major sources for this administrative history include the following:

1. Correspondence of the William Howard Taft Memorial Association, now located at the Taft National Historic Site.
2. Daily correspondence of the Taft National Historic Site located at the park site. The files which date from 1968 to 1974 were at one time located at the Mound City Group National Monument. These early files were later transported

to the park site by Samuel Witherup.

3. Correspondence at the Midwest Regional Office, National Park Service, Omaha, Nebraska.

4. Correspondence at the Office of Legislation, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

5. Correspondence in the Park File, Cultural Resources Management Repository, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

6. Correspondence in the Park File, Central Files, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

7. Correspondence at the Office of Land Acquisition, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

Detailed interviews were conducted with Mary Maxine Boyd, former Superintendent, Taft National Historic Site; John Kawamoto, Associate Regional Director, Midwest Region; Andy Ketterson, Chief, Cultural Resource Management, Midwest Region; Hugh C. Miller, Chief Historical Architect, Washington, D.C.; Randall Pope, Associate Director, Midwest Region; and Samuel Witherup, former Park Technician, Taft National Historic Site. Telephone and in-person conversations were held with National Park Service staff, including Ella Rayburn, Steven Kesselman, Jill York O'Bright, Daniel Wenk, and John T. Lissimore; Hamilton County employees Robert Dugan and Charles Gomien; Midwest Archeology Center employee Jeffrey Richner; Denver Service Center employee Roberta Seibel; and Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace trustees Mary Heller and Hope Taft.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

wiho/adhi/adhib.htm

Last Updated: 27-Feb-2001

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



APPENDIX A: PUBLIC LAW 91-132

Public Law 91-132
91st Congress, H. R. 7066
December 2, 1969

An Act

83 STAT. 273

To provide for the establishment of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,, That, in order to preserve in public ownership historically significant properties associated with the life of William Howard Taft, the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to acquire, by donation or purchase with donated funds, such land and interests in land, together with buildings and improvements thereon and including scenic easements, at or in the vicinity of Auburn Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio, as are depicted on the drawing entitled "William Howard Taft National Historic Site Boundary Map," numbered TAHO-20009, and dated August 1969. The drawing shall be on file and available for public inspection in the offices of the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. When acquired such site shall be known as the William Howard Taft National Historic Site.

William
Howard
Taft National
Historic Site,
Ohio.
Establishment.

SEC. 2. The administration, development, preservation, and maintenance of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site shall be exercised by the Secretary of the Interior in accordance with the provisions of the Act entitled "An Act to establish a National Park Service, and for other purposes", approved August 25, 1916, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1 et seq.), and the Act entitled "An Act to provide for the preservation of historic American sites, buildings, objects, and antiquities of national significance, and for other purposes", approved August 21, 1935 (16 U.S.C. 461 et seq.).

Administration.

39 Stat. 535.

49 Stat. 666.

SEC. 3. There are hereby authorized to be appropriated not to exceed \$318,000 to provide for the restoration and development of the William Howard Taft National

Appropriation.

Historic Site.

Approved December 2, 1969.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY:

HOUSE REPORT No. 91-478 (Comm. on Interior & Insular Affairs).

SENATE REPORT No. 91-396 accompanying S. 560 (Comm. on Interior & Insular Affairs).

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 115 (1969):

Sept. 15: Considered and passed House.

Sept. 24: Considered and passed Senate, amended, in lieu of S. 560.

Nov. 18: House concurred in Senate amendment, with amendment.

Nov. 19: Senate concurred in House amendment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

wiho/adhi/adhial.htm

Last Updated: 27-Feb-2001

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



APPENDIX B: PRINCIPAL STAFF

Mount City Group National Monument

George F. Schesventer to 1971

Ohio Group

William C. Birdsell 1971 to 1975
(headquartered at Mound City Group National Monument) (Ohio group disbanded)

William Howard Taft National Historic Site

Park Managers and Superintendents

John T. (Troy) Lissamore, Park Manager 1971 to 1973

Jerome L. Licari, Park Manager & later Superintendent 1974 to 1977

Fahy C. Whitaker, Superintendent 1977 to 1981

Mary Maxine Boyd, Superintendent 1981 to 1985

Steven A. Kesselman, Superintendent 1985 to present

Historian

Ella Rayburn, Historian 1985 to present

Park Technicians

Samuel H. Witherup, Park Technician 1973 to 1984

Karl Merchant, Park Technician 1977 to 1982

Virginia Beard, Park Technician ? to 1982

Larry G. Asher, Park Technician 1982 to 1984

E. Ray Henderson, Park Technician 1985 to present

Interpretive Specialist

RuthAnne Heriot, Interpretive Specialist 1972 to 1973

Administrative Staff

Charlesetta Spurlock, Administrative Clerk 1973 to 1979

Lynn Kallas, Administrative Technician 1981 to 1982

Brenda Sumler, Administrative Technician	1982 to present
Christine Burton, Secretary	1985 to present

TABLE OF CONTENTS

wiho/adhi/adhiab.htm
Last Updated: 27-Feb-2001

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



APPENDIX C: MAP OF SITE

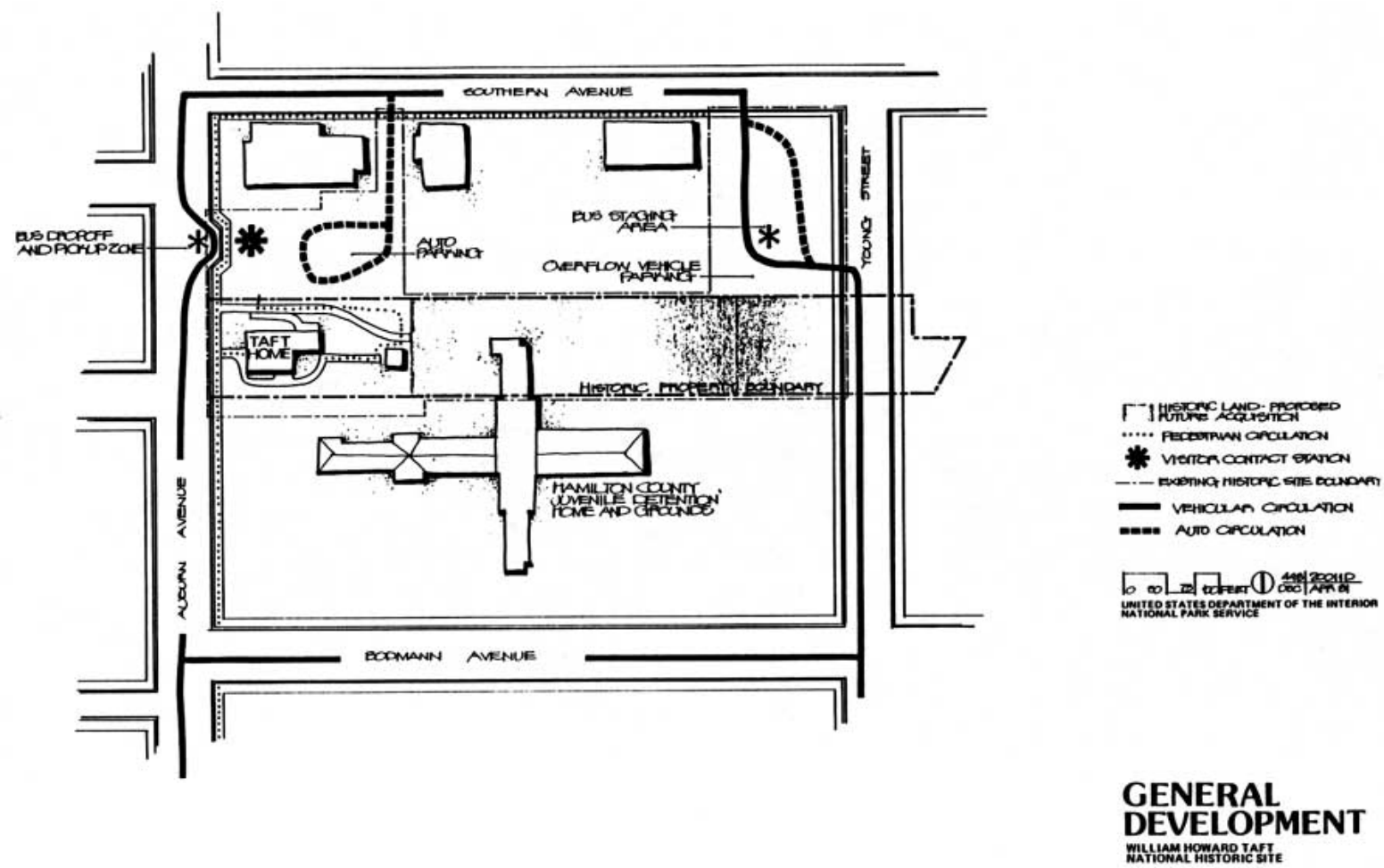


TABLE OF CONTENTS

William Howard Taft

Administrative History



APPENDIX D: ILLUSTRATIONS

- A. View of Taft home when administered by the William Howard Taft Memorial Association.
- B. View of Burkhardt property (now demolished) which stood to the south of the Taft home.
- C. View of the apartment house on Cross property (now demolished) which stood to the north of the Taft home.
- D. Floor plan from the 1981 master plan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

wiho/adhi/adhiad.htm

Last Updated: 27-Feb-2001