Home on a Hill

Administrative History of William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Ohio

Theodore Catton



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
2020



Courtesy William Howard Taft National Historic Site

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William Howard Taft, 27th President of the United States. (Library of Congress photo.)

"He was adjudged by other men in high public office to be an exemplary public servant. He was regarded by friend and foe alike as thoroughly honest, a man deserving of the highest trust."

– Gerald R. Ford

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Introduction

In 2018, the National Park Service (NPS), through the Midwest Regional Office, called for an administrative history of William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Cincinnati, Ohio, "to complete basic historical documentation of the park's history and resources as developed and managed by the National Park Service." NPS indicated further that an administrative history "is essential for present and future interpretation and resource management." This report aims to serve those needs.

William Howard Taft National Historic Site features the birthplace and boyhood home of the 27th U.S. president. The Site consists of the home and some adjoining lots on one city block in the Mount Auburn section of Cincinnati. The Site was authorized in 1969 and the home, which was purchased with private funds by the William Howard Taft Memorial Association (WHTMA), was donated to the federal government in 1970. Historic restoration of the home was completed in 1988. The Taft Education Center, containing administrative offices, a visitor reception area, and exhibit rooms, was completed in 1999. The Site operates with a staff of around eight full-time-equivalent (FTE) positions plus volunteers. The Site currently receives around 30,000 visitors annually, with a record 37,425 visits recorded in 2017.

The administrative history is organized topically. Chapter 1 provides an overview of pre-park history as essential background for the history of the Site commencing in 1969. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive legislative history of the three acts of Congress pertaining to the Site, which were enacted in 1969, 1978, and 2001. Following the authorizing legislation in 1969, two subsequent acts modified the Site's development ceiling and authorized boundary. The next four chapters cover the Site's major operational functions. These are planning and development (Chapter 3), administration (Chapter 4), interpretation (Chapter 5), and resource management (Chapter 6). The role of the Site's cooperating association and the living connection to the Taft family as well as other external relationships are the topic of the last chapter on external relations (Chapter 7).

Documentation for the administrative history consists in the first place of administrative records generated at the Site since its establishment. Park managers (1970 to 1974) and superintendents (1974 to the present) and their administrative assistants maintained subject files for correspondence, memoranda, and reports. In

general, the more recent material is maintained in the Site's central files while older material has been moved to stored files kept on-site. The stored files include some correspondence of the WHTMA from the pre-park years 1961 to 1969. Because of the trend toward electronic forms of communication, the central files contain more valuable documentation for the years from 1970 to 1995 than they do for the years from 1995 to the present. Indeed, as the trend toward paperless recordkeeping has intensified, the documentation gets sparser the closer it comes to the present. Obtaining documentation for the most recent period was the most challenging part of the research for this project. (The situation is not unique to this unit of the National Park System, but it is perhaps more pronounced in this small unit than in most units.)

Additional primary sources for documenting the administrative history came from the Midwest Regional Office, the National Archives, the Chief Historian's Office in Washington, D.C., and the Friends of the Taft Legacy Archive. Research at the Midwest Regional Office was focused on four Hollinger boxes of correspondence preserved in Accession No. MWRO-00062, which pertained mostly to planning and development in the 1970s and 1980s. Records of the NPS in the National Archives primarily span from the beginning of the twentieth century to about 1972; records



Figure 1. The Taft Education Center and the William Howard Taft home. (National Park Service.)

pertinent to this history spanned the years 1967 to 1972 and amounted to less than a half-foot of material dispersed through a handful of folders in different boxes. A similar volume of material came from the Chief Historian's Office and spanned to 1993, with most of it relating to planning and development in the 1970s. Material found in the Friends Archive spans the 1980s to the present and includes board minutes and issues of the newsletter, *Taft Times*. However, the Friends Archive is a single banker box of material and is not a comprehensive record. In summary, these additional sources did not help very much to cover the relative dearth of written records available at the Site for the years 1995 to the present.

To address the information gap, oral history interviews were conducted with a dozen people closely connected to the administrative history. They included the current and three former superintendents, the current and prior chiefs of interpretation, current and former members of the Friends, and former Governor Bob Taft and his wife Hope. Hope Taft was a key liaison between NPS, the Friends, and the Taft family. Oral history interviews were professionally transcribed and then a couple of them were edited for content by the interviewees and all were edited for readability by the contractor and submitted to NPS as a contract deliverable separate from this report.

NPS previously had an administrative history of William Howard Taft National Historic Site prepared in 1985. Antoinette J. Lee contracted with NPS to prepare that history; subsequently she became a long-serving historian in NPS. For her study, Lee consulted records at the Site, in the regional office, and in Washington and conducted six oral history interviews with individuals who were actively involved in planning and development in the 1970s and early 1980s. Lee's history, together with the six transcribed interviews, were valuable sources for this study.

This study is an update of Lee's administrative history, but it also reinterprets the period to 1985 that Lee covered in her report. Lee's history conformed to an earlier standard for NPS administrative histories. It is a somewhat cursory treatment by today's standard. More to the point, Lee's interpretation reflects the time in which the project was completed – fifteen years into a planning and development process that was still three years shy of completion. The Taft home was still not restored and open to the public for house tours when Lee prepared her report. Her six interviewees each expressed a degree of frustration and exhaustion over how protracted the process of historic restoration had become, and that was how she framed her report. Why did planning and development take so long for this Site? What were the lessons learned? From a later perspective in 2020, the many delays do not appear so unreasonable. With passage of time, the lengthy process of historic restoration of the home appears to reflect due deliberation more than it does neglect or mismanagement.

Superintendent Mary Maxine Boyd recognized the difficulty of historic restoration of the Taft home even in 1984 when she observed that it had changed

hands eight times and had been remodeled into eight separate apartments. Restoring it to the condition it was in during the period of historical significance took a lot of painstaking research and investigation. From the vantage point of today, some 30 years after the historic restoration was completed, the story of how the William Howard Taft National Historic Site developed is about how NPS sought to balance dual aims of making the home a public space and making it historically authentic. It exemplifies the dual mission of NPS to provide for public use of such places *and* preserve them for the enjoyment of future generations.

Chapter One

Pre-Park History

William Howard Taft National Historic Site features the birthplace and boyhood home of the 27th U.S. president. Established as a unit of the National Park System in 1969, the National Historic Site occupies a portion of a city block in central Cincinnati, Ohio. This chapter begins with a historical overview of the setting from prehistoric times to the mid-nineteenth century. It then provides a brief sketch of William Howard Taft's early life with reference to the home site and house history. The third part of the chapter traces the history of the property from the late nineteenth century until its designation as a National Historic Landmark in 1964.

Topography and Geology of the Cincinnati Area

The historic Taft home is situated on a hilltop that overlooks downtown Cincinnati and the Ohio River Valley. When William Howard Taft was a boy, he could stand in the front yard of his family's home and spot the smokestacks of steamboats a mile and a half away moving slowly on the Ohio River, the steamboats' tall stacks jutting above the jumble of rooftops of the nineteenth-century city. In Taft's youth, the city of Cincinnati occupied about six square miles of old river terrace situated along a gentle southern bend in the Ohio River. The core area of the city was bounded by the river on the south and a semicircle of hills rising about 300 feet above the floor of the river valley on the north, east and west. Cincinnati's first suburbs, including Mount Auburn where the Taft home was located, spread onto the surrounding hilltops, while Cincinnati's low-lying city center became known as "The Basin." There were two natural clefts in the amphitheater of hills around the city center. On the northeast, Deer Creek Valley formed a steep and narrow defile into the basin, and on the northwest the Mill Creek Valley presented a wider, more gradual approach. When William Howard Taft was a boy, the Miami and Erie Canal ran down the east side of the Mill Creek Valley roughly parallel to Mill Creek. The canal

provided a transportation route between the Ohio River and Lake Erie 274 miles to the north.[1]

Except for the manmade canal built in the early nineteenth century, the landforms and water courses around Cincinnati were largely molded eons ago in the Ice Age. Before the coming of the Ice Age much of the land area of Ohio drained northward. The Ohio River was carved when a continental ice sheet blocked the northward flowing river system, forcing the tremendous volumes of glacial meltwater to find a new outlet to the sea. The Ohio River, flowing from east to west, ran roughly transverse to the southern edge of the continental ice sheet. The Cincinnati area lay near the southern limits of glaciation.

The Ice Age covered long periods of cooler and warmer climates, which are referred to as glacial and interglacial periods respectively. During each glacial period, the cooler climate resulted in a pulse of significant glaciation when continental ice sheets formed in the north and advanced southward. During each interglacial period the ice melted, and rivers swelled to massive size. Over the course of the Ice Age, river systems at the southern limits of glaciation were drastically altered time and again. We do not know how many times the area around Cincinnati was glaciated because each glaciation scraped away the moraines left by preceding glacial advances. We do know that ice sheets extended south of Cincinnati before the Illinoian Stage, which began about 300,000 years ago, because pre-Illinoian glacial till was deposited as far south as northern Kentucky.

In the Illinoian Stage, the continental ice sheet reached to Cincinnati via a long valley glacier extending down what is now the Great Miami River. During a warmer period within the Illinoian Stage, from 240,000 to 230,000 years ago, massive glacial runoff caused greater river erosion, so that the Ohio River Valley became deeper, and hillsides steeper. By the end of the Illinoian Stage, the deeply incised Ohio River Valley partially filled with glacial outwash, reducing the amount of relief and creating the broad valley of today.

In the Wisconsinan Stage, which began about 150,000 years ago, the glaciation never advanced as far south as the Ohio River though at various glacial maximums it extended as far as modern Cincinnati's northern suburbs. Glacial outwash deposited during the Wisconsinan Stage formed large sand pits such as the one at Elizabethtown on Cincinnati's west side. As the Wisconsinan Stage ended, the Ohio River cut away the outwash deposits and the present floodplain was formed.[2]

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[1] Zane L. Miller, *Boss Cox's Cincinnati: Urban Politics in the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 3-4.
[2] Mark J. Camp, *Roadside Geology of Ohio* (Missoula, Mont.: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2006), 342-44.

Indigenous Peoples of the Cincinnati Area

North America's first peoples probably came into the region by the close of the Ice Age. Known to modern archeology as Paleo-Indians, these primitive forebears of American Indian tribes lived in small groups and hunted mammoth and other big game for subsistence. As the climate warmed and the environment changed, the Cincinnati area's ancient peoples developed more elaborate forms of subsistence based on hunting and gathering and limited horticulture, as well as far-flung trade networks. In time, the Ohio River Valley became an important artery for travel and commerce. As the ancestors of American Indian tribes went further into horticulture, they took advantage of the fertile soil found in the Ohio River floodplain and established settlements nearby. They also evolved more complex societies. Earthen mounds that once existed in what is now Cincinnati's central business district are evidence of the Adena culture that flourished in southwest Ohio from around 2200 to 3000 years ago.[3]

Around A.D. 100, long-distance trade relationships emanating from the Ohio Valley formed into an exchange network that came to stretch across the continent. Archeologists call this exchange system the Hopewell tradition. The Hopewell culture in southern Ohio reached its climax from about A.D. 100 to 500. The Hopewell culture featured permanent villages and a pronounced social hierarchy. Hopewellian people's distinctive arts and crafts were traded far beyond the Ohio Valley. The Hopewell culture created numerous mound complexes. A cluster of mounds located two miles north of the modern-day town of Chillicothe, which is about 100 miles east of Cincinnati, was preserved in Mound City Group National Monument in 1923. Today, Hopewell Culture National Historical Park encompasses the former Mound City Group and five other sites of ancient earthworks in southern Ohio.[4]

Around A.D. 1000, the Fort Ancient culture emerged in the lower Ohio River Valley. Fort Ancient peoples adopted maize agriculture and lived in larger settlements. They traded over a wide area. Their culture was influenced by the Middle Mississippian culture that centered at Cahokia near the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers and featured chiefdoms and walled towns supported by outlying hamlets and agricultural production. Like the Mississippians, the Fort Ancient peoples were mound builders who left behind numerous enduring earthworks, including Serpent Mound, now preserved as a National Historic Landmark. The Fort Ancient culture went into decline around the sixteenth century as European-borne diseases decimated American Indian peoples across eastern North America. (Although the

[3] Greg Hand, "The Long-Lost Prehistoric Mounds of Downtown Cincinnati," *Cincinnati Magazine*, February 1, 2016.
[4] Ron Cockrell, *Amidst Ancient Monuments: The Administrative History of Mound City Group National Monument/Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, Ohio*, Chapter Four (no pagination), at https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/hocu/adhi/adhit.htm <June 25, 2019>.

Spanish DeSoto expedition of the 1540s almost certainly did not travel as far north as Ohio as was once believed, the effects of European contact with indigenous peoples ramified far beyond the actual point of contact.) The Cincinnati area fell within a broad region located along the lower Ohio River that was so depopulated archeologists now term the region "the Vacant Quarter."[5]

With the arrival of the French on the St. Lawrence River in the 1600s, various American Indian tribes fought for the position of most favored trading partner in the nascent trans-Atlantic fur trade. Although the Iroquois of New York quickly rose to dominance, their position became tenuous when French fur traders sought contact with other tribes farther west. To protect their position, the five nations of the Iroquois (later six) formed a confederacy and waged war on their weaker neighbors, winning control over the Ohio Valley all the way down to the Mississippi by around 1655. Although the Iroquois did not move their villages into the Ohio country, they claimed that region as their exclusive hunting preserve. For the next forty years, the Iroquois sought to restrict movement down the Ohio River as well as prevent French contact with the Illinois country. Other tribes and the French defied the Iroquois at their peril. Finally, in the 1690s, the French allied with Algonquian tribes of the Great Lakes Region to vanquish the Iroquois Confederacy. Once the Iroquois power was broken, the largely vacant or deserted Ohio country attracted tribes from the east whose lands were being invaded by American colonists. The principal tribes moving in were the Shawnees, the Delawares, and the Wyandots. Those three tribes occupied the area between the late 1730s and the early 1750s. The Delawares occupied the hill country in what is now eastern Ohio. The Wyandots settled around Lake Erie. The Shawnees made their new settlements on the lower Ohio and its tributaries in what is now southwestern Ohio. Other tribes who invested the Ohio country in the eighteenth century included the Miamis in the northwest and the Mingos in the northeast.[6]

Fur Trade and Empire and the New American Republic

The several American Indian tribes who came to occupy the Ohio country in the eighteenth century assumed a prominent role in the fur trade there. As the British challenged the French for domination of the fur trade in the Trans-Appalachian West the newcomer tribes reluctantly transferred their allegiance to the rising British. But the situation was complicated and fluid. At the end of the French and Indian War in

[5] George Milner, "Population Decline and Culture Change in the American Midcontinent: Bridging the Prehistoric and Historic Divide," in *Beyond Germs: Native Depopulation in North America*, edited by Catherine M. Cameron, Paul Kelton, and Alan C. Swedlund (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 59-60.

[6] W. J. Eccles, *France in America*, rev. ed. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1990), 90-98; R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 6-10.

1763, when the Ohio Indians were informed that France had ceded all its possessions in North America to Britain and Spain, many tribes in the Great Lakes region and the Ohio country joined in a war against British rule. The Shawnees took part in this war, which was led by the Odawa chief Pontiac. Peace was only restored when the Shawnees and the other Ohio Indians came to regard the British as their most reliable bulwark against an invasion of white settlers from the American colonies.

The uneasy friendship between the Shawnees and the British persisted up to and through the American Revolutionary War. In the Treaty of Paris of 1783 that ended the Revolutionary War, the Ohio country nominally passed to the control of the new American Republic, but British traders maintained their forts and continued doing business with the Ohio Indians even as American settlers began making inroads into the Ohio country in the 1780s and early 1790s. Friendly relations between the Shawnees and the British remained a thorn in the side of the young American Republic long after British traders at last withdrew from American soil in the mid 1790s. Continued intrigue between the British and American Indians was among the causes of the War of 1812 between the United States and Britain.

Meanwhile, American independence had unleashed a flood of migration of American settlers into the Trans-Appalachian West. On December 28, 1788, a party of twenty-eight men came down the Ohio River in flatboats and founded Cincinnati. The new settlement was called Losantiville but the name was changed to Cincinnati the following year. In August 1789, Fort Washington was established across the river in Kentucky, and as Cincinnati came under the fort's protection its future as a major settlement on the Ohio was assured. With the U.S. Army's victory over American Indian tribes at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, immigration into the Ohio Valley increased and Cincinnati's population grew. When the area was secured from attack and Fort Washington was abandoned in 1803, Cincinnati had a population of about 1,000. Cincinnati became a market town for the agricultural settlement spreading up the Little Miami River Valley, as farmers shipped their produce down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans. The city recorded 2,320 residents in the 1810 census, and 9,642 in 1820. Ohio became a state in 1803 and had a population of 230,760 in 1810.[7]

American Indian resistance to U.S. settlement of the Ohio country culminated with the Shawnee chief Tecumseh's effort to unite tribes and fight alongside the British in the War of 1812. In the Battle of the Thames, Tecumseh was killed and his dream of forming an Indian confederacy under British protection in the Old Northwest

[7] Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier*, 186-89, 375.

died. When the War of 1812 ended, Indian power in the Old Northwest was shattered and removal of the Ohio Indians to points westward commenced.[8]

As the Ohio Indians were compelled to cede their lands, tribe by tribe, to the federal government, American farmers and land speculators rushed in to purchase the newly available public lands. Ohio's population increased to 581,434 in 1820, to 937,903 in 1830, and to 1,519,467 in 1840. Among the immigrants was Alphonso Taft of Vermont, father of William Howard Taft.

Queen City of the West

Even before Alphonso Taft arrived there in 1838, Cincinnati became one of America's leading cities. Cincinnati's location on the Ohio River together with its rich agricultural hinterland soon turned the frontier town into a thriving interior port city. Boosters called it the "Queen of the West," a sobriquet that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow popularized in his poem "Catawba Wine." It was also called "Porkopolis" for its many slaughterhouses and meatpacking plants. The meatpacking industry developed in conjunction with the growth of hog farms in the Scioto and Miami river valleys north of the city. The meatpacking industry spun off various byproduct industries, such as the manufacturing of lard, soap, glue, candles, buttons, shoe polish, brushes, fertilizer, and mattresses, which further stimulated the growth of hog farms. Other support industries, such as barrel making, flourished as well. With all the corn and barley grown in the area, Cincinnati developed steam-powered flour mills and breweries. With all the commerce on the river, which facilitated the importing of raw materials and exporting of finished products, numerous craft shops such as furniture makers and hat makers sprang up. The Queen City became the biggest manufacturing center in the Trans-Appalachian West. By 1820, Cincinnati's manufacturing sector employed more than a thousand workers who produced goods valued at more than $1 million annually.[9]

Over the next three decades, the growth of manufacturing jobs in Cincinnati attracted many European immigrants, mainly Germans and Irish, as well as a smaller number of African Americans many of whom had fled Southern slavery. From 1830 to 1850, Cincinnati's population rose from 26,515 to 115,435, with nearly half the new arrivals coming from abroad. By 1850, German immigrants accounted for 27 percent of the city's population, Irish immigrants comprised another 12 percent, and English-born residents contributed 4 percent, while native-born residents made up only a slim majority of the city's population. Most of those native-born Cincinnatians hailed

[8] Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier*, 315-44.
[9] Ibid, 354.

originally from Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland, or New England.[10]

The city that Alphonso Taft knew in the 1840s and 1850s was already forming spatially around those ethnic and class divisions. Because Cincinnati was still small enough to be a walking city, the wealthy and privileged class lived nearest to the city center while the working class lived farthest out from it. The city center began at the edge of the river where steamboats tied up and off-loaded their cargoes. In those days the edge of the river was a long, sloping embankment that rose 57 vertical feet above the river at low stage. On the crest of the riverbank stood a long row of commercial buildings. On the other side of the commercial buildings, the city's retail and financial district occupied the next several streets running on parallels back from the waterfront.



Figure 2. Cincinnati waterfront in 1848. Mount Auburn is visible beyond the rooftops. (Smithsonian Institution.)

Cincinnati's wealthiest residents lived in two posh locations at the east and west ends of this central district. The city's native-born, white, Protestant residents lived in the area immediately surrounding this central district, while the foreign-born, working-class population mostly lived farther back toward the foot of the hills. The city's poorest residents – mostly Irish and African Americans – made their humble abodes in the Ohio River bottoms amidst the factories and warehouses.[11]

[10] Daniel W. Young and Christopher A. Cain, *Over-the-Rhine: A Description and History* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Cincinnati City Planning Department, Historic Conservation Office, 1995), 9.
[11] Miller, *Boss Cox's Cincinnati*, 4.

Within this rough stratification of the Basin by class and ethnicity there was some further partitioning of the city population. The Germans congregated in an area of the Basin called Over-the-Rhine, so named because it lay north of the "Rhine," their nickname for the Miami and Erie Canal. (The canal has since been converted into West Central Parkway). When Alphonso Taft arrived in Cincinnati in 1838, most of the dwelling units in the Over-the-Rhine quarter consisted of one-story wood-frame houses, while the canal was lined with meat-packing plants and tallow and soap factories. Through the next decade, the German immigrant population of Cincinnati grew to approximately 43,000 and Over-the-Rhine became a thriving ethnic community with its own German-language newspapers, churches, breweries, grocery stores, and theaters. By 1855, the commercial activity in Over-the-Rhine centered at Findlay Market, located between Elm and Race Streets, where the lively market days became an enduring urban tradition.[12]



Figure 3. Miami and Erie Canal. (Wikimedia Commons.)

Besides Over-the-Rhine, another ethnic enclave formed where a small community of free people of color occupied one city block on McAllister Street in what was then the southeast edge of the central district. (The street no longer exists; the city block was located east of Broadway between Fourth and Fifth Streets.) The Dumas House on McAllister Street served as a hotel where slaveowners visiting the city lodged their slaves, and it served, too, secretly, as a station on the Underground Railroad.[13]

Finally, Cincinnati had a small population of commuters who lived outside the Basin. Some of these commuters lived in villages located some six to twelve miles out of the city. Commuting to their jobs by way of the turnpike, some by horse and some on foot, these people were apt to work in the city only intermittently or seasonally. Another class of commuters were well-to-do city residents who made their homes on the nearby hilltops around the edge of the basin. With less than an hour's walk to the center of the city, the hilltop resident could enjoy certain advantages over living in the Basin, such as being farther removed from the stench and filth of the city's

[12] Young and Cain, *Over-the-Rhine*, 11.
[13] Jeff Suess, "Our History: Book a trove of city's African-American history," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, February 6, 2019.

slaughterhouses and having a view of the river valley. The hilltops were already regarded in the antebellum period as Cincinnati's future suburbs.[14]

Cincinnati in the Period of William Howard Taft's Early Life

The city that formed a backdrop to William Howard Taft's early life was a city in transition. The decade before the Civil War was Cincinnati's golden age, when great rivers like the Ohio were still the nation's main arteries of commerce and the city's geographic placement on the border of the Slave South made it a major port for northern exports to the South. With the coming of the railroads, Cincinnati began losing ground to two other rising cities, St. Louis and Chicago. With the coming of the Civil War, Cincinnati had to forego its lucrative trade with the South. Still, it came through the Civil War unscathed, continued to grow, and had a population of over 200,000 in 1870.[15]

In the 1860s and 70s, the Basin grew into a congested city center. Meatpacking and manufacturing industries continued to flourish along the canal even as use of the canal itself declined. Over-the-Rhine became a densely inhabited quarter where three- to five-story row houses now stood in place of the single-story dwellings of antebellum days. German immigrants made up nearly half the population of the city, and a sizable majority of residents in Over-the-Rhine, and German cultural influence on the city reached a peak. Breweries and beer gardens did a thriving business. German music festivals contributed to the city's first architectural marvel: the Cincinnati Music Hall on Elm Street completed in 1878.[16]

In the 1870s, five new inclined-plane railways were constructed on the hillsides around the Basin to ease the commute between Cincinnati's downtown area and emerging suburbs. In the following decade, the cable cars were electrified, and a rapid transit system was developed. These changes made it possible for working class people to move out of the Basin into new neighborhoods farther out. Significant outmigration began around 1870 and the population of the Basin steadily fell thereafter.[17]

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[14] Scruggs and Hammond, Inc., *William Howard Taft National Historic Site Cultural Landscape Report*, report prepared for the National Park Service (Omaha, Nebr.: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 1993), 9-10.
[15] Henry F. Pringle, *The Life and Times of William Howard Taft: A Biography*, Volume 1 (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1939), 20.
[16] Zane L. Miller and Bruce Tucker, *Changing Plans for America's Inner Cities: Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine and Twentieth-Century Urbanism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 1; Young and Cain, *Over-the-Rhine*, 12-15.
[17] Henry Louis Taylor, Jr., "City Building, Public Policy, the Rise of the Industrial City, and Black Ghetto-Slum Formation in Cincinnati, 1850-1940," in *Race and the City: Work, Community and Protest*

Mount Auburn, where William Howard Taft grew up, still had somewhat of a village character when Taft was a boy. Residences were strung along streets that only a decade earlier had possessed the rough quality of country roads. Residential lots were long and narrow: long to allow room behind each dwelling for gardens, fruit trees, livestock pens, and outbuildings; and narrow to minimize street frontage because homeowners were taxed by the foot for road maintenance. The hilltop communities sometimes went by the term "liberties" because they initially formed beyond the reach of city tax collectors. There were seven distinct hilltop communities, and they were separated from one another by green fields and open lots. Reading Road and a ravine separated Mount Auburn from the adjacent community of Walnut Hills.[18]

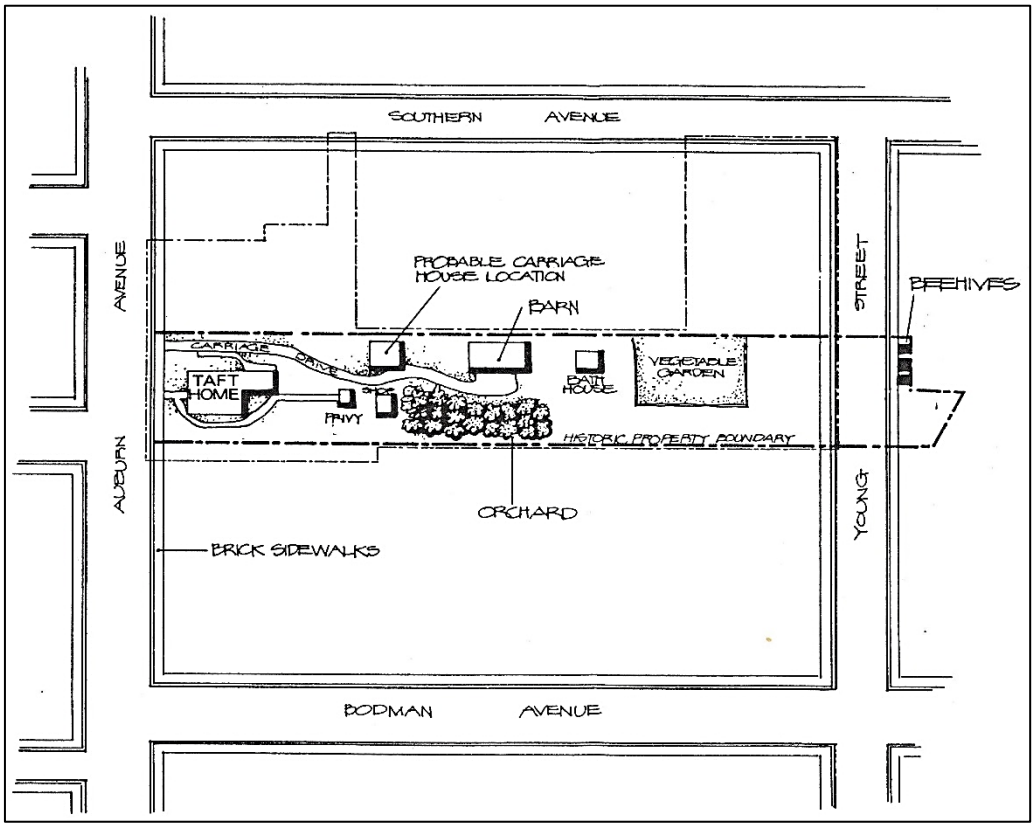


Figure 4. Conjectural plan of the Taft property on Auburn Street around 1870. (National Park Service.)

Mount Auburn was one of the first hilltop villages annexed by the city. Part of the area – including the location of the Taft home – was incorporated into the city in 1849. The remainder was annexed by 1870. Auburn Road (the name changed to Auburn Street and then Auburn Avenue) was widened from a country road to its present width around 1863. By 1870, this suburban thoroughfare had been improved with sidewalks and paved with brick-shaped wooden blocks, known as Nicholson

in Cincinnati, 1820-1970, edited by Henry Louis Taylor, Jr. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 158.

[18] Pringle, *Life and Times*, 20.

pavement. Southern Avenue, a cross street just north of the Taft property, was also paved and lined with sidewalks.[19]

Growth of the urban area and the city's rapid transit system, population shifts from the Basin to the hilltops, and annexations of the hilltop suburbs all combined to bring about major changes in Cincinnati's size and character in the period from 1857 to 1890 when Will Taft was a resident. Halfway through this period in 1874 – the year that Will Taft graduated from high school – Cincinnati was still a walking city. That year, the leading professional and businessmen of the city, including Alphonso Taft, established the exclusive Queen City Club as a place to meet and socialize. At that time all the club members worked in the city and nearly all lived within walking distance of the clubhouse. But the walking city was rapidly being transformed into a commuter city. By 1880, the urban railway system had 76 miles of track. The electrically powered streetcars enabled people to commute long distances from outlying areas to the city center. Growing numbers of people moved out of the Basin to newer housing and quieter, healthier residential neighborhoods on the hilltops and beyond. After Mount Auburn was annexed to the city other annexations followed. The city expanded in area from six square miles in 1850 to 22.22 square miles in 1880. The population shift out of the Basin ended Cincinnati's days as a walking city where people of different classes, races, and ethnicities all lived in proximity. It marked the rise of the industrial city in which the relatively prosperous citizens lived in suburbs characterized by single-family dwelling units while the submerged classes lived in the core area, near factories and businesses, in neighborhoods characterized by multi-family tenements.[20]

Louise and Alphonso Taft

A visitor to the birthplace of William Howard Taft is soon impressed by the personalities of two lesser known figures in the nation's history: the mother and father of the 27th president of the United States, Louise and Alphonso Taft. The couple made their home in the house at 60 Auburn Street from 1854 to 1889. They raised six children to adulthood in the home including the future president. Over the course of their 47 years of marriage, Alphonso Taft had a distinguished career as a lawyer, judge on the Ohio Supreme Court, secretary of war and attorney general of the United States in the Grant administration, U.S. minister to Austria-Hungary and Russia in the Arthur administration, and longtime Republican Party operative. He was the founder of an American political dynasty, the Tafts of Ohio. The roll call of public figures in this

[19] Scruggs and Hammond, Inc., *William Howard Taft National Historic Site Cultural Landscape Report*, 10-11.
[20] Miller, *Boss Cox's Cincinnati*, 5-8.

lineage would come to include not only a U.S. president in Alphonso's son but a succession of Ohio senators and governors in Alphonso's grandson, great-grandson, and great-great-grandson.[21]

Alphonso Taft was born in West Townshend, Vermont on November 5, 1810. Both his mother and father traced their ancestry back to early colonial New England. Alphonso was an only child, raised on a farm, and educated at Amherst and Yale. At the latter institution he earned a law degree, starting a long family tradition of Tafts going to Yale for law. He moved to Cincinnati in 1838, completing his legal apprenticeship in the office of Nathaniel Wright, a fellow Vermonter. Three years later Alphonso briefly returned to West Townshend, Vermont to take a wife, Fanny Phelps, whom he had signaled as a prospective mate before he left. Alphonso and his first wife Fanny had five children together, of whom just two – Charles Phelps and Peter Rawson – survived to adulthood. Fanny always had frail health. She died on June 2, 1852 at the age of 29. Alphonso was a widower for just eighteen months. He returned east and married Louisa Maria Torrey of Millbury, Massachusetts on December 26, 1853.[22]

Louise (the name she went by) and Alphonso had five children, four surviving to adulthood. Their first, Samuel Davenport Torrey, was born in 1855 and died in 1856 at fourteen months. Their second child, the future president, William Howard, was born on September 15, 1857. Two more sons and a daughter followed: Henry Waters in 1859, Horace Dutton in 1861, and Fanny Louise in 1865. With Alphonso's two older sons by his first wife, the children made a nuclear family of eight. Alphonso's parents were also part of the household, having moved west to live with their son many years before Alphonso and Louise were married.[23]

While the Taft family grew, Alphonso forged ahead in his legal profession. As a rising attorney, he often traveled to Columbus to argue cases. He took a strong interest in railroads, helped with the incorporation of the Marietta and Cincinnati Railroad, and served on the board of the Little Miami Railroad. By the late 1840s he was in a law partnership, Taft, Key and Dixon. In 1854, he entered a new partnership

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[21] Ishbel Ross, *An American Family: The Tafts 1678-1964* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1964), 3. Asked about the Taft political dynasty when interviewed for this project, former Governor Bob Taft made an interesting observation. He noted that Alphonso Taft was involved with the founding of the Republican Party in Ohio prior to the Civil War, and that he was politically well-connected when a series of Ohio politicians ascended to the presidency in the decades after the Civil War. Both Alphonso Taft and William Howard Taft reaped the benefit as they received appointments in the administrations of Ulysses S. Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes, Benjamin Harrison, and William McKinley, all Ohioans. And President Warren G. Harding, another Ohioan, appointed William Howard Taft to the U.S. Supreme Court. (Bob and Hope Taft, interview by Theodore Catton, April 12, 2019.)

[22] Ross, *An American Family*, 4-19.

[23] Edwin C. Bearss, *Historic Structure Report: Historical Data – Home, William Howard Taft National Historic Site* (Denver: National Park Service, Denver Service Center, 1972), 3, 33, 42, 57, 72.

with another attorney and friend, Aaron Perry. This partnership lasted a decade and was finally dissolved when Perry moved to another city.[24]

During this time Alphonso also took an interest in politics. Long before the Republican Party sprang into existence, Alphonso was active in Whig Party politics and campaigned for the Harrison-Tyler presidential ticket in 1840. In the political storm over the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, Alphonso stood on the anti-slavery side and watched with interest the birth of the Republican Party that year. He and Louise heard abolitionist Frederick Douglass speak in Cincinnati. In 1856, Alphonso was a delegate to the Republican National Convention. He also made an unsuccessful bid for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.[25]

Alphonso and Louise were forward thinking on many social issues. One issue they cared strongly about was juvenile justice. In 1850, Alphonso and his first wife Fanny helped found Cincinnati's House of Refuge. This institution was modeled on others in New York and Philadelphia and aimed to provide a humane setting for the incarceration of delinquent and abandoned children. The concept, progressive for the times, was to place juvenile lawbreakers in separate custody from adult criminals. (Cincinnati's House of Refuge closed in 1912 and bears no relationship to the Hamilton County Juvenile Court Youth Center that now stands directly behind the historic Taft home.) Alphonso and Louise opposed slavery and were sympathetic to abolitionists. They supported the antislavery cause in the Civil War and wanted to protect African Americans' civil rights in Reconstruction. Louise took an interest in women's suffrage and the temperance movement.[26]

In matters of religion, Alphonso was a staunch defender of freedom of worship and the principle of separation of church and state. In 1855, he presided at the opening of Zion College, center of the Hebrew Union College, the nation's first Jewish theological seminary. He and Louise belonged to the Unitarian Church, the most liberal of Protestant denominations. At an inter-denominational fundraiser for relief during the Civil War, Louise found the Unitarians were being shunned by all the other church groups. She brushed it off, remarking "our church invited in all the heathen who didn't belong anywhere."[27]

Alphonso Taft's political star rose after the Civil War. In December 1865, he was appointed by the governor of Ohio to a vacant judgeship on the Superior Court of Cincinnati. After finishing out the term Alphonso stood for election and stayed on the bench for two three-year terms. In 1869, he ruled in a case involving the Bible and

[24] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 4, 21, 62; Ross, *An American Family*, 23.
[25] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 3, 21; Ross, *An American Family*, 23; Lewis Alexander Leonard, *Life of Alphonso Taft* (New York: Hawke Publishing Company, 1920), 105-09.
[26] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 4, 85-86.
[27] Ross, *An American Family*, 23-24, 39.

public schools. Alphonso opined that the Bible should not be read or taught in the public schools because there should be no state religion. The opinion may have cost him standing with Ohio voters, but it was upheld by the Ohio Supreme Court and he was proud of it.[28]

Near the end of the scandal-ridden Grant administration, Alphonso Taft was called to replace disgraced Secretary of War William B. Belknap. Before the administration ended, President Grant shuffled his cabinet appointments and moved Taft to the position of U.S. attorney general. Serving as U.S. attorney general in the aftermath of the closely contested presidential election of 1876, Alphonso Taft worked with the chair of the House Judiciary Committee, Democrat James Proctor Knott of Kentucky, to draft legislation that provided the vehicle for framing the Compromise of 1877.[29]

Alphonso Taft's last bout of public service began five years later when he was appointed U.S. minister to Austria-Hungary in 1882 for the Arthur administration. As the seven Taft children were by then all out of the home on Auburn Street, Alphonso and Louise went on their own to Vienna to take up residence in the U.S. legation there. After two years of service in Vienna, Alphonso was appointed U.S. minister to Russia and the couple went to St. Petersburg. The Russian winter proved to be hard on Alphonso, who was now 74 years old, and so he was relieved of his foreign service and the couple returned to Cincinnati in the spring of 1885.[30]

Alphonso and Louise resided in the family home at 60 Auburn Street again until 1889, when they moved to California. Alphonso died in 1891; Louise survived him by another sixteen years and died in 1907. While neither one lived to see their son become president of the United States, they did live to see all their sons well established in their chosen professions. Their oldest son, Charles Phelps, graduated from Columbia Law School, started a law practice, and was elected to the Ohio state legislature in 1869. He married Anna Sinton, an heiress to a pig iron fortune, in 1873, and became a newspaper publisher. He was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives and served one term in 1895-96. Alphonso's second son, Peter Rawson, and Alphonso's three sons by Louise, William Howard, Henry Waters, and Horace Dutton, all followed in their father's footsteps to Yale Law School. Peter Rawson practiced law with his older brother but while still a young man he suffered a breakdown and a divorce and died of consumption at the age of 43. For Alphonso, his second son's demise was "the major grief of his life." William Howard, meanwhile, vaulted into the position of judge on the Ohio Supreme Court when he was just 29.

[28] Jeffrey Rosen, *William Howard Taft* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2018), 19; Ross, *An American Family*, 54.
[29] Leonard, *Life of Alphonso Taft*, 164-65.
[30] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 167-68, 186.

Henry Waters became a successful antitrust lawyer. Horace Dutton chose to give up his law practice to become an educator. This was the shape of the Taft family – already steeped in law and public service – when Alphonso and Louise neared the end of their lives.

Early Life of William Howard Taft

William Howard Taft National Historic Site, as the birthplace and boyhood home of a U.S. president, naturally focuses attention on the early life of the 27th president. The visitor who tours the Taft home is stimulated to learn about Taft's nature as a child, how he was nurtured, and how those things contributed to the making of a president.

His parents remarked on what a fat baby he was, prefiguring the fame he would one day achieve as the fattest president in the nation's history. When he was seven weeks old, Louise wrote that "he is very large of his age and grows fat every day…. He has such a large waist, that he cannot wear any of the dresses that are made with belts." Alphonso wrote that his infant son was a "noble, healthy, fast-growing boy." Both parents were relieved that their son had a robust constitution for they still grieved over the loss of their firstborn, Samuel Davenport Torrey, who had been slight from birth.[31]

Louise and Alphonso also delighted in Will's good nature. Louise wrote that their cherubic baby "spreads his hands to anyone who will take him and his face is wreathed in smiles at the slightest provocation." Will's pleasant disposition as an infant stuck with him through his boyhood and on into his adult life. As a youngster he was amiable and gregarious; when he became a politician and statesman, he maintained a smiling demeanor and a self-deprecating sense of humor. Yet, as biographer Jeffrey Rosen tells us, he was also given to "spasms of anger" throughout his life. In one incident, which occurred when Taft was a student at Yale, Taft acted on impulse in an encounter with a newspaper editor who had published something critical about his father. "Will confronted the editor on the street, lifted him up, and bashed his head repeatedly against the ground," Rosen writes.[32]

Will grew up surrounded by brothers. His only sister Fanny Louise was the youngest child and eight years younger than him. He was closest in age to his two younger brothers, but he was emotionally close to all his siblings including the two older half-brothers. Louise treated her two stepsons the same as her own four children and knit them all into a tight family circle. The two older brothers, Charles Phelps and

[31] Pringle, *Life and Times*, 3; Ross, *An American Family*, 27.
[32] Pringle, *Life and Times*, 3; Rosen, *William Howard Taft*, 20.

Peter Rawson, would be strong advocates for Will as he moved into political life in his early adulthood. Indeed, Charles would support Will financially. The seeds of those important adult relationships were planted when Will was very young. For example, in the summer of 1860, when Charles was preparing to leave home for college, he took his brother Will to the circus. Charles was seventeen and Will was just three at the time. Peter and Will overlapped in the Taft home for a few more years than Charles and Will did. "Rossy," as Peter was called, liked to hunt rabbits and birds in the woods and meadows behind the house.[33]

At the age of nine, Will was involved in a serious accident. He was riding in a horse-drawn carriage down Sycamore Street when the horse suddenly bolted, overturning the carriage on the steep hill. The carriage driver was thrown clear, but Will was dragged down the street with the overturned carriage, his head banging on the paving stones. He was pulled from the wreckage with deep lacerations to his scalp and taken into a house on Mulberry Street near the scene to be bandaged. Later that day he was transferred to the Taft home on Auburn Street, but his mother still feared for his life at first as she nursed him through his recovery.[34]

Will and his two younger brothers attended the Sixteenth District School, a public school that was located near the present location of Taft Elementary School. Will performed well in his academic pursuits and was at the top of his class. From a young age he had to face down his mother's and father's high expectations of him, which were constantly expressed in the most exacting terms. His grandfather piled on, once threatening to give him a licking if he did not measure up to his older brothers' performance. The boy pushed back a little, and the constant pressure to excel was a psychological conditioning that probably contributed to his complex feelings about his personal ambition later in life. "You expect great things of me," he wrote his father from Yale, "but you mustn't be disappointed if I don't come up to your expectations."[35]

Will's boyhood friends knew him as "Big Lub." Tall and stout for his age, he was a prize recruit whenever the young boys of Mount Auburn ventured out to play "war" with the young boys of the neighboring village of Walnut Hills who lived across the no-mans-land of Reading Road. Will sometimes led those marauding expeditions with his younger brothers in tow, and as he was called "Big Lub" the younger ones were nicknamed "Lub" and "Little Lub." Will's boyhood years coincided with the Civil War and Reconstruction. His other idle pursuits in those years

[33] Ross, *An American Family*, 32.
[34] Ibid, 48.
[35] Pringle, *Life and Times*, 22, 24, 35; Jonathan Lurie, *William Howard Taft: The Travails of a Progressive Conservative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 6-7.

included ice skating on the canal in winter, swimming in that dubious waterbody in summer, and playing baseball.[36]

Will went to Woodward High School in 1870 and graduated in 1874. His courses included Latin, Greek, mathematics, history, and elocution – the curriculum for college preparation. His grades averaged to 93.73 in his first year, 94.28 in the second, a faltering 86.84 in the third, and 91 in his senior year. His grades put him in good standing with the second highest score in his graduating class. His grades for deportment never dipped below 92.[37]

Woodward High School was highly regarded by the people of Cincinnati, being one of the first public schools in the nation when it was founded in 1826. His parents were staunch supporters of the public-school system. William Howard Taft was proud of his high school, too, serving as head of its alumni association from 1883 to 1884. He returned to Cincinnati when he was U.S. president-elect to lay the cornerstone of the new school when it changed location in November 1908. The school was co-ed and the school faculty probably deserve credit (together with Louise and Alphonso) for nurturing Will Taft's relatively advanced thinking on women's rights. He wrote a high school essay on woman suffrage in which he praised coeducation and voiced ideas that might be viewed today as proto feminist.[38]



Figure 5. William Howard Taft, center, with a young people's literary club. His future wife Helen Herron is seated to his left and his brother Horace is at the extreme right. (William Howard Taft National Historic Site.)

[36] Pringle, *Life and Times*, 20-21.
[37] Ibid, 28.
[38] Ibid, 28-30.

William Howard Taft's Historical Reputation

William Howard Taft was elected president in November 1908 and served in the White House one term. His administration (1909-13) came at a tumultuous time in American history when the industrial revolution was changing the face of the country, cities were struggling with congestion and poverty, immigration was at floodtide, and the people were demanding a host of political and social reforms. Yet Taft is one of our lesser known presidents. His place in history is sandwiched between the two much more famous presidential administrations of Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1908) and Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921). Roosevelt and Wilson won a place in history as the nation's first modern presidents, and in that august company Taft does not shine. In comparison, he appears not so much like a twentieth-century president as a throwback to the line of lackluster presidents who occupied the White House from Reconstruction through the end of the nineteenth century.

Historian John Milton Cooper, Jr. made a comparative study of the Roosevelt and Wilson administrations in his book *The Warrior and the Priest.* Cooper tells us that, as much as the fiery Roosevelt and the professorial Wilson differed from one another, they jointly "shaped the American presidency" by seizing upon and expanding three powerful aspects of the office. Those three aspects were public dramatization, education of the people, and party leadership. In a word, Roosevelt and Wilson used the office of chief executive as their "bully pulpit." Taft did not. He held a different view of presidential authority as being *limited* by the separation of powers between three branches of government and constrained by the U.S. Constitution. In the century and more since Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson were in the White House presidential power only became greater. In general – with some crucial reservations – the public endorsed the modern conception of the presidency that Roosevelt and Wilson first espoused. Taft's more modest conception of the presidency was rejected. Writing about Taft in the 1960s, biographer Donald F. Anderson stated, "Although Taft was an upright, dedicated, and courageous public servant, he has never become a model for succeeding presidents to emulate." Notwithstanding Vietnam War era concerns to prevent the emergence of an "imperial presidency," Taft's conservative view of presidential power remains out of favor to this day. So, it is not surprising that his presidency attracts so little notice.[39]

The first significant biography of William Howard Taft was the two-volume work by Henry F. Pringle published in 1939. This large work, titled *The Life and Times of William Howard Taft*, stood as the last word on Taft for many years and cemented Taft's reputation as a mediocre president. In Pringle's interpretation, Taft

[39] John Milton Cooper, Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), xi; Donald F. Anderson, *William Howard Taft: A Conservative's Conception of the Presidency* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), 3.

was an honorable man and exceptional administrator, but he was ultimately a sad figure who was hopelessly miscast to occupy the White House as the successor to Theodore Roosevelt. The key to understanding Taft was to be found in his judicial temperament. The rough and tumble of politics was not his preferred domain. Judgeships and the law were his haven. Though he rose through politics to be president, always his true ambition was to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. Three times in his career Taft was appointed to the bench: first to the Superior Court of Cincinnati in 1889, next to the Sixth Circuit Court in 1892, and finally to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1921. Taft's term in the White House was, oddly, a detour on his road to the highest court. Pringle was critical of Taft the politician, and the tone of his book was belittling. He referred to Taft's three judicial appointments as his first, second, and third "harbors." Pringle's condescending attitude toward Taft derived from his earlier biography of Theodore Roosevelt, which was critical yet favorable toward its subject, and which won the Pulitzer Prize.[40]

A generation after Pringle's Taft biography, two more Taft biographies appeared: *William Howard Taft: A Conservative's Conception of the Presidency* by Donald F. Anderson (1968) and *The Presidency of William Howard Taft* by Paolo E. Coletta (1973). Neither book challenged the orthodoxy that Taft was a mediocre chief executive. Soon came another biography, *William Howard Taft: An Intimate History* by Judith Icke Anderson (1981). Modeled after the psychobiography of Thomas Jefferson by Fawn Brodie (Anderson was Brodie's student and the book was her Ph.D. dissertation), it painted an unflattering portrait, suggesting that Taft's political ambition rested primarily on a desire to fulfill the expectations of his mother and later his wife. The author also delved into Taft's lifelong battle with obesity.[41]

Two treatments of the Taft administration by narrative historians added to the growing literature: these were *TR and Will: A Friendship that Split the Republican Party* by William Manners (1969) and the more recent *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism* by Doris Kearns Goodwin (2013). Both authors focused on the drama of the soured relationship between Roosevelt and Taft. The two longtime associates and contemporaries, who held each other in mutual high regard during their ascendance under Republican Party

[40] Pringle's political biases were evident in his treatment of the Taft legacy. Pringle was a fan of FDR's New Deal and an outspoken internationalist. Writing in 1939, he was leery of the present slate of Republican isolationists in Congress, which included William Howard Taft's son Robert A. Taft, who was newly elected to the Senate in 1938. Furthermore, as Jonathan Lurie points out, while Taft was dead by the time Pringle wrote his book, nevertheless Pringle "observed the remnants of Taft's Supreme Court in action against the New Deal." He had an ax to grind. (Lurie, *William Howard Taft*, xiii.)

[41] Anderson, *William Howard Taft: A Conservative's Conception of the Presidency*; Paola E. Colleta, *The Presidency of William Howard Taft* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1973); Judith Icke Anderson, *William Howard Taft: An Intimate History* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1981).

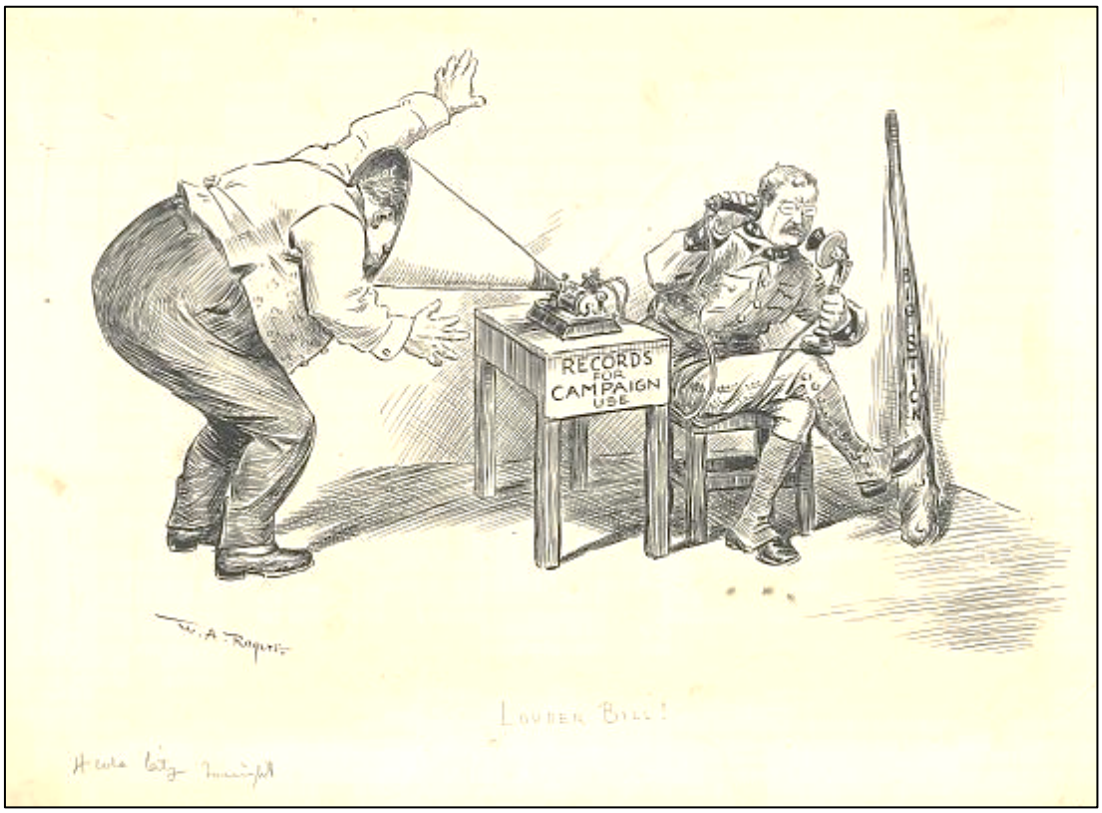


Figure 6. "Louder Bill!" A cartoon mocking candidate Taft in 1908. The rift between Taft and Roosevelt is central to Taft's legacy. (Library of Congress.)

rule in the late nineteenth century, and who then became closely entwined in the Roosevelt administration, turned into bitter foes during the Taft administration. Roosevelt assailed his successor in the White House for allegedly betraying the progressive cause. Taft, for his part, ran for a second term largely to deny Roosevelt the Republican Party nomination and force him into a third-party candidacy. The rift split the Republican vote and secured the election of 1912 for Democratic candidate Woodrow Wilson. It was a presidential election contest for the ages, with Taft going down to humiliating defeat in the three-way race, winning just eight electoral college votes in two states, Vermont and Utah.

In recent decades, Taft's historical reputation has marginally improved. In our modern era of government dysfunction, Taft's handling of the office looks more estimable now than it did in an earlier time. Furthermore, Taft's fight with Roosevelt and the insurgent wing of the Republican Party now finds a modern parallel in the insurgencies that have gripped both the Republican and Democratic parties since 2016. Indeed, as Donald Trump rides the present worldwide wave of populism, his astonishing appeal with a big sector of the American electorate invites comparison with those earlier insurgent presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and Andrew Jackson. Considering the unsettled state of our politics today, the latest crop of historians of the Taft administration have put more emphasis on context, judging Taft's single-term

presidency against the long sweep of the Progressive Movement and the conservative-progressive fissure that appeared in the Republican Party at the beginning of the twentieth century.

William Howard Taft: Confident Peacemaker by David Burton (2004) examined the ex-president Taft's ideas on establishing a new international order at the end of World War I. Burton argues that the *realpolitik* ideas put forward by Taft were superior both to the excessive nationalism espoused by Theodore Roosevelt and the misplaced moralism preached by President Woodrow Wilson. The new international body advocated by Taft in 1917-1918, the author says, was remarkably like the United Nations chartered in 1945.[42]

The next revisionist work on Taft was *The William Howard Taft Presidency* by Lewis L. Gould (2009). Gould lays out his argument in the opening pages, saying that Taft "although not an outstanding chief executive, was a creditable president who confronted an unfavorable political climate for his party and the challenge of Theodore Roosevelt as an alternative leader of the Republicans." As Taft said in his own brief in 1912, he kept the nation out of war, maintained a healthy economy, and observed the constitutional limits of his office. "Although these accomplishments do not enable him to rise above the middle level of all presidents," Gould writes, "they seem more positive in light of the performance of some of his modern successors who accomplished few of the specific tangible achievements that Taft enumerated."[43]

Jonathan Lurie provided another revisionist interpretation in *William Howard Taft: The Travails of a Progressive Conservative* (2012). As Lurie notes, Theodore Roosevelt's rap on President Taft after his first two years in office was that his successor had strayed from progressivism. Lurie contends that Roosevelt's charge was simply not fair. "By every standard measure of progressive regulation, Taft appears to have exceeded the record set by his predecessors," Lurie writes. "Indeed…Taft topped the accomplishments of Roosevelt." Taft surpassed what Roosevelt did in reducing tariffs, busting trusts, modernizing the federal government, and institutionalizing federal conservation, according to Lurie's analysis. In our present era of political spin, Lurie's point that the contrast between Roosevelt and Taft was based more on the relative strength of their salesmanship than on actual substance resonates.[44]

Jeffrey Rosen's pithy new biography, *William Howard Taft* (2018) goes even further in suggesting that Taft's measured approach to the presidency deserves a relook from the vantage point of recent times. Even if Taft's historical reputation

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[42] David Burton, *William Howard Taft: Confident Peacemaker* (Philadelphia, Penn.: St. Joseph's University Press, 2004).
[43] Lewis L. Gould, *The William Howard Taft Presidency* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), xi.
[44] Lurie, *William Howard Taft*, xiii.

cannot escape the decisive verdict of the election of 1912, when he was so repudiated at the polls, Rosen says, there was merit nonetheless in Taft's well-reasoned and consistent handling of the office of the presidency. Rosen describes Taft as the nation's most judicial president and its most presidential chief justice. In both capacities, Taft's thinking was grounded in his reading of the U.S. Constitution and his respect for the separation of powers as conceived by the Founding Fathers.[45]

Taft contended that presidential authority derived from the Constitution. Presidential power might be sweeping, but it had to stem from some article in the Constitution. Absent a constitutional footing, presidential power was constrained. It was limited by the separation of powers, which the Founders saw as an essential foundation of our constitutional form of government in order to prevent the president from claiming too much power. Roosevelt and Wilson had another conception of presidential authority. They viewed presidential authority as emanating straight from the people, with the president being the people's "steward." Roosevelt and Wilson built their expansive assertion of presidential power on the wave of populism at the beginning of the twentieth century that ushered in such reforms as the direct election of senators, the initiative, the referendum, and the expansion of the voting franchise.[46]

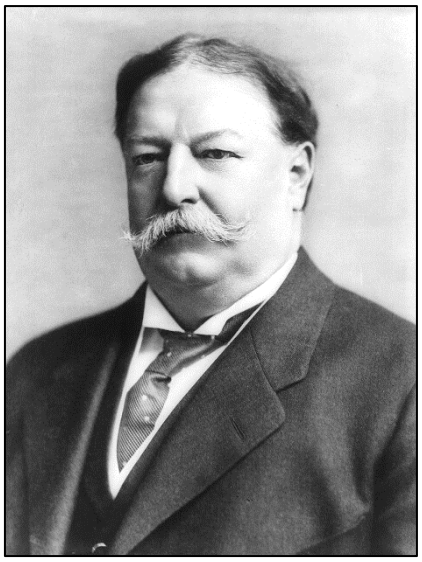


Figure 7. President William Howard Taft. (Library of Congress.)

As for Taft being the most "presidential Supreme Court justice," what Rosen means is that Taft, alone among chief justices, brought to that high office the perspective of having occupied the White House, and furthermore, he sought to remake the whole federal judiciary into a co-equal branch with the legislative and the executive branches. Taft believed this was necessary so that the judicial branch could defend the Constitution against populist threats.[47]

Rosen's biography of Taft breathes new life into the historical significance of the Taft legacy not just for William Howard Taft but for the Taft family. "Taft inherited his devotion to constitutional fidelity over political expedience from his father, Alphonso Taft, who revered judges over politicians," Rosen writes. "William Howard Taft passed on the same constitutional vision to his own children. Taft's oldest son, Robert Alphonso Taft, became one of the leading conservative senators of

[45] Rosen, *William Howard Taft*, 3-4.
[46] Ibid, 8-9.
[47] Ibid, 113.

the twentieth century [and] founded the modern limited-government wing of the Republican Party, in opposition to the big-government conservatism of President Dwight D. Eisenhower."[48]

Rosen has drawn attention to William Howard Taft through his timely comparisons of Taft and Trump in popular venues like *The Atlantic* magazine. Trump's reversion to protective tariffs, his expansive use of executive orders, his attacks on judicial independence, and his budget-busting corporate tax cuts all represent fundamental challenges to Republican orthodoxies and quite possibly a threat to our constitutional system. Above all, Rosen notes, Trump's populist claim that he "alone can fix" America has revived the concerns once held by Taft that popular passions unconstrained by constitutionalism would give rise to a demagogue.[49] Taft's legacy now stands in counterpoint to Trump's populist brand. As the American people grapple with the question of wither the presidency, Taft's deliberative, circumspect, and judicial execution of presidential powers acquires renewed significance.

The Taft House

The house was built before the Taft family lived in it. The date of construction is not known. Architectural historian Norm Souder suggested the oldest part of the house was built about 1819 or 1820, which would make it contemporaneous with the beginnings of Mount Auburn. Historian Ed Bearss did not hazard a guess for its year of construction but noted that the street on which the house was built did not have its present alignment at the top of Sycamore Street until 1838. Architectural historian Anthony Crosby estimated a construction date of about 1845 based on exterior details on the house. The latter date is the one most widely accepted.[50]

Alphonso Taft purchased the house on June 13, 1851, from the estate of G. Bowen. The lot contained 1.82 acres. The house, lot, and improvements cost $10,000. Adjusted for inflation, that amount today would be equivalent to $333,000. Immediate renovations to the house included installation of two stone steps at the front entrance by a stonemason, and construction of a dumbwaiter in the interior by a carpenter. A month after the Tafts moved in, Alphonso hired two men to put two cellar windows in the house and to shore up the back piazza. A few weeks later he hired a laborer, an Irishman, to dig the well deeper and replace a faulty cistern. Digging of the well and construction of two new cisterns took up most of the month of August. By the time

[48] Rosen, *William Howard Taft*, 10.
[49] Jeffrey Rosen, "President Taft, the Anti-Trump," *The Atlantic*, March 19, 2018 at https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/trump-william-taft/555656/ <May 6, 2019>.
[50] Anthony Crosby, *Historic Structure Report: Architectural Data Section, William Howard Taft National Historic Site* (Denver: National Park Service, Denver Service Center, 1979), 2-3.

that work was completed, Alphonso had determined to build an addition on the back end of the house. When the addition was completed it covered the new cisterns and took the place of the back piazza.[51]

The addition was built in the fall of 1851. It was an ell-shaped addition that extended the back of the house by 41 feet along the north-facing façade and 23 feet along the south-facing façade. Whereas the house that Alphonso Taft bought was roughly square in dimension, the addition made the house long and narrow. Moreover, by extending the original basement level 41 feet to the eastward and excavating much of the area around the north- and east-facing facades of the house where the lot sloped away to the north and east, the addition transformed what was a two-story house with a fully underground basement into an imposing three-story house on its north- and east-facing facades.

The addition was completed when Alphonso Taft was married to his first wife, Fanny. Louise joined the household in January 1854. Louise made the home her own by changing some of the interior décor and adding some more furnishings. Over the next decade and a half, the house accommodated a growing family including Alphonso's parents as well as frequent guests such as Louise's sister Delia and a few servants. At one time, as many as 14 people lived in the house. It is presumed that the

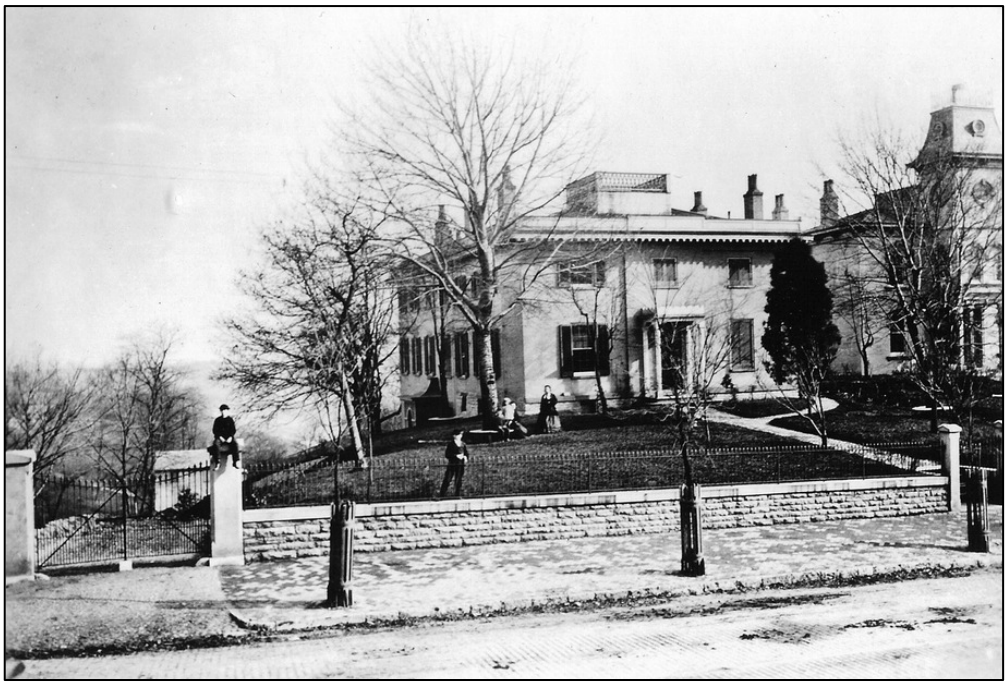


Figure 8. The Taft house about 1867 in the only known photograph of the house from the historical period. (William Howard Taft National Historic Site.)

[51] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 5-7.

large Taft family rejiggered the interior room assignments from time to time, especially as Alphonso's parents became elderly and unable to climb stairs. The structure of the house was not significantly altered by the Taft family after the addition was completed in 1877.[52]

Alphonso and Louise Taft moved to Washington, D.C. in 1876 and rented the house in furnished condition for one year. Shortly before they were to move back into the house in April 1877 there was a fire. Most of the structural damage was to the roof and upper story. Smoke damage was throughout the house. Structural repairs after the fire resulted in several changes to the house. The roof and upper story were raised, some interior partitions were altered, the front verandah was widened, some windows and staircases were modified, and some flooring was replaced. Due to the smoke damage, the Tafts had to replace wallpaper, carpets, draperies, linens, and some other furnishings.[53]

Alphonso and Louise Taft vacated the house again in the spring of 1882 when Alphonso became U.S. minister to Austria-Hungary. Will Taft remained in the house after his parents left for Vienna and took charge of finding renters. Herman Goepper eventually signed a three-year lease starting October 10, 1882. Alphonso Taft considered selling the house in 1884 but decided against it. Alphonso and Louise reoccupied the house following the expiration of the three-year lease on October 10, 1885. Will, Horace, and Fanny moved back in with their parents. Will was engaged to Helen ("Nellie") Herron. Following their marriage and honeymoon in Europe, Will and Nellie lived a short time in the house while their new home in Walnut Hills was being furnished. Will moved out of the house for the last time in November 1886.[54]

Alphonso and Louise Taft moved out of the house for the last time in the summer of 1889 when they went to California. By then Horace had moved out and Fanny was the only offspring still in the house. Acting on Will's advice, Alphonso and Louise rented the house by the month instead of entering a year lease in case they should want to return. It became a rental on August 1, 1889. The first renter was dissatisfied and stayed just two months. Alphonso and Louise returned to Cincinnati and reoccupied the house together with Fanny briefly in early October. Will, meanwhile, had found another renter, W. T. Dickinson, who took possession on October 16. Dickinson rented the house until October 1890. Will moved to Washington, D.C. earlier that year, so Charles Taft took over the task of renting the

[52] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 17-20, 38. The report includes an appendix that identifies the occupants over time.
[53] Ibid, 90-111. See also Crosby, *Historic Structure Report*, 3. Crosby described the changes made in 1877-78 as bringing about "what could be called the third historic appearance" of the house, with only minor changes taking place from then until 1899.
[54] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 119-26.

house. He rented the house to Charles J. Schiff, but Schiff moved out after just four months.[55]

The house was unoccupied at the time of Alphonso Taft's death in San Diego, California, on May 21, 1891. Louise had her husband's body returned to Cincinnati for services and burial, and since the house was unoccupied, the Taft family used the parlor for the funeral. All five surviving Taft children and all the spouses except for Horace's wife were in attendance.[56]

After the death of Alphonso, Louise went to Millbury, Massachusetts to live with her sister Delia. Two more renters occupied the house from 1891 to 1899, when Louise sold the property for $18,000 to Judge Albert C. Thompson.[57]

Changes in the House and its Environs through the 1930s

The house changed ownership three times from 1899 to 1940. Judge Thompson died in 1910 and his widow sold the house to Col. Ernest H. Ruffner in 1912. Ruffner died in 1937 and left the house to his daughter, Violet DeBus. Debus sold the house to Elbert R. Bellinger in 1940.

The first owner, Thompson, was a Civil War veteran, longtime judge, and Republican congressman from Ohio from 1885 to 1891. During his first five years of occupancy of the former Taft house, he and his wife removed the original front porch and replaced it with a wider one. They also built a one-story conservatory in the crook of the ell at the back of the house and razed several outbuildings.[58]

The second owner, Col. Ruffner, served in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and was district engineer in Cincinnati from 1902 until his retirement. He was recently retired when he and his wife occupied the former Taft house in 1912. (William Howard Taft was president, but there was no discussion of historic preservation of the president's boyhood home at that time.) Col. Ruffner made relatively few changes to the house in his 25 years of occupancy. One window in a ground floor room (Room 106, the nursery, in the historic Taft house) was converted into a door, and a small shed addition was erected there. An interior wall was added in the rear bedroom (Room 109) to convert that space into two rooms. A bathroom was added.[59]

[55] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 127-32.
[56] Ibid, 133-34.
[57] Ibid, 135-38.
[58] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 139-41; Crosby, *Historic Structure Report*, 9.
[59] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 141-42; Crosby, *Historic Structure Report*, 9. Bearss (pp. 143-48) summarizes information from two interviews made in 1971 with friends of the Ruffners who provided ample detail of how the Ruffners occupied the many rooms in the house.

Violet DeBus and her husband Louis K. DeBus lived in the house intermittently with her parents. When DeBus inherited the house in 1937, she put it on the market to sell. The William Howard Taft Memorial Association (WHTMA) had been in existence for a few years and it contacted DeBus as soon as the for-sale sign went up in front of the house. DeBus, sensitive to the property's historical significance, tried to negotiate a sale with the WHTMA or wait for the group to come up with the money. But her patience finally ran out and she sold the property to another buyer, Elbert R. Bellinger, in 1940. Bellinger indicated that he, too, had a sense of the importance of the house as a historical museum and that he would offer it for sale to the WHTMA when it had raised enough money.[60]

Mount Auburn saw a lot of change in the half century after the Taft family moved away. In the late nineteenth century, the Mount Auburn community ceased to be purely residential and acquired various grocery and dry goods stores, retail shops, professional offices, and hotels. Christ Hospital relocated from the Basin to its present location on Auburn Avenue in 1893, occupying the site of the Mount Auburn Young Ladies Institute, which moved out to Avondale. As businesses moved into the neighborhood, so did more residents. Row houses and apartments were built alongside the posh homes. Land values rose while the quality of housing stock declined. Many large old estates were subdivided, side streets were added, more row houses went up, and some of the large houses were converted to apartments. Middle-income groups moved into the hilltop residences and lower-income groups moved into the more densely packed housing units located on the hillsides.[61]

Cincinnati continued to grow, engulfing Mount Auburn and spreading well beyond it. Cincinnati's population grew from 296,908 in 1890 to 455,610 in 1940. (This compares with a population today of around 300,000 within the city limits and over 2 million in the metropolitan area.) The exodus from the city core to the suburbs started when William Howard Taft lived on Auburn Street and it accelerated in the half century after Louise Taft sold the house. The population in the Basin, once as high as 141,323, dropped to 83,086 in 1940. The movement to the suburbs was almost exclusively by white people. The relatively small African American population – around 54,000 people or 12 percent of city residents in 1940 – remained in the Basin's West End where it developed into a thriving community with its own churches, businesses, and social clubs. Racial segregation in Cincinnati, incipient in the early

[60] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 142-43; Antoinette J. Lee, *The William Howard Taft National Historic Site: An Administrative History* (Omaha: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 1986), 11-12; Taft Memorial Association, "For Immediate Release," September 15, 1961, William Howard Taft NHS, Central Files (CF), A3821.

[61] Cincinnati City Planning Department, Historic Conservation Office, "Auburn Avenue Historic District Designation Report," 1987, report on file at William Howard Taft NHS, CF, H22, pp. 5-6.

twentieth century, became stark with the spread of suburbs. Mount Auburn remained almost all white through this period.[62]

Two blocks up Auburn Avenue from the historic Taft house, Christ Hospital undertook a major expansion in 1930. The buildings of the Young Ladies Institute were razed, and a new ten-story building complex went up in their place. The high-rise hospital spurred still more population growth in the area. More large houses on Auburn Avenue were turned into rooming houses and apartments – as Bellinger would do with the historic Taft house.[63]

In 1943, the Writers' Program of the Works Progress Administration stated that Mount Auburn was a "desirable residential section largely because of its suburban character and its proximity to the basin by way of Vine Street, Sycamore Street, Highland Avenue, and Reading Road." It noted the house where the late President William Howard Taft was born still stood at 2038 Auburn Avenue. It described the house as a two-story brick building with an open verandah, approached through an iron gate and up two short flights of stairs.[64]



Figure 9. The historic Taft house circa 1940s. (William Howard Taft National Historic Site.)

The William Howard Taft Memorial Association

The William Howard Taft Memorial Association (WHTMA) formed in Cincinnati in 1934, four years after William Howard Taft's death at the age of 72 on March 8, 1930. Its founding members came from two organizations: the Mt. Auburn Civic Association and the Parent Teachers Association for the William Howard Taft Elementary School. The group incorporated on July 7, 1937, with the stated purpose "to plan, promote, erect, and collect funds for a national memorial in honor of William Howard Taft and to insure its perpetuation." When the house on Auburn Avenue went

[62] Eric R. Jackson, "The History of African Americans in Cincinnati," *The Voice of Black Cincinnati* at https://thevoiceofblackcincinnati.com/aftrican-americans-in-cincinnati/ <May 9, 2019>; Taylor, "City Building, Public Policy, the Rise of the Industrial City, and Black Ghetto-Slum Formation in Cincinnati, 1850-1940," 158.

[63] Taylor, "City Building, Public Policy, the Rise of the Industrial City, and Black Ghetto-Slum Formation in Cincinnati, 1850-1940," 158; Cincinnati City Planning Department, Historic Conservation Office, "Auburn Avenue Historic District Designation Report," 1987, report on file at William Howard Taft NHS, CF, H22, p. 6.

[64] Writers' Program of the Work Progress Administration, compiler, *Cincinnati: A Guide to the Queen City and Its Neighbors* (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Wiesen-Hart Press, 1943), 355, 365. The *Guide* erroneously stated that Alphonso Taft built the house in 1853.

up for sale that year, the WHTMA sprang into action to seek acquisition of the property.[65]

By the following March, the WHTMA had enlisted several prominent members of the community including the president of the University of Cincinnati, the assistant superintendent of schools for Hamilton County, and the pastor of the Mt. Auburn Methodist Church. One idea that the group entertained was to partner with the city or county government and acquire the house as a youth center to help with juvenile delinquency. One part of the house would have been used for a community center and another part of the house would have been set aside for a memorial. Possibly the idea was to honor Alphonso and Fanny Taft's initiative in 1850 to establish Cincinnati's first House of Refuge, but it is not known if that connection was intentional or coincidental. Another idea was to raise money through school subscriptions to buy the house outright and make it into a house museum. The fundraising campaign got underway in the fall, with all the children in Cincinnati schools being asked by their teachers to bring pennies from home for the cause. The subscriptions fell short of the goal, however. The WHTMA then tried another tack and sought donations and support from the Taft family. This effort was soon quashed. The problem was that Robert A. Taft, the late president's son, who had been elected to the U.S. Senate in 1938, was interested in running for president in 1940. Taft and his campaign aides did not want to have the senator or other Taft family members involved in a project that might be viewed as a ploy to "build up his political future." After the WHTMA received this rebuff by the Taft family its fundraising effort sputtered, and the historic house property was finally sold to Elbert R. Bellinger instead.[66]

The WHTMA made little headway over the next decade. In 1948, Nelson L. Burbank, principal of Taft Elementary School, wrote to Waldo G. Leland, chair of the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments, for guidance. How was his group to raise funds in order to restore the historic Taft house and make it a memorial site? The reply to Burbank came from A. E. Demaray, acting director of the National Park Service (NPS), who referred Burbank to the American Association of Museums as the entity most able to advise house museum organizations such as his. This deflecting letter from NPS marked the first instance of NPS involvement with the site. It is not known if the WHTMA followed up with consultation with the American Association of Museums or not; in any case, its fundraising effort continued to lie dormant.[67]

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[65] Lee, *Administrative History*, 11.
[66] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 148-50; Lee, *Administrative History*, 11-12.
[67] Lee, *Administrative History*, 13.

Meanwhile, the house's new owner, Bellinger, proceeded to turn the house into apartments. According to NPS historian Ed Bearss, Bellinger was a "self-styled interior decorator and carpenter." He proceeded to renovate the interior into several separate apartment units. Later he would tell the WHTMA that he did all the carpentry work, painting, wallpapering, plastering, stone masonry, and cement work himself, and performed all of it in a way that would allow it to be removed "without spoiling the original formation of the house." He hired workmen but the workmen, he said, only installed new plumbing, electrical wiring, flooring, and roofing. However, NPS architectural historian Anthony Crosby came to a very different assessment of Bellinger's alterations to the house. "Bellinger made a great many changes to the interior when he changed the function of the building to an apartment house," Crosby wrote in his *Historic Structure Report*. "These changes compromised its integrity irretrievably."[68]

In 1940, when Bellinger bought the Taft house, he and his wife Riola May lived next door to the Taft house in the former Leopold Burkhardt residence at 2030 Auburn Avenue. Bellinger had acquired the Burkhardt house from the Burkhardt descendants some time before 1940 and had converted that mansion into apartments as well.[69]

In 1950, a plan was formed to build the Hamilton County Youth Detention Home at this location. The facility was to occupy two adjacent lots at the intersection of Auburn and Bodmann Avenues, taking the place of the Burkhardt house and another nineteenth-century mansion, the Llewellyn Reakit house. Bellinger and his wife sold the Burkhardt property to the county for $35,000 and moved into the rear first-floor apartment of the Taft house. The descendants of Llewellyn Reakit sold their property to the county for $55,000. Both mansions were razed, and a two-story brick juvenile detention center was built in their place.[70]

The WHTMA was powerless to stop either Bellinger's renovations to the interior of the Taft house or the demolition of two neighboring mansions and the construction of a modern new edifice literally encroaching on the backyard of the historic Taft property. But the WHTMA was about to see a change of fortune. A few years after the juvenile detention center was built, the Taft family dropped its earlier reservation to making a memorial site. Charles P. Taft II, the son of William Howard Taft and the youngest of the president's three children, became president of the WHTMA executive board. Helen Taft Manning and Robert A. Taft, Jr., the daughter and grandson of the president respectively, joined as honorary members of the executive board. Ultimately, the Taft family's financial support and political influence

[68] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 152; Crosby, *Historic Structure Report*, 9.
[69] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 153.
[70] Ibid, 153.

would prove decisive in getting the house restored and turned into a National Historic Site.

The Taft Family and the Beginnings of House Restoration

William Howard Taft and his wife Nellie had three children, all born in Cincinnati. They were Robert Alphonso Taft (born September 8, 1889, Helen Taft Manning (born August 1, 1891), and Charles P. Taft II (born September 20, 1897).

Robert Alphonso Taft (1889-1953) was educated at Harvard and earned a law degree in 1913. He served in the Ohio House of Representatives from 1921 to 1931 and in the Ohio Senate from 1931 to 1933. After his election to the U.S. Senate in 1938, he quickly rose to prominence in the Republican Party, became a leader of the conservative wing, and sought the presidential nomination in 1940, 1948, and 1952. In the late 30s and early 40s he stood against FDR's New Deal and opposed U.S. intervention in World War II until the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor. After World War II, he was a leading voice of restraint in U.S. engagement abroad. He became "Mr. Republican" for his embodiment of the Midwestern base of the Republican Party. In 1952, he made his third bid to win the Republican presidential nomination but was foiled when the moderate wing of the Republican Party got behind the popular General Eisenhower. Taft was elected Senate Majority Leader in 1953 to unify the party behind President Eisenhower but he died of pancreatic cancer later that year.[71]



Figure 10. President and First Lady Taft with their three children. Left to right: Charles Phelps, Helen, and Robert Alphonso. (Library of Congress.)

Helen Taft Manning (1891-1987) got her undergraduate education at Bryn Mawr College, starting school in the year her father became president. She received a B.A. degree in history and became dean of the college at the age of 26. Later she went to Yale University, earned a Ph.D. in history, and returned to Bryn Mawr College to serve as dean, professor of history, and eventually head of the history department. Her subject specialization was British colonial history. She retired in 1957 but continued to research and publish in retirement.[72]

Charles P. Taft II (1897-1983) followed in the family tradition by going to Yale, where he studied law and played on the school's basketball and football teams.

[71] James T. Patterson, *Mr. Republican: A Biography of Robert A. Taft* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972); Bob and Hope Taft, interview by Theodore Catton, April 12, 2019.
[72] "Helen Taft Manning, Ex-Dean of Bryn Mawr," *New York Times*, February 23, 1987.

(He soon dropped the Roman numeral after his name and became known to many as Charlie Taft, and as that name avoids confusion with his namesake uncle, the older half-brother of the president, that is how we will identify him hereafter.) In 1921, after completing his law degree and quitting his job as football coach, Charlie Taft returned to Cincinnati to practice law and get involved in local politics. Cincinnati was known at that time as one of the most corrupt cities in the nation, a legacy of more than 40 years of boss rule under George B. Cox and the Republican political machine that survived him. In 1924, Charlie Taft helped found the Charter Committee, a third-party movement aimed at cleaning up city government and ending some 40 years of Republican Party patronage. When the Charterites came to power in 1925, they pushed through a new city charter that instituted a council-manager system in place of a mayor-council system and established nonpartisan elections of the city council based on proportional representation. Charlie Taft insisted that he remained a Republican nationally, but his apostacy from the Republican Party in Cincinnati nevertheless gave pause for the Taft family, strong Republicans all. Indeed, some twenty years earlier his father had gamely accepted the political corruption in his home city in order to avoid risking a breech with his uncle, Charles P. Taft, whose close ties to Boss Cox were known.[73]



Figure 11. Charlie Taft interrupted his studies at Yale University to serve in World War I. (Library of Congress.)

Charlie Taft was elected to the office of county prosecutor in 1926, and then to city council in 1937. He served sixteen terms on city council, almost continuously except for a break during World War II, retiring in 1977. He made a run for governor of Ohio in 1952 but lost to the incumbent Democratic governor, having alienated some Republican voters by his membership in the Charter Party in Cincinnati as well as his willingness to serve in the Democratic Roosevelt administration during the war. He was mayor of Cincinnati from 1955 to 1957. *Fortune* magazine in that period called Cincinnati the best managed city in the nation.[74]

[73] Charles P. Taft, *City Management: The Cincinnati Experiment* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1933), 46-93; William S. White, *The Taft Story* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 4-7; Miller, *Boss Cox's Cincinnati*, 187.

[74] Barry M. Horstman, "The Taft Family: The 'first family' of Cincinnati," in *100 Who Made a Difference: Greater Cincinnatians who made a mark on the 20th Century*, edited by Barry M. Horstman (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Cincinnati Post, 1999), 113; David Mann, interview by Theodore Catton, April 4, 2019.

While he was mayor of Cincinnati, Charlie Taft and his wife Eleanor were honorary members on the board of the WHTMA, but they had little other involvement. In 1958, no longer mayor but still on city council, Charlie Taft was approached by juvenile court judge Benjamin Schwartz with a proposal that Hamilton County would purchase the old Taft house for the Juvenile Court and share it with the WHTMA. Schwartz suggested that the WHTMA would turn the first floor into a house museum and the Juvenile Court would use the second floor for offices. He thought the house museum would serve as "an inspiration for school children" who were served by the court. Charlie Taft was interested in the judge's proposal and thought the Taft family might pay for historic restoration if the county would then maintain the property. While Judge Schwartz's idea ultimately led nowhere with the county commissioners, his discussions with Charlie Taft did propel the son of the president to get more involved with the WHTMA, which proved vital.[75]

Charlie Taft later said that before this point he "had been quite unwilling to be out in front" on the Taft memorial project, and he still did not like leading it, but the discussion with Schwartz made it apparent to him that the WHTMA needed stronger direction to advance its cause. Once he made the WHTMA's cause his own, he pursued it energetically until the site was made into a unit of the National Park System in 1969, and after that he continued to press the issue of getting federal moneys to complete the house restoration. Furthermore, starting in the late 1950s and continuing to the early 1980s he sought to persuade other Taft family members to get behind it with their pocketbooks and their political connections, and as a result the whole Taft family was vital to the project as well.[76]

In 1959, Charlie Taft had the WHTMA initiate negotiations with Bellinger for sale of the house. Bellinger was represented by Leslie Cors, attorney in the Cincinnati law firm of Cors and Bennett. Charlie Taft enlisted the help of Gordon Scherer, a longtime Cincinnati attorney and city planner and Republican U.S. congressman since 1953, to represent the WHTMA. Charlie Taft and Scherer had served on city council together in the late 1940s. As a sitting member of Congress, Scherer added enormous heft to the WHTMA's request to buy the house from Bellinger. Scherer not only approached Bellinger through his attorney, he contacted NPS to request that the Taft house be included in the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings. This marked the second time that NPS was notified of the public's interest in preserving the birthplace of President Taft. NPS historian Roy E. Appleman replied to the congressman that the house would be put on the schedule for survey in 1961.[77]

[75] Lee, *Administrative History*, 15.
[76] Ibid, 14-15.
[77] Ibid, 13-15.

With public interest in the property growing, Bellinger and his attorney had to be concerned about potential condemnation proceedings. Bellinger's asking price in 1959 was $75,000. Appraisers working for the WHTMA put its value at $35,000. The huge difference threatened to create an impasse. Considering the interests of both parties to reach an agreement, Bellinger's attorney Cors developed an unusual counteroffer: a stopgap 100-year lease to satisfy everyone until Bellinger was deceased.[78]

The terms of the lease were as follows. The WHTMA would pay $250 per month and all taxes and utilities on the property and it would be permitted to commence historic restoration efforts. Bellinger, who was now a widower living alone in the apartment at the rear of the house, would keep the apartment for as long as he lived. When he died, the WHTMA would have an option for six months to purchase the house from his heirs for $35,000.[79]

Charlie Taft decided the lease was an important first step. After signing on behalf of the WHTMA, he announced to the *Cincinnati Enquirer* that the WHTMA had "acquired" the house under a "perpetual lease" with option to purchase and would immediately move forward with plans to restore it.[80]

With the lease in hand, Charlie Taft was able to build momentum on several fronts. He raised the WHTMA from an organization once held together by PTA mothers into an association with national stature. Within a year, President John F. Kennedy and Chief Justice Earl Warren were in the association as honorary chairmen; three former U.S. presidents – Dwight D. Eisenhower, Harry S Truman, and Herbert Hoover – and former Canada premier Louis S. St. Laurent were listed as honorary co-chairmen; and the executive board included eighteen distinguished members including Charlie Taft.[81] There was enough money in the WHTMA treasury to hire a part-time executive director, Willa Busch Beall, in the fall of 1960. An amateur historian, she conducted historical research on the Taft family while assisting Charlie Taft with putting out a general call for Taft letters, photographs, and memorabilia to make a museum collection.[82] Soon after Beall was on board, the WHTMA hired an architectural firm, Wood and Kock, to prepare plans for restoration.

On September 15, 1961, on the 104th anniversary of William Howard Taft's birth, the executive board of the WHTMA held a meeting in downtown Cincinnati and

[78] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 153-56.
[79] Ibid, 155-56.
[80] Taft Memorial Association, "For Immediate Release," September 15, 1961, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[81] Superintendent to Files, January 28, 1970, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821; Charles P. Taft to Robert Taft, Jr., June 26, 1961, William Howard Taft NHS, Stored Files (SF), WIHO Development, Funding.
[82] Lee, *Administrative History*, 17.

approved architectural plans for historic restoration of the exterior of the house and renovations in the interior to adapt the birthplace into a public museum. Architects Fred Kock and Paul Kiel and landscape architect Henry Fletscher Kenney made a presentation. Judge Schwartz made a speech about the importance of preserving historical buildings and traditions and the impact it would have on youths. Charlie Taft announced that the cost of restoration was estimated at $150,000 and that the Taft family, by donating $25,000, had provided a kickstart to a national fundraising campaign.[83]

There were two significant features to the fundraising campaign. The first was the role of the Taft family. Charlie Taft reached out to extended family members in Ohio and elsewhere. He pitched the "Alphonso Taft house on Auburn Avenue" as a memorial not just to President Taft but to other Tafts who were important in the history of Cincinnati, the state, and the nation. He used the Taft family's shares in the Taft Broadcasting Corporation as a fair basis for suggesting how much each family member should consider giving. Charlie's uncle, Charles P. Taft had launched the media conglomerate in the late nineteenth century using his wife Anna Sinton's large inheritance. Starting with Cincinnati's two leading newspapers, the enterprise had grown to include television and radio stations and media production companies. Charlie Taft gave 100 shares of his own stock in Taft Broadcasting Company to the WHTMA in 1963, and another 100 shares in 1964. Writing to his nephew Robert Taft, Jr., in 1964, he stated that those contributions had "about covered our current expenses to date."[84]

Not all the Taft family shared Charlie Taft's enthusiasm for the project. David S. Ingalls, grandson of Charles P. and Anna Sinton Taft, wrote his cousin a discouraging letter on September 30, 1964. He thought the Alphonso Taft house museum project looked like a wasted effort. "There is nothing but the shell of an old house, requiring a great deal of expense to produce anything worthwhile," Ingalls wrote. "With the Taft Museum in Cincinnati, why start another location and building – possibly a room at the museum is available for such memorabilia as is on hand." Ingalls proposed to get the extended family together "and discuss this house frankly." He finished bluntly: "From contacts with others in the family, no one but you seems the least interested in pursuing the matter further."[85]

Charlie Taft persisted, and the Taft family continued to give, but members expressed concern about future obligations. Supposing that the restoration was

[83] Taft Memorial Association, "For Immediate Release," September 15, 1961, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[84] Charles P. Taft to Robert Taft, Jr., October 1, 1964, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, WIHO Development, Funding.
[85] David S. Ingalls to Charles P. Taft, September 30, 1964, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, WIHO Development, Funding.

completed, and the house was eventually purchased from Bellinger, then who would pay for maintaining the house and operating the museum? Charlie Taft's answer in 1964 was to protect the family against such an open-ended demand on its charity. Writing to his grand-nephew William H. Taft, III, eldest son of the late Senator Robert A. Taft and an official in the U.S. State Department, he explained, "This means an endowment, and I intend to follow through on it until we really do protect the whole family from future obligations."[86] Of course, the solution that was finally arrived at was to establish the site as a unit in the National Park System.

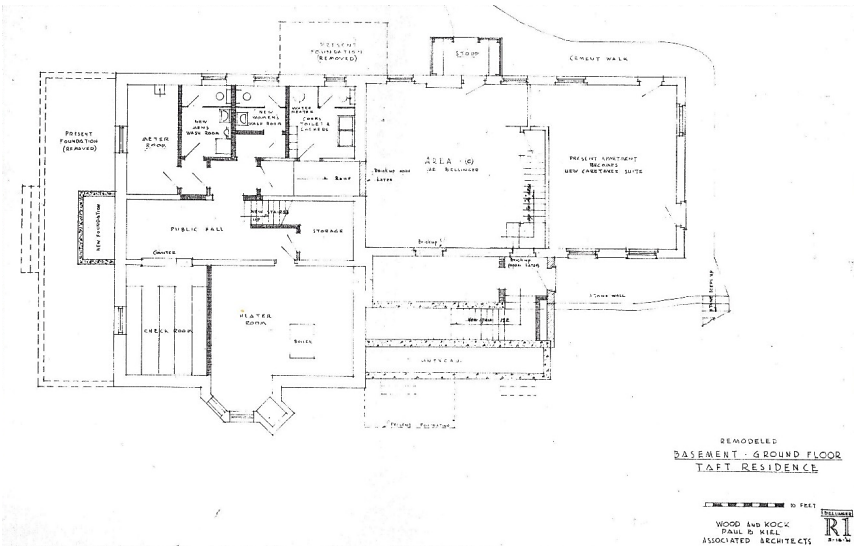
The second significant feature of the fundraising campaign was the enthusiasm shown by the city. Cincinnati newspapers covered the project well. Charlie Taft characterized the house restoration as "a community project in which every Cincinnatian can take pride and in which he can share with interest, with participation, and with money."[87]

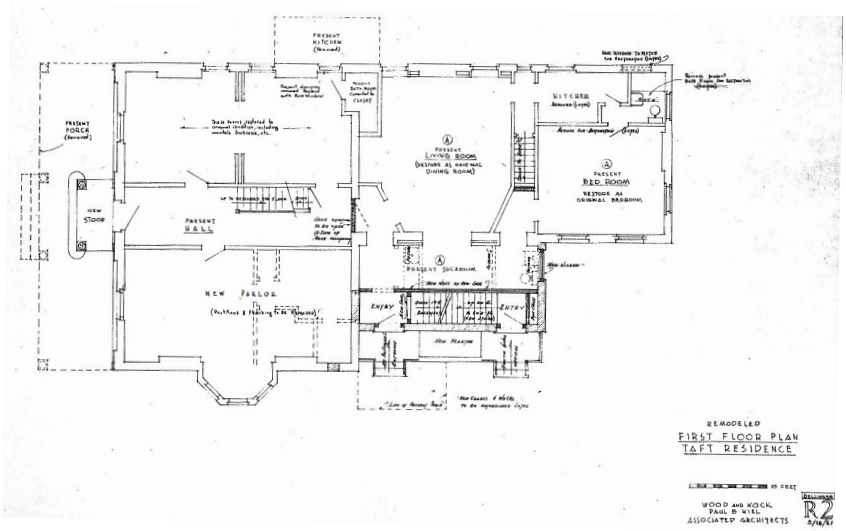
On March 31, 1964, Charlie Taft signed a letter of intent with contractor G. A. Linder for renovations on the house pursuant to the architectural plans prepared by Wood and Kock. It was another significant step toward making a memorial site, though the work performed by Linder was not an unalloyed success. In some ways, it made the house restoration that NPS undertook some twenty years later more difficult. Given NPS's more exacting standards for historic restoration, the work accomplished in 1964 merely added another layer of modifications to the home that had to be peeled back to discern the original structure.[88]

The renovations done in 1964 focused on the exterior appearance of the house. The restoration plan was based on the 1867 photo showing the front of the house as viewed from across Auburn Street. The main thrust of the restoration plan was to restore the roof line to its original appearance before the house fire in 1877. (While making repairs after the fire, Alphonso Taft had had the height of the second story raised several feet.) The plans called for changing the roof line, shortening several windows on the upper floor, changing the front porch, and doing some other exterior restorations. According to NPS investigations made almost a decade later, the renovations in 1964 lowered the ceiling height on the second floor six feet. [89]

NPS historian Ed Bearss and architectural historian Anthony Crosby made different inferences about the work done in 1964. Bearss relied heavily on the recollections of Everett H. Inman, a carpenter who worked on the crew and lived in

[86] Charles P. Taft to William H. Taft, III, October 14, 1964, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[87] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 158.
[88] "Another Line Written on Mt. Auburn Home," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 4, 1964; Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 159-63; Crosby, *Historic Structure Report*, 9-10.
[89] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 157.





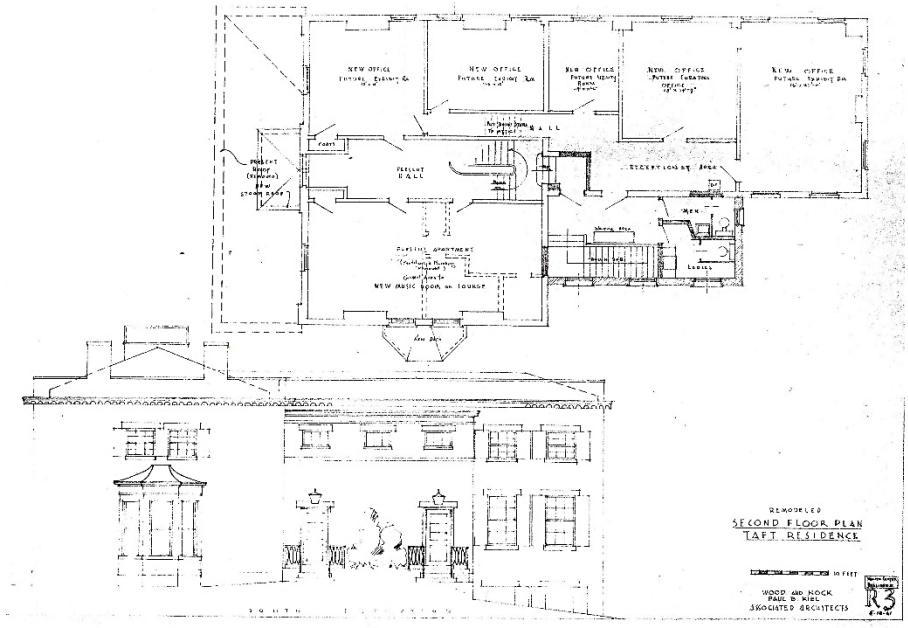


Figure 12. The WHTMA had these architectural drawings prepared in 1964 to show the existing floor plan and what interior walls would be removed to restore the original configuration. (William Howard Taft National Historic Site.)



Figure 13. William Howard Taft, front row center, with members of his high school class. (Library of Congress.)

the downstairs apartment with his family at the time. Touring the house with NPS in 1971, Inman pointed out numerous changes to the interior of the house that dated to the 1964 renovations and Bearss carefully itemized them in his report. Crosby contradicted this information in his report, saying that "the restoration involved only the exterior of the original portion of the house." Crosby did note, however, that some of the changes to the exterior entailed the loss of features on the interior; for example, when the roof was lowered the attic stairs were removed.[90]

[90] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 160; Crosby, *Historic Structure Report*, 9-10.

National Historic Landmark Designation

As noted above, in 1959 Congressman Gordon Scherer requested NPS to include the Taft house in its survey of historic structures. NPS conducted a survey in May 1963. The investigator, Regional Historian S. Sydney Bradford of the Northeast Regional Office in Philadephia made the study under the National Historic Landmarks program and concluded that it was eligible for listing under Theme XXI, Political and Military Affairs, 1865-1912. Bradford recorded the condition of the property as "fair." He wrote, "Now obscured by the trees in front of it, the house's handsome front is hidden from view. Moreover, time has not been kind to the building, for it is quite rundown, and the house has been divided into several apartments. Constructed of brick and painted grey, the house, however, `appears to be of generally sound condition."[91]

At its fall meeting of 1963, the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments recommended that the site be given the National Historic Landmark designation. Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall notified Robert A. Taft, Jr., who was then a Republican congressman from Ohio in the U.S. Congress. Robert Taft forwarded the communication to his uncle, Charlie Taft. As president of the WHTMA, Charlie Taft made formal application for the Registered National Historic Landmark Certificate and Plaque for the William Howard Taft home. At his request, the wording on the plaque was changed from "William Howard Taft Home" to "Alphonso Taft Home, Birthplace of William Howard Taft," which was a significant gesture toward memorializing not just the president but the Taft political dynasty.[92]

A presentation ceremony was held at the Taft house on September 15, 1964, the 107th anniversary of William H. Taft's birth. NPS historian Roy E. Appleman from the Washington Office represented NPS at the event. Charlie Taft received the plaque on behalf of the WHTMA, the Taft family, and Cincinnatians. In his brief remarks, he said of his late father: "All of us are proud that he came from Cincinnati and he was proud of it. To the day he died, he always was interested in what was happening here. He would rejoice to know that the old house on Auburn Avenue has been acquired and is being restored to the way it was when he grew up there."[93]

The *Cincinnati Enquirer*, reporting on the National Historic Landmark designation, stated that the Taft family had donated more than $70,000 to restoration thus far. The estimated cost to complete the project, including buying the house and

[91] Chief, Division of Park Planning to Chief, Office of Resource Planning, September 18, 1968, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, WIHO Restoration – Plans and Research 1969-1985; National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings form prepared by S. Sydney Bradford, August 20, 1963, Midwest Regional Office (MWRO), Accession No. MWRO-00062 (MWRO-00062), Box 2, File 003.7.
[92] Charles P. Taft to Stewart Udall, February 6, 1964, and Herbert E. Kahler to Taft, February 28, 1964, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821; Lee, *Administrative History*, 18.
[93] Lee, *Administrative History*, 18-19.

establishing an endowment for its upkeep, now stood at $200,000. It was the daunting challenge of raising such a large sum that soon prompted Charlie Taft to look to the National Park Service as the ideal custodian of the property.[94]

[94] Lee, *Administrative History*, 19.

Chapter Two

Legislative History and Land Acquisition

Congress legislated three times on William Howard Taft National Historic Site in 1969, 1978, and 2001. This chapter covers the three acts. The most important act was the first one, the authorization act of December 2, 1969 (P.L. 91-132), since it made the historic Taft house a federal property in the National Park System. The legislative history behind this act, including floor speeches and committee reports, constitute the record of "congressional intent." Congressional intent is an elaboration of the prescriptive text of the law itself. NPS has referred to congressional intent to help define the purpose of the National Historic Site and guide its administration.

The authorization act defined the original land base for the National Historic Site. The land base was soon found to be inadequate, but it could only be enlarged by another act of Congress. With guidance from the Department of the Interior, Congress enlarged the land base in the act of November 10, 1978 (P.L. 95-625), and then it modified it again in the act of November 5, 2001 (P.L. 107-60). Getting the land base right mostly revolved around the problem of providing adequate space for visitor parking in a densely populated urban setting.

The authorization act of 1969 also placed a ceiling on appropriations for restoration and development. Congress raised the ceiling on appropriations for restoration and development in the act of November 10, 1978. This provision in the acts of 1969 and 1978 is only touched upon in this chapter while it is dealt with more fully in Chapter 3.

The William Howard Taft Memorial Association Turns to Federal Sponsorship

The National Park System contains numerous presidential sites. Some presidential sites, such as George Washington Birthplace National Monument, honor a president through the power of place; others, like Mount Rushmore and the Washington Monument, feature monuments to presidents.[1] Some nineteen presidential

[1] The house at Washington Birthplace National Monument is a conjectural reconstruction, not the original structure.

sites in the National Park System feature a former home of a president. It has been said that Americans revere their past presidents as a kind of substitute for royalty, as if the national sentiment has its roots in America's separation from the mother country in the eighteenth century. But presidential adulation of the kind seen in the National Park System is mostly a more recent phenomenon. Except in the cases of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, presidential monumentation is primarily a phenomenon of the Cold War era.



Figure 14. President Taft gave the dedication speech for the Lincoln Memorial Hall which enshrines the symbolic log cabin at Lincoln's birthplace in Kentucky. Five years later the farm where Lincoln was born became the first presidential site in the National Park System. (Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park.)

When the U.S. became a superpower at the end of World War II, American presidents automatically rose in stature. The president of the United States as the head of state and commander-in-chief of U.S. military forces became known colloquially as the "Leader of the Free World." In the context of the Cold War, the American people embraced the notion that all U.S. presidents, from George Washington to the newest occupant of the White House, formed a kind of national pantheon of American heroes. Because of the dignity of the office, every past president deserved a shrine to his memory. Congress and the National Park Service both saw fit to add many presidential sites to the National Park System. In many cases these presidential sites were already developed under private ownership and were simply converted to public ownership and put under NPS administration. In other cases, the presidential sites were developed under NPS auspices. The movement to put presidential sites in the National Park System reached a climax in the 1960s when the number of presidential sites with historic homes tripled from four to twelve.

William Howard Taft National Historic Site, designated on December 2, 1969, was the last of the presidential sites established in the 1960s. Other presidential sites designated in the same decade were Lincoln Boyhood, Sagamore Hill, Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace, Herbert Hoover, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Eisenhower, and Lyndon B. Johnson. Just four presidential sites joined the National Park System during the preceding half century, and just eight more presidential sites were added over the next half century. At this writing (2020), the National Park System includes twenty units that feature presidential homes (Table 1).[2]

[2] The list does not include NPS units associated with a president but not featuring a presidential home, such as George Washington Memorial Parkway. There are numerous such units associated with Washington and Lincoln and some associated with Theodore Roosevelt as well.

Table 1: Presidential Homes in the National Park System in order of establishment

1.	Abraham Lincoln National Park, July 17, 1916 (redesignated National Historical Park 1939, redesignated Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site 1959)
2.	Andrew Johnson National Monument, August 29, 1935; redesignated National Historic Site 1963)
3.	Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site, January 15, 1944
4.	Adams Mansion National Historic Site, December 9, 1946 (redesignated Adams National Historic Site 1952; redesignated National Historical Park 1988)
5.	Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial, February 19, 1962
6.	Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, July 25, 1962
7.	Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site, July 25, 1962
8.	Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, August 12, 1965
9.	John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site, May 26, 1967
10.	Eisenhower National Historic Site, November 27, 1967
11.	Lyndon B. Johnson National Historic Site, December 2, 1969 (redesignated National Historical Park 1980)
12.	William Howard Taft National Historic Site, December 2, 1969
13.	Lincoln Home National Historic Site, August 18, 1971
14.	Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, October 26, 1974
15.	James A. Garfield National Historic Site, December 28, 1980
16.	Harry S Truman National Historic Site, May 23, 1983
17.	Jimmy Carter National Historic Site, December 23, 1987
18.	Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site, October 2, 1989
19.	President William Jefferson Clinton Birthplace Home National Historic Site, December 14, 2010
20.	Ronald Reagan Boyhood Home National Historic Site, pending

In the period when the William Howard Taft Memorial Association (WHTMA) formed in 1934, the typical pattern for turning a famous individual's former residence into a house museum was to set up a private endowment or non-profit corporation to manage the site. Charlie Taft and the executive board of the WHTMA proceeded in that vein through the early 1960s. Even with the National Historic Landmark designation in 1964, the expectation remained that the Taft house would stay in private ownership. Then, as Congress and NPS began adding more presidential sites to the National Park System, the idea arose to pursue the alternative of federal ownership of the Taft memorial site. In July 1965, Charlie Taft wrote to Governor James A. Rhodes, "I rather hope that we can get the Federal government to take over the operation after we get the house restored."[3]

On August 12, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the act to establish Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, which turned the privately-run Herbert Hoover Birthplace into a federal property. Someone in the Department of the Interior invited Charlie Taft to come to West Branch, Iowa, where the Hoover birthplace was located, to attend the ceremony when NPS received the property into its custody. Charlie Taft declined to go to the event in Iowa, but he took notice of the legislation, which authorized a federal expenditure of $1,650,000 for land acquisition and site development. Charlie Taft later wrote, "When I saw the publicity on the takeover of the Herbert Hoover Birthplace…that seemed to me a good solution" for the Taft birthplace. Less than a month after the ceremony at Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, Charlie Taft commented to the director of the Ohio Historical Society, Daniel R. Porter, that his private fundraising effort had hit a wall because private donors did not want to be saddled with the operation and upkeep of the historic property after the historic restoration was complete.[4] This was the point at which Charlie Taft decided to pursue federal legislation to make the Taft memorial site into a National Historic Site.

Charlie Taft explained his thinking on the matter in a letter to Congressman Wayne Aspinall, the Democratic chairman of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, as follows:

> I am very glad to state why the William H. Taft Memorial Association decided to file a request for the Federal Government to take over the William H. Taft Historic Site. Our problem has been right along that while the family has put up a substantial amount of money and has done the preliminary reconditioning, we have found it extremely difficult to raise the total amount of money necessary for restoration because of the fact that the donors want to know how we are going to keep the house up after we get it restored. This has affected every

[3] Lee, *Administrative History*, 19.
[4] Ibid, 19-20.

> project of this sort, and this is the reason why five or six presidential birthplaces have been turned over to the United States and are now being operated by the Department of the Interior, National Park Service.[5]

Charlie Taft pitched his idea of federal sponsorship to Ohio's two Democratic senators, Frank Lausche and Stephen M. Young, and two congressmen from southwest Ohio, Democratic Congressman John J. Gilligan and Republican Congressman Donald D. Clancy.[6] As Charlie Taft had long been active in Cincinnati and Ohio politics, he knew all these men. Indeed, he knew Lausche from the campaign trail, having run against him for governor of Ohio in 1952. It is worth noting that three of the four men were Democrats and the party affiliations did not deter Charlie Taft from seeking their help to honor a past Republican president and, by association, to highlight a Republican political dynasty that was still competing in Ohio political races.[7] Congressional politics were less partisan and more collegial then than they are now. Charlie Taft also approached Republican Congressman Fred Schwengel of Iowa chiefly because Schwengel was known by his colleagues in Congress for his sense of history as founder of the United States Capitol Historical Society and chairman of the National Civil War Centennial Commission.

Charlie Taft's pitch to the members of Congress was as follows. William H. Taft, as a former president and chief justice of the Supreme Court, was a great American. William H. Taft's father, Alphonso, was a distinguished Ohioan whose career in politics and the law inspired his son's. The Taft family had acquired control of the Alphonso Taft house where William Howard Taft was born in 1857. Operating through the non-profit WHTMA, the Taft family had restored a part of the house but had "encountered insurmountable barriers" to completing the project without federal assistance.[8]

Senator Lausche introduced a bill, S. 1095, in the Senate on February 28, 1967. Congressman Clancy introduced an identical bill, H.R. 8635, in the House on April 17, 1967. Congressman Schwengel introduced nearly the same bill, H.R. 8658, on the same day. The Senate bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Rules and

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[5] Charles P. Taft to Wayne N. Aspinall, March 10, 1969, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[6] Lee, *Administrative History*, 20.
[7] Robert Taft, Jr. son of the late Senator Robert Taft, was currently not in Congress, having run unsuccessfully for the Senate in 1964 – losing to the Democrat, Stephen M. Young. Robert Taft, Jr. served in the U.S. House from 1963 to 1965 and again from 1967 to 1971, and he served in the U.S. Senate from 1971 to 1977.
[8] Charlie Taft's pitch to the members of Congress is inferred from the fact that Senator Lausche and Congressman Clancy gave virtually identical remarks when they introduced their respective bills. See Senator Lausche, speaking on S.1095, on February 28, 1967, 90th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 113, pt. 4, p. 4848, and Rep. Clancy, speaking on H.R. 8365, April 17, 1967, 90th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 113, pt. 8, pp. 9703-04.

Administration and the House bills were referred to the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. None of the three bills advanced out of committee in that session of Congress. However, the bills sparked action within NPS. It was assumed by NPS that Congress would take up the measure in the next session, so NPS launched its own investigation of the site to have information prepared for Congress and formulate alternatives.[9]

The owner of the Taft house Elbert R. Bellinger died on December 15, 1967. His passing triggered the six-month option to purchase the property for $35,000 that was contained in the WHTMA's 100-year lease agreement. Charlie Taft immediately borrowed the money against his own line of credit, loaned it to the WHTMA, and wrote a check to the executor of the Bellinger estate. Directly following this action, Charlie Taft informed the Taft family of the change of status and affirmed that with the house now in the association's ownership he remained in favor of turning it over to the federal government. He anticipated a hearing in Congress, and he would "do the best I can to get them to take it on as is."[10]

The Alternatives Study and Master Plan Study

NPS historian David A. Kimball and NPS architect Meir S. Sofair made a visit to the Taft house in 1967 and prepared a report on site development alternatives over the winter of 1967-68. Kimball and Sofair worked in the Office of Resource Planning in the Philadelphia Planning and Service Center. No copy of the alternatives study was found, but correspondence around it suggests that it presented three alternatives. It provided details on the Taft house lot and the adjacent lots and buildings on the 2000 block of Auburn Avenue and considered various aggregations of land parcels to be included in the National Historic Site. The two main issues that it brought out were first, the feasibility of recreating the historic scene where William Howard Taft grew up, and second, the advisability of providing visitor parking on the site. Kimball made a presentation on the alternatives for land acquisition, site development, and site management to an internal review team in February 1968.[11] The preferred alternative

[9] Senator Lausche, speaking on S.1095, on February 28, 1967, 90th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 113, pt. 4, p. 4848; Rep. Clancy, speaking on H.R. 8365, April 17, 1967, 90th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 113, pt. 8, pp. 9703-04; Charles P. Taft to Leroy A. Rowell, January 11, 1968, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821; Acting Chief, Division of New Area Studies and Master Planning, Memorandum, January 18, 1968, National Archives II (NAII), Record Group 79 (RG 79), Entry 11a, Box 2131, Proposed Areas.

[10] Charles P. Taft to the Taft Family, December 28, 1967, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.

[11] NPS historians Edwin Bearss, Robert Utley, and Roy E. Appleman all contributed to an emerging consensus within the History Division, which found the site was worthy though costly. A memo from Appleman to Utley recommended against federal purchase of additional lots for parking, saying "The federal expense in preserving the property will be high enough as it is." Appleman was chief of the Branch of Park History Studies. Roy E. Appleman to Robert M. Utley, February 5, 1968, NPS Chief

that emerged from this process proposed to have NPS acquire only the Taft house and the one-half acre lot that it occupied. Under this alternative NPS would endeavor to recreate the historic scene of the time of William Howard Taft's youth in the restored home and on the grounds around the house. NPS would not acquire adjacent lots for visitor parking or for expanding the historic scene to the adjacent lots. Since visitor parking on the site would detract from the historic scene, visitor parking and access would be sought from the Hamilton County Juvenile Court located east of the property.[12]

When Charlie Taft was informed by Deputy Assistant Director Raymond L. Freeman of the preferred alternative, the description in Freeman's letter left him perplexed. Freeman stated: "It would be our intention to create, as far as practicable, a historically accurate scene of the time of William Howard Taft's occupancy." Charlie Taft thought that meant an effort to restore the immediate viewshed to some semblance of what it had been historically. He stressed that that would be impossible because the Hamilton County Juvenile Court stood right behind the house and it was there to stay. However, still thinking in terms of the viewshed, Charlie Taft recommended that the adjacent lot to the north should be acquired and the old apartment house on it should be razed. He was "reasonably certain" that the lot was a vacant "rolling piece of ground" back in the day. "If we purchase this property, as I think we should, it would both clear the view from the north and would restore the type of ground which was there when my father lived in the house," he wrote.[13]

Charlie Taft also pointed out that NPS was mistaken in its notion that visitor parking could be absorbed by the parking lot attached to the Juvenile Court or by nearby street parking. To the contrary, there was a shortage of parking in the area, especially with Christ Hospital located nearby. Moreover, on-site parking was needed to accommodate school groups arriving in buses.[14]

The alternatives report was corrected to reflect the late-breaking development that Bellinger had died and the WHTMA had purchased the house from the Bellinger estate, but the matter of parking was left unaddressed for the time being. Twenty copies of the report were made for presentation to the Advisory Board on National

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Historians' Office Files on William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Division of History Legislative File.

[12] Acting Chief, Division of New Area Studies and Master Planning to Chief, Office of Resource Planning, February 27, 1968, Raymond L. Freeman to Charles P. Taft, March 5, 1968, Theodor R. Swem to Taft, April 30, 1968, and Taft to Swem, June 3, 1968, NA II, RG 79, Entry 11a, Box 2131, Proposed Areas.

[13] Raymond L. Freeman, Deputy Assistant Director, to Charles P. Taft, March 5, 1968, and Taft to Freeman, April 4, 1968, NA II, RG 79, Entry 11a, Box 2131, Proposed Areas.

[14] Charles P. Taft to Raymond L. Freeman, April 4, 1968, NA II, RG 79, Entry 11a, Box 2131, Proposed Areas.

Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments at its next semi-annual meeting in Washington April 16-18, 1968.[15]

When the Advisory Board met in April, the House and Senate bills to authorize the William Howard Taft National Historic Site still languished in committee. Nevertheless, the Advisory Board liked the presentation and voted to endorse the proposal to authorize the William Howard Taft National Historic Site at 2038 Auburn Avenue, Cincinnati. Six other new area proposals were endorsed at the same time, including one other presidential site: Eisenhower National Historic Site adjacent to Gettysburg National Military Park. The Advisory Board's endorsements carried considerable weight with Congress and NPS.[16]

NPS proceeded to a next step, preparation of a master plan study. Since the National Historic Site was not yet established, this was not a master plan for use by site staff. Instead, it was a document "to provide a basis for recommending legislative action." It imagined how the National Historic Site, if established by Congress, would be developed, managed, and interpreted to the public by NPS. David Kimball, the primary author of the alternatives study, was assigned to head up the master planning team. Superintendent George F. Schesventer of Mound City Group National Monument in Chillicothe, Ohio was assigned to the team as well. His participation in the planning exercise anticipated the role he would later assume as superintendent for the fledgling unit, with Mound City Group National Monument staff assisting a manager on site. The master planning team visited the site in September 1968, and it submitted the master plan for review and approval two months later.[17]

The 1968 master plan study envisioned historic restoration of the first-floor rooms only, with the adjoining north side rooms (subsequently identified as Rooms 104 and 105) being adapted for interpretive exhibits and audiovisual presentation. NPS would undertake more in-depth historical research on the house before finalizing those arrangements.[18]

One full year of planning by NPS registered that NPS would take a new line of approach from what the WHTMA envisioned. Whereas the WHTMA proposed to commemorate the historical legacy of Alphonso Taft and all his progeny, NPS aimed

[15] Acting Chief, Division of New Area Studies and Master Planning to Chief, Office of Resource Planning, February 27, 1968, NA II, RG 79, Entry 11a, Box 2131, Proposed Areas.
[16] National Park Service, "National Parks Advisory Board Endorses Eleven Proposals," news release, May 8, 1968, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[17] Theodor R. Swem to Charles P. Taft, August 23, 1968, and George F. Schesventer to Taft, October 7, 1968, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821; Acting Regional Director to Chief, Office of Resource Planning, December 18, 1968, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, WIHO Restoration Plans and Research 1969-1985.
[18] Acting Regional Director to Chief, Office of Resource Planning, December 18, 1968, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, WIHO Restoration Plans and Research 1969-1985.

toward a tighter focus on William Howard Taft and the home environment of his youth. And NPS aimed for a higher standard of accuracy in historic restoration of the house. What time period did the restoration of the home aim to reflect? Were the historical uses of the various rooms known with certainty? Did enough of the historical fabric in the house survive to permit an authentic restoration? The master plan study suggested that NPS should support legislation to establish a National Historic Site, but it also raised some concerns over the extent to which the house had been modified and historic information had been lost.[19]

The Mount Auburn Community Raises Objections

Identical House and Senate bills to establish William Howard Taft National Historic Site were introduced in the new 91st U.S. Congress in January and February 1969. The text was unchanged from the bills written in 1967. Democratic Senator Alan Bible of Nevada, chair of the Subcommittee on National Parks, introduced S.560 on January 22, 1969, offering similar remarks to what had been said two years earlier: the Taft family had acquired the historic house but was now prevented by insurmountable obstacles from undertaking further development of the historic property. Congressman Schwengel introduced H.R. 7066 on February 18, 1969. The bills were referred to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs in the Senate and House respectively.[20]

Section 1 of the bills included an important clause that would be carried into the final legislation. It stated that "the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to acquire, by donation or purchase with donated or appropriated funds, such land and interests in land, together with buildings and improvements thereon…." Legal counsel to the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs confirmed that this general condemnation authority would cover the situation of the apartment house north of the Taft house that the WHTMA wanted to acquire for addition to the National Historic Site.[21]

After the bills were introduced, the chair of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, Congressman Wayne Aspinall, Democrat of Colorado, queried Charlie Taft about the WHTMA's plan to acquire the apartment house north of the Taft house and raze the building. Would this adjacent property have to be acquired

[19] Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation to Associate Director, Planning and Development, February 10, 1969, William Howard Taft NHS, RF, WIHO Restoration Plans and Research 1969-1985.
[20] Senator Bible, speaking on S. 560, on January 22, 1969, 91st Congress, 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 115, pt. 1, p. 1414.
[21] Lewis A. Sigler to Wayne N. Aspinall, October 27, 1969, and Aspinall to Charles P. Taft, October 28, 1969, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.

through condemnation? The Department of the Interior had concerns as well. What arrangements would be made for relocation of the tenants in the apartment building? Charlie Taft tried to minimize the issue of the adjacent apartment building. In a letter to Congressman Aspinall he wrote:

> There are not too many units in it, and we are furnishing the Department of the Interior with a statement from the City of Cincinnati that the relocation problem is not serious. We are prepared to guarantee the government the amount of money necessary to pay any condemnation suit verdict. This would be an amount in the vicinity of $25,000 to $30,000, which I believe we can raise.[22]

At the same time, Charlie Taft assured NPS and the Department of the Interior that displaced residents of the apartment house would be eligible for relocation assistance. In the words of Cincinnati's director of urban development, J. U. Allen, "It is our judgement that the occupants could be satisfactorily relocated."[23]

Condemnation is a contentious legal procedure under any circumstances. Condemning a 21-unit apartment building in the Mount Auburn neighborhood of Cincinnati in 1969 was particularly sensitive. Mount Auburn was a different community in 1969 from what it was in the 1930s when the WHTMA was formed. The population largely turned over during the 1960s as many African Americans moved in and many whites moved out. Mount Auburn was 2 percent African American in 1950, 10 percent African American in 1960, and 74 percent African American in 1970. For many African Americans living in Mount Auburn in the year 1969, forced relocation was all too familiar. A few years prior to 1969 they had had to relocate from Cincinnati's West End to make way for urban redevelopment and the construction of Interstate 75. The relocation of so many residents out of the West End had decimated that community, historically the center of African American cultural life in Cincinnati. From their standpoint, the city's condemnations and forced relocations could readily be viewed as tools of white oppression.[24] No wonder, then, that Mount Auburn community organizers, leaders of a nonprofit called the Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation, wrote to members of Congress who were considering the bill to demand that they consider "the needs of U.S. citizens in the path of the Taft Birthplace Bulldozer."[25]

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[22] Charles P. Taft to Wayne N. Aspinall, March 10, 1969, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[23] Charles P. Taft to Edward S. Peetz, March 17, 1969, and J. U. Allen to Taft, March 10, 1969, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[24] Eric R. Jackson, "Why So Many African Americans Have Roots in the West End of Cincinnati," *The Voice of Black Cincinnati* at https://thevoiceofblackcincinnati.com/west-end-cincinnati/ <May 21, 2019>.
[25] John Dunn, Scott Clark, and Carl Westmoreland to Charles P. Taft, July 30, 1969, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.

The Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation was formed for the purpose of purchasing and rehabilitating apartment houses in the community that were threatened with demolition. Its larger aim was to provide stability to a community racked by rampant crime and studded with rundown apartment buildings owned by absentee landlords. In the opinion of the foundation's co-founder, Carl Westmoreland, Cincinnati's city council had practically no interest in Mount Auburn beyond slum clearance. "Mt. Auburn was a dog" to most city officials, Westmoreland would later say. "It was basically a resettlement camp and the city certainly didn't intend to improve it any."[26]

Mount Auburn was zoned for Concentrated Code Enforcement, which meant that city inspectors were authorized to make house-to-house inspections to enforce building safety codes there. In 1969 the apartment house north of the Taft house had recently failed such an inspection. It had been written up and the owner had been put on notice to make the required changes by a certain deadline. If the owner did not comply with the city's building order, the building would be condemned by the city and demolished.[27] Ostensibly, the city would then provide relocation benefits to the occupants and help each one find a healthier place to live, preferably in the same community. The Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation targeted buildings such as this for rehabilitation, because it recognized that forced relocations tore at the social fabric of their community.

Charlie Taft approached the situation of this apartment house from a different perspective – a long view spanning more than twenty years. This long view started with the *Cincinnati Metropolitan Master Plan* of 1948, which laid out Cincinnati's strategy of urban redevelopment for the 1950s and 1960s. The plan aimed at moving large numbers of people out of the inner city to make room for a modern transportation system. The urban planners thought that by providing relocation assistance, the city would be able to redistribute the population according to a rational design. The result would be a mosaic of residential areas of 20,000 to 40,000 people, each one offering services and facilities to meet most daily needs of the area's inhabitants. The problem with this plan was that Cincinnati was racially segregated and the African American population, being concentrated in the West End, would bear the brunt of the forced relocation program. Through the 1950s, the city government tried to scatter the relocation units around the city to promote racial integration, but the mostly white residential areas fought those initiatives. The forced relocation program stalled as the city concentrated on clearing commercial properties out of the redevelopment zone and leaving the residential properties standing. In the 1960s, time

[26] Britt Robson, "No Middle Ground: The Carl Westmoreland Story," *Cincinnati* 16, no.1 (October 1982), 88.
[27] J. U. Allen to Charles P. Taft, March 10, 1969, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.

ran out and the city government moved aggressively to clear slum housing to make way for freeway construction. At that point the city's forced relocation program kicked in, but the white population was still resistant, so the original goal of racial integration devolved into a divide-and-conquer approach to resettlement that targeted one residential area after another to receive thousands of displaced residents from the West End. Starting with Avondale, then Over-the-Rhine, then Mount Adams, and then Mount Auburn, the city acquired large numbers of relocation units and executed the relocations, effectively tipping each area from white to black. African Americans who were forced out of their homes suffered not only the loss of their local community but the pain and stigma of stirring white resentment and prompting "white flight" wherever they relocated in numbers. Race riots occurred in Avondale in 1967 and 1968. And yet, Cincinnati's ongoing troubles over race relations notwithstanding, the city government did achieve what it set out to achieve in its *Master Plan* of 1948: it eliminated much of the residential area in the Basin to make way for the interstate. In this view, forced relocations were a necessary means to advance the public interest.[28]

The Department of the Interior wanted more information about the city's relocation assistance for the sixteen families who occupied the apartment house. Charlie Taft pursued the matter with the city's Department of Urban Development and the mayor. The mayor arranged a meeting between City Councilman Taft and three Mount Auburn community leaders, including Carl Westmoreland, then vice president of the Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation. The other two were John Dunn, president of the Mount Auburn Community Council and Scott Clark, president of the foundation. The meeting was held at the church of Our Savior on Hollister Street on May 26, 1969. Charlie Taft explained the initiative to establish William Howard Taft National Historic Site. He discussed NPS master plan study, highlighting the fact that the plan addressed local community relations and called for cooperation between NPS and such neighbors as the Hamilton County Juvenile Court and the Mount Auburn Community Council in joint efforts to maintain and improve the community. The three community leaders suggested two large houses in the neighborhood that might be rehabilitated with the city's assistance to receive the 16 dislocated families. Charlie Taft responded that it was too soon to initiate such a project but that there would be plenty of time to work it out.[29]

The meeting satisfied the Department of the Interior's concern as it appeared that the local community was agreeable to the plan to demolish the apartment house.

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[28] Miller and Tucker, *Changing Plans for America's Inner Cities*, 38-40; Cathy McDaniels-Wilson, Judson L. Jeffries, and James N. Upton, "White Racial Consciousness in One Midwestern City: The Case of Cincinnati, Ohio," *Black Diaspora Review* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2012), 28.

[29] John Dunn, President, Mount Auburn Community Council to Charles P. Taft, June 12, 1969, and Charles P. Taft to Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation, August 6, 1969, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.

On July 18, 1969, Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel provided the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs with a favorable report on the bill. Concerning the adjacent property, Hickel's letter stated:

> The National Park Service has prepared a master plan for a William Howard Taft National Historic Site, encompassing the 0.5-acre Taft House and an adjacent 0.28-acre parcel for visitor parking. The Taft Memorial Association has offered to donate the Taft house and funds sufficient to enable the Government to purchase and demolish the existing building on the adjacent parcel.[30]

At the end of July, the House and Senate committees held hearings. Charlie Taft testified along with representatives of the Department of the Interior. The testimony satisfied Congressman Aspinall "that every effort would be made to relocate the residents within the community." In a floor speech in September, Aspinall referred to this testimony in stating that the WHTMA and the Mount Auburn Community Council were holding discussions and it was hoped that "between these two public-spirited groups suitable housing can be found."[31]

But Mount Auburn community leaders had a different perspective on where the discussions stood at that time. Westmoreland, Dunn, and Clark were "dismayed" to read in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* that Charlie Taft had testified before a Senate committee to the effect that the local community was agreeable to the plan to demolish the apartment house. "We were only in the early stages of discussion," the three wrote to Senator Mark Hatfield, Republican of Oregon. Contradicting Charlie Taft's testimony, they stated: "The Trustees of the Community Council feel that the reason given for the demolition, providing a more open view of the birthplace, is not sufficient to justify further forcing families from Auburn Avenue."[32]

Senator Hatfield requested that NPS conduct a quick survey of the Mount Auburn area around the Taft house to identify additional lots where visitor parking might be located. Evidently the intent was to provide the government with other options in case the local community should object strongly to the demolition of the apartment house. This survey was hurriedly completed in the first week of August and four alternatives counting the parcel north of the Taft house were listed in a brief

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[30] Walter J. Hickel to Wayne N. Aspinall, July 18, 1969, in U.S. House, *Providing for the Establishment of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., Report 91-478, 1969, 4.
[31] Rep. Aspinall, speaking on H.R. 7066, on September 15, 1969, 91st Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 115, pt. 19, p. 25346.
[32] John Dunn, Scott Clark, and Carl Westmoreland to Senator Mark Hatfield, July 30, 1969, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.

report and depicted on a map. The map helped form the basis for a "William Howard Taft National Historic Site Boundary Map," dated August 1969.[33]

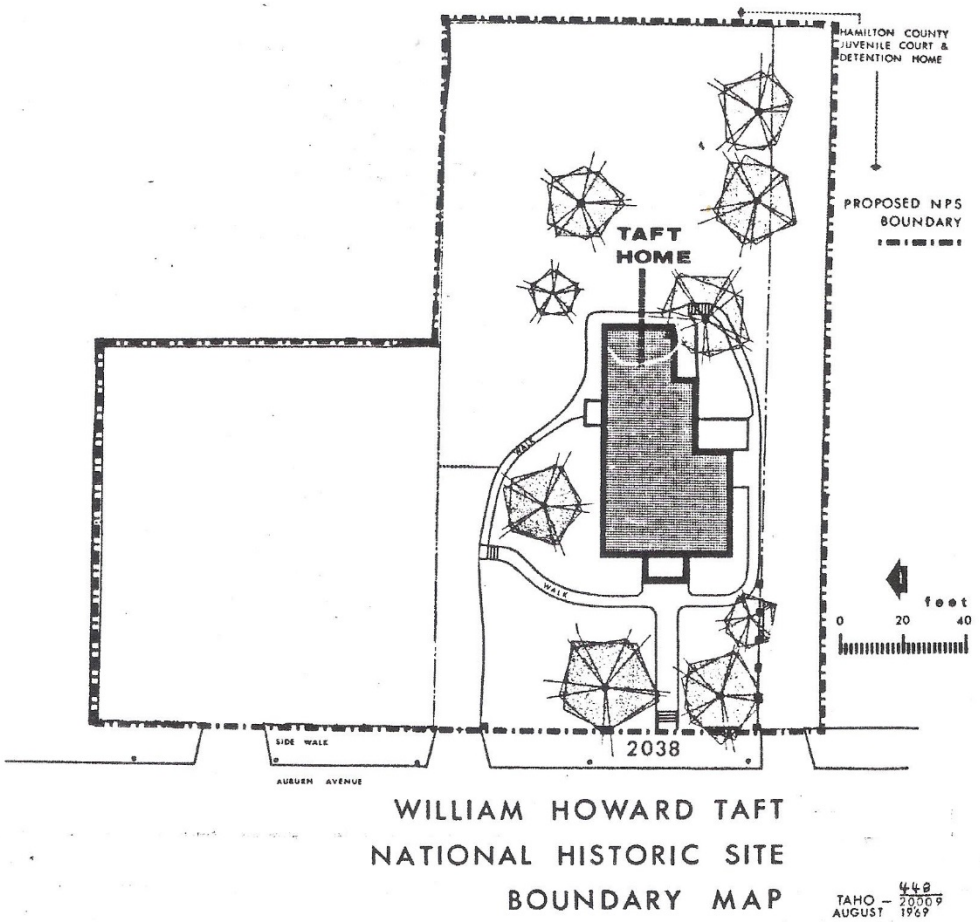


Figure 15. The Site as first established included the former Taft property at 2038 Auburn Avenue and the adjacent lot to the north. (National Park Service.)

The Legislation is Amended and Passed

With the matter of the adjacent lot dealt with, the bill was reported out of the House committee with amendments on September 8, 1969. Section 1 of the bill was amended such that the authority for land acquisition was now keyed to the "William Howard Taft National Historic Site Boundary Map." Section 3 of the map was amended so that the appropriation ceiling for restoration and development was raised from $250,000 to $318,000. This was based on information provided by Charlie Taft to the Department of the Interior and relayed to Congress in the letter from Secretary Hickel.

[33] Frank A. Bracken, Legislative Counsel, to Senator Alan Bible, August 6, 1969, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Restoration Exterior/Grounds.

The bill was reported out of the Senate committee just two days later, with Section 3 amended in the same way but lacking the amendment of Section 1. From here, the bill's journey to enactment was purely procedural. On September 15, the House considered and passed the bill and sent it to the Senate. On September 24, the Senate considered and passed the House bill as amended, in lieu of S. 560. On November 18, the House concurred in the Senate amendment, with amendment. On November 19, the Senate concurred in the House amendment. The bill was sent to President Richard M. Nixon and was signed into law on December 2, 1969.[34]

Congressional Intent in the 1969 Act

Committee reports and floor speeches on the bill enlarged on the bill's purposes and helped convey congressional intent. NPS looked to congressional intent to gain a more nuanced understanding of the authorizing act.

The House report stated that the principal property of the National Historic Site was the house in which William Howard Taft was born in 1857 and lived for 25 years. "Here," the report noted, "he associated with friends of his father, Alphonso Taft, who served as Secretary of War and Attorney General during the Grant administration." (This was a little misleading since the Tafts vacated the house and lived in the nation's capital when Alphonso Taft served in those positions.) The report went on to say, "It was in this environment that the character and philosophy of this dedicated public servant was molded." It noted the fact that William Howard Taft served in many governmental roles but was the only person to have served the nation as president and chief justice.

The House report then made this statement of purpose: "If established, this 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." Clearly, this pointed to two major interpretive themes, Taft's boyhood environment and his political career, with the latter being paramount. It continued, "The authentic restoration of the house and its immediate grounds will help to accomplish the first objective, but creative imagination will be necessary to portray the many contributions which he made to our society throughout his lifetime."[35] NPS would take this statement as congressional direction to restore some of the rooms with as much historical accuracy as possible and to dedicate other rooms to interpretive exhibits.

[34] Public Law 91-132, 83 Stat. 273, December 2, 1969.
[35] U.S. House, *Providing for the Establishment of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., Report 91-478, 1969, 2.

The House report also suggested that the goal of historic preservation extended beyond the site to the surrounding area:

> The success of the effort to preserve this historic property can be greatly facilitated if the city and county government cooperate in maintaining the character of the area. The National Park Service should seek appropriate agreements with the county in order to be sure that its lands will be used in a manner consistent with the objectives of preserving the setting of the site and the city should be encouraged to use its powers to prevent incompatible intrusions.[36]

The Senate report said that the purpose of S. 560 was "to recognize the birthplace of William Howard Taft, the 27th President of the United States, as a national historic site." It, too, noted that Taft was born in the house and lived there for 25 years. It recounted the numerous public offices he held on the road to the White House: collector of internal revenue for Cincinnati, solicitor general of the United States, federal circuit court judge, and governor of the Philippine Islands. It pointed out that during Taft's presidency "trusts were prosecuted with great vigor, with over 80 antitrust suits initiated." It highlighted a few other accomplishments and noted his later appointment to chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. The Senate report then included this important and clear directive: "If authorized, the Park Service is to restore the house as it was when William Howard Taft lived there and to interpret his early life and environment."[37]

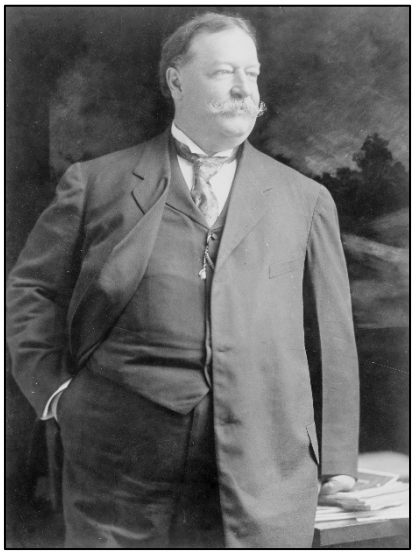


Figure 16. President William H. Taft. (Library of Congress.)

On September 15, 1969, three House members spoke on the bill and their remarks were recorded in the *Congressional Record*. Congressman Gerald R. Ford of Michigan, a Republican, praised William Howard Taft as "a most distinguished American," highlighting his singular achievement in serving as both a U.S. president and a chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, and as "an exemplary public servant," pointing out Taft's integrity and high standing with other men in high public office. Ford observed that the day was Taft's birthday, and he closed his remarks with this eulogy:

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[36] U.S. House, *Providing for the Establishment of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., Report 91-478, 1969, 2.
[37] U.S. Senate, *Establishment of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., Report 91-396, 1969, 1-2.

> Mr. Speaker, we honor here today a truly outstanding U.S. President, a great son of Cincinnati, a man whose name will ever live as one of the finest men ever to serve the American people in the great White House on Pennsylvania Avenue. To make his boyhood home a national historic site is most fitting and proper, a decision I am sure the American people will endorse.[38]

Congressman Schwengel gave the fullest statement on William Howard Taft's political career, listing many of Taft's political accomplishments as well as his qualities of character. As for Taft's historical reputation, Schwengel offered this:

> He was, in my judgment, the man who best represented the spirit of his time – in his personality, in his temperament, in his education; in his positive religious hope, in his calm deliberation, in his loyalty to the laws of his country, in his confidence in humanity and his sympathy with all men living under the U.S. flag. And yet it seems today he is one of the most forgotten and ignored of all our Presidents.

And further reflecting on Taft's legacy as a U.S. president, Schwengel intoned:

> Being President of the United States under modern conditions is not merely the greatest honor, but the greatest responsibility that can come to a man. The successful performance of the duties of that office involves not only devotion to the interests of the people and unquestioned integrity, for almost all of our Presidents have had those qualities. Rather, there is an absolute necessity for something greater and rarer than these common virtues. There must be genius for executive work, physical capacity for the endurance of severe official strain, patience and tact in dealing with other men – the latter a quality which comes only from the constant buffeting of official life, and a certain predisposition for the management of public affairs.

Schwengel related Taft's legacy to what he called a "tradition," meaning a tradition of presidential greatness. He concluded:

> Americans have now had a chance to judge the man and his career against the background of history. So that his memory and fine deeds and inspiration will never be lost to the American people, I urge all my colleagues to support H. R. 7066, creating the William Howard Taft National Historic Site. Such a monument would inspire all who came to view it, all who came to reflect there upon the greatness of the man and

[38] Rep. Ford speaking on H. 7066, on September 15, 1969, 91st Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 115, pt. 19, p. 25346.

> upon the profound meaning of the tradition of which his career was so characteristic a part.[39]

Congressman Donald D. Clancy stated that the purpose of the legislation was "to preserve the birthplace and home of this distinguished statesman, and through it give visitors an understanding of the environment that shaped Taft's character and philosophy, and the impact of this character and philosophy in shaping Taft's public career." This sentence would be quoted in NPS documents and correspondence as perhaps the most succinct statement of purpose to be extracted from the legislative history. Clancy echoed Schwengel in saying that "the memory of William Howard Taft is part of the great tradition and heritage of our country…. We have honored many Presidents and certainly William Howard Taft, the 27th President of these United States, deserves similar tribute."[40]

Acquisition and Transfer of the Taft House Property and the Adjacent Property

Superintendent George F. Schesventer of Mound City Group National Monument assumed responsibility for William Howard Taft National Historic Site on December 2, 1969. Two weeks later at the direction of Northeast Assistant Regional Director of Administration Eugene E. Deao he contacted the office of Charlie Taft to learn when the deed for the Taft house property would be transferred to NPS. Superintendent Schesventer was informed that Charlie Taft had purchased the property for $35,000 with his own funds and was still in the process of getting reimbursed by the WHTMA. Charlie Taft was not only awaiting reimbursement to turn over the property, he was also awaiting registration of the land title with the state of Ohio.[41]

Charlie Taft was anxious to unload the property and NPS officials were anxious to receive it, but both parties were concerned to have the title documents in perfect order, so they waited patiently for nine months to complete the transfer. Richard L. Stanton, head of the Office of Land Acquisition and Water Resources in the Eastern Service Center checked on its progress, or lack thereof, from time to time. The land title registration with the state was finally executed on June 11, 1970. The

[39] Rep. Schwengel speaking on H. 7066, on September 15, 1969, 91st Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 115, pt. 19, pp. 25346-25348.
[40] Rep. Clancy speaking on H. 7066, on September 15, 1969, 91st Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 115, pt. 19, p. 25348.
[41] Superintendent, Mound City Group National Monument to Regional Director, Northeast Region, December 19, 1969, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, WIHO correspondence parking.

transfer of title from the WHTMA to the U.S. government was made on September 18, 1970.[42]

Meanwhile, acquisition of the adjacent property to the north of the Taft house did not go smoothly. The property owner wanted $65,000 for the property; an appraiser put its value at $20,000. Charlie Taft advised NPS that his negotiations with the owner were at an impasse. He now preferred to see NPS try to negotiate a deal and if the owner did not reach terms then it should start condemnation proceedings. But the cost of the property was not the only sticking point. There remained the difficult issue of relocating the tenants. The apartment house (known as the Cross Apartments) had eighteen families – all African American – living in it according to one source, or sixteen families according to another. When Regional Director Lemuel Garrison raised this property issue with Director George B. Hartzog, Jr. and reminded him about the tenants, Hartzog told Garrison "emphatically" that he wanted "no part of this."[43]

Richard L. Stanton, head of the Office of Land Acquisition and Water Resources in the Eastern Service Center, made a strong statement to his staff in December 1969 that no one was to contact the owner or in any way get involved in the acquisition of the property; it was Hartzog's position that the purchase of the apartment house and the relocation of tenants must be left entirely up to the WHTMA. In May 1970, Stanton wrote another memo on this matter in which he noted Charlie Taft's desire for the government to exercise its condemnation authority with the WHTMA then compensating the government to the amount of the condemnation verdict. Stanton explained that the government was not keen on this option because "it is important to note that should the United States become a party to this that we might be required to get into a relocation program which we are not equipped to do."[44]

In January 1971, Congress passed the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act, which standardized relocation assistance allotments and guidelines in all situations where people were displaced when the federal government acquired property by condemnation. So, it was now the law that if NPS took a hand in acquiring the Cross Apartments then it would have to provide $4,000 in relocation assistance for each family living there. Charlie Taft was informed that he must

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[42] Chief, Office of Land Acquisition and Water Resources to Regional Director, January 19, 1970 and February 5, 1970, and Chief, Division of Land Acquisition and Water Resources to Chief, Division of Land Acquisition, May 21, 1970, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, WIHO correspondence parking; "Owner's Duplicate of Original Certificate of Title," and "Registered Land Doc. No. 286553" on pdf file titled "Wiho1deed" obtained through Ron Cockrell from https:\\landsnet.nps.gov.

[43] Chief, ESC-LW to Chief, Realty Section, December 22, 1969, enclosed with legislative history materials obtained from MWRO, Lands Division.

[44] Chief, ESC-LW to Chief, Realty Section, December 22, 1969, enclosed with legislative history materials obtained from MWRO, Lands Division; Chief, Office of Land Acquisition and Water Resources to Chief, Division of Land Acquisition, May 21, 1970, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, WIHO correspondence parking.

negotiate a purchase price without federal condemnation of the property or else factor into the cost the mandated federal relocation assistance of a federal condemnation action. Since the mandated federal relocation assistance would amount to $64,000 for sixteen families, Charlie Taft finally decided to settle with the owner for $50,000 and deal with the cost of relocation assistance at the city level. It is not known how much the city or the WHTMA finally put toward relocation assistance. The tenants in the Cross Apartments did have to relocate under tough circumstances following the sale, and their treatment "caused hard feelings" with Mount Auburn community leaders.[45]

Once the building was owned by the WHTMA, with the property slated to be donated to the U.S. government and turned into a parking lot, some in the NPS thought the old stone building ought to be preserved rather than demolished. The building appeared to date from the 1880s – when the Taft family still lived on Auburn Street – and the exterior of the structure was not without architectural interest. Cleared of apartment dwellers, the interior could be modified to hold staff offices or a visitor center or both. NPS historian Ed Bearss pointed out that demolishing the old building would be inconsistent with NPS efforts to promote historic preservation. NPS historical architect Hugh Miller argued that the Cross building should be left standing to provide "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." (This was a change of perspective from Charlie Taft's idea to restore open space next to the Taft house so that the Taft house would be clearly visible on the approach from the north.) Miller's and Bearss' opinions found support from the director of the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, Ernest Allen Connally, who urged Northeast Regional Director Chester L. Brooks to study options for adaptive reuse before submitting a request for demolition. Miller and Bearss then had an opportunity to present their views to Director Hartzog.[46]

Hartzog heard them out but chose to stay the course on demolition. Too much had already happened to allow a change of plans. The WHTMA had agreed by that time to buy the building and demolish it so it would not be a federal undertaking that would trigger compliance with the before-mentioned Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act. As Miller recalled, arrangements were already underway to relocate the tenants prior to federal acquisition and NPS did not want to interfere with that "subterfuge." NPS had not considered preserving this next-door building in either the alternatives study or the master plan study, nor had it broached the idea before testimony was presented to Congress. Instead, it had endorsed Charlie Taft's idea of clearing the lot to provide visitor parking and to open the view of the

[45] Lee, *Administrative History*, 72; Sam Witherup, interview by Antoinette J. Lee, October 24, 1985.
[46] Lee, *Administrative History*, 73-74; Hugh Miller, interview by Antoinette J. Lee, November 13, 1985.

Taft house from the north. To reverse its position on the Cross building at this late stage was "non-viable."[47]

So, the WHTMA bought the building and evicted the tenants (helping the tenants with the cost of relocation outside of the federal authority), and then demolition went forward in the spring of 1972. After the lot was cleared, the property was conveyed from the WHTMA to the U.S. government on June 25, 1972. The acreage of the property was corrected from 0.28 to 0.32 acres. An examination of title was made and conveyed from the U.S. attorney general to the secretary of the interior on April 3, 1973. This completed the process of land acquisition pursuant to the authorization act of 1969.[48]

Enlarging the Land Base

The original land base was soon found to be too small. The lot where the Cross building had stood was too sloping and tight a space to provide adequate visitor parking. NPS would have to acquire an additional lot for visitor parking. Since that would require an act of Congress, NPS considered other desirable modifications of the land base so that it could present everything to Congress at once. The other considerations besides visitor parking were (1) to have a buffer on the south side of the house, (2) to have a space outside of the historic house for visitor contact and staff offices, and (3) to acquire the full extent of the land contained in Alphonso Taft's original purchase.

In pursuit of these several goals, NPS soon focused on four lots or tracts. All were located on the same block as the National Historic Site. Since the Taft house lot and the Cross Apartments lot were designated as Tracts 01-101 and 01-102 respectively, the four other lots or tracts under consideration were designated as Tracts 01-103 through 01-106.

Tract 01-103 was a narrow buffer strip along the south side of the National Historic Site on land occupied by the Hamilton County Juvenile Court. Charlie Taft had obtained a perpetual easement for this buffer strip, but it was still owned by Hamilton County. A description of the origin of this small parcel, 16 feet wide by 220 feet deep, is contained in a letter Charlie Taft wrote to NPS planner Leroy A. Rowell in 1968:

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[47] Miller interview.

[48] J. Troy Lissimore to Charles P. Taft, February 1, 1972, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821; Deed, June 25, 1972, and Richard G. Kleindienst, Attorney General to Rogers C. B. Morton, Secretary of the Interior, April 3, 1973, on pdf file titled "Wiho2deed" obtained through Ron Cockrell from https:\\landsnet.nps.gov.

> We are also expediting the negotiations with the County of Hamilton to secure an easement for the slope and drive on the south side of the house, now used by us by sufferance based on some verbal understanding Mr. Bellinger had with the County. We proposed to secure from the County both this slope easement, and a right to use their driveway inbound, in return for letting them use our driveway outbound. We asked them also to pave our drive and our parking lot on the present property, as a further consideration for the agreement.[49]

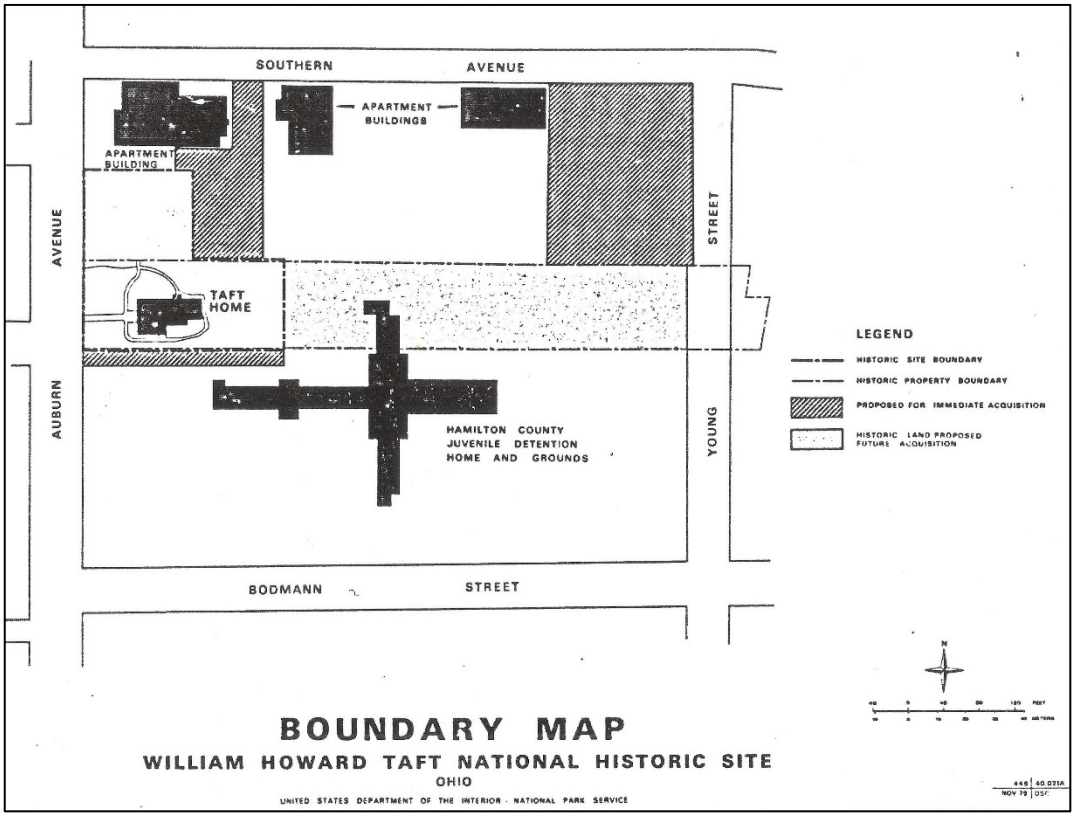


Figure 17. This boundary map was developed around the time of the 1978 legislation. The three shaded areas correspond to Tracts 01-103 through 01-105, and the stippled area is Tract 01-106. This 1979 map shows the footprint of the Juvenile Court building before it was rebuilt in the 1990s, as well as two apartment buildings on Southern Avenue that were demolished in the 1990s. (National Park Service.)

Charlie Taft secured the easement for the WHTMA in December 1969 and it went with the house property to the U.S. government in 1970. NPS wanted to plant vegetation on this strip to screen the historic property from the Juvenile Court complex, so it aimed to get this tiny .08-acre tract turned into federal ownership.

[49] Charles P. Taft to Leroy A. Rowell, January 11, 1968, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.

Tract 01-104 was part of the corner property at Auburn Avenue and Southern Avenue. The corner property contained the Sanning Apartments building as well as a parking lot on the lower ground below the former Cross Apartments building. The L-shaped property wrapped around the .32-acre Tract 01-102. Where the lower level of this property abutted the historic Taft property there was a steep slope and old retaining wall in poor condition. The Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation owned this property. Superintendent Jerry Licari discussed with Carl Westmoreland the possibility of the parking area being donated to the William Howard Taft National Historic Site. Westmoreland offered to sell a portion of the property to NPS for $1.00 with a list of conditions, including repairs to the retaining wall, maintenance of the parking area and driveway and snow removal for the same, and a share of the parking spaces. Midwest Regional Director Merrill D. Beal rejected the offer, including the $1.00 sale price as the parcel had to be literally donated. However, Westmoreland's offer was accompanied by a legal description of the parking area and driveway detached from the rest of the property, defined as Tract 01-104 containing .30 acres. While there was no guarantee that Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation would donate this parcel, Tract 01-104 was included in the package that NPS prepared for Congress.[50]

Tract 01-105 comprised Lots 26 and 27 which together formed a nearly square parcel at the corner of Southern Avenue and Young Street. Owned by Hamilton County, it was used for parking. NPS eyed this lot as a suitable visitor parking area for William Howard Taft National Historic Site, though its location at the bottom of Southern Avenue made it less than ideal.

Finally, Tract 01-106 comprised all that part of Alphonso Taft's original land holding from the rear of the property at 2038 Auburn Avenue downslope to Young Street. This tract was owned by Hamilton County and was dedicated to the Juvenile Court complex. While parking took up most of the space, one wing of the Juvenile Court building extended onto the tract as well. Both the WHTMA and NPS believed it was prudent to point out the desirability of this area eventually being added to the National Historic Site to make the historic property whole. County officials and Juvenile Court administrators were sympathetic in responding to those overtures. They stressed that the Board of County Commissioners had no intention of closing or relocating the facility in the foreseeable future. However, should it ever happen, they would then consider offering the property to NPS.[51]

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[50] Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation to Jerry Licari, November 18, 1976, Carl B. Westmoreland to Licari, December 29, 1976, and Acting Superintendent to Regional Director, March 3, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D22; Regional Director to Superintendent, January 5, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, WIHO correspondence parking.

[51] R. A. Anderegg, County Administrator, to Jerry L. Licari, Superintendent, January 19, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D22.

In sum, NPS proposed Tracts 01-103 through 01-106 for acquisition. Altogether, the four tracts would increase the authorized boundary of William Howard Taft National Historic Site from .83 acres to about 3.5 acres. The expectation was that Hamilton County would donate Tracts 01-103 and 01-105 and the Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation would donate Tract 01-104, increasing the area of the National Historic Site to about 2.5 acres. It was assumed that Hamilton County would not donate Tract 01-106 for the foreseeable future but NPS would be authorized to acquire it when the time came. "Eventual ownership of this property," it was stated, "would enable the NPS to interpret the full boyhood home environment of William Howard Taft." Midwest Regional Director Merrill D. Beal submitted the proposal together with a legislative support package to the NPS Office of Legislation in March 1977.[52]

The Board of County Commissioners passed three resolutions on January 12, 1977 covering each of the tracts owned by Hamilton County. For Tracts 01-103 and 01-105, the resolutions stated that the Board was prepared to convey the land to NPS. In the case of Tract 01-106, the resolution stated:

> if any time in the future the Board of County Commissioners of Hamilton County does determine that the Juvenile Center property is no longer needed for County use, such determination shall be certified to the U.S. National Park Service, or its successor, together with notification that said agency shall have one year from the date of such notification to acquire, or commit to acquire said property, under terms and conditions suitable to the Board of County Commissioners.

Hamilton County Administrator R. A. Anderegg conveyed the resolutions to NPS with an important caveat: an Ohio state law restricted the Board of County Commissioners from conveying county lands to the federal government. So, it would be necessary to get a bill through the state legislature authorizing the conveyances.[53]

In May 1977, NPS State Coordinator William C. Birdsell testified before the Ohio legislature's House of Representatives on a bill to permit the conveyances by the Board of County Commissioners to go forward. In August 1977, Superintendent Fahy Whitaker testified before the Ohio legislature's Senate when it took up the same

[52] Regional Director to Chief, Office of Legislation, March 31, 1977, with legislative support data attached, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D22.
[53] R. A. Anderegg, County Administrator, to Jerry L. Licari, January 19, 1977, Board of County Commissioners, "Resolution of Intent to Make Available Certain County-Owned Property to the U.S. National Park Service in Connection with the Restoration of the William Howard Taft Home," January 12, 1977, and Anderegg to Vance L. Kaminski, February 24, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D22.

measure. The state legislation was passed without debate, clearing the way for U.S. congressional action on the NPS legislative proposal.[54]

Congressman Willis D. Gradison, Jr., of Ohio, a Republican, introduced H. R. 8487, which provided for the proposed land additions to William Howard Taft National Historic Site, on July 22, 1977. This legislation was eventually wrapped into S. 791, a bill introduced by Senator Frank Church of Idaho, a Democrat, on February 24, 1977. Through a series of amendments, the legislation grew into an omnibus parks bill known as the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978, which was passed on November 10, 1978. Section 101 of that act addressed "The limitations on funds for development within certain units of the National Park System and affiliated areas," and item number 28 in Section 101 specifically amended Section 3 of the Act of December 2, 1969 from $318,000 to $1,888,000. As NPS had proposed, the law also enlarged the National Historic Site's authorized boundary to include Tracts 01-103 through 01-106.[55]

Superintendent Whitaker had to remind the Board of County Commissioners of the resolutions in January 1977 with their commitment to convey Tracts 01-103 and 01-105 after the federal legislation was passed. Finally, in 1979, those two tracts were donated. Unfortunately, the deed contained restrictions placed on the county by the city several years earlier, so it could not be registered. A letter was sent to the city asking assistance in clearing the deed of encumbrances.[56] The corrective deed was finally obtained and registered in August 1993.

Tract 01-104, owned by the Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation, was not acquired. It is not clear what caused the donation to be delayed or derailed. In the 1981 *Master Plan* for William Howard Taft National Historic Site, it was still assumed that the Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation would donate the tract to NPS for use as a parking lot provided that an agreement could be forged to allow residents of the Sanning Apartments and site visitors to share the parking lot. In the 1983 *Land Protection Plan* for the National Historic Site, it was still anticipated that NPS would acquire Tract 01-104 by donation. That document also noted the fact that the owner had granted to NPS a right-of-way over the driveway. In 1986, the Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation sold the whole property (the Sanning Apartments

[54] Park Technician to Superintendent, May 5, 1977, and Superintendent to Regional Director, August 10, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets FY '77; William C. Birdsell, State Coordinator to R. A. Anderegg, County Administrator, November 14, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, H1415.
[55] Legislative Affairs Specialist, Midwest Regional Office to Files, February 20, 1981, with attachments, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D22.
[56] Superintendent's Annual Report, 1979, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets, FY '79.

and the parking area and driveway) to a private individual who was uninterested in donating Tract 01-104 to NPS.[57]

Land Exchange

After the 1978 law was passed NPS had a visitor parking area but, as previously noted, the location of the parking lot at the bottom of Southern Avenue was less than ideal. It could accommodate school buses, but the kids and their teachers had to walk up Southern Avenue to reach the site. The location made it difficult for people in wheelchairs to visit the site, too. Consequently, NPS continued to look for other options.

In the 1980s, two apartment buildings stood on lots 28-29 and 32-33 on Southern Avenue. The two buildings were down the street from the Sanning Apartments. NPS considered seeking an exchange with the property at 219 Southern Avenue, which occupied lots 32 and 33. The Statement for Management dated March 1991 called for a land exchange: the lot at the corner of Southern Avenue and Young Street for the property at 219 Southern Avenue, which included the apartment building. The property owner at the time was Gamble Realty. The building would be adapted for use for administrative offices, maintenance, and curatorial facilities. This plan depended on getting another federal law passed "to adjust the park's legislative boundary to include the entire city block in which the birthplace is located." The plan did not eventuate.[58]

In 2001, NPS renewed its effort to accomplish this same land exchange under new circumstances. By then, the apartment building at 219 Southern Avenue had been torn down to make a parking lot, so the aim of NPS this time was to provide visitor parking in a better location and to secure and enhance that open space.[59] By then, too, the property at 219 Southern Avenue had changed ownership and was owned by the SABIS International School of Cincinnati (SABIS), located across Southern Avenue. The staff of William Howard Taft National Historic Site researched ownership of the lots adjacent to 219 Southern Avenue to confirm that all four lots 30-33 could be treated as one parcel for purposes of the exchange.[60] The parcel was designated Tract

[57] Statement for Management, 1991, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18; Land Protection Plan, 1983, on pdf file titled "Wiho_Land Protection Plan 3 17 1994" obtained through Ron Cockrell from ETIC.
[58] Statement for Management, March 1991, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18.
[59] U.S. Senate, *William Howard Taft National Historic Site Boundary Adjustment Act of 2001*, 107th Cong., 1st sess., 2001, S. Rept. 107-76, p. 6.
[60] Carol B. Kerlakian to Joel Hefley, April 24, 2001, in U.S. House, Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands of the Committee on Resources, *H.R. 37, H.R. 640 and H.R. 1000 Legislative Hearing*. 107th Cong., 1st sess., April 26, 2001, p. 9.

01-112. SABIS was amenable to the exchange of Tract 01-112 for the corner lot, Tract 01-105, because the latter was directly opposite the school entrance.

In putting a legislative package together for the land exchange, NPS included another boundary revision and acquisition authority: it added the Sanning Apartments property on the corner of Auburn Avenue and Southern Avenue. The owner, Michael A. Constantini, supported this move, which would allow NPS to acquire the property at some future date "by donation, purchase from willing sellers with donated or appropriated funds, or exchange."[61]

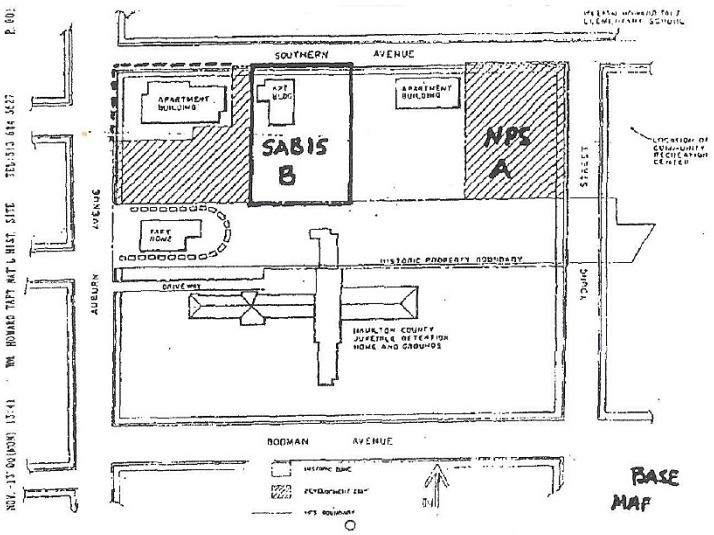


Figure 18. This map shows the land exchange that was authorized in 2001: the corner lot "A" owned by the NPS for the double lot "B" owned by the SABIS school. (National Park Service.)

Congressman Rob Portman of Ohio, a Republican, introduced the legislation in the House on March 13, 2001. Narrowly focused on providing for a land exchange and boundary adjustment for William Howard Taft National Historic Site, the bill carried two key provisions. First, it authorized an exchange of the two parking areas on Southern Avenue. And second, it revised the authorized boundary to include the whole Sanning Apartments property. The bill, H. R. 1000, was referred to the House Committee on Resources.[62]

The House Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands held a hearing on the bill on April 26, 2001. Portman testified along with NPS Associate Director Katherine H. Stevenson. Stevenson said in her prepared statement that NPS planned to develop part of the parcel on Southern Avenue for visitor parking and to allow another part "to revert to the same character it possessed during the Taft years of 1857 to 1899 – green space." She indicated that NPS "would also develop a handicapped accessible walking trail connecting to the site on part of this land to give

[61] Michael A. Constantini to Joel Hefley, April 25, 2001, in U.S. House, Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands of the Committee on Resources, *H.R. 37, H.R. 640 and H.R. 1000 Legislative Hearing*. 107th Cong., 1st sess., April 26, 2001, p. 10.
[62] Director to Regional Director, January 24, 2002, included with William Howard Taft NHS legislative history materials obtained from MWRO, Lands Division.

visitors a better feel for how this land influenced the life of William Howard Taft." As for the Sanning Apartments property, Stevenson stated that the tract had come up for sale twice in the past fifteen years and both times NPS "wanted to acquire the property, but was unable to submit an offer because the property was not within the park boundary." H. R. 1000 would give NPS authority to buy the property when it went on the market in the future. If acquired, it might be used for additional parking or additional green space.[63]

On May 16, the bill was amended and passed by the House Resources Committee. On June 6, it was taken up in the House. Three members spoke on behalf of the bill, lauding the career of William Howard Taft and the significance of the presidential site. They were Congressman Portman, Congressman Steve Chabot of Ohio, a Republican, and Congresswoman Donna Christian-Christensen of Virgin Islands, a Democrat and nonvoting delegate of the U.S. territory.[64]

On May 21, Senator Mike DeWine of Ohio, a Republican, introduced a companion bill, S. 921 in the Senate, and it was referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. On July 17, 2001, the Senate Subcommittee on National Parks of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing. NPS National Capital Associate Regional Director John G. Parsons testified on behalf of the bill. He said much the same thing as Stevenson and noted that H. R. 1000 and S. 921 were virtually identical bills. As H. R. 1000 had been passed by the House, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources reported that bill instead of S. 921 to the Senate. On October 17, the Senate passed the bill by unanimous consent.[65]

Once authorized, the land exchange took some further time to execute. The exchange was stalled in the first place by a change of administration at the SABIS International School of Cincinnati, the landowner, soon after the legislation was passed. Negotiations over the exchange dragged on through the next four years. In 2002, SABIS removed the building at 219 Southern Avenue. In 2005, the exchange was finally completed.[66]

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[63] U.S. House, Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands of the Committee on Resources, *H.R. 37, H.R. 640 and H.R. 1000 Legislative Hearing*. 107th Cong., 1st sess., April 26, 2001, pp. 31-32.
[64] Congressman Portman, Congressman Chabot, and Congresswoman Christensen, speaking on H.R. 1000, on June 6, 2001, 107th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 147, pt. 7, pp. 9948-9950.
[65] U.S. Senate, Subcommittee on National Parks of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, *Miscellaneous National Park and Monument Measures*, 107th Cong., 1st sess., July 17, 2001, pp. 54-57; Director to Regional Director, January 24, 2002, included with William Howard Taft NHS legislative history materials obtained from MWRO, Lands Division.
[66] Kevin D. McMurry, "Property Exchange with Adjacent Landowner," Briefing Statement, April 8, 2002, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2623; Superintendent's Annual Report for 2005, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2621.

Chapter Three

Planning and Development

This chapter discusses NPS efforts to develop the National Historic Site for visitor use. The Taft house had to be stabilized and parts of it restored as much as possible to the way it was in the period when William Howard Taft lived there. The half-acre grounds around the house likewise had to be restored or at least modified to resemble their nineteenth-century character. Minimal visitor facilities were needed. Initially, visitor facilities were limited to off-street parking; later, they were expanded to include the Taft Education Center as well as a small picnic area. Minimal administrative facilities were needed, too. NPS required office space for a small on-site staff and museum storage space for collecting and curating objects related to the Taft family's occupancy of the house.

Development consisted of an iterative process of planning, which was mostly done by off-site NPS planning teams, and restoration and construction work, which was mostly done by contract. Planning rested on preliminary historical research, archeological investigation, and architectural examination of the house. Restoration and construction work, meanwhile, rested on NPS leadership making the decision to prioritize expenditures for the development of William Howard Taft National Historic Site within the overall development project schedule of the National Park System. And that, in turn, was influenced by congressional appropriations. These preconditions for development – the need for preliminary research and the competition for funding – tended to drag out the development process. It took more than a decade and a half to complete the restoration of the house, and another 15 years beyond that to complete the Taft Education Center.

Many supporters of William Howard Taft National Historic Site thought the house restoration took much longer than it should have. Many NPS officials who worked on-site and some NPS officials who worked in the regional office expressed impatience and indignation over the slowness of the development process. It seemed that William Howard Taft National Historic Site was being passed over in favor of other, more high-profile units in the National Park System. Yet the development process did succeed in being deliberative and systematic, and it did manage to avoid

serious missteps, such as putting the Taft family's dining room on the wrong floor as was once proposed.

The *Master Plan* of 1970

As related in Chapter Two, NPS prepared an Alternatives Study and a preliminary Master Plan Study in 1969 while the legislation to establish William Howard Taft National Historic Site was pending in Congress. The law was enacted on December 2, 1969. NPS held an internal meeting on activation of four new units on December 15, at which time it was agreed that NPS undertake a historical architectural study to evaluate the restoration work done on the home by the WHTMA. The historical archeological study was programmed for the 1971 fiscal year. In the meantime, the existing master plan was revised to reflect the Act and provide the basis for development and administration of the National Historic Site. This first official *Master Plan* was approved on February 18, 1970.[1]

The *Master Plan* of 1970 guided development for only a short time, however. Historical research soon brought to light that some of its assumptions about the historic floor plan of the house were incorrect. Furthermore, some said the Master Plan was flawed in its conceptualization of visitor facilities and off-street parking. Discredited soon after it appeared, by 1974 the *Master Plan* would be shelved with calls for a do-over. Although it was replaced, the document remains historically significant as a marker of where things stood at the start of the development process.[2]

The original 1970 plan for restoration was to concentrate on restoring the exterior of the Taft house to its appearance during the period of historical significance. This was given as the period of most intensive Taft association, 1851 to 1874. (The period began when Alphonso Taft bought the property and it ended when William Howard Taft went away to attend college.) The interior would be restored to the original floor plan, but only some of the rooms would be "restored and refurnished to appear as they did during the above period." Overall, the house interior would be "fully restored and selectively restored." The north parlors on the first floor – Rooms 104 and 105 as they were subsequently designated – would be "restored in period style to serve adaptive use." The adaptive use in store was for audio-visual presentation.[3]

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[1] Chief, Branch of Park History Studies to Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, December 15, 1969, NPS Chief Historian's Office Files on William Howard Taft National Historic Site, 1969-1974.
[2] National Park Service, *Master Plan, William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Ohio* (Philadelphia: National Park Service, Northeast Regional Office, 1970), 2; Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 1; Miller interview; Lee, *Administrative History*, 50.
[3] National Park Service, *Master Plan* [of 1970], 14.

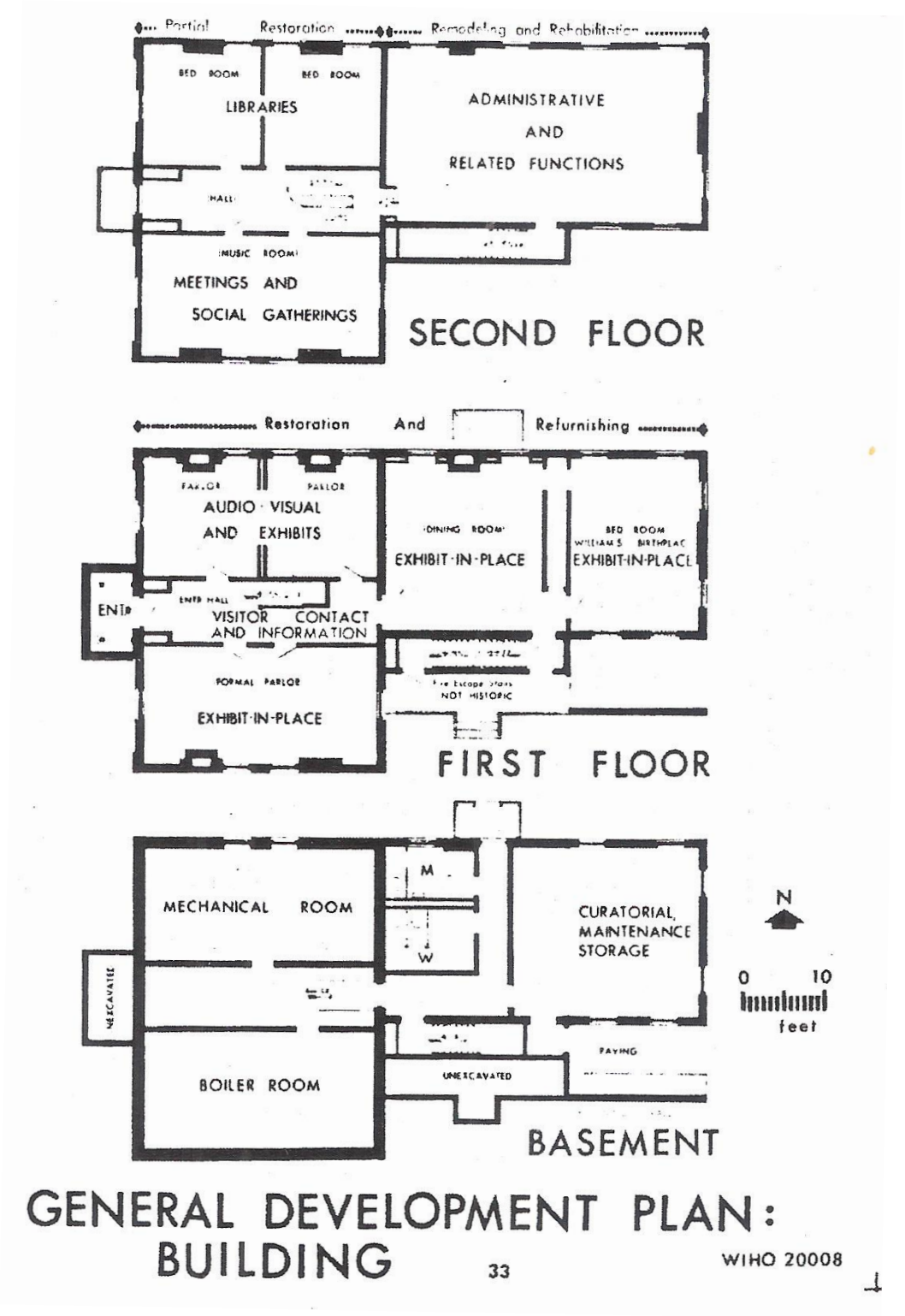


Figure 19. Interior restoration plan in 1970. The dining room was thought to be on the first floor and the William Howard Taft birth room was thought to be in the east room of the addition. (National Park Service.)

The *Master Plan* of 1970 seriously erred in supposing that the two ground-floor rooms in the 1851 addition – Rooms 106 and 109 – were the dining room and the "birth room" of William Howard Taft, respectively. Subsequent research would point to the dining room having been in the basement and the "birth room" or nursery having occupied the room that this plan called the dining room. Moreover, the *Master Plan* of 1970 failed to recognize that the ground floor hallway extended into the rear addition and included another staircase to the second floor; therefore, it assumed that Room 106 was much larger than it was. The *Master Plan* of 1970 placed administrative offices for Site staff on the second floor together with a library and public meeting room. It placed curatorial, maintenance, and storage facilities in the area of the basement that is now thought to have been the dining room, and it placed restrooms in the area of the basement that was historically the kitchen. It would have made the existing solarium on the south exterior wall of the addition into a two-story enclosed fire escape.[4]

The *Master Plan* of 1970 noted that the historic house sat on a half-acre lot, a remnant of the historic Taft property. On the north side of the house, a driveway connected the street to the rear of the property. It was paved at the entrance, then changed to a gravel surface, and terminated in an ungraded and unsurfaced area with parking space for some 18 vehicles. Concrete walkways went around all four sides of the house and another concrete walkway led from the sidewalk to the front door. The rest of the grounds were covered with turf in fair condition. There were several large trees scattered in the front and more in back. The development plan for the grounds included historic restoration of walkways and a carriage drive, historic restoration of retaining walls and fences, and planting of compatible ground cover.[5]

The *Master Plan* of 1970 was probably too sanguine about developing the adjoining 2.8 acres for visitor parking. At the time that the *Master Plan* was approved, the Cross Apartments building was not yet demolished and a parking area for tenants behind the apartment building was accessed from Southern Avenue. The *Master Plan* described the building as three stories high on the Auburn Avenue side and five stories high in back, owing to the sloping terrain. The plan assumed that after demolition NPS could recontour the lot to provide additional visitor parking despite the sharp drop of about 25 feet of elevation from Auburn Avenue. A steep ramp would lead from Auburn Avenue into the depression, which would be leveled and paved with room for 16 parking stalls. The difference in elevation "could present a problem in providing a connection to the Taft grounds," the plan stated, yet "it would help set the parking on a lower level and thus makes it easier to screen." The space was limited, especially as

[4] See Figure 16 facing page, floor plans in National Park Service, *Master Plan* [of 1970], n.p.
[5] National Park Service, *Master Plan* [of 1970], 9-10.

NPS wanted to accommodate school field trips arriving by school bus. "It is a challenging situation for an imaginative designer," the plan admitted.[6]

Several factors contributed to the rejection of this *Master Plan* in the early 1970s. As NPS conducted more research on the house, it seemed that the *Master Plan* made some faulty assumptions. Ed Bearss, a historian in the Washington Office, was tasked to prepare a Historic Structure Report in 1972. His research into the voluminous correspondence, journals, and financial records of the Taft family raised serious doubts about the historic floor plan and how certain rooms had been used by the family. For example, the plan imagined a so-called billiard room in the house as having been a room in which public figures once gathered, whereas it seemed to have been more of a playroom for the Taft children. Findings by Bearss convinced the Site superintendent and staff as well as personnel in the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation and the Denver Service Center that the *Master Plan* was flawed, resting on insufficient information.[7]

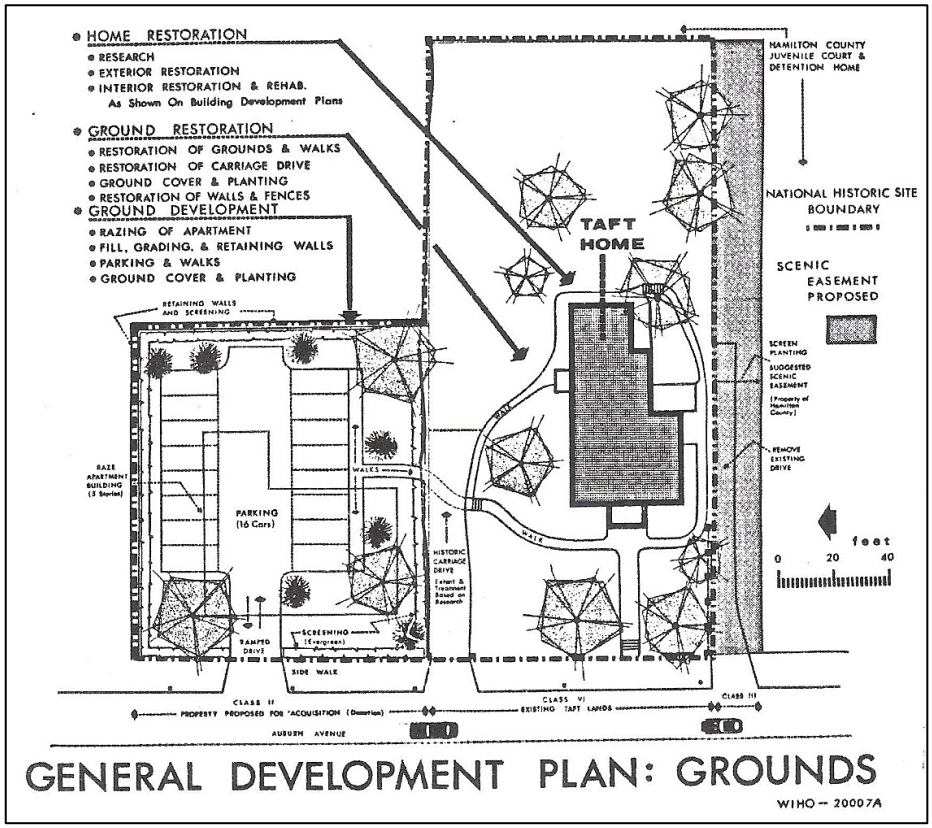


Figure 20. The development plan in 1970. Note the tight visitor parking with no bus parking. (National Park Service.)

[6] National Park Service, *Master Plan* [of 1970], 9-10, 13.
[7] Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, 1.

Hugh Miller, chief historical architect in the Washington Office, argued that the *Master Plan* of 1970 did not properly reckon with the Site's urban setting. Besides advocating for the preservation of the Cross Apartments building (see Chapter Two), Miller contended that the plan did not address off-street visitor parking responsibly.[8]

Organizational changes in NPS left the *Master Plan* of 1970 without defenders and rendered William Howard Taft National Historic Site a blank slate for the offices to which this new unit in the National Park System was assigned. In 1971, Director Hartzog established the Denver Service Center, moving hundreds of planners and other technical staff from former offices in Philadelphia and San Francisco to the new location. The planners who had conducted the initial studies on William Howard Taft National Historic Site in 1968-70 went separate ways, and subsequent planning studies for the Site would be performed by the Denver Service Center. Two years later, in 1973, there was a realignment of NPS regions. The Midwest Region picked up Ohio from the former Northeast Region. Henceforth, NPS units in Ohio – including William Howard Taft National Historic Site – ceased looking to NPS offices in Philadelphia for support and looked to Omaha and Denver instead. Neither the Midwest Regional Office nor the Denver Service Center had a stake in defending a plan that had originated out of other offices. Rather, they were inclined to start over.

John Kawamoto was a landscape architect, park planner, and senior administrator in the Midwest Regional Office when these changes occurred. As associate regional director, planning and resource preservation he was closely involved with the development of William Howard Taft National Historic Site over the next decade and more. Interviewed by Antoinette Lee in 1985, he pointed to yet another factor that undermined the *Master Plan* of 1970 and necessitated a do-over. The NPS approach to historic restoration was changing, Kawamato said. The historic structure report for William Howard Taft reflected the older approach in which NPS focused on archival research and amassed historical data about the structure, while the newer approach emphasized on-site recovery of original bricks and mortar and wallpaper samples and forensic analysis of changes to the structure. In other words, NPS was adopting more exacting standards for historic restoration that drew a sharp distinction between restoring a structure to the way it might have or restoring it to the way it truly was. The NPS approach to putting historic furnishings in a historic structure was moving in the same direction, with an insistence on knowing exactly how furnishings had been arranged if they were to be included at all. The older approach aimed at historic portrayal; the newer approach insisted on historic authenticity. Kawamoto recalled in 1985 that "we were caught right in the middle of that."[9]

[8] Miller interview.
[9] John Kawamoto, interview by Antoinette J. Lee, October 23, 1985.

The final factor contributing to the plan's demise was the big change in national policy around all types of federal land planning efforts that was happening in those years. Just weeks after Congress enacted the William Howard Taft National Historic Site Act, it passed the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). NPS, like other federal land managing agencies, gradually formulated new procedures in the early 1970s to accommodate itself to NEPA's sweeping directives. By 1974, NPS approached master planning as a public process that involved laying out alternatives, evaluating environmental impacts, and gathering public input. The *Master Plan* of 1970 lacked that essential foundation of environmental assessment and public review. It could have been grandfathered in, but NPS thought it better to set the plan aside and start the process anew.

Transition to a Second Planning Effort

NPS pivoted during 1973 and 1974 to make a fresh start on development planning for William Howard Taft National Historic Site. While NPS's aim was to do historic restoration of the presidential home to an appropriate high standard, the Taft family perceived only needless delay and government mismanagement. Charlie Taft, still on the city council and president of the WHTMA, kept tabs on Site development after the WHTMA transferred the property to the federal government. He was informed of two reports on the historic grounds that were prepared by Major Charles Ross McCollough of the Ohio Historical Society in 1971, and he met with Ed Bearss and Hugh Miller when they visited the site in December 1971.[10] Robert A. Taft, Jr., who was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1970, also stayed informed about the Site. Both Taft family members received a copy of Ed Bearss' *Historic Structure Report* in February 1973.[11] Both contributed their own efforts to Site development: Charlie Taft was interviewed by NPS about family history and his personal knowledge of the house, and Senator Taft assisted with getting the papers of the William Howard Taft Memorial Association deposited at the Cincinnati Historical Society.[12] However, when the two men learned that NPS planned to prepare an environmental impact statement

[10] Bearss and Miller coincided at the Site and both filed trip reports. See Hugh C. Miller to Ernest A. Connally, December 14, 1971, and Historian Bearss to Supervisory Historian, January 10, 1972, NPS Chief Historian's Office Files on William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Correspondence 1969-1974.
[11] John T. Lissimore to Charles P. Taft II, January 11, 1972, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows FY '72; William C. Birdsell to Robert A. Taft, Jr., February 14, 1973, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[12] J. Troy Lissimore to Charles P. Taft II, January 17, 1972, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows FY '72.

and a new master plan for the Site, they thought the NPS planning effort sounded excessive.[13]

Charlie Taft and Senator Taft tried to apply pressure on NPS to get the historic restoration started sooner. Through the year 1973 they directed a hail of letters to Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton complaining of the slow progress of Site development. Charlie Taft wrote to Senator Alan Bible, one of the sponsors of the legislation in 1969, saying that he thought the government's timetable for development was "outrageous." He reminded the senator that the Taft family had donated the property to the government "clearly with the intention and understanding that the United States would immediately complete the rehabilitation." He warned, "I am seriously thinking of filing a suit to rescind the gift on the ground of the breaking of that condition."[14]

Charlie Taft thought NPS had money and was refusing to spend it. Mistakenly, he thought that the $318,000 development ceiling in the legislation was an appropriation from Congress and NPS was just banking the money. Regional Director Chester L. Brooks tried to assure him that that was not the case; no construction money for the Site had been appropriated yet. The small amount of money spent thus far on research and planning for the Site had come from another budget allotment. That expenditure did not count against the Site's development allowance, which still stood at $318,000. But this information was cold comfort for Charlie Taft, who wanted to see headway made on the restoration. It only displeased him more when Acting Regional Director George A. Palmer informed him that NPS would probably not obtain construction funds for William Howard Taft National Historic Site until fiscal year 1976 or 1977.[15]

The pressure from the Taft family may have accelerated the programming of construction moneys by one year. It prompted Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton to write Senator Taft and commit to Fiscal Year 1976 as a target end-date for completing the preservation and restoration of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site.[16] Of course, that was only a target and the government would miss it by a wide margin, but the secretary's personal commitment to Senator Taft may have helped launch the planning process, which was prerequisite for construction, sooner

[13] Robert Taft, Jr. to Rogers C. B. Morton, June 27, 1973, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, William Howard Taft NHS Restoration – Plans and Research 1969-1985.
[14] Charles P. Taft to Alan Bible, November 9, 1973, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821. See also Taft to Rogers C. B. Morton, March 8, 1973, and Robert Taft, Jr. to Morton, December 12, 1973, same file.
[15] Charles P. Taft to Rogers C. B. Morton, March 8, 1973, George A. Palmer to Taft, March 29, 1973, Taft to Palmer, April 3, 1973, and Chester L. Brooks to Taft, April 13, 1973, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[16] Secretary of the Interior to Senator Robert A. Taft, Jr., February 6, 1974, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, William Howard Taft NHS Restoration – Plans and Research 1969-1985.

than it might have started otherwise. An item for $10,000 for development planning was put into the 1974 fiscal year budget, with the goal of having the new master plan together with an Environmental Impact Statement completed by June 1974.[17]

Secretary Morton promised something else as well: emergency stabilization of the house. Senator Taft had warned him that the back corner of the house was on the verge of collapse. Morton took heed. "We shall make available $50,000 to undertake immediately urgently needed stabilization," he wrote to the senator. "This work will commence as soon as weather permits." Morton gave his request to NPS, which wrote it into the NPS construction program on a "crash basis" two days later. The request was handled by the Northeast Regional Office and the money was turned over to the Midwest Regional Office, since the latter had taken over direction of the Ohio Group a few months earlier. So began a construction project that would continue in fits and starts over the next 15 years.[18]

Emergency Stabilization

The Midwest Regional Office prepared an invitation for bids and advertised it on June 3, 1974. The work entailed emergency stabilization of the house foundation, erection of a temporary plywood encasement of the "east wing" or 1851 rear addition to the house, painting and caulking of the entire structure, and rehabilitation of failing sections of the stone retaining wall along Auburn Avenue, as well as various other items involving masonry, carpentry, caulking and waterproofing, roofing, painting, and electrical work.[19]

NPS awarded the contract to the Fred L. Schille Company of Cincinnati. Vance L. Kaminski, a historical architect in the Midwest Regional Office, was appointed the project supervisor. NPS also retained the services of architect William J. Miller of Cincinnati to prepare the project specifications and help supervise.[20]

In a change order, NPS added reconstruction of the front carriage gates, repair of carriage gate piers, replacement of carriage gate capstones, and installation of

[17] Chester L. Brooks to Robert Taft, Jr., July 20, 1973, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, William Howard Taft NHS Restoration – Plans and Research 1969-1985.
[18] Secretary of the Interior to Senator Robert A. Taft, Jr., February 6, 1974, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, William Howard Taft NHS Restoration – Plans and Research 1969-1985; Geary Fisher to James L. Ryan, record of telephone call, February 8, 1974, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 4, File 004.10.
[19] Bid Invitation No. 6000-4-0016, June 3, 1974, William Howard Taft NHS, Superintendent's office – reports retrieved from the Sanning Apartments building.
[20] Joe H. Riha to Fred L Schille Co., June 27, 1974, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Stabilization Project; William Joseph Miller, "Historic Structures and Site Report, William Howard Taft National Historic Site," report prepared for National Park Service, Midwest Region, June 28, 1974, on pdf file titled "William Howard Taft NHS Historic Structures and Site Report" obtained through Ron Cockrell from ETIC.

trunnion blocks at the foot of the carriage gate piers. Specifications for the last item give a flavor of how exacting NPS could be when a relatively small feature was going to be in the public eye:

> Furnish and install cut limestone trunion [sic] blocks at the pivot points of the carriage gate piers and a cut stone cane bolt keeper at the center of the carriage gate opening. The subject stone blocks shall be milled out to receive bearing quality bronze trunions approximately 2½" diameter and 1½" thick. Trunions shall be milled to receive gate pivots and cane bolt. The limestone blocks shall match existing historic limestone in quality, color and texture.[21]

The emergency stabilization work was performed from mid-summer of 1974 through the following winter. Vance Kaminski traveled from Omaha to Cincinnati in August and October to inspect progress, while Superintendent Jerry Licari and William Miller provided on-site supervision. The rear of the house was sheathed in plywood – a temporary measure to shield it from the elements, though it would remain in that condition for longer than anyone anticipated. The foundation was reinforced with steel placement. The stone retaining wall along Auburn Avenue was rebuilt, and one section was rebuilt twice because the first attempt was unsatisfactory. Kaminski explained in his trip report: "Immediately upon approaching the building from the street, I noted the stone retaining wall north of the steps was not acceptable. It does not conform to historic photographs. The coursing was poorly done and mortar was used in joints. (It was supposed to be laid DRY!)"[22]

As a last item, the contractor installed monuments marking the boundary of the property. Concrete monuments were installed five feet inside the boundary with a brass plate noting the offset, and brass pins were installed at the property corners.[23]

The Environmental Assessment of 1976

While the Midwest Regional Office oversaw the emergency stabilization work, the Denver Service Center took on the second round of development planning for William Howard Taft National Historic Site. It is pertinent to this history to recognize the intense pressure surrounding the staff at the Denver Service Center in this period. The Denver Service Center was then a new entity in NPS. Established in 1971 and staffed with around 350 employees, the Center in the mid 1970s operated in a highly

[21] Joe H. Riha to Fred L. Schille Co., no date, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Stabilization Project.
[22] Vance L. Kaminski, "Trip Report," October 25, 1974, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Stabilization Project.
[23] Vance L. Kaminski to William Miller, January 31, 1975, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Stabilization Project.

competitive work environment. Technical staff in the regional offices and the Washington Office mostly held a jaundiced, even antagonistic, view of the Center since it was assigned tasks that they would rather do themselves. The planners, landscape architects, historical architects, historians, environmental scientists, and engineers who composed the Center's technical staff had mostly transferred to Denver from the former Western Service Center and Eastern Service Center, which were abolished. As each group brought its own culture to the new workplace – one more innovative, the other more traditional – there was a competition within the Center as well as between it and other offices. The Center manager, Glenn O. Hendrix, came from the Western Service Center and he had a cadre of associates who he put in key positions, which exacerbated tensions between the two groups. In the mid 1970s the Denver Service Center had a lot on its plate; besides master planning for scores of units throughout the National Park System, it was carrying the load of two major NPS initiatives: development planning for the Bicentennial and new area studies in Alaska.[24]

Hendrix and the technical staff at the Denver Service Center were also in the thick of implementing NPS policy to comply with new requirements under NEPA. NPS leadership decided that NPS would approach NEPA compliance by integrating it into the master planning process, and it largely fell to the staff of the Denver Service Center to work that out in practice. As Hendrix outlined in June 1974, the master planning process for William Howard Taft National Historic Site would involve four steps: 1) statement of the problem, 2) description of the environment, 3) preparation of alternatives – including evaluation of environmental impacts, and 4) consultation and coordination.[25]

Over the summer of 1974, Center Manager Hendrix assembled a planning team for William Howard Taft National Historic Site. He appointed landscape architect Dan Wenk as team captain. Over the winter of 1974-75, Wenk and his team made two trips to Ciincinnati to visit the site and meet with personnel from the Midwest Regional Office and the Washington Office. Proceeding expeditiously at this stage, Wenk's team completed a draft environmental assessment in April 1975. The following month the Denver team met with interested personnel in Omaha, where sharp differences arose over the approach that the Denver team was taking. It seemed to the Omaha people that the Denver team was too fixated on the environmental aspects and it was not addressing the underlying problem: that there was insufficient historical data on the house and furnishings. Regional Historian David A. Clary went

[24] Ethan Carr, *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 328; Gerald Patten, interview by Theodore Catton, May 7, 2008.
[25] Patten interview; Lee, *Administrative History*, 56.

so far as to say he did not think the Denver team understood NPS policies for Class VI lands (historic and cultural lands).[26]

Responding to the Midwest Region's concerns, Wenk delayed finalizing the Environmental Assessment and releasing it for public review for about eight months while NPS gathered more information. A second volume of the Historic Structure Report was recommissioned. While the *Historic Structure Report* by Bearss was subtitled *Historical Data*, this one would be subtitled *Architectural Data*. Norman M. Souder, a historical architect out of Philadelphia who transferred to Denver in 1971, had completed a draft of this report in 1972 that was never published. Anthony Crosby, another historical architect at the Denver Service Center, joined Wenk's team and was commissioned to write this second volume, going beyond Souder's earlier work. Meanwhile, Sarah Olson, an expert on historical furnishings, was working under contract to deliver a historic furnishings report. It was anticipated that the report by Crosby and the report by Olson along with the earlier report by Bearss would provide NPS with the information it needed to complete the historic restoration.[27]

The reports by Crosby and Olson were not yet finished when Wenk shepherded the environmental assessment to completion in February 1976. With the benefit of hindsight, this would be viewed as putting the cart before the horse, but at the time everyone was concerned with moving the process forward. That month, Superintendent Licari, the Denver Service Center, and the Midwest Regional Office joined in releasing the document for public review. Besides sending copies to the City Council, the City Planning Commission, and other key stakeholders, NPS made copies available for the general public to review at the offices of the National Historic Site and the Midwest Regional Office. It hosted a public meeting in the gymnasium of the William Howard Taft Elementary School on March 13, 1976.[28]

The Environmental Assessment began with a "Problem Statement" and continued with a "Description of the Environment" before launching into "The

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[26] Kawamoto interview; Lee, *Administrative History*, 57. The antipathy by personnel in the Omaha office toward the Denver Service Center staff was pronounced. Regional officials took great pains to define the development package for the DSC and to include regional and Washington office staff on the DSC team as consultants, even as these officials voiced doubts to one another that the DSC people would give them their due. Regional Historian David A. Clary was especially critical of the DSC. In a typed note to Robert M. Utley he wrote, "Bob – It seems that the war with the DSC planners will last forever." See David A. Clary's record of telephone call, October 15, 1974, with attached note, and other correspondence in NPS Chief Historian's Office Files on William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Correspondence 1969-1974.

[27] Kawamoto interview; Witherup interview; Lee, *Administrative History*, 57.

[28] Lee, *Administrative History*, 62-63; Kawamoto interview; National Park Service, "National Park Service Seeks Public Views on Restoration/Development Plans for the William Howard Taft National Historic Site" (news release), February 4, 1976, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows – FY'75; Webster W. Posey, Clerk of Council to Merrill D. Beal, Regional Director, April 19, 1976, and H. W. Stevens, Director of City Planning to Beal, March 25, 1976, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D22.

Alternatives," – just as Hendrix had outlined. The problem statement was a recitation of what NPS had been wrestling with all along: 1) how to do historic restoration and interpretation of the presidential site, 2) how to provide adequate off-street parking and visitor access, and 3) where to place administrative offices. The description of the environment focused on the architecture of the house, changes to the house since the historic period, and its structural problems in the present. It noted changes to the grounds since the historic period: the elimination of outbuildings, garden, and orchard, the diminishment of the property, and the alteration of the wider setting.

In the section on alternatives, the document listed six alternatives and gave a description of each one. Alternative A, the "no-action" alternative, was not truly an option since the rear addition on the house would eventually collapse without more work being done on it. Alternative B, called "Partial Restoration with Emphasis on Architectural Preservation," would focus on restoration of architectural features that were well documented or still visible. Elements that could not be reproduced without heavy reliance on conjecture would not be reconstructed. Only one room would be subject to historic furnishing and that would be the front hall where visitors would enter. Other first floor rooms and part of the basement would be devoted to interpretation. The second floor would contain administrative offices, a research library, and a meeting room. Historic restoration of grounds would be limited to the half-acre lot. Parking for 10 to 12 cars would be developed on the adjacent 0.28-acre tract, with access from Southern Avenue. Buses would discharge passengers at a curb cut on Auburn Avenue, and buses would park in an overflow parking area at the corner of Southern Avenue and Young Street.

Alternative C, "Partial Restoration with Emphasis on Furnishings," proposed the complete historic restoration of five rooms on the first floor. These were listed as the hall, the parlor, the parlor chamber, the dining room, and the nursery (corresponding to rooms 103, 101-102, 104-105, 106, and 109, respectively, as later designated). The five rooms would be interpreted through an audio tour that would talk about the Taft family's domestic life. The basement interpretive area would accommodate a bookstore as well as an interpretive work room. The second floor would contain administrative offices, a research library, and a meeting room. Historic restoration of the grounds was the same as in Alternative B. The adjacent 0.28-acre tract would be developed with a visitor contact station and parking for 10 to 12 cars. As in Alternative B, access to the parking area would be from Southern Avenue. Buses would discharge passengers at a curb cut on Auburn Avenue, and park in an overflow parking area at the corner of Southern Avenue and Young Street.

Alternative D, "Restoration with Emphasis on Interpretation," would devote all the rooms on the first floor and part of the basement to interpreting the life and significance of William Howard Taft. Besides broadening the scope of interpretation

to put more emphasis on Taft's political career, this alternative would push an environmental education program for school-age children in greater Cincinnati. Historic furnishings would be limited to the display of a few known period pieces. Treatment of the second floor would be the same as in Alternatives B and C. Treatment of the grounds and development of parking would be the same as in Alternatives B and C, except that the parking area on the adjacent tract would be designed to hold as many as 30 cars.

Alternative E, called "Emphasis on Management Objectives," proposed the complete historic restoration of seven rooms: the five listed in Alternative C plus the kitchen and billiard room in the basement. Other rooms would be restored and partially furnished. This alternative called for a visitor contact station to be developed on the adjacent 0.28-acre tract along with parking space for 10 to 12 cars. Interpretation would span the life and times of William Howard Taft, with guided tours featuring Taft's family life in the house, audiovisual materials addressing Taft's career, and museum exhibits in the visitor contact station focusing on the Taft family and the history of the Mount Auburn neighborhood. Administrative support facilities would be on the second floor and in the basement. Historic restoration of the grounds would once again be confined to the half-acre lot.

Alternative F, "Complete, Authentic Restoration and Refurnishing," was included for comparative purposes, like the no-action alternative. It proposed a complete restoration of the whole historic Taft property. It, too, was not truly an option because NPS did not own the whole historic Taft property. According to this alternative, NPS would actively seek to acquire the area currently owned by Hamilton County and partially occupied by a wing of the Juvenile Court complex. All rooms in the house would be restored as accurately as possible and furnished with original Taft furnishings as much as possible. Period furnishings or reconstructions would be used to complete the historic furnishings. Interpretation would take place both in the house and in the proposed visitor contact station next door.[29]

These six alternatives were consistent on a couple of crucial matters. All of them stated that the historic restoration would be done to reflect the historic period from 1851 to 1877, or from the year that Alphonso Taft purchased the property until the year of the house fire. The year of the house fire was taken as the close of the historic period because the exterior appearance of the house changed significantly when the roof and upper story were repaired after the fire. Furthermore, as Bearss' *Historic Structure Report* demonstrated, the fire insurance claims yielded an abundance of data about the house structure and furnishings before and after the fire. It

[29] National Park Service, "A Summary of an Environmental Assessment for the William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Cincinnati, Ohio," March 1976, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Taft Birthplace newspaper articles.

did present a problem for items that the Taft family had acquired after 1877. One alternative (D) proposed that the "post-1877 items with intrinsic aesthetic interest (such as the Eastlake mantels) will be preserved in museum displays." Another alternative (E) proposed that seven rooms would be restored to the historic period and other rooms would be restored to their late-nineteenth century condition and furnished with post-1877 Taft furniture and compatible antiques.

The alternatives all made use of the faulty room designations that were in the *Master Plan* of 1970. They placed the dining room on the first floor, the nursery at the back of the house, and the so-called "billiard room" in the basement. Those room designations were already shaky in 1976 and would prove false not long after the Environmental Assessment was done. Wenk's team forged ahead with inadequate information on the rooms because NPS was responding to strong public and Taft family pressure to move the planning process along, gather public input, and position the Site to be placed in the NPS development project schedule as soon as possible.

Public response focused on Alternative E as the most feasible and desirable alternative. The City Council and the City Planning Commission both pointed out that Alternative F was impractical since Hamilton County did not envision relocating the Juvenile Court in order to vacate the east end of the historic Taft property. Wenk's team and Acting Superintendent Vance L. Kaminski thought the Environmental Assessment had accomplished the objective. Back in Denver, Wenk's team prepared a new draft master plan. Superintendent Kaminski wrote in his annual report that the environmental assessment process was finished. Since no public controversy had emerged over the plan for development, NPS had issued a negative declaration later in the year indicating that no environmental impact statement would be necessary. Early in 1977, a revised master plan was completed by the Denver Service Center and submitted for review by the Midwest Regional Office and the Washington Office.[30]

The halting process of development is an important theme of this study, so it is useful to pause to reflect for a moment and point out that the underlying problem that was the source of William Howard Taft National Historic Site's laggard development was not the same problem all the way through this administrative history. The problem that caused delay from 1970 to 1974 was different from the problem that planners faced from 1974 to 1977, and the problem that arose after 1977 would be different again. In the first four years of its existence, William Howard Taft National Historic Site languished for the ordinary reason that it was awaiting its turn in the NPS development project schedule. If the wait was longer than it might have been, that was owing mainly to organizational changes in NPS – the realignment of NPS regions as well as the opening and closing of service centers – which left the newly established

[30] Superintendent's Annual Report, 1976, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY'77; Lee, *Administrative History*, 61-62.

unit without strong support inside the agency. From 1974 to 1977, the problem that slowed up development was potentially more serious: development planning was getting out in front of the necessary research on the historical resource. Despite mounting pressure to get on with it, prudence finally dictated more delay to await the research findings.

The problem that arose next was still more serious. When the research findings were in, the experts determined that there was a lot about the interior of the house and the furnishings in the historic period that would simply never be known. Consequently, NPS had to restore fewer rooms. Sticklers for historical accuracy argued that no rooms at all should be restored, for the historic restoration would not measure up to NPS standards. And yet, Congress had intended that the house interior be restored. So, planners faced a new challenge: how to balance congressional intent with the dictates of NPS management policy.

Insufficiency of Historical Data and a Compromise Agreement

In this next phase of Site development, technical staff in the Cultural Resources Management Division of the Washington Office weighed in heavily on decisions. NPS historical architect Hugh C. Miller first raised the problem of insufficient historical data in November 1975. He cautioned against historic restoration where there was too little information. "We should not force the mold of a biographical house or house museum on a site where it does not fit," he wrote to Wenk, the team captain of the Denver Service Center planning team. Rejecting the preferred Alternative E in the Environmental Assessment, Miller selected Alternative D, development with emphasis on interpretation, as most fitting given the insufficiency of historical data. "The concept for developing of the site should be the creation of a sense of place rather than attempt to create a physical environment based on incomplete documentation, marginal architectural evidence, and unknown historic furnishings and objects."[31] In another lengthy memo to Wenk dated January 2, 1976, he wrote that the house had been "seriously compromised by alterations and earlier restorations" and whatever NPS did to it now would be "conjectural and add little to the interpretation of the site."[32]

As the planning team wrapped up its work in 1976, the Denver Service Center's Anthony Crosby was unable to complete the historic structure report – architectural data section because the thorough fabric investigation that was needed

[31] Team Member to Team Captain, November 17, 1975, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, William Howard Taft NHS Restoration Plans and Research 1969-1985.
[32] Team Member to Team Captain, January 2, 1976, NPS Chief Historian's Office Files on William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Correspondence 1971-.

was deemed to be too intrusive for Site operations in that busy Bicentennial year. Consequently, an extensive fabric investigation was finally undertaken in the early months of 1977.[33] Gordie Whittington, an exhibit specialist in the Division of Historic Preservation in the Denver Service Center, led the investigation. He and his helpers tore into the interior walls and peeled up the floorboards looking for clues of when interior walls, closets, staircases, and so on, were built or installed. Whittington made typescript notes on his findings, which he turned over to Crosby.[34] Seasonal ranger Sam Witherup talked to Whittington on site and recalled how Whittington drew his conclusions:

> He had the ability to read saw marks and tell me if they were made with a power saw, water power, steam power, you know, they all had their individual characteristics. He could look at brick and tell me if it was local or not. He could tell me modern patches of mortar against old…. He knew what he was looking for when he went in to look for several rooms and he…put some of the things in the old master plan to question.[35]

Shortly after Whittington conducted his investigation, NPS historical architect Henry A. Judd, acting chief of the Cultural Resources Management Division in the Washington Office, wrote a lengthy memorandum stating that he and his group did not recommend approval of the draft master plan. Judd's opinion carried a lot of weight. He was NPS's chief historical architect. It is not clear if Judd had access to Whittington's notes when he prepared the memo; what is clear is that he was amplifying the concerns of his staff member, Hugh C. Miller. (Miller would succeed Judd as NPS's chief historical architect when Judd retired two years later.)[36]

Judd opened the memo referring to NPS standards for historic restoration. "In our judgement," he wrote, the draft master plan's "narrative descriptions and its recommendations fall far short of applicable standards, particularly as they affect sound care of the resource." He went on to point out numerous vague statements in the document, such as the statement that seven rooms would be furnished "as accurately as possible," which evaded the central question of how accurate that might be. Judd and his staff believed that NPS would never be able to restore the house to the period when William Howard Taft lived in it. Judd and Miller both contended that the house was best suited "to be a memorial structure – not an interpretive house museum." By

[33] Crosby, *Historic Structure Report*, 1.
[34] The notes, labeled room by room, survive in MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 2, File O03.12.
[35] Witherup interview. John Kawamoto took a dimmer view of this investigation. "We had this fabric investigation by Whittington. And then he tore half the house apart to find what was there. Then we could not restore it because we had the house torn." (Kawamoto interview.)
[36] Acting Chief, Cultural Resources Management Division to Assistant Director, Planning and Development, April 5, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D22.

this, they meant that the interior should be devoted to interpretive exhibits rather than historic furnishings. Miller later remarked, "I think many of us had questions about the interpretive value of birthplace homes."[37]

Judd contended in the memo that the master plan did not adequately address the deficiencies in the earlier *Master Plan* of 1970 concerning limitations of space. The plan did not explain how visitors would circulate through the house. It assumed that school groups would visit the National Historic Site, but it did not consider whether the load-bearing structures in the house were strong enough to support so many people at once. It called for construction of a visitor contact station as well as the acquisition of an additional tract for bus staging and overflow parking, but these developments were "not justified based on available visitation data or experience at other presidential birthplace sites in urban areas." Furthermore, the second building would require doubling the current staff, and would render the house more of a security problem since the staff would be housed in the new building.[38]

As a result of the Judd memo, NPS held a meeting at the National Historic Site the following month, May 1977. The meeting brought together the National Historic Site staff, senior officials of the Midwest Regional Office, planning team members from the Denver Service Center, and representatives of the Cultural Resources Management Division in the Washington Office. No record of this meeting has been found, but participants later recalled that the main thing to come out of it was a recognition that the planning process had reached a critical impasse. The superintendent and the Omaha people were now at loggerheads with the historical architects in Washington, with the Denver Service Center team caught in the middle.[39]

Following the May meeting, Superintendent Fahy C. Whitaker, Regional Director Merrill D. Beal, and Acting Deputy Director Ira Hutchinson exchanged memos in which they elaborated on arguments that were presented at the meeting. The exchange of memos pointed to opening a dialogue to resolve differences, but they also reflected a hardening of positions.

Hutchinson, elaborating on points made by Henry Judd and Hugh Miller, raised concerns that the proposed development would violate NPS policy on historic restorations. In the first place, Hutchinson questioned whether full interior restoration of seven rooms might not meet the policy requirements that permitted "restoration to a previous appearance only when doing so is essential to public understanding of park

[37] Acting Chief, Cultural Resources Management Division to Assistant Director, Planning and Development, April 5, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D22; Miller interview.
[38] Acting Chief, Cultural Resources Management Division to Assistant Director, Planning and Development, April 5, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D22.
[39] Associate Regional Director to Superintendent, June 25, 1980, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 4, File 006.3; Miller interview; Witherup interview; Andrew Ketterson, interview by Antoinette J. Lee, October 22, 1985.

values, when it can be accomplished with a minimum of conjecture, and when it will not result in significant destruction of historic fabric." Besides being concerned that NPS did not know how each room was used historically, he pointed out that returning the rooms to a pre-1877 appearance would require the destruction of architectural features that were added by the Taft family after 1877. Arguably, those post-1877 features were historic resources that NPS should preserve.[40]

Hutchinson saw a second potential deviation from policy in the proposed development. Adaptive use and visitor use of a historic structure had to be consistent with the preservation of the structure. The proposed adaptive use of the second floor for a library and meeting room would require structural reinforcement of the second floor that would mean removal of remaining historic fabric. Furthermore, the proposed historic furnishings would require installing climate controls in the house, and climate control systems would be an intrusion on the structure itself.

In their defense of the draft master plan, Superintendent Whitaker and Regional Director Beal both claimed that the legislative history of the establishing act compelled some degree of historic restoration. Whitaker saw the current impasse as another instance of NPS having to navigate its dual mandate, preservation versus use. "Do we develop the William Howard Taft National Historic Site for public access and use, or do we board it up in the name of preservation?" The establishing legislation clearly called for both preservation and use. On the preservation side, it stated the purpose of the Site was "to preserve in public ownership historically significant properties associated with the life of William Howard Taft." On the use side, it authorized $318,000 "to provide for the restoration and development of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site." Public review of the draft environmental assessment found overwhelming support for restoration and public use, Whitaker said. Moreover, NPS had committed itself to restoration when it accepted the donation of the property from the WHTMA and the Taft family.[41]

Beal claimed that one of Hugh Miller's contentions – that the house should be treated as a presidential memorial site, not a boyhood home historic site – contradicted the legislative history of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site Act. Therefore, Miller's contention could not be accepted. If "boyhood home" meant that NPS should simply develop the place in a memorial fashion and not restore any interior rooms, that was clearly not what Congress had intended. The legislative history showed that Congress expected NPS to use the historic home for place-based

[40] Acting Deputy Director to Regional Director, June 1, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, William Howard Taft NHS Restoration Plan and Research 1969-1985.
[41] Superintendent to Regional Director, June 6, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY'77.

interpretation of William Howard Taft's boyhood environment.[42] Miller would later concede Beal's point – with reservation – in an interview with Antoinette Lee. "The unfortunate thing starts right off in the expectations of the legislation," Miller would say. "The legislation said restore and refurnish. We should never get legislation written that way."[43]

The conflicting points of view between the superintendent, regional staff, the Cultural Resources Management Division in the Washington Office and the Denver Service Center planning team were not resolved when a second meeting was held in Cincinnati on June 24, 1977. Following the second meeting, NPS Acting Director Daniel J. Tobin, Jr. issued a five-point plan to resolve the deadlock. First, the historic structures report would be finished. Second, based on its findings, a decision would be made whether there was enough data to restore any rooms. Third, following that determination, NPS would conduct a visitor study to assess the need for a visitor center. Fourth, NPS would stand prepared to administer the Site through tours and publications alone if it was deemed that the demand for a visitor center did not exist. Fifth, parking needs would be reassessed at that time.[44]

Complicating this process, NPS confidence in the historic room assignments continued to unravel through the end of 1977 and into 1978. Was the nursery not on the first floor but rather the second? Was the dining room not on the first floor but rather the basement level? If the dining room occupied the basement, then where was the billiard room? Was Room 105 a sitting room or a bedroom for Alphonso Taft's parents? Superintendent Whitaker, insisting on historic restoration even in the face of all these uncertainties, remarked that NPS had enough information "for a reasonably (if not perfectly) accurate restoration" of part of the house.[45]

Meanwhile, the gap widened between NPS policy and the legislative mandate to restore the house when NPS policy became more stringent the next year. In the spring of 1978, NPS prepared to adopt a new systemwide Historic Furnishings Policy. This policy, which was aimed at achieving greater authenticity for interior restorations, threatened to make the draft master plan for William Howard Taft National Historic Site even more problematic. The policy emphasized the use of "original" furnishings and even their "original" placement within the room, and it

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[42] Dave Beal to Bob Stanton, July 29, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, William Howard Taft NHS Restoration Plan and Research 1969-1985.
[43] Miller interview.
[44] Director to Regional Director, undated, NPS Chief Historian's Office Files on William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Correspondence 1971-.
[45] Superintendent to Regional Director, June 6, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY'77; Acting Superintendent to Randy Conrade, Historical Architect, Denver Service Center, October 26, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, William Howard Taft NHS Restoration – Plans and Research 1969-1985; Superintendent to Regional Director, May 5, 1978, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY'78.

called for historic restoration to be accomplished with "minimal conjecture." Beal offered a sharp critique of the policy when it was still in draft form, arguing that it was so stringent it would be unworkable in most instances. NPS did not incorporate any of Beal's suggested changes to the draft, however, and the policy was adopted soon thereafter.[46]

A funding package was put together over the summer to prepare a historic furnishing plan for the Taft House, William Howard Taft National Historic Site. The plan was to "summarize evidence of original furnishings" and "recommend furnishings for eight rooms to be restored to their appearance during the period 1857 to 1877." The package would allow Sarah Olson, the author of the furnishing plan completed under contract in 1975, to revise that plan to conform with the new policy and to reflect the new information coming to light from the architectural analysis. Olson was now on the staff at the Harpers Ferry Center and the project was a task directive from the Midwest Regional Office to the Harpers Ferry Center.[47]

With Olson's and Crosby's research still in progress, the Midwest Regional Office called a meeting to forge a new agreement on how to move the development plan forward. This decisive confab took place at William Howard Taft National Historic Site on May 10 and 11, 1978. Associate Regional Director John Kawamoto spearheaded the gathering, which brought together representatives from the Midwest Regional Office, the Denver Service Center, the Harpers Ferry Center, the National Historic Site, and the Cultural Resources Management Division of the Washington Office – every NPS office involved. Two principals, Dan Wenk and Hugh Miller, were unable to attend, but both their superiors, John Reynolds of the Denver Service Center and Henry Judd of the Washington Office, were there to represent them. Altogether fourteen people participated.[48]

The confab began with a briefing on research findings to date. Crosby used a cardboard model of the Taft house to explain alternatives that he was developing in his report. He said that his research would probably support historic restoration of about the same number of rooms specified in Alternative E of the Environmental Assessment, but with some reassignment of room functions. (Later, Crosby wrote that he came under enormous pressure from the Midwest Region to draw conclusions from

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[46] Regional Director to Deputy Director, March 14, 1979, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 2, File 003.12.
[47] Manager, Harpers Ferry Center to Regional Director, November 22, 1978, with enclosure, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 2, File 003.12.
[48] Attendees were John Kawamoto, Andy Ketterson, Randy Biallas, and Jim Schaack from the Midwest Regional Office; John Reynolds, Anthony Crosby, Vern Smith, and Nan Ricky from the Denver Service Center; John Demer from the Harpers Ferry Center; Fahy Whitaker and Sam Witherup from the Site; and Henry Judd, Harry Pfanz, and Linda Pierce from the Washington Office. (Regional Historian to Associate Regional Director, June 8, 1978, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1, and Chief, Branch of Planning, DSC, to Assistant Manager, DSC, May 25, 1978, NPS Chief Historian's Office Files on William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Correspondence 1971-.)

thin evidence.) John Demer of the Harpers Ferry Center reported that Sarah Olson's research was barely started and there was a great deal yet to be learned. The historical architects from Washington remained skeptical but conceded that the legislation was binding, and some level of interior restoration had to be done. According to Regional Historian Andy Ketterson's report on the meeting, Judd "agreed that we had sufficient data to meet policy requirements for the architectural restoration of all of the first floor, except for Room 105, and the kitchen, dining room, and downstairs hall."[49] Follow-up memos from the Washington Office to the Regional Director confirmed much the same thing: "Rooms proposed for restoration and refurnishing will be consistent with those recommended in Alternative E…i.e., parlor, nursery, bedroom/sitting room, dining room and halls."[50]

It was also agreed at the May 11 meeting that the development must be phased because it was too much to do in one fiscal year. The first phase would entail stabilization and historic restoration of the exterior; historic restoration of selected interior rooms; historic furnishing of three rooms – parlor, nursery, and main entrance hallway (Rooms 101, 103, and 106); and construction of an expandable facility to house public toilets, mechanical room, maintenance area, and storage. During this phase, all interpretive programs would be presented in the historic house. The second phase would include possible restoration of other rooms and possible expansion of the separate facility to include visitor contact functions. The Midwest Regional Office would prepare a legislative request for an increase in the development ceiling and submit it to the Washington Office for inclusion in the Fiscal Year 1980 construction program.[51]



Figure 21. The entrance hall, Room 103. Opinion differed as to whether there was enough information to restore this room with historic furnishings. (Author's photo.)

[49] Regional Historian to Associate Regional Director, June 8, 1978, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1. Crosby's statement is found in Anthony Crosby to Cal Cummings, November 28, 1979, NPS Chief Historian's Office Files on William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Correspondence 1971-.
[50] Acting Director to Regional Director, May 26, 1978, and Acting Associate Director to Regional Director, June 16, 1978, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Restoration – Plans and Research 1969-1985.
[51] Acting Director to Acting Regional Director, May 26, 1978, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, William Howard Taft NHS Restoration – Plans and Research 1969-1985.

The increase in the development ceiling was duly accomplished over the next two months, being inserted into an omnibus bill that became law on November 10, 1978. The act provided, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Ohio: Section 3 of the Act of December 2, 1969 (83 Stat. 273) is amended by changing $318,000 to $1,888,000." Unfortunately, the dollar amount was about half what was sought, and it was inserted as a result of a snafu in the preparation of the legislation. The original request by NPS was for $3,112,000. The Midwest Regional Office subsequently sought to raise that figure to $4,424,000. Apparently, the Washington Office provided some Land Heritage figures to Congressman Joe Skubitz, Republican of Kansas, and the figures were erroneously incorporated into the bill as ceilings. By the time the error was caught it was too late to fix it; NPS had to accept the lower number, for half a loaf was better than none. William Howard Taft National Historic Site was not the only unit affected in that mishap.[52]

The Reports by Crosby and Olson

Crosby completed the *Historic Structure Report* and Olson completed the *Historic Furnishings Report* in 1979. Those two reports showed the way forward for further modifications of the development plan. Two more years passed until the master plan was finalized at last in 1981. The necessity of making further modifications to the master plan was not unexpected, and the issues that arose during this three-year span from 1978 to 1981 were relatively minor.

The *Historic Structure Report* took far longer to reach completion than anyone expected or thought justified. Personnel in the Midwest Regional Office grew increasingly irritated by the delays, drew up another schedule for the report's completion, and were frustrated yet again when it still did not come in on time. One source of delay was NPS's mounting confusion between the alternatives A through F in the Environmental Assessment and the alternative treatments A through E in the *Historic Structure Report*. Indeed, there was some confusion about whether the compromise agreement in May 1978 was based on Alternative E in the Environmental Assessment or Alternative E in the draft historic structure report. While that matter got sorted out in the summer of 1978, the confusion arose all over again the next year as the Denver Service Center revised the master plan, once more using Alternative E for its reference point. Finally, the historic structure report was revised so that the alternatives for treatment were renumbered, eliminating the troublesome label

[52] Fahy C. Whitaker, record of conversation with Frosty Freeman, May 8 and 9, and June 9, 1978, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Correspondence parking; Superintendent to Regional Director, July 28, 1978, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows – FY'78. It remains unclear what the Land Heritage request for $1,888,000 was for that got reassigned to William Howard Taft National Historic Site, if indeed this was what truly happened.

"Alternative E" from that report. But there was a larger point than just a confusion of labels. So much depended on the historic structure report that it was slowly forced into the mold of a management document, only to be abruptly shorn of that function and turned back into a technical supporting document. By 1979, Crosby was so tired of the report he appeared to be seizing every pretext he could find to turn his attention elsewhere.[53]

Crosby's long-awaited report provided almost the last word on historic room uses. He confirmed that the dining room was in the basement (Room 05). The long-held idea that the dining room was on the first floor derived from Bearss, quoting Grandpa Taft's statement that Louise Taft "came down into the kitchen" from the dining room on overhearing an argument between Grandpa Taft and a female servant. But Crosby re-examined the original source and found that it said, "came into the kitchen," not came *down*. Furthermore, Grandpa Taft stated that after the spat in the kitchen Louise "turned and ran upstairs" to the bedroom. Olson found further evidence in the William Howard Taft Papers to suggest the basement location, and Whittington urged this idea based on architectural evidence. Whitaker resisted this reinterpretation of the location of the dining room but finally gave into it. So that is where the matter rested.[54]



Figure 22. The Taft house at sunset, January 2018. (Author photo.)

With the location of the dining room established, other historic room uses became more definite as well. Crosby discussed his logic and then placed this summary in his report:

[53] Acting Associate Director to Regional Director, June 16, 1978, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, William Howard Taft NHS Restoration – Plans and Research 1969-1985; F. A. Ketterson, Jr., record of telephone call, March 22, 1979, and Acting Regional Director to Manager, Denver Service Center, July 19, 1979, and Regional Historian to Associate Regional Director, October 2, 1979, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1; Superintendent's Annual Report, 1979. See also Anthony Crosby to Cal Cummings, November 28, 1979, NPS Chief Historian's Office Files on William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Correspondence 1971-.

[54] Crosby, *Historic Structure Report*, 82-83; Staff Curator to Chief, Division of Reference Services, April 11, 1979, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1; Superintendent to Regional Director, May 5, 1978, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY'78.

Room 01: Coal room

Room 02: Probably storage until 1866

Room 03: Storage tank, hired hand's room until 1864, and a billiard room for a short time after

Room 04: Kitchen

Room 05: Dining room until 1877

Rooms 101 and 102: Parlor

Room 103: Front stair hall

Rooms 104 and 105: Grandpa and Grandma Taft's sitting room and bedroom; Alphonso and Louise's bedroom and sitting room after 1861

Room 106: The nursery, a storage room, possibly a bathroom, a stair hall along the south end, and Alphonso and Louise's bedroom for some time after November 1856

Room 109: A bedroom when Room 106 was a nursery; and a sitting room or back parlor at other times; Grandpa and Grandma Taft's bedroom and sitting room after 1861

Room 203: Stairhall

Rooms 206, 207, 208, 209, and 210: Servants' rooms and storage.[55]

Olson's report led to more debate about which rooms should be restored with furnishings, and which rooms should be "adaptively restored," or restored to their historic dimensions and used for interpretive exhibits rather than being refurnished. Olson found that all the first-floor rooms and the kitchen could be refurnished with about the same level of historical documentation and conjecture. Superintendent Whitaker and Park Technician Witherup were pleased with the report's conclusion and thought it provided a justification for including the restoration of all those rooms in the master plan. However, the Washington Office still focused on the insufficiency of data and maintained that the Taft house could not be furnished within the framework of NPS management policies. The Washington Office approved the furnishing plan for William Howard Taft National Historic Site begrudgingly in the interest of responding

[55] Crosby, *Historic Structure Report*, 85.

to congressional direction and the language in the establishing act. It did so with a desire to minimize exceptions to NPS policy.[56]

While Superintendent Whitaker advocated for revising the master plan to include restoration of all the rooms on the first floor, the Washington Office thought the master plan should only call for interior restoration of a few rooms: the parlor (Rooms 101 and 102), the front hall (Room 103), the library and sitting room (Room 104), and the nursery (Room 106). It thought Rooms 105, 109, and the kitchen and dining room should not be furnished at all.[57]

Whitaker decided to go to the mat for refurnishing Room 109. In her mind, Crosby's report had left it uncertain whether William Howard Taft was born in Room 106 or Room 109. Visitors wanted to see the birth room. Since the room remained uncertain, visitors should be shown both. Associate Regional Director Kawamoto disagreed with her. "It is our view that two birth rooms will create more confusion than illumination, and will contribute little to accomplishing either of the interpretive objectives set in the Site's legislative history," he wrote. "It is our view that the birth room question is not significant enough to be a determinant in which rooms are to be furnished, and we believe it can be dealt with acceptably in other ways." Moreover, Kawamoto thought it was folly to hold up everything else in the chain of development just to be obstinate about one room. He urged Whitaker to accept the Washington Office's position as it would "enable us to approve the furnishing plan, revise the master plan in relation to the rooms to be furnished, approve the historic structures report, and give direction to enable completion of the interpretive prospectus."[58]

Whitaker held her ground and even suggested that Room 109 could be refurnished in lieu of Room 104. If she ever changed her position, she did not put it in writing. She did sign off on the master plan, which was approved on January 12, 1981. Whitaker transferred to another park in the first week of March 1981.[59]

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[56] Superintendent to Regional Director, March 20, 1980, and March 21, 1980, and Acting Superintendent to Regional Director, May 27, 1980, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows – FY'79; Associate Director to Regional Director, January 3, 1980, and Acting Associate Director to Regional Director, April 26, 1980, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 2, File 003.12. See also Supervisory Historian Bearss to Director, Harpers Ferry Center, October 18, 1979, and Acting Assistant Director, Cultural Resources to Regional Director, Midwest Region, October 25, 1979, NPS Chief Historian's Office Files on William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Correspondence 1971-.

[57] Chief, Division of Reference Services, Harpers Ferry Center to Regional Director, March 17, 1980, Superintendent to Regional Director, March 20, 1980, and Acting Associate Director to Regional Director, April 26, 1980, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 2, File 003.12.

[58] Superintendent to Regional Director, March 21, 1980, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 2, File 003.12; Associate Regional Director to Superintendent, June 25, 1980, MRO, Accession No MWRO-00062, Box 4, File 006.3.

[59] Superintendent to Regional Director, October 27, 1980, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 4, File 006.3. Whitaker entered on duty as superintendent at Nez Perce National Historical Park, Idaho, on March 8, 1981.

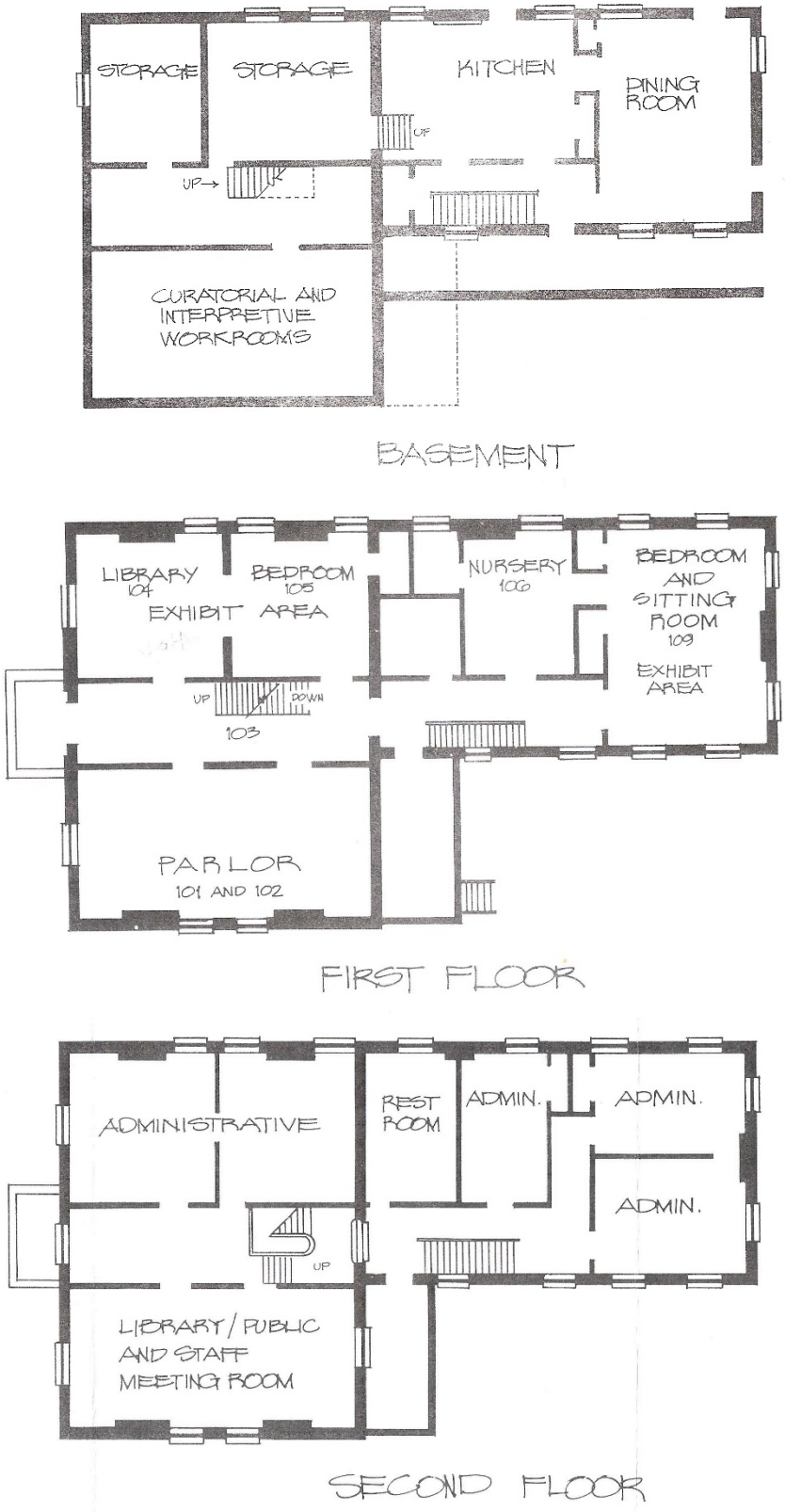


Figure 23. The Interior restoration plan in 1981. The first-floor plan was implemented; the basement and second-floor plans were modified to facilitate adaptive use of those spaces. (National Park Service.)

The *Master Plan* of 1981

The 31-page *Master Plan, William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Ohio* was published in April 1981 and became the guiding document for development and historic restoration for the next decade.

Concerning interior restoration, the plan cited the historic furnishings report by Olson and stated that the following rooms would be refurnished for interpretive purposes: library/sitting room (104), front hall (103), parlor (101 and 102), stairhall, and nursery (106).

The bedroom (105) would be used for interpretive purposes, and the bedroom/sitting room (109) would be adaptively restored to serve as an exhibit area.

The period of significance was defined as 1857 to 1877, or from William Howard Taft's birth to the year of the house fire, when smoke damage had caused so much of what was on the first floor to be replaced. In the rooms proposed for complete refurnishing, the plan allowed for some features dating from 1877-1900 to be removed. Those features dating from 1877-1900 that were deemed historically significant or possessing interpretive value would be retained. Architectural details of this later period, such as window and door architraves, floors, ceilings, and wall surfaces, would be replaced with details duplicating those of the historic period 1857-1877.

The basement was to be used for curatorial, storage, and other administrative space, while the second floor was to be adaptively restored to include a staff and public meeting room/library and administrative space.

As for the exterior of the house, the plan stated that it would be restored to its pre-1877 appearance, and it itemized 17 actions that would be required to accomplish that goal. The first item on the list was to remove the entire roof system of the house and restore it in accordance with Crosby's *Historic Structure Report*. Another item was to replace the solarium and reconstruct the rear piazza. Other items involved historic reconstruction of various windows, doors, porches, chimneys, and cornices, and to paint the house to reflect the historic period.

The restoration of historic grounds would be undertaken with certain limitations. It would be confined to the area under NPS jurisdiction that were originally part of the Taft property. It would be done at present grade levels with minor exceptions to provide for restoration of window wells and historic walkways.

The plan for visitor parking was premised on access from Southern Avenue to a parking area on the adjacent tract and provision for overflow parking and bus parking in the lot at the corner of Southern Avenue and Young Street. (This part of the

plan would be implemented though it would be superseded by the land exchange discussed in Chapter Two.)

The plan described a proposed visitor contact station that would eventually take shape as the Taft Education Center designed and built in the 1990s.

Finally, the plan itemized estimated costs for development and historic restoration as follows (based on construction of similar facilities in other units in 1981 dollars):

Stabilize structure	$331,000
Restore structure's exterior and grounds	438,000
Architecturally restore structure's interior	1,200,000
Construct contact station and plaza	1,024,000
Construct 35-car parking area	51,000
Construct access drive	13,000
Construct bus loading area	8,000
Provide furnishings	253,000
Complete archeological salvage	102,000
Construct 60-car parking area	144,000
Provide site development, landscaping, etc.	145,000
Provide exhibits/audiovisual media	261,000
	$3,985,000

Development in Dribbles

At the end of 1980, the development package for William Howard Taft National Historic Site was ranked in fifteenth place on NPS's national priority list for construction projects. It had been a long time coming, and yet its spot at Number 15 was not as auspicious as one could expect. The construction had been scheduled for Fiscal Year 1979 a few years prior but with the delays in completing the master plan it had slipped to Fiscal Year 1983. Then, with the advent of the Reagan administration and the confirmation of James G. Watt as secretary of the interior in January 1981, the plan of action changed once again.

At Secretary Watt's request, NPS Director Russell Dickenson undertook a sharp review of the national priority list with the aim of eliminating construction

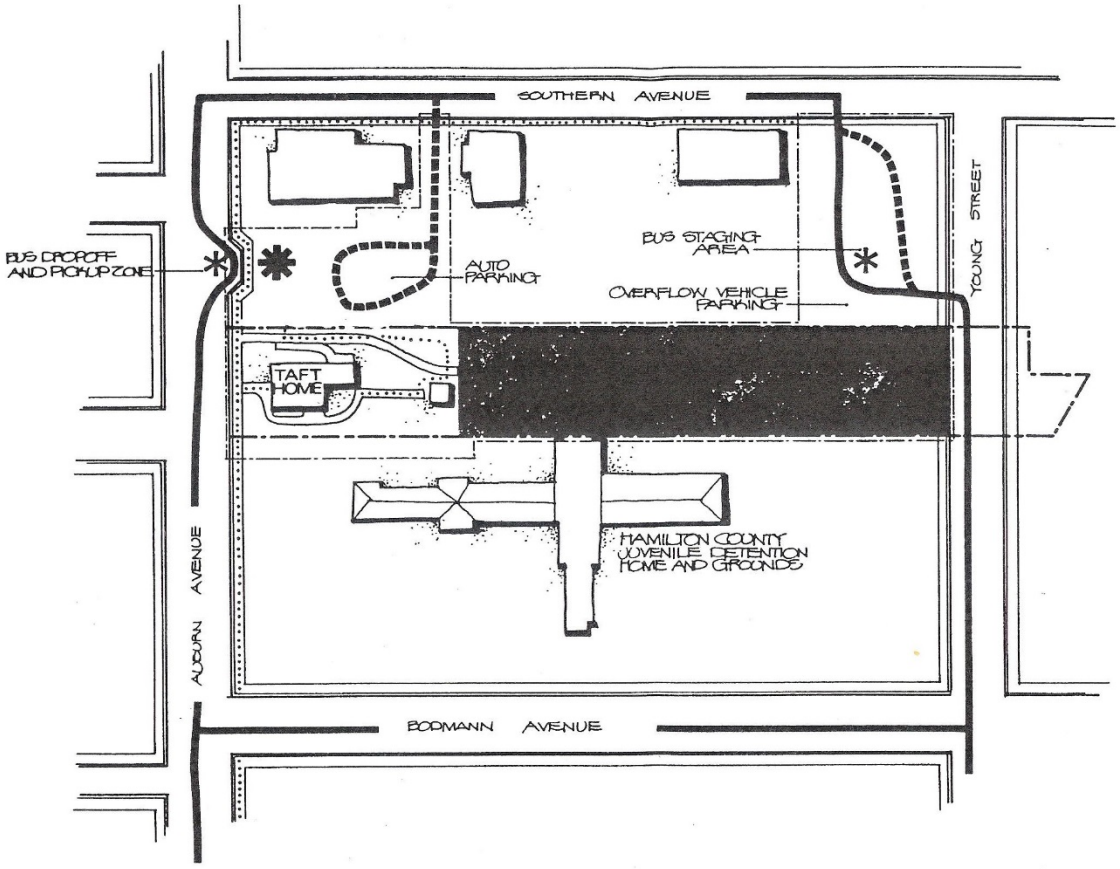


Figure 24. The development plan in 1981. Note the accommodation for bus staging and overflow parking in the corner lot. (National Park Service.)

projects that did not benefit the "health and safety" of national park visitors. To the dismay of all those who had worked for so long on development planning for William Howard Taft National Historic Site, they learned that the development package for the Site was dropped from the construction program. Dickenson's terse comment for this unit next to the listing on the schedule read: "Delete altogether. Reevaluate plans for this area, including the possibility of closing the area."[60]

[60] Assistant Manager, Midwest/Rocky Mountain Team, Denver Service Center to Regional Director, October 31, 1980, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1; "Changes to the Servicewide Priority Construction Project Listing, February 24, 1981, accompanying Director to Regional Director, March 10, 1981, MWRO, Museum Collection, H3015. Rumors swirled around the Department of the Interior at this time that Secretary Watt wanted a "hit list" of National Park System units to propose for congressional deauthorization. The Department of the Interior denied the rumors and it seems that no documentation of a hit list or instructions to create one ever surfaced. Dickenson's thought of "closing" William Howard Taft National Historic Site, unusual as that move would have been, did not imply deauthorization. (See George Cameron Coggins and Doris K. Nagel, "'Nothing Beside Remains': The Legal Legacy of James G. Watt's Tenure as a Secretary of the Interior on Federal Land and Law Policy," *Boston College Environmental Affairs Law Review* 17, no. 3 (May 1990), 497.

Associate Regional Director John Kawamoto thought the decision to drop the Site from the priority list was made on misleading information. As he recalled in his interview with Antoinette Lee, there was a conference call between NPS leadership and staff at the Midwest Regional Office. William Howard Taft National Historic Site was on the chopping block because the historic restoration had no real tie to visitors' health and safety issues. Someone asked, did the house have architectural significance? Historical architect Randy Biallas replied that it did not have architectural significance. Of course, the house did have *historical* significance but that was not the answer to the question asked. Kawamoto explained what happened next, and what he saw as a crucial error in thinking by NPS leadership:

> So, when we said it was not architecturally significant, the director then said well then knock it out because it does not meet the criteria for health and safety. In other words, it was not a health and safety problem. It was not architecturally significant and in between there they forget that it was significant because it was the home of a president we were trying to preserve and restore…. It went out of the construction program. There we were. We were faced with the situation that you still had a deteriorating resource.[61]

In response to this setback, the Midwest Regional Office prepared a report on William Howard Taft National Historic Site that reviewed the legislative history of the establishing act and laid out management alternatives in the starkest possible terms. The report was written for the director's consideration. Under a "no-action/modern museum" alternative, NPS could neglect the building until it collapsed or demolish it and replace it with a small modern museum. Under the next cheapest alternative, NPS could "mothball the Taft home until the budget situation improves." Or, for an estimated $1.5 million, it could stabilize the structure and adapt the interior mainly for administrative and interpretive purposes, deferring the historic restoration for a later time. Or, for an estimated $5 million, it could proceed with all development and restoration according to the master plan. The regional director sent the report to the director on March 19, 1981.[62]

Director Dickenson stuck to his position. In a second meeting on the Servicewide Priority Development Program held in June 1981, he reaffirmed that William Howard Taft National Historic Site did not make the list "in light of the many higher priority construction needs of the Service."[63]

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[61] Kawamoto interview. See also Randall Pope, interview by Antoinette Lee, October 23, 1985.
[62] Regional Director to Director, March 19, 1981, attaching "William Howard Taft National Historic Site," undated typescript report, NPS Chief Historian's Office Files, Correspondence 1971-.
[63] Director to Regional Director, January 8, 1982, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1.

However, at the end of the year the Washington Office and the Midwest Region came up with a creative solution: NPS would fund the multi-million-dollar development a little at a time using Park Restoration and Improvement (PRIP) funds – discretionary funds that were allocated to NPS over a five-year period under a Reagan administration initiative to address health and safety issues in the National Park System. The amount of money would vary each year, and it would never amount to more than a fraction of the total amount needed, so construction work would have to accomplished in dribs and drabs. As Kawamoto explained later, it was not an efficient way to proceed. Stretching two or three years of work over eight or ten meant more contract negotiations, more back-and-forth over job specs. Overhead costs would be higher. "It became a very inefficient way of doing things," Kawamoto said. "But we had no choice at that particular time."[64]

The Washington Office gave the Midwest Region an initial slug of $300,000 from its Fiscal Year 1982 PRIP funds, but subsequently cautioned that the level of effort should not exceed $100,000 per year. The money was made available in November 1981 and construction work began six months later in May 1982. As with the planning effort, the Midwest Region relied on the Denver Service Center to prepare the job specs and supervise the contractor at the job site. The project was described as emergency stabilization and focused on stabilization of the foundation and the first floor as well as removal of the post-1877 front porch. The contract was let to R. J. Beischel Building Company of Cincinnati. The bid came in at about $135,000. Change orders increased the amount to about $165,000. What was left of the $300,000 from the Washington Office was supposed to go toward a second contract focused on exterior restoration; however, NPS only received one bid, which was too high, so year-end money had to be diverted to other parks.[65]

Superintendent Mary Maxine Boyd, who began her tenure at William Howard Taft National Historic Site in the summer of 1981, became closely involved in the restoration effort over the next few years. By the end of the first year of construction, conflicts had developed between Boyd and the regional historical architect, Francis O. Krupka; between Krupka and the project supervisor, David Sherer; and between Boyd and the contractor. The Midwest Region tried to insist that all communications between NPS and the contractor go through Sherer, but Boyd had difficulty

[64] R Neil Thorne, Memorandum of Telephone Call, November 9, 1981, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1; Kawamoto interview.

[65] Regional Director to Manager, Denver Service Center, January 25, 1982, and Contracting Officer to Project Supervisor, May 7, 1982,and Chef, Cultural Resources Management, Midwest Region to Associate Regional Director, June 11, 1982, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1; Acting Regional Director to Executive Director, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, January 19, 1982, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 4, File 004.10; Mary Maxine Boyd, interview by Antoinette J. Lee, October 24, 1985. See also Mary Maxine Boyd to Russell E. Dickinson, September 17, 1982, NPS Chief Historian's Office Files on William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Correspondence 1971-.

complying. She was an outspoken person. By year's end, at least three testy memoranda passed between the superintendent and the regional director, all concerned with matters of protocol.[66]

In December 1982, the Washington Office committed another $100,000 to the Site from its Fiscal Year 1983 PRIP monies. Boyd complained to the regional director that that was not enough – "we can't even cross the street with $100,000" – and told him she was going to Washington to meet with the director about it. Whether or not her sharp words made a difference, the Midwest Regional Office scrounged up an additional $60,000. Regional Director J. L. Dunning pointedly informed Boyd later that month: "The additional $60,000 for FY 1983 did not come from Washington, but came from projects programmed for other areas in this Region."[67]

The project work in Fiscal Year 1983 focused on exterior restoration. It included removal of the solarium, installation of historically correct exterior doors and windows, repairs to exterior brick surfaces, and painting of the whole exterior. This phase of the project did not go well and most of the work was not completed. The contract was let to Brener Building Maintenance Company of Arlington, Virginia, which subcontracted with Cincinnati firms. The contract performance was unsatisfactory and NPS terminated the contract in December 1983. The contractor filed a claim against NPS, charging that the plans and specs were at fault. In the end NPS shelled out $141,000 on a $110,000 contract and got very little for it.[68]

For Fiscal Year 1984, the Washington Office made $248,000 available. The project was called "Structure Stabilization and Exterior Restoration, Phase III," and it consisted mainly of waterproofing the foundation, repairing brick and stone walls, completing the roof, reconstructing the front porch, carriage porch, and piazzas, installing windows and doors, cleaning and painting the house exterior, and providing underground utilities to the building. R. J. Beischel was the contractor and performed satisfactorily.[69]

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[66] Superintendent to Regional Director, November 1, 1982, and November 12, 1982, and Regional Director to Superintendent, November 24, 1982, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1; Russell E. Dickinson to Robert Taft, Jr., November 17, 1982, and Hugh Miller to Dickinson, undated, NPS Chief Historian's Office Files on William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Correspondence 1971-.

[67] Boyd interview; Regional Director to Manager, Denver Service Center, December 9, 1982, and Regional Director to Superintendent, December 20, 1982, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1.

[68] Regional Director to Manager, Denver Service Center, December 9, 1982, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1; Lee, *Administrative History*, 94; Boyd interview.

[69] Associate Regional Director to Regional Director, January 20, 1984, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1; National Park Service, Denver Service Center, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site, RFP WIHO-101C Structure Stabilizaton and Exterior Restoration, Phase III," May 15, 1984, William Howard Taft NHS, superintendent's office – reports retrieved from the Sanning Apartments building; Lee, *Administrative History*, 95; Boyd interview.

Some people in NPS defended this incremental approach toward development of William Howard Taft National Historic Site as not just a necessary improvisation, but a good strategy appropriate to the Site. In a letter to Robert Taft, Jr., Director Dickenson claimed that it gave NPS "an opportunity to work with the conditions of the historic structure," and that it was "the most cost-effective method." Others in the Washington Office made similar claims to staff in Omaha and at the Site. Superintendent Boyd did not buy it. She told newspaper reporters that without faster progress, the Taft house could be under construction for twenty more years. She even voiced her complaint in a letter to President Reagan. Reagan's direct reply to Boyd, typed on White House stationery, promised nothing for the Site but did wish her success with her "commendable project."[70]

Boyd had to reassure the regional director that she would not write to members of Congress concerning the funding issue since that would be a violation of law. However, she was in communication with members of the Taft family and she could supply them with information that they could use in writing to members of Congress. With the support of Taft family members, Boyd helped establish a cooperating association, The Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace, to replace the moribund WHTMA. Charter members included Charlie Taft, Mr. and Mrs. Robert A. Taft, Jr., Lloyd Taft, and Mr. and Mrs. Robert A. Taft, II – all then living in Cincinnati. Boyd worked mainly with Hope Taft, the wife of Robert A. ("Bob") Taft II, to expedite a letter-writing campaign aimed at getting Congress to appropriate more funds to the project.[71]

Robert A. Taft, Jr., who had lost his Senate seat in 1980 and had returned to the law firm of Taft, Stettinius and Hollister, wrote letters to President Reagan and Director Dickenson on June 10, 1983. His letter to Reagan is quoted here in full as it reflects information on spending that the superintendent had provided:

> Dear Mr. President:
>
> I am writing to call to your attention the restoration work being done by the National Park Service on the William Howard Taft Birthplace at the National Historic Site in Cincinnati. This work has been going on for several years at a relatively slow pace and meanwhile the facilities, for safety reasons, have been unavailable to the public. Unless some new step is taken this will continue to be true for a decade.

[70] Russell E. Dickenson to Robert Taft, Jr., November 17, 1982, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821; James E. Carroll, "Frustrating effort to restore President Taft's home," *San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle*, October 23, 1983; Ronald Reagan to Mary Maxine Boyd, January 13, 1984, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.

[71] Superintendent to Regional Director, December 8, 1982, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1; Bob and Hope Taft interview.

> In 1981 a master plan set forth the total cost of the project at $3,985,000, of which some $330,000 was planned for stabilization of the structure which is now practically complete. It is anticipated that the presently planned 1984 funding will be in the $150,000 area to assist in restoration of the structure's exterior. However, at this rate it appears that it will be many years before the work is completed to a point where the house can be enjoyed by the public.
>
> Private efforts are being undertaken to supplement the federal assistance but it is unlikely that this can be more than of marginal help. I believe what is needed is a new look at the entire situation to the end that greatly accelerated funding would result. Your interest and assistance would be much appreciated by all of the members of my family and by this community.[72]

This letter prompted an inquiry from the White House to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), followed by a phone call from OMB to NPS. Randy Biallis, senior historical architect in the Office of Cultural Resources Management within the NPS Washington Office, took the call from the OMB. Biallas initiated a data call, and quickly the Midwest Region assembled information on how much had been spent and what had been accomplished at William Howard Taft National Historic Site over the past few years, why the project had been dropped from the line-item construction program, and how much money was needed to complete the historic restoration. The figures given were approximately $550,000 spent to date and approximately $1.5 million to $2 million needed to complete the project. The OMB then called Superintendent Boyd, who said some of the information was inaccurate. The OMB did not ask Congress for a supplemental appropriation.[73]

Charlie Taft, the youngest son of President Taft who had guided the preservation effort for so many years, died at the age of 85 on June 24, 1983. He had hoped to see the house restored and opened to the public within his lifetime. His passing heightened the sense of disappointment over where things stood. It caused more people to question how much time it was taking. Seth Taft, Charlie's son, took up the cudgels for getting the project completed sooner. In the month after his father's death, Seth Taft wrote to President Reagan and Congressman Willis D. Gradison, Jr. Republican of Ohio. He also wrote to his cousin, Robert Taft, Jr., remarking on the slow progress "on Grandpa Taft's Home" and suggesting that the former senator call

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[72] Robert Taft, Jr. to Ronald Reagan, June 10, 1983, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1.

[73] Jill York and Fran Krupka, Memorandum of Telephone Calls, June 28-29, 1983, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821. NPS responded to a similar data call in 1985, to which it responded with the following figures: "1981 - $6,000; 1982 - $255,100; 1983 - $291,400; 1984 - $300,100; 1985 - $339,700." The estimated cost for completion: $1,677,000. (Leslie Cain, Memorandum of Telephone Call, March 11, 1985, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 2, File 003.8.)

Congressman Gradison "and encourage him to get involved."[74] Gradison was from Cincinnati and had served on city council with Charlie Taft in the 1970s. Seth Taft lived in Cleveland, Ohio. An attorney and former county commissioner, he ran for governor in 1982 but lost in the Republican primary.

Over the next half decade, members of the Taft family rallied around the cause, writing letters to Congress and donating private funds. Hope Taft worked with Superintendent Boyd on the publication of a gift catalog, a fundraising tool that presented a panoply of items needed for the restoration and a price tag for each one. The Friends group sponsored an "inaugural ball" in downtown Cincinnati, featuring a big band and formal dinner that authentically replicated the 1909 banquet menu and two actors portraying President and Mrs. Taft.[75] The fundraising drive reached $300,000 by early 1985 and $600,000 by September 1988, contributing about one fifth of the total cost of the project.

The Taft family's appeals to members of Congress also produced results. The money for development finally broke loose. In Fiscal Year 1985, Senator Howard Metzenbaum of Ohio, a Democrat, tried to include a line item for restoration in a spending bill. When that effort was foiled, Metzenbaum then prevailed on NPS Director Dickenson to fund the project generously from the existing NPS budget. Further efforts to get a line item for Site development into a congressional spending bill finally succeeded in Fiscal Year 1987, thanks to a timely assist from Democratic Senator John Glenn of Ohio.[76]

It was ironic that Congress intervened during a short period when Ohio had two Democratic senators, Howard Metzenbaum and John Glenn, who both came to the aid of this presidential site honoring a Republican president. It was doubly ironic that Robert Taft, Jr. and Howard Metzenbaum were political rivals, Taft having narrowly defeated Metzenbaum in the election of 1970, and Metzenbaum having unseated Taft in a rematch in 1976. Seth Taft alluded to this when he quipped to Metzenbaum in asking for his help, "You might even have some fun working on a project to memorialize a Taft who can't run against you."[77]

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[74] Peggy Lane and Bob Weston, "Mr. Cincinnati Dead at 85," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 25, 1983; Seth Taft to Ronald Reagan, July 25, 1983, Taft to Willis D. Gradison, Jr., July 25, 1983, and Taft to Robert Taft, Jr., July 28, 1983, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[75] Kathy Doane, "Taft Times," *Cincinnati Enquirer Magazine*, February 24, 1985; "Calendar," *Cincinnati Magazine* 18, no. 6 (March 1985), 120; Seth Taft to Russell Dickenson, March 7, 1985, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821; Robert M. Elkins, "Taft Birthplace renovation done," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 17, 1988.
[76] "Taft birthplace money approved," *The Cincinnati Post*, November 8, 1984; Bob Weston, "Taft site restoration gets federal aid," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 19, 1987; Regional Director to Manager, Denver Service Center, September 15, 1987, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 2.
[77] Jerry Condo and Edwina Blackwell, "Here's help for the Taft birthplace," *The Cincinnati Post*, October 4, 1984.

Completing the Restoration

Superintendent Boyd retired in 1985 as the exterior restoration came to completion. She was replaced by Superintendent Stephen Kesselman, who, during his four-year tenure, oversaw the interior restoration and refurnishing of the house. Being involved in this final stage of the house restoration, Kesselman became closely involved with the development of interpretive exhibits in some of the rooms in the house and with the acquisition of historic-period furnishings for other rooms in the house. While those activities were part of Site development, they will not be treated in detail here but rather left to the subsequent chapters on interpretation and cultural resources management. For this chapter section, we will confine ourselves to the process of Site development to complete the story of how NPS staged the construction effort, procured funds, and contracted for work to prepare the house for public use.

When Kesselman arrived, the interior of the house was completely gutted and unusable by the public. The new superintendent was immediately involved in reviewing project statements for the forthcoming interior restoration. Even at this stage, it was unsettled if Site development would continue by dribbles, or if a big bump in funding would allow it to be done in a year or two, or if even at this stage it might stall. Ella Rayburn, historian on the staff of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site, told a newspaper reporter in September 1986 that current estimates for the interior restoration stood at around $1.4 million – a little more than the exterior restoration – with another $500,000 needed for furnishings. It was hoped that the Friends group would largely pay for the latter, while Congress had only committed funds for the first phase of interior restoration.[78]

The interior restoration and refurnishing projects were accomplished through two main contracts. In 1985, NPS contracted with Wilson & Associates, Inc., an African American-owned architectural and engineering firm in Cincinnati, for design development. The contract called for architectural and engineering drawings for all interior restoration plus certain landscaping elements. Again, the Denver Service Center took a lead role in preparing and supervising this contract, with Charles Hudson of the Denver Service Center serving as project manager. Others involved included Superintendent Kesselman and Regional Historical Architect Mark Chavez. The project manager for Wilson & Associates was Ralph Jacob. The original contract amount was $50,442.39. Three contract modifications raised the total amount to $202,281.39. Originally the project was due to be completed by June 1987. NPS was not satisfied with the initial set of drawings and sheets and requested that several of

[78] Regional Director to Superintendent, April 21, 1986, and Superintendent to Regional Director, May 20, 1986, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 4, File 004.10; "Taft home getting new lease on life," *Columbus Dispatch*, September 29, 1986.

them be redone. Wilson & Associates did complete the work in time to enable NPS to take the next step and solicit bids for interior renovations in July 1987.[79]

To perform the interior renovations, NPS contracted with R. J. Beischel Building Company, the same outfit that worked on the exterior of the house from 1982 to 1985. Beischel was the largest general contractor in Cincinnati, having been in business since 1946. The initial contract amount was for $663,983. Ten contract modifications raised the amount to $921,417.86. The NPS project supervisor was Bobby Flickinger of the Denver Service Center. The work was completed to NPS's satisfaction and on schedule over the 12-month period from September 1987 to September 1988.[80]

Completion of the house restoration marked a historic turning point for the William Howard Taft National Historic Site. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held on the anniversary of William Howard Taft's birthday, September 17, 1988. When it was all done, the 18-room house included four furnished rooms, while other rooms on the first floor, the second floor, and in the basement were adaptively restored for exhibit displays and other public uses.[81]

The interior restoration included several elements that were less visible to the public. These included reinforcement of floors and ceilings to withstand heavy public use, installation of a burglar alarm system, fire detection and suppression systems, and electrical and climate control systems.[82]

A small public elevator was installed in the space once occupied by a dumbwaiter service to provide wheelchair access to the second floor. This important development anticipated the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), which mandated that all public buildings have full access for persons with disabilities. Only a few years earlier, NPS had stated in an interpretive prospectus that "barrier-free access will be provided to the house; however, the degree of accessibility will be determined upon completion of the historic structure report….It is unlikely that

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[79] Superintendent to Regional Director, October 9, 1985, and Manager, Harpers Ferry Center to Assistant Manager, Central Team, Denver Service Center, November 27, 1985, and Ralph Jacob, "Review Meeting Minutes," December 3, 1985, and "Design Proposal Review," March 7, 1986, and Jacob to Charles Hudson, November 12, 1986, and John W. Bright to Jacob, January 26, 1987, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D5215; National Park Service, Denver Service Center, "Project Manual: William Howard Taft National Historic Site IFB William Howard Taft NHS-101D Rehabilitate Interior of Taft House – Phase I," July 29, 1987, William Howard Taft NHS, superintendent's office – reports retrieved from the Sanning Apartments building.

[80] Regional Historical Architect to Associate Regional Director, April 6, 1988, and Project Supervisor to Beischel Building Company, June 16, 1988, and Steven A. Kesselman to Paul Beischel, October 25, 1988, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D5217.

[81] "Taft's boyhood home renovated," *Marion Star* (Marion, Ohio), September 17, 1988. One furnished room, the parlor, was officially two adjoining rooms (101 and 102), so the count of restored rooms was sometimes given as five.

[82] Superintendent's Annual Report, 1988, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, FY '89 Daily Yellows.

the second floor can be made completely accessible." The thinking about wheelchair access changed during the 1980s and NPS changed the building specifications so that persons in wheelchairs would have access to the second floor, squeezing a small elevator into that limited space that the dumbwaiter service once occupied.[83]

Site development continued with several follow-on projects. Reconstruction of herring-bone brick walkways and partial restoration of the historic carriage way were accomplished in the year after the public opening of the Taft house. Rehabilitation of the north retaining wall commenced under the contracts with Wilson & Associates and R. J. Beischel Building Construction in 1987-88 and continued under other auspices in the 1990s. The parking lot at the corner of Southern Avenue and Young Street was paved in 1989. A large sign for the National Historic Site was installed in 1990. Cultural landscape restoration, which was embedded in the long-range vision for Site development from the start, became the major focus of development activity in 1992 and 1993 (see Chapter 6).[84]

The Taft Education Center

In 1993, NPS developed a task directive and plan to construct a new building for administrative and maintenance offices on the former Cross property adjacent to the Taft house. The plan aimed to address visitor circulation and parking as well. Since the plan constituted an offshoot of the 1981 *Master Plan,* it included an environmental assessment and identified a preferred alternative. The plan was called a General Management Plan Amendment (with the 1981 *Master Plan* now designated as the General Management Plan). The planning team centered in the Midwest Regional Office. John H. Sowl, regional park planner, was the project manager. Altogether the planning team included eight staff in Omaha together with five staff at the William Howard Taft National Historic Site. Heading the list of consultants to the planning effort were Paul Sittenfeld and Rhoda Brooks, president and vice president of the Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace.[85]

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[83] National Park Service, *Interpretive Prospectus, William Howard Taft National Historic Site* (Omaha, Neb.: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 1982), 14.

[84] Regional Historical Architect to Associate Regional Director, April 13, 1989, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, H3015; Environmental Engineer to Chief, Contracting and Property Management, Midwest Region, May 22, 1989, and Contracting Officer to Superintendent, August 3, 1989, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D5217; United Signs, Inc. to Bob Moore, March 28, 1990, with attachments, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D66. The contract for the parking lot construction was let to John Davis Construction & Supply Inc. for $110,598.40.

[85] Acting Regional Director to State Historic Preservation Officer, December 30, 1992, attaching Task Directive, General Management Plan Amendment for William Howard Taft National Historic Site, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 3, File 004.9; Superintendent to Associate Regional Director, June 17, 1993, attaching General Management Plan Amendment for Willliam Howard Taft National Historic Site (draft), William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18.

The proposal to construct a building adjacent to the Taft house was not new but it differed significantly from the idea for one contained in the 1981 *Master Plan*. It will be recalled that two development alternatives that were presented in 1976 (C and F) called for a visitor contact station adjacent to the Taft house. The concept of a visitor contact station was incorporated into the preferred alternative (E) and included in the *Master Plan*, but it was to be a small facility with the primary function of receiving visitors before they entered the house. It would share the 0.32-acre tract with a visitor parking area. It would include a lobby, an office for two interpreters, a sales display and information area, mechanical rooms for the Taft house, public restrooms, a maintenance area, an exhibits area, and a visitor staging area. It would be an "unobtrusive structure" with "subdued scale and lightness of character," with the chief aim of providing an assembly area to facilitate pedestrian traffic flow.[86]

The proposed "visitor contact station" was modest in character because the 1981 *Master Plan* assumed that administrative offices would occupy the second floor of the Taft house, while curatorial and interpretive activities would be accommodated in the basement of the Taft house. By the end of the 1980s, those assumptions were no longer operative. Administrative offices had been relocated to the Sanning Apartments, while storage facilities were spread between the Sanning Apartments building and another rented space located several miles from the Site.[87]

The proposed new building in 1993 was described not as a visitor contact station but as "park offices." The office space in the Sanning Apartments was unsatisfactory because the space was designed to be apartments and most of the building continued to function primarily as a residential structure for private individuals. The NPS offices were not contiguous, lacked storage space, and did not have proper security features. Maintenance facilities that were previously located in the basement of the Taft house were in a converted recreation room in the residential complex.[88]

The impetus to enlarge the new "park offices" building into the Taft Education Center came from the Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace. The catalyst for this initiative was the death, on December 7, 1993, of Robert A. Taft, Jr., grandson of William Howard Taft. The Taft family wanted to do something for the William Howard Taft National Historic Site in his memory. The Louise Taft Semple

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[86] National Park Service, *Master Plan, William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Ohio* (Denver: National Park Service, Denver Service Center, 1981), 23.
[87] Superintendent to Regional Director, May 20, 1986, with enclosure, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 4, File 004.10; National Park Service, "Statement for Management," March 1991, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18.
[88] Acting Regional Director to State Historic Preservation Officer, December 30, 1992, attaching Task Directive, General Management Plan Amendment for William Howard Taft National Historic Site, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 3, File 004.9.

Foundation indicated it would consider making a sizable donation. Informed of these developments, the Friends group approached Superintendent Kurt C. Topham early in 1994. Topham encouraged the Friends' idea of developing a Taft Education Center that would combine park offices and education/visitor facilities in a single building.[89]

By a timely coincidence, Topham was invited by Superintendent John Neal of Hopewell Culture National Historical Park to attend the meeting of the Ohio Group where Barbara Wainman, a staff assistant to Congressman Ralph Regula of Ohio, a Republican, was present. Regula's office requested that attendees come prepared to discuss current projects and future needs. Regula was a great friend of national parks in Ohio. He was instrumental in the establishment and development of Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area (re-designated a national park in 2000), while his wife Mary led efforts to establish the National First Ladies Library and First Ladies National Historic Site in Canton, Ohio. With a seat on the House Appropriations Committee, he was well placed to be of assistance. The meeting of the Ohio Group took place at Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area on March 11, 1994, giving Topham a direct line to Regula's office at an opportune moment for advancing the Friends group proposal.[90]

In April 1994, the Friends group received a preliminary cost estimate from Bloomfield and Associates, an architectural firm in Philadelphia. The estimate was for a total package price of $1,800,000, with $125,000 of that amount for architectural services. The Friends then submitted a proposal to the Louise Taft Semple Foundation for $250,000 – half to cover the architects' fee and half to serve as seed money for private fundraising. The goal would be to raise half the total cost of the building in private donations.[91]

The Louise Taft Semple Foundation made a grant of $125,000 to the project. The Friends engaged Bloomfield and Associates and a meeting between NPS, the Friends, and the architects took place in August 1994. After receiving input from the Midwest Region, the Friends finalized a contract with Bloomfield and Associates on September 13, 1994.[92]

A planning team met semi-monthly through the next six months as the architectural plans began to take shape. Even so, the effort to coordinate expectations and needs by the Friends and NPS came up short. Differences over the architectural design emerged, which strained the public-private partnership. NPS representatives argued that NPS should prevail since it administered the Site, had experience with

[89] Superintendent to Regional Director, February 10, 1995, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18.
[90] Superintendent to Regional Director, February 10, 1995, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18; "Ralph Regula, Long-Serving Ohio Congressman; Dies at 92," *New York Times*, July 21, 2017.
[91] Superintendent to Regional Director, February 10, 1995, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18.
[92] Ibid.

such buildings, and would live with the result. The Friends group argued that it should prevail since it had hired the architects and it was on the hook for half the overall cost of the building. NPS got its way on some items, but it deferred to the Friends on many others. Site staff generally thought that the building did not provide enough space. The public exhibit and meeting space on the ground floor was too cut up, while the administrative office space on the second floor was too small. Staff in the Midwest Regional Office voiced another criticism of the architectural design: they thought it was not contextual with the historic house and the general period architecture in the Mount Auburn neighborhood. "While the building is perhaps deferential to the presidential site," wrote Acting Regional Director Edward D. Carlin, "it is a work of high fashion that will likely soon be dated. One need only look at Louis Sauer's work at Penn's Landing to see how harsh a zeitgeist infill structure looks after 30 years." Carlin continued:

> The draft design has a rich collage of textures and elegant interior spaces, but the building is conspicuously a late 20th century design. While we applaud the use of the best modern materials, we regret that the design so radically departs from traditional architectural principals in matters of symmetry, order, hierarchy, repetition, axis, focus, mass/size, proportion/scale, transition, and sense of enclosure.[93]

These issues notwithstanding, the architectural plans were completed, and the Midwest Region prepared a development package and submitted it to the Washington Office. Despite concerns that the design was too modern for the context, NPS determined that the undertaking would have no effect on historic properties in the immediate project area. Superintendent Topham sent the proposal to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for review. The SHPO concurred, finding that neither the proposed education center nor the landscape work would diminish the integrity of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site or the Mount Auburn Historic District.[94]

Unlike the earlier struggle to obtain funding for the Taft house restoration, the Taft Education Center project was soon underway. Congressman Regula's attentiveness made a difference as did the enduring political influence of the Taft family. Hope Taft, who was on the board of directors of the Friends group and on the board of trustees of the Louise Taft Semple Foundation, met with Congressman Regula in his office in Washington in February 1995. Hope Taft also coordinated with Paul Sittenfeld in heading up the Friends' fundraising drive. The Ohio State legislature voted to contribute $200,000 toward the project. This unusual commitment of state

[93] Field Director, Midwest Region, to Superintendent, September 11, 1995, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18.
[94] Kurt Topham to Amos Loveday, August 25, 1997, and Martha J. Raymond to Topham, October 6, 1997, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, H4217 Compliance Pt. 2.

funds to an NPS development project was added to the private donations side of the ledger, bringing the Friends closer to their goal of half the total cost. When it seemed that the goal was sure to be met, NPS moved the funding request forward. It asked for $2.3 million – that is, $900,000 for the federal cost-share of the building plus an additional $1.4 million for contingency funds, project supervision, interpretive exhibits, and interior furnishings. Congressman Regula reportedly committed to getting this funding request into a line-item construction when he was meeting with fellow Republicans at the Republican National Convention in San Diego in August 1996. It was included in the Fiscal Year 1997 appropriations bill later that year.[95]



Figure 25. View of Taft house from the Auburn Street entrance. (William Howard Taft National Historic Site.)

On September 25, 1997, a public bid opening was held in Omaha and the low bidder was R. E. Schweitzer Construction Company of Cincinnati with a bid of $1.77 million. Construction began in November.[96]

The grand opening for the Taft Education Center was held two years later. Hope Taft (then Ohio's first lady) and a costumed actor playing William Howard Taft

[95] Superintendent to Regional Director, February 10, 1995, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18; Ray Henderson, interview by Theodore Catton, April 3, 2019; Kurt Topham, "Background and status of Taft Education Center Project, William Howard Taft National Historic Site," December 12, 1996, Friends of the Taft Legacy Archive, correspondence (miscellaneous).
[96] Kurt Topham, "From the Superintendent's Desk," *Taft Times* (December 1997), 1.

shared in the ribbon cutting ceremony. Other honored guests included Seth Taft and Eleanor Taft Hall. Deputy Regional Director David Given represented NPS.[97]

Monumentation

With the opening of the Taft Education Center, development of William Howard Taft National Historic Site was nearly complete. The longstanding development issue of where to provide for visitor parking would finally be resolved by a land exchange in 2006 and construction of a new parking area in 2008.

In the early 2000s some subtle monumentation was added to the Site. The Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace wanted the Taft Education Center to highlight the Taft family more than the president, and the new monumentation mostly aimed at giving the Site that alternative dimension. The monumentation began with the outdoor landscaping at the entrance to the center. Six cast metal seals, each eight inches in diameter, were mounted on a metal shelf on a low curving wall around a brick-lined bay. The seals represented the wide variety of offices in local, state, national, and international arenas in which the Tafts served. They included the seals of the City of Cincinnati, the State of Ohio, the United States Senate, the President of the United States, the United States Supreme Court, and the Governor of the Philippines. (Other official seals considered but not included were the seals of Hamilton County, the United States House of Representatives, NATO, and the Office of the Secretary of War.)[98]

At a ceremony on May 24, 2000, Governor Bob Taft and First Lady Hope Taft planted a cherry tree and placed a bronze plaque on the property near the Auburn Avenue sidewalk. The governor and first lady donated the cherry tree and commemorative plaque in honor of former First Lady Helen Herron Taft and her initiative to plant ornamental cherry trees around the public monuments in Washington, D.C. This cherry tree was a descendant of the original cherry trees planted around the Tidal Basin.[99]

At the same ceremony in May 2000, the Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace unveiled a bust of Senator Robert A. Taft. This bronze bust, mounted atop a four-foot-tall cement pedestal, had formerly graced the grounds of the Taft Museum of Art for nearly 40 years. Its history began with the commissioning of a bust of the senator by the Thomas J. Emery Memorial in the late 1950s with the plan to install it

[97] Claudia McKee, "President's Report," *Taft Times*, (January 2000), 1-2.
[98] "Taft Education Center, Cincinnati, Ohio, Conceptual Exhibit Plan/Visitor Walk Through," November 1998, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File K1817.
[99] Superintendent's Annual Report for 2000, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2621; Kurt C. Topham to Paul G. Sittenfeld, May 12, 2000, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A42.

in Lytle Park in downtown Cincinnati as soon as the expressway through that area was completed. The sculptor was Jacques Lipchitz (1891-1973), an artist of Lithuanian and Jewish heritage and French and American citizenship who was best known for his Cubist style of sculpting (mostly very different from his bust of the senator). Lipchitz completed the bust in 1960 and it was placed temporarily with the Cincinnati Art Museum, only to remain on loan to the museum indefinitely when the plan for Lytle Park changed. With the opening of the Taft Education Center, the Thomas J. Emery Memorial recalled the loan and gave it to the Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace for display at the National Historic Site. The Taft Museum of Art transferred the bust to the Friends of William Howard Taft on May 15, 2000, and at the ceremony nine days later the bust was relocated and rededicated.[100]

In 2003, an Ohio State Historical Marker (state number 43-31) was erected in front of the Taft Education Center on Auburn Avenue. Facing the Taft Education Center, the brown painted cast bronze marker has the following text about Senator Robert A. Taft:

> Robert Alphonso Taft. Robert A. Taft, son of William Howard Taft, was born in Cincinnati on September 8, 1889, and graduated from Yale University and Harvard Law School. After serving in a number of administrative posts, he served in the Ohio Legislature from 1921-1932. Elected as a United States Senator in 1938, he served until shortly before his death in 1953. He rose to the rank of Senate Majority Leader and, in three separate presidential election cycles in 1940, 1948, and 1952, was a chief competitor for the Republican Party nomination. Taft emerged as a leading figure in the party's conservative wing. He was the co-sponsor of the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which sought equity between labor and business in collective bargaining. For his leadership, Senator Taft was given an honorary title of "Mr. Republican."[101]

Facing the street, the same marker has this text about President Taft:

> William Howard Taft. Born here on September 15, 1857, William Howard Taft is the only American to have served as President and Chief Justice of the United States. His unique career of public service began after he graduated from Yale University and Cincinnati Law

[100] Superintendent's Annual Report for 2000, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2621; Kurt C. Topham to Paul G. Sittenfeld, May 12, 2000, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A42; Gretchen Shie to Topham, April 28, 2000, Shie to Lee Crooks, March 8, 1999, and The Thomas J. Emery Memorial to Cornelius J. Hauck, no date, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D62.
[101] National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for William Howard Taft National Historic Site (2015), Section 7, p. 38.

School. He became an Ohio Superior Court Judge at age 29. In 1892, he was appointed a judge of the United States Circuit Court of Appeals. In 1900, President William McKinley sent him to the Philippines as chief civil administrator. President Theodore Roosevelt named him Secretary of War in 1904, and he was elected President of the United States four years later. In 1921, President Harding named Taft Chief Justice, a position that he relished, serving until just before his death in 1930.

Chapter Four

Administration

This chapter focuses on the National Historic Site's administrative development, chronicling the major concerns and initiatives of successive superintendents and staff. Themes include the challenges of operating with a small staff, functioning with limited space for offices and visitor staging areas, and managing a unit in an inner-city environment. The chapter closes with a section on the maintenance program.

Emergence of a New Unit

In February 1969, as momentum built toward the establishment of William Howard Taft National Historic Site, NPS named the superintendent of Mound City Group National Monument, George F. Schesventer, the Project Keyman for the proposed area. With the establishment of the Site on December 2, 1969, field responsibility was assigned to Schesventer. For the next five and a half years, until July 1, 1975, Mound City Group National Monument was the key park administering the new National Park System unit in Cincinnati. As a key park, it would provide administrative oversight and support for William Howard Taft National Historic Site until the latter unit was fully staffed and funded.[1]

Mound City Group National Monument was in Chillicothe, Ohio, 100 miles east of Cincinnati. The former national monument features a 13-acre complex of earthen mounds built by the prehistoric Hopewell Culture. Since 1992, it is one of six units that make up Hopewell Culture National Historical Park. When the national monument was proclaimed in 1923, it became Ohio's first National Park System unit. By the 1960s, Mound City Group National Monument had a new visitor center (a Mission 66 project) and an administrative staff of around eight people including an archeologist, a ranger-historian, an administrative aide, and a maintenance man.[2]

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[1] Acting Regional Director to Director, February 28, 1969, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Restoration exterior/grounds.

[2] Ron Cockrell, *Amidst Ancient Monuments: The Administrative History of Mound City Group National Monument/Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, Ohio*, Chapter Four.

Superintendent Schesventer oversaw two units outside of Mound City Group National Monument: William Howard Taft National Historic Site and Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial, which is located on the Lake Erie shore. Today, NPS administers no fewer than eight units in Ohio (Table 2).

Table 2: Ohio units administered by NPS in order of establishment

1.	Mound City Group National Monument (proclaimed 1923, expanded to Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, 1992)
2.	Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial National Monument (proclaimed June 2, 1936, re-designated national memorial 1972)
3.	William Howard Taft National Historic Site (established December 2, 1969)
4.	Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area (established December 27, 1974, re-designated national park 2000)
5.	James A. Garfield National Historic Site (established December 28, 1980)
6.	Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (established October 16, 1992)
7.	First Ladies National Historic Site (established October 11, 2000)
8.	Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument (proclaimed March 25, 2013)

Schesventer was appointed Ohio State Coordinator on October 23, 1967. The appointment was part of an initiative by Director Hartzog to improve coordination between NPS and various state and non-government institutions in each state, and to increase public awareness of NPS goals and policies. As state coordinator, Schesventer was encouraged to meet with local, state, and national political leaders and educate them about the National Park System. It was in that vein that Schesventer went to see Charlie Taft in his office in city government two weeks after the National Historic Site was established. Of course, Schesventer was also keen to learn details about the impending transfer of the house property to NPS. After the U.S. government acquired title to the Taft house, Schesventer notified utility companies that all future bills be directed to the Mound City Group National Monument.[3]

[3] Cockrell, *Amidst Ancient Monuments*, Chapter Five; Superintendent to Taft Files, January 28, 1970, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821; Superintendent to Regional Director, December 19, 1969, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, WIHO correspondence parking; Lee, *Administrative History*, 32.

Schesventer transferred to Castillo de San Marcos National Monument in St. Augustine, Florida in 1971. Before his departure, he prepared a position description for a park manager who would be stationed at the Site and be under the supervision of the superintendent of Mound City Group National Monument. The position would entail oversight of interpretive and visitor services, curatorial duties, public relations, protection of the property, and administration.[4]

William C. Birdsell was appointed superintendent of Mound City Group National Monument in 1971. He was also named General Superintendent for the Ohio National Park Service Group. An energetic and enthusiastic administrator, Birdsell was involved in the beginning phase of planning for historic restoration and development of William Howard Taft National Historic Site. One of his initiatives for the Site was to get the regional cooperating association, Eastern National Park and Monument Association, invested in the new Site. He envisioned an information desk and publications area being installed in the Taft house where visitors would not only receive information about William Howard Taft, they would also learn about other National Park System units in the region.[5]

Soon after Birdsell started on duty, he appointed John Troy Lissimore to the position of park manager for William Howard Taft National Historic Site. Lissimore made his office in the rear of the house, Room 109. A buzzer system was installed and Lissimore began receiving occasional Site visitors who came to the front door. Lissimore took interested members of the public through the hall and showed them the "birth room." The front rooms of the ground level were not yet open to the public as they were occupied by the Everett H. Inman family who had been residents of the house for eight years with Inman serving as a night watchman for the premises.[6]

Birdsell and Lissimore agreed that a priority of the Site's first park manager was to establish good will between NPS and the predominantly African American community of Mount Auburn. Lissimore who was African American, was ahead of many others in the NPS organization in recognizing the need to promote greater ethnic and racial diversity in the National Park System (both in NPS itself and among the millions of U.S. citizens who are drawn to the national parks). One of Lissimore's first actions at William Howard Taft was to make a connection with the Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC) program. This program aimed at giving inner-city high school youths employment experience while encouraging them to complete their high school education. It was a federal program instigated by President Johnson's War on Poverty.

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[4] George F. Schesventer, "Unit Manager," October 15, 1970, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Yellows from MOCI – FY '72, 1970, 1971; Lee, *Administrative History*, 35.
[5] Superintendent's Annual Report, 1975; William C. Birdsell to Charles P. Taft, June 25, 1971, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Reading File – Letters (May-Dec. 1971).
[6] Park Manager to General Superintendent, February 25, 1972, and Lissimore to Everett H. Inman, February 8, 1972, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows FY '72.

At Lissimore's initiative, NPS funded two NYC enrollee positions at William Howard Taft before it had any other staff positions. The park manager hired the youths through the NYC program coordinator who was stationed at Courter Technical High School. Despite problems with absenteeism and high turnover, Lissimore stuck with it, mentoring several high school youths in succession. The youths, who were mostly engaged in grounds keeping tasks, formed the Site's first custodial staff.[7]

Lissimore reached out to African Americans in Cincinnati and beyond. In March 1972, in a special program and ceremony held at the Mount Auburn Community Council's headquarters, Lissimore accepted an original George Washington Carver landscape painting from a resident of Cincinnati. The donor was a former traveling companion of the late African American conservationist, ethicist, and artist, and the painting was donated to NPS for exhibit at George Washington Carver National Monument in Missouri.[8]

Beginning in 1972, Lissimore sought to build a permanent staff for the unit. In February 1972, Lissimore evicted the Inman family and moved his office to the front of the house or parlor (Rooms 101-102). As he added staff, this large space became filled with additional desks and a temporary library. In 1972, Lissimore hired two park aides and one clerk-typist for the summer. In April 1973, he hired Ruthanne Heriot as an interpretive specialist, with her position being shared between William Howard Taft National Historic Site and Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial in Lincoln City, Indiana. In June 1973, Lissimore once again hired two park aides for the summer. Charlesetta Spurlock, an African American, came on board as administrative clerk in 1974 and remained on the staff until 1979 when she took an early-out retirement.[9]

In November 1973, Lissimore transferred to Gateway National Recreation Area in New York City. Though his tenure at William Howard Taft was short, he established an important precedent as an African American park manager who was sensitive to the needs and interests of the predominantly black local community. Over the next half century, blacks would continue to have a strong presence on the staff at William Howard Taft National Historic Site. Lissimore, meanwhile, would continue his advocacy for a more inclusive National Park Service at powerful posts elsewhere in the National Park System, serving as superintendent at Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site in the late 1970s and superintendent at Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site in the 1990s.

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[7] John Troy Lissimore to Glen Hudson, February 16, 1972, Lissimore to Ray Finke, February 16, 1972, and May 2, 1972, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows FY '72.
[8] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1972.
[9] John Troy Lissimore to Everett H. Inman, February 8, 1972, and Lissimore to All Employees, May 8, 1972, Park Manager to General Superintendent, May 31, 1973, Park Manager to Chief, Office of Finance and Control, June 29, 1973, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows – FY '72 and FY '73.

Charlesetta Spurlock anchored the staff through the next five months, serving as acting park manager from mid November 1973 through March 1974. She had a bachelor's degree in history and social sciences from Tennessee A & I State University and 20 years of experience working in federal agencies mostly in the Cincinnati area. It was during her tenure that NPS realigned the regions and the Midwest Region took over administration of the Ohio units.[10]

In March 1974, Superintendent Birdsell hired Jerome L. Licari, a supervisory park ranger at Ozark National Scenic Riverways, to serve as the next park manager. Licari had a bachelor's degree in forestry (University of Minnesota, 1965) and ten years of experience in management and program operation supervision in outdoor recreation and sports. He was a Vietnam War veteran and former captain in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Licari continued his predecessor's strong support of the NYC program and positive involvement with the Mount Auburn Community Council. He offered his staff's services to the Mount Auburn Presbyterian Church and other neighbors. He initiated research for an eventual Mount Auburn historic district designation. He attended meetings of the Mount Auburn Professional Workers' Group. He worked with a variety of cultural and civic organizations in Cincinnati on preparations for Bicentennial events in the summer of 1976.[11]

Licari was superintendent when emergency stabilization was performed on the house in 1975, initiating the historic restoration that would be a focus of Site administration for the next thirteen years. Because of the restoration work, public access to the house changed. Whereas in 1974 the house was open to the public on weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and tours were offered three days a week between 2:30 p.m. and 5 p.m., after restoration started most of the interior of the house was generally closed to the public. A small exhibit space and information center in the solarium remained open. Two seasonal park aides provided walking tours around the exterior of the house to the few Site visitors who came despite the house's mothballed appearance.[12]

Licari was a transitional Site administrator. On July 1, 1975, the Ohio National Park Service Group was dissolved in favor of each Ohio unit standing as an independent unit. Licari was promoted from park manager to superintendent, reporting thereafter to the regional director in Omaha. Financial and maintenance operations, formerly conducted under Mound City Group National Monument auspices, were

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[10] Jerry L. Licari to Mount Auburn Presbyterian Church, January 22, 1976, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '76.
[11] Lee, *Administrative History*, 39-42; Staff Safety Meeting, May 19, 1975, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '75; Jerry L. Licari to Mount Auburn Presbyterian Church, January 22, 1976, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '76.
[12] Charlesetta Spurlock to Vincent Zachem, March 5, 1974, and Jerry L. Licari to Donald W. Floyd, March 18, 1975, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows – FY '74 and FY '75.

brought within the Site's operations. Licari declared in his first superintendent's annual report for 1975 that the Site made an orderly and effective transition to a fully independent NPS unit. The Site's annual budget in 1975 (ONPS base funding) is not available; the earliest figure on record, for Fiscal Year 1979, was $115,100. Licari was at the helm for nearly three years, from April 1974 through January 1977. He resigned February 4, 1977, taking a job in another federal agency that would enable him to assist Vietnam War veterans.[13]

Following Licari's departure, Vance Kaminski, a historical architect from the Midwest Regional Office was detailed to the Site as acting superintendent until another superintendent was appointed. Kaminski made one decision in that brief period that had lasting significance. As the Denver Service Center team investigated the historic fabric of the house and its demolition work intensified, Kaminski decided that the administrative offices of William Howard Taft National Historic Site had to be temporarily relocated to another building. Kaminski rented an apartment unit in the adjacent Sanning building in the expectation that the staff would return to the Taft home as soon as the Denver Service Center team completed its investigation. But shortly it became apparent that the demolition was more extensive than anticipated. Kaminski wrote to the regional director, "After discussing the matter in detail with the park staff, I have concluded that it would be desirable to continue to occupy temporary quarters, for administrative offices." Thus, an ad hoc arrangement turned into a long stay under a General Services Administration (GSA) year-to-year lease. The incoming superintendent would refer to the space as "our temporary office quarters," but the arrangement would continue, with modifications, for more than 20 years – much longer than anyone anticipated.[14]

Administration during the House Restoration

William Howard Taft National Historic Site had three superintendents after Licari during the years that the Taft home was being restored. They were Fahy C. Whitaker (1977-81), Mary Maxine Boyd (1981-1985), and Steve Kesselman (1985-1989). The Site's operating budget grew incrementally over the period from $115,100 in 1979 to $196,100 in 1988. The permanent staff grew from three to six.

Fahy C. Whitaker, formerly a historian at Cape Cod National Seashore, started as superintendent of William Howard Taft National Historic Site on April 10, 1977. When Whitaker arrived, the Site had a permanent staff of three: superintendent,

[13] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1975, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets FY '76.
[14] Acting Superintendent to Regional Director, March 18, 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows – FY '77; Superintendent's Annual Report for 1977, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '78.

administrative clerk, and park technician. The park technician was Sam Witherup, a seasonal park aide since 1973, promoted to park technician, full-time, in 1976. He had a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Cincinnati and three years of experience teaching in elementary school. In 1976, Witherup was put in charge of interpretive operations.[15] A full-time position in maintenance was added to the staff in June 1977, bringing the total permanent staff to four. Most summers, William Howard Taft National Historic Site also had two park aides as well as two NYC enrollees and a roster of volunteers.

During her four years at William Howard Taft, Whitaker managed the Site under trying circumstances. While Whitaker saw the Master Plan through to completion in January 1981, the Taft house saw limited visitor use all through her tenure. As NPS planners deliberated over which rooms in the house would be refurnished the on-site staff conducted interpretive programs at off-site locations in area schools and city parks. To Whitaker and the staff, it often seemed like the restoration effort was dragging and the unit was being left in limbo.

The critical moment in Whitaker's tenure came when an earthquake jolted Cincinnati on July 27, 1980. Although there was no apparent damage to the house from this 5.3 magnitude temblor, the earthquake was a reminder that the house was still vulnerable to collapse. A Denver Service Center team inspected the place and urged another round of emergency stabilization. Still Whitaker was frustrated by the grindingly slow pace of putting together a funding package even in the face of emergency. An aftershock in October caused greater damage to the house and finally prompted some temporary measures to be taken by the Midwest Regional Office before it was too late. A combination of wood shoring, Styrofoam, white oakum, and tape was used to treat cracks. However, more substantial stabilization efforts were rolled into the PRIP development program that materialized the next year. Whitaker transferred out in March 1981, before the permanent stabilization and restoration of the house had begun.[16]

Mary Maxine Boyd was Taft's second African American superintendent. She came from Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, California, and had relevant prior experience working for the historic restoration of the Frederick Douglass home in Washington, D.C. Boyd arrived in the summer of 1981 unprepared for the poor condition that the house was in. She later admitted that she was "shattered…really stunned…shocked that it was in that state of disrepair." Far from

[15] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1976, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '77.
[16] Mark Bellamah, "Earthquake," *Cincinnati Magazine* 19, no. 2 (November 1985), 144-48; Historical Architect and Structural Engineer to Assistant Manager, Midwest/Rocky Mountain Team, DSC, October 27, 1980, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1; Acting Regional Director to State Historic Preservation Officer, December 30, 1980, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 4, File 004.10.

being deflated by what she found, though, Boyd threw herself into getting the house restoration underway at last. She reached out to members of the Taft family as well as politicians and NPS leadership. She solicited local and national media coverage to call attention to the pressing need for preserving the Taft home. As a female African American superintendent and a forceful personality besides, Boyd soon had the respect of the predominantly white male leadership in the Midwest Regional Office. Her high energy and combativeness wore on the Site staff as well as NPS personnel in Omaha and Denver, but those personal qualities also made a difference in moving the development process forward.[17]

One of Boyd's outstanding achievements was the production of a gift catalog to spur donations for the restoration. The idea behind the gift catalog was to identify many tangible needs so that donors could choose what their cash donations would buy. She had seen a similar enterprise succeed at her former post at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. With the active support of Hope Taft, Boyd developed a proposal and obtained an $8,000 private-sector grant to publish and distribute the gift catalog. The superintendent then supervised the development, publication, and dissemination of 5,000 copies of the catalog. Through the gift catalog, the Site received approximately $80,000 in cash donations, $60,000 in pledged donations, and $40,000 in donated services. Boyd received a Special Achievement Award for her performance in organizing and publishing the gift catalog. The high visibility of private sector donations together with congressional support led directly to greater funding support from within the agency.[18]

Boyd retired from NPS in 1985. In her last year at Taft, she secured two more positions for the Site: historian and park ranger. For the historian position she hired Ella S. Rayburn, a specialist in cultural resources management and museum services with a master's degree from Fort Hays State University, Kansas. Rayburn's main task would be to work with the next superintendent to procure historic furnishings and memorabilia for the rooms as the historic restoration shifted focus to the interior of the house. For the new park ranger position Boyd hired Ray Henderson, a commissioned law enforcement ranger at Carlsbad Caverns National Park, New Mexico with experience in interpretation, museum collections, and visitor protection. With the addition of these two employees, William Howard Taft National Historic Site now had a permanent staff of six: superintendent, administrative technician, maintenance worker, park technician, historian, and park ranger.[19]

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[17] Boyd interview; Lee, *Administrative History*, 47.
[18] Superintendent to Regional Director, April 12, 1985, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, FY 1985; Regional Director to Superintendents, undated, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1.
[19] Superintendent to Regional Director, April 12, 1985, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, FY 1985; Ray Henderson, interview by Theodore Catton, April 3, 2019.

Dean C. Einwalter, management assistant at Ozark National Scenic Riverways, was twice detailed to Taft as acting superintendent, first in October and November 1984 when Boyd was on sick leave, and again in May and June 1985 after Boyd's retirement. Einwalter was an effective pitch hitter for Boyd in carrying on communications with Senator Metzenbaum's office on the matter of development funding (see Chapter Three). Einwalter also had to respond to a draft audit report by the Inspector General in which William Howard Taft National Historic Site was called out as the park with the lowest employee/visitor ratio. Einwalter parried this blow in a letter to the regional director, explaining that visitor numbers were so low because the Taft home remained closed until restoration was complete. "We have every reason to believe that visitation will rise dramatically once the home is in a suitable condition to receive visitors," he wrote. "In the meantime we are operating with what we feel are very limited personnel," he added. "Essentially each major park function, with one exception, has but one representative, and each individual serves multitudinous roles." Einwalter went on to stress that the unit had a growing museum collection that needed proper care, that its staff engaged with the community and provided special programs, and that its Friends group was raising lots of money for the restoration.[20]

Steve Kesselman entered the job in June 1985 and was superintendent at Taft for four years. He held a Ph.D. in American history from Harvard University, had taught at Sarah Lawrence College in New York City, and had previously overseen historic restoration at Fire Island National Seashore, New York. He took a strong, scholarly interest in developing interpretive information on the Taft family and getting the interior restoration and historic furnishings done to as high a standard as possible. He and Ella Rayburn made an effective duo, debating the finer points of conveying history or achieving authenticity. Ray Henderson remembered Kesselman as being extremely hands-on, going over every word of text and every piece of material in the interpretive exhibits.[21]

Kesselman took the historic restoration in a bold, new direction in the first four months after his arrival. Whereas the Master Plan called for adaptively restoring the second-floor rooms for use as administrative offices, Kesselman argued that those rooms should be dedicated to interpretive exhibits and public functions, not administrative offices. Regional Director Charles H. Odegaard approved this important change of plans in November 1985. In effect, the change greatly expanded

[20] Superintendent to Regional Director, December 5, 1984, Staff Meeting Minutes, April 22, 1985, and Acting Superintendent to Regional Director, May 14, 1985, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, FY 1985.
[21] "Name to Know," *Cincinnati Post*, June 14, 1985; Henderson interview.

the exhibit space in the house and committed NPS to providing additional space for administrative offices outside of the historic home. In the short run that meant renting more apartment units in the Sanning building. In the long run it meant developing a separate structure next to the Taft home. Thus, Kesselman's approach to the historic restoration planted the seed for the development of the Taft Education Center though the new building would not be built until several years after Kesselman had moved on.[22]



Figure 26. Superintendent Kesselman had upstairs rooms given to exhibit space rather than administrative offices. (Author's photo.)

Kesselman strengthened the Site's connections with the University of Cincinnati Law School where William Howard Taft once taught and served as dean. With help from the Friends group, Kesselman approached the law school to co-sponsor an annual William Howard Taft Lecture on Constitutional Law. The first lecture was given by Carl McGowan, federal circuit judge for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. The second lecture was given by Republican Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah. In the third year, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia was the presenter. Each year's event took place in a ballroom in a downtown hotel and included dinner with law school faculty and members of the Cincinnati Bar Association, and it might be preceded or followed by an event at William Howard Taft National Historic Site to commemorate the birthday of William Howard Taft. The lecture series kept going, and the lecture eventually became the keystone event of a William Howard Taft Week that the National Historic Site initiated in 2019.[23]

The high point of Kesselman's four years at Taft came with the grand opening of the Taft home in September 1988. Three days of events marked the occasion. On September 15, William Howard Taft's birthday, a special preview reception was held at the Site, sponsored by NPS and the Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace, and limited to major donors, members of the Mount Auburn Community Council, and a few other invited guests. On September 16, a Friday, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia delivered the William Howard Taft Lecture on Constitutional Law. Then, on

[22] Superintendent to Regional Director, July 24, 1985; Andy Ketterson to John Kawamoto, August 2, 1985, Assistant Manager, Midwest/Rocky Mountain Team, DSC to Regional Director, Midwest Region, August 7, 1985, and Regional Director to Superintendent, November 19, 1985, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 2, File 003.9.

[23] Henderson interview; Hugh Hawthorne, interview by Theodore Catton, April 2, 2019.

the morning of September 17, a Saturday, Scalia and former Senator Robert Taft, Jr. helped cut a giant ribbon wrapped around the Taft home. Speakers for the grand opening ceremony included Scalia, Representative Gradison, Seth Taft, Regional Director Don Castleberry, Mount Auburn Community Council President Michael Fallings, Mayor Charles Luken, and County Commissioner Robert A. Taft II. A band played and about 300 people attended.[24]

Growing a Bigger Budget and Staff

After the grand opening in September 1988, the National Historic Site began to receive more visitors. More visitor use called for more interpretive services and an increase in staff. A bigger interpretive program and staff raised the need for more administrative office space. When the Taft Education Center was built to accommodate the growth in visitation and staff, the addition of a second building at the Site roughly doubled the size of the physical plant. As was anticipated, the bigger physical plant necessitated a further increase in staff. The Site's operating budget grew commensurately. The operating budget stood at $207,400 in 1989 and rose to $621,331 in 2005. There were three superintendents in this period: Maryanne Gerbauckas, Kurt Topham, and Kevin McMurry.

The new superintendent at the start of this decade-and-a-half period of growth, Maryanne Gerbauckas, was also Taft's third female superintendent. (By 2020, there would be five female and six male superintendents.) Moving up in the NPS organization, Gerbauckas came to William Howard Taft National Historic Site from a park ranger background at Acadia, Fire Island, Assateague Island, and most recently Colonial National Historical Park. She held the position for three years and then transferred to another superintendent job at Thomas Edison on her way to taking higher positions in the Northeast Regional Office.[25]

During her tenure at Taft from July 1989 to April 1992 NPS pivoted from restoring the house to restoring and improving the grounds. A cultural landscape report was initiated. The resource management plan was updated. A statement for management was completed.[26]

Permanent signage was installed at the entrance on Auburn Avenue announcing that the Site was open to the public daily from 10 to 4. Site visitation grew and began to exhibit some predictable patterns. Visitor numbers peaked in April and

[24] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1988, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, FY '89 Daily Yellows; "Justice Scalia coming to UC," *Cincinnati Post*, August 27, 1988; "Scalia urges restraint," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 17, 1988.
[25] "All in the Family," *Ranger* 8, no. 3 (Summer 1992), 6.
[26] "Statement for Management," March 1991, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File D18.

October, when many school groups came. Visitation fell off in summer when it averaged about 500 to 600 people per month and the numbers shrank still more in winter. An estimated 60 percent of visitation was by metropolitan area residents, while about 25 percent came from the tri-state region encompassing Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana, another 14 percent from other states, and about 1 percent from foreign countries. In the years after the grand opening, annual visitation jumped by a few thousand, from around 4,000 to around 8,000, but it fell short of the 20,000-mark that had been predicted.[27]

Gerbauckas hired NPS historian Robert J. Moore, Jr. to fill the historian position left vacant since 1987 when Ella Rayburn transferred to Steamtown National Historic Site, Pennsylvania. Moore conducted a lot of research on William Howard Taft and the Taft family, producing a detailed chronology among other items. Moore was at the Site two years and transferred in October 1991 to Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, Missouri (re-designated Gateway Arch National Park in 2018). During that time his title changed to chief of interpretation. After his departure, the historian position went away in favor of a chief of interpretation position. Gerbauckas brought in Beverly Albrecht, formerly a park ranger at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, to fill the position of chief of interpretation. Albrecht started on duty January 12, 1992.[28]

NPS's plans for how to complete the development of the Site were still in flux in the years 1989-92. (Kesselman had succeeded in preventing use of the upstairs of the Taft home for administrative offices, but an alternative arrangement had yet to be determined.) Gerbauckas, working through the Friends group, tried to persuade the local representative in Congress to introduce legislation to adjust the Site's authorized boundary to include the entire city block, in part to enhance options for developing the grounds, in part to consolidate visitor parking nearer to the Taft home, and in part to enable NPS to acquire an older apartment building at 219 Southern Avenue to serve as the Site's headquarters building. Gerbauckas also looked at other buildings that might be leased or acquired to provide professional space for administrative offices, maintenance operations, and curatorial services. Chief consideration was given to the Riddle-Phillips house at 2021 Auburn Avenue. The building at 219 Southern Avenue was finally rejected as too small, while the Riddle-Phillips house, a handsome red

[27] United Signs, Inc. to Bob Moore, March 28, 1990, and attached correspondence, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File D66; Superintendent to Lana K. Henry, July 18, 1990, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, 1990 Daily Blues; "Statement for Management," March 1991, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File D18; Ray Henderson, "Determination of Closure," March 31, 1989, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, FY '85 Daily Yellows.

[28] Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace, "Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting," December 3, 1991, Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace Archive, File: Board Minutes; Henderson interview.

brick mansion dating from the mid nineteenth century, was rejected out of concern that it could overshadow the Taft house, confusing visitors.[29]

While the search for more administrative space continued, the stopgap solution was to rent additional space in the Sanning Apartments. From having one apartment unit on the main floor plus a maintenance area in the basement, the GSA lease grew to encompass two apartment units and then a third. Visitors would find, upon entering the building, a small reception area and some interpretive exhibits. But the space was makeshift and unprepossessing. There was no real separation of public and residential use of the entryway and exhibit area and there was poor spatial communication between staff offices.[30]



Figure 27. View of Taft Education Center showing Sanning building (at right) and hospital beyond. (Author's photo.)

Gerbauckas transferred out in April 1992, and three different acting superintendents followed in quick succession until the arrival of Superintendent Kurt Topham. As discussed in Chapter Three, it fell to Topham to oversee the multi-year process of getting the Taft Education Center built. He was superintendent from August 1992 through February 2001. The push for the building became the focus of Topham's eight and a half years at Taft, and it culminated in the grand opening held in November 1999. Hope Taft, then Ohio's first lady, attended the ceremony along with her cousins Seth Taft and Eleanor Taft Hall.[31]

Topham's main accomplishment besides the Taft Education Center was to obtain increases in the operating budget. He secured grant money to pay for buses for transporting school groups to the Site. After a few years, the funding support for buses got turned into a regular line item in the operating budget. He was aggressive in going after other funding opportunities. He was able to increase the operating budget by two-fold during his eight years. He inherited a budget of $245,950 in 1992 and pushed it up to $496,600 in 2000.

During Topham's eight and a half years as superintendent, the interpretive program was significantly expanded (see Chapter Five). Chief of Interpretation

[29] "Statement for Management," March 1991, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File D18; Henderson interview.
[30] Henderson interview.
[31] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1992, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A2621; Henderson interview.

Albrecht led program development until she transferred out in 1995. Park Ranger Ray Henderson headed the interpretive program through the next three years and formally got promoted to chief of resource management and visitor services in 1998. (The title later reverted to chief of interpretation.) Kerry Wood was hired as an intake ranger and education specialist in July 1999. Henderson and Wood worked together for more than a decade and a half after that; Henderson retired in 2015 and Wood was promoted to chief of interpretation soon thereafter.[32]

As the interpretive program expanded, the organization of the staff acquired its present distribution with two individuals in administration, one in maintenance, and all the rest – from three to six FTEs – in interpretation. Through the 1990s, the interpretive division included around eight to ten intermittent employees whose combined hours made up around one to one and a half FTEs. The "intermittent" hires in those years replaced the "seasonal" hires of the previous decade. The intermittent employee, rather than working 40 hours a week through the summer, might work a few days each month all year round. They were generally local people, not the migratory seasonal rangers who were the mainstay of interpretive staffs throughout most of the National Park System. Some were retired schoolteachers. Others were university students.[33]

The staff composition also became more diverse in these years as NPS encouraged women and minority hires and sought to connect the Site with the local community. While Topham was white, Henderson and Wood were both African American. At the end of Topham's tenure, the permanent staff was 87 percent representative of women and minority employees.[34]

Kurt Topham, formerly chief ranger at Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, Iowa, was another first-time superintendent who was moving up the traditional NPS career ladder from law enforcement ranger to park superintendent when he did his tour at William Howard Taft National Historic Site. By this time, it was apparent that NPS used Taft as a place to train new superintendents. Before Topham, park manager Lissimore and superintendents Whitaker and Gerbauckas all used Taft as a steppingstone to other superintendent jobs elsewhere. Although treating the unit as a training site for superintendents was normal and understandable from an organizational standpoint, the Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace took exception to it, because they were concerned with just one unit in the National Park System and they thought it deserved better than that. Topham's relations with the

[32] "From the Superintendent's Desk," *Taft Times*, December 1998; Henderson interview; Kerry Wood, interview by Theodore Catton, April 2, 2019.
[33] Henderson interview. Numbers of intermittent hires and other statistical data are recorded in the Annual Interpretive Program Reports, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File K26.
[34] Superintendent's Annual Report for 2001, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A2621.

Friends started out well but later soured. Through the arduous process of getting the Taft Education Center completed, cooperation between the superintendent and the Friends grew strained. Eventually the Friends supported Topham's ouster.

Topham also began to clash with Taft's long-serving administrative officer Charlotte Morris. Morris objected to some of Topham's office procedures. She wanted to go strictly by the book, and Topham did not want to take instruction from her. Making matters worse, two new employees found they were unhappy in their jobs and began to make things unpleasant for other staff. Part of a superintendent's job at a small unit is to ensure that the few staff members work well as a team. The situation got away from Topham as the various personnel matters began to stew. Finally, a team from the Midwest Regional Office performed an operations evaluation after which NPS made some swift decisions. Topham was whisked into another job at the regional office at the end of February 2001.[35]

Kevin D. McMurry started as acting superintendent on March 5, 2001. After a search was made for a new superintendent, McMurry got the job in June.[36] Ironically, McMurry soon developed his own problems with personnel management. He was well-intentioned, instructing his staff on how to improve their interpersonal communications and taking other measures to reform the workplace such as replacing a rectangular table in the employee breakroom with a round one. But his reform efforts mostly flopped. Moreover, McMurry's own handling of the superintendent job raised concerns and his behavior in the workplace was sometimes less than exemplary. Although he lasted in the job for four years, eventually he was shunted to another unit (Fort Larned National Historic Site, Kansas) as abruptly and ignominiously as Topham had been.



Figure 28. Taft Education Center. (Author's photo.)

The staff moved into the Taft Education Center in the last year of Topham's tenure and settled into the new space during the period that McMurry was superintendent. In those years, the library took up the area now occupied by central files, the copy machine, and the maintenance person's office. What later became the library and conference room was at first used as a conference room exclusively. The maintenance person's office was in the reception area. The new space in the Taft Education Center was a big improvement over the

[35] Henderson interview; Reginald M. Tiller, interview by Theodore Catton, April 10, 2019.
[36] "Acting Superintendent Addresses Annual Meeting," *Taft Times* (Summer 2001), 1; Superintendent's Annual Report for 2001, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A2621.

Sanning Apartments, but it was already cramped. The cramped conditions would be alleviated somewhat when the library was moved into the conference room. That change was made in 2015.[37]

Topham's last year at Taft and McMurry's four-year tenure also spanned the first five years of the Ohio governorship of Bob Taft, great grandson of the 27th U.S. president. Bob Taft was governor from January 11, 1999 to January 8, 2007. With Bob and Hope Taft occupying the governor's residence in Columbus, Ohio, public awareness of the Taft political dynasty grew. As Ohio's first lady, Hope Taft continued her support of the National Historic Site though she dialed back her involvement with the Friends organization. (Her involvement started to diminish in 1991 when her husband was elected secretary of state and the Tafts moved to the state capital.) First Lady Taft was guest of honor for the grand opening of the Taft Education Center on November 5, 1999. Six months later, Governor and First Lady Taft returned to the Site for a rededication ceremony of a bust of the late Senator Robert A. Taft that was relocated to the Site from the Taft Museum of Art. On that day, May 24, 2000, the governor and first lady donated a Japanese flowering cherry tree and planted it on the grounds in recognition of First Lady Helen Herron Taft's planting of cherry trees around the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C. In 2003, Governor Taft was on hand again to initiate the William Howard Taft First Person Interpretive Program, with the governor gamely doing an impersonation of his great grandfather to kick it off.[38]

Governor and First Lady Taft hired a former employee from William Howard Taft National Historic Site to be curator of the governor's residence. Mary Alice Mairose worked as an intermittent employee at Taft in the early 1990s while she was a student at Northern Kentucky University. Hope Taft took a group of women from Columbus to the National Historic Site in 1991 and Mairose was their guide through the Taft home. As Hope Taft and Mairose chatted, it developed that Mairose wanted to do graduate studies in history at Ohio State University but needed a place to live. After considering it with her husband, Hope suggested to Mairose that she might move in with them, help with the care of their young daughter, and find the arrangement an affordable way to pursue her graduate degree. Bob and Hope Taft met with Mairose at William Howard Taft National Historic Site around Christmastime of 1991 to discuss the proposition. Mairose accepted their offer and thereby completed her education at Ohio State University. Some years later, when First Lady Taft found that the governor's residence needed a curator, she got a grant and hired Mairose for the part-

[37] Brenda Pennington, interview by Theodore Catton, April 5, 2019.
[38] Superintendent's Annual Reports for 2000 and 2003, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A2621; Bob and Hope Taft interview.

time position. Mairose later edited a book about the place, *Our first family's home: the Ohio Governor's Residence and Heritage Garden* (Ohio University Press, 2008).[39]

Superintendents in Recent Times

As of this writing (2019), four superintendents have served William Howard Taft National Historic Site since 2005. They were Robin White (2005-2008), Reginald Tiller (2008-2014), Brenda Pennington (2015-2016), and the current superintendent Hugh Hawthorne.

Taft had two acting superintendents in the spring of 2005: Craig Kenkel in March and April, and Sherry Tunteri in May and June. Robin White arrived in early July 2005. Six weeks later, Hurricane Katrina devasted New Orleans. Superintendent White and Chief of Interpretation Henderson both used their federal employee status to volunteer for the cleanup after the hurricane. As Henderson said, White had "a big heart" and her heart bled for New Orleans, a city she knew from an earlier tour as the chief of interpretation at New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park. She had come to admire that city greatly. Her career in NPS was (and still is) largely focused around environmental education and community engagement, and the post-Katrina cleanup called to her.[40]

White is of Gullah/Geechee background. She is a native of Michigan City, Indiana and grew up in the greater Chicago area, where she received a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Indiana University Northwest in Gary in 1987. Her NPS career began at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (re-designated National Park in 2019) where she worked in the summer of 1982 as a park aide mostly working with visitors from nearby Chicago. As White recounts, by happenstance she was "catapulted to prominence" that summer as the "posterchild" for the NPS urban parks initiative of that period, which sought to connect the urban populace with the many national parks found in metropolitan areas. She went on to serve as an environmental education specialist at Petroglyph National Monument, New Mexico, chief of interpretation at Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site, Kansas, and then at New Orleans Jazz, and supervisory park ranger at Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona. She also had a brief stint at Kruger National Park in South Africa. In the course of her early career she obtained a few large grants to develop some innovative programs in public outreach, and she received awards, most notably the Franklin G. Smith Award recognizing her civic engagement and diversity contributions to NPS.[41]

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[39] Bob and Hope Taft interview.
[40] Henderson interview.
[41] Robin White to author, April 22, 2019, email; "Robin White named superintendent for Central High School National Historic Site," *Cincinnati Herald*, June 28-July 4, 2008.

Superintendent White brought those same strengths and interests to William Howard Taft National Historic Site (although she did not obtain any big grants in her three years at Taft). Her goals, she later said, were to "broaden the storyline and become engaged in the life of the neighborhood across multiple communities." She viewed the life of William Howard Taft as a quarry of interesting stories that could connect an early-twentieth century U.S. presidency – classic dead-white-man history – with the communities of color living all around the Site. It was a little-known fact, for instance, that Taft was a long-serving president of the Hampton University Board of Trustees, a historically black university in Virginia. To mine that vein of Taft's life experience and share the information with the predominantly African American local community, White contended, was to "diminish some of the social and cultural barriers" that discouraged local people from visiting the Site.[42]

White energetically pushed herself and her staff to develop numerous programs and activities that would appeal to minority audiences, particularly African Americans. The connection to William Howard Taft in many cases was very thin. For example, Taft was identified with a few sports such as baseball and golf, but did people know he liked fencing? White got African American Olympic medalist Ed Wright, a Cincinnatian, to host fencing lessons for the public. On another occasion, she got the Friends to donate $800 to fund a special exhibit on Yesterday's Negro League Baseball. Many of White's initiatives did not tie to the Taft story at all but did address an original purpose of the Site to support the local community. For example, the Site hosted an African American Health and Wellness seminar sponsored by local physicians that was well attended by community members. White developed many new partnerships with stakeholders and organizations including black churches in the area and the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and Harriet Beecher Stowe House as well as other museums. Her initiatives appeared to boost local interest in the National Historic Site, but it was hard to measure how much those new visitors spurred a further increase of visitation by telling friends and neighbors about the Site or if they ever returned to the Site themselves.[43]

The staff became 100 percent representative of women, minority, and employees with target disabilities in the years that White was superintendent. White highlighted it in her superintendent's annual reports for 2006 and 2007 and linked it to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) goals for the Site.[44]

White brought a unique vision to her three-year tenure at William Howard Taft National Historic Site that was based around community engagement. Some of her initiatives were more enduring than others. She put a lot of effort into the *Long-Range*

[42] Robin White to author, April 22, 2019, email.
[43] Ibid; Superintendent's Annual Report for 2007, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A2621.
[44] Superintendent's Annual Reports for 2006 and 2007, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A2621.

Interpretive Plan, which was completed in her last year at Taft, only for the plan to be largely ignored by the next superintendent. Yet, as the first African American superintendent at Taft in 20 years, she performed a valuable service in directing the staff to go out into the local community and learn about the residents and find out how to serve their needs. Summer day camps proved to be popular as the Site partnered with Imani Pre-K Day Camp and Kuumba Ujima. The first-floor theater room in the Taft Education Center was made available to local nonprofits for business meetings. To Chief of Interpretation Kerry Wood, looking back over his 20 years at the Site, it was evident that those kinds of initiatives did raise awareness of the Site and bring more people of color onto the premises. Only time would tell how they would affect visitor use over the long term.[45]

Reginald M. Tiller was superintendent from August 2008 through October 2014. He was Taft's third African American superintendent. He began his professional career with the YMCA, first in Nashville, Tennessee; then in Portland, Oregon; then in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He worked for Tennessee State Parks and then worked briefly for NPS as a park ranger in law enforcement in Colorado. He went back to the YMCA organization in Tennessee – and to university to get a Ph.D. – but certain NPS officials kept in touch with him as they were keen to bring more African Americans into the agency especially in management positions. So, five years later, in 2005, he was invited to apply for a superintendent job at Coronado National Monument, Arizona. That job prospect did not eventuate, but he soon came into the job of superintendent at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument, Colorado instead. One year later, he transferred to another superintendent position at George Washington Carver National Monument, Missouri, where NPS wanted a stronger African American presence on the staff to correspond with the park story about the famous black conservationist and cultural leader. Tiller liked working at that unit and would have remained longer, but his wife required some specialized medical care that only a big city could provide, so he arranged for a lateral transfer to William Howard Taft National Historic Site for its location in Cincinnati. He and his family relocated there in August 2008.[46]

Tiller had a different management approach from his predecessors. His view of the superintendent's job was to allow the staff to do its work with as little interference as possible while he would focus on matters outside the unit: community relations, partnerships, NPS policy initiatives, budget battles. He was away from the unit more

[45] Superintendent's Annual Report for 2007, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2621; Robin White to author, April 22, 2019, email; Wood interview.
[46] Tiller interview.

than previous superintendents and often had his attention on NPS matters beyond the National Historic Site.[47]

Tiller worked with the Mount Auburn community and other partners in the urban area. His approach was less scattershot, more targeted, than White's. He worked through the Friends group to cultivate new relationships with the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Club, and to strengthen ties with the Cincinnati public school system. The Friends won a substantial grant from the National Parks Foundation pursuant to its program titled "Building Future Minority Leaders in the National Park Service," and NPS paid a consultant to identify useful strategies.[48]

Tiller identified two external relationships that he thought were of paramount importance for William Howard Taft National Historic Site. The first was with Christ Hospital. It was the colossus on Auburn Avenue a half block up the street from the Taft home. It was a neighboring landowner and developer, a potential education partner, and a potential donor, all rolled into one. Tiller found that the Friends group did not have anyone on its board of trustees with connections to Christ Hospital. He sought to remedy that. The second relationship of paramount importance was the Site's partnership with the University of Cincinnati School of Law. The school's and the Site's mutual interest in William Howard Taft was obvious and underutilized. Tiller sought to cultivate that partnership, too, and he relied on Chief of Interpretation Henderson to take the lead. These two external relationships are discussed in Chapter Seven.

Tiller had issues with the way the Midwest Region appeared to use William Howard Taft National Historic Site as a "landing place" for nettlesome employees in other units. Soon after his arrival, the Midwest Region prevailed on him to accept one such employee on the condition that it would be for just one year and the employee's salary would be carried by the unit from which the employee transferred. When the year was up and the employee stayed on, Tiller learned that two other employees on his staff had been moved to Taft for personnel reasons as well. He noted the fact that the Midwest Region did not share this information with him when he interviewed for the position.[49]

Tiller was critical of the Midwest Region on another point; he thought Taft was having to scrape by with too small of an operating budget for its urban location. The budget of around $680,000 covered payroll and little more. He and Kerry Wood agreed that with more money for outreach, the National Historic Site could be serving many more school groups. Tiller had conversations with Regional Director Ernie

[47] Tiller interview; Henderson interview.
[48] Tiller interview; Mark Kornmann to Reginald Tiller, July 27, 2009, Kornmann to John Reusing, July 27, 2009, and attachments, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A22.
[49] Tiller interview.

Quintana and Deputy Regional Director Dave Given about raising Taft's operating budget to $1.2 or $1.3 million and investing more money in educational programming. He thought Quintana and Given were close to agreement with him on that; but then both men retired, and Tiller soon moved on.[50]

Tiller transferred on November 1, 2014 to Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site (re-designated National Historical Park in 2018), and Brenda Pennington started as the next superintendent at Taft on January 11, 2015. She was superintendent at Taft for fifteen months, until April 30, 2016. Pennington's NPS career had begun at Yellowstone in 2004 and she had worked at Indiana Dunes before becoming a Bevinetto Fellow and enrolling in a two-year leadership management program in Washington, D.C. Following the fellowship, she did two acting superintendent details, the latter at Pea Ridge National Military Park, Arkansas, where she was stationed when she took the job at William Howard Taft National Historic Site.[51]

As the new superintendent, Pennington's primary goal was to build the staff into a "great team." Several staff changes occurred soon after her arrival. Chief of Interpretation Henderson retired. Wood competed for the vacant position and was the successful applicant. The chief of interpretation position was recast as "chief of interpretation, education, and operations," with supervision over the interpretive division as well as maintenance. The maintenance position had been vacant for several years but was finally filled when Terry Gusler was hired in 2015. There was a turnover in the administrative assistant position, which was directly under the superintendent's supervision. Finally, there was one GS-9 park ranger who had transferred to the Site several years earlier but whose position had been formally maintained (and paid for) by a different unit until 2015. That position was finally transferred over to the Site in 2015, and Pennington had to adjust the operating budget to cover the cost of this "new" position.[52]

Besides staff changes, Pennington's focus during her fifteen months at Taft was on maintenance needs. By 2015, the historic restoration of the house was thirty years old. The Taft Education Center building was half that old. There were leaks in the roof, worn out flooring, and other items needing attention. Maintenance issues are discussed in the last section of this chapter. Suffice it to say here that Wood brought these neglected items to Pennington's attention and Pennington initiated a comprehensive condition assessment for the Site with the assistance of the Midwest Region's team of technical experts to identify needs. She then followed up with the Midwest Region's Facilities Management Division to develop project proposals and get the maintenance work lined up. Most of the work was carried out after her

[50] Tiller interview.
[51] Pennington interview.
[52] Ibid.

departure. She also used $40,000 of year-end money in the ONPS budget – saved by virtue of the vacancy left by Henderson's retirement – to upgrade the phone system and computers throughout the Taft Education Center.[53]

Three acting superintendents served at Taft through the seven months from Pennington's departure till the arrival of Superintendent Hugh Hawthorne in December 2016. They were Nicholas Georgeff (management assistant at Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, Ohio), Nicole McHenry (Relevancy, Diversity and Inclusion Program Manager, Midwest Region), and Robert Stemple (chief of maintenance at Dayton Aviation Heritage).

Hugh Hawthorne came to Taft from Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, New Mexico where he had been superintendent for two and a half years. Prior to that he was director of Visitor Services, Youth and Education Programs at Boston Harbor Island National Recreation Area, Massachusetts, where he supervised a complex visitor service, interpretation and education program as part of a partnership park that combined federal, state, municipal, and non-profit entities. Before that he was chief of interpretation at Devils Tower National Monument, Wyoming. In twenty years of service in NPS, Hawthorne made it a practice to work in a variety of areas alternating between urban and rural settings. With bachelor's degrees in history and geology, his educational background was similarly well balanced for his back and forth between natural and cultural areas.[54]

A focus of Hawthorne's first two years at Taft was to address the backlog on deferred maintenance. The maintenance projects that Pennington put into the pipeline in Fiscal Year 2016 resulted in nine separate contracts, with most of the work being completed in 2018. The contracts covered the replacement of HVAC systems in both the Taft home and the Taft Education Center, replacement of the elevator in the historic home, renovation of the historic structure's roof and all of its exterior woodwork, repainting, and other items, which all added up to approximately $1.6 million of maintenance costs. A partial redo of the historic landscape was still in progress in 2019.[55]

With the deferred maintenance projects largely completed, Hawthorne had two other chief concerns before him in 2019. One was to develop a new staffing structure. The interpretive division had become top-heavy, with one GS-11 chief, two GS-9 rangers, and a GS-5 park guide on the permanent staff, plus three Pathways student interns at the GS-4 level who generally worked full time over the summer and two

[53] Wood interview; Pennington interview; untitled fact sheet, March 25, 2016, provided by Brenda Pennington.
[54] "Hugh Hawthorne to Manage Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument in New Mexico," *The Grant County Beat*, April 16, 2014; Hawthorne interview.
[55] Hawthorne interview.

days per week during the school year. In 2018, the Site lost one of the two GS-9 rangers, which created a hole but also an opportunity. Hawthorne said he had no intention of filling the position with another GS-9; it would be better to have two people at a lower grade. Whatever the arrangement might be, it would offer a fresh approach to visitor services. Meanwhile, Hawthorne hired a new administrative assistant, Jeanette Meleen, in May 2018, filling a position that had been vacant for six months before that.[56]

Hawthorne's other focus was to expand the interpretive story to include more emphasis on William Howard Taft's contributions as chief justice. There were compelling reasons to make that change. The National Park System had numerous presidential sites but no site that focused on the Supreme Court. The University of Cincinnati Law School was a strong partner and would support a move toward enhancing the Site's identification with Supreme Court history. Two Supreme Court justices, Antonin Scalia and Sandra Day O'Connor, had participated in the William Howard Taft Lecture Series and that was a foundation on which to build. The year 2021 was already marked as the centennial year of William Howard Taft's appointment to the Supreme Court. Swinging the interpretive story toward Supreme Court history would involve more than special events and programs, though; it would call for updating the exhibits. The exhibits were now 30 years old and in need of updating in any case.[57]

Security

Law enforcement and visitor protection were never major management issues at William Howard Taft National Historic Site. Despite the Site's location in a dense urban environment, law enforcement incidents were infrequent and minor. There were acts of petty vandalism to fences and signs, and a few thefts from parked cars in the parking area. In 50 years, there was just one break-in of each of the buildings, both occurring at night. The first, in 1976, involved forced entry through an upstairs door in the Taft house and the theft of $301.21 in Imprest funds and cooperative association money. In the second incident, in the past decade, someone broke the glass entrance door to the Taft Education Center, entered the building, and stole the donation box. There was, in addition, one theft of copper hardware from an air handler unit on the north side of the building. That was the most serious incident because it disabled the

[56] Hawthorne interview.
[57] Ibid.

building's air conditioning system for weeks and necessitated replacing the whole expensive unit.[58]

In the early years, William Howard Taft National Historic Site had proprietary jurisdiction, which prevented the staff from engaging in law enforcement activities. After-hours security was provided by Pinkerton, Inc. making nightly rounds. Later, the Site acquired concurrent jurisdiction and a commissioned law enforcement ranger was on staff from 1985 until 2005. This was Ray Henderson. Superintendent McMurry was also commissioned and at that time Henderson let his commission expire. After McMurry's departure in 2005, there were no commissioned law enforcement rangers on site, the nearest one being at Dayton Aviation Heritage. NPS would send a law enforcement ranger from somewhere else when the need arose.[59]

Superintendent Whitaker oversaw preparation of a "Crime Prevention and Security Plan" in 1980. Jurisdiction was still proprietary at that time, with NPS deferring to the Cincinnati Police to handle all disturbances and incidents. Site staff were trained in proper procedures to be employed while waiting for the police. One staff member was designated as security officer with responsibility for conducting on-site training and for implementing security procedures. Security procedures, as outlined in the plan, mostly involved maintaining locks on doors and cabinets and making use of outdoor lighting. There was also an alarm system connected to an alarm central station and a private patrol service, and it was the responsibility of the security officer to maintain those services. The museum collection was stored off-site in a high security storage building, but some items were stored on-site for interpretive purposes. The policy was not to allow public access to the collection nor make it common public knowledge that items were held at the Site.[60]

NPS continually stressed that the best deterrent to theft and vandalism was community engagement. NPS worked with the Mount Auburn Community Council and other organizations to advocate for improved street lighting, better police protection, and other crime prevention measures. As the 1980 security plan stated, "Neighborhood acceptance of the Site and its mission will reduce antagonism and encourage residents to maintain vigilance and report any incidents to the police during non-working hours." Twenty-five years later, Superintendent Robin White urged the same thing, noting that when the Site engaged with the community it received a measure of security in the form of neighbors looking out for the safety of neighbors.

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[58] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1976, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets FY '77; Superintendent's Annual Report for 1992, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A2621; Robin White to author, April 22, 2019, email; Wood interview; Pennington interview.
[59] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1976, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets FY '77; Henderson interview; Pennington interview.
[60] "Crime Prevention and Security Plan," April 21, 1980, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, File: Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '79.

During the Cincinnati riots of 2001, which erupted in protest of a police officer killing of a young black man, there was much looting and vandalism within a mile of the Site in the Over-the-Rhine and Walnut Hills communities. "But no one ever did any vandalism to the Taft Site," Chief of Interpretation Wood noted, "which says a lot."[61]

Periodically, the alarm system was upgraded. When Pennington was superintendent Wood suggested that building security needed more attention and some changes were made. Public access to the second floor of the Taft Education Center building was restricted through the installation of a locking door at the foot of the stairway and a security code apparatus to operate the elevator. In the Taft house, security cameras and alarm buzzers were installed in discreet locations. An updated security plan established protocols for visitor monitoring and access. Outside doors to the Taft house and the Taft Education Center were always kept locked when no staff member was present giving a tour of the house or staffing the reception area of the Taft Education Center, respectively.[62]

Maintenance

The maintenance worker position that was established at Taft in 1977 gave the Site greater capacity to perform some of its own maintenance operations. Prior to 1977, the Site's capacity to do maintenance was limited primarily to groundskeeping operations performed by NYC students. Other maintenance needs were met in those early years by the maintenance personnel at Mound City Group National Monument. After 1977, the maintenance position was frequently vacant, and at such times the Site reverted to seeking maintenance help from other NPS units. There were many years, too, when Ray Henderson was the designated maintenance worker even though he continued to focus primarily on other duties, particularly interpretation. As the superintendent's annual report described the situation in one year (1992):

> Park Ranger Ray Henderson provided critical support and coverage for day-to-day maintenance activities in groundskeeping and building maintenance during the year and the remainder of the staff provided support in the general housekeeping and office cleaning chores in the wake of the vacant permanent maintenance position. Many other more complicated and detailed maintenance issues have remained in a deferred status and are becoming more critical issues which must be addressed in the coming year.[63]

[61] "Crime Prevention and Security Plan," April 21, 1980, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, File: Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '79; Robin White to author, April 22, 2019, email; Wood interview.
[62] Wood interview; Pennington interview.
[63] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1992, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A2621.

The same situation arose periodically over the next two decades. Still, despite being without full-time personnel from time to time, the small maintenance division was part of the organizational structure of Taft from 1977 onward. It had a place on the org chart, a place in the budget, and an allotted workspace on site.

Workspace for the maintenance division was included in the GSA lease in the Sanning Apartments from 1977 to 1999, and in the Taft Education Center after it was completed in 1999. The Master Plan of 1981 envisioned that the "visitor contact station" would include a maintenance work area, desk space, and storage area. Those ideas were mostly carried forward into the architectural plan for the Taft Education Center with one exception. NPS built a storage shed in 1997 in lieu of providing a maintenance storage area in the Taft Education Center. Called the carriage shed, it was situated at the end of the gravel carriageway entering the property at Auburn Avenue, and it was designed to recall a carriage house present on the property in the historic period.[64]

Maintenance operations could be divided into two categories: items that were performed by Site staff, and issues that were addressed through the Midwest Region with contractor help and additional funding. Maintenance operations in the first category covered a wide gamut of things from routine groundskeeping and housekeeping to improvements and repairs to various types of monitoring of the physical plant to address safety, security, energy efficiency, and other concerns. A sampling of items reported in superintendent's annual reports provides a flavor of those varied activities and responsibilities:

- Completed installation of donated cabinets to finish the TEC lunchroom (2001).
- Completed replacement of the north fence sections damaged in a motor vehicle accident (2001).
- Repainted shed and fence at the Taft home (2001).
- Completed written procedures for safety and maintenance of HVAC systems (2001).
- Completed a bronze marker for the Japanese cherry tree donated by Governor Bob Taft and First Lady Hope Taft (2002).
- Worked with MWRO staff to identify structural issues causing plaster wall areas to crack and break (2004).
- Rehabilitated the exterior ground lighting system (2004).
- Reset numerous loose bricks in the walks surrounding the birthplace to eliminate trip hazards (2004).

[64] National Park Service, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2015, MWRO.

- Repaired the piazza deck and painted both the interior and exterior of the house (2007).

Larger items had to be contracted out and paid for by separate funding outside the Site's operating budget. Those projects had to be packaged and submitted to the NPS's project management information system (PMIS). Generally, Site staff worked with technicians in the Midwest Regional Office to develop those project statements and packages. Sometimes these were relatively minor projects that were accomplished expeditiously. For example, in 2004, NPS contracted for the repair and detailed repainting of interior walls and ceilings in the Taft home, and that same year it contracted for the refinishing of all exterior doors in the house.[65] But larger projects took longer to get approved and funded. By 2002, the National Historic Site had a whopping maintenance project backlog in excess of $1.26 million. As the whole National Park System had an estimated $1.3 *billion* of deferred maintenance, Taft had around one one-thousandth of the total. As Taft was one of some 400 units and it was a very small unit, it had considerably more deferred maintenance than its proportional share.[66]

NPS adopted a facility management software system (FMSS) to deal with the maintenance backlog problem. Taft, along with other units in the Midwest Region, was directed to implement FMSS in 2002. Getting trained in FMSS and figuring out how FMSS interfaced with PMIS (Project Management Information System) and managing all of Taft's project proposals that were waylaid in PMIS was a task itself. Even after the maintenance division passed the initial hurdle of entering all the Site's assets in the database, working with FMSS continued to be technically demanding. It was time consuming at the field level even if it did streamline decision making and deliver cost savings at a higher level in the organization. The maintenance division at Taft obtained technical support in FMSS from the chief of maintenance at Cuyahoga Valley National Park.[67]

After the land exchange was completed in 2005 (Chapter Two), Taft's maintenance division spearheaded the Site's last development project: a new parking area and pedestrian walkway. A proposal to develop those facilities was submitted to the PMIS in 2006; the project was begun in 2007; and it was completed the next year. The new parking area included stalls for 24 cars, a park sign, metal bollards that could be used to close the parking area, tree and shrub plantings, and lighting. The concrete walkway connecting the parking area to the rest of the Site was approximately six feet

[65] Superintendent's Annual Report for 2004, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A2621.
[66] Acting Regional Director to Superintendents, Midwest Region, undated, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D34.
[67] Superintendent's Annual Report for 2002, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A2621; Acting Regional Director to Superintendents, Midwest Region, undated, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D34.



Figure 29. Landscaping included this picnic area and the retaining wall (left) and footpath to parking area. (Author's photo.)

in width and followed the top of a seven-foot-high retaining wall. The landscaping admirably dealt with the sloping ground to the north of the Taft house and made the approach wheelchair accessible.[68]

The HVAC systems in both buildings were an aggravation for many years. Staff members insisted that the problems with the Taft Education Center's HVAC system originated with the building design. To save money, the architect incorporated an older HVAC unit into the new building. The contractor warned that it would not work properly but the architect prevailed. (Two circumstances weighed in the NPS decision to dismiss the contractor's warnings: the Friends group staunchly supported the architect, and NPS wanted to get the construction completed on schedule for the grand opening.) Apparently, the contractor was correct in saying that the HVAC system would fail, however, for breakdowns were almost immediate. Moreover, since the system was obsolete, getting replacement parts for it was difficult and expensive.[69]

As if that was not aggravation enough, the HVAC system in the Taft house frequently broke down as well. The two buildings had entirely separate HVAC except they were linked by underground wiring and a central control system in the newer building. The HVAC system in the Taft house leaked Freon, and then the boilers had to be replaced. Once, the historic house had to be closed to the public after it was discovered that carbon monoxide was building up in the basement. That problem was traced to a chimney that should have been venting the gas but had been improperly capped.[70]

Superintendent Tiller wrestled with the two HVAC systems for the six years he was at Taft, persisting with repair after repair to avoid the high cost for replacement. Ironically, the copper was stolen out of one of the HVAC units shortly before his departure, so the air conditioning in the Taft Education Center was disabled when Superintendent Pennington started, and the staff sweltered through the heat of the

[68] National Park Service, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2015, MWRO.
[69] Henderson interview; Tiller interview.
[70] Hawthorne interview; Pennington interview; Tiller interview.

following summer until a new air condenser was finally installed in the fall with some emergency funds, a year after the unit was disabled.

Temperature and humidity controls were not only vital for people's comfort, they were necessary to protect the wallpaper and other fixtures in the historic house and the museum collection in the basement of the Taft Education Center. When the air conditioning went out in the latter building, backup units were kept running in the museum storage area to protect the resource. In the Taft house, unwanted fluctuations in temperature and humidity due to the faulty HVAC system did cause minor damage to wallpaper.[71]



Figure 30. View of Taft house from rear of property. (William Howard Taft National Historic Site.)

Both HVAC systems were replaced in 2018. The new boilers occupied the same space as the old ones – in the basements of each building – but the chillers were located outside and were more conspicuous than the previous units, so Superintendent Hawthorne planned to screen them with vegetation. The location of the chillers was changed by about 20 yards because the conduits had to be bigger and placed deeper in the ground and there was a concern not to damage the roots of an elm tree.[72]

Another project in 2018 was replacement of the elevator in the Taft house. The old one had a maximum weight capacity of 450 pounds, which could prevent a large

[71] Pennington interview.
[72] Hawthorne interview.

person in a motorized wheelchair from accessing the upstairs of the house. The new elevator took up the same small envelope but had a weight capacity of 1,200 pounds.[73]

The roof of the Taft house was replaced in 2018. To save cost, some copper portions were eliminated from the historic design, but the changes were minor enough that no one objected. Much of the exterior woodwork on the Taft house was replaced in 2018. Most of the wooden crenellations around the roof, many of the exterior doors, and about half the windowsills were replaced. All of the wood shutters were replaced, and thanks to a good catch by the contractor upon studying the historic photo, the new ones came closer to the original look than the ones put up in the 1980s did.[74]

Finally, the house was repainted in 2018 using the same yellow and green colors that had been selected in the 1980s based on recovery of paint fragments.[75]

[73] Hawthorne interview.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid. The house was whitewashed through much of the twentieth century. The first time it received a yellow coat of paint in modern times was in the spring of 1985. A newspaper reporter wrote: "If you've driven by the old William Howard Taft birthplace on Auburn Avenue, were you startled by its blazing new coat of paint?" Rosemary Munsen, "Gala Re-Creates Taft Inaugural, And Friends, Family Celebrate," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 4, 1985.

Chapter Five

Interpretation

The National Historic Site's interpretive program grew from small beginnings in the early 1970s, when the park manager gave informal house tours to passersby, to a full-service operation that encompassed not only house tours but education programs, community outreach, special events, and other interpretation presented through various types of media. There were two significant benchmarks in the program's evolution, both marked by a change in the physical spaces where interpretive activities occurred. The first was the completion of the house restoration with exhibits in 1988, which set the stage for the core program of historic house tours given by professional interpreters in NPS uniform. The second benchmark came with the completion of the Taft Education Center in 1999, which created more possibilities for interpretation with its theater, classroom, and temporary exhibit gallery. Two separate interpretive plans were significant to program development as well: first, the Interpretive Prospectus published in 1982; and later, the *Long Range Interpretive Plan* published in 2008. This chapter discusses these various developments in chronological sequence.

Visitor Activities in the Early Years

Visitor activities were limited in the early years because of ongoing house stabilization and restoration activities. There were not many visitors – perhaps one to two thousand annually. Minimal directional signing to the Site, lack of off-street parking, and the occasional scaffolding seen around the house all kept visitor numbers down. In the early 1970s, all visitors were offered a presentation of approximately fifteen minutes duration in the house, with an additional fifteen-minute tour of the grounds if desired. Exhibits were installed in the solarium on the south side of the house. The solarium was a one-story addition on the south wall of the east wing that stood where a two-story piazza had once been. When the house underwent emergency stabilization in 1974-75, the tour of the interior was restricted to the solarium only,

with visitors being informed they were standing in the one room that was not part of the historic house.[1]

Inquisitive neighborhood children, walking past the house every day on their way to and from school, formed a significant portion of early visitor use. Park managers welcomed those kids and offered them a short walking tour of the house and grounds. Superintendent Licari noted that there were no publications at Taft that were oriented to kids and he urged the addition of a coloring book to appeal to the young audience, saying that it "would be a very valuable aid to our interpretive program" and a means for children to visualize William Howard Taft's lifestyle, which was so different from that of the modern inner-city youths who came to the Site.[2]

NPS printed a leaflet for Taft in 1972, the year of the National Parks Centennial 1872-1972. It featured the 1867 photo of the house, another photo of Taft as chief justice, and a location map of the Site in central Cincinnati, along with about 1400 words of text primarily summarizing the life of Taft. An initial print run of 12,000 was delivered to the Site in February 1973.[3]

Other than the pamphlet, the staff had few visual aides to work with. As interior rooms were yet to be restored, place-based interpretation was difficult to do. Licari wrote that "talks presented must be imaginative, interesting and stimulating" to compensate for the lack of place-based visual cues. He reported in the fall of 1974 that the staff had begun to experiment with off-site presentations. One thing staff did frequently was to take visitors on a walking tour of the historic neighborhood, which had recently gained listing on the National Register of Historic Places.[4]

The Site saw an increase in visitor use around the Bicentennial celebration in 1976. An estimated 2,416 people visited the Site that year. The staff prepared a self-guiding brochure of the historic grounds. Special events included co-hosting an outdoor concert with the Cincinnati Park Board featuring a singing group called the Appalachian Green Parks Project and inviting prominent citizens to a celebration of the birthday of William Howard Taft on September 15.[5]

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[1] Park Manager, William Howard Taft to General Superintendent, Ohio Group, October 23, 1974, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows – FY '75.
[2] Superintendent to State Coordinator, Ohio, October 23, 1975, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows – FY '75.
[3] National Park Service, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Ohio" [pamphlet], (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972); Superintendent's Annual Report for 1972, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '73.
[4] Park Manager, William Howard Taft, to General Superintendent, Ohio Group, October 23, 1974, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows – FY '75.
[5] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1976, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '77.

NPS conducted an oral history interview with Charlie Taft in the fall of 1971 for use in the interpretive program. Planners were anxious to preserve his memories about the house and what he knew of his father's family life when William Howard Taft was a child in the Mount Auburn home, thinking that sound bites from the interview might be worked into an audio tour. Something similar had been done with an interview with Rose Kennedy for John Fitzgerald Kennedy Birthplace National Historic Site. Furthermore, as Superintendent Birdsell pointed out, NPS had intended to interview former President Eisenhower for use at Eisenhower National Historic Site but Eisenhower died before the interview was completed. So, the interview with Charlie Taft was duly accomplished, although some in NPS questioned whether it was appropriate to build an audio tour around his recollections when he had never lived in the house himself. In the end, the interview helped inspire an exhibit about Charlie Taft and the Taft family rather than an audio tour of the house though the interview tapes themselves went unused. That exhibit was installed in the Taft Education Center many years later.[6]

Interpretive Prospectus

NPS's internal discussion over the Charlie Taft oral history was part of a larger internal debate over what should be the thrust of interpretation at William Howard Taft National Historic Site. Should the Site focus on the president's boyhood development taking full advantage of place-based interpretation, or should it be more of a memorial house with exhibits focused on Taft's public career? Historical architect Hugh Miller argued for the latter in the 1970s and explained his position in an oral history interview in 1985, putting it in context with the discussion around other presidential sites:

> I think many of us had questions about the interpretive value of birthplace homes. There had been some disenchantment with the interpretation at JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site] which had recently been restored by the family. That it really did not give the dimension of the President. It gave more the dimension of the family. In fact, in my way of thinking, the tape by Rose is valid in terms of understanding the family, but it does not really give any dimension of John. The same question came out of William Howard

[6] General Superintendent, Ohio Group to Director, Northeast Region, September 14, 1971, and Park Manager, William Howard Taft NHS to Assistant Chief, Division of Audiovisual Arts, October 20, 1971, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821; John T. Lissimore to Charles P. Taft II, January 11, 1972, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows – FY '72; Miller interview. To help with preparation of the exhibit NPS hired local historian Dan Hurley. An actor created the soundbites for it, and those recordings were vetted by Taft family members. The reel-to-reel tapes of the interview with Charlie Taft done many years earlier were not utilized. (Henderson interview.)

> Taft [National Historic Site]. It [the historic house] doesn't tell you very much about the role of the President. I guess there are some people that were thinking it was more of a memorial house given the fact that it had so little fabric. [So, NPS should] talk about the broader dimension of Taft rather than the boyhood period.[7]

The counterargument was that NPS would interpret *both* the "boyhood period" *and* the "broader dimension." NPS must make use of the physical location; therefore, it would interpret boyhood influences on Taft's subsequent public career. Like a one-two punch, contact with Taft's boyhood environment in the house would inspire the visitor to learn about Taft, and then viewing and reading exhibits about Taft's contributions to the life of the nation would give the visitor that fuller view of the man.



Figure 31. William Howard Taft in his youth when he lived in Cincinnati and in his maturity when he was president. The dilemma facing interpretation at all presidential birthplace and boyhood home sites is to connect the young personality with the older one and broaden the Site's significance to the national experience. (William Howard Taft National Historic Site.)

Proponents of the latter approach to interpreting the Site could point to the mandate contained in the establishing legislation and congressional record. The law stated that the Site was established "to preserve in public ownership historically significant properties associated with the life of William Howard Taft." The legislative history stated that the purpose was "to preserve the birthplace and home of this distinguished statesman, and through it give visitors an understanding of the environment that shaped Taft's character and philosophy, and the impact of this character and philosophy in shaping Taft's public career." The *Master Plan* of 1981

[7] Miller interview.

closely paraphrased this quote in its stated goal "to preserve the birthplace and boyhood home of this distinguished American statesman, and through it to give visitors an understanding of the environment that shaped Taft's character and philosophy in shaping Taft's public career." The latter phrase was then carried into the *Interpretive Prospectus* approved in 1982.

An early draft of the interpretive prospectus was completed in 1976, but it went through substantial revisions before it was approved six years later. Not only did NPS struggle with how best to relate the boyhood period to Taft's public career, it also labored over the tone of its presentation. Historians generally treated Taft as a mediocre president: a capable administrator and dedicated public servant but not a very successful chief executive and leader of the Republican Party. Should NPS interpretation follow in that vein? At first, NPS planners assumed that it would. When NPS prepared its 1968 master plan for the proposed area, the document bluntly stated: "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."[8] Taft was a one-term president who had been defeated for re-election, which in the early 1980s drew obvious comparison with the recently terminated "failed presidency" of Jimmy Carter. Indeed, Americans at this time were weary of "failed presidencies" having suffered through the stunted Gerald R. Ford administration in 1974-76 and the debacles of the Nixon and Johnson presidencies before that, and the incomplete presidency of John F. Kennedy before that. As NPS finalized the interpretive prospectus for William Howard Taft National Historic Site in the early 1980s, more than two decades had passed since a U.S. president had successfully completed two presidential terms. That pall over American presidential politics surely influenced how NPS approached interpretation of William Howard Taft. True, Taft's four years in office were overshadowed by the more consequential presidential administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson before and after, but how did Taft's job performance compare with Ford's or Carter's? How did Taft's rejection at the polls compare with the political downfalls of Nixon and LBJ? Measured by those standards, Taft seemed to deserve better treatment. As the interpretive prospectus went through multiple drafts from 1976 to 1982, the negative tone was gradually expunged. The final document did not even mention that Taft served just one term as U.S. president and failed to win re-election. Instead, it put the best possible spin on his political career: "Historians agree that the public life of William Howard Taft was marked and can be characterized by its integrity, logic, thoroughness, order, patience, humanism, and devotion to law."[9] The change in tone

[8] Quoted in Lee, *Administrative History*, 107.8
[9] National Park Service, *Interpretive Prospectus*, 4.

from the 1968 master plan to the 1982 *Interpretive Prospectus* was dramatic, and NPS stayed with that laudatory approach through the following decades.

The *Interpretive Prospectus* laid out how interpretation at the Site would relate Taft's upbringing in the house on Auburn Avenue to the public life he led after leaving home. It identified two interpretive themes that ideally would stay with visitors as they left the Site: first, that William Howard Taft's childhood influenced his adult life; and second, that Taft applied the sound values he acquired from his parents to everything he did in his public career.

The *Interpretive Prospectus* stated that the home tour would be at the core of the interpretive program. The home tour would generally be conducted by an interpreter in uniform, though guided tours might be supplemented with audio or self-guided tours. The tour would conduct the visitor through the first floor of the house, with emphasis on four refurnished rooms. Tour guides would discuss matters relating to individual Taft family roles and house features as the visitor passed them. Tour guides would present their material in a personal, reminiscent style, using anecdotes drawn from Taft family sources, including Peter Rawson Taft's diaries and Charlie Taft's oral history interview. The anecdotes would be reflective of family history, tradition, and stories.[10]

The *Interpretive Prospectus* stressed that the visitor should have a correct impression going into the house that this was not a presidential house; the visitor should understand that Taft did not live in it or visit it when he was president. To avoid that potential misimpression, visitors would be exposed to an overview of Taft's public career in a visitor contact station before entering the home. The envisioned visitor contact station was never constructed, but the Taft Education Center, a bigger alternative, eventually would be built instead. The reception area in the Taft Education Center would come to serve the same function. "By orienting visitors to the contributions and scope of Taft's career before they tour the home," the *Interpretive Prospectus* said, "they should be more easily able to understand and relate to what this home meant to the man."[11]

When the *Interpretive Prospectus* was developed in the early 1980s the restoration of the house was not yet complete. NPS anticipated that visitation would increase when the Site was fully developed. School groups were projected to account for a large portion of the visitation. A school group would comprise up to 50 people. The house tours and exhibits were planned so that the Site could accommodate three school groups at once, or up to 150 visitors at one time. Potentially, one group would be able to tour the house while another group toured the grounds and still another

[10] National Park Service, *Interpretive Prospectus*, 6-7.
[11] Ibid, 2.

toured the exhibits in the visitor contact station. Further, the *Interpretive Prospectus* stated that the first floor would accommodate up to 50 people at once, while the second floor would be capable of bearing up to 25 people at once, for a maximum of 75 people in the house at one time.[12]

The *Interpretive Prospectus* offered an "Interim Plan" and a "Final Plan." The first described all the components of the interpretive program without the visitor contact station. It included plans for an exhibit area in Room 105 and a cooperating association sales area at the south end of Room 109. Once the visitor contact station was built, exhibits and the cooperating association sales areas would move from the house to the new building. Both the interim plan and the final plan called for a library and meeting rooms on the second floor, the former primarily for the benefit of interpretive staff and the latter primarily for special programs and activities serving the community. Suitable activities would include in-depth biographical studies of William Howard Taft's life, lectures or films about American culture in the period of Taft's life, and programs related to Cincinnati, U.S. involvement with the Philippines, the American presidency, the U.S. Supreme Court, or other facets of American life that intersected with Taft's story. The final plan also called for development of an audiovisual program, a short documentary film about William Howard Taft, which could be screened in an alcove of the visitor contact station.[13]

Exhibit Planning

The exhibits in the interior of the Taft house were planned and prepared starting in 1986 and continuing through the final stages of the historic restoration in 1988. Superintendent Kesselman led this effort, and he was assisted by Park Historian Ella Rayburn and Park Ranger Ray Henderson together with Harpers Ferry Center planners Gene Ervine and Mitch Zetlin and Interpretive Specialist Tom Danton at the Midwest Regional Office.[14]

With four rooms slated for historic restoration, Kesselman had a total of nine additional rooms designated for exhibits. Room 105, the first-floor bedroom, was to serve as an orientation room or gathering area at the start of the tour. Room 109, the first-floor bedroom and sitting room at the south end of the house, was to be an exhibit area and cooperating association sales area. This much was laid out in the *Interpretive Prospectus*. Kesselman prevailed in getting the second-floor rooms dedicated to exhibit space as well in lieu of putting administrative offices there (see Chapter

[12] National Park Service, *Interpretive Prospectus*, 15.
[13] Ibid, 6-15.
[14] Interpretive Specialist, Midwest Region to Chief, Interpretation and Visitor Services, Midwest Region, September 30, 1986, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File K1815.

Three). That meant more exhibit space than was anticipated by the *Interpretive Prospectus*. The desire was to have three-dimensional objects as well as photos, personal letters, cartoons, newspaper clippings, artwork, and text panels. Ideally, the three-dimensional objects would be original Taft pieces. However, the WHTMA had already gathered many items and donated them for use in refurnishing the four rooms that were to be restored. Securing more Taft pieces would be a challenge.[15]

Kesselman reached out in two directions to secure objects for the exhibits. One was to the Taft family. He wrote letters to many Taft family members, some of whom had given heirlooms to the WHTMA already. The most highly prized of those collected pieces traced back to the Alphonso and Louise Taft household on Auburn Street. Now, Kesselman cast the net more widely, asking for "three dimensional objects relating to the life and career of William Howard Taft from his early career in Cincinnati through the Supreme Court." There were also some specific needs. "We need photographs or images of Fanny Phelps Taft (Alphonso's first wife) and Fanny Louise Taft Edwards (daughter of Alphonso and Louise)," Kesselman wrote to William Howard Taft III, grandson of the president.[16]

Some important items came from this second effort among the Taft family. Helen Hunter, granddaughter of the president, donated a chair used by William Howard Taft during his tenure as secretary of war in the Theodore Roosevelt administration. (She also donated another chair with slip seat and needlepoint design by Mrs. Taft, and offered a table given to William Howard Taft by Franklin MacVeagh.) Correspondence around the donation began in 1987 and continued into 1988. Helen Hunter lived in Villanova, Pennsylvania. NPS arranged with Valley Forge National Historical Park to pick up the items and ship them to Cincinnati. Kesselman executed the deed of gift on May 24, 1988. Then the exhibit case had to be built.[17]



Figure 32. Helen Hunter, William H. Taft's granddaughter, donated this chair used by Taft when he was Secretary of War. (Author's photo.)

Robert A. Taft, Jr., grandson of the president, donated the portrait paintings of Alphonso and Louise Taft that now grace the west wall of the parlor. Bob and Hope

[15] Interpretive Specialist, Midwest Region to Chief, Interpretation and Visitor Services, Midwest Region, September 30, 1986, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File K1815; "Taft Memorabilia Wanted," *Cincinnati Downtowner*, October 21, 1986.
[16] Steven Kesselman to William Howard Taft III, November 20, 1987, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A3821.
[17] Steven Kesselman to Mrs. Holland Hunter, November 16, 1987, February 12, 1988, March 25, 1988, and May 24, 1988, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A3821.

Taft recalled that those paintings formerly hung in Robert A. Taft, Jr.'s home on Drake Road (a house that had been in the family since 1917).[18]

Eleanor Taft Hall, daughter of Charlie Taft, donated an original silver tray that once belonged to Louise.[19] The Taft Family Association donated an American Indian "treaty" signed by President Taft in 1912, a silver spoon, and a reprint of a book from an 1874 Taft gathering.[20]

Kesselman's other source – the main source – for gathering three-dimensional objects for exhibits was antiques to be found in the Cincinnati area. This effort aimed not just at filling out the exhibit space but also contributing to the historic refurnishing of the four rooms that were being restored. It was known from Louise Taft's letters that she bought many pieces of furniture from Cincinnati furniture makers in the 1850s and 1860s. Cincinnati had a thriving furniture industry in the mid-nineteenth century and many antiques of that vintage were still in circulation. From the description in Louise Taft's letters, NPS was able to seek items that were of similar age and make to pieces in the Taft household even if they were not the original items themselves. For example, her letters referred to a black marble-top table and a square grand Chickering piano situated in the parlor. Kesselman and the staff talked to local antique dealers, scoured the ads in *Antique Week*, went to auctions, and put out a call to the local community. "The goal of this major acquisition program," Kesselman told a reporter for the *Cincinnati Downtowner*, "is to take all the separate pieces, from souvenirs to furniture, and place them in such a way as will give variety and interest – and, we hope, charm and warmth – to this important story."[21]

The major acquisition program, as Kesselman referred to it, was underpinned by two NPS reports – a historic structure report and a historic furnishings report – and assisted by the Harpers Ferry Center. Nevertheless, the superintendent took charge of it and contributed his own research. "These were interesting times to be here with Steve Kesselman," Henderson recalled. A professional historian himself, Kesselman did not defer to the experts from Harpers Ferry nor did he always agree with the park historian. There were frequent discussions over a potential acquisition. Was it supported by the historical documentation? Would it have educational or interpretive value? It could be hard to distinguish what was a cultural resource and what was a prop. The search for three-dimensional objects continued right up to the deadline.

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[18] Bob and Hope Taft interview.
[19] Maryanne Gerbauckas to Mrs. Donald T. Hall, May 31, 1990, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[20] Robert J. Moore, Jr. to Richard Taft Messinger, February 14, 1991, with attachment, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[21] Henderson interview; "Taft Memorabilia Wanted," *Cincinnati Downtowner*, October 21, 1986.

Furniture trucks arrived with many of the pieces just days before the grand opening on September 17, 1988.[22]

Exhibit planning included the design and fabrication of two wayside exhibits. Exhibit 1 featured an artist's rendering of the Taft property in the 1860s showing its several outbuildings, orchard, and garden. The purpose was to illustrate how the backyard was used in the mid-nineteenth century and draw an implicit contrast with its present urban setting. The wayside exhibit was intended for outdoor display in the backyard. Exhibit 2 was to place the Taft house in context with the historic Mount Auburn neighborhood. It featured photos of prominent buildings on the street that were no longer standing. Kesselman coordinated with Harpers Ferry Center on the design of the two exhibit panels.

The two exhibits were fabricated in 1988 and Exhibit 2 was installed next to the sidewalk on Auburn Avenue by the end of that year. The other wayside exhibit was to be installed in the backyard the next year. However, the installation of Exhibit 1 was held up for reasons that are not entirely clear. Superintendent Gerbauckas submitted the "Assessment of Actions Having an Effect on Cultural Resources" form – more commonly known as the XXX Form – with finding of "no effect" to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Acting Regional Director William W. Schenk informed Gerbauckas in November 1990 that he was withholding approval of the XXX Form pending receipt of a site map and other information to support the "no effect" action. Gerbauckas replied on December 19, enclosing the additional information (photographs and a site map). She stated that the Site wanted to place the wayside exhibit at the southeast corner of the house and mount it on a stand identical to the one already in place on Auburn Avenue. Regional Director Don Castleberry concurred in the finding of no effect and notified the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), Dr. W. Ray Luce, of the action on January 15, 1991, stating that if NPS received no response from the SHPO within 30 days then it would assume there was no objection to the proposal. Apparently the 30 days elapsed with no response. However, the installation never happened. Eventually the 4-foot by 3-foot sign was mounted on a tripod stand in the basement instead. Almost twenty years later, in 2019, this wayside exhibit was finally placed in the backyard.[23]

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[22] Henderson interview.

[23] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1988, unmarked cabinet, FY '89 Daily Yellows; Superintendent to Exhibit Planner, Harpers Ferry Center, August 29, 1986, Exhibit Planner to Regional Director, October 15, 1986, Superintendent to Regional Director, March 27, 1987, Acting Regional Director to Manager, Harpers Ferry Center, April 6, 1987, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File D6215; Acting Regional Director to Superintendent, November 27, 1990, Superintendent to Regional Director, December 19, 1990, and Don H. Castleberry to Dr. W. Ray Luce, January 15, 1991, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 4, File 004.10; Wood interview; Hugh Hawthorne to author, August 6, 2019, email.

Kesselman did not push for an audiovisual production. He did not think a short orientation film was essential, although it might be convenient at times. Since the Site did not have a separate visitor center, there was no auditorium in which to show a film. In 1990, Superintendent Gerbauckas and Chief of Interpretation Bob Moore secured project funding and found a producer, Stefan Dobert. Harpers Ferry Center oversaw the production effort, while the Friends group donated the cost of the production contract.[24] Until the Taft Education Center was built, film showings as well as occasional slide talks were presented in the basement of the Taft house.

Exhibit planning for the Taft Education Center mostly took place in 1998. Since the Friends of the William H. Taft Birthplace contributed so much toward the cost of the building, the group took a prominent role in the conceptual design. Before starting discussion on the exhibits and interpretive issues, the group revisited its mission for the new center, which was "to preserve, interpret and promote awareness and appreciation of the birthplace and of William Howard Taft and his family's values." Since the exhibits in the Taft house already addressed Taft's boyhood and public career, the group decided that the Taft Education Center should highlight the Taft family, its values, and various members' contributions to Cincinnati and the nation. The interpretive theme would be the Taft family's commitment to community and public service.[25]

Unlike the first round of exhibit planning for the Taft house, exhibits in the new building were kept to a minimum. The Taft Education Center's most important contribution to the interpretive program was to provide valuable space for staging interpretive activities. The lobby of the new building would provide, at long last, an assembly area for groups of visitors where they could be given a quick orientation prior to the house tour. Exhibit design for this area was very spare. It included a few recessed wall cabinets and a few quotes on the wall. The primary interpretive goal for the lobby was to provide a "lively, comfortable and dignified welcoming space." At last, too, the Site would have a theater for showing its 14-minute orientation film. There was also a classroom for lectures and meetings and a gallery dedicated to traveling exhibits. These spaces were kept void of permanent exhibits.[26]

As the Friends proposed, the new exhibits were oriented to interpreting the Taft political dynasty. The main feature was an animatronic "Charlie Taft." This life-sized robotic mannequin would be activated when the visitor passed in front of an

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[24] Interpretive Specialist, Midwest Region to Chief, Interpretation and Visitor Services, Midwest Region, September 30, 1986, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File K1815; Stefan Dobert to Bob Moore, February 26, 1990; Chief of Interpretation, Midwest Region to Superintendent, June 14, 1990, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A42.
[25] Claudia McKee, "President's Annual Report," *Taft Times*, June 1998, 2.
[26] "Taft Education Center, Cincinnati, Ohio, Conceptual Exhibit Plan/Visitor Walk Through," November 1998, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File K1817.



Figure 33. The animatronic Charlie Taft. (Author photo.)

electronic beam and would begin to tell stories about the Taft family. Visitors could then elect to hear more stories from a push-button menu. To capture Charlie Taft's warm, eccentric character, this robotic version of the long-serving Cincinnati politician was placed in an informal setting: seated on a log next to a box of fishing tackle with his signature yellow Maverick with canoe on right behind him. (His actual canoe was in the museum collection; the diorama had a facsimile of the back end of the car and canoe.) The animatronic Charlie Taft was created by LifeFormations of Bowling Green, Ohio.[27]

Another exhibit was called "The Taft Legacy." It consisted of a cluster of 8-inch by 10-inch "Cornell" boxes raised from the wall surface. Inside each box, photographs and mementos of various Tafts were featured. Another related exhibit was called "The Legacy Interactive." At a computer station, visitors could call up images and stories and explore topics in more depth. Hypertext allowed for quick transition from one topic to another. When this exhibit was designed in 1998 the potential of the internet was starting to become manifest. The exhibit plan stated, "It will be easy to expand and update the material in the computer, and it may be possible to eventually load the material into a web page for the site, thus greatly expanding the educational impact of the William Howard Taft Birthplace."[28]

House Tours

House tours were the core component of the interpretive program from the beginning. In the 1970s they were short – typically fifteen minutes – and revolved around an oral orientation, a peak into the unrestored "birth room," and a pass through the solarium. Through much of the 1980s, when the house was undergoing restoration,

[27] "Taft Education Center, Cincinnati, Ohio, Conceptual Exhibit Plan/Visitor Walk Through," November 1998, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File K1817.
[28] Ibid.

house tours were mostly confined to leading visitors around the house exterior and drawing visitors' attention to the grounds and the neighborhood.[29]

For a short period in the mid 1980s, house tours featured the gutted interior rooms with interpretation being focused on the historic restoration itself. Bob and Hope Taft toured the house at that time and would later recall that the interpreter pointed out vestiges of the historic fabric and subtle evidence of the original floor plan. Their guide would "take a sponge and wipe the walls, and could show you where the original stairsteps were," Hope Taft remembered. "It was like finding the ghost of the house."[30]

House tours took their present form when the historic restoration was complete in 1988. As prescribed in the *Interpretive Prospectus*, house tours were given by a guide in NPS uniform. Tours began with an orientation in the first-floor bedroom (Room 105), proceeded through the four restored rooms, and ended in the rear bedroom and sitting room exhibit area (Room 109). The tour was about 30 minutes. At the end of the guided tour visitors were invited to explore the second-floor exhibit rooms and the grounds at their leisure.[31]

House tours were the interpretive staff's primary point of visitor contact. Visitors were counted manually as they entered the Taft house. After the Taft Education Center was built, all visitors who entered that building were counted as well, and visitors who entered both buildings were counted twice. Generally, interpretive staff were always on hand to welcome visitors in the Taft Education Center and they made sure to stay in the Taft house if visitors remained after the tour. The interpretive staff had a small office adjoining Room 105 which they occupied while visitors toured the exhibits on the second floor.[32]

Another interpretive offering of longstanding was the guided walking tour of the Mount Auburn Historic District. It became a standard 90-minute tour given on each Sunday in May. The ranger led the group on a mile and a half walk through the neighborhood, mostly up Auburn Avenue, providing some history on the many historic buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Interpretive staff acquired a detailed knowledge of their subject matter and provided historic house tours of high quality as evinced by the Site's high ratings in its annual visitor surveys. The staff prided itself on the house tours and thought the tours were consistently the most important piece of the interpretive program. Even so, the staff (and the Friends group) struggled with the fact that William Howard Taft

[29] Jerry L. Licari, "Monthly Public Use Report," unmarked cabinet, Letters – Yellow Sheets FY '76.
[30] Henderson interview; Bob and Hope Taft interview.
[31] Wood interview.
[32] Ibid.



Figure 34. Ranger Reggie Murray speaking to visitors in the parlor, April 2019. (Author's photo.)

National Historic Site had few return visitors. The perception was that the historic house tour was inherently a one-off for the visitor; in most cases, the person did not view a historic house tour as an experience that bore repetition.[33]

Kerry Wood noted that the visitor profile remained consistent in his 20 years of experience. Most visitors were families, many with children. Adults generally ranged in age from about 40 on up. Groups of seniors were also common. In other words, the Site appealed to people of all ages except for the bracket from about 18 to 40. That age cohort was largely missing at Taft and Wood presumed that it was simply a stage of life when people were generally disinclined toward historic house tours, preferring other forms of leisure activity. Wood noted, too, that most visitors were white, and the racial composition had not changed much over time. NPS wanted to broaden the Site's appeal for people of color. There was a conscious effort by the staff to make African Americans in the local community feel welcome and appreciative of the Site as part of their heritage. Getting more blacks and other people of color to visit the Site remained a challenge.[34]

[33] Wood interview; Henderson interview; John R. Reusing, interview by Theodore Catton, April 4, 2019. Results of visitor surveys are cited in many Superintendent's Annual Reports.
[34] Wood interview.

Educational Programming

School groups became a significant part of visitation starting in 1992. As a first step toward educational programming, Ranger Henderson developed an outline titled "Teaching with Historic Places," which he prepared in conjunction with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Chief of Interpretation Albrecht used the outline in designing Taft's first two school programs, "Toys, Tots, and Tafts" for kindergarten through second grade, and "Measure of a Man or Woman" for grades three through five. The first one introduced young kids to an assortment of wooden toys from the period of Taft's childhood. The second one was framed around dressing up seven kids in period costume and getting them to read questions and answers from cue cards as they role-played various members of the Taft household. Since the Taft Education Center did not yet exist, these activities were held in the basement of the Taft house, after which the kids would be given a house tour that was specially crafted to engage their young minds.[35]

NPS and the National Parks Foundation launched the Parks as Classrooms initiative that same year. With the help of Parks-as-Classrooms funding and the assistance of two Volunteers-in-Parks student interns from the University of Cincinnati and the University of Northern Kentucky, the interpretive staff contributed to the new traveling trunk program. A traveling trunk contained curriculum materials and a few three-dimensional objects and could be sent out to schools at teachers' request to provide a teaching unit about the park, in this case William Howard Taft and the 200th anniversary of the White House (that is, since the laying of the cornerstone).[36]

Bringing school groups to the Site became logistically easier after the Taft Education Center was completed. Now school groups could be accommodated in the classroom on the ground floor of the center prior to getting a house tour. To help expand the educational program, Kerry Wood was brought in under the intake trainee program as a de facto education specialist. He joined the staff toward the end of 1999 and went to work on developing two more school programs for the upper grade levels. One, for grades five through eight, was called "Man of Many Hats" and explored the many roles assigned to the President of the United States under the U.S. Constitution. The other, for grades nine through twelve, was called "Judgment Day" and focused on the U.S. Supreme Court and Taft's contributions as a chief justice.[37]

As education specialist, Wood reached out to area schools to sow interest in what the Site offered. The number of school groups grew each year until it peaked at

[35] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1992, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A2621; Wood interview.
[36] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1992, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, File A2621.
[37] Wood interview; Superintendent's Annual Report for 2006, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2621.



Figure 35. Chief of Interpretation Kerry Wood with junior rangers. (Julie/What Should We Do Today? blog spot.)

around 1500 students annually. At the peak numbers, some 30 to 60 schools arranged field trips to the Site each year. Meanwhile, other schools declined to make a field trip to the Site but accepted Wood's offer to bring the program to the school. The latter arrangement saved the school transportation expenses and took just an hour out of the school day instead of all morning or afternoon, but of course it did not include the house tour. Around 1000 more students were served each year through this method. Wood conducted most of the education outreach until 2015, when he was promoted to chief of the division. The GS-9 ranger who filled in behind Wood was unable to maintain the program at that strength; the number of school groups fell and the total number of students who were served through educational programming in a year stood at around 500 in 2018.[38]

Even when school field trips were arriving in peak numbers, they never approached the quantity that had been predicted by some of the planning documents written in the 1970s and 1980s. Attracting school field trips to Taft was harder than it might have seemed for planners working from afar. Taft was in a densely populated metropolitan area; hundreds of schools and many thousands of students were located within a 20-mile radius of the Site. Based on population alone, the Site appeared to have tremendous potential to draw school groups compared with so many other units in the National Park System that were in much less populated areas. But the metropolitan area presented other opportunities for school field trips that created very tough competition for Taft. Larger institutions such as the Cincinnati Museum Center, the Cincinnati Zoo, the Taft Museum of Art, and the Underground Railroad Freedom Center were prepared to accommodate multiple school groups per day. Any given schoolteacher could choose just one or possibly two field trips per year. The Site's offerings had to be very good to compete in that market.[39]

[38] Wood interview.
[39] Ibid.

Like other units in the National Park System, Taft's educational programming faced a squeeze in the 2000s when school budgets for field trips declined. The education specialist sometimes had funds available to pay for a school's bus transportation costs. For a few years in the early 2000s, the Site paid the cost for school buses out of its own annual budget. At other times, grants were obtained for the purpose. In 2015, Wood got a grant from the National Parks Foundation through its Every Kid in a Park (EKIP) program. In 2018, the Site took a different approach by helping the Cincinnati Public Schools obtain the grant. The money still went to the same purpose: bringing mainly fourth graders to the Site under the EKIP program. Sometimes the Friends chipped in money for buses, too. Over the years, the cost of bus transportation went up and the funds got harder to scrounge together.[40]

Educational programming also had to be responsive to changing needs in the schools. The move toward standardized testing in public schools put a crimp on field trips that were not directly part of the material that students were going to be tested on at the end of the year. As hard-pressed teachers increasingly "taught to the test," their desire to give a half or whole day of class time to taking their students on a field trip diminished. Curricula changed. One year, fourth-grade teachers might be tasked with teaching their students about "famous Ohioans" and the Site could offer its "Measure of a Man or Woman" in support of the fourth-grade curriculum. The next year, second-grade teachers might have "famous Ohioans" instead. The interpretive staff had to be aware of such developments and make appropriate adjustments.[41]

Special Events

William Howard Taft National Historic Site held several special events each year. These activities boosted the Site's public profile. Many events were a form of outreach to a given public sector. Other events enabled the interpretive staff to highlight the Site in a special way; for example, during the Christmas season the Taft house was decorated with Victorian-era Christmas decorations, interpreters dressed in period costume, and an open house was held on one day of the season to fete the Friends group and other honorary guests. Several special events dovetailed with national holidays and featured historical forms of holiday celebration: there was an annual ice cream social on July Fourth, a Halloween open house, and a Victorian candlelight Christmas. Special events were helpful in augmenting annual visitation;

[40] Henderson interview; Wood interview; Hawthorne interview; John R Reusing fundraising letter, December 2, 2013, Friends of the Taft Legacy Archive, Membership Interpretation.
[41] Wood interview.

the publicity and interest around these events attracted people who might not otherwise pay a visit.[42]

Some events became an annual tradition. A kids' Easter egg hunt was held each year on the front lawn of the Taft house, reminiscent of the traditional Easter egg roll on the south lawn of the White House. (The time-honored White House tradition began in 1878 in the administration of Rutherford B. Hayes.) Constitution Day was an annual event that was held off-site at Fountain Square. Typically, fifth graders took part and were bused downtown to the square where they learned from interpretive staff about William Howard Taft's love for the law and respect for the constitution, and role-played the Founding Fathers when they signed a parchment containing the Constitution, and stepped into a voting booth to mark a ballot.[43]



Figure 36. Victorian Christmas in the Taft home. (William Howard Taft National Historic Site.)

Another event of longstanding was the Findlay Market Opening Day Parade Celebration. This was a big annual event in the life of Cincinnati in which the staff at William Howard Taft National Historic Site traditionally took part. The parade marked the opening day of the Cincinnati Reds baseball season, and it began at Findlay Market and ended at the Taft Museum of Art. With the help of the Friends, the Site usually hired an actor to impersonate President Taft, rented a horse-drawn carriage for him to ride in, and sent a contingent of the staff to march in the parade in NPS uniforms alongside the carriage. Sometimes the Taft impersonator would be on hand at the first home game to throw out the first pitch of the season – harking to a presidential tradition that began with Taft.[44]

Some interpretive staff enjoyed getting into period costume and doing living history. Ruth Horstman, a part-time park guide and graduate student at Northern Kentucky University with a long interest in living history, offered a living history

[42] Hawthorne interview; Henderson interview.
[43] Wood interview.
[44] Ibid.

program called "What's Cooking in the Taft Kitchen?" in which she gave costumed interpretation as the Taft family's cook.[45]

Putting on special events covered a wide spectrum of activity by the staff. Events could be on-site or off-site, of short or long duration, inexpensive or pricy. A guest lecture or presentation was a relatively easy event to put on. A temporary exhibit in the Taft Education Center was generally a much more elaborate undertaking that involved considerable advance planning, fundraising, and hired services.

With the completion of the Taft Education Center in 1999, the Site had a decent venue for staging lectures, public gatherings, and temporary exhibits, and so the interpretive staff became more heavily involved with putting on special events. Temporary exhibits could be a powerful means of extending the Site's interpretive scope and bringing attention to other NPS sites in Ohio. Traveling exhibits were programmed on such topics as U.S. presidents of Ohio, the Buffalo Soldiers, the Tuskegee Airmen, and Negro League Baseball. Another special exhibit featured photographs by *Time* photojournalist Diana Walker, who covered the White House from the Ford administration through the Clinton administration. Many such exhibits were brought to Taft courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution's Traveling Exhibition Service. Other temporary exhibits were developed largely on-site by the staff. Examples included one about quilting – which was very popular, former Chief of Interpretation Henderson recalled – and another that featured first ladies' gowns. In the case of the latter, Henderson borrowed the gowns from a little museum in Frankenmuth, Michigan. The gowns were reproductions of original gowns on display at the Smithsonian. Henderson drove to the museum in Michigan to get the gowns, and Site staff performed all the work of displaying them on mannequins and labeling them.[46]

Perhaps the biggest effort to put on a temporary exhibit took place around an exhibit called *Looking East: William Howard Taft and the 1905 Mission to Asia*. The exhibit told the story of a three-month goodwill tour of the Far East that Taft led when he was secretary of war. Taft led a large delegation that included 42 members of Congress as well as Alice Roosevelt, daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt, and some prominent Cincinnatians. The exhibit curators were Margo Taft Stever and her son James Taft Stever, who were in some way related to William Howard Taft but more importantly were direct descendants of the mission's official photographer, Harry Fowler Woods. The impetus for the exhibit came from the younger Stever when

[45] "What's Cooking in the Taft Kitchen? Meet the Family Cook," William Howard Taft National Historic Site, 2018, at www.nps.gov/wiho/learn/news/what-s-cooking-in-the-taft-kitchen.htm <September 13, 2019>.
[46] Superintendent's Annual Report for 2005, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2621; Henderson interview.

he discovered scrapbooks containing more than a thousand original photographs of the tour at Woods Camp, the family's hunting and fishing lodge in the Adirondacks. The Stevers approached the Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace to co-sponsor their project. The Friends agreed to help fund the effort. The group also helped to secure assistance from others including a major donation from the Jacob G. Schmidlapp Trust in memory of the trust's namesake, who was a onetime Cincinnati banker, friend of the Tafts, and member of the 1905 mission. The project came to encompass not only a photograph exhibition but also a book and a teaching guide.[47]

Looking East was on display at William Howard Taft National Historic Site from April 20 to June 16, 2007. Afterwards, the exhibit went on tour to places in the Far East. The exhibit then went into storage for a few years. More recently, the exhibit was brought out of storage to be displayed for a second time at the National Historic Site, and the Friends once again contributed funds to assist with its restoration. After this second exhibition, it was returned to storage in the Cincinnati Museum Center.[48]

Another eye-catching exhibit was the loan, in 2013, of a wax figure of President William Howard Taft from Madame Tussauds Wax Museum in Washington, D.C. Some years prior to the loan, John Reusing, president of the Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace and director of development at the Cincinnati Public Library, received a phone call from the Library of Congress asking if he could provide William Howard Taft's measurements for a suit. After consulting Henderson, Reusing responded to this unusual inquiry, whereupon the person at the Library of Congress told him he would receive another phone call shortly. The next call was from Madame Tussauds in London – explaining that it wanted to make a wax figure of President Taft. So, with this minor research assist from the Site and the Friends, Madame Tussauds proceeded to sculpt a wax figure of Taft for its collection of U.S. presidents in its Washington, D.C. museum. After some years went by, Reusing called the company and asked if the figure could be sent to Cincinnati on loan. The company agreed to loan it for a few days if shipping costs were covered. Reusing took the matter to the Friends, who agreed to pay the cost of



Figure 37. Madame Tussauds wax figure of William H. Taft made a hit during its short visit to the Site in 2013. (John Reusing.)

[47] James Stever, *Looking East: William Howard Taft and the 1905 Mission to Asia, the Photographs of Harry Fowler Woods, Teaching Guide*, and Margo Taft Stever to Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace, no dates, Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace, Taft Project; Reusing interview.
[48] Reusing interview.

shipping. Accordingly, Madame Tussauds sent the figure in a large crate and an employee of Madame Tussauds flew to Cincinnati to prepare it for display and answer the public's questions about it. For the short time that the wax figure of William Howard Taft was in Cincinnati it graced both the Taft Education Center (where it stood in the lobby) and the Taft Art Museum (where it posed beneath the portrait of the president's older half-brother Charles P. Taft). On the Saturday in which the wax figure stood in the Taft Education Center, the Site saw a record number of visitors. Reusing cited marketing statistics stating that over a half million people were exposed to the media releases.[49]

Special-emphasis programs were events directed toward a target group. Superintendent White focused attention on special-emphasis programming for African Americans and other minority groups. She reached out to the Irish American community, for example, by bringing performers from the Riley School of Irish Music and the McGing School of Irish Dance to perform at the Site. Many Irish Americans' ancestors had come to the United States as desperately poor immigrants in the nineteenth century. Some worked as domestic servants in the mansions along Auburn Street in the period when the Tafts lived there. The performers discussed how music and dance were used as forms of resistance to British rule in Ireland, and they highlighted the role of music and dance in helping Irish immigrants in America cope with indentured servitude, gain independence, and achieve good standing in the democratic society.[50]

A somewhat related event occurred on May 24, 2019, when William Howard Taft National Historic Site held its first naturalization ceremony onsite. Holding naturalization ceremonies at national park facilities – using the backdrop of a national historic site or national park to underscore the grant of U.S. citizenship – was a new trend in NPS. Most naturalization ceremonies involved around 100 new citizens, which, with their close supporters, could form a group of 300 people or more. Superintendent Hawthorne arranged to have a relatively small group at Taft so that everyone could be accommodated. With that, Taft joined a growing list of NPS units participating in the program in partnership with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.[51]

These were just a few examples of the innumerable special events that the staff at William Howard Taft National Historic Site either arranged, hosted, or took part in over the years. Some general comments about special events were offered by Superintendent Hawthorne and the former president of the Friends group, Reusing.

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[49] Reusing interview; John R. Reusing to Dan Rogoski, April 12, 2013, Friends of the Taft Legacy Archive, Tussauds Taft.
[50] White personal communication.
[51] Hawthorne interview.

Hawthorne stressed that the main limitation on special events was space. At most, the Site could accommodate around 200 people. Taft could not do big special events. As a result, all the work that went into special events did not boost annual visitation appreciably – not even 10 percent. Taft differed from many other small units in that way. If the Site were to acquire additional space – such as the adjacent lot with the Sanning Apartments building – then the potential to hold bigger special events would be considerably enhanced. Reusing noted that special events were near and dear to the Friends group because they were tailored to the Friends' educational mission. Moreover, the Friends provided a valuable service to the Site when it paid expenses for many special events, which obviated the need to pursue those funds through government channels with all the rigmarole and uncertainty that that could entail.[52]

The Long Range Interpretive Plan

In 2007, Superintendent White instigated a re-examination of the interpretive program. Her starting point was the Director's Order 75A on Civic Engagement. Director Mary Bomar issued the directive in 2003 and updated it in August 2007. The message was an all-hands-on-deck appeal to the agency to embrace *civic engagement* as the foundation and framework for programs and planning. In calling for an embrace of civic engagement, Bomar meant that NPS had to demonstrate a new level of commitment to building and sustaining relationships with neighbors and communities of interest.[53] White took the message to heart, tying it directly to the growing challenge of relevancy for the National Park System as NPS tried to pivot from its traditional orientation toward middle-class white people to serve a much bigger, more diverse population in the twenty-first century. The "mandated policy," White said, "encourages park rangers to move beyond the park boundaries as we provide a venue for our constituents to write their own narratives in addressing issues that systematically impact their lives." She wanted William Howard Taft National Historic Site to *serve* the Mount Auburn community, not just take up space in it. She initiated a new round of interpretive planning to establish the Site's path forward. The planning effort culminated in a 58-page document, *William Howard Taft National Historic Site Long Range Interpretive Plan* (November 2008).[54]

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[52] Hawthorne interview; Reusing interview.
[53] National Park Service, "Director's Order #75A: Civic Engagement and Public Involvement," August 30, 2007, at https://www.nps.gov/policy/Dorders/75a.htm <July 23, 2019>. NPS 2006 *Management Policies* furthered the agency's "commitment to building and sustaining relationships with neighbors and other communities of interest – both near and far," asking parks to "embrace civic engagement as a fundamental discipline and practice." See Jenny Masur, "Working with Traditionally Associated Groups: A Form of Civic Engagement," *The George Wright Forum* 26, no. 3 (2009), 85-94.
[54] White personal communication.

White was the guiding spirit on the planning team of 21 people. Sam Vaughn participated on behalf of the NPS interpretive services center in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, but the Harpers Ferry Center did not lead this effort. Rather, the superintendent found a contractor, Ron Thomson, a former NPS ranger who had a consulting business specializing in interpretive plans and other interpretive products, to facilitate workshops and write the plan. Other persons on the planning team included six other Taft staff, a park ranger from Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site, an education specialist from Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, a representative of the Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace, and eight educators or administrators from the Cincinnati community, including two from Mount Auburn.[55]

The planning effort started with an inventory of existing interpretive programs, facilities, and media. The Site staff prepared the following summary:

Taft Education Center

- An information desk that was staffed 362 days per year
- An Eastern National sales outlet
- Public restrooms
- An animatronic robot of President Taft's son, Charlie Taft
- A temporary exhibit gallery
- A classroom
- A 14-minute orientation film
- A computer
- Curatorial storage

Alphonso Taft Home

- The birthplace and boyhood home of William Howard Taft restored to its 1857-1877 appearance with four furnished rooms reflecting daily family life during the period.
- Ranger-led tours of the furnished rooms offered on the half hour to walk-in visitors as well as groups by appointment.
- Seven more rooms given to exhibits about Taft's life and career designed by Harpers Ferry Center.
- A family movie and an audio program about Taft's campaign were available on request.
- A small meeting room and a multi-purpose room.

[55] National Park Service, *William Howard Taft National Historic Site Long Range Interpretive Plan*, report prepared for the National Park Service by Ron Thomson, Compass (Harper's Ferry, WV: National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center, 2008), 51-52.

Neighborhood Tours

- Guided tours of the immediate neighborhood were offered to visitors in the spring and summer.

Special Events and Off-site Programs

- Easter egg hunt
- Public Service Recognition Day
- Black History Month
- Native American History Month
- Women's History Month
- Hispanic Heritage Month
- 4th of July Concert and Ice Cream Social
- Constitution Day
- President's Day
- Victorian Christmas
- Off-site programs offered to senior citizens, civic organizations, social clubs, historical societies, and civic and social service organizations.

Education Programs

- Several curriculum-based educational programs for grades K-12 as well as higher learning institutions.

Junior Ranger Program

- Onsite and web-based Junior Ranger programs still under development.[56]

The workshops also took stock of the Site's existing audiences before moving into a discussion of intended audiences in the future, including potential audiences that a "well-planned interpretation might encourage." The Site staff described the existing audiences in 2007 as follows:

- Annual visitation of roughly 17,000.
- Many onsite visitors were typical of the broad population of National Park System visitors: white and middle to upper class.
- School groups accounted for some 2,500 to 3,000 onsite visits, with third and fourth grade classes comprising the most common age group.
- Local community groups had a standing invitation to use Site facilities for meetings.

[56] National Park Service, *William Howard Taft National Historic Site Long Range Interpretive Plan*, 6-8.

- Other groups with a noticeable presence included families, seniors (often in small groups), service and scout groups, and local or regional visitors who came to the site for special events.
- Internet and virtual audiences were increasing.
- Some visitors liked to "collect" national parks and arrived intent on getting their NPS passport stamped; others had a goal to visit all presidential sites.

The workshops identified three audiences that would be targeted in the future. Of course, all audiences would be welcome and invited to participate in the Site's interpretive programs as before, but the aim in the future would be to give special attention to certain audiences that were only lightly represented in the existing visitation in the hope that these groups would be attracted to the Site in larger numbers. The three targeted audiences were:

- High school educators and students at the junior and senior level and college educators and students.
- Community and regional audiences who liked to participate in special events and community groups, particularly those with missions that paralleled the goals of NPS.
- More diverse audiences, particularly audiences that were representative of the predominantly African American Mount Auburn community.

The nub of the *Long Range Interpretive Plan* was its Part 2 on actions. One set of actions revolved around strengthening the Site's identity within the surrounding community. It included items such as forming a community advisory group to offer advice and feedback on Site activities, demonstrating that the Site was a "safe" place for community dialogue on issues, and innovating ways to improve publicity for special events. It suggested rebranding the Site in the local context: "It isn't enough to say that the park includes the birthplace and boyhood home of Taft, president and chief justice. The park identity also might allude to the park's programs for local schools, dedication to the preservation of Mt. Auburn as a vibrant community, and availability as a venue for civic dialogue."[57]

Another set of actions focused on expanding community audiences and exploring relevance. The problem was stated up front: "Over the years, many community residents have assumed that the park, with its obvious emphasis on the Tafts, is irrelevant to them." Henceforth, staff would prepare for the question, "so what?" Staff would develop programs rooted in community narratives. To that end,

[57] National Park Service, *William Howard Taft National Historic Site Long Range Interpretive Plan*, 30-31.

the Site would invite Mount Auburn residents to stories via oral histories, old photographs, letters, and so on. The Site might sponsor a special event in which residents came to the Site to share community history not only with the Site staff but with other community members as well. The Site would offer more interpretation about the history of Mount Auburn stressing neighborhood transitions that had occurred over time. Other ideas included recruiting docents from Mount Auburn and developing a youth docent program, using students from local schools to lead tours of younger students.[58]

A third set of actions sought to make interpretive programming more interactive. One idea was to adapt the "Man of Many Hats" educational program for use with general audiences taking the house tour or perusing exhibits in the Taft Education Center. Visitors could collect hats by a variety of means, leading to contemplation or dialogue about the hats and the roles they represented. Another idea was to develop a "Room of Reflection" aimed at connecting issues that were current in Taft's day with issues in the present. To make this space interactive, visitors would be encouraged to register their responses via a comment register or short postcard or voting device that would keep a running tally of attitudes.[59]

The *Long Range Interpretive Plan* was idealistic and innovative but ultimately it did not get much traction. Superintendent White provided the impetus behind it, but she did not stay at Taft long enough to implement it. She left in the summer of 2008 and the plan was published in November of that year, by which time Superintendent Tiller was in charge. Tiller did not support the plan. He told Chief of Interpretation Henderson that it would not be implemented. The several dozen spiral bound copies of the report went on a shelf in the library where they received little more attention. Henderson raised no objection because he was skeptical about the plan himself.[60]

Henderson thought some of White's efforts toward civic engagement went too far since they marginalized the National Historic Site story, which of course centered on Taft. For example, the Site hosted a health fair on one occasion. Henderson recalled that there were booths and classes held in the Taft Education Center and the basement of the Taft house, and for the general visitor who arrived for a house tour on that day the scene was confusing for it had no apparent connection to William Howard Taft. Henderson recalled that he was candid with White about his discomfort over the event, telling her point blank that he thought it was inappropriate. "Look, Robin," Henderson remembered saying. "You're the superintendent. Whatever you want me to do, that's what I'm going to do. But I feel it's in our best interest that I give you a different look

[58] National Park Service, *William Howard Taft National Historic Site Long Range Interpretive Plan*, 33-34.
[59] Ibid, 35-37.
[60] Henderson interview.

at some of the things you're doing." White heard him out and returned to the importance of civic engagement.[61]

In Henderson's view, White brought to Taft a passion for civic engagement that she had developed at her previous duty stations at New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park and Grand Canyon National Park, where there was more scope for reaching out to nonwhite communities of interest and traditionally associated groups. Although William Howard Taft National Historic Site was in a big city with a diverse population, its interpretive resources nonetheless centered on a white well-to-do family in a historically white suburb and a boy who became a U.S. president. As stated in the *Long Range Interpretive Plan*, "significance identifies those aspects of an NPS unit that make it *nationally* noteworthy." Some of the proposed actions in the *Long Range Interpretive Plan* were a stretch because they went so far afield from the Site significance.[62]

Looking back on the *Long Range Interpretive Plan*, Henderson stressed another point. Any plan embodying such a strong change in direction as that one did cannot force the change all by itself; a plan needs to have the superintendent behind it seeing to its implementation. The plan was clearly Superintendent White's vision. She planted the seeds for making a strong effort toward civic engagement but when she moved on there was no one left to do the watering.[63]

A New Direction

In late August 2018, Superintendent Hawthorne participated in a Presidential Sites Summit, a three-day conference put on by the White House Historical Association and held at the historic Willard Hotel near the White House in Washington, D.C. Speakers included several well-known presidential scholars, White House correspondents, and former White House press secretaries, as well as many presidential site managers like Hawthorne. The superintendent had a lot of discussion with other site managers about how the many presidential sites around the nation were interpreted and the differences between them. Hawthorne was struck by the repetitiveness between many of their interpretive programs. And he found that the more interesting ones often had a dual focus or a secondary theme; for example, the Eisenhower National Historic Site gave considerable attention to Eisenhower's role as supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe in World War II. From his experience at the conference Hawthorne developed the idea to take the interpretive program at

[61] Henderson interview.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid. Superintendent Pennington stated in her interview that she did not get deeply involved with the interpretive program during her relatively short time managing the Site. Superintendent Hawthorne stated in his interview that he read the plan when he first came and never went back to it.

William Howard Taft in a new direction, giving it a dual emphasis on the Taft presidency and the U.S. Supreme Court. "There really isn't a National Park Service site that has any real link to the United States Supreme Court," he noted.[64]

Hawthorne's plan was in the development stage in 2019. He put his idea to the rest of the staff, pointing out that the National Park System has numerous presidential sites but not one site devoted to the U.S. Supreme Court, so "we should be the U.S. Supreme Court site." He urged the interpretive staff to begin swinging interpretive content toward a dual emphasis on the Taft presidential administration and the Taft court. The staff prepared project proposals for updating the exhibits. The proposals were queued in the PMIS, awaiting funds. When the time came, the exhibits would not only be updated to be more interactive, there would also be a review of their content – a golden opportunity to shift emphasis and focus more attention on Taft's contributions to the judiciary.[65]

Since William Howard Taft was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1921, the 100-year anniversary would be celebrated in 2021. Preparations were already underway. Hawthorne wanted to have another Supreme Court justice give the William Howard Taft Lecture on Constitutional Law for that year, and he felt optimistic that it could be arranged. The event would draw several hundred people so it would have to be held offsite. The probable host institution was the University of Cincinnati Law School.[66]

Indeed, both the University of Cincinnati Law School and the Cincinnati Bar Association were active partners with William Howard Taft National Historic Site. Several history-minded people in those organizations wanted, with Hawthorne, to increase public awareness of William Howard Taft's legacy in the law. One, Stephanie Hunter McMahon, a professor of law at the University of Cincinnati, served on the board of the Friends. Hawthorne thought the partnership with the law community was only growing stronger. If William Howard Taft National Historic Site were truly to become "the U.S. Supreme Court site" in the National Park System, then the law community in Cincinnati would welcome it and continue to be a strong partner.[67]

[64] Hawthorne interview.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Patricia Garry, interview by Theodore Catton, April 4, 2019; Hawthorne interview.

Chapter Six

Cultural Resource Management

NPS recognizes six subdisciplines in its cultural resource management program: archeology, ethnography, history, historical architecture, museum collections management, and cultural landscape management. This chapter examines how the various subdisciplines have been involved at William Howard Taft National Historic Site. For present purposes, the first section on archeology includes ethnography and the next section on history includes historical architecture.

Archeology

NPS made four separate archeological investigations at William Howard Taft National Historic Site in the decade from 1972 to 1982. The main archeological resource recovered by these investigations was a pair of cisterns. One cistern probably predated Alphonso Taft's purchase of the house, while the other was put in the ground a few months prior to the construction of the 1851 addition. The cisterns were partially covered by the foundation for the addition. Archeologists excavated the two cisterns and the 1851 cistern was turned into an exhibit under Plexiglass in the basement of the house.[1]

The archeological investigations were also important in revealing the herringbone pattern and layout of historic walkways, which were replicated in the historic restoration of the grounds. Through a combination of archeological and historical research, it was believed that Alphonso Taft replaced the original walk to the front door and added a second walk around the house to the north entrance on the basement level and more walks around the other side to the south and east entrances.[2]

Archeological investigation was constrained by the fact that the sloping property was built up with fill material in the decades after 1877; the historic grade to the rear of the house where outbuildings once stood was mostly buried so deep that

[1] For a physical description of the cisterns see the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for William Howard Taft National Historic Site (2015) at Section 7, p. 33.
[2] National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for William Howard Taft National Historic Site (2015) at Section 7, pp. 29-30.

excavation was impractical. Superintendents in the 1980s contended that more archeological investigation was warranted but the depth of fill discouraged it.[3]

The first archeological investigation of the Site occurred in 1972. Major Charles Ross McCollough, a newly minted Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, was contracted by NPS through the Ohio Historical Society to perform preliminary historical research and archeological survey with the aim of developing information about the historic grounds. McCollough prepared two typescript reports, the first subtitled "Historic Grounds Report" and the second subtitled "Archeological Investigations of Grounds." Based on his historical research, McCollough noted the existence of historic outbuildings, a vegetable garden, and a probable fruit orchard on the property. Through his archeological survey, McCollough found a cistern, a brick walkway to a privy, and traces of an iron fence along the south property line, but he did not locate the historic outbuildings or the orchard. He used a limited resistivity survey, trenching with a backhoe, and exploratory trenching and excavation to discern some of the historic contours and assess how much fill was present in the rear portion of the historic property. He found that the historic grade lay near the surface around the southeast corner of the house but was buried by as much as seven feet of clay fill along the north and east sections of the lot, making it impractical to continue the search for remains of historic outbuildings.[4]

The next archeological investigation was made in 1974. Deborah K. Bauxar, archeologist with the Denver Service Center, made several test excavations around the rear addition of the house to assess the condition of the foundation prior to stabilization. She further examined the cistern. She discovered brick laid in herringbone pattern near the southwest porch area and recovered numerous glass and metal artifacts. In follow-up to her investigation, NPS contracted with Southside Historical Sites, Inc. of Williamsburg, Virginia to identify and analyze the 492 artifacts she had collected. The report prepared by Jan H. House found that the artifacts postdated the Site's period of historical significance 1851-1877. Moreover, House stated that the artifacts collected by Bauxar had little analytical value because of inadequacies in Bauxar's field notes as well as probable prior disturbance of the ground by McCollough's backhoe operation.[5]

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[3] National Park Service, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site Resource Management Plan," 1981 (revised 1982 and recommended and approved 1986), William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18 Planning Program, p. 13.

[4] Lee, *Administrative History*, 74-75; Scruggs and Hammond, Inc., *William Howard Taft National Historic Site Cultural Landscape Report*, 17; Mark A. Chavez, *Brick Walks Historic Structure Report, William Howard Taft National Historic Site* (Omaha, Nebr.: National Park Service, Midwest Region, 1988), 11; Leslie Perry, "Preliminary Report on Archeological Testing at William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Hamilton County, Cincinnati, Ohio," typescript report, May 14, 1982, William Howard Taft NHS, p. 5.

[5] Lee, *Administrative History*, 76; Perry, "Preliminary Report," op. cit., 6.

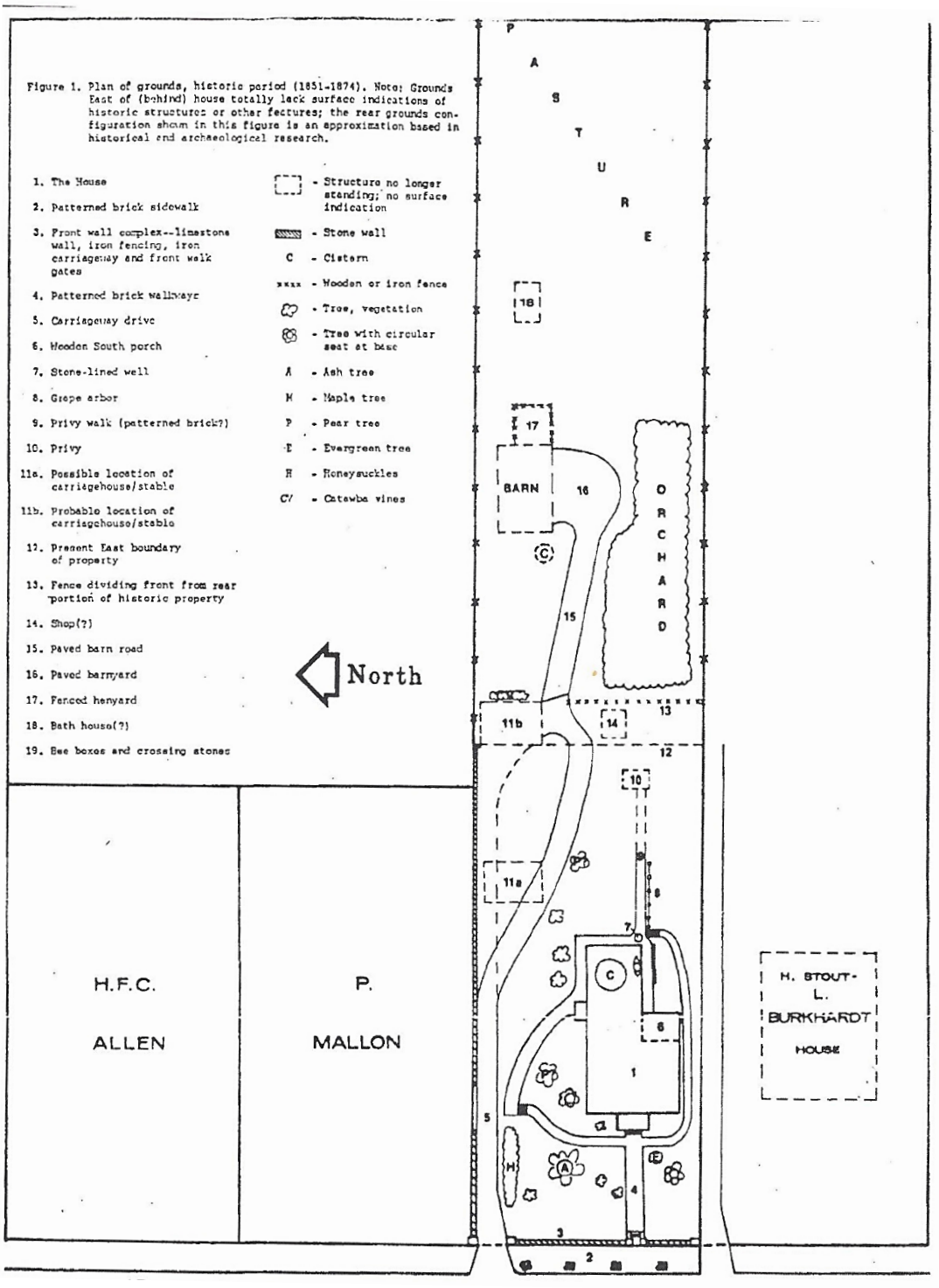


Figure 38. Charles Ross McCollough's "Plan of grounds, historic period (1851-1874)" from his 1971 report.

The archeological investigations in 1972 and 1974 both pointed to the historic Taft property having low potential to yield much information through further archeology. Superintendent Boyd thought differently, however, believing that the archeological work was "not conclusive" and that more information was needed about the location of the carriage drive, the historic configuration of the north retaining wall, and the extent of historic materials in the ground. Prior to the start of house stabilization and restoration work in 1982, she arranged with the NPS Midwest Archeological Center in Lincoln, Nebraska for an archeological investigation focused on the west and north yards and the carriage drive. The project also included another inspection of the cistern, which Boyd had determined to save, and further testing of the ground adjacent to the foundation walls of the addition.[6]

Leslie Perry of the Midwest Archeological Center led a field crew in two weeks of investigation at the Site in April and May 1982. The crew conducted shovel tests at three-meter intervals along thirteen transects on the west and north side of the house and excavated seven units to a depth of 10 centimeters and sifted all material through a ¼ inch screen. The crew recovered some 3,000 artifacts, including a significant yield of domestic, subsistence, and personal materials.[7]

The last archeological investigation was made by Jeff Richner of the Midwest Archeological Center two months later in July 1982. Acting on a tip from the Denver Service Center team who were preparing the house restoration, Richner focused on an area in the historic cellar beneath the basement floor that had apparently received refuse during the period when the Tafts occupied the house. Richner's investigation recovered several thousand more artifacts, including faunal bones and other food remains.[8]

All these artifacts – four collections in total – were accessioned into the Midwest Archeological Center. The artifact collections made by McCollough and Bauxar were transferred from the basement of the Taft house to the Midwest Archeological Center around 1985.[9]

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[6] Superintendent to Director, Midwest Archeological Center, February 25, 1982, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1.
[7] Perry, "Preliminary Report," op. cit., 7-8.
[8] Lee, *Administrative History*, 77.
[9] Midwest Archeological Center, Accessions 256, 258, 174A, and 174B. The Center also has on file the following reports: Major Charles Ross McCollough, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Archaeological Investigation of Grounds," 1972; Deborah K. Bauxar, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site Archeological Investigation of Foundation and Cistern," 1975; Jan H. House, "Artifacts from William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Archeological Investigation: Foundation and Cistern," 1976. The year of transfer is approximate; the Site's 1985 Scope of Collection Statement implied that the collections were already held at the Midwest Archeological Center whereas the Center's accession records give the year as 1987.

NPS conducted archeological monitoring in 1987 as it prepared to demolish the apartment building at 219 Southern Avenue. Although the structure stood outside the historic Taft property, its age required that it be surveyed before it was torn down. (When an asbestos problem was discovered, the terms of the property exchange were modified so that the problem had to be abated and the building demolished before the land exchange was made.) Little of archeological interest developed from the survey other than the gathering of more clues as to the depth of fill across the east section of this city block.[10]

While no more archeological work was done after 1987, some further soil probes were made in the early 1990s by Scruggs & Hammond, Inc. in connection with determining the historic location of the north retaining wall. The north retaining wall is discussed in the section on cultural landscape management later in the chapter. Scruggs & Hammond's historic photo and map research disclosed the full extent of fill in the backyard. The massive fill that was placed to extend Young Street around 1892 was highlighted in Figure A.4 of Scruggs & Hammond's *William Howard Taft National Historic Site Cultural Landscape Report*. A schematic of the historic grade compared with the existing grade was presented in Figure A.22 of the report (reproduced here as Figure 35 at right). According to Scruggs & Hammond's analysis, the depth of fill increased from a few feet directly behind the house to some thirty feet at the east end of the historic property.

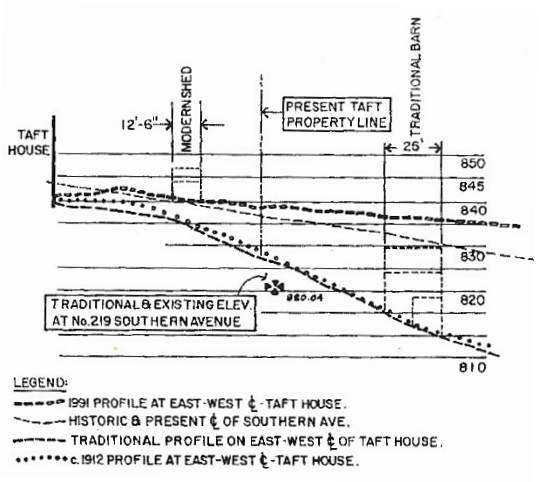


Figure 39. This schematic cross section of the slope behind the Taft house shows probable depth of fill covering archeological resources.

No ethnographic studies have been conducted or programmed for Taft.

History and Historical Architecture

Historical research was basic to NPS administration and development of the National Historic Site. It was foundational both to the restoration of the house and the development of the interpretive program.

All historical research in the Park Service serves one of three functions: interpretation, resource management, or planning. In the 1970s, NPS historians in the

[10] Acting Regional Director to Superintendent, February 4, 1987, and Mark Lynott, "MWAC comments on XXX 6518-7-0003, March 2, 1987, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, H4217 Compliance Documentation; Henderson interview.

regional office or in Washington conducted historical research for interpretation or resource management, while historians, historical architects, and planners in the Denver Service Center performed historical research for planning purposes. Of course, historical research conducted for one purpose would be assimilated by historical research undertaken for another purpose. Thus, for William Howard Taft National Historic Site, cumulative historical research underpinned the long historic restoration effort as well as the interpretive prospectus, exhibit design, and the rest of the interpretive program.[11]

NPS initiated historical research even before the Site was authorized. Historian David A. Kimball spearheaded the Alternatives Study (1968). No doubt other NPS historians got involved in briefing officials to speak and opine knowledgeably about William Howard Taft and Alphonso Taft when Congress held hearings pursuant to the National Historic Site in 1969. Historical architects were involved in research at an early stage as well. Ernest A. Connolly, head of the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, weighed in on the Site's condition and significance. NPS historians developed a preliminary summary of Taft's place in history and an overview of the "park story," both of which were included in the Master Plan of 1970.[12]

In 1972, William C. Birdsell, general superintendent for the Ohio Group, prepared a short history of the Taft house on a nomination form for the National Register of Historic Places. Birdsell included a two-page description of the house and a two-paragraph summary of its significance. Birdsell's description built on earlier ones made by the Cincinnati City Planning Commission in its *Historic Sites and Buildings* inventory report of 1960 and the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings inventory report prepared by S. Sydney Bradford in 1963. Birdsell's other sources were *Life of Alphonso Taft* by A. A. Leonard (1920), *The Life and Times of William Howard Taft* by Henry F. Pringle (1939), and *An American Family: The Tafts – 1678 to 1964* by Ishbel Ross (1964).[13]

By the time the nomination was completed in August 1972, NPS historian Edwin C. Bearss was well along in his research for a historic structure report. Bearss's work, *Historic Structure Report: Historical Data – Home* was published in October 1972. It was by far the most in-depth historical research on the Taft house ever done. Stationed in Washington from 1966, Bearss was transferred to the Denver Service Center in 1972 while he was at work on the report for William Howard Taft National

[11] Heather Huyck and Dwight Pitcaithley, "National Park Service: Historians in Interpretation, Management, and Cultural Resources Management," in *Public History: An Introduction*, edited by Barbara J. Howe and Emory L. Kemp (Malabar, Fla.: Robert E. Kreiger Publishing Company, 1986), 358-74.
[12] Lee, *Administrative History*, 28, 107-08.
[13] William C. Birdsell, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site," nomination form, August 1, 1972, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 3.

Historic Site. Later he would become NPS chief historian, serving in that post from 1981 to 1994.

Bearss perused the large Taft family correspondence to develop a detailed narrative about the Taft occupancy of the house. His main purpose was to provide data for the historic restoration, while his secondary purpose was to detail family activities in and around the home for use in the interpretive program. The lengthy narrative followed a detailed outline that was both chronological and episodic, with headings and subheadings such as "Life Goes on as the Nation Drifts Toward Civil War" and "The Millbury Visit and Willie's Third Birthday." The table of contents itself ran to 12 pages.

Bearss stated in his foreword that "thousands of pages of manuscript materials were examined." Peter Rawson Taft's diary and Louise Taft's letters to her sisters were among the sources most frequently cited in the footnotes. Insurance records associated with the 1877 fire and accounting records of construction materials and furnishings purchased in the wake of the fire made up another big swath of source material.

Despite the report's thoroughness, however, it fell short of providing NPS historical architects and planners with what they needed to plan the historic restoration. As Associate Regional Director John Kawamoto later observed, the study by Ed Bearss "was one of those that was done under the old Park Service formula where you had a little bit more historic research and dang little on the fabric and so we really had no basis for making solid decisions." Bearss did obtain input from historical architects Hugh Miller and Norm Souder as to what information they and their colleagues would need to plan and design the historic restoration, but he approached his assignment primarily with the goal of cataloguing historical data found in the written record, leaving it to others to investigate and report on the historic fabric.[14]

Historical architects were tasked to prepare a companion volume, *Historic Structure Report – Architectural Data Section*. The work was first assigned to Norm Souder. His report was based primarily on visual examination with limited probing and sampling. It was finally deemed insufficient, so it was not published. A second effort was assigned to Anthony Crosby of the Denver Service Center. Crosby incorporated the results of the extensive fabric investigation led by Gordie Whittington and considered major renovations made to the house in 1877 and 1940 and the partial restoration performed in 1964. By the time Crosby completed the report in 1979, it

[14] Kawamoto interview; Bearss, *Historic Structure Report*, i-ii.

was not so much a research report as a planning document, having become deeply entwined with the impending historic restoration effort.[15]

During the 1980s, historical research focused mainly on developing the interpretive program. A team of interpretive planners, historians, and historical architects prepared the Interpretive Prospectus. Ed Bearss and Hugh Miller were consultants to the team. More historical research went into planning and design of exhibits. Superintendent Kesselman and Park Historian Ella Rayburn worked with interpretive planners and historians at Harpers Ferry Center. Another NPS historian, the Midwest Region's Chief of Cultural Resource Management Andy Ketterson, took part in interpretive development as well as ongoing discussions about the historic restoration.

Some NPS historical research for Taft extended to the history of Mount Auburn. The report by Bearss touched on the historical development of Mount Auburn and Auburn Street. Independent of the research by NPS, the Mount Auburn Community Council called for establishment of a local historic district to include all of Mount Auburn. In 1973, the Mount Auburn Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and included historic houses on Auburn Avenue from William Howard Taft Road to the vicinity of Ringgold Street. In 1974, the Mount Auburn Community Council and Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation completed the Mount Auburn Community Development Plan, which called for enlargement of the historic district, but the plan's recommendation was not carried out. The Interpretive Prospectus noted that local historic preservation efforts should be supported, and in 1985 Superintendent Kesselman submitted a proposal for a research project to assist the larger historic district nomination. Before NPS funds were forthcoming, the Historic Conservation Office of the Cincinnati City Planning Department undertook this study. The resulting report proposed a district boundary to include properties on East Hollister Street, the north side of Wellington Place, and several structures on William Howard Taft Road, East McMillan Street, and Sycamore Street. Despite the supporting historical research, the original historic district boundary remained unchanged even as two dozen other historic districts in Cincinnati were listed on the National Register during the 1970s and 1980s.[16]

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[15] National Park Service, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site Resources Management Plan," 1981 (revised 1982 and recommended and approved 1986), William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18 Planning Program, p.6.

[16] City of Cincinnati, "National Register Historic Districts," at https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/buildings/historic-conservation/national-register-historic-districts/ <July 20, 2019>; Superintendent to Regional Director, September 27, 1985, WIHO, CF, H22; Cincinnati City Planning Department, Historic Conservation Office, "Auburn Avenue Historic District," November 1987, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, H22.

Staff at William Howard Taft National Historic Site occasionally performed or assisted with historical research as a service to the public. Taft's first chief of interpretation, Bob Moore, compiled a detailed chronology of William Howard Taft from the William Howard Taft Papers. He prepared a memorandum on various homes Taft lived in throughout his life, including information about "The Quarry," the house that William Howard Taft and Helen Herron Taft built at 1763 McMillan Street in Cincinnati soon after they were married.[17] In 2008, Chief of Interpretation Henderson assisted historian Doris Kearns Goodwin when she visited the Site while doing research for her book, *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism.*[18]

NPS developed its List of Classified Structures (LCS) as a management tool for taking care of historic resources. Initially the Site listed the Taft house in the LCS and nothing else. By the 1990s, NPS was taking a more fine-grained approach with this inventory. Historical architect Ellyn P. Goldkind and architectural historian Dena Sanford, both employees of the Midwest Regional Office, visited the Site in October 1994 to update the Site's LCS listing and identify potential additions to the LCS. On Goldkind's and Sanford's recommendation, eight items were added to the LCS. Goldkind and Sanford described them as "small landscape elements" that were present when the Taft family occupied the property. Since all these items were contributing elements to the National Historic Site, and since the Site was already listed on the National Register of Historic Places, there was no need to determine their eligibility for the National Register listing. NPS did, however, consult the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) prior to listing them in the LCS. In the new LCS listing, the Taft Home was designated HS-01, and the additional elements were as follows: Taft Home – Fence (HS-02), Taft Home – Brick Walks (HS-03), Taft Home – Carriageway (HS-04), Taft Home – Well (HS-05), Taft Home – North Retaining Wall (HS-06), Taft Home – Cisterns (HS-07), Wood Post (HS-08), and Concrete Cobbles (HS-09). The last two elements lacked information to assess their significance within the Site setting and were included provisionally. Later they were dropped.[19]

In the mid 2000s, three more items were added to the LCS. These were all monuments to various Tafts that were placed at the Site in the early 2000s (see Chapter Three). The first was an Ohio Historical Marker (Monument-1) that was placed along Auburn Avenue in 2003 identifying the house as the birthplace of William Howard Taft and summarizing his public career. The second was a memorial

[17] Robert J. Moore, Jr. to James E. Brown, September 20, 1990, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, 1990 Daily Blues.
[18] Superintendent's Annual Report for 2008, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2621.
[19] Historical Architect and Architectural Historian to Acting Associate Regional Director, October 17, 1994, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 4, File 006.1; Acting Regional Director to Superintendent, October 26, 1994, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, H3017.

plaque placed next to the cherry tree that was planted in honor of Helen Herron Taft (Monument-2). The third was a bronze bust of Senator Robert A. Taft (Monument-3).[20]

Standards for recording historic properties for the National Register of Historic Places improved over the years. The two-page description prepared by Birdsell in 1971 sufficed at the time but was deemed inadequate as standards rose. Historical architect David Arbogast rewrote the description in 1975. Forty years later, NPS contracted for a second rewrite. Melissa Dirr Gengler and Liz Sargent of Historic Resources Group, Inc. in Lincoln, Nebraska prepared a new National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for William Howard Taft National Historic Site and a new National Historic Landmark Nomination for the William Howard Taft Home. These documents were several times the length of the earlier ones. Both new documents contained a fuller description of historical significance and listed a longer bibliography. Both new documents followed the LCS in identifying nine contributing structures and gave a physical description and an estimated date of construction for each one. The National Register form listed four non-contributing buildings as well: the Taft Education Center, the Carriage Shed (a modern equipment shed placed in a way to be reminiscent of the historic carriage shed), the Sanning Apartment building, and the Hamilton County Juvenile Court Youth Center. The last two were included because they stood within the authorized boundary. The National Register nomination was signed by the Keeper of the National Register on October 21, 2015, and Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell certified the updated National Historic Landmark nomination on November 2, 2016.[21]

Museum Collection

The enabling legislation for William Howard Taft National Historic Site gave NPS the mission to preserve the birthplace for the interpretation, education, and benefit of the public. Contained within that mission, NPS had the responsibility to acquire and preserve a museum collection relevant to the Site's purposes. For Taft, that meant there was to be a cultural history collection but no natural history collection. The cultural history collection contained both an archeology collection and a history collection but only the latter was managed onsite. All collections of archeological artifacts recovered at the Site were accessioned at the Midwest Archeological Center. Thus, the museum collection at Taft primarily referred to the

[20] E. Ray Henderson to Regional Director, September 12, 2008, William Howard Taft NHS, CF H3017.
[21] National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for William Howard Taft National Historic Site (2015), and National Historic Landmark Nomination (2016).

history collection, which comprised three-dimensional objects, manuscripts, and various types of photographic materials.[22]

The core of the museum collection was originally the William Howard Taft Memorial Association's collection. Even before the National Historic Site was established, the WHTMA sought items for refurnishing the house and exhibiting in a house museum. It appealed to far-flung members of the Taft family who might have heirlooms or other mementos of William Howard Taft to gift those items to the WHTMA. Through the 1960s and 1970s it collected a great many furnishings, books, photographs, and documents. It held the collection in an offsite storage facility. After the National Historic Site was established, NPS gained access to the collection and took over responsibility for the monthly storage charge while the WHTMA retained ownership. A few items from the collection were exhibited in the visitor reception area in the Sanning Building in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Finally, on June 14, 1983, the WHTMA transferred the entire collection to NPS by a deed of gift.[23]



Figure 40. The museum collection contains many books and furnishings on permanent display in the house, such as this table and three-volume set in the parlor. (Library of Congress.)

After NPS took over the collection it had to be catalogued and consolidated. It happened that Taft acquired the museum collection around the same time that museum collection management was being upgraded throughout the National Park System. Each unit was being equipped with a scope of collections statement to guide its museum collection acquisitions, and a national catalogue system was in development for tracking museum collection preservation efforts in every unit. Taft got a historian on staff in 1985, and it got its first scope of collections statement later that year. Cataloging efforts started about the same time. Ray Henderson recalled that the staff had an area for processing the museum collection on the second floor of the Taft house

[22] National Park Service, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site Scope of Collections Statement," 1985, WIHO, unmarked cabinet, FY 1985, pp. 1-3; National Park Service, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site Scope of Collections Statement," 2015, museum storage room, pp. 6-7.

[23] Park Manager to General Superintendent, Ohio Group, May 4, 1972, William Howard Taft NHS, CF A3821; National Park Service, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site Scope of Collections Statement," 1985, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, FY 1985, p. 1.

and seasonal employees worked in that space for several months cataloging everything.[24]

The *Scope of Collections* defined five categories of historical items that were relevant to the Site's purposes. First, furnishings and household objects were pertinent if they were used in the Taft home between 1857 and 1877, the period targeted by the historic furnishings plan. Second, objects directly associated with the career of William Howard Taft were pertinent for exhibit purposes. Third, books, letters, photographs, sound recordings, and similar materials were pertinent if they related to the historic period of the home or to Taft's career. The papers of the William Howard Taft Memorial Association were included in this category as well. Fourth, items of historic fabric of the house that were removed and not incorporated into the historic restoration were pertinent for the information they contained about the house. Post-1877 architectural elements and photographs of the house were included in this category. Fifth, a library of books and reference materials would be maintained inasmuch as it was necessary for the operation of the Site. The library would include materials pertaining to the Taft family, and the history of Cincinnati, the state, the decorative arts, Taft's era, and NPS.[25]

When the cataloging was complete, the Site found that it had over two dozen excess objects: chairs, beds, fireplace facades, lamps and such. In aggregate these items required considerable storage space and they were worth a lot of money in the Cincinnati antique market. Meanwhile, the Site still needed to acquire other objects that it would likely find for sale in the antique market. But NPS policy prohibited the Site from simply deaccessioning and disposing of items from its museum collection to acquire others instead. Furthermore, the Site could not use the Friends group to circumvent the prohibition: it could not give excess items to the Friends to sell in the local antique market to raise money so that the group could then buy other objects and give them to the Site. However, what it could do with the Friends group was exchange items of similar value. Thus, the Friends could purchase antiques and other items that the Site needed for its furnishings plan, give them to the Site in exchange for deaccessioned objects of similar value, and then dispose of those objects to recoup its costs. With guidance from the regional office, Superintendent Kesselman and Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace President Mary A. Heller forged a memorandum of understanding to put this arrangement into effect. The memorandum of understanding still provided for all excess museum objects to be offered first to other NPS areas (and there were takers – one bed, for example, went to Fort Larned National Historic Site, Kansas). After that, the exchange could go forward. As a result,

[24] Henderson interview.
[25] National Park Service, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site Scope of Collections Statement," 1985, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, FY 1985, pp. 4-5.

about $10,000 worth of objects that the WHTMA had collected originally and had given to NPS in 1983 were returned to the Friends group in exchange for about $10,000 worth of items that the Friends purchased on behalf of the Site. At the same time, the Site accomplished another goal by reducing the number of inappropriate objects in its collection, thereby reducing storage and conservation costs.[26]

Museum collection storage was an evolving problem. Through the 1980s and 1990s there was a rotation of storage spaces. Initially, the furniture collection was held at an offsite facility, Security Storage on Oak Street. Some items were moved into a rented space in the Sanning building. Smaller items were kept in locked cabinets, which were housed in the basement of the Taft house and the Sanning building. Once the house restoration was completed in 1988, most of the furnishings were moved to in-place exhibits throughout the house, while manuscripts, photographs, sound recordings and such were kept in museum storage in the basement. Still, about 200 objects remained at Security Storage. Finally, when the Taft Education Center was completed in 1999, all the museum collection that was not exhibited in the house was consolidated in the storage area in the basement of the new building.[27]



Figure 41. Museum storage space in the Taft Education Center. Note Charlie Taft's famous yellow canoe. (Author's photo.)

Other storage needs at the Site intersected with the museum collection storage problem. Three metal sheds occupied the northeast corner of the property where the carriage shed now stands. They provided a limited amount of additional storage for museum collection objects, although those sheds were primarily used to house maintenance tools and building materials that accumulated during the house restoration. The latter included items such as rotted, replaced window shutters that were probably not historic but were being preserved just in case. These materials spilled out of the sheds into a kind of "boneyard," making the whole complex an "eyesore." Eventually, in 1996 or 1997, the building materials were deemed to be

[26] Superintendent to Regional Director, February 19, 1987, Acting Regional Director to Superintendent, March 23, 1987, and Steve Kesselman to Mary A. Heller, May 26, 1987, enclosing memorandum of understanding, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D6215.
[27] Regional Museum Specialist to Associate Regional Director, May 7, 1993, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D6215; Henderson interview.

worthless and were hauled away and the three metal sheds and "boneyard" were eliminated. The carriage shed was built in 1997.[28]

The rotation of storage spaces transpired as NPS sought to upgrade museum storage facilities systemwide as part of its effort to bring all collection management up to museum standards. Taft had a collection management plan prepared in 1992 and a collection storage plan prepared in 1993. It also had a security survey made according to guidelines in the NPS *Museum Handbook*, resulting in another report in 1993 on museum collection security and fire safety.[29]

Among the concerns raised in this period was climate control in the Taft house, since the museum collection was dispersed throughout the building. The HVAC system was already giving problems. Excessive humidity was a threat to fabrics, wallpaper, and other materials. When the Taft Education Center was completed in 1999, the National Historic Site finally had a museum storage area with state-of-the-art climate control. Still, the faulty HVAC system continued to present challenges for the proper care of all those objects in the museum collection that were part of in-place exhibits in the house.[30]

Security for the museum collection was a lesser concern. The survey made in 1993 found that "the overall level of security and fire safety in this park is generally excellent." The report noted the high degree of cleanliness and lack of clutter in the Taft house and commented "it is obvious that the staff takes great pride in the building and its furnishings." Years later, Kerry Wood noted that the museum collection had never suffered harm from fire, flood, rodents, insects, or vandals. Visitors could inadvertently damage museum objects by touching them or spilling on them but there was little evidence of that, either. Shortage of staff to monitor visitors in the house was only of mild concern. The survey in 1993 recommended that "there should be a minimum of two people on duty in the house when it is open to the public." Given staffing levels, however, the Site could not muster that much surveillance, and the feeling by staff was that it was not needed.[31]

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[28] Superintendent to Associate Regional Director, December 4, 1991, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 2, File 003.10; Superintendent to Regional Director, April 7, 1994, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18; Henderson interview.

[29] Wendy Claire Jessup, "Collection Management Plan for William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Cincinnati, Ohio," September 23, 1992, report prepared for Midwest Regional Office, ETIC; Regional Museum Specialist to Associate Regional Director, May 7, 1993, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D6215; Danny L. McDaniel, "Survey of Museum Collection Security and Fire Safety, William Howard Taft National Historic Site," March 16-17, 1993, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D6215.

[30] Wendy Claire Jessup, "Collection Management Plan for William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Cincinnati, Ohio," September 23, 1992, report prepared for Midwest Regional Office, ETIC; Pennington interview.

[31] Danny L. McDaniel, "Survey of Museum Collection Security and Fire Safety, William Howard Taft National Historic Site," March 16-17, 1993, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D6215; Wood interview.

Cultural Landscape Management

Cultural landscape restoration was an aspirational goal for NPS at William Howard Taft National Historic Site from the beginning. Deputy Assistant Director Raymond L. Freeman wrote in 1968: "It would be our intention to create, as far as practicable, a historically accurate scene of the time of William Howard Taft's occupancy."[32] Everyone acknowledged that the rear of the historic property would not be included in that endeavor for the foreseeable future, having been subdivided, sold to the county, and occupied by the Juvenile Court building. Yet the hope remained that adjacent lots along Southern Avenue might be added to the Site and that perhaps, too, the Juvenile Court would someday relocate its facility and transfer the property to NPS. Park Manager Jerry Licari expressed that vision clearly in a letter to the Mount Auburn Community Council in 1974:

> Our proposal for the total restoration of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site is presently being formulated and will be presented to the Mt. Auburn Community Council for consideration as soon as possible. The total restoration, to include the historic grounds extending down from the grounds now managed by the National Park Service to Young Street, is precluded by the use of those grounds by the Hamilton County Juvenile Detention Center at this time. For this reason, the interest of the National Park Service in these grounds is a long-range consideration.[33]

While "total restoration" was never more than a "long-range consideration" as stated by Licari, it became an even more remote possibility when Hamilton County replaced its facility with a new building in the early 1990s. NPS resigned itself to the new construction. It did not attempt to interpose except to request a meeting with the facility superintendent to discuss screening issues. Superintendent Gerbauckas and Regional Cultural Landscape Architect Mary V. Hughes met with Hamilton County Juvenile Detention Center Superintendent Bob Dugan and the architect in July 1991 to discuss the layout of the building, parking areas, and vehicle entrance. The main thing NPS hoped to get was for the county to locate the driveway entrance from Auburn Avenue a few feet to the south to allow for some vegetative screening between it and the National Historic Site. Hughes's record of the meeting stated that it was a productive exchange of viewpoints though NPS did not get what it wanted. The

[32] Raymond L. Freeman, Deputy Assistant Director, to Charles P. Taft, March 5, 1968, NA II, RG 79, Entry 11a, Box 2131, Proposed Areas.
[33] Park Manager to Mt. Auburn Community Council, September 27, 1974, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '73.

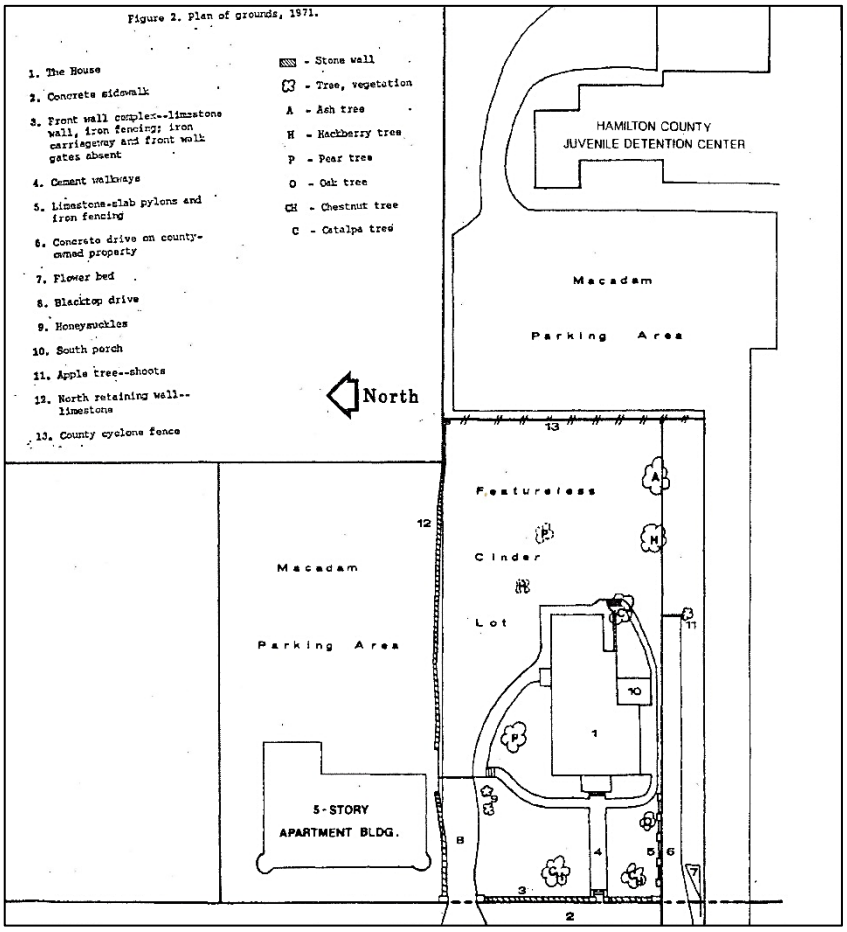


Figure 42. McCollough's map of existing conditions in 1971 was reproduced in Mark A. Chavez, *Brick Walks Historic Structures Report, William Howard Taft National Historic Site*.

county insisted on placing the driveway very close to the Taft house, leaving too little space for vegetative screening.[34]

Short of total restoration of the historic Taft property or the creation of a historically accurate scene, NPS laid out more modest, attainable goals for restoration of historic grounds. The 1981 Master Plan stated: "Historic grounds restoration will be undertaken only on lands under National Park Service jurisdiction that were originally part of the Taft property."[35] A land protection plan prepared in 1983 stated: "The historic grounds to the rear of the home have been so extensively disturbed that the original outbuildings and historic grade cannot be reclaimed. These grounds will be

[34] Regional Cultural Landscape Architect to Associate Regional Director, July 31, 1991, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D5215.
[35] National Park Service, *Master Plan, William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Ohio*, 20.

landscaped in a manner which is complimentary to the historic scene."[36] In the mid to late 1980s, as restoration of the house neared completion, NPS began to flesh out in more detail what the restoration of historic grounds would entail. A lengthy statement of the problem was included in a resource management plan approved in 1986.[37] Specific actions pending and recently taken were described in statements for management approved in 1988 and 1991. The treatment of the grounds included three main elements: first, the restoration of historic walkways and carriage way; second, the stabilization and restoration of the north retaining wall; and third, the treatment of historically derived vegetation.[38]

Regional historical architect Mark A. Chavez made a thorough review and analysis of previous historical and archeological findings about the historic brick walks around the exterior of the Taft house. His 1988 report, *Brick Walks Historic Structures Report, William Howard Taft National Historic Site*, provided the necessary background for a design contract to replace the existing concrete sidewalks with brick walks in the herringbone style. The job of removing modern walks and laying brick walks was contracted in the spring of 1989. This job constituted a major start with more to do.[39]

The north retaining wall first received close attention in a project statement contained in the resources management plan approved in 1986. The plan stated:

> The Taft historic site has an elevation higher than the properties on the north, east, and south. The north boundary between the site and the parking lot of the adjacent apartment building (the Sanning) is supported by a stone retaining wall of 10-15 feet in height. Some sections of the wall are on park land, and others are on the neighboring land. Although that land is within the authorized boundary of the park, its acquisition by the NPS is remote. The wall is apparently deteriorating; its long term stability is not known. It is also unknown how much of the wall was present during the historic period of the site. Both a historic and engineering examination are therefore needed, and plans drawn accordingly. If historic, the wall should be restored; if

[36] National Park Service, "Land Protection Plan, William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Ohio," 1983, ETIC.
[37] National Park Service, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Resources Management Plan," 1981 (revised 1982 and recommended and approved 1986), William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18 Planning Program, pp. 16, 19.
[38] National Park Service, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Statement for Management," 1988, p. 12, and 1991, pp. 7-8, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18.
[39] Chavez, *Brick Walks Historic Structures Report*, 3; Superintendent's Annual Report for 1988, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, FY '89 Daily Yellows.

> unstable, an appropriate and hidden supporting structure will need to be designed.[40]

The plan recommended starting with historic and engineering studies and proceeding with whatever work had to be done using a phased approach, day labor, and small contracts, and coordinating the project with restoration of the historic grounds. As a result, treatment of the north retaining wall was stretched out over the next ten years. It was not so much a major issue as an attenuated one.

Meanwhile, NPS contracted for a cultural landscape report. In the late 1980s and early 1990s NPS was creating its cultural landscape program: defining aims and approaches and developing a template for a new type of planning document, the cultural landscape report. Cultural landscapes were formally recognized as cultural resources in the agency's 1988 *Management Policies*.[41] NPS contracted for a cultural landscape report for Taft in 1991 when its national program for cultural landscape management was still in the development stage. The cultural landscape report for Taft was timely for making management decisions, but the project's timing was complicated for report preparation. The preparers had to delve into the unresolved issue of the north retaining wall as well as consider the current reconstruction of the Hamilton County Juvenile Detention Center on the adjacent property. They also had to contend with conflicting expectations about what a cultural landscape report was supposed to achieve. The contractor for the study was Scruggs and Hammond, Inc., Landscape Architects, of Columbus, Ohio. The firm worked with NPS through multiple drafts of the report and changes in the scope of services and finally delivered a solid, useful report in 1993. After that, the contract was modified to include a construction package for implementation of many of the report's recommendations.[42]

Early in the process of preparing the cultural landscape report, Scruggs and Hammond received a supplemental assignment to undertake a physical investigation of the north retaining wall. The effort followed a preliminary report by Mark A. Chavez, "North Retaining Wall, Historical Analysis and Existing Conditions Report." Chavez determined that a portion of the wall dated from the historic period, but he did not determine if more wall from the historic period remained intact, buried in the slope where the grade had been modified by fill. With the help of a subcontractor, BBC&M

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[40] National Park Service, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site Resources Management Plan," William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D18, p. 19.

[41] Robert R. Page, Cathy A. Gilbert, and Susan A. Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Processes, and Techniques* (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1988), 7.

[42] Superintendent to Associate Regional Director, December 5, 1991, and Gerald T. McClarnon to Walter H. Roch von Rochsburg, October 5, 1992, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 2, Folder 003.10; McClarnon to von Rochsburg, March 10, 1992, and Mary V. Hughes to von Rochsburg, January 11, 1993, and Debra E. Imhoff to von Rochsburg, July 22, 1994, and Acting Superintendent to Associate Regional Director, June 30, 1995, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, D5215.

Engineering, Inc., Scruggs and Hammond investigated the slope with core boring, trenches, and pits dug at selected points to determine the extent of fill, the composition of the fill material, and the condition of the historic resource buried in the slope. Scruggs and Hammond found that the slope had been modified by gradual placement of fill through the first half of the twentieth century. A crude masonry wall had been built along the crest around the 1950s, and this wall had largely crumbled away, strewing chunks down the bank. Remnants of historic wall existed within the slope and could be restored.[43]

The cultural landscape report provided a valuable synthesis of how the grade had been modified over the many decades. It offered new information to NPS staff on the vernacular landscape tradition which the Taft property represented. The section on history served Site staff as a valuable research resource for the interpretation of the Site. One thing the report might have done better, Site staff noted, was provide more details on plant species historically present at the Site, since that information was available in Taft family letters in the Site's museum collection.[44]

The cultural landscape report gave the National Historic Site a roadmap to undertake the three main elements of grounds restoration contemplated almost from the beginning: restoration of historic walkways and carriage way; rehabilitation of the north retaining wall; and planting of vegetation. It recommended restoring most of the property to its historic period appearance. The area included the entire front of the property together with the entire north side from the house to the top of the retaining wall. Only the southwest corner of the property was excepted. In this area vegetative screens would be established to soften the views of the Hamilton County Juvenile Detention Center and the driveway leading to the center. Other plantings would screen the air conditioning units placed at the rear of the property. There would be no effort to restore the historic grade in that back area, leaving archeological resources undisturbed.[45]

Superintendent Topham steered the cultural landscape restoration through the next phase of project design and budget requests. In the summer of 1996, he secured

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[43] Mark A. Chavez, "Historical Analysis and Existing Conditions Report, North Retaining Wall, William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Cincinnati, Ohio," 1987, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 2, File 003.13; Scruggs and Hammond, Inc., "A Supplemental Investigative Report of Conditions in the North Retaining Wall," no date, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 3.
[44] Gerald T. McClarnon to Walter H. Roch von Rochsburg, October 5, 1992, enclosing review comments, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 2, File 003.11.
[45] Scruggs and Hammond, *William Howard Taft National Historic Site Cultural Landscape Report*, 29-32.



Figure 43. A section of the Cincinnati waterfront in 1866 with Mount Adams in the background. The steamboat landing stretched the whole length of the city. (Library of Congress.)

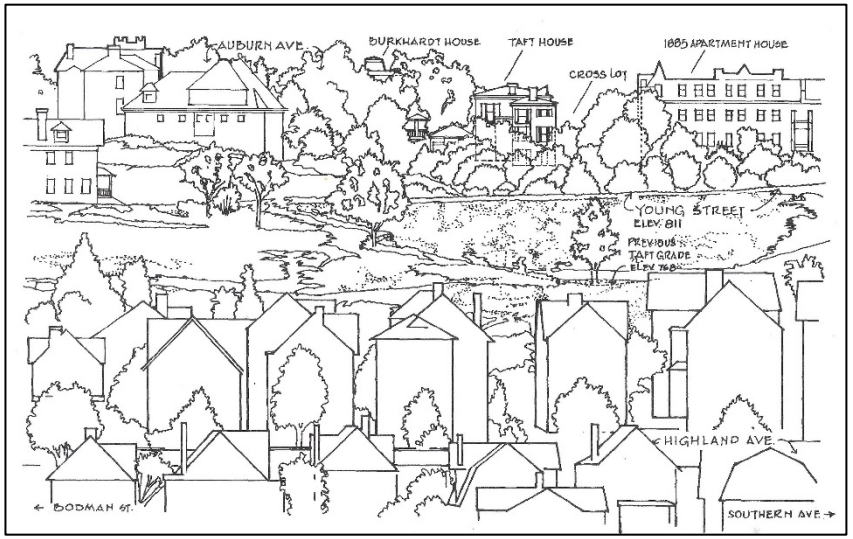


Figure 44. This figure from the cultural landscape report prepared by Scruggs and Hammond, adapted from a historical photo, shows the depth of fill at the rear of the historic Taft property which makes archeological excavation of the area impractical.

the funding and got a contract awarded, with work to commence at the start of the next fiscal year. The work was to be spread over five phases or about five years.[46]

Only Phase I of the project appears to have been completed at this time, yet it alone was significant for it included all the following:

- In the southwest corner of the Site a modern concrete driveway, cast iron fence, and supporting brick and concrete pillars – all dating from the mid-twentieth century – were removed, and clean fill was added to bring the existing grade up to the historic grade, and the area was covered in turf.
- On the east side of the house, or rear yard, an asphalt extension of the driveway was removed, and the grade was smoothed and covered in turf.
- On the north side of the house an asphalt extension of the driveway was removed, and the historic carriage way along the north edge of the property was resurfaced with material approximating its historic appearance. The grade from the north side of the house to the carriage way was smoothed and covered in turf. Three metal sheds were removed and a modern storage building – "the carriage shed" – was constructed where the carriage barn once stood.[47]

It is unclear what happened to the remaining four phases of this project. Apparently, the funding never materialized or got diverted elsewhere. The excitement over the Taft Education Center - completed in 1999 – probably overshadowed the landscaping effort. In any case, some other elements of the Site Restoration Plan did get done. A curving brick walkway around the northeast corner of the house was added. A flagpole erected by NPS in the front yard of the Taft house was relocated to the plaza in front of the Taft Education Center. But many plantings did not get done.

In 2018, Superintendent Hawthorne revived the plan to redo plantings to resemble their historic appearance. Historical Landscape Architect Geoffrey Burt from the Midwest Region visited the Site and reviewed the cultural landscape report. After giving the plan due consideration, it was decided to follow some of the recommendations and not others, balancing historical authenticity with practicality. NPS opted not to plant fruit trees to replicate historical ones because the Site did not have staffing to do the necessary picking and pruning. NPS also decided not to remove a mature American elm tree in the backyard even though it was not part of the historic scene, because American elms of its age and size were now rare in the Midwest. NPS planted two new trees in the front yard, one redbud and one aspen. It planted forsythia bushes along the open portions of the south fence and across most of the east fence. It

[46] Kurt Topham, "Background and status of Taft Education Center Project, William Howard Taft National Historic Site," December 12, 1996, Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace Archive, Correspondence (miscellaneous).
[47] Superintendent to State Historic Preservation Officer, August 27, 1996, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, H4217.

built a two-sided screen to hide the HVAC machinery, which it painted the same shade of yellow as the house. It cut down the large tree of heaven, an invasive, near the south fence. Existing rose bushes and flower beds by the front door and front gate were reinvigorated and enlarged to resemble what was there in the 1870s.[48]

As for the area from the Site's east boundary to Young Street – the historic back end of the Taft property – it no longer received much consideration from NPS the way it did in the 1970s. Hawthorne stated he would not even think of discussing that land with the Juvenile Detention Center because the land was controlled by Hamilton County, not the center, and there was no realistic possibility that the county would give up that land when it had spent millions of dollars on the new building. There was a good fence along the property line and no issues with the neighbor. The newly planted forsythia bushes would grow to form a hedge row along the fence. "You'll still be able to see the building over the hedges," Hawthorne said, "but you won't be able to see the parking lot and all the cars, which should help the historic ambiance."[49]

[48] Hugh Hawthorne to author, August 6, 2019, email; Hawthorne interview; Wood interview.
[49] Hawthorne interview.

Chapter Seven

External Relations

Like all field units in the National Park System, William Howard Taft National Historic Site maintains relations with numerous entities outside NPS. In the beginning, the Site's two most significant connections were first, to the Taft family; and second, to the surrounding Mount Auburn community. Those connections are still important today along with three other notable ones: Friends of the Taft Legacy, Cincinnati schools, and the Cincinnati law community. In addition, the Site has relations with city, county, and state government; the Ohio congressional delegation; federal partners in the region; civic organizations; and close neighbors such as Christ Hospital.

The Taft Family Connection

The Taft family was important to the National Historic Site and NPS for many reasons. First, NPS officials felt a moral indebtedness to the Taft family for gifting the property to NPS and making it a public space; they were respectful of the gift and wanted to honor the family's expectations for how the Site would be developed and used by the public. Additionally, NPS was deeply interested in cultivating good relations with the Tafts because the family wielded political influence locally and in Congress, it had considerable financial resources, it possessed familial knowledge of William Howard Taft, and it undoubtedly had historical artifacts – furniture from the Auburn Avenue home, for example – that could be of great value to the Site. The Taft family, for its part, supported the Site in furtherance of its longtime tradition of public service.

To understand the Taft family's importance to the National Historic Site in 1969 and after, it may be useful to highlight a few branches of the family tree and review some facts of who was who in this clan. The various members of the Taft family who have supported the National Historic Site over the past half century all trace their ancestry back to Alphonso Taft, with some being descendants of his eldest son, Charles Phelps Taft, others being descendants of his second son Peter Rawson Taft II, and still others – the most prominent ones in this narrative – being descended from Alphonso's first surviving son with Louise, William Howard Taft.

Charles Phelps Taft (1843-1929) came into a fortune through his marriage to Anna Sinton in 1873. Charles and Anna put their money into numerous causes, including William Howard's political campaigns. Besides their involvement in politics, they became the owners of two baseball teams, the Philadelphia Phillies and Chicago Cubs, and acquired Cincinnati's two afternoon newspapers, merging them into the *Cincinnati Times-Star*. They were also patrons of the arts. They bequeathed their art collection and their mansion to the City of Cincinnati, and it became the Taft Museum of Art. Their lifelong interest in philanthropy was carried into the next generation after their deaths when their daughter Anna Louise, with her husband William Semple, founded the Louise Taft Semple Foundation in 1941. Charles and Anna's eldest daughter, Jane, married Albert S. Ingalls, a railroad man. While the Semple branch died out after the next generation, the Ingalls branch thrived, with one offshoot, the Lawrence family, still residing in Cincinnati today.

Peter Rawson Taft II (1846-1889) and his wife Annie Matilda Hulbert had one son, Hulbert Taft, Sr. (1877-1959). Hulbert went to work for his uncle's newspaper, the *Cincinnati Times-Star*, and worked his way up to editor and then publisher and finally chairman of the board of directors. Starting in 1939, Hulbert Taft grew the enterprise by acquiring radio stations and then television stations all over Ohio. The move from newspaper publishing to broadcasting was done largely at the urging of Hulbert's son, Hulbert Taft, Jr. (1907-1967) After Hulbert Taft, Sr.'s death in 1959, the media conglomerate became the Taft Broadcasting Company and continued to expand under the leadership of Hulbert Taft, Jr. Following the death of Hulbert Taft, Jr. in a propane gas explosion, his son, Dudley S. Taft, Sr. took his father's place on the board of directors and eventually became head of the company. Dudley S. Taft, Sr. thwarted an attempted hostile takeover of the publicly traded company in 1987 but failed to return the company to private ownership. It was ultimately acquired by Cincinnati businessman Carl Lindner though it retained the name Taft Broadcasting Company. Taft Broadcasting Company continues to be a big presence in the region and this family branch remains prominent in Cincinnati today. Ken Mahler, a great-great-grandson of Peter Rawson Taft II, has stated that "the descendants of Peter Taft represent the business-related arm of the family." They have carried on the family tradition of public service through the family's publishing and broadcasting interests.[1]

The third branch is descended from the president. William Howard Taft (1857-1930) and his wife Nellie had three children: Robert Alphonso Taft, Sr. (1889-1953), Helen Herron Taft Manning (1891-1987), and Charles Phelps Taft II (1897-1983). Those descendants of the president mentioned most often in this history belong to two lines of descent, one through the president's older son and the other being the younger

[1] Ken Mahler Jr., "The Tafts: A Tradition of Public Service," typescript of remarks given to the Friends of the Taft Legacy (undated) and attached with Ken Mahler, Jr. to author, August 23, 2019, email.

son himself – Charlie Taft – and his progeny. Robert A. Taft, Sr. was, of course, the U.S. senator and three-time presidential contender who was a major fixture in American politics from the New Deal era through the Korean War. He had four children. His second, Robert A. Taft, Jr. (1917-1993), served one term in the U.S. Senate from 1971 to 1976. Robert A. Taft, Jr. also had four children. The oldest,



Figure 45. William H. Taft with wife Nellie and sons Robert (right) and Charles. (Library of Congress.)

Robert A. "Bob" Taft II, served as governor of Ohio from 1999 to 2007. Bob and his wife Hope have been actively involved with the National Historic Site through most of its history. Finally, Charlie Taft had seven children. At least two, Eleanor Kellogg Taft (1918-2004) and Seth Chase Taft (1922-2013), took an interest in the National Historic Site largely to complete their father's work.

The National Historic Site's connection to the Taft family began with Charlie Taft and his steadfast efforts in the 1960s to have the place designated a National Historic Landmark and then a National Historic Site. Charlie Taft met NPS historian Roy Appleman at the dedication ceremony when the house on Auburn Avenue was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1964. He was a regular visitor to the National Historic Site after the WHTMA deeded the property to NPS in 1970. He consulted with NPS historian Ed Bearss and NPS historical architect Hugh Miller when they examined the property in 1971. He sat with Park Manager John Lissimore through several hours of oral history interview in the winter of 1971-72. Throughout this period, he corresponded with officials at the highest levels of the organization. As

the son of President Taft as well as the president of the WHTMA, he spoke with authority for the Taft family.[2]

While the Taft family was public-spirited and generous, it could also be tough and demanding. Both Charlie Taft and his nephew, Robert Taft, Jr., wrote many cajoling letters to NPS, the Nixon administration, and Congress when the historic restoration appeared to get bogged down. Robert Taft, Jr. grandson of the president, was in the U.S. Senate from 1971 to 1976. His letters carried weight. Charlie Taft, the former city mayor, was no shrinking violet himself. Sometimes tag teaming, the grandson and son of President Taft made a formidable pair. "Dear Rog," the senator wrote to Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton on one occasion. "Please note the enclosed letter from Charles Taft." The enclosed letter from his nephew was addressed to Senator Alan Bible, reminding that the house had been donated to the United States with the understanding that it would be immediately restored, and fuming: "I am seriously thinking of filing a suit to rescind the gift on the ground of the breaking of that condition."[3] When Charlie Taft and Robert Taft, Jr. tag teamed Secretary of the Interior Morton on another occasion, they received prompt replies from both the NPS director and the Northeast Region director.[4]

After retiring from Cincinnati City Council in 1977, Charlie Taft continued his involvement with the Site. Then in his eighties, he was a living link to the 27th U.S. president at a time when the Taft administration lay more than 60 years in the past. Superintendent Fahy C. Whitaker wrote in her annual report that Charlie Taft and Robert A. Taft, Jr. were two "visitors of note" during the 1979 "Year of the Visitor."[5] Superintendent Maxine Boyd continued the correspondence with Charlie Taft and accompanied him through the house on his last visit to the place when he was in a wheelchair. After his death in 1983 at the age of 85, she told a reporter that "one of his unfulfilled dreams was that his father's home would receive the same recognition as other president's homes."[6]

By the end of Charlie Taft's life other family members stepped up to advocate for the Site in his place. Superintendent Maxine Boyd assisted with networking to create an informal "Friends of Taft" group at the end of 1982. The name list for the

[2] John T. Lissimore to Charles P. Taft II, January 11, 1972, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows – FY '72.
[3] Robert Taft, Jr. to Rogers C. B. Morton, December 12, 1973, enclosing Charles P. Taft to Alan Bible, November 9, 1973, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[4] Robert Taft, Jr., to Rogers C. B. Morton, June 27, 1973, Ronald H. Walker to Taft, July 6, 1973, and Chester L. Brooks to Taft, July 20, 1973, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, WIHO Restoration – Plans and Research 1969-1985.
[5] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1979, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '79.
[6] James R. Carroll, "Frustrating effort to restore President Taft's home," *San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle*, October 23, 1983.

first "Friends" meeting included six Tafts and eight other community members. Besides Charlie Taft, the other family members were Robert A. Taft, Jr. and his wife Blanca, Lloyd Taft (another son of Robert Alphonso Taft, Sr. and grandson of the president), and Robert A. "Bob" Taft II (son of Robert A. Taft, Jr. and great-grandson of the president) and his wife Hope.[7]

One more Taft also became engaged with the National Historic Site around this time. Seth Taft, son of Charlie Taft and grandson of President Taft, briefly came to the fore in the mid 1980s, writing letters to members of Congress, other Taft family members, and the Reagan administration to secure funding to complete the restoration. Seth Taft lived in Cleveland where he was an attorney with the Jones, Day, Reavis & Pogue law firm. In 1982, he ran unsuccessfully for governor of Ohio, losing in the Republican primary election. He came to Cincinnati frequently. After his father died in 1983, Seth Taft helped inspire the Taft family to move ahead with forming the new Friends group (together with nonfamily community members), and the group was formally incorporated in 1984.[8]

Another principal mover in forming the new Friends group was Hope Taft. Born and raised in Arkansas, she went to Southern Methodist University and earned a bachelor's degree in business administration. She met her husband in Guatemala when he was serving in the Peace Corps and settled with him in his hometown of Cincinnati. There she began to learn about the Taft family history going back to Alphonso Taft and the Cincinnati of the mid-nineteenth century. In 1976, she went door-to-door with her husband in his first political campaign, helping him to win a seat in the Ohio state legislature. In the 1980s, with Bob Taft then serving as Hamilton County commissioner, Hope saw the potential to develop William Howard Taft National



Figure 46. Hope Taft and Superintendent Kurt Topham at the grand opening of the Taft Education Center, November 5, 1999. William Howard Taft National Historic Site.

[7] Superintendent to Regional Director, December 8, 1982, with attachment, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1.
[8] Paul Sittenfeld, interview by Theodore Catton, December 4, 2018.

Historic Site into a learning center for the city. Her personal interests included history and conservation so working with NPS was a natural fit. She gave generously of her time, serving as treasurer of the Friends group one year. "I've always said that those people who marry into the family are more excited about the Taft history than those who are born into it," she would later remark.[9]

The Taft family involvement with the Site peaked in the 1980s. Hope worked closely with Superintendent Boyd on production of a gift catalog to help with fundraising. Dudley S. Taft, president of Taft Broadcasting Company and the great grandson of Peter Rawson Taft, donated $8,000 on behalf of the Louise Taft Semple Foundation for the cost of printing 5,000 copies of the catalog and distributing them to businesses, organizations and individuals in the Cincinnati area.[10] After that, other generous donations began to flow in. By January 1984, the Site had garnered $60,000 in cash contributions, including 50 shares of Taft Broadcasting Company stock valued at $2,500 and a $50,000 donation from the Rosalyn Taft Gift fund.[11]

President Reagan's re-election in 1984 became the occasion for another elaborate fundraising effort: an inaugural ball in Cincinnati reminiscent of the 1909 inaugural celebration hosted by President and Mrs. Taft. The gala event was held at the Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza on March 2, 1985. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* chortled, "For all of you who didn't make it to Washington for one of the inaugural balls this year, have we got a dance for you." Ladies were invited to don ball gowns and men to wear tuxedos as they joined the Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace for dinner, music, and dance, with actors in period costume portraying William Howard and Nellie Taft on the night of their own inaugural ball, March 2, 1909. Tickets were priced at $100, $150, and $200, with proceeds going to the historic restoration.[12]

Hope Taft and Superintendent Maxine Boyd became friends. In May 1985, shortly after retiring, Boyd met Hope Taft and her older cousin, Eleanor Taft Hall, to show them the progress of the exterior restoration and to inspect the lot at Southern Avenue and Young Street. They were given a tour by Acting Superintendent Dean Einwalter. Afterwards, over lunch, Einwalter discussed with the two Taft women some ways that Eleanor's branch of the Taft family could make a fitting memorial to

[9] Joyce Rosencrans, "The Taft connection: a family that spans our past and present," *Cincinnati Post*, March 29, 1978; Bob and Hope Taft interview.
[10] Superintendent to Regional Director, December 8, 1982, MWRO, MWRO-00062, Box 1; Mary Maxine Boyd to Robert A. Taft, Jr., December 20, 1982, and Dudley S. Taft to Boyd, August 15, 1983, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[11] Tony Pugh, "Deteriorating Taft Birthplace On The Mend," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, January 30, 1984.
[12] Kathy Doane, "Taft Times," *Cincinnati Enquirer Magazine*, February 24, 1985; Rosemary Munsen, "Gala Re-Creates Taft Inaugural, And Friends, Family Celebrate," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 4, 1985.

her late father, Charles P. Taft II. On information provided by NPS, Eleanor decided that her family would donate funds for restoration of the community room in the Taft house. This choice was made in lieu of assisting NPS with development of the parking lot at Southern Avenue and Young Street as previously considered.[13]

Several prominent Tafts attended the grand opening in 1988. An elderly Robert Taft Jr. joined Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia in cutting a giant ribbon that wound all the way around the house. Seth Taft was there along with Bob and Hope Taft.[14]

After the grand opening, Taft family involvement with the Site gradually waned. Most of the descendants of Alphonso Taft who lived in the Cincinnati area moved away or died. Robert Taft, Jr. died in 1993. In 1990, Bob Taft was elected Ohio secretary of state, so he and Hope moved to the state capital, Columbus. Henceforth, Hope had to limit her involvement with the group because of the geographic distance from Columbus to Cincinnati as well as the mounting demands on her time from other quarters. However, the Friends group kept in contact with Taft family members and succeeded in soliciting another big donation from the Louise Taft Semple Foundation: a $125,000 grant for the development of the Taft Education Center. Furthermore, when Bob Taft was elected governor of Ohio in 1999, it marked a return of the Taft political dynasty in Ohio and a resurgence of local pride and interest in the Taft legacy. The governor and first lady made several official appearances at the National Historic Site during Bob Taft's two terms in the governorship. Also, at Governor Taft's invitation, staff from the National Historic Site traveled to the state capital to attend the dedication of the George Washington Williams Memorial Room on the first floor of the Ohio State House. Williams was the first African American elected to the Ohio Legislature (in 1880), and a law student of Alphonso Taft prior to that. Site staff returned to the state capital the

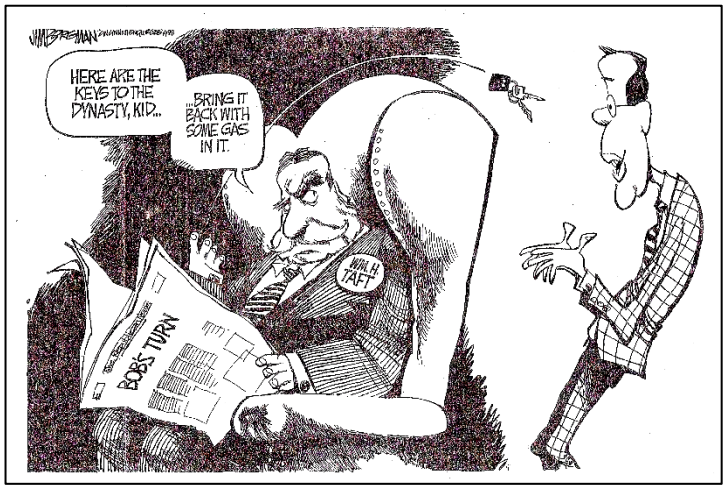


Figure 47. When Bob Taft was elected governor of Ohio in 1998 it marked the latest incarnation of the Taft political dynasty. (William Howard Taft National Historic Site.)

[13] Acting Superintendent to Regional Director, May 15, 1985, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[14] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1988, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, FY '89 Daily Yellows.

next year for the inauguration of Bob Taft for a second term as governor. After two terms, Bob and Hope Taft settled in Dayton.[15]

A few descendants of Alphonso Taft remain in the Cincinnati area at this writing (2019). There is a family named Lawrence who are connected to the Tafts by way of Anne Taft Ingalls, wife of John Tharp Lawrence, Jr. Anne, born in 1931, was the great-great granddaughter of Alphonso Taft and a direct descendant of Charles P. Taft, the president's half-brother. Her father was the famous World War I ace flyer David S. Ingalls, Sr., and a grandson of Charles P.[16] In addition to the Lawrence family, Dudley S. Taft lives in Cincinnati, as do his two sons, Dudley, Jr. and Thomas Woodall "Woody" Taft. As noted above, Dudley Sr. is a direct descendant of Peter Rawson Taft II, the president's other half-brother. A sister of Dudley Sr., Mary Perin "Murph" Taft married a man named Ken Mahler. Their son is Kenneth Taft Mahler. Ken Mahler (the younger), who is now president of Friends of the Taft Legacy, is the great-great-great-grandson of Alphonso Taft.[17]

Early in 2016, Superintendent Pennington contacted Bob and Hope Taft saying she needed help in revitalizing the Taft family connection to the National Historic Site. Hope asked her distant cousin Woody for assistance in recruiting another Taft to join the Friends. Woody put Hope in touch with his cousin, Ken Mahler. Ken Mahler became a trustee in March 2016 and then president of the Friends in March 2017. The group changed its name to Friends of the Taft Legacy in May 2018.[18]

The Mount Auburn Community

In 1969, NPS had few units located in such a densely populated urban environment as Mount Auburn. To many in NPS, the neighborhood appeared rundown. Its property values were in decline. Several of Auburn Avenue's old stately homes were remodeled into apartment dwellings and rented to low-income tenants. It was hard to imagine this National Historic Site attracting numerous middle-class visitors. Midwest Associate Regional Director John Kawamoto tried to describe the mindset in 1969 as he looked back on it fifteen years later. "You have to…recognize that we in the Park Service, to some degree, have an elitist attitude and we are not comfortable with things that are outside our norm," he said. "We are not comfortable in that kind of site." NPS's organizational culture leaned keenly toward big, majestic national parks in the West. It was more partial to protecting nature than preserving

[15] Superintendent's Annual Report for 2003, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2621.
[16] Geoffrey L. Rossano, ed., *Hero of the Angry Sky: The World War I Diary and Letters of David S. Ingalls, America's First Naval Ace* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013).
[17] Ken Mahler to author, August 23, 2019, email.
[18] Bob and Hope Taft interview; Pennington interview; Ken Mahler, Jr. to author, August 14, 2019, email.

history. While the National Park System contained many historic sites in 1969, they were mostly in rural settings. NPS could much more readily develop a Civil War battlefield site in rural Missouri, for instance, than it could take on this old house and lot near the center of Cincinnati. "Why would you want to spend a million dollars on a place that only has a thousand visitors," Kawamoto asked rhetorically. "Why would anybody come there?"[19]

NPS leadership in 1969 was ill at ease engaging with inner city communities racked by poverty and racial unrest. The discomfort was evident in a draft position description for superintendent prepared a few years after the Site was established. Among the primary duties and responsibilities were "coordination and communication with neighborhood leaders (inner city area which experienced serious riot conditions in 1969) and coordination with city and county agencies plus other concerned organizations and individuals." Cincinnati experienced race riots in 1967 and 1968. Tensions remained high in 1969 and after.[20]

Relations between the National Historic Site and the Mount Auburn community got off to a rocky start. The WHTMA acquired the Cross Apartments next door to the Taft house and entered a protracted face-off with the Mount Auburn Community Council over its plan to demolish the structure to make way for visitor parking. The Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation wanted to rehabilitate the structure and preserve its several family dwelling units. The face-off between city councilman Charlie Taft and Mount Auburn community leaders placed NPS in an awkward position. For a time, Park Manager John T. Lissimore sought ways to preserve the building and use it for administrative offices and a maintenance shop. In the end, the WHTMA went through with its demolition and thirteen families who occupied the building had to be relocated. The National Historic Site was established at a cost to the local community, and NPS had to contend with community leaders' anger and suspicion.[21]

Fortunately, NPS and the Mount Auburn Community Council quickly found common ground. Both parties were keen to advance historic preservation of the Auburn Avenue corridor. The Community Council looked to historic preservation to curtail the demolition of old buildings, revive property values, and nurture community pride. NPS favored historic preservation to improve the Site's neighborhood setting. The Site's stake in the neighborhood setting was stated clearly in the House committee report when the National Historic Site was being proposed:

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[19] Kawamoto interview.
[20] J. L. Licari, "Draft," November 7, 1974, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows – FY '75.
[21] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1972, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '73.

> The success of the effort to preserve this historic property can be greatly facilitated if the city and county government cooperate in maintaining the character of the area. The National Park Service should seek appropriate agreements with the county in order to be sure that its lands will be used in a manner consistent with the objectives of preserving the setting of the site and the city should be encouraged to use its powers to prevent incompatible intrusions.[22]

The establishment of William Howard Taft National Historic Site appears to have spurred action on getting historic buildings in the surrounding area protected. The Auburn Avenue corridor was designated as the Mount Auburn Historic District and listed on the National Register of Historic Places on March 28, 1973. It was Cincinnati's first registered historic district.[23] A map of the historic district prepared by NPS in 1975 showed a total of 25 significant historic buildings in addition to the Taft house.

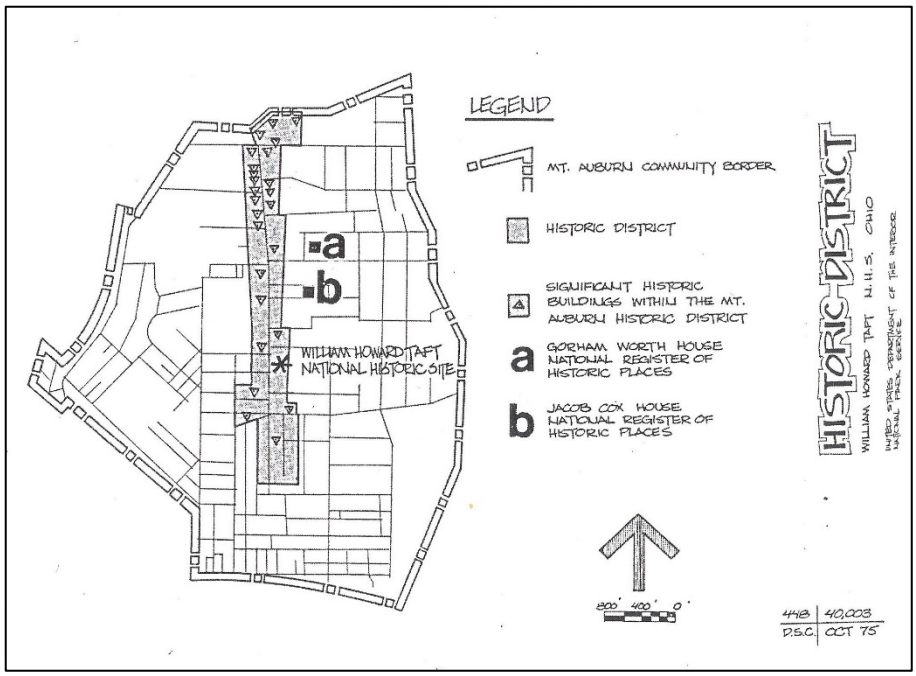


Figure 48. The National Historic Site is centrally located within the Mount Auburn Historic District. (National Park Service.)

Park managers John T. Lissimore (1971-1973) and Jerry L. Licari (1974-1975) regularly attended Mount Auburn Community Council meetings to foster good relations. Licari pitched a "proposal" to the council for redevelopment of the entire

[22] U.S. House, *Providing for the Establishment of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., Report 91-478, 1969, 2.
[23] City of Cincinnati, "National Register Historic Districts," at https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/buildings/historic-conservation/national-register-historic-districts/ <July 20, 2019>.

block around the National Historic Site, including "dual use" of a developed parking area at the corner of Southern Avenue and Young Street and "total restoration" of the original Taft property, which, admittedly, was precluded for the time being by the presence of the Hamilton County Juvenile Court Detention Center. Licari claimed that NPS participation in the council meetings helped to generate "awareness of the historic property values in the Mt. Auburn Historic District." He stressed that their discussions around historic preservation were of mutual benefit, stating: "It is our hope that these activities will result in the preservation and enhancement of historical values in the neighborhood environment of the Taft Home, ultimately enhancing the William Howard Taft National Historic Site, as well."[24]

City planners agreed with NPS and Mount Auburn community leaders that historic preservation would benefit the local community. In 1974, the city adopted the Mt. Auburn Community Development Plan with the support of the Mount Auburn Community Council and the Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation. In the plan, the Mount Auburn Historic District was identified and recommended for local protection. Three years later, the Mount Auburn Design Plan called for the retention of the architectural character of the neighborhood through the imposition of design guidelines. At the same time, Prospect Hill was nominated for listing. The Prospect Hill Historic District, taking in several blocks along the southern edge of Mount Auburn, was listed on September 4, 1980. The Cincinnati City Council established an Interim Development Control District for the Auburn Avenue corridor in 1987, further strengthening protections.[25]

Urban planners in the 1970s and 1980s viewed historic preservation as an effective tool for urban renewal, and NPS encouraged that thinking. Superintendents at William Howard Taft National Historic Site continued to bring that message to the Mount Auburn Community Council. In 1986, Superintendent Kesselman wrote: "The historic consciousness of the neighborhood has been one of the major resources tapped by community leaders to stabilize and revitalize the area. Because we are a historic site at the core of the neighborhood, we feel a particular responsibility to assist in these efforts."[26]

Historic preservation was still at the heart of the National Historic Site's connection with the Mount Auburn community some 30 years later. In 2015, the Mount Auburn Community Development Corporation (MACDC) was formed to strengthen ties between the community council and community business leaders. The

[24] Jerry L. Licari to Mt. Auburn Community Council, September 27, 1974, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '73; Superintendent's Annual Report for 1975, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '76.
[25] Cincinnati City Planning Department, Historic Conservation Office, "Auburn Avenue Historic District Designation Report," November 1987, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, H22.
[26] Steven Kesselman to John P. Zanotti, February 14, 1986, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, H22.

first president of the MACDC was Carol Gibbs, a member of the board of the Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace. In 2017, the MACDC completed a strategic development plan, with the Mount Auburn Historic District given prominence in the plan.[27]

Some superintendents took a more expansive view of the National Historic Site's role in the Mount Auburn community. They sought to engage with other community health concerns besides the rudimentary issues of housing, parking, and preserving historic architecture. Park manager Lissimore put considerable effort into the Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC) program, providing federal employment for at-risk youth. He also encouraged local school-age children to visit the Site, hoping those curious and friendly kids would tell family and friends what they found. In this way he sowed seeds of trust and good will around the neighborhood.[28]

Superintendent Robin White developed outreach to the Mount Auburn community through a range of activities aimed at "broadening the storyline" – expanding the interpretive mission to celebrate cultural diversity in the area. She and her staff worked closely with the Mount Auburn Community Council on numerous neighborhood initiatives, and she continued a tradition of making the community room in the Taft house available as a regular meeting place for the Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation and other groups. She stressed to her staff the need for greater mutual understanding with the surrounding community. This was achieved through such measures as hiring younger guides who were familiar with the culture, attitudes, and behaviors of residents, recruiting program participants from nearby communities, and attending community meetings on various issues.[29]

Superintendents since Robin White have not put as much emphasis on the relationship with the Mount Auburn Community Council. Superintendent Pennington, for one, became active in the Mount Auburn Chamber of Commerce instead.[30] A perusal of council minutes posted on the council's website showed that William Howard Taft National Historic Site was neither represented nor discussed at monthly meetings going back to October 2015. To some extent the Friends group filled the breech; two members of the Friends board, Carol and Steve Gibbs, were active members on the Mount Auburn Community Council. With their detailed

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[27] Mount Auburn Community Development Corporation, *Auburn Avenue Corridor Strategic Development Plan*, February 2017, at mtauburn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Auburn-Ave-Corridor-Study-FNL2.pdf <August 16, 2019>.
[28] John Troy Lissimore to Horace Bradley, May 23, 1971, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Reading File – Letters (May – Dec 1971); Lissimore to Hartwell Parham, February 4, 1972, Lissimore to Glen Hudson, February 16, 1972, and Lissimore to Ray Finke, February 16, 1972, and May 2, 1972, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellows FY '72.
[29] Robin White to author, April 22, 2019, email; Superintendent's Annual Report for 2004, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2621.
[30] Pennington interview.

understanding of community issues, they were a valuable resource for the superintendent and staff.[31]

Other Neighbors

The National Historic Site maintained relations with other public institutions in the area including William Howard Taft Elementary School, Christ Hospital, and the University of Cincinnati College of Law. The connection with Taft Elementary was always tight. Students were intrigued to learn who their school was named for. Some kids visited the Site on their own initiative after school hours. School-sponsored field trips, meanwhile, could be made on foot with few logistics. Typically, one field trip occurred around Christmastime and another in the spring. Rangers could easily visit the school to deliver programs there, and frequently did. Ranger Henderson recalled visiting Taft Elementary once with Hope Taft in the Christmas season; he wore a Santa Clause outfit and she was dressed in a Nutcracker costume. Kerry Wood served on the School Committee for a time, and a former school principal once served on the Friends board.[32]

The other neighborhood school was a charter school at 244 Southern Avenue whose name kept changing as the school administration changed. In 2001, when Congress enacted legislation authorizing a land swap with the school, it was the SABIS International School of Cincinnati. It was a publicly funded charter school run by a private company. The name "SABIS" came from the initials of five charter members, and SABIS Educational Systems, Inc. was the for-profit entity that ran the school. In 2002, the school had an enrollment of 672 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. That year, a citizens' board filed suit to have the contract with SABIS cancelled, complaining that the school management lacked financial accountability. After SABIS was dissolved, the school became the International College Preparatory Academy. That school closed in 2010, after which it became the Mount Auburn Preparatory Academy, a K-10 charter school. The frequent changes of leadership and turnover of teaching staff hampered the National Historic Site's ability to develop a relationship with the school.[33]

Christ Hospital was the behemoth in the neighborhood that superintendents were not sure how to approach. The huge medical complex dominated the view from the Site and drove much of the local commerce in the Auburn Avenue corridor. It was a major influence on public parking and traffic flow through the area. It owned many

[31] Minutes at mtauburn.org/community-council <August 17, 2019>.
[32] Henderson interview; Wood interview.
[33] Doug Trapp, "Un-Chartered Territory," *CityBeat*, March 28, 2002, at citybeat.com/news/article/13022394/news-unchartered-territory-lawsuit <August 17, 2019>; Henderson interview; Wood interview.



Figure 49. Christ Hospital is an outsized neighbor of the National Historic Site. (Author's photo.)

buildings and lots in the neighborhood in addition to the high-rise buildings and parking garages that were clearly part of the medical complex. It had financial resources and a civic outlook. The hospital had 555 beds, and hundreds of patients' relatives and caretakers visited the facility daily. Its employees numbered in the thousands. How could the National Historic Site serve that bustling flow of humanity so close by to it? What could Christ Hospital do for the National Historic Site?

Superintendent Reggie Tiller thought the hospital was practically ignored by superintendents before him. NPS took notice of Christ Hospital when it announced plans in 2012 to construct a new building on the lot directly across Auburn Avenue from the National Historic Site. When Deputy Regional Director Patty Trapp learned of the project, she telephoned Tiller and asked him what he was going to do about it. Trapp thought NPS ought to consider trying to stop it, since the construction would be so prominent in the Site's viewshed. Tiller was taken aback, wondering how NPS could possibly obstruct a $280 million construction project that was being heralded by the city and paid for with private funds. In fact, he welcomed the hospital addition, thinking it would be an improvement over the existing tenement apartment building that stood across the street. The rundown tenement was an eyesore – residents hung their laundry in plain view of the street – and judging by the frequent police calls the building was a menace to public safety, too. Still, the construction project prompted him to contact hospital administrators, and to start a dialogue about how the hospital and the National Historic Site could be good neighbors. Christ Hospital's new facility across the street, the Joint and Spine Center, opened in the fall of 2015.[34]

Over the past half-decade, the relationship with the hospital has been intermittent according to Superintendent Hawthorne. At one time, hospital officials wanted National Historic Site rangers to provide interpretive programming at the hospital. NPS declined the request, being too short of staff to send people off-site. At the present time (2019), Hawthorne sees potential for that kind of interaction in the

[34] Tiller interview.

future. He would like to offer programs for the students attending Christ Hospital School of Nursing and Health Sciences.[35]

Some in the Friends group believed strongly that the hospital was an important part of the community, teeming with people and therefore deserving of more attention. Others in the Friends group were skeptical or apathetic about the potential relationship. The difference of opinion caused Paul Sittenfeld, a champion of reaching out to the hospital, to quit the board.[36]

Meanwhile, the Friends group, with Superintendent Hawthorne's support, pushed to build a stronger connection with the law community in Cincinnati. A key liaison was Stephanie Hunter McMahon, a member of the Friends and professor at the University of Cincinnati College of Law. Pat Fischer, a justice on the Ohio Supreme Court, thought there should be an event to memorialize William Howard Taft's connection to the city and the law school. Justice Fischer discussed it with former Governor Bob Taft, and soon the conversation expanded to include the Friends, NPS, the old law firm of Taft, Stettinius & Hollister, and the University of Cincinnati College of Law. Pat DeWine, another state supreme court justice, was supportive as well. In September 2018, the National Historic Site and the University of Cincinnati College of Law co-hosted the first William Howard Taft Day on the president's birthday. The college hosted the main event, a Taft Day Lecture at the college auditorium given by Taft biographer Jeffrey Rosen, whose talk was entitled "What Would William Howard Taft Do About American Democracy Today?" The Friends group and the Hamilton County Bar Association co-sponsored the festivities. Hawthorne said he wanted to turn it into an annual event centered on the Taft birthday celebration. It would focus on Taft's legacy for American law. It would revive the annual lecture series on constitutional law that had drawn such leading lights as Supreme Court justices Antonin Scalia and Sandra Day O'Connor back in the 1980s.[37]

Superintendents approached many other public institutions in the Cincinnati area from time to time. Superintendent Licari worked with many city partners in preparation of bicentennial events in 1976.[38] Heavily involved with nationwide planning for the bicentennial at the federal level, he was a member of the Greater Cincinnati Bicentennial Commission as well. Superintendent Kesselman formed an advisory committee for the development of exhibits and wrangled the participation of

[35] Hawthorne interview.
[36] Sittenfeld interview; Garry interview.
[37] Bob and Hope Taft interview; Hawthorne interview; Sittenfeld interview; Garry interview. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor gave the William Howard Taft Lecture on Constitutional Law in 1989. (Staff Minutes, February 27, 1989, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, FY '89 Daily Yellows.
[38] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1976, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '77.



Figure 50. Justice Antonin Scalia, Hope Taft, and Senator Robert A. Taft, Jr. (Hope's father-in-law) at the grand opening, September 17, 1988. (Governor Bob Taft.)

three professors of history at the University of Cincinnati in 1987.[39] Superintendent Topham listed the community groups and organizations with which he had "active involvement" in 1993. His list included Friends of Cincinnati Parks, Cincinnati Preservation Association, Cincinnati Convention and Visitor's Bureau, Cincinnati Art Museum, and Historic Homes and Sites of Greater Cincinnati along with some other groups with a statewide or regional focus.[40] Superintendent White listed various entities that she and her staff partnered with to create special emphasis programs mostly in conjunction with national observance months. Her list included the Mount Auburn Chamber of Commerce, Behringer-Crawford Museum, Taft Museum of Art, Museum of Natural History and Science, Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal, and Brent Wood Recreation Park. White further stated that the staff worked closely with staff at Harriet Beecher Stowe House, Mount Airy Fire Marshall, God's Bible School, Mount Auburn First Baptist Church, and New Prospect Baptist Church and that she developed a cooperative agreement with Northern Kentucky University's Office of Latino Student Affairs. In some cases, partnerships involved little more than sending one or two uniformed staff to a partner's event to lend support, show the flag, and thereby attract new visitors. In a city the size of Cincinnati, the possibilities for taking part in public events were endless. Staff participation in events around the city

[39] Steven Kesselman to Zane Miller, March 14, 1987, Kesselman to Roger Daniels, March 14, 1987, and Kesselman to Henry Shapiro, March 14, 1987, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A18.
[40] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1993, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2621.

tended to ebb and flow as acting superintendents did not push that type of activity much and new superintendents needed a little time to get it going again.[41]

State and Regional Partners

The superintendent and staff frequently met or corresponded with officials in city, county, and state government, and with Ohio members of Congress. City and state politicians visited the Site a few times a year generally, sometimes as dignitaries in an official ceremony, other times for purposes of gathering information.

Superintendent White made this notation on her interaction with politicians in her annual report for 2006:

> The Superintendent met with First Lady Hope Taft, Ohio Senator Eric Kearney, and Cincinnati Councilman David Crowley and discussed William Howard Taft NHS mission with Illinois Congressman Obama Barack [sic] during a phone conversation while informing the Congressman of the park's celebration of Taft's 150th anniversary.[42]

A recent example of a politician's visit to the Site was the visit in 2018 by Senator Rob Portman of Ohio, a Republican and native of Cincinnati. Portman participated in the first annual Taft Day on September 18. On that day he attended a formal breakfast at the College of Law and then went to the Site and toured the historic house with Superintendent Hawthorne and Chief of Interpretation Wood. His purpose was to learn about the Site's unmet maintenance needs and draw attention to his legislative initiative called the Restore Our Parks Act. According to a press release posted on Senator Portman's website after the visit, he was informed that the Site had $2.1 million in deferred maintenance projects.[43]



Figure 51. Senator Rob Portman discusses the maintenance backlog with Superintendent Hugh Hawthorne, September 2018. (Rob Portman@senrobportman.)

[41] Superintendent's Annual Report for 2007, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2621; Hawthorne interview.
[42] Superintendent's Annual Report for 2006, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2621. Barack Obama was still a relatively little known first-term U.S. Senator in 2006.
[43] "Portman Participates in the First Annual Taft Day and Tours the William Howard Taft National Historic Site," September 14, 2018, press release at portman.senate.gov/newsroom/press-release/portman-participates-in-the-first-annual-taft-day <August 29, 2019>.

Superintendents at William Howard Taft National Historic Site coordinated with other federal site managers in the region, sharing information and resources. The Ohio National Park Service Group was the first such organization; it consisted of all NPS units in Ohio and it was administered by a general superintendent. The organization was formed in 1971 and was discontinued four years later; however, NPS units in Ohio continued to share information and resources under various other arrangements after the group was formally dissolved. For example, William Howard Taft looked to Dayton Aviation Heritage as the nearest NPS unit with a law enforcement ranger on staff. More recently, it called on Dayton Aviation Heritage for the services of its cultural resource specialist, Ed Roach, when it needed Section 106 compliance performed for various maintenance projects. The Site received other specialized assistance from Hopewell Culture and Cuyahoga Valley. Superintendents at William Howard Taft, Dayton Aviation Heritage, and Hopewell Culture consulted one another and pooled resources in what they called the Southern Ohio Group. Recently the Midwest Region was divided into five different groupings and William Howard Taft falls into the Ohio/Lake Michigan Group, which includes all eight units in Ohio plus River Raisin National Battlefield Park near Detroit, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in northern Michigan, Indiana Dunes National Park on Indiana's Lake Michigan shoreline, and Pullman National Monument in Chicago. The superintendents of these twelve units conferred on a monthly basis by conference call and got together for an annual meeting. In 2020 this group remained active, with its major focus to facilitate resource sharing.[44]

Superintendents also coordinated with federal land managers outside NPS. This interagency group's purpose was to enhance public awareness of federal lands in the area for the benefit of one and all. It also brought federal land managers together for mutual support. The group was called the Greater Cincinnati Federal Executive Board; then it became the Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky Federal Executive Board; and now it includes federal sites in southern Indiana as well.[45]

The William Howard Taft Memorial Association

William Howard Taft National Historic Site's original cooperating association was the William Howard Taft Memorial Association (WHTMA). Formed more than thirty years before the Site was established, the WHTMA's early history is discussed in Chapter One. As soon as the Site was established, NPS was interested to know whether the WHTMA would dissolve or continue in existence. Superintendent George

[44] Pennington interview; Hawthorne interview; Wood interview.
[45] Superintendent's Annual Report for 1979, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Letters – Yellow Sheets – FY '79; Superintendent's Annual Report for 2004, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A2621; Hawthorne interview.

V. Schesventer met with its president, Charlie Taft, on January 28, 1970 to learn the answer and determine the group's new role. Charlie Taft affirmed that the WHTMA would continue in existence after the house was restored and opened to the public. He said the WHTMA "would expect to facilitate, stimulate, and cooperate in any of the operations in the house in which they can be of help." In reply, Schesventer said that was what NPS had hoped to hear and it would refer to the WHTMA as an advisory board and consult with the group in the operation and development of the Taft home. Charlie Taft stated that he envisioned the WHTMA adding new board members and getting more active now that the National Historic Site was established.[46]

Although both parties announced their expectations clearly at this time, the partnership did not develop as each one had outlined. Over the next year and a half, NPS treated the WHTMA more like a real estate dealer than an advisory board. Eager to get the Taft house and lot as well as the adjacent lot to the north transferred into federal ownership, NPS tried to interest the WHTMA in acquiring another lot as well. NPS suggested that the WHTMA might purchase the lot at 2010 Auburn Avenue in the next block south (on the corner of Bodmann Avenue and Auburn Avenue) to provide for bus parking.[47] Ultimately, NPS acquired the lot at the corner of Southern Avenue and Young Street instead. In the meantime, NPS produced the 1970 master plan without any mention of the WHTMA's role as an advisory board, emphasizing its role as a real estate dealer instead. An early draft of the master plan stated, "The Taft Memorial [sic] has offered to acquire the adjacent property, cleanup, and donate it to the Federal government."[48] In the final version this was changed to, "The one-half acre Taft property and the 0.28 acre property to the north must be acquired by donation or using donated funds. The one-half acre Taft property is owned by the William Howard Taft Memorial Association and its donation is anticipated."[49]

The WHTMA, for its part, did not add new board members and assist with Site operations. It continued in existence through the 1970s, but Charlie Taft provided most of its energy. When Charlie Taft became too old to run it, the group faded into oblivion.

In 1970, the WHTMA held a valuable collection of Taft family memorabilia including house furnishings as well as family papers. The records of the WHTMA itself also had historic value. NPS wanted to secure the collection and the WHTMA wanted NPS to have it. Superintendent Schesventer, accompanied by David H. Wallace, Northeast Region assistant chief, Branch of Museum Operations, met with

[46] Superintendent to Files, January 28, 1970, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[47] Superintendent to Regional Director, February 17, 1970, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[48] Master plan quoted in Superintendent to Regional Director, May 3, 1970, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[49] National Park Service, *Master Plan, William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Ohio*, 13.

Charlie Taft on September 21 and 22, 1970 to discuss arrangements. Wallace's notes of the meetings and his subsequent report to the regional director contained several significant details.

Their meeting on the first day was attended by several members of the WHTMA as well as the director of the Taft Museum of Art; the director of the Cincinnati Historical Society; the curator-general of the National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution; the head of the Mount Auburn Community Council; and Willa Busch Beall, former employee of the WHTMA. Wallace stated that Beall was "formerly secretary of Memorial Association," whereas Antoinette Lee, who had access to the WHTMA papers when she prepared her administrative history in 1985, wrote that she was "hired as executive director of the Memorial Association on a part time basis," and worked for the WHTMA from 1960 to 1964. Her main task in that period was to compile research and memorabilia associated with President Taft. Wallace was impressed by what she had accomplished, noting the following:

> Mrs. Beall has done a great deal, using microfilm of Taft papers selected for her by LC [Library of Congress], chiefly PR Taft diary, A and L Taft letters. Also some correspondence between A & L and children during European years, not in LC collection. Suggested to George later that Mrs. Beall might be good bet to do furnishings research either under contract or 700 hr. appointment. Might also consider her for permanent position as Curator. Most impressed with her ability. She feels we should not stick to 1857-74 limits with memorabilia. Would like to show WHT high chair side by side with one of his specially made chairs of later life.[50]

Wallace's notes also state that he and Schesventer went with Beall and Charlie Taft to Mr. Taft's home to look at the WHTMA's correspondence from 1961 to 1964 (for Wallace was interested in the record of acquisitions). Wallace recorded the fact that the WHTMA's correspondence from 1965 to 1970 was kept in Mr. Taft's law office at that time. Later, the records of the WHTMA were consolidated at the Site. When Antoinette Lee conducted her research in 1985, she cited the "Correspondence of the William Howard Taft Memorial Association, now located at the Taft National Historic Site."[51] Unfortunately, some time thereafter the historical records of the WHTMA were mingled with NPS records and some may have been pitched as the Site sought to winnow redundant or extraneous items in the museum collection. Subsequently, the staff tried to establish the sources of all items in the museum collection as it entered them in the national catalog but the source information had

[50] David H. Wallace, "Notes on trip to W. H. Taft NHS, September 21-22, 1970," William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A3821.
[51] Lee, *Administrative History*, 122-23.

been lost.[52] The WHTMA collection cited by Lee ceased to exist as a discrete entity, though some of the material survived in central files and stored and are still found at the Site.

Wallace made another interesting observation. Although he was only able to peruse the 1961 to 1964 correspondence and not the later correspondence, he still discerned a pattern. "It is clear," he wrote, "that there has been a tendency on Mr. Taft's part to encourage donations of material relating to the whole Taft family, down to Sen. Robert A. Taft." NPS wanted to narrow the scope of collections to items associated with President Taft. Both the WHTMA and its successor group, the Friends of the Taft Legacy, preferred to broaden the focus to include other Tafts.

The Friends of the Taft Legacy

The Friends of the Taft Legacy was originally called the Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace. It changed its name to The Friends of the Taft Legacy in May 2018.

Credit for establishing the group is largely owed to Superintendent Boyd. When she arrived at William Howard Taft National Historic Site in October 1981, the WHTMA was basically defunct. One of the first things Boyd did was reach out to Robert A. Taft, Jr., the former U.S. senator and grandson of the president, and other members of the Taft family. She found the family to be generally disappointed with NPS and discouraged over the lack of progress in the house restoration. Indeed, Charlie Taft said he was nearly inclined to take back the museum collection (which he could have done, since it was not formally transferred to NPS until 1983). Boyd met with skepticism from all the Tafts, but they indicated they would help her if she first demonstrated some success. So, as soon as she got the first restoration work going in May 1982, she called Robert A. Taft, Jr. and asked him to come inspect. He arrived at the Site with his uncle, Charlie Taft, who was then in a wheelchair, and though the work was only getting started they were satisfied that the new superintendent showed a fresh resolve and deserved their support. About six months later, Boyd called Robert A. Taft, Jr. again and discussed the need to organize a citizen support group. The former senator gave her a mailing list. Boyd contacted everyone on the list and convened the first "Friends of Taft" meeting on December 13, 1982. Though the

[52] National Park Service, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site Scope of Collections Statement," 2015, museum storage room, p. 6.

former senator did not attend this first meeting, he endorsed her initiative. The Friends group jelled over the next year and formally incorporated in March 1984.[53]

The mission of the Friends was stated in Article I of the Memorandum of Agreement between National Park Service and Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace, Inc. The public's interest in the restoration of the Taft birthplace and boyhood home had grown over the years, this document stated, leading to the establishment of a National Historic Site in 1969 and then the plan for historic restoration. The document went on:

> Since actual work has commenced to stabilize the building and start restoration, public sector interest and support has dramatically increased.
>
> There is a need to increase the restoration effort at William Howard Taft, and as the budget is contingent upon Government appropriations and subject to budgetary constraints, the Service recognizes the need for community support with both capital and manpower resources. Such resources would guarantee the perpetuation of the restoration process of the Taft home.
>
> The Friends has been formed for the following purposes:
>
> 1. To assist in the restoration and preservation of the birthplace of William Howard Taft.
> 2. To assist in fostering a greater awareness and appreciation of the career of William Howard Taft.
> 3. To provide assistance to the Service in the operation and maintenance of the Site.
>
> The Service and the Friends recognize that it is mutually advantageous to enter into this agreement in order that all visitors receive the maximum benefits from their stay in the park, and the restoration process can continue in spite of current budget restraints.[54]

[53] Boyd interview; Mary-Maxine Boyd to Robert A. Taft, Jr., December 20, 1982, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, Development, Funding; Code of Regulations of Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace, no date, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A42.
[54] Memorandum of Agreement between National Park Service and Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace, Inc., March 8, 1984, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A42.

The code of regulations for the Friends provided for a board of trustees composed of three trustees (the number later grew), each trustee being elected by a majority vote of the board and serving for a period of one year. The board of trustees was to hold a meeting on March 15 of each year to elect trustees for the following year. The board of trustees had authority to formulate policies toward fulfilling the mission of the corporation, to have general supervision over the affairs of the corporation, and to make general rules and regulations for the government of the corporation. Officers of the corporation were elected annually by the board of trustees and consisted of a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Nonvoting membership in the corporation was open to any interested person, subject to whatever terms the board of trustees might devise. The secretary was to maintain a list of members and was designated to call special meetings of the membership upon the request of the president or a majority vote by the board of trustees.[55] (In practice, the special meetings developed into semi-regular monthly meetings.)

The Memorandum of Agreement between National Park Service and Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace, Inc. was a separate instrument, intended for renewal every five years. Its key provisions included making facilities and professional services at the Site available to the Friends' use; authorizing the Friends to acquire property and personal services for the benefit of NPS; authorizing the Friends to solicit donations of historic furnishings and other items for use at the Site; and requiring the Friends to keep accurate financial records of all its transactions made in connection with the Site. The Friends' financial records were to be audited at least biannually, with the auditor's report being shared with the superintendent.[56]

The memorandum of agreement was initially approved in March 1984. It was renewed without amendment five years later. The renewal lapsed all through the 1990s until the Friends organization insisted on updating and renewing the agreement in 2000. Director's Order 21, first issued in 1998, mandated that agreements with Friends groups must be updated to take account of more stringent rules and regulations for nonprofits and fundraising. The new agreement included a statement of work that the Friends would partner with local communities (Mount Auburn, Over the Rhine, Walnut Hills, and others) to "facilitate community driven programs that promote integration and collaborations in building a more sustainable society." In terms of fundraising, it stated: "William Howard Taft National Historic Site recognizes and encourages the Friends to raise funds in support of the operations reaching beyond the

[55] Code of Regulations of Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace, no date, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A42.
[56] Memorandum of Agreement between National Park Service and Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace, Inc., March 8, 1984, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A42.

boundaries of the Site." Director Jon Jarvis issued modifications to Director's Order 21 in December 2016, once again spurring need to revisit and renew the partnership agreement. Superintendent Hawthorne expected to meet with the Friends to address the DO-21 requirements later in 2019.[57]

As soon as the Friends was organized in the early 1980s, it dove headlong into fundraising for the historic restoration effort. Superintendent Boyd started the first fundraising project, a gift catalog. Her idea was to appeal to donors by presenting a catalog of discrete items that NPS needed to complete the restoration, from structural elements on the house to various interior furnishings. The Friends assisted in the effort of making the catalog while the Louise Taft Semple Foundation provided for the cost of printing and distributing it. Hope Taft got involved with the Friends during this effort and became a crucial liaison between NPS and the Taft family. She also served one year as treasurer. Her participation also helped with getting media coverage of the fundraising campaign. Altogether, the fundraising drive yielded some $600,000 by 1988. Nearly as impressive as the total amount raised was the number of people who contributed. An official report on the fundraising activity of the Friends organization made by Superintendent Kesselman in 1988 sated there were a total of 654 donors.[58]

After the strong fundraising drive in the 1980s, the Friends concentrated on restoring its coffer for a few years. Then in 1992, it renewed its fundraising drive with the goal of getting the Taft Education Center programmed and built. Altogether the Friends committed to raising $900,000 for a $1.8 million cost-share project. This second round of fundraising was materially helped by a $125,000 gift from the Louise Taft Semple Foundation plus a $200,000 contribution from the state of Ohio. It took a strenuous effort to raise another $500,000 from private donors. The twists and turns in the fundraising effort together with the vagaries in the government's appropriations process strained relations between the Friends and NPS in the 1990s.[59]

The Friends hired a part-time administrative assistant. During the 1990s, when the Site administrative offices were in the Sanning Building, the Friends had an office in the Sanning Building, too. The Friends' administrative assistant worked closely with NPS staff. When the Friends sponsored an event or put on an exhibit, the Friends

[57] Reaffirmation Memorandum, Agreement Number MA-6518-4-8006, March 20, 1989, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A42; Claudia McKee et al. to Kurt Topham, March 16, 2000, Friends of the Taft Legacy Archive, correspondence (miscellaneous); General Agreement for Fundraising Activities and Initiatives Directives between William Howard Taft National Historic Site and Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace, undated draft document provided by John R. Reusing; Hawthorne interview.
[58] 1988 Take Pride in America Awards Application, William Howard Taft NHS, SF, WIHO "Take Pride in America" Contest.
[59] Taft Education Steering Committee Notes from July 15, 1996 Meeting, Rhoda Brooks to Kurt Topham, December 7, 1996, and Kurt Topham, "Background and status of Taft Education Center Project, William Howard Taft National Historic Site," December 12, 1996, Friends of the Taft Legacy Archive, correspondence (miscellaneous).



Figure 52. The Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace ran this full-page ad in the Cincinnati Enquirer on January 1, 2000. (Friends Archive.)

and the Site performed as one team. Chief of Interpretation Henderson treated the part-time Friends employee virtually as one of the staff, and in turn Henderson attended the Friends' board meetings and responded to their requests. At some point – perhaps about 2006 – the Friends terminated the administrative assistant position to save expense. To Henderson, the loss of that position made a crucial difference. The Friends had another perspective; they perceived waning interest by the superintendents. Relations between the Site and the Friends were uneven and somewhat dependent on personalities.[60]

Besides its two major fundraising drives in the mid-1980s and again in the mid-1990s, the Friends assisted the Site with interpretive planning, special events including annual fundraiser events, and financial support for various needs that were sometimes hard to pay for with either the Site's base annual budget or Midwest Region discretionary funds. When the Taft Education Center neared completion, the Friends became involved with interpretive planning for exhibits to go in the new building. Board members participated with Site and Midwest Region staff, Harpers Ferry Center, Eastern National Parks Association and consultants – some paid for by the Friends – to develop what the Friends called the Interpretive Plan. A three-day interpretive planning meeting was held in January 1998. One of the suggestions was to have interpretive exhibits in the Taft home concentrate on William Howard Taft and his parents, and to have the new Taft Education Center "look beyond William Howard Taft and talk about siblings, children and grandchildren." Advocates for this idea noted that not many families had such an impact on politics through multiple generations. This idea was carried into the exhibit design.[61]

To help get its message across, the Friends hired its own historical consultant, Dan Hurley. Hurley was a well-known public historian in Cincinnati. After a teaching career, he had been instrumental in designing education and interpretive programs for the Cincinnati Historical Society, Tall Stacks, the Bicentennial Celebration, and other regional and national projects. Hurley envisioned the exhibit of Charlie Taft as storyteller, which was installed behind the sales and reception area. The second major exhibit was the Taft Family Legacy exhibit on the wall opposite.[62]

The Friends sought ways to help with educational programming. It gave money for providing bus transportation for school groups. It sponsored a high school

[60] Henderson interview; Sittenfeld interview; Reusing interview; Acting Regional Director to Superintendents, Midwest Region, June 6, 2002, William Howard Taft NHS, CF, A22; Claudia McKee et al., to Kurt Topham, March 16, 2000, Friends of the Taft Legacy Archive, correspondence (miscellaneous).
[61] Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace, Board of Trustees Meeting, January 12, 1998, Friends of the Taft Legacy Archive, Board Minutes.
[62] Claudia McKee, "President's Annual Report," *Taft Times*, June 1998; Claudia McKee, "Presidents' Report," *Taft Times*, December 1998; Bill Talbot, "Bill Talbot Reports on Taft Education Center," *Taft Times*, July 1999; Garry interview.

essay contest. The winner of the contest received the Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace Scholarship, a $500 stipend toward the first year of college. The scholarship was presented annually in the 1990s; it was eventually discontinued because it took a lot of effort and did not have an appreciable effect on boosting visitor use. More recently, the Friends' president, Ken Mahler, announced that he wanted to revive the Friends' involvement in educational programming.[63]

The Friends helped arrange public lectures and provided a welcome for guest speakers. The Taft Day Lecture in September 2018 was deemed a great success by all. The group was energized to work with Superintendent Hawthorne to expand the event the following year into a Taft Week, with events held at multiple locations.[64]

The Friends contributed effort and money to special events. In some cases, these happenings were annual events like the Easter Egg roll that NPS staff organized and led, with the Friends being asked to pitch in. In other cases, they were onetime events that the Friends had a prominent role in shaping and executing. Perhaps the biggest event that the Friends ever sponsored was the Looking East exhibit, which featured photographs from William Howard Taft's mission to the Far East in 1905-06 when he was secretary of war (see chapter five). The Friends first took an interest in this project in April 2005 when Margo Taft Stever sought help from Hope Taft in applying for a grant from the Louise Taft Semple Foundation for the curation of some 1,100 photographs. The Friends agreed to facilitate the grant on condition that its role would carry no financial liability. As a non-profit, it would serve "as a conduit for paying the bills incurred by this project." Meanwhile, NPS provided temporary storage space for the photographs in the Taft Education Center as the collection was curated. Ultimately, the photographic exhibit opened to the public on the main floor of the Taft Education Center.[65]

In the years since the Taft Education Center was completed the Friends group has sometimes struggled to define its role or have a clear sense of purpose. After its second major fundraising drive was completed, it was adrift in the early 2000s and membership waned. John Reusing came in as president of the board when Robin White and Reggie Tiller were the superintendents, and he reinvigorated the Friends even though he did not revive its former fundraising capability. When Reusing stepped down the organization needed new leadership. Superintendent Pennington approached Bob and Hope Taft, asking them if there was someone else in the Taft family who would want to get involved on the board to rejuvenate it. Hope Taft consulted Woody

[63] "William Howard Taft Scholarship Assistance Award," *Taft Times*, December 1992, 4; "Anne Marie Ellison Selected for Friends' Scholarship Assistance Award," *Taft Times*, September 1993, 1; "1995 Friends Scholarship Assistance Winner," *Taft Times*, August 1995; Bob and Hope Taft interview.
[64] Hawthorne interview; Garry interview; Bob and Hope Taft interview.
[65] Friends of William Howard Taft Birthplace Minutes for April 13, 2005, Friends of the Taft Legacy Archive, Board Minutes.

Taft, who recommended his cousin Kenneth Taft Mahler. Shortly after Pennington's departure, Ken Mahler was asked to join the board. He became a trustee in March 2016 and was elected president of the board in March 2017. Some thought that having a Taft at the helm would give the Friends group new life.[66]

Two years into Mahler's time as president there were mixed signals about what direction the Friends might take next. Not long before Mahler became president the Friends held a retreat. The retreat led to a work plan; an agenda that was supposed to give it direction for the coming years. Mahler chose to put the work plan aside and put forth his own vision instead, which was to focus the Friends on educational events and products and bring more attention to the Taft family. He sought to further the mission of the Taft Education Center, which was to highlight the many contributions of the Taft family to the city and the nation. Mahler wanted to put across the message that the Taft family continues the legacy of public service in both public and private ways. In 2018, he succeeded in getting the Friends to change its name from the Friends of the William Howard Taft Birthplace to the Friends of the Taft Legacy.[67]

Yet some members of the Friends were unpersuaded. If the Taft family remained an important presence in Ohio, the family members were not as visible in Cincinnati as they had once been. Most of the prominent Tafts had left the city, and no prominent Tafts were active in city, state, or national politics anymore. The Tafts' philanthropy continued, but the Taft political dynasty was finished. So, not all the Friends' board members were enthused about the new leadership. Still just a few years in, Mahler's ability to reshape the Friends remained unproven.[68]

[66] Reusing interview; Pennington interview; Bob and Hope Taft interview; Sittenfeld interview; Garry interview; Ken Mahler, Jr. to author, August 14, 2019, email.
[67] Garry interview; Sittenfeld interview; Hawthorne interview.
[68] Mann interview; Garry interview; Sittenfeld interview.

Conclusion

In the fifty years that elapsed after William Howard Taft National Historic Site was authorized, NPS acquired the house, established on-site administration, studied the resource, restored the exterior of the house to its historic appearance, restored a portion of the interior, developed interpretive and education programs, added the Taft Education Center, developed visitor parking areas, and improved the landscaping around the Taft home. These were the signal accomplishments in the first fifty years of Site administration. Two grand openings punctuated the progress of development: the 1988 grand opening of the Taft house when the historic restoration was completed, and the 1999 grand opening of the Taft Education Center.

Annual visitation statistics for William Howard Taft National Historic Site can be cited as another way to encapsulate this administrative history. From establishment until the completion of the historic restoration, annual visitor numbers were low, bouncing up and down in the 1,000 to 6,000 range. During this period, the Site operated with a rudimentary staff and makeshift visitor reception area in the Sanning Apartments. After more than a decade of managing the Site as a construction zone, the completion of the historic restoration came as a relief to staff as well as a moment of celebration. For the next dozen years, the Site's annual visitation hovered in the 6,000 to 8,000 range. During this time the staff offered house tours to the public, but the Site still lacked a bona fide visitor center. Under these conditions the staff grew to its full complement of eight and it expanded the interpretive program to include education services to area schools. With the opening of the Taft Education Center in 1999, annual visitation at last began to grow. It broke 15,000 in 2003, broke into the 20,000 to 30,000 range after 2010, and climbed into the 30,000 to 40,000 range after 2015. In this time, the staff continued to expand the interpretive program with the Friends providing valuable aid to put on a growing number of temporary exhibits in the education center and other special events.

Three principal themes emerge in this administrative history. The first is the challenging nature of the historic restoration that was accomplished here. When NPS acquired the house, it was in poor condition. It had been converted into an apartment dwelling and the rear addition was at risk of collapse. Only a single photo of the house in the historic period existed. No architectural plans survived from that time.

Archeological investigations into what the historic property once looked like were stymied by a massive fill that had occurred on the sloping rear portion of the Taft family property. The more discouraging assessments in the 1970s held that the house was not worthy of restoration; its historic integrity was irretrievably lost. The first master plan for the Site was recalled when NPS determined that the plan rested on insufficient data. Despite these setbacks, NPS persevered with additional historical research, more intensive architectural sleuthing, and further archeological investigations of the grounds. This report argues that NPS's prudence in undertaking more studies before it completed the historic restoration paid off. It is better to have only four rooms restored and refurnished than to have the dining room or the birth room misidentified and put in the wrong part of the house. The public appreciates NPS's fidelity to historical authenticity.

The second theme relates to the location of William Howard Taft National Historic Site in an urban setting. The Site was authorized in 1969 in a time when there was an influx of urban sites into the National Park System. NPS leadership welcomed the system's expansion into urban settings, believing that it would modernize the National Park System to better serve the needs of an increasingly urbanized nation. Yet despite those high ideals the location of William Howard Taft National Historic Site in an inner-city neighborhood that was predominantly African American tested NPS's resolve. Race riots had erupted in Cincinnati in 1967 and 1968. Racial tensions continued to simmer in the segregated city. The rundown neighborhood was an uncomfortable place to many people in NPS and an unlikely spot to attract many tourists.

Wisely, NPS appointed an African American, John Troy Lissimore, to serve as the first park manager. Over time the federal staff earned the respect of the local community, but the Site attracted few nonwhite visitors. The years passed and William Howard Taft National Historic Site still had difficulty broadening its appeal beyond the traditional national park clientele of white, middle-class families and older people, despite the staff's strenuous efforts to serve a more diverse audience reflective of America or representative of the local community.

A related challenge for Site administration was to find ways to increase the Site's visibility in the big city environment. Overshadowed by the other major namesake attraction in Cincinnati, the Taft Museum of Art, William Howard Taft National Historic Site also competed for attention with numerous other museums, historic sites, the Cincinnati Zoo, and other city parks. For all the effort that staff put into special events, those happenings competed with other events going on all over the city. Education outreach to area schools competed with similar education outreach programs put on by other parks and museums. The big city was a competitive environment in which to forge a large presence.

The third theme concerns the relationship between William Howard Taft National Historic Site and the Taft family. Charlie Taft, the president's son, was a key figure in getting the Site established. The Taft family provided generous support in acquiring the house and the adjacent lot, demolishing the Cross Apartments, helping to pay for the historic restoration, donating historic furnishings, and helping to pay for the Taft Education Center. NPS leaned heavily on private money to develop the Site, and a few Taft family members were the pillars of private sector financial support.



Figure 53. William Howard Taft and his daughter, Helen Herron Taft Manning, in 1908. (Library of Congress.)

Through much of the Site's first fifty years the Taft political dynasty still held public office and helped bring attention to the Site. Recognizing the importance of the Taft family to the Site, NPS communicated directly with Taft family members on important issues concerning Site development. Superintendents regularly reached out to the Taft family for support in organizing and sustaining the Friends group.

In building this constructive relationship, NPS and the Taft family had to bridge some significant differences of perspective. During the restoration, NPS moved according to its own schedule while the Taft family thought the pace was far too slow. Interpreting the Site, NPS focused on William Howard Taft whereas the Taft family wanted to broaden the focus to include other Tafts who held public office.

Birthplace and childhood homes of famous people always present an interpretive challenge. How much should the interpretive story center on place and the environmental influences that factored in the individual's rise to fame? And how much should it focus on the individual's later life and legacy? William Howard Taft National Historic Site poses this challenge like any other birthplace and childhood home, but the tug to tell the story of the Taft political dynasty adds another layer of complexity to finding that elusive balance.

Appendix 1: Legislative Acts

Authorizing Act of 1969

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 Historic Site.

Appropriation.

Approved December 2, 1969.

National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978

Includes: development ceiling increase and boundary adjustment

Public Law 95-625
95th Congress

An Act

To authorize additional appropriations for the acquisition of lands and interests in lands within the Sawtooth National Recreation Area in Idaho.

Nov. 10, 1978
[S. 791]

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978.

SHORT TITLE AND TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1. This Act may be cited as the "National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978".

16 USC 1 note.

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16 USC 460u-9.

(16) **Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, Indiana**: Section 10 of the Act of November 5, 1966 (80 Stat. 1312), is amended by changing "$8,500,000" to "$9,440,000".

(17) **John Muir National Historic Site, California**: Section 3 of the Act of August 31, 1964 (78 Stat. 753), is amended by striking out "$300,000 for land acquisition and restoration of the buildings thereon." and inserting in lieu thereof "$224,000 for land acquisition and $1,285,000 for development".

75 Stat. 782.

(18) For the preservation and protection of certain lands in Prince Georges and Charles Counties, Maryland: Section 4 of the joint resolution of October 4, 1961 (75 Stat. 783) is amended by inserting "(a)" after "SEC. 4." and by adding the following new subsection (b) at the end thereof:

"(b) In addition to such other sums as have been appropriated for such purposes, there is authorized $2,000,000 for development.".

(19) **Longfellow National Historic Site, Massachusetts**: Section 4 of the Act of October 9, 1972 (86 Stat. 791), is amended by changing $586,000 (May 1971 prices)" to "$682,000 for development.", and by deleting "of the area, plus or minus such amounts, if any, as may be justified by reason of ordinary fluctuations in construction costs as indicated by engineering cost indices applicable to the types of construction involved herein.".

(20) **Pecos National Monument, New Mexico**: Section 3 of the Act of June 28, 1965 (79 Stat. 195), is amended by changing "$500,000" to "$2,375,000".

16 USC 433c note.

(21) **Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial, Ohio**: Section 4 of the Act of October 26, 1972 (86 Stat. 1181), is amended by changing "$5,177,000" to "$9,327,000".

16 USC 282c.

(22) **San Juan Island National Historical Park, Washington**: Section 4 of the Act of September 9, 1966 (80 Stat. 737), is amended by changing "$3,542,000" to "$5,575,000".

(23) **Sitka National Historical Park, Alaska**: Section 3 of the Act of October 18, 1972 (86 Stat. 904), is amended by changing "$691,000 (June 1971 prices)" to "$1,571,000", by changing the comma following "development" to a period, and by deleting the remainder of the sentence following said period.

(24) **Statue of Liberty National Monument, New York-New Jersey**: Section 1 of the joint resolution of August 17, 1965 (79 Stat. 543), is amended by changing "$6,000,000" to "$24,000,000."

(25) **Thaddeus Kosciuszko Home National Historic Site, Pennsylvania**: Section 3 of the Act of October 21, 1972 (86 Stat. 1046), is amended by changing "$592,000" to "$742,000".

(26) **Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site, Alabama**: Section 104(e) of the Act of October 26, 1974 (88 Stat. 1463), is amended by changing "$2,722,000" to "$2,862,000".

16 USC 460q-9.

(27) **Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area; California**: Section 10 of the Act of November 8, 1965 (79 Stat. 1295), is amended by changing "$22,700,000" to "$24,649,000".

(28) **William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Ohio**: Section 3 of the Act of December 2, 1969 (83 Stat. 273), is amended by changing "$318,000" to "$1,888,000".

16 USC 430mm.

(29) **Wilson's Creek National Battlefield, Missouri**: Section 3 of the Act of December 16, 1970 (84 Stat. 1441), is amended by changing "$2,285,000 (March 1969 prices)," to "$5,640,000.", and deleting the remaining portion of the sentence following the period.

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Sec. 506. Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site.
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Sec. 508. Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve.

William Howard Taft National Historic Site Boundary Adjustment Act of 2001

Public Law 107–60
107th Congress

An Act

Nov. 5, 2001
[H.R. 1000]

To adjust the boundary of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site in the State of Ohio, to authorize an exchange of land in connection with the historic site, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

William Howard Taft National Historic Site Boundary Adjustment Act of 2001.
16 USC 461 note.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "William Howard Taft National Historic Site Boundary Adjustment Act of 2001".

SEC. 2. EXCHANGE OF LANDS AND BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT, WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, OHIO.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) HISTORIC SITE.—The term "historic site" means the William Howard Taft National Historic Site in Cincinnati, Ohio, established pursuant to Public Law 91–132 (83 Stat. 273; 16 U.S.C. 461 note).

(2) MAP.—The term "map" means the map entitled "Proposed Boundary Map, William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Hamilton County, Cincinnati, Ohio," numbered 448/80,025, and dated November 2000.

(3) SECRETARY.—The term "Secretary" means the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Director of the National Park Service.

(b) AUTHORIZATION OF LAND EXCHANGE.—

(1) EXCHANGE.—The Secretary may acquire a parcel of real property consisting of less than one acre, which is depicted on the map as the "Proposed Exchange Parcel (Outside Boundary)", in exchange for a parcel of real property, also consisting of less than one acre, which is depicted on the map as the "Current USA Ownership (Inside Boundary)".

(2) EQUALIZATION OF VALUES.—If the values of the parcels to be exchanged under paragraph (1) are not equal, the difference may be equalized by donation, payment using donated or appropriated funds, or the conveyance of additional land.

(3) ADJUSTMENT OF BOUNDARY.—The Secretary shall revise the boundary of the historic site to reflect the exchange upon its completion.

(c) ADDITIONAL BOUNDARY REVISION AND ACQUISITION AUTHORITY.—

Effective date.

(1) INCLUSION OF PARCEL IN BOUNDARY.—Effective on the date of the enactment of this Act, the boundary of the historic site is revised to include an additional parcel of real property, which is depicted on the map as the "Proposed Acquisition".

(2) ACQUISITION AUTHORITY.—The Secretary may acquire the parcel referred to in paragraph (1) by donation, purchase from willing sellers with donated or appropriated funds, or exchange.

(d) AVAILABILITY OF MAP.—The map shall be on file and available for public inspection in the appropriate offices of the National Park Service.

(e) ADMINISTRATION OF ACQUIRED LANDS.—Any lands acquired under this section shall be administered by the Secretary as part of the historic site in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

Approved November 5, 2001.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 1000:

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 107–88 (Comm. on Resources).
SENATE REPORTS: No. 107–76 (Comm. on Energy and Natural Resources).
CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 147 (2001):
June 6, considered and passed House.
Oct. 17, considered and passed Senate.

○

Appendix 2: Personnel

Coordinating Superintendents (Mound City Group Nat'l Monument and Ohio Group)	
George F. Schesventer	1969 to 1971
William C. Birdsell	1971 to 1975
Park Managers	
John T. (Troy) Lissamore	1971 to 1973
Jerome L. Licari	1974 to 1975
Acting Park Manager	
Charlesetta Spurlock	1973 to 1974
Superintendents	
Jerome L. Licari	1975 to 1977
Fahy C. Whitaker	1977 to 1981
Mary Maxine Boyd	1981 to 1985
Steven A. Kesselman	1985 to 1989
Maryanne Gerbauckas	1989 to 1992
Kurt Topham	1992 to 2001
Kevin McMurry	2001 to 2005
Robin White	2005 to 2008
Reginald M. Tiller	2008 to 2014
Brenda Pennington	2015 to 2016
Hugh Hawthorne	2016 to
Acting Superintendents	
Vance L. Kaminski	1977 (Feb to Apr)
Sam Witherup	1981 (Mar to July)
Dean C. Einwalter	1984 (Sep to Nov) and 1985 (May)
Dorothy Anderson	1989 (June and July)
Craig Kenkel	2005 (March)
Sherry Tunteri	2005 (May to June) and 2008 (August)
Nicholas Georges (Acting Superintendent)	2016
Robert Stemple (Acting Superintendent)	2016
Nicole McHenry (Acting Superintendent)	2016
Chiefs of Interpretation	
Bob Moore	1989 to 1991
Beverly Albrecht	1992 to 1995
Ray Henderson	1998 to 2015
Kerry Wood	2015 to
Historian	
Ella S. Rayburn	1985 to 1987

Interpretive Specialist
RuthAnne Heriot 1972 to 1973

Park Rangers, Park Technicians, Park Aids (partial list; some held more than one title)
Samuel H. Witherup
Karl Merchant
Virginia Beard
Larry G. Asher
Rodney Stanley Sharp
Kathy Meyer
Bruce VanDervort
Terry Borland
Rodney Schmidt
Joe Gothard
Rosemary Kolks
Fred Nieman
Peg Oter
Eric Patterson
Reggie Murray
Jason Boyd
Paula Merritt
Ruth Horstman

Maintenance Men (partial list)
Roger Smith
Terry Gusler

Administrative Assistants, Administrative Technicians, Administrative Clerks (partial)
Charlesetta Spurlock
Barbara Adkins
Lynn Kallas
Brenda Sumler
Christine Burton
Diane McAllister
Charlotte Morris
Margie Leis
Christine Rodasky
Latoya Chapman
Jeanette Meleen

Appendix 3: Annual Base Budget

Year	Budget	Year	Budget
1979	$115,100	2000	$496,600
1980	$131,300	2001	NA
1981	$130,830	2002	$525,330
1982	$148,800	2003	$523,900
1983	$155,900	2004	$514,845
1984	$161,900	2005	$621,330
1985	$179,200	2006	$631,980
1986	$173,000	2007	NA
1987	$194,000	2008	$672,210
1988	$196,100	2009	$768,586
1989	$207,400	2010	NA
1990	$198,300	2011	$819,602
1991	$215,600	2012	$805,840
1992	$245,950	2013	$768,759
1993	$255,200	2014	NA
1994	$253,400	2015	$796,008
1995	$269,220	2016	$853,300
1996	$271,400	2017	$836,167
1997	$355,422	2018	$815,814
1998	NA	2019	$803,120
1999	NA	2020	$846,000

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Note:
Friends stands for the Friends group
WHT stands for William Howard Taft
WHTMA stands for the William Howard Taft Memorial Associaiton
WHTNHS stands for William Howard Taft National Historic Site

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