M: 37-3-2 1884
Thomas-Siegler House
201 Tulip Avenue
Takoma Park

The original structure of the Thomas-Siegler House was completed in 1884 for Isaac L. Thomas--first postmaster, store owner, and station manager for Takoma Park--is historically significant as one of the earliest homes constructed in B.F. Gilbert's Victorian suburban development.

The original Queen Anne-style dwelling, oriented toward Cedar Avenue, was remodeled in 1889 with the addition of a simple T-shaped section facing Tulip Avenue, resulting in the structure's complex H shape and duplex design.

Extensively landscaped under the ownership of the Siegler family, the grounds are dominated by large white oak trees with an understory of magnolia, American Holly, laurel, azalea, dogwood, and cherry which aesthetically define the setting for the historic structures and contribute to the overall sylvan environment of Takoma Park.

The Thomas-Siegler property, including the main house, the carriage house, and the landscaped grounds, is historically significant as an early example of the Victorian suburban ideal which greatly influenced the early suburban development of Montgomery County.

M:37-3-2

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION
8787 Georgia Avenue • Silver Spring, Maryland 20907

March 29, 1984

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

FROM: Mark Walston, Park Historian MW

RE: Thomas/Siegler House, Site 37/3-2

I have been asked by Planning Staff to verify some of the historical and architectural allegations made about the Siegler property in Takoma Park. The findings of my research are presented below, arranged in three major areas of concern: Main House; Carriage House; and Landscape.

MAIN HOUSE

In November of 1883, Mrs. Amanda G. Thomas, of Washington, D. C., purchased ten lots in B. F. Gilbert's new development, "Takoma Park." By the fall of 1884, the Thomas family house, at the corner of Oak -- now Cedar -- and Tulip Avenues, had been completed, and was occupied by Mrs. Thomas, her husband, Issac L. Thomas, and their two daughters, Jennie and Augusta. Some sources claim the Thomas House was the first dwelling completed in Takoma Park (Proctor, "Takoma Park, Energetic Community," The Sunday Star, 19 November 1933); others claim the Veitenheimer House, also on Oak Avenue, was the first erected (Heaton, "Jottings in Relation to Takoma Park," The Records of the Takoma Park Historical Society, No. 1, 1913). The point is, I believe, moot; it suffices to say that the Thomas House was one of the first homes constructed in the town of Takoma Park.

The house which stands on the property today was not constructed in toto in 1884; only a section of the house dates from that time. In configuration, the original Thomas House was a two story, three bay wide frame house, with the main facade oriented toward Tulip Avenue, and a two story integral rear ell running parallel to Cedar Avenue. It was a T-shaped dwelling, traditional, which could be styled "American Farmhouse." The original roofline can

M:37-3-2

still be discerned among the subsequent additions.

Isaac Thomas -- postmaster, store owner, and station master for the fledgling village -- died in March of 1889. Shortly thereafter, the widow Thomas convinced her sister, Rebecca McWilliam, formerly of Dickertown, New Jersey, to come and live with her in Takoma Park. In anticipation of her arrival, the original house was remodeled and expanded to provide comfortable accommodations for Rebecca. In essence, a second dwelling was attached to the original house; a new two story block was added, perpindicular to the rear ell of the first house and featuring a wrap-around porch and a two story turre t at the southern point of connection. The two sections were tied together architecturally by the continuance of the original horizontal siding and such shared decorative elements as gable-end fan brackets.

The remodelling was completed by November of 1889. In that month, a lease arrangement was drawn up between the two sisters, under which Rebecca was charged one cent a year for rent. In the agreement, Rebecca's portion of the house and yard is described as "beginning at the point where the portico of the house erected by the said Rebecca McWilliam joins the dwelling of the said Amanda G. Thomas," and includes the section of the lot running along the southeast side of Cedar Avenue (Montgomery County Land Records, JA 16/26).

The present Queen Anne appearance of the house is primarily a reflection of the 1889 remodelling; the duplex design of the house is not original, but results from the subsequent additions. The two-part construction, however, does not detract from the historical significance of the building as one of the earliest architectural inhabitants of Takoma Park.

CARRIAGE HOUSE

Southeast of the main dwelling is a frame structure which allegedly served as a carriage house for the Thomas family. An examination of the building revealed, like the house, a two-part construction. The original structure, perhaps dating from the end of the 19th century and a contemporary of the main house, is a one and one-half story frame building, covered with horizontal beaded siding. On the southern facade a shed-roof porch covers the two bay entrances. The siting, the configuration, and the construction details of the

M:37-3-2

earlier section suggests an original use as a carriage house. To this building was added, sometime during the early 20th century, a one story frame addition, covered in german siding. This section was constructed for use as an automobile garage, a function which the earlier carriage house apparently could not perform.

The presence of a carriage house — a rare survivor in Takoma Park — gives the property additional historical value.

LANDSCAPE

In 1919 the Thomas property was purchased by Franklin and Catherine Siegler, formerly of Philadelphia, Pa., from Augusta W. T. Long, the sole heir of Amanda Thomas (d. 1913). Living in the house along with Mr. and Mrs. Siegler at various times was their daughter, Estelle, and their two sons, Edouard Horace (b. 1888) and Eugene Alfred (b. 1891). Later, the house was primarily occupied by Edouard and his wife, Esther.

The Siegler brothers, noted scientists, were both employed by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, from the 1920s onward. Dr. E. Horace Siegler worked in the Bureau of Entomology, specializing in toxicological studies, while Dr. Eugene A. Siegler worked in the Bureau of Plant Industry, concentrating on the diseases of fruit. Through their work and their publications, the two men made significant contributions to the advancement of botanical knowledge in America. (A partial listing of their works, included in the National Union Catalogue, identifies E. Horace Siegler as the author of 15 works published between 1915 and 1939, and Eugene Siegler as the author of 10 works published between 1923 and 1940.) The avid interest of the Sieglers in things botanical is reflected in the property's extensive landscaping and the wide variety of plantings on the site.

The contention has been made that among the various plantings are hybridized species of azaleas developed by Benjamin Yoe Morrison. These azaleas were reportedly part of experimental work conducted during the 1920s and 1930s, which later resulted in the reknowned Glenn Dale azalea.

Morrison was a contemporary of the Sieglers, an associate of theirs at the USDA, and a fellow townsman; his family home, where he lived with his parents, was on Piney Branch Road, only a few blocks from the Siegler house. Morrison joined the USDA in 1920 as an

M:37-3-2

assistant to David Fairchild. Beginning as a horticulturist, he became Chief, Division of Plant Exploration and Introduction at Glenn Dale, Maryland, from 1934 to 1948. From 1937 to 1951 he was Acting Director then Director of the National Arboretum at Washington, D. C. Among other achievements, he was founder of the American Horticultural Society in 1924, and from his home in Takoma Park served for many years as president of the society and editor of their quarterly journal. In addition, during the 1920s Morrison served variously as president, vice-president, and landscape gardener of the Takoma Horticultural Club, an organization which his father, Lisle Morrison, helped found in 1916, and still in existence today. The Morrison Azalea Garden at the National Arboretum is a tribute and memorial to the significance of his work.

Morrison began his pioneering azalea hybridizations at his parents home in Takoma Park during the 1920s, "with the end view of creating races of azaleas that should be winter-hardy at Washington, D. C., and that should have flowers as large as those borne by the varieties of Indian azaleas which were the great ornament of southern gardens" (Morrison, The Glenn Dale Azaleas, USDA Monograph No. 20, 1953; p. 2). Takoma Park was an area well-suited for his experiments; extensive growths of native azaleas had covered the hills prior to the town's development. In 1900, specimens of the Takoma Park native azalea, Rhododendron atlanticum, had been collected and catalogued for botanical study by T. A. Williams (Wilson and Rehder, A Monograph of Azaleas, Cambridge, 1921; p. 148).

From the Takoma Park beginnings, Morrison selected particular crosses to be transferred to the Glenn Dale, Maryland, experimental station. During the mid-1930s, however, a newly-appointed Division Chief ordered Morrison to "get rid" of the azaleas at Glenn Dale, and forbade him to do any additional work on them at that site. Undaunted, Morrison moved all the plants to gardens in and around his Takoma Park home, to continue the work. There he made the final crosses and selections (Livingston and West, Hybrids and Hybridizers, 1978; p. 112).

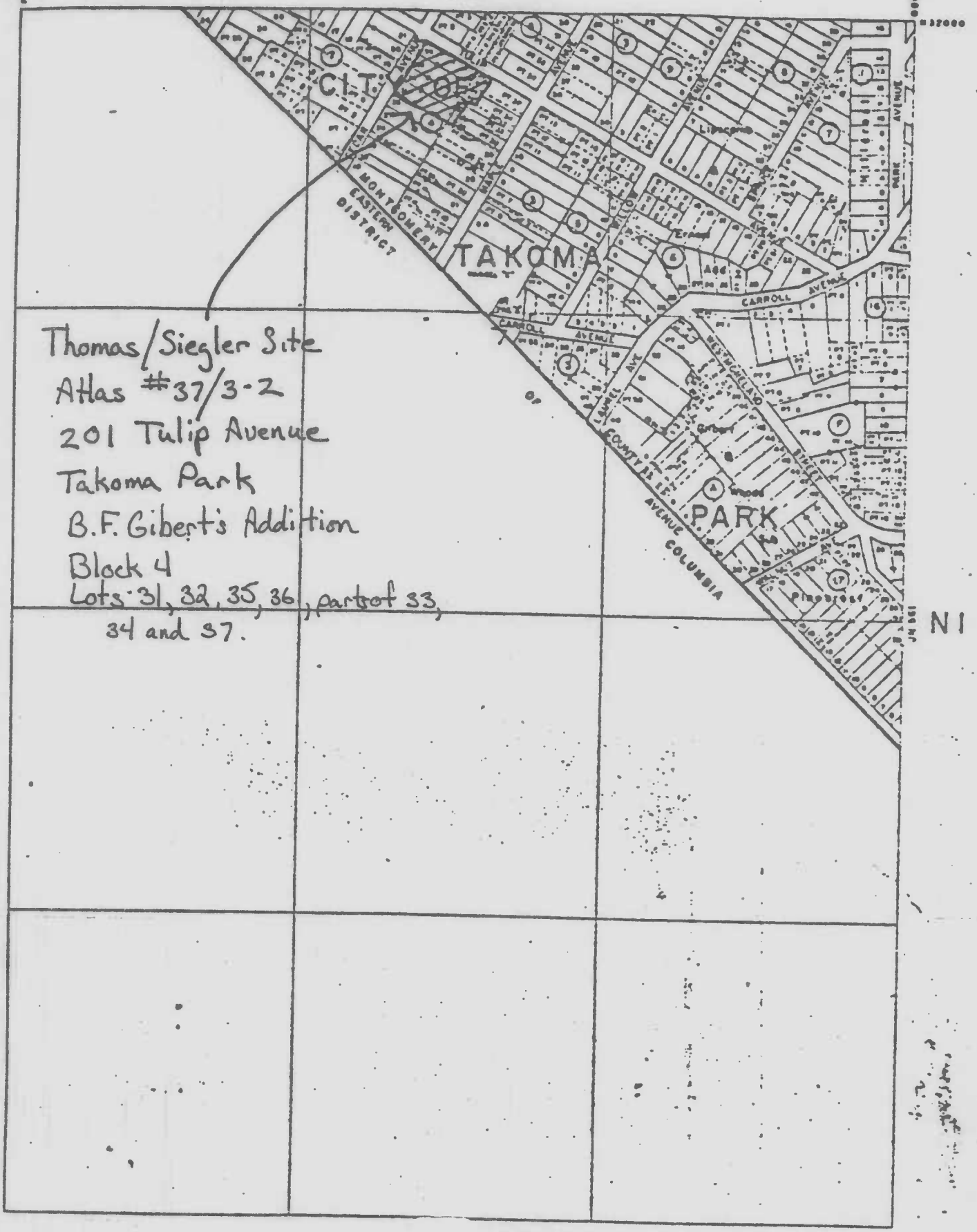
When the next Bureau Chief saw the hybrid azaleas in Takoma Park, he immediately recognized the value of Morrison's work, and agreed that they should be released to the wider public. Moved back to Glenn Dale Station, the selected plants were propigated, and eventually released to the nursery trade as Glenn Dale azaleas.

M:37-3-2

Private gardens in Takoma Park are known to have been actively involved in Morrison's pioneering work. But the question still remains of whether the Siegler property was specifically involved in the experimentations, and whether the azaleas which now exist on the property were part of Morrison's work. One would assume that, as associates of Morrison at the USDA, and as neighbors who shared an interest in horticulture, the Sieglers could very well have participated in the process and, as has been suggested, offered their property as a "study ground and laboratory for the science of azalea culture." Unfortunately, no written account specifically implicating the Siegler property has been found; Morrison, in his formal writings, never mentions private study sites by owner's name. The answer may rest in the Benjamin Morrison manuscript collection, deposited at the Hunt Library for Botanical Documentation, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pa. Until that written evidence is discovered, or until someone better-versed in azalea culture examines the plants and concludes, from age and characteristics, that they are indeed pre-final selection Glenn Dale azaleas, their association with Morrison's hybridization experiments remains hearsay.

J4

M:37-3-2



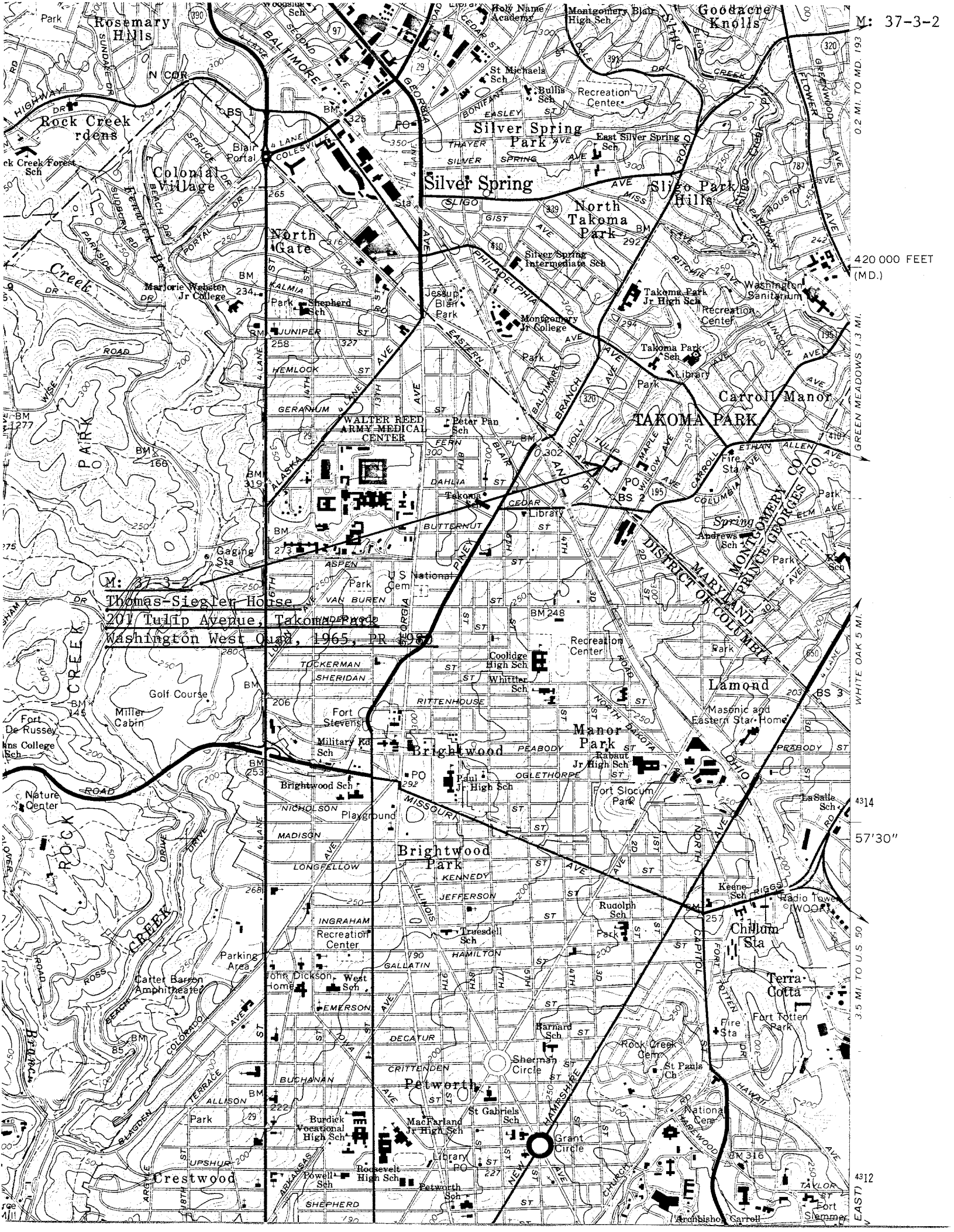
Thomas/Siegler Site
Atlas #37/3-2
201 Tulip Avenue
Takoma Park
B.F. Gibert's Addition
Block 4
Lots 31, 32, 35, 36, part of 33, 34 and 37.

DEPARTMENT OF TAXATION & ASSESSMENTS

DIST	CURRENT TO
13	1-1-81

SCALE 1" = 200'

Map JN341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Thomas-Siegler House
201 Tulip Avenue, Takoma Park
Washington West Quad, 1965, PR 1980
Rosemary Hills
Rock Creek Gardens
Colonial Village
Silver Spring
Silver Spring Park
North Takoma Park
Sligo Park Hills
Goodacre Knolls
North Gate
Carroll Manor
TAKOMA PARK
WALTER REED ARMY MEDICAL CENTER
Brightwood
Brightwood Park
Manor Park
Lamond
Petworth
Crestwood
Chillum Sta
Terra Cotta
Fort Stevens
Golf Course
Miller Cabin
Nature Center
Carter Barron Amphitheater
Parking Area
Sherman Circle
Grant Circle
Fort Slocum Park
Fort Totten Park
Rock Creek Cem
Washington Sanitarium
Recreation Center
Library
Gaging Sta
Fire Sta
Masonic and Eastern Star Home
Radio Tower
Archbishop Carroll
Fort Slemmer
MONTGOMERY CO.
PRINCE GEORGES CO.
MARYLAND
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
420 000 FEET (MD.)
0.2 MI. TO MD. 193
GREEN MEADOWS 1.3 MI.
WHITE OAK 5 MI.
3.5 MI. TO U.S. 50
57'30"
4314
4312