



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home



(National Park Service)

High atop one of Cincinnati's most prominent hilltops stands the large yellow house where William Howard Taft was born and grew up. Located in the once-affluent suburb of Mount Auburn, the two-story Greek Revival house is a reminder of the elegant era when those of means could escape the dirt, heat, and crowded conditions of the lower city. Although attractive and comfortable, the house was quite modest compared to the many splendid country villas found along the slope of Mount Auburn and on the summit. During the mid-19th century, Mount Auburn was known as the city's "Fifth Avenue." Among the many examples of architecture were elaborate Second Empire homes with their two distinctive sloped roofs, rambling Italianate villas belonging to some of Mount Auburn's wealthiest residents, and Georgian Revival houses reminiscent of the grandeur of the southern states.

Walking through the neighborhood, one can imagine the sounds of horse-drawn carriages making their way up the steep hill to return well-to-do Mount Auburn residents to their homes. Now nestled among modern service buildings and other mansions that have been preserved, the Taft House reminds us of the boyhood and upbringing of a man whose career was dedicated to his country.



Document Contents

National Curriculum Standards

About This Lesson

Getting Started: Inquiry Question

Setting the Stage: Historical Context

Locating the Site: Maps

1. Map 1: Downtown Cincinnati and Suburbs, 1871
2. Map 2: Historic Auburn Avenue Neighborhood

Determining the Facts: Readings

1. Reading 1: Will Taft Grows Up
2. Reading 2: The Taft Household
3. Reading 3: High School Admission Test
4. Reading 4: President and Chief Justice
5. Reading 5: Brothers, Sister, Sons, and Daughter

Visual Evidence: Images

1. The Taft house, 1868
2. The Taft boys
3. Taft and his high school graduating class
4. William Howard Taft National Historic Site

Putting It All Together: Activities

1. Activity 1: Leadership Characteristics
2. Activity 2: Practicing Leadership Skills

References and Endnotes

Additional Resources



Where this lesson fits into the curriculum

Time Period: 1850s to 1920s

Topics: This lesson can be used with units on early 20th-century presidents. It will help students understand the role that education, family values, and respect for civic duty played in forming the leadership skills of the Taft family.

Relevant United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

This lesson relates to the following National Standards for History from the UCLA National Center for History in the Schools:

US History Era 4

- **Standard 2B:** The student understands the first era of American urbanization.
- **Standard 2C:** The student understands how antebellum immigration changed American society.
- **Standard 3A:** The student understands the changing character of American political life in "the age of the common man."
- **Standard 4B:** The student understands how Americans strived to reform society and create a distinct culture.

US History Era 6

- **Standard 2A:** The student understands the sources and experiences of the new immigrants.
- **Standard 4B:** The student understands the roots and development of American expansionism and the causes and outcomes of the Spanish-American War.

US History Era 7

- **Standard 1B:** The student understands Progressivism at the national level.
- **Standard 2A:** The student understands how the American role in the world changed in the early 20th century.
- **Standard 3B:** The student understands how a modern capitalist economy emerged in the 1920s.
- **Standard 3D:** The student understands politics and international affairs in the 1920s.



Relevant Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

This lesson relates to the following Curriculum Standards for Social Studies from the National Council for the Social Studies:

Theme III: People, Places, and Environment

- Standard D: The student estimates distance, calculates scale, and distinguishes other geographic relationships such as population density and spatial distribution patterns.
- Standard H - The student examines, interprets, and analyzes physical and cultural patterns and their interactions, such as land use, settlement patterns, cultural transmission of customs and ideas, and ecosystem changes.

Theme IV: Individual Development and Identity

- Standard C: The student describes the ways family, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and institutional affiliations contribute to personal identity.
- Standard D: The student relates such factors as physical endowment and capabilities, learning, motivation, personality, perception, and behavior to individual development.
- Standard F: The student identifies and describes the influence of perception, attitudes, values, and beliefs on personal identity.

Theme VI: Power, Authority, and Governance

- Standard C: The student analyzes and explains ideas and governmental mechanisms to meet needs and wants of citizens, regulate territory, manage conflict, and establish order and security.
- Standard E: The student identifies and describes the basic features of the political systems in the United States, and identifies representative leaders from various levels and branches of government.

Theme X: Civic Ideals, and Practices

- Standard A: The student examines the origins and continuing influence of key ideals of the democratic republican form of government, such as individual human dignity, liberty, justice, equality, and the rule of law.
- Standard D: The student practices forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic.
- Standard H: The student analyzes the effectiveness of selected public policies and citizen behaviors in realizing the stated ideals of a democratic republican form of government.



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

- Standard J: The student examines strategies designed to strengthen the "common good," which consider a range of options for citizen action.

Relevant Common Core Standards

This lesson relates to the following Common Core English and Language Arts Standards for History and Social Studies for middle and high school students:

Key Ideas and Details

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.3

Craft and Structure

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.4

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.7

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.10



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

About This Lesson

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file for the [William Howard Taft National Historic Site](https://npgallery.nps.gov/pdfhost/docs/NRHP/Text/66000612.pdf) [https://npgallery.nps.gov/pdfhost/docs/NRHP/Text/66000612.pdf] (with [photographs](https://npgallery.nps.gov/pdfhost/docs/NRHP/Photos/66000612.pdf) https://npgallery.nps.gov/pdfhost/docs/NRHP/Photos/66000612.pdf). It was written by E. Ray Henderson, Park Ranger, William Howard Taft National Historic Site. TwHP is sponsored, in part, by the Cultural Resources Training Initiative and Parks as Classrooms programs of the National Park Service. This lesson is one in a series that brings the important stories of historic places into the classrooms across the country.

Objectives

1. To explain the role the Taft family played in our history during the 19th and 20th centuries and the effect their civic participation had on the country;
2. To describe how William Howard Taft's family background influenced his success in achieving the posts of president of the United States and chief justice of the Supreme Court;
3. To list jobs held by William Howard Taft before he became president and examine how those occupations prepared him for his most prominent positions;
4. To compare the leadership qualities of current local and national figures with members of the Taft family;

Materials for students

The materials listed below can either be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students.

1. Two maps of Cincinnati and Taft's neighborhood;
2. Three readings that describe Taft's family and upbringing;
3. A copy of the Taft household census report;
4. A copy of Taft's high school admission test;
5. Four photographs that include the Taft family and William Howard Taft with friends;

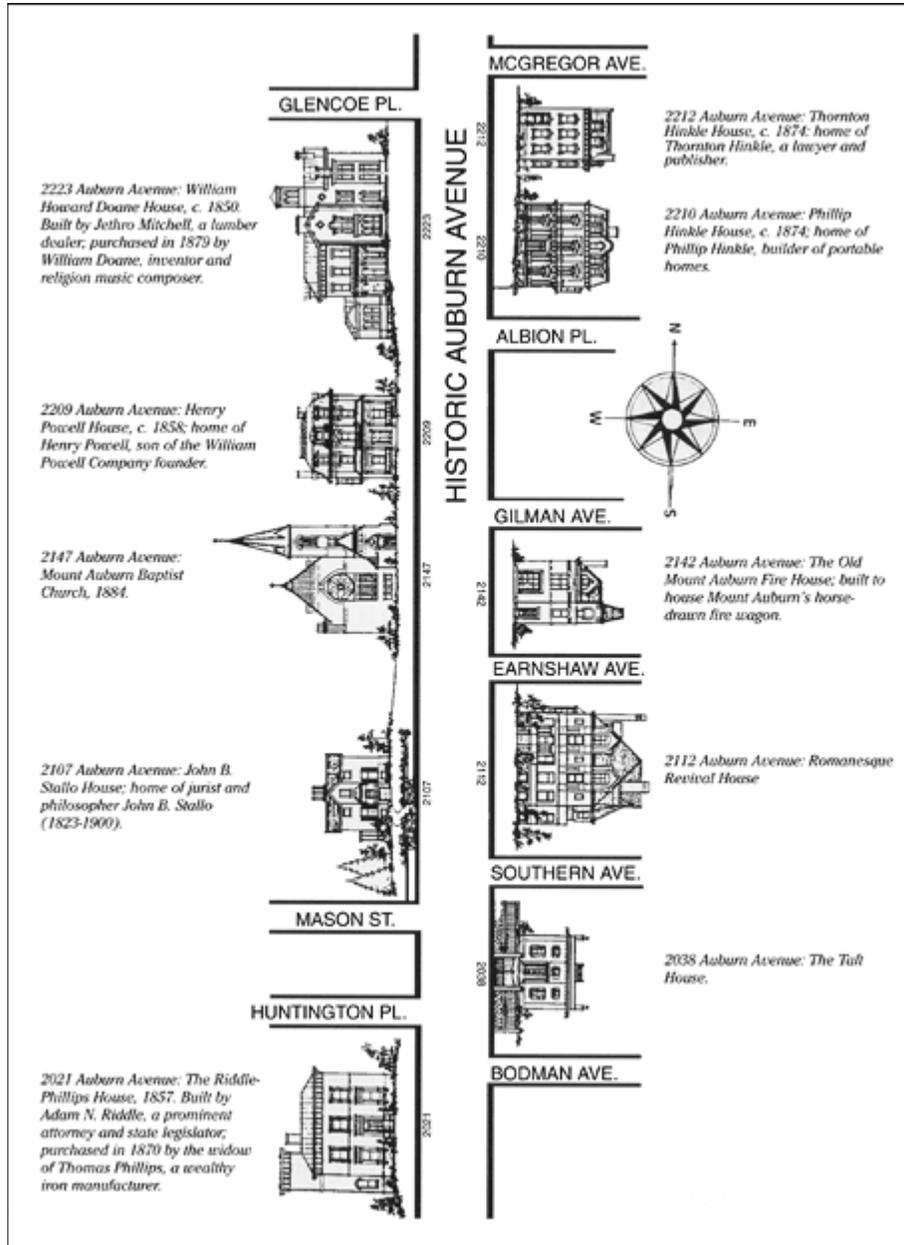
Visiting the site

The Taft house is located at 2038 Auburn Avenue in the Mount Auburn section of Cincinnati. It is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily except for New Year's Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Visitor parking is available. For additional information write to the Superintendent, William Howard Taft National Historic Site, 2038 Auburn Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45219 or [visit the park web pages](#).



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Getting Started



**Which U.S. President lived on this street?
What does the drawing tell you about where
and how he grew up?**



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Photo Analysis Worksheet

Step 1:

Examine the photograph for 10 seconds. How would you describe the photograph?

Step 2:

Divide the photograph into quadrants and study each section individually. What details--such as people, objects, activities--do you notice?

Step 3:

What other information--such as time period, location, season, reason photo was taken--can you gather from the photo?

Step 4:

How would you revise your first description of the photo using the information noted in Steps 2 and 3?

Step 5:

What questions do you have about the photograph? How might you find answers to these questions?



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Setting the Stage

William Howard Taft's father, Alphonso, was prominent both in Cincinnati and the nation. By moving his family to Mount Auburn, a Cincinnati suburb, in 1851, he provided opportunities for his children that would lead to distinctive achievements. Based on the hard work and lofty civic ideals practiced in this upper middle-class setting, William Howard Taft set a course that led him to two of the highest offices in the land (first, as the 27th president of the United States, and later, as the 10th chief justice of the Supreme Court, appointed by President Warren G. Harding), thus carving out a special place in history as the only person to serve the country in both capacities.

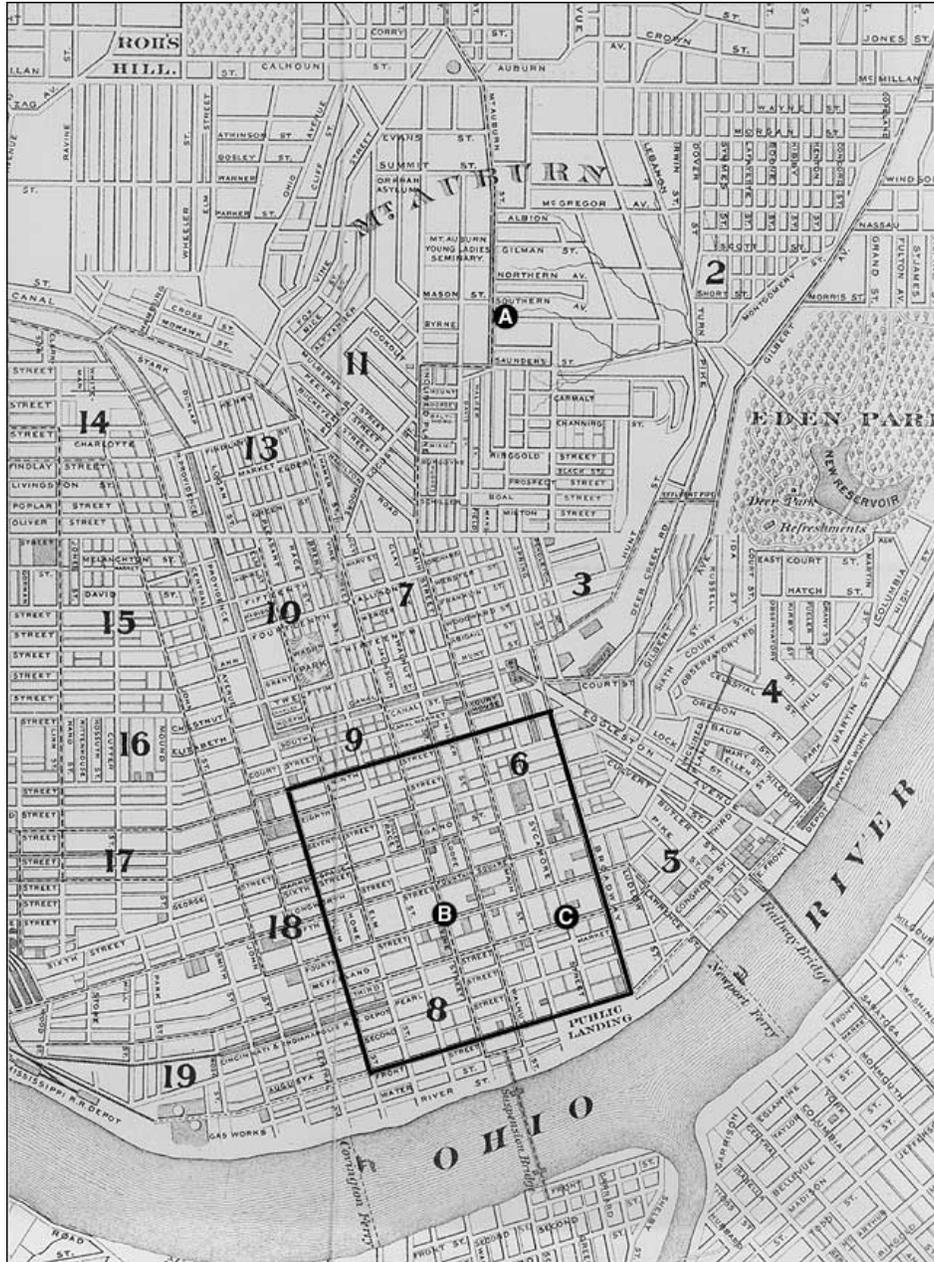
William Howard Taft was born in the family home in Cincinnati on September 15, 1857, and lived there continuously until he went to Yale College in 1874. After graduating from Yale, he began a meteoric rise to national prominence. He loved the law and spent his life in positions where he could practice and live by principles of law. Because he worked hard and was an able administrator, Taft served in several appointed positions. When he became president in 1909, it was only the second time he had been elected to office, the first being in 1887 as a superior court judge in his native Cincinnati. His career should be remembered as one of excellence in public service for almost half a century.



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Locating the Site

Map 1: Downtown Cincinnati and suburbs, 1874



(Williams' Cincinnati Directory)

Key for Map 1

- A. The Taft family's Mount Auburn address.
 - B. The Taft family's downtown address prior to 1851.
 - C. Alphonso Taft's law office address.
- The square identifies the approximate boundaries of the business district.



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Questions for Map 1

1) Locate the suburb of Mount Auburn. Alphonso Taft moved from his home at Fourth and Vine streets (downtown) to Mount Auburn in 1851. What were the advantages and disadvantages of living downtown? Why might Alphonso Taft have moved his family from downtown to Mount Auburn? Why do families move to residential suburbs today? Are the motives different?

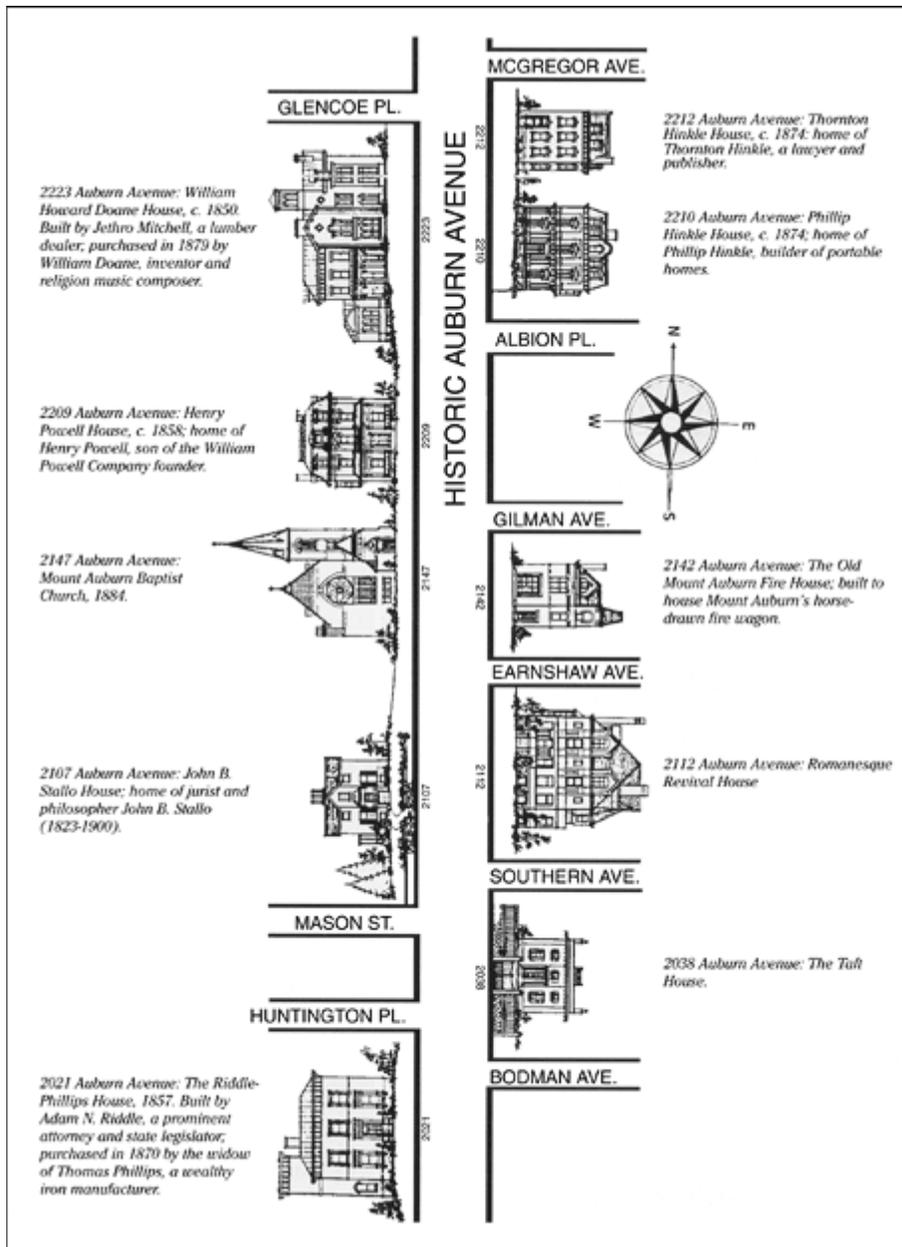
2) The Tafts' new home was still located only one mile from Alphonso's downtown law practice at Third and Sycamore streets. What means of transportation would have been available during the middle of the 19th century? Why was it important to reside close to your work?



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Locating the Site

Map 2: Historic Auburn Avenue



(Courtesy Cincinnati Museum Center)

Map 2 shows the neighborhood surrounding the Taft House. It shows the houses and lists information about the occupants, and details the homes still standing today.

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Questions for Map 2

1) Study the map and captions about Auburn Avenue residents. How would you describe Taft's neighborhood? How might this neighborhood compare to their downtown residence?

2) Note the church and fire house. Does your neighborhood have public buildings? Where would you find these types of structures today? How does the Mount Auburn Fire House differ from modern fire stations?



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Determining the Facts

Reading 1: Will Taft Grows Up

Cincinnati was a busy river port of 50,000 people when Alphonso Taft arrived from Vermont in 1838. Business was good for the ambitious young attorney, who built a practice and made his place in town society. After living in Cincinnati for three years, he married Fanny Phelps, a girl from his Vermont hometown. A decade later he moved the family, which now included two young sons and his parents, to a 10-year-old house on two acres of land a mile north of downtown in Mount Auburn. Alphonso put up a large addition to accommodate his growing family, and also modernized the plumbing.

Fanny died in 1852, only a year after moving to Mount Auburn. In 1854, Alphonso married Massachusetts schoolteacher Louise Torrey. An affectionate stepmother to Alphonso's two sons, Louise gave birth to four healthy children of her own, including William on September 15, 1857. As a child, Will, as he was called by family members, was outgoing and good natured—traits he carried into adulthood. Encouraged by his parents, Will earned high marks throughout his school years. "All play and no work makes Jack a mere toy," his father would threaten, but Will escaped his books by playing baseball, riding the family's pet pony, sledding down the nearby hills in winter, wrestling, or tearing through the house with his siblings.

"I am more and more impressed with the responsibility of training children properly," Louise wrote her mother in 1860. "It is what we are, not what we do in reference to them which will make its impression on their lives." In setting an example, the parents could not have been more diligent. Louise and Alphonso Taft raised their six children to live by the principles of hard work, fair play, and public service. The Taft house was a whirl of activity. Their formal parlor might be the setting for the card games of whist or euchre, a discussion of anti-slavery legislation and women's suffrage, or book reading. Civil War hero and future president, James A. Garfield once accompanied friends to dinner at the Taft home. Often, rugs were rolled up and furniture pushed aside, and the parlor became a makeshift dance hall. Quiet evenings were spent in the library. Alphonso finished up the day's business, Louise sometimes had sewing to do, and the children read or brooded over the chess table. Alphonso, an avid book collector, was a founding member of the city's literary society. Family discussions and letters to friends and relatives were full of references to Dickens, Darwin, and other best sellers of the day. There was scarcely a civic or cultural organization in town that could not claim the participation of one or more Tafts.

Alphonso's tireless work for the Republican Party led to political appointments (for instance, he gave up a well-paying law practice for a city judgeship in 1865) that brought him increasing social prominence, but ultimately led to his departure from Cincinnati. President Ulysses S. Grant summoned Taft to Washington, first as secretary of war, then as attorney general. In the 1880s Taft served as minister to Austria-Hungary and later Russia. Much to Louise's delight, the couple lived abroad and indulged their love of travel. The Auburn Avenue house was intermittently rented out when not occupied by the grown children.

By 1889 the Tafts had left Auburn Avenue for good. Alphonso and Louise retired to California where the climate was better for Alphonso's health. Will completed his education and began a law career of his own. In 1886 he married Helen Herron and built a house in Cincinnati. The other Taft children also were out on their own. Alphonso died in San Diego in May 1891 and was buried in Cincinnati. Tenants were kind enough to allow the family and friends one last gathering in the old home for the funeral.

In 1902 Louise Taft reminded Will, then governor-general of the Philippines, of his late father's role in his career: "You owe so much to his influence that you might be thought a striking exemplification of the

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Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

influence of heredity, and the environment which surrounded you in living in the same atmosphere, and breathing the same air—an inspiration to everything that was good."



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Questions for Reading 1

1) What position held by William Howard's father do you think had the most influence on William Howard's career? Explain your answer.

2) What values were taught in the Taft household as William Howard was growing up? Why do you think these values were important to Taft's later life? What values do you think are important for success in today's world?

3) In your own words, what point was Louise Taft trying to make to her son in 1902 regarding her late husband's influence? Do you agree with her point of view? Why or why not?

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Determining the Facts

Document 1: The Taft Household from 1860-1880

June 1860

Name	Age	Occupation	Where Born
Alphonso Taft	49	Attorney	Vermont
Louise Taft	32	Housewife	Massachusetts
Peter Rawson Taft	78	Gentleman	Massachusetts
Sylvia Howard Taft	68		Vermont
Charles P. Taft	16	Student	Ohio
Peter Rawson (Rossy) Taft	14	Student	Ohio
William Howard Taft	2		Ohio
Henry Waters Taft	1		Ohio
Anna Torrey	19		Massachusetts
Margaret Mulligan	28	Cook	Ireland
Rosa Mulligan	20	Nurse	Ireland
Edward Mulligan	22	Hired Man	Ireland

June 1870

Name	Age	Occupation	Where Born
Alphonso Taft	59	Judge of Superior Court	Vermont
Louise Taft	42	Housewife	Massachusetts
Charles P. Taft	26	Attorney	Ohio
William H. Taft	12	Student	Ohio
Henry W. Taft	11	Student	Ohio
Horace D. Taft	8	Student	Ohio
Fanny L. Taft	4		Ohio
Mary Farrell	30	Servant	Ireland
Mary Conner	23	Servant	Ireland
John McGrath	19	Hired Man	Ireland
Peter R. (Rossy) Taft	24	Law Student in Europe	Ohio

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Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

June 1880

Name	Age	Occupation	Where Born
Alphonso Taft	69	Lawyer	Vermont
Louise Taft	52	Housewife	Massachusetts
Peter R. Taft	34	Lawyer	Ohio
William Howard Taft	22	Lawyer	Ohio
Henry W. Taft	21	At College	Ohio
Horace D. Taft	18	At College	Ohio
Fanny L. Taft	14		Ohio
Mary O'Connell	30	Servant	Ireland
Mary Vale	28	Servant	Ireland
Mary Devany	29	Servant	Ireland

(U.S. Census Data)

Document 1 lists the residents and occupations of those in the Taft household during a 20-year period. It provides information on what life was like for an upper middle-class family from 1860 to 1880.



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Questions for Document 1

1) Does the Taft household look like what is now called an extended family? Why do you think the older boys continued to live with their parents? Do you have grandparents or grown siblings living in your house? If so, do you think the reasons are the same now as they were in the 19th century?

2) How might Anna Torrey have been connected to the Taft family? (You may want to refer back to Reading 1 for a clue.) Why might she have been living with the family?

3) Why do you think the "occupation" column is blank for Sylvia Howard Taft, Anna Torrey, and Fanny Taft?

4) Note the place of birth of the servants. How did they reflect immigration patterns of the time?



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Determining the Facts

Document 2: High School Admission Test Taken by William Howards Taft

Document 2 is a copy of a test William Howard Taft passed to gain entrance into high school. He graduated second in his class at Woodward High School in 1874 and second in his class at Yale in 1878.

Questions Submitted to Grade A, Intermediate Schools, For Admission to High Schools.

UNITED STATES HISTORY

1. Where and by whom were the thirteen original States settled?
2. State the causes of the "French and Indian War." Name two of the principal battles fought, the commanders on each side, and the victorious party. What territory did England gain by the war?
3. When was Jamestown settled? St Augustine? When and by whom was the Hudson River discovered? The Mississippi? The Pacific Ocean?
4. Name the chief cause of the "Revolution." How long did it last? When, where, and by whom, on the part of the Americans, was the treaty of peace concluding the war signed?
5. Name one of the principal battles fought during each of the years of the Revolution, the commanders on each side, and the victorious party in each.
6. When and where was negro slavery introduced into America; and when and by whom was the emancipation proclamation issued?
7. When was the Federal Constitution adopted; and what was the first State admitted into the Union after its adoption?
8. What territory was acquired by the United States during Jefferson's administration? How was it obtained?
9. State the causes of the war of 1812. Name two of the most important engagements on land, two naval battles, the commanders on both sides in each, and the victorious party in each engagement.
10. State the causes of the late war. Name two important battles, the commanders on both sides, the victorious party, and the chief results of war.

(Forty-First Annual Report for the School Year Ending June 30, 1870, Common Schools of Cincinnati. Cincinnati: Wilstach, Baldwin & Company, 1870, p. 126)



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Questions for Document 2

1) Write down as many answers as you can to the questions above. Compare your answers with other students to find out how many you answered correctly.

2) What is the "late war" referred to in Question 10?

3) What do you think the reaction would be if students had to answer these questions to enter high school today? Would such a policy be a benefit to education in today's schools? Why or why not?



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Determining the Facts

Reading 2: President and Chief Justice

Louise and Alphonso Taft sent their children out into the world equipped with an education and a belief that academic learning was best put to use in service to others. Family influence, a diploma from Yale, a law degree, and his own ambition propelled Will Taft into public life at a young age. Still in his 20s, Alphonso Taft's son seemed the natural choice for various legal and judicial posts. He worked hard. He was a loyal party man, campaigning for Republican candidates and receiving jobs in return. His sense of ethics was unshakable, at one point threatening to derail his career: as collector of the internal revenue, he chose to resign rather than replace competent employees with undeserving party favorites. All the while his goal was a seat on the U.S. Supreme Court.

At age 33, he was appointed U.S. solicitor general. This was his introduction to the national scene and to progress-minded politicians such as Theodore Roosevelt. Two years later, as a U.S. circuit court judge, Taft's efforts to make the judicial system responsive to the needs of a changing society drew President William McKinley's attention. McKinley needed someone in the Philippines to establish a civil government for the new U.S. possession. He named Taft, who left for the islands in 1900. Governor-General Taft oversaw the construction of schools and transportation lines, strengthened the economy, and brought modern law to the islands. He won the hearts of the Filipinos. Some historians view these accomplishments as his most important work in light of the strategic role the Philippines later played as a U.S. outpost in the western Pacific.

While Taft was in the Philippines, he was asked by President Roosevelt to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court. He sacrificed his dream in order to finish his work with the people he had grown to love. The Supreme Court offer was repeated a few years later when Taft was secretary of war. Again he declined. Then, President Roosevelt endorsed Taft as his successor. "My ambition is to become a justice of the Supreme Court," Taft wrote his brother in 1905. "I presume, however, there are very few men who would refuse to accept the Republican nomination for the presidency, and I am not an exception." Besides, Helen Taft, often referred to as "Nellie," wanted her husband in the White House. He received the nomination for president in 1908 and won the November election.

The accomplishments of the Taft administration are still a part of American life. He backed the constitutional amendment providing for an income tax, worked within a budget, strengthened the Interstate Commerce Commission to better regulate transportation and control railroad rates, brought dozens of antitrust suits, appointed six Supreme Court justices, and signed legislation admitting New Mexico and Arizona into the union as the 47th and 48th states. He inaugurated the presidential tradition of throwing out the first baseball of the season.

Taft's presidential achievements were obscured by his lack of broad-based support. In the view of Progressives, who had expected a continuation of Roosevelt's policies, he was paralyzed with inertia. With one eye always on the law, he was too cautious to expand his presidential power in the manner of his predecessor. Old guard Republicans, happily rid of Roosevelt, bristled at what they viewed as continuing threats to the free market—the dismantling of monopolies, artificially low railroad rates, and the notion that one's hard-earned money belonged, in part, to the government. Although his party re-nominated him in 1912, his mentor, Theodore Roosevelt, was furious that Taft had moved timidly on his Progressive agenda. Roosevelt headed the ticket for the Bull Moose (Progressive) Party, splitting the Republican vote and ensuring victory for Democrat Woodrow Wilson.

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Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Lifelong devotion to his alma mater took Taft back to Yale where he taught constitutional law for eight years. A third chance at the Supreme Court came his way when President Warren G. Harding had court vacancies to fill. This time there was no burden of unfinished duty to keep Taft from accepting. In 1921 he was named 10th chief justice of the United States.

The first problem he encountered was one of sheer volume. The court was bound to accept any case involving a federal point of law. By the 1920s claims arising from the First World War, income tax laws, and prohibition generated an overwhelming backlog. The Judiciary Act of 1925, backed by Taft, allowed the high court to choose cases based on merit. This paved the way for more judicial reforms. Taft had backed the income tax as president and continued to do so as chief justice. His court upheld prohibition laws and efforts to convict bootleggers, affirmed presidential power to remove appointees, and strengthened the Interstate Commerce Commission as well as the Federal Government in general. "While Taft presided as chief justice, and was often accused of conservatism," explains Taft's biographer Henry F Pringle, "there occurred a steady redistribution of the wealth of the United States." Taft rallied support for a new building for the Supreme Court—a solemn neoclassical structure completed in 1932—giving the judicial branch of the government symbolic parity with the executive and legislative branches.

In February 1930 Taft resigned his post because of illness. A month later he died at age 72. That day President Herbert Hoover articulated the country's sense of loss when he declared, "Mr. Taft's service to our country has been of rare distinction and was marked by purity of patriotism, a lofty disinterestedness, and a devotion to the best interests of the nation." William Howard Taft was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Questions for Reading 2

- 1) William Howard Taft often has been called the "reluctant politician." What evidence can you find to support this claim?

- 2) What position held by Taft before his presidency was the most important? Why do you think so?

- 3) As president, Taft made many contributions to the country. What accomplishments do you feel were his most important? What issues confronted by Taft still affect you and your community today? In what ways?

- 4) If you had been eligible to vote in 1908, would the evidence included in this reading have persuaded you to vote for Taft? Why or why not?



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Determining the Facts

Reading 3: Brothers, Sister, Sons, and Daughter

All of Alphonso and Louise Taft's children were high achievers in public service and education. Charles Phelps Taft and Peter Rawson Taft joined their father in his law practice. Charles became one of Cincinnati's most famous benefactors of the arts. Another son, Horace Dutton Taft, founded the Taft School in Connecticut, while Henry Waters Taft chose law as a career.

William Howard Taft's own offspring and descendants continued the family tradition of service. He and his wife Helen had three children. Robert A. Taft, known as "Mr. Republican," was the Republican leader of the U.S. Senate and is best known for the 1947 Taft-Hartley labor law. Charles (Charlie), known as "Mr. Cincinnati," was a long-time Cincinnati City Council member and mayor of the city. Helen, William Howard Taft's only daughter, was a writer and dean of Bryn Mawr College.

Subsequent generations of Tafts have continued the family commitment to public service. Robert Taft, Jr., the second son of Robert A. Taft and his wife, Martha, served in the Ohio legislature and the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate. Until his death in 1993, he continued to practice law in the firm his father founded.

Robert A. (Bob) Taft II, Ohio secretary of state in 1992, is the great-grandson of William Howard Taft and the oldest of four children of Robert Taft, Jr. Bob Taft earlier served as a state representative and a Hamilton County, Ohio, commissioner. Another son of Robert A. Taft, Jr., William Howard Taft III, held various assignments in the State Department, including ambassadorships to Ireland and Mozambique.

William Howard Taft IV, the great-great-grandson of William Howard, also has held positions in the Federal Government including the ambassadorship to NATO and the undersecretary of defense.

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Visual Evidence

Photo 1: The Taft House, 1868



(William Howard Taft National Historic Site, National Park Service)

In Photo 1, William Howard is standing by the fence, his brother Henry is sitting on the post. His brother Horace and sister Fanny are with their mother Louise, and Aunt Delia is standing.

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Questions for Photo 1

1) What can you surmise about the location of the house, the neighbors, the time of year, and the size of the family by studying Photo 1?

2) What does the photo indicate about the family's economic status?

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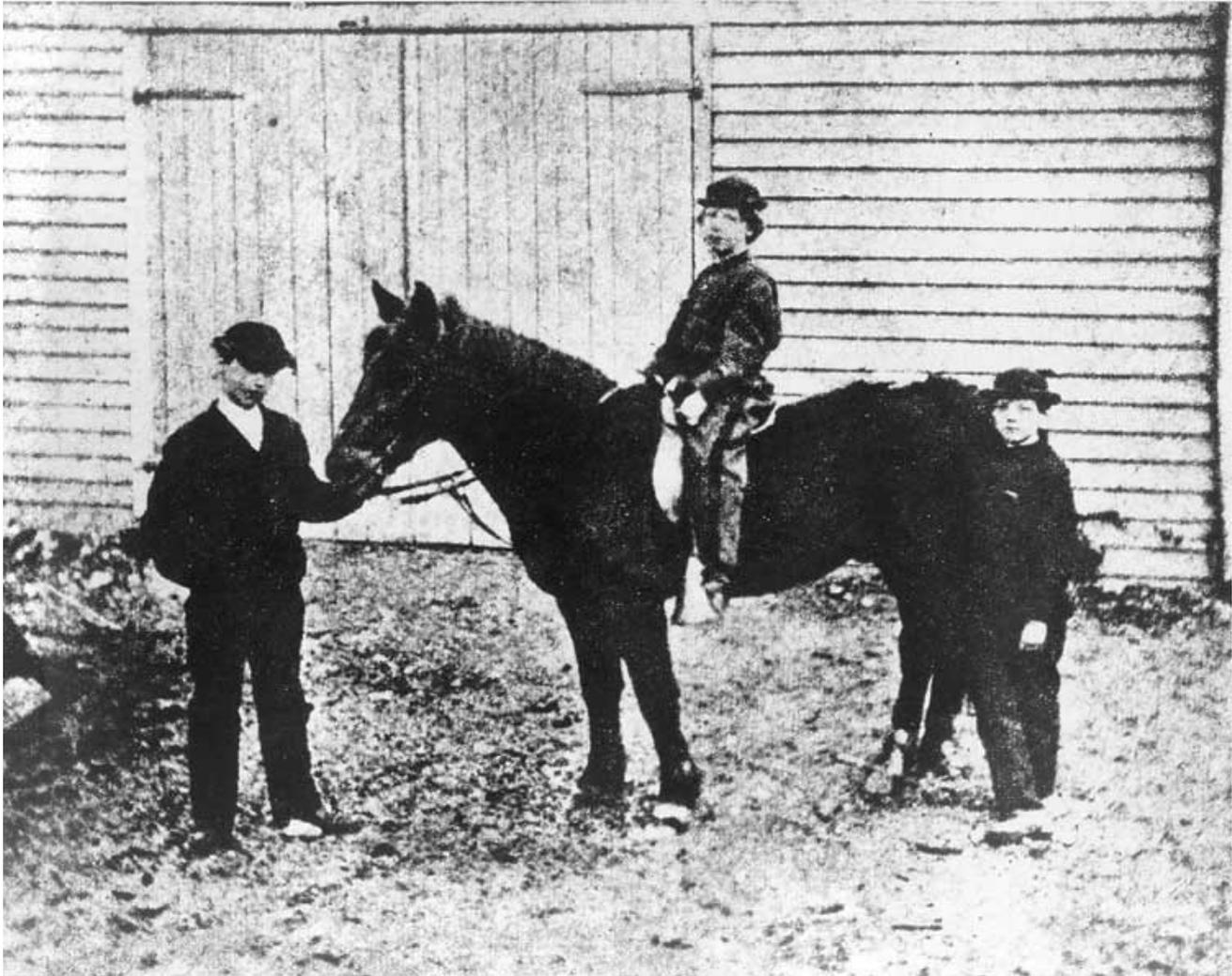
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Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Visual Evidence

Photo 2: The Taft Boys



(William Howard Taft National Historic Site, National Park Service)

Photo 2 shows the Taft boys and their pony by the family's barn. William Howard is holding the reins.



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Visual Evidence

Photo 3: William Howard's high school graduating class



(William Howard Taft National Historic Site, National Park Service)

William Howard Taft (seated with hat) poses with his Woodward High School graduating class.



Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home

Visual Evidence

Photo 4: William Howard Taft National Historic Site



(William Howard Taft National Historic Site, National Park Service)

The Mount Auburn house was sold by the Taft family in 1889. It went through many alterations, including use as an apartment house, before it was saved from demolition by the Taft Memorial Association in 1938, eight years after Taft's death. In 1969, the Federal Government designated the Taft house a national historic site, honoring the life and work of William Howard Taft. Restoration experts and historians used letters and diaries describing the decorating, home improvements, and furniture purchases of the family to furnish four rooms of the house, reflecting the way it looked when the Tafts lived there. The remainder of the house contains exhibits that illustrate Taft's life and career.

Teaching with Historic Places

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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Questions for Photo 4

1) Can you tell in what time period this house might have been built?

2) Do you think it is important to protect historic buildings associated with the lives of our presidents? Why or why not?

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Putting It All Together

Hard work, a good education, and an interest in civic duty are attributes that made the Taft family outstanding leaders over the years. The contributions made by these individuals continue to enrich our lives today. Their leadership skills were carefully cultivated through the example set by their parents and by the activities in which they chose to participate.

Activity 1: Leadership Characteristics

Using the Taft family as an example, ask students to define characteristics associated with leadership. Then ask students to identify someone in their community who fits those characteristics. If possible, have them interview this person, using a set of questions they have developed. Then, have students write a profile of the interviewee and submit it to the school or local newspaper.

Next, have students write their governor, congress person, or senator and ask the same questions they developed for the local leader. Ask students to compare the responses and discuss the types of character traits and leadership skills they found in common among local and national leaders, and the Tafts.



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Activity 2: Practicing Leadership Skills

Have students define the term "neighborhood." Ask what feelings they have about their own neighborhood? Have them compare their neighborhood to the one in which William Howard Taft grew up.

Have students work in small groups to develop a list of activities they could undertake that would benefit their neighborhood (i.e., volunteer for a community action agency, help clean up an area, become a mentor to younger children, plant trees and shrubbery, etc.). Have them assess whether such experiences would be helpful for developing leadership skills. If possible, have the class undertake some of these projects.



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References and Endnotes

Reading 1

Reading 1 was adapted from the National Park Service visitor's guide for William Howard Taft National Historic Site.

Reading 2

Reading 2 was adapted from the National Park Service visitor's guide for William Howard Taft National Historic Site.

Reading 3

Reading 3 was adapted from David Arbogast, "William Howard Taft National Historic Site" (Hamilton County, Ohio) National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1976; and University of Cincinnati Program for the Dedication of the William Howard Taft statue, September 15, 1992.



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Additional Resources

Growing into Public Service: William Howard Taft's Boyhood Home examines the formative years of the 27th president, who dedicated his career to advancing the public good. Below are materials for further exploration of the subjects this lesson considers.

William Howard Taft National Historic Site

The William Howard Taft NHS is a unit of the National Park System. The [park's web pages](#) provide further information about the historic site.

American Presidents Travel Itinerary

The Discover Our Shared Heritage online travel itinerary on [American Presidents](#) provides information about the 27th President of the United States, William Howard Taft, and his boyhood home, the [William Howard Taft National Historic Site](#).

Biographies of William Howard Taft

The following include:

- [a copy](#) of Taft's Inaugural Address;
- [a portrait](#) from the White House Historical Association;

National Archives (NARA)

The Archives has placed on its web site a large number of items about William Howard Taft and his presidency. To find them, visit the [NARA search engine](#).

Beverly Historical Society

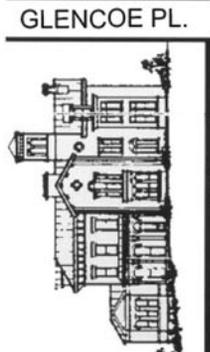
Visit the Taft Summer White House [website](#), created by the Beverly Historical Society. This Massachusetts house is where Taft spent many of his summers during his presidency. This website displays just some of the Taft related items that exist within the Beverly Historical Society's collections. It features photographs, text from local newspapers, political cartoons, and memorabilia.

For Further Reading

To learn more about the Taft family, both students and teachers will find an excellent account in Ishbel Ross, *An American Family: The Tafts—1678 to 1964* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1964). The standard biography is Henry F. Pringle, *Life and Times of William Howard Taft*, 2 vols. (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1939).



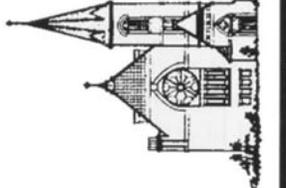
2223 Auburn Avenue: William Howard Doane House, c. 1850. Built by Jethro Mitchell, a lumber dealer; purchased in 1879 by William Doane, inventor and religion music composer.



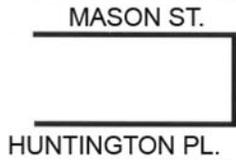
2209 Auburn Avenue: Henry Powell House, c. 1858; home of Henry Powell, son of the William Powell Company founder.



2147 Auburn Avenue: Mount Auburn Baptist Church, 1884.



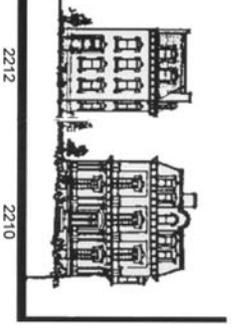
2107 Auburn Avenue: John B. Stallo House; home of jurist and philosopher John B. Stallo (1823-1900).



2021 Auburn Avenue: The Riddle-Phillips House, 1857. Built by Adam N. Riddle, a prominent attorney and state legislator; purchased in 1870 by the widow of Thomas Phillips, a wealthy iron manufacturer.

HISTORIC AUBURN AVENUE

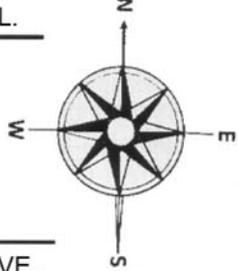
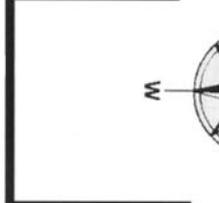
MCGREGOR AVE.



2212 Auburn Avenue: Thornton Hinkle House, c. 1874; home of Thornton Hinkle, a lawyer and publisher.

2210 Auburn Avenue: Phillip Hinkle House, c. 1874; home of Phillip Hinkle, builder of portable homes.

ALBION PL.

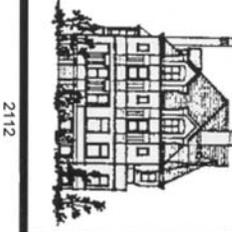


GILMAN AVE.



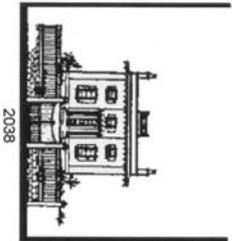
2142 Auburn Avenue: The Old Mount Auburn Fire House; built to house Mount Auburn's horse-drawn fire wagon.

EARNSHAW AVE.



2112 Auburn Avenue: Romanesque Revival House

SOUTHERN AVE.



2038 Auburn Avenue: The Taft House.

BODMAN AVE.





