

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Washington Grove Historic District (M: 21-5)
Additional Documentation and Boundary Increase

Name of Property

Montgomery County, Maryland

County and State

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Summary Statement of Significance

National Register Criterion A

Social History: The Washington Grove Historic District is significant at the state level under National Register Criterion A in the area of social history as an important example of a Methodist camp meeting founded at the height of the religious resort period of the American camp meeting movement and as a successful regional independent assembly Chautauqua. During the religious resort period, camp meetings were founded across the country and in Maryland as an alternative to the secular summer resorts that were gaining popularity among the middle and upper middle classes during the second half of the nineteenth century. Washington Grove represented the trend, drawing thousands from the Washington area to its annual outdoor revival while attracting a stable base of summer residents. Emblematic of the Chautauqua movement's long-running connection to American Methodism and camp meetings, Washington Grove established an independent assembly Chautauqua in 1902, which ushered in a new chapter of community growth and revitalization just as interest and support for camp meetings had begun to falter. The town's buildings, sites, and structures represent a continuity of the activities and traditions established in the camp meeting and Chautauqua periods that are firmly supported by residents today.

Community Planning and Development: The Washington Grove Historic District is significant at the local level under National Register Criterion A in the area of community planning and development for its association with late nineteenth/early twentieth-century suburban migration from Washington, D.C., to Montgomery County via the Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Planned as both an annual camp meeting site and a religious summer resort to serve Washington-area Methodists, Washington Grove evolved into a successful year-round community that influenced similar developments along the railroad corridor. Washington Grove is also locally significant in the area of community planning and development for its involvement in and influence on the suburbanization of Montgomery County during the post-World War II period. Washington Grove is an independent municipality whose town meeting tradition is a direct successor of the annual stockholders meeting of the Washington Grove Camp Meeting Association. It is one of only seven municipalities in Montgomery County with independent planning and zoning authority. In the face of unprecedented regional growth and overreaching development that threatened the social and physical fabric of established communities in the greater Washington, D.C., area, Washington Grove under home rule successfully promoted responsible growth and compatible new design while managing and protecting the physical manifestations of its camp meeting heritage.

National Register Criterion C

Architecture: The Washington Grove Historic District is significant at the local level under National Register Criterion C in the area of architecture. Washington Grove possesses a significant collection of residential buildings that embody the built tradition of the American camp meeting movement and reflect important national

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trends in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century American domestic architecture. Of particular note is the high concentration of Carpenter Gothic cottages. These architecturally distinctive houses feature peaked, front-gable roofs and double doors that evoke the shape and massing of the canvas structures that initially made up the community and vividly express the Carpenter Gothic style using highly ornamental scrollsawn woodwork, bracketed pendants, decorative dressings over or around windows and doors, and turned or chamfered porch posts. Built using natural materials, the cottages reflect the rustic setting of Washington Grove and the importance of nature to the interpretation of the camp meeting as a place apart. Originally constructed as summer residences, these cottages were converted into year-round homes and adapted to modern living with each passing generation. The result is an architecture of accretions that gives Washington Grove's camp meeting cottages a highly eclectic and distinct character. The persistence of vernacular forms through the early twentieth century represents a continuity with the past, and the introduction of revivalist styles adds to the architectural diversity of the district. The new domestic forms and styles introduced in the modern era embody a local manifestation of national trends in residential design. In their simplicity of form, open plans, and affordability, these houses represent a continuity in design from the camp meeting era. Across the continuum of Washington Grove's residential buildings, there is an adherence to standard forms that have been altered through individual elaboration, renovations, and additions to meet the changing needs of homeowners.

Community Planning and Development: The Washington Grove Historic District is locally significant under National Register Criterion C as a notable expression of two important nineteenth-century trends in community planning and development. The spatial organization of the town combines a popular nineteenth-century camp meeting form – the wheel plan – with a residential grid emblematic of railroad and streetcar suburbs across the United States. Washington Grove's physical plan continues to evoke the historic delineations of the camp meeting era Tent Department, characterized by the Circle and the radiating avenues and interstitial alleys that surround it, and the Cottage Department, which features a system of alternating avenues for pedestrian use and roads for vehicular use. This circulation system served to reinforce the sylvan character of the landscape and improve the safety and appearance of the campgrounds, and it represents an early precursor of the Radburn scheme of community planning. In addition, the balance and combination of residential divisions, open spaces for assembly and recreation, and forested preserves has been a fundamental attribute of Washington Grove since its founding and remains intact today.

Landscape Architecture: The Washington Grove Historic District is locally significant under National Register Criterion C in the area of landscape architecture as a representative example of the vernacular tradition of American camp meeting planning and design. Although the site is not the work of a professional designer, gardener, or horticulturalist, the spatial organization, vegetation, circulation networks, and other physical characteristics of the landscape embody the qualities and associations of late nineteenth-century Methodist campgrounds. Washington Grove's first permanent shelter was its tree canopy, and before the construction of the tabernacle, a clearing in the woods was the setting for worship. The landscape provided a natural and healthy, inspirational and insular setting for religious activities and evolved through the twentieth century to support the

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residential, recreational, and social customs of a year-round community while maintaining its essential form and character.

Period of Significance

The period of significance for the Washington Grove Historic District spans the years 1873 to 1969. This period begins with the establishment of the Washington Grove Camp Meeting and ends in 1969 (50 years before the present). During this period, Washington Grove achieved its design significance in the areas of architecture, community planning and development, and landscape architecture as a town founded on camp meeting principles that evolved to incorporate a range of vernacular and stylistic design trends. This period encompasses the formation and development of Washington Grove as a religious camp meeting, its location as an independent Chautauqua assembly, municipal organization, and the events and activities that contribute to its significance within the context of post-World War II planning and development in Montgomery County.

Resource History and Historic Context

The Founding and Early Development of Washington Grove (1873-1901)

Origins and Early Development of Camp Meetings in the United States

Religious camp meetings have been an American phenomenon for over 200 years. While no standardized definition exists, a camp meeting is an outdoor preaching event at which participants sustain themselves and camp overnight, often in tents. Camp meetings are temporary gatherings, typically lasting a few days to a week at the end of the summer. Scholars have developed several theories as to the origin of the camp meeting, and there is still debate over the location and date of the first meeting. Historian Charles Johnson, in his classic work *The Frontier Camp Meeting*, advanced the concept that the camp meeting originated on the Kentucky frontier where populations were sparse and travel and communication were difficult. While preaching outdoors was common throughout the eighteenth century in rural and backwoods areas where churches, or even basic assembly structures, were not available, the element of overnight camping, often for several nights, was missing from these gatherings. Johnson asserted that camp meetings did not achieve universal popularity or standard form until 1800, the year Presbyterian minister James McGready organized several highly successful outdoor revivals in Logan County, Kentucky.¹²¹ More recent scholarship suggests that the earliest camp meetings did not arise from circumstances created by the frontier and were organized in the Carolinas or Georgia during the last decade of the eighteenth century.¹²² Many support the claim that the Rock Spring Camp Meeting near Denver, North

¹²¹ Charles Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting* (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 32.

¹²² Kenneth O. Brown, *Holy Ground: A Study of the American Camp Meeting* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), vii.