

- A NEW HOME FOR THE CATHOLICS -
THE TAKOMA PARK
WORLD HEADQUARTERS
- THE END OF AN ERA - OR THE BEGINNING? -

Our world headquarters, from 1903 to 1989 was “in Takoma Park, Maryland.” Actually, it was just inside the District of Columbia line, and not in Maryland at all. But we have always called it Takoma Park, and so will generally do so in this article.

It may come as a surprise to you to learn—that the buildings, in which our worldwide denominational work for 88 years was guided—are now owned by the Roman Catholic Church. They plan to use it as a major Catholic training center, in conjunction with Catholic University of America, which is located only a few miles away.

Because Catholic University is Jesuit controlled, we assume that our former world headquarters buildings will henceforth also be under Jesuit control.

Here is additional information on the entire affair.

On February 18, 1902, the Battle Creek Sanitarium was destroyed by fire. On December 30 of that year, the Review and Herald building in Battle Creek burned to the ground.

Ellen White had for some time been urging our leaders—and our people as well—to move away from Battle Creek. It had become a camp

of discontent, liberalism, and skepticism. She had repeatedly warned parents not to send their children to Battle Creek, to attend the college or work in the Sanitarium.

She wrote:

“Let the General Conference offices and the publishing work be moved from Battle Creek. I know not where the place will be, whether on the Atlantic Coast or elsewhere. But this I will say, Never lay a stone or a brick in Battle Creek to rebuild the Review office there. God has a better place for it.”—*General Conference Bulletin, 1903, p. 85.*

At that Session, it was voted to move the General Conference to the Atlantic Coast, and urge the Review stockholders to do the same.

The two institutions were legally connected, and there were deep feelings in Battle Creek about such a departure. Many did not want it.

At the Review board meeting in mid-April, in spite of some bitter opposition, the vote was heavily in favor of moving.

But that did not solve all the problems. The two institutions were legally connected, and would do well to move to the same location. Also, it was decided that the Review office would rather move very soon than later on.

A.G. Daniells, the General Conference president, wrote Ellen White for counsel. She replied:

“I have no special light, except what you have already received, in reference to New York and the other large cities that have not been worked. Decided efforts should be made in Washington, D.C. . . . I am satisfied that our only safe course is to be ready to move just when the cloud moves.”—*Letter 95, 1903.*

This was soon followed up by another letter, in which she indicated caution about settling in or near New York City.

“I am sure that the advantages of Washington, D.C. should be closely investigated.”—*Letter 106, 1903.*

In another letter, she said there would be an advantage if the Review bore the imprint of Washington, D.C.

A search team was sent out in mid-June to find a suitable location, and found two promising sites.

One was a 97-acre tract, 60 miles north of New York City at Fishkill, New York. On the Hudson River, with a 40-room hotel on it, the property was available for \$12,000.

Because of Ellen White’s instructions, the committee spent four days in the Washington, D.C. area, searching for properties. It quickly found the little hamlet of Takoma Park.

“One of the finest places we have found was a place called Takoma Park. It is on the main line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroads run-

ning to Chicago and St. Louis. It is also reached by an electric [trolley] line. It is five or six miles from the city. It is . . . a large wooded tract of land, lying on each side of the District line, part in the District and part in Maryland. It has an elevation of 300 feet above the Potomac. It is a magnificent place. We could purchase all the land we required at a very reasonable rate.”—*A.G. Daniells to W.C. White, June 21, 1903.*

The committee recommended purchasing the Takoma Park property, but also keep the Fishkill property open. They might want it for something.

Ellen White responded on June 26, declaring that the Lord had shown her that the Takoma Park property should be purchased for the headquarters and Review, and that the Fishkill property might be secured for an academy.

That should have settled that, but there were problems ahead. Many members in Battle Creek did not want either facility moved out of town. There was talk of doing whatever it took to block a move. Hints of legal action were in the air. Daniells feared that this might tie up the matter in courts for years.

“We are in a dreadful place. God must help us. We are helpless. Sister White, the hour has struck for something to be done. We are in peril. The stability for this cause is at stake. This involves the honor of God and the welfare of thousands of innocent, faithful believers in this message. Unless I am altogether deceived, we are face to face with a crisis.”—*A.G. Daniells to E.G. White, July 5, 1903.*

In obedience to a call from God’s servant to move out of Battle Creek, many were determined that it not happen. Battle Creek had become an Adventist colony, and it was going from bad to worse.

In a letter, written the previous year, P.T. Magan had written that Adventists in Battle Creek—

“were making lots of money these days. They are adding farm to farm continually, building houses and speculating generally. Our brethren

there have gone wild on land and food propositions . . . The town of Battle Creek has come to be known throughout the whole Central and Eastern States as ‘the Adventist mining camp.’ ”—*P.T. Magan to E.G. White, May 25, 1902.*

As soon as W.C. White arrived, the search party returned to the East Coast. They found that, by accident, the Fishkill property had been sold by another agent.

In Takoma Park, they found a 50-acre block of land about a mile from the post office. A Boston physician, Dr. Flower, had partially developed it, planning to open an extension of his Boston hospital in Takoma Park.

But, after investing \$60,000 in the land, and clearing it, he ran out of money—and had to put it on the market. The man who had it, held a \$15,000 mortgage on the property, and would let it go for \$6,000.

This 50 acres, situated by a clear-flowing stream (Sligo Creek), was 7 miles from the U.S. Capitol. They got it for \$120 an acre.

In addition, the search team purchased a 7-acre plot of land a mile south, just inside the District of Columbia.

Quickly, 222 North Capitol Street, only a couple blocks from Congress, was rented as a temporary workplace for the Review and General Conference offices. The Review planned to move there by August 15, 1903.

But what would happen when the brethren in Battle Creek had to face the decision to move?

On July 25, Elder Daniells presented it to the members in the Dime Tabernacle. They read from Ellen White’s letters—and the people beautifully responded. There were tears of sorrow to see these two institutions leave, but they wanted to obey the Spirit of Prophecy counsels.

“The providences of God have opened before us as we have endeav-

ored to walk in the light as given through the Spirit of Prophecy . . . There was a softening and subduing influence present in our midst . . . I do not think I have seen the Tabernacle congregation so deeply interested and so thoroughly stirred over anything since the last conference here two years ago.”—*A.G. Daniells to E.G. White, July 27, 1903.*

Packing began at once. Two freight cars were loaded with General Conference furniture and documents on Monday and Tuesday, August 3-4. They left Battle Creek on the 5th, and arrived in Washington on Monday, the 10th. Printing equipment was shipped shortly after.

The map on page 3 will indicate the primary church buildings.

Through careful planning (and the brief rental of a building in downtown D.C.), the Review was able to make the transition without skipping any issues of their weekly *Review and Herald*.

The new locations of the Review and General Conference were just inside the District boundary.

As the years passed, the population of Washington, D.C. kept growing, and, with it, the suburbs in Virginia and Maryland. But, by the early 1930s, old photographs reveal that much of Takoma Park still had dirt roads.

In 1955, the present writer moved to Takoma Park to attend the SDA Theological Seminary, located on Carroll Ave, next to the General Conference building. He was there three years, obtaining a master’s degree, and then a bachelor of divinity degree. Back then, Takoma Park was still a pleasant village. But, by that time, the roads were all paved and houses extended all the way from it to the White House, and beyond.

During his first of three years there, he regularly attended the Takoma Park Church, which was

On that 50-acre site in Maryland, alongside Sligo Creek which the search team purchased in Takoma Park in 1903, was eventually erected the Washington Sanitarium (now Washington Adventist Hospital), Washington Missionary College (now Columbia Union College), Sligo Church, the Columbia Union Conference headquarters, Takoma Academy, an elementary school, a large Adventist Book Center, a baseball lot, and several parking lots.

On the 7-acre site, purchased at the same time a mile south in the District of Columbia, was eventually built the General Conference headquarters, the Review building, the Seminary, Cornerstone (the Takoma Park Church youth center), and two parking lots.

Land just across Eastern Avenue (the District border street) from the General Conference, was

inside Maryland and later purchased. On this land was eventually erected the Home Study Institute, ESDA, the Takoma Park Church, and the North Building.

If you look on the small map (*left below*), Takoma Park is located just to the right of the top (northern) point of the partial diamond which is Washington, D.C. (The District never became a full diamond in shape, because Virginia never ceded its share of land, as Maryland did.)

The larger map (*right below*) indicates a few primary features of the area. The three key streets in the Adventist holdings were Carroll Avenue, Flower Avenue, and Eastern Avenue. Eastern Avenue marked the boundary, separating the District of Columbia from Takoma Park, which is in the State of Maryland.

GREATER WASHINGTON, D.C.—Most of what is in this map is nearly solid city, plus a few parkways.

TAKOMA PARK AREA—This is a rough sketch of part of the general layout of the Takoma Park/District area. Not all buildings are included, and distance between the Columbia Union Conference office and Takoma Academy is shortened.

much more conservative than the liberal Sligo Church. This was because the Review workers attended the Takoma Park Church. It was known as the headquarters' church, because it was directly across the street from the General Conference, and the most important council meetings of our church were held there.

In 1969 I returned there to work with a friend for four months, and once again lived in Takoma Park. I found the place had changed to a speedway of traffic. Even sleepy Silver Spring beyond it was a hornet's nest of activity. It all seemed like rush hour—all day long.

That summer, friends whom I had known back in college, were working on a new educational textbook. They told me that Neal Wilson (NAD president) and Kenneth Wood (*Review* editor-in-chief) were spearheading a drive to get the General Conference moved out of that madhouse to a quiet country location. But there was heavy opposition. And indeed there was! The hundreds of denominational workers in that area were all settled in their homes. Their spouses worked at area jobs, and they were close to shopping and recreational facilities of Greater Washington, D.C. Their children attended J.N. Andrews Church School, Sligo Elementary School, Takoma Academy, and Washington Missionary College (now Columbia Union College).

Repeated attempts had also been made to move the college out of that area, as far back as the 1950s. (*See box for a review of that failed attempt.*)

Everything was just too convenient—to have it all uprooted and, for the sake of quietness and spirituality, move to the country, without anything around but cows and trees.

I later learned that it indeed had been N.C. Wilson who, in 1969, led out in trying to swing a vote to move

the General Conference out of Takoma Park. He opposed the decision that prevailed: to erect the 10-floor high-rise new office building (which, after its construction in early 1970, was given the name, the "North Building.")

At about that time, Wilson was able to persuade the General Conference officers to purchase 30 acres of, what was at that time farmland, in Montgomery County on Route 29 for less than \$1 million.

By the mid-1970s, a friend reports that crime was becoming more rampant in Takoma Park. Adventist women would be robbed of their purses in broad daylight on Carroll and Eastern Avenues. In some instances, youth attending Columbia Union College were murdered at night on Flower Avenue.

In the late 1970s, Kenneth Wood published a special issue of the *Review*. Those of you who saw that will never forget it! I wish I still had my copy. (If anyone has an extra, please send it, and receive my deepest gratitude.)

On the cover was a painting of a flaming arrow of fire coming down on Battle Creek. Inside was the complete story of the Battle Creek fires, and the move to Washington, D.C.

But there was more: Kenneth Wood's staff had also included two maps: one of Battle Creek at the turn of the century, showing its many Adventist buildings; the other of Takoma Park at the end of the 1970s, with its denominational structures—which were far more in number than those crowded into Battle Creek.

Wood's point was simple enough: It was time to move out of Takoma Park to a country location. Ellen White had repeatedly told us that none of our church offices, institutions, or headquarters were to be located in cities. Yet Takoma Park, Silver Spring, and the District of

Columbia were all one vast city—stretching from Virginia and Maryland, on the south, to many miles up into Maryland, on the north.

By that time, Adventist centralization in the Takoma Park area was immense. There were 13,108 members in 35 churches within a 25-mile radius of Takoma Park. The Adventist work force in the entire Washington area mounted to 4.3 percent of the worldwide total!

The only action which could satisfy the statements—was a move clear out of that congested city area.

In addition, although Wood did not mention it, Takoma Park was becoming a dangerous place in which to live!

When I returned in 1969, I found that the General Conference building had been changed into a fortress under siege.

Side doors were locked and required special security devices to enter. A second wall of glass had been erected at the main entrance, and one could no longer step inside unless someone inside flipped a switch to activate an opening mechanism on the door.

Only the year before, an immense riot had occurred on and around 13th Street in the District. Buildings had been burned and gutted. Others had been robbed. Driving through the area a year later, one saw building after building boarded up and abandoned.

Yet the riot area was only a few miles from Takoma Park.

That summer I had also learned that Takoma Park had, by that time (1969), become the slum of Montgomery County. It was the oldest, and many drug users were already moving into it. Crime was becoming more rampant on the streets.

So it was no surprise, ten years later, to read Wood's plea to move

Continued on the next tract

More WAYMARKS - from —
PILGRIMS REST

HCR 77, BOX 38A - BEERSHEBA SPRINGS, TN 37305

- A NEW HOME FOR THE CATHOLICS -
THE TAKOMA PARK
WORLD HEADQUARTERS

- THE END OF AN ERA - OR THE BEGINNING? -

Continued from the preceding tract in this series —————

out of Takoma Park.

Many leaders were angry that he published that special issue. Within a few years, under the immense pressure placed on him, Kenneth Woods had retired from the Review.

However, the efforts by a faithful few to move our world headquarters out of that ghetto continued. Every year, conditions grew worse.

N.C. Wilson became General Conference president in 1978, and two years later he assumed chairmanship of the Review board. He united with K.W. Wood in urging a relocation of the Review outside Greater Washington, D.C.

This approval was eventually given on October 16, 1980. But, in that meeting, a crucial point was made at that October 16, 1980, Review constituency meeting, by Robert Osborn (at that time, associate General Conference treasurer).

He said that, if the Review moved out of town, it would have a domino effect on the General Conference—and all other church institutions in the Takoma Park area. But, specifically, resultant financial pressures would later lead to a forced relocation of the General Conference, as well.

He said the Takoma Park and Sligo Churches, and the local Adventist schools, would also be effected, in addition to many other church agencies.

“The die was cast in 1980, when the Review and Herald Publishing Association constituency voted to

move the publishing house. If the church made a mistake, it was then.”—*Review*, May 28, 1987.

At that same 1980 meeting, Wilson noted that some thought it would, indeed, be well if the General Conference was also relocated outside the entire area, but that no definite urgings along that line were being made.

The Review voted to move to a site location found in Hagerstown, Maryland. The move was estimated to cost \$5 million, and be made over a 5-year period.

(At the same 1980 meeting, it was voted to close down Southern Publishing Association, in Nashville, Tennessee, which was later done—in spite of the fact that Ellen White had repeatedly told the brethren they were not to close down that publishing house. Discussions began about merging Southern Publishing with the Review in 1977, and it was voted at the 1979 Annual Council to close one of the three North American publishing houses. The merger occurred a year later. The Nashville property was sold to a non-Adventist Bible printing company, and turned over to them on May 15, 1981.)

Wilson recognized that the refusal of the General Conference to buy the Review building when its operations moved to a new site, and its simultaneous insistence that it not be sold until the General Conference sold its property—meant the Review could not receive any income from the use of the property or its sale unless the General Conference also moved.

It appears that certain leaders wanted to get the General Conference out of Takoma Park, and were using the Review relocation as the reason to push forward and do it.

Of course, one can think that Ellen White’s call to get out of the cities should be reason enough. But we now live in a time when it is expedient not to use the Spirit of Prophecy as a reason for doing things.

To add to the problem, when the new high-rise “North Building” part of the General Conference was built about 1971, certain commitments had been made to the local community,—that would now require their approval for the General Conference to move out of the area.

It is far too easy to become entangled with the world, when we live in the city.

It may be that Wilson only wanted headquarters out of Takoma Park for reasons of security, since the area had become something of a slum—and also so close to the region in the District, where more riots might occur. Consistently throughout those discussions, he thought it would be well to merely move down the road a few miles—into the city of Silver Spring.

From one city to another city; that is all the move would amount to. And that is all that ever happened.

The Review rejected an offer, by the Potomac Conference, of free land near the Shenandoah Valley Academy in Virginia; and, instead, they purchased a site in Hagerstown, Maryland, next to Interstate

70, a city of 36,000. Ground-breaking was in the spring of 1981, and the new Review plant began operations early in 1983.

At the very next Annual Council, the question of moving the General Conference out of Takoma Park was discussed. It was voted to move, and leaders began looking for a buyer for the entire complex of buildings: the three-floor South Building (formerly the SDA Seminary), the four-floor Central Building (the original General Conference building, across the street from the Takoma Church), the new 10-story North Building, and a scattering of other buildings, including the Home Study Institute—some 187,000 square feet in all. Also included was the Review building.

By late summer 1982, the General Conference had turned down an \$11.9 million offer from a Canadian development company. A \$15 million sale would be needed to pay for the construction of a new building, so the move would not cost the denomination anything. It would be 250,000 square feet, and located on the property the General

Conference had purchased in Silver Spring.

By 1983, it became apparent that they probably would not get \$15 million for the Takoma properties. The only building appealing to prospective buyers was the North Building. After some discussion, in which it was stated that the new building complex would now cost \$20 million, the council was asked to approve an additional \$6 million over the sale price received.

Then Walter Blehm, president of the Pacific Union, stood up and said that, before requesting a specific appropriation from the council, leadership should first get a definite bid, and ascertain exactly what the new building would cost. In addition, he noted that donations by church members kept dropping off.

When a voice vote was taken, there were many yeses and many noes, but the chairman said the yeses had it.

So the Annual Council approved of spending \$6 million beyond the sale price of the present site. Oddly enough, it was reported at that gathering that the General Conference still had not settled on a definite

site, although earlier reports said it would be the one in Silver Spring.

That same year, the Review moved into their \$13,463,840 plant and offices in Hagerstown. Since their Takoma plant had not been sold, the debt service they were having to pay was high. Pressure increased to get the Takoma properties sold.

Then, in 1985, the 10 acres of the General Conference and Review buildings were sold for \$14 million to the Development Group of Laurel, Maryland.

The agreement stipulated that the new owners would begin *leasing* the property back to the General Conference on November 1, 1985, until March 1988, when the new General Conference building would be ready for them to move into.

But problems immediately developed. The sales contract had been signed before a building permit had been obtained for the 30-acre Route 29 site in Silver Spring. Where I live, the only approval needed to build is an electrical permit, and there are no zoning laws. But in a modern city, like Silver Spring, located in one of the wealthiest counties in America, Montgomery County, life is not so simple.

The brethren quickly discovered that they had to satisfy the county executive, the county council, and the county planning board.

What had once been rural farmland 18 years earlier, was now a rapidly developing corridor of buildings along a major highway. Rezoning permits would have to be obtained. Another problem was "growth management." The county council desperately wanted to keep a lid on the rapidly expanding growth of buildings in the county. Everything was becoming one giant city. One could not tell where one section stopped and the next started, and they were not sure they wanted the General Conference to

Faithful leaders have been trying to move Columbia Union College out of Takoma Park for decades.

In 1957, while I was living half-a-block from the Review building and attending the Seminary, a friend who was taking doctoral work in physiology, at George Washington University, stopped by and asked me to sign a paper requesting our leaders to move the college out into the country, where it belonged.

I readily agreed and signed it. Then he told me that I and only one other person (Elder Leslie Hardinge), among all the students, workers, and leaders he had met—had immediately signed the petition. Everyone else hesitated, fearful that doing so might hurt their

chances of employment or advancement. Only a few signed it.

But the attempt was stonewalled by the college president and nothing came of it.

About 15 years ago, Elder Quigley, Columbia Union president, tried to do it. But he met with such fierce opposition from area Adventists that the idea was rejected.

The truth is that Columbia Union College remains in Takoma Park/Silver Spring area, so it can be attended by area youth. Yet the Columbia Union stretches to the Indiana border! Its college is to serve a multistate region, not just the Takoma/Silver Spring area.

But members throughout the union hesitate to send their youth there, because it is located in a dangerous, inner-city slum area.

build in the county.

Then there was the county planning board. Here again, the General Conference had sold its buildings before obtaining the necessary permits to build elsewhere in the county.

Perhaps Heaven was warning our leaders to get out of the cities—way out!

Time dragged on, while hearings were scheduled and held. The planning board eventually told our leaders that they would have to build parking sites and road improvements, costing \$1 million—or no permit!

To add to this shocking news, the one man in the county who had tried to help push through the permits, decided to quit his office in 1986.

By this time, Wilson began looking at sites outside the megalopolis. But few were aware of it.

Then Charles Scriven, pastor of the Sligo Church, preached a business sermon on Sabbath, November 1, 1986. It was aired over the local college radio station, and was heard by Adventists (and non-Adventists) throughout the congested region. He called for area-wide church members to gather on Sabbath afternoon, November 8, 1986, to discuss business: whether they should let the General Conference move entirely out of the area. This was the first that most members had heard about this, and they stormed into the meeting, determined to prevent such a move.

The General Conference must remain in the multi-cities of Greater Washington, D.C., they said. Their jobs, their homes depended on it. They were comfortably settled in this city-next to city-next to city. Ralph Martin, Potomac Conference president, chaired the meeting. N.C. Wilson agreed to attend.

Some 500 people came to the meeting in the main sanctuary of Sligo Church. Scriven told the assembly that the churches and

schools of the area would be gutted if the General Conference left. There was much wringing of hands and working of emotions. It was said that believers all over the world would be demoralized by the moving costs and would despair. Somehow, the church members in Greater D.C. must save the denomination.

When it came his turn to speak, Wilson acknowledged that he had begun looking elsewhere. He said he wanted a “high-tech park in some city, outside the Greater D.C. area.”

The following week, local church people met and considered buying back the old General Conference buildings, giving it to leadership, and helping them build more buildings in Takoma Park! Apparently, members in the D.C. area have good incomes!

They wanted to buy the empty Review building and/or build on open land across from the South Building, and get the General Conference to sell the Route 29 land to help pay for it.

Apparently, they might have gone ahead with their plan, but they recognized it would be extremely difficult to get the new owners of the General Conference buildings to sell them back.

So, four days after the Sabbath business meeting, Martin wrote Wilson—that the church members were willing to mount a campaign, calling upon the citizens of the area to protest and demand that the county officials let the General Conference move to the Route 29 site. (It would be quite acceptable, because no one would then have to sell their homes or take their children from the local schools.)

But Wilson said No, and everyone waited to see what would happen next.

Less than a month later, on December 15, Wilson asked the General Conference officers to recommend that they abandon Montgom-

ery County as a site. Surprisingly, the officers refused by a vote of 13-11.

But on January 29, 1987, with the aid of a presentation by the Rouse Company, developers outside the area, Wilson obtained a yes vote: 58-17 in favor of relocating to Howard County, to the north of Montgomery County and close to Baltimore. They agreed to a plan to build in the Columbia Gateway Business Park, next to Interstate 95, connecting the District with Baltimore. They would then be on the outskirts of Baltimore.

News of the decision appeared in county newspapers, and even in the Washington Post. Immediately, local Adventists got together and, asking Wilson's permission, launched their own series of meetings with Montgomery County officials.

The county executive, Sydney Kramer, was stunned when they told him the news, and promised to do all in his power to keep the Adventists in the Montgomery urban area. Then they got State Senator Ida Rubin, the Takoma Park mayor (Stephen Del Giudice), and others on their side. Official papers were drafted, and phone calls made to Wilson.

While others in the General Conference did what they could to change the situation, Wilson remained adamant: Silver Spring had had their chance, and the world headquarters was moving out of the county.

By March 2, all the General Conference officers, except Wilson, were in favor of remaining in the county.

A county board meeting was called for the afternoon of March 5, 1987, and Wilson's presence was required for the county to accept their request to move to Highway 29. But Wilson did not appear inclined to attend.

The room was packed with Adventists: General Conference, division, and conference officers. In addition, any worker which wanted

to take the afternoon off and attend were permitted to do so.

Wilson came, compromise was agreed on, and construction began on the Route 29 site.

Twenty-six months after that meeting, in June 1989, the new building was completed, and the staff moved into it.

But unforeseen costs developed as the immense building was erected. In addition, the compromise with the county still required eventual traffic decongestion measures, since the new site fronted on a heavily congested highway.

When the workers eventually entered their new home, they found to their dismay that it was constructed something like a gigantic barn.—There were almost no separate rooms in the entire structure.

To save money, partitions which ran partway to the ceiling were installed. Each worker had a small cubicle for an “office,” and, if he spoke too loud on the phone or to whoever was in his office, it could be heard in surrounding offices.

Privacy had been eliminated.

Our world headquarters had been moved from the rush and turmoil of Takoma Park—to the rush and turmoil of Silver Spring.

In 1969, I found that the main streets in Silver Spring were more jammed than were the streets in downtown D.C. in 1958. The two times that I have since been in the area (1973 and 1986), the situation has steadily deteriorated.

That might have been the end of the story, but recently a new development came to light.

On Wednesday evening, January 3, 1995, a new development occurred.

The Takoma Park Church used to be called our “headquarters church,” for it was right across the street from the old General Conference building. On January 3, 1995, the members of that church were suddenly called to a special meeting. They were only told that it was about

philosophical differences on stewardship.

Ralph Martin, president of the Potomac Conference was there, along with three officers from the General Conference treasury department.

Martin told those in attendance that the senior pastor, one of the associate pastors, and an office secretary had been discharged “for not paying tithes.”

But it was later learned that the three had been paying tithes. Apparently, they knew enough about how the funds are used, that they chose not to pay it into the regular tithe fund,—but instead pay it into the church expense, for use in that local church. It was a matter of principle with them, and carefully thought out. Because, when confronted with the problem, they were willing to leave denominational employment, rather than start paying tithes into the general tithe fund.

The three were told they could stay till the end of the year, but the senior pastor decided to immediately resign.

We would not mention this incident here, except for the strange twist that occurred at that evening meeting.

It seems that, about a year ago, the Roman Catholic Church purchased the former General Conference and Review buildings, which are in Takoma Park. This is common knowledge to the folk in that area.

They intend to use the buildings for an educational center. As for the South Building (the SDA Seminary until 1959), they intend to use it for a seminary to train priests!

This is quite understandable, when one keeps in mind that Takoma Park is relatively close to the large Catholic University of America, which is only a few miles away, in the District.

At this point in the meeting, one of the church members rose to his feet and asked to speak.

It seems that he works on a volunteer basis, one day a week at the new General Conference building. Recently, he had heard that plans were being laid to sell the Takoma Park Church to the Catholics! They had offered \$6 million for it. Located as it is, just across the street from this new Roman Catholic educational center, it would be ideal for a worship building for their priests and students to attend.

In addition, a number of years ago, the members of the Takoma Park Church built a large two-story activity center for their youth, called Cornerstone, just across the street from the South Building (the former SDA Seminary). That large building would be included in the sale price. It includes a big parking lot, which is next to the center.

Hearing this, the members were shocked. It was openly discussed that leadership wanted to get rid of a good pastor—so they could more easily sell the church and pocket the proceeds. Their pastor had encouraged ministries by the church and in the center, and now he was gone.

When confronted with this fact, one of the two financial officers from the General Conference stood up and, instead of denying the possibility, as much as admitted that it was true! He said, “Well, if it is sold, the money would be divided here!”

So now we have seen a brief overview of the history of our world headquarters in Takoma Park, from 1903 to 1989.

The Roman Catholics now own the buildings which, for so many decades, housed the world headquarters of our denomination.

And soon, in spite of the objections of its members (the conference holds the deed), the Catholics may own the church which once was our headquarters’ church, where most of our spring and annual councils have for decades been held.

— Vance Ferrell