

# Community News

## Brookeville does its history homework

Town, local architect honored for restoring old schoolhouse

by Terri Hogan  
Staff Writer

The Town of Brookeville and its resident architect, Miche Booz, have been recognized by Montgomery Preservation Inc. for their work on restoring and preserving the Brookeville Schoolhouse.

The town received a Montgomery Preservation Inc. Historic Preservation Award for the restoration of the schoolhouse, and Booz was recognized as its architect, along with contractor Walter Blank, stonemason David Yinger and concrete worker Buck Bartley.

In addition, Booz was named Outstanding Architect for 2004 in honor of his work on the schoolhouse and previous projects, such as the Sandy Spring Museum.

The awards ceremony will take place on Saturday evening at Glen Echo Park's Spanish Ballroom.

Judy Christensen, chairwoman of the MPI awards program, said that although the building is not monumental, it is important in the town's history and its commitment to education.

"This little building was falling apart, and the town was inspired to preserve it," she said.

Commission President Richard Allan said the town is honored by the award.

"It's always an honor to be cited for this kind of work," he said. "The Town of Brookeville has a tradition of doing all it can to protect its historic assets."

Booz agreed, saying the project meant a lot to the town.

"We're very proud to have this little gem of a building, rather than the eyesore that it was," Booz said. "That in itself is a nice reward."

### The architect

Booz was born in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1950. His childhood was spent in the Middle East and the India subcontinent. He began to paint early, and by age 10 he had won first prize in two international children's art contests.

He attended George School, a Quaker school in Bucks County, Pa. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in fine arts from the University of Maryland in 1975, and went on to receive his master's degree in architecture in 1987.

He works at his Architecture and Painting studio in Brookeville, where he lives with his wife, Diane Teague, and their three children, Paul, Noah and Ella.

Christensen said that Booz was recognized for sustained excellence

in preservation and restoration through architectural design and professional consulting.

"The body of work includes successful design of compatible new infill, additions to historic resources, restoration and renovation," she said. "Mr. Booz has not limited his expertise to compensated work, but has generously donated his professional time and artistic talent to many historic preservation projects in Montgomery County."

Some of his other projects include the Sandy Spring Museum, the Norwood Carriage House, the Brookeville Woolen Mill Worker's House, the Historic Stone Barn at Woodlawn Manor and the Chrobot (Price) Farmhouse in Laytonsville.

In addition to his award-winning designs, Booz also was honored for his pro-bono work. He is working, without compensation, with the Olney Boys and Girls Club to restore Falling Green, the historic home located at its athletic complex.

### The project

The Brookeville Schoolhouse, one of the last remaining one-room schoolhouses in Montgomery County, sits nestled in the woods at the end of North Street.

The Town of Brookeville, ever cognizant of preserving its history, is restoring the wood-frame structure, which dates back to the 1860s.

"The town saw the schoolhouse as another opportunity to preserve a historic resource, so we worked with the heirless to acquire it," Allan said. "We're very pleased to have been able to almost complete the full restoration. It's a great addition to the county's historic resources."

One-room schoolhouses were common in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Most Americans attended one-room schoolhouses during that time.

The Brookeville Schoolhouse appears to have been a typical American one-room schoolhouse — one room with two windows on each side and a vestibule. An outdoor sat behind the structure.

Each schoolhouse would typically have a single teacher, teaching grades one through eight. The youngest children sat in the front of the room, and the oldest in the back. They were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, history and geography. Students memorized and recited their lessons.

Details about the schoolhouse are sketchy and have been comprised from town records and information provided by the Sandy Spring Museum.

The land was purchased for \$300 in 1865, four years after the county's public school system was established by Maryland's General



Brian Lewis/The Gazette

Pictured in front of the old schoolhouse in Brookeville are architect Miche Booz, Town Commission President Richard Allan and building restorer Walter Blank.

Assembly.

The schoolhouse appears to have been in continuous use until the early 1920s.

One of the town's residents, Grace Bryan, 91, recalls attending the school.

"Miss Mary Downey was our teacher; her father had a farm in Sandy Spring," she said. "But she got TB (tuberculosis) and had to go away. We were all crying because we loved her. She was wonderful."

Bryan recalls hanging her coat in the small vestibule and a potbelly stove in the middle of the classroom.

Gladys Unglesbee, 90, a resident of Silver Spring, also has vague recollections of attending the schoolhouse.

"The mothers used to make soup and put it on top of the stove," she said. "The teacher would serve it to us. Sometimes, we would even get cocoa."

"We had a great time there," Unglesbee continued. "It was just a little country school, but we have lots of memories of it."

One of the school's earlier teachers was William H. Briggs, the son of Isaac Briggs, famous land surveyor and Brookeville resident.

### The later years

The school was operational until the early 1920s, when a new and larger school was built.

After the schoolhouse was sold in 1926, it was converted into a residence, but was later abandoned and continued to deteriorate over the years.

James Howell Howard and Maude Lemos Howard, who devoted their lives to education, purchased the property. Their grandson, James H. Howard Jr., recalled visiting the schoolhouse as a young child.

In an undated letter, the younger Howard writes of "drives

into the country" taken with his parents to visit his two uncles and the schoolhouse.

"I have no idea as to what the motivation was for my grandparents to purchase the schoolhouse property, or how it came about that the county was allowed to see the property to Negroes," he wrote.

The Howards were African Americans.

A deed shows the property was transferred to James Howell Howard Jr. by Maude Lemos Howard in 1942.

Whatever the intentions of the Howard family, the schoolhouse sat vacant and began to deteriorate.

To prevent further deterioration of the building, the Town of Brookeville began negotiations with the Howard estate to acquire the property.

Allan said the town had been eager to obtain the schoolhouse property, but was not in the position to purchase it, due to the costs involved in the previous restoration of the Brookeville Academy.

In 1997 the property was deeded to the town by Juanita C. Gardner and Shirley H. Rice, co-administrators of the Howard estate, to honor Howard's wish that the building be restored by the town in memory of his parents, Howell J. Howard Sr. and Consuelo Howard, and their dedication to the improvement, education and well-being of African-American children in Montgomery County and Washington, D.C.

Allan said the town was thrilled to have the opportunity to bring the schoolhouse back to life, but it also had other motivations for wanting to acquire the school when it did.

"We had a driving desire to obtain the schoolhouse while some of the residents that attended the school were still alive so that they could share their memories with us

and help us to restore it as it once was," he said.

### The restoration process

Booz organized a cleanup day in 1996, at which time a tarp was placed over the roof.

"It spent eight years under that blue tarp," he said. "That probably saved it."

After the town was awarded a small grant in 1997, Booz began preliminary work.

In 2001 a small Save the Brookeville Schoolhouse Committee was formed to manage the project and develop recommendations for how the restored schoolhouse could be used.

Several volunteer days, which drew many town residents, resulted in clearing brush and debris from the site. Many of the town's residents have volunteered their time, their expertise and their money to the project.

"When we began, the building had been abandoned for 40 years," Booz said. "It was a mess. We filled two Dumpsters with the material hauled out of there."

Using Booz's plan, the town received grants from both the state and the county. The town also budgeted \$17,000 in capital funds towards the project. The first phase, consisting of restoring the building's exterior, cost approximately \$40,000.

Booz said the first task was to stabilize the building to prevent further deterioration.

Walls were rebuilt or supported, sill plates and windows were replaced, and a new roof was installed.

"The contractor, Walter Blank, deserves a lot of credit," Booz said. "He retained as many of the original materials as possible."

### The future

Allan hopes that the schoolhouse will be completed in time for the seventh annual Montgomery County Heritage Days Tour, scheduled for June 26 and 27.

The town is still considering potential uses for the building.

"One obvious use is to work with the school system to demonstrate or recreate 19th-century education in a classic one-room schoolhouse," he said. "With the Sandy Spring Museum and the Oakley Cabin nearby, it seems to be a natural combination."

Allan said he will solicit ideas from the community on other possible uses.

"Because of its location, its usage will have to be fairly low-key," he said. "We don't plan on using it for anything that would draw large numbers of people."