

***George Extrom***

***Dorothy R. Daggett***

Interviewed by Lorraine Orchard in 1986 at an unknown location.

Oral history tape number: 3

*I am talking with George Extrom, who will be assisted by Dorothy Daggett, Mrs. Ronald Daggett, both of Madison. We are interested to know the relationship between the Taychopera Foundation and the origin of Historic Madison. Because George Extrom has the background for the Taychopera Foundation, I'd like to know if he could give us a little information about it. First, George, I don't know whether to pronounce it "Tay-chopera" or "Tay-kopera." I can spell it, because I'm looking at your paper. The official title is Taychopera Foundation, Incorporated. Now, can you tell us something about dates and purposes?*

George: Of course, there was always a debate over whether that should be "Tay-kopera" or "Tay-chopera." It's an Indian name. I think it means "the four lakes," or "region of the four lakes," or something like that. I always maintained that since it was probably written down phonetically from the Ojibwa – I believe it was the Ojibwa Indian language, they wouldn't have used "ch" if they meant it to be pronounced "Tay-kopera." I was a very small minority of people who believed that. That, incidentally, was also the name of the Central High School annual for many years.

*I remember that.*

George: The early meetings were held in March or the spring of 1968. I think the original idea came from Mrs. Audrey Parkinson, who was a graduate student in municipal planning.

Dorothy: In urban and regional planning.

George: At their organizational meeting, whose minutes I have here, the members present were: Mr. Robert Murphy, Mr. Walter Scott, Mr. Walter Jacobson, Mr. William Redden, Mrs. Elizabeth Redden, Mrs. Audrey Parkinson, Mrs. Dorothy Daggett, Mrs. Jill Marks, Mrs. Phil Lewis, and Mrs. Mary White. This meeting was to consider proposed articles of incorporation. Some of the items are marked for change [in these minutes] from the original in the meeting. It talks about the name, the purposes, membership in it, and that sort of thing. I don't know what else there should be said about the first meetings.

Dorothy: It was prompted, I believe, [by the fact] that historic Mapleside was to be torn down. That was one of the things, and that prompted the Landmarks Commission within a few years.

George: Very early on, people discovered that, unfortunately, a historic home in Madison, Mapleside, on University Avenue, was to be torn down and replaced by a hamburger stand. This had been the first farmhouse and the first farm that produced crops in Dane County. Abel... I forget his name [Dunning]. It was made of sandstone from the Forward Hills Quarries just across University Avenue and [it] was well over a hundred years old. Some people became concerned that it was going to be destroyed and decided to try to save it.

The ordinance was proposed to the Common Council to organize or create a Landmarks Commission which would designate historic buildings for preservation. That was one of the original purposes of Taychopera and I believe it was one of the best things they did. They accomplished that. Mayor Dyke was an enthusiastic supporter and, in fact, the newspaper clipping says he signed the ordinance with a quill pen provided by the State Historical Society.

*I remember there was a lot of publicity about this in the papers.*

Dorothy: It was a real spin-off.

George: I recall when we tried to raise money to save Mapleside, the first plan was to save it where it was. Then it was proposed, since we were not making much headway that way – in fact,

had failed in the month allowed to raise \$50,000 or \$60,000, we didn't raise the money – it was proposed then to take it down, move it to the Arboretum, and set it up again. An architectural firm in Madison offered to have its staff do all the marking and rearranging and keeping it in order for a dollar, but that failed, too. Some of the interest [in the project] is shown by a woman who sent in a poem about it and said we should sell the poem and use the money to help preserve Mapleside. The stones had been piled in the Arboretum, I believe. I don't know if the marks are still extant or if anybody knows where they are, but [Mapleside] was never rebuilt, of course.

But it did give some impetus to this drive for a landmarks commission, which usually designates that a building so selected may not be changed externally from its original shape or form. Inside you can do what you want. That was successfully passed in about 1970?

Dorothy: 1973, maybe.

George: 1967? No, that was another effort.

Dorothy: We didn't meet until 1968. It took several years. One thing that might be of interest is that the last meeting to really preserve Mapleside was held in our home. We spent about three hours trying to convince Burger King to use the home as it was – to be forerunners in preserving and still have their fast-food chain. They were flabbergasted! Now that is done. There are many communities where a company will come in and say "We'll preserve it. We'll contribute this to the history of your community and we will still make hamburgers."

George: Burger King gave \$2,000 toward the restoration fund.

*Good! There probably is a possibility, isn't there, if the stones can be found, that it could be rebuilt in the Arboretum, for example.*

George: I think so. I'm not sure who they would ask.

*Then that gave you the impetus to get started, and you incorporated after that.*

George: It was probably incorporated just before that. I don't have the dates on it.

*Probably when we search through these papers we might get those dates established. Well, you became established and, I'm sure, you accomplished I know of several things. Can you tell us what your big accomplishments were, in your view?*

George: In addition to the Landmarks Commission and the ordinance, I think the greatest accomplishment was saving and moving of the old synagogue, Gates of Heaven Synagogue, which formerly stood where the Valley Bank [now] stands on West Washington Avenue, a block off the Square. It was razed and was moved to its present place. Is that James Madison Park where it sits?

*Yes.*

George: And with some contributions of artifacts, I guess you'd call them. In a Christian church it would be called a [unclear]. It is some kind of a wall panel that came from a Jewish synagogue in Milwaukee. Incidentally, the Gates of Heaven Synagogue is the second oldest existing building used originally as a synagogue. The other one is a very famous one in Rhode Island. [So we did] that, and there were several booklets published about historic Madison – walking tour guides and a study of some of the homes. These were prepared by Jill Marks.

*There still are walking tours and I imagine those guidebooks are still in use.*

George: Yes, they are.

*I think Historic Madison conducts those now, doesn't it?*

George: I believe so.

*I notice you have a clipping here. It says "Let's save the Old Red Gym, too." Did Taychopera get into that? Or you didn't have to?*

George: This is a letter to a newspaper from a university student saying that "as a student who has just returned from Europe, I was thrilled and impressed with all the old, old buildings in every country." This person says we should save the Old Red Gym. In fact, there was another letter inspired by this that I seem vaguely to remember claimed that people come from miles and miles away to look at that old building. Nothing was done by Taychopera, and I don't know as it ever became a formal proposition for them.

Dorothy: The titles might be good [to list], in addition to what you said, because that hasn't been done.

George: Oh, yes, of these booklets that I spoke of. I'll read right from the article: "During its seven years' existence, Taychopera published several booklets, selected historic buildings for inclusion in *Sandstone and Buffalo Robes*, [created] a walking tour guide to Madison's historic downtown buildings, and financed Jill Marks in making films of historic places in the city. Other booklets issued by Taychopera included *Madison Houses 1837 to 1915*, prepared by Mrs. Marks, several colored films of Madison historic places, and a pamphlet devoted to the concept of a historic district in the Gilman Street-Wisconsin Avenue area." That became a fact, too.

*Yes, it did.*

George: It used to be called Big Bug Hill.

*That's right. And now we still have, as we said, tours and articles about those homes and renovation.*

George: There was one other house that we were interested in. [It was located] on Gilman Street near Wisconsin Avenue and was called the Bashford House, I believe. It was an Italian style. It had a kind of tower in the corner of an L-shaped building. It was proposed that that be purchased as an investment. It had six or eight small apartments in it. The idea was that by buying it we could preserve it, for one thing, and have a source of income for promoting our work. That also became financially impossible and was never done.

Dorothy: We did sell notepaper with sketches of the Bashford House, which George has just mentioned; and the Cayman House; the Pierce House; the Herfurth House; and also the Old Spring Tavern, owned by William Stevens. Now one of these is a bed and breakfast.

George: A luxury.

Dorothy: That would be the way to preserve them all.

*You're too modest, Dorothy. I imagine Ron Daggett designed the notepaper. Is that right?*

Dorothy: Right. And the booklets.

*I have seen those. Did he illustrate the booklet, too?*

Dorothy: Yes.

*His sketches have contributed so much to Madison and our history. Is there anything else about the history of Taychopera that we should include before we start to talk about its relationship with Historic Madison and the origin of Historic Madison?*

George: I only can remember the interest there was in the moving of the synagogue. I think it cost \$20,000 to move it. They did it without taking it apart. They wrapped cables around it. It happened [that] my office was on the sixth floor of a building right at the corner where they moved this, so I had a spot for taking some pictures. The contractor came in and [the move] took parts of two days. I remember crews going along Dayton Street clipping tree branches and moving light fixtures. Everybody walked along beside or followed along, expecting it was going to collapse, but it didn't.

One thing that amused me during the discussion of raising money, which we did – we raised enough money to move it – [was that] somebody suggested that since this was the Gates of Heaven Synagogue, one of the ways to raise money would be to sponsor a golf tournament and call it the “Gates of Heaven Open.” That was never done.

*No, no. Was there anything else about Taychopera?*

George: [When we begin] to talk about Historic Madison, we're going to talk about dissolution. The last thing they [the Taychopera Foundation] did was to appropriate \$500 for installing one of the double doors on the synagogue and \$125, some reports say \$200, for an oil painting of Mapleside, which is in the possession of the Madison City Library.

*I see from this article that the watercolor sketch of Mapleside was done by Margaret Mansfield of Waunakee. It's here in the library.*

George: Yes, it used to be in the Arts and Music [Division]. I don't know. I haven't been in there since they changed it.

Dorothy: I thought of one thing that I'm aware of, in retrospect, here. I think we were very conscious of public education and of giving talks to organizations. I don't think there's a better way [than this] to circulate in Madison, to educate the public. And I think it's something that shouldn't die. If there's something going on in Historic Madison or in any of the groups with goals to preserve history, that that is still one of the better ways – maybe the best – to talk with people, to answer questions, and to educate.

*You have here an article written by Frank Custer, who says in 1975 that the Taychopera Foundation was disbanded after seven years of work. This is certainly an important article to retain, it seems to me. Do you remember why you disbanded? Or any of the details that you could relate for us, George?*

George: Strangely, I cannot really remember clearly why we disbanded. There seemed to be flagging enthusiasm after accomplishing the landmarks ordinance and the movement of the synagogue. The membership fell as a result. It was felt that since a new organization seemed to be being proposed which was interested in the history, not necessarily in preservation... I think that was the principal difference between Historic Madison and Taychopera. Taychopera was interested in preservation, Historic Madison in history. As it worked out, a number of Taychopera members went over to Historic Madison, including Gordon Orr, who had been president of Taychopera at one time, and I don't know but what he was a president [of Historic Madison] at one time [as well].

*I think so.*

George: There was a continuity in membership between them [the two organizations]. One of the discussions, or some of the discussions, were between the questions of merging or simply dissolving. Robert B. L. Murphy, who was the backbone really of the organization, giving his legal talents to our problems, as well as his well-known interest in history and historic preservation, had the feeling that their goal was not the same as ours and that the money, which was really all that was to be involved, should better be marked for use in continued preservation. I cannot now remember how much there was left. A proposal was finally made that the money be given to the Historical Society with some strings attached to it for five years – that it could be redesignated for some other similar organization who had similar aims to Taychopera, and if that sort of thing didn't arise in five years, then it would go to the Historical Society. I believe that's the way it worked out, [that] no further organization was formed with that purpose and so the money went to the Society.

This is a notice that I sent out as president in June of 1975 to members. It clarifies some of these questions and objectives and accomplishments, so I'll read it:

"From my notes and recollections of our committee meeting on June 4, I have prepared a summary of the considerations we want to submit to Historic Madison, Incorporated. I would appreciate your confirmation and corrections of them. Then I will ask Gordon Orr to name a committee from his group to meet with us and discuss the subject of merger, probably on June 17 or 18, if the dates are convenient for you.

"First, we propose that Taychopera Foundation Incorporated merge with Historic Madison Incorporated. You recall a few minutes ago I said that we had decided against it, but this was preliminary to that decision. We propose that if a merger is agreed upon, the treasury which Taychopera would bring should be made a separate fund from all other monies of Historic Madison, Incorporated and administered by a separate board of trustees comprising former members of Taychopera who are also members of Historic Madison. The name "Taychopera" should be preserved in the title of the fund. The fund plus proceeds from its investment and additional given to it should be devoted to activities and functions closely related to historic preservation. A change in the bylaws of Historic Madison should be enacted to include as one of its purposes the aim now included in the constitution and bylaws of Taychopera. We will explore the possibilities of requesting the addition to the fund, the Taychopera Preservation Fund, as voluntary contributions and as a fixed portion of these members' dues.

"Other assets which Taychopera will bring are: the films made by Jill Marks; the photographic display made by Chris Barnes, that's Mrs. Robert Barnes; any books, magazines, subscriptions, and association memberships we have at the time of the merger. We should keep in mind the possibility of establishing the trust fund ourselves before merger if no alternative seems possible to ensure continuation of Taychopera."

This, as events turned out, was not done. The merger did not go through because of this disagreement or lack of congruity of aims between the two organizations. Dissolution went on instead of merger. There are records, historical and legal records, of the problems that are covered by these papers and letters, [but] I don't know if they would be interesting to the general reader.

As I say, the merger did not go through because of the difference in goals. But there was certainly no resentment or animosity, as is proved by the fact that Gordon Orr, a former president of Taychopera, was, I think, the first president of Historic Madison. At least he was the person to whom we turned when we were discussing merger. There were other members on their board who had formerly been on our board and had formerly been members of Taychopera.

Historic Madison has thriven, and we [the Taychopera Foundation] left our mark in the city in the synagogue move and the landmarks ordinance. I think that was really when interest began to fade, when we had accomplished what our stated goals were. [Also] it seemed that by that time there were real estate people in Madison who became interested and began to look at their buildings and to think about their buildings with respect to preserving the older ones and, in fact, getting the shelter of landmark designation. One of the first that was designated was the fraternity house, Sigma Phi, on Prospect Avenue. I forget the name of the architect. It was not a Frank Lloyd Wright building, I believe. It was a firm in Chicago.

Dorothy: Was that a Sullivan house, or not?

George: Sullivan, yes, although it was actually done by one of his people who later moved to Madison. That was designated and the plaque was designed by a member of our organization and paid for by our organization, in fact. And there was some consideration being given to other houses. The Pierce House was an outstanding one that comes to mind, which has now been made into, as Dorothy said, a bed and breakfast building. Others, I'm sure, had been influenced. In fact, we may claim, I think, some connection with that Victorian garden that was built on Gilman Street. (I forget the cross street there at that corner). People in that neighborhood... on Yankee Hill or Big Bug Hill, there were a lot of homes of the same era – the first homes in Madison which deserved preservation and recognition, some of which they had received. The question of the maintenance of the records of the Taychopera Foundation was covered in the second paragraph of one of the articles of incorporation of Taychopera, and it reads, and I'm reading from it:

“Upon dissolution or final liquidation of this Foundation, its assets shall be distributed to a successor or comparable foundation, if there be one in existence. And if there be none, to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Distribution to the Society shall be expressly conditioned on the administration and retention of such assets for a period up to five years, during which the Society shall be authorized and encouraged to convey such assets to an organization generally similar in its aims to this Foundation, including an organization created by or on the initiative of the said State Historical Society. Assets so distributed to the Society shall not be subject to further conditions after the completion of said five year period but may be used for purposes as determined by its board of curators.”

That's the end of the article on dissolution.

*Well, George, I certainly thank you. You have a wealth of material here. There are the articles of incorporation and many newspaper articles, correspondence, old programs, minutes of all your meetings in a thick notebook. This is exceedingly valuable material. From your last remarks, we'll know where you think it's all going to end, and I'm sure people from Historic Madison will be happy to be able to refer to it. Right now you just turned to a list. I gather those are charter members or contributors, in 1971.*

George: The membership list.

*A long membership list. There will be many names on there that we will find familiar.*

George: As I recall, organizations had to have two hundred members in order to use a mailing permit for a charitable group, and I believe we made it – not by much, but we made it. There were around two hundred members.

*I thank both you and Dorothy. I can't help observing that you really sowed the seeds that are*

*now bearing fruit. You may be dissolved as a formal organization, but you transferred a lot of your enthusiasm to Historic Madison through the overlapping of members. And we just have to look around in Madison now – look at the Gates of Heaven, look at the landmark homes, and look at the garden on Gilman Street – and we know that you have influenced public opinion and [that] perhaps your mission was done, although you might see a reason to reorganize if something doesn't go right.*

George: It was a great experience for anyone interested in the history of Madison. There are not very many of us who were lifelong members of Madison, I guess, and we want to preserve it the way it was when we were part of it, or of its beginning.