

Jack Taylor Papers at the Dvořák American Heritage Association

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Taylor, Jack, 1925-2019

Title: Jack Taylor Papers

Dates: (Inclusive 1990-2010s)

Abstract:

The collection comprises the papers of Jack Taylor (1925-2019) donated to the Dvořák American Heritage Association (DAHA) in 2012, with a focus on his activism in historic preservation on behalf of Czech composer Antonín Dvořák in New York City covering the years from 1990 to the 2010s. The collection holds documentation related to the efforts to designate “Dvořák House” as a cultural landmark; the unfortunate reversal of the designation and demolition of the house in 1991; and subsequent initiatives, including the co-naming of “Dvořák Place” on East 17th Street, and the placement of the statue of Antonín Dvořák by Croatian-American sculptor Ivan Mestrovic in Stuyvesant Square Park. The chief organizations represented in the papers are the Dvořák American Heritage Association and the Stuyvesant Park Neighborhood Association (SPNA).

See “Dvořák American Heritage Association, Twenty-Five Years of Celebrating Composer Antonín Dvořák and his American Legacy,” and Timeline of History, 1990-2015 at www.dvoraknyc.org.

See also the New York Preservation Archive Project website for information about Dvořák House and Jack Taylor at <https://www.nypap.org/preservation-history/dvorak-house/>.

Biographical Information

Jack Taylor (1925-2019) was a founding member of the Dvořák American Heritage Association (DAHA), established in order to designate the Dvořák House at 327 East 17th Street a New York City cultural landmark. Dvořák lived and composed in the house during his American residency from 1892-1895.

Taylor was a leader of historic preservation initiatives in New York City, focusing intense efforts on the Dvořák House in Manhattan in the 1990s. He was born in Greenwich Village and lived much of his life in lower Manhattan. During World War II, Taylor was stationed in England, and served in the Army Air Forces in occupied Germany. After the war, Taylor attended Georgetown University and then began a career as a journalist, working for The Washington Post and later as an editor at Family Circle Magazine.

After retiring from Family Circle in the early 1980s, Taylor became deeply immersed in historic preservation in New York City. Among the lower Manhattan projects and local preservation organizations in which Taylor was involved, in addition to the Dvořák House and Dvořák American Heritage Association, were: the Drive to Protect the Ladies' Mile, Union Square Park Community Coalition, Stuyvesant Park Neighborhood

Association, Gramercy Neighborhood Associates, and the Historic Districts Council. These efforts led to the formation of the Ladies' Mile Historic District (1989), the East 17th Street/Irving Place Historic District (1998), and Tammany Hall Landmark Designation (2013). **These papers, along with a large bequest of Dvořák material which expands and complements the DAHA bequest of 2012, are located in the New-York Historical Society Museum Library, where they were deposited in 2020.**

Text adapted from the New-York Historical Society Museum Library "Finding Aid of the Jack Taylor Papers" at www.newyorkhistory.org. See also the New York Preservation Archive Project website for Jack Taylor biographical information and oral history: <https://www.nypap.org/preservation-history/jack-taylor/>.

Scope and Contents

The collection at Dvořák American Heritage Association includes documentation comprising predominantly photocopies of newspaper clippings, campaign handouts, preservation alerts, press releases, programs and announcements from concerts and fundraising events, and other materials pertaining to preservation efforts on behalf of the Dvořák House and subsequent related initiatives from the 1990s into the 2010s. The specific focus is the campaign to preserve Dvořák House, the designation of East 17th Street between 1st and 2nd Avenues as Dvořák Place, and the steps taken to secure placement of the bronze statue of Dvořák by sculptor Ivan Mestrovic in Stuyvesant Square Park.

Acquisition History. The Jack Taylor Papers were received by the Dvořák American Heritage Association in 2012 directly from Jack Taylor, a founding member of the organization. (The DAHA bequest of Jack Taylor papers was followed eight years later by a more comprehensive bequest to the New-York Historical Society.) The DAHA documents were reviewed in a preliminary way and selections were highlighted in an exhibition in the Dvořák Room of Bohemian National Hall in 2015, at the time of the 25th Anniversary of the founding of DAHA. The organization was established in 1990 to direct efforts to preserve Dvořák House, the 1850s row house in which Antonín Dvořák and his family lived during his influential American residency as Director of the National Conservatory of Music of America, from 1892 to 1895. (See timeline titled "DAHA: Highlights of History 1990-2015" at www.dvoraknyc.org.)

Description. The bequest was broadly described by Jack Taylor as including papers related to "Expressions of Support for Landmark Designation of Dvořák House; Acquisition of Dvořák Plaque (from the façade of Dvorak House) and Co-Naming of Dvořák Place; Press Articles; Invitations and Programs for Fund Raising Concerts and Events for Dvořák House, Dvořák Street, Dvořák Place and Dvořák Plaque, and Miscellaneous." Contained in the bequest, as mentioned under Scope and Contents, are numerous photocopies of newspaper clippings, campaign handouts, preservation and press alerts, letters of support, and programs and announcements from concerts and fundraising events created principally by Taylor, working in collaboration with community organizations. These were initially directed toward preserving Dvořák House, and after the unfortunate demolition of Dvořák House in 1991, focused on a series of

initiatives to commemorate Dvořák in New York. The papers cover the years of intense preservation and commemorative activity from 1990 through 1997, with miscellaneous additions from following years into the 2010s.

Organization. Following the lead of the N-YHS “Finding Aid of the Jack Taylor Papers,” the Taylor papers at DAHA have been processed, organized, and placed in archival housing. One complete set of the papers, after the elimination of excessive copies, has been assembled in chronological order. These have been placed in two 1-1/2” binders with clear sheet protectors displaying documents on the front and back of the pages (Volumes 1 and 2). The binders contain a sample of each photocopied document included in the Taylor papers at DAHA, forming a visual record of Jack Taylor’s preservation and commemorative projects related to Antonín Dvořák. A third binder contains papers selected for DAHA’s 2015 commemorative exhibition, titled “DAHA: Twenty-Five Years of Celebrating Composer Antonín Dvořák and His Legacy,” which drew from the Jack Taylor Papers. There is another grouping of papers in a booklet prepared by Taylor himself, containing photocopies of letters from prominent participants in the international letter-writing campaign for the preservation of Dvořák House initiated by Taylor.

A 2021 contribution to the archives from Nancy Shear Arts Services has also been incorporated in the Jack Taylor Papers. These papers contain original correspondence, press alerts, and other documents related to the “Antonín Dvořák Statue Dedication on 13 September 1997,” which was coordinated by Taylor on behalf of the Dvořák American Heritage Association (DAHA) and Stuyvesant Park Neighborhood Association (SPNA). Shear was retained as publicist for the gala event in Stuyvesant Square Park, attended by New York City dignitaries, international music and arts personalities, constituents from neighborhood organizations, and the general public.

These archives are now stored in the Dvořák Room in the NYC landmarked Bohemian National Hall (1896) at 321 East 73rd Street, in the lower bookcase cabinet section. This finding aid has been created and posted on the DAHA website in the “Highlights of DAHA History” section of the pull-down menu. The collection will be open to qualified scholars for consultation by appointment upon application to DAHA at info@dvoraknyc.org. Applicants may use a camera, without flash, to photograph pages as needed.

The collection should be cited as: Jack Taylor Papers, Dvořák American Heritage Association (DAHA). Prepared by Majda Kallab Whitaker, Executive Board Secretary and Curatorial Advisor, Dvořák American Heritage Association (DAHA), 2023.