

Eisenhower

National Historic Site
Pennsylvania

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



General Eisenhower nods farewell to a photographer as he heads home from his Gettysburg College office in December 1966.

AP/Wide World Photos

A Five-star Kansas Farm Boy

January 20, 1961: As John F. Kennedy's inauguration drew to a close, the departing President and First Lady, eager to escape the crowds and the bitter cold, quietly left Capitol Hill. After a farewell luncheon they headed north from Washington on snow-covered roads. "And so we came to Gettysburg," wrote General Eisenhower in the mid-1960s, "and to the farm we had bought eleven years earlier, where we expected to spend the remainder of our lives."

Dwight David Eisenhower was born in Denison, Texas, in 1890. Growing up in Abilene, Kansas, young Ike (a nickname from grade school) had no designs on an army career, much less the Presidency of the United States. One of six sons in a family that could barely finance college for one, he discovered that free education awaited any young man appointed to the U.S. Military Academy. At West Point Ike pursued his first love, football, until a severe knee injury barred him from the gridiron for good. Commissioned a second lieutenant in the infantry after graduation in 1915, he reported for duty at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. There he met Mamie Geneva Doud, whose well-to-do Denver family spent winters in San Antonio. On July 1, 1916, they were married. When the United States entered the World War in 1917, Ike hoped for duty overseas. Instead, he spent the war stateside at Camp Colt in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in charge of the army's fledgling tank corps. Ike loved the small town in the foothills of the Appalachians, about 50 miles south of the place that his ancestors had settled in the Susquehanna River Valley in the 18th century. At the war's end Ike left Gettysburg for a new assignment, one of many in a career that became a 38-year tour of the world.

During the 1920s and 30s Ike held a series of staff jobs and steadily rose in rank. His superiors were impressed with his organizational ability. As late as 1940 Ike told his son John, headed for West Point himself, that he expected to retire as a colonel. Then, with war at hand, Ike began to collect stars at record speed. In December 1943 he was named Supreme Allied Commander for "Operation Overlord," the cross-Channel invasion. His orders were simple: "You will land in Europe and, proceeding to Germany, will destroy Hitler and all his forces." Thus on June 6, 1944, at Ike's direction, the largest invasion force ever assembled hit the beaches at Normandy. The heroic efforts of the Allies that followed brought an end to Nazi Germany—and peace to Western Europe.

Ike's wartime success earned him worldwide adoration. Politicians deemed the General—as he now was known—a candidate attractive to all factions. But the next office he took on was political, the presidency of Columbia University in 1948. Anticipating retirement, he and Mamie searched for rural property on which to build; he wanted, as he explained in his autobiography, "an escape from



Major Eisenhower (left), takes a seat with fellow British and American officers at Camp Colt.

concrete into the countryside." In 1950, fondly recalling Camp Colt days, they bought a small dairy farm just outside Gettysburg. Their retirement was delayed for another decade. At the request of President Harry Truman, Ike left Columbia to assume command of NATO forces in Europe. In 1952 the General returned home, accepted the Republican nomination, and won election as the 34th President of the United States.



General Eisenhower and Prime Minister Churchill meet in northern France in spring 1945.

The Eisenhowers planned to spend weekends at their farm when they had spare time. In November 1955 their country home took on a much more serious role. As it had nearly a century earlier, Gettysburg achieved instant fame—this time as the site of the "Temporary White House" while Ike recuperated from his first heart attack. Back in Washington the popular Chief Executive received a steady stream of dignitaries, many of whom he invited to Camp David for conferences, then on to the farm. Eventually, every important visitor to Camp David came to expect an invitation to Ike and Mamie's place.



Ike and President de Gaulle examine a cannon at Gettysburg during a 1960 visit.

Leaving Washington in 1961 after 50 years' service to his country meant retirement at last. While still in the White House, Mamie had confessed, "How nice it will be to be free, to rest and to do as we like." Instead, for the next eight years the Eisenhowers led an active life. Ike worked weekdays at his Gettysburg College office meeting with political and business associates and writing his memoirs.



Dwight and Mamie celebrate 50 years of marriage at son John's home at Valley Forge.

Ike and Mamie made a gift of their house and property to the U.S. Government in 1967; under the agreement they planned to reside at the farm for life. Two years later, on March 28, 1969, General Eisenhower died at age 78. All the world mourned the passing of the man they considered a beloved friend. Mamie rejected the idea of moving to Washington to be closer to family and friends. In 1978, a year before her own death, Mamie Eisenhower spoke of the importance of the Gettysburg property to the couple who had once changed habitats an average of once a year: "We had only one home—our farm."

Courtesy Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



In a rare display of formality, David and Ida Eisenhower pose in 1902 surrounded by six neatly dressed sons. Dwight is at far left.

Courtesy Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

At Gettysburg

Eisenhower National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325, is in immediate charge.

To Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower the red brick farmhouse that stood on the land they purchased from Allen Redding in 1950 seemed custom-made for retirement. Although the Redding house was in disrepair, its "big homey kitchen" appealed to Mamie, who later explained that Ike loved to cook in his spare time and they "could never think of buying a home that didn't have a kitchen big enough for him to use with comfort." When the remodeling began, the architects were surprised to find that beneath the century-old brick veneer was a deteriorating log cabin whose 200-year-old timbers threatened to collapse. The Redding house could not be saved.

Disappointed but determined to preserve at least a small piece of history, Mamie told construction workers to salvage what material they could while dismantling the original structure. Builders carefully retained part of the brickwork and the kitchen fireplace with a bake oven; they built a new house around these existing features. Workmen also put aside wooden beams, floorboards, and shutters. Even some of the shrubbery surrounding the house was dug up and replanted later.



The Eisenhowers' living room, rarely used, was a formal setting in which to display Mamie's "accumulations"—family photographs as well as figurines and porcelain from all over the world. For their 38th wedding anniversary, the White House staff presented them with this marble fireplace, sold from the White House in the 1870s.

By March 1955 "Mamie's Dream House" was complete. The President and First Lady were the proud owners of what chief architect Milton Osborne termed a "modified Georgian farmhouse." Inside were eight bedrooms, eight bathrooms, a stately living room, a formal dining room, a large kitchen, an attic studio, and a porch. With an interior decorator, Mamie set about to make her new acquisition both a home and showplace to entertain visitors. Since the early days of her marriage Mrs. Eisenhower had been collecting furniture and decorative objects. What she could not easily tote from city to city she put in storage. At last she had a place to exhibit the treasures she had been accumulating for 39 years, as well as the enormous variety of housewarming gifts the presidential couple received.

After 1961, guests to the farm were mostly family or members of the small circle of Eisenhower friends. A guest might have toured the nearby battlefield with the General, who had been a student of military history since childhood. Upon returning to the farm the visitor would perhaps be shown around the cattle barns and house, then escorted to the



Mamie once described the Eisenhower's favorite room in simple terms: "We lived on the porch." The comfortable furniture, card table, television, and cheery sunlight for reading and painting made for peaceful days. The General predicted that if they were ever to build another house, "it would be built around such a porch."

back porch for refreshments, conversation and maybe a bridge game.

Ike and Mamie's favorite room was the glassed-in porch on the east side of the house, where they enjoyed the morning sun over breakfast. The couple spent days at a time in this spot reading, playing cards, watching television, or simply relaxing in the comfortable armchairs, looking out over southern Pennsylvania's rolling hills. Taking advantage of the natural light, Ike set his easel by the windows and daubed color on landscapes and portraits. Though the General spoke modestly of his talent—"I don't know anything about painting"—Mamie was an ardent admirer and displayed his works prominently.

In his 1967 autobiography Ike recalled that "Mamie, who had spent a lifetime adjusting herself to other people's housing designs, or the lack of them, wanted a place that conformed to her notions of what a home should be." Even a casual look around the farmhouse reveals the great amount of care both Eisenhowers took to create an elegant, yet comfortable home.



Used mainly for conducting farm business, this small office was President Eisenhower's working place while he recovered from his 1955 heart attack. His desk, a reproduction of one used by George Washington, was custom made from floorboards removed from the White House when it was renovated during the Truman administration.

The General's Farm

Dwight Eisenhower often said of his Gettysburg property that he wanted to "leave the place better than I found it." For 15 years he enthusiastically maintained a successful farm. Eisenhower Farms, which he ran with partners, was composed of 189 acres of Ike's land and 285 adjoining acres owned by a friend. Besides producing corn, wheat, and hay, the farm had a dairy herd and later prizewinning Angus cattle.

In his endeavor to improve the land the General received help from many admirers. On either side of the main driveway is a row of Norway spruce trees, birthday presents from each of the state Republican chairpersons in 1955. A self-guiding walking tour of the grounds begins at the Reception Center. Points of interest are indicated by red-and-white five-star symbols.

1 This 1887 bank-style *barn*, typical of central Pennsylvania, held hay and straw on the upper floor. The lower level first contained dairy cattle stanchions and stalls, then, in the middle 1950s, stables for horses and ponies Ike kept for his grandchildren. The strobe light in the barn's south window was installed after Ike's presidency as an emergency aid for helicopter pilots. Some of Eisenhower's farm equipment is displayed here.

2 Sometimes called the Little House, this two-room *guest house* occupies the site of the Redding garage. Young David Eisenhower stayed here one

summer while he worked for his grandfather as a farmhand. The porch railing came from Mamie's girlhood home in Denver; the bell is from the Pitzer Schoolhouse that stood on property nearby where John and Barbara Eisenhower lived from 1959 to 1964.

3 On the side of the *main house*, north of the fieldstone wing, is a two-story section salvaged from the original Redding farmhouse. That house was supplied with water pumped inside by the windmill to the south.

4 The concrete pad marks a *guardhouse* site, one of several on the grounds that were staffed by Secret Service agents. Government protection at the farm began in 1955, ceased in 1961, and resumed after the assassination of President Kennedy. The path nearby leads to the cattle barns.

5 At this brick *barbecue*, Ike made outdoor cooking a show when he grilled steaks. He was a perfectionist in his cooking and brooked no delay when he called guests to the table.

6 The semicircular *privet hedge* was part of an elaborate landscaping plan during the early years of Eisenhower occupancy.

7 While on the farm, Mamie and Ike spent most of their time on the *porch* entertaining visitors or relaxing by themselves.

8 When Eisenhower stayed at his farm as President, the *flagpole* displayed a Presidential standard as well as the stars and stripes. After leaving the White House he was reinstated as General of the Army and proudly flew the five-star flag, now a symbol of Ike at Gettysburg, and from which the symbol marking tour stops was taken.

9 Presented to Eisenhower by the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway Company, this brass "*Frisco Bell*" carries the Presidential emblem. According to Mamie, her grandchildren, who visited often "loved to ring the bell, and I was always afraid the people of Gettysburg would think there was a fire!"

10 This *putting green*, complete with a hazardous sand trap, was installed in the 1950s for the famous Presidential golfer by the Professional Golfers Association.

11 Once a chicken house, the *garage* later housed vehicles, a walk-in meat cooler, and the chauffeur's apartment. The Eisenhowers' modern "Surrey with the Fringe on Top" is parked in one stall; they used it to show their guests around the farm.

12 The *reception center*, formerly a storage area and later the Secret Service office, has exhibits of Eisenhower's life, a video program, and a bookstore to help tell the story of this historic site.

