

# Old Stone House

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Rock Creek Park

In the midst of Washington, DC, a city of grand memorials to national leaders and significant events, stands an unassuming building commemorating the daily lives of ordinary Americans. The Old Stone House, one of the oldest known structures remaining in the nation's capital, is a simple 18th century dwelling built and inhabited by common people.



The Old Stone House in 1935

Since its completion in 1765, the Old Stone House withstood the forces of development and commercial growth that made Georgetown one of the nation's busiest ports by the mid-nineteenth century. Ironically, local folklore is responsible for saving this architectural landmark from destruction. In 1791, President George Washington and Pierre L'Enfant stayed at Suter's Tavern in Georgetown.

The tavern owner's son, John Suter, Jr. would later operate a clockmakers shop in the Old Stone House starting in 1800. The connection with the Suter family became intertwined with the

history of the Old Stone House, and the legend was born that the house served as headquarters for both Washington and L'Enfant.

Although few detailed records survive from the families who owned the Old Stone House, we can learn much about their lives from the architecture of the house and the personal possessions listed in wills and bills of sale.

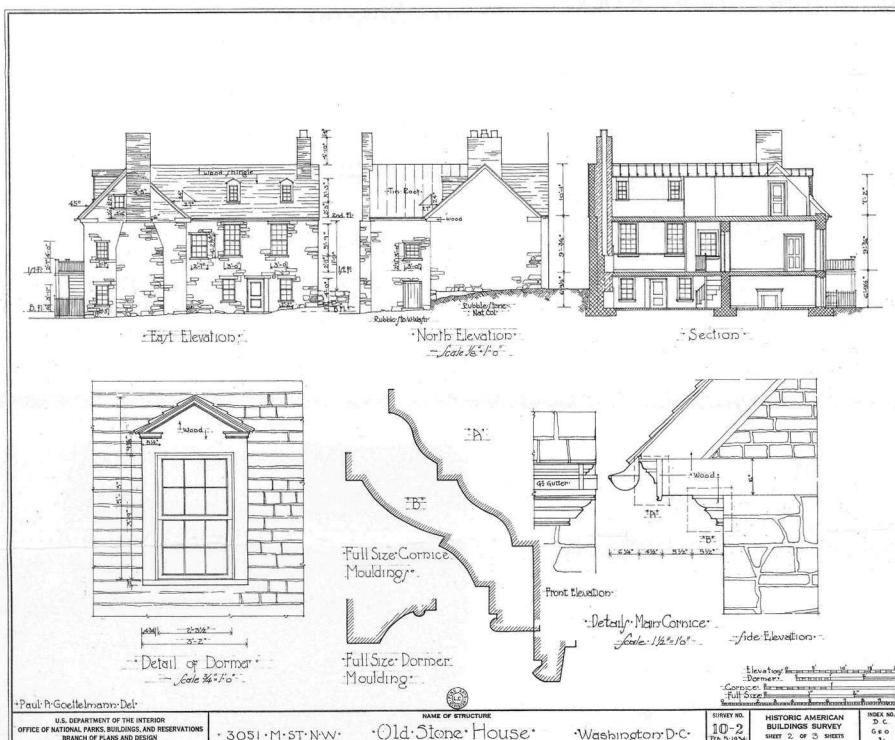
In 1764, Christopher and Rachael Layman traveled from Pennsylvania with their two sons to begin a new life in the growing port town of Georgetown along the Potomac River. For one pound, ten shillings, they bought Lot Three, a property facing Bridge Street, (now M Street, NW), and financed the construction of this

one-room house of blue field-stone, quarried about two miles up river, and solid oak boards, hewn with a pit saw. The back-breaking labor and skill of the builders is evident in the well-placed stones and evenly laid ceiling beams. The marks left by the massive saw used to cut the

ceiling beams can be seen in the room that housed the Layman family.

The Layman's lower-middle class house was simple and functional: stone walls two to three feet thick and packed dirt floors protected the family from harsh weather, while low ceilings conserved heat from the hearth fire.

The Laymans did not own more than the basic essentials, just Christopher's tools, a stove, Bibles, and some furniture. These items were detailed in Layman's will when he died after construction began on the house in 1765.



1934 Historic American Buildings Survey drawing of the Old Stone House

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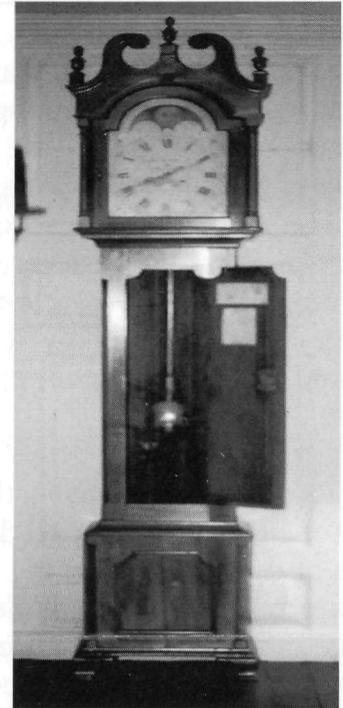
Two years later, Rachael Layman remarried and sold the home to another widow, Mrs. Cassandra Chew.

A prominent Georgetown landowner and self-sufficient widow, Mrs. Chew was a member of the upper-middle class. Her wealth included other property in and around Georgetown, as well as slaves; tax records indicate that Mrs. Chew owned six enslaved African Americans in 1800. Her wealth enabled her to make significant additions to the Old Stone House. She financed construction of the rear kitchen in 1767 and the addition of the second floor between 1767 and 1775.

Upon her death in 1807, Cassandra Chew bequeathed the Old Stone House to her oldest daughter, Mary Smith Brumley. It is believed that Mary lived in the house from 1790, after the death

of her first husband, until around 1802, when she remarried. She was the first in a succession of proprietors throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries who operated businesses out of the house or rented the property. Like her mother, Mary was financially comfortable. An 1826 inventory of her possessions indicates that she owned fifteen enslaved African Americans. Eventually one slave, Tabitha, purchased from Mary her and her infant child's freedom for \$201.

In the mid 19th century, Georgetown was home to a large slave and free African American black population, perhaps as much as one-third of the city's total population. Their labor before emancipation contributed to the commercial development of the nation's capital.



This clock was made by John Suter, Jr, who operated a clock shop in the Old Stone House.

The Old Stone House has been the subject of much local folklore. In the early 20th century, legend had it that the house served as "George Washington's Headquarters," and for some time, a sign confirming the myth hung over the front door. Although later disproved, this myth helped preserve the Old Stone House for later generations.

The Old Stone House was privately owned until 1953, when the federal government purchased the property for \$90,000 in response to a petition from local residents who had come to regard the house as one of historic significance. At that time, the house accommodated offices and the Parkway Motor Company, a used car dealership whose paved lot sat in what is now the location of the beautiful English style garden.

The home and grounds were transferred to the National Park Service and opened to the public in 1960. Today, Rock Creek Park, a unit of the National Park Service, administers this historic site. We hope you have enjoyed your visit to this surviving example of the early history of Washington, DC.

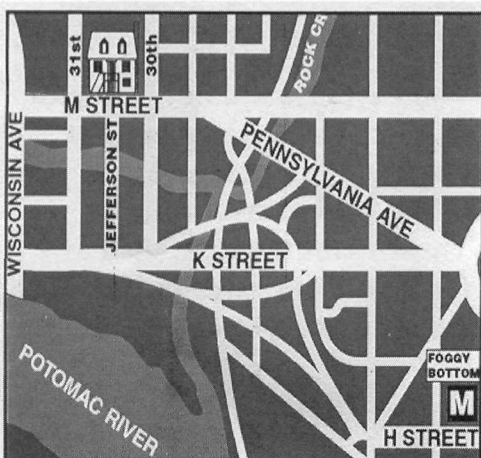
## Hours of Operation:

Days and hours vary. Group reservations requested. Garden open daily dawn to dusk.

For further information:  
202-895-6070

Rock Creek Park  
3545 Williamsburg Road NW,  
Washington, DC 20008

[www.nps.gov/rocr](http://www.nps.gov/rocr)  
[rocr\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:rocr_superintendent@nps.gov)



## Location:

3051 M Street, NW in  
Georgetown, Washington,  
DC.

Metro stop: Foggy Bottom  
(orange and blue lines).  
Commercial parking avail-  
able nearby.



Parkway Motor Company at the Old Stone House. (Auto lot is now the garden)

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