

Independence

National Historical Park
Philadelphia

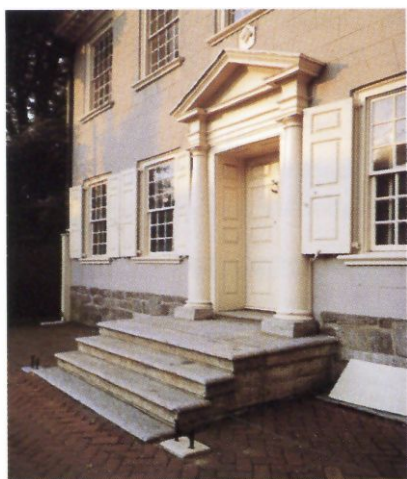
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



"I have taken a house in Germantown"

George Washington

Deshler-Morris House (The Germantown White House)



This building is the oldest presidential residence in existence in the United States. A refuge to President Washington during the yellow fever epidemic in 1793, the Deshler-Morris House later served as a country retreat for the First Family in 1794. The President's cabinet also met here in Germantown, then a few hours ride from Philadelphia. Today, visitors to the beautifully restored Germantown White House are offered a glimpse into the private world of this very public man.



President Washington at Germantown

The new United States faced many political crises, but none so great as a natural disaster from which no one was safe. In the summer of 1793, Yellow Fever was first diagnosed in Philadelphia. Germantown, a prosperous community only a few miles from the city, became the retreat for many wealthy Philadelphians who fled the epidemic in panic. Between August and October, almost 5,000 people died, approximately 10% of Philadelphia's population!

Most of the federal government was in recess when the epidemic began. President Washington left for a brief visit to Mt.

Vernon, his home in Virginia, and was scheduled to return to the capital city of Philadelphia. But with the epidemic raging and the responsibilities of his office to consider, Washington sought a temporary residence near the city to perform his Presidential duties in safety. Attorney General Edmund Randolph elected the home of Isaac Franks as the President's temporary residence. The President resided in the house from November 16 to 30, 1793, and presided over meetings with his divided cabinet: Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, Henry Knox, and Edmund Randolph.

Washington was pleased here and found it "...commodious for myself and the entertainment of company."



The First Family in Germantown



"Courtesy, Winterthur Museum"

Washington returned to this house in the summer of 1794 with his wife Martha and their adopted grandchildren, Eleanor Parke Custis and George Washington Parke Custis. The summer break brought a welcome respite from the pressures of public life. Young Washington, as he was called, attended the Germantown Union School, a short walk from the house. Eleanor "Nelly", was tutored at home. Martha raised flowers, the President posed for painter Gilbert Stuart and the family attended the German Reformed Church across the square from their house.

The Battle of Germantown



Battle of Germantown at Cliveden

Ironically, the house that Washington used as President of the United States had been occupied by his British adversary, Sir William Howe. During the American Revolution, Philadelphia was captured by British troops in September 1777, and the Continental

Army withdrew to the northwest. In early October, a pursuing force of British reached Germantown. Howe used the Deshler-Morris House as headquarters while repulsing a determined but unsuccessful attack launched by General Washington.

Why is it called the Deshler-Morris House?

The Deshler-Morris House gets its name from the first and last owners. David Deshler constructed a small summer house here in 1752. Twenty years later, he built a three story, nine room addition to the front of the house. Isaac Franks, a former Colonel in the Conti-

mental Army, purchased the house after Deshler died in 1792, then rented it to Washington. Franks later sold the house to the Morris family who purchased it and retained ownership until Elliston P. Morris donated it to the National Park Service in 1948.

General Information & Directions

Deshler-Morris House
5442 Germantown Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19144
(215) 596-1748
www.nps.gov/demo

Open April through mid-December.
Call for hours. Group tour reservations
available year round (admission fee).



(A unit of Independence National Historical Park)

From Center City:

Take Interstate 676 West to Interstate 76 West to Exit #32 and follow the signs to Lincoln Drive. At first light, turn right onto Rittenhouse Street. At next light, turn right onto Wissahickon Avenue. At second light, turn left onto School House Lane and continue to Germantown Avenue. Turn right onto Germantown Avenue. The site is located on the right hand side.

From the West:

Take I-76 East PA turnpike to Exit #24 (Philadelphia). Stay on I-76 (becomes Schuylkill Expressway) to Exit #32 and follow the signs to Lincoln Drive. At first light, turn right onto Rittenhouse Street. At next light, turn right onto Wissahickon Avenue. At second light, turn left onto School House Lane and

continue to Germantown Avenue. Turn right onto Germantown Avenue. The site is located on the right hand side.

From the North:

Take I-476 Northeast Extension South to I-276 East towards New Jersey. Exit at #26 (Fort Washington,) then merge onto PA-309 South. Stay on Route 309 for about 5 miles then slight turn right onto east Washington Lane. Turn left onto Germantown Avenue. The site is located between School House Lane and Coulter Street.

From the South:

Take I-95 North to PA-291 East exit #10 (Philadelphia Airport) PA-291 East becomes I-76 West. Stay on I-76 to Exit #32 and follow the signs to Lincoln Drive. At first light,

turn right onto Rittenhouse Street. At next light, turn right onto Wissahickon Avenue. At second light, turn left onto School House Lane and continue to Germantown Avenue. Turn right onto Germantown Avenue. The site is located on the right hand side.

Public Transportation:

By Bus: SEPTA # 23 on Germantown Avenue to School House Lane. The site is located in the middle of the block.

By Train: Chestnut Hill West (R8) to Cheltenham Avenue station. Out of the station walk east 1/2 block and turn right onto Pulaski Avenue. One block up Pulaski then left on School House Lane. Walk three blocks to Germantown Avenue. Turn right onto Germantown Avenue. The site is located in the middle of the block.

