

Old Stone House

Rock Creek Park
Washington, DC

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



In the midst of Washington, DC, a city of grand memorials to national leaders and significant events, stands an unassuming building that commemorates the daily lives of middle-class colonial Americans. Dating from 1766, the Old Stone House is the oldest structure on its original foundation in the nation's capital.

A Presidential Legend

Did President George Washington work or sleep in the Old Stone House?

The Old Stone House has been a clock and watch shop, a middle-class home, and even a used car dealership. However, despite the stories, there is no evidence that George Washington worked or slept on this property.

In 1791, President Washington stayed at the Fountain Inn, also known as Suter's Tavern. It was owned and operated by a man named John Suter, Sr.

By 1800, his son, John Suter, Jr., operated the Union Tavern two blocks from here on present-day M Street. In addition, John Suter, Jr., rented shop space on the ground floor of this house and used it to manufacture clocks and watches.

The men, their taverns, and this house blended together into one tall tale by the end of the 1800s. Despite consistent debunking, the legend lived on.

The Old Stone House and its lot stand as a testament to every major chapter in American history, including the birth of a nation, changes in family life and society, and growth of the American economy.



▲ This clock was made by John Suter, Jr., who operated a clock and watch shop here.

History is in the Details

Hide and Seek: As you tour the house, see if you can find the items below.

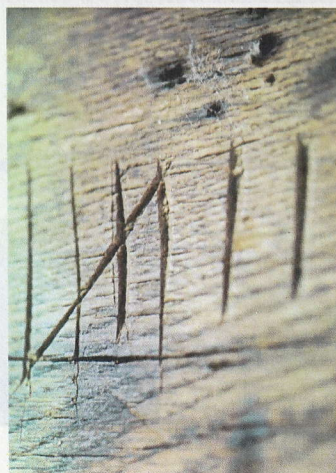
Much can be learned about the people who lived here from architecture, their possessions, and the few remaining detailed records (wills, bills of sale, and property and tax records).

In addition, some of the items you can find within the house today were donated by Georgetown residents to represent objects that could have been found in the household throughout history.

Toys and Games



Carpenter's Marks



Finger Vase



Kick Toaster



1751
Georgetown
Founded

1765
Stamp Act
Uprising

1773
Boston Tea Party

1776 - 1783
American
Revolution

1861 - 1865
U.S. Civil War

1914 - 1918
World War I

1939 - 1945
World War II

1964
Civil Rights Act

1764

1766

1767

1791

1808

1953

1960

TODAY



Christopher and Rachael Layhman traveled from Pennsylvania with their two sons to begin a new life in the growing port of Georgetown. They bought this plot of land (Lot #3) for one pound and ten shillings.

Construction on the Old Stone House was completed. The house was constructed out of solid oak boards and blue field stone, which was quarried approximately two miles up river. Saw marks can still be seen on the ceiling beams.

The Layhmans owned only the essentials: tools, a stove, Bibles, and some furniture. All of these possessions were detailed in Christopher's will when he died in 1765.

Rachael Layhman remarried and sold the house to another widow, Cassandra Chew. This upper-middle class widow owned property, including enslaved African Americans, in Georgetown.

Cassandra Chew financed significant additions to the house, including the rear kitchen and second and third floors. Her daughter, Mary Smith (a widow), lived in the Old Stone House by 1790.

George Washington and Pierre L'Enfant met at Suter's Tavern in Georgetown to plan Washington, DC.

Mary and her mother began to lease the front ground floor room of the house as a business starting in 1800. Mary Smith married Joseph Brumley in 1804.

Cassandra Chew died and willed the Old Stone House to her daughter, Mary Smith Brumley. It remained in this family for the next 70 years.

Georgetown's African-American population, both free and enslaved, comprised about one-third of the city's inhabitants before the American Civil War. Their labor contributed substantially to the commercial development and prosperity of the town.

The Old Stone House was purchased by the National Park Service for \$90,000 in response to a petition from local residents, who regarded the house as historically significant and wanted to preserve it.

The National Park Service opened the house to the public after significant historic preservation work to restore the house to its 1800s interior. Georgetown residents donated most of the colonial furnishings within the house.

Today, Rock Creek Park, a unit of the National Park Service, manages the Old Stone House.



In 1766, the Layhman's lower-middle class home 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 fire. By 1878, when this photograph was taken, new rooms and floors had been added to the house.



It is unclear if any enslaved people worked or lived at the Old Stone House. Yet, several women who owned the Old Stone House owned enslaved African Americans, too. For example, at the time of Mary Smith Brumley's death in 1826, records show she owned 15 enslaved African Americans. Photo not of Old Stone House. Photo: Library of Congress



When the National Park Service purchased the Old Stone House in 1953, the house and lot were being used by the Parkway Motor Company, a used car dealership.




Today, the land surrounding the Old Stone House is home to an intimate English-style garden bringing green space to the heart of Georgetown.

Location:

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Washington, DC
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