



Ford Mansion

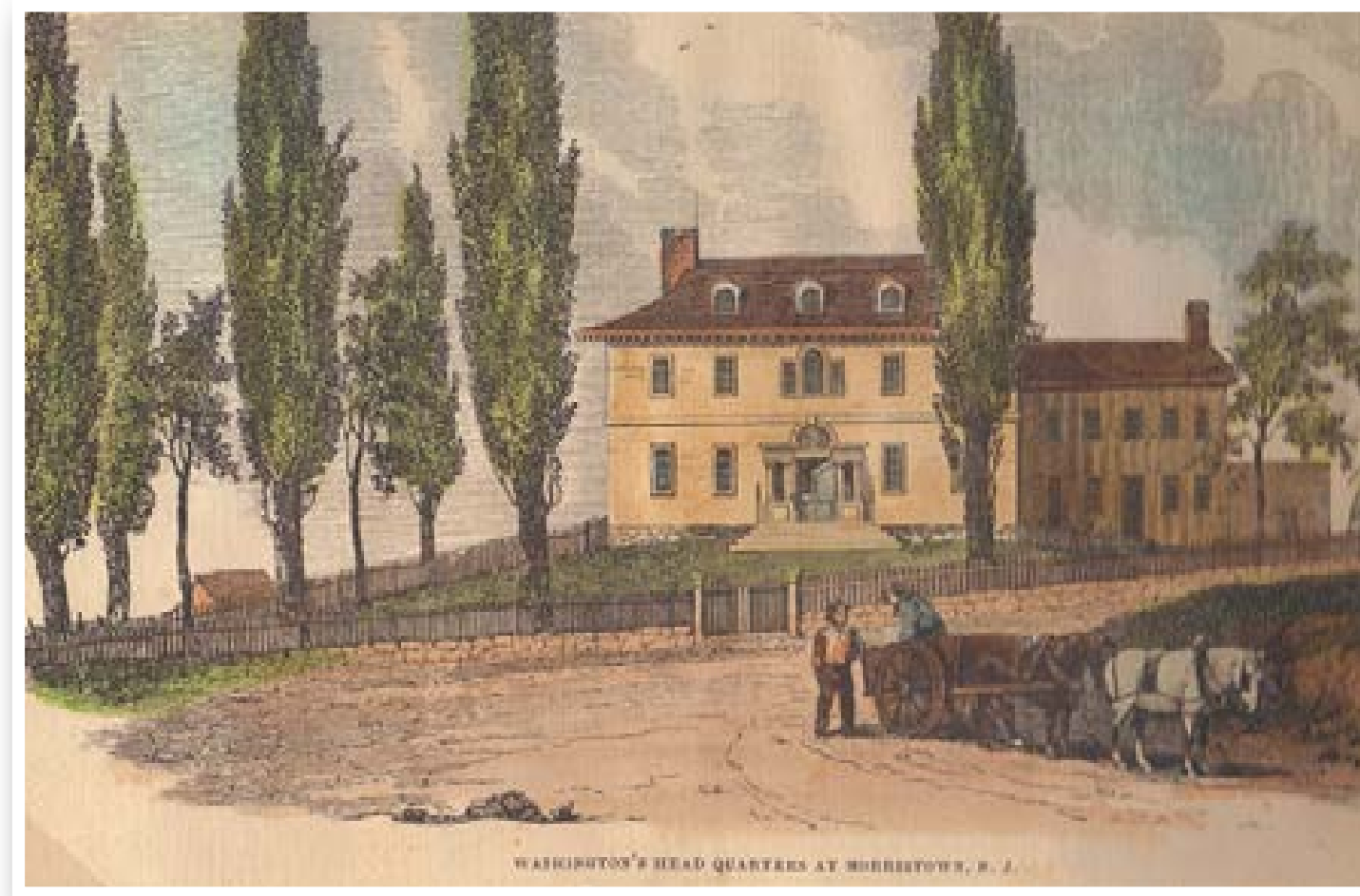
Morristown National Historical Park

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Historic Ford Mansion image: Washington's Headquarters at Morristown, New Jersey. Unknown artist, 1837.

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“Head Quarters is in this Town, at the Widow Fords, at the great white House at the North end of the place.”

General Greene to General George Weedon, December 25, 1779

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Introduction

Jacob Ford Jr., a wealthy iron manufacturer, constructed this fine Georgian-style home in the early 1770s. While serving as a colonel in the Morris County Militia he contracted pneumonia and died in January 1777. Jacob was survived by his widow Theodosia, three sons, and a daughter.

The widow Ford agreed to rent rooms to General Washington and his “military family” during the winter encampment of 1779-1780. Washington brought along five secretaries, including Alexander Hamilton and 18 servants. During his stay Washington was joined by his wife Martha, and visited by various guests, including diplomats from France and Spain and General Lafayette. It was not unusual for over 30 people to sleep in the house on a single night.

The Ford Mansion is restored and furnished to show how it might have appeared during Washington’s stay.

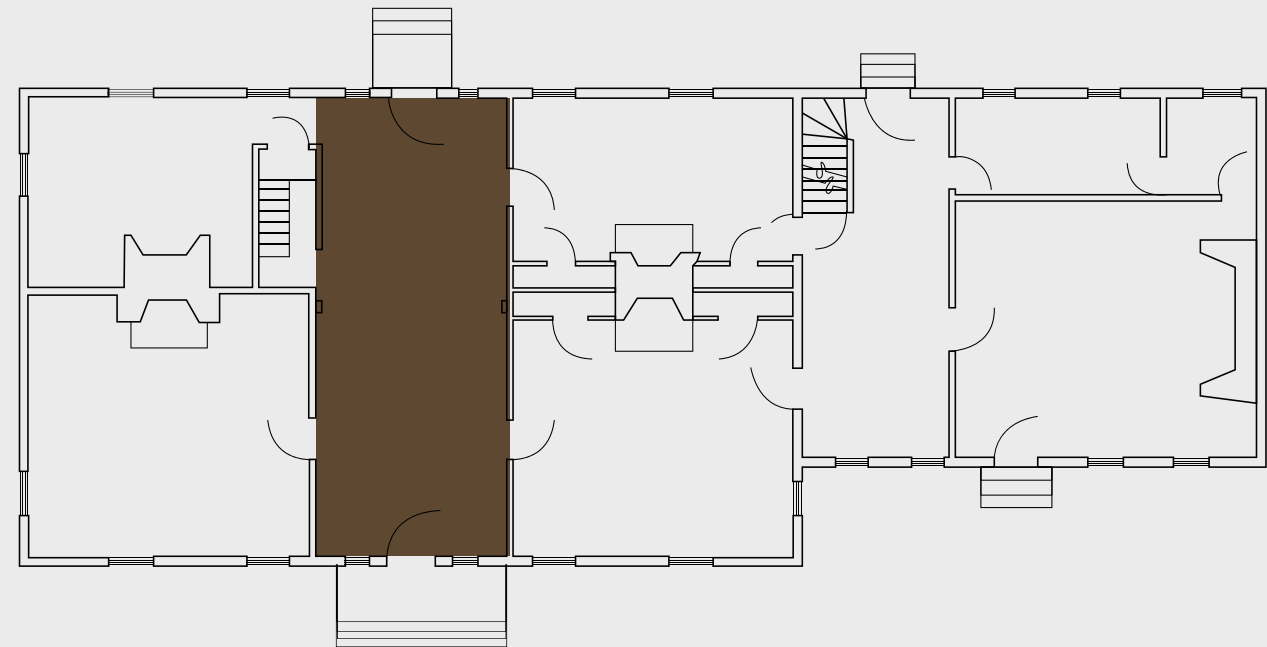




First Floor Main Hallway

The Fords designed this large entrance hallway with its elaborate arch and moldings to impress visitors.

During Washington's stay, this hallway was crowded with people coming and going. Officers arrived with reports; express riders waited to deliver important dispatches; and guards stood watch, or just looked for a place to get warm.





First Floor

Parlor / Conference Room

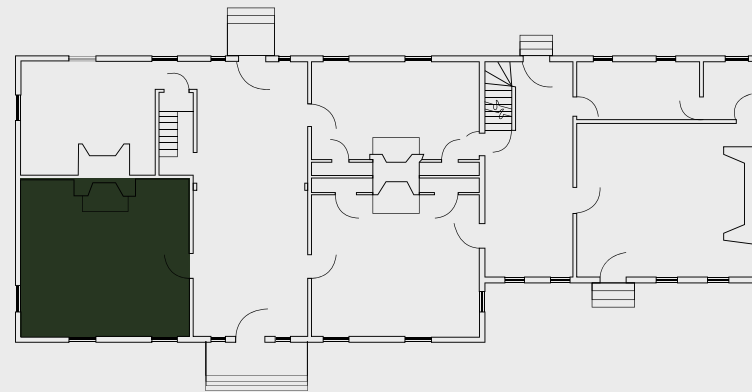
The parlor was the best room in the house displaying the family's best furniture. For most of the day, Washington's secretaries used this room as an office, for reading incoming correspondence and writing letters to communicate the General's orders and wishes across the country.

This room also served as the General's dining room. At 3 pm, quills and papers were put away and servants prepared the room for dinner. George and Martha Washington, the military staff, visiting officers and other guests, sometimes over 20 people, dined here from 3 until 6 pm.

At 9 pm the General and any overnight guests would return for supper, a lighter meal mostly consisting of leftovers from dinner.

Ford Writing Table

This plain little table with its straight legs and sleek lines appears to be built in the style of Hepplewhite, which was popular from 1780 to 1810. However, according to an 1848 interview with Gabriel Ford, this table was a favorite of General Washington. Ford claimed that Washington used this table for writing letters and that ink spots on the table were left by General Washington.



Ford Secretary Desk

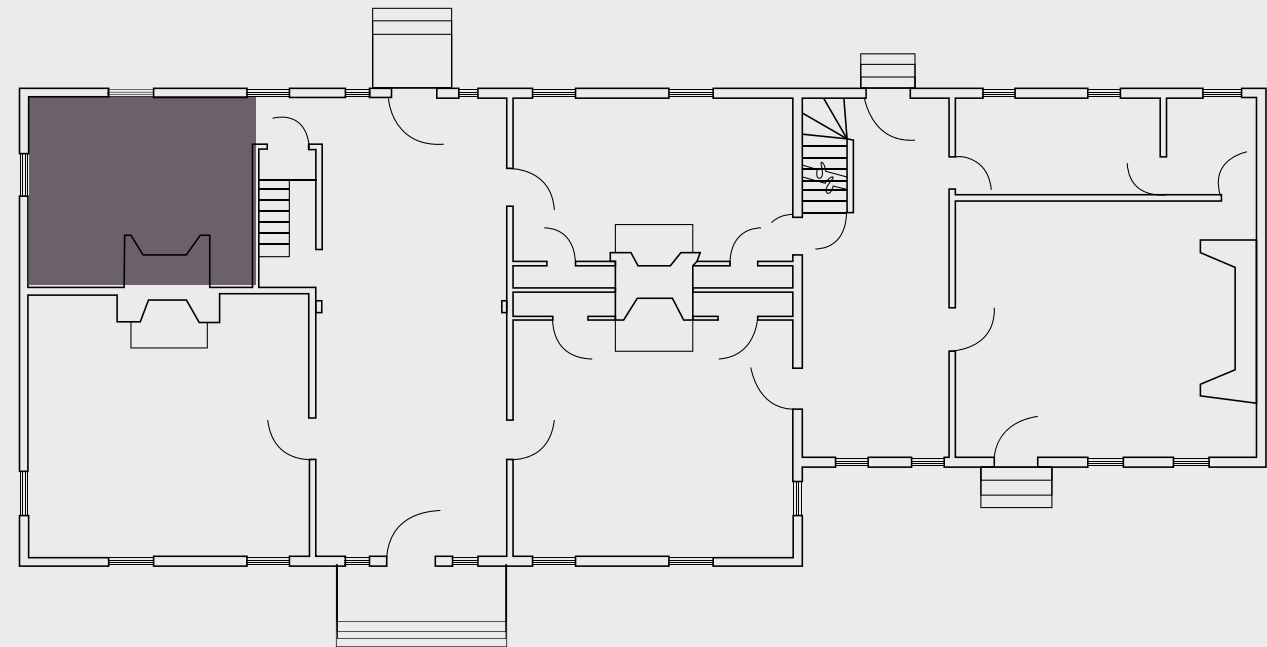
This mahogany Chippendale style desk belonged to the Ford family. It is believed to have been made in New Jersey since it displays features found in both New York and Philadelphia furniture.



First Floor

Study / Washington's Office

The study, equivalent to a den, was Mr. Ford's space in the house. General Washington used this space as his personal office where he struggled to hold his army together during the hard winter. Described as looking "grave" and "unhappy" that winter, Washington dealt with a multitude of problems ranging from bad weather, worthless money and lagging recruitment.



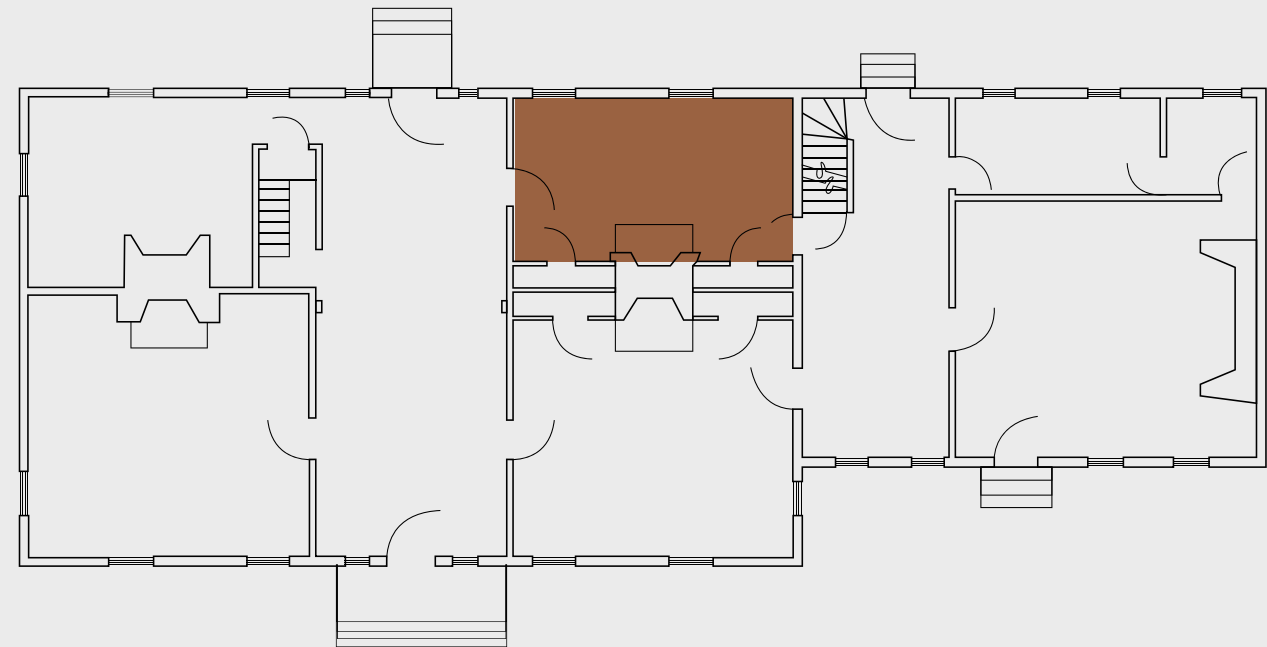


First Floor

Sitting Room / Ford Boys' Room

Similar to a modern family room, the sitting room was the casual gathering spot in an 18th-century home. Mrs. Ford's three sons, Timothy, 17; Gabriel, 15; and eight-year-old Jacob, probably made this their bedroom during Washington's occupation of the house.

Timothy, the eldest, volunteered with the "General's Guard" during the battle of Connecticut Farms (present-day Union, New Jersey). His mother even strapped his father's sword around his waist before he left. Timothy was shot twice in the thigh during a skirmish with Hessian soldiers. Brought home after the battle he recovered and in the fall of 1780 attended the College of New Jersey, today's Princeton University. All three Ford boys eventually graduated from the College of New Jersey.



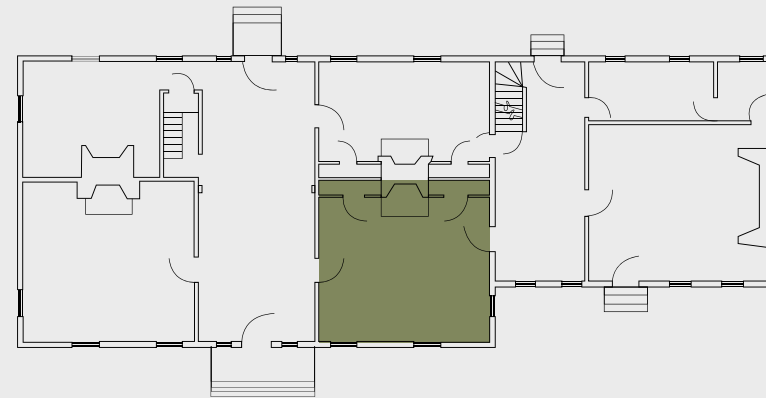


First Floor

Dining Room / Mrs. Ford's Room

The dining room served multiple functions for the Fords during the winter of 1779-1780. Mrs. Ford and her 12-year-old daughter Elizabeth used it as their bedroom. The family also used this room for dining and daily activities.

Mrs. Ford probably chose to keep the dining room and sitting room for her family because it provided them easy access to the kitchen and pantry.



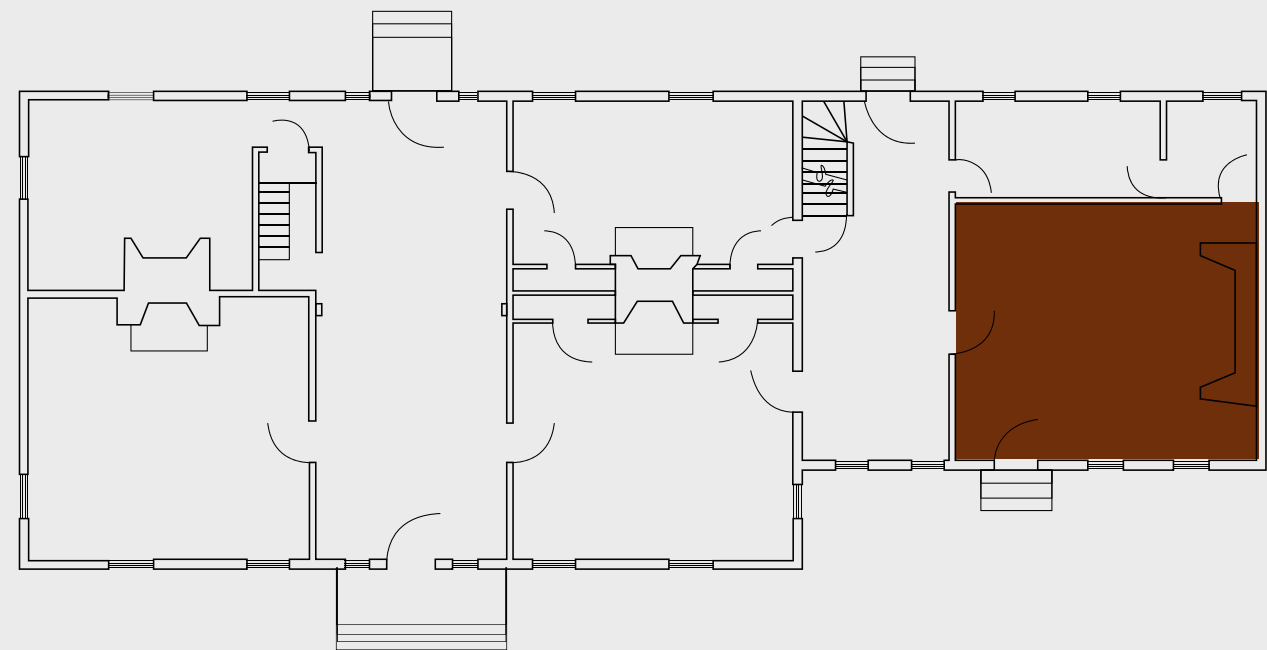
Ford Dining Chair

The mahogany chair with the brass plaque is a Ford family dining chair. There are replicas of this chair made of black walnut distributed throughout the house. The brass plaque was added to the chair in the 19th century by its donor.



First Floor Kitchen

This large kitchen wasn't large enough during Washington's stay. Mrs. Ford's cook had to share the fireplace with Washington's three cooks, each preparing separate meals for separate families. Additionally, the servants ate their meals here and crowded around the fire trying to get warm. Washington wrote that they all "could barely speak because of the colds they had caught."



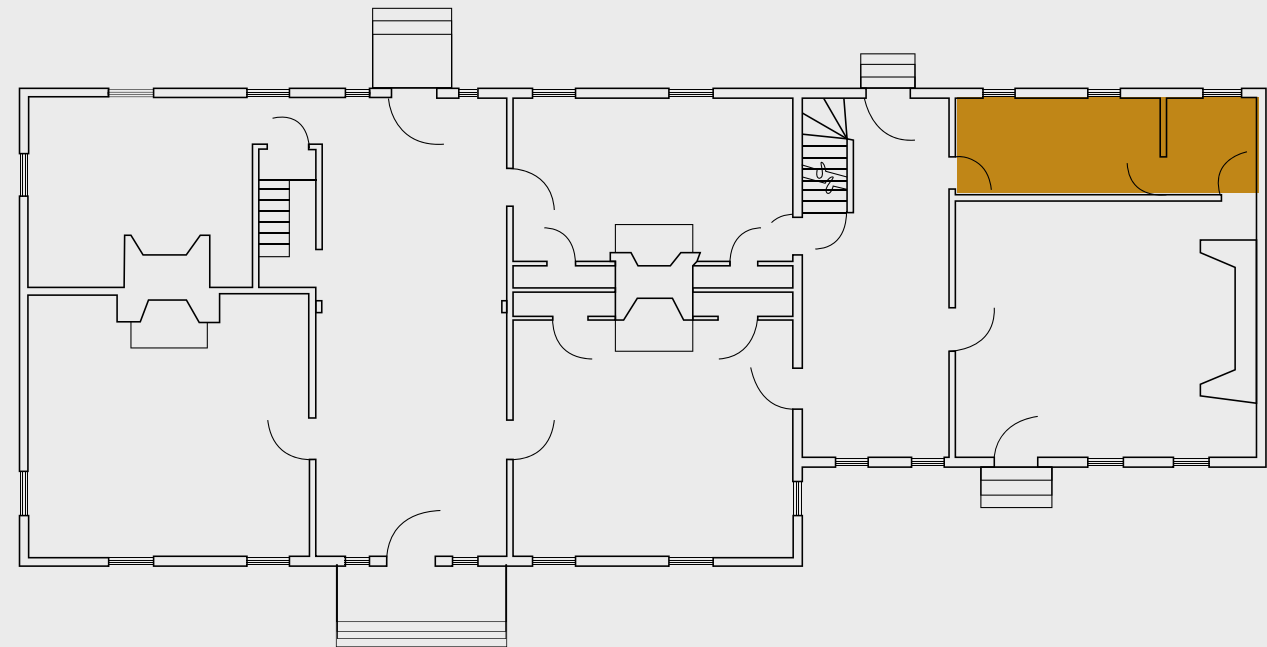


First Floor

Pantry/Buttery

The pantry/buttery, cellar and outbuildings were used to store the food produced on Mrs. Ford's 200-acre farm. What food they produced had to supply the family for one year until the next year's crops could be harvested. In a time before refrigeration, food was preserved by salting, pickling, smoking and drying.

Fortunately the Ford family was not expected to feed Washington and his military family. Washington received rations from the army and bought other food locally.



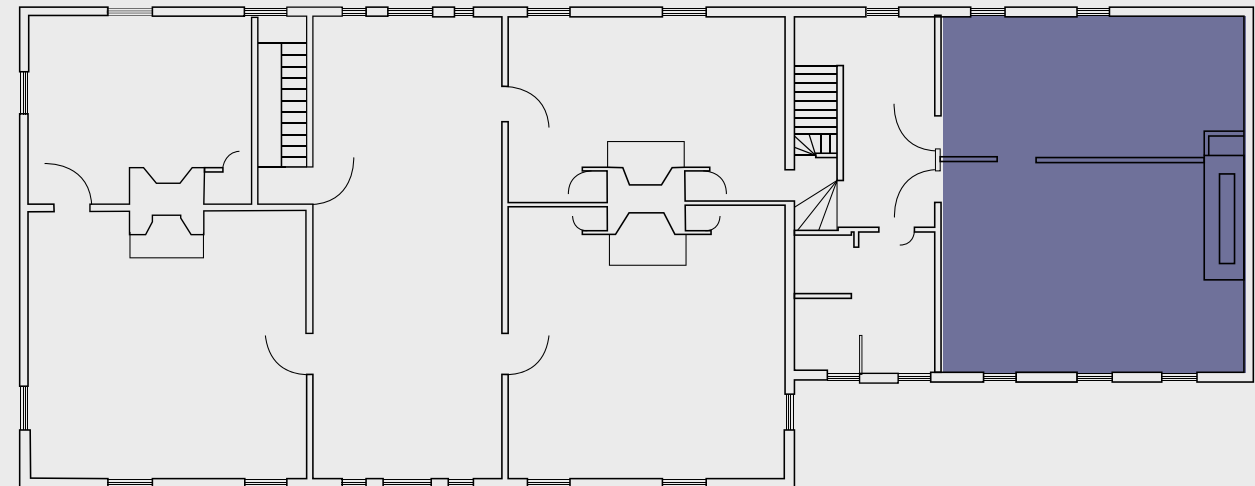


Second Floor Servants' Quarters

An unknown number of the Ford family's servants slept in the two rooms indicated on the floor plan. The photo on the left is of the larger room. The photo to the right is of the smaller room.

Washington and his military family brought an additional 18 servants and enslaved laborers into this house. However, not all of the people would have stayed in these two rooms. Servants probably also slept in hallways, attics and outbuildings on the property.

The military's servants included both men and women, who were black and white, enslaved and free. Among these servants was Mrs. Elizabeth Thompson, a white 76-year-old widow who, as housekeeper, oversaw all of the female servants. Some servants were soldiers paid to do servants work, such as Bildad Edwards, the steward, and Daniel Dyer, the assistant cook. Enslaved laborers included Billy Lee, Washington's personal assistant and Isaac the cook. There were also free African Americans such as the laundress Peggy Lee, Billy's wife, and another cook, Hannah Till, Isaac's wife.



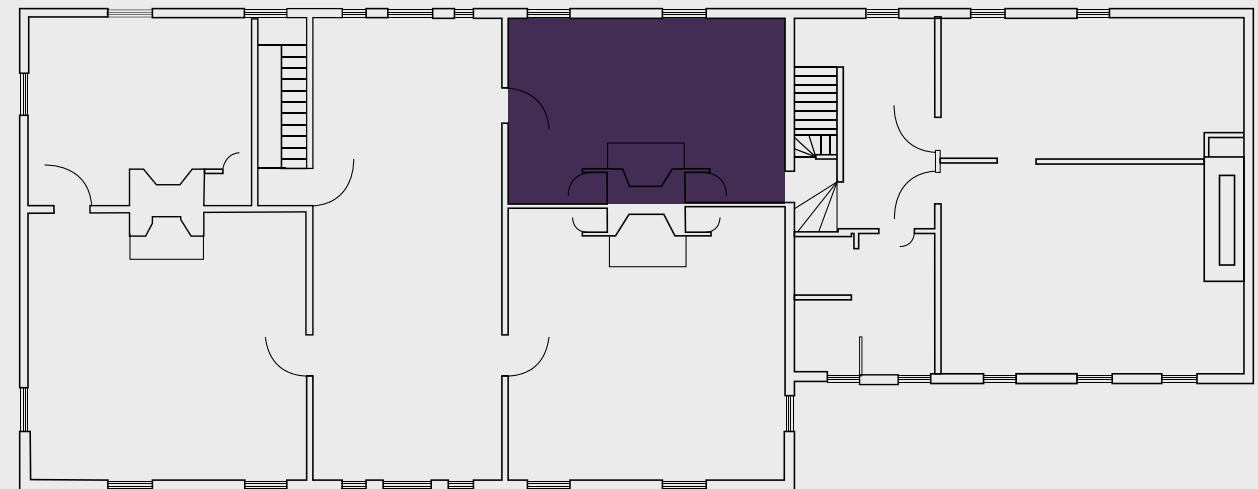


Second Floor

Aides' Room - Small

Washington's five aides and secretaries shared two upstairs bedrooms including this smaller one. However, when the French and Spanish diplomats visited the headquarters in the spring, each Ambassador took over one of the aides' bedrooms forcing the officers to sleep in the offices downstairs.

Don Juan de Miralles, the Spanish representative, took ill during his visit and died in the Ford Mansion on April 28, 1780. His corpse was put on view in the house and was described by Gabriel Ford: "I remember looking upon his dead body with wonder, awe, and admiration, as it lay 'in state' . . . in his richly ornamented open coffin, lined with fine cambric and covered with black velvet. Instead of a shroud, he was in a full-dress suit of scarlet, embroidered with gold lace; a three-cornered gold-laced hat; a cued wig; white silk stockings; large diamond-studded knee and shoe buckles; a prominent diamond ring on his finger, and from a superb gold watch set with diamonds several rich seals were hung."





Second Floor

Aides' Room - Large

Washington employed three aides-de-camps [Richard Kidder Meade, Tench Tilghman and Alexander Hamilton] and two secretaries [Robert Hanson Harrison and James McHenry] to write his letters, file his papers and deliver his messages.

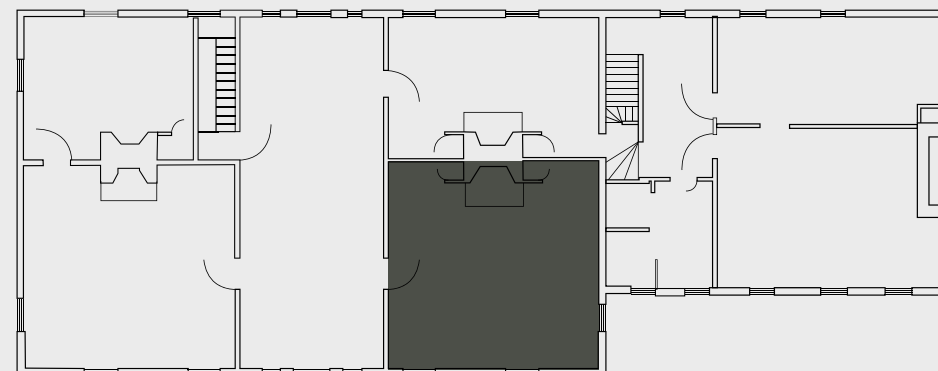
Mrs. Ford would not have had enough beds to accommodate all of her new guests. The aides most likely utilized the folding camp beds, which were used when camping in tents during the campaign season. Officers had to buy their own beds and each bed was custom made for the user.

While the non-standard sizes and the curtains make the beds appear small, 18th-century people were not short. The average height of an American man today is 5 feet 9 inches, while in Washington's army it was 5 feet 8 ¾ inches. Washington was taller than average at 6 feet 2 inches and Hamilton was shorter than average at 5 feet 7 inches.



Officer's Camp Cot

This is an example of an 18th-century folding officer's cot. The other cots on display in the house were copied from this original. When dismantled and folded, the cot compresses to the size of the wooden bundle displayed above.

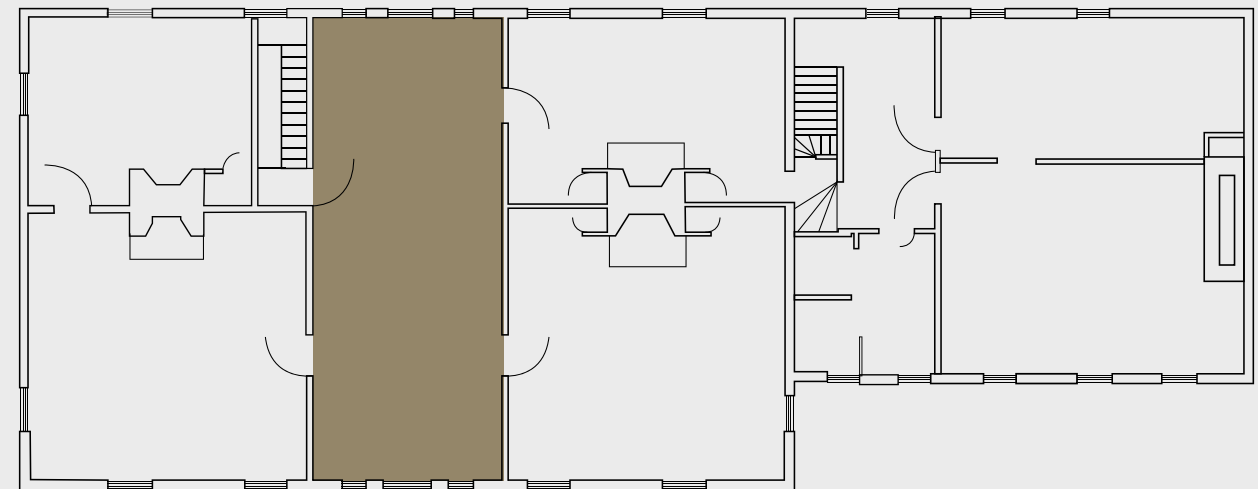




Second Floor Upstairs Hallway

Following Georgian style architecture, the upstairs hallway replicates the size of the main hallway below and displays a Palladian window at the front of the house.

Officers' personal servants most likely slept in this hallway, and one guard's diary account recalls that a sergeant and six men were posted in this hallway.





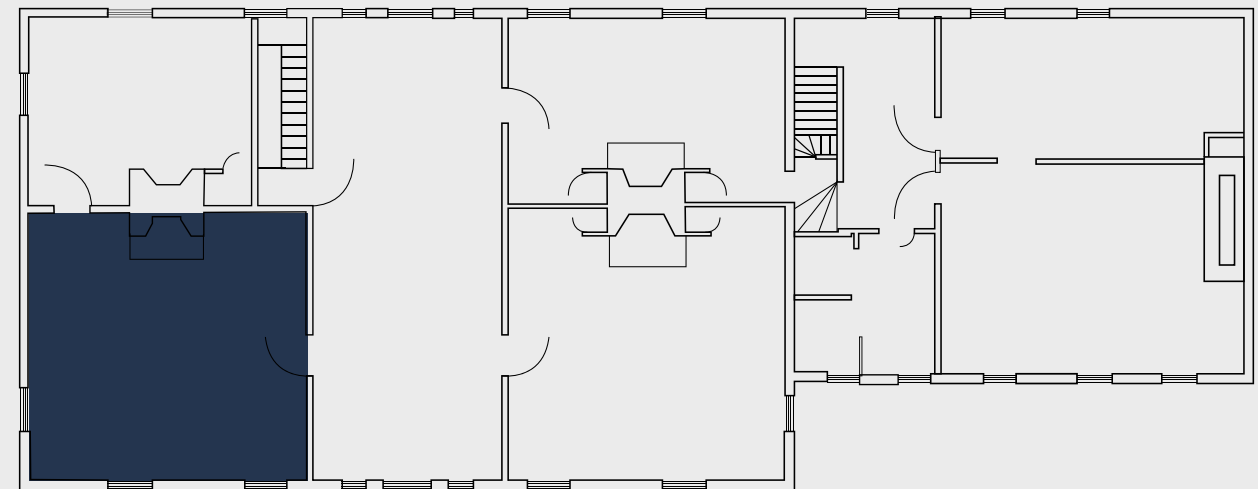
Second Floor

The Washingtons' Bedroom

This served as the bedroom for both George and Martha Washington. Martha spent parts of her day here attending to such tasks as writing, sewing or entertaining guests.

Officers often took furloughs during the winter months, but during eight years of war, George Washington did not go home in the winter. Instead Martha traveled by horse-drawn coach to visit him. Martha Washington traveled from Virginia to a variety of places including Cambridge, Massachusetts; Valley Forge, Pennsylvania; and Morristown, New Jersey.

The mirror and dressing table in this room belonged to the Ford family and were in the house during Washington's stay.



Mirror

Mrs. Ford's son Gabriel told a historian in 1848 that he was surprised that this "looking-glass" survived. He revealed that at one point in time the mirror was in a room occupied by Pennsylvania officers who were: "gentlemen by birth, but rowdies in practice. They injured the room very much by their nightly carousals, but the mirror escaped their rough treatment."



Dressing Table

This mahogany dressing table was made in the fashionable Chinese Chippendale style. It features a folding mirror and numerous compartments to hold jewelry and cosmetics.

On an Old Mirror

This poem is believed to have been written by one of Gabriel Ford's daughters-in-law sometime after the Civil War, but prior to the 1873 auction of the Ford Mansion.

Old Mirror, speak, and tell us whence
Thou camest, and then, who brought thee hence,
Did dear old England give thee birth?
Or merry France, the land of mirth?
In vain another should we seek
At all like thee – thou thing antique.
Of the old Mansion thou seems't part;
Indeed, to me, its very heart;
For in thy face, though dimmed with age,
I read my country's brightest page.
Five generations all have passed,
And yet, Old Mirror, thou dost last:
The young, the old, the good, the bad,
The gay, the gifted, and the sad,
Are gone; their hopes, their sighs, their fears

Are buried deep with smiles and tears.
Then speak, old Mirror; thou hast seen
Full many a noble form, I ween;
Full many a soldier, tall and brave,
Now lying in a nameless grave;
Full many a fairy form and bright,
Have flitted by when hearts were light;
Full many a bride – whose short life seemed
Too happy to be even dreamed;
Full many a lord and titled dame,
Bearing full many an honored name;
And tell us, Mirror, how they dressed,
Those stately dames, when in their best?
If robes and sacques the damsels wore,
And sweeping skirts in days of yore?

But tell us, too, for we must hear
Of him whom all the world revere.
Thou sawest him when the times so dark
Had made upon his brow their mark,
Those fearful times, those dreary days,
When all seemed but a tangled maze,
His noble army, worn with tolls,
Giving their life-blood to the soils,
Disease and famine brooding o'er;
His Country's foe e'en at his door;
But ever saw him noble, brave,
Seeking her freedom or his grave.
His was the heart that never quailed;
His was the arm that never failed!

Old Mirror! Thou hast seen what we
Would barter all most dear to see;
The great, the good, the noblest one
Our own Immortal Washington!
Well may we gaze – for ne'er again
Old Mirror, shall we see such men;
And when we, too, have lived our day,
Like those before us passed away,
Still, valued Mirror, mayest thou last
To tell our children of the past;
Still thy dimmed face, thy tarnished frame,
Why honored house and time proclaim;
And ne'er may sacrilegious hand,
While Freedom claims it as her land;
One stone or pebble rashly throw
To lay thee, honored Mirror, low.

T.F.

Conclusion

On June 7th 1780, British and German troops invaded New Jersey from Staten Island with Morristown as their goal. Slowed by the New Jersey Brigade and the militia, a battle developed around Connecticut Farms (present-day Union, New Jersey). The enemy advance was halted and turned back again in a second battle at Springfield on June 23, 1780. Because of the fighting, Washington and his army left Morristown and Mrs. Ford got her house back.

A month later, Mrs. Ford discovered that in order to be paid for the use of her home she needed a receipt. Washington had left so quickly she had never got one. After writing to Washington, she received the following receipt:

I certify that the Commander in Chief took up his quarters at Mrs. Fords at Morris Town the first day of December 1779, that he left the 23d of June 1780, and that he occupied two Rooms below; all the upper floor, Kitchen, Cellar and Stable. The Stable was built and two Rooms above Stairs finished at the public expence, and a well, which was intirely useless and filled up before, put in thorough repair by walling &c.

R. K. Meade ADC, Head Qrs. Near Passaick, July 27th. 1780

The Ford family owned the house and property until 1873 when it was sold at auction. It was purchased by four gentlemen for \$25,000 who wished to preserve the house. They formed an organization known as The Washington Association of New Jersey that operated the house as a museum from 1874 to 1933 when it was donated to the National Park Service.

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