

Round Up



CRAIG FILDES, FLICKR



The dining room features a silver tea service that was purchased (one piece at a time) by Eisenhower while he was a major in the U.S. Army with winnings from his poker playing. Each piece is inscribed "DDE to MDE."

CRAIG FILDES, FLICKR



In 1950, Dwight D. ("Ike") Eisenhower and his wife, Mamie, purchased the Alan Redding farm in Gettysburg with 189 acres that included 500 chickens, 24 dairy cows and many run-down buildings dating back to prior centuries. The farm would later serve as a retreat to escape the pressures of the presidency as well as a place to host visiting dignitaries.

GEORGE NEAT, SUTERSVILLE

Ike Liked Gettysburg

Eisenhower Farm offers a look into the life of the 34th U.S. president

by John Christopher Fine

"HE WANTED TO JOIN THE NAVY but was too old," Tara Wenzel says with a laugh.

Wenzel, who spent 37 years as a master intelligence instructor with the U.S. Department of Defense, now guides World War II trips around Gettysburg for Tigrett Corporation in collaboration with Gettysburg Bus Tours. She is sharing the background story of Dwight David Eisenhower, the five-star army general and 34th president of the United States, who spent his final years on a farm in Gettysburg.

"Eisenhower's childhood family was very poor," Wenzel continues. "His father lost his business in Texas and then moved the family back to Kansas."

Since the family could not afford to send two sons to college, Eisenhower and his older brother devised a plan to pay for their college education. Ike worked one year to pay his brother's college bill. The younger

Eisenhower was to attend the following year, but he enjoyed the collegiate experience so much that he begged Ike to let him continue.

"Ike agreed, but it meant he would need to find a way to get a college education himself," Wenzel says. "He discovered that by joining the military, he could get a free education."

By the time Eisenhower passed the entrance tests and applied to the U.S. Naval Academy, he was past the admission age. The army, however, did not have an age limitation. Eisenhower was admitted to West Point and graduated in the class of 1915. The rest, as they say, is history.

A Storied Career

WITH THE ONSET OF World War I, Eisenhower sought action in Europe. Instead, the young officer had several tours of duty stateside before being assigned his first military leadership command in 1918 when he was placed



JOHN C. FINE

Eisenhower's farm had pumps for both regular and premium gasoline for farm equipment and personal vehicles. The price on the pump for premium is permanently set at 24¢ cents per gallon.



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The large bank barn contains such implements as a manure spreader and tractor. Eisenhower and his partners kept their prize-winning Angus cattle in the 6,500-square-foot show barn located a short distance away from this barn.



CRAIG FILDES, FLICKR



A copy of Eisenhower's unfinished oil painting of a Scottish castle is displayed on an easel in the covered porch area.

JOHN C. FINE



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in charge of tank training at Camp Colt in Gettysburg.

The 28-year-old captain and his trainees remained less than a year at Camp Colt, bivouacking on the very site where Pickett's Charge took place on July 3, 1863. In November 1918, his division was called up to report to Baltimore to embark for Europe, but after Armistice was declared November 11, Eisenhower never went. He missed the war by seven days.

Eisenhower remained in the military serving under various generals, including MacArthur, Marshall and Conner. During a stint in Panama, he was mentored by Gen. Fox Conner, who lent him history books from his extensive library and discussed them with him. Thus began Ike's lifelong love of history.

From his leadership as Allied commander in World War II through his presidency from 1953 to 1961, Eisenhower saw history and the Battle of Gettysburg as important elements in his worldview. After World War II, Eisenhower and his wife, Mamie, bought a retirement home in the Gettysburg area, where Ike had fond memories of the beautiful surroundings while stationed there.

Presidential Retreat

THE FARM WHERE THE Eisenhowers lived out their remaining years is now designated a National Historic Site, maintained and operated by the National Park Service. It is open to visitors and has become a major area destination.

"The farm was here during the Battle of Gettysburg," site manager Ahna Wilson says. "Mamie looked at it first and fell in love with the property, which has spectacular views of distant mountains. The house had a large square kitchen. While Mamie loved the kitchen, she admitted she was not much of a cook."

The sale was finalized on January 15, 1951, for \$44,000, and the 189-acre property came with the house, a barn and out-buildings, 24 dairy cows and 500 chickens. The couple planned to retire at the farm in 1950, but President Truman tapped

The furniture in the den was custom-made by the Shoshone Furniture Company of Cody, Wyo., in 1954. The western wall has a John Bachelder battlefield map of Gettysburg.



The chef offers fried chicken to the Eisenhowers at the 1956 reelection campaign kick-off picnic at their home in Gettysburg.

Eisenhower to lead NATO in the fall of that year.

“By February, the general and Mamie were on their way to Paris, France,” Wilson says. “Eisenhower asked his friend retired Brig. Gen. Arthur Nevin to live on the site and manage the farm. It was only after Eisenhower’s election and inauguration as president in 1953 that they decided to move into the home.”

The Eisenhowers retained an architect to review the house. What was thought to be a 19th century brick farmhouse was revealed to be a late 18th century log house.

“All the material had deteriorated,” Wilson says. They had to demolish the house down to the foundation. The only part that could be salvaged from the original was a mid-19th century addition. Remodeling was completed in 1955 when they moved in.”

Throughout his presidency, the property served as a weekend retreat for the Eisenhowers and an occasional meeting place for world leaders during the Cold War. In 1967, Eisenhower signed the property over to the National Park Service, retaining a life tenancy. In the agreement,

Mamie was to be given a six-month tenancy after the general’s passing. After his death in 1969, however, Mamie decided that she wanted to continue living in the farmhouse and asked their son John to request a life tenancy for the house. Permission was granted by the Secretary of the Interior, and Mamie lived there until her death in 1979. In June 1980, the house and farm were opened to the public.

Historic Site

SINCE TAKING OVER THE property, the Park Service has added three more farms to the site, including one owned by Eisenhower’s partner in the Angus cattle business that operated on the land. The site now comprises a total of 690 acres. Since 1985, Sam and Wilbur Martin have owned and managed the herd of black Angus cattle on the property through a special use permit.

“Breed standards have changed since Eisenhower bred his prize Angus cattle,” Wilson says. “They are a bit larger now.”

Visitors who tour the Eisenhower farm and buildings can see how the presidential family lived simply. The house remains as it was with much of the original furniture

and furnishings that were either left behind or acquired later by the Park Service. Ike’s putting green was rehabbed after the property was opened to the public. While not an exact replica, it is in the same location as during the Eisenhower years. An avid and competitive golfer, Eisenhower would practice here as well as on a putting green he had installed at the White House.

Tours of the grounds are self-guided with cell phone-activated audio available. House tours begin in the formal living room, where curio cabinets are full of gifts the Eisenhowers received during Ike’s presidency. The marble fireplace features a mantle from the Executive Mansion when President Lincoln was in office. The marble hearth was removed from the White House by President Grant in 1873 and later purchased by the White House staff from an antiques dealer and given to the Eisenhowers as an anniversary gift.

Oil-on-canvas portraits of Ike and Mamie grace the walls of the living room. Thomas Stevens painted them in 1948 when Eisenhower was president of Columbia University in New York City.

“Mamie was sitting for her portrait, and

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when she and the artist took a break, Ike came in, took up a brush and started painting on a blank canvas," Wilson says. "When Stevens returned, he looked at Eisenhower's work and encouraged him to take up painting as a hobby. Stevens sent the general his first set of paints and brushes."

From the living room, visitors pass into the Eisenhowers' favorite room, a finished porch that looks out at the expansive lawn, putting green and Mamie's rose garden. An easel holds a reproduction of Eisenhower's unfinished oil of Culzean Castle in Scotland. He worked on the painting during the last year of his life.

"The Eisenhowers would take their meals here," Wilson says. "They would sit and eat on trays."

In this relaxed setting, Ike held private conversations with visiting dignitaries, such as Soviet leader Nikita Krushchev and France's President Charles de Gaulle.

A Glimpse Inside

MANY INTIMATE DETAILS OF the Eisenhowers' lives are revealed throughout the house. The small entrance hall contains some of Mamie's curios as well as her all-important guestbook, which is opened to a page dated June 6, 1959, when the White House staff had been invited to a party at the farm.

The dining room contains a service Mamie bought in 1927 and took with them throughout their many moves. A tea set on display was bought piece by piece with young officer Eisenhower's poker winnings and his cigarette and lunch allowance.

On the second floor, Mamie's mother's room is recreated and preserved. It became a guest room after Mrs. Elivera Doud died in 1960. A nearby sitting room contains Ike's yearbooks from West Point. The couple's dressing rooms are also on the second floor of the house. Ike used his dressing room to take naps and recuperate after his 1955 heart attack.

Mamie famously said that she considered it a woman's right after age 50 to stay in bed until noon. She worked from the master bedroom, meeting staff and friends while propped up on pillows. The story is told that Mamie kept Ike's side of the bed piled with books and writing materials after he died to occupy the empty space. The second floor also contains the

maid's room and guestrooms.

The tour leads down another staircase to the ground level, where the laundry room, kitchen, den and a room for Sgt. John Moaney and his wife, Dolores (loyal attendants of the Eisenhowers), are located. On the way outside, visitors pass Ike's small office and can view the desk that he used while recuperating from his heart attack. The desk is said to be a reproduction of George Washington's desk made from boards removed from the White House during renovations. At this desk,



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Eisenhower took a phone call on May 7, 1960, informing him that a U-2 spy plane was shot down and its pilot Francis Gary Powers taken prisoner by the Soviets.

Foreign Dignitaries

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE, BARNs and farm machinery add to the allure of what was once a working farm.

"When Krushchev came to Camp David for meetings that were not going smoothly, Eisenhower decided to take a break," Wenzel says. "He invited the Soviet leader to the farm and had a barbecue."

Other visitors to the farm included Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. On one occasion, Mamie reported seeing Churchill going from the bathroom to his bedroom "in his all together." Churchill enjoyed Ike's guided visits to the Gettysburg Battlefield as well as tours of the cattle and show barns. Wenzel shares a story, reported by the Secret Service, that on one tour, Churchill went into the cattle stalls and smacked bulls on their rumps.

Security officials were concerned that he would be trampled or gored; fortunately, nothing untoward happened.

When Eisenhower invited British Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery to visit without alerting Mamie, she relegated Montgomery to stay overnight in the Secret Service quarters. It was revenge for his criticism of Ike's inexperience during World War II.

When Mamie passed away in 1979, their son John, who had graduated from West Point on D-Day, allowed family members

The sun porch at the rear of the house remained a favorite gathering spot for the Eisenhowers, and was a place where they entertained world leaders.

to come to the house and select three things they most wanted. The rest was donated or left on long-term loan to the National Park Service.

The Eisenhower home and farm are regularly enhanced and preserved by the National Park Service. A visit to this national historic site offers insight into history as well as an intimate view of the life of one of America's most liked presidents. ▀

—John Christopher Fine writes from Gettysburg.

WHEN YOU GO

The **Eisenhower National Historic Site** is located in Cumberland Township, Adams County, just outside of Gettysburg. With no parking available on-site, visitors must take a shuttle bus from the Gettysburg Military Park on Taneytown Road. Before going, check to see if there are any COVID restrictions in place. nps.gov/eise/; 717-338-9114. For tour reservations, call 1-877-874-2478.