

LAUREL HILL MANSION



Welcome

- Laurel Hill owned by City of Philadelphia. Part of the Fairmount Park system.
- House managed and maintained by Women of Greater Philadelphia (WGP).
- WGP Nonprofit service organization of volunteers who support cultural and educational initiatives. Long-time stewards of LHM.
- The organization, originally known as Women for the Bicentennial, helped restore Laurel Hill in 1976. After the Bicentennial, it changed name to Women for Greater Philadelphia.

Residents

- Two families own and manage the mansion in its earliest years
Rawle/Shoemaker 1760-1829
Physick/Randolph 1829-1869
- Estate sold by Randolph Trust to City of Philadelphia in 1869 and incorporated into Fairmount Park
- Park installs Park employees as tenants. Interior walls are installed in center section of mansion to create separate private living quarters from public space.
- Colonial Dames Chapter II leases mansion as its headquarters from 1900-1915. CDCII restores and upgrades the Randolph wing considerably: central heating, plumbing, possibly electric?, new roof and new music room floor.
- Marine Corps League makes LHM its headquarters in 1961.



Villa District Laurel Hill's Beginnings

- AKA Edgely Point, a community of country farms on "liberty lands" owned and sold by William Penn and his agents.
- These farms soon subdivided into smaller country estates for wealthy Philadelphians who create summer retreats.
- This enclave of colonial-era mansions known as the Villa district. Oldest and most intact villa district in the world.
- Named Laurel Hill because of native shrubbery all around the estate.

Rawle Shoemaker Families

- In 1760, Francis Rawle buys 29 acre tract from his brother-in-law Joshua Howell, married to Rebecca's oldest sister, Catherine, and makes plans to build a summer villa – Laurel Hill. Rawle dies a year later (1761) in hunting accident at his Frankford estate (Sweeten) on the Delaware River. Leaves wife Rebecca, a wealthy widow with three young children (Anna, Margaret, William) under the age of five.
- Rebecca finishes building LH before her second marriage in 1767 to Samuel Shoemaker, a widower (first wife Hannah) with nine children. They have one son together, Edward. Only Sam's oldest son from first marriage, Benjamin, survives to adulthood. He marries Rebecca's younger sister Elizabeth, becoming stepson and brother in law to Rebecca.
- Both husbands from same social class. Wealthy Quaker merchants, well-educated, cultured, respected. Like his father before him, Sam Shoemaker serves two terms as Colonial Mayor of Philadelphia; holds many political and cultural positions before and during the Revolution.
- LHM is a great meet-up place for political, social and family gatherings but it's not a full-time residence in years before Revolution.

Revolutionary Changes

- Rebecca's diaries and daughter's letters to friends attest to activities held here before and after the Revolution.
- Sam Shoemaker is a British Loyalist and civil affairs administrator while British occupy Philadelphia. As Brits retreat from Philadelphia, he's found guilty of treason by new Patriot government. Many Loyalist properties and assets confiscated, including Laurel Hill. Sam flees Phila for NYC with stepson William. William soon heads to London for law studies. Rebecca joins Sam in NY some months later. At war's end in 1783 Sam and Edward leave NYC for London to live in exile with many other Philadelphians for next couple of years. During the war years, Rebecca and daughters, somewhat homeless, rely on family and friends for shelter and safety. Rebecca struggles to reclaim her property after the war years.
- Laurel Hill sold by Patriot government in 1779 to Major James Parr, who then leases the property to Joseph Reed, Washington's Aide de Camp. Joseph's wife Esther and children occupy LHM in the summer of 1780. She's best known for leading the Ladies Association of Phila to provide aid for Washington's troops. She dies of dysentery at age 34 and Franklin's daughter Sarah Bache takes up the cause. The next tenant is French Minister Chevalier de la Luzerne. An accomplished musician and politician, the Chevalier loves the place and entertains often. His dog attains fame for finding truffles on the property.
- Rebecca recovers mansion after the war (1783) and buys out Chevalier's lease on the house. Resorts to growing strawberries and cabbages in a business arrangement with her farm tenant at Laurel Hill. They sell produce at city food market to raise cash to pay taxes and repairs on the house.
- Son Edward moves into mansion full-time (1808?) with family of 7 children after losing shipping business. In 1816 his wife dies in childbirth and a year later, he dies of typhus, and still heavily in debt. Rebecca mortgages LHM to pay off Edward's debts. William holds the mortgage on the property at this time.

Randolph Mansion

- Sam dies in 1800. Rebecca dies in 1819; William inherits LHM. He uses it from time to time, but then leases it to Dr. Phillip Syng Physick, who eventually buys it in 1828. Dr. Physick's sons use the house for Quoit Society social activities.
- In 1830 Physick dies and passes house in Trust to his daughter Sally Randolph and her husband Dr. Jacob Randolph. Laurel Hill becomes known as the Randolph Mansion. Dr. Randolph dies in 1848.
- Sally's youngest son Philip, a noted chess master and philanthropist, lives at the mansion for some years, but dies in 1869. The Physick Trust sells mansion to Fairmount Park Commission in 1869. It's one of the first structures to be absorbed into the new Park system.
- Park Commission auctions off dozens of structures in the Park, including the mansion's outbuildings, in 1870. The mansion's first floor is divided into separate rooms to house new caretakers, the Park's first gardener and wife. The octagonal wing becomes public space available for rent.
- From 1900-1915 The Colonial Dames of America Chapter II leases this wing. They restore and update the mansion for use as a headquarters and the mansion becomes the first house museum in the City.

Architecture

- Georgian style; center section constructed first in 1760s.
- Red Flemish bond brickwork with black glazed headers. When was mansion painted yellow? Unknown. It was possibly resurfaced in 19th century with a yellow lime wash to protect aging brickwork and mortar. In 1976, it received a heavy coat of yellow paint.
- Other characteristics of Georgian style:
Front and rear facades feature entrance pavilions with pediments above entrances at roof line and above front door. Multi-paned windows (12 over 12 lower floors and 8 over 8 upper floors). Placement of house on site very important, to catch the best views, as well as advantages for light and ventilation.
- One story addition built around 1805. Its brick work mimics earlier section.
- A kitchen was never part of the original construction on any section of the house. Many outbuildings once existed, including a stable and chaise house and a separate summer kitchen building.



- Octagon-shaped section built sometime after 1836, probably by Dr. Physick's daughter Sally Randolph, who also inherits her father's mansion in Society Hill, which also undergoes a massive renovation around the same time.
- Federal style. Window panes are larger, walls are common bond, no windows or chimney stack evident on outer wall.
- Federal style also called Adamesque, named after Adams brothers, English architects influenced by ancient Roman architecture. Style commonly used for public buildings. Glass and ornate plaster work often used as a decorative elements.

Interior

- Original 1767 home was simply one large room on first floor, a stair hall, with two rooms and center hall on second floor.
- One story wing added after Sam's death around 1805. A porch extended the full width of the wing. An interior staircase led to basement below. In later years, the porch was removed and staircase moved to exterior of building. This wing the most heavily altered over the years as needs changed with different occupants.
- It's possible there was an 18th century addition where the 19th century octagon addition exists today. When Sam returns to Phila in 1786 after his long exile in London, Rebecca writes her daughter that Sam is building a large addition at LHM. Some 50 years later, it's possible the Randolphs renovate the mansion extensively and rebuild the eastern addition.
- Alterations by Fairmount Park sometime after 1870 create an enclosed center room to original structure, with interior walls added to create separate stair hall plus passageway to octagon addition.

Middle Parlor Room



- Scene of French Court in 1778, featuring Marie Antoinette, with Franklin being crowned with laurel leaves by Comtesse de Polignac. Print created by Anton Hohenstein. Hand-colored lithograph printed in Philadelphia in 1856.



High Chest

- In 1993, Rawle family presents family heirloom to Laurel Hill, an 18th century Philadelphia Chippendale mahogany high chest. This original piece was given by the Burge family upon the marriage of their daughter, Sarah Coates Burge, to Rebecca's son, William Rawle, in 1783.



- Hepplewhite card table.
- Portrait of Sam Shoemaker and youngest son Edward when they were living in exile in London by Thomas Spence Duche, son of family friend Jacob Duche. Other personal artifacts belonging to Edward and Sam were given to LHM by Edward's descendants.
- Other items in the room...Victorian dining table, prints of Gray's Ferry and Belmont Plateau.



- Federal Secretary, 1785, on loan from Stokes family. Top half is a centennial colonial-revival piece added some 100 years after the lower half was made.
- Erhard Harp "commissioned" by George IV. Restored, but not operable.
- Portrait of William Rawle, copy of Henry Inman original, now at Rawle law office. This copy presented to LHM by R&H. William's wife Sarah Coates Burge is a Gilbert Stewart copy. Original was commissioned by William in 1798 along with a portrait of George Washington. The Burge painting now hangs in a CT museum. The Washington portrait is in a private TX collection.
- Jib door; a Thomas Jefferson design, opens and admits guests to porch and great view of river.



William Rawle

- Leaves NYC for London in 1781 to study law at Temple. William returns two years later to Phila after receiving special passport from old family friend, Ben Franklin, serving as American ambassador in Paris.
- In 1783 William starts law firm...still in existence, oldest in US... and marries Sarah Coates Burge; 12 children born.
- Appointed US District Attorney by Washington in 1791 but doesn't stay in this position for long.
- Trustee of U of PA for 40 years, helped found PAFA in 1805 and HSP in 1825. President of MD Abolition Society 1818.
- Wrote first legal treatise on constitutional law. Argued against slavery before state supreme court in 1805.
- His law firm lives on ... Philadelphia-based Rawle & Henderson oldest law firm in the country.



Pianoforte

- 1808 Broadwood (London) pianoforte. Music always part of life at Laurel Hill, and continues today through the annual Concerts by Candlelight series hosted by WGP. Purchased and restored by WGP in 1983.



Anne-César Chevalier De La Luzerne

- Ambassador takes five year lease from Major Parr, who buys Rebecca's house after confiscation by Patriots. Rebecca must buy out three years of his lease when the mansion is restored to her after the war.
- Large, imposing figure. Norman heritage. Excellent diplomat. French soldier who rose through ranks, becoming major general in 1762.
- Original member of the Order of the Society of the Cincinnati.
- Second French minister to US, from 1779-1784. Sympathetic to American patriot cause. After Philadelphia, becomes French ambassador to Court of St. James where he dies in 1791.
- Great influence on American public affairs. Some of the most important financial negotiations of the Revolution were effected by four persons: Luzerne, Washington, Governour Morris and Marquis de Chastellux.

Chippendale Tall Case Clock



William Bevens, clockmaker from Norristown.
Faux-painted Chippendale case. Eight-day clock.

1767 Fireplace Storage Cupboard

- Walled off in 1870 when interior walls were constructed to create apartment for new Park tenant. Revealed during restoration in 1976. Framing and paint original. Matching cupboard on other side of fireplace removed around 1900 when central heating installed by Colonial Dames. Heating flue in cavity provided access to first and second floors.

