



Foundation Document Overview

William Howard Taft National Historic Site

Ohio



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of William Howard Taft National Historic Site is to preserve, protect, and interpret the birthplace, home, and legacy of future President and Chief Justice William Howard Taft.



Significance

Significance statements express why William Howard Taft National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The Taft family home is significant as a foundation for instilling William Howard Taft's principles of integrity and high academic standards and inspiring his life-long commitment to civic duty—locally, nationally, and eventually globally.
- William Howard Taft held an important series of positions, including judge on the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, governor general of the Philippines, and secretary of war. These steps along his distinguished career path prepared him for election to the presidency in 1908, and his appointment in 1921 as chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Taft is the only person to head both the executive and judicial branches of U.S. government.
- William Howard Taft's public service career spanned a period of industrialization, reform, and rapid change in American society as the nation assumed a broader leadership role in world affairs. Taft's pragmatic approach and dedication to constitutional law addressed many pressing governmental issues, including defining the power and role of the presidency and overhaul of the judicial process.



Fundamental Resources and Values



Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- Taft house: The Taft house (period of significance 1851–77) is the historic property most strongly associated with the development of William Howard Taft's character and personality. The house and surviving elements of the grounds contribute to the character of the Mount Auburn Historic District and provide enduring historical context to the evolving urban neighborhood.
- Original personal collections of William Howard Taft and family: Important objects, mementoes, and archives of William Howard Taft and his family tell the story of how William Howard Taft lived. These original collection items provide a window into Taft's intellectual acumen and philosophy. They narrate and illuminate his many accomplishments.



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- As with most of us, William Howard Taft is a case study in the influence of upbringing and home environment—many of the personal values that William Howard Taft exhibited in his adult life can be traced to his years on Auburn Avenue.
- Taft's tenure as president proved that it can be difficult to predict greatness. Although he appeared to be an ideal successor to President Theodore Roosevelt, groomed for national leadership by a variety of well-performed government positions, Taft was more likely to reflect rather than alter the course of history and to serve from a sense of duty rather than passion.
- After a lifetime of serving in positions others thought he should hold, Taft's appointment as chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court rewarded him with the highest position in the profession he loved best—the law—and provided him with opportunities to use the legal system to wrestle with pressing issues of his day.
- As a public figure, Taft struggled with and influenced a variety of issues that are still part of the public dialogue—immigration, global trade, international relations, race, labor relations, and corporate power to name a few.



Description

The William Howard Taft National Historic Site, located in the Mount Auburn Historic District of Cincinnati, Ohio, is the birthplace and boyhood home of the nation's 27th president and 10th chief justice, William Howard Taft. Built circa 1840, the Taft house is set in a neighborhood of prominent homes on a hillside north of downtown Cincinnati. Newer neighborhoods such as Mount Auburn offered a mix of urban and rural amenities to many of the more prosperous Cincinnati residents and, more importantly, fresher air and cooler conditions than those of the lower city along the Ohio River.

In 1851, with the success of his law practice and business pursuits, William Howard Taft's father, Alphonso Taft, moved his family from the lower part of town to their new residence situated on about two acres in Mount Auburn. The two-story brick house was about 10 years old when the Tafts acquired the property. It was a modest example of the Greek Revival style popular during the period—square and symmetrical with decorative trim and a small front porch. The front of the house was landscaped with a lawn, flower beds, shrubs, and trees. The area behind the house remained primarily rural in character, supporting the family's ties to the farm life then common in the area and throughout the Midwest.

William Howard Taft lived in the house from his birth in 1857 until 1874, when he entered Yale University. Other than the occasional visit, William Howard Taft's association with his boyhood home ended following his graduation from Yale in 1878.

In 1889, Alphonso and his second wife, Louise Torrey, moved to California and leased their home in Cincinnati to tenants. The house was eventually sold in 1899. Subsequent owners made a number of modifications to the house and site. Efforts to save the house from demolition prompted the establishment of the William Howard Taft Memorial Association in 1937.

The property was designated a national historic landmark in 1964. The memorial association donated the property to the federal government in 1969 and it was designated a national historic site under the management of the National Park Service. The agency undertook extensive interior and exterior restoration of the house during the 1980s in efforts to preserve it as a historic house museum reflecting the primary period of Taft family occupation from about 1851 to 1877. The first floor has been restored to approximate the home's appearance during the Taft family's residency, with period furnishings and other decorative elements.

William Howard Taft's homelife and the exemplary values and ideals imparted by his parents during his upbringing in Mount Auburn are recognized as substantial influences on his long and varied career of public service. In support of NPS efforts to preserve and interpret Taft's legacy, the modern NPS Taft Education Center (situated immediately north of the Taft house) offers visitors interactive exhibits and provides storage for collection items, offices for NPS staff, and a meeting space valued by members of the local community. NPS staff members conduct guided interpretive tours of the house for visitors, school groups, and others.

