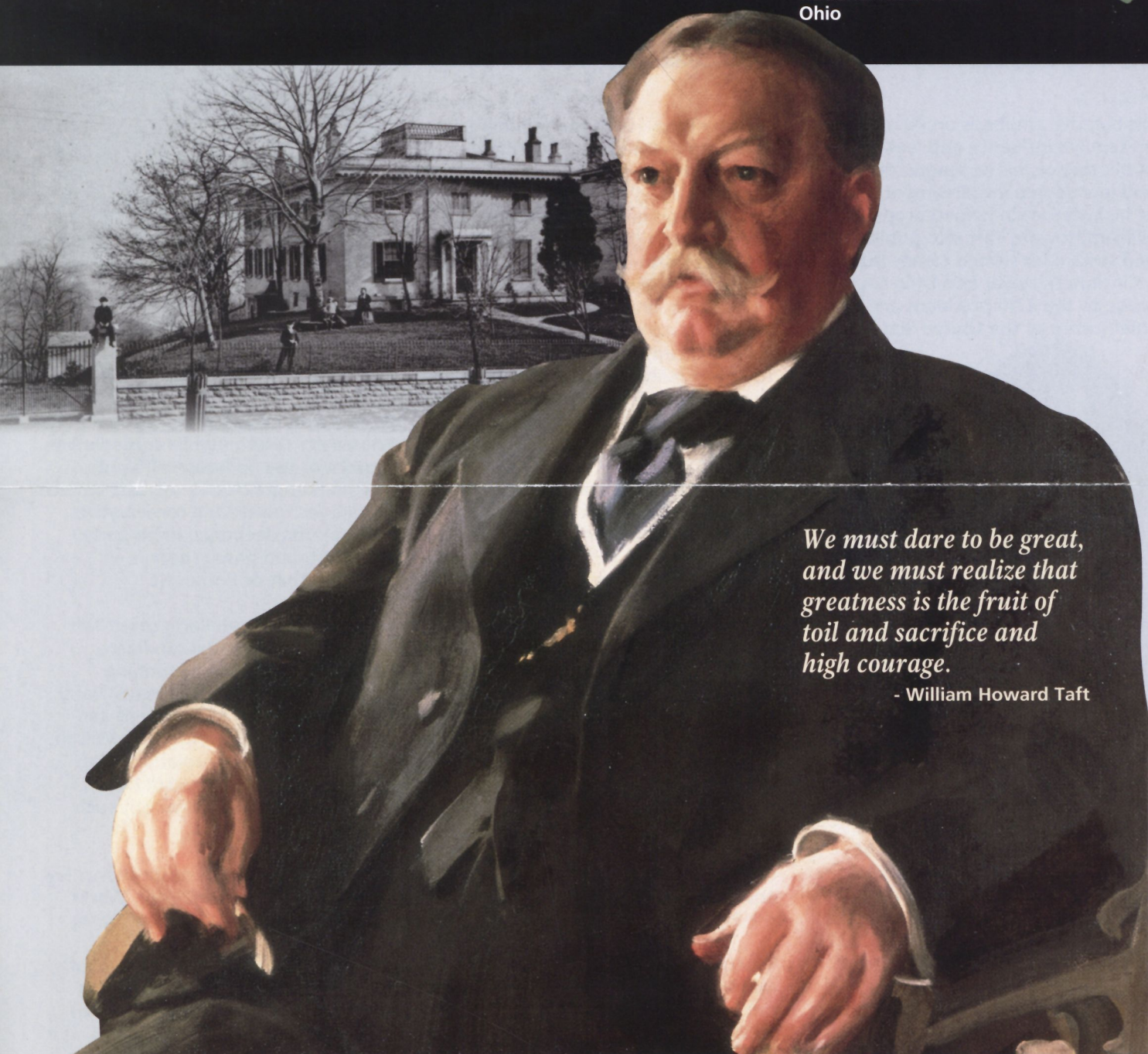


William Howard Taft

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Historic Site
Ohio



*We must dare to be great,
and we must realize that
greatness is the fruit of
toil and sacrifice and
high courage.*

- William Howard Taft

Will Taft behind the fence at his childhood home (left).

William Howard Taft portrait by Anders Leonard Zorn, 1911
WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Since moving from Vermont in 1838, up-and-coming lawyer Alphonso Taft prospered in the busy river port town of Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1851 he moved his wife Fanny Phelps, their children, and his parents to a ten-year-old house in fashionable Mount Auburn. The two-story brick home in the popular Greek Revival design—square and symmetrical with decorative trim and a small porch—stood atop two acres that sloped down toward the Ohio River. The hilltop retreat offered stunning views for residents who could afford to escape the heat, coal dust, and crowds of downtown, a mile away.

To prepare for a growing household, Alphonso added to the home and modernized the plumbing. Then, 1848–52 brought the deaths of his wife Fanny and three of five children.

On December 26, 1853, Alphonso married Massachusetts schoolteacher Louise Torrey, who described Mount Auburn as “so shut out from the sight of the city that it seems like a village by itself.” They had four healthy children—including, on September 15, 1857, William Howard Taft.

Infant Willie, Louise wrote, was “well and hearty & a most charming baby.” Alphonso said Willie was “a delightful little fellow; seems to make the best of the ills of this life.” The Tafts raised their children in the family tradition of hard work, fair play, and public service. Louise believed in “training children properly” to do, as son Peter advised his brother Will, “the very best you could have done. Work hard, and do your part in building up the reputation of the family.”

As the next generation of Tafts went out on their own, William finished school and began a law career. He married Helen “Nellie” Herron, and they built their house on Cincinnati’s McMillan Street. William’s career took him many places: Ohio as lawyer and judge; the Philippines and Cuba as US diplomat; and Washington, DC, as secretary of war, president, chief justice—and more. Though William returned to Cincinnati, he never again lived in his childhood home.

William Howard Taft National Historic Site is home to a renowned family legacy of public service. The Tafts’ values on law, politics, ethics, family, and learning flourished in this orderly, happy home. Here a future president laughed and played—a son, a brother, and a friend.

Parlor



RON FORTH

During Will’s youth the Taft home whirled with activity. The roomy parlor hosted Christmas sing-alongs, games of whist, and talks with visiting celebrities like dinner guest James A. Garfield, the Civil War hero and future US president. With the rugs rolled up and furniture pushed aside, the parlor was a makeshift dance hall where Louise surprised Will with a 21st birthday party full of friends, lively music, and a popular treat—ice cream.

As he grew, outgoing and good-natured Will Taft earned high marks in school. He was active in baseball, wrestling, and tearing through the house with his younger brothers. He also rode the family’s pet pony around the yard and sledged down nearby Sycamore Hill in the winter.

The Tafts participated in many civic and cultural organizations. Alphonso’s work for the Republican Party led to political appointments that eventually took him away from Cincinnati. In the 1860s–70s he served as a city judge, secretary of war, and US attorney general. In the 1880s he served as minister to Austria-Hungary then Russia. The Tafts’ Mount Auburn home, when not occupied by their children, was rented out.

By 1889 Alphonso and Louise retired to California, where Alphonso died in 1891. He is buried in Cincinnati. For his funeral the Mount Auburn home tenants welcomed back the Taft family and friends for a final gathering in the parlor.

Library



RON FORTH

The family spent quieter evenings in the library where Alphonso finished the day’s business, Louise usually sewed, and the children read or played chess. Book collector Alphonso co-founded the city’s literary society; family discussions and letters frequently referred to authors like Dickens and Darwin. Alphonso also maintained an “observatory” (a telescope set up in the widow’s walk) and occasionally woke his family for late-night sky viewings.

Visit a Restored Presidential Birthplace

After the Taft family sold the house in 1899, successive owners modified it. The last divided the deteriorating building into apartments. In 1938 the William Howard Taft Memorial Association worked to save the house from demolition. In 1969 the federal government designated the house a national historic site. Today the park honors the life and work of William Howard Taft—the only person to hold the offices of president and chief justice of the United States.

Restoration The only memorial to the nation’s 27th president and 10th chief justice, William Howard Taft National Historic Site has been restored to the time young Will lived here. Guiding the restoration were Louise’s letters, which detail decorating plans, home improvements, and furniture purchases. All family portraits and many books belonged to the Tafts while they lived here. Where original furniture was not available, restorers substituted antiques of the appropriate style. Most pieces were made in Cincinnati.

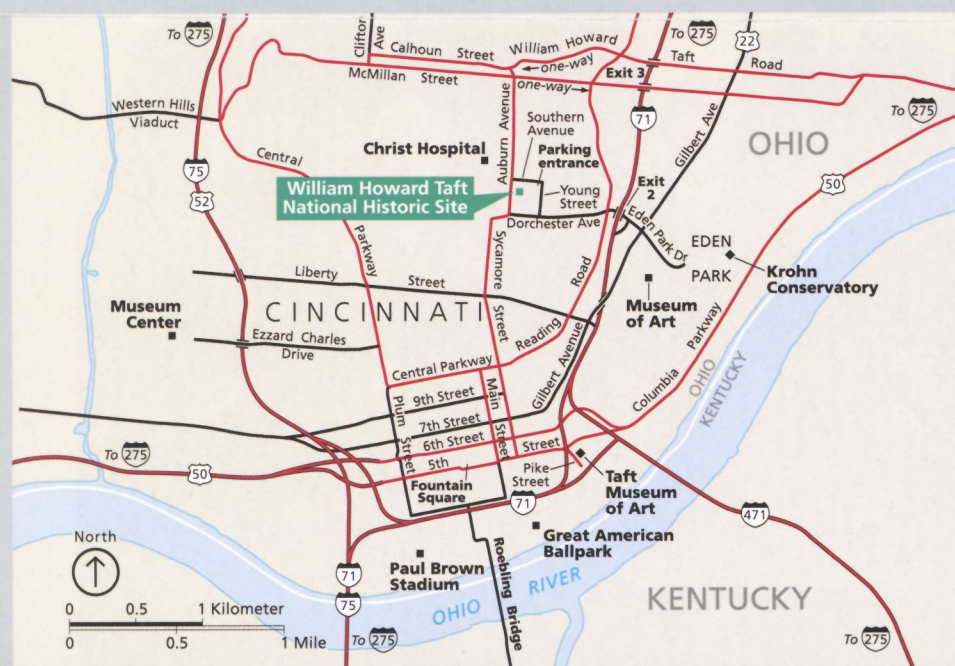
Plan Your Visit The park is open daily from 8:30 am to 4:45 pm and closed Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Begin at the Taft Education Center (beside the Taft home), which offers interactive exhibits, a gift shop, brochures, and an orientation film. Staff conduct tours of historically furnished rooms; other rooms have exhibits of Taft’s early years and political career. Contact the park for information on group tours and programs. For firearms regulations visit our website.

Directions From I-71N take exit 2 (Reading Rd. and Eden Park Dr.). Stay in the right lane; turn left at the first stop light onto Dorchester Ave. Go to the top of the hill. Turn right onto Auburn Ave. Go 1½ blocks to the site. From I-71S, take exit 3 (Taft Rd.). Go ¾ mile to Auburn Ave. Turn left. Go ½ mile to the site. Follow signs to designated parking areas.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website. The house is wheelchair-accessible with an elevator to second-floor exhibits. Observe safety warnings.

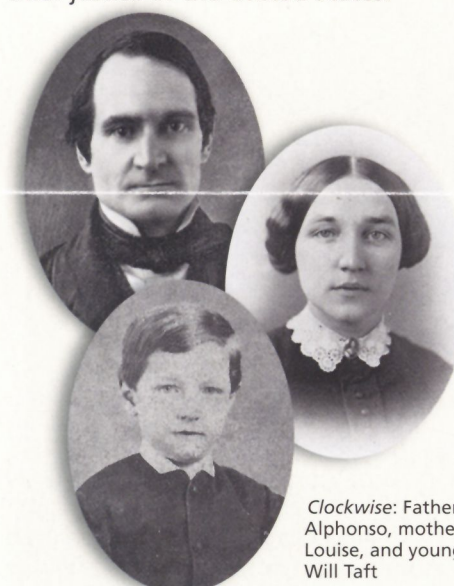
More Information
William Howard Taft National Historic Site
2038 Auburn Ave.
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www.nps.gov/wiho

William Howard Taft National Historic Site is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.



Path to the Supreme Court

His parents' emphasis on learning, his family's influence and legacy to public service, his ivy league diploma and law degree, his dreams and those of his wife—each helped propel William Howard Taft into public life and sustain his storied career from a Cincinnati lawyer and Ohio county judge to the 27th president and 10th chief justice of the United States.



Clockwise: Father Alphonso, mother Louise, and young Will Taft
NPS

Taft's early career steered toward the law and courts he loved as he aimed for a US Supreme Court seat. He first petitioned for a high court vacancy in 1889; President Benjamin Harrison appointed him US solicitor general instead. Taft won 15 of his 18 Supreme Court cases and entered the national scene. He met civil reformers and progressive politicians like Theodore Roosevelt, with whom he became friends.

I am glad that Will is going to work at the law with all his might. That is his destiny.

Alphonso Taft

Naturally driven, hard-working, and ethical, Taft campaigned hard for Republican candidates and received jobs like county legal and judicial posts in return. His integrity proved unshakable—a trait that affected his career when, as a tax collector, he resigned rather than replace competent employees with party favorites.

Taft's appointment as federal judge of the new Sixth US Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati brought his career closer to home—and to the Supreme Court. He ruled on patent rights and labor disputes and became known for his strict interpretation of the law. In a reform era he worked to make the judicial system responsive to the needs of a changing America.

President William McKinley noticed. He chose Taft not to fill a Supreme Court vacancy that opened in 1898 but to be civil governor of a new US possession: the Philippines.

President Taft with first lady Nellie, Inauguration Day, 1909
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Far right: 1908 delegate's ribbon
RON FORTH



Taft accepted—with the president's assurance that the next Supreme Court seat would be his.

In the Philippines Taft established an administrative government following the Spanish-American War. He oversaw construction of transportation lines and schools, brought modern law to the islands, strengthened the economy, and practiced socially equal treatment. Then McKinley was assassinated. What would become of the fallen president's promise to nominate Taft for the Supreme Court?

In 1902 McKinley's successor Theodore Roosevelt offered Taft the next seat on the Supreme Court, but Taft chose to finish his duty in the Philippines. His work there paved the way for an insular government and positioned the Philippines as a strategic US outpost in the western Pacific.

Taft became secretary of war in 1904. A supporter and key adviser of Roosevelt, Taft oversaw the early engineering of the Panama Canal and worked for stability in post-war Cuba. In this post Taft could also continue to advocate for the Philippines.

When Roosevelt said he would not run in the 1908 presidential election, many believed the presumably like-minded Taft would be the nominee. "My ambition is to become a justice of the Supreme Court," Taft wrote his brother in 1905. "I presume, however, there are very few men who would refuse to accept the nomination of the Republican party for the presidency, and I am not an exception." Taft was elected president in 1908.

Anyone who has taken the oath I have just taken must feel a heavy weight of responsibility. If not, he has no conception of the powers and duties of the office.

William Howard Taft
Inaugural Address, 1909

President Taft backed the Sixteenth Amendment allowing the income tax, reorganized the State Department, strengthened the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), brought dozens of antitrust suits, signed New Mexico and Arizona into the Union, introduced "dollar diplomacy," and appointed six US Supreme Court justices. Taft's moderate stances appealed broadly to his party's base—at least, initially.



Above, left to right: William Howard Taft with wife Nellie, son Charlie, daughter Helen, and son Robert; Below: Theodore Roosevelt with Taft BOTH PHOTOS—NPS

Progressives expected him to continue Roosevelt's reforms while conservatives urged him to end Roosevelt's anti-free market policies. When Taft shifted his policies toward the conservatives, political rifts deepened in his party. Taft lost broad-based support—including that of Roosevelt.

Still, the Republican Party chose Taft as its 1912 presidential candidate. Roosevelt responded by running for the Bull Moose (Progressive) Party. Taft finished third to Roosevelt and victorious Democrat Woodrow Wilson. "Well, I have one consolation," Taft later quipped, "no candidate was ever elected ex-president by such a large majority!"

Next, Taft taught constitutional law at Yale University. During World War I he headed the board that mediated disputes between defense manufacturers and labor. When a Supreme Court opening emerged under President Warren Harding, Taft felt no burden of unfinished duty to keep him from accepting. In 1921 Taft became chief justice of the US Supreme Court.

Taft's court affirmed presidential removal powers, upheld Prohibition, and further strengthened the ICC and the federal government under President Calvin Coolidge. Taft's opinions upheld labor's right to organize and did not always side with big business. Believing many decisions should come



from the lower courts, Taft spearheaded the Judiciary Act of 1925—a reform giving the Supreme Court discretionary control of its caseload. Taft also supported a new US Supreme Court building that would be physically and symbolically separate from the other two branches of the federal government, but he would not live to see it built.

In February 1930 Taft resigned due to illness. A few weeks later he died.

President Herbert Hoover said, "Taft's service to our country has been of rare distinction and was marked by a purity of patriotism, a lofty disinterestedness, and a devotion to the best interests of the nation."

William Howard Taft is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

The man with the average mentality, but with control, with a definite goal, and a clear conception of how it can be gained, and above all, with the application and labor, wins in the end.

William Howard Taft

Taft's Service of Rare Distinction

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1857 Born September 15 in Cincinnati, Ohio, to Louise and Alphonso Taft | 1886 Marries Helen "Nellie" Herron; moves to McMillan Street | 1909–13 President of the United States |
| 1863–80 Attends city public schools; graduates second in class from Yale University, 1878; graduates from Cincinnati Law School, 1880 | 1887–90 Judge, Ohio Superior Court | 1913–21 Constitutional law professor, Yale University |
| 1880–81 Legal reporter for <i>Cincinnati Commercial</i> | 1890–92 US solicitor general | 1915–21 President, League to Enforce Peace (forerunner to the League of Nations) |
| 1881–82 Assistant prosecutor, Hamilton County, Ohio | 1892–1900 Judge, Sixth US Circuit Court of Appeals | 1918–19 Co-chair, National War Labor Board |
| 1882 Collector of internal revenue, First Ohio District | 1896–1900 Dean, Cincinnati Law School; promotes growth of school; founds Circuit Court Library | 1921–30 Chief justice, US Supreme Court |
| 1885–97 Assistant solicitor, Hamilton County, Ohio | 1900–01 Heads US Philippine Commission | 1930 Retires as chief justice; dies March 8 |
| | 1901–04 Civil governor of the Philippines | |
| | 1904–08 Secretary of war; heads Panama Canal Commission; provisional governor of Cuba | |

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Taft's Court, 1925. Top row, left to right: Edward Sanford, George Sutherland, Pierce Butler, Harlan Fiske Stone. Bottom row, left to right: James Clark McReynolds, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., Chief Justice William Howard Taft, Willis Van Devanter, Louis Brandeis
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