

Philander Chase Knox Estate

The Past

Although traditionally associated with the site of Maxwell's Quarters, research has revealed that no structure stood at this location during the encampment of 1777-1778. It is likely that Brigadier General William Maxwell, commander of the New Jersey Brigade, established his headquarters somewhere nearby and not in the John Brown house as passed down in legend. In fact, it was not until 1783 that the property east of the Valley Creek, formerly owned by Samuel Brown, was purchase by his son, John Brown. Brown was able to subsequently increase his acreage by purchasing land west of the Valley Creek, the property were Maxwell was purportedly to have stayed. Brown resided in the house on the east side know as the Valley Forge Farm, from 1783 until his death in 1823. Shortly after purchase the land on the west side of the creek, Brown built a house for his son, John, Jr. Over the years, John, Sr. made improvements to both properties by establishing a quarry on his side of the creek and a limekiln on the Junior's side. Upon John, Sr.'s death, his daughter Jane, her husband Benjamin Evans, and their children inherited Valley Forge Farm and Junior inherited the house and surrounding property on the west side of the creek were he had resided with his wife Mary. The Brown family retained ownership of the property until 1854 when Junior's widow, Mary Brown sold the property to a neighbor, Charles H. Rogers.

Rogers, an industrialist, acquired the property to ensure his right to raise the Valley Creek dam in order to increase water power to his mill. Four years later he sold the property, but retained the right to raise the water level of the creek. It subsequently passed through two more hands before being purchased by Richard Peterson who maintained the property from 1869 until selling it to Edward and Amanda Mathews in 1893.

The Mathews, who became millionaires as a result of the California gold rush, immediately set out to convert the venerable old farmhouse into a gentleman's country seat. By 1895, Edward added the Valley Forge Farm to his estate, reuniting the former Brown family holdings. This along with the purchase of additional acreage increased the estate to 265 acres. The Mathews also began to extensively remodeled the 18th century house turning it into an elaborate Queen Ann style mansion with the addition of a servants' wing, a pavilion (tower), a steep and generous roof with a proliferation of dormers, a large glass porch, and a porte-cochère. The estate was completed with the placement of a swimming pool, bath house, racetrack, and tennis court. Here Mathews bred horses, making the estate famous as a stock farm. The Mathews were only able to enjoy their home for ten years. Edward was killed in a fall from a horse in 1901 and Amanda followed him in 1903 leaving the property to Frederick Mathews and other heirs.

The property was quickly placed on the market and purchased by Philander Chase Knox. Knox had been a successful lawyer in Pittsburgh and became Attorney General at the start of President McKinley's second term. At the request of Theodore Roosevelt, Knox remained in that position after McKinley's assassination. During that time he became famous for his "trust busting" suit against the Northern Securities, a large railroad holding company. In 1904 he was appointed by Governor Samuel W. Pennypacker to fill the unexpired term of U. S. Senator Matthew Quay. Knox's ended his public career by serving as the Secretary of State under President William Howard Taft, from 1909-1913. During this term he devoted much effort to the promotion of the "Open Door" policy by increasing U. S. trade by supporting American enterprises in Europe, Latin America, and the Far East.

Quite naturally, there was persistent speculation about Knox's relationship to General Henry Knox who had so aptly trained the artillery crews during the Valley Forge Encampment of 1777-78. It was assumed that this relationship was the reason why Knox purchased the estate, however; there was no connection to General Knox. P. C. Knox just wanted a place that could serve as a weekend retreat that was a reasonable distance from Washington, D. C. and where his son's love of horse breeding and stock raising could be

indulged. As it turned out, he was related to a former Valley Forge resident, former owner of the estate Amanda Mathews, but he did not learn this until after her death.

The social highlight of the Knox family ownership was the 1904 marriage of their daughter, Rebekah to James Tindle, who owned a steel manufacturing business in Pittsburgh. The honored guest at the ceremonies was President Theodore Roosevelt, who spent the night in the Knox home.

For the first seven years of Knox's ownership, the property was kept as it had been during the Mathews years. Only adding a wedding present for his daughter, the house known as Knox-Tindle. It was designed by the fashionable architect, R. Brognard Okie, of Duhring, Okie, and Ziegler of Philadelphia. Okie was a successful and sophisticated exponent of the Colonial Revival style, particularly that with roots in the stone houses of southeastern Pennsylvania.

When Knox retired from public service in 1913 he began extensive alterations. Again hiring architect R. Brognard Okie, to transform the structure from a Queen Ann mansion into the Colonial Revival estate that you see today. The alterations were extensive. Among the major changes were the removal of the main roof to create a lower plate line, removal of the entrance pavilion to create an open entrance porch, replacement of the glass porch with a large library with fireplace and half circle bay window. The interior received new millwork of the colonial genre. Four complete bathrooms and a power room were added, along with floor to ceiling windows in the dining room. The outside was transformed as well with the removal of the porte-cochère and the addition of a stone terrace featuring Mercer tiles depicting 18th century craftsmen. Formal stairs lead from the terrace to the lawns, pool, and the creek below. The large stone barn was replaced by a garage with chauffeur's quarters.

The resulting house was as picturesque and charming as it was impressive in size. Okie gave close attention to many details such as mantels, stair parts, and cabinets. The woodwork was painted in the typical revival fashion of off-white with paper covering the walls. The house was considered such a success that it was featured in the 1916 Yearbook of the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

After the death of P. C. Knox in 1921, his daughter moved into the main house, keeping it as it had been during her father's lifetime. Mrs. Tindle's sons, James and Robert, remained on the property one residing in the original house of Samuel Brown and the other in the house given to Rebekah upon her marriage. Until her death, Mrs. Tindle, an avid gardener, maintained the terraced gardens, a greenhouse, a walled garden and summer house on the slope southwest of the main house. In 1965 the property was sold by James and Robert Tindle to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to become part of Valley Forge State Park. In July of 1976 the state park was recognized for its importance in the creation of the United States and as such became part of the National Park System.

Continually the park service looks for clues to uncover the past. Through the efforts of a diligent park volunteer the granddaughter of P. C. Knox was located. This descendent, Mrs. John B. Swayne, III was able to provide park staff with revealing period photos of the estate in the height of its revival grandeur.

The Present

In 2015, the National Park Service (NPS) leased the historic Philander Chase Knox Estate to Valley Forge Park Events, LLC - a partnership between Robert Ryan Catering & Design and The Party Center. As a result, the estate is now available for private celebrations including weddings and corporate events. In its first year of operations, the venue hosted almost 40 events earning the NPS over \$97,000. All lease proceeds earned by the NPS over the ten-year lease will be used to preserve and enhance this and other sites within Valley Forge National Historic Park for generations to come. For more information on having an event at the Philander Chase Knox Estate, please visit <http://robertryancatering.com/valley-forge-park-events/>.