



Headquarters Tour: Region Conferences 2017

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Situated just blocks off of Dupont Circle, 1734 N Street stands in the heart of Washington DC. A historic neighborhood, which has gone to lengths to protect many original homes and buildings, Dupont has long attracted a myriad of major historic figures, curious tourists, and, of course, the clubwomen of GFWC. When GFWC purchased Headquarters in 1922, the location and building was to “be commensurate with the dignity, size and influence of the organization.” Since then, the house’s history and elegance have been honored, maintained, and protected by GFWC and the generous support of clubwomen. Such bigheartedness, combined with history and tradition, is what makes GFWC Headquarters a home.

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The mansion at 1734 N Street was built in 1875 for Rear Admiral William Radford. The Rear Admiral led a decorated military career, which concluded with his involvement in the Union Navy during the Civil War. Upon his retirement from the Navy, Radford and his family resettled in Washington D.C. When Radford built his home, the neighborhood of DuPont was not yet in existence, and the neighborhood’s streets, sewer system, and streetcar line were all under construction. Sensing the District’s westward expansion, Radford’s choice in real estate was soon proven to be wise. Less than a decade after the home’s construction, Dupont became one of the most sought after neighborhoods in D.C. to reside in and remains so today. By the early 1880s, the elegant residences of the city’s elite blended with more modest row houses such as 1738 (built in 1879) and 1728 (built in 1884) N Street, which GFWC acquired in the 1950s.

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When the Rear Admiral built 1734, he established a tradition of diplomacy and public service, which continued through each of the home's owners, and remains firmly rooted in the activities of GFWC. This tradition can be found in 1734's third owner, General Nelson A. Miles (1839-1925), who achieved military notoriety in the Civil and Indian Wars. In late 1895, soon after Miles transferred to Washington, D.C., to assume command of the U.S. Army, "The General Miles Testimonial Association" organized in New York to raise funds toward the purchase of a home for him in the capital city. *The Washington Post* later reported that about \$40,000 was collected for the purchase of 1734 N Street.

General Miles' most lasting addition to the home was the Spanish-style stables which he constructed in the old carriageway. Today, the old stables house the Iron Gate Restaurant. In an ironic confluence of worlds, General Miles used the room which currently houses the archives as a personal museum, where he displayed Native American artifacts, among other cultural treasures.

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In 1908, General Miles sold the home to New Yorkers John and Grace Hoffman White. Soon after the purchase, the Whites hired New York architects Denby & Nute to transform the traditional façade to a more fashionable Victorian design. Although no images of the original exterior exist, the home likely looked similar to the traditional brownstones of the area. Denby & Nute completely reconstructed the front from the basement to the second floor, removing the original exterior stair way, enlarging the windows, adding limestone facing, and erecting a grand marquis over the new main entrance.

The Whites also modernized the home's interior, constructing a grand staircase to lead visitors from the home's new first floor entrance to a more

open and elegant second floor. The décor reflected Mr. White's interest in exotic animals and birds, such as those depicted by noted muralist Albert Herter on the painted wall canvasses in the drawing room. Grace Hoffman White, a suffragist, peace activist, and writer, decorated some of the home's furnishings with poetic sentiments. A few of these are now in GFWC's collections, including the music room mantel engraved with the words: "I cannot warm you if your heart be cold."

Grace, an artist, was also one of the first people to begin to incorporate the new arts and crafts style into home décor. Just before the turn on the century, the environmental movement first began to take a foot hold in the public conscious. In literature this was reflected through authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. In décor it took shape as the arts and crafts movement, which relied on earthy tones and hand crafted pieces. And in policy, this shone through figures such as Teddy Roosevelt, and legislation like the 1916 Organic Act. Grace's incorporation of these ideals into her home present a stunning confluence and connection, as the clubwomen of GFWC were such a major and influential presence in the environmental movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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Continuing the diplomatic tradition, the Whites leased their home to Uruguay for its legation during World War I, and to the new nation of Czechoslovakia just after the war, before selling it to GFWC in 1922. Under the encouragement of GFWC President Alice Ames Winter (1920-1924), GFWC members attending the 1922 GFWC International Convention pledged \$105,000 and paid \$21,000 into the treasury, which fully covered the \$70,000 purchase price of the house, as well as some furnishings. Hence, 1734 N Street, NW, became the official Headquarters of the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

Currently the property houses staff offices, archives, rooms for meetings and receptions, and living quarters for the International President. GFWC Headquarters is maintained and furnished by generous contributions to the

1734 Society and Gifts to Headquarters. Induction as a National Historic Landmark in 1991 ensures that we maintain the historic integrity of the house, and places us in the eye of the public as a paragon of American history. The second floor, which contains the drawing room, the solarium, and the dining room, remains contemporaneous to the home's 1908 renovation. Let's take a look at each of those rooms:

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The Music Room:

Upon walking up the stairs to the second floor of 1734, the music room is immediately to your right. At the center of the room stands a Chickering baby grand piano with bench, ca. 1925. GFWC President Mary King Sherman (1924-1928) arranged to have the piano placed at GFWC Headquarters in 1926. At the Eighteenth Biennial in 1926, the Headquarters Committee Chairman announced "a Chickering-Grand Ampico Piano has been placed in the Conservatory, through special arrangement of the President, which tends towards making Headquarters seem like the American home."

Several other notable pieces in the room include the painting, "In the Arroyo" by Alson Clark which was given by the California Federation in 1925. The Herschede (*H-uh-r-sh-uh-d-ee*) Hall Clock was given by the Connecticut Federation in 1923 and constructed in 1921. The painting of Mt. McKinley was donated by the Alaska Federation in 1923. It was painted by Sydney Laurence, a renowned artist and war-correspondent, who is known for his Alaskan landscape paintings. Also in this room is a pastel of Mrs. Hugh Reid Griffin, 1925, by Anna Elizabeth Klumpke (1856-1942). Griffin, originally from Chicago, founded the Society of American Women in London in 1899. This was the first American women's club in Europe.

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The Drawing Room:

The drawing room may be considered to be the most impressive room in the mansion and is the heart of the home. During World War II, GFWC was involved in so many wartime programs that this room was turned into an office and a reading library, which provided the women with a way to stay current with war time events. The room remained the headquarters of GFWC's Civil Defense program, until the fall of 1950 when it was redecorated and restored to its use as a welcoming place for GFWC members and guests to gather.

The murals on the walls of the drawing room were commissioned by the Whites. The murals were painted in Paris by Albert Herter, father of Christian Herter, who was the Secretary of State during the Eisenhower administration.

The mantelpieces were installed during the 1960s renovation, which was necessitated due to the collapse of the drawing room ceiling. They are Italian marble, known as "rouge royale." An example of an original mantelpiece can be seen in the office of the International President.

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The Solarium:

The tile and basket weave lattice are another example of Grace Hoffman White's arts and crafts influence which can be found throughout the home. The tile and basket weave, along with the tiling around the music and dining room fireplaces, were all hand made at the same Philadelphia firm. From the side window you can see into the former stables, and what is now The Iron Gate Restaurant.

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When GFWC purchased 1734 N Street, we clearly had no need for stables. So, in 1923 the stables were converted into tea room which was open to the public. Interestingly, GFWC's tea room became the first restaurant in Washington D.C. to serve takeout meals.

Inspired by our own National Better Homes Campaign, in 1925, GFWC converted the space yet again. The restaurant was completely renovated to suit state-of-the-art food preparation, fine dining, education, and entertainment. National manufacturers outfitted the kitchen to demonstrate their modern appliances. The horse stalls were converted into booths, electrified for the convenient use of tabletop appliances provided by Westinghouse. The center was equipped by kitchenware manufacturers with the latest designs of the 1920s including a gas and electric range, a double sanitary-drain-board sink, and kitchen cabinet compartments with sliding shelves. A list of equipment was made available for clubwomen desiring to install similar equipment in their homes. Guests attended lectures and demonstrations on the value of efficient homemaking.

The converted restaurant would serve as a launching point of the Federation's groundbreaking National Home Equipment Survey in 1925. The information garnered in the survey was the first national data set which was aimed solely at the experience of women. The results were so lucrative, that they were sought by the Federal Government, and aided in the addition of "home marker" to the 1930 U.S. Census.

In the 1930s, the show room reopened as the Iron Gate Restaurant. Although the restaurant shuttered its doors in 2011, it was reopened under new management in 2013. Today, the Iron Gate Restaurant is consistently rated as one of the top dining experiences in the city.

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The Dining Room:

The GFWC International President uses the dining room for formal dinners and GFWC events.

In 1976, the Empire mahogany sideboard and dining room table were given in honor of Mrs. Winter. The Minnesota Federation had the mahogany breakfront made especially for the space between the windows and gave it in honor of Mrs. Winter and Mrs. Haugan Johnson, both GFWC International Past Presidents of GFWC Minnesota. The sideboard displays the Revolutionary War-era coffee and tea urns the Nebraska Federation gave to GFWC in 1927. The chandeliers were given in memory of Alma Preinkert, a Past Maryland State President.

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The third floor of Headquarters is designated as the executive floor. It is home to the International President's office, the executive coordinator, and COO's office and the Great States Room, which is used for meetings. When you come into Headquarters for a tour, we invite you to make your way up to the third floor to say hello and see the International President in action!

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The third floor also houses the archives, which are part of the Women's History and Resource Center. Founded in 1984, the Women's History and Resource Center collects, preserves, interprets, and promotes the history of the GFWC and women volunteers. The documents and museum collections kept in the archives document the social and political contributions of GFWC clubwomen from 1890 to the present. Our main collections include Presidential papers, program and convention records, Executive Committee and Board of Directors minutes, award records and scrapbooks. We also house smaller collections such as a sheet music collection, a cadre of rare

books, artwork and photographs. The WHRC is a resource for you to learn about your history, and is open to the public so outside scholars are able to tell and promote our incredible story.

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In 2015 GFWC finished renovations on 1738, converting the building from offices to livable space. There are now 9 beds available in beautiful, newly refurbished rooms, open to clubwomen and their families to stay in. Headquarters truly is a home for all. If you are interested in staying in one of these rooms, please contact our office coordinator at our main telephone number to schedule an overnight stay.

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Since 1922, thousands of GFWC members, numerous political dignitaries, celebrities, and notable professionals have visited GFWC International Headquarters. All members, friends, and associates are invited to tour GFWC's historic Headquarters, when visiting Washington, D.C. This National Historic Landmark is your home, and is a must-see for anyone interested in Washington D.C. history and architecture. We hope to see you there soon.

Special thanks to WHRC Manager Alyssa Constad for collaborating on this presentation.

Sheila E. Shea
GFWC International President