

Woodford

A trusted confidant to Philadelphia's beloved Ben Franklin, William Coleman was a highly educated, successful merchant when he built this summer house in 1756. Legend says the woods and nearby ford in the Schuylkill River gave the estate its name. A patriot, Coleman enjoyed this summer home, with servant's house and stable, on 12 acres of land. William Coleman and his wife Hannah raised their orphaned nephew George Clymer, who later became a signer of both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Woodford presents an engaging story of British loyalties vs. American independence through the tumultuous years of the Revolution. In 1771, David Franks, a crown agent for Philadelphia, purchased Woodford. During the war, Franks held to his view opposing the forces of independence, which led to the New American government seizing Franks property when the British forces departed. The family was ordered to leave and eventually was relocated in England where they went from great wealth and power to poverty.

In 1793, Woodford was purchased by the merchant and marine insurance broker Isaac Wharton. Isaac's wife, Margaret Rawle had grown-up at her parent's country seat at nearby Laurel Hill. For the next 75 years the house functioned as a summer retreat for two generations of the Wharton family until 1867 when the City of Philadelphia purchased it to add to the growing Fairmount Park. In 1887 Woodford became the East Park headquarters for the Fairmount Park House Guard thereby ending Woodford's 130 years as a private residence. Additionally, the new passage trolley system that ran through the park terminated on Woodford's front lawn beginning in 1896 until ending service in 1946.

In 1927, after the death of Philadelphia collector Naomi Wood, a trust was formed and Woodford was selected as a suitable home for the display of her "colonial household gear." Her collection of colonial objects is housed beautifully in this historic home for visitors to enjoy.

Laurel Hill

Rebecca Rawle, a wealthy widow with three young children, built this small country house around 1767. Her second marriage was to the British Loyalist and former Mayor of Philadelphia Samuel Shoemaker. Her home was seized during the Revolution, and the years that followed were difficult for Rebecca and her family. Rebecca spent several years trying to reclaim her house, which was sold in 1782 to Major James Parr. She was able to buy back Laurel Hill and pay off some debts in part by using some of the profits on the produce raised at the home, including strawberries, cabbages and vegetables.

Her son, William Rawle, inherited the home in 1819 and for many years, he would spend summers with his family at Laurel Hill. William practiced law, was the founder of the Philadelphia Bar Association and was involved in many of the city's civic and cultural organizations. In 1869, the house was purchased by the City of Philadelphia as part of the formation of Fairmount Park, including serving for some years as a headquarters for the Fairmount Park Guards.

Laurel Hill originally consisted of a two-story Georgian brick structure with a symmetrically placed entry and a gallery of windows on the first and second floors. In the late 18th/early 19th century, a small single story wing was added to the south-side of the home. Soon thereafter, the unique two-story octagonal wing was added to the north side.