



The Locust Grove Estate Self Guided Walking Tour

Locust Grove Estate Property History

The Haldeman Mansion is located within Locust Grove. We believe this place name had its origins during the Haldeman Family's three generational ownership (1785-1855), when the area around the confluence of the Conoy Creek and Susquehanna River became an Early American commercial center with a grist mill, sawmill, distillery and a swine & farming operation. It is part of an original land warrant of 466 acres granted to John Galbraith (c1711-c1769), an Indian trader/farmer, in 1743 by the William Penn Family.

Go to Stop 1: River Patio Overlook

The Haldeman Mansion is on the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places since 1977. Facing the Mansion, you are looking at its Federal Addition. It was built by John Haldeman (1753-1832) in 1811, according to the date stone at the top of the wall. It was added to the narrower part of the house that was built in two stages sometime after 1798. Behind you is a field in which archaeologists have located a Native American (Conoy) Cemetery. Later on, this tour you will learn more about the Native American presence at Locust Grove.

Stop 2: Mansion's Columned Front Porch

You are looking at the mile-wide Susquehanna River which is one of the oldest rivers in the world, dating back perhaps 450 million years ago, older than the mountain ridges through which it flows. The shallowness of the river and the terrace on which the Mansion sits are products of glacial melts which ended about 10,000 years ago.

From here you can see the Middletown-Columbia Railroad Branch which was built in 1850. On the riverside of the rails are vestiges of the Union Canal opened in 1833. A c1730 ferry crossing passed diagonally in front of this site following a route from Bainbridge to Lowe's Island near the west bank of the river. The Pennsylvania Archives document an Iroquois War Party passing by here, along the river, in 1719 and a Conoy War Party setting out from here as late as 1733. Two Indian paths passed through the Locust Grove property.

Speaking of paths, do you see the opening in the wall next to the railroad? On November 13, 1911, the owner at the time, Benjamin Hoffman (1863-1935), arranged for his daughter Olivia to be married in the Mansion. Guests arrived by rail car from Harrisburg and Lancaster in the early evening. They came through the then gated opening in the wall and ascended the three terraces between the railroad and the Mansion on 200 feet of red carpet. They entered the Grand Foyer entrance behind you. You may want to have a peak through the window at our Grand Foyer Staircase!

Stop 3: Large Ginkgo Tree by the Railroad

When you came up the Mansion's driveway today, you were entering not only the Haldeman Mansion's property, but, also, the Locust Grove Archaeological Historic District, created by the National Park Service in 2020. The ginkgo tree is just outside where a double stockaded Shenks Ferry Culture Village (1500-1550) once stood. Archaeologists estimated it to have been 325 feet in diameter. It would have encircled the Mansion and overlapped the location of the Native American Cemetery mentioned at Stop 1. The village is one of six villages near this location where from 1200AD to 1743 four different Native American cultures settled for a time, one of the first settlements to practice agriculture, to the second to last refugee village in the Lower Susquehanna River Valley.

Stop 4: Large Red Oak Tree Stump Between the Mansion & Conoy Creek

The average red oak tree is said to live about 300 years. You may want to try to count the stump's rings. Measuring 17.5 feet in diameter 4 ½ feet above the ground level, it was diseased and cut down in 2022. It was certainly a witness to much of Locust Grove Estate's history. To the west is an old sawmill thought to date back to the turn of the 19th century. It was built by John Haldeman. The exterior is not original, however, the interior's enormous old posts, joists, and rafters, held together by wooden pegs, are thought to be original. To the right of the old sawmill, on this side of the creek stood a grist mill built in 1790, a distillery was located across the creek from it and the pillars of a high RR bridge can be seen. They are the remnants of a RR spur that serviced a limestone quarry about .5 mile to the northeast.

Between the oak tree and Mansion, archaeologists have found Native American burials and evidence of a circular driveway which serviced what was the main entrance to the Mansion before the Federal Addition was built, servicing the doorway with side panels. On the Mansion's second floor, within the southwest corner of the Mansion, the master bedroom is located. Henry Haldeman's (1787-1849) wife Francis, married at the age of 17 years, gave birth to seven children there from 1812 to 1825, seven children in less than 13 years!

The oldest child was Samuel Steman Haldeman (1812-1880). He became a businessman (partner in the Haldeman Family iron manufacturing business at Marietta), an educator (held positions at several institutes & universities), a scientist (early evolutionist writer, preceding Darwin's "Origin of Species") and linguist (who assisted Noah Webster). His interests spanned a vast array of subjects, as did his expertise and writings. His writings fueled his reputation among scientists at a very young age and by the time of his death in 1880, he was an invited member of considerable standing in more than 28 professional societies in the United States and abroad. In the words of one historian, he "epitomized the generation of 19th Century scholars, who advanced American science and letters to a position of cultural independence from Europe".

Stop 5: 1911 Brick Carriage House

This carriage house was built in 1904 by Benjamin Hoffman. A wealthy tobacco dealer, he stored tobacco in the 1790 grist mill mentioned earlier. Across the Locust Grove Road to the northwest was probably the center, more or less, of Conoy Town (1718-1743). It was a Native American refugee village populated mostly by members of the Piscataway Tribe from Maryland. They moved north into Pennsylvania when the Iroquois led Five Nations promised protection. Conoy Town is believed to have been a scattered collection of dwellings within the area, not a compact village.

The Mansion's location on this terrace, above the creek would have been ideal for the Haldemans, as it looked down on their livelihood, their milling operations. It was up and away from the noise and dust of the mills and horse & wagon traffic would have created. There would have been Conestoga freight wagons with their 6-8 oxen or horses (and their famous bells) bringing grain and hauling away flour to Baltimore & Philadelphia. There would have been smaller horse-drawn farm wagons crossing the stone arch bridge as local farmers brought their grain for milling and hauled away flour and, perhaps, lumber for a new building.

Stop 6. Mansion's Front Door with Side Panels.

The Haldemans were active in the local, state and national political arenas. John Haldeman was a member of Philadelphia's Bingham Court, an informal Federalist Party gathering formed as a center of discussion and debate for men, including George Washington, John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton. The Haldeman's were close friends with the 15th President of the United States, James Buchanan, Jr. (1791-1868) and Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of War, Simon Cameron (1799-1889), both were Lancaster County residents. They, as well as other politicians, probably passed thru the Mansion, it's double fireplace ballroom behind you and perhaps its upstairs guest room, as well, along with merchants from Baltimore, Lancaster, Philadelphia and York with whom the Haldemans conducted business.

Thank You for Visiting the Locust Grove Estate

The Haldeman Mansion Preservation Society is restoring the Mansion to its 1811 condition. Our mission is to restore and preserve the existing buildings and grounds of the Haldeman Mansion property to be used to promote history, education, and community use. Progress is being made within and outside the Mansion. We invite you to join us in preserving what we believe to be an important part of our state's Native American, Colonial, Early American and Scientific Heritages.