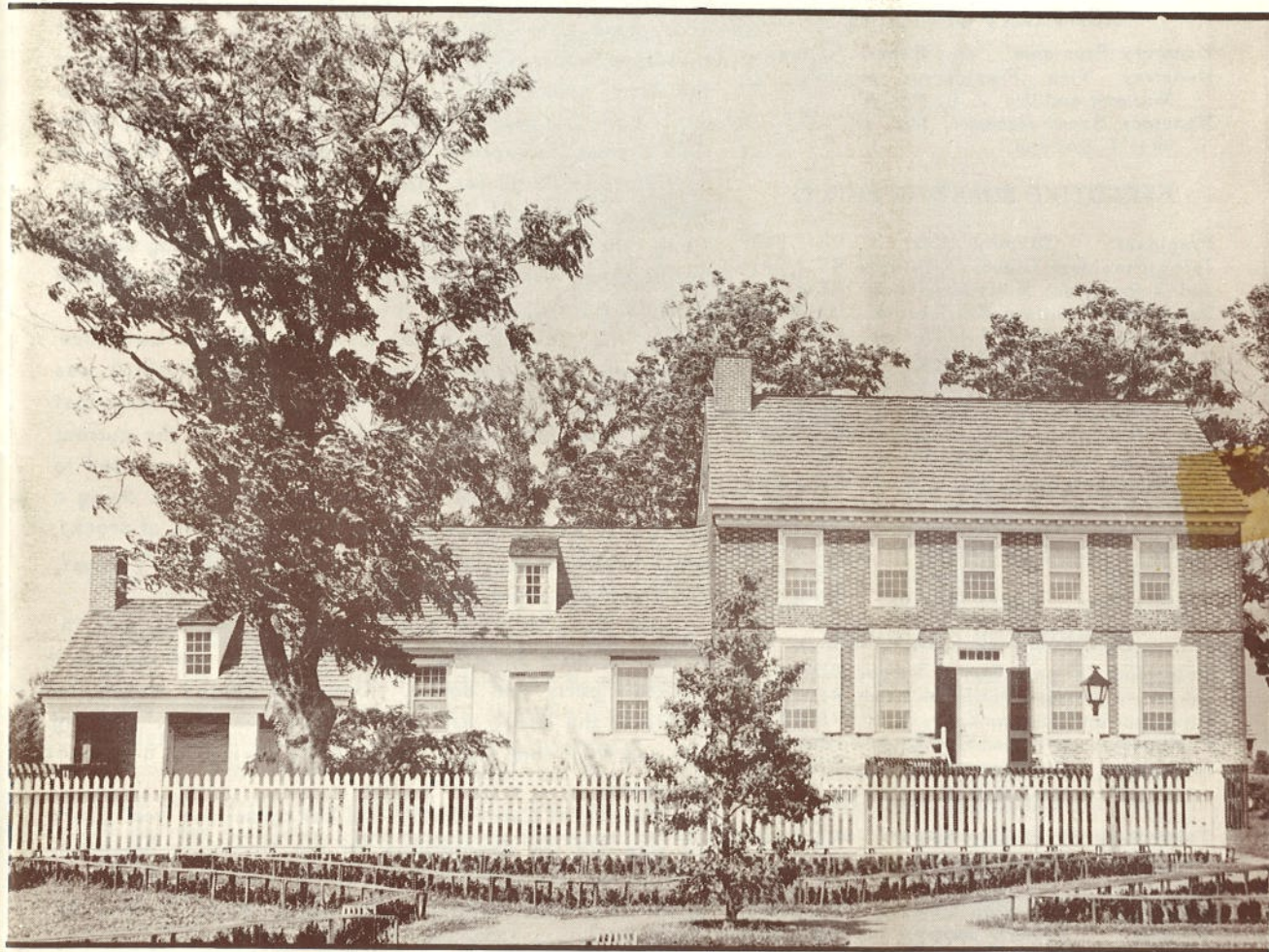


the Highlighter

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Officers' Wives' Club, Dover Air Force Base, Delaware



*The Home of
John Dickinson*

"Penman of the Revolution"

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DEL-MAR-VA GUIDED TOUR John Dickinson Mansion

by Shirley Barrett

Even in December the drive up the lane to the John Dickinson Mansion gives a cheerful prospect. The house itself, with its three graduated wings, its many-paned windows and warm red brick showing through a long-ago whitewashing, is most inviting. Holly trees are bursting with berries, the field is green as it rolls to the St. Jones River, and in the newly-created formal garden a brave anemone blooms between the boxwood rows. A scant five-minute drive past the Air Base on the road to Kitts Hummock is the boyhood home of John Dickinson - farmer, lawyer, politician and patriot.

Called "the Penman of the Revolution," John Dickinson, as a delegate to the Colonial Congress in 1765, drew up "The Declaration of Rights adopted by the Stamp Act Congress." From then on he wrote nearly all the important documents of the American Congress up to the Declaration of Independence. His pen was also busy campaigning for freedom in pamphlets, letters and speeches.

The mansion's large main building was built by John's father, Judge Samuel Dickinson, in 1740 when John was 8 years old. Twelve years later the first wing, a dining room with servants' quarters above was added, and two years after that the summer kitchen wing was built.

Four years before John's death in Wilmington in 1808, the home was damaged by fire destroying much of the interior. Some repair work was done, but the house passed from tenant to tenant, each year of neglect taking its toll. In 1952 the Delaware Colonial Dames of America raised the money to buy the house and a few surrounding acres of land and presented it to the state.

Then began a period of intensive restoration by the state, civic groups, historical

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societies, garden clubs and private citizens. Two years ago the mansion was officially opened, and everywhere the public looks it will see evidence of care, taste and faithful attention to the smallest detail of the restoration. The charm of the house lies in its simplicity.

The mansion was a country home for the Dickinsons, who were Quakers. The furniture in the parlor is mahogany with the sweeping lines of the Queen Anne period. More formal than the other rooms, the draperies at the oversized, 32-paned windows and the upholstery are a rich blue-green brocade. Among the authentic period pieces are two side chairs that once belonged to Caesar Rodney, a neighbor and a close friend of the Dickinsons.

Across the large entrance hall is the library where, after dinner, the gentlemen retired to sip brandy, smoke their long-stemmed clay pipes and talk politics in front of the corner fireplace, while in the next room, the ladies' parlor, their wives chatted and sipped tea. Down two steps from the ladies' parlor is the dining room with its particularly fine walnut drop-leaf table and a display of some of the family crested silver. In both this room and the summer kitchen beyond, the draperies were hand-woven on the old looms at the Delaware State Museum.

Of special interest in the kitchen wing are the old hand candle-dipper and slant-back Windsor chairs brought from John Dickinson's birthplace in Maryland.

The three upstairs bedrooms are not only lovely in their detail but also a testimonial to the authenticity of refurbishing, from the boots beside the bed in the large room, the bird cage in the sunny dressing room, the "clover" pattern in the quilt in the little back bedroom, to the hand-woven sheets on the rope-supported feather mattresses.

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