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## Ike's Place

The Eisenhower Farm in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

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So there they were, making preparations to retire. Married over 30 years, they had had their share of ups and downs. His successful military career had precipitated nearly 40 moves, but everywhere they lived, she had hung the same brass plaque, stamped with a house prayer. Their first son had died of scarlet fever at the age of 3; now, their second had married and presented them with grandchildren. Finally, it was time to buy their first home together. To put down roots. To settle down.

Or so they thought.

But before they could retire to a place of their own, Dwight David Eisenhower was elected the 34th president of the United States. And for Eisenhower and his wife Mamie, the dream of relaxing together on their farm in Gettysburg, Penn., was put on hold.

Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower was born on Oct. 14, 1890, in Denison, Tex., and grew up in Abilene, Kan. Although he had no designs on a military career, he entered the U.S. Military Academy, Class of 1915, to take advantage of a free education. After graduation, he was assigned to Fort Sam Houston



An exotic coffee table from South Korea and an exquisite Persian rug share space in the living room with a combination radio/phonograph in a room that Ike declared to be "stuffy."

in San Antonio, Tex., where he met and fell in love with Mamie Geneva Doud, daughter of a Denver millionaire. The couple was married on July 1, 1916.

Eisenhower's hopes for an overseas assignment during World War I were dashed when he was placed in charge of training soldiers for the army's tank corps at Camp Colt in Gettysburg. This was not Ike's first visit to the little Pennsylvania town: As part of a class project a

few years earlier, he had studied the Civil War battle fought there.

Proving himself a competent organizer, Eisenhower was assigned to a series of staff jobs and steadily rose in rank. His military career peaked during World War II, when, as a five-star general, he led the Allied invasion of Normandy. Post-war, he accepted the presidency of Columbia University and then served as commander of NATO forces in Europe.

Making plans for the future, the Eisenhowers, in 1950, purchased a 189-acre Gettysburg dairy farm for \$44,000. Mamie's project was the renovation of the red brick farmhouse, at the heart of which was a crumbling 200-year-old log cabin. Only part of the brickwork and a summer kitchen fireplace, including a beehive oven, could be saved. Work on the house was completed in March 1955. Meanwhile, Ike turned his attention to the farm. Here, he raised prize-winning Angus cattle in fields where Civil War cannonballs had been excavated as late as the 1920s. Of their Gettysburg retreat, Mamie once remarked, "We had only one home -- our farm." The couple gave the property to the federal government in 1967 but continued to live there until their deaths: Ike's in 1969 and Mamie's 10 years later.

Entering through the front door into a reception hallway, guests are greeted with a glass case containing what Mamie referred to as her "accumulation." Examples of fine ceramics mingle with a presidential souvenir plate from Stuckey's and plastic figures of the couple, cereal premiums during the 1950s.

With one step into the living room, it is clear that this was Mamie's home. In the center of the room is a "pouf," a round stylized seat copied from one in the White House. A Hammond chord organ was a gift from her mother, and a baby grand piano is covered with family photographs. A fan once owned by Queen Victoria, a fireplace that originally graced the East Room of the White House, a low table from the former First Lady of the Republic of South Korea, an exquisite Persian rug from the Shah of Iran: The room is replete with treasures from around the world, many of which were gifts

received during the Eisenhowers' years of public service. Indeed, the couple owned some 98 percent of the items exhibited in the house. Although Mamie's favorite color was pink, she chose yellow for the walls of all of her living rooms over the years, believing that color to be particularly welcoming. Ike considered this room to be "stuffy."

Stepping through to the sun porch is like passing into another world, for it was here that Ike was "at ease." Here, the couple relaxed and watched their favorite television shows (Bonanza for him, As the World Turns for her) on their RCA

color television. Sliding doors provide an indoor-outdoor feel to the room.

Back into the dining room, the mood reverts to a more formal atmosphere, with an elaborate crystal chandelier in the style of one at the Palace of Versailles and a fully stocked silver chest, a gift of Winston Churchill and the people of England. The Eisenhowers bought the table and chairs in Washington, D.C., in 1927. The silver tea service was purchased by Ike for Mamie, one piece at a time, from his poker winnings. The adjoining kitchen holds few surprises, reflecting the



The formal dining was the scene of many happy family meals. Mamie maintained a guest book at the farm and even family members were required to document their visits.



A Toby mug made in the likeness of Ike is displayed in the sun porch. The Eisenhowers appear to have been intrigued by souvenirs celebrating themselves.

era of its most recent usage.

The tour continues upstairs, where a guest room used by Mamie's mother is currently a work in progress. A small sitting room, which houses some of the Eisenhowers' favorite books, leads to the general's room, painted his favorite color (light green) and used for afternoon naps during his recuperation following a heart attack in November, 1955.

Mamie's dressing room is much as she left it, as is the master bedroom. A compromise of tastes, it is decorated in pink and green; here, Mamie kept up with her correspondence and enjoyed watching late-night television in bed. Down the hallway, a linen closet is open for all to see, with its handlabeled shelves and monogrammed towels. The maid's room and two guest rooms complete the second floor. In all, the house has eight bedrooms and nine baths.

Back on the main floor, the tour includes a view of the servants' quarters; Ike's den, the construction of which incorporated materials from the original log cabin; and his office, that housed the only encrypted telephone on the property.

The rest of the phones at the farm were on a party line.

Outdoors, visitors can view a former garage converted in 1956 into a guesthouse, known as "The Little House," home to grandson David during the summer he spent painting fences on the farm. The south side of a handsome 1887 barn doubles as a garage and houses a 1955 Chrysler Imperial limousine, three golf carts and a Crosley run-about, as well as Ike's 1965 Buick station wagon (he was often impatient with slow drivers on the battlefield roads and was himself notoriously bad at parallel parking).

Check out Ike's private putting green, which flies the flag of a five-star general, and was the site of a memorable hole-in-one, which Ike considered the major achievement of his life. Visitors will also see his skeet-shooting course and barbecue outbuilding. An adjacent information center houses a small museum. Wedding gifts, a five-star collar pin and a cigarette lighter share space with a signed Nazi pennant, "I Like Ike" silk stockings and spiked golf shoes (floors in his office offer evidence that Ike did not always change footwear upon entering his home). The spirit of Mamie is captured in her unsophisticated dresses, jangly charm bracelets, and mail-order hats, on display with her custom-made shoes. And in the end, it is that "plain folks" attitude that makes a trip to the Eisenhower Farm a curious one indeed.

Entrance to the Eisenhower farm is by shuttle bus only. Tickets may be purchased at the Gettysburg National Military Park Visitor Center, one mile south of Gettysburg on Pennsylvania Route 97. For more information, call (717) 338-9114 or go to [www.nps.gov/eise](http://www.nps.gov/eise).