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Situated just blocks off of Dupont Circle, 1734 N Street stands in the heart of Washington, D.C., just six blocks north of the White House. A historic neighborhood that 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 liberal support of clubwomen. Such generous spirit, 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 had 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 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.

When Rear Admiral Radford 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. In an ironic confluence of worlds, General Miles used the room which currently houses the WHRC archives as a personal museum, where he displayed Native American artifacts, among other cultural treasures.

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 Edwardian design. Although no images of the original exterior exist, the home probably looked similar to the traditional brownstones in the area. Denby & Nute completely reconstructed the face of the home from the basement to the second floor by removing the original exterior stairway, enlarging the windows, adding limestone facing, and erecting a grand marquis over a 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 began to take a foot hold in the public conscious. In literature, it was reflected through authors such as Ralph Waldo Emmerson and Henry David Thoreau. In home décor, the Arts and Crafts movement relied on earthy tones and hand crafted pieces. And in policy, it was promoted by figures such as Teddy Roosevelt and legislation like the 1916 Organic Act. Grace’s incorporation of these ideals into her home presented a stunning confluence and connection to the clubwomen of GFWC who were such a major and influential presence in the environmental movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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MUSIC ROOM

The music room is named for its beautiful 1925 Chickering baby grand piano, which has been a part of headquarters since 1926. When International Past President Mary King Sherman (1924-1928) had it placed in what was formerly known as the Conservatory, she noted that the addition of the piano “tended toward making Headquarters seem like the American home.”

Notable pieces in the Music Room include the painting “In the Arroyo” by Alson Clark that was given by the California Federation in 1925. The 1921 Herschede hall clock was given by the Connecticut Federation in 1923. The painting of Mt. McKinley (now Denali) by Sydney Laurence was donated by the Alaska Federation in 1923. Laurence was a renowned artist and war correspondent, well known for his Alaskan landscapes.

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DRAWING ROOM

The Drawing Room is the heart of the GFWC Headquarters. During WWII, this room was turned into a war office and a reading library—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 painted wall canvases in the Drawing Room were commissioned by previous owners and were painted by Albert Herter, father of Christian Herter, Secretary of State during the Eisenhower administration. The mantle pieces were installed during a 1960 renovation necessitated by the collapse of the Drawing Room ceiling. They are Italian marble known as “rouge royale.” An original mantelpiece may be seen in the office of the International President.

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**The Solarium**

The tile and basket weave lattice are an example of Grace Hoffman White’s Arts and Crafts influence which can be found throughout the home. The tile and basket wave, along with the tiling around the Conservatory and dining room fireplaces, were all hand made at the same Doylestown, Pennsylvania, tile works. From the windows you can see into the former stables and the Iron Gate Restaurant.

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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 donated it in honor of Mrs. Winter and Mrs. Haugan Johnson, both GFWC International Past Presidents from 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. The mahogany tea cart was gifted in 2002 by the Virginia Federation in honor of International Past President Shelby Hamlett (2000-2002).

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When GFWC purchased 1734 N Street, there was no need for stables. So in 1923, the stables were converted into a Federation Tea Room that was open to the public. The idea was to “bring GFWC into closer contact with the many earnest, thinking women and men who may be permanent or transient resident of Washington.” “High tea,” described as “elaborate, and “low tea,” a cup of tea and either tea cake or gingerbread, were offered each afternoon in the tea house and garden, weather permitting. The cost was $1.50 for high tea and 50 cents for low tea. Dinner was served during evening hours for $3 per plate. Responding to a growing demand in the neighborhood, the tea room manager provided chicken shortcake and pastry “fresh from the oven” wrapped in heavy waxed paper, so that it could be “carried away.” GFWC’s tea room became the first restaurant in Washington D.C. to serve takeout meals!

Inspired by its own National Better Homes Campaign in 1925, GFWC converted the space yet again. The restaurant was completely renovated for 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 1920’s 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 eager 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 that was aimed solely at the experience of women. The results were so useful that they were sought by the Federal Government and aided in the addition of “home marker” to the 1930 U.S. Census.