

# TAYLOE HOUSE



BENJAMIN OGLE  
TAYLOE



*Benjamin Ogle Tayloe House, circa 1890.*

The Tayloe House is one of a small group of historic buildings located on Madison Place, on the east side of Lafayette Square in Washington, D.C. The Tayloe House was erected in 1828 by Benjamin Ogle Tayloe, second son of the prominent Washingtonian Colonel John Tayloe who built the famous Octagon House located on New York Avenue.

The first and third floors of the yellow three-story brick house now serve as conference, reception and office space for the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit and the Court of Federal Claims. The middle level contains a cafeteria and dining room serving breakfast and lunch. The Tayloe House Café is open to the public.

At the time of Benjamin Tayloe's birth, George Washington was ending his term as President. Over the years Benjamin Tayloe became one of the most influential people in the nation's capital as he developed close relationships with his neighbors, President Washington's successors.

Tayloe received his formal education at Phillips Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire, and at Harvard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. After graduation from Harvard in 1815, he studied law and accepted a position with the American Ambassador to Great Britain. After several years in London, he returned to the United States and purchased a large estate on the Potomac River in King George County, Virginia. He named it "Windsor."

In November 1824, Tayloe married the former Julia Dickinson, daughter of Congressman John D. Dickinson who represented the Rensselaer District of New York from 1819-1823 and 1827-1831. At Windsor, Tayloe became a country gentleman and engaged in breeding cattle and pursued his keen interest in horse racing. His wife, however, enjoyed an urban life and particularly the social activities and excitement of the capital city.

In 1827 Tayloe's father gave the couple a lot in Washington, D.C. in the "United States Bank Square," which would later become known as "East President's Square" and included Madison Place. Tayloe began construction on his new home, which was completed in 1828. It was the second home to be erected on Madison Place; the first was the Dolley Madison House.

After the house was constructed, Tayloe chose to lease the house and remain on his estate in Virginia. In 1829, Julia Tayloe persuaded her husband to abandon country life for a more active social life and the family moved into their home on Madison Place in November of that year. Mrs. Tayloe soon became one of the capital's favorite hostesses. The house became a center of early nineteenth century Washington social life and was known as "The House on the Square." Distinguished guests included John Quincy Adams, John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, Dolley Madison, Chief Justice John Marshall, Daniel Webster, and Presidents Jackson, Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler and Fillmore.

The house contained a rare collection of fine paintings and other art objects obtained by the Tayloes during their world travels. One of the original works of art, a bust of Tayloe by Hiram Powers, is on display on the first floor of the Tayloe House today. Also displayed on the first floor are parts of the French china service, circa 1775, used by the Tayloes when entertaining guests.

The "House on the Square" hosted many social and political gatherings during the period of the 1830s and 1840s. Julia Tayloe would ask her many visitors to write a verse in an album which she placed in a central place in the house. A neighbor on Lafayette Square who would serve his country as Congressman, Senator, Secretary of State and renowned attorney wrote:

*My dear Madam:*

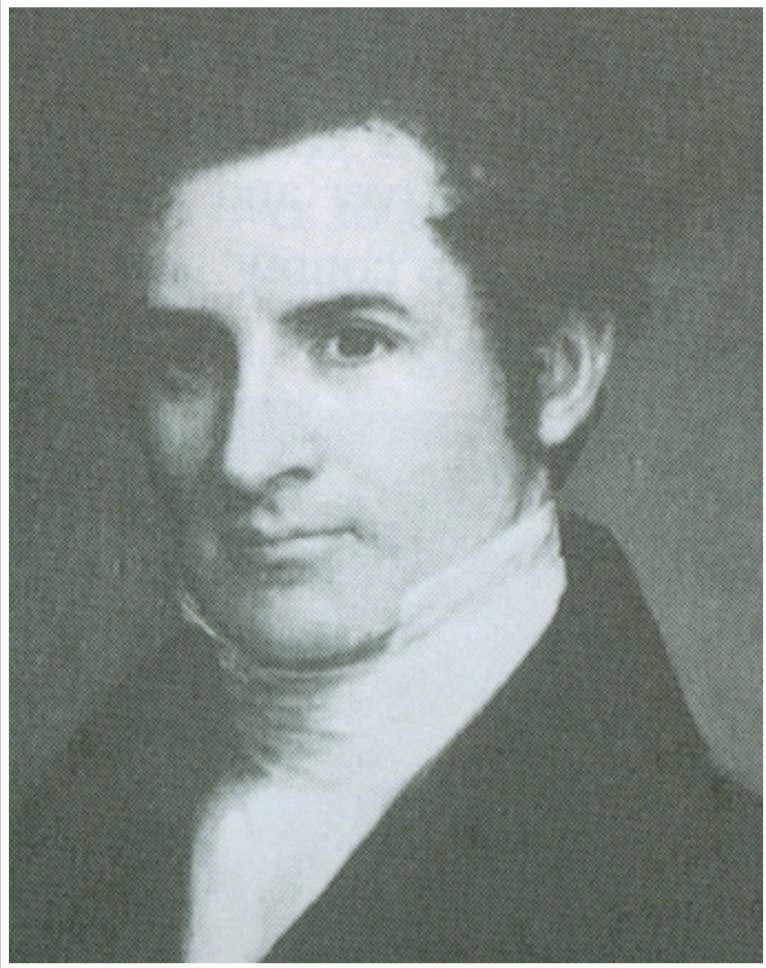
*I comply with your request, and return your volume with a name which, I cannot have the vanity to believe, will in the slightest degree enhance its value. I am, with regard, Your most obedient servant,*

Daniel Webster  
January 29, 1829



**Julia Dickinson Tayloe**

After moving to his new home, Tayloe soon became a close friend of Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky who owned the lot next door and who was said to have won money to pay for the lot in a high stakes poker game. Clay then traded the lot to Commodore John Rodgers of the Navy for a jackass that Rodgers had brought back to America from one of his many travels abroad. The “Rodgers House” was completed in 1830.



**Benjamin Ogle Tayloe**

Julia Tayloe died in 1846. Three years later Tayloe married Phebe Warren, a close friend of his first wife and, like her, a native of Troy, New York. The advent of the Civil War found the Tayloes in the midst of wartime activities with General McClellan's headquarters next door in the Dolley Madison House while Secretary of State William H. Seward resided in the Rodgers House on the other side.

The “House on the Square” once again became a center for both social and political gatherings. One close friend, General Winfield Scott, was a frequent guest and Tayloe recorded an incident on one of his visits:

*One Sunday in the summer of 1857, a terrific hailstorm hit the capital killing cattle, breaking the thick glass of the Capitol building, and passed through our windows like bullets. The General seemed greatly impressed and solemnized. Dinner was delayed. When the storm was over, we cooled our champagne with hailstones, bowl after bowl being brought in, of what the General called “celestial ice.”*

Benjamin Ogle Tayloe died while vacationing in Rome, Italy in 1868 at the age of 71. His body was returned to the United States and was buried in the Warren family chapel in Troy, New York. At the time of his death, Tayloe had substantial financial holdings, particularly real estate in Virginia and Washington, D.C., in addition to cotton plantations in Alabama. His will provided that most of his property be divided among his children. The “House on the Square” plus one-fifth of the income from his estate for life was given to his wife Phebe, with the provision that she bequeath the house to the children or their heirs.

Mrs. Tayloe remained in the house until her death in 1884. The “House on the Square” was sold by Tayloe’s children shortly after Phebe’s death. The fabulous art collection was bequeathed to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, with the provision that it be retained in the gallery as a separate group called “The Ogle Tayloe Collection.” It remained intact until the gallery moved to its new home in 1902, when most of the art was returned to the family.

Senator James Donald Cameron of Pennsylvania purchased the house from the Tayloe heirs in 1887. Senator Cameron made some changes to the interior of the house, including installation of a beautiful staircase which has been restored to its original splendor. In 1895, The Lafayette Square Opera House started to rise on the site of the former Rodgers House. Senator Cameron and his neighbors were outraged. Senator Cameron was quoted in the newspaper as having said that he would not have improved his property had he known a theater was going up within a “biscuit’s throw of his southern windows.” Cameron remained in the house until 1897, when he declined to run for reelection and returned to his other home near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

In 1897 the Tayloe House was leased to Vice President Garret A. Hobart who resided here until his death in 1899. Senator Marcus Alonzo Hanna of Ohio, who was the chief advisor and confidant of President William McKinley, made the house his residence from 1900 to 1902, and it was during this period that the house became known as the “Little White House” because of frequent visits by President McKinley. In 1903 Hanna moved across the street to the Arlington Hotel on Vermont Avenue, where the Veterans Administration now stands. Cameron continued to lease the house to others for many years.









In late 1915, The Congressional Union for Women's Suffrage, or The National Women's Party, leased the house and it became the national headquarters for the movement to give women the right to vote. During that time Alice Paul, one of the most active suffragists, led peaceful marches to the White House. These women, known as the "Silent Sentinels," helped immeasurably to achieve the vote for women in 1920.

Meanwhile, the Cosmos Club, which occupied the Dolley Madison House and the property immediately adjacent to the Tayloe House, began looking for additional space. Senator Cameron sold the property in 1917 to the Cosmos Club for \$250,000 and the property was immediately made the "Ladies Annex."

In 1940 the Cosmos Club sold the Tayloe House, along with other holdings of the Club on Madison Place, to the federal government for eventual construction of a government building or a courthouse. The Club was paid \$1 million for its Madison Place property. World War II intervened and all government construction in Washington ceased. The Cosmos Club continued to rent the house until 1952, when it moved to its new location on Massachusetts Avenue.

The National Science Foundation and then the National Aeronautics and Space Administration became the new occupants of the Tayloe House, Cosmos Club and Dolley Madison properties. In 1964, the Lafayette Square Restoration Project was championed by President John F. Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy, utilizing the architectural plan of their friend John Carl Warnecke. When the project was completed in 1968, the "House on the Square" became part of the National Courts Building complex.

Fortunately, this restoration retained much of the original house constructed by Benjamin Ogle Tayloe in 1828 and it remains one of the most attractive and historically significant buildings on Lafayette Square.

*And when our days' sun shall go down in the west,  
Mid the shadows of trials and joys to its rest,  
May bright rays of hope gild that evening's last sorrow-  
With a promise of blessed reunion the morrow.  
In that city celestial, whose streets have been trod  
By saints and by martyrs, the "city of God,"  
In the palace called beautiful, gathered be there  
All who met or who dwelt in "that House on the Square."*

Penned by a family friend  
following the death of  
Benjamin Ogle Tayloe



## TAYLOE HOUSE

United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit  
Lafayette Square  
Washington, DC 20439