

# Home of the Commandants



DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: Approved for public release;  
distribution is unlimited.

PCN 50100235900

# History

The Home of the Commandants is the oldest continually occupied building in all of Washington, DC. It has been at this site since 1806, prominently positioned on Marine Barracks Washington. The west garden wall runs along 8th Street and beyond the parade field. On the other side of the band hall is "I" Street, which is why the Barracks is often referred to as "8th and I". The front entrance of the house faces "G" Street. The large double doors are custom built of solid mahogany. The doors and outside areas are monitored 24 hours a day by video surveillance.

## ***British Raid***

During the British raid on Washington in 1814, the Capitol, the White House, and most of the public buildings were burned by British troops. However, the Barracks and the Home of the Commandants were not. This could have been for a number of reasons. Some think that Admiral Cockburn and General Ross, commander of British troops, spared it to use as their headquarters, then neglected to apply the torch upon their hurried withdrawal. Another version is that the Marines' stand at the Battle of Bladensburg so impressed General Ross that he ordered the House and the Barracks spared as a gesture of soldierly respect. The most likely possibility is that the residents of the neighborhood simply appealed to the British's better nature by pointing out that a fire at the Barracks would almost certainly result in the destruction of much adjoining private property. The Home was first occupied by Franklin Wharton, the 3rd Commandant, and has been occupied by every commandant since that time. Due to the Home's historical significance, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in December 1972 and designated as a national historic landmark by the Department of the Interior in 1976.





### ***Barracks Photo Circa 1900***

This portrait was discovered while Colonel and Mrs. Twomey, Barracks Commanding Officer 1971 to 1973, were out antique shopping on the eastern shore of Maryland. They stated that it fell against Mrs. Twomey's leg as she passed by it. When she reached to put it back, she realized it was of the Barracks. She and the Colonel purchased the photograph for a "nominal" price and donated it to the Home.

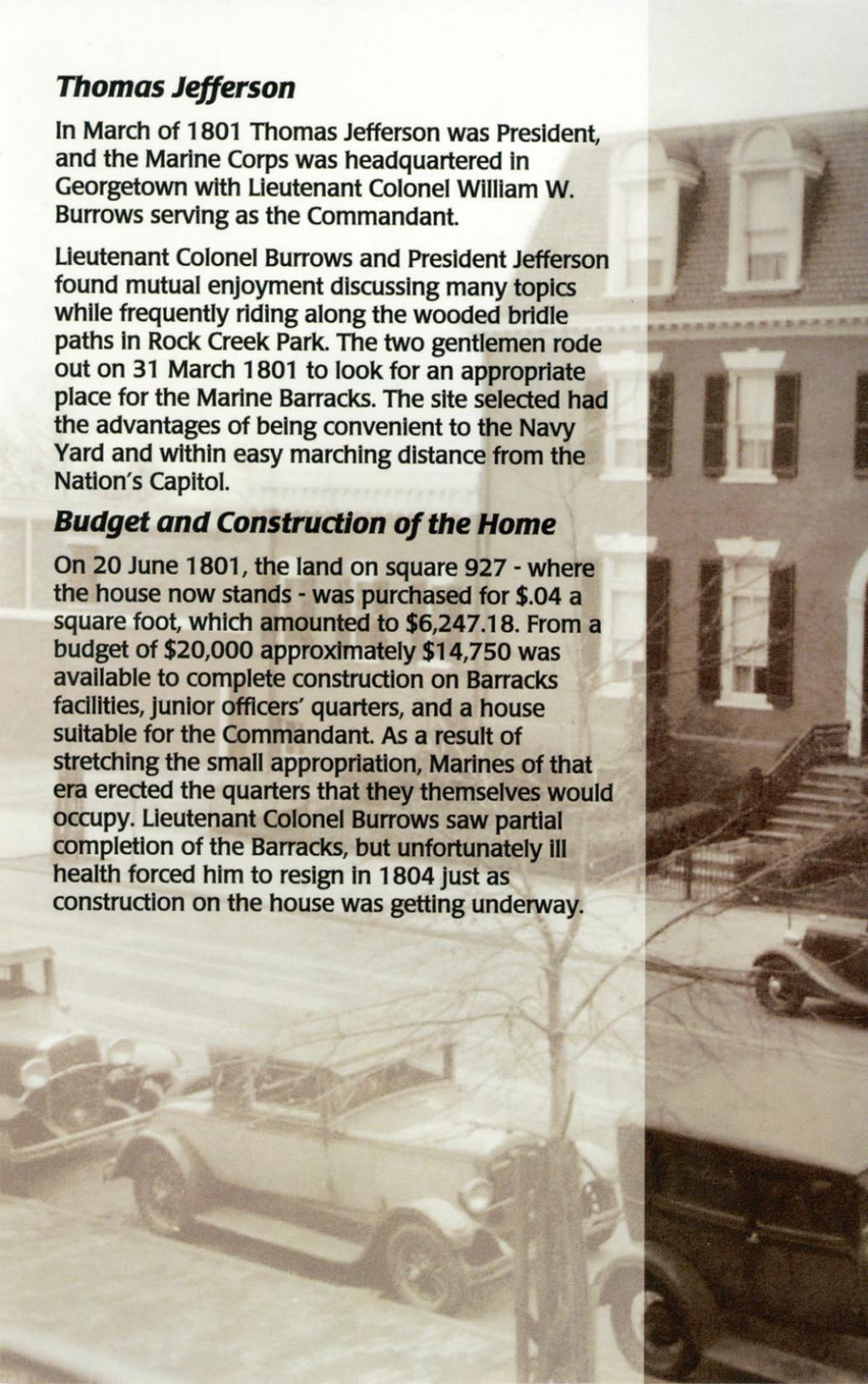
## ***Thomas Jefferson***

In March of 1801 Thomas Jefferson was President, and the Marine Corps was headquartered in Georgetown with Lieutenant Colonel William W. Burrows serving as the Commandant.

Lieutenant Colonel Burrows and President Jefferson found mutual enjoyment discussing many topics while frequently riding along the wooded bridle paths in Rock Creek Park. The two gentlemen rode out on 31 March 1801 to look for an appropriate place for the Marine Barracks. The site selected had the advantages of being convenient to the Navy Yard and within easy marching distance from the Nation's Capitol.

## ***Budget and Construction of the Home***

On 20 June 1801, the land on square 927 - where the house now stands - was purchased for \$.04 a square foot, which amounted to \$6,247.18. From a budget of \$20,000 approximately \$14,750 was available to complete construction on Barracks facilities, junior officers' quarters, and a house suitable for the Commandant. As a result of stretching the small appropriation, Marines of that era erected the quarters that they themselves would occupy. Lieutenant Colonel Burrows saw partial completion of the Barracks, but unfortunately ill health forced him to resign in 1804 just as construction on the house was getting underway.





## ***Design***

The house is a Georgian Federalist design with some of the walls being 3 feet thick. This design can be seen in the fanlight over the front door, the archways, curved walls, and decorative moldings. The Home originally measured at 25 feet by 32 feet and only had 4 large rooms on 2 floors with a large central hallway, a kitchen in the basement, and an attic in which the servants lived. Now, the house has over 15,000 square feet, not including halls, closets or baths. The fireplaces were converted to gas.

## ***Architect***

An advertisement in 1801 found in the National Intelligencer offered a premium of \$100 to any person who could exhibit the best design of a Barracks for the Marines capable of holding 500 men, their officers and a house for the Commandant.

The architect was most likely George Hadfield, an Englishman, who was credited with designing the original Treasury Building and the Executive Offices, both burned by the British in 1814. The other possible architect could have been Anne Louis de Tousard. Tousard submitted a design to the acting Secretary of the Navy, General Henry Dearborn on 4 May 1801.

## ***Completion of the Home***

Due to a strong sense of social responsibility, the 3rd Commandant – Lieutenant Colonel Franklin Wharton – was eager to complete the official residence of the Commandant. As an incentive to the Marines working on the construction of the House, he exempted them from their regular military duties and issued each of them an additional gill (1/4 pint) of rum daily.

The Home was completed in 1806 and has been the Home of the Commandants since.





## ***The 1999 Renovation***

Complete renovation of the quarters, including the garden and the exterior buildings began in 1999 during General and Mrs. Jones occupancy. It was completed in 2003 after the early departure of General and Mrs. Jones to assume duties as Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) in January 2003. General Jones' focused effort of matching both private and appropriated funds presented the unique opportunity for the first renovation in over 50 years.

## ***First Improvements***

The first additions to the Home began around 1837 when Lieutenant Colonel Henderson was participating in the Seminole Indian campaign. A colonial style veranda was added on the "G" Street side of the Home and the entire house was repainted. Prior to the 1999 renovation, Mrs. Russell, wife of the 16th Commandant – completed the last major renovation.

## ***The Gift Fund***

Throughout the years, the Home has been furnished with a combination of government furniture and personal items donated by former Commandants. General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., 25th Commandant and Mrs. Cushman began a project in 1972 that would provide assistance in acquiring appropriate furnishings for the Home.

On 25 February 1972, the Secretary of the Navy authorized the Commanding Officer, Marine Barracks, Washington, DC to solicit various donations or gifts for use in the Commandants' Home.

While the authority of this project was obtained by the Commandant, a large portion of the responsibility for the execution of the plan rested with Mrs. Cushman. Today, the First Lady of the Marine Corps continues to stay very active in maintaining the Home.