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HISTORICAL GROUNDS SURVEY OF  
WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS  
THE FORD MANSION  
MORRISTOWN, NEW JERSEY

Prepared by:

William U. Massey  
May 20, 1975

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express his deepest appreciation to all who assisted in providing information or time to this project. Special thanks go to Bruce Stewart, Park Historian, who was invaluable in providing assistance and editing of the manuscript. Additional thanks go to James W. Coleman, Superintendent and Thomas Smille, Librarian of the Morristown Historical Park, and Mrs. Barbara Doshins, Librarian, Morristown.

Hostins

## INTRODUCTION

In consideration of the use of the Ford mansion as Washington's Headquarters in the winter of 1779, the house has been preserved. However, this shrine was the home of a prominent Morristown family, and its construction and subsequent embellishments reflect the cultural, intellectual, and financial resources of the Ford family. Although the early years can be partially documented, the greatest amount of knowledge relates to Gabriel Ford's diary from 1796-1797 and 1814-1847. This report will detail the improvements of the grounds from 1774-1933.

When Jacob Ford, Jr. built his home in cir. 1774, he was a man of reasonable means, a judge and leading citizen of Morris County, New Jersey. The style of house he built was comfortable and gracious; however, his support for the American cause required his prolonged absences from the property, which resulted in construction delays and delayed the embellishment of the pleasure grounds. Activities were brought to an end with his untimely death in 1777.

His widow, Mrs. Theodosa Ford, was given the right to live in the house, but was burdened with providing for and raising four children. Ultimately, the family prospered, but it was not until the mid 1790's when the first landscape improvements to the pleasure grounds were made. The formalism of the Georgian style was giving way to the naturalism of the romantic style, and these new ideas were incorporated into the grounds developed by Gabriel Ford.

## THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

Upon the original 200 acres of land sold<sup>1</sup> to Jacob Ford, Sr., by L. Anderson in 1743, Jacob Ford, Jr. built his house. This tract of land was a gift to Jacob Ford, Jr. from his father on March 24, 1762.<sup>2</sup> The house was situated in Morris County, at the intersection of the roads leading to Monroe and Elizabethtown, located on a prominent hill and commanded a view for "60 chains."

According to the diary of Gerald Ford, who was the second son of Jacob Ford, Jr., the house was built<sup>3</sup> (completed) in 1774, at which time the family moved into the quarters. With the involvement by Jacob Ford, Jr. in the cause of the American Revolution and his subsequent appointment as Commander of the Eastern Battalion of the New Jersey Militia, construction and improvements to the house and grounds abated. With his untimely death in January 1777, he gave and devised<sup>4</sup> "unto my beloved father Jacob Ford, Sr. all that tract of land in Morris Town of onesaid containing two hundred acres and a half which was conveyed to me by him by deed. . . together with the dwelling house and appurtenances there unto belonging wherein he now lives." To his wife he gave the use and occupation of the "dwelling house wherein I now live." Although Jacob Ford, Sr. now held title to the land, he was to pass away shortly after his son's death.

In Jacob Ford, Sr.'s will and last testament, dated 15 January 1777<sup>5</sup>, he gave and devised "to the heirs and assigns of Jacob Ford, Jr. . . . said land and house conveyed to my said son Jacob by deed dated 24th of March 1762." The ownership of the land was to remain divided among the four children of Jacob Ford, Jr. until Gabriel Ford purchased his brothers' and sisters' shares in 1805.<sup>6</sup>

The first glimpse of the existing conditions of the grounds was July 26, 1780 in a letter from R.R. Meade, Quartermaster officer, USA, to Mrs. Theodosa Ford.<sup>7</sup> He was answering an inquiry of Mrs. Ford's for confirmation of General Washington's occupation of the family home. Contained in the letter is the following passage:

"The stable was built and the two rooms above the stairs finished at public expense; and a well, which was entirely useless and filled up before, put in through repair by walling & C."

This important letter documents the construction of a stable and improvements to the well which were made in the winter of 1779-80. Certainly other structures, such as a privy, sheds, and various types of fencing, would have been present, but their existence is not documented. An ice house and smoke house existed, but they were not built until the early 19th century.

A letter from General Washington's aide during his stay suggests how the appearance might have been during the winter of 1779-80. The letter<sup>8</sup> from Joseph Lewis, Quarter Master Corps, to Major P. Gordon, Quarter Master Corps, indicates that white pine boards and other boards are "much in want", as the "officers are not yet hutted and many of our Stores are Exposed." In addition to the exposed supplies there would have been the horses, carriages, and wagons of General Washington's entourage. General and Mrs. Washington each had a phaeton and baggage wagon,<sup>9</sup> while other senior aides or visitors would also have been expected to have a carriage or baggage wagon. Additionally, General Washington entertained<sup>10</sup> regularly as many as thirty dinner guests a night; thus, there was constant and regular traffic to the Ford mansion during the winter of 1779-80.

Beautification of the property was directed mainly to the Court Yard. Archaeological investigations of the 1930's suggest the existence of a semicircular drive originating on Morris Street and passing by the front door. (See App. p. 21) The existence of this drive is indirectly supported by an early map and Gabriel Ford's diary,<sup>11</sup> in which he describes the tree species and planting location in the Court Yard. The area was enclosed, but the exact style of fencing is unknown.

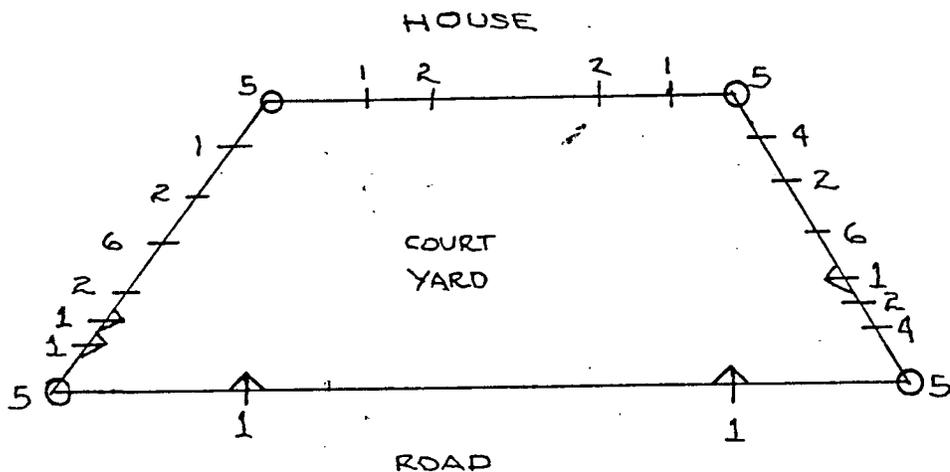
The horticultural improvements began in 1793 with the planting of two poplar trees on either side of the front door.<sup>12</sup> Additional poplar trees were planted in 1794 along Morris Street and in 1795 at the drawing room windows. The existence and location of the poplar trees is supported, in part, by the line engraving of the house, (See App. p. 17). The location of the trees along the front road is clearly illustrated.

In the back of the house, Foussilet pears were planted in 1794 and 1796.<sup>13</sup> These could have been planted in an orchard that is reported to have existed in back of the house or the trees could have been planted in conjunction with a utilitarian garden that would have been located near the house. Other horticultural improvements were to be made by the Ford family but not until the 19th century.

## THE INFLUENCE OF GABRIEL AND HENRY FORD

Gabriel Ford, the second son of Jacob Ford, was a lawyer, judge, and respected citizen of Morris County. Although he lived in the house for over ten years, he did not acquire complete rights to the property until 1805, when he purchased his brithers' and sisters' share of the estate. Gabriel took a personal interest in the development of the pleasure grounds, and planted a number of exotic trees in the landscape. Generally, in his gardening activities, he followed the advice of the Farmer's Almanac, but in 1836 he did subscribe to the recent publication of the Philadelphia Horticultural Society. Although constantly striving to improve the pleasure grounds, he established by 1870 the basic design and planting.

The courtyard was the important ornamental landscape activity of Gabriel.<sup>14</sup> From the original planting of poplar trees in 1793, he continued to add to the collection. In 1814 two larch trees and in 1816 several white pines and two horse chestnut trees were planted. On 25 April 1816 his greatest planting activity occurred when he ordered from Prince Nursery, Long Island, New York, 24 trees for the landscaping of the Courtyard. The bill came to \$12.87 1/2. Below is the diagram of the tree placement.



### Legend

Number	Tree	Quantity
1	Horse Chestnut	8
2	Mountain Ash	6
3	Not Shown	
4	Chestnut	2
5	Beure Pear	4
6	Linden	2

To the plantings he added the following trees:

<u>Tree</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Year</u>
Hawthorn	2	1818
Hawthorn	2	1822
Locust	10	1823
White Thorn	1	1824

The poplar trees planted in 1793 were removed 1 March 1819; from one of the trees an 18 foot long water trough was made for the cow house. In 1820, April 29, the remaining poplar trees were headed down, but when they were removed is unrecorded, although in 1824 he records that grapevines were planted to the poplar mounds in the front yard. In that same year, weeping willows were planted in the gangway, just outside the courtyard.

The courtyard surface received several treatments. In 1813 potatoes were planted, but in 1814 flax in combination with clover and timothy seed was sown. This probably represents the turf Gabriel established, for in June, 1818 he records transferring sheep from the courtyard to the road lot. The sheep were used as mowers, but he records in July, 1819 that a scythe was used for mowing. He fertilized the turf by manuring.

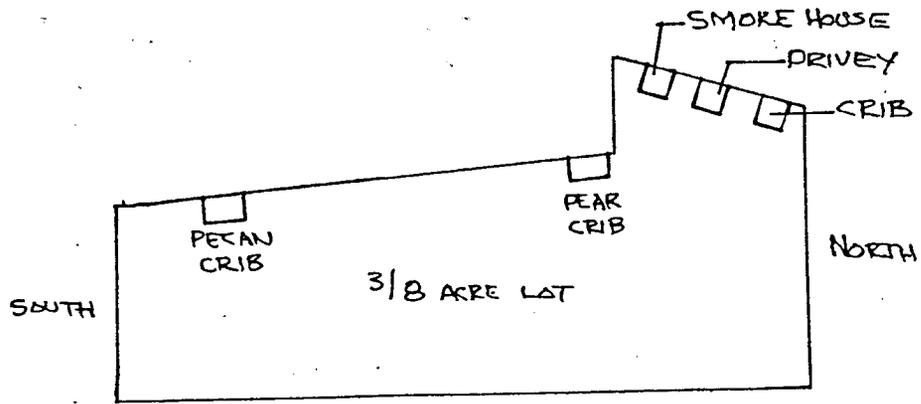
Although information suggests that the courtyard was enclosed by the 1790's, Gabriel redesigned the fencing 20 June, 1818. He employed a mason and one assistant for 23 days at a total cost, including materials, of \$192.25. The engravings indicate the style of fencing to be a white picket fence on a stone foundation with a central gate that opens to a walk leading directly to the front door. The style and linear walk were quite different from the probable 18th century curvilinear approach.

Another feature added to the courtyard was a cistern. On 6 December, 1818 Gabriel records that the windmill at the spring house "blew over last night." To replace this water supply, he had a cistern constructed in 1819. The cistern, which could store 328 gallons of water, was located near the front kitchen door. It collected rainwater which was used for drinking water, from the mansion roof. The original structure collapsed in 1823, and a second structure was built in August, 1823.

Outbuildings comprised an important adjunct of the main structure. The buildings were constructed to serve a functional purpose although this part of the landscape was not incorporated into an overall formal plant. The stable, probably constructed in 1787, had new sides, a new roof, and an enclosure (or pen) built, June 7, 1813. At that time a carriage house was added to the stable. He recorded filling the ice house, but its location is unknown. In 1815 he built a smoke

house, and in 1817 remade the ice house to be 13 square feet. On 23 December, 1816, the fences and outbuildings were painted white.

In his notes is a diagram outlining a 3/8 acre lot that is bordered by the following buildings: Crib, Privey, Smoke House, Pea Crib, and Canning House. The diagram is below:



Unfortunately, the location of this section in relation to the house is unknown.

Much of Gabriel's gardening interest was directed towards his vegetable garden which provided him both a source of pleasure and of utility. The garden consisted of four parterres divided by a crosswalk and enclosed by a fence of post and rail. The relation of the garden to the house is unclear, but tradition strongly suggests that it would have been to the side or back of the house.

In 1822 the parterres were designated East and West Squares. The area was 90 feet X 125 feet or about 14,250 square feet. In 1840 he again diagrams the overall squares and indicated each contained approximately 1/4 acre. Little change occurred in his gardening area in twenty years.

Although the square was mainly planted to vegetables, he did plant young ornamental plants in them. In 1814 he set out in the lowest square, west of the middle walk, a Canadian Dogwood, Clithera, Broom, and Magnolia. In 1816 he set out Rosy Esfsia, Hibiscus, and Sweet Scented shrubs; in 1822 3 Hawthorn trees and in 1823 a Horse Chestnut and Paper Mulberry scions were set out. In 1835 his activities increased and a nursery was established behind the woodhouse, location unknown. How he used the plants or where he transplanted them is unknown; however, in 1823 he does refer to his lilac border and in 1825, he set out under the windows in front of the house sweet scented shrubs and flowering almonds. In 1826 he planted multiflora roses, one under each of the windows of the drawing room and dining room. In 1823, purple jasmin scions were set out at the front and back doors of the Hall.

For the most part, he used the squares for vegetable gardening. He would begin his spring plantings in March, based upon the position of the moon and advice of the Farmer's Almanac calendar. A serious gardener, he took steps to maintain his soil in good tilth by the addition of manure and crop rotation. He recognized the importance of using fresh seed, and would yearly purchase seed from Thronburns, Dixon, and Boisaubin, leading seed distributors of the early 19th century. In 1814, he first mentions using a hotbed, and in 1825, he purchased from Greenmine a hotbed frame with wooden covers on hinges. In 1840 he constructed a root cellar in the garden, but its location is undetermined. Until about 1825, his labor consisted mainly of slave labor, but thereafter, he hired a gardner each year.

In his diary are detailed gardening notes of vegetables he grew. The notes are thorough and provide an unusual opportunity for studying early 19th century gardening advice based upon proven procedures. A list of the vegetables he grew is in the appendix.

Henry Augustus Ford was the benefactor of the mansion and all other edifices upon the death of his father in 1849.<sup>15</sup> Gabriel's wife, Frances, was devised the use and possession of all the lands and tenements; upon his death, Henry Ford inherited the entire homestead.

Although Henry Ford appears to have continued in the same manner as his father, the records only begin in 1856.<sup>16</sup> The records suggest that he seemed to continue rather than enhance the landscape. On April 18, 1856, he purchased from Hosack garden seed, and on May 16 of that year, he bought lima beans and sweet corn.<sup>17</sup> In June, 1858, he planted West Indian parsnip. The following is a list of vegetable plants he grew in 1859:

Onions	Tomato	Parsnips
Lima beans	Salif	Beets
Bell pepper	Squash	Egg plant
Watermelon	Muskmelon	Naturions
Sweet Mexican corn	Cabbage	Raspberries
Okra	Sweet corn	Grapes

In 1859, he planted two maple trees in the courtyard, one of which was to take the place of the dead horse chestnut near the house.

One most interesting document of Henry Ford's is his application on 26 March, 1860 and 23 September, 1863 to the Rahway Mutual Fire Insurance Company for fire insurance for the two story dwelling house, kitchen, and shed or lean-to.<sup>18</sup> The shed is described as 19 feet long by 10 feet wide, and Gabriel in 1836 discussed a similar structure. This structure also appears in the engravings. (See App.p. 17)

Also, he describes the two stone cisterns, built by Gabriel. Water was brought into the house by 1863 by means of a hydraulic pump to the kitchen for storage and the cisterns were neglected.

In Henry A. Ford's will, proved in Tuesday 14th May, 1872<sup>19</sup>, he wished that the "Washington Headquarter's", his residence, when it had to be sold, be auctioned to the highest bidder. The receipts were then to be divided among his children.

The executors faithfully followed his wish for on April 11, 1873, the property was offered at a private sale, and "included the homestead, barns, etc., and was 253 feet by 544 feet deep."<sup>20</sup> The remaining property was carefully mapped and laid out in streets, avenues, and building lots. (See Mapp. 23) On June 26, 1823 the house was sold at auction to a group of men whom later called themselves the Washington Association.

## THE WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION

The Washington Association was formed to be a public nonprofit organization to preserve the Washington Headquarters.<sup>21</sup> The founding directors purchased the house and land for \$25,000 31 July, 1873. With the acquisition of the mansion, the men desired to restore the house and grounds to resemble the time of Washington's occupancy. Their first act was to place a cannon facing Morris Street in 1873.

In 1882 the directors desired to protect the historic shrine from surrounding development. The first purchase was a bordering lot of the dimensions 80 X 275 feet. Its location is unknown. In 1892 three lots on the west side were purchased, and in 1894, Mr. Frances G. Seymour's property was purchased. With each purchase, the new property was graded and landscaped to conform to the homestead.

The directors pursuing their goal of restoring the property to the late 18th century appearance, gave major emphasis and graded for the construction of the approach drive and walks around the house. The newly formed terraces were sodded. In the rear of the mansion the ground was leveled for the development of a formal garden to be planted to the late 19th century plant material. During this period (cir. 1884-1886) a cottage was built to house a caretaker. (See Map p. 24 )

The two final activities occurred in the 1890's. In 1892, gutters along the Morris Street front and the entrance drive were formed and cobbled. The archaeological investigation by the National Park Service uncovered the gutters. (See Map p. 21 ) In 1896 the Lafayette building was constructed to be used as meeting rooms. This was the last act of restoring the grounds during the tenure of the Washington Association.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Land Titles, Morris County and Some unrecorded Deeds collected by Edward Howell. Ancient Deed, dated March 24, 1762. Morristown Public Library, Morristown, New Jersey
- <sup>2</sup>Land Titles, Morris County and Some unrecorded Deeds collected by Edward Howell. Warrenty Deed, dated 31 May, 1731. Morristown Public Library, Morristown, New Jersey.
- <sup>3</sup>Diary of Gabriel Ford, 1794-1796, 1814-1849. Unpublished. Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, New Jersey.
- <sup>4</sup>Will and Last Testament, Jacob Ford, Jr. January, 1777. Morristown National Historical Park Library, Morristown, New Jersey.
- <sup>5</sup>Will and Last Testament, Jacob Ford Sr., 15 January, 1777. Morristown National Historical Park Library, Morristown, New Jersey.
- <sup>6</sup>Diary of Gabriel Ford. 1794-1796, 1814-1849. Unpublished. Morristown National Historical Park Library, Morristown, New Jersey.
- <sup>7</sup>Letter from R.K. Meade, A.D.C. to Mrs. Theodosia Ford, July 26, 1780. Morristown National Historical Park Research Files. Morristown, New Jersey
- <sup>8</sup>Letter from Joseph Lewis, Quarter Master Corps to Major P. Gordon, Quarter Master Corps, 28 January, 1780. Morristown National Historical Park Research Files. Morristown, New Jersey
- <sup>9</sup>George Washington Papers. Mount Vernon, Ladies Association of the Union, Mount Vernon, Virginia
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup>Diary of Gabriel Ford, 1794-1796, 1814-1849. Unpublished. Morristown National Historical Park Library. Morristown, New Jersey.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid.

- <sup>14</sup>Ibid. This section based on the Diary.
- <sup>15</sup>Last Will and Testament, Gabriel Ford, 1849. Morristown National Historical Park Library. Morristown, New Jersey.
- <sup>16</sup>The Account Book, Henry Ford. Morristown National Historical Park Library, Morristown, New Jersey.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup>Application of Henry Ford to Rahway Mutual Fire Insurance Company, 23 September, 1863. Morristown National Historical Park Research Files. Morristown, New Jersey.
- <sup>19</sup>The Last Will and Testament, Henry Ford. The Morristown National Historical Park Library. Morristown, New Jersey.
- <sup>20</sup>The Morristown Republican, April 11, 1873. The Morristown National Historical Research Files, Morristown, New Jersey.
- <sup>21</sup>Folsom, Joseph Fulford. The History of the Washington Association, 1874-1924, Morristown, New Jersey: Banner Press, 1930. This section based upon this book.

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Diary of Gabriel Ford, 1794-1796, 1814-1849. Unpublished. Morristown National Park Library, Morristown, New Jersey.

Falsom, Joseph Fulford. The History of the Washington Association, 1874-1924, Morristown, New Jersey: Banner Press, 1930.

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Letter from Joseph Lewis, Quarter Master Corps to Major P. Gordon, Quarter Master Corps, 28 January, 1780. Morristown National Historical Park Research Files, Morristown, New Jersey.

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Will and Last Testament, Jacob Ford, Jr. January, 1777, Morristown National Historical Park Library, Morristown New Jersey.

Will and Last Testament, Jacob Ford, Sr. January, 1777, Morristown National Historical Park Library, Morristown, New Jersey.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR  
TREATING THE LANDSCAPE

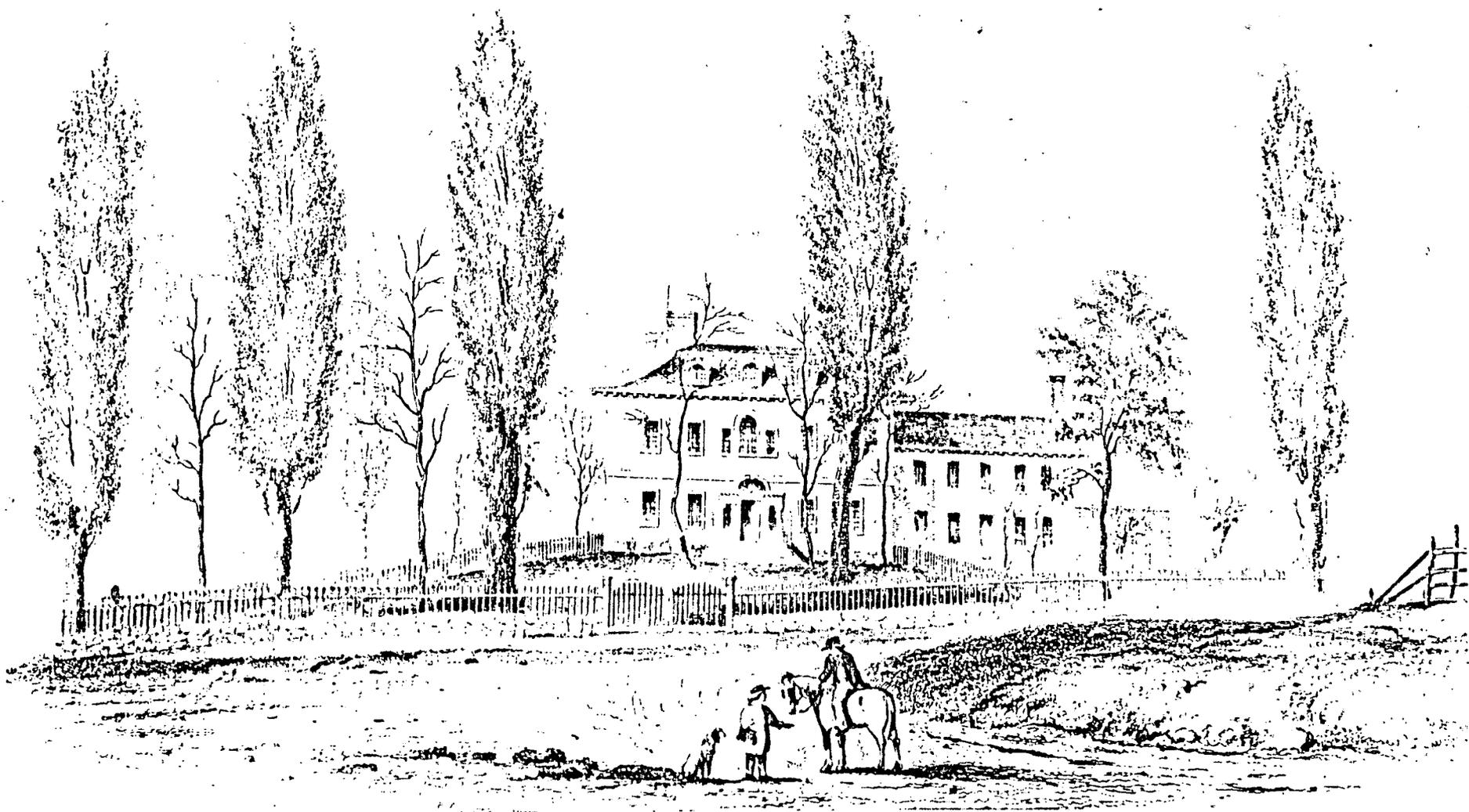
The present situation of the grounds at Morristown Historical Park is directly traceable to the activities of the National Park Service during the 1930's. During this period, the National Park Service beautified and embellished the landscape of the historic park in keeping with the traditions and goals of garden preservation. Now, to restore the grounds to the Jacob Ford, Jr. era would require the removal of major architectural and existing horticultural features, which would be an unfortunate occurrence.

The situation of the present and the situation of 1779-80 should be compared and contrasted to understand the recommendations for treating the landscape. In 1779 Jacob Ford's house was in rural New Jersey on a 2,000 acre farm, which provided a bucolic setting of an uncomplicated and unostentatious way of life. The house, the central focus of this estate, was surrounded by pastures, fields of crops, and an orchard and woods. Now, in 1975, the remaining five acres of the original homestead is surrounded by single family dwellings and major highways. Thus, within the urban setting of today, only a small portion of the original environment can be glimpsed.

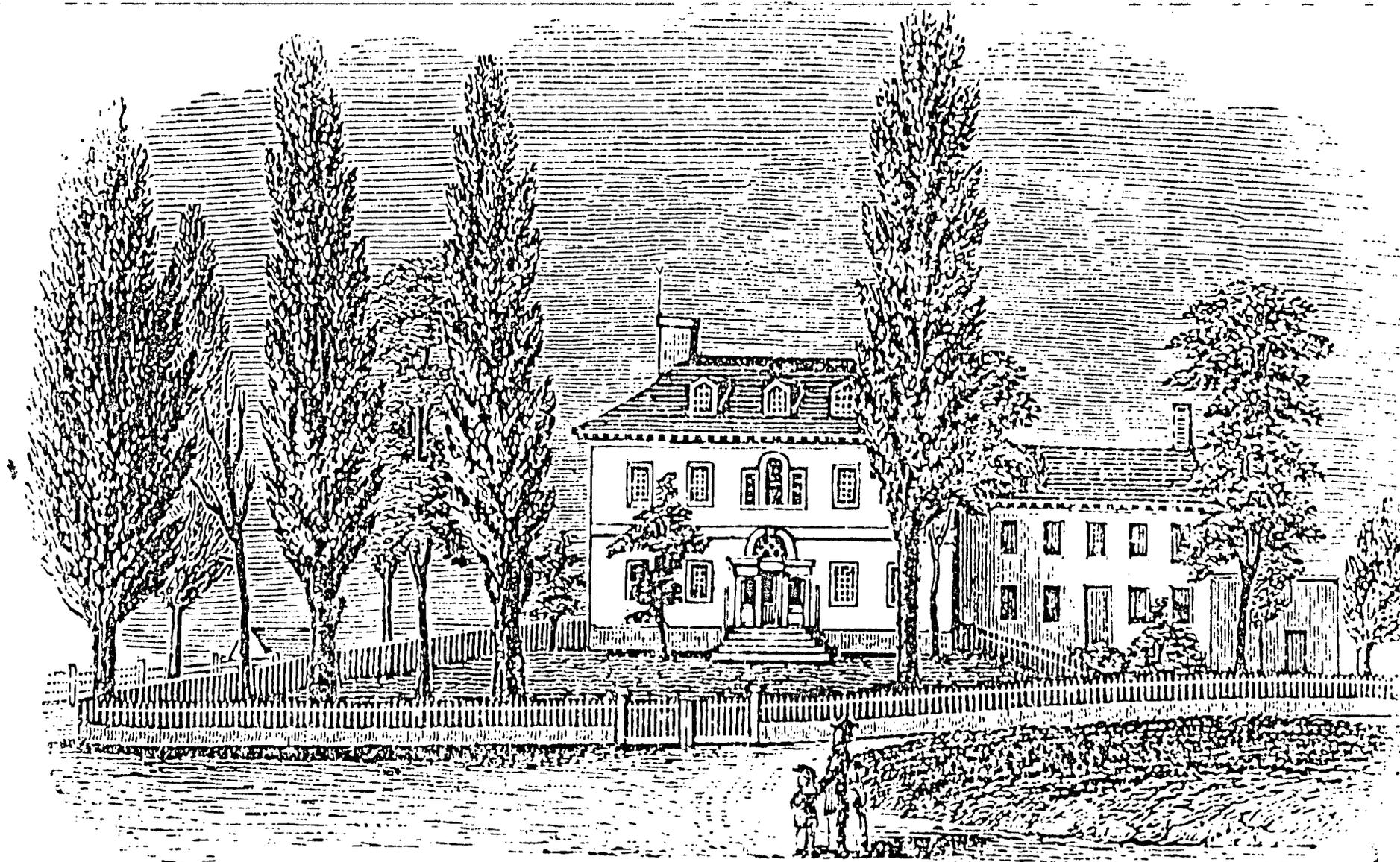
To treat the grounds, I suggest that they be landscaped and maintained in a manner that will promote the accomplishments of the broad goals and objectives of the National Park Service and the Morristown Historical Park. By developing the grounds which allows for a multiprogram activity, a broad base of the community can participate in programs and functions relating to preservation and native studies. This adaptive use of the grounds would permit a wide range of educational and cultural programs that could illustrate the history of not only the Ford family, but also the life and times of Morris County.

To retain the flexibility of use for the site, a landscape design that is attractive, provides privacy and low maintenance is desirable. The existing tree canopy should remain, as well as the brick walk and paths around the house. To reduce visual and noise pollution, a border planting of native shrubs and small trees should be planted. To provide color accent, flowering trees and shrubs should be incorporated into the design. Finally, the turf should be maintained as an unimproved lawn, rather than a manicured turf.

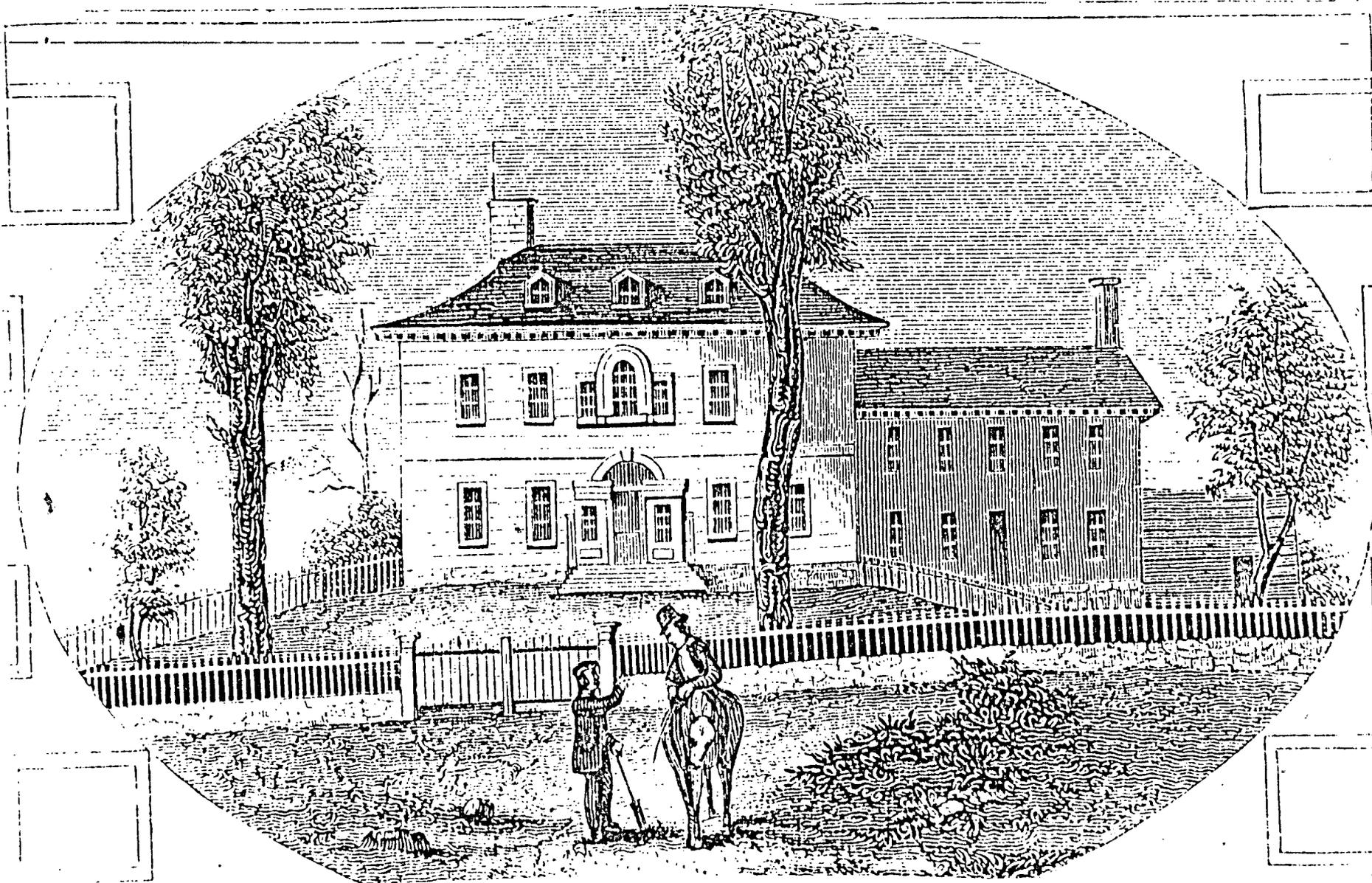
In order to assist the visitor in better understanding the situation at the Ford house during the Revolution, a model could be developed. The model would indicate the location of the house, stable, the roads, and existing terrain features. This could be augmented with an audio-visual program to further explain the Revolutionary period. The one suggestion I have for restoration is to remove the fencing along Morris Street and replace it with the style of fence built by Gabriel Ford. This one project would help to bring back the feeling and appearance of a private home. To compliment the written recommendation is a map indicating the treatment of the grounds.



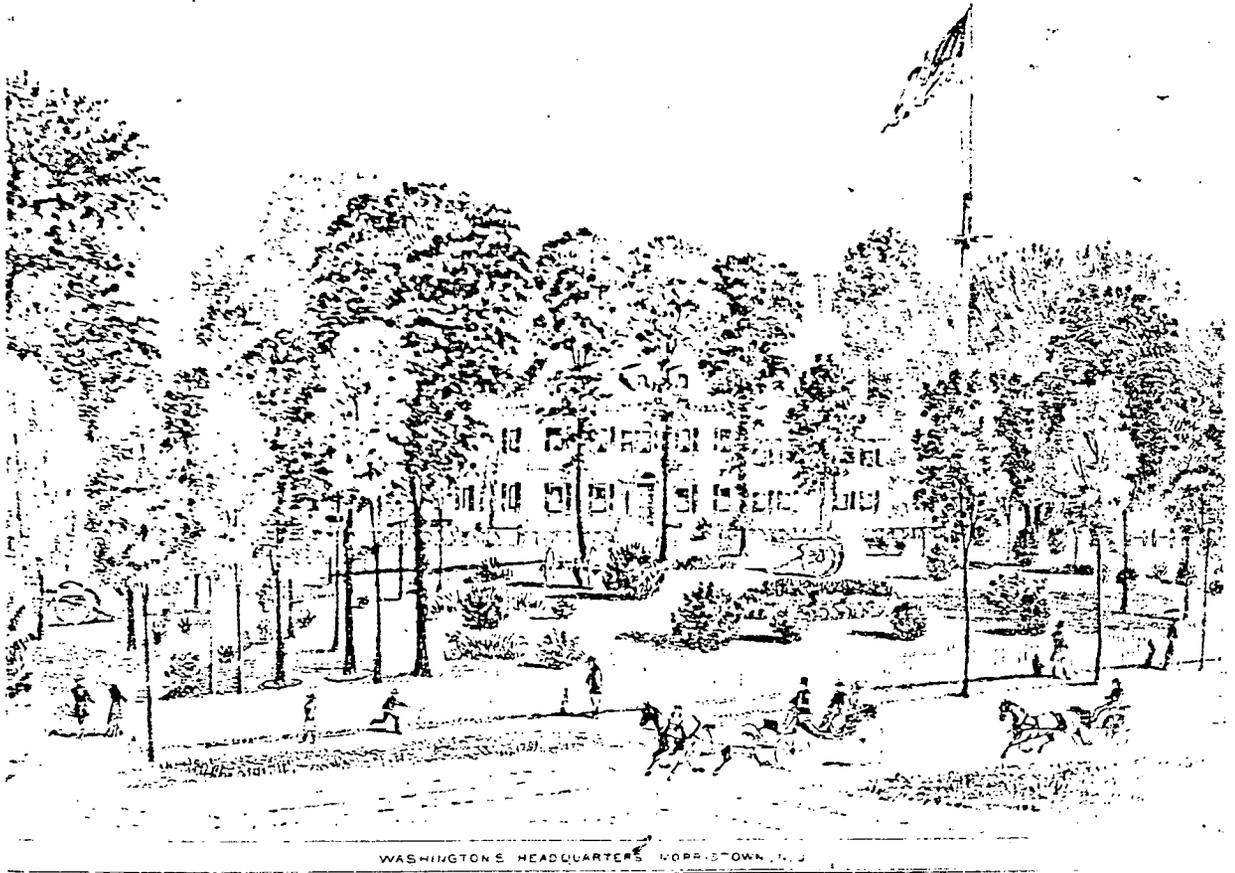
Line Engraving of Washington's Headquarters  
Morristown, New Jersey  
Present Residence of Hon. Judge Ford  
Artist and Date Unknown



Line Engraving of Washington's Headquarters  
Morristown, New Jersey  
Present Residence of Hon. Judge Ford  
Artist and Date Unknown



Line Engraving of Washington's Headquarters  
Morristown, New Jersey  
Present Residence of Hon. Judge Ford  
Artist and Date Unknown



Washington's Headquarters, cir. 1882

Morristown, New Jersey

Washington Association

Artist Unknown



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June 17, 1975

## Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Morristown-Edison Group

From: Staff Historian, Morristown National Historical Park

Subject: Ford Mansion Historic Grounds Report

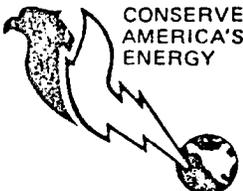
The attached historic grounds report was received at the Park on or about May 30, 1975. The original purchase order was dated October 9, 1974. During the fall and early winter of that year Mr. Massey visited the Park and with my help worked through the available documentation and maps on the subject in the Park research files.

Mr. Massey requested and received our agreement to an extension of the December 31, 1974 delivery date into January 1975. After repeated phone calls and letters, the study was finally received in May 1975 with a bill for \$477.80. This was \$222.20 less than anticipated in the original purchase order. A careful review of the subject study indicates that even at this reduced price, the study is deficient in many aspects, and certainly not what we had hoped for. While agreeing with our evaluation, the Regional Office advised us to accept the study and process the amended purchase order for payment.

Formal studies on paper tend over the years to gain full acceptance as truth because they exist in our files. For this reason, therefore, following is a critical review of aspects of the Historical Grounds Survey of Washington's Headquarters.

Acknowledgements

Although I assisted in the early stages of research, I did not edit the study, and only saw it as an almost completed document. The Park



Save Energy and You Serve America!

librarian is Mr. Thomas Smith. Mrs. Barbara Hoskins is the town librarian.

Introduction (third paragraph)

There is no clear evidence for the statement "it was not until the mid 1790's when the first landscape improvements to the pleasure grounds were made."

Page 4 (second paragraph)

While it is most likely, again there is no clear evidence for the statement, that while Jacob Ford commanded the New Jersey militia "construction and improvements to the house and grounds abated." We just don't know.

Page 9 (first paragraph)

We do not know the extent of the utilization of slave labor by Gabriel Ford. Some records indicate most labor was indentured servants.

Page 11 (third paragraph)

No evidence exists that the Washington Association ever attempted to restore the property "to the late 18th century appearance."

General comments

The purpose of the study was to compile all knowledge concerning the history of the grounds, with major emphasis on it's Revolutionary War appearance. Realizing the lack of specific 18th century documentation, we requested that the study would detail existing knowledge concerning similar homes and ground treatment in 18th century northern New Jersey for characteristic treatment of the time. The report was to include detailed recommendations for the restoration of the grounds to the 1779-80 appearance with a map locating all known and proposed ground features. This the study does not do, nor was the map included as a part of the complete report.

In sum total, the report is useful only as a general survey of existing on-site knowledge with some very general and vague recommendation for future Park development. What is still needed is a Ford Mansion Historic Grounds Report. This study can only serve as a beginning tool for such a report.

Bruce Stewart