Cliveden, Historic Pennsylvania House, to Be Opened Tomorrow as Museum
By DONALD JANSONSpecial to The New York Times
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Samuel Chew, center, last owner of Cliveden, the family home for two centuries, with Mr. and Mrs. James Biddle at dedication ceremonies Wednesday. Mr. Biddle is president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The home will open tomorrow as a public museum.

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PHILADELPHIA, Oct. 5—Cliveden, home of the Chew family for two centuries, will be opened to the public Saturday as a museum.

Gordon Gray, chairman of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, told 200 guests at a dedication ceremony last night that Cliveden was "one of the half-dozen most important houses in the country" because of its architectural, cultural, social and military significance.

Mr. Gray, former Secretary of the Army under President Truman and Special Assistant for National Security Affairs under President Eisenhower, called the 1763 Georgian house, its elegant period furniture and family records "a living document" of American history.

About 100,000 pages of Chew family documents, yet to be examined by scholars, may add rich detail to the story of 18th-century and 19th-century America.

The two-and-a-half-story stone house was built as a summer home by Benjamin Chew, Attorney General and Chief Justice of colonial Pennsylvania.

Samuel Chew, a great-great-great grandson, and other members of the family donated the house to the trust this year when taxes and maintenance of the six-acre estate became burdensome.

Mr. Chew said in an interview last night that it was "a little sad to see the house lose the family, but it's in good hands and I can sort of rest in peace."

Oldest Acquisition

Cliveden becomes the oldest of 12 properties administered by the trust, a private national organization chartered by Congress in 1949 to preserve sites and buildings significant in American history and culture.

It is also the Washington-based trust's first acquisition between the 67-acre estate of Jay Gould, the financier, in Tarrytown, N. Y., and the homes of Woodrow Wilson and Stephen Decatur in Washington.

The dedication last night marked the 195th anniversary of the Battle of Germantown, in which Cliveden played a key role.

George Washington had just lost Philadelphia, the revolutionary capital, after the Battle of Brandywine Creek 35 miles west of Philadelphia. On the morning of Oct. 4, 1777, he tried to retake the city but was repulsed in Germantown, then an outlying village, partly because 120 British soldiers took over Cliveden and used it as a fortress.

Some of the six-pound cannonballs that Washington's troops fired into the Chew house are still there. So are the marks of musket fire. Much of the statuary on the grounds is chipped from the battle, where more than 600 American soldiers lost their lives.

Washington's troops were unable to breach Cliveden's walls or to set fire to the house, and they later retreated to Valley Forge for the winter.

Flanking the doorway under its colonial flag last night were uniformed members of the First Troop, Philadelphia City Cavalry, the unit that served as Washington's bodyguard.

The troop had arrested Justice Chew and Gov. John Penn, accusing them of being agents of the Crown, before the British reached Philadelphia. Both were confined at Union Forge in New Jersey until the British occupation of Philadelphia ended in the spring of 1778.

Justice Chew had been a powerful ally of William Penn's heirs, the proprietors of the colony, often leading the Governor's Council in opposition to Benjamin Franklin and other rebellious spokesmen of the Pennsylvania Assembly.

Named Court President

But Justice Chew did not support the British Army, and after Pennsylvania became a commonwealth he was named president of its Court of Errors and Appeals, serving from 1791 until he retired 17 years later at the age of 85.

Last night, as harpsichord music emanated from the columned parlor, guests admired by candlelight the famed Gothic sofa, Hepplewhite table and other furniture that were in the house when Lafayette, Benedict Arnold and some of the country's Founding Fathers came to visit.

"With its furnishings and papers," said James Biddle, Philadelphian who is president of the National Trust, "Cliveden is one of the most important 18th-century houses in America. Opening it as a museum is our first major effort in the trust's observance of the American bicentennial."

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