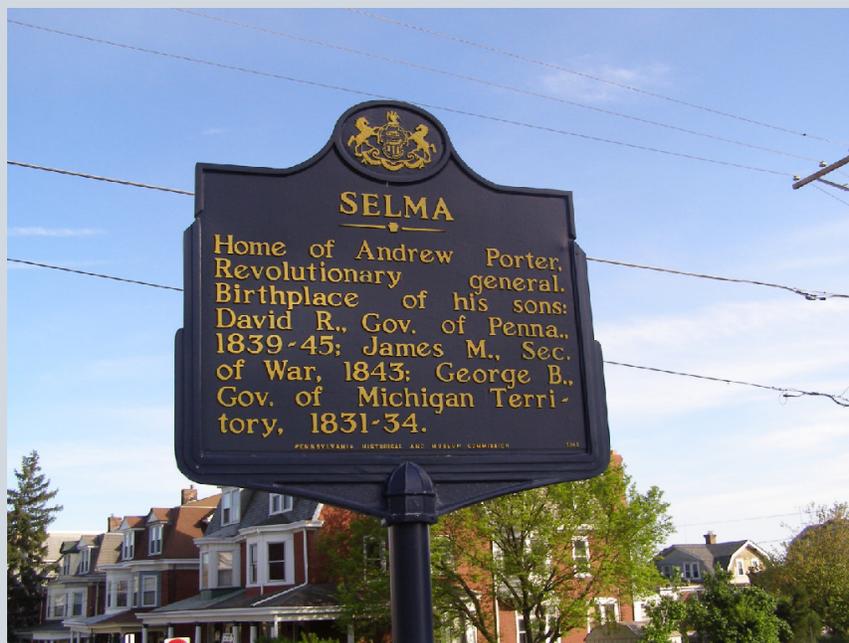


History of Selma



Selma Mansion located at 1301 in West Airy Street, Norristown was built by Andrew Porter in 1794, the land on which it stands being acquired in 1786, the house being built around a small structure that stood there previously. Porter was one of the founders of the U.S. Marine Corps and Pennsylvania's Surveyor General. Other prominent residents of the home were his sons David Rittenhouse Porter who served as governor of Pennsylvania from 1839 - 1845. His son George Bryan Porter, who served as governor of Michigan Territory and his youngest son, James Madison Porter, who was Secretary of War & primary founder of Lafayette College in Easton. Granddaughter Eliza Parker married Robert Todd and gave birth to Mary Todd who grew up to marry Abraham Lincoln, our 16th president.



In 1821 the Selma Farm was sold to the Andrew Knox family, the house and property being purchased as a gift from his father-in-law Thomas Rice to his daughter Rebecca, Knox's wife. Andrew Knox had been a merchant in Savannah, GA up until the War of 1812 when the embargo imposed on British trading ruined him. Subsequently he moved himself and his family to his new home up north. After his death the home passed into the hands of his son Col. Thomas P. Knox, president of the Pennsylvania Agricultural Society. In 1853 Knox had an engineer divide sections of the property into lots and sold 40 of his 120 acre estate leading to the development of the West End of Norristown.

The home was next acquired by Joseph Fornance, son of the Honorable Joseph Fornance, who married Knox daughter Ellen Knox. The elder Joseph Fornance was president of the Norristown town Council and a U.S. Congressman. The younger Joseph Fornance was a lawyer and president of the Historical Society of Montgomery County. In 1902 the younger Joseph sold an additional 22 acres of the former Selma Farm. The house passed down to Joseph the younger's son Joseph Knox Fornance and his wife and served as their home until his widow Ruth passed away in 1982. He had passed away previously in 1965.

The mansion is in the Federal Style, although the interior woodwork and proportions are Colonial or Georgian. The porches are Italianate, having been added in the mid-19th century. After Mrs. Fornance's death the mansion along with its contents of period objects, was offered in turn to the State, Montgomery County and borough of Norristown. Unfortunately, none took the generous offer. Countless wonderful antiques and mementos of the past were lost in an unbelievable "yard sale". It is said that whole crates of Union soldier uniforms, once stored in the barn or wagon house, were snatched up by bargain hunters. At the last moment the house was saved from the wrecker's ball. The Norristown Preservation Society was formed to purchase the house and transform it into a focal point of pride for not only residents of the county seat, but all of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania and the nation.