

Darienite

News for Darien

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Historic Mather Homestead in Darien Prepares to Open as a Museum

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One of Darien's oldest houses, raided by Tories during the American Revolution and later the summer home of the first director of the U.S. National Parks Service, is getting ready to open to the public later this year.

The home at [19 Stephen Mather Road](#) was built in 1778 by Joseph Mather, a church deacon (and son of the Rev. Moses Mather, then minister of Darien's Congregational Church). Joseph Mather chose a spot for it in the north of town thought to be less likely raided by Tories. Mather's descendants have owned it until now.

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A ribbon-cutting ceremony is scheduled for May 5 to mark the transfer of the property from the Mather family to the new Mather Homestead Foundation. The foundation will open the house to small groups of visitors by appointment sometime this spring, said foundation Executive Director Anna Denoyer.

"We hope to be offering school tours starting in the fall," she said in an email.

Here's a description of the home, provided by the foundation (and from an additional email from Denoyer):

The Mather Homestead, built in 1778 by the Deacon Joseph Mather, recently became a Protected Town Landmark by the town of Darien and will soon be opening to the public on a limited basis as a museum.

A notable example of late 18th century houses, this historic residence served as a safe house for neighbors to hide valuables from the British during the Revolutionary War and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

While Deacon Mather was off fighting the war, his wife, Sarah, was home taking care of 11 children and helping their neighbors hide their valuables in the house. Unfortunately, with the help of Tory spies, the British found their way to the home with bayonets in search of valuables.

Sarah had hidden many of the valuables, estimated at nearly 100 pounds of silver and clothing, into the water of a deep well for safekeeping, but the British found it anyway. However, they did not find the silver flatware owned by neighbors that was hidden in the "high-boy" chest dresser that still resides in the dining room of the home.

The Homestead eventually became the home of Stephen Tyng Mather, who is credited with starting the U.S. National Parks Service and serving as its first director from 1917 to 1929. When Mather became assistant to the Secretary of the Interior in 1915, the U.S. owned only 14 parks and 18 national monuments, all administered by army officers or political appointees.

When Mather retired in 1929, he left a professionally administered, progressive National Park Service that included 20 parks and 32 national monuments. Mather laid a sound basis for the future enlargement and development of a national park movement in the U.S.

Stephen Tyng Mather's daughter, Bertha Floy Mather McPherson, founded the Darien Historical Society in 1953 and served as the society's first president.

The homestead, including its contents, has been in the family for many generations and is currently owned by Bertha McPherson's children, who are generously donating it to the Mather Homestead Foundation, which will make the Homestead available to the public for educational purposes and maintain it as a museum starting this year.

For More Information

Learn more on the Web here:

- [Mather Homestead website](#)
- [on Facebook](#)
- [Stephen Tyng Mather page](#) on the National Parks Service website
- [Stephen Mather](#) — article on Wikipedia
- [Stephen Mather Home](#) — article on Wikipedia

School Visits

According to the [Mather Homestead website](#):

Starting during the 2017 to 2018 academic year, we welcome school groups to tour the homestead and learn about its important role in our town and country's history. Visits will be catered to groups but will focus on the following:

Revolutionary War Times:

Deacon Joseph Mather built the homestead as a refuge from the British. Discover where treasures were hidden from the British during the war.

Stephen Tyng Mather and the National Parks System:

Stephen Mather, great-grandson of Deacon Joseph Mather, was an environmentalist and the founder and first Director of our National Parks Service. Learn about the lasting impact his work has had on our country.

?Eighteenth and nineteenth century living:

The Mather Homestead is largely untouched from earlier times when meals were cooked in the fireplace and animals grazed in the yard.