

# Gerald R. Ford Birthsite and Gardens

Omaha, Nebraska

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*Birthplace site today*

## A President's Roots in Omaha

The ornate Victorian house at 3202 Woolworth Avenue was one of the finest homes in Omaha. The 3-story, 14-room house reflected the status of its wealthy occupants, the King family. The King's only son Leslie married Dorothy Gardner. In the summer of 1913, the young couple lived in this house with the senior Kings, awaiting Dorothy's first child.

On a hot and steamy July 14, 1913, Leslie Lynch King, Jr., was born. Soon the new mother took the little boy to live with her parents in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The King marriage ended in divorce and in 1916 Dorothy remarried. The 3-year old boy was adopted by his stepfather, and became Gerald Rudolph Ford, Jr.

## Formative Years

- Honor student
- Football star
- Law degree, Yale University
- World War II officer in Pacific
- Law practice in Grand Rapids
- Married Elizabeth (Betty) Bloomer in 1948
- Elected to Congress in 1948
- Won 13 consecutive terms in the House of Representatives
- In 1965, elected House Minority Leader
- Appointed Vice President, December 6, 1973, after the resignation of Spiro Agnew

## The Presidency

When President Richard Nixon resigned on August 9, 1974, Gerald Ford was sworn in as the 38th President of the United States.

Faced with the Vietnam War, rising inflation, the divisive Watergate issue, and a Congress eager to reassert its power over the executive branch, President Ford took charge during a time of national crisis. President Ford believed that through modest tax and spending cuts, and deregulating energy prices to stimulate production, he could contain both inflation and unemployment. He did not hesitate to use the veto to control government spending.

In foreign policy, Gerald Ford continued *detente* with the Soviet Union and made gains in arms control, human rights, and trade. He supported the joint Apollo-Soyuz space flights. In 1975, Ford ruled out any intervention in Southeast Asia when South Vietnam fell to communist North Vietnam troops.

In the 1976 presidential campaign, Ford defeated Ronald Reagan for the Republican nomination, but then narrowly lost to Democrat Jimmy Carter in one of the closest elections in American history.

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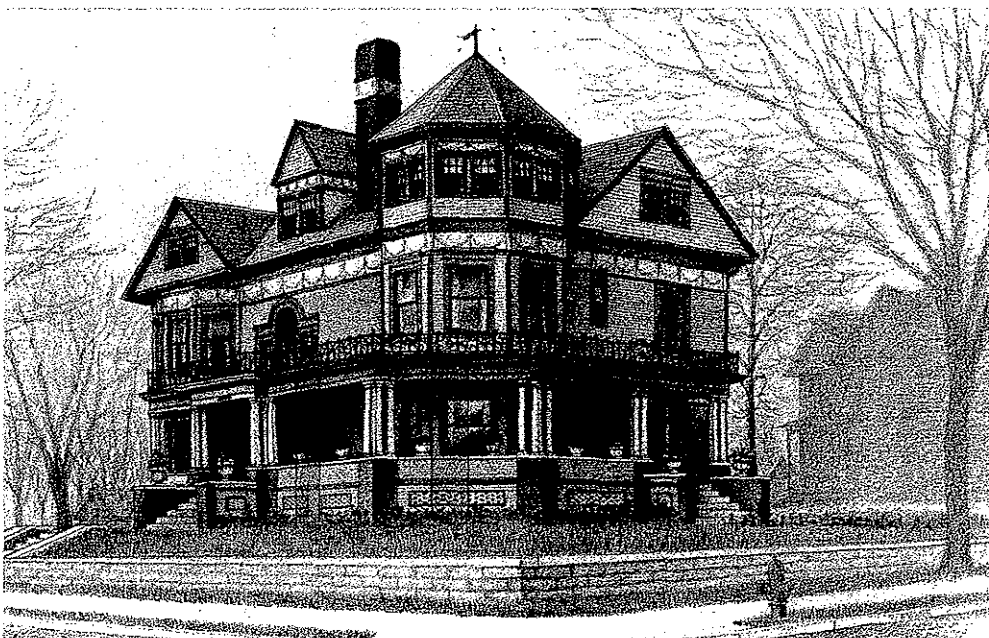
## After the Presidency



President and Mrs. Ford

On January 20, 1977, Gerald and Betty Ford left the White House for their new home near Palm Springs, California. The Fords continue to vacation at their retreat near Vail, Colorado, where the former president enjoys golf and skiing. The couple remains active on behalf of the Republican Party and charities. Gerald Ford serves on numerous corporate boards and is frequently on the speaking circuit.

## The Gerald R. Ford Birthsite and Gardens



Artist rendition of birthplace house in 1913

Rudy Evans

In 1971, President Ford's birthplace home was razed following a fire. Upon Ford's succession to the presidency in 1974, Omaha businessman James M. Paxson purchased the property, intending to build a memorial.

University of Nebraska architecture student Gary L. Dubas of Omaha won the design competition. The Dubas plan called for a garden scene of walkways and shrubbery to mark the original elements of the former home. The Omaha architectural firm Schlott-Farrington and Associates added a colonnade modeled after the south portico of the White House, thereby linking the president's birthplace to his home in Washington, D.C. A kiosk, representing the stately turret of the original home, contains birthsite

information as well as presidential mementoes.

Mr. Paxson donated the birthsite and gardens to the City of Omaha. Gerald Ford spoke at the September 21, 1977, dedication ceremony and unveiled the centerpiece, a large white Georgian marble tablet inside the colonnade with the inscription from his inaugural speech.

The following year, a rose garden was added on an adjacent lot. Conceived by Mr. Paxson, the rose garden honored former First Lady Betty Ford, and represented yet another link to the White House. On July 12, 1980, the Fords returned to Omaha to dedicate the rose garden, which has 400 rose bushes of many varieties.

## Directions to the Birthsite and Gardens



The Gerald R. Ford Birthsite and Gardens is operated by Omaha's Department of Parks, Recreation, and Public Property. It is open daily at no charge.

This brochure was prepared by the National Park Service, with the assistance of Rudy Evans, for the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation.

