

# The Chews and the Ridgelys



**Benjamin Chew Sr. (1722-1810)**  
Of the Revolutionary Generation, Benjamin Chew was well known in the colonies as a prominent Philadelphia lawyer. He served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Philadelphia from 1774-1777. In addition, he maintained a close, lifelong friendship with George Washington and served as a pro bono legal consultant at the Constitutional Convention in 1787. He was responsible for building Cliveden.



**Benjamin Chew Jr. (1758-1844)**  
Like his father, Benjamin Chew Jr. was a successful Philadelphia lawyer, and a member of the city's elite. His major contribution to the family was converting Cliveden into a full-time operational farm and engaging in land speculation on the Pennsylvania frontier. He was a gentleman farmer who kept a labor force of hired and enslaved workers. He was also a major confidant to his son Henry, and provided advice on and support for the operations of Epsom Farm.



**Katherine Banning Chew (1770-1855)** Was the wife of Benjamin Chew Jr. and mother of Henry Banning Chew. When her husband died in 1844, a bitter and divisive family quarrel erupted over his estate, pitting Katherine and her son Benjamin against the other Chew children. In her old age, Katherine fought incessantly over money with her son, Henry, often signing her letters with the guilt laden message: "Your still affectionate, though deeply afflicted mother."



**Cliveden, Germantown, Pennsylvania. Chew Family Seat**  
This elegant Georgian-style mansion was built as a summer retreat for the Chew family in 1763. It would later become the primary ancestral home of the Chews. The bloodiest fighting of the battle of Germantown took place in and around Cliveden in 1777. Benjamin Chew Jr. converted the estate into a full-time operational farm after the death of his father, Benjamin Chew Sr. Later, his grandson Samuel Chew occupied the estate. The mansion was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1966 and is now owned and operated as a museum by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

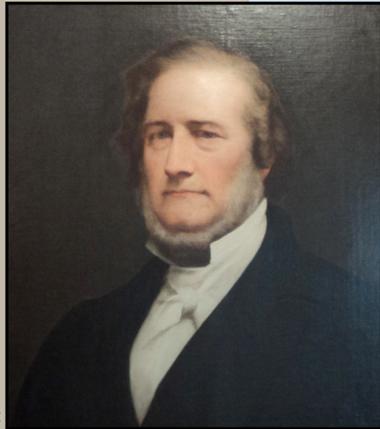


Epsom Mansion, ca. 1843. Baltimore County. Home of Henry Banning Chew and Harriet Ridgely Chew.

**Henry Banning Chew (1800-1866)**

Henry Banning Chew spent most of his adult life as the master of Epsom. Most of what we know about the property from this period comes to us from his meticulous record-keeping. He was born in Philadelphia and educated at the University of Pennsylvania. By the age of nineteen, he was engaged in a mercantile venture shipping goods between Philadelphia and the Caribbean. Following ill-fortune in trade, and a marriage to Harriet Ridgely, he moved to Epsom Farm where he began his career as a gentleman farmer.

Chew operated the farm with moderate success for just over thirty years. During that period, he played a prominent role in the Towson Town area. He and his second wife, Elizabeth Ann Ralston Chew (1793-1862), provided land for and helped build Towson Town's first house of worship, Epsom Chapel. He also built several houses in Towson town, in an area that became known as Chewsville and was active in local politics. He returned to his native Philadelphia in 1862 following the death of his second wife, alarmed and disgusted with Maryland politics during the Civil War. He died at Cliveden in 1866.



**Charles Ridgely Chew (1827-1876)**

Was the eldest surviving child of Henry and Harriet. As he grew older, he began to share the responsibilities of running Epsom with his father. He was never inclined towards academic pursuits and took the greatest interest in agriculture. He raised his own family at Epsom and after his father's death, became master of the estate himself. He rose to prominence in the Towson community and organized a pro-Union militia group known as the Towsontown Guard. His military career was cut short after accidentally shooting himself in the foot shortly after the start of the Civil War. His offspring continued the family line in Baltimore County.



**Benjamin Chew (1830-1885)**

Little is known about the lifelong bachelor, Benjamin, other than his sense of humor. He was popularly known in his community as a profuse teller of tall tales and anecdotes. In 1858, his family gave him his own 280 acre farm in eastern Baltimore County known as Birchland.

**Harriet Ridgely (1802-1835)**

Harriet Ridgely was the youngest daughter of Charles Carnan Ridgely and Priscilla Dorsey Ridgely. She married Henry Banning Chew in 1822. Like her mother, she was an ardent Methodist. She was also a harsh critic of slavery and urged her father and husband to free their slaves. During her marriage, Harriet gave birth to eight children (only three of whom lived past the age of twenty) and suffered frequent illness. She died tragically in childbirth at the age of thirty-two.



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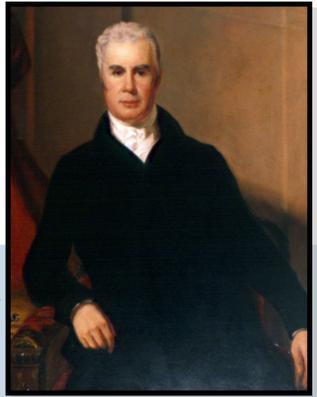
**Samuel Chew (1832-1887)**

Highly regarded by those who knew him, Samuel was well educated and a successful lawyer. As a young adult he spent much of his time at the family home, Cliveden. After marriage, he settled there and became its master following the death of his father. Samuel was responsible for rejuvenating the family's fortune through a marriage with Mary Brown, daughter of the wealthy Philadelphia industrialist, David Sands Brown.



**Charles Carnan Ridgely (1760-1829)**

Second master of Hampton, governor of Maryland from 1816-1819, and one of the wealthiest men in Maryland. At the height of his career, he owned over 25,000 acres of land and over 300 enslaved workers. Under his tenure, Hampton was heavily involved in agriculture and the production of iron. Upon his death, his will freed some of his enslaved workers and provided for the eventual freedom of all others through gradual manumission. However, the transfer of most of his enslaved workers to his children ensured the perpetuation of the institution at Epsom and elsewhere up until the Civil War.



**Priscilla Dorsey (1762-1814)** Priscilla Dorsey was the daughter of Caleb and Priscilla Dorsey of "Belmont." She married Charles Carnan Ridgely in 1782. She had 14 children with him, 11 of whom survived to adulthood. She instilled her deep piety and Methodist beliefs in her daughters.



**Hampton, Towson, Maryland. Ridgely Family Seat.**

This immense 24,000 square foot Georgian mansion, located adjacent to Epsom Farm, was one of the largest and most ornate in America at the time of its completion in 1790. It became the seat of seven generations of the Ridgely Family. Harriet Ridgely Chew was born there and following her marriage to Henry Chew, she and her family were frequent guests. Several Chew children, as well as Harriet, were buried in the Ridgely family vault at Hampton. Epsom Farm originated in the eighteenth century as a parcel of the vast Ridgely landholdings, and for many years, shared a border with the Hampton estate.



"Hampton Vault", Henry Chew, *Memorial Journal*, Chew Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.