



FLORIDA HOUSE  
On Capitol Hill

# The History of Florida House

The Victorian-style row house now known as Florida House was built in 1891 for \$5,000 by Edwin Manning, an architect working on the Library of Congress. The home was sold several times, and at one time was even a boarding house. By the 1970's, though, the house had fallen into disrepair.



In the late 60's, Lawton and Rhea Chiles were visiting Washington D.C. on vacation with their young children. They got lost and found themselves on Embassy Row. One of the children said, "Let's go to Florida's embassy, and they will tell us where we are." Their parents explained that only foreign countries had embassies but the idea, however, intrigued Mrs. Chiles.



After Lawton Chiles was first elected to the Senate in 1970, Mrs. Chiles started spending more time in Washington, D.C. and exploring the east side of the Capitol even though the neighborhood was unsafe and the properties uninhabitable. She found the house on the corner of 2nd and East Capital in total disrepair - almost to the point of needing demolition. But, there was a For Sale sign in the window. Mrs. Chiles knew this was going to be Florida's Embassy. She arranged the purchase of the property with \$5,000 of her own money and \$120,000 raised from friends in Florida.

The house was completely renovated with donations from Floridians and others with an interest in seeing how a state embassy would operate. There are reception rooms on the main and upper floors. On the upper floor, visitors have an extraordinary view of the Capitol Dome.

Florida House opened its doors in October 1973. Today, the mission remains the same – to **connect, celebrate and champion Florida to the world**. Whether a member of the Congressional Delegation, visitors, students, families or those doing business, Florida House is a place of respite for all who enter.



**Florida House remains today a 501(c)3 non-profit, non-partisan organization that does not accept federal or state tax dollars – just as Mrs. Chiles initially envisioned it.** She served as the president and CEO of Florida House from 1973 until 1988 and was Chairman Emeritus until her death in 2015. She was a practicing artist and her watercolor, "Window to Washington," depicting the beautiful view of the Capitol from the House's upstairs window, still graces Florida House. Mrs. Chiles partnered with her husband, Lawton, during his 55 years of public service and the Chiles family continues to be involved with Florida House to this day.

As we approach our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in October 2023, Florida House is proud to be America's Only State Embassy in Washington, D.C. and continue the legacy of Mrs. Chiles. Our Trustees are ensuring our long-term vision and working with the next generation of leaders from Florida. We invite you to come visit us in our nation's capital and spread the word!