

# ***The Dazzling duPont Dynasty***

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Welcome to du Pont territory—an enclave of art, culture and luxury. It all began around the turn of the nineteenth century when Pierre Samuel du Pont brought his family to the United States to escape the aftermath of the French revolution. As an aristocrat about to be stripped of privilege and property, he chose to settle in an area known as the Brandywine Valley—bordering both Delaware and Pennsylvania, just outside of Wilmington. Here he and his equally aristocratic wife Nicole had two sons, Victor Marie and Eluthère Irenée, who founded the powder works known as the E.I. Du Pont de Nemours Company. Eluthère Irenée and his French wife Sophie had four children. In 1803 they built the first home owned by a du Pont—Elutherian Mills, a Georgian style residence on the wooded hillside tract known as Hagley. Eluthère Irenée had his office at home. Down the hill right on the property along the Brandywine River were the little shops that first produced black powder and the small stone homes of the workers. Today, their American antique-filled residence displays generations of du Pont memorabilia and the stone mills, storehouses and waterwheel demonstrate munitions powder manufacture in the early 1800s.

Family member Antoine Bidermann arrived in Delaware from Switzerland to observe the family business and stayed on to become a partner. He married E.I. du Pont's second daughter Evelina Gabrielle. They lived with her parents until 1837, then Antoine purchased 450 acres from his father-in-law to build a twelve room Greek Revival home. This was the beginning of Winterthur, named after Bidermann's ancestral home in Switzerland.

Antoine and Evelina's only child James inherited Winterthur in 1865. James preferred to live in France; so a year later he sold it to his uncle Henry, who never lived there but enjoyed working the farmland. In 1874 his son Henry Algernon and wife Pauline moved in and by 1889, they had inherited it. By 1925 several renovations and an extensive working farm of animals, fruits, vegetables and flowers had been established. A golf course, sawmill, railroad station and post office turned the property into a sort of village.

Henry Francis du Pont became the fifth owner of Winterthur after his father died in 1926. For 43 years he continued to develop his 2400 acre farm, which included a 70 acre flower garden. He raised prize winning Galloway cattle—known for being solid black-- front and rear with a white band around the middle; he was a gentleman farmer and pursued his passion for American antiques that dated prior to 1860. Henry Francis then added a nine story wing to the burgeoning mansion to display his pristine acquisitions. He had decided to turn the multi-winged house into a museum. In 1951 when he opened Winterthur to the public, he moved to a Regency style villa that he had built just a few yards away; today the stone villa serves as the Winterthur Museum Store. Henry Francis du Pont died in 1969.

Winterthur is divided into five styles, periods or themes. It is easy to absorb what period you are looking at; the very first gallery lays out the chronology of fine American antique furniture. A tour guide, easy to read labels and magnificent examples explain the history of the museum's collection. Du Pont's specific themes are: *Early Settlement and Sophistication 1650-1730*), reflecting the late Renaissance and Mannerist designs of England and the Netherlands; transition to the Queen Anne style introduces the *Passion for Rococo* showcasing the finest American Chippendale furniture in the world—including the dazzling Philadelphia Gratz high chest; *East Meets West* includes more Chippendale objects and the breathtaking export porcelain of the Society of the Cincinnati service; *Arts of the Pennsylvania Dutch* was a du Pont special interest—he loved the fraktur, pottery and cupboards of the eastern Pennsylvania German settlers; and *American Classicism* certainly bears a resemblance to neo-classic designs dating back to the Greeks, Romans and French Empire styles.

Alfred Irénée du Pont was the great grandson of Eluthère Irénée du Pont, founder of what evolved into one of the world's leading chemical giants. In the early 1900s, Alfred scoured the Brandywine countryside to acquire the 300 acres on which he built Nemours, a magnificent 16<sup>th</sup> century château. Nemours was the French town that Pierre Samuel represented as a member of the Etats Généraux in 1789. He expanded the property to 1500 acres to now include the adjacent Du Pont Country Club and the Alfred I. du Pont Hospital for Children. The Brandywine granite mansion is a miniature Petit Trianon replete with similar formal gardens. Finished in 1910, it reflects French classic symmetry. There are 102 rooms, spanning 47,000 square feet. The visitor is able to see about 36 rooms on a guided tour limited to five persons, then take a self-guided tour of the extensive gardens. The shuttle bus to and from the house stops at the carriage house, which holds an impression collection of vintage Cadillacs, Buicks and Rolls Royces.

Alfred married three times. He had four children with Bessie Gardner du Pont, then divorced her. His second wife was Alicia Bradford, whose fondness for all things French inspired the building of Nemours. Alicia came into the marriage with one daughter Alicia Maddox and the couple adopted Denise, a French World War I orphan. Alicia Bradford died young at the age of 45 and Alfred married for a third time, this time to Jessie Dew Ball, who came from a prominent Virginia family and was an assistant elementary school principal. The unpretentious second floor bedrooms reflect Jessie's desire for comfort rather than elegance. On the ground floor, there are billiards, two bowling alleys, a water processing plant and back up power generators.

There are fine European paintings throughout Nemours by artists such as Bosch, Canaletto, Murillo, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Rosa Bonheur. The furniture is mostly Louis XIV to Louis XVI, although an American Chippendale chair used at Mount Vernon and a Federal chair that was at Congress Hall in Philadelphia shortly after the American Revolution are in the Morning Room. Musical motifs are everywhere in the Music Room—gold harps over the doors, lyre shaped sconces,

woven into the Beauvais tapestry chairs and musical scenes in the lace curtains proclaim the theme.

The saga continues to 1906 with industrialist and financier Pierre S. du Pont, who bought 202 acres of land just across the Delaware line in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. The land had passed through several owners, but thrived as an arboretum of conifers and deciduous trees under the careful eye of George Washington Pierce. When Pierre heard that the park was deteriorating and that its trees were to be cut down, he arranged to buy the property and its farmhouse for \$16,000.00. Today there are more than 1000 acres. His first garden was an old-fashioned English style cottage garden with flowers, trellises, benches and a one jet fountain. Trips to Italy's Villa d'Este and to Siena resulted in elaborate fountains and an outdoor theatre for the gardens. When he died in 1954, 10 years after his wife, Longwood Gardens was turned over to a Foundation which operates it "for the sole use of the public for purposes of exhibition, instruction, education and enjoyment."

It is ironic that du Pont genealogy ends with the Italian Renaissance style Hotel DuPont where geographically many visitors begin. The elegant four star hotel in downtown Wilmington is listed in Historic Hotels of America. Pierre S. du Pont commissioned teams of Italian and French craftsmen to lovingly create the Lobby's hand carved ceilings, the carved oak paneling and carved ceilings in the formal Green Room dining room (renowned for its Sunday brunch) and the twenty medallions of famous women in history circling the ceilings of the Gold Ballroom. The ballroom walls have been etched in the five layer *sgraffito* process. The two formal dining rooms present the finest cuisine served by a staff consisting of many professionals that have been on hand for twenty years. The historic Brandywine Room is a miniature museum; dine surrounded by generations of Wyeth paintings with the focus on Andrew Wyeth. Here the visitor can live as Pierre S. du Pont lived, because for many years it was his in town home, retreating to his Longwood Gardens estate on weekends. The hotel is owned by the Du Pont company and is constantly bustling with social and corporate events.

It is essential to understand that the du Pont love for elegance and luxury was equaled by their desire to achieve and accomplish. Every du Pont family member was an educated, serious, hard-working, talented individual who was able to transform his skill into concrete accomplishment. Witness the meticulously chosen furniture, architectural plans for houses, horticultural brilliance and entrepreneurial spirit that guided the du Pont dynasty. And their willingness to share their intellectual brilliance and financial largesse with the entire world is even more impressive.

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