The du Ponts of the Brandywine Valley

Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours (1739–1817)
Philosopher and Economist
m. 1766, Nicole Charlotte Marie Louise Le Dée de Rencourt (1743–1787) 2 children

Eleuthère Irénée du Pont (1771–1834)
Founder of E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co.
m. 1791, Sophie Madeleine Dalmas (1775–1828) 7 children

Henry Francis du Pont (1880–1969)
Collector, Gentleman farmer
m. 1916, Ruth Wales (1889–1967) 2 children

For more information on the genealogy and history of the du Pont family, please visit winterthur.org/genealogy.
Beginnings in America

The Winterthur story begins four generations before Henry Francis du Pont, when his great-great-grandfather, Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours, gathered his family and departed post-Revolutionary France for America. This transplanting of the du Pont family in 1800 would leave an indelible mark on the Brandywine Valley.

In 1802 Pierre Samuel’s youngest son, Eleuthère Irénée, founded E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., a gunpowder manufactory along the banks of the Brandywine Creek. In addition to being a chemist, Irénée was a farmer and botanist. He built the first du Pont family home in the Brandywine Valley, Eleutherian Mills, on a tract of land known as Hagley, adjacent to the powder mills. He planted an orchard and extensive garden, farmed, and increased the size of the estate, leaving behind not only an industrial company that bears his name but also a family tradition of agriculture, horticulture, and preservation that has influenced the du Pont family activities in America.

I was born at Winterthur and have always loved everything connected with it.
— Henry Francis du Pont

The Du Ponts of Winterthur

In 1816 Irénée’s daughter Eveline married Jacques Antoine Bidermann, an inventor in E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co. In 1837 the couple purchased 450 acres from her father’s estate, built a 12-room Greek Revival house, and named the property Winterthur in honor of Antoine’s ancestral home in Switzerland. Over the years they developed flower, fruit, and vegetable gardens. In 1867 their son James sold Winterthur to Evelina’s brother General Henry du Pont.

Henry maintained the property well and gifted it to his son Colonel Henry Algeron du Pont, who married Pauline Foster in 1874. Henry Algeron inherited the estate in 1889, increased the size of the house considerably, and continued the farm and garden tradition begun by the family in France. A soldier, recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor, and U.S. Senator, his most enduring legacy was the deep sense of civic responsibility he instilled in his children.

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Henry Francis du Pont: A Grand Vision

Henry Francis and his sister, Louise, were the only surviving children of Henry Algeron and Pauline. H. F. studied horticulture at Harvard’s Bussian Institution and in 1903, one year after his mother’s death, assumed the duties of household management at Winterthur and began his lifelong work in the garden.

In 1916 he married Ruth Wales, and they had two daughters, Pauline Louise and Ruth Ellen. By 1925 the estate included farms, extensive flower gardens with greenhouses, a golf course, railroad station, and post office. H. F. inherited the property in 1926 and during the next 43 years further developed the farmland, raised a prize-winning dairy herd of Holstein-Friesians, collaborated with landscape architect Marian Coffin to island the garden into the 2,630-acre landscapes, and added a wing to the house to display his collection of American antiques.

When Winterthur opened to the public in 1951, the du Ponts moved to a smaller house nearby, which is now the Museum Store on Clenny Run.

Du Ponts in the Brandywine Valley

The Winterthur story is but one chapter in the legacy of the du Pont family in the Brandywine Valley. Numerous cousins of Henry Francis du Pont have also made their names known in the world of horticulture and preservation. In 1909 Pierre Samuel du Pont began the development of his wooded property, Longwood, just a few miles from Winterthur. That same year, Alfred du Pont embarked on the construction of Nemours, his enormous Winington mansion and formal gardens. A few years later, Lammot du Pont Copeland purchased the land for his house and extensive garden at Mt. Cuba. And in 1967 George A. (Frolic) Weymouth spearheaded the formation of the Brandywine Conservancy and its Brandywine River Museum. These and other properties, including Eleutherian Mills, the original family home at Hagley that was restored by H. F.’s sister, Louise, are all maintained for the enjoyment of the public. They clearly document the family’s commitment to preservation of the Brandywine Valley landscape.

To American family dominated a single state longer than the du Ponts of Delaware. French immigrants who arrived in America January 1, 1800, and who founded the highly profitable DuPont Company, became a dynasty of publicity-shy entrepreneurs, engineers, horticulturists, and collectors. The family pursued many passions, resulting in the exquisite art collections, botanical gardens, and libraries now enjoyed by the American public.

Above: Painting of Ruth Wales du Pont (Mrs. Henry Francis du Pont) and daughter Pauline Louise by Harrington Mann, 1921. Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont.


Photo above: Henry Francis du Pont (center) with his sister, Louise du Pont, and their beloved nurse Philippine Veyssier (Popo), behind the Winterthur house, 1884. Winterthur Archives.


Photo above: Painting of Henry du Pont (left) with his sister, Louise du Pont, and their beloved nurse Philippine Veyssier (Popo), behind the Winterthur house, 1884. Winterthur Archives.