



T. Coleman DuPont, 1863-1930

In 1900, by the age of 37, T. Coleman du Pont had made his vast fortune in coal, steel, insurance, and commercial real estate. In 1902, he joined his cousins in taking control of, and incorporating, the DuPont Company, serving as its president from then until 1915. He was elected twice to the U.S. Senate and was the founder of the Wilmington Trust Company. In 1911, he offered to build a “Grand Boulevard” the length of Delaware and donate the road to the state. The silver dedication plaque and ceremonial stake of the Coleman du Pont Boulevard, now known as the DuPont Highway, are on display in Buena Vista’s Heritage Room.

After purchasing Buena Vista in 1914, Coleman remained legal owner until his death. He and wife Alice Elise had a daughter Alice Hounsfeld, born in 1891, who inherited the property upon the death of her father.

Alice Hounsfeld du Pont Buck, 1891-1967 & Clayton Douglass Buck, 1890-1965

Alice H. du Pont married Clayton Douglass Buck, the son of Margaret and Francis, in 1921 and had two children. They also raised Alice’s two children from her first marriage. By 1924, they were living in Buena Vista. Alice worked with prominent architect Brognard Okie on the design and construction of the large library wing on the property’s south side, and the rear wing on the west and north sides. Clayton Douglass worked with his wife’s father on the Coleman du Pont Boulevard as chief engineer. He later became governor and U.S. senator. The Bucks sold Buena Vista to the State of Delaware in 1965 for one dollar.



Buena Vista

Meetings | Conferences | Events

A Brief History



John M. Clayton, 1796-1856

Deciding to construct a new residence on the “State Road below Hare’s Corner” in New Castle, John M. Clayton purchased the “Homestead” property of 325 acres on March 26, 1845 from Abraham Shannon for \$12,000. Built by April 1847, Buena Vista took its place as a major residence of the Greek Revival style in Delaware. The grand scale mansion was named by Clayton after the brilliant success of the illustrious hero and future President Zachary Taylor in the battle of Buena Vista during the Mexican War.



Clayton was born in Dagsboro, grew up in Milford, graduated Yale Law School with top honors, and practiced law in Dover. He married Sally Ann Fisher and lived in the Ridgely House on Dover’s Green. Sally died in 1825 after the birth of their second son. Neither of the sons, James or Charles, lived beyond early adulthood. Despondent and alone after these tragedies, Clayton devoted the rest of his life to work, politics, and playing the violin. He never remarried.

After serving in various state offices, Clayton became a U.S. senator, Delaware chief justice, and secretary of state under President Taylor from 1849 to 1850. He coauthored the important Clayton-Bulwer Treaty with Great Britain guaranteeing neutrality of a canal across Central America, and proposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. After returning to Dover, he died in 1856 and was buried in the Presbyterian Church Yard.

Considered one of the most skilled and brilliant debaters and orators in the Senate, the genial Clayton was always accessible to his colleagues and the public. Greatly mourned by Delaware, who was “bereft of her brightest orator, her most eminent citizen, her truest counselor, her unwavering friend,” Clayton was honored by his fellow citizens in 1934 with a marble statue in Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol.

James C. Douglass, 1817-1875

John M. Clayton had always been close to his nephew, James C. Douglass, the son of his sister Harriet M. and Walter Douglass. While serving in the U.S. Navy, James had married Ellen Sinclair. In 1853, Clayton offered Buena Vista to them but wrote, “... I feel some apprehension that he may decline farming. ... I shall offer him every inducement to stay him for the rest of his life.” On Feb. 7, he conveyed “all that Farm, Plantation, and Tract of Land called and known by the name of ‘Buena Vista’” to James for \$30,000 with \$10,000 in cash and \$20,000 as mortgage.

Clayton continued his presence and agricultural updates at Buena Vista during his nephew’s absences. After Clayton’s death, James improved the house and grounds and continued the dedicated farming practices of his uncle. The tenant house

was built in the English Cottage style by Washington Mason, Daniel Curlett, and I. Rambo. In 1853, Ellen wrote, “We have no trees ... but we hope to have a fine garden in a year or two more.”

Their first child, Constance Margaret, “was baptized at Buena Vista, the seat of the Honorable John M. Clayton, who was the sponsor” in 1853. Months later in 1854, Ellen died and their son Clayton died before adulthood in 1872. Douglass and his daughter “Maggie” were devastated but continued to manage the estate. At the age of 23, Margaret inherited Buena Vista from her father who died intestate. The pieces on view in Buena Vista’s Heritage Room vividly display those listed in a room-by-room inventory taken in 1875 upon the death of James Douglass.

Constance Margaret Douglass, 1852-1926 *Francis Nixon Buck, 1842-1926*

In 1884, Constance M. Douglass married Francis N. Buck of Wilmington. The New York Tribune reported on the “wedding of Miss ... Douglass, who lives at Buena Vista, the homestead of John M. Clayton, which she inherited from her father. ... We drove through a long avenue of trees to the large old fashioned house, and on entering found the beauty of the scene quite dazzling ... a real baronial profusion with true elegance combined.” Margaret and Francis had four children, Ellen, Francis, Walter, and Clayton Douglass.



Francis served on the Wilmington Board of Trade, Front and Union Street Railway Company, and the Wilmington Board of Parks. He worked for the fertilizer manufacturer Walton & Whann Company that would later go out of business with the financial panic of 1893. Memoirs indicate that “Mr. Buck no longer had a special railroad coach that dropped him off at the back of his farm. Things became very tight on the farm as to repairs and equipment...”

Harriet Clayton Comegys, 1840-1927

In 1897, Margaret D. Buck had a deed written between her husband and herself, and her cousin Harriet Clayton Comegys, great niece of John M. Clayton. It noted that “...Francis N. Buck is indebted to Margaret D. Buck his wife in divers large sums of money. And whereas it is desired to secure the premises therein after described to herself and her children.” Harriet was named trustee of Buena Vista to administer the property and turn over income after expenses to Margaret and her children.

In 1914, acting on behalf of Margaret and Francis, Harriet sold Buena Vista to T. Coleman du Pont for \$35,000.