

## BONFIELD Manor – the Federal Revival Structure (1929 - today)



Following the fire at Old Bonfield, Mr. and Mrs. Downes rebuilt the Manor House in the Federal Revival style on the existing foundation. They were thus able to preserve the special feature of the Bonfield site, the mound, dry basement and sweeping views down to Boone Creek. The well-known Philadelphia architect Roland T. Addis designed the house and supervised its completion.

The special characteristics of the original H plan house with seven bays, recessed dormers and two brick chimneys were

- the center hall library, reception rooms, study and dining room on the first floor;
- 5 bedrooms on the second floor with a state of the art ventilation system;
- a large Widows Walk with views to the Oxford harbor;
- an extensive terrace on top of the porch to take in the views across Boone Creek.

While newspaper reports and hearsay among history buffs in the Oxford area believe that there are remnants of slave torture in the colonial basement, no signs or confirming records have been found.

The outline of the colonial kitchen is still visible. The storage vault which could be accessed from outside is now under the sunroom. The storage vault has the heavy wood/iron door mentioned in all these newspaper reports. According to the records, the servants' dining room was located in the front part of the basement on ground level. This area is used now as utility rooms, entrance. A dumbwaiter was added to both floors in the federal revival new house. Mr. and Mrs. Downes never lived in the new Manor House as Mrs. Downes died shortly before its completion.

In 1933, Mr. Downes sold Bonfield to William Hervey Allen, the then-famous novelist and poet from Pittsburgh. Mr. Allen is said to have bought the property with the proceeds of his wildly acclaimed book *Anthony Adverse*. In addition to Bonfield, he maintained properties in upstate New York and later on in Palm Beach, Florida.

Mr. Allen cherished Bonfield and operated it as a self-sustaining farm and special place to welcome his many literary friends. Extensive records of his time at Bonfield, his writings, guests, diaries and economic activities of the farm are archived at the University of Pittsburgh. They warrant special research and an exhibition at a later date.

Mr. Allen converted one of the early slave quarters on the left of the Manor House into a 3 bedroom/2 bath cottage and used it as a guest house. It is said that Robert Frost, one of his dear friends, stayed there when visiting him at Bonfield. The Carriage House included a caretaker apartment, large workshops, 4 bay garages and an electricity plant.

Special care was given during Mr. Allen's stewardship to maintaining the feel of an English garden: English boxwoods framed the Manor House area, majestic magnolia trees and an alley of elms were carefully maintained as were a large kennel for the dogs and a tennis court. The alley trees have been replaced since with ginkos and Leland cypresses; the last of these elms died only last year. To commemorate his success with *Anthony Adverse*, Mr. Allen planted two boxwood hedges in the form of an A on the right side of the Manor House. Only one A survives as the harsh recent winters have taken their toll.

One of Hervey Allen's biographers wrote

*After Anthony Adverse brought the golden shower, one of Hervey's first actions was to buy Bonfield Manor, a beautiful estate lying between two rivers on a cove of Maryland's Eastern Shore. He improved the buildings, cultivated the land, and developed its production capacity until, for a few years at least, it was a self-sustaining establishment as is attainable in our times. The bread the Allen family ate was made from wheat grown and milled on the estate; livestock furnished milk, butter, and red meat; chickens, eggs and white meat. From its own grapes Hervey made wines, and his fields and gardens produced more fruit and vegetables than the household could consume. The sea at his borders provided unlimited oysters, crabs, and fresh fish. He installed a special power plant for use in an emergency, and in his machine shop were stored duplicate parts for all the cars and machinery on the place. In brief, he spent a large fortune on Bonfield and lived like a country squire. Ann recalls this period as a "fabulous existence."*

R.J. Williams, Hervey Allen, the *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, Volume 55, No 2, April 1972, p141/142

In the literary realm, he published in 1938 *Action at Aquila*, another Civil War book, and started research on his monumental work *The Disinherited* and completed the first volume of *The Forest and the Fort* while at Bonfield. When World War II erupted in Europe, he published two stories of his own World War I experience: "Blood Lust" and "Report to Major Roberts." During the War, he received a presidential appointment and worked with the War Manpower Commission in Washington, DC.

Hervey Allen closed down his Bonfield activities during World War II as the intense labor shortage and new income taxes made farming uneconomical. He ultimately sold Bonfield in 1946 to Mr. R. Royce Spring and his wife Harriet Deyo Spring of Easton. Following Mr. Spring's death in 1963, Mrs. Harriet Deyo Spring bought her husband's portion of the property. She made extensive changes to the original house by adding a car port, extending the depth of the house on the east side, and converting some of the reception rooms on the first floor into bedrooms with en suite bathrooms. Further changes followed in the seventies before Mrs. Spring rented the property to the Equitable Trust Company as a retreat and training facility. To accommodate such use, the upstairs terrace and widow's walk on the roof were dismantled and the lay-out of bedrooms refashioned. During the ownership of Bonfield by Mr. and Mrs. Spring (1946-86), further parcels of the 1906 Bonfield Manor lot were sold.

Mr. Wallace Sellers and his wife Naudain bought the remaining 12.34 acre property around Bonfield Manor from Mrs. Spring in 1986. They installed a swimming pool, tended to the garden around the houses and undertook essential renovations in the Manor House to keep the structures from further disintegrating. The rest of the property remained overgrown.

The present owners, Marianne Haug and Andres Rigo, bought the property from Mr. and Mrs. Sellers in 1996.

