

In the Library

BY ALEXANDER LAWRENCE AMES
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COURTESY OF THE WINTERTHUR MUSEUM

The Winterthur Museum, in the Brandywine River Valley north of Wilmington, Delaware.

“Delicious Musk and Times Long Past”

Exploring du Pont family heirloom books in the Winterthur Museum’s mysterious Memorial Library

Among decorative arts devotees, the name Winterthur is synonymous with the finest in early American furniture, textiles, ceramics, and metalwork. The Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library, a 979-acre, former du Pont family estate in Delaware’s scenic Brandywine River Valley, houses the country’s largest collection of early Americana. The museum’s approximately 175 furnished rooms showcase

one-of-a-kind examples of art and craftsmanship, such as Chippendale high chests, silver tankards, and even paintings by the likes of John Copley, Gilbert Stuart, and Benjamin Rush. But since the museum’s opening in 1951, another type of object has figured in the collection: books and manuscripts. While books did not rank prominently in the collecting interests of museum founder Henry Francis du Pont (1880–1969), he did purchase some for his

collection, and many family heirloom volumes have never left the estate. A recent inventory project undertaken in the Winterthur mansion’s family library has revealed previously unknown treasures—and has the museum community talking about how books fit into the world of museum objects.

Winterthur began life as a du Pont family country estate in the early nineteenth century. After Americana collector Henry Francis (commonly

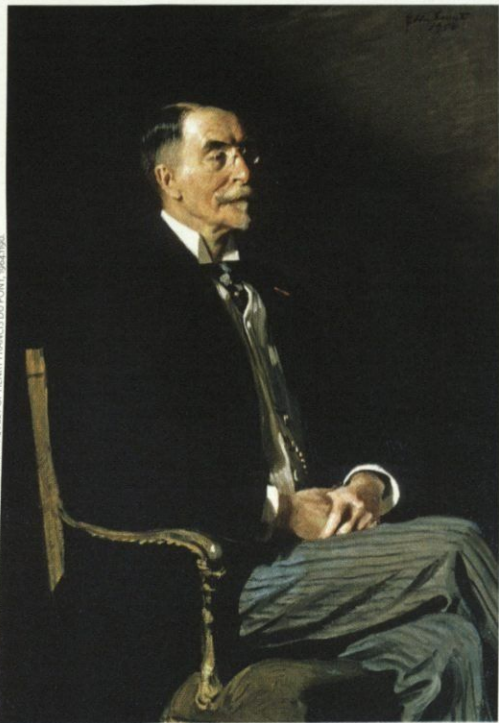
In the Library

known as H. F.) du Pont inherited the property upon his father's death in 1926, the younger du Pont transformed what had been a comfortable Victorian mansion into an expansive repository of early American decorative arts. This process involved expanding the footprint of the house and renovating existing rooms. One such room was a space long associated with H. F.'s father, Henry Algernon du Pont (1838–1926), which has been known for decades as “Memorial Library.”

The library had been part of a 1902–1904 expansion to the house undertaken by architects Perot & Bissell at the behest of Henry Algernon (commonly known as H. A.), a West Point graduate, Civil War hero, and United States senator from Delaware. H. A.

had decorated the space as a typical Victorian gentleman's library, though his son renovated the room between 1941 and 1960 to evoke early American design. H. F. du Pont and his wife Ruth lived inside the Winterthur mansion until 1951, during which time H. F.'s early Americana collection grew by leaps and bounds. (In 1951, the year the museum opened, H. F. and Ruth moved into a new home they had built on the property.) Though the aura of the library changed considerably during H. F.'s lifetime, the space still recalled the memory of his father, who had spent many long hours in the bookish space. In her memoir about growing up at Winterthur, titled *Henry F. du Pont and Winterthur: A Daughter's Portrait*, H. F.'s daughter

Ruth Ellen du Pont Lord described the library: “A dark and quiet place, remote from the rest of the house, it was ideal for reading, studying, [and] staring into the fire . . . Lined from floor to ceiling with books—military, naval, genealogical, many in French . . . smelling of delicious musk and times long past—the library epitomized the essence of my grandfather.” To this day, a large portrait of H. A. hangs above the fireplace mantle in Memorial Library. During the 1950s, the space actually served as a working library for the Winterthur Museum's graduate program in material culture studies. After the opening of a separate space for the Winterthur Library's growing collection in 1960, however, Memorial Library became a museum room used



COURTESY OF THE WINTERTHUR MUSEUM, WASHINGTON, DC. BEQUEST OF HENRY FRANCIS DU PONT, 1964. 1906.

ABOVE: Henry Algernon du Pont, 1906, portrait by Ellen Emmett Rand. Oil paint on canvas.

TOP RIGHT: Memorial Library, pictured in 1959.

RIGHT: Title page of a 1526 edition of Pliny's *Natural History* found in Memorial Library at Winterthur.

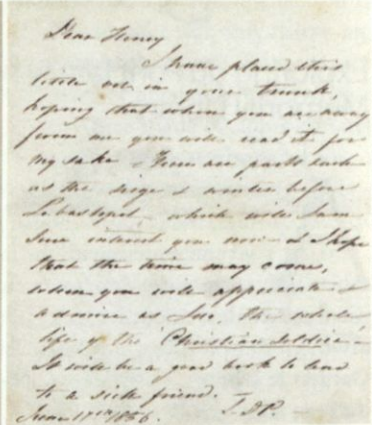
FAR RIGHT: Letter dated June 17, 1856 found in a Bible owned by Henry Algernon du Pont.



COURTESY OF THE WINTERTHUR MUSEUM, PHOTO BY GILBERT ASH.



COURTESY OF THE WINTERTHUR MUSEUM, GARDEN & LIBRARY. PHOTO BY JIM SCHNECK.



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only for artifact display and public touring. (The Winterthur Library, with its vast and internationally known collection of books and manuscripts, now occupies a dedicated space attached to but separate from the historic museum rooms.)

Today, sixty-six years after Winterthur opened to the public, Memorial Library still feels like a distinct, special, and even mysterious place. Part of the mystery stems from the fact that the books on the library's shelves have never been fully catalogued. All of this is changing, however. Last summer, the Winterthur Museum's Registration Department undertook a project to inventory Memorial Library's collection. Advised by the museum's book conservator and the staff of the Winterthur Library, Registration Department volunteers documented 1,910 books, bound periodicals, and pamphlets stowed on the library's shelves—some, it seems, having been housed at Winterthur for generations. Much of the material they uncovered dates to the life of H. F., offering insights into his interests as a collector, gardener, and horticulturist. Other materials harken back to the earliest days of the du Pont dynasty in America and reveal Memorial Library as a treasure trove of du Pont family book provenance.

The earliest published book found in Memorial Library enjoys the added distinction of being one of the oldest books in Winterthur's collection—the Winterthur Library included. It is a 1526 Paris edition of Pliny's *Natural History*, featuring extensive marginalia. Also found in Memorial Library are two French-language books bearing the book label of Éleuthère Irénée du Pont de Nemours (1771–1834), founder of Delaware's Du Pont gunpowder works, which gave rise to the famous DuPont chemical company, as well as several books in which du Pont had inscribed his name. Relics of mid-nineteenth-century du Pont family history abound, including many pieces that shed light on the life of H. A., who, while an illustrious Delaware figure in his own day, has become overshadowed by the legacy of his collector-son, H. F. A particularly poignant piece is a copy of the Bible given to H. A. by his pious mother

Louisa Gerhard du Pont on January 1, 1850, when H. A. was still a boy. Several years later, in 1856, when H. A. was preparing to leave for West Point, Louisa tucked into the Bible a note she had written, and then placed the volume with her son's belongings. "I have placed this little vol[ume] in your trunk, hoping that when you are away from me you will read it for my sake," the note reads, in part. "I hope that the time may come, when you will appreciate & admire as I do, the whole life of the 'Christian Soldier.'" Association copies relating to the life of H. F. also appear in Memorial Library and illuminate the great collector's own network of friends and associates. H. F.'s fellow Delawarean, Howard Pyle, inscribed a copy of his book, *The Story of Sir Launcelot and his Companions*, to him in December of 1907.

The fascinating texts uncovered during the Memorial Library inventory project have catalyzed discussions at Winterthur about how rare books—du Pont family pieces and otherwise—fit into the mission of a museum that celebrates early American decorative arts and material culture. Presently, representatives of Winterthur's Registration Department, Museum Collections, Conservation, and the Winterthur Library are discussing how to catalogue, store, and best make use of the Memorial Library volumes, especially du Pont family association copies. As these conversations progress, one thing is certain: the books will doubtless help the museum illuminate "times long past" in Winterthur and du Pont family history, as Memorial Library has done for decades. 📖

The authors extend special thanks to Beth Parker Miller, Daniela Bono, Julia Hofer, Jeff Groff, Linda Eaton, Gregory Landrey, Emily Guthrie, Linda Martin-Schaff, Melissa Tedone, Susan Newton, and Jim Schneck for assistance with this project and article.

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in brief

ALL HAIL AUSTEN

To mark the bicentennial of Jane Austen's death, several exhibitions are on view this summer in England, including *Which Jane Austen?* at the Weston Library in Oxford from June 23-Oct. 29 and *Fickle Fortunes: Jane Austen and Germaine de Staël* at Chawton House in Chawton from June 12-Sept. 24.

BURNING BOOKS

Through Sept. 1, Dublin Castle hosts an exhibition about the destruction and re-creation of the Irish Parliamentary Bookbindings titled *Burning Books, June 1922*.

FAULKNER'S VIRGINIA

If you're spending time in Charlottesville (say, at Rare Book School) before July 7, check out UVA's *Faulkner: Life and Works*, a survey that showcases first editions, manuscripts, and archival documents.

THOREAU VISITS NYC

Nearly 100 items have been brought together to celebrate the author's bicentennial year in a major new exhibition, *This Ever New Self: Thoreau and His Journal*, that opens June 2 at the Morgan Library & Museum. The exhibit will remain on view until Sept. 10, when it travels to Concord, MA.

FINE PRINTING IN SAN FRANCISCO

Through July 31, the Book Club of California hosts *The Working Library: Clifford Burke and Fine Printing*, a showcase of selected works from Cranium Press, founded by Burke in 1967.

PICASSO ENCOUNTERS

The Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, explores Pablo Picasso's interest in and experimentation with large-scale printmaking in an exhibition running June 4-Aug. 27.