

A
Brief Tour
of
BUENA VISTA'S
Past



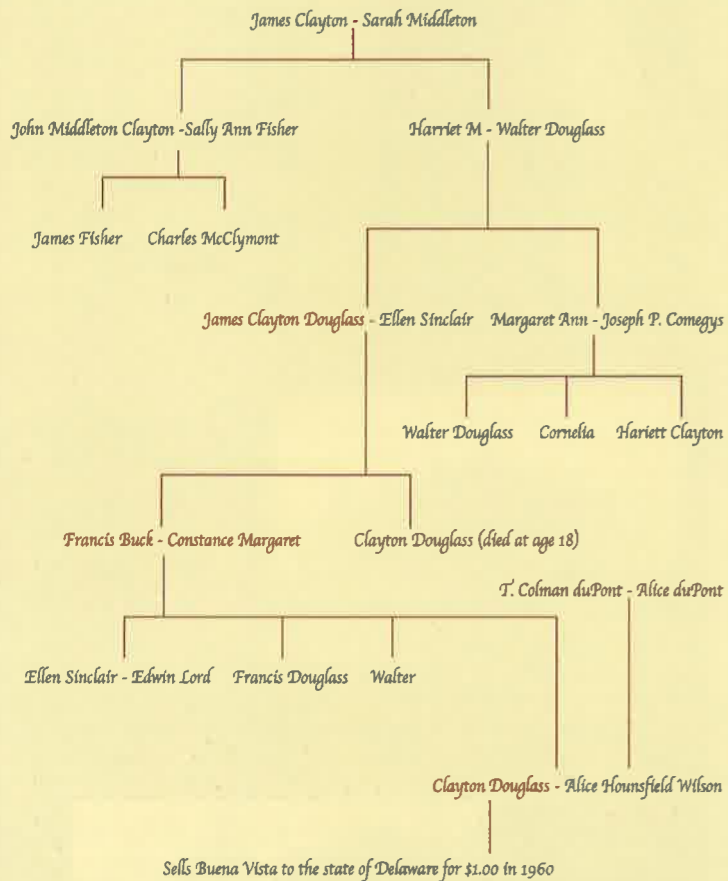
Photographic view of Buena Vista
R. M. Bird 1852



Photo by DSM Exhibit Staff

BUENA VISTA

We know it today as a conference center and a stage for each Administration to promote Delaware and plan its future, but the house has a long history as home to its various owners. This brochure will take you on a brief tour through Buena Vista's history.



JOHN M. CLAYTON
(1796-1856)

John Clayton purchased 325 acres of land for \$12,500.00 on March 26, 1845. We don't know who built the house. He appeared to be living in "his new home on the State Road below Hare's Corner" later that year. By April 18, 1847, he referred to home as "Buena Vista" in honor of General Zachary Taylor's victory during the Mexican War.

John Clayton's public life was replete with success. Born in Dagsboro, he graduated from Yale (1815), became an attorney and served as Representative in the Delaware House (1824), Delaware Secretary of State (1826-28), U.S. Senator (1829-36), Delaware Chief Justice (1837-39), U.S. Senator (1845-49), U.S. Secretary of State for President Zachary Taylor (1849-50) and U.S. Senator (1853-1856).

Tragedy and loss were the hallmarks of his personal life. His wife Sally Ann Fisher, died three years after they were married and both of their sons died as young adults. In 1854 Clayton wrote: "I am out of health and very solitary of course. You will always find me alone."

JAMES C. DOUGLASS

(1817-1875)

The son of John Clayton's sister, Harriet M., and her husband Walter Douglass. He served over eleven years in the United States Navy as a Purser (Administrative Officer) and is said to have served John M. Clayton as a private secretary during the negotiations with Great Britain that led to the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty which avoided war and asserted the Monroe Doctrine.

With no heirs, Clayton wanted his nephew to take ownership of Buena Vista. On February 7, 1853, Clayton writes of Douglass "...I feel some apprehension that he may decline farming, although I have offered him a fine chance for it. His fears have been that being ignorant of it, he may not be able to support his family and pay his debts by it. I shall offer him every inducement to stay him for the rest of his life."

He sold Buena Vista to James C. Douglass for \$30,000.00. Ten thousand dollars in cash and a twenty thousand dollar mortgage sealed the transaction. John Clayton later willed the interest on the mortgage to be used for the education of James's son, Clayton Douglass.

Once again, tragedy marred domestic life at Buena Vista. Ellen Douglass died in 1854, leaving her husband with two children under the age of three. Their son Clayton Douglass died at age 18, leaving Constance Margaret and her father to manage Buena Vista.

James Douglass had the tenant house built that you pass on the right side of the lane as you enter Buena Vista. It was built in 1858, noted as "...in the English Cottage style... Washington Mason performed the carpenter work. Daniel Curlett the plastering. I. Rambo the mason work." He also apparently improved the grounds as well. His wife had noted in 1853 "We have no trees...about the house and very few flowers, but we hope to have a fine garden in a year or two more." James Douglass died in 1875 and his daughter Margaret was left with the farm.



Clayton Douglass with aunt Sarah Johnston and Constance Margaret Douglass



FRANCIS NIXON BUCK
(1842-1926)
and
CONSTANCE MARGARET DOUGLASS
(1852-1926)

Buena Vista had changed considerably by the time Margaret married Francis Nixon Buck on January 15, 1884. A newspaper article quoted someone who attended the wedding at Buena Vista as follows: "We drove through a long avenue of trees to the large old fashioned house..."

Francis Buck was born in Philadelphia but after his father died, he lived with his mother in Wilmington, Delaware. He served on the Board of Directors of the Wilmington Board of Trade (1872), the Front and Union Street Railway Company (1881), and was one of the first Commissioners of the Wilmington Board of Parks (1883). His primary job was serving as Secretary/Treasurer of Walton & Whann Company that made meal and fertilizer from animal bones.

Margaret and Francis Buck had four children, three of whom reached adulthood. For the first nine or ten years, life seems to have been good at Buena Vista.

The Financial Panic of 1893 would eventually cause Walton & Whann to go out of business in 1894. Memoirs from the family of the English farm manager noted 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..." so the farm manager bought his own farm.



T. COLEMAN DUPONT
(1863-1930)

Born in Kentucky, Coleman duPont had already made his fortune in steel, coal, and street railways when he moved to Delaware in 1900. In 1902 he joined his cousins Alfred I. and Pierre S. duPont in taking over control of and incorporating the Dupont Company. Coleman served as President of the Dupont Company from 1902 to 1915. He was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1924 and was also the founder of the Wilmington Trust Company.

Coleman duPont purchased Buena Vista from Harriet Comegys for \$35,000.00 in 1914 and remained the legal owner until his death in 1930. The purchase of Buena Vista appears to have been one of his many charitable acts to help people he knew personally.

ALICE H. DUPONT
(1891-1967)
and
CLAYTON DOUGLASS BUCK
(1890-1965)

Alice duPont Wilson Buck inherited Buena Vista from her father in 1930. She worked with Brognard Dakie, a prominent architect, on the design and construction of the large wing on the south side of the house, which we use today for conference services.

In 1921, Clayton D. Buck married Alice duPont as her second husband; they had two children and raised her son from her first marriage. Mr. Buck left college after two years in 1911 to work on the Coleman duPont Highway and worked his way up to Chief Engineer. He later served as Governor (1929-1937) and one term as U.S. Senator.

The Bucks sold Buena Vista to the State of Delaware in 1965 for \$1.00 as per the will of Clayton Buck.

