

"HSCC Bus Tour to Mansions along the Delaware"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

The mansions along the Delaware River in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, will be the topic of the Historical Society's spring bus on Thursday, May 15th. The tour will depart from the Ascension Church parking lot in Westminister at 7:30 a.m.

The first stop will be "Andalusia" the late eighteenth century home of Nicholas Biddle. Built in 1797 the home is a classic example of Greek Revival architecture and displays an outstanding collection of American and European furnishings. The museum's brochure describes the interesting history of the site:

When you visit Andalusia, the home of seven generations of one of Philadelphia's first families, you share in the hospitality enjoyed by illustrious guests for more than 150 years. President John Quincy Adams, Daniel Webster, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Joseph Bonaparte, former King of Spain, were entertained by Nicholas Biddle, the young nation's most powerful early 19th c. banker, as well as poet, editor, architectural authority, experimental farmer, and political and financial adversary of President Andrew Jackson. Begun in 1797, and expanded in 1806 and 1835 by two of America's most acclaimed architects- Benjamin H. Latrobe and Thomas U. Walter-Andalusia is the finest example of Greek Revival domestic architecture in the United States. American and European furnishings, many of them owned by Biddle himself, fill the sumptuous mansion. From its columned porch you will survey the Delaware River at the foot of the lawn, then stroll the park grounds, carefully maintained in the 19th century tradition. Biddle's romantic outbuildings-a Gothic Grotto and temple-like Billiard Room-will delight you. Within the walls of the Graperies, where formerly hothouse grapes were raised, is a modern day rose garden. In its grounds, buildings, and furnishings, Andalusia captures the genius of its best known owner and reflects the elegance of 19th century life.

Our second stop will be "Glen Foerd" on the Delaware, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The museum's brochure describes the interesting history of the site:

Glen Foerd was built circa 1853 by Charles Macalester as an Italiante river front house in the country. Charles Macalester, founder of the village of Torresdale, was a financier and advisor to eight U.S. Presidents from Andrew Jackson through Ulysses S. Grant.

In 1893 Glen Foerd became the home of Robert H. Foerderer, owner of a major Philadelphia leather tanning plant and U.S. Congressman. Mr. Foerderer enlarged the house in 1902-1903 and transformed it into an Edwardian Classical Revival country house. The transformation included the expansion of the grounds to an 18 acre estate landscaped in the English park tradition. The planned natural landscape was accented with a formal rose garden and a terrace with beds of colorful flowering plants.

Interior architectural features of the house include an art gallery, Haskel player pipe organ, grand staircase, stained glass Tiffany style dome, parquet floors, ornamental plaster ceilings, and rathskellar. The collection includes paintings, prints, oriental rugs, antique furniture, rare books, and objets d'art.

The entire estate, including the mansion and its contents, carriage house, gate house, cottage, garden house, water tower, tennis court, and lily pond, was bequeathed to the community in 1972. It is presently being preserved and maintained as a resource to provide historical and cultural experience to the public.

We will have a hot buffet lunch in the formal dining room following the guided tour of Glen Foerd. The menu includes Grilled Marinated London Grill, Grilled Breast of Chicken, Orzo Salad Primavera, Garden Salad, Fresh Rolls and Butter, a Dessert selection and beverage.

Our final stop will be Pennsbury Manor, the plantation home of William Penn. The site includes Penn's reconstructed home built in 1683 and a number of outbuildings including a bake and brew house, barns, blacksmith shop, formal and kitchen gardens, orchard and a cemetery. The home contains one of the finest public collections of seventeenth century American furnishings. A brief history of the site is included in the museum's brochure:

The next year [1683] he began building his personal estate, Pennsbury Manor. Because of his love for country life, Penn chose 8,400 acres of land 26 miles north of Philadelphia, on the Delaware River. Although he already held English title to the land, Penn was unusual among colonial rulers; he acknowledged the rights of the native Lenni Lenape Indians and purchased his land from them as well. Penn did not live long at Pennsbury Manor. He was only in Pennsylvania twice, during 1682-1684 and in 1699-1701, because ill health and politics kept him in England. Between the two trips, Penn directed the construction through letters to his steward. During the late 1680's Pennsbury bustled with workmen, but in the 1690's the estate fell into disrepair. When Penn returned in 1699 he brought with him his wife Hannah, two of his children, and many servants. According to surviving records, they refurbished the buildings, gardens, and farm, and made numerous trips to Philadelphia for the supplies and provisions necessary for a great estate. Penn's only American child was born in Philadelphia in January 1700 and spent his first two summers at Pennsbury.

Through neglect, Pennsbury's main buildings collapsed and the estate degenerated into ruin after Penn's death. Penn's descendants sold the land in 1792 and succession of owners purchased it over the intervening years. By 1929 no trace of Pennsbury survived above ground and nineteenth century buildings covered the original foundations. In 1932 the Charles Warner Company gave ten acres, including the area of the house, to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a memorial to William Penn. Between 1933 and 1943 the Pennsylvania Historical Commission reconstructed the plantation, including the Manor House, the outbuildings, and the landscape. The architect, R. Brognard Okie, based his design on Penn's original instructions and on careful archeology. Pennsbury Manor reopened as a formal estate in 1939.

We return to Westminster at about 7:00 p.m. Reservations may be made by calling the Society at (410) 848-6494. Tickets \$60 for non members and \$55 for members of the Historical Society; the cost includes transportation, admissions, and the buffet lunch. Tour participants are advised to dress accordingly as parts of the tour involve walking outdoors.

Photo caption: Pennsbury Manor will be the final stop on the Historical Society's May 15th bus trip to the Mansions along the Delaware River in Bucks County, Pa. Photograph courtesy of Pennsbury Manor.