



Eddie Dowling and Longwood Garden project oral histories (transcripts) 1875

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Manuscripts and Archives

PO Box 3630

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Summary Information

Repository:	Manuscripts and Archives
Source:	Dowling, Eddie
Creator - ive:	Copeland, Lammot du Pont, 1905-1983
Creator - ive:	Greenewalt, Crawford H., 1902-1993
Creator - ive:	Ingersoll, C. Jared, 1894-1988
Creator - ive:	Laird, W. W. (William Winder), 1910-1989
Creator - ive:	May, Sophie du Pont, 1900-2001
Creator - ive:	du Pont, Wilhelmina, 1906-2000
Creator - ive:	Scott, Edgar, 1899-1995
Creator - ivr:	Cornwell, Sophy H.
Creator - ive:	Downs, Alletta d'Andelot Laird, 1913-2005
Creator - ive:	Gilpin, D. Brooke (Douglas Brooke), 1925-2014
Creator - ive:	Mason, Charles Henry, III, 1924-2002
Creator - ive:	Morgan, Virginia Mason, 1920-2020
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Abstract:	Longwood Gardens is a series of formal display gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, that was developed by Pierre S. du Pont (1870-1954) after he purchased the site from the Peirce family in 1906. The collection is comprised of two oral history interview projects. The first is with Eddie Dowling (1889-1976), an actor, screenwriter, playwright, director, producer, songwriter, and composer. The second project is commissioned oral histories with people with remembrances of du Pont and the development of Longwood Gardens.

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Biographical Note

Eddie Dowling (1889-1976), a self-described "song and dance man" and Democratic Party activist, was born Joseph N. Goucher on December 12, 1889, in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, to parents of French Canadian and Irish descent, the fourteenth of seventeen children. He began performing at an early age, taking his mother's family as a stage name. Dowling achieved success, first in Boston and then in New York, where he became a Broadway fixture as composer, songwriter, playwright, actor, director, and producer. His work ranged from frothy musicals and revues to productions of Shakespeare, Eugene O'Neill, and the first run of Tennessee Williams's "The Glass Menagerie," in which he acted, co-directed, and produced. During World War II, he originated the famous USO camp shows. Dowling also mingled easily with the mostly Irish American politicians of Tammany Hall and the businessmen who supported them. Initially, in the orbit of Al Smith, he switched his allegiance to Roosevelt after Smith's defeat, applying his talents to the theatrical aspects of Democratic Party conventions, rallies, and campaigns. Dowling died at Smithfield, Rhode Island, on February 18, 1976.

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Historical Note

Longwood Gardens is a series of formal display gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania that was developed by Pierre S. du Pont (1870-1954) after he purchased the site from the Peirce family in 1906. The Peirce family had received this 1,000-acre site as part of a land grant by William Penn (1644-1718). Interested in horticulture, they ornamented the land with trees and plants that were not native to this area. During the 19th century it was opened to the public.

Pierre S. du Pont built a series of formal gardens with fountains on the site which were reminiscent of the Gardens at Versailles. In 1921 he constructed an extensive network of conservatories which contained rare plant species from Africa and South America. Around 1925, P. S. du Pont commissioned three bungalows, or cottages, built for his Longwood staff.

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Scope and Contents

The collection is comprised of two oral history interview projects. The first is with Eddie Dowling (1889-1976), an actor, screenwriter, playwright, director, producer, songwriter, and composer. The second project is commissioned oral histories with people with remembrances of P.S. du Pont (1870-1954) and the development of Longwood Gardens.

The Dowling interview was conducted by Ruthanna Hindes (1917-2001) of the Manuscripts & Archives Department of the then Eleutherian Mills Historical Library at the Lambs Club in New York for the specific purpose of elucidating Dowling's relationships with John J. Raskob (1879-1950) and Pierre S. du Pont (1870-1954), whose papers are among the library's earliest holdings. It was Dowling who introduced Raskob to Al Smith (1873-1944) and thus involved Raskob, formerly a Republican, in national Democratic Party politics. The bonds were formed through their common Catholicism and opposition to Prohibition. With Roosevelt's election and subsequent Repeal, Dowling went with the New Deal, while Smith split with FDR, and Raskob, after trying to find a business-friendly Democratic replacement for Roosevelt through the American Liberty League, eventually returned to the Republicans.

Dowling paints a vivid picture of New York City's high life in the Roaring Twenties when Tammany politicians, contractors, and other political donors, Broadway celebrities, and showgirls all mingled in places like Bill Kenny's Tiger Room, a private nightclub/speakeasy. His narrative also brings out the solidarity of (mostly Irish American) Catholics, the importance of the Church in networking, their defensiveness, and their pride in Smith's 1928 presidential bid, as well as the ease with which millionaires like Raskob could deploy their resources. Dowling describes the candidates and the 1928 presidential campaign, and particularly the 1932 Democratic convention in Chicago, where he orchestrated the entertainment to keep the delegates distracted while deal-makers were lining up votes for FDR. He tells how he pushed through the use of "Happy Days Are Here Again," as Roosevelt's campaign song, over the objections of FDR himself, and of the developing split between himself and FDR on the one hand and Smith and Raskob on the other.

The Longwood Gardens project transcripts contain the interviewees' remembrances of P.S. du Pont and of the development of Longwood Gardens and life there during du Pont's lifetime. In 1974, Longwood Gardens Inc. engaged the Oral History Research Office of Columbia University to conduct a series of oral histories documenting the activities of Pierre S. du Pont in developing Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. The interviews were conducted by Sophy H. Cornwell, the librarian at nearby Lincoln University. Most of the interviewees were members of later generations of the extended du Pont and Laird families. Interviewees include Lamot du Pont Copeland (1905-1983), Alletta Laird Downs (1913-2005), Brooke Gilpin (1925-2014), Crawford H. Greenwalt (1902-1993), C. Jared Ingersoll (1894-1988), William Winder Laird (1910-1989), Charles Mason (1924-2002), Rosa McDonald (1916-2009), Sophie du Pont May (1900-2001), Virginia Morgan (1920-2020), Wilhelmina du Pont Ross (1906-2000), Edgar Scott (1899-1995). Ingersoll and Scott, who also owned country estates, were associated with du Pont in the elite Farmers' Club of Pennsylvania. Morgan, her brother Charles Mason, and Gilpin were all born near Longwood and had many memories of the place.

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Publication Statement

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Revision Description

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Access Restrictions

No restrictions on access; this collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

Literary rights are retained by the heirs or assigns of the interviewee. Reproductions not permitted.

Location of Originals

Longwood Gardens project oral history originals maintained at Columbia Center for Oral History, Columbia University, New York.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Oral histories
- Political participation
- Dowling, Eddie
- Longwood Gardens (Kennett Square, Pa.)
- Du Pont, Pierre S. (Pierre Samuel), 1870-1954