



By Debbie Koontz

Country Outings

and other brief escapes

Longwood Gardens welcomes you year round

KENNET SQUARE — From now on, whenever I hear that old familiar refrain, "takes my breath away," I will remember the time I was awed by the enchanting beauty of Longwood Gardens; and of how two Quaker farmers, Joshua and Samuel Pierce and an industrial engineer, Pierre S. du Pont, turned 300 acres of prime farmland into the horticultural treasure of America.

Such a nickname for the Gardens is quite a profound statement for any person to make and you may ask what credentials have I to make such a decree? I have only a love of nature and 'a farmer's eye' to know that what has been done on this land is amazing.

That is why I am wholeheartedly recommending it as a place for you and your family to visit on a free afternoon or a slow day.

Longwood Gardens is conveniently located about 30 miles west of Philadelphia in the historic Brandywine Valley off Route 1, and yet it is as far away from the hustle and bustle of a city as one can get in Pennsylvania.

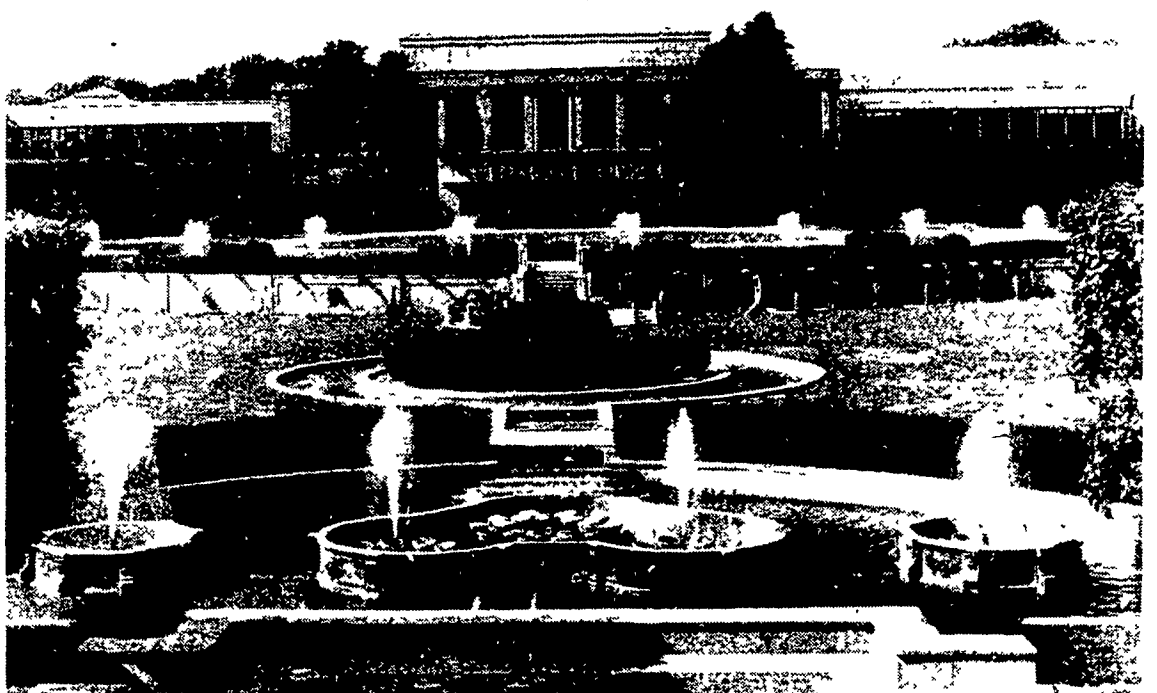
But its proximity to Philadelphia adds to its historic merits, for it was William Penn, founder of the 'City of Brotherly Love,' who sold the land to a Quaker family named Pierce in the late 1700s. Around

1800, the family began planting ornamental trees such as ginkgo, yew, boxwood and paulownia. Ever heard of any of these dandies? Neither had most of the Pierce's friend and neighbors; so when they opened the tree park to public viewing, it became an instant 'smash.'

Finally in 1906, the timber rights to the land were sold and the trees were to be cut. But Pierre du Pont bought the property and proceeded to turn it into the famous Gardens we know today. In addition to being primary designer of the Gardens, du Pont was chairman of both the Du Pont Chemical Company and General Motors.

Today Longwood is owned and operated by Longwood Gardens, Inc., a private, non-profit corporation. Seventy percent of the \$6.7 million annual budget is provided by an endowment from du Pont. The remaining money comes from ticket and gift shop sales.

The Garden contains in its borders nearly 1000 acres, but only 300 acres are open to the public. Though it may take you and your family about 3 to 5 people to farm and operate 300 acres, it takes the Gardens a high 190 full-time employees, including 80 gardeners,



This view is looking over the famed 5-acre fountain garden. The main conservatories house four acres of exotic plants from all over the world.

and 40 students to take care of this garden 'extraordinaire.'

And now that you know the history and the particulars surrounding this 'horticultural treasure,' you can sit back in your seat and take an armchair tour through the park with me — that is unless you decide to visit it yourself.

There's no need to fret over a day to visit; I happily discovered the Gardens are open every day of the year.

At first I felt I might be making a mistake coming to this attraction in the dead of winter. But my fears were unfounded. Winter is forbidden in the Gardens. By January, spring has already

arrived. Huge greenhouses, quoted by Garden officials to be nearly four acres of heated, indoor gardens, include house orchids, ferns, palms, cacti, all types of houseplants grown to unbelievable sizes, banana and coffee trees, sugar cane and vanilla and hundreds and hundreds of flowering plants.

The admission price year-round is a mere \$3. This price includes everything that is open during the season you choose to visit. Though \$3 is inexpensive for all that you see in the greenhouses, this price is exceptional for all that you can view in the summer. For it is during this warm season that Longwood is at its finest.

In summer, the Pierce home is open. This huge home includes an indoor garden-patio. Also in summer, and perhaps most stupendous, are the outdoor gardens. There is a flower garden walk, an open air theatre, reminiscent of European estate gardens, fountains reflecting the ambiance of the greatest artistic water displays in Rome and France, and an Italian Water Garden. This Italian Garden was inspired by du Pont's travels in Europe in 1925. The shapes of the pools are similar, Longwood says, to those at the Villa Gamberaia near Florence, Italy, with the addition of 600 jets of water.

And as if it weren't enough to satisfy the farming, gardening and horticultural enthusiasts who visit, music lovers can also get their money's worth. A mammoth 10,010-pipe organ is played regularly from October and April and is located in the ballroom for all to see. It is here that the Gardens holds year-round concerts, dinners and lectures.

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This is just one example of the artistic touches added to Longwood's greenery. These plants, trimmed to resemble bells above a fountain, welcome visitors to the conservatories.



One of Longwood's love temples sits by the edge of a quiet lake. This, like so many sites at the Gardens, adds year-round beauty.



Stepping into the conservatory is like walking into fairy land. Spring is alive at Longwood all year round and these indoor delights are oblivious to the snowy outside.