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# The du Ponts in Kentucky: Louisville's Central Park, the Southern Exposition, and an Entrepreneurial Spirit<sup>\*</sup>

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## **The du Ponts in Kentucky: Louisville's Central Park, the Southern Exposition, and an Entrepreneurial Spirit.\***

**Timothy Mullin**

**9/21/09**

In the mid-nineteenth century when most businesses were family-owned and operated, young male family members expected to join the firm and learn the business from their elders. It was also a time of pioneering spirit when anyone so inclined could pull up stakes and head west in pursuit of adventure and the promise of success. 'The West,' which for many meant anything beyond the Appalachians, also held the lure of freedom from rigid 'East Coast' codes of behavior and provided a stage for developing an independent spirit.

It may never be clear why several young men and women from the du Pont clan headed west in the 1850s and '60s to establish their home in Louisville, Kentucky. Perhaps, with a family company awash with uncles and cousins, the proverbial grass looked - in this case bluer. It was a bold move, but not an especially risky one as the DuPont Company backed their purchase of a company franchise, and the family kept in close contact. Religion

\* The du Pont family is large, and recurring names and nicknames often make it difficult to follow who's who. The Lamnot family is woven together with the du Pont family in a complicated thread, especially since Margareta was a favorite name. Adding the Coleman/Moxham family only makes the complicated spider's web of family relationships that much more difficult. For this purpose selected family trees are included as appendices.

certainly played a part in who made up the ‘Louisville colony,’ as it was often called; the teachings of Swedenborg linked many of them. Rather than maintaining one business as relatives did back on the Brandywine, the Louisville du Ponts branched out into a number of businesses across Kentucky and beyond. Paper mills, rolling mills, coal mines, lead mines, railroads, street cars, steel mills and banks provided business acumen and an enterprising spirit that allowed the next generation of the family to create the modern DuPont corporation. They married into the extended Coleman- Morgan-Johnson-Moxham family, who worked hand-in-hand with their du Pont cousins in creating the modern DuPont Company.

While cousins back in Delaware built estates that would later become parks, the Louisville family’s estate was a private park, open to the public, before it became their home. They managed one minor, and one major national exposition, and introduced electricity on a grand scale. Those du Ponts born in Kentucky had the spirit of possibility bred into them. The Delaware cousins who worked for the Louisville branch, or even came to visit, were at least introduced to the spirit of looking ‘beyond the pale.’

When Eleuthère Irénée du Pont (1771 – 1834), founder of the black powder business near Wilmington, Delaware, passed away, his eldest son, Alfred V. P. du Pont (1798 – 1856), took over as president of the family company; the future looked bright for his four sons. Alfred’s health, however, led him to retire after only sixteen years and his younger brother, Henry “Boss Henry”

(1812-1889), took over the company for the next thirty-nine years, running the firm with an iron fist. With another uncle in the wings, two older brothers, and five male cousins all awaiting their turn, the possibility of getting ahead in the family company on the Brandywine may not have looked bright for Alfred's younger sons and their cousin from the Victor du Pont branch.

In 1854, Alfred "Fred or Uncle Fred" du Pont (1833-1893) and his cousin Charles I. "Charlie" du Pont Jr. (1830-1873), left Delaware to take over a DuPont Powder Company franchise in Louisville, Kentucky.<sup>1</sup> It may have been a business move as the franchise was being offered back to the Company and running this 'branch office' looked like the best opportunity for Fred and Charlie. Or it may have been a concern that advancement within the DuPont Company was glacially slow, and this may have seemed like the only opportunity for these cousins to manage their own business. Either way, their purchase of the franchise in Louisville was backed by the family company.<sup>2</sup> The business was renamed the C.I. and A. V. Du Pont Company, and began making a profit which Fred and Charlie used to buy a

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<sup>1</sup> Margareta du Pont Coleman Papers, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware (hereafter Coleman papers, Hagley), passim. This extensive collection of family papers includes correspondence between family members living in Louisville and those who remained on the Brandywine. Alfred Victor du Pont, and Antoine Biderman, were the youngest sons of Alfred V. P. and Margareta Lammot (du Pont). Charles I. du Pont Jr. was the son of Charles I. and Dorcas van Dyke (du Pont), and grandson of Victor M. du Pont.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander, James R. *Jaybird: A. J. Moxham and the Manufacture of the Johnson Rail*. (Benshoff Printing Co., Johnstown, Pa., 1991) pg.9.

majority interest in the Louisville Paper Mill. When Fred's brother, Antoine Biderman "Biderman or Bid or Brin" (1837-1923), came to Louisville for a visit in 1856, the firm hired him as their secretary. Though Biderman always talked of moving back home to the Brandywine, he remained in Louisville until late in his life. Biderman's weekly letters to his mother, Margaretta Elizabeth Lammot (du Pont) (1807-1898), and later, letters from his wife, Ellen Coleman (du Pont) (1838-1876), his daughter, Margaretta Elizabeth "Meta" du Pont (Coleman) (1862-1938), and other family members, provide a glimpse of life along the Ohio in the last half of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Lammot family moved to Delaware in the early nineteenth century to operate paper mills near the DuPont powder mills; the Gilpins also operated paper mills nearby. They were Swedenborgian, and soon found like-minded people in the Alexis I. du Pont family (youngest son of E. I. du Pont). The young Lammot children were baptized into the faith at Alexis' home. Margaretta Elizabeth Lammot (1807-1898) married Alfred V.P. du Pont in 1824, and the house near the mills known as Nemours was built for the couple. Margaretta Lammot's nieces and nephews, all followers of the Swedenborgian faith, helped populate the 'Louisville colony' and closely connect the Lammot and du Pont families. When her son, Lammot, married Mary Belin in 1867, Nemours was turned over to the new couple, and Margaretta purchased an old farmhouse on Kennett Pike which she named Goodstay, now on the Wilmington campus of the University of Delaware. The Lammot and du Pont families are closely intertwined through cousins marrying. Margaretta's sister, Mary Lammot, married Thomas Hounsfield, and their daughter Alice Lammot Hounsfield, married Victor du Pont; Alice and Victor's daughter, Alice "Elsie," married Biderman's son, T. Coleman du Pont. The Hounsfield's son Edgar "Ned" moved to Louisville. Margaretta's sister, Elenora Lammot, married Edward Gilpin, their daughter Margaretta E. Gilpin moved to Louisville and married Alexis I. "Lex" du Pont Jr. Margaretta's brother, Ferdinand Lammot had at least two children, Ferdinand Jr. "Ferd," who moved to Louisville, and Margaretta duP. Lammot, who married Henry Belin Jr., both of Fred and Biderman's brother, Lammot's wife, Mary Belin. (see selected genealogy at the end of this article). The Longwood Papers of Pierre S. du Pont, Hagley Museum and Library. *passim*.

“Here I am seated at Fred’s beautiful desk, which at present is covered with millions of little bugs...never before seen in Louisville,” Biderman wrote to his mother in July 1856. He described how the gas light burning all night attracted “some myriad of them,” their tiny carcasses piled up “say two inches deep and a full square, they are smaller than the smallest mosquito.” After telling of his trip out to Louisville, Biderman adds, “[the women out west] wear sunbonnets which have capes covering down almost to the knees (no exaggeration).”<sup>4</sup> “Polly’s ideas of the Louisville ladies is entirely wrong they are (by sight) just as good as our eastern cheeses and show a little more taste than some”<sup>5</sup>

Later he describes the sad condition of their store, “I wish Irenee [his older brother Eleuthère Irénée II] could see our store now, it would give him enough to gas about for three weeks; first place it is of four different colors, unsymmetrical and unharmonious, a big hole in the wall and to complete a huge red, blue, & green gas lamp in front....speaking of gas...it was introduced into our room at the hotel [Louisville Hotel] which is a great convenience.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Antoine Biderman du Pont [hereafter Biderman] to Margaretta Lammot (du Pont) [hereafter his mother Margaretta], July, 25, 1856. Coleman Papers, Hagley. These tiny non-biting midges still plague rural areas of Kentucky, and Biderman’s description of a pile of dead carcasses two inches deep, from one night, is not an exaggeration.

<sup>5</sup> Biderman to his mother Margaretta. Nd, Coleman Papers, Hagley. “Polly,” Pauline du Pont (1825-1914), is Fred and Biderman’s elder sister who remained unmarried and lived with her mother.

<sup>6</sup> Biderman to his mother Margaretta, March 14, 1858. Coleman papers, Hagley.

Kentucky did not impress Biderman at first, he tells his mother, “[Kentucky] is a wild country, nothing but log cabins, and they are like angel visits – horse back is the only direct way of communication,”<sup>7</sup> and says, “yesterday we were surprised with the startling news that there had been no murders the day before.”<sup>8</sup> But Louisville was a bustling, growing town which eventually won Biderman over. He attempts to describe the scene at the docks to his mother, “What a busy energetic place! ...I stood ...on a pile of hemp near fifteen feet high, seeing steamer after steamer closely hemmed in by other steamers as far as the eye could reach, piles of freight and crowds of busy men.”<sup>9</sup> At the time, Louisville had a population of about 43,000, which more than doubled by 1870, and more than doubled again to just over 200,000 by 1900 when most of the du Pont family had moved away from Louisville.

Charles I. du Pont Jr., while one of the original founders of the Louisville business, soon began spending more and more time in Delaware. By 1859 he had decided that the ‘west’ was not for him, and on July 3, Biderman writes to his mother on corrected letterhead, the “C.I.” having been penciled through, to announce that it was now A.V. DuPont & Co.<sup>10</sup> Charlie soon married Fred and Biderman’s sister, Mary Sophie “Toto” (1834-1869).

For the first few years after arriving in ‘the west’, Biderman made the

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<sup>7</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta, December 14, 1857. Coleman papers, Hagley

<sup>8</sup> Biderman to his mother, Margareta, January 3, 1858. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>9</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta, April 4, 18. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>10</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta, July 3, 1859. Coleman papers, Hagley

rounds of tourist sites, including the Hermitage near Nashville, to see Andrew Jackson's tomb, and the Shaker community, Pleasant Hill, near Lexington. "Last week I went to Shakertown...I had always had a much more kindly idea of their institution than the reality has proved; there is a great deal of neatness and hospitality – but so formal and no such thing as the family circle."<sup>11</sup>

One of his favorite spots, to which he took all visiting relatives, remained Mammoth Cave. On his first visit to the cave in August 1856, he roomed at historic Bell's Tavern, and writes his father, "Dear Papa, I have just returned from the Mammoth Cave and consequently have just seen one of the greatest wonders of the world."<sup>12</sup> He wrote to his mother about his visit, remarking that his tour guide was Steven and describing his caving companions, "[three men and three women] from Bowling Green, a town not far distant; not very interesting companions as originality was minus in them and education had not subjected anything."<sup>13</sup>

Rather than relying on fate to choose his caving partners on a later trip, Biderman 'gets up' a group of friends to make an event of it. While describing the fun his thirty friends had, visiting the cave, playing ten pins and dressing up for the ballroom at night, he neglects to mention to his mother that the alluring Ellen Coleman was among the party. He does

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<sup>11</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta, July 15, 1860. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>12</sup> Biderman to his father, Alfred V. P. du Pont, August 2, 1856. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>13</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta, August 9, 1856. Coleman papers, Hagley. Steven, an African-American, was a rather remarkable caving guide, well known to visitors of Mammoth Cave in the 1850s.



mention how much he likes bloomers (referring to the caving costume worn by women), how practical they are, and how he's sure that, in time, bloomers will become widely accepted as the standard mode of dress for women.

Biderman enjoyed several such adventures with groups of young people from Louisville, including a week long steamboat trip "with guns and fishing rods" up the Salt River; Miss Ellen Coleman was one of the guests, and her brother, Tom Coleman, owned the boat.<sup>14</sup> He enjoyed Christmas visits and eggnog, and attended several weddings, including one in January, 1859,

"next Wednesday evening the largest party of the season comes off, it is a wedding, the inter-marriage of two of the wealthiest families here who consider themselves the bon ton. One's father was a Jew beggar in Virginia, the other's came here unknown and penniless 25 years ago; but that is nothing: the groom has no business but amusement, the bride a thoughtless affected climax of airs."<sup>15</sup>

Fred, who seldom wrote letters, could not sit still simply managing his DuPont Co. franchise, he had that pioneering spirit which left few stones unturned. Shortly after arriving in Louisville, and getting the powder concern turned around, he purchased the Louisville Paper Mill, a business

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<sup>14</sup> Biderman to his mother, Margareta, October 4, 1858. Coleman papers, Hagley

<sup>15</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta, January 9, 1859. Coleman papers, Hagley.

that occupied his Lammot grand-father and his Gilpin cousins back in Delaware.

As mills and warehouses seemed to burn down frequently, Fred decided to drill an artesian well to have an ample supply of water in case his mill caught on fire. The drilling, which took several years, drew crowds of on-lookers, but when finished, with a decorative fountain on top, Fred immediately realized the value of the mineral flow.

Biderman quipped to his mother, “Fred... has erected the handsomest fountain I ever saw in the mill yard and has turned quack medicine vendor...we think of barreling it for sale under the name DuPont’s Best, being salty and smelling sulphuriously[sic].”<sup>16</sup> However, advertised as mineral water, the brothers were soon inundated with orders for barrels of the liquid... “we will have to get a horse and wagon just for artesian as we have for powder...”<sup>17</sup> They could hardly acquire barrels fast enough to keep up with orders, let alone the daily crowds, often numbering in the hundreds, who paid admission to drink from the fountain and stand in its spay on hot days.

This led Fred to his next idea, building a bath house and reception room, where people could pay to bathe in the stinking water, yet, “[there] are

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<sup>16</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. August 1 & September 26, 1858. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>17</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta, May 15, 1859. Coleman papers, Hagley

numerous applicants, but no one ever takes a second one [bath].”<sup>18</sup> In May of the following year, Biderman bottles some of the water to send to his mother and describes it as “bouquet de Monkey Jacket.”<sup>19</sup>

Louisville, then as now, was known for horse racing, and Fred soon put some of his profits into a race horse, ‘Crouton’. “I forgot to tell you of Fred’s gone into another branch of business; he has speculated in a thousand dollar stallion, fiery & five grooms.”<sup>20</sup> Sadly, Biderman went out riding on Crouton one day, during which the horse stepped on a nail and is not mentioned again.

Fred may have enjoyed some of the social life in Louisville, but Biderman does not often mention Fred’s attendance when detailing his adventures to his mother. He spends Thanksgiving night, 1859, at a ball given by Capt. Coleman (his future father-in-law), and later mentions that “I went out to Thom Coleman’s, [his future-brother-in-law’s country home, The Meadows, near Shepardsville, Kentucky] the same with whom two years ago I went on a fishing trip...there were 12 children in the house, and 10 grown persons, only 3 chambers & two parlors. I had a very pleasant time.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta, July 4, August 1 & September 26, 1858. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>19</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta, May 8, 1859. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>20</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta, March 13, 1859. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>21</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. July 8, 1860. Coleman papers, Hagley. The Coleman family came from Ireland in the 1830s and settled first on a farm in Cleveland. Capt. Thomas Coleman had previously managed a line of packet boats in Ireland, and realized there was great profit to be made from the Ohio/Mississippi run from Pittsburg to New Orleans, and soon gave up farming. The Colemans relocated to Louisville, where they

While Biderman attended many weddings, balls and other events, he later remarks that “I took dinner out for the first time in Louisville, it was at Capt. Coleman’s.”<sup>22</sup> The du Pont brothers most likely ate their meals at the hotel where they lived, and an invitation to a ‘family dinner’ at someone’s home during the mid-nineteenth century meant a close relationship was forming. Biderman does not mention his fascination with Ellen Coleman to his mother, but the relationship had been developing for several years. Biderman finally writes to his mother about his proposal, “Fred and I went to Mr. C’s and played whist, &c, I giving the ring on the sly.”<sup>23</sup> He writes to his aunt Eleuthèra du Pont (Smith) who wanted to know how the couple met, “Ellen and myself have known each other nearly three years and twice have been thrown together on social trips to the cave & in the country for a week or so at a time.”<sup>24</sup>

It was not a long engagement as the couple was married the next month on April 18, 1861. Biderman assures his mother that she was still close to his heart, “I fear you feel I love you less; if their[sic] was any way I could show you my love to you was stronger than ever instead of being lessened...

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headquartered a line of steamboats running up and down the great rivers. Capt. Coleman’s second wife, Dora Morgan, produced seven children to add to the four Coleman already had for a combined family of eleven children. Dora’s sister, Catherine Morgan (Moxham), lived in Wales and had several children of her own. The elder Moxham children came to live in Louisville with their Aunt Dora in the late 1860s. Capt. Coleman’s eldest son, also Thomas, married Dulcena Johnson of Louisville, whose nephew, Thomas Johnson, came to live in the younger Coleman’s home.

<sup>22</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. August 5, 1860. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>23</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. March 6, 1861. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>24</sup> Biderman to Eleuthera duP. Smith. March 19, 1861. Coleman papers, Hagley.

Mother, your pearls are splendid [as a wedding gift to Ellen].”<sup>25</sup> News of the looming war somewhat affected travel for those coming to the wedding, as well as holding up the trip to Delaware for the new Mrs. du Pont. “The [wedding] party left...I did not go with them on account of the times when war seems inevitable.”<sup>26</sup> “I want to take Ellen home as soon as there is a certainty of everything remaining quiet, and no danger of being interrupted in going and coming.”<sup>27</sup>

## **The Civil War**

Both Fred and Biderman travelled extensively for their powder and mineral water business, and during these trips Biderman asked the locals their opinion about the state of the Union. Biderman, himself, did not especially agree with the arguments on either side of the debate, “I do wish these political demagogues could be transported to the center of Africa and I think, both ultra North & South would be well purified,” he writes to his mother on January 29, 1860.<sup>28</sup>

“For two weeks I have talked politics from Albany, New York to this place [New Orleans], and I have yet to find two men that will agree, or one that

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<sup>25</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. April 14, 1861. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>26</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. April 21, 1861. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>27</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. April 28, 1861. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>28</sup> Biderman to his mother, Margareta. January 29, 1860. Coleman papers, Hagley.

can prove his assertions with any degree of credibility. As far as I can see the following is the general state of the political condition of our union. Slavery is a moral evil, but in the age of 'the almighty dollar' \$4,000,000,000 (about the value of the slaves) cannot be annihilated at a blow; which is virtually done by the north assuming the power of the general government and prohibiting slavery in the territories.....disunion is inevitable unless the north concedes everything the south wants.<sup>29</sup>

He and his mother discuss the issue through correspondence, "You seem to be something of a republican and say the south has no cause to secede. I admit that she has no moral cause, she has a civil right (if the laws...have come to me correctly) I wish to heavens she had not."<sup>30</sup> "Do not fear a dissolution of the Union as a permanency, we may have a three or even a ten year war; but likely in six months all will be settled."<sup>31</sup>

As the threat of war drew closer, Biderman became a greater supporter of the Union cause, "The Union men here are forming a home guard..[to] protect it against any invasion from any quarter. How is Delaware going...she will undoubtedly fight for the Union, it is the border state's only salvation."<sup>32</sup> He writes on May 6,

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<sup>29</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. April 17, 1860. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>30</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. November, 11, 1860. Coleman papers, Hagley.

<sup>31</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. January 23, 1861. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>32</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. April 21, 1861. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

“Kentucky has given an immense vote for the Union....if we only had a loyal governor...but Magoffin is a weak minded drunken in the hands of John C. Breckenridge & Co.....John C. made a speech in Bowling Green last week...and asked ‘who are we to blame for all this?’ when an old citizen rose and said ‘we of Warren County blame you Mr. Breckenridge,’ whereon the crowd hollered ‘that’s so! That’s so!’”<sup>33</sup>

And in June writes, “C.S.A. stands for Confederate Stealing Association,”<sup>34</sup> adding in May of 1862, “the sentiment of every Seccesh is ‘make all you can & skin friend or foe.’”<sup>35</sup>

Biderman continues to keep his mother informed of the privations to business forced upon them by the Union troops in Louisville. Business was suspended off and on, they were not allowed to leave town at times, and rumors swirled through the streets. “We had the report of Morgan [John Hunt Morgan] with 8000 men at Cave City tearing up the track of L. & N. R.R. [Louisville and Nashville]...afternoon passengers came in on the through train and said six men had removed three rails, no damage otherwise done. You see how rumors spread.”<sup>36</sup> He also expressed concern for the family and their business back in Delaware after reading news of Gettysburg and hearing what the family was planning, “it would be utter

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<sup>33</sup> Biderman to his mother Margaretta. May 6, 1861. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>34</sup> Biderman to his mother Margaretta. June 24, 1861. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>35</sup> Biderman to his mother Margaretta. May 7, 1862. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>36</sup> Biderman to his mother Margaretta. July 7, 1863. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

folly to blow up the mills [DuPont Powder Mills] yourselves under any circumstances much less when the enemy is one hundred miles off – with as large an army as his [General Meade’s] between you and them.”

As the war drew farther away from Louisville and Kentucky, the young du Pont couple returned to a more normal routine and even thought about sharing their good fortune, “we are busy with arrangements for soldiers thanksgiving dinner, Ellen is going to send a dozen roast chickens, and apple pies.”<sup>37</sup> And at Christmas reports, “we had twenty-one children at our house Christmas eve to the Christmas tree...our tree was ten feet across at the floor and touched the ceiling, it was very handsome...we had about twenty candles through it, and filled with ornaments and fruit.”<sup>38</sup>

As news of the end of the war reached Louisville, there was great celebration, followed by the sad information of Abraham Lincoln’s assassination. The country mourned, including Louisville, “this day a week we were all joy and busy illuminating....a glorious bright star, three feet across, between the two flags over our door.....Saturday morning, Main St. was hung from one end to the other in mourning, we wrapped our banners in crape....would that I could command language worthy to honor Abraham Lincoln, worthy to execute his assassin.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. November 21, 1864. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>38</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. January 15, 1865. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>39</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. April 21, 1865. Coleman Papers, Hagley.



## **The Growing Family**

Biderman and Ellen began their married life living with her mother in their family home, “The Castle,” on Walnut Street in Louisville. They began looking for a house of their own, and on December 8, Biderman tells his mother,

“in my new domicile where I have dwelt for a week... our parlor is furnished entirely by Ellen’s furniture and 4 chairs & the piano which Mrs. C[Coleman] lent us. The back parlor has my books in and two tables that is all....the dining room is small six persons crowding it...we had it papered oak, the paint is oak, carpet ditto so it is the oak room with a very cozy feeling.<sup>40</sup>

Ellen joins in the letter writing and gives a more detailed account of their new home,

“We have been in since Monday night to sleep and for breakfast & tea- dinner we still take with Mother... To begin at the beginning we have a long narrow hall 12 yrds one way & two the other carpeted in green & oak...the stairs are....of the striped venetian[carpet]....the parlor where we have our only grand carpet- maroon with wreath of small green leaves & roses, running with medallions of drab and white... our curtains...crimson damask & white lace ones...[the real dining room is small, they’ll use the

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<sup>40</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. December 8, 1861. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

back parlor for company]...for the furniture of either dining room we have oak. In the small room we have crimson & oak paper & oak & brown carpet...and Brin takes part possession as a smoking room...upstairs...the front rooms are carpeted alike with ingrain a green ground with a rather small diamond pattern in white & oak...the dressing room and passage have crimson & oak carpets... Brin bought a very handsome set of mahogany furniture for the spare room. <sup>41</sup>

Ellen continues her letter with information about their servant, “she is an Irish woman... I would rather have had negro servants but things are so unsettled.” She then tells her mother-in-law that the Irish woman served tea so poorly, they had to laugh.

Biderman and Ellen start their large family with the birth of daughter Margaretta Elizabeth “Meta” du Pont in February of 1862 and Biderman tells his mother, “Ellen came down stairs...for the first time...both she and Meta are very well.”<sup>42</sup> The following year a son is born, Thomas Coleman “Colie” du Pont, and Biderman reports, “Friday was the birthday of another

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<sup>41</sup> Ellen Coleman du Pont to her mother-in-law Margaretta. December 7, 1861. Coleman Papers, Hagley. Oddly, oak, as a wood, was not in favor in the mid-nineteenth century. Oak, however, was a favorite decorative treatment. When Ellen mentions oak carpet or wallpaper, she is referring to the pattern woven into the surface, generally in stripes, imitating the grain and color of oak. When she mentions oak furniture, it was most likely pine furniture painted in imitation of oak; doors and woodwork were similarly treated.

<sup>42</sup> Biderman to his mother Margaretta. February 26, 1862. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

du Pont, to be christened Thomas.”<sup>43</sup> As Colie grew older he displayed an unbridled spirit which his father describes, “Tom is the roughphistz [sic] fellow you’ve ever saw...it will take a ton of energy & six gross of polishing brushes to get him tamed down.”<sup>44</sup> When Ellen’s brother and his new wife have a child, Biderman notes, “Barry’s wife (Linda) had a boy; to be called Thomas, the sixth Thomas in the family all living on the block...across the street...within a square of each other.”<sup>45</sup>

Once back to running her household, Ellen reports,

“since baby was four weeks old...I have been missing a cook – Johanna [the cook] behaved very badly while I was sick...next I found the housemaid telling stories and preventing other girls coming after I engaged them...so I had to start with fresh servants...I had to find a new nurse...nearly every cook who applied ...refused to come because she could not have her meals & receive her company in the dining room.”<sup>46</sup>

Victorian women of a certain class spent much of their letter-writing time complaining about their servants.

A son soon followed, “Last night Ellen gave us our entertainment, and Anthony [baptized Antoine Biderman] came forth showing good lungs, and

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<sup>43</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. December 12, 1863. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>44</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. November 13, 1865. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>45</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. August 3, 1865. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>46</sup> Ellen C. du Pont to her mother-in-law Margareta. February 25, 1864. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

as respectable as most youngsters of a few hours old.”<sup>47</sup> With each pregnancy, Ellen’s health grew worse. After Antoine Biderman “Erman” came Dora “Dozie”(1867), Zara(1869), Pauline (1871)and Evan(1872). Ellen’s last and most difficult pregnancy in 1876 resulted in the death of both baby and mother.

Ellen and Biderman’s domestic life was not always their own to decide. Ellen’s mother, Dora Morgan (Coleman), kept a tight hold on her eleven children, and in June of 1862, Mrs. Coleman required Biderman and Ellen to give up their house and move back into the Castle, as she planned to move to Philadelphia so her younger children could attend school.<sup>48</sup> After house-sitting Ellen and Biderman found a second house, but soon enough, “Mrs. Coleman talks quite seriously of going to Europe with all the family....Ellen and I will have to go back to the old house (a grand nuisance n’est pas?)”<sup>49</sup> During this trip Dora brought back her Welsh niece and nephews to be educated and live in America. Eventually, as Dora Coleman’s children grew into adulthood and her young wards began making their way in the world with jobs at the several du Pont/Coleman businesses, Ellen and Biderman found house number three, and settled into a routine.

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<sup>47</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. April 27, 1865. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>48</sup> Dora Morgan Coleman took in her Welsh niece and nephews, Florence, Arthur and Edgar Moxham. Dora Coleman’s daughter-in-law took in her nephew, Thomas L. Johnson. Both Tom Johnson and Arthur Moxham would figure prominently in the Louisville family’s future.

<sup>49</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. July 10, 1865. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

Biderman was very concerned about his children's education, having gone through nurses and governesses rather quickly, and then finding local schools for their early education with which he is not especially happy. Biderman's idea of a good education is expressed in a letter to his mother, "I do not want my boys to learn Latin & Greek...it is so much time lost & not only lost, before a clear knowledge of the English language...[it] trains the mind to grasp at ideas." He continues, "as to a school where the number is more than a family circle, control over young men ceases. A teacher has no...power over a boy...in this country where freedom has proved a greater power than force."<sup>50</sup> He's also very concerned that his sons might be too well educated to be on a firm footing with other captains of industry who had little 'book learning.' He says Colie cannot enter MIT "until he is sixteen & then it takes 4 years which will be very long for schooling for a man that must work for a living." He goes on to express his concern about Colie's "disadvantage of facing men of the same age who didn't waste time in school."

Meta went to live with her grandmother in Wilmington to attend finishing school in Philadelphia, while Colie was sent to 'college' at about age 12, in Urbana, Illinois. Erman followed Colie to Urbana, but little is known of the younger children's higher education. Coleman applied to MIT at age fifteen, but was not admitted until the next year due to his age. His cousins, Alfred I. and Pierre S. du Pont also attended MIT.

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<sup>50</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. July 24, 1879. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

Every summer the couple sought a country home to rent, something away from the dust and dirt of the Louisville streets. One summer it was Pewee Valley, just outside of Louisville, another year it was Bardstown, about forty miles south-east. Every summer they found a new location, never too far for Biderman to get into the city for work, but far enough for the family to enjoy fresh country air. In 1871, the du Pont's found a newly built house for the summer, quite close to town, but still in the country as they desired. This Italianate mansion would soon be purchased by the local du Pont family businesses, and be named Central Park. Central Park became an icon of family and stability for the Louisville du Ponts.

## **Central Park**

Within a few miles of the Louisville city limits, near the old Central Plank Turnpike (Third Street), a large country house had been built in 1869, on about seventeen acres. The builder immediately put the property up for sale, perhaps building on speculation that the expanding city would make his venture profitable, which indeed it did as he immediately built a larger mansion across the street .

As the summer of 1871 approached, Biderman writes, "Ellen is on the lookout for a country place for the summer...somewhere near town."<sup>51</sup> And in May, "I have rented a place about 4 miles out, a \$22,000 place that the

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<sup>51</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. March 26, 1871. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

owner wants to sell....Fred is busy building R.R.”<sup>52</sup> A few years earlier Fred purchased the Central Passenger Rail Road, the smallest of Louisville’s three street car lines. The mule-drawn cars traveled along the old plank turnpike to the city limits, and Fred saw the benefit of taking the line a few miles farther out of town...he was already thinking ahead.

“Friday we moved out here, and today...are quite settled in...our quarters are one of the so called ‘fine places’ but it is much over rated. We are ruralizing here for the summer and the place grows on acquaintance; there is a large running spring here that rushes out of the ground...so cool that we drink it without ice...yesterday we invested in a croquet set for the summer campaign.”<sup>53</sup>

For many years Biderman had been longing not only to return to Delaware, but to enjoy what he imagined to be the quiet, easy life of a farmer. “Last Sunday I went out to Tom’s place in the country, ‘the Meadows’ and spent the day...(Oh! For a farm life for me).”<sup>54</sup> After the death of his uncle and namesake, Antoine Biderman, Bid speculates about the possibility of purchasing his uncle’s estate, “I can not afford Uncle Biderman’s place now [Winterthur]; to buy the Brinckle or Pyle place [Gibraltar & Goodstay] I have enough, but neither would afford me sufficient occupation.”<sup>55</sup> Biderman always kept his mother apprised of the plants and flowers he

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<sup>52</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. May 15, 1871. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>53</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. May 28, and June 11, 1871. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>54</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. April 20, 1862. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>55</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. October 12, 1863. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

grew around the office and in his yard in town, including plants shipped from Delaware. Like many of the du Ponts, Biderman had a proclivity for plants, flowers and landscaping, and the prospect of buying and living at this small estate titillated his gardening instincts.

Fred, as it happened, purchased the estate as part of the Central P.R.R. holdings, and Bid writes in March, 1872, “the Park has got to be fenced & laid off in walks etc. music & flower arranged & confectionary etc. etc.” “Fred is busy building a greenhouse & a cold grapery at the park.”<sup>56</sup> This green house was no small affair, as Meta tells her grandmother about cutting roses in the greenhouse some years later, “we cut this last week between 250 to 300 and I am quite positive there are equally as many buds.”<sup>57</sup> The greenhouse included bananas and other exotic plants and was open to the public, as the family had not yet begun to live at Central Park..

Central Park was beautifully landscaped with a spider-web of curving walks, trees and shrubs, a pond and a gate house for collecting a fee from visitors. The plantings and extensive walks rivaled any 19<sup>th</sup> century civic park. Fred was creating a destination at the end of his street car line as many street car concerns did all over the country; a sort of amusement park that would entice ridership on his line, especially on the weekends. Bid notes in June, “Central Park is open now to the public & we have been very much complimented.”<sup>58</sup> Fred promoted the company park for events, and

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<sup>56</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. September, 14, 1873. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>57</sup> Meta du Pont to her grandmother Margareta. March 13, 1887. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>58</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. June 17, 1872. Coleman Papers, Hagley. The fee was five cents.



“tomorrow will be a great gala-day at the park...I put it at 6,000 [visitors]...a great Masonic picnic...we are having about four [events] a week.”<sup>59</sup> And for the 1873 season, “we open 1<sup>st</sup> May with a children’s picnic and fire-works at night...a rent of \$100.”<sup>60</sup> “We put up an arbor 54 ft long & intend using it for an ice cream saloon...Fred sent you by express the first bunch of grapes raised under glass at the park.”<sup>61</sup>

The family had not immediately occupied the mansion on a full-time basis, in fact, as company property, it may not have been expected, as Biderman writes in 1873, “we are looking around for a summer place for next June.”<sup>62</sup> In the end the family spends the summers of 1873 and ‘74 at Central Park, but each time return to their home in the city for the winter. Unfortunately, their home in town burned and the family moved to Central Park permanently in 1875. “We move to the park which is now being papered and whitened etc, etc, etc.” “We are gradually getting settled here at the park...it certainly is much nicer than town.”<sup>63</sup> Ellen adds, “since the fire my hands have been as full of work as hands can be...getting the house in town cleaned from the smoke then getting this house ready.”<sup>64</sup> Young Meta also writes to her “Gram...we all like the park so much better than town, it is so much nicer and cooler. All the shrubbery and trees are so pretty and green.

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<sup>59</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. June 23, 1872. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>60</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. April 20, 1873. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>61</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. June 6 and 12, 1875. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>62</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. March 9, 1873. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>63</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. March 14, and April 25, 1875. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>64</sup> Ellen C. du Pont to her mother-in-law Margareta. May 9, 1875. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

We have a vegetable garden...Papa and uncle have decided that they will have the concerts,” which were possibly in doubt once the estate became a family home.<sup>65</sup> Bid mentions that the gardener, Steven, has planted a flower bed spelling out the name ‘Central Park’ in letters two feet high with aloe and feverfew.

While living at ‘the Park’ seemed like a blessing for the du Ponts, their joy was soon diminished with the death of Ellen Coleman (du Pont) in 1876, during her last and most difficult pregnancy. Writing to his mother, Biderman refuses to use typical black-edged stationary, “I do not want mourning; it is horrible, fiendish; to moan, and groan, and mourn, and parade to the world [is unacceptable]... But oh! The blank...I can not prevent the big round tears at times rolling down my cheeks...I have sold my house [in town] and rest of my real estate.”<sup>66</sup> At this point ‘Cousin Kate’ comes to live at Central Park to act as housekeeper and surrogate mother to the children. Kate had been employed as the governess for several years, helping with lessons and behavior, but she now became a permanent part of the family. Kate Hunter’s relationship to the du Ponts is not completely clear, she may have been an aunt/cousin on the Coleman side of the family, and becomes a vital motherly influence to the children for the rest of her life.

While Central Park saw many great events, including a luncheon for the

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<sup>65</sup> Meta du Pont to her grandmother Margareta. June 1, 1875. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>66</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. May 21 & May 28, 1876. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

President and several Civil War generals during the Southern Exposition in 1883, Meta's engagement party in 1887, was possibly the last great event to take place in the house, of which there is an account,

“We had the billiard table taken down and the parlor and billiard room covered with tarpelines for dancing, the dining room and library for reception rooms & had a temporary dining room built....we had two of the drives lighted with gas & Japanese lanterns...the house of course was lighted up....the inside was all decorated with plants and cut flowers, all the chandeliers were draped in smilax..and in the fireplaces and corners...the florist arranged palms & ferns...on the sideboard, library table & parlor mantelpiece were stands of cut flowers and a hanging basket between the folding doors. The temporary dining room was papered and had two gas chandeliers...it was also decorated with plants & cut flowers....Anne [Cazzanove du Pont, Meta's cousin, daughter of E. I. du Pont II and Charlotte Henderson, who both passed away in 1877 ] wore her train pink watered silk...and I wore a new dress...the greater part of it is red, the vest, front of the skirt, and part of the back drapery is of blue & cream brocade, it is also trimmed with pearl passmentry....there were about a hundred and thirty people.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Meta to her grandmother Margareta. December 17, 1887. Coleman Papers, Hagley Meta and her Delaware cousin, Anne Cazzanova du Pont (Waller)(1860-1899) were best friends and wrote to each other continually. In 1886 Anne makes a very bad marriage to Absalom Waller, described in a letter from Dora to Meta, after the engaged couple had paid a visit, “Annie and Mr. Annie have just left and I am thoroughly disgusted. Oh he is

Biderman, in a depressive state over the loss of his wife, then his sons being taken away by Uncle Fred and Tom Johnson to work at their enterprises, followed by Fred's death, plans a trip to Europe in late 1894, from which he does not return.

"Tom Johnson does not want to let Erman go [A. B. du Pont Jr.], Arthur Moxham wants him too, and so I guess it shows the boy is willing to work...he is learning in the line of street RRs and will be able to help his uncle more when he comes back."<sup>68</sup>

"I want Erman to come home; but Uncle Fred says he cannot be spared from Brooklyn [a street car line near Detroit]. Uncle Fred and A. Moxham want to capture Coleman [ T. Coleman du Pont] from me at Central City...so you see I will be minus him too."<sup>69</sup>

"Dora [his daughter] and Harry [Harry Phillips, recently married]...expect to move next Thursday into their house; and that night Meta and I will be alone at the park."<sup>70</sup>

After seeming abandonment on all sides, Biderman's letters to his mother drop off significantly, and after the tragedy of Fred's murder, practically

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undoubtedly the worst namby-pamby wishy-washy specimen of mankind I ever saw. How under the sun a sensible girl like Annie could have fancied such an object is a mystery to me...he talks in an effected silly way."

<sup>68</sup> Bidreman to his mother Margaretta. February 18, 1887. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>69</sup> Biderman to his mother Margaretta. March 22, 1887. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>70</sup> Biderman to his mother Margaretta. April 5, 1887. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

cease, until the trip to Europe when he writes no more.

With Fred's passing in 1893, his mother, Margaretta Lammot (du Pont) inherited half of Fred's estate (estimated at about \$2 million in 1893 dollars, mostly in stock) including controlling interest in the Central Passenger Rail Road. While Fred's executor, Pierre S. du Pont II (Fred's nephew, son of Fred and Bid's brother, Lammot du Pont, who passed away in 1884), tried to liquidate as many stocks as possible for his grandmother, Margaretta, he held onto the CPRR stocks and Central Park. The grandchildren were quite concerned about losing their home and Meta writes, "I wish I could tell you...what happiness it was to me to know the Park did not have to be sold."<sup>71</sup> However, the other investors in the rail road were interested in seeing their profits grow, and wanted to divest themselves of the Park, which was no longer functioning as the destination Fred intended.

"Your letter has come & I was not surprised at the contents, knowing it must end that way. You can not expect the owners to let their money lay idle, as the Park is not their home any longer – My idea is that it will cost so much less to sell in the lump than to divide, that it will be more profitable to try to get the city to buy, for a park.....I thought at your uncle's death it was valued at \$350,000."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Meta to her grandmother Margaretta. June 27, 1893. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>72</sup> Margaretta to her granddaughter, Meta du Pont (Coleman). August 30, 1894. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

It seems Pierre arranged an exchange of CPRR stock for sole ownership of Central Park, for in 1895 Margaretta offers each of her Louisville grandchildren a portion of the estate. Meta replies that they had talked it over and all agreed not to divide up the park. “We heard that the park commissioners were going to raise \$1,000,000 for park purposes this fall, so ...we all agree that we would infinitely rather see it sold as a park than to cut it up – it is far too beautiful to be destroyed.”<sup>73</sup>

When the matriarch of the du Pont clan passed away in 1898, the Park was left to her Louisville grandchildren, with all its taxes and expenses. Dora du Pont (Phillips) and her family lived in the house for a short while, Erman (married to his cousin from the Hounsfield side, Mary Ethel Clark) and his family occupied the house briefly, and Meta and her children lived there from time to time (her husband and cousin, Michael Bannan Coleman, having also passed away in 1898).

Finally in 1904, the City of Louisville bought the property to establish a city park, and the du Ponts, by and large, moved away from Louisville. The house was torn down, along with other buildings left over from the Southern Exhibition. The paths are slightly redesigned by Fredrick Law Olmstead, who also built a gymnasium where the house once stood.

Before all was lost, a small old house on the property, possibly older than the mansion, and likely where the head gardener lived, was moved from Central Park onto a lot on St. James Court, half a block away, in a Victorian

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<sup>73</sup> Meta to her grandmother Margaretta. January 18, 1895. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

neighborhood developed after the Southern Exposition buildings were demolished. Erman's daughter, Ethel "Eppie" du Pont (1896-1980) lived in this small house among mansions, the only du Pont to remain in Louisville.

## **The Expositions**

The du Pont brothers were men about town. They owned a number of businesses, and sat on managing boards for many others. "Two rail roads are trying to get a grant from the city...[the one] elected me president, against my flat refusal...as soon as it was known the other tended me its presidency."<sup>74</sup> Biderman, in particular, as the public face of the du Pont interests, had many offers.

In 1872, the city of Louisville mounted the Louisville Industrial Exposition to show off its return to strength as a southern city after the Civil War. It is no surprise that they elected Biderman as president of the fair. His role was not simply as a figure head to show up for the opening, but as a working member of the organizing committee. Biderman gives his mother short updates, "our exposition came to an organization last week by election of directors, it is a big job to undertake, but no work no play."<sup>75</sup> "Our exposition is taking shape fast and bids fair to be a success."<sup>76</sup> "Our

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<sup>74</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. August 22, 1872. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>75</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. March 31, 1872. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>76</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. April 7, 1872. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

exposition moves on slowly...I will withdraw as soon as possible,”<sup>77</sup> and mentions the “immensity of work,” in late May.<sup>78</sup> By June he states the building is going well, and in early September says “the exposition opened on Tuesday, very brilliantly and no doubt will be a success,” and in late September says, “the Exposition is a great success.”<sup>79</sup>

Ten years later, when the idea of a great Southern Exposition was circulated in Louisville’s Courier Journal, the du Ponts were quick to join the discussion, and after Biderman’s success with the Louisville Industrial Exposition, he was elected president of this celebration. More than that, Biderman helped find the perfect location on the outskirts of the growing city; a large track of empty land immediately next door to Central Park. In fact, much of the Exposition’s Midway was located on the Central Park property. The monstrous exhibition building, taking up nearly 15 acres, went up just to the south of the du Pont’s property, but the Art Museum, the Shooting Gallery, the Lake with paddle boats, Midway games, and food concessions, along with the novel electric trolley were built right around the du Pont’s home. While Meta and Coleman were a bit old, the younger children could not have lived in a more convenient spot to enjoy the carnival atmosphere every summer for the next five years.

Meta had her own excitement in connection with the opening of the exposition. Opening day was a moment of great fanfare, parades, speeches,

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<sup>77</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. April 21, 1872. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>78</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. May 23, 1872. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>79</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. July 1, September 7, & September 28, 1872. Coleman Papers, Hagley.



and fireworks, with the guests of honor being President Chester Arthur, former president U. S. Grant and Gen. W. T. Sherman, along with other notables. After the opening speeches, a ride on the electric trolley and a visit to the Art Museum, the guests of honor sat down to a private lunch in the du Pont home. As the lady of the house nineteen-year-old Meta acted as hostess. “Tomorrow is your eventful day dear Meta, & we have been thinking all week of your state of tribulation & work both at the Expo & yr house! Are you on your heels or yr head? Arthur, with Grant & Sherman are to be at the opening are you to lunch all the grandees?” her Gram asked.<sup>80</sup>

The Southern Exposition introduced electric lighting on a grand scale for the first time in America. A building here or there, a few streets in New York City previously had electric lights, but for the first time a massive public building was entirely lighted at night by electric bulbs. Crowds came at dusk just to see the lights come on. The exterior as well as the interior were lighted, the paths throughout Central Park were strung with lights, and more amazing, for the first time anywhere, a trolley, powered by electricity, ran on tracks around Central Park, delivering visitors to the Art Museum, the lake, and the midway attractions. A short tunnel was built on the Central Park property through which the trolley ran, the interior of which was lighted with electric bulbs. The connection between this novelty on their grounds, and the fact that the extended du Pont-Coleman families were branching out into street car lines in many cities in the old north-west,

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<sup>80</sup> Margareta du Pont to her granddaughter Meta. July 31, 1883. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

cannot be easily dismissed.

That summer, 1883, Alfred I. du Pont spent his vacation from MIT with his cousin Coleman, who was finished with his studies and would soon be taking on the management of Central Coal. While biographers have mentioned Alfred's first introduction to electric lights as being at the 1876 Centennial in Philadelphia, where one bulb was on display, the Southern Exposition at his cousin's home, for the first time anywhere, displayed the practical application of electric light for an entire building, and an entire complex. Alfred I. experienced firsthand the marvel of living with electricity, and since Edison was there helping to hang the lights, its likely the two met. No sooner did Alfred get back to the Brandywine, than he began to advocate electrifying the powder mills. Even though Boss Henry rejected the idea, Alfred immediately wired his own home, Swamp Hall, and soon lighted the homes along Breck's Lane where he lived.<sup>81</sup>

Cousin Kate writes to Meta, who was visiting Delaware, "just got back from the Expo office...I am completely gone on the art gallery...Oh Meta it's the loveliest place I ever saw in my life, I very nearly live there and every day I find something new to admire."<sup>82</sup> It was the finest collection of paintings and sculptures that had yet been assembled for public viewing. Paintings submitted by local artists like Harvey Joiner were for sale, while other works of art were borrowed from great collections far and wide. Many

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<sup>81</sup> Wall, Joseph F. *Alfred I. du Pont: the Man & His Family*. (Oxford University Press, N.Y.) 1990. Pg. 132.

<sup>82</sup> Cousin Kate to Meta. August 14, 1883. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

pieces were on loan from Gen. Grant and other collectors.<sup>83</sup> The success of this exposition with hundreds of thousands of visitors that first year, kept the fair open for the next four years; Biderman stepped down as president after the first successful year.

### **Enterprising Spirit**

Starting with the powder business in 1854, and branching out with the paper mill by 1856, then adding mineral water, the du Pont brothers had a full plate of businesses to manage. Fred remained the rich, silent partner promoting many, if not all of the du Pont family business concerns in the west, while Biderman was, more often than not, the public face of the du Pont holdings, being listed as president or general manager of the companies they acquired. As their businesses expanded, other du Pont and Lamot cousins moved west to join the ‘Louisville colony,’ and helped expand the small congregation of Swedenborgian that Biderman kept trying to organize. Alexis I. “Lex” du Pont Jr. (1843-1904) came out just after the Civil War and took over running the powder business, which he eventually bought in 1874. Ferdinand “Ferd” Lamot and Edgar “Ned” Hounsfield both soon moved to Louisville and began working for Biderman at the mill. In some rare correspondence to Fred, Ferd writes seeking a situation in “any house in the west” and soon after, Ned writes about the possibility of

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<sup>83</sup> *Catalogue of the Works of Art at the Southern Exposition.* (Louisville, Ky. 1883). Kentucky Library & Museum, Bowling Green, Ky.

going into business as a partner and says “\$20,000 seems reasonable.”<sup>84</sup> Biderman writes his mother, “I got a letter from Ferd accepting a situation from us.”<sup>85</sup> Another cousin, Margareta du Pont Gilpin, also moved to Louisville and eventually married Lex, though died giving birth to her first child.<sup>86</sup>

With the added help of cousins and nephews, the du Ponts began to expand further. In 1869 they bought controlling interest in the Central Passenger Rail Road, which they expanded and developed with Central Park as a destination. Biderman, as manager, hired several teenage boys to help in the office; Tom Johnson, his sister-in-law’s nephew, and Arthur and Edgar Moxham, his wife’s cousins.<sup>87</sup> “Flory (Florence) Moxham comes to stay with us...I am going to give her brother a place in the R.R. office...he is 14 years old.”<sup>88</sup> And six years later, “Arthur Moxham is engaged to Helen

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<sup>84</sup> Ferdinand Lamot to Alfred du Pont. August 11, 1865. & Edgar Hounsfield to Alfred. October 28, 1865. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>85</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. December 6, 1865. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>86</sup> Ferdinand Lamot and Edgar Hounsfield eventually set out in a business of their own, making bicycles. Lex du Pont marries a second time and his youngest son, Eugene (1882-1966) marries Catherine Dulcena “Katedulwe” Moxham (1883-1931), daughter of Ellen Coleman’s cousin Edgar Moxham and her niece, Elizabeth “Bessie” Coleman.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas L. Johnson (1854-1911), nephew of Dulcena Johnson (Coleman). Arthur (1854-1934) and Edgar (1858-1913) Moxham, 1<sup>st</sup> cousins of Ellen Coleman (du Pont). The Moxham brothers married Coleman sisters, Ellen’s nieces. Helen Coleman (1856-1932) married Arthur in 1876; their son, Egbert Moxham (1881-1956) married Biderman’s granddaughter, Dora Phillips in 1906. Elizabeth “Bessie” Coleman (1861-1886) married Edgar Moxham in 1882, and after Elizabeth died, Edgar married her sister Margaret Coleman (1854-1940), Edgar and Bessie’s daughter, “Katedulwe” married Lex du Pont’s youngest son, Eugene.

<sup>88</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. September 26, 1869. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

Coleman ...he is a fine young man an honest hard worker.”<sup>89</sup> These enterprising young men blossomed and, with financial backing from Fred, went on to build street car lines and steel mills throughout the south and upper mid-west.

The du Ponts bought a lead mine just west of Louisville in 1872, “our lead mine is gradually developing into a good thing.”<sup>90</sup> They branched out in the coal business as early as 1877 as evidenced by Biderman’s letter to his daughter, Meta, “I have taken Bannie Coleman [Michael Bannen Coleman ( 1856-1898), his nephew and future son-in-law] into the coal business.”<sup>91</sup> They developed a huge tract of land in western Kentucky in 1882, the Central Coal and Iron Company; building Central City as a company town, with his son, T. Coleman du Pont as on-site manager from 1884 to 1894. They added the Green River Iron and Coal Company, Kensee Mines near Jellico, Tennessee, and Valeria Coal & Mining Co., Iowa to their portfolio. “We have introduced the telephone in the coal business...we converse on it on the average every half hour...one half our orders for coal are transmitted over it.”<sup>92</sup> They built the Elizabethtown and Paducah Rail Road to connect their coal fields in western Kentucky to the Louisville market, with Biderman as president, who was immediately offered the presidency of two

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<sup>89</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. December 4, 1875. Arthur and Helen were 1<sup>st</sup> cousins, once removed.

<sup>90</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. November 27, 1872. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>91</sup> Biderman to his daughter Margareta. November 11, 1877. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>92</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. January 20, 1878. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

other railroads. He writes, “3 presidents in three months.”<sup>93</sup>

Biderman moves into the next business, buying controlling interest in one of the local newspapers in 1869, *The Daily Commercial*, becoming sole owner by 1874. “I send you the Daily Commercial, not that it is of much interest to you, but I control it as a business venture and want your criticism.”<sup>94</sup> In 1884 Bid purchased the *Evening Post* as well, redirecting that paper from a conservative point of view to a more liberal, independent voice.

After the panic of 1873, the Louisville Rolling Mill was in trouble. This family business had, for a long time, belonged to Biderman’s in-laws, the Coleman family. With offices across Main Street from the du Pont’s, and the union between Biderman and Ellen, the families were close and undoubtedly business partners (the street cars, railroads and mining ventures needed iron and rails). When the creditors of the mill called a meeting in late 1873, Fred stepped up and bailed out the Colemans, ending up with controlling interest in the firm. This enterprise became one of the first modern business ventures, creating a model on which the DuPont Company would base its blast onto the international corporate scene in the early 1900s with T. Coleman du Pont (Biderman’s son) at the head, and Arthur Moxham and Tom Johnson as advisors.

The Louisville Rolling Mill Company owned two mills, and the du Ponts

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<sup>93</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. November 5, 1872. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

<sup>94</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. April 19, 1880. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

already had a third in town. With Fred's purchase of the firm, Louisville Rolling became a holding company, leasing its various mills to others. The du Ponts leased one mill as the Central Rolling Mill, a subsidiary of Central Coal and Iron with Biderman as manager, and the Colemans leased another incorporated as the Coleman Rolling Mill, under the management of Biderman's in-laws, Barry and Morgan Coleman. This complicated interest in steel mills lead the du Pont's into their next business venture, as well as providing a proving ground for Tom Johnson and Arthur Moxham, who would revolutionize the street car industry in the late 1800s.

The ore fields outside of sleepy little Birmingham, Alabama were just beginning to be tapped in the 1870s. On December 26, 1879 Biderman writes, "as to the Alabama question...I am not going to Birmingham to live. There is not a Coleman associate with me in iron....I believe the south is on the verge of a boom," and in 1880, Biderman, with Fred's help and other Louisville investors, including the Colemans, chartered the Birmingham Rolling Mill.<sup>95</sup>

The importance of this milling venture was that this is where Tom Johnson and Arthur Moxham put their skills and abilities together, creating new forms of rails, with new methods of steel production. Tom, nephew and ward of Dulcena Johnson (Coleman), got his start in the Louisville Rolling Mills with his Uncle Tom Coleman, but soon moved to the Central street car business of his Aunt Ellen and Uncle Bid. Tom excelled in the street car

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<sup>95</sup> Biderman to his mother Margareta. December 26, 1879. Coleman Papers, Hagley.

industry, and developed, among many other things, a specially designed rail for street cars. Arthur Moxham, who began as an office boy with his cousin Biderman, switched to working for his cousin Tom Coleman in the rolling mills and developed a knack for steel. Together Tom Johnson and Arthur Moxham worked at the Birmingham mills on the new method of 'cold rolling' developed by Moxham, making Johnson's 'jaybird rail' a reality. The Jay Rail became the standard for street car lines throughout America in the 1890s.

Tom Johnson, who by the age of seventeen owned street car lines in Indianapolis, and later St. Louis, Detroit and Cleveland, decided to build a steel mill of his own. With financial backing from Uncle Fred, the Johnson Steel Rail Works was located in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Tom partnered with Arthur Moxham and the company town they built was named Moxham. Tom and Arthur soon convinced T. Coleman du Pont to come along as manager. The Great Johnstown Flood of 1889 had the du Pont/Coleman family in a panic. The mills received some damage, but the town of Moxham, in which T. Coleman and Arthur's families lived, was on higher ground so their families did not perish. Hellen Moxham's sister, Ellen Coleman's niece, Duclenia had married an inventor who worked at the Johnson company. Dulcencia left Woodvale, where she lived, to visit her sister in nearby Moxham that morning; she survived, her husband, at work, did not.

Johnson Steel had expanded into Lorain, Ohio, and by 1898 had become a wholly owned subsidiary of Federal Steel. Tom Johnson held back much of



the land development, railway and other non-steel assets from the deal and created the Johnson Company, and cousin Pierre S. du Pont II was made president. Pierre got his initiation into the financial wizardry of holding companies, subsidiary corporations and managing money, and in 1901 bought his own street car line in Dallas Texas. This apprenticeship positioned him as the financial genius behind the modern DuPont Company in 1902 when the three cousins, T. Coleman, Alfred I. and Pierre bought controlling interest in the family company.

### **Fred's passing, and the du Pont's leaving town**

From their arrival in town the du Pont brothers lived in residence hotels; the Louisville Hotel at first, and then the more stylish Galt House, at the time not more than a block away from their office. Fred continued to live at the Galt House after Biderman's marriage, though he was continually encouraged to share Bid's residence. Just after the Civil War the Galt House burned to the ground, which may have prompted Fred to look more seriously for a house, yet as soon as the Galt House was rebuilt, bigger and more elegant than before the fire, Fred returned there to live. Rather than the "frugal" lifestyle suggested by James Alexander, the Galt House provided the most luxurious accommodations available in Louisville. Tom and Dulcena Coleman, along with several of their married children also

lived at the Galt House after they gave up the Castle. <sup>96</sup>

Fred managed his mother's finances after his father passed away in 1856. He acted as executor for his brother Irene's estate when he passed away in 1877, taking care of the financial affairs of Alfred I., Anne Cazzanova and their siblings. He also managed his brother Lamot's estate after his tragic death in 1884, taking care of his widow, Mary Belin, and her ten children, including Pierre S. du Pont II. Uncle Fred, though never married himself, was somewhat of a father figure to all of his nieces and nephews.

Not only relatives benefitted from Fred's largess. In 1892, after having served on the Louisville School Board and finding that the less fortunate of Louisville were not receiving a decent education, he donated the huge sum of \$150,000 to establish the Manual Training School for underprivileged boys (Now, duPont Manual High School). Here, young men learned trades that would help them find jobs once graduated.

Fred also had a darker side, unknown to his family. Because of Biderman's association with the press, and good friendship with a local doctor, the details of Fred's murder were kept quiet. There was no legal investigation, and no press coverage in Louisville. Only after the story was leaked by a paper in Cincinnati, did any details become known to the public.

"I wired you today and asked you to get hold of 'Goodstay's' copy of *Commercial* on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> inst. So that your dear grandmother and aunt

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<sup>96</sup> Alexander. *Jaybird*. Pg.11.

would not see a reference therein made to the publication in Cincinnati paper of the scandalous rumors concerning the sad ending of your dear Uncle Fred. ....I will tell you in few words exactly what they are, viz, that he was murdered etc, instead of dying a natural death. Of course it is useless for me to say that they are base lies....the matter has been thoroughly investigated and the result of the investigation is exactly what you already knew before you left here, and positively nothing more. He had not been there more than 20 to 30 minutes before the end and the attack came on immediately on his arrival & he never got out of the chair he sat down on as soon as he got in the door – He went there to give the person some money who was sick and needing it, but the character of the place was in reality what we suspected.”<sup>97</sup>

What had been reported was that Fred had been shot to death on the morning of May 16, 1893, by a lady-of-the-night, Maggie Payne , who wanted support for the child which she claimed was his. Upon Fred’s refusal to assist, she shot him. Even in Ban’s telegram to his wife, Meta, then staying with her sick grandmother in Delaware, the family was still trying to cast the tragedy in the best possible light. They couldn’t deny that Fred died in a brothel, even though undocumented tales suggest Fred’s body was whisked to Central Park to cover up the seamier details, they still maintained that Fred was there for altruistic reasons and died of a heart attack.

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<sup>97</sup> Bannen Coleman to his wife, Margareta du Pont (Coleman). May 20, 1893.

Uncle Fred's death tore the Louisville colony apart; within ten years the family had left town, and only Eppie returned to live on St. James Court, near the old Central Park. Biderman wandered Europe, Meta moved her children to Boston, T. Coleman moved with business to Johnstown and then took his family to Wilmington for the opportunity of buying the DuPont Company. Erman was working in St. Louis on the street car lines there, Dora had passed away, Zadie, Pauline, and Evan all left town. The Park was sold to the city as a public park; Fred's estate was divided up and sold, including all his interests in mills, mines and railroads.

Uncle Fred instilled a spirit of entrepreneurship in his family and every one whose lives he touched, either through financial support or advice. He helped prepare his nephews, T. Coleman, Pierre, and Alfred I., with the spirit and ingenuity to face the DuPont company elders, to make a maverick move and buy the sagging old family company, and turn it into the modern corporate giant that they did in the early 1900s.

Getting away from the restrictive policies and social mores of the old family business on the Brandywine, grabbing the endless possibilities of a new life in a raw and open environment, instilling that spirit of the possible in the next generation, Fred, Biderman, and the Louisville colony provided the staging point for the DuPont Company's hurdle into the modern corporate world.

Fred's nephew and native Kentuckian, T. Coleman du Pont, made a lasting reminder of the half-century his family had spent helping Louisville and

Kentucky to grow, by purchasing many acres of natural land that included the famed Cumberland Falls, and donating it in 1927 to the Commonwealth of Kentucky; now Cumberland Falls State Park.