

Henry Mercer constructed his reinforced concrete castle home and estate on approximately 70 acres of land. The Fonthill grounds were made up of several small parcels that Mercer acquired in a few weeks in 1907. Primarily farmland when Mercer acquired it, the appearance of the grounds were greatly altered with the addition of trees and other plants and the remodeling of several historic buildings that stood on the property. This guide will help you explore Fonthill's extensive grounds and discover some of its hidden features.



Aerial view of Fonthill and its grounds shortly after its construction (no date).

FONTHILL CASTLE PARK WALK

“Who learns will love and not destroy, the creature’s life, the flower’s joy.”



Cover Photograph: Reflections by Ruth Photography



**FONTHILL
CASTLE**

East Court Street &
Swamp Road
Doylestown, PA 18901
www.fonthillmuseum.org

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1 Fonthill Castle

Fonthill Castle was designed by Mercer and constructed between 1908 and 1912. It stands on the same spot as an earlier farmhouse which Mercer integrated into the castle. Can you locate the farmhouse?



Farmhouse being incorporated into Fonthill c. 1909.

2 Garage/Terrace Pavilion

Like Fonthill, the Garage incorporates the remnants of an earlier structure that occupied this spot. The stone foundations of a barn serve as the foundation for the Garage. Mercer built a garage even though he never owned a car. The second floor, the Terrace Pavilion, was at one time the meeting place for the Doylestown Nature Club.



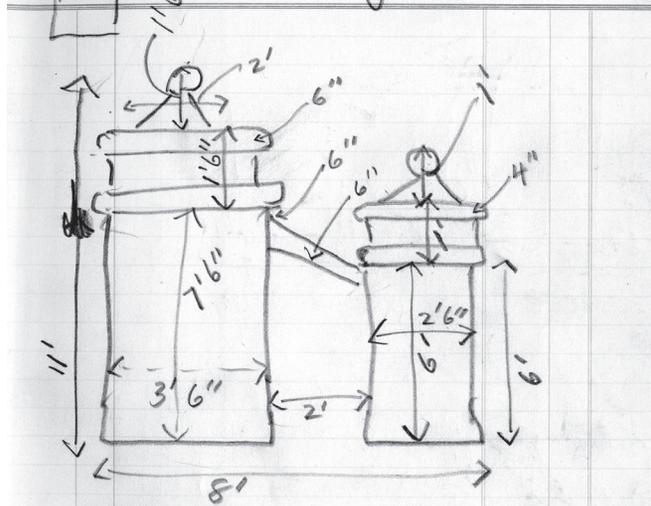
The barn before demolition c. 1909.

3 Front Drive

The London Plane trees that line the front drive from East Court Street form an allée. An allée is a formal walk or drive in a garden or park bordered by trees. Some sources state that the trees along the drive are buttonwood trees, which Mercer received as a gift from Mrs. A. Haller Gross in exchange for a tile installation in her home, but this information is incorrect.

4 Gate Posts

The front gates to East Court Street were inspired by the design of a gate from Jocate on the Yucatan peninsula that Mercer sketched while visiting the area for an archaeological expedition in 1895. There are also gates further down East Court Street towards East Street and gates on East Street and on North Street. These generally mark the paths that enter Fonthill's grounds. Restoration of the gates is in process.



Design for gate posts from Mercer's construction notebook.

5 Doylestown Nature Club Memorial

Mercer worked closely with the Doylestown Nature Club especially during the last few years of his life as he explored establishing an arboretum at Fonthill. As part of that partnership Mercer erected a memorial at Fonthill's south entrance to honor deceased members of the club and planted trees along East Court Street. The Doylestown Nature Club is still active.

6 Springhouse

Like Fonthill and the Garage, an earlier structure stood on this spot. Mercer rebuilt the previous springhouse to give it a more ornate appearance. It seems that Mercer retained the original stone foundations. The springhouse also served a practical purpose. In a time before refrigerators, it could keep perishable foods cool. The tiles that decorate the springhouse contain a riddle: "From earth to sea clouds carry me. To sea from earth I turn at birth."



Left: Original springhouse c. 1909. Right: Mercer's springhouse (no date).

7 Concrete Pond

This pond was established to help manage the water on the property. Parts of Fonthill's grounds are often marshy due to the many springs present on the property. These springs inspired Mercer to name his estate Fonthill. Frank Swain attempted to keep goldfish in the pond when he lived at the house with his wife Laura. Frank and Laura Swain, who had worked for and been very close to Mercer, inherited lifetime rights to the house after his death.



Concrete Pond c. 1941.

8 Tiled Bridge

The bridge was probably built in 1917 when the Little House in the Woods (see below) was remodeled. It contains two mosaics. The mosaic on the north wall shows the ship on which Mercer's ancestors, the Chapmans, immigrated to Pennsylvania from England in 1684. The mosaic on the south wall depicts the twin Chapman sons with the Native American who rescued them and led them home after they became lost in the woods.

9 Little House in the Woods

This house came with the property when Mercer purchased it and probably served as a tenant house, though there is no evidence of anyone occupying the house when Mercer assumed ownership. A barn, which has since disappeared, once stood nearby. Mercer dated the farmhouse to sometime between 1765 and 1775. He added a concrete roof, tile inscription, and tile mosaic in 1917 before offering it to the Doylestown Nature Club for their use. The tile inscription below the roof reads, "Who learns will love and not destroy the creatures life, the flowers joy." *Silva vocat*, which appears on the mosaic, translates as "the forest calls." During Mercer's life the surrounding trees were much

smaller. In recent years the house has fallen into disrepair.



The Little House in the Woods c. 1917.

10 Quarry

The quarry was present on the property when Mercer purchased it in 1907. He had trees removed from the quarry and planted it as a flower garden in 1908. The fieldstone used to construct the Little House in the Woods, the Fonthill farmhouse, and the foundations for the springhouse and the Garage probably came from this quarry.

11 Watercress Spring

There was originally a spring at this location, which borders North Street. Mercer built concrete retaining walls to establish a watercress pond at the site in 1916.

12 Moravian Pottery and Tile Works

Mercer purchased four additional acres of land to house the Moravian Pottery and Tile works in 1911. He constructed the building from 1911 to 1913 and designed it to resemble Spanish missions in California. The Tile Works moved operations from its original location at Indian House on the grounds of Mercer's childhood home, Aldie, to this building in 1912. The tower was added in 1916.

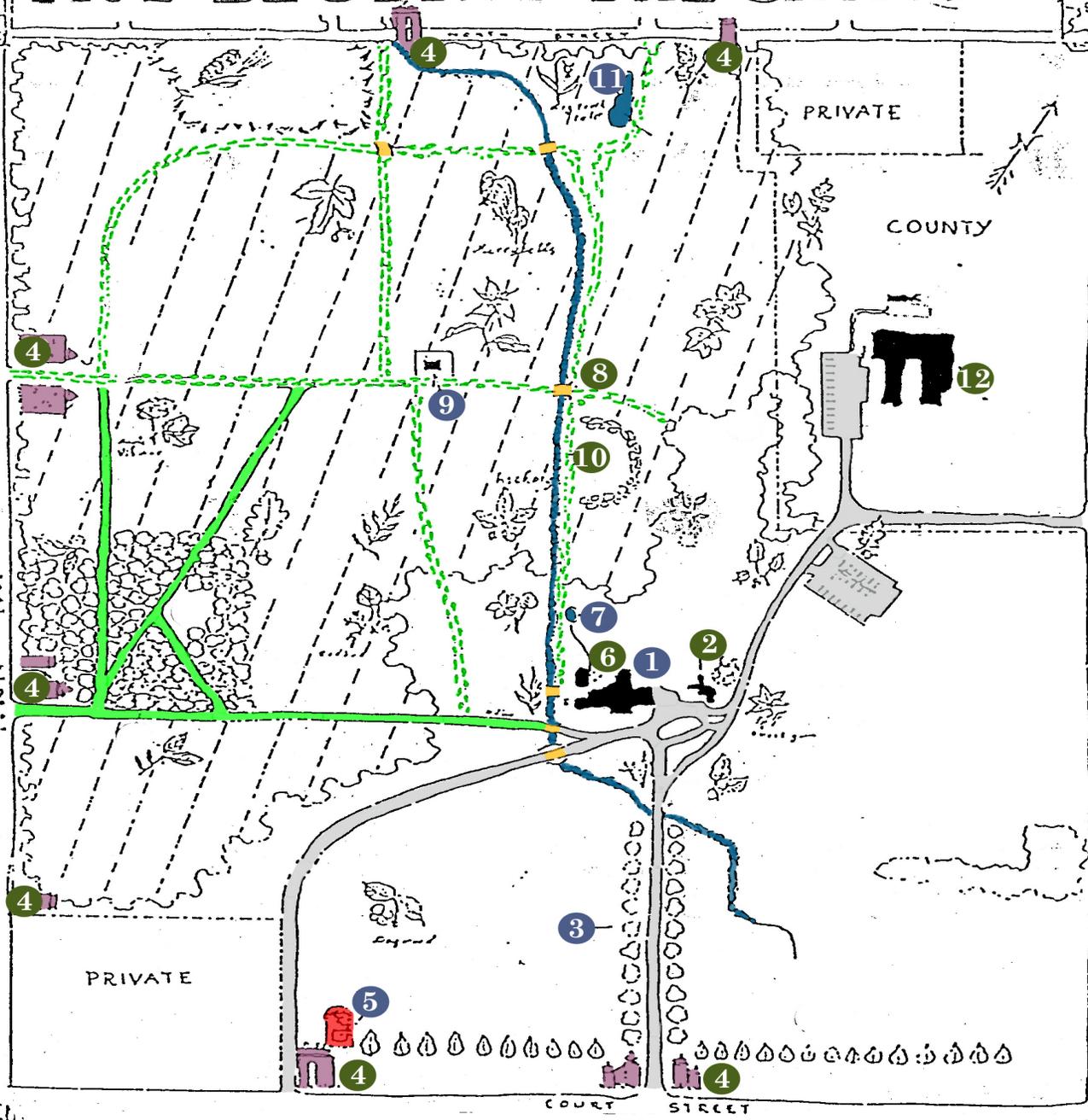


Moravian Pottery and Tile Works under construction in 1912.

NOT DESTROY THE GREAT-

WHO LEARNS WILL LOVE AND

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FONTHILL CASTLE PARK WALK

— Roads Waterway Reforested Foot Path Bridges

- 1) Fonthill Castle
- 2) Terrace Pavilion/Garage
- 3) Front Drive
- 4) Gate Posts
- 5) Doylestown Nature Club Memorial
- 6) Springhouse
- 7) Concrete Pond
- 8) Tiled Bridge
- 9) Little House in the Woods
- 10) Quarry
- 11) Watercress Spring
- 12) Moravian Pottery and Tile Works

***Warning: Surfaces of paths are uneven and rough. Stay on paths. Don't forget to watch out for poison ivy!**