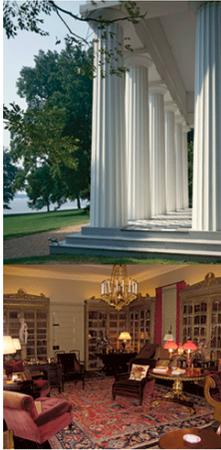


PROFILE

Restoring Andalusia



Class of '83 | From the Delaware River, the old mansion looks like a 19th-century courthouse, or a bank. The latter would be more fitting, given that Andalusia's most famous owner, Nicholas Biddle (1786-1844), served as a director and then president of the Second Bank of the United States under his friend President James Monroe. Originally built in 1796 by the Craig family, the mansion was expanded in a Greek Revival style 10 years later under Benjamin Latrobe. In 1835-36, Biddle expanded and remodeled it again under the direction of architect Thomas Walter.

Declared a National Historic Landmark in 1966, Andalusia's Big House is now a museum, open for tours and the occasional event. Its library and study are home to some remarkable antiques and artifacts, including a complete first edition of the Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which Biddle, a confidant of Thomas Jefferson, helped edit.

The property still belongs to the Biddle family, which is where its many Penn connections began. Nicholas Biddle was a boy genius who enrolled at the University at age 10—only to be denied a diploma three years later because he was too young. (He promptly enrolled as a sophomore at the College of New Jersey—aka Princeton—graduating as valedictorian of his class at age 15; in 1844, shortly before his death, he returned to Penn as a trustee.) Among his Penn-affiliated descendants is Jamie Biddle C'89 WG'97, who is charged with stewarding the property. Several years ago, realizing that the Big House needed some significant renovations and upgrading, he contacted his friend John Hanson C'83, principal of Hanson Fine Building & Historic Preservation, who had studied historic preservation at Penn under John Milner Ar'64, founder and principal of John Milner Architects in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. Milner planned the renovation project; Hanson's firm carried out the work.

Though Andalusia was "state-of-the-art when built," notes Hanson, the library and study wing "did not anticipate 21st-century concerns such as communication, lighting, and de-humidification controls." As a result, the "entire collection was suffering from UV damage and mildew."

The challenge, he adds, "was to leave the space looking like we had never been there."

Soon he and his crew were hauling out dirt from the crawlspace beneath the library floor and building a massive structure to protect the gilded 1830s bookshelves. "We removed all the existing mechanical and electrical systems, performed asbestos abatement, installed a moisture barrier and concrete slab, and retrofitted a new museum-quality heating and cooling system into the space, along with new power and lighting circuits," says Hanson.

Now the only visible difference between *before* and *after* is "some plaster repairs and a fresh coat of paint." —S.H.

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