

WYE HALL FARM
505 Wye Hall Drive, Wye Island
Queenstown
Queen Anne's County
Maryland

HALS MD-22
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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WYE HALL FARM

HALS NO. MD-22

Location: 505 Wye Hall Drive, Wye Island, Queenstown, Queen Anne's County, Maryland

Latitude: 38.888956, Longitude: -76.118572 (Center of House/Terrace, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

Significance: Wye Hall was built in 1793 by William Paca, a prominent lawyer and politician in Annapolis, Governor of Maryland, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. It was designed in the Georgian style by Joseph Clark, who led alterations to the Maryland State House in 1785 and 1792. A fire in 1879 destroyed this original mansion with only the central section surviving.

The commissioned landscape was designed by Luke O'Dio, an English landscape architect of the 18th Century. The original garden parti at Wye Hall reflected a traditional layout with formal gardens on the primary axis and utilitarian gardens on the cross axis. Formal elements included plants that were both profitable and pleasurable, including diverging rows of fruit trees, flowering shrubs, and perennials.

The most notable landscape gesture at Wye Hall was a series of large, raised earthen falls or terraces, upon which the house and gardens were built. Three platforms were developed for the purpose of gaining prospect over the working farms, not only for observation of plantation staff but also to create a sense of power and authority in a period of the Colonies when these principles were fleeting. The earthen platforms were the result of a monumental effort on the part of William Paca's slave population. Paca directed his slave laborers to collect soil in baskets from surrounding areas and to deposit them in a rectangular shape. The platforms created by this effort were sculpted into formal slopes geometrically derived from the golden section. These platforms can be seen today and remain untouched from their original design by Luke O'Dio.

On a windy March day in 1879, a fire burned Wye Hall, destroying most of William Paca's valuable contents including his books, journals, ledgers and notes about Wye Hall. After the fire, the central portion of the house was partially rebuilt and remained in his family until the death of W. B. Paca II, in 1921.

By the time of the Great Depression in the 1930s, Wye Hall had descended into disrepair. However, through both archeological exploration and on-going stewardship, the original colonial gardens and terraces have been documented.

Description: Wye Hall sits on two large earthen falls. The approximate length and width of the two large terraces are 319' x 184' x 6'6" and 251' x 264' x 8'. The terraces run north to south in a rectangular shape and are located on the landward side of Wye Hall. Large one hundred year old linden trees lie to the west and east side of the north terrace. Two hundred year old boxwood planted in 1936 line the north terrace on the east and west.

Current Physical Condition:

The current owners of Wye Hall, Leland and Diane Brendsel, have a vision to conserve the legacy of the property and a desire to understand and preserve Wye Hall's history and landscape.

Starting in 1999, a team of professionals, including architects and archeologists, was recruited to aid in the restoration of the house and gardens. They were also informed by several summers of archeology by the University of Maryland graduate students led by Dr. Mark Leone.

Through this exploration, the framework or "bones" of the 1790's landscape design by O'Dio was discovered to be mostly intact. The massive terraces constructed by Paca's slaves were still present and his 18th century garden was documented. In addition, a historic walking path and the original road from the old Paca Bridge to Wye Hall was investigated. Further research confirmed the original foundation of Paca's Wye Hall on which the 1936 house was constructed. Also revealed were many other historic artifacts, a cistern, out buildings and slave quarters.

The documentation of Wye Hall has been a long process involving both the dwelling and landscape. The falls were preserved as found. A driveway that had been added in later times was removed. The falls were restored in 1999 under the direction of Jay Graham, Graham Landscape Architecture. The Kitchen and Cutting gardens were also reestablished.

Wye Hall is dedicated to environmental, 'Bay-Wise' practices for which Wye Hall has been recognized by the State of Maryland. Nearly 800 feet of "living shoreline" has been created to protect the Wye River. Over one thousand trees and several acres of natural meadows have been planted. Native species have been utilized in all of the gardens.

In the end, the stewardship efforts have widened the owners' experience with the historical and natural landscape. By fostering discovery and participation in the conservation of a small but important piece of history, the vision of William Paca and Wellesley Stillwell still continue today.

History: William Paca acquired half of Wye Island through his marriage to Mary Chew and in 1793 he built Wye Hall as his country home. The Paca family not only

owned large estates in Queen Anne's County, but also many others around the State. Census records starting in 1800 indicate it was a large estate or plantation. The household of John P. Paca in the 1800 census includes 2 adult white males, 1 adult white female, 3 white male children and 1 white female child. There are also 118 slaves to provide the labor of running this property.

The terraces or falls are a typical landscape feature of the 'Gardens of the Gentry' (per *Gardens & Gardening in the Chesapeake 1700 – 1805*) of that period. City gardens were often built with a similar layout to the terraces of Wye Hall, but often within brick walls. William Paca's Annapolis property, now known as Paca House, exhibits smaller scale falls. Influenced by the style in England popular in the colonies at that time – e.g. Houghton Falls in Chestertown, Mount Clair in Baltimore, Middleton Place in Charleston - the terraces were created to elevate the residence for a sense of grandeur and to allow for viewing of the surrounding property and vistas from the residence. Luke O'Dio and William Paca envisioned massive terraces for Wye Hall, and they are somewhat unique in that they are not oriented to the waterfront approach to the property but to the land approach. The building of these large earth mounds took a large slave labor force to move the 23,400 cubic yards of earth. Baskets of dirt were dug from the fields to the east and west of Wye Hall, then carried and dumped, creating the large platforms. The removal of this soil created large bowls in the land that are visible today.

When Wye Hall was completed by the end of the 18th century, it was a well-organized wheat plantation comprised of the Georgian manor house, barns, out buildings, slave quarters and over 1,000 acres of fields on Wye Island. Archeological research reveals Wye Hall was developed as a means to display an elusive sense of political power and stability in the emerging American Republic and also as a productive wheat plantation that supported the entire estate community, including family, foremen, craftsmen, slaves and guests.

William Paca spent the rest of his life at Wye Hall. He died and was buried there in 1799. For the next century, Wye Hall was owned by Paca descendents.

20th Century

W. B. Paca was the last of the Paca descendents to own Wye Hall. He died in 1921. Wye Hall was sold to John and Grace Kinnamon, then to the Clifton Rasin family and in 1934 to Edwin Morgan.

On May 12, 1936, the property is recorded to Wellesley Stillwell, a wealthy mercantilist from Chicago and New York. Together with Norman Rogers, a close friend and spokesman for the Duke of Windsor of England, Stillwell began the task of rebuilding Wye Hall in 1936. Franklin D. Roosevelt was president and the United States was deep into a major depression when Wye Hall was reconstructed.

As Stillwell and Rogers embarked on creating a secluded country retreat and rebuilding Wye Hall, great care was given to incorporating features of an English manor house. The design is a five-part Georgian Revival with servants' quarters, butler's pantry and kitchen, separate his/hers bedrooms and other formal spaces.

When Wye Hall was rebuilt, the stable on the estate was restored for use as a carriage house. This is the era when the cross drive was most likely built across the falls. In addition, the mature 200-year-old boxwood seen today were transplanted around the perimeter of the terrace.

Wellesley Stillwell owned Wye Hall until 1946.

After that the property was owned by:
Brown and family
Frank Hardy
William Chaires
Daniel Boyd

The property was acquired in 1999 by Leland and Diane Brendsel.

Sources:

Consultants:

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The Maryland Historic Trust Historic Property QA-124

Publications:

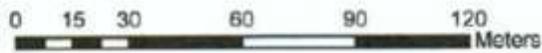
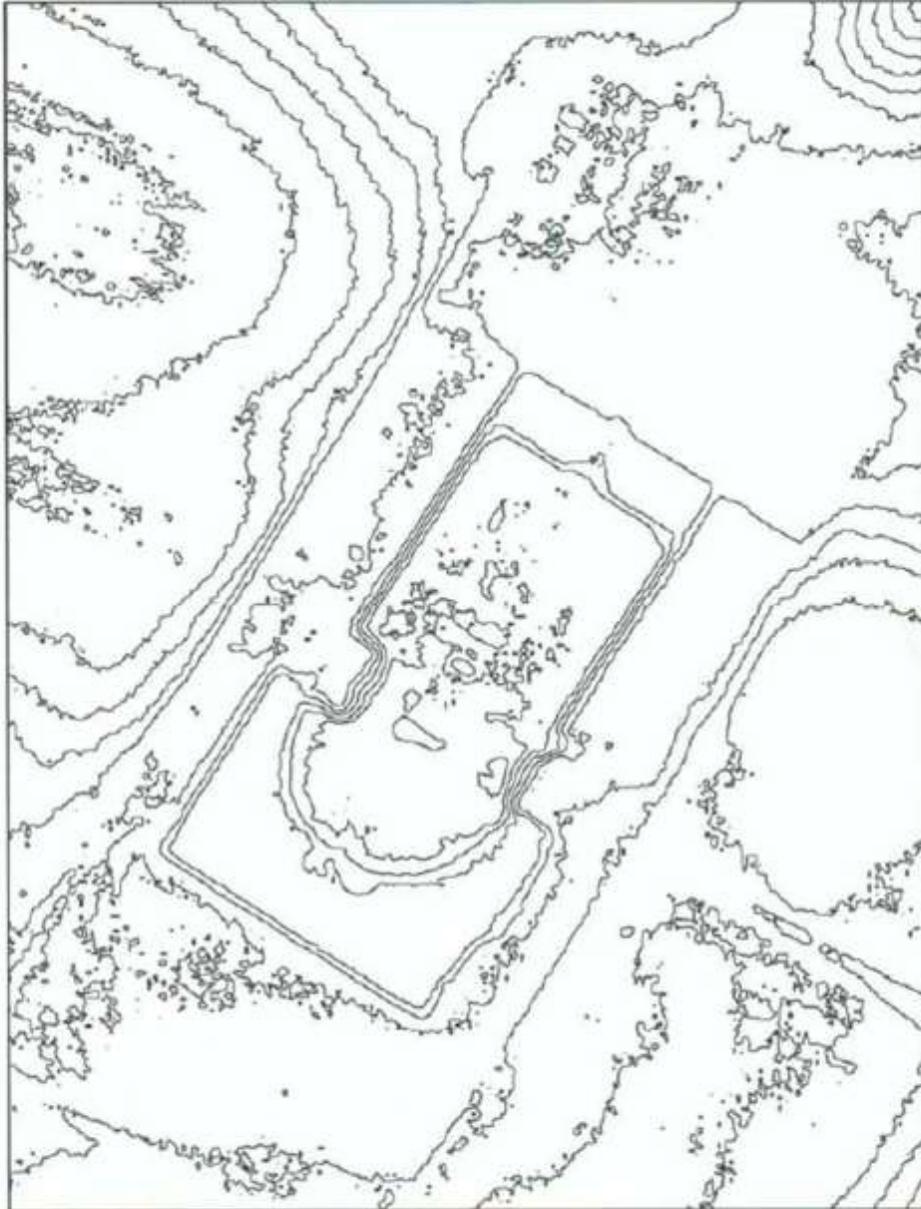
Sarudy, Barbara Wells. *Gardens and Gardening of the Chesapeake 1700 – 1805*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Stiverson, Gregory and Phebe R. Jacobsen. *William Paca – A Biography*. Maryland Historical Society, 1976.

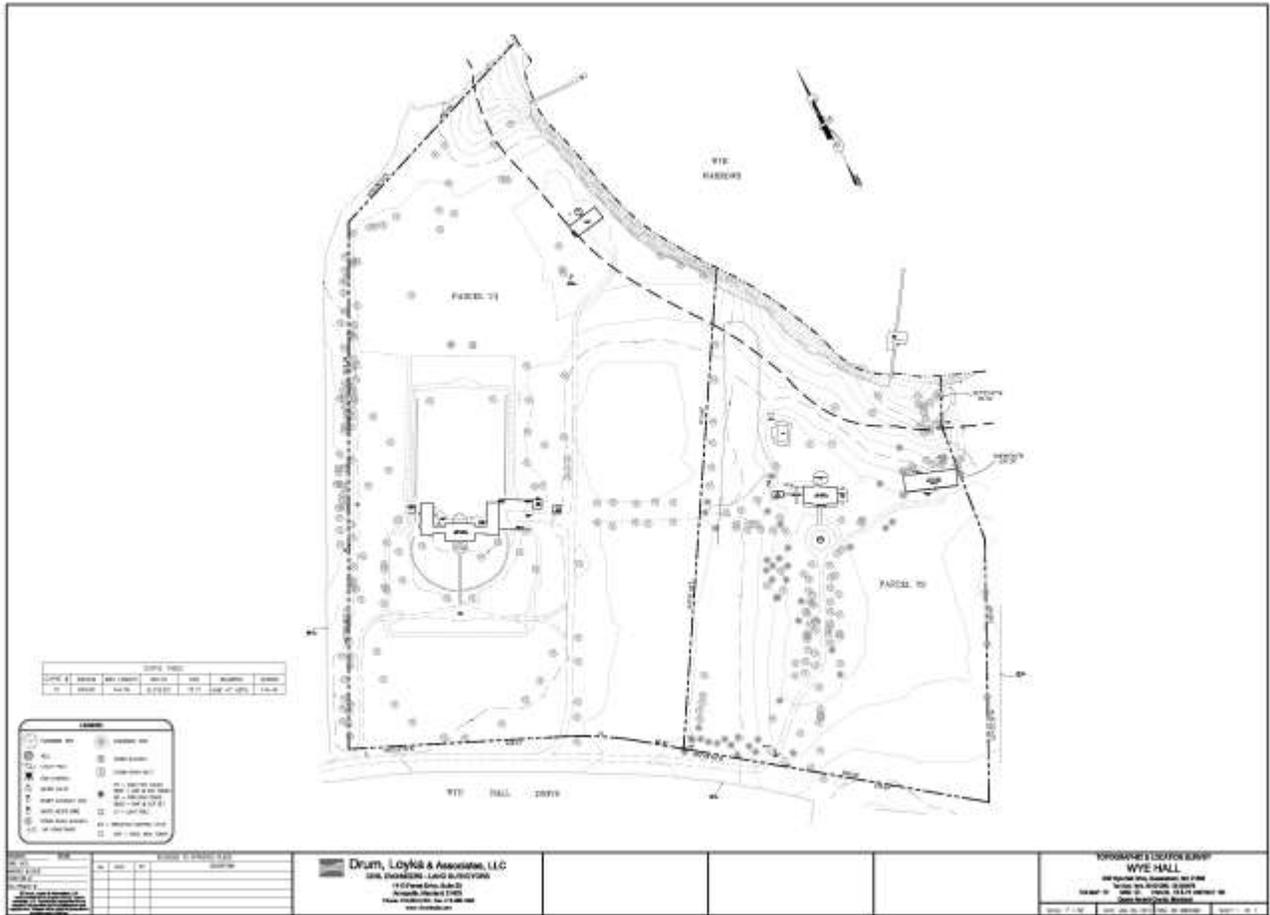
Historians: Diane Brendsel and Terry Babb
with Deborah Schwab, ASLA
December 2013

**Wye Hall
Main House Area
50 Centimeter Contours**

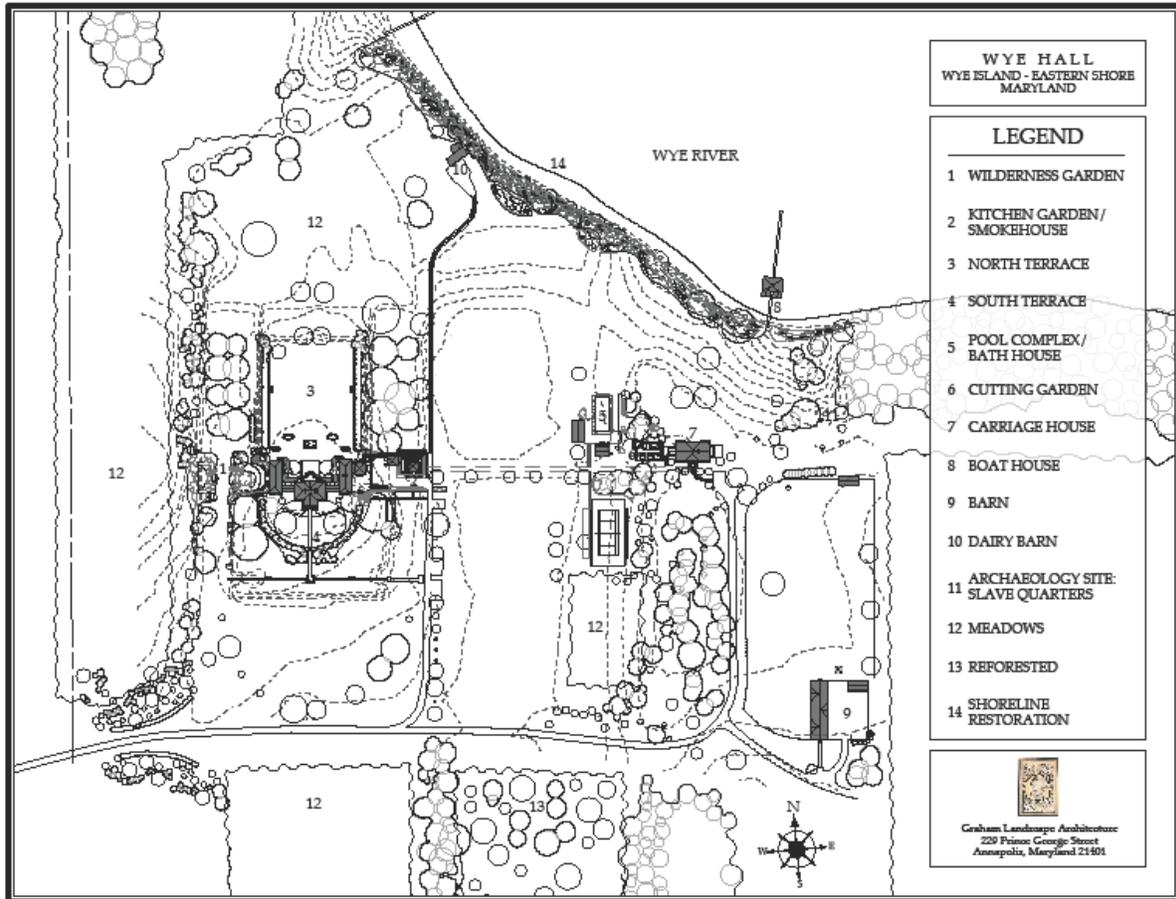
This map was derived from the 1 by 1 meter grid based on the total Lidar Dataset. This map was produced to show contrast between the 50 centimeter vertical contour interval and the closer interval used for the grid-shaded map. The dataset needs some editing, but maps using any desired contour interval across the entire study area can be produced.



Contour of falls (Archeology in Annapolis, University of Maryland).



Topographic and Location Survey (Drum Loyka Associates, Inc., 2013).



Site plan with topography (Graham Landscape Architecture).