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Historical Musings

Small Pond, Big Fish: Elk Point and William DuPont

More than one hundred years ago, my small town had a brief and now largely forgotten encounter with one of the wealthiest men in America. In 1891, William DuPont, a scion of the famous Delaware family, established residence in Elk Point, South Dakota, as an initial step in obtaining a divorce in the state. His ultimate intention was to marry Anna Rogers Zinn, also from Delaware, who, not coincidentally, was herself a recent divorcee.[1]

There is nothing too remarkable today about the bare facts of such a scenario, but perhaps their tale will be more informative and entertaining if context and elaborations are added to what is intended to be a combination of history and "herstory." As an Elk Point native, I have been unable to resist adding a few related personal connections and observations, so it will in part be "mystory" as well.

Before delving into details regarding the DuPonts, it is appropriate to introduce you to Elk Point and its geographic environs. Current coastal dwellers in the United States often refer to South Dakota as a part of "fly-over country." We do not take this intentional put-down too seriously provided that those who actually visit the state confess that they experienced a warm welcome, challenging adventures, and profound self-discovery. If lucky, they may also find that one can still get lost here.

It is true that many of us are also mildly offended when dwellers in larger cities, including those in the Midwest and even our own state, wonder aloud why otherwise intelligent-appearing individuals choose

1. Except as otherwise noted, the descriptions herein relating to members of the DuPont, Rogers, and Zinn families are derived from Jayne E. Blair, *Basic Information on Montpelier's DuPont Family* (Orange, Va.: The Montpelier Foundation, 2007), or from various telephone conversations with persons close to the families.

to spend their lives in one of our many small prairie towns. Their apparent concern is that there is not enough action or change to keep occupants' minds challenged; that the grass does not grow fast enough to deserve constant observation.

Such sophistry overlooks countervailing sociological studies, confirmed by the trend of sophisticates to move from city to suburbia to exurbia to the countryside. If one achieves a respectable education, concentrates as she or he should on a worthy career or cause, possesses and maintains a healthy curiosity, understands something of the global milieu and related issues, acquires a computer and internet access, and accumulates enough financial resources to support occasional travel, the purported disadvantages of a smaller community can become advantages. Elk Point and other Dakota towns have always had their fair share of intelligent, educated citizens, captivating personalities, and significant contributors to the general weal—just not too many of them rich or famous.[2] Perhaps most significantly, small-town residents have the unique opportunity to meet, mingle, and interact with virtually all of the other members of the surprisingly diverse citizenry there, be they great or not so.

Elk Point, located in the extreme southeastern corner of the state, is and always has been a small prairie town. Its date of origin was in July 1859, the first month in which non-Indians were permitted to establish legal settlements in the area and two years before the creation of Dakota Territory. Eli Wixon, a former upstate New Yorker, filed claim to the land that was to become Elk Point. He had been waiting, impatiently, in nearby Sioux City, Iowa, for more than a year for the federal government to open the border after the signing, in 1858, of a treaty with the Yankton Sioux who then inhabited the locale. The Yanktons had good reason to delay vacating their lands, as they had not yet received the modest compensation the United States government had promised.[3]

2. Among the latter category, however, are names such as Ernest Orlando Lawrence and his brother John, Alvin Hansen, Peter Norbeck, Hubert Humphrey, George McGovern, Oscar Howe, Harvey Dunn, Russell Means, Lee Raymond, Al Neuharth, Tom Brokaw, and a much longer list than can be included here.

3. Much of this information appears on a historical marker erected by the Union County Historical Society in the Elk Point city park. *See also* M. B. Kent and Alice A.

During his wait, Wixon had apparently scouted the area and selected a piece of land that he believed would be of sufficient elevation to reduce the likelihood of spring flooding from the nearby Missouri and Sioux rivers. With the subsequent evolution of river transportation, railroads, military "highways," and other roads and the availability of essentially free farmland via the Homestead Act of 1862, Elk Point soon became a thriving town. However, no federal census has recorded a population exceeding two thousand souls.

While it may or may not be the center of the universe, the Elk Point site has enjoyed many more than its cliché-allotted "fifteen minutes of fame." One of the first recorded incidents occurred in 1804 when the Lewis and Clark Expedition, then making its way up the Missouri River to explore the lands of the Louisiana Purchase, visited the immediate area. The town allegedly derived its name from one of Clark's journal entries, which noted that he observed numerous elk roaming near the point of confluence of the Missouri and Sioux rivers. Further, the latitude and longitude of the Wixon claim coincided with the spot where the expedition had held "the first election west of the Mississippi River," a "democratic" exercise to replace Sergeant Charles Floyd, who had died the previous day twenty miles downstream.[4]

Floyd's elected successor, one of three sergeants on the expedition, was a young Pennsylvanian named Patrick Gass. Until quite recently, and more than two hundred years after the event, Elk Point annually held election "reenactments" that were attended by, believe it or not, the great-grandson of Gass. Indeed, only one "great." Contemplate the ages and dates of paternity required.

There have been numerous other Elk Point "moments of glory" since 1804, some of which have attracted national and even international attention. These events include the erection of nearby Fort Brule to protect citizens after Dakota Indians killed white settlers near Sioux Falls in 1862; the arrival at the local train station in 1896 of a young

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Tollefson, "Historical Sketches of Union County, South Dakota," *South Dakota Historical Collections*, 10 (1920): 509–10.

4. Stephen Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson and the Opening of the American West* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 161.

This postcard view of Elk Point's Main Street was recorded around 1908. The photographer of the scene is unknown.

Ole E. Rølvaag, later the author of *Giants in the Earth* and renowned chronicler of Norwegian-American pioneer life in eastern Dakota; the local team's winning of the South Dakota State Amateur Baseball Association championship in 1946 and subsequent participation in the National Amateur Baseball Federation's "Little World Series" in Battle Creek, Michigan; the town's literal "sinking" in the 1950s due to local soil subsidence when water was impounded behind huge dams built upriver on the Missouri; and, in 2017, the trial and multibillion-dollar settlement of the largest defamation lawsuit in United States history—the notorious "Pink Slime" case, which arose from ABC television correspondents' alleged libeling of a meat-recovery process invented by the owner of a nearby packinghouse.

Why, one might wonder, would a wealthy and sophisticated easterner like William DuPont travel westward more than a thousand miles by relatively primitive rail to the little town of Elk Point to obtain a divorce? Well, in those days, divorces were relatively rare and difficult to achieve. Then, as now, they were granted only under the laws of individual states, and, long before the advent of "no fault" divorce leg-

islation, the grounds were highly restricted. Even in a progressive state such as New York, the only accepted ground was adultery. Significantly, an applicant had to be a resident of the state granting the divorce. Those residency requirements, too, could be burdensome, specifying that an applicant had to live in the state for a lengthy period, often a year or more.

In the mid-1800s, local entities were desperately in need of financial wherewithal, and politicians were willing to help businessmen and lawyers attract money from divorce seekers. In its assembly of 1866–1867, the Dakota Territory Legislature enacted a divorce law with a required residency of only three months, and grounds were liberalized. When South Dakota became a full-fledged state in 1889, those laws remained in effect.[5]

Long before Reno, Nevada, became a popular destination for divorces, many other cities proclaimed themselves "divorce capitals," whether of the West, of the United States, of the World, or possibly of the Universe. Several current websites note that Fargo had been advertised as the more modest "divorce capital of the West." Fargo was an early railroad terminus, and it alleges that such status gave rise to "the ten-minute divorce."[6]

Trains stopped in Fargo for a period of ten minutes for lunch, during which time a prospective divorcee allegedly could hustle off the train to a hotel, book a room for a three-month period, hang some clothes in the closet, and get back on the train before it departed the station. The applicant would then return in three months' time claiming to have fulfilled the residency requirement and seek to obtain a divorce. While probably apocryphal, the tale is a clever one.[7]

As to grounds for divorce, a *Rapid City Journal* article, after noting the once-upon-a-time claim of Sioux Falls as the "divorce capital of the world," reveals reasons accepted as grounds for two successful divorce petitions. In one, the man alleged that his wife refused to bathe, and in

5. Dakota Territory, *Laws, Memorials and Resolutions* (1865–66), art. 2, secs. 59–61, pp. 13–14; Dakota Territory, *General Laws, Memorials and Resolutions* (1867), chap. 16, sec. 1, pp. 46–49; South Dakota, *Session Laws* (1890), chap. 105, p. 254.

6. *See*, for example, the North Dakota State University Archives at https://library.ndsu.edu/fargo-history/?q=content/divorce-capital-west

7. Ibid.

the other that, in bed, his wife used his back to warm her cold feet. In view of such cases, the later "no fault" divorce laws must have seemed inevitable.[8]

As promised, this "musing" will include a description of yet another historic Elk Point moment—the involvement of the DuPonts—which, while of relatively short duration and occurring long ago, has some vestigial consequences or at least reverberations today. To provide context, it is relevant first to tell of some late-eighteenth-century arrivals in America.

Among the numerous and diverse immigrants who became important, if not crucial, to our country's success were members of the DuPont family. Father and son, Pierre Samuel DuPont (1739–1817) and Élèuthere Irénée DuPont (1771–1834; hereafter "Irénée"), left Paris in 1799 and arrived in Delaware via New York. They were not among your "huddled masses yearning to breathe free" as poet Emma Lazarus penned in 1883 after France gifted the Statue of Liberty to the United States. Even so, the DuPonts were, in a true sense, refugees, although not destitute escapees from national or international wars like today's emigrants from Iraq or Syria. Rather, their expatriation was the result of personal decisions made in response to an existential threat, itself a consequence of their own actions and associations in France.

From its inception on 14 July 1789, the French Revolution and its aftereffects had riled the country and its citizens, and Pierre Samuel DuPont was deeply involved in the turmoil. Born the son of a watchmaker, he had exhibited an extraordinary proficiency in economics and thereby earned for himself higher social, intellectual, and political status. He eventually became the elected president of the French National Assembly. But after the revolution started, and opposed to the "Reign of Terror" and its bloodbaths, Pierre had made an unsuccessful attempt to assist Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette when revolutionaries attacked their Tuilleries Palace in 1792. For this intervention, he was arrested, "tried," and condemned to death by guillotine.

DuPont family lore has it that, while imprisoned and awaiting ex-

8. *Rapid City Journal*, 9 Feb. 2008. For Sioux Falls as a divorce capital, *see* Connie DeVelder Schaffer, "Money versus Morality: The Divorce Industry of Sioux Falls," *South Dakota History* 20 (Fall 1990): 207–27.

ecution, Pierre observed that each night, following orders from their superiors, the illiterate guards made primitive chalk marks just outside the cells of those to be executed the next day. Pierre allegedly wiped off the chalk outside his own cell after the guards had moved on, thus delaying his execution. He was freed in 1794 after Robespierre's arrest and involuntary demise.

While recounting details of the French Revolution and its impact on William DuPont's grandfather may appear irrelevant to a story centered on Elk Point, there are justifications for their inclusion. *But for* the family's life-threatening circumstances provoking immigration, there might be no DuPonts of Delaware (or Elk Point). There is more: in 1802, at President Thomas Jefferson's request, Pierre assisted James Monroe in negotiations with Napoleon and Talleyrand for the purchase of the Louisiana Territory. So, possibly, *but for* Pierre's successful intervention in the transaction, the western portion of the United States might still be French, Lewis and Clark might not have explored the area, and Elk Point, if it existed at all, might be known by a French name such as Pointe de Elan. All this conjecture may be gross exaggeration, but the occasional contemplation of such counterfactual scenarios is both entertaining and enlightening.

Oh, and there is yet another, involving facts of which most Americans are unaware: *but for* a slave uprising in Haiti and a subsequent yellow fever epidemic there, France would likely not have sold its Louisiana colony to the United States or to anyone else. In 1802, ostensibly to quell the uprising and reestablish slavery in Haiti, Napoleon sent about thirty thousand soldiers and sailors to the island. Some historians posit that he had a concomitant but sub rosa plan—to send this expeditionary force onward through New Orleans to "invade" North America and establish French hegemony over the western half of the continent. However, the fearsome yellow fever epidemic caused the deaths of more than 70 percent of his troops; incredibly, well over twenty thousand men. The resulting setback to this military mission provoked a shifting of French governmental priorities, an urgent need for funds, and a consequent willingness to part with Louisiana.[9]

9. J. S. Marr and J. T. Cathy, *The 1802 Saint Domingue Yellow Fever Epidemic and the Louisiana Purchase,* J. Public Health Manag. Pract., 2013.

Much earlier in France, at the age of just fourteen, Pierre's son Irénée had developed a prodigy's scientific interest in black gunpowder. He later learned the conduct of the trade by working in the royal powder manufactory. While there, he was apprenticed to Antoine Lavoisiere, a French educator known as the "father of modern chemistry" who won fame for his early identification and study of oxygen and its relationship to combustion. Lavoisiere is credited with contributing to the safety of gunpowder production via a simple expedient: the King of France required him to maintain his living quarters in close proximity to the powder mill.

By 1799, when Irénée was twenty-eight years old, both he and his father had again become persona non grata in France. On this occasion, they decided that it was appropriate to leave, some say flee, with their respective families. The DuPonts chose the United States to be their new home and, more specifically, they selected an especially beautiful homesite along Brandywine Creek in Wilmington, Delaware.

While hunting game in America a few years later, Irénée noted the inferior quality of gunpowder made in the United States and, learning of its high price, wisely decided to build a competing powder mill of his own. The mill's location was also along the Brandywine, which provided hydraulic power to run machinery as well as wharves for shipping. This fledgling business evolved into the iconic E. I. DuPont de Nemours & Company, which, with modified name, is still a major industrial enterprise in America today. Thomas Jefferson urged Irénée to build his powder mill in Virginia, but he kept it close to his home in Delaware.

During the first seventy years of the nineteenth century, the United States was expanding rapidly and was also engaged in wars, both of which increased the demand for black gunpowder. It was a prime requisite for military and rangeland armaments and for blasting powder, which was indispensable for building roads and railroads, digging canals, clearing farmland, and many other developmental tasks. DuPont's sales were brisk, and the venture prospered accordingly.

Into this economically favored family, William DuPont, the grandson of Irénée and the primary subject of this article, entered this world, in Wilmington, in 1855. "To the manor born" would not be an exaggeration. He later attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and,

unlike current college alumni, left with neither burdensome student debt nor intense anxiety concerning his career prospects. His father Henry was the DuPont president, and William gained employment and the opportunity to work his way up through the company's "farm system."

About this time, Alfred Nobel of Sweden invented nitroglycerin, a basic ingredient of dynamite, which was soon recognized as a superior alternative to black powder. The DuPont president was not enamored. He is said to have proclaimed, "It is only a matter of time how soon a man will lose his life who uses . . . any explosive of that nature. They are all vastly more dangerous than gunpowder, and no man's life is safe who uses them."[10]

Nevertheless, William's older cousin, Lammot DuPont, also an employee of the family enterprise, became interested in this development and tried, unsuccessfully, to convince his Uncle Henry to adopt the new technology. In 1880, Henry relented, and the Repauno Chemical Company was formed to produce dynamite, with Lammot as the company's president and William as secretary and treasurer. It prospered, with Henry's support. However, four years later, Henry's dire prediction came true and too close to home when an explosion at the plant killed Lammot. William, then only twenty-nine years of age, became president of Repauno.

William's first marriage was to his first cousin, Mary DuPont, in 1887. Family history indicates that it was the equivalent of an arranged marriage, one of its purposes being to preclude her marrying a contemporaneous suitor who was unacceptable to the family. William and Mary lived together in Wilmington but had no children.

Not all that long into this wedlock, unusual by today's standards, William developed a wandering eye or a desire to father progeny. Allegedly, both. While the few DuPont family members "in the know" initially referred to his extramarital relationship as a mere "affair," William had in fact fallen in love with a married woman who was the mother of two children, proving, perhaps, the greater attraction of a non-family marriage partner and, at the very least, her fecundity.

10. B. G. duPont, *E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company: A History, 1802–1902* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), p. 121.

That woman was Anna Rogers Zinn, hereinafter "Annie," as she was usually called. Annie's birth family, the Rogerses, may not have been so wealthy as the DuPonts, but her grandfather and father had made significant fortunes for that day by producing steam locomotives at their machine works in New Jersey. Her family's residence was in Wilmington, and she moved among the same social elite as the DuPonts.

In 1876, at the age of eighteen, Annie had married a thirty-four-year-old army general named George Zinn. While the marriage produced two children, apparently it was not otherwise successful. General Zinn left Annie and the children in 1887. It was shortly after that time when William and Mary DuPont separated. A bit later still, in 1890, Annie obtained a divorce from Zinn in Delaware on grounds of desertion. After that legal event, a social no-no in the day, she was no longer welcome in Wilmington's high society. The crescendo of tut-tutting and gossip mongering probably reached its peak when, in 1891, William DuPont moved, alone, to his newly acquired Elk Point "residence" and filed his petition for divorce in Sioux Falls on grounds of desertion.

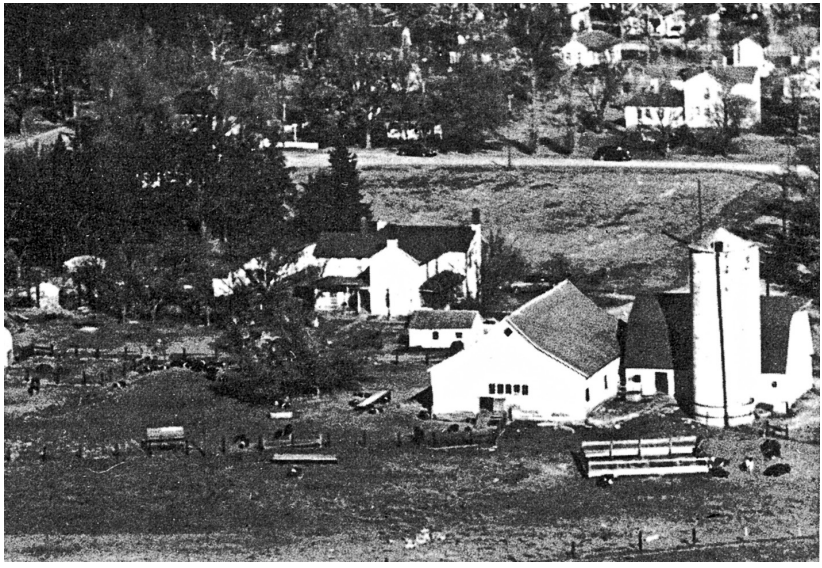
When I first pondered writing about William's and Annie's times in Dakota, I deemed it essential to acquire additional information about the DuPont family. A first step was to telephone a law school classmate and friend who was then the senior partner in one of the two major law firms in Wilmington. After I stated the purpose of my call, he illustrated once again that the world is small and brimming with coincidences. He responded that he had been hunting doves that very morning on a farm owned by William DuPont's granddaughter. His law firm, he added, had represented William's branch of the DuPont family for many years; in fact, a predecessor of his had recommended to William that he go to South Dakota for his divorce. I replied, in a similar vein, that a lawyer friend of mine, currently living in Elk Point, was the grandson of one of William's local lawyers in the 1890s and that he and his wife still possessed artifacts associated with that long-ago relationship.

My Wilmington friend introduced me to the complex DuPont family tree and to William's granddaughter, whom I subsequently interviewed in her penthouse in Coral Gables, Florida. A gracious hostess, she showed me reproductions of portraits of many of the DuPonts and even told a few tales-out-of-school regarding the personal lives of family members. Alas, however, she had never even heard of Elk Point. Nev-

ertheless, William and, later, Annie both left footprints in Elk Point in the form of stories, philanthropic works, and properties, tales of which are extant more than a century after the couple departed.

In 1891, William was thirty-six years old, intelligent, sophisticated, and apparently desirous of certainty regarding his divorce. There were a number of hotels in Elk Point at that time, any one of which would have been delighted to rent a room for three months to such a well-heeled occupant even if the closet was more consistently occupied than the bed. Whether existing accommodations were a bit too seedy by Wilmington standards, or to avoid risk of a subsequent contest of lawful residency, William purchased a farmstead, located on the southern edge of Elk Point, to be his residence in the state.

For the non-extravagant price of $5,250, William bought a 215-acre parcel of land on which sat a house and numerous dependencies. The house boasted fourteen rooms, with an indoor bathroom, no less, running water, and kerosene lighting. A hallway ran from front to back, and there were two stairways to the second floor, one curved and open at the front of the house and the other rising from the kitchen. Such



William DuPont bought this parcel of land and outbuildings in 1891. Today, a football stadium and track occupy the site.

accommodations were pretty posh for Elk Point. The dependencies included a horse and carriage barn, hog house, chicken coop, storm cellar for refuge during violent prairie storms, and, not least, an outdoor privy as backup. DuPont may or may not have added rooms to the house, but he is said to have "filled it with fine furniture."[11]

Further confirming his intent to spend at least a part of the remainder of his life in Elk Point, William also purchased a 150-by-150-foot lot on a corner of Main Street opposite the Union County Courthouse. For this property, he paid the princely sum of twelve hundred dollars. Dakota real estate prices must have appeared a bargain to an eastern millionaire in the nineteenth century—and prices may still be enticing in the twenty-first if a prospective buyer is interested in living or investing in the attractive, if somewhat lonelier, northwest quadrant of the state.

Well, the legal machinery in Dakota proceeded apace, and in 1892 William DuPont received a divorce on grounds of desertion. Even in those early days, a Sioux Falls lawyer's services were not inexpensive and apparently varied according to the client's ability to pay. While the average cost of a divorce was in the $250-to-$500 range, the *New York Times* reported that William DuPont paid $32,000 for his.[12]

The leading newspaper in South Dakota, then and now the *Sioux Falls Argus-Leader*, reported on the granting of the divorce in its edition of 22 January 1892. When William had first moved to Elk Point, the story stated, "He brought his servants, horses, carriages and dogs from the east, and the dear people of Elk Point were kept in a constant state of bewilderment by his grandeur and munificence. His 'ranche', as he called it, was stocked with thousands of dollars' worth of blooded cattle and horses and will in the future, he says, be made his future home." That "dear people" bit seems somewhat condescending, especially considering that, only a few years earlier, travel from the East Coast to Sioux Falls involved first taking a train to Elk Point and then completing the journey north by horse or carriage.

11. *A Century in Review, 1859–1959* (Elk Point, S.Dak.: [Centennial Committee], 1959), p. 12. *See also Quasquicentennial, Elk Point, South Dakota, 1859–1984* (Elk Point, S.Dak.: [Quasquicentennial Committee], 1984), p. 14.

12. Schafer, "Money versus Morality," pp. 214–15.

It had been particularly disappointing to me to learn, in the interview with William's granddaughter, that the DuPont family had never heard him speak of his days in Dakota—nothing about his farm or his fine cattle or horses or dogs. Disappointing, perhaps, but understandable in light of the stigma attached in those days to divorces generally and, particularly, the DuPont family's reaction to his.

First the good news: William and Annie were united in marriage on 1 June 1892 in Saint George's Church in Hanover Square, London, England. The *Wilmington Morning News* in its edition of 4 June 1892 reported on the event, noting that "Mr. DuPont, according to the marriage notice, now claims Elk Point, S. D., as his place of residence." Whether or not they voted in South Dakota, William and Annie did "reside" in Elk Point from time to time after their marriage. Eventually, however, they moved back east, and William's Elk Point lawyer bought the "ranche," which became that family's home for several years.

As to the "fine furniture," a number of pieces of the DuPont furniture still today proudly reside in the home of the grandson of William's local lawyer. While a connoisseur would agree that the furniture is certainly not plebian, so also might she or he conclude that the individual pieces are not likely to be selected for display in the American classical furniture wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Most of the pieces are constructed of oak, not rarer woods such as mahogany or rosewood, which were used for the more expensive tables, chairs, and hall trees in the Victorian period. Nevertheless, their designs reflect the high style of the day and the wood was that regularly used in the Midwest for better furniture, especially Eastlake Victorian. So the local writer was on solid ground in pronouncing the furniture "fine." The owners have generously loaned a few pieces to the Union County Historical Society Museum in Elk Point where visitors to that handsome venue can view them today.

Sadly, the DuPont house and dependencies were torn down in about 1967 when alternate uses took priority. Part of the land became the right-of-way for U.S. Interstate 29, a north-south highway that runs from Kansas City, Missouri, to the Canadian border. Along the route is Sioux City, Iowa, twenty miles to the southeast of Elk Point, and Sioux Falls, South Dakota, sixty miles to the north. Elk Point was bless-

Shown here is one of the items of "fine furniture" that once filled the DuPont residence in Elk Point.

ed with two exits, and the highway has been a boon to the city and its residents, although not a huge one.

On the town side of Interstate 29, a handsome and first-quality high-school football stadium and running track occupy the land upon which the DuPont house and dependencies stood. Land on the other side of the highway has become part of an adjacent farm. The previously vacant lot on Main Street has become the site of a community clinic. This facility has been a particularly welcome and heavily used institution in a prairie town without resident doctors and located some fifteen miles from the nearest hospital. Finally, there is still a thoroughfare named DuPont Street in Elk Point, a little northeast of the farm site and a few blocks southeast of the formerly vacant lot.

While not much has been recorded regarding the significance of the two DuPont properties in the lives of local residents, I can add a few

personal reminiscences. I well remember as a teenager regularly walking from my home, six "city blocks" away, to the dairy barn on the former DuPont farm. A successor to the lawyer's family then owned the property, and my mission was to purchase milk to stock our family's icebox.

I often went in the early evening, at milking time, and came to know both the personnel and processes involved. Long before milking machines were installed, a farmhand would sit on a low, one-legged stool, close to the cow's right side and within arms' reach of her udder, with a pail between his legs, rhythmically squeezing teats until the pail was filled with milk. His talents were such that, upon request, he could squirt the milk directly into my mouth from ten feet away.

What with the cow's tail wagging to shoo away flies, and other barn activities and bodily functions occurring from time to time, there was no certainty that only milk ended up in the pail. When the pail became full, the milker would pour its contents through a simple cloth filter contraption that sat atop a classic, three-foot-high milk can. From the latter it was dipped out and poured through a not-so-recently-sterilized funnel to fill the gallon glass jugs I had brought along. I savored warm milk fresh from its source and often drank a couple of dippers full before lugging the jugs home. The milk was not pasteurized, but at least any wayward detritus had been filtered out. Modern-day medical practitioners theorize that persons raised in rural environments may develop immunities and experience fewer allergies from participating in such a risky process—if it does not kill them first.

In my youth, the farm no longer bore the famous family's name, but the vacant lot on Main Street was known to one and all in the town and surrounding countryside as "the DuPont Lot." William died in 1928, but ownership of the lot apparently resided in his estate until 1945 when a local veterans' organization and, eventually, the clinic's developers purchased it. In the meantime, whether there was a legally granted right to occupy, or merely advantage taken of an absentee land owner, the public and various local organizations regularly utilized the vacant DuPont Lot for a number of community purposes.

For example, in the weeks preceding the high school's annual homecoming celebration, preparations were made for a bonfire and pep ral-

ly. Logs, tree branches, used lumber, and other burnables were hauled and stacked up to fifteen feet high in the center of the lot. On the night before the football game, a student procession following the team's cheerleaders began at the high school and "snaked" its way for five blocks up to the lot while participants chanted such lyrics as: "Your pep/ your pep/ you got it, now keep it/ don't lose it, but use it/ your pep." When they reached the DuPont Lot, someone lit the bonfire and the flames illuminated that section of the town, warmed the crowd on a cool September night, and inspired the revelers to shout and sing encouraging words to the football team. A favorite song, probably long forgotten, went like so: "We'll hit the line for Elk Point, our high school wins today/ We will show the sons of [Yankton], that the blue and white holds sway/ We'll sweep down the field again, victory or die!/ And we'll give a grand old cheer boys, as the Elk Point team goes by."

In the summertime, the DuPont Lot became the venue for a band concert every Wednesday evening. A platform was constructed in the center of the lot by laying bridge timbers, i.e., long boards three inches thick and at least a foot wide, on top of tall supports, with crude steps at one end. The high school band of at least thirty members would assemble on this commodious stand, and the director would lead them in playing old-fashioned music and, especially during the World War II years, rousing Sousa marches.

Family-occupied automobiles would be parked on the two street perimeters facing the platform, and car horns would be honked and headlights flashed to show appreciation after each rendition. A larger audience, seated on blankets on the lawn, would applaud. Younger children would climb upon and jump from and play around the bandstand, interrupting festivities only when slivers from the rough-hewn bridge planks pierced skin or someone was injured in a fall. Both such events occurred with some frequency, but, so far as is known, no one expired, nor was any child's ego or self-esteem permanently affected.

Perhaps the activity at the lot that most ensured regular usage of the DuPont family name was ice-skating. As soon as adequately cold weather set in—and it always did by early December—the Elk Point Fire Department would flood the 150-foot-by-150-foot DuPont Lot, banked around the edges, with several inches of water. After allowing a

day or so for it to freeze solid, it became the center of activity as skaters of all ages converged for this grand winter sport. In the first years, in a climate where the temperature could fall to forty degrees below zero, a small bonfire would be maintained as a warm-up site each evening on one edge of the lot. Later, a hexagonal shed borrowed from the city park served as a primitive warming hut.

The rink hosted hockey matches, figure skating, crack the whip, pomp-pomp-pull-away, and other games, and even budding romances in the dimly lighted corners away from the street lamps. Hockey players did not have proper equipment: no one wore padding or face protection; hockey sticks were one-inch-diameter tree limbs with naturally curved ends; and the "pucks" were small, empty condensed-milk cans with the conventional two tiny holes poked in the top. Most players sported minor facial blemishes from wayward pucks.

Strange to say, but while the name "DuPont" oft rang in the air in Elk Point in those days, no one ever mentioned a word of the family's history or William's or Annie's brief connection with the town—not in school classrooms, the two local weekly newspapers, nor in street or social conversations. Still, some stories have survived.

For a number of years before Annie and William arrived in Elk Point, a small Episcopal congregation met in their modest Saint Andrews Chapel located two blocks south of the center of town. A high school choral group had been permitted to use the chapel for rehearsals. In those days before electricity became readily available, gas lamps hanging from the ceiling lit the space. After rehearsals one evening, the last person to leave the building apparently failed to extinguish all the lamps. That night, the chapel burned to the ground.

With typical resilience, the congregation determined to rebuild the house of worship and looked to the broader community for funds, not to those responsible for the loss. It is notable, in the current litigious age, that the members adopted this approach rather than a claim or lawsuit against the school or its rehearsing students. This attitude of independence, if not naiveté, was still evident sixty years later when federal dam construction upstream on the Missouri River caused soil subsidence in Elk Point. The consequences of the town's "sinking" were enormous: the courthouse, Catholic church, and high school building

all had to be razed, and a number of private dwellings, including my family's, suffered damage. No litigation was commenced nor other legal claim made, to my knowledge, nor was any compensation forthcoming from the federal government. The community and individuals were apparently expected to and did bear the loss.

In these circumstances, church members initiated a door-to-door solicitation campaign. One evening, at a time when William and Annie were residing in Elk Point after their marriage, the pastor and his delegation knocked on the door of a home where Annie was visiting a friend. When she learned of the fire and the purpose of the visit, Annie immediately let the pastor know that there would be no need for further solicitations; she would furnish the financial resources to rebuild. And she did.

The new building, somewhat larger than the chapel and considered to be of a "15th century English-style Gothic" design, was nearing completion when the Episcopal bishop from Yankton stopped by. Astounded at the apparent miracle, he asked where in the world the congregation had obtained the money to build a church like that. After a series of ever-more-penetrating questions, he learned of the reconstruction financing by Annie and of her earlier divorce and remarriage. Resonating the morals of the day, he exclaimed that the congregation could not accept a church paid for by a "person who is living here under those circumstances."[13]

The problem was one that needed a prompt solution, and Annie provided that as well. According to local lore, she summoned "a couple high-powered lawyers from the east" who soon appeared in Elk Point. Behold, they were able to conjure a solution acceptable to both heaven and earth.

It happened that, tragically, one of Annie's two daughters, Mary Rogers Zinn, had recently died in adolescence. The lawyers noted, or at least alleged, that the late teenager's estate held funds that could be made available. Subjected to these persuasive arguments, not to mention the beautiful sight of a nearly completed church, the bishop

13. The story of the church is related in Kermit Rye, "The Rich Divorcee, the Bishop and the Stolen Candlesticks," 2004, copy in author's possession.

graciously agreed that if Mary's monies were used to pay for church construction, rather than Annie's or William's, such financing would be acceptable to him and, presumably, to his deity.

When the church was completed, a bronze plaque was hung directly above the altar with the inscription: "This church is erected for the glory of God and to the beloved memory of Mary Rogers Zinn, born Nov. 30th, 1877, died January 19th, 1893." Also gifted to the church from such funds were several attractive chancel furnishings, including an

Annie DuPont's donation in memory of her daughter aided in the building of the Episcopal Church of Our Savior.

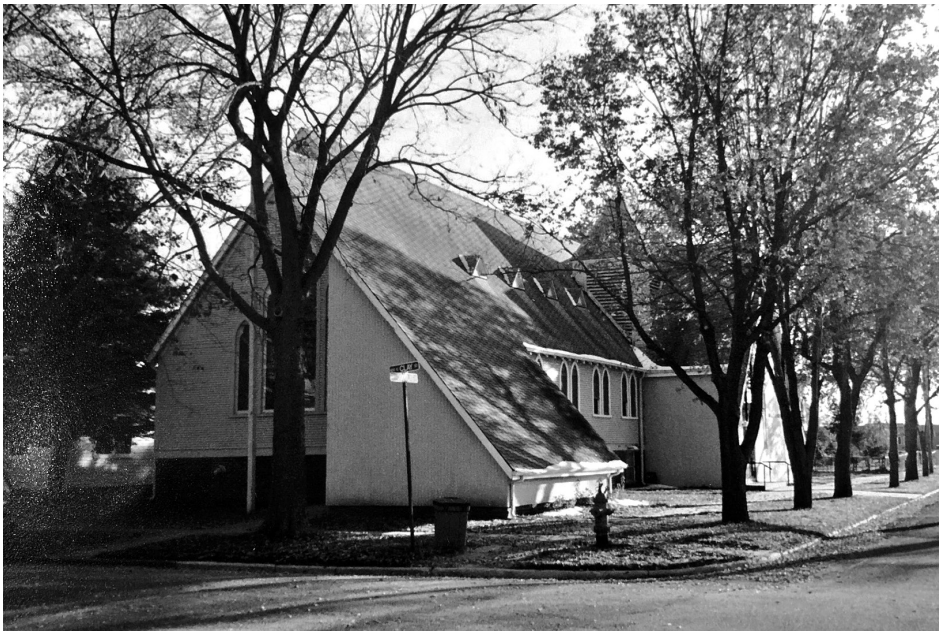
impressive wooden lectern or pulpit with the carved figure of an eagle on its front, a large bronze cross, and two bronze candlesticks. The congregation was renamed "Our Savior Episcopal Church." Were it not blasphemous to do so, the word "savior" might have been made plural to give deserved credit to Annie.

Some years later, the Episcopal membership dwindled and a Lutheran congregation purchased the church, which, as they understood the agreement, included its contents as well. Apparently, the Episcopal bishop interpreted the arrangement differently. He personally made an unannounced visit on a day when the premises were unoccupied, loaded the lectern and other chancel furnishings into his vehicle, and drove off toward Yankton. Observant neighborhood Lutherans alerted the county sheriff, who chased the bishop and recovered what all considered to be "stolen property." It is unlikely that the red-faced bishop was indicted.

In the twenty-first century, the Lutheran congregation built a new church at a different location in Elk Point. The lectern and bronze furnishings have been lovingly installed near its altar. What is not visible there is the plaque bearing Mary's name and statistics. It was removed from its previous location in the old church but is, however, extant, in storage, at the new. Therein lies another short tale.

After the Lutherans replaced the Episcopalians in the church building erected with "Mary's money," the bronze plaque continued to hang in its original place of prominence above the altar. However, a subsequent Lutheran pastor found it disconcerting that this nonreligious object appeared directly in his line of vision whenever he prayed. With approval from the church council, the plaque was relocated and replaced with a reproduction of the famous oil painting by Heinrich Hoffmann of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. That picture, too, is in the new church, although not on the altar.

The DuPont-built church was eventually sold to a regional East Indian cultural organization that used it as a meeting place for its members, most of whom lived within a radius of about sixty miles. Later, when they decided to vacate, the building temporarily became a pre-school childcare center and, in 2017, again went up for sale. This "modernized" building has recently been converted into an apartment complex.



After housing a Lutheran congregation for many years, the former Episcopal church was renovated for other uses.

After his marriage to Annie back in 1892, William retained his DuPont stock ownership but held lesser offices in DuPont subsidiaries. As divorcees, the couple immediately found themselves at least partially shunned by the family. Ostracized may be the more accurate description, insofar as some of those family members were concerned. To ameliorate such stress, the couple acquired a country estate, Binfield Park, outside London, England, where they lived for most of each year.

Their marriage produced two children. The first was a daughter, Marion, who married, divorced, and later married the best man from her first wedding. He was Randolph Scott, a well-known movie actor in that day. They had no children. William and Annie's second child was a boy, William DuPont, Jr., who fathered five children. His eldest, a daughter, was the DuPont whom I interviewed in Florida.

Of far greater significance to the United States and its history, William and Annie purchased Montpelier, a large country estate near Orange, Virginia, in 1900. Montpelier had been the colonial home of James

Madison, the "father of the Constitution" and fourth president of the United States, and his wife Dolley. The house had twenty-two rooms at the time the DuPonts purchased it, and they subsequently enlarged the home to become an English-style country estate of fifty-five rooms. The building's front faces westward and affords a magnificent view of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. During William's and Annie's time, it was often the scene of lavish entertaining of elites from New York City, Wilmington, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. The DuPonts had the clout to arrange construction of a train depot on one edge of the property for the convenience of guests. Nearby, on its own rail spur, sat William's private railroad car.

Annie died in 1926 and William in 1928. Their daughter Marion thereafter occupied Montpelier during her lifetime. She used the estate less for entertaining high society than for horse shows and related activities. She built a steeplechase track on its western incline, part of her equestrian complex, and invited community members to the races.

Most notably from the historical perspective, upon Marion's death in 1983, and in accordance with her wishes, the DuPont heirs to Montpelier gifted the property to the National Trust for Historic Preservation to be used as a shrine to James Madison. During her lifetime, Marion had expressed hope that the house would be restored to the architecture of the time when James and Dolley lived there, and that it would be filled with furnishings owned by them or of that period. The latter wish is still largely unfulfilled, as the Madison family had sunk into penury after James's death, and their furnishings were sold and became scattered.

On a positive note, however, restoration of Montpelier to its more modest original colonial configuration was achieved about ten years ago, at a cost of some $25 million. I attended its dedication and, while there, had the opportunity to meet again with William's granddaughter and with her daughter, the great-granddaughter of Elk Point's temporary residents. On that occasion, I encountered yet another connection and coincidence.

The great-granddaughter lived in Charlottesville, home of the University of Virginia where I had attended law school and where my wife and I currently reside part time. She was also a fellow member of the

local Farmington Country Club. She asked where we were living and, when told, observed that she knew our house well; that it had replaced an antebellum home that had been razed because of a termite infestation. When that older structure was torn down, she had purchased a surviving fireplace mantel—which was then ensconced in her home in Farmington.

In 2017, the great-granddaughter (since deceased), her only brother, my wife (also from Elk Point), and I sat around our kitchen table in Charlottesville to recount and discuss the saga related here. These stories and connections appeared to complete a full circle: from a DuPont ancestor who temporarily resided in Elk Point, to my childhood encounters there with the former DuPont properties, to an Elk Point friend's furniture collection, to a law school classmate's legal relationship with the DuPonts, to common interests in nearby Montpelier, to, finally, an Elk Point native son who was confirmed in the DuPont-built church and entertained William DuPont's progeny in his Virginia home, which also looks westward to the Blue Ridge. The setting and reflections provided the inspiration to sit down and record this historical vignette and to boast, tongue-in-cheek, that a "former Elk Pointer" had acquired and lived in Montpelier!

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On the covers: As a child, Margaret Fogelsong Ball Lloyd (pictured on front with her cousin Donnie Cardinal) spent countless hours exploring the world around her family's farm in western South Dakota. In this issue, she writes of her childhood adventures in the 1940s, which included crossing False Bottom Creek on a makeshift bridge to go to school, just as her mother had done years earlier (back cover).