

# Project Summary

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## *Purpose of the project*

Aldie Mansion, in Doylestown, PA, was built in 1927 by William Mercer. Its Tudor architecture was based upon a 15<sup>th</sup> century English manor. In the early 1980s, the home, vacant and vandalized, was purchased by the Heritage Conservancy, a non-profit group dedicated to the conservation of the area's environmental and cultural heritage. Putting its mission into practice, it restored Aldie to its original splendor, repurposing it as its headquarters and an event facility.

In 2000, to increase the esthetics and marketability of their event facility, the Conservancy decided to renovate its dilapidated entry courtyard with a new fountain. It would be recast from molds that William Mercer sculpted himself for a fountain formerly on the property. To select a design firm, they held a competition to redesign the courtyard. The design would place this new fountain while enhancing the court's pedestrian-scaled, historic atmosphere. Our firm was chosen to design and build the project.

## *Role of the Landscape Architect*

Our role was to redesign the courtyard for its function as the event facility drop-off while preserving the home's historic and architectural character. Challenges to the project included poor drainage, fractured flagstone and asphalt paving from vehicles, poor lighting and overgrown plantings. In addition, the design needed to take into account safeguarding of several large trees' root zones.

To generate a more comprehensive and meaningful design, we persuaded the Conservancy to expand the renovation to include areas adjacent to the courtyard. The scope broadened to the entire front of Aldie, including the Conservancy headquarter's entrance.

Once the design was approved, we assisted the Conservancy in raising money for construction. We helped divide the project into titled areas for donor sponsorship, using names from the mansion's past.

Once funds were raised, we were responsible for the landscape construction, including the hardscape, landscape and lighting installation.

## *Local Significance*

- Aldie is the birthplace of the musical “Sound of Music”. The Mercers entertained often, attracting celebrities such as Groucho Marx. In 1941 they brought the Von Trapp family over from Europe to perform at their Christmas party. Guest Oscar Hammerstein was impressed enough to write a musical based upon their story.
- Like his famous brother Henry Mercer, who had created several concrete landmarks in the area, William Mercer also worked in cast concrete. Basing his designs on carvings he saw in Europe, William personally sculpted the molds for the home’s architectural elements.
- Today the property is an economically self-sustaining and vital part of the community.

## *Special Features*

- The courtyard design is an abstracted four-quadrant medieval courtyard garden.
- The recast fountain was sited on axis with the front door and slightly aside to accommodate limousines and delivery trucks. It was placed on a raised 6” dais to protect it from vehicles.
- Existing, viable 4” thick plus flagstone paving was repurposed in the design for the dais and the paving fields.
- New walls and piers matching the existing were built at the pedestrian entrance from the parking lot to establish the architectural style while providing a sense of entry.
- Reusable brick pavers were used throughout. Locally-fabricated light posts that matched the original house fixtures provide enhanced lighting.