



Environmental Education on the Potomac

Alice and Our Beginnings

Alice Lescinska Lowe Ferguson, wife of Henry Gardiner Ferguson, was a dynamic, creative artist who trained as a painter at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C. When Alice and Henry Ferguson bought Hard Bargain Farm in 1922, little did they imagine that it would become a place where children from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area would come to learn about the environment, agriculture and history. The purchase of Hard Bargain Farm changed the course of Alice's life as she transformed it into a unique, remarkable center that is still alive with the mark of her creative touch.

Hard Bargain Farm, initially a 130-acre plot of land along the eastern banks of the Potomac across from historic Mount Vernon, included an old farm house, farm structures, rolling hills, fields, woods and streams in relatively untouched, undeveloped condition. The Farm became Alice's passion. While it became a place where the couple would bring their friends and entertain them, it also became the place where Alice developed her creative forces as a painter, architect, garden planner, writer, amateur archaeologist, environmental conservationist, and philanthropist.

In the 1930s, Alice Ferguson initiated archaeological investigations along the farm's shoreline. Her discoveries, together with those made later by archaeologists from the Smithsonian Institution and the University of Michigan, provided evidence that this area had been occupied by Native Americans for more than 10,000 years. In 1966, these findings resulted in the designation of the Accokeek Creek Site as a National Historic Landmark.

Alice was responsible for taking the first step toward protecting the area's natural landscape and preserving the beauty of the land and the open space across from Mount Vernon. With foresight and wisdom, she purchased hundreds of acres of neighboring land and sold it to conservation-minded individuals who began building homes in the area. Later, this community was formally established as the Moyaone Reserve, and its residents fought to protect the Potomac shoreline from industrialization in the 1960s by accepting deed covenants through the U.S. Department of Interior, which limited tree cutting and road building and prohibited commercial development. In support of the community, the Alice Ferguson Foundation donated all of its riverfront land to help establish Piscataway Park in 1968.

Upon Alice's death, Henry Ferguson established the Alice Ferguson Foundation in her memory in collaboration with the Moyaone Association. It was officially chartered in autumn of 1954, with bylaws created by three local community members: Louise North, Mary Thornhill, and Nancy Wagner. The charter members imagined creating a foundation that fostered and supported the local education system. This vision has led the organization to become a vibrant education center enjoyed by thousands of residents each year.