

Bonfield Plantation Buildings: The Counting House

The Counting House was built in 1772 as office (downstairs) and sleeping quarters (upstairs) of the plantation overseer. It is said to be the oldest building on the property.

Early maps show an inlet that ends on the side of the house. Plantation records mention that hogs of tobacco were loaded on barges here, counted and shipped out from Boone Creek onto the ships anchored in the Choptank. Workers would assemble on the porch of the Counting House waiting for barges and instructions. The inlet has since been filled in and just a ditch remains. Several of the original colonial features remain, such as the two fireplaces, the brick floor on the ground floor and selected clapboard siding. A brick above the original porch fireplace indicates the year of construction - 1772.

After acquiring Bonfield in 1924, Mr. and Mrs. Carroll Downes renovated the Counting House. It was to be used as living quarters for his chauffeur. A kitchen and shower were added. Mr. Downes initials - CD - in large bronze letters, were attached to the brick chimney at that time and are still visible today.



The novelist and poet Hervey Allen installed his library in the Counting House after he acquired Bonfield in 1933. He installed wooden bookshelves with cords to maintain the seafaring character of the Eastern Shore. Mr. Allen's calling card with crest is still attached to the top of the kitchen door. Over the fireplace and under the mantle hangs a bronze medallion of Mr. Allen's head. According to Mr. Allen's records, most of the books researched during the 1935-41 period were written in the Counting House. He loved the quiet atmosphere away from the bustle of family and friends in the Manor House and the farm activities on the rest of the property.

A selection of his books signed by Mr. Allen, such as *Action at Aquila*, *Anthony Adverse*, *It Was Like This*, and *Forest and the Fort* the first of Allen's monumental work *The Disinherited*, are laid out on the English library table in the Counting House. A copy of his movie and a biographic article are also available.

Little is known about the use of the Counting House during Mr. and Mrs. Spring's ownership of Bonfield (1946-86). In the seventies and eighties the house seemed to have been rented to tenants.

Mr. Sellers (1986-96) used the Counting House as his study and installed air-conditioning and heating.

The Rigo family (1996 -) rehabilitated the Counting House. Extensive termite damage required interior reconstruction, plumbing, electricity, heating and air-conditioning updates. The Counting House is used today again as office, study and guest quarters.