

# Interpreter

COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG

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## Taking Possession

by John A. Caramia, Jr.

*John, operations manager for the Midtown Area, is chair of the Taking Possession Story Line Team.*

### Theme and Key Points

Thomas Jefferson and his political allies idealized the yeoman farmer as a republican citizen and a stalwart defender of liberty. While Jefferson undoubtedly overstated the moral virtues of

the average Virginia freeholder, he did not exaggerate the importance of land ownership to most freeborn Virginia men and their families. The story of Taking Possession explores how land ownership for Virginians, the native inhabitants' desire to retain control of their ancestral homes, and developing imperial policies played out during the eighteenth century. This competition to possess the land changed Europeans and Indians both and formed a number of fundamental American values. Throughout the colonial period, the promise of land ownership lured a

steady stream of European immigrants to Virginia. By the mid-eighteenth century, Virginians had pushed westward, reaching the Ohio River Valley and Kentucky. In their eagerness to claim the land, they repeatedly came into contact and conflict with the native inhabitants. For native peoples, the land and its traditional uses were at the center of their culture. For colonists, land ownership was vital to economic independence and social advancement. As the capital of a vast territory, Williamsburg was the center of shifting networks of political, economic, diplomatic, and military relationships that linked colonial Virginians, Native Americans, other colonists, and the French and British as each vied for control of the Ohio Country and Kentucky. It was also home to many institutions that shaped Virginians' relationship to the land. Taking Possession is also a story of how colonial Virginians used the natural re-



## TAKING POSSESSION STORYLINE



Resource Book

*Cover of this year's resource book.*

sources, altered the environment, and created a new cultural landscape. In the process, they initiated an exploitative land-use ideology. The emergence of a large freeholding population fostered Americans' beliefs in individualism and the ideal of private land ownership. Even so, this privilege had yet to be extended to all Americans.

The Taking Possession story line focuses on four key points:

1. *Cross-Cultural Interactions*: Settlers to the New World perceived land as available. They justified taking possession of the land because they did not recognize or value the Native Americans' view of land use and ownership. In the midst of claiming land, various cultural groups (Europeans, Native Americans, Africans) began to form a range of opinions and stereotypes regarding each other and attempted to secure their own interests through trade, negotiation, or armed conflict
2. *Land Acquisition*: The colonists' exploration, mapping, acquisition, and use of land evolved from European cultural and legal precedents and consumed much of their time and resources. Legal precedent included headrights, land grants, patents, outright purchase, and inheritance. Indian groups began to recognize this system and made claims. In the process, imperial forces eventually came to recognize Indian claims to the land and sought formal land cession.
3. *Williamsburg's Central Role*: As the capital of a vast territory, Williamsburg was the center of shifting networks of political, economic, diplomatic, and military relationships linking colonial Virginians, European powers, Native American groups, and other colonies. Because Williamsburg was a commercial, administrative, and communications hub, it was home to many institutions and activities that shaped Virginians' relationships to the land and other peoples. These included passing laws, licensing surveyors, recording transactions, spreading horticultural knowledge, and negotiating and adjudicating disputes.
4. *Legacy*: In the process of taking possession of the land for themselves, colonial Virginians altered the environment and began to develop an exploitative land-use ideology. The emergence of a large freeholding population fostered Americans' beliefs in freedom, egalitarianism, autonomy, and the ideal of individual ownership of land, which did not fully extend to Americans from all cultural, social, and economic backgrounds.

## Interpretive Programming

The interpretive program for 2000 includes the following:

1. *Days In History*: The year 2000 features a seven-day schedule that incorporates and highlights the Taking Possession story line while integrating it with previously introduced story lines. The first two days of the schedule are new for 2000. Day 1 (Sunday)—“Rule Britannia: A New General Assembly Convenes” (November 7, 1769): Governor Botetourt convenes the newly elected burgesses to address the necessity of redrawing and redefining the Cherokee-Virginia boundary lines and to consider issues raised by the lawless behavior of some western settlers. Day 2 (Monday)—“The West Is Ours: Lord Dunmore Returns from the West” (December 4, 1774): Dunmore comes back to Williamsburg fresh from a resounding triumph over the Shawnee nation in the Ohio Country. His victory buttresses Virginia's claims to western land, encouraging those speculators who have invested in one or another of the various land companies vying for grants in the West. While he was in the West, the first Continental Congress had convened in Philadelphia and developed the Continental Association. Its provisions were just being implemented with the obvious effect of heightening tensions between the colonies and Great Britain. Dunmore is forced to cope with this new set of circumstances while simultaneously defending his western actions to the London ministry. Days 3 through 7 focus on the events beginning with the gunpowder incident that lead up to the declaration for independence and the creation of Virginia's new state government.
2. *Exhibition Sites and Programs*: A number of exhibition sites will focus their interpretation on one or more of the key points of the story line. These include the Palace, colonial nursery, Gunsmith, Rural Trades, Printing Office and Bookbindery, Tenant House, and Raleigh Tavern. Travel and transportation will be part of the interpretation at the Harnessmaker-Saddler and Wheelwright and will be reflected in the reintroduced stage wagon ride in town. Gardens at the Geddy and Tenant sites and a revised garden tour will focus on several of the key points. Finally, a new history walk on Taking Possession will be offered.
3. *Daily Focus Program*: Every afternoon, a program will highlight one aspect of the story line. These will include hands-on surveying,

lectures by Colonial Williamsburg historians and curators, and presentations by character interpreters portraying Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Christopher Gist, Thomas Walker, and Henry Spellman. These programs will take place at the Hennage Auditorium, in the Historic Area, and at Carter's Grove.

4. *Character Interpreters*: This story line will use many of the character interpreters who are already part of our interpretive programs, such as Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Patrick Henry, and Governors Botetourt

and Dunmore. Several new characters have been developed—Thomas Walker (member of the House of Burgesses, agent for the Loyal Land Company, and the first white man to explore Kentucky), James Wood (burgess, soldier in Dunmore's War, and Virginia negotiator with the Indians), and Emanuel Jones (headmaster of the Indian School at the Brafferton). At the Tenant House, James Atherton (veteran of the French and Indian War, one-time guard at the Magazine, and carpenter) and his wife will be in residence during four days of the week.

## New People around Town

### James Atherton

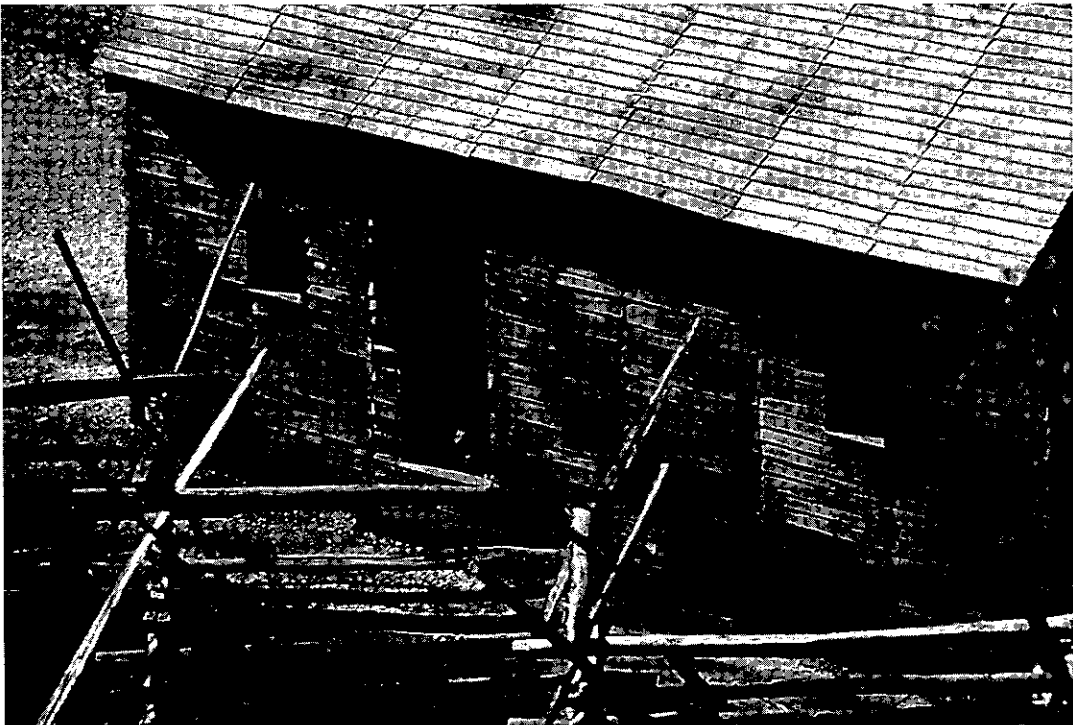
Look for James and Lucy Atherton to provide important background information for the Taking Possession story line and the events of "The West Is Ours," December 4, 1774 (Day 2, Mondays).

Atherton, a veteran of the French and Indian War, is in a position to remind visitors that the contest for the Ohio Country had begun nearly thirty years before. Land speculators in Virginia and Pennsylvania, the Native American inhabitants, and the British and French governments vied for effective control

of the region. Virginia's unsuccessful management of the undeclared war to secure the Ohio in 1753–1754 eventually caused leadership in the conflict to shift from colonial officials in Williamsburg to the British.

Although England did not formally declare war on France until 1756, royal officials dispatched General Edward Braddock to Virginia in 1755 with two regiments of British regular troops, which he reinforced with colonial militiamen at Alexandria before proceeding to the Ohio to unseat the French. James Atherton was a corporal with the Virginia troops in Braddock's command. The expedition ended in a crushing defeat for Braddock at Fort Duquesne

*This year, James Atherton and his wife will reside in the Tenant House—four days a week.*



near the forks of the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers. The July 9, 1755, battle left General Braddock dead. Atherton, shot through the left wrist, was one of the few Virginians to survive the battle.

Atherton was next heard of in Williamsburg. In March 1756, he successfully petitioned the House of Burgesses for compensation for his wound and losses—the House appropriated him £5 plus back pay for a total of £20. The wound Atherton sustained in the line of duty resulted in at least temporary loss of the use of his hand and limited his ability to earn a living in his trade of carpenter.

Perhaps because of his military experience and casualty status, Atherton was hired as a guard at the Magazine, where he served until the guard was disbanded in 1762. Whether through his marriage to one Lucy (last name unknown) or by dint of hard work, Atherton had the wherewithal to buy a Williamsburg lot in that same year. Barely three years later, though, he offered the lot and house for sale in the *Virginia Gazette*, but it did not sell until 1774.

Atherton did well enough for several years to support a wife and son, James (baptized in Bruton Parish in 1759). Somewhere along the line he became a Presbyterian, a dissenter from the established church. His was among the signatures on the 1765 petition asking the York County court to approve a meeting place in Williamsburg (on the Davenport property) for the dissenting congregation.

By June 1767, the former corporal was no longer able to carry on his carpenter's business as he once had. Perhaps as he aged, the old war wound made the exacting work of carpentry too difficult. "By great severity and many misfortunes," an advertisement in the *Gazette* said, Atherton was hoping "to engage with any Gentleman by the year, either in Virginia, Carolina, Florida, or the West Indies" to run his business. He said he had tools enough for eight or ten hands.

Having notified the public as early as 1767 that he intended to go to London "soon," Atherton, nevertheless, was still in Williamsburg in 1775. By that time, he had been presented to the grand jury for failing to list himself as a tithable. Atherton's marriage suffered, too. He claimed that Lucy "behaved in a very unfriendly manner" to him. He also forewarned "all Persons from trusting her on my Account, as I will not pay any Debts She may contract."

Visitors may hear the elder Atherton grouse to his son that too many romantic ideas about war and battle glory have spurred local youths to

sign on with the patriot cause. Corporal Atherton knows all too well that giddy inexperienced troops are in for a rude awakening on the battlefield.

Whether by his own design or by the hand of the Almighty, James Atherton was "no Inhabitant of the County" in 1778 when John Bartle brought suit against him for debt in York County court.

James and Lucy Atherton will be in residence four days a week at the Tenant House this season.

## Emanuel Jones

Keep an eye out for Emanuel Jones, master of the Indian School at the College of William and Mary. Jones provides important perspectives on the Taking Possession story line's emphases on clashes and accommodations between English colonists and Native Americans. Indian policy in colonial Virginia was a mixture of economic interest in increasing trade, strategic concern with lessening hostility between colonists and Indians, and some genuine philanthropic and religious feelings.

Emanuel Jones embodied these varied points of view. A devout Anglican, though not a clergyman, Jones likely believed that the American continent was intended by God for settlement and cultivation. Jones's dealings with Indian boys at the school, however, and his observation of Indians who occasionally visited Williamsburg probably made him less likely than some others to see them only as savages. To be sure, Jones would have judged Native Americans to be people in a primitive state of society but as capable of improvement as other men. As B. J. Pryor, who portrays Emanuel Jones, puts it, "some eighteenth-century people sympathized with the Indians, and desired justice and good for them . . . this concern was, however, paternalistic, and assumed that 'civilized' people knew what was best for them."

Jones became master of the Indian School in Williamsburg, a missionary school for Indian youths, in 1755. The William and Mary charter's preamble stated that the college, among other things, was founded to propagate the Christian faith among the Indians. Reverend James Blair, while in England seeking a charter and a grant of arms for the college, managed to persuade the executors of the estate of renowned scientist Robert Boyle to provide a portion of Boyle's residual interest in the income from Brafferton Manor in Yorkshire to support a school for Indians in Williamsburg. Funds from the Boyle bequest helped sustain the school until the American Revolution.



*The Brafferton (1723), adjacent to the Wren Building on the William and Mary campus, housed the Indian School.*

The first students were a few captive Indian boys. Governors Nicholson and Spotswood encouraged the development of the school. For instance, Spotswood took advantage of various negotiations with tribal leaders to secure the enrollment of some twenty boys by July 1712, including the son of the queen of the Pamunkey people. Spotswood also supported an Indian school at the Fort Christanna trading post south of the James River in the hope of preparing some students to enter the college proper.

It was not until 1723 that the Brafferton building was erected to house the Indian School in Williamsburg. Even with its own building, though, the school languished. Young Indians continued to be difficult to recruit. The ones who did come sometimes died from disease. Many merely went through the motions of practicing Christianity, and others returned home

without baptism to resume their native customs. Jones continued in the post of master for twenty-two years. At the time of his appointment in 1755, eight students came under his tutelage; when he left in 1777 there was only one.

Born in 1730 in Gloucester County, Virginia, Jones was the son of the Reverend Emanuel Jones (1668–1738) of Petsworth Parish. He was educated at William and Mary. Around 1750, he became usher (assistant teacher) of the Grammar School there. During this time he contracted to “hear [from] such boys as shall be recommended by their Parents or Guardians[,] a chapter in the Bible every School Day” for which he was paid an additional salary. Jones further

supplemented his income as usher by offering lessons in “the proper method of singing psalms.”

Jones did not follow his father into the Anglican ministry, however. As a layman, he was unusual among the college faculty, who were nearly all ordained ministers of the Church of England. Nonetheless, Jones willingly swore an oath to the 39 Articles of the Church of England to qualify for the Indian School post.

Although born in the colony, Jones may not have favored revolution. That, after all, would have put an end to the Indian School and his livelihood. He held two other posts at the college—clerk (secretary) to the college faculty and college librarian. In 1777, he resigned all of his positions at about the same time that the college’s Visitors removed the Reverend John Camm, a loyalist, from the presidency.

*Linda Rowe, historian in the Department of Historical Research and assistant editor of this publication, compiled these biographies.*

## Days in History Programming for Taking Possession: Program Overviews and Objectives

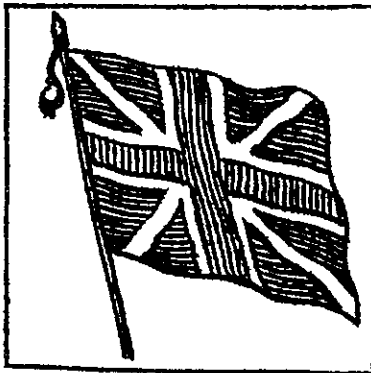
### SUNDAYS

November 7, 1769—  
"Rule, Britannia!"—Lord  
Botetourt Opens the  
General Assembly  
Program Manager: Mark  
Howell

On November 7, 1769, His Excellency Lord Botetourt convenes a new General Assembly to replace the one he had been obliged to dissolve the previous May. The governor's royal instructions required the action when the burgesses passed a series of strongly worded resolutions protesting the passage of Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend's new revenue duties. If Botetourt had hoped to quash the dissension, he failed. The former burgesses had gathered at the Raleigh Tavern, where they adopted and signed the non-importation association introduced by George Washington.

As the newly elected burgesses gather in Williamsburg in November, a major topic of conversation is how poorly the association is faring, particularly among small planters. The duties are on items considered luxuries of little use to the average planters, who do not want to stop buying all things British simply because their rich neighbors want them to. News that Great Britain is likely to repeal most of the duties further weakens the associators' hand.

However, the governor has not called the Assembly to address the problems of the association. Rather, he wishes the members to deal with the pressing issue of the western boundary line with the Cherokee. Britain's insistence on defining a western border for the North American colonies has been a sore point since the end of the Seven Years' War. The line drawn in 1768 at Hard Labor, South Carolina, is perceived as inconsistent with many Virginians' ambitions for western settlement. Settlements already exist west of the line. Furthermore, little of the rich land of Kentucky would have been available to Virginians. In his opening address, Botetourt announces that the king has approved a renegotiation of the boundary. Everywhere in town, wealthy land speculators urge their colleagues to agree that only a westward extension of the Virginia-North Carolina border (36° 31') to the



Ohio River will be considered appropriate.

Visitors touring the city on Sundays will discover that, despite these disagreements, Virginians are proud to be a part of the empire and feel certain that these difficulties will ultimately be resolved. The social season that inevitably develops during Public Times is greatly anticipated. Public assemblies, horse races, the ar-

arrival of actors, and the inevitable gossip of who's who will fill the town while the General Assembly is in session. The difficulties before Virginia are many: access to western lands, trade limitations, the contention of the colony's right to tax and legislate for itself, the growing intransigence of Parliament and the ministry, and the destruction of a significant amount of tobacco by a September hurricane, to name but a few. The idea that Virginia and the other colonies might use these issues to advocate independence from Great Britain is but a loosely formed notion held by only a few of the most radical leaders. It will take other, more sinister, events to cause the issue of independence to be considered.

If only that pesky rumor of the tax on tea might be proven false . . .

### MONDAYS

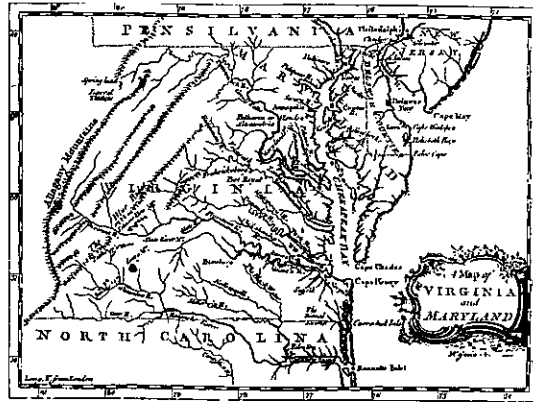
December 4, 1774—"The West Is Ours"  
—Lord Dunmore Returns from the West  
Program Manager and Department Director:  
Barney Barnes

"The West Is Ours" program must sharply delineate the evolving nature of imperial-colonial relations, exploring those factors that strengthen the bonds uniting Americans and Britons as well as those that can drive them apart. Virginian Americans especially must feel the ambivalence of conflicting emotions in December of 1774. On one hand, the British royal governor has just led a successful expedition against the Shawnee in the Ohio Country, potentially opening enormous tracts of virgin land for settlement and speculation. Never before have the actions of imperial authority more clearly coincided with the interests of land-hungry Virginians eager to find fertile ground for their agricultural staple—tobacco—and the wealth and status it brings.

On the other hand, the persistent yet misguided attempts of the British ministry to assert Parliamentary authority over the colonies and to raise revenue have led to creation of the First Continental Congress and its Continental Association. Americans, in defense of their rights as Englishmen, have begun

to see themselves as something quite apart from their British brethren, somehow different and fully capable of determining their own destiny with neither the assistance nor interference of the mother country. They have just taken the first significant step toward creating the institutions that can define and guide that separated status, should separation become necessary.

The time is full of opportunities and hope for the future, but it is not yet clear if that future will unite or irrevocably divide Virginians and all Americans from their British counterparts.



their number should be so inattentive to his duty as to allow the Magazine to stand unguarded. Patrick Henry's call to bring Virginia to a proper posture of defense, made at the recent convention in Richmond, will be examined in light of the removal of the powder.

Town fathers will decide how to make

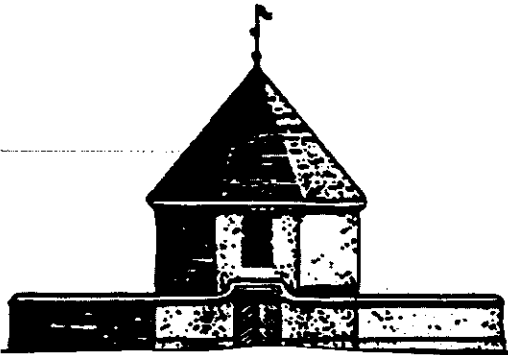
their feelings known to Lord Dunmore. Mr. Speaker will counsel a reasoned response. He and others like him must maintain a moderate demeanor in order to allow the Continental Congress an opportunity to find a peaceful means to redress their grievances. George Wythe and those of like mind will demand a reckoning.

The women of the city will do all they can to maintain a balance in their households. The ladies will decry the threat of possible violence in this peaceable city. The slaves will tread carefully when the rumor of insurrection in outlying areas is bruited about as the reason for Dunmore's actions. Although Dunmore appears to be an enemy of American liberty, there are those who cannot forget the great service he performed in opening up the West. It is imperative that the promised treaties are honored, especially in light of the growing tumult. It is wise to see the back door secured when the wolf is at the front.

#### WEDNESDAYS

April 28, 1775—*The Gathering Storm: Peyton Randolph Departs for Philadelphia*  
Program Manager: Kristin Spivey

The Gathering Storm accentuates the importance of the gunpowder incident in the headlong ride to the Revolution. News has arrived in Williamsburg that independent companies around Fredericksburg are massing and preparing to march to the defense of the capital. Their leaders mean to demand the return of the gunpowder from Lord Dunmore. It is obvious that news of the removal has traveled on swift wings, while the governor's reassurances have not. Despite the underlying unease in the city, Peyton Randolph is determined to set out for Philadelphia before the day is over. His household is making all haste to see that the final preparations for his departure are completed.



#### TUESDAYS

April 21, 1775—*“Raise the Alarm!”—The Gunpowder Incident*  
Program Manager: Kristin Spivey

The new third “Day in History” programming provides us with a concentrated view of the gunpowder incident and its far-reaching effect on the people of Williamsburg and the colony of Virginia. There will be opportunities to examine the reasons for Lord Dunmore's actions, and he will be seen as both political animal and family man.

Townsppeople will question why the night watch grew lax in the performance of its duty to guard the Magazine. Members of the Independent Company will seek to discover why one of



The governor is incensed that the independent companies are so bold and “foolish” as to threaten the king’s representative and his family. He rails at the fickle nature of the Virginians who offered him a hero’s welcome on his return from the West not six months earlier. The citizens, on the other hand, despite their sentiments toward the governor, are anxious to reassure Her Ladyship that she need not fear for herself or their children. Naturally, rumors abound regarding the “Black List” and who is threatened with arrest. Just when it seems that all can be preserved with the aid of Mr. Speaker and the other delegates to the Grand Congress, word arrives of the bloodshed in Massachusetts Bay. Peyton Randolph has much to occupy his mind as he sets out for Philadelphia, but he leaves determined to do his duty by the people of Virginia.

#### THURSDAYS

November 17, 1775—“The Sword Is Drawn”—*Dunmore’s Proclamation*

Program Manager: Harvey Bakari

As news of Dunmore’s Proclamation circulates through the city of Williamsburg, the local committee of safety takes action to protect the citizens and advance the patriot cause. On the steps of the Courthouse, the committee shares its disgust at the proclamation with all members of the community, free and slave. The governor’s declaration of martial law has been expected since June, when he fled the Palace. Before Dunmore escaped Williamsburg, he had privately threatened to burn the city to ashes and free all the slaves. Citizens were nonetheless outraged that his proclamation offered freedom to all able-bodied slaves of rebel masters who were willing to bear arms and join the British forces.

In a society where everyone knew his proper place, the rhetoric of revolution has evoked a longing for liberty and freedom even among the disenfranchised. Gowan Pamphlet, a black Baptist preacher and leader of the enslaved community, calls the Proclamation “A Day of

Jubilee.” During 1775, there was unprecedented slave unrest in Virginia. The Proclamation gives enslaved people a chance to gain their freedom legally. Ironically, their desire for freedom clashes with the white community’s similar quest for liberty.

The impending threat of a British invasion or a slave insurrection has the white community on edge. The local committee of safety increases the number of slave patrols to try to prevent slaves from escaping to Norfolk. At one point, members of the community warn the committeemen of an illegal gathering of free blacks and slaves. Immediately, the patrol advances on the gathering, and, with force of arms, demands that everyone returns to his proper place. It becomes evident that the rhetoric of liberty has no substance for many members of society.



The colonial military forces also prepare for impending conflict with the British. Militia officers threaten and interrogate loyalists about their activities. Colonel Patrick Henry, in preparation for battle, delivers a stirring speech as soldiers are mustered into the Second Virginia Regiment.

It is a time of tremendous change and uncertainty in the colony. The rhetoric of revolution becomes action. There’s no turning back. “The Sword Is Drawn,” and the colony and its people, free and enslaved, will never be the same.

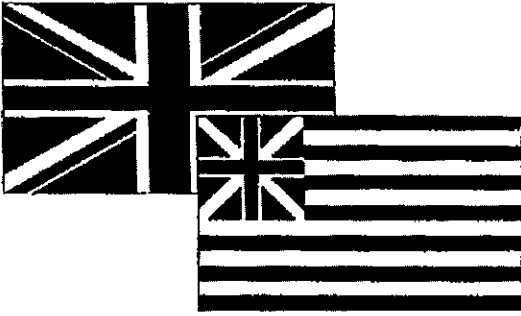
#### FRIDAYS

May 15, 1776—“Virginia Declares Independence”—*Breaking Ties with King and Empire*

Program Manager: William Weldon

The Virginia Convention unanimously adopts a resolution for independence. Since 1765, the time of the Stamp Act, the British colonists of North America have been subjected to illegal taxation, denied rights and liberties, and finally, suffered martial law and threats against person and property. In the spring of 1776, the free citizens of Virginia elected representatives to go to Williamsburg





and vote for independence from Great Britain. But there is an understanding that independence will come, if at all, at a dear price: sacrifice, suffering, and, most likely, war.

The majority of free white, propertied men—the “freeholders” in each Virginia county—express their will in regard to independence. Are their sentiments universal? Are they shared by the women of Virginia? What will a war mean to their lives, to their families? What about those who are not free? How will the enslaved people of Williamsburg interpret a declaration of independence? Are all the free white men of Virginia interested in independence for the same reasons? How much liberty and justice are staunch Virginia patriots willing to extend to those who disagree with their position?

Today’s program will reconstruct for Colonial Williamsburg visitors the summary events of the final day of debate and ultimate decision. They will experience the anguish, excitement, and anticipation felt by Virginians on the eve of this life-changing event, the vote for independence from Great Britain. Visitors will also understand how critical Virginia’s vote was in influencing the Continental Congress in Philadelphia to move toward a declaration of independence for all of the North American colonies. Richard Henry Lee wrote to Patrick Henry that “Virginia has hitherto taken the lead in great affairs, and many look to her with anxious expectation.” Visitors should carry away an understanding of the diversity of concerns, opinions, and emotions held by citizens of Williamsburg regarding the issue of separation from their motherland.

## SATURDAYS

May 16, 1776—“Building a New Republic”—Virginians Create a New Constitution and a Declaration of Rights  
Program Manager: William Weldon

With a vote for independence resolved, delegates to the Convention must form a new government for Virginia, and everyone else must get on with his or her life in light of this momentous decision. The Virginia Army regiments have been absorbed into the Continental Army commanded by General George Washington. Recruitment proceeds—now with even greater urgency.

The Congress has previously dispatched emissaries to the courts of Spain and France, in the desperate hope of enlisting military and financial assistance in resisting British oppression. Most Americans understand that, without a strong foreign alliance, there is little hope of success in fighting the British army and navy or of engaging in the commerce necessary to sustain the free American states. Another very real fear for Virginians is that they will have to fight a war not only against the British in the East, but simultaneously with Indian tribes allied with the British in the West.

We want visitors to see and experience the lives, trials, and anxieties of Virginians as they begin to acknowledge the realities of the decision for independence; to see how Virginia would be governed and how trade and commerce might be conducted under the conditions of a full-scale war; and to gain insights into the story of western lands and settlement during this period.



## Religious Practice in the Slave Quarters of Mount Vernon

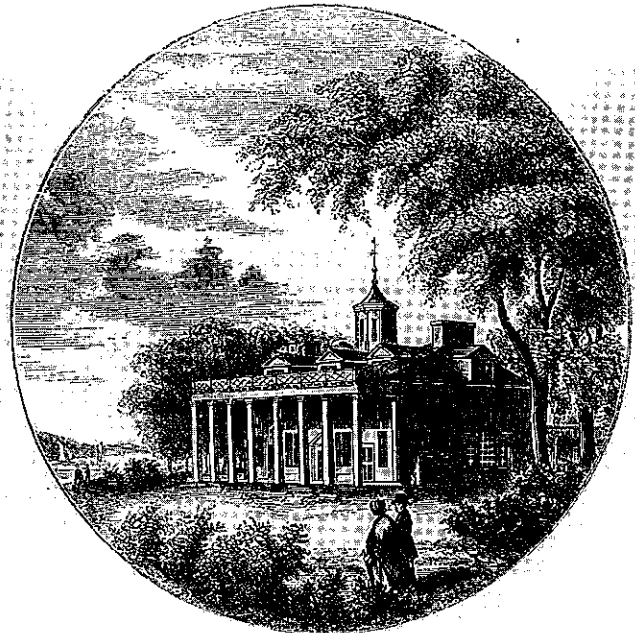
by Mary V. Thompson

Mary is a research specialist at Mount Vernon.

This is part of a larger article "In the Hands of a Good Providence": The Practice of Religion at George Washington's Mount Vernon, a portion of which appeared in the Autumn 1999 issue of Virginia Cavalcade.

George Washington's writings tell us virtually nothing about the religious life of his slaves. However, a fifteen-year in-depth study of the slave community at Mount Vernon has led to the inescapable conclusion that Washington did not even have to leave home to practice the religious toleration that was so important to him. By the time of his death in 1799, Washington's Virginia estate was home to hired white laborers and more than 300 African and African-American slaves, who appear to have followed a variety of belief systems. Elements of Christianity, Islam, and African religions survive in the documentary and archaeological records of Mount Vernon. Whether individual slaves followed any one of these religions exclusively or took elements from each is, however, impossible to say.

There is no evidence that the Washingtons provided anything in the way of religious training or services for the enslaved workers on their estate, beyond giving them Sunday as a day off. In fact, one of the major complaints of Oney Judge, Martha Washington's former maid, who converted to Christianity after she ran away from the executive mansion in Philadelphia, was that she "never received the least . . . moral instruction, of any kind, while she remained in Washington's family."<sup>1</sup> It would have been most unusual if she had been given such instruction, for eighteenth-century masters typically took little or no interest in the religious lives of their slaves. The custom of having simple household services became more common later—in the nineteenth century—and was practiced by the family of Martha Washington's grandson at Arlington plantation, where at least the domestic slaves were usually included. More formal



MOUNT VERNON.<sup>1</sup>

Engraving of the house at Mount Vernon.

church services were held at Arlington on Sundays for the slaves in a little schoolhouse.<sup>2</sup>

A description left by a notable eighteenth-century visitor suggests that the slaves at Mount Vernon had contact of some sort with at least three Christian denominations: Baptist, Methodist, and Quaker. Prince Louis-Philippe of France and his servant, Beaudoin, came to the plantation in 1797, shortly after George Washington's retirement from the presidency. There, they talked with a number of the slaves and recorded that hopes for freedom in the not-too-distant future had been raised among them by members of these three religious groups. Quakers had even approached Washington's slaves at places in Alexandria and Georgetown described as "clubs," possibly meetings of mutual aid or self-help societies. Throughout Virginia, in the last half of the eighteenth century, Baptists and Methodists actively sought new members from the slave community. Whether through their open acceptance of slaves into their congregations as equals or their anti-slavery message, these denominations met with an enthusiastic response, especially from younger African Americans who had been born in America. The presence of Baptists and Methodists among the Mount Vernon slaves is, therefore, to be expected.<sup>3</sup>

There were strong ties between these religious groups and the abolition movement in Alexandria, which was a center for abolitionist

activity during this period. Anti-slavery Quakers took an active role in city government, and the "Alexandria Society for the Relief and Protection of Persons Illegally Held in Bondage" boasted more than sixty members. The society was led by Archibald M'Clean, a teacher whose classroom served as the site for the society's quarterly meetings. M'Clean's wife, Mary Jones, was the daughter of a prominent Baptist minister in Philadelphia and a member of the Alexandria Baptist congregation. Confirmation of Louis-Philippe's statement about the effects these groups were having on local slaves, including those from Mount Vernon, comes from Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick, one of the Washington family's physicians, who, as Superintendent of Quarantine in 1795, attacked the abolition society for "infusing into the slaves a spirit of insurrection and rebellion."<sup>4</sup>

During this period in Virginia history, slaves from Mount Vernon were welcome to attend services at one of the nearby churches of these three denominations. Conversations with local researchers have elicited the information that several slaves from Arlington plantation, the property of Martha Washington's grandson George Washington Parke Custis, were among the charter members of the Alexandria Baptist Church in 1803. About this time, at least three slaves living at Mount Vernon and owned by George Washington's nephew Bushrod—who inherited the estate after Martha Washington's death in 1802—appear to have been members of the same Baptist church in Alexandria.<sup>5</sup> This institution was founded by individuals from an earlier church known as Backlick Baptist Church, the name of which suggests that it was probably located a few miles beyond the neighboring plantation known as Belvoir on or near present-day Backlick Road. It is quite possible that some of the Arlington slaves belonged to or at least worshiped at this earlier church, when they still lived at Mount Vernon, prior to Martha Washington's death and Custis's inheritance of them.<sup>6</sup>

There are some indications that Mount Vernon's slave community had developed spiritual leaders of its own in addition to worshiping with one or more local congregations. Will, an older man, who belonged to the estate of Martha Washington's first husband, Daniel Parke Custis, was overseer from at least 1786 to 1792 at

George Washington's Muddy Hole Farm—one of the five farms that made up the Mount Vernon estate—and was recorded on a 1799 slave list with the initials "Mintr." after his name. It has been suggested that those letters indicate that Will was a "minister," something that would not have been unknown in Virginia at the time. In addition to Will, fifty-year-old Caesar, another of the Custis family slaves at Washington's Union Farm, was said to have been a well-known preacher among the local black population in the last years of the eighteenth century. A description of Caesar records that he often wore clothing that was black and white in color, perhaps as an indication of his ministerial role.<sup>7</sup> These men may have played an important role in helping the enslaved people on the plantation to deal with the hardships of their lives and to find a measure of hope and meaning.

One secular benefit of associating with a church was the opportunity for slaves to learn to read and write. Literacy was an invaluable skill for anyone hoping for a better job on the plantation or trying to get along in the larger society beyond Mount Vernon. While it may not have been common, it was neither unusual nor illegal for Virginia slaves during this period to be literate. In fact, eighteenth-century pastors who actively ministered to slaves often saw it as part of their duty to teach their congregations to read, so that members would have access to the Bible for themselves. Beginning in 1795, the local abolition society, headquartered in Alexandria, even held classes on Sundays to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic to slaves of all ages. Estimates have placed the number of literate slaves at the time of the Civil War at about 5 to 10 percent, after several decades of repressive laws forbidding people to educate them. There is no way to know how many slaves were literate in the years

before laws prevented such instruction, but one historian has estimated that perhaps as many as 15 to 20 percent of adult slaves could read during the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

The slaves who worked as overseers on several of Washington's farms were probably expected to read and write so that reports of work done under their supervision could be drawn up and turned in each week and orders from Washington could be read. For example, when Will, the overseer at Muddy Hole Farm, was sick

*There are some indications that Mount Vernon's slave community had developed spiritual leaders of its own in addition to worshiping with one or more local congregations.*

for two weeks in February 1786, the overall reports contained no information from him and noted that there had been "no acc[oun]t given in."<sup>9</sup> A note dropped at the time of Christopher's escape attempt in 1799 suggests that the young house servant could probably read and write, as well.<sup>10</sup> Because Christopher worked closely with Washington, a certain degree of literacy may have been expected, or might have been picked up, as part of the job. Another intriguing possibility is that Will, who was Christopher's uncle, may have taught his nephew this important skill. The connection between religion and literacy in the slave community during this period and the possibility that Will may have been a minister suggest Will may have taught Christopher to read, not only out of family responsibility, but out of religious belief as well.

Not only house servants and overseers could read. Caesar, the other slave minister on the estate, was a field worker on one of Washington's outlying farms and ran away several times during the 1790s. On one occasion, fearing that Caesar had attempted to escape yet again, Washington commented that he thought Caesar ultimately had a good chance of success, "as he can read, if not write."<sup>11</sup> It is highly unlikely that Caesar needed to read as part of, or as a consequence of, his job, so he must have learned in some other way. Whether it was through another slave, his church, or some other means we cannot say. Like Will, Caesar's literacy may have been linked to his church affiliation.

There are also several tantalizing hints that religious traditions from Africa, or at least their influence, had not completely died out at Mount Vernon by the end of the eighteenth century. This would not have been unusual; evidence of similar cultural survivals has been found in Virginia at Monticello, in Maryland, and in South Carolina. According to historian Peter Kolchin, African-born slaves generally continued to practice their native religions after their enslavement and transportation to the Americas, with these traditions surviving longest in areas where the population had a high concentration of Africans.<sup>12</sup>

Archaeologists working in the cellar of a Mount Vernon slave quarter in the 1980s found a leg bone from an owl bearing marks from a knife cut where the talon had been cut off. The same site also yielded a raccoon baculum or penis bone, incised along one end. The carving on this bone effectively transformed it into a ceremonial or decorative object, which could have been suspended from a cord around someone's neck. Both the baculum and the owl talon

might be amulets of a type described by a former Maryland slave, who recalled that the "only charms that were worn [by slaves on the plantation where he was raised] were made out of bones." The well-known sexual aggressiveness of male raccoons might, for example, have led some to see the baculum as a fertility symbol, while the owl's prowess as a nighttime hunter might have led others to see its talon as a valuable aid to their own nighttime hunting efforts.

Archaeologists have suggested that these pieces might indicate either cultural borrowing from Native Americans or be New World manifestations of African custom.<sup>13</sup> Whatever the answer, these bones certainly suggest the practice of other belief systems besides, or perhaps in conjunction with, Christianity on Washington's estate and lend credence to an undocumented tradition that the slaves at Washington's Dogue Run Farm, at least, practiced voodoo or conjuring.<sup>14</sup>

Given the dominant European-Christian culture, it would have been difficult for slaves to transplant a religion to the Americas completely intact. For example, with the typical workweek in Virginia being Monday through Saturday, Islam's traditional Friday prayers would have been almost impossible to continue in the New World. Given the prominence of pork in the slave diet, it might have been hard to follow Islamic dietary guidelines, but fish, the occasional issue of mutton and beef, and hunted game would have made it possible. Slave status would have ruled out a pilgrimage to Mecca. Yet, other elements of these religious traditions might well have survived the Middle Passage.

The life of Sambo Anderson, an African-born carpenter at Mount Vernon, suggests that at least some slave marriages may have been based on a non-European pattern. According to the 1799 slave census, Sambo was married to a thirty-six-year-old woman at River Farm named Agnes, with whom he had three children, Henky (seventeen), Cecelia (fourteen), and Anderson (eleven). Also living on River Farm at that time were three other children, Ralph (nine), Charity (two), and Charles (one), whose mother, Sall, had died not long before. Sambo was among the slaves freed by the terms of George Washington's will and, as a free man, later made his home on Little Hunting Creek, near Mount Vernon. Unfortunately, Agnes, her children, and Sall's little ones, as dower slaves of Martha Washington, could not be freed and were eventually divided among the latter's four grandchildren.

Eleven years later, in the summer of 1810, a local newspaper alerted its subscribers to the escape of a young man named Ralph, then about

twenty-one years old, who had run away from his owner, Thomas Peter, the husband of Martha Washington's second granddaughter. Ralph was believed to be heading for the home of his father, "A free negro man Sambo, living on Judge Washington's estate, Mount Vernon."<sup>15</sup> It is entirely possible that Sambo had two wives, both Agnes and Sall, a fact George Washington might not have recognized because it was outside the scope of his experience and cultural expectations. Polygamy, while probably not common among Virginia slaves, was not completely unknown either. At least one African-born slave on a plantation belonging to Robert Carter had two wives.<sup>16</sup> There may, however, be another explanation for Sambo's family situation. Given the seven-year gap in age between Ralph and his next youngest sibling, it is possible that Sambo and Sall were involved in an extramarital relationship that resulted in the birth of Ralph. An end to their relationship and Sall's eventual marriage or involvement with another man several years later could also explain the spacing of her younger children. Another possibility is that Sall and Agnes were related and that Sambo and Agnes "adopted" Sall's children after her death.

From this distance and with the sources at hand, it is impossible to do more than speculate, but the possibility that Sambo may have been practicing the marriage pattern he knew as a child in Africa is certainly intriguing and should not be overlooked. Either Islam, which permitted up to four wives, or a more traditional African religion, some of which allowed hundreds and even thousands of wives for those who could afford them, would have given him both a tradition of polygamy and clear conscience to practice it.<sup>17</sup>

The name given to a child born shortly after George Washington's death indicates the continuation of some elements of Islamic culture, if not the actual practice of the religion. Late in the year 1800, a young, supposedly unmarried mulatto woman named Letty, who lived at Washington's Muddy Hole Farm, gave birth to a girl she decided to call "Nila." This unusual name is the phonetic spelling of an Islamic woman's name, "Naailah," which means "someone who acquires something."

In accordance with her late husband's final wishes, Martha Washington took steps at the

end of 1800 to free those slaves who had belonged to him, including Letty, her three children, both her parents, and all her siblings. It may be that "Nila" was an old African name, remembered in Letty's family or that of the baby's father. Maybe Letty simply knew someone named Nila and wanted her daughter to carry the name of her friend. Given the timing of the girl's birth, however, it is also possible that this name was bestowed in commemoration of the family's newly acquired freedom. If the latter interpretation is correct, some knowledge of Islamic tradition or a familiarity with the Arabic language could still be found in the larger African-American community in Fairfax County or Alexandria, if not at Mount Vernon itself, at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

*There are also several tantalizing hints that religious traditions from Africa, or at least their influence, had not completely died out at Mount Vernon by the end of the eighteenth century.*

To a great extent, the religious life of the Mount Vernon plantation mirrored its social makeup. At the top were George and Martha Washington and their family following the formal and rather reserved eighteenth-century Anglican pattern, which stressed the need for private devotions and service to one's church and community

through work on the vestry and through charitable contributions. They, in turn, supported the religious needs of their hired employees—who hailed from England, Ireland, Scotland, and Germany and probably represented a wide variety of Christian denominations—by giving time to attend church services and occasionally purchasing devotional materials for their use. The whites at the top and middle of the social scale, whether they practiced religion or not, came out of a Judeo-Christian background. In contrast, the African and African-American slaves, who made up roughly 90 percent of Mount Vernon's population, may have subscribed to a more diverse system of belief, combining elements of Christianity acquired in America with religious traditions they brought from Africa.

In looking at the practice of religion at Mount Vernon, one is struck by the thought that George Washington was thinking of the situation at his own home when he wrote of the need for religious toleration and freedom and his belief that "every man, conducting himself as a good citizen," was "accountable to God alone for his religious opinions," and should "be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Chase, "Mrs. [?] Staines," *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies*, ed. John W. Blasingame (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 249.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 54, 55; Murray H. Nelligan, "Old Arlington: The Story of the Lee Mansion National Memorial" (unpublished report prepared for the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Capital Parks, 1953), 118. See also Augusta Blanche Berard, *Letter to Mrs. Mary Berard*, 4/18/1856, quoted in "Arlington and Mount Vernon 1856," with introduction and notes by Clayton Torrence, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (April 1949): 161; and *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (March 1859).

<sup>3</sup> Louis-Philippe, *Diary of My Travels in America*, trans. Stephen Becker (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977), 32. See Lucia Stanton, "'Those Who Labor for My Happiness': Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves," *Jeffersonian Legacies*, ed. Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 168, for a discussion of the religious life of the slaves at Monticello. For material on religion among African-American slaves in general, see Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 55–57; Philip D. Morgan, "Slave Life in Piedmont Virginia, 1720–1800," *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, ed. Lois Green Carr, Philip D. Morgan, and Jean B. Russo (Chapel Hill, N. C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 472–479; Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 187–198.

<sup>4</sup> For Alexandria and the abolition society, see Philip J. Schwarz, "George Washington and the Developing Law of Slavery in Virginia" (unpublished paper, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, October 1995); Michael L. Nicholls, "Alexandria and African Americans in the Age of Washington" (unpublished paper, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, December 1995), 17–19, 24–25; Jennifer Jacquelyn Ione Fasy, "After Prayer and Praise: The Record Book of the Alexandria Baptist Church, 1803–1816" (M. A. thesis, Utah State University, 1992), 27.

<sup>5</sup> Fasy, "After Prayer and Praise," 125; Anna Lynch, comp., *A Compendium of Early African Americans in Alexandria, Virginia*, Alexandria Archaeology Publications No. 44 (Alexandria, Va.: Alexandria Archaeology, Office of Historic Alexandria, City of Alexandria, 1993), 83 and 84.

<sup>6</sup> Agnes Mullins, curator at Arlington House; Anna Lynch, historical researcher with the Alexandria Department of Archaeology; and Wilson Gaines, historian for First Baptist Church of Alexandria; telephone conversation with the author, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> See Charles C. Wall, "Housing and Family Life of the Mount Vernon Negro" (unpublished paper, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, May 1962), 25–26; Morgan, "Slave Life in Piedmont Virginia," 479; Philip D. Morgan and Michael L. Nicholls, "Slave Flight: Mount Vernon, Virginia, and the Wider Atlantic World" (unpublished paper, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 1995), 12.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 76, 80–81, 93–94, 111, 114, 121, 130, and 190n; Sobel, *The World They Made Together*, 184–185; Nicholls, "Alexandria and African Americans in the Age of Washington"; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 141–142; Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 156–157. Laws prohibiting the teaching of reading and writing to slaves were passed

in Virginia in the nineteenth century, but were largely ignored. See Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 129; and Calder Loth, ed., *Virginia Landmarks of Black History: Sites on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 41. For a discussion of education among slaves, see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 561–577.

<sup>9</sup> Weekly Reports, 2/11/1786 and 2/25/1786.

<sup>10</sup> George Washington to Roger West, 9/19/1799.

<sup>11</sup> George Washington to William Pearce, 2/21/1796.

<sup>12</sup> Stanton, "Those Who Labor for My Happiness," 168; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 54–55; Bill Broadway, "Digging Up Some Divining Inspiration," *The Washington Post*, August 16, 1977.

<sup>13</sup> Dennis J. Pogue and Esther C. White, "Summary Report on the 'House for Families' Slave Quarter Site (44 Fx 762/40–47), Mount Vernon Plantation, Mount Vernon, Virginia" (unpublished report, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, December 1991), 44–46; Donna Wyant Howell, comp., "Descriptions of Plantation Life," *I Was a Slave* (Washington, D. C.: American Legacy Books, 1995), 41; Joanne Bowen, "Faunal Remains from the House for Families Cellar" (unpublished report, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, November 3, 1993), 28; Stephen Charles Atkins, "Archaeological Perspective on the African-American Slave Diet at Mount Vernon's House for Families" (M. A. thesis, College of William and Mary, 1994), 84–85.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Leland Haworth, *George Washington: Country Gentleman* (Indianapolis, Ind.: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Publishers, 1925), 213.

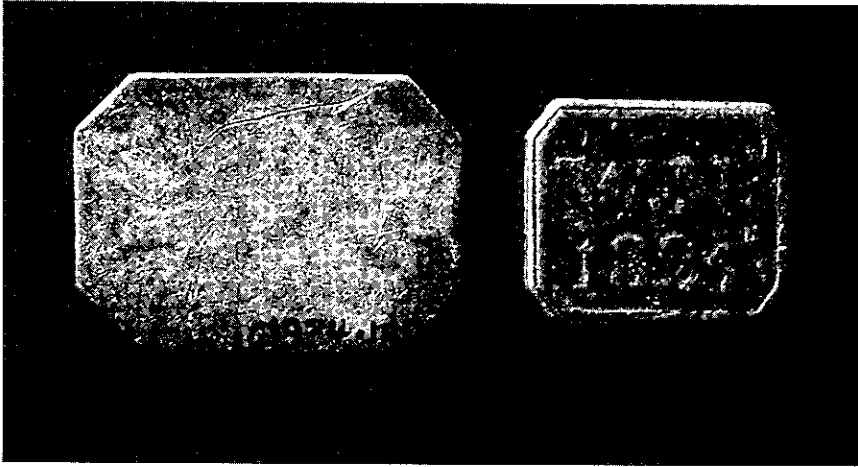
<sup>15</sup> *Alexandria Gazette*, June 10–December 18, 1810.

<sup>16</sup> Lorena Walsh, "A Place in Time' Regained: A Fuller History of Colonial Chesapeake Slavery Through Group Biography," *Working Toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South*, ed. Larry E. Hudson, Jr. (Rochester, N. Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1994), 17 and 30n.

<sup>17</sup> Marie Armand Pascal D'Avezac-Macaya, "The Land and People of Ijebu," *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. Philip D. Curtin (Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 259–259n.

<sup>18</sup> George Washington, Slave List [June 1799], *Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1931), 37: 256–268. John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Last Will and Testament of George Washington and his Schedule of Property to which is appended the Last Will and Testament of Martha Washington* (Mount Vernon, Va.: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 1972), 2–4, 31n. Dorothy Provine, *Alexandria County, Virginia, Free Negro Registers, 1797–1861* (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, Inc., 1990), 10. The connection between the names Nila and Naailah and the Arabic meaning of the name, were brought to the author's attention in a conversation with Nila Chowdry of the Pakistani Embassy in Washington, D. C., and confirmed through a phone call to the reference desk in the library at the Islamic Center in Washington, D. C., 8/14/95. For more information about the practice of Islam in the New World in the early nineteenth century, see Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq, "Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq of Timbuktu," *Africa Remembered*, ed. Philip D. Curtin (Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 163–166.

<sup>19</sup> George Washington to the General Committee of the United Baptist Churches in Virginia, May 1789, *Writings of George Washington*, 30: 321, quoted in *Maxims of George Washington*, 182.



*Samples of communion tokens from the Colonial Williamsburg collections.*

## Interpreting Religion at the Golden Ball

by John Turner

*John is manager for religious studies in the Education Division.*

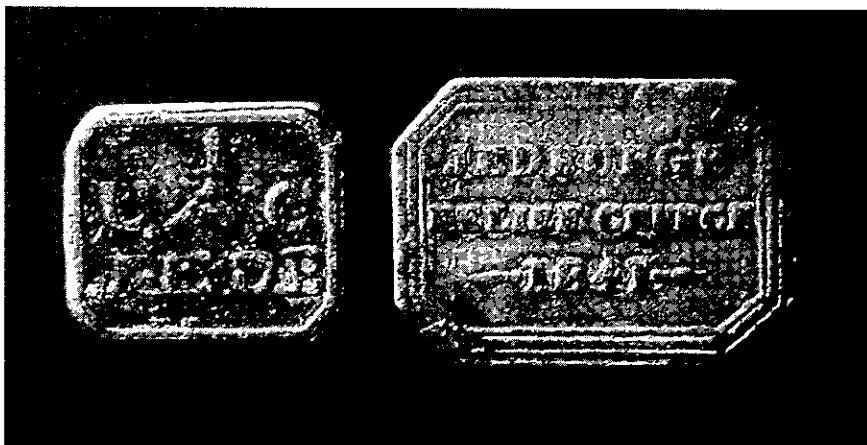
During 1998 and 1999, master silversmith Jimmy Curtis and his staff filled an order for communion silver from a local Anglican church. In the process, they spent many hours at the silversmith's (next to the Golden Ball) interpreting religion and its impact on colonial tradesmen to visitors. More chalices and accompanying pieces have been ordered and will be made, but, in the coming months, another object of religious significance will be added to the silversmith's production schedule: the communion token.

Communion tokens were used primarily by Presbyterians in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. (There are a few in-

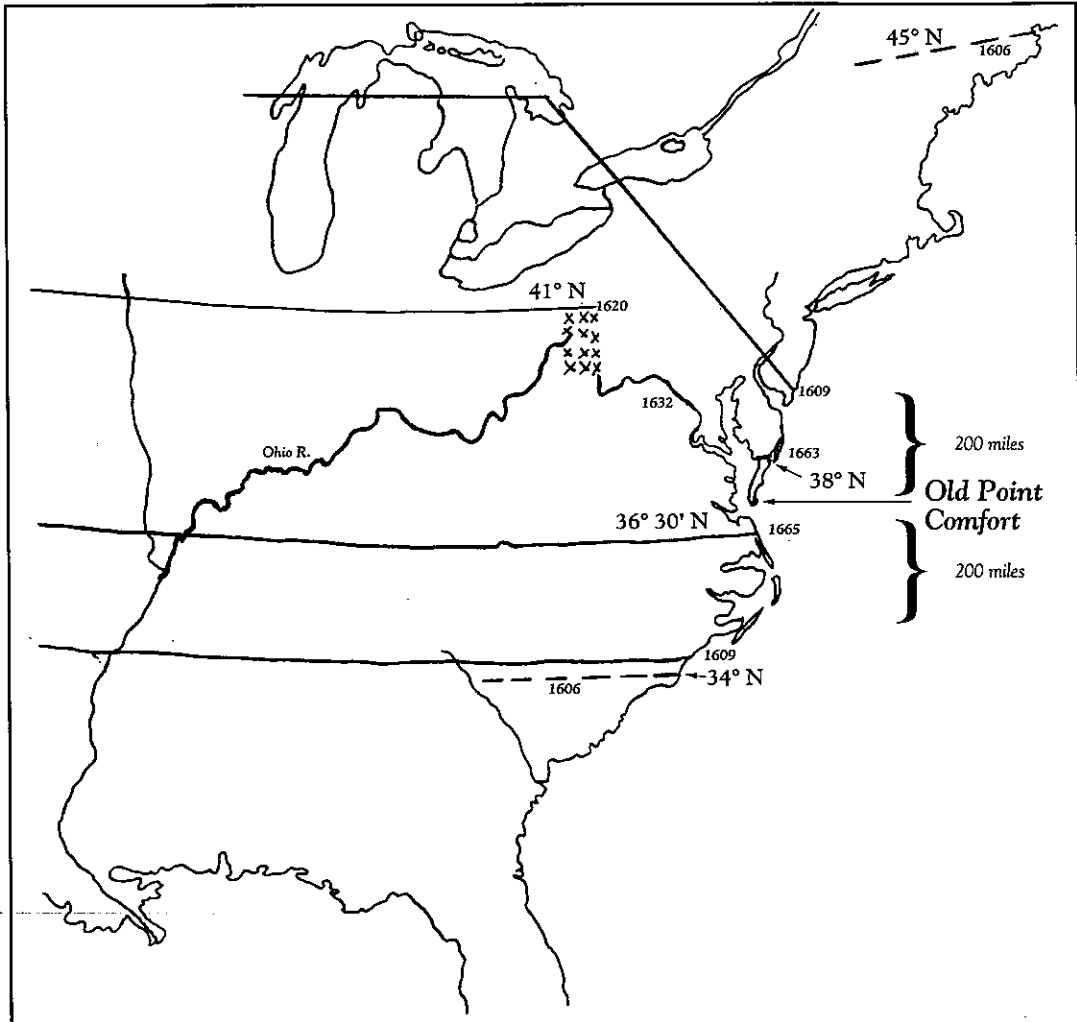
stances of use by Episcopal as well as Methodist churches—and several cases of the revival of communion token use in twentieth-century churches.) The sacrament of Holy Communion was usually observed no more than four times a year by most Presbyterian churches until the twentieth century. Church elders or the minister examined communicants prior to the communion service. Those determined to be ready to participate were given tokens, made most often of metal (and occasionally wood or paper), which, when presented, allowed the bearer to receive communion.

These tokens came in many shapes and sizes and had to be produced each time communion was celebrated. The silversmiths will create several designs and hope to develop this as a hands-on activity for visitors behind the Golden Ball, providing additional opportunities for the silversmiths to interpret another aspect of religion in colonial America. And we can count on them to conduct this program just as Presbyterians strive to conduct themselves, "in decency and in order."

*Samples of communion tokens from the Colonial Williamsburg collections.*



## Evolution of Virginia's Boundary Lines



### 1. FORMATION

- 1606 Virginia Company charter defined Virginia as the land lying between the latitudes of 34° N and 45° N
- 1609 Rechartered Virginia Company given exclusive rights to lands within 200 miles north and south of Point Comfort
- 1620 Northern limit of Virginia set at latitude 41° N

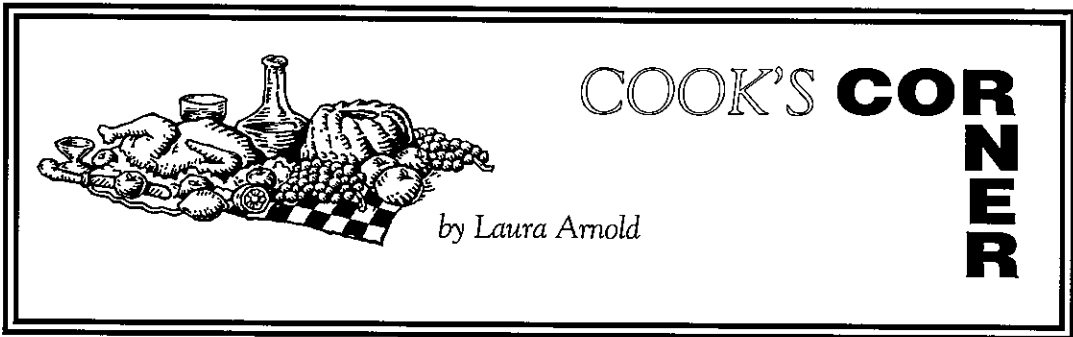
### 2. EARLY ADJUSTMENTS

- 1632 In coastal areas, Virginia's northern limit moved south by 200 miles when Maryland's rights were extended to include lands north of the Potomac River
- 1663 Northern boundary of Virginia's Eastern Shore set at approximately 38° N
- 1665 Southern boundary of Virginia defined as 36° 30' N

### 3. LATE ADJUSTMENTS

- 1763 Conclusion of Seven Years' War established western boundary of Virginia at Mississippi River
- 1774 Quebec Act transferred all Virginia claims north of the Ohio River to Quebec





*Laura is a member of the Interpreter planning board and is a volunteer for this publication.*

Visitors to Jamestown are surprised by the diminutive size of the three ships that brought the first permanent settlers to Virginia in 1607. Information about living conditions aboard those ships elicits questions about the food and drink consumed on a long voyage to this little-known land. Today's travelers equate sea transportation with sumptuous meals and luxury accommodations. Even the visitor who travels by car and stays at a local campground expects a variety of fresh and prepared foods to be available along the way. A recent phenomenon among our visitors is the ubiquitous bottle of spring water, carried along with cameras and waistpacks. Asking visitors to imagine drinking stale, impure water stored in less than sanitary containers forces them to step back in time and consider the historical experience.

To expand our understanding, we rely upon shipping records and diaries of those seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travelers who went beyond recording daily weather and navigational observations to describe the hardships of living in close quarters with often unpleasant fellow passengers and crew. Shipboard food changed little during these two centuries. What passengers and crew ate depended on who they were, how much they paid for their passage, and on weather conditions during the voyage. Most of the crew and ordinary travelers were divided into messes, or groups of six or eight persons. Each mess daily received basic provisions of items such as ship's biscuits, salted meat (usually beef or pork), dried or salted fish, dried peas, flour, lard, cheese, water, and beer. The simple fare created from these ingredients

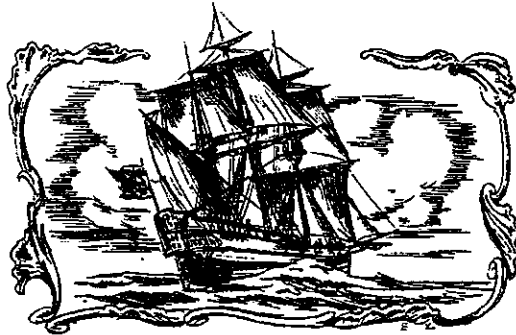
was monotonous and unappetizing. Supplies were often of poor quality to begin with or spoiled during the voyage. In addition, everyone on board suffered during stormy weather when no food could be cooked, and passengers and crew had to endure a diet of bread and cheese.

The journal kept by John Harrower, who crossed the Atlantic with seventy-four other indentured servants bound for Virginia in early 1774, describes conditions on board the *Planter* during its sixteen-week voyage. When a fever laid low many of the passengers, including Harrower, the captain ordered "some Cock & Hen to be killed and fresh broth made for the sick" from his own stock of provisions. By the next day

Harrower was "well and hearty," and "supped on a dish called Scratch-platters. It is made of biscuits broack small and soaked in water untill they are soft, and Winegar, oile, salt, and Onions cut small put to it, and supped with spoons."

A select group of passengers on each voyage paid approximately double the ordinary fare and enjoyed the privilege of dining with the captain on a variety of fresh meat and poultry daily and quenching their thirst with coffee, tea, and ample supplies of alcoholic beverages. To supply the captain's table, the ship *Nassau* carried forty-five pigs, one calf, three sheep, more than twenty turkeys, fourteen geese, and more than a hundred chickens.

Other passengers brought their own supplies to supplement the basic provisions. French Huguenot Monsieur Durand spent nineteen weeks at sea in 1686 before arriving in Virginia. Toward the end of the voyage, when the supply of salt pork was spoiled and unfit to eat, everyone on board was rationed to "three pounds of mouldy biscuit a week & a pitcher of water a day." Durand lamented having depleted his per-



sonal supply of wine. We do not know if he had disguised the taste of the water by flavoring it with wine, or whether he avoided drinking the water altogether until his wine was gone. To add to his woes, Durand did not eat fish of any kind and could not benefit by supplementing the rationed diet with fresh fish the sailors caught as the ship neared land.

When Charlotte Browne crossed the Atlantic with her brother, a commissary officer in General Braddock's army, she brought on board a cask of brandy as part of her "sea Store," but was chagrined to learn on January 16, 1775, that thirty gallons had leaked out into the hold. Several days later she reported a more serious loss. A live sheep, two pigs, eight turkeys, and six ducks belonging to one of her fellow passengers were lost overboard.

The dampness aboard ship encouraged the growth of mold and the presence of weevils in food stored in canvas bags. The British navy attempted to address this problem by developing tin-lined storage chests, but vermin-infested food continued to be a hazard of long sea voyages. Ship's biscuits were traditional rations for British seamen. Properly made and stored, they would not become moldy and could last for a year. The biscuits were made of flour and water, formed into large, thick wafers, and baked as many as four times to remove all moisture. In the nineteenth century, they came to be known as hardtack, a perfect name for something that could not be eaten unless it was broken into pieces and soaked in whatever liquid was available. Those of us who think of a biscuit as a light, fluffy pastry smothered in butter and jam find a daily ration of nine to ten ship's biscuits, salted meat, a fish, dried beans or rice, and the inevitable stale water less than appetizing.

Another way for travelers to improve the taste of water (other than mixing it with wine or spirits) was "To make Portable Soop," a glutinous wafer, for which Hannah Glasse provided the recipe in her 1747 cookbook.

*Take two Legs of Beef, about fifty Pounds Weight, take off all the Skin and Fat as well as you can, then take all the Meat and Sinews clean from the Bones, which Meat put into a large Pot, and put to it eight or nine Gallons of soft Water; first make it boil, then put in twelve Anchovies, an Ounce of Mace, a Quarter of an Ounce of Cloves, an Ounce of whole Pepper black and white together, six large Onions peeled, and cut in two, a little Bundle of Thyme, Sweet Marjoram, and*

*Winter-savory, the dry hard Crust of a Two-penny Loaf, stir it all together, and cover it close, lay a Weight on the Cover to keep it close down, and let it boil softly for eight or nine Hours, then uncover it, and stir it together. Cover it close again, and let it boil till it is a very rich good Jelly, which you will know by taking a little out now and then, and letting it cool. When you find it is a thick Jelly, take it off and strain it through a coarse Hair-bag, and press it hard; then strain it through a Hair-sieve into a large Earthen Pan, when it is quite cold, take off the Skim and Fat, and take the fine Jelly clear from the Settling at Bottom, and then put the Jelly into a large deep well-tinned Stew-pan. Set it over a Stove with a slow Fire, keep stirring it often, and take great Care it neither sticks to the Pan or burns; when you find the Jelly very stiff and thick, as it will be in Lumps about the Pan, take it out, and put it into large deep China-Cups, or well glazed Earthen Ware. Fill the Pan two Thirds full with Water, when the Water boils, set it in your Cups, be sure no Water gets into the Cups, keep the Water boiling softly all the time, till you find the Jelly is like a stiff Glew, then take out the Cups, and when they are cool, turn out the Glew into a coarse new Flannel. Let it lay eight or nine Hours, keeping it in a dry warm Place, and turn it on fresh Flannel till it is quite dry, and the Glew will be quite hard; then put it into new Stone-pots, keep it close coloured [covered] from Dust and Dirt, and in a dry Place, where no Damp can come to it.*

Adding a piece of "glew" the size of a walnut to a pint of boiling water made an acceptable soup, and, if a traveler was fortunate enough to have beans or rice and an onion in his sack of provisions, he ended up with a palatable meal. The Foodways staff at Colonial Williamsburg made portable soup, and their finished product definitely passed the taste test of the cooks who prepared it. The wafers are used to show our visitors examples of travel foods used both by people coming by sea from England to settle in Virginia and by the adventurers moving by land and water to settle lands in the West.

The shops in Williamsburg that stocked luxury goods desired by the local residents also stocked supplies needed by men traveling by horseback over paths and streams to claim an-

other unknown land. From the writings of inveterate traveler Benjamin Franklin emerge recommendations that are as practical as the man who made them. These include unbreakable utensils, such as tin cups and canisters, pewter bowls and plates, small nesting copper pots, and collapsible knives, forks, and spoons. Many of his food recommendations are for "gourmet" items such as cider and wine stored in small wooden kegs, lemons, sugar, chocolate, coffee, tea, raisins, and almonds. Seasoned traveler that he was, Franklin also included salt beef, dried peas, ship's biscuits, and portable soup. His advice to those who traveled long distances was to eat well if they could, but to be prepared to survive on simpler fare. His advice is timeless whether followed by an eighteenth-century traveler or by today's visitor eager to return to the twenty-first century with plastic storage containers, insulated ice chest, and an ample supply of bottled spring water.

*Thanks to Pat Gibbs, historian in the Department of Historical Research, for her contributions to this article.*

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## Hello, Catherine, Goodbye, Durfey; or, Everard Gets the Brush Off

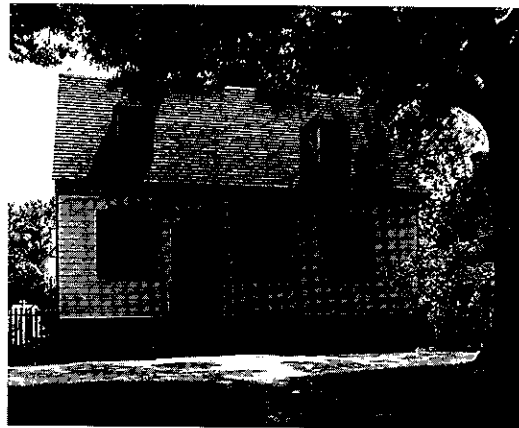
by Edward Chappell

*Ed is director of the Department of Architectural Research.*

In 1986, Colonial Williamsburg officially changed the names of twenty-five buildings in and near the Historic Area. Thirteen years later, continued research and developing interpretive programs have led the Foundation to adjust seven more. Recently, historian Pat Gibbs proposed a group of changes that were reviewed by the Historic Area Properties Committee and subsequently approved by Acting President Rick Nahm.

The new changes follow in the spirit of the 1986 adjustments. The museum's educational focus is increasingly on the late colonial era—the third quarter of the eighteenth century—and most Historic Area buildings are restored or reconstructed to that period. It follows that building names can most usefully reflect the owners or residents at that time. Later family names are used only when the buildings are in similarly late condition.

William Blaikley bought a house on the Duke of Gloucester Street about 1734 and lived there until his death in 1736. His wife, Catherine, the town's leading midwife, occu-



*The Catherine Blaikley House was occupied by Williamsburg's leading midwife for more than thirty-five years.*

pied the house until her death thirty-five years later. The Blaikley-Durfey House, then, can more appropriately be known as the *Catherine Blaikley House*. Tailor Severinus Durfey acquired the property in 1773, and the small building thought to have been his shop will continue to bear his name.

John Brush, an armorer associated with Alexander Spotswood, was a successful tradesman who began building one of the town's best-known houses on Palace green in 1718. But Williamsburg looked very different in 1718 than it did by the time of the Revolution. What we have called the Brush-Everard House was substantially remodeled by Henry Cary about 1730



Thomas Everard maintained a very public career while living in this house on Palace green.

and further improved by Thomas Everard, who became clerk of York County in 1745 and mayor of Williamsburg in 1766 and 1771. Everard also served as clerk of the burgesses' Committee for Courts and Justices, vestryman of Bruton Parish Church, and trustee for the establishment of the Public Hospital. Everard's highly visible public career was pursued from his house, the old Brush House, which he remodeled by fitting with new wainscoting, installing wallpaper, painting rooms with new color schemes, and constructing new work buildings for his slaves. The house saw further remodeling in the nineteenth century, though virtually all of these changes were erased by a major restoration in 1949–1951. The house as we now see it, then, reflects Everard's tenure, and the *Thomas Everard House* is its best name.

In contrast to the Everard house's rich history, there is a dearth of information about the Mary Stith Shop—the building just west of James Anderson's house. A tin shop is mentioned in Mary Stith's 1813 will, and Thomas Jefferson



recorded paying twelve shillings to her sister "Miss Judy Stith for tin shapes" in 1772. Although the frame building at the rear may indeed have been the tin shop, historian Emma L. Powers argues convincingly that the brick building on Duke of Gloucester Street is actually the *Mary Stith House*, not shop.

An unrestored two-story brick house on Ireland Street, a half-

block west of the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum, has been called the Rabon House, after the family that owned it between 1945 and 1962. Shown on the Frenchman's Map, it was almost certainly built in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Although much altered during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it remains an important pre-Revolutionary house. In 1995, architectural historians Carl Lounsbury and Roberta Laynor found that the house was owned and occupied by John Saunders, a builder active in Williamsburg from the 1750s until his death in 1793. Saunders's residency there makes it appropriate to call it the *John Saunders House*.

Restored, but not on its original Page Street site, near the present intersection with Lafayette Street and York Street (Route 60 East), the



Williamsburg builder John Saunders lived here in the late eighteenth century.

Mary Stith's sister may have operated a tin shop in back of this house where they lived.

Powell-Hallam House has become the *Seymour Powell Tenement*. Benjamin Powell bought the property in 1753, probably erected the house within several years, and then sold it to his brother Seymour in 1760. Seymour, who lived in James City County, apparently rented out the property until his death in 1765. Early twentieth-century testimony that "old Mrs. Hallam" lived on the street supplied a fragile link between Seymour Powell's tenement and Sarah Hallam, an actress who performed in Williamsburg in the early 1770s. Although Hallam settled in Williamsburg permanently in 1775, there is no record that she owned property in town.



*Seymour Powell rented out this house while he continued living in James City County.*

Two public houses have also received new names. Gibbs points out that eighteenth-century Virginians, and especially Williamsburg residents, used the term *tavern* to signify public houses. *Ordinary* was a more common seventeenth-century term, and its arcane quality has made it popular in history-conscious places, just as terms like *trunnel* are often preferred to *peg*



*Hartwell Perry's Tavern was one of Williamsburg's public houses.*

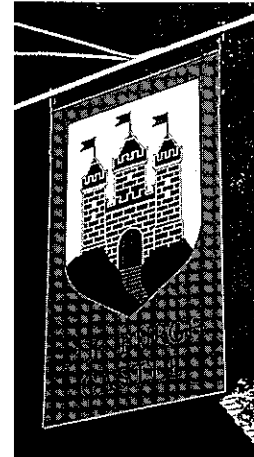


*For much of the eighteenth century, the sign of the Edinburgh Castle hung in front of a tavern "near the Capitol."*

and *necessary* over *privy*. Thus Hartwell Perry's Ordinary has become *Hartwell Perry's Tavern*.

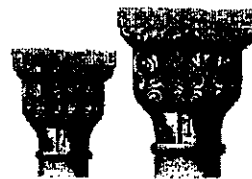
A complex group of references has confused the name Burdett's Ordinary and the distinctive Edinburgh Castle sign. John Burdett rented the T-shaped building beside the later coffeehouse site from before 1739 until his death in 1746. Anne Pattison probably moved her tavern business to the building after Burdett's death, perhaps bringing with her the Edinburgh Castle sign listed in her husband's 1743 inventory. In 1755, several months after Anne Pattison died, Robert Lyon announced in the *Virginia Gazette* that he had opened a tavern at the sign of the Edinburgh Castle near the Capitol. The reproduction sign will remain at the site, which is now called *Edinburgh Castle Tavern*.

The names changed officially in January, and publications, maps, and signs are being revised accordingly.



## MUSEUM NEWS

by Jan Gilliam



Jan is associate curator for exhibits and toys in the Department of Collections and Museums.

Over the past few months we have been busy installing several new exhibitions at the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum and the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum.

In February at the Wallace Museum, *Identifying Ceramics: The Who, What and Ware* opened to the public. This small exhibition provides useful information on how to distinguish between different types of ceramics popular in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Various methods of ceramic production and decoration are explained and illustrated with a range of ceramic forms and types from our permanent collection. After seeing this exhibition, try out your new knowledge in Historic Area buildings.

Also at the Wallace Museum is *Hook, Line and Sinker*, an exhibition showcasing a nineteenth-century fishing kit in our collection that has not been shown in the museum before. The kit is complete with fly-fishing rods, reels, line, and flies. There are also original individual packages with feathers, a variety of hooks, and other equipment needed to make flies.

In April at the Folk Art Museum we opened four new exhibitions, three featuring objects from our permanent collections. Many people who come to the museum have particular pieces they like to see. One of the most popular areas of interest is textiles. *A Quartet of Quilts* highlights four pieced quilts of remarkable color and pattern. Of particular interest is one made by a man from scraps of wool military uniforms. Another of the quilts belonged to an ancestor of Tasha Tudor, children's book illustrator and author. She has generously loaned this family treasure, which is made up of small pieces of printed fabrics from the early nineteenth century.

Did you vote for your favorite painting or drawing last year? If so, you might see it hanging in *By Popular Demand*. Colonial Williamsburg staff members, along with family and friends, were asked to select their favorite piece in the collection and then tell why they like it.

With this as the basis for the current exhibition, you will see an early nineteenth-century formal portrait of a well-dressed New York lady hanging next to a portrait of a woman in a green hat and yellow coat painted by Newport News artist Anderson Johnson in the late twentieth century. The labels include information on the object as well as the "twenty-five words or less" that explain what about the piece struck a chord with the voter. Young visitors to the exhibition should look for special labels to get them thinking about the pictures, some of which were selected by local school children. After viewing the exhibition, it is the visitors' turn to vote. Cards are provided in the exhibition area so visitors can tell us what they like.

Today's children have a chance to see what children looked like "back then." The exhibition *Amanda and Friends* includes a life-sized sculpture of a young girl along with several nineteenth-century portraits of children.

A special exhibition at the museum appears courtesy of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. While closed for renovation, the American Art Museum has loaned the "Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly" created by James Hampton, an African American who lived in Washington, D. C., in the mid-twentieth century. This object, which is actually made up of more than 180 pieces, consists of used furniture and other salvaged materials covered in tin foil. It is impossible to explain the importance and appeal of this object in this limited space. You have to come see it for yourself.

Throughout the year, curators and conservators of these exhibitions will be offering tours. Look in the *Colonial Williamsburg News* or *Visitor's Companion* or check the Museums Web on the Intranet for "Meet the Curator/Conservator" times and topics.

### Taking Possession at the Wallace Museum

Did you ever stop to consider how the colonists, when faced with such vast areas of land, sorted out and gained possession of their

properties? *Ordering the Wilderness* sets out to define this process while showcasing a superb collection of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century surveying equipment. The exhibition details the role of the surveyor in the process of ordering the land and displays antique surveying compasses, chains, drawing equipment, and more items that made up a surveyor's kit.

Land was an important commodity in the colonies. Much of what was settled had to be carved out of the vast wilderness that was Virginia. In order to take legal control of the land, certain procedures were required. The prospective landowner had to enter the land, hire a surveyor, obtain the survey, and pay the necessary fees before he could claim the land as his own. The surveyor's job was to submit a plat that clearly defined the property. In order to create this document, the surveyor visited the property and measured it using compasses,

chains, and poles. He then used these measurements to create a scale diagram of the boundaries of the land from which he then calculated the area. The final drawing, accompanied by a written description of the property, was officially submitted and recorded giving the owner legal title to the land.

In order to complete the survey and the plat, the surveyor needed appropriate equipment and some training in mathematics. The exhibition features a series of brass compasses from the period as well as wooden compasses. Other items include drawing kits necessary for creating the plats and measuring devices like a Gunter's rule, waywiser, and chain. Because many of these pieces are on loan from a private collector, this is an opportunity to see some fine examples of surveying equipment that are not usually available to the public. This exhibition will remain through September 3, 2001.

## Books for Children on Native Americans

Janice McCoy  
Memorial Collection  
John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  
Library



Badt, Karin Luisa. *Indians of the Northeast*.  
Collier, Christopher, and James Lincoln Collier.  
*Clash of Cultures: Prehistory-1638*.  
Doherty, Kieran. *Soldiers, Cavaliers, and  
Planters: Settlers of the Southeastern Colonies*.  
Dougherty, Karla. *The Legend of Pocahontas*.  
Fritz, Jean. *The Double Life of Pocahontas*.  
Hakim, Joy. *The First Americans*.  
Katz, William Loren. *Black Indians: A Hidden  
Heritage*.

Levin, Beatrice. *John Hawk: White Man, Black  
Man, Indian Chief*.  
Maestro, Betsy. *The New Americans: Colonial  
Times, 1620-1689*.  
Nee, Kay Bonner. *Powhatan*.  
Raphael, Elaine, and Don Bolognese.  
*Pocahontas: Princess of the River Tribes*.  
Slonaker, David L., and Sharon H. Adams.  
*Indians of Virginia*.  
Smith-Baranzini, Marlene, and Howard Egger-  
Boret. *USKids History: Book of the American  
Indians*.  
South, Stanley A. *Indians in North Carolina*.  
Stainer, M. L. *The Lyon's Cub*.  
Time-Life Books. *Algonquians of the East Coast*.  
Umhau, Jan Fleet. *Potomac Captive: The  
Adventures of Henry Fleete*.  
Whitney, Alex. *Sports & Games the Indians  
Gave Us: With Step-by Step Instructions for  
Making Indian Gaming Equipment*.  
Wilbur, C. Keith. *Indian Handcrafts*.  
Wood, Marion. *The World of Native Americans*.



## EDITOR'S NOTES . . .



### Go West, Young Man

The *Interpreter* Planning Board bids a fond farewell to board member and friend David Harvey. It seems he took this year's story line too literally and decided to move west to Colorado! He will be head of the objects department at the University of Denver's Rocky Mountain Conservation Center.

Dave started his career with Colonial Williamsburg in 1981 as a character interpreter at the then newly refurbished Palace, playing the part of a footman. Later, he worked as an apprentice blacksmith at the Deane Forge, where he implemented the bloomery program. In 1988, Dave briefly left C. W. to work as a conservator in archaeology with the James River Institute, but returned in 1990 to become associate conservator of metals and arms in the Department of Collections and Museums.

In 1992, he was the guiding force behind "The Common People and their Material World," a conference held at Colonial Williamsburg.

As an *Interpreter* board member, Dave suggested and oversaw the "Bruton Heights Update" column, which features information and research news from the Bruton Heights School Educational Center. Last year, he planned and organized the special Peyton Randolph edition of the *Interpreter*.

Dave, you will be sorely missed, but we wish you all the best in your new undertaking and thank you for the many contributions you made to this publication and to Colonial Williamsburg. (Dave has promised to keep in touch, once he gets his email set up, and will continue to contribute articles periodically.)



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