

Questions & Answers

VOL. 1 NO. 1

AUGUST 1980

This publication attempts to answer your historical questions. So, if questions arise which neither you nor your supervisor are able to answer, please contact Jane Strauss at extension 2449. She will know who in the Foundation is best qualified to answer your inquiry and, in turn, she will respond either by note or by newsletter. Below are just some of the questions we have received in the recent past. By the way, you will notice that each issue of Questions and Answers has in its right-hand margin a "Subject Index." As issues accumulate, this list will allow you to refer quickly to the specific issue and subject you wish to review.

1. What was a freeholder?

Any person who owned land, including women and persons underage.

2. Who was eligible to vote in Virginia in the eighteenth-century?

Suffrage was granted only to free white males, ages 21 and over, who met certain other qualifications. Women could not vote. Indians and Negroes, whether free or slave, were disenfranchised. The Virginia election laws did not mention religion except to require that qualified Quakers make affirmation before voting.

3. What were the other qualifications for enfranchisement?

So far as free white adult males were concerned, franchise requirements did not in practice demand much of a stake nor were they very exclusive. Freeholders could vote who owned (or had a lifetime lease to) a. 25 acres with house and plantation or, b. 100 acres of unimproved land or, c. a house and part of a lot in a town. There were other avenues to the ballot box: freeholders with land which did not conform to these regulations, or men owning no land at all could vote provided they owned £50 visible property (i.e. cash or possessions). In addition, men could vote who had served a five-year apprenticeship in a trade in Norfolk or Williamsburg, and who were housekeepers and inhabitants in those towns following their service. All those eligible may not have exercised their right to vote, but it cannot be said that a large mass of free adult white males were disenfranchised.

4. When and where was the Frenchman's map found?

The Frenchman's map was purchased from a shop in Norfolk. In 1909, its owner (a resident of New York City) sent the map to a friend in Williamsburg with instructions that it be presented to the librarian at the college.

5. Why is it called the Frenchman's map?

Some of the notations on the map are in French, while others are in English. The French notations and the map's date (1782?) suggest that it was drawn by a French soldier who was in this area during the siege at Yorktown or just after.

6. Did Colonial Williamsburg have a fire engine?

In 1716, Masters and Visitors of the College of William and Mary ordered "1 Inigne for quenching Fire" and "2 Doz. leather buckets..." It is not known if it ever arrived. There was at least one fire engine in Williamsburg by March 1756, for it was used to fight a fire that broke out in Dr.

Peter Hay's shop. Two years earlier, the Virginia council had ordered a fire engine and four dozen leather buckets from London "for use of the Capitol."

7. Were special wells designed to be used during a fire?

An act of the Assembly passed in November 1741 (and again in 1761) authorized the Williamsburg city officials to levy a poll tax on the tithable inhabitants to pay for sinking new wells and installing pumps in them "to supply the fire engine with water, in case of fire." But as late as 1771 the city owned only one fire engine and only one pump had been installed. The pump was out of repair, by the way.

8. When was Williamsburg incorporated?

On July 28, 1722, the city was granted a royal charter in the name of King George I. It should be noted that Williamsburg was functioning as the Capitol of the colony from 1699 when the General Assembly passed "an act Directing the Building of the Capitoll and the City of Williamsburg." The government was housed at the College from 1700 to 1704, when the Assembly first used the Capitol for its meetings.

9. How was it to be governed?

According to the charter, the officers of the city corporation included a mayor, a recorder, six aldermen, and twelve common councilmen.

10. When were the markets and fairs held in Williamsburg?

The city was to have two markets a week (Wednesday and Saturday), and two fairs a year (December 12 and April 23).

11. Were there fees placed on goods sold on market day?

Tolls were levied on livestock and goods sold at the market, the revenue from which was to be used for the city's benefit. Tolls were not to exceed 6d. on every beast, 3d. on every hog, and one-twentieth the value of any other commodity sold. Freemen of the city were required to pay only half the toll charged non-residents.

12. Did Williamsburg have a mace?

Yes. The mace is made of silver dipped in gold. It was carried on all solemn occasions, probably by the town sergeant. This mace is now on display in the Courthouse of 1770.

13. Did Williamsburg have a night watch?

Williamsburg had no night watch until 1772, although the Virginia Gazette for several years had waged a campaign for one. The council decided in July, 1772, to appoint "four sober and decent people to patrol the streets from ten o'clock at night until daylight..." They were to cry the hours, apprehend all disorderly persons, have charge of the fire engines, and assist in extinguishing fires. Each watchman would receive a yearly salary of £30.

14. Who in government was responsible for the maintenance of the streets of Williamsburg?

The duties of the common council also included responsibility for the construction and maintenance of public facilities. Since the streets of Williamsburg were in so "ruinous a condition" in 1761 that it was "unsafe to pass in the night in any coach or other carriage," the city was authorized to spend as much of its taxes as was necessary to keep the streets and lanes in repair.

Questions & Answers

VOL. 1 No. 2

OCTOBER 1980

1. What period do we represent?

The Foundation's title, "Colonial Williamsburg", suggests that we represent the colonial period--up to 1776. The reconstructed buildings demand that our interpretation include the time when Williamsburg was the capital of colonial Virginia. The present capitol is a reconstruction of the one destroyed by fire in 1747 and the Public Records office was built after that date. The Magazine is restored to its appearance during the 1750s and across the street is the Courthouse of 1770. Because of the anachronisms present within the restored area--for example, a building that no longer existed in 1747 next to one that was built after that date--we cannot say we represent a specific year or even a specific decade, but rather the ambience of the capital city of colonial Virginia and the quality of life of its citizens.

2. Could one buy a life insurance policy in the eighteenth century?

Existing records do not indicate that life insurance policies were available in the eighteenth century.

3. Were taxes determined by the size of your house?

No, there was no tax on buildings during the colonial period in Virginia.

4. Who committed people to the asylum?

Three justices of the peace in the county where the prospective patient lived were summoned by the sheriff of that county to pass on the sanity of the person. Once sent to the hospital the Court of Directors apparently could refuse to admit the person if they thought him unsuitable.

5. Did they have bouncers in the taverns?

The term "bouncer" originated in the mid-nineteenth-century American west. Carousing and drinking were common when colonial Virginians gathered in taverns and private homes. Presumably, tavernkeepers or one of their employees or servants removed unruly customers when that became necessary.

6. When did the game of darts become popular?

The game of darts was not introduced until the twentieth century.

7. How much was the area around Williamsburg forested?

There is no specific information available to answer this question with any degree of accuracy. However, because people commented on the fact that both the James and York rivers were visible from the cupola of the Wren Building--which is not possible today--we might guess that there was less forest in the later eighteenth-century Williamsburg area than there is today.

8. How were youths punished in the eighteenth century?

Then, as now, forms of punishment varied. St. George Tucker claimed he never used the rod or even spanked his stepchildren, but others used threats of physical force and, on occasion, whipped serious young offenders. Discipline was often administered by persons other than parents. In wealthy families the responsibility usually fell to governesses or tutors. Orphans and children who were apprenticed to learn a trade, were disciplined by the

SUBJECT INDEX: HISTORIC PERIOD, LIFE INSURANCE, ARCHITECTURE, TAXES, THE ASYLUM, BOUNCERS, DARTS, AND JUVENILE OFFENDERS

persons charged with their training.

9. When were the juvenile courts established?

The juvenile court was introduced into American jurisprudence by an Illinois law of 1899. The first juvenile court in Virginia was established in 1914.

10. Were there cobblestones on the streets of Williamsburg?

No, there is no evidence of cobblestones in Williamsburg.

11. How were modillions installed?

They were nailed on, usually from the soffit and corona of the cornice.

12. What is a brick closer?

Closers are pieces of bricks that were inserted near an edge of a wall in order to create a regular bonding pattern.

13. How authentic are the signs?

Although none of Williamsburg's many painted signs survived from the eighteenth century, there is abundant documentation of their existence, and to some extent, of their appearance as well. For instance, the 1742 inventory of Burdett's Ordinary mentions among other things, a signboard depicting Edinburgh Castle, valued at 2 pounds. In 1762, Williamsburg apothecary George Pitt advertised his goods "at the sign of the Rhinocerros." Many other modern Williamsburg signs were designed according to conventional eighteenth-century iconography for certain types of trades and business concerns. In this case, the prints of Williams Hogarth and others have been extremely helpful.

14. Why do we find beaded weatherboards on the buildings in Williamsburg?

Despite a variety of functional explanations, the edges of weatherboards, cornerboards, frames, and other architectural features were beaded primarily for visual reasons. The popular aesthetics of eighteenth-century Anglo-America dictated that the visible individual members of a building should receive detailed attention when it was affordable. This aesthetics may also be seen in molded window muntins, paneled doors, and round-butt shingles.

Erratum: We wish to correct the answer to Question 12 in the August issue of Questions and Answers. Silver gilt is not silver dipped in gold. We should have said, the gold was diluted in Mercury and then wiped or brushed on the cleaned silver surface.

A REMINDER: Colonial Fair Days will be November 8, 9, 10, and 11, 1980.

Questions & Answers

VOL. 1, No. 3

NOVEMBER 1980

This is a special issue of Questions and Answers because of the upcoming Colonial Fair Days.

What is Colonial Fair Days and how does it fit into interpretation?

On November 8-11, an event familiar to the city's 18th-century residents, a fair, will be recreated on Market Square in Williamsburg.

Market and fair days were authorized in the legislation moving the capital from Jamestown to Williamsburg, and remained an ongoing responsibility of the town fathers throughout the 18th century. The charter incorporating Williamsburg in 1722 appointed two markets to be held weekly on Wednesdays and Saturdays "in some convenient Place in the said City," and called for two fairs yearly to be held in December and April. The purpose of the markets and fairs was commercial: there townspeople and visitors could supply their material needs and people of the town and surrounding area could sell "all manner of Cattle, Victuals, Provisions, Goods, Wares and Merchandizes..."

Market Square was the location of the city's markets and fairs. By 1764, a market house had been erected somewhere on the square. We know neither the precise location nor form of this structure. Perhaps it was made of wood, for by 1795 the Magazine was serving Williamsburg as its market house.

Fairs, unlike market days, might last as long as three or four days. The town was always eager to attract buyers and sellers to a fair and went to some expense to do so. A long list of prizes was published prior to the December 1739 fair in order to attract people to Williamsburg. Performers and attractions of various kinds were also welcome since they would add to "the Entertainment and Diversion of all Gentlemen and others." If people would come to laugh with a puppeteer, marvel at an acrobat, show their best horse, or wager on some race or contest, then perhaps they would stay to look and to buy.

Visitors to Williamsburg November 8-11 (10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. except Sunday the 9th, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.) will get a chance to plunge into a full-scale recreation of an 18th-century colonial fair. Send them Market Square way. They will find much to see, do, and buy there at the town's commercial and community center.

Questions & Answers

VOL. 1, No. 4

DECEMBER 1980

Due to the interest, and in some instances confusion over the changes to be made in the Palace, we are publishing a special issue of Questions and Answers. We have asked Mr. Graham Hood, Vice-President and Director of Collections, to answer the questions most frequently asked about the refurbishing of the Palace.

1. Will the Palace lose its elegance and beauty after the lovely wallpaper is removed and the muted colored carpets are replaced by more brightly colored ones?

No, it will not. It will, however, assume a different elegance from the one that we have grown used to -- an elegance much more firmly based on documentation than before. Thus we are gaining not only a different elegance but a much heightened authenticity and realism.

There is no documentation for the kind of wallpaper at present in the Supper Room being used in Williamsburg. Lord Botetourt had intended to paper that room, but precisely how we do not know. What we do know, however, is that he papered the Ballroom; we shall paper it and color it precisely in accordance with the 18th-century instructions.

A number of the carpets in the Palace at present are of the wrong type. We shall install mainly English carpets; we can document that Lord Botetourt brought these with him. Reproductions will be based on the most exacting research to determine patterns that would have been available to him, pre-1768.

2. Are we taking out all of the antiques and putting in reproductions?

Of course not. There will still be many antiques in the Governor's Palace. However, in order to be faithful to the 18th century's concept of the proper furnishing of rooms we shall be installing large sets of items -- these are simply unobtainable in antique form today. In some cases we have a number of objects for a larger set that we will fill out in reproduction form. In other cases we have only one object on which to base the reproduction set. In all cases we are basing the reproductions (made according to the most exacting standards) on prototypes with a firmly-documented history -- many of them with a history of belonging to the governors.

3. Why is Botetourt a good representative of 18th-century style and taste? He was a bachelor.

To start with, we have not chosen to follow the Botetourt inventory in refurnishing the Palace because Botetourt was "a good representative..." We have chosen it because it represents the most detailed and reliable evidence that exists for this project. In other words, we are relying on evidence rather than on the subjective notion of "taste."

Furthermore, one of the great differences between today and the 18th century was that the gentleman of the household then played a vastly more

SUBJECT INDEX: REFURBISHING OF THE PALACE

important role than he does today in the choosing of furnishings and in the outfitting of his residence. We should stress this to our visitors, some of whom perhaps feel that there might be something slightly effeminate about being involved in the choosing of curtains or tea cups. It was certainly not considered effeminate in the 18th century.

In any event, a number of our royal governors were either unmarried or were not joined by their wives for some time after they moved into the Governor's Palace. Spotswood was not married while he was governor; Mesdames Gooch and Fauquier were absent for long periods of time, and Dunmore refurnished the Palace (after the sale of Botetourt's effects in 1771) without the advice of his wife -- she did not arrive until 1774.

In other words, Botetourt's being a bachelor has little to do with it.

4. What are we doing with everything being taken out (i.e. silver sconces, wallpapers, etc.)?

The reconstruction of the Public Hospital and its conversion into the Wallace Gallery of Decorative Arts is going to provide us with a superb opportunity to display items that we feel are not appropriate for the restored area. We have collections of international repute; they deserve to be seen, and they will be seen in the new gallery. Our visitors (and our staff) will thus have new opportunities of comparing what is appropriate for the Williamsburg scene with what may be considered more appropriate for the London scene or the (say) Boston scene.

We hope you are saving your Questions and Answers. This spring you will receive a handbook with a section reserved for Questions and Answers. In the meantime, please continue to send your questions to Jane Strauss.

Questions & Answers

VOL. 1, No. 5

DECEMBER 1980

Now that the Christmas season is here, we asked Lou Powers, Research Staff Assistant, "How did colonial Virginians celebrate Christmas?"

Christmas Day in the eighteenth century was more a holy day than our twentieth-century holiday. The colonials observed it quietly in the home and at church. Businesses closed and schooling was interrupted for the season; slaves and servants enjoyed a day away from their labors if they could be spared. Attendance at the parish church on Christmas morning for communion was expected because the Feast of the Nativity was the major event of the Anglican calendar.

From December 24 through Twelfth Night, January 6, homes filled with visitors. Neighbors, friends, and kinsmen gathered for parties, dances, and fox hunts. Hospitality was the order of the season. At-home entertainment emphasized feasting with provisions varied and plentiful. The colonists continued the traditional holiday foods from England--roast beef and goose, plum pudding and mince pies--and Virginia contributed additional delicacies. Native wild turkeys, ducks, and venison became important items on Yuletide tables. Local waters yielded a wide variety of fish and shellfish for holiday feasts.

Dinner offerings were surpassed only by the variety and quantity of beverages. Imported wines like Madeira and clarets (bordeaux) counted as favorites with meals. Punches of rum or arrack, rum flip, and syllabub were popular, as were French brandy, sherry, beer, ale, and Virginia cider. Toward the end of the century eggnog claimed its place among holiday drinks.

Colonial boys followed the custom of "shooting in the Christmas," setting off their guns on Christmas Eve and morning, and the practice extended into the nineteenth century. Though a definite explanation of this custom has not been found, the association of noise with joyous occasions may be the reason for the "Christmas guns." Another way of raising a joyful noise was with music, especially group singing of the old carols.

Virginia abounds with holly, cedar, live oak, mistletoe, ivy, bay, and other plants appropriate for decorating in the holiday style. With greenery all around them, the colonists likely followed the English custom of decking homes and churches with evergreens.

The Christmas tree was not introduced into Williamsburg until the nineteenth century. In 1842 Charles Minnigerode, classics professor at the College of William and Mary and political exile from Germany, trimmed a tree with candles and fancy paper decorations for children at

the St. George Tucker House. (There are earlier instances of Christmas trees elsewhere in the Atlantic states, though none date from before 1800.) Colonial-style decorations for the holidays are the aforesaid greenery, possibly some fruits and nuts, pine cones, other natural objects and candles, but never colored lights, shiny balls, or tinsel.

Like the Christmas tree, some of our other holiday practices had their origins in the nineteenth century. Christmas cards were unknown in colonial Virginia, though greetings and good wishes for the season were extended in letters. Gift giving in the eighteenth century was reserved for children and servants who might receive some small luxury like confections, gloves, or coins.

This verse from the Virginia Gazette captures the festive spirit of a colonial Christmas:

Christmas is come, hang on the pot,
Let spits turn round and ovens be hot
Beef, pork, and poultry now provide
To feast thy neighbors at this tide.
Then wash all down with good wine and beer
and so with Mirth conclude the Year.

SUGGESTED SOURCES ON COLONIAL CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS:

- Bullock, Helen. "Of Christmas in Virginia" in The Williamsburg Art of Cookery (CW, 1958).
- Carson, Jane. Colonial Virginians at Play (CW, 1965).
- Chambers, R. The Book of Days, Volume II (London, 1881).
- Dawson, W. F. Christmas: Its Origins and Associations (London, 1902).
- Morgan, Edmund S. "Houses and Holidays" in Virginians at Home (CW, 1952).
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A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!



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Colonial Christmas

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SUBJECT INDEX: COLONIAL CHRISTMAS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY WILLIAMSBURG

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