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Reflections of Time: Changes in the Houses

Betty Leviner, curator of exhibition buildings, describes a new way that the houses have been furnished to give interpreters and visitors a broader view of eighteenth-century daily life.

During 1986 two different observations of the Wythe House, made by two different duty officers, were routed to me as curator of exhibition buildings. One thought the rooms at the Wythe House were "too busy" (that is, too many activities were being suggested at one time), while the other felt we might have gone too far in the opposite direction—that the bedchambers at the Wythe were "too spartan." These two diametrically opposed reactions served to refocus curatorial attention on an idea that had been discussed during the winter of 1980–81 when the Palace was refurnished. The idea was to offer a coordinated interpretation among three of the exhibition buildings by reflecting a different time of day in the Wythe, Brush-Everard, and Peyton Randolph houses. For example, breakfast time could be portrayed at one house, dinner time at another, and supper time at the third. Further, it was suggested that in each case the whole house be furnished and interpreted to suggest activities appropriate to its respective time of day.

Last spring historical interpreters and representatives from collections, historical research, and interpretive education were assigned to a committee for each house. Under the leadership of the site supervisor, they submitted proposals for times of day and activities for their house to Mary Ann Brendel and John Austin, who in turn made their recommendations to Dennis O'Toole. The furnishings now on view in the Brush-Everard, Wythe, and Peyton Randolph houses are the results of these deliberations. If a visitor tours each of these houses, he or she will have an idea of what a daily routine involved for an affluent Williamsburg inhabitant during the third quarter of the eighteenth century.

Our eighteenth-century day begins at the Brush-Everard House where it appears to be early morning. A small social gathering was held at the house the evening before, and although the slaves have started cleaning in the dining room, they have not yet had a chance to straighten up the parlor. The furniture, musical instruments, candlesticks, and glasses are still where they were left the night before. The rest of the first floor is in order, and Mr. Thomas Everard is working at his desk. A small table has been set up for breakfast in anticipation of his daughter Martha's joining him when she finally arises and dresses. Mr. Everard's chamber is being tidied, and the linens on his bed are being changed. Upstairs Martha's curtains are still down on her bed since she has not yet awakened, while across the passage her sister

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Between Childhood and Adolescence

Cindy Burns, an education specialist in the department of historical interpretation, continues our series describing typical characteristics of children of various ages.

The older child between the ages of nine and eleven has one foot rather firmly planted on the shore of childhood, but the other is tentatively reaching toward the shore (or precipice!) of adolescence. Having moved away from the "me-centeredness" of the younger child, this older child is very much aware of a greater world and is eager to branch out, learn, participate, use mastered skills, and seek out new skills to master. These activities are usually a pleasure for the child as well as any others involved because of the older child's open, cooperative, considerate manner. This

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Frances, who is so ill that she was unable to visit with guests the evening before, keeps to her bed and medicines. Because of Frances's illness, a slave woman sleeps in the room with her, and the slave's pallet has been rolled up and stored behind the door for the day.

Across Palace Green at the Wythe House, the dessert course of dinner is being served to the Wythes and their four guests in the dining room. The ladies will retire shortly to the parlor for tea. A table with appropriate wares has been placed in the middle of the room in anticipation of this activity. After the gentlemen have finished in the dining room, they will join the ladies for tea or possibly some Madeira or other fortified wine in the parlor. Back in George Wythe's study, we see that he had been writing at his desk before his dinner guests arrived. Across the passage, two of his students had been solving a geometry problem during the morning. Upstairs in the Wythes' chamber, Mrs. Wythe had been working at her tape loom in front of the fire; she drew the fire screen up to protect her face from the heat. Joseph Kidd was also busy during the morning at the Wythes' home. The Wythes have been having the blue chamber cleaned and refurbished, and Kidd, now at home having his dinner, is in the process of rehanging the bed furniture. The student's chamber on the back of the house shows that the boy had been studying at his desk, and although the slave has made his bed, his clothes are still scattered about the room.

The southwest chamber will be changed the first of November from a spare chamber to a domestic work space and will contain a quilting frame and other sewing items that Mrs. Wythe and her female slaves could be expected to use. The room will also contain an old couch for a female slave who sleeps in this space to be on call during the night. Her meager belongings will be suggested by the presence of a small trunk. A disassembled low-post bed will be placed against one of the walls, to be quickly set up if additional space is needed for visitors. In that event, the slave and her couch will be moved out into the passage.

At the Peyton Randolph House, the time of day being illustrated is late afternoon or early evening. The Randolphs will be giving a ball in their home during the evening, so two fiddlers who have been hired for the occasion have been in the dining room practicing on their violins. A punch bowl and glasses have been placed on one of the card tables in anticipation of the refreshments that will be served, and other items have also been brought from storage and placed on a work area in Mrs. Randolph's closet. Mr. Randolph's library was the scene of a conversation with three other gentlemen during the afternoon. They may have been discussing Thomas Jefferson's *Summary View,* which has been left out on the table. Upstairs a ball gown has been placed on the bed for Mrs. Randolph to wear that night. Earlier in the afternoon she had been doing some sewing, which she has left in the seat of her easy chair. In the oak chamber a male visitor will be staying with the Randolphs; while next door in the chamber over the library, a couple, also visiting and attending the ball, has been accommodated. Their presence is suggested by various bits of wearing apparel and their trunks.

These installations, when considered one room at a time, are in no way a novel approach. What is novel is their application in a coherent and cohesive whole. They make it possible for a visitor to enter the front door of each of these sites, receive a consistent interpretation, and witness consistent room arrangements until they exit the back door. It is our belief that such consistency will provide stronger impressions and greater retention of them for our visitors. It should also make the historical interpreter's task easier since there should be fewer incongruities in the way of activities to explain to visitors. While the picture that emerges of what daily life held for an eighteenth-century Williamsburg inhabitant is admittedly geared toward the well-to-do, it is possible to include the city's black inhabitants as well since they were the individuals whose labor made these activities possible. And at the Brush-Everard House, one striking comparison of what life held for these blacks is visible in Frances Everard's chamber where, even though a spare bed is available, the slave woman sleeps on a pallet on the floor. This picture will be expanded when our installation of a domestic work space/slave sleeping area at the Wythe House is completed in November.

These times-of-day implementations are some of the most exciting and freshest approaches we have conceived for the exhibition buildings in the last few years. I hope all of those who have not yet had a chance to visit the Brush-Everard, Wythe, and Randolph sites will do so in the next month or two and see the possibilities that such installations hold for us in the future.

Childhood to Adolescence, *continued*
is in marked contrast to the blasé demeanor the same child as an adolescent may have toward a similar experience in a year or two.

Older children bring an array of already mastered skills to each new experience. They have been in school at least four years and perhaps up to seven. They have mastered language and communication skills, basic mathematic and scientific principles, and are beginning to acquire the skills and abilities that are important for well-functioning members of twentieth-century American society. They are inquisitive, yet open enough to ask questions about their interests and the interesting things they see. They see and listen well and are eager to talk about what they have seen and heard. They love to seek, gather up, and memorize facts but are frequently not able to generalize from a number of facts, see relationships, or move on to more abstract concepts. They have extensive vocabularies, but this does not mean that they understand all that they hear. In fact, misconceptions are frequent, especially when the objects or activities being talked about are not visible. Older children have developed a beginning understanding of calendar and historic time, although true understanding of historic time does not develop until adolescence. These skills, developing and mastered, coupled with inquiring, alert minds make the older child an ideal learner in the historic museum setting.

Socially, the older child's world revolves around home, school, and the peer group. The peer group is frequently the "play group" both at home and school. Older children would rather be recognized as part of a group effort than individually. Their delight in physical activity and their restless energy frequently find release in peer group play and activities.

An outdoor living history museum like Colonial Williamsburg and the older child are a perfect match for each other. The outdoor setting is ideal for this highly physical group. For student groups, open spaces can become outdoor classrooms where talking and questioning can be encouraged. Historic working trades and domestic crafts frequently present opportunities for group involvement, mental as well as physical. Costumed interpreters are visual statements about the life-styles of another era, and they, too, can help young people to observe their surroundings and draw conclusions about their meanings.

Character interpreters are "living artifacts" for this group of learners who depend so much on the physical and visual. The constantly changing scene at an outdoor history museum piques the shorter, non-adult attention span of the older child. The historic site always has a story to tell this group that, more than anything else, loves a good story.

Appealing to youngsters of this age who, with their families, appear in groups of all ages is more difficult than holding the attention of adults only. But every site holds opportunities to include young members of family groups in the interpretation without diluting the experience for the adults present. Again, children of this age enjoy hands-on activities, but even where that is not possible, they are not usually reluctant to investigate something and report their findings to the group. The activity can be done while the interpreter addresses other issues with the adults, and then the children can be brought back into the discussion with their observations. This approach can be especially rewarding if the interpreter then uses the young people's findings to make a significant point with the entire group. Defining unfamiliar terms quickly while making eye contact with the children helps to hold their attention, and the definitions may clarify the subject for adults as well. The important—and challenging—goal is to include these young folks in the interpretation, to make their participation worthwhile, and to keep the interpretation interesting for the adults in the group. Tall order.

To conclude, older children, aged nine to eleven, bring the best of childhood to the historic museum experience. Those who work with them will find them responsive, receptive, open, and, above all, happy to be immersed in the activities that the outdoor historic museum has to offer.

A Place in Time

by Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman

A book review by Dan Stebbins

In *A Place In Time* Darrett and Anita Rutman skillfully develop a "sense of the past in terms of those who lived it." The reader is invited to travel with the authors along the rivers and roads of Middlesex County, Virginia, and to observe and understand the lives and relationships of its residents. Extensive extant county

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records—information from which over 12,000 biographies were created—are the foundation of reconstructing the local webs of human association. Here the authors convey an important sense of the measure and meaning of community, its variations and similarities, in the region between 1650 and 1750.

As historians should, the Rutmans have a keen interest in the process of change over time. They examine and evaluate social, political, and economic changes that occurred in the county over this one hundred-year period. The history of Middlesex becomes "one of process rather than events." Processes such as a broadening of social differentiation, the conjunction of African and English cultures, and the disjunction between economic and political influences receive the authors' close attention. The impact of such phenomena on the changing nature of community and culture is the primary focus.

Middlesex was "quite consciously a layered society. Law, custom and even public architecture" acknowledged this fact. The bottom layer consisted of bound labor, mostly white servants before 1680, usually black slaves afterwards. Life at this level was, at best, quite hard. Though denigrated by those above, this layer was essential to society. Particularly so was the economic function of white servitude in the community because the transition from servant to landholder provided opportunities that were important to economic growth. Freemen rented land to gain the resources to buy their own. They then sold or rented part of their recently purchased lands to obtain additional cash to develop the rest. This was a vital arena of economic activity and a source of prosperity in the area.

The increasing proportion of black slaves in the labor force after 1680, however, changed this. White freeholders found it increasingly difficult to find newly freed servants to buy or rent their excess holdings. Their land was thus harder to develop, and the possibility of failure increased. Slavery was a long-term investment process best suited to the well-to-do, preferably wealthy residents. Slaveholding involved risk; it generated success and failure, winners and losers. Many did gain, and a surge of prosperity was felt throughout the county. Economic levels continued to diverge, life-styles included more amenities, and the distance between the social layers—between freeholders, middling planters, and the "cosmopolitan gentlemen"—increased.

The process of establishing a new town, Urbanna, brought further change to Middlesex. "Old economic networks waned while new ones waxed." With the rise of town-based hegemonies, a separation of economic and political influences appeared. Families like the Churchills, Corbins, and Kemps controlled economic ties. The Robinsons, Beverleys, and other prominent families had vital connections of their own. Their broad base of kinship ties to the highest levels of society gave them particular "political awareness and influence" in the region.

A Place In Time is an insightful analysis of the "social webs in which individuals were embedded." The assumptions that guided the authors' questioning of the records touch the fabric of family, friends, and neighborhoods. Their awareness of the networks of human associations and relationships offers a strong sense of Middlesex society. These networks, the authors claim early on in the study, would "catch the linkages that bound Middlesex to the broader society." Meetings at court day did bring people together. Yet for this reviewer, a picture of the larger whole—life beyond the county—is missing. Moreover, a sense of the "wide spheres of their activities" is lacking in the authors' treatment of the cosmopolitan planters. Certainly these men connected Middlesex to the larger whole of the colony, particularly to Williamsburg, which is mentioned twice and only briefly in the work. An excellent study of people and of relationships, *A Place In Time* could be strengthened by extending the cultural behavior of the counties' inhabitants beyond local boundaries and attaching their lives to the broader Virginia society in which they lived.

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