

Fresh Advices

JULY 1985

Interpreters and the Decorative Arts Gallery

—by Liza Gusler

The Wallace Gallery should prove an invaluable study tool for all interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg. The decorative arts on display and the interpretive exhibits provide a complement to the period shops and house museums in the Historic Area. The gallery will assist us in both learning and teaching about the eighteenth century.

One of the first “study stations” that interpreters will want to visit is the print study gallery. Here, for the first time, eighteenth-century prints, which curators have used in documenting the appearance of our period interiors and other researchers have mined for their wealth of information about eighteenth-century life, will be available for viewing in large numbers. Margaret Pritchard, curator for exhibition buildings and prints and maps, has organized the prints by subject matter, creating convenient access to those depicting a host of eighteenth-century topics and objects. A few of the many categories include architecture, interiors (kitchens, taverns, bedchambers, shops, and so forth), costume, courtship, object usage, and diversions such as dance, theater, and music.

These prints, mostly English, offer an intimate, detailed view of eighteenth-century life. They are the pictorial record of how people—gentry and servants, patrons and tradesmen—lived. They depict the spaces in which they lived and worked and illustrate the arrangement and use of furnishings in a way impossible for an inventory listing to evoke.

An interpreter may choose any one of dozens of topical groupings of prints and have them serve as a focal point of his exploration of the museum. If, for instance, foodways—preparation, service, dining customs—are a

particular interest, he or she might view the prints of dining rooms, tea drinking, taverns, and kitchens. From the print gallery he can proceed to the adjacent metals study gallery, where a large case is devoted to dining utensils. Decorated cooking tools—spit jacks, wrought iron toasters and waffle irons, and bell metal skillets—are displayed in this gallery; they demonstrate that utensils can be ornamental as well as useful.

Dining accoutrements are displayed here as well. Silver, bone, and agate-handled flatware, pewter tankards, porringers, and plates, copper coffee and chocolate pots fill the cases.
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Humphrey Harwood, Williamsburg Builder

Betty Leviner, curatorial fellow, has done considerable research on Humphrey Harwood. Here she gives us a brief biography of Humphrey and his family.

If it were not for his ledger book, Humphrey Harwood would be one of many Williamsburg craftsmen of whom we know little beyond their names and a few isolated facts culled from the *Virginia Gazette*. Because of the remarkable survival of his ledger, however, we know more about Harwood's day-to-day life than any other eighteenth-century Williamsburg craftsman. The ledger, known as Ledger B to distinguish it from the now-lost
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Gallery, *continued*

Tea, chocolate, and coffee were introduced to the Western world in the mid-seventeenth century; they necessitated the development both of new social ceremonies and of decorative art forms. Western shapes for teapots, tea cups, and coffeepots evolved throughout the eighteenth century, changing with stylistic trends. The metals and ceramics galleries, which flow into each other, showcase vessels for the consumption of these beverages, as well as stronger spirits. The interpreter can compare silver and ceramic coffee and teapots, for instance, and see that frequently the same forms appear in both media.

Stylistic changes will be evident in objects made from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth centuries. The thematic exhibit, "Patron and Tradesman: The Forces That Fashion Objects," contains a style progression case that explains the evolution of period styles from baroque designs of the late 1600s through the rococo era to the neoclassic style of the late 1700s. Studying that chronological grouping of objects will enable interpreters to better comprehend aesthetic differences in objects displayed in the study galleries. After examining objects there, the interpreter will better understand such things as the stylistic distinction between the pear-shaped teapot from the first quarter of the eighteenth century and the attenuated, classically inspired coffeepot of the 1790s.

The "Patron and Tradesman" exhibit, which interpreters heard Graham Hood discuss during Core Curriculum, will also explain technological innovations of the period. For instance (still investigating our hypothetical dining theme) the tradesman part of the exhibit explores the development of the process of making "Sheffield plate," a cheaper version of the silver look, created by fusing sheet silver to copper. This technical innovation paralleled the popularity of the neoclassic style in the last third of the eighteenth century, so many Sheffield plate objects were made in designs inspired by the excavations at Pompeii. A case in the metals study gallery displays Sheffield plate dining accessories.

An innovation in ceramic wares of the same period was transfer printing, a cheaper form of decoration than hand painting. The process is explained in the tradesman exhibit, and examples of the technique are displayed in the ceramics study area.

The dining theme can be further explored in the Masterworks Gallery, where objects of particular aesthetic distinction are arranged in a stylistic chronology. Chelsea porcelain teapots in the shape of jolly Chinamen represent the Western fascination with the Orient sparked by the tea trade. Two Williamsburg-made tea tables are among the superlative objects in this central gallery. One table descended in the Galt family here. Made in the late baroque style, it exhibits the restrained elegance of Chinese furniture. The other table, with more exuberant pierced decoration typical of the rococo period, was made in the Anthony Hay Shop about 1770 and has a history in the Byrd family of Virginia. Other tea tables, both rectangular and of the round tilt-top form, may be seen in the furniture study gallery.

After rigorous scrutiny of objects created for pleasurable dining, the interpreter may well want some refreshment. If so, he could go down to the lower court, where a small café offers light meals—or perhaps a cup of tea? Nearby an exhibit called "Dining in Eighteenth-Century Virginia" interprets objects used for dining in Williamsburg. It incorporates shards excavated at Williamsburg sites, shown with matching antique objects, and relates objects with a Virginia provenance (such as Lucy Burwell's silver tea service and a garden bench from Blandfield plantation) to documentary sources describing dining rituals in the colony. A letter describing a dinner at Shirley plantation, William Byrd's diary entries regarding drinking tea with the governor, and inventory references all further our understanding of local dining customs.

The gallery will obviously benefit craftspeople in their understanding of regional, stylistic, and cost variations within their trades. Artisans in the Hay Shop, for example, will be able to use the furniture study gallery to compare New England furniture with southern products and to study the English antecedents of colonial craftsmanship. Such comparisons are not readily possible in exhibition buildings, especially as they now are furnished with the appropriate English and Virginia-made furniture that was there in the eighteenth century.

Students of textile arts will appreciate the opportunity to view costumes, needlework, and household textiles in the textile gallery.

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Harwood, *continued*

Ledger A and subsequent Ledgers C and D, spans the period 1776 to the early 1790s. (Harwood died in 1788, but his son William kept Ledgers B, C, and D open until the mid-90s to close out individual accounts.) While primarily a business document, Ledger B nonetheless permits personal glimpses of Harwood and his family on occasion. This information, coupled with the scant references available in other primary sources, allows us to assemble a brief biographical sketch of Humphrey Harwood.

Harwoods appeared in Virginia records as early as the first quarter of the seventeenth century, although the first Humphrey Harwood showed up by the 1650s. Tracing the Harwood family is made no easier because so few records survive for Warwick County, the area in which Harwood's ancestors settled. Humphrey as well as William continued to be popular first names with the family throughout the eighteenth century.

The Humphrey Harwood who appeared in Williamsburg during the mid-1760s was probably the orphan by that name mentioned in the Warwick County Minute Book, 1748-1762. In 1750 John Levelling was appointed by the court as guardian of "Humphrey Harwood Orphan of Humphrey Harwood de[ce]ase[d]." Earlier that same year Edmund Curtis had been named guardian of William Harwood, another orphan of Humphrey Harwood. Since William's name appears before Humphrey's, William may have been the older of the two. Later on in the same minute book we learn that Humphrey signed an indenture of apprenticeship with Thomas Gibbs, Jr., on February 5, 1756. While I have been unable to trace Thomas Gibbs, he most probably was a brickmason, given Harwood's profession in Williamsburg.

The next definite piece of information concerning Harwood professionally is an apprenticeship indenture with Hubbard Watkins dated November 17, 1766, in the York County records. This document describes Harwood as being "of Warwick County," although from other information it seems he was already living in Williamsburg. Watkins turns up in Ledger B as one of Harwood's employees later on.

It is during this period that Harwood's life in Williamsburg began, and, starting in the 1760s, it is possible to pick up threads relating

to his personal life. The first of these is the birth of a daughter, Elizabeth (called Betsy in Ledger B) on November 24, 1765, according to the Bruton Parish Register. From this and later entries, we know that Harwood's wife was named Sarah. Three years later the Harwoods became the parents of a son William on March 7, 1768. The following year on January 10, Harwood purchased from Dudley and Frances Digges lots 33 and 39, roughly the present sites of Binns and United Virginia Bank in Merchants Square. (This deed unfortunately has disappeared.) These three events were followed by the births of other children.

On July 12, 1770, a second son, also named Humphrey, was born. For the next nine years the parish records list no births to the Harwoods, but then probably in 1778 (the register is unclear) a daughter Frances was born, followed by another daughter Mary, nicknamed Polly, in 1784. There was one more child in the family, possibly born before 1765 when Harwood settled in Williamsburg; thus, the birth would not have been included in the Bruton Parish Register. This child was likely another girl, since only the two boys are mentioned by name in Harwood's will. But we know there were six Harwood children, because the father's obituary states that he was survived by six children.

By 1770 Harwood was a well-established figure in Williamsburg. Professionally, he had several irons in the fire. In addition to the usual brickmason chores, which included building and rebuilding chimneys, repointing brick, repairing grates, and even on occasion moving entire buildings, Harwood also rented out his slaves for daily work and raised livestock and grain on his James City County plantation for the Williamsburg market. He was a subscriber to the *Virginia Gazette* (see folio 8, Ledger B) and frequented Williamsburg's taverns (see folio 15, Ledger B, where he lent William Nicolson six shillings at the Raleigh). A member of Bruton Parish Church, he also belonged to the Williamsburg Lodge of Masons, which he joined in 1773. The lodge's minutes show that Harwood held several offices, such as steward and senior warden, in the lodge whose meetings took place the first Tuesday of each month at 6:00 P.M. His civic responsibilities included jury and militia duty, as well as providing food and

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Gallery, *continued*

Rotating selections of samplers, costume accessories, and domestic textiles such as carpets and counterpanes will allow close scrutiny of techniques of fabric production, decoration, and assemblage.

Silversmiths, brass founders, and blacksmiths will find the metal objects a valuable source for study and design inspiration. Members of the Company of Colonial Performers should find the prints and portraits throughout the gallery a source for understanding the appearance and mannerisms of eighteenth-century people. Visitor aides might particularly appreciate prints of street scenes and outdoor settings, while employees of Historic Area stores will enjoy prints of shops and see among the objects many prototypes for their reproduction wares.

These ideas are only the briefest suggestions of ways that interpreters might use the Wallace Gallery as a study tool. We encourage all interpreters to avail themselves of the newly accessible collection of antiques and to use the gallery to enhance their effective interpretation of the eighteenth century in Williamsburg.

Harwood, *continued*

building services for troops stationed in the area during the Revolutionary period.

At home Harwood was concerned with providing for his children's education as they grew older. In return for his professional services, he obtained educational benefits, both academic and cultural, for his sons and daughters. William studied with Mr. Bracken at the Grammar School of the College of William and Mary; Humphrey took violin lessons from Mr. Basserear, who also instructed Betsy on the spinet; and both William and Humphrey studied dancing with Mrs. Sarah Halam. Nevertheless, as was typical of the day, the boys—especially William—received more education than their sisters.

The life of the Harwood family seems to have proceeded uneventfully throughout the 1780s as far as Ledger B tells. The York

County records, however, raise a disquieting note in August 1788. On the 25th of that month Harwood drew up his will. In it he left his plantation in James City County to William and all his houses and lots in Williamsburg to Humphrey. The rest of his children, who were not named in the will, were left to divide equally the rest of Harwood's real and personal property when William reached "the Age of Twenty one years should it Be his Desire."

Three months later Harwood's obituary appeared in the *Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*. He died on Sunday, November 23, 1788, "after a long and painful illness" and was survived by "a disconsolate widow, and six hopeless children." On the day of his father's death, William, one of the two executors of the estate (Robert Andrews being the other), took an inventory of Harwood's personal property. This shows Harwood to have been relatively well off. His belongings included, among other furnishings, three card tables, two desks, a bookcase, an easy chair, and three large looking glasses. William seems to have been a conscientious executor and advertised repeatedly in an attempt to close all outstanding accounts on his father's estate.

Left an orphan in early childhood, Humphrey Harwood learned a trade that enabled him as an adult to provide himself and his family with many of the amenities of life. Besides being a man concerned about his family, he appears to have felt a sense of responsibility to his community and was involved with many aspects of civic life. While the assumptions presented here will probably never be more than conjectures, Harwood's ledger will continue to be an extremely valuable document that offers otherwise impossible insights into the daily life of a Williamsburg craftsman two hundred years ago.

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