

interpreter

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Who Bought What and Why?

John Caramia and Harold Gill teamed up to give us a fresh slant on the availability of and demand for goods in the eighteenth century.

Elizabeth Bartlett, a resident of King George County, died during the summer of 1765. The value of her estate, inventoried on August 20, 1765, was £9 18s. 3d. (9 pounds, 18 shillings, 3 pence), including a mare worth £3. The inventory suggests that Elizabeth lived in poverty or close to it. We know a great deal about Elizabeth's life, though, and it appears she had lived an active and apparently comfortable life.

In November 1747 Elizabeth and her husband, Thomas Bartlett, leased sixty acres for "the full term of and end of their natural lives" at a rent of £5 and 1,000 pounds of tobacco for each of the first two years and 1,000 pounds of tobacco annually thereafter. In less than a year Thomas died leaving an estate worth over £300. Elizabeth probably inherited at least a third, if not all, of the property left by Thomas (there is no evidence of children in the family). His estate included nine slaves—three men, one woman, three boys, one girl, and one child. Livestock consisted of eleven sheep, twenty-five head of cattle, twenty hogs, seven horses, and a colt. (We don't know why the value of Elizabeth's inventory turned out to be so much lower than her husband's. Possibly she disposed of much of it before her death.) Nonetheless, with the property she inherited from Thomas and the lease of sixty acres, Elizabeth began life on her own.

Fortunately, there is a window through which we can glimpse Elizabeth's life as a widow. During the time between the death of her husband and her own death sixteen years later, Elizabeth made most of her purchases at Edward Dixon's store in Port Royal, across the Rappahannock River from Elizabeth's farm. During these sixteen years, she sold Dixon at least (there are some data missing) 30,000 pounds of tobacco—about two hogsheds a year. With the proceeds she paid her rent,

taxes, and supplied herself with goods. Her purchases in the store and sales of tobacco show that she did not live in poverty.

Dixon closed his books around the first of October each year when he balanced each account. Elizabeth sometimes had a debit balance as high as £20, but sometimes she had a credit balance. Her purchases in the store are itemized and show not only what she bought but when she bought it. Her account also suggests that she dealt in another store besides Dixon's because he did not make her rental payment every year, and there is no indication that she was in arrears.

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How To Recognize a Fake

by Pat Gibbs

If a diary seems too good to be true, it probably is. When the provenance is vague and only a copy survives, the writing appears affected, and the subject matter seems too predictable, suspect a fake. Subject Anne Hughes's diary, printed several times in England during the last fifty years as *The Diary of a Farmer's Wife, 1796-1797*, to these criteria and it is questionable on all counts.

The diary was serialized in the Home Section of the *Farmer's Weekly* in 1937 and 1938 and published by Countrywise Books in 1964. The 1964 edition is based on the typescript submitted to the *Farmer's Weekly*, but the numerous editions printed by Penguin Books in the last decade are based on the magazine version, which modernized some of the spelling.

The October 8, 1937, issue of the *Farmer's Weekly* announced that "this is the first extract from the diary kept by a Herefordshire farmer's wife. It arrived in this office from Mrs. Jeanne Preston, a reader of the Home Section, whose old nurse was a descendant of Anne Hughes and treasured the journal. On the first page of the diary was written 'Anne Hughes, her boke in wiche I rite what I doe, when I have thee tyme, and begynnen wyth thys day,

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Who Bought What, *continued*

During 1758 Mrs. Bartlett sold Dixon two hogsheads of tobacco for a total of £18 4s. and purchased from his store £14 14s 4d. worth of goods. She purchased a variety of articles including a frying pan, a half-pound of ginger, a pair of traces (lengths of leather or chain that connect a horse to a carriage), and 123 yards of textiles.

The goods Mrs. Bartlett purchased from Dixon were all imported from Europe and are typical of the goods available at affordable prices in most Virginia stores. The customers who patronized these stores consisted of the "middling sort," for the gentry rarely purchased goods locally, and the poor are submerged in the cash sales if they are present at all. The stores did, however, carry a full line of goods that were in demand by the largest segment of Virginians and at prices they could afford. Most merchandise was priced between a shilling and a pound, with many items available in a variety of qualities and prices. Mrs. Bartlett, for example, purchased linen at prices from 1s. to 2s. 8d. per yard. The price range of goods was not beyond the capabilities of most people.

Travel, too, was not beyond the reach of most people. A night's lodging with "clean sheets" was available for only 6d. and a dinner with "good small beer" for only 1s. 3d. To hire a chair to Hampton cost 35s. from John Draper's rent-a-chair service in Williamsburg and only 30s. to Richmond. A round trip to England was £22—a trip made in 1739 by Hugh Orr, a Williamsburg blacksmith, and by James Wray, a local carpenter, in 1740. A round-trip to Barbados cost about £5.

It is nearly impossible to know what colonial Virginians thought was "too expensive." We should remember that most people were self-employed (engaged in agriculture), and it is difficult to determine the average income of the vast majority of working men and women. Agricultural income is—and was—often variable because of the weather and market conditions. It is also difficult for us to determine what people viewed as necessities, what they considered luxuries, and why they spent their money in the ways they did.

The market place of colonial Virginia and Williamsburg contained a vast variety of imported goods from around the world. Merchandise was available in a range of qualities and prices affordable to the majority of working people from the widow Elizabeth Bartlett, to a journeyman harnessmaker, and a master blacksmith such as Hugh Orr. In fact, imported

goods were usually cheaper than locally made products, but in most cases what was considered in the eighteenth century expensive or a luxury item was determined by individual considerations and not by our twentieth-century beliefs and attitudes.

Fake, *continued*

Feb. ye 6 1796."

In the preface to the Penguin edition, Michael Croucher reports on his interview with Mrs. Preston's daughter, Molly Preston, who was a schoolgirl in the mid-1930s. Molly recalled that her mother was always "scribbling away at the kitchen table" and remembers the diary was an old thin book with spidery writing but does not know what happened to it.

Molly claimed that Anne's necklace, which figures prominently in the diary and is mentioned in a parenthetical note as being in the possession of the diary's owner, was sold to help the war effort. Skeptics like me wonder if Mrs. Preston lied to her daughter about the diary and necklace or suspect Molly of covering for her mother; after all, Molly Preston holds the copyright. We should not rule out the possibility that the necklace is a "relic" planted into the story to add authenticity to the diary.

Lacking the original diary means one must examine the earliest version, the typescript on which the 1964 edition is based. One would expect Anne's spelling to be inconsistent and phonetic but, as the line about Anne's "boke" shows, her writing has an exaggerated and assumed artificiality as does the entire 1964 edition. Also, the grammar is better than the spelling. The *y* in "tyme," "wyth," and "thys" was not only outdated by the end of the eighteenth century but does not represent the same sound. "Feb." is modern; "Febry." was commonly used then to abbreviate the second month of the year.

Unlike the stuff of a genuine diary, the subject matter is too anecdotal and reads more like a series of vignettes than the day-to-day experiences of a late eighteenth-century farm woman. "Anne" does not think or write like a 1790s farmer's wife. What real-life farmer's wife in the late eighteenth century was so contented that she rarely complained about the burden and tedium of daily life and got along equally well with her servant, her mother-in-law, and the wife of the local squire? Also, the "diary" concludes too neatly

with Anne's worthy servant marrying the new parson and Anne's learning that she is expecting the child she has always wanted.

The 1964 Countrywise edition gives no hint that the diary is spurious. In recent Penguin editions, however, Croucher admits there is "no absolute proof of its authenticity," but he then presents a number of reasons why he believes it is a true account. He concedes that Jeanne Preston stretched the diary with recipes from an old family recipe book. I think it is more plausible that Jeanne Preston, who grew up on a farm and liked to read historical novels, produced a clever fake.

I have not undertaken the needle-in-a-hay-stack task of trying to determine if names like John and Anne Hughes and the Reverend Godfrey Cross and his wife, Sarah, survive in Herefordshire County records of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Lady Susan's husband is always referred to as "my lord" or the "squire," so the most prominent people mentioned in the diary are not easily identified. Also, too few place-names are mentioned to readily locate John Hughes's farm.

The "diary" probably entertained the late-1930s farmers' wives as much as some of the serialized stories that occasionally appeared in the Home Section of the *Farmer's Weekly*. It makes good light reading, but those of us here at Colonial Williamsburg who check out editions of this volume from the Foundation Library should recognize it for the fabricated historical fiction it is.

Issues of the third series of the *William and Mary Quarterly* alert readers to fakes: Arthur Pierce Middleton and Douglass Adair's article, "The Mystery of the Horn Papers," appears in Volume 4 (1947), pp. 411-445. Mary Beth Norton's letter to the editor in Volume 33 (1976), pp. 715-717, identifies two spurious women's diaries.

Changing Editors

About a year ago I asked Bill Tramosch and Conny Graft to help think of ways the *Interpreter* could be improved, and naturally we began planning our third survey of the opinions of our readers. But it seemed to me that in addition to their good suggestions, a new beginning was in order—fresh perspectives, innovations—and possibly a new editor to bring all that about. Bill agreed, and the result was that Mark Howell, instructor in interpre-

tive education, accepted the "call." Mark has begun the planning process (see "Our Readers Speak Out") and is watching over our shoulders as we put the next two issues together.

To the writers and readers of the *Interpreter* for the past nine years, thank you for your contributions and responsiveness. Editing the *Interpreter* has taught me much and has been very rewarding. I am confident that Mark will enjoy the experience as much as I have, and that you will enjoy the next generation of *Interpreters* under his leadership.

—BB

N. B. The index is updated again. Come by the Davidson Shop or call Nancy Dudley on ext. 7624 for your copy.

Our Readers Speak Out

by Conny Graft

What do interpreters think about the *Interpreter*? Do they read every issue, cover to cover? Do they use the information in their interpretations? What do they perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of this publication? How can we make the material more useful? What type of articles would interpreters like to see included in future issues?

These are just some of the questions the members of the editorial committee included in a survey conducted during January, February, and March, 1988. As our editor, Barbara Beaman, stated in the May issue, the primary objective for the *Interpreter* is to provide current and relevant historical information that can be used by interpreters on the job. Making the information relevant for *all* interpreters is quite a challenge. The editorial committee wanted to know how we were meeting this challenge.

With the assistance of two volunteers, visitor aide Holly Wisner and Scott Philyaw, an intern with the Museum Management Program, fifty surveys were conducted with a proportionate sample of interpreters randomly selected from each interpretive department: Company of Colonial Performers, historic trades, historical interpretation, and visitor aides.

What did we learn? When taken together as a single group, the outlook is quite favorable. Eighty percent of the group stated that they read all of the issues. Sixty-six percent read

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Readers Speak Out, *continued*

every article in each issue. The remaining group treat the *Interpreter* like a newspaper and read only those articles that interest them. Eighty-two percent of the group said they use the information in their interpretations but only occasionally. Many interpreters stated that they use the information as background material. Words used to describe the strengths included "informative" and "concise." Fourteen percent said they would like to see more participation by interpreters in planning future issues. The top ten subject areas for future issues chosen by interpreters were: children (62%), women (54%), clothing (48%), Indians (46%), architecture (44%), religion (44%), restoration (44%), African-American history (42%), biographies (42%), and interpretation (42%).

When I separated the data by department, a very different picture emerged. Interpreters in the department of historical interpretation were the most pleased with the publication. Practically all historical interpreters stated that they found the material relevant to their jobs. Visitor aides voiced several concerns with the newsletter. Only 50 percent of this group read it, and of those, only 25 percent read the entire issue. Of the visitor aides who read the *Interpreter*, most said that they used the information in their interpretations. Their most frequently repeated comment was that they would like to see more participation and more articles written by interpreters. Only half of the interpreters in the department of historic trades found the *Interpreter* useful. Several interpreters in historic trades stated they wanted more specific information about their trades, but they also realized that this same information may be too specific for other readers. Interpreters in the Company of Colonial Performers were also less likely to use the information. Several members of C.C.P. would like to see more of "The King's English."

As a result of the evaluation, several changes have been made. Interpreters from each department have been added to the editorial committee: Jodi Norman from the visitor aide department, Brenda LaClair from the department of historical interpretation, Alex Clark from the Company of Colonial Performers, and Marcus Hansen from the department of historic trades. With our new editor, Mark Howell, this committee is now planning to incorporate many of our readers' suggestions for the *Interpreter* beginning with the January issue. The interpreters on the editorial com-

mittee have been asked to gather suggestions for future articles from colleagues in their departments so that our reader feedback and participation becomes an ongoing process. To all of you who participated in our survey, thank you for all your ideas, suggestions, and comments. The editorial committee is committed to making the *Interpreter* a publication that is responsive to the needs of its readers. Please continue to share your comments and suggestions with your departmental representative so that this publication can be the best that it can be!

Who's Who?

Who discovered the Bodleian Plate at Oxford's Bodleian Library?

Miss Mary F. Goodwin, cousin of Dr. W. A. R. Goodwin, and Miss Kate Cannon. Mary Goodwin began the research for the restoration by going through old journals looking for information on the Governor's Palace, the College, and the Capitol. She also agreed to revise and combine into one volume two histories of Bruton Parish Church written by Dr. Goodwin. The title of this now-rare book is *The Record of Bruton Parish Church*, which was published by Dietz Press in 1941.

Who is Mary R. M. Goodwin?

She is Mary Randolph Mordecai Goodwin, the widow of Rutherford Goodwin, Dr. W. A. R. Goodwin's oldest son. Mrs. Goodwin was a historical researcher for Colonial Williamsburg, and many of the reports we use today were written by her. She lives in one of the historic houses of Williamsburg.

Rutherford Goodwin did public relations work in the early days of the restoration, taught the first group of hostesses, and wrote guidebooks about the historic triangle as well as the invaluable history, *A Brief and True Report of Williamsburg in Virginia*.

--BB

The Interpreter is a bimonthly publication of the Department of Interpretive Education.

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