

# interpreter

## The Hospital and the Town

*Shomer Zwelling has done the historical research on the Public Hospital and has written a book about this facility and treatment of the mentally ill. Here he offers suggestions for linking this new information to our Historic Area interpretations.*

Colonists reading the October 3, 1771, issue of the *Virginia Gazette* found the usual hodgepodge of information. Thomas Holt was offering twenty shillings to anyone who would return his horse. John Forse was willing to reward the person who turned up his runaway slave, "a likely Negro Fellow named NED." There was an opening for an "ASSISTANT in a STORE" who would also help with the bookkeeping, and Christiana Campbell announced she was opening a "TAVERN in the House, behind the Capitol, lately owned by Mrs. Vobe." Craftsmen in the building trades may well have been pleased to see a statement signed by Samuel Spurr:

THE Subscriber will give good Wages, and Accommodations, to two or three Journeymen BRICKLAYERS, for the remaining Part of the Season, to work upon the Hospital building in this City. Plenty of Bricks and Lime is ready, so that there will be no Delay.

The Public Hospital in Williamsburg played an ambiguous role in the town's history. On the one hand it stood at the edge of town, its inmates carefully segregated from the rest of Virginia society. On the other hand there was a steady flow of traffic from the town to the hospital and back again. When interpreting this site, it is important to keep in mind both the hospital's distinctive history and its relationship to the larger Williamsburg story. Exhibits in the East Wing of the Public Hospital will help interpreters tell about the various treatment programs employed over a hundred-year period. But what of the other part of the tale? How do we relate the town to the hospital?

There are several sites, historical person-

ages, and themes already part of the Colonial Williamsburg experience that lend themselves to discussion of the hospital. Listed below are a few suggestions that may be helpful in bringing the hospital into the Historic Area interpretive fold.

*Public Institutions.* Not only was the hospital funded by the colonial—and later the state—government, but its history can be closely linked with other public buildings. Before the hospital opened, some mentally disturbed people were confined to the Public Gaol. The proposal to build a mental institution was launched in the Palace by Lt. Governor Fauquier. He in turn suggested the idea to the burgesses in 1766. After Fauquier died, Governor Botetourt took up the torch and pressed the burgesses to pass legislation. They finally enacted a law in 1770 and periodically passed other bills relating to the hospital.

Courthouses also played a critical role in the hospital's history. In fact, admission to the institution was in large part a legal proceeding. According to the early laws, three county magistrates took depositions from local citizens to determine if a person were of "insane

(continued, page 2)

## The Renovated Visitor Center

The Visitor Center will come back on line in mid-March and once again be prepared to serve more than a million visitors to Williamsburg each year. Its mission is to offer general orientation, viewing of *The Patriot* film, hotel and restaurant placements, and, most important of all, to persuade an increasing percentage of our visitors to purchase tickets to insure their full enjoyment of the Historic Area and provide continued support for our educational programs.

You will find the renovated Visitor Center quite a different place in appearance and in function. It will have new colors on the floors, (continued, page 2)

**The Hospital, continued**  
and disordered mind." If the magistrates judged the person insane, he or she was sent to Williamsburg where the hospital's Court of Directors reviewed the case. If this quasi-judicial body agreed with the county magistrates—and no kin or friend were willing to take the individual in—confinement to the hospital was ordered.

Even the College and Bruton Parish Church played a role in the hospital story. James Madison, president of the College from 1777 to 1812, was also president of the Court of Directors for thirty-three years. Madison was particularly interested in the scientific treatment of patients, and together with one of the hospital's early physicians, he instituted a plunge bath (also known as shock treatment) for inmates. As for Bruton Parish Church, one of its rectors, the Reverend John Bracken, served on the Court of Directors. More importantly, the emergence of the hospital in the late eighteenth century represents the transfer of certain functions formerly under the aegis of religious institutions to scientifically oriented secular institutions.

*Crafts and Stores.* Hospital records and various account books indicate that many craftsmen performed work at the hospital. Benjamin Powell won the building contract in 1771 and oversaw construction. After his work was completed, James Anderson frequently came to the hospital to make repairs, mend locks, and put "irons" on patients. Carpenters also found work at the hospital, and several items were purchased for the institution's inmates at the Prentis Store. Of particular importance was the Galt Apothecary. Not only did John Minson Galt and his partner, Philip Barraud, serve as the hospital's visiting physicians during the late eighteenth century, but many of the drugs and instruments on display in the shop were also used in the hospital.

*Afro-Americans.* From the beginning many slaves worked at the hospital. In 1774 a free black woman named Charity was admitted as a patient. She was subsequently cured and released. In 1846 the hospital began accepting slaves who were judged insane. Finally in 1854 the hospital hired a free black—formerly a slave patient—to work as an attendant on a ward. After the Civil War a separate facility for black patients was opened in Petersburg, Virginia. During the 1960s the Williamsburg hospital was again racially integrated.

*Famous Names.* Several well-known Williamsburg area residents served on the overseeing Court of Directors. They included

John Blair, Robert Carter, Peyton Randolph, George Wythe, Lewis Burwell, Nathaniel Burwell, Thomas Everard, Benjamin Waller, and Thomas Nelson. The first keeper of the hospital, James Galt, had formerly served as Public Gaoler.

*Becoming Americans.* The hospital in Williamsburg was part of a larger transformation in the Western World. We know that the second half of the eighteenth century was a time of change in family and community, and the appearance of the hospital was another manifestation of this large-scale metamorphosis. Indeed, the hospital is a visible expression of late eighteenth-century fears that something was seriously wrong with American society and the more optimistic belief that scientific inquiry could solve such age-old problems as insanity. Born of hope and fear, this eighteenth-century mental hospital sheds light on the mood of the colonies on the eve of the Revolution.

#### **Visitor Center, continued**

walls, and ceilings, with a fresh look and more efficient informational displays that will assist our visitors as they determine what type of ticket will best suit their requirements. On entering, one will find a well-lighted model of the entire Historic Area and on each side a large map done in the same style as the map in the "Visitor's Companion." Additionally, there will be a long overhead continuous photograph or frieze of a portion of the north side of Duke of Gloucester Street running from Chowning's Tavern through the Edinburgh Castle. This exhibit will acquaint people with the scale and nature of the Historic Area and give them the basic understanding that they are about to visit a restored historic town of considerable size.

Nearby will be foreign language panels that invite visitors from other countries to ask for printed brochures in their own language to help them with their stay here.

The next element will be a very large audiovisual slide presentation about two minutes in length. Centrally located in the lobby, this will be an exciting short program that will give a quick impression of the Historic Area and its many activities with special emphasis on the people they will meet. Many of the interpreters participated in the making of this presentation, and you will find the smiling faces of many of your friends and colleagues scattered through this short but effective presentation.

(continued, page 3)

## Visitor Center, continued

On each side of the audiovisual display will be large informational kiosks that will provide answers to visitors' questions about what tickets are available to them, how the bus system works, and how to take the next step in electing either a basic ticket or a Patriot's Pass.

Ticket sales will be handled from individual ticket windows or wickets with a single waiting line. We have experimented with this system in the last three years and found it to be the most agreeable method of handling ticket sales, particularly in busy times.

Under consideration, but not ready for the opening, is a brief exhibit for the theater waiting lounges that will introduce the theme, "Becoming Americans."

The presentation in the twin theaters will remain *The Patriot*, but we have augmented the film with a brief introduction by Robert Carroll, who played the part of Patrick Henry in the film. His remarks help tell visitors what they should know in advance of their visit to the Historic Area about the programs they will see and the people they will meet. You may recall Dennis O'Toole's memorandum quoting this preamble to *The Patriot*, but if you have not heard this tape, stop by either the Williamsburg Theatre or the Visitor Center when it opens and listen to this new introduction.

In summary, the major mission of the Visitor Center is to make the time spent there more efficient and to persuade all of our visitors to purchase tickets. *The Patriot* film and its new introduction, the materials in the bookstore, and the general orientation about the physical size and nature of the place are the principal teaching elements at the Visitor Center. They are offered only as preparation for the interpretation of the town that properly belongs in the Historic Area in your own encounters with visitors. We hope that this more informative, more hospitable, more efficient Visitor Center experience will make your job easier so that our visitors will be better prepared to meet with you and hear what you have to say.

—Peter A. G. Brown

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## The Exchange

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*Bobbie Sanders, a historical interpreter, reminisces about a recent group tour in England conducted by another HI, Bettye Jean Lendrim, and her husband, Frank.*

On January 1, 1985, twenty-six eager historical interpreters and friends took vacation and

headed for England to enjoy the sights, learn more about history and the decorative arts, architecture, society, and, of course, to have some fun and shop. Our days were filled with visits to great cathedrals, castles, public and private homes, and museums; the evenings with wonderful dinners and, very often, the theater.

The Victoria and Albert Museum was near our hotel in London. We enjoyed two lectures there, one on Ham House and the other on Chiswick and Osterly Park, three estates we subsequently visited.

Ham House was a special treat because it was referred to often during our Palace training. Its rooms were magnificent and very formal with furnishings against the wall, elaborately carved woodwork, ceilings either painted or decorated with ornate plasterwork, and yes, the floors were uncarpeted and unfinished! The designs of the arms on the gilded balustrade of the great staircase were most impressive. Ham House was the home of the Duke and Duchess of Lauderdale, and it was the duchess who was responsible for its renovation. Bright colors and fresh flowers, popular in seventeenth-century great houses, brought the outdoors indoors as much as possible. Ham House today still contains much of its original furnishings and ornamentation. It is now owned and maintained by the National Trust in cooperation with the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Chiswick was built as a summer villa for entertaining by Lord Burlington to reflect his interest in the Italian Palladian style. One enters through an Inigo Jones gateway. Inside, William Kent's classically painted ceilings depicting allegorical figures, mantel- and chimneypieces modeled after the work of Inigo Jones, and the architectural beauty of the entire villa delight the eye. One can easily imagine elegant social affairs there long ago.

Osterly Park is still very much as it was in the eighteenth century. Built in the 1570s but changed considerably in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, it reflects the styles of William Chambers and Robert Adam. Classical design is evident in the hall with its recessed ends and sculptured reliefs. Most of the original furnishings are by John Linnell and Robert Adam. By the way, did you know that the term "circle of friends" came from the drawing of chairs from the wall to form a circle for conversation? In the library particularly, Adam carried designs of the frieze of the bookcase and chimneypiece to the frieze around

(continued, page 4)

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## Occurrences

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### Weekly Events March 20–May 29, 1985

- Tuesdays:** *Militia Reviews* at 5:15 P.M.  
**Wednesdays:** *Evening of Military Life* at  
7:00 P.M. beginning April  
10  
**Thursdays:** *Palace Concerts* at 8:45 P.M.  
beginning April 4  
**Fridays:** *Fife and Drum Retreats* at  
5:15 P.M.  
**Saturdays:** *Eighteenth-century Plays* in the  
Lodge Auditorium at  
8:30 P.M.  
*Fife and Drum Parades* at  
NOON beginning April 6  
**Sundays:** *Capitol Concerts* at 8:30 P.M.  
beginning April 7

### Special Programs and Events

- March**  
9–24 Canada Time  
21 *Baroque Tercentennial Concert*  
24 *Special Capitol Concert* for  
Canada Time  
30–31 *Garden Symposium* begins  
**April**  
1–3 *Garden Symposium*  
5 *Capitol Evening* at 7:00, 8:00,  
and 9:00 P.M.  
6 *Easter Review* at 8:45 P.M.  
*Easter Magic* at 5:00 P.M.  
20–28 Garden Week  
**May 15** *Prelude to Independence*

### Tour in England, continued

the room creating a harmonious effect throughout. His use of color on ceilings was most effective at Osterly Park.

Another day, we enjoyed lectures at Brompton Library by two young women, Sarah Bowles and Phillipa Barton, who have revived the Dilettanti Society, originally founded in 1732 to “encourage the study of classical antiquity and promotion of the arts.” Through the use of slides and the words of Horace Walpole and Samuel Pepys, we caught a glimpse of the style of entertaining, household management, hierarchy, and pastimes of the eighteenth century.

Women’s duties and entertainments were

often one and the same, including needlework of all kinds, reading novels aloud to each other, gilding picture frames, and gardening, in addition to rearing children and managing often very large households. Gentlemen’s interests centered around politics, cattle, horses for hunting, racing, and breeding, cockfights, and agriculture. Their coffeehouses were much like clubs, each one catering to a different clientele such as the clergy, Whigs, Tories, and so forth. Children were dressed as miniature adults, especially the children of royalty, and their activities included not only education, but caring for pets, music, painting, and games of all kinds.

Gardens were popular places for meeting friends, enjoying music, parading, and entertaining. Dancing and masquerades were also popular. The theater was very fashionable, and, though there were few good playwrights, there were many very good actors.

Style was everything in the eighteenth century, and those who could enjoyed the opportunity to employ the best designers available to decorate their homes. Thomas Chippendale and Robert Adam exemplify the quality of workmanship that is still considered superior today.

I must not neglect to comment on the many delightful guides and lecturers we were privileged to hear during our stay in England. Everyone was extremely knowledgeable, friendly, and had a marvelous sense of humor. They had much to offer in information and example. I hope our guests depart with the same sense of pleasure and appreciation that we experienced. I cannot hope to tell about all the wonderful places we visited and delights we enjoyed. Suffice it to say, we are ready to return to England at the first opportunity. The affinity we felt only increased our interest in learning even more about our “Mother Country.” Oh, to be in England—anytime!

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