



"THE DISSENSIONS OF OUR FAMILIES"

Edmund Randolph, in his March 23, 1810 letter to his children after the death of his beloved wife Elizabeth Nicholas Randolph, describes how "improbable" the idea of their future marriage was "at the time from the dissensions of our families seemed daily to grow into an impossibility from their increasing rancour."

Edmund's father John and his uncle Peyton were sons of Sir John Randolph of Williamsburg. Sir John, the only Virginian to be knighted, held the powerful dual positions of treasurer of the colony and Speaker of the House of Burgesses until his death in 1738. After Sir John's death, John Robinson, a burgess from King and Queen County, held the same positions of treasurer and Speaker until his death twenty-eight years later in 1766.

After Robinson's death it became clear that the treasury accounts were £100,000 in arrears, confirming earlier rumors that "Robinson had been receiving Virginia paper currency from the two wartime issues; and rather than retiring the notes from circulation as required by law, he put them back into circulation in the form of loans to friends and political associates." [Selby, *Colonial Virginia: A History*, p.310] Robinson had not benefitted personally, but many leading Virginians were deeply in debt. The amount of debt owed to the Robinson estate (and the colony) was immense. Members of the council owed £15,600; current and former burgesses owed more than £37,000, while William Byrd III owed £14,921, Bernard Moore owed £8,085, and Archibald Cary owed £3,975.

With Robinson's death, Governor Fauquier fulfilled his instructions from the Board of Trade to separate the two offices of Speaker and treasurer. Fauquier originally wanted to name Peyton Randolph interim treasurer, but realized that Randolph would have to resign his seat in the House, disqualifying him from being elected Speaker. Fauquier thought that Randolph could best serve "His Majesty's interest" as Speaker.

Within a few days of Robinson's death, Fauquier appointed Robert Carter Nicholas, who had offered his services to the governor, as interim treasurer. This appointment initiated a fierce political battle between the Robinson faction, led by Peyton Randolph, who argued for continuing the unification of the offices of Speaker and treasurer and the newly appointed interim treasurer Robert Carter Nicholas, who argued against it. The debate continued through the summer and fall. On November 6, 1766, Peyton Randolph was elected Speaker and on November 12, 1766, the House "Resolved, That it is the Opinion of this Committee that the Offices of Speaker of the House of Burgesses and Treasurer of this Colony shall not be united in the same Person, and that the Speaker shall not be concerned as an Officer of the Treasury in any manner whatsoever; and the Question being put that the House agree thereto, It passed in the Affirmative. Ayes, 68. Noes, 29." [Source: *Journal of the House of Burgesses in Virginia 1766 to 1769*]

To further complicate relations between the Randolph and Nicholas families, "hostility deepened as a result of Nicholas's stalwart Christian orthodoxy and the Randolphs' association with thinkers of a theologically more liberal cast." [Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia*, p. 39] On June 12, 1773, the Bruton Parish vestry met to fill a vacant rectorship and to hear the charges brought by Robert Carter Nicholas against Samuel Henley, a candidate for the position and the acting rector. Carter charged that Henley was "an avowed enemy of the forms of the Church of England as by law established in Virginia, and that he maintained heterodox opinions derogating the divinity of the Savior." From 1771

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AMERICANS *Becoming* TODAY

NO. 1 FOR COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG

PROGRAMMING FOR 2008



The Courtship of John Collet, London, c. 1764

THE REVOLUTIONARY CITY® STORY FEATURED THIS SPRING FOCUSES ON THE MARRIAGE OF EDMUND RANDOLPH AND ELIZABETH NICHOLAS.

MARRIAGE OF EDMUND RANDOLPH AND ELIZABETH NICHOLAS

"We were both born in the city of Williamsburg within twelve hours of each other; myself on the 10th of August 1753 and she on the 11th. My Aunt Randolph, who saw each of us soon after our birth facetiously foretold, that we should be united in marriage:—a circumstance which, 'tho improbable at the time from the dissensions of our families, seemed daily to grow into impossibility, from their increasing rancour."

But on August 29, 1776, Edmund Randolph and Elizabeth Nicholas were joined in marriage. The ceremony, by custom in Virginia, was probably conducted by John Bracken, rector of Bruton Parish Church, and celebrated at the home of Robert Carter Nicholas, the father of the bride. This was an unlikely marriage that unified the often contentious Nicholas and Randolph families who disagreed publicly on issues of politics and religion. It was also a time of extreme tension for the newly created nation and the new commonwealth as Virginians found themselves in the midst of the American Revolution.

Edmund wrote that, as children, they were "taught the elements of reading at the same school" where "she won me by the best of all graces, cheerfulness, good sense, and benevolence." Edmund later attended the grammar school and the school of philosophy at the College of William and Mary, where he was strongly influenced by the Rev. Samuel Henley. He studied law and, in 1774, when his cousin Thomas Jefferson retired from the practice of law, he turned over his clients to Edmund. In May of 1774, when Edmund was 21, he became a member of the House of Burgesses.

With the increasing conflict between the colonies and Great Britain, Edmund's father, John Randolph, the attorney general of Virginia and famous for "his brilliance in the law," declared himself a loyalist in 1775 and returned "home" to Britain with his wife and daughters. His son Edmund was in Philadelphia at the time intending to join the rebel army and seeking support to become an aide to General Washington. In a letter written by John Randolph to his son in August 1775, he implores his son "For God's Sake, return to your Family & indeed to yourself." Edmund, at age 22 and against his father's will, became muster-master general of the Continental Army

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The Form of Solemnization of MATRIMONY

[THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER ACCORDING TO THE USE OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND, 1771]

"Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance, in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her in sickness and in health, and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, as long as ye both shall live?"

The man shall answer "I will"

"Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance, in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, serve him, love, honour and keep him in sickness and in health, and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?"

The woman shall answer "I will"

"Those whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder"

GENTRY MARRIAGES

Letter from Daniel Parke to his daughter Fanny, St. James, London, 1702

... God knows if I may see you more, but if I do not, I shall take care to leave you and your sister in happy circumstances, therefore do not throw yourself away on the first idle young man that offers, if you have a mind to marry. I know it is the desire of all young people to be married, and though few are so happy after marriage as before, yet everyone is willing to make the experiment at their own expense. Consider who you marry as the greatest concern you have in the world. Be kind and good-natured to your servants. It is much better to have them love you than fear you. My heart is in Virginia and the greatest pleasure I propose to myself is seeing you and your sister happy. That you may be ever so is the earnest desire of your affectionate father.

[*Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 20, pp.377]

On Thursday last Mr. W[illiam] C[olston] came here and Communicated his intention of waiting on my daughter Lucy. I told him I had long entertained such a Suspicion and really with Pleasure for his virtue and unexceptionable behavior had long attached my good wishes to him . . . But as a parent I never took any Liberty with a child but to dissuade where I thought I had reason so to do; but in no instance Whatever to persuade. Therefore her approbation must Proceed from his own conduct and her good liking. I should give her £800 Sterling as soon as soon as the times would admit of it.

[Landon Carter Diary, p. 939, September 10, 1775]

James Parker, Norfolk, to Charles Stuart, Esq., 20 October 1769

... Last week our friend W Ronald was married to Miss Kendell, tho her portion is worth six thousands . . . yet I am fully convinced the match is founded on mutual love & doubt not that they will be very happy . . . Since I'm upon matrimony, but known that the very silent & extremely modest Miss Ester Pugh is married to one Billy Pugh, it is reported with a good deal of certainty that she is about seven months gone with child,

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POLITICS

Dissensions

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to 1775 Henley had been a polarizing figure both at Bruton Parish and at the college. While Robert Carter Nicholas led the opposition against men of a more liberal bent, the powerful influence of Peyton Randolph supported Henley. The conflict led to heated debates among Williamsburg residents, which were published in the *Virginia Gazette*. Edmund's own position with Robert Carter Nicholas probably did not improve when Edmund dedicated his paper (delivered as a student at the college) to Samuel Henley. [Source: Rhys Issac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, pp. 209].

Edmund's father, John Randolph, left Williamsburg for London in August 1775 and his uncle Peyton died in Philadelphia in October 1775, while serving as the president of the Second Continental Congress. The absence of the two Randolph brothers coupled with the immediate challenge of the Revolution may have eased the powerful contentions of the past and made the marriage of Edmund and Elizabeth possible.

[Submitted by Anne Willis]

JOHN RANDOLPH ARRANGES TO LEAVE VIRGINIA

Williamsburg, July 12, 1775

It having been asserted, and industriously propagated, that some little time before the late meeting of the merchants, in conversation with a person at my own house, I said that the merchants would not meet, because they were afraid of being robbed of their money by Patrick Henry and his followers: I take this opportunity to declare, upon my honour, that I never said or thought any such thing, and that the person who charges me with uttering such expressions must have mistaken my words, or inferred from them a meaning never intended by

JOHN RANDOLPH

Virginia Gazette (Purdie) July 14, 1775

Williamsburg

I do hereby give notice, that I have conveyed my estate both real and personal to Peyton Randolph, John Blair, and James Cocke, esqrs. Who are authorized to sell the same. All persons who have any demands against me are desired to make them known to those Gentlemen at the meeting of merchants, in October next. I intend to leave the colony for a few months; and beg the favor of those who have any business to transact with me, as attorney general, to John Blair, esq; who has been so kind as to engage to act for me during my absence.

Virginia Gazette (Purdie) August 25, 1775

This morning the attorney general, with his lady and daughters, set out for Norfolk, where they are to take shipping for England.

Virginia Gazette, September 8, 1775

Becoming AMERICANS TODAY is a publication of the Department of Interpretive Training

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Gentry Marriages

that however is only a circumstance, & it is to be hoped Billie had the making of it . . .

[Source: Charles Stuart Papers, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation]

[William Bolling's Diary]

Thursday, December 1, 1785

. . . At eleven we set out in Miss McCall's chariot in four and drive to Blandfield. The road is very fine all the way, excepting at Mr. Waring's mill, where we were detained half an hour. We arrived at Mr. Beverley's at one o'clock, and were fortunate in finding the ceremony was not begun . . . as we understood it was to have been at twelve. About two the company became very much crowded. We were not shown into the drawing room and there had the pleasure of seeing Miss Beverly and Mr. Randolph joined together in holy matrimony. The ceremony was really affecting and awful. The sweet bride could not help shedding tears, which affected her mother and the whole company. She was most elegantly dressed in white satin, and the bridegroom in a lead color, lined with pink satin. After the ceremony of saluting, the ladies retired.

At four we joined them to a most sumptuous and elegant dinner that would have done honor to any nobleman's house in England. We were about a hundred in company. Those I recollect were Mrs. Beverly, the bride, Lucy Beverly, Miss Nancy Carter . . . etc.

After dinner we danced cotillions, minuets, Virginia and Scotch reels, country dances, jigs, etc., till ten o'clock. I had the pleasure of Miss McCall for a partner. She is a fine, sen-



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sible, accomplished young girl, and by far the best dancer in the room. Her elegant figure commands attention wherever she moves. The bride and bridegroom led off the different country dances. I make no doubt, from appearances, but they will be a very happy couple. After supper, which was elegant as the dinner—it's in vain to attempt describing it—we continued dancing till twelve. The bride, however, slipped away at eleven, and the happy bridegroom soon followed . . .

Friday, December 2, 1785

We rose to an elegant breakfast, at ten, consisting of tea, coffee, chocolate, cold ham, fowls, hashed mutton, and various other dishes. The bride came, beautifully blushing, into the room soon after in an elegant undress, and looked more amiable than ever. The fright of yesterday had taken away all of her color, which now returned with a double glow. The bridegroom looked completely happy . . . At four we assembled again, when . . .

Saturday, December 3, 1785

We kept it up in the same manner as yesterday . . . Being Saturday night, we gave over sooner than common and retired to bed a little after eleven.

Sunday, December 4

Most of the company went away this morning, soon after breakfast, in their phaeton, chariots, and coaches in four, with two or three footmen behind. They live in as high a style here, I believe, as any part of the world.

[Source: Quebec to Carolina in 1785-1786]

Marriage

and justice of the peace for James City County at various times during this period.

From 1786 to 1788 he was the governor of Virginia, during which time he also served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and a delegate to the Virginia Ratification Convention in 1788. From 1789 to 1794 he served as the first attorney general of the United States. During President Washington's second term, he served as his secretary of state.

In 1810, after the death of his beloved wife of thirty-three years, Edmund wrote a letter to his "dear" children expressing his profound grief and tremendous sense of loss. As he eulogizes the purity of their mother's mind and spirit, a powerful sense of sadness overwhelms him while regret and even guilt pervade his thoughts as he writes:

. . . My eyes are every moment beholding so many objects with which she was associated; I sometimes catch a sound which deludes me so much with the similitude to her voice; I carry about my breast and hold for a daily visit so many of her precious relics; and above all my present situation is so greatly contrasted by its vacancy, regrets and anguish, with the purest and unchequered bliss, so far as it depended upon her for many years of varying fortune, that I have vowed at her grave daily to maintain with her a mental intercourse, the only one now allowed to me, and daily to beseech the father of mercies and of blessings, to keep me steadfast in my duty to her memory, and that treasure of human happiness the holy gospels.

Edmund, in the letter burdened with regret and grief, makes "the solemn appeal to her, whether in thought and deed, I ever intentionally did her wrong." He praises her many virtues, including her practical charity, as she "inquired into the reality and extent of the misery, proportioned her contributions to her means, and the expectations, which other wretchedness might reasonably form—let the tears of the poor who now lament her speak the rest."

At the same time Edmund sees Elizabeth as being venerated by society, where her name was circulated with "homage and veneration" as "she did not utter a single word which malice could torture, or ignorance could misinterpret into offence." He continues, "My God! I cannot without an emotion of gratitude and enthusiasm remember that while her words of affection warmed and subdued me, their heat and force arose from the contemplation of chaste soul unfolded in her divine

countenance . . ." Edmund recognized that Elizabeth "explored and studied my temper, and anticipated the means of gratifying even my caprices. Innumerable were the instances in which I have returned home, dissatisfied with some of the scenes of the day abroad, and found an asylum in her readiness to partake of my difficulties and [make] them her own, or to divest them by despising them."

Edmund writes that "When we were united I was a deist, made so by my confidence in some, whom I revered and by the labours of two of my preceptors who 'tho of the Ministry [Henley?] poisoned me with books of infidelity." Edmund then recalls that Elizabeth's attendance at "public worship was unremitted" and "the questioning of sacred truths she never permitted to herself nor heard without abhorrence from others." Edmund concludes "that a woman in the present state of our society without religion is a monster." He goes on to say "While my opinions were unsettled Mr. Wythe and Mr. Jefferson came to my house on Sunday evening to play with me at chess. She [Betsy] did not appear in the room; and her repr [oof?, oach?] which from its mildness was like the manna of heaven has operated perpetually as an injunction from above." In the letter he regrets that they did not have family prayers with their children, but mentions that he and his wife prayed together during her last illness.

He notes also that as their financial situation became more challenged and "economy became indispensable, she was the adviser and the minister." Apparently, despite her urging him to sell some slaves to improve their economic circumstances, Edmund ". . . neglected her admonition to sell them, until they nearly ruined me."

Edmund concludes his letter with a prayer for his family:

. . . But thou O! Lord to whom her heart was open, thou knewest it to be spotless, except with inseparable human frailty, protect our family-affection; that neither misconduct, nor dissension may render this agonizing event a source of disunion or cause of our falling off from each other; but teach us to consider every breach of family harmony, as it would have been considered by her while living, an interruption to that heavenly peace of soul which she enjoyed.

[Source: Randolph, Edmund MS Letter to His Children, Alderman Library DEPOSIT MS #4263]

[Submitted by Anne Willis]

EVENING PROGRAMS

2008

In the winter 2008 issue of the *Colonial Williamsburg* journal, Foundation President Colin Campbell writes: "Evenings in Williamsburg offer less activity than guests want. Our current evening programs are popular and consistent with the rest of what we do, but they are in smaller venues and often sold out. We must develop more such activities that provide more resources for more guests." There are both short-term and long-term solutions to this challenge. Long-term solutions include identifying additional venues, programming those venues in a way that generates maximum capacity and creating or revising programs that will meet education and financial goals.

Short-term solutions include rewriting program descriptions to accurately reflect the dynamic nature of many of our programs, polishing current programs to meet the highest possible standards of quality and adding additional nights of successful programs. With these goals in mind, here are some new options and new programs for our guests in 2008:

WINTER

"A Concert at the Raleigh"—On Wednesday, November 13, 1771, a concert of vocal and instrumental music was held at the Raleigh Tavern featuring a variety of instruments including that new sensation, the pianoforte. Guests will be invited to join the Governor's Musick as they present their own Raleigh Concert of late 18th-century music on flute, viola da gamba, and of course, the pianoforte.

SUMMER

"The Great Theatrical Disaster of 1790"—For better or for worse (probably for worse), Mr. Murdock's renowned company of players that brought you "A Grand Medley of Entertainments" has spared no expense to raise the curtain on their own inimitable production of *The Old Maid*. Guests who have seen the Grand Medley will enjoy this behind the scenes look at an educational and entertaining spectacle and won't want to miss their attempts to entertain and educate you with this morally enlightening spectacle!

"African American Music"—This very successful program will continue throughout all seasons, but for the summer guests we will offer the program at earlier times to provide guests more options for their evenings. Summer programs will run at 6 and 7:30 p.m.

ALL SEASONS

"Crime and Punishment" and "In Defense of Our Liberty" will be featured more nights each week based on guest visitation and season.

"Cry Witch" will be featured three times a night on the Saturdays of major holiday weekends.

Wit's Last Stake will continue in the 18th-century Play Series all year after a very successful debut last holiday season.

The following programs will be identified as Revolutionary City evening programs to allow our guests the opportunity to continue the theme of their daytime experience into the night:

Monday: "Revolutionary Points of View"

Tuesday: "In Defense of Our Liberty"

Wednesday: "Revolutionary Points of View"

Thursday: "Revolutionary City: A Capitol Ball"

Friday: "Revolutionary City Concert Series"

This series will feature "The Cobham Consort," "From Ear to Ear," and "The Art of Fife and Drumming" in weekly rotation.

Saturday: "Revolutionary City: The Gunpowder Incident"

Sunday: "Capitol Concert"

Please keep on the lookout for these and other exciting changes throughout the year!

[Todd D. Norris]