

# Questions & Answers

VOL. II, No. 1

FEBRUARY 1981

Many of our visitors in February have a special interest in George Washington. Therefore, we decided, with the assistance of the Research Department, to devote this issue to Mr. Washington's presence in Colonial Williamsburg.

What qualities did Mr. Washington have to make him a practical man of affairs?

Thomas Jefferson in 1814 perceived Mr. Washington in this way:

"Perhaps the strongest feature in his character was prudence, never acting until every circumstance, every consideration, was maturely weighted; refraining if he saw a doubt, but, when once decided, going through with his purpose whatever obstacles opposed. His integrity was most pure, his justice the most inflexible I have ever known, no motives of interest or consanguinity, of friendship or hatred, being able to bias his decision. He was, indeed, in every sense of the words, a wise, a good, and a great man."

During which periods of Mr. Washington's life was he a frequent visitor to Williamsburg?

From his early manhood until he was nearly fifty years old, Washington made frequent visits to Williamsburg. His first visit was probably in 1749; his last known visit in 1781.

What military reasons brought him to Williamsburg?

In 1753 Mr. Washington came to Williamsburg to discuss French encroachments on the Ohio with Lieutenant-Governor Dinwiddie at the Palace. During the French and Indian War (1754-1758) Washington returned to Williamsburg on several missions. Washington was here again in September 1781 when the French and American forces assembled before the Siege of York.

Where did Mr. Washington receive his surveyor's commission?

In 1749 he received a commission as surveyor for Culpeper County from the President, Masters, and Professors of the College of William and Mary, since the College held the office of Surveyor General of Virginia. This was probably Washington's first visit to town.

When was Mr. Washington elected to The House of Burgesses and how long did he serve as a member?

Washington represented Frederick County from 1759 to 1765. After 1765 he was a burgess for Fairfax County, a position he held until 1775.

What personal reasons and business affairs made it necessary for him to come to Williamsburg?

Washington came to Williamsburg to receive his surveyor's commission, discuss military matters with governors, serve as a burgess, manage the

SUBJECT INDEX: GEORGE WASHINGTON IN COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG

estate of Daniel Parke Custis whose widow he married, attend meetings at the Williamsburg Masonic Lodge, and to assemble the French and American forces before the siege of York Town.

How long did it take him to travel from Mt. Vernon to Williamsburg?

The journey from Mount Vernon to Williamsburg took about four days on horseback or five days with a gig or coach.

Which private homes and public buildings did Mr. Washington frequent while he was here?

We know George Washington visited Bruton Church, the Capitol, the Governor's Palace, and the College of William and Mary. Business establishments he frequented include the James Anderson House, Ayscough's, Christiana Campbell's Tavern, the Charlton House, the King's Arms Tavern, Market Square Tavern, the Norton-Cole House, the Raleigh Tavern, the Second Theater, and Wetherburn's Tavern. He visited the homes of Robert Carter, Peyton Randolph, George Wythe, and John Randolph (whose house was called Tazewell Hall).

How did Mr. Washington's marriage to Martha Custis tie him closer to Williamsburg?

Through his marriage to Martha Dandridge Custis, Mr. Washington became administrator of her deceased husband's estate, which included Williamsburg property. George and Martha visited Martha's relative, Mrs. Elizabeth Bassett Dawson in Williamsburg. Daniel Parke Custis and Martha sometimes stayed at their house on Custis Square during their marriage, so Mrs. Washington undoubtedly had a circle of friends in town with which she kept in touch after Daniel's death and her marriage to Washington.

Where was his wife's property in Williamsburg?

Daniel Parke Custis owned three lots on the Duke of Gloucester Street opposite Bruton Church (colonial lots 353, 354, and 355) where Hartwell-Perry Ordinary and the Custis-Maupin House stand today, as well as Custis Square, across Nassau Street from the Public Hospital site.

What was Mr. Washington's relationship to his stepchildren?

Washington was generous and attentive to his stepchildren. He managed their shares of their father's estate and showed sincere concern for the education of "Jackie". Patsy suffered from a long illness during which Washington strove to make her as comfortable as possible. Both stepchildren died young.

What kind of an education did Mr. Washington receive as a boy?

As far as we know, Washington received only tutoring and never went to college. He probably studied arithmetic, geography, composition, simple geometry, and likely learned his surveyor's skills from professionals in his neighborhood.

How tall was Mr. Washington? Did he use false teeth? Did he wear a wig?

George Washington repeatedly referred to himself as exactly six feet tall. Yes, he had false teeth (made not of wood but of animal and human teeth and ivory). No, he did not wear a wig, but he sometimes powdered his own brown hair.

Did Mr. Washington take part in the social life of the town while he was here?

Yes, he gambled at cards and billiards, attended local horse races, balls, the theater, frequented several taverns and coffeehouses with other men, and took meals and spent evenings at private houses in town.

Was Mr. Washington in Williamsburg during the Revolution before the Battle of Yorktown?

In the fall of 1781 the French and American forces assembled in and around Williamsburg before the siege of York Town, and the Wythe House served as Washington's headquarters.

Did Mr. Washington return to Williamsburg after the Battle of Yorktown?

There is no documentary evidence that George Washington visited Williamsburg after September 28, 1781, when the combined French and American forces headed for York Town.

# Questions & Answers

VOL. 2, No. 2

APRIL 1981

The questions for this issue have been selected from the questions asked during our winter in-service training. In addition, the answers to questions our visitors most often ask are included in this issue. We have asked different CW Departments to answer the appropriate questions for us.

Harold Gill: The Research Department

Did the members of the House of Burgesses wear hats while in session?

We think that in imitation of the practice of the House of Commons the burgesses wore their hats while sitting in the Chamber of the House. At some point in the eighteenth century, members of the House of Commons began attending sessions without hats and only the Speaker continued to wear one. The burgesses probably changed their custom within a few years of the House of Commons' change.

Approximately how many taverns were licensed and operating in Williamsburg at a given time from 1750-1775?

From the manuscripts at Badminton House we know that there were nine taverns in Williamsburg in 1769. Between 1702 and 1780 that number varied from eight to fourteen.

What was the population of Williamsburg in the eighteenth century?

During the third quarter of the eighteenth century the population of Williamsburg was about 2,000.

Why were the kitchens separated from the houses?

In 1705 Robert Beverley wrote: "All Their (Virginians') Drudgeries of Cookery, Washing, Daries, etc. are perform'd in offices detach't from the Dwelling. Houses, which by this means are kept more cool and Sweet."

Why are the beds so short, or its corollary, how tall were people in the eighteenth century?

The beds are actually about six feet long, the same as modern standard sized beds; they appear shorter because of the high ceilings and tall bedsteads. Revolutionary soldiers averaged 5'7.7"---slightly more than a half inch shorter than Americans who served in the Korean War.

Are venetian blinds authentic?

Venetian blinds are authentic to the eighteenth century. They are listed in inventories of the Palace, and Williamsburg craftsmen advertised that they made and sold this kind of blind.

Why did the capital move to Richmond?

The seat of government of the Commonwealth of Virginia was moved to Richmond because that city is more centrally located and more easily defended than Williamsburg.

SUBJECT INDEX: QUESTIONS ASKED DURING WINTER IN-SERVICE TRAINING AND QUESTIONS OUR VISITORS MOST OFTEN ASK

When is it appropriate to use the terms British and English? British flag? Englishman? English colony? Are they interchangeable?

The terms are not synonymous. An englishman is a native of England, one of the counties of Great Britain. Every Englishman is a Britisher (or "Briton"), but not every Britisher is an Englishman. There was no British flag until after 1707 and the Act of Union; before that time there was an English flag.

Is there a male equivalent for the term "wench"?

Wench means a young girl or woman, often a slave or servant. Young men of the same position were called fellows.

Edward A. Chappell: Architecture

What was Colonial Williamsburg's policy in regard to the preservation of buildings at the time of the restoration? Could you give us the ten principles of the early Colonial Williamsburg's restoration code?

The list was published in Kocher & Dearstyne, Colonial Williamsburg: Its Buildings and Gardens (Williamsburg, 1949), pp. 48-49. The ten principles were:

1. All buildings or parts of buildings in which the colonial tradition persists should be retained irrespective of their actual date.
2. Where the classical tradition persists in buildings or parts of buildings, great discretion should be exercised before destroying them.
3. Within the "restoration area" all work which no longer represents colonial or classical tradition should be demolished or removed.
4. Old buildings in Williamsburg outside the "restoration area" wherever possible should be left and if possible preserved on their original sites and restored there rather than moved within the "area."
5. No surviving old work should be rebuilt for structural reasons if any reasonable additional trouble and expense would suffice to preserve it.
6. There should be held in the minds of the architects in the treatment of buildings the distinction between "Preservation" where the object is scrupulous retention of the surviving work by ordinary repair, and "Restoration" where the object is the recovery of the old form by new work; the largest practicable number of buildings should be preserved rather than restored.
7. Such preservation and restoration work requires a slower pace than ordinary modern construction work, and a superior result should be preferred to more rapid progress.
8. In restoration the use of old materials and details of the period and character, properly recorded, is commendable when they can be secured.
9. In the securing of old materials there should be no demolition or removal of buildings where there seems a reasonable prospect that they will persist intact on their original sites.
10. Where new materials must be used, they should be of a character approximating the old as closely as possible, but no attempt should be made to "antique" them by theatrical means.

Bland Blackford: Archives

When was the tunnel put under the town?

It was begun in 1940 and completed in 1942.

When did the Travis House cease to function as a colonial-style restaurant?

February 16, 1951.

When were the streets in the Historic Area closed to traffic?

In 1963 we closed Duke of Gloucester from April 1 through Labor Day. In 1965 the hours of closing were from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. beginning at Easter time and continuing through November 28. In 1969 Duke of Gloucester was closed on a twelve-month basis during the day with the hours of 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. year round. The hours of closure were extended to 9 p.m. during July and August.

In January 1973 we closed Blair, Colonial and Queen Streets at their accesses along East Francis Street. Closure time was the same as Duke of Gloucester. On July 1, 1973, the Merchants Square portion of Duke of Gloucester was closed to traffic as an experiment. The Council approved permanent closing of Duke of Gloucester on February 14, 1974.

Williamsburg Area Chamber of Commerce

What is the breakdown of Williamsburg's population today? Are the students at the College of William and Mary included in this total figure?

The population of James City County, the Bruton District of York County, and Williamsburg is 38,000 including William and Mary students. The population of the city of Williamsburg is 11,600 and this figure includes approximately 6,500 William and Mary students.

Personnel

How many people work for Colonial Williamsburg today?

Employment varies during the year. During the busy summer months there are about 4,000 employees, in the fall and spring about 3,600 and in the winter 2,900.

# Questions & Answers

VOL. 2, No. 3

JUNE 1981

The answers to the questions in this issue of Questions and Answers have been contributed by Harold Gill of Colonial Williamsburg's Research Department. A number of the questions are concerned with Virginia's relationship to England and the laws that regulated the colony and the lives of colonial Virginians. In addition, there are a few miscellaneous questions that should be of interest.

Please send all your questions to Jane Strauss.

Was South Carolina the wealthiest colony in the eighteenth century?

No. Virginia was considered the wealthiest continental colony, and Jamaica was the wealthiest in the Western Hemisphere.

What goods were shipped from Virginia and the colonies to China in trade for tea and other goods?

There was no direct trade between China and Virginia. Tea and other goods from "exotic" countries were obtained by the colonists from England in exchange for tobacco.

Why were the Townshend Duties passed in 1768 when he died in 1767?

On May 13, 1767, Charles Townshend proposed a port tax in the American colonies on tea, glass, paper, and other goods. The proposal took on the name of its originator. The legislation was not passed by Parliament until 1768, by which time its namesake had died a premature death at age 42 "of a neglected fever."

What was the College of William and Mary's connection with the Church of England after the Revolution?

There was no official connection.

How, when, and by whom were new counties in Virginia formed?

The House of Burgesses created counties when there were enough people in an area to justify that action. The residents of a locality often petitioned for the division of a county into two or more new counties.

After incorporation of Williamsburg, what was the role of the mayor and alderman in land granting?

The mayor and aldermen had no part in granting Williamsburg lots; that was the function of the feofees, as directed in the 1699 act establishing the City of Williamsburg. (The term "feoffee" is synonymous with "trustee".)

Were eighteenth-century inventories required at anytime other than at death? If so, were they used for taxation at other times? Were taxes paid on household goods only at death?

Estate inventories were required only to settle decedents' estates. Inventories were never used for tax purposes, because personal property

SUBJECT INDEX: VIRGINIA'S RELATIONSHIP TO ENGLAND, LAWS THAT REGULATED THE COLONY AND THE LIVES OF COLONIAL VIRGINIANS, ETC.

(the only kind of items included in inventories) was not taxed--except wheeled carriages during the French and Indian War. After the Revolution, certain items of personal property (clocks and mahogany furniture, for example) were taxed, but not from inventories.

Were there slave blocks in town?

No, as far as we know there was no slave block in Williamsburg. The steps of the Raleigh Tavern were often the scene of slave auctions.

Did they have commercial fisheries in eighteenth-century Virginia?

Though there is evidence that many individuals derived some of their income from fishing, there is no evidence of a commercial fishery in colonial Virginia.

Approximately how much cloth would an acre of flax produce?

We can find no information on the amount of cloth produced from an acre of flax.

Why did sugar come in a cone shape?

Sugar was molded into cones because that shape is the best for crystallizing the syrup. The small end of the earthen mold was open like a funnel and stopped with wet cloth when the hot syrup was poured in. After the substance had mostly solidified, the stopper was removed to allow the last of the juices to drip out. A layer of wet white clay was then spread over the broad end of the cone. As the water (by its weight) descended through the sugar, it mixed with the syrup still in the loaf and washed it away. After about a week's drying in an oven, the sugar loaf was ready for shipment.

What is the real origin of the expression "mind your p's and q's"?

The origin of the expression is uncertain. The Oxford English Dictionary includes the obvious explanation: a child's difficulty learning to distinguish between the tailed letters p and q. (By the way, 1779 is the earliest reference to the phrase in the Oxford English Dictionary.)

Are there any extant golden horseshoes that were given as souvenirs by Governor Spotswood to members of the expedition to the Blue Ridge?

There is no extant original today.



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# Questions & Answers

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VOL. 2, No. 4

AUGUST 1981

This issue of Questions and Answers is in response to a number of questions about the Historic Area that have been answered for us by the Architecture Department.

In the future we are planning an issue on the eighteenth-century use of energy and another on eighteenth-century crime and punishment. If you ever have any questions that you would like answered, please send them to Jane Strauss.

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How was the original land acquired for the development of Williamsburg after 1699? Who was authorized to buy the land and where were funds obtained for the purchasing of it?

When the Virginia Assembly passed the law which made Williamsburg the capital in 1699, the land at Middle Plantation, with the exception of the College of William and Mary, was privately owned by John Page, Henry Tyler, and others. The colonial government purchased 475 acres and entrusted 230 to a board of twelve "Feofees or Trustees." The trustees subdivided and sold town lots. The proceeds were used to reimburse the government. The balance of the land was used for the Capitol and the town ports. For further information see John Reps, Tidewater Towns, pp. 143-146.

Is it possible to say how long it took to construct a home like the Geddy or Wythe House?

In only a few cases does documentation survive making it possible to say how long it took to build some eighteenth-century Virginia houses. It might take two years to build a residence as substantial as George Wythe's or only six to eight months to erect a small frame dwelling. Geddy's house and store, of medium size, might have taken a year or longer to build.

Can you recommend references for plans of colonial homes?

Plans of colonial homes can be found in Marcus Whiffen's The Eighteenth Century Houses of Williamsburg. Although out of print at present, most libraries have a copy and it will be reprinted in about a year. Measured drawings and plans of surviving eighteenth-century dwellings recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey can be purchased from the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation does not make their unpublished plans available to the public. A statement of this policy can be obtained from the Architect's Office.

Why are the pine floors nailed through the face and not through the edge?

It was easier, faster, and, consequently, less expensive to nail them in this manner. More care is required to insert the nail at a diagonal through the edge without splitting the board.

What was the cost of the different size of nails and how did that relate to the cost of the house?

Nails were priced by the hundred and ranged from 3d (pence) to 20d per hundred. The price related to their size and the size related to the member they secured. A 6d nail was 2-3/8" long, a 10d was 2-7/8" and a 20d was 3-1/4" long. Short, thin nails, or brads, were used on moldings and longer nails were used for floorboards, stairs, weatherboards, or fences. In 1767, for example, William Allason, a Fredericksburg merchant, used 1,997 20d nails when he fenced a lot.

What kind of wood is in the handrail of the Wythe House staircase?

The Wythe House stair handrail is walnut.

Were window screens used in the eighteenth century?

Window screens may have been used to a limited degree in the eighteenth century. John Tayloe ordered "wire windows" for Mount Airy in 1765 and James Brice purchased four dozen for his Annapolis townhouse in 1767. Both of these dwellings were built by men of considerable means, and screens probably would have been rare in Williamsburg.

What was the average "life" of an eighteenth-century Virginia kitchen?

There is absolutely no evidence that most kitchens lasted for only about five years. We now know that many outbuildings were less substantially built than are those that survive or have been reconstructed in Williamsburg. However, it is suspected that a kitchen that lasted only five years would have been an unfortunate deviation from the norm. Current scholarship regarding detached kitchens in the Chesapeake centers on their role in the segregation of different social groups rather than their capacity to prevent the spread of fires.

Erratum: In the April 1981 issue of Questions & Answers there were two typographical errors. The sentence on page 2 should read: "An Englishman is a native of England, one of the countries of Great Britain.

# Questions & Answers

VOL. 2, No. 5

OCTOBER 1981

Questions and Answers is designed to help interpreters make their interpretations more interesting, accurate, and relevant to our visitors' experience. It will focus on concepts and issues and provide interesting factual material drawn from our ever-expanding historical and cultural knowledge of the eighteenth century. It is your publication, and its usefulness and vitality depend on your input. Two future issues, for example, grow out of some of your most probing questions--"Energy Sources and Energy Conservation in Eighteenth-Century Virginia" and "Eighteenth-Century Crime and Punishment."

In order to keep Questions and Answers working for you, please send your questions to Jane Strauss, and she will forward them to the appropriate person for an answer. Harold Gill, in the Research Department, answers most of the questions concerned with historical matters. Other questions are regularly forwarded to Ivor Noel-Hume, Archaeology, Ed Chappell, Architecture, and Graham Hood, Collections. Questions of general interpretive interest are used in Questions and Answers, but those of a narrower focus are answered directly to the sender. The editorial board consists of Peter A. G. Brown, Dennis O'Toole, and Bill Tramosch.

This particular issue is devoted to a number of interesting and useful miscellaneous questions. Unless otherwise noted, these have been answered by our Research Department.

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## What disease caused Governor Botetourt's final illness and death?

Lord Botetourt, according to his physicians, died of a "bilious fever and St. Anthony's fire." Dr. John de Sequeyra wrote: "Our good Governor Lord Botetourt had the same [remittent] Fever, but his Blood being in a bad condition, it turned of the Malignant kind, having large Spots of a purple Color upon his Breast & part of his Back, became delirious, & had very strong convulsions for some time before he died."

St. Anthony's Fire (erysipelas) is an acute disease associated with intense local inflammation of the skin and subcutaneous tissue. It is caused by a streptococcus bacterium carried in the bloodstream.

## Was the unicorn ever the symbol of England?

According to my research in J.H.&R.V. Pinches, The Royal Heraldry of England, 1974, the unicorn has been associated with Scottish royalty since 1426. Its first recorded use by English royalty was as a supporter when the arms of England and Scotland were united in the early 1600's.

The lion, on the other hand, has been ascribed to English kings as far back as the Norman Conquest, though its actual use can be traced only to Richard I's Great Seals (circa 1190 and 1200). A lion was also used by the Scottish kings on their royal arms from the time of Alexander II,

1214-1249. However, the lion cannot be said to be the symbol of Britain until the union of the English and Scottish thrones in 1603, when the lion became a supporter of the royal arms opposite the unicorn, as well as retaining its position in the arms themselves. (John R. Barden)

What is the derivation of the term "commonwealth"?

Originally two words--common (shared alike by all) and wealth, also weal (well-being or welfare), which together meant something on the order of "public welfare." Common weal or common wealth were used side by side with general weal, public weal, and weal-public. By the sixteenth century, commonwealth became an ordinary English term meaning the whole body of people constituting a nation or state, the body politic in which the whole people have a voice or an interest. In the seventeenth century it came to mean a state in which the supreme power is vested in the people--a republic or democratic state. Virginia, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Kentucky are the only commonwealth states today.

What was the difference between an alderman and a councilman?

In colonial Virginia the justices of the peace and the county courts exercised almost complete authority in local affairs. The justices were legislators and executives as well as judges for the county. When Williamsburg was chartered, all authority was vested in the mayor, recorder, aldermen, and common councilmen, but unlike the county justices, their powers were divided. All judicial authority and certain executive powers relating to the maintenance of law and order were granted to the mayor, recorder, and alderman alone. The legislative and major executive powers were given to the entire group of officials meeting as a common council for the purpose of governing the town.

According to Williamsburg's charter, the first mayor, recorder, and alderman were named in the charter. They were to elect from the inhabitants of the City, being free men, twelve persons to serve as common councilmen. Each year the mayor was chosen by the aldermen from among themselves. The recorder, aldermen, and common councilmen served during their good behavior. When a vacancy occurred, aldermen were chosen by aldermen from among the councilmen; councilmen were chosen from the inhabitants and free holders of the City by the mayor, recorder, and aldermen.

What was the value of a slave in comparison to eighteenth-century real estate values? Did this change during the eighteenth century?

Between 1765 and 1775, rural land sold for approximately £2 sterling per acre in York County and the average adult male slave was appraised at £54. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the average price was 10 shillings an acre and an adult male slave was valued at an average of £30.

What is the difference between the terms inn, ordinary, and tavern?

None. The terms were used interchangeably in colonial Virginia. Though coffeehouses differed from taverns in England and the northern colonies, in colonial Virginia establishments referred to as coffeehouses provided the same services as taverns and, like taverns, were licensed.

Did the county courts regulate tavern prices to protect the tavern owner or patron?

The county courts established fair prices for certain drinks, meals, and services offered by tavernkeepers to protect the patrons from being over-charged.

Who could have been served alcoholic beverages in a tavern in colonial Virginia?

Restrictions on serving alcoholic beverages applied to three groups--sailors, servants and slaves, and college students.

Sailors who paid in cash could drink, eat, and lodge at taverns but needed the consent of the master of their ship to receive credit at taverns.

Legislation concerning servants and slaves--which forbade anyone from buying from, selling to, or receiving any money or commodity from a servant or slave without consent from the master or owner--applied to tavernkeepers, merchants, and other persons.

Students at the College of William and Mary were not allowed to frequent taverns in or near Williamsburg except at the request of adult relatives or friends. However, by the 1760's, groups of students who belonged to several social-intellectual societies were allowed to meet at the Raleigh and other local taverns but individual students continued to be restricted from frequenting taverns.

Could you supply us with a random sampling of bed lengths in the exhibition buildings? (Collections)

<u>Location</u>	<u>Length by Width</u>
<u>Randolph</u>	
oak bedroom	- 6 feet 5-3/4 inches by 4 feet 1/4 inch
corner bedroom	- 6 feet 6 inches by 5 feet
<u>Wythe</u>	
S. E. bedroom	- 6 feet 4-1/2 inches by 6 feet 4-1/2 inches
S. W. bedroom	- 6 feet 6 inches by 5 feet 1 inch
<u>Brush</u>	
N. W. bedroom	- 6 feet 5-1/8 inches by 3 feet 11-1/8 inches
N. E. bedroom	- 6 feet 3-3/4 inches by 4 feet 9-1/4 inches

Sampling of bed lengths in the exhibition buildings - continued

<u>Location</u>		<u>Length by Width</u>
<u>Geddy</u>		
S. W. bedroom	-	6 feet 2-3/4 inches by 4 feet 4 inches
bedroom #2	-	6 feet 6-1/2 inches by 4 feet 4-1/2 inches
<u>Palace</u>		
His Lordship's bedchamber	-	6 feet 3 inches by 4 feet 5 inches

Did people sleep in a sitting position during the eighteenth century?

Many eighteenth-century inventories include a bolster and two pillows among the furniture for each bed. A bolster was a soft, roundish cushion as long as the bed was wide. The bolster stayed on the bed, and a pillow was used on top of it. From this information we infer, cautiously, that many people slept with their heads elevated.

What happened to George Wythe's furniture?

After George Wythe's death, his whole estate (except for a very few small bequests) went to his nephew George Wythe Sweeny, the surviving heir named in Wythe's will.

There is at Monticello a mahogany dining table supposedly given to Thomas Jefferson by George Wythe, but there is no documentary evidence substantiating that tradition.

Were there locksmiths in Williamsburg?

There is no record of a locksmith in Williamsburg, but there are records that indicate that blacksmiths repaired locks.

Were they eating popcorn in the eighteenth century?

The first reference to popcorn in the Oxford English Dictionary is 1848.

Note: The Antiques Forum will be held in Williamsburg from January 24-29, 1982. The influence of royal governors on colonial tastes in the decorative arts is this year's theme. All active and retired Colonial Williamsburg employees who wish to attend can register for \$125.00. If you should have further questions or wish to register, call Trudy Moyles at 2371.

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# Questions & Answers

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VOL. 2, No. 6

DECEMBER 1981

In this issue of Questions and Answers we are responding to some of the questions most frequently asked by our visitors. When the Christmas season arrives, please refer to your December 1980 issue of Questions and Answers. Remember to send Jane Strauss any questions you would like to have answered in future issues.

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Linda Baumgarten from the Department of Collections has furnished the answers to the following questions about textiles.

Did men and women button their clothes on the opposite side during the colonial period?

During the eighteenth century, most women's clothes were not fastened with buttons. Some clothes were laced, some pinned together, and some wrapped and held with an apron, except for garments such as riding habits. Print and painting sources from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries show that men nearly always buttoned their garments with left lapping over right (as they do today). All of the men's costumes in the C.W.F. collections button this way. Buttoned women's garments, on the other hand, do not seem to have been standardized during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; print sources show garments buttoning from either direction. I do not know when or why standardization occurred.

How did people wash and clean their clothes in the eighteenth century?

Many methods were used to clean clothing, depending on the fiber and construction involved. Washable fabrics such as linens were washed in tubs with soap and hot water. Occasionally, other substances were added or used alone for special cleaning powders or when soap was not available; these included lye water and putrid urine. Silks and wools were either spot cleaned with fuller's earth or other dry solvents like bran, or they were sent to professionals like the wool fullers or silk dyers who were trained in scouring, cleaning and dyeing textiles. (Upholsterers sometimes advertised that they cleaned bedroom furniture.)

What evidence is there of clotheslines in colonial Virginia?

Clotheslines do show up in print sources; they were apparently used indoors as well as outdoors.

What dyeing method was used on the blue resist fabric bed furniture in the Wythe House?

Indigo resist. The areas to remain white were "resisted" or reserved by using a clay or wax material which was applied with blocks or stencils. Indigo becomes darker with repeated dippings, so any areas to be light blue could be blocked out after the desired shade was reached and before further dippings in the vat.

Mr. Sumpter Priddy, Teaching Curator, Department of Collections, has answered the following question on colonial mirrors.

Why are the looking glasses (mirrors) often in two different pieces?

I have addressed this question many times in lectures and there is no absolute answer that I can document. In Baroque looking glasses (i.e., those in the so-called "William and Mary" and the "Queen Anne" styles), the top of the upper mirror often has arches and curves cut to conform to the shape of the molded frame. As a rule, the glass is also bevelled around these edges. The grinding of the bevels around the curves and edges would be much easier to achieve on a smaller piece of glass than on a larger one. Additionally, during grinding, a smaller and thus cheaper piece would be destroyed. This theory is supported by the fact that most glasses of plain, rectilinear form are made of a single piece--and this includes most Rococo and almost all neo-classic examples.

The old story about a tax on large pieces of glass appears to be completely without foundation. Harold Gill has verified that no such law existed in Virginia; and in England every attempt was made to encourage manufacturing in the eighteenth century, not to hamper it. Additionally, if one compares very large, two-piece looking glasses with smaller examples of the same form, the larger will often have a single unit containing more surface area than that of the combined surfaces of the smaller one.

I think the most logical answer is simply the advantage gained by maneuvering a smaller piece of glass during the manufacturing process.

This question on eighteenth-century prints has been answered by Joan Dolmetsch in the Department of Collections.

Why do prints show women with bulging eyes (for example, the 1767 prints along the stairway of the Peyton Randolph House)? Is it because eyes and hands are difficult to do?

I believe too much emphasis is placed on the difficulty of executing such features. If a close observation is made of the prints, it is discovered that very few have such distorted features, including the ones in the set at the Peyton Randolph House. More often the reason for such faults lies at the hand of the engraver who does not take the time to execute such features as finely as might be desired. Towards the end of the eighteenth century one finds that more care was taken in such work, but in the mid-period represented in most of the prints in the Colonial Williamsburg collection, engraving was frequently done by men and women too little trained in their art.

Erratum: In the October 1981 issue of Questions and Answers, we perhaps confused you in our answer regarding George Wythe's furniture. This further information from John Hemphill will clarify the answer.

What happened to George Wythe's furniture?

Since George Wythe (who believed himself to have been poisoned by his grandnephew George Wythe Sweeney) lingered long enough to disinherit his namesake Sweeney in favor of his brothers and sisters, most of the estate must have gone to Wythe's sister's other grandchildren, not to George Wythe Sweeney. For the tragic end of Virginia's Cato and most distinguished early lawyer, see the two articles by Julian P. Byrd, "The Murder of George Wythe," and W. Edwin Hemphill, "Examinations of George Wythe Sweeney for Forgery and Murder: A Documentary Essay," in William & Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, XII (1955, pp. 513-542 and 543-574, especially p. 559, n. 47.

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We have enjoyed receiving your questions this year, and we look forward to hearing from you in the new year of 1982.

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!