

interpreter

The Christmas Box Tradition

by David DeSimone

Dave is assistant manager of Religious Studies and Programs in the Education Division.

"Soon after my Cloths and Linen were sent in with a message for a Christmas Box; as they call it; I sent the poor Slave a Bit, & my thanks."

These words were written on Christmas Day in 1773 by Philip Vickers Fithian, a young tutor living at Nomini Hall, the Westmoreland County, Virginia, estate of Robert Carter. A Virginia Christmas introduced Fithian to some new and unusual customs for ushering in the celebration of the holy season. As Fithian penned the splendid events of that Christmas in his journal, the tutor may have recalled the subdued celebrations of the holiday in his native New Jersey. Christmas in Cohansie, Fithian's hometown, was celebrated with the strict reverence required by Calvinistic tradition. But what about the custom of giving Christmas boxes to servants? Fithian may not have been familiar with what had become, by the eighteenth century, an ancient Christmas tradition in England. (The custom of giving a Christmas box took on a totally different meaning in eighteenth-century Virginia, however.)

From early medieval times in England, the feast of St. Stephen (December 26) held a special meaning for the poor at Christmas. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, died for the new faith soon after Christ himself, perhaps even in the same year. His life and martyrdom were documented by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. It is generally accepted that Stephen preached and distributed alms to the poor (an important fact to remember) before his death. Yet the popular imagination of medieval England stretched out the simple facts of St. Stephen's life, and, as a result, many legends became associated with him. One implies that Stephen worked in the kitchens of King Herod, as found in a verse of an English carol written in 1400:

*Stephen out of the kitchen came, with Boar's head in hand;
He saw a star was fair and bright over Bethlehem's stand
He cast down the Boar's head, and went into the hall:
I forsake thee, King Herod, and thy workes all;
There is a Child of Bethlehem born is better than us all.*

The verse is revealing because it suggests Stephen was a servant or a steward of the king (another important fact to remember). It also fosters the tradition of the Christmas boar's head feast.

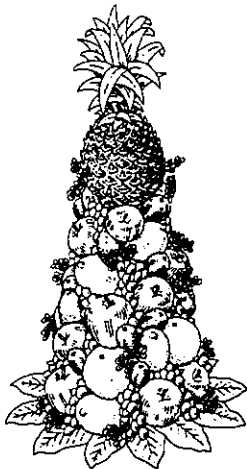
It is little wonder that the feast of the saint soon took on a special reverence in England. December 26, or Boxing Day, as it came to be known, was probably named after the old Christmas tradition of plac-

ing alms boxes around the church during the Christmas season. The boxes were opened on Christmas Day and their contents were distributed to the poor of the parish. This practice was called "the dole of the Christmas Box," or "the Box money." Sometimes parishioners collected alms on Christmas Day and gave it to the poor on St. Stephen's Day. This custom was often practiced in Anglican parishes in eighteenth-century America. John Rowe, a successful Boston merchant, collected for the poor of his parish in 1764. He wrote in his diary:

Christmas Day. Went to Church. Mr. Walter [the clerk] read prayers & [the Rev.] Mr. Hooper preached from 1st Chap. of the Gospel of St John & 17th Verse. I was much pleased with the Discourse. A great number of people at Church. Mr. Hooper sent the Box to me to collect for the poor.

One of the most endearing Boxing Day traditions was the long-established custom of apprentices and servants asking their master and their master's customers for small amounts of money at Christmastime. The servants and apprentices collected the money in small earthenware boxes. When their boxes were at their fullest, the recipients broke them on Boxing Day, generally the day after Christmas. George Wither's colorful seventeenth-century poem, "A Christmas Carol," contains a verse that describes the practice:

The wenches with their wassail bowls
About the streets are singing;
The boys are come to catch the owls,
The wild mare in is bringing.
Our kitchen-boy hath broke his box.
And to the dealing of the ox
Our honest neighbours come by flocks,
And here they will be merry.



Earthenware boxes were commonly used in the ancient Roman world by servants who received gifts from their masters at festivals. In 1714, an English surveyor, Hubert Aubrey, found an antique earthenware pot in North Wiltshire. To his amazement, the pot contained several Roman coins, or denarii. Aubrey wrote that the pot "resembles in appearance an apprentice's earthen Christmas Box." The apprentice's Christmas box tradition may have found its origins in the Roman servants' pots.

By the early eighteenth century, a "Christmas Box" came to mean a gift given to a servant, a slave, an apprentice, or a tradesman. Further, bestowing and receiving Christmas boxes now extended throughout the forty-day Christmas season, no longer confined only to St. Stephen's Day. In 1719, Henri de Valbourg Misson, a French traveler, published "Memoirs and Observations in His Travels over England." Misson commented on the English custom of giving a Christmas box:

From Christmas Day till after Twelfth Day is a time of Christian rejoicing; a mixture of devotion and pleasure. They give treats, and make it their whole business to drive away melancholy. Whereas little presents from one another are made on the first day of the year in France, they begin here at Christmas; and they are not so much presents from friend to friend, or from equal to equal (which is less practis'd in England now than formerly) as from superior to inferior. In the taverns the landlord gives part of what is eaten and drunk in his house, that and the two next days; for instance, they reckon you for the wine, and tell you there is nothing to pay for bread, nor for your slice of Westphalia [ham].

The slaves who waited on Fithian and expected a "Christmas Box" did not collect their gift and place it in an earthenware box. Nor did they confine their request to Christmas Day or St. Stephen's Day. Fithian continued to give Christmas boxes to Robert Carter's slaves as late as January 14, 1774.

One of the best Virginia sources on this subject is in Lord Botetourt's kitchen accounts from 1768 to 1770. The servants of well-known Williamsburg residents are mentioned in the account book. The record and distribution of these gifts were most likely the work of butler William Marshman.

- December 25, 1768—Black Servants—£2. 17s.
 December 30, 1768—Christmas Box to woodman—5s.
 —Groomsman—5s.
 —Mrs. Hay's servant—2s. 6d.
 —Benjamin Moss—poor man—£1
 January 5, 1769—The Carters men for Xmas Boxes—5s.
 January 9, 1769—To sexton [Bruton Parish]—£1
 December 23, 1769—to William Rind's Boy—Christmas Box—5s.
 December 28, 1769—Xmas Boxes to Negro servants—£4.12s.6d.
 —Hay's Black waiting man—2s. 6d.
 —Mrs. Vobe's [Jane] carter—2s. 6d.
 December 30, 1769—Christmas Box—Purdie & Dixon's Servants - 10s.
 January 1, 1770—Christmas to Church Sexton—£1
 January 3, 1770—Christmas Box to President's Servants—£3
 January 4, 1770—Christmas Box—Carter's Servants—£3
 —Kemp's carter for Xmas box—2s. 6d.
 January 5, 1770—Christmas Box Treasurer's Servant—£3
 January 9, 1770—Christmas Box to the tailor's boys—5s.
 January 13, 1770—Christmas Box for Wythe's servants—£.3
 —Christmas Box for Horrock's Servants—£. 3
 —Christmas Box for Everard's Servants—£. 3
 January 15, 1770—Christmas Box for Grace's Servant—5s.
 January 16, 1770—Additional Christmas Box to Sexton—£. 1
 January 23, 1770—Christmas Box to Miller's Servant—2s. 6d.
 January 26, 1770—Christmas Box to Merchants Carter's Servants—£. 3
 —to Mrs. Dawson's servants—£. 3
 February 9, 1770—Christmas Box to Speaker's servants—£. 3
 February 14, 1770—Christmas Box to Col. Burwell's Servants—£. 3
 February 28, 1770—Christmas Box to woodman—2s. 6d.

Traditionally, masters gave servants Christmas boxes in eighteenth-century Virginia. There is some evidence that family members were beginning to exchange Christmas boxes. Sources from the third quarter of the eighteenth century seem to illustrate this very clearly. A February 25, 1768, advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon) listed children's books sold at the Williamsburg Post Office. Among them was a Christmas Box containing a miniature version of the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer*. The advertisement also included a children's Easter gift, Twelfth-Day gift, Valentine's gift, and Whitsuntide gift. Thus, a parent or relative could purchase a gift for a child to commemorate any of the major religious feast days. On December 25, 1769, Robert Wormley Carter indicated in his account book that he had given as a Christmas Box "12s. 6d. to my five children and 10s. to Mrs. Carter." While a student at the College of William and Mary

in January 1773, St. George Tucker received Christmas wishes and a surprise from his brother in Bermuda, Henry Tucker, Jr., who wrote:

I hope you have spent the Christmas cheerfully & merrily—May you live to see many Returns of this Season of common Festivity & may each succeeding one be happier than the last!

P.S. I had almost forgot to tell you that my Fanny begs your Acceptance of a pair of silk Stockings for a Christmas Box.

These examples seem to indicate that bestowing Christmas gifts was no longer confined to servants and apprentices, although large-scale exchanges of presents among family members were years away. For most eighteenth-century Virginians the giving of Christmas boxes continued to follow the ancient tradition—a gift from a superior to an inferior. Recalling that Christmas was a time of year so eagerly awaited by slaves and appren-

tices, Williamsburg's St. George Tucker brought to life the hopes and dreams of the printer's devil (apprentice) in his poem of 1784, "Christmas Verses for a Printer's Devil:"

*Now the season for mirth and good eating advances,
Plays, oysters, and sheldrakes, balls, mince pies and dances;
Fat pullets, fat turkeys, and fat geese to feed on,
Fat mutton and beef; more by half than you've need on;
Fat pigs and fat hogs, fat cooks and fat venison,
Fat alderman ready the haunch to lay hands on,
Fat wives and fat daughters, fat husbands and sons,
Fat doctors and parsons, fat lawyers and duns:
What a dancing and fiddling, and gobbling and grunting,
As if Nimrod himself had just come in from hunting!*

*These all are your comforts—while mine are so small,
I must truly be said to have nothing at all.
I'm a Devil you know, and can't live without fire,
From your doors I can see it, but I dare not come nigher,
Now, if you refuse me some wood, or some coal,
I must e'en go and warm, in old Beelzebub's hole;
Next, tho' I'm a devil, I drink and I eat,
Therefore stand in need of some rum, wine and meat;
Some clothes too I want—for I'm blacker than soot,
And a hat, and some shoes, for my horns and my foot;
To supply all these wants, pray good people be civil
And give a few pence to a poor printer's devil.
May all your Christmas boxes be filled
with happiness, joy, and long life. ■*

Courtship and Marriage

by Elizabeth Maurer

Liz is a specialist in the Department of School and Group Services.

You know what to expect from me, as you have seen my character of a good wife. Suppose I tell you now, what I, in my turn, expect, and how you may best please me and make me happy.—Thus then I begin—Let me ever have the sweet consciousness of knowing myself the best beloved of your heart—I do not always require a lover's attention—that wou'd be impossible, but let it never appear by your conduct that I am indifferent to you.

Margaret Davenport Coulter
to John Coulter, May 10, 1795

In November 1776, Benjamin and Annabelle Powell of Williamsburg married their elder daughter, Hannah, to William Drew of Isle of Wight County. The wedding was the culmination of years of planning, preparation, and effort. Benjamin and Annabelle raised their daughter to be a good housewife and respected member of society; to fulfill her destiny, Hannah did her best to find the most eligible young man to marry. This process was called courting. It was Hannah Powell's first step into adulthood.

Courting allowed young men and women to meet and socialize largely unchaperoned, at a variety of entertainments. Although William Drew and Hannah Powell were of different social stations (he of the gentry class and she of the upper-middling sort), they still met often at church, balls, parties, public entertainments, and neighbors' homes.

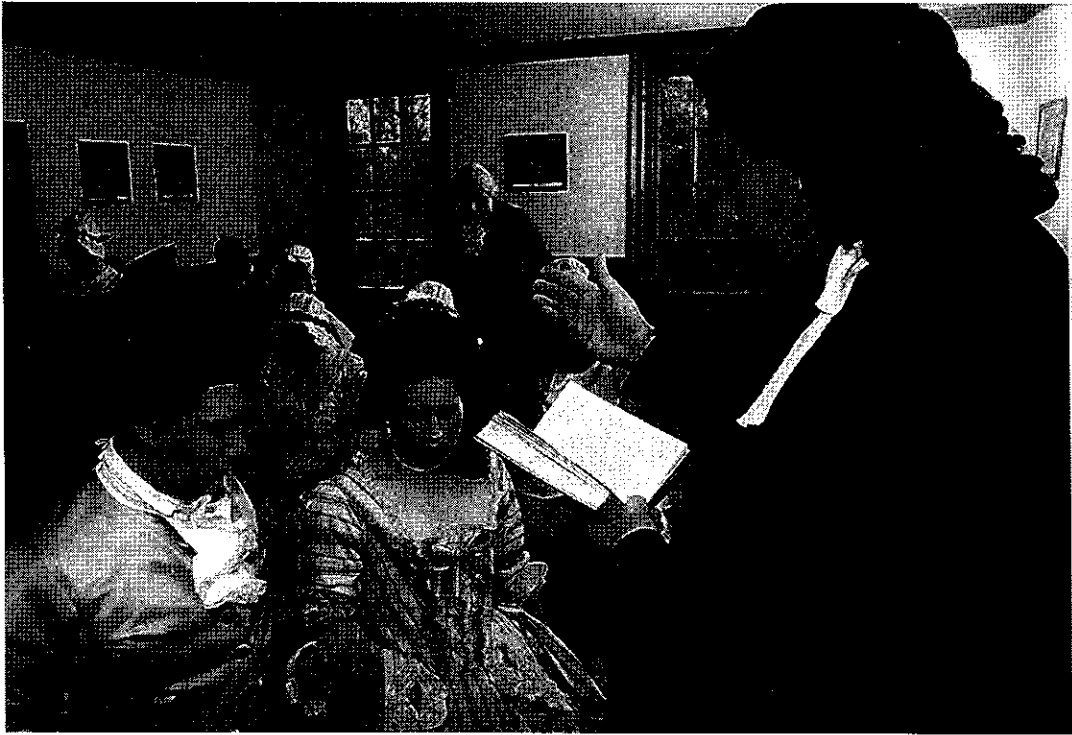
They were part of a small group of well-off, unmarried, young people living in the small city of Williamsburg. When men and women did meet, they obviously enjoyed each other's company.

After an agreeable ride we at length reached the house about two o'clock, just about the time when Miss J's beauty was in its meridian splendor. We found her doing the honors of the table with inef-fable sweetness and grace. . . . After dinner we assemble in the hall where the sweet Judah favored us with a good deal of her incomparable music.

Peter S. Randolph to [?] Carr,
July 28, 1787

Young white men began courting in their late teens. The average man in Virginia married in his mid-twenties. William Drew was in his twenties and already established as the clerk of the court of Berkeley County when he began courting Hannah Powell. In doing so, he was similar to most men of his time who waited until they had completed their education and attained some financial security before proposing marriage. Marriage was the next logical step in life as they sought marriage partners who could support their economic efforts while running their households and raising their children.

Young white women approached courtship and marriage differently. After completing their domestic training, they could enjoy late adolescence as a special phase of life. Since they were not yet responsible for running a household or raising children, women had more freedom during these years than they would ever have again. Courting gave women power; it was their decision whether to accept or reject a suitor. Some wielded it ruthlessly.



Reenactment of the Powell wedding (Rebecca Skelton as Hannah Powell; Brett McMichael as William Drew; and Dave DeSimone as the minister).

You know I have never with all my faults betrayed one symptom of vanity, but now if you should discover a little spice of it can you Wonder-just at this moment are at my entire disposal two of the Very Smartest Beaux this country can boast of—what think you of G & B both at my feet at one. there is much speculation going on as to the preference I shall give & tho I do not intend to practice one Coquettish air as you are pleased to call my little innocent gaieties yet for my own amusement do I intend to leave these speculating geniuss to their own conjectures for some time at least till I have made up my mind as to the time—for you must know I know I mean make one Surprize do for all by being married off hand—believe me it is impossible for me to think too long on the subject lest I should in truth be whimsical.

Eliza Ambler to Mildred Smith,
Febry 1785

While women might begin courting as early as fifteen or sixteen years of age, most—like Hannah Powell—deferred marriage until their early twenties.

It has ever been my wish to keep my Daugh-

ters single 'till they were old enough to form a proper judgment of Mankind; well knowing that a Woman's happiness depends entirely on the Husband she is united to; it is a step that requires more deliberation than girls generally take, or even Mothers seem to think necessary; the risk tho always great, is doubled when they marry very young; it is impossible for them to know each others disposition; for at sixteen and nineteen we think everybody perfect that we take a fancy to. . .

Mrs. Anne Randolph to
St. George Tucker, 1788

Others married quickly for fear that waiting too long might eliminate the availability or choice of husbands. The choice of a husband was very important since, once made, only death could undo a marriage. Marriage for women was a complete life change. It meant leaving childhood behind, taking on adult responsibilities, and forming a new family.

With the rise of the affectionate family, arranged marriages became a thing of the past. While parents expected to be consulted and offered advice or criticism freely, men and women chose their own marriage part-

ners, and parents usually accepted their children's choices. Parents could control their children's ability to marry before the age of twenty-one. Those who disliked their children's choices might withhold permission or, if the children were of age, leave them out of a will. This did not happen often. Young people rarely courted far from their social class, and respected parental opinions most of the time.

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 Virture and unexceptionable behaviour 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 to do so; but in no instance Whatever to persuade. Therefore her approbation must Proceed from his own conduct and her good liking.

Landon Carter,
Sunday, 10 Sept. 1775

The choice of a marriage partner was very important, however, as marriage was a combination of families and should strengthen the family's social position.

Couples made many preparations for their wedding day. Many exchanged gifts of affection. Women's dowries consisted of linens and household goods they had accumulated and any money or property their fathers could afford to give to the couple. The groom's father also was expected to contribute something. Settling the question of where a couple would live and what they would take with them affected others, especially if slaves were part of the dowry.

Like the courtship, the wedding preparations followed rules that were designed to involve the community, both for the public record and communal memory. After they became betrothed, the couple met with the minister to discuss the ceremony and their religious obligations to one another. Three weeks before the wedding, the banns (the declaration of the intention to marry) were posted at the churches in both home parishes. The man secured a certificate from his minister to show that the banns had been announced. A marriage license could be obtained from the county clerk instead of posting banns, but this was rarely done.

The time and place for a wedding was largely determined by convenience. November, December, and January were the most popular months in which to marry. (Hannah Powell married William Drew in November 1776.) Farm obligations were less pressing than during the summer. A couple issued verbal invitations to family and friends, who gathered in the morning at the minister's home or in the bride's parlor; few weddings occurred in churches. Although the Bishop of London ordered that weddings be held in churches, traveling to them could be difficult for rural families and parishioners. Hannah Powell may have been married at Bruton Parish due to its proximity to her home. Whatever the location or time, however, the ceremony was the same. The ceremony was a ritualized affirmation of family. Everyone had an obligation to support and nurture the new family unit.

The ceremony began with a procession. The minister led the group down the aisle of the church or family parlor, followed by the bride and groom in their finest clothes, the parents, and the bridesmaids and bridesmen. Favors, like gloves, fans, or hat bands, were sometimes given to the attendants.

Soon after we got there saw Miss Lucy Robertson married to Mr J W Semple & Doct Williamson to Miss P Temple, I was honour'd with a favour and wait'd on the bride.

Fanny Baylor Hill, March 1797

The guests witnessed the father give his daughter away, the groom pledge himself with a ring, the couple exchange vows, and the bride promise to obey her husband in all things. The ceremony bound the couple forever in the eyes of the community as well as in the eyes of God.

After the ceremony, the wedding party celebrated at the home of the bride's parents. (In middling and lower middling circles, the male guests would often race each other to the house where the winner received a bottle of alcohol.) The family might decorate a table with white paper chains and lay out white foods for a collation. It included two white cakes. The guests consumed the groom's cake, and left the bride's cake untouched for the couple to save (in a tin of alcohol) to eat on each wedding anniversary. The party could last a few hours or several days.



The wedding festivities often began with eating, drinking, and toasting, continued with games and dancing, and ended with the couple's exit from the bride's house.

"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, sensible, accomplished young girl, and by far the best dancer in the room. . . . The bride and bridegroom led off the different country dances. . . After supper, which was as elegant as the dinner. . . we continued dancing till twelve."

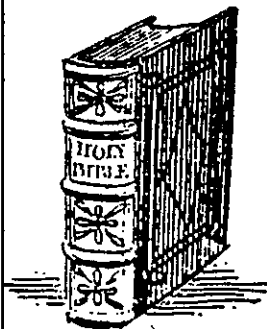


Robert Hunter, Jr.,
December 1, 1785

Anyone who slipped away from the dancing to rest could be hunted down and forced to return. Various wedding customs might have taken place during the party. Young men might try to steal the bride's slipper from her foot. If one was successful, he could ransom it back to its owner for the forfeit of a kiss. When the couple retired, their friends followed them to bed to throw the stocking. Each woman threw a balled-up stocking over her shoulder at the bride. Each man did the same to the groom. Whoever hit the target would be the next to marry. When the bride and groom left her parents' house, they traveled in a carriage perhaps with a boot tied to the back, a symbol of a long and happy marriage. They began their married life visiting relatives and friends before settling down in their new home.

Courtship and marriage were among the ritualized customs that white eighteenth-century Virginians practiced and adapted from their European roots. Courtship taught young people about social interaction; the parties and visits ensured that they met many eligible partners. Some young women even lived with distant relatives in order to meet a larger number of eligible young men. Weddings were joyously celebrated as occasions that affirmed the young couple's affection and the binding of family ties, but they could also be a time of painful separation as young women left their parents' homes forever. Courtship and marriage, life passages common to most white Virginians, were important milestones in the formation of community, conscienceness, and culture in eighteenth-century Virginia. ■

Freeing Religion Story Line



Nineteen ninety-eight and "Freeing Religion" are almost here! Continue using and getting to know the religion resource book (distributed in October and November) in preparation for training days 2 and 3 in January and February 1998. Religion played an important role in the process of Becoming Americans in general and has close ties to the stories of revolution and family.

John Turner and the
Religion Story Line Team

COOK'S CORNER

by Laura Arnold

Laura is a historical interpreter in the Education Division.



The marriage of Hannah Powell and William Drew was an example of the emergence of a new social order: a middling-sort daughter marrying "up" into a gentry family. We can only assume that Benjamin Powell's pride in his future son-in-law allowed his wife, Annabelle, to spare no expense in providing the very best food and drink for the wedding feast. A collation of "white foods" (iced cakes and sugared confections or receipts based on whipped heavy cream or beaten egg whites) required quantities of expensive ingredients such as refined sugar, spices, sherry, brandy, almonds, dried citrus fruits, and almond paste. When Colonial Williamsburg re-creates the Powell wedding for Christmas holiday visitors, wedding foods are prepared based on descriptions of similar eighteenth-century weddings.

Annabelle Powell was fortunate to have a brick oven in which to bake two groom's cakes in Turk's head molds to flank the bride's cake as the centerpieces on a table covered with a fine white linen cloth. The tiered bride's cake was baked in two-inch deep "hoop" pans of graduated sizes. Like the groom's cake, it was iced and decorated with marzipan fruits or



flowers. Sugar cakes (cookies to the twentieth-century cook) for pyramids, or cake trees, and macaroons were other products of Annabelle's oven. These treats could be made in advance of the wedding day.

Creamware pyramids at the back corners of the table held glasses of syllabub, glazed and sugared dried fruits, and the macaroons and other sweetmeats. The creamware pyramids were balanced at the front corners of the table with sugar cake pyramids. Festoons of paper chains joined the cakes in the center to create a table that was a visual and a culinary delight.

In the eighteenth century, weddings during the Christmas season were popular because families had already come together to celebrate the religious feast day. The foods served at the Powell wedding could be adapted for the holiday using receipts from eighteenth-century cookbooks.

Information for this article is based on research by Bob Brantley, Dennis Cotner, and Jim Gay of the staff of Historic Foodways.

Sugar Cakes

Take a pound and a half of fine flour, one pound of cold butter, half a pound of sugar, work all these well together into a paste, then roll it with the palms of your hands into round balls, and cut them with a thin knife into thin cakes, sprinkle a little flour on a sheet of paper (on a cookie sheet) and put them on; prick them with a fork and bake them at 350 degrees. Cakes will vary in size, use largest cakes on bottom of pyramid and graduate size of cakes ending with smallest cakes at the top.

*The Country Housewife,
Richard Bradley, 1727*

Macaroons

Take a pound of almonds, let them be scalded, blanched, and thrown into cold water, then dry them in a cloth, and pound them in a mortar, moisten them with orange-flower water or white of egg, lest they turn to oil; afterwards take an equal quantity of fine powder sugar, with three or four whites of eggs beat all well together, and shape them on wafer paper, with a spoon round; bake them in a gentle oven on tin plates. Preheat oven to 325 degrees, bake for ten minutes, reduce heat to 150 degrees. (This method dries the macaroons and keeps them as white as possible.)

*The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy,
Hannah Glasse, 1745*

Bride Cake

Take one pound of flour well dried, one pound of fresh butter, one-half pound of granulated sugar, a pinch of mace and nutmeg, eight eggs, wash one pound of currants, pick them well, and dry them before the fire, blanch one-quarter pound of sweet almonds, and cut them lengthways very thin, one quarter pound of citron, one-quarter pound of candied orange, the same of candied lemon, one-fourth cup of brandy; first work the butter with your hand to a cream, then beat in your sugar a quarter of an hour, beat the whites of your eggs to a very strong froth, mix them with your sugar and butter, beat your yolks half an hour at least, and mix them with your cake, then put in your flour, mace and nutmeg, keep beating it well till your oven is ready, put in your brandy, and beat your currants and almonds lightly in, rub a bundt pan well

with butter, put in your cake, and lay your sweet meats in three lays, with cake betwixt every lay. Bake at 350 degrees for at least an hour.

The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy,
Hannah Glasse, 1745



To Ice a Great Cake

Take one pound of double refined sugar, beat and sift it very fine, and likewise beat and sift a little starch and mix with it; then beat three whites of eggs to a froth; then mix and beat all these together one hour, and put it on your cake when it is baked, set it in the oven a quarter of an hour.

The Compleat Housewife,
E. Smith, 1753

Black Marriages

[January 26, 1774] At Supper from the conversation I learned that the slaves in this Colony never are married, their Lords thinking them improper Subjects for so valuable an Institution!

The Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion, 1773-1774

The mulatto fellow William, who has been with me all the War is attached (married he says) to one of his own colour a free woman, who, during the War was also of my family. . . I had conceived that the connection between them had ceased, but I am mistaken; they are both applying to me to get her here, and tho' I never wished to see her more yet I cannot refuse his request. . . as he has lived with me so long & followed my fortunes through the War with fidelity.

The Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series Vol. 2 (July 1784-1785)

Slave owner George Washington's remark shows that he did not fully recognize the marriage of one of his slaves nor did he view such marriages as permanent. His slave William, however, considered himself to be married to a free black woman.

RUN away the first of January 1775 a likely mulatto negro wench named Kate, 18 years of age, well made, 5 feet 9 or 10 inches

high, and talks very smooth. She was hired to mr. Philip Moody of Williamsburg in 1774, and last year to mr. John Thruston, from whence she ran off. She has got a husband in Williamsburg, and probably may pass for a free person as she is well acquainted in that city, and I have repeatedly heard of her being there. She formerly belonged to the estate of Mr. John Cary, deceased, of York county. I will give 20s. to any person that will secure her in jail and give me intelligence thereof, or 40s. brought to me in King and Queen, at Mr. John Thruston's.

Edward Cary, jun.

Virginia Gazette (Purdie) 29 November 1776

In colonial Virginia slave marriages were not recognized by the government. In spite of this legal fact African American couples did form family units and considered themselves married in the eyes of their community. Reluctantly, even white masters began to recognize slave couples as "married." But black family life was still fragile. At the center was the powerlessness of the enslaved to control their own destinies. Slave husbands could not protect their wives and children; the white patriarch made the ultimate family choices for his slaves. Slave children were kept with their mothers only during their dependent years. As black family life developed over time, the larger community of the extended family gained greater importance. ■



From "The man of Business," London, 1774. Colonial Williamsburg collection.

Fashions of Motherhood

by Linda Baumgarten

Linda is curator of Textiles and Costumes in the Department of Collections and Museums. This article first appeared in the winter 1987-1988 issue of the Colonial Williamsburg Journal. Our thanks to Wayne Barrett, editor of the Journal, for permission to reprint it.

Women's lives in the eighteenth century usually centered on their families; there was little likelihood of a career outside the home. Women went into childbirth uncertain not only of their own survival but of their child's, as well. It was not uncommon for a woman to give birth seven or eight times during her life, with only five or six children surviving to adulthood. Despite high mortality rates, women expected to have large families. Esther Edwards Burr, mother of Aaron Burr, was daunted by her future prospects after the birth of her second child. She wrote in 1756, "When I had but one Child my hands were tied, but now I am tied hand and foot. (How I shall get along when I have got $\frac{1}{2}$ dzn. or 10 Children I can't devise.)"

Modern medical advances in industrialized societies today have led to smaller family size. More children escape once-fatal childhood diseases. Unborn children are no longer "little strangers." Nevertheless, we should not

overemphasize differences from the past, for some human conditions have not changed. Parents of all eras have loved their children, nurtured them, given them playthings, dressed them in the prevailing fashion, and hoped for their happy future. All parents would subscribe to the sentiment on another eighteenth-century baby gift that reads, "Bright Be Thy Path Sweet Babel!"

Women in the eighteenth century kept up an active schedule of work, social activities, and even exercise during their pregnancies. Englishman Dr. William Buchan wrote a "how to" book he titled *Advice to Mothers* in which he suggested that the best exercises—in moderation—were those to which a woman was already accustomed. He recommended "Slow, short walks in the country, or gentle motion in an open carriage," particularly in the later months, and advised against dancing and other "great bodily exertions." Dr. Buchan observed that laboring countrywomen appeared to suffer no ill effects by continuing their work throughout pregnancy, only requiring a little "abatement" when their size made them "unwieldy."

Esther Edwards Burr was very active during her pregnancy. She went to public worship services, dined at the governor's, visited friends, hosted numerous guests in her home, and rode out in a chaise with her husband, nearly being injured when it overturned. On February 5, 1756, she attended a gathering of female friends who were planning yet another social outing, "a wedding Vissit." Esther was unable to attend because Aaron was born the very next day.

New Englander Elizabeth Porter Phelps rode into town and "drank tea at Brother Warners" one day before she went into labor with her first child. Frances Baylor Hill, a young Virginia woman, kept a journal in 1797 in which she described the activities of a pregnant friend, Sally Row. Sally continued to attend dinner parties less than a month before her child was born. Perhaps Sally was aware of warnings against vigorous activity, because at one outing, she quietly sat quilting with Frances while other friends were dancing.

Women had to cope with the difficulty of dressing for pregnancy in a time when the fashionable figure and undergarments called for tight lacing that shaped a woman's body into a smooth cone from the waist up to the breasts. In 1735, Sarah, Duchess of Marl-

borough, wrote her granddaughter reminiscing about her pregnancies and the clothing she resorted to in an attempt at comfort: "I remember when I was within three months of my reckoning, I could never endure any bodice [corset] at all; but wore a warm waistcoat wrapped about me like a man's and tied my petticoats on top of it. And from that time never went abroad but with a long black scarf to hide me I was so prodigious big." (It is instructive to note that the duchess did not avoid going out, but covered herself with a scarf when she did. The "warm waistcoat" described by the duchess was probably an unboned sleeveless garment that fastened at the front. In spite of the availability of looser waistcoats, some women continued to wear heavy stays or corsets during their pregnancies. The French encyclopedia by Denis Diderot illustrates a pair of stays for wear during pregnancy; they have additional lacings at the side waist to allow expansion as a woman's body grew. As uncomfortable as stays sound to us, they did provide support for the back and helped maintain some semblance of the fashionable female figure by keeping a flat line at the bodice front, pushing the bosom up into a high, rounded shape. Although some criticized stays prior to the 1790s, the most vocal outbursts against them occurred after stays had been abandoned for fashionable reasons at the end of the eighteenth century. In an 1807 edition of *Advice to Mothers*, Dr. Buchan praised the new uncorseted fashions and described the former practice of wearing stays during pregnancy:

Among many improvements in the modern fashions of female dress, equally favourable to health, to graceful ease and elegance, the discontinuance of stays is entitled to peculiar approbation. It is, indeed, impossible to think of the old straight waistcoat of whalebone, and of tightlacing, without astonishment and some degree of horror . . . I need not point out the aggravated mischief of such a pressure on the breasts and womb in a state of pregnancy.

Unfortunately, fashion later in the nineteenth century returned to corseting and constricted the waistline as much as or more than it had in the previous century.

Few maternity gowns survive in museum collections. Colonial Williamsburg has only one. Women altered their usual clothing in

an era when most could not afford large wardrobes or clothing designed specifically for pregnancy. Women's styles were surprisingly adaptable to changes in size. Many gowns fastened at the front with hidden lacings that could be let out to accommodate the new figure. If the triangular stomacher no longer fit the front of the enlarged gown, the front could be filled in with a large neck handkerchief worn much like a shawl. Petticoats usually fastened at either side with ties, and thus could continue to be worn during pregnancy by loosening the ties. Women merely tied their petticoats up over their abdomens, hiking up the hems at the front as a result. Print sources suggest that no attempt was made to adjust hemlines to make the skirts hang evenly in front.

Another garment easily adapted to pregnancy was a loose, unfitted gown with a shortened skirt that was worn with a petticoat as a two-piece outfit. Various called a "bedgown" or "short gown," this style was not limited to maternity wear, but was the everyday dress of many working women as a comfortable alternative to fashionable but tight gowns. Because they were cut full and loose, pregnant women could wear bedgowns without altering them. The high-waisted, uncorseted styles of the turn of the century were even more convenient. They were usually fitted to the upper body with drawstrings that could be loosened as necessary. The absence of a natural waistline made camouflage and fit easier than it had been in the past.

One of the most characteristic garments worn by pregnant women was a long apron tied over the clothing under the breasts and covering the abdomen. As early as 1669, diarist Samuel Pepys associated an apron with pregnancy: "I waited upon the King and Queen . . . she being in her white pinner and apron, like a woman with child."

Wearing aprons to camouflage pregnancy continued in the eighteenth century; even children seemed to associate the wearing of aprons with pregnancy. Philip Vickers Fithian, tutor to the Robert Carter children in Virginia, described the antics of two of his little charges: "Fanny and Harriot by stuffing rags & other Lumber under their Gowns just below their Apron-Strings, were prodigiously charmed at their resemblanc [sic] to Pregnant Women!"

Throughout much of the eighteenth century, most women kept to the practice of

“lying in” for about a month following delivery to regain their strength. By the end of the century, this long period was shortened to two weeks or ten days.

Although bottles were not unknown, most eighteenth-century women breast-fed their children for at least a year. In fact, breast-feeding became increasingly fashionable during the century. Queen Caroline, wife of George II of England, breast-fed all of her children. For those unable or unwilling to breast-feed, wet nurses could be hired to take over the task. Esther Burr, who had been breast-feeding her five and one-half-month-old son, hired a temporary wetnurse when she had to travel with her husband. Referring to Aaron’s nurse, she wrote in the diary, “have got the best Woman in Town for that purpose to late and suckle it.” The phrase “to late” probably derives from the French *allaiter*, meaning to nurse or suckle.

Most women undoubtedly wore their usual clothing while nursing. If a woman wore stays, she may have chosen those with front rather than back lacings and less heavy boning. A rare pair of elaborate brocaded silk stays in the Colonial Williamsburg collection has a flap opening over each breast, in all likelihood as a convenience during nursing; the stays lace at both the front and back.

Weaning occurred when a child was between one and two years of age. Esther Burr weaned Aaron when he was about fourteen months old. She complained, “I am Weaning Aaron and he makes a great Noise about it.” Sometimes a child was weaned abruptly by sending it away from home for several weeks. In January 1797, Frances Baylor Hill recorded in her journal that she “Took Hetty Row that night to wean[,] she cri’d and scuffled a little at first but slept tolerable well that night.” Nine days later, Frances was still being kept awake by little Hetty, whose par-



Child’s linen frock with stays, ca. 1760 Rhode Island. Colonial Williamsburg collection.

ents finally came and got her fifteen days later.

A child’s first solid food consisted of pap, a soft mixture of bread or meal moistened with milk or water, and sometimes laced with beer. Papboats were designed with spouts from which the pap could be fed directly into the child’s mouth.

Children’s clothing underwent significant changes during the eighteenth century. As the century began, some parents still wrapped their newborns in swaddling bands for several months after birth. Swaddling consisted of wrapping the infant’s body tightly with narrow bands of fabric called “rollers.” The baby’s head was immobilized with a separate stay band. A critic of the practice noted that the result was to render the child “as stiff as a log of wood.”

The writings of John Locke argued against physical constraints for children, particularly tight swaddling. Locke’s ideas were expanded and popularized by the publication of *Emile* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1762. Mothers were encouraged to breast-feed their children rather than hiring wet nurses, dress them in comfortable clothing, and allow them to exercise in the fresh air. Others espoused these reforms; Dr. Buchan argued against “the cruel tortures of swathing, of rollers, and of bandages” for children.

In spite of a movement away from tight binding, parents did not readily abandon the practice of putting children into stays or corsets that were thought to encourage good posture, provide back support, and shape a fine figure. Stays were laced about the bodies of some infants almost from birth. Although boys shed their stays when they were put into breeches or trousers, girls continued to wear them into adulthood. In 1771, Williamsburg milliner Catherine Rathell advertised “thin Bone and Packthread Stays for Children of three Months old & upwards.” Evidence from the period suggests that some poor children may have escaped the rigors of wearing stays. No stays are listed among the extant orders for clothing for Virginia slave children. Stays gradually went out of fashion late in the eighteenth century.

Both little boys and girls wore skirts, a practice that continued well into the twentieth century. Toddlers’ frocks were often made with leading strings, long ribbons or fabric sewn to the shoulders of the bodice, that were used to restrain and guide a child learn-

ing to walk. As a consequence, they became a symbol of youth. Leading strings began to lose favor by the late eighteenth century. Dr. Buchan wrote in 1774, "When children begin to walk, the safest and best method of leading them about is by the hands. The common way, of swinging them in leading-strings fixed to their backs, has many bad consequences," among which he noted obstructing the breathing, flattening the breast, and compressing the bowels, all caused when children inevitably strained against the restrictive stays.

The new philosophy about child rearing gradually had an effect on the clothing of older children as well. Around the mid-eighteenth century, the concept of dressing children to resemble "little adults" began to give way to clothing designed specifically for their needs. Instead of wearing the tight dresses styled similar to those of grown women, little girls and boys who were not yet breeched were dressed in more comfortable white cotton or linen frocks that had drawstrings tied at the back, low necklines, and often were decorated with wide, colorful sashes around the waist. Virginia children were not exempt from the new rage for white frocks. Fithian described his pupils in their white frocks with amusement. On a particularly cold day in July 1774, Fithian recorded that "the Girls too, in their white Frocks, huddle close together for the benefit of warming each other, & look like a Flock of Lambs in the Spring—I wish they were half as innocent."

The shape of boys' suits changed too. Instead of constricting outfits with tight bands at the knees and stiff high-necked shirts, they wore long trousers and shirts with open collars. These new children's styles had a wide influence on fashion. Older children increasingly wore them so that, by century's end, adult women dressed in white muslin gowns and grown men adopted trousers instead of knee breeches.

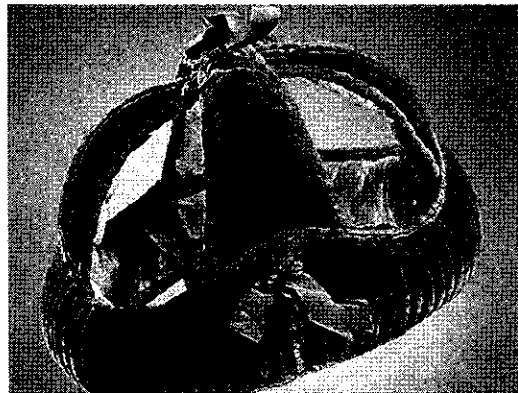
Throughout the period, the basic item of an infant's apparel was a napkin or clout, period terms for a diaper. "Diaper" was derived from the linen fabric often used to make it. Yard goods for babies' diapers were available ready-made in colonial stores; a 1751 advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette* announced that imported "Cloating Diaper" was available. Poorer families used recycled linen and rags. A 1789 book in which clothing necessary for the poor is listed suggests

that a newborn be provided with twenty-four square napkins; the fabric recommended was "figured diaper." Diapers were often folded in a triangle, with the points brought forward over the baby's abdomen and secured with a straight pin. (Pins stuck into pincushions given as gifts were intended to be used, so only rare decorative cushions survived with all their pins intact.) More enlightened mothers sewed ties to their children's diapers to avoid using dangerous straight pins. Such was the recommendation of the 1838 *Workwoman's Guide*, which illustrates a style of diaper tied on with tapes drawn through a loop.

To answer the need for leak-proof rubber pants, mothers used wool flannel squares, called "pilchers," over the linen napkins to absorb excess moisture, especially at night. Wool was chosen because it could absorb large amounts of moisture without soaking through or feeling soggy.

Infants were dressed in multiple layers of clothing. Over an undershirt and stays, a baby wore a pleated flannel petticoat and a slip topped by an outer frock or dress.

Head coverings were considered an indispensable item of children's apparel. Some children wore several caps at one time, with a plain white linen one being the undermost layer. A specialized type of cap for toddlers learning to walk was the "pudding" or padded helmet designed to protect the infant's head in case of a fall. Abigail Adams wrote to a friend in 1766, asking to borrow the quilted "contrivance" for her little girl "Nabby," just beginning to walk. She explained, "Nabby Bruses her forehead sadly[,] she is fat as a porpouse and falls heavey." The affectionate term "puddin' head" was derived from the pudding caps many toddlers wore. Williams-



Pudding cap, England ca. 1770-1785. Colonial Williamsburg collection.

burg milliners advertised "Quilted Puddings for Children."

Milliners and other shopkeepers sold a variety of toys that proliferated on the market by the late eighteenth century. Playing with dolls helped little girls learn their future role in life and taught them the intricacies of fashionable dress. Wealthy young girls sometimes owned very fashionably clothed dolls, purchased and dressed with great attention to detail by local milliners. These milliner's dolls were intended primarily as children's playthings, not "fashion dolls." Peggy Livingston, a five and one-half-year-old girl living in New York, received an elaborate doll

from her Uncle Tommy, which he bought and had specially outfitted in London. Peggy's doll had a hair wig, pair of stays, handmade shift, petticoat, and handkerchief, and a dress designed and made by the milliner.

Colonial Williamsburg will mount a new exhibition of children's clothing in December 1997. On loan from the collection of world-renowned illustrator Tasha Tudor, the clothing dates from the nineteenth century. The garments will be displayed with portraits from the collection at the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center. The paintings show children wearing similar dresses or suits. ■

Child-Bed Linen

by Phyllis Putnam



Phyllis is an interpreter and supervisor at the James Geddy House. She has done extensive research into the making of child-bed linens, and has created sets of these using eighteenth-century patterns.

In a July 9, 1772 advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette* Margaret Hunter, a Williamsburg, Virginia, milliner, listed among other items for sale, "Suits of Childbed Linen". The same phrase appears several times in other advertisements. Just what were child-bed linens? Who made them? How do we know about them?

Obviously, the advertisement tells us that baby linens could be purchased. They were also made in the home. Planning for infant clothing in a well-to-do household, middling or poor family was considered essential for a young woman preparing for marriage. For years sets of these linens were made, loaned out, or handed down from one generation to the next.

Primary sources such as instructional books, diaries, and letters are important for providing information about the type of items that a set of child-bed linens should include. One source suggested that no more than three pieces are necessary for a child's first habit: a shirt, a robe, and a cap. It advocated that the robe and cap should be quilted material of a proper thickness to be sufficiently warm. Also for the health and comfort of the infant, it recommended using flat buttons instead of tie strings and knots, and sleeves that were

easy to put on.

A book with the overwhelming title, *Instructions for cutting out apparel for the Poor; Principally Intended for the Assistance of the Patronesses of Sunday Schools, And Other Charitable Institutions, But Useful in all Families Containing Patterns, Directions, and Calculations, whereby the most Inexperienced may readily buy the Materials, cut out and value each Article of Clothing of every size, without the least Difficulty, and with the greatest Exactness: With a Preface, Containing a Plan for Assisting the Parents of Poor Children belonging to Sunday Schools, to Clothe them; and other useful observations*, was published in London in 1789. It listed "necessities for the lying-in women" and suggested how arrangements could be made for a "set" of baby clothes to be loaned out for a month to a poor family. The last chapter of the book, "Child-Bed Linen for the Use of the Poor," gives us an idea of what a customer might be purchasing at a millinery shop. It included the following items:

- 2 Frocks • 24 Squares of Double Diaper
- 1 Pair Sheets • 2 Bedgowns
- 2 Robe Blankets • 2 Pillow Cases
- 6 Shirts • 1½ yard of white Baize Flannel
- 6 Caps • 2 Shifts • 2 Shirts
- 6 Under Caps

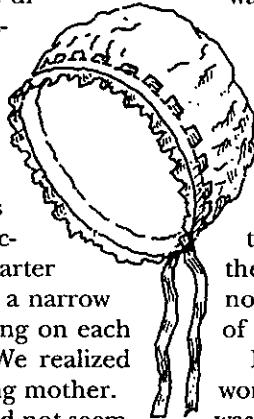
Mary East Thresher suggested a list of child-bed linen items in her seventeenth-century almanac. Following is what she considered necessary in a well-to-do household in 1698:

- My small child bed linning
- 1 pr of pure fine holland little pillow (boor) ME
- 6 fine shirts
- 6 fine callico dimitty wascoats

- 6 fine bellibands
- 6 fine neck cloths lacet
- 6 pure fine night caps lacet
- 6 pure fine forehead cloth doublelacet
- 6 pure fine bigons
- 8 fine long stays
- 4 pr of pure fine holland glove
- 2 pr of pure holland gloves lace
- 4 holland beds: M E in white
- 6 head sutes of fine stript cambrick lacet
- 6 double lacet forehead cloth to ye sutes
- 2 sticht caps (quilted)
- 2 pure fine holland bed, short, belliband, whole bigon and a long stay markt
- 2 pure fine holland half shift lacet att neck and hands

In order to learn more about these objects for interpretive purposes, it was necessary to try to reproduce them. First the terms used in the instructions had to be researched and defined before any clothing was made. The process was frustrating. For example, only after working through the directions was it possible to discover that the two shifts and two skirts listed in the book are for the mother rather than the infant. As the shift was being constructed, it became obvious it was shorter than is usual for shifts. Now the instructions, "the bosom opens a quarter deep, and a hem to draw with a narrow tape before, as far as the turning on each side," began to make sense. We realized the garment was for the nursing mother.

The instructions surely would not seem as confusing to an eighteenth-century girl who had properly learned her housewifery skills. She would be familiar with terms like bellibands, neckcloths, forehead cloths, bigons, and even what a fine holland little pillow might look like. For a twentieth-century seamstress, however, deciphering the instructions and patterns proved quite a challenge. When using patterns, you need to decide which are the top, back, and front of the pattern piece. There are no markings on the plate and the design is not one that would be familiar to us today. A bigger problem with some instructions is deciding how to fold the fabric. Cutting and assembling instructions are combined as one operation. The book assumes the seamstress has prior knowledge and experience of basic plain sewing and garment construction experience.



But remember the title page states that . . . *the most Inexperienced may readily buy the Materials, cut out and value each Article of Clothing every size, without the least Difficulty. . .!*

After examing many sources, it appears children were not being swaddled. The practice of swaddling an infant has been a custom from biblical times to the present in various parts of the world. Swaddling an infant was done to protect fragile limbs. Dr. William Buchan in his book, *Domestic Medicine*, stated that he was aware that although deformities might exist at birth, nine-tenths of them were the result of improper clothing.

Stays for infants were still used throughout much of the eighteenth century and were available in Williamsburg stores. However, not all people approved their use. Buchan suggests (as does the book of *Instructions for cutting out apparel for the Poor. . .*) that the only purpose of clothing an infant was to keep it warm, and that the clothing should be soft and loose. He believed that too many layers of clothing as well as tight clothing caused convulsions. He does not suggest specific items of clothing, but says, "That a child have no more clothes than are necessary to keep it warm, and that they be quite easy for its body. Stays are the very bane of infants. A volume would not suffice to point out all the bad effects of this ridiculous piece of dress."

In a letter written in 1668 by an Englishwoman, Elizabeth Hatton, infant clothing was mentioned. She wrote to her son Christopher concerning his wife: "If my guess be true tell her if she will make me a grandmother I have a little shirt and head cloths and biggin (cap) which I have kept by me that was the first that my mother wore and I wore, and I am very sure that you wore and have ever since laid it up carefully for your wife."

No matter what class a young woman belonged to, an important part of marriage preparation was the acquiring of child-bed linens, whether they were purchased at a millinery shop or made at home. The study of child-bed linen proved an interesting challenge for this twentieth-century interpreter. The reproduction of them, in the eighteenth-century manner, was the key to more fully understanding their importance to the colonial family. ■



THE EDITORIAL PLANNING BOARD of *the interpreter* is happy to announce a new feature of this journal. Beginning with this issue, we will include information and announcements from the Education support departments on the Bruton Heights School Education Center campus. In addition to the existing column on "Exhibitions," we will produce a "Research Tips" column for interpreters, and feature "New Accessions" of note from the Department of Collections and Special Collections in the library.

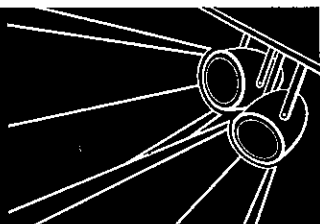
We hope to bring you additional columns in future issues that cover new projects in Historic Area buildings and programs, museums, in-progress research, publications, symposia, and lectures of the staff from Bruton campus.

As with any new effort we will succeed only if we have your interest and support. Please take time to express your thoughts, ideas, and opinions on this new initiative to board members so that we can continue to publish interesting and relevant information.

David Harvey
Department of Conservation



SPOTLIGHT ON *Collections*



The Mitchell Map was arguably the most important map executed of North America before the American Revolution. There is evidence that the second edition of this map was used by the official representatives of Great Britain and the United States in negotiating the terms of the Treaty of Paris.

The growing concern over the expansion of the French into northwestern North America prompted John Mitchell to begin work on the first edition of this map in 1750.

Cartographic historians have concluded that Mitchell had access to maps and geographical reports of the British Board of Trade, and that the records of the British Admiralty were made available to him for the text which appears on the later editions of the map. The first edition was issued in 1755 and the second and third revised editions appeared in 1757.

John Mitchell was educated at the University of Edinburgh and later became a doctor and botanist who practiced in Urbanna, Virginia, for about fourteen years. Although Mitchell was a native Virginian, his intolerance for the summer climate necessitated his return to England in 1746.

The original copy of the Mitchell Map has been on exhibit in the DeWitt Wallace Gallery for many years. It will be removed from display for the next few years to make room for other exhibits. Reproduction copies of this map are in the Governor's Palace advance buildings and the Secretary to the General Courts Office in the Capitol. ■

NEWS FROM The Curators

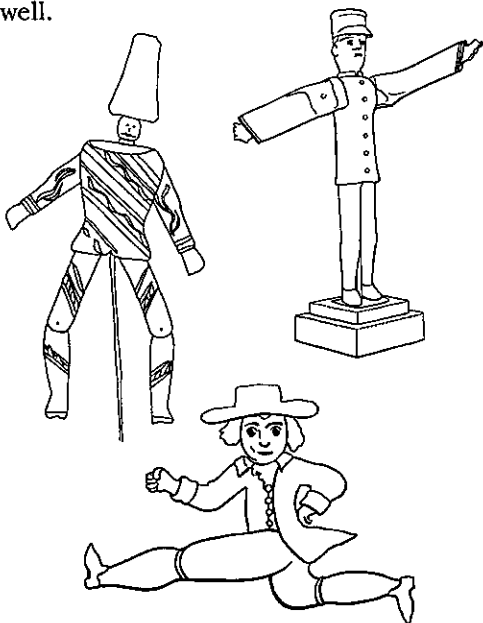
by Jan Gilliam



Jan is assistant curator for exhibits in the Department of Collections and Museums.

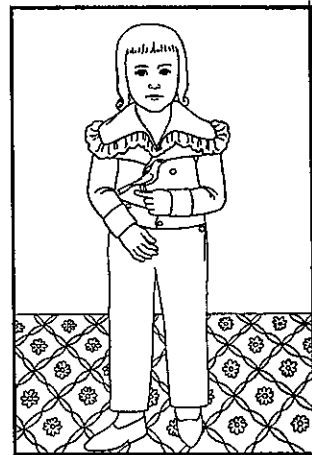
December is always a busy month at the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center. Visitors, including many school groups, look forward to the annual Christmas show. This year two new exhibits will incorporate some of the old favorites in new settings and with rarely exhibited objects.

"TOYZ!," opening November 27, features a selection of primarily nineteenth-century toys from the permanent collection. This includes the popular Long Island dollhouse and the Morris-Canby-Rumford dollhouse as well as a group of dollhouse furnishings just recently given to the Folk Art Center. Other objects included are carousel animals, a display of rocking horses, cast-iron vehicles, tin toys, and a variety of animals and soldiers. AARFAC has an exceptional collection of nineteenth-century toys, many the result of generous gifts donated over the years. Some have only been seen at Christmas, but this year the exhibit will remain on view through August of 1998 so that our summer visitors can enjoy them as well.



The second exhibit is "Child in Fashion." Tasha Tudor, well-known illustrator and the subject of our popular exhibit last year, has loaned her entire collection of antique costumes to Colonial Williamsburg. Among the 500 pieces are some wonderful examples of children's clothing from the nineteenth century. "Child in Fashion" is a display of over 30

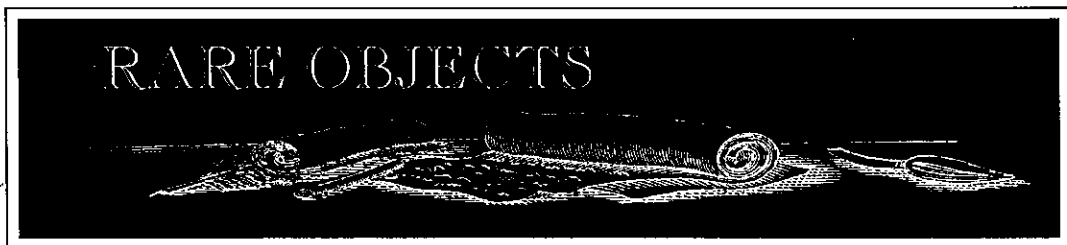
costumes, many children's garments, but also fashionable ladies gowns. These are shown with nineteenth-century portraits of children from the permanent collection of the Folk Art Center. The exhibit looks at childhood fashion



from 1810 through the 1870s. Amidst the paintings and costumes are displayed dolls and paper dolls that also reflect the fashion trends of the period. One area of the exhibit details Tasha Tudor's interest in antique clothing and how her collection plays a role in her art and sewing.

These two exhibits offer our young visitors a chance to explore the world of their nineteenth-century counterparts through toys and clothing. While children are going to find many things to interest them, adults, too, will be intrigued to see the ways their parents and grandparents dressed and played.

Remember to plan a visit to the DeWitt Wallace Gallery as well to see three new exhibits highlighting the decorative arts of the South. And looking ahead, in February the Antiques Forum is celebrating its 50th year with an intensive program devoted to "Fashionable, Neat, and Good: The Arts of the South." Several of the curators will lecture on topics related to the Gallery exhibits. ■



Three rare objects—a court summons, a volume of *The Turkish Spy* and a letter from Alexander Spotswood—have been added to the Special Collection Library at the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library.

According to Special Collections librarian and associate curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Gail Greve, colonial printer William Rind produced the summons that ordered debtor Doomsday Watts to court. Patience Lockhart filed the complaint. Dated around 1773, the summons is in good condition.

The Turkish Spy was not purchased for its content but rather for what's on the book—a bookplate bearing the name of Williamsburg resident Thomas Carter. "This bookplate was printed in Williamsburg by William Parks between 1748 and 1752," Greve said. "These are very hard to come by. We have one other in our collection."

The last object is a letter from Alexander

Spotswood, colonel of the 2nd Virginia Regiment, to Edmund Pendleton. The letter, dated Nov. 16, 1775, details the first activity of the Revolutionary War in the south. Lord Dunmore, royal governor of the colony, left Williamsburg but continued to be involved in the war effort. After this letter was written, Lord Dunmore was defeated at Great Bridge.

The Special Collections Library houses manuscripts, rare books, maps, architectural drawings and original manuscripts on microfilm that relate to Virginia during the colonial period. Greve said employees can access this information to do research. For instance, the printers may want to look at the court summons or bookplate to learn more about colonial printing techniques. "The letter gives us insight into the Revolutionary War and what was going on then," she said.

The Special Collections Library is open 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. ■

The above article appeared in a September issue of the C. W. News. Thanks to the editorial staff for permission to reprint it.

Spotlight on Special Collections

This is a transcription (by David Harvey) of the above mentioned letter from Colonel Alexander Spotswood (grandson of Lieutenant Governor Alexander Spotswood) 2nd Virginia Regiment, to Edmund Pendleton, President of the Committee of Safety.

gentlemen

Mt. Pleasant Camp near Cobham nov. 16 1775

Inclosed is a copy of a letter I Received 2 oclock this morning by express—the original I Forwarded to Colo Woodford in order to hasten his march; that we may as soon as possible get down to the Releif of our poor distresd Countrimen in the lower parts—this small success of his Lordships may probably tempt him to attack us—I wish to god it may—tho for my own part, I can assure you gentlemen—I would rather burn the Towns of Norfolk, gosport, and portsmouth, than hurt a hair of his lordships head—as I am satisfied it would be of more real advantage to the Country—the Towns being a nest of Tories, who may in some measure injure us and his Lordship—a Toll that never can

I am gentlemen with greatest Respect

obt: sut

Alex Spotswood

*The great bridge sargt.
Davenport informs me
is certainly taken up*

THE FAMILY STORY LINE:

An Exploration of Resources at the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library



by Gail Greve

Gail is associate curator of special collections in the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Library at Colonial Williamsburg.

The "Becoming Americans" theme presents many opportunities to explore both primary and secondary sources relating to the colonial period. The family story line, launched this year, is no exception. This article highlights specific items in the Library that will help in researching this topic.

The reference and circulating collections: the places to begin

The reference collection is a useful place to start research. Within the reference collection, one can find biographical sources that describe in great detail the lives of men and women of the colonial period. Encyclopedias, both modern and facsimile copies of eighteenth-century versions, give important insights into all aspects of life during the period. Another group of materials that contains a good deal of information is the *Virginia Gazettes*. Within the *Gazettes*, advertisements are important in giving one a glimpse of family life and the social context within which the family operated. Events reported in the *Gazette* provide a further framework.



Materials generated by Foundation staff also provide useful information. Research reports deal with various topics relating to

eighteenth-century life. One can find a report on carpentry, the cooper in the eighteenth century, or the importance of tobacco in the economy of colonial Virginia. Many of the reports contain data not easily found anywhere else. House histories, reports that describe the history of a particular building within the Historic Area, give background on whom the residents of a particular site were and what took place there. The architectural and archaeological reports help complete the historical picture of a site.

The circulating collection contains a treasure trove of useful information. The online catalog (PATRIOT) is the key to the materials that the Library has in its collections. The Library stacks contain books dealing with everything from religion to the decorative arts to the black experience during the period. An in-depth search, using various subject headings, will provide one with a great deal of material to begin the research process.

Special collections: the primary sources

Primary sources are the foundation of the research process. These are materials written and created by those who were part of society at the time. By reading first-hand accounts, one can learn what shaped the lives of those individuals.

The Special Collections section houses such materials (note that there are primary materials in the reference and circulating collections as well, some of which are described in the section above). Rare books and manuscripts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, along with microfilm, photocopies, and transcripts of original material that relate to the colonial era in Virginia, can be found within the collection. Many of these items can be of great use to those working on the family story line.

The Webb-Prentis Collection, donated by the descendants of William Prentis (first

owner of the Prentis store), contains rare books collected by four generations of the family. The material gives researchers insight into what family members in an upper-class household read during the period. Subjects within the collection range from cooking (*The Virginia Housewife*, 1828) to grammar books used by the children (*Lilly's Grammar*, 1699). Medicine, law, literature, and religion are also covered in the collection. Julie Richter's thesis titled "The Prentis Family and Their Library" divided the collection into twelve subject areas: practical knowledge, education, government and law, moral philosophy, religion, natural history, history, biography, travel and geography, classics, literature, and miscellaneous.

Along with bookplates and other identifying markings that appear in the books, inscriptions provide some of the most interesting material. Handwritten notes give one a sense of the person who wrote the passage, and ownership markings, such as the stamps and gold engraving on the covers, not only indicate the owner, but also the value that was placed on the books. In some cases, one can determine how often a particular book or even a particular passage was read. Worn pages give clues as to which passages were considered important to the family members.

The rare book collection contains a good representation of children's books, many of which can be found in the Webb-Prentis Collection. Among the items are arithmetic books, cypher books, and volumes used in conveying the morals and values of society. An exhibition was mounted on the subject in 1990 and was entitled "Child's Play? Children's Books In Early America." The catalog that accompanied that exhibition, which has the same title, is a useful resource for those interested in the subject.

In addition to rare books, the manuscript collection has many resources relating to children. The Harrower Diary is one example. John Harrower, a Scottish indentured servant, was tutor to the children of Colonel William Daingerfield (neighbor of Richard Corbin) between 1773 and 1776. In writing his diary, Harrower left an important account of the life of a tutor and his relationship with the children he taught. This material can be found in the Corbin Papers (DMS 71.5) or the published version, edited by Edward Riley, *The Journal of John Harrower: An Indentured*

Servant in the Colony of Virginia 1773-1776 (Williamsburg, Va., 1963).

Another aspect of family life can be explored via the pages of cookbooks. Many cookbooks and receipt books found in the collection contain receipts used for medicinal purposes. They reveal the items chosen to create various medicines and what purpose those preparations served. Food receipts in these same cookbooks disclose the kinds of foods that were available at the time, what methods were used for cooking them, which were deemed appropriate to eat, and which were considered harmful. In some cases, it is also possible to trace the use of certain receipts from generation to generation.

One particular cookbook of note is *The Compleat Housewife* by Eliza Smith. First published in America in 1742 by William Parks, it is believed to be the first cookbook printed in America. *The Compleat Housewife* is an important tool for understanding the past, particularly as it relates to women and how they ran their households.

Correspondence and household accounts are also vital sources of information. Manuscript collections such as the Shirley Collection (DMS 91.1), the accounts and letters relating to Shirley plantation in Charles City, and the Burwell Papers, 1736-1786 (MS 64.4), account books kept by Carter Burwell and his son for their plantation, Carter's Grove, reveal much about family relations and what went on within a household. These types of primary sources can also facilitate an understanding of how such things as local and national events affected the family unit. Much can also be learned about births, deaths, health concerns affecting the local area, and other important information that can "flesh out" the picture of family life.

Account books and ledgers are another revealing set of materials. The John Norton and Sons Papers, 1750 [1763-1798] (MS 36.3), accounts of a London merchant doing business with those in Williamsburg, and the James Anderson and Son Account Books, 1778-1805 (MS 62.2), ledgers kept by a Williamsburg blacksmith, are two examples. While they are the accounts of businesses, family members purchased the goods and services. What were they keeping? How much did they pay for particular items? Who purchased the items? Surviving ledgers and account books help answer these questions.

When we are fortunate enough to have

them, inventories reveal much about the family and the material culture of the period. Special Collections has copies of several important inventories, such as the inventory of the Governor's Palace. A researcher can determine a great deal about the socio-economic level of a particular person or family, the items that were used in running the household, and the events that might have taken place in the household. Inventories can also be key components in the accurate restoration and understanding of a site.

Finally, transcripts, photocopies, and microfilm in the collection are sources of additional information. Each of these formats contains the textual information from original manuscript material. Some of the origi-

nals are owned by Colonial Williamsburg, some by other institutions that have generously consented to provide copies for research purposes. In the case of original manuscripts owned by other institutions, researchers gain access to information that would be difficult to obtain, as much of it comes from repositories as far away as Europe.

There is a wealth of material in the Library. This article only begins to outline what can be found. Beyond the resources of the Foundation, the Library staff can also assist you with finding information on the Internet. The family story line is an important area of research, and the Library is rich in resources that aid in understanding that aspect of eighteenth-century life. ■

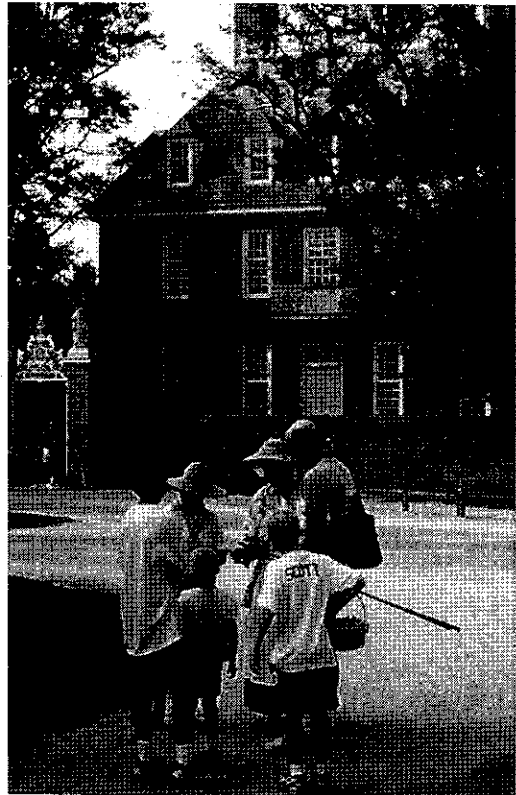
“Redefining” the Family Program Year

by Anne Schone

Anne is a museum educator in the Education Division and is chair of the “Redefining Family” story line team.

As we look at the changes currently underway in the Historic Area, at first glance, the “Redefining Family” story line may appear disassociated from the new directions and challenges we are working to develop. Or is it? Have we learned anything during the interpretation of family this year that is relevant and useful as March 21, 1998, and the beginning of the spring schedule approach? The answer is *yes!* Several important issues that surfaced over the summer can go in the mix as planning for next year continues.

First, more interpreters are interpreting thematically and are stressing the key family ideas in a variety of ways. The findings from the employee interviews, conducted in 1997 by Randi Korn reinforce this observation. In general, Randi's interpreter interviews showed that our employees understood the family story ideas and the importance of interpreting them thematically. A number of interpreters also stressed a higher comfort level in the second year of the Becoming Americans programming. Observations by the historians, the family team, and the pro-



Margie Weiler, coordinator, Family Programs, and Stewart Sensor, junior interpreter.

Photo by Roy Heffley

gram managers support this conclusion. Since *Becoming Americans* is still the “what” we are interpreting as the new programming develops, interpreting to a theme is important to its success.

Increased interdepartmental cooperation and teamwork were also positive results. Char-



Photo by Roy Heffley

acter interpreters and junior interpreters easily blended with traditional interpretations at several sites, and the visitor's experience was the better for it. More experimentation in interpretive techniques helped build confidence at several family sites. Conflict, crisis, tension, and resolution are as much a part of the family story as the traditional "happy" ending. This comes out in a number of programs. Increased cooperation, variations in interpretive methods, and the use of compelling story issues will serve well as we move to March 21 and interpret the Historic Area via the three neighborhoods.

Last summer, the Research Department historians took a larger role in observing, recommending, and supporting in the Historic Area programming. That supportive advisory role for historians and curators is already in place as planning for new programming moves forward.

Family programming developed under Margie Weiler's leadership blended well with the story line family issues. Staff throughout the Historic Area worked hard to make the "history lesson" both fun and involving. And we are getting better at getting the word out about where the action is.

As the year progressed, we found that many programs telling a family story were not originally part of the family story line key sites. These programs vastly enriched the visitor experience. Abby Schuman's "Our Common Passage," and the conversation between Mrs.

Robert Carter Nicholas and Mrs. Wager in "Thy People Shall Be My People" were originally designed to be part of Religion Month. They, and the perennially favorite hymn singing at the Geddy, are religion stories; however, they are also family stories. John Turner and his religion team could not have been more supportive of family issues.

"A House Divided" at the Peyton Randolph was developed for "Choosing Revolution" last year; but, it is a dynamic family story fraught with drama and tension. "Prime Time History Hour's" focus on the Landon Carter family, a family that did not follow the rules of open affection, new roles for children and women, new marriage relationships again gave

contrast and focus to the diversity of families and family experience.

The use of artifacts have been an important way to enhance visitor understanding and enjoyment this summer. Objects like the forceps (made at the Blacksmith Shop and kept now at the Apothecary) reflect issues of change and tension between professional and traditional health care. They enhance and enrich the conversation between Abby, our midwife, and the Apothecary staff. Child-bed linen at the Millinery speaks to both family change and consumerism.

The furniture in the house at the Rural Trades site is a superb example of how most Virginians lived. Just contrast this family to Peyton Randolph's family right next door. If you haven't seen it, examine the table leg with a huge knot in the Rural Trades site house. It makes a point! We need the poor rural site to tell all of the Becoming Americans stories.

Experimentation in new interpretive methods has been a key element of many programs. The Geddy site has been experimenting all summer. New programs such as "Nancy's Dilemma" and "The Churching of Women" explore women's concerns. New characters such as the slave, Grace, and Grandmama Geddy bring out family issues, religion issues, revolution issues - Becoming Americans issues. The Powell site creates continuing stories tying life passage events like marriage into a developing story that

brings visitors back day after day to see what is happening. Role playing in the Family Tour helps visitors actually live as diverse families with shared and conflicting values. The best programs use real stories of real people doing real things.

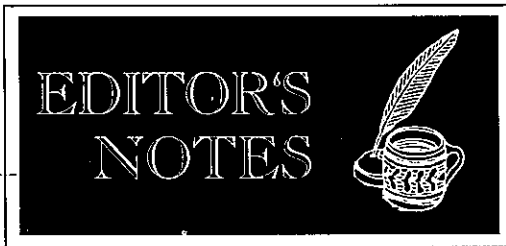
Is this an unmitigated success story? No, it is not. We learned a number of things this summer that we do not want to repeat in 1998. Some offerings did not deliver what they promised in the descriptions of the programs. Visitors came to sites to learn about families and occasionally left unsatisfied. Sometimes only a few words from an interpreter could have helped the visitor understand connections to family ideas. From time to time, sites operated in isolation from the rest of the community. It is particularly important to connect the site and its people to the whole community in 1998. Supervision and staff development are the keys.

More supported practice time will be necessary to ensure that people do not practice their new tour on visitors. Observation and

feedback for first-person interpretation is key. As part of the practice issue, regular scheduling was another problem for some programs. When interpreters seldom do a program, it is like starting all over for a first tour. They should be scheduled to new programs on a regular basis in order to develop proficiency.

During the coming years, the family story will remain, evolve, and connect to religion, the enslaved, the frontier, and the consumer as did the Choosing Revolution story that preceded it. The data that the final visitor evaluation provided will be helpful to us as we analyze our project but also help future programming.

I want to thank the family team members, extended team members, research historians, and other story line leaders for their talents and their support. Most of all, I would like to thank the interpreters who worked so diligently to bring an exciting and provocative story alive for our visitors. We think that everyone involved learned a lot. ■



Thank you to Laura Arnold, historical interpreter and board member, for helping us with the distribution of the fall issue.



Arrivederci to David DeSimone, assistant manager of Religious Studies and planning board member, who is leaving Colonial Williamsburg to pursue his own religious studies at the Vatican in Rome. Thank you, Dave, for your many contributions to C. W. over the last ten years, your insightful teaching and writing, your interpretive skills, and your wonderful sense of humor that helped put it all in perspective. We hope you will keep us informed about the goings-on in Italy. (Dave has promised us an *interpreter* column from the *Eternal City* periodically, so stay tuned!) We wish you Godspeed.



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