

Fresh Advices

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Who Is Grissell Hay and What Is She Doing at Archibald Blair's House?

New Names for Old Williamsburg Buildings

By Edward Chappell and Patricia Gibbs

Those not yet accustomed to the small industrial revolution going on behind the James Anderson House, the current emphasis on black-white relations, or the reinterpretation of life at the Palace may greet a raft of Historic Area name changes with apprehension. Removing William Byrd from the Lightfoot House some years ago was not very reassuring, but why has he now reappeared three blocks away at the Griffin House? What has happened to Congressman Samuel Griffin, or to Judge James Semple who has lost his home to William Finnie? Why has John Draper been displaced by George Davenport and John Norton by someone named Roscow Cole? Who in the world is Grissell Hay and how could she possibly have run a lodging house in the genteel quarters long ascribed to Archibald Blair?

In short, why is the familiar nomenclature of Williamsburg being disrupted by more than twenty major changes, with a profound effect on maps, signs, publications, and psyches linked to the Williamsburg scene? Recently the Historic Area Standards and Practices Committee asked an architect, an architectural historian, and an historian to review names of buildings and recommend possible changes. House names had not received a comprehensive review for over fifty years.

Behind these changes, which go into effect this summer, is a solid historical background available to few other American communities, a situation that is due to the extraordinary

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From Old to New

After the Guidebook Committee recommended several name changes to the Historic Area Standards and Practices Committee, Edward Chappell, Patricia Gibbs, and Nicholas Pappas were asked to review documentary, architectural, and archaeological evidence and submit a list of possible changes. A joint meeting of the HASP and Program Planning and Review committees considered the list and recommended a number of changes to the president. Last winter Mr. Longworth approved the following changes:

<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>
James Anderson Forges	Anderson's Blacksmith Shop
Archibald Blair House	Grissell Hay Lodging House
Bracken House	Bracken Tenement
Bracken-Carter House	Richard Crump House
Carter-Moir House	James Moir House
Carter's Grove	McCrea Stable
Information Center	The Courthouse
Courthouse of 1770	Custis Tenement
Custis-Maupin House	Elkanah Deane Harness Shop
Elkanah Deane Shop and Forge	George Davenport House
Draper House	Greenhow Tenement
Greenhow-Repiton House	Greenhow Brick Office
Greenhow-Repiton Brick Office	William Byrd III House
Griffin House	Shields Tavern
Marot's Ordinary	James Moir Shop
Moir Shop	Nicolson's Store
Nicolson's Shop	Nicolson's Shop
Nicolson Kitchen	Roscow Cole House
Norton-Cole House	Pasteur & Galt
Pasteur-Galt	Apothecary Shop
Apothecary Shop	George Pitt House
Pitt-Dixon House	Benjamin Powell House
Powell-Waller House	Booker Tenement
Redwood Ordinary	Scrivener Store
Scrivener House	William Finnie House
Semple House	William Waters House
Waters-Coleman House	

Name Changes, *continued*

amount of detailed research Williamsburg properties have undergone over the last fifty-five years.

Like the Palace refurbishing, the new group of name changes refines the clarity of our interpretation and removes some of the anachronistic ambiguities of earlier choices. As at the Palace, a half-century-long tradition of change precedes this step.

New names were given to some buildings in the initial years of the restoration. After eighteenth-century framing was discovered inside the Raleigh Hotel, for example, it was restored and called Market Square Tavern in 1931. The first attempt to create a consistent system for naming Williamsburg buildings began in 1933 when eighty recommendations were made by the Department of Research and Record to the Committee on Naming Restoration Buildings consisting of the Reverend W. A. R. Goodwin, lawyer Vernon Geddy, architect Thomas Mott Shaw, and historian Harold Shurtleff. Recommendations adopted in the early thirties included changing the Powder Horn to the Powder Magazine, the Neal House to the James Geddy House, and Kinnamon's Store to the Sign of the Golden Ball. Through the years some of the 1933 names have given way to later findings and changing perspectives.

The large gentry house near the north end of Palace Street has had a particularly unsettled history of twentieth-century names. Very early in the restoration the Saunders House acquired the name of Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie, who lived there for about a year when alterations were underway at the Palace. In 1933 it became the Dinwiddie-Carter House in order to include a valid reference to Councillor Robert Carter, who resided there from 1761 to 1772. Eventually the brevity of Dinwiddie's tenancy was acknowledged, and the name was changed to the Carter-Saunders House, again making reference to Robert Saunders, president of William and Mary at the beginning of the nineteenth century. There had long been a desire to avoid nineteenth-century associations, however, and the name finally settled down to the Robert Carter House in 1968. It now seems unlikely to change again.

The early committee in charge of house names exercised both imagination and discretion in labeling Hugh Orr's house; they delicately chose to call it Captain Orr's Dwelling.

Whatever its moral implications, the careful use of Williamsburg blacksmith Hugh Orr's name seemed entirely appropriate until the 1960s, when archaeological investigations revealed that the present house was built about 1790, a quarter-century after Orr's death. As a result of this finding, the house was renamed for George Reid, who acquired the property from Catherine Orr's estate in 1789.

The large brick house on Francis Street near the Williamsburg Inn was known locally as the Coke House until the name William Byrd was applied in 1933. Initial research showed that William Byrd III purchased a brick house built by William Allen about 1772, and it was assumed to be this house. In response the name was changed to the Allen-Byrd House. In the early 1970s researchers recognized that this house had been confused with the smaller brick dwelling at the west end of Francis Street, and the Allen-Byrd House was properly renamed the Lightfoot House. The change from the Griffin House to the William Byrd III House finally puts Byrd where he belongs and, in the process, displaces the post-Revolutionary owner Samuel Griffin.

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1933 Principles for Naming Buildings

1. Houses should be named after most famous colonial person who lived in them or built them.
2. If no famous or locally well-known colonial name is connected with a house, use the name of the earliest colonial owner or builder.
3. Double names should be avoided except when this would mean not being able to use a well known colonial name at all. *No* triple names should be used.
4. If a house has a well established colonial name already—which does not violate any of these principles—it should be retained.
5. All modern and recently given names should be avoided.
6. If there is a choice of two names use the name of the best known of the two families involved, or the family that has the most living representatives.
7. No avoidable duplication of names.
8. The use of as many Williamsburg and Virginia names as possible.

Name Changes, *continued*

In other ways, too, the current changes are simply a continuation of corrections and clarifications that have taken place over the last half century. The name Redwood Ordinary has clung tenaciously to the unrestored frame house near the gaol on the north side of Nicholson Street, although as early as 1933 Shurtleff recognized that it was a misnomer. Recent dendrochronology corroborates the documentary evidence that carpenter Richard Booker built the house about 1824. Accounts show he rented it to a series of tenants beginning in 1825. Acknowledging this fact, the name has been changed to the Booker Tenement.

Robert Nicholson moved his store and tailor's shop to the north side of Duke of Gloucester Street near the Raleigh in 1774. From several sources we know that his store was located in the surviving eighteenth-century building facing the street and the shop in the reconstructed building to the rear. New names clarify this arrangement: the principal building becomes Nicholson's Store, not shop, and the rear building is identified as a shop rather than a kitchen.

James Anderson consistently referred to his

work place as a blacksmith shop rather than as a forge, so the new name for the reconstruction nearing completion reflects the former. The term "forges," dear to all who have worked on the project, will be officially dropped. Moving the blacksmith operations to this location allows the vacated site to be renamed the Elkanah Deane Harness Shop.

The Federal-style brick house on Market Square was built by merchant Roscow Cole about 1812, replacing a frame store owned by John Hatley Norton. Thus it is immanently rational to refer to it as the Roscow Cole House, rather than to include a reference to Norton, who never saw the present building.

Similarly, the Archibald Blair House is now recognized as a relatively late colonial structure, unquestionably built after Blair's death in 1735. Apothecary Peter Hay owned the house briefly until his death in 1766. Two years later his widow, Grissell, who continued to live in the house, advertised "very commodious lodgings to be let for a dozen gentlemen." In the mid-1770s merchant James Glassford preferred her lodging house, "though it is rather out of the way," to the Raleigh. The widow Hay lived until 1778, and her length of tenure and use of the property are reflected in the building's new name, the Grissell Hay Lodging House.

The current policy of employing building names that reflect pre-1780 occupants and uses whenever possible accounts for George Davenport edging out John Draper and William Finnie's name being attached to the house long associated with James Semple.

No historical interpretation is entirely objective, and the new choices of names reflect some perspectives that are simply different from those of previous generations. The 1933 committee's guidelines for naming buildings reveal a considerably greater concern for celebrity. Two principles, for example, stated that "houses should be named after [the] most famous colonial person who lived in them or built them" and "if there is a choice of two names use the name of the best known of the two families involved, or the family that has the most living representatives."

Williamsburg was widely recognized as a place of historical importance as early as the middle of the nineteenth century, but its position in the national consciousness and viability as a travel destination were far less assured in 1933 than now. In the 1930s reverence for the

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1986 Policy for Naming Historic Area Buildings

1. Foremost, building names should reflect the period to which a structure has been restored or reconstructed and the period which is interpreted.
2. When possible, building names should reflect pre-1780 owners or occupants and uses unless the appearance of the structure dates from a later period or the earliest known owners or occupants are post-1780 (the date the capital moved to Richmond).
3. When a particular individual owned or occupied the building for an extended period, the building should carry his or her first and last names. When several members of a family owned the building for a number of years, the family's last name should be used alone.
4. Hyphenated names should be avoided except when more than one family was associated with a building for extended periods and their association has comparable relevance to the era of restoration/reconstruction or interpretation. However, no more than two names should be used.

Name Changes, *continued*

American past was relatively new and limited. In many ways, early researchers and architects played the role of proselytizers, believing it necessary to convince the public that this was indeed a very historic place. Thus it appeared more crucial to associate Governor Dinwiddie with Robert Carter's House,—or pursuing a more tenuous connection—to rename the main building at William and Mary for Sir Christopher Wren. There are contemporary parallels in other American cities where visiting generals and poets have been given equal billing with long-term residents.

Today the historical significance of Williamsburg is secure, and Americans' views of their history have broadened. It now seems more important to offer a balanced portrait of life in the community than to emphasize our links with prominent early Virginians. Increasingly, we recognize that large numbers of ordinary people rented houses or rooms, and that the documented role of tenements requires exposition. For over sixty years, John Custis and his descendants rented out property at the corner of Palace Street and Duke of Gloucester Street. As a result, the reconstructed Custis-Maupin House is now more properly identified as the Custis Tenement, losing its association with nineteenth- and early twentieth-century owners. The Bracken House on Francis Street was owned by John Bracken from about 1785 to 1806. Since it was a rental property rather than his residence, the term tenement is again appropriate.

Equally important for developing a credible portrait of the community is clarity about what period is being interpreted. Perhaps the most prominent example is the 1981 refurbishing of the Palace to reflect Lord Botetourt's well-documented tenure. The temporal focus of interpretation at the Powell-Waller House has recently been sharpened to reflect the Benjamin Powell family around 1770. The new emphasis is reinforced by changing the name to the Benjamin Powell House, removing the reference to the Waller family, who owned the property after 1791.

Current plans for a fourth operating tavern call for Marot's Ordinary to be shown as it existed when occupied by James Shields, whose extensive 1750 room-by-room inventory survives. The present reconstruction represents an extensively developed building well beyond John Marot's era, and the name Shields Tavern is clearly more relevant to these conditions.

Some hyphenated names have been eliminated and the houses renamed for the most appropriate owner. Examples include changing the Carter-Moir House to the James Moir House, the Greenhow-Repiton House to the Greenhow Tenement, and the Waters-Coleman House to the William Waters House. In replacing the hyphen with an ampersand in the name of the Pasteur & Galt Apothecary Shop, we used the punctuation mark employed by the apothecaries in signing their advertisements in the *Virginia Gazette*.

All this should not suggest that the application of historic names need be a rigid process, intolerantly casting aside all those historic characters who fail to fit the focus of the moment. Some familiar hyphenated names indicate buildings' long histories, and they seem too evocative to replace. The Ludwell-Paradise House was more intimately associated with the Paradise family after the Revolution than it was with its colonial owners, and the Galt family occupied the Nelson-Galt House from 1812 until the early 1980s.

The name of the Coke-Garrett House remains unchanged for an additional reason. Only the story-and-a-half western section of the house dates from John Coke's period. Retaining the Garrett name recognizes the family that made architecturally significant additions in the early nineteenth century.

Like the 1933 effort, the present reassessment of Historic Area names is intended as a comprehensive, consistent effort to suggest the most useful associations known from the fragmentary records. Opportunities for interpretive development will continue, and it would be naive to assume that ours is the last word. Nevertheless, we believe it is a significant aspect of the continuing reassessment of life in the eighteenth-century town. Such activities—respectfully weighing but always questioning conventional wisdom—can ensure a lively, healthy history.

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Editor: Lou Powers

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