● THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG

interpreter

VOL. 10 NO. 1 JANUARY 1989

Black History at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Interest in the early history of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation has blossomed in the last few years. Witness the renewed interest in the Colonial Revival movement and Colonial Williamsburg's part in it. Rex Ellis is nearing completion of his dissertation on the history of interpretation here. This article is extracted from his chapter on the roles of blacks in the Foundation from 1926 to 1946. Rex has drawn on information culled from the Rockefeller family archives, the Colonial Williamsburg archives, the writings of Helen Campbell, who was one of the Foundation's first hostesses, and personal interviews to examine the stereotyping of and the attitudes toward blacks during these formative years.

Even before John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and the Reverend W. A. R. Goodwin officially began the restoration of Williamsburg in 1926, blacks were involved with interpretation at the Powder Horn (Magazine) and at the Wythe House. It was to be many years before they would be employed to interpret their own history, however.

Thanks to the foresight of Mary J. Galt, Mrs. Charles Coleman, Mrs. Israel Smith, and Mrs. Randolph Harrison, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) was chartered in February 1889. Learning that the owner was about to put the Magazine up for sale, Miss Galt and her colleagues negotiated a deal to purchase it. When the building was opened in the early 1900s, "Uncle" Alec Pleasants, a black man, interpreted the structure. In 1926 when Mr. Rockefeller was taken through the building his guide was Alec. Little is known about Mr. Pleasants except that he was once a sexton at Bruton Parish Church.

(continued, page 2)

Discussing slavery . . . was too risky and not in keeping with the egalitarianism that initiated the restoration project.

How *the* Became *ye* (Or Read as I Say, Not as I Write)

John E. Ingram, curator, library special collections is a specialist in the study of linguistics. Here he dispels one of ye *old myths of* ye *past.*

To understand when the form *ye* means *the,* but **not** *thee,* we must distinguish between what was originally a written combination of letters and what was a spoken combination of sounds.

The written form *ye* meaning *thee* was always written **and** spoken as "yee," that is, *you* singular. And here we mean both handwritten, i.e., manuscript, as well as printed letters. The form *ye* meaning the definite article *the* (as in *the* pencil) was written, and, in some type faces, printed, as *ye,* but it was always pronounced **"the."**

Before 1400 the English alphabet consisted of two major letter groups: letters inherited from the Roman alphabet, and in a relatively small number of cases and sounds, letters that were borrowed from the Nordic system of "runes." The borrowing occurred because the Roman alphabet did not have single letters to correspond to single early English or Anglo-Saxon sounds such as "th" in the word *thin* and "dh" as in the word *them.* However, the neighboring

(continued, page 6)

Black History, *continued*

The APVA also acquired part of Jamestown. In the 1890s Miss Ellen Bagby of Richmond was named its guardian. Soon she was authorized to hire a sexton for the property. She hired Sam Robinson, a black man originally from South Carolina's Sea Islands, who soon became a popular interpreter giving his version of Jamestown's settlement. He was particularly well known for his interpretation of the "mother-in-law tree." It seems that in 1687 Benjamin Harrison's oldest daughter Sara entered into a contract to marry one William Roscoe; he was twenty-two and she was seventeen. Three weeks after the agreement was signed, Sara met Dr. James Blair, founder and commissary of the College of William and Mary, and accepted his invitation to marry. Sara's family was twice disgraced, first, because she married Dr. Blair against the wishes of her family, and second, because at thirty-eight he was more than twice her age. In 1713 Sara died and was buried at Jamestown near but not *with* her family. Thirty years later Dr. Blair died and decreed that he be buried six inches from Sara. Seven years afterward a sycamore tree began to grow between the two graves. Since nothing was done over the years to cut the tree or protect the graves, it finally pushed the two graves apart so that Sara was finally pushed seven feet from her husband. Called the "mother-in-law tree" by Robert Ripley, it was entered in his column and included in subsequent shows of "Ripley's Believe It or Not." The mother-in-law tree and Sam Robinson became popular attractions at Jamestown. Parke Rouse, a former director of publications for Colonial Williamsburg, recalled that "somehow, Jamestown Island never seemed quite the same after Sam Robinson died."

Lydia Gardner was another early black interpreter who lived in the Historic Area. Mrs. Gardner interpreted at the Wythe property from 1927 to 1930 when the building was used as the Bruton parish house and an office by Dr. Goodwin. Mrs. Gardner remembers interpreting the building and says that she "was paid around twenty-five cents an hour." Once the restoration began and the popularity of becoming a hostess increased, she was replaced by white hostesses.

James and Geraldine Payne were also among the first interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg. They were hired by James Cogar, the Foundation's first curator, to live on the second floor of the Wythe kitchen. They lived there from 1941 to 1943. They and their two young daughters dressed in eighteenth-century costume and conversed with visitors to the Wythe site. "The entire property was like our home," recalled Mrs. Payne, who later became the first black to work in the Information Center when it opened in 1957. "The girls played in their little costumes representing blacks of the period." When the Naval Weapons Station opened in Yorktown in the early 1940s to support the war effort, James Payne, who was employed by Colonial Williamsburg as a laborer, took advantage of the higher wages paid government employees and left the Foundation.

The Rockefeller family had an honorable and long legacy of supporting black causes, particularly Negro education in the South. Spelman College, Hampton Institute, Tuskegee University, Fisk University, and Atlanta University were all recipients of the Rockefellers' generosity. The General Education Board, founded by Mr. Rockefeller, Sr., dedicated a major portion of its money and resources to support Negro education. As Raymond Fosdick recounts, "When the Board started its work in 1903 there was not one single public high school for negro students in the entire South, and over a period of half a century it helped to promote what was in essence a revolution in the standards of Negro Education." For ten years Rockefeller served as chairman of the United Negro College Fund's National Counsel. When asked why he worked for the fund, he replied:

> First, because it is concerned with a tenth of our entire population. Second, because it is constructive and not controversial, devoting itself to education. Third, because it is cooperative—representing the united efforts of its thirty-two colleges to increase their financial support and enlarge the circle of their friends. We of the white race owe a debt of gratitude to our fellow citizens of the Negro race for having conceived and brought into being the idea of the educational chest, the value of which is so generally recognized . . . freedom does not come as a gift, we cannot have it for ourselves unless we are willing that others should have

(continued, page 5)

The Long *s*

Bob Lyon, formally a journeyman in the bookbindery, is now restoring books in Sydney, Australia. Here he explains the evolution of the Roman letter s.

The ancient Latin alphabet consisted of the shapes still familiar to us today as the capital letters and it is from this alphabet that the long *s* evolved. When these formal letters were written rapidly with a pen on parchment or papyrus or scratched with a stylus on a wax-coated tablet, they gradually evolved into different shapes that we now take for granted as our lowercase alphabet. As a further step in this evolution, consider how little our modern cursive handwriting resembles the printed forms of the same letters. Though some letters—for example *o* or *t*—changed little, others such as *a, g,* and *s* were altered greatly. By the fifth or sixth century the letter *s* was being represented in cursive writing with two basic forms—the long *s* (ſ) and the short *s*. Throughout Europe by the later Middle Ages, for reasons unclear, the long *s* ceased to be used as the final *s* in a word, leaving the eighteenth century with the old convention of using the long *s* in the lower case at the beginning or middle but not at the end of a word. This rule was generally followed in printing, but in handwriting was often ignored, long *s*'s being used at whim or not at all (but still never as a final *s*).

The long *s* owes its demise after centuries of use to one man, the late eighteenth-century English printer and type founder John Bell. The publisher's advertisement of Bell's 1785 edition of Shakespeare—the first book printed without long *s*'s—reads in part as follows:

> In the mode of printing too, he hath ventured to depart from the common mode by rejecting the long ſ in favour of the round one, as being less liable to error from the occasional imperfection of the letter f, and the frequent substitution of it for the long ſ; the regularity of the print is by that means very much promoted, the lines having the effect of being more open, without greatly adding additional distance.

In other words, eliminating this superfluous letter form saved the printer from the difficulty of differentiating between worn or damaged *f*'s and long *s*'s. Also, by doing away with a frequently occurring ascending letter, it left more white space between the lines of type and rendered extra spacing (as in double-spacing a typewritten sheet) less necessary to create an open, legible page. Other printers eventually followed Bell's

(continued, page 4)

From the Editor

When the *interpreter* was first issued back in 1980, its stated goal was to "serve as a forum for all that concerns interpreters . . ." Looking back on the last fifty issues I feel that it has done just that. The *interpreter* has offered articles on current research, programming, and interpretive techniques, such as the use of humor in interpretation. It has also offered interviews, book reviews, exhibit reviews, an occasional editorial view, and probably some other views that I have overlooked.

What has proved to be most difficult is harnessing the potential of the interpretive staff to contribute to the *interpreter.* The survey that Conny Graft conducted last year indicated that several interpreters wanted to know why interpreters were not writing more articles. This is a good point. All too often we go to "proven" sources for our articles—the research staffs, curators, and outside specialists. To help involve the staff in the planning and writing of the *interpreter* we now have department representatives on the planning committee but we need to do more and we need your help. If you have an interest in a particular subject that you would like to share, let us know. If you have run across an interesting fact in your reading or research, let us know. If you know of a book, lecture, or exhibit that would benefit the staff, let us know. You can contact anyone who is listed in the editorial box.

Publications such as this tend to offer only one-way communication. This does not have to be. To be a true "forum" we need your comments, both in the form of articles and reviews and in the form of viewpoints. If you have an opinion or additional information relating to an article, we would be glad to consider it for publication in a subsequent issue. I look forward to the time when we can inaugurate a *Letters to the Editor* column to help make the *interpreter* as relevant and as useful as possible.

—MH

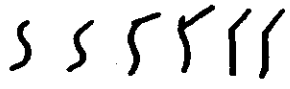
The Long *s*, *continued*

example and by the early nineteenth century the long *s* was the exception rather than the rule.

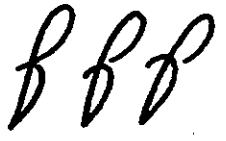
The long *s* is often misleadingly referred to as the "German *s*" because it first appeared in type with the advent of printing in Germany. This was, however, a thousand years after this form of the letter had evolved from Roman cursives, and by this point in time the long *s* was well entrenched in European handwriting. Gutenberg merely reproduced in his cast-metal types the alphabet with which he was familiar. The highly traditional Germans retained these Gothic letter forms long after the rest of Europe had abandoned the style in favor of more legible Italian models (the ancestors of most of our modern printed Roman and Italic typefaces). The Gothic, or fraktur, along with the long *s*, was in common use in Germany well into the twentieth century. It is interesting to note that even today the long *s* survives in Germany as part of the symbol ß , which represents a double *s*. With a little imagination it is easy to trace in this symbol a long *s* followed by, and connected to, a short *s*.

Evolution of the Long *s*

Pompeii, 1st century



Roman, 5th century



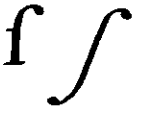
Italian, 6th century

English, 10th century

German, 15th century (printed)

Italian, 16th century

English, 18th century (printed)



English, 18th century (cursive)

it also. . . . The extension of greater opportunities to our Negro population, becomes, therefore, a matter of not only national but international importance. And it is urgent. We do not have any century to wait. The sands are running out.

W. A. R. Goodwin also had strong connections to the black community. While serving at St. John's Church in Petersburg in 1893, he was given a professorship at the Bishop Payne Divinity School for colored students and raised $8,000 a year. In April 1926 Goodwin received news from Hampton Institute that a group "of northern friends" who supported Hampton wanted to see William and Mary. Goodwin wrote a reply that asserted long-established rules of southern segregation: "We take it for granted that the party will be composed exclusively of white persons. It would otherwise occasion you grave embarrassment and criticism, which we would not be willing here at the college to bring about or be responsible for." Racial attitudes of the South were deeply rooted, and both men, especially Goodwin, had long since accepted the societal mandate that relegated blacks to second-class citizenship.

During the early years of the restoration, blacks were constantly perceived as buffoons, dunces, or slackers. One of Dr. Goodwin's favorite stories was told of his black sexton William Galt. It seems that Galt misread a section of a booklet on the history of Bruton Parish Church. "Boss," he asked, "I want you to tell me whar de father of Mr. Hamlet that Mr. Shakespeare tell about is buried in de church yard. . . ." Galt has misread the text which was:

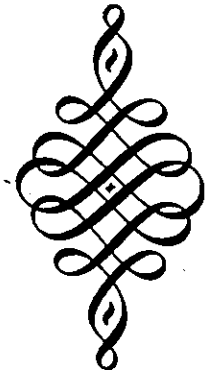
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,
The rude forefathers of the Hamlet sleep.

Raymond Fosdick recalled, in his biography of Rockefeller, a story about a black man named Jim who came to see Goodwin during the time he was purchasing land for Rockefeller. Jim wanted to know if Goodwin was interested in buying his property. Goodwin answered in the affirmative and questioned Jim about the price he wanted. Jim replied, "$35,000." Goodwin exclaimed in astonishment that he would not offer him a price even approaching that sum. Jim then asked, "What about $3,500?" Goodwin agreed to that price (pointing out that even $3,500 was high) and asked Jim why he initially asked for such a large sum. Jim replied, "Well boss, they told me to start high and come down."

Elizabeth Henderson, who was one of the first to be hired to train hostesses, tells of a black man Mr. Rockefeller encountered at Colonial Williamsburg on one of his visits. She recounts that Rockefeller came upon the employee (who did not recognize him) sitting idle and asked him if he had nothing better to do. The black man replied, "Naw suh, I don't have nothin to do. I work for Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and he got plenty of money." The employee was fired the next day.

These, then, were some of the prevailing attitudes toward black Americans during the early years of the restoration. Blacks were a part of the town, but it would be some time before they would be taken seriously. The restoration was too important a venture to employ blacks as interpreters and far too significant a place to begin discussing slavery—an "institution" that was after all not that far removed from the present. Socially, economically, and politically, it was too risky and not in keeping with the egalitarianism that initiated the restoration project. The topic of black history was not only controversial but it was contradictory to the evolving image of Colonial Williamsburg as a bastion of "American ideals" as it was being represented both to America and to other nations.

It would take two world wars before America would begin to break down its long held racial tenets. But for the time being Colonial Williamsburg was still full of employees with strong ties to the Confederacy, who considered the restoration project "the second Yankee invasion."



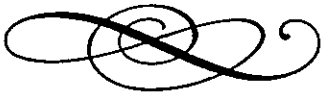
Ye, *continued*

and linguistically related Old Norse language also possessed such sounds, and when parts of its alphabet were adopted, single letters were created to represent them, including the Nordic rune called the *thorn.* Here begins the cause of our later twentieth-century confusion.

When scribes were writing their manuscripts, they used a script variant of the *thorn* that looked very much like the letter *y* with the right side extended upward. Eventually the two letters became closer and closer and finally merged. Coincidental with the merging of the manuscript letters *y* and the thorn was the introduction of printing into England in 1476 by William Caxton. He used imported continental type fonts that had no symbol for the *thorn,* thus sealing the fate of the **printed** version of the *thorn;* it was eliminated. The single letter for the sound "th" was replaced in all locations by the letter combination "th."

For our purposes, that is before 1800, when one sees *ye* used as the definite article *the,* it is always to be pronounced as "the." Thus, when John Custis or Benjamin Waller wrote ye or yt with the *e* and the *t* as superscripts (written above the line), we should read these words just as Custis or Waller's correspondents read them, as *the* and *that.*

In summary, after 1400 the *thorn* fell more and more out of use, and in some manuscripts was represented only by the y-form in the combinations *ye* and *yt* for *the* and *that.* Indeed, many of these forms continued to be employed extensively in manuscript writing—letters, diaries, account books—throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. *Ye* especially lasted a long time, well into the nineteenth century. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* it is still often used today "pseudoarchaically, jocularly, or vulgarly" and pronounced "yee" as in Lewis Carroll's "Ye Carpette Knychte" and in shop signs such as "Ye Olde Book Shoppe."



A Note on the Type

For the past nine years the *interpreter* has been printed using the typeface Caslon, adapted from type designed by William Caslon, the foremost type founder of the eighteenth century. Beginning with this issue, a typeface designed in 1752 by John Baskerville (the second most prominent English type designer) will be used.

Baskerville, who earlier in life made his fortune in the production of japanned ware, is generally credited with having developed the first real "modern" typeface as opposed to the "old-style" types previously in fashion. An "old-style" type is one in which the various parts of the letter are of fairly uniform proportion whereas a "modern" type varies in the weight of its elements, some strokes being relatively thick and others relatively thin. Also, the serifs (the termini of the strokes) are pointed; "old-style" serifs are rounded. This gives Baskerville types a sharp, clean impression on the paper as well as a lighter, more open appearance.

So, although our masthead will remain in Caslon, our text will now be printed in Baskerville, a type that should be easier on the eyes and easier to read.

—MH

Quitrent

An example of Baskerville

Quitrent

An example of Caslon

The interpreter is a bimonthly publication of the Department of Interpretive Education.
Editor: Mark Howell
Assistant Editor: Emma L. Powers
Editorial Board: Dennis O'Toole, Earl Soles, Jane Strauss, and Bill Tramposch
Planning Board: Arthur Barnes, Conny Graft, Liza Gusler, Marcus Hansen, Cathy Hellier, Brenda LaClair, and Jodi Norman
Production: Mary Jamerson and Nancy Milton
©1989 by The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
ISSN 0883-2749