“ 'By Work Done For Me': Building Culture and Client Relationships in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg”

In 1699, the capital of the colony of Virginia moved. The swamps of Jamestown Island with their memories of starvation, massacre, and rebellion were abandoned in favor of the pastoral settings of Middle Plantation, a small settlement half-way between the James and the York Rivers. At the time, Middle Plantation was little more than a cross roads, with a tavern, a church, a few surrounding farms and plantations, and the College of William and Mary. Roads meandered through and around the natural landscape, skirting ravines and following hills. This bucolic spot was chosen not for the natural beauty of its environment, but for the blank canvas it offered on which to plan the town. Driven by baroque sensibilities, Lieutenant Governor Francis Nicholson laid out the new city according to a new aesthetic. The natural topography would be tamed: ravines filled; creeks diverted in order to accommodate straight roads and perfectly gridded lots; and trees cut down to improve sight lines. Named in honor of King William, Williamsburg was to be the academic, economic, political, and cultural center of Virginia, not just a town “but such a Town as may equal if not outdo Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charlestown, and Annapolis.”[1]

At least 152 carpenters, cabinetmakers, bricklayers, builders, and brick makers were responsible for creating and maintaining this landscape over the course of the eighteenth century. This number reflects only the men who left behind some mark in the historical record of the city. Largely absent from it are the journeymen, itinerant laborers, and slaves who practiced these building trades in anonymity. While their handiwork remains visible in the eighteenth-century

1 W.W. Hening, *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619,* (Charlottesville, 1969), p. 422.

structures that still stand, our knowledge of them extends only so far as to recognize the possibility of their existence. Even of the 152 men for whom documentation exists, much of it is scant, particularly so for those who worked in the early decades of the century. Most building craftsmen enter the historical record through a single advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette*, a passing reference in a private letter, or an entry in the surviving county records. Extensive documentation exists for only five of the carpenters active in Williamsburg's building culture prior to 1750. For example, Henry Cary frequently served as an overseer on state building projects, and so occupies a somewhat prominent place in the records of the House of Burgesses and the Executive Council. The record base for the other four craftsmen is less abundant. Estate inventories exist for Richard King, Thomas Whitby, and Thomas Cobb, and an estate inventory and some miscellaneous accounts survive from James Wray.[2]

This absence in the documentary record may speak to the ubiquity of the building trades in daily life. Everyone needed a building, and therefore everyone needed access to someone with the skills to build one. With the passage of time, the skills of these craftsmen and their contributions to the creation of communities have been lost. Buildings occupy spaces on cultural, social, mental and physical landscapes, but the men who created those buildings seldom receive the credit due them. Rather than studying architectural styles and forms, studying the

2 King was active between 1714 and 1727; Whitby between 1703 and 1711; Cobb between 1745 and 1774; and, Wray between 1731 and 1750. Data from the Williamsburg Area Residents Files, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; Cary appears in H. R. McIlwaine (ed.), *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia*, 13 vols., (Richmond, 1913) and H. R. McIlwaine, et al. (eds.), *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, (6 vols. Richmond, 1927-1966); Inventory of the Estate of Richard King, York County Records, Orders and Wills (16) 588, Library of Virginia; Inventory of Estate of James Wray 1750 March 18, Colonial Williamsburg Digital Library, http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/View/index.cfm?doc=Probates\PB00340.xml; Thomas Cobb Inventory and Appraisal, York County Records, Wills and Inventories (22), 245-246, Library of Virginia; An Inventory of Mr. Thomas Whitby, deced., York County Records, Orders and Wills (14), 163-4, Library of Virginia; and Account of Colonel Thomas Jones with James Wray, Jones Family Papers, [c. 1731-1735], Photocopy Manuscripts Collection, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg.

skills necessary to produce those forms allows scholars to acknowledge the human contribution to the creation of a landscape. By acknowledging the presence and the skills of colonial craftsmen, we alter the previously established picture of building culture. No longer based solely on the finished product, scholarly work on building culture can now incorporate the entire process of manufacture and consumption, from the raw goods to the finished product, from workshop to home. When considering building culture in this all-inclusive way, we look beyond style and refinement as the primary measure of a building, to see the skill and ingenuity of the craftsman who created it.

While several innovative and influential studies have examined the development of a shared sense of community through architecture, few go so far as to acknowledge the craftsmen responsible for that architecture. In *Town House,* Bernard Herman explored the entire spectrum of urban buildings, from inns and taverns to widow's rooms and artisan's shops. In them, he found not only regional architectural styles, but also the subtle changes in mentality and behavior. These shifts allowed individuals to develop identities that fit within the established community expectations and to materially live within those expectations, while still exhibiting a sense of self. Robert Blair St. George observed that "the power of place in everyday life suggests that local geography, conceived as a matrix of memory sites fusing conflict and accord, loss and renewal, may be a more powerful principle in the lives of ordinary people than mere chronology" as he studied colonial New England. Among many of the other changes that reflected a growing sense of personal and cultural refinement, Richard Bushman found that enough people had social and financial access to changes in housing, including decorative

features such as sash windows and new special-purpose rooms, like the parlor and the stair passage, that these changes helped to reorder the relationship of houses and social class. New housing forms made it difficult for anyone who aspired to social leadership to live in one of the modest houses that constituted a majority of the country's housing stock.[3]

Missing from the scholarship on the social culture surrounding these buildings is the study of the building culture that produced them, the coordinated system of knowledge, rules, procedures, and habits that surround the building process in a given place and time. Such information has appeared in other works. Cary Carson's, et al, "Impermanent Architecture," Willie Graham's, et al. "Adaptation and Innovation," and Willie Graham's "Preindustrial Framing in the Chesapeake" traces the structure changes in wood-framed building construction. Catherine Bishir provided an in-depth analysis of the contractual language employed between clients and carpenters in an attempt to understand the thought processes that gave rise to buildings. Bennie Brown examined the prevalence of architectural books in colonial Virginia, and found that, as Virginia society stabilized, more architecture books appeared in the libraries of both the gentry and craftsmen, indicating an interest in both parties in function and fashion.[4]

3 B.L. Herman, *Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780-1830* (Chapel Hill, 2005), pp. 261-266; R.B. St. George, *Conversing by Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1998), p. 7; R.L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York. 1992), pp. 114, 116. Other examples of scholarship include: E. Chappell, 'Acculturation in the Shenandoah Valley: Rhenish Houses of the Massanutten Settlement', *Proceedings, American Philosophical Society*, 124 (1980), reprinted in D. Upton and J. Vlach (eds.), *Common Places* (Athena, 1986), pp. 27-57; G.D. Kimball, 'African-Virginians and the Vernacular Building Tradition in Richmond City, 1790-1860', in T. Carter and B.L. Herman (eds.), *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture IV.* (Columbia, 1991), pp. 121-129; D. Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17 (1982), pp. 95-119. reprinted in Upton and Vlach., *Common Places*, pp. 315-35; R. Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill, 1982); L. Walsh and L. Green Carr, 'Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake', in Cary Carson et al., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville, 1994), pp. 59-166; E. Chappell, 'Housing a Nation: The Transformation of Living Standards in Early America', in Cary Carson et al., *Of Consuming Interests*, pp. 167-232.

4 H. Davis, *The Culture of Building* (Oxford, 1999), p. 5; C. Cary, N.F. Barka, W.M. Kelso, G.W. Stone, and D. Upton, 'Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 16/2-3 (1981),

These works treat individual aspects of the building culture, but few have attempted any comprehensive study of it. Catherine Bishir's, et al, *Builders and Architects in North Carolina,* and J. Ritchie Garrison's *Two Carpenters* offer in-depth treatments of the building cultures in eighteenth-century North Carolina and late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Massachusetts, respectively. Bishir, et al, trace the evolution of building culture in North Carolina from its settlement to the modern day, relying on a narrative that engages construction technology; the relationship between builder and client; the handling of design, money, materials, and labor; and the tension over control and status within the building process. By examining builders and building culture as a whole, they supplant theoretical and teleological approaches with one that focuses on the "personal sagas of hundred of individuals laboring at thousands of building sites." Garrison uses a similar approach, though he focuses on only two individuals. Relying on the account books left by Calvin and George Stearns, father and son carpenters, Garrison explores the processes by which the landscapes and buildings of Northfield Massachusetts came into being, and reveals much about the working life of these men, their families, and their community. Unlike much of the scholarship which focuses on the built environment, these books also engage the craftsmen and the production process.[5]

By examining the entire process of production and consumption, our perspective of how

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pp.135-96; W.G., C.L. Hudgins, C.R. Lounsbury, F.D. Neiman, and J.P. Whittenburg, 'Adaptation and Innovation: Archaeological and Architectural Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 64/3 (2007), pp. 451-522; W. Graham, 'Preindustrial Framing in the Chesapeake,'.in A.K. Hoagland and K.A. Breisch (eds), *Constructing Image, Identity, and Place: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, IX* (Knoxville, 2003), pp. 179-96; C. Bishir, 'Good and Sufficient Language for Building', in Carter and Herman, *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, pp. 44-52; Bennie Brown, 'The Ownership of Architecture Books in Colonial Virginia', in K. Hafertepe and J.F. O'Gorman (eds.) *American Architects and Their Books to 1848* (Amherst, 2001), pp. 29-30.

5 C.W Bishir et al., *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building* (Chapel Hill, 1990), pp. 1, 6; J.R. Garrison, *Two Carpenters: Architecture and Building in Early New England, 1799-1859* (Knoxville, 2006), xvii.

the buildings functioned in the social landscape changes. The skills used to construct the buildings are no longer practiced anonymously, but rather become performances of competence, demonstrations of a craftsman's mastery of his trade and his ability to conform to and adapt the existing constructs in which he works. The landscape that would eventually be created in the new capital city of Williamsburg captured not only hierarchies of function and place, but also the means by which these men maneuvered through the social order of colonial Virginia to create that landscape.[6]

At the center of Virginia's building culture was the idea of "competence"- a mastery of a craft that allowed the craftsman to secure economic independence through the practice of his trade. A vague term even in the eighteenth century, competence entailed amassing the necessities of life, particularly in regard to a craftsman's income. Beyond the needs of the every day, the craftsman had to muster enough resources to usher his children into appropriate trades and to maintain the household once he ceased working. Though it encompassed a wide array of standards of living, "competence" contained "a notion of 'manly' independence as the head of a thriving family", an independence that could only be gained by successfully practicing his craft.[7]

6 Through this work, the term "craftsman" is used to denote men active in any of the building trades, including those who appear in the historical record as builders, carpenters, cabinetmakers, brick makers, and bricklayers. This is done not to flatten the specialized knowledge into a single idea of "craft knowledge," but rather to make the text less unwieldy that it might otherwise be if each occupation was given in-depth treatment. "Tradesman" or "artisan" might be equally well applied, as the definitions of the terms overlap a great deal, each meaning "a man who practices a handicraft," "one who is skilled in and practices the industrial arts," and "a worker in a skilled trade," respectively. However, the modern connotations of the latter two tend to bring to mind images of retailers or merchants, men involved in an economic trade, rather than an industrial one, or of practitioners working in highly specialized media. To avoid overcomplicating the narrative, the men who appear in this analysis are called craftsmen. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "craftsman," "tradesman," and "artisan."

7 Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia,* pp. 131-135; Bishir, 'Good and Sufficient Language for Building', p. 98; Garrison, *Two* Carpenters, p. 2; D.J. Rilling, *Making Houses, Crafting Capitalism: Builders in Philadelphia, 1790-1850* (Philadelphia, 2001), p. 15.

Virginia's building culture was also shaped by the scarcity of skilled craft labor, the constant need for buildings and plentiful building supplies at hand, all of which frustrated the development of a formal guild system throughout the colonial era. Still, craftsmen did follow general patterns of craft training: a young man would be apprenticed to a master for a number of years during which he would be fed, clothed, and educated until such time as he had acquired the necessary skills to set out on his own. These apprenticeships could be as little as one year or as long as eighteen, depending on the circumstances under which the person was indentured. When he finished his technical education, the apprentice traditionally moved on to become a journeyman. However, the absence of skilled labor meant that as soon as an apprentice finished his training, he could go into business for himself, so long as he had the connections to find and the skills necessary undertake projects alone. With some property to his name, he could also take on apprentices of his own, though he might only be a year or two out of his own training. Thus, without a formal system or trade organization to regulate the status of "master" for white men in the building trades, the position became dependent on a craftsman's ability to demonstrate his competence through a combination of three elements: property ownership, craft knowledge, and deference. The first served as material embodiment of both his skill and his success; the second demonstrated his on-going ability to display mastery of his trade; and, the last facilitated socio-economic interactions, allowing the builder to interact appropriately with his customers.[8]

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8 H. B. Gill, Jr., 'Apprentices' in J.M. Gaynor (ed.), *Eighteenth-Century Woodworking Tools*, (Williamsburg, 1997) pp. 153-4; R.R. Townsend, *Apprenticeship in Colonial Virginia* (Williamsburg, 1960), p. 7; H.B. Gill, *Apprentices of Virginia, 1623-1800,* (Salt Lake City, 1989). In writing on the building trades in eighteenth-century North Carolina, Catherine Bisher found similar practices, with youths generally serving two to four year terms, orphans and bastards serving until their majority, and no organizations present to regulate training. C. Bishir, 'A Proper Good Nice and Workmanlike Manner: A Century of Traditional Building Practice, 1730-1830', in C. Bishir, *Architects and Builders,* pp. 93-97; Garrison, *The Two Carpenters*, p. 2. For absence of skilled labor, see C. Bridenbaugh, *The Colonial Craftsman, (*Chicago, 1950); Carson, 'Impermanent Architecture', pp.

These producer-consumer interactions could be complicated. Virginia society of the early eighteenth century was a stratified one, in which class differences could be vast, though they seemed to have been rarely insurmountable. A culture of deference provided a means by which an individual could navigate social gradations. For the purposes of this article, "deference" should not be taken to mean the obsequious pandering of the lower and the middling classes to their social superiors. Rather, it was a complicated system of recognizing the subtle markers of social gradation and adjusting one's behavior and forms of communication to fit both the circumstance and the person being addressed. Markers might include material possessions, dress, manners, education, reputation, and birth. However, even with these signifiers, one's status was not always clearly delineated. Good birth and material wealth could be countered by infamous behavior, while inauspicious beginnings could be overcome through personal refinement and contributions to the community at large. For example, Daniel Parke, scion of an established Virginia family, sat on theExecutive Council between 1692 and 1697 when he departed for England; served in a campaign in Flanders in 1701, during which he was made an aide to the Duke of Marlborough; and used "his gallantry, fine appearance and handsome bearing [to please] Queen Anne," which eventually won him an appointment as the governor of the Leeward Islands. Despite his impressive service record and good birth, Parke's violent temper and reputation as a womanizer embarrassed his family in Virginia and brought about an insurrection in the Leeward Islands during which a mob dragged him through the streets and plundered his property. By contrast, Williamsburg carpenter James Wray, a craftsman whose

135-96; Graham, 'Adaptation and Innovation', pp. 451-522; and C. Lounsbury, .The Plague of Building: Construction Practices on the Frontier, 1650-1730' and C. Bishir, 'A Proper Good Nice and Workmanlike Manner: A Century of Traditional Building Practice, 1330-1830', in Bishir, *Architects and Builder.*

early life is unknown, would eventually earn the appellation of "gentleman" through public services in a variety of York County offices, from petit juror to justice of the peace, and masterful performances of his skills to the community at large.[9]

For craftsmen in the building trades, negotiating their way through a social order in which few people's positions were certain entailed playing multiple roles within each exchange with a client. As a master craftsman, he demonstrated his skills in his craft. As an economic agent, he had to maintain his financial independence. As an entrepreneur, he sold his products; as a business man, he had to satisfy his clients; as a social entity, he deferred to those around him. At stake in these exchanges were both the craftsman's competency and his social positioning. Any flaws in performing one could lead to a loss of the other, while superior performances in one could enhance the other. A satisfied client might refer others of his social circle to the craftsman's shop, building his business, while negative experiences might drive customers away. Losing clients posed a significant threat to men active in the buildings trades in Williamsburg. The city's population hovered between four and eight hundred, large enough to maintain several practicing building craftsmen, but small enough to ensure ruin if the craftsman could not maintain his clients' satisfaction.[10]

Few records remain of individual interactions between craftsmen and specific clients. In their place, however, we can examine how craftsmen and government bodies worked together, exchanges which reveal at least some of the difficulties present in craftsman-client relationships.

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9 *Encyclopedia of Virginia Biography* s.v. "Parke, Daniel"; P.A. Treckel, 'The Empire of My Heart: The Marriage of William Byrd II and Lucy Parke Byrd', *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography,* 105/ 2 (1997), p. 131; all York County Records from J. Harwood, '"Frome my Yard": Archaeological Excavations at the James Wray site, Williamsburg,Virginia', (Unpublished Research Report, Williamsburg), p. 47.

10 C. Hellier and Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, *A Population Profile of Williamsburg in 1748*, (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library research report series; RR-139, 1987), p. 2.

In carrying on government work, the craftsmen had to not only fulfill the parameters of the contract, but also had to please the men serving in the House of Burgesses and on the Executive Council. Service in these bodies was generally understood to be the purview of “gentlemen.” A rather amorphous term, this generally conveyed a sense of liberality in one's livelihood: freedom from material necessity and grubbing for subsistence; freedom from the servile subjection; freedom from the subordination of honor and dignity to calculations of interest, and the elevation of the mind through the liberal arts. While the men elected to the House of Burgesses did not necessarily fulfill these conventions and could come from a range of social backgrounds, the men appointed to the Executive Council represented the elite of the colony and saw themselves as archetypes of these values, even when they did not meet them in daily behavior.[11]

Henry Cary's work for the colony exemplifies the complexities of these relationships between craftsmen and government officials. Cary was born into a well-connected planter family in Warwick County, Virginia. While his father and three brothers served in a variety of government posts, including as burgesses, Executive Council members, and magistrates, Cary instead spent much of his professional career as a builder and a contractor. These family connections likely helped him win the various government contracts he held. Cary organized the capital's move from Jamestown to Williamsburg, oversaw the building of the new Capitol, and supervised the restoration of the College of William and Mary after it burned in 1705. These projects seemed to have been completed without significant disagreements between the Cary and

11 Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia,* pp. 131, 196.

the government. That working relationship would fade, however.[12]

In October 1705, the House of Burgesses passed an act for building a house for the governor of the colony, appointing Henry Cary "an overseer to inspect, oversee, and provide for the building aforesaid, with full power to begin, carry on, and finish the same, according to the directions of this act," for which he was to be "paid and allowed for the time of [his] respective service and attendance in the employment and trust aforesaid, after the rate of one hundred pounds a year." Should Cary be unable to finish the task, any other builder entrusted with the task would earn the same compensation. However, the burgesses required Cary, and any other overseer, to

> enter into bond with one surety, of five hundred pounds sterling to our sovereign lady the queen...that he will not imbezile or convert to his own use any part of the money or materials put unto his hands for carrying on the building aforesaid, but that according to the best of his skill and understanding and the trust reposed in him he will faithfully lay out all such monys in and about the uses and services for which he receives it and also that he will lay an account of his disbursments from time to time, before the governor and councill, and before the assembly at their meeting.

Five years later, when the Assembly passed *An act for finishing a House for the Governor of this Colony and Dominion*, they also renewed both Cary's salary and the required bond.[13]

Requiring the bond marked both the social conscientiousness and the practicality of the serving burgesses. The 1705 act allocated £3,000 and the 1710 act allocated an additional

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12 Cary was a Virginia native, was born about 1650 and died in 1720. Given Cary's background, it is interesting that he choose a to pursue a craft rather than a political career as his siblings did. Being raised in the gentry culture which tended to supply men to the House of Burgesses and the Executive Council, it seems that Cary would have been aware of what was expected from him during those client interactions. That he disregarded appropriate behavior during the time he was building the Governor's House seems uncharacteristic. However, it might indicate the depth of Cary's financial crisis. Biographical information from *Encyclopedia of Virginia Biography* s.v. "Cary, Henry," "Cary, Miles," "Cary, Col. Miles," "Cary, Capt. William," "Cary, Col. Wilson."

13 Hening, *The Statutes at Large,* iii, 287 (October 1705), iii, 485 (October 1710).

£2,195**.** These were substantial amounts and their misappropriation would have been an embarrassment to both the colony and the burgesses, as well as detrimental to the welfare of the colony as a whole. Any temptation on Cary's part to "imbezile" was likely to be mitigated by the impending sacrifice of £500, enough to ruin a man. By requiring a bond, the burgesses protected the colony's investment in the project, as well as their own reputations as learned men of sound judgment. By the same token, this forced Cary to conduct himself in a workmanlike manner, showcasing his skills as a master craftsman and his integrity as a businessman.[14]

The burgesses' conscientiousness on the part of the colony did not extend to the workmen employed for its benefit. One month after the assembly passed the second bill allocating money to the building of the governor's house, Henry Cary submitted a petition showing that, while he considered himself under an obligation to take care of the building until the burgesses discharged him, his continued commitment to the project was causing him to neglect his own affairs. He had already broken up housekeeping at his own plantation and removed his wife and domestics to the work site, "all which was very prejudicall to your Petitioner and will [illegible] much to hs ruin if he be not allowed his full Sallary for the full time he hath attended that Service." As venerable as this appointment was, it nevertheless taxed Cary's competence. He performed satisfactorily as a craftsman, but due to the burgesses was in danger of losing his financial independence unless his salary was paid. Fortunately, on 1 December 1710, the assembly paid Cary "the Sume of Three hundred Eighty five pounds Twelve Shillings and Eleven pence *sterling* out of the public Monys."[15]

14 Hening, *The Statutes at Large,* iii, 287 (October 1705).

15 Petition: Henry Cary to the General Assembly of Virginia re payment for work at Governor's Palace, 24 November 1710, Photocopied Manuscript Collection, Rockefeller Special Collections, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia*, iv, 51, 58, 281-282, 284.

This situation suggests bureaucratic lethargy and governmental parsimony. Both are reasons for the delay, but this situation may represent a deeper disparity in the world views of the burgesses and the craftsmen they engaged. As gentlemen, the burgesses were to enjoy liberality in life, a freedom from material necessity that allowed them to undertake important responsibilities in the community at large, such as filling a civil office without salary. Even if they could not be considered "gentry," the men who sat as burgesses had to have the financial wherewithal to be able to concentrate at two months of their year on government business, rather than their own financial concerns. The economic independence that marked this liberal lifestyle was considered a pre-requisite for filling such offices, as a general fear that paying politicians would open the way to their corruption. The continual neglect of salaries correlates with the burgesses' own self-perception of *gratis* civil service.[16]

Moreover, this seems to have been a dominant attitude in the earliest years of the eighteenth century. Cary petitioned on 27 April 1704 for "Allowance for his Extraordinary Services in Overseeing the Building of the Capitol." The next day he was ordered to "lay before the House the amounts of the Disposition of the money payd him for the building of the Capitol &c together with the proceedings of ye Committee appointed to inspect and oversee the said Building." That same year, Thomas Whitby petitioned for "allowance for his care & diligence in building the Capitol." Apparently receiving no answer, he petitioned the governor himself, Francis Nicholson, who sent his approval to the assembly. As Whitby was "Still engaged by an agreement made with The committee Till The whole work is finished So That he Could not undertake any other Work & Therefore I Think it is Reasonable That he should be Allowed his

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16 Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, pp. 131, 196.

Sallary for his being Discharged proceeded only a Mistake Which had it been known he would have been Employed in Some Work That might have Countervailed what he now Demands." It was accordingly resolved that Whitby be paid according to his petition.[17]

These delayed payments, issued only at the insistence of the contractor, implies an on-going tension. The burgesses viewed the chosen contractors as men worthy of being entrusted with works performed for the benefit of the colony. The social similarity of serving the colony overshadowed the different economic circumstances between the two: the burgesses served the colony because they had the liberality to do so, but the craftsmen did so to gain or solidify the financial independence in order to obtain that liberality. Functioning as social creatures, the burgesses emphasized the honor of serving the colony, an honor of which men like Cary were exceedingly aware, and the liberality that it implied, overlooking the economic necessities of payment because they received none for their services. Only with official reminders through the appropriate channels did they separate the honor from the economics.

The size of the project, and the novelty of the undertaking, may also have contributed to the sluggish payments. The investment of such substantial sums mandated careful handling, as did the collective inexperience of the assembly in managing or overseeing a large scale project. With such concerns in mind, the burgesses may have felt that extra attention was necessary to ensure that everything was handled properly. By contrast, Benjamin Powell's accounts of the 1760s and 1770s had much shorter turnaround times. On 13 May 1765, Powell submitted an account "for repairing the Publick Gaol." It was read during that session; the house resolved to

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17 McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia*, iv:51, 58, 289.; McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia*, iv, 51, 119.

pay him £388.13.8 ½ for his work; and Mr. Attorney carried it up to the Council for their concurrence, which gave their assent by June 1. Similarly, on 14 December 1769, Powell's claim for "Repairs to the Capitols was presented to the House, and read" before being "referred to the Consideration of the Committee of Public Claims." Within six days, the committee resolved to pay him £79.11.11 and the same day the Council agreed with the resolve. Though relatively large sums, neither were as great as what Cary had at his disposal. Furthermore, Powell undertook repairs in both cases, rather than full building contracts. A new structure could go awry in countless ways, but repairs could easily be corrected if done poorly. If his earlier repairs correlate with the ones on account in 1773 and 1774, he was providing basic maintenance services including hanging closet doors, painting, glazing windows, removing bookcases, and putting in new seats. While his work would certainly have been judged by the burgesses through the course of their daily interactions with those same doors, windows, and seats, the nature of the tasks did not confer the same sense of honor or obligation. However, performing well in these small tasks may have been fundamental in securing Powell's bid to build the Public Hospital. That contract certainly carried both social and professional implications. Not only did Powell have the honor of working for the colony, but after the hospital's completion, he is referred to as a "gentleman" rather than by any occupation.[18]

18 McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia*, x: 337, 364; McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia*, xi: 339, 349, 351; Account: "Country" [Virginia] with Ben[jamin] Powell, Williamsburg builder, for repairs at Capitol and Prison, 2 October 1773, Photocopied Manuscript Collection, Rockefeller Special Collections, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; Account: "Country" [Virginia] with Ben[jamin] Powell for work at Capitol and Prison in Williamsburg, 24 May 1774, Photocopied Manuscript Collection, Rockefeller Special Collections, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; Account: "Country" [Virginia] with Benjamin Powell, Williamsburg contractor, for work at Capitol, Prison, and Office, 2 November 1774, Photocopied Manuscript Collection, Rockefeller Special Collections, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Commissioned to construct the Public Hospital between 1770 and 1773, Powell received multiple payments during that period: on 26 January 1771 for £250, on 24 December 1771 for £400, on 15 June 1773 for £200, on 15 September 1773 for £592.12.11 ¾, on 22 December 1773 for £143.17.3 ¼, and 28 June 1775 for the balance of the account, £130.12.0 ½. The

In addition to social tensions, bureaucratic lethargy, and the novelty of the enterprise, another possible explanation might account for Cary's need to petition for his salary. As Williamsburg began to develop, the town that Governor Nicholson envisaged did not correlate with that which the local notables, including the men who served as burgesses and on the Executive Council, had pictured. Where Nicholson saw a seat of British imperial power, the Virginia gentry saw a seat of local power and a landscape that could express Virginia's accomplishments, rather than England's. This contest over what forms the new urban landscape should take, and what power that landscape should express, might also have contributed to Cary's delayed payments. As a craftsman working on the Governor's House, Cary was directly responsible for the creation of a landscape imbued with meanings contrary to the ones the local gentry had anticipated. The burgesses' reluctance to deliver Cary's salary might indicate a dissatisfaction with what the building represented, rather than a dissatisfaction with Cary's work.[19]

The Executive Council, though, was dissatisfied with Cary's performance. On 28 April 1711, the council found that the method Cary had "pursued for carrying on that building [of the Governor's House] is extravagantly chargable and expensive." The board required that Cary

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regularity and transparency of the payments indicates that the burgesses had become more comfortable with and knowledgeable about public building projects. Unlike Cary, Powell was not required to submit his accounts to the House of Burgesses for approval, but instead submitted them to the Directors of the Public Hospital. This intervening step puts even more distance between the politicians and the project, further indicating a comfort level with how the project was carried out. They no longer needed to be directly involved. Treasurer's Office Records (Virginia) Cash Books, 15 January 1777-6 April 1782, Library of Virginia cited in Patricia Ann Gibbs, L.H Rowe, and Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, *The Public Hospital, 1766-1885: (Eastern State Hospital)* (Research Report Series, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1974), p. 337.

19 P. Musselwhite, 'Williamsburg's Coronation: Politics, Ceremony and the City in Colonial Virginia' (paper presented at the Virginia Forum, Lexington, Virginia, 24-26 March 2011). Payment mechanisms and the financial situation of the colony have also been offered as suggestions as to why craftsmen's payments may have been delayed. To the best of my knowledge, accounts for the House of Burgesses are not extant for this period.

lessen “the said Expence by a more rugal management of the money,” and to undertake the finishing of the building by piece. On 7 December 1711, the council required that Cary “lay before this Board the Account of his disbursements to be examined.” It seems that Cary had “under the pretence of dieting the Workmen imployed [in building the Governor's House] taken the liberty to maintain his whole family at the publick charge without Warrant.” The council deemed his hundred pound per annum salary sufficient to defray the costs of his family's subsistence. Cary's misuse of public funds may reflect the financial hardship he claimed in his petition, brought on by not receiving his promised salary. Alternatively, Cary might have become overconfident in his competence. Having already served as the primary craftsman on the Governor's House for six years, he might have thought his position secure and his performances of his craft mastery, including his accounting skills, satisfactory.[20]

Given the multi-faceted nature of interpersonal relationships in eighteenth-century Virginia, state contracts likely sprung from various personal client-craftsman relationships. For many of the building craftsmen working in Williamsburg, demonstrating one's skills on an individual, task-based basis could lead to the opportunity to demonstrate those same skills to the colony at large. For the enslaved craftsmen who were locked into their positions in the socio-racial hierarchy, the social mobility and economic success their free counterparts might enjoy from masterful performances of skill was denied to them. Still, performing their work well created benefits for them. Mastering complex skill sets increased the slave's use and value to his master, possibly leading to more individual responsibility in the shop and from there more autonomy in completing projects. After proving himself reliable, the slave craftsman might be

20 McIlwaine, *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, iii, 272-273, 293.

allowed to hire himself out, again practicing his craft with relative autonomy from his shop master. If he remained within the shop's hierarchy, he might work in the shop or even on a project site without direct supervision of the master carpenters. Though his performances of mastery would not earn him social independence, they could bring him some work-related autonomy.

Carpenter James Wray's accounts with Thomas Jones, owner of the Raleigh Tavern in Williamburg, offer a more detailed picture of how free and enslaved craftsmen worked together on a single job site. In late September of 1733, Wray and his slaves did some work for Jones at his tavern. In addition to charges for sash frames and planks, Wray charged for the labor:

> To one days work my self & Thomas at 3/ &
> 7 Days work Daniel at 2/6 & 7 days Matt at 1/6
> About putting in a window frame & mending
> the feather edge plank & work done in the
> Kitchen & repairing the stable inside
> and outside and other jobbs £1.14.00

In January of the following year, Wray added to Jones' account:

> To 2 ½ days work Thomas and Daniel at 2/6 about
> a new gable end to the stable and mending
> the floors in the shades and stalls £0.12.6

The prices charged for the slaves' labor indicate their skills as carpenters. Wray valued Thomas' work in 1733 as highly as his own, implying that the slave had attained skills comparable to that of his master. Daniel likely possessed similar skills, given that Wray valued his labor just below or at the same level as Thomas'. The difference may have been Thomas' ability to work with windows. Of the tasks listed in the first account, putting in a window frame could be completed in a single day. Wray does not specify what sort of window frame is installed, though frames for

both casement windows and sash windows presented difficulties.

Casement windows hinged or pivoted on one side to open and shut, and usually had wooden or iron frames containing panes of glass set in lead. The leaded panes could be set in place before the frame was installed and individual panes could be replaced once the window was in place. To put in a casement frame, a craftsman had to work around glass panes and calculate the placement carefully to allow the hinge full rotation. Sash windows, which began to replace casement windows on a large scale in the 1730s, presented difficulties of their own. Panes were set in a wooden or metal frame that slid vertically or horizontally, rather than pivoting. The best windows of this kind had lead counterweights embedded in the frame to keep the window open, though most were propped open with pins or sticks. If Wray and Thomas installed the frame for such a window that day, they had to ensure the sashes aligned and could move freely and might have had to install the counterweight system as well. The latter required a wood wheel which rotated on an iron or brass pin, set into the top of the window casing, with a rope connecting to the lower sash at one end and counterbalanced by a weight at the other. This system required a great deal more work, and a great deal more skill to manufacture and assemble the components.[21]

Despite any differences in skill sets, Thomas and Daniel both possessed enough knowledge of their trade to work without direct supervision. Once finished with the window, Wray apparently departed the site with Thomas and left Daniel and Matt alone to work. The charges for Matt's labor indicates that he may not have had the same skill levels of the others. If

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21 Account of Colonel Thomas Jones with James Wray, Jones Family Papers, [c. 1731-1735], Photocopy Manuscripts Collection, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg; Lounsbury, *An Illustrated Glossary*, pp. 63, 295-296, 316.

he was new to the trade, either a young man serving an apprenticeship or an adult recently acquired and just learning, this experience may have served as practical experience meant to help him develop his skills and learn how to make specific repairs. How Daniel completed his work takes on new implications in this case. To be entrusted with training another carpenter implies that Daniel had mastered the craft, and possessed a sufficient breadth and depth of craft knowledge that he could train Matt to be a competent carpenter. While the work they finished over those seven days reflected on Wray's skills in training his workmen, it also reflected heavily on Daniel. Being the senior craftsman on site, the responsibility of completing the work in a timely and masterful manner fell to him. Additionally, whatever work Matt did reflected not only his own skills, but also Daniel's ability to instruct and to supervise him. For Daniel, demonstrating his mastery of skills brought additional responsibilities, that in turn presented him with opportunities to distinguish himself from his fellow carpenters through semi-autonomous performances of mastery.

The highly developed skillsets indicated by the value of their labor allowed Thomas and Daniel to function somewhat independently in a social system that denied them independence. They could move between Wray's shop and the client's site without supervision. Their work fulfilled the standards Wray set for himself, and so did not need his on-site approval. In acquiring their skills, refining them, and performing them in a workmanlike manner, Thomas and Daniel demonstrated not only their mastery of their craft, but also their knowledge of and ability to conform to the community's expectations of how such work should be done. This earned them a degree of autonomy and authority that they might never have found anywhere else, but could

exercise on the worksite.[22]

The creation and on-going maintenance of Williamsburg's public spaces was undertaken by three types of men: the gentry, the craftsman, and the slave. Each knew his position within the society, and took advantages of the opportunities available to him to secure or better that place. For some, this meant creating a new capital that could express their imperial ambitions. For some, it meant demonstrating their talents through the buildings they created, in hopes that they might climb the social ladder. For some, building Williamsburg meant the chance to earn a little autonomy and personal recognition in a system that denied them even their humanity. The built environment of Williamsburg captured these ambitions, the ways men chose to express them, and the social hierarchies that limited the forms those expressions could take.

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22 Wray's estate inventory, dated 1750, corroborates the values placed on Thomas' and Matt's labor. Thomas appears as “Tom,” valued at £30, and Matt was valued at £15. Daniel does not appear in the 1750 inventory. He may have been one of the four deaths in the Wray household during the 1747-1748 smallpox epidemic. “Inventory of Estate of James Wray 1750 March 18,” Colonial Williamsburg Digital Library, http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/View/index.cfm?doc=Probates\PB00340.xml.