

ART MUSEUMS *of Colonial Williamsburg*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media contacts: Robyn Liverant for the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg
212.472.6947 or robyn@robynliverant.com
Ellen Peltz for The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
757.220.7287 or epeltz@cwf.org

THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION RECEIVES EXTRAORDINARY GIFT OF HISTORIC DRESS COLLECTION



Williamsburg, Va. (Oct. 23, 2023)—Adding to what is already a renowned assemblage of historic dress, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation has recently received a gift of nearly 330 objects from The Valentine Museum in Richmond, Va., as part of the redefinition of the museum’s holdings. The collection includes gowns, coats, trousers, breeches, waistcoats, vests, petticoats, underwear, accessories, hats, children’s clothing and more, all of which predate 1840. Within the larger group is a 20-piece collection of garments that were owned by and descended through the stepfamily of Lewis Littlepage (1762-1802); it is the largest grouping of clothing owned by a single person to come into the Foundation’s collection.

“Historic dress allows us to look closely at the physical natures of people from the past, but we often know little about their lives,” said Ronald L. Hurst, the Foundation’s senior vice president for education and historic resources. “The Littlepage collection provides a glimpse into the remarkable experiences of a Virginian whose path placed him in direct contact with world leaders at the end of the 18th century.”

Lewis Littlepage was a Hanover County, Va., native whose story is as colorful as the garments he wore. It is a tale of diplomacy, adventure, war, friendship, enemies, debt and deceit. Littlepage attended what was then known as the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg and later served with John Jay at the Court of Spain during the American Revolution. Due to problems with debt, he served with the Spanish Army during

the attack on Minorca and the Siege of Gibraltar. By 1786 he was admitted to the Court of Poland where he served as a Chamberlain to King Stanislaw II until 1795. With war raging across Europe and the second partition of Poland, Littlepage was forced to leave the Court and finally returned home in 1801. Possibly the best summary of Littlepage's life was from Lyon Gardiner Tyler, the president of William & Mary (as it is now called) between 1888 and 1919, when he said, "Perhaps a mere genius, Lewis Littlepage was the greatest that was ever born in Virginia. His story sounds like a fable taken from *Arabian Nights*. It far transcends that of Captain John Smith...his voluminous papers were nearly all destroyed by his executor, obedient to his direction. Had they been preserved, what tales of love and adventure at the Courts of Poland and Russia, and about subtle intrigues and secret conspiracies of Kings, Generals, and great diplomats, may have been disclosed."

When he died a bachelor in Fredericksburg, Va., only nine months after returning from Europe, the inventory taken of his estate was fairly sparse in the way of the customary furniture, ceramics and other saleable goods. It contained, however, a two-page, detailed list of his "cloathes [sic] and decorations" worth \$340.00. Aside from the typical items, such as one hat and 24 pairs of under drawers, the inventory contained objects including one green cloak given to him by the king of Poland, two coats given to him by the king of Spain, a pair of Cossack pistols, a pair of German pistols and a Spanish sword. His small estate was left to his stepbrother Waller Holladay; the surviving objects passed directly through the Holladay family until gifted to The Valentine in 1952 by Mr. and Mrs. A. Randolph Holladay II.

Among the highlights of the Littlepage Collection to come to Colonial Williamsburg is a three-piece suit that it is believed he wore while at the Court of Catherine II of Russia. The suit, originally constructed in 1787 and comprised of a fully embroidered court coat, a single-breasted waistcoat and matching breeches, saw continual wear as Littlepage did not become a member of the Order of Saint Stanislaus until 1790, when the badge was probably added to the breast of the coat. Made from a compound woven silk with several stripes of brown, blue and white with a tiny blue check overtop, the coat was embroidered with a silver bullion edge with grey and white floral sprays down the center front, around and on the pocket flaps, cuffs, collar, the edge of the front pleat and down the center back vent. The order was made on pasteboard or layers of paper, which shows inked drawings to indicate the pattern the embroiderer was to follow. The central motifs were made from a silvered disc with the royal monogram set in garnets of "SAR" (Stanislaus Augustus Rex). Around the embroidered monogram is the Latin motto *Praemiando Incitat* ("Encouraged by Reward"), and surrounding the phrase is a laurel wreath from which radiates an eight-pointed star worked in spangles and bullion. The matching waistcoat is embroidered with blue, white and grey floral sprays. The borders down the center front were worked with copper bullion that is coated to make them blue. This waistcoat is made adjustable by two very large buckles attached at the back; buckles such as these are usually associated with the backs of breeches to make them adjust and are possibly a unique feature of Polish clothing. The breeches are

made from a complex woven silk lined throughout with plain off-white linen. They have a flap front that extends from side seam to side seam with five buttons at the top and two on each side. The waistband of the pocket contains two watch pockets with a button and buttonhole to close it. The back of the waistband retains its original iron buckle for adjustability. Beneath the flap there are two internal white linen pockets. Each knee closes with five buttons and buttonholes and a garter made to fit a set of knee buckles. Each of the garters are embroidered to match the rest of the suit.

“The Littlepage collection offers a unique opportunity to study an individual’s style and how world politics affected their fashion,” said Neal Hurst, Colonial Williamsburg’s curator of historic dress and textiles. “It is such an amazing collection of clothing that tells an unbelievable story.”

Another featured garment in this collection is a buff-colored, twilled woolen waistcoat with a tall, standing collar that Littlepage probably wore while he served as a Chamberlain and diplomat to the Court of Poland between 1785 and 1795. It is embroidered with silk threads in geometric patterns that resemble egg- and dart-like motifs. The front has two large cross or welt pockets with pocket bags made from white linen. At some point, the center back was enlarged with a wedge down its middle and the adjustable tapes were removed. The buttons and buttonhole are unusually closely spaced. Fascinatingly, found in the pocket was a piece of paper that reads "*Si vous dedaignez mon vin je serais au désespoir*" or "If you disdain my wine, I'll be in despair."

In 1790, King Stanislaw August Poniatowski of Poland awarded Lewis Littlepage the Order of Saint Stanislaus. This ribbon is yet another highlight of the recently acquired Littlepage Collection. The sash, a red-and-white silk moiré ribbon, was worn over the shoulder with an enameled badge that hung from the bottom. The badge is in the form of a Maltese cross and is made from paste stones with red foils set behind them. It is mounted around a green-bordered, central white enamel circle showing St. Stanislaus wearing vestments with the letters "SS" to each side of him. Between each of the points of the cross, enameled Polish eagles radiate from the center. The Littlepage Collection contains two surviving ribbons, one with its badge and one with the badge missing.

For a further look at the Littlepage Collection, please visit <https://emuseum.history.org/>, type “Littlepage” in the search, and all of the objects can be seen in full-color images along with interpreted text for each item. Additional information about the Art Museums and Colonial Williamsburg as well as tickets are available online at colonialwilliamsburg.org, by calling (855) 296-6627 and by following Colonial Williamsburg on [Facebook](#) and [@colonialwmsburg](#) on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

About the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg

The Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg include the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum and the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum, both of which are housed in their newly expanded building that offers an additional 65,000-square-feet of space, 25-percent more gallery space and numerous enhancements to the visitor experience. The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum is home to the nation's premier collection of American folk art, with more than 7,000 folk art objects made up to the present day. The DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum exhibits the best in British and American fine and decorative arts from 1670–1840. The Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg are located at 301 South Nassau Street in Williamsburg, Va. Open daily from 10 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

About The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation preserves, restores and operates Virginia's 18th-century capital of Williamsburg. Innovative and interactive experiences highlight the relevance of the American Revolution to contemporary life and the importance of an informed, active citizenry. The Colonial Williamsburg experience includes more than 600 restored or reconstructed original buildings, renowned museums of decorative arts and folk art, extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers and 18th-century inspired culinary options from historic taverns situated along historic Duke of Gloucester Street. Colonial Williamsburg Resorts complement the experience, offering guests five unique hotel properties including the iconic Forbes Travel Guide Five-Star, AAA Five Diamond Williamsburg Inn, newly renovated Williamsburg Lodge-Autograph Collection, Williamsburg Woodlands Hotel and Suites, the Griffin Hotel, and authentic 18th-century Colonial Houses. The resort offers a range of events and amenities including four historic taverns, 15 food and beverage outlets providing exquisite culinary experiences from casual to elegant dining, the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club featuring 36 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. and his son Rees Jones, a world-class full-service spa and fitness center, pools, meeting and flexible event spaces, and scenic gardens providing the perfect venue for weddings and special events. Merchants Square, built alongside the Historic Area in 1935 as one of the first planned shopping districts in the United States, features more than 40 specialty boutiques with products ranging from apparel to fine jewelry, art, specialty foods and gifts. Philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and hospitality operations sustain Colonial Williamsburg's educational programs and preservation initiatives.

#

*Images (left to right): Suit: coat; waistcoat; breeches; Warsaw, Poland, 1787-1795: Coat: silk, linen, silver, gold, garnets, wood, paper; Waistcoat: silk, copper, linen, wool, and paper; Breeches: silk, linen, iron, wood, and paper; Gift of The Valentine Museum, Richmond, VA, 2023-21,1-3; Waistcoat: Warsaw, Poland, 1785-1795, wool, silk, wood, linen, Gift of The Valentine Museum, Richmond, VA, 2023-26; Order of Saint Stanislaus Ribbon, Warsaw, Poland, 1790, silk, copper, enamel, glass, Gift of The Valentine Museum, Richmond, VA, 2023-23.