

ART MUSEUMS *of Colonial Williamsburg*

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RARE WEDGWOOD PLATE FROM CATHERINE THE GREAT'S GREEN FROG SERVICE AND AN 18TH-CENTURY PRINT DEPICTING ITS CENTRAL DESIGN MOTIF ARE ACQUIRED BY THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION



Williamsburg, Va. (Dec. 16, 2024)—A rare pair of related 18th-century objects were recently acquired by The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation: a creamware plate, made by Josiah Wedgwood as part of a service commissioned by Catherine the Great to be used at her castle, La Grenouillère or Kekerekeksinen (Frog Marsh); and a fine copy of a print engraved by François Vivares after work by Thomas Smith. The print depicts Dunnington Cliff on the River Trent in England, which is the motif seen in the center of the plate. By adding the plate to its ceramics collection, the Foundation becomes one of the few American institutions to own a surviving piece from this famous dinner service.

“Colonial Williamsburg’s collection of British-made ceramics is one of the finest in the United States,” said Ronald Hurst, the Foundation’s senior vice president and chief mission officer. “The acquisition of this plate and its printed design source brings new prominence to the collection. We are deeply grateful to the Friends of Colonial Williamsburg Collections for funding both purchases.”

Royal patronage within England and abroad helped Josiah Wedgwood secure a well-respected reputation as a manufacturer of ceramics for all levels of society. Catherine the Great of Russia was a patroness who commissioned two dinner services from his firm; the Frog Marsh service was the second. It encompassed an

astounding 952 pieces, each of which was hand painted in monochrome with distinct views of England and bore a splayed frog within a shield to signify the name of the palace for which it was made. To this day, the service remains the most ambitious endeavor by a British ceramics manufacturer. It was more than a mere dinner service; it was a symbol of British diplomacy and shared with the larger world all that England could offer from ancient architectural ruins to imposing country homes in bucolic landscapes to industrial achievements, such as the view of Dunnington Cliff on River Trent shown on this plate. It also symbolizes the importance of the Baltic region in British and American trade in the 18th and early 19th centuries as well as the production of ceramics through the plate's central image.

“This plate will be very much at home alongside other important Wedgwood-made holdings already in Colonial Williamsburg's ceramic collection, including a prized Portland vase and a piece from the Husk service, the earlier service commissioned by Catherine the Great,” said Angelika R. Kuettner, Colonial Williamsburg's curator of ceramics and glass. “This Green Frog service plate provides so many layers of interpretation for us. Other pieces from the service depicting grand houses are truly lovely, but this example allows us to talk about waterpower in the 18th century and ceramic production, not to mention Wedgwood's industrial and entrepreneurial influence throughout the world.”

The plate's molded rim is painted with a meandering oak leaf and acorn border interrupted by a shield enclosing a green painted splayed frog. The cavetto is painted with a neoclassical, scalloped border between concentric lines. The plate's well is painted with a bucolic scene of a lock on a river, grazing cattle in the background, a sailing vessel on the meandering waterway, and a church spire painted faintly in the distance. The reverse bears a black enamel painted number “221” and an impressed circle.

Of the pieces in the original dinner service, the majority remain in Russia today and have been there since their delivery in the 18th century. A few pieces were not sent and were divided between Wedgwood's Etruria manufactory and Alexander Baxter who was the agent for the purchase. To date, there are 26 extant pieces known that were not delivered to Catherine the Great because, as Wedgwood noted, they were either duplicates or considered by Wedgwood not up to his high standard of quality. Of those, 17 are in museum collections, only 5 of which are in American museums. This acquisition brings that number to 6 in museums in the United States; the remaining 8 pieces are still privately owned.

The view of Dunnington Cliff, located southeast of Derby, is significant as it was the site of King's Mills, Britain's largest water-powered manufacturing area in the mid-18th century and home to numerous mills associated with a variety of manufacturers, including flint grinding for the ceramic industry, paper making, iron forging and flour production. The representation of Dunnington Cliff on the plate comes from a 1745 print, *View of Dunnington Cliff on the River Trent* engraved by François Vivares after the painting on the subject

by Thomas Smith. The opportunity for the Foundation to acquire both the source print with the hand-painted ceramic plate from the Frog Marsh service is significant.

“Together they tell an incredible story. Prints like this one were imported in the 18th century from England to decorate the walls of Virginia houses and also served as inspiration for an important dinner service used in a Russian Palace. Being able to show a printed design source alongside the ceramic plate helps us draw connections between mediums within the decorative arts,” said Katie McKinney, Margaret Beck Pritchard Curator of Maps & Prints



As seen in the image at left, the lock at the center of the plate shows the same lock in the print. While the artists painting the plate adapted the print to their circular canvas, they maintained accuracy with great precision to even include the wispy clouds and a church spire seen faintly in the background

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 5:00 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.

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*Images: Plate, Wedgwood and Bentley, Etruria, Staffordshire, England (made in) and Chelsea, England (decorated in, 1773-1774, creamware, OH: 7/8" OH 9-7/8", Museum Purchase, The Friends of Colonial Williamsburg Collections Fund, 2024-241; *View of Dunnington Cliff on the River Trent*, engraved by Francois Vivares after work by Thomas Smith, London, England, 1745, etching and line engraving on laid paper, Museum Purchase, The Friends of Colonial Williamsburg Collections Fund, 2024-242.