

ART MUSEUMS *of Colonial Williamsburg*

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**EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY WEAPONS OF WAR
ARE THE FOCUS OF A NEW EXHIBITION OPENING IN APRIL 2019
AT THE ART MUSEUMS OF COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG**



Williamsburg, VA (March 11, 2019)—Warfare is complex and sophisticated today, but in the 1700s, during the French and Indian and Revolutionary wars, weaponry and combat was far less so. The arms used by the combatants on all sides of these North American conflicts were an international jumble of firearms and bladed weapons. In *“To Arm Against an Enemy:” Weapons of the Revolutionary War*, opening on April 20, at the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum, one of the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, visitors will

gain a deeper understanding of these instruments of war as the weapons take center stage. The exhibition, which will remain on view until January 2, 2023, will feature approximately 70 muskets, carbines and rifles, bayonets, pistols and swords as used by Loyalists, American patriots, Hessians and British “red coats” in battles on land and at sea.

“To Arm Against an Enemy” opens to coincide with the anniversary of the Gunpowder Incident in which Virginia’s last royal governor, Lord Dunmore, gave orders on April 20, 1775, to remove 15 barrels of gunpowder from Williamsburg’s Magazine. Conducted under the cover of darkness, the mission was successful, outraging the residents of the city and adding fuel to the rapidly intensifying revolutionary fire. The exhibition will remain on view through December 31, 2022, and will be complimented by two satellite exhibitions opening in 2021. The first of these will tell the story of arms in Williamsburg from 1699 to 1780, and the other will discuss artillery, ammunition and military accouterments of the period.

“At the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, every exhibition helps to further the foundation’s mission of authentically telling America’s story,” said Ghislain d’Humières, executive director and senior vice president, core operations. “Its extensive collection of early weapons offers visitors an opportunity to learn more about an aspect of life in the colonies that is often overlooked. *“To Arm Against an Enemy”* promises to be illuminating.”

Prior to the French and Indian War (1754-1763), when red-coated soldiers came across the Atlantic by the thousands and brought the first major influx of British military weaponry into the American colonies, the arms of the colonists were a mix of the obsolete, the old and the odd. Most firearms were privately owned and suited more for shooting game than for combat, while others were outdated foreign pieces captured in previous conflicts. A fresh wave of cutting-edge military arms arrived with the Revolutionary War, adding to the assortment of weapon types already in America.

“Over the last ninety years, Colonial Williamsburg has assembled one of the world’s most comprehensive collections of Revolutionary-era weaponry,” said Ronald L. Hurst, the foundation’s Carlisle H. Humelsine chief curator and vice president for collections, conservation and museums. “That gives us the rare opportunity to explore this subject in an unbiased fashion, from every partisan perspective: American, French, British and Hessian.”

Among the highlights of the exhibition is an English silver hilted smallsword that was presented to Major General Nathanael Greene in 1781 by an unknown party, perhaps at the time he received command of the Southern Department of the Continental Army. Beginning as a private soldier in 1775, Greene had been promoted to major general in the Continental Army by the New York campaign of 1776 and became known as one of Washington’s best and brightest. Of classic smallsword form for the period (this example was made ca.1765-1770), all its elements are cast, chased and pierced. Decorative motifs include openwork scrolls, foliage, shells, lions, eagles, trophies and gorgon heads. At some point in the early to mid-19th century, this

sword was memorialized by the addition of two plaquettes set onto the grip at the midpoint. Both are surrounded by an identical reeded bezel, the first of which frames a miniature enameled portrait of General Greene done after Charles Willson Peale's famous likeness. The other appliqué is of engraved silver and bears the date and presentation to General Greene.

"More than just showcasing the weaponry of the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars, *To Arm Against an Enemy*" speaks to the progression of military technology and the tools that were used to secure American independence," said Erik Goldstein, Colonial Williamsburg's senior curator of mechanical arts and numismatics, who curated the exhibition.

Another featured weapon to be on view in *To Arm Against an Enemy* is a British Pattern 1769 Land Service musket known as a "Brown Bess." Few such muskets in Colonial Williamsburg's collection show as much wear as this example. New at the onset of the war, it was originally issued to the freshly raised 71st Regiment of Foot, also known as Fraser's Highlanders. This unit was two battalions strong and fought in almost every campaign of the Revolutionary War after arriving from Scotland in 1776. Part of the regiment disembarked in Savannah in late 1778, kicking off an extended period of extremely hard service in the South that culminated in defeat at Yorktown in 1781 and disbandment a few years later. This musket ended up in American hands after the war, further contributing to its worn condition over the ensuing decades.

A sword made between 1778 and 1780 at James Hunter's Rappahannock Forge in Falmouth, Virginia, is another featured weapon in the exhibition with a fascinating history. By 1778, there was an explosion in the number of cavalry units fighting on both sides of the Revolutionary War. While the Loyalist light dragoons were largely equipped with swords made by James Potter of New York City, the Continental Army was left scrambling to arm their mounted troops. To fill the void, they turned to Hunter, whose industrial complex was capable of manufacturing these indispensable cavalry swords. While additional research is needed to determine which blades were actually forged at Hunter's works, it seems that he used whatever blades he could obtain to fulfill his orders. For this sword, Hunter used a common three-fullered blade of European manufacture and mounted it with a hilt marked with an "H," struck into the outside of the knucklebow. In addition to this stamp are the engraved marks "1 T PL D N 22," meaning the weapon was number 22 in the first troop of Pulaski's Light (or 'Legion' of) Dragoons. As part of the armament of Pulaski's Legion in the Continental Army, this saber likely saw action at Savannah (1779) and the Siege of Charleston (1780). In addition, it may also have been used at Camden, Guilford Court House and the Siege of Yorktown after Pulaski's unit was incorporated into Armand's Legion under the command of French Colonel Charles Armand Tuffin.

To Arm Against an Enemy is generously funded by The Pritzker Military Foundation.

The Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg remain open during construction of an entirely donor-funded \$41.7 million expansion. Additional information about the Art Museums and Colonial Williamsburg as well as

tickets are available online at colonialwilliamsburg.com, 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. The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2017, is home to the nation's premier collection of American folk art, with more than 7,000 folk art objects made during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. 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 the intersection of Francis and South Henry Streets in Williamsburg, Va., and are entered through the [Public Hospital of 1773](#). Expansion of the museum broke ground on April 27, 2017. Once completed, the museums' expansion will provide a new entrance, improved public access, increased exhibition space and guest services among other enhancements. Museum hours are 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. daily.

About The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Colonial Williamsburg operates the world's largest living history museum, preserving Virginia's 18th-century capital as a fully functioning city. Fun, engaging experiences transport guests back in time and highlight the relevance of America's founding era to contemporary life. The Colonial Williamsburg experience includes more than 500 restored or reconstructed buildings, historic trade shops, renowned museums of decorative arts and folk art, extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers, lodging, culinary options from historic taverns to casual or elegant dining, the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club featuring 45 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. and his son Rees Jones, a full-service spa and fitness center managed by Trilogy Spa, pools, retail stores and gardens. Philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and hospitality operations sustain Colonial Williamsburg's educational programs and preservation initiatives.

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*Images (right to left): Silver Hilted Smallsword, London, England and America, 1765-1770, silver, iron/steel, wood, enamel and traces of gilding, Museum Purchase and Partial Gift of Patty Voght in memory of Thomas G. Wnuck, 2008-7; French M-1766 Cavalry Pistol, Royal Manufactory at Maubeuge, Maubeuge, 1774, walnut, iron, steel and brass, Museum Purchase, 1978-237; Pattern 1769 Land Service Musket, Board of Ordnance, London or Birmingham, England, ca. 1769-1775, walnut, iron, steel and brass, Museum Purchase, 1974-57.