

ART MUSEUMS *of Colonial Williamsburg*

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WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA, WAS A GLOBAL COMMUNITY IN THE 18th-CENTURY AS SHOWN IN A NEW ARCHAEOLOGY EXHIBITION TO OPEN AT THE ART MUSEUMS OF COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG

Williamsburg, Va. (July 22, 2024)—We live in an international world where people, commerce, ideas and traditions cross borders on a daily basis, and this concept is hardly new. As a new exhibition will show at the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum, one of the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, these aspects of life were just as evident in the 18th century. *Worlds Collide: Archaeology and Global Trade in Williamsburg*, which will open on September 7, 2024, in the Margaret Moore Hall gallery, will reveal the colonial capital of Virginia to be a thriving, urban center coursing with people and goods from all over the world as evidenced through approximately 225 archaeological artifacts curated by Colonial Williamsburg's renowned team of archaeologists. The exhibition will remain on view through January 2, 2027. From Spanish coins to Chinese porcelain, punch bowls with political slogans to printer's type and a dog's tag, botanicals and glass, the objects vary widely and represent a mere fraction of the over 60 million objects in the collection. Through the opportunity to recover and understand these artifacts, which are the material remains of daily lives of residents from Virginia and abroad, the evidence shows the collision of worlds that defined the town.

"Written documents, works of art, and other sources of information about the past invariably carry the biases of their creators," said Ron Hurst, the Foundation's chief mission officer, "but archaeological deposits offer a largely unbiased view of past civilizations. This exhibition illustrates clearly that worldwide commerce is nothing new and touched most parts of the north Atlantic world in the eighteenth century, even in a place as small as Williamsburg, Virginia."

Cities such as Williamsburg were hubs where the numerous customs, styles and tastes of its inhabitants clashed, melded, and evolved through daily interactions. Eighteenth-century Williamsburg was home to people representing a broad mix of economic status, genders and ages. In addition to Indigenous people and those of European descent, more than half of the town's population was African or African American, the

majority of which was enslaved. The objects seen in *Worlds Collide* reflect just as much the daily lives of these men, women and children as they do the individuals who enslaved them. To illuminate the diversity of these facets of everyday life, the exhibition is organized around five main themes: material goods, food, ideas, landscapes and people. When visitors walk through the galleries, they may be surprised to recognize themselves in aspects of the colonial capitol.

“Archaeology provides a tangible connection to the past through the materials we find,” said Jack Gary, Colonial Williamsburg’s executive director of archaeology. “These aren’t abstract ideas but materials that we can all look at together and that can spark discussions about our shared past. Guests will likely see themselves and the modern world in many of these themes.”



Among the highlighted objects in *Worlds Collide* are cowrie shells recovered from Wetherburn’s Tavern. Cowries are the small shells of marine gastropods that make their homes in shallow reef lagoons within the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Harvested in these regions, the shells of these creatures were used as currency throughout the Indo-Pacific and portions of sub-Saharan Africa for centuries, traveling from as far east as the Maldives to the Bight of Benin in western Africa. The value of these shells as money, however, led to their exploitation in the transatlantic slave trade. Purchased and processed in the Pacific, these shells were imported to West Africa by European traders extensively as goods of exchange to fund the forced migration of millions of Africans to the Americas. While these objects played a role in this story of human bondage and suffering, they may also speak to the power of memory and the resilient identity of those who were enslaved. Often recovered from archaeological sites once occupied by enslaved men, women and children, these shells were also used as items of adornment or keepsakes. This kind of usage may speak to individuals’ attempts to draw on transatlantic memories and traditions to reclaim their identity in the face of the dehumanizing system of enslavement in the 18th century in places such as Williamsburg.

“Whether in the eighteenth century or today, the objects we use in our daily lives make statements about who we are, what we value, and the connections between ourselves and others in the world. It is exciting to bring so many artifacts that represent a truly diverse set of eighteenth-century Williamsburg’s population into the public eye,” said Sean Devlin, senior curator of archaeological collections at Colonial Williamsburg.



Another highlighted object to be seen in the exhibition is a fragment of a Chinese export porcelain platter owned by John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, who was the last royal governor of Virginia. It is especially unique as it may have traveled the farthest among the objects included in *Worlds Collide*. Adorned with the armorial decoration of a Scottish noble, this object was

found among the late 18th-century refuse in Williamsburg on the site of Prentis Store. Most likely its story began as part of a written order for a large dinner service of tableware, perhaps accompanied by a drawing of the decoration, issued to a European merchant by Lord Dunmore. The order would have traveled to the Chinese port of Guangzhou where workshops specialized in applying the fine overglaze decoration that was requested. The porcelain pieces themselves, however, had previously been shipped to Guangzhou from the city of Jingdezhen (located 400 miles inland), which was an early factory city that produced nearly all porcelain for both domestic and export markets. Finally translated from text to physical object, this service was packed into the hold of a returning merchant ship before being delivered to Dunmore in Scotland. It then continued its global trek when Dunmore was appointed to governing positions first in New York and then Virginia. On the eve of the Revolution in 1775, Dunmore was forced to flee Williamsburg and left most of the family's household possessions in the Governor's Palace. From there, portions of this dinner service, which had literally sailed across most of the globe, ended their journey dispersed about the town.



Excavation at Wetherburn's Tavern also produced a glass decanter for Madeira wine. In the 18th century, Virginians preferred to drink European wines at home and in taverns, and wines from Spain and Portugal were more prevalent than those from France. Among the favorites of Colonials was Madeira, a sweet, fortified wine produced on the Atlantic Island of the same name that was controlled by Portugal. Most of these wines were shipped in barrels or storage jars, and often needed to be decanted into individual bottles or vessels for serving. In this instance, not only did the contents of the decanter cross the world's oceans but so did the vessel. Made of leaded glass, the decanter almost certainly was imported to Williamsburg upon a merchant ship from Britain and was of a very fashionable type in the mid-1700s. The body is engraved with a chain on which hangs a label bearing the engraved word "MADEIRA" and surrounded by appropriate decoration, such as grapes, grape leaves, tendrils and possibly grape flowers.



A broad hoe found at Carters Grove Plantation in Williamsburg that will be on view in *Worlds Collide* is an example related to the agricultural products that flowed back and forth from the Virginia colony across the ocean. Tobacco was the first crop to overtake the countryside in the areas around Williamsburg in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, and the tendrils of this crop reached into every facet of daily life there. The tobacco hoe was a uniquely colonial tool that evolved over the 18th century as did the cultivation of the crop itself; the shape and construction of hoes changed in response to the needs of the agricultural enterprise. By early in the century, hoes were being produced in the tens of thousands in Britain for export to the colonies in North America and the Caribbean. This hoe is stamped with a repeated "AD" mark that likely denoted the shop or individual who made the tool, even though their name is lost to time.



Further exemplifying in *Worlds Collide* how the 18th-century economy was truly global is a Tuscan oil jar found at the Anthony Hay House and Cabinet Shop site. Massive jars such as this were produced in northern Italy, particularly in the upper reaches of the Arno River Valley. The jars were brought down river and used to store and ship edible oils from ports such as Livorno. Among the largest buyers of these oils were British merchants and the British navy. These pots traveled from Italian ports to docksides in London and around the globe in the holds of these ships, being found in such diverse settings as Jamaica, Patagonia and coastal Australia, as well as Williamsburg.

The exhibition is generously funded by Jacomien Mars.

For anyone fascinated by archaeology, globalization or material culture, *Worlds Collide: Archaeology and Global Trade in Williamsburg* is certain to fascinate, delight and educate. It also will serve as an important orientation to Colonial Williamsburg's Historic Area, as it will expand the visitor's imagination to the daily lives of all those who lived there in the 18th century.

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: Cowrie Shells (ca. 1750-1770), shell, Wetherburn's Tavern, T007-2023,76A-C: OBJ-09NA-07363; OBJ-09NA-07364; OBJ-09NA-07383; Dish Fragment (ca.1775), porcelain, Prentis House, T007-2023,115: OBJ-17DA-00069; Decanter (ca.1750-1775), leaded glass, Wetherburn's Tavern, T007-2023,18: OBJ-09NA-01581; Hoe (ca. 1740-1760), iron alloy, Carters Grove Plantation, T007-2023,96 & T007-2023,97: OBJ-50BD-00207 & OBJ-50BD-00210; Oil Jar (ca.1760), earthenware, Anthony Hay House and Cabinet Shop, T007-2023,36: OBJ-28DB-01532.