

**Robert Beverley and the Furniture of Blandfield,
Essex County, Virginia, 1760-1800**

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Introduction

Robert Beverley's world was profoundly and radically different from that of his father or grandfather, as would be the world his generation would leave for the next. His world was shaped by powerful forces over which he had varying degrees of control; at one level, Robert Beverley was a father and planter, raising his family, managing his fields, and participating in his church and community at the fringes of the great British Empire that was just coming into its ascendancy. At another level he was one of the wealthiest and potentially most influential members of a well educated, economically and socially elite class aspiring to power in an important region of that empire, a region that would during his lifetime assert its independence from the control of Crown and Parliament¹. Robert Beverley's immediate world was also shaped by the economic realities of the tobacco dominated agricultural system of the Chesapeake Tidewater, the broad rivers and bay opening into the Atlantic that largely eliminated the need for centralized ports and thus urbanization, and the mercantilist economic philosophies that guided British imperial policy that linked planters more directly to London than to many of their neighbors. Individually, his life would be shaped by his conservative outlook and a deep reluctance to challenge the established political and economic structures that had benefited his family for generations.

When Robert Beverley returned to his native Virginia from England in 1761 to claim his inheritance, he entered a world of paradoxes. The wealth that placed him in the

¹ Jackson T. Main, "The One Hundred," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Ser. 3, Vol.11, No. 3 (July 1954), 354 -384. Robert Beverley ranked among the five wealthiest men in Virginia, holding nearly 50,000 acres of land scattered over eight counties. His almost 600 slaves were distributed among five counties with working plantations.

first ranks of Virginia's colonial society was, however, insufficient to completely relieve the necessity of tending his affairs or elevate him beyond the status of provincial upstart in the eyes of European aristocrats. As one of the wealthiest men in North America, Robert Beverley would be chronically starved for cash and trapped within a trading system that rendered his purse and pride dependent on the merchants of London, Glasgow and Liverpool who controlled his credit, the sale of his tobacco, and access to the consumer goods he desired. As one of the region's largest landowners, he would find himself tied to the inefficient system of agriculture that rapidly depleted the land's fertility and demanded that new fields be constantly procured and cleared. While the system of chattel slavery that he professed to abhor had almost completely supplanted indentured servitude by his lifetime, it would provide Beverley with the manpower required by the labor intensive tobacco culture.² Along with the moral dilemma it presented, this perverse institution would also saddle him with the high costs of supporting large numbers of slaves whose value was reduced as less labor intensive wheat replaced tobacco as the century ended.

Neither Tory nor revolutionary, Robert Beverley chose to withdraw in the face of the political and military turmoil surrounding the breakup of the British Empire in North America. The legal training that reinforced his preference for reasoned discourse, rational

² Beverley to Edward Athawes, 11 July 1761. Letterbook of Robert Beverley, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, DC. The most well known of these Letterbook compilations of Beverley's correspondence is in the collection of the Library of Congress. It is referred to hereafter as Letterbook, LOC. The letters were written in several hands. Possibly these copies were made as exercises in penmanship and as a part of their broader education by various Beverley children or by a secretary. They are generally chronologically arranged from 1761 – 1800. Other Letterbooks, similar to the volume held at LOC, including some correspondence ca. 1745, by Robert's father, William, and son, Robert, Jr., extending well into the nineteenth century, are held privately by descendants of Robert Beverley. These sources are referred to hereafter as Letterbook, PRVT. The author is very appreciative of the access granted by family members to these documents and to their collections of furniture from Blandfield. Miscellaneous papers relating to Robert Beverley and the Beverley family are also held by the Virginia Historical Society and the University of Virginia.

analysis and calculated compromise were no match for the passion for liberty, thirst for independence and the economic self interest that motivated many of his peers towards creation of a new government. In the early stages of the conflict, a voice for compromise and reason, Beverley argued that the ties that bound the colonies to England were far greater than the issues that separated them, but failing to make his voice heard he withdrew. "I have always hated commotions," he wrote as war approached, "[and] I dread Innovations. They are generally carried on by bloodshed + very frequently end in Tyranny."³ Focusing his attention on his domestic affairs, he oversaw the completion and furnishing of his Essex County, Virginia, home known as Blandfield, and limited his role in public affairs during the Revolutionary period to that of a self-proclaimed "sorrowful spectator of these tumultuous times."⁴

The great majority of what we know of how Robert Beverley was shaped by the powerful forces at work in his world is revealed through his surviving Letterbooks, by his great home, Blandfield, and the furnishings with which he chose to surround himself. From these resources Robert Beverley emerges as a unique individual and escapes the stereotype of a southern planter, but his legacy of correspondence, home and furniture also add a great deal of texture and nuance to our picture of the eighteenth-century Virginia gentry and their ambitions. His dialogues with agents, friends and family, his orders detailed in his Letterbooks, his estate inventory, Blandfield preserved by ten generations of Beverleys and today by the Wheat family, and the surviving furnishings, allow a comprehensive consideration of Robert Beverley, his home and its furniture. This work will seek to incorporate these three elements, Letterbooks, house and furniture, in

³ Beverley to Athawes?, ND c. 1775. Letterbook, LOC.

⁴ Beverley to Backhouse, July 12, 1775, Letterbook, LOC.

an integrated study of Beverley and the sources of furniture for Blandfield. It will provide new documentary evidence regarding the specific forms, styles and origins of furniture he acquired that will allow for a more accurate assessment of Robert Beverley's patterns of consumption and the choices of furniture available to him in the Virginia Chesapeake and give a better picture of life in that time.

Chapter One – *Robert Beverley -- Colonial Gentleman*

“I have an ample Fortune, and can be happy in the enjoyment of that, and an endearing Family. I ask no further Favour of my Country than the quiet Possession of it....”⁵

Robert Beverley’s forbearers had seized the opportunities offered through politics, patronage, high risks and hard work in the often turbulent years in Virginia between the arrival of his great-grandfather in 1663 and his birth in 1740.⁶ Known as Major Beverley, or “the immigrant,” the first Robert Beverley (ca.1635-1687) to reside in Virginia had been born in Hull, England, and seems to have received some education, including training in the law. Settling south of the Rappahannock River in what became Middlesex County, Virginia, he rapidly acquired large tracts of land and became a man of consequence, holding a variety of posts in the colony including acting attorney general. Married three times, Major Beverley sent his sons Peter, Robert and Harry to England to be educated. Building upon the advantages gained through their educations and the benefits flowing from a wealthy and influential father, the sons and their offspring

⁵ Beverley to Fitzhugh, July 20, 1775, Letterbook, LOC.

⁶ Information on the Beverley family’s history and genealogy is drawn primarily from the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, John T. Kneebone, ET. Al., editors, (Richmond, Library of Virginia, 1998), Vol. 1, Brent Tarter, “Major Robert Beverley, (1635-1687),” *Magazine of Virginia Genealogy*, Volume 31, No. 3, (August 1993), John McGill, *The Beverley Family of Virginia*, (Columbia, SC, R. L. Bryan & Co. 1956), Worthington Chauncey Ford, “Some Letters of William Beverley,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No4 (April 1895), “Diary of William Beverley of “Blandfield” During a Visit to England, 1750,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Richmond, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Vol. 36, 1928.

represented one of “the most prominent families in Virginia in the early years of the eighteenth century.”⁷

Robert Beverley, Jr., (ca.1667- 1722) known as “the historian”, consolidated and expanded the wealth and influence of the Beverley family in colonial affairs. Following his education in England, he married Ursula Byrd, the daughter of William Byrd (ca.1652-1704), a union that allied two of Virginia’s most important families.⁸ Through his growing family and political network, Beverley was able to gain a series of influential and lucrative positions in government that added to his wealth and prominence. He was extremely active in the government and promotion of Virginia among British policy makers and prospective settlers and was the author of *The History and Present State of Virginia, In Four Parts*, published in London in 1705. At Robert’s death in 1722, all of his accumulated wealth and much of his political power were passed to his only son, William (ca.1696-1756).⁹

Along with an inheritance of over 19,000 acres of land, William also received the benefits of an English education and upon his return to Virginia held a series of governmental positions as a member of the House of Burgesses, Clerk of Essex County and a member of the Governor’s Council. Taking full advantage of his political and financial resources, William Beverley acquired large tracts of land in Augusta County totaling some 118,000 acres and played an important role in the settlement of the Valley of Virginia.¹⁰ His marriage to Elizabeth Bland, a daughter of Richard Bland of

⁷Kneebone, *Virginia Biography*, page 470.

⁸ Brent Tarter, “Major Robert Beverley (1635-1687),” *Magazine of Virginia Genealogy*, Vol. 31, No.3. 180-181.

⁹ Kneebone, *Virginia Biography*, 472. *The History and Present State of Virginia, In Four Parts* (1705), was the first published history of a British colony by a native of North America.

¹⁰ Kneebone, *Virginia Biography*, pages 477-478.

“Jordan’s Point” in Prince George County, added an additional influential family to the Beverley sphere and produced at least three daughters and two sons. Their eldest son, John, died in November 1741 while attending school at a neighboring plantation leaving his brother Robert as the sole surviving son.¹¹

Robert Beverley, the builder of Blandfield and subject of this work, was born at his father’s estate in Essex County August 21, 1740.¹² (*Figure One*) Little is known of his youth, but as the only son of a prosperous, well connected Virginia family, he had little cause to question his own privileged status, the dominance of English culture in the tidewater Chesapeake, or the strong orientation towards London as the center of economic and political power. Both his father, William, and grandfather, Robert “the historian,” had been politically active on both sides of the Atlantic and had relied upon hierarchical relationships to gain and dispense patronage. Beverley’s sense of self and his political and economic philosophies must have been influenced by his father’s relationships with the powerful Fairfax family, the Speaker of the House of Burgesses, John Robinson, and his family’s linkages to other prominent landowners in the colony including the Byrds, Randolphs, Fitzhughs, Carters and Lees.¹³

Robert Beverley traveled with his father to England in 1750 where he was enrolled at Wakefield Grammar School in Yorkshire to begin his formal education.¹⁴ William Beverley recorded in a diary some of the details of this trip with his son and traveling companions who included a nephew, Robert Munford, who would also attend

¹¹ Some Letters of William Beverley, *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (April 1895), 233.

¹² Kneebone, *Virginia Biography*, 473-474. Beverley Family, Rootsweb.

¹³ Kneebone, *Virginia Biography*, Vol. 2, 255-257. The Fairfax family was one of Virginia’s largest landowners. John Robinson was the Speaker of the House of Burgesses 1738 – 1765.

¹⁴ “Diary of William Beverley of “Blandfield” During a Visit to England, 1750,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 34, (April 1928), 27.

Wakefield, Col. John Carlyle, a prominent merchant from Alexandria, and William Henry Fairfax.¹⁵ Among the notable events of this trip were visits by father and son to the town of Beverley in Yorkshire and the introduction of Robert to a variety of family friends and associates including a leading tobacco merchant, Edward Athawes. The familiarity of the letters to Athawes following Robert's return to Virginia, and later to Athawes' son, Samuel, suggest strong personal ties, and it is likely that Edward Athawes was something of a mentor and surrogate parent who oversaw young Robert during his decade in England.¹⁶

Robert Beverley was a student at Wakefield presumably from his arrival in England until 1757 when he was admitted to Trinity College Cambridge. He studied law at the Middle Temple and was called to the bar in February, 1761, but did not graduate and never seems to have practiced law.¹⁷ Although his father had died in 1756, Robert Beverley did not return to Virginia for five more years. He arrived home in the spring of 1761 and shortly thereafter began to record his correspondence in a series of Letterbooks. His first letter, dated July 11, 1761, was directed to "Edward Athawes, Esq.," his friend and mentor, announcing his safe arrival in Virginia after a passage of nine weeks.¹⁸ He immediately followed in August with orders to be sent on the first ship for porter, ale, wine, beer and water glasses, and tailored britches, seemingly reconciled to "be content where I am at least three or four years + then, I hope, shape out a Residence more suitable

¹⁵ *Diary of William Beverley*, page 30. William Henry Fairfax was probably the owner of Belvoir in Virginia and a grandson of Thomas, 4th Lord Fairfax.

¹⁶ *Diary of William Beverley*, page 164. Upon his departure from England, Robert presented Athawes with a miniature portrait of himself, another indication of a close relationship. Beverley to Athawes, Sept. 6, 1774, Letterbook, LOC. He later had this portrait copied for his wife, Maria. Little is known of Edward or Samuel Athawes. The Athawes, along with Backhouse, Bland and others were prominent English merchants dealing in the Chesapeake tobacco trade.

¹⁷ Kneebone, *Virginia Biography*, 473-474. Email, 5/31/05, Adam Green, Assistant Archivist Trinity College, Cambridge to the author.

¹⁸ Beverley to Athawes, July 11, 1761, Letterbook, LOC.

to my Inclinations,” although he complained to Athawes that “news is a very scarce article + amusement much scarcer.”¹⁹ From his correspondence it seems clear that Beverley was ambivalent about his future; at one moment he seemed to anticipate a life in Virginia, at the next he declared that after settling his father’s estate and securing his inheritance, he would quickly resume his life in England.²⁰ The early letters deal primarily with resolving his father’s affairs, the necessities of the tobacco trade and Robert’s largely optimistic assessment of his financial prospects, which he anticipated would allow him to live a life of leisure in Great Britain. “I had much rather be an Inhabitant of Britain upon [pounds] 500 anno than to blaze away here upon four times the sum,” he declared in a letter to Athawes. The realities of the cyclical and difficult business of growing tobacco intruded almost immediately, and Beverley admitted to Athawes that at least two years might be required for him to pay off his debts and successfully organize his holdings while a third would provide the cushion he desired for a “short crop.”²¹

Only in his early twenties and with little experience in managing a large and complex enterprise, Beverley found the first few years back in Virginia tumultuous both personally and financially. While measured in terms of landholdings, he was extremely wealthy; he discovered that money was “scarce in [his] part of the country” and that maintaining a frustrating and personally demeaning level of credit with his English agents

¹⁹ Beverley to Bland, July 11, 1761. Letterbook, LOC, Beverley to Athawes August 1761, Letterbook, LOC.

²⁰ “Will of William Beverley, 1756,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 297-301. After provisions were made for his mother during her lifetime and marriage portions provided for his sisters, Robert was made the heir to virtually all of his father’s estate.

²¹ Beverley to Edward Athawes, 3 March 1762. Letterbook, LOC.

was an unavoidable evil if he wished to sustain the lifestyle of a gentleman.²² He had also experienced a failed and disappointing romantic foray of which he wrote to Athawes in October 1762, “The Excursion, which I made to Philadelphia was with a view of finally fixing myself in my native country by becoming a married Man, but it seems adjudged highly necessary by Providence that we must not be gratified in every Pursuit in Life... [but I remain] fully determined to bear this + every other Disappointment with Fortitude.”²³ By December his notion of returning permanently to England had again been challenged by a neighbor just across the Rappahannock at Sabine Hall whose charms inspired Beverley to write Bland “that before you receive this, I shall become a married man.” Two months later, he announced to Bland that, “Since I last wrote to you, I have fixed myself in the Country by Marrying a daughter of Col. Landon Carter and flatter myself that I may render myself tolerably happy even in this Distant region.”²⁴ Beverley’s marriage to Maria Byrd Carter (1745 – 1817) would be the catalyst for the construction of a new Blandfield to replace the house inherited by his father known by the same name and for a succession of orders that chronicle a rapid ratcheting up of his levels of consumption and expanding lifestyle.

With his decision to settle permanently in Virginia, Robert Beverley assumed his expected place in the life of Essex County, the principal local governmental entity, and in the Anglican church parish of St Anne’s, where he served as a vestryman. “I am vastly in my Domestick way”, he wrote Samuel Athawes in November 1763, “+ unless some

²² Beverley to Bland, Oct. 6, 1761, Beverley to Athawes, Nov. 18, 1763, Beverley to Bland, Dec. 17, 1763. Letterbook, LOC.

²³ Beverley did not identify the object of his affections in Philadelphia, only that “it was an Affair, which I most earnestly wished,” but took a philosophical approach to his disappointing foray. It is one of the few references to Philadelphia in the Letterbooks, a city with which Beverley seems to have had very limited commercial or social contact. Beverley to Athawes, Oct. 27, 1762, Letterbook, LOC.

²⁴ Beverley to Bland, Feb. 25, 1763, Letterbook, LOC.

accident should Disturb my Repose, I shall not alter my method of Life...I delight in my plantations and am a commenced farmer."²⁵ His family's prominence and his legal training gained him appointment in 1764 as a Justice on the Essex County Court where he served until the outbreak of the Revolution.²⁶ Beyond his official role, Robert Beverley was an active participant in the area's business affairs but not markedly litigious in his approach to matters.²⁷ The majority of his appearances in the Court's records involved debt collections, land sales or purchases and title matters that reflected the normal course of business. Beverley appeared as an interested party or appointed official in a range of other management matters of county life which the general court oversaw including the certification of warehouse measures, the construction of bridges and roads, and surveys. While Beverley accepted appointment to several official positions including the Board of Visitors of the College of William and Mary, and as an officer in the county militia, and expressed interest in appointment to the Governor's Council, there is little record of his having been active in any of these roles.²⁸ He seems not to have shared the aptitude or appetites of his ancestors for the risks, rewards and rough and tumble of politics beyond his immediate community and approached public life with a degree of ambivalence.

The course of his adult life and his place in history were largely the product of Robert Beverley's decision to remain passive during the American Revolution which

²⁵ Beverley to Samuel Athawes, 18 Nov. 1763. Letterbook LOC.

²⁶ Kneebone, *Virginia Biography*, 474.

²⁷ Based on examination of the Order Book for the General Court for Essex County for the years 1760 – 1800. Microfilm, Library of Virginia.

²⁸ He indicated his interest in serving on the Governor's Council to Carter. See Letters of Robert Beverley to Landon Carter, Virginia Historical Society. Beverley was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates in 1780, but it is unclear if he took the seat. He was selected as member of the Board of Visitors of the College of William and Mary in 1775 - Va. Gazette, 2/17/1775. "At a meeting of the Governors and Visitors Robert Beverly Esquire of Blandfield in Essex was chosen a member ..." but it is not clear if he ever took an active role in the institution's affairs.

flowed from his deep reservations concerning the independence movement and reluctance to countenance violence with England – attitudes shared by numerous contemporaries.²⁹ In addition, Beverley was deeply distrustful of the role that personal ambition played in politics and worried that the ambitions of the movement's leaders rather than idealism motivated the rebellion. Beverley feared that the appeal of these leaders to the emotions of their followers prevented rational consideration of the issues that divided Crown and colonies, but he recognized in a letter to William Fitzhugh that, "Self-interest and Want of Candour on both Sides" contributed to the impasse.³⁰ The tone of the controversy, he concluded, rather than the essential issues, stood in the way of a resolution. While he acknowledged the justice of many of the grievances of the colonists, the need to protect their inherent rights as Englishmen, and was a supporter of the non-importation pacts, Beverley abhorred the country's "unhappy State on Anarchy and Misrule," and could not bring himself to support armed resistance to England.³¹ "I

²⁹ Linda Colley, *Britons, Forging the Nation 1707 – 1837*, (New London, Yale University Press, 1992), Reflecting the confusion and uncertainty of the times, it was estimated that the population of the colonies was approximately one third revolutionary, one third Tory, one third undecided or neutral. See also Kevin Phillips', *The Cousins' War*, John Shay, *A People Numerous and Armed*, Jack Greene, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* and the work of Ronald Hoffman for the divisions within early American society.

³⁰ Beverley to Fitzhugh, July 20, 1775, Letterbook, LOC. William Fitzhugh was a nephew of Landon Carter and was active in Virginia politics.

³¹ Beverley to Athawes, Sept. 6, 1774, Beverley to Backhouse, July 12, 1775, Letterbook, LOC. These letters and Beverley's letter to Fitzhugh of July 20, 1775, Letterbook, LOC, are the most thorough presentations of his not altogether consistent political views. His positions are analyzed by Robert M. Calhoon in "A Sorrowful Spectator of These Tumultuous Times" in *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 73, January 1965, pages 41-55. The non – importation agreements and associations between the colonies were designed to force Parliament to rescind the taxes imposed on trade and other activities through the Grenville Acts 1764, Stamp Act 1765 and Townshend Revenue Act 1767. The more organized Continental Associations of 1774 were the precursors of the post war Confederations and led to a reduction of over 90% in the value of English imports to the colonies in 1774-1775. Mark M. Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, New York, McKay, 1966, pages 47, 810. The *Virginia Gazette* July 21, 1774, recorded Beverley as a member of the Essex County committee to send aid to Boston, "Resolved that a subscription be set on foot for raising of provisions for the relief of the poor of Boston who now suffer by the blocking up their ports and that Robert Beverly, John Lee, Muscoe Garnett, ... charter a vessel to carry it to Boston." On Jan. 5, 1775 the *Gazette* listed Beverley as a member of the County committee to support the association agreements and resolutions of the Continental Congress. But

have found the current strong and shall not oppose it," he explained to Fitzhugh and concluded neutrality would be the only tolerable policy.

With his decision by the outbreak of war to largely withdraw from public affairs, Robert Beverley seems to have limited his travel and contacts and devoted the remainder of his life to the management of his family affairs and estates. His Letterbooks and other surviving correspondence offer insight into the significant and routine events of a life dominated by the demands of tobacco, multiple children and challenges of the tumultuous times. Beverley chronicles the seasonal issues relating to agriculture in general and in particular the vicissitudes of raising tobacco, a crop he complained was "more liable to accidents than any other plant in the World."³² Beverley continued to depend upon tobacco as his principal crop in the 1780s, and virtually every entry in his Letterbook dealt to some extent with the prices, condition or prospects for the crop. Only gradually, and years after many of his peers, Beverley shifted a significant portion of his resources from tobacco to the growing of wheat, which he eventually recognized as a more predictable source of revenue and as a means of lessening his dependence upon commerce with London. Marketable either in the American market or Europe, in the last decades of the eighteenth century wheat had spurred significant economic development in the Chesapeake, particularly in Baltimore, and had increased consumers' income and the range of items available. As Beverley wrote testily to John Backhouse in 1795

in letters to Landon Carter, Beverley indicated grave reservations concerning non-importation, which injured the merchants who had relied on the word and honor of the planters, and the dire consequences of limiting trade. Despite his misgivings Beverley supported the non-importation pacts and frequently cautioned his agents that he "would be very unwilling to violate our associations in the most trifling instance" and specified that they should not fill his orders unless "the differences should be adjusted." He also believed that restricting trade with Great Britain would lead to an increase in American manufacturing and decrease the level of economic dependence. Beverley to Athawes Sept. 6, 1774, Beverley to Backhouse, Dec. 19, 1774, Letterbook, LOC.

³² Beverley to Backhouse, July 1790, Letterbook, LOC.

concerning his dissatisfaction with the merchant's fulfillment of an order, "I can barter my grain [here] for what I may want."³³ The region's economy and Beverley's circumstances had changed, and by the 1790s Beverley had reached the point that he could state, "I have Established a Resolution never to run in debt in Europe again."³⁴

Beverley was isolated, to a degree, by the remote location of Blandfield, the size of his land holdings, the sparseness of population and the difficulties of travel, which resulted in a commercial universe that seems to have been largely confined to the towns in the vicinity, Tappahannock, Williamsburg and Fredericksburg. Over time, as he became more involved in the management of his scattered plantations, references in his Letterbooks to travel to Richmond, Petersburg, Staunton and Culpepper become more frequent, but there is little evidence of sustained business or family relationships beyond the tidewater and central piedmont portions of Virginia.³⁵ Just as his business horizons were limited, Beverley also seems to have had unusually limited personal interaction in the famously social Chesapeake.³⁶ Beverley receives only rare mention in the papers of

³³ Beverley to Backhouse, Jan. 1, 1795, Letterbook, PRVT.

³⁴ Beverley to Dunlap, Glasgow, Jan. 1, 1795, Letterbook PRVT.

³⁵ In this regard it is notable that Beverley indicated frequently in the 1780s and into the 1790s that he did not have regular business in Philadelphia or Alexandria and made commercial arrangements in these towns on a case by case basis. He noted that he rarely encountered anyone traveling to Norfolk. Beverley to Burke, Jan. 25, 1793. Beverley to Easton, July 22, 1793, Letterbook, LOC. After the Revolutionary War as trade and credit were gradually reestablished, Beverley's Chesapeake network expanded somewhat. References to Norfolk as a trans-shipment point appear, and Baltimore emerges as a city to which he directed goods, shipped his non tobacco crops, notably wheat, and from which he obtained a variety of goods such as bar iron and cat gut for his clock weights. Similarly, Richmond, Petersburg, and Dumfries to the west seem to have taken on increased importance for Beverley although his commercial affairs seem to have centered in Fredericksburg.

³⁶ Robert Beverley appears infrequently if at all in the recorded correspondence of his peers. A survey of surviving published papers of his contemporaries gives no indication that any of the political leaders of his generation considered him or his views of any particular significance. There is no mention of Robert Beverley or Blandfield in the published papers of George Washington, (although his son, Robert, may have visited Mount Vernon), James Madison, George Mason, James Monroe, William Byrd, Patrick Henry, John Carroll, William Lee, and John Marshall, all of whom likely knew Beverley or of him. Only Thomas Jefferson seems to allude to him briefly in a 1789 letter to William Short in which he notes seeing a "Robert Gaines Beverley selling off all for debt" mentioned in the Virginia newspapers and asks of Short "if this is the Tory and head of the family."

his peers and only occasional notice in the diary of his irascible father-in-law and neighbor, Landon Carter.³⁷

Even though he had withdrawn from public life beyond his immediate community, Beverley continued a lively interest in reading of the affairs of the day and frequently encouraged his correspondents in London to supply a steady stream of current newspapers and magazines. His letters combine his commentary on colonial, and subsequently American affairs, and European politics with his instruction, inquiries and entreaties regarding business issues surrounding the pricing and marketing of his crops and the administration of his accounts. The correspondence reveals Beverley's growing disdain for continental conflicts and his gradually increasing optimism that an independent America might offer opportunity and prosperity for his sons and daughters. Beverley's papers vividly reflect the great degree of uncertainty which surrounded life in the Chesapeake as the new American government sought to organize itself, and both individuals and businesses suffered from the constant interruptions of European wars, trade embargoes and the unpredictable nature of communication, commerce and travel in period.

Maria and Robert had ten sons and six daughters beginning with William in 1763 followed by births at regular intervals until 1786 and the arrival of their last child, Harriet. The size of the Beverley's family and the need to provide appropriately for each of his children were matters of significant concern for Robert Beverley as he grew older

³⁷ Jack Greene, Ed. *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752 – 1778*, (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1965). Consistent with Carter's nature, most of his observations regarding Beverley were unflattering and suggest Beverley found little in the way of comradery from Maria's father or called frequently at Sabine Hall. A group of letters from Beverley to Carter at the Virginia Historical Society that discuss family affairs, agriculture and business as well as some of Beverley's views on the day's political and economic issues add further depth and dimension.

and placed increasing constraints on his affairs. “The largeness of my family compels me to observe a strict economy in the maintenance of my children,” he warned a Virginia merchant, and similar cautionary comments concerning his finances along with complaints concerning prices pepper his correspondence.³⁸ Beverley further indicated his concern for his financial circumstances and a sense of pragmatism towards his children in a letter to William, then studying in England, which foreshadowed their later difficulties over money. “It is not to be supposed,” he wrote William in 1787, “that the finances of a Virginia planter are to vie with those of a British nobleman especially a Virginia planter with Ten children...consider yourself...[one] who never will be in possession of a fortune to enable him to be anything else [but] genteel company....”³⁹ Beverley made sustained efforts to gain practical experience for his younger sons and sought positions for them with Virginia-based merchants and subsequently supported their efforts to establish general stores in Culpepper and Tappahannock.⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, given the size of his family and complexity of his holdings, his efforts to establish career opportunities or satisfactory economic circumstance for each of his offspring were not wholly successful. He would eventually and reluctantly agree to William’s decision to renounce his links to Virginia and reside in England, but the strained relationship and financial settlement, which his eldest son found inadequate, eventually led to estrangement and “much litigation and strife.”⁴¹ Robert, the second son also educated in England, did return to Virginia to assume management of lands

³⁸ Beverley to Montgomery, May 28, 1789, Letterbook, LOC.

³⁹ Beverley to William Beverley, Oct. 7, 1782. Letterbook LOC.

⁴⁰ Carter Beverley and Byrd kept store in Culpepper and Tappahannock before giving up their endeavors in the mid 1790s. Letterbook, PRVT.

⁴¹ *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, No. 21, 213.

transferred by his father, and Beverley would subsequently grant tracts of land or otherwise provide an inheritance for each of his children.⁴²

Apparently, his health was in decline by the mid 1790s and Robert Beverley devoted a good deal of the last years of his life to arranging his estate. In March 1793, he drew up a detailed and carefully constructed will in which he sought to “display the strictest impartiality to all my children” which he felt had guided their relationships.⁴³ After providing fully for Maria’s welfare during her lifetime through lands, rents and slaves, he stipulated that she should receive all of the furniture, but authorized her to disperse it at or before her death to such of their children as she thought proper. Beverley arranged his lands to be divided among his sons with Robert receiving the two most prominent plantations, Blandfield and the nearby tract known as “Gray’s.”⁴⁴ The approximately 600 slaves were apportioned between Maria and the various children through a complex formula, and careful provisions were made for the payment of any remaining balance that might be owed to his estranged eldest son, William, at Beverley’s death.⁴⁵ Over the ensuing seven years, Beverley added nine codicils as sons came of age, daughters were married and settlements made, and changes in his land holdings occurred. The last of these codicils, dated January 24, 1800, just a few months before his death,

⁴² Robert received the largest share of the family holdings and eventually succeeded his father as master of Blandfield. Robert lived briefly in Georgetown in the early 1800’s where he built the house known today as Dumbarton Oaks.

⁴³ Last Will and Testament of Robert Beverley of Blandfield, March 9, 1793 with codicils, presented into Court April 21, 1800. Essex County Will Book, Microfilm, State Library of Virginia. Appendix One presents a transcription of the furniture listed in the estate inventory that accompanies the will.

⁴⁴ Grays was a tobacco plantation owned by Beverley that was also in Essex County. Other plantations were known as Chase Plantation in Caroline County, Park Plantation in King and Queen County, and New Design, Poplar and Little Fork Plantations in Culpepper County. Vanessa E. Patrick, Architectural Historian, *Blandfield Essex County, Virginia, An Interim Report on Phase One Documentary Research*, June 1983, Typescript manuscript, research files, Colonial Williamsburg.

⁴⁵ Beverley also stipulated that the slave Harry, who had attended him for twenty years, should be freed “upon the death of his mistress” and granted him seventy acres of land in Essex along with the necessary implements to farm. Since Maria lived until 1817, it is questionable what benefit Harry may have received from this bequest.

concerned the disposition of his stocks of brandy. It began: "Willing to avoid every kind of misunderstanding in my Family..." and suggests a dying man whose possessions had already begun to be quarreled over. Robert Beverley's death on April 12, 1800, at Blandfield received scant notice beyond his family and a brief obituary in the *Richmond Gazette* which read: "Died, at Blandfield, on the 12th instant, ROBERT BEVERLEY, Esq, in the 60th year of his age, after a long and painful illness which he bore with uncommon fortitude and patience. He has left behind him a very large family to lament the loss of one of the best of fathers and the best of men."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ *The Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, Tuesday April 18, 1800. MESDA microfilm.

Chapter Two – *Choices and Constraints*

“Non Importation...may be attended by substantial benefits, for although the inconveniences under wch we shall at first labor will be very great, yet it is notorious with the assistance of the Emigrants from G.B., we shall be able very soon to Establish Manufacture, for our immediate support....⁴⁷

Having sketched the broad outlines of Robert Beverley’s life, including the difficult political decisions that gave rise to his reputation as a Crown sympathizer, if not an outright Tory, it is possible to consider some aspects of the economic and social contexts in which he made the decisions concerning the furnishings he desired for his home. Beverley was certainly well aware of the much discussed forces shaping his world; the policies of Parliament and progression towards war with Great Britain, the cycles of the agricultural markets, and the desire of the colonies for increased self sufficiency. On an immediate and practical level, his choices were constrained by non-importation pacts among the colonies, extreme swings in tobacco crops and prices, unreliable transport and communications, and the slow growth of towns in the Chesapeake and along the fall line of Virginia’s rivers. Other powerful forces such as the first rumblings of industrialization, the dramatic increases in consumption, and the diminishing viability of the slave economy, were influences that were likely vaguely sensed, but much less recognizable or understandable to Beverley or his contemporaries.

⁴⁷ Beverley to Athawes, Sept. 6, 1774, Letterbook, LOC. *Notorious* is used in the sense of a fact widely known but without the pejorative implication.

Whether recognized or not, all of these factors and others, shaped the possibilities, perceptions, and the goods and choices available to Robert Beverley as he went about furnishing Blandfield.

Beverley's peers, the great Tidewater planters who dominated Virginia society in the eighteenth century, represented between three and ten per cent of white heads of household.⁴⁸ By the middle of the century distinct gentry families were emerging and their growing wealth allowed them to begin to replace the modest wooden family houses built by their ancestors with the elegant Georgian mansions that transformed the banks of the Chesapeake's estuaries. Beverley, like the Tayloes, Lees, Carters and others created great homes such as Mount Airy, Menokin and Nomini Hall that characterized this movement toward grandeur, social differentiation and symbolic display.⁴⁹ Growing along with their wealth and homes was the ambition to live like English gentry, and the leading gentlemen of Virginia indulged themselves with a wide range of consumables and furnishings to the point that in 1736 an English visitor arriving at nearby Yorktown wrote that, "You perceive a great Air of Opulence amongst the inhabitants, who have some of them built Houses equal in Magnificence to many of our superb ones at St. James...."⁵⁰ Blandfield, built thirty years later on the eve of the Revolution, did not represent the beginning of a trend, but rather approached the culmination of this era's notion of the great home as an embodiment of gentility, and the apogee of its development along the Chesapeake in terms of scope, grandeur and evolved interior design. The floor plan, room design and dimensions, patterns of access and functional

⁴⁸ T. H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture, The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001), 32 -37.

⁴⁹ Breen, *Tobacco Culture*, 32 -37.

⁵⁰ *London Magazine*, July 1746, quoted in Breen, *Tobacco Culture*, 37.

designations of the spaces that Beverley integrated into his plan for Blandfield reflected the increasingly complex standards of gentility developing in the late eighteenth century. Blandfield, Robert Beverley's "great Plantation Manor," would, he hoped, provide a genteel seat for the Beverley family that reflected their refinement, accomplishments and status, and bolster the authority of the family and its patriarch.⁵¹

Concepts of gentility have been deeply intertwined in debates concerning the causes and effects of the development of material culture in the Chesapeake. Expanding notions of gentility are an important element in the framework in which many modern scholars have addressed the explosion of consumerism within British American and elsewhere.⁵² The estate inventory research of Lorena Walsh, a leading authority on material culture in the Chesapeake, has shown that during Beverley's lifetime the range of domestic goods with which gentry and aspiring gentry wished to surround themselves "exploded."⁵³ The great increase in the array of these amenities facilitated a style of living that supported a distinct and identifiable upper class lifestyle. Luxuries that would have been unimaginable a generation or two previously, including larger living spaces,

⁵¹ Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, (New York, Architectural History Foundation, 1986), 206 – 209.

⁵² Much research has been undertaken and a great deal written beyond Walsh on the development of consumer society in the Chesapeake; frequently citing Beverley as an example. Nearly all is relevant in understanding Robert Beverley and the context in which he made his choices, and, while a comprehensive analysis of this research falls well beyond the scope of this work, several seminal studies provide important insight concerning Beverley. Richard Bushman's identification in his *The Refinement of America* of the growing consciousness of eighteenth-century elites of the power of material goods such as houses, furniture and gardens to distinguish themselves from other strata of society established an early framework for consideration of a growing consumer culture. Cary Carson expanded these concepts to explain the evolution of the most fashionable consumer goods into virtual badges of membership in self-conscious, international consumer groups. Rhys Isaac has continued the analysis of Chesapeake society in his study of the *Transformation of Virginia* during the eighteenth century. Isaac analyzes houses and public buildings of eighteenth century Virginia as elements of a system through which the Chesapeake gentry solidified its power. See also Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake," in *Of Consuming Interest*, Cary Carson, (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1996).

⁵³ Lorena S. Walsh, "Urban Amenities and Rural Sufficiency: Living Standards and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1643-1777," *Journal of Economic History*, Volume 43, Issue 1, (March 1983), 110.

increased levels of personal comfort and quality and quantity of decorative accessories rapidly became necessities for the genteel.⁵⁴ The growing refinement of the Chesapeake gentry and their desire to differentiate themselves as a group was expressed in the internal stratification and external authority of the architecture of their homes and the objects with which they furnished the space.⁵⁵ Walsh notes that such props as matched china place settings, mahogany chairs, tables, buffets and bookcases along with the appearance of coaches and carriages should be seen as indications of an affluent gentry eager to display and differentiate itself through material wealth.

Beginning with his very first order, Robert Beverley's purchases from Virginia fit neatly into Walsh's description and provide ample evidence that he had fully embraced the English genteel lifestyle with all its accoutrements. His early orders included a chariot (carriage), the outfitting and painting of which he described in great detail, livery for his servants and a wide range of ceramics, glass, cutlery and fine attire.⁵⁶ In his instructions to his agents Beverley also frequently provided detailed descriptions and specified individual tradesmen that reveal a familiarity and intimate knowledge of the London shops indicative of an experienced consumer. "When I point out any particular Tradesman, (tho he may live at a distance)," he wrote Bland, "I desire you to purchase of him, because those whom I have employed are not concerned in the Exportation Trade +

⁵⁴ Earlier Beverley generations had "nothing in or about his house but what is necessary." Carson, *Of Consuming Interest*, 64.

⁵⁵ Isaac, *Transformation*, 73-75

⁵⁶ Beverley's (excerpted) order for his chariot provides an example of the level of display and elegance he wished to achieve. "Mr. Page, The following directions I desire you observe with the utmost punctuality. I desire you make me a neat light post Chariot painted as my Phaeton, a light green upon silver, with three bulls heads upon the front & back, & one upon each side the lining to be light colored Cloth with a green & white lace.....the front to be divided into two glasses instead as usual one...The inside you must have neat brass rods with green silk curtains...& also netting inside to put Ladies hatts..." Beverley to Page, Nov. 1761, Letterbook, LOC.

of course the goods will be better + more to my own Inclinations.”⁵⁷ Robert Beverley with his great wealth, English education and prominent family represents a prime, if somewhat extreme example, of the degree to which the concept of gentility and the importance of material culture had been embraced by the Virginia planters. Evidence from his Letterbook correspondence, the elegance and social order of Blandfield, and the furniture displayed there testify to Beverley’s enthusiastic embrace of the rituals and rites of gentility, and his efforts to replicate on the Chesapeake the most genteel lifestyle on the English model that his resources could provide.⁵⁸

While Beverley and the other great planters of the Chesapeake probably came closer than any other group in British colonial America to the lifestyle of the English landed gentry, the British and European elites found them to be provincial, wanting in social origins, much too prone towards bourgeoisie materialism and tainted by a business mentality.⁵⁹ The new colonial gentry and the old European one were linked by an increasingly international society but were set apart by the dissimilar realities of life. An acute awareness of this sense of provincialism, of physical and cultural remoteness from the mother country, is evident in Beverley’s correspondence and was certainly a factor in driving his ambitious quest for displaying his refinement and a motivating force in his pursuit of a genteel lifestyle.⁶⁰ However unpleasant the concept, connotations or consequences of their ambiguous status, the Chesapeake planters were the relatively

⁵⁷ Beverley to Bland, 10 Jan 1762. Letterbook, LOC.

⁵⁸ Cary Carson, “The Consumer Revolution in America, Why Demand?” *Of Consuming Interest: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1994), 522 – 524.

⁵⁹ Michael J. Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman, Cultural Legitimacy in Plantation America*, (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1998), 1-3.

⁶⁰ Rozbicki, *Colonial Gentleman*, 77-78.

nouveau riche residents of a distant territory and were, in fact, culturally and physically isolated from the center of the British Empire upon which they were dependent.

The degree to which planters such as Beverley were isolated, the pace of introduction of consumer goods into the Chesapeake, the level of the self sufficiency experienced by planters, and the impact of these factors on the economic development of the region were important determinants in shaping Beverley as a consumer. The system of large plantations, the geography of the Chesapeake with its broad rivers linked to the sea and England, and the restrictive British mercantile system protecting her merchants and manufacturers clearly hindered the creation of manufacturing in the colonies and the emergence of a diversified skilled labor force.⁶¹ The existence of slave labor also played a role in limiting development of an artisan class. Specific trades such as blacksmithing, coopering and shipbuilding that supported the tobacco trade could survive, but artisans producing glass, textiles, and other household goods found it very difficult to compete with imported goods. The efficient distribution of inexpensive British manufactured goods directly to the largest buyers and the decentralization of the tobacco trade limited the growth of port towns and the concentration of artisan communities and commercial services that characterized such major centers as Charleston, Philadelphia and Boston.⁶² (Alexandria, Norfolk and Baltimore, developed late in the century as a response to the shift to wheat as the most important “money crop.”) Blandfield and the other great plantations were generally *self contained* economic complexes, drawing minimally on local resources, and often physically resembled small villages, but they were hardly *self*

⁶¹ Bruce A. Ragsdale, *A Planters' Republic, The Search for Economic Independence in Revolutionary Virginia*, (Madison WI, Madison House, 1996), 20.

⁶² Ragsdale, *Planters' Republic*, page 21-23. See also Carl Bridenbaugh, *The Colonial Craftsman*, reprint, (New York, Dover, 1990).

sufficient. These plantations lacked the capacity to produce many of the basic goods such as clothing for their slaves, scythes, hoes or nails critical to the agricultural activities that sustained them, much less the fancy clothing, exotic foodstuffs, ceramics and other luxury goods that were increasingly viewed as necessities of life. Even among the most entrepreneurial planters such as John Tayloe, there is no evidence that the economics of Chesapeake plantations allowed for the development of such highly specialized businesses such as cabinetmaking.⁶³

While Beverley and his peers among the great Chesapeake planters wished to diminish their dependency on Great Britain and increase their self sufficiency, up until the outbreak of war, the great majority continued to look across the Atlantic for most manufactured goods and virtually all luxury goods.⁶⁴ Small planters used the developing network of local merchants as a primary source for consumer goods, but men of Beverley's wealth and status used them only when necessary and with reluctance. They preferred what they perceived as the more cost effective and more fashionable merchandise available directly through personal agents. In this well established tobacco consignment system, ships arrived from England in the late fall or early winter, gathered freight and departed in early spring with tobacco and correspondence, but the uncertain communication and long transportation cycle insured that the planter had only the vaguest idea of what price his crop might fetch, what his goods might cost and how his cash balance stood with his agents. The merchants in London, Liverpool and later in Glasgow sold the crops on the best terms possible, and after deducting charges for

⁶³ Breen, *Tobacco Culture*, 86-88, In *Three Generations of Planter-Businessmen: The Tayloes, Slave Labor, and Entrepreneurialism in Virginia, 1710-1830*, Dissertation, College of William and Mary, 1999, Laura Kamoie examines the various business opportunities and economic forces that impacted Beverley's neighbors into whose family his son Robert married.

⁶⁴ Beverley to Athawes, Jan. 5, 1773, Letterbook, LOC.

shipping, insurance, storage, duties and handling, along with a two and one half to three per cent commission, credited the planter's account with the balance.⁶⁵ The merchants acted as the planters' agent in selecting or placing orders for the goods he required, seeing to repairs or alterations to returned items, attended to legal and family matters, provided a range of personal services, and acted as banker -- advancing credit as necessary against future tobacco shipments.

The Chesapeake planters viewed the entire scope of their highly important relationships with British tobacco merchants in intensely personal terms that involved their concepts of individual honor, virtue and reputation. Beverley, like many of his peers, struggled to maintain the perception that his dealings with his agents were based on friendship, rather than representing coarse, business relationships unseemly for a gentleman.⁶⁶ As with some of his contemporaries, Beverley worried about the level of dependence and restrictions that flowed from their chronic, heavy indebtedness, and he may have shared the suspicion of many planters that the merchants operated a conspiratorial cartel whose aim was to control prices, minimize the planters' profits and ensure continuation of their indebtedness and dependency.⁶⁷ This broad concern, coupled with issues of quality, condition, satisfactory design and costs of individual

⁶⁵ Ragsdale, *Planters' Republic*, 4-5. Expenses often ran as high as 75% of the value of the crop.

⁶⁶ Tillison, "Friendship and Commerce," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol III, no 3, 2003. Breen also addresses in *Tobacco Culture*, 84. Robert Beverley reacted with outrage and deeply wounded feelings at the "insulting" treatment suffered by his son William by Samuel Athawes upon his arrival in England during the Revolutionary War. Beverley seemed to feel that the long relationship he had enjoyed with the family and firm would override any differences. He apparently sought the assistance of Athawes upon William's arrival in Europe to attend school c. 1779. Beverley was deeply hurt and insulted by the "cruelty and rudeness" Athawes displayed towards his son and wrote Athawes in March 1780 to terminate their relationship. In the same period, Beverley reestablished his relationship with Backhouse and transferred all accounts from Athawes to this firm. Beverley to Athawes, March 9, 1780, Letterbook, LOC, Beverley to Backhouse, March 9, 1780, Letterbook, LOC.

⁶⁷ Breen, *Tobacco Culture*, 23, 91, 139-151, Beverley to Athawes, Jan. 5, 1773, Letterbook, LOC.

goods insured a constant level of testiness in the relationships that contradicts the planters proclaimed devotion to their merchant friends.

However problematic, paradoxical, distasteful and disadvantageous to the planter this system may have been, it was not sufficiently onerous to stop or even significantly curb the appetites of gentlemen such as Beverley for the finer accoutrements of a genteel lifestyle. What had originated as a business relationship often evolved into the Virginians' most important connection with the metropolitan center of the British Empire and deeply influenced the views of all involved.⁶⁸ Robert Beverley looked to his correspondents for political news, economic trends, the oversight of his sons' educations and advice on the most current fashions in furnishings, attire and accessories. They would translate his instructions for "fashionable," "genteel," and "neat & plain" in fulfilling his orders. The personal and financial ebbs and flows of these relationships, the impact of non importation on trade and the resulting growth of "manufacturers" he had foreseen, and his growing distaste for dependency, were among the many influences at play on Beverley as he balanced the benefits and costs of purchasing furniture for Blandfield from England or from American artisans.

⁶⁸ Ragsdale, *Planters' Republic*, 5.

Chapter Three – *Blandfield*

“I have commenced a great Plantation Manor.”⁶⁹

“The completeness of Blandfield is remarkable [and] it is surprising that a house of such grandeur should have so long remained practically unknown to architects,” wrote Thomas Waterman and John Barrows in their seminal study of Tidewater Virginia architecture in 1932.⁷⁰ Both the fact of Blandfield’s survival and its obscurity may be credited to its remote location at the far reaches of a long, broad peninsula, fronting the Rappahannock River and hidden deep within an extensive surrounding farm and forest. Improbably but propitiously, Blandfield remained within an unbroken line of Beverley family heirs who lived in and cared for the home until 1983 when the entire estate was acquired by James and Wiley Wheat. The historical and architectural research and subsequent restoration of Blandfield undertaken by the Wheats in cooperation with scholars at Colonial Williamsburg and other institutions has achieved the preservation of this enormously important Chesapeake home. (*Figure Two, Figure Three*)

Situated on one of the low ridges that rise above the river marshes, the house is a three-part composition, comprising a dominating central building connected to lower, two-story dependencies by one -story shedroofed passages. The house is built of brick, which in the main house is laid in Flemish bond. Both fronts of the house are substantially the same, each consisting of a central pavilion which is flanked on either side by two windows on each floor, and across the upper part of the pavilions are three

⁶⁹ Beverley to John Bland, 25 Feb. 1763. Letterbook, LOC.

⁷⁰ Thomas Tileston Waterman and John A. Barrows, *Domestic Colonial Architecture of Tidewater Virginia*, (New York, Dover Publications, 1932), 141-145.

windows. Four, tall, central chimneys project above the roof line. The dependencies enclose a rose garden in the forecourt that represent a key distinctive feature known in only a handful of eighteenth-century Chesapeake homes designs. The incorporation of these gardens add further to the English flavor of the overall concept and are indicative of the influences bearing on Beverley and the effect he sought to achieve with Blandfield.⁷¹

It is not possible to state with certainty what specific examples Robert Beverley drew upon as he conceptualized Blandfield and selected its imposing site on a ridge above and about a mile and one half from the Rappahannock River. It replaced a house, presumably built by his father or grandfather, also known as Blandfield, situated much closer to the river that probably dated to the seventeenth century, but of which no description has surfaced and only traces of whose foundations remain.⁷² Beverley would have been familiar with several homes in Virginia that could well have influenced his thoughts on the design – Mount Airy, Carlyle House and Mansfield share a number of features with Blandfield, and the elevation and siting are similar to the arrangement of both Carter’s Grove and Mount Airy.⁷³

Certainly Beverley’s exposure to English homes during his decade there as a student must have been a powerful influence, and he was surely familiar with some of the new, country homes being built during this period which drew on the plans of William Kent and Robert Adam. He would have been aware of increasingly popular architectural

⁷¹ The description of Blandfield is drawn from Waterman and Barrows. For a discussion of the importance of gardens see Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, (New York, Random House, 1992), 127-131. The porches were added in the nineteenth century, and one was removed during the post-1983 restoration.

⁷² The only reference to this home found was Beverley’s comment in a 1769 letter to Landon Carter that after a December holiday ball and other entertainments, he intended to “return into a snug corner of my old cabin.” Beverley to Landon Carter, Transcript of manuscript letter, Virginia Historical Society. Interview by author, with John G. Beverley, descendent of Robert Beverley, 8/2005, who recalled the foundations.

⁷³ Thomas Tileston Waterman, *The Mansions of Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press), 261-165. Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, 206-207.

pattern books such as James Gibbs' *Book of Architecture*, and it is on Plate LXIII of this work that Blandfield seems to rely most heavily in its overall concept.⁷⁴ The Palladian composition closely resembles this design which was described by Gibbs as:

A House of 58 by 44 feet, containing six Rooms on a Floor, with two Stair-cases. The Kitchin is on one side of the Court, and the Stables on the other, with Rooms over them, and are join'd to the House by circular Arcades. The Rooms of the principal Floor are 12 feet high; the Front is plain, with Architraves round the Window. The Design was made for a Gentleman in *Yorkshire*.⁷⁵

If this home were actually built, it is possible that Beverley may have seen it on a visit to his family's ancestral home, also in Yorkshire.⁷⁶

Blandfield, as architectural historian Edward Chappell, who oversaw much of the restoration of the house in the 1980s, has observed, has an "Englishness" that goes beyond the debt to Gibbs but also displays characteristics that are distinctly Chesapeake in origin.⁷⁷ The design chosen by Beverley for Blandfield, he notes, was deeply rooted in English architecture, but in its actualization the house was uniquely suited to and a distinctive product of the Chesapeake culture. Its front doorway, facing away from the river, leads into a large reception hall rather than the more familiar stair passage seen in thousands of early American homes. Two stair passages open off and to the sides of the

⁷⁴ Edward Chappell, Architectural Historian, Colonial Williamsburg, video tape of 1989 Colonial Williamsburg Antique Forum, Rockefeller Library, Williamsburg, VA and interview by author with Chappell, October 2005.

⁷⁵ James Gibbs, *A Book of Architecture, Containing Designs of Buildings and Ornaments*, (New York, B. Blom, 1968, reprint of 1728 edition).

⁷⁶ Kneebone, *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, 470. Robert Beverley (1635-1687) was the son of Peter Beverley of Hull, Yorkshire. Ormsby (Hall) in Yorkshire, now known as the seat of the Penniman Family, which still stands, bears some resemblance to Blandfield, and may have been an early Beverley home according to Burke's Peerage. Col. [John] Carlyle was among the travelers in the Beverley party when Robert went to England to begin his education, and while it seems likely, there is no record of Beverley's having visited Carlyle's Alexandria home.

⁷⁷ Edward A. Chappell, "The Restoration of Blandfield," *The Journal of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*, Williamsburg VA., Vol. 22, No. 3 (Autumn 2000), 44-49. The immigration into the Chesapeake region was overwhelmingly English and consequently the cultural traditions impacting architecture and furniture remained strong. The author would like to acknowledge the generous assistance of Ed Chappell in sharing his knowledge of the house and its history that was indispensable in undertaking this project. Much of this work draws upon these discussions and his published works.

reception hall and originally gave the only access to the corner rooms, reflecting a growing concern in defining public and private space, and in controlling the movements of guests and servants.⁷⁸ An additional Chesapeake aspect of the house was the arrangement of service spaces; kitchen and laundry, in the far rooms of each flanking building that were separated from the core of the house by at least fifty paces and a flight of stairs. Entry to the main house from these buildings was through connecting hyphens that entered through the side walls into the stairway passages on the east and west sides of the main floor. Occupied by slaves during Robert Beverley's tenure, the flankers had center-chimney plans akin to kitchens and slave quarters built in the Chesapeake region for more than a century. This plan, concludes Chappell, allowed Beverley to minimize the need for servants to pass through main rooms as they went about their duties and maximized the physical and social separation between servants and the family.⁷⁹ As was the case with the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, Blandfield would have an imposing exterior, flankers, controlled interior circulation, impressive first floor public rooms with the most fashionable furnishing available.⁸⁰ Beverley would achieve with his design the overriding purpose of the eighteenth-century gentry home which was to "transform life within its walls...[and] hide the everyday vulgar activities of cooking and work ... in outbuildings, or in the cellar."⁸¹ Robert Beverley would have no doubt been quite pleased at the effect that Blandfield, his carefully calculated and powerful composition,

⁷⁸ Doors opening into the central rooms from each of the four corner rooms were not added until later. An order for hinges and locks for parlor doors in 1792 could have been for this early remodeling which would indicate that Robert Beverley oversaw these changes to the internal ordering of Blandfield rather than his son after Beverley's death in 1800. Beverley to Backhouse, August 25, 1792, Letterbook, LOC.

⁷⁹ See Dell Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Winterthur Portfolio*, University of Chicago Press, Vol. 17, (Summer/Autumn, 1982) for further discussion of the evolution of interior space in Virginia.

⁸⁰ In a telling clue as to the magnitude of his ambition, Beverley specifically mentions only the interiors of the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg as design inspiration.

⁸¹ Bushman, *Refinement*, page 127

evoked in a contemporary visitor who wrote: “They live in as high a style here, I believe, as any part of the world...Mr. Beverley’s is one of the handsomest and largest houses in America, and beautifully situated on the Rappahannock. It looks like an elegant nobleman’s-seat in England.”⁸² But Blandfield with its incorporation of local features was not an English home. It was a provincial adaptation of urban design influences, and it reflected the specific needs, aspirations and circumstances of the social context and physical environment of the Chesapeake. The design of Blandfield suggested the progressing assimilation of its owner back into the culture of his native Virginia.

Just as the design source and architect remain obscure, so too are the identities of the builders or joiners responsible for the construction of Blandfield. In a 1763 letter to John Bland, Beverley ordered, “2 White Stone Hearths 6 Feet 4 inches Long + 2 Feet 2 Inches broad” and noted that, “I have commenced a great Plantation Man [or]”, but it was not until three years later that he inquired about securing a master builder.⁸³ Writing to John Backhouse in 1766 or 1767, Beverley explained, “As I propose building an house & doing it upon the most easy Forms, I have taken this opportunity to request you will be pleased to procure me an House Joiner.”⁸⁴ “I would have none but a man well acquainted with his business and upon indentures four years from his arrival in Virginia -- If he understands making Drafts and Designs he would be more useful,” he

⁸² Robert Hunter, *Quebec to Carolina 1785-1786*, Edited by Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, (San Marino, Huntington Library, 1943), 209.

⁸³ Beverley to Bland, ca. 1766, Letterbook LOC.

⁸⁴ Carl R. Lounsbury, Ed. *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape*, (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1994). In defining “joiner” Lounsbury explains that, while in Great Britain the distinction between carpenters, who framed and enclosed buildings, and joiners, who finished the interior work were rigidly enforced, in the early South, joiners and carpenters shared most of these traditional responsibilities. It is likely that Beverley was seeking a man skilled in designing, fabricating and installing fashionable interior woodwork as well as overseeing the framing and construction of the exterior and might also have used the term “master builder.” This designation was used in the Upper South to describe a man who had undertaken numerous building projects and could supervise a large labor force of skilled and unskilled workers.

explained.⁸⁵ An additional three years elapsed before his visiting father-in-law, Landon Carter, recorded in his diary in February, 1770, that he, “rode to see Beverley’s [new] building just raised to the surface of the earth.”⁸⁶ The Letterbook correspondence makes no further mention of the house joiner or provides any explanation for the seemingly intermittent pace of construction, but by April, 1771, Beverley emphasized to Athawes the importance of the timely delivery of his order for goods by stipulating that, “I propose to move into my house by Autumn of 1772.”⁸⁷ By 1773 he could report to Athawes that, “having now finished building,” he expected that his tobacco exports might as much as double with the return of his slaves to the fields, providing some indication of the expense and effort Blandfield’s construction had required.⁸⁸

Architectural historian, Thomas Waterman, initially presumed that the builder John Ariss (c. 1729-1799), who has been linked to Carlyle House in Alexandria, was responsible for Blandfield; but he later revised his views to credit the master builder and architect, William Buckland.⁸⁹ After overseeing the construction and elaborate interiors of Gunston Hall for George Mason in 1759, Buckland had moved to Richmond County, Virginia, in 1761. There he had contracted with Beverley’s neighbor, John Tayloe, II, for

⁸⁵ Beverley to Backhouse, London ND, ca 1766, Letterbook, LOC. Although Beverley uses the term indenture which implies servitude for a period in payment for the cost of passage, the letter goes on to discuss an annual salary necessary to attract such a skilled craftsman which suggests a much broader use of the term that encompassed a more professional, contractual arrangement. The builder and architect William Buckland came to Virginia under an indenture agreement arranged by Thomas Mason on behalf of his brother George Mason as he was building Gunston Hall. Buckland agreed to a four year term during which he was to receive passage, be paid 20 pounds annually as well as other expenses. See Luke Beckerdite, “Architect-Designed Furniture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia, The Work of William Buckland and William Bernard Sears,” *American Furniture 1994*, (Chipstone Foundation, London, 1994), 29-48.

⁸⁶ Jack P. Greene, *The Diary of Landon Carter*, page 362.

⁸⁷ Beverley to Athawes, April 15, 1771. Letterbook, LOC.

⁸⁸ Beverley to Athawes, ND, after Jan 1773. Letterbook, LOC.

⁸⁹ Waterman, *Mansions of Virginia*, 265. For Ariss, see Kneebone, *Virginia Biography*, Vol. 1, 199-201. For Buckland, Beckerdite, *American Furniture*, 1994, and Rosamond Randall Beirne and John H. Scarff, *William Buckland, 1734-1774*, (Board of Regents, Gunston Hall and Hammond-Harwood Association. NP, 1970).

work on Mount Airy, which was either just being completed or being remodeled, and produced the design for Menokin for Tayloe's son-in-law Francis Lightfoot Lee.⁹⁰ Buckland seems to have continued to work at Mount Airy with the skilled carver and joiner, William Bernard Sears, until early 1765 and was involved with Menokin until 1771. This partnership had produced sophisticated interiors and furniture for Mason and Tayloe and had clearly demonstrated the capabilities necessary for undertaking the construction and finishing of Blandfield. Buckland remained in the area and advertised his services until 1772— the years during which Blandfield was built — and was mentioned in the correspondence of Beverley's neighbors, Tayloe, Robert Wormley Carter and Landon Carter -- but there is no known documentary record of his involvement with Blandfield.⁹¹

The evidence pointing to either of these men as the master builder of Blandfield is circumstantial and inconclusive. A detailed comparison of structural techniques or of the traces of the original internal trim and molding fragments with surviving woodwork at other homes such with documented builders or the discovery of written evidence may eventually identify Blandfield's builder.⁹² It is clear that the builder, whoever he may have been, was familiar with the current London architectural fashions desired by Beverley, concludes Chappell in his assessment of Blandfield. The design and

⁹⁰ Richard Guy Wilson, Ed. *Buildings of Virginia, Tidewater and Piedmont*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2002), 335-337, 351-357.

⁹¹ In their biography of William Buckland, Beirne and Scarff maintain that he should be considered the architect, but provide no documentary evidence. *William Buckland*, Page 43. Among the most intriguing candidates for construction of Blandfield are members of the Walker family. Although master builder William Walker, who died c.1750, could not have been involved, he belonged to an important family of artisans working in the Rappahannock River Valley - Fredericksburg area. Recent scholarship has linked furniture made by members of the Walker family to Blandfield and it is possible that William Walker's brother Robert (d. 1777) was engaged by Beverley for work on the house or its furnishings. As with the case of Buckland, no written record of a relationship has yet been discovered.

⁹²Chappell notes in "Restoration of Blandfield" the similarities with wood work found at Shirley, Menokin and stylistically at Carter's Grove and Kenmore. See page 48.

construction successfully incorporate such stylish features as the recessing of window frames into the brickwork, use of large windows with large crown glass panes set in very thin muntins, classical wainscotings without raised panels, and the use of a bell system to the cellar for summoning servants.⁹³ Similarly, the brickwork displays sophisticated techniques and maintains a uniformity of color by avoiding glazed headers that reflect the evolving taste for more austere classicism as well as conforming to the Chesapeake preference for neat and plain.

Beverley's Letterbooks mention at least seven room designations: dining room, common dining room, drawing room, passage, common room, bed chambers and parlor, but there is no written evidence indicating specifically which rooms at Blandfield served these exact functions during his occupancy.⁹⁴ His perception of the need for separate, specific spaces to serve the activities to be pursued in each area and the need to create the additional distinctions of formal and informal spaces, and public and private spaces, were guided by the precepts of gentility.⁹⁵ Although the interiors of Blandfield were largely stripped away in a massive early nineteenth-century renovation, abundant evidence remains of distinct gradations of quantity, quality and complexity in room finishes, leaving no doubt that Robert Beverley incorporated architectural and finish details that paralleled the room's importance and usage hierarchies.⁹⁶ The furniture selected for each

⁹³ Chappell, "Restoration of Blandfield," page 47-48. Interview, Oct. 2005.

⁹⁴ The room designations are recorded in the Letterbooks on the following dates: dining room (Feb. 10, 1772), common dining room, (Aug. 24, 1793), my drawing room (Feb. 10, 1772), passage (June 20, 1793), a common room (June 20, 1793) bed chambers (July 13, 1793) and parlor (Aug. 25, 1792). Further adding to the difficulty of determining room usage at Blandfield during this period is the inexact usage and overlap of terms in the period -- parlor, salon, and drawing room were often used interchangeably, as were study, library, and office, as well as the frequently synonymous hall and passage.

⁹⁵ Lorena S. Walsh, "Urban Amenities," 109-117.

⁹⁶ The contract for renovation of Blandfield in the mid nineteenth century called for removal of wainscoting and other woodwork. Exterior porches were also added along with a multitude of other changes.

area and each room would have been carefully chosen by Beverley to complement and reinforce this carefully constructed and well integrated hierarchy in both the public and private spaces, to be consistent with the functional specializations, and to produce the desired symbolic impact. *Figure Four* illustrates a conjectural first floor plan for Blandfield that incorporates the rooms referred to by Beverley. It is based on the architectural evidence available and comparisons with other Chesapeake homes of his peers in the late eighteenth century.⁹⁷

In contrast with the more common Chesapeake design in which the main entry faced the river, Beverley oriented Blandfield to be entered from the west or land side entrance through the garden and between the flanking service buildings. The main floor of the house consists of six rooms and two narrow side hallways with stair cases that separate the corner rooms. The floor plan is symmetrical with the opposing exterior doors opening into large central rooms. It is similar to the layouts found at Sabine Hall and Gunston Hall with the exceptions of the divided central hall at Blandfield that creates two large central rooms, and the placement of the stairways to the upper floors that divide

Manuscript copy in files of John G. Beverley. Also for contemporary physical evidence, see Memoranda, Vertical Files, Rockefeller Library and Chappell, "Restoration of Blandfield."

⁹⁷ Memoranda records (Vertical Files, Rockefeller Library) which record work done in the 1980s at Blandfield and the assistance of Edward Chappell were invaluable in drawing conclusions regarding possible room usage. Sources drawn upon for comparisons with other Chesapeake homes and discussion of rooms draws include: Edward Chappell, "Williamsburg Architecture as Social Space," *Fresh Advances*, Colonial Williamsburg, November, 1981," Edward Chappell, "Looking at Buildings," *Fresh Advances*, Colonial Williamsburg, November, 1984, Mark R. Wenger, "Mr. and Mrs. Randolph's House," *The Colonial Williamsburg Interpreter*, March 1993, Camille Wells, *Social and Economic Aspects of 18th Century Housing on the Northern Neck of Virginia*, Dissertation, College of William and Mary, 1994, Dell Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Winterthur Portfolio*, (University of Chicago Press, 1982), Vol. 17, (Summer/Autumn), *Room Use Study*, Website, Gunston Hall Plantation, Robert A. Leath and Betty C. Leviner, "A Proposal for Revisions to the John Carlyle House Historic Furnishing Plan," Unpublished report, April 2003, Mark R. Wenger, "The Central Passage in Virginia, Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Living Space," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1986), Mark R. Wenger, "The Dining Room in Early Virginia," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, III*, (Columbia, University of Missouri, 1989), and Jan Gilliam, *Furnishing Williamsburg's Historic Buildings*, (Williamsburg, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1991).

the two rooms on the east and two on the west sides of Blandfield. In the original configuration, the two rooms to the east and two to the west opened only into the dividing stairway passages ensuring that only the central entry hall and adjoining drawing room were directly accessible to visitors as they entered the house. The stairway passages were significantly plainer than the rooms to either side with smaller cornices, baseboards and woods of modest quality, indicating their utilitarian purpose.⁹⁸

After absorbing the powerful impact of Blandfield's elegant exterior, the visitor would have been ushered into the central entry hall or passage, the first and most public of the first floor rooms.⁹⁹ If warranted by the visitor's social status, the guest would have been allowed onward into the large main drawing room, a space of increasing symbolic and physical importance in ceremonies of gentility.¹⁰⁰ The size and design of these two central rooms at Blandfield were consistent with the growing importance of the central passage or hall and the tendency of gentry planters to "widen, bisect and embellish their central passages to create well appointed 'halls' or 'saloons' in which to receive and

⁹⁸ Consistent with the rooms adjoining the stairs the floors reflected status of the area, (southeast Doweled floorboards) (northwest Tongue-and-groove flooring). See Memoranda, Rockefeller Library Vertical files for extensive discussion of flooring construction and evidence of coverings. A painted floor cloth (20 x 15 ordered 4 Jan 1797) was likely in the entry passage and the repeated orders for carpets of appropriate sizes suggest that they were placed in the side hallways and other first floor rooms. Letterbooks, LOC and PRVT.

⁹⁹ Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, pages 206 – 215 discusses impact of the exterior, symbolism of spaces and the hierarchy within the large Chesapeake homes.

¹⁰⁰ In their proposed furnishing plan for Carlyle House (unpublished) Robert Leath and Betty Leviner refer to the passage as a "filtration" device and note that "the passage, parlor, and dining room were the most important areas for the public presentation of the Carlyle family to visitors." In his description of his visit to Blandfield on the occasion of a wedding attended by some one hundred guests, Robert Hunter offered evidence of the ceremonial and functional roles of this design. Hunter recounts that after his party's arrival and a delay during which "the company became very much crowded", they were "shown into the drawing room" where they had the "pleasure of seeing Miss Beverley and Mr. Randolph joined together in holy matrimony." Following the wedding the guests were entertained with a "most sumptuous and elegant dinner that would have done honor to any nobleman's house in England.... [and danced] till ten o'clock." Robert Hunter, *Quebec to Carolina in 1785-1786*, 206.

entertain guests.”¹⁰¹ These were the two largest rooms in Beverley’s design, and the evidence indicates that they were adorned with superior wall finishes, wood moldings, fireplaces and floor coverings. The original flooring that survives in these central rooms as well as the rooms to the southeast and southwest was constructed of blind-doweled floorboards – the most refined finish obtainable – and was covered by carpets and painted floor cloths.¹⁰² The scale of these rooms and the complexity and level of finishes at Blandfield indicate an advanced stage of the evolution of the design of Virginia gentry houses that had progressed from the introduction of an entry space through its development from a ‘passage’ to ‘summer hall’ to ‘saloon.’ This process of evolution of interior design and utilization had ultimately involved the entire house and resulted in a realignment of the traditional, spatial hierarchy within the home.¹⁰³

Based on the doweled flooring, surviving evidence of wallpapers, elaborate trim moldings, and fireplace hearths which are all of equal quality to similar evidence in the central rooms, the two rooms situated to the right of the center entry and drawing room (southeast and southwest corners) were also materially and socially superior spaces. Designed for entertaining and display, these rooms were, after the central hall and drawing room, the most public of the first floor spaces and the most elaborately

¹⁰¹ Wenger, *Dining Room*, Richard Bushman, notes in *The Refinement of America*, page 120, that the formal parlor was the preeminent room in period mansions and received the most concentrated attention as well as the highest degree of decorative elaboration. It might be used for tea, a glass of wine, cards, sometimes dancing and conversation. The parlor cost more than any other room and all for uses with no economic purpose. The superior rooms on the southeast side of the salons would relate Blandfield to Gunston Hall and Westover rather than Carter’s Grove and George Wythe House, where the public rooms flank the passage at the front of the house.

¹⁰² Blind doweled flooring utilized dowel pins hidden between butted floor boards to achieve a surface with no visible evidence of fasteners. Lounsbury, *Glossery*, 143.

¹⁰³ The treatment of the central passageway as two distinct rooms, each with a fireplace, may reflect the evolution of this space in Virginia homes over the course of the eighteenth century as would the later (1792?) addition of doorways providing increased access to the corner rooms.

furnished.¹⁰⁴ Certainly one of these rooms, possibly at the southwestern corner, would have been Beverley's main dining room, while at the other corner might have been a parlor or study that adjoined and supplemented the main drawing room in the center. A rarity in Virginia until the first half of the century, by the time of Blandfield's construction the dining room had grown to equal or possibly surpass any other space as the center of the most important rituals of hospitality of the gentry.¹⁰⁵ Whereas earlier Virginians had taken their meals communally in multi-purpose central halls, over the course of the eighteenth century they saw eating become an opportunity for ceremonial display and conspicuous consumption. As meals became a central element in the rituals of hospitality and a theater for genteel manners, they not only required a finely appointed room, but also a range of elaborate glassware, ceramics, cutlery, plate, pewter, linens and furniture – as well as exotic and varied foods, condiments, beverages and the implements for their preparation and service. The dining ritual even included livery for slaves attending the table. Orders recorded in Beverley's Letterbook document the presence of all of the above in the dining room at Blandfield and provide evidence of the extreme importance he placed on that room and the rituals within.¹⁰⁶

Based on the lesser quality of finishes and flooring, the two rooms situated on the northeast and northwest corners, to the left of the center rooms, were probably intended to be less public in nature and frequented by family. These rooms shared tongue-and-groove flooring, a lower grade than doweled, and do not seem to have been fitted out with as elaborate fireplaces or trim as the rooms to the south. Evidence of closets in the

¹⁰⁴ Memos, Rockefeller Library Vertical Files, March 28, 1984, June 8, 1985.

¹⁰⁵ Mark R. Wenger, *The Dining Room in Early Virginia*, Ryhs Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 76.

¹⁰⁶ Beverley to Bland, Oct. 11, 1763, "2 Silver laced Livery Hats." Beverley ordered furniture and a steady stream of cutlery, ceramics, glassware, table linens, and foodstuffs to be used in his dining room.

northeast room and a combination of drapery and bed orders with dimensions uniquely suited to this room indicate that it was used as a chamber. This would have been consistent with the traditional practice of locating the master and mistresses' bed chamber on the main floor, a custom that continued in many large Chesapeake homes through the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁷

The northwest room was very probably the more casual, "common dining room" referred to by Beverley in his orders and would have been used by the entire family or the children as the occasion warranted.¹⁰⁸ Evidence of bowfat cupboards in the corners of the room, its proximity to the kitchen service area, and the existence of similar secondary dining rooms at Nomini Hall, Gunston Hall and other Virginia homes, not to mention the need to accommodate Beverley's sixteen children, support the supposition that a second dining room occupied this space.¹⁰⁹ Additional evidence of this usage is an order for curtains placed by Beverley in 1795 for his "common dining room" that specified number and dimensions consistent with this room, as well as curtains for a "glass door" that may have been the doorway leading into the kitchen passageway.¹¹⁰

While the less public upstairs passages and bedrooms were not of the importance accorded rooms on the main floor, they also display evidence of a clear hierarchy and were likely furnished in keeping with this formula. As Chappell recorded during the

¹⁰⁷ An order placed to Gist in London in April 1784 included 3 window curtains eleven feet long, a neat, four posted mahogany bed along with fifteen yards of fabric for covering chairs – all to be of dark green – which could only have fit in a first floor room. At Menokin in nearby Richmond County, a large dining room, a study and two chambers (private sitting and sleeping rooms) constituted the main floor. Gunston Hall and Carlyle House also had master bed chambers on the first floors. See Gunston Hall Website and *Furnishing Plan for Carlyle House*, by Robert Leath and Betty Leviner.

¹⁰⁸ Beverley to Owen Jones, Phil. Sept 24, 1793, orders a chimney piece for his "common dining room" which he therefore wishes to be "perfectly plain." Letterbook PRVT.

¹⁰⁹ Evidence of closets or bowfats in the south and east corners of the "west first-floor room," Memo Vertical files., Feb 1, 1984, and Wells, "Social and Economic Aspects," 198. Bowfats or buffets were closets or cupboards, often built in, for the storage of tablewares. Lounsbury, *Glossary*, 51.

¹¹⁰ Beverley to Anderson, April 19, 1795, Letterbook, PRVT.

restoration of these spaces, “The second floor passage was especially Spartan: in order to reach six well finished second-floor bedrooms, the Beverleys and their guests passed through a long space with skimpy cornices, no wainscoting, and an original attic stair so crude that it is often assumed to be a later addition.” Surviving fragments of early trim and hardware clearly indicated that within these private rooms, accessible only to selected guests, family and servants, there also existed distinct variations in quality that would have defined superior and lower status bed chambers.¹¹¹

The largest Chesapeake gentry houses such as Blandfield displayed particularly elaborate internal architectural and decorative hierarchies conveyed through form, finish, and scale that generated a multiplicity of social signals recognizable to Beverley’s contemporaries.¹¹² The transitions from public to private space and the level of significance of specific spaces were expressed in a variety of decorative details. In general, the level of related expense decreased from the most to the least public spaces.¹¹³ Recognition of these room hierarchies, their social symbolism, and the evolving specialization of functions of Blandfield’s rooms are essential to understanding the priorities to which Robert Beverley adhered in selecting the furniture for each area. As with the rooms and finishes, the furniture he chose was characterized by distinct, parallel hierarchies, and its selection and sources were dictated by the interplay of the economic, political and social forces bearing on Beverley.

¹¹¹Chappell, *Fresh Advices*, page iii. Chappell, “Restoration of Blandfield,” 48-49.

¹¹² Chappell, “Restoration of Blandfield.”

¹¹³ Chappell, “Looking at Buildings,” iii, Chappell, “Restoration of Blandfield,” 48.

Chapter Four – *Conspicuous Consumption -- English Furniture at Blandfield*

“I have been some time employed in building an House, & as I am desirous of filling it up in a plain neat Manner, I wd willingly consult the present Fashion, for you know that foolish Passion had made its way, Even into this remote Region.”¹¹⁴

The values and taste for luxury absorbed by Robert Beverley during his extended residence in England while an impressionable young man dominated his choices as a consumer in the decade following his return to Virginia -- the years of Blandfield’s construction and initial furnishing. To Beverley, English goods represented the best, most fashionable and most prestigious to be had as well as tangible symbols of his membership in the upper levels of the developing trans-Atlantic elite. Although he would eventually conclude, as he had cautioned his son William, that a Virginia planter could not hope to emulate an English aristocrat, as he went about selecting the first furniture for Blandfield, he turned to London for the group of carefully selected items that would complete the overall effect he intended. While he had been away from London for only a relatively brief time, he recognized that fashion, however “foolish” the passion, required him to be current in his choices. By necessity, he would rely on Edward and Samuel Athawes, John Bland, John Backhouse, and others--his agents in Great Britain--to translate his desire for the “present Fashion” into furniture for Blandfield’s most prestigious spaces.

¹¹⁴ Beverley to Athawes April 15, 1771, Letterbook, LOC.

Beverley had begun to acquire furniture and a variety of other commodities from England almost immediately following his return to Virginia in 1761. His first recorded order was dated that year and was followed by a stream of purchases of consumer goods which, while interrupted and reduced by changing fortunes and circumstances, including wars in North America and Europe, continued until his death in 1800.¹¹⁵ The first large order recorded in the Letterbooks and the first to include furniture was placed with John Bland in July 1762 when he requested “2 Dozn neat Plain Mahogany Chairs with hair Bottoms.” These initial orders were placed while Beverley was apparently still anticipating his return to England and predate any mention of the building of Blandfield, indicating that the goods must have been intended to make the existing home, his father’s Blandfield, temporarily more comfortable and stylish.

Motivated by “thoughts of changing [his] situation in life,” he followed up with an order to Bland in December 1762 for a “Handsome tea table” and tea chest along with a complete set of China suitable for “2 Genteel Courses of Victuals, 2 large Turenes...Breakfast Plates, Tea cups, Coffee Cupps + all the necessary Appendages for an handsome Tea Table.”¹¹⁶ As he planned to become a married man, he explained to Bland, “This obliges me to send an invoice for some goods...I hope you will be kind enough to chose the china of the most fashionable sort, for in all human Probability, I

¹¹⁵ Robert Beverley’s Letterbooks record long lists of purchases including mosquito screening for windows, paving stones, tooth brushes – “without sponges,” grates for cellar windows, seeds, saws, hoes, Madeira, saddles, shoes, textiles, clothing, nails and a wide variety of other practical and discretionary items. The Letterbooks represent a trove of information on consumer attitudes, consumption patterns and material culture that is well beyond the scope of this work. Consistent with Paul Reber’s research, which focused on the less wealthy middle market, consumers, clothing and textiles along with related goods such as ribbons and buttons represent the most frequently ordered items and probably represented the greatest value among Beverley’s purchases. See Paul Reber’s *Retail Trade and the Consumer in Fairfax County Virginia, 1759-1766*, Dissertation, University of Maryland, 2003.

¹¹⁶ Beverley to Bland, Dec. 27, 1762. Letterbook, LOC.

shall spend my life in this country....”¹¹⁷ His marriage to Maria had precipitated a turn about in Beverley’s attitude towards life in Virginia and heightened his desire to bring his home up to a higher standard of genteel comfort. He followed with an order which included a number of items that reflected the arrival of his new wife, their establishment of a domestic order in the existing home and the need for furnishings appropriate for the lady of the house including: “1 neat plain Chest of Drawers Mahogany, 1 neat dressing Table & looking Glass mahogany, 1 neat Mahogany Table with two Leaves about 3 Feet ½ long, for a Lady to work upon.” Beverley also reminded Bland that, “ I wrote some time since for 3 mahogany dining tables, wh [ich] I hope are upon their voyage.”¹¹⁸ Beverley ordered goods every year between 1764 and 1770, but the Letterbook entries record little furniture, only a “sick chair” that he specified should sit upon a bed and adjust like a “bookstand” for Blandfield and a similar chair he ordered for Colonel Carter, (the latter to be in the shape of an “easy chair”), and horse hair for chair bottoms.¹¹⁹ Beverley was seemingly awaiting the move to “his” Blandfield before making his most important purchases.

As Robert Beverley established his new life in Virginia with Maria, settled into his domestic circumstances with his growing family, and progressed with the construction of Blandfield, he turned to the acquisition of the large quantities of goods necessary to support their developing lifestyle and reinforce their social status. The impending completion of his new home triggered a major increase in the number of items

¹¹⁷ Beverley to Bland, Dec. 27, 1762, Letterbook, LOC.

¹¹⁸ Beverley to Bland, Feb. 25, 1763, Letterbook, LOC. This suggests the existence of a previous, undiscovered invoice that included furniture.

¹¹⁹ Beverley to Bland, Oct. 11, 1763, Letterbook, LOC. “1 Sick Chair to put on a Bed for a sick Person to Lean their backs against stuffed with hair + covered with Check to raise or let Down as a Bookstand. Col. Landon Carter Desr’s such an one only he would Chose it with Cheeks as in a large Easy Chair.”

required for the construction of the house and for furnishing and adorning it. In July 1771 Beverley placed a major order with Athawes for construction materials including mortise locks, escutcheons, window pullies and leads, shutter hardware, and chimney pieces for at least five fireplaces. He also ordered the paints which he described as “Bright olive” and “dark chocolate” along with “light stone,” colors that indicate the level of finishes and rich visual impact Beverley sought to achieve.¹²⁰ As he wrote Samuel Athawes, “I observed that Ld B.[otetourt] had hung a room with plain blue Paper & bordered it with a narrow stripe of gilt Leather, wch I thought had a pretty effect.”¹²¹ Included in his order for wallpapers were “pea green flowered...large Patterns of Pillars and Galleries...[and] a large yellow pattern mixed with stucco color.”¹²² Each element was being put in place: site, garden, house, floor plan, architectural trim, surface finishes and floor covering to insure the most appropriate stage for the furniture and furnishings with which Beverley would surround himself.¹²³

By February 1772, Beverley was ready to acquire the quantity and quality of furniture necessary to fit out the most important rooms of his new home. This, his largest known order from England, with the rich detailed descriptions included in his invoice to

¹²⁰ Color and texture of wall papers and paints were important elements in Beverley’s scheme for Blandfield. In addition to this early reference to wall treatments, he ordered paints again in 1793 and explained that “none but high colors will preserve a tolerable appearance” and specified “bright yellow” and “very bright, lively green.” Beverley to Backhouse? Oct 14, 1793. Letterbook, PRVT.

¹²¹ Beverley to Samuel Athawes April 15, 1771. Beverley was referring to the Governor Botetourt of Virginia and the Governor’s Palace in Williamsburg. Norborne Berkeley, Baron de Botetourt (ca. 1715 – 1770) became governor of Virginia in 1768 and served until his death. He was noted for his fine attire, flamboyant presentation and elaborate entertaining. Allen Johnson, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. 1, (New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1964), 468.

¹²² Beverley to Athawes, July 16, 1771, Letterbook, LOC.

¹²³ Through the assistance and cooperation of several descendents of Robert Beverley, the author was able to inspect to varying degrees a large number (approximately ninety per cent) of the items of furniture from Robert Beverley’s Blandfield. In a number of instances the difficulties of making a full inspection and lack of definitive characteristics prevented a firm attribution as to origins. A number of pieces of Blandfield furniture identified either through photographs or discussions were not available to the author and could be included in this study only indirectly. Other items with histories in the family or at Blandfield could not be linked with any certainty to the period of Robert Beverley’s occupancy and are not discussed.

Athawes, provides important insight into Beverley's ambitions for Blandfield and the effect he sought through the decor.¹²⁴ For Beverley it was essential that English furniture predominate in his dining room and be prominent throughout the symbolically important public rooms located on Blandfield's first floor. Twelve "neat plain Mahogany Chairs with yellow worstit stuff Damask bottoms like the curtains" were ordered for what must have been a first floor room, since the matching "3 Yellow Damask Window Curtains" were specified for windows "11 feet high & 4 Feet six Inches wide."¹²⁵ The number and dimensions of the windows indicate that these furnishing were intended for one of the three rooms on the river front -- drawing room, parlor or master bed chamber. The "neat plain Table for a Tea Table," "neat Mahogany tea board," "a neat looking Glass...in a neat white Frame for my drawing Room," and a "Wilton Carpet 15 feet long & 13 feet wide" also included in the order were intended for one of these first floor rooms.

The less public but higher status bedrooms on the second floor overlooking the river, which were accessible to guests and family, were also deemed sufficiently important for expensive furniture. For at least two he ordered canopied beds "the two front Posts of Mahogany, neat but not Carved," with matching bed curtains, window curtains and chair bottoms. Robert Beverley took great pains to coordinate the fabrics

¹²⁴ Isaac, *Transformation*, 116-136. "With [English] goods came tastes, standards, and a whole set of assumptions about the proper ways of ordering life [and of] shaping the environment for use in accordance with ideas of well-being." Packer also builds the case, based on Isaac and others, that Virginia planters used English goods as evidence of access to agents, credit and favorable commercial relationships with England, and to proclaim their identification with English social and cultural standards. Nancy E Packer, *The Importation of English Furniture Into Virginia, 1750-1800*, Dissertation, University of Delaware, 1989, 73.

¹²⁵ "Worstit" or worsted was a woolen fabric or stuff made from well twisted yarn spun of long-staple wool combed to lay the fibers parallel. Beverley also used the terms, "harrateen" or harateen, a worsted fabric often dyed and used in upholstery, and "morien" or moreen, a worsted fabric frequently finely finished. Florence M. Montgomery, *Textiles in America 1650 - 1870*, (New York, Norton & Company, 1984), 256, 301- 303.

chosen for the bed hangings with the curtains, wall papers and the coverings for the chair seats in each of the rooms to achieve the vibrancy and visual impact he envisioned.¹²⁶ The bed “Curtains” he specified “to be of printed cotton” and “three window curtains to the same...to draw up with pullies & not in the Festoon Manner...& cotton to be sent of the same Sort for a Coverlid with binding & fringe.” Six “Plain mahogany Chairs with Bottoms of Cotton to match the Bed,” were ordered for one bed chamber, with an additional six with bottoms to match the second bed’s fabrics, “The wooden work of these Chairs to be exactly like the former.” Construction details also received Beverley’s attention as he specified that the chair bottoms were all to be loose, indicating his preference for slip seats, “not nailed with brass Nails, wh, I dislike very much,” and that the fabric casing for the horse hair stuffing be “of thick strong Canvas & not the thin coarse stuff...because they are soon cut out.”¹²⁷ In a later letter Beverley directed that “the furniture they may be neat + plain as possible...the mahogany of the light Jamaica kind. The other woods being so heavy as to be destroyed by their own weight.”¹²⁸

Measured by dollar value, beds were the most valuable group of furniture recorded in the inventory of Robert Beverley’s estate. At Beverley’s death Blandfield held “13 Beds Complete” valued at \$910 or an average of \$70 each, quite expensive in comparison with values placed on other items such as a Mahogany press at \$40, a chest of drawers and ornaments \$50, and a large wine case at \$40.¹²⁹ Orders for only three beds from England were recorded in the Letterbooks and their expense, which greatly

¹²⁶ These two beds must have been intended for the second floor as Beverley provides the information that the “Height of the bed Chambers is 10 Feet” which coincides with Blandfield’s second floor rooms.

¹²⁷ Beverley to Athawes, Feb. 10, 1772, Letterbook, LOC.

¹²⁸ Beverley to Samuel Athawes, c. June 1772, Letterbook, LOC.

¹²⁹ Inventory and Appraisal, Estate of Robert Beverley, July 21, 1800, Essex County Will Book 16,15-36, Microfilm, Library of Virginia. All references to furniture in Beverley’s estate and valuations are drawn from this source.

exceeded his expectations, gave Beverley pause. As he complained to Athawes after he had received the beds and the bill, he found the bedsto be “very genteel + very d ear.”¹³⁰ The majority of the beds must have included the extensive fashionable and expensive textile ensembles which represented the overwhelming majority of their costs. Since no beds from Blandfield have been identified, it is not possible to know how many of the thirteen recorded in the inventory were acquired in England or the number purchased locally.¹³¹

Much of the furniture ordered by Beverley from England specifically for Blandfield’s dining room has survived and provides a picture of the fashionable, stylish environment in which he entertained his guests. Beverley’s primary furniture order included “one Dozn. Plain mahogany Chairs & two Arm Chairs with Hair Bottoms for a dining Room.....none bordered with brass Nails. A Mahogany dining Table five Feet long, four Feet one half wide, 2 Feet 4 Inches high, with Square Legs, & two of the Legs to draw out on each Side.” This set of fourteen chairs was certainly among the group of 85 inventoried for his estate, and it is very likely that several of these chairs remain in Beverley family collections. At least four, solid-splat side chairs, *Figure Five* that remain in family collections may represent surviving English chairs acquired in this order.¹³² Another group of surviving walnut side chairs with slip seats, pierced diamond splats,

¹³⁰ Robert Beverley to Athawes, Jan. 5, 1773. Letterbook, LOC.

¹³¹ One explanation is the purported sacking of Blandfield by Union troops during the Civil War when multiple wagon loads of furniture were said to have been loaded onto gunboats on the Rappahannock. Bedding might have represented a relatively attractive choice given its portability and value whether the liberators intended it for personal use or eventual sale. The amount of furniture actually taken, if any, seems relatively small in light of what can now be tentatively matched against the estate inventory. A second possibility is simply that as the fabrics aged during the nineteenth century the styles also changed to favor more elaborate wooden frames and less drapery leading to their replacement.

¹³² One of these chairs is marked XII on the inner frame, possibly indicating a set of twelve or more, and is of the same style as a surviving dining table.

straight, molded front legs and H stretchers that strongly resemble British chairs of the period were also likely among the chairs Beverley ordered from England. (*Figure Six*)¹³³

A dining table with virtually identical dimensions and design to Beverley's order for his dining room table from England remains within the family but appears to have been made in Virginia. The inner frame of this table, *Figure Seven*, is of yellow pine with oak, and the methods of constructing the frame with dovetailed, diagonal braces are similar to other tables with Tidewater histories.¹³⁴ Also surviving in the family is what appears to have been one of the drop-leaf, end sections of a three part dining table that may be part of the "sett of dining tables (\$15)" recorded in the inventory.¹³⁵ These tables may have been the "three dining tables" ordered from England to which Beverley referred in his letter to Bland in February, 1763.¹³⁶ Although there is no record of its order, a three bay sideboard that is likely English, with mahogany veneers, string inlay and spade feet seems to be the sideboard inventoried in his estate for \$20 that also remains in the Beverley family. In what was possibly his last furniture order before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, Beverley added to his dining room a "neat mahogany Press or Case to hold a Service of China & what little Plate I have to stand in a dining Room, with Glass Doors above in the Chinese Taste Something in the shape of a Cabinet

¹³³ English side chairs with similar splats, stretchers and construction can be found in John T. Kirk, *American Furniture and the British Tradition to 1830*, (New York, Alfred Knopf, 1982), figures 872, 870, 256.

¹³⁴ While it is possible that this table is the one ordered from England and was made there from imported yellow pine, it seems more likely that it was the product of a local cabinet shop working to Beverley's specifications. It may have duplicated the English table, if it ever arrived at Blandfield, or substituted for an unfilled order. MESDA records one of a "pair" of dining tables with a Blandfield provenance with the leg configuration (but lacking one leaf) described by Beverley with yellow pine and oak secondary woods, S 7416. MESDA attributed the table to the Chesapeake. Hurst, *Southern Furniture*, 215.

¹³⁵ The second table could only be assessed through photographs and a verbal description. It appears to be similar to other English tables in form and construction. Assuming that the center section was a double drop-leaf, a three section table would have measured approximately 54" x 173". See Kirk, *Furniture*, 31-43, 374, for a discussion of table configurations.

¹³⁶ See note 118.

not large – I suppose about 8 or ten Guineas Price.”¹³⁷ In the years following the Revolution Beverley continued his emphasis on elaborate English dining accessories by purchasing wine coolers and mahogany wine cases. These were probably the large (\$40) and small (\$12) wine cases, (possibly *Figure Eight*) a spirit case and three liquor coolers that appear in the inventory.¹³⁸ The preponderance of English furniture in the main dining room emphasizes the great importance the genteel rituals of dining in fashionable surroundings played in Beverley’s life and the enormous cultural symbolism invested in the room’s furnishings.¹³⁹

The English furniture ordered for the inauguration of Blandfield represented an emphatic, unmistakable statement of cultural values and a claim to the highest status, levels of and gentility which Robert Beverley asserted for himself and for his family. This order along with other acquisitions such as his chariot, tailored attire, ceramics and Blandfield itself are clear evidence that at this stage of his life Robert Beverley considered English goods to represent the pinnacle of fashion, the epitome of genteel taste and evidence of cultural refinement. Although he continued to order a variety of goods, clothing, shoes, and foodstuffs, from England up until the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, it is clear that beyond these early, major and highly symbolic

¹³⁷ This is likely the “glass” press valued at \$30 that appears in the estate inventory but does not seem to have survived. Beverley to Athawes, ca. 1773. Letterbook, LOC. Robert Beverley owned little silver as he professed, a fact reflected in his estate inventory. He only ordered silver infrequently and usually specified pewter, glass or china for his table ware.

¹³⁸ Orders for wines appear quite frequently in the Letterbooks along with accessories such as wine coolers, glasses and wine “waiters.” In John Gloag, *A Complete Dictionary of Furniture Revised and Expanded by Clive Edwards*, (New York, Overlook Press, 1990), 724, a wine waiter is defined a “trolley with legs mounted on casters.” At least one bottle case that appears to be English remains in a Beverley family collection, possibly “One small neat mahogany wine case with six quart decanters the bottoms of the decanters to be larger than the middle - a good lock to the case with two good keys.” Beverley to Anderson, March 29, 1789, Letterbook, LOC.

¹³⁹ With the exception of chairs which were presumably moved from room to room, only two items of furniture that relate to dining seem to have been of Virginia origin, a “Side board table \$3” and a “small dining table \$4” were probably used in the “common dining room.” Both tables are similar in style and construction to other period Virginia tables and remain in the Beverley family.

purchases, he acquired very little additional English furniture, and mostly of specialized forms. The only furniture orders from England mentioned in the Letterbooks for the years 1783 through his death in 1800 were “1 neat, four posted bedstead, the four posts to be plain mahogany,” along with matching window curtains and “fifteen yds of the harateen for covering chairs” ordered in 1784, the aforementioned mahogany wine case in 1789, and a leather screen acquired in 1795.¹⁴⁰ In the years that followed the war, Beverley quickly returned to his pattern of purchasing quantities of goods including textiles, glassware, ceramics, wine and farm tools from Great Britain, noting to Anderson as late as 1794 that he continued to acquire “all my clothing” in Liverpool.¹⁴¹

His attitude towards the purchase of furniture, however, seems to have changed as Blandfield was completed in the early 1770s, and tensions with Great Britain escalated. The reasons are unspecified by Beverley and likely included a combination of factors. Certainly, Beverley’s insistence on adhering to the non-importation pacts, which he frequently reiterated in instructions to his agents, played a significant role as did the natural reduction in acquisitions as the initial furnishing of Blandfield neared completion. Beyond his distaste for his continued indebtedness and the continuous expenses of maintaining his large family, the Letterbooks give little direct indication of the relative importance which the disruptions of war, economic factors, political pragmatism, or the

¹⁴⁰ “A leather screen eight feet high – six folds two feet wide – neat but not costly.’ A similar screen is now in the collection of Colonial Williamsburg, Beverley to Anderson, April 19, 1795, Letterbook, PRVT.

¹⁴¹ The rupture in commerce and communication brought on by the outbreak of war - Beverley’s Letter to Backhouse in August, 1775 seems to have been his last communication with his merchant contacts as the war began - would not be reestablished until March 1779. Several items in the LOC Letterbook for this period are undated and the sequence in which they are inserted confusing making it difficult to determine if there was a total absence of communication, but this seems to have been the case based on content references. Beverley did not wait for the war’s end, 1781 or the peace agreement, 1783, to resume his correspondence. His letters to Athawes regarding the merchant’s hard treatment of William indicate that Beverley’s expectation that relationships would be easily resumed after the conflict was mistaken. Beverley terminated his trade with Athawes and transferred his accounts. It is possible that this unpleasant experience influenced Beverley’s shift towards acquiring furniture in Virginia rather than England.

development of choices within the local market played in the shift in favor of American artisans in Robert Beverley's pattern of purchasing furniture. It is likely from the overlapping styles of English and American furniture at Blandfield that this shift was not dramatic but gradual and that during the initial furnishing of his home Beverley acquired pieces concurrently from London and locally.

The amount of English furniture purchased by Beverley can be easily exaggerated as a result of the concentration of orders in his Letterbooks and the predominance of English furniture in the most public and most highly ceremonial rooms. It is equally easy to overlook the significant quantities of American furniture at Blandfield, the evidence of which is physical rather than documentary and must be developed from scattered sources. American furniture at Blandfield represents compelling testimony of the importance of Virginia artisans in achieving Robert Beverley's grand ambitions. Beverley's desire to "fill it up in a plain neat manner" with fashionable furniture however "foolish" the passion, had not yet been satisfied by the interruption brought on by the Revolutionary War, and he did not stop acquiring furniture -- even though his purchases from England diminished dramatically during the 1780s. While trans-Atlantic trade and coastal commerce suffered during the Revolution, consumers continued to demand goods that the Chesapeake's towns and cabinet shops would strive to provide with increasing success. Robert Beverley's environment, prejudices and preferences had evolved over his occupancy of Blandfield, as had the towns that served Virginia's Chesapeake and the choices they provided.

Chapter Five – *American Pragmatist--Virginia Furniture at Blandfield*

“I shall always desire to make it as commodious as the place will [illegible] admit of, as Providence has [seen] to fix me in affluent circumstances.”¹⁴²

A comparison of Robert Beverley’s estate inventory and the surviving objects indicate that the quantity of furniture at Blandfield was well beyond that which he is recorded as having purchased in Great Britain or that can be attributed to British shops based on materials or construction. While English furniture was certainly prominent in Blandfield’s most public spaces, it shared the stage with the products of American cabinet shops. The American furniture acquired by Beverley could have originated from a variety of sources including pieces imported from other colonies, made by independent local artisans or produced at Blandfield. Furniture from New England was exported to the southern colonies in some quantities and there is considerable evidence that this coastal trade played a role in furnishing homes in the eastern Carolinas and Virginia.¹⁴³ There are, however, no examples of New England furniture surviving from Blandfield. Philadelphia was also a source of furniture for the region, but only a single reference to the Philadelphia furniture trade appears in the Letterbooks, and no furniture from this city’s cabinet shops survives from Blandfield.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Beverley to Bland, Dec. 27, 1762, Letterbook, LOC.

¹⁴³ John Bivins, “A Catalog of Northern Furniture with Southern Provenances,” *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (November 1989), 43-92.

¹⁴⁴ In a rare mention of commerce with Philadelphia, Beverley recorded a letter ordering Windsor chairs, “2 dz painted green + 1 dz painted any fashionable color with morien stuff bottoms,” from Owen Jones to be delivered to Beverley’s son, Robert, in Fredericksburg, but a notation specifies “never sent.” Beverley to Jones, June 13, 1793, Letterbook, LOC.

Local stores established by English and Scottish merchants who had begun to maintain inventories of small amounts of furniture by the end of the eighteenth century represent a possible source for Beverley's purchases. There is little evidence, however, that these or independent Virginia merchants of this period dealt to any large extent in furniture, preferring to concentrate on middle-market commodities such as textiles, apparel and small accessories.¹⁴⁵ Certainly in the years immediately following his return to Virginia, Beverley used local, general merchandise stores only when necessary, and it is likely that he continued to prefer to order his furniture to be custom made, whether from England or local cabinet shops, rather than to shop from existing stocks for the genteel, fashionable objects he required.¹⁴⁶

Another possible source of furniture during the years Blandfield was under construction, between 1765 and 1772, might have been from a skilled joiner or cabinetmaker on site who was commissioned by Beverley to construct such items as bowfat cupboards, presses, chairs, or wardrobes. The collaboration of William Buckland and William Bernard Sears at Gunston Hall and nearby Mount Airy provides precedent, and Beverley's order of glass and hardware specifically for bookcases indicates his access to a trained cabinetmaker.¹⁴⁷ Other than these bookcases, the Letterbooks record only two other references that might suggest that furniture was being made at Blandfield.

¹⁴⁵ See Reber, *Retail Trade*, and Nancy Packer, *Importation of English Furniture*. Packer notes that Richmond merchants were importing and reselling English goods on a very limited basis in the 1780s and suggests that this helped to eliminate the role of planter/importer in the years following the Revolution. While this is a possible source for some of Beverley's English furniture, no evidence of regular commerce with Richmond merchants appears in the Letterbooks.

¹⁴⁶ As he complained to Bland as he urged prompt shipment of an order, "by the delay, I am obliged to purchase a part here," and on another occasion, "I am quite tired with Dealing in yr Store at their exorbitant Rates & shall send to you for every [thing] I shall ever want." Beverley to Bland, Oct. 10, 1761, Letterbook, LOC. Beverley to Bland, Oct. 11, 1763, Letterbook, LOC.

¹⁴⁷ According to Edward Chappell, the level of craftsmanship evident in the surviving fragments of interior trim indicate that competent artisans familiar with contemporary notions of style worked at Blandfield, but the interior woodwork was not as elaborate as that known to have been produced by Buckland and Sears.

Beverley placed an order with John Backhouse in England in 1774 for wire for a “safe” for the preservation of meats, a relatively simple form easily fabricated using rudimentary joinery techniques, and in 1794 he recorded an order for mahogany placed with Norfolk merchants Burke and Brunette.¹⁴⁸ Beverley specified that this wood was to be delivered to his sons’ store in Tappahannock rather than directly to Blandfield making it likely that the sons employed a cabinetmaker or were purchasing inventory for resale.¹⁴⁹ The residency at Blandfield of artisans with the requisite skills, if this were the case, probably lasted only during the period of construction, compelling Beverley in subsequent years to look beyond contract labor for furniture. The possibility that Beverley employed a cabinetmaker or owned a slave capable of fashioning furniture of a style and construction appropriate for use in Blandfield seems highly unlikely given the lack of any documentary evidence for cabinet shops at Blandfield or at other Chesapeake plantations.¹⁵⁰ Even with a home of the scale of Blandfield, Beverley could not have

¹⁴⁸ Beverley to Backhouse, Dec. 19, 1774, Letterbook, LOC.

¹⁴⁹ “I shall thank you for sending on the vessel wch carries this, eighty feet of inch mahogany, + forty feet of half inch plank. I wish it to be of the kind both light in color + weight, for heavy furniture is always inconvenient, + destroys itself. The number + length of planks marked with my name, may secure it from mistake.” Beverley to Messrs. Burke + Brunette, Norfolk, Aug. 19, 1794, Letterbook, PRVT. The amount of furniture – if any – must have been insignificant in light of the small size of the order and the sons dissolution of the business the following year.

¹⁵⁰ Beverley’s estate inventory identifies several slaves as carpenters or coopers and assigns them values slightly in excess of other male slaves without specific skill designations. Given that the practice seems to have been that slaves were identified and valued at the highest skill level attained, it seems unlikely that any of the slaves at Blandfield had achieved proficiency as a cabinetmaker. There is overlap in the period use of the terms joiner, carpenter and cabinetmaker which is important in discussions of Blandfield and its interior finishes, but also in considering who crafted the furniture for the house and if some was made by the builder or his workmen while on site at the time of construction. As it was used to describe slaves in Beverley’s inventory, the term carpenter probably was used to denote a man skilled at the working of timber into building materials and the framing of simple structures, fences and containers, rather than the usage of the same term in suggesting a higher skill level associated with joiner level finish work. The term cabinetmaker designated a craftsman specializing in fine joinery with the skills, tools and materials necessary to make furniture. The best cabinetmakers distinguished themselves from joiners and carpenters by their carving skills, dovetail joints, accurate, detailed work and use of fine woods. Even so, the terms cabinetmaker and joiner were often used interchangeably in America and did not denote the clear distinction made in England where guilds enforced differentiation. In “Carpentry in the Southern Colonies during the Eighteenth Century with Emphasis on Maryland and Virginia,” (*Winterthur Portfolio*) Peter C.

justified the expense of a full time, skilled cabinetmaker, and the towns well within Beverley's orbit offered artisans who could respond to his needs for both utilitarian furnishings for informal spaces and stylish, neat and plain objects appropriate for the more important public rooms at Blandfield.

Three towns stand out in considering the sources of locally crafted furniture: Williamsburg, Tappahannock and Fredericksburg.¹⁵¹ Three other towns, Norfolk, Alexandria and Baltimore are also possible sources based on proximity and the presence of cabinetmakers known to have made furniture of the quality that has survived from Blandfield, but Beverley seems to have traveled to these towns only infrequently if at all and maintained only a limited commercial network in their business communities.¹⁵² As the colonial capital, Williamsburg would have been visited by Beverley on occasion, and he would have been familiar with the merchants and artisans that populated the town. Beverley's references to Williamsburg in his Letterbooks are infrequent, passing in nature, and do not indicate a significant level of engagement with that community. In the first serious attempt to identify the origins of Beverley's furniture, furniture historian Wallace Gusler attributed several items to Williamsburg shops based on similarities in construction and style, but no documentary evidence has surfaced to support this view and more recent research has pointed to other possible sources.¹⁵³

Marzio discussed the evolution of these artisans and terminology describing them. See also Lounsbury, *Glossary*. See Kamoie, *Tayloes* for thorough discussion of skilled artisans on Chesapeake plantations. There was joinery at Monticello that made furniture to Jefferson's design but, as with many things relating to Jefferson, it was not the norm.

¹⁵¹ References to Fredericksburg should be read to include both Fredericksburg and Falmouth in light of their proximity.

¹⁵² Beverley noted his lack of commercial contacts in these towns on several occasions in his shipping instructions to various merchants.

¹⁵³ Wallace Gusler, *Furniture of Williamsburg and Eastern Virginia, 1710-1790*, (Williamsburg, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1993), 50-55.

Tappahannock, on the Rappahannock River and the closest town to Blandfield, was populated by several hundred people, and was a port of entry for foreign goods, with several ordinaries, a Masonic Hall, and a variety of commercial ventures along with a brick courthouse. Beverley was in Tappahannock frequently, attending the County court's monthly sessions during his tenure as a justice and on numerous other occasions. In his study of furniture from the Rappahannock River basin, particularly the group with Irish influences represented at Blandfield, Colonial Williamsburg Curator, Ronald Hurst, notes that structural and stylistic differences point to the conclusion that this "Irish" furniture was made in at least three different shops concentrated in the area near Tappahannock.¹⁵⁴ Hurst identifies ten cabinetmakers in Tappahannock and the surrounding counties, many of whom may have farmed in conjunction with their cabinetmaking, including James Nesmith who was known to have worked between 1778 and 1790.¹⁵⁵ It seems probable that Beverley acquired some of Blandfield's furniture from Tappahannock artisans, but none of the pieces exhibiting the Irish design characteristics that survive in the Beverley family or from other area homes can yet be linked to a specific local cabinetmaker.

Beverley's Letterbooks refer most frequently to his business dealings in Fredericksburg, an urban center characterized by a contemporary observer as "by far the most flourishing town in these parts."¹⁵⁶ Located at the fall line of the Rappahannock

¹⁵⁴ Ronald Hurst, "Irish Influences on Cabinetmaking in Virginia's Rappahannock River Basin," *American Furniture*, (London, Chipstone Foundation, University Press of New England, 1997), 170 – 195.

¹⁵⁵ No evidence has yet surfaced, however, linking any of the "Irish School" furniture purchased by Beverley, including several side chairs and a tea table from Blandfield discussed below, or the furniture with histories in neighboring homes to a specific cabinetmaker.

¹⁵⁶ Quoted by Jonathan Prown, Ronald L. Hurst and Sumpter Priddy, III, "Fredericksburg Clock Cases, 1765 – 1825," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts*, Vol.17 No.2 (November 1992), 54 – 119. Much information concerning Fredericksburg and its cabinet makers was also drawn from Ann Dibble, "Fredericksburg-Falmouth Chairs in the Chippendale Style," *Journal of the Museum of Early Southern*

River, the town was at the intersection of Virginia's western tidewater and the growing central piedmont. Directly across the river from Falmouth, site of what was described as the largest iron works in America during the period, Fredericksburg was populated by some 1,500 inhabitants by the beginning of the Revolution. Approximately 50 miles west of Blandfield up the Rappahannock and easily accessible by water, Fredericksburg was on the route Beverley would have taken when visiting his holdings in the Valley of Virginia and piedmont. The town was also near Culpepper and Dumfries where Beverley supported efforts by his sons to pursue mercantile careers, further suggesting his thorough familiarity with the commercial activities in the area.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Fredericksburg had evolved into a thriving commercial community and a center of the cabinetmaking trade. By the century's end as many as thirty-four cabinetmakers seem to have worked in the town, the most prominent practitioners being James Allen, Thomas Miller, Robert Walker and other members of the Walker family.¹⁵⁷ Much like their peers in Norfolk, Petersburg, and Williamsburg, Fredericksburg cabinetmakers were largely English immigrants, and trained in the British tradition.¹⁵⁸ Most of the work now attributed to the town's artisans

Decorative Arts, Winston Salem, Winston Salem, Vol. 4, No. 1, (May 1978). Brad Rauschenberg, "Two Outstanding Virginia Chairs," *Journal of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts*, Winston Salem, Vol. 2, No. 2, (Nov. 1976).

¹⁵⁷ The MESDA Index of Early Artists and Artisans identifies thirty four cabinetmakers in the Fredericksburg area between 1760 –1825. Thomas Miller (active 1768-1802) whose estate recorded a large quantity of tools and seven work benches also oversaw a significant enterprise although no work has been specifically attributed to his shop. Allen, who appears in local records as early as 1740 and remained in business until his death in 1799, counted George Washington among his customers. In 1759, while traveling from Williamsburg to Fairfax County, Washington noted a purchase of "Mahogany Stands" – for 3 pounds 10 shillings. Hurst, Prown, Priddy, *Fredericksburg Clocks*, 72.

¹⁵⁸ Recent scholarship has expanded the understanding of the geographic, quality and depth of eighteenth century cabinetmaking in Virginia, which was until relatively recently considered to have been centered stylistically and quantitatively in Williamsburg; most prominently in the shops of Peter Scott, Anthony Hay, and Benjamin Bucktrout. More current research indicates that furniture production was much more decentralized than earlier thought and shops in Fredericksburg as well as Norfolk, Petersburg and elsewhere are now thought to have been much more important in the development of the trade.

was strongly influenced by British design and construction practices as well as their exposure to furniture design books such as Thomas Chippendale's *Director*. Significant numbers of chairs and case goods have been linked to cabinetmakers that resided in Fredericksburg or trained there before moving to other locales, and much of Robert Beverley's furniture falls within the parameters of this "Rappahannock School" of Chesapeake cabinetmaking with its strong British flavor and emphasis on the "neat and plain" attributes he admired.¹⁵⁹

The group of "presses" dating to Robert Beverley's tenure at Blandfield provides important evidence of the range of furniture he required for his home, the manner in which furniture choices paralleled architectural and finish hierarchies and the availability of locally made furniture which met these criteria. Presses were broadly defined in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries "as any large cupboard or wardrobe" used for storage, but Beverley's estate inventory records presses by construction characteristics rather than usage, i.e., painted, glass, pine, walnut.¹⁶⁰ Their design, materials and finish suggest their usage and probable locations within the hierarchy of rooms. The only press known to have been ordered from England was the "press or case to hold a Service of China...with Glass doors" for his dining room, which may have been purchased in London because of Beverley's desire that it be in the "Chinese Taste."¹⁶¹ This is very likely the "Glass" press valued at \$30 recorded in the inventory.

¹⁵⁹ Jonathan Prown, "A Cultural Analysis of Furniture-Making in Petersburg, Virginia, 1760 – 1820," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts*, Vol. 18, No. 1, (May 1992), pages 1- 173. Anne W. Dibble, "Fredericksburg-Falmouth Chairs in the Chippendale Style," 1 – 24.

¹⁶⁰ Gloag, *Dictionary*, 535-536.

¹⁶¹ Thomas Chippendale, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director*, (New York, Dover Publications 1966, Reprint of the Third Edition), Plates 132 – 137.

The most expensive press, listed, a “mahogany press \$40,” was among the most valuable single items of furniture inventoried and was very probably used in Beverley’s elaborately finished, first floor, bed chamber. Surviving in the family is a large, cross-banded, mahogany linen press with a scrolled pediment and finial which has yellow pine secondary woods and construction and design features that link it to other case pieces from the area. (*Figure Nine*) This press has a distinctive “in-turned foot” that can also be found on a secretary from King George County, a chest of drawers from Culpepper County, a desk from Spotsylvania County, and a cabinet and desk, bookcase from Caroline County, all locations that encircle Fredericksburg.¹⁶² This press is clear evidence that Robert Beverley was able to acquire important items of stylish furniture for an important first floor space from an unknown but local cabinetmaker who also did business with other patrons in the area that, like Beverley, favored furniture in the English tradition.

Another large linen press constructed of walnut but of a more “neat and plain” and probably somewhat earlier design can be attributed to a specific King George County, Virginia cabinet maker, Robert Walker, based on similarities to other documented Walker furniture.¹⁶³ (*Figure Ten*) Walker also made chairs, tea tables, desks

¹⁶² MESDA Research Files S- 6219, S – 6061, S – 7078, S – 6128, S – 7091, and S – 7092. Along with sharing similar secondary wood, yellow pine and poplar, these pieces have similar drawer construction, case moldings and feet.

¹⁶³ This press was attributed to Peter Scott by Wallace Gusler, *Furniture*, 51-54. Two major research breakthroughs presented at the 2005 Colonial Williamsburg Antiques Forum by curators Ronald Hurst, Robert Leath and Tara Chicirda have provided foundation for reevaluation of this press and a large group of furniture previously thought to have been made in Williamsburg, but now attributed to Fredericksburg artisans. The discovery of a documentary linkage between a Custis and Washington family mahogany dressing table with unbroken provenance, and its maker, Williamsburg’s Peter Scott, has provided for the first time a “Rosetta stone” on which attribution to Scott of other works can be based. Comparisons with this documented example of Scott’s work has allowed curators to attribute over twenty items of furniture to this cabinetmaker, but have also shown that many items previously attributed to Scott were not products of his shop, including several pieces of furniture from Blandfield. The second breakthrough identified Robert Cockburn as the author of a Fredericksburg cabinetmaker’s account book and the identity of his

and bookcases for some of the area's wealthiest families including the Carters, Lees, Fitzhughs and Spotswoods. Standing on ogee bracket feet with paneled doors with indented corners, and Greek key carved cornice molding, this unusually broad press would have echoed the fine finishes in Blandfield's superior upper floor bed chambers.¹⁶⁴ Now in a private collection, it may be the "black walnut press \$12" noted in the inventory. Robert Walker is also thought to have built a matched pair of more vertical, walnut presses, *Figure Eleven*, also designed for storage of linens, which have similar door and ogee bracket feet designs and other construction details similar to *Figure Ten*. These well-built, stylish presses may have been used as a pair or separately and would have been appropriate, practical furnishings for any of the upper floor bed chambers whether utilized by family or guests.

Several pine presses, now stripped, but which would have originally been painted, were also designed for linens and likely intended for use in the less important of the upper bed chambers. (*Figure Twelve*) These presses, three of which survive in the family, are of sturdy, competent construction but do not exhibit the quality materials or design sophistication evident in Beverley's other case furniture. These pine presses rest on straight bracket feet and have flat panel doors, as well as triglyphs in a frieze,

master, Robert Walker II, which allowed another group of furniture to be linked to a group of artisans centered around the Walker family. Scotsmen by birth, brothers William and Robert Walker appear in the Fredericksburg area by 1730 and 1743 respectively. William, "a cabinetmaker and joiner" seems to have made his residence in Stafford County where he worked as a builder, his most notable documented association being with the construction of the Lee family seat, Stratford Hall in Westmoreland County. Robert "a joiner and chairmaker by trade" was active in King George County. The two brothers had at least five sons who were involved in clock, cabinet or chair making and the relationships between the individuals and their work is as yet not entirely clear. Research by Robert Leath into Walker family linkages to furniture with Fredericksburg or Rappahannock Valley histories and a comparison of construction techniques and design have allowed the attribution of several chairs in the Colonial Williamsburg collection to Robert Walker. The author is grateful to Ronald Hurst, Robert Leath and Tara Circirda for sharing their research on this group prior to publication of related articles anticipated in early 2006.

¹⁶⁴ MESDA Research File S-3956. This press may have once had a pedimented top according to the research notes.

representing an attempt by the joiner/cabinetmaker to incorporate classical, architectural features into his work.¹⁶⁵ Valued from \$5 to \$8 these presses were utilitarian furniture that, based on their construction of yellow pine, their classical proportions and their coarse but workmanlike joinery, were probably obtained from local artisans.¹⁶⁶

For “my drawing Room” Beverley requested a neat looking glass “in a neat white Frame” and for an unspecified room “a neat plain Table for a Tea Table & a neat Mahogany tea board.” Five tea tables valued from \$1 to \$7 are mentioned in the inventory and only two can be accounted for in Beverley’s orders to London. Easily moved, tea tables would have also been used in his drawing room, parlor or wherever the tea ceremony dictated. Now in a Beverley family collection, a mahogany tea table, probably recorded as a “round stand table” valued at \$7, is an important example of the high quality of Chesapeake furniture and its extremely close stylistic relationship to English made items. (*Figure Thirteen*) The turned, spiral- fluted urn, on the column of this table was commonly used in a variety of furniture forms in Great Britain and found its way into the American furniture maker’s vocabulary in the Norfolk area and as far north as Rhode Island.¹⁶⁷ The simple, uncarved legs and flat, unadorned top place this table well within the context of the “neat and plain.”

Among the most important surviving items of Virginia furniture from Blandfield is a rectangular, black walnut, tea table with well-shaped cabriole legs, pointed slipper feet, and a distinctively shaped skirt.¹⁶⁸ (*Figure Fourteen*) These design features relate

¹⁶⁵ The inspiration for this pediment may have been a chimney piece at Blandfield which had similar triglyphs that is pictured in the Colonial Williamsburg research files.

¹⁶⁶ Two of these presses are complete, while a pine chest of drawers, which was painted, is similar in form and construction to the presses. This chest was very probably the base that has been separated from its top of one of the presses mentioned in the inventory.

¹⁶⁷ Private Collection, Hurst, *Southern Furniture*, 318-320.

¹⁶⁸ Private collection, now on loan to Colonial Williamsburg, Hurst, *Southern Furniture*, page 305- 308.

this table to the group of Rappahannock River Valley furniture originating near Blandfield and have been linked by Ronald Hurst to Irish influences around Fredericksburg in American cabinetmaking.¹⁶⁹ Other design elements associated with Irish cabinetmaking practices that appear in other Rappahannock area furniture include knee blocks glued to the front rails, elongated carved scallop shells on the cabriole legs, and shallow, but elaborate carvings on aprons of tables, chests on stands and chairs. Although no specific cabinet makers have been linked to this “Irish School,” several other tea tables, including one from Sabine Hall, dressing tables, a dining table and a chest with drawers on stand with histories in surrounding counties are related by style and construction to form the nucleus of this group.¹⁷⁰ The makers of this furniture, Hurst concludes, married English and Irish influences with the Virginia preference for the neat and plain to produce a regional hybrid that was articulated in a variety of furniture forms.

Side chairs of six distinctively different designs remain with the Beverley family and four of these design groups can be attributed to American makers based on the presence of the distinctively “pithy” grain of cherry from the Rappahannock River basin or other identifying features.¹⁷¹ Two groups of cherry side chairs, defined by trifold (or paneled) and trilobite (central lobe flanked by scrolled volutes) front feet, but sharing the same cabriole legs and splat design, have been associated by Hurst with Irish design

¹⁶⁹ Ronald Hurst, *Irish Influences*, 170 – 195.

¹⁷⁰ These pieces are illustrated in MESDA Research Files S-2551, S-4045, S-4567, S-3894, and discussed in detail by Hurst, *Irish Influences*, 181-191.

¹⁷¹ MESDA File S7409, S7412, Colonial Williamsburg L1983 – 20, and Private Collection. A chair which may represent an additional group was recorded by MESDA S 4051 was “said to have been” at Blandfield but has no credible history that would allow it to be considered as having been acquired by Beverley. In her study of Fredericksburg-Falmouth chairs, Ann Dibble identifies three groups of chairs with convincing histories near Fredericksburg indicating that a number of skilled artisans were available to Beverley and other patrons. There does not seem to be a direct relationship between chairs of the four sets from Blandfield or the three general chair groups identified by Dibble. None of the Blandfield chairs inspected by the author display the undercut rear rail identified by Dibble as a common characteristic of Fredericksburg chairs.

influences.¹⁷² (*Figure Fifteen**Figure Sixteen*) These Blandfield chairs can be associated with a corner chair with a similar splat, legs and feet and a history in nearby King and Queen County as well as a dressing table, also with trifold feet, linked to King George County.¹⁷³ The rarer trilobate, voluted foot design appears infrequently in English furniture, but was much more common in Ireland during the period and is found occasionally on Philadelphia furniture from the first half of the eighteenth century. Its use is unknown in Virginia outside of the Rappahannock basin. As is the case with the Irish influenced Blandfield tea table, the specific sources of the Irish designs in these chairs remain elusive, but the extensive trade between the Chesapeake and Irish ports and the influx of Irish immigrant artisans presented ample opportunities for the dissemination of this style.¹⁷⁴

A third set of chairs with a Beverley family history distinguished by pierced backs with three elongated negative spaces linked by carved ribbons may also be of Virginia origins. (*Figure Seventeen*) The carving resembles that on a side chair in the Colonial Williamsburg Collection that is attributed to Fredericksburg cabinetmaker Thomas Miller and could represent another link between Blandfield and shops of this town.¹⁷⁵ Miller, who appears in local records from the 1760's until his death in 1802, seems to have been master of a large shop based on the seven work benches inventoried at his death. He has

¹⁷² A side chair with a Maryland history with a nearly identical splat and crest rail but square legs could be from the same shop suggesting that the maker was equally comfortable with this more standard construction and the "Irish" legs and feet. MESDA Research File S – 10375.

¹⁷³ Ronald L. Hurst and Jonathan Prown, *Southern Furniture 1680 – 1830*, (New York, Harry n. Abrams, 1997), 94-97. Hurst, *Irish Influences*, pages 171-193.

¹⁷⁴ Hurst, *Irish Influences*, Pages 192 – 193. See also Michael H. Lewis, "American Vernacular Furniture and the North Carolina Back Country," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Nov. 1994), 1-38, for further discussion of Irish design elements.

¹⁷⁵ A pair of these chairs has survived with a family tradition that they were gifts from George Washington, but their history is not clear. The MESDA research files identify one as mahogany and the other as walnut. S – 7409, S – 6129.

been linked to architectural carving at Kenmore in Fredericksburg.¹⁷⁶ The fourth set of locally made chairs from Blandfield is represented by an arm chair of early neo-classical design that was probably made in the 1780s and was the latest stylistically of the surviving chairs. (*Figure Eighteen*) This chair was based on an English design commonly used in America and has been attributed to an unidentified Fredericksburg maker based on its construction, the use of yellow pine and black walnut and similar examples with histories in southeastern Virginia, Fredericksburg and Philadelphia.¹⁷⁷ It suggests both the longevity of the mother country's influence in the post Revolutionary War years and Beverley's desire to update his furniture, a desire fulfilled by a local rather than an English artisan.

Of the remaining chairs mentioned in the estate inventory the four "armed chairs \$16" match the four Windsor chairs purchased in 1795 from Baltimore merchant, Jesse Hollingshead, although the \$4 per chair valuation seems high for Windsors.¹⁷⁸ This order, for "four neat armed Windsor chairs" noted in his Letterbook August 31, 1794, of which none seem to have survived, is the only documented order by Beverley from a specific cabinetmaker for American furniture discovered to date. The two "large chairs" valued at \$24, versus the average of \$2 for the group of "85 chairs throughout the house," indicate that they were very elaborate and probably upholstered. They may have been two of the four English back stools (one with a matching foot stool) that survive in the

¹⁷⁶ Information on Miller was drawn from exhibit panels at Colonial Williamsburg.

¹⁷⁷ Hurst, *Southern Furniture*, 117-119.

¹⁷⁸ These chairs do not seem to have survived. Jesse Hollingshead of Baltimore was a "prominent merchant and major purveyor to Washington's army" according to J. Greff, *Fell's Point MD*, 114. He supplied Beverley with a variety of goods and presumably obtained the chairs from local, Baltimore makers. Nancy Goyne Evans' *American Windsor Chairs* (New York, Hudson Hills Press, 1996), makes no mention of Hollingshead, but records prices for similar chairs in the \$1 to \$2 range. The chairs may have had textile cushions added, as did the unsent order for Windsors discussed previously, that could have increased their value.

family or easy chairs that have not been identified. The back stool form stylistically predates Beverley, and he probably inherited them from his father.¹⁷⁹

The history of the bookcases that are first referenced in Beverley's order of October 1763 to John Bland is somewhat of a mystery.¹⁸⁰ Rather than order completed bookcases, Beverley requested that Bland send "50 panes of Glass 12 by 14 of Good Glass as they are Designed for Bookcases." He may have feared that a fully assembled bookcase would not survive the ocean passage, but whatever the reason, the implication remains that on site or nearby there was available a cabinetmaker with skills adequate to the task of constructing the cases Beverley desired. It is possible the construction of these cases was delayed or he required additional book storage since eight years later Beverley ordered "6 neat brass locks for Bookcases + neat inside bolts for the same, The locks to have neat plain + scutcheons, 12 neat brass handles for drawers + six drawer locks with plain scutcheons." These materials would have allowed for three matched cases, each with two drawers and two doors, which could have been freestanding or built-in although there is no architectural evidence suggesting the latter. Beverley's will stipulated that Maria should have all of his furniture, "the Books + book cases excepted."¹⁸¹ This implies that they had been separately provided for outside of the will, but there is no record of their disposition. The estate inventory, however, lists a large number of books

¹⁷⁹ During his trip with Robert to England in 1750, William Beverley noted in his diary while in Hull that he "Went to sevl Shops bout some trifles & bespoke a mahog: chest of Drawers ... & 12 chairs." "Diary of William Beverley of "Blandfield," 27. Hurst, *Southern Furniture*, 79 – 81.

¹⁸⁰ Beverley to Bland, Oct. 11, 1763, Letterbook, LOC. The Peyton Randolph home in Williamsburg included a study with 6 mahogany book presses. It is possible that the glass Robert Beverley ordered specifically for bookcases was used to make a similar group that would have been placed in a passageway or study. The hardware and glass suggest that Beverley intended to have three matching cases made, each with a pair of drawers. There is no architectural evidence remaining that indicates built in cases and the appearance of book cases in the estate inventory indicates that he utilized free standing furniture for book storage.

¹⁸¹ *Essex County Will Book*, page 544, microfilm, Library of Virginia. The will gives no further indication of the disposition of the bookcases, the only furniture specifically identified.

(538 volumes valued at \$ 270) that would have required significant amounts of shelving. The inventory records only “2 Glass book cases” valued at \$40 total and “2 painted book cases” valued at \$16 total, but no book cases with or without glass have surfaced.

Several important items of furniture appear on the inventory that can neither be tentatively matched with surviving objects nor linked to items ordered from London, leaving the question of their origins open. These include a large and small desk (\$30, \$10), a secretary (\$10), a wardrobe (\$30), and a “writing drawer” (\$50).¹⁸² Given Beverley’s turn towards Virginia artisans in the years after Blandfield’s completion for important as well as lesser quality furniture -- as evidenced by the chairs, tables and the range of presses he purchased -- it is possible that all were acquired locally. Further research may locate these items or documentation about them, but in the absence of further evidence there is no basis for attributions.¹⁸³

While only the three presses can now be attributed with confidence to a specific cabinetmaker, much of the American furniture acquired by Beverley can be placed in the two local cabinetmaking traditions of the “Rappahannock school,” centered on Fredericksburg, represented by Robert Walker’s work, and the “Irish school,” of the same region, characterized by Beverley’s distinctively designed chairs and tea table. Both these traditions share English antecedents, but both can be seen as elements of a larger Chesapeake school of what was rapidly evolving into a broader but identifiable Virginia school of cabinetmaking. As he reestablished himself in “his native country” and came to appreciate the resources it offered, Robert Beverley found that he did not have to look far

¹⁸² Based on the high value, this was probably a rather large and elaborately fitted secretary drawer built into a larger piece of case furniture such as a chest of drawers. Gloag, *Dictionary*, 188, 316, 593-595, 730.

¹⁸³ Some furniture belonging to Beverley family descendents was unavailable for inspection but could possibly be plausibly linked to the inventory.

from Blandfield to secure the quality and quantity of furniture he desired for his home. Certainly the immediacy, convenience and economic benefits of buying locally would not have been lost on Beverley and, after his initial flurry of English orders; he turned to cabinetmakers in Virginia's growing towns, most prominently Fredericksburg.

Conclusion – *Robert Beverley -- American*

“I mean well, & as far as I can judge, will endeavor to act well.”¹⁸⁴

At Blandfield, Robert and Maria had raised their family, endured economic uncertainty and social and political revolution, as well as public controversy regarding Beverley’s attitudes towards the revolution. Blandfield had provided the focal point for their lives and served both as a home and stage on which they had displayed the props reflecting the culture, refinement, and gentility they valued and the status they claimed for their family. Robert Beverley’s values were the product of his English heritage, English education and membership in a Chesapeake society in eastern Virginia where England had remained the dominant economic and cultural force since 1607. Beverley was not unusual among his elite peers in his preference for English luxury goods, and he also shared their attitude regarding the desirability of the conspicuous display of material possessions and understood their symbolic value. This group of wealthy planters routinely ordered furniture from London and other English cities; a practice emulated by Beverley as he set about furnishing the most public and prestigious rooms at Blandfield.¹⁸⁵

The logic which had driven Robert Beverley’s commitment of enormous resources to a home on the grand scale of Blandfield, with its blending of English and Chesapeake cultural traditions, also underlay his initial determination to furnish its most

¹⁸⁴ Beverley to Carter, Virginia Historical Society transcript, Aug 28, 1774.

¹⁸⁵ Hurst, *Irish Influences*, page 171.

symbolic spaces with predominately English furniture. This furniture was essential to complete the picture Beverley sought to create of an English gentleman, secure and supreme in his residence, an image reinforced by the further array of luxury goods such as his fancy carriage, liveried servants, japanned tea boards and a sumptuously laid table. The English furniture ordered by Beverley was carefully selected, coordinated with other furnishings, and placed in his home to maximize its effect. While vitally important in fulfilling his vision for Blandfield, the English furniture shared the first floor with presses, chairs and tables of similar design acquired from Virginia artisans, reflecting the changes in Beverley's attitudes and his environment.

Furniture making practices around the Chesapeake had evolved in parallel with the prejudices and preferences that governed Beverley's selections for Blandfield. From the middle of the century significant numbers of cabinetmakers and joiners from Great Britain had emigrated to the area where they and the apprentices they trained, continued to produce furniture in the English tradition.¹⁸⁶ Beverley responded to these artisans and the choices they provided by purchasing local furniture in significant quantities to the extent that by the time of his death, approximately one-half of the furniture owned by Beverley, as measured by value, came from Virginia.¹⁸⁷ Some of this furniture was utilitarian in nature but much, such as the Walker presses or "Irish" chairs and tea table, was of a quality that suggests the items were intended for highly visible, prestigious locations in Blandfield.

¹⁸⁶ Hurst, *Irish Influences*, page 171.

¹⁸⁷ This valuation excludes the beds, which were valued principally for their textiles, and represents the author's attribution as English (\$426) or American (\$418) of the furniture listed and valued in the inventory of Robert Beverley's estate.

Robert Beverley's world was physically remote and culturally narrow, but it was not insulated from the radical changes brought on by the social, political and economic forces at work in the last decades of the eighteenth century. As he had come to understand how little he could control the larger forces shaping his world, he had increasingly focused his attentions and resources on his small fief on the lower Rappahannock where he had hoped to retain a degree of control. There he had fashioned a life that juxtaposed his imagined ideal of an English gentleman with the reality of his life as an American planter. As his personal experiences in England receded into his past, his antipathy towards debt and the resulting dependency on English merchants deepened, and as Virginia was transformed from a tobacco colony into a leading state in an independent nation, Robert Beverley came to appreciate the goods and opportunities available to his family in America. Important evidence of his transformation from an English gentleman to an American and the development of Chesapeake cabinetmaking can be found in the surviving furniture at Blandfield.

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Appendix One

“Inventory and Appraisement of the Estate of Robert Beverley, Esqr., decd.”

July 21, 1800

Essex County, Virginia, Court Records, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Microfilm.

Included under the category of

“Household Furniture &c Vizt”

2 cases knives and forks	20
2 Turkey carpets	140
7 Common Scotch carpets	105
538 Volumes of Books	270
a parcel files Saws & drawing knives	40
Sundry Carpenters & Joiners tools & estimate	60
1 Side board	20
1 Wine Case	12
1 Large ditto	40
1 Spirit Case	8
1 Floor cloth complete with side pieces	50
1 Card Table	5
1 Tea ditto	5

1 picture	100
1 print	15
1 Side board table	3
1 Sett dining tables	15
3 liquor coolers& 1 knife box	15
85 Chairs throughout the house	170
2 Glass book cases	40
1 Ward robe	30
Dressing table \$10 – small dining table \$4	14
Tea table \$7 1 small ditto \$3 1 card table 5\$	15
1 Screen \$40 2 fire ditto \$4	44
1 looking glass \$10 1 clock \$30	40
1 writing drawer	50
13 Beds complete	910
1 black walnut press \$12 2 painted presses \$10	22
1 Cloths Press \$8 2 large chairs \$24	32
1 Tea table \$5 1 small common ditto \$1	6
3 broken tables \$6 1 looking glass \$2	8
4 armed chairs \$16 2 painted Presses \$24	40
1 Small painted table \$8 2 small ditto \$4	12
1 old looking Glass & dressing table	13
24 Trunks	75
2 old Looking Glasses \$2 1 dressing table & lookg Glass \$7	9

1 press \$12 1 Glass ditto \$30	42
1 Dressing table \$10 1 floor cloth \$40	50
2 Painted Tables \$6 1 black walnut table \$3	9
1 Common Table \$1 2 painted book cases \$16	17
1 Common [?] Table \$1 5 painted chairs \$5	6
1 thermometer \$15 1 looking Glass & print \$3	18
1 Sett Tools	10
1 mahogany press	40
1 Secretary	10
1 Desk \$30 1 Smaller ditto \$10	40
1 Chest drawers and ornaments	50
1 Dressing table	10
1 round stand table \$7 6 mahogany chairs \$12	19
2 looking Glasses and dressing table	15

*"The above household furniture stated under head of Grays plantation was so entered through mistake in copying the inventory as well as several other articles. Carter Beverley Executor"

[The final seven lines of items were added to the end of the inventory with the explanatory note added by Carter Beverley.]



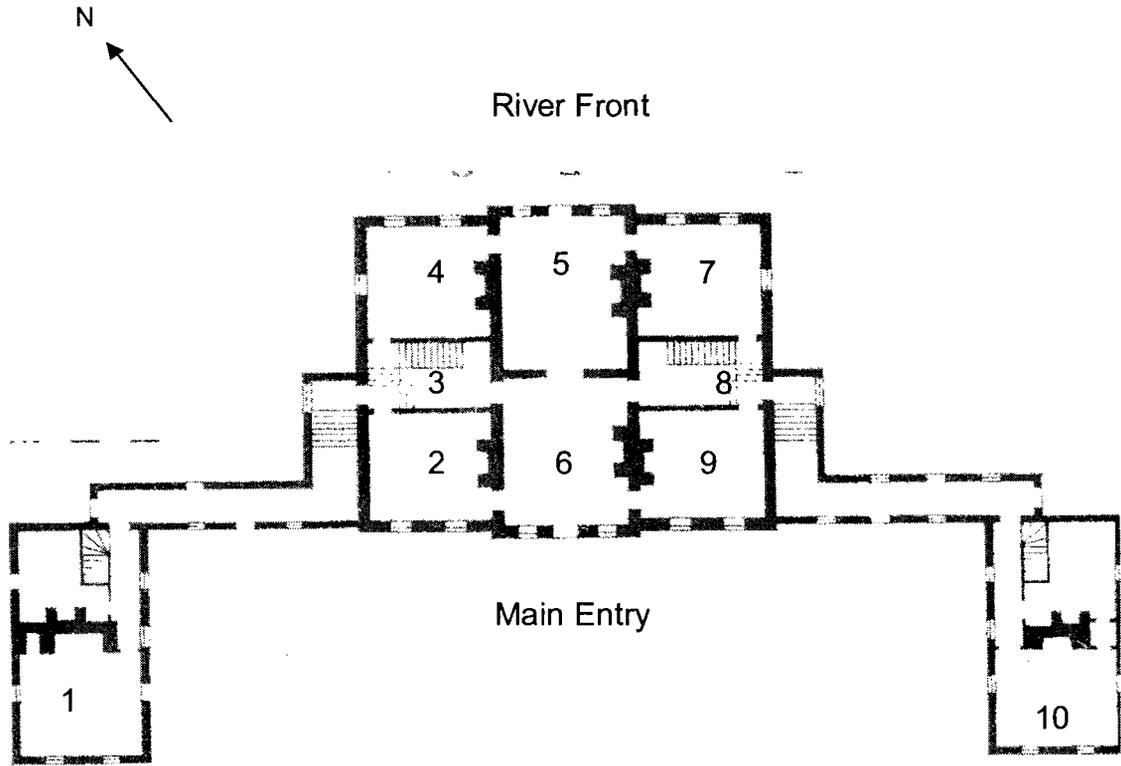
Figure One – Essex County, Virginia, 1755, A New Map of the Most Inhabited Part of Virginia...by Thomas Frye and Peter Jefferson, Detail, Library of Congress.



Figure Two – Blandfield, East (River) Front, Historic American Buildings Survey Photograph, Ca. 1983, Library of Congress.



Figure Three – Blandfield, West (Entry) Front, Historic American Buildings Survey Photograph, ca.1983, Library of Congress.



- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. Kitchen | 6. Entry Hall |
| 2. Common Dining Room | 7. Parlor |
| 3. Stair Passage | 8. Stair Passage |
| 4. Bed Chamber | 9. Dining Room |
| 5. Drawing Room | 10. Laundry |

Figure Four – Conjectural Floor Plan, Blandfield, Essex County, Virginia.

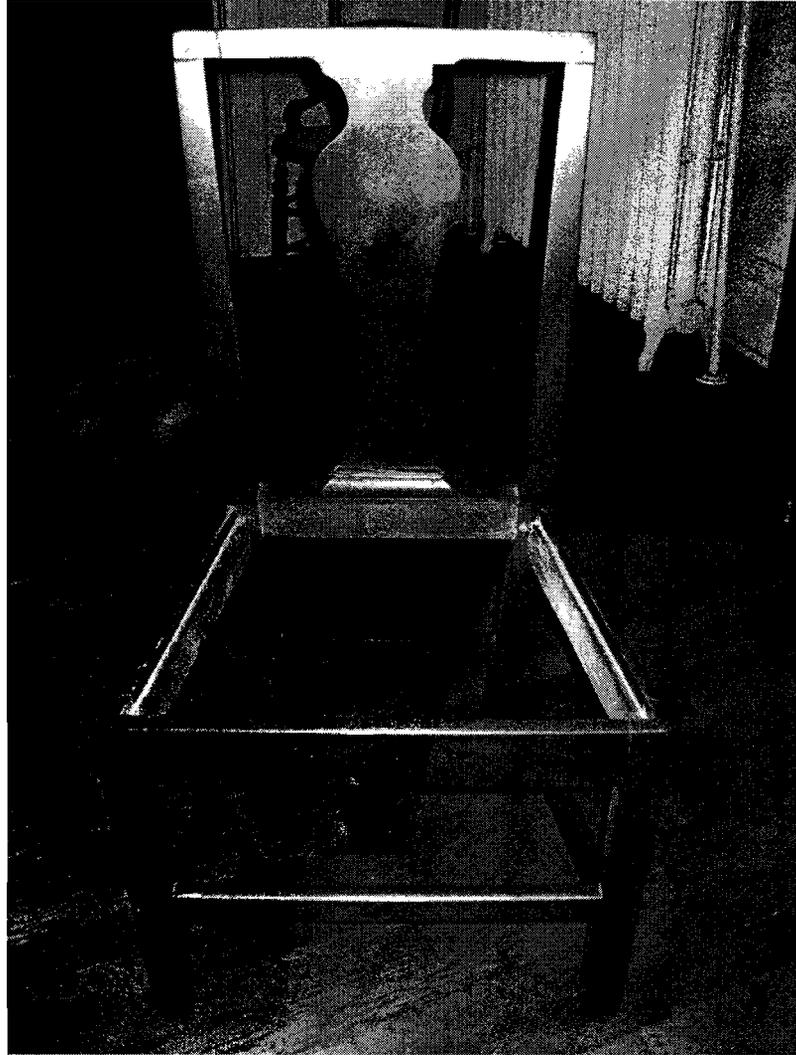


Figure Five - Side Chair, Solid Splat, Mahogany(?) England, Ca. 1750
- 1775, Private Collection, Author Photograph.



Figure Six -- Side Chair, Diamond Splat, Walnut, England, Ca. 1750 – 1785, Private Collection, MESDA Photograph.



Figure Seven – Dining Table, Walnut, Yellow Pine Secondary, Virginia, Ca. 1775, Private Collection, Author Photograph.

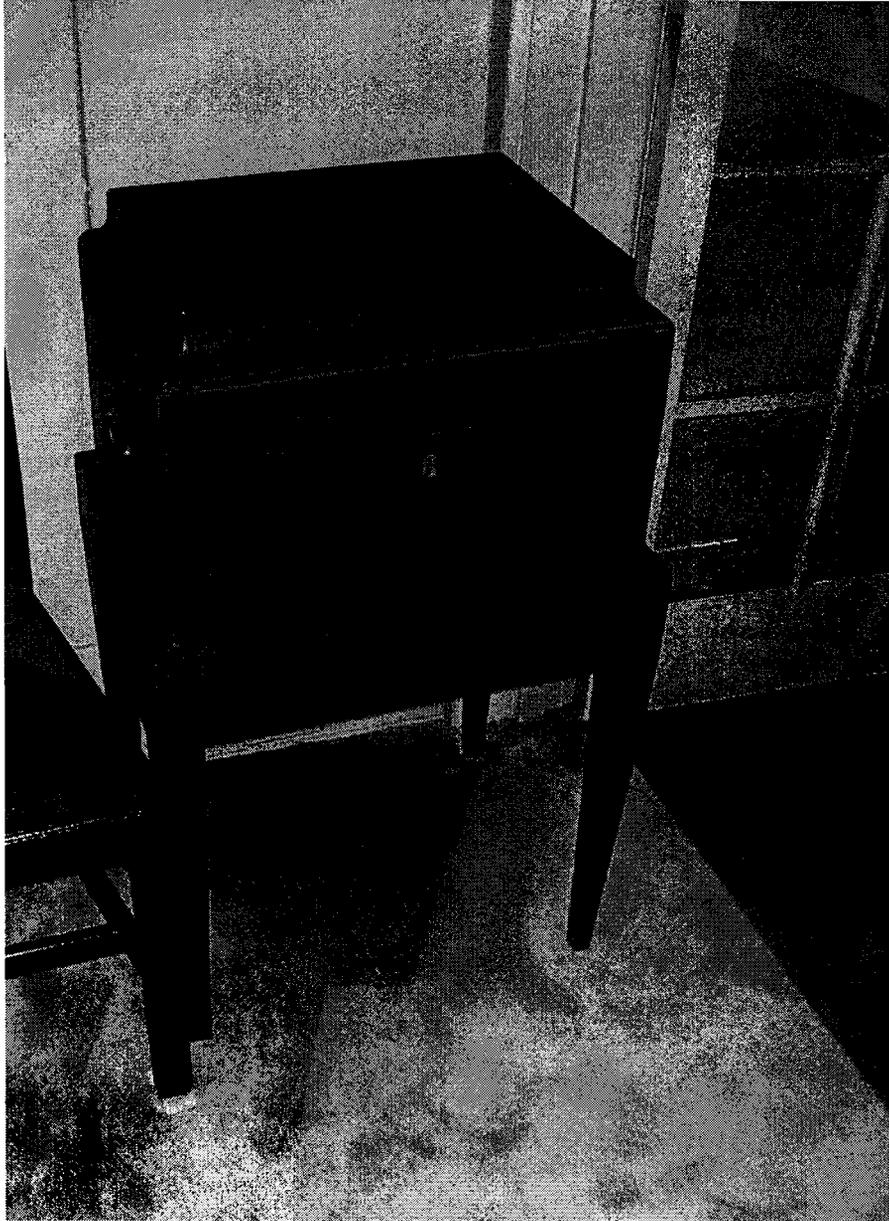
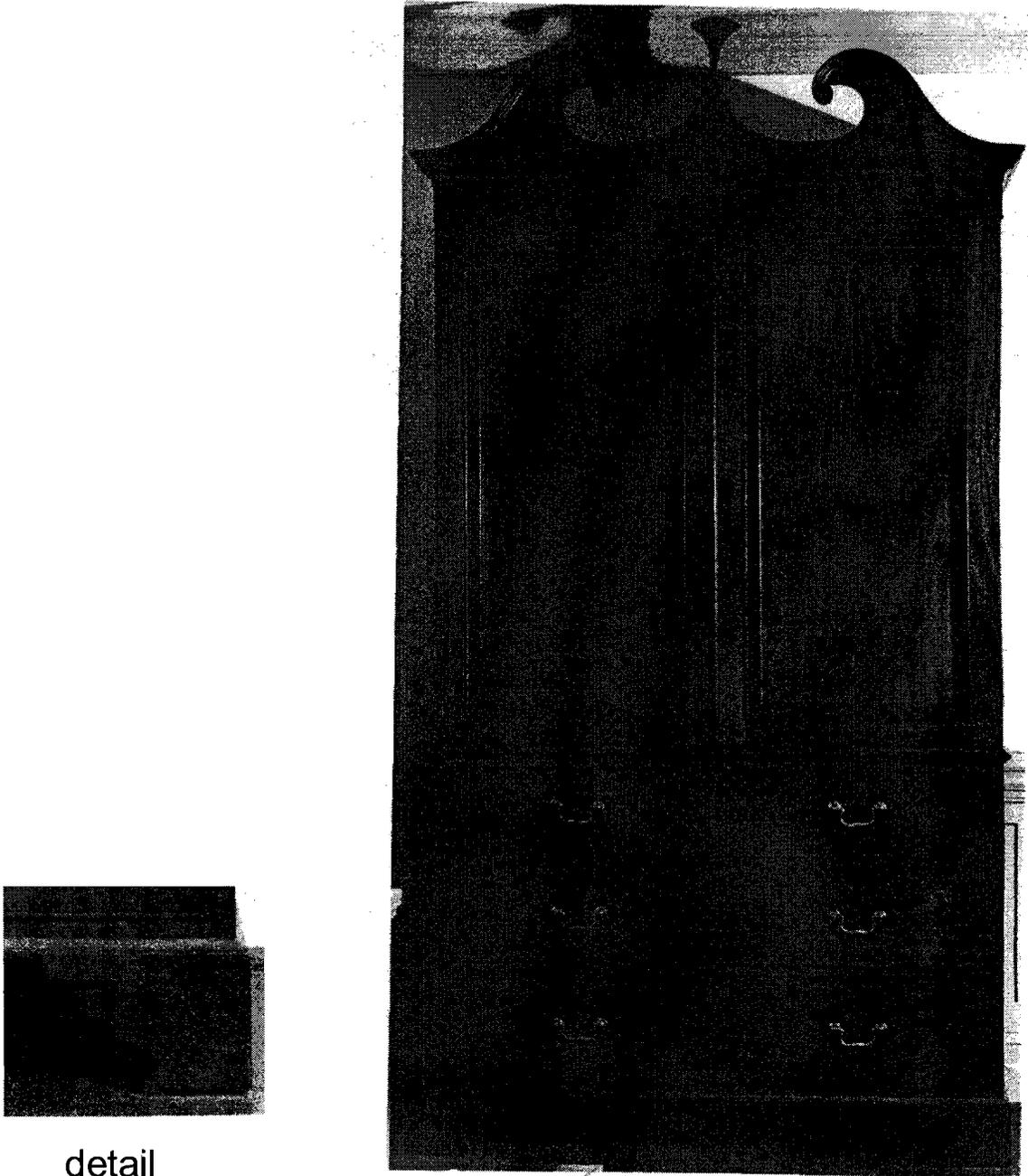


Figure Eight – Wine Case, Mahogany, England, Ca. 1780, Private Collection, Author Photograph.



detail

Figure Nine -- Linen Press, Arched Pediment, Mahogany, Virginia, Ca. 1775, Private Collection. MESDA Photograph.



Figure Ten -- Linen Press, Walnut, Virginia, Robert Walker, Ca. 1760 - 1777, Private Collection, MESDA Photograph

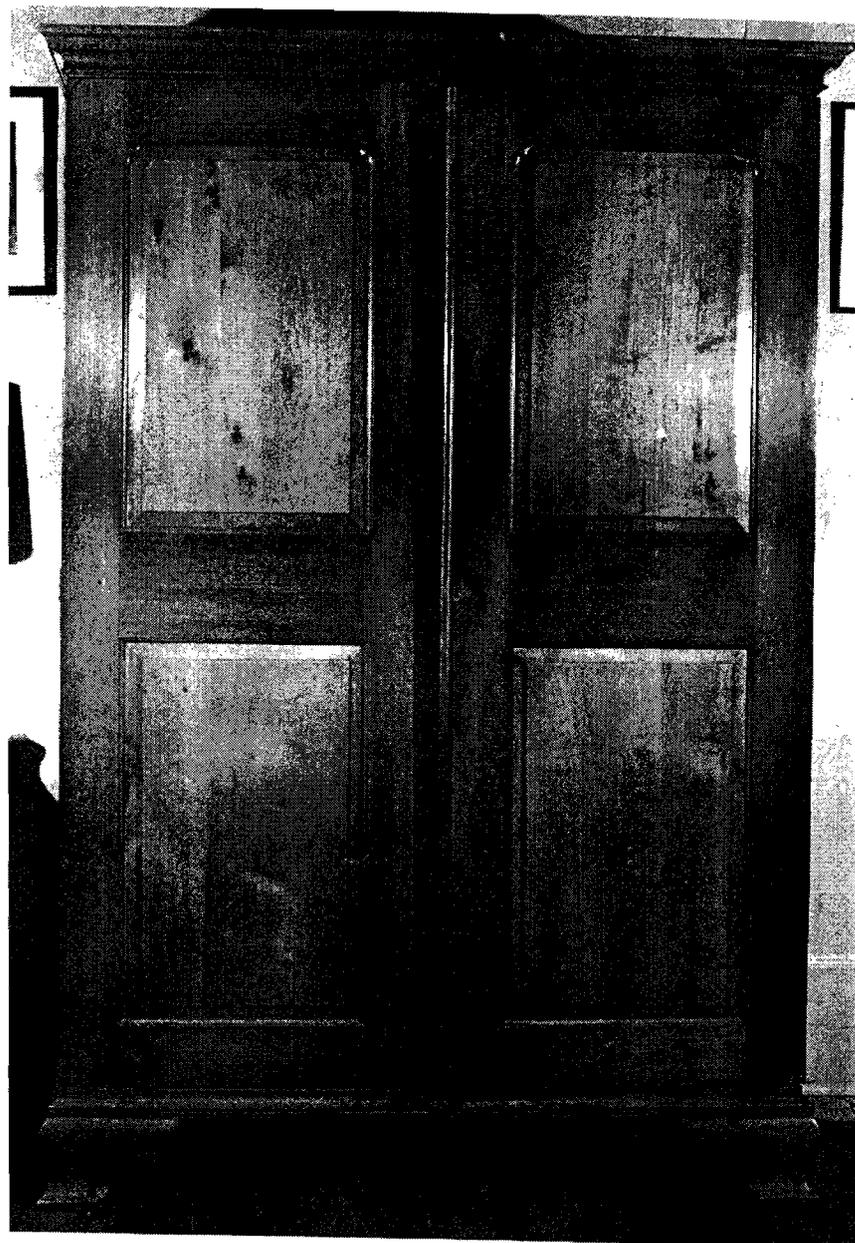


Figure Eleven - Linen Press (One of a Pair), Walnut, Virginia, Ca. 1760
- 1777, Robert Walker, Private Collection, ,MESDA Photograph.



Figure Twelve -- Linen Press, Triglyph Frieze, Pine, Virginia, Ca. 1780,
Private Collection, Colonial Williamsburg Photograph.

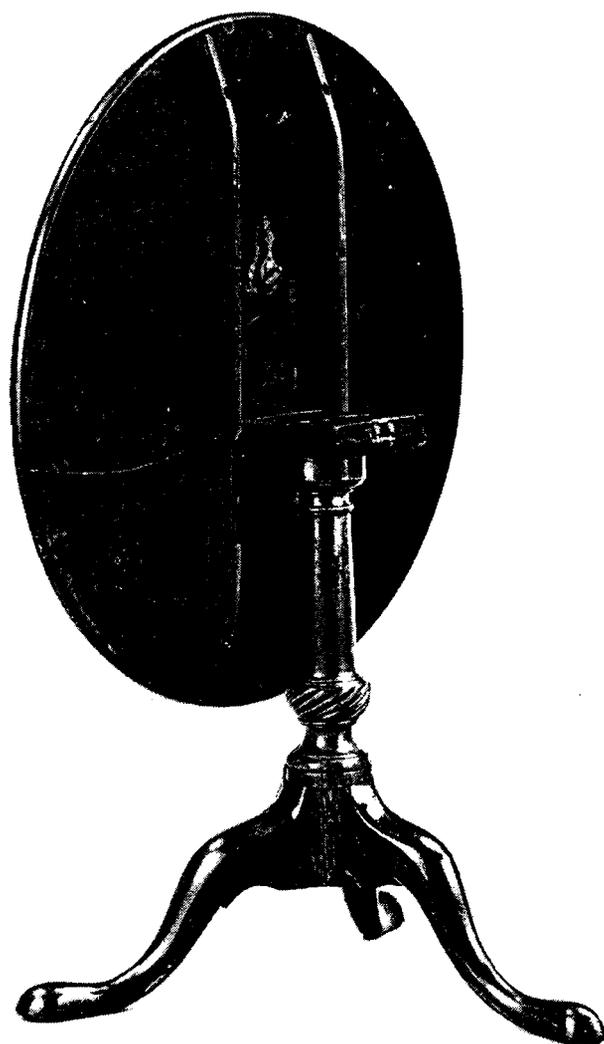


Figure Thirteen -- Tea Table, Spiral Turned Column, Mahogany, Virginia, Ca. 1750 – 1770, Private Collection, Colonial Williamsburg Photograph.



Figure Fourteen -- Tea Table, Pointed Pad Foot, Black Walnut, Virginia, Ca. 1755 - 1770, Private Collection, Colonial Williamsburg Photograph.



detail

Figure Fifteen -- Side Chair, Trifid, Paneled Foot, Cherry, Virginia, Ca.
1760 – 1775, Private Collection, Colonial Williamsburg Photograph.



detail

Figure Sixteen -- Side Chair, Trilobate Foot, Cherry, Virginia, Ca. 1760
– 1775, Private Collection, Colonial Williamsburg Photograph.



Figure Seventeen - Side Chair, Carved Ribbon Splat, Walnut, Virginia,
Ca. 1760 - 1780, Private Collection, MESDA Photograph.

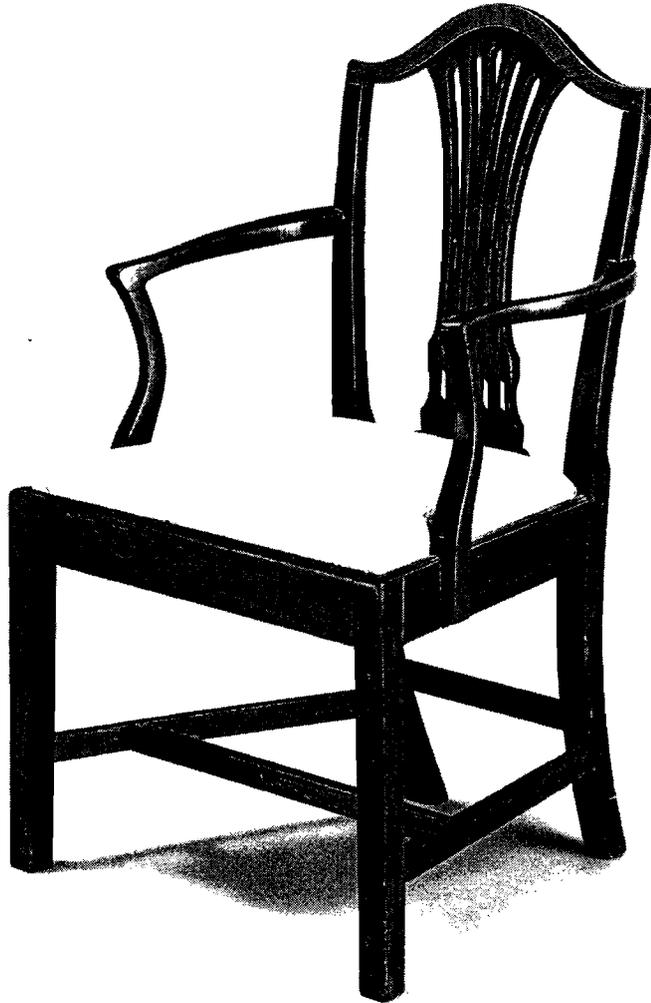


Figure Eighteen -- Arm Chair, Vertically Pierced Splat, Walnut, Virginia, Ca. 1785 - 1800, Private Collection, Colonial Williamsburg Photograph.