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Beaux-Arts Ideals and Colonial Reality: The Reconstruction of Williamsburg's Capitol, 1928–1934

CARL R. LOUNSBURY The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

The design principles associated with the Ecole des Beaux-Arts subtly shaped the manner in which a generation of architects viewed the architectural heritage of America's colonial past. Trained to appreciate and emulate the classical detailing, proportion, symmetrical balance, and axiality that they saw in the Georgian architecture of early America, they failed to understand fully the cultural context and social and economic circumstances that produced these buildings. A conflict between fundamental classical ideals and historical reality arose when architects became involved in the restoration and reconstruction of colonial houses and public buildings in the early part of the 20th century. This is clearly illustrated in one of the largest restoration projects ever undertaken in America: the task of restoring and recreating hundreds of early structures in the colonial city of Williamsburg, Virginia. Executing this project was the Boston firm of Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn. In reconstructing the first capitol building in the late 1920s and early 1930s, they ran up against historical evidence that challenged many of their preconceived notions of colonial design. Although the final result is a testament to the architects' skills in handling 18th-century detailing, the capitol now stands as a monument to the near past and tells us as much about the influence of Beaux-Arts design principles on the restoration of Williamsburg as about the architecture of the colonial period.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES ASSOCIATED with the Ecole des Beaux-Arts permeated the first scholarly and scientific restorations of historic buildings in America in the early 20th century.¹ Most architects who turned their attention to the restoration of colonial houses and public buildings from the 1900s to the 1930s brought their academic training and professional expertise, imbued with Beaux-Arts principles, to bear on these projects. Although Beaux-Arts design was not a style but a technique for systematically working out design choices, the Ecole and American schools of architecture at this time emphasized the formality of academic classicism.²

I would like to thank Mark R. Wenger, Vanessa Patrick, Annie Davis, Edward Chappell, and Cary Carson of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation for commenting on this paper.

1. M. Bacon, "Toward a National Style of Architecture: The Beaux-Arts Interpretation of the Colonial Revival," in *The Colonial Revival in America*, ed. A. Axelrod, New York, 1985, 91–121; C. B. Hosmer, *Presence of the Past*, New York, 1965, 193–211.

2. R. Chafee, "The Teaching of Architecture at the Ecole des Beaux-

Americans trained in this methodology saw the Georgian architecture of 18th-century America simply as the native version of academic classicism, subject to the same compositional rules of design manifest in the more monumental architecture of Europe.³ Thus, while design instruction emphasized an overall order of the constituent parts to create a harmonious composition filled with symmetrical balance, axiality, and a compatibility in the relationship of plan to elevation, a fundamental part of architects' training was spent in minutely detailing and analyzing smaller elements. Taking their inspiration from standing structures, they scoured the American east coast, making measured drawings of capitals, moldings, and other details found on many colonial buildings.⁴

Although based upon classical ideals, Beaux-Arts principles were often at odds with the architectural and historical evidence of 18th-century American architecture. Colonial Revival architects may have had a firm grasp of the details, but their method for incorporating those details into their work was informed by the modern tenets of the Beaux-Arts. Because of their training and temperament, they often misread the intentions and realities of colonial architecture and tended to embellish or improve a structure beyond what was warranted by documentary or physical evidence. The tension between Beaux-Arts ideals and colonial reality became evident when they were brought together in the restoration and historical re-creation of early buildings, as in the work of the Boston firm of Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn in Williamsburg in the late 1920s and early

Arts," and D. Van Zanten, "Architectural Composition at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts from Charles Percier to Charles Garnier," in *The Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, ed. A. Drexler, New York, 1977, 61–109, 111–323.

3. W. B. Rhoads, *The Colonial Revival*, New York, 1977, 387–389.

4. These details were not idle exercises in recording and rendering techniques but were integral elements in the design process. They were used over and over again by students and practicing architects to infuse their designs with the authoritative weight of historical precedent. With the publication of W. R. Ware's *Georgian Architecture* (compiled between 1899 and 1902, after first being published periodically in *The American Architect and Building News*) and the *White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs* (1915–1940), edited by R. Whitehead, Colonial Revival architects could draw on a large corpus of original colonial details for their modern commissions as well as for their work on historic buildings.



Fig. 1. West elevation of the capitol, Williamsburg, c. 1935 (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

1930s. The purpose of this paper is to examine how these sometimes conflicting perspectives shaped the design decisions in the reconstruction of the first colonial capitol in Williamsburg in the early 1930s (Fig. 1).

More than any other building in the restored town of Williamsburg, the reconstructed capitol symbolized the patriotic ideals that motivated John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to underwrite the cost of this monumental undertaking.⁵ After the building had been completed in the winter of 1934, it was tempting, Rockefeller mused, to "sit in silence [in the reconstructed building] and let the past speak to us of those great patriots whose farseeing wisdom, high courage and unselfish devotion to the common good will ever be an inspiration to noble living." It was to their memory that the reconstruction of the building, and indeed, the entire restoration of colonial Williamsburg, was "forever dedicated."⁶ Yet this reconstructed two-story brick capitol, with its distinctive twin apsidal ends, was not the build-

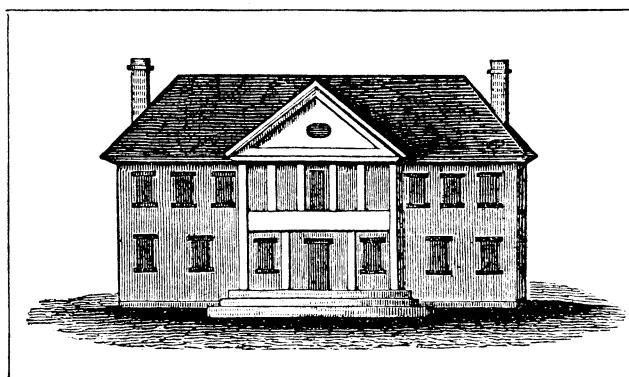
5. For a brief history of the early restoration, see C. Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age*, Charlottesville, 1981, 11–73.

6. From an address of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., at a special session of the Virginia General Assembly, held in the House of Burgesses in the capitol in Williamsburg, 24 February 1934, quoted in H. Dearstyne, "The Capitol: Architectural Report," unpublished report, 2 vols., 1954, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library (CWFL), I, iii.

ing that Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, or George Washington ever set foot in during the stirring events of the Revolution. It was, instead, a copy of an earlier building that had been erected under the direction of Governor Francis Nicholson between 1701 and 1705. This first building was destroyed by fire in 1747. After some debate as to whether the provincial capital should be moved from Williamsburg to a more central location further west, the General Assembly decided to remain in Williamsburg and rebuild the capitol.

The old brick walls of the first capitol suffered little damage from the fire but were, nonetheless, taken down and completely rebuilt in 1751. The second capitol was reconstructed on top of the old foundations, the only major exterior changes being the squaring off of the southern apsidal walls and the construction of a two-story portico on the west façade, facing Duke of Gloucester Street (Fig. 2). This second building witnessed the dramatic events of the Revolution but was left to neglect after the capital moved west to Richmond in 1780. In 1832 the building suffered the same fate as the first one, falling victim to another fire, followed by demolition. In the mid-19th century, an academy was constructed on the capitol site but was pulled down by the time of the centennial celebration of Washington's victory at Yorktown in 1881. The Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) acquired the property in 1897, located and marked the outline of the colonial foundations, and erected a monument on the site. In 1928 the APVA deeded the site to Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., with one of the conditions of the gift being that the APVA had to approve the design of the reconstruction of the capitol before building could begin. Another provision required that the building be completed within five years of the date of the conveyance.⁷

7. V. Geddy to K. Chorley, 6 March 1931. Unless otherwise noted, all correspondence and memos in the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives (CWFA) are from the capitol file.



The Old Capitol.

Fig. 2. West elevation of the second capitol by Henry Howe, c. 1845 (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

As early as 1927, members of Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn had produced preliminary sketches of the second capitol with its large two-story portico on the west façade.⁸ Despite the valued association of the second capitol with the Revolution, the decision was made in 1929 to reconstruct not that building but

8. W. G. Perry to W. A. R. Goodwin, 15 April 1927, CWFA.

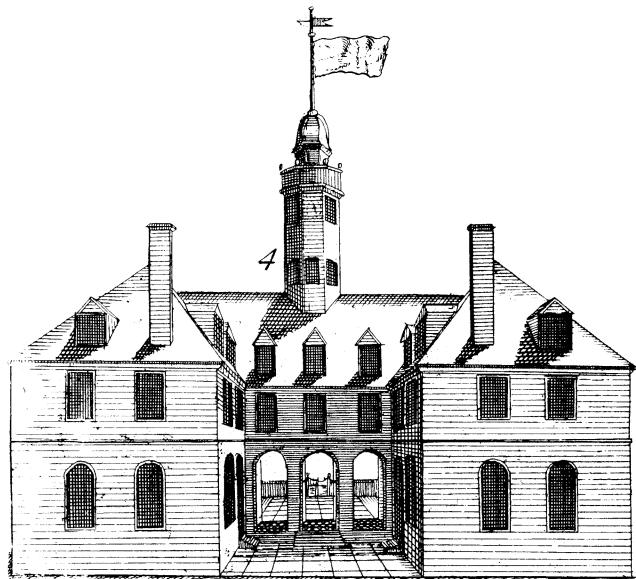


Fig. 3. North elevation of the capitol, Bodleian Plate, c. 1737 (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

the earlier one. The architects then went on to offer a compelling argument for the choice of the first capitol: Considerable documentary evidence survived in the legislative papers of the House of Burgesses and Council describing in great detail the fittings and finishes of the first building, but very little material could be found concerning the second structure. Furthermore, a copperplate engraving depicting the north elevation of the earlier capitol was discovered at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, in December 1929. This provided an added cache of detailed information concerning the placement and size of door and window openings, as well as the general character of the brickwork, central arcade, and cupola (Fig. 3).⁹ Given this solid base of evidence, the architects, led by the principal partner, Andrew H. Hepburn, reasoned that there would be less room for conjecture by constructing this first building. They also felt that the H-shaped structure, with its apsidal ends, was inherently more interesting architecturally.¹⁰

9. The copperplate illustrates the façades of the principal public buildings in Williamsburg. G. Yetter, *Williamsburg Before and After*, Williamsburg, 1988, 66. A second illustration that the architects used in their deliberations was a crude sketch of the capitol made by the Swiss traveler Francis Louis Michel in 1702, when the building was under construction. Michel was an unreliable source: many of the features that he sketched directly contradict the much more accurate and skilled drawing in the Bodleian plate. W. Hinke, ed., "Report of the Journey of Francis Louis Michel from Berne, Switzerland, to Virginia, October 2, 1701–December 1, 1702," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XXIV, 1916, 275.

10. Dearstyne, "The Capitol," 26–27, CWFL.



Fig. 4. Excavation of the capitol site, 1928 (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

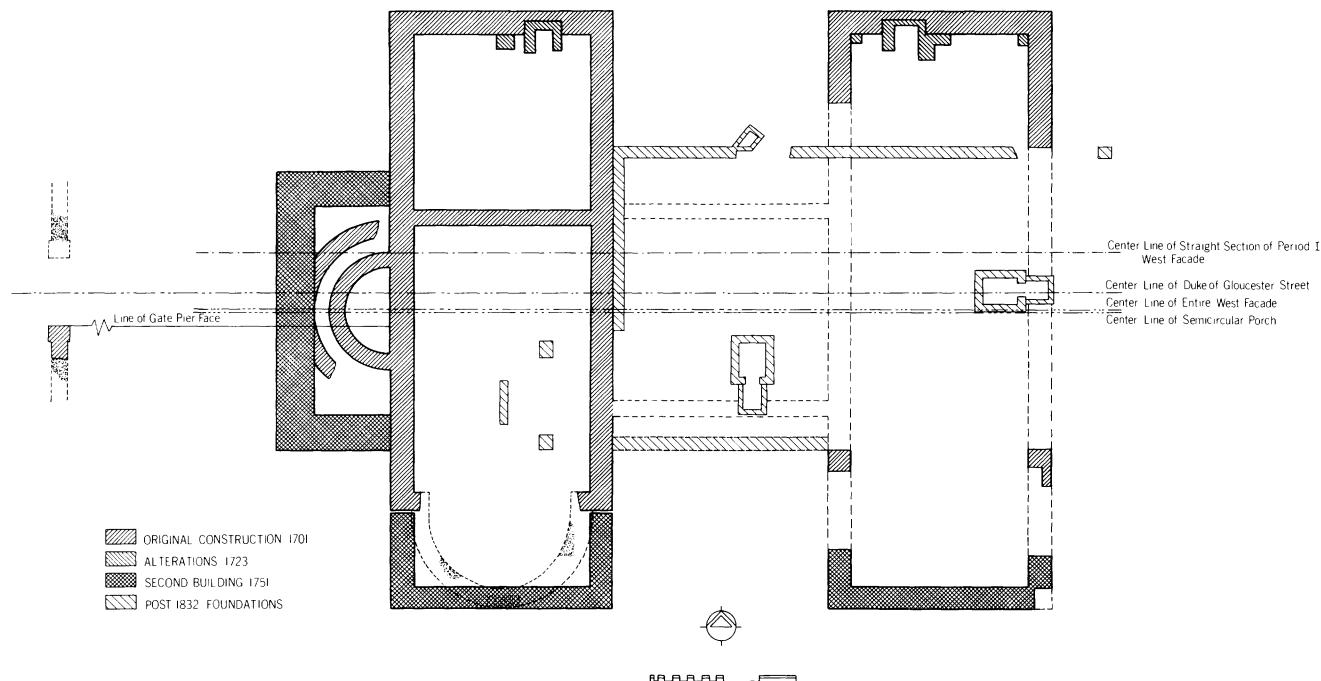


Fig. 5. Plan of capitol foundations (author, after drawing by John Zaharov, 1930).

As design of the building proceeded in earnest in 1929, the systematic collection of documentary evidence associated with the capitol was well underway. The research department of Colonial Williamsburg, the architects of Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn, and the APVA Capitol Committee worked closely together to accumulate and interpret all known documents relating to the construction and furnishing of the two capitol buildings. W. A. R. Goodwin, the rector of Williamsburg's Bruton Parish Church, who had first talked Rockefeller into supporting the idea of restoring and recreating the 18th-century buildings in the town, coordinated the various research groups. This effort culminated in 1932 with a two-volume, chronologically arranged source book of all the available documentary references concerning the capitol, from its first plans in 1699 to the final destruction of the second building in 1832.¹¹

A second valuable source of evidence had appeared in 1928, when the capitol site was excavated by Prentice Duell, Herbert Ragland, Harold Shurtleff, and others, under the direction of Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn (Fig. 4). In 1930 John Zaharov made measured drawings as well as a scale model of the excavated foundations (Fig. 5). He also provided a detailed analysis of the various periods of brickwork and mortar excavated on the site.¹²

11. "The Capitol: First Building, 1698–1747," 1932; "The Capitol: Second Building, 1747–1832," 1932, CWFL.

12. The first drawing of the excavated capitol foundations since the APVA survey in 1898, by Noland and Baskerville of Richmond, was

The Bodleian plate, the contemporary documentary sources, and the archaeological evidence together provided the architects and the APVA Capitol Committee with a wealth of information to guide their deliberations. As in many restoration projects, however, there were lacunae and contradictory pieces of evidence that caused considerable confusion and conflicting interpretations among the researchers and architects.

As with their other projects for Colonial Williamsburg, Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn divided the capitol design work between their Boston office and a branch office that had been established in Williamsburg. Andrew Hepburn assumed the task of coordinating the work of both offices, from initial designs to completion of the working drawings. Although the final design of the capitol was the product of many talented hands, it was Hepburn who had the primary responsibility of explaining his firm's design decisions to the APVA Capitol Committee. Fully conscious that their mammoth undertaking in Williamsburg had already attracted national attention and that the pioneering work would later be scrutinized by "both historians and architects . . . in the light of the historic record," Hepburn took great

made by Thomas T. Waterman in 1928. Two years later, John Zaharov made a more detailed plan of the foundations. Noland and Baskerville, "Plan Showing Work to Be Done for the Preservation and Demarcation of the Foundation of the Old Capitol at Williamsburg, Virginia," 21 May 1898; T. T. Waterman, "Foundations of the Capitol," 25 August 1928; John Zaharov, "Archaeological Survey of the Capitol in Williamsburg, Va.," 14 January 1930, CWFL.

care to produce a final report that carefully outlined the factors that determined their design decisions.¹³

Throughout 1930 the architects prepared sets of design drawings that were then sent to the APVA committee for review. The committee often invited members of the architectural firm to their meetings to explain design decisions. Despite the amiable relationship that initially characterized the conversations between the architects and the APVA committee, a pronounced conflict between the two began to emerge as each group interpreted the archaeological evidence and documentary sources in light of its own historical and aesthetic prejudices. Both groups endeavored to develop a design for the building that would "conform as nearly as possible with all known facts."¹⁴ Their differences underscored the difficulties and biases that are inherent in the design and execution of architectural reconstructions, even in ones, such as the capitol, that are blessed with abundant documentary evidence.

The controversy centered around the placement of the doors on the west and east façades of the building—a sticking point that would have a profound consequence on the overall plan of the building. Serious differences also arose over the character of the colonial work. The APVA committee felt that the architects misinterpreted the meaning of many of the surviving specifications and habitually overestimated the degree and scale of elaboration and finish proposed for the building. Led by historian E. G. Swem of the College of William and Mary and Colonel Samuel Yonge, a retired engineer and a lifelong investigator of early Virginia architecture, the APVA felt that the elaborate designs of architects Robert C. Dean, Thomas Waterman, and Andrew Hepburn did not accord with the economic and social conditions of Virginia in the first decade of the 18th century.¹⁵ The architects, in turn, argued their case on the basis of their Beaux-Arts understanding and interpretation of Georgian design principles.

The difficulties encountered by the restoration architects and APVA committee stemmed in part from some confusion among the colonial builders themselves. The colonial documents show that the design of the first capitol emanated from a committee that continued to change its mind both before and after construction began in 1701 (Figs. 6 and 7). In 1699, shortly after

the decision was made to move the seat of government from Jamestown to Williamsburg, the General Assembly passed "An Act directing the building the Capitoll . . .," which set out detailed specifications for the new building.¹⁶ The act called for a two-story brick building with two 75-ft. wings, each terminated at one end by a semicircular apse, "made in the forme and figure |||." The two wings—one for the House of Burgesses, the other for the General Court—were to be "joyned by a Cross Gallery of thirty foot long and fifteen foot wide each way according to [the |||] figure," and "raised upon Piazzas and built as high as the other parts of the building and the Middle thereof a Cupulo to surmount the rest of the building" (Fig. 6, I). To provide a prominent, eye-catching focal point for the two long façades, the specifications stated that "the middle of the front on each side of the sd building shall have a Circular Porch with an Iron Balcony upon the first floor over it & great folding gates to each porch of Six foot breadth both." This first set of specifications set the general plan from which all future changes would diverge.

The General Assembly committee charged with overseeing the construction of the capitol spent the next two years engaged in the many pursuits necessary before actual construction could begin. In late 1699 it hired Henry Cary, who had just completed the York County Courthouse, as project overseer. Cary and the committee soon began the task of finding the necessary materials and workmen to undertake such a substantial commission. Throughout 1700 and well into the next year, kiln after kiln of bricks were burned, and bricklayers and carpenters were imported from England.¹⁷ Materials that could not be made or obtained in the colony—stone, glass, and ironwork—were also purchased and shipped from England.

By the summer of 1701, when actual construction on the site was drawing near, the assembly decided to modify the plan. On 28 August it changed its mind about the arcade that was to connect the two wings and decided that its width should be enlarged from 15 ft. to 30 ft. in order to make it "the same breadth the main buildings is" (Fig. 6, II). At the same time, it provided further details about the design of the two porches on the long east and west façades. Each was to "be built Circular

13. Quote from a report by W. A. R. Goodwin, "Relative to the Architectural and Actual Front or Fronts of the Capitol," 15 April 1932; A. H. Hepburn, "Notes on the Capitol," 12 December 1930, revised as "Capitol Notes," 21 October 1946, CWFA.

14. W. Perry to Dr. E. G. Swem, 30 July 1930, CWFA.

15. Other active members of the APVA Capitol Committee included newspaper executive John Stewart Bryan, architectural historian Robert A. Lancaster, and Commissioner of Highways and Williamsburg resident George P. Coleman. See "Reply to Explanations of Plans for Restoration of the Old Capitol, Submitted by the Architects at Session of APVA Capitol Committee," 1 October 1930, 5, CWFA.

16. "An Act directing the building the Capitoll and the City of Williamsburgh," April 1699, photostat copy in CWFL from a volume of acts dated 1662–1702, Jefferson Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

17. York County Deed, Order, and Will Book 1694–1698, 24 November 1697, 486; On 9 November 1699 Henry Cary petitioned Governor Francis Nicholson to employ him as overseer of the capitol construction. On the same date, the building committee instructed Cary to agree with a brickmaker to produce 500,000 bricks. This order to have bricks made was renewed on 4 April 1700. On 12 August 1700 the committee agreed with brickmaker John Tullitt to have 600,000 bricks made. Original documents in Public Record Office, London, CO5, no. 1312, quoted in "The Capitol: First Building," 56–57, CWFL.

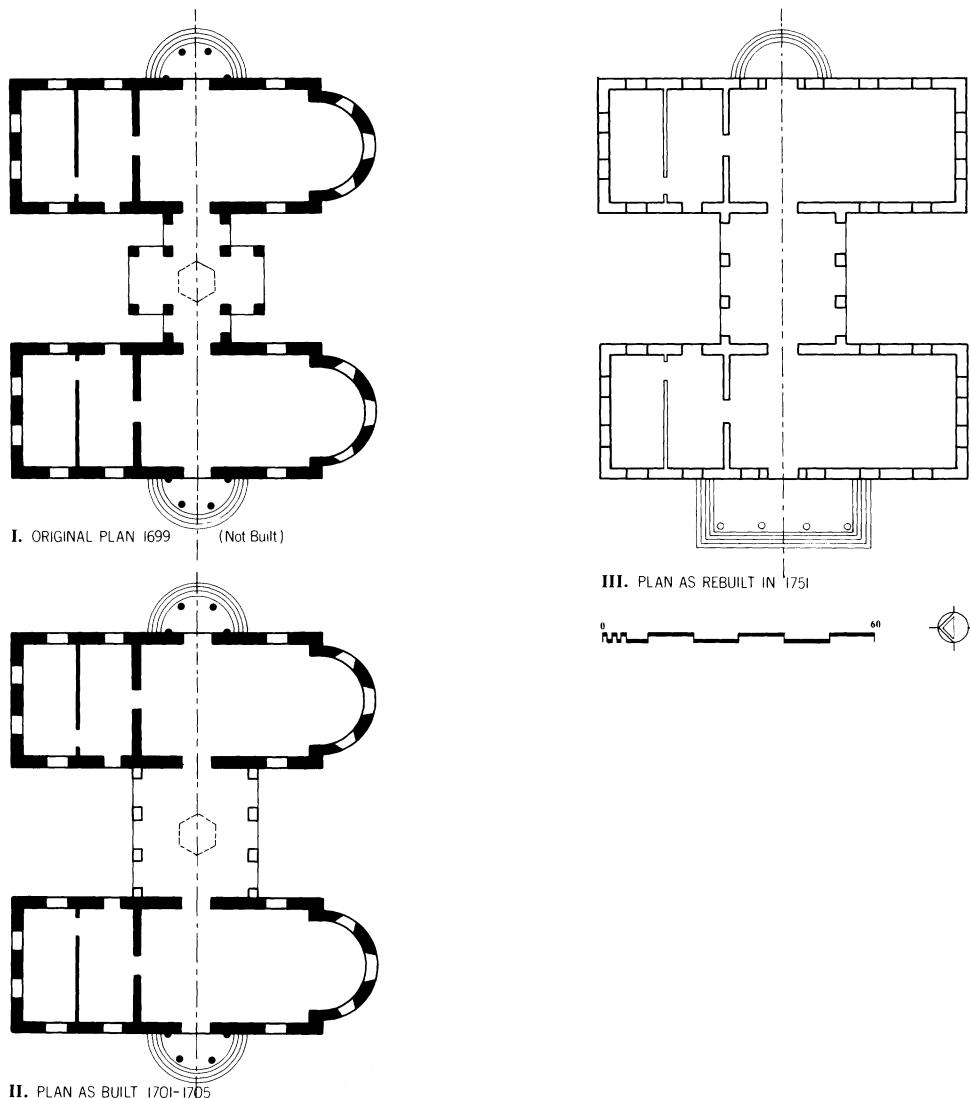


Fig. 6. Sequential development of the capitol (author).

fifteen foot in breadth from Outside to Outside" and "stand upon Cedar Columns."¹⁸

These small but important changes significantly transformed the plan of the capitol. As Marcus Whiffen has argued, the 1701 changes did away with the cross-shaped gallery, intended in the "H+" plan to intersect in the center of the connecting

18. H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia*, 13 vols., Richmond, 1913, III, 272–273. These decisions were officially incorporated in an act "giving further directions in building the Capitol . . ." in August 1701. In 1705, shortly after the building had been completed, another set of specifications was delineated in the codified laws of Virginia. Although slightly different in wording, it reiterated all the principal features called for in the 1699 specifications and ignored all subsequent changes authorized by the assembly between 1699 and 1705, when the building was under actual construction. W. Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, 1684–1710*, 13 vols., Philadelphia, 1823, III, 214, 420–421.

arcade. Running parallel with the two major wings, this small cross-projection may have been intended as a semi-enclosed lobby entrance and stair tower similar to the arrangement found in many contemporary buildings.¹⁹ For example, both the 1676 statehouse at St. Mary's City, Maryland, and the 1696 statehouse in Annapolis, built under the direction of Francis Nicholson when he was governor of Maryland, had front and rear porch towers.²⁰ The members of the colonial building committee pre-

19. The drawing and specifications do not reveal whether this small cross-projection was to be open or enclosed. Two late 17th- or early 18th-century buildings, Malvern Hill in Henrico County, Virginia, and Bond Castle in Calvert County, Maryland, had open porches with enclosed chambers above.

20. W. Hand Browne et al., ed., *Archives of Maryland*, 72 vols., Baltimore, 1883–1972, *Proceedings and Acts of Assembly of Maryland 1666–1676*, II, 404–407; M. Radoff, *Buildings of the State of Maryland at Annapolis*, Annapolis, 1954, 1–5.

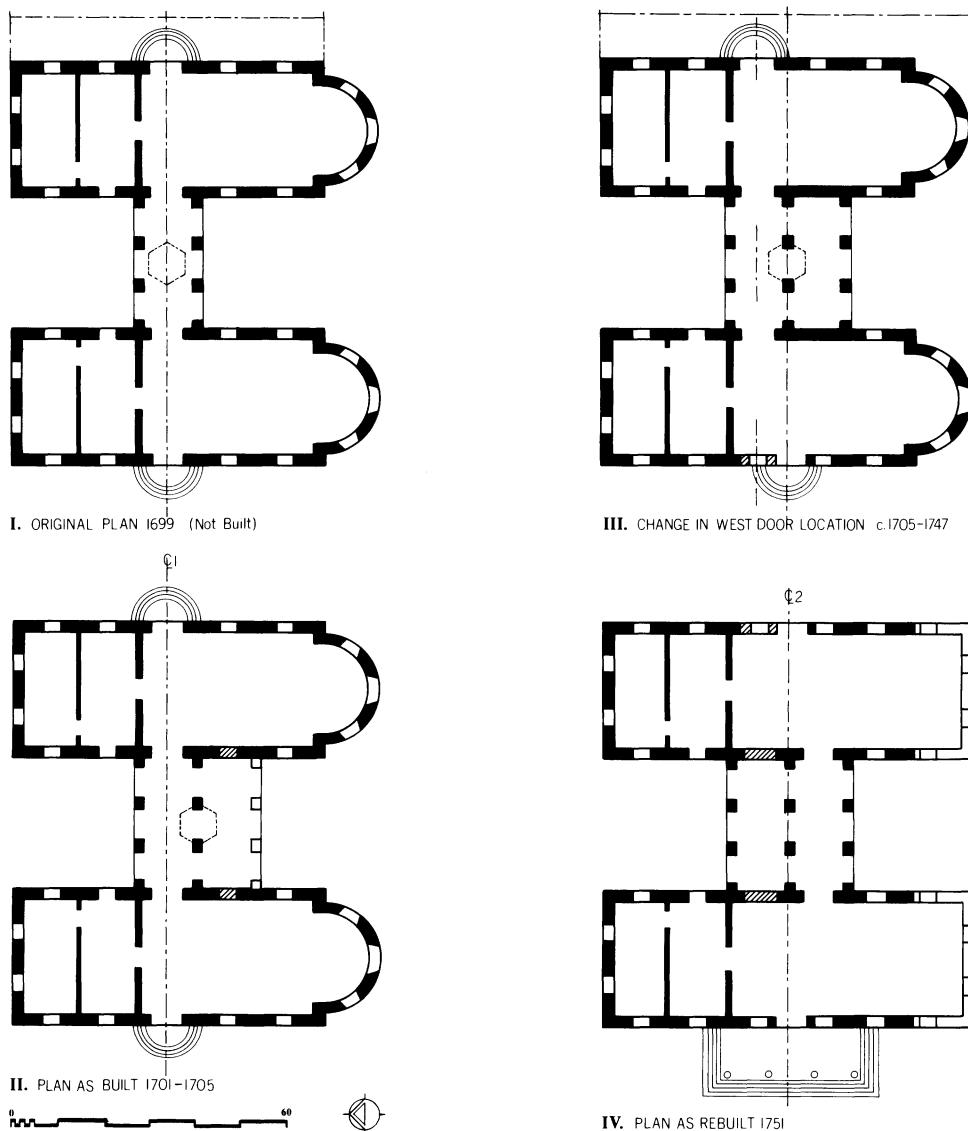


Fig. 7. Sequential development of the capitol as interpreted by Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn (author, after drawing by Andrew Hepburn, 1932).

sumably felt that the tiny connecting arcade and cross-entrance porches provided little room, and that its awkward roof form posed considerable construction problems. Once the idea of the cross-gallery, with its possible stairway to the second floor, had been jettisoned, the function of the original gallery space above the ground-floor arcade was transformed. Instead of a narrow corridor, the space, now 30 × 30 ft., was turned into a large conference room.²¹

In analyzing the original construction sequence Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn proceeded under certain mistaken assumptions, which ultimately created critical flaws in their final design (Fig. 7).

21. McIlwaine, *Journals of the House*, III, 394–395; M. Whiffen, *The Public Buildings of Williamsburg*, Williamsburg, 1958, 38–39.

First and foremost was their error in locating the centerpoint of the two long façades on the east and west sides. The architects thought of the principal façade as only the straight section of the wall and disregarded the apsidal projection. In contrast to the APVA committee, which maintained throughout the design discussions that the apsidal end was an integral part of the main façade, the architects considered only the shorter, flat, section in defining the centerpoint of the façade and, therefore, the central axis of the building.²² The selection of such a centerpoint allowed the architects to devise a symmetrical composition of

22. In a critical meeting held between the APVA Capitol Committee and the Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn architects on 2 October 1930, the differences over the building's centerline were clearly laid out by both groups. "APVA Capitol Committee Meeting Minutes," 2 October 1930.



Fig. 8. Foundation of the semicircular west porch, 1928 (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

door and window openings on this straight façade, an arrangement they considered as absolutely essential if the design was to harmonize with their understanding of early 18th-century design principles.

The consequence of this decision was enormous. It affected the entire design of the building, including the placement of the entrance doors called for in the 1699 specifications, the circulation route within the building, the location of the compass-headed windows in the façades, and the treatment of the arcade separating the two wings. It also caused the cupola to be positioned "off-center" with respect to the doorway, since the position of the cupola was centered on the entire length of the building and not the short façade.²³ The architects were willing to settle for this incongruous asymmetrical arrangement since

23. Hepburn and the architects misunderstood the original 1699 specifications, which described the cross-shaped arrangement of the cross gallery. They could not explain what the phrase referring to an arcaded "cross gallery of thirty foot long and fifteen foot wide each way" meant. The architects later misinterpreted "fifteen foot each way" to mean that the arcade was doubled in width and thus had an extra row of arcade arches in the center of the gallery. By ignoring the fact that the original specifications called for a north-south arm in the center between the two major north-south wings and insisting that the original width of the gallery, like the great doors, centered on the straight façade, they found it hard to explain why the original builders placed the cupola "off-center" once they had doubled the width of the arcade. They attributed the unfortunate result to the naïveté of the colonial builders, who would have discovered the awkwardness only "after the cupola had been built on its new centre . . . [and] the relation between the doorway in its first position and the cupola in its new position could be seen." It was the discovery of "this, and the growing importance of the Duke of Gloucester Street façade, [that] probably caused a reconsideration of the door way [by the original builders] and eventually it was decided [by the original builders] to change the doorway to an axis centered on the cupola." Hepburn, "Notes on the Capitol," 7, CWFA.

they believed the cupola was "not a prime factor of this façade" (Fig. 9).²⁴

Part of their reason for centering the door on the straight part of the long façade was based on their reading of the placement of window openings in several 19th-century views of the second capitol (Fig. 2). These illustrations of the capitol show a symmetrical façade with three windows on either side of a central pair of doors. Hepburn and his researchers believed that, when the building was rebuilt after the 1747 fire, the lower part of the walls of the first building were reused. The openings shown in these illustrations, they thought, indicated the exact position of the windows in the first building with the addition of a new window at the south end, where the apse had been pulled down and the wall squared (Fig. 7, IV).²⁵ They also argued that the original position of the door, centered on the straight portion of the first capitol, was moved at some unknown time before the 1747 fire to the center of the entire façade, a position that was retained when the building was reconstructed in 1751 (Fig. 7, III). The original door, according to the architects' reasoning, was converted into a window at the time of this change. They believed that, despite these early changes, the early 19th-century illustrations were an accurate guide to, and solid evidence for, their theory about the original symmetrical placement of openings.

John Blair, a member of the colonial council and the capitol building committee in 1751, kept a diary that refutes the architects' assumption. It is evident from his diary entries that the walls of the first capitol were not partially reused in the second building but were completely demolished. Although built on the foundations of the first building, the walls of the second capitol were entirely new above ground.²⁶ Thus, in reality, the

24. "Minutes of the Advisory Committee of Architects," 3 December 1930, 7, CWFL.

25. An article with a dateline of 5 February 1747 in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* described the burning of the first capitol in Williamsburg and mentioned that, although the brick walls were left standing, they "seem good, except one or two small Cracks in the Semi-circles." *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 2 April 1747, 2:3.

26. From the cryptic entries in Blair's diary of 1751, it appears that bricklayers, under the direction of James Skelton, began burning bricks for the new building in the early months of 1751 and continued through the summer. In April Blair laid a foundation brick. On 24 June he noted that "they raised ye first Window on Capl Wall," which suggests that the builders had reached the first-floor level. Had the old walls been used, this would not have been necessary. In early October, the second floor began to go up. On 12 December the diarist noted that he "laid the last top brick on the capitol wall, and so it is now ready to receive the roof, and some of the wall plates were raisd and laid on this day." As a man who had seen the flow of provincial politics in Williamsburg, he observed that "I had laid a foundation brick at the first buildg of the capitol above 50 year ago, and another foundation brick in April last, the first in mortar towards the rebuilding, and now the last as above." Had the old walls been partially reused, the length of time laying bricks would have been far shorter and the reconstruction of the

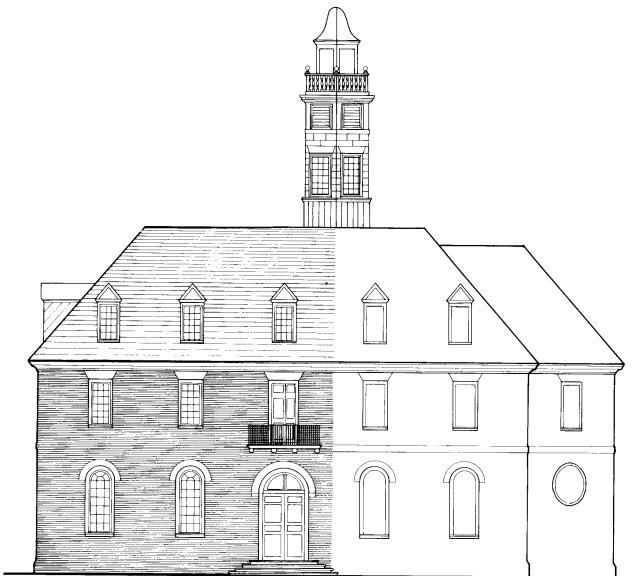


Fig. 9. West elevation of the capitol as built in 1932–1933 (author, after David J. Hayes, 1931).

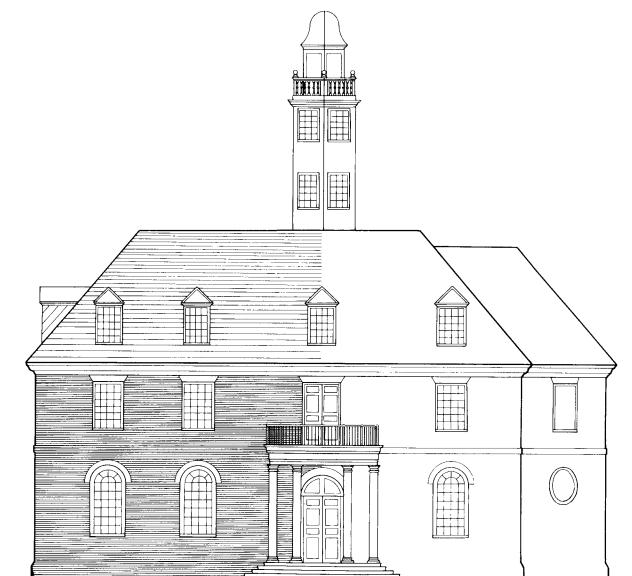


Fig. 10. West elevation of the capitol, based on archaeological and documentary evidence (author).

information about openings that was derived from the 19th-century illustrations had no bearing on the argument.²⁷

Of far greater importance was the fact that the architects' assumption about the placement of the great west door ignored the archaeological evidence. The 1928 excavations of the capitol site uncovered the remains of a semicircular foundation that was attached to the west wall of the building and was assumed to be the remains of a porch and steps (Fig. 8). The architects tried hard to play down the significance of this foundation, since it was not located where they had planned to put their front entrance. Rather, it was situated more than six feet from the centerpoint of the straight façade—within a few inches of the centerpoint of the length of the entire building.

second floor begun much earlier. Although the restoration architects were aware of the information contained in the diary, they apparently did not read through it carefully enough to realize its implications. "Diary of John Blair," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser., VII, 1899, 138, 141, 146, 148, 149, 152; *ibid.*, VIII, 1899, 12, 16.

27. It now appears that nearly all the 19th-century illustrations of the second capitol postdate 1832, the date of the fire and destruction of the building. It is difficult to judge whether early illustrators such as Howe based their illustrations on carefully considered recollections of local inhabitants or on imaginative renderings. All show similar treatment in the position of window openings, but this may be a matter of copying an early illustration. In *The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*, Benson Lossing copied his view of the capitol from an earlier illustration in Henry Howe's *Historical Collections of Virginia* (1845). Lossing noted that Howe based his study on a "drawing from a lady in Williamsburg." This drawing may be the same one presently in the collection of the Valentine Museum in Richmond. B. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the American Revolution*, 2 vols., New York, 1855, II, 264; H. Howe, *Historical Collections of Virginia*, Charleston, 1856, 329.

Because these brick remnants were not where they were supposed to be, the architects found it hard to accept them as original. They argued instead that the semicircular foundation dated from a later period and were therefore not the remnants of the porch called for in the 1699 specifications. John Zaharov, an MIT-trained architect with no previous archaeological experience, reported that the mortar found in the semicircular brickwork did not match that of the principal walls, although he admitted that it was colonial in character and "only slightly inferior" to that found in the main wall. The architects' argument for a later construction date, based on differences of colonial materials and workmanship, was weakened, however, when Zaharov observed that the bricks of this feature were similar in "color and size to the original ones especially those" found in the west façade wall.²⁸ Apparently the architects also overlooked the fact that the semicircular foundation was bonded into the west façade wall and that there was no evidence of an earlier generation of porch masonry—features clearly shown in both photographs and Zaharov's drawing.²⁹ Bonded joints can be formed only at the time of original construction. The APVA committee found Zaharov's observations and the architects' arguments less than convincing.³⁰ As Colonel Yonge pointed out, colonial buildings often showed great disparities in the texture, size, and color of bricks and in mortar composition. He noted

28. J. Zaharov to H. Shurtleff, 24 September 1930, CWFA.

29. See the drawing of the foundations made by Zaharov, 22 September 1930, CWFL.

30. S. Yonge to Swem, 7 November 1930, CWFA.

that "great uniformity" in production methods was "not the practice at that time."³¹

The porch projection measured 16½ ft. in diameter where it met the west wall of the façade. This was 1½ ft. wider than the 15 ft. called for in the original General Assembly specifications. The architects therefore tried to dismiss this as a later feature, since it failed to square with the written record.³² This discrepancy, combined with the difference in mortar composition, was enough evidence for them to maintain that the foundations belonged to a later, though undetermined, period. When pressed by the APVA committee to provide evidence for an earlier entrance foundation at the center of the straight façade, the architects offered a reply that was based on a misreading of the language in the colonial documents: Andrew Hepburn noted that the original specifications for the capitol called for the porches "to rest on cedar posts," which he interpreted not as columns to support an entablature and second floor balcony, but as "underground piles to hold the porches." He reasoned that, since these pilings were wooden, they had long since disappeared, leaving no archaeological evidence.³³ Not only did a lack of evidence not hinder the architects in their determination, it enhanced their argument in favor of locating the entrance porch in the center of the straight façade (Figs. 9 and 10).

With hindsight we can clearly see now that the essential reason for the architects' stubborn and illogical rejection of the compelling evidence was their deeply rooted aesthetic preference for compositional balance and axial symmetry. The primary members of the office had been schooled in these principles throughout their architectural education. William Graves Perry was graduated from Harvard in 1905, MIT in 1907, and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1913; Thomas Mott Shaw finished his studies at Harvard in 1900 and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1905; Andrew H. Hepburn received his degree from MIT in 1904. Stints with the established firm of Shepley, Rutan, & Coolidge before the First World War provided Perry and Shaw ample opportunity to apply these Beaux-Arts principles.³⁴ After

Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn joined forces in 1921, they produced a series of commissions that fit comfortably into the Colonial Revival style practiced by dozens of firms in the Boston area. Their designs for residences and institutions such as the Roxbury Latin School were infused with details gleaned from Georgian and Federal-period buildings in New England.³⁵

Given their background, it was difficult for the members of Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn to conceive of an asymmetrical façade on a major public building in colonial Williamsburg. After all, they could point to the clearly delineated symmetrical fronts on the Wren Building and the Governor's Palace in the Bodleian plate to reinforce their notion that a fully mature and rational, albeit provincial, classicism had evolved in the Virginia capital at the turn of the 17th century.

Although their Beaux-Arts design philosophy often colored their view of Williamsburg's colonial architecture, the architects at Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn were not always blinded by it. They did recognize an important distinction between the work of restoring Williamsburg's 18th-century buildings and their modern design commissions. Sometimes they suppressed their desire to devise a symmetrical façade or to elaborate an architectural detail in the face of clear documentary or archaeological evidence. In an early design scheme for the ancillary buildings at the Governor's Palace, A. G. Lambert, superintendent of the building of the Governor's Palace and a man who had received training "in the days when the Ecole des Beaux Arts of Paris was thought to be the leading school of architecture," laid out a site plan for the service buildings based on a series of perpendicular and diagonal axes that bore little resemblance to the haphazard character of the archaeological evidence.³⁶ Led by Fiske Kimball, the Advisory Committee of Architects (a panel of nationally prominent architects called in to review the work of Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn during the early days of the restoration) attacked Lambert's scheme, pointing out that it ignored many buildings that were known to have existed and included others for which there was no evidence.³⁷ With

31. Yonge, "Reply to Explanations of Plans for Restoration of Old Capitol Submitted by the Architects at Session of APVA Capitol Committee, Held in Williamsburg, 1 October 1930," 30 October 1930, 2, CWFA.

32. Ibid., 4.

33. Hepburn, "Notes on the Capitol," 6, CWFA.

34. For a study of the architectural milieu in which Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn flourished, see T. H. Taylor, Jr., "The Williamsburg Restoration and Its Reception by the American Public: 1926 to 1942," Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1989, 51–56; E. Chappell, "Architects of Colonial Williamsburg," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, eds. C. Wilson and W. Ferris, Chapel Hill, 1989, 59–61; J. M. Lindgren, "The Gospel of Preservation in Virginia and New England: Historic Preservation and the Regeneration of Traditionalism," Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1984; Rhoads, *The Colonial Revival*; and D. Gebhard, "The American Colonial Revival in the 1930s," *Winterthur Portfolio*, XXII, 1987, 109–148.

35. Taylor, "The Williamsburg Restoration and Its Reception by the American Public," 53–54; Perry, "General Statement on the Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," 31 December 1946, CWFL; R. C. Dean, "Notes for Talk on History of the Firm, 1923–1988," CWFA.

36. A. G. Lambert, "A Study of the General Layout of the Governor's Palace, Based on Symmetrically Located Axes," a report submitted to Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn, Architects, 25 June 1932, Governor's Palace File, CWFA. A description of Lambert's predilection for the Beaux-Arts principles can be found in "The Reminiscences of Singleton Peabody Moorehead," transcript of an oral history of the early years of the restoration by a member of the Department of Architecture, 1957, 251, CWFL. For a detailed discussion of this plan and other issues surrounding the design and rebuilding of the palace, see M. R. Wenger, "Reconstruction of the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg," unpublished report, 1980, 25–26, CWFL.

37. "Minutes of the Advisory Committee of Architects," 27 October 1932, 4, CWFL.

his "old-fashioned ideas of symmetry," Lambert was convinced that colonial builders "wouldn't have scattered these buildings around" in the way that the archaeological evidence had clearly revealed.³⁸ In the case of the palace, the weight of evidence overcame aesthetic preference.

At other times during the restoration, historical evidence took a back seat to philosophy.³⁹ It was ignored especially when it went against the rationale for a design scheme. For example, archaeological investigation of the wall that enclosed the capitol building revealed that the gate pier foundations at the west entrance were in line with the semicircular foundations. The fact that the entrance did not align with the proposed steps and door opening at the centerpoint of the straight façade did not disturb the architects as had the "off-center" cupola. Instead, when the time came to draw up a landscape plan for the capitol grounds, they ignored the historical position of the gate and located the reconstructed gate five feet to the north in order to retain a perpendicular pathway to the west entrance and steps (Figs. 1 and 5).

Harold Shurtleff, the first director of the research department, although an architect by training, usually argued from points of historical evidence; yet even he could be transfixed by the tenets of Beaux-Arts design. After reviewing all the pertinent documents and listening to the arguments of both Hepburn and the architects and Colonel Yonge and the APVA committee, Shurtleff agreed wholeheartedly with the designers. In a passionate letter to Dr. Goodwin, he found it

inconceivable that any [colonial] architect would have located an entrance in the façade at the point where the circular foundations stand at the time when the façade ended in a rounded apse. To do so would mean that the designers had put their doorway "off center"—since the architectural surface they were treating as a unit of design would not have included the apse and would have been confined to the flat or straight part of the west side—or in other words had introduced an unsymmetrical element into what was otherwise in its conception a completely symmetrical design. This seems to any architecturally trained mind impossible, as architects in 1700 or before were as little likely to do that as architects would be today. Which of course means the [modern] architects who have interpreted the data presented to them in this problem . . . see no place for the "first period" west entrance except in the *middle* of the front of the west side. This front does *not* include—and could not from a designer's point of view—the curved surface of the apse.⁴⁰

38. Moorehead, "Reminiscences," 251.

39. Many sites appear to have been laid out according to the Noah's Ark principle, whereby privies, dairies, smokehouses, woodsheds, and lumber houses were paired together in a symmetrical pattern at the end of a garden walk or at the corner of a back lot. On most sites such formality was not evident in the archaeological record. In contradistinction to the logic of the Colonial Revival architects and landscape architects, colonial builders chose to place their service buildings across a back lot in response to their functional needs and social importance.

40. H. Shurtleff to W. A. R. Goodwin, 16 April 1932, CWFA.

Such an ahistorical point of view presupposed a constant set of design principles intuitively understood and practiced by architects on both sides of the Atlantic during the reign of William and Mary. It also ignored the effect of local conditions on public building. The process of designing and erecting large important buildings in Williamsburg, on the fringe of the empire in 1700, was far different from practices in London. Shurtleff and members of Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn naturally assumed that the design of the capitol was by an architect who thoroughly understood the principles of Georgian design. Although they could not discover the name of the designer in the records, they were certain that, like the churches built in London in the half century after the great fire of 1666, the major public buildings in Williamsburg were the product of trained hands.⁴¹

What they failed to appreciate was the relatively undeveloped nature of the colonial building tradition at the turn of the century, when professional architects were unknown, major contractual undertakers were only emerging, and the process of erecting monumental buildings was just beginning. Rather than the work of one man, the design of the capitol was the result of decisions made over several years by a committee of provincial officials, none of whom had training in architecture. Even the principal undertaker, Henry Cary, had little experience in erecting large buildings, since there were so few buildings of any consequence in the colony. After nearly 100 years of settlement, the Chesapeake landscape was still dominated by small, impermanent wooden buildings. Only the recently constructed College of William and Mary and a handful of brick churches offered anything approaching the scale of the capitol, and these structures had stretched the logistical and artisanal abilities of provincial craftsmen and undertakers.

By thinking of the capitol as a work of art isolated from geographic and temporal conditions, the architects at Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn failed to perceive the pervasive influence of

41. In their search for the architects responsible for the design of the public buildings in Williamsburg, the early architects of the Williamsburg Restoration found a strong piece of evidence to reinforce this notion. In 1724 Hugh Jones stated in *The Present State of Virginia* that the College of William and Mary was "first modelled by Sir Christopher Wren, adapted to the Nature of the Country by the Gentlemen there; and since it was burnt down, it has been rebuilt and nicely contrived, altered and adorned by the ingenious Direction of Govenor Spotswood; and is not altogether unlike Chelsea Hospital [designed by Wren]." Despite the clarity of Jones's statement, the meaning is fraught with ambiguities. Did Wren or someone in his Office of the King's Works supply the actual design drawings, or did his public buildings, such as Chelsea Hospital, serve as only a general guide for the "Gentlemen" of Virginia, who then altered the "model" to fit the needs of a fledgling institution and the abilities of the local building trades? H. Jones, *The Present State of Virginia*, London, 1724, 26. For a discussion of the validity of this early attribution, see Whiffen, *Public Buildings*, 28–32; J. D. Kornwolf, "So Good A Design." *The Colonial Campus of the College of William and Mary: Its History, Background, and Legacy*, Williamsburg, 1989.

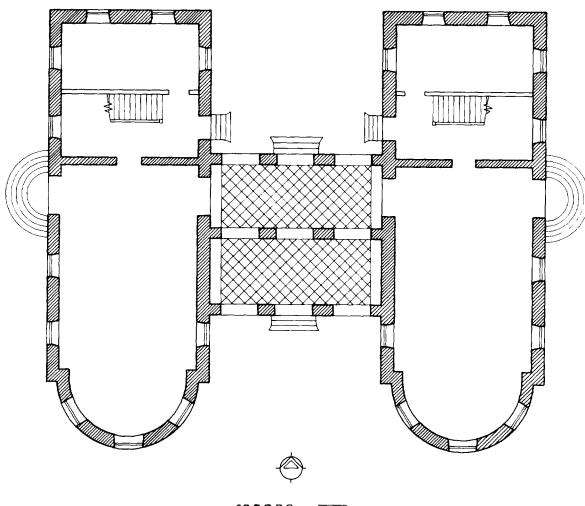


Fig. 11. Plan of the capitol as built in 1932–1933 (author, after David J. Hayes, 1931).

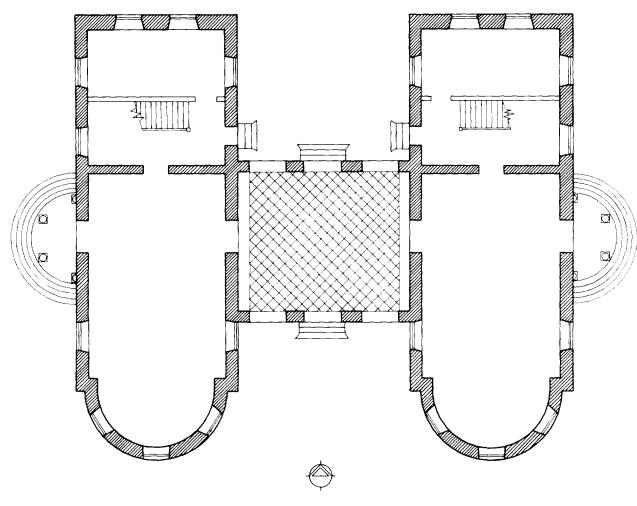


Fig. 12. Plan of the capitol, based on archaeological and documentary evidence (author).

contemporary local building practices on its design. As a result, the desire to have a symmetrical façade unwittingly forced them to compromise the colonial plan. Consonant with their Beaux-Arts design principles, the restoration architects worked hard to make the plan fit the constraints of a symmetrical façade. Placement of the doors at the center of the straight façade meant that the doors opening into the arcade space had to be placed exactly opposite them (Figs. 11 and 12). As a result, the arcade doors did not stand in the center of the arcade but were off-center several feet to the north. In order to mask this asymmetry, and despite the lack of archaeological evidence, the architects decided to insert an inner set of arches in the center of the arcade, breaking the area up into two distinct 15-ft.-wide spaces. They argued that, when the colonial builders changed their specifications in 1701 to widen the connecting arcade, the building was already under construction with the two northernmost sets of arches in place (Fig. 7, II). The third set of arches to the south was added later, they believed, so that the arcade roof could be raised to the same height as that of the main building.⁴²

The architects also argued for the presence of an inner arcade on the basis of their interpretation of a drawing made by the architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe in 1796. Latrobe sketched the statue of Lord Botetourt, which had been erected in the arcade of the second capitol in the early 1770s (Fig. 13). The sketch shows the statue standing headless in the center of the arcade with brick rubble scattered about the base. The arcade walls are plastered in such a way that it seemed that the arches had been enclosed at one time. Because Latrobe had incorrectly scaled the arcade space, making it seem narrower than it was, Hepburn and the restoration architects thought that this view

represented only the two northern arcade walls, the third one, to the south, being out of view. From the angle of the sunlight streaming in from the south, and from the true scale of the statue, however, it is evident that there was no third set of arches.⁴³ Furthermore, the fact that the arcade was completely rebuilt during the construction of the second capitol in the early 1750s, before Latrobe's visit, made Hepburn's argument meaningless.

The error in door placement also affected the layout of the General Courtroom and the House of Burgesses. Located in the center of the straight façade, the doors opened at the back of each room, close to the brick partition walls that separated the stair passages from these main rooms. The architects reasoned that such a position was appropriate for the General Courtroom since it kept people away from the center of activity. Their assumption totally ignored local courtroom design precedent. In many of the country courthouses erected in Virginia in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, rectangular courtrooms with entrance doors on the two long walls were quite common. These doors were generally located close to the bar or front of the courtroom near the magistrates' bench, rather than at the back of the courtroom. People were not to be kept away from the

43. Hepburn, "Notes on the Capitol," 3, CWFA. In 1801 the statue was moved to the front of the College of William and Mary. H. St. George Tucker to St. George Tucker, 8 August 1801, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2d ser., X, 1930, 164. In subsequent years, it was removed to the Eastern State Insane Asylum and then back again to the College. Despite all these moves, parts of the 18th-century base of the Botetourt statue had survived and were reinstalled together with a surrounding railing in the south arcade of the capitol in 1933. However, the statue was never reerected at the capitol. Since the original base encompassed almost the entire width of the south arcade, the architects' reading of the Latrobe drawing was obviously inaccurate.

42. Hepburn to Chorley, 9 December 1930, CWFA.

bench—the locus of court day activity; rather, the proximity of the doors to the bench allowed them to be directly cognizant of the magistrates on their raised platform.⁴⁴ Since the restoration architects had not studied colonial courtroom design, they missed the colonial designers' direct reference to local custom.

Along with the abstract formality that permeated their design rationale, the restoration architects had a tendency to embellish

44. See C. Lounsbury, "'An Elegant and Commodious Building': William Buckland and the Design of the Prince William County Courthouse," *JSAH*, XLVI, 1987, 232–234.

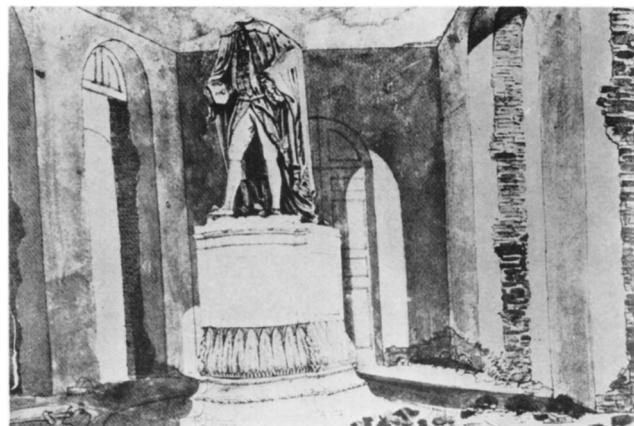


Fig. 13. Benjamin Henry Latrobe's sketch of the Botetourt statue in the arcade of the second capitol, 1796 (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

many of the ornamental details far beyond what the APVA committee felt was appropriate. Once again, the source of the conflict emanated from two different perceptions of the state of colonial society at the beginning of the 18th century. E. G. Swem and Colonel Yonge proceeded very cautiously in assessing the cultural and economic achievements of the colony. The architects, on the other hand, equated frontier Williamsburg in 1700 with metropolitan London, or even later colonial Virginia, and this allowed them to select English and late colonial design sources indiscriminately as precedents for many of the architectural details.⁴⁵ They freely adopted ornamental details from many of the grander buildings in England. Their design for the iron balconies above the problematic front doors derived from Hampton Court. The full-length paneling of the General Courtroom (Fig. 14) was inspired by that found at the Governor's House at Chelsea Hospital and at Glemham in Suffolk. While other details were based on examples closer to home, many of these were taken from the largest plantation houses built by Virginians two and three generations after the capitol was constructed. The pilasters for the House of Burgesses were modeled after those at Gunston Hall, built in the late 1750s. The spandrels in the capitol stairways were patterned after those at Kenmore in Fredericksburg, erected in the third quarter of

45. For a list of design precedents, see Waterman, "The Capitol: Architectural Record," 5 February 1932, CWFL; Dearstyne, "The Capitol."



Fig. 14. General Courtroom, c. 1935 (F. S. Lincoln).



Fig. 15. Council chamber, c. 1935 (F. S. Lincoln).

the 18th century. The pedimented doorway in the capitol stair hall derived from the 1770s woodwork at Shirley in Charles City County.⁴⁶ Although the chronologies of many of these Virginia houses were unclear to the restoration architects in the 1930s, all were built at times far different from that of the capitol's construction. From the 1730s through the Revolution, some Virginians built on a scale and in a stylistic sophistication that was unknown to their forefathers at the beginning of the century.

The use of anachronistic precedent cannot always be avoided. The restoration architects' choice of the best architectural examples that colonial Virginia and Georgian England had to offer was almost inevitable. Their partiality for the genteel and urbane is exemplified by the design of the paneling for the General Courtroom. In 1703 the committee appointed by the General Assembly to oversee the construction of the capitol issued a set of instructions for the furnishing of the courtroom. Their specifications called for "the Circular part thereof to be rais'd from the seat up to the windows."⁴⁷ Reviewing the document in 1930, the restoration architects could make no sense of the statement and dismissed it as being "practically meaningless."⁴⁸ What they

failed to understand about this elliptic phrase was that the word "paneling" had been omitted from a sentence that was intended to read, "the Circular part thereof to be rais'd paneling from the seat up to the windows."⁴⁹ As was typical of county courthouses of the period, the committee members had intended only for the apsidal part of the courtroom, where the magistrates sat, to be paneled at the 3½- or 4-ft. area between the top of the justices' bench and the lower part of the windows.⁵⁰ Based on a 1705 specification for the "wainscote" to be painted "Like Marble," the restoration architects decided to construct floor-to-ceiling paneling with Ionic pilasters throughout the entire courtroom. They pointed out that the term "wainscot" in the 18th century could be applied to all heights of wooden paneling and so felt justified in extending the rich paneling throughout the room (Fig. 14). The splendid woodwork is far richer than any found in contemporary English courtrooms. As reconstructed, it makes nonsense of the visual contrast between an ornamented bench and a much plainer public space that was intended by the colonial builders.

Colonel Yonge continually questioned the architects' propensity to embellish the capitol. When the architects proposed

46. Waterman, "The Capitol: Architectural Record," 5 February 1932, CWFL.

47. McIlwaine, *Journals of the House*, IV, 29.

48. Hepburn to M. Goodwin, 30 April 1930, CWFA; Dearstyne, "The Capitol," 52.

49. Researcher M. Goodwin had reached the same conclusion about the statement. Hepburn to M. Goodwin, 30 April 1930, CWFA.

50. Lounsbury, "The Structure of Justice: The Courthouses of Colonial Virginia," in T. Carter and B. Herman, eds., *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, III, Columbia, 1989, 222–223.



Fig. 16. Capitol under construction, 1933 (F. R. Nivison).

an elliptical council chamber above the General Court (Fig. 15), the APVA balked. It accepted the necessity of adhering to the semicircular form at the south end of the room above the apse, but it saw no need for its repetition at the north end. Hepburn admitted that, although elliptical rooms did not come into general use in England and America until after the construction of the capitol, prototypes could be found in the work of Inigo Jones and Christopher Wren in London in the 17th century.⁵¹ Colonel Yonge criticized such pretentious precedents as being out of context, arguing that "the embellishments of the large rooms of the old Capitol, as proposed by the architects, is [sic] not believed to accord with the then rural environment and the undeveloped condition of the country at large with its sparse population, still new country and almost a wilderness, or in keeping with the scant means available for any greater expenditure than actually necessary."⁵²

In the end, the architects' persistence paid off. Colonel Yonge was unable to convert his fellow members on the APVA committee to his point of view. Where argument failed, the fine quality of Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn's presentation drawings and scale model of the reconstructed capitol proved convincing.

51. Hepburn, "Evidence to Explain the Plans of the Restored Capitol to the Old Capitol Committee of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities," 5 September 1930, 9–10, CWFA.

52. Yonge to Swem, 31 October 1930, 11–12, CWFA.

The wholehearted endorsement of the architects' design by the Advisory Committee of Architects did much to mollify lingering concerns held by some members of the APVA.⁵³ With few revisions, the APVA Capitol Committee gave final approval of the architects' designs at the end of 1930, and construction began in October 1931.⁵⁴

53. On 3 December 1930 the advisory committee met to discuss Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn's design of the capitol. E. G. Swem of the APVA presented his committee's views. Fiske Kimball, the most prominent and influential member of the Advisory Committee of Architects, supported the architects' position, believing firmly that the "main entrance [in the west façade] should be centered on the square front." The advisory committee voted unanimously to accept the design. "Minutes of the Advisory Committee of Architects," 3 December 1930, CWFL.

Pressure was also mounting on all sides to reach an agreement. Two years of research and analysis had delayed construction. With the deadline for having the Capitol finished drawing near, many hoped to bring the discussion to a quick end. See, for example, Perry to Swem, 1 July 1930, CWFA.

54. Colonel Yonge reluctantly went along with the majority of the members of the APVA Capitol Committee. He submitted a minority report, however, in which he reiterated his views. *Year Book of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, 1931–1933*, Richmond, 1934, 38–47. As work proceeded on the capitol in 1932, W. A. R. Goodwin began to have second thoughts about the APVA's acceptance of the architects' design scheme. He reopened the question of the placement of the doors on the west façade and produced lengthy memos stating his argument for the position of the doors in the center of the entire building. With their plans well under way, the architects did not seriously reconsider the issue. With a growing sense of frus-



Fig. 17. State dining room, Governor's Palace, Williamsburg, 1952 (T. L. Williams).

Work progressed smoothly over the next two years as the contractors and an army of skilled craftsmen carefully followed dozens of detailed drawings produced by Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn, ranging from mechanical systems to royal coats of arms (Fig. 16). When Rockefeller dedicated the building in early 1934, he could be truly proud of the fine craftsmanship found throughout the building. The complicated composition of the raised paneling of the General Courtroom was perfectly balanced, the turned stair balusters were carefully matched, and the Flemish bond brickwork with glazed headers glistened in the sunlight in formulaic regularity.

This regularity of detail and perfection of ornament was typical of the Colonial Revival style in which every last detail was carefully resolved on paper before the work of the joiner and bricklayer began. The competence of the craftsmen who worked on the capitol in the early 1930s probably surpassed many of

the skills of their colonial predecessors.⁵⁵ The precision of the design details of the reconstructed capitol, however, belies the realities of the colonial construction process. That process was much less structured and far more diffuse than the restoration architects understood. Throughout the 18th century, the division between the design stage and actual construction was often blurred. The 18th-century capitol planners were typical of colonial building committees, which continued to design features of their structures and resolve various details after construction had begun. In many cases, committees changed their minds and decided to extend the length of a building, or to add a new door or an extra window after the walls were already up. Rough sketches of plans and elevations often served as the only formal drawings a committee ever produced; the more detailed matters were to be worked out by undertakers and principal craftsmen. As a result, awkward solutions occasionally appear in the fabric

tration, Goodwin observed that "to me there will probably be left the slight satisfaction of holding to an opinion as to a door which I will never be privileged to enter." W. A. R. Goodwin to Colonel A. Woods, 16 April 1932; W. A. R. Goodwin to Chorley, 19 April 1932. For a description of all the contributions of the various individuals involved in the research and restoration, see "Persons Who Worked on the Reconstruction of the Capitol and the Nature of the Contribution Made by Each," n.d., CWFA.

55. In a review of the building after it had been completed, Colonel Yonge recognized this problem. He observed that "in the restoration the ornamentation of the more important chambers is very artistic and the joiner work is of a high order, probably equal to, if not surpassing, in some respects the work of the craftsmen of the time when the original building was constructed." *Year Book of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities*, 43.

of colonial buildings. Break joints in foundation walls suggest a change in plan; the edges of door moldings run into cornices, walls, and stairs; uneven and asymmetrical paneling adorns many walls; and Flemish bond brickwork is punctuated by make-up bricks between openings and at edges. Quirks abounded; regularity was illusory.

All of this was overlooked by the restoration architects in their work on the capitol restoration. Caught in their aesthetic predilections, they missed the spirit of the colonial building process. Although the restored capitol is a testament to the 20th-century architects' skills in the handling of 18th-century details, it stands as a monument to the near past, telling us as much about the design principles of the Beaux-Arts as the architecture of the colonial period.

Despite the inherently conservative nature of American history museums, their purpose in the past 70 years has changed almost as rapidly as the sartorial fashions displayed in many of their exhibitions. The period room filled with fine paneling, exquisite Chippendale furniture, and Copley portraits representing the genteel culture of the colonial past is as much a relic of the 1920s as the Model T, bobbed hair, and the raccoon coat (Fig. 17). Dirt floors, squealing pigs, and first-person interpreters plying the new social history to bell-bottomed visitors clearly marked a new era in museology in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Spurred on by scholars asking a different set of questions of the past, many museums changed their interpretations to suit the needs of a new generation of museum-goers. The views of colonial culture presented by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation or Plimoth Plantation in the 1980s were far different from those that visitors received decades before.

Many older institutions are saddled with relics of earlier museum ideals and attitudes. A museum that has had a long history of collecting nothing but the best pieces of Philadelphia cabinet-work finds that it has a surplus of highboys when it begins to interpret the daily life of ordinary colonial Americans. Many institutions must also come to terms with buildings once lovingly restored or reconstructed, which now fit less comfortably into new interpretive programs. It is far easier to hide unwanted furniture than to deal with a large house that has been scraped and improved in an earlier restoration.

Just as the educational goals of history museums have changed, so has our perspective of the architectural legacy of early America. Brick plantation houses and even the more modest frame structures that line the streets of Williamsburg, once thought

typical of Chesapeake architecture by a generation of architects in the early part of this century, are now seen by architectural historians as extraordinary survivors, far larger and more elaborate than the housing inhabited by most colonial Virginians.⁵⁶ The members of Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn who transformed the run-down town of Williamsburg into a museum showpiece of colonial culture labored under a far different set of assumptions about the buildings they were restoring than do their present-day successors.

Trained in the Beaux-Arts principles of design and versed in the Colonial Revival style, the first restoration architects in Williamsburg had a strong knowledge of 18th-century stylistic details, but only an imperfect understanding of how those various elements fit together in a hierarchical system of design. In the field they carefully sketched the profile of door and window moldings, but they failed to note the relationship of these decorative elements to other details in a particular room or throughout the building. As we have seen, typical, too, of this early generation of pioneer restorationists was the tendency to search out and record the best examples of colonial architecture rather than the mundane and ordinary. As a result of the extraordinary effort and fine craftsmanship that went into the restoration and reconstruction of buildings like the capitol, visitors are presented with a more generous and genteel view of colonial building standards than had once existed.

How does a museum deal with the legacy of its early history, especially when the historical and architectural underpinnings that sustained its early development have shifted? Do we preserve buildings, exhibitions, and interpretive programs as they were first created, and view and treasure them, like some old textbook, as a record of an earlier generation's perception of the past? Do we respond to changing intellectual fashion and new high-tech exhibition techniques by casting off or revamping their work? Although such questions admit no easy answers, it is incumbent upon each new generation to study carefully the methodological practices and philosophical principles that guided earlier restorations and exhibitions. By understanding the training and temperament of the early architects of Colonial Williamsburg, it is easier to measure the shortcomings and success of their pioneering restoration work.

56. C. Carson et al., "Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies," *Winterthur Portfolio*, XVI, 1981, 135–196; C. Wells, "The Eighteenth-Century Landscape of Virginia's Northern Neck," *Northern Neck of Virginia Historical Magazine*, XXXVII, 1987, 4217–4255.