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# Leisure time in eighteenth-century Virginia

Andrew Jackson Johnson

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LEISURE TIME IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY VIRGINIA

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of History  
University of Richmond

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Andrew Jackson Johnson, Jr.

August 1964

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## INTRODUCTION

Eighteenth-century Virginia was strikingly agrarian. Tobacco planting on the plantations and farms created an ever-increasing need for new land. The growth of a dispersed rural society reacted against the formation of urban focal units and a middle class. This society did create, because of the endemic loneliness of the country, a people who desired companionship and proved to be gregarious and convivial.

The hospitality for which Virginians are well known was very much in evidence at this period and served in a subtle way to offer diversion to both guest and host. Travelers were invited to the plantations and farms at day or night during all seasons of the year and experienced warm receptions.

Leisure-time activities evolved from or were closely related to the agricultural environment of the people. The salubrious climate and the demanding tasks of farming created a robust people who not only worked hard, but who played hard also.

The horse to the Virginian was not only a "tool" of work, but a means of pleasure and recreation. Hunting for game provided meat and provisions for the planter's table and necessary relaxation after an arduous day's work. The

Virginian's great pride in horses led him, quite naturally, to challenge others to horse races, with money or tobacco as the victor's reward.

Cultural and recreational activities were inextricably mixed in the Old Dominion. There seems to have been little social activity relating to the churches and religious organizations. Most Virginians found their diversions in their homes among their families; others sought entertainment at public events. Music and dancing appealed to almost all of the people, while a lesser number found reading and the theater rewarding recreational pastimes.

The competitive spirit of Virginians ran the gamut of all their activities. They enjoyed varied games among which were billiards, cards, cockfights and bowls. Sports and related amusements were accompanied by considerable gambling in homes, taverns and throughout the country. Drinking was evident at almost every occasion, public and private, for the Virginian's love of the rum "toddy" and other strong drinks was universally known.

The annals of the lower classes are poor and few, but the writer desires to show that their forms of leisure were remarkably similar to those of the gentry. The lesser planters and the poorer farmers were also known for their sociability and hospitality. They shared in the gentry's love of hunting and horse racing, of music and dancing and

other pastimes. The writer also desires to show that the Negro affected some forms of diversion enjoyed by the planters and even contributed some forms of his own making which the master's family found entertaining.

Diaries of great men such as George Washington and William Byrd II offer a keen and perceptive insight as to the manner in which the wealthy planters lived and passed their leisure hours. These diaries also depict the manner of life and leisure time of the people with whom the planters associated, whatever their station in life.

Accounts written by travelers to Virginia offer revealing and informative descriptions of Virginians, the nature of their activities, their social structure, and how they appeared in their everyday lives to a stranger.

## CHAPTER I

### HOSPITALITY OF VIRGINIANS

In eighteenth-century Virginia, visiting was the most popular amusement of the people. Whether Virginians entertained among themselves or invited strangers to their homes, the host conducted the affair eagerly and lavishly. Virginians of all social ranks, rich or poor, planter or farmer, enjoyed the respect of the travelers from other areas who appraised Virginia's hospitality as the finest that a people could render. Relatives separated for many months would gather for barbecues, fish feasts and similar entertainment to which both friends and strangers were openly invited.<sup>1</sup>

Robert Beverley, a native Virginian and planter-historian, said of the colony at the beginning of the eighteenth century, "Here is the most Good-nature, and Hospitality practis'd in the World, both towards Friends and Strangers . . . and besides, the goodness of the Roads, and the fairness of the Weather, bring People oftener together."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, Virginians at Home (Charlottesville: Dominion Books, 1963), pp. 42, 83. See also Elizabeth Coiner, "Customs and Manners in Old Virginia at the turn of the Eighteenth Century," Northern Neck of Virginia Historical Society, III (December, 1957), 626.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Beverley, The History and Present State of Virginia, ed. Louis B. Wright (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947), p. 308.

Strangers were at times bewildered by the generosity extended to them by a people whom they had never met. Beverley explained:

The Inhabitants are very Courteous to Travellers who need no other Recommendation, but the being Human Creatures. A Stranger has no more to do, but to inquire upon the Road, where any Gentleman, or good House-keeper Lives, and there he may depend upon being received with Hospitality. This good nature is so general among their People, that the Gentry when they go abroad, order their Principal Servant to entertain all Visitors, with every thing the Plantation affords. And the poor Planters, who have but one Bed, will often sit up, or lie upon a Form or Couch all Night, to make room for a weary Traveller, to repose himself after his Journey.<sup>3</sup>

The Reverend Hugh Jones, a young professor of mathematics at the College of William and Mary in 1717, concurred with Beverley's statements. According to Jones, no people could entertain their friends with more conviviality or greater care than Virginians. Their free, pleasant, and hospitable homes almost supplanted the inns and ordinaries along the road.<sup>4</sup>

Francis Louis Michel, a Swiss traveling through the region in 1702, recorded that due to prevailing customs regarding the reception of travelers he found it possible to journey through the entire country without using money

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<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid., pp. 312-313.

<sup>4</sup>  
Hugh Jones, The Present State of Virginia, ed. Richard L. Morton (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), p. 84.



except for ferrying expenses. Michel added:

In the first place, there is little money in the country, the little that is found there consists mostly of Spanish coins, namely dollars. Tobacco is the money with which payments are made. There are few ordinaries or inns. Moreover, it is not a country in which much traveling is done, though the inhabitants visit one another. Even if one is willing to pay, they do not accept anything, but they are rather angry, asking, whether one did not know the custom of the country. At first we were too modest to go into the homes to ask for food and lodging, which the people often recognized, and they admonished us not to be bashful, as this was the custom of rich and poor. We soon became accustomed to it.<sup>5</sup>

The warm reception that travelers found in the early 1700's was noted by other travelers throughout the century. Lord Adam Gordon, a British officer and member of the House of Lords, while touring the Old Dominion in 1765 referred to it as the most favorable province in America from the point of both company and climate. He also noted that the residents of the colony aided one another as well as strangers with their "Equipages" in such a kind manner that anyone of feeling would be convinced that, "in this country Hospitality is everywhere practised."<sup>6</sup> A British actor-comedian, John

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5

Francis Louis Michel, "Report of the Journey of Francis Louis Michel from Berne, Switzerland, to Virginia, October 2, 1701-December 1, 1702," tr. and ed. William J. Hinke, The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XXIV (January-June, 1916), 114-115.

6

Lord Adam Gordon, "Journal of an Officer Who Travelled in America and the West Indies in 1764 and 1765," Travels in the American Colonies, 1690-1783, ed. Newton D. Mereness (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), p. 405.

Bernard, alternating his professional visits between Richmond and Norfolk in 1799 commented on the planters as being "men of high intelligence and even refinement" whose conviviality like their summers was "as radiant as it was warm."<sup>7</sup>

An English physician, J. F. D. Smyth, was an acute observer of people and customs and from his peregrinations throughout the colony he concluded that there were three basic classes of Virginians exclusive of the Negroes. Smyth's classification was very valuable as it depicted the ubiquitous nature of hospitality in Virginia among all its people. In reference to the social grouping and the characteristics of the classes Smyth stated:

The first consists of gentlemen of the best families and fortunes in the colony, who are here much more respectable and numerous than in any other province in America. These in general have had a liberal education, possess enlightened understandings, and a thorough knowledge of the world, that furnishes them with an ease and freedom of manners and conversation . . . they being actually, according to my ideas, the most agreeable and best companions, friends and neighbors, that need be desired. . . .

Those of the second degree in rank are very numerous, being half the inhabitants, and consist of such a variety, singularity and mixture of characters, that the exact general criterion and leading feature can scarcely be ascertained. However, they are generous, friendly, and hospitable in the extreme; but mixed with such an appearance of rudeness, ferocity, and haughtiness, which is in fact only a want of polish, occasioned by their deficiencies in education. . . .

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<sup>7</sup>  
John Bernard, Retrospections of America, 1797-1811, ed. Mrs. Bayle Bernard (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1887), p. 146.

The third, or lower class of the people . . . are in Virginia more few in number, in proportion to the rest of the inhabitants, than perhaps any country in the universe. Even these are kind, hospitable, and generous; yet illiberal noisy and rude.<sup>8</sup>

Many visitors to the Old Dominion found that it was not unusual for planters and well-to-do farmers to send their servants to the local inns with pressing invitations to strangers who would be provided, at the Virginian's expense, with entertainment and accommodations far superior to that provided at the ordinary.<sup>9</sup> J. F. D. Smyth observed that if the wayfarer should arrive at cider-pressing time he was often given as much of the liquid as he could drink, invited to remain all night, and "made heartily drunk in the bargain" if he desired it.<sup>10</sup>

One young traveler upon touring the state in the 1770's had developed a unique policy for ingratiating himself to Virginians. His philosophy was that if he behaved decently, dressed well, was of a good nature, would dance with the women and drink with the men, that he would be entertained among them with the greatest friendship as long

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John Ferdinand Dalziel Smyth, A Tour in the United States of America (London: G. Robinson, 1784), I, 65-68.

9

Ibid., p. 70. See also Isaac Weld, Travels through the States of North America, and the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, during the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797 (third edition; London: Printed for John Stockdale, Piccadilly, 1800), I, 143.

10

Smyth, op. cit., I, 70.

as he cared to stay. He added that a little adulation was necessary as Virginians appreciated such attention.<sup>11</sup>

The spontaneity and sincerity of reception that Virginians accorded to their distant neighbors was extended to strangers for basically the same reasons. The Marquis de Chastellux, a highly literate and observant Frenchman touring the state in the Revolutionary period, stated that, "This is because, on the one hand, having no large towns where they can gather, they know society only through the visits they make to each other; and on the other hand, because their lands and their Negroes supplying them with products and the labor they need, this renowned hospitality is no burden to them."<sup>12</sup>

Chastellux clearly depicted the reasons Virginians were able to live at such a leisurely pace but some visitors to the region misinterpreted the gregarious and convivial nature of the state's residents. J. F. D. Smyth whose comments were generally favorable was critical of the customs and manner of living of many white inhabitants which he

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11

Nicholas Cresswell, Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774-1777 (New York: The Dial Press, 1924), p. 270.

12

Francois Jean Chastellux, Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782, ed. Howard C. Rice Jr. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), II, 441.

found, "inactive, languid, and enervating to the last degree."<sup>13</sup>

A German officer, Baron Ludwig von Closen, while serving in Virginia in 1782 as aid-de-camp to General Rochambeau, visited many plantations inhabited by such notable Virginia families as the Carters, Randolphs, Harrisons and Byrds. Closen stated that these families lived in "comfortable circumstances" but remarked: "They are fond of society, and abandon themselves to it, perhaps with too much relish, thinking only of amusing themselves with their estates. . . ." <sup>14</sup>

Two additional traveler's accounts, in part, support the aforesaid statement while revealing interesting characteristics of home life in Virginia almost two hundred years ago. Henry Franklin, an Englishman who visited the state in 1793, related: "The Virginians are remarked for their hospitality and love of pleasure. In the houses of the rich I have frequently been entertained with a dinner of delicacies, served on a plate, in a room where the windows have stood in great need of a glazier; so inattentive are they to the state of their houses, which are very much out of

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<sup>13</sup>

Smyth, op. cit., I, 35. See also Edmund Burke, European Settlements in America (Boston: J. H. Wilkins & Company, 1935), p. 285.

<sup>14</sup>

Baron Ludwig von Closen, The Revolutionary Journal of Baron Ludwig von Closen, 1780-1783, tr. and ed. Evelyn M. Acomb (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1958), p. 187.

repair."<sup>15</sup> A French nobleman and social reformer, Francois de La Liancourt Rochefoucauld, writing in 1796, also noted that Virginians were fond of company, were sincere in their welcome and maintained tables well provided with plate and food, "in a room where half the windows have been broken for ten years past, and will probably remain for ten years longer."<sup>16</sup> Wayfarers, as noted, criticized the disrepair of homes but frequently praised the plentifulness of food on the Virginian's table and his fondness for outdoor feasts.

Barbecues and fish feasts offered a highly diverting time to all classes of Virginians as they were a welcome break from the monotonous pattern of rural living. Few were the invited guests who did not enjoy the music from the fiddles and banjos or the ever-present "toddy" which was consumed in great quantities on these festive occasions.<sup>17</sup>

". . . We have Ladies; Gay Fellows, charming Music; rich & I may say luxurious Entertainment; to all which I am almost every week strongly invited" wrote Philip Fithian, a

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15

Priscilla Wakefield, Excursions in North America, described in Letters from a Gentleman and his Young Companion, to their Friends in England (London: Darton and Harvey, 1806), pp. 48-49.

16

Francois Duke de La Liancourt Rochefoucauld, Travels through the United States of North America, the Country of the Iroquois, and Upper Canada in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797 (London: R. Phillips, 1799), III, 230-231.

17

Cresswell, op. cit., p. 30.

tutor to the Carter family of Nomini Hall, on December 21, 1773.<sup>18</sup> The following year the young tutor recorded in his journal: "I was invited this morning by Captain Tibbs to a Barbecue: this differs but little from the Fish Feasts, instead of Fish the dinner is roasted Pig, with the proper apendages, but the Diversion & exercise are the very same at both."<sup>19</sup> Maintaining hospitable homes sometimes placed great demands on the planter, for friends or strangers might remain for several days, weeks or even months. The Robert Carter family of Westmoreland County in one year consumed 27,000 pounds of pork, 20 beefs, 550 bushels of wheat, 4 hogheads of rum and 150 gallons of brandy.<sup>20</sup>

Some Virginians expressed dissatisfaction with the large numbers of individuals who came to enjoy the free food customarily provided for on the large plantations. Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, Robert Carter's brother, conveyed in laconic but amusing style his feelings in a diary entry dated September 2, 1772, which read:

This is our third Barbecue day. I think it an

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Philip Vickers Fithian, Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion, ed. Hunter Dickinson Farish (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Inc., 1943), p. 48.

19

Ibid., p. 240.

20

Ibid., p. 100.

expensive thing. I confess I like to meet my friends now and then, but certainly the old plan of every family carrying its own dish was both cheaper and better, because then nobody intruded, but now everyone comes in and raises the club, and really many do so only for the sake of getting a good dinner and a belly full of drink.<sup>21</sup>

One should not criticize Landon Carter too quickly for his unsociable attitude as he did entertain great numbers of people at his home in Northern Neck. He noted in his journal on one occasion a festive function which lasted several days.

My annual entertainment began on Monday . . . and held till Wednesday night, when, except one individual or two that retired sooner, things pleased me much, and, therefore, I will conclude gave the same satisfaction to others. The oysters lasted till the third day of the feast, which, to be sure, proves that the methods of keeping them is good, although disputed by others.<sup>22</sup>

George Washington recorded several accounts in his diary where he had gone to Alexandria to a "barbique" and stayed all night and a later event of the same nature, where with a great deal of company he remained until sunset.<sup>23</sup> That Washington returned these favors there can be no doubt for in May, 1774, he noted in his diary, "Went to a Barbique

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21

Landon Carter, "Diary of Landon Carter," William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine, first series, XIII (July, 1904), 163.

22

Carter, op. cit., p. 46.

23

George Washington, The Diaries of George Washington, 1748-1799, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), I, 326.



of my own giving at Accatinck."<sup>24</sup>

A month after Washington's picnic was held John Harrower, an indentured tutor to the Daingerfield family of Belvidera, was enjoying a fish fry. Harrower stated, "At 9 AM left the school and went fishing on the River with the Colonel and his eldest son and another Gentleman in two Canoes. Mrs. Dangerfield another Lady and the other two Boys mett us at Snow Creek in the Chair at 2 PM when we all dined on fish under a tree."<sup>25</sup>

In the last decade of the eighteenth century several travelers from different countries commented on Virginia barbecues in such a manner as to lead the reader to believe that more liquor was consumed at the jovial gatherings than roasted pig. Henry Franklin, the Englishman, during a brief trip to Norfolk in 1793 asserted that the common people of that town often met in the woods to "partake of a sturgeon" or roasted pig followed by plenty of liquor.<sup>26</sup> Afterwards he said that the guests separated unable to walk in a straight line. "Drinking," Franklin stated, "is one of their vices and runs away with great part of their gains.

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<sup>24</sup>

Ibid., II, 124.

<sup>25</sup>

John Harrower, The Journal of John Harrower, 1773-1776, ed. Edward Miles Riley (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1963), p. 46.

<sup>26</sup>

Wakefield, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

As a counter-balance to these defects, they are lively and hospitable. . . ."27 Visiting the same town the following year Moreau de Saint Méry, a French codifier and historian, witnessed a similar barbecue given by the town's militia as a reunion celebration. According to the Frenchman the brothers-in-arms, due to their "boisterous joy," came to "the usual finish: not every citizen soldier . . . able to conquer the charms of the bottle."28 In 1796, Isaac Weld, a native of Dublin, Ireland, visited many homes along the James River and concluded that the outdoor entertainments or picnics of which the common people were extremely fond generally ended in intoxication.29

Numerous visitors from various parts of America as well as travelers representing countries throughout the world visited the Old Dominion during the eighteenth century. The greater number of them were impressed with the receptiveness and generosity of its citizens. If the remarks of two observant travelers could be said to represent the

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27

Ibid.

28

Médéric Louis Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry, Moreau de St. Méry's American Journey, tr. and ed. Kenneth Roberts and Anna M. Roberts (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1947), p. 58.

29

Isaac Weld, Travels through the States of North America, and the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, during the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797 (third edition; London: Printed for John Stockdale, Piccadilly, 1800), I, 187.

sentiments of many, then Virginians were indeed a hospitable people.

Chastellux, the French nobleman, related in his journal in 1782, "I wanted to speak of the virtues peculiar to the Virginians, but in spite of my wishes, I have found only magnificence and hospitality to mention."<sup>30</sup>

The words of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, a young English architect who aided in designing the United States Capitol, written in the last decade of the eighteenth century, serve well as concluding remarks on Virginian hospitality. Latrobe said:

A Virginian welcome must be experienced to be understood. It includes everything that the best heart can prompt and the most luxurious country afford. It is that which will oblige a stranger to stop his career northward, and force him to settle among men whom he experiences to be liberal, friendly and sensible. . . ."31

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30

Chastellux, op. cit., II, 442.

31

Benjamin Henry Latrobe, The Journal of Latrobe, Being the Notes and Sketches of an Architect, Naturalist and Traveler in the United States from 1796 to 1820 (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1905), p. xv.

## CHAPTER II

### EQUESTRIAN AND RELATED RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

#### Horses

One would not find it too difficult to appreciate the eighteenth-century Virginian's use and fondness of horses if several factors were taken into consideration. Virginians were lovers of the outdoors; they enjoyed riding through the broad countryside and their horses provided them the means of travel. Horseback riding offered many hours of leisurely relaxation to all classes of Virginia's rural society. Whether a man directed the activities of a thriving plantation or only a small farm, he could afford a horse and found one necessary to the conduction of his business. The horse thus served the Virginian well in both business and pleasure.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Salmon, an English author and world traveler, described the manner of care and value of the colony's equines at the end of the seventeenth century. He noted that the inhabitants of the region possessed numerous horses but were careless and negligent in breeding them. Salmon wrote

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<sup>1</sup> Louis B. Wright asserts that, "Skill in horsemanship was expected of every gentleman; in fact, even the poorest planters took pride in their horses and their ability as riders." Louis B. Wright, The First Gentlemen of Virginia San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1940, p. 86. See also Smyth, op. cit., I, 23.

that Virginia horses, which "they never shoe," were cheaper than the English breed--costing only five pounds each.<sup>2</sup> "The Gentlemen," he related, "ride pretty sharply, a Planter's Pace is a Proverb, which is a good hard gallop."<sup>3</sup>

In 1702 Francis Louis Michel, the Swiss wayfarer, reported to friends in Europe that horses in the Old Dominion sold for "three to eight pounds sterling" and like the English breed were very light-footed.<sup>4</sup> Michel commented, "They never ride them in a walk, but always in a gallop, as if a deer was running. They are very common. Not many people can be seen traveling on foot, even if it is only an hour's distance."<sup>5</sup>

Michel's closing remarks were supported by an observant German physician, Johann David Schoepf, who when visiting the state after the Revolution remarked: "A traveller on foot is in Virginia an uncommon spectacle; only negroes go a-foot; gentlemen ride. But the whole country being made up of gentlemen and their negroes, and almost no other distinction obtaining, it is always something to meet

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<sup>2</sup>  
Thomas Salmon, Modern History or, The Present State of All Nations (London: Printed for the Author, 1738),  
XXX, 339.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>  
Michel, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>5</sup>  
Ibid.

a white foot-traveller."<sup>6</sup>

Several travelers as well as newcomers who made the colony their home criticized Virginians for their laziness; such were the amusing remarks of Hugh Jones who commented in 1724:

The common planters leading easy lives don't much admire labour, or any manly exercise, except horse-racing, nor diversion, except cockfighting, in which some greatly delight. This easy way of living, and the heat of the summer makes some very lazy, who are then said to be climate-struck. . . .

They are such lovers of riding that almost every ordinary person keeps a horse; and I have known some spend the morning in ranging several miles in the woods to find and catch their horses only to ride two or three miles to church, to the court-house, or to a horse race. . . .<sup>7</sup>

Edward Kimber, an English correspondent for the London Magazine, while touring the colony in the 1740's reported that Virginians rather than walk to church would go eight miles to catch their horses to ride to religious services; "so that you would think their Churches look'd like the Out-

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Johann David Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation from the German of Johann David Schoepf, tr. and ed. Alfred J. Morrison (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1911), II, 45. John Davis, an English author-poet who served as a tutor in Virginia, said in 1798, ". . . The Virginian thinking it degrading to be seen on foot, has always his riding nag saddled and fastened to the fence." John Davis, Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America during 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802, ed. A. J. Morrison (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909), p. 401.

7

Jones, op. cit., p. 84.

Skirts of a Country Horse Fair. . . ."8

Although Virginians were fond of their riding mounts they took unusual pride in the horses selected to pull their carriages.<sup>9</sup> The gentry usually owned a coach, chariot or chaise driven by as many as six horses.<sup>10</sup> When Sir John Randolph, a Williamsburg aristocrat, died in 1735 he stipulated in his will that his wife was to receive his coach, chariot, and chaise with all the accessories as well as his coach horses, riding horses, mares and colts.<sup>11</sup>

Horses were considered such valuable possessions in the Old Dominion that by 1744 the General Assembly enacted a law to protect the owner and prosecute anyone guilty of horse stealing. A reward of ten pounds was offered within two months of the conviction of a horse thief to the individual apprehending him.<sup>12</sup> Horse stealing, however, continued

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[Edward Kimber], "Observations in Several Voyages and Travels in America," William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine, first series, XV (January, 1907), 16-17.

9

Gordon, op. cit., p. 405. See also Smyth, op. cit., I, 23.

10

Jones, op. cit., p. 71. See also Fithian, op. cit., p. 39.

11

"Copy of Will of Sir John Randolph," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XXXVI (October, 1928), 378.

12

William Waller Hening (ed.) The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia (Richmond: Printed for the Editor, 1810-1823), V, 247-248. See also VI, 124.

to be a common crime, for by 1772 some citizens of Fredericksburg used Purdie's and Dixon's Gazette to voice their complaint which stated:

The gentlemen of this Place and Falmouth have raised by Subscription, the Sum of fifty Pounds, which is deposited with Mr. George Weedon, as a Reward for apprehending and bringing to Justice, any person or persons who shall after the Date hereof, steal any Horse, Mare, or Gelding, the Property of a Subscriber. Twenty-five Pounds to be paid on the County Court's committing the Thief for farther Trial and twenty-five Pounds on Conviction at the General Court.<sup>13</sup>

The same issue of the Virginia Gazette announced an event which probably offered exciting entertainment to the people of Williamsburg. The newspaper stated that on October 30, 1772, Joseph Faulks would perform his "Exploits in Horsemanship" by "riding one, two, and three Horses in different Attitudes."<sup>14</sup>

Virginia youths of both sexes loved horses and horseback riding no less than their parents did. Johann Schoepf asserted somewhat critically: "A Virginia youth of 15 years is already such a man as he will be at twice that age. At 15, his father gives him a horse and a negro with which he riots about the country, attends every foxhunt, horse-race and cock-fight, and does nothing else whatever. . . ."15

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<sup>13</sup>  
Virginia Gazette, (Purdie and Dixon, eds.), October 22, 1772.

<sup>14</sup>  
Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>  
Schoepf, op. cit., II, 95.



"He has an unconquerable love for Horses. . . ."

Philip Fithian recorded in his diary on September 15, 1774.<sup>16</sup>

Tutor Fithian was describing his student, Ben Carter, of Nomini Hall. Fithian explained:

. . . . He often tells me that he should have been a skilful, & useful Groom; that he should be more fond & careful of a favourite Horse than of a Wife, or than his victuals, or than any thing whatever! I never saw a Person, in any Diversion, Recreation or amusement, who seemed so full of Pleasure & enjoyment as he is when on Horse back, or even in the company of a Horse!<sup>17</sup>

In October, 1782, one Southern belle, Lucinda Lee, while visiting the Lees and Washingtons of Lower Virginia described to a friend a day's entertainment which consisted of horseback riding. Upon returning from the outing Miss Lee's comment was, "I can't say I was much delighted with the ride, as I rode a very hard-going horse."<sup>18</sup>

That some of Virginia's women were ardent equestriennes was attested by Ferdinand Marie Bayard, a retired French artillery captain visiting Bath, a resort area in the western part of the state, in 1791. Bayard related that the women of the region rode beautiful horses and would challenge each other to race them. He concluded that since their earliest

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<sup>16</sup>

Fithian, op. cit., p. 250.

<sup>17</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>

Lucinda Lee, Journal of a Young Lady of Virginia, ed. Emily V. Mason (Baltimore: John Murphy and Company, 1871), p. 26.

years they were exposed to the "mettle of very fast horses" for they had become "skilful and fearless riders."<sup>19</sup>

Virginians improved their breed of horses during the eighteenth century by importing great numbers of the English racing stock.<sup>20</sup> The German physician Schoepf claimed that during the meeting of the General Assembly in Richmond in 1782 the city resembled an Arabian village. "Horses are a prime object of Virginians," Schoepf explained, "but they give their attention chiefly to racers and hunters, of which indubitably they have the finest in America, their custom former-being to keep up the strain by imported English stallions and mares."<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps of all the remarks and observations made by various sojourners to the Old Dominion La Rochefoucauld, the French nobleman, writing in 1796 best characterized the Virginian's love of horses when he said that though few houses were in "a tolerable state of repair" the best buildings were the stables, for Virginians were fond of

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Ferdinand M. Bayard, Travels of a Frenchman in Maryland and Virginia with a description of Philadelphia and Baltimore in 1791, tr. and ed. Ben C. Mc Cary (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edward Brothers Inc., 1950), p. 40.

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Andrew Burnaby, Travels Through the Middle Settlements in North America, in the Years 1759 and 1760, (second edition; London: T. Payne, 1775), p. 19.

21

Schoepf, op. cit., II, 65.

"races, hunting, in short, of all pleasures and amusements which render it necessary to take peculiar care of horses, as they are the fashion of the day."<sup>22</sup>

### Hunting

Virginia in the 1700's was a virtual paradise for sportsmen. Buffaloes, wild horses, bears, deer, squirrels, rabbits, turkeys, foxes and varied animal life offered a ready means of food for the farmer's table and gave necessary leisure to many men who had to find their amusement in their work. Hunting in eighteenth-century Virginia was a simple, hearty and invigorating activity which offered accessible recreation to all classes. In the last half of the century Virginians were afforded pleasure by the more formal sport of fox hunting.<sup>23</sup>

Robert Beverley, planter-historian, in The History and Present State of Virginia related, "They have Hunting, Fishing, and Fowling, with which they entertain themselves an hundred ways."<sup>24</sup> Particularly amusing was his account of "Vermine Hunting" which was performed by the light of the moon or stars in the summertime. Beverley asserted that the

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<sup>22</sup>

La Rochefoucauld, op. cit., III, 231.

<sup>23</sup>

John Clayton, "Virginia Game and Field Sports," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, VII (October, 1899), 173-174.

<sup>24</sup>

Beverley, op. cit., p. 308.

hunters would find an abundance of foxes, raccoons, or opossums in the corn fields or about their plantations.<sup>25</sup>

Francis Michel was amazed to learn that hunting wild horses was a popular activity of Virginia sportsmen--particularly of the youth. Michel noted that the horses were hunted between April and May during the period when they consumed such quantities of fresh grass that they became lazy and unable to run fast. The Virginians would then mount their best horses, which had been fed oats, and pursue the wild ones which when caught were either eaten or sold as some people "make their living by this practice."<sup>26</sup>

On June 16, 1715, John Fontaine, a Huguenot traveler, stated in his journal that he had gone hunting with Robert Beverley. Fontaine mentioned sighting several deer and shooting squirrels and partridges, followed by a period of diversion at a planter's home.<sup>27</sup>

William Byrd II of Westover cited several accounts in his journal of hunting wild animals while establishing a dividing line between Virginia and North Carolina in 1728.

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<sup>25</sup>

Ibid., p. 309.

<sup>26</sup>

Michel, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>27</sup>

John Fontaine, "Journal," Memoirs of a Huguenot Family: Translated and Compiled from the Original Autobiography of the Rev. James Fontaine, and other Family Manuscripts, ed. Ann Maury (New York: George Putnam & Co., 1853), pp. 266-268.

Of one incident Byrd reported:

On our way the men rous'd a Bear, which being the first we had seen since we came out, the poor beast had many pursuers. Several Persons contended for the Credit of Killing him; tho' he was so poor he was not worth the powder.<sup>28</sup>

In 1739 John Clayton, a botanist from Gloucester County, was asked by certain gentlemen in England to describe "the diversion of hunting and shooting . . . and the several sorts of game" found in the colony.<sup>29</sup> Clayton responded by listing such animals as buffaloes, wolves, wild cats and elks. He then explained:

Now the Gentlemen here that follow the sport place most of their diversion in shooting Deer; w'ch they perform in this manner, they go out in the morning and being pritty certain of the places where the deer frequent they send their servants with dogs to drive 'em out and so shoot 'em running. . . .<sup>30</sup>

George Washington was an enthusiastic sportsman as frequent entries in his diaries attest. On March 29, 1748, Washington noted, "This Morning went out & Survey'd five Hundred Acres of Land & went down to one Michael Stumps on ye So Fork of ye Branch on our way shot two wild Turkeys."<sup>31</sup>

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William Byrd, William Byrd's Histories of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina, ed. William Kenneth Boyd (Raleigh: The North Carolina Historical Commission, 1929), p. 162.

29

Clayton, op. cit., p. 173.

30

Ibid., p. 173.

31

George Washington, Washington's Journal, 1747-8, ed. J. M. Toner (Albany: Joel Munsell's Sons, 1892), p. 38.

A friend of Washington and a fellow planter-surveyor, Dr. Thomas Walker, also enjoyed hunting while conducting exploration and surveying parties in western Virginia. After one such trip in 1750 Dr. Walker wrote in his journal: "We killed in the Journey 13 Buffaloes, 8 Elks, 53 Bears, 20 Deer, 4 Wild Geese, about 150 Turkeys, besides small Game. We might have killed three times as much meat, if we had wanted it."<sup>32</sup>

After the mid-eighteenth century, fox hunting became one of the main activities of Virginia sportsmen. Tutor Philip Fithian of Nomini Hall was probably describing a common situation on Virginia plantations when he said, "Nothing is to be heard of in conversation, but the Balls, the Fox-hunts, the fine entertainments, and the good fellowship, which are to be exhibited at the approaching Christmas."<sup>33</sup>

The nation's first President was an avid fox hunter as he made numerous entries in his diary of following the hounds in pursuit of evasive foxes. He recorded on March 2, 1768, "Hunting again and caught a fox with a bobd Tail and cut Ears, after a chase in wch. most of the Dogs were

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<sup>32</sup>

Thomas Walker, Journal of an Exploration in the Spring of the Year 1750 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1888), p. 69.

<sup>33</sup>

Fithian, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

worsted."<sup>34</sup> Typical entries for January of the following year were:

January 11- Went a fox hunting in the Neck with Mr. Peake, but found nothing.

January 12- Went out in the Mornng. with the Hounds in order to meet Colo. Fairfax, but did not. In Hell hole started a fox and after an hours chase run him into a hole and left him. In ye afternoon went to Alex. to ye Monthly Ball. . . .

January 16- Went a ducking in the forenoon--otherwise at home all day.<sup>35</sup>

In the winter of 1782 General Rochambeau, the French militarist who strongly aided Washington at Yorktown the previous year, joined the sportsmen of Williamsburg on many occasions when they pursued the foxes. Baron von Closen, Rochambeau's aid-de-camp, commented: "M. de Rochambeau . . . amused himself the whole winter riding through the woods, followed by twenty or so enthusiasts. We ran down more than 30 foxes. The dog packs belonging to the gentlemen of the neighborhood are wonderful."<sup>36</sup>

In 1785 Robert Hunter, the son of a Scottish merchant, visited relatives in Tappahannock, Virginia. Young Hunter participated frequently in quail hunting and described the fox hunting where he visited as being delightful entertainment.

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<sup>34</sup> Washington, The Diaries of George Washington, I, 256.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., I, 308-309.

<sup>36</sup> Closen, op. cit., p. 177.

His journal entry for January 24, 1786, states: "This morning I went out a-shooting with Mr. McCall, Billie Ritchie, Hadfield, Mr. Ruffin--and the servants to hold the horses. We had some delightful sport. The dogs did their duty well and started plenty of game. I was a capital shooter in killing three blackbirds flying."<sup>37</sup>

John Bernard, the English actor-comedian, while visiting Virginia in 1797 attributed the fact that residents of the Old Dominion were such successful huntsmen to their wealth, leisure time and favorable climate.<sup>38</sup> His comparison of hunting parties in England and Virginia is both unique and amusing for its serio-comic style.

. . . Hunting in Virginia . . . was a far different thing from its English original. The meaning of the latter is simple and explicit. A party of horsemen meet at an appointed spot and hour, to turn up or turn out a deer or fox, and pursue him to a standstill. Here a local peculiarity--the abundance of game--upsets all system. The practice seemed to be for the company to enter the wood, beat up the quarters of anything, from a stag to a snake, and take their chase. If the game went off well, and it was possible to follow it through the thickets and morasses, ten to one that at every hundred yards sprung so many rivals that horses and hunters were puzzled which to select, and every buck, if he chose, could have a deer to himself--an arrangement that I was told proved generally satisfactory.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>

Robert Hunter, Quebec to Carolina in 1785-1786, ed. Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1943), pp. 220-221.

<sup>38</sup>

Bernard, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>39</sup>

Ibid., pp. 156-157.



As has been previously noted various statements and observations were made by visitants to the Old Dominion concerning the fondness of its inhabitants for hunting but the man who remarked that "the love of the chace" was "deeply rooted in the soul of Virginians" probably best characterized the situation.<sup>40</sup>

### Horse Racing

Horse racing reigned as the greatest sport of Virginia throughout the 1700's. Although it was considered a gentleman's sport, all classes of people from servant to planter, in town and country, enjoyed the fast-moving events at the races. These exciting spectacles with their large purses provided grand entertainment and were an ever-present topic of conversation during the racing season.<sup>41</sup>

It has not been ascertained when horse racing became a formal sport in the Old Dominion, however, it is believed that no horses were used primarily for racing until after 1730.<sup>42</sup> Following this period Virginians began importing

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J. P. Brissot de Warville, New Travels in the United States of America (Dublin: Printed for W. Corbet, 1792),

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William G. Stanard, "Racing in Colonial Virginia," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, II (December, 1894), p. 305. See also Morgan, op. cit., pp. 86-87; and Smyth, op. cit., I, 20-21.

42

Stanard, "Racing in Colonial Virginia," p. 293.

"blooded" or thoroughbred equines of English stock which were bred and used specifically for racing.<sup>43</sup> Until the middle of the century racing mainly consisted of contests between common saddle horses.<sup>44</sup>

Probably the earliest evidence of horse racing in Virginia, and possibly in America, has been preserved in the York County Court records of 1674 which stated:

James Bullock, a Taylor having made a race for his mare to runn w'th a horse belonging to Mr. Mathew Slader for twoe thousand pounds of tobacco and caste, it being contrary to Law for a Labourer to make a race, being a sport only for Gentlemen, is fined for the same one hundred pounds of tobacco and caske.

Whereas Mr. Mathew Slader & James Bullock, by condition under the hand and Seale of the said Slader that his horse should runn out of the way that Bullock's mare might win, w'ch is an apparent cheate, is ord'ed to be putt in the stocks & there sit the space of one houre.<sup>45</sup>

From the above records one might conclude that the courts had no objection to the sport of horse racing, however, common people were forbidden to participate in the activity and gentlemen could be punished for attempting to win a stake by cheating.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>

Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>44</sup>

William C. Ewing, The Sports of Colonial Williamsburg (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1937). pp. 1-2.

<sup>45</sup>

Mary Newton Stanard, Colonial Virginia, Its People and Customs (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1917), p. 252.

<sup>46</sup>

Ibid.

A prominent Virginia gentleman, William Byrd II, in 1709 refused to allow his servant to attend a horse race because, according to Byrd, there was nothing but swearing and drinking there.<sup>47</sup> Evidently Byrd approved of his own attendance at the races held in Williamsburg for he noted in his diary October 17, 1710, "About 9 o'clock we sat down til 12 and then adjourned to the horse race and I lost 35 shillings."<sup>48</sup> By May, 1740, Byrd had sent his family and company to the races giving them all money with which to bet.<sup>49</sup>

Horse races were frequently held at county fairs and on public holidays. The Virginia Gazette on November 26, 1736, announced that some "merry-dispos'd Gentlemen" from Hanover County designed to celebrate St. Andrew's Day by offering divers prizes such as a fine hunting saddle to be run for in a quarter mile race "by any Number of Horses and Mares."<sup>50</sup> The following year certain gentlemen of Hanover

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William Byrd, The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712, ed. Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1941), p. 75.

48

Ibid., p. 244.

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William Byrd, Another Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1739-1741, with Letters and Literary Exercises, 1696-1726, ed. Maude Woodfin and Marion Tinling (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1941), p. 64.

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Virginia Gazette, (William Parks, ed.), November 26, 1736.

County again proposed to celebrate the patron saint of Scotland's birthday with a race which was to include twenty horses and mares. The distance was expanded to three miles and the purse was valued at five pounds. Sponsors of the affair also suggested "That 12 Boys 12 Years of Age, do run 112 Yards, for a Hat of the Value of 12 Shillings."<sup>51</sup>

By 1740 racing had acquired so many avid followers that the betting was profuse. The General Assembly in that year passed an act to prevent the recovery of money or other valuables won on wagers at horse races. The reason being, according to the act, that great numbers of people following racing were losing considerable sums of money to the impoverishment of themselves and their families. Also quarrels, disputes, controversies, and suits had risen over wages laid at horse races.<sup>52</sup>

The students of the College of William and Mary often brought their horses to Williamsburg and were probably frequent participants in the quarter races held in that town.<sup>53</sup> This source of diversion was ended in 1752 when the "President and Masters" of the college ordered that no scholar of any "Age, Rank, or Quality" belonging to any of the schools of

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Ibid., October 7, 1737.

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Hening, op. cit., V, 102-103.

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Virginia Gazette, (William Parks, ed.), July 30, 1738.

the institution was to keep a race horse at the college, town, or in its environs. Students were also forbidden to support or abet others in racing for they would then be subjected to the "Pain of ye severest Animadiversion and Punishment."<sup>54</sup>

Williamsburg for many years was a racing center of the Old Dominion with races being held twice a year, usually in the spring or fall. A race course adjoining the west end of town permitted heats of two, three or four miles. The purse, generally raised by subscription, was awarded to the rider who won two out of three four-mile heats. The races which lasted about a week offered a hundred pound purse for the first day's running with fifty pounds or less being awarded each day thereafter.<sup>55</sup>

J. F. D. Smyth while visiting the capital in 1769 said:

Besides these at Williamsburg, there are races established annually, almost at every town and considerable place in Virginia; and frequent matches, on which large sums of money depend; the inhabitants, almost to a man, being quite devoted to the diversion of horse racing.

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"Journal of the Meeting of the President and Masters of William and Mary College," William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine, first series, II (July, 1893), 55.

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Smyth, op. cit., I, 20-21. See also Lyon Gardiner Tyler, Williamsburg, The Old Colonial Capital (Richmond: Whittet & Sheperson, 1907), p. 58.

Very capital horses are started here, such as would make no despicable figure at Newmarket; nor is their speed, bottom, or blood inferior to their appearance; the gentlemen of Virginia sparing no pains, trouble or expence in importing the best stock, and improving the excellence of the breed by proper and judicious crossing.<sup>56</sup>

Even Chastellux who was critical of Virginians for excessive gambling, hunting and horse races found the latter of "some utility, inasmuch as they encourage the training of horses, which are really of a very fine breed in Virginia."<sup>57</sup>

By November, 1773, the town of Richmond was holding races during its annual fair day on "Shocko Hill."<sup>58</sup> Any horse, mare or gelding who had not won a purse or match over ten pounds in value could participate in the event if the owner could prove the same under oath.<sup>59</sup>

Philip Fithian in the same month of 1773 went to Richmond Court House to see two horses run for a 500 pound purse, besides numerous small bets. The horses in the race were Yorick belonging to Colonel John Tayloe, and Gift owned by Dr. Flood. Fithian observed that there were many people in attendance and that Yorick was the winning horse.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>

Smyth, op. cit., I, 20-21.

<sup>57</sup>

Chastellux, op. cit., II, 441.

<sup>58</sup>

Virginia Gazette, (Purdie and Dixon, eds.), September 30, 1773.

<sup>59</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>

Fithian, op. cit., p. 32.

The year 1774 was a most successful one for Virginia's racing enthusiasts. Towns such as Fredericksburg, Portsmouth, and Dumfries had active jockey clubs which sponsored annual sporting events.<sup>61</sup> The Dumfries Jockey Club announced a race to be held on November 25, 1774, but no person was permitted to enter a horse but a club member. The public was encouraged to attend, however, and premiums were offered to individuals bringing the fattest bullock, the six largest muttons and the two fattest veals.<sup>62</sup>

On October 8, 1774, John Harrower, the indentured servant and tutor, related in his journal the occurrence of a horse race in Fredericksburg. He recalled that the purse was only a hundred guineas and he sadly remarked that his horse, saddle, and bridle were stolen from him while he was attending the races.<sup>63</sup>

By 1775 the political condition in America had become so critical that one correspondent of the Virginia Gazette on July 21st suggested that the Portsmouth and Fredericksburg Jockey Clubs discontinue their meetings during the present crisis and contribute their purses to the people of Boston who were suffering under British economic suppression. The

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<sup>61</sup>

Stanard, "Racing in Colonial Virginia," pp. 304-305.

<sup>62</sup>

Virginia Gazette, (Clementina Rind, ed.), August 4, 1774.

<sup>63</sup>

Harrower, op. cit., p. 65.

Fredericksburg club met in the fall but afterwards there were few races held in the Old Dominion until peace was restored in the country.<sup>64</sup>

George Washington in his leisure time was a frequent "follower of the turf." He loved to attend the races with his family and friends and often did so for several days in succession. Entries in his diary for four days in October, 1786, reveal the enthusiasm for racing at Mount Vernon.

Monday 9th. . . . Allowed all my People to go to the races in Alexandria on one of three days as best comported with their respective businesses. . . .

Tuesday 10th. In company with Major Washington . . . and Mr. Lear went up to Alexandria to see the Jockey club purse run for. . . . Dined by invitation with the Members of it and returned home in the evening.

Wednesday 11th. I rid to all the Plantations, found most of my people had gone to the races. . . .

Thursday 12th. Ferry people all gone to the race and those at home at Dogue run are idle--Overseer being gone to the race.<sup>65</sup>

Although quarter races were popular events in Williamsburg, Fredericksburg, Richmond and other tidewater towns in mid-eighteenth-century Virginia, they later were viewed as being too elementary and were considered characteristic entertainment of the common class. The race consisted of a match between two horses competing on a track one fourth of a

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<sup>64</sup>

Stanard, "Racing in Colonial Virginia," p. 305.

<sup>65</sup>

Washington, The Diaries of George Washington, III, 124.



mile in a straight direction. The courses were usually located near a tavern or inn which provided entertainment and drinks for the spectators.<sup>66</sup> Thomas Anburey, a British officer on parole in Virginia, commented on quarter races in 1779, "It is the most ridiculous amusement imagineable, for if you happen to be looking another way, the race is terminated before you can turn your head; not withstanding which, very considerable sums are betted at these matches."<sup>67</sup>

Anburey also noted that these feats were confined to the interior settlements of the country for they were "much ridiculed" by people in the larger towns of Virginia.<sup>68</sup>

John Bernard, writing twenty years after Anburey, described the spectators at a quarter race as being, "a motley multitude of negroes, Dutchmen, Yankee pedlers, and backwoodsmen. . . ." <sup>69</sup>

The poetic observations of Mrs. Anne Ritson, the wife of a Norfolk merchant, written in the last year of the eighteenth century illustrate well the love of racing in the Old Dominion.

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<sup>66</sup>

Bernard, op. cit., pp. 153-156.

<sup>67</sup>

Thomas Anburey, Travels through the Interior Parts of America (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), II, 227-228.

<sup>68</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>

Bernard, op. cit., p. 156.

A race is a Virginian's pleasure, For which they  
always can find leisure: For that, they leave their  
farm and home, From ev'ry quarter they can come; With  
gentle, simple, rich and poor, The race-ground soon is  
covered o'er; Negroes the gaming spirit take, And bet  
and wager ev'ry stake; Males, females, all both black  
and white, Together at this sport unite.<sup>70</sup>

## CHAPTER III

### CULTURAL PASTIMES

#### Music

Music and dancing were closely associated pastimes in Virginia during the 1700's. Music, however, did have an independently important place in the lives of Virginians. The records of the period available to the researcher disclose that men of social standing placed a high premium on musical ability and sought to educate their sons and daughters accordingly. The itinerant music instructor was a frequent visitor at plantations whose owners often possessed fine musical instruments. The well-to-do did not monopolize musical appreciation, for the newspapers of the period recorded the interest of the populace in ballads, fiddling, and general musical merrymaking. After the mid-eighteenth century, the musical taste of many Virginians had extended to the more refined concerts.<sup>1</sup>

The Reverend Hugh Jones, writing in 1724, offered advice on the improvement of social training at the College of William and Mary. "As for the accomplishments of music,

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Hampden Coiner, "Customs and Manners in Old Virginia at the turn of the Eighteenth Century," Northern Neck of Virginia Historical Society, III (December, 1957), 628. See also Morgan, op. cit., pp. 17-18; and Ewing, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

dancing, and fencing," he said, "they may be taught by such as the president and masters shall appoint at such certain times, as they shall fix for those purposes."<sup>2</sup>

William Byrd II, who enjoyed fine music and lavish entertainment, related in his diary on November 2, 1711, that "two fiddlers and candles were sent to the capital and then the company and we had a ball and danced to about 12 o'clock at night."<sup>3</sup>

The violin was the most popular musical instrument of the period, and Virginians loved to play it to the accompaniment of a hearty group of singers.<sup>4</sup> Those who appreciated such amusement were probably satisfied to read Park's Gazette of October 7, 1737, which proposed the following events for St. Andrew's Day.

That a Violin be played for by 20 Fiddlers and to be given to him that shall be adjudged to play the best: No person to have the Liberty of playing less he brings a Fiddle with him. After the prize is won, they are all to play together, and each a different Tune; and to be treated by the Company. . . . That a Quire of Ballads be sung for, by a Number of Songsters; the best Songster to

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Jones, op. cit., p. 11.

3

Byrd, The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712, p. 431.

4

Philip Fithian informed John Peck, who succeeded him as tutor to the Robert Carter family, that ". . . Any young Gentleman travelling through the Colony . . . is presum'd to be acquainted with Dancing, Boxing, playing the Fiddle, & Small-Sword, & Cards." Fithian, op. cit., p. 212. See also Ewing, op. cit., p. 18.

have the Prize, and all of them to have liquor sufficient to clear their Wind-Pipes.<sup>5</sup>

Orchestras were not known to Virginians of the colonial period or for many years following. Individual musicians, however, and small groups of men traveled to some of the larger towns providing a fine quality of musical entertainment for the residents. Most of the concerts, as they were then called, were frequently followed by gala balls. A variety of instruments was usually heard on these occasions such as: the pianoforte, virginnall, viol, violin, flute, guitar, bugle and many others.<sup>6</sup> The Virginia Gazette advertised on December 11, 1766, a concert to be held in Fredericksburg the 30th day of the month. Those people planning to attend were promised entertainment by the "best Hands in Virginia" who would perform on such instruments as the violin, flute, tenor. base. horn, and harpsichord.<sup>7</sup> Tickets for the affair cost seven shillings six pence which included a supper, ball, and liquor suitable for the occasion.<sup>8</sup>

In 1768 and 1769 concerts were presented at King William Court House and at Hanover Town; the price of admission at the former was five shillings while the sponsors of

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<sup>5</sup> Virginia Gazette, (William Parks, ed.), October 7, 1737.

<sup>6</sup> Ewing, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Virginia Gazette, (William Rind, ed.), December 11, 1766.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. See also ibid., December 24, 1767.

the latter concert requested a dollar a ticket while stating that the ladies asked that those in attendance be governed by silence and decorum during the night's performance.<sup>9</sup>

George Washington attended one of these musical programs at the colonial capital, for in March, 1772, he recorded that he had "Returned to Williamsburg; Dined at Mrs. Campbell's . . . Went to the Concert."<sup>10</sup>

Robert Carter of Westmoreland County was a wealthy planter with versatile musical talents. He not only devoted a great part of his time to self-improvement on various instruments, but hired a music teacher and insisted that his children be taught the different instruments which he owned. An observant guest who visited Carter in 1774 said of his musical ability:

Mr. Carter is practising this evening on the Guittar He begins with the Trumpet Minuet. He has a good Ear for Music; a vastly delicate taste: and he keeps good instruments, he has here at Home a Harpsichord, Forte-Piano, Harmonica, Guittar, Violin, & German Flutes, & at Williamsburg, has a good Organ, he himself is indefatigable in the Practice.<sup>11</sup>

Carter's daughters were given music instructions regularly by a Mr. Stadley who taught at a number of other planters' homes. The Carter girls received instructions on

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., October 27, 1768. See also ibid., May 11, 1769.

<sup>10</sup> Washington, The Diaries of George Washington, II, 59.

<sup>11</sup> Fithian, op. cit., p. 39.

the harpsichord, guitar and the pianoforte on which they practised three days each week.<sup>12</sup> Tutor Philip Fithian ostensibly accounted for the musical inclinations of the Carter family when he commented, "Mr. Carter is sensible, judicious, much given to retirement & study; his Company & conversation are always profitable--His main Studies are Law & Music, the latter of which seems to be his darling Amusement."<sup>13</sup>

Negro servants often possessed musical ability and were in demand on various occasions to display their skill. John Harrower, the indentured servant-tutor, visited another schoolmaster, Martain Heely, who after dinner and conversation played the fiddle. Harrower recalled, "He also made a Niger come & play on an Instrument call'd a Barrafou."<sup>14</sup>

A young Englishman, Nicholas Cresswell, commented on the musical activities of Virginia Negroes. He noted that Sunday was their day of leisure and they therefore spent it by amusing themselves dancing to a banjo.<sup>15</sup> Fithian also described a similar situation in which the Negroes collected around his schoolroom playing the fiddle and dancing.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 28, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> Harrower, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> Cresswell, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Fithian, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

Music advertisements at times reflected the revolutionary conditions existing in Virginia in 1775. In June of that year two music instructors from Alexandria announced in Dixon and Hunter's Gazette that they "would willingly learn any Number of Boys the Military Musick of the Fife and Drum; and also supply any Person with Musick for said Instruments."<sup>17</sup>

These claims were exceedingly mild compared to those of Solomon Balentine, a Petersburg musician, who in 1794 announced to the citizens of Petersburg, Blandford and the surrounding areas that he was prepared to teach or tune more than a dozen different instruments ranging from the German flute to a "Hoeboe."<sup>18</sup>

Thomas Jefferson often reflected the feelings of his fellow Virginians in his writings. When corresponding with a friend in Europe in 1778, his words conveyed the well educated Virginian's appreciation of music. Jefferson said:

If there is a gratification which I envy any people in this world, it is, to your country, its music. This is the favorite passion of my soul . . . I shall ask your assistance in procuring a substitute, who may be proficient in singing, etc., on the harpsichord. I should be contented to receive such an one two or three years hence. . . . The bounds of an American fortune will not admit the indulgence of a domestic band of musicians, yet I have thought that a passion for music

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Virginia Gazette, (Dixon and Hunter, eds.), June 19, 1775.

18

Virginia Gazette, & Petersburg Intelligencer, (William Prentis, ed.), May 20, 1794.



might be reconciled with that economy which we are obliged to observe.<sup>19</sup>

It would be a justifiable conclusion to state that Virginians of all ranks, from servants to statesmen, were fond of music. It was then quite natural that dancing, a closely related form of entertainment, should gain universal approval in the Old Dominion.

### Dancing

Strong evidence supports the belief that, of the organized social activities in eighteenth-century Virginia, dancing was the most popular pastime of the greatest number of people. Virginians of all ages and classes loved to participate in the dances which ranged from common "jigs" to the opulent Governor's ball. Dancing was considered a necessary accomplishment of the period, and men of wealth required that their children be instructed in the art. The services of the professional dancing-master were in great demand in the country districts where he often rotated his visits among several plantations.<sup>20</sup>

Special attention should be given to the spontaneity

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Sarah Nicholas Randolph, The Domestic Life of Thomas Jefferson (Charlottesville, Virginia: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1947), p. 32.

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Burnaby, op. cit., pp. 35-37. See also Stanard, Colonial Virginia, Its People and Customs, pp. 141, 144.

of many dances which were organized in a short period whenever a fiddler could be secured or other music provided. Balls were given to honor royalty and to celebrate special occasions. Assemblies, which differed little from balls, were usually held in private homes with a small admission fee being required.<sup>21</sup>

As early as October, 1709, William Byrd II recorded in his diary of visiting a Colonel Bray's house and finding an abundance of company who agreed to return the next day for a dance. Dance they did, for Byrd the following day related that they danced until two o'clock in the morning.<sup>22</sup> Two years later the same gentleman, in the company of his wife and friends, attended a ball given by Governor Spotswood at the capitol. The Governor, accompanying Mrs. Byrd, opened the ball with a French dance. After an hour of country dances the company was directed into another room where they enjoyed a delightful collection of sweetmeats.<sup>23</sup>

The 1730's were important years socially in the Old Dominion as there were many notices in the Virginia Gazette of dances, balls and assemblies. Particularly colorful

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<sup>21</sup>  
Virginia Gazette, (William Parks, ed.), April 7, 1738.

<sup>22</sup>  
Byrd, The Secret Diaries of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712, pp. 96-97.

<sup>23</sup>  
Ibid., p. 297.

events were the illuminations at Williamsburg in which the citizens of the town illuminated their homes with lanterns, greatly adding to the gaiety of public celebrations.<sup>24</sup>

In the first week of November, 1736, the Governor's birthday was observed with the firing of guns, illuminations and other loyal demonstrations which were followed by a ball held in the Governor's honor.<sup>25</sup> Several years later the same event was celebrated when the Governor had as his guests the "Emperor and Empress of the Cherokee Nation."<sup>26</sup> A brilliant exhibition of fireworks followed a ball at the Governor's palace.<sup>27</sup>

Two ladies residing in Williamsburg, Mrs. Stagg and Mrs. Degraffenreidt, often contended for the honor of being the most gracious hostess in the capital. Their frequent announcements in the Gazette are particularly amusing due to the postscripts. The following advertisements appeared on April 7, 1738.

This is to give Notice to all Gentlemen and Ladies, that there will be a Ball on Wednesday Evening, the 26th of April next, and an Assembly on Friday the 28th, at the House of Mrs. Degraffenreidt, in Williamsburg.

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<sup>24</sup>

Virginia Gazette, (William Parks, ed.), November 4, 1737. See also ibid., October 21, 1737.

<sup>25</sup>

ibid., November 5, 1736.

<sup>26</sup>

Virginia Gazette, (William Hunter, ed.), November 17, 1752.

<sup>27</sup>

ibid.

Tickets to be had of her.

N. B. There will be set up to be Ruffled for, a likely young Negro Woman, fit for House Business, and her Child.

. . . There will be a Publick and Assembly, at the Capitol, on Thursday Evening the 27th of April next: Also several Grotesque Dances, never yet perform'd in Virginia. Tickets to be had of Mrs. Stagg.

N. B. Several valuable Goods will be put up to be Ruffled for; also a likely young Negro Fellow.<sup>28</sup>

In 1737 William Dering, a dancing-master, opened his school at the College of William and Mary where he said, "all Gentlemen's Sons may be taught dancing according to the newest French Manner, on Fridays and Saturdays once in Three Weeks."<sup>29</sup> Dering a few years later was responsible for several gala assemblies held on "Criminal Day" during the meeting of the court at Williamsburg.<sup>30</sup>

Dancing continued to gain popularity in the colony during the 1750's with balls and assemblies being held in Norfolk and Williamsburg.<sup>31</sup> In February, 1752, Alexander Finnie, keeper of the Raleigh Tavern, notified the public that balls were to be held in the Apollo room at Williamsburg.

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<sup>28</sup>

Virginia Gazette, (William Parks, ed.), April 7, 1738.

<sup>29</sup>

Ibid., November 25, 1737.

<sup>30</sup>

Ibid., October 10, 1745.

<sup>31</sup>

Virginia Gazette, (William Hunter, ed.), April 11, 1751. See also ibid., June 6, 1751.

"Once every Week during the sitting of the General Assembly and Court."<sup>32</sup>

The repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766 brought widespread celebrations to the Old Dominion with considerable dancing and drinking occurring. Purdie and Dixon's Gazette stated that the event was manifested by "general illuminations, and a ball and elegant entertainment at the Capitol" where everyone drank loyal toasts.<sup>33</sup>

George Washington took great pleasure in dancing and related activities. He was somewhat critical, however, of a ball which he attended in Alexandria in February, 1760. The entertainment was found to be enjoyable, but he recalled that the food mainly consisted of bread and butter. The coffee could not be distinguished from "hot water sweetened," and pocket-hankerchiefs served for tablecloths and napkins without any apologies being given. Washington therefore concluded, "I shall distinguish this ball by the Stile and title of the Bread and Butter Ball."<sup>34</sup>

Travelers to the Old Dominion often commented on Virginians' love of dancing. Andrew Burnaby, a Methodist clergyman, while visiting the colony in 1759 claimed that

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<sup>32</sup>

Ibid., February 12, 1752.

<sup>33</sup>

Virginia Gazette, (Purdie and Dixon, eds.), June 20, 1766.

<sup>34</sup>

Washington, Diaries of George Washington, I, 126-127.

Virginia's women were "immoderately fond of dancing."<sup>35</sup>

Burnaby also observed that most of the people of the region danced "jigs" which were, he was informed, "borrowed" from the Negroes.<sup>36</sup>

It was the stamina of the Negro and his passion for dancing which so amazed J. F. D. Smyth. Smyth noted that the Negro worked hard until nightfall when one would assume that he would retire. The Englishman continued:

But instead of retiring to rest . . . he generally sets out from his home, and walks six or seven miles in the night . . . to a negroe dance, in which he performs with astonishing agility, and the most vigorous exertions, keeping time and cadence most exactly, with the music of the banjor . . . until he exhausts himself and scarcely has time, or strength, to return home before the hour he is called forth to toil next morning.<sup>37</sup>

During the 1770's a well known dancing-master named Christian held classes in the homes of several planters. In July, 1770, Washington wrote in his diary that Mr. Christian and all his scholars ". . . came here to dancing."<sup>38</sup> Three years later in December, 1773, Philip Fithian stated that he had to dismiss his students on account of Mr. Christian who went to his dancing scholars in rotation and this day he was

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<sup>35</sup>

Burnaby, op. cit., pp. 35-37.

<sup>36</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>

Smyth, op. cit., I, 45-46.

<sup>38</sup>

Washington, The Diaries of George Washington, I, 387.

to instruct Fithian's pupils.<sup>39</sup>

Fithian's accounts of the dances which he witnessed at Nomini Hall are excellent for the picture they present of Virginians enjoying themselves at their favorite pastime.

Of one such dance in December, 1773, Fithian said:

There were several Minuets danced with great ease and propriety; after which the whole company Joined in country-dances, and it was indeed beautiful to admiration, to see such a number of young persons, set off by dress to the best Advantage, moving easily, to the sound of well-performed Music, and with perfect regularity, tho' apparently in the utmost disorder.<sup>40</sup>

It was not an American but a young Englishman, however, who recorded one of the most interesting and descriptive accounts of dancing in pre-Revolutionary Virginia. Nicholas Cresswell, who attended a ball at Alexandria in January, 1775, related:

Last night I went to the Ball. It seems this is one of their annual Balls supported in the following manner: A large rich cake is provided and cut into small pieces and handed round to the company, who at the same time draws a ticket out of a hat with something merry wrote on it. He that draws the King has the Honor of treating the company with a Ball the next year, which generally costs him Six or Seven Pounds. The Lady that draws the Queen has the trouble of making the Cake. Here was about 37 ladies dressed and powdered to the life . . . all of them fond of dancing. . . . Betwixt the Country dances they have what I call ever-lasting jigs. A couple gets up and begins to dance a jig (to some Negro tune) others comes and cuts them out and these dances always last as long as the Fiddler can play. . . .<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>

Fithian, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>40</sup>

Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>41</sup>

Cresswell, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

The Revolutionary War, of course, noticeably reduced the number of dances and balls as well as other forms of entertainment Virginians were accustomed to enjoying. Only a month after Americans were victorious at Yorktown, however, General Rochambeau and Baron Ludwig von Closen joined Virginians in Williamsburg at colorful and well attended balls. The numerous festive functions which Closen witnessed led him to remark, "There are endless balls; the women love dancing with as much passion as the men hunting and horse racing. . . ."42

Four years later in 1785, the young Scotchman, Robert Hunter, while visiting relatives at Tappahannock, Virginia, commented on the cotillions, minuets, country dances and the Virginia and Scottish reels which he had enjoyed as a guest. After one party he attended where the dinner and entertainment were so elegant, he confided to his journal, "It's in vain to attempt describing it."43

The observations of two literate individuals, neither a Virginian, best illustrate the passion for dancing in the Old Dominion during the eighteenth century. The Baroness de Riedesel, wife of a German general serving with

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Closen, op. cit., pp. 176-177.

43

Hunter, op. cit., p. 199. See also Joseph Hadfield, An Englishman in America, 1785 being the Diary of Joseph Hadfield, ed. Douglas S. Robertson (Toronto: The Hunter-Rose Co., 1933), p. 10.



the British forces in America, made the following humorous remark:

The Virginians are generally indolent, which may be attributed to their hot climate; but, on the least excitement, they become animated, and dance and whirl about: as soon as they hear the reel . . . they look for a partner, and jump about with wonderful vivacity; but when the music ceases, they are again like statues.<sup>44</sup>

In a collective summation of Virginians and their attitudes towards dancing, Fithian apparently captured their spirit when he said, "Virginians are of a genuine blood-- They will dance or die!"<sup>45</sup>

### Theater

The birthplace of the American theater, both the amateur and professional branches, was in colonial Virginia. In 1718 the first formal playhouse in the colonies was erected at Williamsburg. The main performers were for several years the students of the College of William and Mary and interested residents of the town. These actors formed one of the most enthusiastic theatrical groups in the American colonies and were responsible for many fine amateur performances at the colonial capital.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>

Madame De Riedesel, Letters and Memoirs relating to the War of Independence, and the Capture of German Troops at Saratoga (New York: G. & C. Carvill, 1827), pp. 220-221.

<sup>45</sup>

Fithian, op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>46</sup>

Hugh F. Rankin, "Virginia and the Colonial Theatre," Arts in Virginia, I (Winter, 1961), 23.

Theater-going was generally limited to Virginians living in such towns as Williamsburg, Petersburg, Fredericksburg, Alexandria, and Norfolk. The theater was a diversion peculiar to the residents of towns and the more well-to-do people living in the country. The best records of the plays presented, as well as the participants and the location, are found in the Virginia Gazette. There are only exiguous accounts of theatrical activity in Virginia before the 1730's and even after this period the records are not continuous.<sup>47</sup>

The first advertisement of a play in the Virginia Gazette was on September 10, 1736, when the public was notified that:

This Evening will be performed at the Theatre, by the young Gentlemen of the College, The Tragedy of Cato: And, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday next, will be acted the following Comedies, by the Gentlemen and Ladies of this Country. viz. The Buzy-Body, The Recruiting-Officer, and the Beaux-Stratagem.<sup>48</sup>

The next week, September 17, 1736, the Gazette announced that on the following Monday night the "young Gentlemen of the College" would perform "the Drummer; or the Haunted House."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>

Morgan, op. cit., pp. 89-90.

<sup>48</sup>

Virginia Gazette, (William Parks, ed.), September 10, 1736.

<sup>49</sup>

Ibid., September 17, 1736.

These theatrical performances evidently created an atmosphere conducive to romance, for what must be one of the first "personals" in newspaper annals appeared in the October 22, 1736, issue of Park's Gazette as an advertisement and read:

Whereas, a Gentleman, who towards the latter End of the Summer, usually wore a Blue Camlet Coat lin'd with Red, and trim'd with Silver, a Silver-lac'd Hat, and a Tupee Wig, has been often observ'd by Miss Amoret, to look very languishingly at her the said Amoret, and particularly one Night during the last Session of the Assembly, at the Theatre, the said Gentleman ogled her in such a Manner, as shew'd him to be very far gone; the said Miss Amoret desires the Gentleman to take the first handsome Opportunity that offers, to explain himself on that Subject.<sup>50</sup>

The first theater erected in Williamsburg was sold in 1735 to a prominent group of men who presented it to the citizens of the capital as a town hall.<sup>51</sup> By August, 1751, however, Mr. Finnie, of Raleigh Tavern fame, and a group of avid theater supporters attempted to raise enough money to construct a "Play-House" so that a "Company of Comedians" from New York might have a place to perform. Each subscriber was to pay a pistole and was to be entitled to a box ticket for the first night's entertainment.<sup>52</sup>

The plan to build a new theater was successful for

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<sup>50</sup>

Ibid., October 22, 1736.

<sup>51</sup>

Tyler, op. cit., pp. 226-227.

<sup>52</sup>

Virginia Gazette, (William Hunter, ed.) August 29, 1751.

the Williamsburg newspaper on October 3, 1751, announced that on Monday, October 21, there would be performed, at the "New Theatre" in Williamsburg, "The Tragical History of King Richard the Third" and a "Grand Tragic Dance."<sup>53</sup>

The citizens of Petersburg, were also informed by the newspaper of the capital to expect a "Company of Comedians" to perform before them in mid-January, 1752. All theatergoers were requested to lend their support by favoring the actors with their attendance.<sup>54</sup>

The aforesaid group of actors returned to Williamsburg in the spring when the public was notified on April 17, 1752, that, "By Permission of His Honor the Governor, At the New Theatre . . . On Friday, being the 24th Instant Will be performed, a Comedy, called the Constant Couple or a Trip to the Jubilee."<sup>55</sup> As an additional attraction there was to be singing between the acts and a dance called the "Drunken Peasant."<sup>56</sup>

The people of Hobb's Hole, now Tappahannock, Virginia, were also entertained by the same actors in May, 1752, before the Thespians moved on to Fredericksburg to play during the

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<sup>53</sup>

Ibid., October 3, 1751.

<sup>54</sup>

Ibid., January 2, 1752.

<sup>55</sup>

Ibid., April 17, 1752.

<sup>56</sup>

Ibid.

"June Fair."<sup>57</sup>

The year 1752 was a highly rewarding one to theater followers in the Old Dominion as they were not only entertained by local talent and a visiting group from New York, but were privileged to have a number of actors from London perform before them. The London Company of Comedians was the first true professional troupe to act in colonial America, and they chose Virginia for their initial performance.<sup>58</sup> On September 15, 1752, the English actors presented William Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice" at the capital.<sup>59</sup>

A more amusing event, however, occurred two months later on the ninth of November, when "The Emperor of the Cherokee Nation with his Empress and their Son, the young Prince," were received by Governor Dinwiddie and members of the Council.<sup>60</sup> After the reception the Indian royalty was entertained that evening with the tragic play "Othello." The pantomime performance, with the brandishing of naked swords by the actors was more than the "Empress" could bear, for she ordered several warriors forward to prevent the

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57

Ibid., April 30, 1752

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Rankin, op. cit., p. 23.

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Virginia Gazette, (William Hunter, ed.), August 21, 1752.

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Ibid., November 17, 1752.

performers from killing themselves!<sup>61</sup>

By 1768 the playhouse at the capital was referred to as the "old Theatre" and the London Company of Comedians has assumed the title "Virginia Company of Comedians."<sup>62</sup> In April, 1768, they played a tragedy entitled "The Orphan" with the admission fee being seven shillings six pence for a box seat and five shillings for a seat in the pit.<sup>63</sup>

George Washington was typical of the gentry who enjoyed the theater for he took Mrs. Washington and their two children to Alexandria in September, 1768, to see a play, "The Way to Win Him," acted. Washington appreciated the performance to such a degree that he "Stayd in Town all day and saw the 'Tragedy of Douglas' played."<sup>64</sup> Washington's diary also reveals that in 1771 he attended a play at the colonial capital.<sup>65</sup>

Theater enthusiasts in Virginia after the mid-eighteenth century, not only enjoyed the standard comedies and tragedies but were treated to various other forms of entertainment not unlike that of the present day. One can

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<sup>61</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>

Virginia Gazette, (William Rind, ed.), April 14, 1768.

<sup>63</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>

Washington, The Diaries of George Washington, I, 292.

<sup>65</sup>

Ibid., II, 39.

imagine the expectations of young and old alike when they read Purdie and Dixon's Gazette on April 13, 1769, which stated:

For the entertainment of the curious, On Friday the 14th of this instant April will be exhibited, at the theatre in Williamsburg, by Peter Gardiner, a curious set of Figures, richly dressed, four feet high, which shall appear upon the stage as if alive; to which will be added a tragedy called the Babes in the Wood; also a curious view of Water Works, representing the sea, with all manner of sea monsters sporting on the waves. Likewise Fireworks, together with the taking of the Havannah, with ships, forts, and batteries, continually firing, until victory crowns the conquest. . . .<sup>66</sup>

A postscript to the advertisement assured the readers that the last events mentioned were not viewed through an "optick box" or "peeping through glasses," but would appear on stage "conspicuously to the view of the spectators, without confusion."<sup>67</sup> The same act was presented again in November, 1772, but Mr. Gardiner, in addition to exhibiting his skill at puppetry, offered to extend himself between two chairs, "and suffer any of the company to break a stone of two hundred weight on his bare breast. . . ."<sup>68</sup>

During the early 1770's Williamsburg and Fredericksburg continued as centers of theatrical activity in the colony.

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<sup>66</sup>  
Virginia Gazette, (Purdie and Dixon, eds.), April 13, 1769.

<sup>67</sup>  
Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>  
Virginia Gazette, (William Rind, ed.), November 19, 1772.

The theater probably attained, during this period, greater popularity than at any other time.<sup>69</sup> Some of the plays most frequently seen were: "The Tender Husband," "The West Indian," "The Musical Lady," "The Provok'd Husband," "False Delicacy," and "A Word to the Wise."<sup>70</sup>

On April 24, 1772, the Virginia Gazette gave notice that the Williamsburg theater would close at the end of "April Court" and that the American Company's engagements would end then as they were moving northward and did not plan to return for several years.<sup>71</sup> The "Provok'd Husband" played in late April, 1772, was their farewell performance and probably the last play acted in colonial Virginia.<sup>72</sup>

The American Revolution which had interrupted other forms of amusement also suspended theatrical activity in the Old Dominion. Congress which was assembled in Philadelphia in 1778 resolved and advised that "theatrical entertainments, horse racing, gaming, and other such diversions as are productive of idleness, dissipation, and a general depravity of

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<sup>69</sup>

Morgan, op. cit., pp. 90-92.

<sup>70</sup>

Virginia Gazette, (Purdie and Dixon, eds.), April 25, 1771. See also ibid., October 17, 1771.

<sup>71</sup>

Ibid., April 19, 1772.

<sup>72</sup>

Ibid. See also Stanard, Colonial Virginia, Its People and Customs, p. 249.



principles and manners," should be suppressed.<sup>73</sup>

In 1779 when the seat of government was transferred from Williamsburg to Richmond, the former capital became "a quiet college village" which was seldom host to noted actors.<sup>74</sup> Richmond, however, was slow in developing a theater, not doing so until the late 1700's.

Those attending the theater in Richmond during the last decade of the eighteenth century were entertained by basically the same performances which had been popular in other tidewater towns for over fifty years. Tragedies and comedies were the main attraction and were followed by choral arrangements often to the accompaniment of several musical instruments. In December, 1791, the comedy, "She Stoops to Conquer, or The Mistakes of a Night," was played. The price of admission was six shillings for a box seat or four shillings six pence for a seat in the pit.<sup>75</sup> Four years later, in December, 1796, Richmonders enjoyed another comedy, "The Rage; or A Picture of Present Manners," which was concluded by a "Grand Sea-Fight" and a colorful display of

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<sup>73</sup>  
Virginia Gazette, (Dixon and Hunter, eds.), October 30, 1778.

<sup>74</sup>  
Tyler, op. cit., p. 231.

<sup>75</sup>  
Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser, (Thomas Nicolson, ed.), December 23, 1791.

fireworks.<sup>76</sup>

Although theaters were usually found only in the larger Virginia towns, one traveler recorded an account of a playhouse in a small resort town in the western part of the state. Ferdinand Bayard, a Frenchman, visiting Bath, Virginia, in 1791 observed that the residents had two public buildings, a bath house and a theater. The actors of the town were "strolling" Irishmen who took turns playing the roles of emperors, jesters and shepherds and "were dying of hunger."<sup>77</sup> Bayard explained:

People gave them alms in spite of severe remonstrances of the Methodists, who claimed that an art as diabolical as dramatic art ought not be encouraged by Christians.

The one who played lovers' parts . . . strove hard with an earnest desire to come off with honor, and delivered his speech all the while spitting in the faces of two Negroes who were scraping on fiddles near the stage.<sup>78</sup>

The people of Bath, despite the criticism of the Methodists and the poverty of the actors, were entertained with diverse plays such as tragedies, comedies and comic operas.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>  
Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser, (August Davis, ed.), December 21, 1796.

<sup>77</sup>  
 Bayard, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>78</sup>  
Ibid., pp. 50-51.

<sup>79</sup>  
Ibid., p. 51.

The theater in Virginia during the latter eighteenth century never regained the popularity it had attained in the pre-Revolutionary period. Richmond failed to become a center of dramatic art and the same was evidently true of other towns in the state.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, Virginians could be proud of their contributions to the growth of the theater in America. They had erected the first playhouse on the continent and for many decades audiences in several Virginia towns had been entertained with plays of high cultural quality performed by the first professional actors in America.

### Reading

Due to the absence of records it is impossible to ascertain the books which the average eighteenth-century Virginian read. The most reliable guides to the researcher are records of libraries, diaries and related materials, however, even these are not continuous. The libraries of the planters reflected their appreciation of practical, substantial, and varied reading matter.<sup>81</sup> Books were not

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Moreau, op. cit., p. 53. See also Ritson, op. cit., pp. 142-143.

81

Louis B. Wright stated that, "The most noteworthy characteristic of the reading of Virginians, as revealed by the extant lists of their books, was its utility." Louis B. Wright, The First Gentlemen of Virginia (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1940), p. 126. See also Jay B. Hubell, The South in American Literature, 1607-1900 (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1954), pp. 10-12.

procured for mere ostentatious reasons but for enjoyment and self-improvement. The most frequently read works were handbooks on agriculture, medicine and law as well as various religious treatises. The ancient classics often broadened the cultural life of the gentry as the diaries of William Byrd and Philip Fithian attest. Gentlemen-planters were not alone in their appreciation of books for the humbler classes at times owned small but highly treasured collections which were read and reread.<sup>82</sup>

Ralph Wormeley of Rosegill owned a library which contained approximately three hundred and seventy-five different titles when he died in December, 1701. His collection was the largest accumulated by a Virginian up to that time. The books covered a wide range of topics which included history, law, science, religion, classical literature and statecraft. The following is a partial listing of books compiled from Wormeley's will and is not truly representative of his collection.

Oglebees American in folio, Daltons Country Justices, Doctr Willis practice of Physick, Doctr Andros Sermons folio, the history of Great Britain, the Book of homileys, Burnets first part of Reformacon, the History of ye world in folio, Doctr Burnet's theor. of ye earth, the reports of Sr Edward Cook. . . .<sup>83</sup>

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Louis B. Wright, "Intellectual History and the Colonial South," William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine, third series, XVI (April, 1959), 222-225.

83

Lyon G. Tyler, "Libraries in Colonial Virginia," William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine, first series, II (January, 1894), 169-170.

Hugh Jones, writing in 1724, was somewhat critical of the reading habits of Virginians, for he said, "They are more inclinable to read men by business and conversation, than to dive into books, and are for the most part only desirous of learning what is absolutely necessary, in the shortest and best method."<sup>84</sup> Jones spoke more highly however, of certain gentlemen in the colony who contributed books to the library of the College of William and Mary. He even suggested that the "gentry of the country" should be allowed to use the library "at certain hours, at such times as they shall be at Williamsburg, either for business or pleasure."<sup>85</sup>

William Byrd II was a versatile Virginia gentleman who read extensively both for pleasure and self-improvement. His library numbered over three thousand three hundred volumes and was the largest private collection in colonial America.<sup>86</sup> Numerous works relating to American history and travel were found in his collection as well as treatises on medicine and law. Three hundred volumes in the library reflected Byrd's interest in the classics.<sup>87</sup> Byrd read the

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84

Jones, op. cit., p. 81.

85

Ibid., p. 113.

86

William D. Houlette, "The Byrd Library," Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine, XVI (October, 1934), 104.

87

Ibid., pp. 103-104.

classics assiduously. He spent some part of each day reading from Greek, Hebrew or Latin authors. Entries from his diaries reveal his interest in both classical literature and poetry.

June 17, 1709- I rose at 5 o'clock and read some Greek in Josephus and perused some of my new books.

August 11, 1709- I rose at 5 o'clock and read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Josephus. I said my prayers and ate milk for breakfast. I read some geometry and removed some of my books in the library.

May 14, 1711- I rose about 6 o'clock and read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Homer. '88  
We were merry with reading my verse, the 3 w. '88

Reading aloud was found to be a pleasant pastime for Virginians, particularly when inclement weather forced the company to remain indoors. William Byrd described one such occasion in September, 1732, while he was visiting a widow, Mrs. Fleming, of Tuckahoe.

We had another wet day, to try both Mrs. Fleming's Patience and my good breeding. . . . I turn'd the discourse, and began to talk of Plays, & finding her Taste lay most towards Comedy, I offer'd my Service to read one to Her, which she kindly accepted. She produced the 2nd part of the Beggar's Opera. . . . After having acquainted my Company with the History of the Play, I read 3 Acts of it, and left Mrs. Fleming and Mr. Randolph to finish it, who read as well as most Actors do at Rehearsal. Thus we kill'd the time and triumph over the bad weather.<sup>89</sup>

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88

Byrd, The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712, pp. 49, 69, 344.

89

William Byrd, The Writings of "Colonel William Byrd of Westover in Virginia, Esqr." ed. John Spencer Bassett (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1901), p. 342.

William Parks, first editor of the Virginia Gazette, frequently published lists of books available at his capital city book store. Many of the books so advertized appealed to both planter and farmer, as pious works and treatises on medicine were read by Virginians in "every rank of life."<sup>90</sup> In June, 1738, the Gazette publicized the sale of Dr. Charles Brown's library at Williamsburg. It was described as "the finest and most copious Collection that ever was exposed to sale in the Colony" containing works on all branches of natural philosophy and "Physick."<sup>91</sup> The public was advised to take advantage of the opportunity "of furnishing themselves with the best Writers in their Way, at reasonable Rates."<sup>92</sup> The following year, in April, 1739, the Gazette listed the most recently published works available at the capital which were:

The Whole Body of the Laws of Virginia. Mr. Mercer's Abridgement of the Laws of Virginia. Mr. Webb's Office of a Justice. The Week's preparation to the Sacrament: The new Version of Psalms: Immanuel, or the Incarnation of the Son of God: Testaments, Psalters, Spelling-books: The Poor Planter's Physician: Dr. Tennent's Essay on the Pleurisy: The Gentleman's Pocket-Farrier, and several sorts of Books. . . .<sup>93</sup>

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90

Wright, The First Gentlemen of Virginia, p. 122.

91

Virginia Gazette, (William Parks, ed.), June 23, 1738.

92

Ibid.

93

Ibid., April 6, 1739.

The Virginia Gazette was probably widely read and greatly appreciated by Virginians as its articles were often well-written and entertaining. Many read the Gazette for business purposes as it contained numerous advertisements. James Gordon, a merchant from Lancaster County, wrote in June, 1761, that he had given public notice in two Gazettes of goods which he had for sale. Gordon also noted in his journal on June 27, 1761, "At home, with my family. A Comfortable day I had, in reading good authors that the almighty has blessed us with."<sup>94</sup>

One of the most literate and scholarly Virginia planters in the last quarter of the eighteenth century was Robert Carter of Nomini Hall. Carter gained much gratification from reading and frequently purchased books and magazines from England. His library contained numerous works on theology, history, politics, medicine and practical handbooks on farming and gardening. Among Carter's favorite authors were Locke, Addison, Pope, Swift and Dryden. Greek and Latin classics were also well represented in his collection.<sup>95</sup> The love of reading at the Carter plantation was most graphically revealed by an entry from Philip Fithian's

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<sup>94</sup>

James Gordon, "Journal of Col. James Gordon," William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine, first series, XI (April, 1903), 23.

<sup>95</sup>

Fithian, op. cit., pp. 34-35.



diary, dated February 19, 1774, which read: "At dinner we were conversing on Reading, among many remarks the Colonel observed that, He would bet a Guinea that Mrs Carter reads more than the Parson of the Parish."<sup>96</sup>

Eighteenth-century Virginians could claim two of the greatest libraries in America; the first was that of William Byrd, and the second, Thomas Jefferson's major library.<sup>97</sup> Jefferson collected, during his lifetime, three different libraries but his first and greatest one was begun after a fire destroyed his family home at Shadwell in 1770.

Jefferson's major library illustrated the interests of an American statesman. His collection was particularly strong in the field of political theory and works relative to America. In fact, he once stated that he had the "best collection of its size probably in America, and containing a great mass of what is most rare and valuable, and especially of what relates to America."<sup>98</sup> Although Jefferson had acquired more books pertaining to history than any other type, he was a lawyer and owned approximately 450 books on law. Like any other well-educated Virginian of his time,

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<sup>96</sup>

Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>97</sup>

William Peden, "Some Notes Concerning Thomas Jefferson's Libraries," William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine, third series, I (July, 1944), 265.

<sup>98</sup>

Ibid., p. 267.

Jefferson perused the ancient classics with enthusiasm for his collection of belles-lettres numbered over 300 works on poetry, romance and drama. Jefferson's interests were myriad and his library, in addition to the previously mentioned fields, contained works on geology, chemistry, medicine, architecture, music, agriculture and numerous related subjects.<sup>99</sup> The most noteworthy description of the value of Jefferson's collection was the fact that in 1815 it was purchased by Congress for \$23,950 to form the basis for a new national library.<sup>100</sup>

The large libraries of Wormeley, Byrd, Carter and Jefferson were, of course, exceptions but as previously stated they furnish the most reliable evidence of the kind of literature read by Virginians of the period. There are a few accounts which reveal that Virginians of lesser means than the gentry found reading a pleasant pastime.

Chastellux, in April, 1782, while visiting General Thomas Nelson of Offley, observed that the family owned "some good French and English books" which they could resort to if they sought such diversion.<sup>101</sup> The Frenchman sadly commented, "but music, drawing, reading aloud, and fanciwork

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<sup>99</sup>

Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>100</sup>

Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>101</sup>

Chastellux, op. cit., p. 383.

by the ladies are resources unknown in America, though it is hoped they will not long neglect to cultivate them."<sup>102</sup>

Chastellux's aforesaid remarks were inaccurate for reading aloud was a well-known pastime to Virginians. Lucinda Lee, while visiting her relatives in Lower Virginia in October, 1782, mentioned how fond she was of reading novels. She also described occasions where she and a young friend were entertained by a Mr. Pinkard who read several plays to them.<sup>103</sup>

Robert Hunter, the young Scotchman visiting his kinspeople at Tappahannock, derived much enjoyment through reading. He related the following accounts in his journal on the 23rd and 24th of December, 1785.

Kate read the Vicar of Wakefield to me this evening and highly entertained me. . . .

Kate and I amuse ourselves with reading alternately to each other, writing, conversing, and playing the harpsichord and violin together. In the evening Kate read me a poem of Blair's upon the grave. We drank tea together and afterwards amused ourselves with reading and conversing with each other.<sup>104</sup>

Reading as a pastime was not ignored in the western sections of the Old Dominion. Ferdinand Bayard, while traveling through Bath and Winchester in 1791, commented on

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102

Ibid.

103

Lee, op. cit., pp. 26-27.

104

Hunter, op. cit., p. 213.

the reading habits of people in that region. He was surprised to discover in one Winchester home that the women were well-informed on French writers and discussed their works with considerable interest.<sup>105</sup> Bayard also observed that almost all of the residents of Winchester and Bath spent the Sabbath reading chapters from the Old and New Testaments.<sup>106</sup>

Due to the lack of records it has not been possible to describe the reading interests of all classes of Virginians. Evidence has been cited, however, which indicated that Virginians of different ranks found reading books a pleasurable diversion.<sup>107</sup>

The cultural pastimes of Virginians throughout the eighteenth century were notable for their diversity. Music and dancing appealed to all Virginians and provided entertainment in a variety of ways. The theater, as previously stated, generally was limited to town-dwellers and wealthy country people while reading books was enjoyed by greater numbers of Virginians as the years passed.

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105

Bayard, op. cit., p. 62.

106

Ibid., p. 87.

107

A fact which also supports this statement was that the Richmond Library and a library society were formed at the capital city in 1785. Virginia Gazette or American Advertiser, (James Hayes, ed.), July 30, 1785.

## CHAPTER IV

### FRIVOLOUS DIVERSIONS

#### Games

The games played by Virginians throughout the 1700's were characterized by their variety and spontaneity. Card-playing and cockfighting, although extremely different in nature, represent in respective order the primary indoor and outdoor amusements of the period. Billiards was a popular game on the plantations and in the taverns. Some records exist of lawn sports such as bowls, nine-pins and cricket. "Button" and "Break the Pope's Neck" were diversions about which little is known. The lower classes in the last quarter of the eighteenth century found much amusement in the brutal sport of gouging, a combination of boxing and wrestling.<sup>1</sup>

Whist, a forerunner of bridge, was probably the most popular card game in the Old Dominion. Piquet, loo and all-fours were less frequently played card games about which there is little evidence.

William Byrd II was an inveterate card player who often joined his wife and friends at whist.<sup>2</sup> He was a poor

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<sup>1</sup> Ewing, op. cit., pp. 23-27. See also Coiner, op. cit., p. 627.

<sup>2</sup> Byrd, The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712, p. 31.

loser, however, and at times a dishonest competitor. On August 27, 1709, he confided to his diary, "In the afternoon I played at piquet with my own wife and made her out of humor by cheating her."<sup>3</sup> Years later, in 1728, while establishing a dividing line between North Carolina and Virginia, Byrd stated that he and his men played cards in order to break the monotony of their work.<sup>4</sup>

At times when unfavorable weather interfered with George Washington's plantation duties and fox hunting he would seek relaxation through card-playing. We do not know the games which he favored as his diary entries generally stated, "At home all day at Cards. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

Philip Fithian's austere Presbyterian training caused him to view with disfavor the drinking and card-playing which he observed in Virginia. One of the most amusing passages in his diary was written in May, 1774, in which he said, "I am ashamed that I may record here what does no honor to my old Aunt, I saw her with three Partners round a table playing Cards at that vulgar game fit only for the meanest gamblers 'all-Fours'."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>4</sup>  
Byrd, William Byrd's Histories of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup>  
Washington, The Diaries of George Washington, I, 246.

<sup>6</sup>  
Fithian, op. cit., p. 140.

The drinking and card-playing which Fithian criticized were appreciated by another tutor, John Harrower, who described a gala occasion held at Colonel William Daingerfield's home in October, 1775.

Company here last night Vizt. Old Mrs. Waller, her son and his wife and at school there Mr. Heely Schoolmaster & Mrs. Brooks Carpenter and they with Mr. Frazer & myself played whist and danced untill 12 Oclock, Mr. Heely playing the Fiddle & dancing. We drank one bottle of rum in time.<sup>7</sup>

Virginians were a gambling people and even a "friendly" game of cards often involved the loss of a considerable sum of money. When Robert Hunter was forced by the weather to remain at a friend's house in Tappahannock, he remarked that his host insisted on playing whist until one o'clock in the morning. The next day Hunter sadly commented that he was opposed to playing whist especially since he lost thirty-six shillings.<sup>8</sup>

Benjamin Latrobe, the English architect-artist, was invited to play cards at a Petersburg home in April, 1796. His description of the evening's entertainment was excellent as he vividly depicted Virginians in an activity which they found very gratifying. Latrobe explained:

After dinner, and one bumper to the President's health, the whole party adjourned to the drawing-room. Loo, the most trifling of the ingenious contrivances

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<sup>7</sup>  
Harrower, op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>8</sup>  
Hunter, op. cit., p. 211.

invented to keep folk from the vile habit of biting their nails, made a very large party happy, whist affording a sulky delight to a few more. The rattling of dollars is a very pleasant sound when it is at last smothered by the folds of your pocket.<sup>9</sup>

A front page advertisement in the December 17, 1799, issue of the Virginia Gazette & Petersburg Intelligencer offers mute evidence of the apparent interest in card games in the state. It read: "Best Harry the VIII Playing Cards, For Sale at the office of the Printers hereof."<sup>10</sup>

Billiards was a game which appealed to many Virginians; it was even considered an acceptable pastime for ladies. William Byrd had a billiard table at Westover and practised the game religiously. His diary contains numerous accounts of his participation with both Mrs. Byrd and friends. "In the afternoon I played at billiards with my wife and then took a walk about the plantation," he recorded in November, 1709.<sup>11</sup> Two years later in Williamsburg Byrd was again playing billiards with a Colonel Smith who was also his opponent at whist and dice.<sup>12</sup>

More than a half century later billiards was still

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Latrobe, op. cit., p. 25.

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Virginia Gazette & Petersburg Intelligencer,  
(William Prentis, ed.), December 17, 1799.

11

Byrd, The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712, p. 112.

12

Ibid., p. 441.



being played with much enthusiasm. Philip Fithian, writing in 1774, complained of his lodging at a tavern. He said, "For Company all the night in my Room I had Bugs in every part of my Bed--& in the next Room several noisy Fellows playing at Billiards."<sup>13</sup>

A young Unitarian minister, Harry Toulmin, arriving at Norfolk in July, 1793, remarked that Virginians were "far from being religionists" because they played billiards on the Sabbath.<sup>14</sup> Later, while at Urbanna, Virginia, Toulmin criticized the men of that town for their indolence. He asserted that they had neither a religion nor business, but would "kill time on more than perhaps six days in the week at a public billiard table."<sup>15</sup> Toulmin's comments revealed not only the widespread interest in the game in the late 1700's but that many men neglected their work in order to play it.

Bowls, cricket and nine-pins were lawn games which were enjoyed by Virginians over two hundred years ago. Due to the absence of records it has been difficult to ascertain more than the fact that these sports were played on different

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<sup>13</sup>

Fithian, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>14</sup>

Harry Toulmin, The Western Country in 1793, ed. Marion Tinling and Godfrey Davies (San Marino, California: The Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1948), p. 19.

<sup>15</sup>

Ibid., p. 30.

occasions in the Old Dominion.

William Byrd described in his diary a cricket match which was held at Westover. He also related in 1721 that he had exhibited his skill at the bowling green on several occasions at Williamsburg.<sup>16</sup> The capital was not the only place where bowls entertained people, for several planters took pride in their well-kept playing greens. Fithian described a "perfectly level" area between his schoolhouse and the stable which Robert Carter had designed for a bowling green at Nomini Hall.<sup>17</sup> The nation's first President probably enjoyed lawn games himself, for in 1785 a visitor to Mount Vernon recorded that Washington had recently constructed a bowling green next to his house.<sup>18</sup>

Nine-pins, like bowls and cricket, was evidently a recreation of men of wealth who were able to construct playing greens and to keep them in good repair. In 1755 a Williamsburg merchant, Daniel Fisher, related that while he was on a horseback trip through Hanover County he observed

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William Byrd, The London Diary (1717-1721) and Other Writings, ed. Louis B. Wright and Marion Finling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 525-526. See also Byrd, The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712, p. 144.

17

Fithian, op. cit., p. 109.

18

Hunter, op. cit., p. 195.

"a number of planters at Nine-pins" next to an ordinary.<sup>19</sup>

There is little information concerning certain indoor games played in the 1700's. Tutor Philip Fithian freely engaged in many interesting forms of diversion created by the Carter family. He related in December, 1773, that he had played the game "Button," where in the course of "redeeming pawns," he received several kisses from the ladies. Later the same night Fithian joined guests in playing "Break the Pope's Neck," which gave the company much entertainment.<sup>20</sup>

Ten years later the young Virginia belle, Lucinda Lee, described two games which sound quite similar to those played by children today. Miss Lee said, "The old man being sick that plays the Fiddle, we have diverted ourselves playing grind the bottle and hide the thimble. Our time passes agreeably enough."<sup>21</sup>

Of the outdoor sports cockfighting was second only to horse racing in its popularity among the men of Virginia. Planters, farmers, Negroes and men of all stations not only attended the cock-matches, but quite frequently owned a

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Daniel Fisher, "The Fisher History," Some Prominent Virginia Families, ed. Louise P. du Bellet (Lynchburg, Virginia: J. P. Bell Company, Inc., 1907), II, 787.

20

Fithian, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

21

Lee, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

"brace of cocks" in which they took pride. This form of entertainment gained wide acceptance after the mid-eighteenth century and retained its appeal for several decades.<sup>22</sup>

Even that august gentleman George Washington found the cock-match an exciting spectacle. When he was at Yorktown in February, 1752, he related that a "Great Main of ck's" fought "tween Glouster and York for 5 pistoles each battle. . ." <sup>23</sup> Washington left, however, before the issue was decided.

Cockfights were frequently publicized in the newspaper, a fact which reveals that they had gained public acceptability. The March 17, 1768, issue of Purdie and Dixon's Gazette announced a contest to be held the following Monday at Sussex Courthouse between Brunswick and Sussex. The sponsors of the event claimed there would be thirty cocks on each side, with five pounds being offered for each battle and fifty pounds for the outcome. At night a ball was to be held for the ladies and gentlemen.<sup>24</sup> Two years later at the same location a match was held between "the Sussex and Charles City gentlemen," which was followed by

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<sup>22</sup>

Chastellux, op. cit., II, 386.

<sup>23</sup>

Washington, The Diaries of George Washington, I, 36.

<sup>24</sup>

Virginia Gazette, (Purdie and Dixon, eds.), March 17, 1768.

a dance.<sup>25</sup>

Cockfights were held throughout the colony in the early 1770's generally occurring at the county courthouses. The Gazette advertised matches at Gloucester Courthouse in the spring of 1772 and 1773.<sup>26</sup> In April of the latter year Williamsburg was the scene of "The Great Cock Match Between the Upland and Lowland Gentlemen" of the country.<sup>27</sup>

Philip Fithian described well the enthusiasm for the sport at Nomini Hall and in the surrounding country. "Before Breakfast, I saw a Ring of Negroes at the Stable, fighting Cocks," he commented on one occasion.<sup>28</sup> He also observed that Easter Monday was a general holiday and that the Negroes had "disbanded" for several days and were "all at Cock Fights throu the Country."<sup>29</sup> The young tutor refused to attend the matches himself, but he did allow his students to attend them.<sup>30</sup>

Travelers to the Old Dominion in the post-Revolutionary period often commented on the cruelty of cockfights.

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<sup>25</sup>

Ibid., February 22, 1770.

<sup>26</sup>

Ibid., May 28, 1772.

<sup>27</sup>

Ibid., April 22, 1773.

<sup>28</sup>

Fithian, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>29</sup>

Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>30</sup>

Ibid., p. 160.

They could not understand how Virginians could find amusement in such a sport. Ludwig von Closen, writing in 1782, remarked that he did not enjoy seeing the gamecocks "knocked about, pricked, blinded and finally killed with the steel spurs."<sup>31</sup> Chastellux, who toured Virginia in the same year, noted that planters came from thirty or forty miles away, many with cocks, and all with money to bet at the matches. The Frenchman after commenting on the "numerous assembly" gathered at the cockpit, said, "I know not which is most astonishing, the insipidity of such diversion, or the stupid interest with which it animates the parties."<sup>32</sup> Chastellux stated that a child of fifteen standing near him "leaped for joy and cried, 'Oh! it is a charming diversion!'"<sup>33</sup>

The most informative description of a Virginia cock-fight was recorded by Elkanah Watson of North Carolina who attended a match at Southampton County in 1787. Watson said:

The roads, as we approached the scene, were alive with carriages, horses, and pedestrians, black and white, hastening to the point of attraction. Several houses formed a spacious square, in the centre of which was arranged a large cock-pit; surrounded by many genteel people, promiscuously mingled with the vulgar and debased. Exceedingly beautiful cocks were produced, armed with long, sharp, steel-pointed gaffs, which were firmly attached to their natural spurs. The

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<sup>31</sup> Closen, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>32</sup> Chastellux, op. cit., II, 387.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

moment the birds were dropped, bets ran high. . . .

In viewing the crowd, I was deeply astonished to find men of character and intelligence giving their countenance to an amusement so frivolous and scandalous, so abhorrent to every feeling of humanity, and so injurious in its moral influence, by the inculcation of habits of gambling and drinking, in the waste of time, and often in the issues of fighting and dueling.<sup>34</sup>

The enthusiasm for cockfighting had greatly diminished by the late 1700's,<sup>35</sup> but another sport known as gouging was very prevalent during the period among the lower classes, primarily in the interior sections of the state.

Gouging was a combination of boxing and wrestling which was characterized by its brutality. Philip Fithian described it as an "odious and filthy amusement" attended by large numbers of people.<sup>36</sup> In the sport, Fithian said, "every diabolical Stratagem for Mastery is allowed & practised, of Bruising, Kicking, Scratching. Pinching. Biting, Butting, Tripping, Throting, Gouging, Cursing, Dismembering,

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<sup>34</sup>

Elkanah Watson, Men and Times of the Revolution; or Memoirs of Elkanah Watson, including Journals of Travels in Europe and America, from 1777 to 1842, with His Correspondence with Public Men and Incidents of the Revolution, ed. Winslow G. Watson (New York: Dana and Company, Publishers, 1856), pp. 261-262.

<sup>35</sup>

John Bernard stated in 1799, "At the time of which I am writing, racing was still the ruling diversion, to the credit of their taste and feeling, that vulgar brutality, cockfighting, has long fallen into neglect." Bernard, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>36</sup>

Fithian, op. cit., pp. 240-241.

Howling, &c."<sup>37</sup>

In 1778 Elkanah Watson was traveling through Hanover County when a pug-nosed fellow and a "wild Irishman" tried to force him into a boxing match with them.<sup>38</sup> Watson related that he had no sooner escaped that dilemma when he noticed a fight between two fat men who were puffing and foaming due to their exertions. The spectacle did not end, according to Watson, "until one succeeding in twisting a forefinger in a side-lock of the other's hair, and in the act of thrusting, by this purchase, his thumb into the latter's eye, he bawled out 'king's curse,' equivalent, in technical language, to 'enough.'"<sup>39</sup>

The quasi-pugilistic sport gained wide acceptance among the poorer inhabitants of the state. George Grieve, an English author, traveling through Virginia in the 1780's claimed that the lower classes of white inhabitants were indolent and dissipated. According to Grieve they neglected their work in order to watch barbarous boxing matches in which the combatants sought to remove each other's eyes and ears.<sup>40</sup> Ferdinand Bayard concurred with Grieve's remarks

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<sup>37</sup>

Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>38</sup>

Watson, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>39</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>

Chastellux, op. cit., II, 601-602.



for he noted that the same amusement was popular among the poorer people of Bath and Winchester in 1791.<sup>41</sup>

The games of Virginia thus appealed to people from different economic and cultural backgrounds. Card-playing and cockfighting were enjoyed by most Virginians; lawn games were favored by the gentry while gouging was primarily a sport of the lower classes. Regardless of their backgrounds, however, Virginians of all classes loved to gamble at the games which they played.

### Gaming

Virginians with their fondness for all forms of entertainment turned quite naturally to gaming. The many games which they pursued offered them numerous opportunities to place bets with the hope of increasing their "stake." Cards, dice, bowls, billiards, cockfights, horse races and most all other related activities became, at times, gambling games. Gambling was truly an activity which encompassed men of all stations in society, and many were willing to risk their fortunes on the turn of a card or the role of a die. The public tavern was a meeting place for planter and farmer alike who drank and gossiped while they gambled at billiards or dice. Laws were passed throughout the eighteenth century to prevent gaming, but they were ineffective as the populace

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Bayard, op. cit., p. 42. See also Weld, op. cit., I, 192.

considered it a respectable vice.<sup>42</sup>

It is interesting to note that certain men who were responsible for administering the political affairs of the colony were often irresponsible in their social affairs. As early as September, 1709, William Byrd II described a gaming incident involving colonial officials which is both amusing and revealing. In relating his arrival at Williamsburg and induction to the Governor's Council Byrd stated:

The President persuaded me to be sworn, which I agreed to, and accordingly went to Council. God grant that I may distinguish myself with honor and good conscience. . . . In the evening we went to the President's where I drank too much French wine and played at cards and I lost 20 shillings.<sup>43</sup>

Two years later Byrd recorded in his diary that he and other council members, who talked lewdly and were almost drunk, went to a coffeehouse and played at dice. Because he lost twelve pounds Byrd made a solemn resolution "never at once to lose more than 50 shillings and to spend less time in gaming. . . ."44

Gaming had become so widespread in Virginia that by 1728, with numerous suits being brought before the courts, the General Assembly enacted laws to restrict its influence.

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<sup>42</sup>

La Rochefoucauld, op. cit., III, 77-78. See also Stanard, Colonial Virginia, Its People and Customs, p. 148.

<sup>43</sup>

Byrd, The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712, p. 82.

<sup>44</sup>

Ibid., p. 442.

In effect, all notes, titles, bonds, and securities won or lent at gaming were made void.<sup>45</sup> An act of 1740 was passed to prevent the recovery of money won on wagers; and to achieve a "more effectual restraint of Gaming at Ordinaries."<sup>46</sup> Any inn-keeper who permitted guests to play cards or dice at his house, by day or night, was subject to a fine of ten pounds, one half of which was to be given to the informer. After one such conviction the ordinary-keeper's license was revoked.<sup>47</sup> By October, 1748, a similar act was passed reiterating the terms of the earlier acts but including greater governance over betting at horse races and cock-fights.<sup>48</sup>

The ineffectiveness of the above laws was best illustrated by a preacher's letter printed in Hunter's Gazette in April, 1751. The preacher, who was opposing an application made for an inn-keeper's license, stated:

. . . As it is notorious, that ordinaries are now, in a great Measure, perverted from their original Intention, and proper Use; viz. the Reception, Accommodation, and Refreshment of the weary and benighted Traveller; (which ends they least serve or answer) and are now become the common Receptacle, and Rendezvous of the very Dreggs of the People; even of the most lazy

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<sup>45</sup> Hening, op. cit., IV, 214.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., V, 102.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 102-103.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 442.

and dissolute, that are to be found in their respective neighbourhoods, where not only Time and Money are, vainly and unprofitably, squandered away, but (what is yet worse) where prohibited and unlawful Games, Sports, and Pastimes are used, followed, and practised, almost without any Intermission; namely Cards, Dice, Horse-racing, Cock-Fighting, together with Vices and Enormities of every other Kind. . . .<sup>49</sup>

The year following the preacher's complaint the "President and Masters" of the College of William and Mary warned that no scholar of any age, rank or quality was to be permitted to play or bet at "ye Billiard or other gaming Tables," or to own fighting cocks.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, students were told not to frequent or even be seen at ordinaries in or near the town unless called there by their relatives.<sup>51</sup>

Men of wealth and social standing demonstrated the same passion for gaming that was common among other classes in the country. John Blair, president of the Governor's Council, recorded in his memorandum book in 1753 that he had won a considerable sum of money from young William Byrd III of Westover. Blair also recorded winning money at cards and billiards from many other prominent gentlemen of the period.<sup>52</sup>

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Virginia Gazette, (William Hunter, ed.), April 11, 1751.

<sup>50</sup>

"Journal of the Meetings of the President and Masters of William and Mary College," p. 55.

<sup>51</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>

Stanard, Colonial Virginia, Its People and Customs, p. 149.

Those of the gentry who gambled did not always escape public criticism, however, for in 1762 several witnesses at the Augusta County Court swore that they saw "John Boyers, Gentleman," participating in unlawful card games at Francis Taylor's ordinary in Staunton.<sup>53</sup>

Travelers commented frequently on the propensity of Virginians for gambling; some even stated that it was the greatest vice in the country. An anonymous Frenchman who arrived at Williamsburg in April, 1765, found it to be a very disagreeable place due to the number of people carousing and gambling at the taverns. He asserted that there was not a public house in Virginia which did not have tables that had been "batered" by dice boxes.<sup>54</sup> Many of the planters, the Frenchman claimed, were professed gamblers, especially William Byrd III who had "reduced himself to such a degree by gaming" that few people would extend him credit.<sup>55</sup> "There are many of them who have very great Estates, but are mostly at loss for Cash," the Frenchman concluded.<sup>56</sup>

Nicholas Cresswell, writing a few years later, came

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Ibid.

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"Journal of a French Traveller in the Colonies, 1765," American Historical Review, XXVI (July, 1921), 742-743.

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Ibid., p. 742.

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Ibid., p. 743.

to the same conclusion about Virginians, for he said, "It appears to me that there is a scarcity of Cash amongst the people of all ranks here. They Game high, Spend freely, . . . but I observe they seldom show any money, it is all Tobacco Notes."<sup>57</sup>

Young boys readily adopted the habits of their elders and could be found wagering money at the horse races and cockfights throughout the countryside. Philip Fithian's remarks about one of his students depicted a common problem. "Harry's Genius seems towards Cocks & low Betts, much in company with the waiting Boys, & against my strongest Remonstrances, & frequent Corrections. . . ."<sup>58</sup> Landon Carter tersely expressed similar feelings when he noted in his journal, "My sons Robert & John came home. Believes them to have been at the gaming table. 'Burn me if I pay anything more for such sport.'"<sup>59</sup>

The American Revolution interrupted or suspended many diversions in the state, but gaming continued to gain in popularity during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. In 1779, in an apparent attempt to force both state and military officials to refrain from gaming, the General

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<sup>57</sup>

Cresswell, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

<sup>58</sup>

Fithian, op. cit., p. 250.

<sup>59</sup>

Carter, op. cit., p. 160.

Assembly passed an act which stated:

If any person by playing or betting at any game or wager whatsoever at any time within the space of twenty four hours shall lose or win, to or from another, a greater sum . . . than five pounds, the loser and the winner shall be rendered incapable of holding any office, civil or military, within the state, during the space of two years. . . .<sup>60</sup>

Many men of wealth, due to their gaming habits, placed themselves in dire financial conditions. Planters would often ride into town to sell the produce of their plantations only to lose it all at the billiard table in one night.<sup>61</sup> Joseph Hadfield, an English merchant, arriving in Virginia in 1785 commented that Virginia women were good wives and managers which was fortunate, for the men were dissipated gamblers who indulged in play to an excessive degree. While staying in Norfolk on one occasion, Hadfield claimed that he was awakened by the "vociferations" of Virginia planters gaming in the next building which was a "perfect Hell if swearing and excesses could make it so."<sup>62</sup>

The ubiquitous popularity of gaming in the state was further illustrated through accounts made by travelers to

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<sup>60</sup>

Hening, op. cit., X, 205-206.

<sup>61</sup>

J. R., The Port Folio; or a View of the Manners and Customs of Various Countries; Interspersed with Anecdotes of Former Times (London: Dean and Schulze, 1812), II, 104-105.

<sup>62</sup>

Joseph Hadfield, An Englishman in America, 1785 being the Diary of Joseph Hadfield, ed. Douglas S. Robertson (Toronto: The Hunter-Rose Co., 1933), p. 5.

the interior and western sections of Virginia in the 1790's. Ferdinand Bayard observed that the banker in the game of faro was considered a gentleman of high esteem in the western towns and was invited to important social affairs. All men of note in Bath considered it a "mark of respect" to be present at the first "sitting" of the faro banker.<sup>63</sup> "Gambling provides for expenses that luxury demands," Bayard remarked, "and Virginians are not free from vanity. They are nearly all gamblers."<sup>64</sup>

The General Assembly attempted again in 1792 to "prevent unlawful gaming," but the law was not enforced.<sup>65</sup> In fact, Isaac Weld, who was visiting the capital in 1796, stated that there was more gambling in Richmond than perhaps in any city its size in the world.<sup>66</sup> At one tavern Weld was invited to play at faro, hazard and billiard tables which were operated openly and attended by numbers of "low-lived fellows."<sup>67</sup> La Rochefoucauld, who toured Richmond in the

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Bayard, op. cit., p. 51.

64

Ibid., p. 52. See also Toulmin, op. cit., p. 33.

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Samuel Shepherd (ed.) The Statutes at Large of Virginia from October Session 1792, to December Session 1806, Inclusive, in Three Volumes, (New Series) Being a Continuation of Hening (Richmond: Printed by Samuel Shepherd, 1835), I, 106-110.

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Weld, op. cit., I, 191.

67

Ibid.



same year as Weld, also complained about the gaming tables which were "publicly kept" in almost every town and particularly in the capital.<sup>68</sup> The Frenchman accounted for the ineffectiveness of the state gaming law of 1792 when he stated:

. . . To the present hour, the greatest number of those who enacted that law--of the present legislators, the justices of the peace, and the other magistrates--are assiduous in their attendance at those feasts of gambling.<sup>69</sup>

Travelers visiting the homes and taverns throughout Virginia during the 1700's commented on the passion for gaming among most residents of the Old Dominion. August Wilhelm Du Roi, a German soldier who fought with the British forces in America, best described the feelings of numerous travelers when he said, "In short, a Virginia gentleman is a sociable, courteous, good creature, who has only one fault, that he is too fond of gambling."<sup>70</sup>

### Drinking

Eighteenth-century Virginians had a propensity to

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La Rochefoucauld, op. cit., III, 77-78.

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Ibid., III, 78.

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August Wilhelm Du Roi, Journal of Du Roi, the Elder, Lieutenant and Adjutant, in the Service of the Duke of Brunswick, 1776-1778, tr. Charlotte S. J. Epping (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1911), p. 159. See also John Harriott, Struggles through Life Exemplified in the Various Travels and Adventures in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, of Lieut. John Harriott (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), II, 89-90.

drinks of all kinds. Being a convivial, gregarious, fun-loving and hospitable society, it is understandable. They drank juleps in the early morning hours and wine, punch, toddy or beer at any time during the day or night, for reasons of health, to cheer their spirits and because it was necessary to the practice of hospitality. The residents of the Old Dominion made "home-brew" from persimmons, apples, peaches and molasses which was consumed in great amounts. The meeting of the county court or the holding of an election was a special occasion generally followed by considerable drinking which, like so many diversions of the region, was spontaneous and without true restraint.<sup>71</sup>

As early as 1705 the General Assembly had enacted laws to punish those found swearing, cursing or drunk in public. The offender had to pay the sum of five shillings, or fifty pounds of tobacco, for every offense.<sup>72</sup>

Those who were entrusted with the power to regulate the behavior of others were not always circumspect in their own actions. William Byrd II, member of the Council of State, recorded the following amusing incidents which occurred at Williamsburg in 1709:

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Weld, op. cit., I, 206. See also Stanard, Colonial Virginia, Its People and Customs, pp. 126-128.

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Hening, op. cit., III, 359-360.

October 27, 1709- We went to court and sat till 4 o'clock. . . . In the evening we played at cards and I won £ 5. We drank some of Will Robinson's cider till we were very merry and then went to the coffee-house and pulled poor Colonel Churchill out of bed.

October 28, 1709- We went to court but much time was taken up in reading our letters and not much business was done. About 3 we rose and had a meeting of the College in which it was agreed to turn Mr. Blackamore out from being so great a sot.<sup>73</sup>

Two years later, on February 7, 1711, William Byrd stated that Governor Spotswood had made an agreement with his servants that if they would forbear drinking on the Queen's birthday, they might get drunk a following day. Byrd observed that the servants "honored the contract and got very drunk today."<sup>74</sup>

Probably the most interesting account of drinking which would be typical of the Virginia gentry occurred in 1716 during Governor Spotswood's celebrated expedition to the region beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains. The men, not wanting to make the trip a bore, attempted to empty what must have been one of the greatest traveling cellars in Virginia. John Fontaine, a member of the cavalcade, explained:

We had a good dinner, and after it we got the men together, and loaded all their arms, and we drank the King's health in Champagne, and fired a volley--the Princess's health in Burgundy, and fired a volley, and all the rest of the royal family in claret, and

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<sup>73</sup>

Byrd, William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712, p. 98.

<sup>74</sup>

Ibid., p. 208.

a volley. We drank the Governor's health and fired another volley. We had several sorts of liquors, viz., Virginia red wine and white wine, Irish usquebough, brandy, shrub, two sorts of rum, Champagne, canary, cherry, punch, water, cider, &c.<sup>75</sup>

Many farmers and planters set out orchards in which were raised apples, peaches and nectarines. Great quantities of cider was made from the produce of the orchards as well as peach brandy and persimmon beer.<sup>76</sup> Hugh Jones, writing in 1724, stated that Virginians raised barley and could "brew as good beer as in England" although they preferred a strong malt known as Bristol beer which they consumed in vast quantities.<sup>77</sup>

Virginians imported some liquors which they could not make themselves. In 1728 William Byrd II, whose drinking exploits have been mentioned, had the temerity to criticize the merchants of Norfolk for "debauching the Country by importing abundance of Rum, which, like Ginn, . . . breaks the Constitution, Vitiates the Morals, and ruins the Industry of most of the Poor people of this Country."<sup>78</sup> It is interesting to note that in the same year Byrd stated that on long trips he and his men remembered their wives with a

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<sup>75</sup> Fontaine, op. cit., pp. 288-289.

<sup>76</sup> Salmon, op. cit., XXX, 389-390.

<sup>77</sup> Jones, op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>78</sup> Byrd, William Byrd's Histories of the Dividing Line, p. 36.

"bunker of excellent Cherry Brandy."<sup>79</sup>

The Virginia Gazette on September 10, 1736, commented favorably on a recent act of the General Assembly which was designed to restrain the excessive drinking of spiritous liquors. The act prohibited the selling of liquors in "bulk," in the streets, from a wheel-barrow, or from a boat. No master was to give liquor to his servants or to pay any part of a workman's labor in liquor.<sup>80</sup>

Elections in Virginia were often accompanied by an excessive amount of drinking. It was common practice for candidates to treat the voters with large bowls of toddy, punch or other intoxicating beverages. The crowds, at times, were unruly and riots were not uncommon events. On one occasion in 1740 a militia captain treated his men to forty gallons of cider and twenty gallons of punch while requesting that they vote for Beverley Whiting of Gloucester County. Whiting was elected but the committee on elections of the House of Burgesses rejected his election charging him with using both coercive means and liquor to secure votes.<sup>81</sup> Years later, however, the House refused to recognize candidate Landon Carter's complaint that William Fauntleroy had

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Ibid., p. 197.

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Virginia Gazette, (William Parks, ed.), September 10, 1736.

81

Richard L. Morton, Colonial Virginia (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960), II, 504.

won the election in Richmond County by giving the voters strong drink. The House seated Fauntleroy because it could not be proven that he was responsible, directly or indirectly, for several of the voters being "merry with liquor."<sup>82</sup>

In July, 1758, when George Washington was a candidate for election in Frederick County his agent dispensed over 160 gallons of liquid refreshment to 391 voters. This was equivalent to more than a quart and a half per person. The voters were provided with a variety of beverages which included: "28 gallons of rum, 50 gallons of rum punch, 34 gallons of wine, 46 gallons of beer and 2 gallons of royal cider."<sup>83</sup>

Nicholas Oresswell recorded in his journal on July 14, 1774, that he attended an election at Alexandria where the candidates "Major Bedwater" and "Col. George Washington gave the populace a Hogshead of Toddy."<sup>84</sup>

Travelers were quite critical of the intemperance which they witnessed among Virginians attending official functions. Robert Hunter, while at Tappahannock, commented

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<sup>82</sup>

Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>83</sup>

Charles S. Sydnor, Gentlemen Freeholders, Political Practices in Washington's Virginia (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1952), p. 54.

<sup>84</sup>

Oresswell, op. cit., pp. 27-28. See also Washington, The Diaries of George Washington, II, 156-157.

in January, 1786, "It being court day the town is very full, though what they come for God knows, excepting it's to get drunk. No other business seems to be going on."<sup>85</sup> Hunter also noted that in April of the same year an election was held and almost every man, black as well as white, got drunk.<sup>86</sup>

Election days in the western towns of the state were also characterized by reveling, brawls and public drunkenness. Ferdinand Bayard, while visiting at Winchester in 1791, explained:

When the candidates have made their platform known through the newspapers, the electioneering agents set to work and give drinks to those whom they wish to control. In order that the recruiting may be done at one and the same time, the public is often notified that a meeting will be held on such a day at such a tavern, to clarify the opinion of the voters.<sup>87</sup>

Parties and other social gatherings were occasions where devotees of Bacchus might enjoy themselves. The Robert Carter family was well known for their gala parties in the 1770's, at which much drinking and toasting were done. Fithian stated that he attended many of these occasions where the guests drank for pleasure, toasted the "Sons of

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<sup>85</sup>

Hunter, op. cit., p. 219.

<sup>86</sup>

Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>87</sup>

Bayard, op. cit., pp. 65-66.

America," and sang liberty songs.<sup>88</sup>

In the late 1700's travelers in Virginia made various comments regarding the drinking habits of the people. Although they seldom agreed, their observations were both amusing and informative.

Brissot de Warville, a Frenchman who was a guest at Mount Vernon, related in 1792 that General George Washington had informed him that a great reformation had occurred in Virginia. The inhabitants, Brissot was told, were less given to intoxication and it was "no longer fashionable for a man to force his guests to drink, and to make it an honor to send them home drunk."<sup>89</sup>

Two years later in Norfolk Harry Toulmin, the Unitarian minister, claimed that he was offered a julep as soon as he arose and peach brandy or rum throughout the day.<sup>90</sup> Another visitor to Norfolk in 1794 commented on the "boozing ken" or bottle-tipping place in the town which was a scene of much drunkenness.<sup>91</sup>

Isaac Weld also complained about the intemperance of Virginians who began each day with several drams of brandy.

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<sup>88</sup>

Fithian, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>89</sup>

Brissot, op. cit., pp. 433-434.

<sup>90</sup>

Toulmin, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>91</sup>

Moreau, op. cit., p. 57.



Weld asserted that there was "hardly a house to be found with two rooms in it, but where the inhabitants have a still."<sup>92</sup>

One of the most humorous descriptions of the Virginia planter's love for drink was recorded in 1799 by John Bernard, the English actor-comedian. Bernard claimed that the planter arose late in the morning, concluded his breakfast with a mint-sling, then relaxed in a cool room with a Negress at his head fanning away the flies. Between twelve and one o'clock "his throat would require another emulsion" so he would sip a mysterious drink called bumbo.<sup>93</sup> After riding around the plantation and conversing with the overseers, he would dine at three, at which time he "drank everything--brandy, claret, cider, Maderia, punch, and sangaree."<sup>94</sup> Upon completing dinner he meditated until dusk when his throat became inflamed again for which he would prescribe "cooling washes until bedtime."<sup>95</sup>

Whether Virginians found their entertainment in games, gaming or drinking, they revealed a deep appreciation for companionship. This love of conviviality was graphically

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<sup>92</sup> Weld, op. cit., I, 206.

<sup>93</sup> Bernard, op. cit., p. 151.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

described by Thomas Gwatkin, a professor at the College of William and Mary in 1774. His observations serve as a fitting close to this chapter as the final toast served to end many successful gatherings in the Old Dominion.

Gwatkin related:

After the Cloth is taken away both at dinner and supper; Madeira and punch or toddy is placed upon the table. The first toasts which are given by the Master of the family, are the King; the Queen and royal family; the Governour and Virginia; a good price for Tobacco. After this, if the Company be in humor to drink, the ladies retire, and the Gentlemen give every man his Lady; then a round of friends succeeds; and afterwards each of the Company gives a Sentiment; then the Gentleman of the house drinks to all the friends of his Company and at last concludes with drinking a good Afternoon or good Evening according to the time of day.<sup>96</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Virginians of all classes during the eighteenth century spent their leisure time in basically the same manner. The widely dispersed rural society of the Old Dominion created a situation which was conducive to extended visits by both friends and strangers who offered a welcome break from the monotony of rural living. Families on plantations, farms and humbler dwellings kept their tables well provided with food and drink. Barbecues, fish-feasts and picnics were outdoor activities attended by children and adults of all ages.

Virginians were sportsmen and actively pursued numerous outdoor sports throughout the 1700's. Horseback riding, hunting and horse races were recreational activities which were easily accessible to everyone. Horse racing was the major sport in the Old Dominion and provided thrills and inexpensive entertainment for the entire populace.

Of the indoor amusements music and dancing were enjoyed by the greatest number of people. Whether Virginians danced jigs in small cabins to a fiddler's tune, or attended opulent balls followed by well-performed concerts, they were equally pleased. Virginians could be justifiably proud of other cultural pastimes. Their theaters were well attended and the audiences were able to see professional actors perform Shakespearean tragedies and comedies as well as varied

dramatical works. Some of the finest libraries in America were collected in Virginia, and evidence supports the belief that reading was found to be a pleasurable pastime among the different classes of society.

Frivolous pastimes occupied no small part of the Virginian's leisure hours. Almost every game, with few exceptions, became a gambling game. Men of the period of every rank had a passion for gaming. They bet on horses, gamecocks, billiards, cards and all other games of chance. Laws were passed to prevent gambling, but the legislators were prominent participants in the activity themselves.

Virginians of the eighteenth century were a pleasure-loving people, and no aspect of their behavior better illustrated this fact than their fondness for drinking. They consumed vast quantities of liquor in their homes and at public taverns. On most occasions where friends met, toasts were drunk and songs were sung. The sociability and conviviality for which the Old Dominion is well known were much in evidence around the toasting bowl.

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