

"A WORK TO WONDER AT:" THE LANDSCAPE GARDEN AS A MODEL  
FOR HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION AT STRATFORD HALL PLANTATION

by

STEPHANIE N. BRYAN

(Under the Direction of Eric A. MacDonald)

ABSTRACT

In the twenty-first century, many Americans are becoming increasingly disconnected from the heritage of place. Consequently, many American historic sites and house museums face persistently declining visitation rates. Numerous variables contribute to this trend, including prevailing methods of historical interpretation at historic sites. This thesis adopts the English landscape garden as a precedent and model to interpret American history in historic and cultural landscapes with Stratford Hall Plantation in Westmoreland County, Virginia, serving as a case study. Finally, this study suggests how the Stratford Hall landscape might be conceived as a 21<sup>st</sup>-century landscape garden, and how such a strategy might offer one way to reengage Americans with historic sites.

INDEX WORDS:     landscape architecture, cultural landscape management, historical  
interpretation, eighteenth-century English landscape garden, Stratford Hall  
plantation

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*For my grandmother.*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Alexis de Tocqueville once stated that “When the past no longer illuminates the future, the spirit walks in darkness.”<sup>1</sup> The spirit of America *is* walking in darkness. Today, less than one-quarter of American students test proficient in U.S. history.<sup>2</sup> This statistic is at once startling and unsettling. Clearly, in this modern American society, something is amiss in that many traditional methods of learning about the past are failing to resonate with the youth of America.

In the recent past, historic sites and house museums have served as a way for Americans to learn about history. In the twenty-first century, however, visitation rates are steadily declining and these places are struggling to capture the waning attention of young Americans, who acquire and process information in ways distinctly different from their predecessors. Consequently, many Americans are becoming increasingly disconnected from the heritage of place.

Yet, many house museums and historic sites comprise a larger cultural and historic landscape that has often been overlooked as an ever-evolving textbook of history.<sup>3</sup> Historic and cultural landscapes can serve as both a museum, exhibiting objects of enduring value, *and* as a muse, or renewable source of inspiration through the experiences created by those objects and their settings. These landscapes hold great potential for reengaging the American imagination, reawakening an interest in American history, and reinventing value in the heritage of place. The

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville and Arthur Goldhammer, *Democracy in America*, The Library of America 147 (New York: Library of America: Distributed to the trade in the U.S. by Penguin Putnam, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> National Assessment Governing Board, "The Nation's Report Card," Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, [http://nationsreportcard.gov/ushistory\\_2010/summary.asp](http://nationsreportcard.gov/ushistory_2010/summary.asp).

<sup>3</sup> Catherine M. Howett, "The Role of the Interpretive Program in the Restoration of Historic Landscapes," in *Breaking Ground: Examining the Vision and Practice of Historic Landscape Restoration. Proceedings of the Eleventh Conference on Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes, October 2-4, 1999* (Winston-Salem: Old Salem, 1999), 59.

thesis considers ways to unleash this untapped energy. Thus, it asks the question: How can the landscape architect intervene through the cultural landscapes of historic sites to create an enduring resonance with many and varied generations of Americans? Furthermore, *why* is it important to do so?

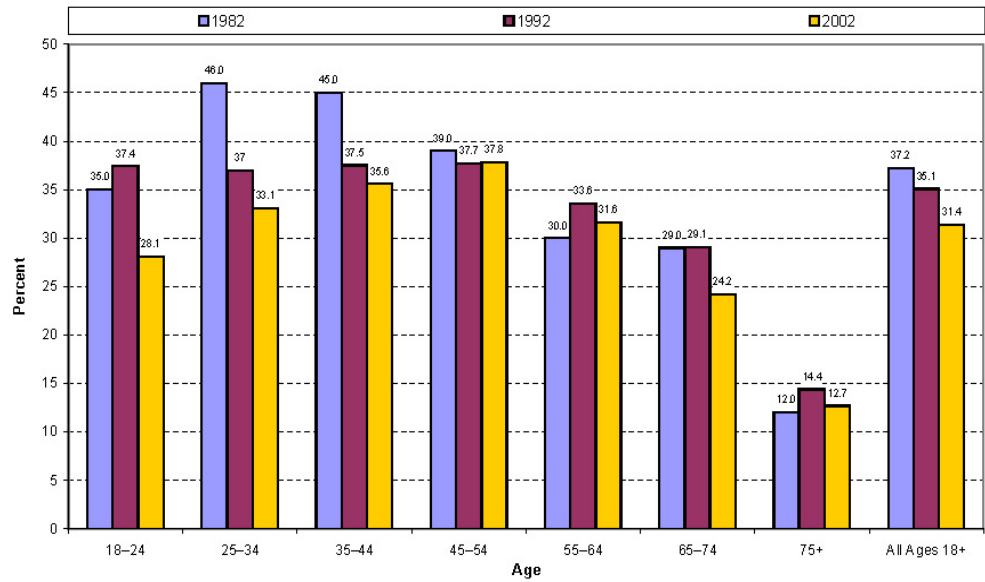
### *Defining the Context*

It is no secret that America's historic sites and historical museums are confronting downward trends in visitation that were set into motion some thirty years ago.<sup>4</sup> The public shift toward a general nationwide detachment from these places can be attributed to a number of forces, exacerbated by the current economic recession.<sup>5</sup> Nearly three decades ago, the National Endowment for the Arts assessed visitation rates through a survey that asked participants the question: "Did you [in the past year] visit a historic park or monument, or tour buildings or neighborhoods for their historic or design value?" The resulting datum indicated that the percentage of Americans responding "yes" to this inquiry steadily decreased from 37% in 1982 to 31% in 2002. They also reveal the decline is concentrated most heavily in the 25- to 44-year-old population (Figure 1.0), which remains greatly comprised of parents of young and adolescent children. The same data further illustrate a generational difference in the likelihood of visiting a historic site (Figure 1.1). It suggests that Americans born between 1938 and 1947 held a 45% greater likelihood of visiting a historic site in the previous twelve months when they were in the 35- to 44-year-old age range than those born between 1958 and 1967, who were only 35.6% likely to do so at the same age. Additionally, the data indicate an overall "graying" of the

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<sup>4</sup> Cary Carson, "History Museums: What's Plan B?," *The Public Historian* 30, no. 4 (2008).

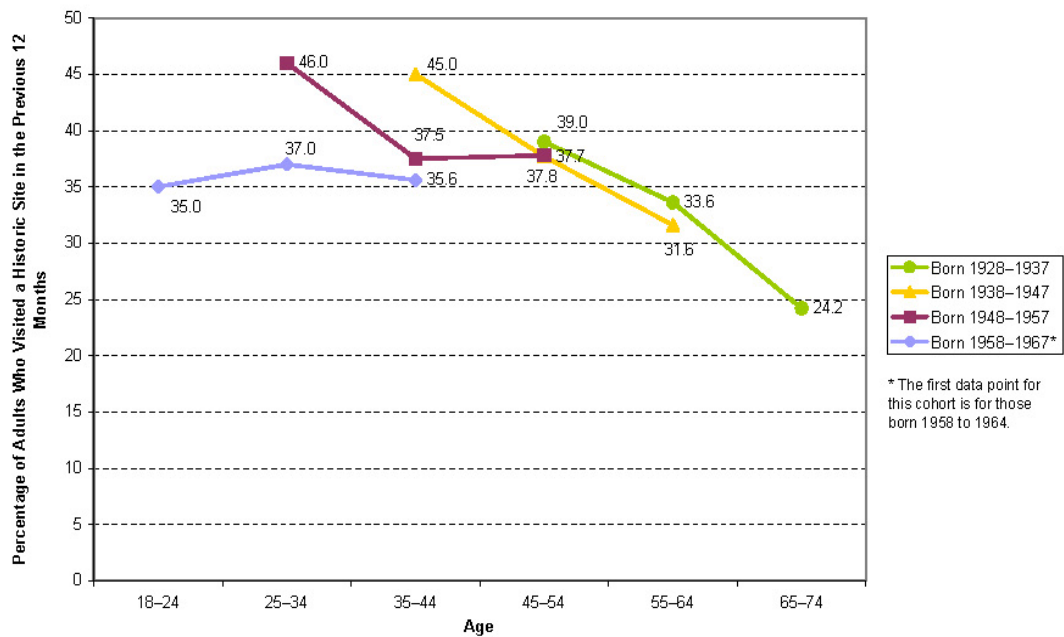
<sup>5</sup> National Trust for Historic Preservation, "How Cultural Heritage Tourism Can Beat the Recession," [http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/heritage-tourism/survival-toolkit/?region=&attraction\\_type=state-parks&heritage\\_tourism\\_strategy=](http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/heritage-tourism/survival-toolkit/?region=&attraction_type=state-parks&heritage_tourism_strategy=). In an effort to combat the recent economic downturn, the National Trust has put forth a "survival toolkit" with eleven strategies and case studies to assist a broad range of attractions.



Source: The National Endowment for the Arts, Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (1982, 1992, 2002).

Humanities Indicators, 2006 • American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Figure 1.1. Percentage of Americans Who Visited a Historic Site in the Previous 12 Months, by age. Source: The National Endowment for the Arts, Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (1982, 1992, 2002).



\* The first data point for this cohort is for those born 1958 to 1964.

Source: National Endowment for the Arts, Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (1982, 1992, 2002).

Humanities Indicators, 2006 • American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Figure 1.2. Rates of Historical Site Visitation, by Cohort. Source: The National Endowment for the Arts, Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (1982, 1992, 2002).

average historic site visitor—a fact that should not be disregarded.<sup>6</sup>

In 2007, Reach Advisors, a marketing research firm serving the museum community, conducted a survey that further substantiates these claims. They noted that historic sites and historical museums ranked last among eight types of museums measured in their family survey, with only 31% of respondents visiting historic sites and 23% attending historical museums. Additionally, these destinations remained the least popular among all demographic groups.<sup>7</sup>

With a plethora of visual media, theme parks, and shopping malls, historical museums and historic sites clearly are failing to command the attention of varied populations across America.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the rural locations of many historic sites and historical museums likely factor into these statistics. For example, visitors to historic sites and historical museums must make a concentrated effort to drive to these often remote places. On the other hand, institutions such as art museums, science museums, aquariums, and botanical gardens, frequently clustered in dense urban areas, are more likely to attract people living in close proximity.

In Virginia, a characteristically rural state, historic site visitation stands in line with national averages, according to the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA), which delivered a 2008 press release admitting to a twenty-year decline in walk-up visitation to historic sites and house museums.<sup>9</sup> Even Colonial Williamsburg, a widely recognized historic site, reported that 2010 brought its worst paid attendance in forty-seven

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<sup>6</sup> The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, "Indicator V-13 Historic Site Visits," <http://www.humanitiesindicators.org/content/hrcoVC.aspx#topV13>. The SPPA seeks visitation data purely from individuals. The National Park Service (NPS) utilizes an alternative means of annually gauging visitation rates. Their data, however, must be interpreted differently as it does not differentiate international from national visitors, and multiple visits from an individual are not distinguished. For statistics from the NPS go to: <http://www.nature.nps.gov/stats/park.cfm>.

<sup>7</sup> James Chung, Sally Johnstone, and Susie Wilkening, "Family Visitation at Museums, Part 2: Historic Sites and History Museums," in *Museum Audience Insight: Audience research, trends, observations from Reach Advisors and friends*. (New York 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Carson, "History Museums: What's Plan B?," 12.

<sup>9</sup> "Press Release: APVA Preservation Virginia to Test Change in Operations at 3 of Its Historic Sites," <http://www.apva.org/PressRoom/PressRelease.php?id=94>.

years.<sup>10</sup> Thus, it is not surprising to read the June 11, 2010, blog where executive director, Paul Reber, added the slightly lesser known Stratford Hall plantation to the list of struggling historic sites, stating that “it is clear these trends reflect a significant cultural shift in the way Americans understand the past... In short, being led around an old house and being lectured about the dead (and usually white) occupants is not the attraction it was for our grandparents.”<sup>11</sup>

In addition to an evolution in the way Americans learn history, an overabundance of historic sites and historical museums compounds this issue by creating competition among one another.<sup>12</sup> In 2007, twenty-eight senior museum professionals met at Kykuit, the Rockefeller family estate-turned-conference center, to troubleshoot these problems. Participants not only acknowledged that, perhaps, too many historic sites and historical museums exist today, but that a majority offer similarly passive learning experiences. One attendee suggested that the typical offerings are “tired and antiquated—disconnected from both current issues and from their own communities.”<sup>13</sup>

Terry Davis, president of the American Association for State and Local History, insists that the large “destination sites,” such as the Mount Vernons and Williamsburgs face the most difficulty as their vast properties grow increasingly expensive to maintain. While management costs accrue, many historic sites and historical museums grasp the false hope that “new galleries, blockbuster exhibitions, souped-up period rooms, or major acquisitions will somehow bring back

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<sup>10</sup> Steve Vaughn, "Attendance Sinks to a 47-Year Low," *The Virginia Gazette*, Saturday, February 13, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Reber, "Re-Discovering Stratford Hall," in *Stratford Hall Blog: New Projects and Innovative Ideas* (Stratford: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, 2010 ).

<sup>12</sup> Harold Skramstad, "An Agenda for American Museums in the Twenty-First Century," *Daedalus* 128, no. 3 (1999).

<sup>13</sup> "Rethinking the Historic House Museum of the 21st Century," (paper presented at the The Kykuit Summit: The Sustainability of Historic Sties, Kykuit Conference Center, Autumn 2007).

the lost audiences of yesteryear.”<sup>14</sup> Aside from opening night, there is no persistent impact in increasing visitation or reconnecting Americans with the heritage of place.

The film industry, on occasion, positively impacts tourism of historic sites and historical museums.<sup>15</sup> For example, the initial excitement and interest in history generated by war films that feature popular young Hollywood actors, such as *Ride with the Devil*, may draw younger generations to these sites. Similarly, anniversaries and re-airings of epics such as *Gone with the Wind* often reinvigorate older generations. Other promotional activities also provide temporary boosts in visitation. For example, as the nation prepared to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the start of the Civil War on April 12, 2011, *Newsweek* quickly pointed out that visitation at Civil War-related national parks was on the rise, with a 6.4 percent increase occurring between 2008 and 2009.<sup>16</sup> At first glance, it is difficult to turn away from the initial promise of these statistics. However, a broader look reveals a pendulum swing thrust into action by isolated events that will once again lose momentum as time passes. Unfortunately, these instances offer only a short-term sense of optimism. There is a growing need for enduring solutions if these sites hope to survive to teach younger generations of Americans about their past.

A glimpse at the projected population changes in the United States over the next forty years further substantiates this call to reevaluate interpretation at American historic sites and historical museums. A report by the U.S. Census Bureau predicts that non-Hispanic whites will no longer comprise the majority of the American population by 2050. While non-Hispanic whites composed 85% of the population in 1960, they are expected to significantly decline by

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<sup>14</sup> Cited in Carson, "History Museums: What's Plan B?," 13-14.

<sup>15</sup> Janine Kelso, "Georgia Prepares for *Gone with the Wind* Anniversary," *Travel Weekly*, <http://www.travelweekly.co.uk/Articles/2009/05/07/30892/us-georgia-prepares-for-gone-with-the-wind-anniversary.html>.

<sup>16</sup> David A. Graham, "Battle over the Battlefields," *Newsweek*, January 13, 2011.

nearly half to only 46.3% in 2050. The report foresees the Hispanic<sup>17</sup> population nearly doubling from 16% today to 30% by 2050. Furthermore, 82% of the increase in population from 2005 to 2050 will be due to immigration.<sup>18</sup> The data reveal a greater challenge looming on the horizon.

While other statistics indicate that historic sites and history museums maintain a predominantly white audience, the extrapolated population shift suggests that the nationwide base of visitors is rapidly diminishing. Consequently, the population shift is expected to result in a notable change in spending. Over the next ten years, aggregate earnings among whites in the 25-54 year-old age range are projected to decrease by \$258 billion. This datum does not suggest that those individuals will be making less money, but rather there will be fewer people making large salaries. Since most museums have member and donor bases that are generally ninety percent white, funding will likely also become scarcer. Given these circumstances, it is all the more crucial for historic sites and historical museums to reach out to diverse groups of people. This may become increasingly difficult because their histories often lack direct connections to these places.<sup>19</sup>

Population changes, competition generated among historic sites and historical museums, mass media, the current economic recession, remote locations, skyrocketing gas prices, and shifting values contribute to this widening chasm among Americans and the heritage of place. However, data from several surveys by Reach Advisors offer some critical considerations for managers of historic sites and historical museums trying to connect with an evolving American

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<sup>17</sup> Hispanics or Latinos are those people who classified themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 questionnaire - "Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano," "Puerto Rican", or "Cuban"-as well as those who indicate that they are "other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino." Persons who indicated that they are "other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino" include those whose origins are from Spain, the Spanish-speaking countries of Central or South America, the Dominican Republic or people identifying themselves generally as Spanish, Spanish-American, Hispanic, Hispano, Latino, and so on.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "USA Quick Facts," (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> James Chung, Sally Johnstone, and Susie Wilkening, "What Do Race and Ethnicity Have to Do with Future Museum Income? Everything!," <http://reachadvisors.typepad.com/>.

population. For example, a survey conducted in 2008 suggests that families who visit historic sites express a desire to experience history beyond the common "nine to five" time frame.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, a survey of over 40,000 museum-going households in 2010 indicates that history museum respondents were divided among their preferences for historical interpretation: nearly half of respondents favored experiencing a historic site or historical museum on their own, while the remainder preferred speaking with staff through a guided tour. This poses a challenge to managers of historic sites and historical museums trying to accommodate both audiences.<sup>21</sup> Finally, data collected from surveys on visitation rates in 2007 indicate that, while historic sites and historical museums struggle to entice crowds, many American families continue visiting art and natural history museums, science and nature centers, botanical gardens and arboretums.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, managers may consider ways to extend historical interpretation beyond the workday time frame, to offer the option of either self-exploration or guided tours, and to combine learning about history with art, nature, and science. Many historic sites and house museums comprise larger cultural and historic landscapes. These landscapes thus provide a stage upon which many historic sites and house museums can meet the learning needs of the American population. They are places where Americans can reconnect with history and nature. The thesis thus explores how landscape architects can manage historic and cultural landscapes in ways that create an enduring resonance with many and varied generations of Americans.

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<sup>20</sup> Erica Donnis, "'History Was Not Just 9 to 5:' Extended Experiences at Museums," in *Museum Audience Insight: Audience research, trends, observations from Reach Advisors and friends*. (New York: Reach Advisors, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> James Chung, Sally Johnstone, and Susie Wilkening, "Interpretation Preferences: How 40,000 Museum-Goers Prefer to Experience Museums," [http://reachadvisors.typepad.com/museum\\_audience\\_insight/2010/05/interpretation-preferences-how-40000-museumgoers-prefer-to-experience-museums.html](http://reachadvisors.typepad.com/museum_audience_insight/2010/05/interpretation-preferences-how-40000-museumgoers-prefer-to-experience-museums.html).

<sup>22</sup> James Chung, Sally Johnstone, and Susie Wilkening, "Family Visitation at Museums, Part 1: Science Centers, Natural History Museums, and Nature Centers," in *Museum Audience Insight: Audience research, trends, observations from Reach Advisors and friends*. (New York 2007). Chung, Johnstone, and Wilkening, "Family Visitation at Museums, Part 2: Historic Sites and History Museums." James Chung, Sally Johnstone, and Susie Wilkening, "Family Visitation at Museums, Part 3: Art Museums and Botanical Gardens/Arboretums," in *Museum Audience Insight: Audience research, trends, observations from Reach Advisors and friends*. (New York 2007).

### *Stratford Hall as a Case Study*

While surveys and statistics offer a generalized view of the growing detachment of Americans from history and the heritage of place, a case study can lend insight into some of the discernible variables that factor into the present situation. For example, a case study offers a better understanding of historical interpretation—which stories are presented and how they are expressed. Knowledge of the learning experience at a particular historic site or house museum can then be compared with overall preferences of Americans. A case study presents a context of reality to which hypothetical solutions may be applied. Thus a case study provides a basis to determine new strategies for historic sites and house museums to reconnect with American audiences.<sup>23</sup>

Stratford Hall plantation in Westmoreland County, Virginia, serves as a case study for the thesis. As fresh generations face a world of accelerated and unprecedented change, Stratford Hall has become one step removed from present times and bears witness to a declining visitation. Overall crowds at Stratford Hall appear to be comprised of a mature, predominately Caucasian population.

Stratford Hall serves as an important case study since it exhibits the characteristic symptoms of the larger problem identified: an increasing detachment of Americans from the heritage of place. At the same time, its preservation efforts emphasize the material culture and architectural details of its Great House and outbuildings. Furthermore, managers of Stratford Hall, like most other historic sites and house museums, have adopted methods of historical interpretation that are largely passive and un-engaging. While Virginia tops the nation with over eighty historic sites and historical museums, it is crucial for places like Stratford Hall to garner

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<sup>23</sup> Mark Francis, "A Case Study Method for Landscape Architecture," Landscape Architecture Foundation, <http://lafoundation.org/myos/my-uploads/2010/08/19/casestudymethod-abstract.pdf>.

distinction and ultimately transform the notion that these places are dull and boring into a more positive outlook.<sup>24</sup>

The cultural landscape thus provides one area where Stratford Hall can begin to carve its niche among the largely homogenous array of historic sites and historical museums that presently overpopulate America. The Stratford Hall cultural landscape is unique, steeped in a rich history that contains myriad vestiges of prehistory, aboriginal and non-aboriginal settlement. Located on the Potomac River, Stratford Hall contains a variety of natural resources that have served its populations over the years and continues to do so. Many elements of the cultural landscape beg to be examined by varied professions and fields. Its complexity may entice the shared interests of archaeologists, anthropologists, agriculturalists, ecologists, economists, feminists, geographers, geologists, historic preservationists, historians, horticulturalists, landscape architects, sociologists, et al. The possibilities for interpreting history and reconnecting the American population with the past thus grow exponentially.

Today Stratford Hall promotes itself as “home of the Lees of Virginia and birthplace of Robert E. Lee”<sup>25</sup>—a perfectly valid narrative that has sustained interest with at least some of the population since the site became a public shrine in the 1930s. However, this focus touches only a small part of the many available narratives, inevitably passing up opportunities to connect with the interests of a varied and dynamic population. Additionally, because the site’s interpretive program focuses almost exclusively on the Lee narrative, interpretation centers on the house and its immediate environs—areas directly correlated to the Lees—overlooking the potential of the vast cultural landscape to serve as both a muse and museum.

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<sup>24</sup> Brenda Hay, "Historical Museum Guide for the United States," CensusFinder, [http://www.censusfinder.com/guide\\_to\\_historical\\_museums.htm](http://www.censusfinder.com/guide_to_historical_museums.htm).

<sup>25</sup> This distinction subtly includes female members of the Lee family, but still overlooks other important persons, such as slaves, who greatly impacted and shaped the site over time.

This suggestion of broadening the narrative is not to belittle the significance of the Lees, their Great House or their strong political ties, but Stratford Hall can and should be celebrated as “home” to so much more—primitive sea creatures, bands of American Indian tribes, unique biotic and abiotic communities, numerous economic enterprises, industrious slaves and indentured servants, masters and mistresses, groups of distinguished ladies bound by an unwavering drive for preservation, to name a few, as well a haven to anyone seeking resolve in historical matters. An inclusion of these elements in the interpretive program at Stratford Hall certainly does not call for the cessation of the legendary Lee stories. To the contrary, these narratives only complement and augment each other, painting an intriguing and more complete picture of often marginalized populations, and creating a quality experience for visitors. Additionally, extending historical interpretation into the cultural landscape provides a more immersive learning experience—one that likely will engage the senses, inspire the imagination, create lasting memories, and draw visitors back time and again.

Beckelman and Robins point out that today members from diverse and underrepresented groups, such as American Indians, African Americans, women, working and lower classes, are challenging traditional history with new and compelling questions: "Where are the monuments and sites, the historic buildings that tell my history? If my ancestors weren't Revolutionary War veterans, if they were immigrants, if they were slaves, if they were Native Americans, if I'm not a Son or Daughter of the American Revolution, where is my history?"<sup>26</sup> Answers to these questions lie at the very heart of places like Stratford Hall. The history *is* there. It simply waits in the shadows for a revelation. This thesis will, perhaps, shed one glimmer of light on the past. Through an expansion of historical interpretation at Stratford Hall, it sets out to answer how

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<sup>26</sup> Laurie Beckelman and Anthony Robins, "Coping with History: Cultural Landmarks and the Future of Preservation," *Forum Journal* 8, no. 3 (1994): 14.

landscape architects may transform someone's feelings of history from apathy to empathy by means of the cultural landscape.

### ***Research Methods and Sources***

To answer the overriding question, the thesis uses a combination of research methods: reviews of academic and popular literature; reviews on various topics related to the management and interpretation of historic landscapes; quantitative data related to U.S. demographics and historic site visitation; case studies of historic landscapes in the U.S. and Britain; and archival research, onsite investigations, and interviews at Stratford Hall Plantation in Westmoreland County, Virginia. Quantitative data gathered from the National Endowment for the Arts, Reach Advisors, CensusFinder, and other online sources were analyzed to document the problem of Americans' detachment from their historic sites. In addition, aggregate U.S. census data were analyzed to provide a general view of how immigration may affect the demographic composition of the U.S. population in future decades.

A review of scholarly literature was conducted in order to better understand how these trends may impact the field of historic landscape management and interpretation. The literature review centered on four broad areas of inquiry: (1) the history, theory, and methods of historical interpretation; (2) the history of historic preservation and current issues in historic site management in the U.S.; (3) the tradition of historical interpretation that evolved from the eighteenth-century English landscape garden; (4) the history of Stratford Hall plantation, past and current interpretive programs at the site.

The literature review provided a discrete definition of the practice of historical interpretation, as well as an outline of guiding principles. This review also offered insight into alternate methods used in historic site interpretation, such as historical re-enactments, historic

trails, monuments, nature hikes, historical markers, and other common interpretive practices. The review of literature related to the U.S. historic preservation movement provided information about why the managers of many historic sites have focused preservation efforts on the material culture of houses and human-made artifacts. The literature establishes a current need to reconsider the significance of the cultural landscape and its intangible elements. Furthermore, the review explains why managers typically have taken a narrow approach to interpreting history in the recent past. The review of literature on the U.S. historic preservation movement also helped to place Stratford Hall within a historic context, revealing it to be much like other American historic sites that are facing a steady decline in visitation.

The review of literature related to the eighteenth-century English landscape garden concept focused on the landscape of Stowe as a case study, while incorporating eighteenth-century writings by Alexander Pope and others who were influenced by Stowe. The contemporary landscape garden of Little Sparta in Scotland also served as a case study for considering how many of the essential characteristics of the English landscape garden were extended and modified into the late twentieth century.

Finally, the review of literature on Stratford Hall concentrated on the site's history, while considering the regional context. Conversations with Judy Hynson, Director of Research and Archives at Stratford Hall, proved invaluable for filling in gaps discovered during the literature review. The literature and conversations helped construct a brief narrative of Stratford Hall and indicated a degree of richness and diversity with regards to its history. Archival research of meeting minutes and correspondence provided insight into how the Robert E. Lee Memorial Association (RELMA) has presented the site's history to the public from the twentieth century to the present.

Firsthand experience of historical interpretation was gleaned through onsite investigations. This examination focused on two physical components of Stratford Hall: (1) restored and reconstructed buildings, including the Great House, kitchen, smokehouse, stables, coach house, slave quarters, cabins, mill, and visitor center; and (2) the encompassing landscape, such as the orchard, the east and west gardens, the trails, the mill pond, the forests, the fields, the cliffs, and beach. This led to the discovery that areas such as the east and west gardens may present visitors with a somewhat conflicting and confusing history. Other areas such as the slave quarters and trails display simple exhibits and panels that generally fail to inspire the imagination. Additionally, walks throughout the landscape revealed subtle clues of past land use, such as old roads and probable areas of human inhabitation.

The field investigations culminated in the finding that the Stratford Hall cultural landscape holds great potential for expanding historical interpretation and enticing new audiences in two ways: (1) by including stories of often marginalized populations whose work in the landscape directly influenced the success of the plantation, such as narratives of slaves, indentured servants, transported criminals, and tenant farmers; and (2) for expressing these stories in ways that are captivating and provocative. This finding presents an opportunity to use the English landscape garden as a precedent and model for cultural landscape interpretation at Stratford Hall.

### *Synopsis*

This introductory chapter discusses Americans' detachment from historic sites, introduces Stratford Hall as a case study for applying hypothetical solutions, and outlines the relevancy and timeliness of this pervasive problem in the context of landscape architecture. Since many historic sites today fail to attract and actively engage a variety of populations, it

poses the question: How can the landscape architect intervene through the cultural landscapes of historic sites to create an enduring resonance with many and varied generations of Americans? Moreover, *why* is it important to do so?

Although this introductory chapter mentions some of the variables contributing to the issue at hand, historical interpretation remains a primary means at all historic sites for enticing audiences, offering meaningful experiences, and creating lasting impressions that will draw visitors back time and again. Thus to begin answering the main questions, the second chapter of the thesis explores the history of historical interpretation and the range of methods used today by historic site managers. Following this discussion, the second chapter outlines the principles of interpretation first articulated by Freeman Tilden, which presently guide managers of historic sites in implementing lucid and cohesive interpretive programs.

A discussion of why many interpretive programs fail to reach the goal of provocation concludes the second chapter through the writings of Catherine Howett and Bernie Herman, critics of cultural landscape preservation, Cary Carson, an expert in historic sites and historical museums, and data gathered by Reach Advisors, a marketing research firm for museums. This section of the chapter delves into some of the fundamental problems that lie at the heart of the practice of historic preservation and accompanying interpretive programs. For example, in the past, historic preservationists, albeit with good intentions, have focused heavily on material culture, thereby marginalizing the dynamic processes that often comprise a greater cultural landscape, which enhance a truly human experience. This practice inevitably has led to an array of house museums that focus on “men of means” and lack the intricacy and ambiguity of living places. Moreover, data indicate that traditional interpretive programs no longer meet the needs of a diverse population that, for multiple reasons, now requires an active approach to learning.

While this part of chapter two touches on both successes and shortcomings, it also suggests goals for taking historical interpretation into a new direction.

The second chapter concludes by calling for a multifaceted approach to historical interpretation that incorporates a broad spectrum of narratives by means of the often disregarded cultural landscape. This sets the stage for the subject of the third chapter: a re-envisioning of the eighteenth-century English landscape garden concept as a way to reinvigorate historical interpretation. By examining the eighteenth-century landscape garden as a precedent, this chapter suggests *why* the cultural landscape is a vital part of the interpretive experience of visitors to historic sites. It reveals that the landscape garden is a provocative place that allows both the content and expression of historical narratives to shift with time. Furthermore, architects of eighteenth-century English landscape gardens created places where human activity became integral to the design. Data suggest that visitors of American historic sites desire these qualities of transition and engagement. Thus, principles derived from the landscape garden concept provide a framework for *how* professionals who manage American cultural and historic landscapes may begin to interpret history in ways that capture attention and generate respect, opening eyes, hearts, and minds to new perceptions of people, places, and events that might otherwise be lost.

The landscape of Stowe, perhaps the most renowned site of the English landscape garden movement, serves as the basis for this investigation. The history of the Stowe landscape shows how English landscape gardeners adopted a didactic approach to design by combining images and words to fill the landscape with associative meanings. The result is a garden where an unfolding narrative speaks to individuals of varying intellectual abilities. Additionally, Little Sparta, a landscape garden in Scotland, provides insight into how the idea of a “readable”

landscape took form outside England in a modern context, nearly two centuries later. Although grounded in eighteenth-century English traditions, Little Sparta pushes the boundaries of those concepts into an entirely new direction. Little Sparta shows how there is a broad spectrum for ingenuity and experimentation of what a twenty-first century landscape garden can become.

Chapters four, five, and six focus on Stratford Hall plantation as a case study for examining both the problems and opportunities associated with interpreting the cultural landscapes of American historic sites. Chapter four introduces Stratford Hall as a historic site that exhibits declining visitation and a restricted approach to historical interpretation. Additionally, its managers have recently recognized the need to implement new management strategies in an effort to sustain the site into the future. The fourth chapter of the thesis, which provides an overview of Stratford Hall's history, reveals richness in the types of stories that await interpretation, potentially drawing in and identifying with diverse crowds.

The fifth chapter relays how Stratford Hall, similar to other shrines arising out of early Colonial Revival preservation efforts, has taken a conservative approach to interpreting its past. This chapter examines the structure, mission, purposes, and management philosophy of the Robert E. Lee Memorial Association (RELMA). It also narrates the evolution of historical interpretation at Stratford Hall in light of broad social trends, and concludes with a discussion of present initiatives. This discussion suggests new opportunities for interpreting the cultural landscapes of Stratford Hall. Chapter six examines these opportunities in greater detail, offering ideas for conveying new and interesting stories at Stratford Hall in its vast historic and cultural landscape. The sixth chapter also begins to use the English landscape garden as a model for cultural landscape interpretation at Stratford Hall.

While Stowe, Little Sparta, and Stratford Hall each take distinct approaches to history, the core comparison among the three sites is the use of the landscape to instruct, teach, and tell stories. Chapter seven thus concludes that the English landscape garden can serve as a model to interpret American history in historic and cultural landscapes in ways that engage imaginations, prompt thoughtful reflection, and challenge accepted beliefs. The chapter also uses three places and events that offer insight into how managers of historic sites may choreograph a twenty-first century landscape garden. The examples include: Fattoria di Celle, a privately-owned historic farm in Pistoia, Italy, that hosts a collection of site-specific art; the 1991 visual arts exhibition at the Spoleto Festival entitled *Places with a Past: New Site-Specific Art in Charleston*; and ArtPrize, a unique open-platform art competition that occurs annually in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Each example provides the opportunity to address some of the key issues managers would have to consider when designing a public art or "landscape interpretation program" at a historic site like Stratford Hall, including: how it will be funded; who will design it and how will it be designed; how it relates to a site's expressed mission, purposes and core values; how it may affect the "integrity" of the landscape; and how it will be received among the public.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION**

#### ***Introduction***

Historical interpretation is a way of managing historic and cultural resources. By carefully selecting narratives with poignant content and expressing them in meaningful ways, managers of historic sites can convey stories that resonate with varied audiences. Historical interpretation also carries the potential to impart values upon its audiences. Furthermore, historical interpretation can guide people's actions by evoking empathy and offering fresh perspectives on life.

Although the term historical interpretation is relatively new, the act of interpreting history has existed since prehistoric times and has thus evolved with humankind. Over the ages, human beings have created numerous ways to express the historical narratives they deem significant to understanding and preserving their culture and heritage. These narratives include myriad art forms—from oral and visual media to performances and writing, in addition to collecting tangible artifacts in museums.

The chapter explores the history of historical interpretation and answers the following questions: What defines historical interpretation? Why is the interpretation of history important to a culture or society? How has historical interpretation evolved over time? What stories have past cultures chosen to articulate and how have they communicated them? Lastly, what roles has historical interpretation assumed for these cultures?

Following a general overview of the practice of historical interpretation, the chapter provides a detailed account of historical interpretation at American historic sites during the twentieth century, specifically through the development of the National Park Service (NPS). This account considers social trends that have influenced historic site managers in selecting which stories to tell. The chapter then examines technological advancements that have inevitably shaped how historic site managers convey those stories. The chapter summarizes the accepted principles that have guided historic site managers in developing interpretive programs, and then examines the status of historical interpretation at American historic sites in the twenty-first century. This section of the chapter defines the specific methods that managers use at historic sites today. A critique of these current practices in historical interpretation through the recent writings of Bernie Herman, Kevin Lynch, David Lowenthal, and Catherine Howett offers insight into why American historic sites may fail to resonate with contemporary audiences. The chapter concludes by offering one possibility for re-envisioning historical interpretation and recapturing the attention of an evolving American population.

### ***Definition and a Brief History of Historical Interpretation***

In 1957, Freeman Tilden, one of the first writers to articulate the principles and theory of historical interpretation, defined interpretation as “an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”<sup>27</sup> Nearly thirty years later, William T. Alderson and Shirley Low described it as “both a program and an activity. The program establishes a set of objectives for the things we want our visitors to understand; the

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<sup>27</sup> Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage: Principles and Practices for Visitor Services in Parks, Museums, and Historic Places* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), 8.

activity has to do with the skills and techniques by which the understanding is created.”<sup>28</sup> Many additional definitions exist throughout the literature. Yet regardless of word choice, historical interpretation remains a way of communicating the significance of a place’s cultural and natural resources to a person or group of people.<sup>29</sup> Rather than merely presenting objective facts, it aims to forge enduring emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the constructed meanings in the resource.<sup>30</sup>

The definitions provided by Tilden, Alderson, and Low arise from the writings of late nineteenth-century naturalist John Muir, who began using the term “interpret” to describe the process of communicating the natural values of the Sierra Nevada mountains to the general public. Subsequently, the National Park Service (NPS), founded in 1916, endeavored to preserve America’s natural resources in ways similar to those described by Muir. The NPS, in turn, adopted the expression “interpretation” to describe the process of conveying the significance of the natural phenomena within parks to visitors.<sup>31</sup> As director of the NPS from 1929 to 1933, Horace Albright actively lobbied to integrate historical areas into the NPS. Consequently, between 1930 and 1933, the NPS established an increasing number of parks for their historical value and the definition of interpretation expanded to include the cultural environment.<sup>32</sup>

It was not until the early 1960s, however, that the Association of Interpretive Naturalists and the Western Interpreters Association professionally recognized the term historical interpretation.<sup>33</sup> Although such applications of the word “interpretation” relate to recent events,

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<sup>28</sup> William T. Alderson and Shirley Payne Low, *Interpretation of Historic Sites*, 2nd ed., American Association for State and Local History Book Series (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Larry Beck, Ted T. Cable, and Douglas M. Knudson, *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources* (State College: Venture Pub., 1995), 4.

<sup>30</sup> National Association of Interpretation, "Home," <http://www.interpnet.com/>.

<sup>31</sup> Barry MacKintosh, "Chapter 1: Origins - Before the National Park Service," National Park Service, [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/mackintosh2/origins\\_before\\_nps.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/mackintosh2/origins_before_nps.htm).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Beck, Cable, and Knudson, *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*, 5.

the process of interpreting natural and cultural resources, as well as history, occurred informally long before the twentieth century. The first known use of *interpret* occurred during the fourteenth century in Middle English, deriving from Anglo-French *interpreter* and Latin *interpretari*, from *interpres*, meaning "agent."<sup>34</sup> The prefix *inter-* derives from the Latin word *inter*, which translates to "among, between" (akin to Old High German *untar* "among", Greek *enteron* "intestine").<sup>35</sup> Thus historical interpretation literally evokes an *agent* of history that acts *between* the past and present. For many millennia, people have created myriad agents of history, which continue to evolve.

The National Association for Interpretation (NAI) traces the activity of interpretation to prehistoric times when shaman, storytellers, and elders of tribal groups carried forth their life stories and legends from one generation to the next through oral traditions.<sup>36</sup> These people used storytelling as a way to explain their universe, define their roles within it, and assign meanings to their world. Oral storytelling allowed human beings to record significant events, celebrate the feats of their heroes and heroines, and identify patterns of human experience and behavior.<sup>37</sup> Oral culture taught members to preserve the wisdom of their heritage, transmit skills, maintain respect for elders, and understand how children fit into their lives.<sup>38</sup> Storytellers composed the content of their stories to resonate with fellow society members. By eliciting emotions, the subject and expression of a story could direct the choices and actions of a people.

Human beings generally embellished oral storytelling with gestures and music. Over time, this embellishment developed into performing arts, where actors used their bodies, faces,

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<sup>34</sup> Merriam-Webster Incorporated, "Interpret - Definition and More," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interpret>.

<sup>35</sup> Merriam-Webster Incorporated, "Inter- (Prefix) - Definition and More," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inter>.

<sup>36</sup> National Association of Interpretation, "Home."

<sup>37</sup> M.K. Zabel, "Storytelling, Myths, and Folk Tales: Strategies for Multicultural Inclusion," *Preventing School Failure* (1991): 32.

<sup>38</sup> M. Van Groenou, "Tell Me a Story," *Montessori Life* (1995).

and presence as media to convey stories. Oral storytelling and performance rituals strengthened cultural bonds and ensured survival by instilling an accepted set of beliefs and values.

Storytelling became a way of learning, and ultimately brought human lives into harmony with reality.<sup>39</sup>

While oral storytelling and performances provided continuity between the past and present, people still could not see or touch vanished human events through the intangible connections provided by spoken language or gestures. Thus tangible artworks crafted from natural materials became a visible way to make events persist. Although created in the past, people discovered that artworks could endure long beyond their creators' lifetimes.<sup>40</sup>

People soon began painting images and carving objects to symbolically represent their intangible stories. For example, prehistoric wall paintings in the Chauvet Cave of Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, France, dating to 30,000 BCE, depict numerous animals in profile, including aurochs, horses, and rhinoceroses. A recent archeological theory explains these paintings as didactic hunting guides to ensure the survival of future generations when bison populations waned.<sup>41</sup> Some fifteen thousand years later, a Paleolithic painting deep in the caves of Lascaux, Dordogne, France, provides one of the earliest examples of narrative art involving human beings and animals. A wounded bird-faced man appears between a rhinoceros and an enraged bison. Art historians surmise that the painter intentionally placed these figures beside each other to convey a story. Paleolithic human beings learned to abstract their world through pictures. Ultimately, they may have hoped to control their world by capturing and holding its images.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Joseph Campbell et al., *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth* (New York: Voyager Co., 1988).

<sup>40</sup> Helen Gardner et al., *Gardner's Art through the Ages* Eleventh ed. (Australia: Harcourt, 2001), xxxiii.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 29-30.

<sup>42</sup> Gardner et al., *Gardner's Art through the Ages*, 10-11.

Carved Paleolithic sculptures in the round, such as the Venus of Willendorf, represent themes of "womanhood" and also indicate tentative efforts at storytelling.<sup>43</sup> However, art historians speculate that the Sumerians, inventors of writing, first used pictures to tell coherent stories. The Warka Vase from Uruk provides a remarkable example of early narrative relief sculpture. The artist divided the relief into three bands to depict religious festivities. One band shows men presenting a bounty to a goddess as a votive offering. The artist's placement of animals, plants, and people in a register and standing on a ground line was a new device that helped organize the scenes of the story into a "readable" sequence.<sup>44</sup>

During the fourth millennium BCE in Mesopotamia, the advent of letters and marks to express language paved the way for written media to eventually replace verbal storytelling customs. As writing systems evolved, people used symbols to create accounts or stories. Early writing in Mesopotamia, however, functioned solely as an economic system. The oldest written documents comprise records of administrative acts and commercial transactions. Around 3400-3000 BCE, Sumerians made inventories of cattle, food and other items by scratching pictographs (simplified pictures standing for words) into soft clay. At this time, writing remained attached to the environment, since its symbols represented tangible aspects of the world rather than abstract ideas.<sup>45</sup>

By 3000-2900 BCE, the Sumerians further simplified their pictographic signs by reducing them to a group of wedge-shaped (cuneiform) signs. This not only marked the beginning of writing, but provided a dichotomy between nature and culture. By 2600 BCE, cuneiform texts were sophisticated enough to express complex grammatical constructions.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 18.

Both the Hebrews and Phoenicians further evolved Mesopotamian symbols into phonetic alphabets, so that marks no longer represented tangible things, but rather sounds. This created a system for fully translating oral accounts. However, this system truly disconnected culture and nature; for the first time, human beings could create stories not embedded in the environment.<sup>47</sup>

The Hebrews used this ability to maintain stories independent of a place as a way of remaining a viable and coherent culture despite years of exile. This system brought about a different way of conceptualizing the past and history, which cultures previously based on rituals and cycles. Script in the phonetic alphabet is linear, moving in one direction from a beginning towards an end and denoting progress. Since constant change characterizes progress, people inevitably felt that they were leaving behind something important. From this point onward, human beings, now living in linear time, began an ongoing quest to find ways of holding onto the past.<sup>48</sup>

Many cultures thus translated their oral accounts into texts. The Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh, the Hebrew Bible, the Egyptian Pyramid texts, the Hindu Vedas, the Islamic Qur'an, and the later Popol Vuh from Guatemala are examples of such sacred narratives that encompass a range of subjects, including mythology, cosmology, ancestry, and history. All of these stories helped people make sense of their collective experiences, such as illness, death, and conflict, in addition to interrelationships, including courtship, marriage, childbirth, and stewardship of nature.<sup>49</sup> The advent of writing and the use of enduring portable media also made it possible for cultures to share their own stories and to interpret others across the world.

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<sup>47</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Van Groenou, "Tell Me a Story."

Today, oral traditions have persisted mostly in illiterate societies as a primary means for transmitting history. In oral traditions, cultures keep stories alive by retelling them again and again. These prove very durable over time. Although contemporary circumstances change, the stories themselves remain very much the same over extremely long periods. This durability is actually inconsistent with the core purposes of such stories—to maintain continuity between past and present. Thus, there is a distinction between cultures that favor oral traditions and those that rely on print media. For the latter, stories became works of individuals, rather than collective efforts. The very act of writing down oral speech inevitably alters the original in some fundamental way. Consequently, the literary idea of the author as originator of a story's authoritative version forever changed people's perceptions of the actual stories.<sup>50</sup>

Living in a linear history, people from Western cultures, particularly those descended from the Greeks and Hebrews, struggled to maintain stories in the midst of continual change. Cultures began searching to uncover historical "truths," and to hold onto the past by revealing, restoring, and preserving its lost narratives. The construction of museums made it possible for existing cultures to admire relics of the remote past without any knowledge of the circumstances that led to the creation of those works.<sup>51</sup> For example, during the sixth century BCE, Ennigaldi-Nanna, a high priestess, founded the first known museum in Ur, which housed a collection of Mesopotamian antiquities. This museum educated upper class women who attended the nearby scribal school. As the curator, Ennigaldi-Nanna carefully arranged artifacts side by side with what are now considered "museum labels." Workers constructed these labels out of clay cylinder

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<sup>50</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, New Accents (London: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>51</sup> Gardner et al., *Gardner's Art through the Ages*, xxxiii-xxxiv.

drums. Text, written in three different languages, assisted visitors in interpreting these highly valued historical objects.<sup>52</sup>

Types of museums changed over time by responding to cultures evolving the visual media, writing, and performances they used to interpret and perpetuate their stories and histories. For example, in Renaissance Europe, cabinets of curiosities served as encyclopedic collections of numerous categorized objects, and stood as microcosms and memory theatres.<sup>53</sup> By the Enlightenment, wealthy patrons had established a number of indoor public museums across Europe. During the eighteenth century, museums encompassed outdoor spaces through English landscape gardens, which integrated both real and constructed ruins to represent different historical eras and foreign cultures.<sup>54</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Oslo, Norway developed the first open-air museum, exhibiting five structures from Oscar II's collection of buildings and expressing history as evolution. Scandinavian people further established open-air museums as a means to interpret rural culture, thus marking a distinction as focus shifted from heroic individuals to folk culture.<sup>55</sup> The advent of such museums paved the way for historic preservation in twentieth-century America, as houses and other structures quickly became a means to convey historical narratives.

### ***Historic Preservation in Twentieth-Century America***

The preservation and restoration of monuments and sites to tell particular stories is a modern Western phenomenon. Early efforts in American preservation dealt with landmarks as

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<sup>52</sup> Wilson Casey, *Firsts: Origins of Everyday Things That Changed the World* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> Robert Evans, Alexander Marr, and John Weston, *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>54</sup> Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*, 232-80.

<sup>55</sup> Norsk Folkemuseum, "The Open-Air Museum," <http://www.norskfolke.museum.no/en/Exhibits/The-Open-Air-Museum/>.

artifacts held separate from the community for veneration, pleasure, or education.<sup>56</sup> The mid-nineteenth-century writings of John Fanning Watson, chronicler of early Philadelphia, about seventeenth-century caves of the first Old World settlers indicate the emergence of a basic consciousness about the past. In the post-Revolutionary period, this consciousness had grown and influenced the painter Charles Wilson Peale, who established an art museum in 1786 to house historical artifacts. Three years later, concern for the past motivated a group of citizens to form the Massachusetts Historical Society. By the U.S. Centennial in 1876, popular interest in American history had grown, and approximately seventy-eight historical societies flourished.<sup>57</sup> By the early nineteenth century, the first known restoration activity took place in America, and by mid-century the growing need for a national identity directed the attention of Americans to past deeds and great men. Consequently, between the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Americans established a growing number of shrines—houses that associated themselves as places where "Washington slept."<sup>58</sup>

Preservation of shrines and house museums thus fulfilled many needs of the period. For example, they served as tangible reminders of respectable figures during the post-Civil War era when Americans felt the ideals of virtue and patriotism had dissolved. Also, life after the war seemed increasingly complex, and Americans gained a sense of reassurance from associating historic sites with what they believed were "simpler" times. Additionally, shrines and house museums evoked feelings of patriotism, which strengthened an American identity. Veneration of the past calmed anxious Americans threatened by a new wave of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. These feelings and occurrences distinguished the Colonial Revival era in

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<sup>56</sup> William J. Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America*, Rev. ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), xvii.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

historic preservation, when Americans passionately sought to revive a past that only their ancestors had experienced.<sup>59</sup>

The patriotism evoked by these shrines swept the nation through the New Deal Era and influenced restoration architects of historic sites, who imparted strong viewpoints of modern life onto their projects. These colonial revivalists emphasized material culture, believing that visitors would feel the greatness of the Founding Fathers through actual relics. As time passed, the value of these historic sites transitioned from solely patriotism to encompass education (which to a degree also generated patriotism). Visitors were no longer content simply knowing these were the birthplaces or homes of famous persons, but rather they sought details about these personal lives.<sup>60</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Americans placed value on education and learning through history. Congress passed the Antiquities Act of 1906 to protect antiquities and objects of scientific interest in the public domain. It authorized President Theodore Roosevelt "to declare by public proclamation historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest" that existed on public lands in the United States. The act thus declared many sites as National Monuments.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916 established the National Park Service (NPS) as an agency of the United States Department of the Interior, and the initial preservation of sites for their natural values expanded to places of historical value, under the direction of Horace Albright in 1929. This began with Colonial (Jamestown and Yorktown) and George Washington Birthplace national

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 11-23.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 11-23.

<sup>61</sup> "American Antiquities Act of 1906," ed. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior (National Park Service, 1906).

monuments in 1930, and climaxed in 1933 with the wholesale transfer of the War Department's historic forts and battlefields, in addition to the National Capital Parks.<sup>62</sup>

Anthropologist Clark Wissler of the Educational Advisory Board advocated archeological and historical sites of the NPS as vehicles for presenting the sequence of American prehistory and history to the general public. In a report to the board in 1929 he wrote:

"In view of the importance and the great opportunity for appreciation of the nature and meaning of history as represented in our National Parks and Monuments, it is recommended that the National Parks and Monuments containing, primarily, archeological and historical materials should be selected to serve as indices of periods in the historical sequence of human life in America. At each such monument the particular event represented should be viewed in its immediate historical perspective, thus not only developing a specific narrative but presenting the event in its historical background. Further, a selection should be made of a number of existing monuments which in their totality may, as points of reference, define the general outline of man's career on this continent."<sup>63</sup>

Similar to Wissler, Verne E. Chatelain, the first chief historian to the NPS, regarded interpretive potential as paramount to the NPS criteria for selecting additional historic sites. In 1933, he wrote that "The sum total of the sites which we select should make it possible for us to tell a more or less complete story of American History...Keeping in mind the fact that our history is a series of processes marked by certain stages of development, our sites should illustrate and make possible the interpretation of these processes at certain levels of growth."<sup>64</sup>

Chatelain greatly advocated communicating history to the public via historic site interpretation. He called for park historians "to disseminate accurate information in an interesting manner" by preparing brochures for their areas and monthly publications similar to

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<sup>62</sup> MacKintosh, "Chapter 1: Origins - Before the National Park Service."

<sup>63</sup> Reports with Recommendations from the Committee on Study of Educational Problems in the National Parks, January 9, 1929, and November 27, 1929 (n.p., n.d.), 24.

<sup>64</sup> Barry MacKintosh, "Chapter 2: Branching into History - Inaugurating the Program," National Park Service, [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/mackintosh2/branching\\_inagurating.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/mackintosh2/branching_inagurating.htm).

"nature notes" produced by naturalists. In a paper entitled "History and Our National Parks," he wrote:

"The conception which underlies the whole policy of the National Park Service in connection with [historical and archeological] sites is that of using the uniquely graphic qualities which inhere in any area where stirring and significant events have taken place to drive home to the visitor the meaning of those events showing not only their importance in themselves but their integral relationship to the whole history of American development. In other words, the task is to breathe the breath of life into American history for those to whom it has been a dull recital of meaningless facts—to recreate for the average citizen something of the color, the pageantry, and the dignity of our national past."<sup>65</sup>

With the park service becoming increasingly involved in historic sites, Congress passed the Historic Sites Act of 1935, which specifically directed the Secretary of the Interior to "establish and maintain museums" in connection with historic properties, to "erect and maintain tablets to mark or commemorate historic or prehistoric places and events of national historical or archaeological significance," and to "develop an educational program and service for the purpose of making available to public facts and information pertaining to American historic and archaeological sites, buildings, and properties of national significance."<sup>66</sup>

In a letter to Congress, President Franklin D. Roosevelt claimed that these activities would stimulate patriotism:

"The preservation of historic sites for the public benefit, together with their proper interpretation tends to enhance the respect and love of the citizen for the institutions of his country, as well as strengthen his resolution to defend unselfishly the hallowed traditions and high ideals of America."<sup>67</sup>

This announcement coincided with the beginning of the New Deal programs for Depression relief. Funds from the Works Progress Administration, the Public Works Administration, and the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> 49 Stat. 666; Roosevelt to Rep. Rene L. DeRouen, 10, 1935, in U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Public Lands, "Preservation of Historic American Sites Buildings, Objects, and Antiquities of National Significance," House Report 848, 74th Congress, 1935, 2.

Emergency Conservation Work Program enabled the NPS to build museums to augment many of its historic sites. Money from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) allowed the NPS to hire "historical technicians," to conduct research for exhibits and site development, prepare publications, and give tours to the visiting public.<sup>68</sup>

Those who developed interpretive programs during the early twentieth century faced many challenges. For example, battlefield parks fell under criticism for making historical interpretation overly technical. The historic sites managed by the War Department, frequently assisted by veterans,<sup>69</sup> marked most of the Civil War battlefields to emphasize the composition of the involved military units and their tactical movements, which aligned with the interests of veterans. The NPS was slow to recognize that contemporary visitors appreciated the overall significance of the battles rather than detailed accounts of their participants and tactics. Their eventual acknowledgement of this issue surrounding visitor experiences instigated a debate about audiences. The NPS questioned whether its interpreters and interpretive media should communicate in depth to the relatively few visitors who were receptive to such presentations, or whether they should highlight only basic historical information that would be understandable to the layperson.

Another issue of historical interpretation arose from the fact that many historical parks bore little resemblance to the way they appeared during their historic periods. The NPS and its critics greatly argued the extent to which the NPS should restore or reconstruct altered sites and structures. Some believed the Williamsburg approach of rebuilding was most appropriate, while

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<sup>68</sup> MacKintosh, "Chapter 2: Branching into History - Inaugurating the Program."

<sup>69</sup> Veterans initially comprised a majority of the visitors at battlefield parks.

others favored exhibits, labels, and other methods to graphically and verbally represent vanished scenes.<sup>70</sup>

The NPS faced further challenges with regard to historical inaccuracy and misleading information. For example, the Virginia birthplace of George Washington lacked both the house in which he was born and any reliable record of its appearance. When the NPS acquired the property, a private association had committed to replicating the house, and thus proceeded to build something similar to what they believed Washington might have been born in, which they constructed upon what they supposed were the original foundations. Despite the conjectural reconstruction and eventual archeological discovery of a larger foundation nearby, the NPS was reluctant to be forthright in presenting historical information. It was not until 1975 that the NPS finally revealed to the public the information that their archaeologists and historians had known for forty years.<sup>71</sup>

After the George Washington Birthplace fiasco, the NPS adopted and generally pursued policies for historic building restoration and reconstruction that stressed accuracy. Thus, the CCC carried out numerous restorations and reconstructions, including war huts at Morristown National Historical Park and several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century iron-making buildings at Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site. The work at Hopewell, begun in 1936, stands as an early endeavor to extend preservation and historical interpretation from men of means to "typical" elements of the American past. Many decades later, managers of historic sites responded to public demands and expanded interpretation to include sensitive topics that had been marginalized in earlier interpretive programs, such as the history of slavery in the U.S.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Barry MacKintosh, "Chapter 2: Branching into History - Historical Challenges," National Park Service, [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/mackintosh2/branching\\_challenges.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/mackintosh2/branching_challenges.htm).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

Throughout the twentieth century, managers of numerous historic sites were reluctant to accept and incorporate new evidence into their interpretive programs. Sites established in honor of historical figures faced unique challenges after their highly esteemed subjects underwent scholarly devaluation. The NPS was committed to portraying historic figures in a positive light and thus tended to dismiss evidence that suggested otherwise. Because honoring heroes has partly motivated the establishment of most historical parks, units of the NPS focusing solely on negative aspects of America's past are virtually nonexistent.<sup>73</sup>

In 1966, Lyndon B. Johnson passed the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966.<sup>74</sup> This raised the standards for historic preservation, which, in turn, improved the quality of historical information interpreted at historic sites. Consequently, many managers have placed utmost importance on restoring buildings and objects to a specific “period of significance”<sup>75</sup> in an effort to present an authentic version of the past.

More recently, however, individuals from various fields have acknowledged the significant role historic and cultural landscapes play in teaching about the past. While the practice of historic preservation has focused largely on historic structures throughout the

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> This established an Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and the Section 106 review process. The ACHP advises the President and Congress on historic preservation issues, develops policies and guidelines in response to conflicts of federal agencies, and participates in the Section 106 review process. On the other hand, SHPOs coordinate statewide inventories of historic properties, nominate properties to the NRHP, maintain statewide preservation plans, advise and educate local people. The National Park Service (NPS) oversees the NRHP. The NRHP is the nation's official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects deemed worthy of preservation. Properties must meet certain criteria to gain eligibility for listing. Over the years, amendments to the NHPA have increased opportunities for properties listed on the NRHP. For example, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 extended preservation from buildings to include the surrounding environments. Section 106 mandates federal agencies undergo a review process for all federally-funded and permitted projects that will impact sites listed on, or eligible for listing on the NRHP. Section 106 serves to minimize potential harm and damage to historic properties. In 1976, Congress extended the review process to include buildings, archaeological sites, and other historic resources eligible for listing. More recently, this criterion has expanded to define and include cultural landscapes.

<sup>75</sup> The NRHP defines period of significance as a “span of time in which a property attained the significance for which it meets the National Register Criteria.” National Park Service, “Glossary of National Register Terms,” ed. National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior, National Register Bulletin: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form (Washington, D.C. 2011).

twentieth century, the late 1980s marked a beginning of recognizing value in historic and cultural landscapes. For example, the National Register of Historic Places began developing bulletins to assist nominations of historic and cultural landscapes.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, the NPS launched a historic landscape initiative to promote responsible preservation practices of historic and cultural landscapes. Subsequently, NPS managers initiated cultural landscape inventories at historic sites. In the early 1990s, NPS policies codified procedures for identifying, evaluating, and treating historic and cultural landscapes, which still guide management of historic and cultural landscapes today.<sup>77</sup>

To some degree, managers—especially within the NPS—have been limited by these standards and other professional practices institutionalized within the federal framework. Still, the institutionalized framework has its virtues, which may prevent controversial occurrences, such as the telling of stories that are outright false, misleading, or based on questionable evidence. Furthermore, while the framework may constrain creativity, it does not prevent it altogether. Since the field of historic landscape management is relatively new, strategies and approaches continue to undergo development in accordance with current issues or concerns that are raised.

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<sup>76</sup> Genevieve P. Keller and J. Timothy Keller, "National Register Bulletin 18: How to Evaluate and Nominate Designed Historic Landscapes," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, 1987). Linda Flint McClelland et al., "National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes," ed. National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior (Washington, D.C. 1999). Patricia L. Parker and Thomas F. King, "National Register Bulletin 38: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, 1998). Beth M. Boland and Elisabeth Potter, "National Register Bulletin 41: Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1992).

<sup>77</sup> "The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes," ed. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior (Washington, D.C.).

*The Evolution of Historical Interpretation at American Historic Sites*

While the field of historic preservation has evolved over the past century, so, too, have the methods of historical interpretation. Initially, historical interpretation at national parks encompassed talks, guided hikes or tours, publications, and museum exhibits. Throughout the years, methods of historical interpretation broadened with technological advances. Slide shows, motion pictures, sound recordings, and other audiovisual media became increasingly popular. Films and recorded voices supplemented or substituted for in-person presentations, and reached more visitors with messages of consistent quality.

By the mid-1950s, parks widely used visitor-activated audiovisual devices.<sup>78</sup> For example, in 1947, managers at the Washington Monument installed the first recorded interpretive message. Almost a decade later, ninety parks had installed more than one hundred audio stations with speakers or hand phones. Nearly two dozen of these parks also used fully automatic movie and slide programs. The latter combined ten minutes of narration with specialized machines that flipped through slides. Furthermore, the NPS placed modern projection and sound equipment in forty-six amphitheatres and campfire circles. These programs began with an introduction about the NPS and ultimately served to orient visitors to a site.<sup>79</sup>

MISSION 66, a ten-year program to improve park facilities in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the NPS, funded many of these technological advances. In 1954, national parks were devoid of any automatic audio or audiovisual installation operations. By 1963, however, a progress report indicated that the audio and audiovisual devices had become "indispensable tools for communication with park visitors."<sup>80</sup> Although these technologies greatly facilitated

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<sup>78</sup> Barry MacKintosh, "Chapter 3: New Directions - Audiovisual Innovations," National Park Service, [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/mackintosh2/directions\\_av\\_innovations.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/mackintosh2/directions_av_innovations.htm).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

historical interpretation, they were often subject to malfunctions. The Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site adopted "acoustiguides," or portable audio devices, for historical interpretation in 1963. Eleanor Roosevelt created the narration by reminiscing about the house and its occupants and guests. Visitors to the home positively received this method of historical interpretation because its first-person accounts reached a quite personal level.<sup>81</sup>

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, NPS interpreters aimed technologies to move beyond passively orienting visitors to actively engaging them in the interpretive process. For example, managers of many historic parks installed electric maps with push-button lights that signaled military action and other historical events. The Division of Interpretation at the NPS became further interested in "sound and light," after seeing how managers of European sites, such as Versailles and the Chateau of Chambord, creatively manipulated these intangible media. Subsequently, the NPS integrated light shows into interpretive programs at some of their established historic parks. For example, Ford's Theatre National Historic Site in Washington, D.C. contracted Guggenheim Productions to design, produce, and install a program in the theatre. Although this program garnered positive reviews, the light and sound equipment proved costly to operate and maintain.<sup>82</sup> While Ford's Theatre offered theatrical performances that integrated simple acts of role-playing, many historic sites developed living history programs during the 1960s in an attempt to try to further recreate the past and more actively engage audiences.

In 1965, Marion Clawson, Resources for the Future<sup>83</sup> program director, wrote an article that called for a national system of twenty-five to fifty operating historical farms under federal

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Founded in 1952, Resources for the Future (RFF) is a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization that conducts independent research – rooted primarily in economics and other social sciences – on environmental, energy, natural

sponsorship, illustrating a variety of regions and historical periods. The Secretary of the Interior (SOI) soon endorsed this concept, realizing that the NPS had previously overemphasized birthplaces. The SOI and NPS began to acknowledge the environmental contexts, such as crops and livestock, which shaped the lives of the respected figures they had memorialized. While many historic sites struggled to entice audiences through the basic offerings of their visitor centers, reconstructed farm buildings and reintroduced crops and livestock gave a new appeal to their historic sites. Consequently, the NPS identified a number of national parks with potential for living farm development, where they could reconstruct buildings and hire actors to carry out daily activities.<sup>84</sup>

The living farm concept accelerated other types of historical role-playing activities within the NPS. During the summer of 1967, the Washington office requested that all regions experiment with interpreters in period dress. Director Hartzog further encouraged historical role-playing, suggesting that the NPS should implement "a program of living interpretation at each of our historic areas, where appropriate, that would involve the making of products for sale through the history associations."<sup>85</sup> By 1974, living history became a trend "to make history come alive" with one hundred and fourteen NPS historic sites offering some form of historical role-playing through their interpretive programs. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, many living history programs fell under criticism for inaccuracy and inappropriateness. Thus by 1975 the NPS had established "firm guidelines to insure that all living history programs achieve high

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resource and environmental health issues. For more information visit the RFF website at [http://www.rff.org/About\\_RFF/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.rff.org/About_RFF/Pages/default.aspx).

<sup>84</sup> Barry MacKintosh, "Chapter 3: New Directions - Living History," National Park Service, [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/mackintosh2/directions\\_living\\_history.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/mackintosh2/directions_living_history.htm).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

standards of historical accuracy and that they directly relate to the central historical theme or association of the park."<sup>86</sup>

Since the 1970s, historical accuracy and authenticity have guided the fields of historic preservation and historical interpretation. A majority of historic sites participate in ongoing research to continually update the information they present. During the past three decades, methods of historical interpretation continue to change with respect to technological advances and new trends—ranging from holograms in the 1980s to augmented reality twenty years later. Today, most historic sites blend a variety of methods, including role-playing, audiovisual exhibits, guided tours, and the artifacts themselves. In summary, the past century has proven that historical interpretation is a process of experimentation and evolution.

### *Current Practices of Historical Interpretation*

Presently managers of American historic sites draw inspiration from a toolbox of historical interpretive methods: oral media, images and objects, performances, and writing. This section elaborates on what methods they commonly use today. Additionally, the section discusses strengths and weaknesses associated with implementing these methods.

Managers of American historic sites frequently integrate oral media into interpretive programs through traditional song and speech. Hired professionals who engage in storytelling or singing activities can encourage audience participation. On the other hand, managers of historic sites can use audio recordings to augment human interpreters with background sounds or music. In the case of self-guided tours at historic sites, audio recordings can replace costly human interpreters and provide consistent explanations of objects, rooms, or places. Managers also incorporate push-button audio devices into visual displays and exhibits, which relay verbal

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

information and add an element of interactivity. Audio devices prove particularly useful for historic sites, such as battlefields, where the continuity of the story can prove difficult to maintain in vast areas.<sup>87</sup>

While acoustical media build on visitors' auditory experiences at historic sites, the use of images and objects most often enhances the visual experience. Many historic house museums display a combination of original or period furnishings. Replicas of household objects and food items frequently accompany these to offer visitors a more complete vision of past domestic life. While these components represent the tangible culture, an element is lost without the sounds, scents, and tastes that would have accompanied those human activities. Managers of historic sites also use traditional indoor museums for two main purposes: to orient the visitor upon arrival, or to enrich the visit by providing an extension of the tour. These typically incorporate a variety of visual displays and exhibits. For example, walls may portray graphic information such as historic images and timelines. Display cases may exhibit collections of utilitarian or art objects associated with the site, and dioramas may provide representations of particular scenes or events.

However, many visitors are not satisfied with passively viewing text, diagrams, and artifacts; they also desire to touch and interact with historic objects. A recent survey by Reach Advisors indicated that many historic site visitors "wished to step behind those velvet ropes, get up close and personal, and touch or use artifacts."<sup>88</sup> While rules exist to prevent deterioration or damage of valued objects, tactile experiences remain important to the learning process. One respondent in the same survey noted that "By touching, I get a better sense of the history and

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<sup>87</sup> Alderson and Low, *Interpretation of Historic Sites*, 82-92.

<sup>88</sup> James Chung, Sally Johnstone, and Susie Wilkening, "Hands-On: We Mean Really Hands-On," in *Museum Audience Insight: Audience research, trends, observations from Reach Advisors and friends*. (New York: Reach Advisors, 2009).

craftsmanship.”<sup>89</sup> Managers of historic sites frequently offer tactile experiences through the use of reproduction artifacts. However, managers usually gear these teaching collections and hands-on activities towards children, disregarding the needs of an adult population.

Although managers of historic sites usually do not allow physical contact with historic artifacts, some programs integrate an interactive, hands-on approach with visual exhibitions. Since the mid-1950s, modern technology has allowed exhibits to become more interactive by incorporating audio-visual media such as touch-screen videos. Research indicates that interactive exhibits are more effective than passive exhibits at attracting and holding the attention of visitors, thus enhancing learning. Many historic sites have installed computer exhibits, which, in some instances, can challenge visitors with questions or educational games.<sup>90</sup> Computers and the internet have opened the doors to virtual exhibits, which may inspire visitors to view an object or place firsthand, or provide a virtual visit to those unable to physically travel to the site.<sup>91</sup>

Technological advances also have broadened the possibilities for interpreting history through cell phones. For example, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, some organizations began using cell phones as a way to offer audio tours of historic sites or districts. During the past decade this has expanded so that cell phone users can now download augmented reality programs that combine historical photographs with real-time views of a structure or scene. These offer an interpretation of how a particular place appeared in the past. Likewise, artistic renderings superimposed upon a current image can suggest how a site may appear in the future.<sup>92</sup>

While technologies like augmented reality may capture the attention of today's youth, they might exclude people who are not technologically savvy, as well as others who are unable

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Larry Beck, Ted T. Cable, and NetLibrary Inc., "Interpretation for the 21st Century: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture." (Champaign: Sagamore Pub., 1998).

<sup>91</sup> Alderson and Low, *Interpretation of Historic Sites*, 77-82.

<sup>92</sup> "Augmented Reality," Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmented\\_reality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmented_reality).

to afford such gadgets. Furthermore, with technology advancing at alarming rates, new software quickly becomes outdated. This should remain a primary concern for historic sites when making investments in such programs.<sup>93</sup> However, historic sites that adhere to standards set forth by the Secretary of the Interior (SOI) may find augmented reality liberating. This technology allows people to visualize the restoration or reconstruction of a building, or other part of the physical environment, through a superimposed image thus forgoing any sort of physical alteration that may ultimately threaten the integrity of a site.<sup>94</sup>

For those who prefer more traditional methods of learning about history, managers of historic sites often use public monuments and sculptures for historical interpretation. Monuments and sculptures provide moral and cultural instruction, and often represent pride and patriotism. Monuments and sculptures frequently assume the figural forms of men, women, or children, or symbolic shapes, such as an obelisk, and they are generally placed in public open spaces. Most often, they commemorate and memorialize significant persons, places, or events. Historic site managers also use plaques to serve this function, yet these emphasize words rather than imagery. Managers may also select an inscription of a quote or brief description to accompany monuments and sculptures.<sup>95</sup>

Although monuments and sculptures play an important role in conveying collective definitions of history, as a visible expression of a consciously defined past, they also can generate extensive public debate and controversy over the meaning of history. Commemoration through monuments or sculptures conjures questions of who is to be honored and why, where the

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<sup>93</sup> Leslie Berlin, "Kicking Reality up a Notch," *New York Times*, July 12, 2009.

<sup>94</sup> National Register for Historic Places, "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation," ed. National Park Service. U.S. Department of the Interior (Washington, D.C. 2002).

<sup>95</sup> Thayer Tolles, "From Model to Monument: American Public Sculpture, 1865–1915," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/modl/hd\\_modl.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/modl/hd_modl.htm).

artwork should ultimately be placed, the source of funding, and, most importantly, who makes these decisions.<sup>96</sup>

The use of both images and words in the landscape serves as an important aspect of place-making. Inscriptions engage readers in a site's relationship with the past.<sup>97</sup> Monuments and sculptures prove beneficial to the public landscape because they are available for viewing any time of day. Consequently, they also are at greater risk from acts of vandalism and the effects of climate and weather.

Historic site managers frequently establish trails as interpretive or narrative devices by linking monuments, sculptures, and other landmarks through a historical theme. Managers can augment significant parts of these trails with plaques, signs, wayside exhibits, or portable media, such as interpretive maps or guidebooks to communicate basic rules and orientation information, as well as detailed explanations.<sup>98</sup> On the other hand, managers may use historic trails to reenact pilgrimages and rituals, such as the Natchez or Oregon Trails, which emerged over centuries of animal and human foot traffic. This activity allows visitors a sense of "walking through someone else's shoes."<sup>99</sup> In both instances, trails offer recreational value and maintain essential links between rural and urban areas.

Trails often contain a number of natural and man-made visual cues such as a clearing for a particular vista, an unusually large tree, a uniquely shaped rock, a no-trespassing sign, a barbed wire fence, etc. In this sense, trails become a linear story, offering beginning and ending points with connected scenes along the way. Trapp, Gross, and Zimmerman state that trails are

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<sup>96</sup> Eileen Eagan, "Immortalizing Women: Finding Meaning in Public Sculpture," in *Her Past around Us: Interpreting Sites for Women's History*, ed. Polly Welts Kaufman and Katharine T. Corbett (Malabar Krieger, 2003).

<sup>97</sup> John Dixon Hunt, *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory*, Penn Studies in Landscape Architecture (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 116.

<sup>98</sup> Suzanne Trapp, Michael Gross, and Ron Zimmerman, *Signs, Trails, and Wayside Exhibits: Connecting People and Places*, ed. Tanner Pilley and James Heintzman, 2nd ed., Interpreter's Handbook Series (Stevens Point: UW-SP Foundation Press, Inc., 1994).

<sup>99</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Cultural Landscapes," <http://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape>.

important because they fulfill a number of human needs: solitude, beauty, new experiences, connectedness, escape from daily stresses or boredom, self-renewal, a private place, peace, inspiration, novelty, comradeship, romance, challenge, and memories.<sup>100</sup> Trails also appeal to individuals of all ages, and offer flexibility for visitors who wish to experience a site at their own pace. Trail usage may be limited by weather conditions or the time of day, yet such variables also offer atmospheric variety that may prompt visitors to return. On the other hand, they may not always be handicap accessible, or they may require a moderate to high degree of physical mobility from able-bodied persons. Managers also must maintain the safety of trails by keeping paths cleared from debris and marked with wayward signs, as well as integrating guide rails along steep slopes. Trails thus may require a significant investment in terms of both construction and maintenance costs.

Walking along historic trails may inspire imaginative reenactments of the past, but living history programs provide historic sites with more literal, structured, and theatrical forms of reenactment. Living history is an intense form of role-playing. Beck and Cable define it as “the re-creation of specific periods of the past or specific events using interpreters usually clothed and equipped with the correct tools and accoutrements of a depicted era.” This often involves the interpreter narrating the story in the first-person and includes a range of characters from common persons carrying out mundane activities to famous individuals.<sup>101</sup>

The historical reenactment is a type of living history that involves a group of individuals playing out a specific scene or battle (obviously without the blood or gore) generally to simulate the experience of a past time.<sup>102</sup> Re-enactments date back to prehistory, and Beck and Cable argue that this type of interpretation is most likely to provoke the imagination because it

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<sup>100</sup> Trapp, Gross, and Zimmerman, *Signs, Trails, and Wayside Exhibits: Connecting People and Places*, 72.

<sup>101</sup> See Conner Prairie Museum or Plimoth Plantation for examples of this form of living history.

<sup>102</sup> Alderson and Low, *Interpretation of Historic Sites*, 35-38.

incorporates the senses, allowing visitors an immersive interpretive experience of the past with sights, sounds, tastes, and smells.<sup>103</sup> Tilden asserts that interpretation ideally implies re-creation of the past and kinship with it.<sup>104</sup> Yet, no matter how hard one tries, it is impossible to re-create history. All living history programs are very labor intensive, requiring high levels of commitment from talented actors.<sup>105</sup>

Because living history may be cost prohibitive, managers of historic sites may seek to implement other role-playing approaches into their interpretive programs. They may hire docents to lead walking tours through a house museum or naturalists to guide an outdoor trail. These employees may hold the visitors' interests and elicit responses by conveying enthusiasm and passion for the subject. Docents may dress in either uniform or period costume to set themselves apart from visitors and offer another hint of the past. Although docents usually narrate in the third person, some may go so far as to take on the primary role of a character, adopting physical mannerisms and colloquialisms as if possessing firsthand experience. Managers may engage visitors by offering role-playing activities, such as churning butter, using wood working tools, riding in old wagons, or even dressing in historical costume.<sup>106</sup>

Most historic sites distribute some sort of written aid for visitors participating in either house museum tours or attending living history programs. These may range from simple leaflets to full-length books. These publications vary in purpose and in content. Brochures and leaflets often promote visitation to the site, orient the visitor upon arrival, and serve as a souvenir after departure. Booklets provide visitors with supplementary information about a site's history.

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<sup>103</sup> Beck, Cable, and NetLibrary Inc., "Interpretation for the 21st Century: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture."

<sup>104</sup> Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage: Principles and Practices for Visitor Services in Parks, Museums, and Historic Places*.

<sup>105</sup> Beck, Cable, and NetLibrary Inc., "Interpretation for the 21st Century: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture."

<sup>106</sup> Alderson and Low, *Interpretation of Historic Sites*, 35-38.

Guidebooks tell the visitor what he or she is seeing and indicate the most effective route to take within the historic site.<sup>107</sup>

Advancements in modern technology have extended the guidebook into the digital realm through easily downloadable mobile phone applications that offer interpretive information. In addition, global positioning systems (GPS) have revitalized treasure hunting games, relating back to medieval Arab customs. Many historic sites now participate in geocaching, an activity where GPS devices are used to “hide and seek” geocaches.<sup>108</sup> Geocaching programs combine navigational information with historical facts. The activity can direct participants to unknown historic sites. For example, a recent *New York Times* article explained the experience of a family who followed a geocache trail to a familiar suburban shopping center parking lot. Soon they walked around a bush to pinpoint the cache, and discovered an eighteenth-century graveyard.<sup>109</sup>

While technological games entice young generations to historic sites, traditional texts remain for those pursuing a higher level of scholarship. These include catalogues, journals, and books, and assume varied forms such as biographical or fictional accounts of an associated person, historical narratives that include relevant events and people, treatment of a site’s general time period, as well as scientific education on regional environmental factors. These extensions of interpretation help fulfill visitors’ interests aroused while experiencing the site. On the other hand, these sources may prove equally important in sparking interest and compelling persons to visit the historic site in the first place.<sup>110</sup> Today, scholarly publications extend beyond the traditional printed means to encompass the world wide web of information through websites,

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Geocaches, or simply caches, are typically small waterproof containers containing a logbook where the geocacher inputs the date of discovery and then leaves a signature with a respective code name. Additionally, participants often place souvenir coins or trinkets of small value within a cache.

<sup>109</sup> Dave Caldwell, "Modern Treasure Hunts for the Whole Family," *New York Times*, December 9, 2010.

<sup>110</sup> Alderson and Low, *Interpretation of Historic Sites*, 71-77.

wikis, and blogs. This has facilitated communications globally and made information widely accessible.

### *Principles of Historical Interpretation*

The NPS argues that interpretation is a critical component of park management because few visitors can truly perceive the intricacy of the human and natural elements that comprise such places without explanation.<sup>111</sup> B. Floyd Flickinger, the first NPS park historian, expressed the centrality of interpretation at historic sites as thus:

"If no other activities were ever contemplated or attempted, our first obligation, in accepting the custody of an historic site, is preservation. However, our program considers preservation as only a means to an end. The second phase is physical development, which seeks a rehabilitation of the site or area by means of restorations and reconstructions. The third and most important phase is interpretation, and preservation and development are valuable in proportion to their contribution to this phase."<sup>112</sup>

With such a range of possibilities for historical interpretation, managers face the issue of how to create coherent interpretive programs. Over forty years after its publication, Freeman Tilden's *Interpreting Our Heritage* persists as the primary sourcebook for historic site managers. Tilden outlines six principles for interpretation of historic sites as follows:

- 1) Any Interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
- 2) Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
- 3) Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
- 4) The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
- 5) Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.

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<sup>111</sup> Barry MacKintosh, "Chapter 2: Branching into History - the Importance of Historical Interpretation," National Park Service, [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/mackintosh2/branching\\_importance.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/mackintosh2/branching_importance.htm).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

- 6) Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.<sup>113</sup>

A carefully constructed narrative lies at the heart of historical interpretation. Narratives are critical because they link the sense of time, event, experience, memory and other intangibles to more tangible aspects of place.<sup>114</sup> Beginning with Tilden's first principle, managers of historic sites can infer that the historical narrative must somehow relate first to the life of the visitor in order to spark his or her interest. As Tilden suggests, the "chief" interests of visitors remain in what touches their personalities, experiences, or ideals. It is critical for managers to know the targeted audience so they can make informed decisions about interpretation, beginning with what story to convey.<sup>115</sup> The interpreter must then relate the narrative to the visitor's life. However, as time passes, this context changes, and so must the narrative in order to connect with an ever-evolving audience. The assemblage of an effective story requires much research, thought, organization and care. Tilden suggests that collaboration from various fields is crucial to constructing the narrative.<sup>116</sup>

Tilden's second principle speaks to the proper use of information and the delineation between information and the process of interpretation. The narrative propels interpretation beyond the transference of merely factual information because it constructs meaning through a moral or conclusion, ultimately bringing about a revelation among the audience. The method of

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<sup>113</sup> Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage: Principles and Practices for Visitor Services in Parks, Museums, and Historic Places*.

<sup>114</sup> Matthew Pottleiger, and Jamie Purinton, *Landscape Narratives: Design Practices for Telling Stories* (New York: J. Wiley, 1998), 3-5.

<sup>115</sup> Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage: Principles and Practices for Visitor Services in Parks, Museums, and Historic Places*.

<sup>116</sup> Beck, Cable, and NetLibrary Inc., "Interpretation for the 21st Century: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture."

interpretation and its level of engagement make vivid the depth of meaning drawn from the story.<sup>117</sup>

Following Tilden's third principle, the story itself is an act of creativity and its methods of interpretation may encompass many art forms—the visual arts, performance, and literature. With the audience still in mind, interpreters who narrate meaningful stories can stimulate the curiosity and captivate the “chief” interests of the audience for the duration of time spent at the historic site. The ultimate aim is for interpreters to provoke thought (Tilden's fourth principle), so that visitors either make new connections, or think about the familiar in different ways.

Tilden's fifth principle emphasizes the importance of presenting a “whole.” This should not be misinterpreted as a mandate to present every piece of information underlying a story, which is clearly impossible. Rather, the narrative should convey a lucid, focused message or theme. Beck and Cable argue that interpretation as a whole presents only the most salient and rewarding themes and, thus, imparts knowledge to visitors by communicating facts, wisdom by attaching meaning to the facts, and education through the careful selection of the most relevant information.<sup>118</sup> Finally, Tilden's sixth principle suggests that children are a unique audience that requires special consideration, involving adaptations or modifications within the program.

### *A Critique of Historical Interpretation*

In light of consistent downward visitation trends at American historic sites, common methods of historical interpretation—particularly reliance on docents, slide orientations, wayside exhibits, role-playing activities, and museum displays as the primary means of storytelling—are failing to captivate and provoke a dynamic population. While many people criticize the subpar

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<sup>117</sup> Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage: Principles and Practices for Visitor Services in Parks, Museums, and Historic Places*.

<sup>118</sup> Beck, Cable, and NetLibrary Inc., “Interpretation for the 21st Century: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture.”

experiences generated at historic sites, it is important to keep in mind the contexts from which these methods arose and exist today. Historical interpretation in twentieth- and twenty-first century America, which has evolved from the earliest days of storytelling, has closely followed trends in historic preservation. In the past, preservationists believed their decisions were the *right* courses of action—and, perhaps, they were "right" by fulfilling certain needs of the time. Today, however, many people recognize that what worked for the past no longer remains true. Thus, in light of shifting values, the quest to do what is right continues. Critics are reevaluating the fields of historical interpretation and historic preservation to determine how these practices may remain relevant to society. Undoubtedly, present actions will always invite future criticisms.

Bernie Herman, an expert in American folk culture, points out that the field of historic preservation is dominated by a "durable property sensibility," which identifies, recognizes, celebrates, and preserves objects. He suggests that historic preservation needs to consider the more intangible contexts of environment, which enhance a truly human experience. Herman specifically identifies that documentation efforts tend to focus solely on physical fabric, which monumentalizes buildings and divorces them from their broader physical contexts and social settings. While these ideas may seem novel, Herman's line of argument is essentially what motivated the NPS to increase the number of living history programs that taught about rural culture during the 1960s and 1970s. Still many historic sites remain devoid of the ambiguity and complexity of living places and continue to focus on "men of means."<sup>119</sup>

Kevin Lynch, an American urban planner and author, furthers the notion that historic preservation remains preoccupied with isolated intact physical artifacts—buildings, roads, and parcels of land—to the detriment of understanding the intricate human activities that occurred

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<sup>119</sup> Bernard L. Herman, "Fleeting Landscapes and the Challenge for Historic Preservation," *Forum Journal* 8, no. 3 (1994): 4.

among those artifacts. Lynch questions the treatment philosophies of historic preservation, and suggests that rather than emphasizing perfect conformity to past form (i.e. restoration), managers of historic sites should “use remains to enhance the complexity and significance of the present scene... The contrast of old and new, the accumulated concentration of the most significant elements of the various periods gone by...will in time produce a landscape whose depth no one period can equal.”<sup>120</sup>

This "temporal collage" that Lynch describes will come alive as each passing generation alters and adds to it. David Lowenthal, a historian and geographer, intimates that "We require a heritage with which we continually interact, one which fuses the past with the present...Only by altering and adding to what we save does our heritage remain real, alive, and comprehensible."<sup>121</sup> Thus, historic preservation and historical interpretation exist as ways of managing change. Perhaps, today it is important for both areas “to make visible the process of change,” rather than regulating it.<sup>122</sup> While historic preservationists attempt to slow the process of change, technology stands as a constant reminder of progress.<sup>123</sup> Since the 1970s, an information age has brought about continuous advancements in technology, with companies releasing updated versions of gadgets and software annually. Computers and the Internet have drastically altered the way younger generations acquire and process information by offering people new ways to actively engage in the learning process.

Consequently, young visitors to historic sites no longer feel satisfied assuming the same passive role that suited their parents or grandparents. Thus, active engagement of visitors has become a critical goal of historical interpretation; more people yearn to see *and* touch, to hear

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<sup>120</sup> Kevin Lynch, *What Time Is This Place?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972), 57.

<sup>121</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 410-11.

<sup>122</sup> Lynch, *What Time Is This Place?* , 57.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

and speak about the past.<sup>124</sup> Researchers today recognize that the creation of new meaning involves dialogue and negotiation.<sup>125</sup> The field of historical interpretation faces the issue of how its methods can effectively speak to younger generations that organize and construct meanings in ways different from their predecessors, in light of historic preservation practices. Although managers may capitalize on technology to entice new crowds, it is no substitute for the real thing, which is what distinguishes a historic site from an amusement park.

Today managers of historic sites should reflect on Tilden's first principle: "Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile."<sup>126</sup> Tilden implies that the entire narrative—the content and its expression—must relate to the modern person. Recent surveys of historic sites suggest that visitors desire to hear stories about "common people—tavern workers, slaves, struggling merchants, families of poor soldiers, and other people to whom they could relate."<sup>127</sup> While stories of white elite men are perfectly valid to convey, they fail to resonate with a demographic that has changed greatly since the early twentieth century. Catherine Howett, a respected historian in landscape architecture, argues that telling history through carefully devised narratives stimulates the intellectual and emotional engagement of its audience rather than allowing them to passively receive information.<sup>128</sup> Storytelling, which relates back to prehistoric times, stands as a powerful medium for modern learning.<sup>129</sup> While Tilden suggests

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<sup>124</sup> James D. Rees, "Forever the Same, Forever Changing: The Dilemma Facing Historic Houses," in *An Athenæum of Philadelphia Symposium* (Philadelphia 1998).

<sup>125</sup> Donna Williams, "Great Expectations: Historic House Museums in State History Programs in the 21st Century," in *Athenæum of Philadelphia Symposium* (Philadelphia 1998).

<sup>126</sup> Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage: Principles and Practices for Visitor Services in Parks, Museums, and Historic Places*.

<sup>127</sup> Carson, "History Museums: What's Plan B?," 18.

<sup>128</sup> Howett, "The Role of the Interpretive Program in the Restoration of Historic Landscapes," 50.

<sup>129</sup> Carson, "History Museums: What's Plan B?," 22.

collaboration among various fields is crucial to constructing the narrative, perhaps, there are ways in which visitors, too, can become part of this process.

In addition to the content of the narrative, managers of historic sites need to reconsider methods of historical interpretation. Few people would deny that the context in which today's visitors experience historic sites is vastly different from that a hundred or even fifty years ago, and this context will certainly continue to evolve. Television, movies, and video games have undoubtedly altered perceptions of reality and allowed people to feel that they are a part of a historical narrative, living vicariously through characters of the past. This fusion of reality and representation has led to the present reaction that historical interpretation is "dull and boring."<sup>130</sup> It is no longer enough for a guide to speak of historic times, or for a simple object to suggest a past activity. Instead, younger visitors expect interpretation to spark their imaginations in ways that mentally transport them back in time, and provoke them to consider entirely new perspectives. Furthermore, since many visitors today possess *a priori* knowledge from sources like the Internet, they seek an intellectual challenge.<sup>131</sup>

### ***Historical Interpretation for Many and Varied Generations of Americans***

There are myriad approaches to achieving Tilden's fourth principle of provocation. However, the thesis argues for a re-envisioning of the cultural landscape as both a muse and museum—a notion that relates back to the eighteenth-century landscape garden. The landscape is a place where historic site managers can cultivate a sense of curiosity through elements of mystery and surprise that will entice visitors to return. With each visit, managers can offer visitors the opportunity to re-live past pleasurable experiences, while providing opportunities for discovering something new.

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<sup>130</sup> Rees, "Forever the Same, Forever Changing: The Dilemma Facing Historic Houses."

<sup>131</sup> Carson, "History Museums: What's Plan B?," 17-21.

Cultural landscapes prove particularly relevant in addressing some of the concerns presently surrounding historic preservation and historical interpretation. In a time where visual media dominate the imaginations of younger generations, cultural landscapes provide places that can heighten awareness of the other senses—touch, smell, sound, and taste. Thus, cultural landscapes can also serve to reengage younger generations with nature. Additionally, as preservationists continue focusing attention towards delaying change in historic structures, cultural landscapes serve as an interesting juxtaposition—reminding visitors of time and transitions through nature's continuing cycles and rhythms. Furthermore, natural elements can create unexpected surprises, such as the sun casting shadows, which make each visit distinct and memorable. Ultimately, the cultural landscape holds great potential for inspiring the stewardship of both culture and nature.

With an amplified degree of change, the cultural landscape also can address visitors' desire to experience history beyond the typical “nine to five” time frame.<sup>132</sup> The landscape allows visitors to participate in the process by making decisions, such as which route to take. Furthermore, it provides the opportunity for visitors to enjoy self-guided experiences, while hired interpreters or publications can spur that experience.<sup>133</sup> The cultural landscape is also a place that can accommodate visitors of all ages. For example, children can roam freely in wide expanses, while benches in intimate settings allow adults peaceful places for meditation.

More specifically, a twenty-first-century landscape garden can intellectually challenge audiences to discover the implicit connections underlying its designed components. Thus, the visitor becomes part of the story's action. The integration of contemporary “eye catchers” and

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<sup>132</sup> Donnis, “History Was Not Just 9 to 5: Extended Experiences at Museums.”

<sup>133</sup> Ken Bupp, “Interpretation Preferences: How 40,000 Museum-Goers Prefer to Experience Museums,” in *Museum Audience Insight: Audience research, trends, observations from Reach Advisors and friends*. (New York: Reach Advisors, 2010).

folies that connect historical stories may transform the cultural landscape into an outdoor art museum. Exhibits may range in permanence—from enduring to ephemeral—which add to the uniqueness of each visit. Taking an artistic approach speaks to younger generations since statistics reveal that art museums attract three people for every one that visits a historic site or historical museum.<sup>134</sup> Finally, the landscape garden is a vehicle through which historic sites can strengthen a community's fabric, inviting a variety of people to participate in the interpretive process.

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<sup>134</sup> Rees, "Forever the Same, Forever Changing: The Dilemma Facing Historic Houses."

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE GARDEN AS A PRECEDENT AND MODEL FOR HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

##### *Introduction*

For many people, the mere thought of visiting a historic site all too often conjures stereotypical images of “the weary docent droning his or her way through a canned recitation of events, names, and dates...the too-slick film or slide orientation, borrowing its style from commercial advertising to provide us with the ‘fast past’ equivalent of fast food...dusty display cases or naïve, amateurish interpretive efforts.” As Catherine Howett contends, historical interpretation often is “so crisply cut and dried, so tritely factual and efficient that nothing is left to engage our imaginations, to prompt thoughtful reflection, and certainly never to challenge or trouble us.” Furthermore, the overabundance of carefully “restored” house museums and gardens lack the ambiguity and complexity of living places.<sup>135</sup> Bernie Herman argues that the zeal to preserve the tangible past has created lifeless monuments that survive only as fixed memories, ultimately inhibiting possibilities for creating new histories.<sup>136</sup> Consequently, this sterile experience has contributed to the growing detachment of Americans from their historic sites.

Today, few people would dispute the ever-increasing need for historical interpretation to intellectually and emotionally engage its audience rather than allowing people to passively receive information and assent to historical “facts.”<sup>137</sup> Many historic site managers have yet to discover ways to truly provoke and engage their audiences. Since there is no single solution,

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<sup>135</sup> Howett, "The Role of the Interpretive Program in the Restoration of Historic Landscapes," 50.

<sup>136</sup> Herman, "Fleeting Landscapes and the Challenge for Historic Preservation," 6.

<sup>137</sup> Howett, "The Role of the Interpretive Program in the Restoration of Historic Landscapes," 50.

managers must develop a multifaceted approach, closely considering the relevancy of story content and expression.

Many of America's cultural and historic landscapes remain grossly underutilized for historical interpretation. Visitors may conceive of these landscapes as enduring artifacts reflecting the many cultures that both shape and are shaped by them over time. These landscapes are also stages that provide infinite possibilities for enacting varied moments of wonder and enchantment. They exist as complicated networks of both human and nonhuman actors—ranging from animals to architects, grasses to gardening shears, and pathways to publications. No one could ever fully understand the intricacy of this symbiotic relationship or predict how its relative components will perform over time. This ambiguity and complexity enliven a place. Although cultural and historic landscapes may appear to be coherent to the human eye, they are never static.<sup>138</sup>

How might the professionals who manage American cultural and historic landscapes interpret history in ways that captivate attention and generate respect for the past, opening eyes, hearts, and minds to new perceptions of people, places, and events that might otherwise be lost? Catherine Howett suggests that “History can only be made real and relevant in narratives, in images and stories, that imaginatively select and heighten, interpret and transform—creating and communicating a reality infused with the spirit of the past but at the same time grounded, without illusion, in the concerns of the present.”<sup>139</sup> This statement resonates with concepts that inspired the eighteenth-century English landscape garden movement.

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<sup>138</sup> Eric A. MacDonald, "Hortus Incantans: Gardening as an Act of Enchantment," in *Cultivating Wisdom*, ed. Dan O'Brien, *Gardening - Philosophy for Everyone*: (Singapore: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 130.

<sup>139</sup> Howett, "The Role of the Interpretive Program in the Restoration of Historic Landscapes," 60.

### *The English Landscape Garden*

From the seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries, English landscape gardeners adopted a didactic approach to design. They combined images and words within expressive settings to create an unfolding narrative in the landscape. By filling the landscape with associative meanings, the English cultivated a literary landscape that visitors could “read” on different intellectual levels. Over time, the landscape garden read as an improving text, while owners and designers adapted old chapters to an ever-evolving narrative through the use of metaphors and allusions.<sup>140</sup>

The landscape garden typically relayed stories from classical Greece and Rome, which the English aristocracy saw as a model for their eighteenth-century culture. Since Italy and England are climactically and ecologically distinct landscapes, wealthy English patrons and their designers, each returning from the Grand Tour, acted creatively through their garden designs. They looked selectively to classical Mediterranean cultures as a source of inspiration rather than believing themselves to be truly replicating those past societies and cultures.<sup>141</sup>

English landscape designers developed ingenious ways to convey the classical ideals they deemed so relevant to their society. They ornamented rural landscapes with monuments that evoked sensations, heightened interest, and stimulated emotion.<sup>142</sup> The viewer, immersed in the eighteenth-century landscape garden, moved from scene to scene, and the scenes themselves served as allusive settings in which dramatic action existed solely in the imagination. This

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<sup>140</sup> These narratives frequently included themes from ancient Greek and Roman poetry such as Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*, 232-47.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> These often consisted of both real and constructed ruins. The latter is referred to as a folly, or a structural element with no practical function. Follies often appeared in the form of Roman temples and grottoes to symbolize classic virtues or ideals, or Chinese temples, Egyptian pyramids, ruined Gothic abbeys, and Tatar tents to represent different historical eras and foreign cultures. These dramatically charged landscape forms were a means of stimulating mental associations with nature’s mysteries.

unique landscape experience stimulated reflection and induced reverie, and drew inspiration from the philosophies of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which saw the mind as theatre of sensation.<sup>143</sup>

During the first half of the eighteenth century, English landscape designers used emblematic devices—statues, inscriptions, paintings, and so forth—that often recalled absent ideas through metaphors and allusions. Thomas Whatley, a government official writing as a landscape connoisseur in 1765, however, suggested that this style made "no immediate impression" upon the visitor because emblematic devices required examination, comparison, and occasionally explanation in order for visitors to comprehend the meanings behind a design.<sup>144</sup> Thus, the period during the latter half of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century was marked by a transition in style as designers paid attention to *both* emblematic and expressive forms. Whatley argued that designers could manipulate the materials of nature—"ground, wood, water, and rocks"—to create expressive scenes that would immediately evoke a range of moods from visitors and therefore complement the prolonged experience of uncovering emblematic associations.<sup>145</sup>

English landscape gardens thus contained precise arrangements of emblematic devices and eventually exhibited strong expressive qualities as designers attempted to evoke the paintings of Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Poussin or poetic lines from John Milton and Alexander Pope. Ultimately, through human intervention, landscape garden designers sought to produce an idealized nature that would reveal the *genius loci*, or the spirit of the place, that

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<sup>143</sup> Locke declared that all knowledge of the world must rest on sensory experience. This concept of the mind as an instrument for inductive reasoning and a theater for personal experience had an important effect on garden design in the eighteenth century as landscapes were contrived to furnish the sensate mind with specific mental associations and impressions. Rousseau extended Locke's influence through philosophical and political discourses on the importance of reverie and the power of the imagination. Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*, 232-47.

<sup>144</sup> Thomas Whatley, *Observations on Modern Gardening: Illustrated by Descriptions* (T. Payne, 1770), 151.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

interacts with the mind, eliciting emotions, fostering perceptions, and stimulating both memory and curiosity.<sup>146</sup> While many landscape gardens throughout England embodied these ideals, Stowe, the Buckinghamshire estate of the Temple-Grenville family, became one of the most renowned examples, enticing great numbers of visitors throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

### *Case Study I: Stowe Landscape Garden, Buckinghamshire, England*

Sir Richard Temple, Third Baronet, first began the Stowe garden in the 1680s by creating a series of terraces and an orchard on a south-facing slope, with its central axis aligned with the spire of Buckingham parish church three miles away. His son, Richard, later Viscount Cobham, expanded and embellished this layout from 1713 until his death in 1749. Initially, Lord Cobham's garden continued the accepted tradition of formality by including long allées and neatly clipped hedges in the design. Under the direction of Lord Cobham, however, this framework eventually deviated from strict symmetry and integrated softer, curvilinear lines that opened the grounds to the surrounding countryside by incorporating ha-ha walls.<sup>147</sup>

Earl Temple, the nephew and successor of Lord Cobham, carried forth this progressively naturalistic style. He remodeled much of the garden by thinning the plantations, widening and naturalizing the vistas, and remodeling a great number of garden structures to suit the new scale of the setting he changed. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, his nephew and heir, the Marquess of Buckingham added the last touches to the landscape garden.<sup>148</sup>

Throughout the eighteenth century, the owners of Stowe employed some of the leading architects, landscape gardeners, and sculptors of the age to transform the grounds into a three-

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<sup>146</sup> Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*, 232-47.

<sup>147</sup> John Martin Robinson, Jerry Harpur, and National Trust (Great Britain), *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens* (London: George Philip in association with the National Trust, 1990), 15-17.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

dimensional equivalent of the landscape paintings of Claude Lorrain and Nicholas Poussin and the poetry of John Milton and Alexander Pope. Many distinguished English artists and designers were involved in creating the garden, including: architects Sir John Vanbrugh, James Gibbs, William Kent and Robert Adam; gardeners Charles Bridgeman and Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown; and sculptors John Nost, Peter Scheemakers and John Michael Rysbrack. However, involvement in the gardens extended beyond native talent and employed artists across the continent, such as Giacomo Leoni, Georges-Francois Blondel, Giovanni Battista Borra, Francesco Sletter and Vincenzo Valdre. The owners themselves, notably Lord Cobham and Earl Temple, also assisted in creating the landscape garden, which represented an amateur design tradition distinct to the Georgian age.<sup>149</sup>

During the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, the garden escaped the swings of Victorian fashion. This was largely a consequence of increasingly straitened finances in the Temple-Grenville family. Thus, the eighteenth-century garden retained much of its physical integrity because the Dukes of Buckingham, successors to the Marquess of Buckingham, lacked the monetary means to make any major alterations. By the end of the First World War, however, Stowe ceased to be a private house and entered into a new phase as the seat of a public school, which still exists today.<sup>150</sup>

This brief account of the succession of Stowe conveys several key principles of the eighteenth-century landscape garden movement. Stowe, similar to other gardens at the time, is perhaps most importantly a collaborative effort. For over three centuries, a multitude of dedicated and diverse persons worked together to create the Stowe garden. These individuals have ranged in profession from architect to landscape architect; in skill level from amateur to

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 17.

professional status; and in style, from the emblematic to the expressive. This variety has strengthened and enriched the landscape as a whole. Stowe has ultimately grown into an anthology, a sum of which is far greater than its individual parts.

The sum of Stowe is a grand monument to the Whig worldview of Enlightenment. Throughout the eighteenth century, the proprietors of Stowe were steadfast adherents of the Whig cause in politics. This political allegiance is a leitmotif in the garden architecture, with images and inscriptions recalling the vicissitudes of politics in eighteenth-century Britain.<sup>151</sup> It is crucial, however, to understand that each of these elements fits together like pieces of a puzzle, achieving order and unity within variety to ultimately convey a story. In “An Epistle to Lord Burlington” (1731), Alexander Pope explains how the creative process of man combined with “Nature” assembles this puzzle:

“Still follow Sense, of ev'ry Art the Soul,  
Parts answ'ring parts shall slide into a whole,  
Spontaneous beauties all around advance,  
Start ev'n from Difficulty, strike from Chance;  
Nature shall join you, Time shall make it grow  
A Work to wonder at—perhaps a STOW.”<sup>152</sup>

The reader can understand “Spontaneous beauties” as a collection of alive and inert elements, such as trees and temples or people and poems. The landscape garden is a dynamic entity, now understood as a collaboration of both humans and “Nature.” Given this collaboration, another important principle of the landscape garden emerges from the lines of Alexander Pope’s poem. As evidenced from “Time shall make it grow,” landscape garden designers embraced change and the fortuity that accompanies it. They rejected the strict control imposed upon the landscape by seventeenth-century French designers. Rather than attempting to tame nature, the

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>152</sup> John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden, 1620-1820*, 1st MIT Press pbk. ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 212.

English acknowledged that the liveliness of the landscape garden derives from its state of constant flux. The frequent remodeling and rearrangement of the Stowe landscape garden stand as a testament to this principle.<sup>153</sup> Change allowed the owners and designers of Stowe to rediscover value in seemingly antiquated elements. An area at Stowe called the Grecian Valley best exemplifies this notion of reinventing value.

The Grecian Temple, a large building decorated with twenty-eight Ionic columns, marks the northwestern corner of the Grecian Valley. Earl Temple first began creating this area of the garden in 1747. By 1764 he had renamed it the Temple of Concord and Victory to celebrate British peace at home and victory in the field, following the end of the Seven Years War. At that time, Earl Temple instigated an ambitious remodeling of the temple. Workers filled-in the side windows because designers proclaimed the temple's existing architecture unfashionable and inaccurate. Designers also determined from new research that details of the singular rectangular room within the peristyle were historically imprecise. Thus, workers demolished the entrance of the temple and reconstructed it, creating an archaeologically correct *pronaos* and *cella*.<sup>154</sup>

Additionally, research indicated that a Graeco-Roman temple of this type would have included a sculptured relief in the tympanum of the pediment. Fortunately, a suitable one existed on the east wall of the Palladian Bridge that architects had erected in 1738 to conceal from sight the decaying village of Lamport. The subject of the relief, "The Four Quarters of the World Bringing their Products to Britannia" aligned with the theme of Concord leading to Victory and Prosperity. However, its original rectangular design did not. Consequently, workers dismantled, moved, and readapted the relief to the new triangular space (Figure 3.1). In turn, they remodeled the Palladian Bridge with columns on both sides, and added a Palmyrene plaster ceiling inside

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<sup>153</sup> For a detailed account see George Clarke, "The Moving Temples of Stowe: Aesthetics of Change in an English Landscape over Four Generations," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (1992).

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.



Figure 3.1: The Pediment of the Temple of Concord and Victory at Stowe Landscape Garden carved by Peter Scheemakers, an eighteenth-century Flemish Roman Catholic sculptor. Source: John Martin Robinson, Jerry Harpur, and The National Trust (Great Britain), *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens* (London: George Philip in association with the National Trust, 1990), 142.



Figure 3.2: The Palladian Bridge at Stowe Landscape Garden. Source: Peter Dean, August 2005. [http://wapedia.mobi/en/English\\_garden](http://wapedia.mobi/en/English_garden)

the structure, in an attempt to create a truer version of the classical ideal (Figure 3.2, previous page).<sup>155</sup> This evolution of the Grecian Temple and Palladian Bridge illustrates a bigger pattern within the English landscape garden tradition. It shows how existing elements were repurposed to meet present needs.

Alexander Pope addressed how humans partake in this process of reinventing value in his *Epistle to Lord Burlington* (lines 191-192):

“You too proceed! Make falling Arts your care,  
Erect new wonders, And the old repair.”<sup>156</sup>

Beginning with the words “Make falling Arts your care,” Alexander Pope suggests that as “Arts” inevitably pass out of style and new trends appear, future generations must take “care” by re-imagining what exists and persists. The addition of new elements partially achieves this notion. A present-day observer of Stowe can retrospectively consider the construction of the Stowe School in 1923 a “new wonder” because it reinvented the landscape garden ideals through a curriculum that embodies the English enlightenment and its ethos.<sup>157</sup>

Another aspect of the 1923 reinvention of Stowe emerges from Alexander Pope’s suggestion for the repair of aged components. “Repair” denotes a restoration of disintegrating elements, as well as a return to a sound state. Repair not only implies restoring the physical stability of material deterioration, but subtly suggests reaching social stability through the reworking of parts to meet present needs. This idea that repair pertains to both physical material and society is also evident in more recent times, such as through the National Trust’s treatment of the Stowe landscape. For example, beginning in 1998, the National Trust renovated Dido’s Cave, a small nondescript building dating from 1720. Rather than strictly restoring it to one

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<sup>155</sup> Robinson, Harpur, and National Trust (Great Britain), *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens*, 142.

<sup>156</sup> Hunt and Willis, *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden, 1620-1820*.

<sup>157</sup> Dr. Anthony Wallersteiner, “About Stowe,” Stowe School Ltd., <http://www.stowe.co.uk/about-stowe/headmasters-welcome>.

period, the trust revealed various layers of the façade, giving visitors a sense of the many architectural transformations that accompanied its centuries of remodeling. This repair fits within the more recent social context of the Stowe school, which upholds a strong value for education.<sup>158</sup>

Looking back to the eighteenth century, despite the sweeping changes that occurred within the landscape, designers always gave careful consideration to how each part would, according to Alexander Pope, “slide into a whole.” After entering the garden, spectators obtained a view of the mansion, groves, temples, obelisk, and water features. Paths directed them to many of the buildings and to several scenes, allowing for occasional glimpses into the surrounding park. Designers diversified the landscape with hills, valleys, lawns, and lakes to create much variety for the eye to behold.<sup>159</sup>

These “eye-catchers” immediately draw attention and then just as quickly disappear from view, while visitors physically and mentally traverse the landscape. This occurrence suggests two key principles of the landscape garden design. William Shenstone in his *Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening*, published in 1764, explains how a designer achieves one of these principles: “When a building, or other object, has been once viewed from its proper point, the foot should never travel to it by the same path, which the eye has travelled over before. Lose the object, and draw nigh, obliquely.”<sup>160</sup>

Following this principle of “hide and reveal,” designers of the landscape garden intentionally set boundaries by vegetation or topography to momentarily restrict visual access to these distant features, thereby heightening the visitor’s interest and anticipation. The Temple of

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<sup>158</sup> John D. Tatter, “Dido’s Cave,” Birmingham-Southern College, <http://faculty.bsc.edu/jtatter/dido.html>.

<sup>159</sup> Henry Rumsey Forster, *The Stowe Catalogue, Priced and Annotated* (London: D. Bogue, 1848), xxiv.

<sup>160</sup> William Shenstone and Robert Dodsley, “Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening,” in *The Works in Verse and Prose, of William Shenstone* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1764).

Venus is one of many examples throughout the Stowe garden that demonstrates this principle of “hide and reveal” (Figure 3.3). A principle that emerges from the experience of “hide and reveal” is how human movement is essential to the landscape garden creating a sense of wonder or delight. The landscape garden requires movement from visitors in order for hidden elements to be revealed visually. This movement then allows the minds of visitors to intellectually uncover the associations designers created among elements. The renowned Elysian Fields, an area begun in 1731, illuminates the principle of how movement is essential to evoking feelings of wonder and delight.



Figure 3.3: The Temple of Venus at Stowe Landscape Garden revealed through an opening in the trees. Source: [http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1275/544289331\\_0020c60496.jpg](http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1275/544289331_0020c60496.jpg)

The Elysian Fields are fraught with poetic and mythic meaning, which provides visitors with a concentrated exercise in mental agility. The name of this part of the garden overtly suggests the legendary Elysium where mortals favored by the gods enjoyed their existence after

death.<sup>161</sup> At Stowe, designers commemorated select mortals, such as Homer (poetry), Socrates (philosophy), Lycurgus (law), and Epaminondas (military genius) through sculptures placed in the Temple of Ancient Virtue, a circular *peripteral* Ionic temple on a podium with a domed *cella* modeled after the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli.<sup>162</sup> The Temple of Modern Virtue, an adjacent sham ruin that has since deteriorated, once heightened the meaning behind the Temple of Ancient Virtue by drawing a direct connection to eighteenth-century England.<sup>163</sup> The waters of the “River Styx” separate the Temple of Ancient Virtue from the Temple of British Worthies, a semicircular exedra with sixteen pedimented niches. Each niche encloses a portrait bust of a British hero offering an inscription for erudite visitors to read.<sup>164</sup>

The Elysian Fields offer visitors an experience that provokes noble patriotic thoughts. Although designers firmly fixed these busts of both ancient and modern figures in the “readable” structure of the Elysian Fields, their placement offers deeper significance. For example, a bust of Alexander Pope faces northward to the newer, expressive extension of Stowe into the Grecian Valley. This placement suggests his role in the landscape garden movement, prophetically grasping the possibilities of expressive gardening.<sup>165</sup> Socrates, symbolic of philosophic thought,

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<sup>161</sup> John Dixon Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque: Studies in the History of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 77.

<sup>162</sup> Michael Gibbon, “Stowe, Buckinghamshire: The House and Garden Buildings and Their Designers,” *Architectural History* 20(1977). Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*, 242-43.

<sup>163</sup> This ruin signified the moral dereliction of contemporary politicians and once included a sculpted headless torso, representing Robert Walpole, the Prime Minister whom Richard Temple detested. D. D. C. Chambers, *The Planters of the English Landscape Garden: Botany, Trees, and the Georgics*, ed. The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, *Studies in British Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>164</sup> Among these busts are the “men of contemplation” who fought for England with their pen, including Alexander Pope, Inigo Jones, William Shakespeare, Francis Bacon, John Milton, John Locke, Isaac Newton, and Sir Thomas Gresham. The other half are “men and women of action,” including King Alfred, the Black Prince, Queen Elizabeth, Walter Raleigh, Francis Drake, John Hampden, King William III, and Sir John Barnard. Pope and Barnard were the only living worthies when the monument was erected in the eighteenth century and so their busts bear no inscriptions. They are placed at the extreme ends of the crescent-shaped building, bookending the remaining busts. Humorously, to the back of the temple is a niche sacred to the memory of Signor Fido, a beloved hunting dog. Francesca Orestano, “Bust Story: Pope at Stowe, or the Politics and Myths of Landscape Gardening,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 38, no. 1 (2005). Also, see Forster, *The Stowe Catalogue, Priced and Annotated*.

<sup>165</sup> Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque: Studies in the History of Landscape Architecture*, 88.

faces the Temple of Friendship, a place where Lord Cobham frequently gathered with friends to discuss politics. Additionally, designers situated Epaminondas, representative of military genius, in a direct line with a monument honoring Captain Thomas Grenville, a member of Lord Cobham's family, who was killed fighting the French aboard his ship *The Defiance*.<sup>166</sup>

A direct sight line also exists between the monument for Captain Thomas Grenville and one in honor of Captain Cook, drawing an immediate connection between the two British heroes. In 1778, Earl Temple erected a monument for Captain Cook on a small island in the midst of the Elysian Fields' "River Styx".<sup>167</sup> It commemorated Captain Cook's discoveries in the South Pacific and reflected Earl Temple's interest in the expansion of the British Empire.<sup>168</sup> The benches of the nearby Seasons Fountain offer visitors a resting place to observe the sculpture of Cook's portrait carved on the monument, and to further contemplate the entire scene (Figures 3.4-3.5).<sup>169</sup>

Artists decorated the globe atop Captain Cook's Monument with brass strips to indicate latitude and longitude. The equatorial band bears a quotation in Latin from Horace's *Archytas Ode* (Book I, Ode XXVIII) that translates to "you were the man who measured sea, earth, and sand without number." In this passage from Horace's poem, the speaker, a drowned sailor, addressed himself to Archytas, a fourth-century Greek mathematician and astronomer, whose interests as an explorer and cartographer closely aligned with those of Captain Cook. Later in the

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<sup>166</sup> This was erected in the Elysian Fields in 1747 immediately following the death of Lord Temple's younger brother. It was likely designed by Lord Temple for its Roman archaeological overtone. In the 1760s, however, it was moved to the north end of the Elysian Fields where Lord Temple must have thought that its heroic and patriotic message would be more in keeping. Ibid., 79. Robinson, Harpur, and National Trust (Great Britain), *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens*, 125.

<sup>167</sup> This monument was restored in 2002 to this original locale after being placed for over 150 years on the southern end of the river.

<sup>168</sup> The National Trust (Great Britain), "Stowe: The Elysian Fields," <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-vh/w-visits/w-findaplace/w-stowegardens/w-stowegardens-gardens/w-stowegardens-gardens-elysian.htm>.

<sup>169</sup> John D. Tatter, "Captain Cook's Monument," Birmingham-Southern College, <http://faculty.bsc.edu/jtatter/cook.html>.



Figure 3.4: The Seasons Fountain at Stowe Landscape Garden located in close proximity to Captain Cook's Monument (Figure 3.5). Source: J.H.B., October 2009.  
[http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2507/4000182003\\_d9f1d808b8.jpg](http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2507/4000182003_d9f1d808b8.jpg)



Figure 3.5: Captain Grenville's Column at Stowe Landscape Garden stands in the distance, aligned with the smaller Captain Cook's Monument in the foreground. Source: John D. Tatter.  
<http://faculty.bsc.edu/jtatter/cook3.jpg>

poem, a passing sailor begs the speaker to grant his “bones and unburied head a measure of loose sand.” According to Greek mythology, a proper burial included a coin placed under the tongue of the corpse to pay the ferryman who carried souls across the River Styx; without this, the unfortunate soul was doomed to wander the banks of the Styx for a hundred years seeking the entrance into the Elysian Fields, the realm of the blessed.<sup>170</sup>

Captain Cook’s Monument then offers insight into the way Earl Temple, similar to his predecessor and uncle Lord Cobham, designed the gardens to present an idea in four dimensions (space and time) and to invite the spectator to participate in the process of interpretation. Captain Cook suffered a violent death: he was dismembered by the hands of the Hawaiians, and his crew eventually dispersed his remains at sea. Thus, the allusion to the drowned sailor in Horace’s poem is symbolic of Captain Cook in that he, too, was unable to cross the River Styx. The placement of his monument on an island is very fitting because, in order to read the Latin inscription, visitors must symbolically journey from the western bank of the river across the Shell Bridge to the eastern side as if wandering the banks of the real Styx. The design of the Elysian Fields immerses visitors in the narrative as they truly become a part of it and complete the landscape.<sup>171</sup>

As understood through the example of the Elysian Fields, there is a politic *of* the garden that occurs by physically arranging objects in spaces where designers attempt to control the visitor’s response. There is also a politic evoked *by* the garden through convictions, opinions, and sympathies of individual visitors expressed in response to what they encounter.<sup>172</sup> Visitors thus complete the garden by making the connections designers created but left obscure, or even

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> John D. Tatter, “Sexual Politics in the Landscape Garden at Stowe,” in *Landscapes and Politics Conference* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2001).

by producing entirely new and unintended associations. Visitors advance from the role of passive spectators gazing at something apart to active participants, fully absorbed in the landscape and its narrative.<sup>173</sup> Boundaries between artist, work of art, and audience become indistinct while each contributes to the “whole” described in Alexander Pope’s epistle.<sup>174</sup>

Another important aspect of the landscape garden is its dialogue with the public world by conveying themes that impart strong moral and political messages. This experience instigated a movement in poetry and prose by eighteenth-century contemporaries such as Stephen Switzer, Alexander Pope, William Congreve, William Gilpin, James Thomson, and Gilbert West. Engravings published in 1739 by Jaques Rigaud certainly suggest the Stowe garden as a focus of social activity, a place of meaningful retreat (Figure 3.6). At this point, visitors frequently “read” the various statues, inscriptions, and temples of Stowe, either contemplating the garden alone or debating its meanings with others.<sup>175</sup>

While open spaces provided visitors with opportunities to reflect upon the landscape garden in solitude, the Temple of Friendship served as an intimate gathering space where Lord Cobham and his contemporaries engaged in political discussions. Standing half a mile from the Temple of Friendship, Lord Cobham erected the Queen’s Temple, originally called the Lady’s Temple, to amuse her guests while he entertained fellow comrades in the Temple of Friendship.<sup>176</sup> Additionally, the form and placement of the Rotunda, an open circular colonnaded

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<sup>173</sup> Jonathan Meades, *Stowe: Reading a Garden* (BBC, 2000).

<sup>174</sup> John D. Tatter, “The Invisible Border between Art and Nature: Pope’s Aesthetic Principles Applied to Poetry and Landscape Gardening,” in *International Conference on Borders and Foundations* (Atlanta 1997).

<sup>175</sup> John Dixon Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening During the Eighteenth Century*, Softshell Books ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 188.

<sup>176</sup> Robinson, Harpur, and National Trust (Great Britain), *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens*, 198.

Ionic building situated at a highpoint on a bastion on a ha-ha, stood as a significant social hub for all within the garden, and offered commanding views of the surrounding milieu.<sup>177</sup>



Figure 3.6: Eighteenth-century Engravings of Stowe Landscape Garden by Jacques Rigaud's show the gardens as a place of social activity. The upper image shows the view across the Eleven Acre Lake from the southwest bastion of the ha-ha. The lower image faces south from the house over the parterre and down the Abele Walk. Source: John Martin Robinson, Jerry Harpur, and The National Trust (Great Britain), *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens* (London: George Philip in association with the National Trust, 1990), 148.

<sup>177</sup> The National Trust (Great Britain), "Stowe: The Western Garden," <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-vh/w-visits/w-findaplace/w-stowegardens/w-stowegardens-gardens/w-stowegardens-gardens-western.htm>.

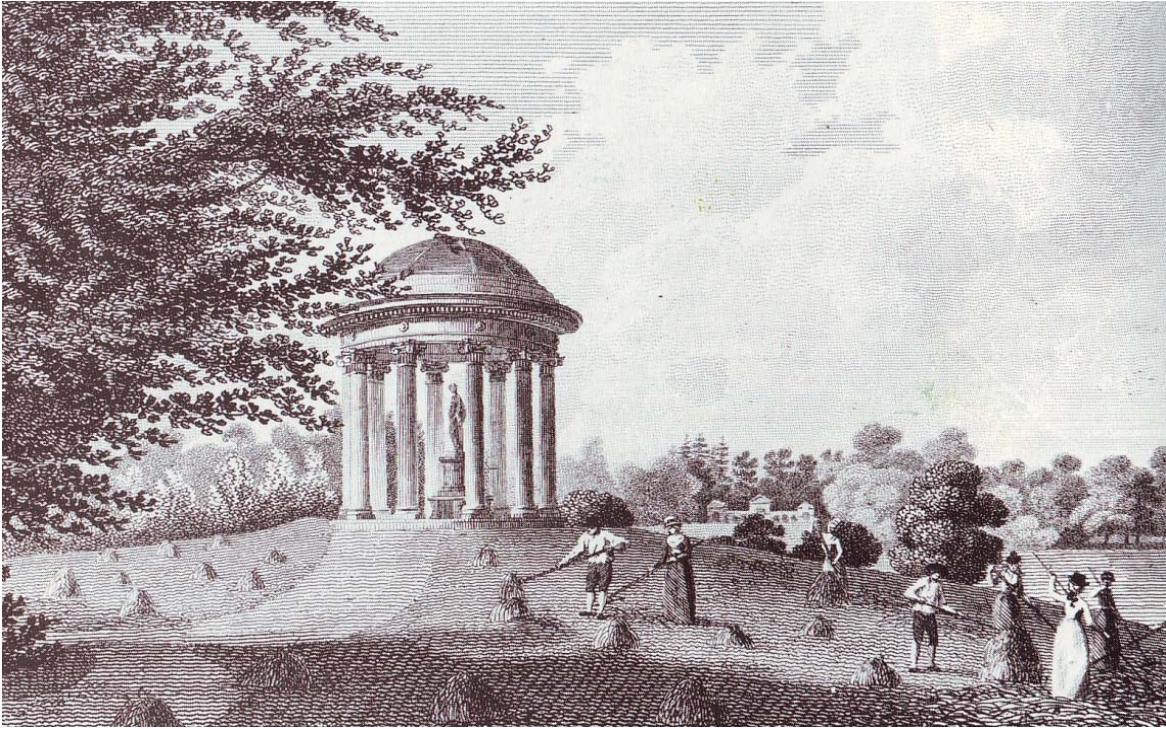


Figure 3.7: Engraving of the Rotunda by T. Medland, with the Temple of Venus in the background. Source: John Martin Robinson, Jerry Harpur, and The National Trust (Great Britain), *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens* (London: George Philip in association with the National Trust, 1990), 136.

An engraving of the Rotunda by T. Medland shows the typical maintenance activities carried out in the garden. During the eighteenth century, designers believed this ability to observe maintenance activities contributed to the overall experience. Consequently, the Rotunda became both a visual attraction and a subject for conversation among visitors (Figure 3.7). Medland's engraving depicts workers raking fresh grass clippings in the foreground. Eighteenth-century commentaries from visitors of Stowe describe the scene of active gardeners and farmers. While contemporary visitors may not appreciate these activities in the same way, the garden has remained a mecca for visitors of all nationalities and ranks, from royalty downwards since the eighteenth century.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>178</sup> Robinson, Harpur, and National Trust (Great Britain), *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens*, 7.

In conclusion, the Stowe landscape represents the prevailing ideas of the eighteenth-century English landscape garden movement. It exhibits the theme of meaningful retreat, which is, perhaps, most meaningful in Stowe's dialogue with the public world to convey strong moral and political messages. The Stowe landscape garden also shows the mental delight by "hide and reveal" techniques from adjudicating the careful contest between art and nature. People, whether visitors debating politics or workers involved in mundane activities, were engaged as characters in the narrative of Stowe. Additionally, the landscape garden integrated diverse scenery that allowed a full repertoire of tragic and triumphant scenes to parallel "the varied movements of the heart."<sup>179</sup> Stowe also demonstrates how the landscape captivates the imagination and intellectually stimulates the literary ambitions of owners, designers, and visitors to the landscape.<sup>180</sup>

Most importantly, Stowe exhibits the universal human experience of change that contributes to the ambiguity and complexity of living places. As related in the beginning of this chapter, Catherine Howett suggests that carefully restored house museums and gardens are devoid of these two characteristics and therefore fail to engage imaginations, elicit emotions, and provoke thoughtful reflections. The allowance for change is one way treatment of historic sites in America has fallen short, and thus an idea that should garner attention when reimagining and reinvigorating historical interpretation. It is, perhaps, Stowe's architectural game of musical chairs, carried forth by a complex network of human and nonhuman actors, that enchants its visitors and summons their return time and again to its "temples of delight."<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> James Thomson and John Beresford, *The Seasons* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1927).

<sup>180</sup> Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening During the Eighteenth Century*, 129.

<sup>181</sup> Clarke, "The Moving Temples of Stowe: Aesthetics of Change in an English Landscape over Four Generations."

### *Case Study II: Little Sparta, Stonypath, Scotland*

The garden of Little Sparta at Dunsyre in the Pentland Hills near Edinburgh, Scotland, demonstrates how the eighteenth-century English notion of the landscape acting as both a muse and museum has survived into the post-modern era. Little Sparta also provides an example of the re-envisioning of the garden as repository for cultural meanings. In America, typical historic site tours and visual exhibits too often filter information by marginalizing grim realities of the past, thus presenting a narrow historical perspective. Nothing remains to “challenge or trouble” visitors at historic sites, thus flattening experience rather than expanding it, by doubly denying the past and current reality of a multifaceted human world.<sup>182</sup>

Ian Hamilton Finlay, however, created Little Sparta as a place that provokes poetic, philosophical, and political thoughts. The garden is a manifestation of the "concrete" poetry that Finlay developed during the 1960s. In this unique writing style, syntax does not dictate the placement of words. Instead, the poet arranges words on a page to form a visualization that often discloses meaning via juxtaposed sounds, shapes, or references. These printed works give readers a suggestively, open-ended meaning through the use of metaphor. Finlay specifically coupled unlike terms on a single page so that they behaved as "multivalent" pointers, or as shifting invocatory signs. It is this element of momentary bewilderment that transfixes the reader and leads to a sense of delight upon recognizing a connection between two seemingly disparate ideas.<sup>183</sup>

Stemming from his early experiments in concrete poetry, Finlay's repertoire of garden artworks indicate an acute sensitivity to formalist concerns of literary and artistic modernism, such as color, shape, scale, texture, and composition. These devices arm his work with evocative

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<sup>182</sup> Howett, "The Role of the Interpretive Program in the Restoration of Historic Landscapes," 50.

<sup>183</sup> Prudence Carlson, "Ian Hamilton Finlay 28 October 1925 - 27 March 2006," Wild Hawthorne Press, [http://www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com/ian\\_hamilton\\_finlay.html](http://www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com/ian_hamilton_finlay.html).

content. As both poet and philosopher, Finlay recognized the power that language and art hold in shaping human perceptions of the world and inciting action. He fully realized the movement of words and art into the world through his gardens at Little Sparta. "At every turn along Little Sparta's paths or in its glades, language—here plaintively, there aggressively—ambushes the visitor. Plaques, benches, headstones, obelisks, planters, bridges and tree-column bases all carry words or other signage; and this language, in relation to the objects upon which it is inscribed and the landscape within which it is sited, functions metaphorically to conjure up an ideal and radical space, a space of the mind beyond sight or touch." Little Sparta reads like a poem, similarly engrossing and enchanting its visitors.<sup>184</sup>

Begun in 1966, Little Sparta became Finlay's creative outlet during the subsequent forty years. In creating the great variety of its garden artworks, which number over 275, he collaborated with many other artists and craftsmen to bring his conceptual poetry to a concrete realization. Similar to Stowe, Little Sparta is a body of work consistently and successfully situated within the idea of collaboration, and further invokes the cooperation of the visitor in co-creating moments of poetry.<sup>185</sup> Instead of promulgating a static perspective, Little Sparta provides a forum that encourages visitors to engage in discussion and debate about the merits of different, perhaps entirely new perspectives. The garden exemplifies an exceptional openness to various levels of interpretation by presenting layered meanings, some that are obvious and others that require deeper thought. Individual artworks within the garden create allusions to pre-Socratic philosophy, the art of Poussin, the poetry of Vaughan, the imagery adopted by French

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Jessie Sheeler and Andrew Lawson, *Little Sparta: The Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay*, 1st Frances Lincoln ed. (London: Frances Lincoln, 2003), 11-12.

revolutionaries, World War II sea battles, and contemporary fishing craft; as a whole, Little Sparta stands as a single grand metaphor for the entirety of Western culture.<sup>186</sup>

Finlay carefully positioned each garden artwork at Little Sparta within what he described as "specific landscape," or areas of individual character and mood (Figure 3.8). The Monument to the Battle of Little Sparta is the first of such landscapes the visitor encounters along the access road. Upon entering Little Sparta, the Front Garden contains various stone inscriptions, which draw inspiration from the Latin language. Within the Front Garden is the Roman Garden, which contains variations on the theme of warships and their modern airborne equivalents. The nearby Secret Garden alludes to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's sentimental novel *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Heloise*.<sup>187</sup>

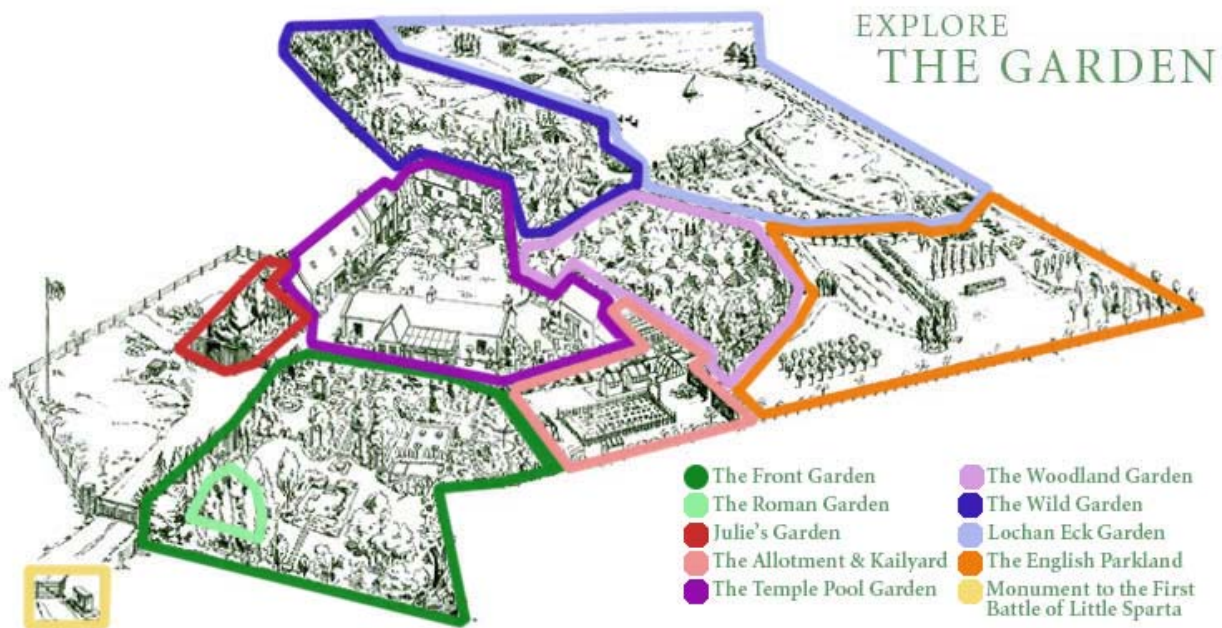


Figure 3.8: Axonometric Drawing of Little Sparta showing "specific landscapes." Source: Adapted by Stephanie N. Bryan from <http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/explore/explore.htm>.

<sup>186</sup> Carlson, "Ian Hamilton Finlay 28 October 1925 - 27 March 2006."

<sup>187</sup> The Little Sparta Trust, "Areas of the Garden," The Little Sparta Trust, <http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/explore/explore.htm>.

The Allotment and Kailyard are productive vegetable gardens on opposite sides of a temple to Baucis and Philemon, which evoke the simple life of two unique epochs. The Temple Pool Garden stands at the very center of Little Sparta, sheltered in each direction by a Hortus Conclusus, the Temple of Baucis and Philemon, a Temple of Apollo, and the artist's house. The Woodland Garden adjoins a pool near the Temple of Apollo and contains paths that direct visitors to outlying areas of the garden. Finlay intended this design to conjure the atmosphere of a European forest with narrow paths that often lead to nowhere. A Wild Garden is to the rear of the house and borders the distant hills. The Lochan Eck Garden sits beyond the Wild Garden and fringes the open water with a monolithic Nuclear Sail sculpture rising over the scene. Finally, the English Parkland comprises a broad expanse alongside the Lochan Eck Garden. Its composition of artworks and landscape echoes the ideals of an eighteenth-century English landscape park.<sup>188</sup>

At Little Sparta, Finlay meticulously situated each constructed artifact within the natural elements of the aforementioned "specific landscapes." Compositions, juxtaposing the peaceful and destructive forces of which humankind and the environment are equally capable, provoke visitors to contemplate and realize the "nature of things," whether on a grand ideological scale or a more intimate one. The result is a garden of narratives conveyed poetically through stone, wood, and metal augmented by the surrounding natural scene. At Little Sparta, the ways in which the intangible qualities of nature enhance the whole experience echoes the eighteenth-century landscape design principle of parts fitting into a whole.

Each element, such as trickling streams or still ponds, rustling grasses or leaves, brilliant sun or calming shade, thus becomes increasingly significant by designation of each garden work to places that fit within a grand artistic scheme.<sup>189</sup> For example, a stone plaque on a tree (Figure

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Sheeler and Lawson, *Little Sparta: The Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay*, 11-12.

3.9) in the Front Garden reads “MARE NOSTRUM,” which translates to “Our Sea.” Below the plaque at the base of the same tree, is a wooden bench (Figure 3.10) that bears the inscription “THE SEA’S WAVES THE WAVES’ SHEAVES THE SEA’S NAVES.” These inscriptions alert the ear to sounds suggestive of the ocean’s tides, such as the rushing and rustling of the wind through the branches and the bending and tossing of tall grasses and reeds on the encircling moorland. Finlay allied the meanings of the words to their sounds to conjure visualizations of the sea that exist solely in the imaginations of visitors.<sup>190</sup> This notion recalls the philosophies of Locke and Rousseau that saw the mind as theatre of sensation.

In another part of the garden, Finlay inscribed a stone funerary urn (Figure 3.11) with the Latin words “COGITATO SUB UMBRA LATINAE CELATA” meaning “A thought hidden beneath the shade of Latin.” *Cogitato* suggests a thought, as well as a meditation. The inscription hints at the death of Latin as Europe’s *lingua franca*. The apt placement beneath the shade of the tree strikes particular resonance when visitors grasp *umbra*’s alternate meaning of ghost.<sup>191</sup>

Finlay also transformed the old farm buildings on the property into a temple precinct that became the center of the artist’s garden. He aspired to renew the didactic garden in the tradition of the Greek philosopher Epicurus who cultivated a vegetable garden to demonstrate his idea of the quiet productive life. So, too, did the poet Alexander Pope create a garden in congruence with his idea of a good society, and William Shenstone, the originator of the term “landscape gardening,” also developed his estate to give substance to his theories of contrived “natural”

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 77.



Fig. 3.9



Fig. 3.10

Figure 3.9: Inscribed Stone Plaque at Little Sparta.

Figure 3.10: Inscribed Wooden Bench at Little Sparta.

Source (both images): Jessie Sheeler and Andrew Lawson, *Little Sparta: The Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay* (Francis Lincoln, 2003), 44.

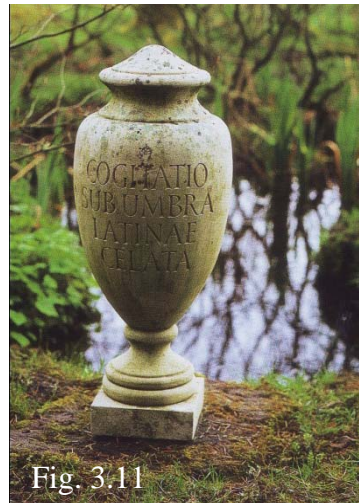


Fig. 3.11

Figure 3.11: Inscribed Stone Urn at Little Sparta. Source: Jessie Sheeler and Andrew Lawson, *Little Sparta: The Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay* (Francis Lincoln, 2003), 77.

vistas. The garden of Little Sparta updated this tradition, while retaining some of its essential nature.<sup>192</sup>

Artfulness and ingenuity are brought to bear on another eighteenth-century principle that is apparent in the gardens at Little Sparta: the frequent combination of literary themes, particularly of the bucolic, classical, and polemic. For example, the solid brick Memorial to the First Battle of Little Sparta<sup>193</sup> bears the inscription “FLUTE BEGIN WITH ME ARCADIAN NOTES” (Figure 3.12). Finlay derived the words from Virgil’s Eighth Eclogue and placed them parallel to the engraved image of a machine gun, whose sleeve vents suggest the finger stops of a flute. This crisply juxtaposes for contemplation modern notions and experiences of struggle with the idyll of the flute-playing shepherds of Arcadia, celebrated in the poetry of Theocritus and Virgil. These two images examine the role of art in engaging conflict as a mediator between form and chaos. This monument stands alongside the track that directs visitors to the garden. Layered with many meanings, it is the first of many “attacks” the visitor encounters upon experiencing the many thought-provoking images and words throughout the gardens.<sup>194</sup>

The landscape garden principle of coherence emerges at Little Sparta through the focus of a singular theme materializing in myriad ways. For example, the leitmotif of war and its inevitable outcomes encompass many historical references to this subject matter within the garden, spanning from the opening notes of the Little Spartan Wars to the crescendo of the French Revolution and the Second World War. This theme varies in form, ranging in representative style from the abstract to the literal, and in physical matter from weathered wood to durable stone.

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>193</sup> The Battles or War of Little Sparta refer to a series of disputes beginning in the 1970s between the Scottish Arts Council and many of its employees, such as Ian Hamilton Finlay. Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.



Figure 3.12: Monument to the First Battle of Little Sparta. Source: Jessie Sheeler and Andrew Lawson, *Little Sparta: The Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay* (Francis Lincoln, 2003), 16.

To illustrate this principle of coherence, the Roman Garden at Little Sparta displays several examples of stone-carved warships and their modern airborne equivalents. A Battleship Bird Fountain (Figure 3.13), Fly Navy monument (Figure 3.14), and Aircraft Carrier Bird Table (Figure 3.15), are among the stone works set atop plinths in the Roman Garden. They pay homage to the elaborate scheme of water features disguised as warships at Villa d'Este. At Little Sparta, the works are miniaturized in deliberate contrast to the impressive sculptures of the Italian Renaissance garden.<sup>195</sup>

Behind the Lochan Eck Garden, a polished slate monolith resembling the Nuclear Sail (Figure 3.16) of a submarine surfaces from the grass and adds a modern touch to the war theme introduced in the Roman Garden.<sup>196</sup> This unnerving form emotionally impacts modern visitors. The war theme then extends further into the Woodland Garden, where the aptly named OHKA

<sup>195</sup> The Little Sparta Trust, "The Roman Garden," The Little Sparta Trust, <http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/explore/roman.htm>.

<sup>196</sup> The Little Sparta Trust, "Nuclear Sail," The Little Sparta Trust.,, <http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/displayD2/nuclearsail.htm>.



Fig. 3.13



Fig. 3.14



Fig. 3.15

Figure 3.13: Battleship Bird Fountain at Little Sparta. Source: Andrew Lawson.  
<http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/displayD2/bath.htm>

Figure 3.14: Fly Navy Monument at Little Sparta. Source: Andrew Lawson.  
<http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/displayD2/flynavy.htm>

Figure 3.15: Aircraft Carrier Bird Table at Little Sparta. Source: Andrew Lawson



Fig. 3.16

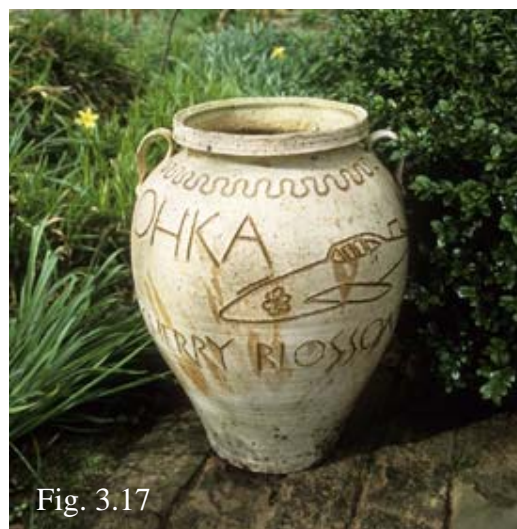


Fig. 3.17

Figure 3.16: Nuclear Sail at Little Sparta. Source: Andrew Lawson.  
<http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/displayD2/smallpics/sailSide.jpg>

Figure 3.17: OKHA Urn at Little Sparta. Source: Andrew Lawson.  
<http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/displayD2/smallpics/sideUrn.jpg>

Urn depicts an image of a World War II Japanese suicide bomber plane (Figure 3.17, previous page).<sup>197</sup> As indicated by these examples, Finlay represents many of Little Sparta's themes in an abstract manner to encourage speculation about the ideas they convey.

The "reading" of these examples initially draws the attention of visitors by recalling famous mass conflicts, such as the French Revolution or the Second World War. However, focus soon shifts inward to a personal level, as the images and words arouse deep emotions by fusing these past occurrences to present realities of war and conflict. Despite this provocative thrust, the most unique element of Little Sparta is perhaps the nuanced fragility and tenderness of nature that constantly belies the destructive forces of human beings. For example, the warships and aircraft carriers in the Roman Garden serve as landing strips and bathing areas for birds, and the OHKA Urn bears an image of the fateful plane with a cherry blossom reflecting the tribute paid by the Japanese to those short but beautiful lives lost during the Second World War.

In other places within the garden, an underlying wit enlivens this tenderness. For example, in the Front Garden, a wooden signpost with the inscription *Zur Siegfried-Linie* directs the eye to the adjacent washing line, thereby recalling songs of the Second World War soldiers poking fun at the German defensive line in Western Europe: "We're going to hang out our washing on the Siegfried Line..." The signpost then leads the eye to two large fiberglass tortoises emerging from the summer flowers and bearing the words *Panzer Leader* on their shells in a Germanic script. Calling to mind German tank forces, these sculptures actually commemorate two real tortoises—family pets that turned out to be highly aggressive toward visitors, as well as destructive to the gardens. Nearby is a grave marking the burial spot of a hare that once frequently visited the garden. The Latin marker translates to "Here rests our little Hare, waiting for the Tortoise," bringing to mind the well known Aesopian fable. Such layering of

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<sup>197</sup> The Little Sparta Trust, "Ohka Urn," The Little Sparta Trust, <http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/displayD2/urn.htm>.

lighthearted wit and seriousness, by engaging the full spectrum of the visitor's emotions and intellect, creates a fine balance at Little Sparta.<sup>198</sup>

The thematic display of the sea exemplifies these juxtapositions of the emotion and intellect, the fragile and destructive, as well as the simple and complex. Throughout the garden are creative works that depend upon the idea of the ocean as context or as a universal idea from which metaphors arise. The ideas and meanings underlying these works mirror the unpredictable nature of the waters: peaceful and serene one moment, while unsettling tides may quickly disrupt the shore of thought. This changeability is demonstrated in Finlay's poignant gesture towards sea and loss first formulated in a poster poem, and then carved into a wooden sundial installed at Little Sparta, where it now shows signs of the elements. It reads "EVENING WILL COME THEY WILL SEW THE BLUE SAIL." As elsewhere in his work, Finlay allows the words of the poem, thus made "concrete," the chance to swell with meaning. The conventional garden sundial assumes the form of a sail positioned westward, even while also suggesting a gravestone. The sewing of the shroud and the mending of the sail for the next day's journey are interknitted in meaning with the weathering of the wood, evoking the sea, the life journey and immortality in this paradoxically green space.<sup>199</sup>

John Dixon Hunt relates that "life is a voyage wherever you sail it." Allusions to the sea and its underlying destructive nature considerably augment the creative possibilities of bringing the sea to Little Sparta through the mind's eye. This concept of creating allusive settings within the landscape again perpetuates the eighteenth-century philosophies of Locke and Rousseau that saw the imagination as a stage for dramatic action. Little Sparta therefore exemplifies the landscape garden principle of stimulating the mind to the point that certain elements need not be

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<sup>198</sup> Sheeler and Lawson, *Little Sparta: The Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay*, 18-20.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

physically present if words and images can evoke a mental existence. While in reality ocean storms are completely absent from the inland gardens of Little Sparta, they can and do exist through the consciousness of its visitors.<sup>200</sup>

Little Sparta demonstrates many of the principles of the eighteenth-century landscape garden such as associations, layered meanings, coherence and harmony between man-made elements and the natural surroundings. However, Little Sparta destabilizes those merely seeking mindful yet complacent retreats, not allowing visitors to rest within the bucolic peace of the past. Finlay pushes the principle of stimulating mental associations in a new direction.

Finlay achieves this by inducing an adversarial mood contrived by his unexpected insertions into a garden of elements of concrete poetry. For example, plinths and column bases appear at the roots of trees, allowing natural trunks to substitute sculpted columns (Figure 3.18). In the Wild Garden, hand grenades give visitors an initial impression of harmless pineapples or even classical urns set atop the imposing gate piers (Figure 3.19). Also, miniature stone aircraft carriers are on standby disguised as innocuous bird tables to casual viewers. Additionally, Finlay's dictionary "redefinitions" often reveal unexpected aspects of the objects they describe and dissolve the accepted meanings of terms. For example, an inscription across a bridge reads "ARCH *n.* AN ARCHTECTURAL TERM A MATERIAL CURVE SUSTAINED BY GRAVITY AS RAPTURE BY GRIEF" (Figure 3.20). The column bases, gate piers, bird tables, and arch exemplify how a garden can transform from a "retreat" into "attack," thereby provoking thought.<sup>201</sup>

In contrivances such as these, Little Sparta awakens skepticism about currently accepted beliefs and behaviors toward a garden and then alerts the imagination to fresh possibilities of

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<sup>200</sup> John Dixon Hunt, *Nature over Again: The Garden Art of Ian Hamilton Finlay* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2008), 57.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.



Fig. 3.18



Fig. 3.19

Figure 3.18: Tree Column Base at Little Sparta. Source: Andrew Lawson.  
<http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/displayD2/nuclearsail.htm>.

Figure 3.19: Gate Piers at Little Sparta. Source: Andrew Lawson.  
<http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/displayD2/urn.htm>.



Fig. 3.20

Figure 3.20: Inscribed Arch at Little Sparta. Source: Jessie Sheeler and Andrew Lawson, *Little Sparta: The Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay* (Francis Lincoln, 2003), 32.

thought and action. With the myriad inscriptions performing a repeated ambush on the mind, it is, perhaps, fitting that Finlay refers to his garden as an “attack” rather than a “retreat.” Images and words at Little Sparta present unexpected challenges to assumptions and convention. The experience is anything but ordinary.<sup>202</sup> Little Sparta physically and mentally stops spectators in their tracks, hinting at meanings beyond immediate comprehension. The gardens are confronting and at times disconcerting.

Little Sparta illustrates how the goal of creating “readable” and associative landscapes endured beyond the eighteenth century, and outside places like Stowe. For example, Little Sparta demonstrates how a late twentieth-century landscape garden in Scotland provokes modern visitors by adopting a similar didactic design approach. Little Sparta, too, interweaves images and inscriptions with the environment to convey themes about history and life. Stowe and Little Sparta further indicate how landscape gardens can “both revitalize a dispirited civilization and rekindle a sense of mystery and reverence for the natural world.”<sup>203</sup> Perhaps, in the twenty-first century, it is befitting for America to create a new history by re-envisioning and cultivating landscape gardens at faltering historic sites. The act of gardening can again serve to resist an increasingly disenchanted and splintered modern world that acknowledges the significance of nature in the midst of its accelerated “progress.”<sup>204</sup> As the British looked to classical Rome and Greece for guidance and inspiration during the eighteenth-century, Americans may similarly turn toward Britain and elsewhere to revive the idea of the landscape as both muse and museum in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>203</sup> MacDonald, “Hortus Incantans: Gardening as an Act of Enchantment,” 124-25.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

### *Principles Derived from the Landscape Garden Concept*

In his mid-twentieth century book *Interpreting Our Heritage*, Freeman Tilden suggested that the experience of provocation was the principal goal of interpretation. Although Tilden made this claim nearly half a century ago, few historic sites have achieved it. Thus, when re-envisioning interpretation of cultural and historic sites, managers should give utmost consideration to places like Stowe and Little Sparta that creatively reach this goal. The experience of provocation and the consequent rethinking of previously unchallenged beliefs makes the landscapes of Stowe and Little Sparta places of complexity and ambiguity, sending visitors back into the world with new outlooks and perspectives on life.

Following the case studies of Stowe and Little Sparta, managers of historic sites may adopt key principles of the landscape garden as they relate to contemporary visitor reception. The following outlines eleven applicable principles:

#### **Principle 1: Associations**

By suggesting associations, managers of historic sites can create a truly engaging experience for visitors. Visitors become active participants in the landscape garden by making connections designers intended but left obscure, or even by producing entirely new and unintended associations. Associations that are not initially obvious can offer returning visitors a sense of something new. Associations act as an intellectual stimulus and allow visitors to become a part of the narrative by providing opportunities for them to call upon past experiences.

#### **Principle 2: Change**

It is important for managers of historic sites to accept that cultural and historic landscapes exist as dynamic assemblages. No person can ever fully understand their complexity, nor can a manager predict or control their performance over time. The landscape garden is a type of

historic and cultural landscape that embraces temporal fluctuations. Ultimately, the allowance for such transitions enhances its liveliness, and the landscape thus contrasts with the "restored" and comparatively "inanimate" house museums that they often enclose. Change is an important part of the human experience, and the uncertainty that accompanies it engenders the possibility for fleeting but significant moments of enchantment and delight.

### **Principle 3: Collaboration**

The significance of collaboration stems from the principle that the landscape garden is a dynamic assemblage. Collaboration between professionals and amateurs of all backgrounds (arts, sciences, etc.) enriches the narrative and fosters a pluralistic outlook vital to historical interpretation. Furthermore, the landscape garden can foster cross-generational collaboration, as a designer might "collaborate" with earlier generations of preservationists to tell a certain story in the landscape today. Many historic sites adhere to narrow perspectives of history, which fail to resonate with an increasingly diverse American population. Inclusive collaboration can prevent this singularity by suggesting a variety of intriguing yet representative stories to convey. Stories are a component of the dynamic assemblage that comprises the landscape garden. Thus, their selection should evolve so that content remains relevant and interesting to present times.

### **Principle 4: Metaphors and Allusions**

Expressing stories through metaphors and allusions enhances the pluralistic view achieved by collaboration. These literary devices allow for open-ended interpretations. By fostering multiple perspectives, landscape gardens become a forum for discussion and debate among visitors. Managers of historic sites can also integrate the concept of allusive settings to engage the imaginations of visitors, by stimulating their minds to connect deliberate references. This method can also physically engage visitors by sending them on a symbolic journey through

the landscape garden. Thus, visitors can assume active rather than passive roles in historical interpretation.

### **Principle 5: Images and Inscriptions**

In landscape gardens, designers integrate images and inscriptions to make stories more cohesive and enduring. Formalist devices such as color, shape, scale, texture, and composition arm narratives with deeper meanings. By occasionally abstracting images and words, landscape gardens can invite speculation about the meanings behind their stories. This approach can help managers of historic sites resist the usual "crisply cut and dried" experience of historical interpretation, and instead prompt visitors to thoughtfully reflect upon such meanings.

### **Principle 6: Provocation**

Unexpected images and inscriptions within landscape gardens impel visitors to challenge assumptions and convention. By awakening skepticisms about currently accepted beliefs and behaviors, landscape gardens often alert the imaginations of visitors to fresh possibilities of thought and action. By similarly inserting surprising and unanticipated elements to convey messages, managers of historic sites can creatively achieve the goal of provocation outlined by Freeman Tilden. The occasional or frequent use of confronting imagery and words can prove unsettling and disconcerting at times, thereby transforming the humdrum experience of a historic site into something visitors may find unique and compelling. Images and inscriptions attain much of their ability to provoke through their placement, such as the way they relate to their context.

### **Principle 7: Tangible and Intangible Relationships**

Landscape gardens also demonstrate how meticulously placing images and inscriptions within elements of the surrounding natural environment, such as shadows or sounds, can enhance narratives by extending the artistic scheme from the tangible to the intangible world.

Furthermore, allying the meanings of words to sounds can conjure visualizations of nonexistent elements within the imaginations of visitors. Thus, managers of historic sites can similarly stimulate the minds of visitors by placing images and inscriptions where certain historical elements have long since vanished to evoke a mental existence.

### **Principle 8: Layered Meanings**

Designers of landscape gardens frequently layer the stories they convey with multiple meanings. Managers of historic sites will find this useful in two ways. First, narratives can relate to those of different intellectual levels. For example, narratives can convey basic messages to children, while an underlying wit simultaneously reveals deeper associations for adults. Secondly, layered meanings can provide fresh possibilities to frequent visitors. Visitors may initially identify the simple or obvious meanings behind stories. Yet subsequent visits may begin to unravel a latent complexity, as visitors build upon previous knowledge and discover new connections.

### **Principle 9: Coherence**

With so many tangible and intangible elements that comprise landscape gardens, designers must aim to strike a balance between order and chaos. This will prevent boring or confusing visitors, while at the same time ensuring a provocative experience. Engaging the full spectrum of the visitor's emotions and intellect through emblematic and expressive devices adds to this balance. The use of themes can also help managers of historic sites achieve coherence by threading together a variety of narratives. Thematic displays thus function as chapters in an unfolding story, with each one somehow connected to the next and ultimately contributing to the gestalt of the landscape garden. However, it is important to recognize that incompleteness and ambiguity are equally important elements of the landscape garden.

## Principle 10: Movement

Finally, movement is essential for visitors to recognize and understand the deeper meanings of connected elements throughout the landscape. Movement in the landscape garden engages both the mental and physical beings of visitors; their eyes often glimpse a folly before their bodies gain intimate experience. The landscape garden then draws upon the intellect of visitors, who participate in the garden by completing connections the designer created but left obscure, or by producing entirely new and unintended associations. The principle of stimulating both physical and intellectual movement may assist managers of historic and cultural landscapes to actively engage audiences rather than settling for passive learning.

## Principle 11: Choice

Landscape gardens provide prime opportunities for visitors to choose their path, to participate in the landscape or the story. Visitors have the ability to choose paths on many levels in landscape gardens. For example, visitors can select what physical route to traverse, or they can choose what meanings to derive by constructing personal interpretations. Furthermore, visitors can choose *how* they want to read and interpret the landscape, with the possibilities ranging the landscape as nature, habitat, artifact, system, problem, wealth, ideology, history, place, and aesthetic.<sup>205</sup> Choice is an important element that allows visitors to feel engaged in the experience of landscape gardens. Choice is further significant in that it adds an element of contingency to the narrative.

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<sup>205</sup> Charles A. Birnbaum, "Preservation Brief 36: Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment, and Management of Historic Landscapes," ed. U.S. Department of the Interior (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service).

### *Conclusion*

From these distinct principles derived from the landscape gardens of Stowe and Little Sparta, managers of cultural and historic landscapes may take direction toward interpreting the history of sites in ways that are meaningful, provocative, meditative, inspirational, contemplative, serendipitous, anticipated, and even, at times, unsettling. An array of visual exhibits, carefully crafted images and words, could offer a fresh alternative to the contrivance often experienced from overly rehearsed house museum tours, lackluster chronologically ordered museum exhibits, neatly “restored” gardens, or the “facts on a stick” that frequently appear within cultural and historic landscapes. Upon experiencing a “readable” garden like Stowe and Little Sparta, it is obvious that each landscape required tremendous planning, thought, and design.

While landscape garden designs offer an initial sense of wonder and delight, certain aspects can become somewhat predictable to visitors over extended periods of time. There is, perhaps, a limit to how many times one can feel utterly astonished by obtaining views of “eye-catchers” in the distance or upon reading and understanding the metaphors or allusions underlying their inscriptions. Still, some works of art endure because of their ability to offer something new with each encounter. The seasoned garden visitor begins to appreciate and enjoy the elements gardens offer beyond that initial surprise. For example, visitors gain a sense of pleasure in being “insiders”, ones who have acquired an understanding closer to the designer’s intentions and who understand how the parts contribute to the “whole.”<sup>206</sup> As a dynamic entity, gardens maintain possibilities of surprise even to frequent visitors. The landscape offers a unique setting to experience and interpret history because perceptions of it are constantly changing in

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<sup>206</sup> Tatter, "The Invisible Border between Art and Nature: Pope's Aesthetic Principles Applied to Poetry and Landscape Gardening."

response to movements over time. The environment's recurring yet uncontrollable plays of climatic, atmospheric, seasonal, diurnal and nocturnal events are constant reminders of time, movement, and change, elements less apparent in a regulated interior environment. Gilbert West recognized this in his poem about Stowe (lines 43-46):

“Lead thro' the Circle, Virgins, lead me on,  
Where, guided by the still-revolving Sun,  
The faithful Dial counts the fleeting Hour,  
Lead to the Church's venerable Tower.”<sup>207</sup>

Additional dramatic occurrences can further heighten this experience of landscape and lead to glimpses of wonder and enchantment. As day transitions to night, darkness and shadows create new forms upon the landscape, adding to its liveliness; as summer eases into fall, a view once obscured by foliage seems miraculously revealed; as a thunderstorm suddenly blows through on a sunny spring afternoon so might the mood drastically change from promising to gloomy while visitors quickly seek shelter beneath garden structures. These circumstances make long-standing elements of the landscape seem fresh to frequent visitors, contribute to possibilities of serendipitous surprise, and create memorable experiences.

The themes of time, movement, change, incompleteness, and ambiguity are critical concepts to the didactic approach adopted by the landscape garden designers and its followers. Gardens, described as complex assemblages of both human and nonhuman actors, constantly evolve while their networks seek equilibrium. At Stowe, designers placed parterres in the ground only to uproot them weeks or years later. Architects erected buildings, and often reconstructed, demolished, or repositioned them. Workers planted and felled avenues of trees, dug and refilled ha-has, and shifted statuary around or sold it at auction.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Gilbert West, "Stowe, the Gardens of the Right Honourable Richard Viscount Cobham," (1732).

<sup>208</sup> Richard Wheeler, "The Park and Garden Survey at Stowe: The Replanting and Restoration of the Historic Landscape," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (1992).

Little Sparta, however, has not undergone such drastic alterations because, in comparison to Stowe, it is a younger garden, has had fewer owners, and has had limited funding. Still, Little Sparta has undergone a subtle metamorphosis. It began first as a garden of words through Finlay's published concrete poetry constructed simply out of paper and ink. Over time these poems underwent numerous transformations to smoothly transition from printed to planted form, in a concentrated effort to fit within living cultural and historical contexts.

From these cases of Stowe and Little Sparta it is most important to understand how gardens uphold values in the midst of a history of constant remodeling. Perhaps, it is instead their constant remodeling of history to suit current needs and maintain societal relevance that is crucial to take away from this analysis, since current practices of historic preservation employed at many of America's historic sites often prevent or slow the process of change. Such places have fallen trap to a "period of significance," or what the National Park Service (NPS) defines as a set time frame of importance in relation to specific persons, places, or events.<sup>209</sup> They remain locked into the idea that a certain "truth" exists and therefore managers must explicate that "truth."

The NPS has certainly contributed immensely to the preservation of cultural and natural resources. It has saved many sites that may have otherwise deteriorated or completely vanished. But, is it not the *now*, the present times, to which these places should remain most significant? Is it, perhaps, because of this constricting guideline that many places become stagnant and fail to command Americans' attention and respect, contributing to an increasing detachment with the

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<sup>209</sup> The study of the history of the built environment is too often guilty of this approach. Colleges and universities generally teach of a garden like Stowe or Little Sparta focusing only on its heyday moving quickly along to the next major design style that emerged. There is, perhaps, a failure in the system to teach of how such places have either flourished or perished up to the present moment, and to predict how they may be received in the future. It is thus critical to both areas of design and preservation to evaluate and understand some of these changes that occurred beyond the most significant period in an effort to manage such historic and cultural sites in ways that evolve with present times and values.

heritage of place? To what extent should managers loosen the grip on the notion that a historical "truth" exists? What are the implications of historic site managers suspending disbelief and viewing history in a new light?

Bernie Herman identifies the paradox of preservation: in the eager quest to preserve, what was once full of life is albeit unintentionally subdued and silenced through the somewhat constricting treatments philosophies of preservation, restoration, reconstruction, and rehabilitation upheld by the NPS evaluation criteria and Secretary of the Interior (SOI) standards. Herman argues that the underlying problem of preservation remains in its focus on managing objects, thereby celebrating only the material, enduring, and singular aspects of cultures. Consequentially, preservation often fails to recognize intangible yet crucial environmental contexts, such as movements and seasonality.

The case studies presented in this chapter demonstrate the significance of these impalpable aspects. For example, T. Medland's eighteenth-century engravings of Stowe emphasize the importance of everyday gardening or farming activities to the experience of the landscape garden, while Little Sparta exploits the sounds created by the wind against the leaves to evoke sensations of the ocean. These "fleeting landscapes" are thus vital to the interpretive experience of visitors to historic sites.<sup>210</sup>

Combining images and words with the environment's intangible elements fosters an experience that simultaneously engages the physical, intellectual and emotional aspects of being. Landscape gardens beg for exploration and discovery. Their emblematic anthology of temples, statues, sculptures, monuments and mottos are so carefully positioned that they become surprises and unsuspected corners.<sup>211</sup> Visitors follow circuits along which they encounter emblems, each

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<sup>210</sup> Herman, "Fleeting Landscapes and the Challenge for Historic Preservation."

<sup>211</sup> Chambers, *The Planters of the English Landscape Garden: Botany, Trees, and the Georgics*, 23.

of which carries layered meanings, sometimes underscored by accompanying inscriptions that may require translation from another language, lateral thinking into a literary piece, or eclectic knowledge of an unfamiliar subject.

Visitors may also happen upon allusions to historical and mythological narratives, as well as visual symbols, puns, and metaphors. The design then encourages them to either contemplate alone or discuss meanings with fellow visitors.<sup>212</sup> Overall, the neoclassical topographies of Stowe and Little Sparta provide a large scale public “reading” of antiquity, which requires contemporary figures in the landscape to translate the ancient text into the modern world.<sup>213</sup>

Translating and understanding the “reading” intended by the eighteenth-century landscape designers, however, are greatly dependent upon acquaintance and familiarity with ancient languages, classical literature, Greek mythology, Roman history, Etruscan symbols, and the Grand Tour sites. Absent that basis of knowledge, which is true as recently as half a century ago, visitors may only visually appreciate a place like Stowe.<sup>214</sup> In spite of this fact, Finlay still created Little Sparta during the late twentieth century in a way that requires knowledge of what has become foreign to most. Both Stowe and Little Sparta demand understanding of the classical world and of contemporary thought about landscapes, thereby calling for erudite visitors to translate their text and decode their meanings.<sup>215</sup>

Designs intended to prompt the memory in one culture or society may not function effectively for later visitors who have to learn to “read” that particular time and place as it is now made available to them. Still, all visitors can choose the level on which they wish to read the

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<sup>212</sup> Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening During the Eighteenth Century*, 143.

<sup>213</sup> Chambers, *The Planters of the English Landscape Garden: Botany, Trees, and the Georgics*, 23.

<sup>214</sup> Meades, *Stowe: Reading a Garden*.

<sup>215</sup> Stowe was the first garden to issue a guidebook to aide its visitors. This produces a conundrum as the knowledge gleaned from such a book may lessen the possibility of serendipitous surprise, while, at the same time, it may heighten awareness and anticipation when subsequently experiencing the landscape garden. *Ibid.*

landscape. Since the original creators of a garden (or any work of art) can never guarantee or control subsequent readings, new visitors bring to the experience their own “take” on the world, which further enriches and enlivens landscape gardens.<sup>216</sup> Although designers direct certain views of and between garden structures, visitor responses remain open to interpretation. Instead of promoting solitary experiences, landscape gardens provide forums that encourage visitors to engage in discussion and debate about the merits of different perspectives.<sup>217</sup> The gardens of Little Sparta, in particular, exemplify an exceptional openness to various levels of interpretation by presenting layered meanings, some of which are obvious and others that require deeper thought.

Managers of historic and cultural landscapes could approach historical interpretation in a similar manner to Ian Hamilton Finlay’s treatment of Little Sparta as a meaningful “attack” rather than simply a “retreat.” Little Sparta illustrates how a garden can challenge accepted beliefs about the form or function visitors expect it will assume. Thus, interpretation of a historic cultural landscape could likewise confound what visitors associate with the practice of historical interpretation, such as by replacing standard historical markers or signs that present basic facts with unanticipated inscriptions and images that provoke deeper thought, recalling Finlay’s unanticipated “redefinitions” and hand grenade sculptures.

Drawing from the principles discerned in the gardens of both Stowe and Little Sparta, the American cultural landscape might adopt the scheme of a landscape garden, but in a way that translates to a contemporary public audience. Landscape designers can derive the content for the “reading” of the landscape from a number of sources relative to a particular site’s history, which speak to the present day societal values. As the English landscape gardens and their successors

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<sup>216</sup> Hunt, *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory*, 122-23.

<sup>217</sup> Tatter, “Sexual Politics in the Landscape Garden at Stowe.”

made great moral statements about past and present times, the American cultural landscape could do the same, similarly remodeling history to meet twenty-first century needs. Arranged scenes might juxtapose grim realities of the past with those of the present. At the same time, they could highlight positive outcomes that emerged in the midst of adversity. The landscape garden can draw a line from a not so distant past to where American society stands today. It may go so far as to suggest alternate histories, or, in other words, what *might* have occurred if history had taken different trajectories.

Managers of historic sites also could utilize cultural and historic landscapes to attract local crowds by offering outdoor experiences that are distinct from typical hiking trails or outdoor parks. Reviving the classical Roman idea of *otium*, or the use of rural leisure as an intellectual stimulus expounded by Pliny the Younger, is particularly relevant today given the general population's persistent outcry to reconnect with nature. Historic and cultural landscapes can also provide avenues to draw in distant audiences seeking temporary "escape" from prevalent urban lifestyles. Furthermore, the present need in America to "rekindle a sense of mystery and reverence for the natural world"<sup>218</sup> follows in the wake of environmental pleas such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, David Attenborough's *Planet Earth*, and Pixar's *Wall-e*. By cultivating landscape gardens through existing historic and cultural landscapes, America, following in England's footsteps, can "revitalize a dispirited civilization"<sup>219</sup> divorced not only from history and the heritage of place, but nature, as well. Landscape gardens may prove increasingly significant in an age of accelerated "progress," where society still wages seemingly endless battles against such abstract themes as pollution, terror, cancer, drugs, obesity, and

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<sup>218</sup> MacDonald, "Hortus Incantans: Gardening as an Act of Enchantment," 124.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

poverty. American cultural and historic landscapes can serve both as a muse to an American society in need of inspiration, as well as a museum to resuscitate the present through the past.

## Chapter 4

### STRATFORD HALL: A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The thesis thus far has examined the practice of historical interpretation, in light of a problem that pervades America: a detachment from the heritage of place. In an effort to resonate with a diverse population, managers of historic sites must take a multifaceted approach. The thesis has presented one possible strategy to addressing this dilemma: cultivating a literary landscape in twenty-first century America. While the discussion thus far has remained theoretical, this chapter aims to provide a practical application by considering Stratford Hall Plantation in Westmoreland County, Virginia, as a case study.

Stratford Hall plantation is a historic site experiencing an overall decline in visitation.<sup>220</sup> While Stratford Hall has a rich history, its interpretative program narrowly provides a singular perspective of history. Historical interpretation thus focuses on the Lees of Virginia, which presents the stereotypical "men of means" narrative. Professionals who work at Stratford Hall have recently recognized the need to adopt new management strategies in an effort to qualify the interpretive experience and provoke modern visitors. Thus, the chapter begins by addressing the range of stories managers could convey to elicit interest at Stratford Hall.

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<sup>220</sup> Statistics indicate slight increases in visitation over the short-run. However, a broad scope reveals that overall visitation has declined within the past three decades. The extent of this decline may be worse when considering overall population increases within the same time frame.

*American Indians and Early European Colonial Inhabitation  
of Tidewater Virginia and the Northern Neck*

Stratford Hall plantation is located within the present-day bounds of Westmoreland County, Virginia. Westmoreland is one of four counties located at the end of Virginia's northernmost peninsula on the Chesapeake Bay comprising the Northern Neck portion of the larger Tidewater region (Figure 4.1). Today, large swaths of verdant rolling fields are interspersed with dense forested tracts that follow ridgelines and deep ravines. This landscape extends northward to the Stratford Cliffs and leads to the flowing waters of the Potomac River, which eventually spill into the Chesapeake Bay.

For thousands of years human beings imposed their own tangible and intangible boundaries on this landscape, and they continue to do so in response to its natural and cultural resources. However, historians often overlook the landscape as a force that greatly shapes and compels the myriad human actions, interactions, and reactions occurring within it. Aristotle once stated: "If you would understand anything, observe its beginning and its development." Thus the chapter provides a brief overview of the pre-history and history of Stratford Hall, expanding an understanding of the landscape's unique context and thereby orienting the reader to its current status and possible future.

The historical overview begins in very broad terms with the pre-history of the Northern Neck, relating common patterns of the larger region to the property within it that later became defined as Stratford Hall. It is difficult to glean specific information regarding the native peoples that inhabited the property before European settlement due to the absence of a recorded history (as their culture relied solely on oral traditions). As a result, the following narrative derives primarily from the recorded historical accounts of European colonists who inhabited this area



Figure 4.1: Map of Tidewater Virginia. The Tidewater region refers to the eastern portion of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Source: Paul C. Nagel, *The Lees of Virginia: Seven Generations of an American Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

from the seventeenth century onward. Additionally, the geographical context of the narrative stretches beyond the property lines of Stratford Hall plantation, touching on peoples, places, and events which, in some way, are essentially connected to and/or impacted its history.

The landscape of tidewater Virginia arose out of a geological remodeling that created layered formations of sands, clays, gravels, shells, and marls<sup>221</sup> during the Cenozoic Era.<sup>222</sup> Within this vast time span, the earth transitioned from the Oligocene Epoch through the Miocene and into the Pliocene as it cooled into a series of ice ages.<sup>223</sup> Ecological variations accompanied these geological and climatic changes. Sparse grasses began to appear during the Oligocene Epoch. These eventually expanded into extensive tracts of grasslands during warming trends of the Miocene, thus, leading to the development of an increasingly important ecosystem. Mammals and birds of this period, similar to those seen today, became particularly well established, adapting to these grasslands.<sup>224</sup>

The Virginia coastal plain remained mostly flooded, and the slow recession of these waters gradually carved out the Chesapeake Bay, creating what would later be described as the

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<sup>221</sup> Thomas Whitehead and Department of Agriculture., *Virginia: A Handbook, Giving Its History, Climate, and Mineral Wealth; Its Educational, Agricultural, and Industrial Advantages*, vol. 81-893 (Richmond: Everett Waddey Co., 1893).

<sup>222</sup> The Cenozoic Era includes the Quaternary, Upper Tertiary, Middle Tertiary, and Lower Tertiary. Most of the Cenozoic is the Tertiary, from 65 million years ago to 1.8 million years ago. The Oligocene, a subdivision of the Paleogene, was a short period within the first portion of the Tertiary in which many ecological changes occurred. The Miocene and Pliocene are subdivisions of the Neogene, and the last portions of the Tertiary period. The Quaternary begins the Pleistocene Epoch which includes only the last 1.8 million years. See "Molluscan Paleontology of the Chesapeake Miocene" by Edward J. Petuch and Mardie Drolshagen and "Tertiary Stratigraphy and Paleontology, Chesapeake Bay Region, Virginia and Maryland" by Lauck W. Ward and David S. Powers for more detailed research.

<sup>223</sup> S. Riebolt and Brian Speer, "The Oligocene Epoch," University of California Museum of Paleontology, <http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/tertiary/oli.html>.

<sup>224</sup> S. Riebolt and Brian Speer, "The Miocene Epoch," University of California Museum of Paleontology, <http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/tertiary/mio.html>. The *Glumiflorae* include a variety of grasses, sedges, rushes, and cattails that provide habitat for many birds and rodents. The spread of grasslands provided opportunities for many grazing animals to undergo much structural evolution, with the best known example being the modern horse. Today, the *Glumiflorae* are considered the single-most important group of organisms worldwide, providing corn, rice, wheat, and barley—the four highest grossing crops in the global food commodities market—as well as sugar cane. They also are utilized to stabilize soils for aesthetic purposes, particularly in America, where they provide the turf that covers many domestic yards and lawns.

largest estuary in the United States.<sup>225</sup> Over time, this hydrological fluctuation deposited sediments and the remains of primitive shark-toothed porpoises, salt water crocodiles, sea cows, gopher turtles, rays, whales, and sharks. The sediments and fossilized remains of these ancient sea creatures are now visible in the bluffs edging the Potomac.<sup>226</sup> This evolution of the landscape created a setting for the first native peoples to inhabit the Northern Neck nearly ten thousand years ago.<sup>227</sup>

Early aboriginal settlement in the area was primarily nomadic, involving small bands of hunter-gatherers who roamed the land in search of food, establishing camps sites along seasonal migration and trade routes.<sup>228</sup> One such place occupied the vicinity of what is now Stratford Hall. During this period, these groups of people repeatedly used the site on a limited basis to extract cobbles from the ravines, from which they fashioned stone tools.<sup>229</sup> Most of the land throughout the region supported a cover of deciduous trees—many of which were nut-bearing—mixed with pines and cedars. A wide variety of berry bushes grew in the forest understory, along with native fruit trees such as the persimmon. Foods provided by forest plants complemented the protein that native people could harvest from the river—oysters, fish, muskrats, beavers, etc. The

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<sup>225</sup> National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, "Usgs Fact Sheet: The Chesapeake Bay, Geologic Product of Rising Sea Level," Eastern Publications Group Web Team, <http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/fs102-98/>.

<sup>226</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Press-Kit," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, [http://www.stratfordhall.org/press/press\\_kit.php](http://www.stratfordhall.org/press/press_kit.php). The Stratford Cliffs are part of the Calvert formation, which occurs in only three other areas worldwide: the Los Angeles Basin, Austria, and Belgium.

<sup>227</sup> Helen C. Rountree and NetLibrary Inc., "Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries," In *The Civilization of the American Indian series* [v. 196]. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996).

<sup>228</sup> Detailed information is lacking regarding early American Indian cultures prior to European settlement within the Northern Neck. Even less information is available about more specified areas such as Westmoreland County and Stratford Hall. Thus, this historical overview offers only a rudimentary account of the site's American Indian history, pulling together generalized knowledge based on recorded archaeological evidence. Future archaeological investigations of sites such as Stratford Hall reveal additional information in the future, particularly given recent advancements in GIS and GPS technologies, which can reveal historic clues unapparent to the unaided human eye.

<sup>229</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Archeological Investigations Continue to Unearth Discoveries at Oval and "Triangle"," *The Chronicle: A Quarterly Newsletter from Stratford Hall* (2008). Crews involved in Prof. Doug Sanford's summer field school annually unearth small amounts of prehistoric American Indian artifacts on the property's "Oval site". Stone fragments from cobbles and stone tool production are consistently recovered. Projectile points dating to about 3000 years ago, as well as American Indian pottery dating to about 1000 years ago, indicate that this site was used for a considerable time frame.

region's freshwater marshes provided habitat to unique plants such as arrow arum with its starchy, potato-like roots (Tuckahoe).<sup>230</sup>

A range of wild greens grew in the manmade and natural meadows of Tidewater Virginia, and fed the Virginia white-tailed deer. Individual men hunted these deer year-round, while whole tribes participated in communal hunts during the late fall. Wild game yielded meat as well as hides for clothing and bones for tools. Plants within the meadows and forests also had medicinal value. The land's soapstone, blue-gray clay, and crushed shells were a natural resource that distinct cultures used to craft pottery and cooking vessels (Figure 4.2). Native peoples adapted to the environment and its seasons, surviving glacial advances and retreats, droughts, the birth of the bay, its rivers, and its surrounding deciduous forests, as well as the mass extinctions of mastodons and mammoths.<sup>231</sup>

Native peoples of the Middle Woodland II period of 200-900 CE proved particularly significant to the history of the Stratford Hall cultural landscape. Family-sized groups used a swale on the property adjacent to the relict springs to collect easily accessible resources such as quartz, which aided in tempering ceramics. This specific locale is characteristic of the eroded finger ridge tops that occur throughout the greater Northern Neck landscape. During this time, American Indian groups established a trade system to obtain rhyolite from quarries in western Maryland, which they also used for tool-making. Additionally, they crafted moderately sized jars that served multiple functions. Larger jars served storage purposes, and smaller curved vessels were used for eating.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Rountree and NetLibrary Inc., "Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries."

<sup>231</sup> Keith Egloff and Deborah Woodward, *First People: The Early Indians of Virginia*, 2nd ed. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press in association with the Virginia Dept. of Historic Resources, 2006).

<sup>232</sup> Katherine Martin, "Before the Lees: Prehistory at Stratford Hall Plantation," (Stratford).

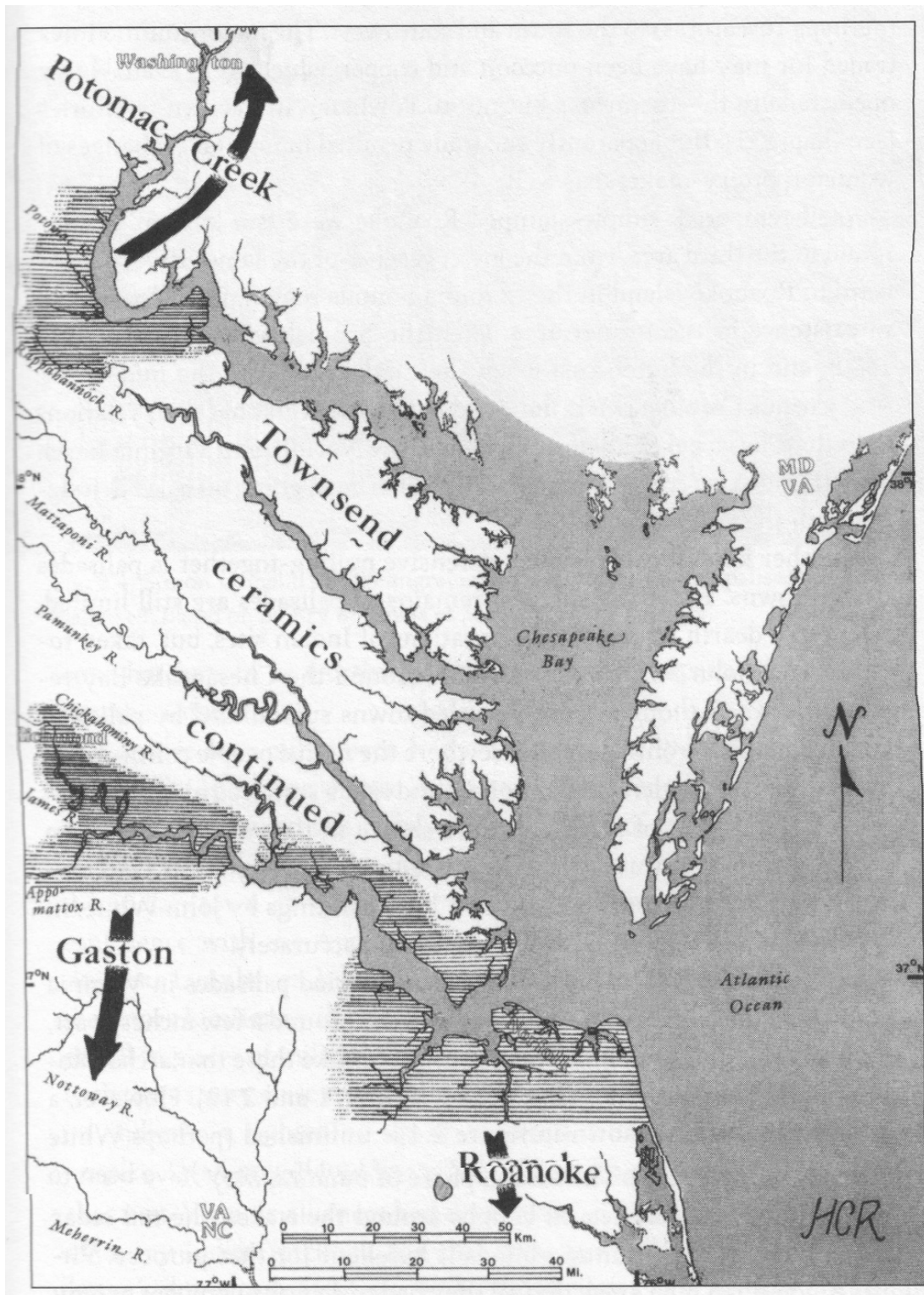


Figure 4.2: A Map of Proto-historic Ceramic Types indicates a continued tradition of shell-tempered Townsend ware throughout the Northern Neck region. Source: Helen C. Rountree, *"Before and After Jamestown: Virginia's Powhatans and their Predecessors,"* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 43.

The Middle Woodland peoples tended to situate themselves in both coastal areas, and in upland settings such as present-day Stratford. Small-sized families focused on intense hunting and gathering of select plant and animal species across a large landscape. Consequently, they frequently moved from place to place. These families spent limited time procuring resources in areas similar to the swales at Stratford Hall. However, over time these populations became more sedentary. The Middle Woodland peoples established semi-permanent camps, which served as staging areas for seasonal hunting expeditions into the interior uplands. The area at Stratford functioned as a seasonal foray-camp, and it likely was linked to a larger residential base somewhere else in the region. Although Middle Woodland peoples occupied such upland sites for brief time periods, landscapes similar to that of Stratford proved crucial in serving the native peoples' various activities.<sup>233</sup>

The native peoples' use of natural resources became increasingly sophisticated. With the domestication of plants, agricultural practices eventually took form. This resulted in crop productions of corn, potatoes, pumpkins, onions, peas, beans and tobacco, which in turn led to the creation of increasingly permanent villages. However, native peoples continued their ancient predecessors' skills of hunting, gathering, and fishing through the early seventeenth century. By approximately 1600 CE, the Late Woodland Indians carved their scattered villages from the woods on the waterfront. Their people filled the isolated forest clearings with dwellings constructed from boughs covered with bark and woven mats. The Late Woodland Indians formed tribes based on the location of centralized spaces, and an elaborately organized system of chiefdoms eventually grew as they established networks of trade.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Egloff and Woodward, *First People: The Early Indians of Virginia*.

The distinctive environmental conditions of the coastal plain provided especially fertile ground for the growth of such chiefdoms. As with earlier native inhabitants, this location offered significant advantages to whomever controlled it. Areas for fishing and a diversity of wild plant life still afforded a great degree of security when staple foods such as maize and venison became scarce. Sixteenth-century renderings by Theodor de Bry, based on illustrations by Englishman John White, offer a notion of the experience traveling along the Potomac and its connected waterways during that time (Figure 4.3). The network of waterways made it possible to navigate to almost anywhere in the region by canoe. Successful chiefs helped villagers within this area maintain and extend control over key natural resources, which supported fairly large populations. A chief knit together multiple communities, coordinating their diplomacy and allowing them to combine forces to field more warriors. The natural resources within this area gave chiefdoms the wherewithal to survive and even initiate wars by harnessing the power of their growing populations to the needs of the polity as a whole.<sup>235</sup>

By the end of the sixteenth century, nearly a dozen different nations lined the banks of the Potomac and its tributaries. A *werowance*,<sup>236</sup> or tribal chief, directly ruled each of these nations, while paramount chiefs assumed indirect control. The Onawmanients (Matchotics)<sup>237</sup> consisted of approximately 425 people in each of their two towns, which were located within Westmoreland County near the current locale of Stratford Hall and its neighboring plantations. A map of chiefdoms around the Chesapeake Bay indicates a "king's house" and "ordinary town" within close proximity to present-day Stratford Hall (Figure 4.4).

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<sup>235</sup> James D. Rice, *Nature & History in the Potomac Country: From Hunter-Gatherers to the Age of Jefferson* (JHU Press, 2009), 53.

<sup>236</sup> These "commanders" could also be female (*weroansqua*). Rountree and NetLibrary Inc., "Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries."

<sup>237</sup> As Rountree points out, the name was soon Anglicized to Nomini. The towns were: Onawmanient, on the west side of Nomini Creek across from McGuire's Wharf and Uttamussamacoma, east of Nomini Creek near Whiteoak Point. Helen C. Rountree et al., *John Smith's Chesapeake Voyages, 1607-1609* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 273.



Figure 4.3: Engraving of Algonquian-speaking Indians fishing in Albemarle Sound. Note the (English) artist's depiction of abundant aquatic life. Source: Theodor de Bry, *The Mariners' Museum*, Newport News, VA.

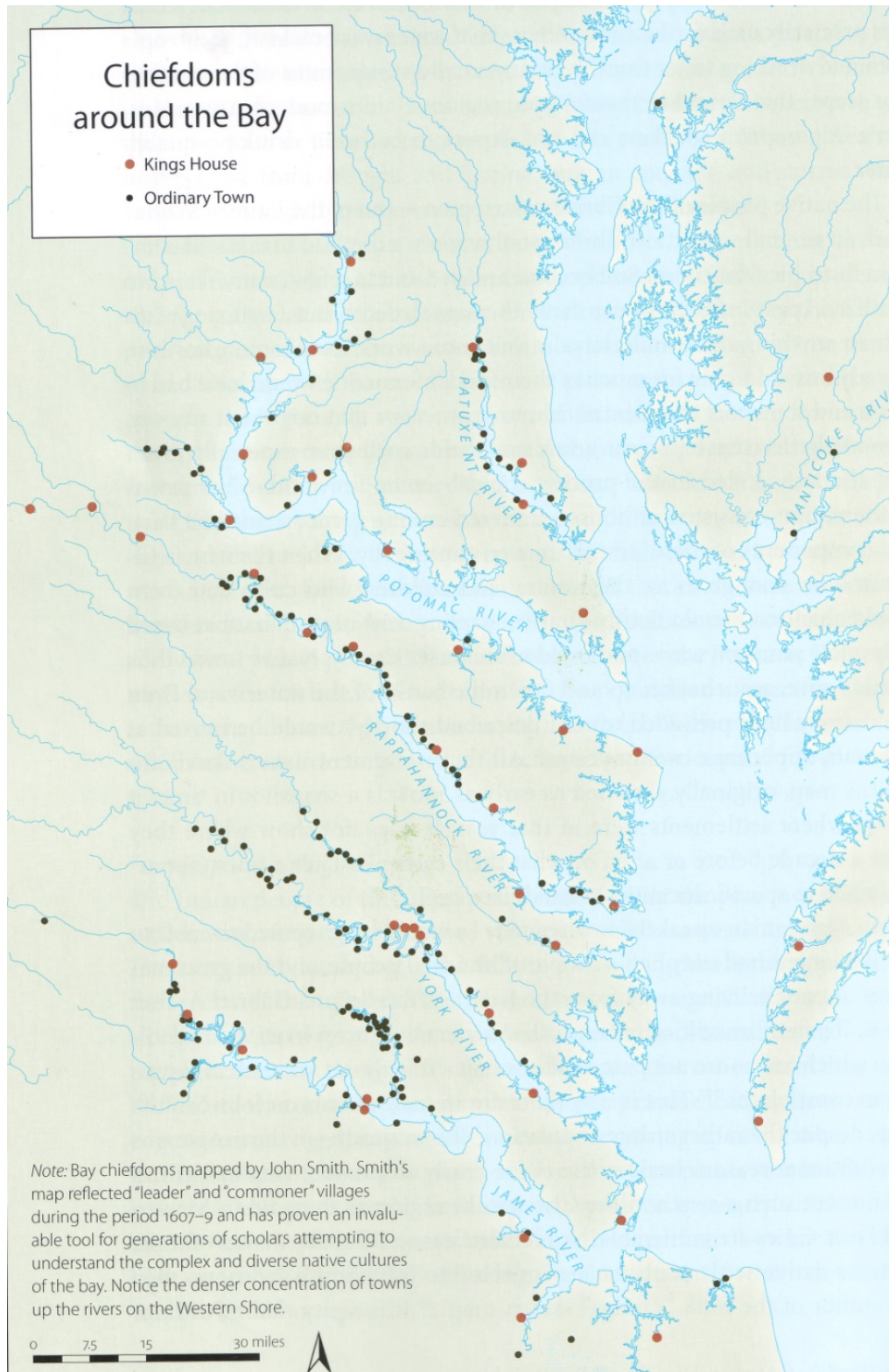


Figure 4.4: Map of Chiefdoms around the Bay. Source: Helen C. Rountree et al., *"John Smith's Chesapeake Voyages, 1607-1609"* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 34.

By the mid-sixteenth century, a powerful chief referred to as Powhatan<sup>238</sup> began consolidating his hold over a half-dozen subordinate *werowances* near the falls of the James and Pamunky rivers. He inherited these Algonquin-speaking chiefdoms sometime in the 1560s or 1570s. According to native accounts, another two dozen Algonquian nations subsequently had “bene either by force subdued unto him, or through feare yielded” to this charismatic leader. Powhatan’s influence extended to the lower eastern shore, and, shortly before the arrival of the English, all but one of the nations on the south bank of the Potomac began paying tribute to him.<sup>239</sup>

By 1607, English colonists occupied Jamestown and within the following year they initiated regular contact with the peoples of the Potomac. This marked the intersection of two previously separate historical trajectories and the meeting of two significantly different environmental sensibilities.<sup>240</sup> The first half of the seventeenth century, however, brought only minor changes to the Native peoples of the Potomac as they were able to hold on to ancestral lands as late as the 1650s. Consequently, most were spared epidemics, which laid waste to other populations during the same period. Colonists, on the other hand, faced a harder and more tumultuous life than the native peoples. They initially struggled in their new environment, and found themselves forced to carve a niche within well-established networks of American Indian trade and diplomacy in order to survive.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Powhatan, properly called Wahunsenacawh, was father to the famous Pocahontas.

<sup>239</sup> Rice, *Nature & History in the Potomac Country: From Hunter-Gatherers to the Age of Jefferson*, 55.

<sup>240</sup> Environmental historian James D. Rice points out that these differences could be read in the landscapes each created. Potomac villagers aimed at dietary diversification within each village or hamlet and traded outside the immediate vicinity mainly for culturally significant goods such as shell beads and copper; thus each local landscape roughly resembled that of every other settlement in the region. The English, on the other hand, tended toward distinctive local specializations, producing surpluses of whatever could be best produced and marketed in each specific place, and thus they created a wide variety of landscapes that were linked together by a variety of long-distance trades.

<sup>241</sup> Rice, *Nature & History in the Potomac Country: From Hunter-Gatherers to the Age of Jefferson*, 71.

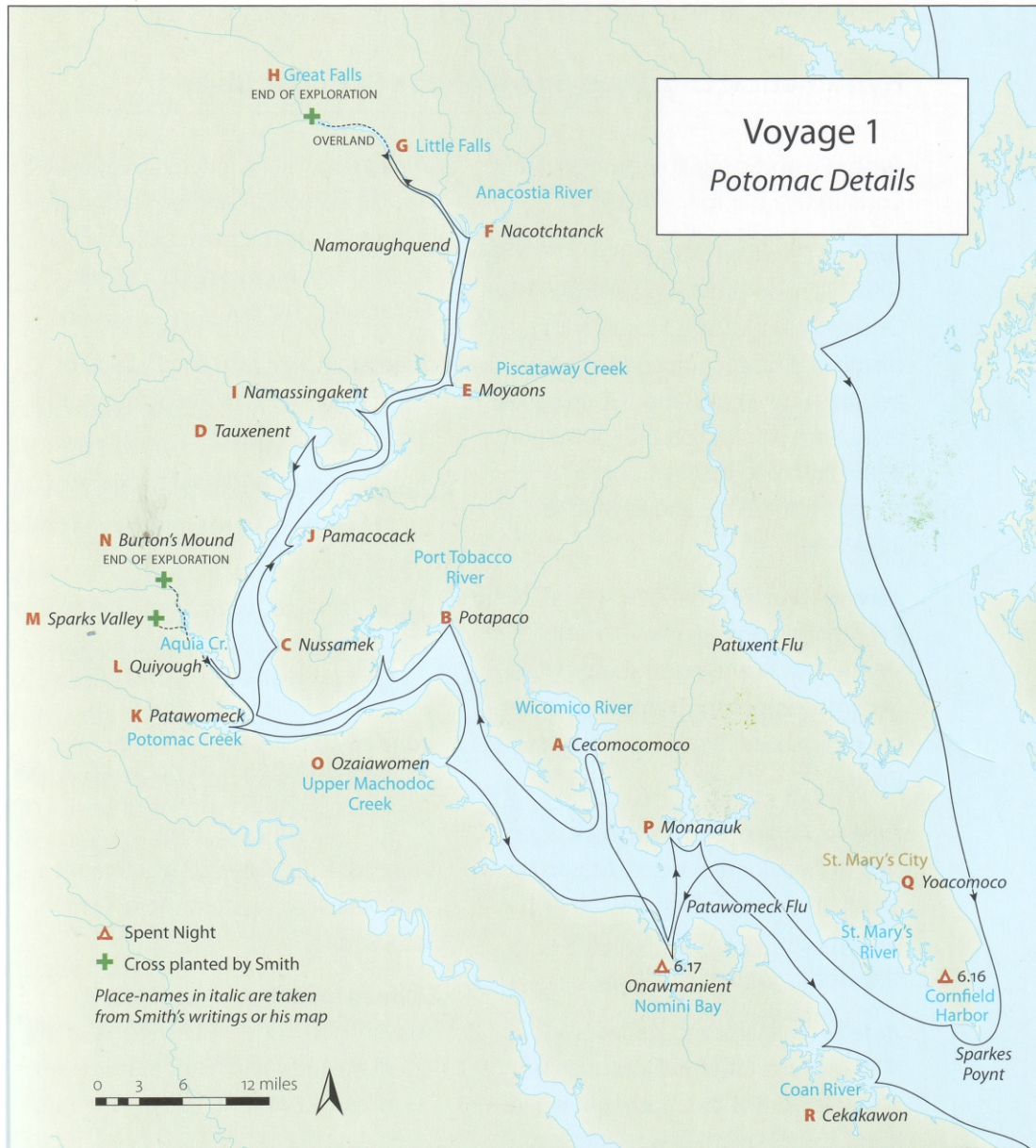


Figure 4.5: Map Showing the Exploratory Route of John Smith during 1607-1608 and indicating his stop at Onawmanient and passage along the Stratford cliffs. Source: Helen C. Rountree et al., *"John Smith's Chesapeake Voyages, 1607-1609"* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 95.

Captain John Smith, who was famously captured by Powhatan during an exploration in the winter of 1607-1608 along the rivers of Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay, was among these early English colonists (Figure 4.5). Smith's captors took him to many areas, including

Onawmanient where he described the people as “strangely painted, grimed, and disguised” warriors who attacked the English. Powhatan eventually spared Smith with the agreement that the English would “make him hatchets...bells, beads, and copper”, all of which were common items of tribute given by a dependent *werowance* to his paramount chief. The early English thus fit surprisingly well into the Potomac world—a landscape of intact and autonomous Algonquian-speaking communities capable of providing goods to the small, struggling colony of Jamestown.<sup>242</sup> During the early seventeenth century, Virginians along the James River discovered the marketability of the tobacco crop and began planting the crop in so many areas that it was well on its way to becoming the staple crop that would later dominate the fields of plantations like Stratford Hall. English colonists transformed centuries-old American Indian footpaths into roads for rolling hogsheads of tobacco to wharfs along the Potomac and other Chesapeake tributaries.

The cultivated Powhatan landscape was markedly distinct from the rural landscapes of England. Powhatan fields appeared rough from slash and burn techniques and the lack of domesticated draft animals. Because they were relatively small, these fields also produced less food than fields cultivated by the English who employed a system of intensive plow agriculture. The American Indians also used no fertilizers on their fields, and after a few years they moved onward, leaving some of the cleared land fallow. Land was not “owned” and anyone could later clear deserted fields for their own use. Since the native peoples crafted dwellings out of perishable materials, every few decades women built houses near their new locations. The English eventually exploited this American Indian practice of “abandonment” to their own

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<sup>242</sup>As Rice suggests, this fit well with Algonquian notions about the interconnectedness of spiritual power, trade and diplomacy. The *werowances*’ tribute system put surplus of corn—of which the English were often desperately in need—into the hands of chiefs, while the English could lay their hands on vast quantities of copper and glass beads. The resulting trade made the English major players in the region’s diplomacy, despite their small numbers and military weakness. *Ibid.*, 80-82.

advantage. Since the Powhatans traditionally moved elsewhere after exhausting a part of the land, they were unable to comprehend why the English wanted to permanently claim lands through sales.<sup>243</sup>

After Chief Powhatan died in 1618, hostilities with colonists escalated under the chiefdom of his brother, Opechancanough, who sought to drive off the encroaching English. Opechancanough's large-scale attacks in 1622 and 1644 faced strong reprisals by the English, resulting in the near elimination of the tribe. In addition to ongoing conflicts with the ever-expanding English settlements and their inhabitants, the Algonquian-speaking nations suffered a high death rate due to maladies introduced by Europeans to which they had not developed immunity. By 1646, European diseases largely had destroyed the Powhatan paramount chiefdom. Thus, by the 1650s the nature of life on the Northern Neck swiftly changed socially, economically, and ecologically. During the second half of the seventeenth century, Anglo-European colonists pushed the few remaining native peoples further inland to densely forested areas as they inevitably sold or deeded their river lands to some of the thousands of new colonists flooding into the Potomac basin.<sup>244</sup>

Although their subsistence practices superficially resembled those of their Algonquian neighbors, underlying differences in the English planters' land ethic virtually guaranteed conflicts between the native inhabitants and newcomers. By the late seventeenth century, many plantations dotted the landscape. English livestock, English surveyors, and English law stood as the keys to systematically dispossessing the Potomac nations.<sup>245</sup> By 1653, colonists created

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<sup>243</sup> Rountree and NetLibrary Inc., "Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries."

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Rice, *Nature & History in the Potomac Country: From Hunter-Gatherers to the Age of Jefferson*, 108.

Westmoreland County and soon held courts at the homes of county court justices, such as on the shores of Currioman Bay, slightly east of Stratford Hall plantation.<sup>246</sup>

### *Pope Era*

Along with Westmoreland County, colonists established a number of significant settlements, including the homes of the great-grandfathers of three American presidents. Among these was Colonel Nathaniel Pope, who patented 1,050 acres between two creeks within the bounds of Westmoreland on May 19, 1651, which has since been known as “Clifts” plantation (Figure 4.6). He amended and renewed this patent, acquiring an additional five hundred acres on April 24, 1656. Throughout his properties, Nathaniel Pope built earthfast<sup>247</sup> dwellings, warehouses, and docks for the merchant trade with England. He exported beaver, tobacco, and raw materials while importing English manufactured goods.<sup>248</sup> He eventually willed the Clifts tract to his son, Thomas Pope, on May 16, 1659. Although Nathaniel Pope arrived in the New

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<sup>246</sup> Rice’s chapter “Microbes, Magistrates, and Migrations” mentions the savagery of the newcomers in their mistreatment of the Patawomecks. Later, in 1661, a number of leading planters in Westmoreland County were not content with partial victories and desperately wanted to gain the remainder of the Patawomecks’ lands. These most prominent citizens of the county tried to frame the Patawomecks’ werowance, Wahanganoche, for murder. He was brought to Jamestown, where the burgesses appointed a special committee to handle the incident. The committee saw right through the Westmoreland men’s ploy: Wahanganoche, they discovered, had turned over the real murder for prosecution by English authorities, but Brent, Fowke, John Lorde, and Captain George Mason had deliberately allowed the killer to escape and then detained Wahanganoche in order to remove a major obstacle to the dispossession of the Patawomecks. The great men of Westmoreland were convicted of contempt, issuing illegal warrants, and “aspersing the honourable governour in declaring falsely that their unjust proceedings were done by his authority”. All paid enormous fines, posted bond for future good behavior, and were stripped of their offices. Since so many of Westmoreland’s leading men were now disqualified from office, the burgesses directed that the county be dissolved for the time being, and reincorporated into Northumberland County. Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> For more detailed information regarding this vernacular architecture of early colonists, see Cary Carson et al., “Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 16 no. 2/3 (1981); Fraser D. Neiman, “Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation: The Social Context of Early Virginia Building,” in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, ed. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986).

<sup>248</sup> Charles E. Hatch, *Popes Creek Plantation, Birthplace of George Washington* (Washington’s Birthplace: National Park Service, 1979).

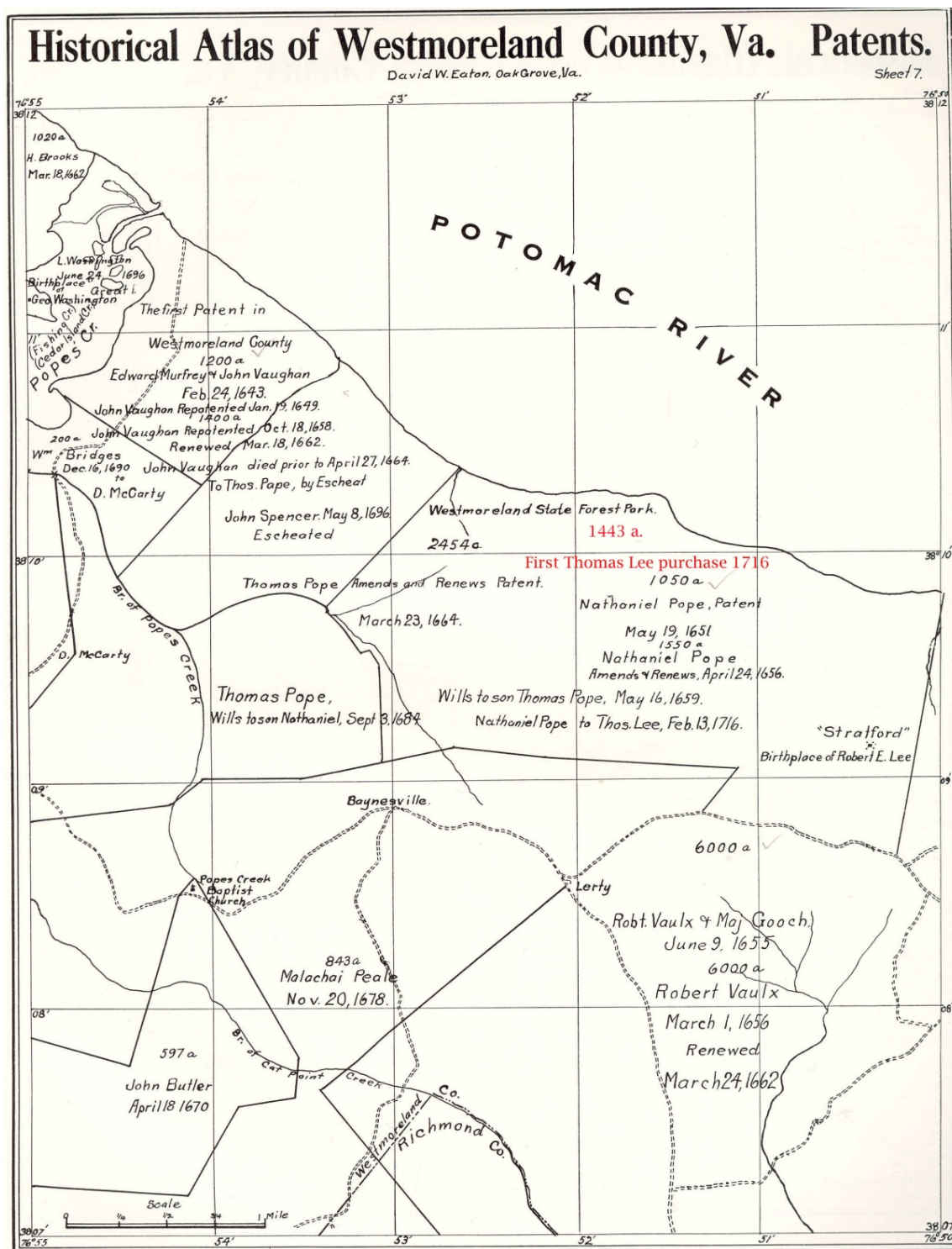


Figure 4.6: Historical Atlas of Westmoreland County (adapted by Stephanie N. Bryan). Source: David W. Eaton, "Historical Atlas of Westmoreland County" (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1942), Patents Sheet 7, 65.

World as an illiterate yeoman, by the time of his death in 1660, he had become one of the county's wealthiest residents.<sup>249</sup>

Thomas Pope followed in his father's footsteps as an English merchant and Westmoreland County planter.<sup>250</sup> He first occupied the Clifts property in 1670, and thereafter, with the assistance of numerous tenants, he developed it into a busy tobacco plantation with two farms.<sup>251</sup> At some point between the 1650s and 1670s, the property expanded to approximately 2,400 acres. Thomas Pope resided on the western edge of the parcel along Pope's Creek, while the Clifts plantation was located on the property's eastern side. Pope's workers constructed a "manner house"<sup>252</sup> on the Clifts plantation around 1675 and erected four palisade walls in response to the depredations of the Susquehannock Indians, whom the English had provoked. As the threat of American Indian attacks lessened over time, Pope's workers dismantled the palisades (Figure 4.7).<sup>253</sup>

After Thomas Pope died in 1685, the property passed to his widow Joanna, and about two decades later his son Nathaniel Pope inherited it. Nathaniel and his wife Elizabeth managed the

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<sup>249</sup> Marion Harland, *The Story of Mary Washington* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1892); Neiman, "Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation: The Social Context of Early Virginia Building."

<sup>250</sup> Thomas divided his time between Virginia and England, and, similar to other members of the county elite, was able to make money at both ends of the tobacco trade, growing the crop and shipping it to England, and then bringing retail goods back to Virginia.

<sup>251</sup> Neiman concludes from archaeological evidence that these tenants were far from poor.

<sup>252</sup> Neiman directed a comprehensive archaeological survey of the plantation in the mid-1970s. He concentrated excavations at the mill field where he and his crew unearthed the seventeenth century "manner house" site. It is considered one of the most significant excavations of the decade. Professor Doug Sanford of the University of Mary Washington has since conducted summer field schools, which continue to uncover additional elements of the Clifts Plantation, such as the foundation for a small earthfast dwelling for slaves in the "Old Orchard" area and another similar building which may have been a barn in the "triangle" area. Alonzo D. Dill and Frazer D. Neiman, *The "Manner House" before Stratford (Discovering the Clifts Plantation)* (Stratford: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, 1980). Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Archaeological Collection," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, <http://www.stratfordhall.org/learn/collections/archcollect.php>; Douglas W. Sanford, "St116," Thomas Jefferson Foundation, <http://www.daacs.org/resources/sites/ST116/background.html>. Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Archeological Investigations Continue to Unearth Discoveries at Oval and "Triangle."

<sup>253</sup> "Clifts Plantation Site Historical Marker," <http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=34569>.



Figure 4.7: Reconstruction Model of the Clifts Plantation. Source: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, <http://www.stratfordhall.org/images/clifts.jpg>

plantation for just over a decade.<sup>254</sup> Historical accounts described the three generations of Popes, including the eldest Nathaniel, as “mariners,” a term that suggests they were most likely ship owners or captains in the tobacco trade. The Popes maintained a separate residence in Bristol, England. Researchers have speculated that the Popes, as absentee landlords, most likely encountered difficulties in managing their Virginia land holdings from across the Atlantic.<sup>255</sup>

### *Thomas Lee Era*

By 1716, Nathaniel Pope and his mother began the legal procedures necessary to transfer title of the land to Thomas Lee, a young member of another prominent Westmoreland County family. In addition to performing his duties as a county judge, Thomas Lee began to conduct himself as a tobacco planter and merchant. By 1717, Thomas Lee had purchased the 1,443 acre-tract and the buildings that comprised the Clifts plantation, including “the manner house on the

<sup>254</sup> There is no concrete evidence to suggest that Nathaniel Pope ever lived at the “Clifts”. Neiman, “Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation: The Social Context of Early Virginia Building.”

<sup>255</sup> William Seale, “Historical Narrative,” in *Proposed Interpretation for Stratford Hall* (Alexandria: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, 1989).

second clift.”<sup>256</sup> Lee, however, continued to reside for another seven years at his family seat at Machodoc, several miles downriver.<sup>257</sup> During this period, many occupants at the Clifts plantation remained tenants, and Thomas Lee, consumed by his public affairs, hired an overseer to manage the slaves, indentured servants, and transported criminals that comprised the remainder of the labor force.<sup>258</sup>

In 1729 outlaws set fire to Thomas Lee’s dwelling at Machodoc, which quickly burned to the ground. It was not until the end of the next decade, however, that workers finally completed construction of an impressive brick mansion, which still stands today on the Clifts tract. The Stratford landscape provided great resources that influenced how Lee constructed his estate. Dense forests provided timbers for the building, the plentiful clay underfoot was molded into bricks that workers fired on-site, and the Potomac yielded oyster shells for mortar.<sup>259</sup> The plateau upon which architects positioned the mansion also offered natural fortifications from American Indian attacks, pirate raids, and roaming bands of sailors or convicts. Thomas and his wife Hannah occupied the residence in the 1730s. Lee eventually called for the demolition of the Pope’s “manner house” because it obstructed access from the new Georgian complex to the river landing, which served as an outlet to the commercial world upon which his fortune greatly relied.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Thomas Lee 1690-1750," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, <http://www.stratfordhall.org/learn/lees/thomaslee.php>.

<sup>257</sup> Ethel Armes, *Stratford Hall: The Great House of the Lees* (Richmond Garrett and Massie, 1936), 40.

<sup>258</sup> Neiman, "Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation: The Social Context of Early Virginia Building," 296.

<sup>259</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Thomas Lee 1690-1750."

<sup>260</sup> Neiman concludes this as the rationale behind the demolition. However, this could have resulted from the structure no longer being used and occupying potentially useful agricultural land. Neiman, "Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation: The Social Context of Early Virginia Building," 269.

Thomas Lee belonged to a small group of well-off planters who successfully assembled large holdings extending over thousands of acres in the South.<sup>261</sup> He and his family members partook in the formation of a rising group of fashion-conscious social elites (which included no more than two dozen family lines) who considered neatness and order important attributes of landscape management. The new dictates of the Georgian mode suggested both substantial construction and balanced symmetry (in both plan and section) as crucial design aspects of a proper gentleman's house. The architecture of Stratford Hall exemplified this ideal. A highly rational formalism guided Thomas Lee and other builders of the time. This resulted in a predictable order of the plantation's façade and spatial arrangement that extended outward at least to the immediate environs. While the design of the grounds adjacent to the house exhibits straight lines, right angle corners, and axes of symmetry, researchers have later suggested that this evidence of mathematical precision indicated superiority over both nature and certain races of mankind (Figures 4.8-4.9).<sup>262</sup>

Beginning with these early days of Thomas Lee (and likely encompassing the Popes' times, as well), the plantation masters used many slaves.<sup>263</sup> In the landscape surrounding his

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<sup>261</sup> Vlach mentions that few plantations reached manorial status with over a hundred slaves: "By the middle of the nineteenth century, less than one percent of all slaveholding families fit the plantation stereotype, a percentage that had remained constant since the middle of the eighteenth century." Although places like Stratford were the exception, they are important because they represented the largest number of slaveholdings from which, albeit unintentionally, a unique black American culture matured. John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 8.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 3-7.

<sup>263</sup> After being captured, slaves were transported to America from the western coast of Africa to slavers. They were then transported to America by the "middle passage" which was an especially cruel trip due to crowded, unsanitary, and utterly inhumane conditions. After reaching America, the majority were sold on board ship at plantation wharfs of prospective buyers such as at Stratford. Many slaves had been farmers in Africa and brought their knowledge of rice production to the South, as well as some native vegetables such as okra and the art of weaving baskets. These farmers became field slaves with the primary task of raising a profitable crop of tobacco. During planting and harvesting times, artisans and house slaves worked in the fields, too. Most women were field hands, although some performed weaving, sewing, dairying, household tasks, and child care.

Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Plantation Life for Slaves," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, <http://www.stratfordhall.org/learn/slavery.php>.

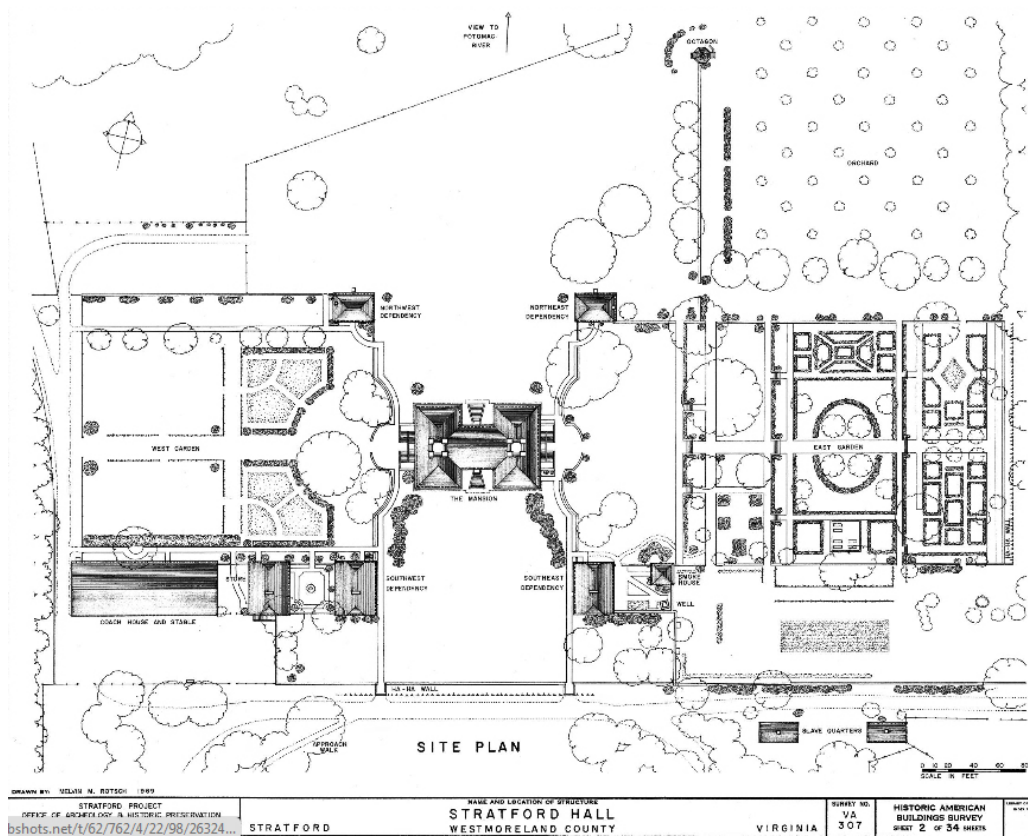


Figure 4.8: Site Plan of the Stratford Hall Great House and its immediate surroundings.  
Source: Historical Architectural Buildings Survey (HABS).



Figure 4.9: The Restored Great House and Outbuildings at Stratford Hall are architecturally symmetrical. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, October 2010.

great house existed a world of work dominated by black people, some of which were likely first-generation immigrants from Africa.<sup>264</sup> Although a master such as Thomas Lee set up a context of servitude, it was unlikely that absolute control was maintained throughout the entire work force. To make slavery survivable, many blacks defined their own spaces and created a landscape which subtly countered their master's, often remaining undetected.<sup>265</sup>

At Stratford, slaves were consistently scattered in areas across the plantation. In 1782, approximately eighty-three slaves resided in Stratford's various quarters. This number included children and infants, in addition to adults. Domestic and skilled slaves resided near the Great House in multi-family dwellings with more substantial construction than the houses built at the field quarters. Builders constructed the duplexes out of stone, while the small field quarters were wood frame structures.<sup>266</sup>

Most slaves discovered subtle ways to exert some control over their lives. For example, many ignored the ritual obeisance of a plantation's carefully marked processional landscape by directly traversing fields, gardens, and grounds, creating shortcuts along the way. Paths and trails into the countryside became central elements to the Virginia slave landscape. Some secret tracks led to clandestine rendezvous places in the woods used for ritual purposes and or festive parties, and connected slaves among neighboring plantations. Although little is known regarding how

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<sup>264</sup> Vlach suggests that because slave settlements containing larger populations required more housing, they took on a more town-like form. Such was likely the case for a place like Stratford, which often employed an excess of eighty slaves. Vlach further explains that while the financial means to own a large plantation clearly divided whites into distinct have and have-not classes, Blacks generally found themselves in sufficient numbers to constitute coherent social groups. Comforted by the fellowship of the quarters, they were able to confront the injustice of their captivity in ways both subtle and obvious. In addition to establishing strong family ties, they created distinctive art forms and developed meaningful rituals. Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, 14-16.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Plantation Life for Slaves."

much control Stratford slaves achieved in this manner, one could generalize that they may have attained some degree of autonomy.<sup>267</sup>

The preferred paths and gathering spaces of slaves incrementally emerged as a response to the given landscape rules imparted by the master. Among the tangible signs of Black initiative and autonomy were the extensive vegetable gardens in which slaves raised much of their own food.<sup>268</sup> Slaves further appropriated other spaces in the plantation landscape. For example, the kitchen was often claimed by the slave cook, the dining room by the house servant, the loom house by the weaver, the barn by the field hand, and so forth. After years of toil in the fields, slaves at a plantation like Stratford sometimes felt the harvest was their achievement rather than the master's. A master like Thomas Lee may have technically owned the crop, but the slaves created it.<sup>269</sup>

The late eighteenth-century writings of tutor Philip Fithian offer insight into this type of experience at Nomini Hall, a Westmoreland County plantation owned by Robert Carter. Scholars have suggested that Fithian's frequent complaints about his pupil, Henry Carter, spending too much time in the kitchen and craft shops signify that these were black spaces and off limits to white boys who hoped to become refined gentlemen. Fithian's writings further indicate that Nomini slaves regularly took over the stables as a place in which to hold their private entertainments.<sup>270</sup> The slaves at Stratford Hall likely behaved similarly because many of the wealthy Northern Neck planters were related either by blood or marriage (or both). It was not

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<sup>267</sup> At Stratford, today there are no obvious traces of these actions within the landscape. It is something that may, perhaps, be uncovered in the near or distant future with advancing GIS and GPS technologies.

<sup>268</sup> Vlach suggests this could even range up to half an acre. As long as the slaves performed their duties with reasonable efficiency, planters were not concerned with the routines of the slave quarters or the domestic claims they exercised.

<sup>269</sup> Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, 14-16.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

an uncommon practice to share slaves, and thus such behaviors were probably not isolated instances but rather fairly common across the slave landscape.

In addition to overseeing the business and management of the plantation, Thomas Lee assumed an active role in colonial politics. He frequently engaged in land negotiations with the Iroquois and he was later recognized as one of Virginia's leading political figures. Hannah, mistress of Stratford Hall, thus frequently directed the large plantation household, the indentured servants, and the slaves in their domestic work and crafts.<sup>271</sup> Among Thomas and Hannah Lee's eleven children were Richard Henry and Francis Lightfoot, two brothers who carried forth the family's political dynasty and became most famous for their signing of the Declaration of Independence.<sup>272</sup>

### *Philip Ludwell Lee Era*

Thomas Lee died in 1750, leaving specific legacies in land, slaves, stock money, or personal belongings to each of his six sons and two daughters.<sup>273</sup> His eldest son Philip Ludwell Lee, only twenty-three years of age at the time, inherited the large estate, and the realities of plantation life soon molded him into a hard master.<sup>274</sup> By this time tobacco planting was declining and Philip Ludwell Lee held less interest in land acquisition than his father. As newer land holdings became sites of tobacco cultivation, slaves sowed the exhausted fields left behind in grains. Thus by the 1760s Stratford was no longer a plantation with one crop but a farm, producing a variety of crops for sale.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> The number of indentures is obscure because they were not generally kept in records. Accounts are limited to those who ran away and thus appeared in newspaper advertisements or court documents. Armes, *Stratford Hall: The Great House of the Lees*, 62-65.

<sup>272</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Signers of the Declaration of Independence," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, <http://www.stratfordhall.org/learn/lees/signers.php>.

<sup>273</sup> Armes, *Stratford Hall: The Great House of the Lees*.

<sup>274</sup> This included lands in six counties: Westmoreland, Northumberland, Stafford, Prince William, Fairfax, and Loudoun. Armes, *Stratford Hall: The Great House of the Lees*, 89.

<sup>275</sup> Seale, "Historical Narrative."

Philip Ludwell Lee, concentrating on the management of his farms, constantly tried to diversify his business activities. He held an engrossing interest in blooded horses, fox hunting, and horse races, and soon developed the Stratford stud farm in conjunction with neighboring establishments of the like.<sup>276</sup> Stratford, although still producing grain, became a landscape of vast pastures that served the busy horse farm.<sup>277</sup> Philip Ludwell Lee also expanded the servant quarters to accommodate a larger population of slaves, which exceeded one hundred at the time, and oversaw the construction of several dependencies, including an icehouse and a springhouse.<sup>278</sup> Thus, under Philip Ludwell Lee's authority, the grounds of Stratford Hall changed in many ways.

Until the middle of the eighteenth century, visitors reached Stratford almost entirely by way of its waterfront. The "warff" or landing, the plantation store, the store houses, the tobacco warehouses, shipyard, stocks, the mills and the coopers shop built by Thomas Lee existed along the Potomac's shore. Philip Ludwell Lee expanded this with a public warehouse to which the county people for miles around sent shipments of tobacco and other goods, including wood, lumber, indigo and naval stores. Additionally, they came to claim their cargoes, to witness the arrival of English ships, and to receive the captains' news. By the latter part of the eighteenth century, the Stratford waterfront stood as a central node for public and private business and of

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<sup>276</sup>Colonel Daniel McCarty's plantation at Pope's creek directly adjoined Stratford. A large stock farm, it was one of the most celebrated horse breeding establishments in Virginia. Additional stud farms were located throughout the Rappahannock Valley and across the Potomac in Maryland. Although Stratford was never as large or conspicuous as some of the other stud farms in the region, it played an important local part in introducing and sustaining English traditions in Virginia. Armes, *Stratford Hall: The Great House of the Lees*, 117-18.

<sup>277</sup> Seale, "Historical Narrative."

<sup>278</sup> Jeanne A. Calhoun, "A Virginia Gentleman on the Eve of Revolution," (Stratford: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, 1996).

local industrial activity. The Stratford landing became an increasingly significant place for gathering and dispersing of news, both foreign and domestic.<sup>279</sup>

Philip Ludwell Lee died in 1775 as the American colonies moved toward the brink of revolution. The estate passed by provision to son Philip Ludwell Lee II, who was only an infant at the time. The widowed Elizabeth Steptoe oversaw management of the estate, which then comprised about seven thousand acres with a large number of white indentured servants and slaves.<sup>280</sup> A few years later, Philip Ludwell Lee II tragically died when he fell from the second story of the house. Because he left no will, the court appointed a commission to divide the now debt-ridden estate between Elizabeth Steptoe Lee and her two daughters, Matilda and Flora.<sup>281</sup> In 1782, Matilda married Henry “Light Horse” Harry Lee III, who became master of the great house and its village of outbuildings, gardens, stables, shops, mills, farms and fisheries in the spring of 1782.<sup>282</sup>

### ***“Light Horse” Harry Lee Era***

As master of the house, “Light Horse” Harry Lee made additional changes to the place. An overseer continued daily management of grain planting and husbandry, while some thirty to sixty slaves worked in the fields. Following the American Revolution of 1776, indentured servitude completely died out. Yet hundreds of tillable acres remained in the uplands and on wide plains that extended from the plateau south and east of the great house. “Light Horse” Harry Lee leased portions of these outlying fields to “small farmers,” and the total number of

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<sup>279</sup> As Armes relates, from the earliest days there was coastwise and West Indian trade at Potomac landings, as well as trade with England. This circumstance brought about an interesting connection and frequent intermarriage between the families of New England, Bermuda and West Indian sea captains and early Virginia planters.

Armes, *Stratford Hall: The Great House of the Lees*, 125-26.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>281</sup> Seale, “Historical Narrative.”

<sup>282</sup> Armes, *Stratford Hall: The Great House of the Lees*, 240.

tenants reached its highest extent in Stratford's history.<sup>283</sup> Colonel Harry, however, was not well suited to the planter vocation as he had little training beyond a single year's management of Leesylvania during his father's absence. He eventually became immersed in politics and never returned to manage the plantation with any degree of interest or success. Instead, he further divided the property by selling certain tracts of the original acreage.<sup>284</sup>

Meanwhile "Light Horse" Harry Lee's fortunes rapidly declined as he became increasingly absorbed in politics. The need to financially support a family of six, coupled with disastrous land speculation deals, eventually reduced him to financial poverty. By 1802, times proved equally hard for Stratford tenants. The tenant families became dependent on the Lees and it was unlikely that any of their various farms brought enough income to pay rent. At this time, tobacco cultivation had lost much of its former profitability, and the stature of Stratford Hall declined as the plantation lost its role as an economic center in the Northern Neck region. Amidst these trying times, "Light Horse" Harry Lee's second wife, Ann, gave birth on January 19, 1807, to the couple's fifth son, Robert E. Lee, who later would be highly regarded as a Confederate general in the Civil War.<sup>285</sup> Within the following three years, growing debts forced "Light Horse" Harry Lee into penury and debtor's prison in Montross, causing Ann Carter Lee and the children to move from Stratford to Alexandria.<sup>286</sup>

Major Henry Lee, the only surviving son to "Light Horse" Harry Lee's first wife, Matilda, served as head of the house in the years following the exodus of Ann and the children.

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>284</sup> The Chantilly tract, the home of his distinguished kinsman, Richard Henry Lee, was among these. After Richard Henry's death in 1794 his house had been dismantled and razed to the ground. Ibid., 283.

<sup>285</sup> Today Stratford Hall still associates itself for being most significant as the birthplace of Robert E. Lee and home of the two brother signers of the Declaration of Independence, Richard Henry and Francis Lightfoot Lee. It was upon this area of significance that the 1966 nomination to the National Register of Historic Places was based. "Stratford Hall 1966 Final Nomination for National Register of Historic Places," ed. Virginia Department of Historic Resources (National Park Service, 1966).

<sup>286</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Henry Lee III," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, <http://www.stratfordhall.org/learn/lees/lighthorse.php>.

Since the late seventeenth century, the McCartys,<sup>287</sup> members of a noble Irish house, had remained friends and neighbors of the Lees. Major Henry Lee married Ann McCarty in 1817, and a year later, after “Light Horse” Harry Lee’s death, they gained legal ownership of Stratford Hall.<sup>288</sup> Around this time, Ann McCarty Lee’s younger sister, Elizabeth, took residence at Stratford. Soon after, she and Major Henry Lee became involved in a scandalous affair. This humiliated Major Henry Lee, making it increasingly difficult for him to live in Westmoreland County. He was induced to sell the plantation and move from the county.<sup>289</sup>

### *Somerville, Storke, and Stuart Era*

In 1822, Stratford Hall opened a new chapter as it moved from the extended tenure of the Lee family into the hands of William Clarke Somerville. Although Somerville owned Stratford until 1828, he occupied the great house for less than three years. Yet he made extensive and costly improvements to the mansion and outbuildings, as well as to the grounds, gardens, and farms. Interestingly, along with these tangible changes, a clause in his will revealed turns in social tides. It read “...that as the existence of Slavery is an evil I deprecate and wish to mitigate as far as is consistent with justice to my brother, that he shall set free my negro slaves after they shall have served the periods hereinafter specified.”<sup>290</sup> After Somerville’s death in 1826, the great house stood tenantless for several years while it was caught in a web of legal proceedings. Only the caretaker and a few slaves remained on the plantation during this time, a stark contrast to the teeming atmosphere of earlier plantation days.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> The McCartys resided next to Stratford at Pope’s Creek. Each head of the McCarty clan was in his turn a successful planter. Henry D. Storke was so enterprising in other business activities that, besides cultivating tobacco and raising thoroughbred horses, he was instrumental in building the industry that supplied Westmoreland brick to the cities of Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington. Armes, *Stratford Hall: The Great House of the Lees*, 371.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 366.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 372-77.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 414-18.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 422-24.

Eventually the courts awarded “the land and premises called Stratford” to the highest bidder, Henry D. Storke whose wife was Elizabeth McCarty. Elizabeth McCarty Storke lived at Stratford for fifty years, perhaps, the longest single occupancy in the plantation’s history. There, she devoted herself to the care and healing of sick children and babies in Westmoreland County.<sup>292</sup> She studied the medicinal qualities of herbs and cultivated an herb garden throughout this half century at Stratford, preparing balms, ointments, teas, and medicines of all descriptions. Additionally, Elizabeth McCarty Storke gave much of her time to gathering slaves together in the old school house to teach the Christian catechism. Following Elizabeth’s death in 1879, the property was left in trust to her grand-nephews, Dr. Richard Stuart and Charles E. Stuart. It remained in the ownership of the Stuart Family until November 19, 1929, when the property was transferred from private hands to become a public national shrine.<sup>293</sup>

### ***RELMA Era***

By this time the great house and its physical setting had fallen into utter disrepair. Efforts to save it were spearheaded by a group of prominent ladies, including Mrs. Charles D. Lanier, Ethel Armes, and Jessie Dew Ball DuPont.<sup>294</sup> They formed the Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation (RELMA) under the laws of the State of New York on March 16, 1929. Their charter included the following: “To acquire the estate known as Stratford Hall, in Westmoreland County, VA the birthplace and boyhood home of Robert E. Lee, and to restore, furnish, preserve and

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<sup>292</sup> Armes relates that even into the 1930s, Elizabeth “is loved and honored today and she is remembered as a friend of those in distress. This association has unfortunately since dissipated.

<sup>293</sup> Armes, *Stratford Hall: The Great House of the Lees*, 433-38.

<sup>294</sup> When the Foundation incorporated in Virginia in the 1970s, the name was changed to the Robert E. Lee Memorial Association. The Association is currently comprised of approximately forty directors from across the country and Great Britain. Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, “About Stratford Hall,” Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, <http://www.stratfordhall.org/about/>.

maintain it as a national shrine in perpetual memory of Robert E. Lee.”<sup>295</sup> The phenomenon of historic preservation was already well-established during pre-Civil War era, when American Revolutionary War monuments were vanishing in the midst of the new nation’s construction boom.<sup>296</sup> Aligned with intent of those earlier preservation efforts, which were strictly concerned with establishing patriotic shrines, the restoration at Stratford sought to “revive the spirit”<sup>297</sup> of colonial days. The former plantation became a place where individuals could reflect upon and extol the leadership of the famed Confederate general Robert E. Lee (Figure 4.10).<sup>298</sup>

Before the stock market crash of 1929, and during the early years of the Great Depression, the distinguished ladies of RELMA successfully raised money to purchase the house and property.<sup>299</sup> RELMA’s restoration and reconstruction endeavors, however, encountered many of the issues that confronted other preservationists during the Colonial Revival period, such as lack of thorough documentation and loss of historical context. Fortunately, correspondence, books from the Lee family’s private collection, letters, manuscripts, and court records gave restoration architect Fiske Kimball some insight into the site’s architectural elements.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> William Seale, "Proposed Interpretation for Stratford Hall," (Alexandria: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, 1989), 70-71.

<sup>296</sup> Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States before Williamsburg* (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1965).

<sup>297</sup> "To Revive the Spirit of the Time' Restoration of the Grounds and Gardens at Stratford Hall Plantation 1929-1934," *Magnolia: Bulletin of the Southern Garden History Society* XIX, no. 4 (2004-2005).

<sup>298</sup> Armes, *Stratford Hall: The Great House of the Lees*, 449. As research progressed, the ladies came to recognize Stratford Hall also as a symbol of a remarkable family that produced three generations of leaders for Virginia. See Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., essay on "The Colonial Revival in the Public Eye: Williamsburg and Early Garden Restoration".

<sup>299</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Robert E. Lee Memorial: Mrs. Lanier and the Beginning," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, [http://www.stratfordhall.org/learn/lees/re\\_l\\_memorial\\_association.php](http://www.stratfordhall.org/learn/lees/re_l_memorial_association.php).

<sup>300</sup> Armes, *Stratford Hall: The Great House of the Lees*. See Chapter XXIII: The Scene in 1928, pp. 443-454 and Chapter XXIV: The Historical Background, pp. 455-475.

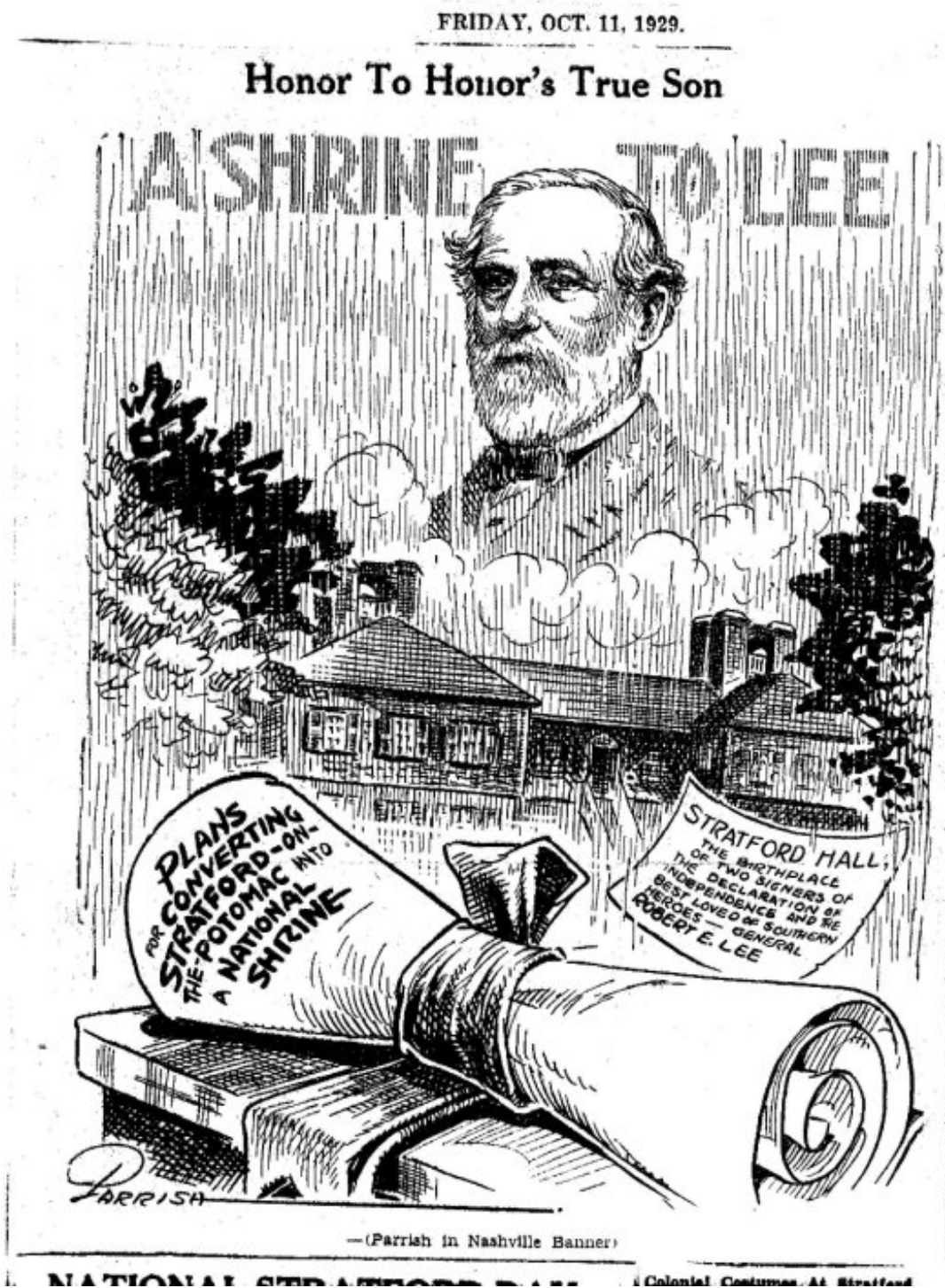


Figure 4.10: An October 1929 Advertisement in the *Nashville-Banner* newspaper, indicates that the women of RELMA utilized the image of Robert E. Lee to promote Stratford Hall as a place worthy of preservation. The choice of name is interesting here as it suggests, perhaps, Lee's stature as being analogous to that of William Shakespeare with the allusion to Stratford-upon-Avon. Source: Stratford Archives, Robert E. Lee Memorial Association.

While RELMA clearly defined its objectives for the house to serve as a shrine, the restoration followed then-current ideas in the new field of preservation based upon architectural history. Thus, Fiske Kimball, supported by RELMA, changed many physical aspects of Stratford Hall to fit an overpowering ideal of architectural perfection. For example, despite Fiske Kimball's realization that the glass bookcase doors in the great hall were not original to the first configuration of the house, he still chose to leave them. Considering such things, Fiske Kimball's counsel was "We must follow, instead of an exact consistency, a wise opportunism, keeping in mind both authenticity and beauty."<sup>301</sup>

The notion that patriotic sensitivities could be kindled through beauty was held by many preservationists during this time. Restoration architects, such as Fiske Kimball, controlled many preservation decisions, such as which architectural elements should be retained. This control permitted historical accuracy and aesthetic values to be placed on an equal basis. At the time, colonial revivalists believed people would feel the greatness of the Founding Fathers through their actual relics. While life seemed increasingly complex in the years following the First World War, many Americans found comfort in associating the distant American past with a time they believed was much simpler and characterized by virtuosity. Thus, the restorers of the 1930s imparted a much idealized view of the past onto their projects. The work of restorationists at Stratford Hall and many other places was inspired by a desire to teach, demonstrate, and show a past where the ideals of life were presumed to be less uncertain.<sup>302</sup>

The practice of landscape architects Arthur Shurcliff and Morley Jeffers Williams was also consistent with this widely accepted philosophy of preservation at the time. At Stratford, they gathered evidence from site excavations and relied heavily on remnants of other surviving

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<sup>301</sup> Seale, "Proposed Interpretation for Stratford Hall," 70-71.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

landscapes of the period, as well as from English precedents.<sup>303</sup> Lacking concrete evidence, discretion was ultimately in their hands, and treatment of the landscape followed a course that was similar to the approach that Kimball implemented in the restoration of the great house. Numerous landscape features were constructed as idealized versions of the past, but in reality were inventions of the restorers' imaginations.<sup>304</sup> Professionals like Kimball, Shurcliff, and Williams were confident that their decisions were the *right* course of action.<sup>305</sup>

Patriotic values remained strong as journalist and historian Douglas Southall Freeman gave an address entitled *The Cornerstones of Stratford* on October 12, 1935, at Stratford Hall's dedication ceremony. Among these "cornerstones," Freeman idolized the Lees as the finest example of family, wise marriage,<sup>306</sup> good management, public service, and courageous decision.<sup>307</sup> This idolization led to the public's perception of these restored places as realistic illustrations of the eighteenth-century colonial era. Instead, most shrines stood as romanticized representations of what elite society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries believed was colonial.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Thomas E. Beamon, Jr., "The Archaeology of Morley Jeffers Williams and the Restoration of Historic Landscapes at Stratford Hall, Mount Vernon, and Tryon Palace," *The North Carolina Historical Review* LXXIX, no. 3 (July 2002).

<sup>304</sup> Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., "The Colonial Revival in the Public Eye: Williamsburg and Early Garden Restoration," in *The Colonial Revival in America*, ed. Alan Axelrod (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985).

<sup>305</sup> Robert E. Stipe, *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>306</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, *The Cornerstones of Stratford: Address at the Dedication of Stratford* (Richmond: Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation, 1935). The affair between "Black Horse" Harry and Elizabeth McCarty seemed to be intentionally overlooked. This particular cornerstone mentions hope that Stratford would house a library on genetics "for there is no home in America where the value of wise mating is better exemplified". Much intermarriage occurred within the Lees and other families of the time, a fact which probably would not be valued today. This notion of "wise marriage" reveals the underlying sense of white supremacy which swept America throughout the early part of the twentieth century.

<sup>307</sup> Freeman mentions a total of eight cornerstones. However, numbers four, five, and eight are not distinct in his speech. *Ibid.*

<sup>308</sup> William Butler, "Another City Upon a Hill: Litchfield, Connecticut, and the Colonial Revival," in *The Colonial Revival in America*, ed. Alan Axelrod (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985).

Since the early Colonial Revival era, the aesthetic character and use of Stratford Hall have further changed.<sup>309</sup> For example, between the 1930s and 1950s, designers erected a number of cabins, a guest house, and a large brick Colonial Revival Council House to accommodate RELMA board members and visitors. In 1942, RELMA hired New York landscape architects Innocenti and Webel to develop the area west of the main house, traditionally used as a service yard, into an eighteenth-century style geometric flower and herb garden. During the 1950s the formal east garden gained new colorful ornamentals such as crape myrtles and yellow locusts—changes that occurred without regard to either the earlier Colonial Revival design intentions or the historical accuracy of the eighteenth-century period.<sup>310</sup> Additionally, throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, RELMA made various attempts to revive some of the plantation's earlier industries, such as raising livestock, producing hams, candle-making, and hand-weaving. These efforts, however, have since been discontinued.<sup>311</sup>

### *Stratford Hall Today*

Today, Stratford Hall's staff and lessees still farm certain portions of the plantation, and the landscape includes several modern buildings, such as a public dining room, gift shop, research library, and visitor center. Visitors can participate in guided house tours, hike nature trails, walk through the gardens, view museum exhibits, and enjoy panoramic views atop the bluffs. The grounds are host to many educational programs, such as the annual Civil War History Symposium and the Northern Neck Cultural Landscape Symposium. Virginia's Historic Garden Week only occasionally features the east garden in its annual tours. RELMA staff members

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<sup>309</sup> At some point in the twentieth century a portion of the property became what is today Westmoreland State Park.

<sup>310</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Virginia Garden History," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, <http://www.stratfordhall.org/visit/gardens/history.php>.

<sup>311</sup> "Lee Home Is Reviving Its Colonial Industries; Talk on Stratford Hall to Be Given Here Wednesday," *New York Times*, October 4, 1942.

organize various camps throughout the summer to allow young visitors to learn colonial trades, hunt for fossils, fish in the mill pond, and explore the aspects of period art and music. Scholarly minds associated with numerous fields—architecture, horticulture, landscape architecture, historic preservation, history, geology, archeology, and so forth—partake in critical research, uncovering new narratives.<sup>312</sup>

The current RELMA mission statement reads: “Stratford Hall preserves the legacy of the Lee family and its plantation community; inspires an appreciation of America’s past, encourages commitment to the ideals of leadership, honor, independent thought and civic responsibility.”<sup>313</sup> This statement suggests that RELMA’s mission has broadened over time as Stratford Hall has evolved from a public shrine to a house museum and place of public education. Primary funding for RELMA and its ongoing projects mostly arises from public contributions and an endowment, with gate receipts and retail income providing secondary and tertiary forms of revenue. Thus it is essential that interpretive programs at Stratford Hall sustain public interest and appreciation over time. Historical interpretation helps people see value that a place is worth preserving.<sup>314</sup>

Stratford Hall has a rich, complex history that extends far beyond the branches of the Lee family tree. The landscape has served as an impetus for action, a means by which the Lee family tree and others have grown. A place such as Stratford Hall relies upon those who experience it for education and inspiration; visitors who climb, rest beneath, and swing forth from its historical limbs. Currently, much of Stratford's energy remains stored. But to survive in the long run, it must become an object of renewed and renewing responses from subsequent generations.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "About Stratford Hall."

<sup>313</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Press-Kit."

<sup>314</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "A Year of Industry and Increase," in *Stratford Hall 2009 Annual Report* (Stratford 2009).

<sup>315</sup> John Dixon Hunt, *The Afterlife of Gardens*, Penn Studies in Landscape Architecture (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 11.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**STRATFORD HALL: AN EVOLUTION OF MANAGEMENT**  
**AND HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION**

*Introduction*

The previous chapter presented a brief historical account of Stratford Hall, suggesting potential narratives for historical interpretation that might help the site reach broader audiences and offer quality experiences to all visitors. This chapter describes and evaluates historical interpretation at Stratford Hall. It answers the following questions: What is the mission of the Robert E. Lee Memorial Association (RELMA) and how has it evolved during the past eighty plus years? How has the structure of the organization and its management practices changed? How do these changes relate to the mission of RELMA and to the activities RELMA has undertaken in order to fulfill its mission? How has historical interpretation at Stratford Hall reflected this evolution in both mission and organizational structure? How does the Stratford Hall cultural landscape factor into the interpretive program?

The ensuing narrative provides a synopsis of RELMA's organizational structure and its decision-making process with respect to its expressed purposes and mission. This account considers how RELMA has viewed its mission in light of influential social trends. In turn, the actions of RELMA are expressions of how its board of directors intends to fulfill its mission. An overview of historical interpretation at Stratford Hall describes the evolution of the content (e.g., stories and "facts") and the modes of expression (e.g., costumed guides, wayside exhibits, dioramas, summer camps, etc.) that RELMA has chosen to implement since it purchased

Stratford Hall in 1929. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the current interpretive activities, including new initiatives, such as a sustainable agriculture program, geocaching, and a cultural landscape symposium.

### *The Evolution of RELMA and its Mission*

During the 1920s, Mrs. Charles D. Lanier, President of the William Alexander, Jr. Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) in Greenwich, Connecticut, assisted by Mrs. Granville G. Valentine, Mrs. Harry Lee Rust, Miss Ethel Armes, Mrs. John J. Naugle, Mrs. I. N. Lewis, and Mrs. Snowden Boyle, negotiated the purchase of Stratford Hall from its owner, Mr. Charles E. Stuart. By January 1929, Mrs. Lanier acquired funding through a loan, months before the stock market crash. Soon thereafter, other prominent ladies, including Lady Astor of Great Britain and Mrs. Alfred I. duPont, joined the endeavor to memorialize Stratford Hall and perpetuate the name of General Robert E. Lee.<sup>316</sup>

The ladies of the UDC chapter quickly discovered they could not hold legal title to the property as an unincorporated entity, and thus they incorporated the Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation (RELMF) in New York on March 16, 1929.<sup>317</sup> The RELMF, which included a national advisory board, board of directors, and group of state directors to ensure representation from people across the country, acted as Stratford Hall's governing body.<sup>318</sup> Twenty well-educated and successful men comprised the national advisory board, including Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt. The RELMF intended the national advisory board to actively cooperate with the

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<sup>316</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Robert E. Lee Memorial: Mrs. Lanier and the Beginning."

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Members decided to organize the RELMF into two separate bodies for several reasons. First, New York corporate laws called for corporate members and separate boards of directors, which were treated differently. Second, New York corporation laws required members of a board of directors to undergo annual elections, and the incorporators wanted lifetime membership. Also, the majority of incorporators (including legal counsel) were New York residents and they included men. Lastly, Mrs. Lanier desired to model the structure after the Mount Vernon Ladies Association by using women directors for states.

board of directors by giving counsel, advice, and practical suggestions. The ladies who initially fought to save Stratford Hall, such as Mrs. Charles D. Lanier and Mrs. Granville G. Valentine, formed a board of directors that included several men, including Mr. Charles E. Stuart. The group of state directors, however, consisted entirely of women from various states across America. Additionally, RELMF designated Miss Ethel Armes as the national executive secretary, since a paid employee could not serve as a board member.<sup>319</sup>

Although RELMF did not explicitly use the term "mission statement" to define their purposes, the following paragraph outlined in their certificate of incorporation certainly acted as a mission statement. It reads as follows:

"To acquire the estate known as Stratford Hall in Westmoreland County, Virginia, the birthplace and boyhood home of Robert E. Lee, and to restore, furnish, preserve and maintain it as a national shrine in perpetual memory of Robert E. Lee. The famous old Stratford Library will be renewed and a Bureau of Research and Information established, which may become a resort for historical writers, scholars, and students; a repository of the records of the Lee family and of the Revolutionary War and Colonial Times, and of the period of the War Between the States. The colonial gardens and the ancient docks at Stratford Landing will be restored and the thousand acre plantation converted into a Memorial Park.

It is proposed to open, under suitable regulations, to open the said estate, with its library, relics, buildings, gardens and grounds to the inspection of visitors, and the use, benefit and enjoyment of the public."<sup>320</sup>

Although RELMF clearly saw the house as a shrine, they also recognized the entire site—the "library, relics, buildings, gardens, and grounds"—as an environment for historical inspiration *and* interpretation. Thus, from the beginning RELMF saw Stratford Hall as both muse and museum, and they clearly intended to transform the entire property into a "Memorial Park" that would serve the public in numerous ways.

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<sup>319</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Meeting Minutes," (Stratford: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, 1929).

<sup>320</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation, "Restoring the Virginia Birthplace of Robert E. Lee," in *Stratford-on-the-Potomac* (Stratford: Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation, 1929).

RELMF's aim of making the estate a shrine fit within a larger national context that defined the Colonial Revival era. The Centennial Exhibition of 1876 reawakened Americans to their colonial past. Consequently, many Americans carried forth a romanticized view of this past, feeling strongly that respectable figures like Robert E. Lee personified certain, seemingly lost, ideals, such as virtuosity and purity. These Americans additionally believed that the eighteenth-century rural lifestyle was somehow "simpler" than the prevalent urban industrial life, and thus gained a sense of reassurance from this associative history. Furthermore, patriotic shrines strengthened an American identity threatened by immigrants from eastern and southern Europe during the early twentieth century. Finally, historic preservation became a means for women, such as Mrs. Lanier, to prove their power and ability at a time when women's suffrage was gaining momentum.<sup>321</sup>

These broad social trends almost certainly influenced the early treatment of Stratford Hall. For example, for many decades, house tours of Stratford Hall focused on furnishings that fit within an idealized yet accepted image of the colonial past, which later research proved were historically inaccurate. A 1942 *New York Times* article explained how RELMF aimed to revive the past by restoring Stratford Hall's industries, many of which were domestic in nature, such as hand-weaving and candle-making. Additionally, the author noted that Stratford Hall sold thousands of hams over the past decade, while workers at the restored mill ground buckwheat, whole wheat, and cornmeal for the Stratford store.<sup>322</sup> However, many of these endeavors did not persist over time.

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<sup>321</sup> Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America*.

<sup>322</sup> "Lee Home Is Reviving Its Colonial Industries; Talk on Stratford Hall to Be Given Here Wednesday."

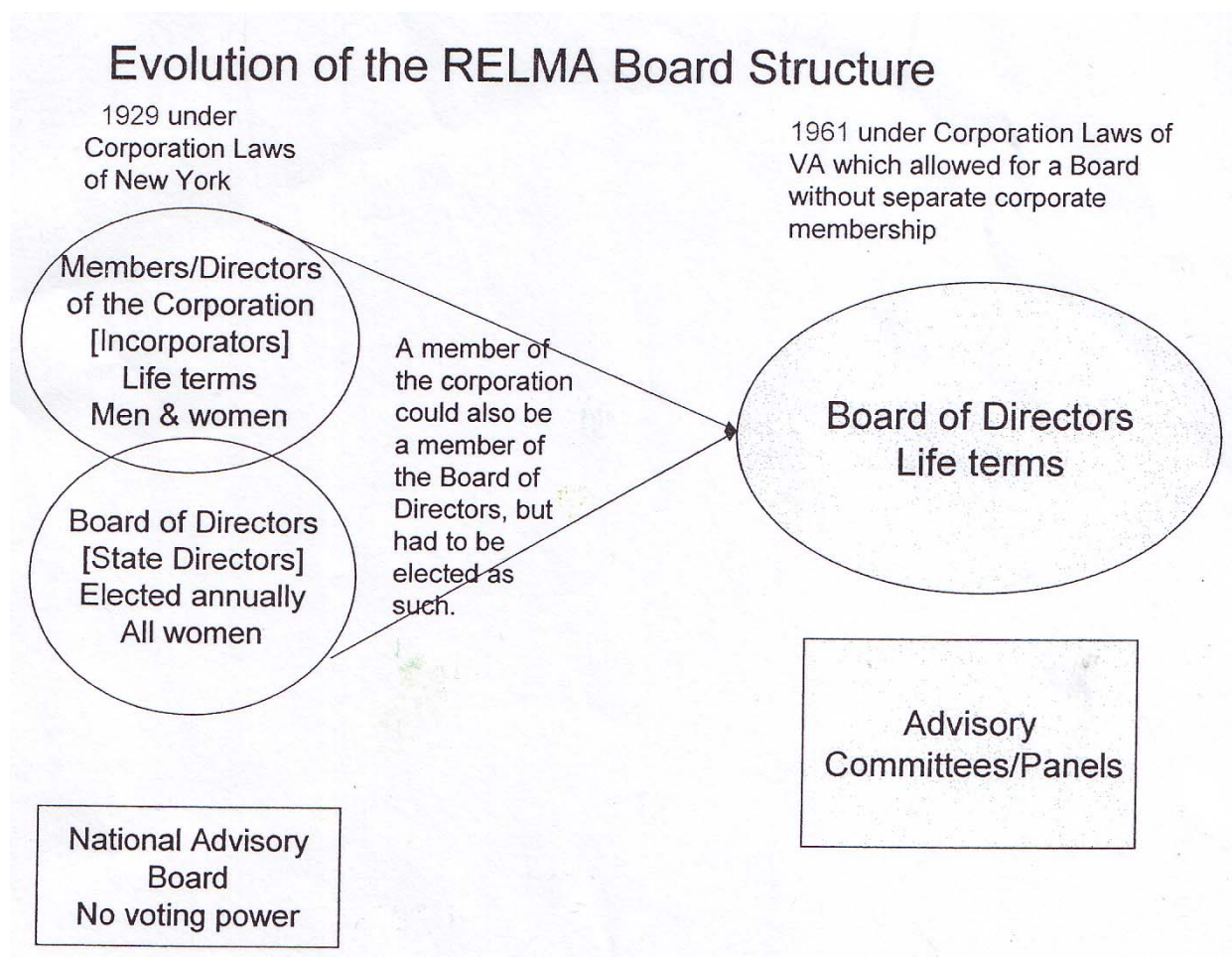


Figure 5.1: Evolution of the RELMA Board Structure. Source: Stratford Hall Archives, Robert E. Lee Memorial Association.

In the decades following World War II, RELMF continued functioning under its established structure and statement of purposes. However, in 1960 Merrill Pasco, a Virginia attorney, incorporated a separate entity in Virginia under the Stratford Hall name. In 1961, this new corporation merged with the existing RELMF into one Virginia-based corporation. The two separate bodies combined into a single board of directors with life terms for members, in allowance with Virginia corporation laws. Ten years later, RELMF became known as the Robert E. Lee Memorial Association (RELMA). A diagram illustrating the "Evolution of the RELMA Board Structure" further explains these changes in the governing body (Figure 5.1). As

evidenced by the diagram, an all-woman board of directors, with representation from most American states, Great Britain and other parts of the European community presently governs Stratford Hall. In addition to the board of directors, separate advisory committees and panels guide decision-making at Stratford Hall. The board continues to hold biannual meetings at Stratford Hall, and conference calls are scheduled as needed to conduct its business during the interim.

Following this transformation of the board structure during the 1960s, Stratford Hall began a new period of management, in which RELMA's actions continued to align with broader social trends. For example, in 1971, RELMA constructed a visitor center to augment the house museum. This action reflected a growing sense that "the thing itself" was no longer sufficient to tell the story. Global advancements in audio and visual technology motivated RELMA to begin telling the Lee family story through *other* media, such as gallery displays, dioramas, and movies. Each of these methods of historical interpretation required new spaces that managers could easily control—spaces that were not burdened by their own past, cultural associations, or emotional attachments. Thus, the modern visitor center at Stratford Hall became a space for creative storytelling, which could not happen as easily within the actual historic structures or landscapes.

Almost two decades ago, RELMA began formulating a distinct mission statement in response to a report issued in 1989 that evaluated the status of historical interpretation at Stratford Hall and made recommendations for the future. The association's mission statement underwent several nuanced iterations. It currently reads: "Stratford Hall preserves the legacy of the Lee family and its plantation community; inspires an appreciation of America's past, encourages commitment to the ideals of leadership, honor, independent thought and civic

responsibility.”<sup>323</sup> Recalling RELMF's statement of purpose from 1929, the core value of education remains relatively unchanged.<sup>324</sup> To aid in fulfilling this mission, RELMA maintains four specific advisory panels, comprised of experts in various fields. The panels include a National Council, Historic Resources Advisory Panel, Historic Interiors Advisory Panel, and Historic Gardens Advisory Panel, all of which appear to be active, according to published annual reports. An executive director and a staff of twenty-eight full-time and forty-five part-time employees currently manage Stratford Hall in accordance with the direction established by RELMA.<sup>325</sup>

### *Phases of Historical Interpretation at Stratford Hall*

Historical Interpretation at Stratford Hall has evolved through two distinct phases. The first phase consists of a period from 1929 through 1961, when the organizational structure of RELMF changed after the merger of the two corporations that eventually became RELMA. Within this time span, RELMF had no cohesive interpretive plan. Historical interpretation included simple tours of the Great House. Some of the elements discussed within these early tours, such as the furnishings, lacked historical accuracy.

The second phase of historical interpretation at Stratford Hall began during the 1960s and continues into the present. The 1960s were a transitional period for RELMA since the two previous governing bodies, the members and directors of the corporation and the board of directors representing particular states, coalesced. Consequently, RELMA began to plan out new strategies for historical interpretation, and, by the 1970s, they had constructed a stand-alone, contemporary museum building to exhibit artifacts they discovered in display cases and visual

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<sup>323</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Press-Kit."

<sup>324</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation, "Restoring the Virginia Birthplace of Robert E. Lee."

<sup>325</sup> Mary Tyler Cheek, "A Statement of Purpose," (Stratford 1982).

graphics they created on walls. This new building reflected a change in the perception of RELMA about historical interpretation and the site.

RELMA also began to reevaluate other aspects of historical interpretation, such as presenting a clear and consistent narrative about the Lees to visitors on the house tour. Thus, by the 1980s, they began developing a formal interpretive plan by hiring an historian to compose a research report on the history of Stratford Hall and the status of its historical interpretation. The resulting interpretive plan evolved during the 1990s and 2000s in accordance with RELMA's attempts to develop a distinct mission statement. This phase from the 1960s up to the present reflects a shift from a focus on the house itself to the inclusion of other types of media, particularly technological devices. At the same time, the content of the stories expanded to include other types of people who resided at Stratford Hall, as well as parts of the property beyond the Great House. Throughout the entire history of historical interpretation at Stratford Hall, however, RELMA has tried to preserve Stratford Hall as a place where anyone can learn about American history and find inspiration in the past.

### ***The Evolution of Historical Interpretation at Stratford Hall***

Perhaps one of the earliest efforts of historical interpretation at Stratford Hall was a booklet entitled "Stratford-on-the-Potomac" compiled by Ethel Armes and published by the William Alexander, Jr. Chapter U.D.C. of Greenwich, Connecticut. A summary of Lee ancestral records, the history of the Lees of Stratford, and Sidney Lanier's address on Robert E. Lee comprised this booklet, along with photographs, maps, and line drawings. The booklet's content highlighted all of the Lees who resided at Stratford Hall, including Thomas Lee, Richard Henry Lee, Francis Lightfoot Lee, and, of course, Robert E. Lee. Ethel Armes hoped this publication would afford "the first means directly at hand to give to the public the essential information

about Stratford and to arouse and hold the interest and enthusiasm of every community," and cost visitors only a dollar to purchase.<sup>326</sup>

During the period between the 1930s and 1960s, historical interpretation focused attention on the Great House. This occurred in light of the aim of RELMF to convert the thousand acre plantation into a "Memorial Park," as described in the foundation's statement of purpose. Likely, RELMF discovered that it was difficult to maintain continuity of the Lee narrative across such a vast property, when audio devices and other technological aids had not yet become mainstream media for historic sites. Furthermore, tangible structures offered visitors the most obvious links to the past as places where visitors could imagine the Lees conducting their daily lives.

Occasionally, the newly restored East Garden garnered attention when The Garden Club of Virginia featured it during the annual Historic Garden Week Tour of Westmoreland County. During the early 1940s, RELMF hired New York landscape architects Umberto Innocenti and Richard Webel to develop the area west of the main house for interpretation. Workers planted many eighteenth-century varieties of flowering perennials, annuals, and bulbs, in addition to the vegetables and herbs that the Lees would have cultivated.<sup>327</sup> While RELMF interpreted this area as an eighteenth-century style geometric flower and herb garden (Figure 5.2), excavation plans from the 1930s indicate that the Lees used this space as a service yard and horse paddock.

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<sup>326</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation, "Restoring the Virginia Birthplace of Robert E. Lee."

<sup>327</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Virginia Garden History: West Garden," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, <http://www.stratfordhall.org/visit/gardens/>.



Figure 5.2: The West Garden at Stratford Hall. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, October 2010.

Around the same time Innocenti and Webel created a plan for the west garden, RELMF extended historical interpretation further into the landscape by constructing the Payne Memorial Cabin. RELMF based the design of the cabin on information gathered from oral histories, and situated the structure on a rise overlooking the Great House and the vista to the Potomac (Figure 5.3). These accounts implied that slaves originally positioned the cabin asymmetrically against the formal layout of the Great House. This aligns with the research of John Michael Vlach on southern plantations, which suggests that this non-formal placement was a subtle message of resistance against the master.<sup>328</sup> RELMF reconstructed the single-room hand-hewn poplar cabin with wood lath chimney to represent the nineteenth-century slave cabin in which William

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<sup>328</sup> Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, 14-16.



Fig. 5.3



Fig. 5.4

Figure 5.3: Payne Memorial Cabin at Stratford Hall from a distance. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.

Figure 5.4: Close-up of Payne Memorial Cabin at Stratford Hall. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.



Fig. 5.5

Figure 5.5: Interior of Payne Memorial Cabin. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, October 2010.

Wesley Payne (1875-1954) was born (Figure 5.4, previous page). The interior contains basic furnishings (Figure 5.5, previous page), which are used for historical interpretation. Although docents did not interpret this slave cabin as part of the house tour, the act of reconstructing the cabin indicates a change in thought about Stratford Hall's history because RELMF took this step in order to honor the service of one of the plantation's many slaves.<sup>329</sup>

During the period from the 1930s into the 1970s, RELMF did not have an official interpretive plan. Instead, the foundation left specific decisions to the discretion of appointed committees. RELMF employed docents to conduct house tours, which generally were limited to basic facts about each room, supplemented by additional information that aligned with the particular interests of a tour group. During this period, RELMF did not see a need to mark trails in outlying portions of the property, and visitors' exploration of the greater landscape was limited to the dirt road leading from the RELMF cabins to the restored mill area located near the cliffs and beach.<sup>330</sup>

By 1971, RELMF transitioned into RELMA and constructed a visitor center because the house museum itself no longer satisfied its experienced visitors. Advancements in audio and visual technology facilitated the incorporation of an introductory slide presentation and a museum exhibit to orient visitors to the Robert E. Lee narrative.<sup>331</sup> After viewing the presentation, visitors walked across a footbridge spanning a deep ravine toward a gravel path leading to the house. RELMA decided this initial sequence of experiences was important because it offered visitors an immediate glimpse of the plantation's varied topography. Upon

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<sup>329</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Outlying Buildings," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, [http://www.stratfordhall.org/visit/great\\_house/outlying.php](http://www.stratfordhall.org/visit/great_house/outlying.php).

<sup>330</sup> Hynson, Judy S. E-mail to Stephanie N. Bryan, March 27, 2011.

<sup>331</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Visitor Center," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, [http://www.stratfordhall.org/visit/visitor\\_center.php](http://www.stratfordhall.org/visit/visitor_center.php).



Figure 5.6: View of the North Vista at Stratford Hall from the great hall within the main house. Source: Lauren M. Brown, October 2010.



Figure 5.7: View of the East Garden at Stratford Hall from the main house. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, October 2010.

reaching the southwestern dependency, visitors joined other tourists, and awaited their tour guide, who was dressed in a colonial costume. Visitors may have found this costume confusing since Robert E. Lee, the subject of the narrative, was born at Stratford Hall after the colonial period.<sup>332</sup>

If visitors arrived early, they could explore a nearby museum exhibition assembled by RELMA. Once the tour commenced, groups of visitors traveled through various parts of the Great House with a docent who interpreted its domestic interiors and offered occasional instances of role-playing. Visitors obtained views of various landscape prospects such as the North Vista (Figure 5.6, previous page) and the East Garden (Figure 5.7, previous page). These components of the Stratford Hall cultural landscape are equally important in constructing and understanding the Lee narrative. Such places provide insight into the lives of the slaves, indentured servants, and tenant farmers who labored to support the plantation's wealthy elite owners. Unfortunately, many visitors' experiences of this vast landscape were (and remain) limited to these framed views, which offer an interpretation of Stratford Hall predominantly from the perspective of the masters and mistresses. Most visitors probably experienced these outdoor spaces during leisure time, after they had completed the house tour. When weather permitted, tour guides offered additional interpretation of the kitchen (Figure 5.8).

The house tour emphasized the mid-eighteenth-century period and focused on Stratford Hall's "children of destiny:" the five brothers of American Revolution fame and their distant cousin, Robert E. Lee. However, interpretation usually stressed the furniture and décor rather than events that may have taken place within the Great House or on the plantation.<sup>333</sup> In the absence of all but a few of the eighteenth-century artifacts, the furnishing committee mainly

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<sup>332</sup> Seale, "Stratford Hall: The Historical Site Today."

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

decorated the rooms with exemplary American and English antiques, which were not originally at Stratford Hall, but suggested how the original furniture might have appeared. The selection of furnishings, as well as their placement and arrangement, painted an idealized picture of eighteenth-century colonial life that was embraced by many historic preservationists during the Colonial Revival era.<sup>334</sup> Consequently, RELMF created a separate decorative arts tour that showcased the furniture collection donated in the 1970s to Stratford Hall by Mrs. Caroline Ryan Foulke.<sup>335</sup> Although the furnishing committee referred to eighteenth-century Lee inventories, RELMF consciously sacrificed historical accuracy to fulfill their idealized notions of the past.<sup>336</sup>



Figure 5.8: Interior of the Kitchen at Stratford Hall. Source: Eric A. MacDonald, July 2010.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Hynson, Judy S. E-mail to Stephanie N. Bryan, March 27, 2011.

<sup>336</sup> R. Scudder Smith, "Stratford Hall Plantation Furniture Well-Received at Christie's," *Antiques and the Arts*(2003), [http://antiquesandthearts.com/Antiques/AuctionWatch/2003-12-09\\_\\_12-10-27.html](http://antiquesandthearts.com/Antiques/AuctionWatch/2003-12-09__12-10-27.html).

Visitors generally left the tour guide after completing the regular and specialized decorative arts tours. Guides encouraged visitors to independently investigate the eastern terraced boxwood garden, western flower, herb, and vegetable garden, the stables and coach house, reconstructed slave quarters, Wes Payne Memorial Cabin, and other nearby outbuildings. Guides left it to the discretions of visitors whether to traverse additional areas of Stratford Hall's vast property, such as the cliffs or the restored mill and pond.<sup>337</sup> For visitors who chose to explore the nearby outbuildings, the stables and coach house offered a glimpse into a crucial aspect of the plantation, when horses were a primary method of transportation (Figure 5.9-5.10). Reconstructed during the 1930s, the coach house became another vehicle for RELMA to interpret history through material culture. Over time, RELMA filled the coach house bays with a collection of nineteenth-century wheeled vehicles and adorned the walls with horse tack (Figure 5.11).<sup>338</sup>

The reconstructed slave quarters adjacent to the Great House also became a place for RELMA to create interpretive exhibits (Figures 5.12-5.13). The 1930s reconstruction of the cabins extended the Lee narrative into the slave culture of the plantation. However, it only offered visitors a small representation of the number of slave quarters that would have dotted the property to accommodate the more than two hundred slaves and indentured servants that once lived at Stratford Hall.<sup>339</sup>

For visitors who ventured beyond the slave cabins and coach house, the reconstructed mill (Figure 5.14) and pond provided a place to demonstrate activities associated with colonial

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<sup>337</sup> Seale, "Stratford Hall: The Historical Site Today."

<sup>338</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Outbuildings," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, [http://www.stratfordhall.org/visit/great\\_house/outlying.php#nogo](http://www.stratfordhall.org/visit/great_house/outlying.php#nogo).

<sup>339</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Plantation Life for Slaves."



Figure 5.9: The Coach House and Stable at Stratford Hall as viewed from the front of the Great House. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.

Figure 5.10: Close-up of the Coach House at Stratford Hall. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.



Figure 5.11: Coach House Bay at Stratford Hall. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.



Fig. 5.12

Figure 5.12: Close-up of Reconstructed Slave Quarters at Stratford Hall with interpretive garden plot. Source: Eric A. MacDonald, July 2010.



Fig. 5.13

Figure 5.13: Interior of Reconstructed Slave Cabin at Stratford Hall shows a new exhibit RELMA implemented during October 2010 to show principle furniture items. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.



Fig. 5.14



Fig. 5.15

Figure 5.14: The Stratford Mill from a distance. Source: Eric A. MacDonald, July 2010.

Figure 5.15: Interior of Stratford Hall Mill. Source: Eric A. MacDonald, July 2010.

industries. RELMA restored the mill's large waterwheel so that the wooden gears would again power millstones. When open, visitors could observe millers grinding corn and wheat as they have been for nearly two-and-a-half centuries, albeit in absence of Stratford Hall's enslaved labor force (Figure 5.15, previous page).<sup>340</sup>

Over time visitors who ventured to more remote areas of the property, such as the mill and pond, expressed concerns about poorly marked nature trails. To address this issue and to give visitors optional outdoor activities, RELMA constructed official trails between the 1970s and early 1980s. Workers carved new paths out of forested tracts to connect specific areas of the plantation, such as the burial vault and the mill. Subsequently, they named the trails to reflect identifiable landscape characteristics or structures, such as the little meadow or the burial vault.<sup>341</sup>

The first marked nature walks in the Stratford Hall landscape included the Vault Trail, Little Meadow Trail, and Mill Pond Trail. Mary Custis Lee deButts, granddaughter of Robert E. Lee and a member of the RELMA board of directors at the time, created trail maps to orient visitors along the way (Figure 5.16). In 1985, the Student Conservation Association of Charlestown, New Hampshire, a non-profit organization known for trail-related work across the country, "rejuvenated" Stratford Hall's then-overgrown Mill Trail and expanded the trail system by constructing the Silver Beech and Overlook trails.<sup>342</sup> The development of these trails broadened the outdoor experiences available to visitors, and may have been one way that RELMA responded to the modern environmental movement.

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<sup>340</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Grain Mill," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, [http://www.stratfordhall.org/visit/great\\_house/mill.php](http://www.stratfordhall.org/visit/great_house/mill.php).

<sup>341</sup> Hynson, Judy S. E-mail to Stephanie N. Bryan, March 27, 2011.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

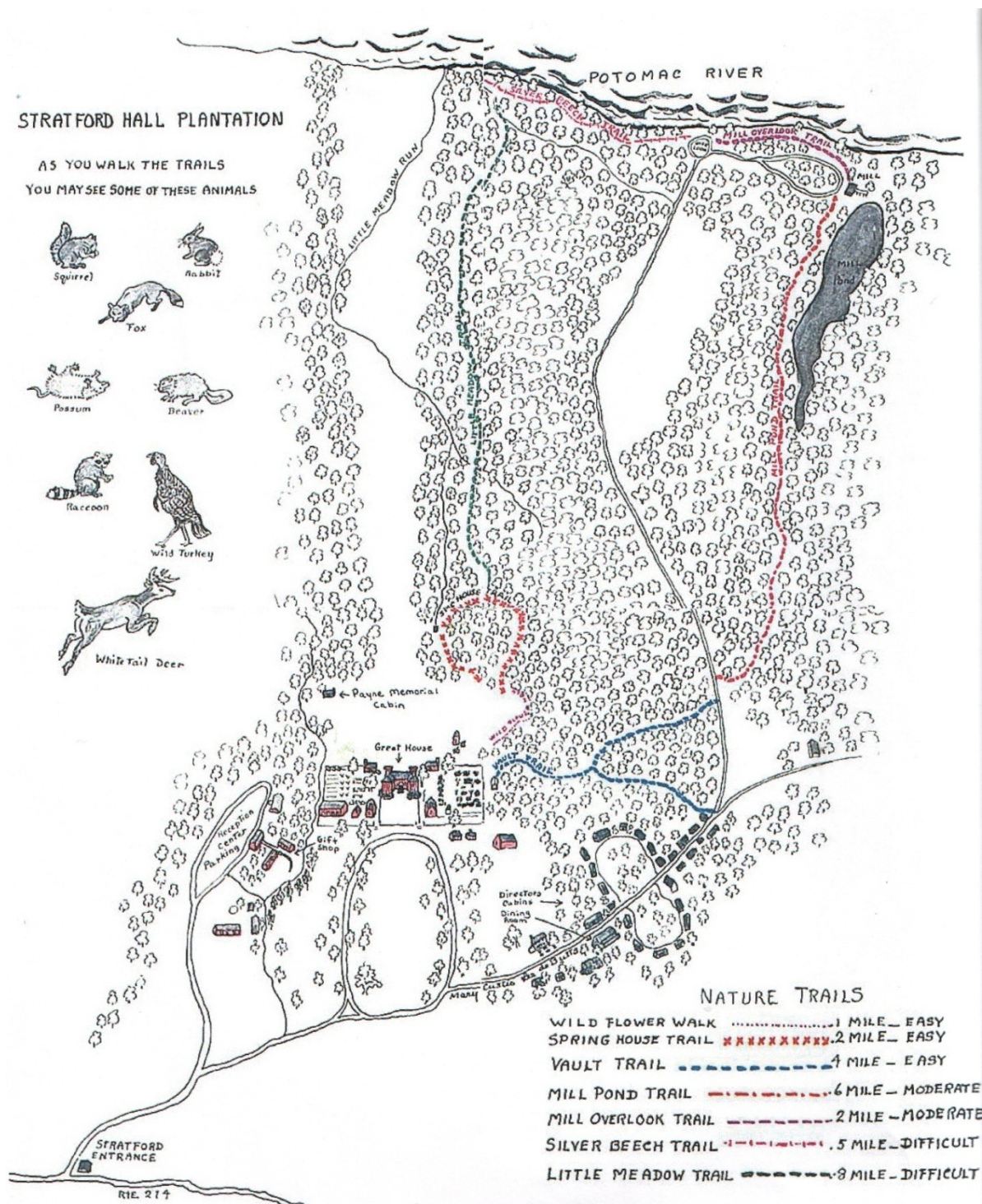


Figure 5.16: Map of Stratford Hall Nature Trails by Mary Lee Custis deButts. Source: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association.

By the 1980s, RELMA aimed to ensure that its reconstructed and restored buildings attained the highest degree of accuracy allowed by current research and that historical interpretation coherently presented this information. This emphasis on historical accuracy and authenticity followed in the wake of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which established an Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, State Historic Preservation Office, National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and the Section 106 review process to guide treatment of historic sites.<sup>343</sup> Despite the rise of the modern environmental movement and sub-discipline of environmental history during the 1970s and 1980s, however, the Great House and its outbuildings remained the central focus of historical interpretation.<sup>344</sup>

During the mid-1980s, RELMA employed William Seale, a renowned historian, to develop the first official report on Stratford Hall's historical interpretation. This document assessed the current condition of interpretive programs, detailed the Lee narrative, and offered recommendations for future changes. Adopted by the RELMA Board of Directors in 1989, Seale's report included seven chapters; nearly a third of the document's body described the material culture associated with the house at Stratford Hall, maintaining RELMA's emphasis on the Great House interiors and architecture. William Seale mainly critiqued the house tour, suggesting that the interpretive process left visitors to assume that the furnished rooms illustrated factual information about the domestic lives of the Lees, when their arrangement and presentation actually exemplified Colonial Revival interior decorating. In addition to a lengthy discussion of the Great House, Seale succinctly addressed the physical integrity of the landscape.

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<sup>343</sup> Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, "The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as Amended," (Washington, D.C. 2006).

<sup>344</sup> This period began with Paul Buchanan and Charles Philips conducting an architectural survey of the Great House moldings in 1984, as well as architectural investigations throughout areas of the house, and an additional survey on the outbuildings. At the same time, Herman Heikkinen led a dendrochronological study to determine a more exact date on the construction of the Great House. By 1993, Charles Philips began a research project on the roof walk that once connected the Great House chimneys. This was the impetus for creating the Historic Resources Advisory Panel.

He suggested that because forest now covered most traces of earlier agricultural and mercantile establishments, the landscape most resembled the period when Philip Ludwell Lee was master. However, he did not give many specific recommendations for improving the landscape's interpretation of this period.<sup>345</sup>

Seale pointed out that the twentieth-century visitors' experience differed greatly from those during the eighteenth-century because the landscape was devoid of the extensive wharves that Thomas Lee and Philip Ludwell Lee established along the Potomac River (Figure 5.17). Seale observed that a tangible part of the early eighteenth-century experience was lost without the ability to gain initial access to the site via the waterway and cliffs, which once served as the doorsteps of the plantation. Additionally, a drastic change in feeling occurred in the absence of the voices, sounds, and sights associated with the busy human activity that once surrounded the wharves. Seale also expressed specific concerns about the condition of the west herb and vegetable garden—a space that research suggested had been a paddock during Philip Ludwell Lee's days—and the east garden, where the Lees would have planted a mixture of ornamental and edible plants, but which RELMA had filled with boxwood.<sup>346</sup>



Figure 5.17: The Stratford Beach and Cliffs. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.

<sup>345</sup> Seale, "Stratford Hall: The Historical Site Today."

<sup>346</sup> Seale, "Proposed Interpretation for Stratford Hall."

Despite raising these issues, Seale centered his recommendations on improving interpretation of the Great House and its immediate surroundings, such as the outbuildings, and the east and west gardens. These areas still provided the most palpable connections to the Lee narrative. Seale generally considered spaces and artifacts not directly associated with the Lee narrative to be extraneous. Therefore, his report did not interweave a narrative of seventeenth-century living in the Tidewater area into interpretation. This is perhaps surprising because archeological excavations conducted between 1976 and 1980 had yielded new evidence and more than 100,000 artifacts that shed light on the pre-Lee history of the plantation.<sup>347</sup>

In his final report, Seale stated that RELMA established clear objectives at the time of its founding, and that Stratford Hall would “be interpreted in one way or another as a Lee house.” Operating on this assumption, Seale focused on the Lee narrative; he used material from the Somerville, Storke, or Stuart tenures only to enlighten views of the Lees. Additionally, Seale recognized the significance of the slave labor force at Stratford Hall, but decided it adequate that docents leading the official house tour only briefly mention this crucial aspect of a working plantation.

During the process of re-envisioning interpretation at Stratford Hall, Seale recognized that “difficulty lies in a certain tension between the original purpose of the restoration back in the thirties and the current idea of recreating the past for educational purposes.” Seale identified a distinct difference between the 1930s treatment of the property as a shrine to a national hero and the 1980s idea of the actual house as a place to teach history. He suggested that management and historical interpretation could bring those ideas into a “harmonious relationship.”<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Seale, “Stratford Hall: The Historical Site Today.”

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

Seale presented a forward-looking solution by proposing that RELMA interpret the site's twentieth-century history, which extended the eighteenth-century narrative of Robert E. Lee and Stratford Hall into the near-present. He believed this approach would allow visitors to better appreciate the current condition of Stratford Hall. It would educate visitors about the patriotism that many Americans embraced following the First World War, which had compelled Mrs. Charles D. Lanier and other women to preserve Stratford Hall in the first place. Furthermore, it would permit visitors to better understand why RELMA made certain seemingly arbitrary decisions regarding preservation in the past.<sup>349</sup>

Seale's report led to modifications in interpretation of the Great House during the early 1990s. RELMA added garden tours, which required advance booking on the part of visitors. The garden tours enhanced and broadened the ever-evolving visitor experience at Stratford Hall. During the 1990s, the Garden Club of Virginia continued to periodically feature the east garden at Stratford Hall during its annual Historic Garden Week Tour in Westmoreland County. One year, to entice additional public interest, RELMA opened some of their log cabins to visitors on the tour. These cabins were erected during the 1940s to serve RELMA directors. During the 1990s, supplemental tours extended historical interpretation deeper into the landscape, beyond the formal gardens. For example, following the reconstruction of the circular spring house in the 1990s, Tommy Moles, Director of Plantation Operations, offered "plantation tours" upon special request. However, these tours did not endure due to the reduction of the interpretive staff in 2002.<sup>350</sup>

By 1993, RELMA partially had implemented Seale's suggestions, which emphasized the house and its immediate surroundings. Robert Leath, Associate Curator of Historic Interiors in

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<sup>349</sup> Seale, "Proposed Interpretation for Stratford Hall."

<sup>350</sup> Hynson, Judy S. E-mail to Stephanie N. Bryan, March 27, 2011.

the Department of Collections at Colonial Williamsburg, and a member of the Historic Interiors Advisory Panel at Stratford Hall, eventually simplified Seale's plan. Among Stratford Hall staff, this revised document became known as "The Figure Eight Interpretive Plan." RELMA believed it aligned better with the philosophy of furnishing the house with objects that reflected "the various periods of Lee family occupancy and the history of the Robert E. Lee Memorial Association at Stratford Hall as accurately as current scholarship, research, technology, and preservation will allow." As a result, RELMA changed the names of many rooms within the Great House to correspond with the time periods specified in the revised plan.<sup>351</sup>

Between 2000 and 2002, RELMA expanded and modified the historical interpretation offered in the visitor center to complement the changes that had occurred in the Great House during the previous decade. The visitor center was altered to accommodate furnishing permanent galleries, each of which focused on a specific theme: the Lees of Stratford, Preservation at Stratford Hall, and Archeology. In the Lees of Stratford Gallery, museum exhibit designers incorporated a diorama depicting Robert E. Lee in his tent during the Battle of Fredericksburg to introduce visitors to the Lee narrative (Figure 5.18). New technologies allowed motion sensors to illuminate the scene and activate an audio track when visitors stepped into this space. Designers also created graphic timelines, which curators placed along the walls to guide viewers through generations of Lee family history. Curators also positioned objects owned by various Lee family members in display cases to augment the timeline (Figure 5.19). Additionally, designers integrated three life-sized statues—one of Richard Henry Lee and two of Robert E. Lee—into these presentations (Figure 5.20). Finally, designers mounted television screens in the

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<sup>351</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Interpretive Plan," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, <http://www.stratfordhall.org/learn/preservation/interplan.php>.



Figure 5.18: Diorama at the Lees of Stratford Gallery. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.



Figure 5.19: Display Cases at the Lees of Stratford Gallery. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.



Figure 5.20: Life-sized Sculpture of Richard Henry Lee placed along the timeline in the Lees of Stratford Gallery. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.

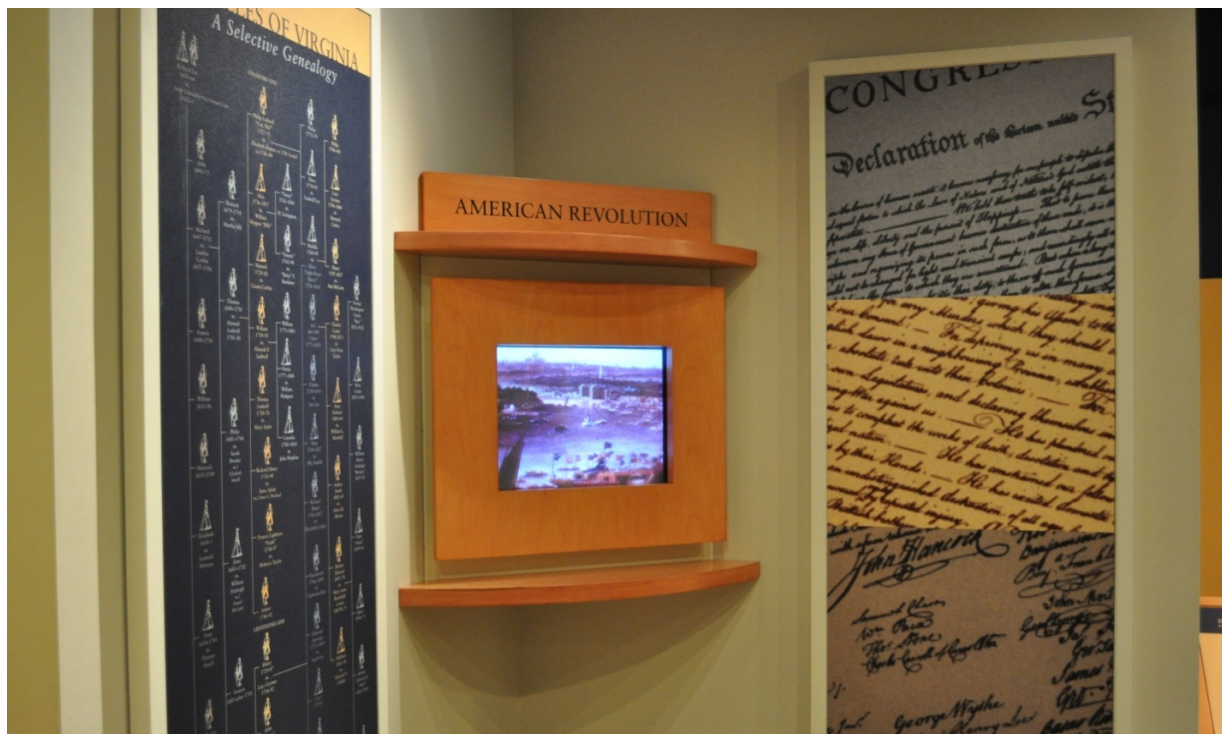


Figure 5.21: Touch Screen Monitors placed in the corners of the walls at the Lees of Stratford Gallery. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.

corners of each wall to show videos about the “American Revolution,” “Architecture,” and Stratford Hall during the “Civil War” (Figure 5.21, previous page).<sup>352</sup>

At one end of the visitor center, opposite The Lees of Stratford Gallery, designers set glass display cases into the walls to frame a hallway. These side displays comprised the Archaeology Gallery, which featured information about, and artifacts dating from other periods in the history of Stratford Hall. Curators developed this gallery to highlight the history of archaeology at Stratford Hall, from the early excavations of the 1930s to the more sophisticated Clifts Plantation investigation of the 1970s, as well as later discoveries made by the archaeological field school of the University of Mary Washington.<sup>353</sup>

The halls of the Archeology Gallery terminated in a room that RELMA designated as the Preservation Gallery. This gallery included eight display panels that highlighted RELMA's preservation of artifacts at Stratford Hall since 1929. Around the gallery perimeter, curators displayed architectural artifacts removed from the Great House and its outbuildings during the restoration by Fiske Kimball during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>354</sup>

Following the improvements that occurred in the visitor center during the mid-1990s, the focus of interpretive planning shifted back to the Great House. In 2003 the RELMA board approved the Lee Heritage Plan (LHP), which was based on Leath's “Figure Eight Interpretive Plan.” A year later, RELMA began implementing this plan, which neared completion in 2007, corresponding with the celebration of Robert E. Lee's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>355</sup> In response to this plan, RELMA decided to remove the antique furniture collection that had been donated decades earlier by Mrs. Caroline Ryan Foulke, which previously had served as the focus of decorative arts tours.

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<sup>352</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, “Visitor Center.”

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, “Interpretive Plan.”

RELMA deemed the furniture unsuitable for the interpretive goal of accurately depicting the various Lee periods, and sold it by auction at Christie's New York in 2003.<sup>356</sup> RELMA placed proceeds from the auction in an endowment, thereby facilitating future acquisitions of appropriate objects for the Stratford Hall collections.<sup>357</sup>

The LHP aimed to make the story of the Lee family flow more smoothly and chronologically in the house tour. Initially, the LHP only addressed the upper floor of the house, and RELMA subsequently added other stories to the narrative as they integrated the lower level into the tour. All together, the plan allowed different sections of the house to emphasize four distinct phases of Lee history at Stratford Hall, including various Lee family members as well as the story of RELMA and the restoration by Fiske Kimball.<sup>358</sup>

Since 2003, RELMA staff has altered the interpretive plan in order to maintain a sense of enthusiasm among docents and other interpretation staff members. For example, in 2004 staff refurnished the hall in the Great House to reflect Thomas Lee's 1758 estate inventory, and completely restored the dining room area to its Colonial Revival period to reflect the work of RELMA. The LHP intended for interpretation of the history of RELMA to extend beyond the visitor center and into the actual house. For some reason, however, the staff proved unable to show excitement when conveying that part of the narrative to visitors in the dining space, so RELMA modified the interpretive plan in response to this situation.<sup>359</sup> Such modifications are important because staff attitude impacts visitor experience.

By 2005, interpretation staff had to respond to advancements in technology and mass media relations, and RELMA developed an official website to convey updated information about

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<sup>356</sup> Smith, "Stratford Hall Plantation Furniture Well-Received at Christie's."

<sup>357</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Collections," in *Stratford Hall Annual Report 2007* (Stratford 2007).

<sup>358</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Interpretive Plan."

<sup>359</sup> Hynson, Judy S. E-mail to Stephanie N. Bryan, March 27, 2011.

the LHP and the Stratford Hall narrative, as well as upcoming events. Research findings featured on the website broadly encompassed the Lees of Virginia, and specifically addressed the story of Robert E. Lee, from the family tree to creation of the RELMA. Supplementary web pages informed visitors about plantation life and slavery, as well as related ongoing or past preservation projects. Additional resources targeted both teachers and students of American history. The website became another medium to serve the purpose of education.<sup>360</sup>

RELMA continued to further develop educational events and programs at Stratford Hall, particularly in preparation for the Robert E. Lee 200<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in 2006. For example, staff implemented a set of special exhibitions in the Stratford Hall Visitor Center. They installed “Capturing Robert E. Lee in Life and Memory: Lee in the American Eye 1861-1940” and “Robert E. Lee and the Women in his Life.” RELMA opened these exhibits to the public on the January 19th anniversary date of Lee’s birthday.<sup>361</sup> Additionally, in 2006 RELMA adopted the goal of introducing new public programs that would help Stratford Hall reach a broader audience. To achieve this end, they launched a number of wide-ranging, fun and educational activities to pique the interests of diverse people, both young and old.<sup>362</sup>

For example, during 2006, RELMA introduced summer camps that gathered grandparents and grandchildren together to learn traditional plantation practices, such as blacksmithing, fishing, brick firing, open hearth cooking, and butter churning.<sup>363</sup> The “Leadership and Life in Revolutionary America” seminar became Stratford Hall’s cornerstone of educational programming as 2007 brought about continued collaboration with teachers from

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<sup>360</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Home Page," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, <http://www.stratfordhall.org>.

<sup>361</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Collections."

<sup>362</sup> Paul Reber, "Executive Director's Report," in *Stratford Hall Annual Report 2007* (Stratford 2007).

<sup>363</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Events," in *Stratford Hall Annual Report 2007* (Stratford 2007).

across the United States and England.<sup>364</sup> Between 2008 and 2009, RELMA added the “Northern Neck Cultural Landscape Symposium” and the “Robert E. Lee Seminar in Civil War History” to the list of residential educational programs, which thus far included the “Lees and Independence” and “Economic Landscapes of the Tidewater.” The introduction of the Northern Neck Cultural Landscape Symposium proved a particularly important step in broadening scholarly discourse on Stratford Hall through an environmental perspective, and this event served to complement the other programs that considered more traditional historical, social, and economic angles on the site's history.<sup>365</sup>

Additional educational activities commemorated specific historical events. For example, “Robert E. Lee 1807-2007: Celebration of an American Icon” became part of Stratford Hall’s 200<sup>th</sup> birthday programming and included an array of lectures, a Great House tour by candlelight, a special role-playing “Lee for Children” tour, as well as new exhibits. To celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Virginia’s settlement, Dr. Douglas Sanford, a professor from the University of Mary Washington's Department of Historic Preservation who directs an archeological field school at Stratford Hall, delivered a speech on “The ‘Clifts’ Before Stratford: A 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Potomac Story.” The “Lee Independence Day” event, on the other hand, focused on Richard Henry Lee’s 1776 congressional resolution for independence.<sup>366</sup> Annual seasonal events included a celebration of African-American heritage during Black History Month, a spring Easter egg hunt, the Northern Neck Food and Harvest Festival, and the wintertime Christmas celebrations. Each of these events provided appropriate tours, storytelling, games, food, and music, and proved successful in drawing in new crowds.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Education," in *Stratford Hall Annual Report 2007* (Stratford 2007).

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Events."

During 2008 and 2009, RELMA increased attention on environmental education with guidance from a new panel of professionals with expertise in natural sciences. Stratford Hall staff attended an environmental education workshop to learn about incorporating environmental history into Stratford Hall's program offerings.<sup>368</sup> Additionally, a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network partly funded the preparation and installment of eight new wayside exhibits for interpretation throughout the Stratford Hall landscape.<sup>369</sup> The signs focused on seventeenth-century life before the Lee family lived at Stratford Hall. Student workers positioned two wayside exhibits at the Clifts plantation site, indicating where the Pope family once lived.



Figure 5.22: Ancient Forests Wayside Exhibit at Stratford Hall. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.

They located another sign on the northeastern side of the house near the octagon building to interpret the American Indian experience. They placed the remaining signs along various hiking trails to discuss a range of topics from Miocene-era cliffs to early forests (Figure 5.22). They also situated a final sign, not part of the grant, in the slave cemetery located adjacent to the

<sup>368</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "President's Report," in *Stratford Hall Annual Report 2007* (Stratford 2008).

<sup>369</sup> Laura Lawfer, "New Signage to Visit," in *Stratford Hall Blog: New Projects and Innovative Ideas* (Stratford: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, 2009).

Council House to offer an explanation of slaves buried at that location.<sup>370</sup> However, although students installed these only a few years ago, they already show signs of weathering. Mildew from rain and fading caused by sunlight (not visible in the photographs) obscure the text and images, making them difficult for visitors to read.

Environmental education extended beyond the theoretical and into the practical realm with the launch of a Sustainable Agriculture Program in 2009. The program focused on contrasting eighteenth- and twenty-first century (organic) farming techniques, thereby creating a connection between the past and the present, fostering an awareness of changes in agricultural practices, and showing their impacts on the present and future form of the landscape. Through this program, RELMA aimed to increase public understanding of the role of agricultural history on the environment and the human diet. This program also stood as a cornerstone in the efforts of RELMA to attract new audiences to the site and develop new and innovative educational programs.<sup>371</sup>

To further capture attention from new crowds and from returning visitors who prefer more traditional means of interpreting the indoor environment, staff updated the permanent exhibit in the Preservation Gallery in 2009. Curators incorporated new interpretive information into the display, along with objects from the Storke and Stuart ownership periods. Additionally, RELMA added an interactive video on plantation life to the Lees of Stratford Gallery to indicate how Stratford Hall was a microcosm of life on all levels during the eighteenth century. This video featured all aspects of colonial life, from the wealthy planter to the enslaved manservant. Curators also updated galleries in the visitor center with a temporary “On the Way to Stratford” exhibit that featured selected photographs from the archival collection dating from 1898 to the

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Paul Reber, "Introduction to Stratford Hall's Sustainable Agriculture Blog," in *Stratford Hall Sustainable Agriculture* (Stratford: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, 2009).

present. This exhibit featured persons and groups who had visited the site either to see the occupants or to make pilgrimages to Lee's birthplace.<sup>372</sup>

The "Rediscovering the Historic House—Creating a New Paradigm for the Visitor Experience" symposium that RELMA held in 2009 shifted focus from the visitor center back to the Great House. Participants discussed their perception that modern and increasingly technologically informed museum audiences expect an innovative interpretive experience. This perception prompted a reevaluation of the historic house museum tour model. RELMA thus assembled an expert panel from various disciplines to consider a new model for historic house interpretation.<sup>373</sup>

In an effort to guide future preservation and interpretation endeavors, RELMA employed an architecture firm in New York to develop a Historic Structure Report to combine past and current research in a format that would facilitate decision-making and ensure accurate interpretation of architectural details in the Great House. To complement this study, RELMA partnered with the landscape architecture firm Jaeger and Co. and College of Environment and Design at the University of Georgia in 2009 to begin a process for documenting the historic landscape that would create a foundation for its future management.<sup>374</sup>

At the same time, RELMA has continued making necessary changes to the Great House tour to elucidate the complicated history of Stratford Hall to its visitors. Because the LHP encompassed four distinct time periods, including those associated with Thomas and Hannah Lee, Philip Ludwell Lee, "Light Horse" Harry Lee and Robert E. Lee, and RELMA, it became impossible to provide docents with appropriate attire that would reflect such an extensive time

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<sup>372</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Visitor Center."

<sup>373</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Rediscovering the Historic House: Creating a New Paradigm for the Visitor Experience," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, <http://www.stratfordhall.org/learn/education/housesym.php>.

<sup>374</sup> Martha Anne Jackson, "President's Report," in *2010 Stratford Hall Annual Report* (Stratford 2010).

period. As a result, the interpreters began dressing in “business casual” attire for all regular house tours. Like other historic sites, however, Stratford Hall continued to use eighteenth-century costumes when conducting period activities during school programs.<sup>375</sup>

Stratford Hall’s new educational offerings continued to garner positive reception from the public. By 2010 preservation efforts focused on a number of outbuildings, and designers brought specific exhibits into these locations. For example, RELMA created two exhibition spaces and an orientation space in the southwest dependency to acquaint visitors with Stratford Hall’s eighteenth-century tobacco industry. Although RELMA currently interprets this area as a workshop where skilled eighteenth-century craftsmen on the plantation would have labored on a daily basis, research indicates that this interpretation lacks historical accuracy.<sup>376</sup> Additionally, staff furnished one of the slave quarters southeast of the house with reproduction objects and descriptive panels to aid in interpretation. They eventually transformed the other quarter into a hands-on educational history area for families.<sup>377</sup>

Fun and entertaining activities stretched into the landscape during 2010 as Stratford Hall became a geocache site as part of the Star-Spangled Banner Geotrail. This activity is a modern-day treasure hunt where participants use hand-held GPS units to locate map coordinates and find a “cache.” A cache usually consists of a small plastic container with a log book, trinkets, and other trade items. The game proved to be educational because the caches incorporated historical information about the plantation. The geocache game was perhaps a step not only toward enticing younger, technologically astute populations, but also toward providing a connection to

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<sup>375</sup> Laura Lawfer, “Interpreter Attire,” in *Stratford Hall: New Projects and Innovative Ideas* (Stratford: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, 2009).

<sup>376</sup> Jackson, “President’s Report.”

<sup>377</sup> Abigail Newkirk, “Coming up Next: The Slave Quarters,” in *Stratford Hall: New Projects and Innovative Ideas* (Stratford: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, 2010).

other Chesapeake Bay sites that are linked to the geotrail through the theme of colonial American history.<sup>378</sup>

Other management endeavors regarding the landscape were not as successful as the geocache venture, however. For example, an attempt to implement sustainable agriculture practices at the gatehouse field failed in 2009, requiring staff to replant the area with organic clover seeds donated by the Seeds of Change program. The clover crop has since thrived, and the field may support organic wheat and corn cultivation in the near future, with the aim of providing grain to the grist mill at Stratford Hall. Workers also maintained a small demonstration plot of colonial tobacco in this field to remind visitors of the crop that historically dominated the extensive plantation.<sup>379</sup>

Other elements of the organic agriculture program are evolving through the development of partnerships with compatible organizations and individuals. By 2011, RELMA initiated a partnership with Stoneleigh Farms, a local Virginia farm that specializes in honey production, to assist in establishing bee colonies in the cliff fields at Stratford Hall. Additionally, Lakota Farms, located in Culpepper, Virginia and one of America's foremost sustainable producers of Devon cattle, will aid Stratford Hall in reviving its tradition as a cattle operation. Aside from returning some of the landscape at Stratford Hall to active production, both of these new programs aim to significantly contribute to the educational mission of Stratford Hall by allowing visitors to experience firsthand these diverse agricultural practices and to better understand their historical importance.<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Geocaching at Stratford Hall," in *Stratford Hall: Home of the Lees of Virginia and Birthplace of Robert E. Lee* (Stratford: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, 2005-2011).

<sup>379</sup> Paul Reber, "Update on Sustainable Farming Program," in *Stratford Hall: New Projects and Innovative Ideas*, ed. Abigail Newkirk (Stratford: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, 2011).

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

### *Conclusion*

Historical interpretation of Stratford Hall plantation has steadily changed and expanded during the past seventy-plus years. The rate of change in the interpretive activities at the site seems to have accelerated during the last decade. Currently, RELMA and its staff seem less inclined to view Stratford Hall as a shrine commemorating a famed Confederate general and more disposed to think of the property as multifaceted—a memorial, museum, and public institution. RELMA aims for Stratford Hall to serve as a place where visitors can learn about, reflect on, and draw inspiration from American history, democracy, and ideals. RELMA has maintained traditional modes of interpretation, such as the guided house museum tour, and has ventured into new techniques such as geocache interpretation. Most of the interpretive efforts employed by RELMA have taken a conservative approach, although some new ventures, such as the sustainable agricultural program, have required a high level of experimentation.

Today, ongoing preservation and everyday interpretation at Stratford Hall remains centered on intact physical artifacts, an approach that follows current standards and values in the field of historic preservation. Although not highlighted in this account, RELMA continues to restore many seemingly minute architectural details to a particular period in order to accurately portray the Great House and its dependencies during the Lee tenure. The evolution of historical interpretation at Stratford Hall thus far indicates a gradual movement toward integrating the history of other people who resided at the plantation, such as slaves. While the vast cultural landscape holds much potential for telling additional stories, the landscape remains greatly underutilized for historical interpretation in comparison to the Great House.

The continued focus on the Great House leaves many visitors with an incomplete understanding of the varied human activities that occurred among those artifacts. Visitors cannot

begin to construct a full understanding of who the Lees were—and, more importantly, *how* they arrived at their prominent leadership positions—without considering the innumerable slaves, indentured servants, transported criminals, and tenant farmers who occupied space on the plantation. Specialized symposia and other educational programs generate discussions about these facets of the site's history and offer fleeting glimpses into this world. Yet the greater cultural landscape remains an afterthought to the overall interpretation strategy of the site, with the only formalized interpretation of the landscape occurring in scattered locations with simple wayside exhibits. Stratford Hall is certainly a place where landscape architects can begin exploring creative approaches to historic landscape management.

**CHAPTER 6**  
**STRATFORD HALL: OPENING A NEW CHAPTER**  
**IN THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE**

*Introduction*

This chapter proposes ideas for a new chapter in the ever-evolving story of historical interpretation at Stratford Hall. Although there are distinctions in the ways Stowe, Little Sparta, and Stratford Hall approach history, the chapter explores similarities and associations between English landscape gardens and plantation landscapes of the American South, and considers how principles of English landscape garden design might provide a basis to interpret the history of cultural landscapes such as Stratford Hall. The chapter thus identifies opportunities for historical interpretation in the Stratford Hall cultural landscape through the eleven principles derived from the English landscape garden. Drawing inspiration from the gardens of Stowe and Little Sparta, as well as from the artworks of contemporary designers, the chapter offers ideas for how designers might unleash the potential of landscape at Stratford Hall to engage the imaginations of visitors.

*The English Landscape Garden as a Precedent and Model*  
*for Cultural Landscape Interpretation at Stratford Hall*

English landscape designers created imaginative associations between eighteenth-century rural English landscapes and the classical landscapes of Greece and Rome. However, more obvious associations exist between eighteenth-century English landscape gardens and many

historic plantation landscapes of the American South. These associations provide a foundation for cultivating a twenty-first-century landscape garden.

Designers of English landscape gardens sought to work *with* nature rather than against it. They promoted the idea of landscape as varied and diverse scenery for contemplation and appreciation, rather than nature demanding control and order.<sup>381</sup> In a sense, the reasoning that drove this concept parallels the transitions that have occurred during the past two centuries in many plantation landscapes of the American South. At many of these places, eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century architecture and site layouts adhered to a strict formal hierarchy characterized by right angles, straight lines, symmetry, and mathematical precision.<sup>382</sup> This dominance over nature extended into the social realm to include subordination of other human beings, which was concurrent with environmentally degrading agricultural practices, such as intensive tobacco and cotton cultivation.

Since the early twentieth century, many plantations of the South have become public institutions where the history is now interpreted, or contemplated and appreciated, and the landscape as a whole is valued for its varied and diverse natural and cultural resources. To draw further connections, early colonists in America maintained contact with Western Europe through family and friends, and they followed Anglo-European customs, such as by planting geometric boxwood gardens on their new land. They also adopted new trends, such as using ha-ha walls to contain livestock and create seamless vistas, for example.

Due to wealthy Anglo-European immigrants carrying forth traditions and maintaining social ties to their ancestral land, a number of the aristocratic bucolic landscapes of Southern plantations mirror those of rural England in cultivation of “natural” scenery and their ability to

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<sup>381</sup> Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*, 232-37.

<sup>382</sup> Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, 3-7.

evoke a pastoral mood. For example, the Stowe landscape garden in Buckinghamshire, England, and Stratford Hall plantation in Virginia both contain extensive cleared vistas and sweeps of open verdant pastures delineated by stretches of dense forests (Figures 6.1-6.4). The colorful, textured foliage of the adjacent tracts of woodland reflect in the ripples of tranquil lakes and ponds. Gentle streams meander through shady groves of trees and mixed forests, while networks of winding footpaths allow visitors to traverse the grounds, experiencing fully the great variety in topography and vegetation these landscapes have to offer.

The Stowe landscape garden is, however, only the nucleus of a much larger landscape that includes wide expanses of parkland along its outskirts. Designers of both Stowe and Stratford Hall plantation centrally positioned their respective residences, and during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries both houses were hubs of extensive surrounding acreage dedicated to agriculture. Like Stowe, set in the midst of countryside, Stratford Hall plantation maintains a rich rural context that is mostly defined by outlying areas of farmland, and the neighboring Westmoreland State Park to its west.

Aside from their apparent spatial qualities, Stowe and Stratford Hall share a comparable social trajectory. Each landscape reflects accepted eighteenth-century beliefs and values—Stowe embodies ideals of the English enlightenment and Stratford Hall expresses American democracy and the Confederate South. Additionally, both landscapes are products of prominent, affluent, and politically active families. Due to the stature of their respective owners, both estates became attractions for the elite. Among Stowe's distinguished guests were Christian VII of Denmark; Queen Caroline of Great Britain; King George II of Great Britain; Frederick, Prince of

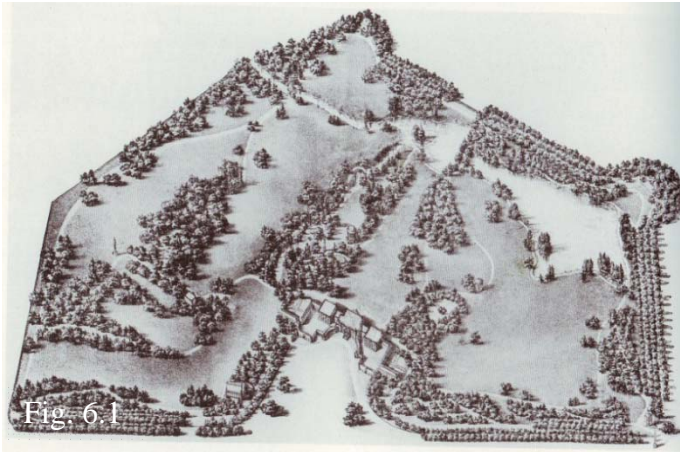


Figure 6.1: Plan of Stowe Landscape Garden from 1910. For clarity, the plan shows only the house and gardens, which were the center of a much larger landscape.

Figure 6.2: Grecian Valley at Stowe Landscape Garden.

Source (for both images): John Martin Robinson, Jerry Harpur, and The National Trust (Great Britain), *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens* (London: George Philip in association with the National Trust, 1990).



Figure 6.3: Pictorial Chart and Topographic Map of Stratford Hall Plantation by Carl Smith, 1955. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Stratford Hall stood at the center of a much larger agricultural landscape owned by the Lees. (image cropped and adapted by Stephanie N. Bryan) Source: Stratford Hall Archives, RELMA.

Figure 6.4: The North Vista at Stratford Hall. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, October, 2011.



Fig. 6.5



Fig. 6.6



Fig. 6.7

Figures 6.5-6.7: The Stowe landscape garden has many winding paths that lead to a variety of "eye-catchers," such as The Gothic Temple (Fig. 6.5, image cropped), Rotunda (Fig. 6.6), and Pebble Alcove (Fig. 6.7).

Sources: (Fig. 6.5) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/bsnizek/3474020258/>; (Fig. 6.6) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/28678602@N04/3053743161/>; and (Fig. 6.7) John Martin Robinson, Jerry Harpur, and The National Trust (Great Britain), *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens* (London: George Philip in association with the National Trust, 1990), 57.



Fig. 6.8



Fig. 6.9



Fig. 6.10

Figures 6.8-6.10: The Indian Fields (Fig. 6.8), the Mill Pond Road (Fig. 6.9), and the Mill Pond (Fig. 6.10) at Stratford Hall show obvious similarities to Stowe. Such areas hold potential for integrating twenty-first century "eye-catchers" for historical interpretation. Sources: (all images) Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011 and October 2010.

Wales; Princess Amelia of Great Britain; King Gustave of Sweden, and Alexander I, Tsar of Russia.<sup>383</sup> The notable visitors to Stratford Hall included Landon Carter, a wealthy Virginia planter; U.S. presidents George Washington, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt; Lady Astor, the first woman to sit as member of the British parliament; and Irene Gibson, the original “Gibson Girl.”<sup>384</sup> Today, Stowe and Stratford Hall are managed as public monuments that commemorate the political ideals of their creators and educate the general public.

The similarities in the tangible and intangible qualities of English landscape gardens such as Stowe and American plantation landscapes might serve as the basis for thinking about how site-specific “eye catchers” could further historical interpretation at places like Stratford Hall (Figures 6.5-6.10, previous page). Grounded in eighteenth-century English aesthetic principles, these interventions might first catch the eye, then educate visitors about the history of Stratford Hall, and finally cultivate a new appreciation of the past. By creating a “readable” garden in the agricultural landscape of Stratford Hall, designers might perpetuate the eighteenth-century *ferme ornée* tradition, and revive the classical idea of *otium*, or rural leisure as an intellectual stimulus.

While it is interesting to ponder the associations and connections between the Stowe estate and Stratford Hall plantation, it is not essential that landscapes superficially resemble each other to apply the eleven principles derived from the cases of Stowe and Little Sparta. Principles, such as collaborating with a variety of people, combining images and inscriptions, using metaphors and allusions, provoking thought, relating tangible and intangible elements, creating layered meanings, achieving coherence, engaging visitors to physically and mentally traverse the landscape, and allowing visitors to choose their path, are independent of the physical qualities of

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<sup>383</sup> Robinson, Harpur, and National Trust (Great Britain), *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens*, 43-44.

<sup>384</sup> Hynson, Judy S. E-mail to Stephanie N. Bryan, March 27, 2011.

a landscape. It is thus important to recognize that the main difference between the sites lies in their distinct approaches to history. For example, neither Stowe nor Little Sparta is interpreting the history of their respective site, *per se*, as one might expect of the interpretive program at Stratford Hall. The core comparison between the sites is a common concern for didactic use in the landscape. Thus, the English landscape garden can still serve as a model for landscape interpretation in any type of historic and cultural landscape.

The following pages explore how the didactic approach employed by designers of landscape gardens might be applied at Stratford Hall by first identifying opportunities for historical interpretation in the landscape. Each of the following sections introduces untapped narratives that future scholars might research and subsequently interpret in a twenty-first-century landscape garden. The discussion draws examples from Stowe and Little Sparta in order to illustrate the potential of cultivating a twenty-first-century landscape garden at Stratford Hall. In addition, the following text also draws inspiration from the work of modern artists, thereby highlighting additional possibilities for treating the cultural landscape as both muse and museum.

While it is not possible to discuss every potential narrative or area within the Stratford Hall landscape, the following sections selectively present stories associated with a few distinctive areas of the landscape: the coach house and stable yard, the East Garden, the kitchen and kitchen yard, the woodlands and fields that are traversed by the trail system, and the Stratford Hall landing and mill. Some of the narratives chosen offer a variety of broad themes such as human relationships with nature and the landscape as a place of labor and leisure, while other narratives provide a glimpse into the personal lives of women, children, indentured servants, and slaves. The narratives and ideas for historical interpretation presented in the chapter

serve to illustrate the potential of the landscape for telling stories via intangible and ephemeral qualities, such as smells and sounds, cycles and seasons.

*The Stables, Stable Yard, Coach House, and Paddock (now the West Garden)*

Horses became an important part of the history at Stratford Hall when Philip Ludwell Lee's introduction of a stud farm quickly became a full-time operation during the late 1700s. Currently, this complex stands silent with dusty tack, grooming supplies, and carriages hiding in the dark, damp bays of the coach house. In the nearby front fields, three retired horses peacefully graze.<sup>385</sup> Today, the West Garden occupies the area William Seale suggested the Lees maintained as a paddock and service yard during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1942, landscape architects Umberto Innocenti and Richard Webel planned the West Garden under the discretion of RELMA as a demonstrative eighteenth-century style flower, vegetable, and herb garden. This garden has since undergone renovations.<sup>386</sup>

Although the West Garden presents an entirely new story and adds yet another historical layer, visitors unaware of the twentieth-century history at Stratford Hall may feel confused by the present scene. For example, it seems implausible that the Lees would have grown their fruits, vegetables, and herbs, intended for human consumption, directly adjacent to the stables, an area that presented a high risk of contamination from animal waste. Furthermore, visitors might find it illogical that the Lees would have cultivated an edible garden that was not within close proximity to the kitchen. Despite these concerns, this area may not require restoration to the period of Philip Ludwell Lee for the sake of historical interpretation.

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<sup>385</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "We Would Like to Introduce You to the Newest Resident of Stratford Hall! Delilah (Left) Has Joined Russian (Right) and Traveller in the Pasture by the Visitor Center.," in *Stratford Hall*. (Stratford: Facebook, 2011).

<sup>386</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Botanical Gardens and Grounds," Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, <http://www.stratfordhall.org/visit/gardens/>.

Probably it is not feasible to reintroduce a racehorse breeding facility to Stratford Hall because it would require great expenses to operate. Still, if visitors have not experienced a top show barn or racing stables, it is nearly impossible to conjure an image of the constant, busy, energetic activities that took place in this eighteenth-century male domain. Anxious horses would have filled the stalls, whinnying, pawing, and kicking during feeding time, until a stable hand finally dropped grain into their buckets or tossed hay into their stalls. Daily tasks kept grooms on their feet. They constantly ran around to feed, curry, tack-up, exercise, cool down, untack, bathe, and turn out the horses. At the same time, a worker's senses became accustomed to the distinct odors wafting down the aisle—the sweet aroma of feed, the strong ammonia from mucking out stalls, the scent of glycerin soap used to clean tack, and the repulsive burning smell that lingered after the farrier shod the horses. For the most part, the sights, sounds, and smells of the working stable environment have completely vanished from the coach house and stable yard of present-day Stratford Hall.

Information is scarce about the slaves and indentured servants who contributed to the essence of this place. Those individuals undoubtedly worked hard throughout the day and remained on standby during the night. The eighteenth-century writings of Philip Fithian indicated that slaves at the nearby Nomini Hall plantation frequently used the stables as a space for entertainment. Since many of the plantations across Westmoreland County were closely connected and often shared slaves, it can be inferred that this was a common behavior rather than an isolated instance.<sup>387</sup> Documentation of the coach house and stable yard workforce is mostly limited to slaves listed on the Lees' inventories.

Because it was uncommon practice to keep records of indentured servants, less information is known about the many indentured servants who actively fulfilled their obligations

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<sup>387</sup> Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, 14-16.

and duties at Stratford Hall, after arriving from places like England or Scotland. Knowledge is limited to runaways whose physical descriptions and names were printed in local newspapers or recorded in court documents. For example, Thomas Bentley was an indentured coachman under Master Philip Ludwell Lee during the mid- to late eighteenth century. Records indicate that he labored for a number of years before running away on July 26, 1770.<sup>388</sup> Additionally, documents from around the same time list John Smith as a blacksmith, who was most likely assisted by slaves Phil and Billy. Other documents reveal that a sixteen-year-old slave named Caesar served as a postilion, along with a thirty-five-year-old slave named Titus.<sup>389</sup>

Although there is little information about the lives and personal character of these workers, it is still possible to offer present-day visitors some insight into how these people were integral to the equestrian operation of Philip Ludwell Lee and the plantation as a whole. Interpretation of this area currently focuses on tangible, visual elements such as equipment and carriages, which are protected from visitors by ropes. The coach house and stable yard is a place where interpretation would benefit from a creative approach, hinting at those intangible elements—the crack of the whip or the loud clomping of hooves. Landscape designers might take inspiration from the way in which Ian Hamilton Finlay juxtaposed images and words against the natural surroundings at Little Sparta to subtly suggest a physically nonexistent sea. The existing West Garden at Stratford Hall might provide a particularly interesting space for a similar strategy for evoking a physically nonexistent historic landscape. This approach might seek to connect the narratives of these two very distinct land uses through puns and intertwining names,

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<sup>388</sup> "Runaways," *Virginia Gazette*, August 16 and August 23 1770. "Slave List from Philip Ludwell Lee's Estate," (1782).

<sup>389</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Indentured Servants and Transported Convicts at Stratford Hall," (Stratford).

sounds, or visual images that contrast the powerful steeds once owned by the Lees with the seemingly delicate flowers, herbs, and vegetables that now adorn the West Garden.

Since smells and sounds comprised such an important part of the late-eighteenth-century landscape, designers may consider integrating artworks that directly engage these senses. The modern concept of sound sculpture, a time-based art form in which sculptures produce sounds, opens the door to this possibility and further updates the ideas gleaned from Stowe and Little Sparta. A current research project entitled "AudioNomad" offers insight into the potential of immersive and location-sensitive audio for historical interpretation.

AudioNomad is a collaborative effort between artist Dr. Nigel Helyer of the University of South Wales, and Dr. Daniel Woo of the Human/Computer Interface Lab. They use fully immersive surround-sound systems and head phones to transform physical environments with fictional audio over-lays. They intend this system to allow participants to enter into a world of extended audio narratives, while negotiating normal everyday surroundings. The design anchors "audio events" at specific points, which participants activate simply by moving through the landscape. These sounds share similar acoustic properties to surrounding ambient sounds. Consequently, listeners perceive the sounds they hear through the headphones to be indistinguishable from the ones they hear in the landscape around them.<sup>390</sup>

AudioNomad created such a soundscape in a churchyard, where the installation made it possible for narrated stories to emanate from grave markers, poetic verses from statues, and cello solos from monuments. The installation allowed participants to enter into a type of parallel audio world, juxtaposing interpretations of the past with present realities.<sup>391</sup> At Stratford Hall, a similar installation could imaginatively interpret the stables, stable yard, coach house, and paddock and

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<sup>390</sup> Dr. Nigel Helyer, "Some Approaches to Sound and Listening," [http://www.sonicobjects.com/index.php/texts/more/some\\_approaches\\_to\\_sound\\_and\\_listening/](http://www.sonicobjects.com/index.php/texts/more/some_approaches_to_sound_and_listening/).

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

actively engage visitors. This strategy could allow visitors a choice in how they want to experience historical interpretation, either experiencing the stable sounds or enjoying the West Garden as it stands.



Fig. 6.11



Fig. 6.12

Figure 6.11: Cross-country Jump crafted out of bourbon barrels.

Source: <http://www.alltech.com/blog/archive/2010/09/30/kentucky-bourbon-barrel-ale-will-have-you-jumping-for-joy.aspx>

Figure 6.12: Stadium Jump designed to suggest a tobacco barn. Source: Franz Venhaus, 2010. <http://www.aet.equestrian.org.au/site/equestrian/image/fullsize/30892.jpg>

While the aforementioned approach offers an idea for historical interpretation on a consistent basis, managers at Stratford Hall might consider hosting an annual horseshow event to occasionally restore an energetic atmosphere to the now subdued barn. Designers could create follies throughout the landscape to function as jumps for a three-day eventing course. For example, at the Alltech/FEI World Equestrian Games held in Kentucky during 2010, designers created cross-country jumps that displayed themes related to the history of Kentucky. Each day of the competition presented a new theme, such as the nature of Kentucky or the thoroughbred industry. Designers crafted jumps to visually display specific aspects of a theme, such as bourbon barrels (Figure 6.11) or a tobacco barn (Figure 6.12). Similar to Kentucky, Virginia has a large equestrian community. While this strategy would draw a new audience to Stratford Hall,

a large equestrian event would also boost the local economy through visiting competitors and spectators attending the event over a week-long period.<sup>392</sup>

### *The East Garden*

Today an overabundance of boxwood plantings consumes the restored East Garden. Research suggests that this garden would have included mixed plantings of herbs to serve cooks in the nearby kitchen. Following the early cultivation of mixed plantings during the time of Thomas Lee, teeming activity likely filled this garden space. In contrast to the active, daily labor required to maintain the garden, Lee family members and their guests accessed the space for more passive uses, such as entertainment and recreation. The East Garden was thus a location where the labors of the lower classes mingled conspicuously with the pleasures of upper-class society. Landscape designers may consider ways to encourage visitors to speculate about the constant work required to maintain and oversee such a space, as well as how the work of garden maintenance differed from contemporary practices. For example, the garden rollers and other tools used to maintain smooth ground surfaces and carpets of turf depended upon the quiet labor exerted by human bodies, in contrast to the noisier, smellier modern-day machines powered by gasoline or electricity.

During the years when Stratford Hall prospered as a plantation, the Lees employed a number of paid gardeners to manage the garden space and to ensure that it produced the fruits and flowers they needed and desired. One of these gardeners was James Spencer, a felon and indentured servant whom Thomas Lee transported from England. Spencer labored in the garden for a number of years until 1747, when at the age of twenty-seven, he escaped with a fellow indentured servant named William Pattison. The *Virginia Gazette* and other newspapers printed

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<sup>392</sup> Jennifer Lewis, "Stadium Jumps Unique to Kentucky," <http://www.alltechfeigames.com/news/detail.aspx?id=5666>.

detailed physical descriptions of Spencer and Pattison to aid in their recognition and recovery, and the Lees offered a reward for their capture. Like a slave overseer, the position of gardener was vital to the efficient operation of the plantation, and it required a high degree of trust on the part of the plantation owner.<sup>393</sup>

Nearly a century later, during the 1830s, a new owner, Mrs. Elizabeth McCarty Storke, cultivated the East Garden for medicinal purposes. She held deep ties with Stratford Hall, previously having been involved in a love affair with Henry Lee when she was only a teenager. Throughout the rest of her life at Stratford Hall, she dressed in attire that expressed mourning and contrition. Perhaps because Elizabeth McCarty Storke's early affair with Henry Lee resulted in her bearing a child, who according to tradition died at birth, she later devoted herself to public service at Stratford Hall, nurturing a great number of sick children and babies throughout Westmoreland County.<sup>394</sup> She meticulously studied the healing properties of plants and cultivated her own herb garden for half a century at Stratford Hall. From certain species, she prepared balms, ointments, teas and medicines to care for ailing children. After her husband's death, she further transformed the garden by adding a large number of imported roses. Decades after the death of Elizabeth McCarty Storke, Ethel Armes wrote that she was still "loved and honored today and...remembered as a friend of those in distress."<sup>395</sup>

The East Garden would have been an obvious place of cyclical nature and human labor, revealing the ebb and flow of the seasons. Thus, it is an intriguing place for interpreting how nature and human culture are interwoven in the landscape. The garden was a source of sustenance and renewal for not just the Lees and their workers, but also for Elizabeth McCarty

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<sup>393</sup> Seale, "Proposed Interpretation for Stratford Hall," 125-29.

<sup>394</sup> Armes, *Stratford Hall: The Great House of the Lees*, 427.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

Storke and the children she healed.<sup>396</sup> The story of Elizabeth McCarty Storke introduces a theme of women's history in a landscape where the currently interpreted stories thus far have remained markedly dominated by males. Likewise, the narrative of James Spencer is an opportunity for historical interpretation at Stratford Hall to occur at an intimate, relatable level for those visitors who do not think of themselves as members of the elite class. Although RELMA has not previously expressed great interest in conveying the stories of garden labor and leisure, or in telling visitors about the life of Elizabeth McCarty Storke, it does not mean that new interpretation cannot shed light onto past characters now believed significant in their own rights.

When re-envisioning historical interpretation of the East Garden, landscape designers might subtly direct attention to both the gravesites of Elizabeth McCarty Storke and members of her family, which are situated within the East Garden, as well as the nearby Lee family burial vault. These could serve as a *memento mori*, interknitting a moral lesson of the fragility of life into the narrative, and thereby relating to a shared human experience. Interpreting the East Garden in new ways might assist Stratford Hall in remaining on the list of gardens featured in Virginia's Historic Garden Week Tour.

### ***The Kitchen, Kitchen Yard and Smokehouse***

The kitchen and kitchen yard at Stratford Hall, slightly southeast of the Great House, is another area that currently relies heavily on visual vestiges to reconstruct history. Presently, managers have placed replications of food and cookware throughout the kitchen and smokehouse to give visitors a sense of the activities that once took place within these areas. The kitchen was consistently one of the liveliest buildings on the plantation throughout the year. The large

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<sup>396</sup> Unfortunately, there is no readily available information about the many lives she attempted to nurse back to health. This chapter in the history of Stratford Hall is an opportunity for further research that landscape designers might explore in order to develop concepts for historical interpretation in the East Garden.

fireplace offered ample space to roast a whole ox and to warm the huge copper and brass vessels gleaming in the hearth. The smokehouse is only a short distance from the kitchen. Within this space, workers salted and preserved meat in boxes crafted from tree trunks. Workers additionally cured hams over smoldering hickory fires.<sup>397</sup>

Activities outside of the kitchen, such as candle dipping, soap making, and laundry chores, required collective efforts from slaves and servants. For example, in order to make soap, a group of slaves had to lift the kettles, keep the fires burning, and carry out the various stages of production. After making the soap, slaves and servants often used their products for washing clothes or dirty dishes. The experience of laundry day at Stratford Hall can be inferred from recollections of slaves from other plantations. For example, Sally Brown, a former slave from Georgia, stated: "We took the clothes out'n the suds, soaped'em good and put'em on the block and hear them battlin' sticks poundin' every which way." Georgina Gibbs, a former slave from Virginia, further illustrates the scene: "Dere wuz five women who done de washing an' ironing. Dey had to make de soap...After de clothes had soaked in dis lye-soap and water, dey put de clothes on tables and beat 'em 'till dey wuz white."<sup>398</sup>

Managers at Stratford Hall currently interpret laundry activities in a room adjoining the kitchen. While current research indicates this room was actually used as a larder or dairy, it still exhibits various types of irons the slaves and servants would have used for pressing clothes. A reel for dipping candles is also placed within this room. The present scene certainly offers little to evoke images of the busy communal activities that largely defined the social area and would have mostly occurred outdoors.

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<sup>397</sup> Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, "Outlying Buildings."

<sup>398</sup> Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, 14-16.

For historical interpretation, this is an area where landscape designers might also consider using the AudioLab technology, previously suggested for interpreting the stables and West Garden. Surround systems and headphones could again provide a way to integrate sounds into the experience, such as from "battlin' sticks poundin' every which way." In addition to sounds, landscape designers might find other ways to enhance the sensory experiences of visitors. For example, landscape designers might draw inspiration from Norwegian artist Sissel Tolaas, who created an exhibit entitled "The FEAR of smell—the smell of FEAR" that engaged the sense of smell from museum-goers. Tolaas worked with men of various ages and nationalities who possessed strong fears. She captured the smells exuded from her subjects through their perspiration. She then mixed the perspiration into wall paint to produce a "scratch-and-sniff" effect. The act of visitors touching the walls released the scents into the air.<sup>399</sup> Such an approach, offers the possibility of reintroducing the fresh smell of soap or the strong aroma of smoked hams wafting through the air.

### *The Trails, Wooded Areas, and Fields*

Official hiking trails and networks of old roads weave through fields and forests of Stratford Hall, offering visitors an experience of the magnificent ecological and topographical variations in the landscape. Along the Silver Beech Trail, early successional forests of pine and sweet gum abruptly transition to a tall canopy of mature hardwoods. The seasons greatly shift perceptions as stark winters intensify a fixed verticality of the trees, while their transient horizontal shadows dance across the crunchy, leaf littered forest floor. Likewise, in summertime the forest offers a cool reprieve beneath a dense shroud of greenery and along purling brooks.

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<sup>399</sup> Kimberly E. Gittleson, "Please Stop to Smell the Art," *Harvard Crimson* (2006), <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2006/10/19/please-stop-to-smell-the-art/>.

A walk through the woods can easily prove both physically and mentally daunting as the grade constantly fluctuates—partly due to thousands of years of rainfall carving out deep ravines, and also from the erosion of precious topsoil due to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century agricultural practices. Along the various trails, visitors also can obtain naturally framed views of the Potomac or the mill pond before reaching larger clearings. The composition of plant communities and ecological stages thus affects the visitor experience and interpretive potential.

Historical interpretation along the trail system could use the aesthetic qualities of the landscape to cultivate a mindfulness of natural systems and human impact. Presently, small panels along the trails at Stratford Hall inform visitors of the various types of flora they may encounter throughout the landscape. The information is wordy and the panels are weathered, making it difficult for visitors to read. Landscape designers might consider replacing these factual panels (Figure 6.13) with simple yet thought-provoking imagery and phrases to relay the story of the American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*).

Chestnut trees dominated forests of the Eastern United States until the early twentieth century, when the accidental introduction of the chestnut blight (*Cryphonectria parasitica*) devastated its populations and permanently altered the forest composition. Before the twentieth century, this significant tree once provided sustenance for wildlife and human beings in the Stratford Hall landscape. Landscape designers could draw inspiration from a similar story at Little Sparta. A tablet that resembles a Greek stele set before a grove of trees reads "BRING BACK THE BIRCH" within the forested front garden at Little Sparta. The tablet resembles a gravestone thereby suggesting the death of the native birch amidst foreign intruders of maples and hornbeams (Figure 6.14). Conveying stories about the plant communities at Stratford Hall offers a creative way to relate to visitors interested in environmental science or ecology.

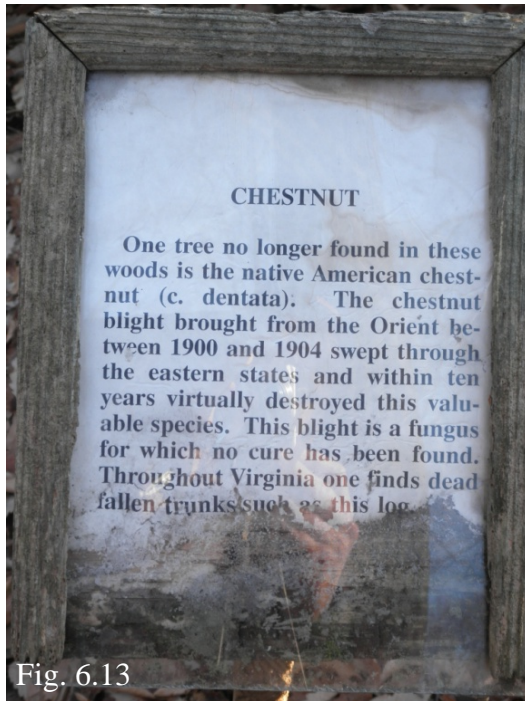


Fig. 6.13



Fig. 6.14

Figure 6.13: Wayside panel along the Silver Beech Trail at Stratford Hall, indicating the history of the American chestnut. Source: Eric A. MacDonal, July 2010.

Figure 6.14: Stone inscribed "BRING BACK THE BIRCH" at Little Sparta  
Source: [http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1008/4725001328\\_838318b377.jpg](http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1008/4725001328_838318b377.jpg)

In addition to interpreting plant communities and ecological stages, landscape designers might consider the many types of people—American Indians, early Anglo-European colonial settlers, indentured servants, transported criminals, slaves, tenant farmers, and visitors who also defined this part of the cultural landscape. Historical interpretation could provoke visitors to ponder some of the following questions: How has this landscape, through its natural and cultural resources, shaped these groups of people—the practices they employed, the food they consumed, the dwellings they constructed, the values and customs they embraced? Alternately, how has each group acted on this particular landscape? Have they treasured and preserved it, or exploited and used it for selfish gain? Furthermore, how have these treatments affected each subsequent

group and their use of the resources? How does my use of this landscape fit into this continuing narrative? What might the future bring?

Landscape designers might discover prime areas within the forests and fields of Stratford Hall to construct modern follies, similar to the Rotunda (Figure 6.15), a social hub for visitors to Stowe, or the Temple of Friendship, where Lord Cobham frequently gathered with friends to debate politics. Although Stratford Hall has a Council House for organized meetings, such temples could promote both formal and informal discussions among visitors and RELMA members. For example, a temple placed at the site of the Clifts plantation (Figure 6.16) could create a social space as well as interpret the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century history of Stratford Hall by integrating aspects of earthfast architecture into its design. On the other hand temples could assume a more ephemeral form, similar to the environmental sculptures of Patrick Dougherty (Figure 6.17). In either instance, temples could serve as outdoor meeting places, where integrated words and images might spark conversations about the past, present, and future of Stratford Hall.

While the ideas thus far introduce broad historical themes into the forests and fields of Stratford Hall, landscape designers might also consider interlacing more intimate stories, speculative about experiences of the indentured servants, transported criminals, and slaves who populated the landscape during the seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries. Historical interpretation might provoke visitors to question what it might have been like to be forced to labor in tobacco fields at the tender age of seven during a scorching southern summer. Landscape designers could incorporate some of the sixty-seven children's names and ages listed on Philip Ludwell Lee's records into the fields to interpret this unsettling aspect of the site's history. Children with known names such as Ben, a mere one month old and valued at ten pounds



Fig. 6.15



Fig. 6.16

Figure 6.15: The Rotunda at Stowe.

Source: [http://farm5.static.flickr.com/4123/4804542954\\_8b4890bc98.jpg](http://farm5.static.flickr.com/4123/4804542954_8b4890bc98.jpg)

Figure 6.16: Site of the Clifts Plantation at Stratford Hall. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, October 2010.



Fig. 6.17

Figure 6.17: "A Capella" Installation by environmental sculptor Patrick Dougherty at Palmetto Bluff in South Carolina. Source: Richard von Busack, *Metroactive Art*.

<http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/04.03.03/dwelling-0314.html>

sterling, or Oakley, aged fifteen and priced at fifty-five pounds sterling, could be used in a sensitive manner to evoke emotional responses from children and adult visitors.<sup>400</sup>

Additional interventions might explore other aspects of the slave experience, such as the feelings of vulnerability and control that laborers would have experienced in the open expanses of fields, contrasted with the promise of temporary or eternal escape offered within the shielding woods. Landscape designers might consider interpreting the personal story of an indentured servant named Saul who absconded from Stratford Hall in May 1738. While Saul was at large, he broke into several homes in the area. William Wiggins, another servant of Thomas Lee, and James Carter, an overseer of Stratford Hall at the time, led the search for the runaway. They eventually caught sight of Saul in the woods of Stratford Hall, and James Carter fired gun shots at him. Carter missed, allowing Saul to escape further into the woods. When Wiggins and Carter again caught up with him, Saul attempted to attack them with a club. James Carter broke the stock of the gun over Saul's head, and the indentured servant was carted off to jail where he eventually faced trial in Montross. Before a jury, he was found guilty of felonious robbery and was hanged until dead. Saul's value was adjudged to be thirty pounds sterling money.<sup>401</sup>

The story of Saul's attempted escape, capture, and death certainly could provide an interesting opportunity for historical interpretation in the Stratford Hall woods (Figure 6.18). Again, landscape designers may draw inspiration from Little Sparta. For example, in his Wild Garden, Ian Hamilton Finlay placed two figures of painted metal to illustrate the story of Apollo and Daphne from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the story, Apollo, enthusiastically in love for the first time, pursues Daphne, who is repulsed by sexual love (Figure 6.19). After many pleas for help, Daphne's father, the river god Peneus, assisted in her escape by transforming her into a

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<sup>400</sup> "Slave List from Philip Ludwell Lee's Estate."

<sup>401</sup> *Westmoreland County Court Orders*, 2 ed. (Montross 1731-1739).



Fig. 6.18



Fig. 6.19

Figure 6.18: Silver Beech Trail at Stratford Hall. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.

Figure 6.19: Apollo and Daphne in the Wild Garden at Little Sparta. Source: Andrew Lawson. <http://www.littlesparta.co.uk/displayD2/smallpics/G542-23-222.jpg>



Fig. 6.20

Figure 6.20: "Male Enslaved African" Sculpture at Brookwood Gardens in South Carolina. Source: Babette Bloch. <http://www.babettebloch.com/images/DSC00251.jpg>

laurel tree. Finlay carefully selected the colors to symbolically heighten the dramatic scene. For example, the blazing red suggests the intense passion of Apollo, while the leafy green presages the fate of Daphne. The two-dimensionality of the enameled sheet metal makes the pair fugitive.<sup>402</sup>

Landscape designers might also find inspiration the larger-than-life sized silhouette sculptures for the Lowcountry Trail at Brookgreen Gardens in South Carolina (Figure 6.20, previous page) by artist Babette Bloch.<sup>403</sup> Landscape designers could similarly use painted silhouettes as abstract representations of Saul, William Wiggins, and James Carter. Designers could also use this narrative as a temporary, or seasonal, component of historical interpretation, resurrecting the installation each year during the month of May when this event occurred. The act of recounting an event such as this each year would introduce an element of ritual to historical interpretation. Designers also might stretch this narrative across the landscape to depict sequential action, using specific colors and materials for their symbolic associations.

### ***The Mill, Pond, and Landing***

The Potomac River, edging the Stratford Hall property, was a lifeline not only for American Indian inhabitants, but also for early Anglo-European settlers. The river once provided an abundance of seafood, and its waterways allowed sailors to easily navigate through the region. During the eighteenth century, the Potomac teemed with activity as ships filled with hogsheads of tobacco departed for England, and likewise returned with exotic goods. Since Thomas Lee was a naval officer for the South Pacific, all ships passing through required his approval. Originally, the landing served the Lees and their visitors as the doorstep to Stratford Hall

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<sup>402</sup> Sheeler and Lawson, *Little Sparta: The Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay*, 71.

<sup>403</sup> Babette Bloch, "Reflecting History," <http://www.babettebloch.com/news.html>

plantation. Today, it is generally one of the last sites that modern visitors experience, if they venture beyond the Great House.

The atmosphere of the Stratford Hall landing and mill has drastically changed from the eighteenth century. The busy human activity that once surrounded the wharves of Thomas Lee has long since vanished. During the time of Philip Ludwell Lee, Stratford Hall residents and workers, as well as visitors from throughout the surrounding region, would have gathered at this locale to learn about domestic and foreign affairs. Many of the sights that would have characterized the scene during the late eighteenth century also have disappeared, including the wharves, the plantation store, the store houses, the tobacco warehouse, shipyard, stocks, coopers shop, as well as the sailing ships.

Historical interpretation of this vanished landscape might draw inspiration from the simple inscriptions on stepping stones that Ian Hamilton Finley incorporated into the garden at Little Sparta (Figure 6.21). The stones might suggest different types of ships, and conjure images of eighteenth-century vessels and their cargoes when glimpsing the vast waterway along the Mill Overlook Trail (Figure 6.22). For example, Thomas Lee owned half of a sailing vessel named *The Terrible*, which was built on the Potomac River in 1733. By 1736, he owned the brigantine *Hopewell of Virginia*. On February 27, 1735, she was registered in Williamsburg with a crew of six under John Chapman as master. The brig sailed from the port of South Potomac, bound for Liverpool with a cargo of tobacco and barrel staves. On October 20, 1736, the Hopewell returned from England to the port of South Potomac with twenty-five unspecified "parcels of Goods" and 1,200 bushels of salt. On March 21, 1737, she sailed to Madeira, Portugal with corn to trade for the wine that had become popular among Virginia planters. By July 1737, the Hopewell had



Fig. 6.21

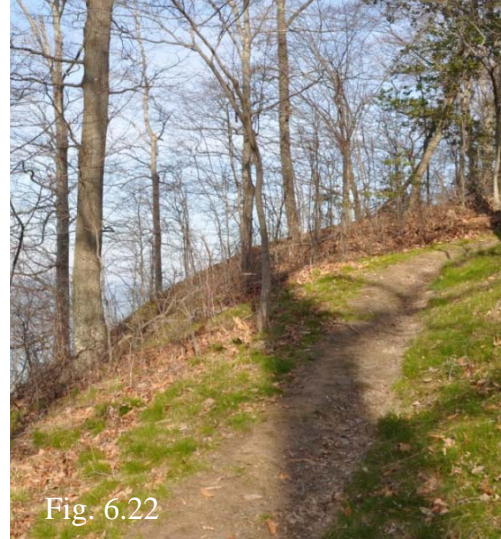


Fig. 6.22

Figure 6.21: Inscribed Stepping Stones at Little Sparta. (image cropped)  
Source: [http://farm5.static.flickr.com/4096/4743193074\\_d7b3e49779.jpg](http://farm5.static.flickr.com/4096/4743193074_d7b3e49779.jpg)

Figure 6.22: Mill Overlook Trail at Stratford Hall. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.

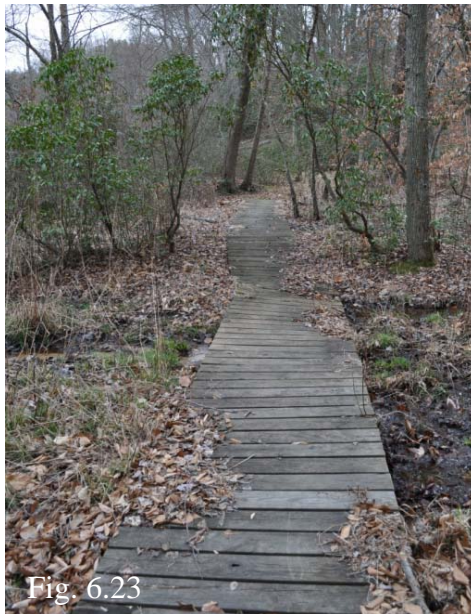


Fig. 6.23



Fig. 6.24

Figure 6.23: Wooden Bridge at Stratford Hall along the Mill Overlook Trail. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.

Figure 6.24: An Inscribed Wooden Bridge in the Lochan Eck at Little Sparta reads "lines of foam strings of foam strands of foam ropes of foam lacings of foam." (image cropped) Source: [http://farm6.static.flickr.com/5211/5499167300\\_abf469d83e.jpg](http://farm6.static.flickr.com/5211/5499167300_abf469d83e.jpg)

returned with wine from Madeira. By June 1738, Thomas Lee was listed as the sole owner of the Hopewell.<sup>404</sup>

Surviving naval records also indicate that Thomas Lee owned the 25-ton coasting sloop Hannah, armed with six guns for protection against privateering vessels and manned by a crew of five. In 1734, the Hannah left the port of South Potomac bound for Antiqua with a cargo of 4,000 barrel staves and 200 board-feet of plank. Thirty years later, Philip Ludwell Lee, son of Thomas Lee, owned the Mary, a 90-ton snow. She had a crew of ten and was registered as a six-sail French prize captured by the British in 1757. The Mary sailed to Barbados with a cargo of 9,300 staves, 11,255 feet of planks, 1,100 bushels of Indian corn, 298 dozen hoops, 32 barrels of herring, 100,000 shingles, 1,130 heading pieces, 8,598 feet of scantling, 135 pounds of myrtle wax, 57 empty hogsheads, 40 empty barrels, and 38 anchor stocks. At the time of his death in 1775, Philip Ludwell Lee had employed workers to build a brigantine "on the stocks." The *Virginia Gazette* described the brigantine in an advertisement as 115 burthen, crafted out of black walnut, cedar, locust, and mulberry.<sup>405</sup> A design with inscriptions, such as the stepping stones, could thus hint at some of these lost elements.

Landscape designers could develop the theme of Stratford Hall's nautical history in other areas around the mill, pond, and landing. Along the Mill Overlook Trail, wooden bridges—through inscriptions, design, and material construction—could invite consideration of concepts and images associated with ships and water transport (Figure 6.23, previous page). For example, Ian Hamilton Finlay incised the words "lines of foam strings of foam strands of foam ropes of foam lacings of foam" upon the wooden planks of a bridge at Little Sparta to describe the appearance of the water beneath the bridge (Figure 6.24, previous page). Additionally, resting

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<sup>404</sup> Hynson, Judy S. E-mail to Stephanie N. Bryan, March 27, 2011.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

places at Stratford Hall, such as the bench along the Mill Overlook Trail (Figure 6.25) could integrate words to encourage contemplation of the water theme. At Little Sparta, a stone bench (Figure 6.26) that reads "OAK BARK BOAT" inspires visitors to pause and meditate on the meaning behind the words. For example, by reflecting on the ambiguity of the antiquated English word "bark," visitors might associate the wood of the oak tree with the future boat it might become.<sup>406</sup>



Fig. 6.25



Fig. 6.26

Figure 6.25: Bench along the Mill Overlook Trail at Stratford Hall. Source: Stephanie N. Bryan, March 2011.

Figure 6.26: An inscribed bench at Little Sparta reads "OAK BARK BOAT." (image cropped)  
Source: [http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1401/4726895799\\_2bb3be773c.jpg](http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1401/4726895799_2bb3be773c.jpg)

### *Conclusion*

The stories of stable workers, garden laborers, Elizabeth McCarty Storke, runaway servants, and ships on the Potomac are just some of the narratives that landscape designers might interpret in a twenty-first-century landscape garden at Stratford Hall. Until now, historical interpretation at Stratford Hall has centered on the Lee narrative, and interpretive activities have occurred primarily within the Great House and its outbuildings. By extending historical

<sup>406</sup> Sheeler and Lawson, *Little Sparta: The Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay*, 36.

interpretation into the cultural landscape, however, the site might encourage visitors to contemplate broader themes, such as human relationships with the nature and the landscape as a place of labor and leisure. Landscape-related stories also offer opportunities to tell the personal stories of women, children, indentured servants, and slaves. The subjects of these stories could potentially relate to a variety of visitors. Still, the stories presented in the chapter are just a small sampling of many that could undergo historical interpretation. Although historical interpretation has traditionally relied on material culture, the landscape holds vast potential for telling stories via intangible and ephemeral qualities, such as smells and sounds, cycles and seasons.

In reconceptualizing Stratford Hall as a landscape garden, designers could transform mundane steps, bridges, benches, signs, and markers at Stratford Hall into elements that impart deeper meanings. This strategy offers managers of Stratford Hall a simple, inexpensive way to begin creating a twenty-first century landscape garden. Some of the principles derived from the landscape gardens of Stowe and Little Sparta may guide this process, such as combining images and inscriptions to evoke mental associations, inserting unexpected elements to provoke thought, and strategically placing elements to encourage movement through the landscape. However, to fully achieve a twenty-first landscape garden, the effort would require collaboration among many people—landscape designers, as well as visual artists, poets, composers, historians, and others. These individuals could work together to layer meanings, consider the placement of artworks within a grander scheme, and achieve coherence in the cultural landscape.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CONCLUSION:**

#### **THE PROMISE OF RE-INVENTING THE LANDSCAPE GARDEN FOR HISTORIC SITE INTERPRETATION**

While the past three chapters have examined Stratford Hall as a case study for applying the principles of the landscape garden, this concluding chapter returns to a general discussion of historic landscape management. The chapter addresses how managers of historic sites could choreograph a twenty-first century landscape garden by developing a resident artist program that fosters a collaborative and cooperative environment. The chapter investigates three places and events that offer ideas for developing this type of program: Fattoria di Celle, a privately-owned historic farm in Pistoia, Italy, that hosts a collection of site-specific art; the 1991 visual arts exhibition at the Spoleto Festival entitled *Places with a Past: New Site-Specific Art in Charleston*; and ArtPrize, a unique open-platform art competition that occurs annually in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

These examples also provide the opportunity to address some of the key issues managers would have to consider when designing a public art or "landscape interpretation program" at a historic site like Stratford Hall, such as funding and design. Additionally, the chapter identifies some of the caveats and complexities that managers may face when implementing a resident artist program, as well as some of the promising outcomes. The chapter concludes by revisiting the main questions posed in the thesis, and summarizing the subsequent findings.

### *Fattoria di Celle*

The Gori family, who presently own the Fattoria di Celle, initiated a resident artist program during the 1980s to create a permanent collection of site-specific art works at their estate. The property was first developed in the Middle Ages, and the current owners have sought to retain and honor the site's rich history. During the late seventeenth century, another historical layer was added when Cardinal Carlo Agostino Fabroni, a notable patron of the arts, constructed the Villa Celle and an adjacent chapel, which still stand today. During the 1800s, the Caselli family acquired the property and commissioned local architect Giovanni Gambini to create an English-style park behind the villa. The park, which encompasses about fifty acres, includes a number of nineteenth-century follies, such as the aviary designed by the poet-architect Bartolomeo Sestini, a tea house, an Egyptian monument, and two lakes with bridges, crags, and a waterfall. The contemporary art installations carry forth this tradition of cultivating a landscape garden.<sup>407</sup>

After conceiving the idea to have an international array of artists create a variety of permanent installations either outdoors in the park or inside the various buildings, Giuliano Gori employed a curator and an advisory panel. Gori worked with the curator and advisory panel to create a set of site-specific rules for artists to follow, considering foremost the ethics of working in nature. They determined that artists must never tamper with vegetation or grading, and that the artworks must never overwhelm the natural environment. Moreover, they insisted that, when conceiving their artwork, each artist must acknowledge the spirit of Romanticism that emanates from the park. Ultimately, Gori concluded that a site-specific artwork was essentially defined by

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<sup>407</sup> Francesca Calamai, "Site Specific Art," [http://www.goricoll.it/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&id=1&Itemid=2](http://www.goricoll.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=1&Itemid=2).

its immovability, since the work could only achieve full meaning within the context of its original location:

"Thirty years of constant engagement and experience have brought us to the conclusion that site specific art, if created according to the ethics of working in nature, is a viable aid in defending the landscape. To avoid impoverishing the art work's poetic power, nature must be scrupulously safeguarded and kept as closely as possible to the way it was when the art work was created."<sup>408</sup>

Each project at Celle thus develops in a certain order, following the aforementioned guidelines. First, the Gori family selectively invites artists to participate in their program. Each artist investigates the property and consults the *genius loci*, ultimately selecting a place to develop his or her project. The artist carefully evaluates environmental conditions, such as climate, light, and vegetation, in addition to the historical and cultural contexts, before creating a permanent work of art. Presently, Fattoria di Celle houses over sixty completed art installations, while others remain in progress. Some artworks are truly unique in that visitors can only fully understand them through active engagement.<sup>409</sup>

For example, the 1982 installation by George Trakas, entitled "The Pathway of Love" requires movement through the landscape in order for visitors to understand the artwork's narrative. Trakas created a pathway for two people alongside a meandering brook. He set two stairways, one in wood and the other in steel, a few meters apart the stairs follow the natural slope of the valley until they converge into one pathway characterized by a blending of these distinct materials. The pathway eventually reaches a platform, where a seat suggests a moment of contemplation. The materials continue forward, however, changing sides to become a unified path, which terminates in a heart-shaped pool. Trakas suggests that steel and wood become the protagonists of the story, and each element, such as the joining and distancing of materials,

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

becomes a metaphor within the narrative. This notion of how the landscape requires movement in order for visitors to read the narrative recalls the landscape of Stowe, where visitors had to traverse the landscape in order to understand its many associations.

The Gori resident artist program is significant in that it has established an internationally renowned creative laboratory that produces and experiments with new vocabularies in all facets of contemporary art. This sense of innovation and ingenuity draws thousands of people to Fattoria di Celle each year when the Goris open their doors to the public. The Goris can be considered patrons of the arts, promoting contemporary art in a similar fashion to the way the Grenville-Temples perpetuated classical design traditions.

### *The Spoleto Festival*

In 1977, Opera impresario Gian Carlo Menotti founded the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina, as an American counterpart to his annual arts extravaganza held in Italy. The goal driving the festival is to combine the arts in a way that attracts audiences to many types of art events—particularly ones that they might not otherwise attend. In accordance with this aim, Charles Duell, President of the Middleton Place Foundation, suggested that the 1991 Spoleto Festival organize an exhibition of contemporary sculptures as a celebration of the 250th anniversary of the gardens at Middleton Place Plantation. As the idea materialized, the festival's board commissioned Mary Jane Jacob to serve as the curator. Hoping to attract new audiences, Jacob extended Duell's concept beyond the grounds of Middleton Place to encompass other areas within the historic city of Charleston.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> This change in venue occurred after Hurricane Hugo devastated the grounds of Middleton Place Plantation and many of the surrounding low country in 1989. Christian Boltanski and Mary Jane Jacob, *Places with a Past: New Site-Specific Art at Charleston's Spoleto Festival* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1991), 7.

Funding for the venture came from seven foundations, eight government organizations, and one corporation. Despite the monetary support, controversy inevitably surrounded the exhibition as the festival's board invited and encouraged artists to delve into a past they might interpret iconoclastically.<sup>411</sup> Many of the site-specific works focused on the city's sometimes unsavory history, which included slavery, the Civil War, and a residual peerage system of privilege based on lineage and property.<sup>412</sup> Artists thus addressed a variety of timely issues: gender, race, and cultural identity; considerations of difference; the notion of the colonizer-colonized paradigm; as well as ideas of domination and exploitation.<sup>413</sup>

The exhibition evoked themes of redefining and rewriting history. Through their works, artists explored issues of postmodernism, such as interest in and regard for history. This aroused questions of whose history is presented, what is written in and out of history, and the notion that there are multiple histories rather than one. This mode of inquiry began when the curator and participating artists began the project with an analytical tour of Charleston. Rather than choosing to present heroic views of history or further enshrining the usual figures that maintain presence in Charleston, artists selected stories of marginalized populations. They further expressed this notion by choosing alternative sites they recognized and reclaimed.<sup>414</sup>

For example, artists Houston Conwill, Estella Conwill Majozo and Joseph de Pace selected the auditorium of the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture of the College of Charleston to display their artwork. The site was connected to numerous historical figures and events, such as poet Langston Hughes, who once read his works in the space, and Civil Rights activists, who later used the site to hold their meetings. On the

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>412</sup> Nicholas Drake, "Charleston," *Art Papers Magazine*, July/August 2001.

<sup>413</sup> Boltanski and Jacob, *Places with a Past: New Site-Specific Art at Charleston's Spoleto Festival*, 17.

auditorium floor, the three artists created a "cosmogram," which can be described as a large diagrammatic map that incorporated text and symbols to commemorate those aforementioned events, while also interweaving broader themes of African American history in the lowcountry. The cosmogram blended multiple layers of history, folklore, dance, sermon, and political manifesto. Similar to how visitors move through the landscape gardens of Stowe and Little Sparta, exhibition-goers became performers in the cosmogram. "The New Charleston" alludes to the popular 1920s dance, and thus visitors symbolically "danced" through the artistic creation, reading the text and symbols, which spiral over a map of Charleston.<sup>415</sup>

The Charleston community proved to be a crucial resource that shaped projects, such as "The New Charleston," and brought collaboration to a local level. At times, this collaboration extended the viewpoint of the artist to a collective one, involving a variety of people, including historians, archaeologists, tour guides, re-enactors, artists, trades people, city officials, festival staff and crew, gospel singers, ministers, neighborhood residents, rag dealers, gourmets, painting contractors, and pool specialists. For example, David Hammons, an artist, encouraged local residents to help finish the single house that he instructed the festival crew to frame out. The specificity of local techniques and materials also grounded artists within the everyday world of Charleston.<sup>416</sup>

The Spoleto Festival thus also exhibits a number of landscape garden principles, such as layered meanings, movement, and collaboration. While the artists chosen were prominent and established, they represented a unique group of people and a variety of races, nationalities, and genders.<sup>417</sup> The Spoleto Festival is also significant in that it evidences how both artworks and landscapes can be used to make statements. By delving into the city's controversial history,

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<sup>415</sup> Boltanski and Jacob, *Places with a Past: New Site-Specific Art at Charleston's Spoleto Festival*, 146-57.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 17.

artists challenged accepted beliefs and generated public discussion and debate about past and present social relations, in addition to cultural values and traditions. This is a form of engagement and provocation not that different from the "attacks" of inscriptions and images launched by Ian Hamilton Finlay at Little Sparta.

### *ArtPrize*

In 2009, Rick Devos, a 27-year-old web entrepreneur, established ArtPrize, an open art competition in Grand Rapids, Michigan, that occurs during a period of seventeen days each year. Devos suggested that "The first challenge is to get people to show up and get engaged." In that respect, the competition has proven successful, with artworks appearing around every corner of the city. For example, during October 2007, dozens of kayakers paddled down the Grand River to obtain a close view of "Nessie on the Grand," a participating artist's creative visioning of the Loch Ness monster, positioned along the shore. A few blocks east of "Nessie's" location, an artist had created a colorful mosaic along the walls of the Grand Rapids Children's Museum. Groups of excited children gazed at their reflections in pieces of mirrored tile and then posed for their parents' cameras. Inside the nearby Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts, adults and children enthusiastically questioned a chatty New York artist named Jason Hackenwerth, while he twisted balloons into the components of what later formed a giant caterpillar-shaped sculpture.<sup>418</sup>

Micheline Maynard, writing for the New York Times, noted that "For the past two weeks it has been impossible to walk more than a few feet in the city's downtown, a combination of historic buildings and glistening new structures, without seeing an orange placard" signifying that an artwork was on display. Dustin Dwyer, a correspondent for Michigan Radio, a public radio network, stated that "Every conversation I've had here for the past two weeks has been

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<sup>418</sup> Micheline Maynard, "Eyes on the Art Prize," *New York Times*, October 8, 2009.

about art." ArtPrize provoked heated debates as some radio listeners were skeptical about the merits of the artists involved and questioned whether the city was rewarding "good" art. This inevitably led to discussions about what constitutes "good" art. Consequently, some people insinuated that only art critics were informed enough to determine what constitutes "good" art or that average people weren't capable of producing "good" art.<sup>419</sup> Other people countered these claims simply by quoting Bob Dylan: "great paintings shouldn't be in museums."<sup>420</sup> Either way, the creators of ArtPrize recognized that the ongoing controversy further boosted interest in the competition, and therefore created a blog to promote these public discussions.

Devos takes pride in the fact that ArtPrize "is a radically open competition. Open to any artist in the world who can find space. Open to anybody in Grand Rapids, Michigan who wants to create a venue. Open to a vote from anyone who attends."<sup>421</sup> Any property within the designated ArtPrize boundary can become a venue by registering on the official website. The website engages owners of venues by allowing them to select which artists they would like to exhibit. Artists are only able to compete once a venue has selected them, which requires a hosting agreement between the artist and the venue. To ensure a fair chance for all art to be viewed, venues must abide by a rule of "minimum opening hours."<sup>422</sup>

On the official day of unveiling, each venue takes its own creative approach to entice crowds. For example, restaurant GR Now served "cocktails that take on a new art form," including one called "first impression" and "inspired by Claude Monet's painting of a sunrise."<sup>423</sup> ArtPrize has certainly boosted the local economy by inspiring such festivities. Greg Gilmore,

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> "Bob Dylan Quote," in *ArtPrize* (Grand Rapids ArtPrize, 2011).

<sup>421</sup> ArtPrize, "Venues," <http://www.artprize.org/venues#boundary>.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> GR Now, "Drink Art: Artprize Cocktail Unveiling," <http://events.grnow.com/events/?com=detail&eID=117346>.

owner of The Bob Marketplace, exclaimed "I think it's about 100 times busier than a normal Wednesday!"<sup>424</sup>

The closing of the competition further stimulates the local economy by enticing more crowds interesting in learning which artist gained the most votes and will thus take home the \$250,000 prize, donated by the Devos family, part owners of Amway Corporations. The process of allowing anyone to vote for the winner turns everyone from passive observers into active participants.<sup>425</sup> ArtPrize has proven engaging on all levels—stimulating interest among local, national, and international artists to submit entries, allowing local venues to participate in the selection process, and providing an opportunity for all attendees to experience the art and then vote.

Since its inception, however, ArtPrize has grown to include a juried competition by a panel of professional judges, each given the privilege of setting their own judging criteria. This year the Ox-Bow School of Art, an affiliated program of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, will also award one artist with a five-week residency at its location in Saugatuck, Michigan. Additionally, in an effort to encourage people to further explore the city, ArtPrize has incorporated a number of large venues curated by regional cultural institutions that also provide housing for twenty-five artists.<sup>426</sup> Likely, ArtPrize will continue to expand and evolve as it engages the community, stimulates the local economy, and sparks conversations across the globe.

ArtPrize is thus an important event in many regards. First, the "open" nature of the event maximizes the potential to engage the public, including artists, local residents, and visiting tourists. Secondly, ArtPrize lends support to the local economy. Lastly, the event is consistent

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<sup>424</sup> ArtPrize, "Venues."

<sup>425</sup> ArtPrize, "Homepage," <http://www.artprize.org/>.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

with the city's culture and landscape. Grand Rapids is a community that prides itself on its support of the arts, and the city has celebrated a history of commissioning public art. Between the late 1960s and early 1970s, Grand Rapids was among the first communities in the U.S. to create a "percent for the arts" policy, in which a small percentage of the cost of new development is funneled toward commissioning and installing public art. Consequently, the landscape of the city includes notable works by artists such as Calder, Meadmore, di Suvero, Maya Lin, and others.<sup>427</sup> Thus ArtPrize proves significant in that it maintains this particular cultural landscape tradition simply by promoting the creations of new public artworks through community engagement and support.

### *Management Considerations*

The examples of the Fattoria di Celle, the Spoleto Festival, and ArtPrize thus provide the opportunity to address some of the key issues managers would have to consider when designing a public art or "landscape interpretation program" at a historic site like Stratford Hall, including: how it will be funded; who will design it and how will it be designed; how it relates to a site's expressed mission, purposes and core values; how it may affect the "integrity" of the landscape; and how it will be received among the public. In the instance of funding, Fattoria di Celle and ArtPrize offer the possibility of securing subsidies from wealthy philanthropists, such as Giuliano Gori and Rick Devos, who hold vested interests in perpetuating art traditions. The Spoleto Festival, on the other hand, shows the potential of gaining monetary support from a variety of sources, including foundations, government organizations, and corporations.

When considering governance of such a program, the Spoleto Festival demonstrates how success can be attained by commissioning a respectable curator such as Mary Jane Jacobs.

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<sup>427</sup> Sculpture Sites GR, "West Michigan Sculptures," [http://www.sculpturesitesgr.org/about\\_us.php](http://www.sculpturesitesgr.org/about_us.php).

Fattoria di Celle and ArtPrize illustrate the options of hiring panels of experts or jurors to help organize logistics and create rules. Managers would have to establish a set of rules and goals that align with the expressed mission, purposes, and core values of a historic site.

For Stratford Hall, this conversation about rules would likely involve the issue of what stories should be conveyed and how they might be expressed, which, in turn, could provoke lively debates among managers and visitors. A recent letter from Paul Reber, the executive director of Stratford Hall, validates these concerns. After expanding the programming at Stratford Hall in an attempt to reach a wider audience, Reber stated in 2010 that: "Two of the questions I occasionally hear are "Why is Stratford Hall running away from Robert E. Lee?" and "Why doesn't Stratford Hall pay more attention to Robert E. Lee?" Some people thus worry that incorporating other narratives into historical interpretation at Stratford Hall will detract from the core mission of RELMA. They may feel that embracing seemingly disconnected topics such as Eastern Woodland Indians, Anglo-European indentured servants, or African slaves veers away from the inspiration of Robert E. Lee that provoked people like Mrs. Charles D. Lanier to preserve Stratford Hall in the first place. Reber addressed this issue by relating back to the core mission of the Robert E. Lee Memorial Association (RELMA) and suggesting that from the beginning RELMA acknowledged that the significance of Stratford Hall extended well beyond Robert E. Lee."<sup>428</sup>

One could consider the notion that permitting the narrative of Robert E. Lee to expand even further, into deeper facets of history (i.e. American Indian culture), as well as allowing it to adapt to present needs (for example, different groups of people wanting to learn about their roots) and proceed into the future, only adds another degree of richness to the narrative and ensures its continuity. Expanding the narrative to resonate with diverse populations is most likely

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<sup>428</sup> Paul Reber, "Executive Director's Report," in *2010 Stratford Hall Annual Report* (Stratford 2010).

essential for sustaining interest well into the future, particularly given the indicators that by 2050 non-Hispanic whites will no longer comprise the majority in the U.S.

In addition to concerns about how the approach of a resident artist program may provoke discussion about a historic site's mission, managers would also have to address how cultivating a landscape garden might impact the "integrity" of a historic or cultural landscape. The National Park Service recognizes the integrity of a property through seven aspects or qualities, including location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.<sup>429</sup> Managers of historic sites would thus have to consider these various elements that contribute to the integrity of a historic site.

Fattoria di Celle and the Spoleto Festival each offer instances of permanent and ephemeral site-specific works that respect nature and social contexts. Fattoria di Celle provides a significant example in that it allows for the narrative to continue into the present, adding layers to vestiges that date from the Middle Ages, the end of the Renaissance, and into the Enlightenment. If managers determine that a historic or cultural landscape maintains a degree of integrity with respect to a certain "period of significance,"<sup>430</sup> they may feel that it is crucial for artists to adhere to site-specific rules, similar to those described by Gori, that would not threaten the integrity of a site. The rules of site-specificity provide an avenue to interpret history through

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<sup>429</sup> Location refers to the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the event took place. Design is the composition of elements that constitute form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. Setting is the physical environment of a historic property that illustrates the character of the place. Materials are the physical elements combined in a particular pattern or configuration to form the aid during a period in the past. Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period of history. Feeling is the quality that a historic property has in evoking the aesthetic or historic sense of a past period of time. Association is the direct link between a property and the event or person for which the property is significant. U.S. Department of the Interior and National Park Service, "Integrity," ed. U.S. Department of the Interior and National Park Service, National Register Bulletin (Washington, D.C. : National Park Service, 1998).

<sup>430</sup> The NRHP defines period of significance as a "span of time in which a property attained the significance for which it meets the National Register Criteria." National Park Service, "Glossary of National Register Terms."

the landscape via a twenty-first century landscape garden in ways that alter visitors' perceptions of the landscape rather than the physical components of it.

In summary, managers of historic sites can glean much insight from the examples of Fattoria di Celle, the Spoleto Festival, and ArtPrize. ArtPrize specifically shows how art maintains the possibility of eliciting the interests of all age groups—from young children to senior citizens. Furthermore, ArtPrize is unusual in that it fully engages the community by allowing anyone the opportunity to participate on some level. While the ways in which Fattoria di Celle and the Spoleto Festival select their artists most resemble the traditional landscape garden approach of collaborating with well-respected artists, architects, and landscape designers, ArtPrize pushes this framework into an entirely new dimension by promoting a democratic process. ArtPrize, however, can still be connected with the landscape garden custom of allowing amateur participation, recalling how the owners of Stowe played large roles in its design even though they lacked formal art backgrounds. Finally, managers of historic sites also might consider how the instances of the Spoleto Festival and ArtPrize stimulate the local economy and draw in visitors from across the country. This is a pressing issue for managers of historic sites because they may be forced to close their doors if visitation continues on a downward trend.

### *Summary of Findings*

The thesis posited the questions: How can the landscape architect intervene through the cultural landscapes of historic sites to create an enduring resonance with many and varied generations of Americans? Furthermore, *why* is it important to do so?

In conclusion, the practice of historical interpretation is one of the most significant factors in enticing visitors to historic sites and offering meaningful experiences. If managers of historic sites hope to sustain interest into the future, and not risk permanently closing their doors,

they must address two main issues relating to historical interpretation: (1) ways of diversifying the stories they convey to resonate with a dynamic population that is increasingly comprised of minorities; and (2) ways of expressing stories that are provocative and engaging. While there is no one solution to the problem of how to reengage Americans with historic sites, the thesis proposes one possibility: re-inventing the tradition of the eighteenth-century English landscape garden. Certainly landscape designers could draw inspiration or derive similar principles from the Italian Renaissance gardens that evoked a sense of awe from designed water tricks or even from the Japanese strolling gardens that used a "hide and reveal" technique somewhat similar to the English landscape garden.

However, the thesis concludes that the English landscape garden can serve as a model to interpret American history in historic and culture landscapes in ways that engage imaginations, prompt thoughtful reflection, and challenge accepted beliefs. Managers of historic sites can re-envision the landscape garden through eleven principles: creating associations that hold societal relevance; allowing for change and evolution to meet the current needs; collaborating with people of diverse backgrounds; using metaphors and allusions to encourage multiple interpretations; combining inscriptions and images to make stories cohesive and enduring; inserting the unanticipated to provoke thought; relating tangible and intangible elements to stir the imagination; creating layered meanings that speak to different intellectual levels; achieving coherence; encouraging movement to physically and intellectually engage visitors; and allowing visitors the ability to choose their path, to participate in the landscape or story. While these principles suggest how managers of historic sites can reconnect Americans with their historic sites, managers must understand why it is critical to do so.

Historic and cultural landscapes are important because they read as textbooks of history. They provide opportunities for community members to not only participate in reading and translating that text, but also in writing and rewriting it, as well. Diverse histories have occurred in historic and cultural landscapes, and therefore these landscapes offer ways to shed light on populations whose pasts have frequently been undervalued. Historic and cultural landscapes also provide opportunities to combine leisurely pursuits with intellectual stimuli. They are places where anyone can discover a way to reconnect with the past and at the same time cultivate an awareness of the present through both culture and nature. As David Lowenthal states in *The Past is a Foreign Country*: “The past remains integral to us all, individually and collectively. We must concede the ancients their place...But their place is not simply back there in a separate and foreign country; it is assimilated in ourselves, and resurrected into an ever-changing present.”<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*.

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