Restoration of a Historic Town to Commemorate National Identity: Colonial Williamsburg in the Early Twentieth Century

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Abstract
This paper reviews how Williamsburg, a historic town in Virginia, U.S.A, acquired the status of a national heritage site. Williamsburg was the capital of the colony of Virginia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The early twentieth century witnessed a boom in commemorating Colonial sites in the U.S. For 150 years, the Williamsburg site had remained an ordinary local town, but it was restored during the 1920s to create a place where the nation's history could be illustrated. The prevailing passion for history caused the reconstruction to surpass the town's original factual conditions, and the project was strongly promoted. This illustrates how ardent nationalism can affect historical preservation. To justify Williamsburg's value as a heritage site, not only was a new town constructed but also archeological and architectural research was conducted to support the process of restoration. The criteria for the restoration were based on a specific period and ignored developments that took place since the nineteenth century. Although the restoration project itself was managed by a private foundation, official legislation designated the town as a national heritage site. This case illustrates how heritage can be created through attitude toward preservation.

Keywords: restoration; colonial Williamsburg; national heritage; nationalism; historic town

1. Introduction
Colonial Williamsburg is an open-air museum that was established by a project in the early twentieth century to restore the capital of the royal British colony of Virginia.

Although it began as a private restoration project, it eventually became a national historic site. As a result, federal and city governments passed legislation in order to support the value of the restoration. This reflected changes in the concepts of historic heritage as well as in the philosophy of preservation in the U.S.

The entire project is an example of how national heritage can be created by a reproduction and reconstruction project inspired by nationalistic feelings. This case study of Williamsburg shows how it represents the intentional reconstruction of American heritage with the aim of highlighting a specific view of the historic past. Such an attitude was praised at that time; this seems contrary to the current attitude toward preservation.

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Following the 1964 Venice Charter that declared reconstruction off limits, in the 1970s, the method
of creating heritage through reconstruction or reproduction came under much criticism. At that time, Colonial Williamsburg gradually started becoming a living history museum.

This paper reviews the restoration process of Williamsburg before its opening in 1932, and assesses the values that Williamsburg came to represent.

In Chapter 2, the institutional planning of the restoration project is reviewed, with a focus upon its value. Chapter 3 stresses the role of the institution in the preservation effort, through a review of the related laws. These chapters show the intention behind the restoration project and discuss the legislative support the project received after the restoration was complete and the site was thrown open to the public.

The authors reviewed various documents such as journals, newspaper articles, and reports from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and the City of Williamsburg.

2. Establishment of Colonial Williamsburg
2.1 History of Williamsburg before the Twentieth Century

Williamsburg was the capital of the Colony of Virginia during the Colonial period. The first capital was shifted there from Jamestown in 1698. Until 1780, when the capital was moved to Richmond, Williamsburg maintained its status as the capital of Virginia, which was the most powerful among the 13 colonies.

Throughout the eighteenth century, Williamsburg was home to around 2,000 inhabitants who lived in the approximately 230 houses that made up the town's residential area.

Williamsburg was related to the country's Founding Fathers such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. This historic background inspired Rev. W.A.R. Goodwin (1869-1939), who first conceived the project and who coined the phrase "the Cradle of the Republic."

After the capital was moved to Richmond, Williamsburg was reduced to a former capital that modern times had left behind. It still was home to many buildings that exemplified the glory of the Colonial period, such as the Public Magazine and Courthouse, while the Capitol and Governor's Palace remained only as foundations. During the nineteenth century, many structures were transformed into the Victorian style. The ongoing construction of newer structures, along with modern infrastructure and facilities, such as telephone poles and gas stations, made for an odd setting filled with incongruities.

2.2 Initial Idea for a National Shrine

The restoration of the Colonial capital was Goodwin's personal idea. He believed that Williamsburg's preservation would imbue the American people with nationalism and the desire to integrate the nation.

Goodwin initially came to Williamsburg to fulfill his first pastorate at Bruton Parish Church in 1903. He began the restoration of the church in 1905. The original design was altered in 1838, and his plan was to restore the church to its colonial appearance. After restoring the church, he began to dream about the restoration of the entire colonial town (Morgan, 2004, 121-122).

Towards the end of 1924, Goodwin founded the Colonial Holding Corporation along with other prominent town residents. This organization bought buildings that required restoration (Greenspan, 2009, 18).

The restoration of Williamsburg was supported by the philanthropic donations of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (1874-1960). Rockefeller agreed with Goodwin's idea. He thought that the pre-industrial past was very important and that it possessed certain attributes that were superior to those of his own time. Further, he insisted on accuracy, authenticity, and precision in every aspect of this project. From the beginning of the project in 1926 to his death in 1960, Williamsburg became Rockefeller's most important project from his numerous philanthropic works.

While a local organization had focused on preserving a number of selected historic places in Williamsburg, Goodwin thought that the entire town could become an educational landmark. He felt that using Williamsburg to introduce Americans to the eighteenth century would help imbue the modern era with a renewed sense of Americanism. He believed that the conflicts in American society were the result of the country's heterogeneous past. If all Americans were able to experience Williamsburg, he thought that "[t]here would be a stronger sense of national community" (Yetter, 1988, 49-52). In his letter to Rockefeller, dated March 3, 1934, the idea of Americanism is emphasized by the statement "we can, however, reproduce the symbols and sacraments of the past" (Greenspan, 2009, 45).

Such admiration for a national shrine can be found in an article in The Washington Post (December 1, 1924):

... it is eminently desirable that the colonial and revolutionary remains of Williamsburg, so far as they still exist, shall be preserved, reverently restored, and sacredly cherished as one of the most precious shrines of American patriotism.

The restoration of Williamsburg focused upon an ideal version of a Colonial town rather than on a realistic one. The attitude towards slavery, as embodied in the project, is a good example of this. Although Goodwin thought about the reconstruction of slave quarters and recognized that slaves were an integral part of Colonial life, in the end, the restoration did not address this issue until after World War II, when Williamsburg was faced with the need to offer an interpretation of African-American history. In fact, the issues around slavery were only included in the
interpretative program that took place after 1976 (Greenspan, 2009, 28-29).

The initial idea of a national shrine lasted until the late 1970s. During that time, Colonial Williamsburg served as a shrine to American ideals. After the late 1970s, it evolved into its new and current role as a social history museum that focuses upon living regional history (Greenspan, 2009, 148).

2.3 Philosophy of the Restoration

In this large-scale restoration project, no fewer than 790 buildings were demolished. Of the existing settlements, only 82 houses were retained, but these were rebuilt such that all traces of the post-1800 period were removed. In place of the demolished buildings, 341 houses that had existed previously, including the Governor's Palace (Carson, 1981), were carefully built. In addition, 38 houses of African-American residents were purchased by the restoration project and their residents were relocated (Greenspan, 2009, 24).

In 1926, Perry, Shaw & Hepburn, a Boston architectural firm, was employed to draw up the preliminary plans (Molineux, 2004). It defined the restoration as a "composite representation of the original forms of a number of buildings and areas known or believed to have existed in Williamsburg between the years 1699 and 1840." It did not intend to clarify the date; instead, it wanted to give a sense of the Colonial period (Yetter, 1988, 60).

An Advisory Committee of Architects reviewed major decisions and assisted in drafting guidelines for the project from 1928 through 1948. It included the head of the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia, Edmund S. Campbell (Yetter, 1988, 60).

The initial restoration project began in 1928 and was completed in 1934. The restoration work started on June 1, 1928. The Raleigh Tavern, which opened in September 1932, was the first building to be put on exhibit (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2007, 134).

According to the New York Times (April 22, 1934), the Capitol building was first opened to the public in February 1934, although its garden and landscape had not yet been completed. The rebuilding of the Capitol was the largest single project in the reconstruction. Its design was based upon old drawings and the archeological evidence of its foundations (Lounsbury, 1990, 373) (Fig.3.).

Most of the restoration work on small buildings focused upon the removal of any alterations that took place after 1800. The public school was demolished for the reconstruction of the Governor's Palace (Fig.4.). In 1929, a new school, the Matthew Whaley School, was built in the Georgian revival style, adjacent to the original site. The Prentis Store, which was used as a gas station prior to the restoration, was considered one of the best surviving eighteenth-century commercial buildings in Virginia. The more recent changes to the structure were eliminated, as shown in the photographs below (Fig.5.).

Although restoration was based upon archaeological evidence and documents, many of the dwelling sites were restored without any evidence. In the restorations, privies, dairies, smokehouses, woodsheds, and lumber houses were paired together in a symmetrical pattern at the end of a garden walk or at the corner of a back lot. In contradiction to the logic of the Colonial Revival architects and landscape architects, the Colonial-era builders chose to place their service buildings across
a back lot to meet their functional needs and to reflect their social importance (Lounsbury, 1989).

Colonial Revivalism took root and became popular during the first three decades of the twentieth century (Greenspan, 2009, 11). The restored houses in Williamsburg were based upon researched details of Colonial architecture. In an interesting reversal, following restoration, these buildings were then regarded as being actual examples of Colonial buildings (Gebhard, 1987, 110). McDonald (2006/2007) noted that Perry, Shaw & Hepburn's architectural office in Williamsburg was well known for its superlative details of Colonial architecture. The result was an overwhelmingly Colonial-style town.

To this end, a philosophy of preservation was carefully observed. The first governing concept was active intervention in the heritage of Williamsburg, whereby reconstruction seems to have been considered "authentic" based upon the findings of research. The second concept involved strict criteria regarding the representation of the historic period: the restoration strictly focused upon the Colonial period prior to 1800. Any alteration after that was regarded as a degradation of the building and was removed, and the building was then restored to its approximate original appearance.

This attitude toward restoration is similar to that of Eugene-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, who wrote that the meaning of restoration is "to reestablish an edifice in a finished state, which may in fact never have actually existed at any given time" (Whitehead, 1990, 195). This philosophy was completely contrary to that of John Ruskin, who stated that "restoration … means the most total destruction which a building can suffer … a destruction accompanied with a false description of the thing destroyed" (Molina-Montes, 1982, 126). The type and degree of intervention carried out at Colonial Williamsburg would be considered completely unacceptable by today's international standards, in which progressive authenticity is given credence. The concept of progressive authenticity acknowledges that monuments and sites are not static and evolve over time (Droste and Ulf Bertilsson, 1995, 4).

3. Institution to Certify Williamsburg's Value

3.1 Legislation and Prestige as Special National Heritage

Colonial Williamsburg began as one man's effort to restore a historic town, but eventually, this effort was supported by both the federal and city governments.

Congressman Louis Cramton introduced a bill that sponsored the creation of the Colonial National Monument. The Colonial National Monument included a parkway to connect Yorktown, Williamsburg, and Jamestown. This was a new category in the classification of historic places in the U.S. (Clark, 2010, 20). The Colonial National Monument was authorized on July 3, 1930. It was established on December 30, 1930, and on June 5, 1936, it was re-designated as a National Historic Park.

At the time, this was quite a major issue. In Volume 2 of the American Civic Annual (1930), "The Nation as a Whole" was the first and largest heading. "National Parks" was one of the main topics, and there were some notable articles in this regard. In an article about the National Park Service, the responsibility of the National Park Service towards historic sites was explored using examples of the birthplaces of former presidents. The National Park Service was established to protect natural heritage sites in 1916. It then came to be identified with the preservation of historic sites.

In an article about a bill that would establish National Historical Monuments, Cramton argued that while Colonial towns were being well preserved by local associations or philanthropists, there had to be more federal government-initiated plans to link these places.

Another article by Ray Lyman stressed the importance of developing historic places in the U.S. He indicated that although American travelers could witness some of the world's best scenery right at home, the country lacked true historic shrines. By 1930, the issue of national heritage from the Colonial period had gained more importance and was linked to the restoration works of Williamsburg. Reproduction or reconstruction came to be regarded as inevitable.

In 1935, the Congress passed the Historic Sites Act, which advocated historic preservation as a national policy. Therefore, the restoration of Williamsburg and the legislation for the Colonial National Monument were a turning point for the recognition of Colonial history as national heritage in the U.S. With this legislation, Williamsburg acquired legal national identity.
The construction of Colonial Parkway enabled many people to visit Williamsburg easily. With many people owning vehicles after World War I, the improvement of the highway system made historic sites easily accessible to travelers for the first time. By the end of World War II, the town acquired a national reputation and was visited by soldiers in large numbers (Morgan, 2004, 133). The number of visitors per year exceeded one million by 1957. In 1966, the Williamsburg Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

In summary, the initial planning and legislation of the Colonial National Monument established the status of Colonial Williamsburg as a special national monument. Further, this legislation influenced the federal support system for national heritage. It offered practical and external support, rather than support related to the specifics of its restoration; for example, it helped develop an express highway linking Williamsburg to similar Colonial towns. This approach characterizes the nature of the American national heritage, which was mainly developed by private organizations and was strongly related to the economic benefits that could be realized. This characteristic is actually stated in the National Historic Preservation Act (1966):

"Although the major burdens of historic preservation have been borne and major efforts initiated by private agencies ..., it is nevertheless necessary and appropriate for the government to accelerate its historic preservation programs ..."

3.2 Enactment of the City’s Preservation Ordinance

In 1947, the City of Williamsburg first adopted a preservation ordinance, in which the Colonial Williamsburg Historic Area was designated as an overlay-zoning district (Cullingworth and Roger W. Caves, 2008, 110). All reconstruction projects and land uses had to be submitted for review by the Board of Zoning Appeals. In 1958, the city adopted a comprehensive architectural-review ordinance for the entire city. At that time, Williamsburg's first architectural review board was established.

At present, the City of Williamsburg has identified an Architectural Preservation District to manage new constructions. According to the Design Review Guidelines (City of Williamsburg, 2006), areas adjacent to the Colonial Williamsburg Historic Area, and the old campus of William and Mary, are included in the Architectural Preservation District Zone 1 (AP-1). In the design guidelines, while the replication or imitation of historic buildings is regulated, the construction of revivalist-style buildings is recommended to ensure long-term compatibility with the city and to enhance the adaptive use of buildings. Emphasis is also placed on the coherence of a building's design elements.

Overall, the guideline stresses the importance of the compatibility of new buildings in the Preservation District Zone, with the aim of avoiding replication and creating distinctions between historic buildings and new structures.

The restoration of Colonial Williamsburg focused upon the appearance and status of the area prior

Fig. 8. Map of Colonial Williamsburg
to 1800. The erection, reconstruction, alteration, restoration, razing, demolition, and moving of a building or structure in the Colonial Williamsburg Historic Area have to conform to the following:

1. Documented historical and/or archaeological evidence of the existence of such building or structure prior to the year 1800.

2. For accessory buildings and structures, historical and/or archaeological evidence indicating that such a building or structure could have existed prior to the year 1800, even though there exists no specific historical or archaeological evidence to support this.

3. The historical value and significance of the building, structure, sign or exterior architectural feature and its relationship to the historic character of the Colonial Williamsburg historic area.

This is an interesting point, because some of the buildings in the historic district are reconstructions; this, therefore, implies that the reconstructed structures built in the early twentieth century are now regarded as the city's original heritage.

Merchants Square, a shopping district designed in Colonial style in 1935, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2005 along with the Williamsburg Lodge and the Williamsburg Inn.

The city government continues to respect the originality and significance of the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg. The restoration design criteria of the 1920s that applied to the period before 1800 are maintained to this day. The part of the guidelines that describes rehabilitation admits that these criteria, which freeze development within a specific period, are quite exceptional:

... The house at 520 Jamestown Road is such an example where the unique character of the property is the result of a substantial Victorian era addition on the original early 19th-century house. It is recognized, however, that there are situations where complete restoration of a structure or building is warranted or beneficial, i.e., the Colonial Williamsburg Historic Area.

The above criteria, however, are in conflict with the articles of the Venice Charter (1964), which does not permit restoration with conjecture, and respects the valid contributions of all periods to the building rather than stipulating a uniform style. Further, the Charter of the Built Vernacular Heritage (1999) stresses that changes over time are important aspects of vernacular architecture. These different philosophies highlight the exceptional focus on maintaining the characteristics of Colonial Williamsburg, which has resulted in an extreme form of restoration, albeit one that is in compliance with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, which permits reconstruction.

Colonial Williamsburg currently includes both historic districts and respects the value of the Colonial history of the eighteenth century and the revival boom of the twentieth century. Approval of the National Register of Historic Place (NRHP) admitted the historic meaning of the Williamsburg project in the early twentieth century. When the Williamsburg Historic District was listed on the NRHP, the boundary of the Historic Colonial Area, established by the city code, didn't include Merchants Square, which was created to meet commercial needs. Since the establishment of the Williamsburg Inn in 1936, more lodges were built in revival colonial style. This commercial and resort area was designated as another historic district in 2006. The Matthew Whaley School was also approved by the NRHP in 2004. The authors think that the philosophy of Viollet-le-Duc in twentieth-century America is not just accepted as a universal standard of preservation but is commemorated as a historic movement.

### Table 1. List of NRHP of City of Williamsburg

| Name                                | NRHP | Period | Intervention |
|-------------------------------------|------|--------|--------------|
| Williamsburg Historic District      | 1966 | 18c    | Restoration  |
| Wren Building, College of William and Mary | 1966 | 17c    | Restoration  |
| Peyton Randolph House               | 1970 | 18c    | Restoration  |
| James Semple House                  | 1970 | 18c    | Restoration  |
| Wythe House                         | 1970 | 18c    | Restoration  |
| Bruton Parish Church                | 1970 | 18c    | Restoration  |
| Chandler Court and Pollard Park Historic District | 1996 | 20c | Revival design |
| Williamsburg Inn                    | 1997 | 20c    | Revival design |
| Matthew Whaley School               | 2004 | 20c    | Revival design |
| Merchants Square and Resort Historic District | 2006 | 20c | Revival design |

### 4. Conclusion

This case study of the heritage value of Colonial Williamsburg prior to the 1970s provides much insight. Although the site had slipped into oblivion for 150 years and did not have its original appearance as the capital of Virginia, its symbolic value as the old capital justified the physical restoration of Williamsburg.

In the restoration project, planning was based upon the Colonial Revival style and archeological research. The attitude and philosophy that governed the preservation were similar to those of Viollet-le-Duc, who dreamed of a desirable style for restored buildings.

Colonial Williamsburg also exemplifies the characteristics of the 1930s, an early period of the national park system in the U.S. At that time, much attention was paid to nationalism, and patriotic feelings were quite strong. The Colonial Revival style was a
prevalent architectural design. Interest in Colonial history eventually led to the reestablishment of the old capital. This illustrates how ardent nationalism can affect the preservation of a nation's past.

Although the idea of restoring Colonial Williamsburg grew from the patriotic feelings of Rev. Goodwin, it was fueled by a growing awareness of the importance of the Colonial period in the nation's history.

The development of Colonial Williamsburg received a lot of external support. The intended value of a "national shrine" was validated by legislation, and the federal government offered legal support on a larger scale by certifying the town as a National Colonial Monument in 1930. The government bestowed upon Williamsburg, along with other colonial towns, its prestige and support. A highway system linking historic Colonial places in Virginia provided the newly mobile masses with easy access to a national historic attraction.

Colonial Williamsburg is more than a restoration of individual buildings, as it occupies a town-sized site without a fenced enclosure. At present, all new construction and rehabilitation falls under the purview of the city government. The intention is to ensure that the city's landscape is compatible with the preserved colonial site. City regulations recommend construction of a similar style, but prohibit the reproduction of specific historic buildings. The regulations also confine new preservation designs to the architectural features of the period prior to 1800. In addition, structures built under the restoration projects of the 1920s are considered part of the historic heritage.

In fact, the restoration efforts of the 1920s and '30s were quite radical, reflecting their builders' eagerness to create a desirable heritage. Although the status of Colonial Williamsburg has changed, the site's authenticity and objectivity has been maintained with the support of the federal government as well as through its own management system. Colonial Williamsburg, although a fabricated historic site by its own management system. Colonial Williamsburg, although a fabricated historic site by modern standards, still represents an important step in American preservation history.

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