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From Necessity to Novelty: Historic Trades in Colonial Williamsburg

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From Necessity to Novelty:
Historic Trades in Colonial Williamsburg

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Abstract

Colonial Williamsburg is a living history museum in Virginia that hosts a large program interpreting and preserving eighteenth-century craft methods. Using ethnographic research methods, this paper evaluates the value of the historic trades program as a means of preserving otherwise lost skills, producing knowledge, and engaging the public in history. I argue that historic trades interpretation connects with audiences more than traditional exhibits, particularly highlighting specialized interpretation, on-the-job discoveries, representation of identity groups, and the ability to utilize online video platforms. Additionally, I address the divide between modern consumption and production, and how visitors can find historic trades that were once critical to everyday life to be novel.

Acknowledgments

My research would not be possible without the endless support I have received from a variety of sources. First, I would like to extend so much gratitude to the lovely people at Colonial Williamsburg, particularly Ted Boscana, Matthew Sanbury, Bobbie Saye, and Barbara Sherer who all took time out of their busy schedules to allow me to interview them.

The Anthropology Department and the National Institute for American History and Democracy (NIAHD) at William & Mary allowed me to successfully complete this work. Thank you to the Anthropology Department for awarding me a Nathan Altshuler Fellowship which paid for the books I used for this project. My thesis advisor, Danielle Moretti-Langholtz, was incredibly encouraging and helpful in expanding and refining my research. Additionally, I would like to thank my committee members: Andrea Wright, who has been endlessly supportive since I declared my major in anthropology in the fall of 2020 and encouraged me to write a thesis on Colonial Williamsburg, and Julie Richter, director of NIAHD, whose Public History course got me excited about Colonial Williamsburg as a place to study interpretation.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family who listened to me rant about historic trades practices, Colonial Williamsburg, and how “everything is so hard” for the last year. Nico and Erin, you’ve been endlessly helpful in keeping me sane throughout this process. Particularly, I want to thank my mom, who inspired my love of history, took me to Colonial Williamsburg when I was a kid, and did everything in her power to make sure I ended up at William & Mary.

Introduction

Generally, people think of museums as places where they stare at objects from behind a glass barrier and read curated signage. Living history museums, however, rely on skilled interpreters to create authentic historical narratives for the public. This includes both first-person interpretation wherein the interpreter acts as a historical figure or a person within that period, and third-person interpretation, in which the interpreter may be wearing clothing of a historic period but is not meant to act as though they are of that time. The most well-known living history museum, Colonial Williamsburg, is nearly a century old, with its initial planning having begun in 1926, is located in Virginia's colonial capital and accrued 105 million dollars in operating revenue alone in 2019.[1] Colonial Williamsburg has an entire system of positions that span from apprentice to journeyman to the master of the shops, where these craftspeople learn the skills and further the memory of their trades through historical reproduction. Craftspeople (also referred to as tradespeople) perform their skills and create goods in front of visitors using eighteenth-century methods. As of May 2020, Colonial Williamsburg employed 80 Historic Tradesmen.[2]. Rather than holding academic degrees in history, though many do, these individuals have dedicated their lives to their crafts. While they showcase eighteenth-century crafts methods, the process of passing on these skills to a select group of people, the apprentices, preserves these methods through oral history and shared memory. The Foundation's website advertises the following:

> "Discover craftsmanship in more than 20 trades, where modern-day practitioners use 18th-century tools and techniques to apprentice in — and eventually master — blacksmithing, woodworking or gunsmithing, just to name a few. These world-renowned

[1] Anders Greenspan, "Colonial Williamsburg," in *Encyclopedia Virginia*, accessed April 11, 2022, https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/colonial-williamsburg/; "Colonial Williamsburg 2019 Annual Report" (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).
[2] Ben Swenson, "Trades Secrets," *Trend & Tradition Magazine*, Autumn 2017, https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/trend-tradition-magazine/autumn-2017/trades-secrets/.

> experts not only make goods and provide services to our Historic Area, they also consult and produce for other cultural institutions around the world. Your admission ticket grants you access to the shops and yards. Visit, ask questions, and observe their mesmerizing work. You will not find a trades community with so many experts in one place anywhere else in the world."[3]

While this short teaser about the trades department acknowledges that those working there are undergoing a process of mastering these trades, it additionally offers the claim that they have more experts on staff than in any other place in the world. Their work is focused on building the trades community that the website advertises, wherein each craftsperson learns from each other and passes on their knowledge.

The primary goal of this project is not just to consider why Colonial Williamsburg's historic trades department functions the way it does but to conduct an ethnographic study focused on the journeymen and apprentices employed at the trade shops and connect their historical preservation methods of formerly necessary goods to the broader creation of knowledge. The narratives public historians tell and how they tell them reflects our current society and its values. The journeys of these journeymen and apprentices can answer countless questions about historical interpretation, class, gender, race, and memory today.

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[3] "Historic Trades," Colonial Williamsburg, https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/explore/historic-trades/?from=navexplore.

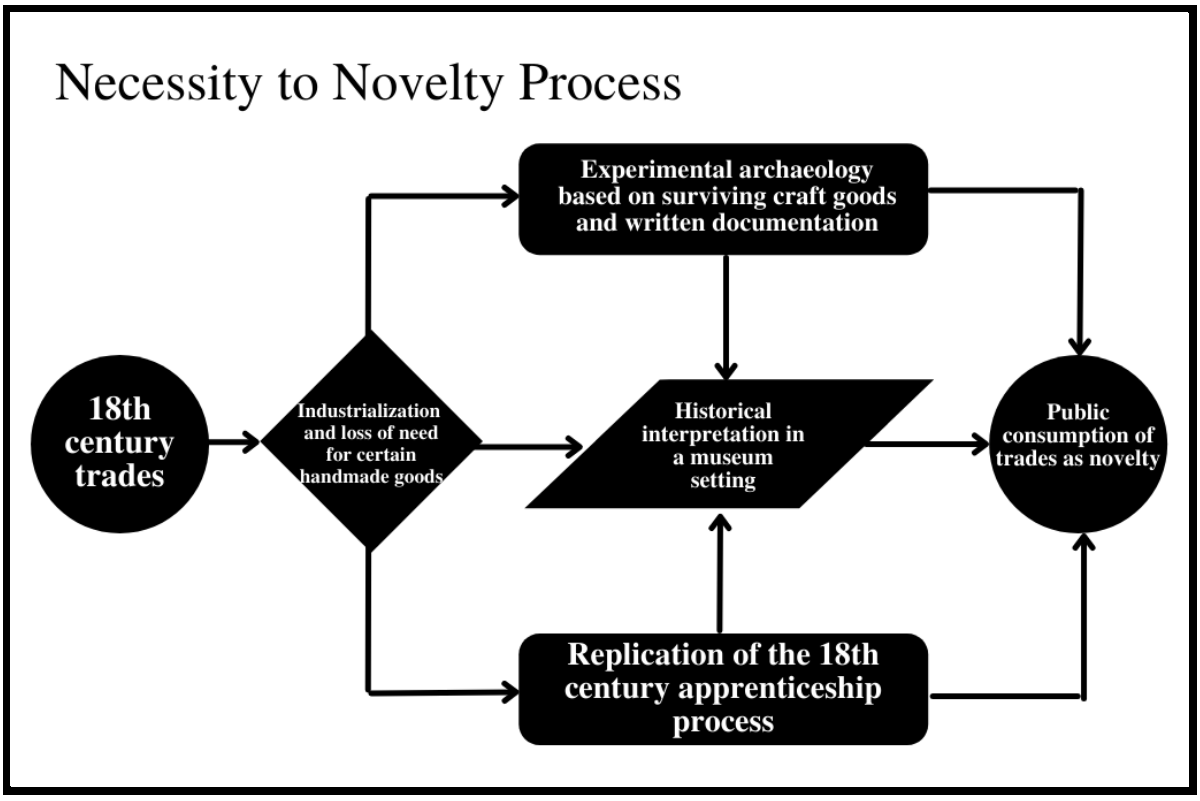

Figure 1: Process of eighteenth-century trades methods becoming practically obsolete and useful as a novelty practice. Figure by author.

These trades shops initially promoted the Foundation's political belief in the importance of "individual accomplishment."[4] In its early years and still today, Colonial Williamsburg promotes a capitalist economy and romanticizes the act of working with one's hands. Visiting a trade shop can be a sign for some to start their own business or learn a hard skill. Anti-communist sentiments in the early-to-mid twentieth century called for celebrations of American history and, more importantly, American capitalism. Today, Colonial Williamsburg offers a sense of escapism from present-day capitalism, wherein mass factory production rules and many Americans spend their days sitting at desks and staring at screens. Rather than highlighting American individualism, historic trade shops present an economic system in which

[4] Anders Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg: The Restoration of Virginia's Eighteenth-Century Capital*, 2nd edition (University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 48.

slavery, the antithesis of freedom and individualism, was an active player. Today, the Foundation's more concentrated efforts toward teaching the history of enslavement work in tandem with trades interpretation, but it is likely impossible to interpret historic trades in this manner without glorifying the oppressive system in some way.

Historic trades interpretation is a valuable practice. When portraying historic trades for public consumption in Colonial Williamsburg, how do craftspeople connect to the memory of the past and the modern society where they live? I interviewed journeymen and apprentices to gain an understanding of their priorities for what they want to portray to the visitors, the effectiveness of their portrayal in displaying these values, and what they hope to do for the production of knowledge outside of what is visible to the public. The apprenticeship process itself, the relevance of historic trades, the production of knowledge, technology's increasing role in historical interpretation, the role of gender in historic trades, and the current state of the industries that replaced historic methods will all be essential to this study. Additionally, the project is a product of participant observation and highlighting the perceptions of the public and the craftspeople themselves.

Trades at Colonial Williamsburg

Envisioned by Reverend W. R. Goodwin of Williamsburg's Bruton Parish Church and funded by the Rockefeller fortune, Colonial Williamsburg was founded in 1926 as a partially reconstructed and partially original living history museum and historic area focused on the years surrounding the American Revolution. The first trade shops were officially opened in Colonial Williamsburg in 1937, and there are over 20 different trades at the living history museum today.[5] These include Cabinetmaker & Harpsichord Maker, Cooper, Carpenter's Yard, Joinery, Wheelwright, Milliner and Mantua-maker, Shoemaker, Tailor, Weaver, Wigmaker, Public Leather Works, Foodways, Colonial Garden, Anderson Blacksmith Shop, Engraving Shop, Foundry, Silversmith, Tin Shop, Apothecary, Gunsmith Shop, Bindery, Printing Office, and Brickyard.[6] Originally, the museum focused on the "great men" of the Revolution and architectural history, but it eventually joined the movement supporting social history. Ironically, to build the eighteenth-century style structures to display trades, the Foundation demolished all of Williamsburg's downtown homes and businesses that were not period accurate in the 1930s.[7] Trade shops were the first step in telling the authentic story of "everyday" working people in eighteenth-century Williamsburg. Today, the journeymen working in the trade shops are not just men, and the site has no gender or race-based restrictions on who can work in the trade shops authentically, as a variety of people would have worked in the eighteenth century. In more recent years, Colonial Williamsburg has implemented African American and American Indian interpretations, as well as more programs focusing on women's history.

When a visitor, who has paid between twenty-five and forty-five dollars for a single-day ticket, walks inside a trade shop on Duke of Gloucester or Prince George Street, or, during the

[5] Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg,* 48.
[6] "Historic Trades."
[7] Andre de la Varre, *Colonial Williamsburg*, The Screen Traveler, 1936.

COVID-19 pandemic, inside an empty gallery space in the Colonial Williamsburg Art Museums, they will encounter craftspeople working on their trades.[8] These craftspeople may be students doing an internship, volunteers, apprentices, journeymen, or the master[9] of the shop. The goods manufactured in the shops largely serve to continue operations in the living history museum. More often than not, all objects stay in Colonial Williamsburg and are worn, used, or displayed to the public. The exception to this is the small number of items sold to the public, particularly at the Prentis Store where "handcrafted leather goods, iron hardware, tools, reproduction furniture, pottery, writing instruments, and Native American crafts" are all sold.[10] While working on their craft, these individuals additionally serve as historical interpreters by answering any questions that guests have and describing what they are doing to visitors within the historic context of the craft. The shops all function a little bit differently; there is no formalized process as to what visitors will see and do when they walk inside, that is up to the individual craftsperson-interpreter. Interpretation depends on the speaker and their audience.

Like every other organization in 2020 and beyond, the trades division at Colonial Williamsburg was not immune to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on operations, especially as a tourist location. A majority of the trade shops in the historic area are tiny buildings that were often tight for visitors even when social distancing at least six feet from others was not a public health necessity. Thus, many craftspeople adapted to working outdoors in the Virginia heat while wearing a face mask and being in the heat associated with blacksmithing or the like. Other trades that could practically move to alternate locations moved inside the newly

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[8] Colonial Williamsburg. "Colonial Williamsburg Tickets," https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/tickets/?from=navvisit.

[9] Colonial Williamsburg continues to use the term *master* to define the head of the individual trade shop, so that terminology will be used here. However, many organizations and academics are moving away from *master/mistress* terminology due to its ties with enslavement.

[10] "Prentis Store," Colonial Williamsburg, https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/locations/prentis-store/.

expanded and renovated art museums. The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum and the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum expansions were completed in 2020, and empty gallery spaces were the perfect places for trades interpreters to set up a small version of their traditional shops.[11] The small shops began to open up again in the Summer of 2021 when COVID-19 vaccinations became widely available in Virginia, but the gallery set-up did not go away. Every day, Colonial Williamsburg advertises "Tradespeople in the Galleries," stating "Meet the Historic Area's expert tradespeople in the galleries. Visit with the joiner, harpsichord-makers, cabinetmakers, silversmiths, tailors, engravers, or wigmakers in the open space of the Art Museums as they demonstrate the techniques and tools used in their trades."[12] In this practice, these various trades will rotate through taking a gallery space one day a week. In 2022, this practice was done away with and is no longer listed on their website, likely due to lessening COVID restrictions in Virginia and national labor shortages.

[11] "Colonial Williamsburg 2020 Annual Report" (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2020).
[12] "Tradespeople in the Galleries," Colonial Williamsburg, October 11, 2021, https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/events/tradespeople-in-the-galleries/?date=2021-10-11.

Literature Review

The most significant anthropological study on Colonial Williamsburg comes from Eric Gable and Richard Handler. Researched and published in the 1990s, this account is critical of the Foundation, particularly highlighting the "contradictory paradigms of the colonial past" shown through Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation of "the history of previously excluded people such as African American slaves, and the social history of consumerism, of the material culture of everyday life."[13] Gable and Handler conclude that Colonial Williamsburg is a "Republican Disneyland" that administratively addresses comprehensive new social history but fails to do so on the public interpretive level.[14] Their book, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past in Colonial Williamsburg,* was incredibly influential in my research, as it is the only ethnographic study of Colonial Williamsburg. Though it does not focus on trades interpretation and is twenty-five years out of date at this point, it was an important piece of foundational literature.

Before the publication of their 1997 book, Gable and Handler released an article in *Museum Anthropology* critiquing Colonial Williamsburg's connections with colonialism and its "tension between business values and educational values" that comes from the administration's "master [historical] narratives."[15] Another article, published the next year "The Authority of Documents at Some American History Museums" in *The Journal of American History,* similarly critiqued bureaucracy at Colonial Williamsburg based on their ethnographic fieldwork.[16] The Foundation, particularly the vice president of research at the time, Cary Carson, was largely very

[13] Gable and Handler, 7.
[14]Gable and Handler, 220.
[15] Gable, Eric, and Richard Handler. "Colonialist Anthropology at Colonial Williamsburg." *Museum Anthropology* 17, no. 3 (1993): 28-29.
[16] Gable, Eric, and Richard Handler. "The Authority of Documents at Some American History Museums." *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (1994): 122.

critical of Gable and Handler's analysis of the museum. Carson responded to both articles in defense of Colonial Williamsburg and identified a fundamental misunderstanding of museums and the structure of historic research between higher-ups and front-line interpreters in Gable and Handler's work.[17] Gable and Handler's research brought about a period of distrust between Colonial Williamsburg and anthropologists that I was careful not to reignite.

The Foundation published a history of historic trades at Colonial Williamsburg as a whole in 2005, written by the then Director of Historic Trades, James Gaynor. The article describes the changes and advancements in the program up until then, and even notes a statement of purpose for the trades program from the 1950s, "to make modern visitors truly feel the companionship and presence of the people who proclaimed the rights of man in words and deeds no American should ever forget." He finishes the article by saying "[w]hen folks tire of the virtual and again seek the real, Historic Trades is here," emphasizing the Foundation's awareness of its role as an alternative to the modern-day.[18] This article is a useful look into historic trades at Colonial Williamsburg throughout time and the Foundation's evolving philosophy surrounding them.

Otherwise, little research on specifically trades interpretation exists today. One article written in 1981 by Gary Brumfield highlights the importance of apprenticeships to keep craft skills alive and highlights the few sites outside of Colonial Williamsburg with historic craft apprentice programs.[19] This article is a part of a larger book on craft apprenticeships, but it is considerably out of date, and only briefly addresses trades in a museum setting. Still, the information in the article relates to my research more than any other piece of scholarly work.

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[17] Carson, Cary. "Lost in the Fun House: A Commentary on Anthropologists' First Contact with History Museums." *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (1994), 141.
[18] James M. Gaynor, "A History of Historic Trades," *Colonial Williamsburg Journal*, 2005, https://research.colonialwilliamsburg.org/Foundation/Journal/Winter04-05/trades.cfm.
[19]Gary Brumfield, "Craft Apprenticeship in Historic Site Museums," in *Apprenticeship in Craft*, ed. Gerry Williams (Daniel Clark Books, 1981), 55.

Similarly, the Colonial Williamsburg blogs, written by staff members and tradespeople, provide compelling and relevant scholarship on historic trades interpretation in brief articles.

Methodology

I conducted the research for this project beginning in August 2021 and ending in April 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and as a human-oriented endeavor, it was not immune to the effects of the pandemic.[20] Casual observational visits to the trade shops and interviews with journeymen and apprentices were my primary modes of research, along with the use of print and digital sources about the Foundation and historic trades interpretation in general. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's website was incredibly useful to me in this process. When contacting tradespeople, I struggled mostly to find their contact information. The Foundation's website, while generally helpful, does not list the names or contact information of any of its trades employees. I contacted Ted Boscana, Colonial Williamsburg's director of Historic Trades, via Linkedin and his office was able to provide me with a few email addresses of current front-line trades interpreters. In addition to Ted Boscana, I interviewed Bobbie Saye, Journeyman Silversmith; Matthew Sanbury, Apprentice Carpenter; and Barbara Sherer, Foodways Journeyman. These are the real names of these individuals, and they confirmed their consent to have their names documented at the beginning of their interviews. Each of them spoke in a professional capacity. I conducted the interviews over a video chat platform. While I was able to interview both male and female craftspeople, all of the people I interviewed were white, and that did affect the results of my research. African American and Indigenous craftspeople do work at Colonial Williamsburg, and their perspectives are relevant and important.

My on-site ethnographic research took place at the Blacksmith Shop, the Silversmith, the Print Shop, the Book Bindery, the Joinery, the Tin Shop, and the Weaving, Spinning, and Dyeing Shop. I observed and asked questions at these shops and did participant observation at the

[20] This project was found to comply with appropriate ethical standards and was exempted from the need for formal review by the William & Mary Protection of Human Subjects Committee (Phone 757-221-3966) on 2021-09-09 and expires on 2022-09-09.

Blacksmith and Book Bindery. Those who I spoke to at these shops will not be referred to by name, as they were not made aware of my research when I entered the shop. Participant observation with the bookbinders and blacksmiths was conducted as a part of Field School in Material Culture at William & Mary. The Foundation puts out *#TradesTuesday* live streams on its Facebook and YouTube pages regularly. These videos allow the tradespeople to share their work with a broader audience, and, for me, was another helpful look into their interpretation and outreach. I particularly benefited from two *#TradesTuesday* panels, one on apprenticeships and another on Black tradespeople. Names from these videos will be listed as they are in the publically available recordings.

Photo 1: A woman works in Colonial Williamsburg's Weaving, Spinning, and Dyeing Shop. December 17, 2021. Photo by author.

Oral history is at the center of this project, and I will primarily utilize the methodology outlined by Elizabeth Tonkin and Jan Vansina to discuss it. The process of teaching and learning that apprentices and journeymen undergo to eventually master their craft is oral history practice.

The journeyman provides a verbal testimony to the apprentice, and the apprentices and journeymen work together to provide similar testimonies to the visitors. These craft communities form out of oral tradition in a way that written training cannot provide. Vansina defines oral traditions as "all oral testimonies concerning the past which are transmitted from one person to another."[21] He emphasizes that "their preservation depends on the powers of memory of successive generations of human beings."[22] Historically, most trades utilized oral traditions to pass along their skills to apprentices. Industrialization caused these skills and their eighteenth-century methods to be essentially obsolete, making the preservation of these skills even more difficult. Third-person living history interpretation, as shown in Colonial Williamsburg's trade shops, is comparable to oral tradition as Vansina describes it.

Tonkin emphasizes the relationship between the speaker and the listener within oral history tradition. As "the basic human mode of communication," oral history here mirrors its use in the eighteenth century and adds new context with the addition of the visitor.[23] She notes that the most common and effective form of oral history communication is personal narratives, which can only be used in specific ways by tradespeople. Limited documentation and assumptions guide what they say about the past; however, trades interpreters can speak from a first-person perspective to highlight what they are working on. While these interpreters share historical facts that they might not have a personal connection to and likely learned because it is their job, they are still able to provide a partial eyewitness account.[24]

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[21] Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (Transaction Publishers, 1973), xvii.
[22] Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, 1.
[23] Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2-3.
[24] Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts*, 40.

Theoretical Perspective

Except for programs like foodways which rely exclusively on written recipes, most of the trades work entirely on experimental archaeology. Some shops have minor written records and many have preserved finished objects to study, such as buildings, garments, silver pieces, and the like. The perceived value of trades and practices can be determined by where such practices were recorded, if at all. Tin, according to the master of the shop, was cheap and easy to produce, so primarily the more impressive tin objects remain, while the everyday items were lost with time.[25] History defined as both what has occurred and what we know about that today is best illustrated by Michel-Rolph Troulliot.[26] Troulliot identifies four instances wherein power-controlled historical production creates silences in records: the making of sources, the making of archives, the making of narratives, and "retrospective significance."[27] Trades rely on sources, archives, and narratives; however, the retrospective significance of the trades emphasizes the silences in those sources, archives, and narratives. Because so little about eighteenth-century trades was written down at the time, we can assume that little value was placed on the actual processes. Yet, silences in the sources and archives can be reclaimed in the narratives created by interpreters. Trades interpretation, through the use of experimental archaeology, challenges the silences Trouillot acknowledges in history and provides an opportunity to create new sources out of presumed historical practices.

While historic trades' ability to fill the silences in the past and create new sources is valuable as a historical process, the physical goods created by craftspeople are a rarity today. Pierre Bourdieu argues that rarity creates value for historical reproduction items as part of the

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[25] Fieldnotes, March 31, 2022.
[26] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995), 3.
[27] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26.

field of restricted production. Since so few people have the skills to build a cabinet, make a wig, or sew a dress using eighteenth-century practices, inherent value is placed on these objects and the craftspeople.[28] This is further amplified by how few people work with their hands daily. Still, that begs the question as to whether the craftspeople who do the work or the Foundation create the value of historic trades. I argue, based on what Bourdieu says, that the monopoly that Colonial Williamsburg has on a lot of these trades establishes both a space for and a means for creating rarity of trades goods and skills. The value in the rarity further highlights the questionable nature of the pay scale for craftspeople and emphasizes the exploitation of the laborers by the Foundation that benefits from these rare skills.[29]

Today, very few people work with their hands to create goods outside of circles of independent "crafters." Even in Colonial Williamsburg, trade interpretation is not intended to teach visitors how to create certain objects, rather it is a more academic pursuit. This academic pursuit is owned by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, and, though they are a non-profit organization, this prevents any sort of ownership of the goods created by the craftspeople themselves. Durkheim writes about the shift from a trade society mediated by guilds to an exploitative industrialized system that grew to what we know today.[30] Showcasing a few of what early American trades looked like allows the Foundation to create a false, glorified image of capitalism, furthering their 1930s-50s goal to be a part of anti-communist propaganda. On the other hand, communities of practice form inside the trade shop among journeymen and apprentices. Despite the economic implications of Colonial Williamsburg's monopoly on historic

[28] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Columbia University Press, 1993), 120.
[29] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production,* 74.
[30] Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, ed. Steven Lukes (Free Press, 2014), 171.

trades, the small communities with collective consciousness and common goals that form around these crafts do hold social and intellectual value.[31]

Paul Connerton theorized on historical reconstruction what he refers to as "habit-memory." He notes "habit is a knowledge and a remembering in the hands and in the body; and in the cultivation go habit it is our body which 'understands.'"[32] One example Connerton provides is that of the work of artisans as they habitually create goods through practiced methods. He addresses, through the use of Carl Bergstrom's analysis, how not only are habit and recollection at odds with each other but so are historical reconstruction and memory.[33] When considering historic trades, it would be easy to group these practices with habitual artisanal creations. However, I would like to consider that the trade shops bridge the gap between how historians reconstruct the past and how individuals and societies remember through habitual practice. While daily journeymen practice a type of habitual memory as they undergo working the printing press, weaving a garment, or the like, the process of redeveloping these historic trade habits for preservation requires the use of historical reconstruction and social memory. As such, journeymen form a habit memory from another time, one that would be lost without historic trades programs like this.

Trades interpretation is a large part of Colonial Williamsburg's involvement in the social history movement. Spencer R. Crew and James E Sims' chapter "Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue" in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of the Museum Display* highlights the importance of artifacts in conjunction with facts and interpretation in a museum setting. Additionally, they identify that with the rise of social history which focuses on

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[31] Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, 63.
[32] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 1st ed., Themes in the Social Sciences (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 95.
[33] Connerton, *How Societies Remember,* 14.

average people, museum collections may not have surviving artifacts to represent these people easily.[34] Historic trades practices in a museum setting allow for objects used and made by average people to be seen by the public without relying on artifacts to remain intact or in museum collections. I look at these trades as a means of efficiently displaying social history to the public.

David Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country – Revisited* is an expansive look into how we think about the past and consider memory. Lowenthal's argument that "memory is innately personal" emphasizes how special the passing on of these trade skills and habit memories is.[35] It can only be passed along by a select group of people, and Lowenthal states that every "time a memory is recalled, it is reprocessed."[36] This applies to passed-down memory and skill as well. Not only is the story of the Revolution and eighteenth-century life reinterpreted every time it is shared or heard at Colonial Williamsburg, but so are the processes of craft production as they are passed down. Lowenthal emphasizes the past as something we approach as something separate from our present selves and society, and his analysis of memory and public perception of the past is incredibly relevant to this study.

Colonial Williamsburg is unique, as it is a living history museum with a strong trades program. The setting of the museum is a street with buildings that *look* original to the eighteenth century. Eighty-nine of Colonial Williamsburg's buildings are original, and the rest are reproductions built in the last century. The Foundation created an aura of authenticity for their museum, promoting further research and reproduction. The novelty of historic trades

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[34] Spencer R. Crew and James E. Sims, "Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of the Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 159–75.
[35] David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country -- Revisited* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 310.
[36] David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country -- Revisited*, 320.

interpretation is mirrored by the novelty of the inauthentic setting. In its early years, Colonial Williamsburg established a Craft Advisory Committee, now known as the Products Review Committee, which described "authenticity" as "a function of the approval of experts."[37] The Foundation's concern for the museum's authenticity is centered primarily around the public's perspective of authenticity, rather than being entirely accurate or original. Though it is a nonprofit, it is still a business, as Gable and Handler emphasize.[38]

Thus, trades interpretation at Colonial Williamsburg is a compelling look into filling silences, displaying an economic narrative, forming communities of practice, displaying social history, and creating a form of habit memory in its artificial location.

[37] Gable and Handler, 35.
[38] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, 49.

Apprenticeship Data and Observation

THE APPRENTICESHIP PROCESS:

The apprenticeship process at Colonial Williamsburg changed in recent years to be a set, five-part program across all of the trades. Currently, the Director of Historic Trades is Ted Boscana and this five-part program came about under his leadership. Previously, the program was inconsistent among the different shops, and there was less emphasis on the public-facing aspect of the apprenticeship. In the current program, apprentices learn on the job under the master of their shop, similar to how eighteenth-century apprenticeships operated. As the apprentice learns more, the master slowly steps away. An apprentice silversmith working in the Colonial Williamsburg art galleries noted that she should be able to recreate anything in the silver hall of the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum by the end of her apprenticeship. While apprentices learn the trade, they are expected to communicate what they are working on and the history of the trade to visitors who filter in and out of the shop all day.

An apprenticeship in Colonial Williamsburg is incredibly niche and demanding, and the job descriptions reflect that. The following was advertised on the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's careers page in September 2021:

> "An apprentice supports the Education and Preservation Mission of Historic Trades and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation by learning and demonstrating the hand skills required to manufacture traditional work of the colonial period. The Apprentice Founder will research primary and secondary 18th-century sources and object-based study. The Apprentice will work with artisans of various trades, historians, curators, and conservators to better understand their trade. The Apprentice will preserve and perpetuate the trade skills by providing a pro-active interpretation of the work, the state of technology, and the diverse people who populated and produced such work in the 18th century."[39]

Because it is such a specified job with limited upward mobility, it is difficult for the Foundation to keep apprentices on, especially considering the pay is not particularly high. Based on

[39] "Apprentice Founder," Colonial Williamsburg, September 24, 2021.

employee reports on glassdoor.com, journeymen make, on average, anywhere from $40,000 to $60,000 yearly.[40] The Foundation does not publicize the pay of journeymen or apprentices on its career recruiting webpage. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development reports the median income in Williamsburg city to be $84,500, classifying journeymen and apprentices as low income.[41] With student loan debt increasing and sixty-three percent of bachelor's degree holders in the United States owing an average of $31,710 in federal loans, not counting private student loans, going into a career in historic trades is often not a financially viable option.[42] In a *#TradesTuesday* video panel on apprenticeships posted by Colonial Williamsburg, an apprentice weaver, Ellie Bain, noted that she was atypical among the other apprentices because she started her apprenticeship immediately after graduating from high school.[43]

Though most apprentices in the present-day start after completing an undergraduate degree, most eighteenth-century apprentices were children and adolescents. In Williamsburg, artisans made up forty-three percent of the head of the household population in 1775, meaning that of the 148 white men of working age in the city, sixty-three of them worked a skilled trade.[44] A 1965 research report by the Foundation describes the apprenticeship process in the blacksmithing trade. It notes that apprentices started at eight years old at the earliest, and completed their apprenticeships when they reached twenty-one. Many masters would

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[40] "Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Salaries," Glassdoor, n.d., https://www.glassdoor.com/Salary/Colonial-Williamsburg-Foundation-Salaries-E19785.htm.
[41] United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, "FY Income Limits Summary," FY 2021 Income Limits Documentation System, https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il2021/2021summary.odn.
[42] Melanie Hanson, "Student Loan Debt Statistics," Education Data Initiative, April 10, 2022, https://educationdata.org/student-loan-debt-statistics.
[43] *#TradesTuesdays Live Panel on Apprenticeship*, 2020, https://youtu.be/kxhJ_0C55E4.
[44] James H. Soltow, *The Occupational Structure of Williamsburg in 1775* (Colonial WIlliamsburg Foundation, 1956).

additionally teach their apprentices reading, writing, and math, along with training them in the craft and housing them. In return, the boy was bound to work for the tradesman for the duration of his contract. Local boys would not always go to a local craftsman for their apprenticeship, and they would often be sent elsewhere to learn a trade, even if their family also worked that trade.[45] A journeyman bookbinder noted to me that Williamsburg's bookbinder during the Revolution sent his son north to Pennsylvania for his bookbinding apprenticeship because the master of a shop would not typically apprentice his own son, and bookbinders were few and far between.

IDENTITY GROUPS IN HISTORIC TRADES:

A 1770 Alexandria, Virginia advertisement for the sale of seventeen enslaved people notes that the group includes "three valuable forgemen, a sawyer, a blacksmith, a carpenter, a miller, and a baker," indicating that training and expertise were provided to the enslaved population as well.[46] Of all Black Virginian tradesmen, seventy percent were carpenters in some capacity between 1717 and 1825. Some developed their skills before arriving in America, some were instructed or assisted by white craftsmen who were hired by their enslaver, some were trained by their craftsman enslaver, and, rarely, some enslaved Black Americans were sent on a formalized apprenticeship by their enslaver.[47] Slave traders purposefully sought out skilled African men who could easily work a skilled trade in America. However, it is essential to remember that this training was a means of obtaining economic success for white trades workers and another form of work with no pay and inhumane treatment for the enslaved. Generally

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[45] Harold B. Gill, Jr., "The Blacksmith in Colonial Virginia," Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library Research Report Series (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, October 1965).
[46] "Slaves," *Virginia Gazette*, August 23, 1770, Rockefeller Library Collections.
[47] Vanessa Elizabeth Patrick, "'As Good a Joiner as Any in Virginia:' African-Americans in the Eighteenth-Century Building Trades: A Sourcebook" (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Architectural Research Department, 1995).

speaking, the only ones who benefited from enslaved Black Americans learning trades skills were their enslavers.

Colonial Williamsburg is aware of the role women played in the eighteenth century, but its tradeswomen are forced to constantly defend that. In a 2021 article on Colonial Williamsburg's website, former apprentice joiner Amanda Doggett wrote the following, identifying women in historic trades:

> "Most free white Virginians fell into the Middling sort or Lower classes, meaning anyone who could work in some capacity would have to be gainfully employed. And this very obviously included women. We often say in our interpretation that there is nothing legal or social preventing a woman in the working class from performing a trade or participating in industry. We have records at Colonial Williamsburg of women working in nearly every trade, owning businesses, buying and selling goods at high rate for merchant practices, running taverns, printing a newspaper, and so on. If it is an aspect of colonial economics, women are very much present. Women, both formally and informally, are apprenticing in trades and are being mentioned in guild records in England as Mistresses of trades and taking on apprentices of their own. In fact, Diderot's Encyclopédie includes portrayals of women working in more than 20 plates."[48]

Although the apprentice to journeyman process is a set five-year program today, there were likely more people going through the process informally, including women and the enslaved, than we might think. An apprentice at the joinery noted to me that women were still paid less than men for working the same job.[49] Formalized apprenticeships for young white men were present and common but are not the whole story, and the tradespeople at the living history museum represent that.

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[48]Amanda Doggett, "To Make Ends Meet: Working Women in the 18th Century," Colonial Williamsburg, March 18, 2021, https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/learn/living-history/to-makes-ends-meet/?utm_campaign=mission&utm_content=1615925866&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.

[49] Fieldnotes, October 29, 2021.

OBSERVATIONS AND DATA:

Photo 2: A work table at Colonial Williamsburg's Joinery. December 17, 2021. Photo by author.

In January of 2022, I interviewed Bobbie Saye, a Journeyman Silversmith at Colonial Williamsburg. She has worked for Colonial Williamsburg for fifteen going on sixteen years, but she never intended to work in a place like Colonial Williamsburg, where she spends her days "wearing funny clothes." Bobbie worked for the National Park Service at Jamestown in Colonial National Historical Park as an archaeologist but was eventually laid off. When she was laid off, she applied to work at the nearby Colonial Williamsburg as an Orientation Interpreter and quickly learned that by applying to work as an Apprentice Silversmith, she could get paid to learn a trade, which was an appealing offer to her. Money still reserves an important place in the lives of tradespeople, though. Bobbie notes that while she has other goals when it comes to interpreting her trade, her main goal is often paying her rent every month. While there was a pay raise in the Foundation in the last year, many people are leaving lately. For the most part, that

stems from younger employees needing to leave the Foundation for somewhere that will pay them enough to eventually pay off their student loans.

Primarily, Bobbie finds importance in her ability to talk about the role of women. She told me that she wants people to know that women were not "just chained in their houses," and they did work in trades. Most commonly, visitors will ask Bobbie if women like her were "allowed" to work in the silver shop, some telling her that she "wouldn't have been here." Surprisingly, the people that tend to say the latter are older women, not men. Sometimes, Bobbie says, frustrating days happen, and she feels like she is "just entertaining people," but she reminds herself how important it is to learn from the past and that keeps her going. Being a woman in trades allows her to show people through her presence and historical backing that women were in all the trades in Williamsburg. Additionally, she highlighted the importance of the Foundation's increasing internet presence in bringing in new visitors, especially younger people, who she says it is all for.

Ted Boscana told me that there was a research day established for tradespeople during the COVID-19 pandemic, and I asked Bobbie about her experience with having a research day. She admits that, at least in her trade, that has essentially disappeared. Most of her learning happens on the job at the silver shop. Almost everything she knows about silversmithing, she learned at Colonial Williamsburg, and that process mirrors that of the eighteenth century. Outside of Colonial Williamsburg, most silversmiths have gone out of business in the last fifty years, making their primary outside connection Tiffany & Co. More "crafters" attend the packed, occasional week-long classes than tradespeople, making her skills increasingly unique. In the future, Bobbie wants the Foundation to host in-person and online classes where people can learn trades for a fee.

On one particular Friday, I encountered an apprentice silversmith in a gallery on the lower level of the art museums.[50] From the upper level, I could hear the grinding of the silversmith's saw echoing through the building. Not yet knowing that the silversmith was stationed there that day, I presumed that I was about to encounter a woodworker. Nonetheless, the young woman working at the lonely table in the art gallery greeted me, and the older couple trailed aimlessly behind me. She was on the shy side and informed me that she had been an apprentice silversmith for nearly a month, but had served as an intern at the shop for a year previously. By the end of her apprenticeship, what she described as an approximately seven-year undertaking, she should be able to recreate anything in the Dewitt Wallace Museum's silver gallery, which she gestured towards. A camera allowed me and the population of older couples that varied in size, particularly growing as a film ended elsewhere in the building, to see her cut the metal with her small saw tool. Largely, her interpretation centered around the economic value of silver and the ability to trade weighted silver products for other goods. Though she wanted us to see how she recreated these silver works, her emphasis was largely on why silver products were of value and their bearing on the middle class in Virginia.

Matthew Sanbury, as of January 16, 2022, is an Apprentice Carpenter at Colonial Williamsburg. He has only two weeks left of his apprenticeship and has been with the Foundation for six and a half years, first in the farm program that was shut down in 2016, before he was recruited to the carpentry program. Before Colonial Williamsburg, he worked at another living history museum called Great Hopes for ten years in woodworking and farming. At the end of his apprenticeship, his job will not change much, as the end of the carpentry apprenticeship consists of managing a project, typical of the responsibilities of a Journeyman.

[50] The building for the Colonial Williamsburg Art Museums is quite untraditional. There are two floors, the upper level being the level of entry. The lower level is underground and has no cell service (adding to the early American authenticity, perhaps).

Matthew reflected briefly on what he has observed from other apprentices over the years. From his apprentice class, he is the last one still working for the Foundation. Though he is the only one left, he did not have many goals going into this career. Mostly, he admits, the job seemed fun and he did not know what to do with his undergraduate degree in history otherwise. Now, he finds talking to guests to be one of the best parts of his job. Some apprentices come in only wanting to talk to people; Matthew described these apprentices as likely seeing Colonial Williamsburg more like Disneyland. On the other end of the spectrum, some apprentices find that they only want to work in the trade, and do not want to talk to visitors. Generally, he estimates, apprentices will stay for the rest of their career if they make it past three years. According to Ted Boscana, pay has a lot to do with this phenomenon.

Though Matthew is dedicated to his work, he does not believe that the job is important. He highlighted that carpentry, done with eighteenth-century methods, is obsolete by 150 years. Taking a utilitarian approach, he argues that his profession is "important to remember not for society to progress," and primarily important for culture rather than life itself. His relatively atypical interpretation toes the line between first and third-person interpretation, as he tries to avoid history and focuses on what he is working on that particular day in a historical context. He is conscious of the fact that what he does cannot be learned in a book, and he relies on experimental archaeology and repetition.

Barbara Sherer is a professional chef who has been with Colonial Williamsburg in historic foodways for about twenty-three years. She believes that if an apprentice stays for five years, they are there for life. This is especially true because she says, the journeyman title does not mean much outside of Colonial Williamsburg. Though the foodways program follows the five-level apprenticeship process, they operate a little differently from the rest of the trades. In

order for Barbara to cook something in the kitchen at work, she needs to find an eighteenth-century recipe for it. She has over 200 cookbooks for this purpose, and they will often post recipes on the Colonial Williamsburg website, though Barbara herself claims to not be very technology-oriented. When she cooks, many people will ask her if the food and fire are real (the answer is always yes). Still, she wants to help visitors, especially children learn from and connect to her work.

Womanhood is also essential to Barbara's experiences as a journeyman. She noted that her title is journey*man*, not journey*woman*, because, historically, only men could be trained professionally. When it came to professional titles, women did not exist. The master of the foodways shop is a man, and Barbara says that visitors are always surprised to see him cooking, as they expect to see only women in the kitchen. One male tailor emphasized that his trade was male-dominated in the eighteenth century, and noted there were no female weavers in the eighteenth century. Likely, I imagine, this tailor is often questioned about being a man in a trade that we see now as traditionally female. When I went to the Weaving, Spinning, and Dying Shop just moments later, the female weaver at the weaving shop said that there were, in fact, female weavers in the eighteenth century. Defense of one's presence in these shops is not unique to one's gender identity.

Three Black tradesmen, Ayinde Martin, Journeyman Carpenter, Harold Caldwell, Apprentice Carpenter, and Adam Canaday, Journeyman Coach Driver filmed and released a panel discussion on Black tradespeople in July 2020. Adam Canaday noted when asked, that he was not a historian first or a tradesman first, rather he was both. To the same question, Ayinde Martin highlighted that he is a historian first because he was educated on the history of the institution of slavery and its effect on his family long before he started working at Colonial

Williamsburg when he was twelve years old. They all agreed that the work they do importantly highlights how enslavement was a primary facet of these shops, especially because they, as Black trades interpreters are the ones who say it. Ayinde noted that visitors tend to feel empowered to ask Black interpreters more questions about enslavement, and part of that comes from the fact that they can take off their eighteenth-century clothing, but they cannot take off their skin at the end of their workday. Still, the panel is proud of what they can do and the impact they make through their work at Colonial Williamsburg. Adam said "we've got the ability to put words with that legacy [of Black people and their achievements in eighteenth-century Williamsburg] and to be able to make it real and give it a feeling, give it something to be proud of. Because if somebody that doesn't look like me can come to Colonial Williamsburg and leave and feel proud, there should be that same feeling for that Black kid that comes here."[51]

CATERING INTERPRETATION:

Each interpreter presents their craft differently. Most begin with simple explanations of what they are working on at that moment, but it varies greatly from there. Many interpreters like Barbara Sherer connect their work to the modern-day, especially when speaking to children. I noticed several trades interpreters pinpointed children and teenagers to connect them to the apprenticeship process. They identify that those adolescents are right at the age at which they would begin an apprenticeship in the eighteenth century. At the Printing Office on January 1, 2022, a craftsman highlighted literacy and perceptions of literacy in the eighteenth century to a group including a family with teenage children and a couple through his trade interpretation. He spoke in an engaging and lively manner and cracked jokes throughout the conversation. Similarly, on that same day in the Weaving, Spinning, and Dyeing Shop, the older woman

[51] *Black Tradespeople Panel Discussion* (Colonial Williamsburg on YouTube, July 1, 2020.), https://youtu.be/Jp4QSpVp3hI.

spinning thread explained the origins of the fibers she was spinning to two elementary school-aged children in a way that they could understand. After she finished talking to the children and their parents, another group walked in and jokingly asked her to "say what you just said." While this was a silly comment, it shows that the audience often does not know what to say or ask and it falls on the interpreter to assess the situation and interpret to a specific audience to the best of their abilities. Of course, all of the trades interpreters have set "go-to" introductions to their shop. Sometimes, these can sound rigid and unwelcoming, like an apprentice tailor I encountered who spoke as though he was reading from a script. Modes of interpretation differ in the online format as well, as I will explain further in the next section.

Unexpectedly, I had the opportunity to briefly practice working in the Blacksmith Shop and the Tin Shop in March of 2022.[52] A group of my peers was allowed to practice making an S-hook in the Blacksmith Shop. First, Ken Schwartz, the master of the shop showed us all how to make the S-hook, and explained tips and tricks about how to best do it. Then, two apprentices helped two of us at a time work on making a hook ourselves. After mere moments in the shop, I was placing an iron rod into a fire, pumping the fire, and manipulating the iron with a hammer and an anvil. Alex, the apprentice who was closely watching me and stepping in to help when I needed it, allowed me to make (safe) mistakes and learn from them. I noticed that his approach differed from the other apprentice, who stepped in faster to help my peers. Neither method was objectively better or worse than the other, but the clear difference in methods and processes between the two men to help us make the same thing showcases how individualized the practice is. At the Tin Shop, the journeymen and apprentices watched over my work much less closely

[52] This opportunity was afforded to me through a course sponsored by William & Mary's National Institute for American History and Democracy (NIAHD) certificate program in Public History and Material Culture, taught by Sarah McCartney. NIAHD has a strong partnership with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

than the apprentices at the Blacksmith Shop had. Again, the master of the shop introduced my group to what we were making, small candle holders which they had already begun creating the base for, and walked us through the making process. Then, we made the items under varying levels of supervision at each step. A considerable amount of the credit for these differences can be given to the fact that tin candle holder making is considerably less dangerous than blacksmithing.

Photo 3: The author learning to make an S-hook under the observation and instruction of an apprentice blacksmith. Photo by Sarah McCartney.

Historic Trades and the Outside World

The relationship between the public and the trades interpreters is an important aspect of the trades interpretation process. Today, our relationship with goods and the economy is entirely different than it was in the eighteenth century, contributing to the way people connect with and perceive trades interpretation. Implicit and explicit biases among visitors and modern consumer culture affect the way people process and react to the interpretation of the trades.

BIASES AND THE PUBLIC:

In the online panel on Black tradespeople, Ayinde Martin noted that he wished more African American people would want to work in the trades at Colonial Williamsburg. A majority of the interpretation staff at Colonial Williamsburg is white; however, 52% of the eighteenth-century population was Black.[53] Black and female interpreters are sometimes victims of insensitive comments by visitors. Colonial Williamsburg's policy on that is as follows: "At Colonial Williamsburg, we do not tolerate racist or sexist jokes, comments, or harassment from our guests or employees. We are committed to creating an environment where together, we can explore our complex history in a manner that is respectful. Violators of this policy will be asked to leave the premises."[54] History is often politicized, and being a part of interpreting it can create unsafe spaces for individuals of marginalized groups, particularly as people like Gable and Handler identify Colonial Williamsburg as "Republican Disneyland" (implying a safe space for conservative social ideologies).[55] This policy would not exist if there was no reason for it.

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[53] *Black Tradespeople Panel Discussion*.
[54] "Know Before You Go," Colonial Williamsburg, https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/visit/know-before-you-go/?from=navvisit.
[55] Gable and Handler, 220.

ONLINE CONTENT:

In the twenty-first century, social media is integral to any museum's outreach. The *#TradesTuesday* series on YouTube and Facebook Live, where viewers can submit questions, is the largest expansion to Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation of historic trades online. The Foundation posted videos online before the COVID-19 pandemic, but most of these videos were short advertisements to come to visit rather than educational or entertaining videos. When the three-month pause on in-person interpretation began in March 2020, interpreters and other employees saw an opening to increase their online presence. Along with YouTube and Facebook, videos were also uploaded to a new Colonial Williamsburg television channel on Roku TV and Amazon Fire TV.[56] These videos allow trades interpreters to have longer and deeper conversations with the public about their work and its history. Video is likely the closest to on-site interpretation many individuals will access.

Everyone that I interviewed seemed to agree that the *#TradesTuesday* videos brought in a wider audience both in-person and online. In-person, interpreters noticed that people from out of town, especially homeschool families, reported that they came to visit because they saw the videos online. Director of Historic Trades Ted Boscana emphasized an increased emphasis on sharing research outside of the Foundation as they are their "own worst enemies with getting outside."[57] This work seems to be paying off, and the videos are reaching an international audience that otherwise would not have interacted with Colonial Williamsburg. Older interpreters like Barbara Sherer in Foodways, don't identify as very "tech-oriented" but still do videos for Facebook. Foodways also has operated a blog with recipes for years in addition to the newer digital initiatives. Though eighteenth-century trades skills are undeniably dying, digital

[56] "Colonial Williamsburg 2020 Annual Report," 16.
[57] Ted Boscana, interview by Cecelia Eure, Web, January 16, 2022.

media like these videos, blogs, and posts on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook allow craft skills from before industrialization to connect to the digital world.

MAKING FOR THE SAKE OF IT:

Digital and in-person interpretation emphasize how the work of these craftspeople is not centered on producing items as quickly as possible to sell; rather, the doing and creating are the core of the practice. The silversmiths make more products to teach and learn the art of silversmithing, not to make a profit. In a way, the relationship between the tradespeople and the economy is a strange one. While the system is exploitative of craftsmen, with its low wages and lack of ownership of one's work, it provides an escape from traditional capitalism and allows workers to create and grow without fear of not producing enough. The livelihood of the tradespeople at Colonial Williamsburg is not tied to their ability to make and sell goods. This is not reflective of the eighteenth-century system as tradespeople then did make goods for sale, but does highlight the creation of handmade goods in a way that visitors do not see in the present-day outside of hobby work and occasional independent artisans.

"FAST" TIMES AHEAD: PRODUCTION TODAY:

Fast fashion is a relatively new phenomenon defined as "a design, manufacturing, and marketing method focused on rapidly producing high volumes of clothing. Garment production utilizes trend replication and low-quality materials (like synthetic fabrics) in order to bring inexpensive styles to the public."[58] While fast fashion allows more people to access trendy goods, it often negatively impacts workers and the environment. Rather than garments lasting for decades, being repaired and altered as styles and bodies change, textiles end up in landfills

[58] Audrey Stanton, "What Is Fast Fashion, Anyway?," The Good Trade, https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/what-is-fast-fashion#:~:text=Fast%20fashion%20is%20a%20design,inexpensive%20styles%20to%20the%20public.

after just weeks of wear. While some items are donated to second-hand sellers, often items that do not sell end up in landfills. 11.3 million tons of textiles were reported by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to be sent to landfills in 2018. 17 million tons of textiles were estimated to have been produced in that same year.[59] The largest fast fashion brand is an online-only retailer called Shein, which estimated itself to have 43.7 million active shoppers and gained 15.7 billion dollars in revenue in 2021.[60]

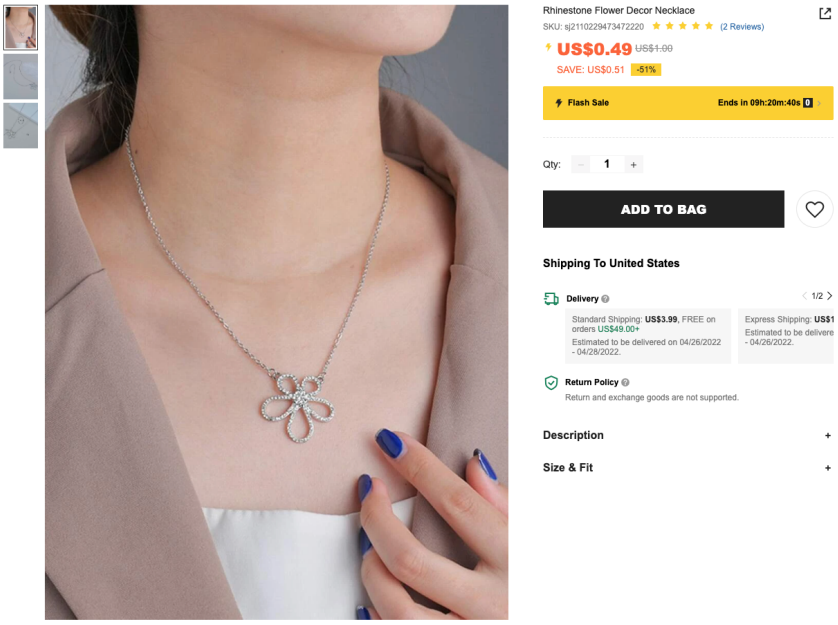

Image 4: A necklace sells for $0.49 US dollars on sale (originally one dollar) at shein.com.[61]

Similar processes apply to the furniture world. IKEA, a Swedish company that sells furniture that the buyer assembles on their own at home, is the largest furniture company in the

[59] "Facts and Figures about Materials, Waste and Recycling," United States Environmental Protection Agency, https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/durable-goods-product-specific-data#FurnitureandFurnishings.
[60] David Curry, "Shein Revenue and Usage Statistics (2022)," Business of Apps, March 11, 2022, https://www.businessofapps.com/data/shein-statistics/.
[61] "Rhinestone Flower Decor Necklace," Store, Shein, accessed April 13, 2022, https://us.shein.com/Rhinestone-Flower-Decor-Necklace-p-6778942-cat-1755.html.

world.[62] Like Shein, IKEA does not make products that are built to last. In the world of Shein clothing and IKEA furniture, trendy goods are accessible at a low price. Need a dress for a wedding you are attending next month? On us.shein.com you can get the latest styles for less than twenty dollars. While IKEA notes commitments to sustainability and workers' rights on their website, the low prices and quality of their products allow individuals to buy and dispose of their furniture quickly, easily, and without financial remorse. In 2018, the EPA reported that 12.1 million tons of furniture and furnishings were generated, with 9.7 million tons taken to landfills. The EPA does not have statistics on the eighteenth century; however, they do report only 2.2 million tons of furniture and furnishings were produced and landfilled in 1960, when industrialization was already in full swing, much less than in recent years.[63]

People no longer repair things based on a lack of "skill, time and cost," but some argue that "traditional institutionalised knowledge is key to steering users towards repair: it is believed if individuals are taught how to repair they will in fact repair."[64] This is not to say that historic trades interpretation in Colonial Williamsburg has any substantial effect on the desire for the masses to create sturdy, sustainable goods. Someone might leave the tailor's shop and decide to try out sewing a little bit, but that would generally only result in a hobby, rather than the formation of a new skill utilized for the creation of all of that individual's wardrobe. The fascination with these trades results from the cultural system of production we now have. Repair skills and the desire to create long-lasting goods went away with industrialization, and historic trades represent art and an important asset that society has lost.

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[62] C. Simionato, "IKEA - Statistics & Facts," Statista, March 7, 2022, statista.com/topics/1961/ikea/.
[63] "Facts and Figures about Materials, Waste and Recycling."
[64] Marium Durrani, "The Becoming of Repair: Understanding Garment Mending through a Practice Theory Perspective," in *Eco-Friendly and Fair : Fast Fashion and Consumer Behaviour*, ed. Carolin Becker-Leifhold and Mark Heuer (London: Routledge, 2018), 102.

Making things is now an alternative lifestyle. Yes, people still build houses, make ceramics, and sew clothing pieces together. However, most of these skills are industrialized and not done by hand. Etsy.com is a website wherein people sell primarily handmade goods. The company notes the following on its website:

> "In a time of increasing automation, it's our mission to keep human connection at the heart of commerce. That's why we built a place where creativity lives and thrives because it's powered by people. We help our community of sellers turn their ideas into successful businesses. Our platform connects them with millions of buyers looking for an alternative—something special with a human touch, for those moments in life that deserve imagination."[65]

As the company says, handmade products are an interesting "alternative" to typical modern-day goods. Historic trades interpretation serves a similar purpose– preserving these previous default means of production in a world where the skills are alternatives.

[65] "Keep Commerce Human," Etsy, https://www.etsy.com/about?ref=ftr.

Conclusion

My work over the past year with this project evaluates the historic trades division of Colonial Williamsburg, a program that is unique in its ability to preserve and showcase skills and stories that would otherwise be lost to industrialization. I have made an effort to explore the systemic issues present at Colonial Williamsburg regarding how the Foundation pays its workers, as well as racial and gender biases.

The trades program works to preserve over twenty eighteenth-century craft trades through experimental archaeology and interpretation and has been doing so for over eighty years. These skills were once vital to life in the eighteenth century and now serve as an education-entertainment hybrid program in the Virginia heat. An increase in online content brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened new visitation and engagement with the historic trades program. People connect to the act of making and find it charming, particularly as most people do not interact with the production processes of the goods they interact with daily. Quality interpretation allows for individuals to find something about the process, whether it be the act of learning a skill or a fascination with the modern equivalent of a good. It is essential to view historic trades interpretation with consideration for the fact that tradespeople work off of little to no written record and essentially portray an imagined past.

How we engage with the past adapts depending on the present day, and historic trades interpretation is a product of that. Colonial Williamsburg replicates what the city was centuries ago, but as David Lowenthal writes "ultimately the replica effaces and replaces the original past."[66] Still, "domesticating the foreign past" allows it to reach, educate, and enamor a wider audience.[67] Not only does Colonial Williamsburg provide an architecturally appropriate setting

[66] David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country – Revisited* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 461.
[67] Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, 463.

for historic trades to seem relevant, but it allows for craftspeople-historians to learn more about a skill that is practically obsolete but intellectually quite remarkable.

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