

# A Conversation with Thad Tate

*Conducted by*

Fredrika J. Teute

THE Institute of Early American History and Culture bears the mark of numbers of historians in its formation and direction over the years, but none has had a more sustained impact than Thaddeus Tate. Much of his adult life has been entwined with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, the College of William and Mary, and the Institute. For seven years, beginning in 1954, he worked as a research associate and then as assistant director in Colonial Williamsburg's research department. In 1961, he joined the College's history faculty and the Institute as book review editor for the *William and Mary Quarterly*. That step initiated a twenty-eight-year association with the Institute. He served as editor of the *Quarterly* from 1966 to 1972 and as director from 1972 until his retirement in 1989. No other historian has filled roles of professional responsibility at the Institute for such a period of time, and none so fully embodies the Institute's history and its living memory.

Thad Tate's friends and colleagues know him as a multifaceted person who can recommend the hike with the greatest view in the West, the best restaurant in any town, and the last steam-powered train ride on the continent. Many have experienced his generous support in the development of their work, and they also recognize him as a scholar who has made valuable contributions to early American historiography. His talent as a historian is brought to bear in this interview, placing the evolution of the

Ms. Teute is editor of publications at the Institute of Early American History and Culture and a former associate editor of the *Papers of John Marshall*. She gratefully acknowledges the keyboard expertise of Ruth M. Vaughan, who transcribed the tapes. She thanks the following people for assisting with background research: Susan H. Godson, who generously shared materials from her work on the history of the College of William and Mary, Deirdre A. Dolan, Mary Carroll Johansen, Elizabeth L. Maurer, and Rachel K. Onuf. She also thanks Michael McGiffert and other members of the Institute staff whose help has made this in many ways a collaborative Institute project.

In the footnotes, the dating of tenure at the Institute is based on when names appear in staff listings in the *William and Mary Quarterly*. Although directors and editors typically begin employment in the summer or fall, their names usually do not appear in the *Quarterly* until the following January issue. The latter date is used. In the interview, Thad Tate usually refers to the academic year schedule, when people actually came and left. Thus there may be a disparity in years between text and notes. For instance, Tate became book review editor of the *Quarterly* in the fall of 1961, but his name does not appear until the January 1962 issue.

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Institute in relation to the field of study that he has helped to shape over a period of more than three decades.

My own association with the Institute extends through two of those decades, beginning in 1971, when I came to Williamsburg for the M.A.-Editorial Apprenticeship Program offered by the College and the Institute. That experience framed my subsequent career and my understanding of the importance of historical inquiry and scholarly publishing. Interviewing Thad Tate offered an opportunity to gather his recollections and reflections concerning the Institute's role and activities for more than half of its existence.

The conversation presented in the following pages comprises excerpts from interviews conducted in Williamsburg at intervals during 1992. A full transcript is in the Institute's archives.

*Tute: Between the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and the Institute, you have spent most of your professional career here in Williamsburg. When was the first time you came to Williamsburg?*

Tate: I had an aunt and uncle who lived in Newport News, and I visited them with my parents when I was about nine years old.<sup>1</sup> We drove to Williamsburg for a day; this would have been the early 1930s. We did not go in any buildings, but I distinctly remember wandering around the Capitol and looking at the restored area.

*Was there a lot of bustle and activity? Were they reconstructing buildings at that time, or was it still a sleepy village?*

My recollection runs strongly on the sleepy village side. I don't remember having any great sense of a large number of tourists around. And things were new enough that my father looked over in the dirt and found a Civil War minié ball, which suggested that they had been doing some digging and construction.

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*You went to the University of North Carolina. Did you take a break from that for the war?*

I was in the Navy. I started at North Carolina as a freshman in the fall of 1941 and came back in the summer of 1946, finished my undergraduate work in two quarters, and then moved into the graduate program doing M.A. work in American history.

*Were you interested even then in colonial history?*

I started graduate school with the intention of working in United States history, but in any field but early American. As it turned out, there were two graduate seminars, the famous UNC seminar in those days—Fletcher Green's southern history seminar with about forty graduate students in it—and a colonial seminar with four or five. I wasn't very drawn to southern history, I must say, or to that kind of mob scene for a seminar, and so I took the early American seminar, and one thing led to another.

<sup>1</sup> Thaddeus Wilbur Tate, Jr., was born in Winston-Salem, N. C., in 1924.

My interests really were in the early national period, so I wasn't far off the early American period.

*At that time had you ever heard about the Institute of Early American History and Culture? It was then just four or five years old.*

It came up briefly in Hugh Lefler's early American seminar. If you look back at the Institute records, you'll find minutes of an advisory group of historians who in '43 made the recommendation for creating the Institute. Lefler was in that group. Somewhere in my papers I have a set of the minutes which he gave out to the seminar members, and I remember he talked about the founding of the Institute.

I can't resist one story about my graduate work in early American history. Lefler put a lot of emphasis on bibliography, but in going all the way through an M.A. in early American history at North Carolina, I never knew there was a man named Perry Miller. Lefler's extensive course on bibliography, I realized later, had some of Miller's books, but Lefler was an uncompromising opponent of the idea of taking the Puritans too seriously, and I guess a little of that rubbed off on me—I hope not too much.

*When Lefler brought the Institute to your attention, what impression did you get of its mission?*

The main thing was the *William and Mary Quarterly*. I began a subscription to the *Quarterly* with volume four in 1948. I read and was very much influenced by Edmund Morgan's pioneer article "Colonial Ideas of Parliamentary Power,"<sup>2</sup> and this played some part in my decision to go on to doctoral work at Brown, where Morgan was teaching. I had been looking for somewhere out of the South, somewhere with a good library, so another factor in the decision was the John Carter Brown Library.

*You worked for the National Park Service. Was that between finishing the M.A. and going on to Brown?*

Yes, I had pushed right through from my Navy discharge, and I was ready for a little time off and uncertain about what I wanted to do—not about continuing graduate school but whether I wanted to stay at North Carolina. I had an opportunity to take a summer job at Yorktown as a historian.

*How did that come to your attention?*

The 1948 version of the old-boy network. Lefler knew the park superintendent and had sent several students up there to work. I found out later that one had spent most of the summer drunk, so his main recommendation for me was that he thought I would stay sober.

*What did you do for that job?*

I was a summer ranger historian, as they called it in those days. I worked the information center, took school tours, put the flags on the battlefield on weekends and took them down, worked as interpreter at the Moore House—the Surrender House—and sometimes at Jamestown, and cleaned privies if that was what needed to be done. I also had my first real acquaintance with Williamsburg. It was where you went to the movies and

<sup>2</sup> WMQ, 3d Ser., V (1948), 311–341.

sometimes to eat. I did at that time meet Douglass Adair,<sup>3</sup> though not in a historical context. A square dancing craze was sweeping Yorktown and Williamsburg, and Douglass was an avid square dancer.

I remember that in the spring of 1949 the Institute Council came to tour the battlefield. It was as if they had come down from heaven, making their grand appearance. We were really in great awe. Samuel Eliot Morison was a commanding presence in the group. He had brought a poodle, and it understood only French, so Morison had occasionally to speak to the poodle in French. Another historian who attracted our attention at that time was William Willcox, who had just done "The British Road to Yorktown: A Study in Divided Command,"<sup>4</sup> which was for military historians an influential article and one that spoke directly to what we were doing. I remember a later time when Douglas Freeman was working on the Washington biography and brought an entourage. There was a great deal of hubbub, and several limousines drove up and went out to the Washington headquarters site, where a fairly elaborate picnic was spread out.

That summer job turned into a year-long job. They really needed somebody for the year, and I was still uncertain about returning to North Carolina. For early American history in 1948 and 1949, there were not very many places to go. Leonard Labaree was at Yale, but he was nearing retirement. You had to think twice before you undertook the rigors of working with Morison at Harvard. Frank Craven was still at New York University—had not yet gone to Princeton. There was Wisconsin with Merrill Jensen. But when you started looking around, there really were not a great many places. I don't know quite how I even knew about Brown, but I knew about the John Carter Brown Library. There were also some North Carolina links. Barnaby Keeney, who was then the graduate dean and a medieval historian at Brown, was a UNC alum. I was farmed out to Brown by the people who had known Keeney. He was interested in getting southern students at Brown and making it a less regional graduate school. So, again, I'm admitting there was an old-boy network.

*When you went to Brown in 1949, you knew that you were going to pursue your interest in early American history. Did you begin studying with Edmund Morgan right away?*

Yes, I took Morgan's seminar and Revolutionary course and took largely English and European history to meet my other fields.

*Did you decide on your dissertation topic while you were at Brown?*

Morgan was working very much on the Revolution then, and I was influenced by that, but it was also a major interest of my own. I started working at Morgan's suggestion on the question of the meaning of the Declaration of Independence in its own time. The more I studied, the more I concluded I had to approach the question through the manner in which the Declaration was applied—hence a study of the social compact

<sup>3</sup> Adair was book review editor of the *WMQ* in 1946 and editor from 1947 to 1955.

<sup>4</sup> *American Historical Review*, LII (1946-1947), 1-35.

theory and the way it seemed to operate in the process of constitution making.<sup>5</sup> I never was very attuned to abstract theory, but I thought I might be able to get into the applications of the contract theory. The result was that article I wrote for the *Quarterly*, somewhat at the instigation of Jack Greene.<sup>6</sup>

*You left Brown in 1954. Where did you go then?*

To Independence Hall for the National Park Service. I'm fond of telling—to the point of boredom, I'm sure, as far as they're concerned—graduate students who are moaning about their job prospects—and legitimately so—that the mid-fifties was another terrible time. A catch-up in hiring happened after the war, and then by the '50s more students were coming out of graduate school. The GI Bill had given a lot of people with academic interests—myself included—the means to attend graduate school. Suddenly, history was a very crowded field relative to the number of jobs.

Brown was a small graduate school without any systematic placement system, and open job listings were still in the future. I was on the Civil Service register as a result of having had that earlier Park Service job. There was an opening at Independence Hall, and the senior historian there was a man I had worked with at Yorktown, Edward Riley. So I went with the idea that it was a permanent job.

*But it wasn't?*

No, the position was, but what happened was that Ed Riley soon became director of research at Colonial Williamsburg. At a time when there was very little expansion anywhere else, he was beginning with a mandate to expand the research program. The tidewater Virginia area had some attraction, and I jumped at the opportunity and came in the fall of '54 to work in the CW research department.

*What kinds of things was CW research getting into, and what did Ed Riley turn you on to doing?*

This is an interesting story in the context of the evolution of interpretive policies at Colonial Williamsburg. CW had in the wake of World War II placed special emphasis in its interpretive program on the Revolution, especially the events that had taken place in Williamsburg and the central role that Virginia leaders had played. Yet in expanding its research effort, Colonial Williamsburg had commissioned one of the major New York management consulting firms to look at its interpretive program. They had come up with a plan to move out beyond political events to the larger society of Williamsburg and Virginia and to undertake a vast array of research studies, initially as background for the interpretive personnel. These were not designed for publication particularly, but they would be full-scale studies of the Virginia setting and its social and institutional dimensions. "Social" included some of what we think of as social history

<sup>5</sup> "The Theory of the Social Contract in the American Revolution, 1776–1787" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1960).

<sup>6</sup> "The Social Contract in America, 1774–1787: Revolutionary Theory as a Conservative Instrument," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXII (1965), 375–391.

today but also things like Williamsburg amusements and recreation and taverns and so forth. There was also a craft research program to do training manuals and background reports for the craft shops. The result was a master list of topics, and people who were being hired were encouraged to look at this list and pick one to work on.

I was engaged to do a study of the coming of the Revolution in Williamsburg, but I also opted rather quickly to study the Negro in Williamsburg, as the 1950s was still using that term.<sup>7</sup> I had not done work in that area, but the subject appealed to me. Among the other new staff members, Hugh Rankin worked on the theatre and also later did a general court study.<sup>8</sup> James Soltow produced what became his study of the economic role of eighteenth-century Williamsburg.<sup>9</sup> The personnel overseeing the program were sometimes impatient that the work wasn't moving fast enough, and ultimately it wound down with a feeling that not much had been accomplished. But these studies, along with Jane Carson's work on amusements and social life in Williamsburg and her James Innes study, made a rather remarkable group of monographs.<sup>10</sup> As social history, they suffered a bit from a lack of methodology and technique. You just did it by compiling the information; there was not much methodological apparatus and little knowledge of quantification.

At any rate, I took up the study of blacks. I never finished the coming of the Revolution study, though it certainly undergirds my chapters in *Colonial Virginia: A History*,<sup>11</sup> but I became very much engaged in the study of blacks. This coincided with some political and social concerns I had as a result of my Chapel Hill experience, when I'd gotten caught up in the question of civil rights and was very much touched by the 1947 Truman report, which people now tend to forget about.<sup>12</sup>

*Hadn't Brown v. Board of Education just been handed down when you came to Williamsburg?*

Yes. There was a very moderate Williamsburg-area interracial study group, of which Bill Towner<sup>13</sup> was a founding father, and I was involved in it. So I was definitely influenced by the times. I am unabashed in believing that historians do choose their work in terms of what's going on around them, and I was interested and sympathetic to the civil rights question and found that a good opportunity for work.

*Wasn't your topic still ahead of its time?*

Yes, that's right. Historians were not yet doing much in black history,

<sup>7</sup> *The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, Va., 1957).

<sup>8</sup> *The Theater in Colonial America* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1965); *Criminal Trial Proceedings in the General Court of Colonial Virginia* (Williamsburg, Va., 1965).

<sup>9</sup> *The Economic Role of Williamsburg* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1965).

<sup>10</sup> *Colonial Virginians at Play* (Williamsburg, Va., 1958); *James Innes and His Brothers of the Flat Hat Club* (Williamsburg, Va., 1965).

<sup>11</sup> By Warren M. Billings, John E. Selby, and Tate (White Plains, N. Y., 1986).

<sup>12</sup> *To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights* (Washington, D. C., 1947).

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence W. Towner was associate editor, 1955–1956, and editor of the *WMQ*, 1956–1962.

at least for the colonial period. There had always been the main work on nineteenth-century slavery and freed blacks after the Civil War, but for the colonial period I don't think much had been done since such studies as the old James Ballagh dissertation on slavery in Virginia.<sup>14</sup>

*How would you compare the kinds of subjects that CW researchers were tackling in the 1950s with the kinds of topics being pursued today?*

I think research was being driven to some extent by comparable social and political concerns. People think of the '50s as a time of great political complacency. The consensus historians are branded as conservatives, yet historians did take off from real political concerns—not only the question of blacks but the idea of the Revolution itself. In reflecting a consensus view of the Revolution, I tended to think the message was not altogether positive, that it contributed to understanding why the United States of the '50s was so conservative and why liberals and radicals fared so poorly. In one sense, consensus history may have been celebratory, but in another sense it was not: in part it offered a critical explanation of why it's often so hard to move the American electorate. I learned *how* hard by working in the second Adlai Stevenson campaign. If you want to know how lonely it can be to be a Democrat, you should have worked Williamsburg for Stevenson in that election.

*Didn't you spend time working on the CW movie, The Story of a Patriot?*

I was assigned as research historian for the movie.<sup>15</sup> There were other research personnel to check, for example, on historical accuracy of buildings and furnishings, but I was the person assigned for the documentary research and the political story. It took a lot of time. CW had launched the idea of a film of some sort just before I came to Williamsburg, and James Agee had been engaged to do a script but had then died very tragically and unexpectedly. CW had received a rough treatment of the film that Agee was working on, and they were trying to determine whether to go ahead with it. I was assigned to write a critique of it from a historian's point of view. It was to present a day in the life of Williamsburg with a cast of characters that had no big names—not identifiable historical personages but very ordinary people, including slaves. Agee was willing to grapple with life at every level of society. It was a remarkable and exciting document—the sort of thing one might have expected CW to be a little apprehensive about making, though in fact I think they were interested. In the end, a wise conclusion was made that it was so much Agee's personal statement that nobody else could finish it. It would have been almost a farce to have tried, so they simply paid for the rights, I think, and stashed it away in the files.

*Did CW make a totally fresh start?*

Yes. They then went with a major Hollywood studio to do a large-scale film. The ruling idea was to avoid a literal orientation film but rather to introduce all the major buildings within the context of the history of the

<sup>14</sup> James C. Ballagh, *A History of Slavery in Virginia* (Baltimore, 1902).

<sup>15</sup> Filmed in 1955–1956 and released in 1957.

Revolution in Virginia. Paramount Pictures agreed to produce the film, assigning first-line production people—as director, George Seaton, who had won an Academy Award for *The Country Girl* and was one of their senior directors, and as scriptwriter, Emmett Lavery, who had done historical films on the Billy Mitchell court martial and on Oliver Wendell Holmes. They wanted research backup, and I drew the job. I worked closely with the Hollywood people, including a hectic two weeks in New York City when Seaton was casting for the film at the same time we were trying to finish the script. We holed up in a fairly elegant hotel. I'd go down to the New York Public Library when we ran out of research material. I didn't do any scriptwriting, but when they decided on a scene, I tried to provide the research.

*What kind of sources did you use?*

Mostly printed sources. Lavery made the decision to go with the major historic figures and a sort of Everyman, the John Fry role. In addition to guiding Lavery to biographies, I did background pieces on some of the major figures. I read about everything on the coming of the Revolution that was in the *Virginia Gazette* for events like the day of fasting and prayer and Jefferson's planning of it in the Capitol. That night scene was written pretty much out of Jefferson's autobiography. For dialogue, a lot of which was tricky, we used recorded political comments. In eighteenth-century formal political discourse, my sense is that the separation of the oral and the written was not rigid. The most indispensable book for the scriptwriter was John C. Miller's *Origins of the American Revolution*<sup>16</sup> because we could use that for excellent quotations. I did a series of five-to-fifteen-page research reports for specific scenes or people.

*Do you remember ever getting into a situation with the Hollywood people where you thought they were really violating historical authenticity for dramatic or popular effect?*

There was nothing really very major, but there were little bits and pieces of things where for one reason or another you made a compromise. I remember one occasion with the speaker of the House of Burgesses. The film refers to the speaker's robe, and our assumption was that it would have been a black robe, because this was a political and not a judicial office. But the Hollywood people wanted a red robe so that when they took the long shots, the speaker would stand out. So red robe it was, although we objected all the way. We had more trouble with the rector of Bruton Parish, Frank Craighill, when we did the day of fasting and prayer scene. Church decoration in eighteenth-century Virginia was pretty simple, but Craighill insisted on using the church's best furnishings, so we had gold festival altar hangings. We could either comply or not do a scene in Bruton Parish Church. One thing I take a lot of ribbing about is that I'm elected to the House of Burgesses or the Revolutionary convention, the only election I ever won in my life. You hear my name called out the window of the Capitol, but I was in fact not there. They needed an eighteenth-

<sup>16</sup> Boston, 1943.



century-sounding name that wasn't an actual Virginia figure. That's my back door into history.

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*When the Institute was started in the mid-1940s, the idea was that Colonial Williamsburg and the College of William and Mary would make it a center for collaborative research on early American history. In the mid-1950s, when you came to CW, was that mission still envisioned?*

I think the Institute program was still being defined, although the mid-1950s were very critical to that process. There was in many ways a closer identification of the Institute and Colonial Williamsburg than later became true, because the Institute was initially housed in CW's main office building, the Goodwin Building. By the time I came, it had moved to the second and third floors above what is now the Rizzoli Bookstore, on Duke of Gloucester Street, but it was still closer to the Goodwin Building, where the CW library was housed, than to the College. There was thus extensive personal contact between the Institute and CW staffs, though I don't think the Institute was necessarily initiating research of direct interest to Colonial Williamsburg. There were sometimes feelings, in fact, that the Institute would go out of its way *not* to publish Virginia history, though it had produced an edition of Robert Beverley's *History* and one of its first major successes was Charles Sydnor's *Gentlemen Freeholders*.<sup>17</sup> The truth of the matter is that very little Virginia work was being done. The Institute actually seemed at times a stronghold of Puritan studies, but that was then the major interest of many early American scholars. Although a research center like the Institute can to some extent shape a field, its activities are essentially a product of the current interests of scholars in the field.

The relationship with the College was not necessarily closer than that with CW, except that the *Quarterly* editor and book review editor were teaching relatively heavy course loads in the history department. There may have been a little feeling that the Institute was more closely engaged with Colonial Williamsburg. Let me underline, though, that Lester Cappon,<sup>18</sup> although he had a close Colonial Williamsburg connection because he had been its archivist, defined the research function of the Institute as essentially independent of both sponsors. It did what the major scholarship of the day demanded.

But the early relationship of the Institute and Colonial Williamsburg, during Carl Bridenbaugh's time as first director<sup>19</sup> and also under Lyman

<sup>17</sup> The Institute's first book publication was Beverley, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, ed. Louis B. Wright (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1947). Charles S. Sydnor's *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia* (Chapel Hill, N. C.) was published in 1952.

<sup>18</sup> Lester J. Cappon was editor of publications, 1945–1955, acting director, 1955, editor of the *WMQ*, 1955–1956, and director, 1955–1969.

<sup>19</sup> From 1945 to 1950.

Butterfield<sup>20</sup> and Cappon, was probably closer then it later became. All three early directors were established scholars at a time when CW's research staff was still small. Later, the expansion of the CW research department created a body of professionally trained CW historians who were engaged primarily in research and not performing administrative jobs in its interpretation program. If that created less need for the Institute, it built frequent contact between the Institute and the research department, particularly after Towner and Jim Smith<sup>21</sup> came. They were younger scholars, contemporaries of many of us who were also new at CW. Whether it was a mutual discussion of things of historic interest or the famous Lord Botetourt Chowder and Marching Society, which was the penny poker club of Williamsburg, there were a lot of contacts.

*About the time you came in 1954, wasn't there a large transition in the Institute staff?*

Yes. Douglass Adair had been *Quarterly* editor, and Lyman Butterfield was director to the end of 1954. Then Towner came in, Abbot<sup>22</sup> became the book review editor, Smith came as editor of publications—all in 1955. It was a very tough year, a difficult transition that raised a real question about the future of the Institute.

*Why did Adair and Butterfield leave?*

I think Adair, with a heavy teaching load in addition to the editorship, was always behind on things and couldn't get his own work done. I suspect that Butterfield, too, wanted to get on with his own scholarship. I don't think people thought that the Institute budget was too tight or that working conditions were intolerable. These were scholars who just reached a point where they had done what they were doing as long as they wanted to and had attractive opportunities elsewhere.

But it did raise a question. Suddenly, the director was gone, the *Quarterly* editor was gone, and only Lester Cappon was still there. For that interim in 1954–1955 Lester was acting director, and there really wasn't anyone much there but him. Jane Carson<sup>23</sup> had worked in a position that never again existed, as a Ph.D.-level administrative assistant to Butterfield, but she shifted to Colonial Williamsburg because of the expansion of the research program and the uncertainty as to whether her position would be continued.

There was some question, in fact, whether the Institute would survive. Ed Morgan was on the Council at that time. In those days, when I was still trying to finish my thesis, whenever he came I would have dinner with him and his wife, Helen, the night before the formal Institute dinner. I vividly remember that he thought the Council might have come for that '55 spring meeting to oversee the dissolution of the Institute. In the event, the

<sup>20</sup> Lyman H. Butterfield was director from 1951 through 1954.

<sup>21</sup> James Morton Smith was editor of publications from 1955 to 1966.

<sup>22</sup> William W. Abbot was book review editor of the *WMQ*, 1955–1961, and editor, 1963–1966.

<sup>23</sup> Assistant to the director from 1952 to 1955, when she became a research associate in Colonial Williamsburg's research department.

decision was made to promote Lester to director and to fill the vacant positions and move forward. Things could conceivably have gone the other way.

*It was at that time that Colonial Williamsburg and the College commissioned Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., to do a study of the Institute and report on its status.<sup>24</sup> In that study, Schlesinger affirmed the importance of the Institute and recommended that it be given a formal charter.*

Clearly, things came together with an intention to reinvigorate the Institute. Within another year, Towner and Smith had come, and in both cases—Towner was a bundle of well-directed energy, and Jim Smith rapidly expanded the book list—things just took off. Lester also could give more time to the directorship.

*Schlesinger's report emphasized research and publication as the Institute's primary goals. Was that a signal to redirect its energies?*

Yes. And the postdoctoral fellowship, as we think of it now, came out of that Schlesinger report, too.

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*In 1961 you joined the William and Mary history department and the Institute staff as book review editor for the Quarterly. Had you done any teaching for the College before that?*

I taught some in the evening college of that period. I have to confess that I was always a homesick academic who wanted to teach. I liked the research work at CW but missed an academic setting. Bill Abbot left, and I was recruited by the history chairman as his replacement. Harold Fowler—Jimmy Fowler, as everybody knew him later—was very close to Lester Cappon and the Institute but also was concerned with replacing Bill Abbot's substantial teaching load in the department. I had finally completed the thesis in 1960, so I was now with Ph.D.

*At that time, a turnover of Quarterly editors occurred. What was happening?*

Bill Abbot became editor of the *Journal of Southern History* at Rice. Bill Towner received a year's leave on a research grant from the Center for the History of Liberty, Oscar Handlin's think tank at Harvard. He went on to the Newberry Library from there. Jack Greene<sup>25</sup> came as visiting editor. During that year, he was offered the job—as most jobs have been offered to Jack at one time or another and sometimes taken!—but decided not to stay. The upshot, in the spring of '62, was that Towner was not coming back and Greene was not going to stay. But Bill Abbot wasn't altogether happy at Rice, and he came back in the middle of the year.

*So you worked with several Quarterly editors?*

Yes, and I must say the experience with Jack Greene was unique. There were some things I would have learned from working with somebody as

<sup>24</sup> "Report on the Institute of Early American History and Culture" (1954), Institute archives.

<sup>25</sup> Greene was visiting editor of the *WMQ* for 1962.

experienced as Towner, as I did with Bill Abbot later, but the point is that Jack and I were both new guys on the block. It was fun because Jack was full of energy and had ideas about things he wanted to do.

I should say, too, that the three and a half years that I worked under Bill Abbot's editorship added another valuable dimension to my experience. Bill returned to the Institute already an experienced editor from whom one could learn a great deal—almost without being aware of it. In retrospect, I think what I most remember about Bill's editorship was his superb and understanding relationship with authors, whether or not their manuscripts had been accepted for publication.

*What was your impression of the Quarterly when you came on board?*

There was a lot of enthusiasm in the profession at large for the quality of Towner's editing. He'd come with a hard act to follow, replacing Adair, but he had put his own stamp on the *Quarterly*, particularly by working with a younger group of authors. He helped them bring their work forward, much as Douglass had done, but Douglass had done a lot of the rewriting himself, while Bill worked more as an editor rather than as a kind of co-author. The journal was at a very high point and was beginning to publish a wider group of authors, who simply weren't there when Douglass was editor.

The book review section had a good reputation in part because it was able to do what more comprehensive journals like the *American Historical Review* could not do—commission longer reviews. We could cover nearly everything that came out in our more specialized field, although we had stopped reviewing historical fiction, for instance, as Douglass had done at one time. Coming aboard with a new editor meant we both charted our course, and I was very much influenced by Jack that year.

*Did you and he envision innovative changes in types of articles or reviews?*

Not especially that I can remember. Jack did a lot of recruiting, often at conferences—in some cases, conferences he'd organized. He didn't commission articles or publish them without the usual review process, though I suspect the review was sometimes light, but I know he actively solicited. To take one example, he put on a very successful conference at his home institution, Western Reserve, that produced two articles by Norman Grabo and myself. Grabo's represented a different kind of article from anything the earlier editors had published in its reach into literature.<sup>26</sup>

*As book review editor, did you try to expand the group of reviewers?*

In the beginning, that first year, I worked a lot with Jack to build a stable of reviewers. Jack kept up with a great deal of what was going on in the field, and he frequently had ideas. We sometimes looked for, not people who were so wildly off the subject you'd wonder why you asked them, but people who weren't completely predictable. My rule of thumb was to think of the most obvious person to review a book and then set that

<sup>26</sup> Grabo, "The Veiled Vision: The Role of Aesthetics in Early American Intellectual History," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XIX (1962), 493–510; Tate, "The Coming of the Revolution in Virginia: Britain's Challenge to Virginia's Ruling Class, 1763–1776," *ibid.*, 323–343.

person aside and go to the second most obvious and so on from there. I don't recall deliberately cultivating very untried reviewers, although we tried to find an eventual assignment for anyone who wrote asking to be considered as a reviewer. We went for scholars who had published at least a couple of relevant articles but not necessarily a book. On the whole, I suspect we had a younger group of reviewers than had sometimes been solicited, but not exclusively so. We never maintained a rotating file or schedule of who had reviewed and who hadn't.

One thing about book reviewing in that period that I think is important: it was much easier to get the reviewer you wanted simply because a lot of people of middle to high rank in the profession were still quite willing to review at the same time that the number of younger scholars was growing. We felt satisfied we were getting our first or second choice in most cases. Later, when some of those people either would not review or were doing paid reviews for the *New York Times* or *New York Review of Books*, it became more difficult.

*In the '60s, the early American field started to burgeon and take off in certain directions such as local community studies. One of the earliest was Sumner Chilton Powell's Puritan Village, which was reviewed in the January '64 issue.<sup>27</sup> Did you think at that time that it signaled what was coming in terms of the new social history?*

Not really. Although I know what a pioneering work Powell's was, it didn't strike me as a herald. It didn't seem to fit any classification. We certainly tried to deal with it fairly, but the volume had a long tangled history in connection with Powell's relationship with the Institute. He had submitted the book to the Institute and then withdrew it in reaction to some readers' reports that demanded revisions. We strongly encouraged him to revise, but he took the position that the Institute had rejected the book. It was one of those misunderstandings that arise. Then, when he won the Pulitzer Prize, he went out of his way in interviews to attack the Institute for having rejected the book. We were operating under a certain amount of negative publicity, and it probably made us be doubly fair about the review. I later had a satisfactory relationship with Powell and some good professional correspondence about *Quarterly* articles and reviews.

*As a historian, are there things you learn as you dole out books to reviewers that you don't learn when you just read a book?*

What was enormously satisfying and fun, even with frustrations when you got a disappointing review or learned how many of your colleagues really didn't write well, was keeping abreast of the whole early American field. You read *Publishers Weekly* regularly, tried to anticipate what books were scheduled for publication. You saw the books when they came in and at least read the introduction, bibliography, conclusion, and jacket blurbs. You watched to see what publishers were doing and which ones were active in the early American field. We had to request a lot of our books, so you had to stay abreast because if you depended on the publishers to

<sup>27</sup> Reviewed by James Duane Squires, *ibid.*, XXI (1964), 143-144.

send review copies, you didn't always get things you wanted and occasionally missed something, usually a book that was published abroad.

*In 1963, Bill Abbot came back as editor and continued in that role until 1966. What was it like working with him?*

There were two issues that Lester Cappon edited before Bill came back. While Lester was great fun to work with in a lot of ways, he was very businesslike. I found that brief period a bit difficult because I realized how much the book review editor relied on working with the editor. Greene didn't expect me to clear book review assignments, but in the course of the normal working day together we talked about them. While Lester was interim editor, he had a lot of other duties. He left me to do the book review section, though he read the reviews in manuscript very carefully and often edited behind me. As good an editor as Lester was, in one critical case he edited a review badly, and it happened to be one by my mentor.

*You mean Ed Morgan?*

Yes. I got a rather tart note from Ed. It was a change that looked plausible but altered the meaning or perhaps made a repetitive statement. Ed, who was, of course, quite a stylist, didn't like that much.

Having known Bill Abbot from his earlier time in Williamsburg and seeing how much the book review editor needed collaboration with the editor, I was really delighted when he came back. We fell right away into a good working relationship. I know the idea has come up from time to time of having a book review editor who works at another campus and sends the reviews in. A lot of journals do that successfully. But I felt the collaboration with the editor was critical to making that job work and really learning from it and feeling a part of the whole editorial process.

The book review editor in those days was a history department member who was detailed to the Institute, so I had a lot of responsibilities on campus, not least of all teaching almost 200 students a semester. Bill also did a lot of teaching, so the *Quarterly* staff built a necessarily close relationship with the history department.

*One of the signs of that was that in 1959 an apprentice program in historical editing was started at the Institute in conjunction with the history department's M.A. program. Was Bill Towner instrumental in that?*

Yes, the College had long been offering an M.A. in history, but only a few people took the degree. Bill got the idea of building it up around the apprenticeship. In addition, the first two *Quarterly* editors, Richard L. Morton<sup>28</sup> and Douglass Adair, were professors in the department. So you can see the connection running back that far.

*Keith Berwick's article on the Third Series of the Quarterly in 1964<sup>29</sup> pointed to the idea that the journal, even though initially intending to attract lay readers as well as scholarly readers, in fact had the largest proportion of*

<sup>28</sup> Morton was editor of the WMQ for 1944–1946.

<sup>29</sup> Berwick, "A Peculiar Monument: The Third Series of the *William and Mary Quarterly*," WMQ, 3d Ser., XXI (1964), 3–17.

*subscribers from the academy. Berwick also noted that after Adair left, the journal abandoned the effort to demonstrate the importance of early American history for an understanding of contemporary affairs. Do those comments suggest the Quarterly's turning in a more scholarly direction by the mid-to-late '50s? Did you have any sense, when you started in the early '60s, that this was still in question?*

I don't think so. There was always around the Institute some concern about ways to have a more popular impact, but increasingly you were staffed with scholars, the scholarly community was growing, the work you were getting was of that sort. Adair may have worried about it more than anyone else. I think that it was a matter of the play of Douglass's mind, really, as much as it was a concerted policy. Perhaps it grew out of his sense of the relevance of political ideas and the Founding Fathers.

It may have had something to do as well with the evolution of the *Quarterly*. The Third Series began by taking over the name of the *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine* and converting it to *A Magazine of Early American History, Institutions, and Culture*, as its first subtitle read. The first two series from the beginning of the journal in 1892 were largely devoted to reprinting Virginia documents, until the late 1920s when the editor of the Second Series, Earl Gregg Swem, began to move in the direction of articles. They were all, however, devoted to Virginia history, and the journal kept a certain readership that was outside the academy—people with genealogical or popular history interests. Once the Third Series expanded to the whole colonial field, there was no easy way for it to serve that earlier constituency as well as scholars. And the scholarly community was beginning to grow and to supply a larger readership.

*Do you think there was also a shift in historical concerns from the early '50s to the early '60s? A statement of objectives that Bridenbaugh laid out in 1946 included recreating a living civilization of the past for the guidance of present-day Americans and maintaining democracy by a continuous examination of its origins.<sup>30</sup> Do you think that Adair as editor perhaps had that in mind as well?*

Probably so. Certainly, he wrote in that vein at times about the basic political ideas of the Founding Fathers.

*Did that more scholarly mission also account for the "road show" that Lester Cappon started in 1956, when the director and the senior editors would go to graduate programs at different universities and talk to students about the principles of historical editing and what scholarly work in history is all about?*

I think that certainly helped, and it was a good way of appealing to younger scholars, a way of saying, Yes, we're interested in articles. One line in the road show was always, Look at the *Quarterly*; we'd like to have work from senior authors, of course, and we sometimes do, but count up any number of issues and you'll find that most articles come from junior scholars. These were often first articles, often growing out of dissertations or even seminar papers. The whole process was an encouragement to

<sup>30</sup> Quoted by Schlesinger, "Report on the Institute," 2–3.

younger, emerging historians to send work in. It publicized the opportunity and reminded them that they provided the bulk of the contents of the *Quarterly*. This was a time, too, when the normal progression of publication was not to get a contract for your dissertation when you gave the publisher two unrevised chapters. There was less pressure to get on with the first book and not to take time out for articles. It was normal to publish a few articles, get the book out as soon as you could but not necessarily immediately. An important article was valued a good deal more than may be the case now.

*What are your memories of the road show in the '60s? People reminisce about the Smith/Abbot/Cappon trio appearing on campuses. Do you recollect how often they went?*

At most, it was maybe three times a year. They went as far afield as Cornell and LSU. The format was quite simple. The editors talked about what publishing articles and books was like and how to go about getting published and what to expect. Lester usually did an introduction, and frequently there were a lot of graduate student questions. These were fairly informal occasions. We were never really budgeted to do this; although nobody expected an honorarium, the host institution would pick up the travel expenses. That became a little tougher as time went on. The focus may have been on preparing manuscripts for book publication, although the *Quarterly* editors emphasized the importance of articles at a certain stage in your career, as I have suggested.

*Towner, Abbot, and you as successive Quarterly editors took on this role as postdissertation advisers in helping young scholars work out their ideas.*

Right. Some of the very good articles we printed were articles that people wrote as they were completing their books. Some that had real impact were done by recent graduate students, but we also occasionally got pieces from senior authors who were on a new project and wanted to say something about it at an early stage. Undoubtedly, the existence of the Institute and the road show and the Institute's centrality to early American history as the field began to grow were all mutually reinforcing.

Articles were especially valued. You'll recall that Ed Morgan published his dissertation on the Puritan family in the publications of the Boston Public Library.<sup>31</sup> It was certainly a well-regarded book, but probably his national reputation emerged with "Colonial Ideas of Parliamentary Power" and "The Postponement of the Stamp Act" in the *Quarterly*. The Stamp Act book came along several years later.<sup>32</sup> And I think of other articles in my time of editing that were opening statements that led to later books. One was Pauline Maier's on riots and mob action in the Revolution. This was a pioneering article that her book elaborated in greater

<sup>31</sup> *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Boston, 1956).

<sup>32</sup> "Colonial Ideas of Parliamentary Power, 1764-1766," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., V (1948), 311-341; "The Postponement of the Stamp Act," *ibid.*, VII (1950), 353-392; Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1953).



detail.<sup>33</sup> Another was Michael Zuckerman's piece, the nucleus of *Peaceable Kingdoms*.<sup>34</sup> But other articles stood on their own. One I remember vividly because it took a lot of work but was an important article was "Jack Tar in the Streets."<sup>35</sup> That was a brilliantly delivered AHA convention paper by Jesse Lemisch out of his dissertation, which was a study of seamen in the Revolution. It was an early salvo in a more radical interpretation of the Revolution.

\* \* \*

*By the time Lemisch's article was published, you had been Quarterly editor for several years. When Bill Abbot left in 1966, what led you to accept the position?*

Bill was offered a chair at the University of Virginia, which he understandably decided to take. I don't know how it happened, but Lester fairly quickly offered me the editorship. I had just received a grant for a year's research leave, but it became clear that was not going to be. I faced for the only time in my career a decision in which I really had three choices, including a job offer at another institution. But it was not a difficult decision. I didn't think long, because I knew the editor's job was what I wanted.

*Why was the position so attractive?*

There was an editorial tradition by then, and the *Quarterly* enjoyed great respect in the profession. I'd been close to the editing process and knew that this was for an early American scholar one of the really interesting and central things to do. It's not something that's easy to explain, but there is a satisfaction about editing, at least for me.

*During your years as editor, what was the flow of articles like? What subjects struck you as emerging fields of interest? For example, did the early work in the New Social History just come in, or did you solicit articles from people like John Demos, Kenneth Lockridge, and Philip Greven?*

I don't remember a time when we felt we were really short of articles. On the other hand, we never had a staggering backlog, and I did relatively little recruiting, occasionally at conferences. The ones you mention came in on their own.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> "Popular Uprisings and Civil Authority in Eighteenth-Century America," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXVII (1970), 3-35; *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York, 1972).

<sup>34</sup> "The Social Context of Democracy in Massachusetts," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXV (1968), 523-544; *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1970).

<sup>35</sup> "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXV (1968), 371-407.

<sup>36</sup> Demos, "Families in Colonial Bristol, Rhode Island: An Exercise in Historical Demography," *ibid.*, 40-57; Lockridge and Alan Kreider, "The Evolution of Massachusetts Town Government, 1640 to 1740," *ibid.*, XXIII (1966), 549-574; Greven, "Family Structure in Seventeenth-Century Andover, Massachusetts," *ibid.*, 234-256.

One thing that strikes me, when I look back, is the large number of authors who went on to make a major mark in the profession. During my editorship, we published eighty or ninety articles. Well over thirty were done by people who were emerging or have since emerged as strong figures in the field—a reflection, I suspect, of the quality and size of graduate school enrollment at the time.

*Who were some of those people?*

Gordon Wood, Pauline Maier, Allan Kulikoff, Stephen Foster, Joyce Appleby, James Henretta, Lockridge, Demos, Greven, Gary Nash, to name a few. There were articles, too, from senior scholars such as Ed Morgan, David Quinn, and Caroline Robbins. We got an article from Vann Woodward because he wanted to tilt gently with Morgan on the Puritan ethic in the South.<sup>37</sup> I thought that to get Woodward into the *Quarterly* was a real coup.

*In that list of authors, you only named three women. Is that a reflection of how few women were doing early American history, or was it some kind of inhibition on the *Quarterly's* part?*

I wouldn't want to absolve the *Quarterly*, but I would like to think that it wasn't a species of traditionalism in looking after the old boys. I went back and counted, and I found that in my seven years there were twenty-one articles by women—those we've mentioned plus others such as Linda Kerber and Mary Beth Norton. Women scholars were emerging who would make their mark, but even so, we had what seems today a fairly small representation of women.<sup>38</sup>

*What about subject matter?*

It was a transitional time for scholarship in the early American period. The largest number of articles—thirty-seven on a very rough count—were on New England, including the first round of social history, especially town studies. I counted seven or so on the Carolinas and Georgia, nineteen on the Chesapeake, eleven on the Middle Colonies, and five on the West Indies. The Chesapeake group was maybe larger than I remembered, but what's characteristic about these Chesapeake articles is that they still were likely to be on political or religious questions or to be social history that was not yet quantitative in method. Then in 1973, when I was no longer editor but one of my issues was in press, the Chesapeake issue came out that began tentatively to reflect a new social history.<sup>39</sup> That transition was beginning to occur just as it had for New England.

In general, the underrepresented areas were women and the family, only two or three in my time. Indian ethnohistory, only two or three again: Gary Nash's piece on Indians and the southern colonies and one of James

<sup>37</sup> Woodward, "The Southern Ethic in a Puritan World," *ibid.*, XXV (1968), 343–370; Morgan, "The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution," *ibid.*, XXIV (1967), 3–43.

<sup>38</sup> During Tate's years (1967–1972) as editor, almost 12% of *WMQ* authors were women. During a recent 6-year period (1986–1991), 20% were women.

<sup>39</sup> "Chesapeake Society," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXX (Jan. 1973).

Axtell's early articles.<sup>40</sup> Not much black history but a little more—seven or eight articles, though they tended to be rather specific articles on blacks in particular localities or on political questions. You weren't yet seeing attention to African-American culture. It was more a transitional period than I would have guessed at the time. The field was moving into the new themes of social history but wasn't yet there. Even some of the new and emerging authors were not doing quite the same kind of work they did later.

*Did you plan for that Chesapeake issue in 1973, or did the articles simply accumulate and seem to suggest such an issue?*

It was the latter. I had not really planned an issue, but within a short period of time we had several strong submissions that meant we were going to have two or three issues with more than one Chesapeake article in them or we could bring the pieces together in one issue. I had not systematically given much thought to special issues. We had a sufficient flow of articles that any time you scheduled a special issue and recruited for it, you were responsible for everyone else being delayed at least one issue in publication, and that killed some of the incentive. But in this case we could make an issue out of things that were accepted in the normal review of submissions.

*With the shift in Chesapeake studies to a social history context, do you think such a thing as a Chesapeake school with a consistent or coherent view of the history of that region emerged?*

Schools are never as tightly formed as people want to say, but the New Social History, quantitative social history, certainly drove a lot of the newer work. There was a shift from the eighteenth century to the seventeenth century that was very marked in the beginning. There was a coherent interest. As a school, it had no base in the academy; its base was St. Mary's City and, to a lesser extent, Williamsburg. People did not train under anyone who was the founder of such a school. Hardly any of the first wave of "Chesapeake historians" had degrees from the same institution. The work developed without that kind of academic center but with a lot of stimulus from Lois Carr's work and that of her associates. Still, while I would hesitate to call it a school in one sense, in another sense I think it was methodologically united—in terms of the interests of a group of scholars who knew each other and in many cases worked together. In these ways I guess I would say it *was* a school.

*What role do you think topical issues can play in pushing the field, introducing new scholars, opening new lines of inquiry?*

They can have some influence if you spot the trend early enough, although if you have enough articles to make an issue, maybe the trend is already there. One risk of topical issues is that if you're not careful, you can end up with four good pieces when you need six, so you may

<sup>40</sup> Nash, "The Image of the Indian in the Southern Colonial Mind," *ibid.*, XXIX (1972), 197–230; Axtell, "The Scholastic Philosophy of the Wilderness," *ibid.*, 335–366.

compromise a little on the other two in order to have a complete issue. Another hazard is that you hold up other work that needs to be published. What's more, for an editor they do take more work, and I understand why journals sometimes use guest editors. I would say, though, that I am certainly sympathetic to doing such issues. I did just the one, in fact. Mike McGiffert<sup>41</sup> has done several more, partly because there have been more commemorative occasions during his tenure.

*Submission rates of articles more than doubled during the 1960s from 61 in 1961–1962 to 155 when you left in 1972–1973. At the same time, the circulation of the Quarterly tripled. What factors do you think contributed to this explosion in submissions and circulation?*

The field was simply growing. More students were coming out of graduate school, new work was emerging, and some of it was attracting interest even outside the early American community because of the new methodologies, such as in social history. I'd like to think the *Quarterly* did something to help it out, but I don't think it necessarily caused the boom.

*Do you think there were similar reasons for the Institute publishing five Needs and Opportunities volumes between 1955 and 1966, which came out of small research conferences usually in the year preceding publication? There were other Needs and Opportunities conferences that didn't result in volumes, but the five—Whitfield Bell on science, William Fenton on Indians, Bernard Bailyn on education, Walter Muir Whitehill on the arts, and Brooke Hindle on technology<sup>42</sup>—all were in that ten-year period. Then, just as the field took off in the mid-60s with the explosion of articles, these research volumes ceased. Do you think this reflected the absence of a need for projecting needs and opportunities?*

That may have been the case, because I remember a lot of times at the Institute when we discussed keeping the Needs and Opportunities series going, yet we did not ever quite arrive at a topic that seemed right. Also, we were moving into a period in which the cost of doing conferences was mounting and it was becoming customary for sponsors to bear more of the expenses and to pay honoraria. And we were moving to open conferences rather than closed ones. It's harder to do the Needs and Opportunities format in that context. After I was director, we conceived the idea of a second Indian conference. We moved as far into that as getting a small grant to help with the conference. Then we realized the field had gone beyond the Needs and Opportunities format and abandoned the idea. Fields were developing so rapidly that such a volume did not perform a necessary service. We did return to this format for an economic history

<sup>41</sup> McGiffert came as visiting editor in 1972 on Tate's becoming director and accepted the permanent position in 1974.

<sup>42</sup> Bell, *Early American Science* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1955); Fenton, *American Indian and White Relations to 1830: An Essay* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1957); Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1960); Whitehill, *The Arts in Early American History* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1965); Hindle, *Technology in Early America* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1966).

conference that led to the volume by John McCusker and Russell Menard.<sup>43</sup>

*The series of Conferences in Early American History started in 1955, and over forty were held by the time they disappeared in the late '70s or early '80s. What happened to that series?*

Lawrence Gipson originated the series with the Institute acting as coordinator and publicizer and other institutions usually organizing them. More than anything else, I think they fell victim to the higher costs of mounting conferences. The Institute, of course, also organized other conferences. One in the '50s led to Jim Smith's volume *Seventeenth-Century America*. This conference was the Institute's part of the observance of the 350th anniversary of the Jamestown settlement and resulted in several classic articles. Nancy Lurie's piece on Indian cultural adjustment and Bailyn's on politics and social structure were two of the most influential essays the Institute has ever published.<sup>44</sup>

Planning got underway very early in Steve Kurtz's directorship, while I was still *Quarterly* editor, for a conference and volume of essays on the American Revolution.<sup>45</sup> That conference was held in March 1971. The idea was to get on board before the bicentennial year. It wasn't entirely a Needs and Opportunities conference in the old format, but it was a major conference designed to survey the Revolution broadly. It was one of the larger conferences the Institute ever undertook. Steve had the idea, and, as conferences tend to be, it was organized out of the director's office with input from the editors.

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*A year after that conference, in 1972, you were presented with the opportunity to become director of the Institute. How did you feel about that choice?*

I had come back in 1971 from a year's leave on an American Council of Learned Societies fellowship, the first chance I'd had to get away for a year since I had joined the Institute staff. I returned recharged and glad to return to the *Quarterly* editorship. Then Kurtz accepted an administrative appointment at Hamilton College, and the Institute needed a new director. This was, of course, a premodern period in the way searches were run. The search was run by the chair of the Council, Clarence Ver Steeg. There was no search committee, though there was input from the Council. Clarence spent a good deal of time reviewing possible candidates and doing preliminary interviews. Mine came at a dinner with him when he came to Williamsburg and just the two of us talked about where the

<sup>43</sup> McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1985).

<sup>44</sup> Lurie, "Indian Cultural Adjustment to European Civilization," and Bailyn, "Politics and Social Structure in Virginia," in *Seventeenth-Century America: Essays in Colonial History*, ed. James Morton Smith (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1959), 33-60, 90-115.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen G. Kurtz was director from 1969 to 1972; he had been editor of publications, beginning in 1966. The conference volume was *Essays on the American Revolution*, ed. Kurtz and James H. Hutson (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1973).

Institute might go, and that was about it as an interview. This was fairly late in the academic year. The Council met in the spring of '72 with the decision not yet made. The members reached the decision with the two presidents at that meeting. I came back for the afternoon session after the Council lunch, and the presidents of the College and Colonial Williamsburg called me aside and offered me the directorship. It happened that quickly, and I was given about fifteen minutes to answer, but I must say I had no hesitation. I knew it was something I wanted to try to do.

*What was your answer to Ver Steeg's question about where the Institute might go under your directorship?*

By that time I was increasingly interested in the conference function, and I must have had some idea that we ought to try to carry it farther and revitalize it. We'd just come out of Kurtz's very successful Revolution conference, which was an incentive. I also remember feeling that the fellowship program would benefit from having a senior fellow in residence along with the postdoctoral fellows. We had no immediate chance to fulfill that idea, though almost ten years later our NEH Centers for Advanced Study grant supported a senior fellowship for two years.

*The first conference after you became director was the Chesapeake conference in 1974 at College Park and St. Mary's City with the Institute as a co-sponsor. Do you remember when you started planning that?*

The Chesapeake issue was in the works at that time, though it was not fully representative of the emerging social history. But clearly that issue telegraphed the emergence of new work in the field. I think the initial idea might well have come from Norman Fiering,<sup>46</sup> but I was the resident Chesapeake specialist insofar as I had any opportunity to be a scholar, and the one who knew the field and had done the issue. Anyway, we both began to think about it. We had no money for this whatsoever, and the question was how to do it. We got in touch with Lois Carr and the St. Mary's City Commission and with the University of Maryland, especially with John McCusker. We decided to have the conference at College Park, with a last day at St. Mary's City. Our only funding was a small grant from the University of Maryland, which we used to print, reproduce, and distribute the papers in advance. The participants came without reimbursement of expenses. The field was fresh, and it was one of the more exciting conferences that I have ever been in on. It resulted in what seemed a very successful volume of essays that came out in 1979.<sup>47</sup>

*In that period, the Institute had fellows who were working in Chesapeake studies. McCusker was here in the early '70s, then Kevin Kelly with his study on southside Virginia, and Rus Menard and Allan Kulikoff. Was this intentional or did it represent a confluence of scholars working in a field that was opening up to good questions?*

It was not very intentional. I wouldn't entirely put McCusker in that

<sup>46</sup> Fiering was editor of publications from 1972 to 1982 and acting director in 1982-1983.

<sup>47</sup> Tate and David L. Ammerman, eds., *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo-American Society* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1979).

group. He did his dissertation on the rum trade and was thought of more as a general economic historian. He developed some Chesapeake interests but never did exclusively Chesapeake work. The others were indeed doing Chesapeake subjects and very much in the mode of the New Social History, but we did not make any concerted effort to favor the subject.

There has been, in fact, a pattern, a purely accidental one, in the history of the Institute that fellows sometimes turn up in small clusters of two or three sharing similar interests. We had an overlapping of fellows doing ethnohistory when Dan Richter and Jim Merrell were on hand. But I don't believe the Institute staff has ever said, This is the time to have fellows studying a specific subject. We have always been open to the best work we could find. There has been an underlying supposition perhaps that, if there were two or three candidates who were strongly competitive and of equal merit, we might opt for a subject on which the Institute had not recently published a book or that seemed to represent a promising new line of work.

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*From the first publication in 1947 of Beverley's History and Present State of Virginia, the University of North Carolina Press had been the publisher of Institute books. Then beginning in 1970, Atheneum published a number of Institute books. Why did Steve Kurtz seek out a publisher other than North Carolina?*

The detailed discussion was undoubtedly between Steve as editor of publications and Lester. I have no knowledge of the details, but there were some dissatisfactions with the North Carolina press. The subsidy arrangement seemed a little outmoded. And only a small amount of royalty could be paid to authors until the subsidy was recovered. Steve had a large design for the Institute. He was ambitious to step up its program and, in the case of book publication, certainly not to abandon the fellows' and first-author books but to look for a haven of senior scholars who would add another dimension to the list. He may have been the first person to think very explicitly of that possibility. A number of presses were approached, Oxford and MIT among them, and several expressed interest. Atheneum was a new and very successful press. The idea of going to a trade publisher was exciting for the Institute because it seemed to offer a wider audience for its authors, especially with a publisher that was off to such a good start as Atheneum and had so much enthusiasm about doing this. With prize-winning books by Gordon Wood and Winthrop Jordan,<sup>48</sup> the Institute seemed to have potential appeal for a national market beyond early American specialists alone.

*Actually, only three books on our list came out with an Atheneum imprint: Patricia Watlington's The Partisan Spirit: Kentucky Politics, 1779-1792,*

<sup>48</sup> Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1969); Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1968).

*Ira Gruber's The Howe Brothers and the American Revolution, and Richard Bushman's edition of documents on The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740–1745.*<sup>49</sup>

The agreement was broken pretty quickly by Atheneum, in spirit if not in letter. For a number of possible reasons, some certainly economic, Atheneum indicated that they would be selective in the future and would take the manuscripts they wanted but would not guarantee to take all Institute manuscripts. Meanwhile, Lester Cappon had chosen to retire as director. Steve Kurtz had been a very quick and logical choice at the Council meeting to succeed him, and Jim Hutson had come in as editor of publications.<sup>50</sup> With Atheneum's decision, I remember a certain sense of alarm around the office because clearly we could not go forward with the revised Atheneum terms; there were manuscripts ready for publication, and the question was what to do about them. The upshot was we returned to UNCP when it came forward with a generous new agreement.

*Kurtz was after better marketing, mass paperback outlets, and national advertising, but that whole experience with a New York publisher points out that there are certain limits within scholarly publishing.*

That is no doubt true. But when you look at subsequent developments—the return to North Carolina, fairly soon after the conclusion of a nonsubsidy agreement, and the advance in the number of Institute paperbacks, particularly from W. W. Norton under its agreement with UNCP—the vision that Steve Kurtz had for reshaping the book publication program in its own way was realized.

*As director, Kurtz laid out an ambitious agenda for the Institute as a center of scholarly research and publishing. What do you remember about his plans for funding the programs he envisioned?*

Steve had been in academic administration as a college dean, and he appreciated the nature of financial problems, the limits on resources, and the increasing need for fund-raising by educational and scholarly institutions. Shortly before he resigned, he made a first effort to bring in a consultant and began to put in place a plan for systematic fund-raising for the Institute. But the idea did not at that time gain the approval of the sponsors. They advised him to explore with them joint ways of developing funds for specific projects and not go outside. His plan evidently suggested a greater independence than they found comfortable. Steve was understandably disappointed. Events later proved that he had a keen sense of what the Institute needed and of the problems it would face.

Under his directorship, plans were already afoot for a major editorial project, the complete writings of Captain John Smith. When I became director, the top item on my desk was a letter from the National Endowment for the Humanities awarding us something in the neighborhood of \$24,000 to complete the work within two years. I knew a two-year time frame was out of the question, and I suspect I realized, too, that that wasn't

<sup>49</sup> Published respectively in 1972, 1972, 1970.

<sup>50</sup> Hutson was editor of publications, 1969–1972.



going to be nearly enough money. But little did I imagine either the time or the resources that project would ultimately take.

*That's one of the special projects connected with Kurtz. Others were the Papers of John Marshall, which got its start in 1966, and the Atlas of Early American History, co-sponsored by the Institute with the Newberry Library, which Lester Cappon went on to edit after he retired as director.*<sup>51</sup>

That's right. In the case of the Marshall Papers, Jim Smith had actually done a lot of the planning on the assumption that the editor of publications would be the editor-in-chief of the Papers. Kurtz was in fact the first editor. In the case of the *Atlas*, Lester had the conception, and the initial financing came from a major bequest in which the Princeton historian Wesley Frank Craven was instrumental. In the case of the Smith edition, Bill Towner had had a long working relationship with the editor, Philip Barbour, going back to Barbour's work on Smith that the *Quarterly* had published.<sup>52</sup> But these significant projects fell into place under Steve.

On this subject of special projects and special funding, the Institute had already received one large outside grant earlier in its history from an Indiana foundation for the expansion of the publication program. This originated in the '50s, when Jim Smith was editor of books. It enabled the Institute to expand its rate of publication by bringing in an additional assistant editor. Fred Hetzel came to the Institute on that grant and launched a career in publishing that took him on to the directorship of the University of Pittsburgh Press.<sup>53</sup>

*Another special project was the History of the Ancient and Honorable Tuesday Club.*

That began with a proposal to Norman Fiering, who was enthusiastic. Early American literature scholars told us that Dr. Hamilton's record was maybe the primary piece of unpublished eighteenth-century American writing, particularly as a satire, of which there is not much. We secured a sizable grant to get the project off the ground, very much with the help of Colonial Williamsburg, from the Readers' Digest foundation, the Lila Wallace and DeWitt Wallace Fund. I very well remember the dinner at which Charles Longworth, the president of CW, backed a representative of the fund into a corner and I held forth on the virtues of the Tuesday Club project. We owe Colonial Williamsburg all the credit for helping us secure that money. Though it proved to be not everything we needed, it was a generous grant. Ultimately, in 1990, with a good deal of delay and a lot of effort, a three-volume edition, edited by Robert Micklus, appeared.

<sup>51</sup> Cappon et al., eds., *Atlas of Early American History: The Revolutionary Era, 1760-1790* (Princeton, N. J., 1976).

<sup>52</sup> Barbour, "Captain John Smith's Route through Turkey and Russia," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XIV (1957), 358-369.

<sup>53</sup> The Lilly Endowment made a 5-year grant in 1957 for an assistant editor in the book program. Frederick A. Hetzel was assistant and then associate editor from 1958 to 1961.

*The Institute has been criticized for taking on such projects because of their cost in time and money. Are they an effective way for the Institute to serve the scholarly community?*

They're an important part of the Institute program, because very few other places will undertake this sort of project. Norman Fiering used to say on occasion that the Institute should see itself as the publisher of the unpublishable. He was thinking in terms of worthwhile projects that presented such financial and editorial demands that not many organizations or publishers would take them on. But they should be done only when special funding is available and when they seem to have enduring value.

There is another example of this sort of project, one that proved more manageable editorially and financially. That is Noble Cunningham's three-volume edition of the *Circular Letters of Congressmen to Their Constituents, 1789-1829*.<sup>54</sup> However difficult some of these projects were, I have always felt they were worthwhile, an appropriate part of the Institute's overall program.

*Conferences also needed funding. Foundations helped underwrite Kurtz's American Revolution conference in 1971. In the 1970s, there was the Chesapeake conference, which was a low-budget conference, and there were the Conferences on Early American History that were small, informal meetings. As director, you seem not to have initiated any other big conferences until the 1980s.*

That's probably true. We did some good conferences but on fairly low budgets or in cooperation with other people. In the '80s we began seeking money, sometimes with a cooperating agency, for some larger-scale and more costly conferences. The one I particularly remember is the economic history conference in October 1980, which revived on a rather different basis the Needs and Opportunities series. We did that at the Institute, and the planning began as early as 1973 with a committee of Jack Price, Russell Menard, and John McCusker and Allan Kulikoff. We received a very generous Liberty Fund grant. We organized the conference around a book, as it turned out, that John and Rus prepared as the position paper and revised on the basis of conference discussion.

There were some other conferences in the '80s that operated with fairly generous funding. One was the Constitution conference in Philadelphia in which we worked with the Philadelphia Center for Early American Studies and the American Philosophical Society. *Beyond Confederation*, edited by Rick Beeman, Steve Bortin, and Ted Carter, was based on that conference.<sup>55</sup> Another was an Anglo-American social history conference funded by the Exxon Foundation. The results in part reaffirmed the old cliché that Britain and United States are two countries separated by a common language. Yet, if the conference did not produce a volume summarizing

<sup>54</sup> Chapel Hill, N. C., 1978.

<sup>55</sup> Chapel Hill, N. C., 1987.

the full conference, *Strangers within the Realm*, the Bailyn-Philip Morgan essay volume, grew out of one of its sessions.<sup>56</sup>

What turned out to be a very successful conference on the question of the Iroquois "empire" was held in Williamsburg in 1984, when Jim Merrell and Dan Richter were both in residence as fellows doing important work in ethnohistory. James Axtell was on the College faculty by then, and William Eccles was a visiting professor that year. Francis Jennings, who was a senior fellow at the Institute the following year, also came for the conference. So did William Fenton, who had edited the 1950s Needs and Opportunities volume on Indians.

It was a bit of a shoestring operation, but we got a little money from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, which underwrites anthropological studies. The conference was well attended. We were uncertain at one point what to expect after we received a number of registrations from Iroquois tribal historians. It made for an interesting meeting, one in which we got to play an honest broker role. Fenton, for all of his sympathetic scholarship, had incurred the hostility of Iroquois leaders in a legal struggle over ownership of treaty belts at the state museum in Albany. Fenton's after-dinner speech for that conference and the reception he got from the Indians constituted a kind of declaration of peace. His after-dinner talk was a great success for those who understood the situation.

I have one amusing recollection of the conference. As it was breaking up, the Iroquois asked everybody to pose on the steps of the campus center so they could take pictures. Fenton was standing with a group near me, and he remarked, "Twenty years ago we were taking pictures of the Indians, and now they're taking pictures of us!"<sup>57</sup>

There was, in fact, a fairly consistent flow of conference activity through the '70s and '80s, despite the increasing difficulty in funding conferences. For me, this is a major function of the Institute. It's a community effort on the part of everyone at the Institute when you do them. The Philadelphia Constitution conference—and a later early American literature conference in which we worked with *Early American Literature* and the University of North Carolina—suggested, too, the advantage of collaborating with other institutions in planning and organizing some conferences.

*Conferences seem to have characterized your directorship in a very significant way.*

Yes. In my high school yearbook, where people wrote in a tag line about something you particularly liked, mine was attending conferences and conventions.

*Earlier in the Institute's annals, Conferences on Early American History represented a collaborative effort initiated by Lawrence Gipson. His idea was that these conferences should serve scholars scattered throughout the United*

<sup>56</sup> Chapel Hill, N. C., 1991. Philip D. Morgan was Institute editor of publications, 1984–1985, 1986–1987.

<sup>57</sup> Papers from the conference were printed in James H. Merrell and Daniel K. Richter, eds., *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America* (Syracuse, N. Y., 1987).

*States. The conception came at a time when the Institute was criticized for not offering real leadership and not communicating with or representing the scholarly community. These charges have a familiar ring. On the one hand, the Institute appears elitist and exclusionary; on the other, it appears not to be a leader in the field. There's often been this tension of expectations about the Institute.*

I'm certainly aware that such a tension can exist. If I perhaps seem a little defensive of the Institute's performance, I'm also aware that it never pays to be complacent. A little self-examination never hurts.

It's also important, however, to keep in mind the relationship between the Institute and the state of early American scholarship over what is now a half-century. At the time the Institute began in the 1940s, early American history was only beginning to revive after several decades of relative quiescence and the disruption of World War II. The number of scholars working in the field was very small. The advisory committee that recommended that the Institute be established and defined its purposes was not a highly exclusive group. In fact, it was very nearly the whole profession.

I believe the initial definition of purposes for the new undertaking and the practical experience of establishing a program demanded inclusivity. The so-called clearing house function of the Institute—its early conferences, the creation of the newsletter by Lyman Butterfield—were all designed to reach out widely to people in the field and to promote collaboration with other institutions. The early *Quarterly* editors built the Third Series by seeking out the work of younger scholars. Book publications did the same. Institute books have always been a vehicle for first-book authors. And the postdoctoral fellowship was conceived as a way of giving further encouragement to emerging scholars.

As the field expanded rapidly, it became increasingly impossible, of course, to incorporate all new scholarship in Institute programs. The consequence was the creation of the tension about expectations that we've discussed. At the time I joined the staff, for example, fellowship applicants numbered well under ten per competition, although the field always had strong candidates. Now they average well above twenty.

The Council, which has often seemed, like the eighteenth-century Virginia Anglican vestry, a self-perpetuating body that can easily tend to exclusiveness, provides an even better illustration, since it's an important link to the constituency of the Institute. In the beginning, the small size of that constituency made it generally both possible and desirable for most of the active senior scholars to serve as members. But I saw things begin to change as early as the time when Douglass Adair and Page Smith led a successful fight to open up the Council, particularly to a wider regional representation.<sup>58</sup> By the time of my directorship, the Council began maintaining an up-to-date list of people who were considered potential members. There were now enough good scholars that it was all too easy to

<sup>58</sup> C. Page Smith served on the Institute Council from 1960 to 1963; Adair served on the Council from 1963 to 1966.

pass over someone unintentionally. In my last years at the Institute I saw Council members work very hard to broaden their ranks.

Another thing that somewhat unexpectedly generated a feeling among a larger number of people in the field of some direct association with the Institute was the creation of the Associates program. Admittedly, this was a fund-raising effort in the beginning, launched in the early '80s with the first NEH challenge grant and at the insistence of NEH. Yet the Associates program has broadened the constituency who feel some direct involvement with the Institute.

*Looking back over the directorships, I would say that Butterfield's emphasized an informational role for the Institute; Cappon's might be called educative, with the road show, Conferences on Early American History, and the editorial apprenticeship program; and Kurtz's clearly focused on making the Institute a major publishing center. How would you characterize your years?*

I've not been able to get much perspective on them yet. I may be the last person to do this. My first thought is that fund-raising became a much more demanding part of the job. In some ways I felt frustrated. I did not see it as something I did very well, and whatever you raised was never enough. I don't take great satisfaction in this, but by the end of my directorship we did have a substantial endowment—almost a million dollars—which showed we were moving in the right direction. And we had also funded a number of special projects, publications, and conferences, partly supported by Associates' giving and other grants. Toward the end of my directorship, the College was still providing just under half of the budget; Colonial Williamsburg supplied about a quarter. Thus we were counting on about 25 percent of our operating money coming from various fund-raising efforts—income from endowment, special grants, the Associates. We were always financially strapped; nevertheless, without that private fund-raising we would have done a lot less. Among other things, it made possible either directly or indirectly the amount of conference activity we were able to carry on, and it sustained some of the larger special publication activities. And another NEH grant for Centers for Advanced Study greatly assisted the postdoctoral fellowship program.

I hope above all that in my directorship the Institute did seem an open place—that through the Associates and the effort to broaden the membership of the Council, it did seem an accessible operation, that people around the country in the field felt they knew what went on at the Institute a little better than might have been true at some earlier times. I would like to think this was the case, but I realize some may think we could have done even more.

*You've been here since 1954. When you came to Williamsburg, did you ever think that you'd spend your whole professional career in this little town in Tidewater Virginia?*

Definitely not. That was a period when you were glad to have a job in your field that paid a salary. I had no idea I would stay or that I would ever move to the College or the Institute. In general, it has been a satisfying experience. By starting at Colonial Williamsburg and moving through the

three posts at the Institute, I had some significant changes of duties. I've always been a proponent of the idea that an academic life is a mobile one and that you should expect to move several times in the course of it. While I stayed in one place, I did move in terms of the kinds of things I was doing.

I had left the South and gone to graduate school in New England and had gone through the usual love affair with New England that seems to afflict most people who go to graduate school there, the feeling that one really couldn't leave. And then the available job was in the South. I came back not unwillingly but not totally enthusiastically. I guess I recovered a certain fondness for and understanding of the South.

*Of all of those positions you've moved through, which was your favorite?*

I really think of all the things I did I liked editing the *Quarterly* best. There's something about it that's very satisfying. It's not the close work, which can sometimes be tedious, but feeling that in bringing an author's work to publication you're filling a role in the advancement of scholarship that isn't filled any other way. Editing was having the best of both worlds. You were still a scholar in your field, even though editing a journal slows down your own productivity. But you combined teaching and scholarship in a rather different way, and there was something very appealing about that.

Editor's Note: After retiring from the directorship of the Institute in 1989, Mr. Tate served for three years as founding director of the Commonwealth Center for the Study of American Culture at the College of William and Mary.