

# The Palace

Summer 2010

The Magazine of Tryon Palace



*A Southern Belle  
Gets a Makeover*

In 1999 Tryon Palace had come to a crossroads. Our mission to preserve and teach North Carolina history had grown beyond the confines of our existing buildings. The Tryon Palace audience was changing. As New Bern and Tryon Palace continued to grow, so did the variety and needs of our visitors, from families to school groups, tourists to senior citizens. The stories that needed to be told had grown to encompass a larger historical picture that spanned race, class, ethnicity and gender. History was not one-size-fits-all.

Our staff realized that these visitors were also beginning to have very different expectations about what constituted a meaningful and interesting museum experience. Museums everywhere were struggling to respond in the face of visitor expectations that were changing as rapidly as technology allowed.

Education was also at the forefront of our concerns. The Tryon Palace staff wanted to find ways to better support North Carolina school curriculums and to provide distance learning opportunities for students across the state. We needed tools to reach out to a younger audience who all too often thought of history as something dead and irrelevant to their lives.

Not least of all, we were facing physical constraints on our ability to provide services for visitors. We had long outgrown the small, converted gas station that had served as our visitor center for many years.

As stewards of an important and treasured piece of North Carolina history, we wanted to ensure that Tryon Palace grew with our audience and remained a place where a visitor could be an active traveler through history, not just a passive follower. We needed a gateway that would become a wonderful starting point for that journey.

The North Carolina History Center began as ideas, goals and plans. Then the work began. For the next ten years, the concept and design of the North Carolina History Center grew from a dynamic collaboration between the Tryon Palace staff and Tryon Palace Commission and a number of players: exhibit designers Edwin Schlossberg Incorporated (ESI), architects Brown Jurkowski Architectural Collaborative (BJAC), Quinn Evans Architects and landscape architects EDAW Inc. Working together we turned those dreams into floor plans, building elevations and design and exhibit concepts.

With the critical financial support of the North Carolina legislature, Craven County, the city of New Bern, Pepsi-Cola and hundreds of donors large and small, the final challenge – building and construction – began. In a few short months we will be opening the doors of the North Carolina History Center, a new gateway for Tryon Palace and a new way for visitors to experience history and create lasting bonds between past, present and future. It marks an exciting new chapter for Tryon Palace, for New Bern and for the citizens of North Carolina.

This issue of *The Palace* magazine is all about telling stories. You will read about a building, exhibits and landscape that completely change the way we interact with our visitors – and our visitors interact with their past; you'll learn about the rebirth of a beautiful young North Carolina woman; and we profile a talented young staff member whose skill transforms 21st-century humans into visible beacons of the past.

A project ends, and a new journey begins. We invite you to come and visit; we've got a lot more stories to tell.

Kay P. Williams  
Director



# The Palace

 Tryon Palace

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For more information about Tryon Palace, visit our website: [www.tryonpalace.org](http://www.tryonpalace.org) or call 252-514-4900, 800-767-1560.

Tryon Palace is a part of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Linda Carlisle, Secretary. [www.ncculture.com](http://www.ncculture.com).

## Down the Garden Paths

Did you know that the gardens at Tryon Palace are open to the public FREE on the first Sunday afternoon of each month through October? Interior tours will also be discounted on these Sundays. Dates are July 4, August 1, September 5 and October 3.



## From the Cabinet of Curiosities

World's largest salad tongs? Nope. That's Tryon Palace conservator David Taylor holding a pair of early 20th-century oyster tongs. Over 14 feet long with steel grabbers at the end, they were used by fishermen to scoop up oysters from the sand bed. Come learn more about the work of coastal fishermen at the North Carolina History Center this fall.



## In the Shop

Indulge the gardener within! Stop by the Museum Shop where you'll find a variety of colorful plants, garden ornaments and even a great Tryon Palace cap to keep the hot sun off your face.

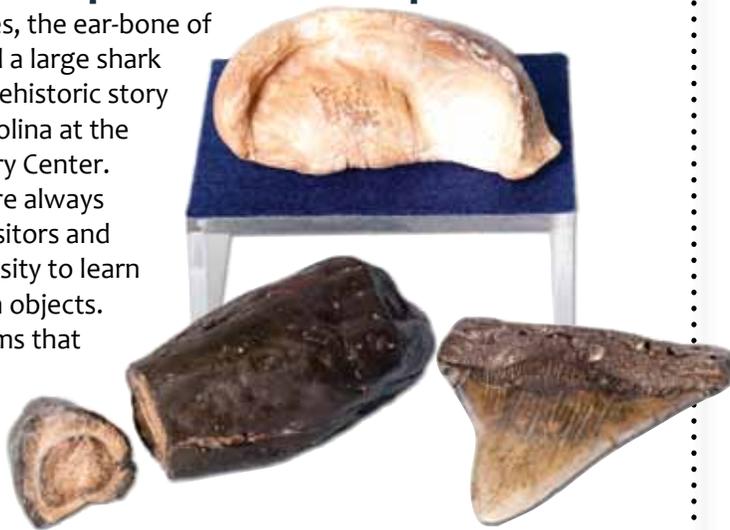


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## Getting the Scoop on Whale Poop

Fossilized whale feces, the ear-bone of an ancient whale and a large shark tooth help tell the prehistoric story of eastern North Carolina at the North Carolina History Center. Artifacts like these are always a hit with younger visitors and can excite their curiosity to learn about other museum objects. "If you use these items that have a 'wow factor' as a teachable moment," says Tryon Palace Registrar Dean Knight, "then perhaps you can hold that child's attention and tell them about some other topic, whether it's about the collection of fossils – or an old piece of furniture." Read more about the North Carolina History Center on page 18.



# History Told With Needle and Thread



Laura Poppe at work in the Palace kitchen wearing one of the costumes she created.

Taking care of hundreds of shoes, hats, breeches and dresses may seem like a daunting task, but for Tryon Palace historic clothing coordinator Laura Poppe, it's just another day on the job.

A trip to Laura's workroom on the second floor of the Jones House is a sartorial treat, with peacock feathers, top hats, costumes in various stages of construction and repair – and of course yards and yards of fabric – lining every available surface. It's serious eye candy for any fan of fashion, and Laura is no exception. "One of my favorite parts of the job when I got here was just being able to come in and see what an awesome stash of fabric Tryon Palace had and imagining all the wonderful things I could make with it," says Laura. "I live by the mantra that whoever dies with the most fabric wins."

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"We've come a long way from the days when those original costumes were seen more as pretty clothes than as teaching tools."

“I love to dispel myths – corsets were not really torture devices – and I love showing visitors that costumes are another important part of history.”

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If some folks are born with a silver spoon in their mouths, Laura Poppe began life with a thimble in her hand and a supportive mother. “I’ve been sewing as long as I can remember,” she says. “My mother was a textile major and she taught me most of my sewing knowledge and inspired me to go further with it.” Go she did. By the age of 14 the young seamstress was making garments for herself and at 16 was teaching sewing classes for the 4-H club. At the same time, a burgeoning interest in costuming and historical research translated into “making a lot of costumes for my entire family.”

After a stint studying graphic design in college (“I enjoyed it, but it really wasn’t what I wanted to do.”), three years ago she jumped at an opportunity to work at Tryon Palace. The rest is history – literally. One of her first responsibilities was to bring the Tryon Palace costume collection more in line with accurate historical

representation. Most of the costumes had been around for a long time, and they reflected a 1950’s aesthetic more than they did period-authentic garments.

“When I first got to the Palace we had only two pairs of stays and they were rarely worn,” she recalls. “Very little costuming was as historically accurate as we wanted. We’ve come a long way from the days when those original costumes were seen more as pretty clothes than as teaching tools. Back then people didn’t always realize that those differences in period styles, the details in authenticity, can be very helpful in teaching the public about history.”

One case in point: stays – those ubiquitous eighteenth-century female undergarments. Although worn unseen underneath

a dress, stays are not only necessary for historical accuracy, but they also play an important role in correctly representing how people moved and carried themselves during a particular time in history.

“A woman’s posture was very different in the eighteenth century; you held yourself with your shoulders

Laura’s favorite costume is this one worn by historic interpreter Karen Ipock. Laura designed the gown and, with the help of two volunteer seamstresses and an embroiderer, completed it after about two weeks of labor. The fabric is changeable green/blue taffeta, trimmed in self-fabric ruching with metallic silver embroidery. The ruffles and flounces are of a fine white voile. The gown is a sacque-back gown with matching petticoat worn over a full complement of eighteenth-century undergarments, including a hoop petticoat to give the skirt its fullness. Karen is also wearing a high wig that matches her natural hair color.



# Poppes Flourish at Tryon Palace

The family that volunteers together stays together. At least that's the case for the Poppe family of Greenville, all of whom – parents included – are active volunteers at Tryon Palace. They have Palace staff member Laura Poppe to thank for it. Laura, the eldest of five Poppe siblings, encouraged all her family to get involved at the Palace – including 11-year-old Ethan who confesses, “I was dragged along because everybody else went!”

Mom Paula saw it as a way to stay in touch with what her eldest daughter loved doing and as an opportunity for the family to experience history outside a textbook. “We love historic sites. We homeschool our kids, so whenever the opportunity would come up for a field trip to a historic site, off we’d go! We even came to Tryon Palace’s homeschool day events when the kids were younger. In fact, I believe we participated in one of the very first



Seth, Jenna and Laura Poppe entertain visitors at the annual Tryon Palace Christmas Candlelight celebration.

Tryon Palace Candlelight celebration. In fact, playing violin at Palace events is Seth Poppe’s favorite volunteer activity although he readily admits, “I did enjoy playing a pickpocket!”

The Poppe parents also pitch in to help as often as they can. “Our favorite volunteer time is Christmas candlelight,” says Mrs. Poppe. “We enjoy participating when there are so many people attending and most are excited about the holiday. We love seeing the fireworks and this year singing Christmas carols on the back lawn. I have enjoyed participating in spinning and felting the most; my husband enjoys handing out cookies and cider, interacting with visitors and playing lawn games with the kids.”

## “There are so many history books that just give you facts and are dull.”

events. When Laura started working here and we found out we could volunteer, it just seemed a natural thing to do!”

The Poppe siblings are involved in activities including playing lawn games, being character interpreters at various events and working at the “coffee house” during Christmas candlelights. Music is a big draw for three of the Poppes – Seth (15), Jenna (17) and Brianne (19) – who enjoy performing on violin, recorder, harpsichord and flute at the annual

While history is an active interest for the Poppe clan, they recognize that’s not always the case with other young people and they have some decided opinions why. Jenna puts it bluntly: “There are so many history books that just give you facts and are dull.” Seth offers another perspective. “Maybe it’s because we think that history should be laid out in chronological order. I’m reading Herodotus and his Histories for school right now and he goes on little rabbit trails in his telling that don’t stay



in chronological order. You get a little background information about the culture and everyday lives of people through these rabbit trails. I also like Charles Coffin's American history books because he tells lots of stories."

What advice do they have for making history more interesting to young people? Change the reading material, say Seth and Jenna: "Kids need to be reading more firsthand accounts, reading books that tell history like a story." Their mother agrees. "Let them read real accounts from people who were actually there, or that tell the point of view of average people. Put real books about exciting adventures in history in their hands. Visit actual historical sites. Act out history – you're on that track at Tryon Palace."

Given all their history-centered activities, we wondered if there might be a budding historian in the Poppe bunch. So far, it doesn't look like it. Brienne is working towards a degree in zoo-keeping, Jenna is continuing her training to be a piano technician and Seth is planning to continue his violin studies; he remains undecided about what he'll study in college. As for the youngest, Ethan: "I want to be an entomologist."

Whatever the future holds for them, one thing's for certain: these are no garden-variety Poppes!



Paula Poppe helps out with lawn games during an event on the South Lawn.

rolled back and a certain curve to your spine," explains Laura. "Stays ensured your correct posture because when properly fitted they help hold your shoulders back. If you slouch, that's when they can dig in and be really uncomfortable. You cannot achieve the fashionably conical 'look' of the eighteenth century without stays, and back then it was just not an option socially to leave the house without wearing them."

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**“It’s a wonderful feeling when I’ve made a beautiful dress that an interpreter loves and loves wearing. It gives me such a sense of accomplishment.”**

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Laura constructs most of the stays used by the costumed interpreters, with the occasional help of some handy volunteers. It is a laborious and time-consuming task, especially since she also makes the patterns. She does use a sewing machine to help her construct the up to one hundred channels required for inserting the boning supports. However, there is still much handwork to be done, including the approximately forty eyelets that she meticulously sews by hand with tiny, even stitches.

Ensuring authenticity takes time – a lot of it. "Sewing the eyelets can take up to a week or more depending on how much time I can spend on them; if I work solely on eyelets, two days tops." But she adds, "I usually don't have that luxury. It can take me a month or two to make a pair of stays since I'm always working on other projects at the same time."

As Tryon Palace's resident mantua-maker, Laura is responsible for designing and crafting all the new gowns being worn in the Palace and throughout the site, spanning a clothing period of about one hundred years. For inspiration, she studies original antique garments whenever possible, reviews many books and primary sources such as prints and paintings, and visits museum collections. She has also taken historic clothing courses at Colonial Williamsburg. She enjoys working with the eighteenth-century clothing the most; "I feel like I understand more how and why they did things with their clothing. It clicks with me



The mantua-maker's workroom is always filled with interesting items. White and burgundy hat, 1770s. Covered in fine white muslin with burgundy silk trimming and decorated with pearls, ruching and ostrich plumes.

Brown wool stays used in the 1770s. These are made of linen canvas with a wool outer fabric and boned with reed. They have a leather binding as well and lace in both the front and back for ease in dressing.



Detail of a stomacher, a fabric panel that decorated the front opening of a woman's gown. This version features tabs at the sides that allow the stomacher to be pinned in place while dressing. It is trimmed in ruching of fine cotton and silver embroidery.

Patchwork pockets based on an original pair ca. 1810. Pockets like these are attached to a waistband and worn on either side of a lady underneath the pocket slits in her petticoat; they remain invisible, but easily accessible.



more. I'm always learning; I've already corrected some of the things I made when I first got here because I have found better research. Knowing how to find quality information and who to ask has been a huge part of my job."

Given the detailed nature of the work, it is not surprising that a relatively small number of new costumes are produced each year, especially taking into account the caps, neckerchiefs, aprons and other accessories that Laura also must make. In addition, there's the mending, maintenance and alterations that need to be done to existing costumes. It can take up to two weeks to make one gown using a modern sewing machine to help a little with inside seams. A "Gown Workshop" that she organized for Tryon Palace interpreters this past January yielded a bonanza of eight new gowns in one month. Laura taught the participants how to drape the fabric and fit the garment directly on the body and supervised the sewing of the costumes. "We have some very talented seamstresses who are really interested in the history and accuracy of what they are wearing and I am very pleased with how far their knowledge of period costuming has come," she says. "They really like to look as authentic as possible. It was a lot of fun to do the workshop with them."

Laura remains busy away from the sewing machine as well. Throughout the year she teaches workshops, participates in the spinning and weaving program at the Palace and can often be found on site as a costumed interpreter. She loves having opportunities to interact with the public and to talk about her favorite topic, historic clothing. "I love to dispel myths – corsets were not really torture devices – and I love showing

visitors that costumes are another important part of history. People don't always understand about fashion. They'll want to know why people wore caps, whether it was for reasons of health, for instance. Sometimes I have to explain it was just because that was the fashion! Just like in the 1940s when a well-dressed woman would not go out without her gloves and hat. It's the same principle. Fashion evolves along with peoples' lives." On Laura's

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“Like food, clothing is one of the most effective ways of teaching history.”

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agenda is a fall fashion show. Although the details are still being worked out, she plans to present the different layers of garments worn and to display both outer and undergarments. “I'd like to present it more as a story about clothing to encourage interaction with the public. Like food, clothing is one of the most effective ways of teaching history. It's so accessible, it's something that people can really relate to and understand, something they have a connection to.”

Off the job, Laura's hobbies include photography and, not surprisingly, sewing. She designs and sews many of her own clothes and all her own costumes. She freely admits, “It is amazing if I have a day when I don't take a stitch in a garment!” Another interest of this self-styled “history nerd” are the Civil War reenactments in which she participates as often as time allows. She confesses, “Dressing up and camping are two of my favorite activities; it's my dream vacation!”

Back in her busy workroom, Laura Poppe admits that the job does hold its challenges. “There's so much to be done and I'm only one person. Fortunately, I have a couple of volunteers who help me out in the shop one or two days a week. They are so very helpful!” In the end, the rewards seem to outweigh any negatives. “I'm doing something now that I really love. Being able to spend time talking with people about the realities of clothing and history is great. The research, the design process and the terrific people I get to work with are all favorite parts of the job.” And, she adds with a smile as she picks up some handwork, “It's a wonderful feeling when I've made a beautiful dress that an interpreter loves and loves wearing. It gives me such a sense of accomplishment.” Looking at one of her beautifully crafted creations, it's easy to see why. ■



## Want to join in the fun?

Tryon Palace is always looking for dedicated volunteers, young and old! We have interesting opportunities available to fit every interest and schedule. For more information, contact Laurie Bowles at: (252) 514-2395, or e-mail her at: [lbowles@tryonpalace.org](mailto:lbowles@tryonpalace.org).

# A Southern Belle Gets a Makeover

Fifteen years ago, descendants of the Holland family of New Bern donated a remarkable life-sized portrait of a young Craven County woman to Tryon Palace. “We knew it was a painting that had significant potential for the collection; it’s a local painting which makes it an especially important acquisition for us and it is rare to have a portrait of this scale. Unfortunately it was not in any condition to be exhibited,” recalls Deputy Director Philippe Lafargue who was the Tryon Palace conservator at the time. “Efforts to secure grant money for its conservation were unsuccessful, and we were faced with space considerations because of its size; we really didn’t have a place to exhibit it.” So the painting went into storage to prevent further damage, waiting for the right time to make its debut.





Above: Time had not been kind to this painting. A combination of accumulated dirt, wear and tear, smoke and water damage, and inexpert retouching had marred and dimmed the once vibrant portrait.

Left: Conservation treatment by the Richmond Conservation Studio returned the bloom to this young Craven County woman and prepared her for a debut at the North Carolina History Center.



Small test swatches were cleaned to determine the right combination of solvents to use to clean off as much of the grime as possible. As shown in the detail, the results of the test cleaning of the tablecloth were especially dramatic.



With the construction of the North Carolina History Center, Tryon Palace jumped at the opportunity to exhibit the painting as part of its new Regional History Museum. But it was clear that more than 150 years after her portrait was painted, this Southern lady was badly in need of a makeover. Tryon Palace turned to the art conservation laboratory of Cleo Mullins whose firm, Richmond Conservation Studio, specializes in the conservation of paintings and decorative objects. Over many months, she and her team would accomplish what she terms “a major transformation.”

The first step was to conduct a thorough inspection of the painting’s structure and condition and get a complete photographic record. It was, simply put, not a pretty sight. The painting was covered with so many layers of dirt, grime and yellowed varnish that its original colors were largely obscured, and the young woman’s once youthful complexion resembled a piece of old leather. Previous crude attempts at cleaning and restoration had left thick patches of oil paint that had hardened to the point of being almost intractable. The paint in some areas had cracked or flaked off and numerous stains,

flyspecks and inexpert attempts at paint retouching marred the surface. During one of the previous restorations the painting had been attached with glue and wallpaper paste onto a piece of cardboard which had begun to separate from the original canvas and was now causing blistering on the surface. Water and mildew

“If the Yankees had spent time to stop and slash every Southern painting they are accused of having damaged, they would have never had time to win the war!”

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damage were also apparent and there were indications that the painting may have been exposed to fire. Somewhere in time, Ms. Mullins says, the painting “had gotten a very good soaking.”

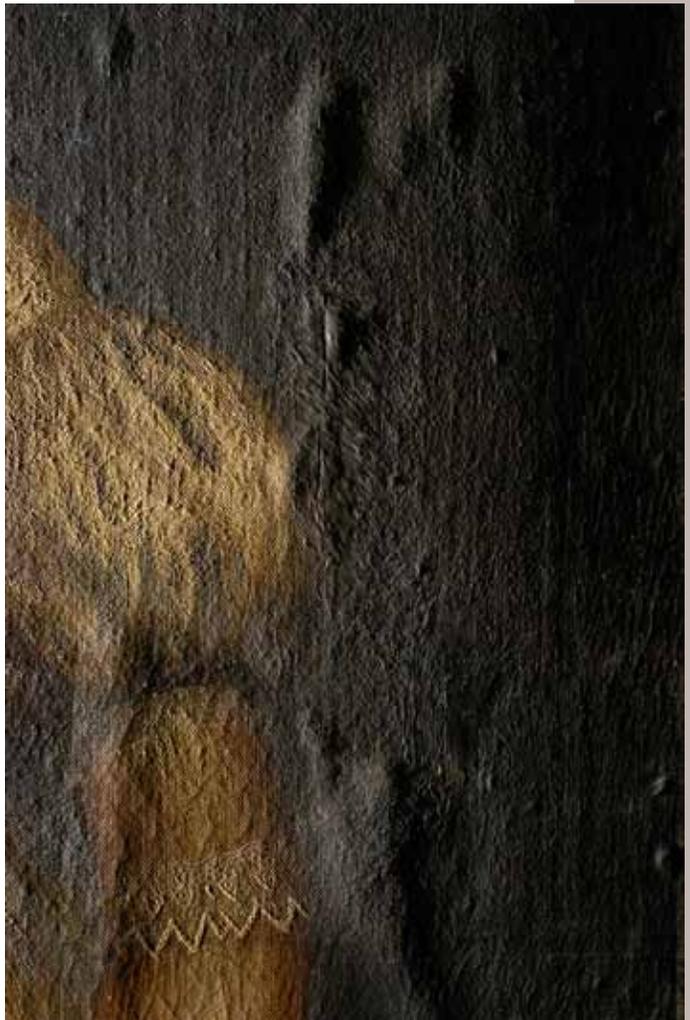
Ms. Mullins also found a number of tears in the painting, leading to some interesting speculation. Family legend had it that the painting was damaged by Yankee soldiers during the Civil War. But, as Ms. Mullins points out, “If the Yankees had spent time to stop and slash every Southern painting they are accused of having damaged, they would have never had time to win the war!”

Still, an encounter with Yankee soldiers is not out of the question. Ms. Mullins estimates that the tears occurred “fairly early on” and “were not the type of jagged complex tears that you typically see when something falls into a canvas.” Instead, she adds, the tears are “straight, clean vertical slits done with something very sharp. You can’t rule out the Yankees.” In addition, the conservators found that the painting’s top and side edges had been cut down from its original larger size, possibly when the painting had been reframed sometime in the early twentieth century.

After thoroughly assessing the condition, the conservation team began a nearly five-month process of structural repair, cleaning and inpainting, with the goal of bringing the painting back as close to its original condition as possible.

First the painting was carefully “released” from its frame and stretcher supports. Small test patches were cleaned to determine the best solvents to use to clean the large canvas. After protecting the surface of the painting with a special plastic-coated paper and using a temporary stretcher to hold the painting in place, lab technician Beth Fulton used large spatulas to slowly coax off the cardboard that had been glued onto the canvas. Smaller bits of cardboard, paper and cloth patches, and filling materials were peeled and carved off by hand. The back was vacuumed, tears were repaired and the back of the painting was newly lined with a layer of pre-tensioned polyester fabric for protection and support.

Over the years, the original canvas had begun to separate from its cardboard backing, causing blistering and flaking to multiple areas of the painting’s surface.



The pure white areas are the filling materials used to fill the gaps in the paint layer (to bring it up to the level of the remaining original paint) and the dark mottling/spots on her face are the remains of a previous crude attempt at retouching; these spots proved to be intractable. Those areas were all compensated for during the inpainting stage of treatment, when dry pigments were mixed with a clear acrylic medium to match the colors and then dotted in the losses and over the stains.

Cleo Mullins then turned her attention to the front and to a careful process of removing layer upon layer of dirt, varnish and clumsy overpainting and retouching. It was a painstaking, time-consuming task that at times required the use of sharp little sticks to carefully pry out grime that had become completely impacted. “We just had to keep working at it slowly,” recalls Ms. Mullins, “juggling between cleaning the dirt and dissolving many multiple layers of varnish. We also used scalpel blades to pick out as much of the old filling materials and overpaint as possible.”

The results were dramatic. With the yellowed varnish and the decades of dirt gone, the painting literally came to light – with some surprises. “Looking at the painting before treatment I would have said that the curtain was green or yellow. It turned out to be lavender and that was a shock!” says Ms. Mullins. The cleaning revealed a table covered with a vibrant red cloth with gold trimming; on top, a vase of white porcelain with gold trim and a bank of pink roses over a shaded green background. The vase is filled with a beautiful spring bouquet of pink roses, orange day lilies, Madonna lilies, freesias and wheat fronds. And most satisfyingly, perhaps, a luminous young woman with a peaches and cream complexion and a shy little



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“We knew it was a painting that had significant potential for the collection; it’s a local painting which makes it an especially important acquisition for us and it is rare to have a portrait of this scale. Unfortunately it was not in any condition to be exhibited.”

smile reemerged. The details of the shirring in her white muslin gown, the lace trim on her dress, the white flower garland in her hair and her dainty shoes all became vivid again.

But the work was not over. Next came the process of inpainting the areas where the paint had flaked away or where intractable remnants of prior retouching with gobs of oil paint had altered the original. Another member of the team, Lorraine Brevig, went to work using tiny brush strokes and cross hatching to ensure a minimal impact on the original painting, while bringing the problem areas as close to their original appearance as possible. “It’s a real trial and error process,” says Ms. Mullins. “Lorraine takes her palette full of known pigments from the time period and goes through them to painstakingly color match each damaged area. It takes a very long time to do an excellent job.”

By mounting the painting to a layer of reinforced fiberglass fabric slightly larger than the original surface, the conservators were also able to open up a few inches of the original edges of the painting that had previously been folded over and tacked, bringing it closer to its original size.

Unlike the heavy-handed efforts at restoration that the painting had suffered in the past, Ms. Mullins’ team of trained professionals used materials and techniques that can be easily reversed at a future time when the painting might again require conservation. “Conservators today are cautious, perhaps overly so,” she explains. “We use materials that are designed to be as stable as possible over the long run. We want anything we add to be easily removable without causing damage to the original painting. And we isolate all the treatments and inpainting we do, not only to protect the condition of the original canvas, but to preserve the distinction between what has been done as a conservation treatment now and what was done by the original artist.”

Our beautiful young lady will be entertaining callers at the North Carolina History Center. Come and meet her. We’re sure you will find her as charming as we do. ■

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“Looking at the painting before treatment I would have said that the curtain was green or yellow. It turned out to be lavender and that was a shock!”  
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Modern conservation treatments focus on repairing and stabilizing old damage, while regaining the appearance and preserving the integrity of the original work.



What's in a name? Plenty, actually. A personal identity. A story. A lifetime. When it comes to names, however, this young woman knows how to keep a secret. For years, the staff at Tryon Palace has been calling her "Miss Bishop;" the painting's elderly donor had forgotten her first name, but thought that she was a Miss Bishop who married a Mr. Holland of New Bern. But we have no real information to indicate definitively who she is or even when she posed for her portrait. So for now, Miss Bishop she remains.

As she waits to take her place in the North Carolina History Center, the search is on to restore this young woman her true identity. Deciphering the clues in her portrait could reveal

## *A rose by any other name...*

some important things about her. We know she was no country bumpkin; the open book and pages of prints on the table next to her are symbolic of a young woman who is educated and cultivated. Her refined dress and shoes, the gold pocket watch peeping out of her sash, and the four slim golden rings on her fingers indicate a degree of family prosperity. In the background the elegantly carved table, the fine porcelain vase and the richly patterned carpet all point to a young woman who either came from a wealthy family – or married into one.

We're not sure how old she is in this painting. Guesstimates put Miss Bishop's age anywhere from 13 to 20. Did she pose for a coming-of-age portrait? Is this her wedding portrait? The rings on her fingers predate the period when a ring on the fourth finger meant a wedding ring. The beautiful flower wreath on her head could have been worn for a ball or a wedding; however, says Tryon Palace curator Nancy Packer, "The wreath did remind me of some of the wax and silk orange blossom wreaths that you can see in some period examples of bridal head pieces." Although Miss Bishop wears white, that doesn't necessarily indicate a wedding dress; Ms. Packer points out that it's a reflection of the Greek Revival aesthetic of the period and that the color was frequently worn as a "best" dress.

As in any good mystery the clues themselves can be confusing. "The vase with the flower arrangement does make me wonder," says the curator. "The fact that they chose flowers alone is interesting. The flowers could represent her youth and innocence; whereas if you saw a fruit arrangement, for instance, it could refer to the fruitfulness of her womb and make you think that it's more likely a portrait of a young married woman. It also strikes me that the most dominant flowers in that vase are lilies, especially white lilies, which are, of course, an ancient symbol of purity – very strongly suggesting that this is an unmarried (or about to be married) young woman." Does the handkerchief in her hand have some significance? Maybe, or it could just be a portrait convention of the time. It's another question that requires further research.

Miss Bishop's clothes hold additional clues that help in dating the portrait. While the late Georgian period saw the waistline of women's dresses move higher to just below the bust, by the 1820s the waistline had begun to creep down closer to its natural place. The waist on Miss Bishop's beautiful dress



Do these flowers represent youth and innocence, or are they commemorating a young woman's wedding? Even the clues in the painting lead to more questions.

hovers a bit above where waistlines would remain later in the 1830s. Her lace-trimmed puffy sleeves show some of the exaggerated sleeve silhouette that would become very popular and would reach peak fullness about 1835. But even fashion clues can prove to be red herrings. “Her shoes are typical of those worn from the very early 1800s even through the 1860s. The details of the gown such as the lace on the sleeves, the shape of the neck and waistline, the ruching on the front of the bodice, the width of the hem – all these are clues to the date,” says Tryon Palace costume specialist Laura Poppe. “Some of them, such as the bodice ruching, are misleading. That sort of detail is often seen on later-period dresses and yet the shape of her gown is much earlier in style.” While Laura Poppe and Nancy Packer continue to scour through examples and period illustrations of women’s fashion to narrow the date further, their best estimate is that the portrait was painted somewhere between 1828 and 1835.

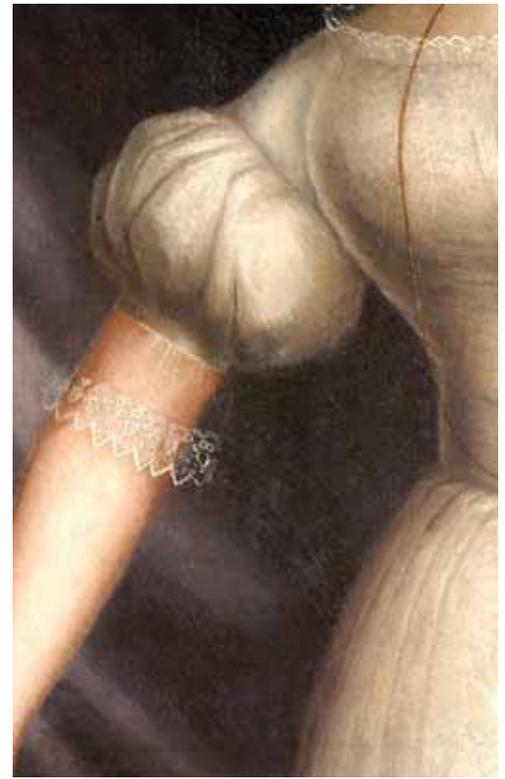
There is no signature on the painting and according to family lore the portrait was painted by an itinerant New York painter. This is probably true. During the nineteenth century it was common for artists to travel throughout the South to display their work and offer their services to well-to-do and well-established southern families. Among those who could afford to pay for them, portraits became one of the most popular ways of promoting the importance of one’s social status. The sheer size of this portrait is itself a clue: a life-size portrait such as this one was very unusual, says curator Nancy Packer. “This was a serious status symbol.”

The painting itself was executed if not by a top-tier portraitist, certainly by one with some considerable skill. “He’s definitely more skilled at certain things than others,” she says. “Some of the details of the lace on her dress, those reflections on her watch chain and on the flowers in her hair are very well done and her face is really lovely. I think he also did a great job with the vase and the table. Some of the proportions are off in her arm and it starts to break down a little towards the bottom. The artist is clearly having some trouble with perspective and scale and the young woman looks like she’s floating, but overall it’s a wonderful portrait. I think she would have been very pleased.”

So where does a history sleuth go next? One avenue of inquiry is the carpet in the painting; the unknown artist went to some trouble to provide a very diligent representation of its design. “He did that carpet with so much detail it might be possible to find a sample that is documented or find a sample that has been reproduced,” says Nancy Packer. “It’s clearly a very specific carpet and I think we may be able to find it in the records somewhere.”

The curator also plans to do some further research in local newspapers of the period to try to identify any artists who might have been traveling through the area at the time.

Following the genealogy trail may yield the most promising results. Since the painting came down through relatives of the Holland family, well-to-do landowners and merchants in Craven County, that’s where Nancy Packer plans to concentrate her efforts and work her way through the ancestry. “I think there’s a lot more to be researched in that family and more work to do with searching through the local papers of the time. I’ve gotten some good leads from people who’ve done a lot of genealogical research in this area. I think we can find her.” ■



Above: Miss Bishop’s clothing provides clues to the date of her portrait. Her sleeves are just beginning to show the puffy silhouette that would reach much larger proportions and peak by 1835. The unknown artist has done an especially skillful job with the lace details of the sleeve.

Bottom left: Is the beautifully hemmed handkerchief in her hand meaningful or just a convention common to portraits of the time? That’s another question that merits further research. The very detailed rendition of the carpet may also help in dating the portrait.



# COUNT TO THE DOWN



## North Carolina H

**T**oo often, contemplating a visit to a history museum can become a Brussels-sprouts kind of moment – you *know* it's good for you, but you don't know if you'll actually *like* it. History can have an image problem, especially with younger people who may be turned off by the thought of “Don't Touch!” environments full of quaint objects, paintings of stiff-looking ancestors and musty documents about events that seem far removed from contemporary life.

Tryon Palace is about to change all that. This fall the North Carolina History Center sweeps away any stereotype of the dry,



The Regional History Museum is one of two new interactive museums in the North Carolina History Center.

The central hall is the first gathering place, containing an information and ticketing desk, informational and directional signage, and a large space for programming special events. Directly off the hall are a new gift shop, the 200-seat Cullman Hall performing arts theater and two smaller orientation theaters. To the southeast, a more intimate special exhibits space hosts a variety of revolving exhibits and a glass-clad café provides a spot for a casual meal.

Two new museums within the Center combine history and high-tech to provide unique intergenerational learning opportunities. The **Regional History Museum** envelopes visitors in the grand sweep of the area's history, while the **Pepsi Family Center** provides an engaging, hands-on environment in which families become "citizens" of a 19th-century coastal community. There is also an exciting new way to tour Tryon Palace's historic houses and gardens.

We asked lead exhibit designer Dr. Clay Gish of ESI Design to give everyone a sneak peak of what's in store.

# History Center

dusty museum and replaces it with a lively, high-tech, family-friendly attraction where visitors of all ages can see that history isn't just a thing of the past.

Some of the changes to the Tryon Palace visitor experience will be immediately obvious. Instead of arriving at the repurposed 1950s-era visitor center currently in use, guests will now begin their visit at the North Carolina History Center; they will immediately find themselves in the soaring, light-filled Mattocks Hall with its exposed architectural features that harken back to the days when the site was a boat-building facility.

## History With a Perspective

"One of the important reasons for building the North Carolina History Center was to give people more options for what they can do here, as well as more ways to explore this region's history," says Dr. Gish. "Now they are going to have a lot more choices depending on what their interests are."

If anything, history is about telling stories and when it comes to enjoying a good story, empathy and understanding go hand in hand. The North Carolina History Center takes the idea of "walk a mile in my shoes" and uses it to engage visitors with the stories that unfold

“One of the important reasons for building the North Carolina History Center was to give people more options for what they can do here, as well as more ways to explore this region’s history.”

At the Pepsi Family Center, a young visitor uses a “chipper” to keep resin flowing for use in the turpentine still.



as they tour the Tryon Palace historic buildings, gardens and the North Carolina History Center.

For their tour of Tryon Palace, visitors can now choose a particular “perspective” on the past: women, children, African-Americans (free and enslaved), workers, town leaders and two history professional tours: architectural historian and a gardener’s

tour. “What each of these tours does is give you a particular focus for your visit,” says exhibit designer Dr. Gish. “Say you want to take the African-American tour. As you go through all the historic buildings, in each one of them you’ll learn about the lives of African-Americans who lived and worked in this area. For instance, if you visit the Hay House you’ll learn there was an enslaved woman and a girl who lived and worked there, perhaps mother and daughter, and you’ll learn about how they spent their days in that house. In the Stanly house you’ll hear about the illegitimate son, John Carruthers Stanly; he earned his own freedom and was able to buy the freedom of his family and become a very successful businessman, quite wealthy. Later in life he actually helped his white half-brother out of an economic jam. We focus on the personal stories of real people as much as possible because that’s what brings history to life.”

### **Navigating Through History**

To help them create a custom-made journey through the past, visitors will be able to use a nifty little tool called a “History Navigator” for the duration of their visit. The History Navigator is a personal handheld device that extends the information provided by human guides and exhibits – a kind of GPS to the past. An on-camera narrator acts as a personal tour guide throughout the various sites, telling visitors about the people who lived and worked there and suggesting additional items for exploration.

Using the History Navigator, visitors can watch videos, listen to stories and music, and look at historical photos and images. (Inside the historic houses, visitors are asked



Left: The History Navigator acts as a high-tech tour guide, creating opportunities to view history from different perspectives.

Below: The Regional History Museum combines technology with more traditional museum exhibits to enhance and extend learning opportunities for all ages.

to turn off the Navigator so they can interact with the living history interpreters and fellow visitors.)

Using a map of the site, visitors choose where they wish to visit. When they arrive at a historic house, the History Navigator relays the stories pertinent to that house and the perspective they have chosen to explore. For instance, at the Dixon House, visitors exploring the Worker-Artisan Tour hear the story of Lewis Bond, a master cabinet maker, and his young apprentices – William, Robert, James and Henry. “That kind of perspective view on history makes this concept really unique here,” says Dr. Gish.

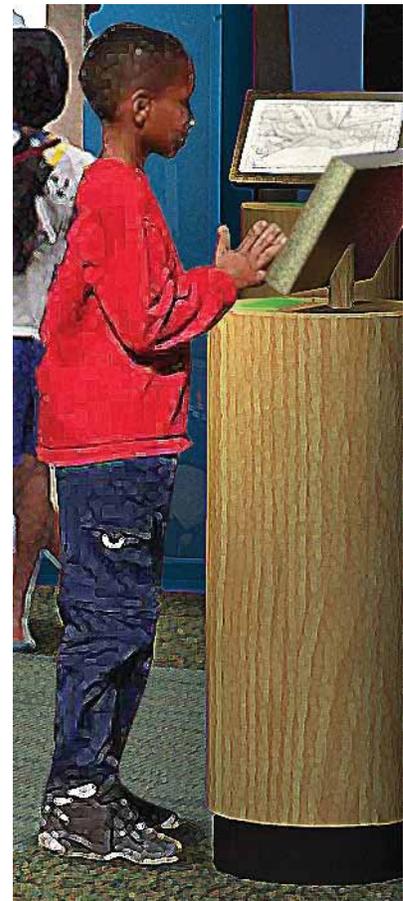
At any point, visitors can select other roles to explore a variety of experiences and points of view. “Suppose you have just visited the Palace kitchen and learned what all the people who work in the kitchen do, but you then wonder what life was like for the family,” says the designer. “Switch to the town leader perspective on the History Navigator to find out. Or say you want to switch to the children’s tour; at that point you can find out what kids did who were also working at the Palace at this time.” More than a way-finder, the History Navigator is designed to spark

curiosity and make connections using the kind of technology that drives contemporary life today.

### The Regional History Museum

In the Regional History Museum, visitors discover the history of North Carolina’s central coastal region through artifacts, graphics, audio and live demonstrations that show how the experience of people changed from the region’s earliest days through the early 20th century. Exhibition areas are organized around the themes that bind humans across generations: people, work, environment and community.

“We take the environment as a starting point because it really did determine where people chose to settle and the kinds of industry they developed,” says exhibit designer Dr. Clay Gish.





On board the Snap Dragon, youngsters will find that smooth sailing requires teamwork and analytical skills.

Entering the Regional History Museum, visitors find themselves immersed in an abstract sylvan environment with large murals and cutout shapes of long leaf pines, once the dominant eco-system of the region.

In a clearing ahead, there's a large circular projection area where visitors can gather around and choose from among nine different video presentations exploring geologic history, native peoples, European settlement and how the region developed over time.

A river of light – lighting effects that ripple and shimmer like water – emphasizes the rivers' importance to the region and leads visitors on a path through the museum and through the progression of life from a natural setting toward a more urbanized environment. Throughout, a combination of graphics, artifacts, activity kiosks and audio first-person accounts weave the story of the men, women and children, free and enslaved, who made this area unique.

### The Pepsi Family Center

Technology takes center stage over at the Pepsi Family Center, an interactive museum filled with hands-on activities geared to the 7 to 12-year-old age group.

In the Pepsi Family Center, children, families and the young at heart begin their journey to the past when “they enter a time machine that looks like a spacecraft,” says Dr. Gish. The doors close and soon the Time Machine whirs to life as a series of historical images depicting the passage of time swirl rapidly counterclockwise, whizzing visitors back to the 19th century. “Then it suddenly stops, the door opens and you step outside and see a sign that says ‘Welcome to 1835,’” says Dr. Gish.

As visitors emerge from the Time Machine, they cross a small wooden bridge to find themselves in a little 19th-century coastal town complete with a house, a “downtown” shops area, a wharf with a ship in harbor, and a pine forest surrounding a turpentine

still. A four-sided clock tower stands in the center of the Town Square where a virtual Mayor waits to greet visitors and explain the various activities.

At the Pepsi Family Center all the activities are computer-enhanced, hands-on experiences led by virtual hosts; for instance, young visitors can create a virtual quilt aided by the lady of the house who is hosting a quilting bee. In another area the Cook, an enslaved woman, helps kids prepare a meal for the family; there's a newspaper office where kids can make a newspaper and a shop where they help the grocer pull together shopping orders. In the forest they'll find the tools to make turpentine in the distillery.

All the activities will require analytical thinking and teamwork. "For instance, on the ship, if you are the helmsman there's an actual ship's wheel that you are turning and there's a compass that you have to read," says Dr. Gish. "You will have to work with the first mate to get the navigation of the ship right and with the lookout and people working the sails to figure out which way to adjust them to get the maximum wind speed for the journey."

Just as in a true-life sea adventure, it won't always be smooth sailing. "At some point on this trip a big storm comes up so the kids will have to deal with the ship in a crisis

mode for part of the voyage," says Dr. Gish. "There's an aspect like that for each of the activities; the aim is to have kids working together to accomplish a goal."

### **History Is Not One-Size-Fits-All**

Whatever your interests, whatever your age, the opening of the North Carolina History Center means that there will be many ways to explore Tryon Palace and its campus of activities.

And if technology isn't your thing, no problem. "You can still go on the guided tour through the Palace, you can still do a self-guided tour through the historic houses and anywhere you want on the grounds – with the History Navigator or not, that's optional. You will still find the gracious hospitality and the living history programs that Tryon Palace does so well," says Dr. Gish. "But for people who want to know more, they can also listen to the first-person accounts, they can do the interactive activities that will make it more interesting for the more adventurous – I don't want to say just younger people either, because plenty of older people are eager to try new things too."

The countdown begins! The North Carolina History Center is scheduled to open fall 2010. ■

**“We take the environment as a starting point because it really did determine where people chose to settle and the kinds of industry they developed within.”**

# History Goes Green

From the earliest stages of the design process of the North Carolina History Center, Tryon Palace was determined to create a building that would preserve the history and culture of its surrounding environment and would be a model of sustainable building design. Why go green? It was an easy decision to make.

Sustainably designed facilities and sites provide cost-effective, healthy and pleasant environments by minimizing environmental impacts, life-cycle costs and use of nonrenewable resources. That means using less energy and ensuring better air quality for everyone. A green facility made good economic and environmental sense to us. In addition, with the acquisition of the 6.5-acre Barbour Boat Works site for the North Carolina History Center, we knew we had an extraordinary opportunity to reclaim a historic portion of the New Bern waterfront and make it accessible and enjoyable for residents and visitors alike. We were determined to be good stewards of this vital waterfront setting. Tryon Palace hired architects BJAC to provide project leadership to accomplish sustainability within the framework of our project goals.

Sustainable design can involve many things, including improving indoor air quality for all users and visitors, and increasing natural light wherever possible to create a better interior experience and allow us to use less energy overall. But “going green” also means operating cost reductions, operations and maintenance optimization, productivity increases, natural resource conservation, waste reduction, recycling, performance improvement and potential liability reduction. At the North Carolina History Center, this translates into a number of sustainable architectural features.



Bald cypress and wax myrtle are part of the constructed wetlands that act as a natural filtration system for the North Carolina History Center.

An 80,000 gallon cistern collects water for use in irrigation throughout the site.



The Center is primarily clad in locally manufactured brick. The use of local materials not only helps our area's economy by buying locally, but also cuts down on carbon emissions created when materials are transported from great distances. Inside, the Mattocks Hall and circulation areas enjoy generous natural light, minimizing our total energy consumption and creating open, welcoming spaces for our visitors and staff. Natural materials such as terrazzo

catches and stores water to supply irrigation for the surrounding landscape, decreasing our overall water usage. The gardens around the Center contain local, indigenous plants which require less water and energy to maintain. Other landscaping features include a parking area bioswale, which uses natural plants and materials to remove silt and pollution from automobiles from surface runoff water. Surface runoff is directed to the reconstructed wetlands area which functions as a natural filtration system for water runoff from the site, as well as for the 30 acres of the surrounding New Bern residential area.



Abundant natural lighting creates a welcoming atmosphere and reduces total energy consumption.

and maple have been used throughout; natural materials use less finishes and chemicals and result in a healthier environment for building occupants.

The Center's floor elevation is set at twelve feet above sea level both for flood prevention and to avoid any groundwater contamination. An 80,000-gallon rainwater and condensation cistern

Redeveloping the Barbour Boat Works was an important part of the sustainable strategy for the North Carolina History Center. Designated as a 'brownfield site' – an official term for abandoned or underused industrial and commercial facilities – the site had become unsightly. With the completion of the North Carolina History Center, this revitalization project creates a thriving public history and recreation district – a transformation that will benefit our community for many generations.

Tryon Palace is proud that the new building and site will receive LEED Silver certification. LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) is an internationally recognized green building certification system that verifies a project was designed and built to improve performance through energy savings, water efficiency, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction, improved indoor environmental quality and stewardship of resources.

History looks great green! ■



**W**illiam “Bill” Drewer was many things. A loving husband and father, a respected colleague and talented Principal with Quinn Evans Architects in Washington, DC, a mentor to many aspiring architects and young professionals. When Bill passed away in January, much too soon at the age of 48, he had already left his mark on cultural heritage projects up and down the East Coast including, fortunately for us, New Bern.

## Saying Good-bye to a Friend: William Drewer (1962 - 2010)

From 2000 until the time of his death, Bill worked closely with Tryon Palace in the design of the North Carolina History Center. We all remember the tall, lanky, unassuming guy who spent countless hours trying to understand who and what made Tryon Palace work. Nearly everybody knew Bill because Bill made a point of getting to know nearly everybody. He spent many hours with the staff, not only learning about their present work and projects, but also soliciting their ideas about the tools they needed to move Tryon Palace into new ways of presenting history and enriching visitors’ experiences. He helped us articulate what the North Carolina History Center could and would be.

Bill specialized in architectural designs that were sensitive and appropriate to historical settings, so he spent much of his time getting to know New Bern as well. He took his camera

on walks around town taking photos of many buildings; photos that would later inspire him and his team to design a building that would fit seamlessly into the fabric of our historic town.

Bill worked very hard to get things right – the first time around. “It’s pretty remarkable that the concept of the building he came up with 10 years ago has not really changed much over that time,” says Tryon Palace Deputy Director Philippe Lafargue. “Bill was

a very passionate professional and it really showed in his work. He had a wonderful, dry sense of humor, but he also knew how and when to be forceful in a very positive way. He was a real advocate for protecting the integrity of the building’s design, while still balancing our needs as a client. It was such a great pleasure to have been able to work with him on this project.”

Bill’s passion translated into a great design; that great design became the North Carolina History Center, a new hub for all of Tryon Palace’s activities, a place where the past sparks conversations about the future, a place where visitors can be active participants in history, rather than passive witnesses. There’s a saying that every job is a self-portrait of the person who did it; we’ve got a building at Tryon Palace that proves it.

Thanks Bill. ■

## New Friends

The Tryon Palace Council of Friends welcomes the following members who have joined between March 23, 2010 and May 31, 2010.

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Ms. Melinda J. Robinson, New Bern

Mr. David N. Skipper, Wilmington

Mrs. Tempe Younger, Kinston



**DON'T MISS THIS!**

The new North Carolina History Center won't be open to the public until fall 2010, but members of the Tryon Palace Council of Friends will have lunch and be given a tour of the new Center on July 31<sup>st</sup> for our Annual Meeting/Friends' Day. This will be the first official function in the History Center and we couldn't be more excited that it will be for members of the Council of Friends.

If you are not a member of the Friends, but want to be part of this very special event, please contact Karen O'Connell at 252-514-4933 or [koconnell@tryonpalace.org](mailto:koconnell@tryonpalace.org) for membership information. Membership information is also available on our website at [www.tryonpalace.org](http://www.tryonpalace.org).

## Coming Up

Be sure to check our website often for an update on events and activities we are planning to celebrate the opening of the North Carolina History Center. We're excited to have a special exhibition of North Carolina's copy of the original Bill of Rights coming to the Center in September. We'll have more information soon at [www.tryonpalace.org](http://www.tryonpalace.org).

# Events Sampler

The **July 4 weekend** will be a busy and fun one at Tryon Palace with patriotic kids' craft activities, colonial cricket matches, musket firing demonstrations, and a special Tryon Palace Fife & Drum Corps performance followed by a dramatic 18th-century reading of the Declaration of Independence scheduled for **July 3**. On **July 4th** we are holding a unique **19th-century town celebration** on the New Bern Academy Green featuring music, dancing and games including townball, an early precursor to baseball! These events are all free of charge; there is a fee for interior tours.



Learn about 300 years of African-American history on one of our **African American Historic Downtown Walking Tours** through New Bern. Tours last approximately 90 minutes and cover 16 blocks. Reservations are required: 252-514-4935. Dates are **July 18, August 15** and **September 19** at 2:00 p.m.; \$4 per adult, \$2 per student.

On **Wednesday, August 25**, celebrate the **anniversary of North Carolina's First Provincial Congress** by becoming a delegate! During this interactive program, the audience will participate in the First Provincial Congress that took place at Tryon Palace on August 25, 1774. Craft activities for children will be included. Time: 6:00 p.m.; \$4 per adult, \$2 per student, FREE with regular admission.



On **September 6** at the New Bern Academy Green, you can also watch the spectacle of the 1802 **Stanly-Spaight duel** unfold as two 19th-century New Bern political rivals meet in a deadly reminder of an era when a man's personal honor was his most cherished quality. Tours of the New Bern Academy and a concert by the Tryon Palace Fife & Drum Corps round out the day's activities. FREE, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Fans of historical fashion are in for a real treat during **Démodé Fashion Weekend, Friday, September 10 – Sunday, September 12**. Démodé – meaning outmoded – never looked so good! New York may be showing off all the latest fashions this week but come see our classics and explore the world of 18th-century fashion. The weekend will include a variety of fashion shows, period demonstrations, tea and light treats, and kids' craft activities. Times and costs vary; consult our website for more details.

*Please note: programs are subject to change. For up-to-date information about these events, tour and garden hours, and a complete listing of all our events, please visit our website at [www.tryonpalace.org](http://www.tryonpalace.org), or call (252)-514-4900 or (800) 767-1560.*

## IN FOCUS

### Brushstrokes of African-American History

William Aiken Walker was a quintessential Southern artist. Born in 1839 in Charleston, South Carolina, Walker served in the Confederate army and was wounded in Virginia. After the war he turned to painting for his livelihood and for the next 50 years he traveled throughout the South becoming the most prolific chronicler of life in the Reconstruction era. His genre paintings of plantations, cotton fields, and the men and women who worked the land provide a unique and rich record of African-American life during the period.

Two of Walker's paintings will be exhibited in the North Carolina History Center. These portraits of laborers standing in a cotton field wearing torn, well-worn clothing illustrate that while war may have bought African-Americans their freedom, they continued to live their daily lives close to the land that had enslaved them.

By all accounts a charming and outgoing man, Walker understood the mystique of the "Old South" and took advantage of a burgeoning postwar interest for quaint mementos of a changing region. Most of his paintings are on a small scale, which made them inexpensive and easily portable for the tourists at the hotels and holiday spas where he sold many of his works. Although at the time many of his paintings were bought as novelty souvenirs rather than fine art, today we recognize the invaluable artistic and historic record left by Walker. Walker's work was to some extent sentimental, but he never descended to caricature or trivialization; all his subjects are depicted with great dignity and the painter's careful attention to detail speaks eloquently of African-American lives defined by poverty and hard labor. ■



## Additions to the Annual Report

The Council of Friends extends sincere appreciation to the following individual donors who provided private support for Tryon Palace in 2009.

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