Fall Program

Step Into The Trenches for an archaeological treasure hunt with us on Tuesday, October 16, at 8:30 p.m. Ivor Noël Hume, a masterful lecturer, will give us an up-to-date report on his excavations of Wolstenholme Town on the James River. It is the most important seventeenth-century site to be discovered and is beginning to revolutionize historical interpretations of the earliest European settlements in Virginia. Don't miss it!

Ivor Noël Hume

Colonial Williamsburg is preeminent in the field of eighteenth-century architectural restoration. Building and restorative work has always been preceded by detailed archaeological work. Now, under Ivor Noël Hume, Director of the Department of Archaeology since 1957, exciting new archaeological discoveries are being made for the seventeenth century as well. Mr. Noël Hume is guiding the excavation of the oldest British domestic settlement yet to be found in America—Wolstenholme Towne, founded in 1619 along the banks of the James River, about 10 miles east of Jamestown.

Mr. Noël Hume came to Williamsburg from the Guildhall Museum in London, where he had been a staff archaeologist since 1949. In that position he was responsible for the recovery and recording of antiquities discovered as a result of wartime bombings in London. His radio and television broadcasts for the British Broadcasting Corporation, and his numerous articles in Connoisseur, Antiques, Country Life and Collector's Guide have earned him a wide popular audience. Thousands of visitors to Williamsburg have heard his superb narration for the film “Search for a Century” describing the archaeology at Carter's Grove. Mr. Noël Hume is highly respected for his authorship of Archaeology in Britain, Treasure in the Thames, Great Artifacts of Colonial America and his series of pamphlets about the archaeology of Colonial Williamsburg. In 1959 he became a Research Associate of the Smithsonian Institution, an honorary position which he still holds.

In 1970, when Colonial Williamsburg acquired Carter's Grove, work was begun exploring the 500 surrounding acres along the James River. In searching for artifacts which would demonstrate eighteenth-century plantation life, Williamsburg archaeologists found evidence of a much older, seventeenth-century English settlement. The exciting story of the Wolstenholme Towne discovery is told by Mr. Noël Hume in his article, “First Look at a Lost Virginia Settlement” in the June 1979 National Geographic:

“For close on 350 years the remains of Wolstenholme Towne would lie buried and forgotten—until archaeologists looking for something quite different came upon them. But even then, a few dirty marks in the soil and a handful of potsherds did not hint that we had stumbled upon one of the most dramatic incidents in American colonial history—or that there we would uncover post-holes offering evidence of the earliest town plan yet excavated in British America, together with some truly astonishing artifacts.”

After three years of the most painstaking digging, and skillful, almost miraculous restoration of fragments of pottery and metal Mr. Noël Hume can speculate about the value of his latest triumph. “Whenever we open a door into an unknown world, everything we see inside is important. Although traces of the 1622 massacre are intensely interesting and dramatic, and finding the colonists’ arms and armor is exciting, what really matters is the new light shed on British life in America in the second decade of colonization.”
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New Treasure

As YOU MAY HAVE already noticed from widespread newspaper and television coverage, the library has committed itself to purchasing one of the most important historical volumes ever acquired. William Hack’s late seventeenth-century manuscript “South Seas Atlas,” copied from a Spanish derrotero captured by the English pirate Bartholomew Sharp, documents a crucial chapter in American history recorded in no other source.

Our next issue of the Quarto will be entirely devoted to the atlas, with a history of its creation and evaluation of its importance by Dr. George Kish of the Geography Department. Professor Kish, who served as part-time curator of maps under Randolph Adams in the mid-1940’s, has a wide reputation for his scholarship in the field of historical geography and mapmaking in the Age of Discovery and Exploration.

An effort is now underway to raise $50,000 to complete payment for the new treasure, and assistance on the part of all friends of the library will be most welcome in the coming months. The atlas, which is as beautiful as it is historically important, will be on display at the October 16 meeting of the Associates.

Wallace J. Bonk

Dr. WALLACE J. BONK, former head of the School of Library Science, died in Ann Arbor on July 18 after an extended illness. Professor Bonk, in addition to his noteworthy contributions as a teacher and administrator, had a scholarly interest in the history of rare book libraries and fine printing. He published several monographs based on research at the Clements Library and co-authored a standard work, Building Library Collections, now in its 4th edition.

Professor Bonk took a keen interest in the library’s activities. His wife Joyce has been our catalog librarian since 1956, when Professor Bonk received his doctorate from the University of Michigan. On his last visit to the Clements, Professor Bonk shared in the staff’s enthusiasm for the new manuscript atlas which had arrived the day before. His effervescent personality, his warmth, and his delightful sense of humor will be deeply missed.

Staff Activities

IN EARLY AUGUST Map Curator Douglas Marshall returned after six weeks in Los Angeles, where he was a post-doctoral fellow at the William Andrews Clark Library. The study program focused on English maritime enterprise in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Mr. Marshall will spend September attending international conferences on historical cartography, maintenance of cartographic archives, and history of nautical science in Helsinki, Berlin, and Greenwich.

Barbara Mitchell, assistant manuscript curator, became the third generation of Clements curators to attend the Institute for the Editing of Historical Documents held in Madison, Wisconsin, in July. Both John Dann and Arlene Shy were selected to participate in previous institutes. The two-week session was sponsored by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.
The Most Expensive book previously purchased for the library was the account of Magellan's circumnavigation of the globe written by a survivor, Antonio Pigafetta, and published at Paris about 1525. It was bought at auction in 1966 by the Associates for $56,000. Of course, a handful of books acquired by Mr. Clements early in the century are worth that much and more today, but no similar amount was ever paid for a single title.

Any misgivings the director had then about authorizing such a high bid were dispelled the next day, when a disappointed private collector offered $75,000 for the book. It was the seventh known copy, and the only one in private hands. That was the end of the story for eleven years, until December 1977, when Sotheby Parke Bernet Galleries announced the discovery of another copy in Europe and offered it at auction. Mr. Peckham admitted to feeling some uneasiness, because if this copy should bring a good deal less than $56,000 the Associates would appear to have been extravagant and his judgment questioned. However, it didn't. In fact the book brought the astonishing price of $130,000 and went to Yale University. We were pleased that another university found it a desirable investment.

Equally astonishing, Sotheby Parke Bernet has just offered another copy—the ninth—from "the same European private library" as the eighth copy. Imagine, two copies in one collection! With a repaired title page, it was auctioned on May 23, 1979 and was purchased for $100,000 by a dealer, presumably acting for someone else.

The rise in monetary value of our copy in a dozen years is due in part to inflation, no doubt, but it also makes our copy look like a basement bargain. The Associates are to be congratulated again on their daring decision in 1966. The big plunges pay off in a very few years, and they provide the items that add luster to this library.

Stretching Our Funds

We Always Do a good job of stretching our rare book acquisitions budget as far as possible. With staff expertise and a superb reference library of bibliographies and dealers' catalogs, we have a considerable knowledge of the values of Americana and we stay away from overpriced items. Particularly rewarding are those occasions, once or twice a year, when we acquire an outstanding piece at a fraction of its true value.

A New York auction catalog arrived in early May containing a manuscript "Map of the Counties of Newcastle, Kent and Sussex upon the Delaware according to a Lawful Survey made in the Year 1737," drawn by Benjamin Eastburn and measuring 27 x 38 inches. The description noted that Eastburn published a survey map of the region in 1740, and suggested that it was possibly "a preliminary draft, an engraver's master, or just a slightly later copy of that printed map."

It was a case where our collections gave us an advantage not shared by the auction gallery cataloger. We have a copy of the printed Eastburn map, and the Delaware portion of it measures only 7 x 14 inches, is little more than an outline map of boundaries, and is clearly dated 1740. It simply made no sense that a map of 2 1/4 x 3 1/6 feet in size, dated 1737, would be a copy of a much smaller one dated three years later. Carnegie Book Shop looked at the map for us, guaranteed that it was indeed a contemporary manuscript, and assured us that "some loss of paper" noted in the catalog did not affect the important portions of the surface.

Early American manuscript maps are high on our priorities, and we authorized a bid of slightly over $2,000. We got it for $400!

When the map arrived, it was clear that it was a very important map drawn by a professional surveyor, presumably Eastburn, who had personally visited the territory. It is far and away the largest, most detailed map of present-day Delaware done in the colonial period.

Playing on hunches, we again turned to our superb reference collection. In February and March of 1872, Puttick & Simpson, auctioneers of London, sold the library and archives of William Penn and his descendants. We have the catalog, and lot 570 is the very same map, its whereabouts lost to scholars for more than a century.

The acquisition, therefore, turned out to be the original survey of the "three lower counties on the Delaware," done for the Penn family proprietors at a time when they were squabbling over boundaries with the Calverts, proprietors of Maryland. Careful research and superior library resources enabled us to acquire an exceptional item for five to ten percent of its true market value.
James Humphreys was a prudent man. When he began publishing his newspaper The Pennsylvania Ledger in January 1775 he announced to his Philadelphia readers that he intended to report political news impartially. However, his sentiments soon became public knowledge; he signed the oath of allegiance to George III and refused to bear arms against his king. In 1776 Humphreys published a pamphlet, Strictures on Paine's Common Sense, which sold several thousand copies in a few months. Coming under increasing attack from Philadelphia patriots, the publisher closed his paper before the year was out and retired to the country.

Humphreys returned to Philadelphia when the British took possession of the city in September, 1777. British occupation revived the city's economy and Humphreys capitalized on the new burst of prosperity. He reestablished his newspaper as The Pennsylvania Ledger or the Philadelphia Market Day Advertiser. Here Humphreys reported the “progress of the tyranny, knavery, and oppression of congressional authority.”

When the British evacuated Philadelphia in June, 1778, James Humphreys followed them to New York, then joined the Loyalist migration to Shelburne, Nova Scotia. Humphreys was a Philadelphian by birth and he returned to his beloved city as soon after the war as he dared. Once again he established a printing house.

Recently we acquired a set of The Pennsylvania Ledger or the Philadelphia Market Day Advertiser. We are pleased to add it to our other Loyalist newspapers such as The Royal Gazette, published in Charleston, South Carolina, by John Wells and the numerous publications of the great Tory printer James Rivington.

Van Deventer Papers

Christopher Van Deventer's papers were given to the library almost twenty years ago. As deputy quartermaster general during the War of 1812, chief clerk in the War Department from 1817 to 1827, and a friend of John C. Calhoun, Van Deventer maintained a close connection with the complex political events of the time.

Yet one small group of his papers remained in family hands until a few months ago when 195 additional items were donated by Robert Van Deventer of Chattanooga, Tennessee. This recent acquisition fully documents the scandal that ended Christopher Van Deventer's public career.

In 1818 Van Deventer's brother-in-law, Elijah Mix, bid on a War Department contract to provide stones for the construction of a fort at the Rip Rap shoal at the entrance to Hampton Roads on the Chesapeake. Van Deventer, then chief clerk under Secretary of War Calhoun, knew nothing of Mix's proposal until after the contract was signed with Gen. Joseph Swift, chief of Army engineers. But Mix's price, low enough to secure the contract, was too low to bring in the work, and Mix asked his brother-in-law to underwrite a quarter share.

Van Deventer consulted Calhoun, who, while noting there was nothing illegal in the involvement, advised against it. But Van Deventer went ahead and bought in, without informing Calhoun. A year later he was coerced by the floundering Mix to purchase another quarter interest. But as Mix's business soon improved, Van Deventer sold both shares.

In January 1820, an anonymous letter to President James Monroe, which was quickly passed along to Calhoun, accused Van Deventer of financial interest in awarding the Rip Rap contract and charged the department with other irregularities. Since defense costs had been under attack for some time by administration critics, as well as Calhoun's enemies, this affair excited some debate in the press. Yet after a two-year congressional investigation, no formal censure was brought against anyone, although there were recommendations for upgrading the Engineer Department's contracting procedures.

Within months of the legislative review, Van Deventer received a blackmail threat, the first of several from Elijah Mix, whose shady career as a forger, bankrupt, and swindler, was coming to light.

Calhoun was vice president when Mix's perfidy was thoroughly exposed in 1825. Maj. Satterlee Clark, who bore an old grudge against Calhoun, gave to one of Mix's competitors a letter from Mix which claimed Calhoun had been in compliance with Van Deventer's involvement in the Rip Rap contract. When the letter was published in the Alexandria Gazette, Calhoun immediately called for a full investigation.

This time, the legislative report exonerated Calhoun, but was so vague in other respects that Van Deventer was regarded as a liability to the War Department and dismissed. Van Deventer, no doubt guilty of "an inadvertency," as Calhoun put it, tried to clear his name from the imputation of wrongdoing generated by the dismissal.