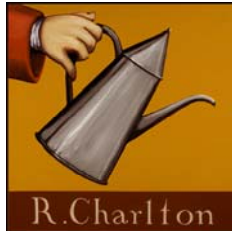


# Colonial Williamsburg

---

THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION  
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS  
P.O. BOX 1776  
WILLIAMSBURG, VA 23187-1776  
(757) 220-7286  
www.history.org



## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHARLTON'S COFFEEHOUSE**

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — The reconstruction of Charlton's Coffeehouse, the only 18th-century coffeehouse in America today, embodies considerable history within the walls of the 35-foot square building.

The first owner of the property upon which the coffeehouse stands was Francis Sharpe. He purchased Lot #58 from the trustees of the City of Williamsburg in 1713. After failing to build a structure on the lot within 24 months, Sharpe forfeited the property to the city's trustees, then re-purchased the land in 1717 and constructed a house on the western edge, avoiding a deep ravine to the east. Sharpe died in 1739, leaving the property to three sons, William, Jacob and Francis Jr. William was allotted the smallest portion of the lot, a 35-foot square eastern section, sold to Robert Crichton prior to 1750. Nathaniel Walthoe, clerk of the Governor's Council at the Capitol next door, purchased the property that year from Crichton. A storehouse — using every inch of the 35-foot square parcel — was constructed on that section of lot #58 in 1750.

Archaeological and historical records agree that prior to 1765 the storehouse was converted to use as a coffeehouse. Archaeology also indicates that while Richard Charlton operated his coffeehouse, he encroached on adjacent property by using an area north of the structure for disposal of his trash, and perhaps engaging in other activities on the adjacent property. Charlton's trash dump yielded a rich cache of more than 70,000 artifacts during a 1997 excavation. The artifacts included ceramic and glass fragments that revealed few differences between taverns and coffeehouses. Charlton may have been judicious in his purchase of serving pieces, but his choices in specialty pieces was more extravagant, evidenced by

fragments of elaborate jelly and syllabub glasses and a glass pyramid for fancy desserts. Charlton's menu also seems ambitious. Nearly 30,000 animal bones recovered by archaeologists reveal a high-style elite cuisine with a preference for roasted lamb and mutton. Also on the menu were calves heads, hams, peacocks and a variety of wildlife.

Charlton's Coffeehouse was the central stage for one of the significant political moments prior to the Revolutionary War. Between the coffeehouse and the Capitol at the eastern end of Duke of Gloucester — in the area known as The Exchange due to the amount of businesses conducted there — a bitter public demonstration against the Stamp Act erupted in 1765. The object of the public furor was George Mercer, chief distributor of the stamps for the Virginia colony. Royal Gov. Francis Fauquier escorted Mercer from the front porch of Charlton's Coffeehouse to safety with the grounds of the Governor's Palace. Mercer subsequently resigned his appointment before any stamps were distributed in the colony.

Two years later, Charlton advertised that his coffeehouse was now open and doing business as a tavern. Charlton closed his tavern by April 1771, and tavernkeeper Christiana Campbell rented the building briefly that year but by March 1772 Charlotte Dickson purchased the property and returned it to its prior use as a store.

The building was still standing a century later when an 1880 photograph includes the front porch and a small portion of the building. By 1890, a new Victorian-style residence was constructed on the original foundation and incorporated elements of the 18th-century structure.

– CWF –