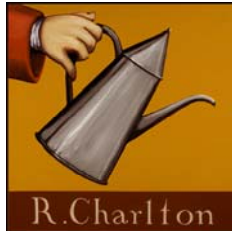


Colonial Williamsburg

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AMERICA'S ONLY 18th-CENTURY COFFEEHOUSE TO OPEN NOV. 20

The Newest Exhibition Site In Colonial Williamsburg's Historic Area Was A Leading Center Of Political And Social Activity in Pre-Revolutionary Williamsburg

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. – More than 200 years have passed since Americans gathered to discuss political and social issues in an authentic 18th-century coffeehouse. That will change Nov. 20 when Colonial Williamsburg formally opens Charlton's Coffeehouse, the Historic Area's newest exhibition building and the most significant historical reconstruction on Duke of Gloucester Street in more than 50 years.

Charlton's Coffeehouse is built on its original foundations with 18th-century construction techniques and in compliance with modern building codes. The newest exhibition site in the Historic Area will reflect its 18th-century role as a gathering place for the politically connected as well as for the socially ambitious.

"Richard Charlton's clientele included Governor Fauquier and his Council, members of the House of Burgesses and other government officials, prominent businessmen, the town's fashionable elite, and important visitors, perhaps including members of a Cherokee delegation," said Jim Horn, vice president for research and historical interpretation and the Abby and George O'Neill director of the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library. "Alongside the Capitol, the Governor's Palace and the Raleigh Tavern, Charlton's Coffeehouse may well be among the most politically significant sites of pre-Revolutionary Williamsburg."

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In the 1760s, Richard Charlton, kinsman of a Williamsburg wigmaker, followed the example of numerous London counterparts and opened his coffeehouse adjacent to the Capitol. There he likely served China tea imported from England, West Indian coffee, chocolate from the Caribbean rim and high-style cuisine, placing his establishment a cut above the collection of gentry taverns in the immediate vicinity. His coffeehouse soon became a stylish retreat from the mundane governmental activities of the Capitol, a gathering place for the social elite, a hotbed of political discussion and debate, and a place to hear the latest news from England as well as local gossip.

“As the first reconstruction in 50 years of an 18th-century structure on Duke of Gloucester Street, the Charlton Coffeehouse brings together the expertise of our historians, archeologists, curators and skilled tradesmen. This project clearly demonstrates Colonial Williamsburg’s commitment to develop new programming in the Historic Area to further engage our guests,” said Colin Campbell, president and CEO of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. “The Coffeehouse will serve as our newest interpretive space allowing visitors to learn more about the role and importance of the site in Revolutionary-era Williamsburg, and 18th-century coffeehouses in general. We are deeply grateful to Deborah and Forrest Mars, Jr. whose generous support is making this reconstruction a reality for future generations to enjoy.”

Archaeological evidence recovered from the coffeehouse site reflects the importance of fine dining as well as the consumption of tea, coffee and chocolate. Charlton offered an epicurean menu that included fish, shellfish, all kinds of meat and game, even peacock. Besides hot beverages, patrons could choose from a section of wines, beer and spirits. A fragment of a Cherokee pipe suggests the presence of Indians who may have been part of an official delegation. Other finds include a number of wig curlers, indicating Richard Charlton’s connection to the wig-making business, and several bones from an anatomical skeleton that was likely used in scientific presentations.

Modern guests entering Charlton’s Coffeehouse will tour in small groups and learn the significance of his establishment before concluding the experience with the opportunity to enjoy a sample tasting of period coffeehouse beverages – coffee, tea or chocolate.

Coffeehouse furnishings will include carefully researched reproduction furniture, ceramics, glassware, hardware and other items representing the variety of activities that took place there. Reproduction maps, prints, advertisements and broadsides will adorn the walls and period newspapers in the main rooms will contribute to the ambience. Hand-printed wallpapers will cover the walls of the well-appointed private meeting room and the north room, both based on microscopic study of original building fragments.

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“The furnishings and fittings at the coffeehouse have been chosen to create the most historically accurate setting that we can provide,” said Ronald L. Hurst, the Carlisle H. Humelsine chief curator and vice president for museums and collections. “These tools will assist our interpreters in bringing the spaces to life for our guests.”

The reconstruction will provide an exciting new venue for Historic Area programming including using the porch as a principal stage for scenes from *The Revolutionary City*[®] and special event performances. One of the most dramatic encounters of the period leading up to the American Revolution took place on the porch of Charlton's Coffeehouse in 1765 when an angry crowd protesting the Stamp Act confronted the appointed collector for Virginia, George Mercer, and demanded he swear an oath that he would not distribute the official stamped paper. The royal governor, Francis Fauquier, intervened and saved Mercer from the crowd. Mercer later resigned his position and the Stamp Act was repealed by the British Parliament the following year.

The finished reconstruction will appear as close to the original structure as historical, archaeological and architectural evidence permits. It incorporates substantial portions of the building's original brick foundations. The one-and-a-half-story framed portion of the building—35 feet square—is constructed of hand-sawn timber framing covered with cypress weatherboards and white cedar roof shingles. A central brick chimney allows two of the three first floor rooms to have functional fireplaces, while in the cellar a massive hearth is the central feature of the reconstructed kitchen. Research indicates that at least two of three first floor rooms were used for serving food and beverages which were prepared in the cellar. Other rooms on the first and second floors may have been rented or used for lodging or living quarters.

Reconstruction of Charlton's Coffeehouse is possible through a generous \$5 million gift from Forrest and Deborah Mars Jr. His interest in Colonial Williamsburg began as a youngster during family visits to the restored colonial capital and he has been supporting The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation for nearly 25 years. Forrest and Deborah Clarke Mars are Life Members of the Raleigh Tavern Society and are listed on the Courtyard of Philanthropy at the Visitor Center as among the foundation's 20 most generous benefactors.

The family's Mars Foundation of McLean, Va., has previously made grants to Colonial Williamsburg supporting a range of projects including the Courthouse restoration, the George Wythe House redecoration, costuming, the Peyton Randolph outbuildings project, Great Hopes Plantation and, most recently, the Historic Trades Foodways chocolate programs.

Forrest Mars is the former chief executive officer, now retired, of the family-owned Mars Incorporated, a company with global sales of \$22 billion. With the opening of Charlton's Coffeehouse, the company will add the West Indian blend of coffee to its product line.

Deborah and Forrest Mars preside over the advisory board of the Colonial Chocolate Society, an informal organization made up of representatives from Mars Incorporated, University of California-Davis, Colonial Williamsburg and other living history museums—all interested in the research, interpretation and presentation of historical chocolate making. Mars Incorporated and Colonial Williamsburg have partnered with other museums to create the Mars American Heritage line of chocolate products available at Colonial Williamsburg's Craft House, Tarpley's Store, Greenhow Store, Raleigh Tavern Bakery and WILLIAMSBURG Revolutions in Colonial Williamsburg's Visitor Center. American Heritage Chocolate has been designed and developed as closely as possible to 18th-century chocolates eaten and consumed as a drink for pleasure and used by the armies as rations. The American Heritage line includes an authentic chocolate drink mix, chocolate sticks and chocolate bars and is also sold at Historic Deerfield, Fort Ticonderoga, Mount Vernon, Monticello and Fortress Louisbourg.

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8/2009