

University of North Carolina at Asheville

The Social Power of Food:
Food's relationship to gentility and power for eighteenth century Americans.

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A little old man whom I found att[sic] vittles with his wife and family upon a homely dish of fish without any kind of sauce. They had no cloth upon the table, and their mess was in a dirty, deep wooden dish which they evacuated with their hands, cramming down skins, scales, and all. They used neither knife, fork, spoon, plate, or napkin because, I suppose, they had none to use. I looked upon this as a picture of that primitive simplicity practiced by our forefathers long before the mechanic arts had supplied[sic] them with instruments for the luxury and elegance of life.¹

This 1744 excerpt by Dr. Alexander Hamilton described a meal he observed in Maryland at the house of a Susquehanna ferryman. Their food and table setting were very primitive, especially to Hamilton who was an upper class Scot living in Annapolis society. The upper class society in Virginia and Maryland were used to meals like this one, hosted by George Washington during his presidency:

In the middle of the table was placed a piece of furniture about six feet long and two feet wide, rounded at the ends. It was either of wood gilded or polished metal, raised about an inch with a silver rim...in the center was a pedestal of plaster of Paris with images upon it, and on each end figures, male and female of the same. It was very elegant and used for ornament only. The dishes were placed all around, and there was an elegant variety of roast beef, veal, turkies, ducks, fowls, ham, etc: puddings, jellies, oranges, apples, nuts, almond, figs, raisins, and a variety of wines and punch.²

While the ferryman and his family had one wooden bowl of plain fish, the gentry class ate from tables laden with a variety of foods including meat, vegetables, fruits, and desserts and covered with expensive linens, plates, flatware, and decorations. For people like the ferryman food was essential for survival, but for men like Hamilton and Washington dining meant more than nourishing the body. The seventeenth and eighteenth century gentility in the Chesapeake colonies used dinning as an opportunity to demonstrate their elite social status.

¹ Alexander Hamilton, *Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744*, Edited by Carl Bridenbough, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), 8.

² Theophilus Bradbury, Letter to his daughter Mrs. Hooper, *Christmas with George Washington 1776-1799*, (Philadelphia: Franklin Printing Company, n.d., *Binder 20*, Mount Vernon Ladies Association, Virginia).

Secondary sources for food and society fall into four groups; the first of which contains sources the descriptions of colonial and early American food, cooking, accessories, and eating habits, both within the Chesapeake region and throughout America. This information provides the basic understanding of general eating habits needed before one can examine the social roles of food and eating. Patricia Mitchell wrote a small book entitled *Revolutionary Recipes: Colonial Food, Lore, & More*. This book described and compared a Continental soldier's diet with "an 18th-century colonist's normal diet," as well as containing sections on the differences between soldiers and officers.³ These sections were particularly useful in preparing this paper because the officers were members of the gentry while the regular soldiers were of a lower class and the difference in eating habits was a major marker of the difference between these two groups. Lorena Walsh's paper "Consumer Behavior, Diet, and the Standard of Living," provided background on what equipment people in America had for cooking and eating and what kinds of food they had to eat, as well as how these items move through society and social groups including the status symbols used by the gentry.⁴ *Cooking in America, 1590-1840*, by Trudy Eden, provided basic information on the eating habits of different regions, including the Chesapeake, during different time periods: Native Americans; 1590-1675; 1675-1740; 1740-1800, and 1800-1840.⁵

Another source that provided an excellent summary of food production, preparation and eating habits during this period was Sandra Oliver's book *Food in Colonial and Federal America*. In addition to basic descriptions, it took into account regional differences, including

³ Patricia B. Mitchell, *Revolutionary Recipes: Colonial Food, Lore, & More*, revised edition, (Chatham, VA: Patricia B. Mitchell, 1991), 2.

⁴ Lorena S. Walsh, "Consumer Behavior, Diet, and the Standard of Living in Late Colonial and Early Antebellum America, 1700-1840," in *American Economic Growth and Standards of Living before the Civil War*, ed. Robert E. Gallman and John Joseph Wallis, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁵ Trudy Eden, *Cooking in America, 1590-1840*, The Greenwood Press "Daily Life Through History" Series, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006).

the Chesapeake, Native American and African American influences on eating habits.⁶

Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America by James McWilliams had a chapter that described the eating habits in the Chesapeake, as well as chapters for other regions and a chapter describing kitchens in America. This source also included a chapter on the change towards imitating Britain; a topic which included an increase of elaborate British goods, which played into demonstrating one's social status during the colonial period.⁷

Other sources described the basics of cooking and eating specifically in the Chesapeake. Joe Taylor's book discussed food and visiting in the South. The first half of the book provided basic descriptions of food, equipment, and behaviors surrounding food beginning with the Native Americans eating habits prior to European arrival, and the Euro-American eating habits through the Civil War era, and described all segments of white society including frontier eating, "plain eating in the Old South," and how the large plantation owners of the gentry class ate. Chapter five of this work also covered where and how well people ate when traveling, though it mostly discussed taverns and the rise of luxury resorts at the beaches and in the mountains,⁸ and not the hospitality offered to travelers by the gentry. Jane Carson's *Colonial Virginia Cookery: Procedures, Equipment, and Ingredients in Colonial Cooking* described every aspect of cooking in colonial Virginia; including British traditions, kitchen design, and ways they cooked and preserved food.⁹ Katherine Harbury's book, *Colonial Virginia's Cooking Dynasty*, is divided into three parts, with the first and second parts being descriptive and the third part being copies of an unidentified cookbook and Jane Randolph's cookery book. Part one discussed Virginian

⁶ Sandra Oliver, *Food in Colonial and Federal America*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005).

⁷ James E. McWilliams, *A Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

⁸ Joe Gray Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

⁹ Trudy Eden, *Cooking in America, 1590-184*, The Greenwood Press "Daily Life Through History" Series, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006).

society and part two discussed the food and ingredients available to Virginian society.¹⁰ These two sections are presented separately by the author, but this paper attempts to show how they are intertwined.

The second group of sources consisted of the materials that focused on food studies, primarily on the development of and changes to the American diet, as well as the social meanings of food. The first source was on food studies in general, using global examples. Chapters six, seven, and eight of *Everyone Eats* were most relevant to this paper. Chapters six and seven focused on food for pleasure and food as a way of communicating. Chapter eight discussed “food as a social marker” and the way foods can express identity with a certain group, a certain social status, or a certain social role and ended with a discussion of elite versus non-elite food, which is how food was used by the Chesapeake gentry.¹¹ *No Foreign Food: The American Diet in Time and Place*, by Richard Pillsbury, began by exploring the reasons behind food choices: why some foods are eaten and others are not, including the idea that food is linked to social status and virtues, as it was for the Chesapeake gentry.¹² Leslie Brenner’s *American Appetite: The Coming of Age of a Cuisine*, traced the development of America’s modern day cuisine from Native Americans and colonial times, and provided a summary of foods eaten by those groups and the reasons behind their choices.¹³ This book could fall under the first source group, but the reasons behind the food choices placed it into this second group and provides the relevance to this paper.

¹⁰ Katherine E. Harbury, *Colonial Virginia’s Cooking Dynast*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004).

¹¹ E. N. Anderson, *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

¹² Richard Pillsbury, *No Foreign Food: The American Diet in Time and Place*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

¹³ Leslie Brenner, *American Appetite: The Coming of Age of a Cuisine*, (New York: Avon Books, 1999).

A third branch of food studies focuses on women and food, because in many cultures, including America during the colonial period, women were viewed as responsible for food preparation. Two chapters of Catherine Manton's *Fed Up: Women and Food in America* are relevant to this paper. Chapter three, covered the development of American eating habits and included a brief section on colonial times and Chapter five dealt with "food as a status symbol," mostly in the twentieth century but covered some basic theories behind this principle, which was believed by the Chesapeake gentry of both genders.¹⁴ Janet Theophano's book, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote*, discussed the importance of cookbooks to women and included sections on colonial era cookbooks, both American and British, as well as some earlier ones from England, which show the importance of food and recipes to the writers and users of these books, including men and women in eighteenth century Chesapeake.¹⁵ Julia Cherry Spruill's book, published in 1938 and reprinted in 1972, is considered the classic, authoritative work on women's lives in the South in the colonial period and describes kitchens and dining rooms, and the roles of plantation mistresses and their helpers in food production and the social importance of these roles.¹⁶

The fourth group of secondary sources discussed the formation and expectations of colonial society and gentility. Richard L. Bushman described how the expectations for every aspect of life changed with the rise of gentility, and that food and its accessories were no exception.¹⁷

¹⁴ Catherine Manton, *Fed Up: Women and Food in America*, (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999).

¹⁵ Janet Theophano, *Eat my Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote*, (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

¹⁶ Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women's Life & Work in the Southern Colonies*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972).

¹⁷ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).

This paper focuses on the flat lowland areas of Maryland and Virginia from the late seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century. The western mountain sections of these states were considered the backcountry and the settlers there did not have the means to live to the upper class's standards. Yet, the descriptions of meals and manners in the backcountry, recorded by upper-class, Chesapeake travelers show the gentry class's ideas of how food should be cooked and served. Their travel journals often contain their disappointment and disgust at the way the backwoods men ate. The same applies to upper class Chesapeake men like Dr. Hamilton who kept journals of his journey through New England; his descriptions of meals of both classes are influenced by his expectations.

The population and economic situation of Chesapeake society influenced diet, society and the relationship between the two. People left England to come to the Chesapeake in hope of gaining riches, but these people still considered themselves Englishmen. It was natural, therefore, for these settlers to try to recreate British society and values. As a man became richer, and "having acquired land, from time immemorial the symbol of place and position, he set out consciously to imitate the country gentry as he knew or imagined them."¹⁸ And, during the late seventeenth century, these rich Englishmen living in the Chesapeake did form "a social group that was recognizably a kin to the country gentry in England."¹⁹ In addition to the gentry class, there was a growing middle class of tradesmen, merchants, and medium farmers, and a lower class of workers and servants, much like the English society the settlers were accustomed to.²⁰ It was possible, especially in America, to move up to a higher social group, but "the groups were

¹⁸ Louis B. Wright, "The Life of William Byrd of Virginia," in *The London Diary (1717-1721) and Other Writings*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰ Carl Bridenbough, "Introduction," in *Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Alexander Hamilton*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1948), xxiv.

clearly made and defined”²¹ by the way they dressed, acted, ate, and by their possessions.

The British population in the Chesapeake wanted to recreate British foodways, but did not do so without influence from other groups. The early colonists relied heavily on Native Americans for food and the Native Americans introduced them to new foods and new cooking methods.²² The flexibility of British cooking allowed some of the Native American contributions to continue after the settlers no longer relied on the Native Americans and began to form new, American dishes. The African American population also influenced the English colonists’ dining habits. Slaves, especially those who cooked for the plantation owners, influenced their food by bringing some of their traditional African cooking methods and spices with them and integrating them into traditional British or new American dishes. This blending of cultural cooking styles, while remaining mostly British, was specific to the Chesapeake: the New England colonies remained almost completely British in their cooking, while the farther south the colony was located, the less British, and the more blended, the cooking became.²³

The rise of tobacco as a cash crop, as well as the institution of slavery, provided an economic base for the gentility and their lavish eating habits. While they did grow some of their own food, “Tobacco profits allowed the Chesapeake planters to import not only manufactured goods...but also many foodstuffs from England,”²⁴ allowing them to more easily imitate the English gentry and set themselves apart from the lower classes. The slaves who tended the tobacco provided the labor behind their masters’ money. The gentry class in the Chesapeake could not have lived their genteel way of life without their slaves, as Chastellux noted, “because their lands and their Negroes supplying them with the products and labor they need, this

²¹ Ibid.

²² McWilliams, 92.

²³ Ibid., 120, 128.

²⁴ Ibid., 114.

renowned hospitality is no burden to them.”²⁵ The Chesapeake gentry were able, therefore, to hold the lavish entertainments for which they were famous throughout the colonies only because of the slaves’ labor.²⁶ These slaves allowed the whites to live their genteel lives through their economic contributions and their hard work, and influenced the whites’ foodways through their African ingredients and cooking chores.

In colonial America, especially in the Chesapeake, food went from being simple survival items, to a way to show one’s social status and emulate British traditions including the lavish entertainments of the British gentry and nobility. For early colonists, such as those at Jamestown, Virginia, food was necessary “to live and work, not to luxuriate in.”²⁷ The first settlers had very few cooking supplies and were expected to nourish, not entertain. The early kitchens were part of the house and were multi-purpose rooms. These early colonists might have a table and a bed, but little other furniture. Early colonial houses had a fireplace at one end and, if they could afford it, a brick oven either as part of the fireplace or outside.²⁸ Fireplaces had hooks or arms that held pots over the fire, but most early cooks only had one pot and one spoon,²⁹ limiting what they could cook. This continued to be the state of frontier and poorer kitchens even into the 1770’s. In September of 1772, William Eddis, an Englishman in living in Annapolis, described a meal in the backcountry that was an example of what the frontier and poor households ate, and which was similar to what the early settlers would have eaten. In addition to easy to cook one pot stews, these settlers regularly ate: “Indian corn, beaten in a mortar and afterwards baked or boiled, forms a dish which is the principal subsistence of the

²⁵ Marquis De Chastellux, *Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782*, ed. Howard C. Rice, Jr, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 441.

²⁶ McWilliams, 128.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

²⁸ Spruill, 25-7.

²⁹ McWilliams, 204-5.

indigent planter and is even much liked by many persons of a s superior class. This, when properly prepared, is called *hominy*, and when salt beef, pork, or bacon is added, no complaints are made.”³⁰

In the late seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, an increase of money and trade began to increase the tools colonial cooks in wealthier households had access to, and allowed for more complex meals. As houses became fancier and cooking utensils increased, kitchens were redesigned.³¹ Kitchens on plantations were made into separate buildings. In addition to more pots and pot hooks, cooks had trivets that stood on three legs and held food above the fire, spits for turning meat, and the wealthy had luxury items like waffle irons.³² The increase in ingredients, space, and equipment made it possible for cooks to turn cooking into an art and serve much more intricate meals. Joshua Brooks described one such complex meal at Mount Vernon with the Washingtons, which included “boil[ed] pork, top; goose, bottom; roast beef, mutton chops, hommony, cabbage potatoes, pickles, fried tripe, onions, etc...mince pies, torts, cheese.”³³ William Maclay’s dinner with President Washington included “iced creams jellies & co. then Water Melons Musk Melons.”³⁴

The menu of colonial Chesapeake gentility was influenced by both the land they were from and the land in which they lived. Meat was widely consumed in America, more so than it was in Europe,³⁵ but to ensure fresh meat throughout the year preservation was very important. Salted meat could be brined in the English tradition or smoked in a smoke house. People also

³⁰ William Eddis, *Letters from Americans*, ed. Aubrey C. Land (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), 66.

³¹ McWilliams., 205.

³² Spruill, 25-6.

³³ Joshua Brooks, “A Dinner at Mount Vernon,” from *Unpublished Journal of Joshua Brooks*, ed. R.W.G. Vail, *The New York Historical Society Quarterly* XXXI (1947): 72-85, *Research File: Food*, (Mount Vernon Ladies Association).

³⁴ William Maclay, *Diary of William Maclay*, ed. Kenneth Bowling and H. Veit, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, *Binder 20*, (Mount Vernon Ladies Association).

³⁵ Pillsbury, 24.

used the Native American method of “jerking” which did not require salt.³⁶ Beef and pork were favorite meats of the British colonists, though many other kinds of meat were consumed as well.³⁷ McWilliams noted William Byrd’s frequent eating of meat, especially beef, usually boiled or roasted.³⁸ Byrd, a member of the Virginian gentility, also regularly consumed beef, chicken, pork, bacon, fowl, rice, squirrel, pigeon, goose, honey, and mutton.³⁹

The Chesapeake Bay and the numerous rivers that flow into it, in addition to providing fertile farmlands, provided many kinds of fish and seafood. Eddis wrote home that “Provisions of every kind are excellent and plentiful; and the Chesapeake, with our numerous rivers, affords a surprising variety of excellent fish.”⁴⁰ The Bay and its tributaries provided fish and seafood, even to the more inland plantations. Fish, crabs, and oysters were eaten in this area by the gentry class. Philip Fithian remarked one day that “We dined today on the Fish call’d Sheeps-Head, with Crabs – Twice every week we have fine Fish.”⁴¹ He also often mentioned oysters, perch, bass, and being invited to fish fries at nearby plantations along with his employer’s sons. Joseph Hopper Nicholson’s Maryland ledger books from the 1790’s also contained mention of purchasing oysters, perch, rockfish, and even a turtle.⁴² William Byrd mentioned having fish on several occasions, though he did not mention oysters.⁴³

The colonists in the Chesapeake ate a wide variety of fruits and vegetables in varying amounts. William Byrd’s diary included peas, asparagus, sallet[sic], strawberries, cherries,

³⁶ McWilliams, 126.

³⁷ Pillsbury, 24.

³⁸ McWilliams, 120.

³⁹ William Byrd, *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover 1709-1712*, ed. Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1941).

⁴⁰ Eddis, 32.

⁴¹ Philip Vickers Fithian, *Journals and Letters 1767-1774*, ed. John Rogers Williams, (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 195.

⁴² Maryland Manuscripts #5353, *Maryland Manuscripts*, (University of Maryland Special Collections, Maryland).

⁴³ Byrd, *The Secret Diary*, 15, 20, 13, 25, 30, 34.

turnips, raspberries, and apples, but these entries are infrequent.⁴⁴ McWilliams claims that Byrd's rather infrequent consumption of fruit and vegetables was because of the amount of land and attention given to tobacco over gardening.⁴⁵ However, it also seems likely that Byrd's usual rule of only eating one dish might also account for this lack of vegetables and fruits, since some of the other planters seem to have grown and consumed more fruits and vegetables. Nicholson's Maryland account book also includes such things as pumpkins, apples, lemons, raisins, limes, almonds, cakes and peaches "for the children," potatoes, sprouts, pears, and chestnuts.⁴⁶ Byrd's diet also regularly featured hominy and rice.

Many luxury food items enjoyed by the gentility were imported from Europe. Alcohol, both American and European, was widely consumed. Nicholson's account book lists wine and porter, punch glasses and a punch spoon, and tea.⁴⁷ A page from a store's account book in Bladensburg, Maryland included rum, Bohea Tea, Green Tea, and "spirits."⁴⁸ Wine was imported from Europe, along with other luxury items like sugar, tea, coffee, cheese, and various kinds of sugar were imported and sold. Another merchant ledger from Maryland included both bohea tea and hyson tea, coffee, pepper, sugar and Muscavado sugar.⁴⁹ Byrd had luxury items such as "Rhenish wine and sugar,"⁵⁰ syllabub, and chocolate, which was a frequent breakfast for him.

As the planters' wealth increased, food became a cultural luxury as well as a necessity. They had the means to choose their food and buy nonessentials, and with these they attempted to demonstrate their gentility, in the same ways as the English gentry did. The Chesapeake gentry

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ McWilliams, 121.

⁴⁶ Maryland Manuscript #5353.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Maryland Manuscript #199, *Maryland Manuscripts*, (University of Maryland Special Collections, Maryland).

⁴⁹ Maryland Manuscript #5429, *Maryland Manuscripts*, (University of Maryland Special Collections, Maryland).

⁵⁰ Byrd, *The Secret Diary*, 69.

began hosting large, lavish dinners, where every detail from what was on the table, to what they wore and how they behaved was carefully planned and observed.⁵¹ Bushman states that “The great balls were elaborately staged performances... People did not attend such events to relax, but to present their most beautiful, gracious, and pleasing selves.”⁵² The meals in the Chesapeake were more lavish than those in New England and manners and behavior at these meals were more structured than those in the South.⁵³

To the Chesapeake planters, the appearance of gentility and being considered genteel by their peers was an important goal. Richard Bushman said that “Gentility bestowed social power.”⁵⁴ Genteel people expected, and were given, preferential treatment.⁵⁵ But gentility was not just about manners, “By the eighteenth century, ‘genteel’ was used to describe a host of objects, situations, persons, and habits.”⁵⁶ To be considered genteel, one “had to attend to every aspect of life,”⁵⁷ including food, manners, and character. And the Chesapeake planters succeeded in imitating the British gentry, according to Englishman Eddis “In short, very little difference is, in reality, observable in the manners of the wealthy colonist and the wealthy Briton.”⁵⁸

Fithian, a New England tutor working in Virginia, found out how important manners and dining were to the genteel Virginians when “I took a whim in my head & would not go to dinner, my Head was not dress’d & I was too lazy to change my clothes – Mrs. Carter, however, in the evening lash’d me severely... She would not hear none, & said I was rude, & censurable.”⁵⁹

⁵¹ McWilliams, 128.

⁵² Bushman, 52.

⁵³ McWilliams, 128.

⁵⁴ Bushman, 61-2.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁸ Eddis, 58.

⁵⁹ Fithian, 180.

Even everyday events such as family dinners were governed by a strict set of genteel manners and expectations, which even their tutor was expected to follow, including attending family meals. These entertainments became so important to the genteel class that they “structured genteel diaries as weather and the exchange of work and goods did the journals of farmers.”⁶⁰ For many of these men, especially at the emergence of these lavish affairs, their diaries present both their working side, as planters, politicians, and tutors, as well as their genteel side through detailed lists of events, meals, and guests. Obviously, these entertainments were important enough to take the time and supplies to record them along with such serious matters as business and politics. They demonstrated their gentility through shows of wealth, social skills including hospitality and manners, and social connections, which influenced business and politics.

Food, when chosen and presented correctly, was a good way for members of the Chesapeake gentry to display their wealth. Inviting a large number of people to dinners and other entertainments was one way to show that they had wealth by supplying the amount of food prepared and consumed at these events. As an example of the size these dinners could be, Fithian recorded one on occasion that he was one of thirteen guests in addition to the family at a neighboring plantation.⁶¹ Lavish dinners marked times of celebration within the gentry class. Fithian noted what was, apparently, a new custom to him: “It is custom here whenever any *person* or *Family* move into a *House*, or repair a house they have been living in before, they make a *Ball &* give a *Supper*...so we...are...to invite our *Neighbours*.⁶² Balls and suppers for the neighborhood required money to provide food and the labor to prepare and serve it. Byrd noted, “we went to the christening of Mr. Anderson’s son, where we met abundance of company.

⁶⁰ Bushman, 47.

⁶¹ Fithian, 83.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 76.

There was a plentiful dinner.”⁶³ Mr. Anderson’s ability to provide “a plentiful dinner” to an “abundance of company” showed his guests his prosperity since he could entertain so many, so lavishly. Landon Carter noted one day: “I went this day to captain Beale’s who gave his Son Thomas a public dinner upon the bringing home of his late married wife Miss [illegible Ball].”⁶⁴ The phrase “a public dinner” implies that there had been a great number of guests that would have expected to be fed and served. Again, successfully, feeding and serving them all would have proven that Captain Beale had the wealth necessary to be counted in the gentry class.

Celebrations were not the only time lavish dinners and entertainments were held by the Chesapeake gentry. Eddis, after becoming friends with the royal governor of Maryland, recounted what happened when the governor went visiting. The governor and his entourage, including Eddis, arrived at a plantation outside Annapolis and found “All the good things of a plentiful country decorated the table of our munificent host; the wines were excellent and various.”⁶⁵ A plentiful table, complete with a variety of good, most likely imported, wine showed that the host was an acceptably wealthy and genteel member of society to play host to the royal governor.

Upon visiting an island plantation belonging to a Mr. Chalmers on another excursion with the governor, Eddis noted the amount of foods served during “a substantial breakfast in the true American style, which consisted not only of tea, coffee, and the usual accompaniments, but likewise ham, dried venison, beef, and other relishing articles.”⁶⁶ The gentry class was expected to provide food for large groups of visitors; however, it still demonstrated to his guests that Mr. Chalmers had the money and lands to acquire that enough food, without expecting payment.

⁶³ Byrd, *The Secret Diary*, 2.

⁶⁴ Landon Carter, *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778*, Vol. 1, ed. Jack P. Greene, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1965),415.

⁶⁵ Eddis, 19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

The variety of dishes served and the ingredients in these dishes also illustrated the wealth of a host to his guests. Mr. Chalmers confirmed his wealth to the governor and his entourage by serving a large, varied meal, proving his ability to acquire all the different foods and ingredients as well as the manpower to cook more than one dish. Imported items, including cheese, wine, rum, sugar, tea, chocolate, and coffee, varied in cost; however, the ability to have any of them indicated a host who had at least some money to spare. The more often these items were served, and the larger the amounts they were served in, the richer the host must be to be able to afford such luxuries. A French officer in America during the Revolutionary War, for example, noted that “The use of sugar generally marks the difference between poverty and affluence.”⁶⁷

In the above visit to Mr. Chalmers’ island plantation, Eddis mentioned that “tea, coffee, and the usual accompaniments”⁶⁸ were served at breakfast. The inclusion of imported items such as tea, coffee, and possibly sugar to go with it, in a breakfast for such a large group as the governor traveled with would have obviously showed to his guests that Mr. Chalmers was wealthy since he could afford such luxuries. That ability marked him as a worthy member of the gentry to his peers. Landon Carter, in his diary, kept track of how much sugar, tea, and butter had been ordered and used, but not any other food stuff, which suggests that they were more important, expensive and harder to acquire than the others. This is also suggested by his note on March 16, 1767: “The pot of brown sugar filled this day. The last time pretended to be the 16 of January but I know they have had some since,”⁶⁹ which sounds as if “they” – probably his wife or his cook – were concerned about what he would say about their usage of such a costly imported item.

⁶⁷ Jean-Francois-Louis Comte De Clermont-Crevecoeur, “French Nobleman Views 18th Century Americans,” *University of Princeton Quarterly*, no.56 (1973) *Research File: Food/Menu*, (Gunston Hall, Virginia).

⁶⁸ Eddis, 15.

⁶⁹ Landon Carter, 337.

Food preparation displayed one's wealth through the use of expensive ingredients. In many cookbooks, "the recipes show that the dishes were rich, highly seasoned,"⁷⁰ which would have often required expensive, imported spices. Robert Carter requested his British merchant send him "6 lb combohea tea, 6 do. best hyson. 15 lb currans, 5 ounces nutmegs, 5 do. mace, 5 ounces Cinamon, 4lbs pimento, 4 lb white ginger, 5 ounces Cloves, 2 lbs capes, 1 gallon salad oil."⁷¹ The use of imported items like these in the dishes served at his table reinforced the impression of the wealth available to him to spend on such spices and his ability to entertain to genteel standards.

Another way dining allowed the Chesapeake gentry to show their wealth was through the presentation of the food on fancy plates, table linens, silverware, and decorations. Many planters ate and served food that resembled the food the lower classes ate, including hominy and pork; however, "the tables themselves in gentry and plebian houses – the dishes, platters, drinking vessels, and flatware – would never be confused."⁷² Alexander Hamilton wrote down the eating habits of a lower class old man who ran a Susquehanna ferry between Maryland and Pennsylvania:

They had no cloth upon the table, and their mess was in a dirty, deep wooden dish which they evacuated with their hands, cramming down skins, scales, and all. They used neither knife, fork, spoon, plate, or napkin because, I suppose, they had none to use. I looked upon this as a picture of that primitive simplicity practiced by our forefathers long before the mechanic arts had supplied[sic] them with instruments for the luxury and elegance of life.⁷³

⁷⁰ Spruill, 68.

⁷¹ Robert Carter, "Letter Book, Volume I, p2-8," *Research File: Food/Menus*, (Gunston Hall, Virginia).

⁷² Bushman, 74.

⁷³ Hamilton, 8.

Dr. Hamilton, as a member of the gentry, assumed they must not have the means to afford such “luxuries” as silverware and individual place settings. The Chesapeake gentry class to which Hamilton belonged expected that if one could afford such luxury then obviously they would not choose to do without it; to the gentry class such items as silverware and individual plates were absolutely necessary, and, for the gentry at least, the fancier these table settings the better.

While traveling in New York, Hamilton noted the behavior of another lower class family: “This cottage was very clean and neat but poorly furnished. Yet Mr. M-s observed several superfluous things which showed an inclination to finery in these poor people, such as...half a dozen pewter spoons and as many plates, old and worn out but bright and clean, a set of stone tea dishes, and a tea pot.”⁷⁴ This lower class family did not have much, yet they had individual dishes as well as a stone tea set. Interestingly, while gentry like Dr. Hamilton were expected to aim for finery, Dr. Hamilton described the New York family’s attempt at luxury as “superfluous things,” but seemed to romanticize the simplicity of the ferryman’s table. Perhaps the gentry like Hamilton expected the lower class to aim for basic civility, but Hamilton saw the New York family as aiming for more than the simple civility in eating that their class should have. Perhaps he saw such items as stone tea dishes and a pot as a mark of wealthy and gentility that they did not deserve. This shows the attention the Chesapeake gentry paid attention to all table settings as markers of social class, not just within their own social group.

The Chesapeake upper class, however, aimed for the luxury and elegance of the British gentry, and most of them succeeded. Their dishes were acceptable to at least one member of the British gentry. Thomas Anbury, a captured British officer who was quartered in wealthy homes in both the North and in Virginia noted the Virginians’ “handsome services of plate,”⁷⁵ which

⁷⁴ Hamilton, 55.

⁷⁵ Thomas Anbury, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America*, Vol. 2, (Arno Press, 1969), 371-2.

shows that at least some of the Chesapeake gentry were meeting the British gentry's expectations and proving themselves to be more than just backwards colonists.

Anbury was talking about the Virginian gentry, but the Maryland gentry were not any less selective about their dishes. Nicholson's account book from the 1790's includes purchases of "ornamental china, 1 doz. Punch glasses," "two teapots for Sally," and a "Punch spoon," which was almost as expensive as the china.⁷⁶ An inventory of a house found in Charles Carroll's papers, dated 1762, included: "China Soop plates, 11; China plates, 24; Old Do. Do., 9...New China Dishes, 4; New Pewter Plates; Do. Do. Dishes, 2; other Dishes, 8; Plates, 36...Tea Closset, Red & White China cups, 10; Coffie Cups, 6...Blue & White China Bowls, 5...Wine glasses, 24."⁷⁷ The amount of dishes, especially China which had to be imported, showed their guests how wealthy the Carrolls were since they had the money to spend on such items instead of making do with less expensive wood or pewter. A table set for many people in matching china was more impressive to guests than a plainly set table or a set with only a few fancy dishes or a mismatched set, and would have satisfied genteel expectations and standards.

The Chesapeake gentry also used expensive table linens to illustrate their wealth to guests and such usage separated them even further from the ferryman or the New York family. While the Maryland ferryman Hamilton mentioned had neither napkins nor table cloth, the Carrolls' inventory included: "new Table Cloths, 14; new Damask napkins, 12; old Diaper Table Clothes, 5; Huckerback [rough surfaced linen] Do., 5; old Damask napkins, 12; Huckerback Do., 8."⁷⁸ Obviously, Hamilton would be much more impressed and comfortable at the Carrolls' expensively covered table than he was with the uncovered table of the ferryman. Robert Carter

⁷⁶ Maryland Manuscript #5353.

⁷⁷ Charles Carroll, *Dear Papa, Dear Charley: The Papers of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, 1748-1782*, Vol. 1, ed. Ronald Hoffman, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 294-300.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

asked his British agent for “8 diaper table cloths to fit a table holding 10 persons at 10/ each, 2 dozn. Diaper napkins of the smallest size 8/”⁷⁹ to be sent from England. The use of such fine table linen was a visible divider between a genteel table, such as the Carrolls’ or the Carters’ tables, from a common table such as the table eaten at by the ferryman or the New York family.

Inviting guests to dine was also a chance for the Chesapeake gentry to show their peers the money they could afford to invest in non-practical expenses. The lower classes might be able to afford fancier dishes, as had the New York family Hamilton wrote about, but they rarely had the money to buy artistic items that had no practical use. A dinner guest of President Washington’s described a nonessential table furnishing he saw at their dinner: “In the middle of the table was placed a piece of furniture about six feet long and two feet wide, rounded at the ends. It was either of wood gilded or polished metal, raised about an inch with a silver rim...in the center was a pedestal of plaster of Paris with images upon it, and on each end figures, male and female of the same. It was very elegant and used for ornament only.”⁸⁰ A piece of gilded wood or metal that large would have cost a large amount of money, as would the plaster of paris figures. That this guest felt it necessary to mention that this item was “for ornament only” suggests that people would assume such an expensive item would have some practical use. That he described this object and its ornamental status proves that the gentry paid close attention to such status symbols, especially at meals.

The Chesapeake gentry of the period also began to have rooms whose main or only purpose was entertaining, instead of the multipurpose, work rooms of the early settlers or the poorer classes. In his “Notes on the State of Virginia,” Chastellux described houses in Virginia as “spacious and well ornamented” and said that “all they wanted in a house is a bed, a dining

⁷⁹ Robert Carter.

⁸⁰ Bradbury.

room, and a drawing room for company. The chief magnificence of the Virginians consists in furniture, linen, and silver plate; in which they resemble our own forefathers who had...only a well-stored wine cellar and handsome sideboards.”⁸¹ In this quote, Chastellux not only noticed their expensive table settings, but also their habit of having rooms to entertain in, not to work in.

The Chesapeake gentry did not want or need work space in their houses, because, unlike their poorer counterparts, their slaves did the work in the outbuildings; however, they wanted rooms for entertaining company and could afford to build them and move the work to the outbuildings. Fithian described the first floor of the home of the Carters, for whom he worked: “There are four Rooms on Floor, disposed of in the following manner. Below is a dining Room where we usually sit; the second is a dining Room for the Children; the third is Mr. Carter’s study; &the fourth is a Ball-Room thirty feet long.”⁸² Having a thirty foot ballroom and a dining room that was separate from the kitchen and ballroom would have marked their house as a genteel house because they had the money to build, furnish, decorate, and use such rooms, and to build outbuildings for the cooking and cleaning. The lack of work space in the house, aside from a gentlemen’s study, also showed that the master and mistress of the house were wealthy enough to have others do the manual labor that supported their lifestyle.

Dining was also a chance for the Chesapeake gentry to show their peers their genteel social skills. One of the most important social skills and expectations was hospitality, including shelter, food and drink, to friends and invited guests as well as strangers. Houses, and their masters and mistresses, often became well known for their hospitality, or, in a few cases, their lack of it. The flat, coastal areas were well settled with impressive plantations, yet towns were spread out across the countryside and most were rather small. The size and distance between the

⁸¹ Chastellux, 441.

⁸² Fithian, 129.

towns increased the plantations importance for travelers and social events. A French visitor to Virginia noted that “The Virginians have the reputation, and rightly so...of being hospitable...This is because...having no large towns where they can gather, they know society only through the visits they make.”⁸³ The role of plantations as social centers and travelers’ havens made it important for a planter and his wife to be able to feed anyone who might stop in, and made them responsible for providing appropriate food at a social event.

Hospitality was in fact more important to the Virginians than their personal privacy and comfort. The houses he saw in Virginia reminded Chastellux of “our own forefathers who had no private apartments...but only a well-stored wine cellar and handsome sideboards.”⁸⁴ The reason for this statement was that Virginians would have the family in as few rooms as possible and leave rooms empty for visitors. Fithian described the house at which he was a tutor as having “four rooms on a Floor...Above stairs, one Room is for Mr. & Mrs. Carter; the second for the young ladies; the other two for occasionally Company,” while one son shared a room in the school house with Fithian and the other two sons slept in the other room in the school building.⁸⁵ Anbury described Colonel Randolph’s house as having two wings, “each wing has two stories, and four large rooms on a floor; in one the family reside, and the other is reserved solely for visitors.”⁸⁶ This habit of having many rooms and having rooms available for guests and entertaining was important hospitality, but, as previously discussed, also served to demonstrate wealth.

Offering food, drink, and shelter to even the unexpected guests was an important show of genteel hospitality and manners. A French officer in America noted this custom: “When you go

⁸³ Chastellux, 441.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 441.

⁸⁵ Fithian, 128-9.

⁸⁶ Anbury, 358.

visiting, the master of the house never fails to offer you a drink.”⁸⁷ Often the host or hostess insisted on the acceptance of such offers to stay and eat. At Mount Vernon, when Joshua Brooks and his companions mentioned they ought to leave, “Miss Custis said we would stay to dinner, [that] twenty miles was too much to ride without something. She went out, said she would call the General and he soon came in and with great familiarity and politeness requested our stay.”⁸⁸ Even as three or four of the guest had been unexpected, the Washingtons still managed to feed themselves, Miss Custis, Mr. Leer, and four guests on “Leg [of] boil[ed] pork, goose, roast beef, round cold boil[ed] beef, mutton chops, hommony, cabbage, potatoes, pickles, fried tripe, onions, etc...mince pies, tarts, cheese...port, Madeira, two kinds [of] nuts, apples, raisins.”⁸⁹ Members of the gentry class, like Washington, were expected to provide food to even the largest group of unexpected guests, and the more lavish the provisions, the better it demonstrated the hosts wealth, hospitality, and gentility.

Turning down such hospitable offers, unless they had some urgent business elsewhere, was almost inexcusable among the gentry class. The earlier cited time that Fithian was scolded for not attending a simple family dinner at the main house demonstrated the importance with which these meals and invitations were viewed. Guests of Byrd’s in Virginia almost always stayed to eat, and some were even “persuaded to stay all night,”⁹⁰ demonstrating the importance of offering and accepting food and shelter amongst the Chesapeake gentry.

Hospitality, including meals, was extended even to guests who came to see someone who was not home. While Byrd was studying in London, he experienced the manners of the English gentry that he and his fellow Virginians were trying to emulate. For both the English and

⁸⁷ Comte De Clermont-Crevecoeur.

⁸⁸ Brooks, 73.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 76.

⁹⁰ Byrd, *The Secret Diary*, 12.

Chesapeake gentry, hospitality had to be offered, even when the master of the house was not at home. Byrd illustrated this on “December 15,” when “I went to his [Colonel Blakiston] house but they told me he dined not at home, so I went;” but the next day, “came Colonel Blakiston and reprimanded me for not dining with his wife yesterday.”⁹¹

In the Chesapeake, John Harrower remarked one day that “After school houres[sic] I went two Miles to see the Taylor who made my cloaths[sic]...and I found his wife and Daughters drinking tea, at which I Joyned[sic] them.”⁹² Chastellux was planning to stay at his friend’s, General Nelson, house on his trip, and even though he passed the General while going towards the General’s house, Chastellux still stopped there, where “In the absence of the General, Mesdames Nelson, his mother and his wife, received me with all the politeness, ease, and cordiality natural to this family. But as in America the ladies are never thought sufficient to do the honors of the house, five or six Nelsons had gathered to receive me.”⁹³ Just as Byrd found in England, within the Chesapeake gentry declining a hospitable invitation to dine was nearly inexcusable.

Additionally, inviting guests and travelers in to dine provided a chance to show one’s wealth and genteel manners. Eddis wrote home in 1771 that “Several of the most opulent families have here established their residence; and hospitality is the characteristic of the inhabitants. Party prejudices have little influence on social intercourse.”⁹⁴ Though that would change in somewhat during the American Revolution, among the gentry hospitality was still very important, even more so than political disagreements.

⁹¹ Byrd, *The London Diary*, 50-1.

⁹² John Harrower, *The Journal of John Harrower: An Indentured Servant in the Colony of Virginia, 1773-1776*, Ed. Edward Miles Riley, (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg, 1963), 49.

⁹³ Chastellux, 383.

⁹⁴ Eddis, 48.

Thomas Anbury found that “Many gentlemen around Richmond, though strongly attached to the American cause, have shewn[sic] the liberality and hospitality so peculiar to this province, in their particular attention and civilities to our officers.”⁹⁵ The gentry’s hospitality in inviting the British officers to dinners and entertainments was questioned by the lower classes, who “charge them with being partial to Great-Britain, but these are gentlemen of fixed principles, of affluence and authority, and therefore despise all popular clamour.”⁹⁶ Anbury also noted that the gentry’s invitations were not merely the required food and shelter; he was “detained” in Richmond “beyond my original intention by the hospitality of the neighbouring gentlemen, who would not let me leave them without visiting the whole circle,”⁹⁷ which also relates back to the importance the gentry put on making and accepting hospitable, social invitations. These quote show that genteel Virginians viewed hospitality between the gentry as something so important that not even the politics of the Revolution should interrupt it.

But hospitality in the Chesapeake was not reserved for other members of the gentry, friend or stranger: it also extended to anyone passing by and in need of refreshment or shelter. Eddis wrote home about “Colonel F[itzhugh], a gentleman of considerable property” whose home was “as well known to the weary indigent traveler as to the affluent guest,”⁹⁸ for providing shelter and food. Anbury was told that “before the war, the hospitality of the country was such, that travelers always stopt[sic] at a plantation when they wanted to refresh themselves and their horses, where they...were supplied with everything gratuitously.”⁹⁹ The plantations were an important resource for travelers, genteel or not, and their aid to travelers was a way for the planters to show their wealth, hospitality, and gentility.

⁹⁵ Anbury, 345-6.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 346.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 351.

⁹⁸ Eddis, 18.

⁹⁹ Anbury, 341.

Fithian gave an example of how charitable hospitality worked at the home of his employer, Mr. Carter: “There came in about eight o'clock[sic] a man very drunk, & grew exceeding noisy & troublesome, & as the Evening was cold & stormy, Mr. Carter thought it improper to send him away; he was therefore ordered into the kitchen, to stay the night.”¹⁰⁰

Fithian recorded the names of most of the Carters’ guests, including overseers, but not the name of this man. This implies that this man was not connected to the Carters, and obviously this man had not behaved in a very genteel manner, and yet they considered it “improper to send him away.”

The Chesapeake gentry seem took this idea of hospitality farther than the European gentry. Many European visitors to the colonies were shocked at the lack of inns or taverns and the poor services of the ones that did exist. Thomas Anbury, however, wrote “I am not surprized[sic] that accommodation for travelers is so bad, as I am informed, before the war, the hospitality of the country was such, that travelers always stopt[sic] at a plantation when they wanted to refresh themselves and their horses, where they...were supplied with everything gratuitously and if any neighbouring planters heard of any gentleman being at one of these ordinaries, they would send a negroe[sic] with an invitation to their own house.”¹⁰¹ Sometimes this hospitality took a gentleman well out of his way. Hamilton, after leaving Annapolis, “met Mr. H[ar]t going to Annapolis. He returned with me to his own house where I was well entertained and had one night’s lodging and a country dinner.”¹⁰² Food was central to both of these examples of the genteel hospitality of the Chesapeake upper class.

Good manners and behavior were another social skill expected of the members of the gentry, and dining was a good opportunity to show one’s good manners and upbringing. The

¹⁰⁰ Fithian, 114.

¹⁰¹ Anbury, 341.

¹⁰² Hamilton, 3.

men who recorded their social lives did not omit to record how the people involved behaved, as this was an essential social skill and marker. Anbury declared “What a pity it is, that a country where the superior class are of such an hospitable and friendly disposition, should be rendered almost unsafe to live in by the barbarity of the people.”¹⁰³ This expressed the belief of the gentility at the time that hospitality and manners were one of the markers that set them apart from the lower classes.

After arriving in Virginia, Fithian found that “The people are extremely hospitable, and very polite both of which are most certainly universal characteristics of the Gentlemen in Virginia.”¹⁰⁴ Fithian also remarked that “Mrs. Carter...is also well acquainted...with the formality and ceremony which we find commonly in high Life.”¹⁰⁵ Dinners and other entertainments were prime opportunities for people like Mrs. Carter to show that they knew the genteel way to behave. Fithian also describes a governess from a neighboring plantation, starting with her looks and clothes and then states “Her behaviour[sic] such as I should expect to find in a Lady whose education had been conducted with some care & skill.”¹⁰⁶ And Fithian was not the only person noticing the behavior of those around him.

Washington’s manners and behavior were frequently remarked upon because of the numerous visitors his fame brought him and the importance the gentility put on behavior. Brooks recorded the behavior of the Washingtons, especially George, during his visit to Mount Vernon: “I did not find that openness in the General I expected, reserve and stiffness abounded...He was polite, he gave attention to us, but there was wanting the *Jen e scai quoi*[sic]

¹⁰³ Anbury, 350.

¹⁰⁴ Fithian, 58.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 83-4.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

that gratifies.”¹⁰⁷ Obviously, Brooks was surprised that George Washington did not behave with the “friendly disposition”¹⁰⁸ Anbury accredited to Virginians, nor was Brooks the only one to note Washington’s seriousness. Maclay described his dinner with President Washington as:

The most solemn dinner ever I eat at, not an health drank, scarce a Word said. Until the Cloath[sic] was taken away. then the President...with great formality drank the health of every individual by name round the Table...the Ladies sat a good while and the Bottles passed about. But there was a dead Silence almost. Mrs. Washington at last withdrew the Ladies, I expected the Men would now begin But the same Stillness remained.¹⁰⁹

George Washington’s behavior was noted frequently by his numerous visitors, but manners, good and bad were noted by and about any member of the gentry, and particularly at dinners where everyone could see and was watching.

Lapses in manners by all classes were noted by the Chesapeake gentry, particularly at dinner. Fithian made mention of a visit by “An inspector – He is rather Dull, & seems unacquainted with company for when he would, at Table, drink our Health, he held the Glass of Porter fast with both his Hands, and then gave an insignificant nod to each one at the Table, in Hast, & with fear, & then drank like an ox.”¹¹⁰ Apparently, this inspector was not well instructed in how to behave as a gentleman should behave at the table and therefore stood out at the Carters’ genteel table. When dining with two other gentlemen, Hamilton complained that “This is a trespass on good manners which many well bred people fall into thro’ inadvertency, two engrossing all the conversation upon a subject which is strange and unknown to a third person

¹⁰⁷ Brooks, 76.

¹⁰⁸ Anbury, 350.

¹⁰⁹ Maclay.

¹¹⁰ Fithian, 204.

there.”¹¹¹ When the genteel made a manners related mistake, especially at the table, it rarely went unnoticed by their peers.

Dinners were often ways to show off social connections, relationships, and status in society. The importance of who came to dinner can be gauged by the fact that many people kept detailed lists of who dined at their house as well as whose houses they dined at. Fithian lists dinner guests or being a guest 39 times from November to May in one year, mainly December through March.¹¹² William Byrd, from February 6 through the end of May 1709, either listed guests or was a guest 48 days out of the 114 days in that period.¹¹³ Obviously, dining was a frequent social event for the gentry. Invitations were often considered an honor. Landon Carter wrote: “Captn. Beale had invited this family yesterday to a dinner and a twelfth Cake, every body showed such an inclination of obliging the old Gentlemen’s Compliment that they all prepared and ventured through the rain.”¹¹⁴ The family could have stayed out of the rain and eaten at home, but chose to attend a social dinner, which proves that these dinners were about more than nourishing the body; they were important social events.

Business and politics among the gentry were often conducted along the lines of social relationships during this period and agreements and discussions often happened over food at their social events. Bushman states that “Drawing-room society often brought together influential people to create relationships over dinner or at tea that played directly into alliances in business and politics.”¹¹⁵ The large dinner parties held by the gentry provided an opportunity to meet people they may not have met yet, and opened the way for new social, political, and business connections. When Eddis arrived in Maryland and met the governor, “Governor

¹¹¹ Hamilton, 23.

¹¹² Fithian, 52-171.

¹¹³ Byrd, *The Secret Diary*, 1-41.

¹¹⁴ Landon Carter, 344.

¹¹⁵ Bushman, 441.

Eden...invited me to meet a party at dinner...he introduced me in the most obliging terms to several persons of the highest respectability in the province.”¹¹⁶ These connections were probably quite useful when Eddis had lived in Maryland long enough to get a political appointment, which was his goal in America. Hamilton, on his journey, made new social connection at “the coffee house where I was introduced by Dr. Thomas Bond to severall[sic] gentlemen of the place.”¹¹⁷ Fithian wrote that “it is a general custom on Sundays here, with Gentlemen to invite one another home to dine, after church; and to consult about & determine their common business.”¹¹⁸ Byrd recorded conducting business over dinner on at least on occasion: “Colonel Randolph dined with me and I ate chicken for dinner, and our chief business was concerning a ship for his son.”¹¹⁹ Politics were discussed and conducted over food as well. Fithian recorded one day: “Breakfasted with us Mr. Blain & Mr. Warden, all the conversation is Politicks.”¹²⁰ Nicholson’s account book includes two large sums of money: one on October 3 “at the Election in Brandy,” and on October 6 “at the Election in Brandy,” spending almost as much as he spent on a carpet.¹²¹

Food was even more central to politics during the Revolution than usual because “the items being taxed were very often directly related to food and the colonists’ ability to produce it and trade it among themselves.”¹²² This ability to produce and trade among themselves affected everyone from the lower classes that included self-sufficient farmers and the merchants that had to purchase most of their food and trade with the farmers, to the gentry that used and profited from food grown by their slaves. Non-importation agreements became a large part of the

¹¹⁶ Eddis, 8-9.

¹¹⁷ Hamilton, 19.

¹¹⁸ Fithian, 57.

¹¹⁹ Byrd, *The Secret Diary*, 4.

¹²⁰ Fithian, 176.

¹²¹ Maryland Manuscript #5353.

¹²² McWilliams, 283.

Revolution. Eddis noted in October 1774 that “A general nonimportation agreement will speedily take place, and I have reason to believe will be resolutely adhered to.”¹²³ Non-importation agreements relied on the gentry and the growing middle classes to stop ordering and purchasing the status objects that the Chesapeake gentry prized such as tea, spices, china, and fine linens.

Tea became especially central to the patriot cause. Eddis included an account of a tea issue in Annapolis. A ship brought in “two thousand, three hundred, and twenty pounds of tea” for a merchant company in Annapolis, and the citizens of Annapolis caused such a commotion, including threatening to burn the ship, that the owner wound up burning it himself “to prevent worse consequences,” and publishing an apology to the citizens of the city.¹²⁴ He also referred to tea as “that detestable plant, as it is here termed.”¹²⁵ An earlier quote by Anbury stated that the gentlemen in Richmond were accused by some of the lower classes of having loyalist sympathies because of the hospitality shown to the captured British officers,¹²⁶ which was the same response that importing, selling, or consuming tea and other British goods earned. Anbury maintained that his hosts were patriots, but also had principles, which apparently included hospitality to other members of the gentry, whether American or British.

The first English colonists to Virginia and Maryland worried about food because they were in danger of starvation. By the eighteenth century, however, most colonists, as long as they were not living in the frontier, had steady food supplies. From the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, the budding upper class was beyond survival, and began to see food as an important mark of status and power. In the settled areas of the Chesapeake colonies, most people

¹²³ Eddis, 90.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 91, 97.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹²⁶ Anbury, 345.

could reach a survivable level of food; but the lavish dinners of the gentry class indicated the wealth of the host. The table items, the ingredients used, the decorations on the table and in the house would all demonstrate wealth, while an individual's behavior demonstrated their class and upbringing. Social events centered around food and these social events fostered social, business, and political relationships, and provided opportunities for creating new ones. In short, food was essential for the Chesapeake gentry and not just as physical nourishment, but with social, political, and financial meaning and influence.

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A collection of personal and business documents related to Maryland. The business documents include account books that list the buying and selling of food and food related items.

Research File: Food. Mount Vernon Ladies Association, Virginia.

This is a folder compiled by the staff of copied and transcribed sources that mention food and dining either at Mount Vernon or with George Washington while he was at other places as general or president. Many of the sources in the binder were unpublished and held in special collections elsewhere. This folder also provided suggestions for the published sources.

Research File: Food/Menus. Gunston Hall, Virginia.

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Brenner, Leslie. *American Appetite: The Coming of Age a Cuisine*. New York: Avon Books, 1999.

This book outlines the development of “an American Cuisine.” Though most of the book deals with modern times, its starts with a section on Native American and colonial times.

Bushman, Richard L. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.

This book focused on the rise of gentility in the 1700’s and respectability in the early 1800’s. Both sections start with a chapter on Delaware, where the author is based, as an example and then describes the changes in behavior, “Bodies and Minds,” “Houses and Gardens,” “Cities and Churches,” “the Comforts of Home,” “literature and Life,” “Religion and Taste,” “City and Country,” and “Culture and Power” for the colonies in general.

Bridenbough, Carl. “Introduction” in *Gentleman’s Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948.

This introduction to the travel journal included background on Alexander Hamilton and his social background, standing, and expectations.

Carson, Jane. *Colonial Virginia Cookery: Procedures, Equipment, and Ingredients in Colonial Cooking*. Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1985.

This work is a good overview of colonial cooking in Virginia. It covers cookbooks, kitchens, supplies and methods of cooking and preserving.

Eden, Trudy. *Cooking in America, 1590-1840*. The Greenwood Press “Daily Life Through History” Series. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006.

This work is an interesting combination of general overview and history, recipes/primary documents and how to cook it today. Her bibliography contains information on period British cookbooks as well as American cookbooks.

Harbury, Katherine E. *Colonial Virginia’s Cooking Dynasty*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004.

The first part is an excellent summary of the social structures and traditions surrounding food, cooking and dining during this period. The second part is an excellent summary of

the foods eaten. The third part is a reprint of two period cookbooks with commentary and other, related, period recipes.

Manton, Catherine. *Fed Up: Women and Food in America*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999.

This book starts with a chapter on food studies in general, and is followed by a chapter on the brief history of food. The following chapters deal with the increase of processed foods, the increase of food production as a big business, food as status and familiarity, “disturbed eating,” healthy eating, and food and politics.

McWilliams, James E. *A Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

This work is an excellent summary of colonial cooking. Each section of the colonies, including the West Indies, has a chapter. It also has a chapter on alcohol and one on the increase in consumption of British goods.

Mitchell, Patricia B. *Revolutionary Recipes: Colonial Food, Lore & More*. Chatham, VA: Patricia B. Mitchell, 1991.

A short work that focuses on the differences between regular colonial fare and the fare of the Continental Army. It includes the differences between the lower class soldiers and the upper class officers.

Pillsbury, Richard. *No Foreign Food: The American Diet in Time and Place*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998.

The first chapter of this book discusses an aspect of food studies: why some foods are eaten and others are not. The second chapter discusses the ingredients, habits, and structure of meals during this time period, which became the beginnings of the American diet.

Oliver, Sandra. *Food in Colonial and Federal America*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005.

This work is another excellent summary of colonial eating habits. It covers all aspects of food production and regional differences. Also includes African and Native contributions.

Spruill, Julia Cherry. *Women's Life & Work in the Southern Colonies*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1972.

This is an older work, but is still considered the important book on the topic and is still quoted in new books about women in the colonies.

Taylor, Joe Gray. *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the South: An Informal History*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.

This book is a summary of eating habits in the South, starting with Native American contributions and covering all the way up to “Contemporary South.” It describes the food eaten, and how they ate it, for the different levels of society at different times.

Theophano, Janet. *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

This book analyzes the uses and importance of cookbooks to women beyond merely instructions of how to make a meal. The author argues that women throughout history have used cookbooks in many ways: as a way to make connections, to interact with each other, and to express themselves.

Walsh, Lorena S. "Consumer Behavior, Diet, and the Standard of Living in Late Colonial and Early Antebellum America, 1700-1840." *American Economic Growth and Standards of Living before the Civil War*. Edited by Robert E. Gallman and John Joseph Wallis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

This paper was presented at a conference that "was part of the Development of the American Economy program." The paper covers all of America during this time period and looks at the food, food related items and changes to cookbooks during this time. The majority of the paper just lays out a summary of the various kinds of documents she looked at. Her conclusion section states that "conclusions remain tentative," partly because there is such a difference between different regions, between rich and poor, between urban and rural. Her most solidly stated conclusion is that more research needs to be done.

Wright, Louis B. "The Life of William Byrd of Virginia." *The London Diary (1717-1721) and Other Writings*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.

A short biography of William Byrd and some background on his times and society.