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Map showing Virginia counties which are important to this study; they include Henrico, Goochland, Chesterfield, King William, and Prince William Counties.

A Virginia Cabinetmaker: The Eventon Shop and Related Work

LUKE BECKERDITE

In February, 1954, *The Magazine Antiques* published an article by Helen Comstock entitled "Discoveries in Southern Furniture."¹ The article reviewed discoveries in Virginia and North Carolina furniture made after the landmark exhibition *Furniture of the Old South 1640-1820* held in Richmond in 1952.² The desk-and-bookcase in Figure 1 was illustrated in Comstock's article and described as the most important discovery resulting from the exhibition, due to the fact that it was signed by its maker, Mardun V. Eventon (Fig. 2).³ During the past decade MESDA's field research program has recorded eleven additional pieces that can be attributed to Eventon or to cabinetmakers associated with him.

The earliest document concerning Eventon is an attachment against his personal property instituted by John Murry, an ordinary keeper in Dumfries, Virginia, and brought before the Prince William County Court of Common Pleas on 23 February 1762.⁴ At the same court Eventon settled a suit against Samuel Wells for trespass, assault, and battery.⁵

The Dumfries ledgers of the Scottish merchant firm of John Glassford & Co. provide the first indications of Eventon's trade. On 12 April 1762 he was credited £0:15:0 for "Making a Table & fixing handles to a broom & scrubbing Clamp."⁶ Later entries in the ledger record payments of £1:7:6 for a "Walnut side Table," and £1:15:0 for a "Dining Table."⁷ The latter was described as a "Dinner Table" and cross-referenced under the heading "Household Furniture."⁸ Eventon must have been relatively successful in his trade at the time, for in a June, 1762,



Figure 1. Desk-and-bookcase by Mardun V. Eventon, 1750-1760, King William County, walnut with yellow pine. HOA: 84", WOA: 41", DOA: 21³/₄". MESDA research file S-1641.

advertisement in the *Maryland Gazette* he appealed for "Two or Three Journeymen CABINETMAKERS . . . versed in their Business" and offered "ready Money" for "two or three Thousand Feet of good Mahogany Plank."⁹

On 7 June 1762, Mardun Eventon witnessed an indenture between Thomas Williams and a joiner named Maurice Eventon in which Williams was apprenticed for a period of four years to learn the "Art and Mistery of the Carpenters and house Joiners traide."¹⁰ The unusual names of the two artisans, as well as their related occupations and evident proximity, coupled with later documents dealing with Mardun Eventon's estate, strongly suggest that the two men were related and possibly in business together.¹¹

The Eventons may have been associated in King William County before moving to Dumfries. A "Mauris Everton" of King William County took an apprentice in Charles City County on 15 December 1755.¹² Although documentation for Mardun's presence in King William County is lacking, the earliest pieces attributed to him have King William County histories. The signed desk-and-bookcase (Fig. 1) descended in the Gwathmey family of that county, and may be the "Bookcase & Desk" valued at \$20 in the inventory of Major Joseph Gwathmey (d. 1824) of "Burlington."¹³ The dining table illustrated in Figure 15 descended in the Tarrant family of King William County and the table in Figure 14 was purchased there about 1950.¹⁴

Mardun evidently found it profitable to combine the house joiner's trade with cabinetmaking. He was credited £10:9:5 1/2 for "joiner's work" in the Glassford ledgers on 11 August 1762,¹⁵ and on 7 January 1763 he was paid for work done on the "lower church" in Dettingen Parish in Prince William County.¹⁶ The "lower church" was located on Quantico Creek just below Dumfries.¹⁷

It appears that Mardun associated with the "wrong sort" while in Dumfries. On 6 June 1763, he was brought before the court and charged with attempting "to break the County Goal" to free John Standley and Rouben [sic] Golder, both of whom were being held on suspicion of counterfeiting. Eventon was placed in the custody of the Sheriff until John Baylis, one of the town's trustees, and Lynaugh Holme posted £50:0:0 security on the condition that he appear before the next grand jury and "be of good behavior" for a year and a day.¹⁸ Standley and Golder were found guilty of counterfeiting and ordered to stand trial at General Court in Williamsburg.¹⁹



Figure 2. Detail of the inscription on the back of the desk-and-bookcase illustrated in Figure 1.

Mardun may have been in debt before attempting the jail break, since he sold or mortgaged most of his property to a Dumfries merchant, Allan Macrae, on 20 May 1763. The property consisted of household goods and implements, livestock, provisions, a meat house, “one Compleat set of Cabinet &. one Compleat set of Joyner’s Tools . . . two thousand feet of Walnut plank” and a set of turner’s tools. The transaction was sealed by the delivery of a tenon saw “in the name &. in room of all the said Goods.” Macrae evidently took possession of the property after Eventon acknowledged the “Bill of Sale” on 8 November 1763.²⁰ This is the last known reference to Mardun Eventon in Prince William County.²¹ The earliest subsequent reference to him is a suit against Eventon by Ambrose Brewitt in Henrico County on 6 June 1768;²² however, he may have joined Maurice there shortly after selling his property in Dumfries. Maurice was involved in law suits in Henrico County from 25 October 1763 to 6 June 1768.²³

Like many cabinetmakers in southeast Virginia, Maurice also worked at the house builder’s trade. On 13 February 1769 the *Virginia Gazette* carried his appeal for “FOUR regular bred Workmen, two to the House Joiner business, one to the Cabinet, and one to . . . House, Chair, and Table work.” Interested tradesmen were requested to apply immediately “in the upper end of Charles City County.”²⁴ In the *Virginia Gazette* of 21

September 1776, Eventon again appealed for "JOURNEYMEN HOUSE JOINERS or HOUSE CARPENTERS" and added that he was located at Woodson's Cross Roads, near Fourmile Creek, in Henrico County.²⁵ This notice implies a successful business, and contrasts sharply with Mardun Eventon's advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette* the following summer:

Wants Employment, and is now at Leisure, a Master Workman in the various Branches of the Cabinet Business, chinese, gotick [sic], carving, and turning; is well acquainted with the Theory and Practice in any of the grand Branches of the five ancient Orders, viz. Ornamental Architects, gothick, chinese, and modern Taste, &c. also Colonades, Porticoes, Frontispieces, &c. to Doors; compound, pick [sic] Pediment, and plain Tabernacle Chimney Pieces; chinese, ramp, and twist Pedestals; geometrical, circular, plain, and common Stair Cases, and sundry other pieces of Architect too tedious mentioning. My chief desire is to act in the Capacity of Superintendent, or Supervisor over any reasonable Number of Hands, either in public or private Buildings. I have an elegant Assortment of Tools and Books of Architect, which I imported from London and Liverpool.²⁶

At the time of the advertisement, Eventon was residing at Captain Richard Baugh's "near Bermuda and Shirley Hundreds" in Chesterfield County.²⁷

Mardun probably enlisted in the Continental Army shortly after placing the advertisement in August, 1777. A "Mardan Evington" was listed on a muster roll for the 5th Virginia Regiment of the Continental Line,²⁸ and Eventon described himself as a soldier in his last will and testament.²⁹ Eventon may have become ill or injured in service during the winter of 1777. On 12 December 1777 Maurice offered to sell an assortment of tools, twelve architectural books, livestock, and household and kitchen furniture.³⁰ The tools and books were undoubtedly the ones mentioned in Mardun's advertisement of August, 1777.³¹ Mardun signed his will on 17 January 1778,³² and it was proven in court in Chesterfield County after Maurice verified the signature on 5 March 1779.³³ Mardun's friend, Benskin Easley, and his son, George V. Eventon, were the only benefactors. Eventon's "inside & outside Apparell" in Chesterfield County was left to Easley,

and George inherited all of the clothing and effects that were left in the possession of John Gorbil in Alexandria.³⁴ George and his brother Thomas were placed in the custody of the churchwardens of Dale Parish until they could be bound out.³⁵

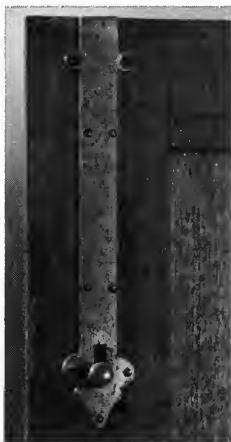


Figure 3. Detail of the brass latch on the left door of Figure 1.

Maurice Eventon posted bond and acquired administration of Mardun's estate on 7 May 1779.³⁶ The following November the court ordered Maurice either to reimburse Nathaniel Quarrels for a debt owed by the estate, or give him the right of administration.³⁷ Maurice evidently paid the debt, since he again advertised Mardun's furniture, livestock, tools, and books on 11 December. The latter items were described as "12 or 15 books of architecture, by the latest and best authors in Britain, viz. Swan, Pain, Langley, and Halfpenny," and "as complete a set of cabinet and carpenters tools as any in the state." The furniture, utensils, and livestock were to be sold at Maurice's "dwelling-house" in Henrico County on the last day of December and the tools and books were to be auctioned in Richmond in January.³⁸

Despite Mardun Eventon's obvious familiarity with current architectural designs³⁹ and his claim to be a "Master Workman in the Various Branches of the Cabinet Business," the furniture both documented and attributed to his shop is conservative in style. The desk-and-bookcase illustrated in Figure 1 has several details that identify it as the earliest piece in the group. Although it was probably made during the 1750's, the desk has a molded writing shelf on the fallboard, corbelled drawer ranks, and



Figure 4. Detail of the writing cabinet and bookcase interior of Figure 1.

receding ogee-blocked drawer fronts, all details generally associated with the late Baroque style (1700-1730). Early desk interiors with arched prospects flanked by engaged pilasters may have provided the inspiration for the unusual carved arch on the door of the Eventon example. MESDA field research has shown that details from earlier styles are often found on furniture from rural areas of the South where tastes were conservative. In this instance, however, the interior design probably reflects the cabinetmaker's stylistic background, since a later desk attributed to Eventon has a virtually identical writing cabinet interior (Fig. 4, 23).



Figure 5. Detail of the case construction of Figure 1.

The desk-and-bookcase is made of black walnut with yellow pine secondary wood. The dovetail pins at the bottom of the desk are exposed, and the joints are concealed by narrow strips of yellow pine that are mitered to a framing member at the front and nailed to the bottom. By contrast, blind or "secret" dovetails were used to join the top to the sides, even though the joint is hidden by the waist molding. All of the dovetail joints on the bookcase are exposed and show evidence of toothplaning. Cabinetmakers occasionally used a tooth plane for leveling dovetails and various hidden surfaces since the steep angle of its iron permitted scraping cuts which had little or no tendency to tear the wood. This technique of finishing was also used extensively inside the desk (Fig. 5) and on other pieces in the group (Fig. 25 and the base of a clothes press not illustrated).

Both the drawer blades and the floor of the interior are set in exposed half-dovetail grooves. The grooves for the latter extend

to the back of the case and have deep saw kerfs, indicating that they were cut with a back saw before the waste was planed out. The drawer supports of the desk are attached with short wrought nails set in rectangular notches that were sawn and chiseled in the runners (Fig. 5). This method of attaching the runners restricts the movement of the sides and often causes them to split. Shrinkage also tends to force the drawer blades out of their grooves, dislodging the back boards. Both sections of the case have vertical back boards with beveled edges that are dadoed to the sides and top and nailed along a scribed line into the bottom of the case.



Figure 6. Detail of the right rear foot and base molding of Figure 1.

The base molding and the tall bracket feet of the desk are cut from single pieces of wood (Fig. 6) that are mitered together at the front corners and nailed to the framing strips under the bottom. Large quarter-round blocks glued to the strips and feet support the weight of the case. Evidence of stylistic influence from Williamsburg can be seen in the quarter-round base molding of the desk. Although rarely seen in other areas, this form of bed molding occurs on Williamsburg case pieces dating from the 1730's⁴⁰ to the Revolution.⁴¹

The exterior drawers of the desk are unusual in having extremely shallow lipmolding at the edges, and drawer frames that are mitered at the back (Figs. 7, 8). Mitered drawer frames

also occur on an early group of pad-foot tables from the Surry-Sussex County area (Figs. 12, 13) and several groups of southeast Virginia desks;⁴² however, there is little evidence of this construction being used elsewhere in the state. The bottom boards of the drawers are perpendicular to the front, beveled on three faces, and nailed at the back. To compensate for shrinkage, small segmented blocks were glued to the bottom against the front edge and sides. Prominent tear marks on the outer surfaces of the bottom boards indicate that they were rived rather than sawn. Although evidence of riving can be found on eighteenth-century furniture from the Mid-Atlantic colonies and New England, it rarely occurs on Virginia pieces after 1700.



Figure 7. Detail of the molded edge of an exterior drawer from Figure 1.

Four small “secret” drawers are concealed by the pigeon-hole brackets above each of the receding drawers (Fig. 9). The brackets are glued to the drawer fronts and have a deeply hollowed chamfer at the back to facilitate their removal (Fig. 10). Small strips of wood attached to the pigeon-hole partitions function as runners under the drawers.

Flanking the prospect door are document drawers with applied classical columns. The construction of the drawers is unusual in that the sides do not occupy the full height of the space, and they run on long filler blocks glued between the partitions (Fig.

9). The base and capital turnings of the columns attached to these drawers are stylistically related to columns on the document drawers of two early Williamsburg desks-and-bookcase⁴³ and the arm supports on the Speaker's chair for the House of Burgesses.⁴⁴ Similar turnings and interior arrangements also occur on Massachusetts desks; however, the impact of New England styles on Tidewater furniture was minimal in comparison with that of Williamsburg.

Shallow dados in the bottom of the bookcase show that the interior was refitted and that the lower pigeon-hole partitions originally extended to the bottom of the case. This alteration was probably made while the bookcase was still in Eventon's shop

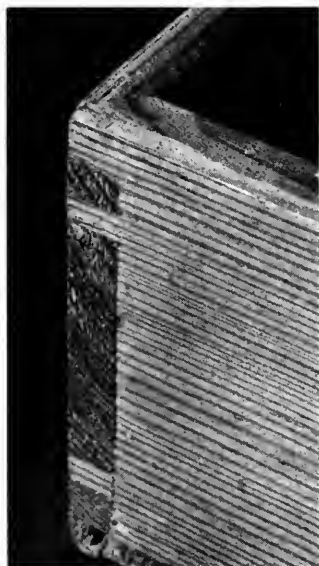


Figure 8. Detail of the mitered frame of the drawer illustrated in Figure 7.

or shortly thereafter, since the construction of the three lower drawers matches the interior drawers of the desk.

Except for the small applied bead, the cornice molding was cut from a single piece of wood (Fig. 11). The molding was apparently run with three different planes rather than a single molding plane; the cove was cut with two sizes of hollows (hollow and round planes usually were made pairs) and a table plane was used to run the fillet and quarter-round.

The table in Figure 14 is attributed to Eventon based upon the construction of its drawer, which is virtually identical to the

exterior drawers of the desk-and-bookcase. The drawer runners on the table are lapped over the front rail and nailed into mortises in the rear legs and back. The interior finish is coarse, and there are deep tears and adze marks on the rails. Unlike most tables from the Tidewater region, this example is fitted with battens, and the top is molded only on three sides. Eastern Virginia tables are generally finished on all four sides.



Figure 9. Detail of the interior drawers of Figure 1.



Figure 10. Detail of the back of a pigeon-hole bracket from Figure 1.



Figure 11. Detail of the cornice of Figure 1.

The leg and foot turnings of this table are closely related to the dining table in Figure 15. Both examples have turned legs with square stiles and feet that turn in sharply below the toe and rest on flat cylindrical pads (Fig. 16). Feet of similar form, though larger and flatter, occur in a group of Surry-Sussex County tables (Fig. 12). These tables also have flat battens dovetailed to the frame and screwed to the top similar to the table attributed to Eventon (Figs. 13, 17). While these relationships point to a connection between Eventon and the Surry-Sussex group, the construction of the dining table differs significantly in two respects. The hinge segments of the swing leg protrude through mortises in the frame, a feature not seen on dining tables in the Surry-Sussex group, and the legs lack the distinctive astragal and scotia turnings seen on Figure 13. On the Eventon tables the stiles are slightly undercut, and there is no transition (i.e. a chamfer or turning) between them and the round sections of the legs other than a simple shoulder.

Unlike the preceding pieces, the construction of the clothes press in Figure 18 was strongly influenced by house joinery. With

the exception of the drawers, the piece has no dovetails. Instead, both sections of the case are constructed with large raised panels and mortise-and-tenon joints. The dimensions of the framing members and the size and arrangement of the panels indicate that each side of the press was laid out and made as a separate unit, a procedure related to the construction of architectural paneling.



Figure 12. Table, 1730-1750, Surry-Sussex County, Virginia, walnut and birch with oak cross-braces and yellow pine. HOA: 27 $\frac{7}{8}$ " , WOA: 31 $\frac{1}{8}$ " , DOA: 18". MESDA acc. 2870.

The press is unusual in having a third door that conceals a shallow compartment with shelves and double-ogee shaped partitions (Fig. 19). Although this space was probably intended for the storage of valuables or documents, the maker did not attempt to disguise the door. The door is mounted with large brass hinges, and it has shaped upper panels like the front doors rather than two rectangular panels like the other side (Fig. 18).

Like most joined pieces, the stiles of the chest extend to the floor, forming supports for the case and feet (Fig. 20). The feet



Figure 13. Detail of cross-brace and drawer of Figure 12, (top removed).



Figure 14. Table attributed to Mardun V. Eventon, 1750-1760, King William County, walnut with yellow pine. HOA: 28", W'OA: 32 $\frac{3}{8}$ ", DOA: 18". MESDA research file S-6695.

and base molding are cut from the same board, and their profiles are strikingly similar to those in Figure 6. The clothes press even has a small V-shaped cut in the bottom edge of the base molding at the front of the case. The press and desk-and-bookcase also have similar cornices with applied beads and coved sections run with hollow planes (Figs. 11, 21).



Figure 15. Dining table attributed to Mardun V. Eventon, 1750-1760, King William County, Virginia, walnut with oak cross-braces and yellow pine. HOA: 29", Width open: 52¼", Width closed: 18⅞", DOA: 46⅞". MESDA research file S-4510.

The back of the clothes press is constructed like the desk-and-bookcase, but with the addition of a wide central muntin separating the back boards of the upper case. The construction of the drawers and the attachment of the runners also differs; the runners are not notched, and the drawer frames do not have mitered dovetail joints at the rear. In other respects, however, the drawer construction is typical of the group.



Figure 16. Detail of the leg and foot of the dining table illustrated in Figure 15.



Figure 17. Detail of the cross-braces of the dining table illustrated in Figure 15.



Figure 18. Clothes press attributed to the shop of Mardun V. Eventon, 1755-1765, probably King William County or Prince William County, Virginia, walnut with yellow pine, poplar, and walnut. HOA: 80 $\frac{3}{4}$ " , WOA: 44 $\frac{7}{8}$ " , DOA: 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". The clothes press is in the Kenmore collection, Fredericksburg, Virginia. MESDA research file S-5904.



Figure 19. Detail of the side door and document compartment of Figure 18.



Figure 20. Detail of the right feet and base molding of Figure 18.



Figure 21. Detail of the cornice of Figure 18.

The chest of drawers illustrated in Figure 22 shares features with both the clothes press and desk-and-bookcase. The back boards have three beveled faces dadoed to the sides and top, and the feet and base molding are cut from the same board and shaped like those in Figures 6 and 20. The feet are supported by vertical glueblocks, but these butt against the bottom of the case rather than against framing members like the blocks of the desk-and-bookcase. Although the drawer supports are replacements, the absence of dadoes, as well as lines scribed on the sides of the case, indicates that they were originally nailed. As in the clothes press, the drawer frames of the chest are not mitered. Unfortunately, many of the bottom boards have been replaced, and there is no surviving evidence of glueblocks. Despite these parallels, the chest of drawers differs from other pieces attributed to Eventon in having a directly molded top (i.e. the moldings are not applied) that is joined to the sides with a full-length dovetail. Such variations in the style and construction of pieces attributed to Eventon should come as no surprise considering his employment of journeymen cabinetmakers and joiners.

The desk in Figure 23 illustrates this point particularly well. The style of the interior and construction of the drawers and case is nearly identical to the signed desk-and-bookcase (Fig. 1),⁴⁵ yet there are significant variations in the profile and blocking of the feet and base molding (Figs. 6, 24). Unlike other pieces in the group, the feet of this desk are nailed to large, horizontally-grained blocks that extend the full depth of the case. These blocks are in turn nailed to framing strips that are mitered at the front corners like those of the desk-and-bookcase. Although this type of blocking occurs frequently on furniture from the Piedmont region of North Carolina, this is the only known instance of its use in Virginia.



Figure 22. Chest of drawers attributed to the shop of Mardun V. Eventon, 1760-1770, probably King William County or Prince William County, walnut with yellow pine. The brasses on the small drawers are replaced. HOA: 40 $\frac{3}{4}$ " , WOA: 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ " , DOA: 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Photograph courtesy The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, acc. 57-157.

One of the most unusual pieces in the Eventon group is a chest of drawers (Fig. 25) that descended in the Payne family of Goochland County. Its paneled back, drawer blades, and quarter-round base molding are related to those of Figures 1, 18, 22, and 23, and the drawers have mitered frames like the desk-and-bookcase, side table, and desk. The upper drawer of the chest is fitted with pigeon-holes, lidded compartments, and an adjustable ratcheted writing board (Fig. 26). The edges of the drawer sides have rabbets that engage thin strips that are nailed to the sides, acting as drawer guides. The writing drawer runs on a full dustboard that is dadoed to the sides — a detail found on one

other example in the group⁴⁶ — and the small drawers are supported by runners that are mortised into the drawer blades and chamfered off and nailed at the back.



Figure 23. Desk attributed to the shop of Mardun V. Eventon, 1765-1775, probably the Henrico-Chesterfield County area, walnut with yellow pine. MESDA research file S-6527.



Figure 24. Detail of the foot of the desk illustrated in Figure 23.



Figure 25. Chest of drawers, 1765-1775, southeast Virginia, walnut with oak drawer frames and yellow pine. HOA: 36 $\frac{3}{4}$ " , WOA: 43 $\frac{1}{4}$ " , DOA: 24 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". The chest is owned by the Lynchburg Museum System and exhibited at the house museum "Point of Honor." MESDA research file S-7535.

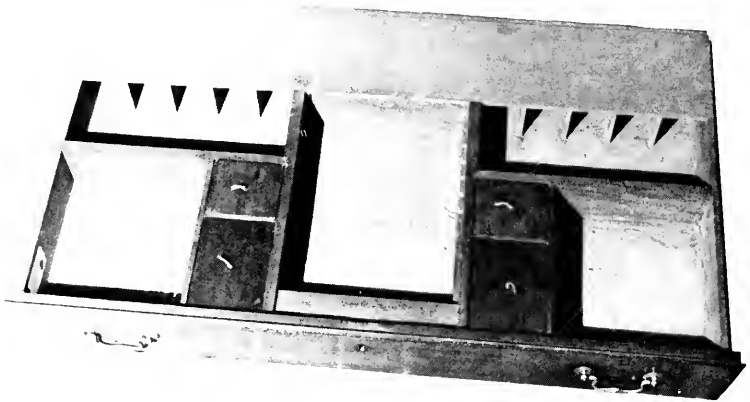


Figure 26. Detail of the writing drawer of Figure 25.



Figure 27. Desk-and-bookcase, 1765-1775, southeast Virginia, walnut with oak drawer sides and yellow pine. HOA: 89 $\frac{1}{4}$ " , W'OA: 39 $\frac{1}{8}$ " , DOA: 23 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". MESDA research file S-6701.

A desk-and-bookcase by the same cabinetmaker (Fig. 27) presents an interesting departure from other pieces in the group in having the drawer blades covered by thin strips of walnut glued and nailed to the front edges of the desk. In other respects, the case construction is nearly identical to the preceding chest. The feet are integral with the base molding (Fig. 28) and they were cut from the same pattern used for the feet of the chest. Although the blocks for the feet of this desk-and-bookcase are missing, glue lines show that they were triangular in shape and butted against the bottom of the case. On the chest (Fig. 25), the blocks are rectangular and nailed in place.

The bookcase is fitted with two short raised-panel doors and a fallboard that conceals eighteen pigeon-holes (Fig. 29). This unusual arrangement suggests that the desk was originally owned by a merchant or public official. Family tradition maintains that the desk-and-bookcase descended from William Miller, who served as Clerk of Court for Goochland County during the 1790s. It is entirely possible that the desk-and-bookcase, the chest (Fig. 25), and the base of a related clothes press (not illustrated)⁴⁷ were made in Goochland County by a journeyman cabinetmaker or apprentice trained in Eventon's shop. Although little is known about the migration of these tradesmen, the geographic distribution of pieces with reliable histories indicates that it was extensive.



Figure 28. Detail of the left front foot and base molding of Figure 27.



Figure 29. Detail of the bookcase fallboard and pigeon-holes of Figure 27.

A desk which descended in the Rudd family of Chesterfield County, as well as a desk-and-bookcase (Figs. 30, 32), represent the work of another cabinetmaker associated with Eventon. The interiors have document drawers with applied classical columns (those of the desk are missing) and straight drawer fronts arranged in tiers like the signed desk-and-bookcase (Fig. 1) and another desk (Fig. 22). In a manner typical of the group, the document drawers run on large filler blocks glued between the partitions (Fig. 31).

The case construction of these pieces differs significantly from others in the group. Although the feet on the desk are replacements, the original base molding and most of the glueblocks survive. The glueblocks are triangular, and have mitered flankers that extend about $\frac{1}{4}$ " under the base molding. These partially-surviving blocks indicate that the feet were very thin and separate from the base molding.

Another departure from the usual construction of this group is the addition of a large, horizontal batten to the back of the case. Made of rived oak, the batten is dovetailed to the sides behind the small upper drawers. This batten provides additional support where the sides are weakest, and serves as a muntin for the back boards. These boards are horizontal, and have beveled edges dadoed to the sides and top.



Figure 30. Desk, 1770, southeast Virginia, walnut with oak drawer bottoms and frames and yellow pine. The date "15 June 1770" is incised on the left fallboard slide, and one of the back boards is dated "AD 1770 June." The desk originally had a bookcase. HOA: 40" (including the replaced feet), WOA: 30", DOA: 21". Photograph by Sumpter Priddy, III.



Figure 31. Detail of the writing cabinet of the desk illustrated in Figure 30. Photograph by Sumpter Priddy, III.



Figure 32. Desk with later bookcase, 1770-1780, southeast Virginia, walnut with oak drawer frames and yellow pine. HOA: 79" (not including the replaced feet), WOA: 40¼", DOA: 21¾". MESDA research file S-9954.

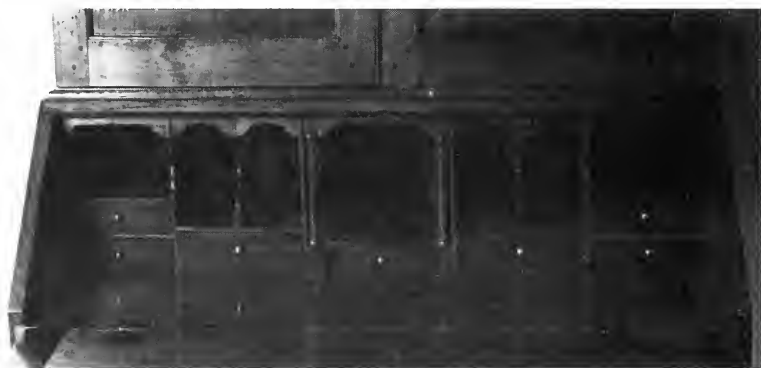


Figure 33. Detail of the writing cabinet of the desk-and-bookcase illustrated in Figure 32.

The drawer frames and bottoms are also made of rived oak. The drawers do not have mitered frames or segmented glueblocks, but the bottoms are beveled on three faces and dadoed to the sides and front like other examples in the group. As in the preceding chest and desk-and-bookcase (Figs. 25,27), the drawer runners are tenoned into the drawer blades and chamfered and nailed at the back.

The collective study of these pieces provides evidence for several important conclusions. The construction, style, and histories of the signed desk-and-bookcase and the tables (Figs. 1, 12, 14) identify them as products of Eventon's hand. Variations in the style and construction of the other pieces in the group show that a steady stream of tradesmen passed through Eventon's shop. The clothes press, chest, and desk (Figs. 18, 22, 23) are closely related to the early pieces attributed to Eventon, and probably were produced under his supervision. The other case pieces have interrelated features and histories that allow us to attribute them to journeymen cabinetmakers who had worked in Eventon's shop, but the exact locus of their production is uncertain. Like much of the furniture produced in eastern Virginia, these pieces bear witness to the widespread diffusion of urban British style from Williamsburg, and the tempering of this style by the conservative character of the rural society.

Mr. Beckerdite is Research Associate for MESDA.

FOOTNOTES

1. Helen Comstock, "Discoveries in Southern Furniture," *The Magazine Antiques*, February 1954, V. 65, No. 2, pp. 131-135.
2. *The Magazine Antiques*, January 1952, V. 61, No. 1, pp. 38-101.
3. Contemporary documents refer to him as Mardun Van Eventon and Mardun Vaughn Eventon.
4. *Prince William County Court Order Book, 1761-1763*, p. 76.
5. *Ibid*, p. 68.
6. John Glassford & Co., M-1442-12, V. 200, *Dumfries Ledger E, 1762-1763*, p. 216. Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
7. *Ibid*, p. 216.
8. Glassford, V. 199, *Dumfries Ledger E, 1762-1763*, p. 3.
9. *The Maryland Gazette*, 24 June 1762, 3-2. Eventon also had at least one apprentice while in Dumfries. On 8 February 1763 he registered a complaint against apprentice Nathaniel Overall for "Obsconding from his Service," *Prince William County Order Book, 1761-1763*, p. 408.
10. *Prince William County Deed Book P, 1761-1764*, p. 173.
11. The possibility of this relationship was first discussed in Wallace B. Gusler's *Furniture of Williamsburg and Eastern Virginia, 1710-1790* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1979), p. 163.
12. *Charles City County Order Book, 1751-1757*, p. 355.
13. Comstock, "Discoveries," p. 131.
14. MESDA research files S-4510 and S-6695.
15. Glassford, V. 200, *Dumfries Ledger E*, p. 216.
16. *Dettingen Parish Vestry Book, 1745-1785*, ms. no. 19727, p. 1. Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.
17. Bishop William Meade, *Old Churches and Families of Virginia* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1857), p. 209.
18. *Prince William County Court Order Book, 1761-1763*, p. 525. Eventon may have made furniture for Lynaugh Holme. His Glassford account shows a £7:0:0 credit "By Capt. Lynaugh Holme" on 7 September 1763 (Glassford, V. 200, *Dumfries Ledger E*, p. 216). John Baylis was appointed a trustee of the town of Dumfries in 1761 (Fairfax Harrison, *Landmarks of Old Prince William* [Berryville, Virginia: Chesapeake Book Co., 1964], p. 395).
19. *Prince William County Court Order Book, 1761-1763*, p. 526.
20. *Prince William County Deed Book Q, 1763-1768*, pp. 35-36.

21. There are no surviving court order books for Prince William County from 1764-1765 and his name does not appear in any subsequent court records (Letter from Mrs. Edith Sprouse to the author 6 August 1984) or deeds.
22. *Henrico County Court Order Book, 1767-1769*, p. 247.
23. *Henrico County Court Order Book, 1763-1767*, p. 129, 200-201, 253, 365, 398, 424, 453, 497, 511, 565, and 699. *Henrico County Court Order Book, 1767-1769*, p. 241 and 252.
24. *The Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 13 February 1769, 2-1. Although most of the records dealing with Maurice Eventon are from Henrico County, he owned at least one tract of land in Charles City County. On 7 March 1770, he used a tract of 200 acres as security for £103:15:8 in a deed of trust to Amos and James Ladd (*Charles City County Records, 1766-1774* [Deeds, Wills, Orders, etc.], p. 220). Three years later Eventon sold this tract to Christopher Toler for £150:0:0 Virginia currency. The deed, dated 11 October 1773, was proven on 3 November 1773 (*Ibid.*, p. 509).
25. *The Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), 21 September 1776, 3-2.
26. *The Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), 22 August 1777, 3-2. In Purdie's *Virginia Gazette* of 15 August 1777, Eventon stated that he would work on public or private buildings "from the most elegant and superb, down to the gentleman's plain country seat."
27. *Ibid.* and *The Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), 22 August 1777, 3-2. Eventon witnessed Richard Baugh's will on 21 August 1777 (Benjamin B. Weisinger, IV., comp., *Chesterfield County, Virginia Wills, 1774-1795*, 1979, p. 85).
28. John W. Gwathmey, *Historical Register of Virginians in the Revolution* (Baltimore: Geneological Publishing Co., 1973).
29. *Chesterfield County Will Book 3, 1774-1785*, pp. 200-201.
30. The tools and books included ". . . a complete Set of House Carpenters and Joiners Tools . . . 12 Books of Architecture, a set of carving Tools, a Set Turners Tools, and the Bench with 2 Screws and Points, and a moving Steel Rest . . ." (*The Virginia Gazette* [Dixon and Hunter], 12 December 1777, 2-1, and *The Virginia Gazette* [Purdie], 12 December 1777, 3-2).
31. It is highly unlikely that two tradesmen in the same area owned such an extensive assortment of design books. William Buckland is the only southern tradesman known to have owned more; his inventory lists fifteen design books (*Anne Arundel County Inventories, 1777*, V, 125, p. 337).
32. *Chesterfield County Will Book 3, 1774-1785*, pp. 200-201.
33. *Chesterfield County Order Book 6, 1774-1784*, p. 208.
34. *Chesterfield County Will Book 3, 1774-1785*, p. 201.
35. The churchwardens were ordered to bind out Thomas on 5 June 1778 (*Chesterfield County Order Book 6, 1774-1784*, p. 174) and George on 5 November 1779 (*Ibid.* p. 264).
36. *Chesterfield County Order Book 6, 1774-1784*, p. 225.
37. *Ibid.*, 5 November 1779, p. 264.
38. *The Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Nicolson), 11 December 1779, 3-1.

39. For example William Pain's earliest book, *The Builder's Companion*, was published in London in 1758 and Abraham Swan's first volume, *The British Architect*, was published in London in 1745 and re-issued there in 1748, 1750, and 1758 (Helen Park, *A List of Architectural Books Available in America Before the Revolution* [Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1973], pp. 67-68, 71-72).
40. MESDA research files S-7264 and S-2371.
41. Gusler, *Furniture of Williamsburg*, pp. 58-131. MESDA research files S-9952 and S-3888.
42. The tables appear to originate in the Surry-Sussex County area (MESDA research files S-6541, S-6936, S-7186, and S-10755) and the desks from Southampton and Isle of Wight County (MESDA research files S-4111, S-4341, S-5523, S-11075 and S-3599 and S-4353).
43. MESDA research files S-2361 and S-5373.
44. Gusler, *Williamsburg Furniture*, pp. 13-16.
45. The runners on the desk have V-shaped notches formed by converging saw cuts.
46. See Bernard and S. Dean Levy, Inc., Catalog 4, 1984. The desk illustrated on page 38 has a full dustboard under the top drawer.
47. The clothes press has a Fluvanna County history. Fluvanna is just west of Goochland County. MESDA research file S-7621.

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Figure 1. View on the Potomac and Shenandoah, aquatint by Joseph Jeakes after a painting by William Roberts, published in 1810. 15¼" x 19¾". MESDA accession 3424-4.

Virginia Landscapes by William Roberts

BARBARA C. BATSON

Three prints of Virginia scenery, Natural Bridge, the Potomac River, and Harper's Ferry, as well as the preparatory watercolors for the last, all recently acquired by MESDA, offer a rare opportunity to understand the process by which landscape prints were produced as well as to examine artistic selection of topographical views during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The artist, William Roberts, remains largely obscure; the years of his birth and death, his training, even his nationality — all are unknown or uncertain. Manuscript notes on two prints provide a tantalizing bit of information, however. *View on the Potomac* in the MESDA collection is inscribed "Mr. Burton / 91 Gloster Place / Por" A similar inscription is on the handcolored aquatint, *Junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, Virginia*, owned by the New York Public Library: "Original picture in oils at 91 Gloucester Place. Painted by Mr. Roberts, father to Mrs. Grace Burton, Mother of Sir Charles Burton."¹ *Burke's Dictionary of Peerage and Baronetage of the British Empire* notes that Benjamin Burton of Dublin, lieutenant of the 19th Lancers, married Grace-Anne Roberts, who was the "only child of William Roberts, Esq. 91 Gloster-Place, Por[t]man-square." Their eldest child and son, Charles William Cuffe Burton (1823-1902) inherited the baronetcy, married, and died without issue. The title and his estate, presumably including the painting by his grandfather, passed to his niece, Grace Ellen Burton, and her husband, Sir Francis Denys.²

Roberts nevertheless had at least one tie to America. In two letters to Thomas Jefferson, who owned two oils by Roberts — one of Natural Bridge and another of Harper's Ferry — Roberts mentioned his brother, Edward, a merchant in Norfolk, Virginia. In his letter of 24 July 1803, Roberts wrote that he was "lately from Norfolk, taking an Excursion with his Sister M^{rs} Taylor and presuming on the honour of having been introduced to M^r Jefferson almost an age ago in London by Hector S^t John Author of 'Letters by an American Farmer'; intended to take the liberty this morning of expressing the singular gratification he should derive from an opportunity of renewing his respectful remembrance. . . ."³ However, Roberts probably did not make the preliminary sketches for the three prints while on this tour. The paper upon which both *Junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah* and *View on the Potomac* were printed as well as the paper used for the wash drawing of *Junction* all bear an 1808 watermark.

Landscape paintings and prints increased in popularity during the last half of the eighteenth century. Though earlier artists had drawn and published views of ports and towns to record progress in settling the American frontier, after mid-century artists turned their attention to the unsettled countryside for views that were uniquely American. A primary influence on this increased taste for landscape views was the concurrent English interest in the sublime and picturesque areas of the British countryside. In 1756, the statesman Edmund Burke wrote *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful*, arousing an awareness of natural views which created in the spectator feelings of awe, astonishment, pain or terror. The travel books by the Rev. William Gilpin and treatises by Sir Uvedal Price and Richard Payne Knight, on the other hand, stressed the picturesque in the countryside for quiet contemplation of nature. These three views of Virginia are all examples of these two opposing aesthetic philosophies which largely determined the character of landscape painting both in Britain and America until the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

The latest print of the three is *View on the Potomac, Virginia* (Fig. 1). Manuscript notes record that Conalghi and Co. published the print in March, 1810, and the paper is watermarked "J WHATMAN / 1808. The print, engraved by Joseph Jeakes,⁴ presents a placid pastoral scene to the viewer. The roughness of the surfaces of the trees at left and the gently sloping hills of the foreground satisfy the requirements of a "picturesque" view

advocated by Rev. Gilpin. The picturesque, according to Gilpin, was a compromise between the beautiful, characterized by smoothness, and the sublime, which was depicted with violently rugged lines. "A distance," wrote Gilpin, "must stretch away many leagues from the eye; it must consist of various *intermediate parts*; it must be enriched by *numerous objects*, which lose by degrees all form and distinctness; and finally perhaps *terminate* in faint purple mountains, or perhaps mix with the blue mists of ether, before it can pretend to the character of *grandeur*."⁵ The emphasis on gradual recession into space, gently undulating hills, and contrast of dark foreground and light middle ground is well observed in *View on the Potomac*. The foreground is dark and slightly elevated to allow a gentle transition for the spectator to be drawn into the scene. The middle ground contains the strongest light which gradually fades into the distance. The trees, which serve to border the scene, are tall with their foliage confined to the crowns to better reveal their rough bark. Roberts turned the people in the foreground away from the spectator as if to invite meditation in quiet company. In scenes such as *View on the Potomac* intellectual and emotional pleasure was the goal, quite unlike the physical reaction suggested by *Natural Bridge*.

The Natural Bridge (Fig. 2) in Rockbridge County, Virginia, drew visitors and artists alike during the last quarter of the eighteenth century and after.⁶ The immensity of the feature inspired awe, astonishment and terror in the spectator, and thus the term "sublime" was often used to describe the bridge. When Isaac Weld, a British traveler, toured North America between 1795 and 1797, he visited the bridge and noted that "to behold it without rapture, indeed is impossible; the more critically it is examined, the more beautiful and the more surprising does it appear."⁷ He further noted that viewing the chasm from a ledge fifty feet above the ground revealed "the arch in all its beauty, but the spectator is impressed in the most forcible manner with ideas of its grandeur."⁸ And John Edwards Caldwell, visiting the site in 1808, wrote that "I felt so strongly 'the emotions arising from the sublime,' that I could not in plain rational language convey to you my ideas of what I had seen. . . ."⁹

Jefferson, who had owned the bridge since 1774, considered it "the most sublime of nature's works."¹⁰ His description in *Notes on the State of Virginia* was often quoted in the numerous travel accounts published during the first half of the nineteenth century:

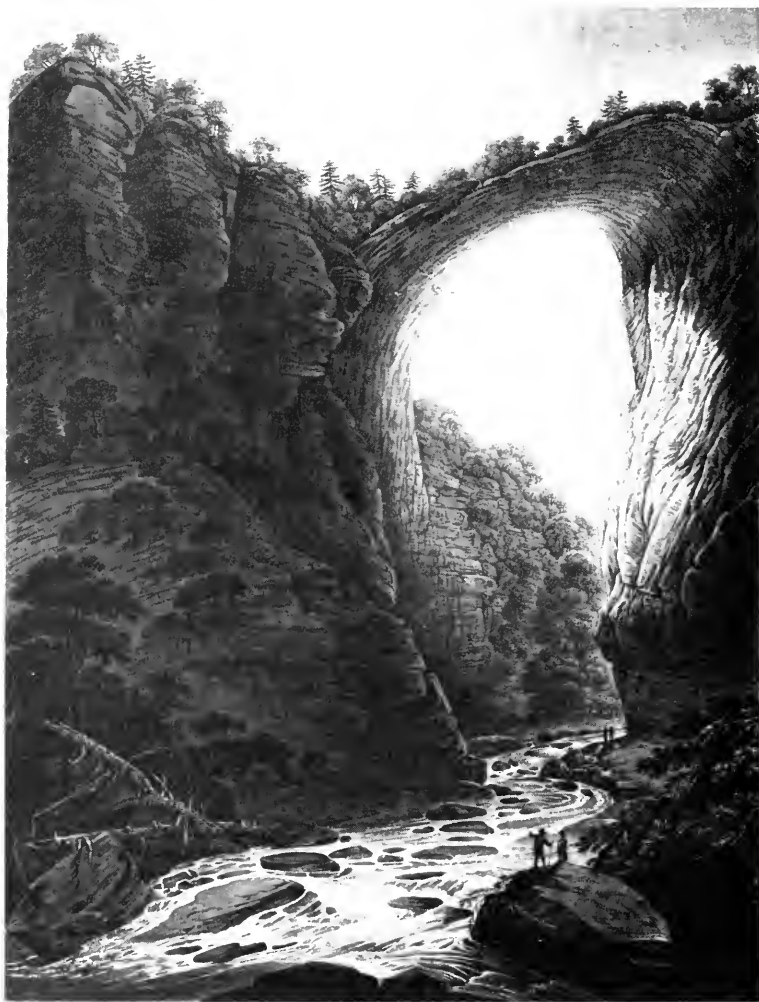


Figure 2. The Natural Bridge, aquatint by J. C. Stadler after a painting by William Roberts, 1808. 32¼" x 24½". MESDA accession 3433.

You involuntarily fall on your hands and feet, creep to the parapet, and peep over it. Looking down from this height about a minute, gave me a violent headache. If the view from the top be painful and intolerable, that from below is delightful in an equal extreme. It is impossible for the emotions arising from the sublime to be felt beyond what they are here; so beautiful an arch, so elevated, so light, and springing as it were up to heaven! the rapture of the spectator is really indescribable!"¹¹

Jefferson, like the writers who followed him, stressed the physical response of the spectator on viewing the bridge. Burke, in his *Philosophical Inquiry*, had repeatedly emphasized the physical nature of the sublime which obliterated the rational.

Roberts chose to depict the bridge from ground level rather than from a distance, probably to better convey to the spectator the awe one felt when looking up. The birds flying under the arch at upper left and the four people in the fore and middle grounds provide a sense of scale for the two-hundred foot height. Further, Roberts exaggerated the ellipse of the arch, which appears in his view to sweep violently upward to the right. The selective light falls upon the right side of the bridge and throws the foreground into deep shadow. The view is charged with drama and conveys to the armchair traveler the wonder of the great arch.

The manuscript notation at the bottom of the aquatint records that the print was published "27 February 1808 by Messrs. Conalghi & Co., Cockspur Street, London." The engraver was John Constantine Stadler.¹² In a letter of 26 February 1808 to Jefferson, then President of the United States, Roberts noted that he was then in England and that correspondence was to be directed to "Mr. Stockdale, Bookseller, Piccadilly." The letter is interesting for Roberts' mention of his hope to publish another view:

Sir

When I had the honour at Washington, of presenting to your Excellency two Views of The Natural Bridge and of Harpers Ferry, I believe you were pleased to signify your approbation of my design to have them engraved. That design, as to the former is now accomplished. I am desirous that you should possess an accurate representation from my original drawing, as the paintings you before received, were not I think altogether so worthy of the Subjects. I

hope you will pardon my freedom in soliciting your Acceptance of two of the fifty-two impressions herewith sent, the remainder, if the request be not too presuming you will be pleased with your usual condescension to order to be addressed & forwarded to my Brother Edward Roberts Merchant in Norfolk. It may however not be improper to say that it is with great deference submitted to your own discretion to suffer any number of them to be taken by such as you may be pleased to permit to receive them; they remitting ten dollars each therefor [sic] to my Brother. My object being only to reimburse the expences of publishing, on the event of which must depend the publication of my View of Harpers Ferry also.

On the great violation of decoram in sending such a package and so familiarly addressing myself to the President of the United States I can only hope for a mild constriction from the considerations that the Scene is, with him, & justly so, a favorite; that it is from the pencil of a Virginia, that the number of impressions increases but in a small degree the size of the package, that a choice from such a number might be as desirable as it is due, and that the regular introduction of such an article although not intended to be prohibited, might possibly be otherwise obstructed.

It would give me sincere satisfaction to hear that it has reached its destination, & been recieved [sic], amidst all important Cares without contempt or offence. Still greater satisfaction would it be to attend in this Country to any Commands from one who is held in such thorough respect by

Your Excellency
Most devoted and obedient
Humble Servant.

William Roberts.¹³

Either the Roberts painting or prints inspired other artists such as the French painter Jacques Milbert, who included the Natural Bridge in his *Itinéraire Pittoresque* which was published in two volumes and a portfolio in Paris during 1828-1829. Milbert noted in Plate 53 (Fig. 3) of his work that he had copied the “painting by V. Roberts belonging to Mr. Jefferson.” The reader should note that while Milbert’s lithograph indeed copies Roberts’ composition, certain details vary between the two imprints.¹⁴



Figure 3. View of the Natural Bridge, lithograph by Bichebois, Paris, 1828-1829, after a copy of William Roberts' painting by Jacques Milbert. 11½" x 7½". MESDA research file 13440.

Fortunately, Roberts must have received sufficient encouragement from the sale of his Natural Bridge print to publish his view of Harper's Ferry, entitled *Junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah, Virginia* (Fig. 6). MESDA is most fortunate in also owning the wash drawing executed on the site as well as the water-color used by the engraver Joseph Jeakes to execute the aquatint, all allowing us a rare insight to the printmaking process. Jefferson, in *Notes on Virginia*, wrote that

. . . the passage of the Potomac through the Blue Ridge, is perhaps, one of the most stupendous scenes in nature. You stand on a very high point of land. On your right comes up the Shenandoah, having ranged along the foot of the mountain an hundred miles to seek a vent. On your

left approaches the Potomac, in quest of a passage also. In the moment of their junction, they rush together against the mountain, rend it asunder, and pass off the sea . . . the distant finishing which nature has given to the picture, is of a very different character. It is a true contrast to the foreground. It is as placid and delightful as that is wild and tremendous. For the mountain being cloven asunder, she presents to your eye, through the cleft, a small patch of smooth blue horizon, at an infinite distance in the plain country, inviting you, as it were, from the riot and tumult roaring around, to pass through the breach and participate of the calm below.¹⁵



Figure 4. Junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah, Virginia, preparatory landscape by William Roberts, pencil, ink, and watercolor on paper, the paper water-marked 1808. 17½" x 22". MESDA accession 3424-1.

Isaac Weld, on the other hand, noted that although “the approach towards the place is wild and romantic” and the confluence “certainly a curious scene, and deserving of attention,” he could not agree with Jefferson that the scene merited a “voyage across the Atlantic.”¹⁶ In fact, Weld continued, Wales boasted numerous scenes equal to, if not better than, the Virginia example.



Figure 5. Junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah, Virginia, *watercolor on paper by William Roberts, the paper watermarked 1808, 12" x 15½"*. MESDA accession 3424-2.



Figure 6. Junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah, Virginia, *aquatint by Joseph Jeakes after the watercolor by Roberts, ca. 1810, 15¼" x 19¾"*. MESDA accession 3424-3.

For Roberts the Harper's Ferry view merited artistic representation, not only on canvas but also for the wider print-buying public. Like Jefferson, he positioned himself high above the junction of the two rivers and exercised his artistic prerogative to choose the point of view which would accord with his aesthetic principles. Whereas other artists, such as William Winstanley and Francis Guy, had painted that same scene at water's level, Roberts opted for the high vantage point. Below were the rivers, as described by Jefferson, the buildings of the settlement including the arsenal, and the river boats used to transport goods and materials down to the Federal City. The regularity of the lines and the details of the buildings in the wash drawing (Fig. 4) suggest Roberts used a mechanical aid such as a portable camera obscura or a camera lucida, either instrument requiring some skill in drawing. A portable camera obscura was "an apparatus, representing an artificial eye, whereon the images of external objects, received thro' a double convex glass, are exhibited distinctly, and in their natural colours, on a white matter placed within the machine, in the focus of the glass."¹⁷ The image thus produced was easily traced with a black-lead pencil. The camera lucida, patented in 1807 by William Hyde Wollaston, consisted of a four-sided prism mounted on an extendable stand; it allowed the seated artist to view both the scene and the paper simultaneously.¹⁸ Compactness and portability were the greatest advantages of this sometimes awkward device. The degree of similarity between drawings executed with either instrument makes it difficult to determine which one Roberts used. If all the preparatory drawings were finished before 1807, he probably used the portable camera obscura.

The view of Harper's Ferry chosen by Roberts follows the precepts of picturesque beauty. It includes the requisite foreground, middle ground and distance, as well as numerous features such as buildings, trees, and boats. The mountains recede into the picture plane and gradually lose details of foliage and rocks to their general forms. The foreground is dark to draw attention to the middle ground; the scene is lighted from the right, and the face of the Potomac bank and the ferry are highlighted. Rather than writing notes on the drawing about colors, Roberts used lightly tinted washes to fix the scene on paper and in his memory.

Roberts later transposed his wash sketch into a "studio" or finished watercolor (Fig. 5) upon which the published print was

to be based. To lessen the sense of vertigo one would experience when looking at the sketch, Roberts moved the perspective of the foreground closer to the scene. The foreground in the finished painting remains dark, though correctly framed on the left by a tree to provide a sense of scale. The mountains become smaller in the background to emphasize the body of the scene, the confluence of the two mighty rivers. The sense of rushing currents, noted in the wash drawing, is diminished in the watercolor. Perhaps to compensate, Roberts placed boulders in the Potomac; these also suggest the dangers of navigation on the river. Cannons identify the central building as the arsenal, and Roberts further added a man on horseback; the figures are larger than necessary and contribute to an ambiguity of proportion.

This watercolor was taken to the engraver, Joseph Jeakes, who was capable of producing an aquatint capturing both the details of the scene and the gradations of light. Jeakes further lowered the perspective, and slightly tightened the composition. The foreground remains dark, but the ruggedness of the framing tree and the broken ground are clearly visible. The people in the courtyard of the arsenal were increased in number, and the cannons were replaced with two logs. The boat on the Shenandoah retains its position from wash drawing to aquatint, but the ferryboat was moved closer to the center of the print. Jeakes more clearly delineated the rocky face of the Potomac and Shenandoah banks, and added large boulders in the Shenandoah. He further tidied up the clouds which Roberts had already changed in the transition from drawing to watercolor, and the aquatint clearly shows the late afternoon light which peeps over the Shenandoah side, brightening the Potomac bank.

To execute the plate Jeakes used a finely powdered resin which, when heated, adhered to the surface of the copper or steel plate. The plate was then placed in an acid bath. The acid bit into the metal around each particle of the resin, resulting in tiny dots. To achieve the tonal gradations required, the engraver "stopped out" or waxed those areas not to be deeply etched. In printing, the aquatint, like an etching, contained darker images in those areas most deeply etched, and thus holding more ink.¹⁹ The completed print has a tonal effect "resembling a fine drawing in watercolours or Indian ink."²⁰

Although the size of this aquatint argues its inclusion as an illustration for a travel book, the following description of Harper's Ferry, contemporary with the print, suggests the familiarity of the view:

. . . the road miserably bad, but the country beautiful, and the land good; the approach to the ferry is strikingly picturesque, and after crossing, ascending the hill, and viewing the junction of the Shenandoah and the Potomack, forcing their way through the blue mountains, and proceeding in one joint stream to the ocean, the mind is lost in wonder and admiration and my pen in vain attempts a description of the scene itself, or the feelings I experienced in contemplating this great work of nature! Batteaux descend the river in spring and fall, to Georgetown and Washington; they carry from 70 to 120 bbls. of flour, and are 70 to 75 feet long, and 4 or 5 feet wide. . . .²¹

The degree of competency with which the wash drawing and the watercolor are executed suggests Roberts had received lessons in drawing and was comfortable with the watercolor medium. Until other works, either signed by or attributable to Roberts, are located, however, it is difficult to describe his style or role in American or English art. It is possible that Roberts may not have been a professional landscape painter, though he certainly possessed the skill which enabled him, according to one writer, "to take the sketch . . . of a beautiful prospect . . . or uncommon appearance in nature . . . Rocks, mountains, fields, woods, rivers, cataracts, cities, towns, castles, houses, fortifications, ruins, or whatsoever else may present itself to view on our journeys or travels in our own country or foreign countries, may be thus brought home, and preserved for our future use either in business or conversation."²² Roberts' drawing ability, perhaps coupled with knowledge of the aesthetic philosophies of Burke and Gilpin, enabled him to choose three scenes of Virginia that suggested to the art-buying public both the sublime and the picturesque. Further, these prints offered scenes "absent and distant . . . as if they were before our Eyes, which otherwise we cou'd not see without troublesome voyages and great Expence."²³ Roberts probably agreed with Gilpin that

on the whole then, the *true enjoyment of the picture* depends chiefly on the *imagination of the spectator*; and as the utmost the landscape painter can do, is to *excite the ideas* of those delightful scenes, which he represents, it follows that *those scenes themselves* must have a much greater effect on the imagination, than any *representation* of them which he can give; that is, the idea must be much more strongly excited by the *original*, than by a *representation*.²⁴

FOOTNOTES

1. Information supplied by Tobin A. Sparling, Print Room, New York Public Library. A hand-colored copy of the print "View on the Potomac" is in the collection of the New York Public Library.
2. "Burton," in *Burke's Dictionary of Peerage and Baronetage of the British Empire* (London, 1894), pp. 218-219. The baronetcy was created in 1758. Benjamin Burton died in 1834; he and Grace Anne had five children, one of whom, Adolphus William Desart Burton (1827-1882) remained in the Portsmansquare house. His daughter, Grace Ellen Burton, married Sir Francis Denys (1849-1922); she died in 1935.
3. William Roberts to Thomas Jefferson, 26 February 1808, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. Marie Kimball, in her article "Jefferson's Works of Art at Monticello," (*The Magazine Antiques*, Vol. LIX, April, 1954, p. 299) noted that an inventory taken by Jefferson of his art collection listed, among numerous other works, paintings of the Natural Bridge and the passage of the Potomac through the Blue Ridge. The latter is presumably referring to the view of Harper's Ferry. William Roberts to Thomas Jefferson, 24 July 1803, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. Hector St. John was the pseudonym of Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur whose *Letters by an American Farmer* was published in 1782.
4. E. Bénézit, *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs*, 10 volumes (Paris: Librairie Gründ, 1976), vol. 6, p. 48. Joseph Jeakes, who was working at least by 1796, was also a landscape painter; he exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1796 and 1809.
5. William Gilpin, *Observations on the Western Parts of England Relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; to which are added a few remarks on the Picturesque Beauty of the Isle of Wight*, 2nd edition (London, 1808), p. 330.
6. Pamela H. Simpson, "So Beautiful An Arch: Images of the Natural Bridge 1787-1890," (exhibition catalogue), Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia, 1982. *Editor's note:* In illustration numbers 7, 8, 14, and 15, Simpson documents four additional prints, by three engravers or artists, all plagiarizing freely from Roberts' 1808 view. One of these, by Jacques Milbert, is illustrated here in Figure 3.
7. Isaac Weld, Jr., *Travels through the States of North America, and the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada during the Years 1795, 1796, 1797*. 4th edition (London, 1800), p. 164. Weld illustrated his book with his own drawings; the one of Natural Bridge is a more literal interpretation than Roberts's. *Editor's note:* Weld's view is also illustrated in Simpson, Plates 3, 4, and 5.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

9. John Edwards Caldwell, *A Tour Through Part of Virginia, In the Summer of 1808, . . . Also . . . Some Account of the Islands of the Azores*. (Belfast, 1810; reprint edited by William M. E. Rachal, Richmond: The Dietz Press, Inc., 1954), p. 24.
10. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, edited by Thomas Perkins Abernathy (New York, 1964), p. 21.
11. *Ibid.*
12. E. Bénézit, *Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs*, Vol. 9, p. 766. German-born John Constantine Stadler (active 1780-1812) exhibited landscapes at the Royal Academy in 1787.
13. William Roberts to Thomas Jefferson, 26 February 1808, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.
14. Simpson, "So Beautiful an Arch," plate 14, p. 18; the actual wording is ". . . J. Milbert d'apres le tableau de V. Roberts app. a M. Jefferson. . . ." In G. C. Groce and D. H. Wallace, *The New York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America 1564 -1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 540, reference to possibly another copy of Roberts' painting by another engraver is made: "Roberts, W. Delineator of a view of Natural Bridge (Va.), engraved by William Main who was working in NYC between 1820 and 1837. . . ."
15. Jefferson, *Notes*, pp. 16-17.
16. Weld, *Travels*, p. 178.
17. "Camera Obscura" in *Encyclopaedia; or, a Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature, etc.* 18 volumes and 3 supplements (Philadelphia, 1790-1798, 1803), IV: 60.
18. Rudolf Kingslake, "Optics Design in Photography: The Camera Lucida," *Image 25*, nos. 3-4 (September-December 1982) :38.
19. Ralph Mayer, *A Dictionary of Art Terms and Techniques* (New York, 1969), p. 17.
20. "Aquintinta," *Encyclopedia*, II:146. Although the aquatint process was a form of etching, print makers seem to have signed the plates as engravers, as did Stadler and Jeakes. *Editor's note*: The term "engraving," used without any other qualification, is understood to represent a line imprint pulled from a plate cut with engravers' burins.
21. Caldwell, *Travels*, pp. 10-11.
22. "Drawing," *Encyclopedia*, VI: 117-118.
23. Roger dePiles, *The Art of Painting, and Lives of the Painters . . .* (London, 1706), p. 61.
24. Gilpin, *Observations on the Western Parts of England*, p. 177.

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