

## *Brothers of the Spade<sup>1</sup>*

*Correspondence of Peter Collinson, of London, and  
of John Custis, of Williamsburg, Virginia,  
1734-1746<sup>2</sup>*

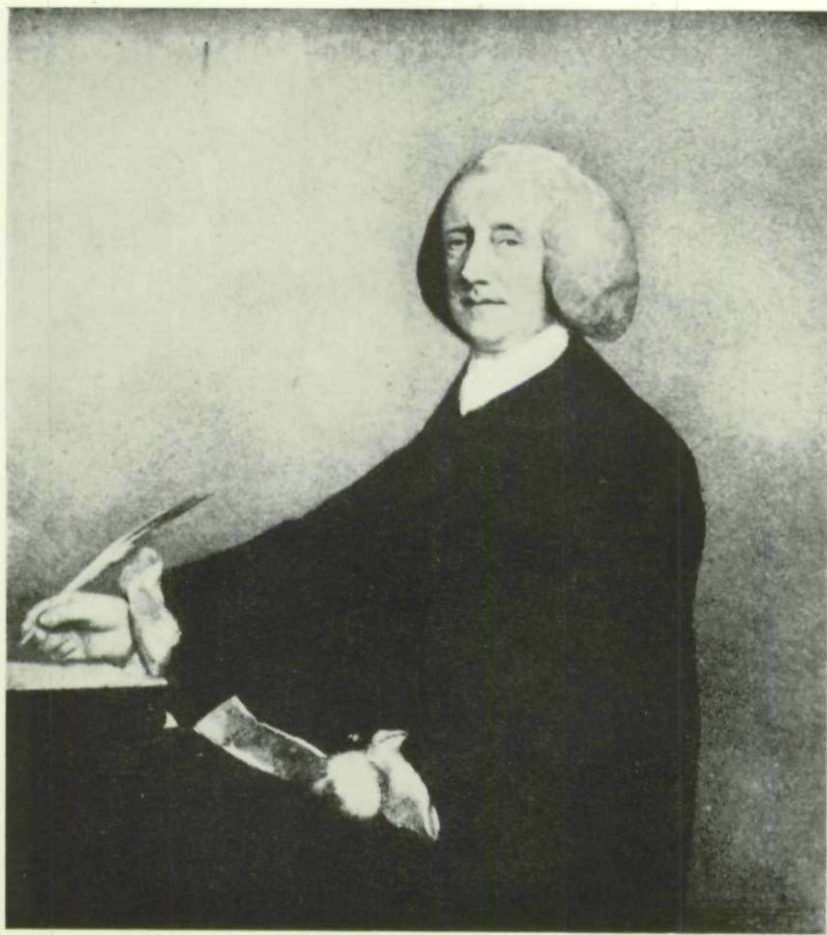
BY E. G. SWEM

IN editing the letters of Peter Collinson of London, and of John Custis of Williamsburg, 1734-1746, I shall not attempt an exhaustive study either of Collinson, indefatigable promoter of botany and horticulture in England, or of Custis, wealthy, eccentric and somewhat misunderstood Virginia planter. I am presenting a biographical sketch of each; in that of Collinson calling attention to a few high lights of his career so that it will be evident how the letters to John Custis merge into his general purpose of advancing a love for plant life, and of arousing a desire for the improvement of gardens in England; and how that purpose was accomplished by the importation of seeds from all regions of the world, but principally from North America, and by the generous dissemination of advice about their propagation; in the course of the sketch and the notes accompanying it, I shall take the liberty to point out some defects in preceding contributions on Collinson, and refer to the newer literature that has arisen since the publication of the *Life of Peter Collinson*, by N. G. Brett-James in 1925. The sketch of John Custis demands a review of our knowl-

EDITOR'S NOTE: Because of the length of many of the footnotes, they have been placed at the end of the article, beginning on page 154.

edge of his great-grandfather, grandfather and father, and of his son and descendants so closely interwoven with events of Virginia history for two centuries; and in addition an attempt to estimate his character more justly than heretofore, in view of the sentiments expressed in these letters.

Peter Collinson was born January 28, 1694, in a house opposite Church Alley, St. Clement's Lane, London, the son of Peter Collinson, of Grace Church Street, and Elizabeth Hall.<sup>3</sup> His father and his grandfather James were among the earliest Quakers, and Peter Collinson himself, contrary to the opinion of some writers, remained a Quaker throughout his life. He was brought up by relatives at Peckham in Surrey, where he lived until April 8, 1749, when he says, "I removed from my house at Peckham, Surrey, and was for two years in transplanting my garden to my house at Mill Hill, in the parish of Hendon, in Middlesex."<sup>4</sup> From a very early age he was taught to love plants and gardens. Such instruction for Quaker families had been advocated by George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, and was a precept to be observed, as much as that of frankness and fair dealing. He mastered the principles of botanical learning from books, from interviews and correspondence with learned friends, and from practical and experimental work in his own garden. We know little of his early life and education. With his brother James he succeeded to his father's business of haberdasher and mercer. Their trade was prosperous at home, and with commendable foresight they developed transactions with merchants in the American colonies and the West Indies. In his letters, Collinson does not hesitate to say that his first duty was to his business, and after that to gardening and importation of new species of plants into England. He had shown so much earnest application to natural history, and especially to botanical studies, and development of gardening, that in 1728, at the



PETER COLLINSON  
From an Oil Painting by Gainsborough  
Reproduced from N. G. Brett-James, *Life of Peter Collinson*

age of thirty-four, he was chosen a member of the Royal Society of London. For the remaining forty years of his life, he was an active participant in forwarding all the purposes of that institution. The friends Collinson had already made and those he was now more closely associated with in the Royal Society were the most talented men of that day in all branches of science; among them was Sir Hans Sloane who, devoting his wealth and genius to correspondence with public men and lovers of nature in every part of the world, brought together a marvelous collection of manuscripts on all subjects, and a collection of specimens illustrative of natural history, unrivalled in that time. Credit must be awarded to Collinson for a continuous and strenuous effort in adding to Sloane's Museum. His knowledge of the collection was intimate and detailed. Upon Sloane's death at the advanced age of 93, this accumulation of literary and natural objects, acquired by private means, was sold to the nation, and was the foundation of the British Museum. Of that collection, and Collinson, Dr. John Fothergill says: "Among the great variety of articles which form that superb [Sloane] collection small was the number of those with whose history my friend [Collinson] was not well acquainted; he being one of those few who visited Sir Hans at all times familiarly and continued to do so to the latest period."

At the age of seventy-two, after a lifetime of devotion to the improvement of the gardens of England, Collinson wrote: "As the nobility and gentry have for some years past introduced a great variety of North American trees, shrubs and flowers into their plantations, the present as well as the next generation may be pleased to know at what time and by whom such abundance of the vegetable production of our colonies were naturalised to our climate. In the very early part of my life, I had a love for gardening, this with my years, my public station in business brought me

acquainted with persons that were natives of Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and New England. My love for new and rare plants put me often in soliciting their acquaintance for seeds or plants from new countries. I used much importunity to very little purpose for the favour of the people was entirely the other way. What was common with them but rare with us they did not think worth sending. Thus I laboured in vain or to little purpose for some years and obtained but few seeds or plants, neither money nor friendship would tempt them. Notwithstanding these discouragements as I continued engaged in trade with these people, new correspondents offered and I continued to renew my requests to them, they made fair promises but very few performances and those of little consequence. Thus little difficult affairs stood for some years longer, at last some more artful than the rest contrived to get rid of my importunities by recommending a person whose business it should be to gather seeds, send over plants. Accordingly John Bartram was recommended as a very proper person for that purpose, being a native of Pennsylvania with numerous family.<sup>5</sup> The profits arising from gathering seeds would enable him to support it. At first it was not thought that sending over would prove a trade but with the demand the price was fixed at £5 5s *od* a box. Besides myself the next person that gave John Bartram encouragement was Lord Petre at Thorndon,<sup>6</sup> Essex, who continued to employ him from 1736-1740 when the orders of the Dukes of Richmond,<sup>7</sup> Norfolk,<sup>8</sup> and Bedford<sup>9</sup> began. Afterwards the taste for planting grew and the annual orders for the boxes of seeds as by the following lists evidently appears. The transacting this business of procuring foreign seeds brought on me every year no little trouble to carry on such a correspondence attended with so much loss of time in keeping accounts, writing letters with orders, receiving and paying

the collectors' money, difficulties and attendance at the Customs house to procure the delivery of the seeds and then dispersing the boxes to their proper owners. Yet all this trouble with some unavoidable expense attending it did not discourage me for I willingly undertook it without the least gain of profit to myself in hope to improve or at least to adorn my country, besides to oblige so many great and worthy people many of them my friends and acquaintances but more were strangers who all applied to me and asked it as a favour. I would take their orders for seeds, I could not refuse their requests because I had the public good at heart. It hath pleased God to prolong my life nigh 72 to see the reward of my labours crowned with success in the numerous plantations spread over this delightful island which gives infinite pleasure to Peter Collinson, December 16, 1766. After the subscribers' names a list of seeds contained in each box is added. Unsought and unasked I was honoured with diplomas from members of the Royal Society of Sweden and Berlin. I forgot to mention that after I had supplied the several persons in the following lists with seeds the next was 'Pray sir, how and in what manner must I sow them, pray be so good as to give me some directing for my gardener is a very ignorant fellow.' This creates more trouble and loss of time, yet to encourage planting I never refuse anyone, and they were not a few."<sup>10</sup>

Much of Collinson's correspondence is believed to have been lost; we know, however, that among his correspondents were the foremost scientists, especially botanists, in Europe and America, horticulturalists and patrons of horticulture, leading merchants and world travelers.<sup>11</sup>

Collinson discovered Benjamin Franklin, encouraged him by making him known to members of the Royal Society, and as a true and sincere friend, assisted him so long as he lived. On the death of Collinson in 1768, Franklin wrote a

letter to the son, Michael Collinson, expressing deep gratitude for the aid of his father extending over many years to the Library Company of Philadelphia, and to himself, without reward, or expectation of it. The most explicit and adequate account of Collinson's service to Franklin may be found in I. Bernard Cohen's volume entitled *Benjamin Franklin's Experiments*. Cohen says, "Collinson is the most important single person in Franklin's career. He was responsible for Franklin's initial activity in electrical science; his encouragement was equally responsible for its continuation."

Of all of Collinson's American friends, John Bartram, the self-taught botanist, a farmer boy of Chester County, Pennsylvania, of Quaker parentage, was the most faithful and discerning correspondent. The letters between these two reveal their scientific ambitions and pursuits, and also their amusing personal characteristics. In 1849 there appeared from the publishing house of Lindsay & Blakiston in Philadelphia *Memorials of John Bartram and Humphry Marshall*,<sup>12</sup> with *Notices of their Botanical Contemporaries*, by William Darlington, M.D., LL.D., with illustrations.<sup>13</sup> The title should have been *Memorials of John Bartram, Humphry Marshall, and Peter Collinson*, for the reason that there are one hundred and twenty-seven letters from Collinson to John Bartram, Sr., John Bartram, Jr., and William Bartram in the volume. This work still remains our chief authority for the botanical knowledge exchanged between the two, for the importation of seeds into England, and for an understanding of their frank and devoted friendship.<sup>14</sup> William Darlington gathered in this volume all the correspondence he could find in the Bartram papers. Unfortunately he does not explain his method of editing. Some changes in punctuation and phraseology have undoubtedly been made, and there are omissions in many of

the letters, indicated by editorial asterisks. Darlington permitted the omissions, because the omitted matter was irrelevant to botanical and gardening subjects, or because the writing was illegible. A modern editor would have printed everything legible. Some of the surviving papers, in the Pennsylvania Historical Society library, are now difficult to decipher. It is regretted that Darlington made any changes and omissions, but fortunate that they were printed at all before the deterioration that befell them. The lack of an index, in Darlington's book, of plant names, and of persons is most deplorable. In spite of these defects, the *Memorials* will remain a chief reliance for the student of Collinson and Bartram, and for the historian of botany in the United States. In his preface to the *Memorials*, he says, "Those ancient manuscripts [the Bartram papers handed over by Col. Robert Carr] were not only jumbled together in a chaotic mass, but were generally much injured by time, and many of them scarcely legible . . . especially the case with the letters from John Bartram to his friends, of which letters he seems to have been in the habit of retaining the original rough drafts."<sup>15</sup> *Brett-James* makes no allusion to having compared original letters of Bartram to Collinson in any depository in England, with the drafts in *Darlington*. The Bartram letters, in the *Memorials*, being drafts only, must be read with considerable caution. There are two letters from Bartram to Cadwalader Colden in *Darlington*.<sup>16</sup> In order to see how much difference there was between the draft in the *Memorials*, and the full letter, as sent to Colden, and published in "Colden's Correspondence" the letter of Bartram to Colden of January 16, 1743, as it is in *Darlington*, pages 326-8, was compared with the letter of the same date in "Colden's Correspondence," vol. 3, 1743-47, *Collections of the New York Historical Society* for 1919, pages 3-6; the former proved to be a draft and about one fourth in



length of the original received by Colden; the letter of June 26, 1743, in *Darlington*, also is a draft, and has important omissions from the letter in Colden, pages 23, 24.

To understand what Collinson accomplished in introducing new plants into England, many from Bartram, and some by the help of information received from other correspondents, such as John Custis, *Brett-James* includes in Appendix C the *Hortus Collinsonianus*, which is a complete list of all the species known to have been introduced for the first time into England by Collinson from all parts of the world, a total of one hundred and eighty-one.<sup>17</sup>

Four years before his death, which occurred on August 11, 1768, and as he began to approach the borders of that "happy land," Collinson wrote the following letter to Colden; it is quoted to show his peaceful philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

Ridge Way House feby 25: 1764

I am Here retired to my Sweet & Calm old Mansion, from its High Elevation, Look 40 or 50 Miles round Mee on the Busie Vain World below—Envyng No Man but am truly thankful for the undeserved Blessings Good Providence hath pleased to conferr on Mee.

With a Pious Mind filled with admiration I contemplate the Glorious Constellations above, and the Wonders in the Vegitable Tribes below—I have an assemblage of Rare Plants from all quarters the Industrious collection of forty years—Some or other of them all the year round & all the Seasons through are delighting my Eyes, for in the Depth of our Winter, the plants from the Alps, Siberia & the mountains of Asia exhibit their pretty flowers and anticipate the Spring—the Black Hellebore with its Large white Flowers—the acconite with its Golden Clusters, these show themselves before Xmas—for that reason the First is called the Xmas Rose—Primeroses & Polyanthus, Wall flowers & some Violets & Single anemonies flower all Winter, unless a snow happens to fall, which is seldome—it seems a Paradox (considering our Latitude) to tell Foreigners that Vegetation never ceases in England—

After reading nearly everything written by Collinson now in print, and what has been published about him, I am

obliged to admit that his life has been inadequately treated by historians and biographers. I offer the hope that all of his manuscripts including his scattered notes written in botanical works and books of travel which he read assiduously should be brought together and properly edited by a botanist, who should also be well versed in botanical history.<sup>19</sup> Such a volume to include his own letters of course, and those sent to him now known to be in manuscript, and those in print, of which the originals have been lost. A careful search would disclose many letters not hitherto known, in depositories of United States and Europe, especially in England. Little has been said of Collinson's business correspondence by his biographers. There must exist numerous examples of his letters to American colonial merchants, and to English merchants trading to the West Indies. These should also be printed not alone for their additional light on Collinson's personal characteristics, but also as illustrating business methods of the time.

This Quaker gentleman,<sup>20</sup> who devoted his leisure<sup>21</sup> from an exacting mercantile routine to the improvement of scientific and literary pursuits in the colonies deserves a more thorough exposition of his contribution to the cultural life of early America.<sup>22</sup> Our English friends, in writing about Collinson, have, naturally, emphasized his influence on horticulture in England, and have not grasped in its full extent, his importance in our colonial life. But concurrently with the preparation of such a volume on Collinson, there should be a full reconsideration of John Bartram.<sup>23</sup> There never has been a comprehensive study of this courageous pioneer in American science, a native, self-taught genius, who became the leading authority on natural history in all its connotations in colonial America. This modest Pennsylvania farmer, sustained by an intense philosophic, not sanctimonious, admiration of the universe, travelled thousands of

miles, alone, and often, on foot, through pathless forests in unsettled America, to observe the various species of plant and animal life. Collinson, city bred, as he was, and although unusually sympathetic, never comprehended the toil and the hardship endured by this heroic figure.<sup>24</sup>

John Custis of Williamsburg, the correspondent of Peter Collinson, was the great-grandson of John Custis of Rotterdam, Holland, who was born about 1599, in Gloucestershire, England. He was in Rotterdam as early as 1630, because in the act naturalizing his son John in Virginia, it is stated that the son was born in Holland in 1630. At just what time John of Rotterdam came to Virginia has not been determined; according to Dr. Susie M. Ames, he was living on the Eastern Shore in 1641.<sup>25</sup> Colonel Henry Norwood tells of his visit to the Custis family in 1650.<sup>26</sup> The ship, *Virginia Merchant*, in which Colonel Norwood, Major Francis Morison and Major Stevens, and others, were sailing was wrecked among the islands of Assateague Bay on the Atlantic Coast of Maryland on January 12, 1650; the survivors who reached the mainland went to the home of Argall Yeardley, son of Sir Francis Yeardley who had "not long before brought over a wife from Rotterdam, that I had known almost as a child; her father, Custis by name, kept a victualing house in that town, lived in good repute and was the general host of our nation there." The date of the death of this first John is not known.<sup>27</sup> No will was recorded in Virginia. He had a son John Custis known as Major General, having been appointed in Bacon's Rebellion Major General of the Northampton Militia, who boldly and vigorously supported Governor Berkeley; he was born in Holland in 1630, and died in Virginia January 29, 1696. He was in Northampton County certainly as early as 1654. To be naturalized May 10, 1658, it was necessary for him to have been in the colony four years. He may have named his estate Arlington

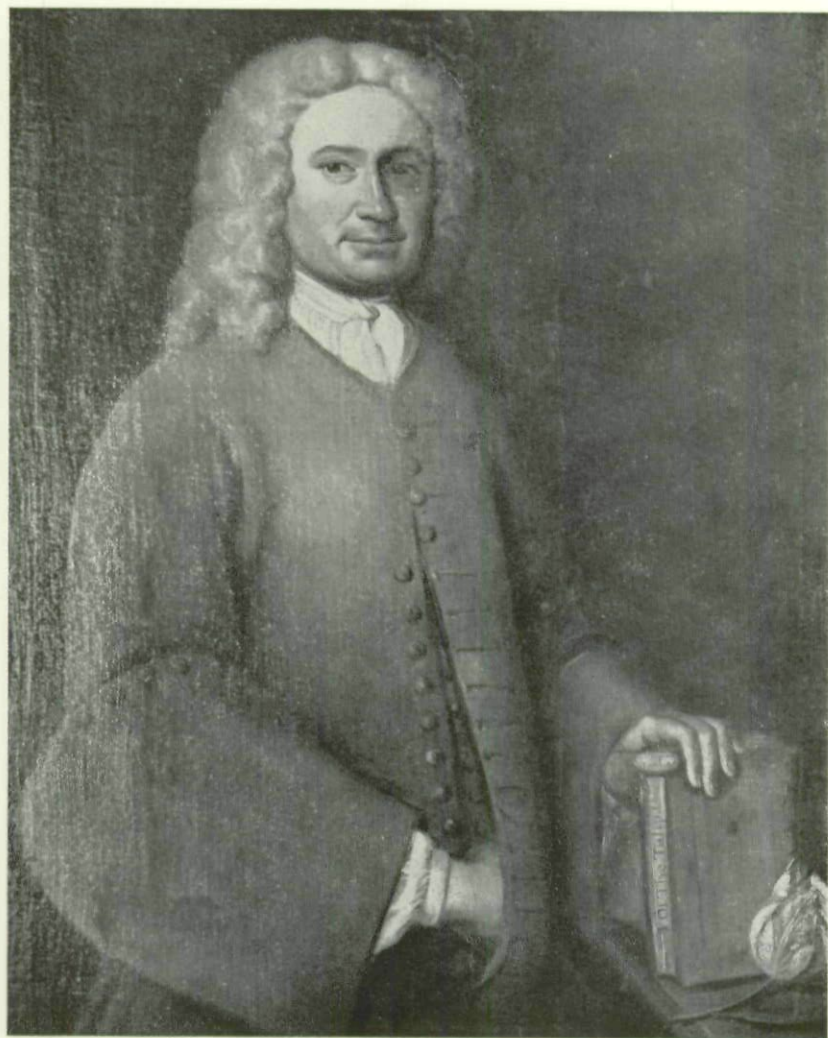
in Northampton County for the estate Arlington of a relative in the parish of Bibury (Bybury) in Gloucestershire; or for Lord Arlington, according to the family tradition as related by Mrs. R. E. Lee. He was a member of the House of Burgesses from Northampton in the February 20, 1677, session, following Bacon's Rebellion. The earliest record of his membership in the Council is the session of 1680; he resigned from the Council on account of illness April 16, 1692.<sup>28</sup> He died January 29, 1696, and was buried at Arlington on Old Plantation Creek; his will was proved February 10, 1699, and has been printed in full in William Welsh Harrison's *Harrison, Waples and Allied Families*, Philadelphia, privately printed, 1910, pp. 93, 94. He left a life estate in Arlington to his widow, also Mockon [Mockhorn] Island and Smith's Island, and after her death to his grandson John, who later was known as John of Williamsburg, to whom he gave also generous stocks of cattle, sheep and horses; and £100 for his maintenance in school in England. The Major General had a son born in 1653, known as John Custis of Wilsonia, who married Mary Michael; they were the parents of John Custis of Williamsburg. The will of John of Wilsonia has been printed in full (*Letters to George Washington*, edited by S. M. Hamilton, Boston 1901, vol. 3, pp. 373-83). Among other bequests to his son John he gave the Chiconessex plantation and "my father's picture now standing in my hall"; he was a member of the House of Burgesses for sessions between 1684 and 1699; and was appointed to the Council December 26, 1699; his last appearance in Council was April 30, 1713; his death was announced in Council March 1, 1714; the date of death on his tombstone is given as January 26, 1713, which was old style; the will was proved March 16, 1714.

John Custis, the correspondent of Peter Collinson, known as "John Custis of Williamsburg," was born in Northampton

County in August, 1678,<sup>29</sup> the son of John of Wilsonia and Mary Michael.<sup>30</sup> It is now known that he used the fund devised by his grandfather for his education in England; in his first letter to Peter Collinson in 1735 he said he had never seen the horse-chestnut tree, "tho I was bred in England." In the *Memoir* of G. W. P. Custis, by Mrs. R. E. Lee, printed in the *Recollections of George Washington*, by G. W. P. Custis, there is a letter from Daniel Parke II (page 16) to the father, John Custis of Wilsonia, in regard to the marriage of Parke's daughter Frances to the son John Custis; in the same volume there is printed a letter (pages 16, 17) from the young man to Frances Parke expressing his love and admiration for the lady; this contrasts with what he said of his wife on his tombstone, to which reference will be made in mention of his will. John Custis and Frances Parke were married in August, 1705. The other child of Daniel Parke II, a daughter, Lucy, married William Byrd II, 1706. Frances was born in 1687. Her grandfather Daniel Parke I (1628-1679) was a wealthy landowner in York County, physician and lawyer, a member of the Council, Secretary of the Colony, and generally conspicuous in public affairs. His extensive holdings of land in York and New Kent Counties were inherited by his son Daniel II (1669-1710), who married Jane Ludwell of Green Spring, and who was well known in Virginia and England for his domineering, selfish and brutal character.<sup>31</sup> He was a friend of Marlborough, serving with him in his campaigns, and, as an aide, rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Having been appointed Governor of the Leeward Islands, he was serving in that office in 1710, when he was murdered, in Antigua, one of the islands, by a mob, angered by his official actions. Parke left his estate in England and Virginia to his daughter, Frances Custis, his estate in the West Indies to Lucy Chester, a natural daughter, and £1000 to Mrs. Lucy Byrd. He left

many debts, and his estate was further involved by the demands of the illegitimate daughter and of a natural son, Julius Caesar Parke. It was necessary to make some legal arrangement between the two husbands, William Byrd and John Custis, in regard to settling the debts of their father-in-law; accordingly on February 4, 1711, a contract was drawn between the two (*Virginia Magazine of History*, vol. 35, pp. 377-81) in which Byrd was given the English property, Whitchurch in Dorset, the estates known as Mount Folly on York River, Taskenask on York River and Skimino on York River, with its mill, if he would agree to settle the debts in England and Virginia. Byrd in later years considered he was a heavy loser, by the agreement, more debts appearing in England than had been supposed. The *Virginia Magazine of History* has printed in vol. 50, 1942, pp. 169-79, 238-63, the abstracts of titles of all the Byrd holdings, including the three plantations mentioned. In the *Secret Diary of William Byrd, 1710-1712*, edited by Dr. Louis B. Wright and Miss Marion Tingling, published in 1941, there are frequent mentions of John Custis, his wife Frances and the Queen's Creek plantation, where the Byrds always visited on their trips to Williamsburg. There were four children born to John and Frances, two of them, a son and a daughter, died young and were buried beside their great-grandfather, the Major General, at Arlington, for so the inscription on the tomb indicates. The two that lived were Daniel Parke Custis (1711-1757) and a daughter, Frances Parke Custis, whose date of death was 1744; she married a Virginia and London merchant William Winch, June 27, 1739 (*Virginia Gazette*, June 29, 1739), whose will was made in London January 22, 1740; he mentions his wife Fanny Parke Winch but cuts her off from all inheritance, because her father John Custis had not kept his agreement for paying him £1000 upon marriage; she was living in

Virginia at the time of Winch's death and writing him a dutiful letter, now in the Virginia Historical Society Library, about their property in Virginia; there is no further mention of her, probably due to the loss of the records of New Kent where she was living. Mrs. Lee relates that Fanny Parke Custis married a Captain "Dausie," (Lossing has it "Dansie") contrary to the wishes of both father and brother; she does not mention the marriage with Winch, although of that marriage there is indisputable proof.<sup>32</sup> In a letter written in 1731, to Mrs. Parke Pepper, wife of a London merchant, who was a relative, and who had proposed a match between her daughter and his son, Custis writes that "the distance of place and consanguinity would render such a thing impracticable," and he adds "my children are all the comfort I have in the world, for whose sakes I have kept myself single, and am determined so to do as long as it shall please God to continue them to me"; "If Colonel Parke had lived to see my son, he would have seen his own picture to greater perfection than even Sir Godfrey Kneller could draw it" (G. W. P. Custis, *Recollections*, pp. 18, 19). When John's father, John of Wilsonia, died in 1714, he left the son much additional land. His plantations were on the Eastern Shore and in York, New Kent and King William Counties, the total number of acres being about fifteen thousand; these plantations were all under cultivation and were among the most productive in the colony. He was one of the wealthiest men of his time in Virginia.<sup>33</sup> The married life of John and Frances was most unhappy, as was that of the sister Lucy and William Byrd.<sup>34</sup> There seems to have been constant bickering about the income which Frances was to receive and spend. A crisis was reached in June, 1714, and a legal agreement was drawn up in regard to individual receipts and expenditures, and with a promise to cease quarreling; this has been printed in the *Virginia*



JOHN CUSTIS IV, OF WILLIAMSBURG  
From the Original Painting Owned by Washington and Lee University

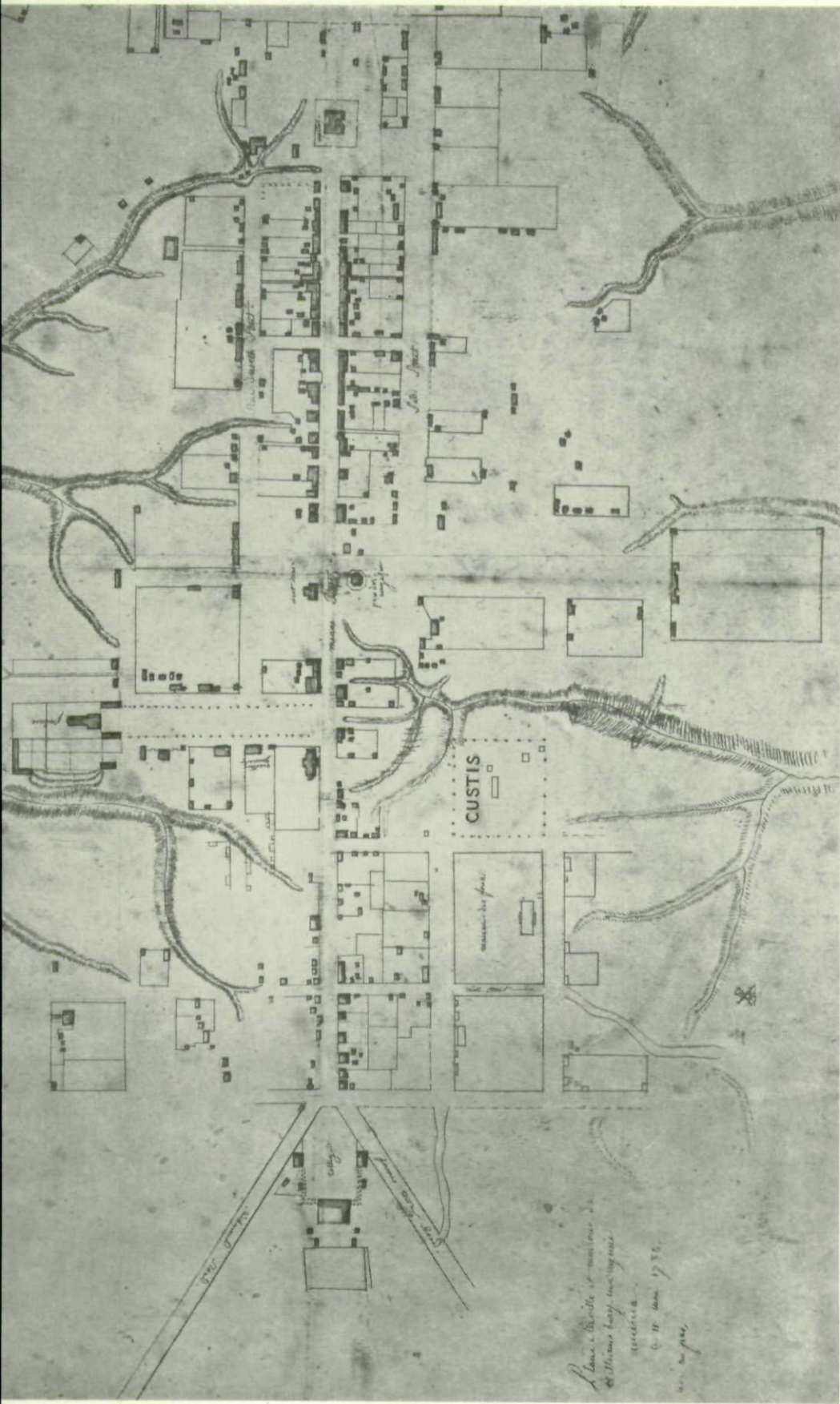


*Magazine of History*, vol. 4, pp. 64-6. Not long thereafter Frances died, March 14, 1715; her sister Lucy Parke Byrd died on November 21, 1716, in London. In 1725 or 1726 John's portrait was painted by one of the traveling painters who occasionally visited Williamsburg. This shows him with the left hand holding a thin, bound volume, with the title, "On the tulip," lettered on the fore edge; there is a picture of a tulip in the lower right-hand corner of the canvas. The portrait is marked "aetat 45." This and the portrait of Daniel Parke Custis were hanging at Arlington House on the Potomac when Mrs. R. E. Lee wrote the *Memoir* of her father G. W. P. Custis. Both portraits have been reproduced in the volume by William Welsh Harrison, entitled the *Harrison, Waples and Allied Families*, 1910. The original portraits of John Custis, of Frances Parke Custis, his wife, of Daniel Parke Custis, his son, of Martha Dandridge Custis, his daughter-in-law, and of John Parke Custis and Martha Custis as children, his grandchildren, are in the possession of Washington and Lee University. Mrs. Lee also speaks of some portraits of the Custis family at Abingdon, "which have long since crumbled into dust, and two, now at Arlington, painted by Van Dyke, tradition says, came from Holland." (*Recollections*, p. 21.) We know that as early as 1717, and perhaps before, Custis was interested in gardening; his first letter to an agent, Micajah Perry, in London, on this subject, of which we know, was written in 1717. He was a member of the House of Burgesses from Northampton County in the session of October 23, 1705, and a member representing the College of William and Mary in 1718. There is no surviving record of William and Mary College which shows that any student by the name of Custis attended the college, or that any member of the family was on the Board of Visitors before the American Revolution.<sup>35</sup> John was appointed to the Council June 2,

1727, and served in that exclusive and powerful political group until a short time before his death in 1749.<sup>36</sup> In a letter now in the Ludwell Papers in the Virginia Historical Society, written in 1717 to Philip Ludwell,<sup>37</sup> Custis narrates his side of the contention with Governor Spotswood over the timber which the Governor cut down on Custis' land in order to improve the vista from the Governor's Palace grounds to the north to the Queen's Creek plantation of Custis and beyond. Custis had given permission to cut down trees, but it was understood they were to be "scrubby" trees, fit only for firewood; instead, the Governor had had cut down valuable timber from which lumber could be made; Custis' innate economical nature rebelled at this useless destruction just in order to obtain what the Governor called a "vista." Custis was a friend of Commissary James Blair, president of the College, for, in a letter in 1721, to Messrs. Perry, merchants in London, he refers to "my particular and good friend Commissary Blair"; the two were congenial in their hostility to Governor Spotswood. The last ten years of his life he must have suffered much with illness, if we can judge from his letters to Collinson. The exact date of death we do not know. The will is dated November 14, 1749. He knew before his death that his only surviving child and son, Daniel Parke, had married Martha Dandridge. The family tradition is that he hoped his son would marry a daughter of William Byrd II.<sup>38</sup> His objection to the marriage of Martha Dandridge to his son was that she had no fortune corresponding to his son's; this objection was overcome largely by the good offices of Mr. James Power, a prominent attorney of the period.<sup>39</sup> His will was proved at a court held for James City County April 9, 1750. The records of that court and of the General Court being destroyed, there is no official copy of the will, of the report of the executor, and accompanying papers in Virginia.

Owing to some of his property being in England, the will was filed in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, and was proved November 19, 1753. There is an abstract in Henry F. Waters' *Genealogical Gleanings in England*, Boston, 1901, vol. 1, pp. 393, 394. The will is of unusual importance on account of its bearing upon the career of George Washington, into whose hands fell the settlement of the intestate estates of John's son, Daniel Parke Custis, and grandchildren, John Parke Custis, and Martha Parke Custis. After bequests of £200 to Thomas Lee, £100 to John Blair, £20 annually to Mrs. Anne Moody, a house and lot to John Cavendish, and the manumission and provision for support of a negro boy, Jack, who died in 1753, he left the whole of his estate to his son Daniel Parke Custis, and made him the sole executor. He referred specifically to Smith's Island and Motton (Mockhorn) Island as being firmly entailed to him.<sup>40</sup> He directed that he was to be buried at Arlington in Northampton County, and on the tombstone to be erected an inscription was to be placed, which has made him highly conspicuous in the annals of Virginia.<sup>41</sup> This inscription bears the statement that he was "aged 71 years, and yet lived but seven years, which was the space of time he kept a bachelor's house on the Eastern Shore of Virginia." The Queen's Creek plantation was out on Capitol Landing road from Williamsburg, across the bridge over Queen's Creek, and had within its limits three thousand three hundred and thirty acres. A part of this land later came into the Waller family, the last member of that family who lived on the tract being the late Major Hugh Mercer Waller, who died in 1896 at the age of sixty-five. The map of the French engineers entitled *Carte des environs de Williamsburg en Virginia ou les armées française et Américaine ont campés en Septembre 1781* clearly shows the Custis plantation and places on it eighteen buildings in a group;<sup>42</sup> the

location of Custis' mill at the head of Queen's Creek is distinctly indicated; this was known in the nineteenth century, and today as Waller's mill; the site has recently been acquired by Williamsburg for a city reservoir; there was a grist mill at this site nearly three hundred years ago, it being mentioned in connection with property of Daniel Parke I (1628-1679). The house occupied by Major Waller, not now standing, is reported to have been of the old Virginia type, one and one-half stories, two parts connected by a corridor, not the original Custis house, but the overseer's house. It was not far from the family cemetery referred to in some detail in the note on G. W. P. Custis. From 1759 to 1778, when John P. Custis took charge of all his plantations, Washington controlled Queen's Creek.<sup>43</sup> Some of the correspondence with the managers of the plantation has been published in S. M. Hamilton's edition of *Letters Written to Washington*, and in the edition of Fitzpatrick's *Writings of Washington*. In 1778 the General and his wife gave a full release of all dower right in all the plantations, including Queen's Creek, the grist mill, and the lots in Williamsburg and Jamestown, in return for an annual payment to them by John Parke Custis of £525, or \$2100 silver money Virginia currency.<sup>44</sup> A great part of the original plantation was acquired by the United States government in 1941 for the site of Camp Peary, which camp altogether comprised more than 10,000 acres. The United States government has transferred the whole area to the State of Virginia to be used as a part of the State Park System, but retaining the right to claim it in an emergency. Dr. L. G. Tyler in *Williamsburg, The Old Colonial Capital*, p. 248, has this to say about the garden lot in Williamsburg: "The six-chimney-lot lies on the south side of Francis Street on the eastern portion of the Eastern State Hospital park, and gets its name from the six chimneys which once



BILLETING MAP OF WILLIAMSBURG, KNOWN AS THE FRENCHMAN'S MAP OF 1781  
The Name Custis Has Been Added in This Reproduction to Indicate the Family Lot

stood there, the houses to which they belonged having perished by fire. This lot was formerly owned by Colonel John Custis, who died in 1749, leaving it to his son Daniel Parke Custis. George Washington and his wife when visiting Williamsburg would stay at the Custis residence. All that now remains is a brick kitchen and a large yew tree, said to have been planted with Mrs. Washington's own hands."<sup>44</sup> Information about Custis is widely scattered. Some sources have been mentioned in the foregoing. The most important, which has not been used by biographers, is his letter-book, now in the Library of Congress. There are one hundred and thirty-six copies or drafts of his letters, 1717 to 1742, of which fourteen are written to Peter Collinson in reply to letters from him and are printed in this contribution in the best sequence obtainable. Students of Virginia history are happy to know that Dr. Maude H. Woodfin of the University of Richmond has copied all of these letters, many of which relate to the writer's business dealings with his agents in England, the Perrys, the Hanburys, and Robert Cary. Dr. Woodfin will publish the whole with that thorough and full elucidation of the text to be expected from her pen, and of which she has given such a conspicuous example in her edition of *Another Secret Diary of William Byrd, 1739-1741*. There are several references to Custis in *Darlington's* volume (letter to John Bartram, from Collinson, January 16, 1744, pp. 167, 171); the reference to Custis having the best collection of lilacs in America (letter to Bartram from Collinson, p. 108); "[the yapon] grows nowhere to the northward of that island thee found it on, which belongs to Colonel Custis" (letter from Collinson to Bartram, April 12, 1739, p. 131); "I'm informed my friend Custis is a very curious man; pray what didst thou see new in his garden" (about 1738, *ibid.*, p. 113); there is a letter of John Bartram to Custis, November 19,

1738, with exasperating asterisks at the end, indicating omissions, *ibid.*, p. 312. The use of the word "curious" by Collinson in reference to Custis has led to some misconception about him; the word as used at that time does not imply eccentricity but inquisitiveness; Mrs. R. E. Lee in the *Memoir* of her father prints five letters of William Byrd II to Custis, October, 1709, January 21, 1715 (?), October 2, 1716, one near the close of 1716 about his daughter Evelyn's arrival in London, and on December 13, 1716, about the death of his wife; unfortunately there are indications in these letters that they have not been printed in full. Mrs. Lee on page 13 of the *Memoir* refers to a "chest of old papers" relating to the Custis family. Undoubtedly some of these papers were lost through deterioration of the paper and the vicissitudes of the War of 1861-65, but a good number, a total of 680, remain, and are now in the possession of the Virginia Historical Society, having been carefully repaired according to the best modern practice. The late Dr. W. G. Stanard edited and printed some of them in the *Virginia Magazine of History*. Mrs. Lee speaks of there being at Arlington a considerable number of books with the signature of John Custis. These books came into the possession of his heir Daniel Parke Custis, and from him to John Parke Custis, and then to G. W. P. Custis. Five of the titles in the original John Custis library were in the possession of General Washington and are identified in A. P. C. Griffin's *Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*.

The documents in the Custis letter-book being rough drafts, some punctuation and capitalization has been added in the interest of legibility.

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