



## **Demystifying Morley Jeffers Williams Landscape Architect and Excavator of Tryon Palace 1952-1962**

Thomas Beaman, Jr.

Morley Jeffers Williams was a landscape architect who, when archaeology was but a fledgling field, recognized the contribution that archaeology could bring to the study and restoration of historic landscapes. Once described by a newspaper reporter as "a substantial, quick-speaking man with a brown moustache and a generally brown tweed appearance," Williams used archaeological evidence combined with documentary sources as methodological tools to research the historic landscapes of Stratford Hall and Mount Vernon in Virginia in the 1930s, and Tryon Palace in North Carolina in the 1950s. The results of these excavations yielded information that was used to interpret and guide the restoration of buildings, gardens, and landscape features at these historic sites.

Morley Williams was born in Tillsenburg, Ontario, Canada on August 1, 1886. He attended the Engineering School at the University of Toronto in 1910 and 1911. Williams left Toronto for employment as a bridge construction inspector with the Canadian Pacific Railroad, and in 1912 was hired by the Montreal-Port Arthur District of the Canadian Northern Railway as the acting engineer of bridge site surveys and bridge construction inspector. He eventually became the

resident engineer in charge of roadbed grading and track laying.

Williams moved to Kingsville, Ontario in 1914, where he acquired half-ownership in a grain elevator and began operating 300 acres of cropland, specializing in seed grades of corn, small grains, and grasses. In 1922, Williams took over the farm operations of Mr. Vincent Massey (then president of Massey-Harris Farm Machinery Company) in Port Hope, Ontario. As part of his duties, he consulted on the buildings and layouts of private farms. This job was probably Williams' initial experience with landscape design.

In 1925, at the age of 38, Morley Williams completed a BSA in Horticulture from the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph, Ontario. He immediately enrolled in Harvard University's School of Design where, in 1928, he received his Masters of Landscape Architecture in City Planning. His thesis, a study that illustrated how to introduce gardens and greenery into an urban landscape, was completed under the advisement of Henry Hubbard, Arthur Comey, John Nolen, and Arthur Shurcliff. Williams was awarded a year-long Sheldon Traveling Fellowship in 1929, which he spent studying landscape design in Europe and North Africa. In 1930, Williams officially joined the faculty of the

Harvard School of Design as an assistant professor.

In March 1931, Williams received a grant from the Clark Fund for Research in Landscape Design to investigate "American Landscape Design as Exemplified by the Plantation Estates of Maryland and Virginia, 1750 to 1860." Two months later, he traveled throughout Virginia and Maryland making topographical surveys of historic plantations, including Gunston Hall, Woodlawn, and Mount Vernon. His 1931 survey of George Washington's Mount Vernon was very significant because of the archaeological discovery of four early outbuilding foundations near the main house. This survey was the first time Williams used archaeological evidence to formulate ideas on the development of historic landscapes. The results of this survey also prompted Williams to suggest that the Mount Vernon landscape was consciously designed to resemble the shield in Washington's coat of arms.

Based on his surveys and archaeological discoveries the previous summer, in 1932 The Garden Club of Virginia asked Williams to complete earlier research, begun by Arthur Shurcliff, on the landscape of Stratford Hall, home of the Lees of Virginia. With data from Shurcliff's previous

investigations and new archaeological excavations supervised by Harvard graduate student Charles Pinkney, Williams identified the layout, walls, and terraces of the East Garden. He was further able to document the original approach to the mansion and the historic view from the mansion to the Potomac River. From these findings, Williams was asked to draw up plans for the restoration of the East Garden, which was reconstructed based on his designs. Also during the summer of 1932, Williams conducted a landscape survey of Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello, in which he located the serpentine walk and several planting beds on the West Lawn.

In 1934, Williams and Pinkney conducted additional archaeological investigations at Stratford Hall to determine the extent of westward development from the main house. Williams and Pinkney then oversaw the restoration of 'God's Acre' in Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Additionally, Williams continued the exploration of the four foundations he had discovered at Mount Vernon in 1931. In 1935, Williams returned to Mount Vernon where he conducted more archaeological investigations and supervised the restoration of the kitchen garden. That same summer, he was asked by the Olmsted brothers to research the history of the White House grounds as background information for a possible redesign of the landscape.

Morley Williams resigned from the faculty of the Harvard School of Design in May of 1936 to be the Director of Research and Restoration at Mount Vernon. Over the next three years, Williams continued to supervise the investigation of archaeological features and to conduct documentary research necessary to begin the restoration of the property as depicted in Samuel Vaughan's 1787 drawing. The focus of his research was to identify the construction date of buildings and landscape features, which were an integral part of the historic landscape. In 1939, Williams left Mount Vernon after the appointment of Cecil Wall as

Director, a position Williams had long coveted.

During 1940 and 1941, Williams conducted independent research on eighteenth-century manuscripts and newspapers. During this period, he and his new wife Nathalia Uhlman (b. 1910) had two children, Richard MacKinsey (Mack) and Brooke Curtis. Nathalia was also a trained architect who had studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the School of Architecture at Fontainebleau, France. From 1941 until 1947, the Williamses jointly operated a private practice in Bluemont, Virginia. In September 1947, Morley Williams joined the faculty of the North Carolina State College (now University) School of Design as a professor of Landscape Architecture. The following year, he succeeded Professor E. G. Thurlow as head of the Landscape Architecture Department. It was while Williams was at North Carolina State College that he was offered the opportunity to conduct excavations and other physical research on Tryon Palace prior to its restoration.

In early 1952, at the age of 65, Williams left academia to pursue the development of Tryon Palace State Historic Site. The opulent pre-Revolutionary, Palladian-villa style home of loyalist governors William Tryon and Josiah Martin in New Bern, North Carolina, was planned for reconstruction by the Boston firm of Perry, Shaw, and Hepburn, Kehoe and Dean. Based on his previous experience at Stratford Hall and Mount Vernon, Williams was recommended to conduct the preliminary archaeological investigations and physical research on the original palace.

It is presumed that no technical summary or public report was ever written on these early excavations at Tryon Palace. So far, only a photographic album with captions concerning the restoration of the East Wing has been located, though it contains little information on the excavation of that structure. Yet basic descriptions of many structural remains can be compiled from the daily work reports, correspondences, and meeting minutes. The Main

Building of the Palace was located under the surface of George Street, but only the east and west foundation walls, part of a stairway partition, and portions of original interior basement walls remained. Both the southeastern and southwestern basement rooms were found not to have been paved but had dirt floors. Structural remnants of the East Wing foundation, which served as the Palace's kitchen, were also found and excavated. The original West Wing, which was the stable for the Palace, was an extant structure at the time of the restoration and did not require extensive archaeological investigation. Additional elements of the original Palace landscape were also discovered, including footings of the original colonnades and palisado walls, storm drains, a well near the East Wing, three privies, and a surface of the original entrance drive. No evidence was found of the outbuildings added by Governor Josiah Martin in 1771-1772. A nineteenth-century cistern and a foundation constructed of ballast stone believed to date to the settlement of New Bern in the early eighteenth Century were also encountered in Williams' investigations. With the majority of the physical research completed, Williams was hired in 1955 as landscape architect to design the gardens and supervise their construction. No archaeological evidence was found of the gardens, so Williams chose designs for the formal and kitchen gardens based on eighteenth-century English landscapes.

Due to almost continual disagreements, by 1962 the association between the Tryon Palace Commission and Morley Williams had dissolved. Many of these disagreements involved unfinished reports on the restoration and the large number of unprocessed artifacts from the excavations. Sensational speculation still exists that Williams destroyed many of the field notes and reports related to archaeological investigations of the Palace, though this is highly unlikely. The daily reports generally served as field notes, and drawings

of the two excavated building foundations do exist. Numerous photographs on file at Tryon Palace Historic Sites and Gardens and the State Archives well document the excavation and site restoration. Based on records that do exist for the archaeological investigation, it is more likely that Williams, at the age of 75 when he left the Palace project

in early 1962, never completed these reports.

Morley and Nathalia Williams never fully retired and continued to research and restore historic houses and landscapes, such as the Samuel Smallwood House in New Bern and the Courthouse Green in Edenton. They divided their time between New Bern, North Carolina and

Lottsburg, Virginia. Morley Williams died of congestive heart failure and was cremated on December 1, 1977 in Lottsburg. Nathalia passed away in New Bern in November 1995. (Editor's note: an expanded version of this article will appear in *North Carolina Archaeology*, Volume 49.)



## John Lawson/Enoe Will Tri-Centennial Hike

Tom Fowler

On December 28, 1700, John Lawson left Charleston, South Carolina, in a large dugout canoe and headed north up the coast to the mouth of the Santee River. Over the next two months he would travel up the Santee and then walk into North Carolina, looping across the Piedmont to emerge some 500 miles later at the mouth of the Pamlico River near present-day Greenville.

Lawson later wrote a popular book describing his journey, titled *A New Voyage to Carolina*. Widely read in Europe, the book contained detailed descriptions of the geography, natural history, and Native American culture that Lawson observed during his travels. In particular, Lawson described following the great Indian Trading Path from present-day Salisbury to Occaneechi Town on the Eno River near present-day Hillsborough.

At Occaneechi Town, Lawson left the Trading path and traveled east along the banks of the Eno and Neuse Rivers, guided by a local leader of the Shakori tribe, Enoe Will. Lawson noted that: "Our Guide and Landlord Enoe Will was of the best and most agreeable Temper that I

ever met with in an Indian, being always ready to serve the English, not out of gain, but real affection." Lawson also noted that the 14-mile hike from Occaneechi Town to Adshusheer (a Shakori village near present-day Durham) was "a sad stony way." Enoe Will, much admired by Lawson, gave his name to a river. Lawson went on to become Surveyor General of the colony and to help found New Bern.

Lawson reached Occaneechi Town about mid-February of 1701, so February 2001 will mark the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lawson and Enoe Will's hike along the Eno River. To celebrate this 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Eno River Association is planning a commemorative event and hike in February of 2001. If you are interested in planning or helping with this event please contact Eno River Association and NCAS member Tom Fowler at (919)493-6296 in Durham, or by e-mail at [Judacullah@aol.com](mailto:Judacullah@aol.com).



## Spring NCAS Meeting Held at Schiele Museum

Michele Vacca, President

The spring meeting of the North Carolina Archaeological Society was held May 20 at the Schiele Museum of Natural History in Gastonia, North Carolina. Following the NCAS business meeting, Dr. Alan May enlightened the audience about "Taking the Waters: All Healing Springs, Gaston County, NC." Along with the presentation about this early health "spa" in nineteenth-century Gaston County, slides pictured early advertisements showing the original buildings which later became Linwood College as well as how the site looks

today. Dr. Ann Tippitt aired a recent video prepared by the Schiele Museum, "People of Clay: the Catawba Indian Pottery Tradition," available for purchase through the Schiele Museum. Lunch was served in the Stowe Gallery and a tour of the Schiele's newest exhibit, the Henry Hall of the American Indian, was offered. A self-guided tour of the Catawba Indian Village completed the day's activities.

## 2000 NC State Fair

We are planning for the 2000 NC State Fair exhibit for October 13-22. If you want to sign up early to help man our booth located in the Kerr Scott Building, please contact Dee Nelms @ 919/733-7342 for available times. You will get an entrance pass for the day(s) you work. We need your support to make this work. Thank you.



### NCAS Newsletter Publication Schedule

All NCAS members are encouraged to submit articles and news items to Dee Nelms, Associate Editor, for inclusion in the *Newsletter*. Please use the following cut-off dates as guides for your submissions:

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|--------------|-------------|
| Spring Issue | February 28 |
| Summer Issue | May 31      |
| Fall Issue   | August 31   |
| Winter Issue | November 30 |

Visit the archaeology web site that has information on our society:

<http://www.arch.dcr.state.nc.us>

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