New features of Southwest will include workbench and exhibit of 18th and 19th century woodworking tools

Most visitors will recognize the Southwest outbuilding as the place where their guided house tour began. The Southwest, closed to the public for a year, has been undergoing a transformation as part of the Lee Heritage Interpretation Plan. Helping us with part of that transformation is a group of members of the Mid-West Tool Collectors Association (M-WTCA).

Using research collected regarding the skilled craftsmen who worked at Stratford in the 18th and early 19th centuries, a wish list of tools typical of an 18th century work shop, and images of period work benches, the group was able to gather a donation of period tools appropriate for the shop as well as construct a reproduction work bench from native poplar.

Phil Baker and Jack Sciara of the group came armed with a plan for a reproduction work bench based on one in the shop of the Dominy family of East Hampton, New York (now at Winterthur Museum), as well as period paintings and illustrations. With help from our own Phil Mark and Doris Sciara, the team constructed a 14-foot work bench with back boards to hold tools.

Meanwhile, Neil Bohnert, Henry Caudle, Herb Caudle, and Jim DePoy worked with our Collections staff to identify and assess the group of tools donated by M-WTCA members. The men examined each tool, noting any maker or owner marks, recording time period, woods, and other important factors. Through the members of the M-WTCA, Stratford Hall now possesses a group of 18th and 19th century woodworking tools of great quality — perfect for our plantation work shop.

To read more about the on-going work on the Southwest outbuilding and the Northwest Stair Passage, visit our website StratfordHall.org and click on “Blogger” at the bottom of the home page.
Virginia farmers and planters of all social classes were united by shared agricultural practices and challenges that characterized daily life. These common interests compelled people to come to terms with disturbing anxieties, threats or patterns of change.

An important part of Stratford Hall’s mission is to encourage and promote scholarship on the Lees and their world. There has been no shortage of publications on Robert E. Lee, with over 600 books alone since his death in 1870. Unfortunately, the 18th century Stratford Lees, including two signers of the Declaration of Independence, Richard Henry Lee and Francis Lightfoot Lee, have attracted much less attention, with only a handful of books written about any of them. Late last year, we were especially pleased to note that the University of Virginia Press would release a new book by University of Tampa history professor Albert Tillson, Jr., titled Accommodating Revolutions: Virginia’s Northern Neck in an Age of Transformations, 1760-1810.

Since Australian historian Rhys Isaac published his Pulitzer Prize-winning The Transformation of Virginia in 1982, the accepted view of mid 18th century Virginia was of a society that was unstable and conflict-ridden, with the leadership of prominent gentry families like the Lees under attack from economic stress, a restless middle class, and increasingly assertive enslaved Africans and African-Americans. These conditions were exacerbated by the influence of emerging Baptist and Methodist congregations who undermined the power of the established Church of England. Isaac’s view has been supported by the work of other historians like University of Richmond professor Woody Holton. Holton, in his book Forced Founders, argues that the deciding factor that compelled the Virginia gentry to support independence from Great Britain was Governor Dunmore’s offer to free any of their slaves who would fight against the patriots.

While Tillson’s book is not entirely about the Lees, they figure prominently in his story. Tillson, focusing on the Northern Neck, presents a different view from Isaac and Holton. In the Northern Neck, gentry families like the Lees and Carters adapted to changes in society and culture, making accommodations with their less affluent neighbors in order to maintain their political power and influence. Virginia farmers and planters of all social classes were united by shared agricultural practices and challenges that characterized daily life. These common interests compelled people to come to terms with disturbing anxieties, threats or patterns of change. Tillson goes a long way to helping us to understand why, despite the turmoil of the Revolutionary era, the distribution and exercise of power and prestige remained unchanged in early national Virginia. We might say that the Lees’ influence was preserved because they were good politicians, responding to and understanding the concerns and interests of their constituents. In this sense, it may be that our modern political system, for good or for ill, was born in 18th century Virginia.

If you want to learn more about this book, we hope you will join us on June 5 for our annual The Lees & Independence celebration, when Professor Tillson, as our featured speaker, will be available to sign copies of his book. Professor Tillson’s presentation and the entire day’s activities are free to the public. Details about this event can be found elsewhere in this edition of The Chronicle and on Stratford Hall’s website at www.stratfordhall.org.

Paul C. Reber
Executive Director
New Objects and Fun Factoids Can Be Found in the Lee Gallery

If you haven’t had a chance to visit the permanent exhibit in the Lees of Stratford Gallery since late last fall, then be sure to check it out on your next visit as it has received an exciting update including new interpretive information and objects into the gallery.

The update includes new object label text with more stories about the Lees and other residents of Stratford; added screening to our lights to cut down levels near light-sensitive objects; and over 60 new object mounts (crafted on-site by a team from SurroundArt) to make sure the artifacts were safe and secure. Some of the newly-installed objects also received conservation treatment prior to their installation (you can read more about one of these objects in the exhibit).

New objects on display include: fragments from a rat’s nest found in the Great House’s attic (including pieces of a porcelain soup plate decorated with a crab, which was likely used by Thomas and Hannah Lee); the original Hall chandelier hook; Arthur Lee’s writing box which he used to safeguard important documents; a transfer-printed tureen and ladle from the Storke and Stuart periods of Stratford ownership (a new acquisition!); an original pot hook and birdhouse from Stratford; buttons from Robert E. Lee’s uniforms and a vase used to hold flowers at his funeral.

Visitors to the exhibit will also find fun factoids and other items of interest interspersed among the object labels. It is our hope that this new information and these new objects will help our visitors more fully understand the four generations of Lees and their servants and slaves that called Stratford home, as well as the legacy of the Somerville, Storke, and Stuart families of Stratford through the beginning of the 20th century.

We would like to thank those donors who helped fund this project: 2009 Update Funding provided in part by David H. Walker, Tranquillity, Reedville, Virginia; and Conservation Update Funding provided in part by Mr. and Mrs. Peter Irving Channing Knowles II, Richmond, Virginia and Ann Bellah Copeland, West Palm Beach, Florida.

This spur is one of two on display belonging to Robert E. Lee. They were sent to him from friends and admirers in Maryland.
Participants from around the United States joined Stratford Hall’s second annual Robert E. Lee Symposium on Civil War History. On Friday night, January 22, approximately 70 people joined us at Stratford for a house tour, dinner, and a lecture by Dr. Gary Gallagher, from the University of Virginia. Gallagher spoke about “The Most Important Confederate: General Lee’s Impact on the Battlefield and Home Front.”

On Saturday morning, the 35 participants attending the entire program arose bright and early to trek to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where we met Dr. Peter Carmichael from West Virginia University. Carmichael led our battlefield tour on Saturday and our morning discussion and battlefield tour on Sunday. Participants in this symposium saw portions of the Gettysburg battlefield that visitors usually don’t see. We went to portions of Culp’s Hill and Cemetery Hill not frequented by the regular day visitor to Gettysburg, and we also drove Longstreet’s march — something that many people never even consider doing!

We ended our Gettysburg battlefield tour on Sunday afternoon at Culp’s Hill, at a spot National Park Service historians believe to be a shallow gravesite where Confederate soldiers were buried when the battle was over. This stop brought a poignant end to our tour. Throughout the weekend, we discussed the battle and the people involved, but at this stop the sacrifice of Northern and Southern families was brought to the forefront of our minds. Here, we read a letter from John Futch, a Confederate soldier who watched his brother, Charlie, die in his arms just after the attack on Culp’s Hill in July 1863. This moment helped us see just how much this battle — and the Civil War — affected the lives of those who lived through it.

We hope you’ll join us for next year’s Robert E. Lee Symposium on Civil War History. We will be putting out details in the coming months, and look forward to seeing you here in January 2011. Visit our Facebook page to see photographs and video clips of Peter Carmichael’s battlefield tour and Gary Gallagher’s lecture. Simply go to StratfordHall.org and click on the “find us on Facebook” logo at the bottom of the home page. Become a fan of our Stratford Hall page and keep up-to-date on events and happenings at Stratford!
The Northern Neck of Virginia, laying in-between the Rappahannock and Potomac Rivers, doesn’t usually get much snow — if any. Natives of the area can tell you that sometimes there is a period of seven to ten years in-between a big snowfall — usually a one time a season event. And that’s what made this winter, with its first snowfall in December, followed by many more snowfalls, unique. Here’s a look at what this winter brought to Stratford.
New Star-Spangled Banner Geotrail Includes Stratford Hall

The new Star-Spangled Banner Geotrail, launched in February, is a unique journey through American history and across the landscapes of the Chesapeake Bay region. Intended to compliment and promote the congressionally designated Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, the Geotrail commemorates the dramatic chain of events, people and places that led to the birth of our National Anthem during the War of 1812. The first-of-its-kind, multi-state initiative, the geotrail is sponsored by Friends of Chesapeake Gateways, the Maryland Geocaching Society, and the National Park Service.

Geocaching, pronounced “geo-cashing,” is a worldwide phenomenon, in which participants use a hand-held GPS (Global Positioning System) to plot map coordinates in order to locate a hidden treasure or “cache.” Searching for a cache is akin to going on a treasure hunt and can involve clues, riddles and visits to multiple locations. A “geotrail” is a series of caches tied together by a common topic or theme.

The Star-Spangled Banner Geotrail includes Stratford Hall and more than thirty diverse sites that are all part of the landscape of the Chesapeake Campaign of the War of 1812. Some hold national prominence, others reflect the all-encompassing nature of the conflict, during which the British raided and burned communities throughout the Chesapeake region. In addition, the majority of participating locations are also designated Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails, special places that share the story of the Bay and its Rivers.

“The geotrail is a wonderful way to build interest in the War of 1812 in the Chesapeake and in the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail,” said Suzanne Copping, National Park Service Project Manager. “The Geotrail crosses state lines, just as the British and Americans did, and also connects sites along the National Historic Trail to other locations in the larger Chesapeake region. The stories behind the caches highlight the roles of civilians, soldiers, women and African-Americans and draws attention to a variety of themes as we approach the 1812 Bicentennial.”

In order to participate in the adventure, a geocacher must access the official geocache website at www.Geocaching.com. A basic membership is free. Once an account is established, the geocacher can use the advance search function to locate the Star-Spangled Banner account and retrieve the map coordinates and hide details for each Star-Spangled Banner Geocache. The next step is to head outside with a GPS to find geocaches along the Star-Spangled Banner Geotrail.

“We bought the $5 grounds pass and went over to the bluffs to find the cache. The view is amazing! It is very easy to imagine the ships out in the water. So little has changed in the region since then. The view is probably about the same as it would have been during the war. Stratford Hall Plantation is much bigger than we expected. It is really quite a beautiful home, incredible how many of the buildings are still standing. Thank you for another wonderful stop on the SSB Geotrail.” — Bocco

“…After signing the log and enjoying the views we walked down to the mill to take a few pictures and just enjoy our day. After that we knew that would be the end of our caching if we wanted to get to our family on time. Thanks for bringing us here, we noticed the cabins and now have an idea for a trip!” — Coupleocachers
Mark your calendar now to bring the family to Stratford on June 5 for our annual Lees and Independence event. This free event will have a host of activities for children from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., there will be a Revolutionary War encampment by the Second Virginia Regiment, a book signing and talk by Albert H. Tillson, Jr. at 5:30 p.m., and the day’s activities will be capped off with a free concert at 7 p.m. by the 380th U.S. Army Band.

Children’s activities will include signing the Declaration of Independence with a quill pen, taking pictures in colonial clothing, and doing a Lee interactive activity and receiving a prize in the Gift Shop. Children can also try out their aptitude for military drilling and shoulder their wooden muskets and march to the drummers’ beat and the musical strains of “Yankee Doodle,” giving them a taste of upcoming summer camp activities at Stratford.

The Revolutionary War Encampment will include firing demonstrations, outdoor cooking, and a number of other activities.

The Second Virginia Regiment is a recreated Revolutionary War living history group. The organization is composed of volunteers who authentically clothe and equip themselves to portray the soldiers and families of this historic military unit.

Albert H. Tillson’s talk in the Visitor Center is entitled “The Abduction of the Atwell: A Northern Neck Incident of the Revolutionary War.” Tillson’s lecture is based on documents he found regarding two deserters from the British Army who made their way into Westmoreland County in September 1779 and met two local loyalists who urged them into a vast plot to kidnap, steal money, hijack a ship, and rejoin British forces.

The 380th Army Reserve Band, based in Richmond, VA, will end the evening with a free concert starting at 7 p.m.

Be sure to join us for this event that commemorates the June 7, 1776 resolution made by Richard Henry Lee to the Continental Congress to declare independence from England: “Resolved, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.”

This event also highlights the important roles the other Lees, including Francis Lightfoot, Arthur, William, Thomas and “Light Horse” Harry had in fighting for independence.

Don’t forget June 5th for the whole family!
Mark your calendar now for June 5 for our annual Lees and Independence event.
Calendar of Events
For more info visit StratfordHall.org

May 9
Mother’s Day Luncheon/Preservation Month Tour
Take Mom out to a special place for Mother’s Day and have a lunch buffet in the Stratford Dining Room. Also, in celebration of Preservation Month, join us for a preservation-focused tour at 2 p.m. The tour is included in the cost of the Great House tour ticket.

June 5
Lees and Independence
This year’s Lees and Independence event will take place in the late afternoon, beginning at 3 pm. Enjoy activities for kids, Revolutionary War re-enactors, and free live music at an evening concert. This event is free and will be fun for all ages!

June 25–27
Weekend Family Adventure Camp
What an adventure it is for children and their families to experience the realities of plantation life as it was 250 years ago. There is something for everyone with so many educational and fun-filled activities packed into a weekend for children, age 8-12, and any accompanying adult relatives.

July 13–15
Grandparent/Grandchild Camp
Three days of fun-filled, educational activities offer a memorable family bonding experience while participants are re-living 18th century life on a Virginia plantation. The camp offers a myriad of hands-on experiences for both children and adults. For children ages 8-12.

What’s Your Membership Status?
Take time now to show your support for Stratford Hall by joining (memberships start at just $35) or renewing your membership. Use the enclosed envelope, join online at StratfordHall.org/give, call 804-493-8038 ext. 8919 or better yet, plan a visit and join while you’re here. Your membership also ensures your subscription to The Chronicle continues, so you don’t miss out on all the exciting things happening at Stratford Hall. Join us and become a Friend of Stratford today!

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Stratford preserves the physical and intellectual legacy of the Lee family and their plantation community to inspire an appreciation of our nation’s past and encourages people to pursue the Lee’s ideals of leadership, independent thought and civic responsibility.

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