

William Hamilton and The Woodlands: A Construction of Refinement in Philadelphia

THE LARGE, PORTICOED HOUSE standing in Philadelphia's Woodlands Cemetery is one of the few tangible remnants of William Hamilton's significant, but not entirely comprehended, contributions to the city's colonial and postrevolutionary social atmosphere. As a man with a substantial personal fortune, Hamilton did as he pleased and in time crafted a unique life within acceptable social bounds. Ultimately, this life left few traces of traditional male success—political office, lucrative business ventures, and being head of a family dynasty—and he essentially wrote himself out of many types of modern history. Both William Hamilton and The Woodlands are compelling topics and they have been individually introduced or alluded to by scholars, but it is a shared and outwardly unified identity that conveys their singular value. William Birch's description in *The Country Seats of the United States of North America* (1808) was one of a number that not only offered a flattering picture of the owner and his constructed landscape, but more importantly also represented them as indivisible components of an overall experience, noting "The beauties of nature and the rarities of art, not more than the hospitality of the owner, attract to it many visitors . . . and do credit to Mr. Wm. Hamilton, as a man of refined taste."¹ The

I would like to thank Timothy P. Long and Aaron V. Wunsch for insight about William Hamilton and The Woodlands shared through their own work, during personal conversations, and in correspondence. I would also like to recognize Orlando Ridout V and Michael Hardy for generously directing me to some helpful sources, and Lisa Davidson, Catherine Lavoie, and Gigi Price for their professional support and friendship. Finally, Tamara Miller's patient editorial comment throughout this project provided me with valuable and much appreciated guidance.

¹ William Birch, *The Country Seats of the United States of North America, with some Scenes connected with them* (Springland, PA, 1808), 3. Birch had a number of reasons to present William Hamilton and his seat in such a positive light. See Martin P. Snyder, "William Birch: His 'Country Seats of the United States,'" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 81 (1957): 224–47. Despite obvious bias (not even George Washington and his seat at Mount Vernon were so glowingly depicted), Birch's words still demonstrate the period merger of man and place.



Fig. 1. Engraving of the mansion-house and lawn from the southeast at The Woodlands, Philadelphia, PA. William Strickland after William Birch, ca. 1809, reprinted 1830. Society Print Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Woodlands was not just another of the Philadelphia area's many elegant seats. Having no dedicated profession or progeny, its creation, maintenance, and use became William Hamilton's lifelong vocation (fig. 1).

In a period when most Americans had neither the income nor the inclination to pursue an almost wholly leisured existence, Hamilton spent four decades and enormous amounts of resources in creating and modifying his Schuylkill River tract. Like the numerous suburban estates encircling Philadelphia, The Woodlands both represented and declared status; however, unlike the men building the others, Hamilton did not project this status toward the additional outcomes of augmenting political clout, attracting business partners, or increasing possibilities for a successful alliance through marriage.² Throughout his adult life, The Woodlands

² As an unmarried and wealthy white male, Hamilton's life at The Woodlands is also situated beyond many of the principal focuses of social, cultural, and family history. His relationship with The Woodlands was not typically masculine or feminine, neither expressing, for example, comprehension of his house as a "protective shell" for his "private life" nor dealing personally with "tension between the ideal of romantic attachment and the understanding of the proper roles of spouses." See Susan M. Stabile, *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY, 2004), 24; and Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca, NY, 1980), 174.

remained first and foremost a complicated aesthetic, intellectual, and social exercise, and the location where Hamilton merged personal interests and inclinations with broader trends related to refinement. In doing so, his life approximated the rarified country life common to England, though interpreted by a person raised, invested, and seemingly contented in America.³ "Every Hour that I exist I find myself more attached to America," he wrote from London late in 1784, "& more fully persuaded that I cannot be so happy any where as with my friends there."⁴

Hamilton's relationship and preoccupation with The Woodlands is most effectively understood through a filter of gentility, a concept identified by historians as a defining aspect of preindustrial America. As discretionary income increased in the eighteenth century among certain social tiers, such as royal representatives, urban merchants, and southern planters, these groups sought to set themselves apart from other groups and solidify their social, political, and economic positions.⁵ The consumption of tasteful goods and the knowledge of how to properly use them became "a passport to refinement" and an obvious sign of status.⁶ The totality of this process—including the accumulation of wealth, how best to spend it, and the mastery of associated acts of comportment, language, and entertainment—is known as "gentility" or "refinement."⁷ Although shared characteristics existed, the importation of genteel European culture occurred relative to distinct conditions in the American colonies. With a desire to link similar individuals and groups across considerable geographic distances and to establish a clear pecking order within a "fluid populace," Americans up and down the eastern seaboard

³ Like many gentlemen of his age, Hamilton died "greatly indebted." See ledger entry, Mar. 31, 1821, James Hamilton Estate in Account with James Lyle, 1817–21, Cadwalader Collection, General Thomas Cadwalader Papers, series III, box 107, folder 1, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁴ William Hamilton to Dr. Thomas Parke, Dec. 1, 1784, Society Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵ Kevin M. Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular: Lifestyles of the Colonial Elite," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville, VA, 1994), 2; Gary B. Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia, 2002), 60.

⁶ J. Thomas Savage and Robert A. Leath, "Buying British: Merchants, Taste, and Charleston Consumerism," in *In Pursuit of Refinement: Charlestonians Abroad, 1740–1860*, ed. Maurie D. McNinn and Angela D. Mack (Columbia, SC, 1999), 55. Overall, Charleston may have focused more intently on social developments in London and elsewhere in England, but the Philadelphia gentry—especially the Hamiltons—also held close ties with and interest in the taste of the mother country.

⁷ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York, 1992), xi–xix, particularly xvii–xviii; Cary Carson, "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial British America: Why Demand?" in *Of Consuming Interests*, 521–22; Nash, *First City*, 68.

vigorously embraced gentility's easily perceived aesthetic benchmarks.⁸ These included such "sanctioned items" as fashionable dwellings, luxury goods, and clothing.⁹ As America's largest and most politically important eighteenth-century city, particularly as the nation's capital between 1790 and 1800, Philadelphia possessed the population, means, and desire to foster the creation of especially genteel environments.

William Hamilton (1745–1813) was born into one of the city's wealthiest and most powerful families, whose fortunes rose with those of the colonial center. In only one generation, the Hamiltons emerged from somewhat obscure North American beginnings to a place of political, economic, and social leadership in Pennsylvania. The family's prominence established by Andrew Hamilton [I] (ca. 1676–1741) was carried on and expanded by the next generation. In doing so, they became founding members of a leading cluster of Philadelphians known as the "proprietary gentry." This group successfully challenged and in some ways dominated the separate and equally affluent, but generally more subdued, Quaker gentry.¹⁰ With fewer strictures on consumption, the members of the proprietary cohort fully participated in the burgeoning consumer revolution taking place on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. They filled town and, increasingly, country houses with imported and locally made furniture and other fine household goods, and these structures became both the location and one of the more easily perceived constructions of gentility.

The American preoccupation with refinement was the predominant cultural condition shaping William Hamilton's world, within which he ultimately took up an atypical lifestyle. Many eighteenth-century American "gentlemen" retained obvious ties to commerce, an association that would have disqualified them from use of that title in England and on the Continent.¹¹ The principal reason for this distinction was that

⁸ Michal J. Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman: Cultural Legitimacy in Plantation America* (Charlottesville, VA, 1998), 130.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 136. Gary Nash notes that the consumption habits of the gentry promoted sectors of the local economy, including "several hundred chair, chest, and table makers." Nash, *First City*, 60. See also Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 406–7, for the relationship between gentility as a condition for the mass production and consumption of consumer goods.

¹⁰ Stephen Brobeck, "Revolutionary Change in Colonial Philadelphia: The Brief Life of the Proprietary Gentry," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 33 (1976), particularly 415–18; see also Nash, *First City*, 66, for Quakers.

¹¹ Rozbicki, *Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 61–69. Thomas Doerflinger notes that many Philadelphians of second- and third-generation wealth held an "aversion to trade." Although they usually held a great amount of landed wealth and frequently disengaged themselves or never entered the mercantile world, this did not necessarily disqualify them from receiving profits from trade while

inherited, landed wealth, the primary route to a gentlemanly existence in Europe, simply did not yet exist for most North American families. The Hamiltons were an exception to this condition by the time of William's birth. At the age of two, upon his father's early death in 1747, Hamilton inherited his first tracts, including a largely unimproved "Plantation on the West Side of the Schuylkill containing about three hundred and fifty six acres" that in time became The Woodlands.¹² While his brother followed their father into mercantile commerce, William Hamilton seems to have looked to his uncle, James Hamilton, for direction.¹³

At a time when unmarried men of any rank were extremely rare, James Hamilton (ca. 1715–83), the family's de facto male parent, furnished a successful example of upper-class bachelorhood.¹⁴ Beyond political motivation that resulted in numerous provincial, county, and municipal positions—the most significant being the colony's lieutenant governorship 1748–54, and again 1759–63—James Hamilton cultivated an uncommon life for himself and his extended family.¹⁵ Using inherited resources and his position in the colony, Hamilton expanded an already large fortune through land purchases and other investments. He resided full time at "Bush Hill," an estate located just above the northwestern quadrant of Penn's platted city. The estate's centerpiece was a massive, three-story Georgian house completed by his father in 1740.¹⁶ Bush Hill became the site of an extensive library and contained the best of few "picture" galleries in the English colonies; within this setting James Hamilton became known for his hospitality and frequent entertaining.¹⁷ His associ-

pursuing a genteel profession. See Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1986), 42–45.

¹² Will of Andrew Hamilton [III], Sept. 14, 1747, Will Book H, #187 (microfilm), Philadelphia City Archives.

¹³ See Timothy Preston Long, "The Woodlands: A 'Matchless Place'" (MA thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1991), 72, 74, for Hamilton's father's and brother's commercial interests. Long's extensive study of The Woodlands provides an analysis of its eighteenth-century estate planning and construction as well as its ultimate transformation into a planned burial ground with the 1840 establishment of The Woodlands Cemetery Company. It furnished a key source for locating a number of important primary documents related to the house's construction.

¹⁴ Smith, *Inside the Great House*, 128–29.

¹⁵ "James Hamilton," in *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania: A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 2, ed. Craig W. Horle et al. (Philadelphia, 1997), 449.

¹⁶ Henry A. Boorse, "Bush Hill: An Historic Philadelphia House," *Imprint* 9 (autumn 1984): 12, for completion date.

¹⁷ Robert C. Alberts, *Benjamin West: A Biography* (Boston, 1978), 25, for gallery; Boorse, "Bush Hill," 13, for entertainment.

ations with such local organizations as the Dancing Assembly, Philosophical Society, Mt. Regale Fishing Company, Society of the Sons of St. Tammany, and the Jockey Club further underscored Hamilton's social prominence, as did construction donations for the Freemason's Lodge, the College of Philadelphia, and a new steeple for Christ Church.¹⁸ Regardless of whether his decision was a conscious one, William Hamilton styled himself after his independent uncle in virtually every way except political ambition.

Given his age, fortune, and location, William Hamilton could very well have been a key player in revolutionary and early federal politics were it not for his family's association with the Penns and obvious service to the Crown. "Politicks seem to take up every Body's attention, & I believe, there never was a greater variety of sentiments on any Topic . . .," he wrote to William Tilghman in 1779. "If indeed it was proper, I could not give you much Information, as I keep myself for the most part out of the way, not only for my dislike to the subject as at present handled, but because I have other Fish to fry."¹⁹ In declaring his "dislike to the subject as at present handled," he indicated ambivalence towards the cause of independence. William's stance was likely an outgrowth of James Hamilton's own sentiments and those of many other members of the proprietary gentry, who supported lessening the injustices placed upon Americans while not advocating a full break with the mother country.²⁰ Although tried (and acquitted) of treason in October 1778, William Hamilton's unclear position probably stemmed more from loyalty to a loving uncle than necessarily from any strong antipathy towards the American cause.²¹ At present, there is little evidence suggesting that he held a keen interest in the intellectual underpinnings of the Revolution, let alone an active political career in the new nation. With James Hamilton nearing the end of his life and as one of his two principal heirs, it is also unlikely that William Hamilton would have done anything to endanger receiving another family legacy.

Drawn neither to politics nor business, William Hamilton was, a visitor once reflected, "interested only in his house, his hothouse and his Madeira," and these three items offer an outline for the conceptual under-

¹⁸ Brobeck, "Revolutionary Change in Colonial Philadelphia," 416, for membership; "James Hamilton," 449, for donations.

¹⁹ Hamilton to William Tilghman Jr., Apr. 1779, Society Collection.

²⁰ "James Hamilton," 463.

²¹ *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, Oct. 17, 1778, postscript.

pinnings of his relationship with The Woodlands.²² No single item announced aspirations for or the attainment of gentility more than a fashionable, well-situated house.²³ Hamilton engaged in two major periods of domestic construction at The Woodlands. Both the initial circa 1770 dwelling and its late-1780s reconception and expansion ably conveyed Hamilton's well-developed notion of taste, assured his place among the American elite, and provided a striking backdrop for events of all types. Hamilton filled his house(s) with fine furniture, tableware, and of rarer note, a large collection of paintings and sculpture. He engaged in widely acknowledged hospitality and entertained, at times lavishly—a central action in genteel culture and one interpretation of his observed interest in Madeira.

Hamilton's third preoccupation, "his hothouse," will not be fully developed in this essay, but as an expression of his primary intellectual curiosity it warrants mention. Among the extraordinary auxiliary structures at The Woodlands was an immense and much celebrated greenhouse/hothouse, mostly completed circa 1792. Period sources note that the finished structure was "equal to any in Europe" and that "nothing [at The Woodlands] . . . can excite more admiration."²⁴ As a member of Philadelphia's established aristocracy, he received a broad, classical-based education, and with no need for an official profession Hamilton collected specimens of aesthetic and scientific value and engaged in botanical investigation at The Woodlands.²⁵ In doing so, historian Aaron V. Wunsch explains, he "made

²² Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree: Travels through America in 1797–1799, 1805 with Some Further Account of Life in New Jersey*, trans. and ed. Metchie J. E. Budka (Elizabeth, NJ, 1965), 53.

²³ Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 97; Nash, *First City*, 63; Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular," 2. That a house could even stand proxy for its human inhabitant-owner is discussed by Robert Blair St. George in *Conversing by Sign: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998). In his study of objects, actions, and their meanings in colonial New England, St. George relates how houses were frequently discussed in terms of the human body and, in chapter 3, "Attacking Houses," how houses were sacked in proxy for the misdoings of their owners. This type of corporate act happened in part to "dishonor" a family through the "literal dismantling of their visible estate" (p. 243).

²⁴ Dr. Charles Drayton, diary entry for Nov. 2, 1806, 59, Drayton Hall, National Trust for Historic Preservation, South Carolina, for "Europe," from a transcription furnished by Timothy Preston Long; Oliver Oldschool, Esq. [Joseph Dennie], "American Scenery—For the Port Folio, The Woodlands," *Port Folio* 2 (1809): 507, for "admiration."

²⁵ Doerflinger, *Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*, 42–43, for type of education, profession. Hamilton graduated from the College and Academy of Philadelphia (later the University of Pennsylvania) in 1762 with a "Baccalaureatus." Long, "Woodlands," 75. This education contributed to his passion for and knowledge of gardening and horticulture; his 1813 obituary somewhat narrowly claimed that "the study of botany was the principal amusement of his life." William Hamilton obituary, *Poulson's*

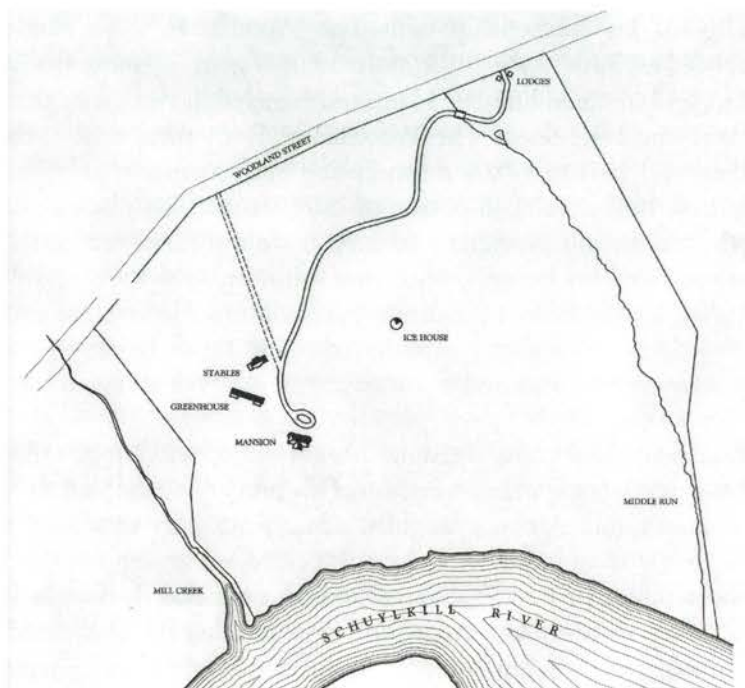


Fig. 2. Estate plan achieved by ca. 1795, based on nineteenth-century maps. Courtney Gunderson, HALS PA-5, detail of sheet 2, 2004.

the property a New World model of contemporary English gardening techniques.”²⁶ “His hothouse” might also be viewed as a concern for molding an integrated estate landscape. English thoughts and practices on the development of country estates greatly influenced Hamilton and his contemporaries as they established their own versions in America. His house, in its two phases, and its outlying structures were part of a larger, unified concept of views and movement through the landscape (fig. 2). A

American Daily Advertiser, June 8, 1813, 3. During his lifetime, Hamilton developed a friendship with the Bartram family living south of The Woodlands along the Schuylkill River. Since the 1730s, the Bartrams’ botanical garden and the scientific and exploration interests of father John Bartram and son William Bartram were well-known and respected on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1785, Hamilton introduced the ginkgo tree to North America through a gift to William Bartram. One of these original trees is still living at Bartram’s Garden in Philadelphia.

²⁶ For additional information principally related to the landscape history of The Woodlands from Hamilton’s eighteenth-century actions through the numerous nineteenth- and twentieth-century phases of cemetery development by The Woodlands Cemetery Company, see Aaron V. Wunsch, “Woodlands Cemetery,” HALS No. PA-5, Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS), National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2003–4, particularly I-C “Historical Narrative,” section entitled “William Hamilton and the Public Nature of the Woodlands.”

cohesive estate environment also exhibited the owner's intellectual prowess and an ability to "synthesize" complex ideas regarding architecture, gardening, and a total aesthetic.²⁷ As soon as he was able, Hamilton began using his inherited Schuylkill River tract to translate his personal ideals and interests into a more tangible statement.

Repeating a chronology of construction whose foundations extend back to at least the 1870s, prior scholarship situates the appearance of the first house at The Woodlands during the short ownership tenure of William Hamilton's father. He inherited the property in 1741, but did not obtain clear title until 1745, and died in 1747.²⁸ No documentary evidence indicates Andrew Hamilton [II]'s (ca. 1710–47) improvement of the site, and a 1752 map of Philadelphia and its immediate surroundings confirms that no seat or villa existed there at that time (fig. 3).²⁹ The first high-style dwelling at The Woodlands was not constructed until William Hamilton attained his majority in 1766.³⁰ Misunderstanding about the chronology is understandable since the building campaign, between 1786 and 1789, that resulted in the present house, destroyed or masked most of the original, circa 1770 structure. Rescuing William Hamilton's early house from obscurity is significant not only for a clearer understanding of the present structure, but also for illustrating the significant first steps toward independently conveying and personalizing his refinement.

Hamilton established The Woodlands during a busy time of villa construction along the Schuylkill River. With a handful of exceptions, including the Norrises' Fair Hill (1712), the Logans' Stenton (1723–30), and the Hamiltons' Bush Hill (1740), prior to the 1750s and 1760s secondary dwellings in rural areas were generally modest and meant primarily for daytrips or occasional weekend stays.³¹ A thriving local economy and steady flow of design ideas from England allowed affluent city dwellers the means and confidence to establish stylish secondary

²⁷ Long, "Woodlands," 24, 59, 77.

²⁸ Will of Andrew Hamilton [I], Aug. 4, 1741, Will Book F, #210 (microfilm), Philadelphia City Archives; abstract of title in Cadwalader Collection, General Thomas Cadwalader Papers, series III, box 108, folder 4, for clear title in 1745.

²⁹ N. Scull, G. Heap, and L. Hebert, *A Map of Philadelphia and Parts Adjacent* (Philadelphia, 1752), Historical Society of Pennsylvania. For full discussion, see James A. Jacobs, "Addendum to The Woodlands," HABS No. PA-1125, section I-A-6 "Original Plans and Construction" (Historic American Buildings Survey [HABS], National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2002).

³⁰ Jacobs, I-A-6 "Original Plans and Construction."

³¹ Aaron V. Wunsch, "Schuylkill River Villas," HABS No. PA-6184 (Historic American Buildings Survey [HABS], National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1995), 3–4.

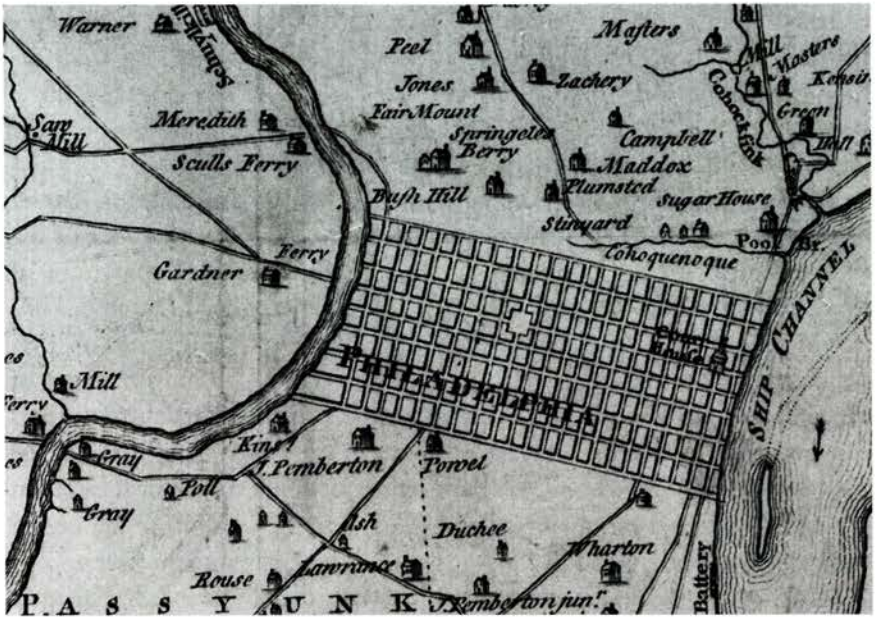


Fig. 3. Detail of N. Scull, G. Heap, and L. Hebert, *A Map of Philadelphia and Parts Adjacent* (Philadelphia, 1752), Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The large open area below Ferry (Market) Street to the left of the city grid ultimately became the high-style core of William Hamilton's estate.

residences, known as villas, within the metropolitan area in the years leading up to the Revolution. Principally meant for escaping the summer's heat and occasional epidemics, an increase in their construction contributed to the more seasonal movement of elite Philadelphians between urban dwellings and suburban villas. As a youth, Hamilton would have split time between his mother's townhouse and his uncle's seat at Bush Hill. It is not known whether he initially intended to ignore social convention and, like his uncle, live year round in the country, but the nearness of The Woodlands to the city and the fact that he never constructed an in-town residence suggest that he might have had this in mind from the start.

Like its construction date, the physical appearance of Hamilton's first dwelling at The Woodlands eluded researchers for a long time. Richard J. Betts's article, "The Woodlands" (1979), suggested a double-pile, central passage plan for structure, a common eighteenth-century arrangement. He also observed that only a "thorough architectural survey and restoration" would reveal aspects of the earlier structure and allow for more

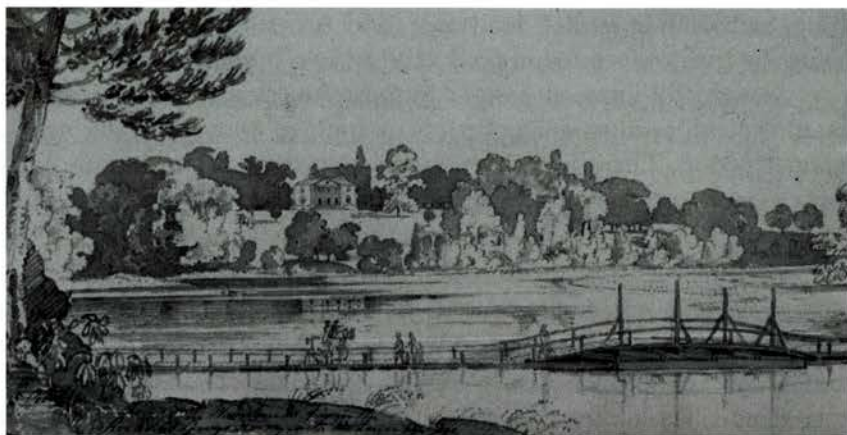


Fig. 4. *The Woodlands from the Rocks at Gray's Ferry, with the Lower Bridge, 5th October*, Joshua Rowley Watson Scrapbook, 1816. Courtesy of the Barra Foundation, Inc.

definitive conclusions.³² Fieldwork and physical investigation more than a decade later finally confirmed the original house's form and many of its exterior details. In the mid-1990s, Robert FitzGerald, Timothy Long, and Thomas McGimsey were able to observe and document historic fabric in the house made visible during the construction of a second-floor tenant apartment. Through their efforts, the trio established the footprint and overall form of the villa, and among other discoveries, revealed a pristine expanse of original exterior wall.³³ Although the initial disposition of interior spaces remains unknown, FitzGerald, Long, and McGimsey's fieldwork uncovered a prerevolutionary house of bold form that communicated and was likely equated with William Hamilton's self-assurance, good taste, and refinement.

Hamilton located the dwelling on a prominent rise above the Schuylkill River at a point where it turns ninety degrees in its course just upriver from a ferry, and later a bridge, crossing (fig. 4). The house's

³² Richard J. Betts, "The Woodlands," *Winterthur Portfolio* 14 (1979): 227, see also 228–29. With this article, Betts provided the first serious published scholarship on the house and established a base for further discoveries and comprehension of the house and estate during the last quarter century. In his 1965 restoration report for the portico columns, G. Edwin Brumbaugh suggested a possible cruciform plan for the initial house, but also observed that without major demolition no serious conclusion could be made. See G. Edwin Brumbaugh, "Preliminary Restoration Report No. 1—South Portico" (Philadelphia, Apr. 28, 1965. Copy located in the offices of the Philadelphia Historical Commission).

³³ As part of this consultation, FitzGerald, McGimsey, and Long (1) opened two view ports in

siting, surrounding garden landscape, and two-story, tetrastyle portico facing the river cooperated in producing an awe-inspiring effect. A common, though still impressive, sight to most Americans by the middle of the nineteenth century, open porticos of any size were scarce during the colonial period. There is little evidence suggesting that a monumental portico stood anywhere in Philadelphia in 1770, certainly none as visible as the one that Hamilton constructed.³⁴ Extant fabric shows that the rubble-stone structure was covered in stucco incised to mimic ashlar stone courses, beveled quoins articulated the building's corners, and at least some of the windows were contained within crosstetted Georgian frames.³⁵ Just behind the portico on the east- and west-facing walls, two-story three-sided bays extended five feet from the temple-like mass, and a stringcourse situated between the first and second stories unified the composition. With the drama that colored many aspects of his life, young William Hamilton made his introductory move in the genteel game of residential one-upmanship practiced up and down the colonial eastern seaboard by the wealthy and powerful.

During the following decade, Philadelphia became the center of revolutionary activity, to the detriment of the local economy and most gentry estates. The Hamilton family—which made its colonial fortune in service to the Pennsylvania proprietors and the Crown—survived the war without confiscation of property, though like most of the other leading households, came out of the war with its finances in disarray. While certain families among the proprietary gentry showed fortunate economic endurance and adapted to the changed conditions, the conflict still

the wall of the oval drawing room in order to view the house's original exterior northeast corner; (2) exposed, in an upstairs room, the original exterior stucco on the three-sided bay; (3) bored a small hole in the plaster at the base of the arched recess on the southwest side of the room that allowed for a fiber-optic exam, which indicated the presence of a finished wall behind the extant one; and (4) cut a view port into the drum wall of the circular vestibule at a point above the domed ceiling. Robert FitzGerald to Timothy Long, e-mail, Dec. 9, 2002, forwarded to author via e-mail, Dec. 17, 2002.

³⁴ The only contemporary structure that may have had a similar treatment was John Penn's Landsdown, a Philadelphia estate dwelling whose own construction was roughly contemporaneous with The Woodlands. Landsdown possessed a front-facing portico divided into two levels; however, each level contained its own Order rather than utilizing the overall monumental scale of a single two-story Order.

³⁵ The view ports cut by FitzGerald, McGimsey, and Long into the oval drawing room wall revealed the original stuccoed quoins at the northeast corner. In 1965, Brumbaugh discovered what he interpreted to be unstuccoed brick quoins like those at Mt. Pleasant behind the east pilaster on the portico. Brumbaugh, "Preliminary Restoration Report No. 1—South Portico," 6. FitzGerald, McGimsey, and Long concluded that the stucco was chipped off the face of the quoin in order to accommodate the wood pilaster added as part of the 1780s renovations.

shattered the group's former dominance in Philadelphia.³⁶ Unified social, economic, and, eventually, political power passed to the most successful members of the already prosperous and rising merchant class.³⁷ Within an expanding cultural landscape, Hamilton's intact wealth and earlier decision to live beyond common period conventions—remaining single, residing full time at his country estate, and eschewing mercantile commerce and politics—meant that he was never challenged in the renewed, postrevolutionary game of status and dominance. Although giving himself the opportunity to pleasantly live out his life as a sort of dowager installed in a Georgian villa, he had no intention to do so quietly. He aimed to remain a trendsetter in Philadelphia and, using *The Woodlands* again as his primary tool for expression, he engaged in spirited competition with members of the new ruling elite, in particular William and Anne Bingham.

In 1785–86, Hamilton and the Binghams interacted in London while pursuing independent travels, during which they acquired the most up-to-date ideas about architecture and design. Hamilton had received a sizable inheritance from his Uncle James's estate two years earlier, but it was so heavily encumbered with transatlantic debt that he felt he needed to go to England in order to settle matters. He arrived in London late in 1784 and within a year abandoned plans to travel to the Continent, in large part because he underestimated the cost of living for himself, a favored niece, two nephews, and at least one servant.³⁸ Hamilton concluded in November 1785, "Delightful as this country is, It has no charms for me without a great deal of money."³⁹ Still, the family moved among the highest Anglo-American circles and, like most other Americans living abroad, intended to buy things that in Hamilton's words, "may be had in a better taste & some of them cheaper than in America."⁴⁰ While the second part

³⁶ Brobeck, "Revolutionary Change in Colonial Philadelphia," 432–34.

³⁷ Doerflinger, *Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*, 30, 255. Gary Nash observes that prior to the Revolution merchants were never a "cohesive group." In the early 1770s, only an estimated 15 percent of identifiable merchants could be considered part of the "social elite," which was further divided between the Quakers and the Anglicans. See Nash, *First City*, 47–50.

³⁸ Hamilton to Dr. Thomas Parke, July 29, 1785, Society Collection, for changes in plans.

³⁹ Hamilton to Dr. Thomas Parke, Nov. 2, 1785, Ferdinand Julius Dreer Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, for quote.

⁴⁰ Hamilton to Dr. Thomas Parke, Sept. 24, 1785, Dreer Collection. A summary of some of Hamilton's financial problems can be found in Long, "Woodlands," 92–95; see also the Hamilton-Parke correspondence in the Society Collection, the Pemberton Family Papers, and the Dreer Collection at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania for more detailed information related to Hamilton's financial state while in England.

of his statement implies practical foresight, the first part more accurately portrays Hamilton's primary concern. Refinement required subtle shifts in visible standards so that the comfortably genteel and fashionable could separate themselves from the aspiring. After the Revolution, England remained a principal source for American culture, architecture included.⁴¹

At the time of Hamilton's departure, changes to his villa at The Woodlands were at least already in the planning stages. No known evidence offers definite reasons for wanting to alter his country house, but interaction with one of the best-known eighteenth-century builders in Philadelphia, Thomas Nevell (1721–97), at least suggests the scope of his intentions.⁴² He was likely living at the house most, if not all, of the year and probably desired to make it more functional and visually appropriate to its full-time use.⁴³ Problems of upkeep and damage inflicted during the Revolution required attention, and suspicion during the conflict soured Hamilton's perception of the city.⁴⁴ He also appears to have cared neither for urban living nor its expense.⁴⁵ His initial motivations for rethinking the first house probably did not reflect any major aesthetic shortcomings, since he apparently planned to work with Nevell. A disruption in cultural exchange during the Revolution meant Americans could not have known about the latest developments in architecture. However, upon arrival in England the contrast between the simple clarity of neoclassicism and the more ornamental Georgian favored by the American gentry would have

⁴¹ For full discussion of the English contributions to American architecture from the turn of the century through 1850, see W. Barksdale Maynard, *Architecture in the United States, 1800–1850* (New Haven, CT, 2002), particularly chap. 2.

⁴² Thomas Nevell's accounts show that he provided Hamilton with "some Extracts from Sundry Plans in [his] Possession" in 1784, Thomas Nevell account book, 1784, Wetherill Papers, University of Pennsylvania, as quoted in Long, "Woodlands," 91. That his work may have included a more extensive design for alterations is indicated by an October 1784 letter from Hamilton to his steward Benjamin Hays Smith instructing him that "Nevils plan should be paid for." William Hamilton to Benjamin Hays Smith, Oct. 6, 1784, Society Collection. Thomas Nevell's best-known commission is John MacPherson's Mount Pleasant (1763–64), a large Georgian country house located further up on the Schuylkill River.

⁴³ The city's steady physical expansion, better road networks, and the danger and dislocation accompanying the yellow fever epidemics in the 1790s led some families to abandon the city altogether. They either enlarged existing country retreats or built villas that from their inception were meant for year-round use, establishing an early example of metropolitan suburbanization. Wunsch, "Schuylkill River Villas," 14–16.

⁴⁴ In 1779 Hamilton declared that the view of the city from his estate, which had previously been "an object of my regard," had become "absolutely disgusting to me." Hamilton to William Tilghman Jr., Apr. 1779, Society Collection.

⁴⁵ Hamilton to Dr. Thomas Parke, Mar. 8, 1786, Pemberton Family Papers, vol. 45.

been starkly apparent to Hamilton and others.⁴⁶

While a financial cloud hung over Hamilton's trip, the Bingham's dazzled Europe while on a true grand tour from 1783 through 1786. As the progeny of two leading merchant families, the 1780 marriage of William Bingham (1752–1804) and Anne Willing (1764–1801) assured a life of luxury and a place of prominence in postrevolutionary Philadelphia.⁴⁷ Among the few Americans with enough monetary worth to earn the note of Europeans, during their travels the Bingham's also amassed a large collection of art, tableware, furniture, rugs, and tapestries. Their objective to make an unprecedented, highly fashionable splash in America hinged on an opulent new residence. In the summer of 1785 the Bingham's shipped a residential design to Philadelphia, attributed to English architect John Plaw, months in advance of their departure so that construction could begin before their return.⁴⁸ Sources record that the Hamiltons and Bingham's interacted socially while in London, and it is likely that they would have shared knowledge of planned construction.⁴⁹ It is possible that Hamilton saw an actual drawing, but even a verbal description would have been enough for him to understand that the Bingham's new house would eclipse anything previously built in Philadelphia. Hamilton now possessed a benchmark against which to weigh his options for an expansion of The Woodlands. He spent September 1785 "viewing the best Houses in [and] about this metropolis," as much for gathering ideas as for leisure since he reiterated in the same

⁴⁶ See Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular," 54–58; and Damie Stillman, "City Living, Federal Style," *Everyday Life in the Early Republic*, ed. Catherine E. Hutchins (Winterthur, DE, 1994), 137–74.

⁴⁷ More a contemporary of Hamilton's than his wife, Bingham was born into a prosperous merchant family and graduated from the College of Philadelphia only six years after Hamilton. He created a massive personal fortune while serving the British and, after 1776, the American governments on postings in the Caribbean. For his full biography, see Robert C. Alberts, *The Golden Voyage: The Life and Times of William Bingham, 1752–1804* (Boston, 1969).

⁴⁸ Stillman, "City Living, Federal Style," 140–41, for attribution, and also, James A. Jacobs, "Addendum to The Woodlands," HABS No. PA-1125, section I-A-2 "Architect, Builders" (Historic American Buildings Survey [HABS], National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2002), for more on the Bingham's architect; Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 159, for advance plans.

⁴⁹ In letters to America, both Abigail Adams, wife of the American minister to England, and her daughter linked the beauty and social graces of Ann Hamilton, William Hamilton's favored niece, to that of Anne Bingham, not insignificant commentary given Bingham's exulted reputation. Hamilton interacted enough with the Bingham's to trouble himself with sending notice, presumably on a faster ship, to a Philadelphia friend bearing details about their return passage, including information about the goods and new servants with which they traveled. Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 151, 153, for transcriptions of the Adams's letters, and chap. 12 for Anne Bingham's reputation; Hamilton to Dr. Thomas Parke, Mar. 8, 1786, Pemberton Family Papers, vol. 45, for ship.

letter, "some addition to the House, a stable & other offices are immediately necessary at the Woodlands."⁵⁰

Hamilton sailed for home in mid-1786 with clear notions, and possibly actual plans, for how he would reconsider The Woodlands, but being cash poor, unlike the Bingham he traveled with no lavish materials or architectural elements such as mantles and ceiling rosettes. Notwithstanding the scale of personal finances, Hamilton and the Bingham were all affluent Americans raised in a culture of refinement, and they returned to Philadelphia confident in their understanding of the latest developments and the knowledge that they would be among the first to implement them at home in a high-profile manner.⁵¹ Late in 1786, the Bingham moved into their massive townhouse, which became a principal location for the Republican Court's formal and informal events and the object of both praise and scorn.⁵² Completed three years later, the dynamic spaces and restrained finishes of William Hamilton's expanded estate house as effectively expressed current neoclassical taste in plaster and wood as the Bingham townhouse did in marble and Coadestone.⁵³ The mixed reception of the Bingham's opulent house and associated social events suggest that contemporaries might have viewed Hamilton's efforts as more appropriate

⁵⁰ Hamilton to Dr. Thomas Parke, Sept. 24, 1785, Dreer Collection. In his thesis, Timothy Long used formal analysis to suggest Plaw for the 1780s work at The Woodlands. Long, "Woodlands," 54. Given his personality and sociomaterial aspirations for the trip, it is not difficult to imagine Hamilton seeking out the same architect in an effort to create an estate house to rival the one planned by the Bingham in the city. Regardless, if both houses were designs by John Plaw, then he was responsible for two of the most celebrated eighteenth-century residences in America. The question about "the architect" for The Woodlands demands an essay of its own. Briefly, no information has been uncovered linking the expansion of The Woodlands to any one architect, although numerous have been offered as candidates. See Jacobs, I-A-2 "Architect, Builders," for a full review of past and present ideas about possible design sources for The Woodlands.

⁵¹ The interior finishes of John Penn's Solitude (1784–85) are considered among the earliest and finest examples of neoclassicism in the United States, but the modest bachelor retreat's cubic mass and room arrangement is not unlike a number of other eighteenth-century Schuylkill River villas.

⁵² Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, chap. 13; Nash, *First City*, 131; Richard G. Miller, "The Federal City, 1783–1800," *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, ed. Russell F. Weigley (New York, 1982), 177–78. For general background on celebrations and American nationhood, see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997). For discussion of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century townhouses, see Bernard L. Herman, *Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780–1830* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005).

⁵³ Although the architect is unknown, John Child is the master craftsman associated with the 1780s expansion. The finished house's complexity and Child's likely submission of a competition drawing for the new Library Company building in 1789 indicate that he was a skilled builder. See Betts, "Woodlands," 233n69, for competition.

to America and, as a result, perhaps even more refined.⁵⁴ As a place of respite outside of the high-pressure, politicized atmosphere of the metropolis, Hamilton's successful reshaping of The Woodlands asserted his social presence and maintained the estate as a singular destination on the Philadelphia social circuit. As one genteel visitor from Annapolis wrote her sister in 1799, "I am determined to go to his House which looks very inviting and see all that is worth seeing—I daresay you have often heard of it. The Woodlands it is called—just over the Schuylkill."⁵⁵

Unlike the first house with its unprecedented and highly visible monumental portico, the novelty of the second was far less overt as it lay within the house.⁵⁶ Hamilton passed over the conventional domestic plan for large houses with a central passage flanked by four primary rooms, and instead relied upon a system of intersecting axes for arranging the dwelling's public spaces (fig. 5).⁵⁷ These axes provided controlled and dramatic sight lines that created stunning vistas through the house. A European visitor in 1798 somewhat backhandedly acknowledged Hamilton's achievements at The Woodlands when he noted, "the house is spacious, arranged and decorated in a style rare in America . . . [it] would be nothing elsewhere; but here the eye, deprived for a long time of all that resembles art, dwells with pleasure on all which reminds one of it."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Stillman, "City Living, Federal Style," 140–43, for inappropriateness in America; Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular," 54–55, for being called "very ungenteel" by a contemporary. In the same paragraph, Sweeney also discusses Hamilton's reconfigured house at The Woodlands; however, known period opinions either viewed the house as highly agreeable, or the extreme opposite. As described by one European traveler, Hamilton's house was "small and ill-constructed, very much out of repair, and badly furnished." François-Alexandre-Frédéric, duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America* (London, 1800), 3:482–83.

⁵⁵ Rebecca [Lowndes] Stoddert to "My Dr Sister," Sept. 23, 1799, Rebecca Stoddert Papers, Library of Congress. Similarly, Philadelphian Thomas Cope wrote in his diary in 1805 that for a visiting friend "no plan had such powerful attractions for him as the Woodlands." A decade later, diarist Samuel Breck recorded, "Joseph Bonaparte. This Ex-King has been in Philada. lately, and visited the Woodlands a few days ago. He expressed himself much pleased with the botanick garden, walks, shrubbery, house, paintings, and prospect." *Philadelphia Merchant: The Diary of Thomas P. Cope, 1800–1851*, ed. Eliza Cope Harrison (South Bend, IN, 1978), 184; and "The Diary of Samuel Breck, 1814–1822," ed. Nicholas B. Wainwright, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 102 (1978): 480.

⁵⁶ See Betts, "Woodlands," Long, "Woodlands," and Jacobs, "Addendum to The Woodlands" for more detailed discussions of the design and construction of the house(s) at The Woodlands.

⁵⁷ Despite an ability to walk through the first-floor public rooms in a complete, roughly elliptical route, the jib door connections between the dining and drawing rooms on the north and their respective square cabinets on the south were probably relegated to service use, at least while guests were present. In 1979, Richard Betts noted the parallel and intersecting axes of public circulation. Betts, "Woodlands," 221.

⁵⁸ Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree*, 52–53.

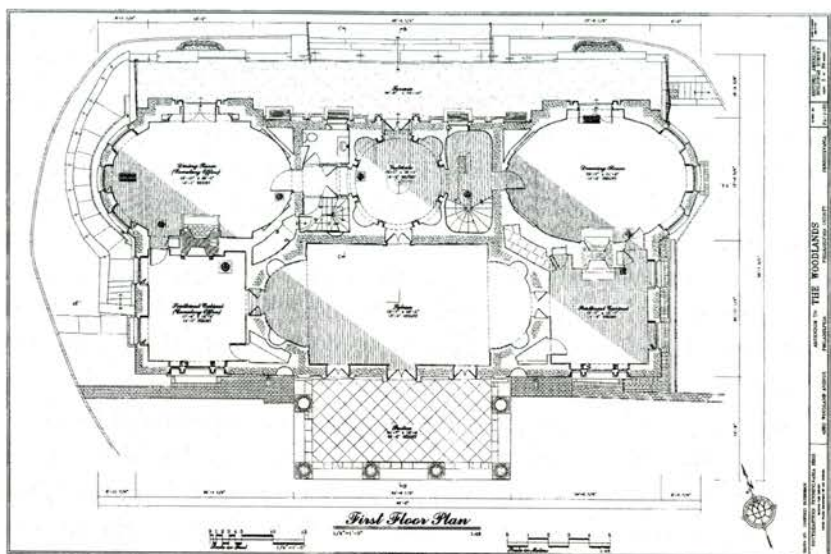


Fig. 5. First-floor plan, The Woodlands, ca. 1786–89. Courtney Gunderson, addendum to HABS No. PA-1125, sheet 3, 2003.

At his reconceived estate, Hamilton continued to vigorously develop an especially hospitable personality, opening his doors to what at times undoubtedly seemed like an endless stream of visitors.⁵⁹ Local Philadelphians and travelers alike recorded mostly approving, and sometimes highly flattering, opinions of their visits. One guest remarked in 1797, “No man . . . is happier to receive his friends, or entertains them better, than Mr. William Hamilton: he is a chearful man, a most excellent companion, and is in every respect the gentleman.”⁶⁰ Because he lived in a single location the entire year, over time William Hamilton’s genial and welcoming nature became more associated with the estate than did any triumphs in its planning and construction. His 1813 obituary afforded a fitting epitaph: “his noble mansion was for many years the resort of a very numerous circle of friends and acquaintances, attracted by the affability of his manners, and a frankness of hospitality, peculiar to himself, which made even strangers feel at once welcome, easy and happy in his society.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ See Rozbicki, *Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 157–58, for link between refinement and hospitality.

⁶⁰ Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels through the United States*, 3:482–83.

⁶¹ William Hamilton obituary.

Free from the tensions of the urban social scene, visitors to The Woodlands attended events of varying size and character given by Hamilton and members of his extended family.⁶² Invitations for dinner and tea at The Woodlands were, no doubt, common, as indicated by extant examples.⁶³ One family friend later reminisced that "he kept a hospitable house, entertained gentlemen frequently, and ladies occasionally."⁶⁴ Evidence for entertaining only men, a common eighteenth-century practice, at The Woodlands is supplied by a May 13, 1783, invitation requesting "the honor of Dr. Parke's company to partake of a bachelor's dinner on Tuesday."⁶⁵ Later accounts indicate a sustained level of entertaining after the neoclassical expansion. On May 30, 1795, Hamilton managed "a large party at dinner, principally Members of Congress."⁶⁶ As a host, rather than a player, he could keep abreast of the myriad personalities, discussion, and activities of Philadelphia's postrevolutionary leaders.⁶⁷ On a more regular and less formal basis, Hamilton frequently opened The Woodlands to visitors and was known to receive "every genteel stranger."⁶⁸

Much of Hamilton's hospitality manifested in large and small meals held in his dining room. As any person of his position, he owned a great deal of plate and matched glassware and dinnerware. Perhaps in preparation for a major dinner or party in January 1791, he purchased thirty plates, twenty-four glasses, and four decanters.⁶⁹ Even more than porcelain and

⁶² Relatively little evidence survives about how the Hamiltons used the house on a day-to-day basis. The most intriguing clues about the nonceremonial functions and usage of The Woodlands come from the extant service spaces in the cellar and attic and their sophisticated patterns of circulation. See James A. Jacobs, "Addendum to The Woodlands," HABS No. PA-1125, section I-B "Historical Context, Supporting Gentility: The Service Spaces at The Woodlands" (Historic American Buildings Survey [HABS], National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2002). For concepts related to the "everyday" and architecture, see Dell Upton, "Architecture in Everyday Life," *New Literary History* 33 (2002): 707-23; Steven Harris and Deborah Berke, eds., *Architecture of the Everyday* (New York, 1997).

⁶³ See Pemberton Family Papers, vols. 37 and 39, and the Dreer Collection for examples.

⁶⁴ *Recollections of Joshua Francis Fisher, Written in 1864*, ed. Sophia Cadwalader (Boston, 1929), 221.

⁶⁵ Pemberton Family Papers, vol. 39.

⁶⁶ Thomas Twining, *Travels in America 100 Years Ago* (New York, 1894), 162.

⁶⁷ This tendency continued throughout his life as Philadelphian Thomas Cope observed in 1808 that he dined at The Woodlands along with "a number of the members & some of the heads of [government] departments." *Diary of Thomas P. Cope*, ed. Harrison, 221.

⁶⁸ James Mease, *The Picture of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1811), 348.

⁶⁹ Account ledger entries for Jan. 20 and 21, 1791, Woodlands household accounts, 1791, George Smith Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

glassware, silver objects such as candlesticks, wine coasters, eating utensils, tea equipage, epergnes, and platters expressed good taste to guests. Gentility in America was more dependent on material show than in Europe, and, as with architecture, the country looked eagerly eastward for the newest luxury household goods.⁷⁰ While in England Hamilton purchased "some plate in the present taste," not only replacing older pieces with new, but also more than tripling his taxable quantity.⁷¹ Hamilton's new silver would have visually enhanced events in his dining room and elsewhere in the house's public spaces, which glittered with candlelight reflected from mirrored doors, window shutters, and wall panels.⁷² The mirrored surfaces at The Woodlands, like the polished silver plate, rendered a light-filled world in which Hamilton's uniquely shaped rooms surely seemed all the more dynamic to visitors and guests and generated favorable opinions about his aesthetic sensibilities.⁷³

The ritual and display inherent to the act of dining required extensive "behind-the-scenes" staging, particularly in the kitchen. Servants and their own, generally suppressed, circulation routes and work areas inside and outside the house provided the underpinnings for Hamilton's genteel life, and without their work none of his celebrated hospitality would have been possible.⁷⁴ Service functions took place in roughly one-half of the dwelling's interior area with most occurring in the cellar and in the attic, linked by a secondary stair. Of rarer note, these areas were very well

⁷⁰ Rozbicki, *Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 143.

⁷¹ Hamilton to Dr. Thomas Parke, Mar. 8, 1786, for quote. For a few consecutive years from 1779, Hamilton was taxed for sixty-four ounces of plate. In 1785 the assessment was for only twenty ounces. While possibly sold-off to help fund his trip to England or manage his uncle's debts, the two-thirds reduction of the earlier quantity likely stemmed from a wish to purchase new objects. In 1787, the year following his return, he was taxed for two hundred ounces of plate. See Pennsylvania tax assessment ledgers for Blockley Township, 1779 through 1787, located at the City of Philadelphia Municipal Archives.

⁷² One mirrored panel survives in a window shutter present in the southeast cabinet on the first floor. Hamilton was not the only Philadelphian to achieve such an effect. The drawing room in William and Anne Bingham's townhouse also featured "folding doors . . . covered with mirrors, which reflected the figures of the company." A portion of Samuel Breck's nineteenth-century memoir as quoted in Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 163–64. See Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 126–27, for more on the effect of light.

⁷³ The effect of the mirrors was also notable in the daytime. See Long, "Woodlands," 61–62. In one account, a visitor commented that the walls between the dining room bows were "fitted with mirrors, from near the floor to more than mans height, so that the whole cemicircle seems light." Drayton, diary entry for Nov. 2, 1806, 54, Drayton Hall.

⁷⁴ For more on the complex layering of space in estate houses of the gentry, see Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in *Material Life in America, 1600–1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston, 1988), 357–69.



Fig. 6. Passage between the vestibule and the dining room showing the service stair location and one of the two doors used to close off the space for staging purposes partially open. Joseph Elliott, addendum to HABS No. PA-1125-28, 2002.

finished with fully plastered walls and ceilings, paneled doors, architrave molding, and fireplace surrounds.

Located directly under the dining room, the kitchen featured all of the available domestic technology. The well-lighted space included a large cooking fireplace with a pot crane and adjacent oven and a built-in sink with a gravity drain to the exterior. A stove stood in the room's northeast corner, an item contained in relatively few eighteenth-century dwellings. Stoves appeared as precise French cooking methods became more prevalent among English and American households.⁷⁵ For ease of staging meals and screening family and guests from mundane prep activities, the first-floor passage between the entrance vestibule and the dining room could be closed-off by folding doors, allowing unfettered movement between the service stair, a pantry, and the dining room (fig. 6). A dumb-

⁷⁵ "Stove," *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape*, ed. Carl R. Lounsbury (1994; Charlottesville, VA, 1997), 357.

waiter located behind a jib door in the dining room's southwest corner furnished an additional serving aid during meals. These and other service provisions demonstrate the house's inherent complexity, which existed as much in its intricate separation of the servants and the served as in the much more visible public rooms.

The dining room and a similarly dimensioned drawing room balanced one another across a domed entrance vestibule on the house's north side. This arrangement followed contemporary trends in England where the rooms "reigned as king and queen" over the other domestic spaces, particularly during formal social events with men remaining in the dining room after a meal and women retiring to the drawing room.⁷⁶ Few details relate how the Hamiltons specifically utilized the oval-shaped drawing room at The Woodlands, although it likely acted as a general-purpose living room for both daily, family use and the entertainment of guests. The dining and drawing rooms probably saw the most frequent use, but the saloon was the house's most visually impressive (fig. 7). There was likely no domestic space in the city that rivaled William Hamilton's saloon in size, originality, and prospect. Saloons generally existed for the "formal reception and entertainment of guests." Often located at a house's core and receiving a great amount of air circulation, they were also places of refuge during the hot summer months.⁷⁷ A memoir from the mid-nineteenth century emphasizes the dual function at The Woodlands, where the saloon "was a noble room for dancing, and delightfully cool in summer."⁷⁸ However important Hamilton's saloon may have been for seasonal living and large social gatherings, it also functioned in another very important way by providing space for the display of art—a limited practice even among wealthy Americans.

No aspect of gentility imported by North Americans during the eighteenth century remained as singular as collecting art, and no consumable

⁷⁶ Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven, CT, 1978), 233.

⁷⁷ "Saloon, salon," *Illustrated Glossary*, 315.

⁷⁸ *Recollections of Joshua Francis Fisher*, ed. Cadwalader, 220. No documents have been found confirming that balls or large dances were held in this room, but evidence that Hamilton hosted large events at The Woodlands suggests use in this manner. Hamilton owned a piano by the 1780s, and additional musicians could have easily been brought out from Philadelphia. An individual account ledger records payments made to Godfrey Welzel for tuning Hamilton's "forte piano" once and sometimes twice a month from ca. 1786 through 1788. Woodlands household accounts, 1788, George Smith Collection.



Fig. 7. The saloon at The Woodlands, ca. 1786–89, looking west. The marble-floored niches in the hemicycle once contained classical sculpture and, in one, a cannon stove for heating the room. The mirrored doors and lunette and the wall sconces date from a 1981 restoration. Joseph Elliott, addendum to HABS No. PA-1125-41, 2002.

luxury was more expensive when considering function versus cost.⁷⁹ The Hamiltons were among a small group of Americans that thought about painting and sculpture in a serious although, when considering contemporary English collections, still modest manner. Significantly, it was not William Hamilton who inaugurated the family's forays into the art world, but rather his uncle. By the mid-eighteenth century, James Hamilton was already a patron of the arts. In 1752, he hired portrait painter John Wollaston—among the first English practitioners in the colonies—to

⁷⁹ Margaretta M. Lovell, "Painters and Their Customers: Aspects of Art and Money in Eighteenth-Century America," in *Of Consuming Interests*, 285–86. See also Angela B. Mack and J. Thomas Savage, "Reflections of Refinement: Portraits of Charlestonians at Home and Abroad," in *In Pursuit of Refinement*, 23–24.

create "2 half length Pictures."⁸⁰ He continued to support the careers of artists, even to the point of contributing money to the education of American expatriate Benjamin West, who in turn painted copies of works for free or reduced cost for Hamilton and other American benefactors.⁸¹

James Hamilton's portrait commissions to Wollaston and, in 1767, to Benjamin West followed the most common pattern of art patronage in eighteenth-century America. A desire to graphically mark significant family milestones and familial and societal position made painted portraits the most pervasive art form in colonial and postrevolutionary America.⁸² As lifelong bachelors, James and William Hamilton did not pursue two of the more common reasons for commissioning a portrait—marriages and births—but still had their own and those of family members painted. Well-known portraitist Charles Willson Peale, who studied under West, completed one of William Hamilton early in 1776.⁸³ After the Revolution on the eve of leaving for England, Hamilton instructed his steward to pay an unnamed male artist for the portraits of two of his nieces, although he qualified the request by observing that he was "sorry to say I saw no likeness in Nancys the last time I was at his Room."⁸⁴ The poor quality of Nancy's (Ann's) portrait and her favored status among siblings both likely contributed to Hamilton's decision to have them sit for a full-length double portrait by West while in London (cover).⁸⁵ West did not complete the portrait until well after her 1798 death and just before Hamilton's in 1813; in the process, he repainted the entire canvas with the exception of the heads.⁸⁶ Although not marking a

⁸⁰ Ledger entry, Oct. 20, 1752, James Hamilton cashbook, 1739–57, James Hamilton Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁸¹ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 40, 47, 49. James Hamilton both gifted and loaned money to West. A February 1770 letter from Hamilton to the Barclays, his London agents, suggested a desire to recoup some of the money following West's commercial success. Although pursuing repayment, Hamilton wanted it "without any vehement pressing" against West. James Hamilton to David and John Barclay, Feb. 20, 1770, James Hamilton Papers, letterbook, 1749–83.

⁸² Mack and Savage, "Reflections of Refinement," 24; Lovell, "Painters and Their Customers," 286–88.

⁸³ Charles Willson Peale diary entries for Jan. 22, 24, 26, 27, 1776, in *Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, vol. 1, ed. Lillian B. Miller (New Haven, CT, 1983), 170.

⁸⁴ Hamilton to Benjamin Hays Smith, Oct. 6, 1784, Society Collection.

⁸⁵ Hamilton had no nieces formally named "Nancy," and since it was frequently a nickname for women named "Ann," this instance likely refers to Ann Hamilton Lyle.

⁸⁶ Benjamin West to Robert Barclay, Sept. 5, 1810, Frank M. Etting Collection, Artists, 93, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The double portrait of William Hamilton and his niece Ann Hamilton Lyle by West was donated to The Historical Society of Pennsylvania by descendants and now hangs in the society's main reading room.

particular milestone in life, the completed work provides visual documentation of one of Hamilton's strongest emotional bonds.

Distinct from most of their contemporaries, by the time of James Hamilton's 1783 death, the Hamilton family had amassed a notable "picture" collection, apparently composed of more works than they needed or wanted. Just prior to his departure for England, Hamilton forwarded instructions to his steward regarding some objects at Bush Hill, telling him that "the two large pictures of Latona & the Rape of Proserpine now in the green House may be sold."⁸⁷ As they were stored in the greenhouse at Bush Hill, these "two large pictures" were already of little or no use to the Hamiltons and presumably had already been replaced with something better. Their sale also indicates William Hamilton did not need them at The Woodlands, alluding to the presence of another burgeoning family art collection. As early as 1776, he purchased his own copy of a Titian *Venus* made by Charles Willson Peale after an earlier copy by West.⁸⁸ Hamilton continued to expand his own holdings, even to the point of selling superfluous painted pieces, not for appreciation elsewhere, but for reuse of the canvas.⁸⁹

Within an established family and personal collecting tradition, William Hamilton surely considered where art would be displayed when planning the house's expansion in the 1780s. It has been suggested that portraits of James Hamilton, and later William Hamilton and Ann Hamilton Lyle, hung in the shallow niches on either side of the dining room's interior entry, a location previously occupied by an Adolph-Ulric Wertmüller copy of a Sir Godfrey Kneller portrait of Andrew Hamilton [I].⁹⁰ Hamilton placed a number of sculptural pieces in the saloon, executed both in-the-round as well as in bas relief. An early eighteenth-century description located a marble statue of Antinous in one hemicycle niche and "a beautiful group" of bronzes portraying "Apollo in pursuit of Daphne with Peneus at her feet, in a style worthy of the Grecian sculptors," across the room in the other.⁹¹ A contemporary diary entry noted

⁸⁷ Hamilton to Benjamin Hays Smith, Oct. 6, 1784, Society Collection.

⁸⁸ Charles Willson Peale diary entries for July 30 and Aug. 14, 1776, *Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale*, 1:191, 193.

⁸⁹ Hamilton to Benjamin Hays Smith, Nov. 7, 1792, George Smith Collection.

⁹⁰ *Recollections of Joshua Francis Fisher*, ed. Cadwalader, 221. This memoir mistakenly attributes the double portrait of William Hamilton and Ann Hamilton Lyle to "Stewart," likely referencing the portraitist Gilbert Stuart, who studied under West. Oldschool, "American Scenery," 505–6, for the earlier portrait.

⁹¹ Oldschool, "American Scenery," 506.



Fig. 8. The southeast square cabinet built as a “picture” gallery for William Hamilton’s large art collection. Joseph Elliott, addendum to HABS No. PA-1125-53, 2002.

the presence of a bas relief sculptural panel “so done with Lions” above one of the saloon’s doors.⁹²

The square “cabinets” flanking the saloon were heavily populated with paintings. Early on Hamilton envisioned one of these rooms, the southwest cabinet, as informal eating space, but by the end of his life it had also been given over to artistic display, further indicating the extensiveness of his art holdings.⁹³ Hamilton likely planned the southeast cabinet to display art from the beginning. Instead of plaster, he had the walls fitted with tightly laid boards (fig. 8). The upper portion, separated from the lower by a chair rail, was presumably covered in canvas or fabric and organized into units by means of Doric pilasters.⁹⁴ A description of the house, published in 1809, collectively noted the appearance of these rooms in this manner, remarking, “on every side the living canvas speaks.’

⁹² Drayton, diary entry for Nov. 2, 1806, 55, Drayton Hall.

⁹³ Hamilton to Benjamin Hays Smith, June 20, 1791, George Smith Collection, for reference to a “breakfast Parlour.”

⁹⁴ The board walls remain extant and ghosts of the pilasters that divided the finished wall into sections also survive.

The walls are decorated with the works of several of the ancient painters, from the Italian, Dutch, and Flemish schools, many of which are of great merit."⁹⁵ Named artists—Douw, Van Huysum, and Schudt—and mentioned schools correspond with works present in contemporary private collections located in Charleston, South Carolina, which in turn were based on earlier English trends.⁹⁶

The quantity of and, apparently, subject matter of pieces at The Woodlands forced Hamilton to hang some of it in rooms outside the house's public regions. Young Philadelphia socialite Harriet Manigault described two of the paintings encountered in 1814 on the house's second story while visiting her friends, William Hamilton's grandnieces and the daughters of Ann Hamilton Lyle. She commented that the life-sized painting of Venus in Andrew Hamilton [IV]'s room was "a most *disgusting* looking thing," and reflected that the "small Danae" in James Hamilton's room "frightful; she is on the point of receiving Jupiter in the shape of a *shower of gold*." They were, in Manigault's opinion, "very correctly concealed by . . . curtain[s]," and this concealment and their peripheral location indicates that the images, their symbolic meanings, or both may have been shocking, even bordering on unrefined.⁹⁷ Although viewed as appropriate for a private masculine domain, these paintings were neither meant for general nor necessarily feminine consumption; it is plausible that Manigault's viewing with her young friends was not a sanctioned activity.

The classical subject matter present in some of Hamilton's artwork underscores how art collecting, despite its expense and rarity in America, easily extended from another key aspect of genteel life: education. Familiarity with classical myths, themes, and learning structures was a central part of upper-class education for both men and women, an education whose largely nonpractical emphasis cultivated the mind, allowing for intelligent and witty conversation with other genteel people.⁹⁸ The

⁹⁵ Oldschool, "American Scenery," 506.

⁹⁶ Maurie McInnis, "Picture Mania: Collectors and Collecting in Charleston," in *In Pursuit of Refinement*, 39.

⁹⁷ Harriet Manigault, *The Diary of Harriet Manigault, 1813–1816* (Rockland, ME, [1976]), 61 (Nov. 25, 1814). This painting was a copy of a much larger version by Adolph-Ulric Wertmüller, which, in 1795 or shortly thereafter, caused a great stir as it was the "first nude to exhibited in Philadelphia." See Beatrice B. Garvan, *Federal Philadelphia, 1785–1825: The Athens of the Western World* (Philadelphia, 1987), 81–82.

⁹⁸ For more on polite conversation, see Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 83–89.

importance of classical themes to the literal and figurative construction of eighteenth-century American life has been largely lost to less humanistic interpretations of history over the past two hundred years.⁹⁹ In the eighteenth century, a classical education was synonymous with refinement. Hamilton's art objects were not only an outgrowth of his own cultivation, but could also be used to evaluate quickly the level of understanding held by his guests. The link between classicism and refinement as embodied by William Hamilton's estate appeared in an 1809 poem in which the writer feels that she should never have to visit Rome if she could "often wander" The Woodlands. The poet reflected, "Then, while within the *Woodland's* fair domain, / The Muses rove, and Classic pleasures reign; / For distant climes no longer will I sigh, / No longer wish to distant realms to fly."¹⁰⁰ This allusion contributed to a dreamy vision of The Woodlands at the pinnacle of its fully developed state.

Upon William Hamilton's death, the estate passed to his nephew James Hamilton [II]. Accounts of life at The Woodlands in the four years before James's untimely passing indicate that he and other resident family members wished to live in a manner much like William before them.¹⁰¹ After his 1817 death, social activity slowed. An 1820 diary entry made by Samuel Breck, a family friend and neighbor, commented that the estate's physical upkeep and associated lifestyle had begun to tax the Hamilton family, and they desired to divest themselves of the still-grand property.¹⁰² Eight years later, The Woodlands was sold out of the family, its contents scattered, and the coordinated identity of its owner-creator and the landscape passed into obscurity. During decades straddling the nation's formation, William Hamilton's individuality gave shape to an exceptional place. By directing most of his intellect and ambition into the creation and recreation of The Woodlands, he effectively sidestepped most of the ill effects of political turmoil, economic hardship, and social restructuring that defined the age. In addition to keeping himself outside of volatile areas of participation, in choosing to focus his energies on refinement, he excelled in an area of contemporary culture that remained relevant and

⁹⁹ John C. Shields, *The American Aeneas: Classical Origins of the American Self* (Knoxville, TN, 2001), ix–xii.

¹⁰⁰ Laura, "For the Port Folio: The Woodlands," *Port Folio* 1 (1809): 180–81.

¹⁰¹ See "Diary of Samuel Breck," ed. Wainwright, 469–508, and multiple entries in Manigault, *Diary of Harriet Manigault*.

¹⁰² "Diary of Samuel Breck," ed. Wainwright, 498–99.

constant during his entire life. Through his work and activities at The Woodlands, Hamilton advanced the arts, sciences, and sociability in an unselfish way that provided decades of enjoyment and education for locals and visitors alike.

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