



Wells-Thorn House Kitchen, Historic Deerfield

The Wells-Thorn House Kitchen installed as a room for cooking, eating, working, and sleeping as it would have appeared c. 1725. The Wells-Thorn House at Historic Deerfield presents period rooms depicting the lifestyle of Deerfield residents in a progression from the early days of 1725 through the high-style of the 1850s. The current house dates from 1747.

PHOTO ESSAY

**Furnishing the Frontier:
The Material World of the
Connecticut River Valley, 1680 – 1720**

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Abstract: *At the end of the seventeenth century, Deerfield, Massachusetts, bore little resemblance to what is here today. There were fewer than fifty families living in small houses, of one or two rooms with a garret above, surrounded by a protective stockade. English colonists migrated to western Massachusetts in the 1600s, establishing Springfield to the south in 1636 and Deerfield in the north in 1669. This photo essay explores the lives of these early English settlers through the objects they owned and provides a glimpse of the Connecticut River Valley when it was on the English frontier.*

The region's early settlers sought economic opportunity. Many New England towns were running short of land for the next generation of farmers. New towns such as Deerfield were created to meet this need. Most settlers owned sparsely furnished homes that served as living space as well as storage for crops, farming tools, and trade goods such as furs, lumber, pitch, and barrel staves. Inventories of household possessions indicate that most inhabitants owned no more than a few articles of clothing and some utilitarian items, such as one or two low bedsteads enclosed within curtains hung from the rafters, inexpensive ceramics such as earthenware pots, and metal wares including iron skillets, pewter plates, and brass

kettles. Only the wealthiest owned luxury items such as a clock or a set of silver spoons.

Few household objects have survived from this early time. Judged by modern sensibilities, most of them may seem unremarkable, yet their preservation marks them as the cherished possessions of their original owners and of generations that followed. The authors of the accompanying text in this photo essay are staff members at Historic Deerfield. Bosse is the librarian and curator of maps. Lane is the curator of furniture. Lange is the curatorial department chair and the curator of historic interiors. And Zea is president of Historic Deerfield.

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Pair of Great Chairs, possibly Springfield, Massachusetts, c. 1680. Ash and modern rush seats. Museum Collections Fund, 2006.4.1,2.

Reserved for the use of male heads of the household and guests of equal or higher standing, great chairs served two purposes: as seating and as a symbol of the sitter's status. The only matched pair known to have survived together from seventeenth-century colonial America, these chairs were acquired from descendants of the Bliss family in Longmeadow, Massachusetts. A wood turner probably made them as part of a larger set that may have included ten or twelve side chairs, all of which would have been supplied with plump, down-filled cushions.



Previous page:

Great Chair, Hartford County, Connecticut, or Hampshire County, Massachusetts, c. 1680. Ash and modern rush seat. John W. and Christiana G.P. Batdorf Fund, 2003.33.

A wood turner fashioned all three “great chairs” from freshly cut (greenwood, or tree-wet) ash. He turned the leg posts and stretchers on a foot-operated spring-lathe, shaped the seat rails with a spoke-shave (a knife designed for shaping or smoothing wooden rods and spokes) and attached the frame components with round mortise-and-tenon joints.

The use of horizontal slats in place of turned spindles for the back was an alternative design choice that probably did not reflect a significant price reduction, given the labor required to make the slats. The maker cut greenwood ash into thin, arched boards and either secured them to a bending clamp or inserted them into a bending rack and let them dry to shape. He then shaved them smooth and fit them into narrow mortises cut in the rear posts. The simplified turnings on the rear posts, just above the seat rail, are distinctive decorative features of turned seating furniture from the Connecticut River Valley.

Facing page:

Side Chair, London, England, c. 1700. Beech and modern cane seat. 0914.

When a member of the Stebbins family first placed a set of six, ten or perhaps even twelve cane chairs, including this example, in the best parlor of his Deerfield home, he made a dramatic fashion statement that set a new standard for the neighborhood. Although the set was later divided, this example remained in Deerfield; a nineteenth-century descendant replaced the side and bottom rails of the back with parts carved to evoke the original. These repairs underscore the surprising fragility of the form. They also suggest that the owner sought to preserve the chair not only for its aesthetic appeal, but perhaps also for its association with the family’s, and the town’s, past.





Caudle Cup, made by William Pollard (1690-1746), engraved on base, “H*Beamon,” Boston, Massachusetts, c. 1720. Silver. Museum Collections Fund, 97.60.6.

Caudle cups are deep drinking vessels that had two handles and, generally, a cover. This particular cup was either the gift or legacy of the estate of Hannah Beaman (c. 1646-1739) to the First Church of Deerfield. Puritans celebrated communion four to six times a year using domestic vessels—beakers, cups, and tankards—rather than chalices of the ecclesiastical traditions that they had rejected.

Beaman, Deerfield’s first schoolmistress and one of the captives taken to Canada in 1704, never had children. Like some other childless benefactors of the First Church of Deerfield, she chose a piece of silver as a way of being remembered in the community.



Plate, London, Bristol, or Brislington, England, 1675-1695. Tin-glazed earthenware (delftware) decorated in cobalt blue and manganese purple. Gift of Reginald and Rachel French, 95.029.2.

The frontier nature of the early towns of western Massachusetts and central Connecticut, and the limited resources of many inhabitants, did not encourage ownership of imported ceramics. Yet small numbers of delftwares—so named because they originated in the city of Delft in southwest Holland—from the earliest period of settlement in the Connecticut River Valley do survive. The delftware or tin-glazed earthenware industry developed in England in the late sixteenth century, and often imitated the decorative motifs and color of more expensive Chinese export porcelains. The image of a Chinese man seated among rocks was a popular one on delftwares of the late seventeenth century. This plate has a history of ownership in the Smith family of Hadley, Massachusetts.



Gallipot, probably London, England, 1700-1725. Tin glazed earthenware decorated in cobalt blue. Gift of Elizabeth Fuller, 65.180.

This jar descended in the family of Dr. Thomas Williams (1718-1775) of Deerfield. Made throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gallipots were used extensively for medical preparations before labeled drug jars began to appear. Although associated with doctors and apothecaries until the late eighteenth century, they were also the ideal general-purpose storage containers for such items as groceries and pigments, and are frequently mentioned in cooking and recipe books. Similar gallipot fragments have been found in excavations in London and throughout the colonies, including Virginia, Connecticut, Maine, and Massachusetts. A “gallipot” was listed among the household possessions in the inventory of Thomas Wells (1652-1691) of Deerfield.



Cup, The Midlands, England, 1700-1720. Slip-decorated earthenware. 68.016.

Slip-decorated earthenware, or slipware, was a type of pottery decorated with various colors of watered-down clay (slip) and then glazed. These items found use as inexpensive, imported vessels for household purposes such as food storage, preparation, and service. A wide range of these wares were sold throughout Britain and to the colonies, and have been found at excavations throughout New England. Utilitarian slipwares persisted on the English ceramic market; shards of this type of pottery dating to c. 1760 were found in the excavation of Dr. Thomas Williams's (1718-1775) privy pit in Deerfield. An old paper label with this cup reads, "Slip ware mug used in the Old Cushing House, Kingston, Mass. House built in 1699. Mr. Cushing was the first Ship Builder of the Pilgrim Colony."



Wine Bottle, England, 1700-1720. Dark olive green glass. 1593.

In the early seventeenth century, English glassmakers perfected a dark olive or “black” glass that was suitable for making bottles. The dark color of the glass (a result of iron impurities in the sand source and the sulfurous fumes from the coal to fire the glass furnace) protected the contents from spoilage. “Wine bottle” was a generic term, for such bottles held beer, distilled liquors, fortified wines, and a variety of spirits. Two glass bottles were listed in the inventory of Benjamin Barrett of Deerfield, who died in 1690.



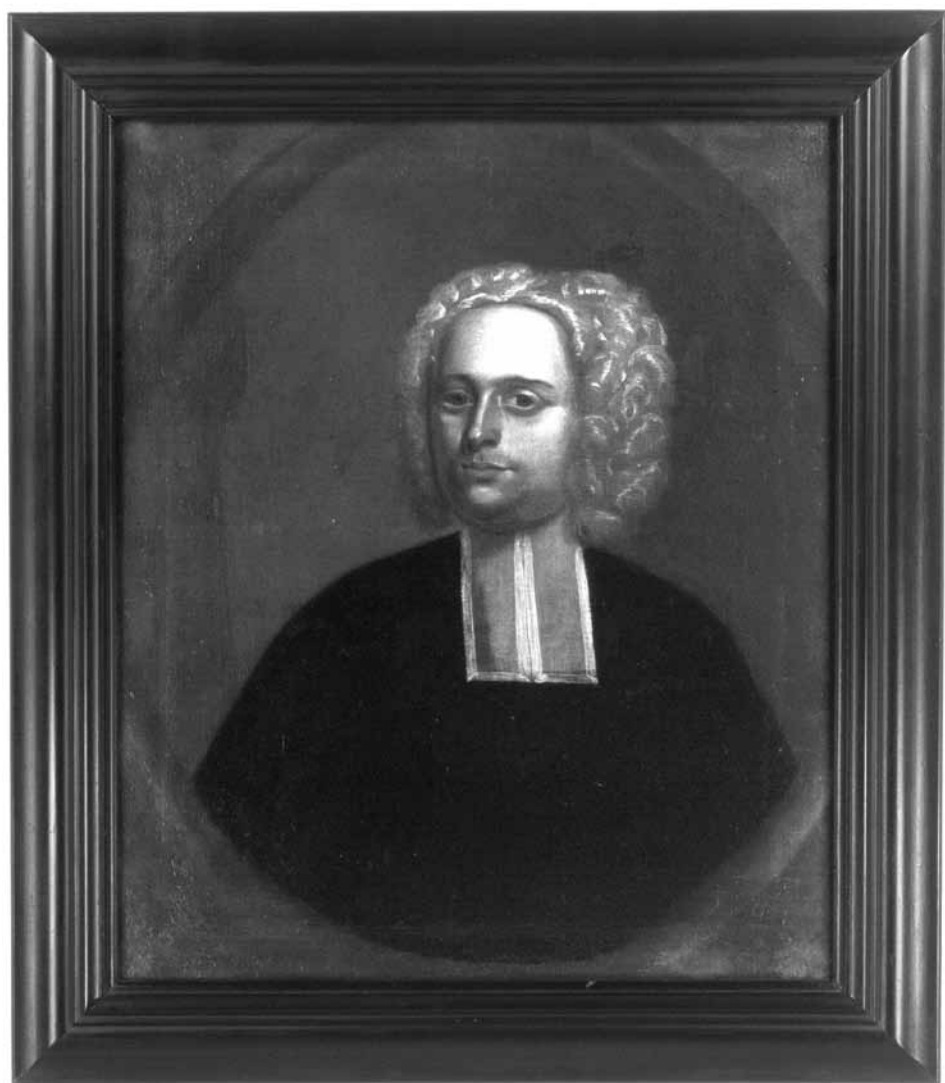
Dagger, England, 1640-1670. Steel and cast iron. 64.328.

This fragment of a dagger is typical of the small military edge weapons (any weapon used to break human flesh) used in New England. Missing pieces from the dagger are its leather covered wooden grip, and perhaps a crosspiece next to the blade. The feature that identifies this dagger as a military weapon is the heavy cast iron pommel, or enlarged knob on the dagger's hilt, similar to those seen on swords. The spine of the blade is reinforced by a distinct ridge, and the blade tapers across its width toward the single sharp edge. Ordinarily, daggers were used with swords to fend off blows of an opponent, and only rarely used for stabbing. This fragment was found at Bloody Brook in South Deerfield.

Portrait: The Reverend John Williams, Boston, Massachusetts, c. 1707. Oil on canvas. Mr. and Mrs. Hugh B. Vanderbilt Fund for Curatorial Acquisitions, 80.015.

John Williams (1664-1729) was early Deerfield's spiritual and intellectual leader, prepared by a Harvard education and his social connections for the power structure of Massachusetts. Williams was taken to Canada as a captive with many of his congregation after the 1704 attack on Deerfield. Following a prisoner exchange, Williams returned to Boston in late 1706 and published a book about his captivity, *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion* (Boston, 1707) and commissioned this portrait, perhaps from Nehemiah Partridge (1683-c.1737). John Williams' first wife, Eunice Mather, was killed immediately after the 1704 attack; he married Abigail Allen Bissell (1673-1754) in September 1707.

Although there is no definitive proof that this is a portrait of the "Redeemed Captive," a typewritten label on the back of the canvas identifies the sitter as the Reverend John Williams, and the auctioneers noted it as the property of a local collector who had found it in the attic of a family with roots in Deerfield.



Book: *Acta Synodi Nationalis, Synod of Dort, Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 1620.* Henry N. Flynt Library, Historic Deerfield.

Religion played a central role in the lives of many early New Englanders, who valued literacy in order to read the Bible and theological texts. These proceedings of a council of the Dutch Reformed Church addressed a schism between followers of the teachings of John Calvin and Jacobus Arminius. Four generations of Deerfield's Williams family owned and signed the book: the Reverend John Williams, dated 1704; the Reverend Warham Williams, 1721; Charles Kilborn Williams, 1847, and his grandson, also named Charles Kilborn Williams, 1877. Missing from this list of signatories, but who presumably owned the book as well, is the Rev. Samuel Williams, son of Warham and father of the elder Charles K. Williams. A note laid in the volume, signed "C.K. Williams," states that Deacon William Park of Roxbury, Massachusetts, once owned the book and shared it with the Reverend Richard Mather, grandfather of Cotton Mather. The book's descent in the Williams family can be explained by the fact that William Park's daughter, Theoda, was the mother of the Reverend John Williams.

*Wm Williams Liber 1725
Joh Williams his Book 1704*

ACTA Ch Williams 1847

**S Y N O D I
N A T I O N A L I S,
In nomine Domini nostri
IESU CHRISTI,**

Autoritate Charles Kilborn Williams.

**D D. O R D I N V M
G E N E R A L I V M F O E D E R A T I
B E L G I I P R O V I N C I A R U M,
D O R D R E C H T I
H A B I T Æ**

1877.

ANNO MDCCCXVIII ET MDCCCXIX.

Accedunt Plenissima, de Quingue Articulis, Theologorum Indicia.



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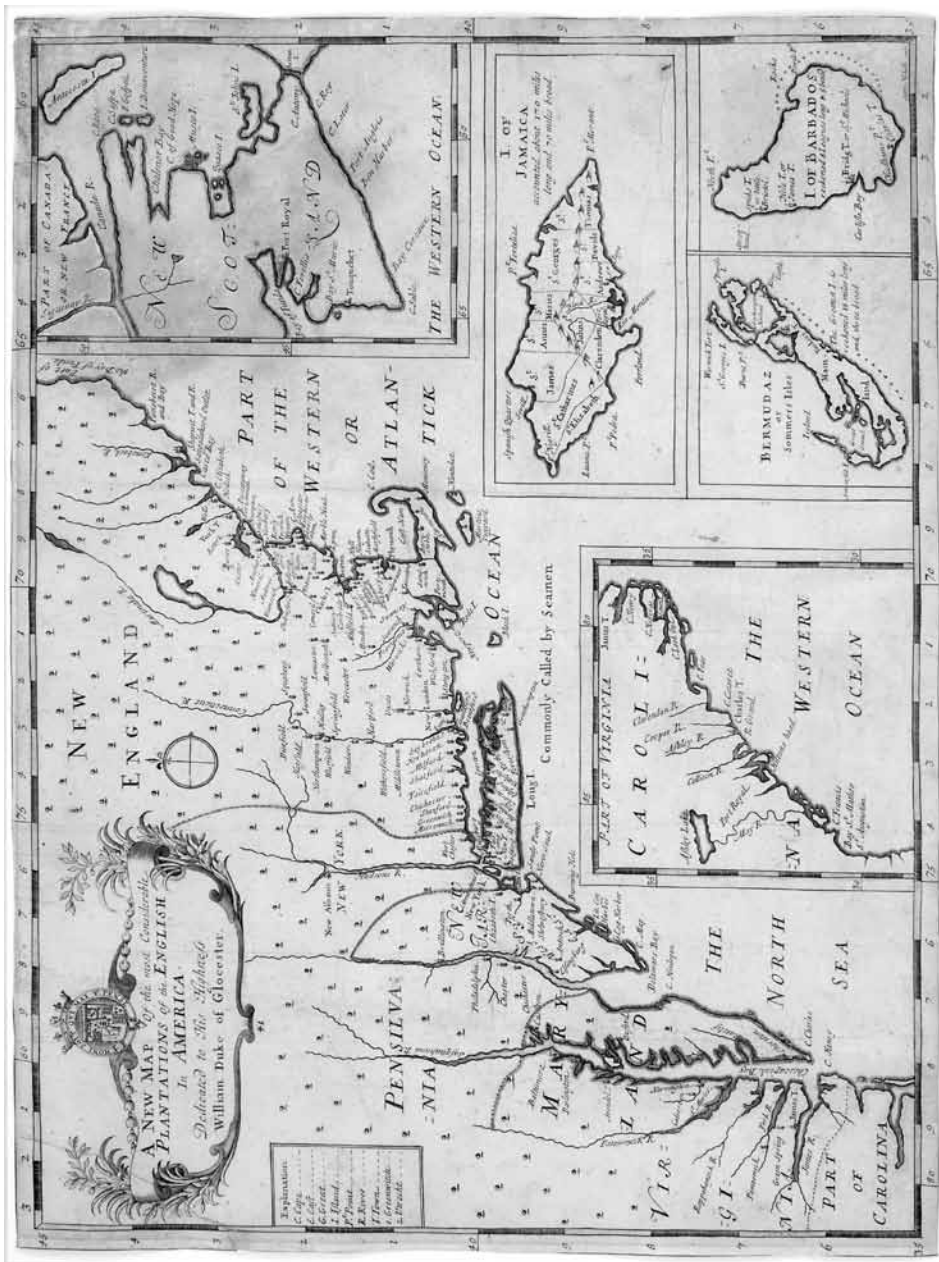
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Map: *A New Map of the Most Considerable Plantations of the English in America Dedicated to his Highness William Duke of Gloucester*, Edward Wells (1667-1727), cartographer; Sutton Nicholls (fl. 1680-1740), engraver, Oxford, England, 1700. Published in *A New Sett of Maps both of Antient and Present Geography*. The Albert and June Lauzon Collection, gift of Mrs. June Lauzon, 96.044.

Edward Wells, an academic geographer and mathematician, taught at Christ Church College, Oxford, where William, Duke of Gloucester, was his student. Wells dedicated his map to the Duke, the heir of Queen Anne. Wells drew on Dutch, French, and English sources to compile his map, which places New England in the context of other American colonies (including England's island holdings and the Atlantic coast from Canada to St. Augustine). The map depicts settlement in the Connecticut River Valley from "Saybroke" (Saybrook, Connecticut) to "Squaheeg" (Northfield, Massachusetts). Deerfield's exposed location on New England's northwest frontier is clearly seen.

