*Research*

# "Virginia Needs Living Heroes": Historic Preservation in the Progressive Era

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JUST OVER TWENTY YEARS AGO social historian J. C. Furnas dismissed late nineteenth-century antiquarians and preservationists as "cults of quill pen and corner cupboard" composed of "atavistic" old ladies.[1] Much in the same vein, Richard Hofstadter scoffed at the work of the era's patriotic and genealogical societies. Because they had lost status in modern America, he said, they exhumed the "family glories of the past."[2] Historians largely echoed their opinions and discounted the value of one generation protecting the artifacts of its forebears. Their response was understandable during the mid-twentieth century, when urban renewal altered city landscapes and "new and improved" were the buzzwords of Madison Avenue marketing. Historians during this period seemed unaware of the well-stated rationale of earlier Virginia preservationists: "We cherish our

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1. J. C. Furnas, *The Americans: A Social History of the United States, 1587–1914* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), 604.
2. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 139.



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*past* for the sake of our *future,* so that while preserving the one we are building the other for ages yet to come."[3]

In 1889 tradition-minded Virginians, including many of the state's most prominent families, formed the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA), the first statewide preservation organization in the United States. During its first quarter century, APVA acquired a range of buildings from an old debtors' prison to Jamestown's colonial ruins.[4] Recent interpreters of APVA have added little to the caricature of antiquarians drawn by Furnas and Hofstadter of a brightly plumed ostrich hiding its head in the sand amidst the general turbulence of late nineteenth-century America. Charles B. Hosmer, Jr. pictured these Virginians as socialites and amateurs who failed to muster adequate energies and expertise in their preservation work.[5] Karal Ann Marling, on the other hand, saw the declining status, ancestral worship, and feminine domesticity of these Virginians as the fuel which ignited the engine of preservation.[6] Neither Hosmer nor Marling, however, assessed APVA work in the context of Virginia's storm and stress after the Civil War. Surely these Virginians did love their society balls, and their technical skills reflected the day's relative backwardness. But their preservation work should not be dismissed simply because it entailed more cultural education than architectural conservation, or because it seemed to them to have little relevance to present or future.[7]

After the havoc wreaked by the Civil War and Reconstruction, Virginia preservationists strove to rebuild their war-torn society upon its antebellum foundations. Historic buildings became symbols of revered and ancient ways. Preservationists used them as metaphors to focus their energies and to express customary values.[8] In the process, early preserva-

3. Quoted in James M. Lindgren, " 'For the Sake of Our Future': The Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and the Regeneration of Traditionalism," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 97 (January 1989), 48.

4. During this quarter century APVA also acquired Williamsburg's Powder Horn, Mary Washington's Fredericksburg home, John Marshall's house in Richmond, a colonial-era government complex in Eastville, the Old Stone House in Richmond, the Rising Sun Tavern in Fredericksburg, and a twenty-two-acre section of Jamestown Island containing the ruins of the church and its graveyard.

5. Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 67–68.

6. Karal Ann Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876–1986* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 91–93; James M. Lindgren, *"Pater Patriae:* George Washington as Symbol and Artifact," *American Quarterly* 41 (December 1989), 705–13.

7. Although David Lowenthal says nothing about APVA, he does hit the mark when he suggests that the past can be used to change the present and create a different future. Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 27, 325–26.

8. Little in the current literature on preservation assesses buildings as symbols or preservationists as active cultural agents. Cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz reminds us, however, that culture should be studied through its semiotic context. "Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun," Geertz argues. Culture represents those webs, and it is articulated through man's behavior. Artifacts resultantly "draw their

tionists helped to restore a society in which elites held hierarchical sway over poor whites and African-Americans. They protected as well such "traditional" values as the Protestant work ethic, feminine domesticity, and the sanctity of private property.[9] In so doing, preservationists worked to make traditionalism a hegemonic force which would set the cultural code of future Virginians.[10]

The Old Dominion's elite and middle-class women shepherded traditionalism and faithfully subscribed to the tenets of "true womanhood." Throughout much of the nation, and the ladies who preserved Mount Vernon best illustrate the point, women led the preservationist cause. After the Civil War, southern women extended the bounds of their domestic sphere by caring for burial grounds, aiding their churches, and working for the moral reform of society. Whereas southern women generally focused on the legacy of the Confederacy, Virginia ladies cast their eyes as well on the material heritage of the colonial and revolutionary periods. Those historic buildings captured their attention largely as a means to uplift society. They would be used to teach virtue, refinement, and patriotism.[11]

Male society largely regarded historic preservation as women's work, but men lent their energies, as they did through APVA's Gentlemen's Advisory Board, to ensure that traditionalism would counter even greater foes outside of the home. These gentlemen politicized historic preservation and used it as a weapon in the battles that accompanied industrialism, urbanism, and nationalism. In the tense years before the Civil War, for example, Edward Everett used the memories associated with George Washington's home as a foil to attack fire-eating politicians, immigrant-

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meaning from the role they play. . .in an ongoing pattern of life, not from any intrinsic relationship they bear to one another." What preservationists conserve primarily gains importance, therefore, through the act of preservation and popularization. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5, 7. See also Henry Glassie, "Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifact's Place in American Studies," in Robert Blair St. George, ed., *Material Life in America, 1600–1860* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 63–92.

9. "Traditional," of course, is an arbitrary term. As Daniel Rogers has shown, the Protestant work ethic evolved considerably in the nineteenth century. Similarly, feminine domesticity paralleled the rise of industrial capitalism and its bourgeoisie. Daniel T. Rogers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966), 151–74.

10. Raymond H. Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored: An Interpretation of the Progressive Impulse, 1870–1930* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968); T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90 (June 1985), 567–93.

11. Welter, "Cult of True Womanhood"; Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840–1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830–1930* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

based political machines, and conniving parvenus.[12] Thomas Nelson Page and his fellow APVA advisers would similarly use the example of John Marshall's home or ancient Williamsburg as they condemned populists, socialists, and other critics of traditionalism. Gentlemen preservationists, and to a lesser extent their working-class underlings, commonly wielded historical symbols in their conflicts with contemporary adversaries.[13]

Virginia traditionalism faced its most severe crisis after the collapse of the Confederacy and the advent of Reconstruction. Lyon Gardiner Tyler, son of a United States president, experienced the postwar trauma and led the preservation campaign in Williamsburg, the birthplace of APVA. "The calamity was overwhelming," the president of the College of William and Mary wrote. "As a result, the past was severed from the present, the people who survived went about in a stunned condition. After a little, they came to their consciousness, only to face a struggle for self-preservation against reconstruction and negro domination, foisted upon them by their merciless conquerors."[14] Like most white supremacists, J. L. M. Curry, an influential educator and APVA adviser, condemned "the enthusiasm of fanatics" who espoused reconstruction politics.[15] APVA founder Cynthia Coleman, a descendant of the First Families of Virginia (FFVs), cringed at the sight of black Virginians exercising their new-found freedoms. Accustomed to white dominance and black deference, she deplored "the way in which the miserable negroes behave now about everything we hold sacred, or attach any sentiment to."[16]

The rise of the Readjuster Party, a democratic coalition which included once powerless Virginians, fully revealed the collapse of such Virginia traditions as elite leadership, black subservience, and legal conservatism. Voted into office by poor whites and blacks, the Readjusters dramatically confronted the customs which had shaped the Old Dominion. In Wil-

12. George B. Forgie, *Patricide in a House Divided: A Psychological Interpretation of Lincoln and His Age* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 159–99; Wallace Evan Davies, *Patriotism on Parade: The Story of Veterans' and Hereditary Organizations in America, 1783–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955).

13. Philip S. Foner, ed., *We, the Other People: Alternative Declarations of Independence by Labor Groups, Farmers, Woman's Rights Advocates, Socialists, and Blacks, 1829–1975* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976); Philip S. Foner and Rheinhard Schultz, *The Other America: Art and the Labour Movement in the United States* (West Nyack, N.Y.: Journeyman Press, 1985); Philip S. Foner, *American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975).

14. Lyon G. Tyler, *Virginia Principles* (Richmond, 1928), 1; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

15. J. L. M. Curry, "Causes of the Power and Prosperity of the United States," oration June 27, 1889, 26–27, Curry Papers II–10, Library of Congress; Jessie Pearl Rice, *J. L. M. Curry: Southerner, Statesman, and Educator* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1949). George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 256–62.

16. Cynthia Coleman to George [P. Coleman], February 26, 1884, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Box 57, College of William and Mary; James M. Lindgren, " 'Whatever is Un-Virginian Is Wrong': The APVA's Sense of the Old Dominion," *Virginia Cavalcade* 38 (Winter 1989), 112–23; Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865–1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

liamsburg, for example, African-Americans comprised half the town's population, supported the Readjuster ticket, and inaugurated what they hoped would become new traditions. On January 1 they regularly flaunted their freedom by holding a parade on Duke of Gloucester Street to honor Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation. Riding in brightly decorated wagons or on horseback, the celebrants explicity challenged the elite-defined traditions and identity of the old town. Fifty miles away in Richmond, William Wirt Henry, grandson of the "Give Me Liberty, or Give Me Death" patriot, attacked the Readjusters in the State Senate. Evoking his grandfather's legacy, he said, "I trust that some of the same fire which kindled in his breast when pressed by the heel of tyranny lingers in mine, and surely no people ever suffered more galling tyranny" than Virginians under the Readjusters.[17] APVA subsequently preserved historic sites which directly repudiated the Readjusters. Whether it was the debtor's prison in Eastville or John Marshall's Richmond home, Virginians learned that elected legislatures could not violate written constitutions or ignore contracted debt.

Workers' unions and their counterculture similarly challenged traditionalism. Emboldened by the success of radicalism in Richmond, the Knights of Labor even held its national assembly there in 1885. On that occasion William Mullen, a Virginia labor leader, presented a gavel to Grand Master Terrence Powderly. Crafted from three pieces of wood, the gavel symbolically revealed the Knights' reading of history. One piece was taken from the hall where Patrick Henry gave his "Give Me Liberty" address, another from a tree at Yorktown, and a third from the ruin of Richmond's notorious Confederate prison where, Mullen said, "Patriotic sons of our common country were confined . . . for being engaged in a struggle to liberate a race of people from the galling yoke of slavery." Whereas the Civil War represented America's "second Revolution" and a war against the slave-power conspiracy, Powderly and the Knights would use the gavel to bring justice to America through a "third revolution"—one to liberate the "slaves of monopoly and oppression" under industrial capitalism.[18] The emerging Populist movement would add weight to the Knights' attack.

Preservationists often traced these late nineteenth-century revolts directly to the French Revolution.[19] Reverend Beverly Dandridge Tucker,

17. William Wirt Henry, "Speech of William Wirt Henry," *The State*, December 20, 1879, Henry Papers, Virginia Historical Society. Henry incidentally was named after the eulogizing biographer who embellished Patrick Henry's reputation, as did Mason Weems that of George Washington, and created the "Give Me Liberty" address. Bernard Mayo, *Myths and Men: Patrick Henry, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1959), 18.

18. Quoted in Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 159, 163, 167, 175; Michael B. Chesson, *Richmond After the War, 1865–1890* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1981).

19. Traditionalists equally blamed the Paris Commune (1871) for robbing them of their social stability. Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877–1919* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1987), 17–24.

an adviser to Norfolk preservationists, praised APVA's work precisely because such "reverence for the past" was needed to reverse the revolutionary momentum. He condemned revolutionaries who tried "to uproot everything which men held sacred, [and] to break with the past."[20] Similarly, Edward Virginius Valentine, APVA adviser and sculptor of the Confederacy's Lost Cause, lamented the rise of those "radical theories of French philosophy" which had sprouted such modern ills as woman's suffrage, black rights, and popular-class socialism.[21]

Tradition-minded Virginians equally abhorred the culture of New York City and its unbridled materialism. APVA president Belle Bryan called New York City a den of immorality, warning her members that its gilded culture encouraged "sordid aggrandisement and selfish pleasures."[22] Her husband Joseph, though a prominent New South capitalist and influential publisher, attacked its Jay Goulds who worshiped mammon and thought that "money is everything."[23] Their materialism, privatism, and ruthless individualism ran counter to Virginia's customary noblesse oblige and public service. Whether in its published pamphlets, public addresses, or elaborate ceremonies, APVA consequently pictured self-sacrificing Virginians who put duty and honor before material gain or individual comfort as they shaped Virginia and the nation.

For that reason, Rev. William A. R. Goodwin spent long years trying to restore Williamsburg. Infatuated with the town's history and trapped by its myths, Goodwin wanted to preserve "the spirit of the days of long ago" which would "illumine the judgment of those who have entered upon this rich inheritance of the past and lead them to. . .resist the spirit of ruthless innovation."[24] Later Goodwin used the example of Williamsburg as he preached the social gospel. Condemning the excesses of industrial capitalism and modernism, he lamented that "civilization has grown materialistic, and greedy, and full of lust and ambition." He feared that "America is imperiled by the immorality which grows out of fatigue, and from the weariness of pursuit after false gods."[25] The preservation of Williamsburg,

20. Reverend Beverly Dandridge Tucker, "The Continuity of the Life of the Church," in Rev. Wm. A. R. Goodwin, *Bruton Parish Church and Its Historic Environment* (Petersburg, Va.: Franklin Press, 1907), 149.

21. Edward V. Valentine, "Woman's Suffrage," n.d., Valentine Articles, Valentine Museum, Richmond, Va.

22. Isobel Bryan, "Report of the President for 1903," *Year Book of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, 1901–1904* (Richmond: Wm. Ellis Jones, 1905), 7.

23. Joseph Bryan quoted in John Stewart Bryan, *Joseph Bryan: His Times, His Family, His Friends* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1935), 259; James M. Lindgren, " 'First and Foremost a Virginian': Joseph Bryan and the New South Economy," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 96 (April 1988), 157–80.

24. Goodwin, *Bruton Parish Church Restored,* 33; Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 11–73.

25. Rev. Wm. A. R. Goodwin, *The Church Enchained* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1916), 19, 21, 36, 56, 67.

Goodwin thought, would create a large-scale museum where Americans could recapture their lost traditions and innocence.

Preservationists also worried that northern decadence had spread to the South. Thomas Nelson Page, an FFV who often spoke at APVA rallies, warned that it was eroding the foundations of traditionalism. "This hastening to be rich," said the popular novelist, "is a thing which is destroying the true spirit of our race."[26] As it was, New South excesses did lead to the demolition of historic landmarks, the abandonment of old neighborhoods, and skepticism toward traditional ways. John Lesslie Hall, professor of literature and history at the College of William and Mary, told an APVA audience in 1895 that "the utilitarian spirit of the age may hinder us in our [preservation] efforts. Many may ask, why not expend this time and money in building railroads? For such, we have no argument. . . . These scoffers are aesthetically dead. They can no more understand our feelings than can the unregenerate man comprehend the things of the spirit."[27]

What APVA proposed was not the stoppage of progress, but a regeneration of traditions which would redirect both Virginia and American society. Sounding much like Brooks Adams, Cynthia Coleman nervously watched the material wealth and overseas empire of the United States expand in the late nineteenth century. She warned, "It is a law of nature, that the rising grandeur and opulence of a nation must be balanced by a decay of its heroic virtue." She believed that the wealth and power of the North particularly led to these flaccid and gilded ways. Decay and expansionism seemed intertwined in her estimation. "As governments extend their dominion either by conquest, colonization, or annexation," she predicted at the time the United States was acquiring its colonies, "there is an increase of wealth, luxury and power which ends by sapping the true virtue of a people."[28] Her influential cousin, publisher Joseph Bryan, similarly thought that this imperialism would "lead our country astray from the faith of simplicity and moderation which had been so clearly laid down for us by the founders of the Republic."[29] For Coleman, Bryan, and numerous preservationists, the earlier civilization of Jamestown and Williamsburg deserved not simply protective care, but use as a role model for the future.

Most preservationists did not stay in the anti-imperialist cause for long. Preservationists implicitly compared the dark-skinned people of Amer-

26. Thomas Nelson Page, *On the Necessity for a History of the South* (Roanoke: Hammond's Printing Works, 1892), 24.

27. John Lesslie Hall, *Introductory Address at the Jamestown Celebration* (Richmond, 1895), 6; James M. Lindgren, "APVA: Uniting Town and Gown," *William and Mary Magazine* 57 (Summer 1989), 30–31.

28. Cynthia Coleman, Miscellaneous papers, n.d., Tucker-Coleman Papers, Box 101.

29. Joseph Bryan to Moses D. Hoge, May 6, 1898, Bryan Letterbook, Virginia Historical Society; James M. Lindgren, "The Apostasy of a Southern Antiimperialist: Joseph Bryan, the Spanish-American War, and Business Expansion," *Southern Studies* (forthcoming); David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 154–214.

ica's new colonial empire with Virginia's seventeenth-century Indians. APVA honored Pocahontas through numerous monuments and ceremonies, for example, and praised her for abandoning her native ways for the superior civilization of the European-Americans. Foreshadowing the "white man's burden" mentality of modern imperialists, Sara Pryor, an APVA vice president and popular novelist, claimed:

> Pocahontas is to be honoured all the more inasmuch as she conquered every instinct in her savage nature, becoming reverent, gentle, pitiful, and patient; and correcting every blemish in her "manners barbarous," learning to "live civilly," and behaving, in all situations, with discreet gravity. Like the lovely lily, the root was in slime and darkness; but at the first touch of the sun the golden heart was revealed of a perfect flower.[30]

Imperialism in the Pacific and Caribbean had clear affinities with the South's emerging progressivism. The "white man's burden" translated into the control and "uplift" of dark-skinned peoples, whether they be in Samoa or Southampton County.[31] The Old Dominion's progressivism in turn mirrored the traditionalism voiced by preservationists. Like echoes in a canyon, the shouts of imperialists, progressives, and preservationists reverberated upon each other. Each clamored for order, progress, and civilization.

With antebellum society as their model, southern progressives yearned for a stable and cohesive community which would foster economic progress. Politics would be reformed, social controls applied, and society purified so that the South could be protected from its weakest elements. Progressives articulated the all-too-common argument that a constriction of the South's electorate was needed to save its morality and prevent Negro domination.[32] Philip Alexander Bruce, APVA adviser and popular historian, predicted that Virginia's newly enacted Constitution of 1902 would "eliminate with equal effectiveness the least intelligent and the least conservative elements among the white and black voters alike. This [would] be of extraordinary advantage to the general moral health and prosperity" of the state. APVA founder Mary J. Galt knew that the once-quiescent popular classes had become active with Readjusterism. Their disfranchisement required that humility and deference would "*have* to be cultivated" within their ranks. Herein lay the importance of cultural preservation and education. A mythical history would be spread about the Old

30. Mrs. R. A. Pryor, *The Birth of a Nation, Jamestown, 1607* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1907), 300.

31. Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's A Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982).

32. Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored;* J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880–1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983).

Statue of Pocahontas at Jamestown. Cast in bronze and set atop a granite pedestal, this eighteen-feet high statue of Pocahontas was only one of APVA's many tributes to the woman who saved John Smith. (*From Richard T. Couture,* To Preserve and Protect [*Dallas: APVA, 1984*])

Columbia, 1896. APVA regularly held pageants and balls both to honor Virginia's founders and raise moneys. A pageant in 1896 mixed patriotism and preservation to publicize the cause. (*From* Discovery, *Fall 1989, APVA*)

Dominion's happy days, a time not incidentally when social deference and limited voting defined its electorate. This history would then be used to teach the populace the lesson that enlightened elites could insure economic success and political freedom only if, as J. L. M. Curry put it, "the citizenship is restrained and disciplined and elevated by intelligence and morality."[33]

As APVA preached the virtues of traditionalism, it also lent its hand to the civil religion of patriotism. While protecting the homes of John Marshall, Mary Washington, and Patrick Henry, the ancient towns of Jamestown and Williamsburg, and the sacred sites of the revolutionary cause, the APVA enshrined "meccas" where Americans could visit and pay homage to the Founders. Virginians, of course, added their own twist to the

33. Philip Alexander Bruce, *The Rise of the New South,* Volume 17 in *The History of North America,* ed. Guy Carleton Lee (Philadelphia: G. Barrie, 1905), 471; Mary J. Galt to an unknown correspondent, n.d., draft, Galt Papers III, College of William and Mary; J. L. M. Curry, *A Brief Sketch of George Peabody, and a History of the Peabody Education Fund Through Thirty Years* (Cambridge: University Press, 1898), 82. The threat of Negro domination proved to be an effective, but grossly exaggerated, means to insure the passage of the constitution.

American tale of patriotism. Legal conservatism, state sovereignty, and limited democracy all became central ingredients in APVA's historical rendition. The Old Dominion shared more of the patriot's limelight with the introduction of regular railroad service and the automobile. Such improvements, Professor Hall predicted, would "bring untold thousands of pilgrims to the sacred shrines of Virginia."[34] His friend Cynthia Coleman glorified these patriotic acts and said that "love of country is religion for it is god given, and the heart that is not moved by it is fit for 'treasons, stratagems and spoils.' "[35] As a result, APVA laid countless memorials which served as holy ground where pilgrims could reconsecrate their patriotism.

This version of civil religion captured the attention of preservationists not only in Virginia, but throughout the land. If a building or site had become "historic" through its links with the Revolution, the Constitution, or an equally important facet of the civil religion, preservationists commonly tapped the resources of the patriotic movement to win financial and moral support. In New England, for example, William Sumner Appleton launched his career in historic preservation through the patriotic societies. In 1905 he organized a drive to preserve Paul Revere's home in Boston.

As immigration and modernization transmogrified Boston, Appleton wanted to make the Revere home a "patriotic memorial" which would become "a constant incentive to patriotic citizenship." One of his elite colleagues predicted that the memorial would "serve as a daily lesson to the [immigrant] youth of that district in Massachusetts' ideas of loyalty, simplicity and civic pride."[36] Appleton founded the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) in 1910, but his budding interests in Yankee craftsmanship and scientific methodology gradually pulled SPNEA toward material culture and away from the civil religion. As he matured as a preservationist, Appleton would regard old buildings more as historical documents and less as patriotic attractions.

In this he was unusual. Tradition-minded preservationists of the Progressive Era saw their work as an instrument of patriotism, and this was especially true of women's groups. Whether in the Daughters of the Revolution,

34. John Lesslie Hall, "The Meeting Place of the First Virginia Assembly," in *Exercises and Addresses at the Celebration of the 300th Anniversary of the First Law Making Body on the Western Hemisphere Which Convened at Jamestown, July 30, 1619* (Richmond, 1919), 12.

35. Cynthia Coleman, untitled essay, n.d., Tucker-Coleman Papers, Box 103; Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975); Russell Richey and Donald G. Jones, eds., *American Civil Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

36. William Sumner Appleton and Curtis Guild, Jr., quoted in James M. Lindgren, " 'A Constant Incentive to Patriotic Citizenship': Historic Preservation in Progressive-Era Massachusetts," *New England Quarterly* (forthcoming); for an extended discussion of New England's historic preservation movement in the Progressive Era, see James M. Lindgren, "The Gospel of Preservation in Virginia and New England: Historic Preservation and the Regeneration of Traditionalism" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1984), Chaps. 4, 5, and 6.

the National Society of the Colonial Dames in America, or APVA, their brand of historic preservation reflected feminine duty in contrast to the emerging male-oriented professionalism of SPNEA. Ironically, as historic preservation took on more of the professionalism of the architect and archaeologist, women increasingly lost their once-prominent role as guardians of the nation's material heritage.[37]

In many ways, APVA and, to a lesser extent, SPNEA, had become revitalization movements through which traditionalists reconstituted a waning culture. As with such movements, preservationists carefully selected, edited, and adapted the old culture to their modern needs. Such "history" offered role models for the present and future. As Joseph Bryan admitted, "I do not see how a better service can be rendered our present generation than by holding up before them constantly *renewed* exemplars of the former men of dignity, character, and learning who made the old standard of Virginia morality and patriotism so high."[38] Historic buildings captured APVA's attention largely as means to recreate the present in the mold of the past. Preservationists commonly quoted Father Abram Ryan, chaplain of the Confederacy, who said: "A land without ruins is a land without memories; a land without memories is a land without history."[39] Historic buildings, as a result, became metaphors for those memories, memories which had risen from the ashes of an Old Dominion charred by the Civil War and popular-class activism.

While preservationists primarily valued history as a means to reinforce traditionalism, they built the historic preservation movement on narrow and classbound foundations.[40] Relatively few buildings would be saved during the Progressive Era.[41] Within that period, APVA saved more than many others in the movement, but it generally preserved those which

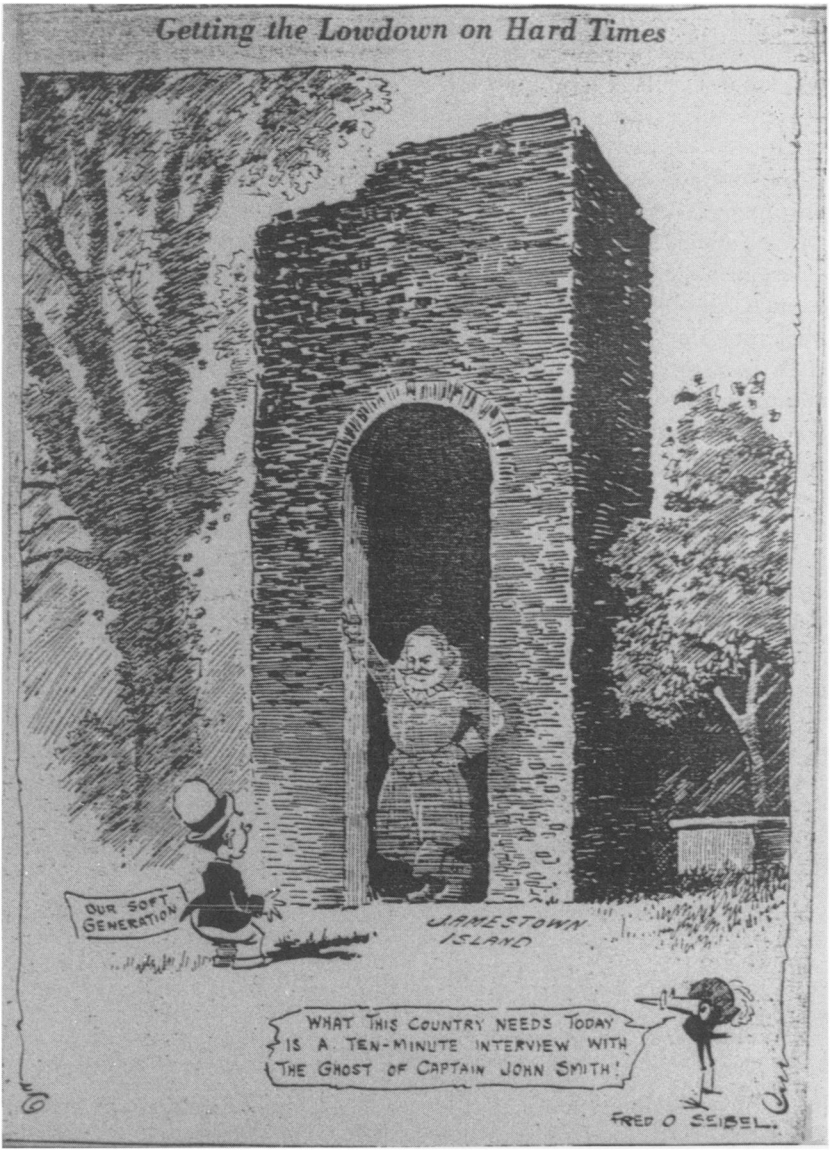
37. By the 1930s some Virginia preservationists demanded, but without much success, that APVA develop a more architecturally minded brand of historic preservation. See, for example, Mary Wingfield Scott, "A.P.V.A. Tries to Save Old Richmond," *Journal of the American Society of Architectural Historians* 3 (October 1943), 26–31.

38. Joseph Bryan to John B. Henneman, September 8, 1898, Bryan Letterbook, emphasis added; Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58 (April 1956), 264–81.

39. Abram J. Ryan quoted in "Address of Mrs. J. Taylor Ellyson," *Year Book of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, 1911–1912* (Richmond: Wm. Ellis Jones, 1913), 14. After studying American preservation, Robin Winks concluded: "That which we teach, that which we say, and those things which we preserve, must be relevant and invariably relevant to some future point. The past must be usable, it must help define future goals for the nation." Robin Winks, "Conservation in America: National Character as Revealed by Preservation," in Jane Fawcett, ed., *The Future of the Past: Attitudes to Conservation, 1174–1974* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1976), 142.

40. Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States" and "Reflections on the History of the Historic Preservation Movement," in Susan Porter Benson *et al.*, ed., *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 137–99.

41. Cary Carson estimates, for example, that Virginia and Maryland have but a handful of dwellings from the seventeenth century, while Massachusetts alone has over two hundred. Cary Carson, "Doing History with Material Culture," in Ian M. G. Quimby, ed., *Material Culture and the Study of American Life* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1978), 56.




**"Getting the Lowdown on Hard Times." Virginia traditionalists commonly used the image of John Smith to encourage habits of work, discipline, and service.** ***(From Fred O. Seibel,* Richmond Times-Dispatch, *no date, APVA files, Richmond.)***

enabled traditionalists to advance their cause. While some northern preservationists worried about the demolition of Virginia's remarkable colonial courthouses, for example, Joseph Bryan's newspaper justified their demolition and called them "ugly and unsightly without and within." His *Richmond Times* did not want simple, though aesthetically refined or historically rooted, structures; it instead wanted grand courthouses which would show "the majesty and dignity of the law." Those laws, of course, had been crafted and defined by the elite, and were challenged by Populists, workers' unions, and African-Americans.[42]

Preservation also entailed more memorialization than actual conservation, as APVA focused on the message, not the mortar and bricks, of the past. Jamestown provides a perfect case study. With Virginians so intent on proving their priority over Plymouth as the nation's first settlement, and the state's elite trying to anchor their traditions of legal conservatism, select leadership, and white supremacy, the island became what James Branch Cabell called "a mere mob of monuments and memorial tablets."[43] Such monument building, however, was fairly typical in the nation, especially by the patriotic and veterans' societies. Elite Confederate veterans and their supporters, for example, erected scores of monuments to honor the dead and promote neo-Confederate politics.[44]

All the while, APVA brought thousands of pilgrims each year to the ruins at Jamestown. In elaborate ceremony and ritual, Virginians honored their ancestors, commemorated their forebears' deeds, and reconsecrated their lives to the mission undertaken by the likes of John Smith, Patrick Henry, and Robert E. Lee. Such formalized rituals represent much more than ancestor worship. Modern traditionalists regarded these acts of homage as the surest foundation for stability, prosperity, and responsible leadership.[45]

The interpretation of such sites and the decision to place those monuments rested on a history which was wrapped in myth and tradition. Preservationists scoured history, not for any disconcerting complexity

42. "Virginia's Court-Houses," *Richmond Times*, February 3, 1900.

43. James Branch Cabell, *Let Me Lie: Being in the Main an Ethnological Account of the Remarkable Commonwealth of Virginia and the Making of Its History* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1947), 46.

44. Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865–1913* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 40–44, 128–31. Confederates built monuments partly as an act of bereavement to honor and remember their recent kin. Preservationists, on the other hand, protected a past whose heroes were remote in time, but still worthy of emulation.

45. Victor Turner reminds us that ritual revolves around potent symbols which encapsulate cultural values and individual emotion. Ritual acts induce the celebrant to follow acceptable norms by converting "the obligatory into the desirable." At its most profound level, ritual thus reveals the "unavowed, and even 'unconscious,' wishes and goals" of the participant. The invisible becomes visible, the private public. What follows are heightened commitments and emotions. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 30, 46, 49–50. See also Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," in *Material Life in America*, 17–36.

which might undermine their modern power, but for pleasing myths and telling legends which could enhance elite hegemony.[46] James Branch Cabell, who as a college student boarded with APVA organizer Cynthia Coleman, contrasted the methods of professional historians, for example, with those hierophants who wrote Virginiana. "How very differently," he said, "do we shape our history in Virginia, where we accept such facts as we find desirable and dismiss those which are not to our purpose! We have thus enriched the field of American folklore with that stirring epic which is the history of Virginia."[47] As a result, Virginia's historic preservation became intimately tied with politics.

Preservationists reacted against disturbing trends not only in the Old Dominion, but in New England, as shown in the case of what APVA called its "sister-society," SPNEA.[48] Yankee traditionalists surely lamented the recent changes which they believed had disfigured the face of New England. A popular antiquarian, Samuel Adams Drake, spoke for many when he regretted that "greasy voluble Italians" had taken over the Boston neighborhood which held Paul Revere's home and Old North Church. In 1914, SPNEA president Charles Knowles Bolton judged those immigrants to be a "eugenic failure." He deplored the rise of the immigrant ward bosses and the "democracy run mad" which had elected them. He devoted his energies to strengthening Yankee traditionalism out of a belief that it would take those newcomers "two generations to grow to our standards."[49] Prominent Yankees campaigned to limit immigration and discipline the newcomers, but they had little role to play in SPNEA itself.

Within APVA, on the other hand, tradition-minded elites used historic preservation as one means to rebuff the Populists, restore white supremacy, and enact the "progressive" constitution of 1902. Ten years earlier, John Lesslie Hall proposed such usage of history to revise the present and shape the future. Speaking at Jamestown, he told pilgrims that valuable lessons could be learned from the John Smiths, Thomas Dales, and Alexander Spotswoods, who not only disciplined what he regarded as an unruly populace, but established a prosperous economy in the Colony of Virginia. "Let us realize that Virginia needs *living* heroes," he said, "that she needs earnest and devoted Smiths to save her from drones and laggards, and from treacherous leaders; that she needs Dales to give her strong and well-executed laws, and Spotswoods to develop her wonderful

46. W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969); Wesley Frank Craven, *The Legend of the Founding Fathers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956); George B. Tindall, "Mythology: A New Frontier in Southern History," in *The Ethnic Southerners* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976).

47. Cabell, *Let Me Lie*, 67.

48. Mrs. J. Taylor Ellyson, "President's Address," *Year Book of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1934), 14.

49. Samuel Adams Drake, *Our Colonial Homes* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1893), 19; Charles Knowles Bolton, Note-Book, April 27, 1913, February 6, 1914, Bolton Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

resources."[50] A decade later, the new Smiths controlled the Readjusters and Populists, the new Dales enacted a modern constitution, and the new Spotswoods accommodated economic development. The traditionalist renaissance, fueled by the historic preservation movement, helped usher in a return to Virginia's old ways.

50. John Lesslie Hall, *Introductory Address at the Jamestown Celebration, May 13, 1891* (Richmond, 1891), 5.