

ART MUSEUMS *of* Colonial Williamsburg

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THE EARLIEST-KNOWN, VIRGINIA-MADE HORSE RACING TROPHY IS ACQUIRED BY THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION



Williamsburg, Va. (April 24, 2023)—In October 1810, a horse named Madison (likely in honor of President James Madison), won first place in a race held at the New-Market racecourse in Petersburg, Virginia. Its owner, Revolutionary War veteran Burwell Bassett Wilkes (1757-1815) of Brunswick Country, Virginia, received a \$400 cash prize for the win. Although Wilkes, who had turned to farming and breeding in the decades following the war, had several prized racehorses, this victory was certainly his greatest equestrian triumph. To mark the event, Wilkes converted his stakes into a monumental and unparalleled piece of early Virginian silver holloware. Known as the “Madison” Horse Racing Trophy, it descended through five generations of the Wilkes family before recently coming to The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation’s esteemed silver collection.

“Following more than two hundred years of careful preservation in the family of its original owner, Colonial Williamsburg is honored to become the permanent steward of this important and monumental example of early Virginia silversmithing,” said Ronald L. Hurst, the Foundation’s senior vice president for education and historic resources.

Grand in stature, the Madison trophy stands 13-1/4” high and expands to 10-1/4” between its lip and its handle. Made and marked by Johnson & Reat (1804-1815) of Richmond, Virginia, the trophy is similar in form to a cream pot but on a majestic scale. Its tall, helmet-shaped body is of swollen, rectangular cross-section and has two bands at its mid-point. While the top one is plain and convex, the lower band is milled and carries an undulating grapevine motif. The right side of the trophy bears an engraved inscription, while the other carries an engraved racecourse scene replete with an American flag at the finish line, centered around a cast appliqué of two galloping horses and their jockeys running neck and neck—with Madison in the lead. The body flows into a very narrow neck set above a stepped, rectangular foot with a strip of the same grapevine banding at the bottom. Its pouring lip is edged with an applied gadrooned band that ends in an even higher three-dimensional horse’s head crest. Made of hollow repoussé construction, the horse head details are applied, chased and engraved.

“The Madison Trophy is colossal, a work of silversmithing genius, and jaw-dropping to see. It will instantly grab and hold your attention,” said Erik Goldstein, senior curator of mechanical arts, metals and numismatics. “Nothing like it exists in the world of early 19th-century, Virginia-made silver, and it is unique in the collections of Colonial Williamsburg for many reasons.”

Wilkes, being “low and weak of body,” composed his estate plan in late 1814; he passed away the following year at the age of 57. Described in his will as “a silver Cupp won by Madison,” the trophy went to his daughter Mary “Polly” Wilkes, who saw fit to scratch variations of her initials into the underside of the foot. It seems the formal inscription was added years later and included the erroneous date “Spring, 1811” as shown by contemporary newspaper accounts. The trophy has been preserved in Virginia by Burwell Wilkes’ descendants since it was made.

The Madison Trophy was acquired through The Friends of Colonial Williamsburg Collections Fund, The Joseph H. and June S. Hennage Fund, Mark S. Farnsworth, and a partial gift of the Family of Randolph Madison, Jr. It is currently on view in the Chesapeake section of *A Rich and Varied Culture: The Material World of the Early South* located in the Nancy N. and Colin G. Campbell Gallery of the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum, one of the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg.

Additional information about the Art Museums and Colonial Williamsburg as well as tickets are available online at colonialwilliamsburg.org, by calling (855) 296-6627 and by following Colonial Williamsburg on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/colonialwilliamsburg) and @colonialwmsburg on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/colonialwmsburg) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/colonialwilliamsburg).

About the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg

The Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg include the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum and the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum, both of which are housed in their newly expanded building that offers an additional 65,000-square-feet of space, 25-percent more gallery space and numerous enhancements to the visitor experience. The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum is home to the nation's premier collection of American folk art, with more than 7,000 folk art objects made up to the present day. The DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum exhibits the best in British and American fine and decorative arts from 1670–1840. The Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg are located at 301 South Nassau Street in Williamsburg, Va. Open daily from 10 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

About The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation preserves, restores and operates Virginia's 18th-century capital of Williamsburg. Innovative and interactive experiences highlight the relevance of the American Revolution to contemporary life and the importance of an informed, active citizenry. The Colonial Williamsburg experience includes more than 600 restored or reconstructed original buildings, renowned museums of decorative arts and folk art, extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers and 18th-century inspired culinary options from historic taverns situated along historic Duke of Gloucester Street. Colonial Williamsburg Resorts complement the experience, offering guests five unique hotel properties including the iconic Forbes Travel Guide Five-Star, AAA Five Diamond Williamsburg Inn, newly renovated Williamsburg Lodge-Autograph Collection, Williamsburg Woodlands Hotel and Suites, the Griffin Hotel, and authentic 18th-century Colonial Houses. The resort offers a range of events and amenities including four historic taverns, 15 food and beverage outlets providing exquisite culinary experiences from casual to elegant dining, the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club featuring 36 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. and his son Rees Jones, a world-class full-service spa and fitness center, pools, meeting and flexible event spaces, and scenic gardens providing the perfect venue for weddings and special events. Merchants Square, built alongside the Historic Area in 1935 as one of the first planned shopping districts in the United States, features more than 40 specialty boutiques with products ranging from apparel to fine jewelry, art, specialty foods and gifts. Philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and hospitality operations sustain Colonial Williamsburg's educational programs and preservation initiatives.

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* "Madison" Horse Racing Trophy, marked by Johnson & Reat (1804-1815), Richmond, Virginia, ca. 1811, silver, Museum Purchase, The Friends of Colonial Williamsburg Collections Fund, The Joseph H. and June S. Hennage Fund, Mark S. Farnsworth, and Partial Gift of the Family of Randolph Madison, Jr., 2023-13.