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Blandfield Plantation

Essex County, Virginia



BLANDFIELD, ONE OF
THE MOST SPLENDID
MID-GEORGIAN
TIDEWATER MANSIONS
DATING FROM THE
COLONIAL PERIOD

North of Tappahannock, near Caret, is one of the most important and historically significant houses in Virginia and the nation. It is Blandfield, one of the most splendid mid-Georgian Tidewater Mansions dating from the Colonial Period, in Virginia. The mansion has been lovingly and meticulously restored by the Wheat family, in the spirit of its builder Robert Beverley. In 1983, Mr. and Mrs. James C. Wheat, Jr. purchased Blandfield, which had fallen into a state of disrepair, from Beverley family descendents. The purchase of Blandfield and the surrounding 3500 acres of pristine land, rescued Blandfield Plantation from commercial development at the hands of land speculators who wished to turn Blandfield and her lands into a Dutch owned resort.

Blandfield is located on a breathtaking and vast acreage which borders the Rappahannock River, in Upper Essex County, north of Tappahannock. The original patent granted to Major Beverley, in 1683, included over 100,000 acres, which seems unfathomable to us today. The mansion is situated atop the ancient escarpment approximately one mile from the Rappahannock River, which can be seen in the distance. The mansion we see today is the second house built on the original land grant. The first home was built close to the river shore. Archaeological test digs still reveal bricks and foundation locations.



Blandfield mansion was built by Major Beverley's great-grandson Robert, between 1769 and 1773 and was named in honor of Elizabeth Bland, the wife of William Beverley, the builder of the first house at Blandfield. The first house was located much closer to the river and vanished, long ago, from the landscape.

Robert Beverley was educated in England, which obviously must have influenced him in the style of home that he would eventually build, back in Virginia, which was still a British colony at the time of Blandfield's construction. It is thought that the plans for Blandfield were adapted, by Robert Beverley, from specific plates in an influential 1728

book by English Architect James Gibbs. Drum House in Scotland has also been mentioned as a possible model for Blandfield. The plans of James Gibbs were inspired by the 16th century Italian Villa designs of Andrea Palladio. Palladian designs were focused upon entertaining guests by the wealthy of the period. Similarly, these plans were characterized by a five part plan which included flanking dependencies to house the kitchen and other essential service areas. These dependencies are connected to the main house by completely enclosed one-story corridors, know as hyphens. Robert Beverley, the builder of Blandfield was married to Maria Byrd Carter of Sabine

Hall, which is located on the other side of the Rappahannock River, in Richmond County.

The exterior of Blandfield is in keeping with its 18th century appearance, and has remained, for the most part, unchanged, with the exception of a screened porch added on the river side, during the 19th century. The interior of the mansion, underwent drastic alterations by William Beverley, grandson of the original builder, in the 1840s. William Beverley had the original 18th century woodwork from Blandfield removed from the house and redone in a very bland Greek Revival style. What his reasons for this are not known, however there has been much speculation over the years regarding his motivation. Perhaps he thought the woodwork was outdated or needed repair, or perhaps he thought that the elaborate woodwork presented a fire hazard as a portion of Mt. Airy's interior woodwork had previously burned. Could this have caused him to take such drastic action? We will never know his reasons, however, the interior wood work, as seen today, is more in keeping with Blandfield's original, more elaborate 18th century appearance.

The restoration of Blandfield was accomplished over many years, under the direction of Architects and research specialists from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. For over one year, they patiently searched the house for any clues and fragments to guide them in their restoration of Blandfield's interior, back to its 18th century appearance. Their extensive on site research paid off as evidence was found of the original 18th century woodwork, including dimensions for all of the cornices. In the attic a complete inside shutter was also found and provided valuable information about Blandfield's operational interior shutters. As much glass as possible from the original 18th and 19th century window panes was also saved and reused during restoration.

Robert Beverley must have been an extremely interesting, well spoken and confident man of great vision. He was a prolific writer and documenter, who went into great detail regarding the building, decorating and furnishing of Blandfield, which he included in his diary. In it he listed in great detail the materials and furnishings ordered for the house, which



has been an invaluable tool in restoring Blandfield to her previous 18th century grandeur and majesty. Did he keep these notes solely for himself, or was he looking ahead to the future, preparing an inventory for the future generation or individuals who would one day restore his beloved Blandfield? The fabrics, wall coverings, interior woodwork, furnishings and window treatments that one can see at Blandfield today are all based on Robert Beverley's original notes. The Virginia Historical Society, Library of Virginia and the Essex County Library all contain volumes of information regarding the Beverley family and Blandfield's Builder — Robert Beverley.

Blandfield's original 18th century kitchen is one of the very few remaining examples of kitchens during this period, in Virginia. It has been wonderfully restored and preserved. The kitchen contains an 8' fireplace, bread oven and the original cranes that the heavy iron kettles were suspended from. The hearth was also used for cooking in cast

iron skillets. This dependency, contains two rooms on the first floor — the kitchen and a second smaller room for food preparation. Although the floors were originally dirt, bricks were laid in 1986. The second floor contains a very generously sized room and fireplace, where it is thought the chef or tutor may have lived. A secondary room upstairs was for the servants. The stairway to the upstairs is original and shows the wear characteristic of 300+ years of use.

The Grand Hall is grand indeed, with dimensions of 25' x 30'. All ceilings on the first floor are 13½ feet high, above the floor. The wallpaper copied for use in the restoration of the Grand Hall is known as Pillars and Galleries. It was found by Colonial Williamsburg research staff, in the Library of Congress and provides a dramatic and stunning backdrop for the decorative arts and furnishings used in the Grand Hall.

Although Blandfield is a home of massive and classically Georgian proportions, it is also a wonderfully

welcoming place and a living record of Robert Beverley's vision. Blandfield is a family home that truly is capable of transporting one to another time.

The dining room is a welcoming and cheerful place, as are all of the public rooms on the main floor of the Mansion. The dining room is to the left of the Grand Hall, from the main entrance.


The Green Room is situated just behind the Grand Hall and is joined by a lovely porch, on the river side of the house, which opens to breath-taking vistas of the rolling landscape and the Rappahannock River in the distance. The vibrancy of the colors utilized throughout Blandfield often seem bold to modern day visitors and guests, who are surprised to find that they are the colors used originally in Robert Beverley's day. They create a truly stunning and opulent backdrop for the equally colorful and opulent fabrics found throughout the house. The Green Room is the most exquisite shade of emerald green imaginable.



The Yellow Room, to the left of the Green Room, facing the river side of the house, contains a large grouping of rare bird, botanical and wildlife studies by renowned 18th century artist Mark Catesby.

Blandfield, built under the vision and guidance of Robert Beverly and restored by the vision and determination of Mr. and Mrs. James C. Wheat, Jr. lives on today as a legacy that will endure under the stewardship and guidance of James C. Wheat III and successive generations, into the future. There is no place quite like Blandfield. It is an amazing and wonderful place.

In addition to the main house Blandfield is the site of some of the best upland bird and water fowl hunting on the east coast and entire middle-Atlantic region. Blandfield's Lodge is modeled after an 1870's Coast Guard station at Parramore Island, which was a popular hunting and fishing spot for the Wheat family for over 30 years. The Lodge is one mile from the mansion and overlooks over 600 acres of pristine creeks and marshland. From the third floor observation room, scenic water views, sunrises, sunsets and panoramic vistas of this pristine portion of the Rappahannock River can be taken in, adding to an already unforgettable experience.

Believing that Blandfield is a treasure to be shared, Blandfield Plantation, will be available for weddings, intimate or gala receptions and special events, beginning in 2009. Both the main house and its beautiful grounds as well as the Lodge provide an unforgettable backdrop for special events. For more information regarding weddings at Blandfield Mansion or Blandfield's Lodge, please contact Diana Adams, Blandfield Plantation's Executive Director at 804-690-5736. You may also email her at dianaadam85@aol.com. Visit Blandfield Plantation online at www.blandfieldplantation.com. 

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