

## The Diary of William Byrd II



William Byrd II

William Byrd II, born 1674, died 1744, was an English planter and author from Charles City County in colonial Virginia. After the death of his father in 1704, William became the owner of Westover plantation.

Some of the shipbuilding at Westover on the James River is recorded in his diary. In July 1709, Byrd wrote: "I sent the boatmaker to Falling Creek to build me a little boat for my sea sloop." Two days later he wrote: "I sent Tom to Williamsburg for John B-r-d to work on my sloop." Later in the month, he noted that John B-r-d had come in the night to work on his sloop.

In November, he wrote: "In the afternoon we paid a visit to Mr. Hamilton who lives across the creek. We walked about his plantation and saw a pretty shallop he was building." In August, 1710, he wrote that he had taken a walk to see the boatbuilder at work. On August 9, he wrote that he had paid the builder of his sloop sixty pounds, which was twenty pounds more than he had agreed for. Later in the year, he noted that his sloop had gone down to the shipyard at Swinyards.

Byrd acquired a new shipwright who came from England on the ship "Betty" in 1711. In March, he wrote that the new shipwright was offended because he had been given corn pone instead of English bread for breakfast. He had taken his horse and ridden away without a word. However, he reported later that the shipwright had returned.

On May 15, 1712, Byrd reported that he had engaged Mr. T-r-t-n to build him a sloop next year. Several years later, he recorded the loss of his great flat boat, but it was found by a man at Swinyards. Swinyards was a place for public warehouses and a shipyard, located on the north bank of the James River, a short distance below Westover, opposite

Windmill Point.

Source: Shipping In Colonial Virginia by Cerinda W. Evans.

### **The Library of William Byrd at Westover**

William Byrd was known as one of the most eminent men of affairs in Old Virginia.

His father came to Virginia a few years before the Rebellion of Nathaniel Bacon, and bought the famous estate of Westover on the James River and in Charles City County. For anyone who has visited this old plantation, it yet stands in its magnificence amongst a flora of English holly bushes. Colonel Byrd inherited a vast estate from his uncle which included the present site of Richmond.

He sympathized strongly with his neighbor, Nathaniel Bacon, and held a command under him; but after the collapse of the rebellion he succeeded in making his peace with the angry Royal Governor Berkeley. Byrd soon became one of the most important men in the colony, and was commissioned receiver-general of the royal revenues. Upon his death in 1704, his son succeeded him in this office.

The son studied law in the Middle Temple and was made a fellow of the Royal Society. Also, he served on the Colonial Council for many years. He lived in the gracious splendor of his estate of Westover where it was known that he accumulated a library.

The library contained 3,625 volumes, classified nearly as follows: History, 700; Classics, etc., 650; French, 550; Law, 350; Divinity, 300; Medicine, 200; 245 Scientific, 225; Entertaining,

etc., 650.229.

This must have been one of the largest collections of books made in the colonial period. In 1727 he was one of the commissioners for determining the boundary between Virginia and North Carolina. In the journeys connected with that work he selected the sites where the towns of Richmond and Petersburg were afterwards built; and he wrote a narrative of his proceedings so full of keen observations on the people and times as to make it an extremely valuable contribution to history.