

The Robert Gilbert Story



The Virginia Gazette

Eleven advertisements placed in the weekly newspaper for Williamsburg, the Virginia Gazette, from 1768 to 1783, remain the sole evidence of the business venture of Robert Gilbert, boot and shoemaker. His shop was in Williamsburg on Back Street in a house where he formerly resided opposite

to Mr. Richard Charlton. The story is one of the hazards faced by most craftsmen in eighteenth-century Williamsburg; debts piling up, excess stock on hand, shortage of capable and reliable help, and a market that dried up when the capital moved to Richmond in 1780. He crafted men and womens wood-heeled shoes, calf skins, sole leather, calimanco and pumps, childrens morocco, etc.

"ROBERT GILBERT, BOOT and SHOEMAKER, &c. HEREBY acquaints the publick that he has opened shop near the Capitol in Williamsburg, where he intends carrying on his business in all its branches, viz. shoe or channel, calf or buckskin boots, jockey do. and splatterdashes, mens plain, stitched, spring, and wood-heeled, shoes and pumps, calf or dogskin; campaign, single, double, or turned channels, slippers, blue or red turkey, cork soles, galloches; womens leather, stuff, silk, and braided shoes and pumps, slippers, cork soles, galloches, and clogs. As he imports the whole of his materials from Great Britain, where punctual payments are required, he proposes supplying Ladies and Gentlemen with any of the above articles on the most reasonable terms, for ready money. Those who please to favour him with their custom may depend on their work being speedily executed, in the genteelest and newest fashions, and in such a manner as he hopes will merit a continuance of their favours. Source: Virginia Gazette, June 30, 1768.

Source: The Leatherworker in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg Being an Account of the Nature of Leather, & of the Crafts commonly engaged in the Making & Using of it by Thomas K. Ford.