

**NJS Presents****Teaching NJ History****In this Issue:*****1719 William Trent House Museum—The Significance of New Jersey’s Colonial History*****By Samantha Luft****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v3i1.71>**

*Have your students ever asked who the state capital of Trenton is named for? That man, William Trent, built his country estate north of Philadelphia, in New Jersey, at the Falls of the Delaware River about 1719. It was a large, imposing brick structure, built in the newest fashion of the day. Nearby, there were numerous outbuildings as well as grist, saw, and fulling mills along the Assunpink Creek. In 1720 Trent laid out a settlement, which he incorporated and named “Trenton.” After changing hands numerous times, the Trent House opened as a museum in 1939. Today it is owned by the City of Trenton and operated by the Trent House Association. The William Trent House is a designated National Historic Landmark and is listed in both the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Bring your classes to learn about colonial life, and challenge them to compare it to life as they know it today. This article includes references to the relevant New Jersey Curriculum Standards.*

The 1719 William Trent House Museum is the nearly three-hundred-year-old residence of Mr. William Trent, the founder of New Jersey’s capital and Trenton’s namesake. Though brief, Trent’s residence was extremely significant to the area as he helped to develop Trenton (or as it was first known, “Trent’s Town”) into the thriving community it is today. After his death in 1724, ownership of the House changed hands several times over the next two hundred years, but it has withstood the test of time and been transformed into a public history institution and monument to

New Jersey's Colonial history. In 1929, the last resident of the House, Mr. Edward A. Stokes, donated the House and remaining grounds to the City of Trenton, which has since then operated it as a museum.

Built in 1719 in the American-Georgian style by Trent, a wealthy Scottish immigrant and resident of Philadelphia, the House was set on 1,600 acres of land and originally intended to be his summer residence. It contains eleven rooms, an indoor kitchen (in the basement), and a cupola. A successful merchant, Trent situated the House near the bank of the Delaware River so that he could easily monitor incoming and outgoing ships. Soon after the House's completion, Trent made it his permanent home with his second wife and their son, William Trent, Jr. After Trent's death, the House was owned shortly by an elder son from his first marriage. Subsequent residents of the House included Supreme Court Justices, Generals, Governors, Mayors, doctors and merchants, all of whom influenced the evolution of the House in some way.

In 2019, the William Trent houses will celebrate its 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. During that span of time, the House and its various residents have played a prominent role in several eras of regional history. The House continues to be an outstanding example of early Colonial architecture and a living historic resource which interprets the past and embraces the future.

### **Lesson Plan/Tour**

Tours begin with an introduction in the century-old Carriage House/Visitor Center. There, visitors first learn about Trent and his property, the many residents who lived at the House after his death, and about the process of transforming the Trent House from a private residence to a museum. Special exhibits highlight recent archaeology projects on the grounds, including both Native American and Colonial artifact discoveries. Permanent exhibits include the probate

inventory of the House taken two years after Trent's death, which was used in a modern refurnishing plan of the House, and an interpretation of the 1930s restoration of the House.

Visitors are then taken into the Trent House Museum, where they learn firsthand how its Colonial residents lived. Daily rituals are discussed, such as the process of bathing, the use of chamber pots, the practice of cooking, and unusual sleeping habits. This general overview encourages visitors to compare Colonial life with modern life as they know it. The structure of the House is mostly original and is decorated with both authentic period furniture and replicas of period furniture. Visitors experience a vivid representation of life in the House during the Trent family's residence in the 1720s.

A small garden on the grounds near the House has been restored by a Historic Horticulturist to reflect the types and varieties of fruits, vegetables, and herbs which would have been grown in an eighteenth-century Kitchen Garden. During most of the year, the garden thrives and is included in tours. A new Apple Orchard added to the grounds in 2016 will be included in future tours. As a wealthy landowner, Trent installed both a large Kitchen Garden and an Apple Orchard on the property during its early development.

Interested tour groups, especially large groups of children or students, can request an additional tour segment featuring a hands-on demonstration of Colonial toys and games. Tour guides show children the types of entertainment which were available in the eighteenth century, including games such as hoops and sticks, and toys such as the cup and ball, the spinning top, and the buzz saw. None of the toys or games require any power source and all can be made from inexpensive materials. Children participating in this tour segment can play with replicas of all the toys and games in our collections.

### **Curriculum Standards**

The tour meets New Jersey state Social Studies curriculum requirements for fourth grade students. It is an experiential and impactful enrichment of lessons on local and state history, environment, and government.

6.1.A.1. Explain how present events are connected to the past.

6.1.A.2. Apply terms related to time including years, decades, centuries, and generations.

6.1.A.4. Organize events in a time line.

6.2.A.3. Recognize that government exists at the community, county, state, and federal levels.

6.2.B.4. Evaluate the importance of traditions, values, and beliefs which form a common American heritage in an increasingly diverse American society.

6.2.E.6. Explain why it is important to understand diverse peoples, ideas, and cultures.

6.2.E.7. Explain that even within a culture, diversity may be affected by race, religion, or class.

6.4.A.1. Discuss how families long ago expressed and transmitted their beliefs and values through oral tradition, literature, songs, and celebrations.

6.4.A.2. Compare family life in a community of the past to life in a community of the present.

6.4.A.3. Discuss the reasons why various groups, voluntarily and involuntarily, immigrated to America and New Jersey and describe the problems they encountered.

6.4.A.4. Discuss the history of their community, including the origins of its name, groups and individuals who lived there, and access to important places and buildings in the community.

6.4.B.1. Compare the major early culture of the Lenape that existed in the region that became New Jersey prior to contact with the Europeans.

6.4.B.2. Discuss the reasons why revolutionary leaders, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and Governor William Livingston fought for independence from England.

6.4.B.3. Discuss New Jersey's role during the American Revolution.

6.5.A.1. Distinguish between goods (e.g., objects) and services (e.g., activities).

6.6.A.4. Identify the major cities of New Jersey, the United States, and the world.

6.6.B.2. Explain changes in places and regions over time and the consequences of those changes.

6.6.B.4. Discuss factors involved in the development of cities (e.g., transportation, food, marketplace, religion, military protection).

→ See more at [www.nj.gov/education](http://www.nj.gov/education); accessed December 12, 2016.

*Samantha Luft currently works as the Museum Manager of the 1719 William Trent House Museum and has done that since 2016. She previously worked as the Interim Director and a Docent at the same institution. She graduated from Monmouth University, Class of 2004, with a B.A. in Anthropology and a concentration in Art History. She then went on to complete her M.A. in Museum Studies with a concentration in Registration from Seton Hall in 2012. She oversees programming, social media outreach, exhibit design, educational outreach, and partnering with outside agencies and consultants for the museum.*