“To the Memory of Sweet Infants”:
Eighteenth-Century Commemorations of Child Death in Tidewater, Virginia

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ABSTRACT

Life in the eighteenth-century Tidewater was set against the grim specter of death. Children were especially vulnerable, perishing with disheartening frequency throughout the century. Yet despite the high rates of child mortality, Tidewater culture underwent a revolution in regard to the eighteenth-century family. Children became the emotional focus of the family, becoming cherished for their youthful capering and playful nature. However, child death was no less common. The way in which parents coped with the death of a child changed throughout the century, reflecting the emotionalized understanding of children and childhood. The rituals surrounding the death of a child—from preparations for burial, the funeral, and lasting commemorations—evolved over the course of the eighteenth century, reflecting the new place of the child within the eighteenth-century family and the emotional trauma felt by the family after the death of a child.
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Introduction

In the eighteenth-century Tidewater Virginia household, death was an all-too-familiar visitor. Untimely, premature death was a constant factor of colonial life, affecting all classes, races, and ages with swiftness and brutality. The very youngest were among the most vulnerable: because of illness, accident, or other infirmities, children perished with disheartening frequency throughout the century. Historians such as Lawrence Stone have argued that as a result of high childhood mortality, parent-child relationships (especially those between parents and infants and young children) were marked by emotional distance, both in life and in death. Stone went as far as to argue that English parents were so distant from their children that they did not attend their deceased children’s funerals nor did they mourn the death of a child.\(^1\) However, subsequent generations of historians have argued that this emotional distance was not the case. Historians such as Daniel Blake Smith and John F. Walzer have argued that while parents loved their children deeply, their love was tempered by ambivalence and uncertainty. John F. Walzer suggests that parents were unsure as to the place of the child within the early eighteenth-century family.\(^2\) As a result, early-century parents’ interactions with young children were colored by the prevalence of death and ill-health—parents displayed reserved emotions in an attempt to protect themselves emotionally from the very-real threat of child death. Adding to Walzer’s suggestions, Daniel Blake Smith suggests that illness and death in the family cemented kinship bonds between family members and communities. Child death formed a constant backdrop against which family life was set; Smith argues that through an examination of how Tidewater families expressed their loss, the “changing texture” of eighteenth-century family life is revealed.\(^3\) Despite the high rates of child mortality observed by these historians, many scholars now argue that a new understanding of children and childhood emerged. Children garnered new emotional weight during the eighteenth century, becoming the focal point of the family, cherished for their playful nature and childish capering.\(^4\) This altered understanding of


childhood was expressed by deep attachment to even very young children and infants; later-century parents formed strong emotional bonds and deeply grieved the death of a child.

Despite the previous research regarding children and child mortality, these studies have failed to connect colonial Virginians’ understanding of mortality with the emergence of sentimental childhood in the Tidewater. My thesis examines the connection between the sentimentalization of childhood through death rituals. I suggest that the emergence of an emotionalized view of children and childhood can be found in the rituals surrounding the death of the child. This thesis asks how parents publically and privately expressed emotion upon the death of a child, and how parents recorded and commemorated the events surrounding the death of a child. As children gathered greater emotional weight within the family, the way in which parents remembered their children after death reflected a highly emotional, sentimentalized view of children and childhood. Rituals surrounding the death of a child that were once basic, differing little from those of adults, evolved throughout the century. Early-century mourning was expressed only in formulaic, ritualized sentiments; however, by the end of the century, mourning became highly emotional, openly expressing private grief and projecting the family’s private agony and grief to the outside world. Further, with the changed understanding of childhood, the way in which parents mourned and memorialized their deceased children emphasized that the child died during a unique and cherished time of life. Tombstones commemorated the child’s innocence and youth lost, differing from commemorations found on adult tombstones. In the following chapters, I will demonstrate not only how Tidewater culture shifted, adopting a new understanding of children and childhood, but also how public and private commemorations memorializing the death of a child began to reflect the changed understanding of childhood.

A Note on Terminology:

For the purposes of this study, the terms “grief” and “mourning” refer to two different concepts when discussing the death of a loved one. Mourning refers to the public, shared expressions of private grief and emotion upon the death of a loved one. Because of its public

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nature, mourning was often highly formulaic and ritualized. Mourning is expressed to the community through symbols and articles that members of Tidewater culture would easily recognize as being elegiac. In this context, rituals performed upon the body after death—the preparation of the body for burial, visitation by friends and family, and the funeral—in addition to articles from material culture, such as tombstones marking the graves of the dead, serve as open, public symbols indicating a family’s bereavement. Conversely, grief is a more private, less-tangible response to death and is therefore best articulated in items not meant for consumption by the general public, but for the bereaved family alone. Grief is best expressed in private diaries, correspondence, and other personal reflections upon the death of a loved one not meant to be seen by the outside world or community. This thesis shows how parents’ altered sense of grief resulted in changes in public demonstrations of mourning. Both public expressions of mourning and private expressions of grief evolved, expressing and emphasizing the greater emotional loss felt by parents upon the death of a child.

Sources

Private reflections regarding the death of a child are best articulated in parental diaries. Because of the private nature of these sources, the reflections regarding child mortality are more intimate and personal than those sources meant for public consumption, which, because of the wider intended audience, tended to be highly formulaic. These sources reveal the inner world of grief felt by parents upon the death of a child and because of the private nature, typically express sentiment less-bound by the accepted understanding of mortality in the Tidewater.

Much of what is known about the Tidewater family has been gleaned from eighteenth-century parental diaries. Unlike those from New England, Tidewater diaries are relatively rare; lower levels of literacy prevented all but the educated upper classes from keeping written records. Consequently, Tidewater diaries can only reflect a small portion of colonial Chesapeake society and the sentiments expressed in these diaries may not be reflective of those in other classes or of other races.

All of the diaries in this study represent only diarists from the upper classes. For reflections upon mortality during the early eighteenth century, I turned to sources such as William Byrd’s “secret diaries,” Reverend Robert Rose’s diary, and the diary and
correspondence of William Beverley. Not only did all three diarists record the death of a child, but these diaries also reflect the eighteenth-century understanding of childhood, and how early eighteenth-century parents reacted to and comprehended the death of a child. In order to demonstrate the cultural understanding of children and childhood and how later-century parents coped with the death of a child, I consulted the diaries of Landon Carter and the diary and correspondence of Colonel James Gordon. Carter and Gordon’s writings offer insight into the changed, later-century understanding of childhood; these diaries reflect the more-emotional concept of childhood and illustrate how perceptions of children changed over the course of the eighteenth century. I also reviewed several additional eighteenth-century diaries. Although the diaries of Hugh Jones, John Harrower, and Phillip Vickers Fithian do not provide direct insight into the death of the child from a parental perspective, these diaries nonetheless offer contextual evidence and a perspective into eighteenth-century Virginia death practices.

The ways in which colonists publically mourned their dead is most evident in eighteenth-century cemeteries. Tombstones elaborate upon the features of private grief, publicly expressing the family’s emotional loss to the outside world. I visited a small sample of churches and family cemeteries in the Virginia Tidewater, seeking surviving children’s tombstones. Although not definitive, the results of this small survey were suggestive of the notion put forth by historians of eighteenth-century childhood that the eighteenth-century saw the rise of an emotional understanding of childhood. Through an examination of tombstone inscriptions, decorations, and with whom the child was buried, this survey suggested that this aspect of

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material culture was related to the changing views of childhood. Through a combination of “public” and “private” sources, I was able to examine how parents privately comprehended the death of a child in contrast to how parents publically expressed their grief to the outside world.

Chapters

In order to discuss the eighteenth-century understanding of grief and how children were publically mourned, I have divided my thesis into three chapters. Through this organization, public expressions of mourning may be contrasted and compared to private notions of grief over the course of the century, and traced alongside the evolution of childhood within the Tidewater.

In chapter one, I provide an overview of eighteenth-century childhood and death in the Virginia Tidewater. The factors affecting the emotional context of family life early in the century are contrasted with the highly-emotional understanding of childhood found later in the century. Early-century childhood was characterized by parental ambivalence; as the result of high rates of child mortality, many parents attempted to project emotional detachment from their children. However, by the middle of the eighteenth century, a more-emotional understanding of childhood arose, and parents began to openly express their love and affection for their children both in life and in death. Yet even as notions of childhood changed, rates of mortality remained high. The changed understanding of childhood was not due a decrease in rates of mortality: instead, the altered view of the Tidewater family and culture was behind the more-emotional conception of childhood. As a result of the sentimentalization of childhood, patterns of grief and mourning shifted to reflect the new, emotionalized interpretation of childhood. This chapter concludes with a discussion of child mortality rates and the leading causes of child death.

Through a discussion of child-life and death, I lay the foundations for the next two chapters regarding public and private commemorations for children.

The second chapter discusses how parents privately coped with and grieved the death of a child. How did parents remember the child’s life and privately commemorate the death of a child? How did parents commemorate death at different ages: death due to premature delivery, infants, or young children? What terms did parents use when discussing their children, both in life and in death? Who did parents feel was responsible for the death of a child? Finally, how did parents remember their children’s lives after their passing? Answers to these questions provide insight into not only the changing emotional value attached to infants and children but
also how parents’ private comprehension of child death differed from public expressions of mourning.

The final chapter focuses on public commemorations of child death. Preparations for burial, the funeral, and lasting commemorations in the form of tombstones are discussed, comparing and contrasting how children’s burials and funerals differed from those of adults. Finally, this chapter focuses upon the evolution of children’s mortuary monuments over the course of the century: how children were commemorated, with whom children were buried and memorialized, and how symbols found on tombstones changed to reflect the more-emotional understanding of children and childhood.

Through an examination of public and private commemorations of child death, the way in which Tidewater colonists understood not only their children but their own mortality is revealed. Commemorations, both public and private, stand in testament to family’s love for their deceased members, and offer a valuable perspective into the eighteenth-century family and culture.
Chapter 1:
“Innocence Resides in Heaven”: Child Life and Death in Eighteenth-Century Tidewater Virginia.

The eighteenth century was a pivotal time in the history of childhood, leading to a changed understanding of the emotions attached to children and childhood. Yet even as children garnered new emotional weight within the colonial family, rates of mortality remained high. High rates of mortality plagued colonists of all ages and walks of life; many colonists’ lives were brief, limited by sickness and early death. While Tidewater culture was affected by high rates of mortality, none were quite as vulnerable as the young. The frequent specter of child death continued to haunt colonial families, precisely as cultural notions of the child’s place within the family began to change. However, the emotions attached to the death of a child were radically transformed during the eighteenth century, reflecting the new, emotional understanding of children and childhood.

This chapter examines both child-life and child mortality in the eighteenth-century Tidewater. First, the changing place of the child within Tidewater family is discussed and contrasted to later eighteenth-century family life, highlighting the changes and emergence of a more-emotional understanding of childhood. The altered perception of childhood will be contrasted to the constant threat of child death and mortality—the effects the high rates of both adult and child mortality had upon Tidewater culture and the leading causes of child death are examined. Through a discussion of child life and death, the foundations are laid for future chapters, discussing changing patterns of remembrance and commemoration for children’s lives and deaths.

*The Emotional Value of Tidewater Childhood*

Historians argue that notions of childhood were “born” in the eighteenth century, eventually leading to a highly sentimentalized and emotional understanding of childhood by the beginning of the nineteenth century. The concept of “childhood” did not exist in the early eighteenth century; children were instead viewed as “miniature adults.”

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century children went from being hurried out of dependency upon adults and into adulthood as soon as possible to being allowed a special phase in life—childhood—wherein children were cherished for their youthful innocence and playful nature. John F. Walzer asserts that early-century childhood was profoundly defined by parental ambivalence. Through an examination of parental diaries, Walzer studied how parents related to their children, both in life and in death; he noted that while parents loved their children, they were nonetheless unsure as to the place of the child within the family. Walzer is not alone in his assertions; this tension was apparent in many aspects of eighteenth-century culture, affecting how parents perceived their children. The way in which parents viewed their children’s behavior was affected; because infant’s bodies barely resembled proper, adult bodies, and because children’s behavior was the antithesis of proper adult behavior, many parents assumed that their children (especially young children) were less than human. Children’s loud cries and impulse driven actions further led parents to believe that infancy and childhood was a selfish phase of life, and that children were unable to care for anything but their own immediate needs. As a result, much of early eighteenth-century parenting was designed to bring children out of dependency upon parents and family and into a semblance of adult independence as soon as possible. Early-century parents attempted to mold their children into adult form from infancy, if not in mind, then at least in body. Parents’ attempts to form their children into “miniature adults” are evident in the material culture of the eighteenth century. Historian of material culture, Karin Calvert asserts that much of the material culture of early eighteenth-century childhood consisted of items designed to bodily bring children into a position more closely resembling that of an adult form—walking stools, stiff corsets, and swaddling bands were all designed to coax infants and young children’s bodies from a bestial position of crawling into proper, upright adult posture. Further, historians Nancy Schrom Dye and Daniel Blake Smith note that the cultural perception of children had lasting

12 Karin Calvert, Children in the House, esp. chapter “The Inchoate Child.”
implications upon family life: only as children progressed in age, were “broken” of their childish impulses, and perceived selfishness, and began to develop “adult” attributes did parents begin to recognize their children as fully human and worthy of strong emotional bonds. This view was pervasive in Tidewater society, and persisted for the first half of the eighteenth century.

Parental ambivalence was exacerbated by the disheartening rate of infant and child mortality—many parents attempted to create emotional barriers (or at least to publically project emotional distance) between themselves and their infants and young children to protect themselves from the emotional devastation of the death of a child. Through an examination of the instability of seventeenth-century family structure and its resonation within the eighteenth-century family, Dye and Smith demonstrates the often considerable emotional distance between parent and child. Only as infants developed into (preferably healthy) children and outgrew infantile vulnerability to disease and other complications arising from pregnancy, childbirth, and infancy did many parents dare express emotional attachment to their children.

Early century parents frequently coped with the death of a child by consigned the fate of their children to God’s will. Belief in Divine will as the controlling factor behind children’s life or death colored parents’ interactions with their children; rather than looking to mortal actions and hands as responsible for their children’s health or illness, parents instead credited both their children’s life and mortality to God’s will. Nancy Schrom Dye and Daniel Blake Smith suggest that this belief in Divine will profoundly shaped parent’s understanding of their children’s life and death: “Children were God’s temporary gift to parents; what He had freely given He could just as freely—and suddenly—take away.” The perception of Divine will as the primary influence upon early-century children’s lives led parents to believe that their children’s fate could not be swayed by human hands and it was therefore futile to attempt to undo the work of the Lord. In turn, this perception of resignation to God’s will acted as a coping mechanism, allowing parents to comprehend and come to terms with the death of a child.

15 Dye and Smith, “Mother Love and Infant Death,” 335.
17 Dye and Smith, “Mother Love and Infant Death,” 332.
However, by the end of the century, the ways in which parents coped with the death of a child became less focused upon the Divine; parents instead adopted different methods to handle the death of a child.

As a result of changes in the Tidewater society and culture, a revolution occurred within the colonial home—the place of the child within the family was re-evaluated. Adult mortality rates declined throughout society during the latter half of the century, adding stability to the family and Tidewater society. With the decline in adult mortality, families stayed together as a cohesive unit for longer periods of time, allowing for nuclear families to form with more parents seeing their children to adulthood. The family itself was also restructured, prioritizing different stages of life and family members’ roles within the family itself. The affluent upper classes modeled themselves after the leisured English gentry, which allowed more time for play and leisurely pursuits. In addition to allowing more time for leisure and play, the English gentry also idealized childhood innocence and naïveté. Tidewater parents adopted notions similar to the English gentry, and as a result, later-century Virginia children gradually became the emotional focus and center of the family. Later-century Tidewater parents fell under what Philip J. Greven termed the “moderate” or “genteel” model of parenting; parent-child relationships took on a relaxed, affectionate, emotional tone with an emphasis upon gentility. Childhood came to be seen as a discrete phase of life, valuable on its own terms. Children were prized for their playful “prattling” rather than being perceived as simply miniature versions of adults. Later-century children were brought to the fore of family life and became the objects of indulgent attention and affection by parents and relatives.

Later-century upper-class parents perceived of childhood as a cherished, fun phase of life, meant to be treasured by parents and children alike. Later-century parents no longer attempted to hurry their children into a semblance of adulthood and instead allowed for an extended period of

19 Mintz, Huck’s Raft, 39.
21 Calvert, “Children in American Family Portraiture,” 101-103; Mintz, Huck’s Raft, 10; Smith, Inside the Great House, 266.
childhood. Children were idolized for being children (rather than miniature adults) and were allowed to retain their youthful behavior for as long as possible. The material culture of later eighteenth-century childhood reflected this changed understanding of children and of childhood as a distinct phase of life; Karin Calvert suggests that the proliferation of articles from material culture designed specifically for child-sized hands such as toys, miniature furniture, and other objects designed specifically for children attests to redefinition of childhood as a discrete phase of life. While this shift may not be representative of those in other classes, the upper-classes perceived of later-century childhood as a time of life for play and frivolity without the worries of adults, and children were worthy of items befitting their small size. Further, the newly leisured upper-class parents were all too happy to provide their children with the accoutrements for childhood play and amusement.

The changing understanding of childhood was similarly reflected in how parents understood their children’s mortality. As children gained new emotional value within the family, parents took on a more active role in their children’s wellbeing; parents similarly placed greater burdens of responsibility upon human hands for their children’s mortality. While the belief in Divine providence as guiding children’s lives did not completely vanish, human hands (and specifically mothers) were posited as holding the greater responsibility for both their children’s health but also spiritual wellbeing. As the emotional value of children changed within the family and as parents assumed greater responsibility for their children’s lives, the death of a child became a greater blow to the eighteenth-century family and to parents. The way in which later-century parents coped with the death of a child differed from that of their earlier counterparts, becoming more emotional and sharing their private grief with the wider community through mourning practices.

By the late eighteenth century, Tidewater culture had so thoroughly adopted notions of childhood that childhood itself had been divided into three distinct phases: infancy, girlhood or boyhood, and youth, each with its own, distinct attributes. Karin Calvert notes this distinction in eighteenth-century family portraits; drawing upon the distinctive styles for different genders and age groups, Calvert asserts that the shift in portraiture showing children wearing child-

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27 Calvert, “Children in American Family Portraiture,” 112.
specific garments and around items designed for children reflects the changed perception of childhood. Additionally, the focus upon families in relaxed, informal settings suggests a turn toward the Tidewater’s emphasis upon the genteel, affectionate family, demonstrating an interest in the family as a cohesive unit, and placing children as cherished members within this unit.28 The division of childhood into three distinct phases reflects the impact the changed perception of childhood had upon colonial society and culture. Later-century parents no longer attempted to rush their children toward adulthood or demand autonomy from their children at young ages; instead, parents preferred to keep children within the family fold as long as possible, lauding each phase of childhood for its own attributes.

Infancy began at birth and lasted until about age seven.29 During this first phase of life, children were not differentiated by gender; children of both sexes wore a unisex gown denoting their infancy and subordination their parents.30 The unisex gown opened down the front and featured long ribbons that flowed down the back. These ribbons were used by adults to help children as they learned to walk (and to reign them in afterwards).31 In addition to practical functions, the ribbons also acted as a symbol, denoting the child’s subordination to his or her parents: the ribbons acted as restraints, allowing adults to physically control the child’s movements.32 Similarly, during infancy, all children were seen as members of feminine society, regardless of gender.33 Mothers were positioned as the protectors of their children’s spiritual and physical wellbeing during this phase of life, regardless of the child’s gender.

When infants reached six or seven years of age, he or she moved to the next phase of life, girlhood or boyhood. Along with this transition came a change in the child’s role within the family. No longer were children seen as gender-neutral infants; after this phase of life, children were differentiated by sex, becoming boys and girls. During this phase of life, children began to learn and adopt adult gender roles. Sex differentiation was also met with a change in clothing; at

33 Mintz, Huck’s Raft, 23.
age seven, boys stopped wearing the unisex gown for infants and instead adopted a miniature version of adult male clothing. In a process known as “breeching,” the boy was given his first pair of pants, signifying not only his status within society as a male, but also effectively severing his ties to feminine society. 34 Boys were no longer under their mother’s control; instead, boys moved to the control of the father, who would introduce him to male society. It was also during this time that boys took their first steps toward manhood, with increased work responsibilities and beginning formal education. 35 While there was no equivalent to breeching for girls, around age seven, young girls were similarly inducted into the world of women. Girls began to learn how to manage a household and perform domestic chores to help prepare for their future as wives and heads of household. 36

The final stage of childhood for boy boys and girls was youth, and was marked by preparations for the responsibilities of adulthood. Adulthood was traditionally marked by inheritance or land ownership, marriage, and leaving the birth family to start a new family. For boys, adulthood was marked by the land inheritance or ownership. 37 While ages at inheritance varied, owning land was seen as the most important step toward adulthood for men. Marriage effectively ended childhood for both sexes. Men typically married in their mid-to-late twenties, while women married slightly earlier, typically at the end of their teens or early twenties. 38 For women, marriage was the final step toward adulthood; marriage marked a woman as a full member of adult society.

Death in the Tidewater

Despite the prioritization of children and childhood, children continued to perish with disheartening frequency. Low levels of health in the Tidewater in combination with high rates of adult mortality affected the formation of stable family life throughout the eighteenth century. This section examines rates of adult and child mortality within the Tidewater and its effects upon family life, along with the leading factors contributing to the prevalence of ill health in the Chesapeake region.

35 Mintz, Huck’s Raft, 23.
36 Mintz, Huck’s Raft, 23.
37 Mintz, Huck’s Raft, 37.
38 Mintz, Huck’s Raft, 37.
The Tidewater region itself was unhealthy. Located around low-lying swamps in combination with inadequate sanitation, the environment bred disease. Chief among them were malaria and dysentery. Darrett and Anita Rutman noted that the Tidewater’s endemic malarial environment profoundly shaped colonial life throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Malaria is transmitted by the bite of infected mosquitoes; once infected, the victim experienced high fevers followed by sweating and chills, leading to the eighteenth-century colloquial term for the disease, “fever and ague.”

The Tidewater’s generally warmer climate (as compared to that in New England with harsh winters which killed off much of the mosquito population) was an ideal breeding ground for malaria, often reaching epidemic levels. However, malaria rarely killed its victims; instead, Rutman and Rutman termed malaria the “great dibilitator”—instead of killing the victim, the disease weakened the host’s body and allowed other diseases to take hold, leading to death. The warmer months between June and October were amongst the worst for malarial infections, with mortality rates reaching their highest levels. Survivors gained temporary immunity to the disease, but re-infection was likely to occur several times throughout the victim’s life. Malarial infection was a life-long ordeal, with subsequent re-infections further weakening the host and leading to other disorders to compromise health. Pregnant mothers were especially vulnerable to malaria; any immunity the mother had to the disease was nullified by pregnancy. Consequently, infected mothers and their unborn infants were highly susceptible to spontaneous abortion, premature birth, death during pregnancy or difficult or fatal childbirth for both mother and infant. However, as we shall see, should a seasoned mother survive her pregnancy, her immunities were temporarily passed on to her infant through breast feeding, benefitted the next generation of Virginians.

“The bloody flux” or dysentery was also readily spread throughout the Tidewater, owing largely to inadequate sanitation. Dysentery is a bacterial infection spread by food or water contaminated by fecal matter. The Tidewater’s inadequate sanitation and sewage systems, in combination with unsafe food handling led to easy transmission and frequent outbreaks of

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42 Grob, The Deadly Truth, 87.
43 Rutman and Rutman, “Of Agues and Fevers,” 34.
44 Rutman and Rutman, “Of Agues and Fevers,” 52.
dysentery throughout the eighteenth century. Dysentery was a constant presence in the Tidewater, with epidemic outbreaks occurring only sporadically; when infection reached epidemic levels, rates of mortality spiked to between five and ten percent of the total population. Like malaria, the unpleasant symptoms of dysentery infrequently killed. However, dysentery frequently led to other complications, most notably dehydration. Eighteenth-century physicians had no knowledge of dehydration, and as a result, many dysentery victims perished. Among the most susceptible were infants and children, but many colonists were infected (and re-infected) with dysentery throughout their lifetime. Like malaria, dysentery weakened survivors, leaving the victim vulnerable to other infections and lowering the overall level of health within the Tidewater.

While malaria and dysentery were endemic to the Tidewater, other diseases were also a threat to colonists’ health and lives. Even though malaria and dysentery were an everyday part of Tidewater life, they did not generate the fear and panic of epidemic diseases. Because of the dramatic presentation of symptoms, the drastic increase in mortality rates, and the lack of effective prevention or cures, diseases such as diphtheria, yellow fever, and smallpox led to pervasive feelings of helplessness throughout the century. Even after the introduction of inoculation in the 1720s, little could be done to prevent the spread of epidemic disease or treat disease after infection.

Although steadily improving throughout the eighteenth century, rates of adult mortality across all age groups and classes remained high while life expectancies remained low, affecting the formation of stable, nuclear family life. The average life expectancy at birth for a man born in the early portion of the eighteenth century was generously in the mid-forties or early fifties. Women’s life expectancies were similar to that of men, but women’s lives often ended prematurely because of the rigors of pregnancy and childbirth. The effects of low adult life expectancies were worsened by patterns of immigration. An imbalanced sex ratio and high

45 Grob, The Deadly Truth, 85.
46 Grob, The Deadly Truth, 86.
48 Grob, The Deadly Truth, 86.
49 Grob, The Deadly Truth, 84.
51 Mintz, Huck’s Raft, 37.
levels of disease resulted in unstable family life in the seventeenth century, the effects of which were felt into the eighteenth century. Throughout the seventeenth and into the early portion of the eighteenth century, Virginia’s population was only able to sustain itself through immigration. Historian Ross W. Beales notes that between 1635 and 1699, more than 80,000 people immigrated to Virginia; however, the Virginia population in 1700 was only about 60,000. Immigrants were very susceptible to disease; upon arriving in Virginia, immigrants underwent the “seasoning” process of becoming acclimated to the Tidewater’s unique disease environment. Because of the rigors of the seasoning process, many immigrants died before being able to begin families, or leaving orphans. In addition to the high rates of mortality among immigrants, the sex ratio was imbalanced until late in the seventeenth century. Men greatly outnumbered women, leading to later age at marriage, which in turn limited family size: by marrying later, parents were limiting their fertility, creating smaller families. Although the sex ratio had begun to level in the early eighteenth century, the effects upon family life were profound and were felt until the middle of the century. As a result of the early demographic turmoil within the seventeenth-century Tidewater, the Virginia population was unable to sustain itself through natural reproduction until the middle of the eighteenth century. As native-born Virginians began to outnumber immigrants, adult life expectancies steadily increased throughout the eighteenth century, and by the 1750s, both men and women could expect to live to their mid-fifties or early sixties. The increase in adult life expectancy meant more adults saw their children to adulthood, and allowed for a more-stable family life in which notions of childhood could grow.

Disease took its toll on the eighteenth-century family; the precarious nature of both adult and child health, especially in the early-eighteenth century affected the formation of stable family life and in turn, surviving children’s lives. Stable, nuclear family life only became

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57 Grob, The Deadly Truth, 71.
58 Smith, Inside the Great House, 256.
possible in the Tidewater in the middle of the eighteenth century; before then, families were frequently torn apart by the death of a parent. Many children lost one (if not both) parents before reaching maturity.\(^{59}\) As a result, many families were combined after parents remarried, adding step-parents, step-siblings, and half-siblings to the family and household.\(^{60}\) The uncertainty of adult survival in addition to the instability of family life led to further upheaval within the colonial home, often leaving colonial children and childhood in the wake.

Similarly, the disease environment in the Tidewater weakened adults and compromised healthy births for their children. While children born to parents who survived the seasoning process tended to fare better than their immigrant counterparts, other factors affecting adult health contributed to weaker offspring and in turn, child mortality. Poor maternal nutrition and the rigors of eighteenth-century medicine often nullified any benefits maternal immunities may have imparted to the unborn child; consequently, children born to weak mothers were in turn weaker and unable to thrive in the unhealthy Tidewater conditions.

While rates of mortality were unquestionably high for children, accurate statistics for infant and child mortality are difficult to reconstruct. No records were kept that offer an accurate picture of rates of child mortality. Church records offer a glimpse of children surviving to baptism, but children dying before receiving this rite typically left no trace in official records. An overall picture of child mortality may be gleaned from parental diaries. The miscarriages, stillbirths, and other forms of child mortality were recorded in the pages of parental diaries, but these poignant records can only shed light on a small portion of society. The only conclusion that may be gleaned from these records is that rates of infant and child mortality were undeniably high throughout the century. Through an examination of rates of mortality throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, historian Richard A. Meckel notes that rates of infant mortality for the first-third of the eighteenth century were close to twenty percent in the first year, dying from disease or the lingering effects of childbirth.\(^{61}\) However, even children surviving their first year of life remained highly susceptible throughout the first years of life; an additional fifteen percent of infants surviving their first year of life died before reaching


puberty. Additionally, historian Daniel Blake Smith suggests that rates of infant and child mortality may have run as high as forty percent in some areas of the Tidewater. The Tidewater’s harsh disease environment combined with the unhealthy climate made survival difficult for adults and children alike.

Causes of Death in the Tidewater

Life in the Tidewater was frequently overshadowed by illness and death. Colonists of all ages were vulnerable to the ravages of illness, and as mortality statistics suggest, few families were untouched by disease. Consequently, illness and death were in the fore of many colonists’ minds. This section briefly discusses some of the leading causes of child death in the Tidewater, from childbirth and infancy, to childhood, and finally youth.

Eighteenth-century pregnancy was not met with the excitement and joy felt by later generations of families. Eighteenth-century expectant mothers, their family, and friends recognized that pregnancy was a dangerous time which frequently resulted in death of the mother, infant, or both. On average, a woman became pregnant at approximately two year intervals, beginning at marriage in her late teens and lasting until menopause in her late-thirties to early-forties (should she live that long), with intervals between births becoming longer as she approached menopause. However, relatively few pregnancies resulted in a healthy child; Judith Walzer Leavitt cites that while the average woman in the late eighteenth century bore approximately seven children over the course of a lifetime, she experienced considerably more pregnancies which terminated in either stillbirth or miscarriage. Further, not all live-born children lived to adulthood—the average family typically produced only two to three children who survived childhood. The threat of death or injury during childbirth in addition to the rigorous, often debilitating cycle of pregnancy and childbearing colored not only women’s maternal experiences but was also a defining factor of eighteenth-century women’s lives.

Especially in the first half of the eighteenth-century, births were attended by a midwife and the pregnant woman’s friends and family. The late-eighteenth-century diary of Maine

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63 Smith, “Autonomy and Affection,” 47.
64 Beales, “The Child in Seventeenth-Century America,” 16-17; Calvert, Children in the House, 23.
65 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 14.
66 Mintz, Huck’s Raft, 37.
67 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 37.
midwife Martha Ballard offers a view into a typical rural midwife’s duties. Although Ballard’s diary is out of geographical focus, there is no reason to suspect that how midwives practiced in the Tidewater differed from those in New England. Midwives served both women and children and were able to treat minor injuries and illnesses through their use of traditional medicine. Eighteenth-century midwives were herbalists, preferring to use naturally occurring remedies and allowing nature to take its course rather than intervening (and often interfering) with nature as physicians often did. In the birthing room, the midwife’s chief concern was to comfort the expectant mother as nature took its course rather than attempting to hurry or circumvent nature through physical or medical intervention. Although rarely, midwives also assisted in long, difficult labors by providing herbs or other natural medicines that stimulated contractions (such as ergot), or eased pain. Midwives were also able to perform some minor procedures upon the mother in order to assist birth, such as turning the fetus in the womb in the case of a “breech” birth. However, midwives did not typically intervene with the natural process of birth, but simply encouraged and comforted the expectant mother, guiding her through the natural process of childbirth with as little intervention as possible. Additionally, many midwives stayed after the birth to help the mother recover from birth and assist in caring for the newborn infant. Additionally, were mother or infant to die in birth, the midwife frequently assisted the family in preparing the corpse for burial, performing the final rituals of washing, dressing, and “laying out” the body.

However, during the latter-half of the eighteenth century, licensed physicians specializing in obstetrics entered the birthing room. While many upper-class women expected to receive better care from licensed physicians than from midwives, physician’s treatments often proved disastrous to both mothers and infants. Despite the new problems brought about by the introduction of physicians into the birthing room, many upper-class families nonetheless welcomed physicians and their remedies into the birthing room, placing much faith in the

69 Ulrich, A Midwife’s Tale, 53.
70 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 38.
71 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 38.
72 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 38.
73 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 37.
74 Ulrich, A Midwife’s Tale, 64.
75 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 36.
physician’s abilities. During the last decades of the eighteenth century, many upper-class families increasingly turned to physicians, placing the care of pregnant mothers in their hands. While eighteenth-century families believed that the physician’s formal education greatly assisted in the birthing room, most physicians lacked the years of practical experience that guided midwives. Propriety prevented male physicians to come in such intimate contact with a woman’s body, and many physicians had little “hands-on” training; even when in the birthing room, propriety prevented physicians from viewing the pregnant woman’s delicate anatomy, often leading to disastrous consequences in unpracticed hands.

Eighteenth-century physicians had a different view of medicine and health than their midwife counterparts. Eighteenth-century medicine was based upon the humoral theory; physicians believed that health was attained only through a balance of the four bodily fluids—blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. Illness was caused by an imbalance in the humors, and health was achieved only when the humors regained balance. As such, much of eighteenth-century medicine was concerned with restoring balance to the humors; pukes, purges, and bleedings were believed to rid the body of the excess humors, and were among the most commonly used restoratives. Consequently, this view led physicians to believe that pregnancy was a sickness. To eighteenth-century physicians viewed the symptoms of pregnancy as a blockage or obstruction in the uterus; as a result, physicians often employed drastic treatments to “cure” parturient mothers of their perceived illness. Consequently, many physicians used treatments meant to intervene in the debilitating (albeit natural effects) of pregnancy, leading to further complications. Chief among them were phlebotomy and forceps use, which were employed by physicians during pregnancy and in the birthing room in an attempt to hurry or circumvent nature.

The belief that phlebotomy, or bloodletting, was instrumental to a healthy birth was frequently implemented by physicians throughout the eighteenth century. Physicians practiced bloodletting upon pregnant women before birth in order to prevent carriage, during birth to ease pain, assist in labor, reduce inflammation, and (paradoxically) stop hemorrhage, and after birth to

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76 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 36.
77 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 39.
78 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 41.
79 Ulrich, A Midwife’s Tale, 55.
assist in healing any problems arising from birth itself. However, although both physicians and their patients alike placed great faith in bloodletting late in pregnancy and during childbirth, the practice frequently complicated pregnancy and childbirth. If weakened by “therapeutic” blood loss, mothers and infants were often unable to survive the already difficult process of birth, further lowering the survival rate for both mother and child.

Similarly, although later-eighteenth-century physicians and families believed that forceps could aid and ease the birthing process, forceps frequently brought a host of new problems into the birthing room. Forceps were first introduced in America in the 1760s and were used during difficult births to extract the child from the mother’s womb, making previously undeliverable births possible and saving the lives of both women and children. Before this time, there was little recourse for any birth deemed “abnormal.” If a birth was deemed abnormal or the baby was undeliverable, neither midwives nor physicians were able to save both mother and infant. Most often, a midwife would call for a physician, and attention turned to saving the mother’s life by surgically removing the fetus from the mother’s body. Using small surgical knives or an instrument called a crochet (similar in appearance to a modern crochet hook), the child was dismembered within the womb and extracted from the mother’s body. This grisly procedure was the only recourse for abnormal births until the introduction of forceps in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Forceps use allowed physicians to deliver previously undeliverable children and to assist in long and protracted labors by removing the child from the womb. However, forceps use frequently enhanced the already-present dangers to mothers and children. Many physicians were seen as overusing or misusing forceps. Improper forceps use frequently caused tears or vaginal lacerations to the mother (which could subsequently lead to infection and death) or caused injury to the fetus’s head, further diminishing the likelihood of a healthy birth

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82 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 44.
84 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 36.
86 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 99.
87 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 99.
88 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 99.
89 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 39.
90 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 99.
91 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 45.
92 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 47.
and survival for both mother and infant. Despite improvements in obstetric technology, the birthing room remained perilous for mother and infant throughout the eighteenth century.

While the specter of death never completely vanished, many infants surviving birth were relatively healthy for their first few years of life. Although infant mortality was as high as forty percent during the first year, owing in part to the lingering effects of childbirth or diseases affecting the young in particular (such as dysentery), the care of young infants often helped the very young survive their first years. Most Tidewater families chose to nurse their own infants, barring maternal illness or injury arising from childbirth. Especially in the latter half of the century, breastfeeding was seen as instrumental to family formation because of the close contact between mother and child, fostering intimate bonds of affection. In addition to forming emotional bonds between mother and child, breastfeeding had an additional, salubrious benefit for the child: infants breastfed by a woman who had survived the seasoning process or a woman born into the Tidewater’s disease environment were consequently imparted temporary immunities to diseases the woman had survived. Infants breastfed by seasoned or native-born were among the healthiest, which resulted in a sharp decline in the mortality rates for infants surviving childbirth, lasting through the first few years of life until weaning.

Although nursed infants gained temporary immunity to some Tidewater diseases through nursing, when toddlers were weaned at approximately age two, rates of mortality increased sharply. With weaning came a lapse in between the mother’s immunities as the infant built his or her own immunity to disease. As a result, children between the ages of two and four succumbed in proportionately higher rates than their older or younger counterparts. Among the most devastating to the newly weaned (and indeed, the leading diseases found in the Tidewater) were malaria and dysentery. Respiratory failure and anemia in concert with the high fevers and sweats caused by malaria frequently caused death in weaned infants and young children. Similarly, dysentery was a leading killer of weaned and young children. Like malaria,

93 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 45.
94 Smith, Inside the Great House, 47.
95 Smith, Inside the Great House, 48.
100 Rutman and Rutman, “Of Agues and Fevers,” 50.
101 Grob, The Deadly Truth, 86.
dysentery weakened its victims, allowing secondary infections to take hold and kill an already weakened body.\textsuperscript{102} Thus, even healthy infants could fall victim to death as weaned toddlers, unable to adapt to the Tidewater disease environment.

While the likelihood of death during childhood decreased sharply after the child survived the uncertain periods of birth and weaning and began to acquire immunities of his or her own, the threat of mortality formed constant backdrop against which colonists’ lives were set. Diseases easily treatable today killed in the eighteenth century, regardless of age. With little knowledge as to how disease was spread, many diseases ran rampant through the colonies, infecting both young and old. Once disease entered into a household, it rarely claimed only one victim; as a consequence of the spread of disease, forty percent of families lost more than one child or family member to the same disease.\textsuperscript{103} Additionally, adults and children alike fell victim to a host of other ailments easily treatable today—broken bones, scalded skin, or lacerations could easily become infected. With little recourse to treat these injuries, the old and young alike simply succumbed.

\textit{Conclusion:}

Disease and death formed a constant backdrop against which many colonists’ lives were set. In spite of the precarious nature of eighteenth-century life, Tidewater culture reorganized, lauding childhood as a special phase of life, becoming highly emotional and sentimentalized by parents. Yet despite the new emotional weight and cultural emphasis placed upon childhood, child death remained a no less common trauma to the eighteenth-century family. However, with a changed understanding of child-life came a changed understanding of child death. Later century colonists expressed increasingly emotional displays of grief and mourning upon the death of a child, sentimentalizing the life lost and the virtues that the child could have embodied had he or she lived to adulthood. Parents’ private and public reactions upon the death of a child shifted over the course of the eighteenth century, expressing the changed understanding of children, childhood, and the place of the child within the family.

\textsuperscript{102} Grob, \textit{The Deadly Truth}, 86. \\
\textsuperscript{103} Grob, \textit{The Deadly Truth}, 82.
Chapter 2:
“A Severe Stroke Indeed”: Child Death and Changes in Private Commemorations.

As his beloved six-year-old daughter Susannah, affectionately called Sukey, lay gravely ill in December 1758, weakened by repeated bouts of malaria, Landon Carter turned to his diary in an attempt to comprehend her illness. Carter darkly ruminated on the prevalence of ill health and mortality within the Tidewater, writing “It is necessary that a man should be acquainted with affliction and ‘tis certainly thing short of it to be confined a whole year in tending one’s children. Mine are now never well.”

Sukey’s health continued to decline, and she eventually succumbed to her illness in April of the following year; her slow decline and the “Severe agonys [sic] of her disorder” featured prominently in Carter’s diary and mind until her death. Eighteenth-century parents like Landon Carter often suffered repeated experiences with the illness and death of a child. The death of a child and the emotional devastation that parents felt were recorded in parents’ private diaries and correspondence throughout the eighteenth century. The ways parents recorded their children’s deaths speaks to how they understood and accepted child mortality. With the increasingly emotional understanding of childhood came a changed view of child mortality; this altered perception changed how parents recorded and remembered their children’s deaths. Through an examination of how parents referred to their children both before and after death, who parents felt was responsible for the child’s death, and finally, how parents remembered their children’s lives after their passing, we are better able to elucidate how parents privately grieved the death of a child.

A Note on Parental Diaries

Diaries offer a first-hand glimpse into the eighteenth-century family—through diaries, not only is the way in which colonists lived and worked revealed, but also how colonists understood their day-to-day lives and how they interacted with one another, both in life and in death. Much of what we currently know about eighteenth-century family life and how colonists

coped with death has been gained from such readings. Historian John F. Walzer used diaries to examine how parents understood their children in life—through diaries such as those left by William Byrd and Landon Carter, Walzer studied how colonists viewed their roles as parents to their children, finding that eighteenth-century parenthood was largely defined by what he termed “parental ambivalence.” Walzer suggests that parents were uncertain as to the place of the child within the family: while parents loved their children, they could not ignore the high rates of child mortality and emotionally protected themselves from the very-real possibility of child death. Expounding upon Walzer, Daniel Blake Smith investigated not only how parents understood their children in life, but also in death. In his monograph, Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society, Smith examined how parents reacted to child death, re-examining Byrd and Carter’s diaries in a different light. Through an examination of diaries, Smith examined personal-relationships between the upper classes, finding that death and illness served to cement ties between communities. Smith suggests that the “inescapable phenomenon” of illness and death within the Tidewater formed bonds between community members, and formed a constant backdrop against which Chesapeake life was set.

This study again seeks to inspect diaries from a different angle—I suggest that by examining not only how parents recorded the death of a child, but also how parents remembered their children’s deaths, we are better able to understand how colonial ideas of childhood changed and evolved over the course of the eighteenth century. As the death of a child became a greater emotional blow to the Tidewater family, the ways in which parents privately recorded and remembered the death of a child demonstrated the parent’s greater sense of emotional loss. The families’ greater sense of devastation and how parents attempted to comprehend and cope with their loss is reflected in the pages of parental diaries.

However, several factors must be considered when interpreting eighteenth-century diaries. The diarists’ intentions and nature of the diary itself, along with the limitations of the diaries must be accounted for when using eighteenth-century diaries. Firstly, surviving diaries shed light on only a small portion of Tidewater society; those I consult were written by members of the upper, literate classes. Additionally, diaries were kept for a number of reasons: while

some diaries were meant for the diarist’s eyes alone, others were kept for posterity. Historian Patrick Henry Butler suggests that many diaries were kept to be read after death by the diarist’s friends and family, so that the readers may draw upon and learn from the experiences recounted within the diary. Butler cites diaries such as Landon Carter’s as an example of this kind of diary. Born in 1710, Landon Carter was a successful aristocratic planter from Richmond County, Virginia. In his surviving diary, kept from 1752 until his death in 1778, Carter recorded the day-to-day events of his business and family life. Butler suggests that Carter kept his diary in an attempt to understand not only the social and political turmoil of the day, but also to come to terms with his own mortality. Further, Butler suggests that Carter intended that his diary would be read by his friends and family after his death so that readers may learn from his experiences. Carter’s diary offers a mix of simple record combined with intense personal introspection into his private world. When Carter recorded the death of his daughter Sukey, his reflections were a combination of a straightforward recollection of his daughter’s death and the family’s mourning, alongside his own intimate thoughts and grief upon her illness and passing.

In contrast, other diaries were intended to be private, both during the diarist’s life and after death. William Byrd’s “secret diaries” are such an example. Born in 1674, Byrd was also a wealthy planter and statesman, considered the founder of Richmond. In his “secret” diaries, the first surviving set chronicling the years between 1709 and 1712, Byrd delved deeper into his private family life, recording intimate episodes from within the Byrd household. Byrd also recorded his emotional life in more depth than many other contemporary diarists, recording not only day-to-day events but also offering deep introspection. Yet Byrd so desired to keep his diary private that he coded his diaries so they could not be easily read without transcription (Indeed, Byrd’s diary was not translated until the 1940s).

Lastly, other diarists simply offered records of events taken from daily life with little introspection or inward reflection. Reverend Robert Rose’s diary is such an example. Rose, a

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110 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 430.
111 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 430.
112 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 435.
Scottish immigrant to Lancaster County, Virginia was a prominent religious figure in the Tidewater, serving as the first minister of St. Anne’s Parish in Albemarle County.\(^{115}\) His diary, kept between 1746 and 1751, simply recorded a recollection of the day’s events with little personal introspection. Rose seemingly put no effort toward preserving the privacy of his diary, nor did he attempt to leave his diary for use after his death. Rose not only recorded the emotional trauma of death within his own family, but because of his role as reverend within the community, he also recorded the deaths of many of his parishioners, noting the final religious rites he performed for the dying and comfort offered to the bereaved.

This chapter also utilizes two other Tidewater diarists: the diary and letters of William Beverley and the diary of Colonel James Gordon. William Beverley was a clerk and statesman in Essex County, Virginia. Beverley recorded the death of his son while at William Byrd’s plantation at Westover in 1743; through his diaries and correspondence with friends, he discussed the lasting emotional trauma of the death of his son. Similarly, Colonel James Gordon, an immigrant to Lancaster County from Ireland in 1738, became a wealthy and influential merchant.\(^{116}\) Gordon described the prevalence of illness within his family, in addition to his wife’s miscarriages and his daughter’s illness and death.

Because of the variety of diaries, their intended audiences, and the diarists’ reasons for recording his daily life, diaries are at times uneven in nature and difficult to work with. However, they reveal the private lives and worlds of colonial Virginians. This chapter surveyed the diaries of five men from the Tidewater—in rough chronology, William Byrd, William Beverley, Reverend Robert Rose, Colonel Landon Carter, and Colonel James Gordon. Through these diaries and the first-hand accounts of the illness and death of a child, we are not only able to better understand how Virginia parents understood their children, but also see the changes that occurred within concepts of childhood and mortality.

These diaries are all written by men. Diaries written from a maternal perspective are exceedingly rare before 1750.\(^{117}\) Consequently, none of the diaries included in this survey offer maternal reflections from mothers in the Tidewater. For a maternal perspective into the

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emotional trauma brought on by the death of a child, I have had to look outside of the Tidewater. Although out of my geographic area of study, the diary of Elizabeth Drinker, offers a glimpse into child mortality in urban Pennsylvania. Drinker, a late-eleventh-century Quaker woman from Philadelphia kept an almost daily diary for nearly fifty years, spanning between 1759 and 1807 and recorded her experiences with marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, and child mortality. However, Drinker’s diary may only be used to generalize eighteenth-century maternal emotion upon the death of a child. Because of Drinker’s different region and cultural background, her diary may not be representative of Virginia mothers. Yet Drinker’s diary offers a vital and interesting perspective into how mothers comprehended and coped with the death of a child, even if her diary is not from the Tidewater.

Terms of Affection and Address

Over the eighteenth century, the increasingly emotional understanding of childhood and children was reflected in the terms by which parents referred to their children, both in life and in death. Especially for dying or deceased children, terms of affection (or lack thereof) give clues as to the emotional proximity between parent and child, and how parents used this emotional proximity to either distance themselves from or embrace the emotional pain of death. The terms of address used by parents to record children’s deaths at different stages of life: fetal death as the result of miscarriage or premature birth, infants, and children reflect how parents comprehended their children both in life and in death.

Many eighteenth-century pregnancies resulted in miscarriage or stillbirth. Indeed, many families had multiple experiences with fetal death. Diarists’ wives’ and daughters’ stillbirths and miscarriages often featured prominently in private correspondence and diaries. However, the way in which parents wrote about and understood the death of an unborn child changed over the course of the eighteenth century. Even in life, infants were often termed “little stranger” by both parents and family members. Items such as christening pillows and other, small children’s objects from eighteenth-century material culture frequently featured the phrase, “Welcome, Little Stranger.” Historian John F. Walzer posits that this was due in part to the perception that infants, both unborn and born, were not yet seen as being viable humans or members of the family. Especially in the early part of the century, until infants survived the tenuous periods of childbirth and early infancy, parents avoided forming strong emotional bonds with their infants: seeing
their children as strangers helped parents keep an emotional distance between themselves and their children, girding themselves against the emotional loss of a child. However, as children became endowed with greater emotional worth, the death of a stillborn child went from being perceived as the death of a virtual alien to the loss of an unborn family member. The death of an unborn child became as worthy of grief and mourning as any other family member, and the ways in which parents recorded and remembered their loss stands in testament to the changed emotional value placed upon children.

In the early summer of 1711, William Byrd’s wife, Lucy Parke, was nearing the end of an otherwise uneventful pregnancy. As Lucy Parke Byrd prepared to give birth, Byrd began to fear that his wife would miscarry and urged her to be bled, to which she refused to consent. Like many of his contemporaries and physicians, Byrd believed that bloodletting lessened the chances of miscarriage and promoted healthy births for both mother and child. Despite “many small quarrels” between William and Lucy Byrd over the next few days, Lucy Byrd steadfastly refused to be bled (which William Byrd attributed to “her fear which is very uncontrollable.”) Eventually, on June 25, after a week of uncertainty as to the health of mother and child (and eventual submission to her husband’s insistence that she be bled), Lucy Byrd prematurely delivered a nearly full-term fetus. William Byrd recorded the birth in his diary:

My wife grew worse and after much trial and persuasion was let blood when it was too late…my wife grew very ill which made [me] weep for her…in the afternoon, my wife grew much worse and voided a prodigious quantity of blood…before I returned [from a walk around the plantation], my wife sent for me because she was very weak and soon after I came she was delivered of a false conception and then grew better. [emphasis added]

Although the fetus was nearly full-term at over seven months of gestation, William Byrd nonetheless referred to the fetus in ambiguous, non-human terms, stating only that the fetus was a “false conception.” Byrd first recorded his wife’s pregnancy in October 1710; by Byrd’s own

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reckoning, the fetus would be at least in its eight month of gestation, and would have matured to a point so that it was identifiable not only as a near-term infant but also as male or female. Yet Byrd did not refer to the infant in gendered (or even human) terms, nor were any possessive terms identifying the infant as a member of the family (such as “son,” “daughter,” or even “child”) used to identify the unborn child. Even “stranger” was too familiar a term to identify the child; the deceased infant was referred to as an anomaly, not as a child, nor as a potential family member.

Additionally, no mention is made as to the fate of the deceased infant’s body. No record remains as to how the body was disposed of, nor if any mortuary rituals were provided for the deceased infant. Neither of the Byrds seemed to dwell upon the infant’s death or Lucy Parke Byrd’s miscarriage. Indeed, in the days following Lucy Byrd’s miscarriage, both Byrds fell back into mundane routine; Byrd records that both he and his wife were in improved spirits the next day—“My wife was extremely mended and very cheerful, thank God…In the afternoon I took a nap with my wife and then went and read some French. I let my wife some pictures to divert [sic] her.” The previous week of fear and anxiety over both the health of both mother and infant were seemingly replaced by the commonplace, and no further reference is made to either Lucy Byrd’s ill health, the family’s emotional upset as the result of her miscarriage, or to the deceased infant. Indeed, neither the infant nor how Byrd or his wife dealt with the death of a child was ever again mentioned in the diary.

Later-century premature deliveries were commemorated in increasingly familiar and human terms. The terms by which parents addressed deceased unborn children changed later in the century. The diary of Colonel James Gordon offers an example of the changed understanding of childhood. When Gordon’s wife miscarried in September 1760, unlike his early-century counterpart William Byrd, Gordon recorded the sex of the deceased infant. Gordon’s diary entry read:

Between 11 & 12 last night my wife was delivered of a dead child—a girl, & I adore the Almighty God, she is as well as can be expected. Sent for Mr. Chincester & Nancy, but they were coming before Gustin got here.

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Unlike Byrd’s recollection of his wife’s miscarriage fifty years earlier, Gordon records not only that the fetus was a child (and by implication a member of the family) but also identifies the fetus by as a girl, reflecting the changed understanding of children within the family. No longer were deceased infants simply “false conceptions” but were identified not only as children but as family members, as worthy as mourning as any other deceased loved one.

However, like William Byrd, Gordon does not expound upon the fate of the deceased infant’s body, nor does he record either his or his wife’s emotional state after her miscarriage. The body after death does not claim Gordon’s attention; instead, like Byrd, Gordon turned his attention to his wife’s improving health. The day after her miscarriage, Gordon simply wrote, “My wife continues to recover for which I return the Almighty thanks.”

Like his early-century counterpart, no further mention of the deceased infant girl, her body, nor either of the Gordon’s emotional states survives in Gordon’s diary.

In comparing Byrd and Gordon’s similar experiences with the death of a child, separated by fifty years of cultural change, the beginning of the shift in understanding of childhood is revealed. While not a sea change, the ways in which parents understood the death of an unborn child shifted, making the death more personal and traumatic for the family. While the death of a prematurely born child never garnered the same emotional outpouring as the death of an older child, later-century families valued prematurely born children in their own right. Unborn children were no longer anonymous “little strangers”—they were instead identified as members of the family.

The ways which parents referred to infants dying after a few months of life similarly changed. When William Byrd’s infant son Parke was approximately eight months old, he fell “very sick of a fever” in May 1710. After nearly a month of rallying and declining health, Parke Byrd eventually succumbed to his illness on June 3, 1710. William Byrd recorded his son’s death and his and his wife’s grief in his diary:

I rose at 6 o’clock and as soon as I came out news was brought that the child was very ill. We went out and found him just ready to die and he died about 8 o’clock in the morning. God gives and God takes away; blessed be the name of God…My wife was much afflicted but I submitted to His judgment better, notwithstanding I was very sensible of my loss, but God’s will be done.

Throughout the duration of Parke Byrd’s illness in May and June of 1710, Byrd’s diary entries reflected his emotional preparation for his son’s death. The terms Byrd used when referring to his son became increasingly emotionally distant as Parke Byrd’s survival became less likely. William Byrd first makes note of his son’s illness on May 12, 1710; in the intervening 23 days before Parke Byrd’s death on June 3, Byrd refers to Parke Byrd as “the child” eleven times and “the boy” six times, while only referring to Parke Byrd as the more possessive “my” or “our child” twice, “my” or “our son” four times, and “my” or “our boy” three times (not including an additional instance after Parke Byrd’s death). In the initial stages of his son’s illness, Byrd affectionately termed Parke Byrd “my son” or “the boy,” suggesting that the child was not only a member of the family but identified him as his son. When Parke Byrd’s death appeared imminent, Byrd’s terms of identification became increasingly emotionally distant; instead of referring to his son affectionately as “our” or “my” son or as “our” or “my” boy (implying a connection between his son and the Byrd family), he instead identifies his son simply as “the child,” distancing and eventually severing emotional, filial bonds between father and son. Byrd’s identification of his son as “the child” reflects the increasing emotional distance he placed between himself and his son’s mortality. Terms identifying Parke Byrd as a member of the family such as “my son” or “the boy” were no longer used and imply Byrd’s increasing emotional distance from his son’s mortality. After his son’s death, Byrd completely severed emotional ties between himself and his son, simply discussing his son as “the corpse,” retaining no affectionate terms to indicate family ties between father and son.128

In contrast, during Parke Byrd’s final illness, Byrd’s other child, his three-year-old daughter Evelyn also fell ill of a similar illness. Byrd also documented her illness and his anxiety over her health. However, when discussing his daughter’s sickness, Byrd referred to her in more affectionate terms, consistently calling her “my daughter” and even by her pet name of “Evie.”129 Byrd also recorded the treatments given to her in hopes of alleviating her pain and curing her illness in greater detail than those of his son. For example, on May 24, 1710, Byrd recorded the treatments given to his daughter:

I sent for my cousin Harrison to let Evie blood who was ill. When she came she took away about four ounces. We put on blisters and gave her a glyster which

worked very well. Her blood was extremely thick, which is common in distemper of this constitution. About 12 o’clock she began to sweat of herself, which we prompted by a tincture of saffron and sage and snakeroot. This made her sweat extremely, in which she continued little or more all night. 

By contrast, on May 30, Byrd simply recorded that he gave his son “bark,” noting that later in the day, “we thought the child better.” Byrd consistently dedicated more space in his diary to the treatments given to his daughter, focusing on how much of certain treatments were given to her and recording their effectiveness. The attention to detail regarding his daughter’s treatments in combination with the difference in nomenclature suggests Byrd’s stronger emotional attachment to his daughter; at three years of age, Evelyn was an older toddler and by virtue of her age and immunities, was more likely to survive her illness. Evie’s age allowed stronger emotional attachments between father and daughter to form. Unlike Parke Byrd, Evelyn was an older child and had survived her period of infantile anonymity, and Byrd’s worries for her health reflect the longer period of time for emotional bonds to form.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the death of an older child was the most devastating within the family. By virtue of the child’s age, more time had been allowed for greater emotional bonds to form between parents and children. Older children had more time to garner greater emotional weight within the family, were often identified by their own names and personalities, and were past the point of infantile anonymity. However, the longer period of interaction between parents and child often compounded the grief that many later-century parents felt upon the death of an older child. Especially by the end of the century, many parents were inconsolable upon the death of an older child, reflecting the emotionalized understanding of children and childhood, and the devastation felt by parents who experienced the death of an older child.

In November 1748, Reverend Robert Rose’s fourteen-year-old daughter Mary Rose was “sized with a Difficulty of Breathing.” As the girl suffered through a bout of pneumonia, Rose recorded his family’s efforts to restore her health, again through bleeding: “Sent for Mrs. Birwell and Mrs. Edmundson to Bleed Her but could not, sent for Dr. Roy who bled her at the 3d

132 Rose, The Diary of Robert Rose, 44.
Although Mary Rose’s health seemed to be improving, the following day, her health swiftly deteriorated and she died that evening. Rose recorded the event in his diary: “This Day, my Daughter was, I thought, easier, but at Night about seven of the clock, she fainted away and died without a groan.” Two days later, he recorded his daughter’s funeral: “A Rainy Day, buried my Dear Daughter’s Body by her Mother & Brother Robert’s at Mrs. Brooke’s plantation, I stayed at Mrs. Tarent’s all this day.” Rose’s recollection of his daughter’s death is suggestive of commemorations for older children. Like William Byrd and his concern for his older daughter Evie’s health, Robert Rose’s daughter Mary was an older child at age fourteen, and was well past the period of infantile vulnerability and anonymity. Rose’s recollections of his daughter’s sickness and death suggest a closer emotional proximity shared between father and daughter: throughout her illness, Rose refers to her as “my Daughter” and even “my Dear Daughter.” By virtue of Mary Rose’s age and the time she had shared with her family, stronger emotional bonds were able to form between parent and child, making her death all the more devastating to her father.

Although only ten years passed between Robert Rose’s experience with the death of a child and Landon Carter’s experience with child death, Carter’s recollection of his six-year-old daughter Susannah’s death stands as an example of a highly emotional expression upon the death of a child. Although Carter’s Sukey was considerably younger than Robert Rose’s daughter Mary, Carter’s recollections of his young daughter’s death are reminiscent of Rose’s recollections from a decade earlier. Although Rose’s record of his daughter’s death was not nearly as detailed nor as expressive as Carter’s, similar emotional sentiments were shared between the two fathers upon the death of a daughter. The period of infantile anonymity was waning, and even relatively young children were endowed with greater emotional weight by their parents.

Throughout her short life, Susannah Carter was weakened by successive bouts of malaria; unable to thrive, her health slowly declined before her father’s eyes. As did many of his peers, Landon Carter recorded his attempts to restore his daughter to health, and as her death neared, to ease her pain. As her health declined, Carter recorded the treatments provided to his daughter. Several months before her death, he wrote:

133 Rose, *The Diary of Robert Rose*, 44.
134 Rose, *The Diary of Robert Rose*, 44.
135 Rose, *The Diary of Robert Rose*, 44.
Poor Sukey still very ill. Severe fevers almost constant. There seemed to be a small intermission from a little after sunset till past 12 at night. Dr. Flood got down 4 doses of bark amounting Decoction and all to 1/4 of an Ounce, the decoction boyled down with Valerian root, but her fever rose high at 9 this day and continues till this past 2, which is the time that one of these days she used to grow a little Cheerfull but now she has both head ach and great Sickness at Stomach, a complainit she never had before and this is her 8th day.136

In the spring of 1758, when her death appeared imminent, Carter had his daughter removed from the family home at Sabine Hall to live with a nearby family friend, Mr. Gilbert Hamilton.137 Historian Daniel Blake Smith suggests that Carter had his dying daughter sent away from the family home not out of callousness, but because his love was so great for his daughter that he could not bear to watch her die.138 Hamilton sent Carter daily updates as to his daughter’s condition; when Susannah died on April 25, 1758, Hamilton sent Carter a detailed letter, including a graphic description of his daughter’s final moments and the appearance of her corpse. After learning of Susannah’s death, Carter became introspective, reflecting on his sense of loss and focusing upon the genteel virtues his young daughter had embodied during her short life, lamenting that her virtues were only just blossoming and their fullness would remain a mystery. In addition to her potential contributions to society, Carter had a more self-interested reason to lament her death. Indeed, Carter had hoped that his beloved Sukey would care for him in his old age. Carter recorded that Susannah’s death was a:

Severe stroke indeed to A Man bereft of a wife and in the decline of life because at such periods ‘tis natural to look out for such Connections that may be reasonably expected to be the support of Grayhairs and such an one I had promised myself in this child in Particular.139

In contrast to Carter’s introspection, he also included an unusually graphic description of his daughter’s dying hours and corpse in his diary, as relayed by Gilbert Hamilton:

138 Smith, *Inside the Great House*, 270.
This morning Mr. Gilbert Hamilton (at whose house my dear little daughter Susannah has been ever since her last illness) sent me an account of her death. Certainly approaching, and he says in his letter, although her face, feet and hands are all cold and her pulse quite gone and reduced to the bones and skin that cover them and dying very hard under the Severe agons of her disorder, Yet does she preserve her usual Patience to such a degree that he never saw such an Example before.

Carter went on to juxtapose the unusually graphic depiction of his daughter’s final moments with an elegiac poem that lamented her lost life and the virtues that she had yet to (yet was destined to) embody:

For although she did not live beyond the very Dawn
Of humane life
Such were the early discoverys of her growing Excellencys
It might be justly concluded That had the same Soul
Animated to a Mature Age A more healthy Frame
She would have been a Conspicuous Pattern if not inimitable
Even amongst the most Prudent, Good, and Virtuous
Of her Sex
God Omnipotent.

The contrast between Carter’s description of his deceased daughter’s final moments and the virtues Carter felt she would have embodied had she survived stand in stark contrast to early century commemorations for children of all ages. Not only does Carter lament his daughter’s lost life, he also laments the effects his daughter’s life and death had upon him, both physically and emotionally. Susannah Carter’s death was indeed a “severe stroke” to her father. Carter’s understanding of his daughter’s death reflects the increasingly emotional bond felt between parents and children, and the increasingly emotional sense of loss and devastation parents felt upon the death of a child.

With the rise of the emotional understanding of childhood, parents increasingly sentimentalized their children’s lives and deaths; in turn, parents also increasingly internalized and were emotionally devastated by the death of a child. Parents’ sense of grief and loss grew more intense. Childhood was to be joyous time in life for both parents and children; instead, death robbed parents of these joyous years. The way in which parents understood their

children’s lives and deaths was reflected in the language used when discussing the death of a child, suggesting parent’s emotional attachments to their children, and how parents comprehended the lost young life.

Responsibility

As parents adopted a more emotional view of children and childhood, parental diaries expressed a similar change as to who they felt was responsible for the fate of their children. Early century parents placed their children’s life or death in the hands of God, resigning their children’s fate to a higher power. However, later-century parents increasingly placed the burden of blame upon themselves (or placed blame upon other, human hands) and that the family, especially the mother, was responsible for their children’s wellness. This shift in perception of responsibility from the Divine to human hands coincides with not only the increased sentimentalization of childhood, but with the reorganization of the Tidewater family. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, husbands and wives had been on relatively even economic footing: women were seen as “working partners” both within the home and on the plantation, and engaged in many of the same domestic duties as men. However, by the middle of the eighteenth century, male and female roles were becoming increasingly separated—men assumed more responsibility for the family’s economic and business life, while women were put in charge of the home. As women became less important to the family as work partners, their role as moral guardians of home and family and as caring, nurturing mothers increased. Rather than Divine will, mothers were posited as the most influential force behind their children’s wellbeing; consequently, mothers fell under increased scrutiny upon the death of a child.

Early-century parents placed their children’s health or mortality squarely in the hands of a higher power, and often used the death of a child to demonstrate their submission to God’s will. After Parke Byrd’s death, William Byrd wrote of his resignation to God’s will, stating simply, “God gives and God takes away; blessed be the name of God.” In contrast to Lucy

142 Smith, Inside the Great House, 238.
143 Smith, Inside the Great House, 238.
144 Smith, Inside the Great House, 238.
Byrd’s miscarriage the year before, both Byrds experienced an emotional upset upon the death of their son. However, the Byrds’ grief manifested in very different forms. While Byrd wrote of his acceptance of his son’s death, he also recorded that his wife, Lucy, was not as willing to submit to God’s will. Byrd wrote that, unlike himself, Lucy Byrd “was much afflicted but I submitted to His judgment better, notwithstanding I was very sensible of my loss, but God’s will be done.” Byrd went on to record that for the next several days he was “griped in my belly very much”; John F. Walzer suggests that Byrd’s intestinal upset may have been a physical manifestation of his grief at the death of his son. While Byrd consciously wrote of his submission to God’s will, he may have felt more grief than he was willing to commit to paper, even in a “secret” diary. While Byrd did not discuss his grief in his diary (other than noting his upset stomach), Byrd noted that his wife “continued very melancholy” for the next few weeks. Instead of expressing his own grief, Byrd wrote that his wife continued to grieve the death of their son; instead of recording his own emotions, Byrd recorded that he was better able to cope because of his submission to God’s will. Historian Peter G. Slater notes that parents frequently saw the death of a child as an opportunity to show their devotion to God. Many early century parents viewed the fate of their children as controlled by God’s will; by accepting and submitting to God’s will, parents were demonstrating their faith and devotion to a higher power. The death of a child was the perfect stage to test and demonstrate personal faith in God, and to illustrate submission to His will. Ideally, such submission to God’s will would help parents find solace in the idea that their children were in Heaven and would not suffer on earth as did the living. However, as suggested by Landon Carter’s emotional outpouring after the death of his daughter, Sukey, and his questioning of God’s will, this was not always put into practice.

Mid-century parental responses to child death represent a transitional phase in how parents understood and coped with the death of a child. Parents had not yet fully released their children’s mortality from God’s hands, but had yet to fully place their children’s mortality in human hands. When William Beverley’s son John died while under the care of William Byrd at

151 Slater, “From Cradle to Coffin,” 34.
his estate at Westover in 1742, the tension between this transition becomes apparent in Beverley’s correspondence. Beverley wrote to his friends, detailing what he felt was Byrd’s appalling care and neglect of his dying son. In his letters, Beverley reveals the tension between resting his son’s fate in the Divine to placing the blame upon human action. In a letter to William Fairfax, Beverley recorded his emotions upon his son’s final days and grief upon his death:

Above all with a deep Melancholy for ye Death of my Dr son John who deptd this life at Colo Byrds (where I placed him at school) and yt inhuman Lady kept my dearest boy tho’ very sick all along in a cold room without fire or any body to lie with him to keep him covered, tho’ it was very cold and to my extreme grief I got there 2 nights before he died, having with him only that old fool of a Doctor we saw at Col. Blands who had no medicines and before I could get a Doctor, it was too late, for God took him from me on the 26th of Novr. O! That I had died in his room; for tho’ I know I ought to submit with patience, yet my Melancholy increases and I believe it won’t be long before I lye in the dust with him who was the sweetest boy that ‘ere was born.153

While Beverley cites the squalid conditions and inadequate care provided by the “yt inhuman Lady” (presumably Byrd’s second wife, Maria) and the poor care provided by the “old fool of a Doctor” as instrumental in the decline of his son’s health, Beverley nonetheless credits God with his son’s final removal on November 26.154 Additionally, like Landon Carter, Beverley described his extreme feelings of grief upon the death of his son, even stating that he would soon follow him to the grave. However, it should be noted that Beverley’s grief upon the death of his son was seen as excessive even by some of his contemporaries. William Byrd himself wrote to Beverley, chastising him for being “immoderately afflicted for the loss of your ‘dear Poppet.’”155 However, while Byrd may have viewed Beverley’s grief as “immoderate,” (quite possibly to absolve himself of culpability), such grandiose expressions of grief similar to Beverley’s would soon become more common and accepted within the Tidewater.

Later century parents gradually removed their children’s fate from Divine hands and looked to fault human action for their children’s deaths. When Landon Carter’s daughter-in-law, Winifred Beales Travers Carter, miscarried in April 1771, Carter bitterly recorded what he

155 William Byrd to William Beverley, quoted from Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 183-4.
perceived as his daughter-in-law’s careless actions and lack of maternal instinct and compassion which led to her miscarriage:

…My son’s Wife miscarried last night. She is a strange woman. I suspected her being with child some months ago, and advized her to be careful in many things, particularly to get timely blooded, as she always knew how fatal the want of such a thoughtfulness had been torn a laughing matter, both in her husband and herself; till on Saturday whilst Colo. Corbin, his son, and daughter was here she was taken with very suspicious complaints, concea[led] from everybody, for she went about as Usual; and after the Company was gone she would only be blooded in the morning. Yesterday she was blooded, and stayed from bre[ak]fast to keep herself still, the only piece of prudence she has been guilty of. And in order to keep her to it her husband stayed at home all day yesterday. But when I came home last night I found Mortimer was sent for: however, after such uneasiness she miscarried about 11. And upon inquiry I find this still Lady came down yesterday to dinner, eat hartily of Mutton Chops, fish, etc., and cherry tart with milk in it: So that to all appearance there must have been some intention to forward the abortio[n]. Strange woman indeed.\textsuperscript{156}

Unlike his early-century counterparts, Carter placed the burden of blame of his daughter-in-law’s miscarriage squarely upon what he perceived as her lack of self-care and inadequate maternal instincts; mortal hands (rather than Divine will) was exclusively to blame for Winifred Carter’s miscarriage. Winifred Carter’s actions, ill-used medical advice, and even dietary habits were called into question; Carter ultimately blamed her “strange” habits for the death of her unborn infant. When his daughter-in-law miscarried again in October 1774, Carter explicitly stated his belief in his daughter-in-law’s culpability for the death of her unborn child. Carter recorded his vitriolic disdain for his daughter-in-law’s habits and actions in his diary:

\begin{quote}
It is her own fault, a woman that hardly moves when not with child, always is Jolting in a Chariot when with Child. This is the 3d destroyed this way.\textsuperscript{157}
\end{quote}

Carter, unlike his early-century counterparts, completely removed the fate of his deceased grandchildren from Divine will and placed the responsibility of their deaths squarely upon the hands of the woman he viewed to be an irresponsible mother. With the emergence of a highly

\textsuperscript{156}Carter, \textit{The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall}, vol. II, 620.
emotional family life, in combination with the shift in male and female roles, parents assumed greater responsibility (or placed greater blame) for their children’s fate. Therefore, greater blame was placed upon “irresponsible” parents or other, human figures when a child died rather than upon the impetus of Divine will. Parents grieved not only the loss of a child, but the loss of a child as the result of irresponsible human action. As children became increasingly precious to the family, and as childhood gained greater emotional weight, families shifted, assuming greater responsibility for the lives of its youngest members.

Remembrance and Recollection

Despite the emotionalized understanding of childhood, few Tidewater parents revisited the memory of their children after the child’s death. In the diaries surveyed, children were rarely mentioned in parental diaries after deaths, and many parents did not even include notation of the child’s funeral, even though children were typically afforded the final ritual of a funeral. While other adults record attending children’s funerals, parents rarely recorded their own children’s funerals. With the shift toward a more emotional understanding of childhood, Daniel Blake Smith argues that many parents could not bear to record or relive the emotional pain of the death of a child.  

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Especially after mid-century, few Tidewater parents documented the details of their children’s funerals. While parents undoubtedly attended their children’s funerals, descriptions of children’s funerals in the surveyed parental diaries are rare. When William Byrd’s son Parke died in 1710, Byrd included the details regarding how the family prepared for the funeral, including the wood that was used to make his son’s coffin, the name of the coffin maker and where the coffin came from.  

159 Byrd also included details of the funeral and burial—the friends and family who attended the funeral, down to the weather the day of the funeral and what the family served the funeral guests for dinner.  

160 Yet despite the meticulous details Byrd provided the day of his son’s funeral, after the funeral, Parke Byrd virtually vanishes from the diary. He is never again mentioned in Byrd’s diary; while Byrd recorded that his wife “continued

158 Smith, “Autonomy and Affection,” 270.
disconsolate,” he did not note the source of his wife’s unrest.  

Both Byrd and his diary become conspicuously mute in regard to his emotions and grief upon the death of his son.

Later century diaries recollected even less about children’s funerals than their early-century counterparts. Although Landon Carter included unusually explicit details regarding not only his daughter Susannah’s final days but also his emotions upon her death, Carter did not include any details as to her funeral. In the days following Susannah’s death, Carter instead turned his attention to the details of his business and the status of his yearly planting. Like Parke Byrd, Susannah Carter was never again mentioned in Carter’s diary. This conspicuous absence was largely due to the emotionalized understanding of childhood—parents did not wish to remember the details of their children’s funerals (or such graphic depictions of their children’s final moments as did Landon Carter). Parents repressed such memories because the memory of such an emotionally-charged event was too painful for parents to document or to remember.

While paternal diaries often avoided mentioning the final rituals surrounding the death of a child or remembered the child’s memory after death, some maternal diaries mentioned the death of a child after the death and funeral, keeping the memory of the child alive within the pages of the diary. Although not a Virginia diarist, Elizabeth Drinker’s diary may shed light onto how Tidewater mothers remembered their children after death. After Drinker’s nearly three-year-old son Charles died on March 17, 1784, Drinker twice recorded the anniversary of her son’s death in her diary. Thirteen years after Charles Drinker’s death, Drinker wrote: “Misty wind S.E.—this is a mild St. Patrick’s-day—13 years this day since the death of our last Child—Charles.” Again in 1803, Drinker simply wrote, “St. Patrick’s day, Our little Charles died 19 years ago hazey morning,” before continuing with a recollection of her day. Perhaps most tellingly, when Molly, a family friend’s child became ill, Drinker recalled the memory of her son’s death in her diary:

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161 Byrd, The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 189, (June 8, 1710).
Her little Mary, now about 6 weeks old, was very ill of a child, and oppress’d with phlegm they sent for Dr. Dunlap, he ordered snake-root-tea, which she gave her, but the child was so oppress’d that she thought she would have died, observed an unusual luster in her eyes, which she recollected hearing me say was the case with my dear little Charles a few minuets before he died—of something like the hives.—but little Mary after some little time brought up some phlegm which relieved her.—she is now bravely.  

By contrast to paternal diaries, Drinker’s diary suggests that women discussed the death of a child. Because of common experiences with pregnancy, birth, and the death of a child, women formed what Carroll Smith-Rosenberg termed “The Female World of Love and Ritual.” Smith-Rosenberg argues that common experiences with the female life cycle (especially those related to childbearing) formed a constant backdrop against which women’s lives were set; because of shared experiences, women formed close, emotional bonds with other women. Further, these relationships formed support networks between women, allowing women to communicate their experiences of common, everyday events affecting women’s lives with other women. Through this network, the often-traumatic events related to pregnancy, childbirth, and the inevitability of child death were discussed, and women shared their experiences, offered comfort and condolence, and sympathized with their female friends over shared experiences. To this end, it is not difficult to imagine Elizabeth Drinker sharing her experience with the death of her beloved Charles with her family friend, Molly. By using Elizabeth Drinker’s recollection of her son’s death to identify the illness of another child, Molly was in turn able to save the life of another child. In this way, Charles Drinker’s memory lived on within his mother’s world of friendship, love, and affection shared between women and mothers.

Conclusion

As the cultural understanding of childhood changed, so too did the ways in which parents grieved the death of a child. As the emotional value placed upon children changed, sentimentalizing children and child-life, the death of a child became all the more devastating to the parents. Parents privately recorded their experiences with the death of a child in parental

diaries. Through these diaries, we are better able to understand the private world of grief parents experienced. Parental diaries suggest that as notions of childhood evolved and became increasingly emotional, so too did the ways in which parents remembered their children’s deaths. The death of a child became such an emotionally charged event that by the end of the century, parents could not bear to record their children’s funerals—the event was too traumatic to document or relive. Through an examination of private recollections and remembrances, we are better able to understand mourning rituals, and contrast private grief to how children were publically mourned. Private views of child death shed light on public commemorations, elucidating the shift in parental perceptions of children and childhood, and demonstrating changes in how parents wished their children to be remembered for eternity.
Chapter 3:
“Here the Fond Hopes of His Griev’d Parents Lye”: Changes in Public Commemorations of Children’s Deaths

As the result of the high rates of child mortality, the majority of eighteenth-century Tidewater families knew all too well the emotional pain of the loss of a child, and many parents lived to see several of their children buried before reaching maturity. Yet despite the high rates of child mortality, the eighteenth century witnessed radical changes in perceptions of the family and children’s place within the family. As childhood gained new emotional value within the Tidewater family and community, the death of a child became an all the more devastating (although no less common) loss to the family. The later eighteenth-century reorientation of family life was reflected not only in the material culture of life, but also in the material culture of death. This chapter discusses how families publically mourned the death of a child. The way in which families chose to represent and commemorate their deceased children’s lives in the form of mortuary practices—from preparing the body for burial, to interment, to lasting commemorations in the form of tombstones—reflected the emerging, highly sentimental understanding of childhood, and the emotionally devastating sense of loss parents felt upon the death of a child. By examining mortuary practices for children and the evolution of these practices over the course of the eighteenth century, we are able to trace how parents understood their children, childhood, and mortality.

The topics of death and childhood in the Tidewater have been addressed by previous historians. Historian Daniel Blake Smith has written extensively about the Tidewater family and childhood in the eighteenth century. In his monograph, Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society, Smith discussed eighteenth-century family life, arguing that the “inescapable phenomenon” of illness and death and the mourning rituals surrounding death helped to cement ties between family members and the larger community.169 Smith also addressed the high rates of mortality in the eighteenth-century Chesapeake, discussing how Tidewater families coped with the death of a loved one. Smith and Nancy

Schrom Dye also discussed how mothers comprehended the death of a child in the article “Mother Love and Infant Death: 1750-1920.” In the article, Dye and Smith argue that American motherhood between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries was set against and defined by the death of a child, affecting how mothers interacted with their children. Similarly, historian Patrick Henry Butler addressed the topic of mortality in the Tidewater in his dissertation, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life: Death and Society in Colonial Tidewater Virginia.” In “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life” Butler offers a holistic view of death and mortality in the Tidewater, discussing both mortuary practices and the cultural understanding of death. Butler argues that mortuary monuments were a vital part of Tidewater society, allowing the memory of the deceased to live on within the family and community.

While the topics of mortality and childhood have been discussed by previous historians, the intersection of childhood and death has not been fully addressed. This intersection is vital because it offers insight into eighteenth-century family life and its evolution over the course of the eighteenth century. A study of death allows not only further insight into Tidewater culture, but also an examination of how colonists comprehended the common occurrence of illness and death within the eighteenth-century household. By examining both death and childhood, we are better able to comprehend not only how colonists understood their children, but also how colonists confronted death.

Methodology

Tombstones represent the most lasting expression of a family’s ritualized, public mourning, and in turn, reveal the family’s sense of emotional loss upon the death of a child. Colonists’ changing understanding of children and childhood may be examined through a study of tombstones. When preparing for this chapter, I surveyed churches and family plots found in a small section of the Tidewater in the area surrounding Williamsburg on Virginia’s eastern coast. While I was unable to visit every cemetery in the Virginia Tidewater because of the small scale of this project, the results of this survey are nonetheless suggestive, revealing patterns that parallel those found by others who have examined tombstones as historical evidence.

Geographically, the cemeteries are in area south of the Piankatank River, north of Norfolk, and east of Richmond, comprising approximately 120 square miles.◊

Figure 1: Map of Surveyed Area (Courtesy of Mapquest.com)

At these sites, I sought graves of children dying at or before ten years of age between the years 1690 and 1810. I read these tombstones in terms of just more than numbers—inscriptions, decorations, and who the deceased child was buried with. In this way, I was able to relate this aspect of material culture to changing views of childhood. In all, I surveyed thirteen sites, with a total of 73 graves commemorating the lives of 127 different individuals. Of the 127 individual commemorations, 100 were children who died aged ten years or younger.◊ Eleven sites were church cemeteries: Abingdon Church, Bruton Parish Church, Grace Church, St. John’s Church, St. Luke’s Church, St. Mary’s White Chapel, St. Paul’s Church, St. Peter’s Church, Ware Church, Christ Church, and Westover Church. I also visited two family cemeteries: the Travis Family cemetery on Jamestown Island, and the Byrd Family cemetery at Westover Plantation in Charles City County. Of these two sites, only the Travis Family plot yielded tombstones applicable for my survey. While all thirteen sites yielded a valuable perspective into eighteenth-century mortality in general, only seven of the sites yielded tombstones fitting my criteria.

◊ See Appendix A for a list of churches and cemeteries visited, the date of founding, and numbers of graves surveyed.
◊ See Appendix B for a list of the graves surveyed with names, ages, year of death, symbols or inscriptions and the relationship of those commemorated.
Although the remaining four sites did not yield surviving children’s tombstones, the sites nonetheless offered contextual evidence of eighteenth-century commemorations.

When interpreting my data, I considered a variety of factors to relate the changing understanding of children and childhood to changes in mortuary monuments from across the eighteenth century. I considered the ages of the children buried and the year in which they died (which did not necessarily reflect when the tombstone was erected). I also considered if the children were commemorated individually, or if the tombstone commemorated the lives of more than one family member. If the memorial was shared (commemorated more than one individual), I considered the relationship between those memorialized—if the commemoration was shared between parent and child, siblings, or other family members. Lastly, I considered any auxiliary, decorative additions to the tombstones: symbols or graphics found on the tombstone or inscriptions beyond the simple recitation of the name, date of death, and family affiliation. By looking at these variables and how these factors evolved over the course of the century, I was able to examine how mortuary monuments changed in accordance with views of childhood.

Time has not been kind to memorials in the Tidewater. Many memorials have eroded away or fallen completely to the ravages of time, rendering the symbols and inscriptions illegible. Because of the decayed state of many tombstones, I turned to church record books. Church record books (typically compiled during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) included records of who was buried in the church yard along with a transcription of what was legible on the tombstone at the time of the initial survey. What was legible on tombstones at the time of the initial survey was frequently a great deal more than what remains today. Additionally, many records included maps of the graveyard as it was during the nineteenth century, indicating the locations of graves that have since worn away to illegibility or fallen completely. With a few exceptions, these locations have remained the same, and I was able to use these maps to cross-reference inscriptions in church record books with tombstones in the churchyard. Through cross-referencing, I was able to photograph many tombstones as they stand today, even those without legible inscriptions.
A Note about Gravestones

Even today, eighteenth-century cemeteries are continually evolving landscapes. As early as the 1820s, Virginians expressed concern about the decaying state of eighteenth-century graveyards. In 1825, *The Phoenix Gazette*, an early nineteenth-century newspaper in the Tidewater region, worried about the fate of many of the tombstones housed in church yards. Referring to Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg, an editorialist lamented:

> It is with a feeling of sadness that we see the rapid decay of the monuments in the old churchyard of Bruton Parish. One by one, they are crumbling, and like the beings whose virtues they were erected to commemorate, they will soon be passed away.\(^{172}\)

Beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing to the present day, eighteenth-century graves have been relocated from their original sites on family lands to safer locations.\(^{173}\) Relocation helps prevent further weathering, destruction, vandalism, or by far the worse culprit of grave destruction—urbanization. However, the very act of preservation presents a false picture of the cemetery to modern historians. First, while upper-class Virginians were noted for their preference for burial on family land, today, graves have been relocated to churchyards.\(^{174}\) Churchyards were typically the burying grounds for the lower, un-landed classes; the local church was one of the only places available to the lower classes to dispose of bodies.\(^{175}\) Because of relocation, visiting many eighteenth-century cemeteries today presents a false picture of the actual eighteenth-century makeup of the cemetery—modern hands have placed decidedly upper-class graves within once lower-class surroundings.\(^{176}\) More misleading still is the uneven recordkeeping related to the relocation of graves. While some relocated graves have been marked with modern plaques or other markers indicating the original location and who relocated the grave, an equal number have been relocated without record. Although some memorials in

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\(^{173}\) Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 217.

\(^{174}\) Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House*, 279.


this study were marked as relocated graves, others have undoubtedly been relocated without record. For the purposes of this study, the impact of relocation upon my results is a moot point; the fact that tombstones were being erected in the memory of a child is as important as the original location of the grave.

It should also be noted that this study can only represent the very upper echelons of society. Then as now, mortuary goods were expensive; historian Patrick Henry Butler notes that even in the upper classes, economics played as large a role in commemoration as did affection for the deceased.\(^{177}\) Memorials made of materials durable enough to survive two-and-a-half centuries in the Virginia climate (such as limestone, granite, marble, or slate) were expensive, and were typically available to only the very wealthy.\(^{178}\) While lower-class Virginians undoubtedly commemorated their dead in an equal proportion to those in the upper classes, lower-class memorials tended to be made of less durable materials and have not withstood the test of time. Easily decomposable materials such as wood were frequently used, but have long since degraded and vanished; archaeological research has recorded the presence of impermanent markers while no trace remains of the marker itself.\(^{179}\) Additionally, many families preferred to plant evergreen trees, acting as a symbol of eternal life and marking the burial site in lieu of a carved marker indicating the name, birth and death dates of the deceased.\(^{180}\) Further, many bodies, both rich and poor alike, were committed to the earth without a marker to indicate their final resting place. Archaeological excavations of both church and family lands have uncovered bodies in unmarked (yet obviously intentional) graves; grave goods around the bodies give clues to the individual’s identity and social status during life, and confirm that even some wealthy Virginians were buried without markers.\(^{181}\) Additionally, because of the cost-prohibitive nature of commemoration, many families waited several years before ordering a shared memorial, commemorating the lives of several deceased family members under the same tombstone. Yet despite these restrictions and conditions, many families chose to erect lasting commemorations in the memory of even their shortest-lived members.

\(^{177}\) Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 229.
\(^{178}\) See Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” especially chapters “Commemorations: Remember Our Graves,” and “Death of Another.”
\(^{180}\) Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 229-30.
\(^{181}\) Cami Brooks, Assistant Director and Gift Shop Manager, Historic St. Luke’s Church, interview by author, Smithfield, VA, October 29, 2008.
Based upon the results of my survey, permanent markers commemorating the lives of children steadily increased throughout the eighteenth century. This increase supports the notion that with the rise of a more emotional understanding of childhood, more families viewed children’s lives as deserving of lasting commemorations (and toward the end of the century, lasting, individual commemorations), no matter the cost. The uneven nature of commemorative practices throughout the eighteenth century offers tantalizing clues (and equally frustrating gaps) for historians. However, even from the uneven records, patterns emerge in the history of eighteenth-century commemorations, linking evolving notions of childhood to changing commemorative practices for the death of a child.

After Death: Mortuary Practices, Family, and Community

After a death occurred, the family began the processes of both grief and mourning for the life lost. According to historian Patrick Henry Butler, the preparations for the funeral and funeral itself were more to colonists than the simple disposal of the body: the funeral helped
to define the process of grief for those close to the deceased; to bring the community together to remember the deceased; to offer hope for the future beyond death for the deceased and for the living; and to help the survivors cope with the loss that death entails.¹⁸²

The preparations for the funeral, the burial, and the public commemoration for the deceased all served as coping mechanisms, helping the family to come to terms with its loss and begin to recover from the emotional trauma of death. Mortuary rituals also played a role within the community, announcing the family’s bereavement and loss. Because no funerary industry existed in the United States until well into the nineteenth century, all preparations for the funeral and burial were performed within the home by family and friends.¹⁸³ The close contact colonists had with death and funerary preparations in itself acted as a form of commemoration, not only helping the family cope with the death of a loved one but to facilitate remembrance of the deceased.

¹⁸² Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 136.
Patrick Henry Butler noted that the family never experienced the early stages of grief and mourning alone. Families used networks of communication to spread news of the death to friends, neighbors, and the wider community. Beginning in the early part of the century, many upper-class adult deaths were publically announced in the form of death notices published in newspapers.  

First published in 1736, the *Virginia Gazette* published which simply detailed the name of the deceased and date of death. The death was also announced to the community by word of mouth, spread by family, friends, and neighbors. Out of respect for the surviving family and the deceased, friends and relatives were obliged to visit the bereaved and to view the body of the deceased, ideally in time for the burial. As news of the death spread throughout the community, the family began preparing the corpse for visiting and viewing by a cadre of mourners. The body was typically prepared for visitation by close female relatives who washed and dressed the corpse for its “laying out.” Preparations for the laying out and funeral were simple. Friends and family washed the body and put the body into a position of repose for its viewing; the arms and legs were posed and the eyelids positioned as if the deceased were asleep. However, very little else could be done to enhance the appearance of the corpse: the bereaved were forced to see the dead as they were rather than in a preserved or enhanced state.

Maris Vinovskis notes that because of the lack of preservation, colonists were forced to face death and decay as it was and were not shielded from the realities of death.

Unlike other colonies, Virginians frequently buried their dead fully dressed rather than simply shrouded. When John Harrower, an indentured servant and tutor to the Daingerfield family in the 1770s recorded the funeral of Mrs. Thomas Dawson in his diary, he noted that the corpse was buried in her finery: “At sunset this evening the Corps being drest in a Calico Goun and white apron was put in a black Walnut Coffin lined with Flannel and pinchbeck handles.

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184 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 153.
185 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 153.
186 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 153.
188 Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale*, 64.
191 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 155-6.
The corps has also a sheet round them.”\(^{192}\) Other than these simple preparations, the body was buried unaltered; with no way to forestall decomposition through natural or chemical means such as embalming, only a few days could pass between death and burial. On average, bodies were buried within two to four days after death, allowing family and friends to pay their final respects to the body of the deceased and the mourning family.\(^{193}\)

As the body was being prepared for funeral and burial, the family placed an order for a coffin. Local cabinetmakers typically made coffins, which were ordered by the family after death occurred.\(^{194}\) Coffins were nearly universally employed in Virginia from its earliest days instead of burial in a simple shroud. Because of the accessibility of timber, wooden coffins were available to most colonists, even to those of modest means. Coffins were made of a variety of materials, ranging from the humble pine to elaborate, nesting metal caskets believed to protect the body and forestall decomposition.\(^{195}\) The most prized material for coffins was black walnut because of its dark, somber color, and connotations with mourning; because of this, black walnut was used for both adult and child coffins.\(^{196}\) However, should the deceased’s family not be able to afford a coffin, many parishes allowed families to rent coffins from the church to be used during the laying out and funeral but to be returned before burial.\(^{197}\) While only the wealthiest colonists could afford burial in expensive metals or woods, most colonists regardless of age, status, or wealth sought eternal rest for family members in a coffin of some sort.

Preparation for the funeral and burial did not differ greatly by age of the deceased; surviving documents do not indicate a separate method of burial, distinguishing adult funerals from those of children. Before the funeral, friends and family arrived to view the corpse and to comfort the mourning family. The laying out served an important function both to the deceased and to the family. While the lapse between death and burial allowed the family and community to bid farewell to a member, it also ensured that the deceased was in fact dead. Because medical technology was often unable to distinguish death from a coma or otherwise vegetative state, the


\(^{194}\) Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 159.

\(^{195}\) Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 134.

\(^{196}\) Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 160.

\(^{197}\) Hume, “Alas Poor…Who?” 72.
laying out allowed the deceased a few days above ground in order for the family members to ensure that a still-living body would not be buried alive. While the family typically offered refreshments (and occasionally a feast) to the procession of mourners, most funerals in Virginia were relatively simple and brief. A procession of mourners saw the corpse to its final resting place, where a simple service was read over the body before burial. When Colonel James Gordon’s three-month-old daughter Sally died in August 1762, the family chose not to have a service read over her body; Gordon recorded in his diary that he believed that the lack of a religious service “seemed to some very strange.”

Mortuary rituals, from death to funerary preparations to funeral, were kept within the family. Because of the distance between priests and parishioners, the Church was less actively involved in Virginians' burial rites. Instead, family members took on the priest’s traditional role: the dying was comforted by the family, bodies were prepared for the funeral by the family, buried in family plots, with a family member reading the service over the body. Consequently, Virginians broke with English tradition and did not require that bodies be buried within consecrated church ground, nor did families require a church officiant read the service over the body. In the 1770s, diarist and tutor to the Carter children at Nomini Hall, Philip Vickers Fithian noted that “only the lower sort of people are buried at the Church; for the Gentlemen have private burying yards.” Hugh Jones, a visitor to Virginia in the 1720s, noted both of these idiosyncratic practices in his journal:

The parishes being of great extent (some sixty miles long and upwards) many dead corpses cannot be conveyed to the church to be buried: So that it is customary to bury in gardens or orchards, where whole families lye interred together, in a spot generally handsomely enclosed, planted with evergreens, and the graves kept decently: Hence likewise arises the occasion of preaching funeral sermons in houses, where at funerals are assembled a great congregation of

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198 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 161.
199 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 175-6. By contrast, Boston legislature passed sumptuary laws governing the cost of funerals in hopes to curb the excess and drunken revelry associated with funerals that came to be seen as a problem (Butler, 175).
201 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 166-7, 402; Smith, Inside the Great House, 279.
neighbors and friends; and if you insist upon having the sermon and ceremony at church, they say they'll be without it, unless performed after their usual custom.204

After the services, the crowd of mourners dispersed and the family began to privately grieve its loss within the heart and home.

Early eighteenth-century children’s funerals did not differ greatly from those of adults. While Lawrence Stone argued that many English parents did not attend their children’s burials and funerals, American parents’ diaries record that throughout the eighteenth century, parents saw their children to their final resting place and even afforded their children public funerals, albeit on a smaller scale than those of adults.205 Throughout the century, children’s funerals seem to have been smaller, quieter affairs, attended only by close family and friends of the parents. When William Byrd and his wife Lucy buried their young son Parke in 1710, Byrd recorded that seven friends and family members attended their son’s funeral and stayed to mourn with and comfort the grieving couple until late in the evening.206 By contrast, adult funerals were larger: many Tidewater wills allotted substantial amounts of the estate for a lavish funeral for the deceased, including provisions for the coffin, winding sheet, and food for the mourners, and small tokens of remembrance such as rings or other tokens of mourning for close friends and family of the deceased.207

As notions of childhood evolved, eighteenth-century parents provided their deceased children with a final ritual befitting the status of the child within the family and emphasizing the innocence of the young life. Families frequently distributed tokens of remembrance to mourners, such as scarves, arm bands, cloaks, gloves, rings, and other small items, often giving the name and date of the deceased’s death.208 Later in the century, the bereaved family distributed mourning tokens in different colors in order to distinguish adult funerals from that of a child.

207 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 135-6. 182.
208 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 155; David Hackett Fischer, Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 114-5.
Children’s mortuary goods were typically white instead of the traditional black used for adults.²⁰⁹ The color white had connotations with the innocence of the child’s young life; while children’s coffins were often made of the same dark materials as those of adults, the coffin was often decorated with white nails.²¹⁰ While many aspects of burial were similar for adults and children, later-century families increasingly differentiated burials by different ages. Families increasingly emphasized the age of the deceased, differentiating between the aged and the young, and proclaiming the family’s emotionalized loss and innocence of youth.

Tombstones and Memory

After the funeral, the family sometimes decided to erect a tombstone in the memory of the deceased. Tombstones served a variety of functions, both within the family and community. According to folklorist Joseph J. Edgette, tombstones are considered “closed symbols.” A closed symbol has “one meaning readily recognized by those who encounter it…these symbols held the quality of universality crossing racial, national, and ethnic boundaries.”²¹¹ A tombstone sends an immediate sign to the outside world that a death had occurred. While Edgette argued that the sight of a tombstone had one, immediate meaning, I contend that the emotional meaning behind individual tombstones varied, depending on the proximity the viewer had to the deceased in life. First and foremost, no matter the proximity the living viewer had to the deceased, the sight of a tombstone acted as a reminder that death had occurred. Whether the deceased was a member of the family or a stranger, the tombstone was designed to inspire meditation on death and mortality, and in turn, inspire introspection in the viewer as to his or her own mortality.²¹² The emphasis upon death was heightened by the frequent use of graphic depictions of mortality found on tombstones throughout the American colonies (to be discussed later). However, Tidewater tombstones unlike those in New England, were not designed to inspire reflection as to the fate of the soul, but rather simply to remind the viewer of the deceased.²¹³ To facilitate remembrance and reflection upon mortality, most graveyards and family plots were near frequently trafficked

²⁰⁹ Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 160.
²¹⁰ Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 160.
²¹² Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 214.
²¹³ Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 214.
areas. For example, William Byrd’s family plot was placed a mere quarter mile from his family estate at Westover. The small family cemetery was near the original site of Westover Church (on Westover plantation until relocation in the mid-eighteenth century) and was visible from the James River. Because of its location, the cemetery was in close proximity to areas commonly trafficked, both by the family and the wider community. Whether in family plots near the family’s estate or larger communal cemeteries, the close proximity between the living and the dead served to remind family and passersby of the family’s continuing love and affection for the deceased.

In addition to the visual functions tombstones served by evoking memories of the deceased, tombstones offered a physical location for families to “commune” with the dead. Tombstones were situated within public or semi-public locations that allowed families to re-visit memories, and most importantly, provided families with a public location to express private grief and loss. Even today, centuries-old tombstones are visited and preserved by descendents who leave material offerings of trinkets and occasionally wreathed with flowers left by families remembering their ancestors. While graves served to hide away the moldering physical remains, tombstones acted as a place-marker for the deceased; while the deceased is no longer an active member of the family, the tombstone nonetheless offers the bereaved a place and physical object to interact with as they had with the living. Tombstones evoke memories of the dead, allowing the family to not only heal from the loss, but also allowing the deceased to live on within the family and community’s collective memory.

Changes in Commemoration: Tidewater Tombstones

As the death of a child became a more emotionally devastating event for the colonial family, tombstones shifted to reflect the family’s sense of loss and private grief to the outside world. As a result, the ways in which families chose to commemorate deceased children changed to reflect the family’s increased displays of emotion at the loss of a child and the sentimentalization of childhood in the eighteenth century. This shift is reflected in the trends

214 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 370.
216 Mike Wanless, facilities manager, Bruton Parish Church, interview by author, Williamsburg, VA, October 29, 2008. My conversation with Mike Wanless discussed the preservation efforts many families have wished to undertake for decaying tombstones. Interestingly, Bruton Parish Church does not allow for tombstones to be refurbished or otherwise “modernized,” preferring to allow time to weather and decay the tombstones without modern interference.
suggested by my survey. After 1750, memorials for children changed, both in style and quantity. More tombstones commemorating children survive after 1750—fifty-seven tombstones (approximately 80-percent from the survey) are from the period between 1750 and 1810. Similarly, the number of tombstones commemorating the life of a child with another family member—a sibling, parent, or relative, decreased. In the latter half of the century, more tombstones were dedicated to children as individuals while instances of tombstones shared between two or more family members decreased. The increase in overall surviving tombstones commemorating children’s lives and the increase in individual memorials for children is a reflection of the shift toward the increasingly sentimental understanding of children and childhood.

The marked increase of individual tombstones for children is most indicative of the changed understanding of childhood in the Tidewater (See Figure 2, next page). The trend of individual commemorations reflects not only the increasingly emotional understanding of childhood (and devastation upon its loss) but also of the idea of each child as having a unique, individual identity. In addition to patterns of memorialization, the trend toward parental perceptions of children as individuals is also reflected in naming practices. Earlier in the century, many families gave their children “necronyms” or the reuse of names of deceased siblings. Historian Lawrence Stone suggests that this practice was designed to help parents cope with the death of a child by passing both the name and identity of the deceased child to another child.217 The body was in a sense immaterial until the child had lived long enough to build his or her own identity. However, Stone finds that by the end of the century, the use of necronyms had become dramatically less common, due in part to the changed understanding of childhood.218 He argues that while the use of necronyms did not completely

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218 Stone, The Family, Sex, and Marriage, 409.
vanish, no longer were names and identities seen as transferrable entities—each life was deserving of its own identification. Like names, this pattern is also seen in memorialization: tombstones also became increasingly individualized. Lives were recognized individually rather than grouped together, and even the shortest-lived were deemed worthy of their own, individual commemorations. Changes in patterns of commemoration also reflect the reorganization of family life and parents’ changing relationship to their children. Although the number of commemorations shared with parents decreased, shared burials were nonetheless present in the latter half of the century. However, the choice as to with whom the child was commemorated also changed.

Although relatively uncommon throughout the century, commemorations shared between fathers and children exist, most often commemorating the lives of fathers and first-born sons. The practice of burying fathers and first-born sons together emphasizes patriarchal bonds shared between bearers of the family name. Consequently, shared gravestones tended to emphasize the father-son relationship, and lamented the loss of bearers of the male line. Socially and economically, the loss of a male child, (especially a first-born son or only male child) was a more devastating event within the family than the death of a girl. As bearers of the family name, boys were able to do more to support their parents and family; boys could carry on the family name, inherit land, money and, most importantly, were able to financially support parents in their old age.219 The emphasis upon boys as bearers of the male line and the devastation death brought to families is reflected on tombstones throughout the century. James and Mathew Whaley’s 1705 tombstone in Bruton Parish Churchyard in Williamsburg offers an example of the paternalistic, father-son relationship as reflected in commemorations:

Here lieth the Body of James Whaley
Of Yorke County in Virginia Who
Departed this life the 16 day of May
Anno Domini 1701 and in the fiftieth
Yeare of his age
His Body Iyes to be Consumed to Dust
Till the Resurrection of the Just
Amongst which number He'll in hopes appeare
His blessed Sentence at doomsday heare.

Mathew Whaley Iyes Interred here
Within this Tomb upon his Father dear.

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James Whaley’s protective, paternal care over his son Mathew’s wellbeing continued to the
grave; by placing Mathew “upon his father dear,” the Whaleys positioned James Whaley as his
son and heir’s perpetual protector. Additionally, Mathew’s special place within the family
during life is reiterated in death—his family chose to emphasize that Mathew was their only
child, son, and heir.

Later century commemorations were not exclusively shared between father and son—
instead, fathers were posited as protectors of their children, regardless of sex. The transformed
role of the father is illustrated in the shared commemorations of Nathaniel, Phebe, Betty, and
Phebe Portlock. The Portlocks’ memorial in St. Paul’s cemetery, Norfolk reads:

Here Lies Intered the Body of
NATHANIAL PORTLOCK
Of This Borough
Who Departed This Life
March 15th, 1752
Aged 25 Years
Near This Also Lies the Bodys of
PHEBE, BETTY, & PHEBE PORTLOCK
Daug. Of Nath. Rebecca Portlock
Who Dy’d in Their Infancy.

That Nathaniel Portlock and his infant daughters were commemorated together speaks not only
to the changed position of children within the family, but also to the changed position of female
children within the family. Girls were endowed with increased sentimental value within the
family and were seen as being as deserving as boys of being buried with their father.

Although commemorations shared with the mother occurred frequently throughout the
eighteenth century, instances of commemorations shared with the mother became more common
during the latter half of the century. This shift coincides with the increased emphasis of the

220 James and Matthew Whaley Table Tomb, 1705. Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, Virginia.
221 Nathaniel, Phebe, Betty and Phebe Portlock Tombstone, 1752. St. Paul’s Church, Norfolk, Virginia.
mother-child bond and the rise of the perception of the mother as protector of family, hearth, and home.\textsuperscript{222} During the latter half of the century, tombstone inscriptions made explicit reference of the mother-child relationship, lauding and commemorating for posterity women’s roles as mothers and wives within the family. The shared commemoration of Mary and Jane Purdie from 1772 makes Mary Purdie’s role as wife and mother to her children explicit, emphasizing her motherly role within her family in her epitaph:

\begin{quote}
Here Lyes Interred the 
Remains of Mary Purdie Wife of 
Alexr Purdie Printer who departed 
This Life on Saterday ye 28, of March 
1772 in the 27 year of her age. She left 
Behind her four sons Jas Hugh Alexr 
and William, and by her side lie Jane 
A dear little Daughter who did not 
Quite attain her second year. She 
Was a virtuous, loving, frugal and 
Discreet wife, and affectionate though 
Discerning Mother, one of the best 
Of Mistresses. As a friend and Ac 
Quaintance, she possessed the Qua 
Lifications which render that Con 
Nection valuable for she was Sen 
Sible Prudent Generous and 
Honest hearted no deceit lay un 
Der her Tongue. Her husband 
In gratitude for the ardent affection 
She bore him the genuine esteem he 
had for her and in Justice to her 
Virtues used this stone to be 
Placed over her. It will on…[illegible] 
Day serve to con…[illegible]\textsuperscript{223}
\end{quote}

The emphasis later in the century upon the mother’s role within the family in relation to her children reflects the changed understanding of children and childhood within the family. The increased instances of memorials shared between mother and child and the increased emphasis upon the mother’s role as nurturer and protector within the family speaks to the changing role of the mother within the family, along with her duties to her children and her family. Daniel Blake Smith and Nancy Scrhom Dye note in their study of the changes in how mothers understood

\textsuperscript{222} Dye and Smith, “Mother Love and Infant Death,” 330.
\textsuperscript{223} Mary and Jane Purdie Tombstone, 1772. Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, Virginia.
child mortality that later eighteenth-century mothers were believed to hold the most influence over their children’s physical and spiritual well-being and were placed as guardians of their children in both body and soul. Dye and Smith note that this thought differs from early-century notions of children’s lives being under control of Divine whim; later-century children were instead placed under the guardianship of caring, watchful mothers.

Inscriptions found on later eighteenth-century tombstones suggest that colonists believed that the mother’s protection over her children extended beyond life and into the grave. Perhaps the most indicative example of the belief in the mother as the protector of her children is the shared tombstone of Ann Burges and her infant daughter Anne, who died in 1771. The inscription reads:

Here sleeps in Jesus united to Him by Faith and the Graces of a Christian life, all that was Moral of Mrs. Ann Burges once the tender and affectionate Wife of the Revd HENRY JOHN BURGES of the ISLE of WIGHT; She died 25th December 1771 in giving birth to an Infant Daughter, who rests in her Arms; She here waits the transporting Moment when the Trump of GOD shall call her Forth to Glory, Honour & Immortality,

Oh, DEATH where is thy Sting?
Oh GRAVE, where is thy Victory?

Not only does the inscription emphasize that Ann Burges made the ultimate sacrifice of her life in giving birth to her child, by placing the infant Anne in her mother’s arms, the tombstone also suggests that she will eternally embrace and protect her child. By burying mothers and children together, commemorations posit mothers as perpetual protectors of their children and emphasize the eternal bond shared between mother and child.

Shared tombstones commemorating the lives of siblings were also common throughout the eighteenth century. Siblings dying within a few years of one another were frequently buried together throughout the century. However, during the latter half of the century, shared commemorations for siblings increased while commemorations with other, more distant family

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226 Ann and Anne Burges Table Tomb, 1771. Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, Virginia.
members—grandparents, and other relatives—decreased. Commemorations shared between siblings reflect the all-too common colonial experience with multiple child deaths. By placing siblings together, families were expressing and emphasizing their multiple experiences mourning the deaths of children. As children’s lives as individuals became more precious within the family, the loss of multiple children and their childish innocence was thereby more emotionally devastating to the family.

In her study of early nineteenth century attitudes toward infant death, Sylvia D. Hoffert notes that the trend toward memorialization of even very young children became popular in the nineteenth century. In contrast, my survey suggests that its beginnings are rooted in the eighteenth century changes in childhood and family life. By the end of the eighteenth century, a proliferation of tombstones commemorating the lives of children living only a matter of days or months appeared. Although these children’s lives were brief (and arguably parents had not had time to “get to know” their children), parents nonetheless saw these children as deserving of individual tombstones as older children. William Harper’s 1806 tombstone and simple epitaph is perhaps most indicative of this shift:

Here lies the body of an
Infant son of Wm. Harper,
Born and died
April 28th, 1806.

Not only was William Harper’s infant son given a lasting commemoration, he was also identified as a son and member of the family, even though he lived only one day. This is a drastic departure from earlier commemorations for infants and children that combined family members, especially the very short-lived; the individual commemoration for very young infants speaks to the perception that children, even the very young, had discrete personalities and lives that were equally deserving of individual commemoration as older family members.

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228 William Harper Tombstone, 1806. St. John’s Church, Richmond, Virginia.
Changes in Symbols

Although many eighteenth-century adult graves were decorated with additional symbols or inscriptions, few of children’s gravestones I examined included such embellishments. Most children’s graves in the survey simply included the name of the deceased, dates of birth and death, and often the names of the parents of the deceased. Of the seventy-three gravestones, only nineteen (slightly over 25% of the survey) included an additional symbol or inscription (see Figure 3). Of these nineteen, thirteen tombstones included inscriptions, while the remaining six included a symbol or motif. Three tombstones from the earlier period contained symbols, while the remaining three were from the latter half of the century. The use of inscriptions did not appear in the sample until the 1770s and did not become common until the 1790s. Additionally, symbols idiosyncratic to children’s graves did not appear until after the turn of the century; earlier symbols included on children’s graves were simply smaller versions of those found on adult tombstones.\(^{229}\) By tracing the changes and evolution of symbols found on children’s tombstones, beginning in the eighteenth century and into the early years of the nineteenth century when symbols idiosyncratic to children’s graves alone emerged, the way in which parents chose to represent their children’s lives in death is also revealed.

Tombstone symbolism in the Tidewater differed from that of other regions in North America. Notably, symbols from New England frequently implemented graphic depictions of bodily decay; this form of symbolism is known as *memento mori*. *Memento mori* (translated literally as “remember your death”) was intended to evoke thoughts of personal mortality in the viewer at the sight of bodily decay, and in turn remind the viewer that the soul, not the body, was eternal.\(^{230}\) While some Tidewater tombstones included similar motifs, the intended meaning behind the usage of graphic depictions of death differed due in a large part to the Anglican faith. Even tombstones from the early period in the Tidewater tended to depict more optimistic symbols.

\(^{229}\) Edgette, “Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep,” 8.

representations of mortality, emphasizing the triumph of the eternal soul over death rather than depicting the moldering physical remains. Additionally, tombstones in the Tidewater were not meant to inspire meditation within the viewer as to his or her own mortality, but rather to evoke memories of the deceased and the mourning family. This difference is the result of both religious and cultural differences between New England and Virginia. Virginians’ mortuary art reflected mainstream English design, rather than New England tombstones which were laden with religious symbolism. Additionally, many Virginians were not as attached to the Church as an institution—Virginians frequently did not follow rituals prescribed by the Anglican Church, especially in regard to mortuary practices. Daniel Blake Smith argues that in the absence of religious guidelines dictating mourning rituals, Virginians were left to form their own understanding of death and mortality. The absence of a guiding religious doctrine led, in turn to a more emotional understanding of death and mortality. Because of the separation between many Virginians and the Anglican Church, religious attitudes toward death and dying were considerably more emotional in Virginia than in New England. By contrast, New England’s more graphic representations of death and mortality were the result of Puritan theology and proximity to the church. While David Stannard argued that Puritans optimistically viewed death as the end of mortal concerns and the gateway to Heaven, death was also a punishment for sin and for being human. Puritan mortuary art, by contrast, included graphic depictions of the moldering physical remains to direct attention away from the physical world and turn attention instead to the afterlife. As a result, Virginia’s mortuary art optimistically represented the hope for the future of the soul while reminding viewer of the deceased and his family rather than attempting to instill horror and disgust to redeem the soul of the living.

While some motifs from the early part of the century depicted images of bodily decay, the macabre symbolism was frequently tempered with hopeful icons of regeneration or immortality. Two tombstones, those of John and John Champion, Jr. and the Chamberlayne sisters’, are early-century examples of this kind of “blended” symbol:

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231 Hijiya, “American Gravestones and Attitudes Toward Death,” 358.
232 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 266.
233 Smith, Inside the Great House, 266.
234 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 420.
237 Butler, “Knowing the Uncertainties of This Life,” 265.
The symbols found on Champion family and Chamberlayne sisters’ graves are remarkably similar, containing both explicit references to the ravages of mortality in the form of a human skull, and references to the immortality of the soul. The inclusion of a skull is akin to memento mori, speaking to viewers, “Remember, you too will someday follow!” However, unlike New England memento mori, the Tidewater tombstone symbolism tempered graphic depictions of the ravages of mortality with a symbol of hope. The inclusion of the laurel wreath or crown encircling a symbol of mortality acts as a symbol of victory over death. Additionally, because laurel leaves do not wither or wilt after being cut, the laurel is traditionally associated with immortality and eternal life. The inclusion of laurel also acts as a reference to child mortality—symbolologist and folklorist Douglas Keister suggests that laurels found on a child’s gravestone represent innocence and chastity, and reflect upon the innocence of the child’s brief life. Taken as a whole, the symbol represents a more optimistic view of death and the afterlife; while the colonists were undoubtedly acknowledging the inevitability of mortality, the wreath of laurels nonetheless suggests hope and an entirely more optimistic view of death, emphasizing the immortality of the soul over the ravages of bodily decay and death.

238 John and John Champion slab tomb, 1700. St. Peter’s Church, New Kent, VA.
239 Frances and Ann Chamberlayne slab tomb, 1725. St. Peter’s Church, New Kent, VA.
240 Keister, Stories in Stone, 48.
241 Keister, Stories in Stone, 48.
Later eighteenth-century mortuary art moved away from explicit representations of mortality toward more euphemistic representations of death; symbols used to represent death focused on elegiac objects rather than upon the decaying body. Similar to tombstones’ functions as closed symbols, elegiac objects have only one meaning within the culture. Historian James A. Hijiya asserts that elegiac figures such as willows, urns, and weeping women were all implemented to euphemistically represent grief and mourning. The urn motif found on ten-year-old Joseph Lovell’s 1784 tombstone in St. John’s Church Cemetery, Richmond, is an example of the shift toward euphemistic representations of death and mortality. On Joseph Lovell’s tombstone, the body has been replaced entirely by an all-encompassing urn:

Figure 6: Joseph Lovell Tombstone with Willow and Urn Motif, 1784. (Photograph by Author).

Borrowed directly from English tradition and symbolism, the urn (or willow and urn) motif became common in the United States during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The urn motif reflected not only the emerging neo-classical style in art but also a turn toward euphemistic representation of death. The frequently-implemented urn was also a symbol of regeneration and immortality similar to the wreath of laurels; the urn itself was believed to carry

243 Joseph Lovell Tombstone, 1784. St. John’s Church, Richmond, VA.
the water of eternal life. Similarly, the willow represented triumph over death; the willow was prized for its regenerative powers and became a symbol representing the soul’s triumph over the ravages of mortality. In addition to its regenerative powers, the shape of the weeping willow echoed the slumped posture of a body in mourning, weeping over the deceased loved one. Because of their dual meanings, these euphemistic symbols became common motifs and eventually entirely replaced explicit depictions of death and mortality. However, the meaning behind the symbols remained the same, representing the optimistic hope of eternal life and resurrection while lamenting the life lost.

During the latter half of the century, depictions of the body shifted to represent the changing notions of both childhood and mortality within the Tidewater. Infant John Dana Blaney’s 1796 tombstone (relocated from family land in Isle of Wight County to St. Luke’s Church in Smithfield in the early 2000s) is an example of this later-century shift. Upon his death, John Dana Blaney received his own table tomb on family land commemorating his brief two months on earth. Blaney’s table tomb included a representation of his soul ascending into heaven in the form of an angel or cherub:

Figure 7: Angel/Soul Detail from John Dana Blaney’s table tomb, 1796. (Photograph by Author).

The symbol of the soul ascending into heaven in the form of a cherub or angel was a motif soon to become common in the nineteenth century. Symbols of angels or cherubs were the final stage

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251 John Dana Blaney Slab Tomb, 1796. St. Luke’s Church, Smithfield, VA.
in the evolution of eighteenth-century mortuary symbols, evolving from the death’s head (as seen on the Champion family and Chamberlayne sister’s tombs) to winged death’s heads or soul effigies (bodiless heads supported by wings), before morphing into fully-human (rather than skeletal) form.\textsuperscript{252} By the end of the century, the head and body were rejoined and the soul in human form was seen ascending into heaven on angel’s wings. No longer is the focus placed upon the moldering physical remains while euphemistically referring to the fate of the soul by negation. Instead, the focus has completely shifted to an explicit representation of the immortal soul in human form ascending to its final destination for reunion with the Divine in heaven. The transformation of earlier symbols is complete—the grim skull has been fleshed out, the wings support the entire body (rather than a decapitated head) and the soul has taken the form of a (decidedly plump) full-bodied human ascending to heaven for eternity. Further, the angel’s body resembles that of an infant, reflecting the time of life during which the individual had died.\textsuperscript{253} The grim specter of death was replaced with the hope of salvation, resurrection, and eternal life, and mortuary symbols optimistically reflected this altered perception.

\textit{Epilogue: Early Nineteenth-Century Symbols}

While symbols such as death’s heads, angels and willow and urn motifs were used on children’s graves, these symbols were used on tombstones for both adults and children. By the end of the eighteenth century and first quarter of the nineteenth century, a new set of symbols emerged for use solely on children’s graves. Among the most popular symbols for children were those of lambs and rosebuds. These symbols represent the fruition of the shift in cultural understanding of children and child mortality in the Tidewater. That these symbols were used exclusively on children’s graves suggests that, as with the similar shift in material culture, parents viewed deceased children as deserving of their own mortality symbols and icons. The broken rosebud was first employed beginning in the early years of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{254} While roses in various states of bloom were included on adult tombstones, rosebuds were typically reserved for use on children’s graves. The fullness of the bloom represented the length or brevity of the deceased’s life—for example, a deceased mother was often represented as a rose

\textsuperscript{252} Keister, \textit{Stories in Stone}, 136.
\textsuperscript{253} Edgette, “Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep,” 8.
\textsuperscript{254} Keister, \textit{Stories in Stone}, 43.
in full bloom with rosebuds, while a younger woman was depicted as a newly-blossomed rose. However, children were depicted as unopened rosebuds or rosebuds with broken stems, representing a life cut short.

![Image of broken rosebud](image_url)

**Figure 8:** Broken Rosebud Detail from Aylwise Yerby’s 1820 Gravestone. (Photograph by Author).

Similar to the willow and urn motif, rosebuds offer a euphemistic representation of mortality in lieu of the body. Children were cut down, literally in the “flower of youth”—however, instead of representing the death of the body, the body has been replaced by another organic symbol which stands in place of human life. When compared to the full blossoms decorating adult graves, unopened rosebuds represented the lost potential of the child and the family. Families mourned for not only a lost member, but a member cut down with so much potential and so much beauty left unknown. The use of a rosebud also reminded viewers of the fleeting nature of life. Instead of imploring viewers to “Remember thy death!” the rosebud symbol instead acted as a gentle reminder, imploring viewers to instead “Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.”

Similarly, the use of a lamb on children’s graves became popular during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Along with the increased use of euphemistic references to death, depictions of lambs at rest or asleep became increasingly common during the late eighteenth century and acted as euphemistic representations of death and mortality.

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256 *Aylwise Yerby Tombstone*, 1820. St. Mary’s White Chapel, Lancaster, VA.
The image of the lamb represented the child’s innocence, and even echoed religious overtones of “the lamb of God.”\textsuperscript{260} However, the lamb’s sleeping or resting position euphemistically referred to death. Sleep or rest had long been associated with death and mortality.\textsuperscript{261} That the lamb is depicted as sleeping rather than deceased or decayed reflects the changed Tidewater culture. Not only had the body been entirely replaced by an animal, so too had the graphic depiction of death. Instead of graphically displaying the ravages of mortality, death was instead referred to as a peaceful passage not unlike that of the natural process of drifting off to sleep. Additionally, the symbol of the lamb and the rosebud were, like tombstones themselves, “closed symbols.” Because these symbols were used only to represent the death of a child, their meaning could not be interpreted in any other way. That these symbols became idiosyncratic to children alone attests to the changed understanding of childhood in the Tidewater—children’s lives were not only worthy of their own, individual, lasting commemoration, but also of their own set of symbols used to adorn these commemorations.

\textsuperscript{259} Julia Conway Rock plot fence detail, n.d. (early nineteenth century). St. Mary’s White Chapel, Lancaster, VA.
\textsuperscript{260} Keister, \textit{Stories in Stone}, pp. 74.
\textsuperscript{261} Aries, \textit{The Hour of Our Death}, pp. 23-4.
Conclusion

The changing emotional value placed upon eighteenth-century children was reflected in public commemorations for the death of the child. As children’s lives became valued for sentimental reasons, the loss of a child was all the more devastating to the family. Families reflected their more emotional sense of loss in mortuary art, emphasizing the greater sense of loss. Public rituals surrounding the death of a child—from the laying out, to the funeral, and finally, lasting commemorations in the form of tombstones for children projected the family’s mourning to the outside world, and reflect the revolution both within the home and the cemetery. Family’s commemorations for deceased children stand in testament to their love for even the shortest lived members for eternity.
Conclusion

The death of a child is a traumatic event to the family and community today; however, thanks to twenty-first century medicine and living conditions, most families do not know this pain. In contrast, the death of a child in the eighteenth-century was an all too common occurrence, touching most eighteenth-century families in the Tidewater. In spite of the high rates of child mortality, the eighteenth century was a pivotal time in the history of childhood.

Parents’ altered perception of children and childhood resulted in changes in how parents interacted with their children both in life and in death. As childhood became a cherished phase of life, endowed with a highly sentimental and emotional value, the death of a child became all the more crushing to the eighteenth-century family. The highly-emotional understanding of children and childhood led parents to remember their children’s lives in increasingly sentimental terms. Parents’ private commemorations became increasingly outwardly emotional, not only recording intimate details and thoughts upon the death of a child, but also sharing their private grief with other members of the community. Public mourning rituals commemorating the death of a child—the preparations performed upon the body after death and the funeral—shared the family’s private grief with the outside world. These final rituals increasingly emphasized the cherished phase of life during which the child died. Mortuary goods became distinguished between those given for adults and those for children, sharing with the wider community that the person mourned was a child. Perhaps most tellingly, lasting public memorials for the death of a child emphasized this emotional shift. Tombstones and mortuary monuments for children became increasingly individualized and proclaimed to the outside world that not only had the family experienced the grievous loss of the death of a child, but monuments stand in lasting testament to the family’s love for their deceased children.

The changes in the perceptions of childhood were not the result of a shift in rates of child mortality. While rates of adult mortality declined, allowing for the stabilization of family life and allowed for the formation of nuclear families, rates of child mortality remained largely unchanged. Instead, the changes in childhood were the result of changes in the Tidewater culture. Unlike colonists in New England, colonists in the Tidewater were less-bound by religious dictates; the Church was less-actively involved in Tidewater society and culture. In the vacuum left by the absence of the Church, Tidewater colonists were left to create their own practices for rituals surrounding both life and death. Unlike those in New England, upper-class
Tidewater colonists modeled themselves after the leisured English gentry, which emphasized the emotional role of children within the family, placing the child at the center of the family and eventually becoming the focus of indulgent affection and attention.

The lack of organized Church presence in the Tidewater also led to changes in how colonists understood and coped with death. Tidewater colonists did not employ Church rituals when dealing with the death of another. Instead, they created their own rituals, filling in the void left by colonists’ distance from the Church. Colonists adopted the role of the clergy when administering the final rituals related to death, re-creating and reforming these practices as their own, and eventually creating rituals suitable for different stages of life. As the death of a child became a more-devastating and traumatic loss to the Tidewater family, rituals surrounding the death of a child reflected this emotionalized sense of loss. Parents grieved their highly-emotionalized loss, the loss of a cherished phase of life, and the loss that the joys of childhood were supposed to bring but were cut short because of death.

The emotional attachments felt by parents for their children shaped how Tidewater parents responded to the death of a child. Although no less common, the death of a child became a severe shock to the Tidewater family; in order to deal with their loss, families created rituals surrounding the death of a child in order to help parents comprehend, cope, and commemorate their children’s lives.

Suggestions for Further Research

While this study was reflective of patterns asserted by previous historians, it was also limited in scope. Further research is needed in order to further explore and fully understand this topic. Topics that I could not address, such as restrictions based upon geography, class, and gender, may be further explored in order to delve deeper into this topic. Geographically, a future study would benefit from a more-thorough examination of Tidewater cemeteries than this study was able to undertake. A comprehensive study may shed light on the peculiarities of the Tidewater: was this a uniquely Tidewater phenomenon, or was it occurring throughout the colonies? A comparative study between colonies may also prove beneficial, highlighting regional, and ethnic differences in death practices.

Similarly, a study of tombstone art and iconography from outside the Tidewater is also needed to further our understanding of the material culture of death. A study of tombstones or
other articles from the material culture of death from other regions may be particularly illuminating in terms of how other regions comprehended and commemorated child death. A study of how adult tombstone symbolism and inscriptions changed over the course of the eighteenth century may also be particularly illuminating as to changes within Tidewater society and culture, in addition as to how colonists understood their own mortality.

Similarly, this study could not address issues of class and race because of constraints on time and source material. While the source material for those not in the upper class is admittedly very thin, existing diaries from the upper classes discuss how the lower classes publically mourned their dead. A future study of how the lower classes remembered their dead (and how the upper classes recorded and contrasted their own experiences with death) would similarly add to the existing historiography and hopefully shed light on class differences in the eighteenth century.

Finally, this study was largely only able to address diaries from the father’s perspective. Although Daniel Blake Smith and Nancy Schrom Dye noted that diaries from mothers before 1750 were exceedingly rare, later century diaries written from the mother’s perspective nonetheless exist. Although I was unable to locate maternal diaries from the Tidewater, studies from other regions (notably Pennsylvania, where Elizabeth Drinker’s diary covers nearly half a century of the female lifespan, including experiences with child death) may be particularly illuminating.262 Through a study of maternal diaries from other regions, additions may be made to the historiography of motherhood, but also make contributions to the fields of gender and childhood. By examining how mothers from different regions understood the death of a child, not only will regional differences regarding parenting be revealed but may also shed light as to how parents understood their children.

Through a study of the intersection of eighteenth-century childhood and mortality, the eighteenth-century family comes into sharper focus. Through parents expressions of love and loss, both public and private, the way in which eighteenth-century parents interacted with and understood their children is better revealed. These records stand as poignant reminders of the

love shared between eighteenth-century family members, transcending boundaries of space and time, and stand in testament to the eternal bond shared between parents and children.
Appendices

Appendix A:
Map of Church Locations, Year of Founding, and Gravestones Surveyed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Church/Cemetery</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Surveyed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Abingdon Episcopal Church</td>
<td>White Marsh, VA</td>
<td>Ca. 1650</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bruton Parish Church</td>
<td>Williamsburg, VA</td>
<td>Ca. 1660</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Byrd Family Plot</td>
<td>Westover Plantation, VA</td>
<td>Ca. 1635</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Christ Church</td>
<td>Lancaster, VA</td>
<td>1670</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Grace Church</td>
<td>Yorktown, VA</td>
<td>1697</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. St. John’s Church</td>
<td>Richmond, VA</td>
<td>Ca. 1740</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. St. Luke’s Church</td>
<td>Smithfield, VA</td>
<td>1632</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. St. Mary’s White Chapel</td>
<td>Lancaster, VA</td>
<td>1669</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. St. Paul’s Church</td>
<td>Norfolk, VA</td>
<td>1739</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. St. Peter’s Church</td>
<td>New Kent, VA</td>
<td>1679</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Travis Family Plot</td>
<td>Jamestown Island, VA</td>
<td>Ca. 1700</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Ware Church</td>
<td>Gloucester, VA</td>
<td>Ca. 1690</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Westover Church</td>
<td>Charles City, VA</td>
<td>Ca. 1735</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 73
Appendix B:

List of Graves Surveyed, with Location, Number of People Commemorated, Name(s), Age, Year, Symbols, and Relationship between shared commemorations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bruton Parish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Blair, James; Anne Blair; Archibald Blair</td>
<td>10.3 yrs.; 2.11 yrs.; .9 mos.</td>
<td>1740; 1741; 1744</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>†Blair, Jane; James Blair; John Blair; Blair Munro Blair</td>
<td>40 yrs.; 21 days; 10 mos.; 10 mos.</td>
<td>1800; 1795; 1797; 1801</td>
<td>Mother/Children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>†Brown, Margaret; Jane Brown</td>
<td>36 yrs.; 14 days</td>
<td>1720; 1720</td>
<td>Inscription (Virtuous)</td>
<td>Mother/Daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>†Burges, Ann; infant Daughter</td>
<td>No age; Infant</td>
<td>1771; 1771</td>
<td>Inscription (Religious)</td>
<td>Mother/Daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Custis, Daniel Parke</td>
<td>2.3 yrs.</td>
<td>1754</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Custis, Frances</td>
<td>4 yrs.</td>
<td>1753</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dyer, Edward</td>
<td>1.7 yrs.</td>
<td>1722</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>†Munro, Mrs. Christian; Mary Blair; Sarah Blair</td>
<td>60 yr.; 2 yrs.; .3 mos.</td>
<td>1725; 1730; 1735</td>
<td>Grandmother/Granddaughters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>†Purdie, Mary; Jane Purdie</td>
<td>27 yrs.; 2 yr.</td>
<td>1772; 1772</td>
<td>Inscription (Virtuous)</td>
<td>Mother/Daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>†Stith, Buckner; Catharine Stith, †Mrs. Catharine Blackley</td>
<td>19 yr; 18 dys.; 75+ yrs.</td>
<td>1766; ?; 1771</td>
<td>Grandmother/Grandchildren</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Timson, Anna Maria; William Timson</td>
<td>1.5 yrs.; 1.5 yrs.</td>
<td>1735; 1736</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>†Whaley, James; Matthew Whaley</td>
<td>50 yrs.; 9 yrs.</td>
<td>1701; 1705</td>
<td>Inscription (Religious)</td>
<td>Father/Son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Peter’s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chamberlayne, Frances; Ann Chamberlayne</td>
<td>30 days; 6 mos.</td>
<td>1722; 1725</td>
<td>Symbol: Skull-Laurel Motif</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>†Langborn, William; Francis Lanborn</td>
<td>43 yrs.; 1.6 yrs.</td>
<td>1766; 1761</td>
<td>Symbol: Family crest</td>
<td>Father/Son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>†Mossom, Thomas; Robert Mossom</td>
<td>20 yrs.; .7 mos.</td>
<td>1739; 1744</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abingdon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Burwell, Mary</td>
<td>1 yr.</td>
<td>1690</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Page, Elizabeth</td>
<td>3 yrs.</td>
<td>1693</td>
<td>Symbol: cross-laurel</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ware Church</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anderson, George Dabney</td>
<td>10 yrs.</td>
<td>1771</td>
<td>Inscription (Religious)</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Year(s)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>†Dixon, Lucy; Two Children</td>
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<td>1731 &gt;1731 &gt;1731</td>
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<td>†Fox, Isabell, Mary Fox, Susannah Fox</td>
<td>38 yrs.; 4 yrs.; 3 yrs.</td>
<td>1742; 1742; 1743</td>
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<td>9 yrs.</td>
<td>1703</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>†Willis, Ann; Anne Willis</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Blaney, John Dana</td>
<td>2 mos.</td>
<td>1796</td>
<td>Symbol: Angel</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Alexander, George</td>
<td>20 mos.</td>
<td>1789</td>
<td>Poem (Religious)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>†Allmand, Louisa; Louise Allmand</td>
<td>39 yrs.; 9 mos.</td>
<td>1802; 1802</td>
<td>Mother/Child</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>†Blaney, Mrs. Helen; Helen Maria Read Blaney; Caldwaller Blaney</td>
<td>29 yrs.; 6 wks.; 25 mos.</td>
<td>1799; 1799; 1799</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>†Brown, Elizabeth; John H. Brown; Infant Daughter Brown</td>
<td>25.3 yrs.; .6 mos.; .9 mos.</td>
<td>1796; 1793; 1797</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>.11 mos.; 3 yrs.</td>
<td>1792; 1791</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>70 yrs.; 9.6 yrs.; 18 mos.</td>
<td>1809; 1809; No date</td>
<td>Father/Sons? Grandfather?</td>
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<td>1803</td>
<td>Mounted on church</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>9 mos.</td>
<td>1800</td>
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<td>Durant, Thomas; Lewis E. Durant</td>
<td>3.3 yrs.; .4 mos.</td>
<td>1798; 1798</td>
<td>Sibling</td>
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<td>Granberry, Polly; John Granberry; Henrietta Granberry</td>
<td>No ages given—Infants</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Greenwood, John; Nancy Greenwood; Abby Greenwood</td>
<td>6 weeks; 7 mos.; 6 mos.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>†Hayes, Robert; Robert Hayes II (infant)</td>
<td>58 yrs.; 16 mos.</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Hayward, Geo. Agusta</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>Individual</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Johnson, Mary Ann; William Augusta Johnson</td>
<td>4.2 yrs.; 1.10 yrs.</td>
<td>1795; 1795</td>
<td>Poem (Religious)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>†Johnson, Mrs.</td>
<td>21 Yrs.; 1803</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother/Daughter</td>
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**St. Luke’s**

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Blaney, John Dana</td>
<td>2 mos.</td>
<td>1796</td>
<td>Symbol: Angel</td>
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**St. Paul’s**

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<th>Year(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Alexander, George</td>
<td>20 mos.</td>
<td>1789</td>
<td>Poem (Religious)</td>
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79
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<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Surname, First Name; Additional Names</th>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Elizabeth; Ann Elizabeth Shepherd Johnson</td>
<td>4 mos.</td>
<td>1803</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>†MacGill, Catherine; Mary Ann MacGill</td>
<td>20.1 yrs.; 1.6 yrs.</td>
<td>1797; 1797</td>
<td>Mother/Daughter</td>
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<td>Norris, Eliza</td>
<td>1 yr.</td>
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<td>Norris, Rebecca</td>
<td>4.5 yrs.</td>
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<td>9 mos.</td>
<td>1802</td>
<td>Poem (Illegible)</td>
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<td>†Portlock, Nathaniel; Phebe Portlock (I); Betty Portlock; Phebe Portlock (II)</td>
<td>25 yrs.; “Infancy”</td>
<td>1752; 1752; 1752; 1752</td>
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<td>Taylor, Catherine; Thomas Taylor; Martha Ann</td>
<td>1.6 yrs.; 1.6 yrs.; 7 mos.</td>
<td>1800; 1800; 1802</td>
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<td>1810</td>
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<td>†Thorburn, Ann Roy; James D. Thorburn</td>
<td>21 yrs.; Infant</td>
<td>1802; No date</td>
<td>Mother/Son</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Tompkins, M. B.</td>
<td>4 yr.</td>
<td>1795</td>
<td>Individual</td>
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<td>Vickers, Ruben</td>
<td>15 mos.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Williamson, Mary; James Williamson</td>
<td>19 mo.; 47 days</td>
<td>1794; 179-</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
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<td>Travis Cemetery</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>†Champion, John; John Champion (son)</td>
<td>40 yrs.; 5 yrs.</td>
<td>1700; 1700</td>
<td>Symbol: Skull Motif</td>
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<td>St. John’s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Baylor, Elizabeth; Eleanor Baylor</td>
<td>8.3 yrs.; 1.4 yrs.</td>
<td>1792; 1797</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>†Burton, Robert; John Pitfield Burton</td>
<td>68 yrs.; 5 mos.</td>
<td>1808; 1804</td>
<td>Poem (Religious); elaborate table tomb</td>
<td>Father/son</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Davidson, Mary Ann</td>
<td>5 mos.</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Individual</td>
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<td>Davidson, Rebackah B.</td>
<td>14 mos.</td>
<td>1799</td>
<td>Inscription: Poem</td>
<td>Individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Harper, Infant</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Individual</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Harper, Richard H.</td>
<td>11 mos.</td>
<td>1805</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Henry, Mary Ann</td>
<td>19 days</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Individual</td>
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<td>#</td>
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<td>Name 2</td>
<td>Age 1</td>
<td>Age 2</td>
<td>Age 3</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>†Laforest, Elizabeth Aubin; Peter Aubin Laforest; John B. Aubin Laforest</td>
<td>†Laforest, Elizabeth Aubin; Peter Aubin Laforest; John B. Aubin Laforest</td>
<td>28 yrs.; 12 mos.; 8 days</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Leiper, Lucy Angelu</td>
<td></td>
<td>23 mos.</td>
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<td>Lockheart, John</td>
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<td>1.9 yrs.</td>
<td>1810</td>
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<td>Lovell, Joseph</td>
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<td>10 yrs.</td>
<td>1784</td>
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<td>McCraw, Lucy B.</td>
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<td>1 mo.</td>
<td>1795</td>
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<tr>
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<td>McCraw, Samuel</td>
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<td>2 mos.</td>
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<td>Poem</td>
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<td>Perkins, Elizabeth</td>
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<td>2.8 yrs.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>†Perkins, Elizabeth; Rebecca Perkins</td>
<td>†Perkins, Elizabeth; Rebecca Perkins</td>
<td>26 yrs.; 17 mos.</td>
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<td>Perkins, Polly</td>
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<td>10 mos.</td>
<td>1800</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Spencer, Elizabeth Drew</td>
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<td>15 mos.</td>
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<td>Spencer, Mary Ann</td>
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<td>4 yrs.</td>
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<td>Starr, Thomas B.</td>
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<td>&gt;1 yr.</td>
<td>1794</td>
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<td>2 yrs.</td>
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<td>3.5 yrs.</td>
<td>1788</td>
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<td>8.4 yrs.</td>
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†Denotes an adult.

**Bold** denotes graves before 1750.

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<th># of Individuals</th>
<th># of Adults</th>
<th># of Children</th>
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<td>32</td>
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<td>1750-1810</td>
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<td>128</td>
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Bibliography

Visual Primary Sources

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Ann and Anne Burgess Tombstone, 1771. Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, VA.

Frances and Ann Chamberlayne Tomb, 1725. St. Peter's Church. Hayes, VA.

Infant Harper Tombstone, 1806. St. John's Church, Richmond, VA.

James and Mathew Whaley Tombstone, 1705. Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, VA.

John and John Champion Tomb, 1700. Travis Family Cemetery, Jamestowne Island.

John Dana Blaney Tombstone, 1796. St. Luke's Church, Smithfield, VA.

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Julia Conway Rock Family Plot, n.d. St. Mary's White Chapel, Lancaster, VA.

Mary and Jane Purdie Tombstone, 1772. Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, VA.

Nathanial, Phebe, Betty, and Phebe Portlock Tombstone, 1752. St. Paul's Church, Norfolk, VA.
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Wanless, Mike, interview by Amy Coffman. *Interview with Grounds Director at Bruton Parish Church* (October 29, 2008).