

Verdmont

HISTORIC HOUSE & GARDEN



THE BERMUDA NATIONAL TRUST



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To protect Bermuda's unique natural & cultural heritage forever

Preface

Ever since Bermuda was first settled 400 years ago, its residents have been making an impact on these islands, for better and for worse. They have crafted and built beautiful things...houses, boats, furniture and silver spoons. They have also changed the landscape, using biodiversity-rich marshes as rubbish dumps, importing invasive plant and animal species that threaten the native species, over-developing this narrow strip of land in the ocean. The threat of losing valuable open spaces and historic treasures sparked the creation of the Bermuda Monuments Trust in 1937 by a group of Bermudians who wanted to ensure that future generations would have the opportunity to understand their past. In 1970 the Bermuda National Trust was founded and took over from the Monuments Trust. Since then it has grown to become one of the island's most respected institutions. It is an independent not-for-profit organization which promotes the preservation of the island's architectural, historic and environmental treasures, and encourages public access to and enjoyment of them. Its members and friends are from all walks of life, having in common a love of Bermuda and the desire that its special aspects should be safeguarded for everyone to enjoy now, and forever.

Each of our historic houses tells a story about Bermuda's intriguing past. Their exhibits comprise an outstanding collection of furniture, silver, porcelain and paintings made and owned by Bermudians. This guide provides information on the architecture and history of this very special Bermuda National Trust property. It highlights the people who occupied the premises and sets the building into the historical timeline of our history. Images will help you to identify unique pieces of art, furniture and artefacts. We hope that your visit to our historic house will be enhanced and that you will be encouraged to visit other Trust properties soon.

For more information on the Bermuda National Trust, the properties in its care, programmes, events, membership and volunteer opportunities please visit www.bnt.bm or contact us at 441 236 6483.

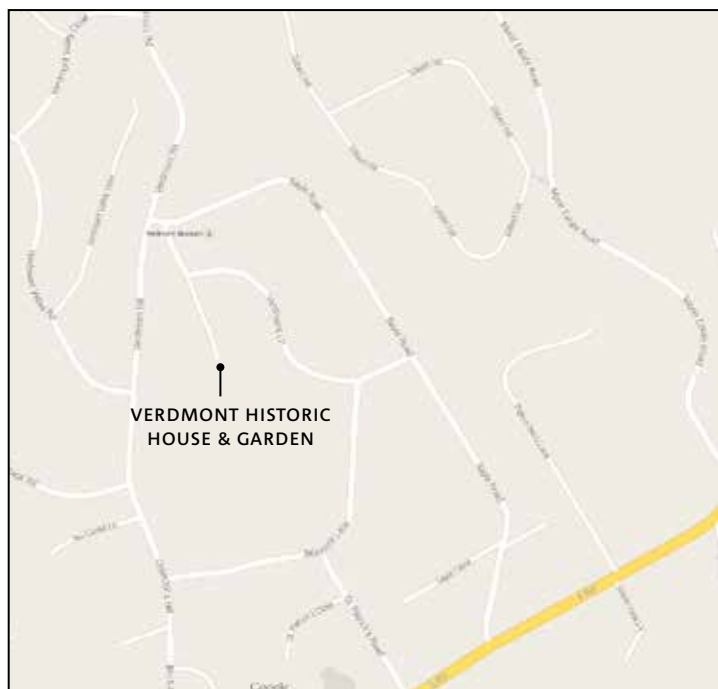
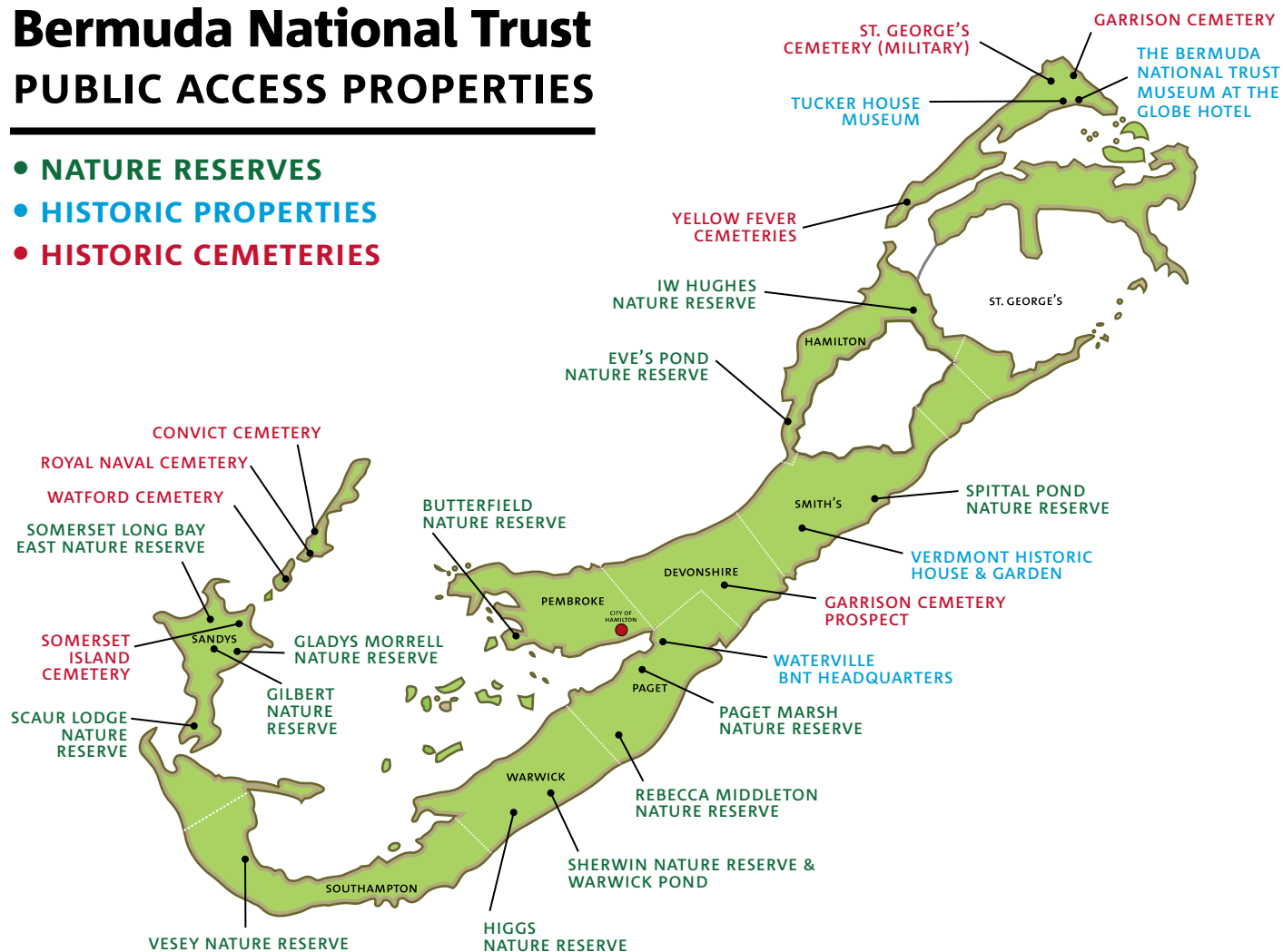
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Directions

Location: 6 Vermont Lane, Collector's Hill, Smith's Parish

Telephone: (441) 236-7369

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Verdmont

HISTORIC HOUSE & GARDEN



STANDING PROUDLY IN SMITH'S PARISH OFF COLLECTORS HILL, VERDMONT is one of Bermuda's most significant historic treasures, having been built almost 300 years ago, between 1694 and 1714.

Verdmont is aptly named as it is translated from two French words, *vert* and *mont*, meaning 'green hill'. This grand house would have been suitably positioned to catch the southern breezes and to view ships travelling along the South Shore towards St. George's. The property on which it stands originally consisted of three shares, 75 acres, and would have stretched from coast to coast. Rather than the houses that you see between Verdmont and the South Shore, the land would have been covered in native and endemic plants, notably cedars and palmettos. The first record of the house being called Verdmont was in a newspaper announcement of John Green's (a former owner) death in 1802.

While the exact date of the building is a mystery, the house has remained standing for close to 300 years. The footprint of the house has remained the same over this period of time. What is also remarkable is that it was lived in up until 1951 without plumbing or electricity.

It was subsequently purchased, restored and opened as a museum that is now maintained by the Bermuda National Trust. The museum features an extensive collection of antiques including Bermuda-made cedar furniture, portraits, English and Chinese porcelain and a child's nursery. A walled formal garden surrounds the house and a young grove of Bermuda cedar trees envelopes the south hillside.

Many people have been born and died under its roof. Each has a different story to tell. There were the wealthy owners, the grieving widows and their children. Here too lived generations of enslaved men, women and children who we only know by their first names. All have contributed to the history of the house.



The Owners & Occupiers

John Dickinson

Research indicates that the first owner of Verdmont was a man named John Dickinson who acquired the property around the end of the 17th century. The three shares, or 75 acres, on which the house stands, had earlier been owned by three-time governor of Bermuda, Captain William Sayle, who died in 1671. How Dickinson may have acquired it brings us to an interesting story.

Dickinson was a man of influence and property and is thought to have become part owner of a newly built Bermuda sloop of war named the *Amity*, in 1691. W.S. Zuill in his book *The Story of Bermuda and her People* states that under the command of a Rhode Islander named Thomas Tew, the *Amity* was commissioned to attack a French trading station in The Gambia, on the west coast of Africa. Once at sea, Tew changed course and sailed up the east coast of Africa and (intentionally) fell in with an Arab convoy of six ships. He engaged the first and largest, which was heavily armed and carried 300 soldiers. Tew captured it without losing one of his own 45 men. Their prize proved to be loaded with treasure from Moslem India: 'broken gold and gold dust...Lyon dollars and Arabian gold'. This act of outright piracy is believed to have netted over £80,000 (several million dollars today). Tew's personal share was reported to be £12,000. The shareholders were discreet about the source of their windfall, for most of them were prominent citizens. Much of the booty quietly went into land purchases; it is reported that 13 shares of 25 acres each were bought and 'appropriate' buildings erected. Was Verdmont among them?

Another of the *Amity* shareholders was Colonel Anthony White, Chief Justice of Bermuda. Another beneficiary was Colonel White's daughter, Elizabeth, recently widowed, who inherited her husband's share in the venture. Before the juicy *Amity* melon was sliced, however, Elizabeth married John Dickinson.

Did father, daughter and new son-in-law use Arab gold to buy the land and build Verdmont? There is no proof, but the indications are right. With sudden prosperity, the family had more than enough money to build a fine home for the newlyweds. Verdmont is only a mile from the site of Colonel White's own 'mansion house' at Flatts. It is a matter of record that Dickinson and his father-in-law bought 75 acres of land at that time which does exactly encompass all of the original Verdmont property. The Dickinsons did have a home on that land, for John's will refers to 'my now dwelling house'. Lastly, from a structural point of view, the present building could have been built as early as 1700-1710. Indeed, an inventory of John Dickinson's effects, taken shortly after his death in 1714, lists his dwelling house as one with four rooms over four rooms, Verdmont's exact structural arrangement as it appears to this day.

When John Dickinson's will was proved in 1714, it provided that the Verdmont estate remain his wife's until her death, then be divided between their two daughters, Elizabeth inheriting the southern portion, including the house, and Mary the northern, where Hinson Hall, on Middle Road, was later built. However, John's widow Elizabeth was still living when daughter Elizabeth (by then Mrs. Spofferth) died in 1733, so her share of the property eventually went to her daughter, also named Elizabeth.

The Dickinsons, John, Elizabeth and their two daughters, were not alone on this grand estate, for John's inventory lists four male and two female slaves. The record details only their names and the values assigned to them. This lack of information raises many more questions than are answered about Sambo, Prince, Robin, Peter, Ruth and Beck. John's will also reveals the name of Bess, a slave who looked after his sister Alice, who lived with his family.

Elizabeth Spofferth

We do not know when this Dickinson granddaughter was born but her mother died in 1733 and she inherited Verdmont upon the death of her grandmother, Dickinson's widow, about 1747. She married first Robert Brown, a merchant in St. George's, and then in September 1755 she married Thomas Smith.

Elizabeth & Thomas Smith

The Mr. Smith whom Elizabeth married was the Honorable Thomas, Collector of Customs and member of the Governor's Council for 20 years, a widower with four daughters. It is this Smith family whose portraits by John Green, his son-in-law, hang in Verdmont today.



As Collector of Customs, Thomas Smith did not have an easy job, nor an enviable one, for smuggling was common. Bermuda's official port of entry was St. George's, but incoming ships had a convenient habit of unloading cargo at the other end of the island, then reporting to Customs. During the American Revolution in the late 1700s, smuggling and privateering reached a dizzying peak of activity. While Collector Smith was doing his aging best to cope with the smuggling problem, his four daughters were busy with their own concerns of becoming engaged and married: Mary (Polly) to the portrait painter John Green, Elizabeth (Betty) to Captain Henry Trott and Catherine to Joseph Packwood. Honora (Peggy), the youngest, did not marry.

Their stepmother, Elizabeth Smith, had no children of her own. After the Collector died in 1781, she willed her Verdmont property to Mary Green, Smith's oldest daughter, and to Samuel Trott, Betty's son. After Elizabeth's death in 1789, the northern part, including the house, was to go to Mary, the portion south of the public road to Samuel. A survey of the period shows that there was no more valuable house in the parish than Verdmont. The land (50 acres in all) was valued at over £583.

Interestingly, this was almost the same value as that placed on the four men (Bacchus, Daniel, Mell, and Joe), three women (Rachael, Sue, and Marian), five boys (Nat, Sam, Davy, Jim, Tom) and two girls (Tish and Sall) listed as slaves on the inventory of Thomas Smith in 1782. These 14 people were collectively assessed at £581, or more than one third of the total of the Smith inventory, valued at over £1600. Certainly it can be presumed that they were an integral part of the daily life at Verdmont and the functioning of the estate. The inter-relationships and interactions between themselves and the Smith family can only be guessed.

left:

**Portrait of Thomas Smith
Attributed to John Green**

Collection Bermuda National Trust,
Verdmont Museum

John & Mary Green

Mary Smith's husband, John Green, was a man of both varied accomplishments and considerable mystery. In the 1760s he moved to Bermuda from America. In 1774 he went to London to develop his painting skills under Benjamin West, who had become historical painter to George III. Opinions as to the quality of John Green's work vary considerably. He is generally regarded as a minor but noteworthy portrait painter of his day. After Green's return to Bermuda and marriage to Mary, he presumably painted the Smith family portraits that hang at Verdmont. Some may have been done before he left.

Either Green had training in more than portrait work, or influential political connections, or both, for he stepped into two highly responsible offices. In 1785 he was appointed to the same post his father-in-law had held, Collector of Customs. More surprisingly, the following year he was made Judge of the Court of Vice-Admiralty, a position he held until his death 16 years later. As Judge, he was heartily disliked by American sea captains for his harsh condemnations of their ships and cargoes. (England was then at war with the new French Republic, and both British warships and Bermudian privateers were seizing and bringing to Bermuda any ships suspected of trading with the French.) Green was also on the Governor's Council from 1792 until his death.

In spite of his prominence, John Green remains a shadowy figure. He had no ancestors in Bermuda and left no descendants. Almost nothing is known of his private life at Verdmont, except that he was a gentleman farmer who one year produced 80 bales of cotton as a contribution to that short-lived local industry. Governor Beckwith wrote of him, "There is not in the King's service a more upright judge." When he died, at a time when huge fortunes were being made (and lost) in Bermuda, his estate was valued at only £286, one third of which consisted of three slaves – two boys, Brutus and Prince, and a girl, Philis. If the information about John Green is sketchy, the information about these three members of the Verdmont household is even more so.

Were the Greens responsible for the few obvious changes that were made in the house during the mid to late 18th century? It is possible. Green himself had been so impressed by classical Georgian influences in London that he had written Collector Smith, back in 1774: "This stile (sic) does not only prevail in Architecture and the other fine arts, but even in common furniture amongst the nobility and men of taste and fortune." It would be natural for him to want to add artistic new touches to the house; indeed, some of its elements belong very definitely to this period, including the dentil moulding in the drawing room and parlour, the interior panelled shutters and the elegant carved mantel



left:

John Green self portrait

Miniature

By John Green

Collection Bermuda National Trust,
Verdmont Museum



left:

Portrait of Mary Green

By John Green

Collection Bermuda National Trust,
Verdmont Museum

in the upstairs parlour. Green might well have put up the damp-resistant wainscoting in the drawing room and parlour and covered it with fabric or wallpaper as a background for his portraits. He might also have been the one who changed the interior doors from cedar to mahogany. All these 18th century features strongly suggest Green and his period, but we cannot be sure; the old house has kept its secrets well.

The Trotts

John and Mary Green died childless in 1802 and 1803 respectively, and Verdmont went to Samuel Trott, Mary's nephew, who already owned that part of the property south of the South Shore Road. After Samuel's death in 1817 his widow, Sarah, and some of their children continued to live in the big house. One of these, John Henry Trott, in turn inherited the



property – amazingly, the only time in its long history that Verdmont ever passed from father to son. But the son lost interest after his daughter, Catherine, died there of typhoid in 1858, and he moved to Hamilton, taking the Green portraits with him. The John Green portraits were eventually acquired by James d'Esterre, a grandson of Samuel Trott and they were obtained from him for Verdmont by artist and businessman Hereward Trott Watlington.

During this period of Trott ownership of Verdmont, several slave registers were compiled in Bermuda. From these we learn not only the names of those enslaved but also their gender, colour, employment, age and country. Tom, Dick, Prince, Beck and Nanny appear on three registers, indicating their presence at Verdmont over a nine-year period. What happened to Peter

between the first and second register and to David and Lattice between the second and third register is not revealed. The addition of Emma, a young seven-year-old female of coloured descent, in the 1827 register and Geoffrey, a young two-year-old male of coloured descent, in the 1830 register raises the questions of familial relationships. Unfortunately, the registers do not answer these questions. Slavery was abolished in Bermuda on August 1, 1834. We do not know the names of the people who worked at Verdmont after that.

left:

Captain John Henry Trott & Harriet Trott

Courtesy William and Joyce Zuill

The Spencer-Joells

In the mid 19th century, John Trott sold Verdmont to Rupert Spencer, who farmed it. Rupert was a bachelor, so his brother John and family not only shared the capacious house with him, but John's two daughters, Emma and Ella, inherited the entire 50-acre estate. After their own father's death in 1871, the two girls divided the property: Emma, by then Mrs. Stafford Joell, took the house and land north of the South Shore Road, and Ella the land south of it, plus cash. The Spencer-Joell tenancy was destined to be Verdmont's last private ownership.

Emma and Stafford Joell and family of five children lived at Verdmont during the economic slump following the American Civil War. This was the period when the islanders turned back from the sea to the soil, began to farm in a more scientific manner and then marketed their crops overseas. Stafford Joell, who listed himself as a 'planter', no doubt tried his luck with potatoes and onions, possibly arrowroot and lily bulbs, for Bermuda exported all of these at the time. It is doubtful if the Joells took much interest in the history or architecture of the house. To them it was not their ancestral homestead, just a big, old-fashioned dwelling. They probably added the wooden verandah on the south side (now gone) and may have dug the water tank by the detached kitchen to replace the hillside catchment 200 feet away (also gone). Fortunately for us, they did not attempt any Victorian 'modernisation'.

Emma died in 1919, outliving her husband. They left five children, but only Lillian, born in 1875, made the house her permanent home; she lived there for almost 75 years. A spinster, she stayed alone at Verdmont in the latter part of her life, after her brothers and sisters had gone their separate ways. For nearly half a century she worked for a law firm in Hamilton, walking to and from work. Lillian loved the ancient house as it was and shunned modern conveniences. There was no electricity, no plumbing, no telephone, no refrigeration and no running water. She used candles and oil lamps for lighting, cooked on a kerosene stove in the dining room, and dipped water from the tank outside the former kitchen quarters. Naturally she was regarded as a 'character', but characters were nothing new to Verdmont.



left:

Joell family, c1940

Pictured back row from left:

Lillian, Alan, Spencer, Esther and Irene (known as Dolly) Joell

Front row from left: Alaine, William and Diana Joell

Courtesy Alaine Joell Saunders

The Enslaved People of Verdmont

For more than the first 120 years, Verdmont was home to generations of men, women and children who had no choice but to live and work here.

Perhaps the house was built by slaves. Alas, we do not know their names. We do, however, know the first names of others from the inventories of several of Verdmont’s owners. Bess, who cared for John Dickinson’s sister Alice, is mentioned in his will where he made provision for her “accommodation ... so long as she continues serviceable in the family”.

More information, such as employment, age and country of origin can be found on the Returns and Registers of Slaves. The Return of Slaves, below, was made in 1833 by John Trott, on behalf of his late father Samuel Trott. Tom, a mariner, probably worked at sea remitting the bulk of his wages to his master. Dick and Prince were listed as labourers and Nanny (or Nancy), Emma and Geoffrey as domestics.

Geoffrey, who was five years old at the time of emancipation on 1 August 1834, was probably the last born into slavery at Verdmont. We do not know what happened to him. Did he stay on at Verdmont with his mother Nanny where she may have continued to work for wages? Or did they leave? And what surname did the family assume?

RETURN OF SLAVES made by

| NAME | SEX | COLOR | EMPLOYMENT | AGE | COUNTRY |
|----------|--------|-------|------------|-----|---------|
| Tom | Male | Black | Mariner | 35 | Bermuda |
| Jack | Male | Black | Labourer | 20 | " |
| Prince | Male | Black | " | 20 | " |
| Nanny | Female | " | Domestic | 26 | " |
| Emma | " | " | " | 15 | " |
| Geoffrey | Male | " | " | 5 | " |

I, John Trott do swear that the Return now by me delivered to be Registered, contains a true, faithful and correct account and description of all the Slaves belonging to the Estate of Samuel Trott deceased to the best of my knowledge, information and belief, so help me God.

Sworn before me, this 15 day of October 1833.

above:
Trott Return of Slaves
 Return of Slaves 1833/34 John H Trott agent for the Estate of Samuel Trott (deceased) 15 October 1833
 Courtesy Bermuda Archives

The Bermuda National Trust

Lillian Joell’s resistance to change protected Verdmont from structural alteration. But she was evidently resistant to maintenance too: the roof leaked, floors were rotten, windows broken, shutters missing, hinges rusted away. The grounds were overgrown, plantings had gone wild and the drive to South Shore Road was choked with trees and brush. Fortunately, the Bermuda Historical Monuments Trust realized the building’s historic and architectural importance and bought it in 1951. After much needed repairs and renovation, Verdmont was reopened as a museum in 1957. It is now owned and administered by the Bermuda National Trust, successor to the earlier organization.

African Diaspora Heritage Trail • Bermuda

The Bermuda Department of Tourism and the international body **African Diaspora** created a trail linking sites, monuments and museums which have a common legacy of slavery and portrait the heritage and culture of the people of African descent. These sites were officially designated as part of the transnational heritage tourism initiative formed in 2001 and are part of the **UNESCO Slave Route Project** with the aim to protect and educate about the heritage and culture of those belonging to the African Diaspora. A bronze plaque created by Bermudian sculptor Carlos Dowling near the kitchen indicates the official heritage status of Verdmont.



Returns & Registers of Slaves

Following the Abolition of Slave Trade Act in 1807 Britain required its colonies to maintain Registers of Slaves in order to monitor slave ownership and stamp out slave trading. Bermuda submitted its first Register of Slaves in 1817 when slave owners, or their agents, were required to complete a Return of Slaves listing their slaves by name, sex, colour, employment, age and country of origin. The information was then entered into a Register of Slaves.

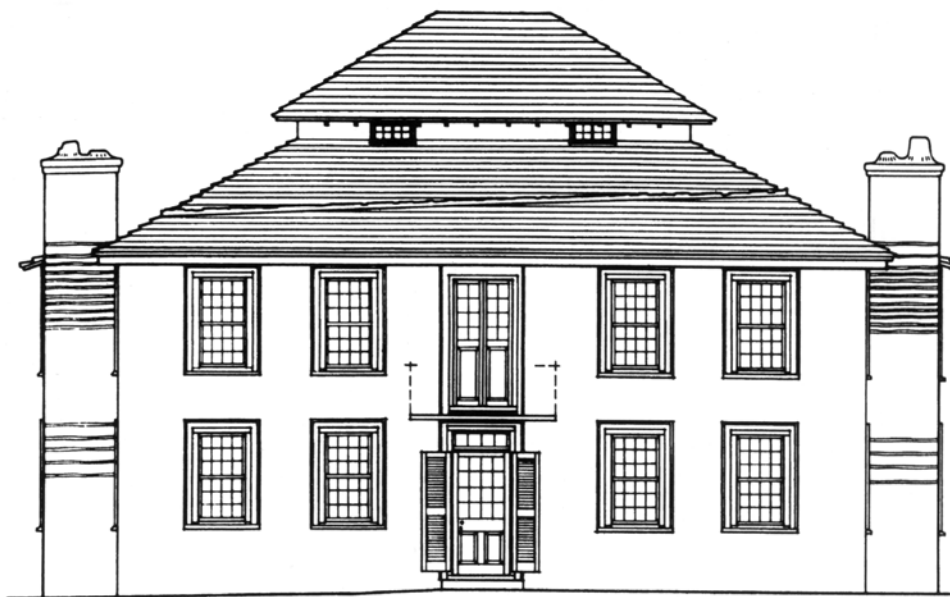
Architecture & Furnishings

Architecturally, Verdmont is one of the most fascinating old houses in Bermuda. The front of the house which faces the South Shore is a fine example of the rare transitional style, retaining some aspects of 17th century dwellings, while anticipating the classicism and symmetry of the Georgian mansions of the 18th. As mentioned previously, unlike most old buildings, Verdmont has remained virtually unchanged structurally for close to 300 years. It embodies traditional Bermudian materials and methods of construction, yet has several features unique to itself.

From the Outside

Built of Bermuda limestone, cut into blocks, the method of construction is typically Bermudian, but there are several architectural features that decidedly are not. The most noticeable of these is the curious roof-on-roof, which is the only one in Bermuda and almost certainly not part of the original design.

Unusual, too, are the large double chimneys at each end of Verdmont, which provide eight fireplaces, one for every room in the house. The position of the chimneys illustrates how old Bermuda homes are more akin to those of the American South than to the early homes of New England. Because of their cold winters, New Englanders favoured a large central chimney, to warm as much of the house as possible. In Virginia, Maryland and Bermuda, milder climates caused early builders to push chimneys to the ends of the house, to dissipate heat and open up central passages through which air could circulate.



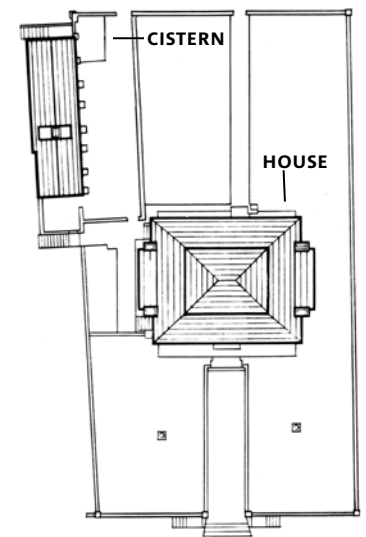
HOUSE FRONT ELEVATION



above:

The back entrance to Verdmont

KITCHEN/
SLAVE QUARTERS



SITE PLAN

ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY CARY CARSON,
COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION, DRAWN
BY JEFFREY BOSTETTER

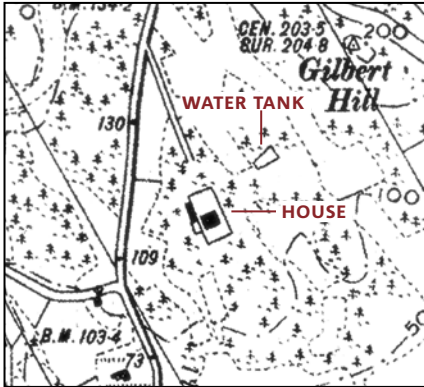
Near the northwest corner of Vermont is a smaller building, obviously old, with a chimney that seems unnecessarily large. This was the former detached kitchen and slaves' quarters, now remodeled into a residence for letting. The interior has been much altered, but the building itself may be as old as Vermont. It is the only surviving dependency of what must once have been a group of sheds, stables and the like in the rear of the big house.



left:
**The former detached kitchen/
slave quarters**

As in the American South, the finer Bermudian homes used to have their kitchens in separate buildings. This removed the danger of fire as well as the disturbances of noise, heat, smoke and cooking odours. Kitchen and domestic chores were performed by slaves in early times, as was most of the field work.

One important structure not seen at Vermont is a water storage tank for the main house. This is puzzling, for storage of rainwater has always been essential on the island, and roof catchments were in common use for generations. However, Vermont evidently relied on a hillside catchment and storage tank (now destroyed) 200 feet to the east, from which water was carried in buckets. There is now a small tank by the former kitchen building, but water was never piped from it to the big house, only dipped and carried. Consequently, there were never any flush toilets; chamber pots and the triple-seated stone privy still standing near the northeast corner of the house had to suffice.



SURVEYED AND CONTOURED IN 1898-1899 BY
LIEUT. A. J. SAVAGE, RE. PUBLISHED AT ORDNANCE
SURVEY OFFICE, SOUTHAMPTON, ENGLAND, 1901.
COURTESY WORKS & ENGINEERING



Privy exterior



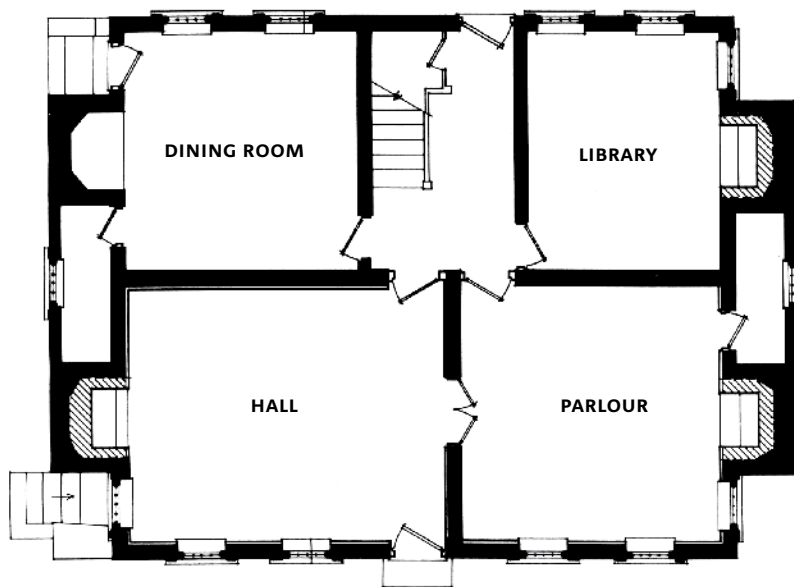
Privy interior



Wash basin & chamber pots

Inside Vermont/the Ground Floor

The basic plan is four rooms downstairs with four rooms above, each with its own fireplace. An attic is found on the third floor, from which the earlier residents would have had access to the cupola.



left:
Vermont ground floor plan

ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY CARY CARSON,
COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION, DRAWN
BY JEFFREY BOSTETTER

Hall & Parlour



From the south, one enters immediately into the hall or drawing room. The parlour, adjacent, is connected by large double doors that, when open, provide an impressive 40-foot expanse of the entire length of the building with fireplaces at each end. The pine boards covering the walls of the drawing room and parlour have caused much speculation. Panelled walls are occasionally found in old Bermuda homes, but native

cedar is generally used, with the boards running vertically. Here they run horizontally and are not of top quality. They were presumably intended only as a base for a wall covering of fabric or paper; indeed, traces of old wallpaper were removed when the house was restored in the 1950s. Also, the delicate, white-painted dentil moulding at the junction of walls and ceiling is better suited to decorative wall covering than to exposed boards.

The family portraits in these two front rooms show Bermuda's 18th century dress and hair styles, even though these are obviously of the 'Sunday best' variety. Many were painted by John Green himself.

In addition, the drawing room and parlour contain a variety of fine antique furniture reflecting styles of many eras, in most instances either made of Bermuda cedar or made in Bermuda. Of special note is a handsome pair of Queen Anne side chairs, c.1750, having 'split splat' backs which are unusual and almost peculiar to Bermuda. Other items of Bermuda cedar include an 18th century chest-on-chest with 'marching' legs, another unique Bermudian feature, a large corner cupboard, and a notable desk whose lid and sides are of single planks. The six cedar chairs with woven palmetto seats, c.1740, show an interesting use of the resources available to early craftsmen, notably the use of two of Bermuda's endemic trees.

left:
**The pine board parlour walls
with paintings**

The connecting wall between the double chimneys allows the space between to be converted into closet-like cubicles accessible from various rooms. These cubicles are single recesses which stem directly from those in medieval English dwellings, and were in turn forerunners of the more formal powdering rooms of Georgian times.



left:
**Cedar chair with woven
palmetto seat**

centre:
Queen Anne side chair

right:
**Chest-on-chest with
marching legs**

Dining Room



The other two rooms on the ground floor are the original dining room and a room now furnished as a library. The dining room fireplace is the largest in the house, with a hearth elevated nearly two feet from the floor. Raised hearths are common in old Bermuda homes, particularly in fireplaces used for cooking, which suggests that the purpose was to save stooping. Although the last occupant of the house, Miss Lillian Joell, used a kerosene stove, in an earlier day this fireplace would

have served for light cooking, making tea or just keeping food warm that had been brought from the detached kitchen. In the hall between the rooms is a venerable long-case clock, still running, with English works and a Bermuda-made case, which dates from 1790.

left:
Dining room fireplace

Library

The library contains a mahogany 'drum' table made in England in about 1820, and a cedar corner cabinet with ornately carved 'Greek key' motif made by a Paget cabinetmaker, Solomon Hutchings, between 1800 and 1830. The blue and gold coffee service within is French, c.1810 and is said to have been seized by a Bermudian privateer in 1815. The set is reported to have been a gift from Napoleon's wife, Josephine, to Dolley Madison, wife of James Madison, the fourth president of the United States.

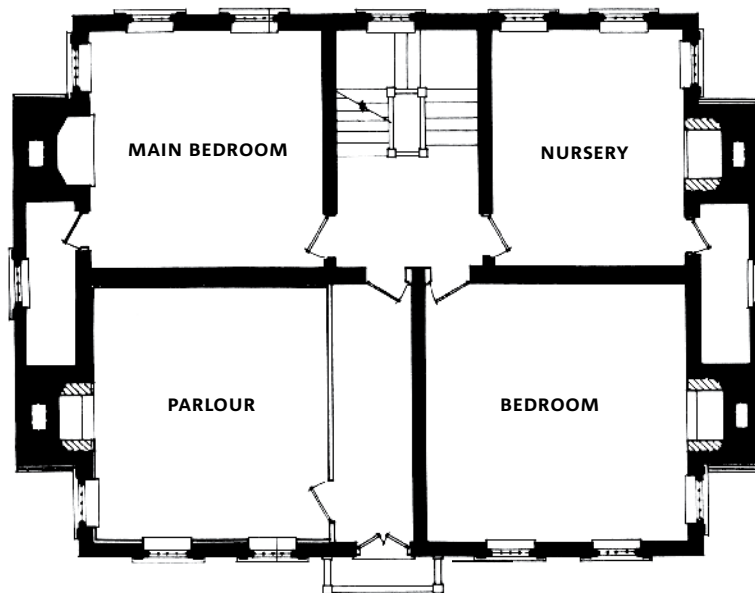


left:
Madison china

Sources: Vernon A. Ives, *Verdmont Booklet*, date unknown, Revisions made in 1996, John W. Cox, 2004, Ted Cart

The First Floor

The magnificent balustrade staircase leads to the floor above and thence to the attic. The balusters are of 17th century design, hand turned from local cedar. The layout of rooms on the first floor is identical to the floor below. While some of the flooring was replaced when the house was renovated, one can still see very old, worn pine flooring, probably original, on this level. The boards are wider at one end than the other (from the taper of the tree trunk) and are alternated to balance out the difference, an ingenious saving of both labour and wood. This technique is also seen in the top of the cedar chest in the main bedroom.



left:

Vermont first floor plan

ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY CARY CARSON,
COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION, DRAWN
BY JEFFREY BOSTETTER

Main Bedroom

To the north of the upstairs parlour is the main bedroom. The bed, impressive as it appears, is an amusing example of early 'show'. The spiral reeded posts at the foot of the bed, where they would be noticed most, are of imported mahogany; the two at the head, less conspicuous, are of local cedar and the covered headboard is just a piece of old pine! This room also contains two traditional cedar chests on legs for the storage of clothes or bedding. Lifted off the legs, they served as travel trunks. It is thought that the intricate dovetailing possibly identifies the maker, each craftsman having his own pattern. The small truckle or trundle bed, when not in use, could be pushed under the larger one. The panelled cedar tallboy, in the William and Mary style, is the earliest of the three highly important examples at Vermont. This one dates from about 1700.



left:
Spiral reeded four poster bed

below:
Cedar chest on legs



Nursery

The smallest room on this floor is furnished as a nursery. Here is a four-poster child's bed and even a doll's four-poster. More typical of the average Bermuda home is the rocking cradle with uprights at each corner to support a mosquito net. (Until the 20th century, mosquitoes were a serious problem on the island, the then unknown cause of many an epidemic of yellow fever.) There are also children's chairs, a miniature sofa, dolls and doll furniture and early children's books and toys.



left top:
Four poster bed

right top:
Rocking cradle



left:
Wooden toy horse



right:
Miniature sofa and bed

Parlour

Opening off the corridor is an attractive room now papered and furnished as an upstairs parlour. As the 18th century progressed upstairs parlours become increasingly popular in Bermuda. An elegant cedar tea table, c.1740, showcases teacups which have no handles. This is because the tea, first brought from China, was drunk by the same method the Chinese used – cupping the hands around the cup. If the tea was too hot, it was poured into the large dish-like saucers and sipped from the saucer.



left:
The parlour

right:
Chinese tea cup



left:
Side table
Made in bird's-eye cedar by John Henry Jackson

right:
Cedar tea table, c.1740

Bedroom

The remaining front room, also facing the sea, is furnished as a bedroom. Among the items on display is an important and rare Bermuda cedar bonnet-top tallboy of about 1750, having shell carvings and 'trifid' feet, and a cedar cradle from the early 18th century.



left:
Bermuda cedar bonnet-top tallboy, c.1750

right:
Bermuda cedar chest

Bed, Bath & Beyond



The one natural resource necessary for survival that Bermuda does not have is fresh running water. The early settlers, like us today, appreciated the value of collecting water from rain and from underground wells. Initially, rainwater was collected in barrels. Shortly thereafter, cisterns were constructed for storage. In the early days, these were made of cedar and then later tanks were cut from the rock and made watertight with a lime mortar.

Without indoor plumbing, the demand on the water source was not as great as it is now and tanks were much smaller than they are today. They were often built partially above ground and had a domed or flat slate roof. Water was dipped by hand and carried into the house in buckets. The catchment for Verdmont was located 200 feet to the east. There is now a small tank by the former kitchen/slave quarters, but water was never piped from it to the big house, only dipped and carried. Consequently, there were no taps, baths, showers, etc. installed at Verdmont, nor any flushing toilets. Early methods of sanitation included chamber pots, tucked under beds, and commodes, a piece of furniture designed to conceal a chamber pot. Verdmont also has a triple-seater stone privy still standing near the northeast corner of the house, one of the few still surviving.

Getting a bath was not a daily routine and was more complicated than we know it. Baths were taken once a week, unless the weather outside was too cold – then it would be skipped until the next week. E. A. McCallan in *Life on Old St. David's Bermuda* reports that an elderly friend of his “affirmed that frequent bathing was injurious because it removed the protective oil of the skin.” In preparation for a bath, water was carried in buckets into the house and heated in a large pot in the fireplace. Once hot it was then transferred into a portable bathtub, in which a person would be able to sit only with their knees bent. The head of household usually took the first bath, followed by the remaining adults and then children in order of position, usually chronological, within the household. You can imagine the state of the water by the time it was the turn for the ‘baby’ of the family. Any soap used was home-made from lye, a liquid from ash and fat boiled together.

“Early to bed and early to rise ...” was true for many Bermudians relying on the sun and candles as their main sources of light. At night, you would have retired early to bed using a candle to guide your way. Those who could not afford candles burned whale oil in lamps. Since nightgowns and pajamas did not become fashionable until the 19th and 20th centuries, people wore their undergarments to bed. Men would wear their long shapeless shirts and women their long shift. If you could afford it, your mattresses would be stuffed with feathers or sheep’s wool. Poorer people collected Bermuda bed-straw or bed-grass as mattress filling and E. A. Mc Callan recalls dried crab-grass being used to stuff soldiers’ mattresses. One person to a bed would have been a luxury and most families in Bermuda shared beds, particularly the children. If extra sleeping space was required, a trundle bed was used and could be tucked out of sight during the day.

Clothing Styles: Late 1700s



While clothing styles would have varied depending on socio-economic status and occupation, there are some generalisations that can be made for clothing worn by people in the latter half of the 18th century.

Babies, both boys and girls, were dressed in long gowns or shifts until they were toddlers. Sometime between the ages of two and five years old, boys and girls would start to be dressed differently.

Boys wore breeches, trousers that came down to just below the knees, and long shirts that they pulled over their head and tucked into their breeches. A waistcoat or vest was worn over the shirt. Stockings up to the knees and shoes were added and a tricorne or three-cornered hat placed on the head when going outside. Men dressed similarly, adding a long coat and possibly a cravat, a narrow cloth wrapped around the shirt collar.

Girls and women would start with a long shift that was possibly also used as a nightgown. Stockings would be pulled on and held up with ribbon. Stays around the midriff and hoops to fill out the skirts may have been added depending on position and occupation. Petticoats came next and a pocket, or separate pouch, in which was carried personal items was tied around the waist and then came the outer-most layer. For middle class and poorer women, this might have included a long skirt that came down to the ankles and a short gown or jacket. Gentry and middle class women wore a long dress over their undergarments.

The material used to make the clothes varied among the social classes. Gentry folk had their clothes made from imported silks, satins and fine linens. For those who could not afford these materials, wool, cotton and coarse linen were available.



left:
**Portrait of Master
Joseph Packwood**



left:
Portrait of Mary Green
right:
Portrait of Jane Slater

Cedar & Palmetto

The grounds of Vermont contain a variety of plants, some of which have been intentionally grown and some have arrived on their own.

Native plants are those that were present in Bermuda before the first people arrived. In other words, they arrived here on their own without human assistance. How did they get here? They probably arrived as seeds carried by the wind or by ocean currents or in the stomachs of migrating birds. Some native plants of Bermuda include the prickly pear cactus, bay grape and Spanish bayonet.

If native plants are isolated for long periods, they may evolve into distinct species that are not found anywhere else in the world. Species which are unique to an area are called endemic. Bermuda has a few mosses, ferns and flowering plants that are endemic and three endemic trees: the olivewood, cedar and palmetto. These latter two were of great importance to earlier generations of Bermudians.

The cedar is probably the most important plant in Bermuda's history. The first accidental settlers from the *Sea Venture* used it for shelter and for building the *Deliverance* and *Patience* to take them off the island. Later, it was used by settlers for windows and doors, tables and chairs, chests and bureaus. It was used in the shipbuilding industry when Bermuda was known for its fast boats and sloops. Additionally, the cedar berries were used to make cedar berry beer and cough syrup. Forests of cedar were even used as a dowry – a gift given with a bride when she married. In the 1940s a scale insect was introduced to Bermuda and destroyed 85 - 90% of the cedar trees. Those that were resistant have been used to grow more trees which are being planted over Bermuda again.

Early settlers found many uses for the Bermuda palmetto as well. They saw the wild hogs eating the berries and trusted that they could as well. The heart of the tree was eaten like a cabbage and a strong alcoholic drink, bibby, was made from the sap. The leaves have been used for everything from thatching roofs to making umbrellas, baskets, mats, hats and rope.

David Wingate, former Government Conservation Officer, estimates that 85 - 90% of the plants growing in Bermuda today are introduced. These are plants that were brought here by people either accidentally or for use as food, medicine or decoration.



left:
**Palmetto roof as seen at
Early Settler's Reconstruction
Cottage at Carter House**

right:
Palmetto broom

Plant Foods in Bermuda c.1800

Farming at this time in our history was in a very poor state. No one, black or white, free or slave, wanted to work the land. Governor William Browne, appointed 1781, wrote “agriculture is a subject foreign to the engagement of the people”. Bermudians had been used to earning their living by boat building, trading, privateering and piracy. As seamen, most Bermudians considered work on the land degrading and rich whites refused to permit their slaves to labour on the land as the labour of whites and free blacks was sufficient to cultivate what little land remained after that used to graze animals and grow cedar.

During the American Revolution, 1775-1783, Bermuda, as a British colony, became the enemy of the Americans and many trading opportunities were lost including, for example, the salt trade that had been so profitable. Additionally, the boat builders of America copied the style of the fast Bermuda sloops and made them bigger and better. Bermuda, because of its strategic location, was a very possible target for invasion by the Americans or the French (America’s allies in their War of Independence).

In 1801, the situation was so bad that the lead story in The Royal Gazette, April 18, stated “the situation of these islands at present is truly alarming for want of corn, flour, rice, pork, etc. Many poor families have been several days without a mouthful of bread kind, and at present there is no likelihood of a remedy.” This was disastrous as bread was eaten in large quantities and at one time a loaf of bread was considered one man’s ration for a day.

The few acres that were cultivated included the following crops: potatoes (common and sweet), beans, peas, pumpkin, squash, onions, carrots, corn (maize), cassava, barley and collard greens. These vegetables were supplemented with imported rice and wheat, and herbs and fruits grown locally. The fruits included oranges, lemons, limes, pomegranates, pawpaw, prickly pear, melons, sugar cane, cherries, bananas, mulberries, cedar berries, palmetto berries, figs and sugar apple. Only the wealthy could afford most of these.

The herbs included anise, basil, cumin, fennel, marjoram, parsley, hot red peppers and sage. From the fruits and berries, people would make their medicines: poppy syrup, cedarberry syrup, castor oil, bitter aloes, marjoram tea and pomegranate bark tea. The drinks included water, gingerbeer, berry beer, beer, rum and wine.

The basic daily food for most people was corn grits and mush, bread, cornmeal, peas and rice together with a little meat or fish once or twice a week. For a special treat they might make fennel seed or ginger cookies.



Dutch Oven

Most cooking was done over an open fire or hearth. Pots were hung over the fire on hooks and everything was boiled together. A griddle with a long handle was used to make pancakes and a long-handled fork to toast bread. Baking was done in a separate bread oven located to one side of the large fireplace. Alternatively, bread could be baked in a Dutch oven, an iron pot on three legs with wood burned below and on the lid.

Author: Ray Latter, 2003

Sources: Collett, Jill *Bermuda: Her Plants and Gardens 1609-1850* Published by Macmillan Publishers Ltd., London 1987 McCallan, E.A. *Life on Old St. David's Bermuda* Published by The University Press, Glasgow 1948

Plants Grown in the Small Rock Garden at Verdmont



Aloe

At one time plantations of aloe grew in Bermuda. The juice was extracted and sent to America to help in the making of medicines. Boiled with molasses, it was a good cough remedy. A slice soaked in water produced a liquid that was good for colds. Today, the cut leaves are used to help cool sunburn.



Basil

Used in cooking particularly with tomatoes, basil is first mentioned in 1616. The seed was said to cure sadness and so make one happy. The juice was used to help eyesight.



Chives

This plant has leaves similar to those of an onion and, in fact, they are closely related. It is frequently used on dishes with eggs, cheeses and potatoes but may also be used as a garnish.



Lemon Balm

The leaves look very much like those of the stinging nettle but smaller. Rubbing the leaves between the fingers produces a distinctive lemon smell. It is used to treat nervous tummy upsets in children and to help with depression and anxiety.



Lemon Grass

This grass was used as an herb in cooking in Asia. In Bermuda, the leaves are steeped in boiling water, the juice strained and sugar added to make a lemonade drink often used for coughs.



Parsley

It is not clear when this plant was introduced to Bermuda. Today, it is found growing wild in many places. It is used for garnishing foods as well as for flavouring sauces, stews and stocks. It is often used as a diuretic to help reduce fluid retention.



Sage

Sage is a flavourful herb for meats, particularly pork. It is not known when it was first imported but it is likely that it arrived quite early.











Thyme

This low growing herb is often used in cooking roasts and stews. The small leaves are dried and used for seasoning. They may also be used to aid digestion, particularly of rich foods, and to clear coughs and chest infections.

Source: Collett, Jill *Bermuda: Her Plants and Gardens 1609-1850* Published by Macmillan Publishers Ltd., London 1987

Other Common Plants Grown in Bermuda

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|--|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |
| <p>Bay Grape</p> <p>This native plant with its distinctive shiny, round leaves and red veins must have arrived here on its own. It is often seen growing near the coast. The fruit grow in clusters and turn red when ripe. They are enjoyed by birds and may be made into a jam.</p> | <p>Fennel</p> <p>The seeds of this plant were first sent to Bermuda in 1616 and grew very well here. People used to chew the seeds to prevent them from feeling hungry and to freshen their breath. Fennel was also said to be good for stomach upsets. The dried stems were used to make kite sticks for the traditional Good Friday kite flying.</p> | <p>Honeysuckle</p> <p>Two types grow in Bermuda – the ones with yellowy-white flowers and the ones with orange-red flowers. The old name for it was woodbine and Nathaniel Tucker mentions it in a poem in 1772. Children would pluck the flowers and enjoy sucking the nectar from within.</p> | <p>Lantana</p> <p>The common sage bush, Lantana, grows wild over Bermuda today. It was brought in from the Bahamas by Samuel Spofferth over 250 years ago to be grown as firewood for the poorer people. The leaves were used to brush the teeth and the branches for scrubbing out cooking utensils and chamber pots.</p> |
|  |  |  |  |
| <p>Nasturtium</p> <p>This native plant from South America was first mentioned as being in Bermuda in 1772. It was probably brought in as a garden plant and escaped into the wild. The leaves and flowers were used in salads and the seeds can be used like capers.</p> | <p>Pawpaw</p> <p>It is not clear if it is native or introduced. By 1621, pawpaw trees were plentiful. The fruit when green is used as a vegetable. When put in a stew, it makes the meat tender. When ripe, the fruit is good to eat by itself or in fruit salads. In old Bermuda, the juice of the green fruit was used to cure ringworm and warts.</p> | <p>Prickly Pear</p> <p>A native cactus, the early settlers discovered how good the fruit was to eat. By the 19th century, a candy was being made from it in St. David's. Prickly pears were hung in store houses to prevent rats from eating corn. The colourful fruit was used for dyeing materials purple, scarlet or pink. It was also thought to have a medicinal use – that of cleansing the kidneys.</p> | <p>Rosemary</p> <p>There is no record of when this was imported to Bermuda but it was certainly in use by 1687, particularly as an air freshener. Even lightly touching the close-growing, thin leaves releases the aromatic scent of rosemary. It is used in cooking, especially with lamb, but is also said to have been used in a cough syrup with molasses and as a hair rinse to darken graying hair.</p> |

Toys & Games



For many years, children growing up in Bermuda did not have lots of toys to play with as they do now and they didn't have electronic games or remote control toys. Slave children often worked from a very early age. When children had time to play, they enjoyed the same games that their parents and grandparents had played when they were young. Some of these games are still played today, like tag, hide-and-seek, hopscotch and jump rope. Children played marbles, but they used clay marbles before glass ones were invented. Sometimes they even took an old hoop and tried to roll it with a stick.

Games helped children learn skills that they would need later in life as farmers and parents. Games taught children how to aim and throw, how to solve problems and do things with their hands, and how to follow directions and rules. They also learned to be fair, to wait their turn and to use their imaginations.



Assorted toys in the nursery at Verdmont

The Model Doll House at Verdmont



**Model Doll House
by Ronnie Chameau**

The doll house in the attic is an exact replica of Verdmont. It was crafted in 1997 by Mrs. Ronnie Chameau who built the house in 2 sections with a scale of 1" = 1 foot. The house is made of natural materials and every item (except for the electrical light fixtures) is handmade. The wall paper is a hand painted reproduction of the wallpaper from the upstairs parlour by Mrs. Chameau in watercolour. Some of the miniatures were contributed by Dr. Jack Arnell and Mrs. Betty Hollis.

Doll houses like the model of Verdmont have been around for about 400 years with the most detailed created in Germany, Holland and England. The earliest houses were very expensive and off limits to children. Some of them were worth the price of a modest full-size house. Germany was the producer of the most prized doll houses and doll house miniatures up until World War II. They were and are still collectors' items.

Archaeology at Verdmont

In 2006 the Bermuda National Trust, working with the Ironbridge Gorge Archaeological Unit, conducted an archaeological survey of the Verdmont property to look for evidence of outbuildings listed in the 1714 probate inventory of John Dickinson.

Several interesting features were uncovered and in 2007 archaeologists from Bristol University, working in the eastern sections of the property, excavated the remains of an ancillary structure that may have been associated with the animals kept on the property. Surveys with ground-penetrating radar were conducted in the formal north lawn and archaeologists investigated the privy and discovered that it was built over a cave.

In 2012, Dr. Brent Fortenberry resumed archaeological work at Verdmont to investigate the area below the kitchen cottage. It was determined that the area under the kitchen was a strong candidate for the housing of enslaved Africans, and a blocked up doorway revealed the possibility of a linking staircase between the current patio area and the cellar space. Additionally, archaeological work revealed a posthole on the current patio with a single piece of 18th century tin-glazed earthenware in the fill. In 2013, Dr. Fortenberry continued his work at Verdmont with the excavation of an area that has been known as the kitchen garden. Digging revealed the remains of the outbuilding from the earliest period of occupation of the site.

The artefacts below were found in digs conducted by the National Trust's Archaeological Research Committee at Verdmont in 2006 and 2007:



1. Black transfer printed plate, fragment, Early 19th century
Pearlware
Made in England, probably in Staffordshire

2. Blue transfer printed bowl or saucer, fragment, Early 19th century
Pearlware
Made in England, probably in Staffordshire

3. Pipe bowls and stems, fragments
c.1800
Clay
Made in England

4. Decorative handle, fragment
Mid 18th to 19th century
Tin-glazed earthenware
Made in England

5. Sugar bowl, wheat sheaf-style treatment, fragment
Early 19th century
Ironstone china
Made in England

6. Faunal assemblage
Miscellaneous bones

7. Square pharmaceutical bottle base, with proprietary embossing
Late 19th century
Clear glass
Made in England

8. Small hand blown pharmaceutical bottle
Late 18th to early 19th century
Green glass
Made in England

9. Blue transfer printed earthenware, fragment
Late 18th century
China glaze
Made in England

10. *Pecten ziczac* (Bermuda scallop)
Shell

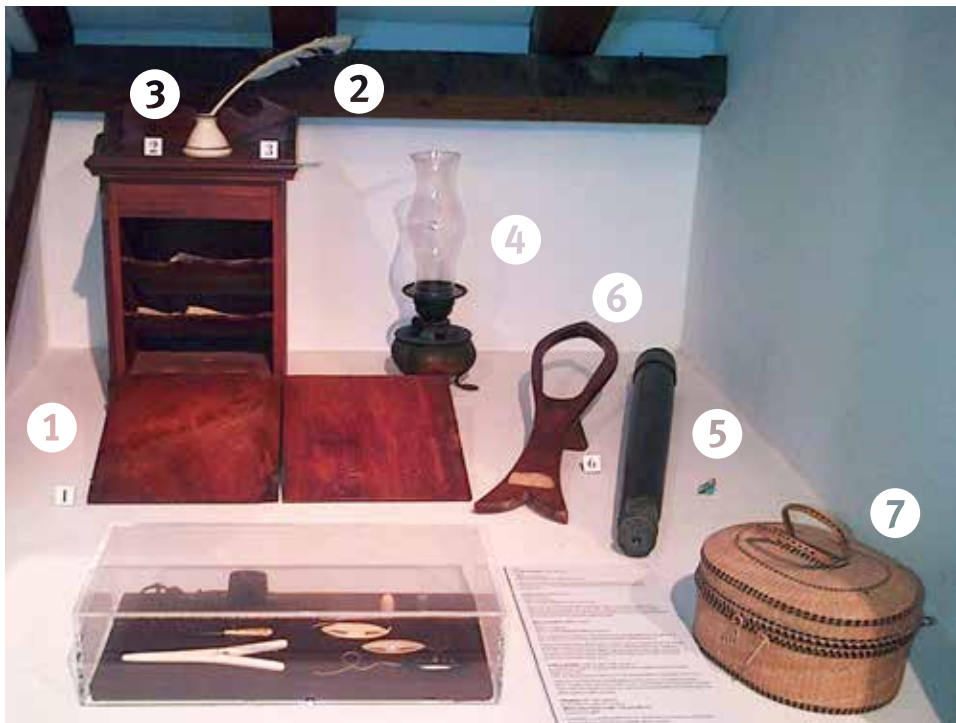
The Attic & Exhibit

There is question regarding the attic headroom of 7'6" and why a wide balustrade staircase leads to this area. Speculation has it that this room was used for political meetings, social gatherings, storage or sleeping quarters.

The octagonal framing in the centre of the ceiling is supposed to have provided room for a ladder leading up to a one-time cupola or widow's walk. Whether widow's walk or cupola or both, it is reputed to have blown down in the 19th century and been replaced, blown down again in the hurricane of 1926 and not replaced. The entire roof was rebuilt yet again during renovations in the 1950s.

An exhibit *Verdmont: House and its People*, displays pictures of the family members who lived at Verdmont and the history of this historic home. A variety of artefacts are on display which allows visitors to see items that would have been used by the people who lived and worked in this home.

Owners Artefacts



1. Portable writing desk, c.1840

Bermuda cedar
Made in Bermuda

2. Quill pen, modern

Goose feather
Made in Bermuda for educational use

3. Inkwell, modern

Stoneware
Made in Colonial Williamsburg, USA

4. Oil lamp, 19th century

Lamp, copper, made in England
Chimney, glass, made in Colonial
Williamsburg, USA

5. Telescope, first half 19th century

Leather-clad brass
Made by Cary, London, England

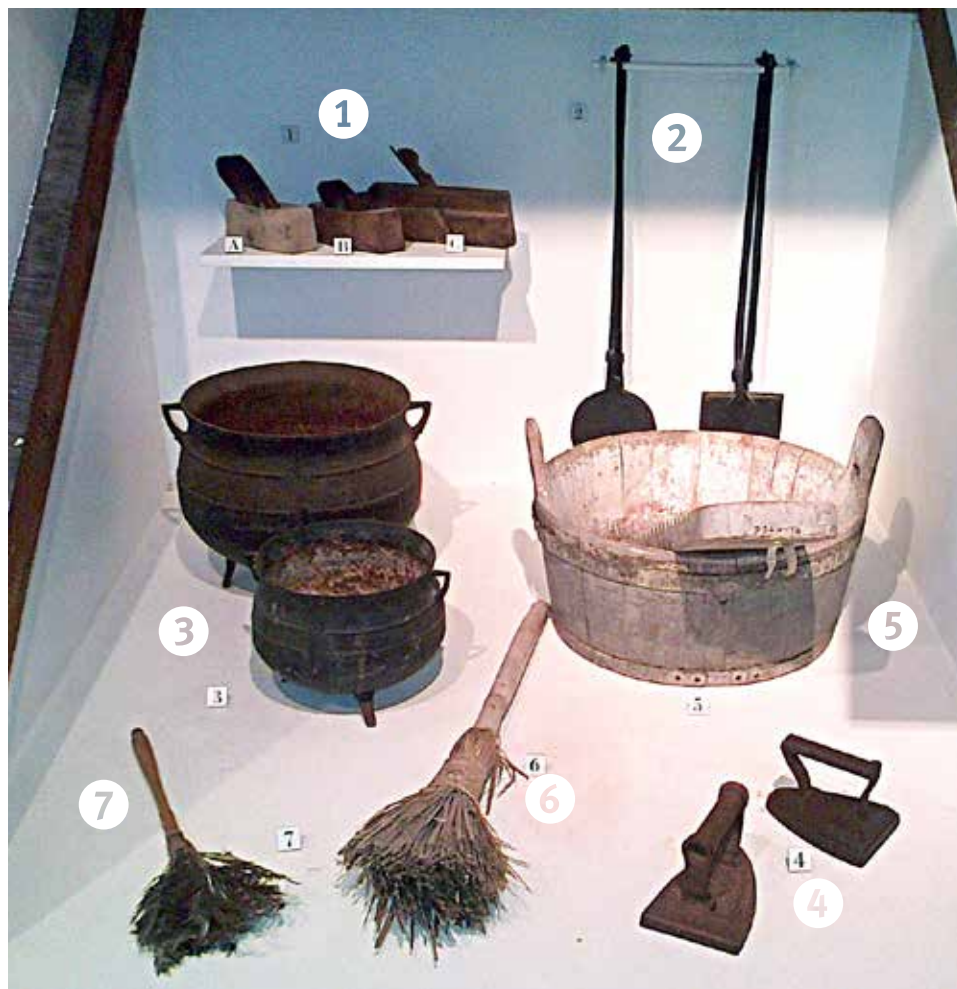
6. Boot jack, 19th century

Ash wood, possibly
Made in England

7. Sewing basket, late 19th century

Wicker, green silk lining

Slavery Artefacts



1. Wood working tools, 19th century

Beech wood
Made in England

- A. Moulding plane, W Greenslade, Bristol
- B. Smoothing plane, H Stone
- C. Smoothing plane, WW Bubbs

2. Waffle irons, 19th century

Iron
Made in the USA

3. Cooking pots, cauldrons, 19th century

Iron
Made in England

4. Smoothing irons, c.1880

Iron
Made in England

5. Wash tub & scrub board, 1870 to 1880

Pine
Made in Bermuda

6. Palmetto broom, c.1930

Dried palmetto leaves, Bamboo handle
Made in the West Indies

7. Feather duster, c.1930

Domestic chicken feathers, possibly Barred Rocks, Wood handle
Made in the USA

Daily Life Artefacts



1. Commode chair, Chair, mid 18th century, pot early 19th century
Chair, Bermuda cedar,
made in Bermuda
Pot, white glazed stoneware,
made in England

2. Toilet set, c.1900
Porcelain
Made in England

3. Bed pan, c.1880
White glazed stoneware
Made by Burgoyne Burbidges and
Co, London EC, England

4. Hanging food safe,
End 19th to early 20th century
Painted wood, wire mesh, recent
Made in Bermuda

5. Bucket, modern
Oak with galvanised bands
Made in Colonial Williamsburg, USA

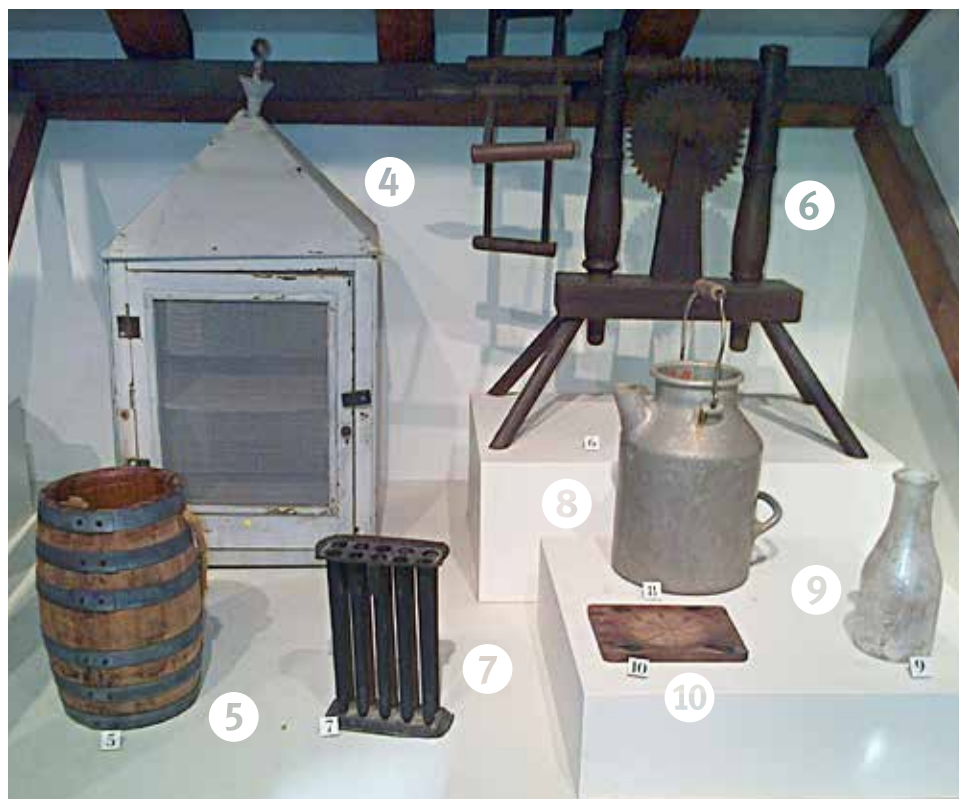
6. Skein or yarn winder
19th century
Wood

7. Candle mould
Early 19th century
Tin
Made in New England, USA

8. Milk pail
19th or early 20th century
Aluminium
Made in England

9. Pioneer Dairy milk bottle
First half 20th century
Glass
Made in the USA

10. Orange or lemon squeezer
Late 19th century
Bermuda cedar
Made in Bermuda



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