

We hope you will enjoy this little sampler of **Colonial Life For Ordinary Children in the South Carolina Colony**. Because ordinary people did not have the means to have their portraits painted, & photographs were not yet invented, the Gibbes Museum of Art does not have images from that time of ordinary people, children or adults, to share with you. But we do have a wonderful collection of portraits of children & adults who belonged to the very rich & powerful “ELITE” class in Charles Town (now Charleston), South Carolina.

Colonial Life For Ordinary Children in the South Carolina Colony. Take a peek at 10 conversations of 2 ordinary Colonial children, Henry & Molly, in the South Carolina Colony, around 1770.



1. Ma!...I'm hungry! What's for dinner?

For most colonists, there was a large variety of food available, but no good place (like a refrigerator or freeze) to store it. So most food was salted, pickled, dried, smoked, or canned (in a glass jar). In South Carolina, almost every meal contained **RICE**. SC became very wealthy from rice “**Carolina Gold**”, which was exported all over the world.

2. Ma!...do I really have to sew this seam right now? Ouch! That needle really hurts!

In most families, the girls were expected to help their mothers make clothes for the family. Fabric was expensive, & making clothes by hand took a long time, so most people had only one or 2 changes of clothing. Molly wore a “homespun” dress (always with an apron), & usually a “**mob cap**” or a **bonnet** to protect her hair from dust & bugs. Girls also often wore “**pantaloon**s”.



3. Pa...do I really have to do an apprenticeship?

Sometimes parents urged their sons to work as apprentices for master tradesmen. Henry might have to walk to the man's shop or may have even have to live with the the family who owned the shop. Apprenticeships lasted for 5-7 years. The idea was that this training would pay off later for the boy (& his family), & give him a way to make a good living. Along with the specific trade (shoe-making, leather work, furniture making, iron work, etc), masters were required, often by law, to teach basic reading & writing. Henry, this young apprentice, is not too happy about the idea of being an apprentice!



4. Pa!.....Benjamin & Henry are taking up all the room in this bed!



Home Life in Colonial America for most people was cramped! Usually children shared one bed or one bedroom, & families were quite large. Families often had 6-12 children.

Mattresses were often stuffed with straw, which could have bugs in it. ("Sleep Tight & Don't let the bed-bugs bite!!" came from this nasty problem). Children often slept under home-made **quilts** in winter. And who do you think helped create the quilts?

5. Pa!....Will we EVER get there? I've been walking forever & I'm so tired.

Whether you lived in the city or the country, you had to WALK to get anywhere: the store (if there was one within walking distance), school (if you were lucky enough to have one in your area), church, or to see your cousins (if they lived close by). A big social event, like a barn-raising or a fair (where you could see & participate in animal trading, craft sales, wrestling matches, foot races, greased-pig chases, beauty contests, horse races, etc.) was worth a long trip. And if where you were going was more than 5 miles, your options were riding a horse, using a carriage, or going by boat.

6. Henry! Eliza! Let's play cards before the lamp light burns out!

Henry's favorite games would have been carved from wood, as in tops, cup & ball, & Jacob's Ladder. If Molly had a loving grandmother, she probably had a home-made doll made of left-over fabric & stuffed with straw or rags. Or, if she was really lucky, she might have had a very crude **china doll**. But everybody loved **card games**, and, like everyone in 1770, Henry & Molly needed to depend on lanterns when the sun went down.



7. Gather around me, children, it's time to learn your lessons....

Henry & Molly, & their brothers & sisters might have walked to a nearby one room school house until they were 8, 9, or 10, when they quit school to work. Their cousins, farther away from a village in the country, had to make do with learning from their parents or grandparents. Most "learning" was taught out of a "primer". Molly might have created a "**sampler**" to show that she knew her ABCs. This would have taken a huge amount of time, & it's likely that Molly would never finish it. Henry was expected to prepare himself for running the farm or a business, so he had to learn enough math to deal with the farm or business accounts.

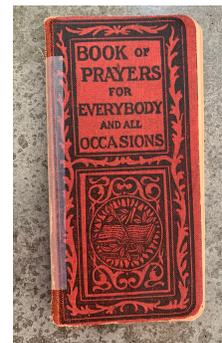


8. *Uncle Charles, read us that story about the lion & the mouse, p-l-e-a-s-e.....*

Molly & Henry, like most children, would have enjoyed stories from a popular book called "Aesop's Fables". Parents liked the stories, because they taught moral lessons. Books were very expensive, & in rural areas, hard to get, so sometimes the only book owned by families was the Bible, which was treasured by the families & passed down from generation to generation.



Bibles became very important, because births, marriages & deaths were recorded in them. As the books were passed on, Molly & Henry's grandchildren would have their family history to refer to when necessary.



9. *Grandpa! Will you sing "Yankee Doodle" for me?*

With no radios, no TV, no computers, music was a special way to pass the time. Popular music, like Yankee Doodle, spread quickly throughout all 13 colonies. If you could play an **instrument** (as in a harmonica, a lute, a fife), you were in much demand. Harpsichords were popular, but not everybody had the money or space for them.

10. Grandma, what does “government” mean? Why are so many people talking about “representation?”

Each of the 13 colonies had their own government. The Continental Congress was made up of representatives from each colony. They really didn't have much power, but they talked & argued a LOT. Usually the talk was about taxes. Each city & town also had their own government.

Molly & Henry's parents, since they were ordinary people, would not have been included in the government of the South Carolina colony, but they might have been involved with the local village. And, in the days before the Revolution, Molly & Henry would most likely hear a LOT OF CONVERSATIONS about government.

Adapted from Everyday Life in the Revolution, <http://americanhistory.mrdonn.org/revolution-dailylife.html> & <https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/02/life-in-the-southern-colonies-part-3-of-3/>

Other resources:

Role of Kids in the city in Colonial Williamsburg
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVxad8R4Nig>
5.32 minutes

junior docents at Williamsburg:
home schooled, no public school
if your parents were uneducated, you were too
slaves: learning on the job
kids jobs some hard (getting water from the well)
silversmith: polishing, helping in the workshop
learning trade as an apprenticeship
only Sundays off, spent time in garden
had to learn how to count
toys: hoops, sticks, pegs, jax, trap ball, danced

Role of Children on a Colonial Farm in Virginia
https://www.historyisfun.org/pdf/colonial-life/What_was_the_role_of_children_on_a_%20farm.pdf

<https://www.ccpl.org/charleston-time-machine/declaring-independence-1776-charleston>
Declaring Independence in Charleston, SC