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Dissertation

**A MIDLING GENTILITY: TASTE, STATUS, AND MATERIAL CULTURE AT
THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY WOOD LOT, WANTON-LYMAN-HAZARD
SITE, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND**

by

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Volume I of II

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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PREVIEW

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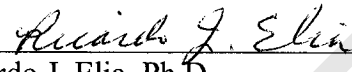
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PREVIEW

Acknowledgments

I began searching for a dissertation topic in the early fall of 2002. I fortunately discovered the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House archaeological project on the internet. Since then, the site has governed the course of my intellectual and, often, practical life. Archaeological collections from the property are truly inspiring and I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to work on a portion of them. All errors of fact and interpretation in the resultant dissertation are my own responsibility. Like all large projects, however, this dissertation is a product of many individuals besides its author.

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The Wanton-Lyman-Hazard site is owned and maintained by the Newport Historical Society. This project would have been impossible without the Society's continuing support. I am grateful to both Scott W. Loehr, current Executive Director, and Dr. Daniel Snyder, Jr., former Executive Director. The Society's Historic Sites and Collections Manager, Adams Taylor, shared with me not only his first-hand knowledge of the Society's collections, but also his basement workspace. Bert Lippincott is the Society's Reference Librarian and Genealogist. He helped me navigate the rich and varied collections of the Society's library and archives. Kimberly A. Krazer, Registrar, and Jessica Files, Director of Education, have also generously and cheerfully helped me with a variety of research requests. I am grateful to all the Newport Historical Society staff. It has been a privilege to work with them and with their documentary and material collections.

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I also thank Stewart L. King. He knows why.

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THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY WOOD LOT, WANTON-LYMAN-HAZARD
SITE, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND**

(Order No.)

CHRISTINA J. HODGE

Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2007

Major Professor: Mary C. Beaudry, Professor of Archaeology and Anthropology

ABSTRACT

Can we assume that social rank predicted consumer choice in colonial Anglo-America? Did the middling sorts simply emulate their social superiors? If not, how might we think about their choices' relationships to deeper social structures? These questions are central to this historical archaeological dissertation on middling identity in 18th-century Newport, Rhode Island, on the northeastern coast of the United States. Colonial Newport—distinguished by burgeoning trade and a climate of religious tolerance—epitomized the successful American entrepôt. The central data set for this study is an artifactual assemblage from the Wood Lot area of the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard site, including over 15,000 fragments of 18th-century household goods and food remains. Select printed sources and archival documents contextualize these finds.

Artifacts recovered from the Wood Lot are direct evidence of the middling individuals living there ca. 1720–1775. These materials and related documents describe: changing ideals of property use and hygiene; preference for fashionable drinking over

dining and for non-alcoholic over alcoholic beverages; strategic investment in clothing and sociability; and conflict over gendered authority and values, particularly those governing consumerism and leisure activities. Given this evidence, we should not dismiss middling consumerism as an imperfect emulation of elite consumerism, as middling consumerism typically has been in American historical and material studies. Notions of "tasteful consumption" and "middling gentility" are productive alternatives to "emulative consumption" and "elite gentility."

During the Georgian period, non-elite homes throughout the British empire were developed as social spaces that shaped values and personal identities. Provincial British in America and elsewhere did not mindlessly pursue an essentialized, elite culture; they adapted/interpreted a heterogeneous, partial, and contested one based on particular circumstances. This study challenges assumptions embedded within our understanding of colonial America, namely, that 18th-century forms of gentility were inevitable, desirable, cohesive, and elite. It also provides needed historical context for the development of modern American class systems.

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List of Abbreviations

CRIPP	Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
NEHGS	New England Historic Genealogical Society
NGC	Newport Garden Club
NHS	Newport Historical Society

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