

## *OBITUARY*

### **EDWARD A. CHAPPELL**

1948-2020

Edward A. Chappell died in hospital of a heart attack on Saturday, July 25, 2020. He was born in Farmville, Virginia, October 16, 1948, the only child of Edward Acree and Rosa May Chappell. His wife, Susan Buck, survives him. Ed had made Williamsburg his home since 1980 when he was hired to rebuild and direct the Architectural Research Department at Colonial Williamsburg. He retired in 2016, by then holder of an endowed chair, the Shirley and Richard Roberts Director of Architectural and Archaeological Research.

His education and early work experience were preparation for this career appointment and for a wide variety of special projects in Virginia, Annapolis, Charleston, Jamaica, Bermuda, Antigua, and elsewhere. Taken together, they earned his reputation as a leading preservationist and historian of early Atlantic-world architecture. He attended Ferrum College and the College of William & Mary before taking a graduate degree from the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia. Ed was one of a small army of young men and women who found starter jobs with state historic preservation offices following passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Working summers and eventually fulltime, he crisscrossed the backroads of Kentucky and Virginia surveying and recording hundreds of historic structures and archaeological sites before he finally settled down in the job at Colonial Williamsburg.

He brought his field experience to the Foundation at just the right time. Historians there were busy rethinking its educational mission. Their goal was to retell an American history more broadly conceived. They sought to take into account everybody who'd had parts to play in a more complicated story. Restored Williamsburg needed places to tell those stories. During Ed's long tenure, he and the able young architectural historians he hired into his department added

numerous missing buildings to the restored townscape—two slave quarters, a market house, a retail store, a hospital asylum, a coffeehouse, a city-county courthouse, a Revolutionary War armory, and a tin shop. Before he retired, plans were in hand to rebuild a working playhouse. His vision took in the environs of the 18th-century capital as well. He argued successfully to enlarge the greenspace around the Historic Area and to create scenic easements along the wooded approaches to the town. He encouraged the president and the trustees to invite the celebrated British neo-classicist architect Quinlan Terry to design additions to Merchants Square.

Ed and his colleagues generously shared Colonial Williamsburg's largesse with many sister institutions. He and they lent their expertise to Monticello, Mount Vernon, Prestwold, Drayton Hall, Historic Charleston Foundation, Historic Annapolis, and to many private house owners as well. Ed always insisted that this side work was more than an even-steven trade: "When we see more, we learn more. We take away more than we give back." Many of these outside projects found their way into publications, sometimes co-authored, sometimes Ed solo.

His irresistible curiosity about folk buildings everywhere took him literally to the ends of the earth. For pleasure or professionally (it was hard to tell the difference) he sought out world architecture in Russia, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Bali, Nepal, Bhutan, and China, and that isn't counting innumerable side trips to England and Europe. Everywhere he went he measured floorplans, profiled moldings, and sketched hardware. These drawings, among other personal papers, he has donated to the Virginia Historical Society.

The breadth of Ed's scholarship was a measure of his fascination with the makers of things and the things they made. He was an avid collector, a sorter and hoarder, and ultimately a generous donor: handwoven baskets, wood carvings, street paintings, exquisite Christmas tree ornaments, Chinese communist kitsch, and, most important of all, modern Pueblo pottery. For years, he and Susan traveled to the Zuni reservation in New Mexico. There he interviewed

potters who were trying to fit their fresh artistic visions to a venerable Zuni pot-making tradition. He concentrated on the work of a single modern master, Randy Nahohai, and ended up documenting and writing about a whole family of potters and the spiritual culture that underpins their work. Along the way, Ed acquired a notable study collection of Pueblo pottery, soon to be shared with visitors to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Folk Art Museum at Colonial Williamsburg, and the Heard Museum in Phoenix.

Back home in Williamsburg Ed was a persistent citizen advocate for good civic and collegiate design. He served on architectural review boards for both the City and the College. Gentle persuasion was his preferred gambit, but, if need be, he could lower his voice, stretch out his Farmville drawl, and stare down college presidents, city officials, and even his employers. For his trouble the College gave him its highest stewardship award. For his steadfastness, his fellow citizens came to regard him as the town's foremost champion of architectural and landscape design that could be and should be as forward-looking today as it was 200 years ago.

Ed Chappell was as many-sided as the miscellany of fans and friends who now mourn his sudden death. He leaves behind his two cousins Jeanne Edenzon and Kathy Powell, whom he regarded as sisters, and also their children who deeply loved and admired their "uncle". When he married Susan, he joined a New England-bred family. They too embraced him and were entranced by his many travel adventure stories. He enlivened the lives of all who knew him.

A memorial service will be scheduled when it is safe to gather and share stories of Ed's expansive and generous life. Meanwhile and in lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made payable to "Colonial Williamsburg for the Ed Chappell Architectural Research Fund" at PO Box 1776, Williamsburg, VA 23187.

31 July 2020  
Susan Buck  
Cary Carson