

THE ACADEMY OF ELECTRICAL CONTRACTING

**Paper Presented by
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COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG AND NECA

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It is an honor and a pleasure to speak to you, the members of the Academy of Electrical Contracting, this morning. It is especially pleasurable because this meeting is virtually in my home town. I have lived just up the river in Richmond for fifty-one years. During these years, Williamsburg has been a big part of my life's work and pleasure.

In 1947 our company, Chewning and Wilmer, Inc., (at that time a 20+ year member of NECA) was invited to bid on an extension to the Williamsburg Lodge. It was called the West Wing. The name was later changed to the South Wing. Many of you are staying there on this trip. We got the contract and I was the job manager.

It was the first of many contracts to come in Williamsburg. Since that time there have been few, if any, years that we have not had billing to Colonial Williamsburg.

The South Wing was, I believe, the first or among the first hotel rooms in the area to be air conditioned. Later jobs included wiring for the A/C systems in many of the previously constructed buildings including the Inn, the Capitol and the Governor's Palace. These jobs proved very interesting to me in the way the work and equipment was concealed. The condensers are usually in one of the out buildings, such as a carriage house or a Necessary. Air handling units are usually built-in, but carefully, so the authenticity of the building is not destroyed. Cooling towers are a real problem to conceal, but I loved the solution used at the Governor's Palace. There was a small pond there which purportedly was used to "store" fresh fish for the Governor's table. Fish would be caught in neighboring waters and moved to the pond where they could be easily retrieved at the proper time. Ed Boynton, the A/C engineer, conceived the idea to use this pond as the cooling tower. As I recall, it had to be enlarged – but the fish didn't seem to mind that!

Another thing that impressed me about the architecture was the planning and creation of modern settings in Colonial space such as the King's Arms Tavern. The kitchen is completely underground with its ceiling about three feet below the back yard. Yes, you thought it was a garden when we marched through it Thursday night. And the Carriage House? It is the employee's entrance, lounge and locker room. Going down the stairs, employees enter the kitchen which extends underground from the Carriage House to the Tavern. Christina Campbell's Tavern uses the same general plan.

You have undoubtedly read about the beginnings of Colonial Williamsburg in the late 1920's and early 1930's, through the vision of Rev. Goodwin and the

generosity of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. I never met them. Mr. Rockefeller hired the architects – Perry, Shaw and Hepburn of Boston – to make the plans for the project. They sent a bright young architect to Virginia, full time, to research Williamsburg. His name was A. Edwin Kendrew, and in the 1950's and 1960's we became intimate friends. Ed, a New Englander by birth and education, said he really didn't relish moving to Virginia, but in the early 1930's it looked like a good steady job for a young, newly married professional. Besides that, he didn't have a job in New England.

Ed Kendrew led the team that presented the first five year plan to Mr. Rockefeller. He told me that Mr. Rockefeller said he really hadn't expected it to cost that much but he would talk to Abby and let him know in a few days – and in a few days he called with the go ahead.

Ed became the principal architect. Colonial Williamsburg formed its own architectural and building departments, and Ed became Senior Vice-President heading most of the research, planning and construction. He retired about 1970 and continued living in Williamsburg until his death about ten years ago.

To operate an enterprise like Colonial Williamsburg is a major business. You have to have hotels and restaurants, a transportation system and a laundry. You have to have tailors and dress shops to make Colonial clothes. You need a big laundry and a good-sized stable with all sorts of farm animals. You need managers with political skills to take over a town and countryside without inciting the residents to "take up arms". You need advertising, writers, and movie makers, musicians and archeologists and information centers. You even need electrical contractors.

I hope by this time you have seen the movie "The Patriot" at the main Information Center. If you haven't, make a special effort to see it before you go. Through the life of a fictitious young man in the mid-18th century you see the development of that zeal for freedom which characterized the birth of our nation. You also see the thinking of those who wanted to remain loyal to England. This film was made here in 1956, and I often observed the action.

At that time Colonial Williamsburg was also building the Information Center. The Information Center consists of two theaters with wrap-around screens to show "The Patriot", and other areas for reservations, books, tours, gift shops and more. The area also has a 500-seat cafeteria, 220-room motel, swimming pools and an administration building. I had the privilege of being the project manager for electrical work.

They had specialty designers for everything from

bicycle paths to electrical fixtures. It was then I met Edison Price and worked closely with him. The Center has been altered and added-to over the years, but it is still quite a place.

Another interesting thing about Williamsburg is that virtually all buildings on Duke of Gloucester Street which are not exhibit buildings are modern living quarters. They are rented as residences, almost exclusively to employees of the Foundation. Several of my friends, including Ed Kendrew, have had these as homes. It was stimulating and fun to have cocktails in one of the living rooms overlooking the street and watch the tourists go in and out of the King's Arms.

Another building I found especially interesting was Robertson's Windmill. When I was called in on the job, I assumed we would motorize the sails so the mill could be made to look like it was running at any time. But that wasn't what they had in mind. The mill was to run only from natural wind. They did want a few lights inside for maintenance purposes, but they also wanted a lightning protection system on the main structure and the sails. This involved making slip rings that would be secured to the shaft of the sails to conduct the lightning from the sails into the building. Because the building is built on a rotating shaft (to allow it to face the wind) another slip ring had to be made to take the lightning to ground. Two other - much smaller - rings bring 120 volt power in to the housing.

Colonial Williamsburg has been a tremendous economic factor in this area. The Foundation bought a lot of land. In the late 1960's, they bought the Carter's Grove Plantation just east of the city, and they restored and use the home and gardens. But they surprised a lot of people a few years later when they sold much of the land to Anheuser-Busch. Busch soon had a brewery and theme park under construction. Then Busch built

the Kingsmill Resort area with its great golf courses and major tournaments. With the bottle and can plants that surround a large brewery, the area has boomed. We, along with Miller Electric, Buck, Ed, and many others, have had large shares of the work.

Our company has also done a lot of work at the Gardens, including several of the big rides. Until the new ride opened about a month ago, the largest and best known was The Loch Ness Monster, which we wired in the early 1980's. All of our promotional brochures point out that we are the only electrical contractor on the face of the earth to wire a Loch Ness Monster!

NECA and Colonial Williamsburg have had a great partnership over the years. Our members have done a lot of work for them and their friends. And we have brought a lot of business to them. District III has met here at least four times, and I think Districts I, II and V have also met here. Of course our state Chapter has met here often, and NECA seminars have been presented here.

So, welcome to Virginia, to Colonial Williamsburg, and to the home of the Virginia Chapter of the National Electrical Contractor's Association.

Charles P. "Jed" Wilson was inducted into the Academy of Electrical Contracting in 1969. He has been active in NECA's Virginia Chapter for 51 years, serving as the Chapter Governor for eight years and as the Chapter President for four years. In addition, he was the Vice President of District III for four years. His service to NECA also includes membership on the Executive and Government Affairs national committees. This is Mr. Wilson's second presentation to the Academy.