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## **Silver Bequest: The Jame H. Willcox Jr. Silver Purchase Fund**

Winston-Salem, NC (May 1, 2010): Nearly two years ago, Robert Leath, Vice President of Collections and Research at Old Salem, received a phone call that changed life at MESDA.

Robert was more than pleasantly surprised when he learned that James Haskell Willcox Jr., a Virginia resident who had been making annual pilgrimages to Old Salem for educational weekend seminars, had left a sizeable donation to MESDA upon his death in June 2008. Jim's love of early southern decorative arts, and in particular southern silver, led him to establish the James H. Willcox Jr. Silver Purchase Fund, with a bequest totaling more than \$500,000.

Born in 1940 in Darlington, South Carolina, Jim Willcox graduated from Clemson University in 1962 with a chemical engineering degree, and immediately began working with Hercules, Inc., a chemical company in Hopewell, Virginia, where he was a superintendent for various divisions for thirty-three years. While he enjoyed his work at Hercules, Jim's real passions were historical and genealogical research, and collecting antiques, particularly Virginia silver.

Jim was a member of numerous genealogical societies, including the Society of Colonial Wars, Sons of the Revolution, and Sons of Confederate Veterans. He also belonged to several local historic organizations, including Historic Hopewell Foundation, Chesterfield Historical Society, Prince George County Historical Society, and Merchant's Hope Episcopal Church.

He curated the Virginia Historical Society's 1987 Virginia Silver show and assisted in organizing the VHS Museum's silver exhibit. In his honor, the Virginia Historical Society named the silver exhibit hall for him. He was also a member of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and lent pieces from his silver collection for a number of its exhibitions. His associations with the Antiquarian Society of Richmond, Collectors Circle of the Virginia Museum, and Silver Society of London were evidence of his profound interest in antiques and preserving their place in history.

Willcox's place in history and his legacy will continue through the Willcox Fund, which will be used by MESDA, to support the acquisition and study of southern silver. The first purchase from the Willcox Fund is a silver cann fashioned by Walter Pearce (1805–72) in Norfolk, Virginia, for Ella Waller Tazewell (1826–85), the daughter of one-time Virginia governor Littleton Waller Tazewell. The Pearce cann is a rare object and MESDA is proud to add this stunning piece to its Chesapeake decorative arts collection.

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