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## Strange Windows from Early Maryland

Henry M. Miller

Excavators on 17th- and 18th-century colonial sites in North America frequently encounter the remains of windows. Glass windows are taken for granted today, but in the 17th-century only those with at least some degree of wealth could afford them. For many, their window openings were covered with cloth, oiled paper, or just shutters. But if you were able to have glazed windows, both archaeology and the surviving windows in America and Europe suggest that they typically featured diamond-shaped panes of glass. That is what analysis of specimens from the first major 17th-century site excavated at St. Mary's City, Maryland—St John's Plantation (18ST1-23)—demonstrated. This evidence has been employed to produce windows for 17th-century buildings the museum later reconstructed, as seen here (FIG. 1). One sample of window-glass fragments from St. John's contained specimens that were very different, however. The analysis of these "strange windows" and the effort to decipher their story is the subject of this article.

Excavations began at the St. John's site in 1972, under the direction of Garry Wheeler Stone. The first secretary of state for the new colony, John Lewger, established the plantation and had a substantial dwelling built there in 1638. It would be both his home and a place of government business; the legislature and provincial court met there on multiple occasions. The Lewger family sold the plantation in 1650, and its next notable occupant was Dutch merchant Simon Overzee. He acquired the property in late 1653 and moved into the house in January 1654, soon thereafter making a number of renovations to the plantation. A very ambitious person, Overzee established a three-year trading partnership with Augustine Hermann of the city of New Amsterdam in 1659, but it ended with Overzee's sudden death in 1660 (Stone 1982). The newly avail-

able dwelling was acquired by Governor Charles Calvert in 1661. The son of Lord Baltimore, who would later inherit the title, Calvert lived there until 1668. He subsequently leased out the plantation to a series of innkeepers who occasionally offered it for government use. St. John's became a farmhouse near the end of the 17th century, and it was abandoned and demolished ca. 1720 (Stone 1982).

Although one English writer described the structure as the "Palace of St. John's" (Speed 1676: 44), archaeology revealed a building far less grand. Stone's excavations found that Lewger built a central-chimney hall-and-parlor house, 1½ stories high, 52 × 20.5 ft., likely inspired by East Anglian architectural precedents (Stone 1982). The dwelling was well finished with wood floors, brick fireboxes on the chimney, plastered walls, and glazed windows. While not a "palace," it was for the time and place an impressive dwelling and one of the best in the young colony. Excavators recovered more than 7,750 window-glass fragments and hundreds of thin lead strips known as "turned leads," earlier called "window comes." What did these windows look like? No glazed 17th-century windows survive from Maryland, although there are examples in New England and England (Cummings 1979). To answer that question, I conducted an analysis of the St. John's window artifacts in 1977 and 1978.

The immediate problem was how to figure out the nature of the windows from big piles of small fragments. The most useful way was to measure the angles at which the panes were originally cut and the turned leads soldered together. Even on broken and decayed glass specimens, one can generally identify the original edges. These are sometimes indicated by cut marks, but more commonly a slight discoloration or differential weathering along the



Figure 1. A reconstructed 17th-century window at St. Mary's City based upon archaeological evidence. (Photo by Donald Winter, *Historic St. Mary's City*, 2007).

original edge is visible where the turned leads once held the glass. All the window glass at St. John's was broad glass, which originally had a greenish tint and contained numerous imperfections due to the manufacturing process. This is typical for 17th-century sites and many 18th-century ones (Scharfenberger 2004).

The importance of angles was fully explained by Isabel Davies (1973) in her study of 18th-century windows at Colonial Williamsburg. An early 18th-century builder's dictionary by Richard Neve showed that window glass was usually cut into diamond

shaped panes of two sizes, a "square quarrell" and a "long quarrell" (Davies 1973: 78–80). The square form had angles of 77° and 102°, while the long form was cut at 67° and 102° angles. Most of the measurable fragments at St. John's from the second half of the 17th century displayed these angles, although some 90° specimens were also present, suggesting that rectangular or perhaps square-shaped panes appeared in some windows. These right-angle specimens were most common in contexts of the last quarter of the century. A plethora of glass and window-lead specimens

were recovered from a large pit in the backyard of St. John's, filled in the late 1690s. From these it was possible to reconstruct four windows, one of which is seen here with diamond-shaped panes of the long-quarrel form (FIG. 2).

Evidence of similar windows has been found at many St. Mary's City sites since then, including the Leonard Calvert House (18ST1-13), Van Sweringen's Lodging House (18ST1-19), the Jesuit Chapel (18ST1-103), and the Print House. (18ST1-14), as well as other Maryland sites. Diamond-shaped panes predominate and were clearly the most popular form in 17th-century Maryland. Based upon these findings, especially from St. John's, casement windows with diamond-shaped panes were designed and reproduced for six of the museum's reconstructed buildings (as shown in Figure 1).

But one feature at St. John's revealed windows with a difference. The "Dairy" is one of

the earliest contexts at the site, having been built ca. 1640 for Mrs. Lewger on the rear side of the house. The Dairy after full excavation is shown in Figure 3. Artifacts indicate that it was demolished in the mid-1650s, corresponding to the arrival of Simon Overzee, who renovated the structure (Stone 1982). Based on the 500 specimens of broken window glass found with other debris in the dairy-pit fill, this must have included replacing some of the windows. Notably, and unlike later features, not a single piece of turned window lead was recovered from this deposit, probably due to it being recycled. Replacement of these windows in the mid-1650s is somewhat unexpected, as they were only 16 years old at that time, a rather short use life.

In measuring the Dairy assemblage, I identified a few specimens representing long-quarrel panes. But other fragments had unusual angles. such as 46°, 98°, and 118°. To



Figure 2. A 17th-century window excavated from the St. John's site as partially reassembled. Marked window leads indicate a date after 1678 for this window. (Photo by Henry Miller, Historic St. Mary's City 1980.)



Figure 3. The ca. 1640 Dairy built along the rear wall of the St. John's house. The building's sill is indicated by the line of stones at the top of the image. The fill layers of this feature held the unusual window-glass assemblage. (Photo by Garry Wheeler Stone, *Historic St. Mary's City*, 1974.)

figure out what they represented, the only solution was to try to reconstruct some of the panes from the fragments. This was a large and complicated jigsaw puzzle, but the effort revealed that at least some of the earliest windows at St. John's had shapes that included isosceles triangles and pentagons. The shapes and some of the actual panes are seen in Figure 4.

These are highly unusual shapes for 17th-century windows. It is likely that John Lewger brought them as preassembled windows when he sailed from England in 1637, given the absence of glaziers in the first years of settlement. He was the most highly educated man in the young colony, having received B.A. and M.A. degrees from Trinity College,

Oxford University, and a doctor-of-divinity degree from the same institution. A fellow student at Trinity with whom he became friends was Cecil Calvert, who became the second Lord Baltimore in 1632. Lewger was ordained as an Anglican minister and served a parish for several years, but converted to Roman Catholicism in late 1634, thereby losing his income and ending his Church of England career (Middleton and Miller 2008). He renewed his acquaintance with Calvert, who sent him to Maryland to be the first secretary of state for the colony. Shortly after his arrival, Lewger began construction of what would be one of the finest houses in Maryland. But it was a surprise to learn it had some windows with panes of such uncommon shapes. Was

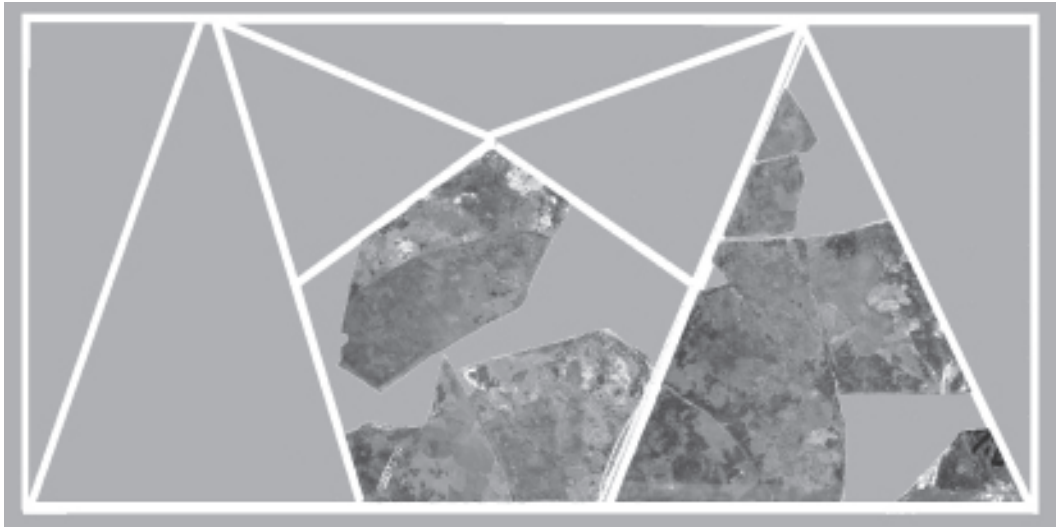


Figure 4. Pane shapes and some of the reconstructed glass panes from the Dairy-fill assemblage. The triangles are approximately 6 in. high, and the pentagon is 3 in. on each side. (Photo by Donald Winter, Historic St. Mary's City, 2007.)



Figure 5. Artist's impression of the parlor of St. John's (ca. 1642), showing one possible configuration for the pentagonal- and triangular-shaped window panes. (Illustration by L. H. Barker, 2007; courtesy of Barker and Historic St. Mary's City.)

there any meaning intended in the use of such shapes, and what pattern did they form?

I examined pictures of hundreds of English and Dutch paintings and engravings, as well as surviving glass windows in dwellings in Britain and Europe in search of windows with similar elements but met with no success during the 1977–1978 analysis. I have also looked at publications on shape symbolism and numerology. A pentagon has five equal sides and has, since the time of the ancient Greeks, been associated with the human person, given the five elements on each hand and foot, five major projecting components of the body, and the five senses (Cirlot 1971: 270–271). It has both positive and negative connotations from the medieval period as Hooper (2000) demonstrates. In Christian symbolism, it is associated with divine grace and the five wounds of Christ (Cooke 2005; Ferguson 1966: 59). The triangle is, along with the pentagon, one of the original forms of nature and in Christianity is seen as symbolizing the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Cooke 2005; Ferguson 1966; Pennick 1979: 128–129). This is normally an equilateral triangle, i.e., with three equal sides. The isosceles triangle, on the other hand, is sometimes called the “Golden Triangle” because it can reflect the proportions of the golden ratio in mathematics (Cooke 2005; Skinner 2006: 36–38). Geometry was a central element in late Renaissance and baroque thought and fashionable in elite circles during this period (Cosgrove 1988; Yates 1979). Perhaps Lewger had unusual geometric shapes included in some of his windows to display his intellectual refinement. Still, the actual appearance of these St. John’s windows is open to speculation. One possible arrangement for these panes was devised using the varied measured angles and reconstructed specimens as painted by artist L. H. Barker; it represents a best guess by the archaeologist and artist as of 2007 (FIG. 5).

However, recent research raises another possibility. The pentagon and isosceles triangle are geometric shapes consistently found together in one prominent composition, the

pentagram. The pentagram has a long history, and examples are found around the world and date back thousands of years in Europe (Coimbra 2011). It became a Christian symbol that represented the five wounds of Christ and even symbolized Christ himself (Ferguson 1966: 59). The pentagram was used in medieval and postmedieval churches, and one classic example appears in a ca. 1400 window of Amiens Cathedral in France (FIG. 6). Similar pentagram windows are found in varied Christian structures built since then and into the 20th century. (Note that the pentagram has taken on very different meanings in the 20th century, being used in the Wiccan religion and in Satanism, demonstrating the multiple and even opposite meanings the same symbol can carry depending upon the context.) There is also evidence from medieval Europe that the pentagram was considered a symbol of protection against evil (Champion 2015: 47–49). Fernando Coimbra (2011: 125–126) found it has a long history, appearing on rock art dating to the Bronze Age, in medieval contexts, and he reports that the pentagram

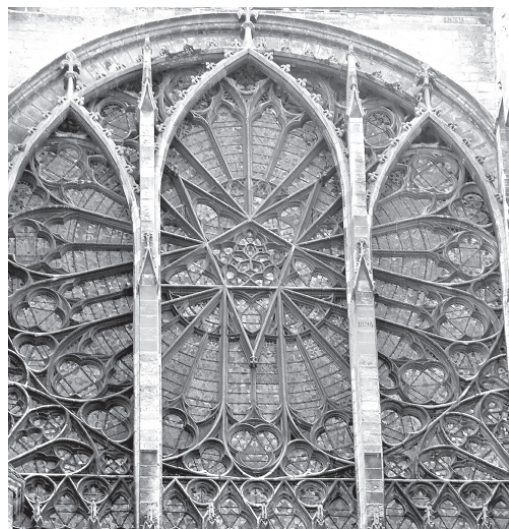


Figure 6. A pentagram in the ca. 1400 window of the north transept of Amiens Cathedral, France. (Photo from Wikimedia Commons, 2012, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:North\\_facade\\_of\\_the\\_Cath%C3%A9drale\\_Notre-Dame\\_d%27Amiens#/media/File:Amiens\\_Rose\\_Nord\\_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:North_facade_of_the_Cath%C3%A9drale_Notre-Dame_d%27Amiens#/media/File:Amiens_Rose_Nord_1.jpg)>.)

served in folk practice throughout Europe well into the 19th century as a symbol to protect the home. Charles Fairey (2018, 2019) has recently presented data suggesting the pentagram served as a Catholic apotropaic device in post-Reformation England to provide protection from evil. It is quite possible that these St. John's windows contained pentagrams in their design. They could have displayed Lewger's deep Christian faith and/or provided protection for the house and those that dwelt in it.

It is important to note that symbols were very popular in 17th-century European life, and their use is one of the hallmarks of 17th-century baroque culture (Ashworth 1993). This has been referred to as an "emblematic world view" by scholars (Bath 1993; Westerhoff 2001). It was a language of symbols and allegories that visually communicated meaning for both Protestants and Catholics. Indeed, educated people of this era loved ingenuity and things with multiple or even hidden meanings, calling them "devices" (Praz 1979: 206; Westerhoff 2001). Symbols appeared in artwork, on and within buildings, on household items, in books, and in landscapes (Ashworth 1993; Corthell et al. 2007). Did the highly educated John Lewger bring these unusual windows to Maryland to display his elite position and intellectual status, or did they convey a religious meaning, or even represent folk magic? Or did they serve as a "device" with multiple meanings? Each is a possibility, but no firm conclusions can be reached. It can only be said for certain that pentagrams are composed of pentagons and triangles, and early St. John's had glass panes in both shapes.

When Simon Overzee took possession of the house in 1654, he removed these unusual windows. Overzee was Dutch, and there is some suggestion that he was of the Jewish faith (Carr 1970). As noted, the windows in St. John's were about 16 years old when Overzee moved into the house, not that old for such fenestration. No doubt there were other windows in the house that had the common diamond shaped panes, but pieces of only a few

of them were found in the Dairy assemblage, and the quantity of glass in that feature implies he did not replace everything. That was apparently restricted to the ones with the more complex shapes, which most likely would have illuminated the more formal parlor of the house. Did Overzee find those windows that perhaps displayed Christian symbolism to be unacceptable? Or did the practical merchant merely prefer a more standard and less elaborate type of window for his home? His exact motivations cannot be determined, only that he demolished the windows soon after moving into the house.

It was never anticipated that in studying piles of broken 17th-century window glass such unusual shapes would be found and questions raised about the ideas and intentions of its builder. The study of window-glass collections from sites can be monotonous, but it nevertheless has the potential of yielding significant and unexpected insights. Were triangle- and pentagon-shaped glass panes very rare in 17th-century America, or did other elite sites also display them? The intensive analysis of window-glass assemblages from other sites is strongly encouraged, for it may help illuminate the varied beliefs of elite colonists. At St. John's, this effort revealed that John Lewger's 1638 dwelling displayed some windows that were very strange and perhaps even unique in the American colonies. The what, when, where, and how questions can be answered, but why Lewger brought such windows to early Maryland remains an enigma.

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