

## Playing the Palace

High-tech History Center will broaden the mansion's appeal.

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Tryon Palace - North Carolina's equivalent to Colonial Williamsburg - is no stranger to radical re-dos. And in late October, you'll be able to see what a \$60 million high-tech augmentation can accomplish.

The game-changer is a 6,600-square-foot center that will provide depth and context for all visitors, educational diversions for their kids, and make Tryon Palace - the re-creation of the mansion and grounds built by one of the last royal governors of North Carolina - a more competitive travel destination.

The original was built in the late 1760s by royal Gov. William Tryon, a pushy guy who collided frequently with ornery colonists. The regal, London-style brick home he commissioned was intended to reflect the crown's power. Tryon was promoted to New York governor in 1771; quarrels with his superiors during the Revolution resulted in his getting the boot.

Josiah Martin, Tryon's successor in North Carolina, fled from colonials, who made the mansion the state capitol - George Washington danced there - until Raleigh came along in 1794. Tryon's palace burned to the ground four years later. Over time, a highway and about 50 residences blanketed the original grounds.

In the late 1940s, the state decided to excavate the grounds, with an eye toward rebuilding the place. The foundations were unearthed, several acres of houses were removed, and, in a stroke of luck, the original blueprints were found in London. Public and private money was raised, craftsmen were hired and the hard-to-believe-it's-not-colonial Tryon Palace opened to the public in 1959, the same month the Corvette Stingray debuted.

A time trip? You bet. But "house museums" of all stripe aren't doing well these days. Preservation often translates as "nothing new." Repeat visitors need changing exhibits and - increasingly - interactive bells and whistles.

Hence Tryon Palace's new N.C. History Education Center, on six acres just around the corner at Front and Metcalf streets. It holds a museum, orientation theater, a performance hall, galleries, a kid-friendly compound, café, and an outdoor plaza with a view of the restored wetlands and the river beyond.

It's a high-tech wraparound for visiting the Palace.

### **Context, before and after**

As of late October, you'll first go to the History Center, 529 S. Front St. (at Metcalf). Buy your tickets in the lobby; check for word of special programs scheduled for the day. See the brand-new orientation movie and walk through the Gateway Gallery, where a timeline and exhibits further attune you to the 1770s.

You can rent a History Navigator (\$5), a hand-held text/sound gadget that can be set to reflect history from certain perspectives - a leader, a slave, a woman, etc. As you tour the Palace buildings and gardens, the device can be activated to add historical detail that merges with the viewpoint you've selected. (You can also hear period music and poetry through it.)

Then you go around the corner and visit the Palace, the outbuildings and gardens; chat with re-enactors, and so on.

## Playing the Palace, Cont'd.

When you're done, return to the History Center to see the after-tour flourishes that add context to the development of New Bern as well as palace complex.

The center's Regional History Museum covers the early days of N.C.'s central coast, the natives who were first lived there and the Europeans and Africans who displaced them. The computer-enhanced presentation ties history to specific and real people who've been researched. There are graphic panels and more. One neat touch is a flat-screen TV mounted high on a wall that shows images of actual signs used by silversmiths, blacksmiths and others. The TV is positioned so you view the tradesmen's signs as though they were mounted on an actual street.

The highly-interactive Pepsi Family Center is meant for kids. Pass through the fancy "time machine" and you're transported to 1835. You've been given a color-coded computer scan card, so get to work performing tasks in areas set up like a ship (loading it; electronically sailing it), a home (cooking a virtual meal, etc.), a forest (mak-

ing turpentine) and a store (tasks include working at a print shop). Computer points are scored with each task accomplished. At the end, your results can be sent, via Internet, to your home or school.

Besides being highly interactive, The Pepsi Family Center is focused on team-building: Completing the tasks require working with others in your group. No group? Then you team with other visitors.

The Minnette Chapman Duffy Gallery holds changing exhibits related to the area. First up is the "Bern / New Bern" exhibit spotlighting the town's Swiss origins. The display debuted in December in Switzerland. (The gallery will open during the 300th Jubilee, then close again until the center's formal opening in late October.)

Also inside: a state-of-the-art 202 seat performance hall, and a café.

Outside: a plaza that overlooks a restored marsh, with the Trent River beyond.