

Time for Tea: The Cultural Significance of Tea in the British Atlantic World, 1730-1750

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It can be difficult to imagine how a simple beverage can so wholly shape a lifestyle and inspire an enormous range of material objects to supplement it, but that is the case with tea. During the eighteenth century, tea drinking transformed the social and material cultures of Great Britain and the American colonies. Although tea eventually became the preferred beverage of the masses, it was initially a beverage solely associated with the upper class and it was the upper class that fully experienced the changes in culture in the mid 1700s. The preexisting cultures in Great Britain and the colonies, both of which were strongly based in consumerism and favored wealth and luxury, created the ideal environment for tea culture to form.

This paper will examine how consumerist ideals facilitated the rise of tea drinking and the establishment of a social and material culture based on tea drinking amongst the upper classes in the British Atlantic World between the years 1730-1750. This paper will discuss how tea came to represent the wealth and luxury of the upper class, but it will also go beyond that. It will delve deeper to examine how tea drinking cultivated sociability and encouraged the polite behaviors that were characteristic of the upper class. And it will examine how tea drinking sociability led to a new tea material culture.

In order to do so, this paper will have a wide scope. I must examine British and American cultures from before tea became a popular beverage in order to understand the role consumerism played in establishing tea culture, and in that context, I must examine how tea became the favorite beverage of the wealthy and how social and material cultures formed from its popularity.

The existing literature on this topic is extensive and varied. Many authors and historians have previously written on the subject of tea and the social customs and materials that are associated with it. There is also an extensive amount of literature on British and American cultures during the eighteenth centuries as well as the Consumer Revolution. In order to understand how my argument differs from and expands upon these previous interpretations, I will examine some of the existing literature on my subject.

The first area of literature to be examined concerns the Consumer Revolution and demand for luxury that occurred in Great Britain during the eighteenth century. *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England*, by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, chronicles the consumer revolution that took

place in Great Britain during the 1700s. This book is interested in the process by which Great Britain became commercialized. The authors maintain that the movement had its roots in the past, stemming from before the 1700s, because at the end of the seventeenth century, London had already become the largest city in Europe.¹ The authors argue that the size and makeup of Great Britain's capital was a necessary factor leading to consumerism.² The authors also concede that by the eighteenth century, England did not have all the features of a modern consumer society, but the progress made during that time was unprecedented.³ The authors explain that while goods were becoming more accessible to people of all classes during the 1700s, "luxuries were becoming necessities" and people were buying for the sake of fashion.⁴

Other authors, such as Maxine Berg, discuss the emergence of Great Britain's new luxuries in the eighteenth century and aims to provide a "history of those new consumer goods."⁵ She argues that the new consumerism of the eighteenth century was a "product revolution" that was made up by manufacturers and consumers and that there was a focus on the "commercialization of luxury."⁶ Berg also argues that market demands for the new goods were created at home and all over the British Empire, particularly in America. Eventually to compete with foreign imports, the English began producing their own version of goods in order to corner the markets and create "British" goods.⁷ These goods would eventually become extremely desired in British colonies, particularly

¹ Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 21.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵ Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6

⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

America. Texts concerning the Consumer Revolution and the demand for luxury that occurred in Great Britain during the eighteenth century support my thesis because of the factors stemming from them. They created the optimal environment for the rise of tea consumption as well as the desire to purchase tea because it was a luxury item.

Many authors have also written about eighteenth century British and American cultures. In *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, John Brewer discusses eighteenth-century English culture in regards to the arts and economic activity. Brewer argues that “the rise of the fine arts and of social refinement were not isolated phenomena; they were immediately tied...to the practical and technical improvements and commercial practices of the modern world.”⁸ Brewer also states that the British economy was not necessarily the fastest growing economy, but it differed from the economies of other countries because “more economic activity was for the market and less for substance and a larger proportion of the workforce was not employed on the land.”⁹ Thus, this new economy was focused on creating goods to sell rather than farming crops to feed people. Brewer maintains that “England was the embodiment of modern commerce and refinement.”¹⁰ Brewer’s argument lends support to my thesis because it suggests that the economy was becoming more consumer based by focusing less on agriculture and more so on manufactured goods. Brewer maintains that social refinement in British culture was directly tied to that economic shift towards consumerism.

⁸ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1997), xix.

⁹ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

American culture was also shifting towards a focus on refinement in the early eighteenth century. Authors such as Richard L. Bushman focus their writings on the new material world that was created to promote the genteel lifestyle.¹¹ Bushman's book, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, chronicles the changes in material culture in American society from the late 1600s "continuing until gentility was thoroughly entrenched in the middle classes in the middle of the nineteenth century."¹² One of Bushman's main arguments is that people sought out and strove for gentility and that led to refinement of American culture because "gentility was the visible expression of gentry status, the most sharply defined social class in the colonies."¹³ This text supports my argument because it suggests that material objects, like tea drinking materials, exemplified the much desired genteel lifestyle.

Another author, David Shields, explores the aspects of polite society that formed a refined culture in British America through the use of letters and other personal correspondences. Shields writes that his book, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*, "is the study of the role of private society in invoking civility in British America."¹⁴ Thus Shields argues that activities in the private lives of colonists created the idea of gentility and created the desire for polite society. Tea drinking would become one of the activities that promoted gentility. Shields defines private society as "groups formed outside the jurisdiction of the state so that people might share pleasures, promote projects, and fashion new ways of interacting."¹⁵ These new ways of interacting changed

¹¹ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1992), xiii.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, xv.

¹⁴ David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), xiv.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

American culture and formed a more polite, genteel society. This text is useful for my argument because it supports the idea that a genteel society was formed by affluent colonists who wanted to emulate British polite society which contributed to the rise of tea drinking overseas once it was becoming popular in Great Britain. The idea of polite society, refinement, and gentility referred to by Richard L. Bushman and David Shields is central to my argument because those qualities were the foundation of the social identity that formed on the basis of tea drinking.

“High-Style Vernacular: Lifestyles of the Colonial Elite” by Kevin M. Sweeney “seeks to periodize the changing character of the relationship of the upper classes to the consumer revolution and stylistic changes.”¹⁶ Sweeney argues that wealthy colonists tried to act as British as possible and that was the behavioral and social standard they lived up to.¹⁷ Sweeney also argues that during the eighteenth century material goods served as markers of status and that they played important roles in genteel social gatherings, such as tea parties.¹⁸ This text supports my argument because it describes ways in which American colonists tried to act as their British counterparts, which was a principle reason as to why tea drinking became popular in the colonies. Sweeney also claims that material goods were not only desired as physical tokens of wealth but they were also central to social functions. This directly supports my argument that tea and teawares were purchased as a means to display wealth and because they were fundamentally important to tea drinking socials.

¹⁶ Kevin M. Sweeney, “High-Style Vernacular: Lifestyles of the Colonial Elite,” in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (The University Press of Virginia, 1994), 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Although understanding eighteenth-century British and American societies and cultures is central to my argument, tea is the main subject of my paper. Thus, the next area of literature to be discussed is the function of tea and tea drinking in the eighteenth-century. In *The Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800*, author James Walvin discusses foreign foods that became dietary staples in the British Empire through trade. Walvin states that many of these staples such as tea, coffee, sugar, and potatoes were initially “objects of great social and intellectual curiosity.”¹⁹ These new foods “took root in Britain roughly between the years 1660-1800” which were the critical years “between the development of a powerful British imperial and global trading presence and the early days of modern industrialization and urban growth.”²⁰ Walvin discusses how these new items, including tea, were at first “the expensive luxury of the wealthy” but became “the cheap commonplace pleasure of the masses.”²¹ This text supports my argument because it is crucial to understand how tea came to Great Britain and the colonies and why it became so popular.

“Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage” by Rodris Roth, is devoted to tea in the eighteenth century, including origins, social customs, the people who drank it, its role in the American Revolution, and the equipment that goes along with drinking and serving tea. Roth argues that tea was initially a luxury item that only the wealthy could afford and that tea created new social and material cultures. Roth also talks about how art created during the eighteenth century often depicted tea drinking

¹⁹ James Walvin, *The Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800* (Basingstoke, 1997), ix.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

and how art supported the idea that tea was a luxury that was associated with wealth.²² Roth's essay supports my argument because it touches upon every aspect of tea drinking, from its status as a luxury item to what was used to drink it with. It supports my arguments that tea was a beverage of the upper class during the early eighteenth century and that social and material cultures formed from the popularity of tea drinking.

Evidently there are many interpretations on my subject, how then will my argument be different? First, my interpretation is that the development of a new social and material culture surrounding tea stemmed from ideals and factors of the Consumer Revolution and the existing cultures in Great Britain and the American colonies. The desire for luxury and new material objects was already ingrained in the minds of the British and Americans; tea was simply a new item that pandered to those desires. Second, I am limiting my focus to the material culture and society of the British Atlantic World. This will not be an argument on economics. Third, my argument will mainly be supported by detailed visual sources including eighteenth century paintings, and material objects such as tea services and furniture. My approach to this topic differs somewhat from what other scholars have written because I am explicitly using ideals bred from the Consumer Revolution to support my arguments about social and material culture stemming from tea drinking. I think my approach to examining this topic will provide a new and unique perspective to the field of material and social culture of the British Atlantic World.

Using visual sources such as art work allows me to get a glimpse of eighteenth-century life, including tea gatherings and upper class lifestyles based on the depictions in

²² Rodris Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," in *Material Life in America: 1600-1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Northeastern University, 1988), 447.

the paintings. Of course I must keep in mind that these paintings are representations of life and that the subjects paid the artists to render the representations. Thus, the paintings only show what the subjects wanted to be shown, regardless of reality. Because paintings were expensive, the sitter generally had a great deal of input as to how they would be portrayed. However, the way people wanted to be portrayed can tell us much about their culture. The fact that the eighteenth-century paintings I will be using heavily depict wealth and luxury conveys the importance placed on those qualities amongst the upper classes of that time period. Thus, the paintings I will be using are invaluable primary sources. Using material objects like teawares and tea tables from the eighteenth century allows for a precise depiction of what material possessions were used and commonplace during this time period in relation to tea. These visual material sources will show me exactly what was being used by the upper classes between 1730 and 1750 and how it was representative of their class.

Another insightful and invaluable primary source I will be using is the diary of a Pennsylvania colonist, John Smith. Between the years 1736 and 1752, Smith kept a written record of his daily activities, especially those concerning Hannah Logan, the daughter of the colony's governor, James Logan, whom he was courting. Smith writes often of visiting the Logan household to see the beautiful Hannah, and he chronicles their lengthy courtship that resulted in their marriage. Although the editor of Smith's diary focuses on their courtship, I will be emphasizing Smith's records of his social visits where tea was served. Smith remarks often in his journal that when he would visit friends or meet in other social settings, he was always served tea. Those records give insight to

eighteenth-century tea socials which will be supportive to my argument about tea social culture.²³

All of my primary sources, visual and written, will be instrumental in supporting my argument because they are from the time period I am focusing on. These sources help us to understand that time period as well. Also key to understanding the time period, as well as my argument, is understanding how the Consumer Revolution and the existing cultures in Great Britain and the American colonies facilitated the rise of tea culture.

Historical Background: How the Consumer Revolution and existing cultures in Great Britain and America lead to the rise of tea culture

In order to understand how tea drinking created a new social and material culture in both Great Britain and the American colonies during the beginning of the eighteenth century, it is important to first examine the existing cultures in each place. The established ways of life in Great Britain and the American colonies created the necessary environment needed for tea drinking to become popular. Understanding these preexisting cultures provides necessary background and context to the creation of new social and material cultures. In Great Britain, the Consumer Revolution shaped English culture, while in the colonies, the desire for refinement and the desire to appear British defined American culture.

In Great Britain, the rise of tea culture was facilitated by the Consumer Revolution and its affect on British culture. The early years of the eighteenth century saw Great Britain well-prepared for a consumer revolution because of new developments in

²³ Albert Cook Myers, ed., *Hannah Logan's Courtship: A True Narrative* (Philadelphia: Ferris & leach Publishers, 1904).

social structure.²⁴ Great Britain had experienced what is known as ‘the narrowing of the social distance,’ meaning that it was easier for people to promote their social status because the societal gaps between classes were becoming smaller.²⁵ This new development facilitated the occurrence of the consumer revolution because people desired to purchase material goods to promote and raise their social status.²⁶ During this time people strove for vertical social mobility because it was more attainable than it had ever been, therefore people spent more on material goods to emulate people of higher stature.²⁷ The increased desire for new materials, especially the desire for fashionable items, is what sparked the emerging consumer marketplace and the consumer culture that defined Great Britain during this time.²⁸

Material possessions had once been prized for their durability, however, during the Consumer Revolution, objects were to a much greater extent prized for their fashionability.²⁹ Fashion became the driving force behind the consumer marketplace and it was what motivated people to begin spending their money more profusely.³⁰ In order to cater to the public’s rising appetite for fashionable goods, new objects of a vast variety and of excellent quality were being manufactured.³¹ Most of the objects being mass produced and consumed were, at one point, items people had hoped to inherit; during the

²⁴ McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁸ T.H Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 152.

²⁹ McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England*, 1.

³⁰ Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 152.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

Consumer Revolution people could buy those items for themselves.³² These objects included many household items including furniture, candle sticks, and many other items.³³ Manufacturers leapt at the opportunity to indulge the peoples' desire for fashion and encouraged consumerism by producing fashionable objects.³⁴ While people of all social stations began participating in Great Britain's new consumer culture, it was the wealthy upper class that set the standard on the desire for luxury in the consumer culture.

The term luxury took on new meaning during the Consumer Revolution. It no longer had negative connotations and it came to be associated with production, trade, and extravagant goods.³⁵ Luxury became particularly associated with trade and foreign imports, specifically goods from Asia.³⁶ During the Consumer Revolution, Asian consumer goods, such as tea, were being imported as luxuries.³⁷ Wealthy Britons catered to their own desires for luxury goods by spending vast amounts of money on luxury goods such as silks and porcelains from Asia, as well as items of silver and furniture to adorn their homes.³⁸

An excellent representation of the wealthy upper class lavish lifestyle in Great Britain is the painting *The Western Family* (see figure 1).³⁹ The initial impression one receives from this painting is that the upper class of England lived very extravagant and lush lifestyles. Based on the lavishness of their dress and the ornate furniture and decorations in the room one gathers that no expense was too much for material goods to

³² *Ibid.*, 1.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁵ Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, eds., *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁸ McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England*, 10.

³⁹ William Hogarth, *The Western Family*, oil on canvas, 1738, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

the members of high society. Though the painting is an artist's rendering, it is reasonable to conclude that this painting is a fair representation of many upper class households during the early eighteenth century. Also, it is important to note that the painting could represent how the family wanted to be portrayed, meaning they consciously wanted to be painted a certain way in order to show off their wealth. Whether *The Western Family* depicts reality or an imagined version of it, the painting still exemplifies the importance placed on wealth and material objects during the eighteenth century. All of the factors of British society during the early eighteenth-century, including consumerism and the desire for luxury goods and materials, paved the way for the rise of tea culture between 1730 and 1750. Simultaneously, society in the American colonies was making a shift that would lead to a rise in tea culture there as well.

Between the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century, American society became focused on refining its culture.⁴⁰ American colonists believed refinement was achieved by adopting a genteel lifestyle.⁴¹ The genteel lifestyle was achieved by wealthy colonists who emulated aristocratic culture in order to create a social gap between themselves and those they saw as inferior.⁴² As with the British, Americans purchased luxury items in order to raise their social status.⁴³ During this time the American gentry class was transformed in both appearance and conduct.⁴⁴ These transformations were made so that genteel Americans closely resembled their counterparts across the ocean, the British aristocracy. Members of the gentry class studied manners and diligently attended to every aspect of life in order to appear equal to

⁴⁰ Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, xix.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴² Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular: Lifestyles of the Colonial Elite," 5.

⁴³ Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, xviii.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, xii.

British aristocrats.⁴⁵ Americans began to dress and speak differently, and a new form of manners and conduct emerged in order to create a polite, genteel society that was similar to the British upper class.⁴⁶ A rise in consumerism in the colonies was the result of colonists striving for the genteel lifestyle.

Consumerism had quickly become a facet of early eighteenth-century colonial American society. As previously stated, American colonists were purchasing luxury goods at higher rates in order to raise their social statuses.⁴⁷ Acquiring new goods and possessions became the goal of ambitious and prosperous colonists.⁴⁸ New possessions motivated residents of the colonies to try to cross the social gap in their society instead of passively living life in their current social station.⁴⁹ American colonists believed that the genteel lifestyle was attainable only when the proper environment was created, and the proper environment was created by building stately mansions and filling those mansions with costly possessions.⁵⁰ These material goods were put on display as visual representations of wealth.⁵¹ As often depicted in paintings of the time period, material objects would be placed in a portrait with their owners. These objects, captured forever with oil and canvas, were to be lasting testaments to a person's wealth and social standing.

One such portrait is of a young colonist, Susanna Taux (see figure 7). In her portrait, Taux is depicted standing next to a table that is laid out with a silver tea pot, a

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, xviii.

⁴⁸ Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular: Lifestyles of the Colonial Elite," 2.

⁴⁹ Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, 29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xviii.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

cup and saucer, and a dish, and she is also holding a pipe in one hand.⁵² These objects were consciously included in the portrait, likely at the request of the Taux family, in order to physically display the family's fortune. This desire to display material wealth was a major characteristic of the consumer culture in the colonies. The emerging consumer culture in the colonies created links across the Atlantic with Great Britain as well.

Consumer culture in the American colonies was also a response to the colonists' desire for "Britishness." Americans in every part of the colonies considered themselves as fully British.⁵³ British customs were imitated in the colonies⁵⁴ and colonists were intent on maintaining their full rights as citizens of the British Empire.⁵⁵ This personal and cultural identification with Great Britain dictated colonial consumerism. When it came to consumer products, colonial buyers identified good taste with British taste and they were enticed by anything British.⁵⁶ As such, colonists responded to British consumer goods enthusiastically.⁵⁷ Colonists came to directly associate fashion and quality with British products.⁵⁸ Colonists identified British furniture styles, for example, with gentility, so they were keen to buy those furniture styles to strengthen their bond to Great Britain as well as promote their own refinement and gentility.⁵⁹ The demand for British products led to new consumer goods being created during the Consumer Revolution, which were made especially for international markets, particularly in the American

⁵² *The Gansevoort Limner Portrait*, 1730, Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

⁵³ Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 167.

⁵⁴ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 441-442.

⁵⁵ Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*, 295.

⁵⁶ Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 166-167.

⁵⁷ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*, 296.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 312.

colonies.⁶⁰ These goods were the same that were being used in Great Britain at the time, but production increases were needed to meet colonial market demands.

American culture during the early eighteenth century was focused on gentility, consumerism, and appearing as British as possible. American culture also closely resembled British culture of the time. The characteristics of American culture created the perfect environment for tea culture to become mainstream because as soon as tea culture became the fashion in Great Britain, it was not long before it became the fashion of wealthy colonists.

Thus, the Consumer Revolution created the desire and availability for new material goods, particularly luxury goods, in England and across the Atlantic. Wealthy citizens in both Great Britain and the American colonies used material goods to establish their upper class social status. The Consumer Revolution also led to a change in American society in which colonists began striving to emulate their counterparts in Great Britain. All of the factors stemming from the Consumer Revolution led to the rise of tea drinking and tea culture in Great Britain and the American colonies.

A New Exotic Beverage: Tea

The preexisting cultures in Great Britain and the American colonies lead to the popularity of a new foreign beverage: tea. The consumer-driven societies in both regions eventually led to the desire for more foreign luxury goods which came to include food and beverage items. Tea would become one of the most highly demanded foreign products. This section will explore the origins of tea, its rise in popularity, and how the new beverage was used.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 324.

The origins of tea can be traced back to Asia. Long before tea became a popular beverage in Great Britain, it was a universal drink in China.⁶¹ A number of Asian societies, including those in China and Japan, had long had many uses for tea dating as far back to the third century A.D. In those societies tea served many functions. It was used in religious ceremonies, as a means of taxation, and also as a medicine.⁶²

Even before Europeans began trading directly with Asian countries, tea was being traded westwards into the countries of Asia Minor. After trade was established between Great Britain and countries in Asia, tea became an accidental product of empire.⁶³ By the mid-seventeenth century tea was being imported and consumed in Great Britain.⁶⁴ The industry that developed around tea was calculated and deliberate.⁶⁵ The desire to exploit and profit from the new product lead to an industry that was well-organized and well-developed, which was beneficial to the society of consumers who desired it.⁶⁶ Tea becoming in such high demand that by 1717, approximately two hundred thousand pounds of tea leaves were being imported to London, as opposed to only a few hundred pounds a decade or two before.⁶⁷ The demand for tea continued to grow and by the late 1750s, nearly three million pounds were being imported to London.⁶⁸ Tea eventually became in demand overseas in the American colonies and by the late seventeenth century

⁶¹ Walvin, *The Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800*, 9.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 10 and 12.

⁶⁴ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 440.

⁶⁵ Walvin, *The Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800*, 12.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ P.M. Guerty and Kevin Switaj, "Tea Porcelain, and Sugar in the British Atlantic World," *Magazine of History* 18, no. 3 (April 2004): 56.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

it was being sold in the colonies.⁶⁹ By the dawn of the eighteenth century, tea was rapidly rising in popularity.

In the early decades of the eighteenth century, tea became a sensation in Great Britain and the American colonies because it was simple to use and it served a variety of functions.⁷⁰ Tea initially became popular because it was promoted for its medicinal uses.⁷¹ It was endorsed as being good for the health and was used to relieve symptoms ranging from the basic cold to a high fever.⁷² Tea was also very easy to prepare, which enabled people to brew and serve it in the comforts of their own home.⁷³ Tea also provided energy from caffeine rather than intoxication as other popular beverages such as wine did.⁷⁴ Also, unlike alcoholic beverages, tea appealed to individuals who desired light refreshment at any point during the day.⁷⁵ For that reason tea became the signature popular beverage of women and the upper class.

As tea became more popular in the early years of the eighteenth century, tea appealed to women not only as a light refreshment, but as a means of socializing. Taking tea with a group gave women an opportunity to socialize, express good manners and civility, and to discuss fashion.⁷⁶ Women initially embraced tea as their signature beverage because for many years drinking coffee and going to coffee houses had been a

⁶⁹ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 440.

⁷⁰ Guerty and Switaj, "Tea Porcelain, and Sugar in the British Atlantic World," 56-59.

⁷¹ Walvin, *The Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800*, 11.

⁷² Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*, 112.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, 216.

⁷⁶ Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*, 105-106.

male pastime, which generally excluded women.⁷⁷ Men did begin drinking tea in larger numbers, however.⁷⁸

As tea began appealing to both sexes, it became the signature beverage of the upper class polite society.⁷⁹ As tea was becoming increasingly linked to the wealthy members of society, it was linked to fashionability.⁸⁰ The desire of women and the upper class to have the fashionable beverage greatly increased the popularity and demand of tea.

Thus, tea came to Great Britain and the American colonies as a product of empire and was promoted for its many qualities and functions. The new exotic beverage took the upper class by storm and it quickly rose in popularity because of its qualities, benefits, and its association with taste and fashion. Despite its popularity, it could not have been foreseen that tea was soon to become the driving force behind an entirely new upper class social identity and culture.

Tea Time: A new form of social gathering and a new identity

The immense popularity of tea as the signature beverage of the upper class led to the creation of tea culture amongst the wealthy in Great Britain and the American colonies. Essentially, tea socials became the standard form of socializing which introduced the ritual of drinking. This section will explore how tea time came to be a time for family, friends and socializing, as well as how the social identity that became associated with tea reflected polite upper class society.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁷⁹ Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 171.

⁸⁰ Guerty and Switaj, "Tea Porcelain, and Sugar in the British Atlantic World," 57.

The availability of new goods such as tea created new ways of dining and socializing.⁸¹ These new social gatherings became the norm for the members of the wealthy upper class in Great Britain, and within a decade, they soon became the custom overseas in the colonies.⁸² The most noticeable change was that tea drinking and tea socials took place in the privacy of one's own home rather than a public venue such as a coffee house, which was where most drinking had taken place previously.⁸³ Taking tea in the home provided an opportunity for all members of a household, male and female, to socialize and interact with one another.⁸⁴ A family would often take tea in the morning with breakfast or in the afternoon in a more social setting.⁸⁵

An excellent depiction of an intimate gathering of family taking tea is the painting *The Strode Family* (see figure 2).⁸⁶ William Strode, his wife, and his brother along with clergyman Dr. Arthur Smythe, are depicted in the piece. The family butler is serving tea to the intimate familial gathering. The family is obviously wealthy as observed from their dress and the room and furnishings of their home, but the painting details more than the family's wealth. The social aspects of tea are the central theme in this piece: the family and a close friend are joined for conversation over tea. Polite conversation is being promoted by William Strode who seems to be encouraging Smythe to put down his reading in order to converse with the group. This exemplifies that tea drinking demanded sociability. Conversation was expected and promoted during tea time. It is also clear that the gathering is meant to include all members of the family as Strode's wife is seated at

⁸¹ Berg and Eger, eds., *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, 7.

⁸² Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 442.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 230

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 442.

⁸⁶ Hogarth, *The Strode Family*, oil on canvas, 1738, Tate Gallery, London.

the table. And this image also depicts how social visits soon came to include tea drinking because Smythe is a guest who called upon the family and was then served tea. Images such as *The Strode Family* express a typical eighteenth-century informal tea gathering in the home that exemplifies the sociability associated with tea drinking.

The Western Family is another example of a small family social centered on tea time (see figure 1).⁸⁷ Apart from depicting the wealth of the upper class, a noticeable feature of the painting is its central theme: tea time. The subjects of the painting are all oriented around an elegant tea table that is furnished with what appears to be a porcelain tea set. This painting depicts the social nature of drinking tea in the sense that it was a beverage for all people. Men and women, young and old, have all gathered to take tea in this scene. The wide range of ages depicted in this painting, from the older clergyman to the young toddler peeking over the edge of the tea table, exemplifies why tea was such a popular drink because anyone could drink it and enjoy it. Similar to *The Strode Family*, conversation is also emphasized in this piece. Mrs. Western is depicted with her hand on the clergyman's arm, seemingly to pull him back into the tea table conversation. This depiction portrays how important conversation and sociability were to tea time socials because tea socials were the place where gentility was refined amongst the upper class.

The Strode Family and *The Western Family* depict upper class families partaking in a fashionable activity that was gaining popularity – drinking tea. These paintings also express the sociability associated with tea time because they portray people in the act of conversing in social settings. These conversations that took place around the tea table cultivated gentility and the behaviors that characterized polite society. Drinking tea

⁸⁷ Hogarth, *The Western Family*, oil on canvas, 1738, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

became a characteristic occurrence of visiting and socializing with its own identifiable ceremony.⁸⁸ Thus, tea time was used to justify social gatherings with family and friends whether the gathering was large and formal or more intimate and informal.⁸⁹

As tea socials were quickly becoming fashionable amongst the upper classes in Great Britain and the American colonies, a new identity was being formed around tea time. As tea was the favorite beverage of the upper class during the eighteenth century, it was quickly becoming associated with polite society and refinement.⁹⁰ Tea drinking was also coming to be associated with good manners and cosmopolitan taste.⁹¹ Those associations formed because of the conversations that were a prominent aspect of upper class tea socials. As tea social culture was forming, there became a growing association between visiting and being served refreshments.⁹²

Serving tea, especially to guests, was a marker of hospitality and politeness.⁹³ In the American colonies, the highest distinction of esteem and civility a colonist could show another person was to invite that person to drink tea with them.⁹⁴ As the Pennsylvanian colonist John Smith frequently notes in his journal, he was often offered tea upon his visits to friends' households.⁹⁵ He remarks that after dining at Governor James Logan's household he was served tea and was treated with politeness and gentility by his hosts.⁹⁶ As a guest, Smith could expect to be treated graciously as that was characteristic of upper class individuals, but being served tea was an additional way for a

⁸⁸ Berg and Eger, eds., *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, 230.

⁸⁹ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 445.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 439.

⁹¹ Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 304.

⁹² Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, 216.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 439.

⁹⁵ Cook Myers, ed., *Hannah Logan's Courtship: A True Narrative*, see pages 74, 81, 86, 90, 98, 114, 151, etc.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

host to show their own refinement while simultaneously treating a guest with courtesy and graciousness. Smith also remarked that on these social visits conversation would ensue while taking tea, which further exhibits the social nature of tea drinking.⁹⁷ Thus, tea was no longer viewed as a simple beverage. It became increasingly identifiable with characteristics of the upper class, thus forming tea's social identity. Tea was associated with the upper class for other reasons as well.

Although tea would later become the drink of the masses, during the first half of the eighteenth century tea was solely associated with the upper classes of Great Britain and the American colonies because the wealthy were the only ones who could afford it. When tea was introduced to the colonies it was considered a luxury item.⁹⁸ As such, drinking tea was an activity only the prosperous or governing colonists could afford.⁹⁹ As Smith pens numerous times in his journal, he would go to Governor Logan's household for tea. Logan was considered a country gentleman and being governor of the colony, he was arguably the one of the wealthiest and most important men in Pennsylvania, excepting the colony's founder, William Penn.¹⁰⁰ Logan could easily afford purchasing a new luxury item like tea to serve his family and friends. The expense of the tea was not the only reason tea drinking was the social custom of the upper class. The materials with which to drink tea were also very costly and leisure time was considered necessary to consume tea.¹⁰¹ Possessing wealth was the paramount circumstance that allowed for leisure time.¹⁰² Members of the upper class had enough money to not have to work as

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 305.

⁹⁹ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 441.

¹⁰⁰ Cook Myers, ed., *Hannah Logan's Courtship: A True Narrative*, 9.

¹⁰¹ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 440.

¹⁰² McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England*, 265.

frequently as members of the lower classes, thus, money lead to increased amounts of leisure time that were filled with tea socials.¹⁰³

William Hogarth's *An Assembly at Wanstead House* depicts one such social (see figure 3).¹⁰⁴ Hogarth's conversation piece precisely depicts an upper class social gathering that would come to be associated with tea drinking. An assemblage of finely dressed aristocratic men and women are shown conversing and otherwise socializing in a lavish room. The room they are gathered in is extremely ornate with a large chandelier, ceiling and wall murals, a patterned rug, a grand fireplace, and ornate furniture. All of the detail given to the assembly room exemplifies the extravagant lifestyle of the upper class and their desire to have luxury materials in their immediate environment. In the corner of the painting, two women and a man are sitting drinking tea at an ornate tea table that is set with a fine tea service. This painting combines all of the elements as to why tea drinking was solely associated with the upper class during this time period: material displays of wealth, leisure time for socializing, and, of course, people consuming tea. Images like *An Assembly at Wanstead House* helped to create the identity of tea as a social beverage of the wealthy upper class.

Although tea drinking was associated with the entire upper class, it was particularly associated with upper class women. Upper class women would often gather for tea and the conversations that ensued during tea time were believed to cultivate good manners and judgment.¹⁰⁵ Women would also use the opportunity afforded by tea time to discuss fashion and even gossip.¹⁰⁶ As an increasing number of upper class women began

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹⁰⁴ Hogarth, *An Assembly at Wanstead House*, oil on canvas, 1728-31, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

¹⁰⁵ Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*, 106.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

participating in tea socials, men in both the colonies and Great Britain acknowledged that those socials were contributing to women's more prominent role in the public sphere.¹⁰⁷ The women who were becoming bolder and more visible drank tea.¹⁰⁸ In general, it was recognized that the tea socials conducted by upper class women were conducive to cultural refinement.¹⁰⁹ As depicted in *The Western Family*, it is Mrs. Western that is pulling the group into the conversation and encouraging sociability.¹¹⁰ By promoting sociability amongst the group, Mrs. Western is helping to generate cultural refinement. Thus, upper class women helped form the social identity of tea by encouraging sociability and interaction during tea socials which lead to gentility and refinement.

Thus, tea time socials created a new form of social gathering and established a new identity that was associated with the upper classes of Great Britain and the American colonies. As the wealthy were the only people who could afford to buy tea and take the time to have tea drinking socials, tea time became associated with the upper class and characteristics of polite society. Social gatherings centered on conversation and acting in a genteel manner became popular because they were a part of polite society. Tea drinking became synonymous with wealth and polite society which was the basis for its identity. These new social gatherings and tea identity were results of the consumer societies in Great Britain and the American colonies, and the desire to consume was soon fixated on equipment with which to drink and serve tea. A new material culture was to emerge alongside the new social culture.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁰⁸ Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 304.

¹⁰⁹ Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*, 106.

¹¹⁰ Hogarth, *The Western Family*, oil on canvas, 1738, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

Tea Pots and Tea Cups: New Materials for Tea Time

Along with a new social culture and identity, tea drinking also established a new material culture. As tea socials increasingly became the favorite pastime of the upper classes in Great Britain and the American colonies, there was an ever increasing desire to possess materials with which to drink and serve tea.¹¹¹ Just as tea was a luxury item only the wealthy could afford, the same was true for the tea materials. The consumer driven upper classes desired the new luxury materials that complimented the new luxury beverage. This section will discuss the wide range of popular teawares and materials used to serve and drink tea and how they stimulated and encouraged tea social culture.

Tea was a costly imported item that only the wealthy could afford to buy in the early decades of the eighteenth century and similarly, the materials used to drink and serve tea were also quite expensive.¹¹² These new material goods became associated with the fashionable upper class societies of Great Britain and the American colonies because only the wealthy could afford to purchase them. For the upper class, luxury material goods represented physical symbols of their wealth.¹¹³ Once tea drinking rose in popularity among the wealthy upper class, the wealthy soon began using tea time as an opportunity to display their wealth and fashion through their tea materials.¹¹⁴ Such importance was placed upon these goods that John Smith remarks in his journal that while having tea a friend's house earlier in the day, he broke a cup and saucer.¹¹⁵ Smith does not elaborate on the event or circumstances, but breaking a cup and saucer would

¹¹¹ Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular: Lifestyles of the Colonial Elite," 9.

¹¹² Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*, 114.

¹¹³ Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular: Lifestyles of the Colonial Elite," 5.

¹¹⁴ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*, 150.

¹¹⁵ Cook Myers, ed., *Hannah Logan's Courtship: A True Narrative*, 90.

not have been worth mentioning had those tea drinking utensils not been costly or desirable goods.

Members of the upper class were quick to begin purchasing new and fashionable teawares. They would not waste any time for those items to become more affordable or available, they would purchase teawares ahead of other basic household equipment.¹¹⁶ The wealthy would generally use tea pots and cups of the most stylish design to display their affluence.¹¹⁷ Only the utensils in the leading and fashionable designs were desired and purchased by the members of the upper class.¹¹⁸ The wealthy were extremely mindful of fashion changes and trends and were always keen to set their tea tables with only the most fashionable teawares.¹¹⁹ There was a wide variety of teawares that the wealthy desired to own.

The substantial increase in tea drinking during the early eighteenth century provided the hospitable atmosphere to develop a wide range of new objects and materials associated with tea time.¹²⁰ Compared to other table wares, consumers bought new teawares at more expensive prices and with larger amounts of decoration.¹²¹ Tea materials were generally made of porcelain or decorated with pearlware.¹²² The most popular, and necessary, teaware was the tea pot.

The most commonly owned tea pots were made of porcelain, pewter, or silver.¹²³ In general, tea pots were bought in sets with other matching utensils, such as cups and

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 305.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹¹⁸ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 447.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*, 150.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 309.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 456.

saucers, and all pieces were of the same pattern.¹²⁴ Matching sets were often painted with the same design, such as one tea set dating from the mid-eighteenth century that is now in the possession of the British Museum (see figure 4).¹²⁵ This tea set is made of delicate white porcelain and depicts an intricate garden scene on each object in the set, which includes a milk jug and slop bowl. It is an excellent example of the predominant style of tea set owned by the wealthy members of the upper class because porcelain sets with a painted design were the most commonly owned tea sets. Other than having a painted design on a tea set, another one of the most popular and common styles of tea sets were simply white and blue china.¹²⁶

Although silver was one of the materials used to make tea pots, tea sets of silver were rare and quite unique.¹²⁷ One such silver tea pot belonged to Abigail Robinson of Newport, Rhode Island now in the collection of the National Museum of American History (see figure 5).¹²⁸ This silver tea pot was created for Abigail Robinson around 1750; it was likely a wedding gift because she was married around that time. It is a classic inverted pear shaped pot with an engraving of her family name on the side. As silver was the most expensive and rare material with which to make tea utensils, this was a generous gift that only a wealthy person could afford.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 449.

¹²⁵ Chinese style English painted porcelain tea set, circa 1756, The British Museum, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=71713&partid=1&searchText=tea+sets&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&numpages=10&images=on&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx¤tPage=2

¹²⁶ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 449.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 449.

¹²⁸ Silver tea pot made for Abigail Robinson of Newport, RI., Circa 1752, National Museum of American History, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object.cfm?key=35&objkey=183>. (accessed January 2010).

Another colonist who owned a rare silver tea service was Pennsylvania governor, James Logan (see figure 6).¹²⁹ Logan's full tea service was of an elegant design with sculpted edges and engravings on the side. It is no surprise that James Logan, as governor, could afford such a unique and costly tea set because he was one of the wealthiest men in the colony. This was very likely the tea service that was used when Smith would come to call on Hannah Logan, and with which she would serve him.¹³⁰ Paintings of the time also depicted silver teaware.

In a formal portrait of the young Susanna Taux of the Hudson River Valley from 1730, Taux is depicted in elegant dress holding a rose and she is standing next to a table equipped with a silver tea pot, cup and saucer, and a sugar dish (see figure 7).¹³¹ This portrait is revealing of the role tea played in upper class life in the American colonies. As previously mentioned, it was the conscious decision by Taux's parents or someone else with authority over her, to depict her with traditional tea equipage because tea was a marker of status and wealth. During this time period, people often had their most valuable items painted along side them to leave a lasting reminder of their wealth. Not only is Taux painted with a tea pot, which would have been a valuable item nonetheless, she is painted with a silver tea pot, which were very expensive and rare. This painting was clearly meant to be a physical testament to the Taux family's fortune because of the silver tea pot and other material goods depicted in the portrait.

As evidenced by purchases and eighteenth-century artwork from both Great Britain and the American colonies, tea pots and sets were luxury items that were becoming increasingly seen as a marker of wealth, thus members of the upper class

¹²⁹ Cook Myers, ed., *Hannah Logan's Courtship: A True Narrative*, 40-41.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³¹ *The Gansevoort Limner Portrait*, 1730.

sought to buy them. Thus, the portrait of Susanna Traux featured the silver tea pot as the lone item that would exemplify her family's wealth. This desire to own and display tea pots soon became a desire to purchase all sorts of tea materials to compliment tea socials and display wealth.

Tea drinking came to require not just tea pots and cups, but items such as spoons, milk jugs, slop bowls, tongs and even tea tables.¹³² Tea tables were rapidly becoming common household fixtures by the early decades of the eighteenth century in Great Britain and the colonies.¹³³ A member of the upper class would consider a well-equipped tea table to exhibit a vast array of tea utensils, other than simply a tea pot, such as a slop bowl, milk or cream jug, a tea canister, sugar container, sugar tongs, tea spoons, and cups and saucers.¹³⁴ The increasing desire of the upper classes to own and display such materials is depicted in the painting *Man and Child Drinking Tea* (see figure 8).¹³⁵

This painting depicts a richly dressed Englishman and child drinking tea. The father daintily holds a porcelain tea cup in his hands while the child in his lap drinks from a cup. In front of them is a table that is completely laid out with a wide range of the finest tea equipment. There is a tea pot, slop bowl, sugar tongs, a sugar dish, etc. This painting is a wonderful representation of not just tea drinking but of all of the costly equipment that went along with it. This painting lends visual proof to the argument that tea drinking was an upper class pastime because one would indeed need to be wealthy in order to afford the tea and drinking equipment. Also, because the tea table was the focal point of tea drinking and socials, the table can be viewed as a place to educate children in

¹³² Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*, 306.

¹³³ Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*, 114.

¹³⁴ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 447.

¹³⁵ *Man and Child Drinking Tea*, Circa 1725, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

politeness and sociability. *Man and Child Drinking Tea* depicts a child at the tea table, which would expose him or her to polite social behaviors. Thus, *Man and Child Drinking Tea* depicts not only the vast array of teawares that an upper class person would deem necessary for tea socials, it also depicts the tea table's important role in cultivating polite social behaviors.

The painting *An English Family at Tea* also depicts a well-equipped tea table (see figure 9).¹³⁶ This painting depicts an early eighteenth-century social gathering of an upper class British family that is assembled for tea time. The painting portrays a cozy domestic scene, centered on a family gathering for tea time. The elegantly dressed family is being served their tea from a silver tea pot by a maid. Most of the family is sitting at the tea table waiting for the tea to be served so that conversation can then ensue. Other members of the family are standing in close proximity to the tea table so that they may also partake in the conversation once it begins. The tea table is also fully furnished with the numerous materials that were desirable for serving tea such as cups, saucers, and a milk jug.

Artwork such as *An English Family at Tea* and *Man and Child Drinking Tea* depicted the tea table because it was central to displaying the fashionable and costly tea materials as well as because it was central to the social ritual of tea drinking. The tea table was the place where politeness, behavior, and sociability were refined, thus it was often included in eighteenth-century artwork.

The most popular style of tea table during the early decades of the eighteenth century was the circular tripod table.¹³⁷ These tables were generally made of mahogany and could feature elegantly carved edges with a stem and feet that were also delicately

¹³⁶ Joseph Van Aken, *An English Family at Tea*, ca 1720, Tate Gallery, London.

¹³⁷ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 447.

carved (see figure 10).¹³⁸ These tables were the center of tea socials because it is where the tea service would be placed and where guests would gather.¹³⁹ The tea table also served as a vessel which facilitated the spread of manners and taste.¹⁴⁰ As previously mentioned, the tea table was the place where sociability was encouraged and where manners and gentility were refined, thus they played an important role in tea socials.

Tea tables served a purpose when tea was not being served as well. When a tea service was not in use, it would still be set out for display on a tea table rather than being put away in a cupboard.¹⁴¹ People would leave the tea service out on display on a tea table because those items were physical representations of their wealth and they wanted guests to observe them. Thus, the tea table had several crucial purposes in regard to tea drinking and socials.

As a result of the increasingly high demands to purchase tea materials, imports and manufacturing of these items also increased. In 1746, the colony of New York was spending £10,000 on tea materials, alone.¹⁴² To meet such high demands, large markets were opening up in the colonies and Great Britain to import items such as teawares made of china.¹⁴³ Overseas in the American colonies, colonists drank their tea out of imported cups that came from British markets.¹⁴⁴ Items made of porcelain became heavily imported because of increased demands for luxury china items used to prepare and serve

¹³⁸ Mahogany Tea Table, Circa 1765-75, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/american_decorative_arts/tea_table/objectview.aspx?page=2&sort=0&sortdir=asc&keyword=tea&fp=1&dd1=1&dd2=0&vw=1&collID=1&OID=10008555&vT=1. (accessed January 2010).

¹³⁹ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 447.

¹⁴⁰ Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*, 114.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Guerty and Switaj, "Tea Porcelain, and Sugar in the British Atlantic World," 57.

¹⁴³ Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 304.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

tea.¹⁴⁵ Chinese porcelain was the most fashionable and highly desired material for teawares, but domestically manufactured imitation porcelain was being bought as well.¹⁴⁶ Porcelain made in Britain would be made into fine tea sets that often imitated Chinese designs (see figure 4).¹⁴⁷

Thus, the wide range of materials used to serve and drink tea exemplify how vast the material culture for tea became with the increase in tea drinking during the eighteenth century. The desire to purchase these expensive luxury goods coincided with the social culture surrounding tea because members of the upper classes of Great Britain and the American colonies wanted more items to use during their tea time socials. Whole new markets centered on tea materials opened up to meet demands for those products. The wealthy were the only ones who could afford to buy these items as they were quite expensive. The vast amount of items that the wealthy indulged in purchasing exemplifies that people were willing to spend top dollar to have these fashionable items.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the early decades of the eighteenth century, 1730-1750, witnessed the creation of a new social and material culture amongst the wealthy upper classes living in the British Atlantic World. These new cultures were not created because of monumental changes in British or American colonial societies. After all, ideals bred during the Consumer Revolution were still prominent and dominant in those decades. They were created because of the monumental popularity of a beverage: tea. Tea's rapid rise from a simple new beverage to the most popular beverage of the upper class is what

¹⁴⁵ Walvin, *The Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800*, 21.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Chinese style English painted porcelain tea set, circa 1756, The British Museum.

created those new social and material cultures. As tea quickly became the signature beverage of the upper classes in the British Atlantic World, it led to new social and material cultures, because the preexisting cultures in Great Britain and the colonies created the ideal environment to promote it.

Consumerism had already taken root in the British Atlantic World before tea became a product of empire. People desired to purchase new and luxurious items because owning those items helped advance one's social status or because they served as physical tokens of wealth for those who already had high social stature. At the same time people were joining the consumer marketplace, they were also focusing on refinement and polite society. Although any person might join the consumer marketplace, only the wealthy had the means to concentrate on refining themselves, which was also done by purchasing luxury goods. Tea became the foreign luxury good that members of the upper classes strongly desired to have because being able to purchase it solidified their social status as a wealthy member of upper class society. Simply owning tea meant that a person was of wealth and standing. Eventually, the upper classes in Great Britain and the American colonies established social and material cultures that had their foundation in tea drinking.

Tea drinking soon led to new forms of socializing. Unlike other beverages such as coffee, tea was consumed in the home where all members of a household could participate in tea time. As evidenced through eighteenth-century paintings, these gatherings could be intimate or large. These new tea socials became closely associated with characteristics of the upper class, such as gentility and refinement, which solidified tea's status as a wealthy person's beverage. As tea socials rose in popularity, members of the upper class soon desired to purchase more materials with which to drink and serve

tea. This desire created new markets for consumer goods completely related to tea. Items such as tea pots, cups, milk jugs, slop bowls, and even tea tables were in high demand. Members wanted these new materials to compliment their tea socials of course, but as these tea materials were quite costly, they also desired them as physical representations of their wealth.

Thus, the preexisting consumer based societies of the British Atlantic World facilitated the rise of tea drinking and the establishment of a social and material culture based on tea drinking amongst the upper classes between the years 1730 and 1750.

Although tea drinking was solely associated with the wealthy upper class members of society up until the mid-eighteenth century, tea drinking has endured as a popular beverage because it became available to the masses. By 1750, the cost of tea had declined at such a rate that people at any level of society were able to purchase it.¹⁴⁸ Even in the most remote areas of the American colonies, tea drinking was becoming a common fixture.¹⁴⁹ Much like members of the upper class, members of the middle to lower classes took an instant liking to tea because of its medicinal benefits and because of the caffeine boost they received from drinking it.¹⁵⁰ The quick rise in tea drinking amongst the masses of British and American society led to the creation of even more tea materials used to serve and drink tea.¹⁵¹

Thus, tea has evolved from a beverage of the wealthy and endured as a beverage of the masses. Tea parties and socials, as well as tea pots and cups, are just as recognizable today as they were in the eighteenth century. Tea culture has prevailed.

¹⁴⁸ Guerty and Switaj, "Tea Porcelain, and Sugar in the British Atlantic World," 57.

¹⁴⁹ Roth, "Tea Drinking in Eighteenth Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," 442.

¹⁵⁰ Guerty and Switaj, "Tea Porcelain, and Sugar in the British Atlantic World," 57.

¹⁵¹ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*, 150.

Appendix of Images



Figure 1 – *The Western Family*

William Hogarth, *The Western Family*, oil on canvas, 1738, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.



Figure 2 – *The Strode Family*

William Hogarth, *The Strode Family*, oil on canvas, 1738, Tate Gallery, London.



Figure 3 – *An Assembly at Wanstead House*

William Hogarth, *An Assembly at Wanstead House*, oil on canvas, 1728-31, Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Figure 4 – Chinese Style English Painted Porcelain Tea Set

Chinese style English painted porcelain tea set, Circa 1756, The British Museum.
http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=71713&partid=1&searchText=tea+sets&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&numpages=10&images=on&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx¤tPage=2. (accessed January 2010).



Figure 5 – Silver Tea Pot

Silver tea pot made for Abigail Robinson of Newport, RI., Circa 1752, National Museum of American History.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object.cfm?key=35&objkey=183>.

(accessed January 2010).



Figure 6 – James Logan's Silver Tea Set

Albert Cook Meyers, ed., *Hannah Logan's Courtship: A True Narrative*, 40-41.



Figure 7 – *The Gansevoort Limner Portrait*

The Gansevoort Limner Portrait, 1730. Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Figure 8 – *Man and Child Drinking Tea*

Man and Child Drinking Tea, Circa 1725. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.



Figure 9 – *An English Family at Tea*

Joseph Van Aken, *An English Family at Tea*, ca 1720, Tate Gallery, London.



Figure 10 – Mahogany Tea Table

Mahogany Tea Table, Circa 1765-75, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/american_decorative_arts/tea_table/objectview.aspx?page=2&sort=0&sortdir=asc&keyword=tea&fp=1&dd1=1&dd2=0&vw=1&collID=1&OID=10008555&vT=1. (accessed January 2010).

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Man and Child Drinking Tea, Circa 1725. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Silver tea pot made for Abigail Robinson of Newport, RI., Circa 1752, National Museum of American History.
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