

John Colin Moon 1930 to 2022

*By William H. Casterline, Jr.
June 1, 2023 **



John Moon on Market Square with the Powder Magazine and the Courthouse behind him.

John Colin Moon was born August 23, 1930, in Vankleek Hill, Ontario, Canada and soon moved with his parents to Hebrides on the west coast of Scotland, and later to Hastings on the south coast of England. In 1945, at age fifteen, Moon enlisted in the Scots Guards Regiment which had been raised in 1642 and which is charged with protection of the Royal Family. At the recruiting office he was required to take a written test to determine his scholastic abilities and a medical exam. He also needed permission from one of his parents. Moon was required to sign an agreement that if he did not reach the height of six feet he would leave the Scots Guards and revert to regular military duty “upon reaching the age of man service.” As a boy soldier, Moon applied for training as a Drummer Boy.

** The author gratefully acknowledges the substantial contribution of Bill White whose reviews, insights, recommendations, additional text and edits greatly improved this biography.*

After first receiving training in warfare, tactics and weapons, Moon was posted to the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards at Windsor Castle as a Drummer Boy where his musical training continued. By the age of 17 years and 6 months he was a fully trained Guardsman and Drummer and he was assigned to the 1st Battalion Scots Guards at Chelsea Barracks in London. At the age of 23 years and 3 days Moon became the youngest drum major in the history of the Brigade of Guards. Moon was later appointed Senior Drum Major of the Brigade of Guards, then Senior Drum Major of the British Army and in 1953, by “Royal Warrant,” he was appointed “a Drummer to the Royal Household,” a position he held for the remainder of his life.

On seven different occasions he oversaw the Massed Bands and Massed Pipes and Drums at the world-renowned Edinburgh International Festival Tattoo. He also was responsible for providing the music for the daily Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace, the Guard Mounting from Horse Guards, the Annual Cenotaph Ceremony, and most importantly, The Queen’s Birthday Parade (often miscalled the Trooping of the Colour). He retired from the Scots Guards in 1962, moved his family to British Columbia, Canada, and directed the Powell River Pipe Band.



Drum Major John Moon, Scots Guards deployed in Egypt 1956.



Scots Guards Pipes and Drums, Drum Major John Moon at Windsor Castle 1950s.



THE MALL , RETURNING FROM QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY PARADE
SENIOR DRUM MAJOR , 1960

In 1966, Moon and his family moved to Long Island, New York, where he worked for Jennings Jones, Ltd., a firm that supplied ceremonial equipment, military regalia and emblazoned drums to the U.S. military service bands. During this time he traveled extensively to military bases to teach bands and drum majors around the United States. In 1968, Moon became Director of Music at the United States Merchant Marine Academy at King's Point, New York.

Following the resignation of George Carroll as Musick Master/Drum Major of the CWF&D in the summer of 1971, Colonial Williamsburg began a search for his replacement.

Moon recalls:

During late October I received two calls from Bill Hammes, then Assistant Director of Craft Shops, ascertaining my credentials and testing any mutual interest in my considering the position of Musick Master at Colonial Williamsburg. November found me traveling down to Williamsburg for a series of interviews with Foundation officers.... In a hectic and pressured two days I was interviewed by Carlisle Humelsine, the President of CWF, Mills Brown and Jimmy Fuller of Personnel, Peter Brown, then Vice President of the Historic Area, Earl Soles, then Director of Craft Shops, Bill Hammes, his assistant and James Darling, the Foundation's Music Consultant. In addition, a demonstration was arranged to allow me to meet the current program staff and to hear the current players perform.

Moon recalled a meeting with Carlisle Humelsine, the President of Colonial Williamsburg. "I met with Mr. Humelsine and he asked me what I needed. I said, 'one year without interference.' Mr. Humelsine said, 'I will give you two' and we shook hands. That's all it took to finalize the agreement. Mr. Humelsine was a great supporter of the Corps. I never wanted for anything."

Moon accepted the position and arrived for work as the new Musick Master/Drum Major on January 2, 1972. By that time the Corps had successfully weathered seven months without a named supervisor. Moon recognized the role Herb Watson and Bill White had played to keep the Corps together during those interim months and retained them both on staff. Moon recalls:

During my first discussions with them I decided that, rather than follow the rule of 'a new broom sweeping clean', I would retain them, learn from them, and acknowledge the difficult task they had undertaken...and survived...over the previous months. This decision was important in many respects. It postulates one of many philosophies I embrace, that of promoting from within, by internal recruiting. It also offered a degree of deserved trust and recognition to the incumbents. I can't give enough praise to Bill and Herb for surviving the transition.

The experience of the 1971 Senior Corps, together with the leadership of Watson and White, also deserve credit for the success of the Corps during the previous seven months after Carroll's departure. Many of these Senior Corps members had been in the Corps for seven years and they provided the experience and momentum to help keep the Corps performing and operational.

January and February found Moon absorbed in orientation, uniform fittings and learning about the Corps and how it fit in at Colonial Williamsburg.

Moon's first directive was "all activities will start on time," which he described as "a nice and easy policy that all could understand..." He also remembers "having heard the fifers and drummers perform in November, I had promised myself that my first musical adjustment would be that of introducing dynamics to an acceptable level by marking all drum scores with volume

signs, then enforcing their usage. The drummers, by nature, rebelled against such heavy-handed measures, but the tacit support of the fifers was evident to all.”

In February Colonial Williamsburg arranged for a reception for the Corps’ parents to meet the new director. That reception evolved in 1976 to become the annual parents’ meetings, which have been held yearly ever since. Moon said, “it was a way to tell them thank you for the use of your offspring.”

In August of 1972, the Corps embarked upon a Corps trip that performed at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Gettysburg and Valley Forge National Park. Subsequently, Moon made a decision to stop trips to New England fife and drum musters and no trips to New England musters were taken until after Moon retired.



1972 trip at U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

White remembers that Moon brought a firm approach to the Corps members and their parents, which White summarized as, “This is your son’s job. You can’t come down here and fix it for him. He has to fix it for himself.” While Moon implemented strict policies, White also saw that he had a light side. The seniors in the Corps often tested him. Moon was firm, but he also had a sense of humor.

In the spring of 1972, publicity shots were scheduled with the Corps in regimentals and Moon in his full British Drum Major uniform that included a kilt. While assembling in the main room at the old Courthouse, one of the drummers, Harry Lacher, put his arm around Moon and asked for a date. “John chased him around the room three times,” recalls White.



1972 publicity photos.



On the 1972 summer trip to West Point, several of the seniors decided that Moon needed to be “initiated” into the Corps. They grabbed him to throw him into the outdoor hotel pool. Moon, however, was not going to go down without a fight. He grabbed on to Greg Kyte and would

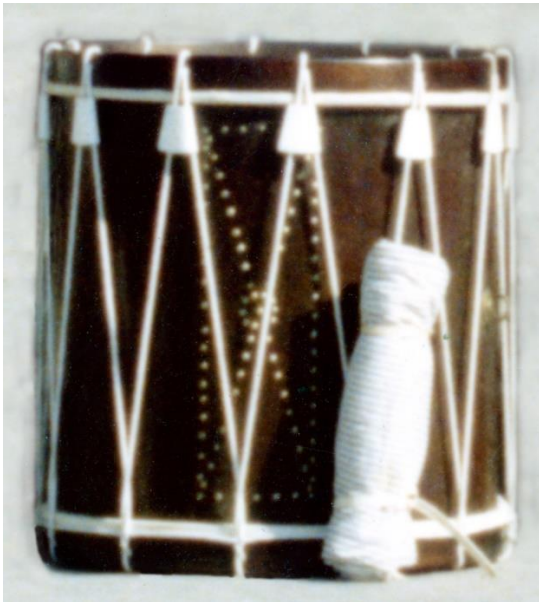
not let go. Both of them went into the pool. As Moon went to his room to change, one of the other adult chaperones could be heard saying, “Don’t let those juvenile delinquents in the room.” One can surmise that Moon had seen plenty of such antics during his years in the British Army and that he felt they were part of the transition process. White recalls that Moon “was good natured about these kinds of things and we sensed he was fitting in.”



1972 Senior Corps.

Moon established the keeping of records on all current and graduating members and the Corps’ rules and regulations were revised. The record keeping included establishing “issue numbers,” starting with 001, which has continued in sequence to this day.

Over the years Moon oversaw the acquisition of a number of sets of drums. In 1973, a new set of drums from Rose-Morris in London was acquired. In addition, several drums with the “Soistman” tack design were acquired from Charles “Buck” Soistman. These drums matched Soistman tack design drums acquired earlier by the Corps at different times beginning in 1962, and the older and new drums combined made a complete set. Later acquisitions of drums ordered by Moon included the first set of drums for the Corps made by Pat Cooperman in 1980. These drums were designated for the Junior Corps. In 1981 Moon ordered a set of drums from Bill Reamer. These drums had a unique “SGR” tack design and snare strainer design created by White, and they are known as the “SGR” drums. In 1987, a set of drums ordered by Moon from Pat Cooperman was delivered for the Senior Corps.



1973 Rose Morris.



1980 Cooperman for Junior Corps.



1981 Reamer "SGR."



1987 Cooperman for Senior Corps.

In May of 1973, the Powder Magazine and the militia program were put under Moon's management. Over the next few years music programs including the Musick Teacher's Room and evening concerts were added to this portfolio. To replace Gaoler-Guardsmen who had elected to move from the Gaol and Powder Magazine to other Exhibition Buildings, chosen Corps members began training as interpreters in the Powder Magazine, which allowed them to be employed as casual relief during the summer months. Since the beginning of the Corps, alumni, mostly college students, had regularly been hired as Gaoler-Guardsmen to work as casual relief during summers, holiday seasons, and weekends, and all of them were in the Militia. These Corps alumni, as Militiamen, often show up in photographs of the Corps over the years.



Militia Muster early 1970's.



1973 Senior Corps.



John Moon marching with the Junior Corps early 1970's.

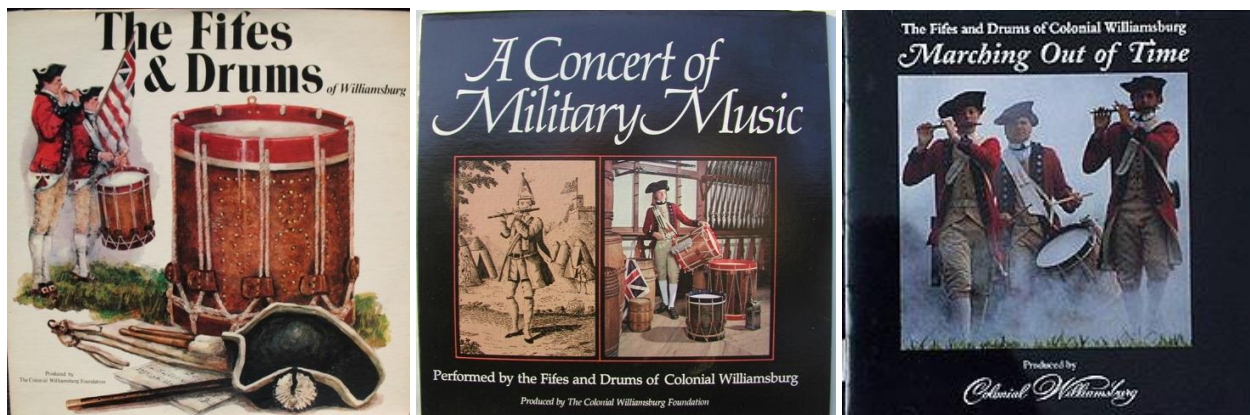
In support of military programs and the Corps, a decision was made to focus on the Virginia State Garrison Regiment based on research by White. This unit was raised in Williamsburg by an Act of Assembly in the Capitol Building. More important, this unit was garrisoned the City of Williamsburg and guarded the Powder Magazine. This allowed an authentic presentation of regular troops and their field music during 1778 to 1781, a key period of Williamsburg's military history. The small clothes of the Corps were died buff to match the uniform worn by the SGR and a new set of regimentals were ordered for the Corps and military programs.

In September the Corps hosted the last Field Musick Day. Getting other corps to attend had been a problem because there was a tradition in New England of camping at the musters, but Colonial Williamsburg could not provide such arrangements.

In the 1960s new Corps members were admitted a few at a time to replace exiting Corps members and to enlarge the growing Junior Corps that, in turn, would enlarge the Senior Corps. This practice resulted in multiple starting dates each year for new recruits. By the 1970's a lengthy waiting list had developed. Parents began putting names on the list when their children were born. Moon reorganized the recruitment system. In February 1975 the Corps brought in its first full recruit "class" of ten fife and eight drum recruits. A second class entered in September. These recruit classes became annual occurrences and were a big improvement over past admission practice. The classes were more efficient and allowed groups of fifers and drummers to be trained and progress together.



In August 1974 the Corps recorded its second album, *The Fifes and Drums of Colonial Williamsburg*. Unlike the Corps' first album in 1968 that was shared with the Band of Musick, this album, which was released in 1975, was dedicated only to the music of the Corps. The recording sessions took place in the main room of the Corps' headquarters in the 1932 Courthouse Building. Moon also directed the Corps in another two albums: *A Concert of Military Music*, in 1978, and *Marching Out of Time*, in 1987.



These also were the years of the American Revolution Bicentennial and Moon played a key role in the development of Colonial Williamsburg's commemoration. His leadership of those events also insured that the Corps would be prominently highlighted. The series kicked off with a unique light and sound program on the night of April 20, 1975, to depict the 200th anniversary of the incident when British Marines removed gunpowder from the Powder Magazine on April 20, 1775, coincidentally one day after the British attempted to do the same thing at Concord, Massachusetts, but were met with the "shot heard around the world" on April 19, 1775.

The July 4th, 1976, celebration was broadcast on CBS with Roger Mudd. On July 25th, the Corps performed in the 200th anniversary celebration of the first reading of the Declaration of Independence in Williamsburg. The Corps also performed for the Prime Minister of Ireland and at the opening of the Yorktown Victory Center. In September of 1978 the Corps traveled to Philadelphia to participate in the Von Steuben Day celebrations.

On October 18, 1981, the Corps marched the entire 15 miles from Market Square in Williamsburg to Yorktown to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the victory at Yorktown. The 7 ½ hour March was, and remains, the longest in the Corps' history. President Ronald Reagan with French President Francois Mitterrand attended the Yorktown celebration the following day, October 19, 1981. That evening President Reagan hosted a state dinner for Mitterrand in celebration of the nation's bicentennial at the Governor's Palace where Moon and other Colonial Williamsburg musicians performed.



March to Yorktown, October 18, 1981.



March to Yorktown, October 18, 1981.



President Ronald Reagan and French President Francois Mitterrand -- State Dinner at the Governor's Palace, October 19, 1981



President Reagan, President Mitterrand, and John Moon -- State Dinner at the Governor's Palace, October 19, 1981

Moon was responsible for providing significant opportunities for Corps members. In September 1976 members of the Corps were finally recognized as Colonial Williamsburg employees and became “Juvenile Performers”. According to Moon:

Collaboration with the Employee Department resulted in our deciding to apply for Theatrical Work Permits for all student members, allowing us greater flexibility in their hours required to perform. The forms for application were received from Richmond and this important administrative step was completed by the end of the month, with members, their parents and supervisors signing the documents. From now on, regardless of internal nomenclature, the students were officially designated as Juvenile Performers.

Work opportunities grew significantly as well. The performance schedule expanded significantly, especially during the summer months. By the summer of 1975 the Corps, or members of the Corps, were performing seven days a week through the summer. Fifers and

drummers were added to the summer staff at the Powder Magazine and to performances at the Musick Teacher's Room. In addition, fifers and drummers playing tin whistles and bodhrans began moving throughout the Historic Area entertaining visitors waiting to enter exhibition buildings and trades shops.

Under Moon's leadership the Fifes and Drums continued to be a key attraction at Colonial Williamsburg and the Foundation's chief public relations ambassador. In March 1977, Moon received the results of a Colonial Williamsburg visitor survey conducted in 1976. He remembered:

A Foundation survey held in 1976 was shared with departments and showed that the Fifes and Drums were the most popular, and the most well-remembered experience of our visitors, which prompted internal discussions as to upgrading and expanding the program even more.

In the following years there were any number of significant events, programs, television appearances, and public relations tours featuring the Corps. In April 1975, the Corps performed for a visit of *HMS Ark Royal*. In June the Corps performed for the West German Chancellor.

In 1975 The Corps performed at a welcoming ceremony at Patrick Henry Airport for Emperor Hirohito and Empress Nagaka of Japan. The July 4th ceremony that year was attended by Alexandre Solshenitsyn, and then the Corps performed at Ft. Monroe for a combined concert with the Army's Continental Army Band. On July 27th the Corps performed at Fort Eustis for the 200th anniversary of the Chaplaincy. In October the Corps performed in the William & Mary Sunset Parade in the Sunken Garden, and for Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. In January 1976, the Corps performed for President Gerald R. Ford. The Corps also played for the 50th anniversary Celebration for Colonial Williamsburg.

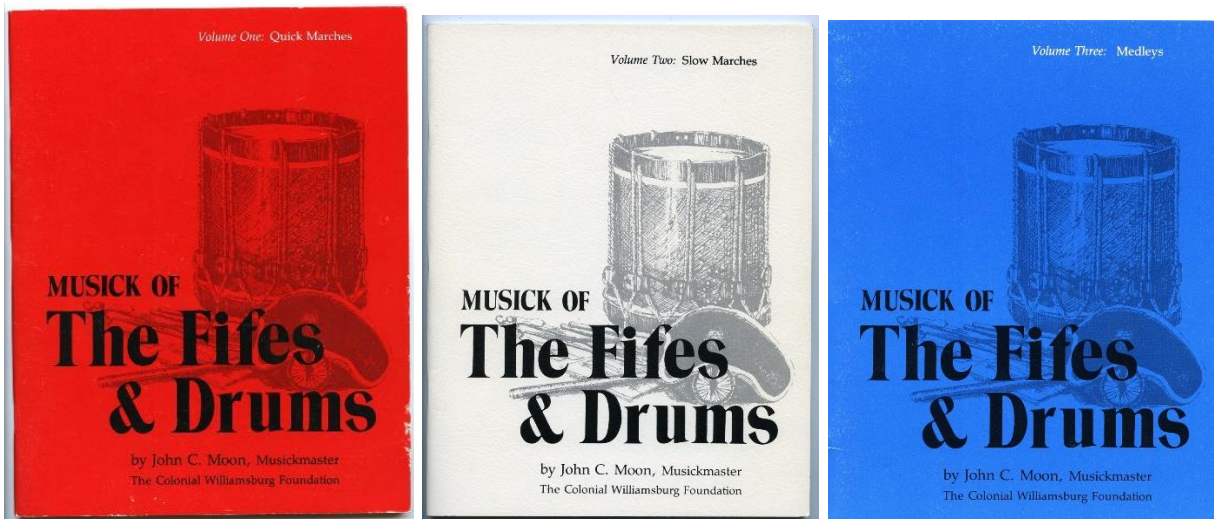


1975 performance at Fort Eustis.



1976 Moon and White confer before a performance.

Music research and arranging was one key focus of Moon's work with the Corps. Under his direction hundreds of new scores and drum beatings entered the Corps' repertoire. Library searches both in the United States and Britain were a key part of this work. Under Moon's leadership the Corps assembled one of the largest collections of 18th and early 19th century military and popular tune books and drum scores. His collaboration and correspondence with music scholars enhanced our understanding of period field music. He was a frequent teacher and speaker at forums and workshops. In addition, Moon published a series of music works including: *Musick of the Fifes and Drums: Quick Marches*; *Musick of the Fifes and Drums: Slow Marches*; *Musick of the Fifes and Drums: Medleys*; and *An Instructor for the Drum*. No one can listen to the American fife and drum lexicon of today without acknowledging the profound impact of John Moon.





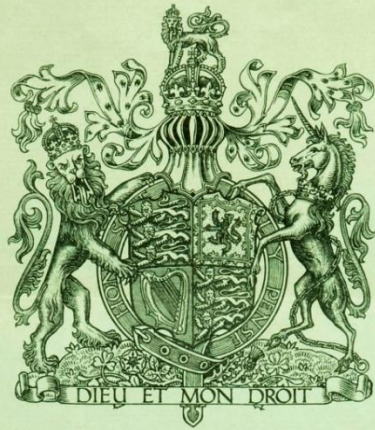
1976 Colonial Williamsburg 50th Anniversary photograph of the Corps.

In August of 1978 the Corps traveled to Toronto, Canada, to perform at the Canadian National Exposition, Old Ft. George in Canada, and Old Ft. Niagara, New York.

In November the ABC-TV Perry Como Colonial Williamsburg Christmas Show was taped in Williamsburg. John Wayne was a guest star on the show and Corps members had an opportunity to meet and talk with him during filming in the Governor's Palace gardens.

In May 1980, the Corps played for His Royal Highness Prince Charles of Great Britain. After the performance, Prince Charles approached Moon and said, "You must have been a drum major in the British Army." Moon replied "Yes sir! And I used to work for your mother; what made you ask?" Prince Charles replied, "I recognized the drum covers being rolled properly." Prince Charles also asked about why the shoes and belt buckles of the Corps were not polished. Moon replied they would have been "clean but not polished" in the 18th century. Then Prince Charles asked if Moon had a "Warrant" and John replied that he did. "He was quite pleased" recalls Moon. The "Warrant" Prince Charles referred to was from the Royal Household designating Moon as "a Drummer to the Royal Household."





LORD CHAMBERLAIN'S OFFICE.

These are to Certify that
2705311 Sergeant (Drum Major) A. Moon
is, by The Queen's Command, hereby appointed ^{Scots Guards}
into the Place and Quality of a Drummer to
the Royal Household

To have, hold, exercise and enjoy
the said Place, together with all Rights, Profits, Privileges
and Advantages thereunto belonging.

This Appointment to be during Her Majesty's
Pleasure and to become void on the death of the Sovereign.

Given under my Hand and Seal
this twenty-ninth day of August 1953
in the second Year of Her Majesty's Reign

Scarborough



1953 John Moon's Royal Warrant.

In 1978, the decision was made to construct a new specially designed building for the Corps. Moon had lobbied for such a building since 1972. Over the years the Corps had been shuffled from one building to another and it was time for the Corps to have its own home. The decision may have had some divine intervention. During a visit to the Corps' headquarters in the 1932 Courthouse by CW President Charles R. Longworth, Moon was giving Longworth a tour and lobbying for a new building. Suddenly, several pieces of tile fell from the ceiling narrowly missing them and they both joked there was a message in the near miss.

Construction of the new Fifes and Drums Building began in the summer of 1978. By March of 1981 the new Fifes and Drums Building was completed. The new building was one of Moon's most important contributions to the Corps. One year later an article in *Williamsburg's Public Observer* noted "after one year's use by 145 boys ages 8-18, the walls bear not a single piece of graffiti." The article then quoted Moon, "I've threatened each of them with death if there's one mark on this building."

On June 6, 1981, the official dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony of the Fife and Drum building was held. Moon chose Jonathan Hugins, the youngest member of the Senior Corps, to cut the ribbon. The new building was specially designed for the Corps and included numerous energy-saving features. One particularly unique design was to vent the drum storage room to the outside. This was to allow the drums to be stored in the same humidity as the outside. Otherwise, storing the drums "inside" would subject them to dryer humidity and the constant changes between the two are harmful to the drums, particularly the calfskin heads.



1981 newly constructed Fifes and Drums Building.



1981 interior of Fifes and Drums Building.



Fifes and Drums Building dedication June 6, 1981.



Charles Longworth, Jonathan Hugins, and John Moon cutting the ribbon at the June 6, 1981, dedication of the Fifes and Drums Building.

May of 1983 saw the Corps undertake one of its most demanding and high-profile assignments, when it repeatedly performed for the Economic Summit of Industrial Nations meeting in Williamsburg. Among those attending were President Ronald Reagan, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, French President Francois Mitterrand, and German Prime Minister Helmut Kohl.

Moon summarized the Corps' performance as follows:

The largest involvement with the State Department was experienced with President Reagan hosting the Economic Summit of the Industrial Nations.... It is worth mentioning here that the Senior Corps and SGR were required to attend every official arrival and departure of the seven Heads of States as well as to support many other functions and receptions over the Summit period. I believe this pressure-packed time to be the culmination of all the work and effort that had gone into training the Corps to be the best in the country at its given roles. Local schools and parents were most helpful in allowing our members to make up work at other times so that they could have the experience of performing important ceremonies for such an occasion. Great credit must go to Bill White for his sterling work in leading this group of young men to be alert and performance-ready at all hours of day and night, and be prepared for last-minute changes as a matter of form.



Departure ceremony for President Reagan – Economic Summit of Industrialized Nations, May 1983.



Departure ceremony for President Reagan – Economic Summit of Industrialized Nations, May 1983.

In 1984 the Corps performed at Capital Square in Richmond for the kickoff of the first vacation photography contest, receiving TV and newspaper coverage in Richmond. The Corps also played with the Scots Guard military band and Black Watch at SCOPE in Norfolk. In June the Corps played for a visit by Virginia Governor Charles S. Robb and the Governor of Bermuda.



Staff photo by DAVID BOWMAN

Washington's birthday

George Washington, flanked by an aide and a flag carrier, inspects the troops Monday on Market Square Green in Colonial Williamsburg.

Washington is portrayed by Ben Gilbert. The event, part of a weekend of activities for Washington's birthday, was attended by about 2,000

people. Over a 30-year period, Washington made about 55 trips to Williamsburg, including a honeymoon in 1759.

2-19-85



Photo taken for the Marching Out of Time Album in 1987.

The Corps appeared in a 1986 taping of ABC's "Good Morning America" show. The Corps also made a trip to perform at the LSU-Notre Dame football game half-time show in the Superdome in New Orleans.

In June of 1987 the Corps traveled to Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan. The Corps would return there in 1990.



1987 Greenfield Village.

The Corps also traveled to Philadelphia for the 200th anniversary of the Constitutional Procession, and to B. Altman's Department Store in New York City for a promotion of its Williamsburg Christmas Shop. In 1987, the Corps also played at the Langley AFB Tactical Air Command (TAC) Tattoo.



1989 cover of the CW Journal.

In August of 1992, the Corps performed at the Langley Air Force Base Air Combat Command Tattoo and made a tour of several Revolutionary War sites in New York, Massachusetts, and Canada. The Corps played at Old Ft. Niagara, New York, Ft. George, Ontario, and Ft. Ticonderoga, New York. The final stop was at the Old North Bridge, Concord, Massachusetts.



1992 Fort George, Ontario, Canada.

In all these performances and more, Moon impressed on his young charges that they represented the United States, the Commonwealth of Virginia, Colonial Williamsburg, and most important, the Corps. As ambassadors their work ethic, professionalism, precision, and musicianship reflected on themselves and the Corps. Moon cultivated an *esprit de corps* was intrinsic to every Corps member's experience.

Moon was promoted to Director of the Company of Colonial Performers (CCP) in 1980 with responsibility for all Colonial Williamsburg's performing arts programming, actor interpreters, and African American programming. As a condition of accepting the position Moon asked that it be of a short time period so he could revert back to leading the Corps. He returned to focus on and lead the Corps again in 1985.

In 1993 Moon retired after 20 years with Colonial Williamsburg. However, he continued to be involved actively with the Corps as a volunteer. He continued his teaching and maintained an office in the Fifes and Drums Building while he reorganized the music library. In 2007 he met Her Royal Majesty Queen Elizabeth during her visit to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown.

He regularly served as the Master of Ceremonies at evening performances at the Kimball Theatre during Drummers Call. In 2008 during the Corps' 50th anniversary he drum majored the alumni corps of alumni from his era. It was his last time drum majoring down the Duke of Gloucester Street and on Market Square.



2008 50th anniversary of the Corps, John Moon drum majoring the alumni corps from his era for the last time.







A proud John Moon watches over the alumni and current CWF&D on Market Square during the Corps' 50th anniversary in 2008.

Moon's contributions to Colonial Williamsburg, the Fifes and Drums, and the military music community were significant. Generations of visitors to Colonial Williamsburg, local residents, musicians, and Corps members were touched by and continue to be influenced by his music, his research, his teaching, and the performances he created.