



The Apprentice – Williamsburg Style

Twelve year-old Henry awoke at dawn on a chilly December morning, reluctant to toss off his warm covers. He slept in the unheated attic of his master's house and he knew the floor would be cold under his feet. Marcy, the housekeeper, was already in the warm kitchen preparing breakfast. Henry knew it was his job to make sure the fires in the rest of the house were lit and rooms warmed before the family awoke.

Henry wriggled out of his long nightshirt and donned his cold clothes. He scampered downstairs and washed his face quickly with some warm water Marcy prepared for him.

"Good morning Henry," she said. "I have a Johnny cake and some hot tea ready for you after you light the fires."

After Henry got the logs burning in the dining and living room fireplaces, he sat down for a quick breakfast in the kitchen with Marcy, a black slave. Henry was an apprentice to Mr. Wilson who was a cabinet-maker. Henry and his parents signed a contract with Mr. Wilson to teach Henry to be a cabinet-maker too.

Henry would live with Mr. Wilson's family until he was sixteen in 1784, promising to be a faithful servant. In exchange for Henry's work, Mr. Wilson would provide Henry with food, lodging, clothing and laundry in addition to teaching him the cabinet-maker's trade. Henry could not leave Mr. Wilson's house without his permission and Henry could not sell any of the merchandise he made.

"Thank you for the breakfast," Henry said to Marcy as he put on his coat. "I need to get the fire lit in the workshop and the tools ready for the day. Today Mr. Wilson will be working on Dame Anderson's new dining table."

Henry scampered off to the workshop which was the small building behind the house. He knew Mr. Wilson would be upset if the shop wasn't ready when it was time to start working.