



## **Williamsburg Bray School Project Awarded \$5M from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s Monuments Project**

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (Feb. 19, 2022) — The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has awarded a \$5-million grant supporting the [Williamsburg Bray School Project](#), an initiative spearheaded by The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and William & Mary. This collaborative project focuses on preserving, relocating, researching and restoring the Bray School. The grant will support the work of the foundation and William & Mary, advancing the project that began after an announcement of the Bray School’s discovery was made last year.

The school is believed to be the only remaining Colonial-era building in the country that was dedicated to the education of Black children. The Williamsburg Bray School was a British-chartered institution that operated from 1760-1774 with a mission to impart Christian education to Black children and the deeply flawed purpose of directing the enslaved to accept their circumstances as divinely ordained.

“The Bray School Project will help us tell a more complete story of our nation’s complex history of race, religion and education,” said Cliff Fleet, president and CEO of Colonial Williamsburg. “This is particularly important today as our country navigates its way through these divisive times. We are very grateful to the Mellon Foundation and President Elizabeth Alexander for enabling us to partner with our colleagues at William & Mary to develop meaningful public programs while relocating and restoring this historic structure in time for the 250th anniversary of the Bray School’s closing in 2024.”

The project is a partnership that can only happen in Williamsburg, where the structure and the historical narratives are tied specifically to the Williamsburg community, Colonial Williamsburg and William & Mary. Restoring the Bray School will allow the building to function as a monument honoring the more than 400 enslaved and free Black children who were instructed at the school prior to the American Revolution.

The grant is part of the [Mellon Foundation’s Monuments Project](#), a five-year, \$250 million initiative launched in 2020 to reimagine and rebuild commemorative spaces and transform the way history is told in the U.S. The investment represents the largest grant ever awarded to Colonial Williamsburg by the Mellon Foundation and is among the Mellon Foundation’s largest Monuments Project grants to date.

“For far too long, crucial voices have been missing from the stories we tell about William & Mary’s past — and that of our nation,” said W&M President Katherine A. Rowe. “We are grateful for the opportunity to listen to the voices of Bray School students and their families through sustained research and to amplify their stories for all to hear. Thanks to the Mellon Foundation’s

support and our partnership with Colonial Williamsburg, we can learn from those stories, acknowledge historical injustices and work toward a more inclusive future.”

In 2021, researchers from Colonial Williamsburg and W&M announced they had identified the original Williamsburg Bray School. The building’s frame, currently tucked inside a contemporary building on William & Mary’s campus, will be recovered and relocated several blocks to Colonial Williamsburg’s Historic Area at the intersection of Francis and South Nassau streets. It will become the Foundation’s 89th original 18th-century building, and the first restored by the Foundation since the 1960s.

“Through their transformational Monuments Project, the Mellon Foundation’s grant will greatly advance our efforts to restore the Bray School,” said Ronald L. Hurst, Colonial Williamsburg Carlisle H. Humelsine chief curator and vice president for museums, preservation and historic resources. “The restored structure will become a key interpretive venue for onsite guests, ensuring that previously untold stories will contribute to an ongoing reexamination of our past and present, and reflection on our future.”

In addition to funding the preservation, relocation and restoration of the Bray School, the Mellon Foundation’s grant will support the development and implementation of public programming to educate visitors about the school’s complicated history. Genealogy work and oral history interviews conducted by the [William & Mary Bray School Lab](#) will inform Colonial Williamsburg’s future interpretive programs.

Two groups are ensuring broad regional and local community representation: the Bray School Board, composed of key collaborators from both sides of the partnership and the museum community, and the Bray School Advisory Council, which is made up of regional leaders, educators, museum curators and historians. Another advisory group, the Bray School National Impact Committee, will convene renowned artists, public figures, academic scholars, museum leaders and media specialists to share the school’s story with national and international audiences.

“Education and cultural awareness have the potential to transform lives, bridge divides, enhance understanding and foster tolerance,” said Ann Marie Stock, presidential liaison for strategic cultural partnerships and chancellor professor of modern languages and literatures at William & Mary. “Combining the talents and resources of a leading public university and a renowned living history museum, with generous support from the Mellon Foundation and other donors and significant community participation, we are activating that potential.”

The Monuments Project is a signature initiative of Mellon Foundation President Elizabeth Alexander. The project seeks to ensure that future generations inherit a memorial landscape that venerates and reflects the rich complexity of the American experience, and tells a fuller, more inclusive story of history.

“The Williamsburg Bray School Project monumentalizes significant small acts of liberation in our country’s history — those of enslaved and free Black children learning to read and write at a time and in a place where formal schooling was rare and Black potential was suppressed,” said Alexander. “By restoring the Bray School, we restore our knowledge of the vital stories of the Bray School children, of the families and friends to whom the children brought their learning, and of the capacious power of education. We are honored to support this work with the Monuments Project, which aims to elevate and celebrate stories like these throughout the United States.”

Investigation and stabilization of the Bray School structure will take place in 2022, as will site prep at its future location. The building will be moved in late 2022 or early 2023. Plans call for the restoration to be completed by fall 2024. For more information about the Williamsburg Bray School visit [colonialwilliamsburg.org/brayschool](http://colonialwilliamsburg.org/brayschool).

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#### ***About The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation***

*The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation preserves, restores and operates Virginia's 18th-century capital of Williamsburg. Innovative and interactive experiences highlight the relevance of the American Revolution to contemporary life and the importance of an informed, active citizenry. The Colonial Williamsburg experience includes more than 600 restored or reconstructed original buildings, renowned museums of decorative arts and folk art, extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers, lodging, culinary options from historic taverns to casual or elegant dining, the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club featuring 45 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones and his son Rees Jones, a full-service spa and fitness center, pools, retail stores and gardens. Philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and hospitality operations sustain Colonial Williamsburg's educational programs and preservation initiatives.*

#### ***About William & Mary***

*Founded by Royal Charter in 1693, William & Mary is the second oldest institution of higher learning in the country. The Alma Mater of the Nation is a preeminent university, combining the depth and breadth of a liberal arts and sciences education with the disciplined exploration and innovation of a leading, global research university. A vibrant and inclusive community, William & Mary cultivates creative thinkers, principled leaders and compassionate global citizens equipped for lives of meaning and distinction. As a "Public Ivy," the university convenes great minds and hearts to meet the most pressing needs of our time. William & Mary's graduate program in U.S. Colonial history was recently named the best in the country, according to **rankings** by U.S. News & World Report.*

#### ***About the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation***

*The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, a not-for-profit corporation under the laws of the State of New York, was formed on June 30, 1969, through a consolidation of two foundations — the Avalon Foundation and the Old Dominion Foundation. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation believes the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and we believe that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence and freedom to be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive.*

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