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Becoming a voice for their ancestors

Excavations begin at Williamsburg's First Baptist Church site

By Madison Peck
Staff Writer

WILLIAMSBURG — Descendants, archaeologists and researchers alike gathered Monday for the long-awaited beginning of burial excavations at the original First Baptist Church site.

The First Baptist Church descendant community unanimously voted in March to begin excavating three grave shafts in order to learn the race, age, sex and anything else about the people buried on the site. Since archaeologists began digging in September 2020, the original foundation of the church, a structure dating to 1865, and 41 graves have been identified.

Members of several congregations who are descendants of early Williamsburg residents gathered to view the opening of the graves. The ancestral blessing ceremony that was performed before the work began included a mix of prayers and song — a solemn and moving moment, said Connie Matthews Harshaw, president of the Let Freedom Ring

Foundation. The group has been working since 2018 to preserve the church, its history and artifacts that date to the 18th century.

“My heart is full. It was a moving tribute this morning. The day was all about the descendants,” Harshaw said. “We wanted the descendants to have an opportunity to voice what their ancestors may be thinking or saying.”

The 41 burial sites, which are rectangular holes about two feet wide and five feet deep, have been primarily identified because of their surface appearance, according to The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. One of the chosen graves was marked by an upside-down wine bottle, making it the only marked grave identified so far.

The process will take about two months. It will include confirming the presence of human remains, determining how long they've been there and assessing if the conditions permit further testing. If conditions allow, osteological and DNA testing will be

Turn to Ancestors, Page 4



Colonial Williamsburg Director of Archaeology Jack Gary answers questions about the burial excavation process following the ancestral blessing ceremony held at the Nassau Street Site of First Baptist Church on Monday. COURTESY OF LET FREEDOM RING FOUNDATION



High school students take part in the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's Public Archaeology Institute, which gives them an opportunity to better understand the work of archaeologists through hands-on experiences. MADISON PEEK

Getting their hands dirty

Archaeology program offers real-world experience to high schoolers

By Madison Peck
Staff Writer

WILLIAMSBURG — Ten high school students huddled around 1-by-1 meter squares dotting the earth, digging for artifacts of the old Eastern State Hospital building.

The students sat in the heat, pulling out small items and showing them to the archaeological staff from Colonial Williamsburg, who told them stories about the history of Eastern State and their work so far.

The program that brought the students to the Custis Square site was the Public Archaeology Institute, in which high schoolers experience what it's like to be a full-time archaeologist for a week.

The program, run by The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, is in its second year but has quickly become popular. This year there were 50 applications for the 20 spots.

“They essentially jump in [as if] they have



A 1964 photograph shows excavators at two Custis Square wells and the excavated Custis mansion cellar hole. In the background is part of Eastern State Hospital's former building. THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION

Turn to Dirty, Page 7

WILLIAM & MARY

Business school dean looks to future

By Sian Wilkerson
Staff Writer

WILLIAMSBURG — William & Mary's new dean of the Raymond A. Mason School of Business is ready to start a new journey.

It's something of a homecoming for Todd Mooradian, who will begin his new role August 15. Mooradian previously taught at William & Mary for nearly 30 years before leaving in 2017 to serve as dean of the College of Business at the University of Louisville.



Though Mooradian Mooradian will be on familiar ground in Williamsburg, it's the modernity of the school around him that he's looking forward to joining.

“This is starting a new job,” he said. “William & Mary is very different than it was when I left, even though that was only 5½ years ago. And I'm a different person. ... Both William & Mary and I have changed and I think saying that I'm returning evokes the idea of William & Mary's past, and this is a break from the past. William & Mary is moving forward and looking forward with real excitement.”

Mooradian will succeed Lawrence Pulley, who is retiring after 24 years as dean.

In addition to teaching for several years at William & Mary, Mooradian, who owns a house in Gloucester County with his wife, Paula, also served for three years as associate dean at the business school.

At Louisville, Mooradian helped develop and launch three new programs as well as overseeing the development of non-degree micro-credentials. In 2020, he was awarded the William J. Rothwell Award for outstanding service in the university's development effort.

“An experienced leader and scholar, Dr. Mooradian has a deep appreciation for William & Mary's learning mission,” William & Mary president Katherine Rowe said in a statement. “We are delighted to welcome him back. Under Vision 2026, William & Mary will graduate principled, data-savvy professionals who are prepared to thrive in every stage of their careers. Todd Mooradian will advance these goals of curricular innovation with dedication and verve.”

Mooradian's return to the area and to the school is happening as William & Mary is already embarking on its strategic plan with Vision 2026.

Turn to Business, Page 4



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Archaeology program at Colonial Williamsburg grants hands-on experience to high schoolers

By Madison Peek
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Expand



Thomas Ray (left) and Natalie Herman are two of the 20 students who took part in The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's Public Archaeology Institute, which allows high schoolers to experience what it's like to be a full-time archaeologist for a week. Madison Peek/staff (Madison Peek)

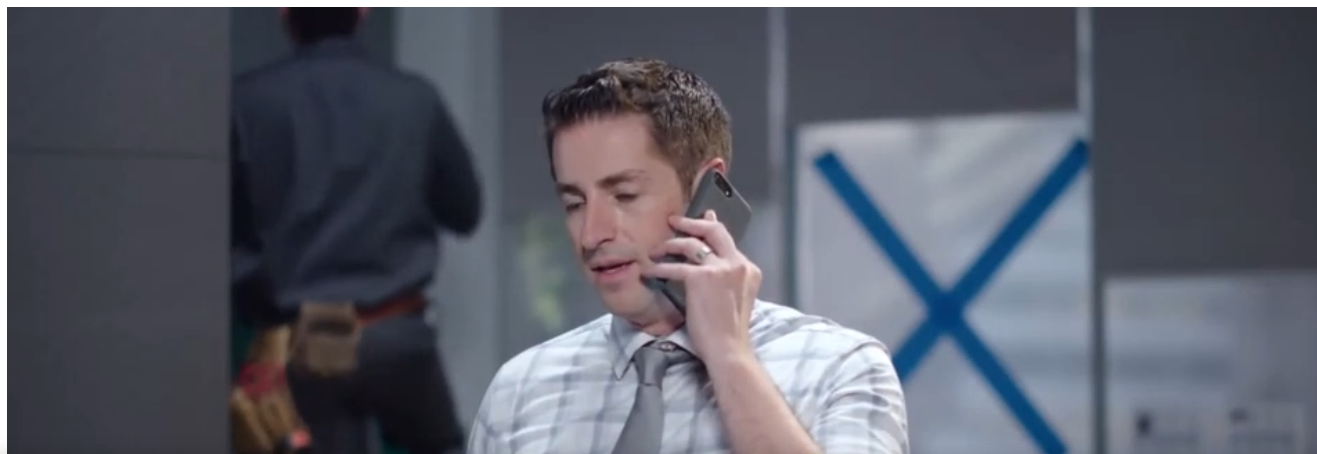
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The program that brought the students to the [Custis Square site](#) was the Public Archaeology Institute, in which high schoolers experience what it's like to be a full-time archaeologist for a week. The program, run by The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, is in its second year but has quickly become popular. This year there were 50 applications for the 20 spots.

“They essentially jump in [like] they have always been doing this. They learn as they go,” said Crystal Castleberry, a Colonial Williamsburg archaeologist. “They dig an entire test unit with a partner and they sort of work through the process with their partner and with the team leaders that we have on site.”



The Custis Square site in Colonial Williamsburg, where high school students participated in a program that let them work as archaeologists. Madison Peek/staff (Madison Peek)

The ongoing project students worked on was digging in Custis Square to learn more about the Eastern State Hospital. The building the group was analyzing was built in the 1890s after the original hospital structure burned down. The 1890s building was bulldozed in 1968 and turned into a cow pasture, so the group has found well-preserved foundations, artifacts and lots of rubble, Castleberry said.

The 1890s hospital building looked like “the scariest mental hospital building you can conjure up,” complet

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By analyzing the remains of the hospital building, students and archaeologists can learn about the history of the hospital and how mental health care was treated over the years. Williamsburg was the site of the first mental health hospital in the country and has had “every iteration” of mental health care in the almost 250 years the hospital has been established.

Students learn about the history of the hospital, conduct digs and log the artifacts they find. They conclude the program by giving a tour of the grounds to friends, family and visitors.

The 20 students who were a part of the program came from states all over the country. Students had to write an essay about why they wanted to be in the program, sharing their specific passions for archaeology.

“There’s a lot of history here and it’s really cool,” said Eli Jah, a high school senior from Alexandria.

Jah discovered the program while shopping for potential colleges and jumped at the opportunity to put his passion for archaeology to work.



The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's Public Archaeology Institute allows high schoolers to experience what it's like to be a full-time archaeologist for a week. Madison Peck/staff (Madison Peck)

Perched above a shallow site square, high school students Thomas Ray and Natalie Herman used trowels to unearth layers of dirt and pull out artifacts, which they placed in a plastic bag and filled out a form. The form had to be very detailed, with information about exactly where the artifact was found, what it was, what soil it was in and any other pertinent details. Someone looking at the forms 50 years later should be able to tell exactly where the artifact was found, Herman, a North Carolina native, said.

Ray, of Hanover, and Herman, both juniors in high school, are planning to be archaeologists or work with history in the future. Despite the scabs on their hands from the digging, they were happy to get hands-on experience in the field.

“As I’ve gotten older, [in my] classes we haven’t done as much interactive things,” Herman said. “It is interesting to see like how the stuff they taught us in class, like the dirt layers, I could see it in real life.”

For Williamsburg native Will Kester, the hands-on experience brought to life the behind-the-scenes of the history he’s surrounded by.

Kester said he enjoyed “being able to dig and ask questions that you don’t really get to find out from a history teacher or online.”

“Everyone had so much knowledge that it was a great experience. I learned a lot from it,” Kester added.

Kester had been waiting to age into the program since he participated in the Kid’s Dig, a former Colonial Williamsburg Foundation archaeology program aimed at elementary school students interested in archaeology. The Kid’s Dig was the inspiration for the Public Archaeology Institute after 21,000 kids participated in the program over five years.

“We really tapped into how excited young people are about archaeology and what they can still find out that isn’t in a history book,” Castleberry said. “It sort of brings the whole history thing to life in a much more tactile way for them.”

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A 1964 photograph shows excavators at two Custis wells and the excavated Custis mansion cellar hole. In the background is part of Eastern State Hospital’s former building. Courtesy of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

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