

## WILLIAMSBURG BRAY SCHOOL

> *This project connects the human spirit and elevates voices unheard.*



*By examining and relocating the original Bray School structure and the perspectives of those who interacted with it, we are gaining insights into our nation as it relates to the complexities of race, religion, education, self-governance and freedom.*

## The Williamsburg Bray School



*Above:* Steve Chabra, architectural preservation project supervisor, studies 18th-century framing that was reused during the building's 1925 renovation.

*Below:* Colonial Williamsburg Site Supervisor Janice Canaday, a descendant of a Williamsburg Bray School student.

**The Williamsburg Bray School Initiative** is expanding our understanding of what is likely the oldest building in the United States dedicated to the education of enslaved and free Black children. By examining this original structure and the perspectives of those who interacted with it, we are gaining deeper insights into our nation as it relates to the complexities of race, religion, education, self-governance and freedom.

Research conducted on the Prince George House, a small white building that housed William & Mary's Department of Military Science, revealed it to be the Bray-Digges House, home of the Williamsburg Bray School for the first five years of its 14-year existence (1760-1774). The school was a British-chartered institution where more than 400 enslaved and free Black children were educated prior to the American Revolution. Recommended for establishment in Williamsburg by Benjamin Franklin, the Williamsburg Bray School's mission was to impart Christian education to Black children and to help



them accept enslavement as divinely ordained. Dendrochronological analysis of the structure's wood framing, conducted in 2020 by Colonial Williamsburg researchers, confirmed that it was erected in 1760 as a tenement house. The building was recently relocated from William & Mary's campus to Colonial Williamsburg's 301-acre Historic Area, where it became the 89th original structure restored by the Foundation.

Many of the original structural elements remain, including floorboards, door frames and stair rails. These items are helping researchers bring the structure back to life, and also illuminate the experiences of the hundreds of students who attended the school. Restoration is slated to be completed by 2024 to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Williamsburg Bray School's closing.

The project will enable Colonial Williamsburg to offer fascinating new public programs about our country's nation builders — Europeans, Africans and American Indians — whose diverse backgrounds became irrevocably intertwined. This initiative will ensure that current and future generations learn the complex stories of those traditionally denied historical recognition.

Additional donor funding is needed to support the historic preservation, restoration and exhibition of the Williamsburg Bray School building and the creation of onsite and online public programming for guests of all ages and backgrounds will provide invaluable context to today's political landscape and new insight into our common history.