

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **The William & Mary Bray School Lab Wins National Award for Collaboration to Recover America's Oldest Black School History**

**Bray School book project earns national recognition for groundbreaking scholarship**

**WILLIAMSBURG, VA – June 23 2025** – A William & Mary project, in partnership with The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and Williamsburg Bray School Descendant Community, that uncovers and shares the hidden history of America's oldest extant school for enslaved and free Black children has earned the nation's most prestigious honor in local history preservation.

The award comes at an auspicious time, as William & Mary, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and the Williamsburg community recently celebrated Juneteenth, a time of reflection and liberation, while the restored Williamsburg Bray School building was opened to the public as Colonial Williamsburg's 89th original building on the same day.

The William & Mary Bray School Lab received a 2025 Award of Excellence from the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) for *The Williamsburg Bray School: A History Through Records, Reflections, and Rediscovery*. The award, given in the Special Projects category, recognizes exemplary multi-faceted work in public history. The project stood out for its sustained community engagement, collaborative storytelling, and advancing descendant-generated research to tell broader histories of the nation, as well as institutional cooperation and goodwill.

This award also honors a book of the same name produced by the Bray School Lab in collaboration with The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Published by Colonial Williamsburg in 2024, the book project was led and edited by Maureen Elgersman Lee, director of the Bray School Lab, and Nicole Brown, graduate assistant. The volume features more than 30 original essays reflecting on the history and legacies of the Williamsburg Bray School and its students, as interpreted through seven key archival documents, inspired by the rediscovery of the original Williamsburg Bray School building in 2020.

Housed in a historic building on Colonial Williamsburg's campus near the site of the restored Bray School, the W&M Bray School Lab operates as part of Strategic Cultural Partnerships at William & Mary, under the leadership of Presidential Liaison Ann Marie Stock.

“We are grateful for the many partnerships that enabled the W&M Bray School Lab to complete this project and receive this prestigious award,” Stock said. “We seek to connect the community to our research – *The Williamsburg Bray School* is an excellent example of that goal.”

“We are thrilled to be receiving a 2025 Award of Excellence from the AASLH Leadership in History Awards Committee,” said Elgersman Lee. “The award is not a stand-alone book award, but a recognition of the sustained collaboration, reckoning, and bravery that culminated in the publication *The Williamsburg Bray School* book. And still the work continues.”

“I was honored to collaborate on this work with Dr. Elgersman Lee and the many essayists who put their heart and soul into this book,” said Brown, co-editor. “I am also delighted that the AASLH sees the merit in both the monograph and the cooperative way in which the co-editors developed the monograph with respect for the story of the Williamsburg Bray School and its scholars.”

Mrs. Jacquelyn Gardner, who wrote a letter of critical review, noted the responsiveness of the editorial team. “Inviting the local Black community to share our oral histories and to participate in lectures, workshops, walking tours, community programs and celebrations, not only enriched the Bray School project with a deeper pool of resources to draw from,” she explained, “but also fostered healing to a community whose story had been long overlooked and whose contributions to our nation’s history were left untold.”

With the largest proportion of essays authored by members of the Descendant Community, *The Williamsburg Bray School: A History Through Records, Reflections, and Rediscovery* book exemplifies visionary community collaboration and the power of partnership. The book also contains photos, graphics, transcriptions, and essays written by leaders, students, faculty, and staff at William & Mary and The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Now in its 80th year, the AASLH Leadership in History Awards are the nation’s most prestigious recognition for achievement in the preservation and interpretation of state and local history. This year, AASLH is presenting 54 national awards recognizing outstanding people, projects, exhibits, and publications. These honorees represent the best in the field and provide leadership for the future of state and local history.

Established in 1945, the AASLH Leadership in History Awards program promotes excellence in the collection, preservation, and interpretation of state and local history across the United States. The awards not only celebrate significant achievements but also highlight the vital contributions of organizations of all sizes to the historical field. For more information, contact AASLH at 615-320-3203 or visit <http://www.aaslh.org>.

The W&M Bray School Lab and its partners are honored to be among the 2025 recipients, and look forward to continuing this transformative public history work. To explore the history and legacies of the Williamsburg Bray School and engage with this nationally recognized work, visit the [Bray School Lab online](#) or plan your visit to the restored building in the Historic Area of [Colonial Williamsburg](#). Copies of *The Williamsburg Bray School: A History Through Records, Reflections, and Rediscovery* book are available now at Colonial Williamsburg retail outlets and [online](#).

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**About the W&M Bray School Lab and Strategic Cultural Partnerships**

Strategic Cultural Partnerships (SCP) at William & Mary catalyzes the university's cultural and historical resources to generate new knowledge and foster understanding. Through collaboration, SCP bridges divides and creates common ground to build a more just world—transcending boundaries between past and present, scholarship and practice, and campus and community.

The William & Mary Bray School Lab is a unit of SCP. The W&M Bray School Lab uncovers, documents, preserves, and shares the history and legacies of the Williamsburg Bray School (1760–1774) and its students. It is a central component of the Williamsburg Bray School Initiative, a groundbreaking partnership between William & Mary and The Colonial

Williamsburg Foundation. Together, they aim to transform traditional narratives of American history by centering Black legacy at the heart of U.S. democracy.

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

As the world's largest U.S. history museum, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation preserves, restores and operates Virginia's 18th-century capital of Williamsburg to fulfill its mission, "That the future may learn from the past." 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, and extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers.

### **About the American Association for State and Local History**

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and promoting history. Headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee, AASLH supports individuals and institutions through publications, training, and professional development, helping to make the past more meaningful for all people.

### **Links**

- [William & Mary](#)
- [W&M Bray School Lab](#)
- [Strategic Cultural Partnerships](#)
- [The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation](#)
- [American Association for State and Local History](#)