

Robert Francis Engs
Lemon Project Consulting Scholar
1943-2013

Professor Engs came to William & Mary in the fall of 2008 as the Visiting JP Harrison Professor of History. He taught a course that explored the Civil War experience as described by black and white Southerners, mostly from the Tidewater area. He also researched and wrote a report on what was known about the history of African Americans at the College and the steps that needed to be taken to complete that history. His work led to the Lemon Project: A Journey of Reconciliation. After retiring from the University of Pennsylvania, Professor Engs returned to William & Mary in the fall of 2009 to bring together a number of efforts exploring slavery, Jim Crow, integration and efforts toward College/community reconciliation, and as consulting scholar for the Project. He was an expert on the post-Civil War American South, particularly the responses of freed people and white Southerners to emancipation, and he had a special interest in the roles of education, religion and the missionaries in the emancipation process. He has written numerous articles and books, including "Freedom's First Generation: Black Hampton, Va., 1861-1863," and had developed an electronic archive on the middle 19th century, titled "The Crisis of the Union Archives." He was currently editing a collection of Civil War letters.

Jody Allen, Managing Director and co-chair of the Lemon Project, stated "With the death of Robert Engs, the academy has lost a shining star, but those of us lucky enough to have called him friend and mentor have lost our rock. A scholar on the cutting edge when he published *Freedom's First Generation*, Bob was never overly impressed with his own light but always willing to work with others to find and showcase their own abilities. He was gracious and generous with his time. He listened and gave honest feedback. He will be greatly missed."

Fall 2008 was not the first time that Engs, who has family in the Williamsburg area, had taught at William & Mary. About 20 years ago, he served as the Commonwealth Visiting Professor at the college. And, long before that, he made connections to people who would one day be the college's top administrators. He was classmates with both President Taylor Reveley and former Provost Geoff Feiss at Princeton. The three were all members of the Class of 1965. Provost Feiss remembered Engs in saying, "His youthful spirit, humor, and iconoclasm, along with his unwillingness to settle for tokenism or cant, made his company ever a pleasure. A lovely man in every sense of the word. [Our] conversations spanned a decade as he educated me on being black at Princeton in 1961 and on the history of African-Americans in Williamsburg and the Peninsula. His was a remarkable career. You hate to see the pioneers die out."

Engs, who received his doctorate in history from Yale University in 1972, was a former Guggenheim and William Penn Fellow, and a recipient of the Lindback Award for Excellence in Teaching. At Penn, he directed a president's forum titled "The Enduring Significance of Race," and he served as undergraduate chair of the history department and co-chair of the Afro-American Studies Program. Engs lectured for community organizations and historically black

colleges, and helped public schools develop their curricula on African-American history and social studies.