



The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR LIBRARY

WINTER 2022

NEWSLETTER

VOL. 4, NO. 3

LIBRARY AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH STAFF SUPPORT SPRAGGINS CARRIAGE PROJECT



The Benjamin Lewis Spraggins Sr. Sociable Carriage.

Photo Courtesy of Wayne Reynolds.

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The departments of Historical Research and Digital History and Rockefeller Library play key roles in supporting and promoting research and education at Colonial Williamsburg, and directly impact programming and exhibitions throughout the Foundation.

A project to recognize and celebrate Colonial Williamsburg's Black Coachmen highlighted the vital role each unit plays – before, during, and after the dedication of the Benjamin Lewis Spraggins, Sr. Carriage. For more about this project, please read Janice Canada's [The Benjamin Lewis Spraggins, Sr. Sociable Carriage blog](#).

SPRAGGINS CARRIAGE

(continued)



John Wesley Sheppard Jr.

Corporate Archives and Visual Resources

Researching Colonial Williamsburg's Black Coachmen

In the early months of 2020, the Rockefeller Library was asked to assist Coach & Livestock with identifying Colonial Williamsburg's Black coachmen. A new carriage was under construction in Pennsylvania and Coach & Livestock director Undra Jeter had the idea to name it for one of these early coachmen to honor their unsung contribution to the Foundation's history – but he needed to know who these men were. Using Dr. Ywone Edwards-Ingram's excellent article "Before 1979: African American Coachmen, Visibility, and Representation at Colonial Williamsburg" (The Public Historian, Vol. 36 No. 1, p. 9-35, February 2014) as a jumping off point, the staff of Visual Resources and Corporate Archives set to work. Dr. Edwards-Ingram had named several of the Restoration and later eras Black coachmen in her article. Visual Resources combed through photographic prints of coaches and coachmen, checking photo and slide labels and photography logbooks, looking for additional named men. Corporate

SPRAGGINS CARRIAGE

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Archives searched sources such as the CW News newspaper, CW Journal articles, and double-checked names against employee information to confirm years of service. Corporate Archives was also able to use the library's subscription to Ancestry to look through census records, Virginia vital records, obituaries, cemetery records, and newspaper indexes to assemble basic biographical information for the identified coachmen. For one individual, there was even a scanned funeral program in Ancestry.

To date, the library has been able to identify nineteen Black coachmen: Junious Winder Bartlett, Kaley Dover Edwards, Willie Lee Fitts, Reuben Hill, Sr., Charles Preston Jackson, Lewis Johnson, Jr., Joseph Louis Jones, Captain Mason, Willie Meekins, Willie Washington Minkins, George Parsons, William H. Patterson, James Woodfield Sampson, John Wesley Shepperd, Sr., Benjamin Lewis Spraggins, Sr., Willie Stringfield, James Edward Wallace, Harmon Washington, Jr., and Dennis White. Current coachmen Undra Jeter, Adam Canaday, Collin Ashe, and Elijah Ford carry on their legacy. This is an ongoing project, and it is hoped that more coachmen can be identified by name from the records and in the photographs held by Visual Resources.

After reading through the research, the committee tasked with naming the new carriage settled on Benjamin Lewis Spraggins, Sr. Hired in 1934 as both the first coachman and the first Black coachman, Mr. Spraggins was employed as a costumed coachman for nineteen years, serving as an ambassador and tour guide for the Historic Area via carriage tours. He was known as the "most photographed man in Williamsburg." It was deemed fitting therefore that the new carriage be named for him, honoring both him and the Black coachmen that he represented, their legacy, and their contributions to Colonial Williamsburg as we know it today.

Historical Research and Digital History

Researching and designing the Spraggins Carriage monogram



The Spraggins Carriage monogram.

Photo courtesy of Wayne Reynolds.

SPRAGGINS CARRIAGE

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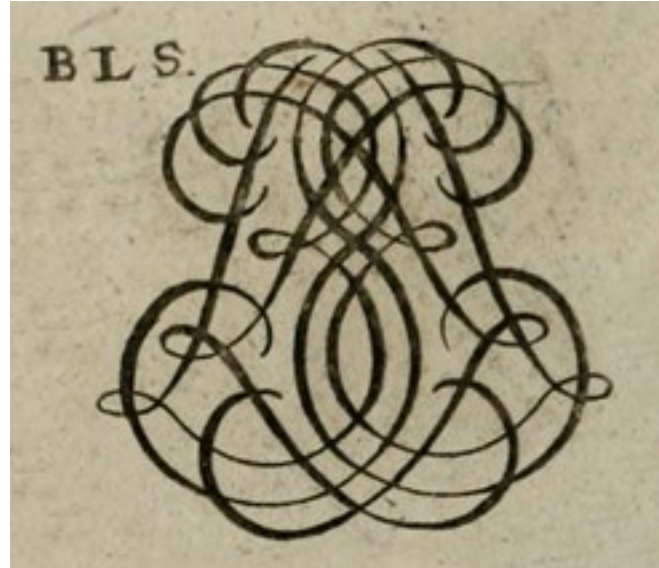
Last year Colonial Williamsburg created a new carriage, the Benjamin Lewis Spraggins, Sr. Sociable Carriage. Sociable carriages were open four-wheel carriages with two double seats that face each other, meant to display the wealth of the passengers. The Spraggins sociable is named in honor the life and legacy of Mr. Benjamin Lewis Spraggins, Sr. Mr. Spraggins was one of the most well-known coachmen at Colonial Williamsburg for 19 years.

At the beginning of the Spraggins carriage project the Historic Research team were invited to examine what decorative motifs should be applied to each of the Carriage four panels. Eighteenth-century coaches were often embellished with decorative motifs on the flat panels of the carriage. We examined twenty-two references to contemporary American coaches and discovered half had devices on them. As expected, some of these were coats of arms, although there were also examples of animal heads, cyphers, and grotesque or allegorical figures.

We initially considered replicating a coat of arms, seeking a version from the College of Arms in the UK, the official body that oversees and creates coats of arms. They have searched all the arms created since the late Medieval period and it appears that there is no official coat-of-arms for the Spraggins surname. As we wanted to create an authentic 18th century device that was directly applicable to Mr. Spraggins, we considered alternatives and the monogram device was seen as appropriate, accurate, and attractive.

The BLS monogram is based on the letters BLS, the initials of Benjamin L. Spraggins' name.

Further research led us to uncover a French graphic design book published in 1724.¹ The book consists of monograms of various sets of initials. Luckily, the book contained the BLS monogram seen in the below image.

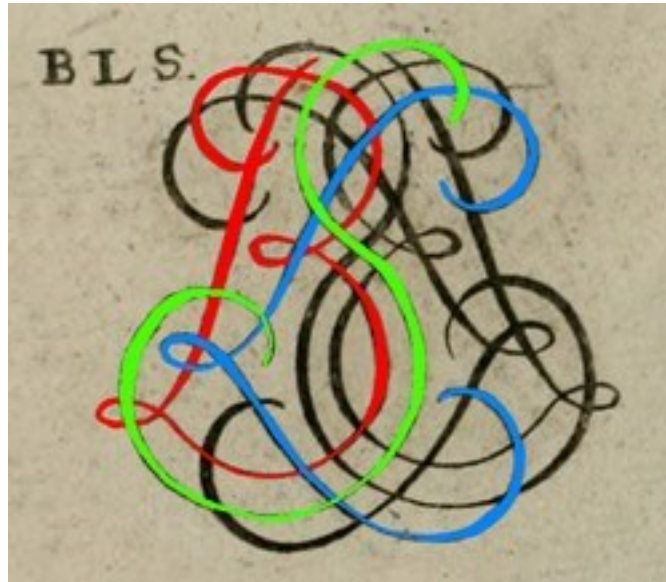


Enlargement of the original illustration from the 1724 design book.

1. Recueil d'emblèmes, devises, medailles, et figures hieroglyphiques ...Paris: C. Jombert. 1724. 119.

SPRAGGINS CARRIAGE

(continued)



In the above illustration we have used color to highlight the BLS letters. Red for the B; Blue for the L, and Green for the S. As you can see, the BLS letters are intertwined on the left side of the image. They were then reversed and added to the right side of the monogram to create an attractive symmetrical device. The final device was hand painted in gold paint on the four side panels of the carriage. I think we all agree the carriage is a magnificent symbol of Mr. Spraggins' legacy.

Media Collections

Visually documenting the painting of the Spraggins Carriage and Dedication Event

It's already halfway through March and Media Collections has been extremely busy! As part of our mission to visually document the history of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, we've already created thousands of images for the archives. Our biggest project thus far has been the photographic documentation of the Benjamin Spraggins Carriage Sociable Ceremony on February 26, 2022. The event took place on a cool but sunny winter day in front of the Courthouse on Market Square with well over 300 people in attendance. It began with a parade of local community partners that included groups like the Black Gum Saddle Club, Buffalo Boyz Motorcycle Club, and New Zion Baptist Church. The Colonial Williamsburg Fifes & Drums marched and provided music. Then came the carriages carrying members of the Spraggins family in 18th century style. It was quite possibly one of the largest processions of horse drawn carriages on Duke of Gloucester Street in recent memory. Once the family arrived at the Courthouse, interpreter Ronald Pressley moderated the hour with speakers that included President Cliff Fleet, retired master silversmith Jimmy Curtis, retired master printer Willie Parks, Professor Robert Watson, and a prayer from James Ingram. Reginald Fox led the Community Choir in a song, "Ride On King Jesus." Spraggins family members unveiled the new carriage, which had been sitting to the side covered by a canvas drape. Members of the Coach & Livestock department presented the family with a commemorative plaque and brought horses forward to harness to the vehicle. Coachman Adam Canaday drove the

SPRAGGINS CARRIAGE

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Carriages bring Spraggins family members to the ceremony.

Photo courtesy of Wayne Reynolds.

carriage for its first official ride carrying Benjamin Spraggins' grandson Darryl Jimmerson, his wife and their grandson, and Coach & Livestock director Undra Jeter. Collin Ashe and Elijah Ford served as footmen. After the ceremony, guests were invited to a reception where hospitality provided a full menu that included regional favorites like ham biscuits, fried chicken, braised greens, and potato salad. The Lodge pastry chefs also presented their own version of the Spraggins carriage made of modeling chocolate and gold dust. Volunteer photographers Jerry McCoy and Wayne Reynolds each shot over 600 images of the festivities. These images have been edited and processed and are currently being cataloged into The Source – Colonial Williamsburg's official media archive and digital asset management system. Staff and volunteers can access these images (and tens of thousands of others) with an online account. If you were unable to see the dedication ceremony in person - you can still see it online through Janice Canaday's The Benjamin Lewis Spraggins, Sr. Sociable Carriage blog.

SPRAGGINS CARRIAGE

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Interpeter Ronald Pressley.

Photo courtesy of Jerry McCoy.



Spraggins carriage before the unveiling.

Photo courtesy of Wayne Reynolds.

SPRAGGINS CARRIAGE

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First drive of the Spraggins carriage with Spraggins family and Undra Jeter.

Photo courtesy of Wayne Reynolds.



Spraggins carriage display piece at the reception.

Photo courtesy of Jerry McCoy.

COFFELT FELLOW: MEG ROBERTS



Coffelt Fellow Meg Roberts at work in the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library.

In January, Colonial Williamsburg welcomed Meg Roberts, the 2019 Robert M. & Annetta J. Coffelt and Robert M. Coffelt Jr. Fellow, for a monthlong research fellowship. Meg's visit was delayed multiple times due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

The Coffelt Fellowship directly supports the educational mission of Colonial Williamsburg and is intended for doctoral candidates and junior scholars working on topics related to the American Revolution, Early Republic, or ideas and philosophies of America's founding fathers. We are very appreciative of the Coffelt family's generous support of this fellowship opportunity.

Meg is currently pursuing a PhD in History at University of Cambridge, Newnham College. Her research explores the experience of caregivers for sick and disabled people during the American Revolutionary War. This period saw a swell in both long-term and short-term illnesses and disabilities, requiring intensified levels of care work at all levels of society. However, despite caregiving labor being a routine aspect of the Revolutionary experience, it has received minimal attention in the current historiography of the conflict. Her project draws together histories of disability, domestic work, medicine, war, emotions, household, and family, and is concerned with both the physical and emotional experience of domestic care in times of crisis. This research is particularly timely given the current prospect of assessing our own care practices as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

CONSIDER THE SOURCES



Volunteer photographer Wayne Reynolds captures aerial views of the Historic Area with his drone.

Mark Your Calendars!

On May 20th at 1pm, the Rockefeller Library's Media Collections Manager, Tracey Gulden, and Visual Resources Librarian, Marianne Martin, will be featured in Colonial Williamsburg's Livestream Consider the Sources: Collections Exposed in celebration of National Photography Month.

Photography collections play a critical role at Colonial Williamsburg. They provide important visual evidence that compliments documentary records and are used to illustrate a wide variety of presentations, publications, exhibitions, social media posts, and promotional materials produced by departments throughout the Foundation. With half a million analog photographic formats and over 440,000 digital assets, preserving, organizing, and cataloging the vast archive of images is daunting. Meet Visual Resources and Media Collections staff and learn about their strategies for storing and caring for the collections, improving access and retrieval, and facilitating outreach through public programs and exhibits to underscore the value of photographic repositories. Visit the visual archives to see highlights of pre-restoration, restoration progress, and local history collections and media collections to find out how the Foundation continues to expand and update its photo collections through an active institutional photography program and digital asset management system.

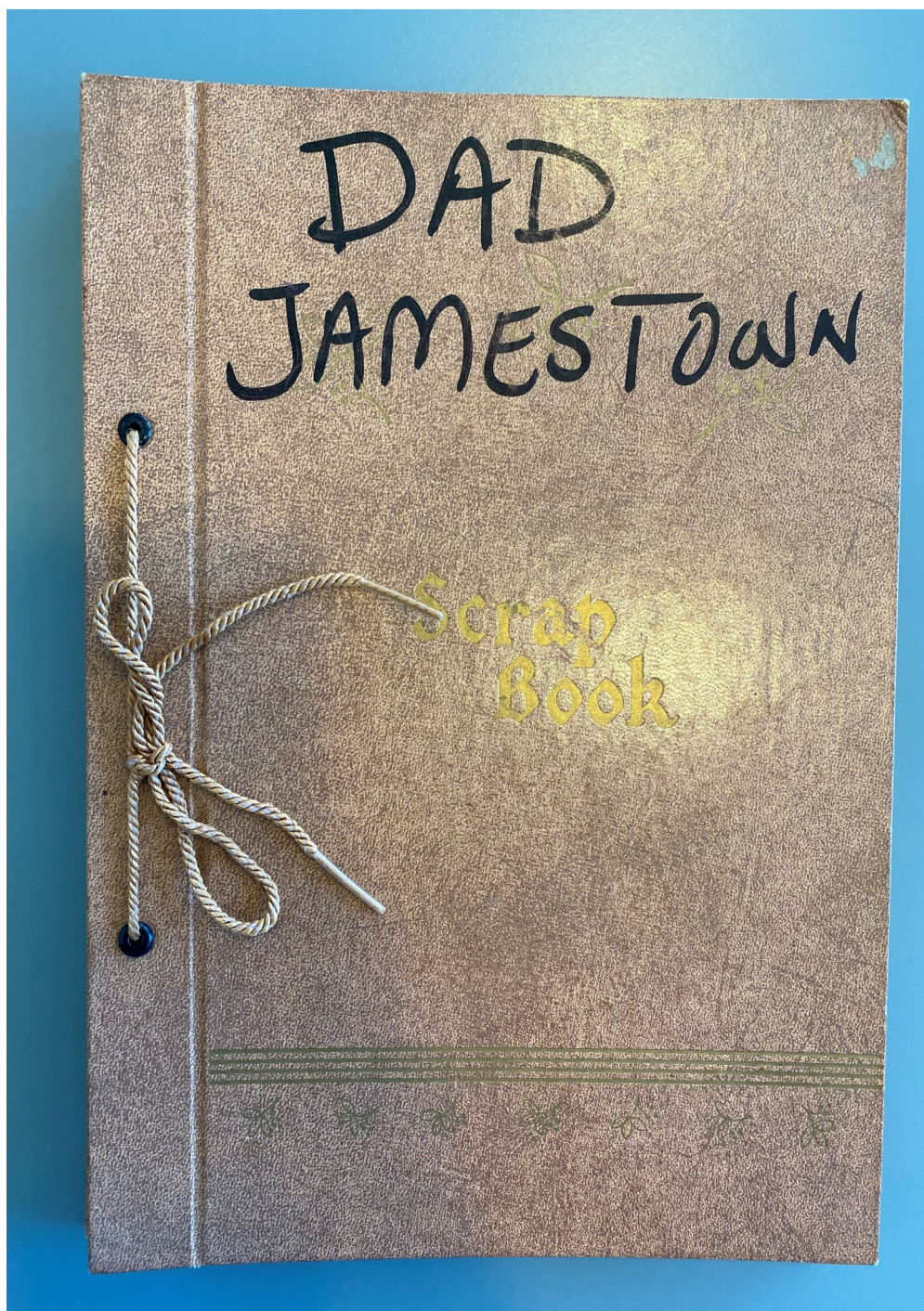
CONSIDER THE SOURCES

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Photographers Jane Iseley and Frank Davis examining slides spread out on a light table in preparation for a Garden Symposium lecture, photo by Tina Heuvel, 1976.

ALBERT Q. BELL SCRAPBOOK



Front cover of the Albert Q. Bell scrapbook.

Corporate Archives recently was given a scrapbook of newspaper clippings and ephemera relating to Albert Quentin Bell by a local donor and Bell family member. Bell was an Englishman who had moved to the United States in the 1920s and settled in Manteo, NC. He had previously constructed outdoor amphitheatres for The Lost Colony play on Roanoke Island, for the Cherokee removal drama *Unto These Hills* in Cherokee, NC, and had consulted on the Matoaka Lake theater built for *The Common Glory* in Williamsburg in 1947. In the 1950s, Bell was involved in the construction of The Cove Amphitheatre at Lake Matoaka for the play *The Founders: A Drama of Jamestown* and the fort and glasshouse at Jamestown Festival Park, all created for the 350th anniversary of Jamestown in 1957. The scrapbook and various inserted ephemera are principally related to his work in 1956-1957 for these Jamestown anniversary projects. Ephemera inserted into the scrapbook includes a May 11, 1957, letter from *The Founders* cast thanking Bell "from our hearts for the beautiful theatre you have built us" and a press packet announcing the premiere season of *The Founders*. The Bell scrapbook will be a permanent part of the Corporate Archives and is available for research by appointment. (Accession 2022-003)

ALBERT Q. BELL SCRAPBOOK

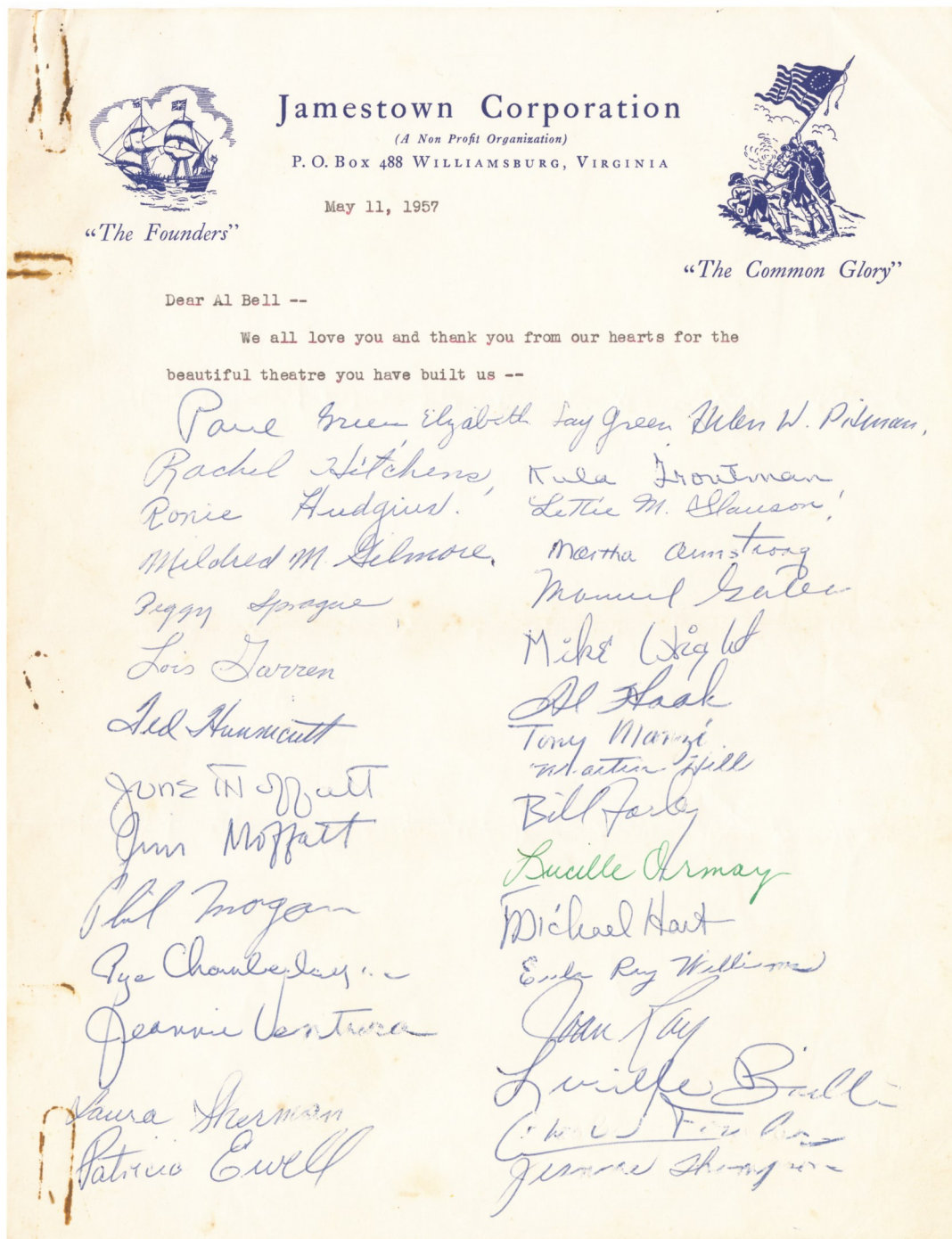
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Interior pages with articles about reconstruction of the Jamestown fort, Albert Q. Bell Scrapbook.

ALBERT Q. BELL SCRAPBOOK

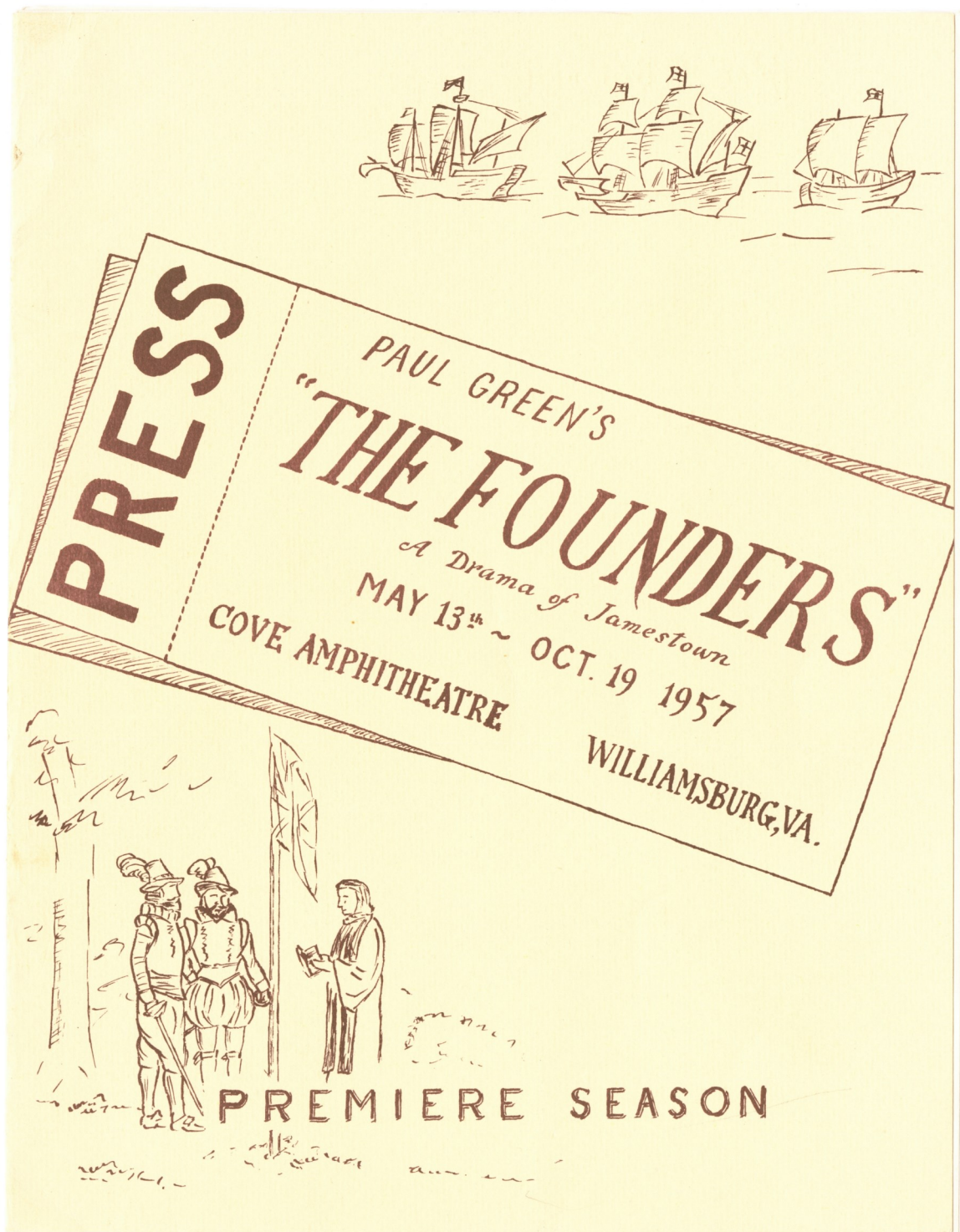
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Page one, Letter from cast of *The Founders* to Albert Q. Bell, May 11, 1957. Albert Q. Bell Scrapbook.

ALBERT Q. BELL SCRAPBOOK

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Cover of press packet for *The Founders* Premiere Season, May 13-October 19, 1957. Albert Q. Bell Scrapbook .

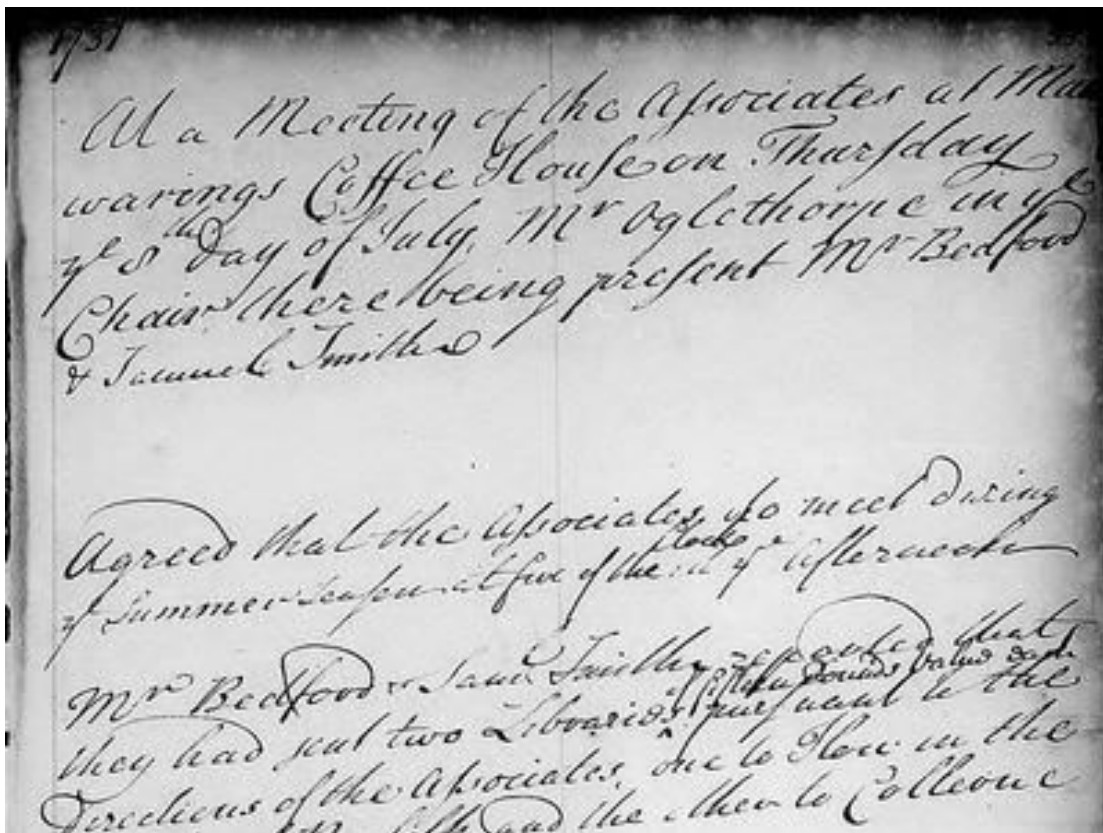
FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

In the last issue of our newsletter, we announced the formation of the Friends of John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library group. This initiative will bring together those with a personal commitment to strengthening the library's collections and directly support the library's mission of supporting research and scholarship at Colonial Williamsburg. Annual membership fees will be used solely to acquire, digitize, and conserve library research collections — activities that directly support the work of our historic area interpreters, historians, and museum curators.

A prime example of how our Friends group would support Colonial Williamsburg's educational mission is to help the library purchase vital resources such as the newly acquired electronic subscription database Bray Schools in Canada, America, and the Bahamas, 1645-1900. This vital resource, created by the British Online Archives, provides access to primary resource materials related to the history of the Bray Associates, directly supports one of the Foundation's major current initiatives.

Another example is recent purchases of additional 18th-century Virginia Gazettes for our Special Collections. While funding has allowed us to purchase several issues over the last several years, support from Friends would allow us to acquire additional available issues. Returning these rare newspapers to Williamsburg where they were originally printed would allow the library to provide ready access to these key resources.

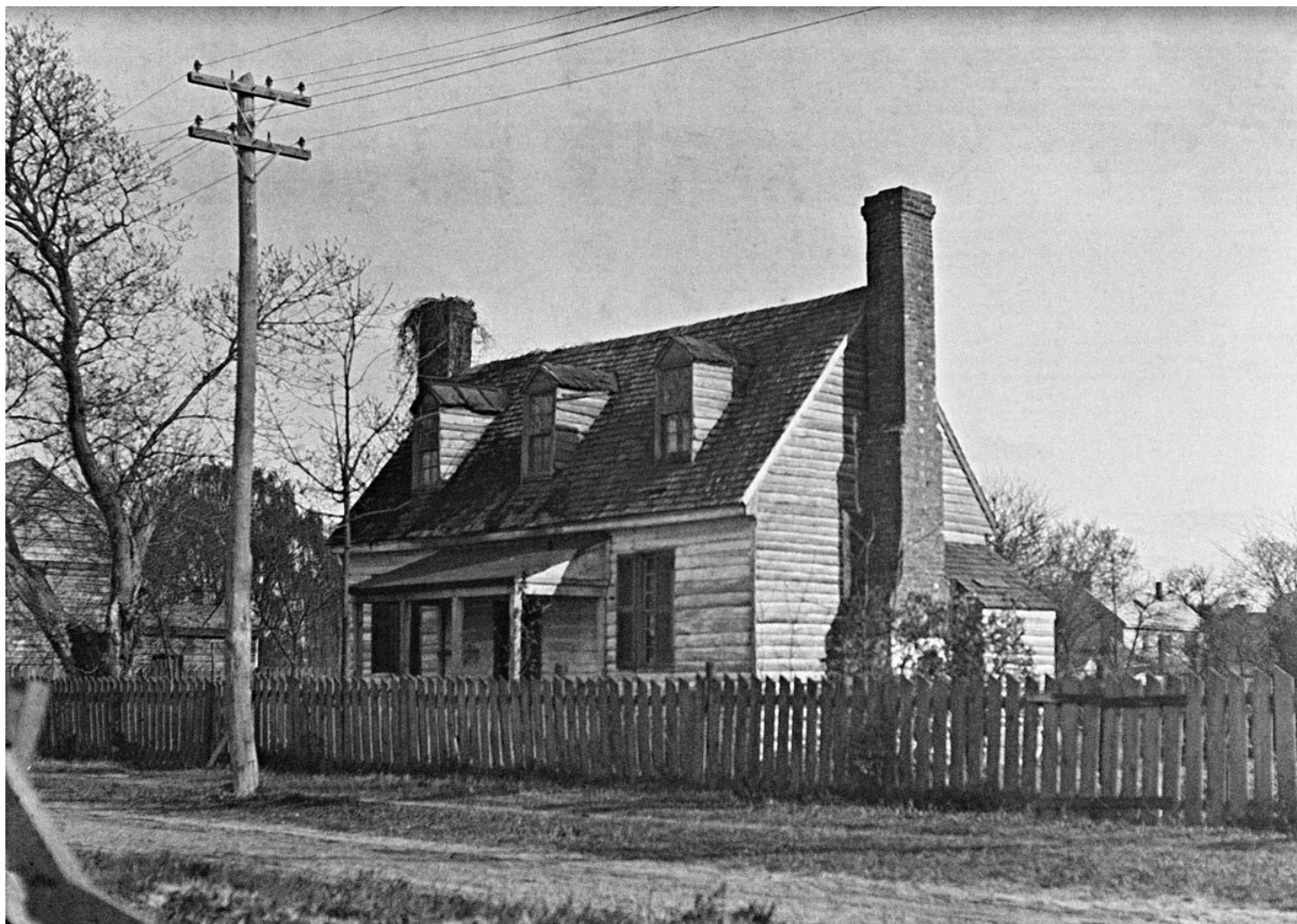
Please consider becoming a Friend and supporting the work of Colonial Williamsburg. More information on this exciting new venture can be found on the [Friends of John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library](#) page.



The Bray School database includes documents, minute books, letter books, and account books for the Associates of Dr Bray.

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

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Front elevation of the Dudley Digges House shown in its original location on Prince George Street, in Williamsburg, Va. The schoolhouse where enslaved and free Black children were taught before the Revolutionary War will be moved from the William & Mary campus to Colonial Williamsburg and restored.

The *John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library Newsletter* is a publication of Colonial Williamsburg's John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library.

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Please visit [Friends of John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library](#) for information on how you can support the Library.

To contact the library directly, please call 757-220-7249; 757-565-8510 or email us at rocklibrary@cwf.org.