



# *The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*

JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR LIBRARY

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NEWSLETTER

VOL. 3, NO. 1

## BOB SOWERS AND THE TODD AND BROWN INC. BRICKYARD



***Bob Sowers and an unidentified colleague molding bricks, 1947.***

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Attention to authenticity and detail guided the restoration of Williamsburg’s eighteenth-century buildings. This care extended to the materials used to restore or reconstruct structures. Many Virginia residents contributed surviving historic bricks from family properties to provide a supply for projects in Williamsburg. In addition, brick masons created thousands of bricks according to colonial methods to aid in filling in gaps in deteriorated foundations, walls, chimneys, and fireplaces.

Contractors Todd and Brown Inc., hired by Perry, Shaw,

## BOB SOWERS AND THE TODD AND BROWN INC. BRICKYARD

(continued)



*Workmen stacking bricks at the Todd and Brown Inc. brickyard located behind the Williamsburg Inn, 1930s .*

and Hepburn in 1928 to oversee construction projects in Williamsburg, set up a temporary brickyard behind the Williamsburg Inn to facilitate the brick manufacturing process. Workmen from Colonial Brickyard Company staffed the site. Archival photographs in the library's collection capture the components of the early brickyard, including a clay pit, a clay mill, kilns for firing the bricks, and stacks of bricks drying in preparation for the firing. Rather than use the eighteenth-century foot treading process to mix and condition the clay for molding, the brickyard used the nineteenth-century technology of a pug mill powered by a mule circling round it. The pug mill contained blades within it that moved back and forth and mixed the clay as the animal's movement rotated a vertical shaft connected to them.

Veteran brick mason Bob Sowers, known by the nickname "Babe," helped to lead the effort to make bricks according to historical methods at the brickyard. Architect Thomas Mott Shaw captured Mr. Sowers and his team through several detailed

## BOB SOWERS AND THE TODD AND BROWN INC. BRICKYARD

(continued)



***Colonial Brickyard Company workmen operating the pug mill at the Todd and Brown Inc. brickyard, 1933.***

pencil sketches that are part of the Thomas Mott Shaw collection of drawings housed at the Rockefeller Library. Bob Sowers specialized in molding the bricks and stood down in a pit by the clay mill operated by the mule walking in a circle. He pulled clay out of the mill and filled and smoothed wooden brick molds to precise quantities. According to a notice in the May 1942 Colonial Williamsburg News, "...every brick the Restoration has used Bob Sowers molded." Sowers, a resident of Lightfoot, Virginia, worked initially for the Colonial Brickyard Company and then became a member of Colonial Williamsburg's Construction and Maintenance Department until retirement.

Today, several brick manufacturers market "Old Williamsburg" bricks emulating the rubbed brick and glazed headers used to construct many Williamsburg structures. In addition to educating visitors about colonial brickmaking techniques, the Historic Trades masonry staff continues the tradition begun at the Todd and Brown Inc. brickyard of producing bricks for use in various restoration projects throughout the Historic Area.

## BOB SOWERS AND THE TODD AND BROWN INC. BRICKYARD



**Bob Sowers filling brick molds at the pug mill of the Todd and Brown Inc. brickyard, 1933.**

## “WE SHALL CARRY ON”: COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG’S PARTICIPATION IN THE WAR EFFORT, 1940-1945

The outbreak of World War II could have been disastrous for Colonial Williamsburg as a young museum that was only a decade old. However, the proximity of the site to many military installations, along with the determination and resiliency of staff, allowed Colonial Williamsburg’s historic area, hotel properties, and restaurants to assume new roles assisting in the community war effort. Less than a month after the United States declared war, President Kenneth Chorley wrote a letter to Members of the Restoration Organization in which he stated “The year which closed last night brought to an end the most successful year in the history of the Restoration. More people visited Williamsburg, went through the exhibition buildings, and stayed in our hotels, than in any other year.” He assured employees that despite the anticipated need for rationing which could adversely affect the tourism industry, Colonial Williamsburg had no plans to close its operations. Rather, it would seek new ways to make “...travel and recreation ...a vital element in our war plans.” Chorley ended his letter by coining the rousing phrase “We Shall Carry On” as the wartime slogan to guide Colonial Williamsburg employees.

## “WE SHALL CARRY ON”

(continued)



***Soldiers and civilians listening to a Sunday band concert on Palace Green, 1943.***

Provisions for housing for the influx of soldiers, military families and officials into the area became a top priority. Williamsburg's population doubled between 1941 and 1942 and left officials and residents scrambling to convert all useable spaces into extra rooms and dormitories for new residents. The Williamsburg Inn became a non-profit residence for army and navy officers and their wives, while the Inn dining room converted into their officer's club. The Williamsburg Lodge, Brick House Tavern, and Market Square Tavern provided housing for additional weekend guests. Many local families opened their own homes and rented rooms, including at outlying farms, as the town experienced a 300% increase in private room rentals. Some soldiers even ended up renting makeshift bunks at local churches. President Chorley noted in a January 1944 letter, "Every bed in town is filled every night. We have put beds in kitchens, shops and in every other building that could be adapted to living quarters. John Green [Director of Visitor Accommodations] and his staff have found places for an astonishing number of these people...His report shows that there were 167,649...guest days in 1943..."

The large influx of soldiers and their families from Fort Eustis and Camp Peary also meant Colonial Williamsburg needed to step up and become a hub for off-duty personnel seeking entertainment and dining venues. Servicemen congregated on the business blocks, later known as Merchants Square, and attended movies at the Williamsburg Theatre where between nine and ten thousand people per week watched films at the theatre. Other activities for weekend leave included candlelit evening tours of the Capitol, shopping at the Craft House, refreshments at Chowning's Tavern, a juke box and dancing in the Williamsburg

## “WE SHALL CARRY ON”

(continued)

Lodge Game Room, carriage rides, afternoon concerts on Palace Green by military bands, picnics, and dining at the Travis House. The main Williamsburg USO opened in 1942 in the Stringfellow Building on the business block providing a canteen, a reading room, and a music room where soldiers could play records or listen to radio programs. The rear parking lot served as an outdoor dance floor on some evenings. Crowds soon overwhelmed the facility with the USO sometimes experiencing over 8,000 visitors on a Sunday afternoon. John D. and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Jr. donated \$10,000 to fund the construction of an expansion to include a social hall. On May 6, 1943, the expansion dedication ceremony was presided over by the Rockefellers and top Army and Navy officers. During the following year, the USO drew almost one million visitors and by 1945 had welcomed its three millionth visitor. The Virginia Gazette reported that it held “...the record for attendance in ratio to floor space, among the USO Clubs of the United States.”

Bruton Heights School, which had opened in September 1940 as a new educational facility and community center for Williamsburg’s African American residents supported in part by donations from the Rockefellers, expanded its recreational activities for adults to include African American soldiers. In 1941, groups of servicemen from Fort Eustis began attending movie screenings in the Bruton Heights School auditorium. A committee of African American citizens formed in 1943 developed a more formal recreational plan proposing that Bruton Heights School could function as a USO for African Americans stationed at Fort Eustis and Camp Peary. A dance held on March 24, 1943 in the Bruton Heights gymnasium attracted one hundred servicemen and gave impetus to the proposal. The offerings expanded to include a canteen serving light refreshments with help from community volunteers

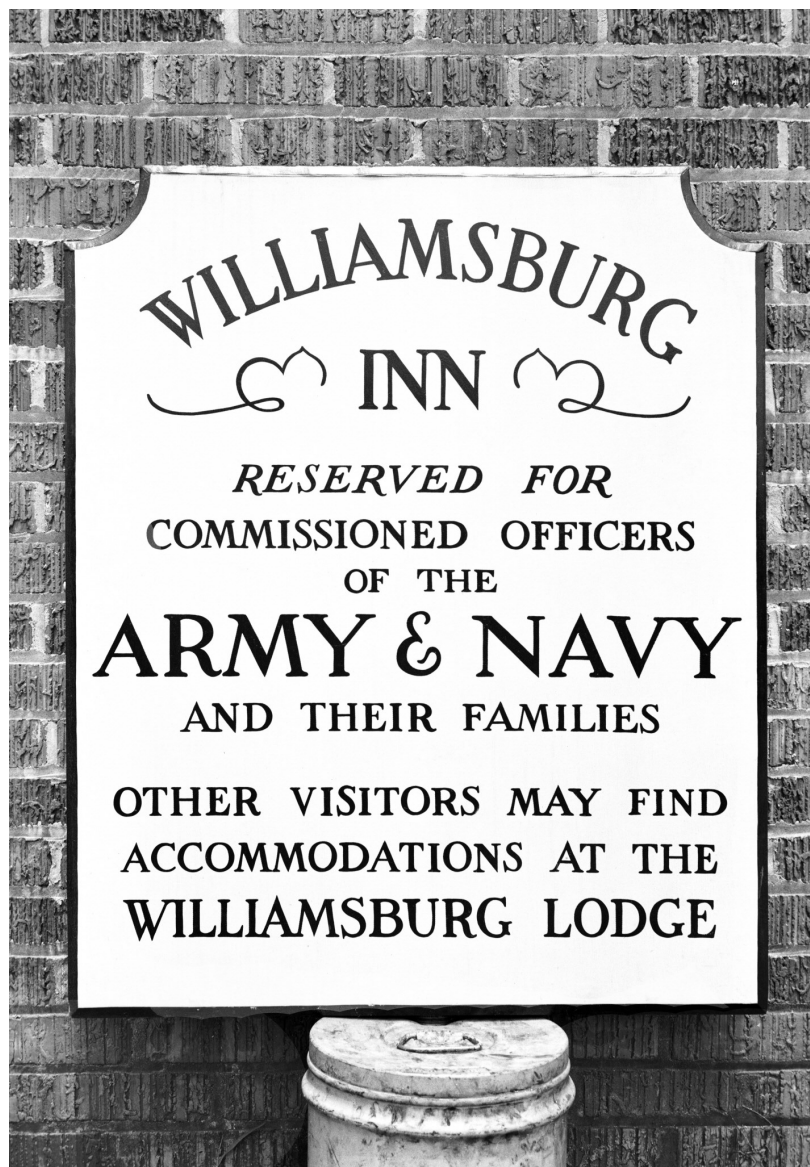


***Two costumed employees salvaging fat in the Governor’s Palace Kitchen as part of a fat salvage drive, 1945.***

such as Fred and Fannie Epps, movie nights held five nights per week in the school auditorium, and dances in the gymnasium. Officials converted a classroom into a military lounge and opened the school library to provide access to books and magazines. Bruton Heights officially became a unit of the national USO organization in 1944 and Marie Shepard served as its full-time director. By August 1944, the Bruton Heights USO had welcomed over 10,000 soldiers and eventually the program outgrew the facility and moved to Fort Eustis in 1945.

Colonial Williamsburg employees played a significant role in the war effort, whether through military leave to serve their country or whether through local projects to support troop morale, raise funds and

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*Sign, Williamsburg Inn Reserved for Commissioned Officers, 1942.*

collect supplies, or protect the community. During the war, 194 Colonial Williamsburg employees took military leave to serve in various posts around the world. War bond drives became a frequent occurrence with Colonial Williamsburg leading the way by offering the option for employees to elect a ten percent monthly payroll deduction for purchase of war savings stamps and bonds. Many employees and town residents signed up to serve as airplane spotters as part of the Ground Observer Corps. They manned posts round-the-clock in the steeple of the Methodist Church on Merchants Square and included Boy and Girl Scouts. Bundles for Britain, organized by local housewives, assembled used garments to send overseas to aid British clothing shortages, while Red Cross volunteers sewed surgical dressings and rolled bandages. Colonial Williamsburg employees and residents joined forces to participate in fat salvage bees, pulpwood collection, Books for Buddies, and knitting scarves for servicemen. Others served as civilian defense wardens who trained the community for air raid drills. The Colonial Parkway Tunnel, which Civilian Conservation Corps crews built to route traffic under Williamsburg's Historic Area, was almost complete aside from paving in 1942 and became the city's designated air raid shelter. Victory gardens also appeared all around town and included plots at the C&O railroad tracks behind the Palace, twenty-four plots measuring 25 x 50 feet behind the Freeman House on Francis Street, and one maintained by students at Matthew Whaley School.

Vegetables such as corn, potatoes, string beans, sweet potatoes and tomatoes kept the Lodge kitchens replenished during the war. As the war progressed, many convalescent soldiers filled area hospitals and townspeople and William & Mary students united to bring them comfort. Kenneth Chorley's wife, a professional singer known as Jean Travers prior to their marriage, gave countless concerts, including a three-hour recital at the Fort Eustis hospital. Hostess Elizabeth Callis offered special tours of the Historic Area to groups with neuro-psychiatric war injuries.

“WE SHALL CARRY ON”

(continued)



*Soldiers and civilians socializing in the canteen of the Williamsburg USO, 1943*

Through many different avenues of community wartime service, Colonial Williamsburg and its employees proved that they could indeed “Carry On” and impact the war effort in beneficial ways that would also sustain the organization financially. Through all these achievements, Colonial Williamsburg employees and residents alike were commended for their resourcefulness and commitment.

Did you enjoy the above article about CW and WWII? It was taken from a presentation by the same name given in July via Zoom by Marianne Martin and Sarah Nerney for the Williamsburg Regional Library. Did you miss it? It is available on the WRL’s YouTube site and takes about 45 minutes to view: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VoM\\_LVXvjNg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VoM_LVXvjNg)



## DRONE PHOTOGRAPHY CONTINUES

In July, volunteer photographer/drone pilot, Wayne Reynolds, and Media Collections Manager, Tracey Gulden, captured aerial views of two more locations in the Historic Area. The first is the newly expanded Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg. The enlarged building is home to two world-class museums: the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum and the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum. The expansion adds 65,000 additional feet of space and 7 new museum galleries. Guests can now enter through a 2-story entrance on South Nassau street topped with a cupola and weathervane that face a pair of brick arcade buildings. Seen from the air the true scope of the expansion can be viewed in grand detail. The second location is the Custis Square Archaeology Project located just across South Nassau Street from the Art Museums. On this 4-acre lot stood the home and extensive garden of Williamsburg resident John Custis IV . During this 5-year project archaeologists hope to uncover a wealth of knowledge about the landscape and all the people who lived there. While we can only show a few images of these sites here, you may see more on the Rockefeller Library's Facebook page. Many thanks as always to Wayne Reynolds and drone for all these amazing photographs!



*The expanded Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg .*

*Photograph courtesy of Wayne Reynolds*

## DRONE PHOTOGRAPHY CONTINES

(continued)



*Custis Square archaeology project.*

*Photograph courtesy of Wayne Reynolds*



*Custis Square ditch feature.*

*Photograph courtesy of Wayne Reynolds*

**DRONE PHOTOGRAPHY CONTINUES**

**(continued)**



***Custis Square as seen from the new entrance to the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg.***

***Photograph courtesy of Wayne Reynolds***



***The expanded Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg with Public Hospital in front.***

***Photograph courtesy of Wayne Reynolds***

**DRONE PHOTOGRAPHY CONTINUES**

**(continued)**



***Over head view of expanded Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg.***

***Photograph courtesy of Wayne Reynolds***



***Southern view of the expanded Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg.***

***Photograph courtesy of Wayne Reynolds***

## LIBRARY CIRCULATION GOES “CURBSIDE”

Though the library building is still closed to visitors, Colonial Williamsburg staff regained access to Rockefeller Library’s circulating books on Tuesday, June 23rd through a new “curbside” service. Patrons use the library catalog to “order” books online and are notified by email when the books are ready for pickup. So far, this new service has put over 300 books in the hands of eager researchers, and it’s a delight for library staff to see familiar (though masked) faces during pickup hours. With the start of the fall semester at William and Mary, lending back and forth between Rockefeller and Swem Libraries has also resumed. Colonial Williamsburg staff and W&M faculty, staff, and students again rejoice in access to two amazing library collections!



***Librarian Melissa Schutt arranges bags full of books ordered online, awaiting pickup from the Rockefeller Library.***

***Photograph courtesy of Wayne Reynolds***



***Library Assistant Felicity Meza-Luna hands off a bag of books to a patron on the first day of curbside pick-up at the Rockefeller Library.***

***Photograph courtesy of Wayne Reynolds***

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

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