



Coach and Livestock

Coachmen of the Past

For the next year, we will be highlighting and honoring the many contributions of African American coachman to Colonial Williamsburg and the Coach and Livestock program. In this issue, we spotlight the achievements of Ben Spraggins. Benjamin Lewis Spraggins Sr. was born 4/21/1909 in Halifax County, Virginia to Mitchell Spraggins and Mary Bruce. He was employed by the Foundation as a Stableman from 9/17/1934 through 9/28/1953.



Ben Spraggins, coachman- interpreter, reached his twentieth service anniversary on August 28.

First employed as a laborer in C&M, Ben also worked as janitor, stableman, stableman-coachman, laborer-coachman and coachman before reaching his present position on March 14, 1951.

A spare-time barber, Ben lives with his wife and three children at 430 South Henry Street.

Spraggins Covers 11 Miles Per Day on Coach Circuit

By Don Piedmont

For a man who has travelled thousands of miles and never left James City County, Ben Spraggins is a singularly optimistic coach-driver. As senior member of CW's coach driving team, Ben travels approximately 11 miles a day, or seventy-seven miles a week, and has been doing that since 1937, when he first mounted to the driver's seat.

Ten times every day, Ben leaves his hitching post in front of the museum with his carriage loaded for a tour of Williamsburg. In April, for example, Ben and John Sheperd carried around 3000 passengers in their two vehicles; the biggest month ever. In June, they are running well ahead of last year's figure. Each trip is well filled, and Ruby Steele operates a miniature Reservations Office in booking the rides. One trip of the new Mulberry Phaeton had seven passengers, counting the small fry that sat up on the driver's box.



Ben Spraggins
Once-around the town

Williamsburg Pride

When you ride with Ben, you get the notion that Williamsburg is his town just as the Palace somehow belongs to Fleming Brown. If it's not "This is a beautiful garden on my left", it's "That brick house on the right is used as a residence. I think it's in a beautiful setting, don't you?". Ben has a running commentary on the Williamsburg scene that has developed naturally as he has watched the restored area grow up in the past thirteen years.

Inssofar as anything younger than two decades can have a tradition, the coach service does. From 1935 until 1940, the coach carried hostesses to the buildings. The coach used for that purpose has long gone; Ben's new pride is the bright green Randolph coach. During the war, the rides were carried on as usual, with no problems of gas or tire rationing. The only fuel the coaches used was hay, and there was no shortage of that. Then the coach rebuilding program came into effect, and Colonial Williamsburg's able coach consultant, Colonel Paul Downing has turned out the Randolph Coach and the Mulberry Phaeton to replace the not-too-authentic black one. Of them all, Ben's favorite is the Randolph; his favorite team is Fancy and Nancy.

The busy season starts in March and runs through November. Getting the coach and team from the stables behind the Capitol each morning, Ben makes his first run at nine, his last at four in the afternoon. Even with a couple of hours off in the heat of the day, that's a full day's schedule for man and beast.

Ben was working on construction jobs for CW before he took to driving the teams and explaining the restored area to eager visitors. He came to Williamsburg from Halifax and first started work with the organization in 1934. Ben with his wife and two children live on South Henry Street. At forty years of age, Ben cuts quite a figure in his colorful knee breeches and tricorne hat and couldn't even begin to tell you how many pictures have been taken of him.

In general the routine goes along quite pleasantly with some new twist every day, as all have found who have dealt with the public. Generally it is the inconsiderate drivers rather than the foolish questions that nettle him the most. The other day he signalled for a turn into Duke of Gloucester Street only to have to rein in sharply when a Hudson from Pennsylvania ignored him. "Don't we have a lot fools in this world?," he was heard to mutter.

Cleveland Bays

We have been hard at work with our Cleveland Bay Breeding Program. We are using donor mares again this year and so far have 9 confirmed pregnancies. The gestation period for a horse is 11 months so these foals will hit the ground in late Spring 2021



4 of our purebred mares, Willow, Nora, Bayberry, and Isabella

The Red Carriage



Winthrop Rockefeller , Jeanette Rockefeller, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip in the Red Carriage in 1957

The Red Carriage is the oldest carriage in the fleet. It was originally purchased in 1940 for \$500 as a Britzka carriage. A Britzka is a two seater carriage with a convertible roof. The carriage underwent restoration and changes here at Colonial Williamsburg in the 1950s and was renamed the Mulberry Phaeton. In 1957 Queen Elizabeth became the first member of the Royal Family to visit Colonial Williamsburg and rode This carriage has been in service ever since. The body and underworks were overhauled in 2017 and repainted in a fire engine red. We know this carriage now as the Red Carriage.

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