

Colonial Williamsburg

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Colonial Williamsburg partners with the Historic American Buildings Survey and Library of Congress; contributes nearly 600 drawings of historic buildings to national collection



(L) Bundy House, Essex County, Virginia; 2012 (R) Edward Chappell and Harry Bradley recording the stair at Mason House, Accomack County, Virginia. Images courtesy of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Download high resolution images [here](#).

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (May 30, 2023) – The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation joins a national preservation effort by making a collection of historic architectural documentation available to the public as part of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) housed in the Library of Congress. HABS, administered by the National Park Service, is the federal government's oldest preservation program begun in 1933 to document America's architectural heritage. The collection contains records on more than 45,000 historic sites and is utilized by architectural preservationists across the nation as a primary resource for historic architecture.

“It’s a true honor to contribute some of the Foundation’s research and documentation to the HABS collection,” said Matt Webster, Colonial Williamsburg’s executive director of architectural preservation. “Research is the bedrock of everything we do here at the Foundation – it informs not only the way we preserve and reconstruct buildings, but also how we portray historical figures and present evidence about historical events.”

Colonial Williamsburg's architectural research collection is vast, spanning three centuries of construction and including structures ranging from estates to agricultural buildings. For the collaboration with HABS, Colonial Williamsburg is sharing more than 570 drawings representing nearly 200 structures built primarily between 1750 and 1850, most of which were documented by Colonial Williamsburg architectural historians starting in the 1980s under the direction of Ed Chappell, former Shirley and Richard Roberts Director of Architectural Research. Chappell was particularly interested in studying outbuildings not only to better understand the enslaved and free individuals who lived and worked in them, but also to gain a fuller understanding of properties as self-contained economies in which many different buildings served distinct purposes in service of a common goal.

"The Foundation's Agricultural Buildings Project was created at a time when many important everyday buildings were disappearing. Thanks to this project, many of these buildings were documented before they were lost, providing a wealth of information for future researchers that will now be forever preserved thanks to the partnership among The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, HABS and the Library of Congress," said Jennifer Wilkoski, the Foundation's Shirley and Richard Roberts architectural historian.

The Colonial Williamsburg collection is currently being digitized by HABS and shared with the Library of Congress where they will be available, along with related written and photographic documentation, to the public as research resources.

"HABS was intended to represent 'a complete resume of the builders art' to include not just high style and architect-designed buildings, but also the humble vernacular buildings that speak to the everyday lives of individuals from the past. The Colonial Williamsburg collection is exactly that. It is a remarkable addition to the HABS collection," said Catherine Lavoie, chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey.

The creation of HABS was inspired in part by the preservation efforts of John D. Rockefeller Jr. and the Rev. Dr. W.A.R. Goodwin at The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Colonial Williamsburg architects were producing drawings and photographs of colonial buildings in Virginia even before HABS employed architects across America to conduct a national survey of architectural resources. In fact, Charles E. Peterson, who wrote the proposal that created HABS, was working on the Colonial Parkway and interacted with the Colonial Williamsburg architects. Peterson witnessed them at work recording buildings that could inform their restorations and was clearly influenced by that experience. The Colonial Williamsburg architects would later send a telegram to Interior Secretary Harold Ickes endorsing Peterson's proposal.

While The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation is among the first private entities to contribute a major collection of historical documentation to HABS, both organizations hope that more will follow suit.

"It's a wonderful way to build the HABS collection and to present to scholars and the general public important archives such as this that might not otherwise be readily accessible," Lavoie said.

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About The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation preserves, restores and operates Virginia's 18th-century capital of Williamsburg. 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, extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers and 18th-century inspired culinary options from historic taverns situated along historic Duke of Gloucester Street. Colonial Williamsburg Resorts complement the experience, offering guests five unique hotel properties including the iconic Forbes Travel Guide Five-Star, AAA Five Diamond Williamsburg Inn, newly renovated Williamsburg Lodge-Autograph Collection, Williamsburg Woodlands Hotel and Suites, the Griffin Hotel, and authentic 18th-century Colonial Houses. The resort offers a range of events and amenities including four historic taverns, 15 food and beverage outlets providing exquisite culinary experiences from casual to elegant dining, the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club featuring 36 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. and his son Rees Jones, a world-class full-service spa and fitness center, pools, meeting and flexible event spaces, and scenic gardens providing the perfect venue for weddings and special events. Merchants Square, built alongside the Historic Area in 1935 as one of the first planned shopping districts in the United States, features more than 40 specialty boutiques with products ranging from apparel to fine jewelry, art, specialty foods and gifts. Philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and hospitality operations sustain Colonial Williamsburg's educational programs and preservation initiatives.

About The Historic American Building Survey

The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) is the nation's first federal preservation program, begun in 1933 to document America's architectural heritage. Creation of the program was motivated primarily by the perceived need to mitigate the negative effects upon our history and culture of rapidly vanishing architectural resources. While creating a lasting record for future generations, the rich HABS archive of period-specific architectural details also aids in the restoration and interpretation of historic properties. The significance of the HABS program resides in the broad scope of the collection and its public accessibility, as well as in the establishment of national standards for recording historic architecture. Thus, HABS is also responsible for the development of guidelines for the production of the drawings, histories, and photographs, and the criteria for preparing them for inclusion in the collection, recognized as the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Architectural and Engineering Documentation*.

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