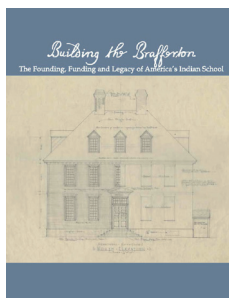




BUILDING THE BRAFFERTON: THE FOUNDING, FUNDING, AND LEGACY OF AMERICA'S INDIAN SCHOOL

by Danielle Moretti-Langholtz, Buck Woodard, eds.
(A Book Review)



During my years in Williamsburg, Virginia, the Brafferton School sat on the periphery of my mental landscape. As a construction history scholar, the visual symmetry of the College of William and Mary's historic campus piqued my interest. The Wren Building serves as the focal point of the campus, flanked by the Brafferton to the south and the President's House to the north. The careful siting

and scaling of these flanking buildings makes them appear of equal size, though the Brafferton is substantially larger. As an archaeologist at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, my colleagues excavated around and within the building in preparation for its second restoration as I cataloged the artifacts in the lab. Despite these connections to the Brafferton's history, my primary knowledge of the school was a ghost story I heard at some time and in some place now long forgotten: A boy, of unnoted tribal heritage, had been sent to the Brafferton as a pupil. Confined and constrained within the building, he snuck out in the middle of each night to run through the woods that surrounded the College. His outings were discovered, the windows of his room nailed shut, and the door locked at night. The boy subsequently died of a broken heart, away from his people

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and the woods that brought him solace. His ghost, so they say, can still be seen running across campus, seeking the woods.

Building the Brafferton is the culmination of collaboration among archaeologists, architectural historians, tribal members, curators, and students to restore the history of the Brafferton School. The interdisciplinary approach is an effective one, tracing social, cultural, and economic networks through the flow of cash and goods from the rural English countryside, through London as the metropole, and into the colonial capital of Virginia—but also from the wilds of the Virginia woods and the indigenous cultivation fields back through Williamsburg and to London in the form of pelts, furs, and tobacco. The authors also trace the flow of social capital through political, religious, cultural, and familial connections, creating a picture of colonial Virginia that is richly detailed and treats every individual discussed as an active agent in these networks, seeking benefits for both themselves as individuals and the networks they represent.

To make this process of reconstructing history a manageable one, the book is divided into three sections: the founding, the funding, and the legacy. “The Founding” focuses on the formation and role of English educational and religious doctrinal goals as an adjunct to colonialism. By necessity, this section focuses heavily on the Reverend James Blair, who leveraged his connections to Anglican leadership and Virginia’s leading families to secure a place for himself as an arbiter of education in a growing capitalist world system. Juxtaposed against the machinations of Blair is the political precarity of the Virginia Indian tribes that had been drawn into the same growing capitalist world system. Tributary relationships formed the core of the political bonds that colonists entered into with Virginia Indian tribes, creating hierarchical relationships of power that allowed the subordinated party to retain control of its own internal affairs. The Virginia Indian tribes that sent young men to the Brafferton were therefore using education to further their own political agendas, providing members of their tribes with the opportunity to become cross-culturally literate and relying on the potential future security that such literacy could bring.

“Funding” comprises the second section with a focus on the multiple income streams that commingled to support both the Brafferton School and the College of William and Mary. Though named for Brafferton Manor, the estate of the school’s English benefactor Robert Boyle, much of the schools’ funding depended on the loss of indigenous sovereignty and theft of indigenous resources. Taxes on exported tobacco, skins, and furs provided one funding stream, while at the same time destroying traditional indigenous subsistence activities and fostering a growing indigenous reliance on European manufactured goods and debt. The opening of the “College Lands,” two 10,000-acre plantations meant to provide agricultural products and income to the College, was predicated on the removal of those lands from indigenous control. Therefore, even as Brafferton students became versed in the ways and manners of their colonizers’ society, culture, and politics, the facility that allowed them to do so was maintained and operated at the cost of their own peoples.

The two strongest contributions to this section are Buck Woodward’s “Students of the Brafferton Indian School” and Ashley Atkin Spivey’s “Making Pottery and Constructing Community at Pamunkey During the Brafferton Era.” Woodward offers biographies of seven of the approximately 125 indigenous pupils who attended the Brafferton School between 1702 and 1778, highlighting the roles these individuals filled in both their home cultures and in the colonist cultures they occupied. Though brief, these biographies offer the reader rich, three-dimensional portraits of these men and the choices they made as they navigated political turmoil, religious tensions, and personal choices. Spivey’s essay brings women into the conversation through colonoware, low-fired, locally produced, hand-built earthenware that dates from the 17th to the 19th centuries in the eastern United States. Pamunkey women produced the ubiquitous pottery for home use and eventually for the market economy. While the production of colonoware for public consumption was necessary for the tribe’s economic survival, the Pamunkey view the process of pottery making as an expression of their relationship to landscapes which they have inhabited for centuries and physical manifestations of their identity. Pamunkey ceramics function as extensions

of the women who made them, creating an enduring connection to the community, even when the object itself resides outside it.

The third section, “Legacy,” examines the significance of the Brafferton to the post-colonial history of the College of William and Mary and to contemporary indigenous communities. Much of its focus rests on the twentieth-century restoration of the building as part of the first stages of the restoration of Williamsburg, Virginia, to its colonial appearance. Mark Kostro and Alexandra Martin explore the presence of knapped glass tools recovered during Brafferton School excavations, and the active materialization of indigenous identity through mnemonic practices that create and maintain community bonds. Danielle Moretti-Langholtz’s “The Brafferton Indian School: In Memory and Legacy” examines how the Brafferton became coded in space and memory: the erasure of the centrality of indigenous peoples to the College of William and Mary’s founding finances, how the Brafferton was connected to structures of power and wealth, and how the American Revolution and post-revolutionary period reframed indigenous and Anglo-American relationships to enable westward expansion. Taken collectively, this volume reconstructs the history of the Brafferton School by acknowledging those historical ruptures and constructing new memory bridges to address what has been forgotten and overlooked in the past two centuries.

Building the Brafferton undertakes the herculean tasks of recovering a forgotten history and centering the indigenous experiences of a colonial place and power structure. Moreover, it succeeds at these tasks remarkably well, recognizing the conflicting choices that historical actors made in the hopes of securing the best outcome for themselves or for their people, whether indigenous or colonizer. The editors recognize modern indigenous voices as well, including authors and scholars of Virginia Indian heritage among the contributors and recognizing the contributions of the Brafferton Legacy Group, which is made up of members of tribes known to have sent scholars to the Brafferton School.

The acknowledgement of modern indigenous experiences, however, is the one area in which the text is lacking. There are several references to the place the Brafferton School occupies in the histories of these Virginia Indian tribes, but no direct voice from among

those tribes to provide the reader insight to what that place is. Given that *Building the Brafferton* grew from an exhibit presented at the Muscarelle Museum of Art at the College of William and Mary and several events took place during the excavation and restoration of the Brafferton and during the exhibit, it seems likely that this knowledge was shared through venues other than a printed text. For example, the exhibit included pieces by Pamunkey, Eastern Band of Cherokee, Wyandot, and Nottoway artists, each of which reflects on the ways in which the histories of colonizers and their institutions are intertwined with those of indigenous peoples. To a reader who could not attend the events or see the exhibit, this offers an intriguing glimpse of how modern indigenous communities might recollect places like the Brafferton, but leaves the feeling that that much more to the subject than is captured on the page. In the larger context of the book, this seems like a moment of potential historical rupture, where something worth being preserved stands at the risk of being lost. That very possibility, however, underscores Moretti-Lanholtz's observation that memory is constructed and reconstructed by the processes of forgetting and remembering, and we continue to be active participants in those processes.

Those processes of forgetting reduced the experiences of the Brafferton scholars to the ghost of a indigenous boy, running to the woods. Those processes of remembering have put names, faces, families, and lives to the Brafferton scholars, rendering Robert Scholar, Thomas Step, Charles Murphy, John Montour, John Nettles, Robert Mush, and Henry Bawbee as ghosts no more.

Bio: Libby Cook is an independent scholar who received her PhD in Early American History from William & Mary in 2017. With a research specialty in construction history and the pre-industrial building trades, she transitioned to culture resource management and historic preservation, where she has worked in both the private and the public sectors.

WORKS CITED:

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RIAS VOL. 16, SPRING-SUMMER Nº 1/2023