

Colonial Williamsburg Arboretum

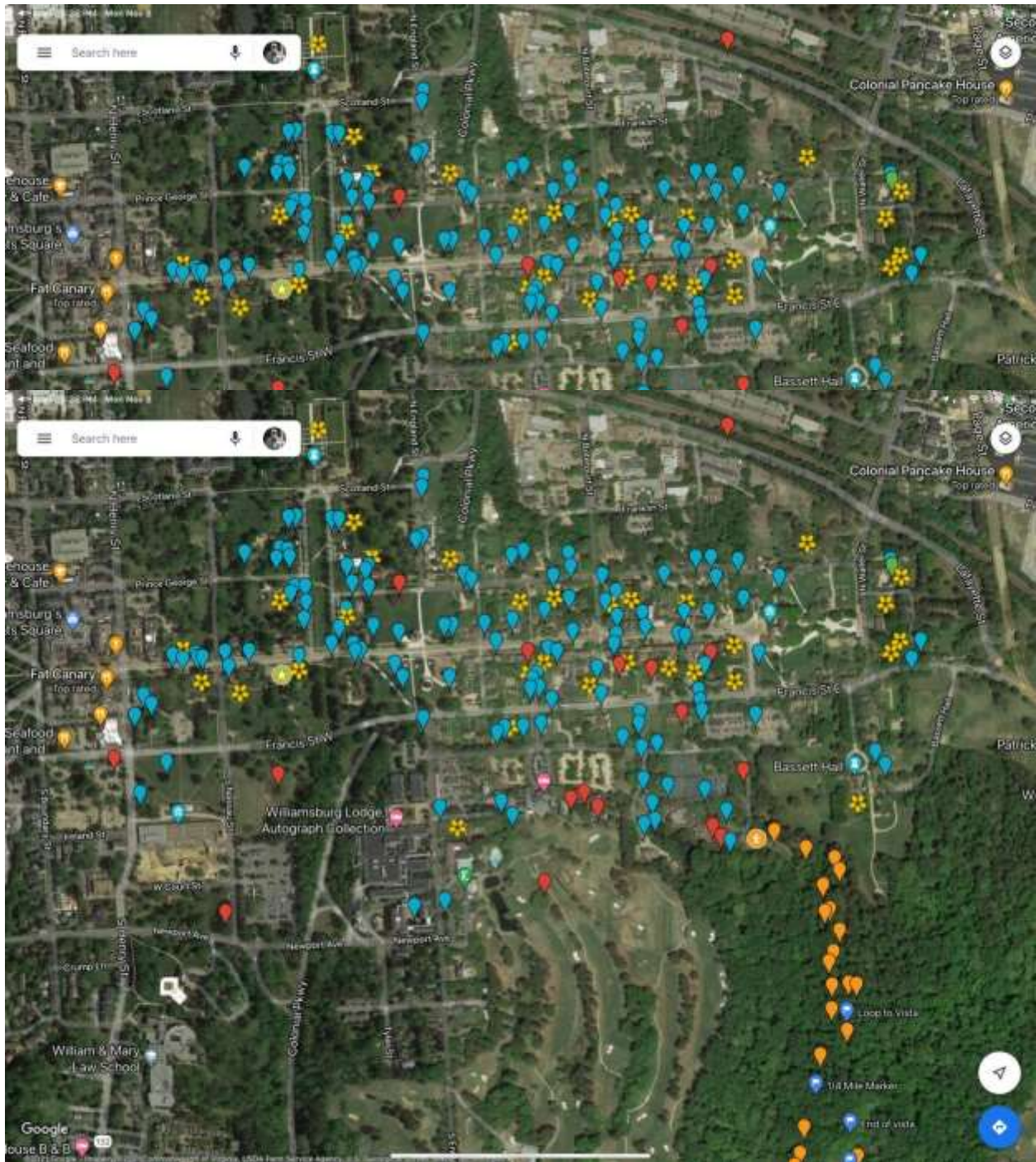
"That the future may learn from the past."

Colonial Williamsburg (CW) has within the boundaries of its Historic Area a unique collection of trees and woody plants. The majority of them are native to the MidAtlantic region, and those that are not, were introduced into the Virginia Colony prior to 1800. Although these plants were familiar to Virginia colonists, many of today's visitors do not recognize them because they are not readily available in commercial nurseries.

In 2018, six James City County/Williamsburg Master Gardener Tree Steward volunteers recognized the importance of this collection of trees and woody shrubs. After conversations with the CW Landscape Management Team and Certified Arborist, Charles Gardener, who proposed establishment of an arboretum in Colonial Williamsburg, they set to work. Their work was instrumental in developing a plan, in consultation with CW's Arborist to apply for national arboretum status with the ArbNet Arboretum Accreditation Program (ArbNet.org) maintained by the Morton Arboretum Registry.

Their work began by assembling historic records of the landscape plants by Arthur A. Shurcliff. Mr Shurcliff was the first Landscape Architect employed by John F. Rockefeller, Jr. in the 1930's to oversee the planning layout of gardens and plantings during restoration. His plans and plats, and those developed by his successors, were obtained from the CW archives and reviewed by the team. Next came the lengthy process of locating and inventorying the thousands of trees and woody shrubs in the 300+ acre Historic Area of the Colonial Capitol. The Tree Stewards were divided into two-person teams and the Historic Area was subdivided into sections to be visited and inventoried. These inventories were recorded on spreadsheets with identifying information that will be used to form the base for later inclusion in an international Botanical Gardens Conservational Information [BGCI] plant search database. Then selections from each species were made and specimens were tagged with metal signs with QR codes that linked to an accessible data base containing information about that plant that is available to the public using a code reader on their smart phones and tablets.

On September 28, 2018, their application for Level I Status (25 trees and/or woody shrubs tagged) was approved as a fully accredited national arboretum. Work was completed on July 22, 2019 that elevated the arboretum to Level II status (100 trees and/or woody shrubs tagged). At that time CW was the only Level II certified arboretum in the Commonwealth. The eventual, long-term goal is for the arboretum to become a fully accredited Level III (500 trees and/or woody shrubs tagged) national arboretum and work is on-going to achieve that goal. Currently the only Level III arboretum in the Commonwealth is Arlington National Cemetery. Colonial Williamsburg has created a webpage for the public to learn about the Arboretum with informational links and an interactive map of the Arboretum with links to the Virginia Tech dendrology website can



be found at: <https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/explore/arboretum-gardens/>

As a natural educational component of that project, the James City County/Williamsburg Tree Steward Volunteers took advantage of the educational possibilities that logically flow from the creation of the CW Arboretum. JCC/W Master Gardeners have long

enjoyed a working relationship with Colonial Williamsburg. Over 20 years ago the unit developed the Learning Garden Project, that maintains two demonstration gardens growing period flowers and vegetables in the Historic area. Master Gardener volunteers conduct weekly public tours through the gardens explaining sustainable gardening techniques and practices. Because of the success of that project, the Tree Stewards developed another joint project with CW that uses the Arboretum as a resource to educate the public on the value of trees and woody shrubs in our ecosystem. Tree Stewards volunteers trained by CW Staff in the historic perspective of this colonial area, provide guided tours of the Arboretum on a regularly-scheduled, weekly basis under the guidance of the CW Landscape Management Team. The public, CW visitors, school groups, youth organizations and nature-based interest groups take advantage of this learning experience. These tours involve plant identification and cultural requirements, responsible landscape management, and natural resource conservation, ecological and/or environmental concerns, and the challenges involved in maintaining an urban forest.

This project provides a high level of visibility and exposure for the JCC/W Master Gardener unit, the Peninsula Tree Stewards and the Virginia Cooperative Extension educational programs and supports the overall mission of Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners: **“to better utilize our resources, we form collaborations with hundreds of public and private partners and volunteers, who help us reach larger and more diverse audiences and also leverage the impact of our work ...to serve communities throughout the Commonwealth... by providing communities with locally identified programs, including answers to individual questions via ...educational programs to meet targeted needs; education for the preservation of historic landscapes; urban tree planting programs; and guidance in making the natural environment accessible to all residents regardless of disabilities, incomes, or where they live.”**

As the world’s largest living history museum, Colonial Williamsburg presents a unique partner for the James City County/Williamsburg extension Master Gardener unit to work with to acquaint the thousands of its visitors with the learning opportunities available from Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Resources for the avid tree-hugger

- [Colonial Williamsburg Arboretum](#) webpage
- [Virginia Big Trees](#)
- [Virginia Tech Dendrology](#)
- [iTree](#)
- [Flora of Virginia app](#)
- [PlantSnap app](#)
- [Seek by iNaturalist app](#)

This project has continued for the past 6 years and is on-going. Because of the large number of hybrids, cultivars and varieties of individual species, our volunteers have recently begun reaching out to various organizations that have the expertise to assist in identifying species of plants in the collection, such as the Holly Society of America, the Virginia Camellia Society, the American Rhododendron Society and others with expertise who have indicated a willingness to further the work of the Arboretum by providing expert advice about plants in the collection. Obviously, there is a great deal of detail and work that has been expended that cannot be explained in sufficient detail for this short summary. For more information, please visit the Colonial Williamsburg Arboretum & Gardens website at [Colonial Williamsburg Arboretum](#).

Rick Brown
Arboretum Volunteer