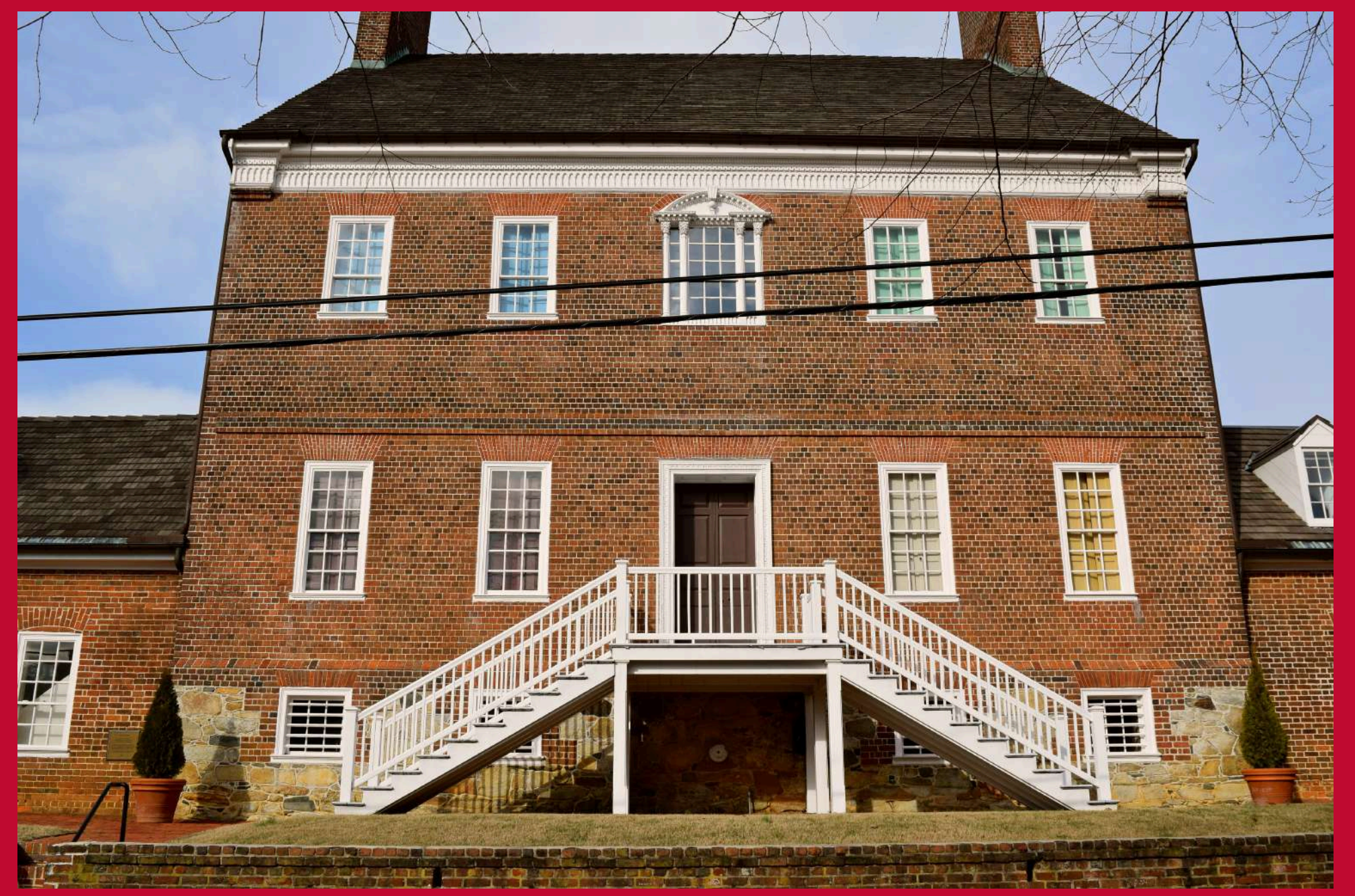


Exploring Free and Enslaved Black Craftspeople at the James Brice House

Cade Fanning - Haverford College '26



Background

- James Brice was a wealthy Annapolitan planter, a prominent local politician, and a member of the elite during and after the Revolution
- In 1767-1774, he oversaw the construction of his mansion in downtown Annapolis
- My research explores the free and enslaved Black craftspeople who worked in the construction of the James Brice House and has the goal of creating an interactive touchscreen exhibit on the topic

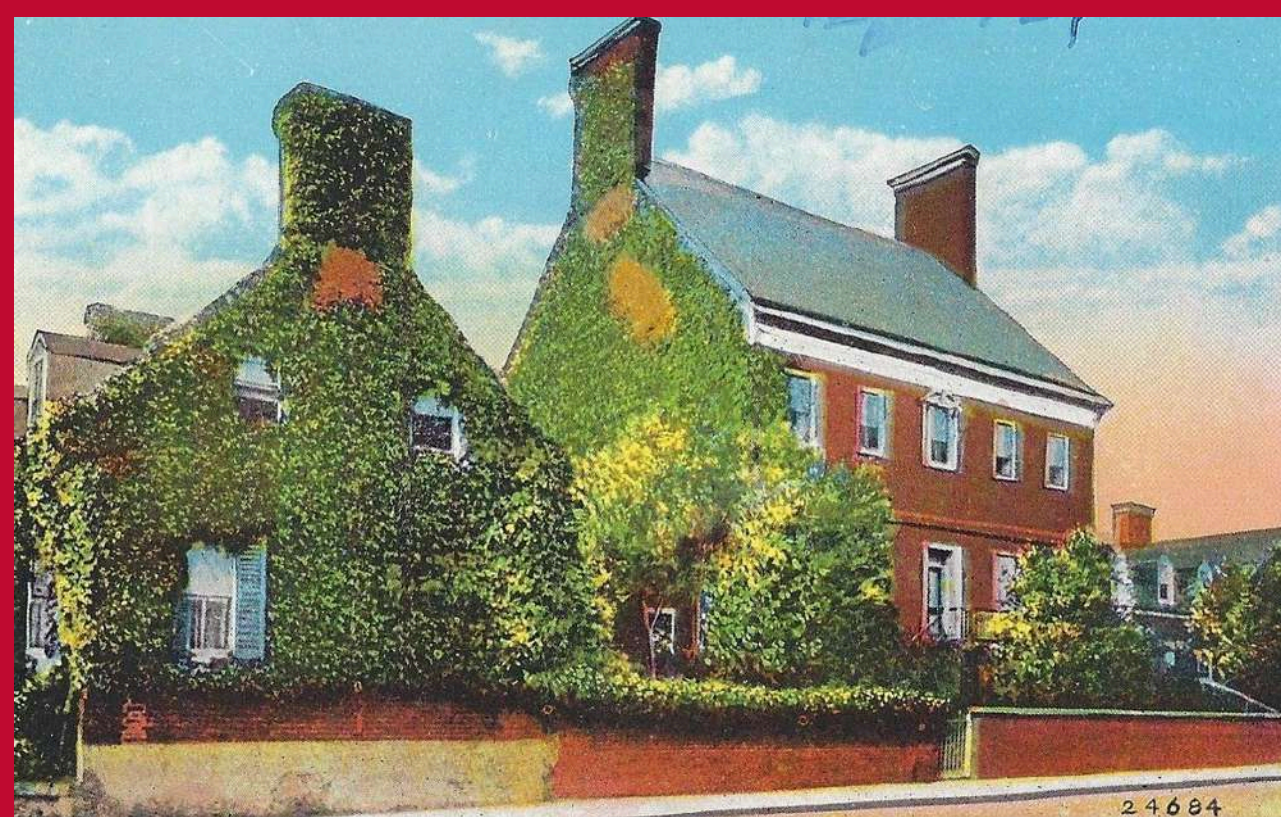
Research Process

- Researched primary sources directly from James Brice: he was an unusually meticulous record-keeper and many of his detailed account books and inventories are extant
- He recorded nearly all payments made during the construction of the house, illuminating the work and lives of free and enslaved Black craftspeople
- When a bound laborer ran away, Brice placed ads in *The Maryland Gazette* describing the laborers, their appearances, and their apparel
- Wealth of detailed primary sources provided more information but required significantly more sifting
- Additional challenge of constructing these stories from financial transactions; research centered around the glimpses of craftspeople's work and lives that could be gleaned from receipts



HART B420: Museum Studies Fieldwork Seminar
Faculty Advisor: Monique Scott

Praxis Site Supervisor: Katie Turer
Praxis Community Partner: Historic Annapolis



Contextualizing and Applying Research

- Focused on contextualizing findings within the historical context of urban enslavement in colonial America
- Attended virtual lectures on colonial craftsmanship and enslavement
- Further researched the topic through scholarship, exhibitions, articles, and books on free and enslaved Black craftspeople
- Established a framing of the era that improved my understanding of how the people who worked on the Brice House fit into contemporary systems of enslavement and labor
- Analyzed Historic Annapolis's Comprehensive Interpretation Plan for Brice House to familiarize myself the organization's goals for the site and the message they wish to share with visitors
- Keeping that mission in mind shaped the presentation of my research by allowing me to consider how my research connected to it

Takeaways

- Enslavers like James Brice viewed enslaved laborers as investments, apprenticing them to indentured or convict craftspeople and then renting their labor to others and collecting their wages
- Enslaved craftspeople used their skill to counter the perception of them as property, developing their craft as a way to redefine themselves as skilled individuals, not tools
- The acquisition of professional skill among enslaved individuals allowed them to improve their socioeconomic standing and in some cases obtain their freedom and establish generational wealth



Plaster Rosettes
Date: 1766-74
These oil plaster rosettes came from the drawing room cornice and illustrate the detail work done

Accomplishments

- I developed a plan for an interactive exhibit based on my research
- Highlights their stories and accomplishments in an interactive manner
- Connects to the idea of the participatory museum: transforming museums from a place of presentation to a place of dialogue wherein visitors are active participants in the knowledge being shared
- Encouraging visitors to interact with these underrepresented stories involves them in the dissemination of the grounded, community-centric historical message Historic Annapolis aims to convey through the James Brice House

