



FOUNDING FEMALES Female Qualifying Ancestor Index

Female Ancestor Number: 101

Name: Stith, Elizabeth (Bray) Allen Smith

Dates: (ca. 1692—wp22 Feb 1774)

Colonial Society: VA

Date added to ROA: 2-7-2024

Service Woman of Distinction – founder of a free school for poor children

Authority: Gundersen, Joan R., "Elizabeth Bray Allen (ca.1692-1774)," Dictionary of Virginia Biography, Library of Virginia (1998-), published 1998

(http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/dvb/bio.php?b=Allen_Elizabeth_Bray, accessed February 7, 2024); Isle of Wight County Deed Book 9, 1752-1758: 78-83

Biography:

Elizabeth Bray was born about 1692 to Mourning Burgh Pettus and James Bray near Williamsburg, Virginia. James was from Wilmington Parish, James City County. He owned 1280 acres of land in the county which was known as "Utopia" and "Littletown", as well as property in three additional counties in addition to a house in Williamsburg. Elizabeth was well educated which was unusual for girls at that time.

Elizabeth first married Arthur Allen November 27, 1711, owner of a large plantation and builder of the oldest brick dwelling in the U.S. This estate, known as Bacon's Castle, was erected in 1665 and originally contained 5,300 square feet. Elizabeth and Arthur Allen had one son and one daughter. Sixteen years later, Elizabeth became widowed, taking on management of the vast Allen estate. Remarkable for the time, Elizabeth was deeded land by her father in his will just two years before her widowhood, which included a plantation, two single lots in Williamsburg, and other real estate. By now an astute entrepreneur, Elizabeth sheltered these gifts by securing a bond with her brother in 1725 and selling life rights to some of her property for 500£.

Prior to her second marriage by 1730 to Arthur Smith, successful planter in Isle of Wight, Elizabeth wisely entered into an agreement with her future husband to further protect her income. This act paved the way for Elizabeth Allen's philanthropic endeavor: an endowment of 140£ in 1753, which created a free school for poor children in Smithfield. Elizabeth reserved exclusive rights to name trustees, and provided meticulous direction for the building's construction. Teaching of the children did not end within the confines of the school; after their education, boys were later bound out as apprentices, and girls were bound "to some Honest Woman to be taught Household affairs."

Following Arthur Smith's death in 1754, Elizabeth administered her own property as well as Smith's vast estate, and within nine years remarried to a Stith. Elizabeth Bray Allen Smith Stith died in February 1774 in Surry County, having outlived her three husbands. In addition to providing generously in her will to her grandchildren and godchildren, Elizabeth endowed 120£ and the remainder of her estate to her school in Smithfield.