



Hampton

CONVENTION & VISITOR BUREAU

Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 5, 2018

Contact: Elizabeth Severs, 757/728-5326
elizabeth.severs@hamptoncvb.com
Seamus McGrann, 757/727-6841
mmcgrann@hampton.gov

Author Shares Untold Story of African American WPA Gardeners At Hampton History Museum Free Lunchtime Program April 18

Hampton, VA - As a prelude to Historic Garden Week in Virginia, Author Martha McClenny Williams will talk about her book, “WPA Original Gardeners: Norfolk Botanical Garden,” as part of the Hampton History Museum’s free Lunch in Time Series on Wednesday, April 18, Noon-1:00 p.m.

The story of the gardeners remained hidden for over a half century. The original 220 African-American gardeners were unknown and forgotten until a search to find names and honor their legacy was initiated by a group of middle school students. In 2009 a WPA Memorial Garden was developed with an appropriate sculpture. Dr. McClenny Williams will talk about the journey to find the names of the gardeners, and the stories that she learned from their families. After her talk, she will sign copies of her book.

-More-

1919 Commerce Drive, Suite 290 | Hampton, Virginia 23666
757.722.1222 | 800.487.8778 | fax 757.896.4600 | www.hamptoncvb.com

Author Shares Untold Story of African American WPA Gardeners at Hampton History Museum Free Lunchtime Program April 18- Page 2

Survival was the goal during the Great Depression. During the darkest period in the history of the United States families suffered great hardships and at one period over 13 million men and women were unemployed. If a person had a job it was at reduced wages and part-time. For African Americans, unemployment was double that of the general population. Norfolk, once a city of abundant jobs for African Americans whether professional, skilled, unskilled or laborer was hard hit during the Great Depression. Men and women found themselves waiting for any type of job. For many the relief lines were not an option.

In 1938 the City of Norfolk received a Works Progress Administration grant and offered 200 African American women and 20 men the job of clearing a swamp to build an azalea garden. They used only pickaxes, shovels, hand saws, ropes and wheelbarrows to successfully clear debris, shrubs, underbrush, and cut down trees. They planted 4000 azaleas, 2000 rhododendrons, 100 bushels of tulips and a variety of other plants in six months. The once 25 acre swampland and only existing WPA garden is now a 175 acre natural beauty which has attracted international attention and won many awards.

The program is free and open to the public. Attendees are encouraged to bring a bag lunch. The museum will provide free dessert.

Historic Garden Week in Virginia is April 21-28, 2018.

The Hampton History Museum is located at 120 Old Hampton Lane in Downtown Hampton. There is free parking in the garage across the street from the museum. For more information call 757/727-1102., visit www.HamptonHistoryMuseum.org, or like the Hampton History Museum on Facebook and follow it on Twitter and Instagram.

-More-

Author Shares Untold Story of African American WPA Gardeners at Hampton History Museum Free Lunchtime Program April 18- Page 3

Partially bordered by the Hampton Roads harbor and Chesapeake Bay, Hampton, with the 344,000 sq. ft. Hampton Roads Convention Center and the award-winning Hampton Coliseum, is located in the center of Coastal Virginia and the Hampton Roads metropolitan area. Hampton is the site of America's first continuous English-speaking settlement, the site of the first arrival of Africans in English North America, and is home to such visitor attractions as the Virginia Air & Space Center, Fort Monroe National Monument, Hampton History Museum, harbor tours and cruises, Hampton University Museum, The American Theatre, among others.

###