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## The Enslaved People and the Tylers Too: Why It Is Imperative to Discuss Slavery in Public History

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The Enslaved People and the Tylers Too: Why It Is Imperative to Discuss Slavery in Public History

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for  
the degree of Bachelor of Arts / Science in Department from  
William & Mary

by

Meredith Jackson

Accepted for Highest Honors



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Jody Lynn Allen, Director



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Williamsburg, VA  
May 7, 2021

The Enslaved People and the Tylers Too:  
Why It Is Imperative to Discuss Slavery in Public History

By  
Meredith Jackson

I dedicate this thesis to my grandmother. She gave me a book about Dolley Madison when I was a child, starting my interest in the past. Without her dedication to education and encouragement for my love of history, I would not be where I am today.

I would like to provide a special thank you to the staffs at Special Collections Research Center at William & Mary, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University, Manuscripts and Archives in Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University, and the Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History in Charles City County, Virginia, for all of their help in providing documents for this research. I greatly appreciate them all going the extra mile, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. I would also like to thank Frances Tyler for sharing her research and several documents that have been instrumental to this thesis and to the staff at Sherwood Forest Plantation who allowed me to walk the grounds and inside the house to further contextualize the experiences of enslaved African Americans on the property. I am thankful for this opportunity to tell a fuller picture of the Tyler family and the plantation. I also want to extend my gratitude to Dr. Julie Richter and Dr. Sara Bon-Harper for agreeing to be on the committee for my thesis defense. Last but not least, I wish to thank Dr. Jody Allen for her guidance during my undergraduate career, especially in regards to my thesis, and for believing in and encouraging my research interests. I am grateful for all of her support.

## Introduction

In recent decades, a strong push has been produced around the world to include topics in history that have largely been ignored, such as slavery and the treatment of Native Americans. The events in the summer of 2020 – including the murder of George Floyd and the numerous Black Lives Matter protests against police brutality – as well as the Capitol insurrection in 2021 that brought the Confederate flag into the halls of a beacon of American democracy, exposed to the world the risks of the United States’ reluctance to acknowledging its past and the impact it has on the present. Public history is imperative now more than ever to aid in educating everyone about the real story of America, meaning that one cannot just highlight the “celebratory” episodes in American history or largely ignore stories that are not told by Caucasian people or from their point of view. While there have been various complaints made to historic sites and museums by visitors for mentioning slavery and the enslaved, it is imperative to tell a more complete story of American history. Using Sherwood Forest, President John Tyler’s Charles City County Plantation, this thesis will highlight why public history institutions must engage with slavery. In this paper, the stories of the Tyler family’s often overlooked perpetuation of both slavery and the Lost Cause – which is an interpretation of the Civil War that paints the Confederacy in a positive light – and the almost virtually forgotten narratives of the enslaved people at Sherwood Forest will illustrate to readers why it is vitally important for public history institutions to discuss some of the more “uncomfortable” aspects of American history that still have yet to be fully uncovered and examined.

Because of the lack of focus and research on the enslaved people – especially at Sherwood Forest, which is still owned by the Tyler family and open to the public for tours – there is a gaping hole in the knowledge of John Tyler’s life since one cannot study the story of

the enslaver without covering the enslaved. Existing literature about President Tyler primarily focuses on his political career – such as those from Gary May, Edward Crapol, and Christopher Leahy – and while they do reference Tyler’s views on slavery, the discussion is limited to the context of how the institution affected his political career. May focused on Tyler’s presidency, especially how he was instrumental in allowing Texas into the Union, but there is hardly any mention of slavery or the enslaved. Crapol stated that he provided analysis of Tyler’s “ambivalent views on slavery, his racial outlook, his belief in white supremacy, and his faith in American exceptionalism,” but his book only sporadically mentioned some of the many enslaved people whom Tyler owned throughout his life.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Leahy argued that one of the main themes of Tyler’s life was that he was a southerner, which defined his politics and development of legislation that favored the South. In this sense, Leahy exclusively wrote about Tyler’s views on slavery as it related to legislation.<sup>2</sup> These biographers on Tyler principally focused on his political career and rarely included the enslaved people in the narrative.

Some biographers have taken a different perspective on Tyler and examined his domestic life with his family. Robert Seager wanted to “humanize” the president and “bring him out of the shadow into which history has cast him.”<sup>3</sup> He wrote about the “informal social history” of the Tyler and Gardiner families since he focused on both John and Julia Gardiner Tyler. However, as he shed light on the domestic lives of both the former president and first lady, he hardly mentioned the enslaved people at the White House or Sherwood Forest. The author occasionally pointed out the stories and names of some of the people the Tyler family owned. Moreover,

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<sup>1</sup> Edward P. Crapol, “Introduction,” in *John Tyler: The Accidental President* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher J. Leahy, “Introduction,” in *President without a Party: The Life of John Tyler* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2020), 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Seager II, “Forward,” in *And Tyler Too: A Biography of John and Julia Gardiner Tyler* (United Kingdom: Creative Media Partners, 2017), xiii.

Leahy wrote an article about John Tyler's domestic life as the future president was torn between his family and his career, and because Tyler valued his career more than his family, he was an absent husband and father.<sup>4</sup> Leahy did mention enslaved people, even though he discussed Tyler's domestic life with his family on the plantation. In another book, *First Dads: Parenting and Politics from George Washington to Barack Obama*, Joshua Kendall described Tyler as a "double-dealing dad" since it is rumored that he had illegitimate children.<sup>5</sup> While he provided much attention to the multiple allegations that Tyler had children with enslaved women, Kendall scarcely mentioned the tenth president's views on slavery or the other enslaved people the Tyler family owned. While these authors discussed Tyler in a domestic setting, they left out that he was an enslaver and the stories of the enslaved people who lived and labored at his plantations.

Outside of President John Tyler, there is little research on the other members of the Tyler family. Little is known and mentioned about Henry Tyler, President Tyler's great-great grandfather, and Judge John Tyler, President Tyler's father. Few biographers – including Lyon Gardiner Tyler, Crapol, and Leahy – rarely discussed these two slaveowning men. Furthermore, there is hardly anything written about the extended members of the Tyler family – such as Eliza Tyler, W. Tyler, and Lewis Tyler – whose documents are included with the Tyler Family Papers at the Special Collections Research Center at William & Mary. Little has been published about Julia Gardiner Tyler, President Tyler's second wife. She is, however, heavily discussed in Seager's biography of the couple, as well as in Lyon Gardiner Tyler's books about his family, and while there is some emphasis on her views of slavery, the enslaved people at Sherwood Forest are hardly mentioned, even though her personal letters at William & Mary show that she

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Leahy, "Torn Between Family and Politics: John Tyler's Struggle for Balance," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 114, no. 3 (2006): 324.

<sup>5</sup> Joshua Kendall, "Prologue: The Sense and Sensibility of James Garfield," in *First Dads: Parenting and Politics from George Washington to Barack Obama* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 9.

interacted with them often. A dissertation by Theodore DeLaney about the first lady provided ample attention to her stance and defense of slavery, especially in learning more about elite southern women in the nineteenth century, but he only sporadically discussed few of the enslaved people Julia Gardiner Tyler wrote about in her letters, leaving out vital information about the enslaved people at Sherwood Forest. President Tyler and Julia Gardiner Tyler's son, Lyon Gardiner Tyler, also has rarely been researched, even though he wrote numerous books and articles over his career and endeavored to preserve his family's papers and national reputation. There is one article from Dan Monroe that analyzed Lyon Gardiner Tyler's piece, "John Tyler and Abraham Lincoln: Who Was the Dwarf?" The writing was Tyler's response to a 1920s *Time* magazine article stating that the presidential accomplishments of Abraham Lincoln dwarfed those of John Tyler. Monroe dissected Lyon Gardiner Tyler's argument about Lincoln and showed how Tyler took a very biased view on the president whom he is famous for critiquing. However, Monroe did not discuss Lyon Gardiner Tyler's other writings – such as *The Letters and Times of the Tylers* and "A Confederate Catechism" – and because of this, Monroe missed the opportunity to address Lyon Gardiner Tyler's favoritism towards his family and his perpetuation of the Lost Cause. Because there has been little to no attention on members of the Tyler family outside of the U.S. president, this thesis endeavors to encapsulate how multiple family members supported and defended slavery and the Lost Cause, as well as to bring to the forefront the enslaved people who lived and labored at Sherwood Forest.

As more and more people demand that slavery should be discussed at historic sites, museums, and classrooms, the emphasis on conveying the stories of the enslaved is more imperative than ever. As of right now, the tours at Sherwood Forest follow a similar format to John Tyler's biographies in that they discuss his political career but do not mention his or his



family's stances on slavery and the Lost Cause nor the enslaved people on the property, giving the effect that slavery was not present at the plantation. Sherwood Forest is not unique in the fact that the staff and some members of the family wish to discuss and uncover the stories of the enslaved, both on tours and on their website. This thesis will enhance the narrative of Sherwood Forest to tell a more complete story by amplifying the lives of enslaved African Americans in conveying their accounts before and during the Civil War, as well as their experiences after the war and those of their many descendants. It will also add to the historical narrative about the Tyler family and how they perpetuated and defended slavery and the Lost Cause. By bringing to the forefront the attitudes of the Tyler family and the narratives of the enslaved, it will showcase the greater need in the United States for public history institutions to provide a fuller story of American history. If these stories of the "uncomfortable" aspects of United States history are not told to Americans, there will be a major gap in the historical narrative, giving the false notion that certain events are not as important or that they never happened.

## Chapter 1

### The Tyler Family and Its Connections to Slavery, the Confederacy, and the Lost Cause

#### *Introduction*

“Prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future and renders the present inaccessible.”<sup>6</sup> This quote from Maya Angelou exemplifies why it is important to bring to light and discuss honestly past discriminations that persist in America, especially since they are still affecting the present. Americans saw the effects of its history with white supremacy and slavery from the election of Donald Trump to the murder of George Floyd to the insurrection at the Capitol. It is because of these events that people must engage in discussions about how key political figures, including American presidents, have perpetuated these ideas for centuries. President John Tyler and his family were among many individuals throughout American history who have owned people, defended slavery, and perpetuated the Lost Cause, a narrative of the Civil War that paints the Confederate South in a positive light. Tyler’s great-great grandfather, Henry Tyler, was one of the first people in the Tyler family to own enslaved people in America, starting the family’s long history of owning enslaved people. Furthermore, various members of the family used their political positions to expand slavery, such as President Tyler annexing Texas as a slave state and Judge John Tyler opposing the international slave trade while staying mute on the domestic trade. Both of President Tyler’s wives also supported slavery. His first wife, Letitia Christian Tyler, came from a prominent Virginia plantation family, and his second wife, the northern-born Julia Gardiner Tyler, wrote publicly in defense of American slavery. Five of John Tyler’s children supported and fought for the Confederacy, while the former U.S.

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<sup>6</sup> Maya Angelou, goodreads, accessed January 16, 2021, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/218230-prejudice-is-a-burden-that-confuses-the-past-threatens-the>.

president was elected to the Confederate Congress. Even beyond the Civil War, Lyon Gardiner Tyler – John and Julia Tyler’s son who became a president of the College of William & Mary – wrote a series of biographies in the late nineteenth century to defend his ancestors and authored “A Confederate Catechism” in 1920 in order to paint the South in a favorable light. It is important to acknowledge and understand that very prominent people have used their platforms to support white supremacy – from college presidents to U.S. presidents. In order for America to move forward, spaces must be created where people can learn about these heavily flawed ideas, how they formed America’s politics and lifestyle, and how they are in action today, or else the United States will be further steeped in prejudice since Americans will not have the proper understanding of their past to change their present and future.

*Henry Tyler (1660-1729)*

Henry Tyler, the great-great-grandfather of President John Tyler, and he was one of the first members of the Tyler family to be a slaveowner.<sup>7</sup> He was an important figure in the community since he was appointed by the House of Burgesses to lay out the new capital, Williamsburg, in 1699 and was also a churchwarden of Bruton Parish for many years.<sup>8</sup> Henry Tyler’s will shows just how wealthy and prominent he was in Virginian society. His will stated that his wife, Elizabeth, inherited ten enslaved people – Jack, Thomas, Aggy, Alice, Kate, Doll, Sarah, David, Daniel, and Peter.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Henry Tyler bequeathed to his son, Henry Tyler, all of his lands and eleven enslaved people: Edward, Cuffee, Ralph, Pegg, Betty, Bertram, Rachel, William, Benjamin, Charles, Dick, and any future children of these individuals.<sup>10</sup> To his

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<sup>7</sup> This information is based on a Tyler Family Tree given to the author from a direct descendent of President John Tyler.

<sup>8</sup> Lyon Gardiner Tyler, “Chapter I: 1747-1778,” in *The Letters and Times of the Tylers* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, Cor., 1884), 1:44.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

dozens of grandchildren, Henry Tyler willed them each an enslaved person of “the value of ten pounds, or ten pounds in money.”<sup>11</sup> The plantation owner’s last will and testament displays how many enslaved people he owned – and there could possibly be more than those who were mentioned explicitly – displaying early on in American history how the Tyler family supported and benefited from slavery.

*Judge John Tyler (1747-1813)*

Henry Tyler’s great-grandson and President Tyler’s father, Judge John Tyler, was a prominent Virginian during the Colonial and Revolutionary periods. He was a judge, a member of the House of Delegates, a delegate to Virginia’s convention to ratify the U.S. Constitution, and a governor of Virginia.<sup>12</sup> Just like his ancestors, he was a slaveowner as well. An 1805 notice in the *Richmond Enquirer* advertising for the sale of his lands identified that Tyler possessed Greenway, an expansive plantation in Charles City County, Virginia, that had various outbuildings – such as a dairy, meat house, two granaries, and a large barn – and several slave quarters. Along with the land, he offered to sell “thirty or forty slaves” to the purchaser, but both the land and the human beings remained in his possession until he died.<sup>13</sup> In his will, Judge Tyler bequeathed his sons their own tracts of land, as well as enslaved people. Tyler stated that if the women who belonged to John C. Seawell, whose names were Becca and Hannah, were sold, Tyler’s executors had the right to “purchase them and convey them” to his daughter, Maria,<sup>14</sup> who was married to Seawell.<sup>15</sup> According to the inventory attached to his will, Tyler owned 44 enslaved people when he died in 1813: Lewis, Jim, Page, Moses, Robin, John, Betty, Harry,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> “John Tyler: Member From: 1778-1786,” House History, Virginia House of Delegates Clerk’s Office, accessed January 17, 2021, <https://history.house.virginia.gov/members/3914>.

<sup>13</sup> Tyler, “Chapter VI: 1800-1808,” in *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 1:189.

<sup>14</sup> John Tyler, “Will and Inventory of Hon. John Tyler,” *William & Mary Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1909): 232.

<sup>15</sup> “Seawell Family,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (1899): 56.

Daniel, Ned, Ephrairi, Benjamin, Cary, George, Burwell, William, Washington, Little John, Roscius, Armistead, Tom, Garrick, Shadrach, Jenny & her two children, Betsy, Delia, Edy & her child, Louisa, Aggey & her child, Maria, Patsy, Leah & her child, Alice, and Martha.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that after Judge Tyler's died, his children – and possibly grandchildren – inherited enslaved people, and that several enslaved individuals were sold to pay off the judge's debts. Future President John Tyler himself inherited the land named Mons Sacar in Charles City Country from his father, and it is likely that he also inherited enslaved people with the estate.<sup>17</sup> President Tyler grew up around slavery on his father's sprawling plantation, Greenway, and was willed enslaved people by his father, continuing the horrific cycle on his future properties, like Sherwood Forest.

Due to his prominent position in Virginia politics, Judge John Tyler also made his opinion known about certain topics, such as the slave trade. According to a speech that was documented by Lyon Gardiner Tyler, Judge Tyler, who was a slaveowner, opposed the clause in the United States Constitution that extended America's participation in the international slave trade until 1808. The judge stated that "Nothing could Justify" the international slave trade at the Virginia State Convention in 1788.<sup>18</sup> Judge Tyler gave a speech at that same convention, and he said he condemned the extension of the "African trade" since it was "one cause of the complaints against the British" during the Revolutionary War, and until the clause was redacted, the judge would "vote against the Constitution."<sup>19</sup> It is interesting that a man who owned people – and most likely, sold them as well – would be against the operation of the Transatlantic slave trade in

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>18</sup> Lyon Gardiner Tyler, "Speech to Court on John Tyler (1746-1813)," undated, Box 7, Folder 14, Tyler Family Papers, Group E, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Tyler, "Chapter VI: 1800-1808," in *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 1:154.

the new country. One possibility is that Tyler was opposed to the competition that international slave traders posed to him as he tried to sell enslaved people domestically; in his 1788 speech, Tyler did not mention any opposition to the domestic slave trade in the United States. Lyon Gardiner Tyler appeared to try to provide a rationale as to why his grandfather opposed the international slave trade but not the domestic one by writing that there was no “real, heart-felt desire to remove” slavery from Virginia.<sup>20</sup> This statement illustrated that Virginia lawmakers at the time wanted to keep the institution of slavery as it meant that they could more easily buy and sell enslaved people without having to worry about the competition from international traders. The notion is further supported by the words of Oliver Ellsworth from Connecticut at the Constitutional Convention when he declared that Virginia could afford to oppose the international slave trade since “it is cheaper to raise than import them.”<sup>21</sup> The statement from a northerner showcases the open understanding that for Virginians, it was less expensive for slaveowners in that state to buy and sell enslaved people domestically than it would be from international slave traders since American plantation owners exploited generations of enslaved families. While the judge declared his opposition to the controversial clause, it is highly likely that he did so because of the competition posed by international slave traders, emphasizing that the prominent plantation owner was against the policy for personal gain to create an easier situation for him to buy and sell enslaved individuals to and from his fellow plantation owners.

*President John Tyler (1790-1862)*

President John Tyler would be the last person in the Tyler family to be a slaveowner.

Throughout his life, Tyler owned numerous enslaved people. When Tyler lived on plantations in

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 1:155.

<sup>21</sup> “The Debate in the Convention of 1787 on the Prohibition of the Slave Trade,” *New York Times*, November 24, 1860, 1, accessed January 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/1860/11/24/archives/the-debate-in-the-convention-of-1787-on-the-prohibition-of-the.html>.

Charles City County, he owned 24 enslaved people in 1820,<sup>22</sup> and by 1830, he owned 29 people.<sup>23</sup> By the time Tyler moved to Williamsburg in 1840, the population of the enslaved at his residence was fourteen.<sup>24</sup> During the years that the Tyler family lived at Sherwood Forest, there were 45 enslaved people on the plantation in 1850,<sup>25</sup> and 43 enslaved individuals by 1860.<sup>26</sup> In regards to how Tyler treated the enslaved individuals, James Hambleton Christian – an enslaved man who was owned by the Christian family and said that he was the half-brother of John Tyler’s first wife, Letitia Christian – stated that Tyler treated the enslaved “very cruelly.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the enslaved who worked in the house were “treated much better” since they were the “favorite servants” from Letitia Tyler’s family, showing how she protected individuals whom she considered her “investments.”<sup>28</sup> Tyler further showed little regard for enslaved people when he told his new wife, Julia Gardiner, that possessing a plantation with numerous enslaved people was “gold mine enough,” which emphasized the enormous wealth he possessed from the people who labored and lived on the property.<sup>29</sup> Between these documents and instances, one can observe how Tyler showed little regard for enslaved people and how he was the last in a long line of a Virginia slaveholding families who bought and sold human beings.

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<sup>22</sup> 1820 U.S. Federal Census, Census Place: Charles City, Virginia, 11. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>23</sup> 1830 U.S. Federal Census, “Schedule of the Whole Number of Persons Within the Division Allotted to George C. Maddiff By the Marshal of the Eastern District (or Territory) of Virginia,” Census Place: Charles City, Virginia, 14. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>24</sup> 1840 U.S. Federal Census, “Schedule of the Whole Persons Within the Division Allotted to William R. Pierce By the Marshal of the Eastern District (or Territory) of Virginia,” Census Place: James City, Virginia. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>25</sup> 1850 U.S. Census: Slave Schedule, “Slave Inhabitants in the County of Charles City, State of Virginia, Enumerated By Me, On the 2<sup>nd</sup> Day of September, 1850. Samuel Waddill, Ass’t Marshal,” Census Place: Charles City, Virginia. Source: FamilySearch.com.

<sup>26</sup> 1860 U.S. Census: Slave Schedule, “Slave Inhabitants in the County of Charles City, State of Virginia, Enumerated By Me, On the 25<sup>th</sup> Day of June, 1860. Ro. H. Bush, Ass’t Marshal.” Census Place: Charles City, Virginia Source: FamilySearch.com.

<sup>27</sup> William Still, “Ex-President Tyler’s Household Loses an Aristocratic Article,” in *Still’s Underground Rail Road Records* (Philadelphia: William Still, 1886): 70.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>29</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 15 December 1848, Box 8, Folder 2, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

Not only did John Tyler own a substantial number of people over time, there were allegations that the president also fathered children with enslaved women. In December 1841, a journalist named Joshua Leavitt published a story in the newspaper *The Emancipator and Free American* that claimed John Tyler fathered children with an enslaved woman. In the article, Leavitt recounted the testimony from a few years earlier of a Baptist minister who was traveling and staying with a Baptist woman in Richmond, Virginia.<sup>30</sup> The minister and the enslaved man conversed with each other, and the enslaved person revealed that he was sold to the woman by then-Governor John Tyler in Williamsburg and that his name was John Tyler since his mother said that “Governor Tyler was my father.”<sup>31</sup> When asked about his family from the minister, John Tyler revealed that he had many siblings, who were most likely “all sold before now.”<sup>32</sup> Leavitt continued to state that it is plausible that President Tyler “supported his family by selling” enslaved children since other plantation owners in Virginia did the same, especially when they were in debt.<sup>33</sup> The piece then went on to detail the story of Charles Tyler – who Leavitt claimed was another enslaved child of President Tyler’s – as he traveled to Canada from 1837-1838. Charles Tyler told the man who gave him food and clothing for the journey that “his master had been in Congress, and that he was his body servant,” revealing later that Charles Tyler was owned by the future tenth president.<sup>34</sup> Leavitt’s article was not the only claim that President Tyler fathered children with an enslaved woman. Reverend John Dunjee, who was born enslaved and became a prominent Baptist minister in the late 1800s, stated that he was the

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<sup>30</sup> Joshua Leavitt, “Tyler-Ising,” *Emancipator and Free American*, Vol. 6, Issue 32, December 10, 1841, New York.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*



son of President John Tyler and an enslaved woman.<sup>35</sup> While it has not yet been proven that Tyler had children with enslaved women, it is important to note a situation that was unfortunately all too common on those properties – slaveowners having children with the enslaved women they owned.<sup>36</sup> These are important pieces of oral history in showing the character of John Tyler and his feelings about enslaved people, especially if he sold his own children.

The Brown family, a historically prominent free family in Charles City County, also asserts to have direct ancestry of people who were children of John Tyler and free women. The family says that Tyler and Patsy, a free woman who worked in the kitchen at Sherwood Forest, had two children together, Sylvanius Tyler Brown and Susan Brown.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, a descendent of Isaac Brown stated that the father of his ancestor named Ottoway Brown was President John Tyler,<sup>38</sup> and that a descendant of the family named Polly, another free woman who worked at Sherwood, had children with John Tyler.<sup>39</sup> Doris Christian, a descendent of Sylvanius Brown, stated that Tyler wrote down that he had 52 children during his lifetime, meaning that Tyler most likely had 37 biracial children – some of whom were free and others who were enslaved. There are also stories that the Caucasian members of the Tyler family knew of the familial relationship with their African American kin. Doris Christian detailed how her father, Sylvanius Brown, Jr., was friends with Alfred Tyler, a Caucasian descendant. Additionally, Isaac Ridley, Jr., a family member in the Brown family line, was told by C. Hill

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<sup>35</sup> Daryl Cumber Dance and Daryl Lynn Dance, “Chapter III: Polly, the Forgotten One and Her Generation: Abraham’s Children, Nieces and Nephews,” In *The Lineage of Abraham: The Biography of a Free Black Family in Charles City, VA* (Dance, 1998): 39.

<sup>36</sup> Paul E. Teed and Melissa Ladd Teed, “Economic Life,” in *Daily Life of African American Slaves in the Antebellum South* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2020), 24.

<sup>37</sup> Richard M. Bowman Center For Local History, “African American Oral History – Doris B. Christian,” YouTube video, 1:36:49, February 8, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGWOQRnV7ls>.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

Carter, the owner of Shirley Plantation, that they were both related to the Tyler family.<sup>40</sup> While there have been no conclusive results through DNA evidence, the Brown family's oral histories are important to note in talking about how free women on plantations also had children with the male members of the Caucasian family who hired them, and it further displays Tyler's attitudes towards race since he never recognized his biracial children.

John Tyler held many beliefs about slavery that were not atypical for the time amongst slaveowners, and it was those thoughts that would be influential as he debated slavery during the Missouri Compromise (1820) as a United States Representative. He publicly portrayed that he was opposed to slavery, just as his father, and yet, decided not to endorse the abolition of it because slavery was "here without his fault" as it was established before he was born.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Tyler would "tolerate no officious interference from without," meaning that he resented the efforts from the North to curb slavery in America.<sup>42</sup> During a speech as U.S. lawmakers debated admitting Missouri as a state, Representative Tyler declared that the North would "add much to the prospects of emancipation, and the total extinction of slavery" if Missouri was admitted as a free state, showcasing how the legislator endeavored to expand slavery to new states and used his power as a member of Congress to further those beliefs.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, John Tyler opposed granting U.S. citizenship to the free African Americans in Missouri since they "did not come within the purview of the Constitution on that subject."<sup>44</sup> Yet, he mentioned nothing about not granting citizenship to its Caucasian residents, further emphasizing his priorities that Missouri should be a slave state. As Tyler was in Congress, he

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>41</sup> Tyler, "Chapter X: 1819-1821," in *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 1:313.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 1:318.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1:330.

gave speeches that furthered the ideals that slavery should be protected and expanded in the United States, and it eventually would be true with the future admittance of slave states, such as Missouri.

John Tyler also used his position as the U.S. President to expand slavery through the annexation of Texas. In a letter to his Secretary of State Daniel Webster in 1841, Tyler instructed the secretary to try to acquire Texas while he tried to plan how to obtain Northern support for the acquisition of another slave state. The president stated a possible solution so that both the North and the South would agree to the possible admittance of another slave state that there should be a “rigid enforcement of the laws against the slave-trade” since it would “make as many free States south as the acquisition of Texas would add of slave States.”<sup>45</sup> Tyler had the full intention of declaring Texas a slave state, spreading slavery within America. Years later, Tyler defended his decision in an open letter that was published in *The Intelligencer* newspaper in 1859 where he stated that the deal was in accordance with the Missouri Compromise since the territory was below the 36.30 degrees latitude line, meaning that it was eligible to be admitted as a slave state. Tyler also argued that during the treaty negotiations, the Texas officials never mentioned inserting a provision to restrict or abolish slavery, so the past president argued that the country was complying with the wishes of the residents of the new state.<sup>46</sup> While there was massive opposition to Texas being a slave state, President John Tyler used his platform as the highest ranking member of the government to ensure that the new state would play a part in the continuance and expansion of slavery in the United States.

During the Civil War, the Tyler family chose to align with the Confederacy, even though

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<sup>45</sup> Lyon Gardiner Tyler, “Chapter IV: 1841,” in *The Letters and Times of the Tylers* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, Cor., 1885), 2:126.

<sup>46</sup> Tyler, “Chapter X: 1819-1821,” in *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 1:326-328.

John Tyler was a former U.S. president. As he was serving on the Confederate Provisional Congress in 1861, Tyler was asked by his friends to run for the seat in Charles City County for the Confederate House of Representatives. During his address to the residents of the county, Tyler declared that the North cruelly invaded “our soil” to “force us back into a union which they have destroyed,” which shows that Tyler believed that the South seceding to defend slavery was justified since to him, the Northerners were the aggressors.<sup>47</sup> The former president additionally stated that if he was elected to the Confederate Congress, he would try to end the war speedily and “advance the permanent interests” of the Confederacy, meaning that he would support furthering slavery as he had done throughout his political career.<sup>48</sup> John Tyler was elected to the Confederate Congress but died before taking his seat and is the only U.S. president to be buried under a non-United States of America flag since he chose to secede from the Union in order to protect slavery.<sup>49</sup>

John Tyler’s children also served in and supported the Confederacy. His sons from his first marriage to Letitia Christian served in the Confederate government. Robert Tyler was the Register of the Treasury Department,<sup>50</sup> John Tyler, Jr., served in the War Department and in the Confederate Army,<sup>51</sup> and Tazewell Tyler was a surgeon in the Confederate military.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, President Tyler’s daughter with Letitia Christian, Letitia Tyler Semple, and her husband supported the Confederacy as he was the Paymaster of the Confederate Navy.<sup>53</sup> Two sons from his second marriage to Julia Gardiner also served in the war: David Gardiner Tyler

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<sup>47</sup> Tyler, “Chapter XXI: 1861,” in *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 2:664.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> “President John Tyler’s Memorial,” Hollywood Cemetery, accessed January 19, 2021,

<https://www.hollywoodcemetery.org/visit/things-to-see/103-president-john-tyler-s-monument>.

<sup>50</sup> “The Confederate States Government,” *The Liberator*, Vol. 34, Issue 31, July 29, 1864, Boston.

<sup>51</sup> “Presidential Private Secretaries,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, Vol. 17, Issue 273, December 23, 1888, Chicago.

<sup>52</sup> Tazewell Tyler, U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>53</sup> Carol Frink, “Louise Home Host to Many of Proud Birth,” 27 December 1939, Box 6, Folder 5, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

enlisted with the college company as a private in Lexington, Virginia, and John Alexander Tyler enlisted as a private in Charles City County with the 1<sup>st</sup> Rockbridge Artillery Unit. They both surrendered at Appomattox in 1865.<sup>54</sup> Even after the Civil War, Tyler's children supported the Confederacy. At the unveiling of the Confederate monument in Charles City County in 1900, David Gardiner Tyler stated that the monument would teach children the venerations "of their fathers and admiration for the heroic age."<sup>55</sup> He further declared that the Civil War was created out of "self-defense more strictly than any conflict waged for the past one hundred years," showing that he believed the South's secession was the right course of action.<sup>56</sup> Both President Tyler and his children supported the Confederacy throughout their lives, supporting a secessionist government that fought to protect slavery.

#### *Extended Tyler Family Members*

While it is uncertain exactly how these individuals – W. Tyler, Eliza Tyler, and Lewis Tyler – relate to the Tyler family, it is important to highlight how these individuals were also involved with slavery since their documents are found with the Tyler Family Papers at William & Mary. A "list of furnishes" from W. Tyler from 1829 names 36 enslaved people along with their ages: Fanny Dunbar (75), Sally Locus (59), Rachel (63), Lucy (59), Luke (59), Jimmy (54), Emuno (71), Betty (44), Elsy (50), Ursula (48), Dinah (48), Rachel (44), Phillis (26), Peggy (19), Betty (14), Joe Davis (45), Emanuel (38), Rich (15), Stephen (13), Emo (9), Winny (7), Lucy (3/4 months), Jimmy (3/4 months), Lally (49), Hannah (41), Sally (40), Mana (19), Phillis (24), Bills (40), Randolph (40), Beverly (28), Leo H. (40), Claripa (12), Elsy (30), Frank (7), and Sam

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<sup>54</sup> David Gardiner Tyler, U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865. Source: Ancestry.com.; John Alexander Tyler, U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>55</sup> David Gardiner Tyler, "Addresses Delivered at the Unveiling of the Monument to Confederate Soldiers of . . . Charles City County, Virginia," 21 November 1900, Box 5, Folder 1, Tyler Family Papers, Group H, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary, 40.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

(15).<sup>57</sup> There is a note on the document that states that “this woman Nursid Mrs. Tyler,” and it is unclear if it was in reference to Sally Locus or Rachel, which demonstrates that at least one of them worked in the house.<sup>58</sup> While it is unclear who W. Tyler is, one can view from the list of the enslaved that he was a large slaveowner in 1829 – including owning two people who were not even a year old – like many of his assumed relatives.

Eliza Bray Tyler – who was married to Samuel Tyler, a politician – was another member of the Tyler extended family who owned numerous enslaved people.<sup>59</sup> In January 1828, Tyler paid to take out an advertisement in a newspaper that an unnamed enslaved man was for hire, and in October 1830, she bought an advertisement to sell or hire him again.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the slaveowner paid for a runaway slave advertisement for a man named Randall.<sup>61</sup> Throughout the 1820s, Eliza Tyler was in the process of selling her Westbury Estate in Virginia, which included the enslaved. In the deed, it lists the 33 enslaved people Tyler left with the property for the new owner: Emannuel, Sam, Ned, William, George, Armistead, Soudon, Eomono, Betty Babtisl, Joe, Davy, Peter Jim, Betty, Ursula, Sally, Sawain, Sally, Sarah, Rachel, Ester, Rose, Sarah, Rachel, Ginny, Fastur, Alice, Pillis, Dinih, Charlotte, Suckey, Suey, Ketty, and Patty. Another document appears to be the inventory of the enslaved people Tyler still owned after the sale of Westbury. The inventory includes the names of 15 people along with their monetary value: Maria (\$450 with her children), Ole Abby (\$145), Patty (\$500), Armistead (\$1230 with his wife and two children, one of whom is named, Godfrey), Lance Ellis (\$300), Old London (\$300), Peter Fippin (\$600), Lackey (\$600), Zack (\$500), Letty (\$300), Rose (\$400 with Anne and Nancy), Mills

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<sup>57</sup> “Tyler Family Miscellaneous,” 14 March 1829, Box 8, Folder 3, Conway Whittle Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. Note: The word nursed is misspelled in the letter as “Nursid.”

<sup>59</sup> “Bray Family,” *William & Mary Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1905): 267.

<sup>60</sup> “Estate Papers, Mrs. Eliza Bray Tyler,” Box 8, Folder 4, 1835-1845, Conway Whittle Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

(\$350 with children).<sup>62</sup> Between the deed and the inventory, one can observe that Eliza Tyler was a wealthy slaveowner. She could make hundreds, even thousands, of dollars if she decided to sell some of the enslaved, showing how they were considered “investments” to her. While there is no date on the inventory, there is a receipt of the bill Eliza Tyler paid to Charles City County in 1829 for taxes on her land and the enslaved, and it stated that she paid \$6.40 to the county for sixteen enslaved people, meaning that she either sold some of the seventeen named people listed above, some had died by then, or that many enslaved people were not considered taxable since they were under the age of sixteen.<sup>63</sup> The documents exhibit that Eliza Tyler’s money was built off the labor of the enslaved, even selling some of them with the Westbury lands to build up her own wealth.

Another inventory from an unknown Tyler relative that appears is that of Lewis Tyler. The document lists the names of 121 enslaved people, who are divided between 12 family members, with Tyler’s wife possessing the highest number of enslaved people. This inventory appears to have been created to evaluate how Lewis Tyler could pay off his debts, quite possibly after he died since the enslaved are divided between family members.<sup>64</sup> Tyler was an enormous slaveowner, and it would not be uncommon for the family to sell enslaved people to pay off debts. Because the enslaved are divided between multiple persons, the inventory demonstrates how the family would keep perpetuating slavery since there is no mention of emancipation, but rather that the enslaved people would stay with Tyler relatives they were bequeathed to until their deaths. Nonetheless, the documents of W., Eliza, and Lewis Tyler demonstrate how entrenched the Tyler family was in continuing slavery since they owned enormous numbers of

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<sup>62</sup> “Westbury Estate Papers,” Box 8, Folder 19, 1820-1828, Conway Whittle Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

human beings, sold many enslaved people to pay off debts, and generated their family's wealth from those who lived and labored on their properties.

*Julia Gardiner Tyler (1820-1889)*

Julia Gardiner Tyler was the second wife of John Tyler, and while she was a Northerner by birth, she quickly learned about and embraced southern slavery. Upon marrying President Tyler, Julia Tyler became a “plantation mistress” at Sherwood Forest in Charles City County, Virginia. In July 1844, Tyler wrote to her mother, Juliana Gardiner, that she was to expect the enslaved people to “attend” to her and that they would be brought to the main house to meet her since she was the new plantation mistress.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, in 1845, she stated to her mother in a letter that she planned to have “all my servants paraded around me – numbering some 60 or 70.”<sup>66</sup> These instances showed that the new wife enjoyed the plantation life as numerous enslaved people were at her beck and call; it appeared Tyler thought of the enslaved as objects, rather than human beings, and she wanted them to know that she was in charge. Moreover, she was not the only one in her family who was interested in experiencing what life was like on a plantation. In 1852, a relative of Julia Tyler's family – Eben H. Horsford, an academic who married into the Gardiner family<sup>67</sup> – visited Sherwood Forest. He wrote to his mother that he wanted to know more about slavery so that he could “form an intelligent judgement” of it.<sup>68</sup> He further discerned in the letter that slavery was “its best form” since the enslaved were treated as

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<sup>65</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 11 July 1844, “Letters from the Tyler Trunks,” *Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 18, no. 3 (1946): 143-145.

<sup>66</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Tyler, 26 March 1845, Box 7, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary, 2.

<sup>67</sup> “Mary Gardiner Horsford,” *New York Evening Post*, 30 November 1855, New York, in *Deaths Taken From the New York Evening Post From April 23, 1855 to March 17, 1856*, Vol. 32, Copied and Compiled by Gertrude A. Barber, 1941, in U.S., *Newspaper Extractions from the Northeast, 1704-1930*, 408. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>68</sup> Eben N. Horsford to his mother, 14 February 1852, Box 8, Folder 4, Tyler Family Papers, Group B, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary, 3.



“a minority that never terminates.”<sup>69</sup> These letters showcase that while being raised and living in the North, these two individuals were curious to learn how slavery in the South operated on a plantation, and were ultimately impressed by the system. Julia Gardiner Tyler and Eben Horsford both held the conviction that the institution of slavery did not need to reform, showing their support for slavery and their regard of viewing the enslaved as less than human beings.

Julia Gardiner Tyler defended slavery publicly in 1853 when she wrote an open letter to the Duchess of Sutherland after the English woman criticized American slavery. In the open letter, Tyler detailed how England was the cause behind slavery in the United States because it “not only permitted but encouraged” the slave trade for money and that Queen Anne possessed a monopoly on the Transatlantic slave trade with Spain.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, Tyler wrote that it was America’s independence that made the former mother country “realize” how immoral slavery was since they no longer held that monopoly. To Tyler, the British should not have been throwing stones in glass houses because the country did not “prevent the introduction” of the slave trade when they had the power to do so and due to the terrible treatment the Irish endured.<sup>71</sup> In the letter, Tyler tried to paint a favorable picture of slavery in America. She said the duchess lied about the enslaved not being able to practice religion since no “Sabbath goes by that the places of worship are not numerously attended by the black population.”<sup>72</sup> The plantation mistress also stated that the enslaved people in America lived “sumptuously in comparison with the 100,000 of the white population in London” since they were well fed and clothed in the winter.<sup>73</sup> She also argued to the duchess that it was a “rare occurrence” for enslaved families to

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler, “A Letter to the Duchess of Sutherland and Ladies of England, In Reply to Their ‘Christian Address’ on the Subject of Slavery In the Southern States,” 1853, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary, 5.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 5-7.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 6.

be torn apart after the English lady wrote about enslaved families being separated.<sup>74</sup> Throughout her entire letter, Julia Gardiner Tyler showed how much she was entrenched in the Southern way of thinking about slavery, and that she – a Northerner by birth – defended the enslavement of human beings on the world stage.

Numerous people took notice of the open letter since Julia Tyler’s sister, Margaret Gardiner Beeckman, wrote to their mother that a man named Captain C. told Tyler at her dinner party at Sherwood Forest that her letter was the topic of multiple conversations while he was in New York; other guests also declared to Tyler that they admired her letter to the duchess. Beeckman detailed that a bookstore in Ithaca, New York, wrote a letter to Tyler asking if she would write a book called *White Slavery in England*.<sup>75</sup> A few days later, Beeckman wrote to her mother again that Tyler’s letter was still gaining wide admiration since a “mail bag was filled to overflowing today with newspapers – all advertising favorably to Julia’s letter.”<sup>76</sup> It was also mentioned that John Tyler further received letters that praised “Mrs. Tyler’s magnificent response.”<sup>77</sup> Because of her position as a former first lady, Julia Gardiner Tyler utilized her platform to defend American slavery worldwide, and as more and more people wrote and said that she was correct, it showed that numerous Americans – both in the North and the South – supported slavery in the decade before the Civil War.

Even though Julia Tyler was born in the North, she supported the Confederacy during the Civil War. As she was still living at Sherwood Forest in 1863, Tyler wrote to her mother that she would “keep the slaves I have as long as I am out of danger,” and the plantation mistress created

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>75</sup> Margaret Beeckman to Juliana Gardiner, 19 February 1853, Box 2, Folder 4, Tyler Family Papers, Group G, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>76</sup> Margaret Beeckman to Juliana Gardiner, 23 February 1853, Box 2, Folder 4, Tyler Family Papers, Group G, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

plans on where to send the enslaved people in case she had to flee Charles City County, possibly to another plantation in the area.<sup>78</sup> Her decision to keep the enslaved people with her had probably more to do with the fact that it was “impossible to have free labor” since there were hardly any free African American and Caucasian people who could work if she chose to send the enslaved people away.<sup>79</sup> According to Tyler, the wages for workers, especially Caucasian ones, were very high at this point during the war, so keeping the enslaved people at Sherwood was more about having a source of labor instead of for humanitarian reasons like she tries to portray it to her mother.<sup>80</sup> By July 1864, Julia Tyler and her family left Sherwood Forest for New York, and during that time, the plantation was turned into a school by the enslaved people for African American and Caucasian students.<sup>81</sup> Since she was upset that enslaved African Americans were in charge of her plantation, Tyler wrote to Union General Butler to ask if he could give the ownership and management of Sherwood over to her nephew, John C. Tyler, from “under the control of some of” the enslaved people, who were placed in charge of the property by General Wild.<sup>82</sup> In this instance, Tyler was so upset that the enslaved were left in charge of the property that she used her status as a prominent national figure to ensure the “right” person was managing the plantation. Based on the surviving letters from the former first lady, John C. Tyler moved to Sherwood Forest to “see its delivery” by the Union Army to him, but the resolution is unclear.<sup>83</sup> In another instance while Julia Tyler was living in New York during the Civil War, she detailed

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<sup>78</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 8 April 1863, Box 9, Folder 1, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> William Clopton to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 1 July 1864, Box 4, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>82</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to General Butler, 1864, Box 9, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>83</sup> William Clopton to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Box 9, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

the story of how men stole her Confederate flag. They pushed their way into the house after a resident answered the door, went to the parlor, took down the flag, and left the house. Julia Gardiner Tyler claimed that the men took a non-Confederate flag since she possessed “no other Flag in the house but that of the U.S.”<sup>84</sup> Whether or not it was a Confederate flag, the situation displayed that Julia Tyler still held sympathy for the Confederacy since many people around the area suspected that her house would have such a flag. During the Civil War, Julia Tyler was a staunch supporter of the Confederacy, even in the North, and tried to maintain strong control over the enslaved people at Sherwood Forest, even pushing back against Union officers who liberated the enslaved.

*Lyon Gardiner Tyler (1853-1935)*

Lyon Gardiner Tyler was a son of President John Tyler and Julia Gardiner Tyler, who became a well-known historian and a president at the College of William & Mary in the twentieth century. Tyler wrote many speeches, books, and other works that were steeped in the Lost Cause as he tried to paint a rosy picture of the South while depicting “northern aggression.” This might be due to Tyler growing up during the Civil War. At one point during his life, the future college president wrote about his recollections of seeing General McClellan’s army coming through Charles City County in 1862. The Tyler children and their governess, Miss Bernard, went to the gate that “faced the public road,” and Bernard led them in singing southern songs, “especially ‘The Bonnie Blue Flag,’” to the Union officers.<sup>85</sup> Lyon Gardiner Tyler was taught to support the Confederacy, so his upbringing sheds light as to why he would ardently

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<sup>84</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Unknown Person, 17 April 1865, Box 9, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>85</sup> Lyon Gardiner Tyler, “McClellan’s Army Passing,” in “Reminiscences in *Confederate History* of Charles City County, Virginia Recollections of the Civil War in Charles City Co.,” ed. Mary Ruffin Copeland, undated, Box 9, Folder 25, Tyler Family Papers, Group E, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary, 1.

defend it and his father, who would have served in the Confederate Congress if he had not passed away before his term began, throughout his lifetime as a prominent historian of his era.

To further defend the Confederacy and his family, Lyon Tyler wrote three volumes of books entitled *The Letters and Times of the Tylers* in the 1880s and 1890s. The books detailed Tyler family history from one of the earliest ancestors, Henry Tyler (1660-1727), to President John Tyler; the historian wanted to secure his family's legacy and show their prominence throughout American history, such as John Tyler aiding in the annexation of Texas and Judge John Tyler being present at the Virginia Convention to ratify the U.S. Constitution. However, within its pages, there is a present bias as Lyon Tyler defended his ancestors' past involving slavery, such as not condemning that his family owned people and trying to rationally explain why various family members supported measures that extended slavery in America. The books were also rooted in the Lost Cause as Tyler endeavored to paint a less problematic view of slavery in the United States. For instance, Tyler wrote that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was "libel with a coloring of truth," exhibiting how he thought that the famous abolitionist book overexaggerated its depiction of slavery.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, Tyler wrote that enslaved people endured "as little as that of any laboring population in the world" in an effort to portray the Republican Party during the 1860 Election as a group full of abolitionists who were embellishing the horrors of slavery.<sup>87</sup> The historian also endeavored to depict the North as a lawless place while defending slavery. For example, he wrote that "riots and strikes happened every month" in the North, while the South had "no disturbance" since Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831.<sup>88</sup> Using his position as a president of a well-known institution, Lyon Tyler used these books to depict his ancestors in a positive light,

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<sup>86</sup> Tyler, "Chapter XVII: 1853-1857," in *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 2:519.

<sup>87</sup> Tyler, "Chapter XIX: 1861," in *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 2:572.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

while also painting the narrative that slavery was not as bad in the South as the North wanted people to believe, refusing to acknowledge the true horrors of slavery to himself and his audience.

During his lifetime, Lyon Tyler also wrote speeches that defended slavery in the United States. One of those speeches was called “Contributions of Virginia to the War.” Tyler stated that Virginia gave the “Capital of the Confederacy,” Richmond, especially for its various industries that aided that war effort.<sup>89</sup> The state also provided “the greatest general of the war – Robert E. Lee.”<sup>90</sup> Tyler described Lee as a person whose character was of “true manhood,” was “a leader of men,” and that such a man “needed no martyrdom, no assassination, like Lincoln, to place him first in the opinions of his people.”<sup>91</sup> The historian wanted to make sure that Lee appeared in a better light than U.S. President Abraham Lincoln in an effort to depict the South as a superior place to the North. Tyler also stated how his father aided the Confederate cause as he “passed a bill to construct one hundred” gunboats in the provisional Congress in an effort to win the war.<sup>92</sup> In this document, Tyler wanted to show his pride in his home state and his father for their accomplishments for the Confederacy, therefore, defending their actions for fighting to keep slavery in the United States.

When he was president of William & Mary, Lyon Gardiner Tyler wrote a pamphlet called “A Confederate Catechism: The War of 1861-1865” in 1920 that defended the secessionist movement. Tyler started with writing that secession was not the cause of the Civil War, but rather, it was the “intemperate agitation in the North against everything Southern” and the

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<sup>89</sup> Lyon Gardiner Tyler, “Contributions of Virginia to the War,” undated, in Box 5, Folder 15, Tyler Family Papers, Group E, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary, 1.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

election of Abraham Lincoln since a “purely Northern president was elected by purely Northern votes” in 1860; Tyler wanted to portray the Republican Party as a threat to the South’s constitutional rights due to their platform of not wanting to expand slavery.<sup>93</sup> However, Abraham Lincoln was not even on the ballot in several southern states since those state governments did not support the Republican Party. Lincoln then had no opportunity to win votes in those states since constituents could not cast their ballots for the Republican presidential candidate.<sup>94</sup> Throughout the pamphlet, Tyler emphasized that slavery was not the cause of the Civil War, which is a trope of the Lost Cause. For instance, he stated that the cause of the Civil War was the “vindictive, intemperate anti-slavery movement,” not slavery itself.<sup>95</sup> When considering what the Confederacy fought for, Tyler wrote it was to “REPEL INVASION AND FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT” as he compared Confederate leaders to the Founding Fathers since he believed the two groups fought for the same causes.<sup>96</sup> He also declared that there would have been no war if Lincoln did not send any troops,<sup>97</sup> yet it was the Confederacy who fired the first shots when they bombarded the U.S. Fort Sumter in 1861.<sup>98</sup> Tyler endeavored to depict the South as a region that was standing up to the tyranny from the North, all the while ignoring slavery as the key cause of secession and the Civil War.

In the pamphlet, the college president further elaborated stating that Lincoln could have avoided war if he allowed New Mexico to become a slave state since it was “too barren for

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<sup>93</sup> Lyon Gardiner Tyler, “A Confederate Catechism,” 1920, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Harold Holzer, “Election Day 1860,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 2008, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/election-day-1860-84266675/>.

<sup>95</sup> Tyler, “A Confederate Catechism,” 2.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Fergus M. Bordewich, “Fort Sumter: The Civil War Begins,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 2011, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/fort-sumter-the-civil-war-begins-1018791/>.

agriculture,” so slavery could not have been sustained there.<sup>99</sup> When considering Lincoln’s part in the war, Lyon Tyler wrote in “A Confederate Catechism” that the sixteenth president’s “war violated every law of humanity,” without ever stating that slavery was in itself inhumane.<sup>100</sup>

Lyon Gardiner Tyler’s words resonate with modern-day audiences since the Sons of Confederate Veterans currently sell the pamphlet on their website as they believe that it “corrects the propaganda about the South” and President John Tyler, and that it “should be read by every student” in the United States.<sup>101</sup> As Tyler’s Lost Cause words resonate with various Americans across the country in the present day, the situation illustrates that people prefer to paint history through white supremacist ideals, and America must recognize this or else it will fail to create a better, more equitable future.

Tyler was a fierce critic of Abraham Lincoln and did not miss the opportunity to criticize him more in 1929 when he wrote “John Tyler and Abraham Lincoln: Who Was the Dwarf? A Reply to a Challenge.” The piece was printed as Lyon Gardiner Tyler’s reaction to the magazine article in *Time* that stated John Tyler was “historically a dwarf” in his achievements as president compared to the accomplishments of Abraham Lincoln.<sup>102</sup> In the document, the historian compared Lincoln to Tyler while trying to demonstrate why his father was the better president out of the two. Similar statements that were written in “A Confederate Catechism” were evident throughout the article, such as the North wanting war instead of the South. In this open letter, Lyon Gardiner Tyler pushed further against Lincoln stating that his “argument in favor of freedom of the slaves had an equal application to the States in secession. Why were they not

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<sup>99</sup> Tyler, “A Confederate Catechism,” 5.

<sup>100</sup> Tyler, “A Confederate Catechism,” 8.

<sup>101</sup> Jay Reeves, “Old South Confederate Monument Backers Cite 1929 Book Claiming Lincoln, ‘Vindictive’ Anti-Slavery Movement Caused Civil War,” *Business Insider*, May 29, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/ap-old-south-monument-backers-embrace-confederate-catechism-2017-5>.

<sup>102</sup> Lyon Gardiner Tyler, “John Tyler and Abraham Lincoln: Who Was the Dwarf? A Reply to a Challenge” (Richmond: Richmond Press, Inc., 1929), 4.



equally entitled to their freedom and independence?”<sup>103</sup> With this ironic statement, Tyler completely ignored that enslaved people had no freedom whatsoever and tried to suggest that southern men had no freedom, which is entirely incorrect. The South was not enslaved – they enslaved human beings and fought to protect the institution of slavery. While further trying to discredit Lincoln, Lyon Tyler stated that his father was “a merciful master, and there was a mutual love between him and his slaves” and eliminated the slave trade in Washington, D.C., while Lincoln was “forced” by “the Radicals” in his party to issue the Emancipation Proclamation and previously defended an enslaver in court who wanted to acquire his enslaved person who ran away.<sup>104</sup> With his line of argument, Lyon Gardiner Tyler tried to excuse his father’s history of literally owning other human beings by saying he was a “merciful” enslaver and that he eliminated slavery in the U.S. capital, all the while trying to discredit Lincoln as a man who did not want to end slavery. Lincoln declared months in advance that he would sign the Emancipation Proclamation, and it was several members of his party and those in the North who were hesitant about the document. After signing the proclamation, Lincoln famously stated that “never in my life felt more certain that I was doing right than I do in signing this paper.”<sup>105</sup> While Lincoln fought to end slavery and preserve the Union, Lyon Tyler’s father was a traitor who seceded and fought for slavery. Lyon Gardiner Tyler, like many people before and after him, wanted to rewrite history to the way it suited him and his racist ideals, and it is these notions that Americans need to correct and recognize or else the division between Americans will only increase.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>105</sup> Louis P. Masur, “How the Emancipation Proclamation Came to Be Signed,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, January 2013, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-the-emancipation-proclamation-came-to-be-signed-165533991/>.

### *Conclusion*

The Tyler family is one example of how individuals supported and perpetuated slavery and the Lost Cause throughout the history of the United States. Various people in the prominent Virginia family – such as a churchwarden, judge, U.S. President, U.S. First Lady, college president, and many large slaveowners – used their platforms to spread their ideologies that defended slavery, supported the Confederacy either in the military or government positions, and conveyed to audiences their arguments that the Confederacy did not fight to keep slavery. Since the 1600s, numerous members of the family owned human beings, and many of those who held political offices used their positions to further slavery. Even after the Civil War, Lyon Gardiner Tyler utilized his family's status in American history and his position as the son of a U.S. president and as a president of a well-known college to portray his family and the Confederacy in a certain light, focusing more on their positive aspects instead of the negative ones. It is important to understand that these were not unusual beliefs in the United States during these time periods, and because of this, Americans need to have honest conversations about the country's history with white supremacy if they mean to move forward as a society. The events in 2020 and 2021 – such as the murders of George Floyd & Breonna Taylor and the insurrection at the Capitol – show that it is because of Americans' refusal to understand their complex history that the country is so divided. The miseducation of the Confederacy and slavery is evident in various museums and schools that are usually in the South, especially since those tropes have been perpetuated by organizations that are dedicated to painting the Confederacy in a positive light. It is time for schools, museums, and other institutions to stress these stories – such as the Tyler family's connections to slavery, the Confederacy, and the Lost Cause – in an effort to acknowledge the history of prejudice in the United States so that one day, it is dismantled.

## Chapter 2

### Humanity: The Stories of the Enslaved People at Sherwood Forest

*“How curious a land this is, – how full of untold story,  
of tragedy and laughter, and the rich legacy of human life;  
shadowed with a tragic past, and big with future promise!”*  
- W.E.B. DuBois

The stories of enslaved people have been largely ignored in American history. The narratives of the enslavers – such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison – are more well-known than those of the enslaved. As more and more plantations try to uncover the history of slavery on the property, this work also brings to light the names and stories of those who were enslaved at the plantation. It is these stories that are worth telling because if they are not conveyed to the public, the plantation staff is only acknowledging half the story. It is as important to know the enslaved human beings who lived and labored on the property as much – if not more – than the enslavers. The Tyler family wrote many letters that contain several names of those who were enslaved on the plantation or at least sightings, meaning vague mentions about enslaved people without any names or anything specific, since the people who wrote these letters did not view enslaved people as “worthy” of the historical record. Through these primary sources, it is revealed that there are at least four documented enslaved families among the sixty to seventy enslaved people at Sherwood Forest: the Armisteads, the Blacks, the Halls, and the Shorts. After the Civil War, many of them settled in Virginia with their families. The names of several individual enslaved people were also revealed, as well as the stories about the type of work in both the main house and the fields, sicknesses in the quarters, and festivities on the property. Through these documents – such as letters from the Tyler family, Freedmen’s Bureau records, marriage certificates, death certificates, and U.S. Census data – human stories will be

told about those who have been largely forgotten by historians.

*The Armistead Family*

The patriarch of the Armistead family was Burwell Armistead, Sr.<sup>106</sup> He was the husband of Maria Armistead and the father of Burwell Armistead, Jr., and was the enslaved gardener at Sherwood Forest. In one letter from Tazewell Tyler to his step-mother, Julia Gardiner Tyler, in September 1845, he mentioned that Armistead “made the circle and graveled it,” referring to the pathway that carriages would have used to go right to the main house.<sup>107</sup> During the Civil War, Armistead was still on the property since it was revealed in a letter to Julia Gardiner Tyler from her friend, William Clopton, that Armistead was “put in possession” of the plantation, along with another enslaved person named Claiborne Carter by Union General Wild, and both men were instructed by Wild to not “allow any one to have” any possessions from the main house.<sup>108</sup> The letter further discussed how the enslaved people took beds, bedstands, carts, wagons, and livestock into their possession, and how both Carter and Armistead “have their wives there” with five or six other enslaved people, showing that many most likely ran away during the chaos of the war, especially since the Tyler family lived in New York with the Gardiner family by 1864.<sup>109</sup> A few months later, Celia Johnson, a free African American woman who was a maid at Sherwood Forest, wrote to Julia Gardiner Tyler about the state of the plantation, and Johnson detailed how Armistead’s wife, Maria, saved two carpets for Tyler, and that Burwell Armistead

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<sup>106</sup> See Figure 1 on page 64 for the Armistead Family Tree.

<sup>107</sup> Tazewell Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 2 September 1845, Box 7, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary. Note: In the letter, Burwell is referred to as Burrel, and the Richard M. Bowman Center in Charles City County, VA, stated that Burwell and his son, Burwell Armistead, Jr., were sometimes referred to with the name Burrel.

<sup>108</sup> William Clopton to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 2 August 1864, Box 9, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

wanted Tyler to pick up a dress for his wife.<sup>110</sup> These stories of the Armisteads and others showed what their assigned jobs entailed and ultimately how they survived on the plantation during the Antebellum and Civil War Eras.

Maria Armistead, who was also enslaved at Sherwood Forest, was the wife of Burwell Armistead, Sr., and the mother of Burwell Armistead, Jr. There are two mentions of a person named Maria in two letters from the Tyler family that could possibly refer to Maria Armistead. The first letter is from Julia Gardiner Tyler to her sister, Margaret Gardiner, in 1846 where she stated that Maria, “the dairy woman,” obtained a “fine supply of butter for the winter.”<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, David Gardiner Tyler wrote to his mother, Julia Gardiner Tyler, in 1864 while he was enlisted with the Confederate Army that he enjoyed his “own cooking more than I did that of old Maria at Sherwood.”<sup>112</sup> Both letters show that the enslaved person Maria labored in domestic settings that pertained to food, making it likely that they are the same person. Since both letters only mention a first name, the enslaved woman named Maria who worked in the dairy and was a cook could very likely be Maria Armistead. As no other enslaved person named Maria is mentioned in Sherwood Forest’s surviving records, it can be inferred that these two instances provide historians with indications into the life of Maria Armistead.

After the Civil War, Burwell and Maria Armistead appeared on several Freedmen’s Bureau records in Princess Anne County, Virginia. The couple first appear in 1866 on the rations rolls for February, March, and April of that year in Princess Anne County. Burwell was listed as 80 years old in all three of the records, which would place his birth year approximately in 1786,

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<sup>110</sup> Celia Johnson to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 16 November 1864, Box 10, Gardiner-Tyler Family Papers, Manuscript and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

<sup>111</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Gardiner, 29 October 1846, Box 8, Folder 1, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary. Note: Margaret Gardiner is the same person as Margaret Gardiner Beeckman; she was not married and had not changed her name at this time.

<sup>112</sup> David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 16 September 1864, Box 15, Folder 1, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

only three years after the United States won their independence from Great Britain. Maria's age was listed as 65 in February 1866 and 70 in March and April 1866, which would place her birth year between 1796-1801. In all three records, they were listed as "Aged," meaning that they could not perform any laborious work.<sup>113</sup> The Freedmen's Bureau records from August-September 1866 in Princess Anne County, Virginia, also showed the Armistead couple. The passage stated that Burwell and Maria Armistead had seven children and that one unnamed child lived with the couple to help take care of Maria; the record further indicated that the Armisteads "get no help from" their children. The last part of the entry stated that Burwell was "crippled" and depended on rations, as well as the fact that the Armisteads possessed "about 3 acres of ground."<sup>114</sup> Burwell and Maria Armistead's narratives illustrate how numerous formerly enslaved people created new lives for themselves after the Civil War when they were freed.

Their son, Burwell Armistead, Jr., was also an enslaved man at the Tyler family plantation. The first mention of him is from a letter from David Gardiner Tyler to his mother, Julia, in 1864 that detailed that "Burwell, Jr., and his wife, together with Claiborne, Randolph, and Lucy, are at Sherwood."<sup>115</sup> This further adds to the previous letter from William Clopton that Burwell Armistead, Sr., and Claiborne Carter were placed in charge of the plantation by the Union Army since it specifically names some of the people who were still at Sherwood during

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<sup>113</sup> Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, Reports and Records Relating to Complaints, 1865-1867, "Ration Roll Princess Anne Co.: February 1866.," Roll 161.; Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, Reports and Records Relating to Complaints, 1865-1867, "Ration Roll for Princess Anne Co.: March 1866," Roll 161.; Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, Reports and Records Relation to Complaints, 1865-1867, "Ration Roll Princess Anne Co.: April 1866," Roll 161. Source: FamilySearch.com. Note: Their last name is spelled Armistead instead of Armistead.

<sup>114</sup> Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, "Letters Sent, Aug.-Sept. 1866," Roll 160. Source: FamilySearch.com. Note: The ages of Burwell and Maria are different than those on the February, March, and April 1866 records listed earlier, but since these are the same names of the people listed earlier in the year, depend on rations and live in the same place, it appears that the ages might have been documented incorrectly by accident.

<sup>115</sup> David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 6 September 1864, Box 15, Folder 1, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

the Civil War. After the war, Armistead stayed in Charles City County, Virginia. In 1867, Armistead was married in that county, and his parents were listed as Burwell and Maria Armistead. Unfortunately, there is no mention of his wife's or of his wife's parents' names.<sup>116</sup> While the 1864 letter from David Gardiner Tyler stated that Armistead was with his wife at Sherwood, it is possible that either his wife died between 1864 and 1867, and he remarried, or the couple a marriage ceremony after the war. In the 1870 U.S. Census, Armistead was living in Charles City County. He was listed as 34 years old, meaning that he was born in approximately 1836. His occupation was a laborer, and there were two other people living in his household, Eliza Armistead (50) and Rebecca Armistead (23), but it is unclear their relation to Burwell Armistead, Jr., who was listed as the head of the household.<sup>117</sup> The stories of the Armisteads showcase how they adapted to changing circumstances during the Civil War and how they created a life for themselves after one of the bloodiest conflicts in U.S. history.

### *The Black Family*

The Black family was an enslaved family that lived at Sherwood Forest.<sup>118</sup> The matriarch of the family was Eliza Black, who was an enslaved seamstress at the plantation. The first mention of Eliza Black is in an 1846 letter from Julia Gardiner Tyler to her mother that detailed Eliza's wedding to Alexander Black. Tyler noted that it was "the greatest frolic" with a feast, fiddling, dancing, music, and a large gathering.<sup>119</sup> Eliza Black appeared again in 1859 in a letter from Julia Gardiner Tyler to her brother, David Gardiner, where she described a wedding for an enslaved woman named Becky. In the letter, Tyler stated that the enslaved people celebrated

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<sup>116</sup> "Marriages For the Year 1876," Charles City County, Virginia, Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History, Charles City County, Virginia, 20.

<sup>117</sup> 1870 U.S. Federal Census, "Inhabitants in Tyler Township, in the County of Charles City, State of Virginia, Enumerated By Me," Samuel E. Bahesck, Ass't Marshal. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>118</sup> See Figure 2 on page 64 for the Black Family Tree.

<sup>119</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 10 February 1846, Box 8, Folder 1, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

“their holiday week between Christmas & New Year,” and how Black organized “a great blow-out” for Becky’s wedding the day before Tyler wrote the letter, which would have been December 29, 1845.<sup>120</sup> Tyler observed that there was “music & dancing & feasting all night long,” and that several enslaved people from other plantations were also in attendance.<sup>121</sup> While the life of an enslaved person was filled with terror, work, and fear, they did find some instances to hold festivities to at least take a break and not think about the horrors of slavery that they were enduring.

Eliza Black acted in the best interests of herself and her children when she ran away from Sherwood to Fort Monroe during one of the most tumultuous times in American history. Black and her four children appeared on the records at Fort Monroe from 1863-1865.<sup>122</sup> The four records from the Freedmen’s Bureau that pertain to Black and her children indicate that she lived at Camp Hamilton in Fort Monroe where she received rations.<sup>123</sup> In two of the records, she was listed with four children,<sup>124</sup> and an 1865 document specified that she had three boys and one girl.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, in three of the Freedmen’s Bureau records, there was a remark written next

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<sup>120</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to David Gardiner, 30 December 1859, Box 8, Folder 5, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Records Relating to the Issuance of Rations,” Vol. 1-3, 1863-1865, Fort Monroe, Roll 115.; Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Register of Destitutes Receiving Rations,” Vol. 1-2, 1865, Fort Monroe, Roll 127.; Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Register of Destitutes Receiving Rations,” Vol. 1-2, 1865, Fort Monroe, Roll 127.; Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Records Relating to Issuance of Rations, Vol. 1-3, 1863-1865, Fort Monroe Roll 115.; Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Records Relating to Issuance of Rations, Vol. 1-3, 1863-1865, Fort Monroe Roll 115. Source: FamilySearch.com.

<sup>123</sup> Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Records Relating to the Issuance of Rations,” Vol. 1-3, 1863-1865, Fort Monroe, Roll 115.; Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Register of Destitutes Receiving Rations,” Vol. 1-2, 1865, Fort Monroe, Roll 127.; Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Records Relating to Issuance of Rations, Vol. 1-3, 1863-1865, Fort Monroe Roll 115.; Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Records Relating to Issuance of Rations, Vol. 1-3, 1863-1865, Fort Monroe Roll 115. Source: FamilySearch.com.

<sup>124</sup> Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Records Relating to the Issuance of Rations,” Vol. 1-3, 1863-1865, Fort Monroe, Roll 115.; Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Register of Destitutes Receiving Rations,” Vol. 1-2, 1865, Fort Monroe, Roll 127. Source: FamilySearch.com.

<sup>125</sup> Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Register of Destitutes Receiving Rations,” Vol. 1-2, 1865, Fort Monroe, Roll 127. Source: FamilySearch.com.



to Eliza Black's entries, "1<sup>st</sup> U.S.C.C.," which could be in reference to the 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Colored Cavalry that fought in the Civil War.<sup>126</sup> This would mean that Black had a relative or close friend who served in that regiment, and if that is the case, it could be in reference to Henry Black, a man who was also enslaved at Sherwood Forest when Eliza Black and her children were.<sup>127</sup> Henry Black enlisted with the regiment on December 10, 1863, in Norfolk, Virginia, at 19 years old, and he agreed to serve for three years. His enlistment paper also stated that he was a waiter.<sup>128</sup> This connection is further emphasized since it is believed that he is the same Henry Black that appears with Eliza Black and her children in the 1870 U.S. Census when they were living in Wythe, Virginia.<sup>129</sup> In that census record, Henry Black's occupation was listed as "servant at home," and Eliza Black's occupation was a seamstress, while her son Thaddious (18) was an oysterman.<sup>130</sup> Eliza also lived with her two other children: Allen (14) and Helen (4). It is unclear what happened to the fourth child who was with her at Fort Monroe during the Civil War. Eliza Black's story is one of resilience as she ran away from Sherwood with her children, who then all settled in Virginia following the war.

While there are inconclusive documents that cannot trace all of Eliza Black's children, there is definitive documentation about her son, Thaddious Black and his family. On April 20, 1872, Black married a woman named Maria Hill in Hampton, Virginia. On his marriage license,

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<sup>126</sup> Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, "Records Relating to the Issuance of Rations," Vol. 1-3, 1863-1865, Fort Monroe, Roll 115.; Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, "Records Relating to Issuance of Rations, Vol. 1-3, 1863-1865, Fort Monroe Roll 115.;" Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, "Records Relating to Issuance of Rations, Vol. 1-3, 1863-1865, Fort Monroe Roll 115. Source: FamilySearch.com.

<sup>127</sup> Based on research, there is no indication of a familial relationship between Eliza Black and Henry Black.

<sup>128</sup> Henry Black, U.S., Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1863-1865, Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>129</sup> 1870 U.S. Federal Census, "Inhabitants in the Wythe Township in County of Elizabeth City, State of Virginia, Enumerated By Me on the 22 Day of June, 1870," L.G. Supanous, Ass't Marshal. Note: The historians at the Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History in Charles City County, Virginia, believe that Henry Black is the formerly enslaved person who was in the household of Eliza Black in 1870. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

he was listed as 22 years old, meaning that he was born around 1850, and his parents were listed as Eliza and Jesse Black.<sup>131</sup> While Eliza Black did marry Alexander Black in 1846, it is likely that Alexander Black died since he is not the father of Thaddious Black, and he did not appear on the Freedmen's Bureau records with Eliza Black and her children. Therefore, Eliza Black then most likely married Jesse Black before their son, Thaddious, was born in 1850, but Jesse's name is not stated on the Freedmen's Bureau records at Fort Monroe, meaning that he either stayed at the plantation or possibly was separated from his family during the Civil War.<sup>132</sup> In 1893, Thaddious Black was the one who reported the death of his father, Jesse Black. His father died on December 24, 1893, at the age of 60 years old, and his occupation was a laborer. On the death record from Charles City County, Jesse Black was also listed as "Consort" under the column "Consort of, or Unmarried," most likely meaning that Jesse and Eliza Black were married at some point before his death.<sup>133</sup> It is also possible that since Thaddious Black reported his father's death instead of his mother that Eliza Black had passed away before Jesse Black. Regarding Thaddious Black and Maria Hill's family, they had two children: Eliza Black Jordan and Victoria Black Williams Chisman.

Eliza Black Jordan was married on May 19, 1892, in Hampton, Virginia, to Joseph Jordan at the age of 19, meaning that she was born around 1873. Her parents were listed as Thaddious and Maria Black.<sup>134</sup> In the 1900 U.S. Census, Eliza Jordan was living in Wythe, Virginia, with her husband, who worked as an oysterman, and two children: Albert (5) and

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<sup>131</sup> Thaddious Black, Virginia, U.S., Select Marriages, 1785-1940. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>132</sup> Note: Through my research, I have found no familial relationship between Alexander Black and Jesse Black.

<sup>133</sup> "Register of Deaths," Charles City County, Virginia, Virginia Deaths and Burials, 1853-1912. Source: FamilySearch.com. Note: Thaddious' name appears as Thad Black.

<sup>134</sup> Eliza Black, Virginia, U.S., Select Marriages, 1785-1940. Source: Ancestry.com. Note: Thaddious and Maria's names appear as Thadors and Mary Black.

Hathaway (3).<sup>135</sup> However, in 1929, Eliza Jordan died at the age of 60 in Hampton, Virginia, and her death was reported by her husband. Her parents were listed as Thaddious Black and Maria Hill.<sup>136</sup> She is buried at Bethel AME Church Cemetery in Hampton, Virginia.<sup>137</sup> There is much known about Eliza and Joseph Jordan's son, William Albert Jordan. In the 1930 U.S. Census, he was listed as living in the household of his wife's parents, Mary and William Chesman, in Hampton, Virginia. His wife's name was Hattie Chesman Jordan. Additionally, Jordan was a butler.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, the draft cards from World War I and World War II stated his name as William Albert Jordan, and his World War I draft card revealed that his birthdate was December 2, 1893.<sup>139</sup> He died on June 6, 1987, at the age of 93 in Newport News, Virginia. His parents were listed as Joseph Jordan and Eliza Ann Black. At the time of his death, he was widowed and had retired from working in the shipyard.<sup>140</sup> William Albert Jordan's story shows audiences that while the Civil War seems like so long ago, many people only have two or three generations between themselves and their ancestors who were enslaved.

Victoria Black Williams Chisman was the second daughter of Thaddious and Maria Black. On March 17, 1903, Victoria married Joseph Williams in Hampton, Virginia, and her parents are listed as Thaddious and Maria Black. On the marriage license, she was 19 years old, meaning that she was born around the year 1884.<sup>141</sup> By 1910, Williams and her husband lived in

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<sup>135</sup> 1900 U.S. Federal Census, "Population," Census Place: Elizabeth City County, Virginia, Enumerated on 29 June 1900, Howard S. Thompson, Enumerator. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>136</sup> Eliza Jordan, Virginia, U.S., Death Records, 1912-2014. Source: Ancestry.com. Note: Thaddious and Maria's names appear as Thadus Black and Maria Hill.

<sup>137</sup> "Eliza Ann Black Jordan," Find a Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/14216102/eliza-ann-jordan>. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>138</sup> 1930 U.S. Federal Census, "Population Schedule," Census Place: Hampton City, Elizabeth City County, Virginia, Enumerated on April 14, 1930, by Gladys L. Wallace, Enumerator. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>139</sup> William Albert Jordan, U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918; William Albert Jordan, U.S., World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>140</sup> William Albert Jordan, Virginia, U.S., Death Records, 1912-2014. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>141</sup> Victoria Brown, Virginia, U.S., Select Marriages, 1785-1940. Source: Ancestry.com.

Wythe, Virginia, with their two children, Gladys (6) and Dorothy (4). Joseph Williams' occupation was a boatman.<sup>142</sup> Unfortunately, just a few years later, Victoria Chisman was the one who reported her daughter Gladys' death on May 28, 1928, from chronic bronchitis and influenza; she was just 24 years old when she passed away. At the time of her death, Gladys was a dressmaker. On Gladys Williams' death certificate, Victoria Williams was listed as Victoria Chisman, meaning that either her husband died or they divorced and then she married a man with the last name of Chisman.<sup>143</sup> The next instance where Victoria Chisman appeared in records was the 1940 U.S. Census where she was living in her daughter Dorothy's household in North Hampton, Virginia. Her daughter was married to a man named John Randell, who was an auto mechanic. Victoria Chisman was listed as widowed, and she was a waitress at a government hospital. The record further stated that Chisman's and John Randell's highest grade level was "College, 5<sup>th</sup> or subsequent year," and Dorothy Randell's education level was the first year in high school.<sup>144</sup> On April 6, 1946, Victoria Chisman died at the age of 53 years old from cancer in Hampton, Virginia, and she is buried at Phillips Cemetery in Hampton, Virginia.<sup>145</sup> Victoria Chisman's story shows her life through her marriages and losses, and that she received a very high education at a time when women were not attending college in large numbers.

### *The Hall Family*

The patriarch of the Hall family was Tony Hall, who was an enslaved man at Sherwood Forest and was the husband of Fanny Hall and is believed to be the father of Peter Hall.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> 1910 U.S. Federal Census, "Population," Census Place: Wythe District, Elizabeth City County, Virginia, Enumerated on April 29, 1910, by Holaud D. Cork, Enumerator. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>143</sup> Gladys Williams, Virginia, U.S., Death Records, 1912-2014. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>144</sup> 1940 U.S. Federal Census, "Population Schedule," Census Place: Wythe, Elizabeth City County, Virginia, Enumerated on April 24, 1940, by Grace A. Leuz, Enumerator. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>145</sup> Victoria Chisman, Virginia, U.S., Death Records, 1912-2014. Source: Ancestry.com. Note: Her parents' names appear as Thad Black and Maria Hill.

<sup>146</sup> See Figure 3 on page 65 for the Hall Family Tree.

Unfortunately, there is not much known about Hall except for his death. In a letter from Julia Gardiner Tyler to her sister, Tyler detailed that Hall died on the morning of May 6, 1845, at Sherwood Forest from cancer.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, Tony Hall was “bedridden for several months” and that the cancer “attacked his nose.”<sup>148</sup> At the time of his death, Julia Tyler wrote that Hall was “surrounded by my comfort” and gave him as much aid as she could, meaning that Tyler tried in her own way to help Hall as he was dying.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, a couple of months later, Julia Gardiner Tyler wrote to her mother, Juliana Gardiner, about Tony Hall’s funeral. In the letter, it was mentioned that a young pastor named Mr. Leavell came to “perform the burial service for poor Tony” on July 15, 1845. Julia and John Tyler were in attendance, as well as enslaved people from Sherwood and other plantations in the area.<sup>150</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler mentioned that the pastor “commenced with a psalm,” and then the enslaved people “desired to pursue the ceremony their own way.”<sup>151</sup> The former president’s wife detailed that one of the enslaved was a Baptist preacher and that all the enslaved gathered around him to pray.<sup>152</sup> However, the death records from Charles City County at that time show that Tony Hall was not the only person to be buried that day; two unnamed children, who were also enslaved at Sherwood, were buried on July 15, 1845.<sup>153</sup>

According to oral traditions, there are two cemeteries for the enslaved at Sherwood Forest. One is said to be located “mid-way along the west side of the thirty-acre field,” but

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<sup>147</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Gardiner, 6 May 1845, Box 7, Folder 9, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 15 July 1845, Box 7, Folder 10, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> “Private Register of Burials,” Charles City County, Virginia, Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History, Charles City County, Virginia.

unfortunately, there is no surviving evidence above ground.<sup>154</sup> The other is rumored to be on the original tract of land of Creek Plantation, which was the name of the plantation before President Tyler changed it to Sherwood Forest. It was reported that George and Jimmy Tyler – who are extended members of the Tyler family – were told about this burial ground from David Gardiner Tyler, Jr.,<sup>155</sup> and that there is a presence of periwinkle in that area,<sup>156</sup> which many archaeologists have stated is an indicator of historic cemeteries, including African American ones.<sup>157</sup> Today, no one in the Tyler family or on the staff at Sherwood Forest knows for sure where the burial ground is, but historians know it is on the property given Julia Gardiner Tyler’s letter regarding Tony Hall’s burial and the death records from the county that have survived.

Fanny Hall was the wife of Tony Hall and the mother of Peter Hall, and she was also enslaved at Sherwood Forest. She is first mentioned in a letter from John Tyler to his daughter, Elizabeth Tyler Waller, in 1846. Tyler stated that Fanny Hall was going “down in the carriages” to see Waller in Williamsburg, Virginia, and Tyler hoped that Hall would be “diligent” and aid “you and my little namesake.”<sup>158</sup> It appears that Tyler sent Hall to help take care of his daughter and grandchild. Additionally, in the letter, it is also revealed that Hall is the “right hand in all that relates” to Julia Gardiner Tyler’s chamber, meaning that Fanny Hall was an enslaved person who labored in the house.<sup>159</sup> Hall appeared in a letter from Julia Tyler to her mother in 1859, and she

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<sup>154</sup> Mary C. Fesak, “Chapter 2: John and Julia Develop Sherwood Forest,” in *Sherwood Forest* (Garden Club of Virginia, 2019), 28.

<sup>155</sup> Sherry Brown Tyler, *80% Heaven Bound: Deaths and Burials in Charles City County, Virginia* (Charles City County Historical Society, 2000), 322.

<sup>156</sup> Fesak, “Chapter 2,” in *Sherwood Forest*, 28.

<sup>157</sup> Lynn Rainville, “Locating and Recording the Dead,” in *Hidden History: African American Cemeteries in Central Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 15.

<sup>158</sup> John Tyler to Elizabeth Tyler Waller, 18 October 1845, John Tyler Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

stated that Hall sent her “thanks and her love to Master David, and to you.”<sup>160</sup> Tyler also wrote that Hall received tobacco from David Gardiner, Tyler’s brother, and that she and several other enslaved people inquired about the well-being of the Gardiner family whenever they saw Julia Tyler.<sup>161</sup>

Three enslaved people are mentioned by name in John Tyler’s will: William Short, Fanny Hall, and her son, Peter Hall. Tyler stated that he wanted Julia Gardiner Tyler to “take good care of my faithful servants,” Fanny Hall and William Short, the enslaved butler, so that they might be “comfortable” in their old ages.<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, Peter Hall was “bequeathed” to Julia Gardiner Tyler as her coachman by the former president, along with all the horses and carriages.<sup>163</sup> Tyler further went on to write that his wife could “select” as many or few footmen and an outrider, which is the person on horseback who goes in front or beside the carriage to escort or guard it. The former first lady additionally had the authority to choose an enslaved woman to be her “maid servant” and an enslaved boy for each of their sons.<sup>164</sup>

During the Civil War, Fanny Hall resided at Sherwood Forest. In 1864, it was noted by William Clopton, a friend of the Tyler family, that Hall was “the leader in tearing down the curtains and gathering things up generally” since many enslaved people were carrying furniture from the house and into their own quarters.<sup>165</sup> After the Civil War, Fanny Hall appeared in Freedmen’s Bureau records and in U.S. Census data, both in Virginia. In 1866, Hall was listed on Freedmen’s Bureau ration records in Princess Anne County, Virginia, from February to April

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<sup>160</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 1 December 1859, Transcripts, Sherwood Forest Plantation Foundation, Charles City County, Virginia.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> John Tyler, Will Book 2, Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History, Charles City County, Virginia.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> William Clopton to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 2 August 1864, Box 9, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

of that year. Hall was listed under the “Aged” column and was said to be 60 years old in February and March but as 65 in the April record, which would place her birth year between 1801-1806.<sup>166</sup> The next record Hall appeared on was the 1880 U.S. Census. She lived in Kempsville, Virginia, and was the only person in her household. At the time, she was recorded as 90 years old and a widow.<sup>167</sup> Fanny Hall’s story provides insight into the lives of the enslaved people in the house as well as how numerous people shaped their new lives after the Civil War in a society where all enslaved people received their freedom.

### *The Short Family*

The last known slave family at Sherwood Forest was the Short family.<sup>168</sup> The patriarch of the family was William Short, who was the enslaved butler at the plantation and the husband of Louisa Short. William Short first appears in a letter from Julia Gardiner Tyler to her mother in 1845 where Tyler detailed that Short and an enslaved woman named Fanny traveled with John and Julia Tyler to White Sulphur Springs, Virginia.<sup>169</sup> In another letter from 1849, Tyler told her mother that she had sent Short for “some fine sweet potatoes for seed” in the morning from Dr. Tyler’s estate 25 miles away and described that he was “a most faithful servant.”<sup>170</sup> Short was

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<sup>166</sup> “Virginia, Freedmen’s Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872,” Reports and Records Relating to Complaints, 1865-1867, “Ration Roll Princess Anne Co.: February 1866.,” Roll 161.; “Virginia, Freedmen’s Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872,” Reports and Records Relating to Complaints, 1865-1867, “Ration Roll for Princess Anne Co.: March 1866,” Roll 161.; “Virginia, Freedmen’s Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872.,” Reports and Records Relation to Complaints, 1865-1867, “Ration Roll Princess Anne Co.: April 1866,” Roll 161. Source: FamilySearch.com. Note: I believe that this is the same Fanny Hall from Sherwood Forest because she is on the same page for the ration rolls as Burwell and Maria Armistead and because she is elderly, which was stated in John Tyler’s will.

<sup>167</sup> 1880 U.S. Federal Census, “Inhabitants in Kempsville District, in the County of Princess Anne, State of Virginia, Enumerated By Me on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Day of June, 1880, Jar. E. Bell, Enumerator.” Source: Ancestry.com. Note: I believe that this is Fanny Hall from Sherwood Forest, even with the discrepancies in age between her entries in the Freedmen’s Bureau and the 1880 U.S. Census, because of her elderly age, and she is on the same page as Victoria Short Brown’s family, who was also enslaved at Sherwood Forest.

<sup>168</sup> See Figure 4 on page 65 for the Short Family Tree.

<sup>169</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 10 August 1845, Box 7, Folder 10, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary. Note: It is unclear from the letter if the Fanny mentioned is Fanny Hall or Fanny Johnson, who were both enslaved at Sherwood Forest.

<sup>170</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 3 April 1849, Box 8, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.



also called an “honest and faithful servant” by John Tyler in a letter the former president wrote to John Martin in 1851.<sup>171</sup> Tyler penned the letter because he noticed that Short was absent from payroll list for pensions for veterans from the War of 1812 and asked if Short could receive the land that was promised to former soldiers of that war since Short was still alive.<sup>172</sup> Tyler had served in the 52<sup>nd</sup> Regiment in the Virginia Militia with the rank of captain,<sup>173</sup> and it appears that William Short accompanied Tyler during the war. It is interesting to see Tyler advocate for an enslaved person to acquire land when he was very much in favor of keeping people in bondage as was noted in the previous chapter. The last known mention of William Short is in John Tyler’s will when he is one of the three enslaved people named explicitly with Fanny and Peter Hall.<sup>174</sup>

The matriarch of the family was Louisa Short, who was the wife of William Short. There is not much known about her, and the earliest mention of Louisa Short is in a letter from Tazewell Tyler to his stepmother, Julia Gardiner Tyler, where he stated that “Louisa went to Uncle William Tyler’s for some pickle” and that she was “preserving the peaches.”<sup>175</sup> This indicates that Louisa worked in the house like her husband since he was mentioned earlier to have also completed an errand to another Tyler family member’s estate for some produce. The next mention of Short is from the Freedmen’s Bureau. She appeared in Princess Anne County, Virginia, on the “Census Returns for the Black Population” in that county. At the time, she was listed between 50-70 years old, and under “Former Owner,” it was noted that it was John Tyler.<sup>176</sup> Since she appears alone on this record, it is possible that her husband, William Short,

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<sup>171</sup> John Tyler to John K. Martin, 26 September 1851, Box 2, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> John Tyler, United States War of 1812 Index to Service Records, 1812-1815. Source: FamilySearch.com.

<sup>174</sup> John Tyler, Will Book 2, Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History, Charles City County, Virginia.

<sup>175</sup> Tazewell Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 2 September 1845, Box 7, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>176</sup> Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Census Returns of Black Population in Princess Anne County,” Princess Anne County, Virginia, Roll 161. Source: FamilySearch.com.

had passed away. The last known instance of Louisa Short is on the 1870 U.S. Census where she was living in the household of her granddaughter, Victoria Brown, in Kempsville, Virginia. She was listed as 70 years old, meaning that she was born around 1800, which was the year of the third U.S. presidential election.<sup>177</sup> Since she is older and her husband is not present, it is likely that William Short had died by 1870. Louisa Short's story emphasizes how long slavery endured in the newly created United States – which had an opportunity at its birth to end the slavery – since it spanned most of her lifetime.

The next member of the Short family is Roscius Short, who was the son of William and Louisa Short. The first time he appears in documents is in 1856 in a letter from Julia Gardiner Tyler to her mother, Juliana Gardiner, where she mentioned that Roscius Short ran away. According to the document, Short drank during the Christmas holidays, and John Tyler struck Short “with his fist” to “reprimand” him for “something he replied saucily” to the enslaver.<sup>178</sup> It appeared that Tyler and Short fought as Short “took an attitude for a fight when John fell upon him to pummel him well.”<sup>179</sup> After the altercation, Short “ran out the front gate,” and after he did not come back immediately, John Tyler placed a “notice to the watch in Richmond.”<sup>180</sup> The chief of police in the Virginia capital then alerted the Tylers when Roscius Short was placed in jail, and Tyler stated that he would be punished. In the letter, Tyler revealed that Short was William Short's son.<sup>181</sup> Roscius fought back against the system of slavery at Sherwood again when clashed with the overseer, Mr. Hogan, in the 1850s. Hogan did not like Roscius since “he would

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<sup>177</sup> 1870 U.S. Federal Census, “Inhabitants in the Kempsville Township, In the County of Princess Anne, State of Virginia, Enumerated By Me on the 5<sup>th</sup> Day of July, 1870, E. D. Cornick, Enumerator.” Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>178</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 15 January 1856, Transcripts, Sherwood Forest Plantation Foundation, Charles City County, Virginia.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

not pay as much deference to his orders” as the other enslaved people.<sup>182</sup> One day, Hogan went to the barn when Roscius was there alone, locked the door, and planned to whip Short to “show” Short that he was “the better man of the two.”<sup>183</sup> Hogan then lunged for Short, and Short took Hogan by the wrists to stop him, which then caused Hogan to yell, “Murder!”<sup>184</sup> Because of the commotion, many enslaved people gathered around the barn, including Short’s father, William Short, who called for his son to come out of the structure.<sup>185</sup> John Tyler then arrived at the scene and told both Roscius Short and Hogan to open the doors and come out. It was reported that Tyler found the altercation amusing and told John Selden when he visited Selden’s plantation that Hogan “might just as well have locked himself in a cage with a roaring, raging lion.”<sup>186</sup> After the fight, Tyler fired Hogan, and it is unclear if Roscius Short was ever punished. Roscius Short’s story reveals how some enslaved people tried to push back against the system that deprived them of humanity.

Victoria Short Brown was the daughter of Jerry Short, who was Roscius Short’s brother. Victoria Short is first mentioned in a letter from Julia Gardiner Tyler to her mother on December 28, 1846, where she stated that Short was “formally presented” to her son David Gardiner Tyler “as his Christmas present.”<sup>187</sup> Unfortunately, it was not unusual to “gift” an enslaved person on various occasions to a member of the Caucasian family since numerous people did so, such as the wills that were mentioned in the previous chapter. At one point during or after the Civil War, Victoria Short left Sherwood Forest. She appeared in the Freedmen’s Bureau records for Princess

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<sup>182</sup> “A Planter’s Pride In His Slaves,” *William & Mary Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1915): 225. Note: While the article has no author, it is believed to have been written by Lyon Gardiner Tyler, President John Tyler’s son.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>187</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 28 December 1846, Box 8, Folder 1, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

Anne County, Virginia, for the “Census Returns for the Black Population.” She was listed between 20-50 years old, along with an unnamed newborn boy, presumably her child. For both her and the child, John Tyler was listed as their “former owner.” The Census Return record also mentioned that she received \$5.00 a month for her labor.<sup>188</sup> Moreover, in October 1865, Short married a man named Simon Brown in Norfolk, Virginia. On the marriage license, she was listed as 21 years old, meaning that she was born around 1844, and that her parents were Jerry and Martha Short.<sup>189</sup> By 1870, Simon and Victoria Brown were residing in Kempsville, Virginia. Simon worked as a fisherman, and they had a son named Henry, who was four years old. Louisa Short and Letitia Short, Victoria’s grandmother and sister respectively, also lived in the house, and Letitia Short’s occupation is stated as a female laborer. There was another person in the house named Rosalie Brown, who was twelve years old, but it does not appear that she is the daughter of Simon and Victoria; it is possible that she is Simon Brown’s sister.<sup>190</sup> By 1880, the family is still living in the same town and are now a household of five since they have two more children: Laura (8) and Susan (6). In 1880, Simon Brown worked on a farm.<sup>191</sup> In 1879, Victoria and Simon had another child named Mamie Brown, who married a man named John Smith. This information appeared on Mamie Brown Smith’s death certificate, who died on February 19, 1963, at the age of 83 in Newport News, Virginia. At the time of her death, she was a widow.<sup>192</sup> Victoria Short and her family show how the people who were enslaved and their descendants carved their way in a new American society where slavery was abolished.

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<sup>188</sup> Virginia, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872, “Census Returns of Black Population in Princess Anne County,” Princess Anne County, Virginia, Roll 161. Source: FamilySearch.com.

<sup>189</sup> Victoria Short, Virginia, U.S, Select Marriages, 1785-1940. Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>190</sup> 1870 U.S. Federal Census, “Inhabitants in the Kempsville Township, In the County of Princess Anne, State of Virginia, Enumerated By Me on the 5<sup>th</sup> Day of July, 1870, E. D. Cornick, Enumerator.” Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>191</sup> 1880 U.S. Federal Census, “Inhabitants in Kempsville District, in the County of Princess Anne, State of Virginia, Enumerated By Me on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Day of June, 1880, Jar. E. Bell, Enumerator.” Source: Ancestry.com.

<sup>192</sup> Mamie Brown Smith, Virginia, U.S., Death Records, 1912-2014. Source: Ancestry.com. Note: Her parents are listed as Simon Brown and Victoria Shorts.

### *Sightings*

Unfortunately, there is little information about numerous enslaved people due to a lack of records that have been lost with time, either from fires or the fact that people did not believe these records were important to preserve. This section is dedicated to the people whose names appear once in various records, are not a part of the four main slave families mentioned earlier in the chapter, or are unnamed. It is important to also know their stories as they show what enslaved people endured and give readers a glimpse into their lives, providing a fuller story of not only Sherwood Forest Plantation, but also for the whole of American history.

Randall Black was an enslaved man at Sherwood Forest.<sup>193</sup> He first appears in a letter from Julia Gardiner Tyler to her mother in November 1848. She detailed that her son, David Gardiner Tyler, “went out all the day yesterday shooting with Randall” and that they caught a crane to bring home.<sup>194</sup> A month later, Julia told her mother in a letter that her husband and David Gardiner Tyler went deer hunting. Both men had “sent Randall to alarm the woods,” and it was at that moment that a deer sprang in front of John Tyler, who then shot the deer.<sup>195</sup> The next instance Randall was mentioned was through letters that he was at Sherwood Forest with other enslaved people, such as Claiborne and Lucy, during the Civil War.<sup>196</sup> After the war, he appeared in the 1870 U.S. Census in Harrison Township, which is located in Charles City County, Virginia. At the time, he was a laborer and was 65 years old, which would mean that he was born around 1805. The other person in his household was Lucy Black, who could possibly be Randall

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<sup>193</sup> Randall Black sometimes appears in records as Randolph or Randol Black. Based on research, it does not conclusively appear that he was a member of the Black family, whose line was mentioned earlier in the chapter.

<sup>194</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, November 1848, Box 8, Folder 2, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>195</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, December 1848, Box 8, Folder 2, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>196</sup> David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 6 September 1864, Box 15, Folder 1, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary. Note: Randall in this letter is listed as Randolph.

Black's wife, and she was 67 years old.<sup>197</sup> In April 1875, Randall Black died at Sherwood Forest, and his death was reported by David Gardiner Tyler, who is listed as "friend" on the death record.<sup>198</sup> Additionally, his death certificate noted that his father was Douglas Black – who also might have been enslaved by the Tyler family – and that he was a founder of the Parrish Hill Baptist Church, which is likely his burial place.<sup>199</sup> While he was enslaved for most of his life, it is fascinating to see what Randall Black achieved after the Civil War, such as creating a new church in Virginia that is still in active use today.

Fanny Johnson was an enslaved housekeeper at Sherwood Forest, and she is only explicitly mentioned in one letter that Julia Gardiner Tyler wrote to her mother about Johnson's death on July 2, 1851.<sup>200</sup> Tyler wrote that Johnson had died from "dropsy, which attacked her whole frame," and she had been sick since the previous winter.<sup>201</sup> In the hour before her death, Johnson told other enslaved people to "take all the pillows from under my head and let me lie down, & cover me up for I feel rather cold," and when Tyler heard about this, she instructed an enslaved woman named Nancy, who was fulfilling Johnson's tasks, to raise Johnson's head since Tyler feared that Johnson could suffocate.<sup>202</sup> However, Johnson prevented Nancy from doing so by "shaking her head & pressing it back."<sup>203</sup> When Fanny Hall saw this, she tried to raise Johnson's head, and it was at that moment that Johnson passed away. Julia Gardiner Tyler ended

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<sup>197</sup> 1870 U.S. Federal Census, "Inhabitants in Harrison Township, In the County of Charles City, State of Virginia, Enumerated By Me on 30<sup>th</sup> Day of July, 1870, Samuel E. Bahesck, Ass't Marshal." Source: Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History, Charles City County, Virginia. Note: In this record, Randall appears as Randol Black.

<sup>198</sup> Tyler, *80% Heaven Bound*, 323. Note: He appears as Randolph Black in this record.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> Note: There are several letters in the Tyler Family Papers that mention an enslaved person named Fanny, but it is not known explicitly whether the member of the Tyler family is talking about Fanny Johnson or Fanny Hall, who were both enslaved at Sherwood and labored in the main house.

<sup>201</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 2 July 1851, Box 8, Folder 2, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

the letter by stating that for Johnson, “everything has been done for her in sickness & health that could be done, otherwise she could have died years ago.”<sup>204</sup> It is interesting to see that Tyler at one level seemed to care for Johnson, offering a rare, fleeting glimpse of Tyler acknowledging for a very brief moment that the enslaved people were human beings since she and her family had appeared not to regard them as such in their various writings over the decades. While Tyler portrayed herself as a “benevolent” enslaver who cared about and for the enslaved people at Sherwood Forest, it is important to remember that Johnson lived, labored, died, and is most likely buried in the place in which she was enslaved.

Henry’s story is one of resistance against enslavers and the system that upheld the institution of slavery. In a June 1852 letter from Julia Gardiner Tyler to her mother, Tyler stated that Henry was the barber who came to Sherwood Forest to cut her son’s hair. She wrote that Henry was a runaway and that he was with the Tyler family when they were in Washington, D.C., meaning that he labored at the White House. Henry was described as “the smartest looking fellow” and that “his whole appearance that of a handsome Spaniard of fashion & style.”<sup>205</sup> It appears from the letter that Henry ran away from the Tyler family while they were at the White House, was captured, and then John Tyler sold him to a person in Georgia. This is evident in the correspondence since the former first lady wrote that Henry stated that he went to Washington, D.C., to acquire manumission papers because they “cannot be got in the State of Georgia.”<sup>206</sup> The letter revealed that Henry purchased his freedom through his wages as a barber in Georgia.<sup>207</sup> Furthermore, he wanted to visit Sherwood to talk to John Tyler since Henry “never

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Tyler, 18 June 1852, Box 8, Folder 4, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary. Note: The underline under Spaniard appears in the letter written by Tyler.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

could be a contented man or die happy” after “his arrest & departure” unless he could talk to the former president one more time.<sup>208</sup> Henry stayed for the day and had a discussion with John Tyler about running away because when he found out that they all had to go back to Sherwood Forest after Tyler’s presidency ended, Henry ran away to stay in the nation’s capital; John Tyler forgave Henry.<sup>209</sup> At the end of the letter, Julia Tyler stated that Henry was going to continue being a barber in Georgia, and he cut David Gardiner and Tazewell Tyler’s hair with his “genuine barber’s skill.”<sup>210</sup> Henry exemplifies the ways that enslaved people pushed back against the system, especially at a time when it was difficult to obtain one’s freedom. He took a risk going back to the Tylers since they might have tried to re-enslave him, but it is possible that Henry wanted to show John and Julia Tyler that he was free from the system that the Tylers perpetuated and defended throughout their lifetimes.

Claiborne Carter was another person who was enslaved at Sherwood Forest, and his life right after the Civil War was well-documented. The first time Carter appears on the records is in several letters from the Civil War that stated that not only was he on the plantation with several other enslaved people, but he was one of the two individuals who was placed in charge of Sherwood by General Wild.<sup>211</sup> After the Civil War, Carter married a woman named Martha Dittman at Greenway Plantation in Charles City County, Virginia, on December 12, 1867. At the time of the marriage, both Carter and Dittman were widowed. Carter’s age was listed as 60 years old, meaning that he was born around 1807, and Dittman’s age was 40 years old, so she was born approximately in 1827. Furthermore, Carter’s mother was listed as Lucy Tyler, who most likely

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> William Clopton to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 2 August 1864, Box 9, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary. David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 6 September 1864, Box 15, Folder 1, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.



was another person who was enslaved by the Tyler family. On his marriage license, it was stated that Carter's occupation was a laborer.<sup>212</sup> The next time that Carter appeared in the records was in the 1870 U.S. Census where he lived in Chickahominy Township in Charles City County, Virginia. The only people in the household were Claiborne and Martha Carter, and his occupation was a farmer.<sup>213</sup> Like other formerly enslaved people, Carter stayed in the area after the Civil War and created his own life where he found love and employment.

Throughout the letters, Julia Gardiner Tyler made several mentions about enslaved people who labored in the main house. During the eras when slavery was present in America, plantation mistresses were in charge of the management of the house and those in the household, meaning that they oversaw the labor of the enslaved in the main house.<sup>214</sup> Typically, the assigned jobs for enslaved people in the house were such people as the cooks, maids, gardeners, nurses, coachmen, and manservants.<sup>215</sup> Enslaved women usually cleaned the house, such as the windows, carpets, clothes, floors, and dishes. The typical people who would labor in a domestic setting were young children, women, and individuals over 50 years old.<sup>216</sup> Based on her letters, Julia Gardiner Tyler was a typical plantation mistress since many of these trends from American slavery are evident in her writings. For instance, Tyler wrote to her mother in 1844 that she put the "coachman and footman in very neat livery – a suit of black with black velvet bands & buckles on their hats."<sup>217</sup> This correspondence shows that Julia Tyler was in charge of how the

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<sup>212</sup> Claiborne Carter, Marriage License, Charles City Marriage Book 1 & 2, Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History, Charles City County, Virginia.

<sup>213</sup> 1870 U.S. Federal Census, "Inhabitants in Chickahominy Township, In the County of Charles City, State of Virginia, Enumerated By Me on 6<sup>th</sup> Day of July, 1870, Samuel E. Bahesck, Ass't Marshal." Source: Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History, Charles City County, Virginia.

<sup>214</sup> Paul E. Teed and Melissa Ladd Teed, "Political Life," in *Daily Life of African American Slaves in the Antebellum South* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2020), 136.

<sup>215</sup> Teed and Teed, "Economic Life," in *Daily Life of African American Slaves*, 27.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>217</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 8 September 1844, Box 7, Folder 8, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

coachman and footman looked, especially since numerous people would see them when the Tylers used the carriage to visit different places, ensuring those outfits reflected the status of the presidential family. On several occasions, Tyler noted how she made the enslaved people clean the main house. In 1844, upon arriving to Sherwood Forest from a leave of absence, Tyler wrote to her mother that the vacant house was “opened to us by the servants,” denoting that the enslaved people cleaned the house before they arrived. Moreover, Tyler told her sister in 1845 that “everything kept in order around the house” was done by the enslaved people,<sup>218</sup> and on one occasion in 1851, Tyler stated to her mother that she “had to set the servants to work right away” to clean the house before company arrived, showing that Tyler was a typical plantation mistress in directing the enslaved people in the house on what to accomplish.<sup>219</sup> Through various letters, Tyler discussed how she interacted with the enslaved seamstresses. In 1845, Tyler wrote that three enslaved people were sewing several pieces for her; she detailed that one person was sewing an “under skirt, another upon a pair of white sleeves and the other is hemming cup towels.”<sup>220</sup> A month later, Tyler noted that she was “keeping the seamstresses engaged,” indicating that she tasked the enslaved seamstresses with a certain job.<sup>221</sup> While there are no names mentioned, and the letters are authored by the plantation mistress, one can observe a glimpse into the lives of those who were enslaved in the main house and what types of tasks they would have had to endure on the property.

If enslaved people were not working in the main house, they were mostly laboring in the

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<sup>218</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Gardiner, 9 October 1845, Box 14, Gardiner-Tyler Family Papers, Manuscript and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

<sup>219</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 23 May 1851, Box 8, Folder 1, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>220</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 26 March 1845, Box 7, Folder 9, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>221</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 23 June 1845, Box 7, Folder 10, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

fields. There is one occasion where Julia Gardiner Tyler discussed enslaved people in the fields. Tyler explained to her brother, Alexander Gardiner, that John Tyler was “out on horseback three or four hours every day in the fields among the slaves, encouraging them by his presence.”<sup>222</sup> Furthermore, Julia Tyler stated that she often took a pony and rode to the fields to “join” Tyler when the sun was setting.<sup>223</sup> Tyler also wrote to her brother that she and the former president in the evenings will “sit upon the piazza and listen to the corn song of the work people as they come winding home from the distant fields.”<sup>224</sup> It is highly likely that John Tyler wanted to ensure that the enslaved in the fields worked hard and that the overseer did his job properly in watching over the enslaved people; it is also likely that Julia Tyler joined her husband to learn about everything that it took to operate a plantation since she had just married a slaveowner. The daily lives of enslaved people in the fields included placing them on a strict schedule – such as when to wake up, when to arrive at the fields, when they could eat, and when they could go home – or else it would lead to their economic ruin.<sup>225</sup> Moreover, in an effort to increase productivity, many slaveowners supervised or hired an overseer to supervise the fieldwork and set productivity quotas to ensure that they would acquire as much wealth as possible. In many instances, slaveowners and overseers had to determine whether or not to allow those who were injured, sick, and heavily pregnant to work in the fields since they could die or the woman could miscarry; as a form of resistance, many enslaved people faked illnesses since it allowed their bodies a rest if they did not have to labor in the fields for at least a day.<sup>226</sup> While the names of the

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<sup>222</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Alexander Gardiner, 17 June 1845, Box 7, Folder 10, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. Note: The underlining of the words corn song appears in the letter from Tyler.

<sup>225</sup> Teed and Teed, “Political Life,” in *Daily Life of African American Slaves*, 131.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 132.

people who labored in fields might be lost, the letter from Julia Gardiner Tyler allows a small glance into their lives and what they endured during their lifetimes.

Life was further cruel on a plantation since enslaved children were at great risk of getting sick or dying due to the high infant mortality rate. It was difficult for enslaved mothers to take care of their children since they had to balance childrearing with their laborious demands from their enslavers. In some instances, either an older enslaved woman watched the children while their parents labored all day, or the enslaved parents took their children with them while doing the tasks assigned to them by the enslavers.<sup>227</sup> There are a few instances where enslaved children at Sherwood Forest were sick, and they either recovered or unfortunately passed away. In October 1846, Julia Gardiner Tyler wrote to her mother that an unnamed enslaved boy, who was deathly ill, recuperated. Tyler noted that the boy “came to life after having died and been laid out,” which was a shock to the enslaved people and Tyler since the “appearance of life” left the child prior to his recovery.<sup>228</sup> Unfortunately, other children at Sherwood Forest were not so lucky. In 1845, Julia wrote to her sister that an unnamed young enslaved boy died the day before the Tylers arrived back to the plantation. It was reported that his cause of death was “eating dirt,” and Tyler documented that she had frequently heard of these “habits,” so she encouraged the enslaved people to help her break the “habit” for the enslaved child.<sup>229</sup> An enslaved person eating dirt was not an uncommon occurrence, and historians believe that it was a symptom of hookworm.<sup>230</sup> Inhumanely, Tyler was more worried about the fact that the child’s death was a

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<sup>227</sup> Teed and Teed, “Domestic Life” in *Daily Life of African American Slaves*, 59-60.

<sup>228</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 29 October 1846, Box 8, Folder 1, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary. Note: The words are underlined in the letter from Tyler.

<sup>229</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Gardiner, 9 October 1845, Box 14, Gardiner-Tyler Family Papers, Manuscript and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

<sup>230</sup> Kenneth M. Stamp, “Maintenance, Morbidity, Mortality,” in *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, Inc., 1961), 304.

“loss of several hundred dollars” as opposed to the death of a person.<sup>231</sup> Another child’s death that was recorded at Sherwood Forest was the passing of Tazewell. In the Charles City County death records, Tazewell died on December 1, 1855, at the age of one year and three months old. The cause of death was that he was “burnt.”<sup>232</sup> Since it was difficult for enslaved babies and toddlers to have adequate supervision, these tragedies were not uncommon since other enslaved children also received burns, such as getting too close to a fireplace where their clothes could catch on fire or have severe burns right on their skin.<sup>233</sup> The high infant mortality rate, lack of proper supervision, and poor working conditions created a tough environment for children, where it was likely that they became very ill or even died.

Because of the difficult working conditions and close quarters, sicknesses would spread very quickly between the enslaved people. For instance, in 1849, it was recorded by John Tyler in a letter to his brother-in-law, Alexander Gardiner, that there was a flu outbreak among the enslaved. Tyler wrote that “as many as 14” people on the plantation were sick with the flu, some of whom were enslaved.<sup>234</sup> Tyler went on to state that all the enslaved were “again at this work with the one exception.”<sup>235</sup> In 1849, Julia Gardiner Tyler wrote that there was a dysentery outbreak among the enslaved. She documented that most recovered quickly and that there are “one or two cases, but they are slight, and the subjects are walking about.”<sup>236</sup> Regarding a recovery period, Tyler noted that the enslaved “have never been obliged to leave their work more

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<sup>231</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Gardiner, 9 October 1845, Box 14, Gardiner-Tyler Family Papers, Manuscript and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

<sup>232</sup> “Charles City County Death Register, 1855,” Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History, Charles City County, Virginia.

<sup>233</sup> Marie Jenkins Schwartz, “Ill and Injured Children on Antebellum Slave Plantations: A Dangerous Childhood,” *Southern Quarterly* 53 (Spring/Summer 2016): 63.

<sup>234</sup> John Tyler to Alexander Gardiner, 17 January 1849, Box 2, Folder 1, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Tyler, 4 July 1849, Box 8, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

than a day or two.”<sup>237</sup> Between the two letters, it is evident that John and Julia Tyler would not allow sufficient time for the enslaved people to recover from their serious ailments. When it came to the health of enslaved people, the laborious work exposed them to a number of infectious ailments, such as the flu and dysentery. Due to the long days of arduous work, close quarters, and little sanitation, the average life expectancy of an enslaved person in Antebellum America was just over 30 years old.<sup>238</sup> Between the lack of breaks and the lack of medical attention to the enslaved, these stories emphasize how terrible the system was in that there was little help for enslaved individuals who became sick, making their chances of dying unfortunately quite high.

Despite the harsh, deplorable conditions on plantations, enslaved people did try to celebrate special occasions in their own ways. Julia Gardiner Tyler recorded in July 1844 that there was a party at the laundry late at night. Tyler noted that she wanted to stay up late to “peep at the fun” since these festivities usually started around midnight and ended in the early morning.<sup>239</sup> She observed the party from the window and saw that there was dancing and singing, and according to her, they danced a jig and played music that was “of a striking the bones by one man and another was singing.”<sup>240</sup> In 1845, Julia Gardiner Tyler told her sister, Margaret Gardiner, that the enslaved people were enjoying a “four days’ holiday” and have been drinking, but the enslaved people in the main house still had some tasks to attend to during the holiday break.<sup>241</sup> Parties held by enslaved people provided an escape in a way from the day-to-

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Calvin Schermerhorn, “The Everyday Life of Enslaved People in the Antebellum South,” *OAH Magazine of History* 23, no. 2 (2009): 33-34.

<sup>239</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to unknown person, July 1844, “Letters from the Tyler Trunks,” *Tyler’s Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1937): 146.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Gardiner, 25 December 1845, Box 7, Folder 10, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

day suffering of slavery since they could socialize with one another and some tried to find a significant other. It was an opportunity especially for young people to dress in their best clothes and have some fun. The festivities usually began at night since the workday was over by then.<sup>242</sup> As a way of survival, the enslaved people held celebrations that allowed them to forget for a moment the deplorable conditions of slavery.

Several enslaved people at Sherwood Forest fled, and many others stayed on the property during the Civil War. In an undated letter from Julia Gardiner Tyler to the U.S. Commanding Officer at Jamestown and Williamsburg, she explained that two men, a woman with five children, and a free African American woman “left my service.”<sup>243</sup> Tyler noted that they stole some of her clothing, as well as some from her children, and took two boats from the neighbors for escape on the river.<sup>244</sup> The historians at the Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History in Charles City County, Virginia, believe that Eliza Black and her children were among the people who escaped. In the letter, Tyler wrote that a “faithful maid and seamstress” was trusted with a key, and Black was an enslaved seamstress at Sherwood Forest, and she also had numerous children.<sup>245</sup> The historians also believe that one of the men was Henry Black since he enlisted with the 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Colored Cavalry in 1863, and he appeared in Eliza Black’s household in 1870. Furthermore, regarding the plantation, William Clopton wrote to Julia Gardiner Tyler in July 1864 that Sherwood was turned into a schoolhouse by African Americans and Caucasians and that there are several new houses erected on the property.<sup>246</sup> By August 1864, Clopton recorded in his letter to Tyler that almost everything in the house had been destroyed or had been carried

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<sup>242</sup> Teed and Teed, “Domestic Life” in *Daily Life of African American Slaves*, 51-52.

<sup>243</sup> Julia to Commanding Officer, U.S. Forces at Jamestown and Williamsburg, undated, Transcripts, Sherwood Forest Plantation Foundation, Charles City County, Virginia.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> William Clopton to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 1 July 1864, Box 9, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

off by the enslaved people into their quarters. Clopton went on to state that the enslaved people killed all the sheep and hogs, so they were killing some of the neighbors' livestock. At this point, it seemed that only a few people the Tyler family enslaved remained at Sherwood since he mentioned seeing Claiborne Carter, Burwell Armistead Sr., and their wives with about five or six other enslaved people, including Fanny Hall and an unnamed young enslaved woman.<sup>247</sup> This would mean that numerous enslaved people fled the property, most likely with or after the Union Army came to Sherwood Forest, since the 1860 Slave Schedule noted that there were 43 enslaved people at the plantation.<sup>248</sup> A man named John Semple wrote to Julia Gardiner Tyler in September 1864 and noted that Claiborne Carter, Burwell Armistead, Jr., Randall Black, and their wives returned to Sherwood Forest with several free African Americans and had "a tolerable crop of corn."<sup>249</sup> By September 1864, it was detailed in a letter from David Gardiner Tyler to his mother, Julia Gardiner Tyler that all of the "outbuildings have been pulled down and burnt."<sup>250</sup> While some of the original outbuildings – such as the smokehouse and dairy – still stand at Sherwood Forest today, the enslaved most likely destroyed numerous structures and created new ones for themselves, such as those that were mentioned in Clopton's letter from July 1864. While some enslaved people left Sherwood Forest for survival, others stayed and fitted the plantation to their image with creating a schoolhouse, making their own food, and taking the furniture from the main house into their own spaces.

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<sup>247</sup> William Clopton to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 2 August 1864, Box 9, Folder 3, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>248</sup> 1860 U.S. Census: Slave Schedule, "Slave Inhabitants in the County of Charles City, State of Virginia, Enumerated By Me, On the 25<sup>th</sup> Day of June, 1860. Ro. H. Bush, Ass't Marshal." Source: FamilySearch.com.

<sup>249</sup> John Semple to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 10 September 1864, Box 6, Folder 6, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.

<sup>250</sup> David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 28 November 1864, Box 15, Folder 1, Tyler Family Papers, Group A, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary.



*Conclusion*

The stories from the enslaved people at Sherwood Forest have been overlooked for decades. They have hardly been discussed or mentioned in books and articles about the Tyler family or on tours and brochures for Sherwood Forest in the past, demonstrating a lack of interest in uncovering those pieces of history. These narratives matter when discussing the full history of the plantation since one cannot just view it from the perspective of the Tyler family. The glimpses into the lives of the enslaved people at the plantation from various letters, censuses, marriage licenses, and death records, display a fuller picture of the plantation's history. Several expose the horrors of slavery, such as the Tyler family demanding what tasks have to be completed in the main house and the fields, enslaved infants passing away, and the prevalence of spreading infectious diseases throughout the slave quarters. The narratives also illustrate a story of survival before and after slavery was abolished in America through by highlighting ways in which enslaved individuals continued their own traditions, forms of resistance against the institution of slavery, how the formerly enslaved fashioned Sherwood Forest during the Civil War into their own vision, and how several of them fled the plantation to start their new lives with their freedom. The lives of the enslaved people add to the comprehensive story of Sherwood Forest and to U.S. history, and their life stories must be told in order to fill in the missing gaps when articulating what life was truly like on a plantation.

## Family Trees

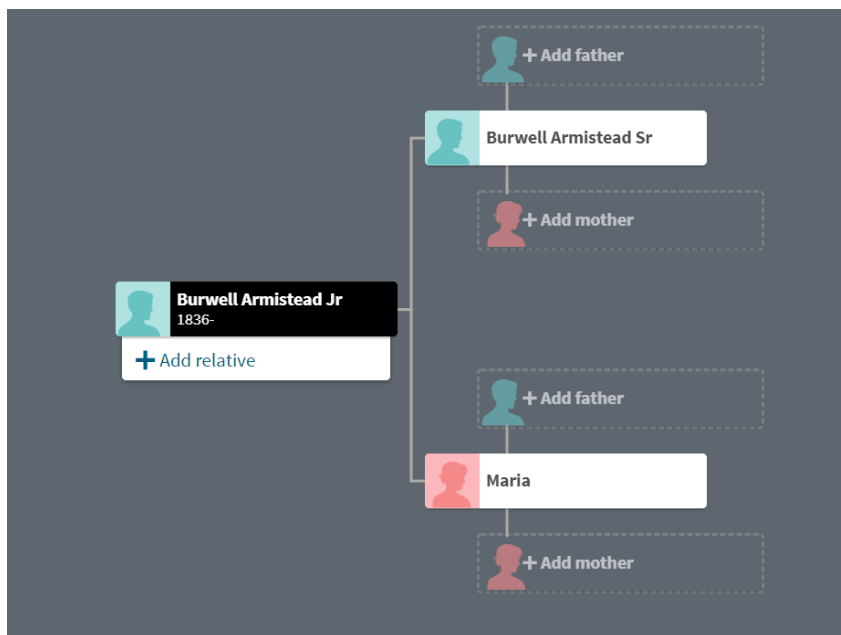


Figure 1: The Armistead Family Tree. The family tree was created on the author's Ancestry.com account, and the photo of the tree was taken by the author.

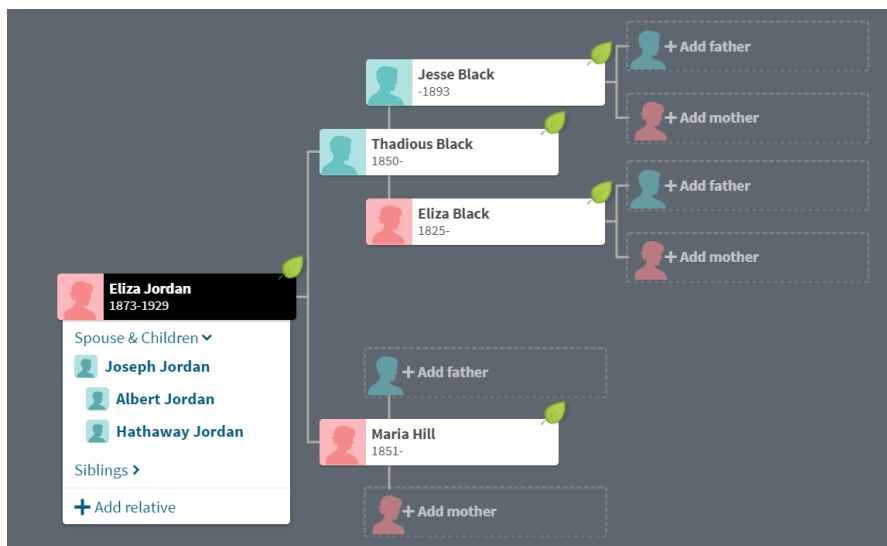


Figure 2: The Black Family Tree. The family tree was created on the author's Ancestry.com account, and the photo of the tree was taken by the author.

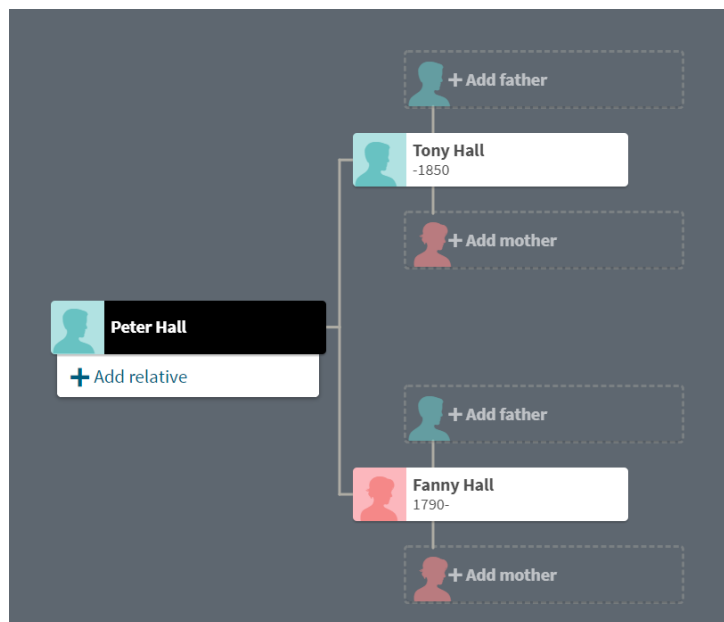


Figure 3: The Hall Family Tree. The family tree was created on the author's Ancestry.com account, and the photo of the tree was taken by the author.

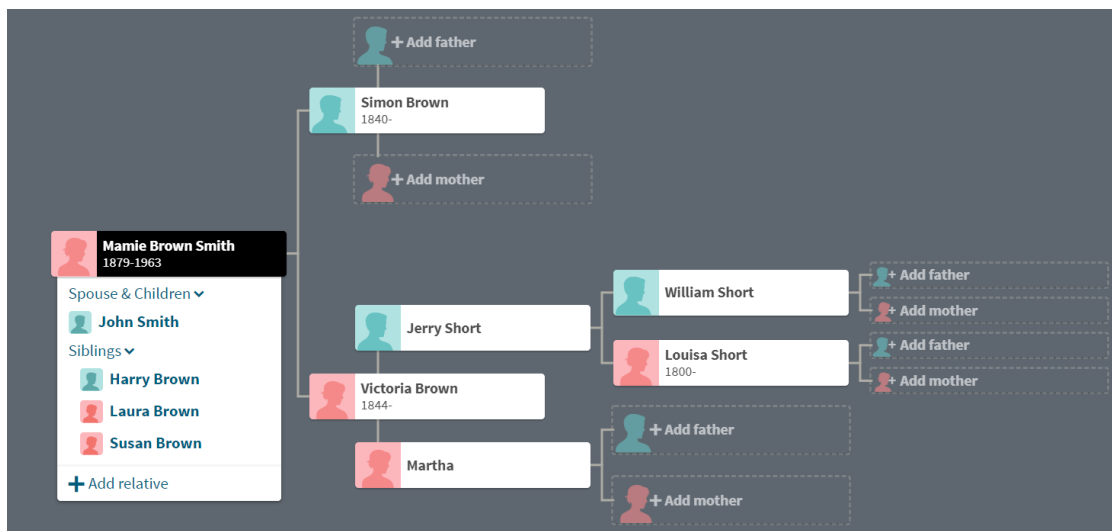


Figure 4: The Short Family Tree. The family tree was created on the author's Ancestry.com account, and the photo of the tree was taken by the author.

## Chapter 3

### Why Educating Visitors About Slavery Is Imperative For Public History

#### *Introduction*

“When it comes to the most nagging issue in our country’s history — race — it seems the very last thing we are able to do is communicate honestly.”<sup>251</sup> Those are the words from Sheila Johnson, a billionaire businesswoman and notable philanthropist, regarding how this country cannot move forward without having an honest discussion about America’s racist past. Even as more historic sites and museums discuss slavery with visitors, numerous places have yet to tackle these conversations, inhibiting guests from challenging their “romantic views” of what they know about the subject – particularly about plantations – from school and popular culture. Slavery is a part of American history, and historic sites must be honest about where the abhorrent institution existed. These stories must be told to humanize the enslaved people, and some plantations are starting to highlight those voices; the most prominent examples are the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana and the McLeod Plantation in South Carolina as they have tours that specifically discuss slavery and the enslaved. However, the homes on the James River in Virginia, including Sherwood Forest, have done little in the past to include the narratives of the enslaved in their tours as the docents mostly discuss the family who owned the house. While many museums and historic sites are nervous about conveying these stories and engaging in conversations about slavery with visitors, it is imperative for these places to tell the complex story of American history – which includes discussing slavery – because if not, these institutions make the enslaved people invisible, indicating to audiences that their stories are not worth

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<sup>251</sup> Jeff D’Alessio, “Being Black in America: Sheila Johnson,” *The News-Gazette*, October 13, 2020, [https://www.news-gazette.com/opinion/being-black-in-america-sheila-johnson/article\\_99f4eaf2-40ce-5239-ab1f-b39f68cf2b7a.html](https://www.news-gazette.com/opinion/being-black-in-america-sheila-johnson/article_99f4eaf2-40ce-5239-ab1f-b39f68cf2b7a.html).

knowing. If the United States is to move forward, public institutions, such as Sherwood Forest, have the obligation and responsibility to create spaces for discussions on slavery in order to create a more complex narrative of our collective history. Americans must come to grips with the country's racist past in order to understand how the legacy of slavery persists in the present day to create a more equitable society, or else the country will be submerged further in hate and ignorance.

*Incorporating the Story of Slavery and Enslaved People at Historic Sites and Museums*

One of the first institutions to take an active effort in telling the stories of the enslaved was Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. Small efforts began in the mid-1900s to incorporate slavery in their interpretation. One example was a talking machine in the George Wythe House laundry room in 1965. After pressing the button, visitors heard about the experiences of the enslaved people who labored in that space. However, it was tampered with several times. John Harbour and Edward Spencer – Colonial Williamsburg officials – suspected that the janitorial staff broke the machine. The actions of those who broke the device indicate that some individuals believed that tourists should not have to listen to anything related to slavery or that they disagreed with the story and how it was being told.<sup>252</sup> Similarly, Colonial Williamsburg bought Carter's Grove, a plantation once owned by the prominent Carter family, in 1970. The purchase was seen by many as a step in the right direction toward telling a "more inclusive presentation of eighteenth-century life."<sup>253</sup> However, it would not be for another decade that the slave quarters were restored, interpreted, and open for the public to view.<sup>254</sup> In subsequent years, there were multiple attempts by staff members to include more stories that told the African

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<sup>252</sup> Anders Greenspan, "Achieving Maturity," in *Creating Colonial Williamsburg: The Restoration of Virginia's Eighteenth-Century Capital* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2002), 135.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

American experience – both free and enslaved – at Colonial Williamsburg, but they fell through every time for reasons that remain unclear.<sup>255</sup>

After decades of complaints that they needed to do more to incorporate those stories, Colonial Williamsburg started to take a more proactive, serious approach to discussing slavery in the 1970s. The administration understood their responsibility to ensure their interpretation was historically correct since this was the first known instance that a major institution was creating programming centered around enslaved and free African Americans. In 1979, the institution approached Rex Ellis, a professor at Hampton University, to help them interpret slavery as accurately and correctly as possible. Within the year, there were numerous new roles for interpreters in the Historic Area. For instance, one of the people portrayed was Jenny, an enslaved scullery maid at Wetherburn's Tavern, who discussed her experiences in the town. Another role was Nioto, an enslaved man who talked about his life in Africa and how he was captured by slave traders. A third role was Betty, a free African American seamstress, who detailed for visitors the struggles of keeping her family together and the legal and social restraints placed on African American women during the period. Because of the success of the first summer with active programming about free and enslaved people in Williamsburg, the project grew.<sup>256</sup> The popularity of the program illustrated that visitors wanted to learn about these long-forgotten stories.

Despite the popularity, however, the program was met with backlash from some employees and visitors. African American employees were upset with Professor Ellis because they felt that African Americans should not be portrayed in instances of bondage.<sup>257</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 135-136.

<sup>256</sup> Christy Coleman Matthews, "Twenty Years Interpreting African American History: A Colonial Williamsburg Revolution," *History News* 54, no. 2 (1999): 7.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

interpreters received cold reactions from mostly Caucasian visitors.<sup>258</sup> Even with these objections and negative receptions, Ellis pressed on since he knew that it was vital to tell the stories of both free and enslaved African Americans to accurately portray Williamsburg during the Colonial Era, especially since the population of the town was a little over 50 percent African American at the onset the American Revolution. He even expanded the program to include evening events, such as the “Black Music Program” – which explored how storytelling and music told the experiences of enslaved people – and the “Other Half Tour,” a three-hour walking tour that encompassed West African life, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the development of slavery in Virginia, and the evolution of the social and cultural lives of African Americans. The programming was further expanded in 1985 when a full-time staff was hired to create daily and evening programs, and in 1988 when IBM, AT&T, and Phillip Morris gave millions of dollars to reconstruct the slave quarters at Carter’s Grove.<sup>259</sup>

In 1994, the Department of African American Interpretation announced that it would recreate a slave auction in the middle of the Historic Area. Christy Coleman, the Director of the African American Interpretation Department at Colonial Williamsburg, designed the event, stating that the portrayal was imperative if twentieth-century audiences were to understand life during the eighteenth century.<sup>260</sup> Additionally, Coleman defended the re-enacted slave auction by stating that in order to understand racism in America in the twentieth century, one had to “understand the horrors that took place” because of the institution of slavery.<sup>261</sup> Individuals posed multiple reasons that were directed to Colonial Williamsburg on why this was seen as an

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<sup>258</sup> Anders Greenspan, “New Challenges,” in *Creating Colonial Williamsburg: The Restoration of Virginia’s Eighteenth-Century Capital* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2002), 151.

<sup>259</sup> Matthews, “Twenty Years Interpreting African American History,” (1999): 8.

<sup>260</sup> Greenspan, “New Challenges,” in *Creating Colonial Williamsburg*, 163.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

ill-advised idea: the institution had no right to portray a mock slave auction at a predominantly white institution and one that ignored discussing the African American experience in the colonial capital for decades; the event might create racial discord; Colonial Williamsburg should not portray African Americans in a powerless situation; and individuals would never reenact other horrific events that occurred in U.S. and world history.<sup>262</sup> In the end, Coleman and Colonial Williamsburg went ahead with the program since they believed it had an educational purpose. While he initially objected to the mock auction when Colonial Williamsburg told him about it, Jack Gravelly, the Virginia Policy Action Director for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), noted after the program that it was “passionate, moving and educational.”<sup>263</sup> While some of these events and programs were regarded as controversial, they allowed visitors to see the true horrors of slavery and provided the opportunity for tourists to leave the institution learning something new about slavery and its evils.

A major problem in how Colonial Williamsburg has chosen to portray slavery is that it can be easily avoided. While the organization has made strides since its founding in the 1920s to actively tell the narratives of the enslaved and the facets of slavery, visitors can choose not to attend these programs. Guests can choose to go to a talk between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison about government as opposed to attending a discussion with James Armistead Lafayette, who was a spy during the Revolutionary War, about his life and experiences as an enslaved and freed man in America. Furthermore, there are certain tours of historic sites that do not include any mention of slavery, such as the Capitol, which discusses the House of Burgesses,

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<sup>262</sup> Matthews, “Twenty Years Interpreting African American History,” (1999): 9.

<sup>263</sup> Greenspan, “New Challenges,” in *Creating Colonial Williamsburg*, 164.



the Governor's Council, and the political climate of pre-Revolutionary Virginia.<sup>264</sup> Similarly, the Governor's Palace hardly mentions slavery, and when the staff at the historic building does, the interpreters use the word "servants," which is incorrect when referring to enslaved people as it suggests that the enslaved were not treated as badly and had more freedom than they actually did.<sup>265</sup> In contrast, there are places in the Historic Area that discuss slavery, such as the backyard of the Peyton Randolph House. The site provides information about urban slavery, but depending on the tour guide, one might just receive information about the Randolph family and a couple of vague comments about the enslaved people on the property.<sup>266</sup> Therefore, it would be easy for guests to avoid the realistic conversations of slavery when visiting the Peyton Randolph House, Governor's Palace, and the Capitol. It is one of the pitfalls of the foundation, since visitors can leave without obtaining a better understanding of slavery and its lasting impact that is felt in today's society.

Colonial Williamsburg is not the only institution that has struggled with incorporating information about slavery into its programs. One example is My Old Kentucky Home, a mansion built in 1818 for U.S. Senator John Rowan at Federal Hill in Bardstown, Kentucky. The mansion's website promoted itself as a multifaceted place with a visitor center, garden, picnic area, replica of Rowan's law office, a golf course, and a large campground. The slave cemetery was not mentioned on the website, even though the family cemetery of the people who owned

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<sup>264</sup> The author went on a tour of the Capitol with her HIST 409 class in Colonial Williamsburg on September 30, 2020, and she recounts that the guide hardly discussed slavery. He mentioned that enslaved people would be tried differently in court but provided no additional details about it; the rest of the tour discussed the politics of the time and the bodies of government, such as the House of Burgesses and the Governor's Council.

<sup>265</sup> The author went on a tour of the Governor's Palace in Colonial Williamsburg for her HIST 409 class on September 30, 2020, and she recounts that she heard about slavery a couple of times, but the guides used the word "servant" instead of "enslaved people." It was a sentence in the tour; there was no in-depth information about the enslaved.

<sup>266</sup> The author went on a tour of the Peyton Randolph House in Colonial Williamsburg for her HIST 409 class on September 30, 2020, and she recounts that the guides mainly focused on the Randolph family and provided little information about the enslaved people; slavery was mentioned in a sentence briefly.

the property was. Additionally, the guides did not mention slavery on house tours at the time. In 1999, a young docent named Eric Browning decided to uncover the narrative of slavery at the house so that it could be shared with visitors. In 2002, Browning started to research more extensively the history of slavery at the mansion, and he created a new script for the house involving every-day details, such as how the enslaved people built and cleaned the house and took care of the children of the Rowan family.<sup>267</sup> He presented the script to Alice Heaton, the site superintendent, who responded that while the research was well-done, she felt that the information was “too negative.”<sup>268</sup>

Months later after sending the script to Brooks Howard – the Assistant Director of Historic Sites for the Kentucky Department of Parks – Browning and Howard met to discuss the script.<sup>269</sup> At the meeting, Howard stated that she and Heaton both wanted slavery to be interpreted at the site, but they wanted the information to be confined to the dining room or hall, rather than in each room, because they believed enslaved people had a “better connection” to these spaces.<sup>270</sup> It was also suggested that docents should “read the group” before discussing slavery to see if that is something the guests wanted to know more about.<sup>271</sup> Lastly, Howard wanted Browning to include something “positive” about slavery.<sup>272</sup> This story demonstrates that even administrators can be the ones who hinder the telling of the fuller story of history. In this case, the staff members both wanted to pander to visitors who did not want to confront slavery; the staff also believed that slavery should be romanticized when conveyed to the public on tours.

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<sup>267</sup> Joanne Melish, “Recovering (from) Slavery: Four Struggles to Tell the Truth,” in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: The New Press, 2014), 115-116.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-117.

While Browning wanted to tell the full story with a script for all to use, he eventually conceded to having slavery discussed in one room since it was better than nothing; the story ended with Browning still trying to create a comprehensive script for the historic site.<sup>273</sup> Even though Browning knew that telling the history of slavery at the mansion was important to the overall narrative of the site, he was stopped by the administrators since they were uncomfortable with confronting the facts and relaying them to visitors.

The history of these historic sites and museums reveals that Americans are still trying to grapple with the terrible aspects of their past and how to convey them. Administrators are uncomfortable about telling visitors about the realities of slavery, and, often, they themselves do not want to confront the past. Historic sites today are experiencing some difficulty in explaining the more complete story, especially if the staff members have to perform a balancing act between what paying customers want to learn and what they should; this situation could lead an institution to hardly discuss the history of slavery in order to attract customers to the site. At Colonial Williamsburg, visitors can choose to ignore the stories and buildings that include conversations about slavery and enslaved people. At the mansion in Federal Hill, administrators made sure to prioritize the comfort of many visitors and themselves over relaying the full story of the site. One cannot talk about these historic sites without their ties to slavery since people were enslaved at those places. It is a part of American history that must be told, even if people are uneasy with it. These instances exhibit how America still has serious progress to make about confronting its past since there are people in the twenty-first century who do not want to discuss the uncomfortable nature of slavery and its effects on America today.

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 117-118. Note: The author visited the website in April 2021 and saw that there is a section for the enslaved people when discussing the history of the property. However, under the section that details the house tour, there is no mention of enslaved people being included on the tour.

### *How Historical Memory of Slavery Affects Public History*

The way Americans remember slavery in historical memory impacts how it is portrayed at public history sites since people across the country still learn a different narrative about slavery depending on the region in which they reside. Conversations about slavery have been difficult to have in classrooms, books, movies, and monuments, and because of this irregularity in education, guests of all ages often seem to be on one side or the other if docents mention slavery too much or if it was not enough.<sup>274</sup> When people think of slavery, their first thoughts are of a plantation, the Black Belt, and how enslaved people worshiped at African-Christian churches. With these notions, people then ignore that slavery was practiced in the North predominantly before the American Revolution and that universities were involved with slavery, either by owning enslaved people as an institution or through their faculty, staff, and/or students who owned enslaved people.<sup>275</sup> These memories of slavery can hinder a historic site's or museum's interpretation of the system that enslaved millions of people in America. The arguments arise when visitors are challenged on what they know about history, as people do not like to think that they are wrong or that what they believed for decades was incorrect, inhibiting their understanding of the complexities of American history.

If institutions want to provide an accurate account of slavery in the United States, it is time to make sure that memory and history come together. Historic sites and museums have to ensure that they include information about the complex history of slavery so that it becomes ingrained in people's historical memories of slavery; these institutions have an obligation to infuse "history into memory's passions" so that a collective past can be "embraced, legitimized,

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<sup>274</sup> Ira Berlin, "American Slavery in History and Memory and the Search for Social Justice," *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 4 (2004): 1260.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 1263.

and sustained.”<sup>276</sup> The memory of slavery and its history at this moment are not the same since people often do not know various aspects of slavery, especially since the American education system conveys a different story about slavery. For instance, a study conducted in the 1990s by the U.S. Department of Education discovered that high school history classes were taught by teachers who did not have adequate training. This creates a situation where high schoolers may not obtain a good grasp of the nation’s past since they might leave with little or incorrect knowledge, such as a romanticized version of slavery or the Civil War.<sup>277</sup> Furthermore, a study conducted by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) found that *only eight percent* of high school seniors across the country could identify slavery as the main cause of the Civil War.<sup>278</sup> How teachers and professors relay history *matters* because it builds the foundations of how students view the past. If America is to truly come to terms with the past, its citizens have to confront the more complete story head-on by teaching about slavery both in the classroom and at public history sites. Therefore, the historical narrative about slavery will become more universal to Americans since it will show the cruelty that was perpetuated against other human beings, its role the Civil War, and how its legacies still live on in the systemic racism that plagues America.

Historic sites and museums can misrepresent slavery to their visitors, which creates a missed opportunity in a setting that is more immersed in history. The danger then is that institutions could tell the story of America without mentioning slavery, portraying America as a free country from the beginning and ignoring a large, yet terrible, part of its past. By choosing not to discuss a significant part of America’s history, these institutions make the enslaved people

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 1268.

<sup>277</sup> James Oliver Norton, “Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue,” in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: The New Press, 2014), 42.

<sup>278</sup> “SPLC Report: U.S. Education on American Slavery Sorely Lacking,” Southern Poverty Law Center, January 31, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2018/01/31/splc-report-us-education-american-slavery-sorely-lacking>.

invisible in the national memory, therefore dehumanizing them so that predominantly Caucasian visitors would not be uncomfortable or feel guilty when the topic was brought up.<sup>279</sup> Because of this long-held notion, there appears to be a “one drop rule” in public history, which was described by Barbara Chase-Riboud in her 2009 article. Her definition of the rule is that if an institution mentions one aspect of American history that pertains to African Americans, then the staff members have created a “multiracial America.” However, in doing so, the institution then effectively re-writes history since it omits an important aspect of the American past, creating a space where staff members and visitors feel less uncomfortable about the topic of slavery.<sup>280</sup> The rule demonstrates that even in very recent history, museums and historic sites are unwilling to confront slavery, despite the fact they possess a vital role in addressing the inequalities of the past and present. Museums have the obligation to be these centers of discussion so tourists can comprehend the complexities of the past and how those have affected present-day society. Historic sites have to be willing to discuss their ties to slavery, whether it is a plantation or a church or university whose earliest founders and benefactors were slave traders and/or slaveowners, since they hold the responsibility to tell the public the full story of the United States’ history, or else they are perpetuating a false history.

One of the most famous houses in America is Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington, and it has made some strides to make in order to create a more inclusive narrative. Azie Mira Dungey was an interpreter who portrayed an enslaved woman at Mount Vernon for years, and she was inspired to create a YouTube channel called “Ask a Slave” based on her interactions with visitors at the plantation. While the web series is satirical in nature, it sheds

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<sup>279</sup> Barbara Chase-Riboud, “Slavery as a Problem in Public History: or Sally Hemings and the ‘One Drop Rule’ of Public History,” *Callaloo* 32, no. 3 (2009): 826.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 827.

light on how visitors interact with those who interpret enslaved people, what kinds of questions are asked, and how museums and historic sites can do better when trying to have discussions that pertain to slavery.<sup>281</sup> At Mount Vernon, Dungey noticed that the “surrounding ethos” of the Founding Fathers seemed to inhibit the visitors from asking questions and seeing the interpretation of slavery at the plantation, even when she was right in front of them portraying an enslaved woman.<sup>282</sup> Moreover, guests came to Mount Vernon to learn about George Washington, not slavery, so people would ask questions that were related to the Washingtons and usually asked little – if at all – about the enslaved people who labored on the land. Customers came wanting to ask questions that pertained to the greatness of Washington; when Americans learn about the first president in school, teachers hardly mention that he was a slaveowner, so most visitors do not even think about asking those questions since they do not immediately equate Washington as being an enslaver. When Dungey noticed this pattern in people’s collective memories about Washington, she dedicated her time to uncovering stories of the enslaved people at Mount Vernon. She felt that it was her job to uncover the whole story of the plantation’s history, which inevitably included the narratives of the enslaved.<sup>283</sup> Even with these stories, people seemed to still be more interested in what the Washingtons ate for dinner than the enslaved people who cooked the meal.<sup>284</sup> These examples reveal that the collective memory of the United States can inhibit people from learning about slavery and the enslaved who built this country since that narrative is hardly discussed in the American education system and – until the last few decades

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<sup>281</sup> Amy M. Tyson and Azie Mira Dungey, “‘Ask a Slave’ and Interpreting Race on Public History’s Front Line: Interview with Azie Mira Dungey,” *The Public Historian* 36, no. 1 (2014): 36.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

of the twentieth century – were usually not confronted with that part of the past at institutions or through the media.

At the end of the interview, Dungey offered several suggestions on how public history institutions could do better in incorporating slavery in their materials for visitors. One of the suggestions was to include a video about slavery at Mount Vernon.<sup>285</sup> This could be useful since it would provide visitors a well-rounded overview of slavery as a whole and on the enslaved people who lived and labored at the plantation. It could spark conversations and questions regarding slavery when the Washington family owned the land. Another recommendation was to weave more stories of the enslaved into the narrative of the Washington family since the accounts of the enslaved and enslaver are interconnected. One of her most innovative ideas was to discuss how African foods influenced the cooking at Mount Vernon since many people were interested in what Washington and his family ate; it is a way to connect their questions about the Caucasian family and make it a more inclusive answer that encompasses the many facets of history.<sup>286</sup> A third suggestion was to weave more historical facts into interpreters' answers to provide them a better understanding the past. One example was to state that numerous people in the Colonial, Revolutionary, and Early Republic Eras opposed slavery because present-day visitors assume that all Americans during those time periods accepted the awful institution since it was a large part of society at the time.<sup>287</sup> It would be an instrumental idea to ensure that visitors are provided the most accurate information as possible so that they walk away with new lessons about American history. It is highly important that the administration prioritizes the stories of the enslaved so that they truly tell the full story of the site that they are in charge of, ensuring that

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 59-60.



visitors will return home with new and correct knowledge about slavery that they otherwise had not learned.

*Reactions to Slavery in Public History*

While many interpreters and administrators at historic sites and museums want to tell the complex story of history, there are numerous tourists who complain about the mere mention of slavery. For example, there was a negative review of the Whitney Plantation that went viral on Twitter. The author stated that she and her husband “didn’t come to hear a lecture on how the white people treated slaves.”<sup>288</sup> They just wanted a tour of the house and grounds. The tweet further stated that the tour guide was “radical” when discussing the harsh treatment of enslaved people, and the author felt she was “being lectured and bashed about the slavery.”<sup>289</sup> She also felt that she should not have to hear or feel guilty about slavery since neither her ancestor nor those of her husband owned enslaved people.<sup>290</sup> There seems to be a disconnect with the author and with what a plantation actually was since it appears she wanted the romanticized version of the main house and grounds where the guides only discuss the stories of the Caucasian family and never mention the history of slavery or the enslaved people who were once on the land. People were quick to respond to the viral tweet with historical facts about slavery and why it is imperative to hold those discussions at plantations.

However, this is not the first or the last tweet that will discuss how people, usually Caucasians, do not want to listen to stories that pertain to slavery since they are uncomfortable confronting that truth in American history. Reviews of other plantations across the country include instances of individuals stating that the tours that included slavery were: “not what we

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<sup>288</sup> Saira Rao (@sairasameerarao), Twitter post, August 7, 2019, 4:03 p.m., <https://twitter.com/sairasameerarao/status/1159193443467481090>.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

expected,” “I was depressed by the time I left,” “the mentions of former owners were defamatory,” and numerous reviews of people stating that they “would not recommend.”<sup>291</sup> Even one review of the Whitney Plantation specifically stated that they would not recommend the tour since it “was all about how hard it was for the slaves.”<sup>292</sup> These reviews show that people are unwilling to confront the past since it makes them upset. While on vacation, the author of the tweet and others with similar viewpoints do not want to confront the hard truths about the nation’s history, yet they choose to visit a plantation where the very horrors of slavery occurred. By not wanting to hear these stories, they are essentially dehumanizing the enslaved people since both the administrators and guests have determined that their narratives are less important. As more and more plantations included stories of the enslaved people, a greater number of individuals push back against these stories since they are “depressing.” However, these sites have an obligation to teach the complexities of American history, including confronting its terrible events, since it is on those sites where slavery was practiced and perpetuated.

Other historic sites across the country have experienced similar reactions when the topic of slavery is discussed. For example, a woman pulled Gary Sandling, the Vice President of Monticello’s Visitor Programs and Services, aside during a tour of the gardens that centered around how the enslaved people built, tended to, and planted the vegetables at the terrace and asked why he was mentioning the enslaved people since the plantation staff should “be talking more about the plants.”<sup>293</sup> Although in the past Monticello decided to not engage with tourists about slavery, they have made efforts in recent years to ensure that the stories of the enslaved are

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<sup>291</sup> Gillian Brockell, “Some White People Don’t Want to Hear About Slavery at Plantations Built By Slaves,” *The Washington Post*, August 8, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/08/08/some-white-people-dont-want-hear-about-slavery-plantations-built-by-slaves/>.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Hannah Knowles, “As Plantations Talk More Honestly About Slavery, Some Visitors Are Pushing Back,” *The Washington Post*, September 8, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/09/08/plantations-are-talking-more-about-slavery-grappling-with-visitors-who-talk-back/>.

told, and multiple people have pushed back against that approach. One of the most prominent examples is the Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society since they are opposed to talking about slavery since it is “overemphasized” at the “expense of Jefferson’s accomplishments.”<sup>294</sup> One cannot discuss Thomas Jefferson’s accomplishments in United States history – such as fighting for independence and authoring one of the most famous documents in world history, which is where he stated that all men were created equal – without also mentioning that he owned human beings and fathered children with Sally Hemings. Another example is at McLeod Plantation in South Carolina where a visitor complained that she did not “come to hear a lecture on how white people treated slaves.”<sup>295</sup> Moreover, there was a complaint from a woman at McLeod, and she pulled Shawn Halifax, who trains interpreters and lead programmers, aside and told him that he “hated the South” since he painted a picture of the plantation with a “brush that was much too large and much too black.”<sup>296</sup> This situation once again demonstrates how certain people refuse to accept slavery because of what they previously were taught. This woman took offense at having southerners portrayed in a bad light; however, the tour guide is portraying the people who owned the plantation in their proper light as individuals who owned people, perpetuating a system that held other human beings in bondage. By discussing slavery, it also humanizes the people who were dehumanized in their lifetimes. While some visitors might be upset with historic sites and museums finally discussing slavery, these sites have the obligation to tell the entire story of not only their site, but of American history.

Other complaints around interpreting slavery stem from visitors, usually predominantly African American, who believe interpreters in the present-day should not place themselves back

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

in those powerless positions. As mentioned earlier, this was the belief of many African American staff members when Rex Ellis hired multiple interpreters to portray enslaved people at Colonial Williamsburg. Some African American guests and staff members feel that it is wrong that African Americans would put themselves in the position to interpret enslaved people, who had virtually no power in their daily lives. In some instances, museums have not needed people to interpret slavery. For example, at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library, the curators placed statues of enslaved people and a slave trader at an auction. The display shows a family being ripped apart at the auction while the slave trader looks on. It powerfully portrays the horror on the family's faces knowing that they might never meet each other again. The placement is also key since it is right after visitors turn a corner, meaning that they cannot avoid witnessing the display in the museum.<sup>297</sup> As museums take into account how to interpret and portray slavery, seeing the reality of slavery from a powerful display can be just as impactful as hearing stories from people alive today.

#### *Calls For Historic Sites and Museums to Do Better In Interpreting Slavery*

While there have been negative responses, there have also been several positive responses to historic sites and museums discussing slavery. For instance, at the Whitney Plantation, whose tour focuses on the enslaved people as opposed to the Caucasian family, it was discovered after a recent study conducted by Professor Amy Porter at Georgia Southern University that sixteen percent of their visitors were African American. This is significant since most plantations nationwide have a composition of eighty to ninety percent Caucasian visitors.

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<sup>297</sup> "What's Inside ... The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum: The Journey, Part I – The Pre-Presidential Years," Abraham Presidential Library and Museum, accessed November 22, 2020, <http://lincolnlbraryandmuseum.com/pp.htm>.

Additionally, the study discovered that slavery was the visitors' "top interest post-tour."<sup>298</sup> This survey indicates that more people want to learn about these stories than those who do not.

Tourists want to gather knowledge about the enslaved people, so museums and historic sites have an obligation to share those narratives. As more and more people demand to learn the full story, the more that historic sites and museums will accommodate tourists' interests. This push from the public might be what is needed from institutions that have tried to avoid the subject.

Given the events of Summer 2020, an increasing amount of people are demanding that Americans confront their past with slavery to understand the present. For instance, Berkeley Plantation, sixteen minutes away from Sherwood Forest, posted a statement on their website during the summer that told visitors that they supported and believed that Black Lives Matter. The statement also included the harmful actions that were done to African Americans and Native Americans at Berkeley and believed that their descendants deserved justice, and that the institution is working with researchers and historians to "uncover all aspects of this site's past."<sup>299</sup> In past tours, there would be little – if any – mention of slavery at Berkeley as the guides focused on the prominent Harrison family and the house during the early years of the Civil War when the Union army used it on their way to take Richmond.<sup>300</sup> Given that more people want to learn about the full picture of all that occurred on a plantation, Berkeley now is trying to adapt their tours to reflect that. They have chosen to discontinue perpetuating a

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<sup>298</sup> Knowles, "As Plantations Talk More Honestly About Slavery, Some Visitors Are Pushing Back," 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/09/08/plantations-are-talking-more-about-slavery-grappling-with-visitors-who-talk-back/>.

<sup>299</sup> Tiya Miles, "What Should We Do With Plantations?" *Boston Globe*, August 8, 2020, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/08/08/opinion/what-should-we-do-with-plantations/>.

<sup>300</sup> The author has visited Berkeley twice (2007 and 2018). In both instances, she does not remember any mention of slavery or of the enslaved on the tours, but she remembers how much they discussed the accomplishments of the Harrison family and Berkeley's claim to have the first Thanksgiving in America. She was accompanied by at least one relative both times.

romanticized version of slavery and of a plantation as these historic homes on the James River endeavor to confront their complex pasts.

Berkeley Plantation is not the only plantation on the James River that in the past did little to discuss or mention slavery on its tours or websites. In 2016, numerous scholars conducted a study of the James River Plantations to observe which ones had information about slavery on their websites. They chose to focus on the websites since these are usually the first impressions people obtain of the physical site before visiting.<sup>301</sup> Even though the “social, financial, and political prowess” was based on the labor of enslaved people, it was discovered that the historic homes hardly discussed slavery.<sup>302</sup> This provides visitors with the impression that the lives of enslaved African Americans do not belong in the narratives of the plantations, both in the past and the present.<sup>303</sup> In this sense, it could mean that then tourists do not ask questions about the enslaved people since it appears that their lives are not worth knowing and are marginalized while the sites always talk about how the region had significant impacts on United States history, such as its pivotal roles in the American Revolution and Civil War.<sup>304</sup> At the beginning of this year, one could not find any mention of slavery or of the enslaved on the websites of the major James River Plantations: Shirley, Westover, Sherwood Forest, and Berkeley; it was equally difficult to find any mention of the enslaved on tours as well.<sup>305</sup> Looking at Sherwood Forest

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<sup>301</sup> Meredith Stone, Ian Spangler, Xavier Griffin, and Stephen P. Hanna, “Searching for the Enslaved in the ‘Cradle of Democracy’: Virginia’s James River Plantation Websites and the Reproduction of Local Histories,” *Southeastern Geographer* 56, no. 2 (2016): 205.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 207-211.

<sup>305</sup> The author looked at the websites in February and March 2020 for an independent study class, and it was discovered that none of the websites mentioned slavery. Furthermore, the author took a tour of Shirley in 2017 with her class and does not remember any information about slavery that was conveyed to visitors. In a previous footnote, it was stated that the author took a tour of Berkeley in 2018. In May 2018, the author took a tour of Westover Plantation with a relative and a friend, and the only instance where the owner discussed slavery was at the end of the tour when the owner revealed to the author that they do not know much about the enslaved people at the plantation and wanted to learn more in order to tell a more complete story of Westover. In May 2019, the author took a tour of

specifically, it was revealed in the 2016 study that the site did not mention slavery at all on their website.<sup>306</sup> As of 2020, that is still the case for Sherwood Forest, but more of the plantations have promised to tell visitors the fuller story, including researching information pertaining to the enslaved men and women at the historic homes.<sup>307</sup> Even though these sites did not want to discuss slavery in the past, they are trying to do better now. In 2020, the other three plantations placed on their websites' statements about Black Lives Matter and about how slavery was perpetuated and practiced at the site. Shirley and Berkeley Plantations both added a whole page on their websites that is dedicated to people knowing that slavery was practiced on the land and how the Caucasian families perpetuated the system that enslaved other human beings. Because of the importance of the moment, Westover Plantation's whole website was just a statement on their support of Black Lives Matter and acknowledgment of the wrongs that were inflicted on the enslaved people who lived and worked there. They are also endeavoring to research names and lives of the enslaved people.<sup>308</sup> This move to finally include the full story on their websites – and hopefully their tours – shows that these sites are responding to the public and are also dedicated to ensuring that people go home with the whole picture, including the narratives of the enslaved.

Some historic sites had already included information about slavery in their tours. The most prominent examples are the Whitney and McLeod Plantations. Since its opening in 2014, the Whitney Plantation has exclusively focused on the experiences of the enslaved Africans and African Americans. Since it opened in 2015, the McLeod Plantation has focused not only on interpreting the experiences of the enslaved African Americans, but also of the free African

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Sherwood Forest with a relative and a friend, and the tour guide did not mention slavery at all, but they are now committed to telling the narratives of the enslaved.

<sup>306</sup> Stone, "Searching for the Enslaved in the 'Cradle of Democracy,'" (2016): 215.

<sup>307</sup> The author viewed the website for Sherwood Forest Plantation on November 8, 2020. Note: The staff at Sherwood Forest is currently working on creating new scripts for tours and a new website that will both include the enslaved people.

<sup>308</sup> The author viewed the Shirley, Westover, and Berkeley Plantations websites on November 8, 2020.

Americans who lived at the historic home before and after the Civil War.<sup>309</sup> Both of these plantations are a stark departure from the usual plantation tours, which mainly center around the Caucasian family, providing a romanticized version of plantations. Furthermore, the stories of the free and enslaved African Americans humanize them as the staff discusses their lives since they are largely omitted from the historical narrative. The Whitney and McLeod sites prioritize a more historically realistic view of slavery and discrimination that occurred before and after the Civil War and should be regarded as models for plantation tours. While some places might be hesitant about altering their tours because the sites depend on money from tourists – who are usually Caucasian people who want the romanticized “Gone with the Wind” version of slavery on a plantation – there seems to be a call from the public for plantations to research and share the complex history of America: how it fought for freedom, yet enslaved millions of people for centuries.<sup>310</sup> It is time for sites and museums to challenge the public on what they think a plantation tour should look like and incorporate the stories of people who have been historically marginalized for centuries with the public so that they have a better understanding of United States history.

*Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story?*

While hearing about the horrors of slavery can be difficult, they are necessary in order to understand how it has impacted various institutions in America. There are instances where interpreters experience a difficult time since visitors can be rude to them. Furthermore, some interpreters are met with backlash from individuals who believe the interpreters should not place themselves in a powerless situation. However, many interpreters feel that it is their responsibility

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<sup>309</sup> Miles, “What Should We Do With Plantations?” 2020, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/08/08/opinion/what-should-we-do-with-plantations/>.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.



to help bring the voices of the enslaved to the forefront. Stephen Seals, who interprets James Armistead Lafayette at Colonial Williamsburg, says he does his job because it “gives a voice to his ancestors.”<sup>311</sup> He is not only speaking for Lafayette, but also for the many enslaved and freed African Americans who lived in this country for centuries and whose voices have been ignored by many for so long; Seals uses the narratives of other people who were enslaved to fill the gaps in Lafayette’s life since there is still so much that remains unknown. Moreover, he believes that these narratives must be told to the public since it humanizes the enslaved people because when people are taught about slavery, the enslaved are usually treated as statistics instead of actual people.<sup>312</sup> Even though he stated that talking with tourists can be difficult at times, Seals loves what he does because he is not only teaching people about a little-known hero from the American Revolution, but the Colonial Williamsburg interpreter is providing a voice to those who were denied it for centuries as he helps to tell the history of America.

Another interpreter at Colonial Williamsburg, Hope Wright, detailed why she tells the stories of enslaved women in the colonial capital of Virginia. Wright usually portrays Eve, an enslaved woman who lived and labored at the Peyton Randolph House. Wright stated that she tells Eve’s story and other enslaved women’s since they “worked from a position of hidden strength” as they provided “for their own households as well as those of whites.”<sup>313</sup> Moreover, she uses the stories of enslaved women to further inform her “understanding of black women’s history”<sup>314</sup> and to show audiences the “strength of black women in Williamsburg and how they dealt with the difficulties of their circumstances.”<sup>315</sup> For instance, when she interprets Eve,

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<sup>311</sup> Dr. Julie Richter, “Performing History,” HIST 409: Public History (class lecture, The College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA, September 24, 2020).

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ywone D. Edwards-Ingram, “Hope Wright,” in *The Art and Soul of African American Interpretation* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2016), 49.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 51.

Wright ensures that Eve does not appear “downtrodden,”<sup>316</sup> but with “pride and dignity” in “her ability to understand her situation.”<sup>317</sup> By telling these stories, she is not only humanizing the enslaved women, but Wright is giving them a voice and relaying their stories that have been largely overlooked in history. Like other interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg, Wright makes it a priority to convey to the public about the lives of women who have predominantly been absent from the historical narrative.

### *Conclusion*

While it can be difficult for people to hear about slavery since many do not want to confront the terrible aspects of our country’s past, it is important that historic sites and museums tell the whole American story, not just the more comfortable parts. America has to confront its past and learn from it, especially since its history with slavery explains how Jim Crow persisted and how discrimination continues today since nothing happens in a vacuum. Therefore, the stories of the enslaved people who lived and labored in America need to be told more broadly; they cannot be ignored any longer. When people are taught the narratives of the enslaved, it provides a voice to people who have been denied theirs for so long. Numerous historic sites are endeavoring to come to terms with the fact that slavery was perpetuated there – such as the plantations on the James River – while many were dedicated to relaying the stories of the enslaved since their founding, such as the Whitney and McLeod Plantations. Recent surveys suggest that tourists want to know the stories of the enslaved, which might pressure those reluctant historic sites uncover those long-lost narratives. Furthermore, the National Register of Historic Places will no longer accept any nomination from a historic Antebellum Era site if there is no mention of slavery, providing another motivation for those places to include a fuller picture

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 51.

of American history.<sup>318</sup> Since public history reaches a vast audience, it is their ultimate job to tell a more complete story of history, and a step in the right direction is providing a space to hold discussions about slavery and how its legacy plays a large part in American society.

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<sup>318</sup> Jay Reeves, "U.S. Historic Places Often Fail to Mention Ties to Slavery," *The Detroit News*, February 23, 2020, <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/nation/2020/02/23/plantation-slavery-historic-places/111364788/>.

## Conclusion

During his term, President Donald Trump created the 1776 Commission, which sought to provide Americans with the “true” facts of American history. The commission’s report, which was published in January 2021, has been criticized by numerous historians. There are approximately two and a half pages about slavery, which is not ample enough room to discuss an historical event that led to the enslavement of millions of people for 246 years. In the beginning of the section, the authors tried to defend the Founding Fathers by stating that they were not “hypocrites who didn’t believe in their stated principles,” and that calling the Founders hypocrites “has done enormous damage, especially in recent years, with a devastating effect on our civic unity and social fabric.”<sup>319</sup> However, it is not a lie to state that several people who fought for independence and created America’s government – including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison – owned people. It does not cause damage to society to discuss that paradox. Furthermore, the commission barely examined anything about slavery in American politics during the Antebellum period, such as the Missouri Compromise, the admittance of Texas and other slave states, the fight between Senators Charles Sumner and Andrew Butler on the U.S. Senate floor, and the Compromise of 1850. The authors only reference one enslaved person in the whole section, and that person was Frederick Douglass.<sup>320</sup> The section did not discuss anything about the onset of the Civil War, but rather stated that the “conflict was resolved, but at a cost of more than 600,000 lives” and very briefly mentioned the three amendments added to the Constitution following the war.<sup>321</sup> With this writing, the authors chose not to highlight the events that were before, during, and after the Civil War. This

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<sup>319</sup> The President’s Advisory 1776 Commission, “The 1776 Report,” January 2021, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Presidents-Advisory-1776-Commission-Final-Report.pdf>, 10.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*

document, which was written by the United States government and approved by a United States president, showcases how imperative it is now to ensure that a fuller, more complex history of this country is told because even officials in the U.S. government want to re-write the past and forget about the millions of people who were enslaved in this country for centuries.

The fight to tell a more complete story is also present at William & Mary. A 2020 opinion piece by Gordon Morse in the *Daily Press*, a local newspaper, discussed how a memorial to the enslaved people who lived and labored at the university should not be constructed. Morse argued that the modern-day campus was not built by enslaved people since most of the buildings at the university today are from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>322</sup> However, not only has the college stood on the same tracts of land since its founding, there are original buildings on campus that were built by enslaved people: the Wren Building, the President's House, and the Brafferton. Furthermore, there are people buried on campus who owned enslaved people and defended slavery from the 1600s to the 1800s, such as the Randolph family and former William & Mary Presidents Benjamin Ewell and Thomas Roderick Dew. Morse continued his argument by declaring that the "original college founded in 1693, died with the Civil War" since the college was in financial ruin during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>323</sup> He stated that William & Mary Presidents Benjamin Ewell and Lyon Gardiner Tyler saved the university by "gently sheltering the embers in the late 19th century, fighting the General Assembly and securing the inclusion of the college in the state system," and because of this, there should be a memorial dedicated to those who rescued the college in the 1900s.<sup>324</sup> That notion completely

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<sup>322</sup> Gordon C. Morse, "Opinion: William & Mary Should Celebrate the Leaders of Its Ascendancy," *Daily Press*, September 5, 2020, <https://www.dailypress.com/opinion/vp-ed-column-morse-0906-20200905-tldkbfxoprhj3lgzulxtldfxgu-story.html?outputType=amp>.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

absolves Ewell and Tyler of their wrongful actions since Ewell was a colonel in the Confederate Army – thereby fighting to keep people in bondage – and Tyler wrote avidly to defend the Confederacy and perpetuate the Lost Cause. Furthermore, it is important to discuss the lives of the people who lived and labored at William & Mary, and the memorial to those enslaved people is a way to bring the conversation forward about the university’s history of slavery and about the enslaved people themselves.

The conversation about which people to honor still continues at William & Mary, especially in light of the Board of Visitors’ February 2021 meeting cancelling a student panel about race issues on campus – including the discussion of the Student Assembly referendum on renaming campus buildings dedicated to individuals with connections to slavery and segregation. During the time the Board would have met with the student panel, a protest was held outside of the Alumni House, the location of their meeting. Many students relayed racist statements made by individuals who hold a connection to the university, such as Lyon Gardiner Tyler, to emphasize why the buildings must be renamed. Additionally, many protesters felt that by not renaming those buildings, the Board did not care about BIPOC students at the university.<sup>325</sup> As William & Mary endeavors to come to terms with its past, it showcases the debate that is currently occurring across the country between people who want to stop honoring those who favored slavery and segregation and those who want to maintain the status quo.

The push to discuss the fuller picture of an institution’s history is still alive. Emory University in February 2021 announced they joined the Universities Studying Slavery Consortium because of “tragic history of human enslavement” that is shared by both the

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<sup>325</sup> Will Kobos, “Students Advocate for Renaming Campus Buildings Dedicated to Racist Figures,” *The Flat Hat*, March 8, 2021, <https://flathatnews.com/2021/03/08/students-advocate-for-renaming-campus-buildings-dedicated-to-racist-figures/>.

university and the United States.<sup>326</sup> Emory is another university that is coming to terms with its past in slavery and wanting to acknowledge and talk about the impact of slavery on its campus. Additionally, Baylor University also released information about their institution's connections to slavery. In March 2021, the university's Commission on Historic Campus Representations' report was made public, and it was revealed that several of its founders and members of the Board of Trustees in the Antebellum Era were enslavers. The president of Baylor, Linda A. Livingstone, stated that they are looking into the recommendations from the commission, but they have decided that they are "not going to change the name of the university."<sup>327</sup> In March 2021, Baylor announced that it would erect two statues on campus to the first African American graduates, the Rev. Robert Gilbert and Barbara Walker.<sup>328</sup> The University of Texas at Austin also came under fire in March 2021 from wealthy donors when all but one football player left the field after the game instead of participating in the tradition of singing "The Eyes of Texas," which was historically performed at minstrel shows at the university and has ties to a saying from Robert E. Lee to Confederates, which was "The eyes of the South are upon you."<sup>329</sup> While various donors have threatened to withhold their donations if the university's president gives into "cancel culture," current students have conducted their own protests, such as student athletes refusing to attend dinners with donors and petitions to boycott the song, to pressure the university to remove the racist song.<sup>330</sup> These 2021 stories further emphasize that institutions

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<sup>326</sup> Susan M. Carini, "Emory Joins the Universities Studying Consortium," Emory: News Center, March 24, 2021, [https://news.emory.edu/stories/2021/03/er\\_uss\\_consortium/campus.html](https://news.emory.edu/stories/2021/03/er_uss_consortium/campus.html).

<sup>327</sup> Andrew Moore, "Baylor Commission Reveals Founders' Ties to Slavery," KCENTV, March 23, 2021, <https://www.kcentv.com/article/news/local/baylor-commission-reveals-founders-ties-to-slavery/500-36288ac8-c08c-4b0a-830c-3c6307911128>.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> "The Eyes of Texas' History: Origins, Meaning and Debut," University of Texas at Austin, accessed April 6, 2021, <https://eyesoftexas.utexas.edu/origins-and-debut/>.

<sup>330</sup> Kate McGee, "'UT Needs Rich Donors': Emails Show Wealthy Alumni Supporting 'Eyes of Texas' Threatened to Pull Donations," *The Texas Tribune*, March 1, 2021, <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/03/01/ut-eyes-of-texas-donors-emails/>.

cannot hide from their pasts as several universities commit to uncovering their dark histories with slavery, while others have to be pressured by either students, faculty, staff, alumni, and/or society as a whole to confront those facts.

It is also important to discuss the true and awful history of slavery in America because many Americans have a wrong view of it. In October 2019, the BBC published an article about incorrect statements tourists made to historic sites and museums in the American South. Olivia Williams, a tour guide at McLeod Plantation in South Carolina, said that the number one statement she hears from tourists is that “slavery was not that bad” and to add to that, tourists have said to her that enslaved people “had a place to sleep,” as well as meals and vegetables.<sup>331</sup> From these statements, the prevailing historical narrative mirrors the 1776 Commission. People do not know or want to know about the true horrors of slavery. At McLeod, they educate the public by discussing the awful aspects of slavery, such as talking about how slaveowners would arrange marriages for enslaved people between whom the slaveowners considered “strong” and how pregnant enslaved women were whipped lying down to protect the child since he/she was considered an “investment.”<sup>332</sup> There are mixed reactions to these tours as some people cry when learning about how enslaved people were treated while others question why McLeod’s staff would even mention slavery since they know the enslaved “worked here, but the owners worked, had to manage this place too.” It is these flippant responses about the treatment of enslaved people that showcase why discussing all aspects of slavery is vitally important to moving forward as a country. It is time that America faces what past citizens did to other human beings – from historic sites to museums to the classroom – because it aids in explaining the racial

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<sup>331</sup> Rito Prasad, “The Awkward Questions About From Tourists in US South,” *BBC News*, October 2, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49842601>.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*



disparities that are seen today, and if one knows that history, one can correct the present and future.

Through a comprehensive view of the Tyler family's opinions on slavery and the Lost Cause, in addition to uncovering the stories of the enslaved people and their families at Sherwood Forest before, during, and after the Civil War, this thesis sheds light on why discussing slavery at sites connected to the abhorrent institution is necessary and vital to our country. Sherwood Forest exclusively told the story of the Tyler family in the past, but numerous members of the family and the staff at the plantation have now shifted their focus in conveying to tourists not only the stories of the Tyler family, but of the enslaved people and their families as well. These narratives help in telling a fuller story of Sherwood Forest since they provide visitors with knowledge about all those who were present on the plantation. Now, more than ever, public history has an important part to play in educating everyone – including our own leaders – about slavery. The United States still needs to strive to teach one, united story that includes the history of slavery because as it has been observed, leaders at the highest levels of government want to ensure the “bad” aspects of American history are never told. Additionally, more people are calling on institutions to dedicate time and energy to conveying the whole story of American history. Furthermore, there are increasing calls to remove statues honoring Confederate leaders from where they currently stand. With the increasing demand from the public for institutions to discuss their ties to slavery, historic sites, museums, and schools must dedicate themselves to teach audiences about all aspects of American history so that they can use the past to make the present and future a place where everyone is treated equitably.

## Their Names and Sightings

Jack • Thomas • Aggy • Alice • Kate • Doll • Sarah • David • Daniel • Peter • Edward • Cuffee • Ralph • Pegg • Betty • Bertram • Rachel • William • Benjamin • Charles • Dick • Benjamin • David • Jacob • Tom • Bartram • Grace • Kate • Sarah • Alice • Nell • Hannah • Amos • Samuel • Will • Peter • Crispin • Sylvia • Lucy • Mary • George • Frank • Ned • Tytus • Moses • Hercules • Johan • Ephraim • Tom • Catron • Patt • Andrew • Jack • Priscilla • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Becca • Hannah • Lewis • Jim • Page • Moses • Robin • John • Betty • Harry • Daniel • Ned • Ephrairi • Benjamin • Cary • George • Burwell • William • Washington • Little John • Roscius • Armistead • Tom • Garrick • Shadrach • Jenny & her two children • Betsy • Delia • Edy & her child • Louisa • Aggey & her child • Maria • Patsy • Leah & her child • Alice • Martha • Ann Eliza • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved Man • Emmanuel • Sam • Ned • William • George • Armistead • Soudon • Eomono • Betty Babtisl • Joe • Davy • Peter Jim • Betty • Ursula • Sally • Sawain • Sally • Sarah • Rachel • Ester • Rose • Sarah • Rachel • Ginny • Fastur • Alice • Pillis • Dinih • Charlotte • Suckey • Suey • Ketty • Patty • Maria and her children • Ole Abby • Patty • Armistead, his wife & two children, one of whom is named Godfrey • Lance Ellis • Old London • Peter Fippin • Lackey • Zack • Letty • Rose • Anne • Nancy • Mills & children • Unnamed Enslaved People • Fanny Dunbar • Sally Locus • Rachel • Lucy • Luke • Jimmy • Emuno • Betty • Elsy • Ursula • Dinah • Rachel • Phillis • Peggy • Betty • Joe Davis • Emanuel • Rich • Stephen • Emo • Winny • Lucy • Jimmy • Lally • Hannah • Sally • Mana • Phillis • Bills • Randolph • Beverly • Leo H. • Claripa • Elsy • Frank • Sam • Hannah • Cry • Williams • Williams • Louisa • Elsa • Sally • Tam • Rach • Steph • Joe Davis • Ursa • Betsy • Eliza • Rich • Martha • Sevnin • Sally • Marisa • Alieuch • Dick • Phillis • Kitty • Peggs • Eom • Salley • Sarah • Claripa • Jenny Fishn • Lucy • Patty • Cicin • Beverly • Auroa • Emanuel • Scott • Eerse • Phillis • Phillis • Fanny • William • James • Phell • Diamna & children • Milly • Fan • Phobe • Bev • Judy • James • Abby Davy • Jack Johnson • Billy Dunbar • Wilrnu • Aggy & child, Amy • Lizzy • Fanny • Char • Becca • Winny • Maria • Abby • Paty • Armitad, wife, & their child, Topy • James Elly • H. Lonson • Peter Feggin • Kesiah • Betsey & child • Lucas • Y. London • Harry • Tom Allintf • Aggy • Eliza • Ag • Diana • Robert • Peter • Charlotte & child • Sally Tar • Polly & child, Billy • Abby Eliza • Tago • Maria • Dinah & child • Katy • Earti • Billy Naiden • Billy Baptist • Phil • Wilson • Levy • Betty • Lawrence • Moses • Ned Locen • Nancy • Capid • Patty • Wickey • Zack • Letty • Rose & child, Am • Mills • Johann • Equire • Ned Witson • Luy & child, Elon • Jerry • Sam • Randolph • Rachel • James Ellis • Unnamed Enslaved People • Randall • Unnamed Enslaved People • John Tyler & his siblings • Unnamed Enslaved Woman • Charles Tyler • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved Mechanics and Carpenters • Unnamed Enslaved Coachman and Footman • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved Seamstresses • Tony Hall • Unnamed Enslaved People Who Labored In the Fields • Unnamed Enslaved Seamstresses • Fanny • Two Unnamed Enslaved Children • Unnamed Enslaved People • William Short • Fanny • Louisa Short • Burwell Armistead, Sr. • Maurice • Fanny • Unnamed Enslaved People Who Labored In the Main House • Unnamed Enslaved Carpenters • Unnamed Young Enslaved Boy • Fanny Hall • Unnamed Enslaved Boy • Unnamed Enslaved Woman • Unnamed Enslaved Children • Unnamed Enslaved People • Eliza Black • Alexander Black • Maria • Unnamed Enslaved Boy • Unnamed Enslaved People • Victoria Short • Unnamed Enslaved People •

William • Randall • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Fanny • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Thaddious Black • Roscius Short • Peter Black • Unnamed Enslaved Janitor • Fanny • Fanny Johnson • Nancy • Unnamed Enslaved People Who Labored In the Main House • Unnamed Enslaved Person • Unnamed Enslaved People • Henry • Unnamed Enslaved People • Tazewell • Elsy • Unnamed Enslaved People • Thomas • Eliza • Henry • Elly • Tazewell • Unnamed Enslaved Baby Girl • Rebecca • Unnamed Enslaved Baby Boy • Eliza • Unnamed Enslaved Baby Girl • Nancy • George • James Tyler • Eliza • James • Charles • Unnamed Enslaved People • Becky • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Doni • Unnamed Enslaved Baby Boy • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Peter Hall • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Henry Black • Eliza Black's Four Children • Unnamed Enslaved People • Unnamed Enslaved People • Claibrone Carter & his wife • Unnamed Enslaved Woman • Unnamed Enslaved People • Burwell Armistead, Jr., & his wife • Lucy • Randall's wife • Maria • Maria Armistead • Unnamed Enslaved People • Jerry Short • Unnamed Enslaved Child • Lucy Tyler • Jesse Black • Douglas Black • James Hambleton Christian

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