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As far as I can tell, Benjamin S. Ewell, the College's sixteenth president (1854-1888), has been memorialized at William and Mary more than any other person. That is not surprising given his long tenure as president, his dedication to the College, and his titanic efforts on its behalf, especially in the decades after the Civil War.

Some memorials to him have disappeared already. The first to come (and go) was the College Hotel, renamed Ewell Hall within a week of Ewell's death (it was demolished in 1927).¹ The King and Queen Gate (where James Blair Drive ends at Richmond Road) was built as the "Ewell Gate" in 1932.² And our two hundredth anniversary, in 1893, was marked "by the gift of gold and silver medals by Earle Walter Blodgett, Esq., of the Philippine Islands, for prizes in the Department of Mathematics, to be known as the 'Ewell Medals,' in honor of the venerable Emeritus President, Benjamin S. Ewell, LL. D."³ I can find no record of those medals after 1902.⁴ The memorial tablet once in the Wren Building honoring those who fought for the Confederacy was headed by Ewell's name.

More recently, the Benjamin Stoddart Ewell award conferred by the Student Association to outstanding students was renamed. In March of this year, the SA passed Senate Bill 327-029 changing the Ewell Award to "The Cypher Award." The Bill noted that "President Ewell's

¹ See Helen C. Walker, "'So Decayed an Institution': Colonel Ewell's College, 1862-1888" in Susan H. Godson, et al., *The College of William and Mary: A History*, 2 vols. (Williamsburg: King and Queen Press, 1993), 1:411 and the Swem Library SCRC Wiki, "Ewell Hall Dormitory."

Let me emphasize here that in this essay, I speak for no one other than myself.

² *The Flat Hat*, February 16, 1932, p. 1. The gate was pictured in *The Times Dispatch* (Richmond), Feb. 7, 1943, p. 46 and described as "the imposing Ewell Memorial."

³ Lyon G. Tyler, ed., *Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Charter of the College of William and Mary: 1693. 1893* (n.p. Whitet and Shepp), p. 16.

⁴ See *The Richmond Dispatch*, June 27, 1902, p. 7a. In 1888, Blodgett had given ten gold medals, Brafferton Medals, for prizes in pedagogy; in 1890 he added a gift of silver medals (Tyler, p. 9). I think it likely he gave ten gold and silver medals for the Ewell Medals.

support for the Confederacy could be seen as contrary to the value of ‘Belonging,’ which is integral to the William & Mary community.”

In the Flat Hat account (March 4, 2020) of the SA meeting, one Senator is reported as supporting the Bill (which passed unanimously), but with the reservation that it “did not explicitly express parts of Ewell’s history involved in his contributions to the campus.” The Senator thought it “important in sharing both sides of history when writing a bill of this nature”; he “read aloud a list of Ewell’s accomplishments to the College.”

Several Senators objected to the possible revision, one noting, according to the Flat Hat, that “we already herald Ewell for his great achievements we don’t learn about those bad things at all.” Another expressed her reservations as a person of color and felt it would be “not appropriate to include” in the Bill “the good things that he [Ewell] did for this campus.”

But we still have on campus both Ewell Hall (and its Ewell Recital Hall, home of the Ewell Concert Series) and Ewell Circle. In June 1899, a tablet to Ewell in the Chapel was dedicated by the Alumni Society.⁵ At the College Cemetery there is a monument at Ewell’s grave, where from 1926 for some years Alpha Chapter of PBK gathered on the date of his death to hear a eulogy and place flowers.⁶

With the current and long-overdue reframing of American history and culture, monuments to Confederate figures are, thankfully, crumbling all over, even in the deep South. And Ewell (1810-1894), a graduate of West Point, joined the Confederate army and served as a high-ranking officer on the staff of General Joseph E. Johnston (who in 1878 became a member of our Board of Visitors).

So it’s not surprising that Ewell and his memorials have become the subject of legitimate scrutiny.

And though Ewell may well still be overly commemorated on our campus, I’d like here just to underline the complexity of history, life, and human beings, and propose that the College

⁵ Addresses Delivered at the Unveiling of the Tablet Erected by the Alumni to the Memory of Benjamin Stoddert Ewell, LL. D., Late President of the College of William and Mary : College Chapel, June 21, 1899 (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson 1899).

⁶ See at the Swem SPRC Wiki “Sunset Ceremony.” In 1901, at the annual meeting of PBK, the College was presented a portrait of Ewell, presumably the one now in the Wren Building (The Virginia Gazette, February 23, 1901, accessed th the on-line Archive Williamsburg (<https://archivewilliamsburg.wixsite.com/research>), January 18, 2021).

continue to memorialize Ewell with something beyond his grave marker. If it were up to me, I'd retain Ewell Hall.

I think we should do so both for Ewell's importance in the history of the College and for the compelling evidence that he seems to have tried to redeem himself. Also, it would seem unwise to suppress the fact of our engagement with the Confederacy; Ewell's story may be a dramatic way to confront that history.

In support of my position I offer (I) comments made by a visitor to the College in 1883; (II) the testimony of a distinguished local Black minister who knew Ewell well; and (III) a revised draft of my work on Ewell and race ultimately published in The William & Mary Bill of Rights Journal.⁷

I. In 1883, a visitor to Williamsburg had a chat with President Ewell in his office in what is now the Wren Building. The account, published in several newspapers of the time,⁸ featured Ewell's progressive views: "President Ewell favors the project of turning the place [W&M] into a state normal school. We found him a courteous and genial old gentleman, a Readjuster and progressive in politics. He thought that education and development would best be fostered by the new party, and he was of the opinion that the voters of the state would continue the Readjusters in power."

According to Brent Tarter in the online Encyclopediavirginia, "the Readjuster Party was the shortest-lived and most radical political party in Virginia's history." Established in 1879, it was the majority party in both houses of the General Assembly and held all statewide offices by 1881. Of particular note here is the prominence of African-Americans in the party: leaders of the party "invited all supporters of readjustment [of the state's debts] irrespective of race and ... African Americans held party offices and won election to the General Assembly and to local offices as Readjusters." The party also abolished the poll tax and "eliminated the brutal, humiliating whipping post, left over from slavery days, for punishing African Americans." In

⁷ See pp. 1153-1156 of my "A First Look at the Worst: Slavery and Race Relations at the College of William and Mary," William & Mary Bill of Rights Journal, 16:4(2008), 1141-1168. Citations in the excerpt below to Chapman are to Anne W. Chapman, "Benjamin Stoddert Ewell: A Biography." Ph.D. dissertation in History (1984), College of William and Mary.

⁸ I cite The Gazette (Cedar Rapids, Iowa), April 16, 1883, p. 4b.

supporting higher education, the Readjusters established Virginia State University. The party “welcomed African American men ... as fully enfranchised citizens.”

Ewell’s views here are anticipated almost a decade earlier when Ewell wrote a letter (May 9, 1874) to the Governor of Virginia, James Kemper. According to Robert Jones, Kemper had vetoed a bill that would have disenfranchised Blacks in Petersburg: “The obvious intent of the measure was to circumvent Negro-Radical control, actual or threatened, of the city government.” Ewell’s letter commends the Governor’s veto.⁹

II. A witness to Ewell’s redemption after his service with the Confederate army is Dr. Lewis Wellington Wales (1860–1927), a local Black minister. The Rev. Wales was called to be Minister of Mt. Ararat Church in July 1885:

A short time after coming to Williamsburg I had the honor of meeting the old president of William and Mary College, Benj. S. Ewell, who proved a good friend to me. He expressed his willingness to aid me when and wherever possible. This he did in many ways. The old gentleman carried me through the college building and at times when convenient to himself gave me access to the college library which was of great benefit to me at that time. I shall ever remember the kindness of the honored and beloved president of William and Mary College, whom I met for the first time in 1885. This venerable educator, although a Confederate veteran of the civil war, was among the best friends the colored people had. To me as a struggling young man at that time, he was a tower of strength, in that he became intensely interested in my welfare as an humble leader among my people, and always had a word of encouragement.¹⁰

⁹ Robert R. Jones, “James L. Kemper and the Virginia Redeemers Face the Race Question: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of Southern History*, 38:3(August 1972), 403; Jones mentions Ewell’s letter in note 54, p. 405 in the context of letters approving the Governor’s action. Jones makes clear that Kemper, however, was deeply flawed in other respects pertaining to race.

¹⁰ Brief Autobiographical Sketch of the Life and Labors of Rev. L. W. Wales, D.D. (Williamsburg VA: 1910), p. 6.

III. Benjamin Ewell was a complicated man. He was a Unionist, but like most of the faculty was an officer in the Confederate Army, in which many students also served.¹¹ Ewell was instrumental in building the series of redoubts just east of town; the main source of labor was slaves,¹² including the College's. But after the war, Ewell was quoted in *The True Southerner* as "in favor of Negro suffrage" (24 November 1865);¹³ Chapman notes Ewell's "strong support for Negro suffrage and the establishment of schools for former slaves" ("Ewell," p. 175), though Williamsburg was largely hostile to the idea.¹⁴

¹¹ See Sean Michael Heuvel, "The Old College Goes to War: The Civil War Experiences of William and Mary Students, Faculty, and Alumni," M.A. Thesis, University of Richmond (2006); his article on the students, "The Old College Goes to War: The Civil War Service of William and Mary Students," appears in the *Virginia Social Science Journal*, 42(2007), 32-48. Heuvel draws attention to Ewell's being "bitterly opposed [to] secession" and his difficulties in dealing with the students (p. 14; see too Chapman, "Ewell," p. 125).

One professor, Edwin Taliaferro, "organized secessionist activity among his students"; and students were allowed to form a militia in January 1861. They raised a "secession flag" before Fort Sumter was fired on (see Peter S. Carmichael, *The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005], pp. 127, 130, 139). Ewell emphasized that "no secession flag had ever flown from the college buildings" (Chapman, "Ewell," p. 216; see too p. 125 for his support of an anti-secession speech by a student).

In 1863 a conference was called to consider new textbooks for the Confederacy and to explore "the best means for supplying the necessary text-books for schools and colleges, and for uniting their efforts for the advancement of education in the Confederacy": "A communication was read from E. T. [sic] Joynes, Prof. Greek Literature, William and Mary's College, Virginia, containing some valuable suggestions in relation to the object and aims of the Association, and the best method of accomplishing them" (see <http://docsouth.unc.edu/ims/teachers/teachers.html>). Joynes alone among the Faculty did not join the Confederate Army, but he was the "chief clerk for the Confederate Bureau of War" and developed "a cordial friendship" with Robert E. Lee (Heuvel, p. 38).

¹² See Earl C. Hastings, Jr. and David Hastings, *A Pitiless Rain: The Battle of Williamsburg, 1862* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane, 1997), pp. 43, 45. At one time, Ewell impressed "all able-bodied slaves, and free Negroes, in the vicinity of Williamsburg" (Chapman, "Ewell," p. 132).

¹³ I am grateful to Stephanie Heintz who mentioned Ewell's support for black suffrage in a *Daily Press* article, July 29, 2006, p. A5, and who subsequently sent me the date.

Not surprisingly, Ewell possibly and faculty members certainly owned slaves; see for example entries in the Bucktrout Daybook and Ledger (Swem Library): "Jan 27 1862 M^r Joines [probably Professor Edward S. Joynes] Paid by Vest Paid to making a small coffin a child at M^r Euwells and dug grave for same 5.00" (perhaps the child was owned by William Vest, a local merchant, or by Joynes, and hired out to Ewell); "August 5 1862 M^r Blane for M^{rs} Morrisson professors wife to making a coffin for black child dug grave and carried it to the ground 8.00 Insolvent"; "Dec^r 30 1862 M^{rs} Morrisson to a coffin for old black woman (Bethia) 10.00 to grave for same 2.00 to conveyance to ground 1.00 Insolvent."

Though faculty-owned slaves would likely have been buried close to where they died, the question of where College slaves were buried for some 170 years is open; presumably the campus has somewhere on it whatever might remain of a slave burial ground. Zech notes that in 1766 the College expended 5/- for a coffin for a black child (p. 66).

¹⁴ Laura Smith Haviland, in *A Woman's Life-Work* (Chicago: Publishing Association of Friends, 1889; rpt. Arno Press, 1969), pp. 407-418, describes local black schools immediately after the war, including large ones in Williamsburg's "old slave-pens" (p. 412) and at Fort Magruder; "to the horror of many Williamsburg residents, [Ewell] welcomed teachers sent by the Friends' Association of Philadelphia and pledged his full support for their efforts" (Chapman, "Ewell," p. 175). In 1866, Williamsburg residents suspected that "teachers in the Quaker schools for freedmen were setting blacks against white citizens" (Chapman, "Ewell," p. 182).

Indeed, the evidence in Anne W. Chapman's biography is of a man sympathetic to Blacks. His nurse had been a free mulatto woman whom he remembered "as one of the greatest influences in his life" (p. 23). Ewell "deplored the effects of slavery on both whites and blacks" and thought it "responsible, at least in part, for Virginia's economic decline and detrimental to her future industrial growth" (p. 66). At the President's House, he employed not his own slaves, but "three hired servants,"¹⁵ to the apparent irritation of his mother (who lived with him), "who favored the reopening of the slave trade" (p. 107).¹⁶ Similarly he ran his farm with "a white manager and a score of hired slaves" (p. 110).¹⁷

After the war, Ewell found himself attacked as an Abolitionist when he urged "acceptance of defeat, a policy of moderation, and quick reunion as the best paths to Virginia's future" (pp. 174, 173); he urged Virginians to get used to "'waiting on themselves rather than being waited on a by a reverential and obsequious darky'" (p. 175). (Tone can be tricky, but I read this as Ewell flinging back in his compatriots' face their demeaning attitude towards Blacks.)

In 1867, seeking federal reparations for the burning of the Wren Building, Ewell included among the affidavits one from a freed slave (p. 181). He argued at one point that federal support would allow the College to "help supply the teachers so desperately needed by both blacks and whites" (p. 211).¹⁸ One newspaper attacked Ewell's support for U. S. Grant and said Ewell "had

The teachers Ewell supported (who are also mentioned in Haviland) can now be identified: Margaret Thorpe details her and Martha Haines' efforts in an impoverished Williamsburg deeply hostile to Yankees--and to educating blacks. Already the Ku Klux Klan was locally active (see Richard L. Morton, "Life in Virginia, by a 'Yankee Teacher,' Margaret Newbold Thorpe," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 64:2[April 1956], 180-207). At this time too, Ewell "insisted that Pauline, his only remaining Negro servant whom he had taught to read and write, conduct a school for Negroes" (Chapman, "Ewell," pp. 175-176.

¹⁵ After the war, in reduced circumstances, Ewell had as an attendant at the President's House, "a teen-aged Negro servant, Robert Rush" (p. 245). When the College was closed, Ewell was driven in each day by "Malachi Gardiner, a black tenant farmer who shared his acreage and whom he called 'The Professor'" (p. 277) and to whom Ewell was devoted (Bright, p. 18). Elizabeth Woolsey Gilman and her husband, the President of Johns Hopkins, visited Williamsburg in 1887; she describes Gardiner in more detail and also speaks of "an old colored woman who seemed to be the sole guardian" of the College (see Parke Rouse, Jr., *Remembering Williamsburg: A Sentimental Journey Through Three Centuries* [Richmond: Dietz Press, 1989], p. 103).

¹⁶ Ewell's marriage was a disaster and his wife had left him, in part, one faculty foe alleged, because he took a mulatto as a mistress (p. 97): "rumor would have it that he kept a mulatto woman for his mistress. This woman was his slave and his housekeeper and dressed much above her condition. I do not think he had religious principle enough to restrain him from such conduct and what was worse the students generally believe the rumor true" (Chapman, "Totten," p. 80).

¹⁷ Later, when the farm was run by his son-in-law, Beverley Scott, he was concerned that Scott "persisted in treating the Negroes he hired as though they were still slaves" (p. 246).

¹⁸ Ewell's seeking funds from the Commonwealth was complicated once by a rumor (which he denied) that students from the College, organized as "Wise's infantry," "had disrupted a racially mixed Republican meeting in

suggested Negro students be received at William and Mary,” which he denounced as ““a malicious falsehood”” (pp. 219, 220).

And in fighting off frequent attempts to move the College, Ewell reassured those who feared racial conflict locally, telling “the public that Williamsburg’s black population had been and would remain docile and orderly” (p. 183); in 1872, he again suggested that “relations in Williamsburg between the races ... were ... good” (Chapman, “Ewell,” p.216). The College welcomed Blacks and whites alike to its Commencement festivities. At the 1855 Commencement, held July 4 and with Ewell presiding, there was included at 1 p.m. “a picnic dinner in the College Yard attended by all the townspeople, black and white” (Chapman, “Totten,” p. 164, n4). William Robert Garrett describes this part of his own graduation day, July 4, 1858, in detail,¹⁹ explaining that “the entire population of the city and vicinity, and the entire student body gathered around the tables—and such tables!” (p. 254). Each student was expected, with his belle, “to take many courses at different tables, and pay in full at each” (p. 255): “a great revenue flowed into her [each family’s Black cook’s] treasury from the dinner fees, and from generous donations” (p. 254).²⁰

And finally, in an article focusing on Ewell and Phi Beta Kappa, Earl Baldwin Thomas includes the account that Ewell himself likely contributed to *Appleton’s Cyclopedia of American Biography* (vol. 2, 1887); it suggests again Ewell’s moving away from Confederate values:

Dr. Ewell urged the election and re-election of General Grant to the presidency because of his moderation and magnanimity at the close of the war. He was opposed to secession in 1861, thinking it unnecessary and unconstitutional, and resisted the measure until war was waged. After 1865, he exerted himself to foster harmony between the North and the South, and loyalty to the national government.²¹

All this suggests to me, again, that some modest memorialization of Ewell on campus is appropriate.

Williamsburg” (p. 214; see too *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, February 24, 1872, p. 96). In Congress federal reparations failed once when an amendment was attached “calling on ... [William and Mary] to open its doors to colored students” (*The New York Times*, February 18, 1873, p. 1), perhaps a sardonic commentary on Ewell’s apparent sympathies; see too the issue of December 14, 1872, p. 6).

¹⁹ “William and Mary College in 1858,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 10 (April 1902), 251-257.

²⁰ I have not found any other mixed race gatherings during earlier presidencies.

²¹ Earl Baldwin Thomas, “Colonel Benjamin Stoddert Ewell, LL.D.” *The Phi Beta Kappa Key*, 4:6 (1921), 369.