Walking Tour

UVA Walking Tour
Enslaved African Americans at the University

The University of Virginia utilized the labor of enslaved African Americans from the earliest days of its construction in 1817 until the end of the American Civil War. Most of the University’s first enslaved laborers were rented from local slave-owners and worked alongside whites and free blacks in all the tasks associated with constructing the Academic Village. When the first students arrived in March 1825, enslaved African Americans worked in the pavilions, hotels, and the Rotunda; maintained classrooms, laboratories, and the library; and served the daily needs of the students and faculty, especially in providing cooking and cleaning services. This self-guided tour is an introduction to some of the significant people, places, and events that shaped the early history of African Americans at the University of Virginia. For further information see slavery.virginia.edu.

Key
- Site open to the public
- Exterior viewing only, building not open to the public
- Historic location only
- Historic marker
- Parking

1. Rotunda and Bricks in the Academical Village

One of the most overlooked legacies of enslaved labor are the bricks that cover the Academical Village. Enslaved workers dug the clay, fired the bricks, hauled them to Grounds, and laid them to build this university. The brick-making began in 1817 with a team comprised largely of enslaved men, but also of one woman and several children also working in the brick yards. In 1823, an enslaved man named Charles was responsible for digging the clay and making one of the bricks, with the help of six enslaved boys rented out from John H. Cooke. Enslaved men Dick, Lewis, Nelson, and Sandy were also rented to the brickyard, and worked long hours by the kiln. That same year, as part of Rotunda construction, five men of color Robert Battle, Isaac, Jack, and Lewis worked for 176,000 bricks and a few tons of sand to the University during a five-month stretch. For his Herculean efforts, he was paid $170. Enslaved workers also carved out the terraces levels on the lawn, creating the unique landscape that you see today. Many of the enslaved were highly skilled at construction, carpentry, stone-cutting, and blacksmithing. They contributed to some of the more intricate design work seen in the details of the architecture on Grounds.

2. Enslaved Labor Plaque

In 2007, the University installed a slate memorial in the brick pavalent of the cryptosteps, the passageway under the south entrance of the Rotunda. The plaque reads: “In honor of the several hundred women and men, both free and enslaved, whose labor between 1817 and 1826 helped to realize Thomas Jefferson’s design for the Rotunda, a piece of the Stonewall that adorned the Rotunda is now held as a remembrance of their labor and the law. This plaque recognizes the work of these enslaved people and serves as a reminder of the University’s responsibility to honor their contributions.”

3. Mrs. Grey’s Kitchen

Completed in 1833, this 1½-story Hotel E “office” with two rooms was known as Mrs. Grey’s Kitchen. It served as both quarters and workspace for the enslaved. Mrs. Grey had the kitchen structure expanded in 1844, adding an “apartment for the lodgment of servants.” Records document that a dozen or more enslaved people resided at hotel E as early as 1839. One was Williams, a young boy who worked as a dormitory dining hall servant. In 1844, several students boarding with Mrs. Grey complained that Williams was “impatient” and that he did not “attend well” at the meals. Under pressure from the faculty, Williams was “withdrawn” from serving the student dormitories. In 1855, Mrs. Grey complained to the faculty that a student boarder had struck her servant William in her presence and that the student was rude. The student defended his behavior, stating that “he would do so if he were to suffer it.” Faculty sided with the student in concluding that Williams was “highly offensive in manner, & impatient in language to Mr. Harris & is highly unsatisfactory in his conduct to others.” Williams was subsequently removed from any attendance on the students.

4. Henry Martin

According to oral history, Henry Martin was born at Monticello on July 4, 1826—the day Jefferson died. He was sold to the Carr family at William’s estate sale in 1827 and until 1847 remained enslaved at a property in Albemarle County. In 1847, Mr. Martin was rented to a Mr. Carr, who ran a boarding house just north of the University. Until the general emancipation of 1865, Mr. Martin heated coal, delivered wood, and worked as a domestic laborer at her boarding house. In freedom, he took a job with the University as janitor and bell ringer, which he mentioned in an 1880 letter to College Rooms, a student publication that was planning to report on his life story. He would go on to work at U.V.A. for over 50 years. Martin routinely arose at 4 a.m. to tend to his responsibilities. It was Martin who rang the bell to spread the alarm when the first waves of smoke were spotted in the Rotunda fire of 1895. “I was as true to that bell as to my God,” Martin said in a 1914 interview. He died in 1915 and is buried in the Daughters of Zion Cemetery in Charlottesville.

5. McGeuffey Cottage

McGeuffey Cottage is all that remains of a row of outbuildings located to the west and rear of Pavillion IX. These were built as work and residential spaces, including one built as early as 1831 for the accommodation of domestic. George Tucker, a professor of Moral Philosophy, was the first resident of Pavilion IX, occupying it between 1825 and 1845. Census records document that he owned two men and two women in 1840 who labored there in support of Tucker’s family. Tucker also rented enslaved people to the University as needed. In 1828, Anthony个小时 worked for five months performing labor for the University. In 1840, he was rented for a month and assisted a stonemason while building walls surrounding the Academic Village.

6. Violence Against the Enslaved

In the course of carrying out their responsibilities, enslaved people interacted with white students in spaces throughout the Academic Village on a regular basis. Unsurprisingly, those daily interactions with students could and did turn violent. Students resorted to reflecting physical violence upon the bodies of free and enslaved laborers for a variety of often imagined “offenses,” including insolence, impudence, language or a perceived lack of deference. Failure to change a plate at the dinner table or presumed negligence in preparing a dormitory room or changing bed linens could result in violent retaliation. Enslaved individuals who did not speak to white students with respect and deference were also putting themselves at risk. The slave system was upheld by both violence and the routine threat of violence.

At U.V.A., the enslaved endured beatings, whipings, and even sexual assault. As one student explained in response to his attack upon an enslaved NJM, “whenever a servant is insolent...[he] will take upon himself the right of punishing without the consent of the master” because “correction of a servant for impudence, may be defended on the ground of necessity for maintaining due subordination.” A complaint against an enslaved person for an offense could lead to their removal from classes, or even from the University. Furthermore, even when students were judged by faculty to be at fault, their actions were only reprimanded and very rarely led to any meaningful punishment.

Walking Tours of Grounds

A set of thematically-driven walking tours, allow you explore the University of Virginia, including a tour focusing on the history of enslaved African Americans at UVA through places, people, and events.

Available for iPhone, iPad, and Android
library.virginia.edu/map/walking-tours

To learn more visit slavery.virginia.edu
President’s Commission on Slavery and the University

This self-guided tour introduces some of the people, places, and stories related to early African American life at the University of Virginia. Between 1817 and 1865 the University relied on the labor of enslaved African Americans, whose presence was undeniably central to the building and functioning of the University of Virginia. This walking tour is an initiative of the President’s Commission on Slavery and the University, a group committed to acknowledging and memorializing the lives and legacies of enslaved laborers at UVA.

To learn more visit slavery.virginia.edu

# ENSLAVED AFRICAN AMERICANS at the University of Virginia

## Walking Tour

This self-guided tour introduces some of the people, places, and stories related to early African American life at the University of Virginia. Between 1817 and 1865 the University relied on the labor of enslaved African Americans, whose presence was undeniably central to the building and functioning of the University of Virginia. This walking tour is an initiative of the President’s Commission on Slavery and the University, a group committed to acknowledging and memorializing the lives and legacies of enslaved laborers at UVA.

To learn more visit slavery.virginia.edu

---

### The Crackerbox

One of the few surviving outbuildings, the “Cracker Box” is a two-story structure erected in 1820 behind Hotel F. Built on the land where the present-day University of Virginia campus now stands, this building was originally used as a storehouse and later as a residence for university officials.

---

### Pavilion VI and Garden

Pavilion VI was one place where William and Isabella Gibbons, both enslaved by different professors, served to maintain family connections and educations for themselves. William was owned by Professor Howard in Pavilion B and later worked as a butler for Professor McGuire in Pavilion IX. Isabella was owned by Professor Smith in Pavilion IV and VI, where she worked as a domestic servant. Although their marriage had no legal standing, William and Isabella preserved their union and raised their children while held in bondage. The strong opposition of white Virginians also severely limited access to education for the enslaved. William learned to read by carefully observing and listening to the white students around him. Their daughter Bertha recalled that she could not have learned to read or write, “unless my mother taught me wisely.”

---

### East Lawn Basement Rooms

The basement rooms had many different uses. Some were living quarters for enslaved people. Pavilion occupants occasionally occupied these rooms by breaking through common walls, which allowed a direct passageway from the basement to the inside of the pavilion. Many of these rooms show evidence of modification to make them more habitable, including whitewashed walls and plaster ceilings. Despite these improvements, most of the rooms were barely habitable without floors, windows, ventilation, or fireplaces.

These rooms were sometimes rented out to businessmen such as Jack Kennedy, a member of Charlottesville’s small free Black community, who applied to use one as a barber shop for the accommodation of the students. The faculty approved because they hoped the students would come fewer reasons to go to town. In another room, enslaved laborers constructed a large cistern, which was once a vital part of the University’s water supply and fire protection system. The cistern was connected to pipes and trenches built by enslaved people. Two free black men, Thomas Fanini and his partner, Mr. Battles, maintained the water system for decades.

---

### Pavilion Ill and Garden

In 2012, archaeologists discovered 67 mostly unmarked grave shafts, which likely contain the remains of enslaved African Americans. In 2014, the university undertook renovation and interpretive panels were installed, all without disturbing the graves. Although we do not know who was buried here, we do know they were people with families, faith, community, and cultural traditions. Thus, in 2014 and 2017, the FCJU organized memorial programs with instructions and an evening event to dedicate the work by renowned filmmaker Gregory Miller.

---

### Memorial to Enslaved Laborers

The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers honors the lives, labor, resilience, and resistance of 4,000 enslaved people who lived and worked at UVA between 1817 and 1865. First proposed by students in 2010, the idea for a memorial garnered widespread support from students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the local community, as the President’s Commission on Slavery and the University brought that initial vision to reality.

Situating within the UNESCO World Heritage Site space northeast of the Rotunda, the memorial sits in the midst of what was originally fields cultivated by enslaved people. The memorial’s design and location were deeply informed by a process of engagement with students, faculty staff, and the local community. Hoskier + Yoon Architects, the team who designed the memorial, which was completed in 2020.

As people walk along the memorial’s path, the interior granite wall rises to a height of eight feet. This wall bears the names of nearly 600 enslaved persons. Flanking parallel to the wall of names, a smaller ring of granite incorporates a bench for individuals to rest and reflect. The smaller ring also hosts a stone-table with a timeline of the history of slavery at UVA etched into the stone.

---

### University Cemetery

In 2012, archaeologists discovered 67 mostly unmarked grave shafts, which likely contain the remains of enslaved African Americans. In 2014, the university undertook renovation and interpretive panels were installed, all without disturbing the graves. Although we do not know who was buried here, we do know they were people with families, faith, community, and cultural traditions. Thus, in 2014 and 2017, the FCJU organized memorial programs with instructions and an evening event to dedicate the work by renowned filmmaker Gregory Miller.

---

### Gooch Dillard Grave Site

The Gooch Dillard dormitory is located on what was originally part of Frederick Macy’s 250-acre Piedmont plantation. With the exception of 1851, when UVA briefly took ownership of the property, Piedmont remained with the Macy family until UVA purchased it in 1947. As Macy’s plantation holdings grew, so did the number of enslaved people he owned. In the decades between 1820 and 1860, Macy owned between 25 and 62 enslaved individuals. Prior to construction of this dormitory complex in 1982, Macy descendant Alice M. Clark recalled the location of a cemetery containing the remains of enslaved people who lived and worked there. Archaeologists then conducted limited testing in the area. Although only nine graves were identified, it is believed that the cemetery could be larger.

In 1999, Student Council, working with the President’s Commission, installed interpretive panels documenting this history.

---

### Photography

Photography credits:
- Front: Dr. John Trickey and Andrew S. Stack, 1896-1910, Photography Collection, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville.
- 17-18 Rivanna Archaeological Services, LLC. (2014). University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville.

---

### Resources
- Back: University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville.
- 17-18 Rivanna Archaeological Services, LLC. (2014). University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville.
- 17-18 Rivanna Archaeological Services, LLC. (2014). University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville.

---

### Enslaved African Americans at the University of Virginia

This self-guided tour introduces some of the people, places, and stories related to early African American life at the University of Virginia. Between 1817 and 1865 the University relied on the labor of enslaved African Americans, whose presence was undeniably central to the building and functioning of the University of Virginia. This walking tour is an initiative of the President’s Commission on Slavery and the University, a group committed to acknowledging and memorializing the lives and legacies of enslaved laborers at UVA.

To learn more visit slavery.virginia.edu