

## **Presidential Commission on University History and Identity**

In November 2018, President Ronald A. Crutcher charged the Presidential Commission for University History and Identity with studying the University of Richmond's history and its implications for our current campus climate and the future by:

- Exploring how our institutional history is recorded, preserved, and made accessible to a diversity of audiences;
- Re-examining our past to identify people and narratives previously excluded from our institutional history; and
- Recommending ways to acknowledge and communicate our history inclusively.

### **Defining Principles**

Over the course of our work, several defining principles emerged:

- Understanding and conveying the history of the University will require the collaboration of people from across our community.
- Such a history must explore a complex historical record with honesty, imagination, and diligence.
- An adequate history must reach deep into the past of Virginia, of Richmond, and of our campus.
- This history must pay attention to people who bore many kinds of relationships to the institution.
- The University must reckon with the issues of slavery, segregation, and desegregation in our history.
- This history must convey its discoveries through means both traditional and innovative so that all who follow will have a clearer understanding of this place and of their role in its still-unfolding story.

### **Recommendations**

The committee identified specific recommendations around three major areas:

#### **Commemoration and Memorialization**

- Engage a current member of the faculty with experience studying slavery, religion, and segregation in Richmond and Virginia in 2019-20 to assemble and interpret evidence, culminating in a report, regarding Robert Ryland, Douglas Southall Freeman, and slavery on our landscape. The historian would present these findings, along with important documents and other evidence, on a public website and in additional public venues.
- In spring 2020, the President will consider forming a memorialization and commemoration working group to consider, alongside the historian's report, policies and practices. This working group will be tasked with making recommendations to the Board of Trustees regarding the possible renaming of Ryland Hall and Freeman Hall as well as the memorialization of enslaved people. Beyond spring 2020, the University should consider

hiring a historical services firm experienced with these issues to help guide the resulting memorialization working in conjunction with faculty experts on campus.

- Build a repository of existing campus spaces of memorialization and commemoration, including information on sites (e.g., building names, portraits, plaques) and those commemorated (e.g., dates of commemoration, demographic information about those honored, criteria for naming decision); use as a resource to educate the public about sites of memory and to inform future decision-making.
- Support ongoing work to integrate historical context into campus, including development of historical exhibits and interpretive signage.
- Establish a process to evaluate and shape the commemorative campus landscape going forward.

### **Academic and Co-Curricular Initiative**

- Support meaningful projects emerging from faculty and student interests that examine overlooked or previously excluded dimensions of our institutional history.
- Pilot and test an academically grounded initiative to coordinate efforts to research, teach, and disseminate a more inclusive history of the University, its place in Richmond, Virginia, the nation, and the world, focusing on slavery, segregation and desegregation, during the 2019-20 academic year. Use the pilot to determine the best ongoing mechanism to leverage faculty expertise and applied student research, learning, and skill-building to uncover a range of intersectional histories and their legacies at the University of Richmond, in Richmond, and beyond. Archive the work as part of the effort to grow a fuller understanding of UR's institutional history.

### **University Archives and the Virginia Baptist Historical Society**

- Fund digitization projects such as the papers of Baptist denominational leaders, university-related materials, registers, and associated documents of free and enslaved Black Virginians, to expand access to these important historical artifacts.
- Create a University archives program within the university's institutional structure and develop a comprehensive records management plan for the University.
- Endow a fund to replace revenue previously generated by the UR-VBHS agreement and make permanent the VBHS wing of the Library.

## The Shape of the University's Story

The Commission's work builds on key characteristics of the University's history:

That history is a *braided narrative*. The story of one group is not the story of everyone, though they intertwine. It is not a simple story nor should we try to make it one. That history will need to be conveyed in many places, media, and narratives.

That history is marked by *sharp breaks and discontinuities*. The move from the countryside into the city, the effects of the Civil War and emancipation, the creation of Westhampton College, the migration to the West End, the arrival of international students, the impact of the Robins gift, the nationalization of the student body, the break with the Virginia Baptists, and the ongoing integration and inclusion of previously excluded and marginalized people have all reoriented life in the institution.

That history has often been characterized by *confusion and uncertainty*. From its beginnings, the University has navigated a shifting terrain, often not of its own making. With each break, it has taken the University years to readjust to the new order, recalibrating its strategies, values, and presentation of itself to university, regional, and higher education communities.

That history has shown *deep but oblique connections with the great wrongs of the history of our city, state, and region*. Our institution, unlike other colleges and universities in the state and region, was not built by enslaved labor, did not own slaves institutionally, or participate in the sales of enslaved people, but the college did rely on the labor of enslaved people belonging to President Robert Ryland. While we do not have Confederate memorials on our campus, Confederate iconography has recurred throughout our history. The University embodied and perpetuated the spirit and practices of racial segregation for over a century after emancipation.

That history built on the *displacement of African American people*. Our landscape was occupied by a plantation worked by enslaved labor, where people lived, died, and were buried within our borders. Our move here was enabled by the displacement of African American communities and by the distressed purchase of land an African American self-help organization had purchased for its elderly members.

That history has been shaped by *our origins in and sustenance by Virginia Baptists*. The University would not exist nor have survived without generations of effort and support by Virginia Baptists. The Virginia Baptist Historical Society is filled with the records of Virginia churches in which white and black people, free and enslaved people, struggled to live moral lives in the midst of an immoral institution. After the losses of the Civil War, Virginia Baptists raised the money to recreate the institution. Across most of the 20th century, our identity was that of the Baptist university of Virginia, integrated by gender, fulfilling a missionary purpose with international students but excluding both African American men and women of the same faith. Since the severing of our relationship with the Baptists, we have not paused to take stock of that relationship.

That history reveals *recurring efforts to build a more inclusive community*. The Virginia Baptists who founded the school led the struggle for religious freedom for those of all faiths and none. The University proudly claimed female students decades before many other Virginia schools and has seen those women help lead their fellow students for generations. International students have long

been an important and enlivening presence at the University. People within our community have long led efforts for the full inclusion of people of all kinds of backgrounds and identities.

That history shows a *complicated relationship with our city*. We have long been engaged with the city of Richmond but must work hard to overcome a severing that came with our move west and with our focus on students from other states and countries.

## Recommendations

The Commission identified specific recommendations around three major areas, described below:

Commemoration and Memorialization

Learning in Place

The University Archives and the Virginia Baptist Historical Society

### Commemoration and Memorialization at the University

Although commemoration and memorialization are often used as synonyms, we approach these related terms differently. We recognize commemoration as a process designating who and what should be remembered. Linked to commemoration, memorialization is a process by which memory is preserved and circulated. Memorialization can take a variety of forms, from statues and other forms of public art to performances and ceremonies.

From its first buildings on the campus constructed at the beginning of the 20th century to its most recent buildings, commemoration has played an important role in defining the University. The first buildings were named for important figures in the history of the founding of Richmond College, especially Robert Ryland and Jeremiah Jeter. Over time, other buildings took the names of important internal leaders of the University such as Frederick Boatwright, May Keller, Bruce Heilman, and George Modlin. From early years, too, significant donors were acknowledged by naming, especially members of the Robins, Weinstein, and Jepson families. Many other buildings and places bear names for different reasons: Maryland Hall, named in recognition of support from Baptists in that state; Milhiser Gymnasium, named by parents after the death of their son; Freeman Hall, named after an alumnus and rector of the University. The naming practices have followed the general trends of their times, moving toward donor recognition as the primary criterion.

We now have the opportunity to consider our history more intentionally and comprehensively, determining the stories we most want and need to tell. The following recommendations can begin that process.

**Further Research.** To responsibly commemorate and memorialize our pasts, it is imperative that we have a firm grasp on the histories that underpin the contemporary moment.

- Engage a current member of the faculty to gather, integrate, and present the evidence on the most pressing issues before us: Robert Ryland, Douglas Southall Freeman, and the lives of the enslaved people who lived here. This historian will mentor UR graduate and undergraduate students in contributing to the research and work in conjunction with other faculty members teaching classes related to the University's history and identity.

- *Create a Comprehensive Inventory of Campus Sites of Memory.* Before embarking on new commemoration and memorialization projects, a comprehensive inventory of current sites of memory on the University of Richmond campus is necessary. Such an inventory will help make the argument for new sites of memory on campus, drawing attention to existing representation and lack thereof. While an inventory was created via a student research project in fall 2018, the existing data are incomplete and a more systematic cataloging of sites is necessary. The inventory should be used to establish a database including information on sites (e.g., building names, portraits, statues, busts, plaques, benches, etc.) as well as information about those commemorated, including: commemoration dates; specific criteria used for the naming decision, if available; and demographic and personal information about the individual or group commemorated. The database could then be mapped, made accessible and serve as a resource for a historical services firm and faculty engaged in the next steps and future decisions regarding commemoration and memorialization.
- *Explore Campus Ground.* Given recent research on the enslaved people who lived and worked on the grounds of the current University of Richmond, as well as the existence of a burial ground no longer observable on historical maps, further archaeological exploration of the campus is warranted. Ground penetrating radar will be used in fall 2019 in an effort to more precisely locate the site and extent of the graveyard. This research may result in a commemorative marker, such as a plaque or memorial.

*Process.* While commemoration and memorialization can take place in a variety of ways – interpretive signage, historical plaques, art, and performance— future commemorative efforts should consider an array of contributions to the University.

No formal mechanism exists to consider the naming or renaming of campus spaces. Therefore, we recommend the establishment of a process and set of procedures for changes to the commemorative landscape. Building on the experience of this commission and the work of faculty and students to recover our past, we recommend that the University consider institutionalizing commemoration and memorialization as an intentional and ongoing part of its planning. The University should establish a process, informed by the experiences of this year, through which future suggestions for commemoration can be considered in a systematic and inclusive way.

In that work, the University should listen to the ideas and concerns of the campus community, and collaborate with those whose stories have been excluded from Richmond’s historical record. The Commission recommends several different strategies for engaging community voices including, but not limited to:

- Community Forums held at UR Downtown
- Continued engagement with Black alumni through the University of Richmond Black Alumni Network (URBAN)
- Engagement with Westhampton and Richmond College alumni during Homecoming and Reunion Weekends
- Conversations with Baptist congregations, in collaboration with Virginia Baptist Historical Society, including descendants of First African Baptist Church (where Robert Ryland served as senior minister from 1841-1865)

While the work of the coming year is proceeding, the University should also take other steps to foster a historical understanding of our landscape:

- *Create a Collection of Campus Walking Tours.* To embrace the Commission’s charge to develop a more inclusive history of the University of Richmond, we propose the creation of a series of campus walking tours that draw upon the research conducted by students in courses, fellowships, and in independent research projects to share campus histories. Tours would be designed for classes, prospective students and their families, and student groups such as URISE, as well as to alumni. Tours given by students, faculty, and staff would be available in person, as well as via mobile apps such as CLIO. A tour map would be available in the Admissions building as one way to share with visitors how the University of Richmond tells its stories by acknowledging its past.
- *Develop Historical Exhibits and Interpretive Signage for Display on Campus.* Another way to build a more vibrant culture—for members of the community to see themselves in the traditions of the institution—is to weave them more intentionally into the campus landscape. We recommend that historical exhibits sharing stories through artifacts, photographs, digital media, and oral histories be displayed at highly visible locations on campus such as the Queally Center for Admission and Career Services, Boatwright Memorial Library, Tyler Haynes Commons, and UR Downtown.
- *Establish Connections with Descendant Communities.* Recent research has begun to uncover the names of enslaved people who lived on the grounds of UR’s campus. We see this research as an important step in the necessary work to establish and develop relationships with descendants.

## **Learning in Place**

In order to fulfill our promise to Richmond, our campus and community, we have a responsibility to excavate our layered histories and respond to our most pressing problems. Realizing this goal will require academically grounded work that draws on the collaborative, intellectual, and creative strengths of our faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners to create inclusive histories that animate promising futures.

We propose the creation of a sustained office, organization, or center to coordinate and support academic initiatives to research, teach, and disseminate inclusive histories of our University and its place in Richmond, Virginia, the nation, and the world, including attention to and support for academic and creative work that interrogates the contemporary implications of these pasts. This new umbrella organization will require deliberative planning and financial, staffing, and technological support. It will afford an excellent naming and fundraising opportunity for donors seeking to help the University forge its brightest future. We envision this new office, organization, or center supporting a broad range of projects emerging from faculty, staff, students, and community partners that examine overlooked or previously excluded dimensions of our collective pasts and their present-day legacies.

The academically grounded work we propose will build on existing strengths, most notably the pilot Race & Racism Project, but also a broad array of existing programs and projects, including

community-engaged learning courses across the schools, faculty-mentored student research and internships, and faculty learning communities.

This new umbrella organization will coordinate, fund, and support teaching, research, and creative production that centers 1) the development and dissemination of inclusive histories; 2) efforts to inclusively commemorate and memorialize individuals and collectives who have shaped the University of Richmond; 3) contemporary issues and problems intimately tied to the legacies of Richmond's complex pasts; 4) and contemporary policies and their implications.

With an emphasis on student research and place-based, community engaged learning, this new organization will contribute to a critically and thoughtfully self-reflective campus environment. It will encourage and support students who seek to contribute to these emerging histories of the University through coursework, fellowships, internships, and travel. This support may include but is not limited to:

- (1) faculty development (e.g., seminar series, summer institutes);
- (2) student research fellowships;
- (3) student, faculty, and staff research, travel, creative work, and internships;
- (3) conference participation and academic programming;
- (4) publications and digital initiatives.

Given the existing strengths upon which it could draw and amplify, this new umbrella organization is well-positioned to be a national leader. The immediacy of recent student activism surrounding Ryland Hall and Freeman Hall, the need to learn more about these figures and the history of enslaved people at UR, and the growing body of research on the history of race in the 20th century at UR generated by the Race and Racism Project, present a timely opportunity to pilot the Learning in Place Initiative in 2019-20.

Building on the model developed by the Race & Racism Project—which features thematically designed courses, cohort-building summer research opportunities, and collaborative public research and presentations involving faculty, students, staff, alumni, and community partners—the Learning in Place pilot would explore the viability of mechanisms for strategically connecting academically grounded work aimed at generating a more inclusive history at the University of Richmond.

The Learning in Place pilot would harness faculty expertise and center student learning, integrating the research completed over the course of the 2019-2020 academic year into a digital archive that builds on and connects to the Race & Memory Project (formerly Race & Racism Project) digital collection, which would serve as an institutional repository for documents and resources illuminating dimensions of the University's history and identity. The Learning in Place initiative would reaffirm the University's commitment to excavating the many intersectional identities defining the community's constituents, seeking to institutionalize successful prototypes in a larger, cross-school, sustained organization that have been heretofore temporary and located in one school.

To pilot Learning in Place, we recommend the following:

- Reconfigure a current faculty member's role for 2019-20 to teach a reduced load and serve as the Director of Institutional History and Identity. Reporting to the Provost's office, this

position would pilot the Learning in Place Initiative, and be responsible for: examining, analyzing, and sharing research on Ryland and Freeman; informing campus conversations on the WC and RC resolution; and examining, analyzing, and sharing research on enslaved people on campus to guide memorialization discussions about the enslaved burial ground. This work would draw from the existing digital collections developed by Race & Memory Project to fill in the archival gaps and weave a comprehensive narrative.

- The Director would teach a 2-1 load and, when appropriate, will connect the courses to the research being undertaken.
  - The Director would manage a part-time research coordinator who would mine the VBHS archive for materials and support faculty teaching courses tied to Learning in Place, including those connected with the Race & Memory Project. The Director and research coordinator—with possible support from the Digital Engagement team in the Library— would create and maintain a website with primary sources related to the aforementioned areas of research and additional readings to provide accessible historical context for the University community.
  - The Director and research coordinator would support paid graduate and undergraduate student researchers to delve into the topics of focus for 2019-20, providing mentorship on archival work and public history. In the application process for these research fellowships, student fellows from the Race & Racism Project would receive priority consideration.
  - The Director would mentor, along with several faculty and staff, a cohort of summer fellows in 2020. The research coordinator would be responsible for administering the logistics of the summer fellows program.
- To further support the Learning in Place initiative's goal of providing distinctive, applied learning experiences for students, the Provost's office would issue a call for proposals to create a small faculty learning community (approximately 4-5 faculty), which would collaborate with the Director and foster intellectual engagement on the University's history. Selected faculty would work closely with the Director during the fall 2019 semester and develop new courses or course modules during the spring 2020 semester that engage students in researching, analyzing, and sharing new knowledge about the University's past. Participating faculty in the Learning in Place initiative would receive a \$1200 stipend to support the development of their new courses and course modules and participate in the learning community. Their students could generate content for the growing digital archive.
  - Fund and support a cohort of summer research fellows and faculty/staff mentors in 2020 to continue exploring the history of race on campus as well as examining other untold stories. (See above for mentoring and supervisory structure.)
  - Continue to share the faculty and student work produced through a searchable archive with possible support from the Digital Engagement staff at the Library.

This new umbrella organization will need to collaborate with stakeholders to ensure existing programs and projects are properly integrated and aligned, working closely with the CCE and UR Downtown, the Digital Scholarship Lab, Boatwright Memorial Library, and the new Teaching and Scholarship Hub. At the same time, we believe that the long-term success of President Crutcher's

call to “acknowledge and communicate our history inclusively” hinges on the creation of a robust institutional infrastructure and a significant investment of resources, including funding, faculty and staff personnel, technology, and logistical support. This new academically grounded venture will contribute to the thriving Richmond to which we aspire. The focused pilot in 2019-20 will lay a foundation for exploring and evaluating a more robust infrastructure to support Learning in Place in the future.

The creation of a such a distinctive organization would demonstrate the University of Richmond’s commitment to being a responsible partner in our community, invested in addressing critical societal issues as we prepare educated, engaged leaders who are cognizant of and prepared to exercise their civic responsibilities and to understand UR and Richmond in place.

### **Virginia Baptist Historical Society (VBHS) and the University Archives**

As a distinct legal entity residing within the University community since 1876, the Virginia Baptist Historical Society (VBHS) serves as the designated repository of the Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV). As such, the VBHS has accrued singular status among similar organizations due to the particular nature, age, size and significance of its holdings and its nearly 150-year role in the field. It is unique among peer organizations, due to the custodianship and maintenance of its own collection, employment of its own staff, robust programming and publishing, and annual support from the denomination. VBHS is governed by a twenty-person self-perpetuating Executive Committee drawn from members across the Commonwealth and beyond.

The VBHS holds the historic church records of over 500 congregations, as well as the papers of numerous Baptist leaders and organizations, the complete Religious Herald (from 1828), an extensive library, art, artifacts and a small museum gallery. A significant emphasis is the Virginia Baptists’ role in securing full religious liberty for those of all faiths and none. The church records also contain information about thousands of free and enslaved people, making the archive a rich source for African American history as well.

The same Virginia Baptists whose story is chronicled in the VBHS founded the University of Richmond. In order to train clergymen, they established the University as the flagship educational institution for Virginia Baptists and nurtured it self-sacrificially, even in periods of deep financial hardship. The building itself, designed and designated as a permanent home for VBHS, is a gift from the Baptist women of Virginia, and was intended to stand as a “living memorial” to the religious liberty struggle of Virginia Baptists by providing far more educational and enduring historical value than any static monument.

In light of this shared history, the University invited the VBHS in 1981 to develop and administer the University Archives, based on an agreement between the two entities through the involvement of the Board of Trustees. This arrangement was reaffirmed in the 1999 agreement which created the Center for Baptist Heritage and Studies (based at the VBHS), while dissolving the formal institutional relationship between the BGAV and UR. Thus, the current archival management agreement also involves the Center, another distinct legal entity with its own Board of Directors.

While the University Archives (UA) was originally envisioned as a repository for materials related to the history and culture of the University, the Society has not received the level of financial support necessary to embrace the rapid technological change of recent decades (c. \$37,000 annually). In

spite of significant under-compensation, the VBHS has faithfully administered the UA within these limitations and now welcomes the opportunity to focus on its core specialization. With the right financial offsets, continuing regard for the autonomy of the organization, its historically designated space, and respect for the ownership of its collection and responsibility to broader constituencies, VBHS could confidently and appropriately transfer the administration of University Archives to the direct care of the University in a manner that is beneficial to all. Furthermore, VBHS can continue to offer endless research potential for those seeking to better understand the cultural and historical context in which the University originated and developed over time.

We recommend moving the University Archives out of the VBHS while simultaneously preserving and deepening collaboration between the two institutions. Specifically, we recommend:

#### *The University Archives*

- Physical removal of the files collected since 1981 from the VBHS into an alternative space within the University or a new, purpose-built space that meets all archival standards and is open to the public;
- The creation of a university archives program within the university's institutional structure, including the hiring of a full-time, professionally trained university archivist/records manager;
- The development and implementation of a comprehensive records management plan for the University, to include born-digital records.

#### *The Virginia Baptist Historical Society*

- The endowment, with University or philanthropic financial support, of a fund for the VBHS to replace in perpetuity the revenue lost from the sundering of its historic agreement with the University;
- Recognition of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society Wing of Boatwright Memorial Library as permanent VBHS space, designated as such to honor the sacrificial giving of Blanche Sydnor White and others;
- Expansion of access to its materials by enabling patrons to search for and request items electronically, and by extending operating hours.

#### *New Initiatives*

- Fund and enable projects such as the digitization of papers of denominational leaders, university-related materials, registers, and associated documents of enslaved and free Black Virginians;
- Work with the VBHS to gain permission to digitize the records of Virginia Baptist churches that possess valuable genealogical materials for descendants of enslaved people;
- Assist the VBHS with integrating the collection's descriptive information within the library's catalog and archival discovery services.

## Opportunities and Challenges

A thriving University Archives within the institutional structure of the University of Richmond and in collaboration with VBHS would allow for the following opportunities:

- Greatly expand opportunities for research and scholarship for students, faculty, alumni, staff, scholars, and family and community members to conduct research in primary historical records of the university;
- Provide convenient and accessible onsite and online access to the University's historical records;
- Ensure the University's extensive historical records are preserved, organized, and accessible;
- Offer guidance on the management of those historical records, their collection and use.

To ensure success of this work and the permanent preservation of its history and identity in the form of a thriving and inclusive University Archives program, the University should address and commit to supporting a robust set of fiscal, space, and staffing needs, highlighted by the following:

- *Space:* The library has been strongly advocating the need for additional space, especially for the archives, for a number of years. These considerations are in alignment with space studies currently being completed by the University .
- *Staff:* Create a new position, with VBHS input, of University Archivist/Records Manager reporting through the library's organizational structure. Additionally, the University should support a position within the VBHS with the primary work of liaising with the University Archives on University-related materials, digitization, and research to facilitate ongoing cooperation between the individual collections.
- *Budget:* Permanently fund the University Archives to ensure staff, research, digitization, technology, training, furnishings, supplies, and other needs are adequately addressed.

The foundation of the University is built on its recorded and unrecorded history. Committing to the development of a vibrant, robust, and inclusive archival program within the institutional structure would ensure the unfolding history of the University of Richmond is preserved and made accessible to diverse audiences near and far.

## Commission Membership

Edward Ayers, President Emeritus and Tucker-Boatwright Professor of the Humanities (co-chair)

Lauranett Lee, Visiting Lecturer, Jepson School of Leadership Studies (co-chair)

Ayele d'Almeida, '20, Race and Racism Project student research fellow

Gill Hickman, Professor Emerita

Amy Howard, AVP for Community Initiatives & CCE

Charles Irons, Professor of History and Chair of the Department of History and Geography, Elon University

The Honorable Roger L. Gregory, Trustee *Emeritus*

Lynda Kachurek, Head of Rare Books and Special Collections, Boatwright Memorial Library

Craig Kocher, University Chaplain

Nicole Maurantonio, Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Communication Studies

Marilyn Branch Mitchell, W'78

Greg Mitchell, R'80

Nathan Taylor, Executive Director, Virginia Baptist Historical Society

Suzanne F. Thomas, W'61, Trustee

Doug Winiarski, Professor of Religion and American Studies

Ashleigh Brock, '05, Assistant to the President, *ex officio*, staff to the Commission