

For the Religious Herald.
A Card.

A friend has just informed me that an individual, formerly a resident of Richmond, had reported in the county of Madison, that I am an abolitionist, and had dissuaded at least three gentlemen from sending their sons to Richmond College. Personally I would not care for such a report, as I am somewhat accustomed to slander, but for the sake of the College and my associates in its management, I feel it my duty to say that I was born and raised in Virginia, have always lived, and expect to continue to live, in my native State, and to feel heartily identified with her interests; that I own about a dozen slaves; that I have never manumitted one, and do not design doing so; that I do not think emancipation safe or humane to either master or servant; that I have no sympathy or correspondence with the abolitionists; and that I do not think it morally wrong under existing circumstances to hold slaves. The

Feb 3	Salary Ryland	76.00
March 15	Jan. 1850	825.00
June 10	July 2	70.00
July 1	Aug 1	465.00
July 2	Aug 1	315.00
July 2	Aug 1	145.00
July 2	Aug 1	300.00
July 2	Aug 1	124.00
July 2	Aug 1	35.00
July 2	Aug 1	10.00
July 2	Aug 1	65.00

Sal. Ryland 37.00
Total Salary for 1850 is \$1763.00
Average Salary for 6 years is \$1763.00
Total for 6 years is \$10578.00



Rev. ROBERT RYLAND, D.D.

at Washington next winter that if it will send me. I have seen an account of the college in the Columbian Star which says the expenses in no case whatever during the last year exceeded 2000 that is for board, tuition, washing, fuel and candles &c. it was likewise spoken of very highly both as a literary & religious institution, lab-

“A Season of Discipline”: Enslavement, Education, & Faith in the Life of Robert Ryland

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Submitted with Lauranett L. Lee, Ph.D., January 2021

would rejoice where now it mourns. This is the second case of a colored person registered on my book who brought a spontaneous offering to the cause. The first was a woman belonging to the family of Bro. O. T. Mitchell of Louisa. Giving me twenty five cents with a cheerful smile that bespoke the pleasure of the deed she said "Take this—I have no learning myself but I want others to have it." In that family I saw five generations standing in the group—the child—the mother—the grand-mother—the great grand mother—and the great, great grand mother. The donor of the twenty five cents was one of the links in this chain. Her name is "Sophy"—a name that is registered among the founders of Richmond College.

Yours, &c.,
R. RYLAND.

For the Religious Herald.

Images: (above) Detail, Robert Ryland, [Letter to the Editor], *Religious Herald*, December 4, 1845, Virginia Baptist Historical Society (VBHS); (cover) [*Richmond, Va. First African Church Broad Street.*] Richmond, Virginia, 1865, Library of Congress; Portrait, Robert Ryland, Robert Ryland Papers (RRP), 04.005, VBHS; Robert Ryland, "A Card," *Religious Herald*, September 14, 1858, VBHS; Robert Ryland, "Private Receipts for 1859," Ledger II, RRP, 55.2.073, VBHS; Detail, Robert Ryland to Josephine Ryland, August 9, 1831, RRP, 16.034, VBHS; Detail, Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, April 19, 1823, RRP, 1.005-006, VBHS; Michie & Michler, Detail, Engineers Map, Library of Congress; Detail, Albert H. Campbell and Jedediah Hotchkiss, and Jeremy Francis Gilmer, *Map of part of Essex, King and Queen, and King William Counties*, [1863], Library of Congress.

“A Season of Discipline”: Enslavement, Education & Faith in the Life of Robert Ryland

Shelby M. Driskill, Research Coordinator, University of Richmond Inclusive History Project, January 19, 2021

Submitted with Laurant L. Lee, Ph.D., Historical Consultant, University of Richmond Inclusive History Project

As we are bound to recognize the hand of God in controlling the nations of the earth, we naturally inquire what was His purpose in permitting these people first to be brought to this country, and then, after a season of discipline to be set free? To my mind it does not seem presumptuous to infer that the Benignant Being had in view, first, the salvation of a vast throng of benighted souls, who would not otherwise have been saved, and then to send them and their descendants, properly qualified to illumine the two hundred millions of Africans yet in darkness with the light of the gospel.

Robert Ryland writing in 1897 of those who were once enslaved, in *The Colored People* (1898)

Content Notice: Robert Ryland and his contemporaries used the terms “colored” and “negro” to denote Black people. That language is included in quoted portions of this report. It also contains racial slurs and accounts of violence, racism, death, dying, and murder.

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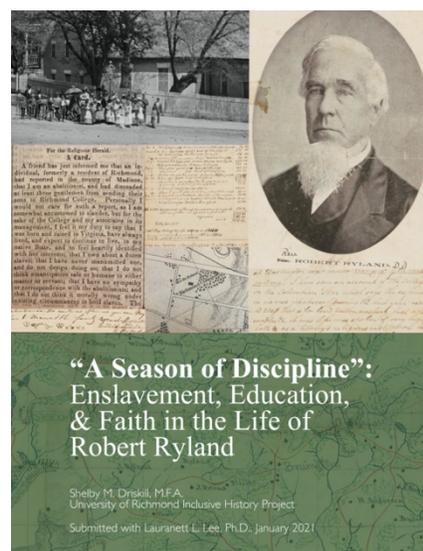
“A SEASON OF DISCIPLINE”: ENSLAVEMENT, EDUCATION & FAITH IN THE LIFE OF ROBERT RYLAND

Shelby M. Driskill, Research Coordinator, University of Richmond Inclusive History Project, January 29, 2021

Submitted with Lauranett L. Lee, Ph.D., Historical Consultant, University of Richmond Inclusive History Project, January 29, 2021

SUMMARY

In Fall 2019, following the July 8, 2019 release of [Making Excellence Inclusive: University Report and Recommendations](#), and supported by the findings of the Presidential Commission for University History and Identity, the University of Richmond established a research initiative organized by Dr. Amy Howard and led by Dr. Lauranett L. Lee. The Inclusive History Project was tasked with the study of three subjects: the burying ground on the campus of the University of Richmond; the first president of the institution, Robert Ryland; and former trustee and rector, Douglas Southall Freeman. The considerations of Robert Ryland and Douglas Southall Freeman were prompted by the joint resolution of the Westhampton College and Richmond College Student Government, “On Changing the Narrative: Regarding Building Names.”¹ In undertaking this research, the University of Richmond is committed to providing a more holistic narrative of its own history, one that is more complete and accurate. The reports are not intended to reach any conclusions nor are they meant to offer recommendations. They are designed to provide a thorough and accurate record that will augment existing accounts of institutional history and further future conversations centered on these subjects.



Robert Ryland (1805-1899), for whom a portion of Ryland Hall is named, was one of the institution’s earliest leaders. After serving as principal/superintendent of Virginia Baptist Seminary from 1832-1840, he became the first president of Richmond College and the president of the Board of Trustees. Both the seminary and the college were precursors to the University of Richmond. Ryland continued to lead the institution until his resignation in 1866 and over those decades he exerted a singular influence on its growth. His early efforts to stabilize and develop the seminary and the college have been recognized as largely responsible for the existence of the university.

¹ [“On Changing the Narrative: Regarding Building Names”]. *The Collegian*, [n.d.], web, [link](#). The Joint Resolution was passed by the Richmond College and Westhampton College Student Government Associations on April 3, 2019. It was sent to the Interim Coordinating Council and to the Vice President for Student Development, Student Development Division. The resolution was co-authored by A. J. Polcari (class of 2021) and Caroline Schiavo.

Ryland was also a Baptist minister and a major figure in the history of Virginia Baptists. Between 1841 and 1865, he was pastor of Richmond's First African Baptist Church, and he served in leadership roles in numerous Baptist organizations.

Education and ministry were Ryland's twin commitments. From his earliest association with what would become the university, he believed that the strength of the institution was drawn from its commitment to a robust liberal arts education. His spiritual life and pastoral work were animated by his belief in equal access to biblical teaching and the equality of souls. These convictions were central to his work at First African Baptist Church, where he was and is credited by some with preserving a space for the self-governance and religious expression of the church's Black congregants despite what historian and University of Richmond President Emeritus Edward L. Ayers describes as a "compromised form of the church."² Ryland's convictions regarding spiritual equality did not extend to a belief in racial equality. He was, in the words of an 1867 item in the *Religious Herald* a "divine right of slavery" Baptist, and he, like a number of antebellum religious figures, viewed enslavement as an instrument of God.³ Despite antislavery leanings in his college years, when he once referred to enslavement as "legalized crime," by the time Ryland became affiliated with the institution he was both enslaving people and hiring them out, leasing them to others for profit. Virginia Baptist Seminary and Richmond College were among the entities that paid Ryland for the labor of those he enslaved. He and others working on behalf of the institution also paid "hire" for other enslaved people who worked on the campus, and enslaved laborers were vital to the day-to-day operations there. The institutional use of hired enslaved laborers who worked on the campus for faculty and students was also under the oversight of the Board of Trustees. No evidence has been located in the course of research for this study indicating that the institution itself enslaved people. Instead, it regularly used enslaved labor by, in effect, renting men and women from individual enslavers or hiring agents.

The Robert Ryland Study was charged with providing 1.) a comprehensive biography of Robert Ryland, with particular attention paid to the ways that his academic and ministerial work intersected with enslavement; 2.) a determination of the degree to which he used the labor of those he enslaved, or the enslaved labor of others, in the running of the institution; and 3.) an overview of his contributions to a.) the formation of the University of Richmond, b.) Virginia Baptists, and c.) religious freedom in Virginia. This report, "*A Season of Discipline*": *Enslavement, Faith & Education in the Life of Robert Ryland*, provides the requested information. This summary provides an overview of the report findings.

EARLY YEARS TO 1832

Robert Ryland's family was deeply connected to the local Baptist congregation at Bruington Baptist Church in King & Queen County, Virginia, and his parents also held daily worship in their household. His father, Josiah Ryland, often hosted Baptist leaders in his home and Robert Ryland recalled that it was "a common resort for preachers whose discourse, in the private circle, often

² Edward L. Ayers, "The Trials of Robert Ryland," *Baptist History & Heritage* 48, no. 2 (2013), 13.

³ "Anti-Slavery Baptists," *Religious Herald*, October 17, 1867, Virginia Baptist Historical Society (VBHS).

turned upon spiritual topics.” This environment, and the pastoral influence of Bruington Baptist Church pastor, Robert Baylor Semple, established a spiritual path for Ryland that would eventually lead him to the ministry. When he was sixteen, Ryland felt he had missed a calling from God when he chose to attend school rather than a week-day spiritual meeting. His regret over his choice was a pivotal moment and for “three years, without any change of purpose” he prepared for his baptism at the age of nineteen.⁴

Ryland was raised at Farmington, his father’s plantation in King & Queen County, which was operated using the labor of both enslaved and free people. According to the 1820 Federal Census, Josiah Ryland enslaved thirty-five people who were forced to provide domestic, agricultural, and other labor to the family. Nineteen free Black people also worked on the Ryland property.⁵ Ryland later recalled “about forty negroes of all ages between infancy and decrepitude” at Farmington, and he detailed his playing with enslaved children and being cared for by enslaved adults.⁶

Inspired by Robert Baylor Semple, Ryland attended boarding school at Humanity Hall in Hanover County where he studied the classics and other subjects. Thomas Nelson, the teacher who ran the school in the vein of Peter Nelson, Semple’s former instructor, enslaved thirty-one people in 1820. That number is likely reflective of the number who were there when Ryland attended the school.⁷ In 1823, Ryland wrote an emotional letter to his father, building a variety of arguments for why Josiah Ryland should send him to Columbian College in Washington, D.C. rather than establishing him with a farm or other means of income: “I can not [sic] value money so highly,” Robert Ryland wrote, “as to prefer it to education.”⁸

At Columbian College, Ryland at times felt out of place socially and spiritually. He found the students there to be “extravagant & indiscreet young men,” declared his own class standing “not

⁴ Robert Ryland, “My Experience and Call to the Ministry,” *The Colloquium*, clipping dated 1889 in appended document, Robert Ryland Papers (RRP), 51.044-045, VBHS.

⁵ United States, Federal Census of 1820, St. Stephens, King & Queen County, Virginia, “Ryland, Josiah,” 19; National Archives and Records Administration, Roll: M33_142; Image: 49. Nineteen people were included in the category “All other persons except Indians not taxed” which was added to distinguish between “the number of free colored persons and of slaves,” See “1820 Census Instructions to Enumerators,” United States Census Bureau, [link](#).

⁶ Robert Ryland, *The Colored People*, Baptist Mission Rooms: Baltimore, Maryland, 1898, 4-5, RRP, 3.059, VBHS. While Ryland does not use the word “slaves” here, he described “sympathizing with the young under their [his family’s] discipline” and not being allowed to “treat the old servants with any disrespect,” indicating that he was referring to enslaved people. Ryland’s overall focus in *The Colored People* was a consideration of the post-emancipation lives of formerly enslaved people and their descendants.

⁷ United States Federal Census, 1820, “Thomas Nelson,” Hanover, Virginia; 63, National Archives and Records Administration Roll: M33_138; Image: 78. While there are several entries for Thomas Nelson and Thomas Nelson, Jr., that which shows thirty-one enslaved people also shows thirty-eight “Free white persons – Males,” indicating the student population at the school.

⁸ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, April 19, 1823, RRP, 11.005-006, VBHS.

respectable,” and wrote that, “[a]mong the students I am unpopular.”⁹ Ryland eventually cultivated friends and acquaintances who were “pious” and who, he wrote, did not “retard me in my religious course.”¹⁰ Among them was Rollin H. Neale of Connecticut, who described Ryland as having given “the first anti-slavery speech I ever heard.”¹¹

Ryland’s antislavery leanings in his college years were captured in a college address he that gave on the subject of the American Colonization Society in 1824. The society was formed to transport free Black people to Liberia. Historian Samantha Seeley describes the organization as having “accommodated the varied interests of white slaveholders, ministers, reformers, and anti-slavery men who made up its founding members.”¹² Ryland was moved by the society’s work and, at the time, by the effect it might have on ending enslavement, ridding the United States of what he then called “legalized crime.” He only articulated full-throated antislavery sentiment a few times in his early adulthood, and his “Colonization Society” speech is the clearest example. In it he likened enslavement to a “devouring insect” that “continually riot[ed]” at the tree of liberty. He also hailed the role of education in marking an end to “this evil,” insisting that “the beam of science will chase away the gloom of ignorance, [and] peace & happiness will reign in the land.”¹³ Ryland’s vision of an ideal end to enslavement was contingent on the removal of Black people from the United States.

Throughout this period, Ryland honed his rhetorical skills and his ministerial thought by asking friends and family members to share their private religious struggles with him so he could guide them to a stronger relationship with God. His letters were sermon-like responses to deaths and other challenges they faced.¹⁴ He often expressed concern over the spiritual state of his mother and siblings, who at the time had not been baptized.¹⁵ After missionary work in eastern Virginia, Ryland had expected to teach at a school in Nashville, Tennessee. When the position promised to him was instead given to a friend who offered to accept a lower salary, Ryland shifted his focus to ministry.¹⁶ While his father offered him a farm and “all the appliances for its culture” if he would remain in King & Queen County and work under Semple, Ryland was concerned at operating in the pastor’s shadow and being limited to part-time ministry. He instead sought a church in Lynchburg, Virginia.¹⁷

⁹ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, February 25, 1824, RRP, 11.008-010, VBHS.

¹⁰ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, October 20, 1824, RRP, 11.011-013, VBHS.

¹¹ [Rollin H. Neale] R.H.N., “Reminiscence of College Days,” RRP, 10.010, VBHS.

¹² Samantha Seeley, “Beyond the American Colonization Society,” *History Compass*, 14 (3), 93.

¹³ Robert Ryland, “The Colonization Society,” RRP 26.026, VBHS.

¹⁴ Letter, Robert Ryland to “Baylor Semple, Jr.” [Robert Baylor Semple, Jr.], November 2, 1825, RRP, 14.004, VBHS.

¹⁵ Letter, Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, October 20, 1824, RRP, 11.011, VBHS.

¹⁶ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, December 9, 1826, RRP, 11.017, VBHS; Ryland, “Call to the Ministry,” [1889?]; Robert Ryland, [Timeline], Ledger 1, 11, RRP, 55.1.011, VBHS.

¹⁷ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, August 1827, RRP, 11.024, VBHS; Robert Ryland, “An Historical Address,” 1886, RRP, 51.027, VBHS.

He began leading a small congregation that had broken away from the existing Baptist church there and also reached out to “poor families” in the city.¹⁸ After beginning his ministry by holding services in the Masonic Hall, Ryland was well positioned to capture the religious enthusiasm of the Second Great Awakening, and his congregation grew quickly, expanding enough to justify the construction of a permanent church. Ryland preached before white and Black congregants during his Lynchburg years. One of his most vivid accounts of the period focused on York Woodson, a formerly enslaved Black minister, whom Ryland recalled being an extraordinary man and a talented speaker. When Woodson was forbidden from preaching after Nat Turner’s Rebellion in Southampton, Virginia, Ryland went to the city’s mayor on his behalf, hoping to ensure that Woodson could continue to preach freely.¹⁹ While the mayor said police would look the other way, he also made it clear that he would have to impose the “penalty” if Woodson were officially reported. The penalty was being whipped, “not exceeding thirty-nine lashes,” and this risk prevented Woodson from resuming his ministry. Ryland was convinced that Woodson’s loss of ministerial purpose resulted in the man’s early death “of a broken heart.”²⁰

Ryland married Josephine Norvell in 1830 after a courtship that was often focused on her spirituality. Their purchase of a home coincided with the appearance of enslaved people in Ryland’s highly detailed ledger of expenses and receipts. His expenses of 1831 show the purchase of shoes for an enslaved woman named Mary. A letter he wrote refers to her behavior being unacceptable and his hope that an enslaved man his father was sending to him would behave differently than Mary.²¹ Ryland’s February 1832 entries showed that Mary had been joined by two other enslaved people,

¹⁸ Robert Ryland, “An Historical Address,” 1886.

¹⁹ Nat Turner’s Rebellion began in Southampton County, Virginia on the night of August 21, 1831. Turner was an enslaved man driven by what were described as religious visions and potentially his reaction to his child being used by his enslaver as collateral on a debt (David Allmendinger, *Nat Turner and the Rising in Southampton County*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (2014), 63-67). Nat Turner enlisted a group of enslaved men in a plan to execute a targeted revolt, focused on killing white people “with their own weapons.” From the night of the 21st to the afternoon of the 23rd, the men killed fifty-five white people (Patrick H. Breen, “Nat Turner’s Revolt (1831),” *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Humanities, June 18, 2019, accessed Dec. 14, 2020). One of the key results of the rebellion was the crackdown on gatherings of free and enslaved Black people. Some believed that Black ministry was the heart of the rebellion, and when the Virginia General Assembly passed laws in response to it on March 15, 1832, constraints on preaching were mentioned first. Even ordained ministers were no longer allowed to assemble for religious purposes, whether free or enslaved. The punishment was “stripes... not exceeding thirty-nine lashes” (Commonwealth of Virginia, *Acts Passed at a General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia*, Richmond, Virginia: Thomas Ritchie, 1832), 20–22).

²⁰ Robert Ryland, “York Woodson: The Colored Preacher,” in “The Co-Worker,” a column in unnamed publication, handwritten note from Robert Ryland, “Published by the First Baptist Church[,] Lynchburg, Va,” RRP, 08.033, VBHS; Commonwealth of Virginia, *Journal of the House of Delegates, 1831-1832*, Bill no. 18, Richmond: Thomas Ritchie (1832), 1 [printed page number; 759 in digital version of *Journal*], Hathi Trust Digital Library, [link](#); Virginia, Laws Passed, March 15 1832, Chapter XXII, Nat Turner Project, [link](#).

²¹ Robert Ryland, Ledger 1, RRP 55.1.021, VBHS; Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, November 7, 1831, RRP, 11.044, VBHS.

Sam and Maria.²² All three of them relocated with Robert and Josephine Ryland when he accepted the position of Principal at Virginia Baptist Seminary in Henrico County, Virginia.

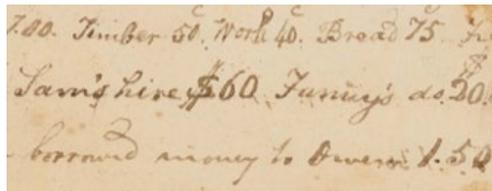
²² Robert Ryland, Ledger I, RRP 55.1.021-023, VBHS.

INSTITUTIONAL BEGINNINGS

While the Virginia Baptist Seminary began at Spring Farm in Henrico County, it grew out of two home-based education centers. One was at Dunlora plantation in Powhatan County, which was operated by Edward Baptist on the land of his sister, Ann Hickman.

According to the 1830 Federal Census, Hickman enslaved fifty-seven people on the property.²³ The other center was operated in Henrico County by missionary and minister, Eli Ball.²⁴ Spring Farm was purchased to provide education to potential ministers, but Ryland's emphasis was on the liberal arts, which he believed would "prepare the student for those sacred subjects."²⁵ The seminary was established on a manual labor system which required students to contribute three hours of labor a day to the farm, and they were then paid out of the proceeds from the sale of farm yields.²⁶ The labor of students did not substitute for the use of enslaved labor. Before the arrival of the first seminary students, Ryland had agreed to serve in an additional role as steward of the institution, overseeing its buildings and operations and managing the board of the students. As part of his employment agreement with the Baptist Education Society he provided the labor of Sam, an enslaved child who had been given to him by his father. Ryland described Sam as a "boy" at the time, and census data indicates that he was fifteen at the oldest.²⁷ At the seminary, both Sam and Ryland's furniture would be "used... as common stock" by the institutional community.²⁸ The next year, Ryland asked his father to give him more "servants" to labor at the seminary. In a letter to his wife, who was then staying with her Ryland in-laws, he wrote,

I wish you to ask Papa to let me know distinctly and as soon as possible how many servants he can let me have at the beginning of next year. He did not say positively that he would not give me any at all, so I will thank him to say what servants he will give, that I may make my



"Expenses of the Boarding Department... 1834," Ledger I, 55.1.033, VBHS

²³ United States, *Federal Census of 1830*, "Ann Hickman," Powhatan, Virginia; Series: M19; roll: 193; page: 258; Family History Library Film: 0029672.

²⁴ Reuben E. Alley. *History of the University of Richmond: 1830-1971*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia [Published for the University of Richmond] (1977), 14.

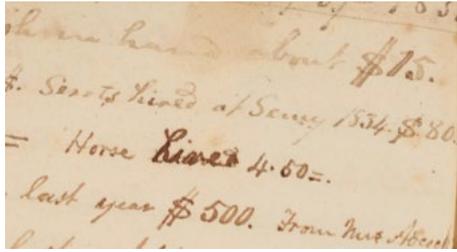
²⁵ Robert Ryland, *A Sermon Delivered Before the Baptist Education Society of Virginia*, July 4, 1836, Richmond: Wm. Sands (1836), 15, VBHS.

²⁶ Robert Ryland, *The Society – The Seminary – The College: An Address*, Library: Richmond College (1891), 11-12; Ryland, Ledger I, RRP, 55.1.06.

²⁷ United States, *Federal Census of 1840*, "Robt Ryland," Henrico County, Virginia; Series: M704; roll 561 of 580 rolls; page 264; Family History Library Film: 0029687, Ancestry.com. Among those Ryland enslaved in 1840, there were two males, one under the age of 10 and one between 10 and 23. That information only narrows Sam's age to being between 2-15 years of age in 1832 when Ryland wrote of his use at the seminary. Research has not yet yielded additional means of specifying his age.

²⁸ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 7, 1832. RRP 11.048-049, VBHS.

arrangements accordingly - i.e. hire others if necessary. Ask him to say the same as to the cows. I can't think he will decline giving me some servants and some cows.²⁹



"Receipts (on private account) of 1835," Ledger I, 55.1.036, VBHS

By 1835, Ryland was recording "Sam's hire" and that of Fanny in the expenses of the institution's Boarding Department and the payments for their "hire" in his personal receipts.³⁰ Three years later, Ryland attributed the stillbirth of one of his children to his wife's exhaustion caused, he wrote his father, by "several of the negroes pretend[ing] to be sick."³¹ It appears that Mary was the caregiver for his youngest child. Mary was never indicated in Boarding Department expenses, so she was evidently not formally

hired out to the seminary. She died in 1837.³² Recalling his time as a student at the seminary, Charles Lewis Cocke, who was later a professor at Richmond College as well as the campus steward, described the very early seminary students as not receiving the sort of "attendance" they would later be provided, and wrote that at the time the "servants" only entered students' rooms to fill the lamps "with an inferior grade of oil."³³

Ryland's thoughts on enslavement during the seminary period were distilled in an open letter published in the *Religious Herald* and republished in the *Christian Watchman* in 1835. He had written it in response to the publication of Francis Wayland's textbook, *The Elements of Moral Science* in which Wayland devoted a section to questioning the morality of enslavement. Ryland wrote that he found parts of Wayland's thoughts on enslavement to be "manly and just," and that he himself considered enslavement wrong "in the abstract;" however, he then outlined what he believed to be three "difficulties" associated with manumission and an end to "domestic slavery":

1. Some enslaved people could not care for themselves and "benevolence" required that they remain enslaved;
2. Virginia law demanded that freed people leave the state and "servants of humane masters... prefer their present bondage to expatriation and freedom;"
3. The labor most often done by enslaved people had always been done by them. Referring to "the drudgery of domestic business," Ryland wrote, "slaves have always performed it." It would be "impossible to find white persons among us who can be obtained on wages to do

²⁹ Robert Ryland to Josephine Ryland, October 7, 1833, RRP 16.069, VBHS.

³⁰ Robert Ryland, "Boarding Department of 1835," Ledger I, RRP, 55.1.033; "Receipts on Private account for 1836" Ledger I, RRP, 55.1.041, VBHS.

³¹ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 17, 1835, RRP, 11.055, VBHS.

³² Robert Ryland to Elizabeth Ryland Willis, December 26, 1838, typescript, RRP, 15.044, VBHS.

³³ Charles L. Cocke, "Incidents in Early Life," *The Richmond College Messenger*, March 1900," Charles L. Cocke Papers, Hollins University.

this work” because “respectable” white people were “too high-minded” for this sort of labor and the “indolent and vicious will come and receive the wages but will not do the work.”³⁴



“Columbia,” in *A Richmond College Picture Book* (1911)

At the institution, the seminary’s “farm experiment” had not succeeded. Spring Farm was at a significant distance from the city and the crops planted there had not thrived. In 1835, Virginia Baptist Seminary relocated to the Columbia estate formerly owned by the Haxall family, and it remained there until 1914 when Richmond College moved to the current site of the University of Richmond. At the new location, Ryland and his family lived in the main college building along with members of the faculty. Crops were planted around the property and enslaved people continued to work at the seminary, both those who were enslaved by Ryland and those who

were hired from other enslavers or agents. For some people recorded on the ledger pages showing expenses of the Boarding Department, Ryland used the term hire, as in paying “Caroline’s hire,” while for others he simply noted a payment or a wage. Among those for whom he used the term “hire” were the people he himself enslaved, Sam and Fanny. Others for whom he paid “hire” during the seminary period were Caroline, Isabella, Nancy, Celia, Albert, Abby and Christian.³⁵

Between 1836 and 1837, Ryland spent one year as the Chaplain of the University of Virginia. There he advocated for temperance among university students and, while a congregant at Charlottesville’s Baptist Church, he waded into a doctrinal controversy. He was referred to as a “young hero” by Peter Fossett, a man formerly enslaved by Thomas Jefferson, for his leadership during a reform crisis in the church.³⁶ During this period Ryland’s wife and his mother-in-law ran the boarding operation at the seminary. In 1837, the child of a woman who was hired out to the institution visited his mother there and brought smallpox to the campus. In an item placed in the *Religious Herald* by Ryland and other members of a Virginia Baptist Education Society committee, the child was described as having been hired out to “one of the factories” in Richmond.³⁷ No information has been found on who enslaved the mother and child and hired them out to the seminary and the factory.

³⁴ Robert Ryland, “To Dr. Wayland,” *Christian Watchman*, August 21, 1835, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank.

³⁵ Robert Ryland, Ledger I, “Boarding Department of 1835 (second term),” RRP, 55.1.039; “Expenses of the Boarding Dept 1838,” RRP, 55.1.057; “Expenses of the Boarding Department 1839 2nd Session,” 55.1.062; Ledger II, “Expenses of the Boarding Department 1840 1st session,” RRP, 55.2.006, VBHS.

³⁶ [Peter Fossett] in “Once the Slave of Thomas Jefferson,” *The World* (New York, NY), January 30, 1898, Newspapers.com, and at “Recollections of Peter Fossett,” Monticello.org, [link](#).

³⁷ “Notice,” *Religious Herald*, January 13, 1837, 7, col. 2, VBHS.

The use of enslaved labor on the campus continued after the institution's charter as Richmond College in 1840.

AT RICHMOND COLLEGE (1840-1861)

1840-1849

ADMINISTRATION

Following the charter of the college, Ryland was president of both the institution and its Board of Trustees. He worked as the General Agent, seeking funds for the college, and wrote frequent items in the *Religious Herald* sharing news of the institution and reaching out to potential students and their parents.³⁸ In his fundraising role, he recorded financial gifts to the college in regular items placed in the newspaper. In 1845, he contributed a series of letters to the *Religious Herald* detailing a combination vacation/fundraising tour, and in one he wrote of the contribution of a Black man named Ralph Perry. He also noted the contribution of twenty-five cents given by an enslaved woman named Sophy. Ryland wrote that she gave him the money saying, “Take this – I have no learning myself but I want others to have it.” He then described her as being “among the founders of Richmond College.”³⁹

Ryland recruited new faculty members, including the proslavery writer George Frederick Holmes, who only spent two years at Richmond College but was viewed as a highly significant hire.⁴⁰ Holmes was awarded an honorary doctorate by the institution in 1859.⁴¹ During the 1840s, Ryland was often a parental figure to students, encouraging self-reliance and discouraging the consumption of alcohol. Former students recalled him as blunt at times, but kind. One remembered often seeing Ryland through his office window at night and thinking, “[I]f I had to live the life he is leading, life would hardly be worth the sacrifice he is making.”⁴²

ENSLAVEMENT

Students and faculty at Richmond College would have interacted with enslaved people on campus in almost every aspect of daily life. They performed domestic labor including cooking and cleaning. They attended to students in the dining room, worked in the garden, tended their fires, filled the lamps in their rooms, and also cultivated and harvested the crops that were grown on the campus in its earliest years. At Richmond College, Ryland continued to fill the role of steward between 1840 and 1842 and recorded the names of additional people for whom the college paid “hire”: Nathan, Abbey, Rachel, Miles, Peter, and Hannah. These men and women were enslaved by unknown people. One woman who worked on the campus, Aggy Cooper, is known to have been a free Black person. Others referred to in the ledgers by first name only but without the “hire” distinction may

³⁸ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, June 7, 1842, University Archives, VBHS.

³⁹ Robert Ryland, [Letter to the Editor], *Religious Herald*, December 4, 1845. The details Ryland provides on Sophy include a description of her family and the name of the man who enslaved her which aligns with the federal census and other data. Details are included in the body of the report.

⁴⁰ “Southern Quarterly Review,” *Richmond Whig*, April 3, 1846, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank.

⁴¹ Alley, 40; Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, October 7, 1845 and March 2, 1847.

⁴² William F. Fleet to Robert Ryland, March 10, 1889, RRP, 40.128, VBHS.

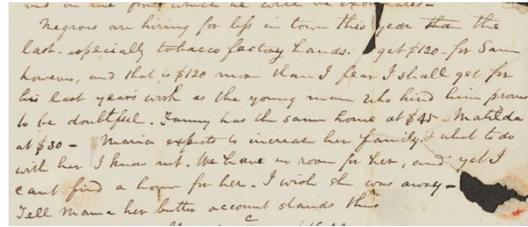
have been paid a direct wage. Some of these people could have been free. It is just as possible that they were “self-hired” enslaved people.

In the census of 1840, Ryland was recorded as the “head of the family” for the campus. His entry shows the students, his own family, and the teachers, totaling seventy-one “Free White Persons.” It also enumerates two “Free Colored Persons” and nine “Slaves.”⁴³

Ryland’s records indicate that he stopped hiring Fanny and Sam out to the institution in 1840. The two were instead hired out “in town.” By 1842, Sam was working in a tobacco factory while Fanny and Matilda were

hired out to homes.⁴⁴ He was also hiring out the labor of John, Matilda, Lucy, Maria, Thom/Tom, and Louisa between 1840 and 1849. In 1849, Ryland recorded that Sam had died of pneumonia after he had been unable to “get a home in town,” indicating that he may have been self-hired at that time. Ryland had brought him to Richmond College to work in the dining room and in the garden. After detailing Sam’s death, Ryland relayed that a man named John had also died. He had purchased John to prevent his being separated from his wife and the man was then attempting to purchase his freedom from Ryland. Ryland wrote that he had previously bought people in such situations but had decided to stop because he saw such purchases as an investment, expecting repayment with interest, and found that he was not repaid.⁴⁵

In 1842, Charles Lewis Cocke was hired as College Steward and took over the management of the enslaved and free workers on the campus. After handing the stewardship to Cocke, Ryland wrote that he was now relieved to “have less money to handle, less to do with Negroes, less collecting, less vexation of the spirit, but more leisure, more time to read & visit with friends.”⁴⁶ From a letter that Cocke wrote following his departure from Richmond College to assume the administration of what would become Hollins College, it appears that he was using those he enslaved or controlled in the operations of Richmond College: “I do not know yet whether I shall bring any of the servants



Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, January 4, 1842, RRP, 11.066, VBHS

⁴³ United States, Federal Census of 1840, “Robt Ryland,” Henrico, Virginia, National Archives Records Administration, Roll: 561, 264, census page 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Family History Library Film: 002968, Ancestry.com.

⁴⁴ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, January 4, 1842, RRP, 11.066, VBHS.

⁴⁵ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, May 5, 1849, RRP, file 11.074, VBHS; Robert Ryland to unknown recipient, January 11, 1848, American Colonization Society, American Colonization Society Records, Library of Congress; also accessed through Fold3.com. The date of the Ryland’s letter to his father relating the details of Sam and John letter appears to be 1849, however the last digit is incomplete. “1849?” was written at a later date on the outside of the letter. Details such as the pending graduation of Ryland’s nephew Josiah Ryland (1830-1903) and Poindexter S. Henson align with events in 1849.

⁴⁶ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, January 4, 1842, RRP, 11.066, VBHS. This excerpt appears in Alley, *University of Richmond*, 33, which was cited by Jennifer Oast in *Institutional Slavery: Slaveholding Churches, Schools, Colleges, and Businesses in Virginia, 1680-1860* (2016).

from Richmond College or not. I had much rather do so but the expense of getting them here will not justify my bringing them.”⁴⁷

On May 19, 1844, when the campus was still quite isolated and considered to be “in the country,” an enslaved infant was killed at Richmond College at 2:00 a.m. The child’s mother was accused of the murder. She was enslaved by “Mrs. Fox,” of King William County, formerly of Henrico County. This appears to be Mary Fox, the aunt of Charles Lewis Cocke. A member of the Richmond College Board of Trustees headed the inquest in the absence of the coroner, and another Board member was also on the panel.⁴⁸

In the recollections of Ryland’s nephew, Josiah Ryland (1830-1902), he detailed some of the Black people on campus: a woman he referred to as “Aunt Aggy,” who was likely Aggy Cooper, a man named Tom, who worked in the dining room and “serve[d] fifty hungry men at once,” and Cleber, who “kindled our morning fires.”⁴⁹ Robert Ryland enslaved a man named Tom who appeared in his records and ledger between 1848 and 1864.

PERSONAL LIFE

During this period, Ryland suffered the deaths of five of his children and, in 1846, that of his wife, Josephine Ryland. His grief for her was acute, and he was initially overwhelmed by the responsibility of caring for his young children. He married Betty Thornton Ryland in 1848 and the two remained together for the rest of his life. Ryland’s four surviving children from his marriage to Josephine Ryland and the three children he had with Betty Thornton Ryland all lived to old age.

⁴⁷ Charles L. Cocke to James Cocke, July 1, 1846, Charles L. Cocke Papers, Wyndam Robertson Library Special Collections, Hollins University. This excerpt is also quoted in Oast’s *Institutional Slavery* (2016).

⁴⁸ “Unidentified: Coroner’s Inquisition,” May 3, 1844, Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. Note, in some browsers the document and transcription is only visible when “Page turner” is selected from the pull-down menu. Mary Fox’s connections to Richmond College and Robert Ryland: Robert Ryland, “Acknowledgements,” March 14, 1844, *Religious Herald*, VBHS. Federal Census, 1860, King William County, Virginia, 34-35, Ancestry.com – note this is not Mary E. Fox whose property with Richard Fox adjoined William Ryland’s property; *Virginia Marriages, 1700-1850*, via ancestry.com, 645: Mary Burton of Henrico married James Fox of King William County in 1824. James Fox was the brother of Charles L. Cocke’s mother, Elizabeth Fox.

⁴⁹ Josiah Ryland (1830-1902), “Recollections of an Old Boy,” *The Messenger* 18, no. 4, 1894, 121, [link](#).

1850-1859

INSTRUCTION & ADMINISTRATION

In 1856, Robert Ryland was accused of using his position as professor of Moral Philosophy to promote abolitionist ideas to his Richmond College students. An anonymous writer to the *Richmond Enquirer* wrote that Ryland was using a textbook written by a “violent fanatical abolitionist,” a reference to Francis Wayland, the author of *The Elements of Moral Science*. The letter-writer continued that Wayland’s book included “strong abolitionist doctrines.”⁵⁰ The following year, a similar accusation was published in *The South* and was more focused on Ryland himself. It stated that Ryland occupied “an influential and responsible office” and “devote[d] all his time and talents to the accomplishment of his fiendish purposes.” The writer also accused Ryland of indoctrinating students incrementally, “carefully feel[ing] the pulse of his patient ere he repeats his dose... until finally, when his class is so thoroughly imbued... taking the Bible in his hands, proceeds to gather from its pages a recognition of his detestable doctrines.”⁵¹ The Richmond College Board of Trustees defended Ryland and declared the body’s confidence in his support for slavery. To satisfy the public, however, it launched an investigation into the charges that he was an abolitionist, eventually finding them to be without merit.⁵² Ryland’s students published their own defense, writing that he had encouraged them to skip the offending passage of the textbook and to read proslavery writers in its place. They concluded by writing, “Dr. Ryland is an owner of slaves, and, so far as we have means of ascertaining, has always been.”⁵³

The next year, Ryland thought he had been accused of abolitionist leanings again, and while the rumor appeared to grow out of his work at First African Baptist Church, he believed it to have resulted in three prospective students

II. BOARD OF TRUSTEES.
Whereas, an article was published in *The South* on the 12th inst., over the signature of "Amicus Douciss," charging that the President of Richmond College, has "dared, and still dares to use his most strenuous exertions for the overthrow of slavery—for sowing the seed of abolitionism and implanting a spirit of Northern fanaticism in the minds of those entrusted to his care;" that, "with a zeal that would be truly laudable in a more glorious enterprise, he devotes all his time and talents to the accomplishment of his fiendish purposes;" that "there are young men of undoubted talents and of wisdom, fit to adorn much older heads, who have by his villainous labors alone become so thoroughly imbued with his abolition principles that they do not hesitate to openly avow and advocate his sentiments;" and whereas, we, as the legal guardians of the college, are responsible to the public for the character of the instruction imparted by its faculty; and whereas, Mr. Roger A. Pryor, editor of *The South*, having been called upon, has refused to give the name of the author, and assumed the responsibility of the charges himself.* Therefore,
1. Resolved, That from our long and intimate acquaintance with President Ryland, the fact that he is a Virginian and a slaveholder, our knowledge of his views on the subject of slavery as publicly and privately expressed, and such investigation as the brief period which has transpired since the said publication has permitted us to make, we unhesitatingly declare our belief that the said charges are wholly false.
2. That for the entire satisfaction of the public mind, we will continue our investigation, until we have arrived at as full a knowledge of the grounds of these charges as we can attain, and that when said investigation is ended we will without reserve publish the result.
3. That A. M. Poindexter, James Thomas, Jr., and L. R. Spilman be and are hereby appointed a committee to conduct this investigation, and to report as soon as a thorough investigation can be made.
4. That the said committee are hereby instructed to call upon the editor of *The South*, and request him to aid them in their labor by furnishing them a statement in full of the facts and evidence upon which he bases the allegations of the article aforesaid.
J. B. JETER, President pro tem.
JOHN M. MERRAY, Sec'y B. T. R. C.
December 15th, 1857.

"Vindication of President Ryland, II. Board of Trustees," *Religious Herald*, December 24, 1857, RRP, 10.006, 10.004, VBHS

⁵⁰ "Northern Books – Wayland's Moral Science," *Richmond Enquirer*, September 23, 1856, [link](#).

⁵¹ "Beware of 'Traitors!,'" *The South*, clipping hand-dated "12/12/1857," RRP, file 10.003, VBHS.

⁵² Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, December 22, 1857.

⁵³ "Vindication of President Ryland: I. Graduating Class," *Religious Herald*, December 24, 1857, 203, col. 1., VBHS. Also clipped in RRP, 10.006, VBHS. The *Religious Herald* was a bi-weekly Baptist publication that regularly published the writing of area Baptist leaders, including Robert Ryland. Its articles were often reprinted by newspapers outside the region, as was the case when the information contained in Ryland’s “Card” which was referenced in the abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator* (Boston, MA). Other newspapers that republished items or excerpts from the *Religious Herald* during the antebellum period included *The Boston Recorder*, *The Christian Watchman* (Boston), and Frederick Douglass’ *The North Star*.

being discouraged from enrolling at Richmond College. His response to what he called “slander” was an unequivocal statement of his support for enslavement:

I feel it is my duty to say that I was born and raised in Virginia, have always lived, and expect to continue to live, in my native State, and to feel heartily identified with her interests; that I own about a dozen slaves; that I have never manumitted one, and do not design doing so; that I do not think emancipation safe or humane to either master or servant; that I have no sympathy or correspondence with the abolitionists; and that I do not think it morally wrong under existing circumstances to hold slaves. The Providence of God has made it my duty to preach the gospel to the people of color, but I do not see why this relation to them should annoy me with vague suspicions, or affect my standing among right-minded men.⁵⁴

Ryland later discovered that he had been misinformed about the rumor, and he retracted the accusation of slander.⁵⁵

In his administration of the campus, Ryland oversaw the conversion to a gas system that was designed to centralize the distribution of heat. An enslaved man named Martin was referred to as the “gas maker” and was responsible for its operation. Ryland found that the gasworks did not provide enough work to fill Martin’s time, so he hired him out to someone outside the campus. The payment for his hire was collected by Ryland and turned over to Richmond College, “less commissions.” This indicates that someone, possibly Ryland himself, was paid a portion of the hire amount for facilitating the arrangement. In the same list that included money paid by Ryland on behalf of Richmond College and collected for the institution, he also noted paying “College svts [servants]” a total of ten dollars for ringing the bell.⁵⁶

Ryland was actively raising funds for Richmond College during much of his tenure, despite the designation of other “General Agents” for that purpose.⁵⁷ During this period Ryland also led the faculty, taught, and promoted the interests of the college. He managed conflicts with professors, oversaw student progress, and published items on the college’s development. The financial stability of the institution grew along with its reputation during the 1850s.

ENSLAVEMENT

According to the Federal Census Slave Schedule of 1850, Robert Ryland enslaved thirteen people on the day of enumeration: a man, age 48; a boy, age 14, a boy, age 10; a boy, age 8; a woman, age

⁵⁴ Robert Ryland, “A Card,” *Religious Herald*, September 14, 1858, 147, col. 3, VBHS.

⁵⁵ Robert Ryland, “Another Card,” *Religious Herald*, Nov. 18, 1858, 3, col. 4, VBHS.

⁵⁶ Funds Paid For Richmond College... Funds Received for Richmond College, President's Account, July 7, 1859, Trustees Records 1851-1860, University Archives, VBHS. In Jennifer Oast’s *Institutional Slavery: Slaveholding Churches, Schools, Colleges, and Businesses in Virginia, 1680-1860*, she describes similar payments for “extra work” to enslaved people hired out to other Virginia colleges such as the College of William and Mary and Hampden Sydney College (167, Kindle).

⁵⁷ “Virginia Baptist Anniversaries,” *Daily Dispatch*, June 8, 1853, Virginia Chronicle.

55; a woman, age 36; a woman, age 37; two girls, age 10; a girl, age 6; a woman, age 60 (described as “mulatto”); a girl, age 12; and a woman, age 58.⁵⁸

On December 21, 1850, after the death of his father, Ryland wrote a letter to his mother providing information on his father’s grave marker and asking her to send him the “servants” that came to him after the settlement of Josiah Ryland’s estate: “They can walk part of the way. They will have to be hired out, and it is better for them to come before New Year’s Day.”⁵⁹ The census enumeration of those Robert Ryland enslaved took place before he wrote this letter to his mother and it is not known how many enslaved people were transferred to him in the settlement of his father’s estate. Ryland’s ledgers of the time show his extensive use of the “hiring out” system. During the years 1850-1859, he hired out Sally/Sallie, Ellen, Matilda, Thom/Tom, Louisa, Judy, and Walker Lee. Their labor provided a significant portion of his income.⁶⁰ Combined invoices and receipts in Ryland’s personal papers show his payments to doctors for visits to some of those he enslaved in 1854 and 1855 and his purchases of their shoes. Those named in the medical care receipt are Matilda, Sally, and Violet. Ryland purchased shoes for Lucy, Ellen, Violet, and Judy and heavy work shoes for Tom. He paid taxes on specific properties and the enslaved people, carriages, and other items associated with them.⁶¹

CAMPUS “HIRE” OF ENSLAVED PEOPLE

Ryland described the college “servants” as “frequently changed” which was typical of the system of “slave hiring” used in many businesses, institutions, and homes in antebellum Richmond.⁶² An 1854 Richmond College advertisement in the *Religious Herald* included the provision of “servants’ attendance” to students.⁶³ Two advertisements placed in the *Daily Dispatch* by a campus steward indicate the plan to “hire” a number of people. Both stipulate that a “liberal price will be paid for”

⁵⁸ Federal Census Slave Schedule, 1850, enumerated December 12, 1850, “Robert Ryland,” Henrico, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration, ancestry.com. Robert Ryland’s brother in-law H.F. [Henry] Thornton was acting as the college’s steward at this time (Federal Census, 1850, “H.F. Thornton,” Henrico, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration, ancestry.com).

⁵⁹ Robert Ryland to Catherine Peachey Ryland, December 21, 1850, typescript, RRP, 22.004, VBHS. New Year’s Day, and at times the days around it, were “hiring days” when enslaved people hired for one year terms would either seek new work (if they were “self-hired”) or were placed in new homes or at new businesses where they would be under the control of an overseer or, in the case of colleges, the campus steward.

⁶⁰ Robert Ryland, Ledger II, [Receipts 1850-1859], pp. 120-139, RRP, 55.2, VBHS.

⁶¹ “State Taxes 1855,” “Robt Ryland,” RRP, 34.024; “County Taxes, 1857,” “Robert Ryland,” RRP 34.072, VBHS.

⁶² Robert Ryland, President’s Report, January 9, 1860, Trustees’ Records, University Archives, VBHS; Oast, *Institutional Slavery*, 101-102.

⁶³ Advertisement, “Richmond College,” *Religious Herald*, August 17, 1854, 127, col. 5, VBHS.

those who were hired, rather than wages being paid **to** them.⁶⁴ The timing of the advertisements was likely aligned with the coming “Hiring Days” at the first of the new year.

Institutional records of the time contain a number of references to enslaved labor and the work of “servants”:

- Ryland complained to the Board of Trustees that the professors were relying too heavily on the labor of those “servants” attached to the Boarding Department, writing that the number of fires that they were already attending were significant and professors should pay the cost of “hire” for a “servant” to maintain the five fires in their classrooms. It appears that he proposed the Boarding Department continuing to cover his/their food and clothes, but this separate “hire” would cover his/their “extra work.”⁶⁵
- The Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees from July 17, 1852 include Ryland’s summary of budget concerns related to the cost of “servants’ hire.” In the same report, Ryland included a line item, “Servants hire, extra work [etc].”⁶⁶
- In the Board’s minutes of July 16, 1856, the “hire” of a man named William is shown in a conflict over which budget should cover the cost of his labor: “Resolved that the hire of the servant William, for the session 1854 & 5, ought to have been paid out of the proceeds of the boarding department, as the Trustees assumed the payment of his hire, only on the condition that the Boarding department not involve them in loss.”⁶⁷ This also indicates that cost of labor associated with the Boarding Department was expected to be covered by the amount students paid for room and board (“the proceeds of the boarding department”).⁶⁸
- Following the departure of the steward, C.A. Mayo, Ryland wrote to the Board of Trustees that among the items Mayo left in chaos was the accounting of the “hire of servants” during the previous session.⁶⁹
- After Mayo left his position as steward, a person he enslaved appears to have remained on the campus, still hired to the institution’s use. He or she was then hired out by the college for a short time or limited duties to James B. Taylor, a member of the Board of Trustees who was doing significant work on two projects: the shift to a “hotel” boarding system in which individuals leased buildings and assumed the cost of hiring laborers, and a large construction project consisting of a new main campus building and upgrades to the grounds

⁶⁴ “Wanted. – To hire by the month or year,” *Daily Dispatch*, November 15, 1855, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#); “Wanted – Servants,” *Daily Dispatch*, December 31, 1855, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#).

⁶⁵ Robert Ryland, President’s Report, December 2, 1851, Richmond College Board of Trustees Records 1851-1860, VBHS.

⁶⁶ Minutes, Richmond College Board of Trustees, July 17, 1852, University of Richmond, University Archives, VBHS.

⁶⁷ Minutes, Richmond College Board of Trustees, July 16, 1856.

⁶⁸ Minutes, Richmond College Board of Trustees, July 16, 1856.

⁶⁹ Robert Ryland, President’s Report to the Richmond College Board of Trustees, November 1, 1856, Trustees Records 1851-1860, University of Richmond, University Archives, VBHS.

and other structures. Nine dollars was noted among “Funds collected for Richmond College by R. Ryland 1857”: “April 30 Jas. B. Taylor servant hired of C.A. Mayo.” In this context, “hired of” meant “hired from,” and indicates that the college was re-hiring out the labor of someone whom it had hired from Mayo.

In the Fall of 1856, Richmond College attempted to address the ongoing financial losses associated with students’ housing and food by switching from the steward-based system to a “hotel” system like that at the University of Virginia.⁷⁰ College owned buildings were rented to men known as “hotelkeepers” who were responsible for providing students with housing and meals. These operations remained under the oversight of the Board of Trustees. The Board dictated the duties of the “servants” in the buildings, and Ryland and other professors would at time inspect the “dormitories”:

Attendance of Servants on Dormitories

Daily {Bring water and clean towels, clean up the rooms, make up the beds}

Wash the windows once in four weeks.

Black students shoes, afternoon, daily.

Carry water to each Dormitory twice during the day

The duties which have no fixed hours must be performed after breakfast hour: as well as the cleaning up the grounds which must be performed daily by 10 o’clock. All the grounds being equally divided⁷¹

Direct Board of Trustees intervention in the operations of the buildings centered on the financial collapse of two of the hotelkeepers. When the debt of one man mounted to the point that his personal possessions in the building were on the verge of seizure, the Board authorized Ryland to extend him eight dollars a day from college funds to keep the hotel operational. Ryland also paid “svts’ hire” [servants’ hire] for enslaved laborers working in the hotel.⁷² The next year, another hotelkeeper was in the same position, with an advertisement and legal notice of the auction of his possessions “at the Richmond College” appearing in the newspaper. Three enslaved people who worked in the hotel/dormitory were named in the notice: Sarah, Willis, and Little John.⁷³

At the start of the following decade, the Federal Census Slave Schedule enumerated twelve enslaved people in the college-owned hotels of William Lindsay and Anselem Brock, eleven of whom were

⁷⁰ Information about the use of hotels at the University of Virginia can be found in Oast, *Institutional Slavery*, 173-174, Kindle.

⁷¹ Regulations for Renting and Keeping Boarding Houses at Richd College,” Presented at the Meeting of Trustees Nov. 1. 1856, Trustees Records, VBHS.

⁷² Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, April 26, 1858, University Archives, VBHS; Robert Ryland, President’s Account, July 7, 1859, Board of Trustees Records, University Archives, VBHS.

⁷³ “Trustees’ Sale of Household Furniture,” Daily Dispatch, September 28, 1859, Virginia Chronicle; “Trustees’ Sale of Genteel Household and Kitchen Furniture,” *Daily Dispatch*, September 28, 1859, Virginia Chronicle.

hired from other enslavers.⁷⁴ Brock had previously been a hotelkeeper on the campus of the University of Virginia, and in an announcement of the Richmond College hotels placed by college trustee James B. Taylor, Lindsay was described as having run a hotel at William & Mary.⁷⁵ In the building managed by Brock, there were five “hired” enslaved people. In Lindsay’s building, there was one woman that he personally enslaved and six other enslaved people that were “hired out” to work there. They included a thirty-year-old woman who was enslaved by Richmond College mathematics and astronomy professor Lewis Turner, who had also filled the steward’s role in 1854.⁷⁶

PERSONAL LIFE

Ryland’s personal financial records show his increased affluence over the decade, and by 1859, he had reached a point of personal and professional comfort. This brief period of stability and satisfaction reached its zenith in the late summer of 1859, when his son, William Semple Ryland (1836-1906) was ordained as a Baptist minister and Robert Ryland provided him his ministerial charge.⁷⁷ Charges are given by senior Baptist ministers to those who are recently ordained and they communicate the gravity and importance of a lifelong commitment to ministry.

1860-1861

GROWTH OF THE COLLEGE

By 1860, the college was thriving and Ryland was approaching the end of his third decade as leader of the institution. When he wrote his son in October of that year, his feelings about the administration of Richmond College were among the most positive he ever expressed about his work there: “I am in decidedly good spirits concerning the college.”⁷⁸ There were one hundred fourteen students attending in 1859-60. A Modern Languages department had been established in 1859, and in 1860 Jeremiah Bell Jeter, a key Richmond College trustee, established a committee “to study the propriety of establishing a law department.”⁷⁹ The Building Committee made up of three college trustees was accepting bids for the construction of the “Central Edifice,” which was to be a

⁷⁴ “A. Brock” and “William Lindsay,” United States Federal Census of 1860, Slave Schedule, Henrico, Virginia, 44-45.

⁷⁵ *Catalog of the University of Virginia*, 1857-1858, Hathi Digital Library, 7, [link](#); “Richmond College,” *Richmond Enquirer*, August 22, 1856, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#).

⁷⁶ “William Lindsay,” *United States Federal Census of 1860*, Slave Schedule, 45.

⁷⁷ *Richmond Whig*, August 23, 1859, 2; *Daily Dispatch*, August 15, 1859.

⁷⁸ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, October 13, 1860, RRP 01.041, VBHS.

⁷⁹ Alley, 45; W. Harrison Daniel, “The Genesis of Richmond College, 1843-1860.” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 83, no. 2 (1975): 134.

significant addition to the campus.⁸⁰ The endowment had reached \$100,000 and the institution “boasted an expanding curriculum.”⁸¹ After students initiated plans to organize a military company, the “Richmond College Minute Men,” and in anticipation of a session that never opened due to escalation of the Civil War, Professor of Greek, C.H. Toy was selected to provide military instruction in the Fall of 1861.⁸²

Prior to the closure of Richmond College before the 1861-62 session, the campus hotels/dormitories continued to provide room and board for students and enslaved men and women continued to labor in the college’s buildings.

ENSLAVEMENT

The 1860 Federal Census Slave Schedule indicates that Robert Ryland enslaved fifteen people at the time of enumeration. They appear in three entries.

Ryland’s primary entry shows nine individuals:

- Woman, age 75
- Woman, age 35
- Man, age 21
- Young woman, age 19
- Young man, age 18
- Girl, age 16
- Girl, age 6
- Girl, age 3
- Boy, age 1

The second entry shows four individuals that he hired out to Agnass Cooper, the free Black woman who resided on the campus:

Agness Cooper, Employer; “R. Ryland” (Henrico County) “owner”:
Woman, age 24
Girl, age 6
Girl, age 4
Girl, age 2

The third entry shows a fifty-year-old woman and a one-year-old child enslaved by “Dr. Ryland” and hired to the use of a man named William Hendrick.

⁸⁰ [Advertisement], *Richmond Whig*, July 10, 1860.

⁸¹ Daniel, “Genesis of Richmond College,” 149.

⁸² Alley, 44; Daniel, “Genesis of Richmond College,” 134; “Richmond College Minute Men,” *Richmond Whig*, November 30, 1859, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

Of those enslaved by Robert Ryland in 1860, nine people did not appear in his 1850 Slave Schedule entry.⁸³

In an 1860 letter to his son, Ryland noted the illness of a man he enslaved named Walker, who was unable to work in “the Factory for 1½ months.”⁸⁴ In June and October of 1862, Ryland was paid \$36.60 and \$16.50 for “Walker’s hire.” At the time, he was also hiring out two women: Ellen and Matilda, for whom he was paid \$90.00 and \$70.00 respectively. In Ryland’s record of receipts in 1863, Ellen and Matilda are still shown as having been hired out, but Walker no longer appears there.⁸⁵ He does appear, along with Sally, Lucy, Judy, Louisa, Ellen, and Tom, in the record of visits by two doctors to those Ryland enslaved.⁸⁶ Walker’s last name was Lee. He was baptized by Robert Ryland at First African Baptist Church in 1859. Ryland kept careful records of those he baptized and who enslaved them. In the location of the enslaver’s name next to Walker Lee’s, Ryland wrote “Ro. Ryland.”⁸⁷

Ryland enslaved a man named Sam, age twenty-two, who was listed among those who died in Henrico County in 1862.⁸⁸ In 1863, Ryland continued to hire out Ellen and Matilda. He earned \$150 for Ellen’s labor and \$120 for Matilda’s. That year, he also hired out Tom and earned \$31.45 for the man’s work.⁸⁹ He hired out Matilda, Ellen, Tom, and Sally in 1864, earning \$504.00. In 1864,

⁸³ United States Federal Census of 1860, Slave Schedule, Henrico County, Western Subdivision, “Robert Ryland,” 44-45; “Agness Cooper,” employer, “R. Ryland,” Henrico County, owner; “Wm Hendrick,” employer, “Dr. Ryland,” owner, 28. In 1860, Robert Hill Ryland, M.D., the son of Robert Ryland’s brother Samuel Ryland, was living in Louisiana and seven people he enslaved were enumerated there. Given Robert Ryland’s prominence in Richmond, the enumerator’s use of “Henrico,” as his place of residence, and the frequent use of “Dr. Ryland” to distinguish him in many other contexts even before his honorary doctorate from Columbian College in 1860, it is most probable that “Dr. Ryland” refers to Robert Ryland, not his Louisiana nephew. United States Federal Census, 1860, Census Place: West Feliciana, Louisiana; Page: 157; Family History Library Film: 803411; United States Federal Census, 1860, Slave Schedule, “R.H. Ryland,” Louisiana, West Feliciana, Ward 8, The National Archives in Washington DC; Washington DC, USA; Eighth Census of the United States 1860; Series Number: M653; Record Group: Records of the Bureau of the Census; Record Group Number: 29; Example of Ryland referred to as Dr. Ryland in 1853, “Richmond College,” *Daily Dispatch*, July 4, 1853, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#)).

⁸⁴ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, November 20, 1860, RRP 01.039, VBHS.

⁸⁵ Family income, Ledger II, Robert Ryland Papers, RRP, 55.2.33, 55.2.34, VBHS.

⁸⁶ “Expenses of Family for 1863 (War prices),” Ledger II, RRP, file 55.2.34, VBHS.

⁸⁷ First African Baptist Church (Richmond, Va.), Minute Books, 1841-1930, Accession 28255. Church records collection. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia Minutes of the Deacons of First African Baptist Church, July 30, 1859, Library of Virginia.

⁸⁸ Henrico County Register of Deaths, September 1862, “Sam,” age 22, “Robert Ryland, Master,” microfilm, Library of Virginia.

⁸⁹ “Receipts for the year 1863,” Ledger II, RRP, 55.2.34, VBHS.

Ryland sold two people, Maria and Parthena, for \$2,400 in a partial exchange for Confederate stock coupons.⁹⁰

Ryland liquidated many of his assets and invested in the Confederacy. Ryland encouraged the Richmond College Board of Trustees to do the same. The board invested much of the college's endowment in Confederate funds.⁹¹

INSTITUTIONAL "HIRE"

The record of institutional hire prior to the close of campus at the outset of the Civil War is distilled in the 1860 Federal Census Slave Schedule in which the entries for the campus "hotelkeepers," Anselem Brock and William Lindsay, flank that of Robert Ryland, indicating the enumerator's movements on September 5, 1860: Brock's building, then Ryland's residence, then Lindsay's building.

Enslaved People "Hired" in Brock's "Hotel":

Woman, age 40, enslaved by L. McRae (Henrico County)

Woman, age 25, enslaved by Mrs. Cobbit (South Carolina)

Man, age 20, enslaved by Mrs. Meade (Richmond)

Young man, age 17, enslaved by Mr. Farish (Henrico County)

Woman, age 30, enslaved by Mrs. Byrd (D – [illegible; possibly D.C. or Dla.])⁹²

Robert Ryland's entry

Enslaved People "Hired" in Lindsay's "Hotel":

Man, age 50, enslaved by L. Taylor (James City County)

Man, age 35, enslaved by Roy Temple (New Kent County)

Young man, age 18, enslaved by Mr. Rawlings (Orange County)

Boy, age 16, enslaved by Roy Temple (New Kent County)

Boy, age 14, enslaved by Ann Mutter (Richmond)

Woman, age 30, enslaved by Lewis Turner (Henrico)

Lindsay also personally enslaved one woman, age 70.⁹³

CAMPUS CLOSURE AND CIVIL WAR HOSPITAL

The campus housed Confederate soldiers for a time following the closing of Richmond College in 1861. It was then turned over to "a committee of Louisiana gentlemen" in August of that year and

⁹⁰ "Receipts for the year 1864 (Bellum horrendum)," Ledger II, RRP, 55.2.035, VBHS.

⁹¹ Robert Ryland, "Receipts for the year 1864," Ledger II, RRP, 55.2.035, VBHS; Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, November 21, 1863, University Archive, VBHS.

⁹² United States Federal Census of 1860, Slave Schedule, Henrico County, Virginia, Western Subdivision, "A. Brock, Employer," 44.

⁹³ United States Federal Census of 1860, Slave Schedule, Henrico County, Virginia, Western Subdivision, "William Lindsay, Employer, 45.

became known as the Louisiana Hospital.⁹⁴ Ryland and his family continued to live on the campus rent-free during the Civil War, and often visited the wounded in the hospital that occupied the Columbia mansion and other former college buildings.⁹⁵ These visits were one part of his colportage outreach work, funded by the Baptist Colportage Board, through which Ryland would distribute “thousands of tracts, hymn books, spelling books, and religious newspapers” to wounded soldiers in the city’s many hospitals.⁹⁶

FIRST AFRICAN BAPTIST CHURCH

In 1841, Robert Ryland was asked to lead First African Baptist Church by Jeremiah Bell Jeter, his longtime friend, Richmond College trustee, and pastor of Richmond’s First Baptist Church.⁹⁷ Because of the constraints on the assembly of enslaved and free Black people following Nat Turner’s Rebellion in 1831, Virginia law demanded that religious gatherings of Black people be supervised by a white pastor. Originally, First Baptist Church had held a racially mixed congregation where the white attendees were vastly outnumbered by Black people. Those enslaved and free Black congregants had previously attempted to establish their own church but had been “thwarted” by the Virginia General Assembly in 1821.⁹⁸ By 1841, the white congregants were

⁹⁴ “Richmond College,” *Central Presbyterian*, August 31, 1861, Virginia Chronicle; President’s Report, undated, Trustees Records, University Archives, VBHS. This document was later dated “1862?” although the description of Brock and Lindsay as current hotelkeepers and the plan to consider the use of the campus as a hospital indicates it was written before August 1861.

⁹⁵ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, June 15, 1863; *Religious Herald*, June 6, 1861, 90, col. 7, VBHS.

⁹⁶ “The Richmond Hospitals, An Interesting Report,” *Richmond Enquirer*, October 17, 1862, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#); Robert Ryland, Ledger 2, “Receipts for the Year 1862,” RRP, file 55.2.033, VBHS.

⁹⁷ Jeremiah Bell Jeter’s own history as someone initially resistant to enslavement and a “reluctant” enslaver warrants additional consideration. Jeter wrote that he “grew up with a determination never to own a slave,” although “[w]hether slavery was right or wrong” was not his issue with human bondage. It was the “management . . . responsibility, care and trouble” and the “firm authority” which he saw as necessary that were “uncongenial” to his “taste and habits.” He came to enslave people through one or more of his marriages. In 1840, Jeter enslaved three people (United States Federal Census, 1840, Richmond, Ward 3, Henrico County, Virginia, “Jeremiah B. Jeter,” 216). In 1860, Jeter enslaved one person, an eleven-year-old boy he hired out to W.M. McFarlane (United States Federal Census, Slave Schedule, 1860, “J.B. Jeter,” Henrico County, Virginia, 47). Following Jeter’s wedding to Mary Dabbs in 1863, he controlled all of those associated with her late husband’s estate. In 1860, Josiah Dabbs had enslaved twenty-five people (United States Federal Census, Slave Schedule, 1860, “Josiah Dabbs,” Henrico County, Virginia, 42-43). Jeter noted that the “state forbade” the emancipation of those he controlled through his wives’ estates unless they left Virginia, but he said it was what he viewed as their inability to support themselves that decided the question: “It was simply cruelty to free a mother with dependent children.” He considered sending them to Liberia but “none of them desired [it].” He was also concerned that if he sent away “the men who could support themselves and aid in the support of others, and retain the women and children to be supported by my own labors” he would be “stretching my humanity quite beyond the power of its endurance.” Those he held “earnestly protested” being sold or given away and Jeter determined that “it was not only allowable for me, but my solemn obligation, to hold and rule them, for their interest and for my own.” (Jeter, *Recollections of a Long Life*, 68-69).

⁹⁸ Midori Takagi, “*Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction*”: *Slavery in Richmond, 1782-1865*,

planning to build a new church and according to Robert Ryland, “some very fastidious people don’t like to resort to a church... where so many colored people congregated.” Enslaved and free Black members raised \$3,500 for the purchase of the original building from First Baptist Church. James Thomas, Jr., a member of the Richmond College Board of Trustees was a significant financial supporter of the effort.⁹⁹

Ryland’s decision to accept the position was driven in part by his deeply held belief that Black and white people deserved equal access to the teachings of the gospel. He viewed acting on this belief as his duty, although he wrote, “It is more congenial to my feelings to preach to whites, than to the blacks.”¹⁰⁰ In a letter to the American Colonization Society in 1847, his description was positive and emotional. He wrote, “[M]y position as pastor of the Af. Ch. is one that accords well with my tastes. I feel honored with the privilege of preaching to them & of doing what little I can to aid them to heaven.”¹⁰¹ In 1898, Ryland wrote that “[o]ur bodies are diverse in color, but our souls, if they have any color, are by nature equally dark, and by the blood of the Lamb, may be made equally white.”¹⁰² He was described by some members of First African Baptist Church with tremendous affection and by others with hostility.

Ryland’s convictions regarding the equality of souls did not affect his approach to earthly equality. In a sermon he gave in response to an attack on an enslaving family by a member of First African Baptist Church which resulted in the death of a white woman and her child, Ryland emphasized that

Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia (1999), 2125, electronic version.

⁹⁹ James Thomas, Jr.’s fortune was centered on his tobacco business which relied on the labor of enslaved people. Historian Joseph C. Robert refers to Thomas as “the most famous of the mid-nineteenth century tobacco manufacturers” (Joseph C. Robert, *The Story of Tobacco in America*, New York: A.A. Knopf (1949), 82). Thomas personally enslaved fifty-five people in 1860 (Federal Census Slave Schedule of 1860, Henrico County, Richmond, Ward 3). In 1852, man named Frank was enslaved by Thomas and “received ten lashes at the public whipping post” for being in the city with an “improper pass” (“Improper Pass,” *Daily Dispatch*, June 12, 1852, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#)). A woman he enslaved named Sarah Ann Jackson was also whipped ten times for trespassing and disorderly conduct in 1853 (“Disorderly,” *Daily Dispatch*, March 4, 1853, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#)). Nelson, another man enslaved to Thomas, received “ten lashes” for disturbing the peace by playing music on Broad Street (“Serenaders,” *Daily Dispatch*, July 30, 1852, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#)). Peter Haskins was sentenced to thirty-nine lashes for theft in 1853 (“Stealing Money,” *Daily Dispatch*, February 15, 1853, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#)). Isaiah Smith escaped from Thomas and hid on a vessel bound for Pennsylvania. He was discovered during a search of the ship. A news item detailed the plan to return Isaiah Smith to Thomas (“Fugitive Slave Captured,” *Daily Dispatch*, April 26, 1854, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#)). Other news items indicate Thomas’ use of enslaved people hired from other enslavers. Two of those people were [Richard](#) and [Cary](#). The students of University of Richmond Assistant Professor of History Samantha Seely have conducted project-based research on Thomas, his relationship with the institution, and his use of enslaved labor.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Ryland to Mrs. James Robert Fleet, December 5, 1866, RRP, 15.008, VBHS.

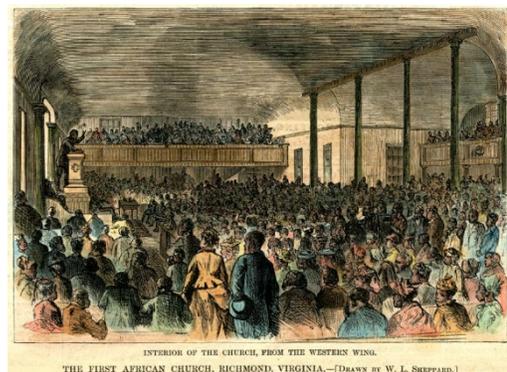
¹⁰¹ Robert Ryland to the American Colonization Society, September 28, 1846, Papers of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress and Fold3.com.

¹⁰² Robert Ryland, D.D., *The Colored People*, Baptist Mission Rooms: Baltimore, Maryland, 1898, RRP, 3.060, 7, VBHS.

the existence of the church demanded congregants' adherence to a racial hierarchy: "God has given this country to the white people. They are the law-makers – the masters – the superiors. The people of color are the subjects – the servants – and even when not in bondage, the inferiors."¹⁰³ In the day-to-day workings of First African Baptist Church, his belief in sharing the gospel meant that he facilitated aspects of spiritual expression and self-governance that made the church a key location of Black power in the South. At the same time, his efforts were aligned with the priorities of proslavery Christianity, showing critics of enslavement the "success of quasi-independent black churches" and emphasizing the effects that religion could have on maintaining enslavement while modulating what Ryland viewed as its most objectionable aspects: the separation of families and the limits on sharing religion with enslaved people.¹⁰⁴ When a visiting journalist asked a Black Richmonder why proslavery people were encouraging him to visit First African Baptist Church, the man responded, "I thought they would tell you to go there. They [always] do. That's an old game of theirs – *Go to the African Church* they [always] say to strangers, *and see how happy our slaves are, and how well they dress.*" When the same man was asked if Ryland always preached in a way "to suit the slaveholders," he explained that "[h]e wouldn't be allowed to preach at all if he didn't."¹⁰⁵

SERVICES

Prior to Nat Turner's Rebellion, Black ministry had thrived in Virginia and some of the most talented and significant ministerial voices in the region were among the members of First African Baptist Church. In what Ryland called "recompense for [the] slight" of not being able to preach, he established a pattern of church services in which men would be called to pray or to exhort the congregation in public religious addresses that were long, powerful, and evocative of sermons.¹⁰⁶ Numerous white visitors would note the enormity of the congregation – often 1,500 to 2,000 people – and detail the extraordinarily moving words of the enslaved and free speakers that Ryland would gesture to from the pulpit. These accounts provided the names of individuals in the congregation and detailed elements of Ryland's sermons. They also described the choir and the congregational singing that began thirty



William Ludwell Sheppard, "First African Church, Richmond, Virginia -- Interior of the Church from the Western Wing," VCU Libraries Digital Collection

¹⁰³ Robert Ryland, "Substance of Sermon, Delivered at the African Church, July 25, 1852, by the Pastor," *Daily Dispatch*, August 6, 1852, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#). An excerpt of the sermon was quoted in Alfred L. Brophy, "The Nat Turner Trials," *North Carolina Law Review* 91 (2013), 1822, [link](#).

¹⁰⁴ Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press (2008), 170.

¹⁰⁵ James Redpath, *The Roving Editor, or, Talks with Slaves in the Southern States*, New York: A.A. Burdick (1859), 17-18.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Ryland, "Origin and History of the First African Church," in *The First Century of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, 1780-1880*, Richmond: Carlton McCarthy (1880), 258.

minutes before each service, when those assembled would sing “solemn old tunes,” “one after another join[ing] in until all seemed to be singing” in “strong, mellow tones, full of pathos.”¹⁰⁷

Ryland’s ministerial attention to Black congregants was, like Jeter’s before him, focused on “preach[ing] *out* of their minds their dreams and fancies, their visions and revelations, and all their long cherished superstitions.”¹⁰⁸ Prior to the racial separation of the congregation into two churches and Ryland’s assumption of the role of pastor at First African Baptist Church, these beliefs had caused conflict for Jeter. Historian Midori Takagi describes the “horror” that white members of First Baptist Church had felt when they saw that “black members maintained a strong belief in spirits and witchcraft in addition to their unshakable faith in God and saw no conflict or contradiction between the two.”¹⁰⁹ Ryland worked to address this, seeing it as one of the “peculiarities” of the congregation.¹¹⁰ In his sermons he drew on biblical passages to enforce white supremacy and the enslavement system. Former First African Baptist Church member Henry Brown, who orchestrated his escape from enslavement by having himself shipped in a box to Pennsylvania following the loss of his family after they were sold, remembered Ryland using his position as pastor to support the system of enslavement: “[H]e was not ashamed to invoke the authority of heaven in support of the slave degrading laws under which masters could with impunity abuse their fellow creatures.”¹¹¹

At times, Ryland would invite ministerial students from Richmond College to give the sermons at the church.¹¹²

BAPTISMS, MARRIAGES, DEATHS & FUNERALS

Ryland maintained careful baptism lists in the minutes of the deacons’ meetings that he recorded as their “moderator,” recording those who had been baptized and the men and women who enslaved them. For free members, he wrote the word “free.” He also shared the number of baptisms he performed at the church in newspaper items and in private letters. In 1859, two entries above his record of the baptism of Walker Lee, Ryland drew a line and wrote, “3153 to this,” meaning that Walker Lee was the 3,156th person he baptized there.¹¹³ Ryland took pains to explain to those outside of the church that these numbers did not indicate any willingness on his part to hurry congregants

¹⁰⁷ G.F. Root, “Congregational Singing Among the Negroes,” reprinted in *Southern Musical Advocate and Singer’s Friend*, April 1, 1860, [link](#).

¹⁰⁸ Robert Ryland, “The Origin and History of the First African Church,” 255.

¹⁰⁹ Takagi, *Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction*, 1183-1229; Ryland, “The African Church,” 255.

¹¹⁰ Ryland, “The Origin and History of the First African Church,” 255.

¹¹¹ Henry Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written By Himself* [British edition], Manchester: Lee and Glynn (1851), 32, Documenting the American South, [link](#).

¹¹² Robert Ryland, “The Origin and History of the First African Church,” 259-260.

¹¹³ Minutes of the Deacons of First African Baptist Church, July 30, 1859, Library of Virginia.

through the decision to be baptized. Instead, he wrote, he saw it as his “duty to throw obstacles in the way,” and to “[hold] up the dangers of a premature confession.”¹¹⁴

Ryland also performed marriages for enslaved congregants although there are limited accounts of this facet of his ministry.¹¹⁵ He was frequently at the deathbed of church members, and his recollections of these moments provide names and details of the dying in their final hours.¹¹⁶

DEACONS

As pastor of First African Baptist Church, Robert Ryland recorded the minutes of the church’s deacons, a decision-making body made up of mostly free members of the congregation. This disproportionate representation of free men caused tension in the church and resulted in one of the few instances when Ryland recorded his own efforts to sway the deacons’ decision making. After the exclusion of three men who objected to enslaved people not having a more proportional representation among the deacons, Ryland attempted to intervene on their behalf.¹¹⁷ He recorded other conflicts within the church and deacons’ decisions on those issues. The minutes also contain records of people who entered as members of the church, and those who left it. Ryland’s accounts of members who were sold to places in the Deep South and those who moved to the North provide a sense of what Gregg Kimball calls, “the church’s relative position in a world of faith that overlapped with Richmond’s place in the African diaspora.”¹¹⁸

The deacons oversaw the church treasury, which was filled by the donations of members, proceeds from choir concerts, and the highly profitable renting of the church building, which was among the largest venues in the city. During the week and on Saturdays, the building was the site of political meetings, musical performances, art displays, and an array of other events often attended by largely white audiences. This included what was said to be the first display of the Confederate flag in Richmond and one of Jefferson Davis’ final speeches as President of the Confederacy.¹¹⁹

Ryland admired many of the deacons and wrote vivid accounts of them in a series of essays on the church which he published in the mid-1850s. He recalled that Joseph Abrams, who was a significant minister before Nat Turner’s Rebellion, had once been whipped for preaching. After Abrams’ death

¹¹⁴ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences of the First African Baptist Church, No. 1,” *American Baptist Memorial* 15, September 1855, 262, Hathi Trust Digital Library, [link](#).

¹¹⁵ “Let Off,” *Daily Dispatch*, March 27, 1858, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

¹¹⁶ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences of First African Baptist Church, No. 4,” *American Baptist Memorial*, December 1855, 355, Hathi Trust Digital Library, [link](#).

¹¹⁷ Takagi, “*Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction*,” loc. 2253, electronic version; First African Baptist Church, Minutes, May 5, 1850, Library of Virginia.

¹¹⁸ Gregg Kimball, “Richmond’s Place in the African American Diaspora,” in *Afro-Virginian History and Culture*, ed. John Saillant, 145, 163.

¹¹⁹ “African Church Speech,” Papers of Jefferson Davis, Rice University, [link](#); “The Stars and Bars in the Church,” *Daily Dispatch*, August 17, 1876, [link](#).

in 1854, Ryland offered to write the text for his grave marker, but was refused because, in Ryland's words the following year, "his friends thought their own literary taste fully equal to the occasion...The result satisfies me that I ought to have waited, at least until I was invited."¹²⁰

THE COLONIZATION MOVEMENT

Robert Ryland used his position as pastor at First African Baptist Church to advance the interests of the [American Colonization Society](#). In 1846, he wrote to the society that he was "gradually bringing the whole subject of colonization before the minds of the people. At this time their minds are seriously agitating the matter. Some half dozen are about concluding to offer themselves."¹²¹ He wrote to the society and described those he believed to be ideal prospective candidates for transport to Liberia, individuals who were either already free or whose enslavers were willing to give them up to support the movement. He also noted those that he did not believe were well suited to be missionaries or colonists, either because of advanced age or, in the case of the enslaved man Burwell Mann, because he demonstrated "no special prominence either as to intellectual or moral worth."¹²² Mann eventually secured his freedom, but it does not appear that Ryland or the American Colonization Society helped him. Ryland did assist a First African Baptist Church deacon named Thomas U. Allen. He purchased Allen on December 22, 1843 for the purpose of eventually freeing him and continued to legally own him until, it appears, Allen could repay the cost of his purchase.¹²³ Ryland recorded elsewhere that he charged interest when he acted as a purchasing agent for other people, and this may have been the case with Allen. Ryland held him for the following fifteen months as Allen sought contributions at First African Baptist Church and in other congregations.¹²⁴ Ryland also raised funds for the effort at a meeting of Baptists in Lowell, Massachusetts in 1844. He did not tell his audience that he was Allen's legal enslaver, but instead described him as enslaved by his previous owner.¹²⁵ Once Allen secured his freedom, he became the pastor of Second Baptist Church in New Bedford, Massachusetts and later pursued higher education in New Hampshire.

¹²⁰ [Robert Ryland], "Reminiscences of First African Baptist Church, No. 4," *American Baptist Memorial*, 354.

¹²¹ Robert Ryland to American Colonization Society, October 12, 1846, American Colonization Society Records, Library of Congress and Fold3.com.

¹²² Robert Ryland to the American Colonization Society [likely William McLain, ACS Secretary], January 11, 1848, American Colonization Society Records, Library of Congress and Fold3.com.

¹²³ City of Richmond, "Ryland to Allen, Emancipation," City of Richmond Court of Hustings, DB 47:632, Library of Virginia.

¹²⁴ Gregg D. Kimball, *American City, Southern Place: A Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press (2000), 145.

¹²⁵ S.C.C., "For the Religious Herald," November 14, 1844, *Religious Herald*, VBHS. Ryland does not refer to Allen by name, but the specifics align with information in the First African Baptist Church minutes and the emancipation document Ryland filed in Richmond's Hustings Court on April 14 1845, several weeks after he signed the emancipation document. Ryland referred to Allen as being "owned by an orphan child." The letter writer wrote that "Brother R. was desirous of getting some assistance" and said he was willing to receive any donations toward Allen's effort and that of First African Baptist Church, which had offered to assist him. At this point, Ryland was Allen's legal owner. He had been purchased from Edmonia

PRESSURES & CONTROVERSIES

After the discovery of a clandestine operation to use Ryland's regular distribution of mail to congregants as a means of communicating plans of escape from enslavement, Ryland was "mortified," both by being used for the purpose by members of the church and by the request of "some white persons" that he use his position to help in efforts to capture others attempting to escape. Ryland viewed both accusations – that he was facilitating freedom and that he was acting as an impediment to it – as equally at odds with his role: "Be it mine to preach the gospel, to watch for souls, to make full proof of my ministry."¹²⁶

Ryland's position at the church placed him at a point of "tension" between his congregation and increasingly vocal proslavery interests in Virginia and in the region.¹²⁷ In 1849, he discovered that there was a rumor that he was receiving an exorbitant salary as pastor. He was driven to locate the source of the story, and his frustration prompted him to share his feelings about his position at First African Baptist Church with his father: "I feel that I am disinterestedly and laboriously working for the welfare of the blacks & through their benefits, for that of the whites — and to be calumniated thus & charged with oppressing the blacks on the one hand and trying to [illegible: possibly "defraud"] their masters of their slaves on the other - is rather discouraging — However I am determined to try to do right and leave my character for God to de – ["decide" or "determine" – letter is torn]."¹²⁸

The 1852 murder of two members of the Winston family by Jane Williams, a woman they enslaved and a member of First African Baptist Church, was a threat to Ryland's leadership and to the church's survival.¹²⁹ Williams' motive for the brutal attacks on Virginia Winston, Joseph Winston (who lived but was gravely injured) and their infant may have centered on the possibility that she was to be sold away or separated from her own young child.¹³⁰ Ryland visited Williams in her jail cell when she was still insisting that she was innocent and he "exhorted her to make her peace with God." She confessed to Ryland and said that she alone had attacked the Winstons.¹³¹ Her husband,

Stagg, the "orphan child," on December 22, 1843 (City of Richmond, Hustings Court, DB: 47:632, Library of Virginia). Ryland's decision not to disclose that he was Allen's owner may have been linked to abolitionists in the audience who had already expressed hesitation for assisting in purchasing someone even for the purposes of freeing them.

¹²⁶ [Robert Ryland], "Reminiscences of First African Baptist Church, No. 3," *American Baptist Memorial*, November 1855, 324, Hathi Trust Digital Library, [link](#).

¹²⁷ Ayers, 21.

¹²⁸ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, May 20, 1849, RRP, 11.075, VBHS.

¹²⁹ The material on Jane Williams and the Winston murders is drawn from Shelby M. Driskill, "Jane Williams: Enslavement, Murder, and 'A Creed So Prevalent,'" (unpublished manuscript, October 21, 2020), Ulysses file.

¹³⁰ "The Testimony in the Murder Case," *Daily Dispatch*, July 22, 1852, Virginia Chronicle; "Confession of the Murder," *Richmond Enquirer*, July 30, 1852, Virginia Chronicle.

¹³¹ "Jane, The Murderess," *Daily Dispatch*, July 26, 1852, Virginia Chronicle.

John Williams, was also under suspicion. Ryland gave a sermon to the First African Baptist Church congregation centered on the biblical commandment “Thou shalt not kill,” and told them of the threats the murders had concentrated on the church and on its members. He urged the congregants to “*keep your own place – the place of submission.*”¹³² The enslavers of Richmond would now suspect all of the church members, he said, “the most innocent and deserving.” It was, he continued, their “duty to bear these reproaches with meekness, and to see to it that the suspicions resting on you shall prove, so far as you are concerned, to be unjust and groundless.”¹³³ Following Jane Williams’ conviction for the murders, Ryland visited her again. She confessed that she had poisoned another Winston child weeks before the other murders and asked him to keep this a secret until after she was executed, “fearing that a mob would seize and destroy her.”¹³⁴ Ryland did not alert the police, and only shared the confession with the press after she was killed. At the gallows, he stood beside Jane Williams and said a prayer for her.¹³⁵ He continued to believe that John Williams was innocent, later lamenting that he had been executed unjustly and blaming the “infuriated state of the public mind” at the time of the murders.¹³⁶

In 1862, an editorial in the *Confederate Baptist* targeted “the African churches of Richmond” insisting that they were “the resort of insolent negroes, who desire to be exempted from control of their masters.” While the editorial writer did not name Ryland when he wrote that a white pastor leading a Black congregation “is always degraded...ruled by negroes, and as a direct consequence, loses all his manliness as a master, and his integrity as a Christian,” Ryland responded to what was clearly an attack on him. He defended the church, writing that it was made up of “staid, orderly, and obedient” people. He also defended himself. He acknowledged that he was the target of “sneers of the proud, ungodly and blaspheming men,” and wrote that he was “happy to be ‘degraded’ in their view” seeing it as “the price of the privilege of preaching Christ’s gospel to the poor.”¹³⁷

CATECHISM & LITERACY

While Ryland believed that enslaved people should have access to “suitable” reading material and the legal limitations on reading instruction were one of his two objections to the enslavement system, providing direct reading lessons would have put him at odds with authorities and many in the white community. It appears, however, that he may have found a way to support the development of literacy among the congregants who were learning to read or improving their reading skills. In 1848, he published a catechism – questions of faith followed by answers from

¹³² In Ryland’s published writing, italics were substituted for his underlining of text.

¹³³ Robert Ryland, “Substance of a Sermon, Delivered at the African Church, July 25th, 1852, by the Pastor,” *Daily Dispatch*, August 6, 1852.

¹³⁴ “Further Confession of Jane Williams,” *Daily Dispatch*, September 17, 1852.

¹³⁵ “The Execution of Jane Williams,” *Daily Dispatch*, September 11, 1852.

¹³⁶ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences of First African Baptist Church, No. 3,” *American Baptist Memorial*, November 1855, 324, Hathi Trust Digital Library, [link](#).

¹³⁷ Robert Ryland, “African Baptist Churches,” *Religious Herald*, May 14, 1863, Robert Ryland Biographical File, VBHS.

biblical texts – under two titles, *Scripture Catechism, for Coloured People* and, a short time later, *Scripture Catechism for the Instruction of Children and Servants*. These may have operated, in the words of Charles F. Irons, as a “thinly veiled literacy program” that Ryland intended to be “a primer for his black congregants.” They were also constructed to support the tenants of proslavery Christianity. In addition to the “brief section on the mutual responsibilities of ‘Masters and Servants,’” – responsibilities that included submission to “masters,” even cruel ones – Irons writes that “through the very act of creating and disseminating a catechism, Ryland was making the case that a well-regulated system of paternalist instruction—not abolition—was the best way that owners could care for their slaves.”¹³⁸ Ryland shared his beliefs about reading and his own strategy for the distribution of “suitable” reading material among members of the congregation in one of his 1855 essays.¹³⁹

A single source also indicates that Ryland supplied the congregants who could read with a collection of hymns. He was said to have distributed fifteen hundred copies “but found he had not enough to supply a copy to each one who could read.”¹⁴⁰

SECTIONALISM, SECESSION & WAR

Ryland’s feelings of allegiance to the South deepened in the years leading up to secession, however he hoped separation from the Union could be avoided while enslavement was preserved, a sentiment articulated by a number of his peers. Sectionalism had threaded through Ryland’s personal and public writing in the decades before the Civil War. In one of a series of essays he wrote for the *Religious Herald* in support of Richmond College, he detailed the risks posed by a reliance on “foreign” teachers, specifically teachers from the North, and he challenged potential students to show their loyalty to the region by becoming teachers themselves: “Do you deliberately consent to withdraw from all competition and allow the youth of other States to come in and supplant you?”¹⁴¹ He was amused though, by a controversy that arose when a northern instructor was being considered for a position at Richmond College. Several members of the Board of Trustees left a meeting in protest, and the absence of their negative votes meant the candidate got the position.¹⁴²

In an 1857 speech before the Columbian College Alumni Association, Ryland spoke out on his fear of disunion in response to enslavement and the increasing calls for abolition from those in the

¹³⁸ Charles F. Irons, “‘And all these things shall be added unto you’: The First African Baptist Church, Richmond, 1841-1865,” *Virginia Cavalcade* (Winter 1998), 29; Charles F. Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum America*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press (2008), 187, 180.

¹³⁹ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences of First African Baptist Church, No. 2,” *American Baptist Memorial* 15 (October 1855), 292.

¹⁴⁰ “Letter from the South,” excerpt in “Religious Privileges of Slaves,” *Semi-Weekly Standard*, September 2, 1857, *Chronicling America*, Library of Congress, [link](#).

¹⁴¹ Robert Ryland, “Richmond College – No. 11,” *Religious Herald*, VBHS.

¹⁴² Robert Ryland to William Ryland, September 27, 1858, RRP, 01.071, VBHS.

North, and he shared his hope that his listeners would “[r]ebuke those politicians... who are continually exasperating the public mind and urging measures to weaken the bonds of union.” After posing the question of why God would have allowed enslavement in the United States, Ryland offered the prospect of a possible end to the use of forced labor in “a few centuries.” After those hundreds of years, he argued, “free labor may supplant slave labor throughout our borders. As the country becomes filled up with people, the competition between laborers for employment will so reduce their wages that economy may induce capitalists to prefer voluntary operatives.”¹⁴³

As described in the summary section focused on the campus in the 1850s and detailed in section 3.2.2.5 of the complete report, in 1858, Ryland responded to what he believed to be a rumor that he was an abolitionist by placing an item (“A Card”) in the *Religious Herald* in which he stated that 1.) he identified with the interests of Virginia, 2.) he owned “about a dozen” slaves, 3.) he had never manumitted one, nor did he see it as “safe or humane for master or servant” to do so, 4.) he did not sympathize with the abolition movement nor did he communicate with those aligned with it, 5.) he did “not think it morally wrong under existing circumstances to hold slaves.”¹⁴⁴

After expressing his dread of potential war to his son, Ryland’s support for the Confederacy deepened following Virginia’s secession, and he, like many, began weighing in on the strategies of generals: “It seems to me that we are giving up too much ground without fighting, but I yield to the powers that be... I am still not doubtful of the final result. We are contracting our circumference to thicken the line & when we make a stand, it will be a firm one! ... Our reverses of late have given the Yankees great audacity but I trust as Genl. Whiskey shall cease to command our forces, the [illegible: possibly “scale”] will soon turn in our favor.¹⁴⁵ In a letter written to one of his two sons who served in the Confederate army, Ryland wrote, “[O]ur beloved South having been threatened with invasion and subjugation, it seemed to me that nothing was left us but stern resistance or abject submission to unconstitutional power. A brave and generous people could not for a moment hesitate between such alternatives. A war in defence [sic] of our homes and firesides—of our wives and children—of all that makes life worth possessing is the result. While I most deeply deplore the necessity for the sacrifice, I could not but rejoice that I had a son to offer to the service of the country, and if I had a dozen *I would most freely give them all.*”¹⁴⁶

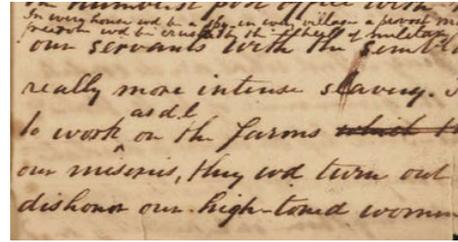
¹⁴³ Robert Ryland, *The American Union*, RRP, 51.020, VBHS. Also published as Robert Ryland, “The American Union,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), September 3, 1857, 2. *Early American Newspapers*. Newsbank. This contrasts with his speech, “The Colonization Society” (1824), in which he anticipated enslavement ending within one hundred years (RRP, 26.026-29).

¹⁴⁴ Robert Ryland, “A Card,” *Religious Herald*, September 14, 1858, VBHS.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, November 23, 1860, RRP, 1.030, VBHS; Robert Ryland to William Ryland, March 4, 1862, RRP, 1.009, VBHS.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Ryland, “A Letter to a Son in Camp,” *Religious Herald*, August 15, 1863, VBHS. Also included in John William Jones *Christ in the Camp; or, Religion in Lee’s Army*, Richmond: B.F. Johnson & Co. (1888), 28.

Ryland’s strong support of the Confederacy was also demonstrated in an 1864 sermon given at Mount Olivet Church in which he spoke of the need to examine the sins that may have affected the South’s fortunes in the war – among them were alcohol, gambling, and prostitution – and called upon the congregation to rally behind the Confederate cause. Of enslavement, he said that, should the North win the war, “they [would] curse our servants with a really more intense slavery.” The South’s loss would upend the social order when the North “[would] turn out a brutal soldiery to insult & dishonor our high-toned women whom they would afterwards employ as cooks, & milk-maids, as washers & seamstresses.¹⁴⁷



Robert Ryland, [Mount Olivet Sermon,] April 8, 1864, RRP, 0157-.0158, VBHS

POST-WAR RICHMOND & KENTUCKY YEARS

Following the surrender of the Confederacy and the end of the Civil War, Ryland attempted to resign as pastor of First African Baptist Church in May of 1865, but “the majority refused to accept his withdrawal” in light of his years of service to the church.¹⁴⁸ In June, however, Ryland resigned the position, writing later that he did so “from a belief that they would *naturally* and *justly* prefer a minister of their own color.”¹⁴⁹

Ryland’s personal wealth was wiped out due to his investment in Confederate funds. The endowment of Richmond College was practically destroyed due to the institution’s own Confederate investments which Ryland had encouraged. For months following the end of the war, Ryland followed the request of the Board of Trustees and prepared the campus for the arrival of students. He threw himself into the process, attempting to locate the contents of the college’s library which had disappeared after being removed by the military.¹⁵⁰ Word reached Ryland before March of 1866 that some key members of the Board of Trustees wanted him to resign his position. Feeling that he lacked the confidence of the full board, Ryland wrote a letter of resignation from his positions as president of Richmond College and its Board of Trustees on March 23, 1866. He was persuaded to remain on the board and was provided a house on the campus rent-free until September 1867.¹⁵¹

Ryland found work at two city institutions: the Richmond Female Institute, where he and his family lived for a time, and at the Richmond location of the National Theological Institute, which provided

¹⁴⁷ Robert Ryland, [Mount Olivet Sermon,] April 8, 1864, RRP, 54a.0157-.0158, VBHS.

¹⁴⁸ John T. O’Brian, “Reconstruction in Richmond,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 89, no. 3, July 1981, 263.

¹⁴⁹ Ryland, “The First Century of the First African Church,” 264.

¹⁵⁰ “Ro. Ryland,” Union Provost Marshals’ File of Paper Relating to Individual Civilians, M345, National Archives Records Administration, accessed through Fold3.com.

¹⁵¹ Robert Ryland to the Richmond College Board of Trustees, March 23, 1866, Records of the Board of Trustees 1861-1870, University of Richmond, University Archives, VBHS; Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, June 12, 1866, University of Richmond, University Archive, VBHS.

ministerial instruction to formerly enslaved men. He wrote that he saw the work there as an absolute necessity, and believed that “the colored people have recently been raised, not only to freedom, but to the dignity of citizenship... *They ought to be educated.* But that is not all. *They will be educated.*” He believed he should be the one to provide their education since he had “labored, on the Sabbath and in other spare hours, with honest zeal, for their spiritual welfare.” He wrote that he “still number[ed] among them a host of warm-hearted friends.”¹⁵² His decision to teach at the institute shocked the editors of the *Religious Herald*, but they appeared to note his extenuating financial circumstances, writing that there was “a more weighty reason which it was not proper for him to mention,” and they conceded that Ryland was “the best qualified for training colored men for the ministry.”¹⁵³ Ryland’s time at the institute, which was located at the former Lumpkin’s Jail site, the notorious slave prison known as the Devil’s Half-Acre, was limited. While he wrote that he had resigned after realizing that two female teachers could be hired for what he was paid, his private letters indicate the work with the students did not satisfy him professionally: “My pupils were so unimpressionable that the work was almost purely mechanical. Did you ever fancy that turning a grindstone all day without sharpening the iron would be harder work than if it [should] sharpen it? (Oh darkeydom! forgive the insinuation).”¹⁵⁴ The institution took the name Colver Institute in 1869, became the Richmond Institute in 1876, and Richmond Theological Seminary in 1886. In 1899, the seminary merged with the Wayland Institute to form Virginia Union University.

Ryland accepted a position leading Kentucky Female College and resigned from the Richmond College Board of Trustees on May 25, 1868. He remained at the women’s college until 1871, then moved on to positions at Lexington College and Henry Male and Female College. Between 1893 and 1897, Ryland served as Chaplain of the Southwest Virginia Institute. Throughout his over thirty years in Kentucky, he continued to work when he could as a guest minister, preaching before white and Black congregants. He was frustrated at not locating a permanent church during much of this period and attributed it to the “spirit of the age.” When he could, however, he relished “opportunities to labor among the destitute and among those who were willing to receive the gospel from the lips of an old man. My aim,” he continued, “has been and still is, to be found at work when the Master comes.” As for his personal spiritual journey, Ryland remained convinced of his own “great unworthiness,” writing at the age of eighty-five that, despite “many humiliating failures,” he had tried to “live a Christian life.”¹⁵⁵

Ryland continued to demonstrate the same contradictions on the subject of race that he had prior to emancipation. In 1885, he was deeply concerned for the Black domestic workers in Kentucky who

¹⁵² Robert Ryland, “To the Baptist Churches of Virginia and the South Generally,” *Religious Herald*, September 12, 1867, VBHS.

¹⁵³ Editors, “Address of Dr. Ryland,” *Religious Herald*, September 12, 1867, VBHS.

¹⁵⁴ Charles H. Corey, *History of the Richmond Theological Seminary, With Reminiscences of Thirty Years Work Among the Colored People of the South*, Richmond: J.W. Randolph Company (1895), 57; Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, October 1, 1868, RRP, 13.023, VBHS.

¹⁵⁵ Robert Ryland, “My Experience and Call to the Ministry,” “Lexington, Ky., 1889,” *The Colloquium*, p. 44, clipping from RRP, 51.046, VBHS.

were on the verge of being displaced by workers from England. He wrote, “What will the colored women do after a while?”¹⁵⁶ Six years later, however, he was amused by his wife’s surprise when she could not find a cook that suited her, writing that she was seeing the difference between “antebellum & post-bellum times.” He continued, “The new generation of Negroes is far above hard work. The women are worse than the men. If you hire them, they study how little work they can do to avoid dismissal, & as soon as they can get money enough...they are gone!”¹⁵⁷ A year before his death, Ryland wrote *The Colored People*, a small publication that included his thoughts on enslavement, colonization, and the lives of Black people following emancipation. In it he remembered those his father enslaved with fondness, painting an idyllic portrait of his childhood among enslaved children and the meals he shared with their families. Ryland wrote that after enslavement – “a season of discipline” – the colonization of Africa by Christianized formerly enslaved people and their descendants would be a demonstration of the “hand of God.” Despite what he referred to as “a natural and mutual race-prejudice between whites and blacks” based on white “distaste for the black skin, the curly hair and the servitude so long associated with them” and Black people’s memories of “the hardships of slavery, and our reluctance to cut the tie that bound them,” Ryland asked his readers to remember that “[o]ur bodies are diverse in color, but our souls, if they have any color, are by nature equally dark, and by the blood of the Lamb, may be made equally white.”¹⁵⁸

Robert Ryland died at his daughter’s home at the age of ninety-five after suffering a brief illness.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Robert Ryland to Samuel Ryland, March 15, 1885, RRP, 12.034, VBHS.

¹⁵⁷ Robert Ryland to Betty Ryland, December 10, 1891, RRP, 20.018, VBHS.

¹⁵⁸ Robert Ryland, *The Colored People*, 6-8, RRP, 3.060-061, VBHS.

¹⁵⁹ Obituary, “Robert Ryland,” RRP, 03.038, VBHS.

SOURCES

The Virginia Baptist Historical Society provided access to thousands of pages of Robert Ryland's personal papers. In early to mid-2020, University of Richmond Digital Engagement Team in Boatwright Library has digitally preserved this material resulting in nearly six thousand images, and their work facilitated research during the COVID-19 lockdown period when access to campus was limited. A significant portion of the material cited in the report has also been drawn from other sources located during independent research (Fall 2018-Fall 2019) and under the auspices of the Inclusive History Project (Fall 2019-Winter 2020/21):

- Institutional records including the minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees (microfilm), records of the Board of Trustees (manuscripts), and digitized volumes of *The Messenger*
- Hundreds of newspaper articles, including the *Religious Herald* (Virginia Baptist Historical Society), other Baptist publications, and contemporaneous local, regional, and national newspapers located in digital databases and on microfilm (*Virginia Chronicle*, Library of Virginia and the Virginia Newspaper Project; *Chronicling America*, Library of Congress; and *Early American Newspapers*, Boatwright Library at the University of Richmond through a gift of Edwin S. Snead, III, Class of 1951)
- Biographies and autobiographies of Ryland's friends, students, and colleagues
- The minutes of deacons' meetings at First African Baptist Church which Ryland recorded (Library of Virginia, provided by members of First African Baptist Church)
- Henrico County and Campbell County tax records (Library of Virginia)
- Data from the Federal Censuses of 1810 to 1890, particularly the records of enslavement within Population Schedules before 1850 and the designated Slave Schedules of 1850 and 1860
- Manuscript records and images from the Library of Virginia, the library of the Virginia Historical Society at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture, the Wyndham Robertson Library at Hollins University, the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia, the Lynchburg Museum, Duke University (papers of George Frederick Holmes), and the Library of Congress (records of the American Colonization Society)

BRIEF PROFESSIONAL TIMELINE

- 1827-1832 Pastor of Second Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Virginia
- 1832-1840 Instructor, administrator, and steward – in charge of facility and “hired” labor – at Virginia Baptist Seminary
- 1840-1866 Following Virginia Baptist Seminary’s charter, became President of Richmond College, President of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, and Professor of Moral Philosophy and other subjects; at times served as General Agent (fundraising) and performed steward’s duties
- 1841-1865 Minister of Richmond’s First African Baptist Church, a position that legally had to be filled by a white man due to the constraints put into place following Nat Turner’s Rebellion in 1831; guest minister at many local and regional churches
- 1867-1868 Instructor at the Richmond branch of the National Theological Institute, focused on the instruction of formerly enslaved ministerial students; Instructor at Richmond Female Institute
- 1868-1871 Administrator of Kentucky Female College; guest ministry at local churches
- 1871-1881 Administrator of Lexington College and Henry Male and Female College; brief pastoral position and guest ministry continued
- 1893-1897 Chaplain of Southwest Virginia Institute

SELECTION OF RYLAND’S PUBLIC STATEMENTS & WRITING ON ENSLAVEMENT

- 1824 Ryland gave a public address while a college student focused on the work of the American Colonization Society in which he referred to enslavement as “evil” and “legalized crime,” envisioning the removal of freed Black people from the United States as a remedy, providing a state of “innocence” for the country and a Christianizing influence on Africa that he hoped would counter Islam (“The Colonization Society,” RRP, 26.026-.029, VBHS)
- 1835 In an open letter to theologian and academic Francis Wayland, in response to Wayland’s textbook, *The Elements of Moral Science*, specifically a section focused on the immorality of enslavement, Ryland wrote of three “difficulties” with manumission and abolition: first, enslavers who freed those they enslaved would have to continue to care for those who could not care for themselves; second, in Virginia, those who were freed had to leave the state and “servants of humane masters... prefer their present bondage to expatriation and freedom” (here Ryland introduced the idea of “humane masters” who are “studying the subject of slavery candidly”); third, white people would not work for wages to do the work that enslaved people were doing, particularly the “drudgery of domestic business... slaves have always performed it.” Ryland concluded by writing that he hoped he would not be viewed as an advocate for enslavement, and that he felt “the perplexity of the subject.” (“To Dr. Wayland,” *Christian Watchman*, August 21, 1835)
- 1852 In a sermon given in response to the murders of members of an enslaving family by a woman held by them who was a member of First African Baptist Church, Ryland emphasized why enslaved and free Black congregants must remain submissive to white people. In part, it would protect the existence of the church. Ryland also stated, “God has given this country to the white people. They are the law-makers – the masters – the superiors. The people of color are the subjects – the servants – and even when not in bondage, the inferiors.” (“Thou Shalt Not Kill”/ “Substance of a Sermon,” *Daily Dispatch*, August 6, 1852)
- 1857 In a speech before the alumni association of his *alma mater*, Ryland spoke out on his fear of disunion in response to enslavement and calls for abolition, asking listeners to “[r]ebuke those

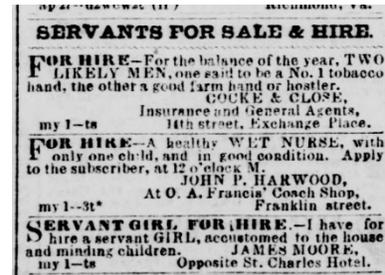
politicians... who are continually exasperating the public mind and urging measures to weaken the bonds of union.” After asking why God would have allowed enslavement in the United States, Ryland offered a possible end to the use of bondage in “a few centuries.” Then “free labor may supplant slave labor throughout our borders. As the country becomes filled up with people, the competition between laborers for employment will so reduce their wages that economy may induce capitalists to prefer voluntary operatives.” (“The American Union,” RRP, 51.020, VBHS)

- 1858 Ryland issued a public response to what he believed to be a rumor that he was an abolitionist. This was a year following an anonymous accusation that he was spreading abolitionism through his use of Francis Wayland’s textbook. To quell the suspected rumor, which he thought was influencing parents of prospective Richmond College students, Ryland placed a “card” in the *Religious Herald* in which he states 1.) he identified with the interests of Virginia, 2.) he owned “about a dozen” slaves, 3.) he had never manumitted one, nor did he see it as “safe or humane for master or servant” to do so, 4.) he did not sympathize with the abolition movement nor did he communicate with those aligned with it, 5.) he did “not think it morally wrong under existing circumstances to hold slaves.” (“A Card,” *Religious Herald*, September 14, 1858, VBHS)
- 1861 In a report from the Education Board of the Virginia Baptist General Association, Ryland wrote that the South can no longer accept ministers from the “corrupted region” of the North which had harbored a “long-cherished hatred...toward the institutions of the South.” (Report to the Virginia Baptist General Association, published in the *Daily Dispatch*, June 1, 1861, Virginia Chronicle)
- 1864 In a sermon at Mount Olivet Church in Hanover County, Ryland called on listeners to rally to the Confederate cause and to imagine the social inversion should the Union prevail: the North would “curse our servants with a really more intense slavery. They [would] hire our private citizens to work as d.l. [likely “day labor” or “day laborers”] on the farms... once owned by them, & to crown all our miseries, they wd turn out a brutal soldiery to insult & dishonor our high-toned women whom they would afterwards employ as cooks, & milk-maids, as washers & seamstresses.” (Mount Olivet Sermon, April 1864, RRP, 54a.0157-.0158, VBHS)
- 1880 In a history of First African Baptist Church, Ryland recalled his time there, his baptisms of members, his ministerial priorities, and other memories of the church’s early decades. He also addressed the belief among white people that “all negroes are alike,” praising specific members of his former congregation. Ryland concluded by sharing his feelings on emancipation, “The negroes are now all free, and I am heartily glad of it, though I say nothing of the agencies and methods by which the event was accomplished. They are our fellow-men— our fellow-citizens— and many of them our fellow-Christians.” Ryland then called for recollection of the “leading doctrine” of Christianity: “Love worketh no ill to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” (“The Origin and History of the First African Church” in *The First Century of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, 1780-1880*, 272)
- 1898 Just a year before he died at the age of ninety-five, Ryland’s thoughts on enslavement were recorded in his work, *The Colored People*, in which he fondly recalled those enslaved by his father, urged an end to “all prejudice and indifference,” called for a focus among white readers on the “temporal and spiritual interests” of Black people, and again addressed why God would have allowed enslavement. His answer is aligned with the priorities of the colonization movement, to which he remained committed for most of his adult life. After the enslavement era, “a season of discipline,” Ryland wrote, “it does not seem presumptuous to infer that the Benignant Being had in view, first, the salvation of a vast throng of benighted souls, who would not otherwise have been saved, and then to send them and their descendants, properly qualified to illumine the two hundred millions of Africans yet in darkness with the light of the gospel.” (*The Colored People*, RRP, 3.059, VBHS)

TERMINOLOGY

“SERVANTS”

The term “servant” was the “standard euphemism” for enslaved people in the antebellum South, and like most white Virginians at the time, Robert Ryland generally defaulted to this term in his letters and other writing.¹⁶⁰ “Servant” is also a frequent designator used in the records of the Board of Trustees and other institutional documents. Historian Christopher L. Tomlins describes “unfree” labor becoming the assumed synonym for “servant” and writes that “what was differentiated was free labor.”¹⁶¹ Jeffery Kahana summarizes Tomlins in his own examination of the term, writing that “Americans in the early republic, [Tomlins] argues, bristled at the word servant to describe working people who were not black slaves.”¹⁶² Midori Takagi also addresses the use of the word in relation to the work of enslaved people: “Throughout this period household servants were mostly slaves and generally women.”¹⁶³ A significant amount of the labor needs at Virginia Baptist Seminary and Richmond College fell into the category of household work. In 1835, Robert Ryland was clear that he defaulted to viewing domestic labor as being performed by enslaved people. On “[t]he drudgery of domestic business,” Ryland wrote, “slaves have always performed it.”¹⁶⁴ This is also one of the rare instances in which Ryland used the term “slaves.”



Typical classified section in the
Richmond Daily Dispatch (May 2, 1860)

Some examples of Robert Ryland’s own use of the term “servants”:

1. An essay he wrote describing efforts of enslaved members of First African Baptist Church to use mail distribution as a means of organizing escape efforts: “About this time several servants escaped to the North, from their masters, and wrote back to their former comrades, here, detailing the manner of their escape, and proposing to them facilities and information for the same experiment.”¹⁶⁵
2. Ryland treated “servant” and “slave” synonymously in an 1858 statement declaring his commitment to the institution of slavery in Virginia: “I own about a dozen slaves... I have never manumitted one, and do not design doing so... I do not think emancipation safe or

¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth Pryor, in “Book Discussion on Reading the Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee,” C-Span, May 19, 2007, [link](#).

¹⁶¹ Christopher L. Tomlins, *Law, Labor, and Ideology in the Early Republic*, New York: Cambridge University Press (1993), note 30, 268.

¹⁶² Jeffrey S. Kahana, “Master and Servant in the Early Republic, 1780-1830,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Spring 2000, 28.

¹⁶³ Takagi, “Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction,” 34.

¹⁶⁴ Robert Ryland, “To Dr. Wayland” [Open Letter to Francis Wayland], *Christian Watchman*, August 21, 1835, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank.

¹⁶⁵ Robert Ryland, “Reminiscences of First African Church... No. 3,” 323.

humane to either master or servant.”¹⁶⁶

3. His description of how enslaved people were able to donate money to First African Baptist Church: “My own servants, when we were about to furnish their fall or spring clothing, would often say that, by patching their old garments, they could do without *new* ones, and would ask us for the *money* instead. Of course, we had no objection to this plan, unless we suspected a vicious use of the money. I suppose other families pursued the same course.”¹⁶⁷
4. In an 1864 sermon at Mount Olivet Baptist Church, when speaking of the prospect of Northern victory and the freeing of enslaved people: “they wd [would] curse our servants with a really more intense slavery.”¹⁶⁸
5. In Ryland’s papers, there are more than a dozen references to the purchase of “servants’ clothes,” both as personal expenses and as expenses of the Virginia Baptist Seminary and Richmond College Boarding Departments.¹⁶⁹ The required purchase of enslaved people’s clothing was typically made explicit in hiring agreements.¹⁷⁰
6. In his receipts year to year, Ryland notes the money he received for hiring out those he enslaved including “Servts hired at Semy [Seminary] 1834 80.[00].”¹⁷¹

“HIRING OUT”

Given the institution’s use of hired enslaved labor, and Ryland’s regular hiring out of those he enslaved, a familiarity with the “slave hiring” system and associated terminology is necessary. The system of enslavers leasing those they enslaved to others formed a significant part of Richmond’s antebellum society and economy. The practice was referred to as “slave hiring,” “negro hire,” “servants’ hire,” or simply “hiring” and covered a range of forced labor, from household work for families who may not have enslaved anyone personally to the large-scale hire of enslaved men to work in the area’s coal pits and factories. Takagi writes, “Bondmen who were hired out were

¹⁶⁶ Robert Ryland, “A Card,” *Religious Herald*, September 14, 1858.

¹⁶⁷ Robert Ryland, “Origin and History of the First African Church,” *The First Century of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, 1780-1880*, Richmond: Carlton McCarthy, 1880, 271.

¹⁶⁸ Sermon, “Mt. Olivet Ap 8 64, Judges 6:24,” RRP, 54.0150, VBHS.

¹⁶⁹ Examples of “Servants’ clothes” purchases in the ledgers maintained by Ryland include Ledger I, RRP, “Expenses of the Boarding Department of VBS 1834,” 55.1.032; “Expenditures of the Boarding Department 1835, 1st Session,” 55.1.037; “Expenditures of the Boarding Department, 1837,” 55.1.051; “Expenses of the Boarding Department” 1838, first and second sessions, 55.1.55-57; Ledger II, “Expenses of the Board.g Department, 1840 Second Sess.n,” 55.2.007; “Expenses of the Boarding Department 1841 1st Session,” 55.2.009, VBHS.

¹⁷⁰ John J. Zaborney, *Slaves for Hire: Renting Enslaved Laborers in Antebellum Virginia*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press (2012), 12, 14.

¹⁷¹ Robert Ryland, “Receipts on Private Account of 1835,” Ledger I, RRP, 55.1.036, VBHS.

temporarily employed away from their owners as skilled artisans, house servants, fire fighters, road pavers, and factory hands.”¹⁷²

In his records of Boarding Department expenses, Ryland frequently noted the payment of “hire” (Ex: “Fanny’s hire”) and in the case of his hiring out those he himself enslaved, he recorded his own receipt of the associated amount of their “hire.”¹⁷³ Hirers would often enter into agreements of a one-year hiring period which ended each December. “Self-hired” enslaved people would seek new employment during “Hiring Days” on and around New Year’s Day. Historian John Zaborney writes that, “[i]n Virginia, those who hired by the year executed a slave-hiring bond for the transaction.”¹⁷⁴

The full version of this examination of terminology is included in Appendix A of the report.

¹⁷² Takagi, “Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction,” location 115-116, Kindle.

¹⁷³ Robert Ryland, Ledger I, RRP, 55.1.036, .039-040, VBHS.

¹⁷⁴ Zaborney, *Slaves for Hire*, 12.

“A SEASON OF DISCIPLINE:” ENSLAVEMENT, EDUCATION & FAITH IN THE LIFE OF ROBERT RYLAND

Shelby M. Driskill, Research Coordinator, University of Richmond Inclusive History Project, January 19, 2021

Submitted with Laurantt L. Lee, Ph.D., Historical Consultant, University of Richmond Inclusive History Project, January 29, 2021

In Fall 2019, following the July 8, 2019 release of [*Making Excellence Inclusive: University Report and Recommendations*](#), and supported by the findings of the Presidential Commission for University History and Identity, the University of Richmond established a research initiative organized by Dr. Amy Howard and led by Dr. Laurantt L. Lee. The Inclusive History Project was tasked with the study of three subjects: the burying ground on the campus, Robert Ryland, and Douglas Southall Freeman. The considerations of Robert Ryland and Douglas Southall Freeman were prompted by the joint resolution of the Westhampton College and Richmond College Student Government, “On Changing the Narrative: Regarding Building Names.”

Robert Ryland (1805-1899), for whom a portion of Ryland Hall is named, was a central figure in two antebellum institutions: Virginia Baptist Seminary/Richmond College and First African Baptist Church. After serving as principal/superintendent of Virginia Baptist Seminary from 1832-1840 he became the first President of Richmond College. Both were precursors to the University of Richmond. He was the public face of the institution in the first decades of its history, exerting singular influence during the Virginia Baptist Seminary era and Richmond College’s pre-1868 period, and was largely, if not entirely, responsible for the institution’s sustained existence. He remained the president of the college until his resignation in 1866. He led the Board of Trustees until 1868. Ryland was also a Baptist minister and a major figure in the history of Virginia Baptists. Between 1841 and 1865, he was pastor of Richmond’s First African Baptist Church, and he served in leadership roles in numerous Baptist organizations.

The Robert Ryland Study was charged with providing 1.) a comprehensive biography of Robert Ryland, with particular attention paid to the ways that his academic and ministerial work intersected with enslavement, 2.) a determination of the degree to which he used the labor of those he enslaved, or the enslaved labor of others, in the running of the institution, and 3.) an overview of his contributions to a.) the formation of the University of Richmond, b.) Virginia Baptists, and c.) religious freedom in Virginia. This resulting report contains findings that detail Ryland’s roles at what became the University of Richmond; his work as a minister; his enslavement of men, women, and children; the profit he derived from “hiring” them to others, including the seminary/college; and the frequent use of the labor of enslaved people hired from other enslavers or agents by the seminary/college, which was under the overall supervision of the Board of Trustees during the Richmond College period.

“A Season of Discipline”: *Enslavement, Faith & Education in the Life of Robert Ryland* contains the findings of Shelby M. Driskill during a period of independent and course-based research

between October 2018 to August 2019, and her work while Research Coordinator of the University of Richmond Inclusive History Project led by Dr. Laurant L. Lee between August 2019 and Spring 2021.

REPORT ORGANIZATION

Part One provides an overview of Robert Ryland’s life before he assumed the leadership position at Virginia Baptist Seminary. Particular attention is provided to enslavement, education, his spiritual development, and his early years as a minister.

Part Two examines the years 1832 to 1840 when Ryland worked as administrator, instructor, and steward of Virginia Baptist Seminary, the institution that was chartered as Richmond College in 1840. This portion of the report includes information on Ryland’s personal enslavement, the institution’s use of those he enslaved, his shaping of the educational priorities of the seminary and his role in its day-to-day operations. It also includes the institution’s move to the Columbia estate (where it remained until 1914) and Ryland’s brief position as the chaplain of the University of Virginia.

Part Three covers Ryland’s life and work at Richmond College the years between 1840 and 1861 when the campus closed during the Civil War. Included are details of Ryland’s enslavement of men, women, and children and his ongoing use of the “hiring out” system, leasing those he enslaved to others. It contains details of the institutional use of “hired” enslaved people for the daily operations of the campus, specifically those who were hired or owned by campus stewards and managers of dormitories. Also included are details of Ryland’s administration of the college, his work on the Board of Trustees, his role as a professor, and his personal life. An additional section contains excerpts of Ryland’s private financial ledgers focused on those he enslaved and hired out.

Because Ryland spent much of the antebellum period living on the campus, details of his personal life and institutional work are covered together in **Parts Two and Three**. While general institutional history is drawn upon for the purposes of context, this report is not intended to be a comprehensive history of the institution’s early years. Ryland’s own history of Virginia Baptist Seminary and Richmond College, [The Society, the Seminary, the College: An Address](#), and W. Harrison Daniel’s [“Genesis of Richmond College: 1843-1860”](#) are available online. Reuben E. Alley’s *History of the University of Richmond* (1977) is available at Boatwright Library.

Part Four is dedicated to Robert Ryland’s work at First African Baptist Church in Richmond. It includes Ryland’s role as pastor there, the services he conducted at the church, controversies centered on his work, the connection between his ministerial role and his work on behalf of the American Colonization Society, and his relationships with congregants.

Part Five details Ryland’s approach to sectionalism, secession, and war. It provides an overview of his writings and addresses on those subjects and describes his activities during the Civil War.

Part Six spans Ryland’s years in post-war Richmond, his work for the Richmond Female Institute and the National Theological Institute, his departure in 1868, and his later life – including his educational and ministerial work – before his death in 1899.

Appendix A: An examination of the use of the terms “servants” and “hiring out”

Appendix B: Details of two of Ryland’s significant Baptist influences, Robert Baylor Semple and Andrew Broaddus

Appendix C: 1849 newspaper item detailing the brief life of Thomas U. Allen, a formerly enslaved man whom Robert Ryland purchased in 1843 as an agent for manumission and freed in 1845

Appendix D: “Vindication of Dr. Ryland,” (1857), items from the Richmond College Board of Trustees and the graduating class defending Robert Ryland against accusations of teaching abolitionism

Appendix E: Selected Sermons of Robert Ryland

Appendix F: “To Dr. Robert Ryland,” a poem by Reverend Walter Henderson Brooks, a formerly enslaved congregant at First African Baptist Church

Appendix G: A late life letter from Robert Ryland to Jeremiah Bell Jeter

OVERVIEW OF SOURCES

Robert Ryland’s papers – thousands of pages of letters, ledgers, sermons, and other items – were critical to the research on his life and thoughts on enslavement, spirituality, and also other aspects of his biography. This collection of resources also provided much of the material related to the people he enslaved and other enslaved people who were “hired out” to the institution. The papers are held by the Virginia Baptist Historical Society and, over the course of the last year, have been digitally preserved in cooperation with the University of Richmond Digital Engagement Team in Boatwright Library. The coordinated efforts of Dr. Nathan Taylor of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, and Kimberly Wolfe, of the Digital Engagement Team, resulted in over six thousand pages of material – handwritten letters, ledgers, and sermons; examples of Ryland’s published work; newspaper clippings; and other records being available for research during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Of particular interest to this study were antebellum-era materials and Ryland’s recollections of his life and work before his departure for Kentucky in 1868:

- Precise records of Ryland’s personal finances, 1824-1868
- Equally detailed records of the institution’s Boarding Department 1832-1842¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ The break in day-to-day institutional financial records is likely explained by a note Ryland added later in which he stated that the records he had been keeping of tuition collected ended when Charles L. Cocke took over the position of college steward. Boarding Department records would have been maintained by Cocke as well. Despite extensive searching, these later ledgers have not been located and may have been lost in the fire that burned the original Ryland Hall in 1910. There is a possibility that the only reason the information they contain survived was because Ryland was keeping institutional records on separate pages in the same ledgers as his personal accounts and therefore retained them rather than housing them at the institution. It is hoped the missing institutional ledgers may one day be found. For years not covered by available ledgers, information that relates to enslaved labor on the campus has been located in the records of the Richmond College Board of Trustees including board minutes, a Report of the Steward (1843), and Robert Ryland’s President’s Reports between 1851 and 1862.

- Hundreds of letters written by Robert Ryland between 1824 and his death in 1899 which provide biographical information, some details of those he enslaved, and his thoughts on enslavement, education, and other matters
- Newspaper clippings and Robert Ryland's published writing

This material which constitutes the Robert Ryland Papers (RRP) was collected through the efforts of members of Ryland's family, including his nephew, Charles Hill Ryland, who was the Librarian and Treasurer of Richmond College, and Garnett Ryland, a member of the University of Richmond faculty and head of the Department of Chemistry. Garnett Ryland was also one of two developers of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society.

A significant amount of information in this report has been drawn from other sources as well:

- Institutional records including the minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, manuscript records of the Board of Trustees including Robert Ryland's quarterly reports, and digitized issues of *The Messenger*
- The complete run of the *Religious Herald* held by the Virginia Baptist Historical Society
- Hundreds of other contemporaneous newspaper articles and items from local, regional, and national newspapers that are located in digital databases and on microfilm
- Reports and other items published by Baptist associations and organizations
- Biographies and autobiographies of Ryland's friends, students, and colleagues
- The minutes of deacons' meetings at First African Baptist Church which were largely recorded by Robert Ryland
- Henrico County and Campbell County tax records
- Data from the Federal Censuses of 1810 to 1890, particularly the records of enslavement within standard census records before 1850 and the designated Slave Schedules of 1850 and 1860
- Manuscript records from the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, the Library of Virginia, the library of the Virginia Historical Society at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture, Wyndham Robertson Library Special Collections at Hollins University, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia, Duke University Libraries Special Collections and Archives, and the Library of Congress

TRANSCRIPTION NOTES

While the Robert Ryland Papers contain some published material, the majority of the documents are handwritten letters, ledgers, and sermons. Below are notes on the transcription process used for this report.

- Across much of his writing, Robert Ryland used the plus symbol (+) for the word "and." This was transcribed using an ampersand (&).
- At times in his letters and sermons, and more often in his informal writing, Ryland used dashes for commas and periods. For clarity, these have been substituted for appropriate punctuation. Images of several letters appear in the body of the report.

- Ryland’s ledger entries often use “do” for “ditto” to indicate a repetition of an above or previous category. These have been replaced by bracketed words indicating the category to which he was referring.
- For emotional emphasis in his writing, Ryland frequently underlined sections of text. In published items italics were used to represent those underlined sections. When handwritten manuscripts are quoted in this report underlining is retained. Italics are used in quotes drawn from published material.

“SERVANTS” AND “HIRING OUT”

“Servant” and “servants” were common euphemisms for enslaved people and were the preferred terms used by Ryland and most of his contemporaries. “Hire” and “hiring out” were used to denote the leasing of enslaved people by their enslavers to other individuals, businesses, and institutions. A full examination of the terms is located in Appendix A.

1.0 EARLY YEARS TO 1832

1.1 FAMILY & FAITH

1.1.1 ENSLAVEMENT AT FARMINGTON

Robert Ryland was the third child of Josiah Ryland (1767-1850) and his second with Catherine Peachy Ryland (1776-1858). Josiah Ryland was among the most significant landholders in King and Queen County, Virginia. He owned 1,146.5 acres of land in 1820 when Robert Ryland was fifteen years old. According to that year’s Federal Census, Josiah Ryland enslaved thirty-five people who were forced to provide domestic, agricultural, and other labor to the family. Nineteen free Black people also worked on the Ryland property at that time.¹⁷⁶ Josiah Ryland’s aversion to being “dependent on foreign mechanics” meant that his properties held a number of cottage industries worked by the labor force bound to the family. Robert Ryland’s daughter, Josephine Ryland Knight, recalled that her grandfather has “learned the carpenter’s trade and trained his servant Tom in it” and in addition to the carpenter’s shop, his estate known as Farmington was the location of “a cooper’s shop, a gin house, [and] a rope walk, where they made ropes from cotton spun by the Negro women.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ United States Federal Census of 1820, St. Stephens, King & Queen County, Virginia, “Ryland, Josiah,” Page: 19; National Archives and Records Administration, Roll: M33_142; Image: 49. Nineteen people were included in the category, “All other persons except Indians not taxed” which was added to distinguish between “the number of free colored persons and of slaves,” see “1820 Census Instructions to Enumerators,” United States Census Bureau, [link](#).

¹⁷⁷ Josephine Ryland Knight, “Reminiscences of Farmington,” read at the Ryland Family Reunion, 1932, retrieved from ancestry.com. Emma R. Crump referred to Knight’s remembrance as “her ‘Reminiscences of Farmington’” in a letter to Mabel Ryland, August 17, 1961 (RRP 2.003-004). Details in the “Reminiscences” also correspond to Josephine Ryland Knight, “Sketches of Robert Ryland,” VBHS, and Robert Ryland, D.D., *The Colored People*, Baptist Mission Rooms: Baltimore, Maryland, 1898, 4-5, RRP, File 3.059,” VBHS.

In his 1898 publication, *The Colored People*, Robert Ryland recalled his childhood surrounded by “about forty negroes of all ages between infancy and decrepitude”:

I was nursed by a kind woman of color whom I called ‘Mammy,’ and loved as such. I played with colored boys, rode on their backs, was drawn in a toy wagon by them as my horses; for the grown servants I was the constant intercessor with my father and mother for extra food, clothing and medicine. After eating in the “great house,” I have often gone into their quarters to partake by invitation of their food. It seemed to taste sweeter than what I had eaten with the family. Sympathizing with the young under their discipline, I was not allowed to treat the old servants with any disrespect. I called them, as was the custom, “Uncle” or “Aunt.” When I returned from boarding school or college, I was welcomed by the whole colored group with an affection that I honestly reciprocated.¹⁷⁸

According to Josephine Ryland Knight, an enslaved woman named Patience, referred to as Aunt Patience by the Ryland family, was one of Robert Ryland’s caregivers during his boyhood.¹⁷⁹

1.1.2 FAITH AND THE SEEDS OF MINISTRY

Many of the recollections of Farmington recorded by Robert Ryland and his children centered on the family’s deep associations with the Baptist church, which was central to the Rylands’ lives in King & Queen County. Josiah Ryland was a deacon of Bruington Baptist Church, an institution of profound significance to both Virginia religious history and the development of the Baptist denomination. Family worship was also a daily activity in the Ryland household. Robert Ryland described his own faith as having been rooted in his upbringing at Farmington where “morning and evening worship” was a “uniform habit.” The house was “a common resort for preachers whose discourse, in the private circle, often turned upon spiritual topics.”¹⁸⁰ In later decades, Robert Ryland’s daughter recalled those enslaved by Josiah Ryland attending church with the family. A “farm wagon drawn by mules” with a “rag carpet and perhaps a dozen low, shuck-bottomed chairs” followed the two Ryland family carriages on Sundays, providing transportation for the “feeble and aged servants” while “[t]he vigorous preferred to walk across the fields and through the woods meeting friends along the way.”¹⁸¹

Robert Ryland’s early ministerial inspiration centered on the influence of Robert Baylor Semple, a central figure in Virginia Baptist history. Ryland remembered “often shed[ing] secret tears, after praying I might not shed them” while listening to Semple preach. Despite participating in “boyish sports and worldly associations,” during his teenage years, Ryland returned to spiritual thoughts “at

¹⁷⁸ Robert Ryland, D.D., *The Colored People*, Baptist Mission Rooms: Baltimore, Maryland, 1898, 4-5, RRP, 3.059,” VBHS.

¹⁷⁹ Letter, Josephine Ryland Knight to Garnett Ryland, undated, RRP, 42.062-076, VBHS. “Mrs. Josephine Ryland Knight’s Recollections of her father, Dr. Robert Ryland,” appears to have been added at a later date, possibly by Roberta Ryland Adkins who signed an appended note to Garnett Ryland on October 8, 1932 (RRP, 42.076). Patience was also mentioned Josephine Ryland Knight’s “Reminiscences of Farmington.”

¹⁸⁰ Robert Ryland, “My Experience and Call to the Ministry,” RRP, 51.044, VBHS.

¹⁸¹ Knight, “Reminiscences of Farmington.”

intervals, and with increased intensity.” He later located a key spiritual moment on a particular day in his sixteenth year, when he had resisted an impulse to attend a spontaneous mid-week church meeting and instead, “anxious to learn,” chose school over the spiritual gathering. That evening he was filled with deep regret, believing this to have been a moment of divine calling which he had missed: “I was immediately convinced that the impulse to attend the meeting was from God! That week was one of serious meditation.” Ryland wrote that the experience made him determined he “would become a better Christian.” He spent “three years, without any change of purpose, to get ready for baptism.” This period of preparation blended his scholarly and spiritual impulses, when he “read and heard attentively whatever religious thought came my way.” Ryland found himself “driv[en]... almost to despair” by the absence of a profound conversion experience, however, and was deeply disappointed that he was unable to “see my condition in its true light and to feel the horrors of a guilty conscience.” During his time of doubt, his belief that he was “so far short of...true godliness,” prevented him from seeking to be baptized. After witnessing a particularly moving immersion ceremony, however, Ryland was baptized in August of 1824 at the age of nineteen. Ryland never had the conversion experience he longed for. He eventually came to peace with its absence and wrote that he was “finally led to inquire whether the Spirit does not operate differently on different individuals.”¹⁸²

Two key figures in Baptist history were closely attached to the Ryland family and to Robert Ryland himself: Robert Baylor Semple and Andrew Broaddus. It appears that each man may have influenced key aspects of Ryland’s later approaches to education, ministry, enslavement, and the colonization movement. Details of Semple and Broaddus, and the influence of both men on Robert Ryland, appear in Appendix B.

1.2 HUMANITY HALL

While president of Richmond College, Ryland once compared the value of “self-education” versus work with a teacher. His thoughts were paraphrased in the *Richmond Enquirer*: “[I]f a man begins with a teacher, he can accomplish more in a short time than he could otherwise by a long effort.”¹⁸³ His own family had a history of valuing education, including the 1771 provision for Josiah Ryland to receive five pounds for schooling at the death of his father, Joseph Ryland (1716-1772).¹⁸⁴ It is likely that Bruington Baptist Church pastor and family friend Robert Baylor Semple also influenced Robert Ryland’s desire for education and may have led the way to his attending Humanity Hall in Hanover County, Virginia, the school which had

<p>EDUCATION.—The subscriber offers his services to the public for the ensuing year to instruct boys and young men in the following branches of Literature, viz. Reading, Writing and Spelling; the English language with propriety—the Latin and Greek languages, History, Geography with the use of the Globes, the Elements of Natural Philosophy, the Elements of Geometry with practical surveying, Arithmetic, Vulgar and Decimal with Algebra.</p> <p>The price of board, tuition, washing, bedding and fuel, will be an hundred dollars for the term, paid quarterly in advance, to commence on the 15th of January and expire on the tenth of December next, with the usual vacation. He hopes from his success, experience and diligence in his profession, to obtain that share of the public patronage which he merits.</p> <p>THOS. NELSON, Humanity Hall, forks of Hanover, Dec. 14, 1809.</p>	<p>THO. HIGGINBOTHAM & Co. December 23. 2w</p> <p>WINGFIELD ACADEMY. (Forks of Hanover). At this place will be taught, the ensuing year, the Greek, Latin, French, and English Languages; Geography, the use of the Globes, Italian Letters, Geometry, Arithmetic, Book-keeping and Writing.</p> <p>EXPENSES. Board, Tuition, Washing, Bed & Bedding £ 30 per annum. Board, exclusive of Bed & Bedding 50 per annum. In either case quarterly payments in advance will be required.</p> <p>For eligibility of the institution, the subscriber wishes the support to be made to its patrons and scholars for a long series of years past. The school will be opened the 15th of January, and closed the 10th of December. Small fees will be lodged in the drawing house of the subscriber.</p> <p>FRANK NELSON, Dec. 24 spdw</p>
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[Richmond] *Enquirer*, December 30, 1809, Virginia Chronicle

¹⁸² Robert Ryland, “My Experience and Call to the Ministry,” RRP, 51.045, VBHS.

¹⁸³ “Baptist General Association of Virginia,” *Richmond Enquirer*, May 10, 1859, Virginia Chronicle.

¹⁸⁴ Essex County, Virginia, Will Book 12, page 14, Joseph Ryland, August 17, 1772. The text of Joseph Ryland’s will is also included in RRP, 03.008, VBHS.

been associated with Semple's former teacher, Peter Nelson.¹⁸⁵ Nelson was "known throughout lower Virginia as one of the most distinguished teachers in the state."¹⁸⁶

Humanity Hall was located at Forks of Hanover, approximately thirty miles from Ryland's home in King & Queen County. While Ryland described a religious awakening associated with school at age sixteen and letters indicate that he was studying and boarding in Hanover County in the spring of 1823 at the age of seventeen, the precise date he began attending the school is not clear.¹⁸⁷ Instruction at Humanity Hall covered the standard subjects – Mathematics, Geography, and "the English language, with propriety" – and Peter Nelson's brother, Thomas Nelson, who was running the school at the time, also provided Latin and Greek language instruction.¹⁸⁸ As was the case at the Ryland family home, during Robert Ryland's time boarding at Humanity Hall he would have been surrounded by enslaved people, in this case those laboring for the Nelson family and, it is likely, for the school and its students. Thomas Nelson enslaved thirty-one people in 1820, and that number likely reflects the size of the enslaved community at the time that Ryland attended the school.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Peter Nelson was a student of the classics, a graduate of the College of William and Mary and established a school focused on Latin, Greek, and ancient rhetoric (*Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, [Genealogies of Virginia Families](#), 760, which draws heavily from information in Roswell Page's *Hanover County History and Legends*, 54). Like most schools in the area, Humanity Hall was operated out of a private residence. It stood about a hundred feet from the main house at Wingfield ([Survey of Historic Resources, Hanover County, Phases I and II](#), 1992, Hanover County Planning Document, Prepared by Land and Community Associates, Charlottesville, VA., 63).

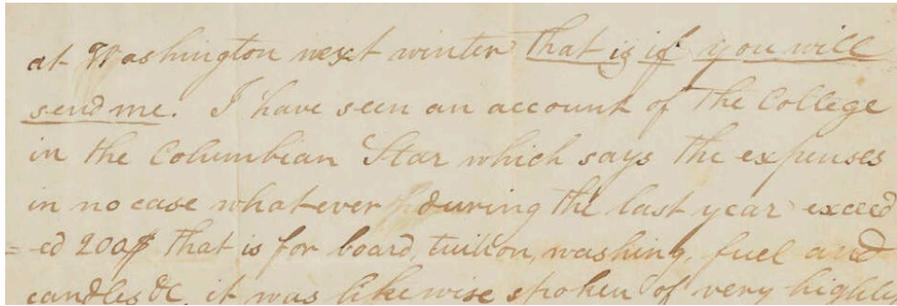
¹⁸⁶ Alfred James Morrison, *The Beginnings of Public Education in Virginia, 1776-1860*, Richmond: Davis Bottom (1917), 169, quoting James B. Taylor's *Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 306.

¹⁸⁷ Robert Ryland, "My Experience and Call to the Ministry," RRP, file 51.045, VBHS; Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, April 19, 1823, RRP 11.005, VBHS. In the brief biography of Robert Ryland written by his granddaughter, Bessie Taliaferro Carter, she writes that Ryland attended two academies (Bessie Taliaferro Carter, "Robert Ryland" in "Miscellaneous Papers, Sketches, and Notes on Robert Ryland and Ryland Family," in RRP, VBHS, 03-046). This may have been a reference Humanity Hall and Wingfield Academy, both run by the Nelsons on the same estate.

¹⁸⁸ *The Enquirer* (Richmond, Virginia), January 17, 1811. In 1809, before the attendance of Robert Ryland, Humanity Hall was advertised by Thomas Nelson while Wingfield Academy was advertised by Peter Nelson ([Nelson advertisements], *The Enquirer*, December 30, 1809). According to the 1820 census, Peter Nelson was not boarding students, so at that point, Robert Ryland's primary academic influence would have been Thomas Nelson, who was Peter Nelson's brother according to available genealogical records: http://nelson-dna-project.tripod.com/docs2/Nelson_Of_Hanover.pdf. Charles Hill Ryland also noted that it was Thomas Nelson who taught Robert Ryland in his years at Humanity Hall (Charles Hill Ryland, note, December 11, 1881, RRP, file 42.024, VBHS).

¹⁸⁹ United States Federal Census, 1820, "Thomas Nelson," Hanover, Virginia; 63, National Archives and Records Administration Roll: M33_138; Image: 78. While there are several entries for Thomas Nelson and Thomas Nelson, Jr., that which shows thirty-one enslaved people also shows thirty-eight "Free white persons – Males," indicating the student population at the school.

1.2.1 “[T]HAT IS IF YOU WILL SEND ME”



Detail, Letter, Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, April 19, 1823, RRP, file 11.006, VBHS

At Humanity Hall in April 1823, Robert Ryland wrote a pivotal letter to his father, one that demonstrated his determination to receive further education. It also provides a glimpse of Ryland’s early rhetorical development. It appears he was answering a letter in which Josiah Ryland had inquired into his son’s plans for life after the completion of his studies at Humanity Hall. His questions or concerns for his son had apparently included matters of property and marriage, reflecting what Robert Ryland referred to as his father’s “anxious suspense about my future and eternal welfare.” He responded to Josiah Ryland’s position with sympathy at having to tolerate “his own offspring... still wandering in nature’s darkness, still destitute of Mary’s choice and still subject to the just vengeance of an offended God” and then made an abrupt shift to his recent reading of the classics. Here he finally reached the point of the letter:

I am reading Xenophon the 2nd book in Mr. N's course which I shall finish before June and Greek next session[;] time enough to learn Euklid and a few other things necessary to enter the college at Washington next winter that is if you will send me.

Ryland was referring to Columbian College, the institution that would become George Washington University. What followed was his attempt to convince his father of the merits of the institution and the value of extending his formal education. He was hoping to disrupt the pattern Josiah Ryland had established with his older children, that of providing a farm and enslaved laborers when they were of age. “I can not value money so highly,” Ryland wrote, “as to prefer it to education.” Ryland listed the expenses of Columbian College, and praised the school’s reputation as a “literary & religious institution,” one that would prepare him for a life of the mind no matter what profession he chose. “[I]f I had a thousand dol[lars],” Ryland wrote, “I would spend it in going to school although I was to be a blacksmith afterwards.”

Josiah Ryland had apparently raised the possibility of his son attending college, and then either reconsidered or shown some hesitation, prompting Robert Ryland to ask him to remember the offer and obliquely accusing his father of inconsistency: “[Y]ou first made the motion to send me to college and if you now alter your mind I shall, instead of thinking of you, as heretofore, as unanimous and fixed in your opinions, be obliged to think otherwise.” Here, Ryland turned again, this time drawing his father’s attention to the social approval of the “clever men you know”: “I’ll venture to say that nine out of ten will advise you to send me[;] and why? because they are men of education, have enjoyed its fruits, know its value and therefore are the best consultants.” As part of the proposition, Ryland asked his father to note “every cent I may expend and I promise to be very

abstemious and attentive.”¹⁹⁰ Ryland repositioned his argument a final time, writing that he would “make an attack on [Josiah Ryland’s] pride”: “Do you wish to see the name Ryland as in England so also in Virginia celebrated for learning?” He made no promises that he could live up to his ancestors, but argued that there was no way to know for sure unless he was sent to Columbian College.¹⁹¹

A Ryland family remembrance may have referred to this letter when it described Ryland writing to his father at the age of eighteen and saying “Give my brothers the farms and hands, but please give me an education. The world needs educated men!”¹⁹² No material located in this research process contains an original form of this quotation or has indicated that Ryland intended to entirely give up his interest in family land, wealth, and enslaved people, though the original may be located elsewhere. In 1838, after noting with pleasure the effect his father’s wealth was having at Farmington, Ryland wrote his sister indicating his expectation that he would be provided for as his siblings had since comparable money had not come to him when he was married.¹⁹³ He also expected to receive a group of enslaved people from his father’s estate and planned to hire them out in Richmond.¹⁹⁴ According to his ledger entry from July 1839, Ryland was paid two thousand dollars by his father “in past pay for Shooter’s Hill,” a farm adjoining Josiah Ryland’s main property at Farmington. In what appears to be a later addition, Ryland added in parentheses, “but gave no more.”¹⁹⁵ While Ryland did not choose the life of a wealthy large-scale landowner and at times his commitments to education and ministry put him at a distance from some of the immediate benefits of his father’s wealth, evidence does not indicate that he renounced that wealth in his pursuit of both careers.

¹⁹⁰ This may have set the stage for Ryland’s lifetime of carefully recording even the most minute expenses and receipts, a habit that has had a significant effect on the process of tracing his life and locating records of enslaved men and women during his years as a minister, seminary principal, and college president.

¹⁹¹ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, April 19, 1823, RRP, 11.005-007, VBHS.

¹⁹² Robert Ryland as quoted in “The Ryland Family,” Robert Ryland Biographical File, VBHS.

¹⁹³ Robert Ryland to Elizabeth Willis, December 26, 1838, RRP, 15.044, VBHS.

¹⁹⁴ Robert Ryland to Catherine Peachey Ryland, December 21, 1850, RRP, 22.004, VBHS.

¹⁹⁵ Robert Ryland, “Memorandum of Moneys,” Ledger 1, RRP, July 1839, 119, VBHS.

1.3 COLUMBIAN COLLEGE

Preliminary research conducted by George Washington University describes enslaved people being a part of daily life at Columbian College where they “had an almost constant presence on campus working as servants or laborers. Some of these enslaved men and women lived with presidents and stewards on campus while the college hired the labor of others from their masters.”¹⁹⁶ The method of stewards paying hire for enslaved laborers would later be adopted at Virginia Baptist Seminary and Richmond College under Ryland’s leadership.

As a student at Columbian College, Robert Ryland stepped into a sphere of spiritual and academic influence populated by key Baptist intellectual figures including Robert Baylor Semple, Luther Rice, and William Staughton. Ryland’s interest in the colonization movement may have been inspired or supported by his exposure to Rice, Staughton, and addresses by a founder of the American Colonization Society, Charles F. Mercer.¹⁹⁷ While he was thrilled at the opportunity to study, at times Ryland was highly conscious of his academic weaknesses and the differences between he and the “extravagant & indiscreet young men” around him. He wrote his father that his class standing was “not respectable” and “[a]mong the students I am unpopular.” In Ryland’s view, his study of religion also placed him at a social disadvantage since there was “a most inveterate hatred” between many of the “classical” and “religious” students. In a declaration of ambition and with the emotional candor that often marked his writing, Ryland wrote that the judgements of his classmates formed “another spur to my ambition and makes me study more closely than perhaps I otherwise should.” He made it clear, however, that this was “not with a desire to gain their favor and... the reputation of a good scholar... but to deprive them the pleasure of triumphing over my weakness and to fill them with invidious surprise instead of a sneering contempt.”¹⁹⁸ Ryland eventually cultivated friends and acquaintances whom he called “pious,” writing that they did not “retard me in my religious course.”¹⁹⁹

Among those friends were several Northern students including Rollin H. Neale of Connecticut. Neale and Ryland maintained a correspondence in the years following graduation and, in Neale’s words, “[d]uring the Abolition controversy... [Ryland] gave us Northerners hard hits.” Neale

¹⁹⁶ George Washington University Library, “Slavery at Columbian College,” George Washington University, website: <https://library.gwu.edu/src/university-archives/gw-history/slavery-at-columbian-college>.

¹⁹⁷ American Colonization Society, “Life Members of the American Colonization Society,” *Thirty-Second Annual Report of the American Colonization Society*, January 16, 1849, 55; Columbian College, [List of Columbian College faculty], <https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.19201500/?sp=2>; “Baptist General Association of Virginia, Thirty-sixth Anniversary,” *Richmond Enquirer*, May 10, 1859, [link](#). The layers of connections between the Ryland family, Semple, and Staughton are illustrated in Ryland’s March 1826 letter to Josiah Ryland when he wrote, “Dr. Staughton called on me the other day and told me he had just received a letter from Uncle Semple and that he mentioned the declining health of Aunt Semple with much discouragement” (Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, March 18, 1826, RRP, 11.014, VBHS).

¹⁹⁸ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, February 25, 1824, RRP, 11.008-010, VBHS.

¹⁹⁹ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, October 20, 1824, RRP, 11.011-013, VBHS.

recalled, however, that in their college days, while they were working in the garden at Columbian College, “the first anti-slavery speech I ever heard was from my old and very dear friend, Robert Ryland of Virginia.” Ryland did not recall this “potato patch conversation,” but he wrote that he had not forgotten “my early scruples and subsequent trials and struggles on the vexed question of slavery.”²⁰⁰

1.3.1 “THE COLONIZATION SOCIETY” (1824)

Ryland’s early antislavery leanings were evident in an 1824 address on the colonization movement that he gave at Columbian College, an impassioned description of what he then thought were the moral consequences of slavery for the country. Speaking of the United States as a living thing, a tree he referred to as “she” and enslavement as a “devouring insect,” he asked, “[D]oes not the eye of investigation discover some deformity in her character, some unpropitious omen of her future destiny? Does not some devouring insect continually riot at the root of that tree, on whose stately arms are inscribed equality & independence? ... Our liberty is tarnished.” At this point in his young adulthood, Ryland viewed the slave trade as an “evil” leading to an “impending ruin” for the country. The solution, he argued, was in the work of the newly formed American Colonization Society, “the only method by which we can not only dissipate the gathering cloud but wipe away this ‘broadest foulest blot’ and thus complete the glory of our Republick [sic].”²⁰¹

While at Columbian, Ryland was at the conjunction of streams of enthusiasm for the colonization movement, surrounded by many of its leaders and most public proponents including Charles Fenton Mercer, a founder of the American Colonization Society who preached before the students, and William Staughton, president of Columbian College who “presided over a local chapter of the colonization society in 1823.”²⁰² Ryland’s exposure to what the society extolled as its early successes may have combined with the influences of his younger years, particularly those of Semple and Broaddus, who had both supported early colonization efforts. In his Columbian address, Ryland was ready to evangelize the movement’s goal of relocating formerly enslaved people to Liberia and to use this as an opportunity to provide Christian resistance to the influence of Islam and “idolatry” in Africa where, he said, “[d]arkness hath covered the earth & gross darkness the people’ [and t]he horrors of idolatry & the absurdities of mahometanism have an undisputed sway.”²⁰³ For Ryland, colonization presented an opportunity to spread Christianity by populating Africa – “this long

²⁰⁰ [Rollin H. Neale] R.H.N., “Reminiscence of College Days,” clipping in RRP, file 10.010, VBHS. The “Abolition controversy” to which Neale referred was likely the conflict among Baptists over the subject which led to the formation of the American Baptist and Southern Baptist Conventions. Ryland’s response to Neale also contained his oft repeated aversion to two aspects of enslavement, “permitting the separation of families and prohibiting their education” which he wrote were “always grievous” to him. The clipping containing both Neale’s recollection and 1867 Ryland letter to him were preserved by University of Richmond President, F.W. Boatwright who called it “a valuable record” (RRP 10.012).

²⁰¹ Robert Ryland, “The Colonization Society,” RRP, 26.027, VBHS.

²⁰² Ryland’s memories of Mercer appear in the *Richmond Enquirer*, May 10, 1859; Aaron Menikoff, *Politics and Piety, Baptist Social Reform in America: 1770-1860*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 73.

²⁰³ Robert Ryland, “The Colonization Society,” RRP, 26.028-.029, VBHS.

neglected continent” – with Christianized Black colonists. He wrote that “[t]his is not idle speculation” since “[t]en Africans have already been rescued from the chains of servitude” and “restored” to Africa, “their afflicted familiar.”²⁰⁴ In the speech, Ryland connected colonization and an end to what he referred to then as the “legalized crime” of enslavement:

But when the slave trade, the cause of all this evil[,] shall have ceased, the work of Civilization will then be commenced. The door of legalized crime, will be forever closed, the dawn of innocence will rise to witness the expiring struggles of guilt, the beam of science will chase away the gloom of ignorance, peace & happiness will reign in the land, the horn of plenty will pour its abundant stars at the feet of the laborer, and the deserts of Africa will “rejoice & blossom as the Rose.”²⁰⁵

Education as a “beam” that “will chase away the gloom of ignorance” remained a lifetime commitment for Ryland, as did colonization, although this is the only known instance of his linking it to the potential abolition of American slavery.²⁰⁶ At this point in Ryland’s thinking, while the country existed in a state of guilt, “innocence” was still possible, although he believed it demanded the removal of Black people.²⁰⁷ At nineteen, he was convinced that colonization could affect an end to enslavement, stating that if he were able to “ascend the mount of vision” and “open the mouth of prophesy,” he “would predict the total abolition of slavery within a hundred years.”²⁰⁸

1.3.2 SHAPING OF MINISTERIAL THOUGHT AND COMMUNICATION

Robert Ryland complained to his father that the Columbian College religious services were “conducted with too much formality and precision,” in contrast to what he had known at Bruington Baptist Church. While he was absorbing the classics and other subjects in his classes, the new influences did not alter his approach to worship which remained fixed on the methods he had learned in childhood: “I have been accustomed generally to do as the Romans do when at Rome but in matters of religious conscience I shall show the citizens of Washington how the Virginians do.” Ryland noted that the Columbian congregations stood rather than knelt during prayer, writing his

²⁰⁴ Robert Ryland, “The Colonization Society,” RRP, 26.028, VBHS.

²⁰⁵ Robert Ryland, “The Colonization Society,” RRP, 26.029, VBHS.

²⁰⁶ See “The Colonization Movement,” Section 4.4.

²⁰⁷ Robert Ryland, “The Colonization Society,” RRP file 26.026, VBHS. While Ryland’s colonization essay doesn’t mention Lott Cary by name, he would have known of him. Cary was a formerly enslaved man who was the first Black missionary to travel to Liberia and whose biography animated the next decades of the Colonization movement, particularly in its association with the Baptist church. Cary had saved enough money over years of being “hired out” to a Richmond tobacco warehouse to pay for his freedom and that of his young children in 1807 (“:ott Cary,” *Philadelphia Recorder* (1823-1831), Oct 29, 1825, 122). While he was enslaved Cary had begun to learn to read through self-instruction and then began evening classes taught at First Baptist Church by William Crane. He became a noted lay minister, was a founder of the Richmond African Baptist Missionary Society, and established a church in Liberia. At the time of his death in 1828, Cary was “one of the most famous black men of his day” (John Saillant and the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, “Lott Cary (ca. 1780–1828),” *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Humanities, Apr. 13, 2017, [link](#)).

²⁰⁸ Ryland, “The Colonization Society,” RRP, 26.027, VBHS.

father, “In praying the congregations stand: this is tolerable and perhaps preferable as it is a rule to which all will conform, whereas kneeling is not; but they stand up and look about while the minister is praying. I can not [sic] approve of this. I shall not follow it.”²⁰⁹

Ryland viewed himself as the absent educational “overseer” of his family, and in letters he encouraged his father and family to read the newspaper he had delivered to Farmington.²¹⁰ His correspondence with Josiah Ryland makes it clear that he saw his oversight role as a spiritual one as well. Ryland was deeply concerned with his family’s commitment to God and the personal salvation of his mother and siblings who had not yet been baptized. In his absence from Farmington, he encouraged his father to ask them how they “feel on the subject connected with eternity... You should converse with them on this awful subject.” Ryland feared that the elder Ryland was too easy on his children and his wife: “Your presence with them makes you forget the full worth of their souls.”²¹¹

While he was away at Columbian, Ryland established a pattern of ministry through letters, entreating family and friends to view deaths of loved ones as opportunities to draw closer to God and asking them to share their private spiritual considerations with him. Following the death of Semple’s son, John, Ryland received word that John Semple’s brother, Robert Baylor Semple, Jr. was struggling with profound grief. Ryland wrote to the young man that he should use his loss to seek repentance for what Ryland viewed as his sinful state:

[G]o to a throne of mercy & humble yr self & cry mightily for pardon (for indeed you need it) tell the Lord you are a poor helpless sinner, that you are tired of Satan’s service, that you are sick of sin...I wish you to answer this in a candid and extensive manner and open freely yr bosom, tell me yr exercises & desires and be assured that it will afford me the utmost pleasure to aid you all in my feeble reach... [B]elieve me to be interested in yr. eternal good.²¹²

Ryland’s overarching concern, however, was for his mother’s soul, and this worry deepened through his years at Columbian. In an attempt to influence her personal state of religion, he asked Josiah Ryland to “converse with Mama” about “the conversion of souls from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to the living God.”²¹³

1.3.3 MISSIONARY WORK AND FUTURE PLANS

In 1826, Ryland was presented with two potential paths, that of a minister and that of a teacher. Over the summer of that year, he traveled with George Adams on a missionary trip between

²⁰⁹ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, February 25, 1824, RRP, 11.009, VBHS.

²¹⁰ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, October 20, 1824, RRP, 11.012, VBHS.

²¹¹ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, March 18, 1826, RRP, 11.016, VBHS.

²¹² Robert Ryland to “Baylor Semple, Jr.” [Robert Baylor Semple, Jr.], November 2, 1825, RRP, 14.004, VBHS.

²¹³ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, October 20, 1824, RRP, 11.011, VBHS.

Richmond and Hampton, Virginia, where they found the “State of religion” to be “generally fairly low.” Despite this inauspicious beginning, the two attended “forty-five meetings” during their journey, speaking before “large and attentive” congregations and taking up collections for the Virginia Baptist General Association. They found people “desirous of hearing the gospel” and “[i]t was not uncommon to see numbers weeping and apparently anxious to know what they must do to be saved.” The two men ended their work together with the hope that their “labor may not be in vain in the Lord.”²¹⁴

After returning to Columbian College, and as he prepared to leave as a graduate, Ryland secured a teaching position Nashville, Tennessee. According to his letter to Josiah Ryland in December 1826, however, a close friend he referred to only as “Armstrong” had travelled to Nashville and offered to take the position for less money, leaving Ryland without a job. While it appears he was initially overwhelmed by his friend’s betrayal and sought the input of a trusted professor who assured him that he had been “treated...very unjustly,” Ryland eventually shifted to a spiritual perspective on the situation, though not without some remaining animus:

I sincerely wish [the school] may not repent of it in less than twelve months; for I know all about Armstrong [here Ryland’s underline became increasingly thick and dark], but I really believe a benevolent Providence (to be better understood hereafter) has superintended all this business. Perhaps my health might have been destroyed by so sedentary a life and perhaps God has some better work for me to do.²¹⁵

He graduated from Columbian College on December 20, 1826 and although he continued to note the feeling that he had not been truly called to ministry – that he lacked of the “sense of ‘necessity’ of which Paul speaks and to which the good old preachers alluded” – he committed himself to pastoral work and was ordained on April 21, 1827.²¹⁶

1.4 LYNCHBURG



Detail of 1860 Blackford Map of Lynchburg, Lynchburg Museum. The Masonic Hall where Ryland began his Lynchburg ministry is shown next to the “Baptist Ch.,” the church built while Ryland was pastor.

Josiah Ryland responded to his son’s changed plans with an offer to provide him with a farm and “all the appliances for its culture,” which would have allowed Robert Ryland ample financial stability as he acted as an occasional minister at Bruington Baptist Church. He found this scenario unacceptable because he could not conscience part-time ministry or the prospect of “being in Bro. Semple’s way.” Despite his father’s wishes that he remain in King & Queen County, Robert Ryland was determined to establish himself as

²¹⁴ Geo. F. Adams and Robert Ryland, “To the Board of the Gen. Association of Virginia,” RRP, 14.001, VBHS.

²¹⁵ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, December 9, 1826, RRP, 11.017, VBHS.

²¹⁶ Robert Ryland, “My Experience and Call to the Ministry,” RRP, VBHS; Robert Ryland, Ledger I, RRP, 55.1.011, VBHS.

a full-time minister, and that ambition demanded a new location.²¹⁷ The city of Lynchburg, located at the foot of Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains, was a challenging choice. Just two decades before, the itinerant minister Lorenzo Dow described the city as “the seat of Satan’s Kingdom” and “a deadly place for the worship of God.”²¹⁸ While the ensuing decades had seen the development of several churches in the city, there was no firm position awaiting Ryland. He later recalled riding a pony away from Farmington with only ten dollars and four sermons.²¹⁹ It does not appear that an enslaved person accompanied him at this time.

While he was driven to pursue ministry, Ryland remained unconvinced that he was properly called to it by God, and his determination to work in Lynchburg amplified his concerns. “I have not myself a sufficient quantity of personal holiness to recommend it effectively to others,” Ryland wrote his father. His own ambition deepened his worry over the “purity of [his] motives” in going to Lynchburg, and he was acutely aware of the “selfish and religious” drives that he found “grew together.”²²⁰ Upon his arrival in the city he discovered that “the Baptist cause” was “low, very low” and his prospects were dim: “All the leading families of the place were connected... with well-rooted churches and there was little material for building up a new interest.”²²¹ Despite the absence of an obvious congregation and the presence of anti-Baptist sentiment in the area, Ryland saw the promise of reaching out to “poor families” and a group of “godly, praying, working women” who had felt alienated by divisions in the Baptist church but “seemed to be enlivened by the coming of the young minister [here Ryland was writing of himself in the third-person as was his occasional style].”²²²



Masonic Hall, image licensed through Lynchburg Museum

A small congregation of nineteen, at least partially populated by a rupture in the existing Baptist Church, began gathering each Sunday at the Masonic Hall where Ryland had held his first meeting the day he

²¹⁷ Letter, Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, August 1827, RRP, 11.024, VBHS; Robert Ryland, “An Historical Address,” 1886, RRP, File 51.027; Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, August 1827, RRP, 11.024, VBHS.

²¹⁸ Lorenzo Dow and Peggy Dow, *History of Cosmopolite : or, The writings of Rev. Lorenzo Dow : containing his experience and travels, in Europe and America, up to near his fiftieth year : Also, his polemic writings, Cincinnati : Anderson, Gates & Wright, 1858, 187, 193.*

²¹⁹ Robert Ryland, “An Historical Address,” September 12, 1886, RRP, 51.027, VBHS.

²²⁰ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, May 1827, RRP, 11.021, VBHS.

²²¹ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, May 1827, 11.021, VBHS; Ryland, “An Historical Address” 4, VBHS.

²²² Robert Ryland, “An Historical Address,” 4, VBHS.

had arrived.²²³ The Masonic Hall at times functioned as the courthouse, a school, and “the early house of virtually every Protestant denomination in Lynchburg.”²²⁴ Ryland was provided a small salary, was given board in the home of John and Ann Hollins, and, because the clothes he had were not consistent with the leader of a congregation, was offered a new wardrobe which was to be paid for in preaching. Ryland wrote that he never knew “how many yards of theology the tailors got from their Baptist loom for their service.” He earned a total of \$500.00 in his first five years in Lynchburg. His salary was raised to \$300.00 per year and he was able to buy a house in the city six months before his departure to lead the Virginia Baptist Seminary in 1832.²²⁵

In Lynchburg, he was welcomed into the city’s community and was described as someone “peculiarly adapted to his calling” whose “gentlemanly, winning ways [gave] him easy access to the hearts of those he wished to impress.”²²⁶ Ryland drove himself to extremes during his early months there through his “immoderate preaching, conversing, singing and walking over the hills of the city,” eventually suffering from “a violent hemorrhage from the lungs” that nearly killed him and kept him bedridden for a month. The attacks returned several times and Ryland learned to treat them with immediate rest that would allow his lungs to heal.²²⁷ As a minister, Ryland caught the rising wave of religious enthusiasm and revival that marked the Second Great Awakening and the summer of 1828 saw a rapid increase in his congregation. This resulted in the construction of a permanent church building on the lot next door to the Masonic Hall. Its architecture was considered unusual, with the entrances to the sanctuary on either side of the pulpit, and it was said that this was so the entire congregation would see any latecomers quickly and not have to remove their attention from the pulpit and the words of pastor.²²⁸ Ryland had been frustrated by late arrivals to services in Lynchburg, and it remained a long-term irritation that he mentioned decades later in the context of his ministry at First African Baptist Church in Richmond.²²⁹ He was described as having worked in “[g]reat harmony” with other denominations in the city” where ministers “help[ed] each other as far as possible.”²³⁰ This cooperation presented challenges to his growing and sustaining a church,

²²³ William A. Christian, *Lynchburg and its People*, Lynchburg: J.P. Bell Company (1900), 88.

²²⁴ Lynchburg Museum; Image “Masonic Hall,” after the building was relocated, licensed from Lynchburg Museum, Lynchburg, Virginia.

²²⁵ Ryland, “An Historical Address, 5.” The Federal Census of 1830 shows that John Hollins enslaved five people. The two white males between twenty and thirty enumerated under Hollins’ entry are likely Hollins’ son and Robert Ryland (United States Federal Census of 1830, “John Hollins,” Lynchburg, Campbell County, Virginia, Series: M19; Roll: 194; Page: 327, ancestry.com).

²²⁶ [Margaret Anthony Cabell], *Sketches and Recollections of Lynchburg by the Oldest Inhabitant*, Richmond: C.H. Wynne (1858), 341, Hathi Trust Digital Library.

²²⁷ Ryland, “An Historical Address,” 7.

²²⁸ Cabell, *Sketches*, 342; Christian, *Lynchburg*, 88

²²⁹ Robert Ryland, “Origin and History of the First African Church,” in *The First Century of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, 1780-1880*, Richmond: Carlton McCarthy (1880), 257.

²³⁰ Christian, *Lynchburg*, 88.

however, and both Ryland and the local Methodist minister found themselves losing members to the Episcopal church. Margaret Anthony Cabell recalled Ryland accepting this with “Christian love,” but in private correspondence he shared his frustrations with the pressure that denominations which practiced what he called “lazy religion” were placing on his efforts.²³¹

Lynchburg was the location of key moments in Ryland’s early ministry, including his first administration of baptism. In a letter to his father that was focused in part on persuading Josiah Ryland that the decision to establish himself in the city had been a good one, Ryland described his immersion of a “young lady” and his own “emotions of joy” at “administering the beautiful ordinance.” He wrote, “Never have I done any thing in which my [heart] was more delighted.”²³² Ryland became known for his sunrise services which “were the resort of all, and of many who had previously wasted their precious hours in sleep.” Margaret Anthony Cabell also remembered his 1829 baptism of “three beautiful young girls” during a particularly moving twilight ceremony, when “their countenances, radiant with holy joy, were farther illuminated by the parting rays of the sun, and so tenderly impressive was the scene that a bird hovering over them... was pronounced a *dove* by one of that excited throng.”²³³

Ryland’s congregation was racially mixed and he noted his baptisms of Black people, including one man named Martin: “Baptized three coloured persons this evening, among them was Martin, who promises to be a useful man.”²³⁴ In his ledger at the time, he recorded their financial contributions to him separately: “Cash from Coloured members 2.00.”²³⁵ He later recalled a man named Jack Best, whom he referred to as an “old colored member of high standing in the whole community” who was “an attendant at one of the warehouses.” Best had regularly “deposited” small amounts of money with Ryland’s wife, Josephine Norvell Ryland, who would often ask if he needed the money returned, to which Ryland said Best replied, “Keep it till I call for it.” As Best suffered from what proved to be a terminal illness, he repeated that he would “call for” the money when it was needed. After Robert Ryland performed his funeral service “to a crowded audience of whites and blacks” on the verse from the Book of Luke which Best requested – “Fear not little flock, it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” – the Ryland family treated the money as a gift from Best, using the twenty dollars that had accumulated to purchase a set of silver spoons which they then referred to as “the ‘Best Spoons.’”²³⁶ Jack Best’s burial record indicates that he was interred on July 10, 1831.²³⁷

²³¹ Cabell, *Sketches*, 342; Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 7, 1828, RRP file 11.027, VBHS.

²³² Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, August 1827, RRP, file 11.023, VBHS.

²³³ Cabell, *Sketches*, 341.

²³⁴ Robert Ryland to Josephine Norvell Ryland, August 6, 1831, RRP, 16.030, VBHS.

²³⁵ Robert Ryland, Ledger I, RRP, 55.1.22, VBHS.

²³⁶ Ryland, “An Historical Address,” 7, RRP, 51.036, VBHS.

²³⁷ Southern Memorial Association, Diuguid Funeral Records 1820-1950, “Jack Best,” D0107102.

Beginning in Lynchburg and extending through much of his professional life, Ryland’s ministry regularly took him away from home. In 1829 he described preaching to a group of enslaved people, “a large number of negroes on the farm of a Mr. Parnill, by moonshine.” He wrote that “they were all seated before the door of their master.”²³⁸ His descriptions of ministerial travels also detailed the strains within the denomination including the “hypercalvinistic” Baptists he found in Culpeper, Virginia who had previously resisted the typically “expository” sermons of Andrew Broaddus.²³⁹ Ryland’s excessive travel and his tendency toward overwork frequently affected his courtship and marriage to Josephine Norvell Ryland.

1.4.1 MARRIAGE

While Ryland had proposed to Josephine Norvell of Richmond in September or early October of 1829, their engagement had not been smooth. Word reached Ryland that she had soured on him, but he was reassured by a November 1829 letter from Henry Keeling, a prominent Baptist and later an editor of the *Religious Herald*. Keeling wrote to Ryland that his wife had inquired about Josephine Norvell’s feelings for him and that all was well. While Keeling had harbored initial concerns about her suitability as the wife of a minister, he wrote Ryland with confidence: “[I]f she is destitute of religion, it follows that some persons are much better Christians without religion than some others are with it.” Keeling gave assurances that the relationship was solid, writing, “She is a Jewel, get her ... I promise you success.”²⁴⁰ Ryland’s subsequent romantic letters to her included poetry and strong efforts at religious persuasion. He asked her to meditate on questions of faith: “‘Are you a real Christian?’ ... Do you inquire... how it can be ascertained that you are a believer?”²⁴¹

Following their marriage, and Ryland’s baptism of his wife in December 1830, their letters were marked by two topics that arose frequently in the coming years: their growing love for one another and his frequent travel away from her.²⁴² Ryland grew increasingly comfortable with direct



Robert Ryland to Josephine Ryland, August 9, 1831, RRP, 16.034, VBHS

expressions of sentiment: “Is it childish for me to say I love you? — No! — I delight to cherish for you these kind emotions. As long as I have one cent, one mouthful of bread... you shall not suffer if I can relieve you. I feel that you are a part of myself.”²⁴³ Ryland longed for his wife to deepen her relationship with God writing, “My dearest one, I hope you will strive to enjoy the presence of

²³⁸ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, August 13, 1829, RRP, 11.031, VBHS.

²³⁹ Robert Ryland to Josephine Norvell Ryland, October 3, 1831, RRP, 16.054, VBHS; Robert Ryland, “Elder Andrew Broaddus, Richmond College, December 15, 1848,” in *The Sermons and Other Writings of the Rev. Andrew Broaddus, With a Memoir of His Life*, New York: Lewis Colby (1852), 543.

²⁴⁰ Henry Keeling to Robert Ryland, typescript, November 28, 1829, RRP, 14.002, VBHS.

²⁴¹ Robert Ryland to Josephine Norvell, “To Josephine,” RRP, 09.020; “On My Wedding,” RRP, 09.024; December 28, 1829, RRP, 09.004, VBHS.

²⁴² Robert Ryland, “Mrs. Josephine Ryland,” undated typescript, RRP, file 3.079, VBHS.

²⁴³ Robert Ryland to Josephine Norvell Ryland, March 29, 1831, RRP, 16.012, VBHS.

Jesus. There is great room for improvement in your spirit[.] You need more zeal, courage, & decision.” He encouraged her to develop spiritually through evangelism, “talk[ing] to sinners more.”²⁴⁴ He also believed that comfort would come for her through her support for his own spiritual commitment — “Don’t let yr. thoughts be occupied so much about future schemes & prosperity. Pray for me, talk to me and encourage me” — while he also implored her to challenge him on own spiritual growth, assuring her that she could “reprove [him] sharply” if she found that development wanting.²⁴⁵

Separation introduced difficulty, with Ryland travelling for as many as forty days at a time, and he worried she might doubt his constancy:

My frequent absences from you may sometimes tempt you to suspect my affections but you should cast such temptations away from you as calculated to mar yr. own happiness. If I did not love you, if I did not feel happy in my marriage relations you would easily discover it. It would appear in every feature of [damage from wax seal but appears to be “my face”] it would find its way into my sermons, causing them to be confused & poor indeed.

He assured her that while he did not believe she “indulge[d] such suspicions” he wanted to state his happiness with clarity “because they may tempt you. I believe you have made up yr. mind to endure these inconveniences of absence ascribing them to a desire in me to do good to the perishing souls of men. And who would not make sacrifices in this cause? I know you are willing to do it.”²⁴⁶

Josephine Ryland spent increasingly lengthy amounts of time with Robert Ryland’s family at Farmington, and he coached her on how to be happy in their presence.²⁴⁷ In his frequent letters, Ryland described his deepening love for her as a challenge to his complete faith and willingness to sacrifice everything to God: “[I]t really seems that I am too happy in the possession of yrself [and] long to keep you. My sins deserve chastisement & I fear never will be subdued until it comes, yea until scourging is inflicted. And on this point, yr.self, I am completely vulnerable. The question has been asked by my mind a dozen times, ‘Can I give her up?’ and answered ‘no! no! Lord! Take anything else, my health property, other friends, even my good name, but Oh! Spare my Beloved.’”²⁴⁸ The relationship he had described in measured tones to his brother less than two years before was a strong bond by August of 1831 when, as he socialized with friends, Ryland left the room to write to her, “[M]y friend. Yes! You are my special, bosom, darling friend, my other self.” In later years he recalled that their “acquaintance was very imperfect before marriage both from her

²⁴⁴ Robert Ryland to Josephine Norvell Ryland, June 24, 1831, RRP, 16.021, VBHS.

²⁴⁵ Robert Ryland to Josephine Norvell Ryland, June 24, 1831, RRP, 16.021, VBHS.

²⁴⁶ Robert Ryland to Josephine Norvell Ryland, August 27, 1830, RRP, 16.002-003, VBHS.

²⁴⁷ Robert Ryland to Josephine Norvell Ryland, August 7, 1837, RRP, 16.094, VBHS.

²⁴⁸ Robert Ryland to Josephine Norvell Ryland, August 10, 1831, RRP, 16.045, VBHS.

taciturnity and the remoteness of my residence. I used to tell her sportively that I fell in love after marriage.”²⁴⁹

In their years in Lynchburg, Josephine Ryland taught Sunday school and she was often Ryland’s confidante as he planned his ministerial work and the operations of the small school he ran in the city between 1830 and 1832.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, typescript, April 27, 1830, RRP, 13.028, VBHS; Robert Ryland, “Mrs. Josephine Ryland,” undated typescript, RRP, file 3.081, VBHS.

²⁵⁰ Robert Ryland to Josephine Norvell Ryland, August 6, 1831, RRP, 16.031; Robert Ryland, Ledger I, RRP, files 55.1.19, 21, 22, VBHS.

1.4.2 PERSONAL ENSLAVEMENT

Once Robert and Josephine Ryland established their home together, an enslaved woman named Mary began appearing in Ryland's ledgers and correspondence. She may have been the single person noted in the "Slaves" column in his 1832 tax record.²⁵¹ In a letter to his father in November of 1831 describing their preparations to move into their own house, Ryland referred to Mary and an enslaved man named Coffee who it appears Josiah Ryland had leant to the couple:

I expect to go to house-keeping within 2 weeks, tho[ugh] it will be hard squeezing to get bread & butter. I will thank you, therefore, to send Coffee up as soon as you can spare him. He should be sent to Mr. Crane, who will direct him how to proceed here... I hope Coffee will behave better than Mary does. She promises to be a very bad girl. Don't forget to give him a Pass, stating where and to whom he is coming.²⁵²

No further mentions of Coffee have been located in Robert Ryland's papers. Mary was joined by two other enslaved people that Ryland noted in February of 1832: a child named Sam who was given to Robert Ryland by his father, and Maria, the cost of whose transport to Lynchburg was noted in Ryland's expenses ("Moving Maria 25").²⁵³ It is possible that she, too, was originally enslaved at Farmington and was shifted from father to son, but available records do not offer any clarity on this question. Ryland purchased shoes for Sam in February and clothes and shoes for Maria in April and May, just before the family and the enslaved people who were bound to them moved to Henrico County. There Ryland assumed the role of principal at the newly formed Virginia Baptist Seminary, the institution that would eventually become Richmond College.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ City of Lynchburg, Tax Records, Robert Ryland, Lynchburg, Virginia, 1832, Library of Virginia.

²⁵² Letter, Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, November 7, 1831, RRP, file 11.044, VBHS. "Mr. Crane" is William Crane (1770-1866), one of the remaining antislavery voices among prominent Virginia Baptists and an early father of the Virginia Baptist Seminary. Ryland's ledger shows several instances of small amounts of money given to "Wm. Crane's servant" indicating his frequent visits to Crane who was committed to the colonization movement and religious education of enslaved people (Robert Ryland, Ledger I, February 1827, RRP, file 55.1.012). Given the use of the term "servant" by Ryland and most Virginians at the time, these were likely the common gratuities given to an enslaved person or persons. Crane enslaved four people in 1830 despite his aversion to enslavement, a feeling which eventually took him north to Baltimore (William Crane, United States Federal Census, 1830, Richmond Madison Ward, Richmond Virginia; Series: M19; Roll: 195; Page: 419); Marie Tyler-McGraw and the Dictionary of Virginia Biography, "William Crane (1790-1866)," Encyclopedia Virginia, Virginia Humanities, September 6, 2017, accessed November 1, 2020).

²⁵³ Ryland referred to Sam being a "boy" at this time twice in his letters. In an 1832 letter to his father, Ryland referred to him as "my...boy Sam," and in a letter detailing Sam's death in 1849, Ryland wrote, "We had the misfortune to lose our man Sam last night (the boy you gave me)" (Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 7, 1832. RRP 11.048-049, VBHS; Letter, Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, May 20, 1849, RRP, 11.074, VBHS). The census of 1840 shows that Ryland enslaved a boy or young man between ages 10-23. This would have been Sam. The data allows for only limited specificity. Sam would have been fifteen or under in 1832.

²⁵⁴ Robert Ryland, Ledger 1, RRP files 55.1.021-023, VBHS.

During Ryland's time in Lynchburg, his ledger also shows his occasional hire of people designated by only a first name or referred to as "servant." As previously noted, Ryland defaulted to using the term "servant" for enslaved people and including surnames when referring to white and free people: Mr. or Mrs. [surname], Bro. or Sis. [surname], or [first name and last name].²⁵⁵

1.4.3 YORK WOODSON & ROBERT RYLAND

The Richmond African Baptist Missionary Society, held its annual meeting in that city on the 7th inst. ; when more than 2000 persons listened to a sermon by Brother York Woodson, of Lynchburg. The Society voted to request the particular attention of the General Baptist Board of Missions, to the schools and operations under the care of Br. Lott Carey, in Africa.

Boston Recorder, April 28, 1828, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank

Many years after his departure from Lynchburg, Robert Ryland recalled his time there in the context of his connection with a free Black minister named York Woodson. Woodson began life as an enslaved child in Portsmouth, Virginia between 1800 and 1810. There he was held along with his parents by the Woodson family. The Woodsons would routinely ask their children and those they enslaved to memorize long passages of the Bible. As a child, York

Woodson showed an extraordinary affinity for the task, "commit[ing] to memory nearly all the striking passages of the Old and New Testament." Ryland did not provide details of how Woodson "obtained his freedom" but in the following years he had settled in Lynchburg and was committed to preaching. In his remembrance Ryland called him "a devoted minister of the gospel" and "a natural orator, [who] drew large crowds of white and colored hearers when it was known that he was to preach."²⁵⁶ Woodson's reputation spread as far as New England. In 1828, the *Boston Recorder* noted a crowd of two thousand people who "listened to a sermon by Brother York Woodson, of Lynchburg" while attending the annual meeting of the Richmond African Baptist Missionary Society.²⁵⁷ In Lynchburg, because there was not a separate congregation for enslaved and free Black people, Woodson "occupied the position of evangelist, and often held meetings for prayer and preaching, and attended funerals among his people in and around the city." His work drew him to the young Baptist minister, Robert Ryland, who remembered Woodson as a "humble, earnest Christian." The two men would meet in Ryland's study, forming a bond close enough that Ryland referred to him as his "brother beloved." In December of 1827, Ryland recorded a twenty-five cent "Contribution to York" in his expenditures of the year.²⁵⁸

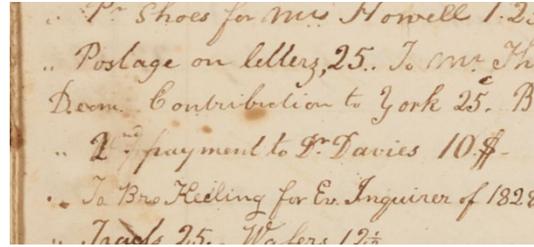
²⁵⁵ Robert Ryland, Ledger I, "Expenditures during the year 1829," RRP, 55.1.016, "Money expended during the year 1831," 55.1.020, "Expenditures of 1832," 55.1.023, VBHS.

²⁵⁶ Robert Ryland, "York Woodson: The Colored Preacher," in "The Co-Worker," a column in unnamed publication, handwritten note from Robert Ryland, "Published by the First Baptist Church[,] Lynchburg, Va," RRP, 08.033, VBHS.

²⁵⁷ "Religious Summary: The Bible Cause," *Boston Recorder*, April 28, 1828, 67. The Richmond African Baptist Missionary Society was founded by Lott Cary and William Crane. Ryland was a close acquaintance of Crane and his records show an 1829 donation to "Wm. Calls" "to aid him in Africa," indicating Ryland's support for African missionary work at the time (Robert Ryland, "Expenditures of 1829," RRP, 55.1.017, VBHS).

²⁵⁸ Robert Ryland, "Monies expended [etc.] 1827," Ledger I, Robert Ryland Papers, Virginia Baptist

Throughout his life, Ryland was a careful, uncompromising critic of other ministers – not malicious, but never willing to hold back his opinion when he found a minister not up to the task.²⁵⁹ About Woodson, however, Ryland offered unalloyed praise. He recalled the man’s service at the funeral of “[a] pious girl” at the Presbyterian church, Lynchburg’s largest church at the time. The sanctuary was filled with Black and white mourners where, Ryland noted, “the colored people sat on the first floor and the white people in the gallery,” an inversion of the usual seating in churches which indicates that the child who had died was likely Black. Woodson shared the pulpit with the Presbyterian minister, William S. Reid, who “read the chapter and the congregation sang the voluntary” because Woodson could not read. When this portion of the service was complete, “[Woodson] then rose and, with his characteristic modesty, announced his text – ‘*I am the resurrection and the life.*’”



Robert Ryland, Ledger I, Expenses of 1827

Ryland took significant time to describe Woodson’s style that day, and what was likely a carefully calibrated beginning that built to an emotional and spiritual crescendo:

At first he seemed timid and embarrassed. He held his right hand on the open Bible and scratched its pages with his fore finger, having a down-cast countenance. He then occasionally raised his eyes to look at the audience, and again turned them towards the Bible... Gradually he began to raise his head with more self-possession and to look piercingly into the eyes of his hearers. At length he seemed fully inspired by his subject and wholly oblivious of himself. He straightened up his tall, commanding person, expanded his broad chest, brought out his clear, strong, musical voice, employed natural and appropriate gestures, and quoted some of the sublimest passages of Holy Writ. His eyes glistened with a strange lustre [sic]. His large mouth was opened to its fullest capacity. His white teeth seemed whiter by contrast with his raven complexion. In short, his voice, tremulous with emotion, was a continuous stream of genuine eloquence. For a time the packed audience was as still as death. Presently a suppressed sob was heard, and then another and another. “Parson” Reid... wept like a child... and there was a general breaking down over the whole house. The preacher, having become near inaudible, made a solemn pause, and looking over the scene, said in a subdued tone: “When God Almighty begins to preach, it is time for old York to stop.” Even this unique close tended to deepen the sense of Divine Presence, as no one for a time rose up to offer the concluding prayer or to pronounce the benediction. I have rarely witnessed an instance of deeper and more general impression on an audience.

Ryland concluded his memory of the day by contrasting Woodson’s sermon with what he viewed as the overemotional style that he observed in other Black ministers, “a tumultuous and an uncalled-for exhibition of feelings so common with our colored friends.” In Woodson he saw emotion “manifestly kept down until human nature could no longer endure, and then it overflowed.”²⁶⁰

Historical Society, 15.

²⁵⁹ See Ryland’s appreciation of Andrew Broaddas, Appendix B.

²⁶⁰ This echoes his criticism of “superstition” and emotion among the members of First African Baptist

In 1832, in the wake of Nat Turner's Rebellion and the crackdown on Black ministry, when those who had once preached freely "were silenced over the whole state," Woodson sought Ryland's advice. Despite the belief of Ryland and others that the new laws "were not rigidly enforced," Woodson was among the Black ministers who were "discouraged and mortified" by the threat to their ministry and to their safety: "[He was] not willing to violate the civil laws and yet burning to preach the gospel!" By this point, Ryland had risen in prominence in the city, and used his connection to the mayor, John H. Warwick, to advocate for Woodson. Ryland "inquired if some exception in his case might not be tolerated." Warwick, familiar with Woodson's ministry, said that he "would request the police to connive at his preaching," turning a blind eye to the violation of the law. If, however, Woodson were to be "reported officially," Warwick told Ryland that he would have to "impose the penalty."²⁶¹ The penalty for a "slave, free negro, or mulatto" who was discovered to have organized a meeting, religious or otherwise, was punishment with "stripes, at the discretion of any justice of the peace, not exceeding thirty-nine lashes."²⁶²

Ryland cautioned Woodson to "wait on the Lord, [and] to preach only where he was well known. [I] assured him that I did not believe the people of Lynchburg would allow him to be disturbed in his ministerial functions." Woodson was not convinced, however, and Ryland wrote that "he seldom preached afterward." He ended his remembrance of York Woodson with a description of the committed young preacher's decline, when he "withered and sickened and died." The precise date of Woodson's death not known, but records record his burial on July 11, 1834. Ryland viewed the forced end to Woodson's ministry as responsible for the man's death. He wrote, "I shall ever believe [he died] of a broken heart."²⁶³

1.4.4 RYLAND AND BAPTIST COLLEGES

On April 27, 1830, Robert Ryland wrote that he had received an extraordinary offer from Robert Baylor Semple, the towering figure in the Virginia Baptist church, as well as a Ryland family friend, the uncle of Ryland's half-brother, William Ryland (1798-1861), and the administrator of Columbian College. The elder Baptist, who had so influenced Ryland as a child and a young man, had offered Robert Ryland a leadership position at Columbian College, and Ryland wrote that Semple was urging him "to go to Washington to live!" "What do you think of this," Ryland asked his brother, and continued, "He says he wants to 'cast off the four corners of the College' on my

Church (Robert Ryland, "Reminiscences of the First African Church, No. 1, *American Baptist Memorial*, September 1855, Hathi Trust Digital Library).

²⁶¹ Robert Ryland, "York Woodson: The Colored Preacher," in "The Co-Worker," a column in unnamed publication, handwritten note from Robert Ryland, "Published by the First Baptist Church[,] Lynchburg, Va," RRP, 08.033, VBHS.

²⁶² Commonwealth of Virginia, *Journal of the House of Delegates, 1831-1832*, Bill no. 18, Richmond: Thomas Richie (1832), 1 [printed page number; 759 in digital version of *Journal*], Hathi Trust Digital Library, [link](#); Virginia, Laws Passed, March 15 1832, Chapter XXII, Nat Turner Project, [link](#).

²⁶³ Southern Memorial Association, *Diuguid Funeral Records 1820-1950*, York Woodson burial record D0111508; Ryland, "York Woodson." Woodson's burial record was located and provided by Lynchburg researcher, Amelia Talley Driskill.

shoulders.” Ryland was hesitant, though, writing that since Semple was “weary of the burden” he feared that he, too, would be “press[ed] down to earth” by the responsibilities there. His growing church in Lynchburg and the reaction of the congregation should he accept the offer also gave him pause:

The folks here would growl a little if they knew the contents of his letter. I don’t know what to say or do. It is my impression just now that I shall [not] leave [Lynchburg] until it appears that no more good remains to be done by my instrumentality. I hate to deny any request which the good old gentleman makes. Word from any other source, I could say “no!” without a pang... My attachment to my Ch[urch] here [is] strong and so the conflict is strong.²⁶⁴

Ultimately, Ryland chose to remain in Lynchburg. Two years later, however, when the Baptist Education Society offered him the chance to lead a seminary in Henrico County, Ryland was drawn to the possibilities it presented. In 1832, despite misgivings over the risks of underfunding and prospect of subsequent debt, he left his new home and his position in Lynchburg and stepped into instructional, leadership, and operational roles at the newly formed Virginia Baptist Seminary.

²⁶⁴ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, April 27, 1830, RRP, 13.023 VBHS.

2.0 INSTITUTIONAL BEGINNINGS: 1832-1840

Virginia Baptist Education Society and Seminary

The formation of the Virginia Baptist Seminary emerged from the belief among some Virginia Baptists that, despite the relatively close location of Columbian College in Washington, D.C., the state required a Baptist educational institution of its own.²⁶⁵ An earlier effort to develop a seminary in Virginia had been “abandoned” in 1809, but new interest in the idea formed after the prominent minister and missionary, Luther Rice, expressed concern that the lack of a pool of educated Baptist pastors would negatively affect missionary work.²⁶⁶ While some Baptists resisted the idea on biblical terms, arguing that an emphasis on ministerial education did not align with the biblical tradition of “unlearned” ministry, particularly that of Peter and John, four Education Societies were formed in 1820 which led to the creation of Columbian College in 1821.²⁶⁷ A formal institution in the state of Virginia remained the ideal for some state Baptist leaders, however, and the next ten years saw increasing enthusiasm for the idea. In 1830, the Virginia Baptist Education Society was formed for the purpose of “devis[ing] means for the improvement of our rising ministry.”²⁶⁸

On June 8, 1830, the Society established a plan of home-based educational centers for ministerial students, “[a] sort of internship” that would provide both a “literary” education which would prepare for college entrance and theological instruction, or a “two year terminal course preparing for immediate service as a minister.”²⁶⁹ Robert Ryland did not support the plan, believing that money would be put to better use in support of “schools already established.”²⁷⁰ His was not the prevailing view. In 1890, he recalled raising the argument against the movement toward the “bricks and mortar” goal, but because he “was a young pastor of a weak church, and void of influence in Baptist councils,” he “was voted down.”²⁷¹

The efforts were centered briefly in Powhatan County, at Dunlora plantation which was owned by Ann Hickman. There her brother, Reverend Edward Baptist, began to teach a group of six students in 1831. According to the 1830 Federal Census, Ann Hickman enslaved fifty-seven people on the property.²⁷² In early 1832, Edward Baptist continued to teach in Powhatan while the minister and

²⁶⁵ While an overview of the history of the Virginia Baptist Seminary and its transition to Richmond College is provided here, fuller accounts of that history can be found in several sources: Stewart Bowe Medlin, “The Founding of the Permanent Denominational Colleges in Virginia, 1776-1861,” thesis, College of William and Mary, 1979; Alley, *University of Richmond*; and Daniel’s “The Virginia Baptist Seminary, 1832-1842” and “The Genesis of Richmond College, 1843-1860.”

²⁶⁶ Medlin, 88-89; Alley, 5

²⁶⁷ Medlin, 89-90.

²⁶⁸ Robert Ryland, *The Society, the Seminary, the College: An Address*, Richmond College, 1891, 9

²⁶⁹ Medlin, 92

²⁷⁰ Ryland, *Society*, 9

²⁷¹ Ryland, *Society*, 10

²⁷² United States Federal Census of 1830, Powhatan, Virginia, “Ann Hickman,” Series: *M19*; Roll: *193*;

missionary, Eli Ball, “rendered similar services in his home” in Henrico County.²⁷³ A number of factors including the desire among some in the Education Society to make manual labor a part of the instruction process and Edward Baptist’s declining health resulted in the society concentrating its efforts at Spring Farm in Henrico County, which was purchased by society trustees for the purpose in 1832. This was followed by the selection of Robert Ryland as the principal of what was to be called Virginia Baptist Seminary. While Ryland had initially argued against the seminary out of concerns over potential debt and the belief that Virginia Baptists already had access to Columbian College, once he accepted the position he brought a commitment to the importance of a robust liberal arts education, convinced that “science, and literature, and language be taught first” because “[t]hey will prepare the student for those sacred subjects... [Liberal arts and theology] are desirable...[b]ut if one *must* be omitted, let it be the latter.”²⁷⁴

Spring Farm was located in central Henrico County, four miles north of what were then the Richmond city limits. Of the 241 acres on the property, fifty were wooded and the rest were extolled in an advertisement as being a combination of “very rich low grounds” and portions at higher elevation that were “of good quality... adapted to corn, wheat, oats, rye, and clover.” The main house was described as accommodating “a large family,” and surrounding the house were outbuildings consisting of “an office near the house, a frame smoke house, and kitchen[, and] negro houses, with shingled roofs and brick chimnies [sic].”²⁷⁵ During the farm’s period as a seminary, Ryland, his family, and some students occupied “the plain farm-house” while others lived in “slab-covered log-cabins.” The “unsightly barn... served for a chapel and school-rooms.”²⁷⁶

If he was to run an educational institution, Ryland intended it to meet his own scholarly standards. When considering the academy operated by Edward Baptist at Dunlora, Ryland wrote, “[Baptist] was an educated minister and a competent teacher; but with the large farm and several important churches to supervise he found little time for training, systematic work.” The result was that the students at Dunlora had been “more occupied with prayer-meetings and revival services than with their books in the classroom.”²⁷⁷ With his assumption of duties at Virginia Baptist Seminary, Robert Ryland's personal hope was to eventually pursue a life of the mind, one focused on teaching while

Page: 258; Family History Library Film: 0029672.

²⁷³ Alley, 14.

²⁷⁴ Robert Ryland, A Sermon Delivered Before The Baptist Education Society of Virginia, July 4, 1836, Richmond: Wm. Sands, 1836, 15.

²⁷⁵ “Mineral Spring Farm for Sale,” *Constitutional Whig*, June 13, 1831. The advertisement and prospective sale of Spring Farm was handled by Thomas Taylor, former co-owner of the Westham plantation that is now home to the University of Richmond. Spring Farm was located at a bend in Trumpet Branch, in Henrico County in the present-day Bloomingdale section of the Lakeside neighborhood. Following its sale after the relocation of the seminary to the Haxall mansion closer to the city, the farm changed hands several times, and eventually became the Bloomindale Stock Farm owned by Lewis Ginter.

²⁷⁶ Ryland, *Society*, 15.

²⁷⁷ Ryland, *Society*, 10.

being surrounded by educated men.²⁷⁸ As he was shifting his household from Lynchburg to Spring Farm and was temporarily focused on the details of boarding and the workings of the farm, he wrote his father that he was “anxious to have nothing to do but with the studies of the youths.”²⁷⁹ This was an echo of the hopes he had expressed months before when he had agreed to take the position and anticipated that leadership of the seminary would provide “an opportunity to cultivate my mind more extensively.”²⁸⁰ Two factors prevented Ryland from achieving this professorial ideal, however, the farm-based nature of the early seminary and the lack of a steward to oversee the Boarding Department. Despite the effusive descriptions of the richness of Spring Farm’s land in the advertisement, the private letters of the previous owners showed their own frustrated attempts to cultivate the poor soil there, which proved to be largely clay.²⁸¹ Ryland found similar difficulties with the property. In 1834, as he was preparing for the seminary’s removal from the farm, Ryland wrote his father that it had been poorly suited to the purposes of the institution, a “low froggy place” that was “too far from town.”²⁸²

While there had been an initial attempt on the part of the Board to hire a steward to oversee the boarding of students at the institution, Ryland was asked to fill the role in 1832, making him responsible for the facility at Spring Farm and for overseeing the enslaved laborers hired for its operation.²⁸³ The seminary began modestly, with only ten students, on Monday, July 9, 1832, the day Ryland described as having been “set apart... to begin.”²⁸⁴ As an instructor, Ryland continued with the “small class in the Greek testament” that Edward Baptist had begun at Dunlora, and he added the study of Latin, mathematics, and English grammar to the curriculum. While a number of teachers moved through the seminary, the educational load was generally carried by Ryland and two other instructors. As the student population began to grow, Eli Ball was added to the faculty as an assistant teacher, but Ryland found him prone to “short cuts” with the students’ learning, and Ball only remained for a year before he was replaced by Caleb Burnley.²⁸⁵ As an administrator, Ryland almost immediately began struggling with the early departures of students for ministerial posts in churches which were “alluring” students away before their studies were complete.²⁸⁶ In his duties as

²⁷⁸ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 7, 1832, RRP, 11.049, VBHS.

²⁷⁹ Alley, 14; Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 7, 1832, RRP, 11.048-049, VBHS.

²⁸⁰ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, May 13, 1832, RRP, 11.046, VBHS.

²⁸¹ Emily Bingham, *Mordechi: An Early American Family*, New York: Hill and Wang (2003), 84, 86; U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Soil Survey of Henrico County, Virginia*, Washington: Government Printing Office (1914), 23.

²⁸² Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 1, 1834, RRP, file 11.052, VBHS.

²⁸³ “Virginia Baptist Seminary,” *Richmond Whig and Commercial Journal*, December 14, 1832, Virginia Chronicle; Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 7, 1832.

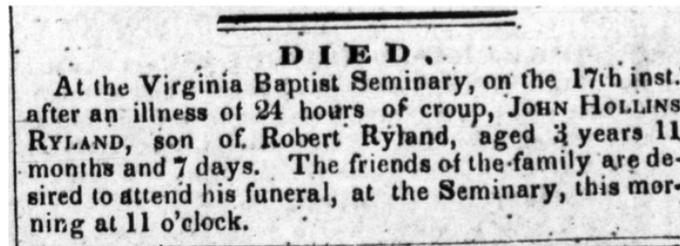
²⁸⁴ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 7, 1832, RRP, 11.048-049, VBHS.

²⁸⁵ Ryland, *Society*, 12-13.

²⁸⁶ *Religious Herald*, September 28, 1838, 155, 2.

steward Ryland also had to navigate the complaints of students regarding food and “neatness” of the seminary. He wrote, “I never had heard so much complaint as they exhibited.” Ryland called the early students “grown up children that need cow-hiding and common sense as much as theology.”²⁸⁷

After attempting to run Spring Farm as the seminary’s campus for two years, the manual labor effort largely ended with the purchase of the Columbia estate in June 1834, which was, in Ryland’s words, “an onward stride to respectability and usefulness [that] brought us nearer to market, nearer to the post-office, nearer to medical aid, nearer to the book-stores, and nearer to spiritual privileges.”²⁸⁸ Most of Ryland’s surviving children were born in the Columbia mansion, the main building of Virginia Baptist Seminary and then Richmond College which also served as the family’s home.²⁸⁹ During the seminary period, Ryland’s personal life was marked by a series of deaths in his family. At the age of one, his first child with Josephine Ryland, Ann Peachey, called “sweet little Peachey” by her father, died eleven days after the birth of her brother, Robert Hall Ryland.²⁹⁰ Young Robert died three years later.²⁹¹ In 1835, Josephine Ryland gave birth to a stillborn child, whose death Ryland attributed to his wife’s exhaustion after “the negroes pretended to be sick & she was imprudently exercised too much.”²⁹² In 1838, the couple lost another son, John Hollins Ryland who was nearly four years old at the time of his death from croup.²⁹³



Richmond Compiler, January 19, 1838, Library of Virginia

²⁸⁷ Robert Ryland to Josephine Ryland, September 20, 1832, RRP, 16.059-060, VBHS.

²⁸⁸ Ryland, *Society*, 15.

²⁸⁹ Roberta Ryland Adkins, “Robert Ryland,” RRP, 42.079, VBHS.

²⁹⁰ Robert Ryland to Josephine Ryland, April 30, 1832, RRP, 16.056-57, VBHS; [Robert Ryland’s wives and children], RRP, 3.019, VBHS.

²⁹¹ Robert Ryland, Ledger 1, 58, RRP 55.1.035, VBHS. Ryland notes a doctor visiting Robert Hall Ryland six times and the cost of the child’s coffin.

²⁹² Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 17, 1835, RRP, 11.055, VBHS.

²⁹³ “Died,” *Richmond Compiler*, Jan 19, 1838 2, 5, Library of Virginia.

2.1 ENSLAVED LABORERS AT VIRGINIA BAPTIST SEMINARY

Enslaved laborers were a critical part of the operations of the Virginia Baptist Seminary at Spring Farm and their use increased after relocation to the Columbia estate in 1835. Records show that those enslaved by Robert Ryland worked with other enslaved “servants” hired by the institution.²⁹⁴ The entwining of Ryland’s personal enslavement and the use of enslaved labor by the institution began before the first students arrived at Spring Farm and continued for decades.

2.1.1 SAM, FANNY, MARIA & MARY

Sam and Fanny were two people enslaved by Robert Ryland whom he “hired out” to Virginia Baptist Seminary. Mary and Maria were enslaved in the Ryland household. Since the Ryland home was the institution, however, it is likely that these women also served faculty and students.

Apart from a brief mention in the last months of Ryland's Lynchburg period, what is known of Sam’s earliest years of enslavement by Ryland is largely recorded in connection with the institution. Fragments of his life emerge from Ryland’s letters to both his father and his wife, Josephine Ryland, and from Ryland’s ledger containing institutional and family finances. They show Sam’s work at the seminary beginning in its earliest days. In two letters, Robert Ryland referred to Sam as being a boy when he was given to him by his father, Josiah Ryland, and came live and work for the family in Lynchburg.²⁹⁵ It was there that Ryland recorded the purchase of his shoes.²⁹⁶ After the family’s move to Spring Farm and just before the students arrived at Virginia Baptist Seminary, Sam was already a part of institutional operations. Robert Ryland was to be the seminary's principal and, in what he believed to be a temporary position, its steward, in charge of the farm and the boarding of the students. As he was preparing Spring Farm for their arrival, he wrote to his father, describing the place, his responsibilities there, and the “use” of Sam:

The farm consists of 234 acres which cost \$4000. [A] crop is now growing for which the Board paid \$500. Servants are hired here, and many things are put here in the way of housekeeping... This is a pleasant place, said to be healthy... The Board has agreed to give me 200\$ from now to Xmas besides boarding my family, for acting as steward & teacher & for permitting my furniture & boy Sam to be used here as common stock.²⁹⁷

Sam’s work as “common stock” may have included both domestic and agricultural labor at the seminary. Additionally, Robert Ryland recorded receiving forty dollars for the hire of Sam to “JR” in 1833.²⁹⁸ It is possible that “JR” may have been an informal way of noting his father, Josiah

²⁹⁴ Robert Ryland to Josephine Ryland, July 1841, RRP, 16.108-109, VBHS.

²⁹⁵ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 7, 1832, RRP, 11.049, VBHS; Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, May 20, 1849, RRP, 11.074, VBHS.

²⁹⁶ Robert Ryland, Ledger 1, “Expenditures of 1832,” RRP, file 55.1.023, VBHS.

²⁹⁷ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 7, 1832, RRP, 11.048-049, VBHS.

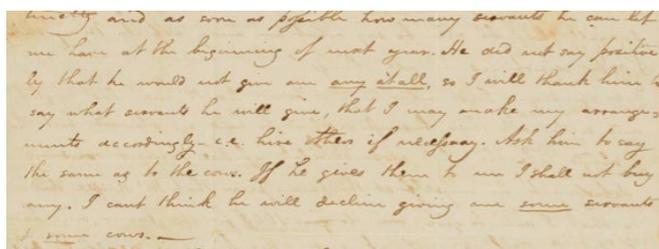
²⁹⁸ "Money received in 1833," Robert Ryland Ledger No. 1, RRP, 55.1.025, VBHS.

Ryland or one of his brothers, John or Joseph. This sort of exchange of enslaved people between family members for harvests and to exploit specific skills was common at the time.²⁹⁹

That year, Ryland sought other enslaved people for institutional use. Writing to Josephine Ryland, who was staying with her Ryland in-laws at Farmington, Ryland described plans at the seminary, including the “employment of an overseer” and “get[ting] the woman Bro[ther] Crump spoke of.” Ryland then turned his attention to those enslaved by his father at Farmington, and the possibility of his father “giv[ing]” him “servants” and livestock for the seminary:

I wish you to ask Papa to let me know distinctly and as soon as possible how many servants he can let me have at the beginning of next year. He did not say positively that he would not give me any at all, so I will thank him to say what servants he will give, that I may make my arrangements accordingly - i.e. hire others if necessary. Ask him to say the same as to the cows. If he gives them to me I shall not buy any. I can't think he will decline giving me some servants and some cows.³⁰⁰

In August 1834, Ryland expressed his concern for Josephine Ryland's health under the stress of managing the farm and the seminary's boarding concerns while he was travelling, reassuring her that, “if things don't go exactly right, don't be distracted overmuch about it.” He



Robert Ryland to Josephine Ryland, October 7, 1833, VBHS

continued, “I would rather have a little neglect on the farm & about the house

matters than that [your] mind should be worn down with anxiety.” To alleviate her worry, he offered help with logistics as well as the overall strain she had expressed in an earlier letter. Saying he would repay her the cost, he asked that she use her own money to purchase more ice should the money he left for the purpose run out: “[T]ell Sam to try to buy from Mr. Young's ice-house in the best terms he can. If you should want a woman very much, you can hire one & I will pay for her. Sam can work in the house.” Ryland's language in this excerpt, that he would pay “for” the woman that Josephine Ryland might hire instead of writing that he would “pay her” or “pay her wages” indicates that this may have been an enslaved person and echoes later descriptions of similar hiring.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ See Charles L. Cocke papers, Wyndham Robertson Library, Hollins University, for many examples of the financial relationships between relatives engaging in this intrafamilial leasing of enslaved laborers.

³⁰⁰ Robert Ryland to Josephine Ryland, October 7, 1833, RRP, 16.069, VBHS.

³⁰¹ Robert Ryland to Josephine Ryland, August 7, 1834, RRP, 16.080, VBHS. Thirty-two years before, the Young property was the gathering site for a planned uprising of enslaved people that became known as Gabriel's Rebellion. See Michael L. Nicholls, “Gabriel's Conspiracy (1800),” *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Humanities, 21 Apr. 2016, web. 14 Nov. 2020, [link](#).

Ryland was receiving money for hiring out both Sam and a woman named Fanny to the seminary in 1835. On December 22nd he recorded “Sam’s hire” (80.00) and that of Fanny (30.00) in the expenses of the Boarding Department.³⁰² In his private receipts in September of 1836, Ryland recorded receiving a payment of 110.00 for “Sam & Fanny’s hire last year.”³⁰³ During their period of “hire” to the institution, their clothes and shoes were often listed as Boarding Department expenses. Examples include “Shoes for Fanny 87 ½,” and “Sam’s clothes.”³⁰⁴ Ryland also noted the expenses he covered personally, among them were “Sam’s tooth drawn 50,” “Vest for Sam 50c,” and “Doctress for Fanny 3.00.”³⁰⁵ Ryland wrote to his sister in December of 1838 and described his hopes of giving up the stewardship at the seminary and his plan to hire out Sam and Fanny elsewhere: “Shall hire out my servants – Sam and Fanny.”³⁰⁶ At this point Ryland had already begun hiring Sam out to work on the construction of the James River and Kanawha Canal. There was a significant labor shortage on the canal due to the deaths of Irish workers from extreme heat and the resulting diminishment of the labor force when many remaining free workers left. The work there was reported to be particularly awful.³⁰⁷ A ledger entry shows that Ryland received three payments for Sam’s canal labor: “Sam’s work on Canal \$20+27.75+15.60.”³⁰⁸

Robert Ryland, Ledger 1, “Private receipts for the year 1838,” VBHS

³⁰² Robert Ryland, Ledger I, “Boarding Department of 1835 (Second Term),” RRP, 55.1.039, VBHS.

³⁰³ Robert Ryland, Ledger I, “Receipts on Private account for 1836,” RRP, 55.1.040, VBHS.

³⁰⁴ Robert Ryland, Ledger I, “Expenses of the Boarding Department of VBS,” February 10, 1834, RRP, 55.1.031; “Expenditures of the Boarding Department 1837,” RRP, 55.1.050, VBHS.

³⁰⁵ Robert Ryland, Ledger I, “[Family] Expenditures of 1833,” RRP, 55.1.025; “Family Expenses of the year 1834,” RRP, 55.1.028; “Family Expenses for 1836,” RRP, 55.1.040, VBHS.

³⁰⁶ Robert Ryland to Elizabeth F. Willis, typescript, December 26, 1838, RRP, 15.044, VBHS.

³⁰⁷ Wayland Fuller Dunaway, *History of the James River and Kanawha Canal Company*, dissertation, Columbia University (1922), 131. See also interview with Langhorne Gibson, author of *Cabell’s Canal: The Story of the James River and Kanawha*: Gary Robertson, “Canal Was Carved With Slave Labor,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, September 26, 1999, [link](#).

³⁰⁸ Robert Ryland, Ledger 1, “Private receipts for the year 1838,” RRP, 55.1.053, VBHS.

In his personal expenses in 1839, Ryland noted his purchase of two hundred dollars' worth of stock in the James River and Kanawha Canal Company.³⁰⁹

Like Sam, Mary first appeared in Robert Ryland's accounts during his time in Lynchburg. In a letter to his father, Ryland had referred to her as a "bad girl," contrasting her with an enslaved man named Coffee that he had asked his father to send to him.³¹⁰ During that period, Ryland purchased shoes and clothes designated for Mary and hired her out to the use of someone named J. Cary, work for which he was paid 13.31 in December of 1832.³¹¹ Clothing purchases designated for her continue over the following years. In 1836, both Sam and Mary were mentioned in an accusation of theft. Josephine Ryland wrote her husband that "Sister Nelson," likely the wife of faculty member William Nelson, had apparently named them both as suspects, then changed her mind and "declared in a very positive manner her belief of Sam's innocence" but that "she would never believe that Mary had not taken [the items] till they were produced from another quarter."³¹²

Mary is also mentioned in Ryland's letter to his father in which he recorded the stillbirth of his child:

Josephine was taken sick today about 1 o'clock, and suffered very acute pain till about a half hour ago (10 o'clock) at which time she was delivered of a child that had just died. This result has been caused by too much fatigue endured for several days past. We had to have the house cleaned up [illegible, possibly "today"] and several of the negroes pretended to be sick & she was imprudently exercised too much. She has been obliged to carry Johnny [John Hollins Ryland], in her arms as Mary is unwell and he is so fretful as to require her attention.³¹³

In March of 1837, Ryland recorded the payment of three dollars to a "Black Doctress" which aligns with the time of Mary's death.³¹⁴ In a letter to his sister in which he described his plan to hire out the labor of Sam and Fanny once he was no longer steward of the seminary, Ryland added a

³⁰⁹ Robert Ryland, Ledger I, "Family expenses for 1839," RRP, 55.1.059, VBHS.

³¹⁰ Letter, Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, November 7, 1831, RRP, file 11.044, VBHS.

³¹¹ Robert Ryland, Ledger I, "Money expended during the year 1831," May 1831; Dec. 1831; RRP, 55.1.020-021; "Receipts of 1832," RRP, 55.1.022, VBHS.

³¹² Josephine Ryland to Robert Ryland, August 31, 1836, typescript, RRP, 17.037-.038, VBHS. If "Sister Nelson" does refer to William Nelson's wife, this demonstrates the fluidity between Ryland's personal enslavement and enslaved people associated with the institution. Mary was never shown as "hired out" to institutional labor, but due to Ryland and his family living in the main campus building with other faculty at the time, she, like Sam and Fanny, would have been in daily contact with faculty and students, and would have likely served them as well. It is not yet clear whether this is the same William Nelson ("Wm. Nelson") that Ryland referred to as being drawn toward Alexander Campbell's beliefs in Lynchburg (see Section 2.3).

³¹³ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 17, 1835, RRP, 11.054-.055, VBHS.

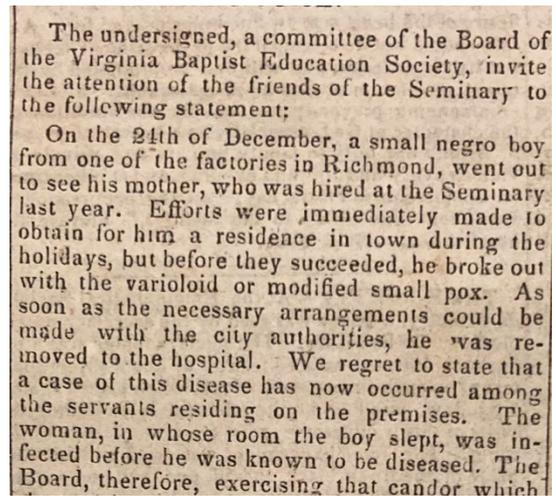
³¹⁴ Robert Ryland, Ledger I, "Family Expenses of 1837," 89, RRP, 55.1.049, VBHS.

parenthetical note: "I suppose you have heard that Mary - Beverly's daughter is dead. She died last Spring."³¹⁵

³¹⁵ Robert Ryland to Elizabeth Ryland Willis, December 26, 1838, typescript, RRP, 15.044, VBHS.

2.1.2 “HIRE” OF OTHERS

According to an item placed by Ryland (along with Jeremiah Bell Jeeter, Henry Keeling, James B. Taylor and William Sands – all members of a committee for the Virginia Baptist Education Society), an 1837 smallpox outbreak at the seminary was the result of a visit from a “small negro boy,” who was hired out to “one of the factories” in Richmond. The child had visited his mother who was “hired to the seminary,” and brought the disease with him. He was infected with what the notice described as varioloid, the milder form of the disease. It then spread to “the woman in whose room the boy slept” but because she was already confined because of “another kind of sickness,” the notice assured the public that there was no danger to students and that “the family have been repeatedly vaccinated.”³¹⁶ Several weeks later, Ryland wrote a letter detailing the woman’s full recovery, and the return to campus of both students and professors. He then provided the rates for tuition and board and asks for prayers for the seminary.³¹⁷ This “all clear” was reinforced by a brief news item in the *Religious Herald* published on February 10, 1837. There was no further mention of the child whose illness sparked the issue.



The undersigned, a committee of the Board of the Virginia Baptist Education Society, invite the attention of the friends of the Seminary to the following statement:

On the 24th of December, a small negro boy from one of the factories in Richmond, went out to see his mother, who was hired at the Seminary last year. Efforts were immediately made to obtain for him a residence in town during the holidays, but before they succeeded, he broke out with the varioloid or modified small pox. As soon as the necessary arrangements could be made with the city authorities, he was removed to the hospital. We regret to state that a case of this disease has now occurred among the servants residing on the premises. The woman, in whose room the boy slept, was infected before he was known to be diseased. The Board, therefore, exercising that candor which

“Notice,” *Religious Herald*, January 13, 1837, VBHS

As with the entries for Sam and Fanny in 1836, Ryland continued to use the word “hire” to designate some people he recorded in his ledger:

Servants clothes \$28.37 1/2 Presents to [ditto: “Servants”] 2.50 Mrs Prichard 4.00, Sarah 7.50, Josephine \$8.80... “Nancy’s (cook) hire \$62.00. Celia’s [ditto: “hire”] \$40. Albert’s [ditto: “hire”] 80. Nelly 3.³¹⁸

In this example, “hire” was paid for Nancy, Celia, and Albert, while it appears that Nelly was simply paid. The cost of “Servants clothes” was also noted. Both categories appear numerous times in Ryland’s highly detailed records of Boarding Department expenses between 1832 and 1841. Other entries covering the seminary years (1832-1840) also show some individuals who were paid but not “hired.” At least one of them, Aggy Cooper, is known to have been a free Black person. Other names include Judy, Charlotte, Hardenia, “Agg-,” and Mary Crow.³¹⁹ The status of these women is unclear. One cannot assume they were all free simply because “hire” was not paid for them. “Self-

³¹⁶ *Religious Herald*, January 13, 1837, 7, col. 2, VBHS.

³¹⁷ *Religious Herald*, January 27, 1837, 15, col. 3, VBHS.

³¹⁸ “Expenses of the Boarding Department 1839 2nd Session,” Ledger I, RRP, 55.1.062, VBHS.

³¹⁹ “Agg-” appears on a list with Aggy Cooper, so she was a separate person likely named Aggy or Agness. An Aggy Smith also appears in the ledgers, so this may refer to her. For more information on Aggy Cooper, see “Research & Questions: Aggy/Agness” (Section 3.1.1.4).

hiring” was common in Richmond and other cities in Virginia. These enslaved people “who hired their own time” were at times paid directly, and this may have been the case with some of those listed with amounts only.³²⁰ Ryland also recorded payments to woman he referred to as “Mrs.” or “Sister,” and it is likely that these were white women.

Some individuals appear several times in the Boarding Department expenditures recorded in Ryland’s ledger. The table below shows typical entries for each person named during the Virginia Baptist Seminary years for whom the institution paid “hire.” Richmond College was chartered in March 1840, so it is possible Abby and Christian were hired during a portion of that period.

Caroline	“Caroline’s hire and rest of her clothes \$21.50”	“Boarding Department of 1835 (second term)”
Isabella	“Isabella’s hire \$50”	“Expenses of the Boarding Dept 1838”
Sam	“Sam & Fanny [ditto: ‘hire’]”	“Expenses of the Boarding Dept 1838”
Fanny	“Sam & Fanny [ditto: ‘hire’] 130.”	“Expenses of the Boarding Dept 1838”
Nancy	“Nancy’s (cook) hire \$62.00”	“Expenses of the Boarding Department 1839 2 nd Session”
Celia	“Celia’s [ditto: ‘hire’] \$40.”	“Expenses of the Boarding Department 1839 2 nd Session”
Albert	“Albert’s [ditto: ‘hire’] 80.”	“Expenses of the Boarding Department 1839 2 nd Session”
Abby (a.k.a. “Abbey”)	“Abby’s hire \$20”... “Moving Abby 1.25”	“Expenses of the Boarding Department 1840 1 st session”
Christian	“Christian’s [ditto: ‘hire’] 3.87 ½”	“Expenses of the Boarding Department 1840 1 st session” ³²¹

2.1.3 RYLAND ON ENSLAVEMENT: OPEN LETTER TO FRANCIS WAYLAND (1835)

Three years after the opening of the seminary, Ryland's views on enslavement, both “in the abstract” and in its daily systems and applications, were distilled in an open letter to Francis Wayland which was reprinted in the Boston-based *Christian Watchman* on August 21, 1835 following its original publication in the *Religious Herald*. Wayland was the president of Brown University, the most prominent of the Baptist-affiliated institutions in the United States. Ryland shared his objections to

³²⁰ John J. Zaborney, *Slaves for Hire: Renting Enslaved Laborers in Antebellum Virginia*, 65.

³²¹ Robert Ryland, Ledger I, RRP, 55.1.037-.062, 55.2.006-.007, VBHS.

the portions of Wayland's book, *Elements of Moral Science*, that considered enslavement. In the "Personal Liberty" section of the 1835 edition, Wayland had provided reasons "slavery...violates the personal liberty of man as a physical, intellectual, and moral being" and examined enslavement over nine pages, ending with his conviction that God would act to end enslavement "without the delay of a moment" but that enslaved people should "bear their sufferings with patience, committing their souls unto him as unto a *Faithful Creator*."³²² Ryland resisted parts of Wayland's approach and wrote that there were three "peculiar difficulties" that prevented an end to enslavement, though he makes it clear that he could provide more. The first two related to personal manumission decisions, while the third was focused on both the individual and overall effects of abolition.

First, Ryland argued that some enslaved people would be unable to care for themselves, writing that "among even [a] family of servants, while some could maintain themselves, if emancipated, others could not." "Benevolence," he wrote, would force former enslavers to care for those who needed it and "surely justice could not demand this of him." Second, Ryland briefly mentioned the law that required freed people to leave the state, and that "servants of humane masters... prefer their present bondage to expatriation and freedom." Ryland included enslavers who were "studying the subject of slavery candidly" in the category of "humane masters." Ryland's final "difficulty" provides a window in the ways in which enslavement was ingrained into white society's sense of social and economic stability in the South and Ryland's own relative comfort with human bondage even as he acknowledged the moral issues surrounding it. His argument came down to a practical consideration, that the labor most often done by enslaved people had always been done by them and acceptable white people would not do it. Referring to "the drudgery of domestic business," Ryland wrote, "slaves have always performed it." It would, he continued, be "impossible to find white persons among us who can be obtained on wages to do this work" because "respectable" white people were "too high-minded" for that form of labor and the "indolent and vicious will come and receive the wages but will not do the work."

Ryland's concluding paragraph provides an indication of his stance over many of the years that followed. He considered enslavement wrong "in the abstract." He questioned its morality, and yet he could see no way to free those in bondage without undermining the economic and social system that sustained all he knew. He hoped to not be categorized as "an advocate for slavery," he wrote, "though I appear to be in the above remarks." He continued, "I feel the perplexity of the subject, and am looking with intense interest on everything said and done in reference to it." Ryland's "intense interest" in the subject remained largely "abstract," and did not alter his willingness to enslave others and to participate in the hiring out system.³²³

³²² Frances Wayland, *The Elements of Moral Science*, Boston: Gould, Kendall & Lincoln (1835), 220, 229, 230 [link](#).

³²³ Robert Ryland, "To Dr. Wayland," *Christian Watchman*, August 21, 1835, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank.

2.2 THE “MANUAL LABOR REQUIREMENT” AT VIRGINIA BAPTIST SEMINARY

The Virginia Baptist Seminary was one of several institutions, including Wake Forest College and Mercer Seminary, that required students to devote some time to manual labor. At Virginia Baptist Seminary, the students were compensated for their work out of the proceeds from farm yields.³²⁴

Robert Ryland described three goals of the manual labor requirement: “improving the health, diminishing the expenses, and perhaps guarding the humility of young preachers.”

While at one time a superintendent was hired to oversee the three hours a day each student was required to contribute. Ryland described him as an “unsuitable” man who “afterwards fell into disgrace,” and he took over the role himself.³²⁵

In the seminary’s 1833 listing in the *Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Education Society*, the manual labor requirement was included among the facts of the institution: “14 scholars, all preparing for the ministry; 30 students about

to be admitted... No student under 16 years to be received. All to labor 3 hours a day, Saturday and Sunday excepted.”³²⁶ A later article by University of Richmond president, Fredrick W. Boatwright, associated the need for access to markets for the goods grown by the students as one factor in the decision to relocate the institution to the Columbia mansion on the former Haxall property in 1835. Boatwright described the requirement as “very unpopular with students.”³²⁷ Ryland appeared to have felt similarly when describing the “abandoned” requirement in 1843, saying it was “inconvenient and unprofitable,”³²⁸ though in 1890 he did not associate the change with the feelings of students, who, he said, had “cheerfully submitted” to manual labor. He instead attributed its end to three factors. First, the students were inexperienced farmers. Second, the timing of labor and harvest which meant that the arrival of profits from the sale of farm yields would arrive after many students had gone and the most significant need for labor was in the summer when the students were not in residence.

Pay Roll of the Students for 1839					
By John W. Williams					
	Number of Days	Per Day	Amount	Deduct	
Robert Gregory	72 1/2	83	6.14	6.14	
J. L. Swell	120 1/2	"	10.22	21.01	Cr.
J. Duval	112	"	9.52	8	9.44 Paid
J. Moody	144 1/4	"	12.26	55	11.71 Pd
J. Leitch	135 1/2	"	15.74 1/2	50	15.24 Pd
W. Parkins	184 1/2	"	15.79	20 1/2	15.43 Pd
			12.14	73	16.41 Cr.

“Payroll of the Students for 1839,” Ledger I, RRP, VBHS

³²⁴ Robert Ryland, Ledger 2, “Pay Roll of the Students for 1839,” RRP, 55.2, VBHS.

³²⁵ Robert Ryland, *Society*, 11-12.

³²⁶ “Colleges and higher seminaries,” *Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Education Society*, May 1833, 323.

³²⁷ F. W. Boatwright, “The Beginnings of Baptist Education in Virginia,” *Religious Herald*, November 9, 1923, VBHS.

³²⁸ Robert Ryland, “Richmond College – No. 1,” *Religious Herald*, November 23, 1843, VBHS.

The chief impediment to success, however, was “the cost of a suitable manager.”³²⁹ At times between 1836 and 1838, it appears Ryland relied on some oversight from a student. Charles Lewis Cocke was a student at the Virginia Baptist Seminary from 1836 to 1838. He was later an instructor and steward at the institution after its charter as Richmond College, and finally was President of what became Hollins University. Reflecting on his time as a Virginia Baptist Seminary student, Cocke described himself as having been the “superintendent” of his fellow students’ work in fulfillment of the manual labor requirement, “labor[ing] with great zeal” in the role. Cocke wrote that he “kept the grounds and garden in better order than ever they had been” and that this was actually was his “second lesson in management,” the first being his oversight of those who were enslaved on one of his family’s farms when he was a young teenager.³³⁰ Cocke noted “two features” of the early days of the institution “which in the lapse of years have dropped out, or been forced out by the increasing pressure of other and higher demands”: the manual labor requirement and what Cocke initially called an “absence of servants.” The details he provided in his recollection of his time as a student make it clear, though, that “servants” were present. Cocke was distinguishing between the level of attendance provided at the seminary and that which was typically provided at the college in later years: “Students were required to keep their private rooms in order – no servants entered these rooms save once daily, and then to fill our lamps with an inferior grade of oil.”³³¹

The manual labor system appears to have lingered after the move to the Columbia estate, but there were no significant remnants of the requirement after the charter of Richmond College in 1840.

2.3 INTERRUPTION: CHAPLAINCY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

In 1836, Robert Ryland accepted a one-year chaplaincy position at the University of Virginia. During this period, Josephine Ryland oversaw the seminary’s Boarding Department. It appears she was assisted by her mother Ann Norvell.³³² At the time, Robert Ryland’s finances had been strained exceedingly by the running of the seminary’s boarding department. He described himself as “in need of funds” in July of 1835, writing Josiah Ryland that, he was “obliged to borrow \$400 to pay the debts of the boarding house” and he hoped his father would pay an outstanding bill. While the University of Virginia position may have been seen as an opportunity for some financial relief, Ryland’s primary motivation appears to have been a pursuit of emotional rest and intellectual stimulation. Although he had already chosen to accept the offer, he wrote to ask his father’s thoughts: “What do you think of my going to the University for a while? I have decided on going as it will improve me and give me time to rest, rest, rest. But how shall I be able to preach to those learned professors and giddy young men?... I will tell them the simple truth as it is in Jesus.”³³³ Ryland described himself as not “competent to fill [the chaplaincy] acceptably” but stated that he

³²⁹ Ryland, *Society*, 11.

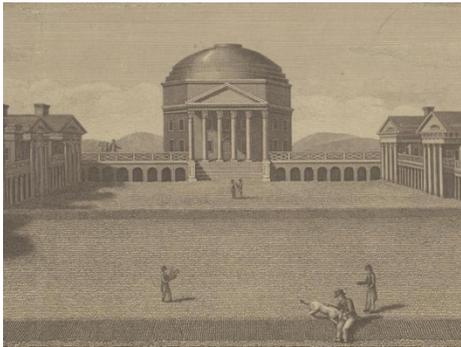
³³⁰ Charles L. Cocke to Jas. T White and Co. Dec. 16, 1897, Charles L. Cocke Papers, Hollins University.

³³¹ Charles L. Cocke, “Incidents in Early Life, *The Richmond College Messenger*, March 1900,” Charles L. Cocke Papers, Hollins University.

³³² Robert Ryland to Caleb Burnley, February 18, 1836, RRP, 14.013, VBHS.

³³³ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, July 17, 1835, RRP, 11.55-56, VBHS.

was driven to accept it by “the prospect it afforded of renewing my studies and improving my mind.”



University of Virginia Visual History Collection, RG-30/1/10.011, Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va

Temperance was a particular focus during Ryland’s year as the university’s chaplain. He exchanged letters with John Hartwell Coker, a prominent Virginian who hoped to advance “the Temperance reform” at the institution. Ryland wrote that one option was to circulate a “pledge” among the students, “to abstain from drinking anything but water, except in private houses, until the end of the session.”³³⁴

Among his sermons preserved from the period is a call to his congregation of “learned professors and giddy young men” to consider living with humility. After providing an analysis of the subject in the context of striving for greatness, he stated, “But if you would ever be saved you must come down

in the dust before God.”³³⁵ While University Chaplain, Ryland also performed the funeral service for a student basing his sermon on, “Choose this day whom ye will serve.”³³⁶

2.3.1 ROBERT RYLAND AND THE INFLUENCE OF ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

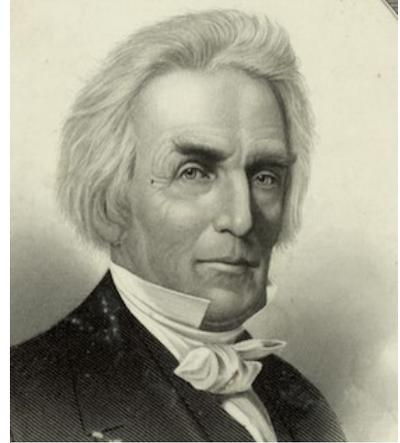
During his tenure as Chaplain at the University of Virginia, Ryland was a congregant at the city’s Baptist church. There he found himself at the center of a doctrinal reform movement that many Virginia Baptists believed posed existential challenges to their churches. Alexander Campbell was among the leaders of what is known as the Stone-Campbell movement or the American Restoration movement which, in part, sought to bring all Christian denominations together in a single body. Campbell and many of those moved by his message were members of Baptist churches and associations. Robert Ryland’s family had already encountered their influence at Bruington Baptist Church in King & Queen County. Ryland’s father, Josiah Ryland, later appeared to be concerned that his son might shift his own allegiance to the reformers, who stressed the education of ministers.

³³⁴ Robert Ryland to John Hartwell Coker, September 27, 1835, John Hartwell Coker Papers, Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903. Robert Ryland and John Hartwell Coker also corresponded about the success of First African Baptist Church and during the Civil War Ryland wrote to Coker regarding the depravation affecting the city’s residents and that of his own family in particular.

³³⁵ Robert Ryland, Sermon, “and be clothed in humility,” February 21, 1836, RRP, 54.0125, VBHS.

³³⁶ Robert Ryland, Sermon, “Choose this day whom ye will serve,” February 4, 1836, RRP, VBHS.

Years before, in 1827, Josiah Ryland had levelled strong criticism at one of Campbell's followers. After a pastor at Bruington Baptist Church had spoken on matters of conversion that were points of contention, "he called on an old brother, Josiah Ryland, Sr. to pray. The old man prayed that the church might be delivered from such heresy as had been preached from the pulpit that day."³³⁷ Shortly after Josiah Ryland's stand against Campbell's adherents in his own church, he evidently wrote to Robert Ryland in Lynchburg, worried that his son might be drawn to the reform movement. In his June 1830 response, Ryland tried to ease his father's mind. Whatever his concerns about the power of his personal religious awakening, he would not be drawn to Campbell's movement.³³⁸ He did share his concern over the appealing nature of the reform message – "The fact is he is talked about too much by far" [Ryland's emphasis] – but also stressed his efforts to be diplomatic, an approach that was characteristic of some of his later writing on the subject of enslavement. He wrote that "[i]f I fall in with [Campbell's] warm friends, I generally raise my objections to him... If I fall in with his ardent opposers, I endeavor to soften down their feelings by presenting... some of his unexceptionable sentiments... I shall not swallow down his errors merely out of a pliable politeness nor will I adopt any of his ideas because he is a great man. I must think for myself."³³⁹ The pressure of Campbell's reform effort grew, however, and Ryland wrote of his work to counter it in 1831. William Nelson, viewed by Ryland as a prospective congregant, was being drawn toward Campbell's beliefs and away from joining his church. Ryland wrote that he had "walked with him, talked with him about joining our church. He is a Baptist in sentiment, but 'loves all' & so do I, but that phrase I am tired of. The Reformers are trying hard to get him."³⁴⁰



Alexander Campbell, detail from J. C. Buttre, "Pioneers in the great religious reformation of the nineteenth century," Library of Congress Image Collection

In 1834, prior to Ryland's arrival in in Charlottesville, the Baptist church there had been visited by Dr. Benjamin Franklin Hall after a number of church members had been "disposed to reform" through their reading of Campbell's *Millennial Harbinger*. Hall had "preached fifteen or sixteen sermons" where he "developed the ancient gospel and plead for a return to the primitive order of things."³⁴¹ In 1835, as a new attendee at the church, Ryland found a congregation deeply affected by Campbell, and, in the words of Disciples of Christ historian Frederick Arthur Hodge, the group was "favorable to the restoration" advocated for by those committed to reforming the church. Ryland

³³⁷ Frederick Arthur Hodge, *The plea and the pioneers in Virginia; a history of the rise and early progress of the Disciples of Christ in Virginia*, Richmond: Everett Waddy, Co. (1905), 226. Hathi Trust Digital Library.

³³⁸ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, June 19, 1830, RRP, 11.038, VBHS

³³⁹ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, June 19, 1830, RRP, 11.038, VBHS

³⁴⁰ Robert Ryland to Josephine Ryland, July 27, 1831, RRP, 16.005-006, VBHS.

³⁴¹ Hodge, *The Plea and the Pioneers*, 119.

recognized the real possibility of the church being persuaded by the followers of Campbell, and responded by “denounc[ing] the reformers as heretics,” echoing his father’s language from the previous decade. A motion to divide the congregation was proposed.³⁴² In January 1836, the motion was raised again, and it passed by a single vote. When the reformers asked the Baptists to “name



Peter Fossett from Wendell Phillips Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens; Historical, Sociological and Biographical* (1926)

one single sentiment or practice held to by the reformers that was not consistent with the Word of God” Ryland prevented any potential triumph by “stating that the reformation flourished by controversy.” This single action “cut off” the advantage of the adherents of Alexander Campbell, who included the Charlottesville church’s pastor among their number.³⁴³ The reformers eventually formed their own congregation in Charlottesville, and some Virginia Baptists credited Ryland with holding off their efforts in the city’s Baptist church. Among the members at the time was Peter Fossett, a man formerly enslaved by Thomas Jefferson. Ryland’s role in the controversy appears in Fossett’s recollections of his life which were published in the *New York World* on January 30, 1898:

I well remember the struggle they had in the great controversy with Alexander Campbell. Two eloquent young preachers – Lindsay Coleman and James G[oss] – the pride and hope of the Baptist denomination, took Campbell's side, and tried to take the church from them. The people belonging to the church had a church meeting which lasted for a week, day and night. Every time a vote was taken it was a tie. If it had not been for that young hero, Robert Ryland, who was chaplain at the University of Virginia, they would have succeeded.³⁴⁴

By February of 1836, what had been an existential crisis in the Charlottesville Baptist congregation was reduced to Ryland describing Campbell’s followers as “pester[ing] me somewhat. They don’t hesitate (some of them) to say that I preach lies. This does not hurt me, but I am grieved to see the ‘hurt of the daughter of my people[,]’ to see the wounds inflicted on the cause of Christ by his avowed followers. Poor Baptist! When will your sorrows end?”³⁴⁵

2.3.2 RETURN TO THE SEMINARY

As Ryland prepared to return to Richmond and the administration of the Virginia Baptist Seminary, he wrote to one of the institution’s former teachers, Caleb Burnley, and candidly shared both his concerns over Burnley’s educational and spiritual state and his worries over the possibility of his accumulation of more personal debt associated with seminary’s Boarding Department. Ryland had considered Burnley undermotivated during the time they worked together and wrote, “while at the Seminary you might have improved yrself much more than you did (tho. you did to a considerable

³⁴² Hodge, 119.

³⁴³ Hodge, 119-120.

³⁴⁴ Peter Fossett in “Once the Slave of Thomas Jefferson, *The Sunday World* [New York], January 30, 1898, excerpted by Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello, [link](#).

³⁴⁵ Robert Ryland to Caleb Burnley, February 18, 1836, RRP, 14.013, VBHS.

extent) had you studied with more ardor.” His concern was that Burnley might have retained these habits, and recommended that, while Burnley was in his new capacity as “head of an important academy,” he might “employ much of yr. leisure time in cultivating yr. talents...”:

The country needs sound & thorough scholars[;] our young men need examples of severe application to be set before them. Many of them dont [sic] know what it is to study, and example will show them. I should think you might devote at least 4 hours in every 24 to yr. private edification, besides light reading, such as newspapers, [etc.]. You need correction in yr. conversation, spelling & reading. You ought to review carefully the Latin and Greek Grammars and study every lesson before you teach it. You will thus grow in capacity and usefulness and yr. influence will increase in both extent & value.

Ryland was also preoccupied with Burnley’s spiritual development, expressing worry over the younger man’s “personal piety” and writing, “I fear you have relaxed in yr. duties.”

Do you pray in secret habitually? Do you read the Bible daily? Do you meditate on yr. ways candidly? The religion of the heart cannot thrive long, or even live long unless thus cherished. I feel my own defects in this particular and therefore know how bad it is to forsake the Lord. My dear Bro, you have made a publick confession of yr interest in Jesus. The vows of God are upon you. The world, the church, the Savior all expect much of you. Let us aim at a high standard of holiness. Let us try to be devoted, humble, active Christians. Time is short! Eternity is at hand! ... You may be sure this is for yr. good. Be not wounded with me.

The return to Virginia Baptist Seminary meant a return to the fears of debt in “the boarding concern,” and the need for austerity in its operations:

I hear from Mrs. Norvell [Ryland’s mother-in-law] that we have at the Semy about 40 students. This fully equals my anticipations, rather transcending them, as our cause operates strongly against them in increase of the number... Bro. N writes me that he despairs of making both ends meet in the boarding concern. I think it is probably it will bring me in debt, but I will [illegible] it up next Fall if I have to give them bread and water.³⁴⁶

In the mind of at least one Virginia Baptist Seminary student, Ryland’s return brought with it a sense of renewed institutional stability. In his later years, H.W. Dodge recalled both the beauty of Josephine Ryland – “the loveliest being that has ever appeared on the horizon of my vision” – and the relief he and other students felt when Robert Ryland came back to lead the seminary. Ryland’s year at the University of Virginia had left them feeling “that we were ruined.”³⁴⁷

In 1838, during a visit to Farmington, his family’s plantation in King & Queen County, Ryland wrote his sister, Elizabeth Willis, and shared his pleasure at seeing their childhood home (“the good old place”) and his admiration for its “good keeping.” Ryland also observed the marks of his father’s increased wealth, and the possibility of his sharing in it:

³⁴⁶ Robert Ryland to Caleb Burnley, February 18, 1836, RRP, VBHS.

³⁴⁷ H.W. Dodge to Robert Ryland, March 12, 1889, RRP, 40.096, VBHS.

[T]he land [is] good – cornhouse full – smokehouse crowded – horses fat – house newly painted – a new carriage to ride in, and last but not least, money a plenty in the draw – Money! yes but the old man keeps the key – keeps it locked up I believe and then keeps the second key. He has set Joseph up as a merchant at Stevensville in a capital of \$1500. John is about to start in Jeffersonton on the same capital... and I fully expect that in two more years it will be my turn to draw on the bank.³⁴⁸

It is possible that his note of a July 1839 payment from his father in the amount of 2000.00 – “past payment for Shooter’s Hill” – marked the disbursal of these anticipated funds. In the last decades of his life, as indicated by his altered handwriting, Ryland added in a parenthetical note, “but gave no more.”³⁴⁹

At the seminary, Ryland remained overwhelmed by the amount of work involved in his many roles at the institution. On March 7, 1839, he wrote to Elizabeth H. Miller of Powhatan County, “Time is gold to me. My business drives me so that out of 24 hours I sometimes only sleep 6.” Ryland recognized that the intensity of his work was affecting his relationship with Josephine Ryland: “My wife often complains that I don’t attend enough to her. I sit but seldom in her chamber and when she comes to see me, I am not agreeable. My mind is on other things. As I am not acting as steward this year entirely, I hope to have more leisure, but the time has not yet come.”³⁵⁰

2.4 SEMINARY TO COLLEGE

The year 1840 marked an institutional point of transition when Virginia Baptist Seminary was chartered as Richmond College. Ryland described the decision as largely driven by a need to “secure a legal title” to the Columbia estate where the institution was located: “[A]s the [Baptist Education] Society was not incorporated, its trustees, acting in their individual capacity, could not prevent the property from descending, at their death, to their own legal heirs”³⁵¹ The “transformation of Virginia Bap Semy into the Richmond College” would resolve the issue of the Virginia General Assembly “grant[ing] no charter to any religious body.”³⁵²

The name “Richmond College” was a point of contention for Ryland. He had hoped the institution would be named for an important Virginia Baptist, to “embalm the memory of [Robert Baylor] Semple or [Andrew] Broaddus and thus virtually ‘perpetuate’ the Baptist relation of the school.” The idea was rejected by members of the Board of Trustees which, Ryland recalled in 1884, “turned up its nose” at the suggestion. These “nominal & legal friends” on the Board “ridiculed [the suggestion] most heartlessly.” The subject evidently extended over several meetings, and Ryland lost his temper “on one occasion” when his “equanimity lost its possession of my proud heart.” It

³⁴⁸ Robert Ryland to Elizabeth Willis, December 26, 1838, RRP, 15.044, VBHS.

³⁴⁹ Robert Ryland, Ledger 1, “Memorandum of moneys,” RRP, 55.1.064, VBHS.

³⁵⁰ Robert Ryland to Elizabeth H. Miller, March 7, 1839, RRP 14.021, VBHS.

³⁵¹ Robert Ryland, *Society*, 16.

³⁵² Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, October 20, 1884, RRP, 25.040, VBHS.

that moment, “knowing the hard work done at the institution” with what he had felt was very little support from a number of the trustees, Ryland deployed sarcasm, saying that “for the money spent on the Seminary & the interest manifested by its trustees it was the biggest thing of the age!” While Ryland wrote that he did not seek confirmation on the “leading motivation” of the committee, he was convinced that it was related to “a desire to divest the college of sectarian prejudice.” Despite the official charter of Richmond College in 1840, Ryland had a personal hesitation about calling it by the new name, holding a “strong aversion to publishing catalogues, advertisements [etc.] under the name ‘Richmond College’ when we were *de facto* only the same concern.” While the name “Richmond College” did appear following the charter, Ryland himself did not feel comfortable using the name until 1844 “when things became ripe for action, or at least riper.”³⁵³

³⁵³ Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, October 20, 1884, RRP, 25.040, VBHS.

3.0 AT RICHMOND COLLEGE

3.1 1840 TO 1849

3.1.1 ENSLAVEMENT

Robert Ryland's personal enslavement of others continued in the decades after the charter of Richmond College in 1840. While he served as the college steward, Ryland "hired out" Sam and Fanny to institutional use, and the college continued to use "hired" enslaved people in domestic and agricultural work. The system of steward-centered use of enslaved labor was similar to that used at other institutions, including the College of William & Mary, Hampden-Sydney College, and Columbian College.³⁵⁴ Evidence of the practice at Richmond College appears in Ryland's records of the Boarding Department and his letters to family, as well as communications to the Richmond College Board of Trustees, and college advertisements placed in local newspapers.³⁵⁵ Responsibility for the hire and management of enslaved people described as "servants" and the supervision of at least one free Black person transferred from Ryland to Charles L. Cocke who served as steward between 1842 and 1846. After Cocke's departure, Ryland again assumed the steward's duties, and over the next years returned to the work several times when the position was unfilled.

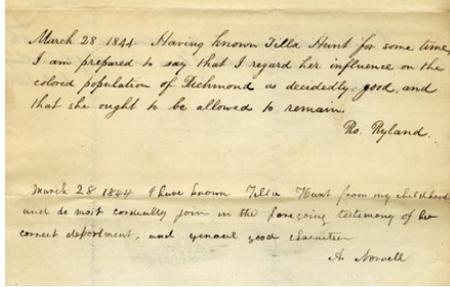
One Ryland letter of the period distantly echoed the antislavery feelings he had expressed in his 1824 address and in his conversation with Rollin H. Neale at Columbian College. In May 1841, after witnessing conflicts over enslavement which would lead to the split between Baptists of the North and South just two years later, Ryland shared an account of the experience with his father. Writing that he was "far from an advocate of slavery" and that "to see [slavery] removed from our State and our country would be my highest joy," he was also clear that "the abolitionists have the wrong spirit about the thing."³⁵⁶ Despite this rare enthusiasm for a hypothetical end to enslavement, Ryland continued to enslave others and manage an enslaved workforce. Among his peers, Ryland was not alone in expressing this compartmentalized approach: discomfort with the idea of enslavement, resistance to the abolition of slavery, and day-to-day support for and participation in the slave system. He considered "removal" of enslavement an ideal, but continued to hire out those he enslaved and to oversee the use of enslaved labor at Richmond College. His comfort with the realities of the system showed itself in a number of other ways, including his off-hand judgment of another man's poor management of "servants" whom Ryland described as "idle & sloven" in an 1839 letter to Josephine Ryland. "He is rich," Ryland continued, but did not "keep up that order and discipline" that he once had. In the same letter, Ryland shared a frank explanation of his brother-in-law's absence during his recent visit to his sister's home: "He had a servant that absconded last Friday, & he is gone to look for him."³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Oast, 151, 162; "Slavery at Columbian College," website: <https://library.gwu.edu/scrc/university-archives/gw-history/slavery-at-columbian-college>

³⁵⁵ "Servants," *Richmond Enquirer*, September 3, 1844, 4.

³⁵⁶ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, May 8, 1841, RRP, 11.063, VBHS.

³⁵⁷ Robert Ryland to Josephine Ryland, August 12, 1839. 16.097, VBHS.



Matilda Hurt [Hunt], Virginia Untold, Library of Virginia

In March 1844, Robert and Josephine Ryland endorsed the petition of Matilda “Tilla” Hunt, a formerly enslaved woman who sought to remain in Virginia after she was freed. Other supporters for her petition were Ryland’s mother-in-law, Ann Norvell, and Jeremiah Bell Jeter, Ryland’s friend and a prominent figure in the history of Richmond College and the Virginia Baptist church. Ryland wrote, “Having known Tilla Hunt for some time, I am prepared to say that I regard her influence on the colored population of Richmond as decidedly good, and that she ought to be allowed to remain.”

Josephine Ryland and her mother both described knowing Hurt for decades and each supported her request to remain in Richmond with descriptions of their memories of her. Hurt’s petition was approved on April 1, 1844.³⁵⁸

3.1.1.1 1840 FEDERAL CENSUS

According to the United States Federal Census of 1840, eighty-two people were in Robert Ryland’s “household.” This is because the enumerator, Abner Holland, included those residing at the institution in the figures – students, faculty, any white staff, and enslaved and free Black people – along with Ryland and his family. The record provides a glimpse of the proportion of free to enslaved people working on the campus at the time. The 1840 census did not distinguish between those enslaved by the householder and hired enslaved people:

“Free White Persons”: 71 “Free Colored Persons”: 2 “Slaves”: 9

Of those described as “slaves,” four were children under the age of ten (one boy and three girls); two were aged ten to twenty-three years (one male and one female). The remaining three people were women, one between twenty-four and thirty-five, and two between thirty-six and fifty-four.³⁵⁹

3.1.1.2 ENSLAVED BY ROBERT RYLAND

SAM, FANNY & MATILDA

After Robert Ryland gave up the position of College Steward, he wrote to Josiah Ryland, detailing family news and his current finances including a brief record of his income from hiring out the labor of Sam, Fanny, and Matilda:

Negroes are hiring for less in town this year than last – especially tobacco factory hands. I get \$120 for Sam however, and that is \$120 more than I fear I shall get for his last years

³⁵⁸ Matilda Hurt [Hunt], Petition to Remain in the Commonwealth, March 1844, Virginia Untold, Library of Virginia.

³⁵⁹ *United States Federal Census of 1840*, “Robt Ryland,” National Archives Records Administration, microfilm publication M704, 580 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Year: 1840; Census Place: Henrico, Virginia; Roll: 561; Page: 264; Family History Library Film: 0029687.

work as the young man who hired him proves to be doubtful. Fanny has the same home for \$45 – Matilda at \$30[.]³⁶⁰

For at least part of the decade, Sam was responsible for finding his own place to live, which may have meant he was “self-hired.” Ryland described Sam’s difficulty “get[ting] a home in town” in 1849 when sharing the news of his final days and death:

We are all in usual health at present, though we had the misfortune to lose our man Sam last night - (the boy that you gave me) - He was attacked with Pneumonia about 10 days ago — and after a fearful struggle, fell a victim last evening - He could not get a home in town, & after the spring opened, I took him here [at Richmond College] to work in the garden, & in the dining room - He was very obliging & we all felt quite affected at his death - I talked plainly with him during his last sickness on eternal things - he said he had not lived as he ought to have done, but had a hop[e] in God’s mercy[.]³⁶¹

Further details of Sam’s appearance in Ryland’s financial records can be found in Section 3.4. Information about “self-hiring” is included in Appendix A.

MARIA

Maria had been enslaved by Robert Ryland since February of 1832, when he paid to have her transported to Lynchburg: “Moving Maria 25, Jug of molasses 75.” Two months later, Ryland noted paying \$1.12 ½ for “Maria’s dress” alongside “Shoes for Sam,” and in May he paid \$1.50 for her shoes. Maria was “moved” again in 1832, this time in the Ryland family transition from Lynchburg to Henrico County, as Robert Ryland was setting up his new home at the Virginia Baptist Seminary.³⁶² On December 15, 1833, Ryland gave her 18 ¾ cents as a Christmas holiday gift (“sal. Aretas” from the Greek, *arete*, defined as excellence), recorded on the same line as his payment for tobacco and “Shoes for Mary 1.00”³⁶³

In January 1842, Maria appeared in the letter that Robert Ryland wrote to his father in which he detailed his income from hiring out Sam, Fanny, and Matilda. Of Maria he wrote, “Maria expects to increase her family & what to do with her I know not. We have no room for her, and yet I can find no home for her. I wish she was away.”³⁶⁴ It is likely that Maria, mother of at least one child, was pregnant. There is no indication in the available records of any decision made about her or her child or children in the next three years. In the summer of 1845, Ryland’s solution for “what to do with” Maria was shared in a letter he wrote to his wife, then staying with Ryland’s parents at Farmington:

Should Papa express any displeasure at m[y] sending Maria home, tell him that my chief aim was to avoid exciting prejudice in the African Ch[urch] in Town & thus of weakening my

³⁶⁰ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, January 4, 1842, RRP, 11.066, VBHS.

³⁶¹ Letter, Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, May 20, 1849, RRP, 11.074, VBHS.

³⁶² Robert Ryland, Ledger 1, “Expenditures of 1832,” RRP, 55.1.023-024, VBHS

³⁶³ Robert Ryland, “Expenditures of 1833,” Ledger I, RRP, 55.1.027, VBHS.

³⁶⁴ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, January 4, 1842, VBHS.

power to do them good. This would have been done by putting her up at auction. For while they all feel that owning slaves is no ground of objection to a preacher, I think they would generally hear the gospel less kindly from the lips of a minister who should sell one at auction.³⁶⁵

Out of concern for how it would appear to his enslaved and free Black congregants at First African Baptist Church, Ryland did not auction Maria in 1845, instead sending her to Farmington, away from those she had known for at least the last thirteen years. It is not clear whether her child or children were sent with her. Additional information on Ryland's hiring out of Maria can be found in Section 3.3.1.2 and details of his sale of her appear in Section 3.4.

JOHN & RYLAND'S "INVESTMENT" IN EMANCIPATION

The Ryland family had a history of purchasing enslaved people for the purpose of keeping families together. In Josephine Ryland Knight's reminiscence, she described Josiah Ryland sending an agent to New Orleans to purchase a woman sold away from her husband, whom he enslaved. She wrote that "[Josiah Ryland] was a kind master. One of the Fleets [related to the Rylands through the marriage of Robert Ryland's sister] willed that his servants should be sold in New Orleans. Grandpa sent an agent there to buy Betty and bring her back to her husband, Tom. Tom was always devoted to his master."³⁶⁶

Robert Ryland appears to have intervened in a similar potential separation, although his approach was different than that of his father. He purchased an elderly man named John, who was then responsible for repaying Ryland, possibly with interest, to secure his freedom. In the same letter in which Robert Ryland described the death of Sam and rumors about his salary at First African Baptist Church, he detailed the situation and John's death:

A few days ago, we lost an old man, named John, who lived in the city & whom I bought some 4 years ago to prevent his being separated from his wife — He lacked about \$150 — of paying back his purchase money — He is the last that I mean to relieve in this manner.³⁶⁷

Ryland's frustration at not being repaid the amount of the John's purchase price echoes sentiments he expressed in a letter to the American Colonization Society on January 11, 1848:

The truth is I have bought several slaves with the understanding that when they should refund the amount advanced they should be free[.] I have then given them up their time to make the money as fast as they could, but have found that they generally made about enough to pay the interest on the investment & support themselves, feeling little obligation to relieve me. I am, therefore, about settling down into the purpose of doing good in some other way[.]

³⁶⁵ Robert Ryland to Josephine Ryland, July 11, 1845, RRP, 16.141, VBHS.

³⁶⁶ Josephine Ryland Knight, "Reminiscences of Farmington."

³⁶⁷ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, May 20, 1849, RRP, 11.074, VBHS.

Ryland viewed these purchases as “investment[s],” intending to free those he purchased only once he was repaid with interest. Describing those he had “relieve[d] in this manner” as “feeling little obligation to relieve me,” by the late 1840s he had decided to support the work of the American Colonization Society by seeking out already free Black people – “There are also many free persons meditating on a change of continent” – or those whose “masters are willing to give their slaves to go [to Liberia].”³⁶⁸ Ryland's focus had shifted to seeking enslaved people whose owners would be willing to give them away for the cause of Liberian colonization rather than facilitating the freedom of those in John’s position.³⁶⁹

3.1.1.3 INSTITUTIONAL “HIRE”

In addition to Sam and Fanny, records show a number of other enslaved people hired to the use of Richmond College. The available names of those for whom “hire” was paid between the 1840 charter of the college and 1849 are Nathan, Abbey/Abby, Rachel, Miles, Peter, Hannah, and Nancy (it is not clear if she is the cook named Nancy in the 1839 expenditures). Additional names in the records of the early 1840s may correspond to enslaved people, though without the use of the word “hire” or a record of their needing a pass their status cannot be further clarified at this time.

NATHAN, ABBEY, RACHEL, MILES, & PETER

In the summer of 1841, Robert Ryland was visiting Washington, D.C. and Baltimore while Josephine Ryland was overseeing the facilities and preparations for Richmond College's second session of the year. In June, Ryland sent her a brief letter with instructions for the enslaved laborers on the campus as well as one person who may have been free:

Nathan & Miles & Francisco will help about the oats - and as need may require will wait on Mr. Philips, as bringing him timber - lime, sand, making up mortar & carrying it up to him - Mr. P. will white-wash - unless you object - Let him do my room while you are visiting - or else you can sleep in the little room. When you start to K & Q give Nathan & Abbey a pass for 9 days — Sent to Winston & Beazley’s for groceries, to Bakins for meal - Rachel might go before you start & return so as to s— w— [illegible, likely “stay while”] Abbey is away. Ride out as often as you please. Visit yr neighbors[-] and when you go to K & Q don’t trouble with friends by being too much afraid of troubling them. Be cheerful & happy — pray for yr. husband, and write to him about the garden, the oats, the plastering & especially yrself —

[postscript] Nathan & Abbey are to scour the upper rooms & Rachel & Miles the lower. Ask Francisco to feed the cows.³⁷⁰

Josephine Ryland replied with worry and frustration:

³⁶⁸ Robert Ryland to unknown recipient, January 11, 1848, American Colonization Society, American Colonization Society Records, Library of Congress.

³⁶⁹ In 1843, Ryland acted as the purchasing agent for Thomas U. Allen. This was largely conducted in connection with First African Baptist Church and details of their relationship appear in section 4.4.2.

³⁷⁰ Robert Ryland to Josephine Ryland, July 1841, RRP, 16.108, VBHS.

[Mr. Phillips, the plasterer] is obliged to hire a hand, as Nathan's services are necessary in the oat field, and Miles is laid up, homesick I think. Francisco has had a great deal of trouble with the oats... He seems desirous to have them very good but needs direction.

[Following day]

... It is no use for me to stay here[.] I can manage nothing without you. Francisco is stacking oats today fine weather for it [sic]. Mr. Philipps did not succeed in hiring hands his work stops [sic]. I think it would be well to come home sooner than you designed. You know the Seminary should call you back if your wife cannot. The master's eye will do more than hired hands.³⁷¹

While some of the labor was in rooms the family occupied, Josephine Ryland's hope that the obligations of "the Seminary" might "call [Ryland] back" shows this was institutional work.³⁷² That Nathan and Abbey would require "a pass" shows that they were both enslaved. They are also noted in Ryland's ledger under "Expenses of the Boarding Department of 1841 1st Sess." where Ryland wrote "Nathan's hire \$119" and "Abbey's 15.00." He also recorded "hire" for Rachel and Miles on the same ledger line, indicating their enslavement as well: "Rachel's 45" and "Miles' [ditto: 'hire'] \$80." Francisco may have been free. He was remembered by Ryland's daughter as being Portuguese and Ryland's records show that he received payment rather than being paid "hire."³⁷³ "Peter's hire \$30," appears on the same ledger line as Francisco's simple wage payment and an entry for "Servants' clothes: \$44.12."

The differences in hire amounts – 119, 80, 15, 45, 62.50, 30, and 2.00 – may have corresponded to specific skills, age, and long-term hires versus *ad hoc* hiring for specific jobs. The purchase of clothes for enslaved laborers hired from an agent or an individual was standard practice and was often part of hire agreements.³⁷⁴ "Servants' clothes" were recorded as a Boarding Department expenses in the second Richmond College session of 1841 just as they were in the Virginia Baptist Seminary sessions and in Ryland's family expenses for those he personally enslaved.

COLLEGE STEWARD: CHARLES LEWIS COCKE (1842-1845)

After having managed the minutiae of campus operations while running the Boarding Department and the operations of campus, Ryland was anxious to shift his attention away from the duties associated with the College Steward position. He sought someone to operate the Boarding Department and other day-to-day operations of the campus, and ideal steward was found in the form of former Virginia Baptist Seminary student Charles L. Cocke, who was then serving as a tutor at

³⁷¹ Josephine Ryland to Robert Ryland, July 21, 1841, typescript, RRP, 17.043-044, VBHS.

³⁷² Josephine Ryland's reference to the institution as "the Seminary" aligned with Ryland's reluctance to call Richmond College a college in the years immediately following its charter in 1840.

³⁷³ Josephine Ryland Knight recollection in Alice Broaddas Mitchell, "Historic Homes of Richmond, 'Columbia,'" *The Messenger* (Richmond College) 32, no.7 (April 1906), 317, [link](#).

³⁷⁴ Zabourney, *Slaves for Hire*, 12, Kindle.

Richmond College.³⁷⁵ Despite his youth, Charles Coker later described himself as already having a long history of “management” that extended to his childhood, when he operated one of his father’s farms and oversaw the labor of the enslaved people there.³⁷⁶

In addition to his history with the earlier years of the institution, Coker's family shared several connections to Richmond College and Robert Ryland. His aunt, Mary Fox, had once lived in Henrico County and moved to King William County when she married his uncle. She was a donor to Richmond College in the 1840s and, according to the enumeration pattern in the 1860 Federal Census, her property was close to that of Robert Ryland’s brother, William Ryland. Charles L. Coker was also a relation of John Hartwell Coker, Ryland's correspondent regarding temperance at the University of Virginia.³⁷⁷ Prior to his assumption of the role of College Steward, Coker had been a mathematics tutor at the institution, and it was while he worked in this capacity that Ryland selected him to handle, in Coker's words, “the entire management of [the college’s] business affairs – the keeping of the premises in order, the boarding of the pupils, and the settlement of the school accounts.” Taking advantage of a drop in food prices, Coker credited himself with significantly improving the meals offered to the students during his time as steward: “In this business I gained considerable reputation as a manager... [A]ll articles of provision reached a low market value, which enabled me to give the boys fine fare and they sounded my praises throughout the state.”³⁷⁸

After Coker took over the College Steward duties, Ryland shared his pleasure with Josiah Ryland:

I feel greatly relieved by thus getting such a mountain of care off my mind. I shall now have less money to handle, less to do with Negroes, less vexation of the spirit, but more leisure, more time to read & visit with friends.³⁷⁹

Coker’s management and oversight is recorded in a report he submitted to the Richmond College Board of Trustees on December 1, 1843. Because of the “extreme old age” of “Agnas a free woman residing on campus” who had been doing the washing for the college, Coker anticipated the need to “increase the number of apartments occupied by the servants.” The limited existing quarters had

³⁷⁵ Ryland later wrote another college administrator of the advantages of filling tutor positions with graduates of the institution (Robert Ryland to Dr. [Howard] Malcolm, April 9, 1846, RRP, 14.026, VBHS).

³⁷⁶ Coker also recalled that his “second lesson in management” was as a Virginia Baptist Seminary student, superintending the work of the other students there and “[keeping] the grounds and garden in better order than ever they had been” ([Letter to Jas. T. White and Co., Dec. 16, 1897], Charles L. Coker Papers, Hollins University, Roanoke, Virginia).

³⁷⁷ Robert Ryland, “Acknowledgements,” March 14, 1844, *Religious Herald*, VBHS. Federal Census, 1860, King William County, Virginia, 34-35, Ancestry.com. Note that this is not Mary E. Fox whose property with Richard Fox adjoined William Ryland’s property; *Virginia Marriages, 1700-1850*, via ancestry.com, 645: Mary Burton of Henrico married James Fox of King William County in 1824. James Fox was the brother of Charles L. Coker’s mother, Elizabeth Fox.

³⁷⁸ Charles L. Coker to Jas. T. White and Co., Dec. 16, 1897, Charles L. Coker Papers, Wyndham Robertson Library, Hollins University, Roanoke, Virginia.

³⁷⁹ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, January 4, 1842, RRP, 11.065-066, VBHS. This excerpt is also quoted in Reuben E. Alley, *University of Richmond*, 33, and Oast’s *Institutional Slavery*, 191.

been “a serious inconvenience” to him and he saw that increasing “when it becomes necessary to increase their number.”³⁸⁰ A letter Cocke wrote to his father from Richmond College describes the hire of an enslaved man named Randolph. His father was paid “\$62 ½” for Randolph’s labor, either by Cocke or the institution.³⁸¹ Following a period of frustration with the position, indicated by Cocke’s threat to leave the job in 1844 and his request to be relieved of some of his duties in 1845, he resigned on May 29, 1846.³⁸²

A month later, Cocke had assumed a new role as head of Valley Union Seminary near Roanoke, Virginia, which would become Hollins College and eventually Hollins University. His plans there were complicated by the lack of available enslaved laborers in the area, and he wrote to his father that he had considered drawing on those he enslaved or controlled who were still at Richmond College:

I find very great difficulty in obtaining suitable servants. They hire for about as much as they do in Richmond and at present there is an unusual scarcity. All hands are hired out to harvest. This however will soon be over and there will be an abundance. I do not know yet whether I shall bring any of the servants from Richmond College or not. I had much rather do so but the expense of getting them here will not justify my bringing them. If Randolph and Molly would be willing to stay up here for several years, I would not hesitate to bring them, but I fear they would not be satisfied.³⁸³

Cocke’s ability to draw from the Richmond College enslaved labor force likely indicated that some of those who worked on the college grounds were enslaved by him or by his family. Randolph and Molly may have been among them, although Cocke’s phrasing is unclear. By October 1848, Cocke’s letters indicate that they were both with him at Valley Union Seminary and that his father and his “Aunt Fox” had some interest in their ownership and/or control.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁰ Charles L. Cocke, Report of the Steward, December 1, 1843, Trustees Records 1841-1850, University of Richmond, University Archive, VBHS.

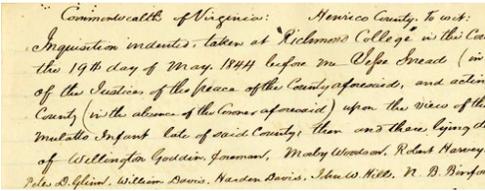
³⁸¹ Charles L. Cocke to James Cocke, “Richmond College Dec. 11” “184” written above, Charles Lewis Cocke Papers, Hollins University.

³⁸² Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, July 9, 1844, December 27, 1845, May 29, 1846, University Archives, University of Richmond, VBHS.

³⁸³ Charles Cocke to James Cocke, July 1, 1846, Charles L. Cocke Papers, Wyndham Robertson Library, Hollins University.

³⁸⁴ Charles L. Cocke to James Cocke, October 27, 1848, Charles Lewis Cocke Papers, Wyndham Robertson Library, Hollins University.

RESEARCH & UNCERTAINTY: FANNY



"Unidentified: Coroner's Inquisition," May 3, 1844, Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection, Library of Virginia

At two o'clock in morning on May 19, 1844, an enslaved infant child was found murdered on the campus of Richmond College. At the time, the college was still relatively remote, surrounded by fields and large estates. The child's mother, an enslaved woman named Fanny, was accused of killing the child "at 'Richmond College.'" Fanny was described as being the property of "Mrs. Fox of the County of King William late of the County of Henrico"

and her child was referred to as a "female mulatto infant." The coroner's inquest conducted later that day was led by two members of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, Jesse Snead, who acted as coroner due to the unavailability of the Henrico County official, and Wellington Goddin, who was named foreman of the panel. Their report stated that Fanny had been "moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil," and had beaten the child in the face with a "certain Brick or other weapon" causing her to die "instantly."³⁸⁵

Given the specifics provided on "Mrs. Fox," it is highly likely this was Mary Fox, aunt of the college's steward, Charles L. Cocke, and neighbor of Robert Ryland's half-brother, William Ryland. Mary Fox had resided in Henrico County prior to her marriage to James Fox and her move to King William County, facts that correspond to the description in the Coroner's Inquisition. Fox had made a donation to the Richmond College endowment between January 20 and March 14, 1844.³⁸⁶ The pattern of transfer of enslaved people between Cocke, his father, and Mary Fox preserved in Cocke's records held at the Wyndham Robinson Library at Hollins University increases the likelihood that Fox hired Fanny out to Cocke for Richmond College's use or she may have been hired directly to the college through him.³⁸⁷

Information on the child's murder and the accusation against Fanny is limited to the coroner's report held by the Library of Virginia which can be viewed online in the [Virginia Untold database](#). It is not

³⁸⁵ "Unidentified: Coroner's Inquisition," May 3, 1844, Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va., [link](#). Note, in some browsers the document and transcription is only visible when "Page turner" is selected from the pull-down menu.

³⁸⁶ Robert Ryland, "Acknowledgements," March 14, 1844, *Religious Herald*, VBHS. Fox continued to enslave people in Richmond. In the September 5, 1855 record of a First African Baptist Church deacon's meeting, Ryland recorded that Caroline Freeland had been excluded from church membership for "rejecting her husband." Freeland was enslaved by Mary Fox (Minutes of First African Baptist Church, September 5, 1855, Library of Virginia).

³⁸⁷ Mary Fox's connections to Richmond College and Robert Ryland: Robert Ryland, "Acknowledgements," March 14, 1844, *Religious Herald*, VBHS. Federal Census, 1860, King William County, Virginia, 34-35, Ancestry.com – note this is not Mary E. Fox whose property with Richard Fox adjoined William Ryland's property; *Virginia Marriages, 1700-1850*, via ancestry.com, 645: Mary Burton of Henrico married James Fox of King William County in 1824. James Fox was the brother of Charles L. Cocke's mother, Elizabeth Fox.

clear how the panel came to the conclusion that Fanny was responsible for the infant's death. Their record does not indicate that she confessed.

RESEARCH & UNCERTAINTY: AGGY COOPER, AGGY MORRIS, AGNASS, AGGY

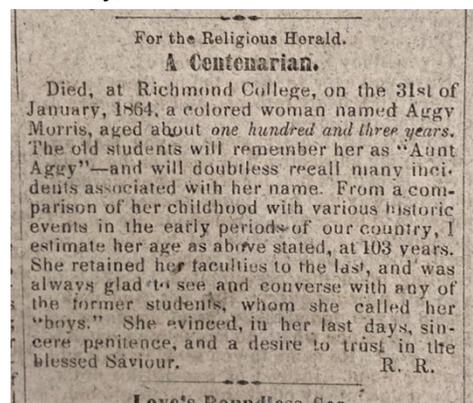
The earliest record of a woman named Aggy appears in a Boarding Department ledger entry for March 27, 1835: "To Aggy for washing \$8.50."³⁸⁸ Aggy appears regularly among those paid for washing in Ryland's records of the department's expenses between 1835 and 1840. In the first session of 1841, there are two women with similar names in the department expenses: "Agg- Smith (washing) \$11.50" and "Aggy Cooper \$131.00." That session, "Aggy's house 52.75" is also paid for out of Boarding Department expenses. In the second session of 1841, Aggy Cooper is again paid for washing: "Aggy Cooper in full for washing \$115." Aggy Smith is not mentioned again.

As noted in Section 3.1.1.3, in the report of the College Steward that was submitted to the Richmond College Board of Trustees on December 1, 1843, Charles L. Cocke wrote of the concern that "[t]he washing, performed up to this time by Agnas a free woman residing on the premises, cannot be done by her in the future in consequence of extreme old age."

She appeared as "Aunt Aggy" in the recollections of Josiah Ryland (1830-1903) who was Robert Ryland's nephew and one of the first two graduates of Richmond College. He described her as "one of the characters of the college premises" who lived "[n]ear 'Science Row,' in a plain negro cabin" and would provide the students with "molasses cakes, her scrambled eggs, [and] her hoe-cakes made of flour." Josiah Ryland remembered students tormenting her dog and her threats to complain to Robert Ryland. He also recalled students making a point of "taking formal leave of her... at the end of a session."³⁸⁹

Aggy Cooper was listed as a sixty-five year old free "Mullato" woman in the United States Federal Census of 1850. She was enumerated along with the Ryland family, students at Richmond College, and the steward at the time, Ryland's brother-in-law, H.F. Thornton. In 1860, her entry has not yet been located in the Population Schedule, however that year she was listed in the Slave Schedule as the "employer" of four enslaved people – a twenty-four year old woman and three children between the ages of two and six – all of whom were enslaved by Robert Ryland.³⁹⁰

Among Ryland's last items published while he was president of Richmond College was the announcement



³⁸⁸ Robert Ryland, Ledger 1, "Expenditures of the Boarding Department 1835 1st Session," RRP, 55.1.037, VBHS.

³⁸⁹ Josiah Ryland (1830-1902), "Recollections of an Old Boy: Part 1," *The Messenger*, v. 18, no. 5, January 1894, 120, [link](#).

³⁹⁰ Federal Census of 1860, Non-Population Slave Schedules, Henrico, Western Subdivision, "Agness Cooper[,] Employer," National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication M653, 45.

of the death of “A Centenarian” that the “old students will remember as Aunt Aggy.” After Ryland compared “her childhood to various historic events” he placed her age at 103. “She retained her faculties to the last,” Ryland wrote, “and was always glad to see and converse with any of the former students, whom she called her ‘boys.’” In the announcement, Ryland gave her full name as Aggy Morris.

It appears that Aggy Morris, Aggy Cooper, and Agness Cooper are the same woman, although further research may reveal additional clarifying information. In the deed records of the Goochland County Overseer of the Poor, “Sall child of Aggy Cooper” was among the “free negro children” bound to Thomas Pleasants between 1795 and 1796.³⁹¹ It is possible that Sall’s mother, Aggy Cooper, is the same free Black woman who eventually lived and worked at Richmond College and died there seventy years later.

Another woman named Aggy appears in Ryland’s private accounts as having been enslaved by or bound to him. He referred to her as “Little Aggy” in 1844, as the mother of a child in 1856, and of multiple children in 1863.³⁹²

CLEBER & TOM

In Josiah Ryland’s campus recollections noted in this section, his quotes of Aggy (likely Aggy Cooper/Morris), Cleber, and Tom relied on racist dialect, a device common among many white writers between the antebellum era and the early decades of the 20th century. Those quotes have not been used in this report. His essay can be read in its entirety [here](#).

Tom was among the enslaved people who appeared on an itemized list of shoes, boots, and a trunk purchased during the year 1855. Ryland purchased a pair of “Brogans” (heavy leather shoes that went above the ankle) for him on December 5, 1855. Tom told Ryland that he wanted to be baptized in September of 1859 and Ryland wrote to his son, William, that he had not yet questioned him about it, referring to Tom’s spiritual readiness. Such questioning was typical of the Baptist approach to baptism and formed one part of the process at First African Baptist Church. Ryland referred to him as “[o]ur boy Tom” at the time of his request. Tom was hired out by Ryland, along with Ellen and Matilda, in 1863 and was one of two recipients of Ryland’s “Gifts to servants” that year. He was also recorded as having received medical care in 1863. Ryland hired out Tom, Matilda, Sally and Ellen in 1864, as well.³⁹³

³⁹¹ Goochland County, Virginia, Deed Book 1791-1795, p. 185. Held by the Library of Virginia. This information was located through “Virginia Slaves Freed After 1782” in *Free African Americans of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Delaware*, web, [link](#).

³⁹² Robert Ryland, “Private expenditures for 1844,” “Expenditures for 1856,” Expenses of 1863,” Ledger II, RRP 55.2, VBHS.

³⁹³ Combination bill/receipt for trunk, boots, and shoes sold by W. [illegible] W. Taylor, 1855, Robert Ryland Papers, Virginia Baptist Historical Society; Robert Ryland to William Ryland, September 30, 1859, Robert Ryland Papers, 1.078; Robert Ryland, Family Expenses 1863; Robert Ryland family receipts 1863 - 1864.

In his recollections of his time as a student at the college in the late 1840s, Josiah Ryland described Tom serving the students and faculty in the campus dining room. He referred to him as “Tom, the cup bearer,” writing that he “flew up and down the table, trying in vain to serve fifty hungry men at once.” Ryland also remembered Tom “[p]icking up little snatches of Latin” at the college. In his essay published in 1894, Ryland wrote, “I think Tom is now selling potatoes and cabbages in the Second Market. If so, surely he ought to get a good share of the College trade, and the Professors and caterers should at once make his acquaintance. Doubtless he is a staunch friend of the College, and regards himself as one of the early graduates.” Further details of these people and others enslaved and hired out by Ryland can be found in Section 3.4.

Of the man Josiah Ryland and Robert Ryland called Cleber, which may have been a variation of Claiborne, Josiah Ryland wrote, that he was “the Vulcan who kindled our morning fires.” He was a “tall” and “gaunt” man who the younger Ryland called “a philosopher” who “walk[ed] among a hundred and fifty boys and men at their most mischievous period of life” without saying “an unkind or impudent word.”³⁹⁴ Cleber was likely the man referred to as Clebo in the memories of another student, James E. Bell, who recalled him getting alcohol for students in Screamersville, the district between the campus and Richmond’s city limits.³⁹⁵ Robert Ryland recorded giving Cleber a payment of \$1.50, likely an end of the year gift or *ad hoc* hiring, in 1849.³⁹⁶

3.1.2 RYLAND AS ADMINISTRATOR, MENTOR, FATHER & HUSBAND

Following the charter of Richmond College in 1840, and in addition to Ryland’s continuing role as steward and faculty member, he became both college president and president of the institution’s Board of Trustees. A brief concern over the “informality” of his occupying both leadership positions led to his offer to resign from his Board of Trustees office, but he remained its president for the next twenty-eight years.³⁹⁷ As college president, his leadership of the faculty included recruitment and hire during a time of “[f]requent changes... result[ing] from short tenures and irregular appointments” and teaching duties during this period generally fell to Ryland and two other men.³⁹⁸ At one point, in an attempt to grow the student body, Ryland offered to personally advance money for suitable students to fill available spots at Richmond College and he also recruited students while travelling.³⁹⁹ The institution grew despite challenges that included difficulties in securing funding, outbreaks of illness, and controversy with some Baptists over dancing.

Ryland continued to act as a fundraiser for the college, at times formally as its General Agent, and at

³⁹⁴ Josiah Ryland (1830-1902), “Recollections,” *Messenger*, 1894, 121.

³⁹⁵ James E. Bell to Robert Ryland, March 21, 1898, RRP, 01.011-012, VBHS.

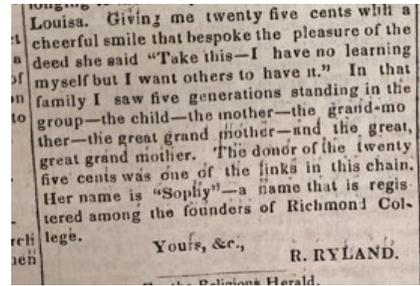
³⁹⁶ Robert Ryland, “Private Expenses of 1849,” Ledger II, RRP, 55.2.063, VBHS.

³⁹⁷ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, December 15, 1843, University Archives, University of Richmond, VBHS.

³⁹⁸ Alley, 39.

³⁹⁹ *Religious Herald*, August 13, 1846, 130, 6; George Braxton Taylor, “Alfred Elijah Dickenson,” *Virginia Baptist Ministers, 5th Series*, Lynchburg: J.P. Bell Company (1915), 167.

others in his capacity as Richmond College's president.⁴⁰⁰ The *Religious Herald* routinely published Ryland's summaries of donations to the college endowment and library. During this decade he also wrote several pointed requests for more support from Baptists and an increased commitment to the college from its trustees.⁴⁰¹ One notable account of his fundraising efforts shows Ryland's frustration at the limited donations from people of means and also provides a window into the life of an enslaved woman named Sophy. In an 1845 article in the *Religious Herald*, part of a series Ryland wrote detailing a combination vacation and fundraising tour with his family, he described a donation given by a Black man, Ralph Perry, a "subscription of one dollar" for Richmond College.⁴⁰² Ryland referred to Perry as "a colored brother," and praised his generosity in contrast "sons of millionaire fortune who would condemn this poor man." Perry was, Ryland wrote, "the second case of a colored person registered in my book [of donors]." The first was "Sophy," a woman enslaved by "the family of Bro[ther] O.T. Mitchell of Louisa... who brought a spontaneous donation to the cause":⁴⁰³



Robert Ryland, *Religious Herald*, December 4, 1845, VBHS

⁴⁰⁰ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, June 7, 1842. Reuben E. Alley's *History of the University of Richmond: 1830-1971* (1977) and W. Harrison Daniel's "Genesis of Richmond College: 1843 - 1860" (1975), provide additional details on these early fundraising efforts. A number of general agents were designated over the coming decades, most significantly A.M. Poindexter of Halifax County and Richmond, who was credited helping to establish the financial health of Richmond College and Columbian College. Robert Ryland published promotional articles, took fundraising tours, and operated as the college's general agent a number of times over the coming decades. Between 1843 and 1859, funds were also sought from the General Assembly of Virginia, though none of these efforts were successful (Alley, 40-41).

⁴⁰¹ Robert Ryland, "Dear Brethren," *Religious Herald*, January 5, 1843, 3, 2 (general need for funds); Robert Ryland, "Mr. Editor," *Religious Herald*, April 27, 1843, 67, 4 (funds for student support through the Education Society); Robert Ryland, "Richmond College - No. 8," *Religious Herald*, January 25, 1844, 15, 1: "I will not say that any member of the Board who is not conscious of a sincere sympathy for the enterprise should resign, but that he should immediately rouse up to this state of feeling... giving liberally, praying habitually, and laboring faithfully in its behalf."

⁴⁰² It is likely that Ralph Perry was a free man. In both Ryland's personal life and in his oversight role at Richmond College he generally used last names when referring to free people and first names only when referring to those who were enslaved. In his "moderator" role in meetings of deacons of First African Baptist Church, however, Ryland recorded last names of nearly every enslaved person mentioned.

⁴⁰³ The Federal Census of 1840 shows "O.T. Mitchels" living in Goochland County, and enslaving seventeen people, including two women 55-99, one woman between 24-35, and one woman or girl between 10-23. These entries may represent four generations of Sophy's family; see United States Federal Census, Year: 1840; Census Place: Goochland, Virginia; Roll: 559; Page: 404; Family History Library Film: 0029686. Mitchell's store and post office was between Gum Springs and Shannon Hill, Virginia, near the border of Goochland and Louisa Counties. See "Postroads," *Revised Statutes of the United States Relating to Postroads*, Vol. 18, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1875, 310.

Giving me twenty five cents with a cheerful smile that bespoke the pleasure of the deed she said “Take this – I have no learning myself but I want others to have it.” In that family I saw five generations standing in the group – the child – the mother – the grand-mother – the great-grandmother – and the great-great grandmother. The donor of the twenty five cents was one of the links in this chain. Her name is “Sophy” – a name that is registered among the founders of Richmond College.⁴⁰⁴

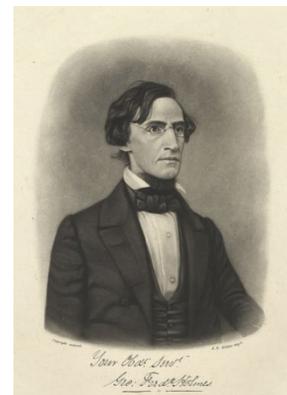
Searches of Ryland’s papers and early institutional records have not yet revealed these early notations of donations which Ryland said included Sophy’s contribution. It is possible these were among items lost in the Old Ryland Hall fire of 1910. Ryland’s account in the *Religious Herald* is the only known record of Sophy’s life and the lives of her family members.

Ryland often operated as the public voice of Richmond College. After “an unusual quantity of sickness” in 1843, he began the new year with an essay focused on the institution, one of a series he wrote for the *Religious Herald*, and in it he stated that although “few thinking persons would form an estimate from the sickness of one fall... To allay the fears of the patrons, however... the Trustees have changed the time of the summer recess.”⁴⁰⁵

3.1.2.1 RYLAND AND GEORGE FREDERICK HOLMES

Ryland’s leadership as the president of the institution included recruiting new members of the college faculty. Among his most prominent hires was George Frederick Holmes.⁴⁰⁶ Holmes was a British writer and vocal defender of Southern exceptionalism, sectionalism, and enslavement, described by Harvey Wish as “[u]ndoubtedly the most brilliant and creative of the proslavery school.”⁴⁰⁷ Two years before his hire at Richmond College, an essay attributed to Holmes was published in the *Southern Literary Messenger Review* which argued the continued use of enslaved labor in the South:

[T]he nature of a Southern climate forbids white labor for agricultural purposes; the cultivation of lands accordingly requires negro slavery; a great part of Southern property consists of slaves, and not only the property, but even the actual existence of the South depends upon their continuing in that state. Under these circumstances, any persons who agitate the question of



George Frederick Holmes
from Adam B. Walter,
George Frederick Holmes,
Special Collections,
University of Virginia
Library, Charlottesville,
Virginia

⁴⁰⁴ Robert Ryland, *Religious Herald*, December 4, 1845, VBHS.

⁴⁰⁵ Robert Ryland, “Richmond College, No. 6,” *Religious Herald*, January 4, 1844, VBHS.

⁴⁰⁶ William Preston to George Frederick Holmes, October 16, 1846, Letterbook, 169, Papers of George Frederick Holmes, Duke University Libraries, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, [link](#). Preston wrote of Ryland soliciting an opinion on Holmes’ suitability for employment at Richmond College.

⁴⁰⁷ Harvey Wish, “Aristotle, Plato, and the Mason-Dixon Line,” *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 10, no. 2 (April 1949), 260.

emancipation, or in any way endeavor to bring it about, are guilty of the Wildest and most wicked incendiarism.⁴⁰⁸

Holmes' hire was a significant one for the young college. The *Richmond Whig* congratulated the institution on "the valuable acquisition" and praised the "services which [Holmes] has already rendered in the service of literature and good morals."⁴⁰⁹

He served on the faculty for less than two years before departing for a similarly brief period at the College of William & Mary.⁴¹⁰ In 1859, seven years after the publication of his blistering review of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Holmes was awarded an honorary doctorate by Richmond College. In the years that followed, his association with the college was mentioned in institutional histories and student recollections.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁸ [George Frederick Holmes,] "On Slavery and Christianity," *Southern Quarterly Review*, January 1843, 253.

⁴⁰⁹ "Southern Quarterly Review," *Richmond Whig*, April 3, 1846, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank.

⁴¹⁰ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, October 7, 1845 and March 2, 1847, University Archive, VBHS; "George Frederick Holmes," William & Mary Libraries, Special Collections Research Center Wiki, [link](#).

⁴¹¹ Alley, 40; Daniel, "Genesis of Richmond College," 136; Josiah Ryland, "Recollections of an Old Boy," *Messenger*, April 1897, 270.

3.1.2.2 RYLAND AND RICHMOND COLLEGE STUDENTS

In his oversight of students during the decade, Ryland managed expulsions, sickness, and alcohol abuse.⁴¹² Ryland's daughter, Josephine Ryland Knight, recalled the drama surrounding the expulsion of one particular student:

After the luggage was put in the waiting hack, the family, the professors, students, and servants, were assembled in the yard to say a kind farewell, in pity for the young man. He turned toward his president and poured out a torrent of abusive language. I can see my father now, standing on the steps of the Columbia mansion fronting Grace [Street]. His mien was majestic and paternal, with a slightly amused smile at the senseless rage of the erring one. When the voice and the vocabulary of the excited youth were at last exhausted, the president made him a graceful bow, and waving farewell said "Is that your valedictory, Christian?" The angry boy whirled and rushed to the carriage without even a gesture.⁴¹³

An 1845 outbreak of scarlet fever on the campus resulted in an anonymous letter to the *Richmond Enquirer* signed "A Visitor" which described the college as having been "sorely afflicted" by the illness but that "Health has again resumed her sway, and the College is in a flourishing condition."⁴¹⁴ Ryland's position as administrator and parental figure was also demonstrated in his response to the apparent overindulgence of alcohol by a student, James E. Bell, who wrote Ryland at least twice over the next fifty years, recalling the text of a "prophesy" Ryland had given to him: "Prophesy of R. Ryland in 1848 — This is to affectionately admonish my friend Jas. E. Bell the he abstain wholly from alcoholic stimuli that unless he does he will be an inebriate in ten (10) years." Bell referred to Ryland as a "false prophet," because he had managed to avoid becoming an alcoholic and he thanked him for "the incalculable benefit" of his "timely admonition and paternal advice." Bell recalled that he and Ryland's nephew, Robert "Bob" Ryland, had gotten "Clara" and "Clebo" to procure wine for them from Screamersville. "Clebo" likely refers to the man whom Josiah Ryland and Robert Ryland called "Cleber," the "servant" at the college who was responsible for maintaining students' fires.⁴¹⁵

In the spring and summer of 1848, Ryland navigated a controversy that he believed threatened the institution's future funding. In February of that year, students had planned an event in the college's "public rooms" where, in the words of "Elder C. Kendrick," they "danced in good earnest... in the presence of the President!" Dancing was considered "worldly" by many of the Baptist supporters of the college and pointed complaints were raised in the pages of the *Religious Herald* and other publications. After what was felt to be an insufficient response from Ryland, and his use of the word

⁴¹² James E. Bell to Robert Ryland, March 21, 1898, Robert Ryland Papers, VBHS.

⁴¹³ Josephine Ryland Knight, RRP, 42.068, VBHS. Josephine Knight's recollection continued, "Afterward, this same fellow came to a bad end[.] He stabbed a fellow student in Lexington and found himself a despised criminal."

⁴¹⁴ "Richmond College" *Richmond Enquirer*, May 23, 1845, Virginia Chronicle.

⁴¹⁵ James E. Bell to Robert Ryland, March 21, 1898, RRP, 01.012, VBHS; James E. Bell to Robert Ryland, February 25, 1889, RRP, 40.015, VBHS.

“amusement” in his explanation, some members of the Board of Trustees stated that Ryland “deeply wounded our feelings, and increased the evil which we fear may grow out of this affair.” Kendrick, editor of the *Ecclesiastical Reformer*, referred to the dance as a demonstration of the “sinful manners and customs of the world.”⁴¹⁶

Ryland responded to the outcry again, writing, “Since my baptism in 1824, I have *never* attended a ball – a theatre – a circus – a barbecue – or anything of the kind... My sense of propriety would forbid me to tolerate dancing at my own house.” Still, he viewed the event with far less concern than Kendrick. While he would not have approved the gathering had he known dancing was to take place, Ryland assured readers of the *Religious Herald* that “none of the pious students, and none of the ladies attached to any church joined in the amusement.” His consideration in allowing the dancing was “not whether Christians should dance – that had already been settled – but to what extent they should feel it incumbent upon them to denounce the practice in the gay dreamers of this world.” What worried Ryland most was the risk the controversy posed to the stability of funding for the institution due to the “withhold[ing]” of “promised contributions.” In the face of the criticism, he offered to resign, clearing the way for “a more trustworthy agent” if it was believed that “he who presides over the interests of the College has forfeited confidence of its friends.”⁴¹⁷

SELECTED STUDENT MEMORIES OF ROBERT RYLAND

Reuben Baker Boatwright, father of University of Richmond President, Frederic William Boatwright recalled his own first “lesson” as a student at Richmond College. After arriving, he stood in his empty dormitory room and asked Ryland how he was to get furniture. “I don’t know,” Ryland replied. “You must see to that yourself.” Boatwright called it “a lesson of self-reliance, which I very much needed.” He remembered being “mad” with Ryland “only once for a short-time.” He wrote to Ryland that “[o]n speaking day, in presence of the whole school, you stood up, and mimicked my manner, and especially my eyes. I stopped winking them so fast, after that day. The deep impress of your character has remained with me.”⁴¹⁸ Julian Broaddus recalled “with pleasure and gratitude” Ryland’s “uniform kindness” and in a letter to his former professor noted “one tender, affectionate, fatherly talk you once gave me at the College gate” calling it a “precious memory” which in later years had been an “incentive to earnest effort when the days were dark and I almost ready to despond.”⁴¹⁹ In a March 1889 letter, John W. Cottrell remembered once mistaking Ryland for a fellow student and attempting to involve him a moment of “boyish pranks.” Ryland, he wrote, was “offended... & [you] ordered me to come your room next morning when you gave me a kindly

⁴¹⁶ “Elder C. Kendrick” is Rev. Carroll Kendrick. Kendrick’s editorial from the *Ecclesiastical Reformer* (Kentucky) is quoted in “Dancing in Richmond College,” *Religious Herald*, May 11, 1848, and appeared below the resolutions of members of the Richmond College Board of Trustees. The editors of the *Religious Herald* wrote that they “much regretted that such an affair should have occurred at the College, knowing the repugnance of our brethren to dancing, and other similar amusements.”

⁴¹⁷ Robert Ryland, “Mr. Editor,” *Religious Herald*, June 29, 1848, VBHS.

⁴¹⁸ R.B. [Reuben Baker] Boatwright to Robert Ryland, January 1, 1889, RRP, 42.030, VBHS.

⁴¹⁹ Julian Broaddus to Robert Ryland, March 12, 1889, RRP, file 42.045, VBHS.

gentle reproof, which even now lingers in my memory like a ‘happy dream.’ I shall never forget your kindness & faithfulness.”⁴²⁰ William F. Fleet related a memory of the lamp in Ryland’s office “shining brightly at 12 (midnight)” and “six hours” later seeing Ryland “with red eyes” calling the morning roll. He recalled thinking, “[I]f I had to live the life he is leading, life would hardly be worth the sacrifice he is making.”⁴²¹

3.1.2.3 Loss

Of the nine children that Josephine Ryland had given birth to “in quick succession,” only four had survived early childhood. Robert Ryland drew on his grief during this period in considering death and spirituality. After the death of his daughter, Roberta, Ryland wrote to offer consolation to another grieving father, Samuel Harris. Ryland described his experience of such loss “four times” and shared what he viewed as the spiritual lesson he found in the deaths of his children. He asked both Harris and his wife to “examine your hearts & see if that little boy had not risen higher in the throne than Jesus Christ, if he did not sometimes get right between your hearts & God... I have been called on four times to lose just such a child as yours, and I feel every time that it was just what I deserved.”⁴²²

In the summer of 1846, Ryland’s household was again overtaken by sickness. When their young daughter, Kate, experienced severe convulsions that June, Ryland described his wife as “violently shocked” by the sight. Josephine Ryland was, in Robert Ryland’s words, already suffering with the “crushing weight” of the “domestic duties” at the college which had “imposed on her a species of self denial that was afflictive to her nature.” While Robert Ryland was away on a “preaching excursion,” three of their children had suffered a severe fever which he believed left her with an “anxiety of mind” that “impaired her already feeble constitution and brought her to the borders of the grave.” Ryland was with her when she died on October 28, 1846 at the age of thirty-nine. After her death, the Ryland children who had died over the previous years – Ann Peachy, Robert Hall, John Hollins, Roberta, and an unnamed infant – were disinterred and “laid upon her breast in one common tomb.”⁴²³

While the newspaper obituary Ryland wrote for his late wife focused largely on her spiritual state, in a letter to his father, he recognized that he had “spoke[n]... coolly of her in the paper.” In his correspondence with family he wrote with more tenderness and candor:

I have never known a purer character... I feel alone in the world! Still I do not want to be comforted. I desire to keep the wound open, to cherish a sense of my loss, to feel the vanity

⁴²⁰ John W. Cottrell to Robert Ryland, RRP, 42.081-082, VBHS.

⁴²¹ William F. Fleet to Robert Ryland, March 10, 1889, 42.128, VBHS.

⁴²² Robert Ryland to Samuel Harris, October 27, 1843, RRP, 14.022, VBHS.

⁴²³ Robert Ryland, “Mrs. Josephine Ryland,” undated typescript, RRP, 3.080-081, VBHS. Ryland’s remembrance of Josephine Ryland provided an overview of her life, their relationship, her care of her children, and her role at the institution. Ryland and his second wife, Betty T. Ryland, named another child Roberta, Roberta “Bertie” Ryland Adkins.

of the world, & to labor for more inward holiness... I seem to realize that she is not far from me, just beyond a narrow stream... I seem to feel the delicate pressure of her gentle spirit on mine saying, "Be calm."

He closed his letter to his father by asking that family and friends not attempt to comfort him, but instead "pray for my sanctification" and signed it "Yr. afflicted son, Ro. Ryland."⁴²⁴

Two years later, on June 8, 1848, Ryland married Elizabeth "Betty" Thornton (1821-1905), and the two remained together for the next fifty-one years. During the decades of their marriage spent in Richmond they experienced far fewer long separations than Ryland had with Josephine Ryland, so there is less correspondence between them. Their available letters show a comfortable and loving relationship. They had three children who all survived to adulthood.

⁴²⁴ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, November 2, 1846, RRP, 11.080-081, VBHS; Robert Ryland to Elizabeth Ryland Willis, October 28, 1846, RRP, 15.016, VBHS.

3.2 1850 TO 1859

3.2.1 ENSLAVEMENT

3.2.1.1 RYLAND AS AN ENSLAVER

1850 FEDERAL CENSUS

In 1850, Robert Ryland was again the Head of Household for the college's entry in the Federal Census. It named Ryland's family, college faculty – Bennett Puryear and Lewis Turner – students, Ryland's brother-in-law, H.F. "Harry" Thornton, who was College Steward for a short time, and Agnes Cooper, the free Black woman who lived on the campus.⁴²⁵ Beginning in 1850, enslaved people were recorded separately on the Federal Census Slave Schedule. Entries provided enslavers names, the ages of those enslaved, their sex, and the designation for "black" or "mulatto," but not names of enslaved people.

Ryland's entry in the Slave Schedule of 1850 shows thirteen people: a man, age 48; a boy, age 14, a boy, age 10; a boy, age 8; a woman, age 55; a woman, age 36; a woman, age 37; two girls, age 10; a girl, age 6; a woman, age 60 (described as "mulatto"); a girl, age 12; and a woman, age 58.

They were enumerated on December 12, 1850.⁴²⁶

Name	Sex	Age	Race
Robert Ryland	m	48	w
	m	14	w
	m	10	w
	m	8	w
	f	55	w
10	f	36	w
	f	37	w
	f	10	w
	f	10	w
	f	6	w
	f	6	w
	f	60	w
	f	12	w
	f	58	w

RYLAND LETTERS AND RECORDS

On June 9, 1850, the patriarch of the Ryland family, Josiah Ryland, died after a long illness. Robert Ryland arranged for a stone marker to be made for his father's grave, and on December 21, 1850, he shared the news of its completion with his mother, Catherine Ryland. The letter also contained his request that she arrange transportation of "the servants that fall to me" after the "division" of the enslaved people in the elder Ryland's estate:

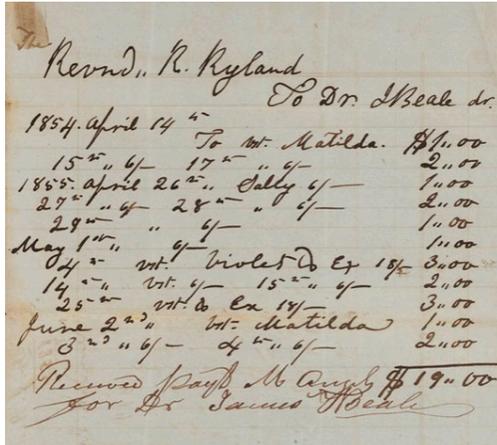
It has occurred to me that if there should be a division of the servants before you send your turkeys over, that you might find room in the wagon for the servants that fall to me. If so, you will oblige me by sending them along with Tunstal [the enslaved man who transported goods and family members]. They can walk part of the way. They will have to be hired out, and it is better for them to come before New Year's Day.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ United States Federal Census, 1850, "Robert Ryland," Western District, Henrico, Virginia, 133-134, National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, 1009 rolls); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29; National Archives, Washington, D.C, retrieved through ancestry.com.

⁴²⁶ United States Federal Census Slave Schedule, 1850, United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Seventh Census of the United States, 1850. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1850. M432, retrieved through ancestry.com.

⁴²⁷ Robert Ryland to Catherine Peachey Ryland, December 21, 1850, RRP, 22.004, VBHS.

Ryland was hoping to have them in Richmond by the traditional “hiring out” period around New Year’s Day, when hirers would seek enslaved laborers and “self-hired” enslaved people would negotiate for new situations and homes. The census enumeration of 1850 took place before Ryland wrote this letter to his mother. Available records do not provide the number of people Ryland received from his father’s estate.



Dr. James Beale to Robert Ryland, [Invoice/Receipt for visits between April 1854 and June 1855], VBHS

By 1850, Ryland’s family would routinely travel with at least one enslaved person.⁴²⁸ Among Ryland’s papers held by the Virginia Baptist Historical Society are receipts indicating his payments for items and medical care for enslaved people along with local and state tax payments that reflect some those he enslaved who were associated with specific properties. During 1854 and 1855, he paid Dr. James Beale for a number of repeated visits to Matilda, Sally, and Violet, all women that Ryland enslaved. Matilda was seen three times between April 14th and 17th, 1854. Sally was seen five times between April 26 and May 1, 1855. Beale visited Violet five times in May of 1855. Matilda was again seen multiple times in 1855, visited by Beale three times between June 2nd and

4th. While there is no indication of the nature of these visits, it is possible they were centered around pregnancy.⁴²⁹ There are two children between the ages of five and six in Robert Ryland’s 1860 Slave Schedule entry.⁴³⁰

Several sources show Ryland’s purchase of shoes and clothing for those he enslaved including an 1856 bill for shoes and other items purchased in 1855. Along with items for Ryland’s children (a trunk for his son, William, and shoes for his daughters, Kate and Josephine), the list includes shoes for four enslaved women or girls and one man or boy. Ryland purchased “st. shoes” (servant shoes) for Lucy, Ellin/Ellen, Violet, and Judy, and heavy work shoes for Tom. A family anecdote indicates that Lucy was a caregiver for at least one of Ryland’s children, Ann Catherine “Kate” Ryland Taliaferro. Her daughter wrote that when her mother was a student at Richmond Female Institute, “[s]he was accompanied each day by Mammy Lucye, as she was afraid to go through Screamersville alone. That was a section between Richmond College and the City of Richmond where there were so many bar rooms and drunkards that it was not safe for her to walk alone.”⁴³¹

⁴²⁸ Robert Ryland to Elizabeth F. Willis, May 4, 1850, RRP, 15.004, RRP.

⁴²⁹ Dr. James Beale to Robert Ryland, [Invoice/Receipt for visits between April 1854 and June 1855], RRP, 34.005, VBHS.

⁴³⁰ United States Federal Census Slave Schedule 1860, Bureau of the Census. Eighth Census of the United States, 1860. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860. M653, 1,438 rolls, 44-45, retrieved through ancestry.com.

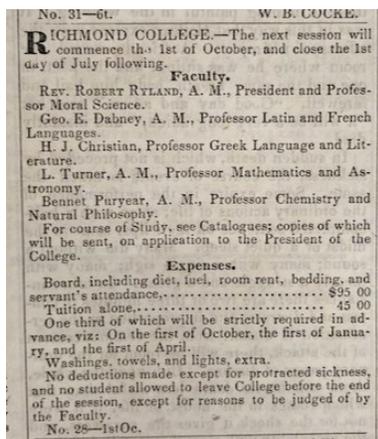
⁴³¹ Bessie Taliaferro Carter, “Robert Ryland,” RRP, 3.048, VBHS.

Tax receipts also reflect some of those who Ryland enslaved during this period. In 1855, for example, Ryland was taxed on property he owned in the City of Richmond including two pieces of real estate (improvements valued at 3,000.00 each), a gold watch and other items, and the enslaved people associated with the properties “3 slaves at \$2.50.” In 1855 and 1856, Ryland also paid tax on “1 lot [o]n Broad Street 30 x 140.” This assessment included a tax of twelve dollars on “3 slaves.”⁴³²

Robert Ryland baptized Walker Lee, a man he enslaved, on July 30, 1859. The record of the moment, written by Ryland, is found in the Minutes of the Deacons of First African Baptist Church, where Lee’s full name is recorded next to Ryland’s as his enslaver.⁴³³

3.2.1.2 CAMPUS HIRE

COLLEGE RECORDS



Advertisement, “Richmond College,” *Religious Herald*, August 17, 1854, VBHS

As the college grew during the decade between 1850 and 1860, evidence shows that there was a comparable growth in reliance on enslaved labor. At the end of the decade, Ryland noted in a report that the “servants” were “frequently changed,” which is consistent with the system of “slave hiring” in Richmond’s businesses, institutions, and homes.⁴³⁴ Students boarding at the college received “Servant’s attendance,” as indicated in an advertisement for the institution that appeared in the *Religious Herald*: “Board, including diet, fuel, room rent, bedding, and servant’s attendance, ... \$95.00.”⁴³⁵ While no institutional ledgers have been located that provide comprehensive detail comparable to 1832-1842 period contained in Ryland’s combined personal/institutional records, the minutes of the Board of Trustees and Robert Ryland’s reports to the Board provide examples of the college’s use of enslaved people in its workforce. In his 1852 report, Ryland wrote that “bonds for servants’ hire are not payable until January next” and he recommended that the examination of the Boarding Department accounts be delayed until those funds had been expended.

⁴³² “Taxes 1855,” RRP, 34.017, VBHS.

⁴³³ Ryland’s record of hundreds of last names of enslaved people in the Minutes of the Deacons of First African Baptist Church is a resource of tremendous significance. In addition to providing a trove of material for contemporary genealogists, it counters the belief that enslaved people did not have last names. In his personal records, Ryland only refers to Walker Lee as “Walker.” In the church record, however, where Lee, like other members of the congregation, could assert agency, he was “Walker Lee” (see section 3.3.1.1). In the FABC deacons’ minutes, enslaved people only rarely appeared without a last name.

⁴³⁴ Robert Ryland, President’s Report, January 9, 1860, Trustees’ Records, University Archives, VBHS; Oast, *Institutional Slavery*, 102.

⁴³⁵ Advertisement, “Richmond College,” *Religious Herald*, August 17, 1854, VBHS.

As John Zaborney writes in *Slaves for Hire: Renting Enslaved Laborers in Antebellum Virginia*, “In Virginia, those who hired by the year executed a slave-hiring bond for the transaction.”⁴³⁶

Ryland was once again managing the details of the Boarding Department in 1851 when he wrote in a report to the Board of Trustees that the professors were relying too heavily on the domestic laborers from that department:

There being now five fires to be made & kept up in the recitation rooms, besides one or two hours daily service in the Laboratory, the Boarding Dept. is rather burdened with this class of duties imposed upon the servants. It has, therefore, insisted that the professors should hire a servant to attend on them, & it proposes to board & clothe that servant for his extra work. To this they have consented provided the Trustees will say that the demand is just & reasonable.⁴³⁷

The details that the Boarding Department would “board & clothe” the “servant” and the professors, or their portion of the budget, would cover “extra work” likely indicates Ryland meant that this would be the “hire” of an enslaved person or persons already working in the Boarding Department. On July 17, 1852, the minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees show Ryland describing the amount spent on “servants hire” being more than during the period in the previous year and the increased cost was likely to absorb all the gains of the department once it was combined with the payment of “back debts.”⁴³⁸

In a meeting of the Board of Trustees on July 16, 1856, a resolution was adopted regarding the labor of a man named William and the budget from which the amount of his hire should have been drawn: “Resolved that the hire of the servant William, for the session 1854&5, ought to have been paid out of the proceeds of the boarding department as the Trustees assumed the payment of his hire, only on the condition that the Boarding department not involve them in loss.”⁴³⁹ As was often the case, the Boarding Department showed a budget shortfall, and this apparently was in violation of the condition that the Trustees imposed; they would cover the cost of his hire on the condition that the Boarding Department not exceed the limit on expenditures for the session. Four months later, specific instructions for those who provided “attendance” to students housed in the “dormitories” also referred to as “hotels” and “boarding houses” were presented at a meeting of the Board of Trustees. In December 1856, Ryland wrote of the accounting chaos left in the wake of a departed steward, C.A. Mayo, noting that “the while business of last session” including “the hire of servants”

⁴³⁶ Zaborney, *Slaves for Hire*, 12.

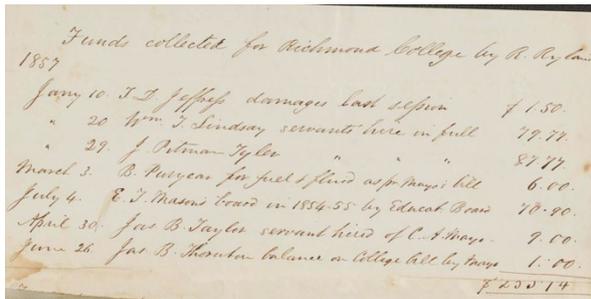
⁴³⁷ Robert Ryland, President’s Report, December 2, 1851, Trustees Records 1851-1860, University of Richmond, University Archives, VBHS.

⁴³⁸ Minutes, Richmond College Board of Trustees, July 17, 1852, University of Richmond, University Archives, VBHS.

⁴³⁹ Minutes, Richmond College Board of Trustees, July 16, 1856, University of Richmond, University Archives, VBHS.

was “all unsettled.”⁴⁴⁰ More details can be found in the “Steward of the College” and “Hotels” sections below.

Robert Ryland’s personal papers contain a list of funds he collected for Richmond College in 1857 and turned over to the Board of Trustees. This list includes payment to the college for “servants’ hire.” While no records have been located that indicate the college “owned” people, this shows that, by re-hiring out those it had hired, the institution was acting in the capacity of “owner” or agent. In January 1857, the two “hotel keepers,” those running the dormitories, paid Richmond College through Robert Ryland a total of \$167.54 for an unspecified number of people the previous year: \$79.77 (William T. Lindsay) and \$87.77 (J. Pitman Tyler) for “servants’ hire in full.”



Funds collected for Richmond College by R. Ryland
1857

Jan 10	J. T. Jeffers damages last session	1.50
" 20	Wm T. Lindsay servants hire in full	79.77
" 29	J. Pitman Tyler "	87.77
March 3	B. Poyens for fuel & food asp. prop. bill	6.00
July 4	E. J. Masons board in 1856-57 by Educat. Board	70.00
April 30	Jas B. Taylor servant hired of C. A. Mayo	9.00
June 26	Jas B. Thacker balance on college bill by trans	1.00

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Robert Ryland, “Funds collected for Richmond College by R. Ryland 1857,” VBHS

Later that year, Ryland also collected nine dollars from James B. Taylor for what he wrote was a “servant hired of C.A. Mayo.”⁴⁴¹ In the slave hiring terminology of the time, “hired of” generally preceded the name of the enslaver from whom the person was hired. Examples of this usage often appeared in financial records, court documents, and advertisements seeking escaped enslaved people.⁴⁴² Mayo was no longer the steward at the college, but a person he enslaved had evidently remained there, hired out to the institution, then hired out again to “Jas. B. Taylor.” The amount indicates that this may have been a short hire or was a payment for specific duties. Rev. James B. Taylor was moderator of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, leader of the Baptist Foreign Mission Board, and a founding trustee of Richmond College. In his capacity as trustee in the mid-1850s he was involved in establishing a committee focused on new campus construction.⁴⁴³ He was also overseeing the conversion of the Boarding Department to the management of “hotel keepers” who would manage two dormitory buildings.⁴⁴⁴ It is possible this hire was in relation to elements of

⁴⁴⁰ Robert Ryland, President’s Report to the Richmond College Board of Trustees, November 1, 1856, Trustees Records, University of Richmond, University Archives, VBHS.

⁴⁴¹ Robert Ryland, “Funds collected for Richmond College by R. Ryland 1857,” RRP, 34.059, VBHS.

⁴⁴² One example of the use of “hired of” in advertisements seeking escaped enslaved people appeared in the June 5, 1855, *Richmond Enquirer*, in which F. Mallory Sutherland advertises for the return of fifteen-year-old Thomas Washington. Sutherland writes that Washington had “left with another boy I hired of Mr. Benjamin R. Lewis” (“Twenty Dollars Reward,” *Richmond Enquirer*, June 5, 1855, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#)).

⁴⁴³ George B. Taylor, *The Life and Times of James B. Taylor*, Philadelphia: The Bible and Publication Society (1872), 233, 245.

⁴⁴⁴ Taylor placed an advertisement describing the “boarding houses,” later called hotels, for prospective “hotel keepers.” “According to a general bill of fare affixed by the Trustees...thirty-five to fifty boarders” would be in each dormitory and Ryland or Taylor would be available to show the buildings to potential applicants: “The houses and lots will be shown and all necessary information given by the Rev. R. Ryland,

that work or to a specific event or events on the campus. Ryland turned all the funds he collected over the Board of Trustees on July 11, 1857.⁴⁴⁵

In 1858, Bennett Puryear, professor of science, made recommendations to the Board of Trustees on charges for board at Richmond College which he contrasted with those at the University of Virginia: “Board including diet, servants’ attendance and room furniture, costs at the Univ. Va. \$130. Board here including only diet and attendance costs \$120; so that board with us is really higher than at the University.” Puryear continued with suggestions regarding board including policies related to the “hotels.”⁴⁴⁶ That Puryear equated the “attendance” provided to students at Richmond College with the duties of “servants” at the University of Virginia is not surprising. A comparison of the labor requirements for Richmond College’s “dormitories” largely mirrors the duties of enslaved workers at the university. At Richmond College, the duties listed were “Bring water and clean towels, [c]lean up the rooms, make up the beds, [w]ash the windows once in four weeks, Black students shoes, afternoon, daily, [and] [c]arry water to each Dormitory twice during the day... cleaning up the grounds which must be performed daily by 10 o’clock.”⁴⁴⁷ At the University of Virginia, duties “began with lighting a fire by 6 a.m. and bringing fresh water at the start of the day. It was expected that the rooms be swept, the beds made, and firewood and/or ice delivered as appropriate for the season, in addition to the regular washing of sheets, windows, and so forth.”⁴⁴⁸ Research has not revealed evidence that Richmond College students brought enslaved people to the campus or “hired” those already working at the college to be their personal attendants, one possible distinction between the two institutions.⁴⁴⁹

In 1858, the cost of the hire of a “servant” was appropriated to the Chemistry Department, headed by William G. Strange.⁴⁵⁰ In 1861, when Strange’s accounts showed a balance due, the Board of Trustees withdrew the budget allowance of twenty-five dollars, resolving that “the appropriation heretofore made of \$25 for servants hired to attend the laboratory be here dispensed with.”⁴⁵¹

now a resident at the College, or by application to Jas. B. Taylor, Chairman of the Committee” (“For Rent,” Richmond Enquirer, August 5, 1856, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#)).

⁴⁴⁵ “Funds collected for Richmond College by R. Ryland 1857,” RRP, 34.059, VBHS.

⁴⁴⁶ [Letter to Richmond College Board of Trustees from B. Puryear, 1858], Trustees Records 1851-1860,, University Archives, University of Richmond, VBHS.

⁴⁴⁷ “Regulations for Renting and Keeping Boarding Houses at Richd College,” Presented at the Meeting of Trustees Nov. 1. 1856, Trustees Records 1851-1860, University Archives, University of Richmond, VBHS.

⁴⁴⁸ Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia, President’s Commission on Slavery and the University, Report to President Teresa A. Sullivan, 2018, 19, [link](#).

⁴⁴⁹ University of Virginia, President’s Commission on Slavery, 26.

⁴⁵⁰ Report of the Auditing Committee... for session 1858-1859, Trustees Records 1851-1860, University Archive, University of Richmond, VBHS.

⁴⁵¹ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, August 18, 1861, University Archive, University of Richmond, VBHS.

An enslaved man named Martin was described as the “gas-maker” for the College during the period when a central gas-works was attempted. His enslaver is unknown. Richmond College hired him out at least twice during a period when there was not enough work for him. In his Presidential Account report of July 7, 1859, Ryland recorded the receipt of 5.75 on July 31, 1859 (from Martin’s hire to someone with the last name Allen) and on January 12, 1859 the receipt of 46.25 for “Martin’s hire less commissions.” This indicated that, in his role as President of the college, Ryland may have been acting as an informal hiring agent, placing Martin in situations outside the college and, at least once though probably multiple times given Ryland’s pluralization of the word, drawing “commissions” for it.

In a summary of the President’s Account on July 7, 1859, Ryland noted the total payment of ten dollars to “College svts for ring.g bell.”⁴⁵² This is consistent with small payments given to hired enslaved people for particular additional duties.

3.2.1.3 COLLEGE STEWARDS & “HOTEL KEEPERS”

While no evidence has been located that shows enslaved people coming to Richmond College with students, advertisements and institutional records make it clear that “servants’ attendance” was provided to the students by the college. Many of the enslaved laborers who served the students at the college were under the supervision of those referred to as stewards. Beginning in the mid-1850s, this role was filled by board-supervised “hotel keepers.”

Following Charles L. Cocke’s departure in 1846, the duties of steward had once again fallen to Robert Ryland. He continued to step into the role when the position was vacant. During those periods, Ryland oversaw the facilities, including the enslaved and free labor force, while also Richmond College president and president of the Board of Trustees. In accounts he submitted the Board in March of 1852, he noted that one amount he collected was reduced by 49.97 “[because] no steward.”⁴⁵³ By 1853, Ryland’s frustration with filling the Boarding Department duties rose to the point that he tendered his resignation as president of the college on June 19, 1853 which was enough to prompt the Board of Trustees to “contemplate relieving him” of the Boarding Department duties.⁴⁵⁴ The prospect of Ryland’s departure may have resulted in more effort being directed toward the recruitment and hiring process and the mid-to late 1850s saw a string of stewards at the college. None, however, remained for very long.

The Board offered Dr. A.G. Hudgins the steward position on July 17, 1852. At the same meeting, Ryland submitted his accounts for the boarding department which included the line item: “Servants hire, extra work [etc].”⁴⁵⁵ Hudgins died suddenly before March 1853 and while his wife was briefly

⁴⁵² President's Account, July 7, 1859, Trustees Records, VBHS. For a description of payments to enslaved people for “extra work” see Oast, *Institutional Slavery*, 167, Kindle.

⁴⁵³ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, March 2, 1852, University of Richmond.

⁴⁵⁴ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, June 19, 1853, University of Richmond.

⁴⁵⁵ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, July 17, 1852, University of Richmond. Ryland also submitted a meticulous list of \$800.00 of supplies and provisions that he had purchased for the over

considered for the position it was once again vacant by the end of that month.⁴⁵⁶ A professor at the college, Lewis Turner, took over the position and ran the boarding department for just over two years.

WANTED--To hire by the month or year, a good COOK, male or female. Also, several good male house servants, and out door hands. For such as are competent to discharge the duties required a liberal price will be paid. Apply to George Timberlake, on Brook Avenue, or to C. A. MAYO, no 15-ts At Richmond College.

WANTED--To hire for the balance of the year a white or colored Servant to take care of

On July 30, 1855, C. A. Mayo assumed the position of steward at Richmond College, and his duties included the hire and supervision of enslaved workers.⁴⁵⁷ That winter, he placed two advertisements in the *Daily Dispatch*, seeking “servants” for the college, and in both he used language that indicates that those who were being “hired” were enslaved people leased out by those who owned them or by agents. In the first, which

ran in the *Daily Dispatch* on November 16, 1855, Mayo wrote that the “servants” would be hired “by the month or by the year.” He sought “a good cook, male or female... several good male house servants, and out door hands” and wrote that “[f]or such as are competent to discharge the duties required a liberal price will be paid.” He signed the advertisement, “C.A. Mayo[,] at Richmond College.”⁴⁵⁸

The second advertisement, published the following month, was more detailed. This was likely because the general one-year slave hiring term was on the verge of ending, a transition coinciding with “Hiring Day” or “Hiring Days” on and around New Years Day, when enslaved people were hired by individuals, businesses, and institutions.⁴⁵⁹ In the second advertisement,

WANTED--SERVANTS--To hire for the ensuing year, at the Richmond College, a good COOK and BREAD-MAKER, male or female; a good WASHER and IRONER; several Men and Boys for Dining-room service, and others for housework generally. Also, a Man who has had some experience in gardening. A liberal price will be paid for such as can be recommended as honest and competent to discharge the duties required. Apply to de 28-3t* C. A. MAYO, Steward.

WANTED--Mill Hands for the ensuing

Mayo wrote that the college was seeking “[t]o hire for the ensuing year, at the Richmond College, a good COOK and a BREAD-MAKER, male or female; a good WASHER and IRONER; several Men and Boys for Dining-room service, and others for housework generally. Also, a man who has some experience gardening.” The list provides a glimpse of the nature of the labor at the college. Like the November advertisement, Mayo again described payment “for” those hired rather than payment *to* them. This phrasing contrasts with Ryland’s own advertisement for a housekeeper for the college

the years for the Boarding Department. The list offers an extraordinary glimpse of daily life at the college.

⁴⁵⁶ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, March 7, 1853; March 21, 1853.

⁴⁵⁷ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, June 18, 1853, June 30, 1853, March 7, 1854, June 13, 1854, July 30, 1855.

⁴⁵⁸ “Wanted” [Advertisement], *Daily Dispatch*, November 16, 1855, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#).

⁴⁵⁹ “Wanted – Servants – to hire for the ensuing year at the Richmond College,” December 28, 1855, [link](#); Takagi, “Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction,” 773.

that had previously appeared in the *Religious Herald* in which he wrote, “To one well recommended I will give liberal wages.”⁴⁶⁰

Mayo left abruptly before the end of 1856, and Ryland once again stepped into the daily management of the college facilities. This included sorting out the unfinished business Mayo left behind. In a note to the Board of Trustees dated “Oct. 31,” Ryland wrote, “If Mr. Mayo has not yet submitted his accounts to the [Auditing] Committee they should be urged to call on him, as the persons to whom he owes money for the College are anxious to be paid and cannot be paid till he renders his account[.] Moreover the whole business of last session, including the proceeds of the sale of the horse[,] the hire of servants...is all unsettled[,] and is likely to remain so unless looked after.”⁴⁶¹

“HOTELS”

The ongoing difficulty with keeping a college steward led to an alternate strategy for the management of dormitories and board. Using the system already in place at the University of Virginia, college-owned buildings referred to as “hotels” were placed in the hands of “hotel-keepers” who would live in them with their families while providing room and board to students. Historian Jennifer Oast describes the system at the University of Virginia where buildings were leased to hotelkeepers who were often “economically disadvantaged gentlemen” motivated to “keep costs down.” They would provide “a staff of slaves” and “usually hire extra slaves to help cook meals, serve in the dining room, and clean the students’ rooms.”⁴⁶²

At Richmond College, the terms “hotels,” “dormitories,” and “boarding houses” were used interchangeably in college records. As was the case with the stewards, the hotelkeepers’ overall management of “servants” was formally overseen by the Board of Trustees, which stipulated the daily duties of “servants” at the “dormitories.” As mentioned in a previous section, in November 1856, after the first hotelkeepers were hired, the Board of Trustees detailed the duties of those who performed domestic work for the students:

Attendance of Servants on Dormitories

Daily {Bring water and clean towels, clean up the rooms, make up the beds}

Wash the windows once in four weeks.

Black students shoes, afternoon, daily.

Carry water to each Dormitory twice during the day

The duties which have no fixed hours must be performed after breakfast hour: as well as the

⁴⁶⁰ Robert Ryland, “A House-Keeper Wanted,” *Religious Herald*, December 18, 1851, VBHS.

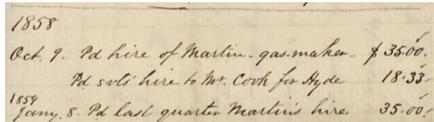
⁴⁶¹ “Communication of President of Rich[mond] College,” Trustees Records 1851-1860, University Archive, University of Richmond, VBHS.

⁴⁶² Oast, *Institutional Slavery*, 179-180.

cleaning up the grounds which must be performed daily by 10 o'clock. All the grounds being equally divided⁴⁶³

In the first years of the hotels, Robert Ryland collected the hotelkeepers' rent twice a year and he inspected the buildings "from time to time." Among a list titled "Duties of the President," that was "printed by order of the Board" Robert Ryland was "required from time to time to visit the hotels and observe that that the [illegible, possibly "tables"] & fare & the conduct of the students are in accordance with the regulations of the College, and that he and the Professors as he may request, shall from time to time visit the rooms of the resident students with a view to their neatness & good order, and to the general behavior of their occupants."⁴⁶⁴

Additional details of the oversight of Ryland and the Board of Trustees and the work of enslaved people in these campus buildings can be found through an examination of the individual hotelkeepers. James P. Tyler and William Lindsay were the first men to hold the position, and were named in an announcement in the *Richmond Enquirer* on August 22, 1856. According to trustee James B. Taylor's description of their hire, Lindsay had been a hotelkeeper at the College of William & Mary before accepting the Richmond College position.⁴⁶⁵ Two years later, both men's management of the college dormitories were vouched for by the Board of Trustees in an advertisement directed at prospective parents: "Diet and attendance" were among the costs listed, with details of the "two hotels... under the management of Mssrs. Tyler and Lindsay -- who are well qualified for their posts."⁴⁶⁶



1857
Oct. 9. Pd hire of Martin gas maker \$ 35.00.
He sold hire to Mr. Cook for Hyde 18.33
1857
Jan'y. 8. Pd last quarter Martin's hire 35.00.

Major W.B.F. Hyde assumed the steward position beginning in August 1857 and within four months he was overcome by debt. The Board of Trustees authorized two members to intervene in his creditors' plan to sell his furniture and other items, taking "any steps, legal or otherwise, that may be necessary to protect the college from any loss or inconvenience" resulting from a seizure of Hyde's property contained in the college's building.⁴⁶⁷ In April, a meeting was called by Ryland to deal with Hyde's situation. He had "no funds and no

⁴⁶³ Regulations for Renting and Keeping Boarding Houses at Richd College," Presented at the Meeting of Trustees Nov. 1. 1856, Trustees Records, University of Richmond, VBHS.

⁴⁶⁴ "Report of the Committee on Defining President's Duties," 1859, Trustees Records 1851-1860, University Archives, University of Richmond, VBHS.

⁴⁶⁵ "Richmond College," *Richmond Enquirer*, August 22, 1856, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#). A later hotelkeeper, Anselem Brock, had previously run a hotel at the University of Virginia (https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/simile_timeline?content_id=8441; http://juel.iath.virginia.edu/public_person?person=43766#m1). Lindsay may have run a privately owned hotel in Williamsburg, rather than one owned by the institution as was the case at the University of Virginia and Richmond College.

⁴⁶⁶ "Richmond College" [Advertisement], *Richmond Enquirer*, September 21, 1858, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

⁴⁶⁷ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, August 4, 1857, University Archive, VBHS; Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, January 2, 1858, University Archive, VBHS.

credit” meaning he could not “keep up the Hotel.” This would have meant he could not provide food to students nor pay for the laborers in the building. The Board authorized Ryland to pull no more than eight dollars a day to provide to Hyde for the purpose of maintaining the operations of the building.⁴⁶⁸ That summer, Ryland was reimbursed for \$386.05 he had advanced to Hyde.⁴⁶⁹ Prior to Hyde’s departure, Richmond College paid someone named Mr. Cook \$18.33 for the “hire” of enslaved people for the hotel’s use: “Pd. svts’ hire to Mr. Cook for Hyde 18.33.” The amount appeared in the settlement of Ryland’s account for the year along with money paid for the hire of Martin, “the gas-maker.”⁴⁷⁰

In 1859, one of the original hotel keepers, James P. Tyler, was also deeply in debt. As a result, an advertisement for the sale of his possessions and legal announcement appeared in the newspaper detailing the furniture that would be auctioned and the plan for the enslaved people who Tyler had hired to work in the building. The advertisement for the auction directed readers’ attention to the sale of Tyler’s furniture at the college building and “to the hiring out of the SERVANTS for the balance of the year.” The sale was to take place at ten o’clock in the morning “at the Richmond College.”⁴⁷¹ The legal notice that appeared the same day went into more detail, listing individual items that ranged from a piano to cream pots. Also listed were the enslaved people who were to be hired out until their term ended, probably in December. They were named Little John, Willis, and Sarah. The original auction was postponed and it appears to have been averted entirely given that Tyler remained as hotelkeeper until June 27, 1859.⁴⁷² In September, however, Ryland wrote to his son, William, describing his relief that “the trouble of getting Tyler away & Brock established in his hotel is over.”⁴⁷³ Given typical hiring practices, it is possible that Willis, Sarah, and the person referred to as Little John remained on the campus until at least the end of December. “Brock” refers to Anselem Brock, a former hotelkeeper at the University of Virginia.⁴⁷⁴

The following year, William Lindsay and Anselem Brock’s hire of eleven enslaved people who worked in the buildings was recorded in the Federal Census Slave Schedule of 1860. See Section 3.3.2.

⁴⁶⁸ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, April 26, 1858, University Archive, VBHS.

⁴⁶⁹ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, July 28, 1858, University Archive, VBHS.

⁴⁷⁰ Robert Ryland, “President’s Account,” June 7, 1859, Trustees Records, University Archives, VBHS; “Communication of President of Rich College read Nov 1, 1856” from Trustees Records 1851-1860, VBHS.

⁴⁷¹ “Trustees’ Sale of Household Furniture,” *Daily Dispatch*, September 28, 1859, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

⁴⁷² “Trustees’ Sale of Genteel Household and Kitchen Furniture,” *Daily Dispatch*, September 28, 1859, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#); Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, June 27, 1859.

⁴⁷³ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, September 30, 1859, RRP, 1.078, VBHS.

⁴⁷⁴ University of Virginia, *Catalog of the University of Virginia, 1857-1858*, Hathi Digital Library, 7, [link](#).

3.2.2 ACCUSATIONS AND RUMORS

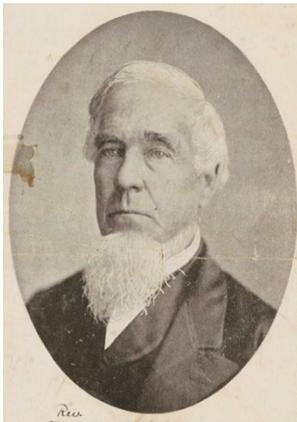
3.2.2.4 WAYLAND AND ACCUSATION/INVESTIGATION

Despite Ryland's objections to Francis Wayland's approach to slavery in *The Elements of Moral Science* (see Ryland's open letter in *The Christian Watchman*, Section 2.1.3), he used the textbook in his own Moral Philosophy classes at Richmond College. As proslavery sentiment in Virginia deepened in the 1850s so did objections to the use of Wayland's work at Richmond College and Richmond Female Institute.

1856 ANONYMOUS OBJECTION

There was at least one shot across the bow indicating public discontent with students at Richmond's institutions of higher learning using Francis Wayland's textbook, *The Elements of Moral Science*. In September 1856, an anonymous letter writer signing himself "Vindex" wrote to the *Richmond Enquirer* voicing his objections to *Moral Science* and Wayland himself, taking particular issue with the use of the book in local institutions: "Every true Virginian and Southern man is now convinced that slavery is an institution of God and the Bible, and that it is neither 'a moral nor a political evil.'" The writer continued that Wayland's work, "a Northern book," was being "tolerat[ed] in high places... placed in the hands of our youth of both sexes as a text book in Richmond College and Richmond Female Institute." Wayland, he wrote, "is known at home as a violent fanatical abolitionist" with a book that included "strong abolitionist doctrines." After raising the concern that parents might not be aware of instructors' use of the text, he concluded, "If the people of Richmond can tolerate such a book in the hands of their children, the people of Virginia and the South cannot and will not."⁴⁷⁵

1857: ACCUSATION IN *THE SOUTH*, BOARD OF TRUSTEES INVESTIGATION, & STUDENT DEFENSE



Robert Ryland, undated photograph, Robert Ryland Papers, Virginia Baptist Historical Society

A year after the "Vindex" letter, another anonymous accusation centered on Francis Wayland's work appeared in the proslavery publication *The South*. This time, Robert Ryland was directly accused of using Wayland's textbook to teach students the tenants of abolitionism. In a letter titled "Beware of the 'Traitors!,'" a writer declared that Ryland "has dared and still dares to use his most strenuous exertions for the overthrow of slavery – for sowing the seed of Abolitionism and implanting a spirit of Northern fanaticism in the minds of those entrusted to his care." Ryland, he continued, "holds an influential and responsible office," the care of "one to two hundred young men." In that position, "he devotes all his time and talents to the accomplishment of his fiendish purposes." The writer detailed Ryland beginning with Wayland and progressing from there, easing his students into antislavery and then abolitionist thinking: he

⁴⁷⁵ "Northern Books -- Wayland's Moral Science," *Richmond Enquirer*, September 23, 1856, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

“does not advance too boldly, but carefully feels the pulse of his patient ere he repeats his dose... until finally, when his class is so thoroughly imbued... taking the Bible in his hands, proceeds to gather from its pages a recognition of his detestable doctrines.” The letter was signed *Amicus Doulcias*, Latin for “Sweet Friend.”⁴⁷⁶

The Richmond College Board of Trustees reacted immediately. With Jeremiah Bell Jeter serving as President *pro tem* in Ryland’s place, the board published an item in the *Richmond Enquirer* stating that while they had complete confidence in Ryland’s “views on the subject of slavery, as privately and publicly expressed... for the entire satisfaction of the public” the board would continue with an investigation into the accusation “until we have arrived at as full a knowledge of the grounds of these charges as we can.” Trustees A.M. Poindexter, James Thomas, Jr. and L.R. Spilman led the investigation committee.⁴⁷⁷ Their findings were summarized in the minutes of the Board of Trustees a week later: “Resolved: That the charges made against Rev. Robert Ryland and the Students of Richmond College are without foundation and proven to be false.”⁴⁷⁸

The statement of the Board of Trustees was published in the *Religious Herald* as the second section of an item titled “Vindication of President Ryland” which also contained a student statement signed by members of the graduating class. The eleven students conceded that Ryland used Wayland’s text, which “contains sentiments on the subject of slavery at variance with those of the Southern people.” They insisted, however, that Ryland, “has repeatedly expressed his reluctance to continue the use of said work, urging as the reason for his continuance that he considered it more clear and conclusive on the general principles of the science than any other work extant.” Regarding enslavement, Ryland “expressed in the most decisive manner, his disapprobation of the principles maintained by Dr. Wayland, and that he always spoke favorably of the institution of slavery.” The students described Ryland “omit[ing] that portion of Dr. Wayland’s work which embodied his views of slavery – not even requiring us to read it.” Instead, they wrote, he “recommended to our perusal and study the works of Dew, Stringfellow, Bledsoe, and others.” They concluded their portion of the “vindication” with the insistence that “Dr. Ryland has never, in a single instance, attempted to poison our minds with ‘Abolition principles.’ We would state, also, in this connection, that Dr. Ryland is an owner of slaves, and, so far as we have means of ascertaining, has always been.”⁴⁷⁹

Among the writers that the students described Ryland recommending, it was Rev. Thornton Stringfellow of Culpeper County, Virginia who had the closest ties to Richmond College. Stringfellow was among the top donors to the Richmond College endowment between July and November 21, 1844 and was well known for his fervent defense of slavery in an essay centered on the biblical justifications for “hold[ing]” and “transmit[ing]” men, women, and children. It was first

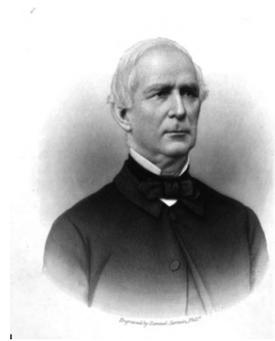
⁴⁷⁶ “Beware of ‘Traitors!’” *The South*, clipping hand-dated “12/12/1857,” RRP, file 10.003, VBHS.

⁴⁷⁷ Jeremiah Bell Jeter and John M. Murray, “For the Enquirer,” *Richmond Enquirer*, December 22, 1857, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#).

⁴⁷⁸ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, December 22, 1857, University Archives, VBHS.

⁴⁷⁹ “Vindication of President Ryland,” *Religious Herald*, December 24, 1857, VBHS.

published in the *Religious Herald* then separately as *A Brief Examination of Scripture Testimony on the Institution of Slavery* (1850).⁴⁸⁰ In it, Stringfellow marshalled biblical evidence to argue that enslaved people were their “master’s money.” He ended a section on biblical law and slavery with a summary of his overall approach to the subject: “Here is the authority, from God himself, to hold men and women, and their increase, in slavery, and to transmit them as property forever.”⁴⁸¹ Historian Beth Schweiger describes Stringfellow as “one of the foremost apologists for proslavery Christianity in the South.”⁴⁸²



Jeremiah Bell Jeter, from *Recollections of a Long Life*, frontmatter

Stringfellow’s structure of religious support for enslavement had a significant effect on a number of his fellow Baptists, including Richmond College charter trustee, Jeremiah Bell Jeter, who described Stringfellow as responsible for shaping his own beliefs regarding human bondage and forced labor. Jeter, once among those termed “reluctant slave owners,” reconsidered his stance in light of Stringfellow’s argument, writing that “[i]t was a plain, logical, and vigorous statement of the scriptural teaching on the subject. On reading it, I remember remarking that the Scriptures were more favorable to slavery than I had been.” Jeter wrote that although he had previously believed that “slavery in the South was allowable from the necessity of the case, and that its abolition would be fraught with more mischief than good,” Stringfellow’s pamphlet “placed the subject in a new

light.”:

Moses, under certain limitations, established slavery. It could not have been wrong. Christ and his apostles lived and labored in countries where slavery existed under Roman law; and though they dared to proclaim the most unwelcome truths, and reprove every kind of sin, at the peril of their lives, they neither spoke nor wrote a word in condemnation of slavery.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸⁰ Robert Ryland, “Funds collected for the endowment of Richmond College,” *Religious Herald*, November 21, 1844, VBHS; Thornton Stringfellow, *A Brief Examination of Scripture Testimony on the Institution of Slavery* (1850), 9, Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina Library, University of North Carolina, [link](#).

⁴⁸¹ Stringfellow, 9, [link](#).

⁴⁸² Beth Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth Century America*, New York: Oxford University Press (2000), 72.

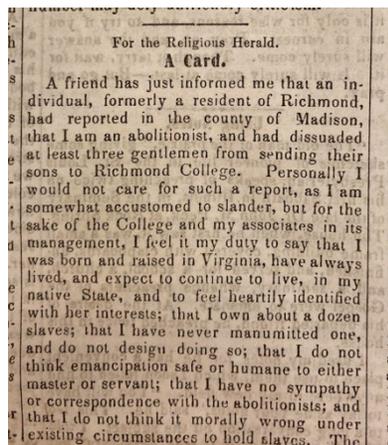
⁴⁸³ Jeter, *Recollections of a Long Life*, 70. Jeremiah Bell Jeter, *The Recollections of a Long Life*, Richmond, Virginia: The Religious Herald (1891), 70, [link](#). Jeter’s own history as initially resistant to enslavement and a “reluctant” enslaver warrants additional study. Jeter wrote that he “grew up with a determination never to own a slave,” although “[w]hether slavery was right or wrong” was not his issue with bondage. Rather the “management . . . responsibility, care and trouble” and the “firm authority” which he saw as necessary that were “uncongenial to my taste and habits.” He came to enslave people through one or more of his marriages. In 1840, Jeter enslaved three people (United States Federal Census, 1840, Richmond, Ward 3, Henrico County, Virginia, “Jeremiah B. Jeter,” 216). In 1860, Jeter enslaved one person, an eleven-year-old boy, whom he hired out to W.M. McFarlane (“W.M. McFarlane . . . employer,” “J.B. Jeter . . . owner,” Federal Census of 1860, Slave Schedule, Henrico County, Virginia, Richmond, Ward 2, 47). Following Jeter’s wedding to Mary Dabbs in 1863, he controlled all of those associated with her late husband’s estate.

Historical theologian Jeffrey P. Straub points out that, after Jeter wrote this reflection on Stringfellow and his own views during the enslavement era, his “next paragraph...went on to celebrate the end of slavery ‘by the overruling Providence of God.’”⁴⁸⁴

In 1856, six years after the publication of his *Examination of Scripture Testimony on the Institution of Slavery*, Stringfellow was awarded Richmond College’s first honorary Doctorate of Divinity (D.D.)⁴⁸⁵

The accusation that Ryland was an abolitionist and his subsequent “vindication” were followed closely in the regional press. In December, after the publication of the students’ defense of Ryland, the *Alexandria Gazette* described the related events to its readers and wrote that “the students deny... the truth of the allegation” and “Dr. Ryland stands high as a Christian, a scholar, and a gentleman; is himself the owner of slaves; and is, probably, as true and loyal to the State and any citizen within its limits. To attempt to injure him, will only make him friends.”⁴⁸⁶

3.2.2.5 MADISON COUNTY RUMOR AND RYLAND'S RELIGIOUS HERALD CARDS



Robert Ryland, "A Card," *Religious Herald*, September 14, 1858, VBHS

In September 1858, a year after Robert Ryland was accused of being an abolitionist by the anonymous letter writer in *The South* and cleared following an investigation by the Richmond College Board of Trustees, the accusation of his having abolitionist sympathies appeared to arise again. Word had reached Ryland that someone in Madison County, Virginia had discouraged three families from sending their sons to Richmond College. Ryland took out an item (“A Card”) in the *Religious Herald* on September 14th to address the matter. In it he wrote that he was used to the accusation of being an abolitionist (“I am somewhat accustomed to slander...”) but he felt that “for the sake of the College and my

In 1860, Josiah Dabbs had enslaved twenty-five people. Jeter noted that the “state forbade” their emancipation unless they left Virginia, but he said it was what he saw as their inability to support themselves that decided the question: “It was simply cruelty to free a mother with dependent children.” He considered sending them to Liberia but “none of them desired [it].” He was also concerned that if he sent away “the men who could support themselves and aid in the support of others, and retain the women and children to be supported by my own labors” he would be “stretching my humanity quite beyond the power of its endurance.” Those he held “earnestly protested” being sold or given away and Jeter determined that “it was not only allowable for me, but my solemn obligation, to hold and rule them, for their interest and for my own.” (*Recollections of a Long Life*, 68-69).

⁴⁸⁴ Jeffrey P. Straub, “Baptists, Jeremiah Bell Jeter, and the ‘Blighting Withering Curse,’” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 25, (2020), 109.

⁴⁸⁵ Alley, 42.

⁴⁸⁶ [“The charge against Rev. Dr. Ryland...”], *Alexandria Gazette*, December 30, 1857, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

associates in its management” he should provide a public declaration of his attitudes about enslavement.⁴⁸⁷

Ryland began by affirming his loyalty to Virginia and “her interests.” While such phrasing was often used to communicate loyalty to the enslavement system without detailing it, Ryland did not remain in the realm of euphemism, but instead followed the statement with specifics. He wrote that he currently enslaved “about a dozen” people and that he had never freed anyone whom he enslaved. This indicates that Ryland distinguished his role as an enslaver from his having operated as a purchasing agent for Thomas U. Allen and the man named John who died in 1849. Regarding emancipation and the morality of enslavement, Ryland wrote that he did not believe “emancipation safe or humane to either master or servant” and asserted, “I do not think it morally wrong under existing circumstances to hold slaves,” echoing the beliefs he recorded in 1835 in the open letter to Francis Wayland (Section 2.1.3). The next portion appears to indicate what Ryland believed to be the genesis of the rumor and is followed by the effect it could have on his social position: “[t]he Providence of God has made it my duty to preach the gospel to the people of color, but I do not see why this relation to them should annoy me with vague suspicions, or affect my standing among right-minded men.” Unlike the accusation the year before, which focused on his role as a teacher, the inciting rumor in September of 1858 appeared to emanate from his work as pastor at First African Baptist Church.

I feel it is my duty to say that I was born and raised in Virginia, have always lived, and expect to continue to live, in my native State, and to feel heartily identified with her interests; that I own about a dozen slaves; that I have never manumitted one, and do not design doing so; that I do not think emancipation safe or humane to either master or servant; that I have no sympathy or correspondence with the abolitionists; and that I do not think it morally wrong under existing circumstances to hold slaves. The Providence of God has made it my duty to preach the gospel to the people of color, but I do not see why this relation to them should annoy me with vague suspicions, or affect my standing among right-minded men.⁴⁸⁸

Two months later, on November 18th, Ryland placed another item in the *Religious Herald* addressing the Madison County rumor in which he wrote that “letters from Madison” had assured him that the person he accused of slander “said much less of me than I at first believed he did.” Discovering that what he had heard “was not dictated by malicious spirit” and that the source “did not ‘dissuade’ persons from sending their sons to Richmond College.” Ryland concluded by stating, “I hereby revoke the charge of ‘slander’ implied in my former card.”⁴⁸⁹ On December 10, 1858, the

⁴⁸⁷ Robert Ryland, “A Card,” *Religious Herald*, September 14, 1858, 147, col. 3, VBHS. The *Religious Herald* was a bi-weekly, Richmond-based Baptist publication that frequently published the writing of Ryland and other Baptist leaders. It was read and excerpted by editors of publications in the North and South, as indicated by an article in the Boston-based abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, that shared the information contained in Ryland’s “Card” (“Rev. Dr. Ryland Not an Abolitionist,” *The Liberator*, December 10, 1858, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank).

⁴⁸⁸ Robert Ryland, “A Card,” *Religious Herald*, September 14, 1858, 147, col. 3, VBHS.

⁴⁸⁹ Robert Ryland, “Another Card,” *Religious Herald*, Nov. 18, 1858, 3, col. 4, VBHS.

details of Ryland’s initial unalloyed statement on slavery, minus the slander accusation that was later retracted, was shared in the Boston abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, which covered it under the headline, “Rev. Dr. Ryland Not An Abolitionist”:

Rev. Dr. Ryland, President of Richmond (Va.) College, has felt called upon to publish a card in the editorial columns of the Religious Herald, denying the statement of an individual... who said he was an Abolitionist, thereby dissuading at least three gentlemen from sending their sons to the College. He says that he owns a dozen slaves – that he never has manumitted one, and, what is more, never intends doing so.⁴⁹⁰

3.2.3 CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT

The 1850s saw significant growth of Richmond College spurred by the successful fundraising led by several agents including Robert Ryland. This resulted in the construction of a large campus building and the upgrading of many other campus structures. Portions of the project were completed by at least one company that used the work of enslaved men. Two newspaper items describe men who were enslaved by Glenn & Davis, the masonry contractors, in the two years immediately preceding the company’s work on the “main edifice” and other campus improvements.⁴⁹¹

3.2.3.1 GAS SYSTEM

The matter of heating thirty-seven rooms at the growing college took up a great deal of administrative attention. In addition to warming the students’ rooms, in 1851, Ryland wrote of the college’s frequent use of Boarding Department “servants” to tend five fires in classrooms and the laboratory, leaving the department “rather burdened with this class of duties imposed upon the servants.” The professors, he wrote, “should hire a servant to attend on them, & it proposes to board & clothe that servant for his extra work.”⁴⁹²

At Robert Ryland’s urging, the college developed a “gas works” that produced the means of centrally serving much of the campus.⁴⁹³ The system, using “gas made of pine wood,” was described as “entirely successful” in the *Alexandria Gazette*, but was ultimately plagued by problems including student complaints about irregular heat distribution.⁴⁹⁴ Ryland was responding to dissatisfaction with the system when he wrote that he disagreed with the belief that the gas system

⁴⁹⁰ “Rev. Dr. Ryland Not an Abolitionist,” *The Liberator*, December 10, 1858, Early American Newspaper, Newsbank.

⁴⁹¹ “College Notes,” inserted in the Richmond College Board of Trustees minutes between February 3, 1855 and April 10, 1855, University Archives; “Richmond College,” *Daily Dispatch*, August 22, 1855, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#); “Albert Thomas, slave to Glenn & Davis” in “Shooting Case,” *Richmond Mail*, January 14, 1854, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#); “Henry, slave to Glenn & Davis” in “Assault,” *Daily Dispatch*, March 2, 1852, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

⁴⁹² Robert Ryland, President’s Report, December 2, 1851, Trustees Records 1851-1860, University Archives, University of Richmond, VBHS.

⁴⁹³ Robert Ryland, “President’s Quarterly Report, January 9, 1860,” Trustees Records, VBHS

⁴⁹⁴ “Wood-Gas,” *Alexandria Gazette*, October 1, 1856, Virginia Chronicle.

President's Report referred to in the minutes contained a substantial amount of information on "future arrangements in making fires in the students [sic] rooms and the Boarding Department."⁴⁹⁸

3.2.3.2. FUNDRAISING AND GROWTH

Much of the fundraising for Richmond College during the decade was due to the efforts of Rev. Abraham "Abram" M. Poindexter. Poindexter, a prominent Baptist minister and fundraiser for Columbian College, enslaved at least forty-eight people in 1850.⁴⁹⁹ In 1852, his work to endow Richmond College with a hundred thousand dollars was described as "progressing with admirable success." By April of that year, Poindexter had already raised \$38,000 from contributions in the city of Richmond alone and was confident that "the amount will ultimately reach to \$40,000 or more." The selling of "subscriptions" to the college which began in the 1840s, as well as other efforts by Poindexter and others, led to increasing financial stability at the institution.⁵⁰⁰ In 1859, at a meeting of the Virginia Baptist General Association, Rev. J.L. Burrows called on the assembled group to support Richmond College in its effort to "secure an endowment" by helping to raise the quarter million dollars needed by the institution "within a few years."⁵⁰¹ While Poindexter was fulfilling the duties of the General Agent for the college and others were also helping to establish a significant endowment, Robert Ryland continued to solicit funds as well. On August 14, 1859, Ryland spoke at the annual session of the Baptists of the Potomac Association and "urged the claims of Richmond College."⁵⁰²

3.2.3.3 RYLAND LEADING THE FACULTY & PROMOTING THE COLLEGE

Robert Ryland's relationship with the faculty was, in the seminary and early Richmond College years, often intimate since a number of teachers and professors lived in the Ryland household. As the college and the number of faculty members grew, Ryland continued to provide his home to professors, and viewed the boarding of one man and his wife as a way to market the institution: "Professor Adkins & wife are to board with us! At \$50 pr. month for everything except washing. They are plain - easy-to-please people and we thought it best to take them here as it wd tend to identify him with the College." His relations with faculty members were not always smooth,

⁴⁹⁸ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, January 10, 1860, University Archives, University of Richmond, VBHS.

⁴⁹⁹ Federal Census Slave Schedule, 1850, Virginia, Halifax, Northern District, "Abraham Poindexter," The National Archive in Washington DC; Washington, DC; National Archives and Records Administration, Microform Publication: M432; Title: Seventh Census of The United States, 1850; Record Group: Records of the Bureau of the Census; Record Group Number: 29. Poindexter had homes in Halifax County and the city of Richmond (Henry S. Burrage, *Baptist Hymn Writers*, Portland, Maine: Brown, Thurston & Company (1888), 342).

⁵⁰⁰ "Richmond College," *Daily Dispatch*, April 7, 1852; "The Richmond College," *Daily Dispatch*, March 12, 1852; Daniel, "Genesis of Richmond College," 145.

⁵⁰¹ "Baptist General Association, Thirty-sixth Anniversary," *Richmond Enquirer*, May 10, 1859, Virginia Chronicle.

⁵⁰² "Religious News," *Daily Dispatch*, August 15, 1859, Virginia Chronicle.

however. Ryland described “disclosures” of George Dabney (Latin and French) and Sidney H. Owens (Greek) as “painful and humiliating,” writing his oldest son, William Ryland, that the situation, “caus[ed] me a deal of anxiety as to my future course.” In response to the conflict, Ryland had appealed to Jeremiah Bell Jeter to determine if “prominent Baptists were favorable to my continuance here.” The result was positive. After Jeter visited several Baptist associations, Ryland wrote that he had assured him that “almost the unanimous opinion of the brethren is in favor of my remaining here, not only as desirable, but as a necessary adjunct to the College, that 4/5 of the patronage for years past are due to my personal influence and that I must not resign!”⁵⁰³ Details of what sparked the conflict have not been located.

At times, Ryland took a philosophical view of students’ scholarly focus – “Nothing new about college. Some boys studious others idle. Some good others bad” – but he continued to act as a vocal institutional advocate and recruiter.⁵⁰⁴ In 1858 he shared his frustration that prospective students were being drawn off by the University of Virginia: “[S]o many Freshmen go to the U. [University of Virginia]. That splendid humbug is killing all the Colleges in the state & ruining many of our best boys by taking them away from suitable instruction.”⁵⁰⁵

3.2.4 PERSONAL LIFE

As the college stabilized, so did Ryland’s personal life. His tax receipts show increases in his property including ownership of a carriage, real estate, and enslaved people associated with specific properties.⁵⁰⁶ His personal estate was valued at \$53,000 by the end of the decade, which according to one estimate would have the present-day value of 1.7 million dollars.⁵⁰⁷ He was offered the honorary degree, Doctorate of Divinity by Shurtleff College (Illinois) in 1852, but declined it, writing that “such titles do not accord with the simplicity of the gospel” and he believed he was “not sufficiently learned to deserve them.”⁵⁰⁸ He self-published *Lectures on the Apocalypse* in 1858 and sold copies to individuals and churches including two copies to First African Baptist Church. He continued to derive significant income from hiring out those he enslaved (see Section 3.4). His family with Betty Ryland grew with the births of three daughters between 1850 and 1860, and by the end of the decade his letters reflected relative professional ease and personal happiness.

⁵⁰³ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, September 30, 1859, RRP, 01.078-.079, VBHS.

⁵⁰⁴ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, January 29, 1859, RRP, file 01.063, VBHS.

⁵⁰⁵ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, September 27, 1858, RRP, file 01.070, VBHS.

⁵⁰⁶ “State Taxes 1855,” “Robt Ryland,” RRP, 34.024; “County Taxes, 1857,” “Robert Ryland,” RRP 34.072, VBHS; United States Federal Census of 1860, “Robert Ryland,” Western Subdivision, Henrico, Virginia, 170-171, ancestry.com.

⁵⁰⁷ Samuel H. Williamson, “Purchasing Power Today of a US Dollar Transaction in the Past,” MeasuringWorth, 2020.

⁵⁰⁸ “D.D. Declined,” *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, September 9, 1852, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#). Ryland did accept the degree the following decade when it was offered to him by his *alma mater*, Columbian College (“Further Exercises at the Columbian College Commencement,” *Evening Star* [Washington, D.C.], June 28, 1860, *Chronicling America*, [link](#)).

Following a holiday, Ryland wrote to his son, “This is the last day of the happiest vacation I ever spent.”⁵⁰⁹

3.2.4.1 ORDINATION OF WILLIAM RYLAND AND MINISTERIAL ADVICE TO CHARLES HILL RYLAND

Ryland had developed a fond relationship with his adult son, William Semple Ryland (1836-1906), and his letters to him contain everything from advice on ministry to a teasing correction of his son’s spelling: “Be sure to write soon, and don’t spell “until” with two ls — untill!!”⁵¹⁰ On August 23, 1859, while attending the annual session of the Baptists of the Potomac Association, Robert Ryland stood with William Ryland and delivered his son’s ministerial charge, the solemn statement by a senior Baptist to a recently ordained minister. “[I]n the presence of 3000 persons, in a beautiful grove,” Ryland saw his son begin what would be a lifetime of ministerial work.⁵¹¹ Ryland advised him to help future congregations weather difficulty when “[c]ircumstances may call for the discussion of disputed points”: “Let it be done frankly and independently, but mildly and courteously.” Ryland was clear about this necessity, though he stressed that “[t]his peaceable temper is not at war with zeal and uncompromising fidelity to the truth.”⁵¹² The moment between father and son was described as “a most powerful and touching one” and there was “scarcely a dry eye” in the crowd. William Ryland would settle in Winchester to begin the process of developing a church there and Robert Ryland continued to offer him advice on the practical aspects of beginning his ministerial life, including approaches to securing a well-located church for his new congregation and the cheapest way to travel.⁵¹³

At the close of the decade, Ryland provided less formal advice to his nephew, Charles Hill Ryland as he left to begin his ministerial studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He encouraged Charles Ryland’s confidence and shared what he felt were the qualities a minister must project to a congregation:

Hold up yr. head & stand on yr. legs when you go to preach, look the people right in the eyes, & let em have it. Whatever you may think of yrself out of the pulpit, when you are in it, consider yrself a man, yea a man of authority – a great man. Away with that mean, sneaky feeling that seems to beg pardon of all flesh... You are a preacher & cherish that you are, must be, have a right to be a preacher & that you mean to be heard — & felt.⁵¹⁴

⁵⁰⁹ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, September 30, 1859, RRP, 01.078, VBHS.

⁵¹⁰ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, August 31, 1854, RRP, 01.077, VBHS; Robert Ryland to William Ryland, January 21, 1859, RRP, 01.072, VBHS.

⁵¹¹ *Richmond Whig*, August 23, 1859, 2; *Daily Dispatch*, August 15, 1859.

⁵¹² Robert Ryland, "Council to ministers: An ordination charge to a young minister by his father," Charleston, South Carolina: Baptist Publication Society, Virginia Baptist Historical Society.

⁵¹³ *Richmond Whig*, August 23, 1859, 2; *Daily Dispatch*, August 15, 1859; Robert Ryland to William Ryland, May 9, 1860, RRP, 1.065, VBHS.

⁵¹⁴ Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, November 8, 1859, RRP, 25.013-014, VBHS.

3.3 1860-1865

By 1860, Ryland had reached a point of personal and professional stability and satisfaction. While he continued to take great care of his personal finances, and noted a lack of fluidity at times, as his son was beginning his own ministry, Ryland was able to offer William Ryland the funds to purchase a church building or to construct a new church in Winchester, Virginia.⁵¹⁵

His feelings about the administration of Richmond College were among the most positive he ever expressed about the institution, “The faculty is more active and more disposed to adopt my suggestions. My ‘plan of operations’ is going into effect and is to do good.” While it is not clear what his “plan of operations” was, Ryland was generally pleased with the faculty at this point. After previous difficulty persuading professors to attend daily chapel, he wrote in October 1860, “One professor attends prayers always with me.”⁵¹⁶ As the president of the institution, Ryland continued his correspondence with parents of prospective students. In one letter, he detailed the qualifications of Richmond College professors to the father of potential student and noted that the college was well positioned to prepare the man’s son for a future course of study at the University of Virginia, much more so than “Dr. Harrison’s school.” Richmond College, Ryland continued, taught some subjects – “Nat[ural] Phil[osophy], & Chemistry & Moral Science” – “more thoroughly... than any private school can do.” Ryland also touted the “general culture” at Richmond College, a quality that was “rather ignored by the schools that ‘prepare’ youths for the U” and he highlighted the advantages of a “suburban college” which he believed “greatly superior to those of the U. or any of its rural preparatory schools.”⁵¹⁷

In 1860, one hundred fourteen students were enrolled at Richmond College and the institution was established enough that its alumni had regular meetings which “often resulted in recommendations to the administration or Board of [T]rustees.”⁵¹⁸ It was a “reputable institution,” which “possessed an endowment of \$100,000, boasted an expanding curriculum, and had plans for the establishment of a law department.”⁵¹⁹ The institution’s future and Ryland’s own were pitched into uncertainty with start of the Civil War and the closure of the campus in 1861. Census records, Ryland’s personal ledgers and letters, and the records of the institution for years between 1860 and 1865 also provided many of the last known accounts of the enslaved people who were held by Robert Ryland and those who were bound to the college through “hire.”

3.3.1 RYLAND’S PERSONAL ENSLAVEMENT

In the Federal Census Slave Schedule of 1860, Robert Ryland appears as the owner of fifteen people listed in three entries: his primary entry, which shows nine people; his hire of four people to Agness

⁵¹⁵ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, September 30, 1859, RRP, 1.078; Robert Ryland to William Ryland, September 21, 1860, RRP, 1.044, VBHS.

⁵¹⁶ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, October 13, 1860, RRP, 01.041, VBHS.

⁵¹⁷ Robert Ryland to unnamed recipient, August 2, 1860, RRP, 14.028-030, VBHS.

⁵¹⁸ Alley, 45.

⁵¹⁹ Daniel, “The Genesis of Richmond College,” 149.

Cooper, which appears directly below his main entry and indicates that her campus house was the next one visited by the enumerator; and the hire of two people to a man named William Hendrick.

Robert Ryland:

Woman, age 75

Woman, age 35

Man, age 21

Young woman, age 19

Young man, age 18

Girl, age 16

Girl, age 6

Girl, age 3

Boy, age 1

Agness Cooper, Employer; “R. Ryland” (Henrico County) “owner”:

Woman, age 24

Girl, age 6

Girl, age 4

Girl, age 2

William Hendrick, Employer; “Dr. Ryland” (ditto from entry above, “Henrico”):

Woman, age 50

Girl, age 1

Nine people who appeared in the 1850 Slave Schedule entry do not appear in the 1860 version.⁵²⁰

3.3.1.1 WALKER LEE, SALLY, LUCY, JUDY, LOUISA, ELLEN, TOM & SAM

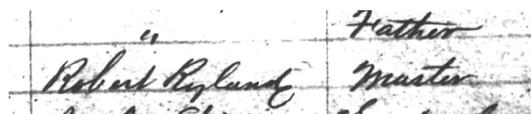
A man named Walker began appearing in Robert Ryland’s personal letters and records in 1860. At that time, Ryland had been hiring him out to what he referred to as “the Factory.” Walker became ill, and Ryland wrote in a letter to his son that he was unable to work. After describing the illness of his wife, Betty Ryland, he wrote, “Walker too has not been to the Factory for 1 1/2 months.”⁵²¹ While

⁵²⁰ United States Federal Census of 1860, Slave Schedule, Henrico County, Western Subdivision, “Robert Ryland,” 44-45; “Agness Cooper,” employer and “R. Ryland,” owner, Henrico County, owner, 45; “Wm Hendrick,” employer, “Dr. Ryland,” owner, 28. In 1860, Robert Hill Ryland, M.D., the son of Robert Ryland’s brother Samuel Ryland, was living in Louisiana and the seven people he enslaved were enumerated there. Given Robert Ryland’s prominence in Richmond, the enumerator’s use of “Henrico,” as his place of residence, and the frequent use of “Dr. Ryland” to distinguish him in other contexts long before he received the degree from Columbian College, it is most probable that “Dr. Ryland” refers to Robert Ryland, not his Louisiana nephew. United States Federal Census, 1860, Census Place: *West Feliciana, Louisiana*; Page: 157; Family History Library Film: 803411; United States Federal Census, 1860, Slave Schedule, “R.H. Ryland,” Louisiana, West Feliciana, Ward 8, The National Archives in Washington DC; Washington DC, USA; Eighth Census of the United States 1860; Series Number: M653; Record Group: Records of the Bureau of the Census; Record Group Number: 29).

⁵²¹ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, November 20, 1860, RRP, 01.039, VBHS.

Ryland’s own records do not provide Walker’s last name, the minutes that he maintained at First African Baptist Church record Walker Lee as among those baptized by Robert Ryland at First African Baptist Church on July 30, 1859. Ryland recorded the man’s full name and beside it, in the section where he routinely wrote the name of an individual’s enslaver, Ryland wrote his own name, “Ro. Ryland.”⁵²² The ledger pages listing Ryland’s personal receipts between 1862 and 1864 show Ryland resumed hiring out Walker Lee during those years and received payments for his labor. He also appeared three times in Ryland’s personal accounts between 1862 and 1863. Ryland hired him out, along with Matilda and Ellen, though he does not record to whom.⁵²³ He appeared again in 1863, this time on a list of family expenses, specifically line items that record visits from a Dr. Snead and Dr. James Beale. Over the year, he, Sally, Lucy, Judy, Louisa, Ellen, and Tom were visited by both doctors. Notations also appear for “Aggy & children” and “Sally & children.” Unlike others who were named in Ryland’s ledger entries in this period —Matilda, Tom, Sally, and Ellen— Lee no longer appeared in the receipts of 1864, indicating that he had either died, was unable to work, or was kept at the Ryland home rather than being hired out.⁵²⁴ Further details of these and other enslaved people who were named in Ryland’s personal ledger entries are included in Section 3.4.

In September of 1862, a man named Sam was recorded as having died in Henrico County. He died from “skrofula,” which refers to a glandular swelling that likely indicated tuberculosis. At the time of Sam’s death, he was enslaved by Robert Ryland, who was referred to as his “Master.”⁵²⁵ According to the Federal Census “Slave Schedule” of 1860, Ryland enslaved two young men at the time of enumeration, ages eighteen and twenty-one. His letters and records indicate that he already enslaved Tom and Walker Lee, so Sam may have been newly enslaved by Ryland between 1860 and 1862. As of this writing, no references to Sam (d. 1862) have been located in Robert Ryland’s papers so this cannot be confirmed.



3.3.1.2 MARIA AND PARTHENA

After Ryland sent Maria to Farmington in 1845 to avoid a possible negative reaction of congregants at First African Baptist Church should he have auctioned her, there were no further references to her until he noted his sale of she and a woman or girl named Parthena in 1864.

⁵²² Minutes of the Deacons of First African Baptist Church, July 30, 1859, Library of Virginia.

⁵²³ Robert Ryland, Ledger II, Family receipts, RRP, 55.2.074-075; 55.2.033-035, VBHS.

⁵²⁴ Robert Ryland, Ledger II, Family receipts, RRP, 55.2.33-34, VBHS.

⁵²⁵ Henrico County Record of Births and Deaths, 1862, Library of Virginia.

The records of Ryland’s private expenses and receipts for 1863 and 1864, on a page he subtitled, “Bellum Horrendum,” record details of the state of his finances in the last years of war. While he was liquidating some assets, such as his “parlour carpet,” he continued to invest in the Confederacy, purchasing bonds in June and August of 1863. Ryland’s entries also show that he was deriving income from his hiring out of Matilda, Sally, Ellen and Tom. The absence of Maria here and in Ryland’s expenses may indicate that she was still in King & Queen County and her labor was not profiting Ryland’s household. On January 22, 1864, however, as part of an exchange of Confederate bond coupons with his nephew, William Christopher Fleet, Robert Ryland sold Maria and a woman or girl named Parthena, writing “I disposed of Maria & Parthena to W.C. Fleet at \$2400.”⁵²⁶ Fleet’s property was situated in King & Queen County, and it is possible that Maria and Parthena did not change locations. It is also possible that they did.



No other records of Maria and Parthena have been located.

3.3.2 ENSLAVED PEOPLE “HIRED” ON CAMPUS

Robert Ryland’s 1860 Slave Schedule entry is flanked by those of the two campus “hotel keepers,” A[nselem] Brock and William Lindsay, an indication of the census enumerator’s journey from hotel to house to hotel. Brock hired five enslaved people for his boarding house. Lindsay’s entry shows one woman that he personally enslaved and six other enslaved people that he “hired” to serve Richmond College students and work for the portion of the boarding operation that he oversaw.

The entries provide the ages of the hired people along with the names and locations of those who enslaved them and had leased them out for the use of those at the college:

Enslaved People “Hired” in Brock’s Hotel/Dormitory:

- Woman, age 40, enslaved by L. McRae (Henrico County)
- Woman, age 25, enslaved by Mrs. Cobbit (South Carolina)
- Man, age 20, enslaved by Mrs. Meade (Richmond)
- Young man, age 17, enslaved by Mr. Farish (Henrico County)
- Woman, age 30, enslaved by Mrs. Byrd (D – [illegible; possibly D.C. or Dia.])⁵²⁷

Enslaved People “Hired” in Lindsay’s Hotel/Dormitory:

- Man, age 50, enslaved by L. Taylor (James City County)
- Man, age 35, enslaved by Roy Temple (New Kent County)
- Young man, age 18, enslaved by Mr. Rawlings (Orange County)
- Boy, age 16, enslaved by Roy Temple (New Kent County)

⁵²⁶ Robert Ryland, Ledger II, “Receipts for the year 1864,” RRP, 55.2.035, VBHS.

⁵²⁷ Federal Census of 1860, Slave Schedule, Henrico County, Virginia, Western Subdivision, 44.

Boy, age 14, enslaved by Ann Mutter (Richmond)
Woman, age 30, enslaved by Lewis Turner (Henrico)

Lindsay also personally enslaved one woman, age 70.⁵²⁸

The last enslaver noted among those who hired people out to Lindsay's oversight was Lewis Turner, a professor of mathematics and astronomy at Richmond College who had acted as college steward in 1854.⁵²⁹ It is possible that a woman he enslaved and hired to the college while he was steward may have continued to labor there through the last half of the 1850s, but available records cannot confirm this.

⁵²⁸ Federal Census of 1860, Slave Schedule, Henrico County, Virginia, Western Subdivision, 45.

⁵²⁹ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, March 7, 1854, University Archives, University of Richmond, VBHS; "Richmond College," *Morning Mail*, May 3, 1853.

3.3.3 CAMPUS USE BY CONFEDERATE MILITARY

After Virginia joined the Confederacy in May of 1861, the campus was used for “several months” by Confederate soldiers while the Board of Trustees formed a tentative plan to reopen Richmond College.⁵³⁰ According to board minutes, on August 18th, a motion was passed that “duties of the College be resumed on the 1st of October.” As president, Ryland was “requested to notify the authorities of the Confederate States to that effect, and also to have the usual advertisement made in the newspapers, and also to have the premises put in proper order.” Professor of Greek, C.H. Toy, was scheduled to provide military instruction to students.⁵³¹ Ryland noted “soldiers on campus” in a report to the trustees. In it he detailed the condition of the campus following a period of occupation: “[M]uch injury has been done to the furniture, enclosures, shrubbery & buildings, yet I do not think the friends of the College will regret its appropriation to the use of our patriotic volunteers.” Included in the disruption and disarray was the disappearance of a portion of the college’s financial records. A ledger from the previous session which had been left in view was “destroyed or removed by the soldiers...Indeed the books for the last two sessions were lost, but that for session before last was recovered & placed in the hands of the Committee.”⁵³² A search of institutional material at the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, in Boatwright Library’s Special Collections and Rare Books, and other locations have not yielded this ledger that Ryland saved and passed to other trustees.

Ryland offered to give his thoughts on the possibility of a military hospital on college grounds, but he was also still thinking session by session, and anticipating a return to normal operations. He wrote of the search for a Greek professor for the coming session and the consideration of a school for younger boys in the future. Expecting students by the following session he wrote of storing coal and allowing “Hotel Keepers” to prepare and advertise. Ryland stressed that if this was not to be the plan, the professors needed to be notified so they could “seek other business, if they desire it.”⁵³³ On August 24th, however, the *Daily Dispatch* reported that the “directors” of the college had recently resolved to provide the campus to “a committee of Louisiana Gentlemen, to be used by them as a hospital for the sick and wounded soldiers of the Confederate States Army.”⁵³⁴

3.3.4 FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE COLLEGE AND INVESTMENT IN THE CONFEDERACY

⁵³⁰ “The Right Spirit,” *Daily Dispatch*, August 24, 1861, [link](#).

⁵³¹ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, August 18, 1861; “Genesis of Richmond College,” 134.

⁵³² Robert Ryland, President’s Report, undated, Trustees Records, University Archives, Virginia Baptist Historical Society. This document was later dated “1862?” although the description of Brock and Lindsay as current hotelkeepers and the plan to consider the use of the campus as a hospital indicates it was written before August 1861.

⁵³³ Robert Ryland, President’s Report, [“1862?”] – Ryland’s description of damage by soldiers and his consideration of a hospital on the campus makes it likely that this report was written in the late summer of 1861.

⁵³⁴ “Richmond College,” *Central Presbyterian*, August 31, 1861, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

At a called meeting of the Board of Trustees in November of 1862, the board considered the sale of institutional investments to fund the purchase of Confederate bonds. After postponing action on the question for three days and on the motion of L.R. Spilman, the trustees voted that the Treasurer was “authorized to sell the Bonds held by the college of the City of Richmond, Petersburg, and Lynchburg and reinvest... in 8% Confederate Bonds.”⁵³⁵ On June 15, 1863, the Board of Trustees noted the receipt of two thousand dollars from the estate of James D. Witt for the education of students recommended by the Baptist General Association of Virginia.⁵³⁶ In response to a ten-thousand dollar bequest from James Crane recorded on October 20th the board authorized Ryland to represent the board in a Chancery case centered on the settlement of the estate.⁵³⁷ In November, word of another gift of two thousand dollars, from the estate of William S. Nunn, was published in the *Daily Dispatch* and the *Abingdon Virginian*.⁵³⁸ Three weeks later, the board authorized the treasurer to “invest any funds he has or may have in hand belonging to the College in Confederate Bonds.”⁵³⁹

Decades later, Ryland described his personal decision to invest in the Confederacy and the effect that may have had on the college endowment. He said his commitment to personally invest was spurred by the Vice President of the Confederate States of America, Alexander H. Stephens, who believed that “these bonds would be the best investment we could get” were the South to win the war.⁵⁴⁰ Ryland had liquidated parts of his wealth – selling a house, lot, and stock – and invested at least \$13,499 in Confederate funds.⁵⁴¹ Despite the objection of the trustee James Thomas, Jr., the college also liquidated the bulk of its investments in city and railroad stock “at great apparent profit,” and applied that profit to Confederate investments which were worthless after the war.⁵⁴² Ryland did not know “how far my counsel influenced the Board, but I confess that my firm conviction of the justice of our cause and my strong hope of its ultimate triumph induced me to invest my own means in the bonds, and to advise and to urge the trustees to the same policy.”⁵⁴³ Ryland described this enthusiasm for the Confederate investment and his effort to centralize the

⁵³⁵ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, November 27, 1862.

⁵³⁶ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, June 15, 1863.

⁵³⁷ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, October 20, 1863.

⁵³⁸ Nov. 4, 1863, *Daily Dispatch*, Perseus Digital Library (Nunn’s named was misprinted “Maun” in the *Daily Dispatch*); “Education,” *Abingdon Virginian*, November 13, 1863, *Virginia Chronicle*.

⁵³⁹ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, November 21, 1863.

⁵⁴⁰ Robert Ryland, *Society*, 23.

⁵⁴¹ Robert Ryland, Ledger 2, “Receipts for the year 1862,” RRP, 55.2.033, VBHS.

⁵⁴² John A. Broadus, *Memorial of James Thomas, Jr.*, Richmond: Everett Waddey (1888), 70.

⁵⁴³ Robert Ryland, *Society*, 23.

heating system with gas as his “two blunders” as President of the Richmond College Board of Trustees.⁵⁴⁴ The institution’s investment ultimately “destroyed most of its endowment.”⁵⁴⁵

3.3.5 COLPORTAGE

Ryland and his family continued to live in their home on campus “free of rent” during the Civil War.⁵⁴⁶ Following the closure of campus, Ryland derived income from a number of sources including his salary at First African Baptist Church, his hiring out of Walker, Ellen, Matilda, and others, rent from boarders that his family took in, the sale of Maria and Parthena, teaching students from the Richmond Female Institute, and his work for the Baptist Colportage Board.⁵⁴⁷

As Richmond began to fill with soldiers – those housed at Richmond College and elsewhere and the wounded in the city’s many hospitals – Robert Ryland saw a ministerial opportunity. Colportage involved the distribution of what Ryland described as, “thousands of tracts, hymn books, spelling books, and religious newspapers.”⁵⁴⁸ In June 1861, Ryland “visited among the 500 soldiers stationed at the college, and had found it exceedingly pleasant to engage in such labors.”⁵⁴⁹ During the visits he also provided face-to-face ministry and education. Ryland organized and praised the colportage efforts of others and regularly visited the hospitals himself, at times in the company of his wife, Betty Ryland, where they would distribute religious newspapers including the *Religious Herald*, *Central Presbyterian*, *Southern Churchman*, and *Christian Observer*, and minister to the spiritual and practical needs of the wounded.⁵⁵⁰

In July of 1861, Ryland was described as “laboring with commendable zeal for the spiritual good of the soldiers stationed at the College.” His pamphlet, *Volunteers Wanted* had been printed for the Colportage Board and was on the verge of publication. In the months that followed, mentions of him in the Richmond newspapers centered on this work.⁵⁵¹ Ryland received \$600.00 from the Colportage Board in 1862.⁵⁵² In October of that year, A.E. Dickenson, a former student at Richmond College and later a major benefactor and supporter of the institution, shared Ryland’s account of his past

⁵⁴⁴ Robert Ryland, *Society*, 23.

⁵⁴⁵ Robert Ryland, *Society*, 19.

⁵⁴⁶ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, June 15, 1863.

⁵⁴⁷ Robert Ryland, “Receipts for the year 1862,” Ledger 2, RRP, 2.033, VBHS; Richmond Female institute teaching (“I am to go about 50 times and to receive \$100.”) in letter to William Ryland, November 20, 1861, RRP, 1.035, VBHS.

⁵⁴⁸ "The Richmond Hospitals, An Interesting Report," *Richmond Enquirer*, October 17, 1862, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

⁵⁴⁹ *Religious Herald*, June 6, 1861, VBHS.

⁵⁵⁰ "The Richmond Hospitals, An Interesting Report," October 17, 1862; C[olumbus] Cornforth to Robert Ryland, November 13, 1865, writing from Pennsylvania, RRP, 01.027, VBHS.

⁵⁵¹ "Volunteers Wanted," *Daily Dispatch*, July 3, 1861, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

⁵⁵² Robert Ryland, Ledger 2, “Receipts for the Year 1862,” RRP, 55.2.033, VBHS.

eight months of ministry among the wounded. Ryland wrote, “[w]herever I found the most destitution, there I made the most frequent visits.” The response of the soldiers was a “deep and thrilling interest” in religion. Ryland saw among the men three classifications: those who were already deeply committed to the Christian faith, those who “were rejoicing in a recent hope of eternal life” and those who “exhibited a marked anxiety about their salvation” who “received with a docile spirit every suggestion made for their benefit.” Ryland viewed many of the men he spoke with as likely to “seek fellowship with the Churches of Christ immediately after their return home. Let pastors look out for them.” As was the case with so many subjects, Ryland’s detailed the opportunity for growing churches out of war with a tone of specificity and candor: “All these battles, with their hair-breadth escapes and terrible sufferings, have produced a softened state of mind which harmonizes well with our efforts to evangelize.”⁵⁵³

Among those Ryland visited was a wounded Union soldier in Libby Prison Hospital named Columbus Cornforth who had attended school with one of Robert Ryland’s sons. In a letter written to Ryland seven months after the end of the war, Cornforth described his return to Pennsylvania, and his recovery from his wounds, although his arm was “to a great degree, useless.” He thanked Ryland for visiting him in prison, and extended his gratitude to Betty Ryland, as well, who had sent him “pickles and preserves” that “did me a great deal of good.” Cornforth also complimented Ryland’s views on the possibility of postbellum denominational reunion that had been published in the newspaper. While Ryland’s published thoughts on the reuniting of American Baptists and Southern Baptists have not yet been located, Cornforth’s letter indicates that Ryland may not have felt such a reunion possible in the months immediately after the end of armed conflict: “I read your recent communication in the Examiner and think your view of union [struck through twice] denomination union the correct one. Facts go to sustain your position, though we might wish it other wise [sic]. As far as myself, I feel no bitterness to any one [sic]; though I did all in my power to sustain the government, and take satisfaction in reflecting upon my course of action. This is a fact which goes to show that your views of denominational reunion are true.”⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵³ "The Richmond Hospitals, An Interesting Report," *Richmond Enquirer*, October 17, 1862.

⁵⁵⁴ C[olumbus] Cornforth to Robert Ryland, November 13, 1865, writing from Pennsylvania, RRP, 01.027, VBHS.

3.4 PRIVATE LEDGER ENTRIES 1840-1864

Robert Ryland's ledger entries offer a highly detailed look at day-to-day life in antebellum Richmond. The pre-1841 pages provide a record of the seminary-college hire of enslaved people, and Ryland's hiring out of those he enslaved both to the institution and, in the case of Sam in 1838, to the James River and Kanawha Canal. The entries that cover the next twenty-four years contain details of Ryland's extensive personal use of the system of leasing out (and at times leasing) enslaved people. In this section, drawn from Ledger Number Two in the Robert Ryland Papers (RRP 55.2), selected entries for the period 1840-1865 are organized beneath corresponding names of enslaved individuals. This provides the fragments of their lives that are revealed in Ryland's accounting. They are listed by the year they first appeared in the record. Only Walker Lee's last name is known (see Sections 3.3.2 and 4.1.1).

In Ryland's expenses he recorded allocations to individual enslaved people. These were likely the clothing allowances that he noted in his 1855 essay. They are therefore listed here as "clothing allowance" however they may have also included year-end gifts. There is a possibility that at times Ryland was simply itemizing his expenses, and some of the funds were not given directly to the people associated with the amounts. Beginning in 1859, this itemization largely stopped and an expense amount would follow the word "servants."

ENSLAVED AND "HIRED OUT"

SAM

- 1840 "Sam's hire for 1840 \$104.50" (Receipts, 101)
- 1841 "Sam's hire 1840 \$110" (Receipts, 102)
- 1842 "Feb 1 Sam's hire \$20"
"Mar 23 Sam's hire 10 + 10 + 10 + 10 + 10 + 10 + 10 + 30" (Receipts, 104)
- 1843 Clothing allowance: "Sam \$5.10" (Expenses, 107)
Likely for 1843 work "Jany 6 [1844]... Sam's hire \$55" (Receipts, 106)
- 1844 "Editor Streeter owes \$60 for Sam's hire which he seems not disposed ever to pay_ [later addition "And never did?"] (Receipts, 108) L.R. Streeter was the editor/publisher of the *Richmond Weekly Star*.⁵⁵⁵
- 1845 Nov. 20 "Sam's [ditto "hire"] \$30" ... "Sam's hire \$11.23" (Receipts, 110); Clothing allowance: "Sam 4.70" (Expenses, 111)
- 1846 "Nov 7 Sam's hire \$30" (Receipts, 112)
"Jany 2 1847 "Sam's [ditto "hire"] in full \$23.50 [recorded in 1846

⁵⁵⁵ Library of Virginia, <https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/vnp/results.php?cities=Richmond&page=7>

receipts] (Receipts, 112)

Clothing allowance: "Sam 12.06" (Expenses, 113)

1847 "July 28...Sam 30... Sep. 4. Sam 15... Sam's [ditto "hire"] 10.50"
(Receipts, 114)

Clothing allowance: "Svt Sam \$5.25" (Expenses, 115)

1848 Clothing allowance: "Sam \$1.50" (Expenses, 117)

1849 "Jany 4 [1850]" "Sam's hire 2 months to Republican \$10" (Receipts, 118)

Clothing allowance: "Sam 22.50" (Expences, 119)

Sam died in 1849.

FANNY

1840 "Fanny's [ditto: "hire"] 30+10" (Receipts, 101); "Fanny's hire for 1840 after paying doctors, commissions, [etc] \$37.18" (Receipts, 102)

1841 "Fanny's hire 1841 \$38.00" (Receipts, 102); "Fanny's Doctor's bill \$5.00" (Expenses, 103)

1842 "Fanny's [ditto "hire"] \$10. + 10 + 10 + 10" (Receipts, 104); "Dr.s bill to Fanny \$10" (Expenses, 105)

1843 January 2: "Fanny's hire \$6.25;" July 3: "Fanny's hire 6.25;" "Octo 15 Fanny's hire \$6.25" (Receipts, 106); Clothing allowance: "Fanny \$9.41" (Expenses, 107)

1844 "Jany 6 Fanny's hire \$5.00" (Receipts, 106; Ryland wrote some 1844 receipts on the 1843 page); Clothing allowance: "Fanny \$28" (Expenses, 109)

1845 "Jany 7" possibly for 1844 work "Fanny's hire \$6.25;" January 18 [Ryland may have added to this line through year] "Fanny's hire \$6.25 + \$6.25;" November 20 "Fanny's hire \$6.25" Receipts, 110); Clothing allowance: "Fanny 4.37" (Expenses, 111)

1846 "Jany 3... Fanny's hire 6.25;" "Ap. 6 Fanny's hire 6.25;" "July 20... Fanny's [ditto: "hire] \$6.25;" "Dec. 22... Fanny's hire 6.25" (Receipts, 112); Clothing allowance: "Fanny 1.[00]" (Expenses, 113)

1847 "Fanny's hire \$6.26 + 6.25 + 6.25 + 6.25" (Receipts, 114); Probable clothing allowance: "Fanny 1.25" (Expenses, 115)

1848 "Ap. 5 Fanny's hire \$6.25;" (Receipts, 116); Probable clothing allowance: "Fanny \$27; Unknown reason (after "Leeching \$5.00. Cupping \$3.") "Fanny .38 [superscript "c"] (Expenses, 117)

1849 Clothing allowance: “Fanny \$20.01” (Expenses, 119)

Fanny’s record stops in 1849.

MARIA

1841 “Doctor’s bill (Maria) \$10.72” (Expenses, 103)

1842 [Likely doctor’s bill since this falls in a list after “Drs bill for Fanny” and before those of Ryland’s wife and children] “Maria \$6” (Expenses, 105)

1843 Clothing allowance: “Maria 2.10” (Expenses, 107)

1844 May have been for 1843 work: “Jany 6 Maria’s hire \$36.00” (Receipts, 106); “Maria’s \$23.12” (Receipts, 108); Probable clothing allowance: “Maria \$10.50” (Expenses, 109)

1845 “Maria’s hire \$2.00” (Receipts, 110)

In 1842, Ryland wrote that Maria “expect[ed] to increase her family & what to do with her I know not. I wish she was away.” In 1845, Ryland sent her to his parents’ plantation in King & Queen County rather than “exciting prejudice” against him at First African Baptist Church by auctioning her off. In 1864, he sold Maria and Parthena to a relative who lived in the area of his late parents’ former property.

JOHN

1842 “John’s hire 1841 \$100” (Receipts, 104) — this is currently unclear since Ryland purchased an elderly man named John in 1844 for the purpose of allowing him to buy his freedom; may have been someone else named John.

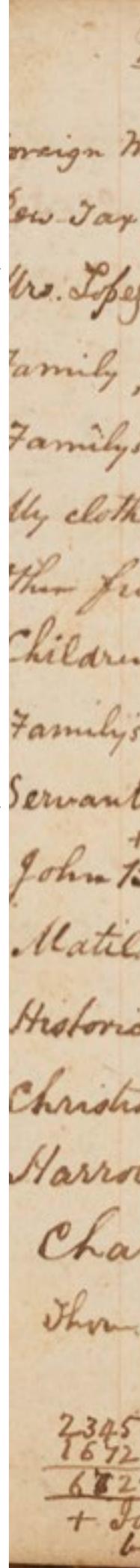
1844 “John’s [hire] + [“+” is subscripted under John’s name and links to note] 45;” Note: “Bought John Jany 15 1844 at \$250. he is to be free when he returns the money. He died in 1849 leaving \$170.66 unpaid_ RR” (Receipts, 108); Clothing allowance: “John 15.37 1/2” (Expenses, 109)

1845 “John’s [ditto “hire”] \$55” (Receipts, 110); “Servant John \$21.81 (doctor’s bill)” (Expenses, 111)

1846 “June 20 John’s hire \$8”... “John’s hire 8.” [possible back payment]; July 20 “John’s hire \$7.00;” Dec. 22 “John’s [ditto “hire”] \$8.” (Receipts, 112)

1847 “Feb 6 John’s hire \$4.25;” “John’s [hire following “Fanny’s hire”] \$2.00 + 1 + 6 + 8 + 4 + 4 + 5 + 5” (Receipts, 114)

1848 “Ap 3 John’s hire \$4.00 + 6.25 + 8 + 4 + 2 + 1.50” (Receipts, 116)



" 22. College Salary for 1850-51 by self \$ 175. 175.00
 " " Ellen's hire \$35. Thom's hire \$20. 55.00

1849 Clothing allowance "John 15.25 +" Plus sign links to note below: "+ John died in the Summer leaving his debt unpaid by just \$170.66_ ["just" is likely sarcasm] a dead loss. Be done with this plan!" (Expenses, 117)

John died in 1849.

MATILDA

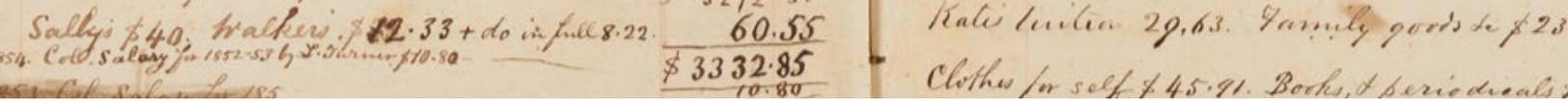
- 1842 "May 17, 1843 Hire of Matilda for last year \$27.08" (Receipts, 104)
- 1843 Clothing allowance: ("Matilda \$4.24" Expenses, 107)
- 1844 "Jany 6 likely for 1843 work "Matilda's [ditto: "hire"] \$20" (Receipts, 106); "Dec. 3"... "Matilda's hire \$25" (Receipts, 108)
- 1845 "Matilda's hire \$27" (Receipts, 110); Clothing allowance: "Matilda 2.50" (Expenses, 111)
- 1846 January 2, 1847 "Matilda's hire \$30" ("Private receipts for 1846" RRP, 55.2.060, 112); Possible clothing allowance but not on the same line as others: "Servant Matilda 1.25" (Expenses, 113)
- 1847 "Dec 22... Matilda's hire 30." (Receipts, 114); Probable clothing allowance: "Matilda .75 [superscript "c"]" (Expenses, 115)
- 1848 "Jany 6 Matilda \$30" (Receipts, 116)
- 1849 "Jany 1 [1850]" likely for work the previous year, "Matilda's hire: \$35" (Receipts, 118); Clothing allowance: "Matilda \$4.00" (Expenses, 119)
- 1850 January 9, 1851: "Matilda's hire \$35." (Receipts, 121); Clothing allowance: "Matilda \$5.00" (Expenses, 121)
- 1851 "Matilda's [hire] 10" (Receipts, 122); Clothing allowance: "Matilda \$11" (Expenses, 123)
- 1852 November 27 "Matilda's [hire] 50." (Receipts, 124); Clothing allowance: "Matilda 1.[00]" (Expenses, 125)
- 1853 "Matilda's [hire] \$60" (Receipts, 126); Probable clothing allowance: "Matilda 6." (Expenses, 127)
- 1854 January 1, 1855 "Matilda's hire \$30.00" (Receipts, 128)
- 1855 "[July] 18 2 qrs [quarters] hire for Matilda \$30" ("Receipts of 1855 on private account" RRP 55.2.069, 130); Clothing allowance "Matilda 1.88;" "Dr. Beale for Matilda \$6" (Expenses, 131)

- 1856 "July 4... Matilda's hire \$30;" "Dec 19 Matilda's hire in full \$30"
(Receipts, 132); Clothing allowance: "Matilda 1[.00]" (Expenses, 133)
- 1857 July 3 "Matilda's [hire] \$35" (Receipts, 134)
- 1858 July 3 "Matilda's hire \$35;" Dec. 29 "Matilda's hire \$35" (Receipts, 136)
- 1859 June 10 "Matilda's hire \$35;" Dec 3 "Matilda's hire \$35" (Receipts, 138);
"Dr. Beale \$7.00 for Matilda" (Expenses, 139)
- 1860 Feb 3: "Matilda's half-year hire \$35.00;" Oct. 7: "Matilda's hire in full"
(Receipts, 140)
- 1861 July 3rd: "Matilda's hire \$35.00;" Dec. 2: "Matilda's hire \$35" (Receipts,
142)
- 1862 October 22: "Matilda's hire in full \$70" (Receipts, 60)
- 1863 July 2: "Matilda's [hire] \$90" (Receipts, 60)
- 1864 January 14: "Matilda \$30 [possible back payment]... Matilda \$30"
(Receipts, 62)

There is no further record of Matilda.

LUCY

- 1842 "Jany 26 [1843]... Lucy's hire \$14.80" (Receipts, 104)
- 1843 Clothing allowance: "Lucy \$14.37 ½" (Expenses, 107)
- 1844 Clothing allowance: "Lucy 14.53" (Expenses, 109)
- 1845 Clothing allowance: "Lucy 18.53" (Expenses, 111)
- 1846 Clothing allowance: "Lucy 21.44" (Expenses, 113)
- 1847 July 28 "Lucy 20."... Sep 4 "Lucy 10" "Lucy's hire \$7.00" (Receipts,
114)
- 1849 Clothing allowance: "Lucy 13.50" (Expenses, 119)
- 1850 Clothing allowance: "Lucy \$14.28" (Expenses, 121)
- 1851 Probable clothing allowance: "Lucy \$86.57" [amount may indicate
children] (Expenses, 123)
- 1852 Clothing allowance: "Lucy 11.75" (Expenses, 125)
- 1853 Clothing allowance: "Svt. Lucy 7.80" (Expenses, 127)



- 1854 Clothing allowance: “Lucy 10” (Expenses, 129)
- 1855 Probable clothing allowance “Lucy 8.98” (Expenses, 131)
- 1856 Probable clothing allowance “Lucy 5.12” (Expenses, 133)
- 1863 “Dr. Snead... [visit] to Lucy \$6” (Expenses, 61)

Ryland’s financial record of Lucy ends in 1863.

AGGY

The name “Aggy” presents biographical/identity complications. An elderly free Black woman, whom Ryland and his nephew referred to as “Aunt Aggy” and later “Aggy Morris,” lived on the campus. In the 1850 Federal Census the name “Agness Cooper” aligns with details of her life and location. According to the Federal Census Slave Schedule of 1860, Ryland hired out a woman and three children that he enslaved to her, and he notes two donations “for Aunt Aggy” in his receipts of 1864, presumably to offset her medical or funeral expenses. Entries in Ryland’s ledgers indicate that there was also a younger woman named Aggy, who was enslaved by or bound to Robert Ryland.

- 1843 Clothing allowance for Aggy or possible gift for Aggy Morris/Cooper: “Aggy \$1.00” (Expenses, 107)
- 1844 Clothing allowance: “Little Aggy” (Expenses, 109)
- 1846 Clothing allowance for Aggy or possible gift for Aggy Morris/Cooper: “Aggy 6.[00] (Expenses, 113)
- 1856 Clothing allowance: “Svt Aggy 6.12” It is unlikely that Ryland would have referred to the free and very elderly Aggy Morris/Cooper as a “servant;” “Dr. Wortham for Aggy’s child \$6.00” (Expenses, 133)
- 1863 “Dr. Beale [visit to] Aggy & children \$174.50” (Expenses, 61)

LOUISA

Louisa, Tom/Thom, and Violet may have been enslaved by the family of Ryland’s second wife, Betty Thornton Ryland. Their arrival coincides with Ryland’s recorded expenses of their marriage.

- 1848 Clothing allowance: “Louisa 1.75” (Expenses, 117)
- 1849 Clothing allowance: “Louisa” \$2.00 (Expenses, 119)
- 1850 January 9, 1850: “Louisa’s [ditto “hire”] \$18.50” (Receipts, 121); Clothing allowance: “Louisa 2.13” (Expenses, 121)
- 1851 “Louisa’s [ditto “hire”] \$23.12” Receipts, 122)
- 1852 “Sep... Louisa’s hire \$20” (Receipts, 124)

- Dec 24. Mr. Fee \$1.00 - do \$4.00. 3363 12
 Dec 21. Mr. Ettinger's m. 7. \$10. Colliga Saly for 1853 54. 00
 Walker's hire 50 Maliedas \$40.00 Ettinger \$4625 Louisa 37.00 193. 25
 (1817.22) 35 2. 37
- Oct \$7.19. Harrod & Murray's bill \$7.47. Washing clothes \$6.
 Deduct Walker's board \$32.50. Armes \$60
- 1853 "Dec 21... Louisa's [hire] 37.00" (Receipts, 126)
- 1854 "Aug 10... Hire of Ellen & Louisa \$55" possibly indicating that they were hired out to the same place/person; "Jany 1 [1855]... Louisa's [hire] 25.00" (Receipts, 128); Clothing allowance: "Louisa 7.92" (Expenses, 129)
- 1855 "July 7... 2 quarters hire Louisa & Walker \$46.25;" "Jany 12 [1856] Walker and Louisa's hire from Hill in full 50.87" ("Receipts of 1855 on private account" RRP 55.2.069, 130); Clothing allowance: "Louisa 1.25" (Expenses, 131)
- 1856 "Nov. 14 ... Mr. Ettinger for Louisa \$20;" "Dec 26 Mr. Ettinger for Louisa \$20;" "Jany 10 [1857]" likely for 1856 work "Louisa's hire in full \$11.60" (Receipts, 132); Clothing allowance: "Louisa 7.30" (Expenses, 133)
- 1857 Oct. 3 "Louisa's hire in vac. \$12" (Receipts, 134)
- 1859 Sep 23: "Louisa's hire on vacn \$13.00" (Receipts, 138)
- 1863 Clothing allowance or other expenses associated with her: "Louisa \$76;" "Dr. Beale to Louisa \$30;" "Dr. Snead [visit(s) to] Louisa \$76[.00];" "Louisa's grave" (Expenses, 61)

TOM/THOM

- 1848 Clothing allowance: "Thom 3.38" (Expenses, 117)
- 1849 "Thom .75 [superscript "c"]. shoes" (Expenses, 119)
- 1850 January 22, 1851 "Thom's hire \$20" (Receipts, 121)
- 1851 "Tom's hire \$30" (Receipts, 122)
- 1852 "Nov. 27... Thom's hire for 1852 \$35" (Receipts, 124)
- 1853 "Thom's work \$15" (Receipts, 126)
- 1854 "Thom's hire .75 [superscript "c"], [ditto "Thom's hire"] \$5.25, ditto ["Thom's hire] \$8. from Ladd ("Receipts of 1854 on private account" RRP 55.2.068, 128); Clothing allowance: "Thom 7.48" (Expenses, 129)
- 1855 Probable clothing allowance "Tom 21.38" (Expenses, 131)
- 1856 "July 25... Thom's hire in vac. \$7.33" (Receipts, 132); Clothing allowance: "Tom 15.19" (Expenses, 133)

- 1858 July 31: "Tom's hire in vacn. \$6.50" (Receipts, 136)
- 1859 Nov. 3 "Tom's hire to Brock \$2.50" (Receipts, 138); Brock was one of the hotelkeepers at Richmond College.
- 1860 Oct. 4: "Tom's vacation work \$2.00" ("Private Receipts for 1860" RRP 55.2.074)
- 1863 April 21: "Tom's hire \$31.45" (Receipts, 60); "Dr. Snead [visit(s) to] Tom \$20;" "Gifts to servants... Tom \$5-" (Expenses, 61)
- 1864 April 13: "Tom's hire \$30 + 40;" September 22: "Tom's hire \$40 [ditto "Tom's hire"] \$40, [ditto "Tom's hire"] 10[.00] (Receipts, 62)

Ryland's record of Tom/Thom ends in 1864.

VIOLET

- 1848 Clothing allowance: "Violet 3.38" (Expenses, 117)
- 1849 Clothing allowance: "Violet \$7.46;" Unexplained, not on the line with clothing allowances: "Violet \$2.00" (Expenses, 119)
- 1850 Clothing allowance: "Violet \$10.63" (Expenses, 121)
- 1851 Probable clothing allowance: "Violet \$10.53" (Expenses, 123)
- 1852 Clothing allowance: "Violet \$8.65" (Expenses, 125)
- 1853 Clothing allowance: "Violet 13.11" (Expenses, 127)
- 1854 Clothing allowance: "Violet 17.25" (Expenses, 129)
- 1855 Clothing allowance: "Violet 17.53;" "Dr. Beale for ... Violet \$8.00" (Expenses, 131)
- 1856 Clothing allowance: "Violet 7.81" (Expenses, 133)

Violet appears to have been enslaved in the Ryland household. There is no record of her being hired out. Ryland's record of her ends in 1856.

SALLY/SALLIE

- 1849 Clothing allowance: "Servants Sally & children \$19.05" (Expenses, 119)
- 1850 Clothing allowance: "Sally 2.50" (Expenses, 121)
- 1851 "Sally's [hire] \$35" (Receipts, 122); Clothing allowance: "Sally \$4." (Expenses, 123)



- 1852 November 27 “Sally’s [hire] \$40” (Receipts, 124); Clothing allowance: “Sally \$32” (Expenses, 125)
- 1853 Probable clothing allowance: “Sally 8.20” (Expenses, 127)
- 1854 “Aug. 10... Sally 25.[00];” “Jany 1... Sally’s [hire] \$30.50” (Receipts, 128)
- 1855 “Aug 30th Sally’s hire \$25” (Receipts, 130); “Dr. Beale for ... Sally \$5.00” (Expenses, 131)
- 1856 “July 25 Sally’s hire to July 1. \$25;” “Dec 19... Sally’s [ditto “hire in full”] \$25” (Receipts, 132); Probable clothing allowance: “Sally 50 [superscript “c”]” (Expenses, 133)
- 1858 July 3: “Sally’s [hire] \$15;” Jany 10 [1859]: “Sally’s hire \$10_ less \$2.50 for board 10 days” (“Private Receipts for 1858” RRP 55.2.072, 136)
- 1859 No month/day: “Sally’s hire \$7.00” (Receipts, 138)
- 1861 April 1: “Sallie’s hire \$2[.00]” (Receipts, 142)
- 1863 “Dr. Snead [visit(s)] to Sally \$6;” “Dr. Beale [visit(s) to] Sally & children \$71.25” (Expenses, 61)
- 1864 Jan. 14: “Sally \$15 + 15;” February 6th, 1865: “Sally’s hire \$30” (Receipts, 62); Unexplained expense: “Sally (svt) \$5” (Expenses, 63)

Ryland’s record of Sally/Sallie stops in 1864.

JUDY

- 1849 Unexplained expense: “Judy \$8” (Expenses, 119)
- 1851 Clothing allowance: “Judy 62 1/2 [superscript “c”]” (Expenses, 123)
- 1854 July 1, “Judy’s [hire] \$5.00;” Nov. 28 “Judy \$4.25... Judy 3.25” (Receipts, 128)
- 1855 Clothing allowance: “Judy 8.73” (Expenses, 131)
- 1856 Clothing allowance: “Svt. Judy 6.20” (Expenses, 133)
- 1863 “Dr. Snead [visit(s) to] Judy \$25” (Expenses, 61)

Ryland’s record of Judy stops in 1856.

ELLEN

- 1849 January 4, 1850 “Ellen hire \$32.37” (Receipts, 118)

- 1850 January 22 1851 "Ellen's hire \$35" (Receipts, 120); Clothing allowance: "Ellen 6.00" (Expenses, 121)
- 1851 "Ellen's [hire] \$40" (Receipts, 122)
- 1852 November 27 "Ellen's [hire] 40" (Receipts, 124); Clothing allowance: "Ellen 9." (Expenses, 125)
- 1853 "Dec 21... Ellen's [hire] \$46.25" (Receipts, 126)
- 1854 "Aug 10... Hire of Ellen & Louisa \$55" possibly indicating they were hired to the same place/person; "Jany 1 [1855]"... "Ellen's [hire] 30.00" (Receipts, 128)
- 1855 Clothing allowance "Ellen 8.14" (Expenses, 131)
- 1856 "Nov. 14 Mrs. S for Ellen's hire in vacn. \$2.00;" "April 11 [1857]" on 1856 page so likely for 1856 work "Mr. Butler for Ellen's hire in full \$28" (Receipts, 132); Clothing allowance: "Ellen 3.44" (Expenses, 133)
- 1857 "Oct. 3 Ellen's hire \$35;" "Ap 13 '58 Ellen's hire in full \$34.37" (Receipts, 134)
- 1858 July 3: "Ellen's [hire] from Mr. August \$31.45;" Dec. 29: "Ellen's hire \$37" (Receipts, 136)
- 1859 July 2: "Ellen's first quarter \$20;" July 5: "Ellen's second [ditto "quarter"] \$20;" Oct 10: "Ellen's 3rd quarter \$20;" Dec. 3: "Ellen's last quarter \$20" (Receipts, 138)
- 1860 Feb. 3: "Ellen's half-year hire \$45;" Dec 31: "Ellen's hire in full_ less \$5 for arrest as a runaway" (Receipts, 140)
- 1861 April 18: "Ellen's hire \$20;" Aug. 27: "Ellen's hire \$18;" Dec. 2: "Ellen's hire \$20" ["in full" lined though]; Undated: "Ellen's hire \$8." (Receipts, 142)
- 1862 October 22: "Ellen [ditto "hire in full"] \$90; November 15: "Ellen last year's \$4" (Receipts, 58)
- 1863 July 2: "Ellen's hire \$72; December 31: "Ellen's [ditto "hire"] \$75 (Receipts, 60); "Dr. Snead [visit(s) to] Ellen \$68" (Expenses, 61)
- 1864 January 14: "Ellen's hire \$67; Same line "Ellen's hire \$60 + 60;" November 25: "Ellen's hire in full \$63" (Receipts, 62)

Ryland's record of Ellen stops in 1864.

WALKER LEE

Walker Lee was known only as Walker in Ryland's ledgers and letters, however he recorded Walker Lee's last name in the minutes of First African Baptist Church. Given the date of his first appearance in Ryland's records, it is possible he was a part of Robert Ryland's father's estate, and among the "servants" Ryland asked to be sent to him Richmond once his father's assets were divided.

- 1851 "Walker's hire \$10" (Receipts, 122)
- 1852 "Walker's [hire] \$12.33 + [ditto "Walker's hire"] in full 8.22" (Receipts, 124)
- 1853 "Walker's hire \$50" (Receipts, 126); "Deduct Walker's board \$32.50" (Expenses, 127)
- 1854 "Walker's hire \$25." (Receipts, 128)
- 1855 "July 7... 2 quarters hire Louisa & Walker \$46.25;" "Jany 12 [1856] Walker and Louisa's hire from Hill in full 50.87" (Receipts, 130); Clothing allowance "Walker 1." (Expenses, 131)
- 1856 "July 25... Walker's [ditto "hire to July 1" if ditto reflects entire portion following Sally's entry] \$45;" "Dec 19 ... Walker's hire in full of R.J. Christian 45.00" (Receipts, 132); Clothing allowance: "Walker 2.76" (Expenses, 133)
- 1857 "[July] 3... Walker's hire \$50;" "Jany 11 [1858] Walker's hire \$25 (Receipts, 134)
- 1858 July 3: "Walker's [hire] \$45;" Dec. 29: "Walker's [ditto "hire"] \$45" (Receipts, 136)
- 1859 July 6: "Walker's two qtrs hire \$62.50;" Dec. 3: "Walker's hire \$62.50" (Receipts, 138)
- 1860 July 16: "Walker's hire and board less deduction for sickness \$46.66;" Jany 5 1861: "Walker's hire in full (board included) sickness deducted 40.00" (Receipts, 140); "Dr. Beale to Walker \$3" (Expenses, 141)
- 1861 April 1: "Walker's [hire] \$5;" Dec. 2: "Walker's (half) \$30;" [Also under Dec 2 but may have been a later date]: "Walker's hire in full \$30_" (Receipts, 142)
- 1862 June 3: "Walker's hire \$36.60;" November 15: "Walker's hire \$16.50" (Receipts, 58)
- 1863 "Dr. Beale [visit(s) to] Walker \$28.25" (Expenses, 61)



Ryland's record of Walker ends in 1863.

“YOUNG SERVANTS”

The amounts Ryland designated for “young servants” may have reflected the clothing allowance of the children he enslaved or end of the year gifts.

- 1852 “Young servants 5.82” (“Private expenses for 1852” [Ryland added a note after he wrote the year, “Who will live to see the end?”], 125)
- 1853 “Young svts. 24.23” (“Private expenses for 1853,” 127)

LEWIS

- 1855 Clothing allowance: “Lewis .75 [superscript “c”]” (Expenses, 131)

THOSE “HIRED” BY RYLAND

CATHERINE

- 1847 “Catherine’s hire \$42.00;” Clothing allowance: “Catherine \$12.59” (Expenses, 115)
- 1849 Clothing allowance: “Catherine .50 [superscript “c”]” (Expenses, 119)
- 1855 “Catherine’s hire \$9.17” (Expenses, 131)

ALICE

- 1849 Probable clothing allowance “Alice .75 [superscript “c”]” (Expenses, 119)
- 1854 “Alice’s hire \$50;” Clothing allowance: “Alice 10.64” (Expenses, 129)
- 1855 Clothing allowance “Alice 75 [superscript “c”]” (Expenses, 131)

JANE

Jane died in 1852 shortly after she was hired out to Ryland. His payment for her “hire” appeared the following year.

- 1852 Clothing allowance: “Jane 1.33;” [ditto “Jane”] funeral & sickness 11.25” (Expenses, 125)
- 1853 “Jane’s hire 10.00” (Expenses, 127)

7 pt. et bond at par of the treasury 1500
 Bond at par with money paid by C. J. Allen 300
 8200 Confid. bonds at par 8200
 1000

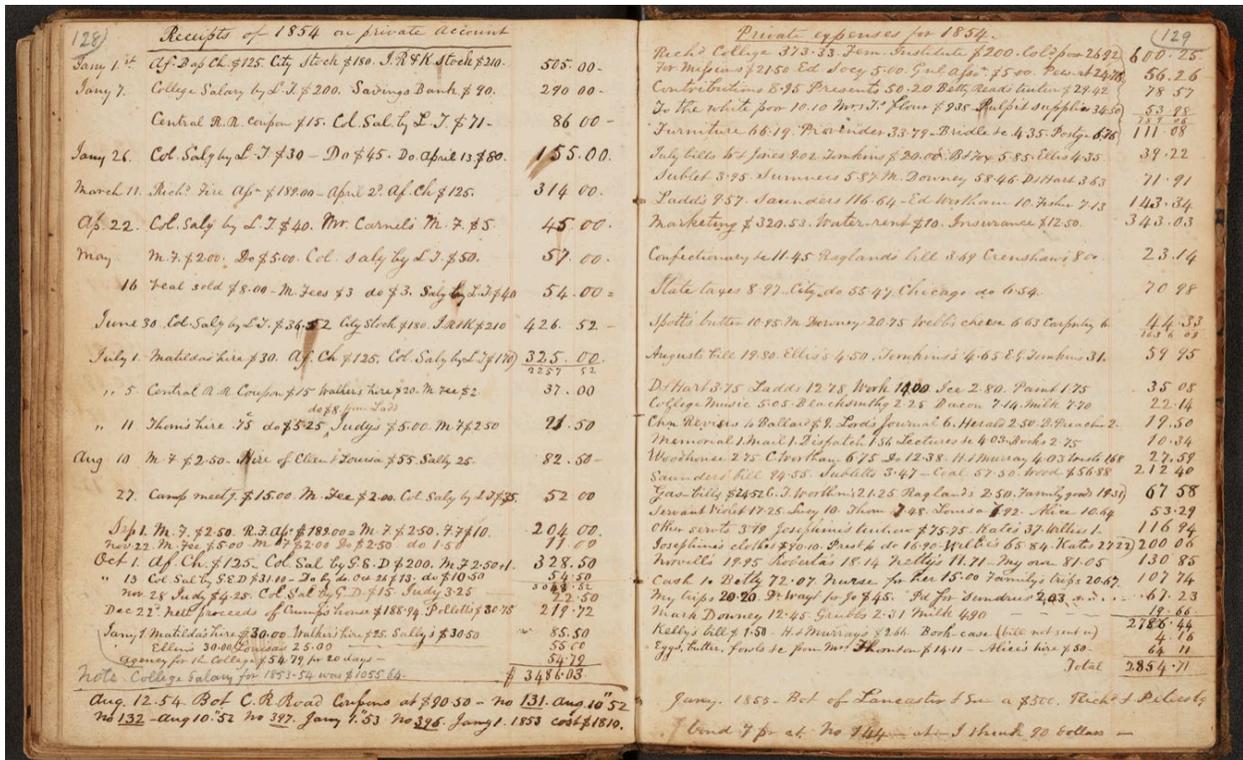
Deduct this amount recd of boarders
 Hush's bill \$1.50 - Dr. Steel & S. Louisa's Grav & 3.
 942283

11608
 3721
 \$8487.00
 9.50
 8486.50

"OTHER SERVANTS"

Ryland recorded small payments to "other servants" and "College servants" and these amounts may have represented *ad hoc* payments for extra work or end of the year gifts.

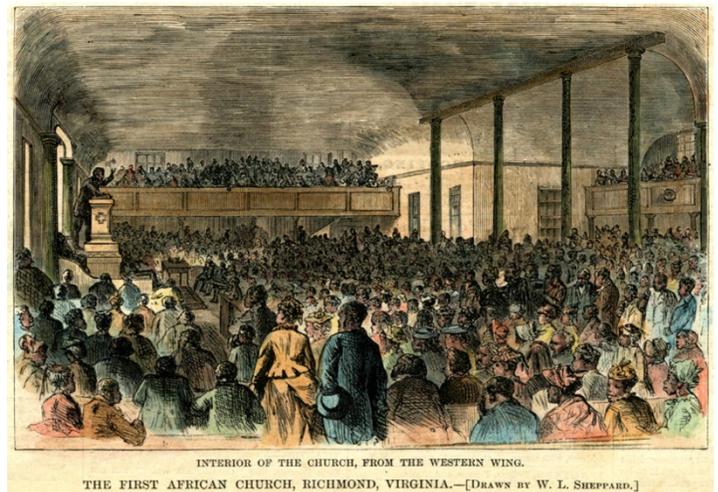
- 1843 "Other servants: 1.37 1/2" (Expenses, 107)
- 1844 "College servants 2.[00]" (Expenses, 109)
- 1845 "College servants 2.50" (Expenses, 111)
- 1846 "College [ditto: "servants"] 2.20" (Expenses, 113)
- 1847 "College svts & others \$1.85" (Expenses, 115)
- 1849 "Cleber 1.50" (Expenses, 119): Cleber was described by two former students as being a "servant" at Richmond College
- 1854 "Other servts 3.19" ("Private expenses for 1854" RRP 55.2.068, 129)



Robert Ryland's 1854 Accounts, Ledger 2, RRP, 55.2.068, VBHS

4.0 FIRST AFRICAN BAPTIST CHURCH

Robert Ryland's work at Richmond College often meant he was the public face of the institution, his name and position there appearing in local, regional, and at times national publications. From 1841 to 1865, however, he was equally if not more well-known for his position as the white pastor of Richmond's First African Baptist Church. His increasing prominence as a Baptist leader, while partially attributable to his leadership at the college, was largely driven by his leadership of the enormous and powerful congregation of enslaved and free Black people.



William Ludwell Sheppard, "First African Church, Interior of the church from the western wing." VCU Libraries Digital Collections

Aspects of Ryland's time as the pastor of First African Baptist Church have been considered by a number of scholars. University of Richmond President Emeritus, Dr. Edward L. Ayers' 2013 address, "The Trials of Robert Ryland," was published in the journal *Baptist History & Heritage* (2013) and is [available digitally](#) through the University of Richmond Scholarship Repository. A thesis by University of Richmond graduate, Teresa Payne, "Robert Ryland and the First African Baptist Church of Richmond: Their Antebellum Years" (1974) is also [available digitally](#) through the Richmond Scholarship Repository. Articles and book length scholarship on the church and its members include works by Carter G. Woodson (*The History of the Negro Church*, 1921; *The mind of the Negro as reflected in letters written during the crisis, 1800-1860*, 1926), John T. O'Brian ("Factory, Church, and Community: Blacks in Antebellum Richmond," *The Journal of Southern History*, November 1978), Gregg Kimball ("Richmond's Place in the African American Diaspora" in *Afro-Virginian History and Culture*, John Saillant, ed., 1999), and Midori Takagi ("*Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction*": *Slavery in Richmond, 1782-1865*, 1999). This section draws on some of this established work as well as the deacons' minutes preserved by First African Baptist Church and shared in microfilm with the Library of Virginia, contemporaneous news articles, the records of the American Colonization Society held by the Library of Congress, Ryland's remembrances, and the newly considered collection of his personal letters and other records held by the Virginia Baptist Historical Society.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁶ The historical and genealogical richness of the church's minutes, preserved by members of First African Baptist Church and shared on microfilm at the Library of Virginia, cannot be overstated. The church's willingness to make the records available to the public is a tremendous act of generosity, one that provides details of lives that were otherwise barely recorded or not recorded at all. Numerous scholars have studied the material in the past and currently Anelise H. Shroud, historian and Assistant Professor of Digital and Computational Studies at Bates College, is working with the minutes using digital prosopography methods,

In “Factory, Church, and Community: Blacks in Antebellum Richmond,” John T. O’Brien organizes the association of enslaved and free Black people with Virginia’s churches into “three periods”: the missionary period between 1750 and 1790 when “Baptists and Methodists were most successful because they enlisted numerous black preachers and exhorters and mixed antislavery sentiments with the Gospel;” the period between 1790 and 1831 when activity waned somewhat, and the post-Nat Turner period, when the laws passed after the rebellion “suppress[ed] independent black churches, and outlaw[ed] black preaching.”⁵⁵⁷ During the second period, the racially-mixed congregation of Richmond’s First Baptist Church was already dominated by enslaved and free Black people. Of the 1,300 members of the church in 1828, 1,000 were Black, and by 1836 Black people made up 2,000 of the church’s 2,400 members.⁵⁵⁸

Midori Takagi details repeated efforts among Black congregants to form their own church, including an 1821 petition that was rejected by the Virginia General Assembly and other “thwarted” attempts after Nat Turner’s Rebellion in 1831.⁵⁵⁹ Robert Ryland described “several motives” for the eventual separation of First African Baptist Church from First Baptist Church: the church building was “behind the times” and the white congregation wanted a new structure, and the “mixed character of the audience,” which, it was believed by some, interfered “with the progress of the church.”⁵⁶⁰ He was more specific in an 1855 essay when he wrote that “some very fastidious people” did not “like to resort to a church... where so many colored people congregated.” According to Ryland, Black congregants raised \$3,500 for the purchase of the original building and the white members of First Baptist Church relocated to “a new and more tasteful edifice.” Additional funds were provided James Thomas, Jr., the Richmond tobacco magnate and member of the Richmond College Board of Trustees.⁵⁶¹

Jeremiah Bell Jeter, the pastor of First Baptist Church, saw his friend Robert Ryland as the ideal choice to lead First African Baptist Church in 1841. Ryland, who often spent his Sundays travelling to temporary posts at churches in the region, had hoped to find a permanent church in the city. In 1838, he described his typical routine to his sister – “I frequently sit up until 12 o’clock and rise by light the next morning” – a schedule made more trying by the need to travel when he had to “go to

providing data visualizations of church members’ relationships with other churches and with one another.

⁵⁵⁷ John T. O’Brien, “Factory, Church, and Community: Blacks in Antebellum Richmond,” *The Journal of Southern History*, November 1978, 521.

⁵⁵⁸ O’Brien, “Factory, Church, and Community,” 522, 524.

⁵⁵⁹ Midori Takagi, “Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction”: Slavery in Richmond, 1782-1865, (1999), electronic version, 2125.

⁵⁶⁰ Robert Ryland, “First African Church,” in Henry Allen Tupper, *The First Century of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, 1780-1880*, (1880), 247-248.

⁵⁶¹ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences of the First African Baptist Church, No. 1], *American Baptist Memorial* 15, September 1855, 263, Hathi Trust Digital Library, [link](#); Jeter, *Recollections*, 263; also noted on O’Brien, “Factory, Church, and Community,” 525.



[Richmond, Va. First African Church (Broad Street)], Library of Congress

the country and preach.” At the time he had believed he would be offered a position at Third Baptist Church which would have “require[d] more study – but less riding.”⁵⁶² That position did not materialize but three years later he accepted the role at First African Baptist Church in part because of this practical advantage of a church closer to his home at Richmond College. Ryland also believed it was both his “duty” to “advance [the] prosperity” of First Baptist Church by aiding in the separation of the Black people from it and to “evangelize

the people of color.” Following Nat Turner’s Rebellion, Ryland believed that “all the ministers of Christ, and especially [Baptists], were called” to insure Black people’s access to the “divine things” that Black ministers were now forbidden to share.⁵⁶³

Ryland often described his work at First African Baptist Church in the context of duty rather than pleasure. After his 1865 separation from the church and his subsequent ministry to exclusively or largely white congregations, he wrote, “It is more congenial to my feelings to preach to whites, than to the blacks. The latter service I did from a sense of duty.”⁵⁶⁴ One 1847 letter, written to the American Colonization Society, shows a different side of Ryland’s thinking, however: “[M]y position as pastor of the Af. Ch. is one that accords well with my tastes. I feel honored with the privilege of preaching to them & of doing what little I can to aid them to heaven.”⁵⁶⁵ Ryland’s level of spiritual commitment to the church and its members cannot be detached from the proslavery sentiments that were dominating many Baptist churches and associations as well as other denominations in the South at the time. Charles F. Irons considers the motivations of Ryland and his mentor, Andrew Broaddus, when he writes that they “thought they were defending their right to

⁵⁶² Letter, Robert Ryland to Elizabeth Ryland Willis, December 26, 1838, typescript, RRP, 42.045, VBHS. While Ryland was the pastor at First African Baptist Church, he continued to visit some area churches as a guest pastor and also took occasional “preaching excursions” that kept him away for significant periods of time (“Appointments for Elder Ro. Ryland,” August 29, 1844, *Religious Herald*, VBHS; Robert Ryland, “Mrs. Josephine Ryland,” undated typescript, RRP, 3.080-081, VBHS). In his memoir, Jeter recalled Ryland’s schedule differently and wrote that at least part of his decision to offer Ryland the position at First African Baptist Church was because “his official duties [at the college] were not onerous” and Ryland often had weekends free, making the role at First African Baptist Church “no great draft on his intellectual powers” (Jeremiah Bell Jeter, *Recollections of a Long Life*, 211).

⁵⁶³ Robert Ryland, “Origin and History of the First African Church,” *The First Century of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, 1780-1880*, (1880), 252.

⁵⁶⁴ Robert Ryland to Elizabeth Ryland Willis, December 5, 1866, RRP, 15.010-011, VBHS.

⁵⁶⁵ Robert Ryland to the American Colonization Society, September 28, 1846, Library of Congress, also accessed through Fold3.com.

spread the Gospel, not inventing new spurious arguments to protect their material self-interest in the court of public opinion.”⁵⁶⁶

In 1855 Ryland wrote a series of essays about First African Baptist Church in which he provided a description of its organization, detailed the challenges it had faced, gave biographical glimpses of some of its individual members, and listed what he viewed as the many successes of the church. The essays were published in the *American Baptist Memorial*, a magazine that contained contributions from Baptist leaders across the country. As a result, it would have likely drawn positive national attention to Ryland’s congregation while also softening the realities of enslavement. Irons notes the “enormous boost” this sort of positive attention often gave to proslavery Christians, a “rhetorical trump card” that allowed them to show critics of enslavement the “success of quasi-independent black churches.”⁵⁶⁷ A glowing account of the church, its members, and Robert Ryland that was written by a “lady correspondent” of the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript* was described by the *Richmond Mail* as “giv[ing] the Northern abolitionists an excellent hit” with its “high tribute” to Ryland’s “zeal, liberality, and eloquence.”⁵⁶⁸ In a conversation with a visiting Northern writer, James Redpath, who mentioned having been told by proslavery people to visit to visit First African Baptist Church, one Black Richmonder replied, “I thought they would tell you to go there. They [always] do. That’s an old game of theirs – *Go to the African Church* they [always] say to strangers, *and see how happy our slaves our, and how well they dress.*”⁵⁶⁹

A letter Ryland wrote to John Hartwell Cocke in August of 1858 sheds light on his efforts to make up the funds he had contributed to purchase a lot on Leigh Street for the construction of Ebenezer Baptist Church, a sister congregation that was formed when the membership of First African Baptist Church grew too large for its building. Ryland was frustrated by the refusals to donate by white men who had great wealth “in slaves.” He wrote that getting money from “the whites” was proving difficult and that “previous payments have been received mainly from the blacks.” Ryland asked Cocke to assist him since his “own contribution of money & time to it is as large as I can make it. If justice to my wife + seven wd. allow it, I wd. pay the whole debt and be done with it.” A donation from Cocke would alleviate what Ryland called the “painful” task of door-to-door fundraising, when he would “walk the streets & get a dollar from one person, a ‘call again’ from another, & a snarl from a third!” He was particularly offended by the refusals of “more than one man of wealth in slaves, [who] have told me they [wouldn’t] give a cent because they did not wish their slaves to have the gospel preached to them[.]”⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁶ Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 174.

⁵⁶⁷ Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 190.

⁵⁶⁸ “Rev. Dr. Ryland,” *Richmond Mail*, May 16, 1854, [link](#).

⁵⁶⁹ James Redpath, *The Roving Editor, or, Talks with Slaves in the Southern States*, New York: A.A. Burdick (1859), 17-18.

⁵⁷⁰ Robert Ryland to John Hartwell Cocke, August 6, 1858, Cocke Family Papers, Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

One account of a visit to First African Baptist Church that year describes Ryland seeking funds for Ebenezer Baptist Church during the service: “He made a short address during the exercises, in which he invited the audience to contribute to the new African Church, lately erected in another part of the city, at a cost of \$8000, which is capable of seating 1200 persons. The appeal was liberally responded to.”⁵⁷¹

4.1 SERVICES

In his position as pastor, Ryland structured church services to provide individual members with opportunities to pray at length and lead exhortations in “recompense for [the] slight” of not being able to preach.⁵⁷² In one of his “Reminiscences” essays of 1855, Ryland wrote, “As the laws of Virginia are rather stringent as... regards colored men’s preaching, I have aimed to mitigate their effect by encouraging them to pray in public... Not a few of them have a remarkable facility and power in prayer, and awaken the devout emotions of the auditors.”⁵⁷³ A range of visitors to the church recorded accounts of these portions of the services and the work of the well-known church choir.

The unnamed contributor to the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript* that the *Richmond Mail* described as a woman attended an 1854 service alongside two thousand Black congregants. She estimated that over two-thirds of the congregation were enslaved and noted the regular attendance of a small group of white people: “they usually have twenty to thirty whites as worshippers also.” John Kinney, leader of the choir, led the first prayer, which was followed by “antiphonal singing” that alternated between the men and the women in the choir. Lewis Allen, a “free black,” led the next prayer and the writer stated that she had “rarely heard its equal.” Of Ryland, she wrote that he possessed a “Miltonic eloquence” during a sermon focused on abstention from the “fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” The choir then joined together in singing “Vital Spark of Heavenly Flame” before Joshua Thompson, who was enslaved by “Mr. Taliafero of Gloucester County,” rose to lead the congregation in “a spiritual.” The song had never been printed, Thompson explained to the writer, and he spoke the lyrics for her so she could share the spiritual with the newspaper’s readers.⁵⁷⁴

N. Stinson, a writer with the proslavery newspaper *Day-Book* (New York, N.Y.), also detailed Ryland’s system of providing opportunities for congregants to lead prayers which, while not spoken

song I have alluded to. At my request he repeated the words of the song, (not printed,) and I wrote them down to send to you. At the line, “Come, friends and acquaintance, let us join hand in hand,” they all grasped hands fervently, whilst continuing the song. It was a scene of earnest devotion and heartfelt joy, such as is rarely witnessed; and for this reason I have taken pains to describe it with accuracy. But here is the song:

Once more I have come to visit you here—
The cause of my coming—your souls are so dear;
I am afraid some be lost without balm supplied,
Thereto’s balsam in Jesus that flows from his side!
Chorus—Hallelujah! hallelujah! look up to the Lord!

I’m pained in my bowels, my heart it has grieved
To see fellow mortals so sadly deceived—
On barren land they fall where nothing can grow—
They are carelessly living, though Jesus did bleed!
Chorus—Hallelujah, &c.

I’m bound to invite you to Jesus’ kind arms,
To tell of his beauty and of his bliss charms;
I’ll point out to Heaven, to the land of sweet rest,
Where saints in perfection are eternally blest,
Chorus—Hallelujah, &c.

Come friends and relations, let us join hand in hand,
The voice of the turtle is heard in our land:
Let us all march together and follow the sound—
We’ll march to the place where Redemption is found.
Chorus—Hallelujah, &c.

Satan is busy; he is watching you hard
To catch all poor Christians thrown off their guard:
I am often discouraged, and think ‘tis in vain,
‘Till the Gospel be scattered like showers of rain—
Chorus—Hallelujah, &c.

Sometimes I’m induced to look over the land
With a solemn impression to see how it stand—
To see how ‘tis borne up by the Lord every day
Whilst sinners stand trifling their time all away!
Redemption in Jesus is hidden and sealed,
To none but believers is redemption revealed!
Hallelujah, hallelujah! Then look up to the Lord.
It is impossible for me to describe the rapt manner

Boston Daily Evening Transcript, May 1, 1854

⁵⁷¹ “Virginia Ladies, Virginia Hospitality, and Courtesy, &c,” *Pittsfield Sun* (Massachusetts), November 18, 1858, Newspapers.com.

⁵⁷² Ryland, “Origin and History of the First African Church,” 258.

⁵⁷³ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences... No. 2,” *American Baptist Memorial*, October 1855, 289, [link](#).

⁵⁷⁴ “Correspondent of the Transcript,” *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, May 1, 1854, [link](#).

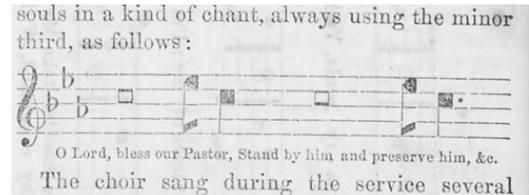
from the pulpit, provided a sermonic experience. Stinson, a slavery enthusiast, was surprised to find the congregation to be “respectable looking and well dressed,” and described Robert Ryland gesturing to a man – “a slave,” according to Stinson – who then “open[ed] the meeting” with a prayer:

“Dear God, will you please to look over the banisters of heaven right down on us here and see what we doing and then take up our poor weary souls with one hand over us and the other hand under us, and put your big arm around us and lift us right up out of this pit of mud and flat and bring us near to yourself, that we may see the glory of God in his holiness.”

“Dear God will you please” was the commencement of every supplication, and he spoke it so simple, so earnest and so feelingly, that I could not help thinking that many of our learned divines might learn how to pray from this “poor slave.” Again, after dropping suddenly down from a lofty height, he would commence low and roll out a few poetical sentences like the following:

“Dear God, will you please to come down into this flock and take the lambs up into your bosom, and then lead the old sheep down by the side of the water courses into green pastures ——— O dear God take them over the river into Goshen where the grass is green and where they may get fat on the smiles of the Lord and the sunshine of his righteousness forever and ever.”⁵⁷⁵

The choir was made up of “about thirty” people who sat in the church’s front gallery. The group had “the reputation of being the best in Richmond” and was the intended focus of the account of G.F. Root, a writer for the *Southern Musical Advocate* who spent half a day at the church.⁵⁷⁶ Root had inadvertently arrived early, and was therefore able to hear the informal congregational singing that always began thirty minutes before each service. He listened as “one after another joined in until all seemed to be singing” in “strong, mellow tones, full of pathos.” After Ryland took the pulpit, “he called on one and another to lead the prayer before the sermon commenced” and “prayers so full of faith and earnestness are not often heard.” In response, the congregation answered in “a kind of chant, always using the minor third” that offered a blessing to Ryland, “O Lord, bless our Pastor, Stand by him and preserve him.” Root’s impression of the choir was favorable, but he called it “only choir-singing” and found that he preferred what one congregant called the “solemn old tunes” that had preceded the service.⁵⁷⁷ Of this congregational singing, Ryland wrote that “[t]he whole assembly is united in an old fashioned, spiritual song, and the zeal, the harmony, the fervor, the number and volume of voices, all tend to excite feelings of devotion.” Ryland described the singing of both the congregation and



⁵⁷⁵ N. Stinson, “Editorial Correspondence,” *Day-Book* (N.Y.), reprinted in the *Richmond Whig*, December 31, 1850, [link](#). In the introduction to Stinson’s account, the *Whig* called the *Day-Book* “a zealous champion of Southern rights.” This prayer has been altered from the original dialect that was used by Stinson when quoting Black congregants.

⁵⁷⁶ [Robert Ryland], *Reminiscences* No. 2, 289; G.F. Root, “Congregational Singing Among the Negroes,” reprinted in *Southern Musical Advocate and Singer’s Friend*, April 1, 1860, [link](#). The introduction to Root’s account indicates that his visit had occurred “several years” before it was printed in the publication.

⁵⁷⁷ G.F. Root, “Congregational Singing Among the Negroes.” Root’s description of the chant also appears in Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press (2003), 207.

the choir as “the great attraction” of the service, much more so than the sermons, “as they can hear more studied and instructive sermons in every pulpit in the city.” It was the music that inspired visitors to “come in to witness the novel scene.”⁵⁷⁸

Ryland regularly invited guest ministers to the church and would give the ministerial students at Richmond College the opportunity to “exercise their gifts as a means of improvement to themselves.”⁵⁷⁹ A.E. Dickinson, a former student at the college recalled that Ryland “would always preach in the morning himself but in the afternoons he would frequently get one or another of the boys to preach.” At times, Ryland was present for their sermons. Thinking that one student’s effort had “gone on sufficiently” Ryland, who was seated behind him, “gently pulled his coat-tail and said, ‘Booker, this is a good stopping place.’”⁵⁸⁰ After one sermon given by a student, Ryland requested that “Deacon Simms... follow with a prayer.” Simms rose and, as Ryland recalled, “[h]e offered up a devout petition to God for his blessing on the truths just delivered, and for large grace ‘on our stripling young brother that is trying to learn how to preach.’”⁵⁸¹

Regarding the subjects of Ryland’s sermons at First African Baptist Church, in addition to his concern with quelling “fleshly lusts,” he also worked to address what he saw as “peculiarities” in the congregation, specifically a belief in the supernatural.⁵⁸² Midori Takagi details the association of these beliefs with history of First Baptist Church prior to the separation of the congregations: “Much to white congregants’ horror, black members maintained a strong belief in spirits and witchcraft in addition to their unshakable faith in God and saw no conflict or contradiction between the two.” Jeter had difficulty managing this aspect of his Black congregants spiritual lives during his period of ministry to the racially mixed congregation. Takagi writes that while he felt that belief in “elements of the African cosmology” should not “be a barrier to church membership,” he “struggled hard to eliminate what he referred to as the ‘dread of imaginary beings or evils.’” She also notes Ryland’s more active effort at First African Baptist Church, when he worked to steer clear of “metaphysical refinements” of scripture and would instead focus on didactic lessons that would “preach *out* of their minds their dreams and fancies, their visions and revelations, and all their long cherished superstitions.”⁵⁸³

Henry Brown, an enslaved man who became famous for having himself shipped in a box from Richmond to the free state of Pennsylvania after his children and his wife were sold away, was a

⁵⁷⁸ Ryland, “Reminiscences... No. 2,” 289.

⁵⁷⁹ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences... No. 2,” 291.

⁵⁸⁰ [A.E. Dickinson], “Memories of Fifty Years Ago,” *Religious Herald*, June 19, 1902, RRP, 04.086, VBHS.

⁵⁸¹ Robert Ryland, “Origin and History of the First African Church,” 259-260.

⁵⁸² Robert Ryland, “Origin and History of the First African Church,” 255.

⁵⁸³ Takagi, *Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction*, loc. 1183-1229, Kindle; Robert Ryland, “Origin and History of the First African Church,” 255.

former First African Baptist Church congregant who remembered Ryland's focus on obedience to enslavers:

He used to preach from such texts as that in the epistle to the Ephesians, where St. Paul says, 'servants be obedient to them that are your masters and mistresses according to the flesh, and submit to them with fear and trembling'; he was not ashamed to invoke the authority of heaven in support of the slave degrading laws under which masters could with impunity abuse their fellow creatures.⁵⁸⁴

In Redpath's interview, the same man who had described the proslavery advantages of sending Northern visitors to First African Baptist Church was asked if Ryland always preached in a way "to suit the slaveholders." He explained that Ryland "wouldn't be allowed to preach at all if he didn't."⁵⁸⁵

4.1.1 BAPTISMS, MARRIAGES, DEATHS & FUNERALS

In the minutes of First African Baptist Church that Robert Ryland maintained for twenty-five years, he described himself as the "moderator," although the minutes rarely show Ryland stepping in to the discussions and decisions of the church's deacons. He appears to have generally confined his role to keeping meticulous records, "inscribing baptisms, deaths, the restoration of members, and their exclusion from fellowship, in a large ledger."⁵⁸⁶ Critically, Ryland included last names of hundreds of enslaved people as well as the names of those who enslaved them, providing vital information for contemporary historians and genealogists. As detailed in previous sections, one example of an enslaved person recorded with his last name is Walker Lee, who was enslaved by Ryland himself. In Ryland's personal records, Lee is referred to as "Walker" with no last name. In the First African Baptist Church minutes of July 30, 1859, however, Ryland recorded Walker Lee's full name with his own beside it in the column in which he wrote enslavers' names.

Ryland's attention to the baptism numbers is made clear on the page that contains the record of Walker Lee's baptism. Three names above Lee's entry, Ryland drew a line and wrote, "3153 to this," indicating the number of people he had baptized at First African Baptist Church to that point.⁵⁸⁷ His communications of baptism numbers appear in his own records and letters, including those to John Hartwell Cocke, and items he placed in the *Religious Herald*.⁵⁸⁸ They reflect Ryland's

⁵⁸⁴ Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written By Himself*, 1851 [British edition], 32.

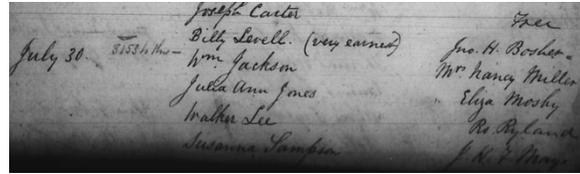
⁵⁸⁵ James Redpath, *Roving Editor*, 17-18.

⁵⁸⁶ Minutes of First African Baptist Church, Library of Virginia; Gregg Kimball, "Richmond's Place in the African American Diaspora," in John Saillant, ed., *Afro-Virginian History and Culture*, 145; Takagi, "Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction," loc. 2257, Kindle.

⁵⁸⁷ Minutes of First African Baptist Church, July 30, 1859, Library of Virginia.

⁵⁸⁸ Robert Ryland, [Letter to the *Religious Herald*], *Religious Herald*, July 21, 1859, VBHS; "Revival Among the Colored People," *Religious Herald*, July 9, 1862, VBHS.

overall commitment to conversion above other ministerial approaches, a priority he described many years before as his “peculiar anxiety.” In an 1831 sermon he had said, “I confess myself most pleased with efforts to persuade men to be reconciled to God... I feel impelled to this course by my peculiar anxiety to see souls [illegible; possibly “really”] converted & Zion crowded with willing captives of grace.”⁵⁸⁹ In November 1859, Ryland wrote to his beloved nephew, Charles Hill Ryland, “I baptized 39 darkeys Sunday before last & 30 last Sunday. Nothing but cold weather will stop them from going into the water.”⁵⁹⁰ In 1864, even as his attention was occupied by “raiders” who had “stripped” the King & Queen County Rylands of “everything in the shape of food,” Ryland wrote John Hartwell Coker of the baptisms at the church and the success of its Sunday School: “Yesterday I baptized 13 colored pple. Our S. School is flourishing. It numbers 284 children yesterday. The excitement of war around us, however, tend to divert the minds of my congregation, as of others, from the gospel.”⁵⁹¹ By the time he left First African Baptist Church, Ryland had baptized 3,832 people.⁵⁹² In the margin of the October 11, 1851 Deacons’ Minutes, Ryland added a note that he had



Minutes of First African Baptist Church, July 30, 1859, Library of Virginia

⁵⁸⁹ Robert Ryland, sermon, “[F]or why will ye die, o house of Israel,” March 6, 1831, RRP, 54.093, VBHS.

⁵⁹⁰ Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, November 8, 1859, RRP, 25.014, VBHS. Charles Hill Ryland (1836-1914) was a Baptist minister, trustee and treasurer of Richmond College, and the college’s librarian. He was a student at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary during the period of Ryland’s first available letters to him, when Ryland referred to the institution as the “Greenville Seminary.” For a time during the Civil War, Charles Hill Ryland was the steward of the Engineer Hospital, where enslaved men who were impressed from across Virginia to labor on the fortifications around Richmond were treated for illnesses and wounds. Historian Jaime Amanda Martinez details Charles Ryland’s involvement in a controversy centered on the care being given to these men in her book *Confederate Slave Impressment in the Upper South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015). In it she describes Charles Ryland’s defense of the hospital after an accusation that “the poor Negroes are dying off like sheep, afflicted with the rot” was published in the *Richmond Examiner*. The newspaper recommended that enslavers check the condition of those in the hospital. Charles Ryland published a response in which he insisted that the facility was “thoroughly cleansed” each day, “oftener if possible,” and after addressing the accusations at length he invited the publisher of the *Examiner* “and the public” to come and see for themselves (Martinez, 60; C.H. Ryland, “To the Editor of the Examiner,” *Richmond Examiner*, December 11, 1862, Library of Virginia). A subsequent investigation by a hospital inspector found a need for improved conditions, in part because of the monetary value of the enslaved men there (Martinez, 61). It is not clear when Charles Ryland’s affiliation with the hospital ended. Robert Ryland cared deeply for his nephew and in his last decades he wrote him frequently of family news, Richmond College history, and to share observations of politics and society.

⁵⁹¹ Robert Ryland to John Hartwell Coker, January 10, 1862, Papers of John Hartwell Coker, Box 168, Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

⁵⁹² Ryland Knight, “Robert Ryland,” *Virginia Baptist Ministers, 4th Series*, George Braxton Taylor, ed., Lynchburg, Virginia: J.P. Bell (1913), 354; Thomas Joyce Ryland, “Robert Ryland Line,” RRP, 03.018, VBHS.

baptized “nearly” two enslaved people for every free person at First African Baptist Church that year.⁵⁹³



Despite his enthusiasm for these numbers, Ryland was careful to note that those who sought to be baptized in the church were carefully questioned. In one of his 1855 essays in the *American Baptist Memorial*, he wrote that while some ministers encourage confession in their congregation, “I have deemed it my duty to throw obstacles in the way of mine, by holding up the dangers of a premature confession.” Ryland viewed this, in part,

as a way to ensure that those requesting baptism possessed “less superstition, less reliance on dreams and visions... [and] talk less of the palpable guidings of the Spirit as independent of or opposed to the word of God.” In short, Ryland continued, “[t]hey have less of the ‘I am right because I know I am right’ feeling.” Those seeking to be baptized were required to “converse with a deacon and obtain his approval. He is then expected to bring from his master, if he is in bondage, a testimonial of his general propriety of conduct, or of his recent improvement in that respect.” This was followed by a conversation with Ryland himself to determine the applicant’s “views on doctrine.”⁵⁹⁴ This interview process applied equally to those Ryland himself enslaved. In September of 1859, Ryland wrote his son, William Ryland, “Our boy Tom has asked leave to be baptized. I’ve not talked with him yet.”⁵⁹⁵ Ryland’s careful process was not impenetrable. In 1851, Sal[ly] Palmer lined up with the congregants who were being received for baptism. According to a note from Ryland appended to the Deacon’s Minutes from October 5, 1851, Palmer had done this “clandestinely,” and had not gone through the preparation process which included “oral confession” and obtaining permission from her enslaver. After receiving a complaint from Harriet Palmer, the woman who held Sally Palmer, that Ryland had “baptized her servant... without her consent,” he wrote of Sal[ly] Palmer, “[s]he is, therefore, not a member of our church & Mrs. Palmer shall be informed of her bad behavior.”⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹³ Minutes of First African Baptist Church, October 11, 1851, Library of Virginia.

⁵⁹⁴ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences... No. 1,” September 1855, *American Baptist Memorial*.

⁵⁹⁵ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, September 30, 1859, 01.080, VBHS. The name “Tom” and “Thom” appeared in Ryland’s records and in his ledger where he recorded his income from hiring out those he enslaved. “Tom” also appeared in the Richmond College recollections of his nephew, Josiah Ryland, who remembered Tom working in the college dining room and referred to him as “Tom the cup bearer.” It is probable that they were the same person.

⁵⁹⁶ Minutes of First African Baptist Church, October 5, 1851, microfilm, Library of Virginia. Sal[ly] Palmer’s name is partially obscured in the microfilm version of the church’s minutes.

Ryland performed marriages for white people throughout his ministerial career. Records of marriage fees appear in his personal accounts beginning in his Lynchburg years and extending to the years after the Civil War. One article and his daughter's recollections indicate that Ryland also performed marriages for enslaved people in Richmond. On a Thursday night in March of 1858, four enslaved people were arrested after returning from Robert Ryland's house where two of them had been married. The *Daily Dispatch* described their arrest as a source of humor for its readers: "they were returning home in anticipation of a great deal more ease and comfort than they obtained." The four unnamed people were accused of "riding in a hack owned by J.R. Croften without consent of their owners."⁵⁹⁷ In her memories of her father, Ryland's daughter, Roberta Ryland Atkins recalled the relationship between Ryland and the members of First African Baptist Church, and wrote that "[s]ometimes wedding parties would come to be married by him and the big parlor at Columbian Hall [Richmond College] would be lighted up, the people came in hacks and filed in and we children would greatly enjoy the beautiful ceremony."⁵⁹⁸

Ryland was also present at the deathbeds of congregants. In an 1855 essay, he wrote of William Warwick, "a servant of Mr. Saybrook [who] sent for me to see him during his last illness. His mind was reposing with unshaken trust on the sufficiency of Christ and his whole nature seemed to be pervaded with *love*." A member of the choir named Sarah Pearce died young, and Ryland wrote that before her death she gained "a foretaste of celestial joy... warned her unconverted kindred of their danger and with a placid smile fell asleep in the arms of Jesus." When deacon Simon Bailey "became deranged... from protracted bodily disease," he was jailed and then placed in a "lunatic ayllum." Ryland visited him there and wrote that just before dying, Bailey "enjoyed a lucid interval [and] expressed strong confidence in the grace of God. *Simon Bailey was a good man.*"⁵⁹⁹

4.2 DEACONS

While the Black members of First African Baptist Church "enjoyed less autonomy than was customary among Baptists," and had to concede to the oversight of a white pastor, the church's Black deacons were generally the governing body that made its day-to-day decisions.⁶⁰⁰ Ryland kept their minutes but his direct influence on their proceedings is rarely recorded. The deacons were almost all free men, a highly disproportionate representation of the largely enslaved membership, and this resulted in one of the few recorded controversies where Ryland attempted to weigh in on the deacons' decisions. In 1848, a letter of protest signed by free and enslaved congregants was submitted to the deacons. It raised concern regarding the "few if any" enslaved deacons and the system which prevented much of the congregation from voting in their election. No action was taken by the deacons to address the letter. In 1850, three church members, whom Midori Takagi describes as "presumably slave men," again raised the objection to "partiality to *free* persons in the

⁵⁹⁷ "Let Off," *Daily Dispatch*, March 27, 1858, [link](#).

⁵⁹⁸ Roberta Ryland Adkins, "Robert Ryland," RRP, 42.077, VBHS.

⁵⁹⁹ [Robert Ryland], "Reminiscences... No. 4, December 1855, *American Baptist Memorial*."

⁶⁰⁰ O'Brien, "Factory, Church, and Community," 526.

administration of church affairs,” this time in a letter sent to Ryland. In response to the challenge, all three men were excluded from First African Baptist Church by the deacons.⁶⁰¹

Ryland attempted to mediate the conflict in the hopes of securing their restoration to the church. Following Ryland’s own letter of protest to the deacons in which he pointed out that the men’s original charge had been withdrawn and they had apologized, an offer was made to the three: in exchange for restoration, they were asked to agree that the exclusion had been out of a “sense of duty.” One man, Stephen Brown, conceded and was restored to membership, but James Allison and Charles Feggens refused to do the same. Ryland recorded the outcome in the minutes of the meeting, referring to himself in the third person:

The pastor... was particular in explaining that he did not mean to require them to justify the act of excision, but only to acquit the church of improper motives in their late proceedings. He believes this much himself, & he considered an affirmative answer... essential to the harmony & fellowship that should exist in the church. The private members still manifested great discontent with the result.⁶⁰²

A standoff ensued, ending in November 1850 with a meeting of the deacons, “a large number of private members,” and the white Superintending Committee from First Baptist Church (which largely stayed out of the deacons’ deliberations and decisions). After a discussion of the “history of all the circumstances,” and statements of men “appointed to represent the congregation,” members of the Superintending Committee asked Feggens and Allison if they could operate in “fellowship” with the deacons “if they should be restored.” After the two “answered affirmatively,” Ryland wrote that they would be restored at the next meeting of the Church and that “all parties should bury their unkind feelings, should avoid in the future all party spirit & should endeavor to live harmoniously.”⁶⁰³

Ryland’s notes from the deacons’ meetings provide a vital record of reasons for exclusion from church membership; the frequent leasing of the church building, which was one of the largest, if not the largest, gathering place in the city; and glimpses of the personal lives of members. On March 2, 1851, Isabella Carter, who was enslaved by Ryland’s former mother-in-law, Ann Norvell, was excluded for drunkenness. A political meeting held at the church had resulted in people entering the choir loft and “defac[ing] the hymnals,” and the deacons agreed that Ryland would place an item in the paper “deprecating such proceedings in the future.” A woman named Sarah Royal complained to

⁶⁰¹ Takagi, *Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction*, loc. 2253, Kindle; Minutes of the First African Baptist Church, May 5, 1850, microfilm, Library of Virginia.

⁶⁰² Minutes of First African Baptist Church (Richmond), July 7, 1850-July 20, 1850, microfilm, Library of Virginia. Ryland referred to himself in the third person in the minutes of deacons’ meetings and in some published works connected to his ministry.

⁶⁰³ Minutes of First African Baptist Church (Richmond), November 17, 1850. Another rare example of the white superintendents asserting their authority occurred when they delivered a resolution requiring Ryland to raise the issue of church members congregating after services with no white person present, and to “kindly urge” them to adhere to “the law of Va, forbidding all assemblies of colored persons for religious purposes, except with the presence of a white person” (Minutes, September 5, 1852).

the deacons that she had been excluded from membership because she had an “illegitimate” child with a member at Second African Church, but the father of the child had been allowed to remain a member of his own church.⁶⁰⁴

A committee of deacons oversaw the Treasurer, who managed income from weekly collections, choir concerts and the “letting of the house.” The renting of the building was a significant source of income for First African Baptist Church. According to minutes from January 4, 1852, the previous year had yielded \$460.79 in collections, \$110.00 from a choir concert, and \$267.11 in proceeds from renting the church’s vast sanctuary.⁶⁰⁵ Hundreds of secular gatherings for largely white audiences were held at the church during the years that Ryland was its pastor, including an art performance where “children and servants” paid half-price, a concert featuring the Norwegian violinist and composer Ole Bornemann Bull with an eight year old “musical phenomenon,” a display of Maximo Valdez Nunez and Bartola Velasquez who were known as “The Aztec Children... a new race of people,” and speeches by both Stephen Douglas and, in one of his final addresses as President of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis.⁶⁰⁶ The church was also described as being “thronged” by Confederate supporters on the eve of the Civil War, who filled it for “an improvised meeting” that was the site of the first display of the Confederate flag in Richmond.⁶⁰⁷ It is not known whether the church received rent after this “meeting” nor is it clear if the race of the church’s congregation was a factor in its being chosen as a Confederate rally site. Rent charged by the church for scores of other events over the decades helped to enhance its financial stability and was another example of the self-governance and self-determination of its Black membership and deacons.

Ryland personally admired many of the deacons. While his focus on “respectability” and “integrity” in the portions of an antebellum essay that referred to them served to advance the communication of proslavery Christianity, it also provides contemporary readers with a rare connection to their lives. In his “Reminiscences” essay series he recounted the deathbed words of Archibald Gwathmy, who had “lived a consistent life”: “I don’t wish to hurry God, but I desire to depart.” Deacon John Taylor and his wife, Betsy “lived with the family of Mr. Blair” – “lived with” was likely a euphemism for “enslaved by” – and both John and Betsy Taylor were, in Ryland’s words, “highly

⁶⁰⁴ Minutes of First African Baptist Church (Richmond), 180, 191, 193, LOV.

⁶⁰⁵ Minutes of First African Baptist Church (Richmond), January 4, 1852, Library of Virginia.

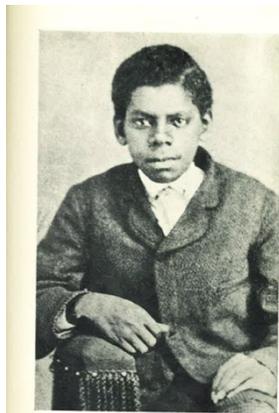
⁶⁰⁶ “The Panorama of Eden,” *Daily Dispatch*, May 17, 1852; “Ole Bull’s Farewell Concerts in America,” *Daily Dispatch*, January 10, 1853, [link](#); “The Aztec Children,” *Daily Dispatch*, February 11, 1853, [link](#); “Senator Douglas’ Speech,” *Richmond Enquirer*, July 13, 1852, [link](#); “Mass Meeting at the African Church,” *Daily Dispatch*, February 7, 1865, [link](#). For more information Maximo Valdez Nunez and Bartola Velasquez, who were purchased from El Salvador at a young age and known as “The Aztec Children,” see Ann McKenzie Garascia, “Bartola and Maximo, “The Aztec Children,”” *Nineteenth-Century Disability: Cultures & Contexts*, accessed December 7, 2020, [link](#). On February 10, 1865, Jefferson Davis gave what was called the African Church Speech in which he said, “Our women must take broomsticks and drive absentees and stragglers to their duty. [Loud cheers.] We have one cause to sustain, one country to defend. He who falls on the soil of Louisiana, or sheds his blood on the soil of North Carolina or Virginia, is alike an honored martyr” (“African Church Speech,” Papers of Jefferson Davis, Rice University, [link](#)).

⁶⁰⁷ “The Stars and Bars in the Church,” *Daily Dispatch*, August 17, 1876, [link](#).

respectable persons.” Deacon Simon Bailey was “a man of unsullied integrity” whose greatest complement was to call something “sweet” – sermons, friends; “alienated husbands and wives were counseled to be ‘sweet,’ and the church in general was exhorted to be ‘sweet.’”⁶⁰⁸

Ryland’s greatest praise was reserved for Joseph Abrams, a tremendously powerful and beloved Black minister. Prior to Nat Turner’s Rebellion, when Abrams could preach freely, “[h]e attended funerals for his deceased brethren and friends, and aided the pastors of the church in maintaining order among the living.” At First African Baptist Church, Ryland was keenly aware of Abrams talent as a pastor: “He was heard with far more interest than I was, and on this account, I should have often requested him to speak, but for the fear of involving him and the church in legal trouble.” Ryland described one particular moment when Abrams was speaking of the punishment of early Christians: “[H]e said, ‘These troubles were not confined to the apostolic age. Even I can say with Paul, “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus,”’ — alluding to a whipping that some wicked man had given him in the early days for preaching the gospel.” Ryland recalled that “[t]he effect” of Abrams description “was thrilling.” After Abrams’ death in June 1854, Ryland offered to write the inscription for “neat marble obelisk” that was being prepared to mark his grave. His offer was refused because “[Joseph Abrams’] friends thought their own literary taste fully equal to the occasion...The result satisfies me that I ought to have waited, at least until I was invited.” Abrams’ funeral was attended by thousands of people. Ryland described approximately eight thousand mourners “in and around” First African Baptist Church, and a procession that included “more than fifty carriages [which] followed the remains to the tomb.”⁶⁰⁹

4.3 WALTER HENDERSON BROOKS & ROBERT RYLAND



In 1866, One Year Out of Slavery

Walter H. Brooks, *The Pastor’s Voice*, Library of Congress

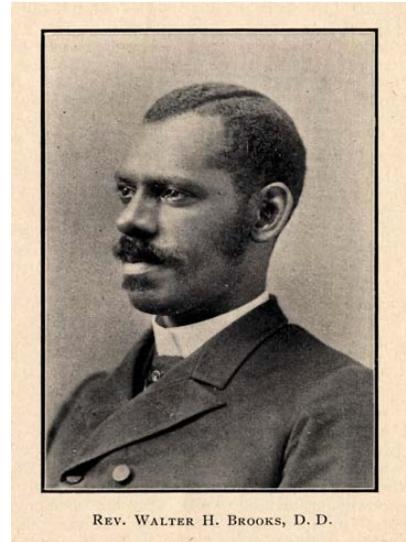
Ryland was a significant influence on the childhood of Reverend Walter H. Brooks, D.D., a poet and the pastor of Nineteenth Street Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.. Brooks’ mother, Lucy Goode Brooks, and her children were enslaved and his father, Albert Royal Brooks was free. In 1858, when the family was about to be sold apart, Albert Brooks negotiated installments that would allow him to purchase his wife and his younger children from the man who enslaved them. Lucy Goode Brooks, in attempt to prevent her older children from being sold away from Richmond, had made arrangements for their sale to buyers who committed to keeping them in the city. Despite her efforts, her daughter, Margaret Ann Brooks, was sold to an enslaver in Tennessee, and the family never saw her again. Lucy Goode Brooks later founded the Friends’ Asylum for Colored Orphans.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁸ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences... No. 4,” 354.

⁶⁰⁹ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences... No. 4, 354.” The *Alexandria Gazette* also reported “eight thousand persons” and “a train of over fifty carriages” for Abrams’ funeral procession, “said to have been the largest ever seen” in Richmond (“News of the Day,” *Alexandria Gazette*, June 16, 1854, [link](#)).

⁶¹⁰ John T. Kneebone and the Dictionary of Virginia Biography, “Lucy Goode Brooks (1818–1900),” *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Humanities, 27 Aug. 2015. Web. 16 Nov. 2020, [link](#)).

Walter Brooks' early life was already deeply rooted in religion. His father "owned and read frequently his family Bible, and the fireside instructions of a godly mother left... a lasting impression" on Brooks as a young child. He also recalled the family's attendance at First African Baptist Church, when his parents "taught my feet the way to the House of God." There Ryland's ministry, and his supervision of the Sunday school classes "became a new factor in influencing a life." Brooks described the minister providing "faithful, fatherly instruction, although I was perfectly illiterate, and, under the then existing laws, it was not his privilege to teach me letters." Ryland taught the children the Ten Commandments and hymns including "Around the Throne of God in Heaven" and "That Sweet Story of Old," each of which refer to children. In Brooks' memory, "Dr. Ryland's colored Sunday-school [was] one of the dearest institutions I have ever known."



Walter H. Brooks, from Henry N. Jeter, *Twenty-five years Experience with the Shiloh Baptist Church and her History*, (1901)

Brooks remembered Ryland as "put[ting] himself in personal touch with the perishing groups who were about him, making the poor rich toward God, and awakening songs of joy, where sorrow and despair hitherto reigned." Brooks appears to have acknowledged the collision of proslavery sentiment and Ryland's ministry, writing, "Whatever may have been Dr. Ryland's intentions, he certainly inspired hope, for all that is best in this life, as well as for the life to come." Just as Ryland once recalled York Woodson as his "brother beloved," Brooks wrote of Ryland, "I revered him as a loving father, as a friend of humanity, as the incarnation of the Christ-Spirit, and to my dying day, I shall think of him as "Brother Ryland" — a brother beloved in Christ."⁶¹¹

To Dr. Robert Ryland *

'Tis three score years and ten, yes more,
Since first I saw the holy man,
Who kindly showed our feet the way,
That leads to holiness and God.

So tender, fatherly, was he,
So wise in speech, in manners mild,
I could but love him, when a child:
In hoary age I love him still.

From Brooks' *The Pastor's Voice*, Library of Congress

Brooks included the poem, "To Dr. Robert Ryland," in his collection of poetry, *The Pastor's Voice* (1945). Beneath it he wrote, "Dr. Ryland was president, the honored president, of a white institution of learning at the same time he was pastor of a congregation of black people, nearly all of whom were slaves, as I and my parents were at the time."⁶¹²

The complete text of Brooks' poem, "To Dr. Robert Ryland," is included in Appendix F.

⁶¹¹ Walter H. Brooks, [Remembrances of Robert Ryland], VBHS.

⁶¹² Walter Henderson Brooks, *The Pastor's Voice*, Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, Inc. (1945), 363, Library of Congress.

4.4 THE COLONIZATION MOVEMENT AND FIRST AFRICAN BAPTIST CHURCH

Robert Ryland used his position at First African Baptist Church to advance the cause of African “colonization” and the work of the American Colonization Society which had been formed in 1816 for the purpose of removing free Black people from the United States and transporting them to Liberia. Historian Samantha Seeley describes the organization as having “accommodated the varied interests of white slaveholders, ministers, reformers, and anti-slavery men who made up its founding members.”⁶¹³ The movement had roots in Virginia that predated the formation of the society and supporters of its goals included Ryland’s early influences, Andrew Broaddus and Robert Semple (See Appendix B). Following his interest in the movement while a student at Columbian College, Ryland joined the American Colonization Society. His ledger shows his early donations and in 1851 he was elected one of its vice-presidents.⁶¹⁴

4.4.1 RYLAND’S WORK WITH COLONIZATION SOCIETIES

Although Ryland’s interest in colonization formed during his years at Columbian College, he dated his deep commitment to the movement to 1831, the year of Nat Turner’s Rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia. In an 1846 letter to the American Colonization Society, Ryland wrote, “I have felt a deep concern on this subject for 15 years.”⁶¹⁵ In his capacity as pastor at First African Baptist Church, Ryland saw himself as ideally positioned to advocate for colonization to church members. On October 12, 1846, he wrote to an unnamed correspondent at the American Colonization Society (some of his correspondence to the society was directed to William McLain, the organization’s secretary) and detailed his approach to sharing colonization information with members of First African Baptist Church: “As I am the pastor of a large African Ch. in the city, I am gradually bringing the whole subject of colonization before the minds of the people. At this time their minds are seriously agitating the matter. Some half dozen are about concluding to offer themselves.”⁶¹⁶

⁶¹³ Samantha Seeley, “Beyond the American Colonization Society,” *History Compass*, 14 (3), 93.

⁶¹⁴ Robert Ryland, Ledger 1, “Expenses at the Columbian College,” and “Family Expenses for 1836,” RRP, 55.1.010, 55.1.041, VBHS.

⁶¹⁵ Robert Ryland to American Colonization Society, September 28, 1846, American Colonization Society records, Library of Congress; electronic access: Fold3.com. The Nat Turner Rebellion in Southampton, Virginia significantly increased fear among white Virginians that the presence of free Black people in the state would have an inciting effect on the enslaved population. In the immediate wake of the rebellion, The *Constitutional Whig* reported that two hundred free Black people were sent to Liberia from Southampton. The writer urged the effort to continue, writing, “The Commonwealth ought to send off at least two thousand every year. A drain like that would soon put a stop to insurrections and rumors of insurrections.” (*Constitutional Whig*, October 6, 1831, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#)). See also, “Nat Turner’s Rebellion,” Library of Virginia, [link](#), and Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press (2007), 72). The rebellion led to an allocation of state funds to support the transportation of free Black people to Liberia and included taxes on free Black people that would support the Virginia Colonization Board (“Colonization Board – The Act of March, 1850,” *Morning Mail*, April 5, 1853, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#)); Philip Slaughter, *The Virginian history of African Colonization*, Richmond: Macfarlane & Fergusson (1855), 103).

⁶¹⁶ Robert Ryland to American Colonization Society, October 12, 1846, American Colonization Society records, Library of Congress; electronic access: Fold3.com.

He later wrote to the society regarding several free and enslaved Black people and the possibilities of their joining the society's Liberian colony. In September 1846, after having shared a letter from the society with his congregation, Ryland wrote with a description of "two promising young men with whom I have conversed lately who desire to go as missionaries to Liberia." Ryland emphasized their sex because he was replying to a request included in an earlier letter from the society seeking women willing to go to Liberia:

Thomas Martin is a free boy 18 years old, bound to a shoemaker who will release him to go, reads tolerably well, baptized this last summer, is exercised strongly in reference to a mission to Liberia, is a modest, good-looking, healthful, active man, a teetotaler [sic] spoken well of by his brethren.

George Roper is a slave of Mrs. Bartlett... who consents to his going. 21 yrs old, a house servant, but now in a tobacco factory, baptized this summer, reads pretty well, writes legibly, desirous to preach in Liberia, is also a modest, likely, intelligent youth, of good health, of good report, strictly temperate, &c. I shall introduce the lads to the Board of For. Missions in Rich.d who are now looking for colored men for Africa, but they have no system matured for interacting them & will have to depend on private efforts to fit them for the field[.] Is it best to let the Colonization Socy. take them out...if they prove suitable men?⁶¹⁷

Ryland also described a seventy-year-old free Black man named John Quarles, who had "recently purchased himself." Quarles was a shoemaker who was committed to making the journey to Liberia. Ryland wrote that Quarles was able to "read tolerably," was "active for [his] age," and had "preached the gospel among his own color" before Virginia law forbade it. The members of First African Church were willing to fund Quarles' journey should the society agree to allow him to sail from Norfolk that November. "He may be thought too old to go out," Ryland continued, "but his habits of life are such as to awaken the hope that his health will be good & his example salutary on the colony."⁶¹⁸ A reply seeking other colonists was again read by Ryland to the church congregation in early November, but only Quarles was willing to go. "He is bent on going," Ryland wrote. No others were "disposed, at present, to embark for Monrovia." Ryland was convinced this would change, though: "I am confident that before long there will be many ready to emigrate."⁶¹⁹

In 1849, the Colonization Society of Virginia was reconstituted after its early incarnation had faded in significance. According to Historian Marie Tyler-McGraw, author of *An African Republic: Black & White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (2007), in the mid-19th century there were critical distinctions between the American Colonization Society and the Colonization Society of Virginia. Suspicion that the American Colonization Society harbored abolitionists and was an organ of abolitionism rose in the early decades of the century. Tyler-McGraw describes "a letter writer in the *Richmond Enquirer* [1826]" who "warned that the ACS was the 'repository of all the fanatical

⁶¹⁷ Robert Ryland to American Colonization Society, September 28, 1846, American Colonization Society records, Library of Congress; electronic access: Fold3.com.

⁶¹⁸ Robert Ryland to The American Colonization Society, October 12, 1846.

⁶¹⁹ Robert Ryland to the American Colonization Society, November 11, 1846.

spirits of the country,' claiming that it was an abolition society that encouraged both slave revolt and federal power over the states."⁶²⁰ The Colonization Society of Virginia was reconstituted with a distinctly proslavery emphasis. One of its chief goals over the following decade was the removal of free black people from the area and to relocate those who were "spontaneously liberated" to their avoid inspiring resistance and revolt among enslaved people.⁶²¹ Robert Ryland opened the reconstitution meeting with a prayer and was on the committee of five selected to nominate the society's officers.⁶²²

clared policy of this State. It admits that no association in the Union can show a more conservative record than the Colonization Society of Virginia, composed as it is of slaveholders who have as much interest in the community as any other citizens. It does not advise emancipation, and has no relations to slavery, except the incidental one of affording to slaveholders, spontaneously liberating their slave, facilities for transporting them to an asylum in a distant land, instead of sending them to the North, where they would add fuel to the flame already raging so fiercely, and become media of communication between the abolitionists and our slaves, thus facilitating the escape of fugitive slaves.

The Colonization Society of Virginia sent from
"Colonization Society of Virginia," *Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser*, February 22, 1849, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank

His affiliation with the national organization continued. In July of 1850, Ryland hosted society agent James Washington Lugenbeel at First African Baptist Church. Richmond was one of several stops on Lugenbeel's tour of Virginia in the hope of "awaken[ing] greater interest in the colonization enterprize [sic], especially among the free colored people." He was accompanied by Rev. Charles Slaughter who, like Ryland was a Vice President of the American Colonization Society. Slaughter was also the head of the Colonization Society of Virginia. The two men addressed "about one thousand colored persons" at the church, and that afternoon Lugenbeel "met, by appointment, a considerable number of free colored persons, and spent about two hours in conversation with them about Liberia."⁶²³

⁶²⁰ Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia*. An African Republic, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press (2007), 42.

⁶²¹ "Officers of the Colonization Society of Virginia," *Daily Dispatch*, February 12, 1855, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

⁶²² "Colonization Society of Virginia," *Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser*, February 22, 1849, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank.

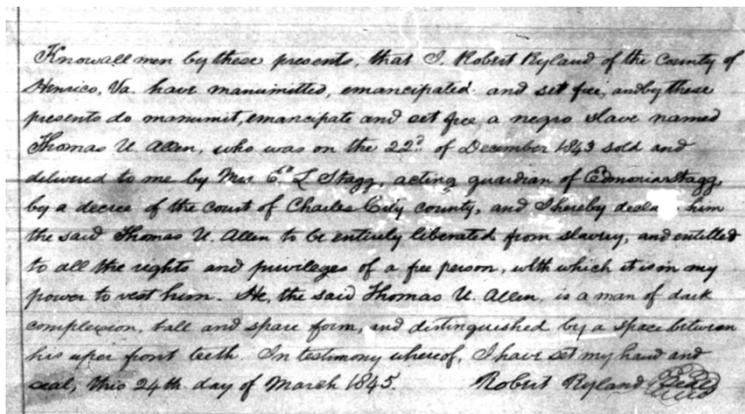
⁶²³ "Prospects in Virginia," *African Repository*, July 1850, 215, [link](#).

4.4.2 THOMAS U. ALLEN & ROBERT RYLAND

On December 22, 1843, Robert Ryland purchased a man named Thomas U. Allen for the purpose of emancipating him once Allen was able to repay the cost.⁶²⁴ This was the same process Ryland would later describe in his 1849 account of John (see Section 3.1.1.2).

Thomas U. Allen was born in approximately 1815.⁶²⁵ Before 1843, he had been inherited by fifteen-year-old Edmonia Stagg, who was described in his later emancipation

document as “an orphan child” from Charles City County, Virginia.⁶²⁶ Allen lived over thirty miles away in Richmond and was a member of Robert Ryland’s congregation there, indicating that he may have been “hired out” in the city. During his late twenties, he served as a deacon at First African Baptist Church and had demonstrated ambition and promise as a minister. Because laws instituted in the wake of Nat Turner’s Rebellion constrained Black ministry, Allen hoped to secure his freedom and relocate to Liberia to preach there as part of the colonization movement. On March 5, 1843, Allen approached his fellow deacons, expressed his “ardent desire to devote himself” to pastoral work in Africa, and sought their financial assistance after Edmonia Stagg’s guardian agreed to sell



The image shows a handwritten document in cursive ink on aged paper. The text reads: "Know all men by these presents, that S. Robert Ryland of the County of Henrico, Va. have manumitted, emancipated and set free, and by these presents do manumit, emancipate and set free a negro slave named Thomas U. Allen, who was on the 22^d of December 1843 sold and delivered to me by Mrs. E. L. Stagg, acting guardian of Edmonia Stagg, by a decree of the Court of Charles City County, and thereby do declare the said Thomas U. Allen to be entirely liberated from slavery, and entitled to all the rights and privileges of a free person, with which it is in my power to vest him. He, the said Thomas U. Allen, is a man of dark complexion, tall and spare form, and distinguished by a space between his upper front teeth. In testimony whereof, I have set my hand and seal, this 24th day of March 1843. Robert Ryland" followed by a signature and a circular seal.

“Ryland to Allen, Emancipation,” City of Richmond Court of Hustings, DB 47:632, Library of Virginia

⁶²⁴ “Ryland to Allen, Emancipation,” City of Richmond Court of Hustings, DB 47:632, Library of Virginia. Research on Thomas U. Allen and Burwell Mann (see Section 4.3.3) was prompted by a 1935 correspondence between Garnett Ryland and Tom Ryland contained in the Robert Ryland papers. Garnett Ryland was contacted by an unnamed professor at what was then the Virginia State College for Negroes, now Virginia State University. The professor was seeking information on Allen and Mann and had provided a typescript of the emancipation information document showing Ryland’s freeing of Allen and details from some of Mann’s letters that appeared in Carter G. Woodson’s *The Mind of the Negro as reflected in his letters written during the Crisis*. Both Rylands looked through the records they had but could not locate more information on either man (RRP, 10.021-.026, VBHS). The foundational work of that unnamed professor led to the additional findings on both Allen and Mann that are contained in this report. Two of Allen’s appearances before his fellow deacons at First African Baptist Church before and after Ryland held him are included in Gregg Kimball’s *American City, Southern Place: A Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond* and are drawn from the Minutes of First African Baptist Church that Ryland recorded. Other details of Allen’s life have been located in the course of research for this report.

⁶²⁵ “Thomas U. Allen,” Massachusetts Deaths 1841-1915, 1921-1924,” Family Search database.

⁶²⁶ “Ryland to Allen, Emancipation,” City of Richmond Court of Hustings, DB 47:632, Library of Virginia; United States Federal Census, 1850, Charles City County, Virginia, “Edmonia Stagg,” roll 939, 410a, National Archives and Records Administration.

him for \$600. In the church minutes, Ryland recorded that the deacons agreed to help Allen with some funds and also suggested he seek contributions elsewhere.⁶²⁷

In the year following his purchase by Ryland, Allen spent time in the North raising money for his legal emancipation.⁶²⁸ Ryland shared Allen's story and sought funds for his effort at an 1844 gathering of the Salem Baptist Association in Lowell, Massachusetts. While there is not a record of Ryland providing Allen's name, his description of the object of his fundraising – an “intelligent, pious, member of the African Church, Richmond, desirous of being a missionary to Africa” who was “owned by an orphan child” – makes it clear he was referring to Thomas U. Allen. At this time Allen was not owned by the child, of course, but by Ryland, who offered to accept any contributions the attendees might be willing to offer. A Southern witness wrote a letter to the *Religious Herald* describing the event and offering a sarcastic assessment of the Northern audience's aversion to purchasing someone, even for the purposes of securing that person's freedom: “The antislavery brethren were thunderstruck, perfectly amazed! What! give money to purchase a human being! No, never! Why not? Oh! It would be sinful. It would recognize the ownership on the part of the master.”⁶²⁹ This sentiment among audience members may have influenced Ryland's decision to withhold the fact that he was Allen's legal owner at the time.

Ryland signed Allen's emancipation on March 24, 1845. It included a physical description, information that was typical for such documents. Thomas U. Allen was “a man of dark complexion, tall and spare form, and distinguished by a space between his upper front teeth.” The document was filed in the City of Richmond Hustings Court on April 14, 1845.⁶³⁰ By this time, Allen had already made it clear to the deacons at First African Baptist Church that because the missionary society in Boston did not have the funds to send him to Liberia he would instead serve as a minister in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Ryland recorded the “dissatisfaction... felt among the members” who had provided him with funds to secure his freedom “with the expectation of [his] going to Africa.” Allen assured them that he had “offered himself” to the missionary society “in good faith,” but had been told that both the lack of funds and his need for experience prevented his being a Liberian colonist. Allen expressed his determination, Ryland wrote, “to improve his mind



The former Second Baptist Church, New Bedford, Massachusetts, where Allen served as the first pastor (Google Maps)

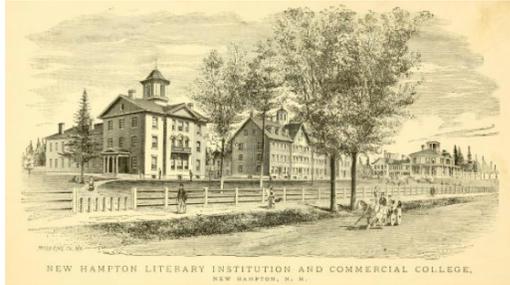
⁶²⁷ Gregg Kimball, American City, *Southern Place: A Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond*, 145; Minutes of First African Baptist Church, March 5, 1843, Library of Virginia.

⁶²⁸ “Death of Rev. Thomas U. Allen, Late of New Bedford,” *Bedford Mercury*, October 5, 1849, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank. This remembrance was signed “R.B.”

⁶²⁹ S.C.C., “For the Religious Herald,” *Religious Herald*, November 14, 1844, VBHS.

⁶³⁰ “Ryland to Allen, Emancipation,” City of Richmond Court of Hustings, DB 47:632, Library of Virginia.

and follow the leadings of Divine Providence in regard to his future efforts. The brethren being satisfied granted a cordial dismissal.”⁶³¹



From Frank H. Kelly, *Reminiscences of New Hampton* (1889), 78

In Massachusetts, Allen assumed his role as the first pastor of New Bedford’s Second Baptist Church.⁶³² According to a friend, he had been “persuaded” to accept the ministerial position but he remained driven to seek formal education. Allen “struggle[ed] with the great disadvantage of his want of education, which he... used laudable efforts to improve.” He led the congregation of Second Baptist Church for three years and then in the summer of 1848 he resigned and enrolled as a student at the New Hampton Literary and Theological Institution, a Baptist school in New Hampshire. In just a year “his studious habits, his gentlemanly and Christian deportment, won the esteem of his teachers and his fellow pupils, and he was regarded as eminently promising.” While traveling to visit friends in New Bedford, however, Allen was “arrested by insidious disease” in Boston.⁶³³ His disease was recorded as “consumption,” the term used for pulmonary tuberculosis.⁶³⁴ After “five or six weeks” of illness he died in the home of the African Methodist Episcopal pastor and bishop George Spywood on October 2, 1849, four and a half years after Robert Ryland emancipated him. He was thirty-four years old.⁶³⁵

The author of a remembrance published in the *Bedford Mercury* wrote that Allen “will long and favorably be remembered here by the Church which he served, his fellow pastors, and many kind friends in the community at large, by whom he was encouraged and helped on his way. Though early

⁶³¹ Gregg Kimball, *American City, Southern Place: A Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond*, 146; Minutes of First African Baptist Church, April 6, 1845, Library of Virginia.

⁶³² S.F. Smith, ed., “Ordinations,” *The Christian Review*, Volume 10, Boston: William S. Damrell (1845), 154. Allen was described as having been ordained on January 23, 1845 and associated with the New Hampton church at that time. This record indicates that Allen was ordained in Massachusetts four months before he was officially freed in Virginia. The writer of the *Bedford Mercury* item described having met Allen while he was raising funds for his emancipation in Pennsylvania and New York in the Spring of 1844. Both details point to Ryland allowing Allen flexibility of movement prior to his emancipation.

⁶³³ “Death of Rev. Thomas U. Allen, Late of New Bedford,” *Bedford Mercury*, October 5, 1849, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank; “Notice,” *Reflector and Watchman*, September 21, 1848, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank.

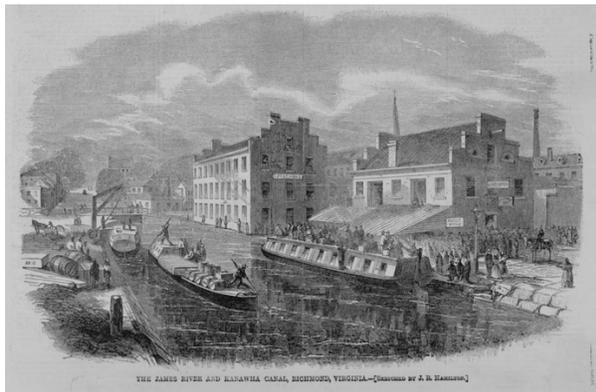
⁶³⁴ “Thomas U. Allen,” record 4400, October 2, 1849, “Massachusetts Deaths 1841-1915, 1921-1924,” Family Search database.

⁶³⁵ Allen’s death was also recorded in the Town Clerk records which gave the address of his death as 4 Southac St., now known as Phillips St. (Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1849, record number 4400, Family Search). This was the home of Rev. George S. Spywood (George Adams, *The Boston Directory 1848-1849*, Boston: James French and Charles Stimson (1848), 281). Among the records that detail Spywood’s position in the AME Zion Church is “Pastors of the AME Zion Church in Boston, Mass. USA,” in Jacob W. Powell’s *Bird’s Eye View of the General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church*, Boston: Laval Press (1918), 22-23.

removed, may his example and success cheer others on their humble way towards the attainment of similar excellence of character.”⁶³⁶ The free Black minister and abolitionist, Jeremiah Asher, described Allen’s death as a personal and denominational loss. He described Allen’s profound effect on those around him and his tremendous promise as a minister: “High expectations had been formed about him. With many others I had anticipated that, when he should have completed his course of study, he would shine as a bright star in our denomination... But he is gone, and his eloquent tongue lies silent in the grave.”⁶³⁷ Allen was buried in East Boston Cemetery.⁶³⁸

The text of the 1849 remembrance of Thomas U. Allen that appeared in the *Bedford Mercury* is included in Appendix C.

4.4.3 BURWELL W. MANN & ROBERT RYLAND



I think I had better take in the report, and let the people of Richmond know, that I can not go. Since I made up my mind to go to Africa, there is about five persons going, or has determined to go, if I went. their names will be sent hereafter. Send me word how many times in a year will the reports be sent
yours in many tears
Burwell Mann

If as you see no way as yet by which the money can be raised you will please send me word whether I must have my clothes made, or to make any preparation for going

Harper's Weekly, v. 9, no. 459 p. 653 (J.R. Hamilton), the former Ladd’s Lumber building owned by the James River and Kanawha Canal Co; Burwell Mann to the American Colonization Society, November 21, 1847, American Colonization Society Records, Library of Congress and Fold3.com

Burwell Mann was born about 1804, and when he encountered Robert Ryland in the late 1840s he had been enslaved by a man named John Cosby for seventeen years.⁶³⁹ Cosby “hired” Mann out to David M. Branch, the owner of a tobacco warehouse located on the turning basin in Shockoe Bottom.⁶⁴⁰ Mann hoped to secure his freedom and to preach, despite the law instituted after Nat

⁶³⁶ “Death of Rev. Thomas U. Allen,” *Bedford Mercury*, October 5, 1849.

⁶³⁷ Jeremiah Asher, *An Autobiography with Details of a Visit to England*, Philadelphia (1862), 117-118, [link](#). Jeremiah Asher is known for having written to Abraham Lincoln to urge the use of Black chaplains in the Civil War. He served as chaplain in the United States Colored Infantry Regiment. Asher was the first Black chaplain to die in military service when after he contracted typhoid fever while providing pastoral care to soldiers (“Ministerial Register,” *The Independent* (New York), August 24, 1865, Proquest).

⁶³⁸ Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1849, record number 4400, Family Search.

⁶³⁹ United States Federal Census of 1860, Population Schedule, “Burrell Mann,” National Archives and Records Administration, M653, 1,438 rolls, Richmond Ward 1, Henrico, Virginia, Ancestry.com. See footnote in previous section (4.2.2) for information on the early research into the lives of Thomas U. Allen and Burwell Mann.

⁶⁴⁰ Carter G. Woodson, *The Mind of the Negro as reflected in his letters written during the Crisis*, Washington, D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc. (1926), 16; “Trustee’s

Turner's Rebellion that prevented Black ministers from doing so. In an 1847 letter to the American Colonization Society, Mann wrote that he longed to attain his freedom and to go to Liberia where he could, "become wise unto Salvation...[and] be the instrument in the hand of God in turning Many to Righteousness... [T]he deprivation of church Rights & privileges here has made me willing and ready to give up this part of the world & any other object for the Sake of Christ and the Glory of his people in that continent."⁶⁴¹

Mann previously attended the Union Hill Methodist Church, but had grown frustrated with the church's apparent refusal to support his efforts to attain freedom and "go to Liberia let it cost what it may... Our Methodist Ministers Spurn me away Saying that they could do nothing for me in these respects if I were not a Free man."⁶⁴² American Colonization Society Secretary, William McLain, evidently wrote that Mann should seek Robert Ryland's assistance. In Mann's November 21st reply, he described Ryland as being "the very friend of which you speak." According to Mann, Ryland had spoken to Cosby, who said he would free Mann once he was paid four hundred and fifty dollars. Mann wrote that Ryland "has given me a good advice & promises to help me pay, & use efforts to get others to help me."⁶⁴³ Ryland encouraged Mann to offer himself to the society as a colonist rather than a missionary which would, in Mann's words, "be some advantage."⁶⁴⁴

Just over a month later, on January 5th, Mann wrote of Ryland again, this time including him among three men to whom he was willing to be sold if the American Colonization Society would pay for his purchase. Should he be unable to raise money to repay the society, he offered that Ryland and the other two men could sell him:

Mr. John G. Mosby, the Rev. Mr. Ryland, & Rev. Taylor, are Gentlemen of this city into whose hands I am willing to be place, untill the money is Raise to Repay you. and if I do not comply with what I here promise, I am willing for you, or those in whose Hands I may be placed, to sell me again, to any Citizen of Richmond, or Washington. These gentlemen have seen my face in the flesh but they do not know my mind Relating to Liberia as you do. The

Sale of Tobacco Presses, Screws, etc.," *Richmond Enquirer*, January 18, 1848.

⁶⁴¹ Woodson, *The Mind of the Negro*, 15. Burwell Mann's letters to the American Colonization Society were collected by Carter G. Woodson and printed in *The Mind of the Negro as reflected in his Letters written during the Crisis* (1926). In the Ryland Papers, there is correspondence between Garnett and Tom Ryland related a professor from Virginia State University, then named Virginia State College for Negroes, who sought information on any connections between Ryland and Mann. The two agreed that there was no mention of Mann in Ryland's personal papers known to the family. The unnamed professor also sought information on Thomas U. Allen, and had located the record of Ryland's emancipation of him at what is now the Library of Virginia. The Ryland letter in which Mann's efforts was located in the American Colonization Society records held at the Library of Congress and is cited in *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* by Ira Berlin (New Press: New York, 1974), 155). Three other letters Ryland wrote to ACS were also located in that collection over the course of this research.

⁶⁴² Burwell Mann to the American Colonization Society, June 21, 1847, in Woodson, *The Mind of the Negro*, 15.

⁶⁴³ Woodson, 22, 27.

⁶⁴⁴ Woodson, 28.

Rev. Ryland & Taylor is interested in my case Mr Ryland has promise me to give me some money & to be my Agent, to see me righted, if I could get any one to advance the money.⁶⁴⁵

Ryland's own thoughts on Mann can be found in a letter he wrote to McLain the following week, a reply to an apparent inquiry about Mann's situation and his "worth." Despite Mann's belief that Ryland would help him, no records have been located that indicate that Ryland assisted him as he had Thomas U. Allen. Ryland wrote that after discovering that the man who enslaved Mann wanted "really a full price" for him, he "concluded to have nothing to do with the matter." In Ryland's estimation, Mann "occup[ied] no special prominence either as to intellectual or moral worth." Ryland added, with apparent amusement, that Mann had "imbibed the idea that his emancipation & emigration to Liberia are so important to the world's well being, that he is surprised that the different societies... do not eagerly contend for the honor of first doing the work!" Ryland urged McLain and the society to focus on the "many free persons meditating on a change of continent" or those whose "masters are willing to give their slaves to go [to Liberia]" rather than those, like Burwell Mann, who required money to secure their freedom from enslavement.⁶⁴⁶

Mann could not follow the advice of Ryland and others and raise money himself to pay for his freedom because he was constrained by the man to whom he was "hired out," who would not allow him to attend church gatherings to raise the necessary funds.⁶⁴⁷ By March of 1848, Mann's letters to the American Colonization Society appear to indicate that any hope related to Ryland or others in Richmond had disappeared. He developed another plan "as I can not find any friends in American, who will advance the money." Mann hoped to "write to the Liberian Government, that if they will Redeem me from this Slavery, that I will go as a Colonist, and I will Repay the Government the Same money again, and work at my Trade there every day, and in the missionary field on Sundays."⁶⁴⁸ As with his outreach to Ryland and other ministers, this effort appears to have gotten Mann no closer to freedom. In total, Mann wrote over forty letters to McLain and others at the American Colonization Society in the hope that the organization would assist him. He described hearing of a ship sailing from Baltimore, holding those bound for Liberia, and his pain "that I were not one in that number."⁶⁴⁹ Carter G. Woodson referred to Mann's letters as demonstrating "a most pathetic case," but one that was "typical... of thousands of ambitious slaves who, after having been imbued with the spirit of freedom offered by the prospect of African colonization, struggled hard, and too often struggled in vain, to reach this "land of promise."⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁵ Woodson, 35.

⁶⁴⁶ Robert Ryland to William McLain, January 11, 1848, American Colonization Society Records, Library of Congress, also accessed through Fold3.com.

⁶⁴⁷ Gregg Kimball, "Richmond in the African American Diaspora," in *Afro-Virginian History and Culture*, John Saillant, ed., 157-158; Woodson, *The Mind of the Negro*, 20, 26-27.

⁶⁴⁸ Woodson, 37.

⁶⁴⁹ Woodson, 37.

⁶⁵⁰ Woodson, 15

Despite repeated discouragements, Mann did acquire his freedom within a year of his last letter to the society. No evidence has been located that Ryland played a role in the process. In the censuses of 1850 and 1860, Mann was enumerated with the free Black and white people of Richmond, where he worked as a laborer and a factory worker.⁶⁵¹ In 1860, he was listed with his wife, Susan Mann. By 1870, the two had relocated to Lynchburg, Virginia, where they were raising their daughter, Rebecca, then nine years old and attending school. It was in Lynchburg that Mann was finally able to work as a minister. At the time the census was enumerated, he was the pastor of the city's nascent African Methodist Episcopal Church, which provided the foundation for what one bishop described in 1881 as having grown into "a fine little church and congregation."⁶⁵²

There is no known record of Burwell W. Mann's death.

4.5 CONTROVERSIES AND PRESSURES

Ryland's work at First African Baptist Church, and the existence of the church itself, was threatened by what records indicate was sustained pressure from sectional and proslavery quarters, and, according to a letter to his father, pressure from the members of the church.

In 1849, Ryland wrote to his father of his frustration at being accused of "oppressing blacks on the one hand and trying to defraud their masters on the other," calling it "rather discouraging." At the time, Ryland felt that he had "few genuine friends," a feeling prompted by his discovery that there was "a gentleman in town" asserting that Ryland made an annual salary of \$2,500 at First African Baptist Church. Ryland was outraged and wrote of the tensions surrounding his position there and his sense that he had been betrayed by those he expected to stand for him. He had believed himself to have "many who... would take me by the hand, but the longer I see mankind, the more satisfied I am that they are cold -- selfish & untrustworthy." As a result, he aspired to depend on no one, to "do my duty[,] be kind to all[,] ask few favors[,] rely on God, & act in such a manner so that no man can truly say naught against me" while still "avoid[ing] a sour, misanthropic temper." Ryland was determined to locate the person who started the rumor, "to find out ere long & put him to silence," though at the time he wrote Josiah Ryland that he had not been able to persuade "the informant" to reveal who had made the claim about his salary. Ryland ended the account of the rumor with a frank description of his feelings about his role as the pastor of First African Baptist Church:

I feel that I am disinterestedly and laboriously working for the welfare of the blacks & through their benefits, for that of the whites — and to be calumniated thus & charged with oppressing the blacks on the one hand and trying to [illegible: possibly "defraud"] their

⁶⁵¹ United States Federal Census, 1850, "Burwell W. Mann," Richmond (Independent City), Henrico County, Virginia, 361, National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, 1009 rolls; Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29; National Archives, Washington, D.C.; United States Federal Census, 1860, "Burrell Mann," Richmond Ward 1, Henrico, Virginia, 177, National Archives Records Administration, microfilm publication M653, 1,438 rolls. Washington, D.C.

⁶⁵² United States Federal Census, 1870, "B.W. Mann," Lynchburg, Henry Ward, Campbell County, Virginia, 55, National Archives and Records Administration, microfilm publication M593, 1,761 rolls. Washington, D.C.; A.W. Wayman, *My Recollections of African M.E. Ministers* [Electronic edition], Philadelphia: A.M.E. Book Rooms (1881), 170, [link](#).

masters of their slaves on the other, is rather discouraging — However I am determined to try to do right and leave my character for God to de -- [decide or determine -- letter torn].⁶⁵³

Criticism of the church continued in the following years. Ryland generally used the terms “servants,” “people of color,” and “colored” to describe Black people during his time as pastor. However in 1850, he wrote his wife and described “preach[ing] 2 good sermons to the ‘niggers’ on Sunday.” His use of quotation marks around the term may indicate that he was adopting what he likely considered a coarse term in an echo of the language of his critics.⁶⁵⁴

On April 23, 1863, Ryland wrote an open letter to the editor of the *Confederate Baptist*, which was published in the *Religious Herald* in response to a *Confederate Baptist* editorial concerned with the “religious culture of our slaves.” The editorial argued that “the African churches of Richmond... are the resort of insolent negroes, who desire to be exempted from control of their masters.” Ryland’s reply quoted liberally from the editorial and refuted its writer’s assertions while relying heavily on ideas of respectability – the behavior of the enslaved members of his congregation within the confines dictated by white people– whom he described as “staid, orderly, and obedient” people associated with “highly respected families.” He responded to a call by the *Confederate Baptist* that the “religious meetings of the colored population should be under control of the whites” with the simple answer that they already were. Assuming that the writer was concerned with “separate houses of worship,” Ryland provided an overview of why First African Baptist Church and other churches for free and enslaved Black people were formed in the first place. Prior to their formation, he wrote, the sharing of a church with a growing proportion of Black people became an issue for white congregants: “Our citizens have a repugnance to admitting into their elegant churches more colored people than would fill one side-gallery” and without the construction of their own churches, “our slaves in the cities never have been and never will be accommodated with seats to hear the word of God.”

He shared the number he had baptized at that point (“3,540 people of color in Richmond”), and finally addressed an attack directed at him and other ministers to Black people. The *Confederate Baptist* had asserted that “[s]o far as our experience goes, he is always degraded...ruled by negroes, and as a direct consequence, loses all his manliness as a master, and his integrity as a Christian.” While this language seems general to all ministers in this position, Ryland believed it was directed at him personally. Although he was willing to withhold his responses to the editorial’s other comments, this attack was “extremely discourteous” in its suggestion regarding “his integrity as a Christian.” Ryland resisted the “offensive” and “grave charge” and requested “an unequivocal retraction of this language, in its obvious application to myself.” He acknowledged that he was the target of “sneers of the proud, ungodly and blaspheming men,” and wrote that he was “happy to be ‘degraded’ in their view” seeing it as “the price of the *privilege* of preaching Christ’s gospel to the poor.”⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵³ Robert Ryland to Josiah Ryland, May 20, 1849, RRP, 11.075, VBHS.

⁶⁵⁴ Robert Ryland to Betty Ryland, August 19, 1850, RRP, 20.012, VBHS.

⁶⁵⁵ Robert Ryland, "African Baptist Churches," *Religious Herald*, May 14, 1863, Robert Ryland

4.5.1 MAIL CONTROVERSY

By stepping into the role of minister at the church, Ryland was, inadvertently, well-positioned to record its “relative position in a world of faith that overlapped with Richmond’s place in the African diaspora.” Historian Gregg Kimball details how Ryland’s lists of dismissals from the church provide a record of the connections between the Black community in Richmond and the communities formed in the North and, due to the efforts of the colonization movement, in Africa. While the formal dismissals that Ryland recorded showed some free people who moved north, Kimball also notes that “most of the dismissed slaves” were headed to the deep South, including the states of Mississippi and Georgia.⁶⁵⁶

Former members would address correspondence to their Richmond connections care of First African Baptist Church and Ryland would then “announce... [the letters] from the pulpit on Sunday at the close of worship.” Ryland later wrote that such a public distribution “gave greater publicity to the plan and thus, no doubt, suggested the idea of using it for a different purpose and on a wider scale.” A coordinated use of the system to organize escapes from enslavement was discovered and Ryland experienced a double-sided shock. He was “mortified... that a *few* of the congregation had abused my confidence,” and in a demonstration of what Edward L. Ayers refers to as the “tension” and the “fundamental contradiction of his work,” Ryland was also “mortified to learn that some white persons, even some professing Christians” hoped that Ryland would work in cooperation with the police to help apprehend potential escapees.⁶⁵⁷ This prospect horrified him. He wrote, “I *had* not the least intention, *should* have had none, when I became pastor of the colored people, to degrade my office to a police to detect and to apprehend *runaways!*” Ryland viewed both sides, facilitating freedom and acting as an impediment to it, as equally at odds with his role: “Be it mine to preach the gospel, to watch for souls, to make full proof of my ministry.”⁶⁵⁸ Historian Ira Berlin describes the controversy within the social and racial dynamic of Richmond at the time, writing, “Much to their chagrin, whites were constantly discovering” that enslaved and free Black people were “twisting to their own purposes the liberties that the African churches and benevolent associations provided... The extent of this activity is impossible to measure, but the name of one Richmond benevolent society — the Union Travelers — suggests other objectives besides securing burial plots.”⁶⁵⁹

4.5.2 JANE AND JOHN WILLIAMS⁶⁶⁰

Biographical File, VBHS.

⁶⁵⁶ Kimball, “Richmond in the African American Diaspora,” in *Sallient*, 145; 163.

⁶⁵⁷ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences... No. 3,” *American Baptist Memorial*, 323-324; Ayers, “The Trials of Robert Ryland,” 21.

⁶⁵⁸ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences... No. 3,” *American Baptist Memorial*, 324.

⁶⁵⁹ Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South*, New York: New Press (1974), 314.

⁶⁶⁰ Portions of this section are drawn from Shelby M. Driskill, “Jane Williams: Enslavement, Murder, and a

One of the greatest threats to First African Baptist Church and Robert Ryland's ministry there were a pair of murders that occurred on the morning of July 18, 1852. Virginia Winston, her husband Joseph Winston, and their eight-month-old daughter were discovered after having been attacked with a hatchet. The infant was dead, and Virginia Winston died of her injuries shortly after the family was discovered. Those enslaved by the family were immediately suspected. Days after the murders, Joseph Winston was said to have been astonished that his "servants" would have anything to do with the attack since, as the *Richmond Enquirer* wrote, "he always leaned to the side of mercy" in his treatment of them.⁶⁶¹ This contrasted with testimony at the later trial of Jane Williams, which revealed that he had "threatened to sell [Jane Williams] without her child" and had recently whipped another enslaved woman.⁶⁶² John Williams testified that Jane Williams had been sleeping in the Winston's house for the previous week in a small bed with her own "little daughter," and another witness stated that Jane Williams was upset because she was being forced to travel away from the house for the next month "in attendance of her mistress," and potentially away from her own child.⁶⁶³

Following testimony before the Coroner's jury, suspicion settled on Jane and John Williams, both members of First African Baptist Church, and the city went into a state of upheaval. Gregg Kimball notes that, for some white people in the city, the Winston murders fit a "pattern of growing conflict," a belief held by Richmond resident at the time, Mary V.H. Terhune, who wrote that "it is well understood here by both negroes and whites that a struggle for supremacy is at hand." She described the murders as "the beginning of trouble."⁶⁶⁴ Their aftermath was also recalled by Matthew Mark Trumbull, an antislavery aspiring lawyer who had just settled in Richmond and found he and his family caught in "something like a wolf hunt" for abolitionists following the discovery of the Winstons. Trumbull and his wife and child fled the city and continued until they "landed safely on free soil."⁶⁶⁵

4.5.2.1 "THOU SHALT NOT KILL"

On Saturday, July 24th, Ryland visited Jane Williams in her cell. She had maintained her innocence, but although one witness had named Anna, an enslaved woman who had been whipped by Joseph Winston, as someone with a potential motive, evidence pointing to Jane Williams mounted and she

'Creed So Prevalent,'" (unpublished manuscript, October 21, 2020), Ulysses file.

⁶⁶¹ "The Late Tragedy," *Richmond Enquirer*, August 3, 1852, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#); *Peculiar Tragedy*, 12.

⁶⁶² "The Testimony of the Murder Case," *Daily Dispatch*, July 22, 1852, Virginia Chronicle.

⁶⁶³ "The Testimony in the Murder Case," *Daily Dispatch*, July 22, 1852, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#); "Confession of the Murder," *Richmond Enquirer*, July 30, 1852, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

⁶⁶⁴ Gregg Kimball, *American City in a Southern Place*, 67; Mary V.H. Terhune quoted in Kimball, 67.

⁶⁶⁵ Matthew Mark Trumbull quoted in Kenneth L. Lyftogt, *Iowa's Forgotten General: Matthew Mark Trumbull and the Civil War*, University of Iowa Press (2007), 23.

had become the prime suspect.⁶⁶⁶ In her cell, Ryland “exhorted her to make her peace with God, as she would undoubtedly be hung.” Williams then admitted that it was she who had attacked the family, killing Virginia Winston and her baby, and she insisted that she had acted alone.⁶⁶⁷ The following day, Ryland delivered a sermon at First African Baptist Church that addressed the Winston murders and the arrest of Jane and John Williams. Text of Ryland’s draft version of the sermon is included in Appendix E.

One of the early lines in its final version distilled Ryland’s overall message to his audience: “God has given this country to the white people. They are the law-makers – the masters – the superiors. The people of color are the subjects – the servants – and even when not in bondage, the inferiors.”⁶⁶⁸ This aligns with his earlier writing in *The Scripture Catechism for Coloured People* (1848) in which he used words from *Ephesians* to encourage obedience to “masters,” in the answer to the question, “Do the scriptures enjoin obedience on servants? A[nswer]. Yes. Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ, not with the eye-service as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Eph. iv. 5,6.”⁶⁶⁹

According to the draft version of the sermon located in Ryland’s personal papers, he originally planned to begin with a description of the murder scene. In the version delivered at First African Baptist Church and subsequently published, however, he folded the description into a particularly personal section toward the end of the address, imagining both what he would have felt seeing his own wife murdered in the manner of Virginia Winston and the thoughts of his own child were he about to be killed “by the very being whom it loved, next to its parents, most of all on earth.”⁶⁷⁰ Several other portions of the draft sermon were also developed more fully in the version Ryland gave in front of the enslaved and free members of the church.

Ryland’s stated purpose was to explain the commandment that forbade killing, although Ryland had previously believed an explanation was “needless.” Addressing the Black congregation, Ryland described “some peculiar reasons why *you* should deplore the occurrence of this tragic event.”⁶⁷¹ First was the increased risk to the church from the white community who already “look with suspicion on your separate organization” and acts such as the Winston murders will “confirm this

⁶⁶⁶ “The Testimony in the Murder Case,” *Daily Dispatch*, July 22, 1852, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#);

⁶⁶⁷ “Jane, The Murderess,” *Daily Dispatch*, July 26, 1852, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

⁶⁶⁸ Robert Ryland, “Substance of a Sermon, Delivered at the African Church, July 25th, 1852, by the Pastor,” *Daily Dispatch*, August 6, 1852, [link](#); also quoted in Alfred L. Brophy, “The Nat Turner Trials,” *North Carolina Law Review* 91 (2013), 1822.

⁶⁶⁹ Robert Ryland, *The Scripture Catechism for Coloured People*, Richmond: Harrold & Murray (1848), Lesson L:3, VBHS.

⁶⁷⁰ Robert Ryland, “Thou shalt not kill,” draft, RRP, 54.0983, VBHS; Ryland, “Substance of a sermon,” *Daily Dispatch*.

⁶⁷¹ The italicized words likely correspond to Ryland’s underlined sections in a manuscript version written after his initial draft.

prejudice and disturb your quiet and delightful worship.” Outside of the church, this suspicion would also “increase the strictness of discipline to which you are subject in the family, in the factory, on the farm – from the City Police and from the State authorities.” Ryland then spoke candidly of his own role as pastor and focused particular attention on how his audience might be hearing his warnings. He then described what he saw as a double benefit of their “keep[ing]... the place of submission”:

While, therefore, it is the duty of other ministers to inculcate kindness and forbearance on the masters, it is my duty – charged as I am in the providence of God with your instruction – to urge you to *know* and to *keep your own place – the place of submission*. But you say, ‘Mr R is preaching now for the good of the white people.’ No. I am preaching to your *especial benefit*. It is very true that my counsel to you will if followed, prove beneficial to the whites, but this is collateral – an incidental benefit. My *primary* object is your temporal and eternal good.

Ryland’s years of public speaking and his study of rhetoric are evident in his use of emotion, precise detail, and logic to try and enlist the congregants of First African Baptist Church in an agreement not to rise up against enslavers. They would be caught, he insisted, through the “ingenuity of lawyers – the learning of judges – the discrepancy of witnesses – the concurrence of events – the stirrings of conscience – the color of the cheek – the very breathing of the culprit in his efforts at composure... ‘*Murder will out.*’ Let no one think for a moment, then, that he can stain his hands with innocent blood and then escape punishment.” Ryland focused significant attention on the biblical discouragement of revenge, a possible insight into Jane Williams’ motive. Only God, he insisted, can take revenge “whether our injuries are real or imaginary.”

The memories of the death of Josephine Ryland seem to animate much of Ryland’s response to the Winston killings. A murderer, he argued, prevents the victim’s preparation for death, and he recalled that it was this opportunity for Josephine Ryland to prepare for her death that had provided some comfort when he had otherwise “felt as if the horizon of my life were overcast with dark clouds, all my schemes of happiness were blasted, the world itself was a blank.” To Ryland, the “one consolation” was that God had taken her from him, not a “murderer’s axe.” He also recalled the death of one of his sons in his consideration of the death of the Winston child: “What if that child,” his own, “while nestling in his mother’s bosom, and sleeping with all the innocence of an angel, had been butchered by the very being whom it loved, next to its parents, most of all on earth? The very thought makes me shudder with horror.”

Ryland paid particular attention to the threat that the murders posed for First African Baptist Church. Suspicion was now attached to the entire church community, “the most innocent and deserving”:

I have no doubt but that last night hundreds of families in this city slept with their chambers locked against their own long-trusted and really trustworthy servants.... This whole church is disgraced in the eyes of the public. You, brethren, who, I confidently believe would not hurt the hair of the head of any living person, and who are honestly striving to promote the purity of those of your own color... even the best of you will have to bear the suspicion of an outraged community... It is your duty to bear these reproaches with meekness, and to see to it that the suspicions resting on you shall prove, so far as you are concerned, to be unjust

and groundless.”

A murderer, Ryland insisted, “if not detected by human laws spends a miserable life and a dreadful eternity.” What followed was a layering of images as Ryland built to the sermon’s conclusion and the transition to prayer. He described “[c]onscience torment[ing]” a killer with “a whip of scorpions” leaving him with “constant dread of exposure.” Ryland imagined the hypothetical murderer’s dreams: “In his nightly slumbers the pale image of his injured victim rises up to his view and makes him cry out with agony.” Finally, upon his death, “the spirit that he had dismissed prematurely to its God will be a swift and fearful witness against him. And the avenging Judge – but here I leave him. Let us pray with the Psalmist.”⁶⁷²

On July 30, 1852, a writer for the *Richmond Republican* referred to First African Baptist Church as a “cradle of crime,” a place where Jane and John Williams “were nurtured and matured.”⁶⁷³ Ryland provided his “Thou Shalt Not Kill” sermon for publication six days later in the *Daily Dispatch*, possibly to counter the outcry and protect the church.⁶⁷⁴ It was later reprinted in a small book, *Particulars of the Dreadful Tragedy* published in 1852 by John D. Hammersley, editor of the *Daily Dispatch*.

4.5.2.2 “CONFESSION,” EXECUTIONS & “A CREED SO PREVALENT”

After Jane Williams’ conviction and during a second visit from Ryland, she confessed to the poisoning of another Winston child who had died “some weeks before” and asked him to keep her confession a secret until after her execution, “fearing that a mob would seize and destroy her.”⁶⁷⁵ Ryland withheld the information from the police and the press. On the day of her execution, he accompanied her to the scaffold, and “offered up a fervent prayer to the Deity on her behalf,” a prayer which the *Daily Dispatch* described falling on the “unwilling ears” of the crowd of six thousand who were gathered there.⁶⁷⁶ Jane Williams was executed on September 10, 1852. Despite John Williams’ claims of innocence, supported by his wife’s insistence that he was not involved in the murders and Ryland’s public questioning of her on the scaffold to provide her a last chance to say she had acted alone, John Williams was convicted and executed on October 22, 1852.⁶⁷⁷

A month after Jane Williams’ execution, a *Daily Dispatch* writer quoted three enslaved witnesses that he had overheard in the moments immediately after her hanging: “‘She has gone home,’ said

⁶⁷² Ryland, “Substance of a sermon,” *Daily Dispatch*.

⁶⁷³ The *Richmond Republican* quoted in William A. Link, “The Jordan Hatcher Case: Politics and “A Spirit of Insubordination” in Antebellum Virginia,” *The Journal of Southern History* 64, no. 4 (1998): 645.

⁶⁷⁴ Rev. Robert Ryland, “Substance of a Sermon, Delivered at the African Church, July 25th, 1852, by the Pastor,” *Daily Dispatch*, August 6, 1852, [link](#).

⁶⁷⁵ “Further Confession of Jane Williams,” *Daily Dispatch*, September 17, 1852.

⁶⁷⁶ “The Execution of Jane Williams,” *Daily Dispatch*, September 11, 1852; “The Execution of Jane Williams,” *Richmond Enquirer*, September 14, 1852.

⁶⁷⁷ “The Execution of John Williams,” *Daily Dispatch*, October 23, 1852.

one. ‘She is in glory,’ said another. ‘Her seat is far higher in heaven than that of Mrs. Winston,’ said a third.” The writer was outraged at what he referred to as “a creed so prevalent among the slave population, that it may almost be pronounced universal,” a conviction that baptism, in whatever form an enslaved person “may happen to fancy” would protect that person from damnation even if they were to later commit a crime. He noted the Williams’ membership at First African Baptist Church before calling Jane and John Williams “devils incarnate.” Finally, he echoed the Presbyterian minister who gave the Winston funeral sermon who called for “better religious instruction” for enslaved people.⁶⁷⁸ A follow-up article three days later indicated that the newspaper received negative reactions from some in the Baptist community who insisted that Robert Ryland and others had been “untiring in their efforts to instruct the congregation of the African Church.” The original writer offered an apology of sorts for the portion of the earlier article that referred to “better religious instruction,” however he insisted that the “creed” was known to everyone except Ryland and his supporters, who were operating in “ignorance” and must “unteach” enslaved people “this particular *dogma*.”⁶⁷⁹

The impact of the murders on First African Baptist Church remained significant enough that three years later Ryland included it in an essay in which he also detailed the mail controversy, calling both “severe *trials*” for the church. He continued to insist on John Williams’ innocence, attributing the man’s conviction and execution to the “infuriated state of the public mind” rather than “from the conclusiveness of the testimony.” The church, Ryland wrote, had “shared largely, but most unjustly, in the odium” of the murders.⁶⁸⁰

4.5.3 CATECHISM & LITERACY

Another account of a service at First African Baptist Church was that of Marianne Finch, who had spoken with Ryland and subsequently included portions of their conversation in the description of her time there. Ryland had described the church’s congregants as “very respectable, reliable people – none more so in the city.” According to Finch, Ryland also noted that “many” of the church members were literate and “they all had Bibles.”⁶⁸¹ While at various times Ryland referred to the constraint on providing reading instruction to enslaved people as one of his two objections to the

⁶⁷⁸ “The Trial of Jane and John Williams for the Murder of the Winston Family,” *Daily Dispatch*, October 25, 1852, *Virginia Chronicle*.

⁶⁷⁹ “The Case of Jane and John Williams,” *Daily Dispatch*, October 28, 1852, *Virginia Chronicle*.

⁶⁸⁰ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences... No.3,” *American Baptist Memorial*, 324.

⁶⁸¹ Marianne Finch, *An Englishwoman’s Experience in America*, London: Richard Bentley (1853), 299; also cited in O’Brien, “Factory, Church, and Community,” 520. Finch’s impression of enslavement in Richmond was influenced by her experience at First African Baptist Church, but the effect was not that which was intended by proslavery Christians. Of her experience at the church Finch wrote that she “was delighted to find such a body of people in the heart of slavery,” and that she “remembered them with much pleasure” as she watched “a slave sale” the next day. Her hope for an end to enslavement was not altered by her time with Ryland and the church congregants. She instead viewed the community at First African Baptist Church as a demonstration of the possibilities for the Black community after the “gloom” of enslavement was lifted: “This church, like a ray of sunshine in a storm, rendered more distinct the clouds of gloom that hung over the landscape; but, at the same time, brightened the hope of their dispersion.”

implementation of slavery – the other being the separation of families – his most explicit published statement on reading appeared at the end of one of his 1855 essays for *American Baptist Memorial*. In it he wrote that “[a] very important agency in their religious cultivation is the distribution of suitable religious books.” In addition to recruitment material from the American Colonization Society, Ryland distributed “many Bibles and Testaments” to the members of the church because “[s]ome of them can read, and all of them can have the scriptures read to them.”⁶⁸² Ryland even provided a strategy for “the best method of doing good...with books,” writing that those who agreed with him should “lend [books] systematically and for short periods. If the work is *lent*, not *given*, it will be read by *more persons*. If the period is short, say one week, it will be read *at once*, [and] if [the] *system* be observed, it will be *returned*.” Ryland used his concluding paragraphs to solicit funds to purchase “such works as the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, the *African Preacher*, the [*L*]ife of *Sam’l Pearce* and the *Church Members’ Guide*” for the congregants to read over “the holidays, the long winter evenings, and other intervals of repose.” His advice for reading was tied to paternalism and respectability as well as his desire for development of faith free of “depend[cy] on desultory oral instruction for their entire knowledge.” Ryland argued that literacy and access to “suitable” reading material would result in changes that would benefit the enslaved and the enslaver:

They will make more useful servants, if in a state of bondage, and more safe and reliable residents, if free, by having their minds imbued with rational views of Christianity...I am fully aware that some will think I am approaching delicate ground, and yet with the most considerative feelings and with the admission that grave *abuses* might follow, I am constrained to believe nevertheless, that *greater benefits would accrue both to themselves and to society* by increasing their facilities to understand that gospel, whose maxim is “on earth peace, good will towards men.”

Using typical euphemisms of the time, Ryland affirmed his loyalty to the *status quo* while advocating for literacy, echoing the diplomacy that marked his early responses to the church reform movement during the early to mid-1830s:

I am a Southern man by birth, education and habits. I deplore the ultraism and recklessness of the North on this subject, and not the less on account of the *increased restrictions* which have been thus occasioned to the colored people. But I would respectfully ask Southern Christians if they are not in danger of neglecting known, imperative duty, because others are not disposed to mind their own business. Let us not be frightened from the path of real benevolence, either by the rashness of the North, nor by the morbid sensitiveness of the South.

⁶⁸² Robert Ryland to the American Colonization Society (“My dear Madam”), September 28, 1846, American Colonization Society Records, Library of Congress and Fold3.com; [Robert Ryland], [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences of First African Baptist Church, No. 2,” *American Baptist Memorial* 15 (October 1855), 291-292.

Ryland viewed the provision of reading material to enslaved people as an example of “real benevolence,” contrasting it with abolition, which he viewed as a “rash” response of those “not disposed to mind their own business.”⁶⁸³

By the time Marianne Finch visited First African Baptist Church, Ryland had already published his *Scripture Catechism, for Coloured People*, immediately republished as *Scripture Catechism for the Instruction of Children and Servants* (both published in 1848). The book was structured with questions connected to faith and included a section on the role of “servants” in relation to their “masters.” In it, Ryland drew on Ephesians to encourage enslaved people to “be obedient to them that are your masters,” even those who are “unkind”: “Servants be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward [in this context “improper”].”⁶⁸⁴

In his 2013 address, “The Trials of Robert Ryland,” Edward L. Ayers noted the objection to the *Catechism* by Richmond mayor Joseph Mayo, who believed it to be an “invitation and an aid to help slaves learn how to read.”⁶⁸⁵ Historian Janet Duitsman Cornelius points to the relatively simple structure of Ryland’s work and the additional marketing of the book to parents of young children as evidence of its being “adaptable to use in the teaching of reading.”⁶⁸⁶ Charles F. Irons refers to Ryland’s distribution of the *Catechism* as a “thinly veiled literacy program” and that Ryland intended it to be “a primer for his black congregants.” The *Catechism*, however, is also linked to proslavery messaging. In addition to the “brief section on the mutual responsibilities of ‘Masters and Servants,’” Irons writes that “through the very act of creating and disseminating a catechism, Ryland was making the case that a well-regulated system of paternalist instruction—not abolition—was the best way that owners could care for their slaves.”⁶⁸⁷

Upon the publication of the catechism, Henry Keeling, founder of the *Religious Herald*, submitted a favorable review of the book to the newspaper and also provided a separate letter which was published below it. He endorsed the work of Ryland at First African Baptist Church through the lens of paternalism and white-dictated ideas of respectability. In the earliest years of Ryland’s ministry at the church, Keeling wrote, when “he began to catechize his people,” Ryland had sought a catechism that was appropriate to the “peculiar circumstances” of his congregation. Keeling called the book

⁶⁸³ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences of First African Baptist Church, No. 2,” *American Baptist Memorial* 15 (October 1855), 292. This passage was also quoted in Carter G. Woodson’s *The History of the Negro Church*, Washington, D.C., Associated Publishers (1921), 161-162.

⁶⁸⁴ Robert Ryland *Scripture Catechism for Coloured People*, Richmond: Harold & Murray (1848), 139-140.

⁶⁸⁵ Edward L. Ayers, “The Trials of Robert Ryland,” 18.

⁶⁸⁶ Janet Duitsman Cornelius, “*When I Can Read My Title Clear*”: *Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South*, Charleston: University of South Carolina Press (1991), 46-47.

⁶⁸⁷ Charles F. Irons, “And all these things shall be added unto you”: The First African Baptist Church, Richmond, 1841-1865,” *Virginia Cavalcade*, Winter 1998, 29; Charles F. Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum America*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press (2008), 187, 180.

“the result of many years’ experience and application to the subject, by a gifted, cultivated, and assiduous mind.” His more personal letter below his review described the effect of Ryland’s ministry on the “intellectual and moral worth” of the church’s members in the context of social behavior. Where he and other white people were once “fearful for our personal safety” among “servants” who were “endlessly amusing themselves,” Keeling described the change after Ryland assumed the leadership of the church, writing that now “several thousand” were “under the pastoral care of a scholar, and a philosopher, a gentleman who is himself a holder of slaves and the President of Richmond College.”⁶⁸⁸

In addition to the catechism, one source notes that Ryland published a collection of hymns for the church congregation. This, too, may have deepened the existing literacy of church members. A letter to the Boston *Courier*, republished in the Raleigh, North Carolina, *Semi-Weekly Standard* described the use of the song collection in the context of widespread literacy among the congregants:

Dr. Ryland found in singing from memory, that not knowing the words of their hymns correctly, they did not articulate them right. To correct this he had an addition [sic] of 1500 copies of their most favorite hymns published for their especial use, but found he had not enough to supply a copy to each one who could read.⁶⁸⁹

5.0 SECTIONALISM, SECESSION & WAR

In the decades before the Civil War, sectionalism had occasionally threaded through Robert Ryland’s public and private writing. In one of a series of essays published in the *Religious Herald* between 1843 and 1844, Ryland attempted to prompt more student interest at Richmond College by persuading readers of the risks posed by a reliance on “foreign” teachers, specifically teachers from the North. While he cautioned against “all indiscriminate prejudice against foreigners merely because they are foreigners” and wondered what the state of the South would have been “had not the North supplied us with schoolmasters,” Ryland also challenged his young male readers with a call to their regional pride: “Do you deliberately consent to withdraw from all competition and allow the youth of other States to come in and supplant you?”⁶⁹⁰ Loyalty to Richmond College itself became a sign of increasing sectional identity in the following years. W. Harrison Daniel traces the shift of Virginia Baptist funding from Columbian College in Washington, D.C. to Richmond College in the 1850s, attributing the transition to rising sectional loyalty and “local pride.” Daniel notes the example of A.M Poindexter, the chief antebellum and postbellum fundraiser for Richmond College,

⁶⁸⁸ [H.K.], “*The Scripture Catechism for Coloured People* [review],” *Religious Herald*, August 17, 1848, VBHS; [H.K.], “Rev. Robert Ryland’s Church,” *Religious Herald*, August 17, 1848, VBHS. While the review and the letter are signed with Keeling’s initials, details in both contributions and his former relationship with the paper indicate that he is the author.

⁶⁸⁹ “Letter from the South,” excerpt in “Religious Privileges of Slaves,” *Semi-Weekly Standard*, September 2, 1857, *Chronicling America*, [link](#).

⁶⁹⁰ Robert Ryland, “Richmond College – No. 11,” *Religious Herald*, February 15, 1844, VBHS.

who had “transferred his primary allegiance” from Columbian College “to the state-denomination school at Richmond.”⁶⁹¹

On one occasion, Ryland viewed the increasing sectionalism around him with humor. In an 1858 letter to his son he described deliberations over the hiring of a Massachusetts native, A.H. Slocumb, as a Richmond College tutor. Ryland seemed to delight in an electoral comedy of errors that resulted from some trustees’ anti-Northern feelings: “Last evening after 6 or 8 ballots we elected a tutor A.H. Slocumb of Mass! A graduate of Amherst... C. T. Wortham resigned on the strength of a Yankee elected & the two Thomases left the room quite wrathful at his being voted for & thus by diminishing the vote against him, elected him!”⁶⁹² This somewhat blithe perspective was rare, however, and Ryland’s writings and addresses of the time generally reflected his grave concerns over the prospect of disunion, while still defending enslavement. Once Virginia seceded, Ryland’s allegiance to the state took the form of complete support for the Confederacy.

5.1 “AMERICAN UNION” SPEECH

Thirty years after his own graduation from Columbian College, and amid rising tensions over enslavement, in 1857 Robert Ryland returned to his alma mater to deliver a speech before the Alumni Association. In his “American Union” address Ryland pondered what he called “the great question of our age” which until recently had been “sacrilegious” to consider: “*Shall the union of the United States be preserved?*”

Ryland provided the text of the speech for later publication by Columbian College so it might “more widely diffuse the spirit of conservatism which it was designed to inculcate” and “The American Union” and the speech did reflect Ryland’s significant worry over disunion.⁶⁹³ He appealed to North

⁶⁹¹ W. Harrison Daniel, “The Genesis of Richmond College, 1843-1860,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, April 1975, 131-149, 144.

⁶⁹² Robert Ryland to William Ryland, September 27, 1858, RRP, 01.071, VBHS. The “two Thomases” referred to by Ryland were A. Thomas and James Thomas, Jr., who was credited with significant financial donations to both Richmond College and First African Baptist Church. His fortune was centered on his tobacco business where he relied on the labor of enslaved people, and historian Joseph C. Robert refers to him as “the most famous of the mid-nineteenth century tobacco manufacturers” (Joseph C. Robert, *The Story of Tobacco in America*, New York: A.A. Knopf (1949), 82). Thomas personally enslaved fifty-five people in 1860 (Federal Census Slave Schedule of 1860, Henrico County, Richmond, Ward 3). In 1852, man named Frank was enslaved by Thomas and “received ten lashes at the public whipping post” for being in the city with an “improper pass” (“Improper Pass,” *Daily Dispatch*, June 12, 1852, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#)). A woman he enslaved named Sarah Ann Jackson was also whipped ten times for trespassing and disorderly conduct in 1853 (“Disorderly,” *Daily Dispatch*, March 4, 1853, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#)). Nelson, another man enslaved to Thomas, received “ten lashes” for disturbing the peace by playing music on Broad Street (“Serenaders,” *Daily Dispatch*, July 30, 1852, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#)). Peter Haskins was sentenced to thirty-nine lashes for theft in 1853 (“Stealing Money,” *Daily Dispatch*, February 15, 1853, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#)). Isaiah Smith escaped from Thomas and hid on a vessel bound for Pennsylvania. He was discovered during a search of the ship. A news item detailed the plan to return Isaiah Smith to Thomas (“Fugitive Slave Captured,” *Daily Dispatch*, April 26, 1854, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#)). Other news items indicate Thomas’ use of enslaved people hired from other enslavers. Two of those people are [Richard](#) and [Cary](#).

⁶⁹³ Robert Ryland, “Correspondence,” *The American Union, An Address Delivered Before the Alumni*

and South to pull back from “extremes,” stating that, “[E]xtremes often engender extremes.” He asked Southerners to “[r]ebuke those politicians... who are continually exasperating the public mind and urging measures to weaken the bonds of union.” To those in the North, he reminded them of what he viewed as their share in “the alleged ‘guilt of slavery’” and then attempted to convince them of the “great misconception of the real condition of Southern slaves” who, he argued, were “better clothed and fed and cared for than the laborers of any country in Europe.” The birthrate and “general cheerfulness” among enslaved people, Ryland argued, showed that they were “a happy people.” This sort of distortion was increasingly common and eventually formed one part of the [Lost Cause mythology](#) that later dominated many historical narratives of the antebellum and post-Civil war eras.

At one point in the speech, Ryland even appeared to approach the antislavery thinking of his younger years when contemplating the contradiction at the heart of the denunciation of the African slave trade and perpetuation of domestic enslavement: “If slavery is right in the abstract, then the justice and humanity of the traffic which we have denounced must be boldly proclaimed.” While acknowledging that it was not “right in the abstract,” Ryland pivoted with the question, “[W]hy did Providence permit its introduction?” After consideration of biblical sources, Ryland’s focus turned to immediate economic expedience and in doing so he provided his most distant estimate of when enslavement might end when “voluntary operatives” would work in place of enslaved people: “In a few centuries from the present time free labor may supplant slave labor throughout our borders. As the country becomes filled up with people, the competition between laborers for employment will so reduce their wages that economy may induce capitalists to prefer voluntary operatives.” Until “capitalists” were convinced to use a labor force of free men and women, though, Ryland believed that it was “the duty of the South to elevate the character of the slave” by providing training in “the whole circle of the mechanic arts” to “prepare him for whatever destiny may await.” While he was enslaved, the imagined man in Ryland’s example would gain “intelligence” that “will render his master more able to provide for him.” Alongside this “elevat[ion]” through training, Ryland stressed the importance of literacy among enslaved people for the purpose of deepening the connection of “our fellow-beings” to “the great doctrines and precepts of the gospel.”

Despite his use of the term “fellow-beings,” Ryland urged his audience to abandon consideration of “immediate emancipation,” and said it was “idle to talk” of it since “without the habits of self-reliance which fits the inferior class for all the cares and responsibilities of freedom, liberty itself were a *curse* to them.” This “curse” of liberty for free Black people provided Ryland the opportunity to interweave the colonization movement into his consideration: “To colonize the shores of Africa... is the great philanthropy of the age... Let the free colored people be taught to feel that the only star of national hope to them is that which shines on those youthful colonies.” The speech ended with Ryland’s appeal to the Columbian College alumni, “who belong to that class of men that originate and control public sentiment,” to “cherish the spirit” of Daniel Webster, who feared the sun ““shining on the broken fragments of a once-glorious union”” and of George Washington, whose

Association of the Columbian College, D.C., Richmond: H.K. Ellyson (1857), frontmatter, VBHS.

farewell address included a call to Americans to remember the “immense value of your national union to your collective and individual happiness.”⁶⁹⁴

Ryland’s “American Union” address was praised as a “capital academic oration” in the *Evening Star* of Washington, D.C. and was printed in the *National Intelligencer* which called it “conservative and patriotic in its conclusions.”⁶⁹⁵ An account of the speech also appeared in Richmond papers, including a summary from the *National Intelligencer* piece that was printed in the *Daily Dispatch* on September 7, 1857. Its writer quoted the *Intelligencer* description of the address that referred to Ryland’s stance as “conservative and patriotic in its conclusions.” This praise from the Northern publication was reprinted without comment in the *Dispatch*. Given the deepening anti-Northern sentiment in Richmond, however, the printing of praise from the Washington, D.C. newspaper may have been significant in and of itself. The item was published just two months before the anonymous accusation that Ryland was an abolitionist.

A year later, George Washington was mentioned in an introduction of Ryland, who was attending the commencement exercises at Rochester University (New York). After describing Ryland’s association with Richmond College and First African Baptist Church, the university’s president commented on Virginia and the state’s place in the Union. Here he wove George Washington and Ryland together in a description that one witness described as “burst[ing] forth in a torrent of most burning eloquence.” Washington was “that greatest of men” and Ryland was “a scholar and ... Christian philanthropist.” The writer who shared his account viewed Ryland a “noble man” among “true hearts which are the foundations of our nation... unruffled by the writhing waves of the storm -- unchanged by time.”⁶⁹⁶

5.2 RYLAND AND WAR: FEAR, ACCEPTANCE & ENTHUSIASM

As he had written in the *Religious Herald* the week before his “American Union” address, Robert Ryland “heartily identified with [Virginia’s] interests,” a euphemism for support of slavery which he had made clear by detailing his enslavement of “about a dozen” people and his belief that “emancipation” was neither “safe nor humane to either master or servant.”⁶⁹⁷ Following John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry in 1858, Ryland wrote to his nephew, Charles Hill Ryland, that while “the talking world” of Richmond was no longer fixated on Brown, “I’d like to put the rope around his neck. Virginia has shown too much forbearance toward these cutthroats.” Still, as secession and war became likelier, by November 1860 he wrote of his dread at the prospect and his hope that secession, armed conflict, and bloodshed could be prevented: “I am opposed to secession

⁶⁹⁴ Ryland, Robert. “The American Union,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), September 3, 1857, 2.

⁶⁹⁵ “Spirit of the Morning Press,” *Evening Star*, September 3, 1857; (“Dr. Ryland’s Address,” *Daily Dispatch*, September 7, 1857.

⁶⁹⁶ Original appeared in the *Western Watchman*, Reprinted as “The North and the South -- A Pleasing Incident at Rochester,” *American Union* [Morgantown, in what is now West Virginia], August 6, 1858, [link](#).

⁶⁹⁷ Robert Ryland, “A Card,” *Religious Herald*, September 14, 1858, VBHS.

tho[ugh] I don't see how it is now to be avoided!... What is to be the result I do not know!" He described the South Carolinian students at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary as "so overbearing" on the subject of slavery "as not ever to allow the Virginians to express an opinion." Ryland wondered to his son William whether "God designs to scourge the nation by employing one part to fight against the other." Like other Virginians, Ryland hoped "war w[ould] not come" but was also willing to "bear the breaking up of our union." At the heart of his concern in 1860 was the violence of war: "I dread the smell of gunpowder, & the sight of blood!" Despite his belief that "[a]ll is dark in the future so far as man has to control things" Ryland still hoped for divine intervention, that God would deliver the nation from "imminent peril."⁶⁹⁸

Once Virginia seceded and war commenced, however, Ryland's private tone shifted with the radically changed circumstances. By 1863, when martial law was declared in Richmond and the city had "assum[ed] a rigid aspect," Ryland shared his opinion of military leaders and decisions:

It seems to me that we are giving up too much ground without fighting, but I yield to the powers that be... I am still not doubtful of the final result. We are contracting our circumference to thicken the line & when we make a stand, it will be a firm one! ... Our reverses of late have given the Yankees great audacity but I trust as Genl. Whiskey shall cease to command out forces, the [illegible: possibly "scale"] will soon turn in our favor.⁶⁹⁹

Publicly, Ryland showed his allegiance in addresses, sermons, and published letters. On December 15, 1863, Ryland opened the Senate session of the Confederate States Congress with a prayer.⁷⁰⁰

5.3 COMING OF WAR & SECESSION

In the early days of the war, a boarder in the Ryland house remembered the passing of soldiers and the "rattle of a drum" during the family's period of worship. "[Robert Ryland] immediately ceased to pray, and said: 'Norvell, get up and see whether those soldiers have uniforms and are armed. All remained kneeling until his son reported, and then he resumed his prayer.'⁷⁰¹ Ryland's early aversion to military leadership and war gave way to deeply felt support for the Confederate South.

5.3.1 REPORT TO VIRGINIA BAPTIST GENERAL ASSOCIATION

Ryland's report as Corresponding Secretary of the Education Board of the Virginia Baptist General Association was printed on June 1, 1861, and it reflected his increasing association with the Confederacy. The chiding tone he had used in his *Religious Herald* message to potential students challenging them not to let the South be dominated by Southern teachers was gone. He had shifted to a frank chauvinism as he wrote of Northern ministers in the South:

⁶⁹⁸ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, November 23, 1860, RRP, 01.030, VBHS. In the letter, Ryland also notes his vote for "Bell & Everett, of course" in part because "they represented the Union Party of the country."

⁶⁹⁹ Robert Ryland to William Ryland, March 4, 1862, RRP, file 1.009, VBHS.

⁷⁰⁰ "Confederate States Congress," *Richmond Enquirer*, December 18, 1863, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

⁷⁰¹ Rev. W.S. Penick, D.D., "Rev. Robert Ryland, D.D.," RRP, 03.037, VBHS.

The long-cherished hatred of the Northern States towards the institutions of the South, has at length developed itself in an aggressive and cruel war — a war which, in the inadequacy of its cause, in the earnest efforts of the assailed to avert it by peaceful adjustments, and in deliberate purpose to exterminate or subjugate brothers whose chief crime consists in asking to be let alone, has no parallel among civilized nations. Our reliance for ministers of the Gospel must henceforth be, under God, exclusively on ourselves... Especially must we train our own preachers.

Ryland also invoked the framework of the North as a threat to land/home, wives, and daughters, a rhetorical device intended to hint at inversions of social systems that rested on gendered sexual vulnerability which was deployed by many white Southerners in the Civil War era to rally public support for the Confederacy. He wrote, “We have convincing and painful evidence that a large majority of the so called ministers of the Prince of Peace are active instigators of the crusade against our soil, our homes, our wives, our daughters. The inference is that our educational labors, instead of being lessened, must hereafter be greatly augmented.”

The South, Ryland wrote, was engaged in a “holy cause of maintaining our independence,” and he envisioned the victory that he believed awaited:

[A]s soon as victory shall perch on our banners, as it surely will in the end, and we shall be recognized, as we shall inevitably be, by European Powers and the United States as a distinct confederacy, a scene of prosperity, unexampled in our past career, will open upon us, and then we shall call on every lover of his country to give holy to the cause of emancipation from ignorance, as he does now to the cause of deliverance from social and political oppression.”⁷⁰²

5.3.2 “LETTER TO A SON IN CAMP”

Two of Robert Ryland’s sons enlisted in the Confederate Army, William and Norvell Ryland. A letter that he wrote to one of them was published in the *Religious Herald* as a means of stoking enthusiasm and conviction for the Confederate cause. In it, Ryland addressed the question of why he “a professing Christian” would “freely give” his son to volunteer for military service. His answer was centered on what he believed to be the South’s right of sovereignty: “My reason was that I regarded this as a purely defensive war.” The region had been “threatened with invasion and subjugation” and to Ryland there were only two choices, “stern resistance or abject submission.” The “brave and generous” supporters of the Confederacy “could not for a moment hesitate between such alternatives.” Here Ryland again drew on the “home/land, wives, daughters” frame to solidify his point:

[O]ur beloved South having been threatened with invasion and subjugation, it seemed to me that nothing was left us but stern resistance or abject submission to unconstitutional power. A brave and generous people could not for a moment hesitate between such alternatives. A war in defence [sic] of our homes and firesides—of our wives and children—of all that makes life worth possessing is the result. While I most deeply deplore the necessity for the

⁷⁰² “General Baptist Association,” *Daily Dispatch*, June 4, 1861, Perseus Digital Library, Tufts University, [link](#).

sacrifice, I could not but rejoice that I had a son to offer to the service of the country, and if I had a dozen I would most freely give them all.⁷⁰³

5.3.3 MOUNT OLIVET SERMON, 1864

Robert Ryland's Mount Olivet Sermon was a powerful call to his listeners to stay committed to the Confederacy, and its text is pointedly anti-Union. This wasn't unusual for ministers of the time, but Ryland's language about enslavement and the Confederacy is remarkable in the context of his own his former aversion to war. The North, Ryland insisted, was "no longer fight[ing] for the reconstruction of the Union" and was instead seeking "subjugation" of the South and the infliction of "deep & remediless agonies" on the region's people. Should the Confederacy lose, Ryland believed that Jefferson Davis and "every prominent citizen" would be "sent to the gallows" and "every tract of land [would] be confiscated & sold in small parcels (to Germans and Yankees)" to offset the federal debt. Part of the proceeds from this "whole sale confiscation" would go to paying "pensions" for "their mercenaries."

Ryland then shifted his concern to the effects a Union victory would bring to the lives of those in the South, where "every office... from the governorship down to the humblest post office" would be filled by "Northern men" who would "establish a system of universal espionage. In every house wd be a spy, in every village a provost marshal, & the last throbbing of civil & religious freedom wd be crushed by the heel of military despotism." Here he narrowed his view further, focusing on what he saw as the unacceptable social reversals that would follow an end to the enslavement system:

They [would] curse our servants with a really more intense slavery. They [would] hire our private citizens to work as d.l. [likely "day labor" or "day laborers"] on the farms once owned by them, & to crown all our miseries, they wd turn out a brutal soldiery to insult & dishonor our high-toned women whom they would afterwards employ as cooks, & milk-maids, as washers & seamstresses. Oh. I [would] rather that the whole adult population of these States, men and women, should die on the plains of battle if we could thus gain indep.nce [sic] than we should all live & be subjugated. Our short lives would be a small sacrifice for the freedom & happiness of millions yet to be born.

The federal commitment to abolition was particularly upsetting to Ryland. The Union "first disavowed all right & purpose to interfere with the domes institutions of the states ["domestic institutions": enslavement] & now openly proclaim their purpose to abolish them. At first they only [illegible: possibly "enticed"] our slaves [from] quiet homes, they now forcibly abduct them & put them in the front of the battle." Here Ryland added the parenthetical aside, "The very enlistment of colored soldiers is a confession of conscious weakness."

Ryland concluded the sermon by calling for the congregation to pray for Confederate President Jefferson Davis.⁷⁰⁴ Further excerpts can be found in Appendix E.

⁷⁰³ Robert Ryland in John Jones, *Christ in the Camp: or Religion in Lee's Army*, Richmond: B.F. Johnson and Co. (1887) 28; previously published in the *Religious Herald*, August 15, 1861, VBHS.

⁷⁰⁴ Sermon, "Mt. Olivet Ap 8 64, Judges 6:24," Robert Ryland Papers, file 54.0150, VBHS. Ryland used "wd" for "would" in his copy of the sermon that was transcribed for this study.

6.0 POST-WAR RICHMOND & KENTUCKY YEARS

6.1 POST-WAR RICHMOND

Due to his heavy investment in Confederate funds, Ryland's personal wealth was wiped out following the Civil War. Richmond College was in a similar position following the collapse of the institution's \$100,000 endowment due to its conversion of former investments and available funds to "Confederate securities."⁷⁰⁵ Ryland was always open about the state of his post-war finances, privately referring to the enormity of his losses in correspondence with family and publicly in the pages of the newspaper.⁷⁰⁶ A decade later, he recalled the period in a letter to the *Daily Dispatch* in which he wrote, "I did not keep a dairy, but possessed *one* cow, whose milk, carried on foot to my customers morning and evening, sustained my family for many months."⁷⁰⁷ Ryland's ledger entry for 1867 shows the income he derived from selling milk and his carriage, as well as the financial gifts he was given to help he and his family. Richmond College Treasurer Charles Wortham gave Ryland twenty dollars and a donation of ten dollars was given to him by "JBT," likely the Richmond College trustee James B. Taylor.⁷⁰⁸

Between the end of the war and his departure from Richmond three years later, Ryland expressed frank opinions on race and sectionalism, opinions that were typical of many of Richmond's white citizens. Of the "Yankees" in Richmond, he wrote that "they fancy we & all ours belong to them & it is a mercy that they don[']t cut our throats & seize all our houses!" Regarding the voting power of Black citizens, he believed that "if Radicals get the elections & impeach Johnson & inaugurate negro suffrage times will be squally;" however, he believed that were Democrats to get a majority the "Radicals" might "hang Jeff Davis in spite... an irreparable injury piled on thousands already inflicted... If the Yankees will keep away from us & the negroes will keep quiet, I wd not give a cent to go into the Union. Our representatives will increase the tax & not be able to legislate for our benefit against so large a majority."⁷⁰⁹

In the months immediately following the Confederate surrender, Ryland left his position at First African Baptist Church and was asked to resign as president of Richmond College. Then in his early sixties, he attempted to locate a teaching position and also worked at area churches. He made early attempts to begin a school with his daughter, took a brief position at Richmond Female Institute, and worked for nearly a year at the newly formed Richmond branch of the National Theological

⁷⁰⁵ Alley, 48, Ayers, 15.

⁷⁰⁶ Letter, Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, January 30, 1866, RRP, 25.016, VBHS.

⁷⁰⁷ "Dr. Ryland and the Old African Church," *Daily Dispatch*, August 24, 1876, Virginia Chronicle.

⁷⁰⁸ Robert Ryland, Ledger II, "Receipts from all sources in 1867," p. 68, VBHS.

⁷⁰⁹ Robert Ryland to Norvell Ryland, September 21, 1866, RRP, 21.002, VBHS.

Institute. He also drew a limited income from ministerial duties at Four Mile Creek Church in Henrico County and Walnut Grove Church in Hanover County.⁷¹⁰

After the war, a letter to his sister indicates that the woman he enslaved named Lucy remained with Ryland family following emancipation. In a description of the family's change in circumstances, he wrote, "We have only one svt, (a cook, washer, milker, [etc.]) at \$6 pr m[onth]. Aunt Lucy does what she can. We all work, live plainly, & resolve to be satisfied."⁷¹¹ Beyond this mention of Lucy, none of Robert Ryland's personal papers examined for this study include further news or information about those he once enslaved.

6.1.1 DEPARTURE: FIRST AFRICAN BAPTIST CHURCH AND THE APPOINTMENT OF JAMES H. HOLMES

On April 9, 1865, "[t]he first challenge to a white pastor came from black Union troops on April 9 who charged Robert Ryland of the First African Church with preaching a disloyal sermon and threatened to arrest him." Ryland was defended by members of the church.⁷¹² On Sunday April 30, 1865 Ryland preached to a now entirely free congregation. The Richmond *Commercial Bulletin* described him "[taking] strong rebel ground" however, and "discouraging enlistments in the Union army." Ryland went so far with his sectionalism that he was apparently reported to the Federal authorities and "was requested to report himself at the Provost Marshall's office."⁷¹³ He attempted to resign as pastor in May of 1865, but "the majority refused to accept his withdrawal" in light of his years of service to the church.⁷¹⁴ In the months that followed, however, Black Richmonders continued to build on the existing structures of self-help societies and African churches. On June 10, for example, First African Baptist Church was the site of a mass meeting of more than 3,000 people organized by Black leaders determined to communicate to U.S. President Andrew Johnson the "brutal enforcement by the police and army of pass and curfew laws which were designed to expel thousands of blacks from the city."⁷¹⁵ Later that month, in this period of increasing self-determination among church members, Robert Ryland resigned as pastor of First African Baptist Church. He later wrote that he had done so out of "a belief that they would *naturally* and *justly* prefer a minister of their own color."⁷¹⁶

On July 27, 1865, the *Alexandria Gazette* reported Ryland's resignation as pastor of First African Baptist Church.⁷¹⁷ The coming months brought decidedly different descriptions of Ryland's role

⁷¹⁰ Robert Ryland, "Receipts of 1866," Ledger II, p. 66, RRP, 55.2.037, VBHS.

⁷¹¹ Robert Ryland to Mrs. James R. Fleet, November 5, 1855, RRP, 15.010, VBHS.

⁷¹² O'Brian, "Reconstruction in Richmond," 263.

⁷¹³ "Miscellaneous," *Commercial Bulletin*, May 6, 1865, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

⁷¹⁴ O'Brian, "Reconstruction in Richmond," 263.

⁷¹⁵ O'Brien, "Factory, Church, and Community," 509-510.

⁷¹⁶ Ryland, "The First Century of the First African Church," 264.

⁷¹⁷ "Virginia News," *Alexandria Gazette*, July 27, 1865, Chronicling America, Library of Congress.

there. Most praised his work, noting that he had served as pastor for twenty-four years and the enormous number of church members (“about three thousand”), and one described his work having “given universal satisfaction.”⁷¹⁸ In 1868, a contrasting view was reprinted in the *Religious Herald*. A New York newspaper reported that someone who had been baptized by Ryland had visited the city and said of him, “He ain’t right, honey.”⁷¹⁹

In a circular published in the annual of the Dover Baptist Association, Ryland wrote that “the colored people” should be supported in their religious pursuits, in part because, when given opportunities to “rise up in rebellion” against enslavers, “they have exerted but little agency” to bring about their freedom.⁷²⁰ “During the war,” he wrote, “they were under constant temptation to rise up in rebellion against us, and to seek to destroy us by fire and sword,” yet “[t]he worst form of insubordination that they exhibited was to leave us quietly and join the standard of the enemy.” In return, Ryland argued, his readers should “cherish kindly feelings and pursue a just and generous conduct towards them.” In the recently free population, Ryland saw a vast potential for evangelism and growing the church. “Why should we contribute men and money to evangelize Africa, when we have Africa here, with all restriction of law removed, and with every opportunity which nearness, community of language, knowledge of character, exemption from expense and disease, and our own welfare can possibly furnish?” Now that Black people made up a voluntary labor force, what Ryland had once believed to be an impossibility, he called for them to receive “reasonable wages,”: “It is idle to expect human nature, in its best forms, to labor without recompense.” Ryland closed by exhorting all, white and Black, to work for the recovery of the South, because “we must bow to the great law of our being *that labor is the true dignity*.”⁷²¹

The position of pastor at First African Baptist Church did not immediately pass to a Black man, despite Ryland’s description of the preferences of the congregation. G.K. Stockwell, a white abolitionist, briefly served in the role. By 1867, however, Reverend James H. Holmes (1826-1900) was named the church’s pastor and continued to lead its congregation until the beginning of the twentieth century.⁷²² Holmes had been born into enslavement in King & Queen County, and beginning at the age of nine was hired out to a tobacco warehouse in Richmond.⁷²³ In 1842, at the

⁷¹⁸ “Religious Intelligence from the Southern States,” *Central Presbyterian*, August 3, 1865

⁷¹⁹ *Religious Herald*, January 2, 1868, 3, col. 3, VBHS.

⁷²⁰ This diminishing of Black agency was typical of antebellum and postbellum proslavery and Lost Cause writing.

⁷²¹ Robert Ryland, “Circular Letter: To the Churches Composing the Dover Association,” [c. 1865-1866], Robert Ryland Biographical File, VBHS.

⁷²² Colored Shiloh Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Second Annual Session of the Colored Shiloh Baptist Association of Virginia*, Petersburg, Virginia: The Daily Index Office (1866), [1]; “Freedmen’s Celebration to Commemorate Their Emancipation,” *Daily Dispatch*, January 2, 1866; Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform*, New York: Oxford University Press (1999), 75.

⁷²³ William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive, and Rising*, Cleveland: George M. Rewell & Co. (1887), 666-67.

age of thirteen, he was baptized at First African Baptist Church by Robert Ryland.⁷²⁴ After Holmes' marriage, his mother and father-in-law escaped enslavement through the Underground Railroad. When a letter they sent to Holmes and his wife was intercepted, Holmes was jailed on suspicion of planning an escape and was then sold south to New Orleans away from his wife and two children.⁷²⁵ While his family did eventually succeed in making it to the north and freedom, James H. Holmes never saw them again.⁷²⁶ After years laboring in New Orleans and surviving a catastrophic explosion, in 1851 Holmes returned to Richmond, still enslaved. Robert Ryland recorded the day in 1853 that he was received back into membership at First African Baptist Church. Holmes became a deacon and served on at least one church committee.⁷²⁷ While he was able to save the \$1800 (Confederate) to purchase his freedom, because of a debt to a lawyer he was not legally free until after the Civil War.⁷²⁸ Following Robert Ryland's resignation from his position at the church, and the brief period of Stockwell's pastorship, James H. Holmes became pastor of the church in 1867. He baptized two hundred people in his first year of leadership. The church continued to grow and to thrive over the following years with membership reaching 4000 in 1880.⁷²⁹



A late-life photograph of James H. Holmes, first Black pastor of First African Baptist Church (*The Colored American Magazine*, January 1901, 194)

On a return visit to Richmond after his departure for Kentucky, Ryland visited First African Baptist Church. He noted that, for a time, “a dissention” in the church had “threatened its very existence,” but that the “malcontents have left” and its “2,500 members that remain under the guidance of James H. Holmes, and of their experienced deacons, have a fair prospect of continued and enlarged prosperity. They all ‘mean business.’” He then posed the question to the white readers of the *Religious Herald*, “Are not our colored brethren of the South and West making greater sacrifices for the cause of Jesus, *in proportion to their means*, than the whites, who claim a higher degree of spiritual culture?”⁷³⁰ Ryland continued to follow the activities of First African Baptist Church throughout his life. On November 28, 1889, he wrote an open letter to Holmes, advising him to avoid anything to do with the political, particularly activities like the circulating of a letter to voters

⁷²⁴ Minutes of First African Baptist Church, September 14, 1842, Library of Virginia.

⁷²⁵ Simmons, 667.

⁷²⁶ Billingsley, 74.

⁷²⁷ Billingsley, 75; Minutes of First African Baptist Church, April 10, 1853, January 2, 1858, Library of Virginia.

⁷²⁸ Simmons, 668-669.

⁷²⁹ Simmons, 669.

⁷³⁰ “My Trip to Virginia,” *Religious Herald*, [undated clipping, reprinted from the *Western Recorder*], Robert Ryland Biographical File, VBHS.

to which Holmes' name had been attached, apparently erroneously.⁷³¹ Sociologist Andrew Billingsley describes Ryland as having been Holmes' "lifelong mentor," and historian Paul Harvey writes that Holmes was Ryland's "protégé."⁷³² Further research into the relationship between Holmes and Ryland is warranted.

6.1.2 DEPARTURE: RICHMOND COLLEGE

Almost immediately after the fall of Richmond, Ryland was asked by the Board of Trustees to do what was necessary to reopen the college in some form. Ryland began a search for the missing contents of the college library, writing to representatives of the U.S. Military with descriptions of the lost collection.⁷³³ He also placed an advertisement in the *Commercial Bulletin* seeking students – "The Trustees of this institution, by consent of the proper authorities, have determined to reoccupy it at once for literary purposes" – with Ryland and "a gentleman of high reputation as a teacher" as instructors. The two would "organize into classes such pupils as may be received." The following October, Ryland wrote, the college would reopen with a full faculty. In the meantime, the two hotels would be established again by the Board, and operations would resume.⁷³⁴

Two months later, Ryland and George Dabney were advertising a "High School at Richmond College" which would open in October rather than a typical college session since the institution was "unable to keep up its present course" due to the "interruptions and losses of the war."⁷³⁵ In the fall and winter of 1865, Ryland noted in a report to the Board of Trustees that he had collected rent from two people he referred to as "colored" who were then residing in campus buildings: Betsy in September of 1865 (\$1.90) and Harry Holmes in December (\$4.00). It is possible that both were among those who had previously labored on the campus when it was operational, but no available records offer clarity on that question.⁷³⁶

In January of 1866, institutional circumstances remained uncertain and Ryland wrote to his nephew, Charles Hill Ryland, of his loss of income during a time when "the avocation of teaching at the College" was not a possibility. He was pained that these changes accompanied so many others, including the departures of two of his older children. His daughter, Josephine "Joe" Ryland and son, Norvell "Norby" Ryland left together for different destinations in pursuit of work. Ryland wrote,

⁷³¹ Robert Ryland, "An Open Letter to a Colored Pastor," *Religious Herald*, November 28, 1889, Robert Ryland Biographical File, VBHS.

⁷³² Billingsley, 74; Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press (2005), 17.

⁷³³ "Ro. Ryland," *Union Provost Marshals' File of Paper Relating to Individual Civilians*, M345, National Archives Records Administration, accessed through Fold3.com.

⁷³⁴ ([Advertisement: "Richmond College"], *Commercial Bulletin*, May 15, 1865).

⁷³⁵ Advertisement, "High School at Richmond College," *Commercial Bulletin*, July 28, 1865, Virginia Chronicle.

⁷³⁶ Robert Ryland, "President's Report," [1862?], Records of the Board of Trustees, University Archives, University of Richmond, VBHS.

“their departure is more tear-compelling than any one of my late trials” and in the days before they left, he found himself “breaking down” during regular evening worship with his family.:

I still feel, my dear Charly [generally spelled “Charley” in Ryland’s letters], as if God wd. take care of us, & this assurance comes to my relief most wonderfully & opportunely. Look at the facts. First, I am bereft of all my property, & made poor from having been independent. 2nd I am deprived of a salary from the Af. Ch. (\$600) just when I need it. 3rd. The avocation of teaching at the College, after being pursued 30 years, fails me. Here then I am, 61 yrs old, No property, no church, no salary, a large family, & every article of living at double the former price! Nature & reason wd. suggest despondency, deep, dark, utter despondency! The gospel comes in & whispers a sweet, strong, joyful assurance of [illegible; “suppl—”], temporal, & of affluence eternal!⁷³⁷

It is unclear when word reached Ryland that unnamed people he called “friends of the College” believed he should be “entirely separated from its future management,” but in the period before March of 1866, when he submitted his resignation from both the presidency of the College and his position on the Board of Trustees, he consulted with his old friend Jeremiah B. Jeter on the sentiment. Ryland wrote in his letter of resignation that, in response, Jeter had “frankly stated” that Ryland would “subserve” the college by “dissolving my connexion [sic] with it” and that J.B. Taylor agreed with him. Ryland then heard from others on the Board of Trustees – A.M. Poindexter and R.H. Bagby – that they, too, felt he should step down, although he noted that Bagby had “based his advice...on the impressions of others.” Feeling that he lacked the confidence of the full board, Ryland wrote a letter of resignation from both positions on March 23, 1866 (it appears a question mark or the number seven was written over the three).⁷³⁸ While his resignation from the college presidency was accepted on June 12, 1866, he was persuaded to remain on the board. At the same meeting, the Board of Trustees agreed to provide Ryland and his family a home, rent free, until September 1867.⁷³⁹ It is not known whether an explicit connection was ever made between the pressure on Ryland to step down from his position as President of Richmond College and his encouragement of the Board to purchase Confederate investments.

During what was later called “The Great Meeting” of the Virginia Baptist Association, Ryland’s name was lifted by Rev. J.C. Long who stated that Ryland “had reason to be proud of the work that he had accomplished, and no name would stand higher in the history of the denomination in Virginia than Robert Ryland!”⁷⁴⁰ The meeting is largely known for the actions of James Thomas, college trustee and tobacco magnate, who pledged “\$5,000 toward another endowment,” paid the salary of an additional faculty member, and triggered a surge in giving that helped to reestablish the fortunes

⁷³⁷ Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, January 30, 1866, RRP, 25.016-.017, VBHS.

⁷³⁸ Robert Ryland to the Richmond College Board of Trustees, March 23, 1866, Records of the Board of Trustees, University of Richmond, University Archives, VBHS.

⁷³⁹ Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, June 12, 1866, University Archive, VBHS.

⁷⁴⁰ “Baptist General Association of Virginia,” *Daily Dispatch*, June 12, 1866, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

of the institution.⁷⁴¹ A later report stated the belief that “100,000 will be obtained for Richmond College” as a result of the enthusiasm of the Baptist General Association, although only \$25,000 was ultimately collected.⁷⁴² On the same day, the *Daily Dispatch* reported that the College was to reopen in October and that Robert Ryland had tendered his resignation as its president.⁷⁴³

Accolades for Ryland appeared in several news items following the meeting. As Poindexter was raising money in King & Queen County, he referred to Ryland’s “self-sacrificing labors” for the college.⁷⁴⁴ After John Broadus refused the presidency on August 6, 1866, an item appeared in the *Daily Dispatch* referring to a recently placed advertisement and reassuring potential students and their families that the institution was still “under the presidency of the estimable Dr. Ryland.”⁷⁴⁵ This may have been the result of the mistaken use of an older item, though, since Ryland, the Board, or both, appeared determined, and Tiberius G. Jones, D.D. was elected president of Richmond College by September 1, 1866.⁷⁴⁶ Ryland had been offered a position at the Richmond Female Institute, but the building there continued to be occupied by Union forces. As Ryland was running out of time, Professor George Dabney offered to store the family’s furniture in his house.⁷⁴⁷

Ryland reflected on his time as president of the college in “The Origin and Early History of Richmond College,” which he published in the student-run literary magazine in March of 1897. When describing his own experience, Ryland referred to himself in the third person, as he often did when he was describing his ministerial work, but he shifted to first person as he detailed what he believed to be the ideal relationship and roles of college presidents and members of the faculty:

He had the same number of recitations as the professors, encountered all the odium of maintaining discipline, had a host of outside matters to attend to, was held accountable by the public for the proper management of the College, and yet in the Faculty meeting his vote was worth no more than that of the last elected and youngest professor. Hence he was censured sometimes for measures which he had tried his best to prevent. Now, as I am out of the office, I will say boldly that if one is held responsible for the doing of anything he should be invested with the power of doing that thing. Hence the president of a college, if the people look to him for its success, should be made a thorough *autocrat* in college affairs. If he is a sensible man he will respectfully consult all the teachers on every important subject that comes up for decision. If they are sensible men they will probably give their views on that subject, and then leave him to do just what he pleases, helping him to bring it

⁷⁴¹ Alley, 48.

⁷⁴² “Virginia News,” *Alexandria Gazette*, June 14, 1866, Virginia Chronicle; Alley, 48.

⁷⁴³ “Richmond College,” *Daily Dispatch*, June 14, 1866, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

⁷⁴⁴ “Rappahannock Baptist Association,” *Daily Dispatch*, August 3, 1866, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

⁷⁴⁵ “Richmond College,” *Daily Dispatch*, August 6, 1866, Virginia Chronicle.

⁷⁴⁶ “Virginia News,” *Alexandria Gazette*, September 1, 1866, Virginia Chronicle.

⁷⁴⁷ Robert Ryland to Mrs. James Fleet, November 5, 1866, RRP, 15.009, VBHS; Robert Ryland to Norvell Ryland, September 21, 1866, RRP, 21.003, VBHS.

to pass. He should make every teacher an autocrat in his class, selecting the text-books, adopting the mode of teaching, deciding the standard of scholarship, etc.⁷⁴⁸

A former student, Rev. W.S. Penick, recalled Ryland as a teacher and administrator: “He was too ingenious to be popular, too modest to be vain-glorious, too honest and sincere to be obsequious... He was microscopic in his style of teaching; so much so that some have thought him rather finical. He believed that great character was compounded of little virtues. Who of us who knew him as a college president can ever forget his frequent chapel lectures to the students on little things? One of those students to this day never ascends a flight of bare steps, or hears a door slam, or borrows a postage stamp, that he does not recall those brief, but empathetic, lectures on these subjects.”⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁸ Robert Ryland, “The Origin and Early History of Richmond College,” *Richmond College Messenger* 23, no. 5, March 1897, 229, in RRP, 51.129, VBHS.

⁷⁴⁹ Rev. W.S. Penick, D.D., “Rev. Robert Ryland, D.D.,” RRP, 03.037, VBHS.

6.1.3 RICHMOND FEMALE INSTITUTE



Richmond Female Institute, photographed between 1861 and 1865, Library of Congress

Ryland “spent several weeks in anxious deliberation” following his departure from the presidency of the college. His own inclination was to leave the city to lower his family’s expenses, “and to preach at two [churches].” Betty Ryland was concerned for their young daughters’ educations, however, and the family decided to remain in Richmond. While he briefly considered opening a boys’ school with his older daughter, Kate, he concluded that “the terrible competition” in Richmond would prevent the enrollment of enough students to cover expenses. He was offered a position at Richmond Female Institute which would provide his three young daughters with free tuition and the Ryland family with a home. The transition between the house that Richmond College had provided and their new home at Richmond Female Institute was not smooth, however. Federal

troops who had used the institute as a headquarters continued to occupy it for an additional six weeks, forcing the family to move from one friend’s home to another until they could finally take possession of their rooms in the institute’s north wing. Ryland wrote to his sister once the five were settled: “I have here a good chamber, dining room, girls’ room, & guest chamber... kitchen, 2 servants’ rooms.” Of the disruptive six weeks he wrote, “[L]et it all pass and be forgotten.”⁷⁵⁰

References in Ryland’s letters and in a brief biography of Ryland written by his granddaughter show that he already had a history with the institution, having taught classes there before and during the war.⁷⁵¹ One of his wartime students recalled his teaching Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, when he guided them “through the intricate images of that wonderful and profound blank verse.”⁷⁵² In his post-war position, Ryland tutored individual students and taught moral science, Latin, and history. He relished his subordinate role, happy to not be in charge of an institution, writing, “I am an assistant & have no responsibility, no care about the general management of the school. This I enjoy exceedingly.”⁷⁵³

⁷⁵⁰ Robert Ryland to Mrs. James R. Fleet, November 5, 1866, RRP, 15.009, VBHS; Bessie Taliaferro Carter, “Robert Ryland” RRP, 03.048; Robert Ryland to Norvell Ryland, September 21, 1866, RRP, 21.002, VBHS.

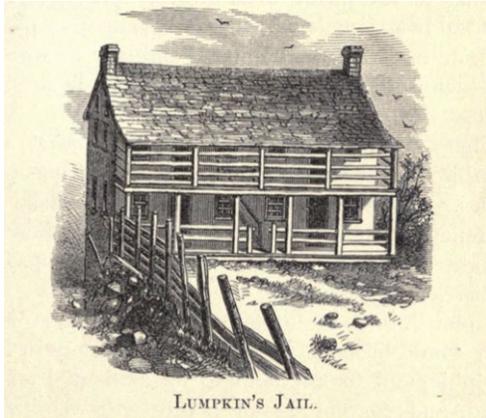
⁷⁵¹ Bessie Taliaferro Carter, “Robert Ryland” RRP, 03.048; Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, December 4, 1861, RRP, 25.020, VBHS.

⁷⁵² Hattie Allen Collins to Robert Ryland, March 11, 1889, RRP, 40.070, VBHS.

⁷⁵³ “Institute Reopened,” *Daily Dispatch*, October 23, 1866, [link](#); Robert Ryland to Mrs. James R. Fleet, November 5, 1866, RRP, 15.012, VBHS.

Richmond Female Institute could only offer Ryland a half-time position, however, which necessitated his search for additional work, and his eventual departure from the institution.⁷⁵⁴

6.1.4 NATIONAL THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE AT RICHMOND



"Lumpkin's Jail," from Charles Henry Corey's *History of the Richmond Theological Institute*, 42

The staunch abolitionist, Dr. Nathaniel Colver, was heading the newly constituted Richmond branch of the National Theological Institute when he encountered Robert Ryland on the street. The stated goal of the institute was to provide preparation for the Baptist ministry to formerly enslaved men. Colver recalled seeing Ryland “returning from the market with a basket under on his arm, [and] decided to secure his services as an associate in teaching.”⁷⁵⁵ Ryland was to teach his new students at the former Lumpkin’s Jail, which only two years before had been the “slave trading complex” also known as the “Devil’s Half-Acre.”⁷⁵⁶

Ryland’s acceptance of Colver’s offer was marked by a lengthy piece he contributed to the *Religious Herald* explaining his decision to teach students there. He wrote that he saw the work as an absolute necessity. He believed that “the colored people have recently been raised, not only to freedom, but to the dignity of citizenship... *They ought to be educated.* But that is not all. *They will be educated.*”⁷⁵⁷ Ryland called on the newspaper’s white Baptist readers to see that, because of what he described as their financial constraints rather than racism, they were leaving these educational efforts to “strangers,” the Northerners who Black people saw as “their special friends.” Ryland believed himself to be someone who could “reach” them because his “peculiar relations to them in former times have so softened their prejudices as to make them willing to be instructed.” He had, he reminded the readers of the *Herald*, for twenty-five years “labored, on the Sabbath and in other spare hours, with honest zeal, for their spiritual welfare. I still number among them a host of warm-hearted friends.” This was an opportunity, he insisted, to begin the process of easing the tensions between North and South. He and Colver “both agree to make zealous and combined efforts for the improvement of the colored race,” however, “[Dr. Colver] does not pledge his people to general co-operation with the South. I do not pledge mine to similar co-operation with the North.” Their work

⁷⁵⁴ Robert Ryland to “Bro. Garnett,” July 24, 1867, RRP, 14.037-038, VBHS.

⁷⁵⁵ Charles Henry Corey, *A History of the Richmond Theological Seminary*, Richmond: J.W. Randolph (1895), 56, 62.

⁷⁵⁶ Matthew R Laird, “Lumpkin's Jail,” *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Humanities, Jan. 25, 2018, accessed Oct. 11, 2020, [link](#).

⁷⁵⁷ Again, Ryland’s depiction of Black people as passive rather than active agents in their own lives is typical, but important to note.

together, Ryland wrote, would concentrate efforts on those called to the ministry as a strategy to spread moral uplift. He personally would also work to promote his conception of racial harmony: “It shall be my special aim to conciliate them, and through them, their hearers, to the white people, while I shall use every suitable occasion to conciliate the whites to them.” Ryland concluded with a typically candid message for those who criticized him: “[S]ome fastidious people will, perhaps, think, or affect to think less of me for choosing this field of toil... Of such I can only say that they probably think very little of me now, as in matters of *duty* I have not been accustomed to inquire what they like or dislike.”⁷⁵⁸

Among those who reacted to Ryland’s choice were the shocked editors of the *Religious Herald*, Jeremiah Bell Jeter and A.E. Dickenson, who “did not even know of his determination until we received his address for publication.” His decision to teach at the institute flew in the face of the Virginia Baptist General Association which had “declined co-operation” with the institute’s effort to train Black ministers. Jeter and Dickenson chided the Baptists of Virginia for not working more quickly to provide Ryland another ministerial position, noting that he had stated the reasons for his decision and that there was also “a more weighty reason which it was not proper for him to mention.” They conceded that “[o]f all the men we know, Dr. Ryland is the best qualified for training colored men for the ministry” and then offered their grudging acceptance.⁷⁵⁹ The reaction to Ryland accepting the position varied among other Baptists, and reflected the sort of duel criticism he had faced while pastor at First African Baptist Church. The *American Baptist* of New York called Ryland’s association with the school for Black ministers “‘an unseemly alliance’ with ‘pro-slavery professors of theology.’” According to the *Journal & Messenger* of Cincinnati, Ohio, Ryland’s decision “is severely criticized by some of his Southern friends.”⁷⁶⁰

The *Daily Dispatch* described the institute as serving “fifteen ministers and candidates for the ministry, besides a goodly number of freedmen, who are seeking general culture.” The tone of the article was optimistic, though distinctly paternalistic: “If the teaching imparted by this Institute is judicious, it must tend in a great degree to elevate the colored race, and fit them for the grave responsibilities of life.”⁷⁶¹ Colver described the situation in Richmond in 1868, “The South is one vast ruin. The blacks are ignorant, have nothing, and the whites seem demented... Our school is prosperous. Many being turned away because they have nothing to live on, and we have nothing for them.”⁷⁶² In later formal correspondence regarding the school’s history, Ryland described his work there as a positive experience: “Dr. Colver, the Principal, taught only Biblical knowledge, and I devoted six full hours a day in teaching all the elementary branches that I saw most needful to the pupils. I got along very pleasantly with all the students, and with Dr. Colver.” His relationship with

⁷⁵⁸ Robert Ryland, “To the Baptist Churches of Virginia and the South Generally,” *Religious Herald*, September 12, 1867.

⁷⁵⁹ Editors, “Address of Dr. Ryland,” *Religious Herald*, September 12, 1867, VBHS.

⁷⁶⁰ “Colored Ministers,” undated clipping, RRP, 03.001, VBHS.

⁷⁶¹ “Richmond Theological Institute for Young Men,” *Daily Dispatch*, December 25, 1867.

⁷⁶² “Baptist Colored Ministers,” *The Congregationalist*, March 12, 1868.

the institute did not last long, however, and in less than a year he resigned to accept a position leading Kentucky Female College. While his public explanation for his departure from the institute, which eventually became part of Virginia Union University, was his concern that “a female could teach at \$600 per annum, what I was teaching at a cost to the Society of \$1,200,” in his letters to close confidants Ryland shared his frustration with the work and with the students themselves. He wrote to his nephew Charles Hill Ryland that the work there did not “fill up my longing to be useful, tho. it gratified it partially.” Ryland’s objection was to what he believed to be the limited capacities of the institute’s students: “My pupils were so unimpressible that the work was almost purely mechanical. Did you ever fancy that turning a grindstone all day without sharpening the iron would be harder work than if it shd. sharpen it? (Oh darkeydom! forgive the insinuation).”⁷⁶³ He echoed the sentiment in a letter to his son, Norvell Ryland, in which he wrote that teaching the students there did not “satisfy” him: “In the main, I am better satisfied in teaching a Fem[ale] School than I was trying to beat some sense into the brains of negroes.”⁷⁶⁴

The institution took the name Colver Institute in 1869, became the Richmond Institute in 1876, and Richmond Theological Seminary in 1886. In 1899, the seminary merged with the Wayland Institute to form Virginia Union University.

6.1.5 DEPARTURE: RICHMOND COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

After receiving an offer to assume the presidency of the Kentucky Female College in Shelbyville, Kentucky, Ryland resigned his position on the Richmond College Board of Trustees on May 25, 1868. Unlike his letter that marked his resignation as President of the College, his note to the trustees was extraordinarily brief:

Richmond May 25th 1868
To the Trustees of Richmond College

Gentlemen, Expecting to remove to Kentucky, I hereby offer my resignation as a trustee of Richmond College.

In dissolving a connexion [sic] which has continued so long, I will say that I have no other feelings than those of kindness to you as individuals & as a corporation.

Very respectfully,

Ro. Ryland

Many years later, as he closed a remembrance of his years in Richmond and at Richmond College, Ryland deployed the dry humor that often appeared in his private letters when he wrote, “Whatever defects may have appeared in my humble participation in this history, I do boldly claim as one act of

⁷⁶³ Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, October 1, 1868, 13.023, VBHS.

⁷⁶⁴ Robert Ryland to Norvell Ryland, October 24, 1868, RRP, 21.012, VBHS.

signal merit and far-reaching benefit to the cause – *my resignation of the Presidency of the College and its Board of Trustees.*”⁷⁶⁵

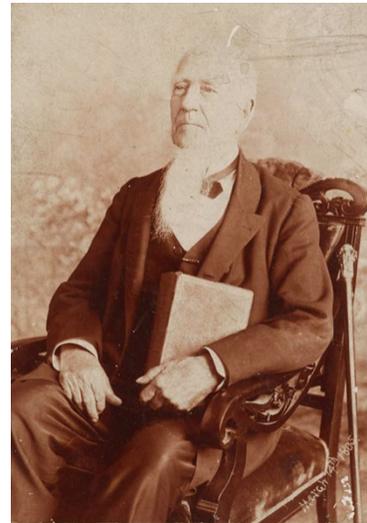
While Ryland described his kind feelings to the trustees as “individuals & as a corporation” and pointed to his departure to Kentucky as the reason for his resignation, there are also indications that he was frustrated by willingness among some trustees to take on debt.⁷⁶⁶ As for his decision to take the position in Kentucky, Ryland published a letter in the *Religious Herald* and, with typical frankness, described his rationale for leaving Richmond, which had been his home for thirty-six years:

I found myself not only divested of my whole estate, consisting of a small patrimony, and the proceeds for forty years work, but involved in ante-war debt of fourteen hundred dollars, surrounded by a large and dependent family – three of whom were yet to be educated – and in the consequence of the upheaval of things, without employment!

Ryland thanked the trustees of the college for providing him with a house for two years and then asked a blessing for all his “beloved friends”: “That God Almighty may largely bless you shall ever be the prayer of your loving brother in the hope of eternal life.”⁷⁶⁷

6.2 KENTUCKY YEARS AND LATER LIFE

Over the next thirty-one years, Robert Ryland continued to work in academic roles while preaching as much as he could. For three years he was the administrator of Kentucky Female College (1868-1871) and then took over leadership at Lexington College (1871-1878). At both institutions he struggled to secure steady streams of institutional funding. Between 1878 and 1881 he relocated to New Castle, Kentucky and worked at Henry Male and Female College and was briefly affiliated with a church.⁷⁶⁸ Between 1893 and 1897, and spanning his late eighties and early nineties, Ryland was the chaplain of the Southwest Virginia Institute in Bristol, Virginia. As he moved through the last decades of his life, his work at the three educational institutions did little to ease his acute financial strain. While he never secured a full-time ministerial position, Ryland served as a guest minister whenever he had the opportunity, and his personal ledger from his post-Richmond years contains numerous entries showing his visits to regional churches and the sermons he



Robert Ryland, circa 1893, VBHS

⁷⁶⁵ Robert Ryland, *Society*, 24; reprinted in the *Religious Herald*, April 5, 1906, RRP 4.082. It is likely that, in the original form, italicized words were underlined, Ryland’s typical method of emphasis.

⁷⁶⁶ Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, January 28, 1878, RRP, 25.009-010, VBHS.

⁷⁶⁷ “To My Brethren and Friends in Virginia,” *Religious Herald*, July 16, 1868, VBHS.

⁷⁶⁸ Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, January 28, 1878, RRP, 25.009-010, VBHS.

delivered from their pulpits. He remained committed to sharing the gospel despite what he described as being “comparatively ‘laid upon the shelf.’” By 1889, he believed this was due to his age which had him out of step with the “spirit of the age.” His “mortification” at his lack of a church meant he relished “opportunities to labor among the destitute and among those who were willing to receive the gospel from the lips of an old man. My aim,” he continued, “has been and still is, to be found at work when the Master comes.”⁷⁶⁹

As for his personal spiritual journey, Ryland remained convinced of his own “great unworthiness,” writing at the age of eighty-five that, despite “many humiliating failures,” he had tried to “live a Christian life.”⁷⁷⁰ He returned to Richmond a number of times over the decades – sharing his memories of his time in the city and his affiliation with First African Baptist Church and Richmond College. Ryland’s 1890 address to students and faculty, published as *The Virginia Baptist Education Society: The Society, the Seminary, the College* in 1891 was typically candid and detailed. He shared his thoughts on students, described a garden superintendent who did not last in the position, and reflected on his mistakes as an administrator. He did not mention the enslaved people who worked on the institution’s two campuses. Ryland continued to write on religious matters for a number of publications throughout this period, producing newspaper articles, his memories of his work as pastor in Lynchburg, his essay on York Woodson, recollections of First African Baptist Church and Richmond College, and *The Colored People*, published just one year before his death in 1899.

While he no longer expressed the sectionalism he had during the Civil War, in 1879 he distilled what he believed to be the lingering feelings between white people of the North and South: “We must forget a great deal more before love will bubble up freely.”⁷⁷¹ Regarding race, Ryland continued to contain the many of the contradictory qualities he had prior to the Civil War. In an 1885 letter to his brother, Samuel Ryland, Robert Ryland expressed deep concern over the effect that the arrival of British domestic laborers would have on the Black women who had been doing that work in Lexington: “White help is being introduced in Lex [Lexington] from England. There is a special agency for it. What will the colored women do after a while?”⁷⁷² Six years later, however, in response to Betty Ryland’s frustration over replacing a cook, Ryland teased his wife for expecting consistent labor from free Black people:

[Your] condition as to the loss of servants & finding unfit succession brings you to an equality with all the housekeepers in [Virginia] and the while South. You are the only person I have found anywhere in the country, who had seen no radical difference between antebellum & post-bellum times, until [your] excellent cook left you! Nor have I a single crust of comfort for you in the future! The new generation of Negroes is far above hard work. The women are worse than the men. If you hire them, they study how little work they

⁷⁶⁹ Robert Ryland, “My Experience and Call to the Ministry,” “Lexington, Ky., 1889,” *The Colloquium*, 44, clipping from RRP, 51.046, VBHS.

⁷⁷⁰ Robert Ryland, “My Experience and Call to the Ministry,” VBHS.

⁷⁷¹ Letter, Robert Ryland to Norvell Ryland, June 1, 1879, RRP, 21.017, VBHS.

⁷⁷² Robert Ryland to Samuel Ryland, March 15, 1885, RRP, 12.034, VBHS.

can do to avoid dismissal, & as soon as they can get money enough...they are gone!⁷⁷³

Throughout his post-Richmond years Ryland continued to preach before white and Black congregations. He also lead Bible classes for Black people focused on reading and in 1885 wrote of this work, “I am going down to hear my colored class read the Bible. Some few of them desire to learn. Many think they ‘know it all.’”⁷⁷⁴

In 1898, Robert Ryland published the pamphlet, *The Colored People*, an essay he wrote at the age of ninety-two that was meant to promote the work of Baptist societies committed to “the improvement of the colored people.” Ryland approached his white readers from a different perspective, however, urging them to avoid abandoning their own “personal efforts because of their reliance on societies for that purpose.” He hoped that more white Americans would “exert a kindly influence on the colored people,” urged an end to “all prejudice and indifference” and a focus on the “temporal and spiritual interests” of Black people. The essay demonstrates those contradictions that, to Ryland, were consistent. As he entreated his readers to seek better kinship with Black members of the community, he also retained the overall frame of racist paternalism common among white Southerners at the time: detailing his fond childhood memories of the enslaved people on his father’s plantation, describing racial separation in churches and schools as “benevolent,” and not mentioning those people he once enslaved.⁷⁷⁵ He also restated the religious justifications for enslavement that he had expressed in his antebellum writings:

As we are bound to recognize the hand of God in controlling the nations of the earth, we naturally inquire what was His purpose in permitting these people first to be brought to this county, and then, after a season of discipline to be set free? To my mind, it does not seem presumptuous to infer that the Benignant Being had in view, first, the salvation of a vast through of benighted souls, who would not otherwise have been saved, and then to send them and their descendants, properly qualified to illumine the two hundred millions of Africans yet in darkness with the light of the gospel.⁷⁷⁶

Colonization, and the “preparation” of Black people for an eventual removal from the United States, continued to be his animating impulse as he laid out a number of ways in which his readers could “most easily and rapidly effect this important work of preparation.” Despite what he referred to as “a natural and mutual race-prejudice between whites and blacks” based on white “distaste for the black skin, the curly hair and the servitude so long associated with them” and Black memory of “the hardships of slavery, and our reluctance to cut the tie that bound them,” Ryland asked his readers to remember that “[o]ur bodies are diverse in color, but our souls, if they have any color, are by nature equally dark, and by the blood of the Lamb, may be made equally white.” After considering differences in “genealogy” and “experience,” he wrote that white people “are all too apt to palliate

⁷⁷³ Robert Ryland to Betty Ryland, December 10, 1891, RRP, 20.018, VBHS.

⁷⁷⁴ Robert Ryland to Samuel Ryland, March 15, 1885, RRP, 12.034, VBHS.

⁷⁷⁵ Robert Ryland, *The Colored People*, 8, RRP, 3.061, VBHS.

⁷⁷⁶ Ryland, *The Colored People*, 6-7, RRP, 3.060, VBHS.

our faults and to exaggerate theirs; to boast of our virtues and to question theirs.”⁷⁷⁷ He encouraged readers to discourage what he believed to be sexual promiscuity among Black people by “impress[ing] their minds with the sanctity of the marriage vow,” to hire Black people and to “pay their wages cheerfully and punctually,” and provide “extra pay in food, clothing, medicine or books.”⁷⁷⁸ Here Ryland focused on the southern states: “The country people of the South have comparatively little money, and cannot gratify their generous impulses with large donations. But by deeds of kindness and delicate attentions to the suffering, they can and do greatly alleviate the afflicted.”⁷⁷⁹ Finally, and to Ryland most importantly, he asked white people to “spend half an hour a week...teaching your ‘help’ to read the Bible” and to evangelize in the domestic space. He concluded by asking readers to attend to all those “for whom no one has cared.”⁷⁸⁰

Ryland’s finances, never completely stable after the Civil War, were often particularly strained. They were also public knowledge. When word reached him that he had been described as poor, he was recalled as saying to one congregation, “I want it distinctly understood that I am not poor. I have a bank up yonder... a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. And after a while I expect to step through the pearly gates, walk the golden streets, and trample under my feet the gold whose loss some of you are whimpering and whining over now.”⁷⁸¹ To his children, grandchildren, and other relatives, Ryland was a tender letter writer and active source of advice and help.⁷⁸² Just a year before his death, Ryland’s eldest son wrote him seeking employment assistance following his departure from Bethel College after ongoing difficulties with that institution’s Board of Trustees.⁷⁸³

Ryland attended the Baptist General Association meeting in Roanoke in November 1893. Then approaching ninety, he spoke on the “economy of funerals” and led a prayer.⁷⁸⁴ On the final day of the gathering, Ryland, “the father of the association,” and “still hale and hearty” joked with the assembled ministers that “he did not think that the church should put men on the shelf who were as young and vigorous as himself.” At this point Ryland had begun to say his good-byes, and told those gathered there that “he never expected to attend another meeting of the association.” The *Savannah Morning News* called the statement “especially pathetic,” but over the next years Ryland continued

⁷⁷⁷ Ryland, *The Colored People*, 8, RRP, 3.061, VBHS.

⁷⁷⁸ Ryland, *The Colored People*, 8, 10, RRP, 3.061-.062, VBHS.

⁷⁷⁹ Ryland, *The Colored People*, 10, RRP, 3.062, VBHS.

⁷⁸⁰ Ryland, *The Colored People*, 11-12, RRP, 3.062-.063, VBHS.

⁷⁸¹ [Clipping transcription], RRP, 42.087, VBHS.

⁷⁸² Postcard, Robert Ryland to Robert Ryland [grandson], January 31, 1883, RRP, 1.002; Postcard, Robert Ryland to William Ryland [son], January 12, 1884, 1.005, VBHS; Postcard, Robert Ryland to Norvell Ryland, December 21, 1895, RRP, 21.006, VBHS.

⁷⁸³ Letter, William Ryland to Robert Ryland, May 5, 1898, RRP, 18.046, VBHS.

⁷⁸⁴ “Baptists of Virginia,” *Morning News* (Savannah, Georgia), November 11, 1893.

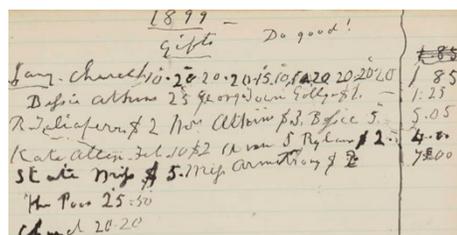
anticipate his death and to say farewell to those he knew with humor and acceptance.⁷⁸⁵ On his ninety-fourth birthday, March 14, 1899, he placed an item in the newspaper, a note to his “children, grandchildren, and other relatives, along with numerous brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus”:

I am sending my loving salutation... With the exception of eyes that require large type, of ears that prefer an unwhispered gospel, of teeth that delight in soft food, and of feet that can only walk by the aid of a friend, my health is uniformly good. I have been absent from church only *once* this terrible winter though I had to ride.

“But why have you lived so long?” Answer: Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people, and some persons need more discipline than others to fit them for its pure society and employment. God makes no mistakes.

Ryland added that that the short item was likely his final communication to those he knew, and he ended it with a simple benediction: “May God’s richest blessings abide on you all! Ever yours, R. Ryland.”⁷⁸⁶

During his final years, Ryland retained his curiosity and his drive to learn, weighing in on contemporary politics and scientific advances including applications of electricity and radium.⁷⁸⁷ Always drawn to the study of languages, Ryland had learned Hebrew from a rabbi in Richmond and his daughter recalled that in the winter of 1898 and 1899 he read the Hebrew Bible “through.”⁷⁸⁸



During those years he also continued to note “gifts” on a page in his ledger, money he was able to give to family, to church, and to “The Poor.” At the top of the page, he wrote the words, “Do good!”⁷⁸⁹ On his last page of receipts he wrote, “The Lord is good!” and over his expenses he wrote, “Owe no man!”⁷⁹⁰

After a brief illness, Robert Ryland died at his daughter’s home on April 23, 1899.⁷⁹¹

6.2.1 BURIAL AT HOLLYWOOD CEMETERY

⁷⁸⁵ “Virginia’s Baptists,” *Morning News* (Savannah, Georgia), November 15, 1893.

⁷⁸⁶ Robert Ryland, “March 14, 1805 – March 14, 1899,” RRP, clipping in file 44, “Obituary,” VBHS.

⁷⁸⁷ Josephine Ryland Knight to Garnett Ryland, “Recollections of her father, Dr. Robert Ryland,” RRP, 42.072, VBHS.

⁷⁸⁸ Josephine Ryland Knight to Garnett Ryland, “Recollections,” RRP, 42.071, VBHS.; Roberta Ryland Adkins, “Robert Ryland,” RRP, 042.080, VBHS.

⁷⁸⁹ Robert Ryland, “Gifts of 1898,” Ledger VI, RRP, 55.6.045, VBHS.

⁷⁹⁰ Robert Ryland, “Receipts”/ “Expenses,” Ledger VI, RRP, 55.6.047, VBHS.

⁷⁹¹ Obituary, “Robert Ryland,” RRP, 03.038, VBHS.

Ryland intended to be buried in Kentucky. His daughter recalled him saying that “an oak should lie where it fell.” Nevertheless, he bent to the wishes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees who believed that his burial in an institutional plot “would be history” for the institution, and in the years before his death he corresponded with Charles Hill Ryland about the specifics.⁷⁹² While he agreed to be buried at Hollywood Cemetery, he requested that an additional plot be provided his for his wife, Betty Thornton Ryland, so they could be beside one another in death.⁷⁹³ Ryland had assumed that he would die first, but if Betty Ryland were to not outlive him, there was “general anxiety that she be buried in KY and I with her.” Ryland stipulated how the situation should be handled: “If my dear wife shall be called home first I will bring her to Richmond & bury her entirely at my own expense. If I am called home first, I will direct that my coffined body will be given up to the Trustees of R. College to be disposed of at their pleasure.”⁷⁹⁴



Graves of Robert Ryland and Betty Thornton Ryland, Hollywood Cemetery, (Shelby M. Driskill, 2021)

Ryland requested that “a small marble slab” be placed at his grave, “at my children’s expense.” On it he asked for a simple inscription and verse from Revelations 22:20: “R. Ryland, born in K & Queen, March 14, 1805. Died (in or at) (Place & date) ‘Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, Come Lord Jesus.’” Ryland then added in parenthesis, “This is enough.”⁷⁹⁵

Despite Ryland’s request for a simple marker and the Bible verse for his grave, the trustees of Richmond College placed a large obelisk there with an inscription that praised his work for the institution and his “service to Christian education,” but did not mention his work at First African Baptist Church:

Robert Ryland, A.M., D.D.
1805 – 1899
President of the Virginia Baptist Seminary and of Richmond College, 1832 – 1866. Erected by the Trustees of the College in memory of his efficient and devoted service to Christian Education.⁷⁹⁶

Betty Ryland was buried beside him following her death in 1905.

⁷⁹² Adkins, “Robert Ryland,” RRP, 42.079, VBHS.

⁷⁹³ Adkins, “Robert Ryland,” RRP, VBHS; Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, August 23, 1898.

⁷⁹⁴ Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, August 23, 1898, RRP, 25.142, VBHS.

⁷⁹⁵ Robert Ryland to Charles Hill Ryland, December 19, 1898, RRP, 25.124, VBHS.

⁷⁹⁶ George Braxton Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers*, Fourth Series, Lynchburg: J.P. Bell, Co., 1913, 355

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive biographical research and report that was requested following the recommendations of the President's Commission has resulted in findings that shed light on specific details of Robert Ryland's life and legacy as educator, administrator, and minister. Ryland's work during the Virginia Baptist Seminary and Richmond College eras was essential to the present existence of the University of Richmond. His belief in the importance of a liberal arts education shaped the character of the institution and under his leadership prior to the Civil War it grew from a small farm-based seminary to a nationally-known college. Over those decades, the use of those he enslaved and other enslaved people who were "hired out" to work on the campus were central to its daily operations. In his ministerial life, Ryland's commitment to the equality of souls, though not bodies, preserved a space at First African Baptist Church where forms of self-determination, self-governance, and power coalesced for many members of Richmond's enslaved and free Black community.

Walter Henderson Brooks, who as a child was an enslaved congregant at the church, wrote in his warm appreciation of Ryland, "Whatever may have been Dr. Ryland's intentions, he certainly inspired hope, for all that is best in this life, as well as for the life to come."⁷⁹⁷ "Whatever may have been Dr. Ryland's intentions" gets to the seeming contradictions at the heart of proslavery Christianity and of much of Ryland's thinking regarding enslavement and the lives of Black people. While his childhood was spent surrounded by those enslaved by his father and others, by his early adulthood he had begun to cultivate antislavery thinking, possibly inspired by the early Virginia Baptists who were connected to his family. As a college student, he called enslavement a "legalized crime," a "devouring insect" that was destroying the roots of the tree of liberty, though his hopes for abolition were entwined with the colonization movement and the removal of free Black people from the United States. Despite these early leanings, eight years later he was hiring out the labor of two people he enslaved for the use of the institution that would become the University of Richmond. While he often detailed what he believed to be a divine plan that justified enslavement – that God intended it as an instrument to spread Christianity in Africa – at times he also drew on social and economic reasoning for the preservation of human bondage in the South. In 1835, in considering enslavement in the context of the "drudgery of domestic business," he wrote that "the slaves have always performed it" and "respectable" white people could not "be obtained on wages to do this work."⁷⁹⁸ In 1857, he spoke of the possibility that, "in a few centuries," competition might drive down wages to the point that "voluntary operatives" might take on the work then being done by enslaved people.⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹⁷ Walter H. Brooks to "Prof. Ryland," May 6, 1939, Robert Ryland Biographical File, VBHS.

⁷⁹⁸ Robert Ryland, "To Dr. Wayland," *Christian Watchman*, August 21, 1835, Early American Newspapers. Newsbank.

⁷⁹⁹ Robert Ryland, The American Union, RRP, 51.020, VBHS. Also published as Robert Ryland, "The American Union," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), September 3, 1857, 2. Early American Newspapers. Newsbank.

As he was working in the role of pastor at First African Baptist Church, often touching the lives of people like Walter Henderson Brooks, Ryland continued to enslave people himself and over the decades in Richmond he hired out twelve of them: Sam, Fanny, Sally, Walker Lee, Ellen, Matilda, Tom, Louisa, Maria, John, Lucy, and Judy. He profited from their labor while operating within a moral framework that allowed for what he called “humane masters.” While at times he described the subject of slavery as “perplex[ing]” to him, and he took pains to make clear his aversion to both family separations and the constraints on free access to religious teaching and the Bible, the findings of this study demonstrate Ryland’s day-to-day comfort with enslavement. In Virginia, in the South, and in many Baptist churches and associations, Ryland was not unique in this compartmentalization. He was unique in his chronicling of it, and in his weekly spiritual relationship with a congregation of fifteen hundred to two thousand enslaved and free Black people at First African Baptist Church. Through his records, one also gains access to the lives of some of those he enslaved, fragments of biography that bring us slightly closer to aspects of their lives. In his longer descriptions of York Woodson, Joseph Abrams, and some of the congregants at First African Baptist Church, Ryland provided details of their lives that we would not otherwise have, ways to begin seeing their choices and their power when so many of their experiences were constrained by enslavement and racism. An examination of his life also provides one avenue to learning of Thomas U. Allen and Burwell Mann, though in other sources we see facets of those two extraordinary men that Ryland did not record and may not have seen.

Robert Ryland knew the harm done to enslaved people. He knew that Joseph Abrams had been whipped. He knew that Ellen, a woman he enslaved for at least fifteen years, had run away from the person he hired her to and was arrested. He kept records of the many members of his congregation who were sold South. He purchased the freedom of a man who would have been separated from his wife and another man who was committed to ministry and education but had been prevented from pursuing either because he was enslaved; but Ryland also viewed these purchases as investments and charged interest that had to be paid before he would free those he assisted. He enslaved over two dozen people before he was sixty. He was willing to auction a woman, only deciding against it to prevent outcry among the congregants at First African Baptist Church. He later sold she and another woman in the waning days of the Civil War as part of a purchase of Confederate stock. He did not believe “emancipation safe or humane to either master or servant,” nor did he believe that it was “morally wrong under existing circumstances to hold slaves.” These specific facts of his history and descriptions of his thinking bring us closer to understanding the depth of Ryland’s participation in the enslavement system even as he ministered to enslaved people. Ryland was driven, spiritually and intellectually, by honesty, an “uncompromising fidelity to the truth.”⁸⁰⁰ Despite this, he was able to avoid including most of the dehumanizing, violent, and cruel daily realities of enslavement in his consideration of the subject “in the abstract.”⁸⁰¹ An end of enslavement would upend the social system he vigorously defended and would also diminish his material wealth. He was, until the end

⁸⁰⁰ Robert Ryland, “Council to ministers: An ordination charge to a young minister by his father,” Charleston, South Carolina: Baptist Publication Society, VBHS.

⁸⁰¹ Robert Ryland, “To Dr. Wayland,” *Christian Watchman*, August 21, 1835, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank

of his life, compelled to “do good,” and he did good – a great deal of it – but he also saw himself and other enslavers as doing good *through* enslavement. Following emancipation, he remained convinced that American enslavement of Black people, “a season of discipline,” was divinely sanctioned and necessary.

In Edward L. Ayers’ consideration of Robert Ryland’s role at First African Baptist Church, he writes that “[Ryland’s] story holds up a mirror to our own time and to ourselves,” and he asks, “Are we, too, complicit in the great and growing inequality and injustice all around us? Are we, too, giving away too much by aligning ourselves with the institutions and values of our own time and place?”⁸⁰² Ryland and others in his sphere did not exist in a moral vacuum. The antislavery feelings of William Crane, Ryland’s friend and one of the original purchasers of the Virginia Baptist Seminary property, grew stronger as he grew older and he eventually left Richmond for the North.⁸⁰³ Yet for Robert Ryland many of those prevailing “institutions and values” that codified and strengthened the enslavement system held sway, even as he objected to some aspects of the system’s implementation. By examining his history, and by considering what contemporary truths we may see there, perhaps a willingness to question our “own time and... ourselves” can be drawn out of his writing.⁸⁰⁴ Finally, among the many collisions of moral and spiritual ambition, educational drive, candor, rationalization, racism, paternalism, kindness, and self-interest found in Ryland’s records of his life and work, we also find people like York Woodson, Thomas U. Allen, Burwell Mann, Walker Lee, Sam, Maria, and Sophy. Whatever his intentions, there is good in that.

⁸⁰² Edward L. Ayers, “Trials of Robert Ryland,” 13.

⁸⁰³ Marie Tyler-McGraw and the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, “William Crane (1790–1866),” *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Humanities, September 6, 2017, accessed Dec 10, 2020, [link](#); William Crane, *Anti-Slavery in Virginia*, Baltimore: J.S. Weishampel (1865), 20.

⁸⁰⁴ Ayers, “Trials of Robert Ryland,” 13.

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The research that provided the foundation for this report on Robert Ryland, as well as the exploration of the history of the burying ground located on the University of Richmond campus, began as part of a student project for Digital Memory and the Archive, a course designed and taught by Dr. Nicole Maurantonio, Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Communication Studies, and Irina Ragova, now the Digital Resources Archivist at Kansas State University Libraries. Their support and the input of students, particularly Christina Lee and Cortrelle Simpson, were vital to the early structures of the research. The staff of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society provided access to the extraordinary collection of Robert Ryland's papers and other material related to his life, those of his contemporaries, and the history of the Virginia Baptist church. Dr. Nathan Taylor, the director of VBHS and the Center for Baptist History, has been an important resource, providing historical insights, denominational context, and research suggestions. Darlene S. Herod, Research Assistant, has been generous with her time and her expertise. She and Robbie J. Miller, Operations Specialist, have been patient and welcoming during my many visits to VBHS.

In the spring semester of 2019, Dr. Laurantett L. Lee supervised my ongoing study of the burying ground and the role of enslavement at the early institution and in the life of Robert Ryland as part of an independent research course in the Master's in Liberal Arts program in the School of Professional and Continuing Studies. Her expertise and commitment to rigor in the development of holistic historical narratives were guiding inspirations for both streams of research. Dr. Lee and Dr. Edward L. Ayers were then co-chairs of the President Ronald A. Crutcher's Commission on University History and Identity, which recommended historical research that would "assemble and interpret evidence, culminating in a report, regarding Robert Ryland, Douglas Southall Freeman, and slavery on [the University of Richmond] landscape." In September 2019, Dr. Lee, who was leading the resulting Inclusive History Project invited me to be its research coordinator, and to continue my work on the burying ground and Robert Ryland. She and Dr. Amy Howard have provided wisdom and leadership throughout the research and writing process. It has been a privilege to conduct this research under their oversight and to work alongside those researching Douglas Southall Freeman: Suzanne Slye (Historical Research Consultant), Ayele d'Almeida (Undergraduate Research Assistant), Catherine Franceski (Undergraduate Intern), and Meriwether Gilmore (Volunteer).

Over the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown and facilities closures, a number of individuals, departments, and institutions have provided accommodation that allowed for access to vital materials. University

of Richmond administrators provided additional time for project completion due to those constraints and in response to the volume of material included in Robert Ryland's papers. As part of a partnership between the Virginia Baptist Historical Society and the University of Richmond Digital Engagement Team in Boatwright Library the Robert Ryland Papers have been digitally preserved. Through their cooperation and the efforts of Kimberly Wolfe, Digital Collections Librarian, and Marion Dieterich, Digital Engagement Associate, I have been able to access the thousands of pages of letter, ledgers, and other materials from off-campus. The work of both the Virginia Baptist Historical Society and the Digital Engagement Team has been essential to this work. The late Beth S. Harris, Special Collections Management Librarian at Wyndham Robertson Library at Hollins University, provided rapid access to the Charles Lewis Cocke papers on the day that COVID-19 was declared a national emergency. I will always remember her kindness, as well as her commitment to archival access and support for research. Because the Library of Congress was closed to visitors, Andrew Gaudio, Reference Librarian in the Researcher and Reference Services Division, provided scanned excerpts of *The Pastor's Voice* by Walter Henderson Brooks. Amelia Talley Driskill, an independent researcher in Lynchburg, Virginia, located the digital record of York Woodson's burial. Ann Lloyd Breeden and Molly Field, Special Assistant for Board Operations, provided scanned versions of archival university records. Both before and during the COVID-19 period, the staff of the Library of Virginia's Manuscripts and Archives departments provided research support and access to contemporaneous newspapers and documents, including the minutes that Ryland recorded at First African Baptist Church. These are available to the public on microfilm through the generosity of the church's members.

Douglas Broome and Stella Broome have provided unwavering support for this work and have been daily sources of strength and love.

Shelby M. Driskill
January 1, 2021

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: “SERVANTS AND HIRING OUT”

“Servants”

The term “servant” was the “standard euphemism” for enslaved people in the South, and like most white Virginians at the time, Robert Ryland generally defaulted to this term in his letters and other writing.⁸⁰⁵ “Servant” is also a frequent designator used in the records of the Board of Trustees and other institutional documents. Of those who are described as working at the institution in the antebellum period, only Agness Cooper, one person among the many listed in Ryland’s Boarding Department accounts and in other documents, was described as “free.” This default to “servant” connoting enslavement and “free” as the necessary distinguisher is consistent with the findings of Christopher L. Tomlins who describes the early American use of the term: “[W]hat underwent homogenization as “servants” were various categories of “unfree” labor; what was differentiated was free labor.”⁸⁰⁶ Jeffery S. Kahana, referring to Tomlins’ work, also writes, “Americans in the early republic, [Tomlins] argues, bristled at the word servant to describe working people who were not black slaves.”⁸⁰⁷

While initially linked to British usage, the use of “servant” for “slave” grew in alignment with notions of freedom in the early republic. It provided enslavers and hirers of enslaved people a moral distance that the word “slave” did not. Historian Francois Furstenberg writes that the use of the term “servant” was a part of an enslavers shifting “moral agency” to enslaved people which, in the minds of enslavers, “made slaves responsible for their condition.” This shift implied, “at the very least... they could have chosen death over slavery... [w]hich may explain why southerners preferred the term “servant” to “slave,” the former connoting an element of volunteerism.”⁸⁰⁸ Enslaved people were, in the linguistic and moral formulation of many of those who enslaved them, *choosing to serve*.

In a consideration of one Ryland contemporary, William Meade, a Richmond Episcopal bishop and author of *Sermons, Dialogues, and Narratives for Servants*, the historian Milton C. Sernett notes the links between the use of the term “servant” for enslaved people and religion, writing that the practice “reached its zenith when Bishop Meade told the blacks they ought to be content with their situations because Jesus had been born a ‘servant’ and took the part of a ‘servant’ in his relationship

⁸⁰⁵ Elizabeth Pryor, in “Book Discussion on *Reading the Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee*,” C-Span, May 19, 2007, [link](#).

⁸⁰⁶ Christopher L. Tomlins, *Law, Labor, and Ideology in the Early Republic*, New York: Cambridge University Press (1993), note 30, 268.

⁸⁰⁷ Jeffrey S. Kahana, “Master and Servant in the Early Republic, 1780-1830,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Spring 2000, 28.

⁸⁰⁸ Albert Matthews, *The Terms Hired Man and Help*, Cambridge: John Wilson and Son (1900), 10; Francois Furstenberg, “Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy, Virtue, and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse,” *Journal of American History*, March 1, 2003, 1310.

to the disciples.”⁸⁰⁹ In Robert Ryland’s own work, *The Scriptural Catechism, For Coloured People* (1848) – later published as *A Scripture Catechism, for the Instruction of Children and Servants* (1848) – the common understanding of the term is clear from his usage, when he drew on verses from Ephesians and Peter as he entreated “servants” to “be obedient to them that are your masters,” even those who are “unkind”: “Servants be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward [in this context “improper”].”⁸¹⁰

Historian Midori Takagi writes that “[t]hroughout this period household servants were mostly slaves and generally women.”⁸¹¹ A significant amount of the labor needs at Virginia Baptist Seminary and Richmond College fell into the category of household work. In 1834, Robert Ryland was clear that he defaulted to viewing domestic labor as being performed by enslaved people. On “[t]he drudgery of domestic business,” Ryland wrote, “slaves have always performed it.”⁸¹² This is also one of the rare instances in which Ryland used the term “slaves.”

In addition to his use of the term in his *Catechism* and in his 1835 open letter, there are dozens of examples of Robert Ryland’s use of “servants” to designate enslaved people in his public writings and addresses, and in his private papers. A selection is below.

1. Ryland uses the term when describing efforts of enslaved members of First African Baptist Church to use mail distribution as a means of organizing escape efforts: “About this time several servants escaped to the North, from their masters, and wrote back to their former comrades, here, detailing the manner of their escape, and proposing to them facilities and information for the same experiment.”⁸¹³
2. In his record of money he received year-to-year, Ryland notes his income derived from hiring out those he enslaved many times, including “Servts hired at Semy [Seminary] 1834 80.[00].”⁸¹⁴
3. Ryland treated “servant” and “slave” synonymously in an 1858 statement declaring his commitment to the institution of slavery in Virginia: “I own about a dozen slaves... I have never manumitted one, and do not design doing so... I do not think emancipation safe or

⁸⁰⁹ Milton C. Sernett, *Black Religion and American Evangelicalism: White Protestants, Plantation Missions, and the Flowering of Negro Christianity, 1787-1865*, Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press [Originally published by the University of Michigan] (1975), 200.

⁸¹⁰ Robert Ryland *Scripture Catechism for Coloured People*, Richmond: Harold & Murray (1848), 139-140.

⁸¹¹ Takagi, “Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction,” 34.

⁸¹² Robert Ryland, “To Dr. Wayland” [Open Letter to Francis Wayland], *Christian Watchman*, August 21, 1835, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank.

⁸¹³ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences of First African Baptist Church, No. 3,” *American Baptist Memorial*, November 1855, 324, Hathi Trust Digital Library, [link](#).

⁸¹⁴ Robert Ryland, “Receipts on Private Account of 1835,” Ledger I, RRP, 55.1.036, VBHS.

humane to either master or servant.”⁸¹⁵

4. In describing how enslaved people were able to donate money to First African Baptist Church: “My own servants, when we were about to furnish their fall or spring clothing, would often say that, by patching their old garments, they could do without *new* ones, and would ask us for the *money* instead. Of course, we had no objection to this plan, unless we suspected a vicious use of the money. I suppose other families pursued the same course.”⁸¹⁶
5. In an 1864 sermon at Mount Olivet Baptist Church, when speaking of the prospect of Northern victory and the freeing of enslaved people: “they wd [would] curse our servants with a really more intense slavery.”⁸¹⁷
6. In Ryland’s papers, there are more than a dozen references to the purchase of “servants’ clothes,” both as personal expenses and as expenses of the Virginia Baptist Seminary and Richmond College Boarding Departments.⁸¹⁸ The required purchase of enslaved people’s clothing was typically made explicit in hiring agreements.⁸¹⁹

Others associated with Richmond College also used the term to indicate enslaved people. In reference to a man he enslaved, Jeremiah Bell Jeter wrote in his autobiography, “[Brother Knapp] censured me on account of the manner in which a servant of mine was clothed... Old Uncle Davy was a slave almost entirely past service.”⁸²⁰ Referring specifically to the enslaved people who labored at Richmond College upon his departure from the institution, Charles Lewis Cocke, who had overseen their labor as college steward, wrote, “I do not know yet whether I shall bring any of the servants from Richmond College or not,” indicating that those “servants” he was referring to were not free and that they were under his control, enslaved by him or by a member of his family.⁸²¹

⁸¹⁵ Robert Ryland, “A Card,” *Religious Herald*, September 14, 1858, VBHS.

⁸¹⁶ Robert Ryland, “Origin and History of the First African Church,” *The First Century of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, 1780-1880*, Richmond: Carlton McCarthy, 1880, 271.

⁸¹⁷ Sermon, “Mt. Olivet Ap 8 64, Judges 6:24,” RRP, 54.0150, VBHS.

⁸¹⁸ Examples of “Servants’ clothes” purchases in the ledgers maintained by Ryland include Ledger I, RRP, “Expenses of the Boarding Department of VBS 1834,” 55.1.032; “Expenditures of the Boarding Department 1835, 1st Session,” 55.1.037; “Expenditures of the Boarding Department, 1837,” 55.1.051; “Expenses of the Boarding Department” 1838, first and second sessions, 55.1.55-57; Ledger II, “Expenses of the Board.g Department, 1840 Second Sess.n,” 55.2.007; “Expenses of the Boarding Department 1841 1st Session,” 55.2.009, VBHS.

⁸¹⁹ John J. Zaborney, *Slaves for Hire: Renting Enslaved Laborers in Antebellum Virginia*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press (2012), 12, 14.

⁸²⁰ Jeter, *Recollections*, 267.

⁸²¹ Charles L. Cocke to James Cocke, July 1, 1846, Charles L. Cocke Papers, Wyndham Robertson Library, Hollins University; also cited in Oast. *Institutional Slavery*, 192.

While there was at least one free Black person working alongside enslaved domestic and facilities laborers at the institution, the specific references in the records and the conventions of the time make clear that a significant portion of the labor force discussed in this study were enslaved and hired out for use by Virginia Baptist Seminary and then Richmond College.

“Hire” and “Hiring Out”

An understanding of the scale of “slave hiring” in Virginia, and specifically the Richmond area, is critical context for a biographical consideration of Robert Ryland and any examination of the University of Richmond’s history prior to emancipation in 1865. While the hire system — in effect the renting or leasing out of enslaved people to individuals, businesses, and institutions — was used throughout the south, in Richmond and Henrico County it formed a significant aspect of daily life. Midori Takagi provides an overview of the rise of the practice in Richmond, describing it as a way for white people there to “adapt slave labor to the urban industrial setting.”⁸²² The practice was referred to as “negro hire,” “slave hire,” “servants’ hire,” or simply “hiring” and covered a range of labor, from household work for families who may not have enslaved anyone personally to the large scale hire of enslaved men to work in the areas coal pits and factories. Takagi writes, “Bondmen who were hired out were temporarily employed away from their owners as skilled artisans, house servants, fire fighters, road pavers, and factory hands.”⁸²³ Enslaved people were “self-hired” when they negotiated their own positions and, at times, located their own housing. An 1852, *Southern Planter* article referred to the practice with frustration: “now the negro is permitted to ‘choose his master.’”⁸²⁴ John T. O’Brien writes that self-hire “freed owners from the chore of traveling to Richmond during the holiday or of paying a 5 percent commission to a hiring agent.”⁸²⁵ In *Slaves for Hire: Renting Enslaved Laborers in Antebellum Virginia*, John J. Zaborney writes, “[b]y the 1850s, slave hiring had become so central to white Virginians’ lives and activities that slave-hiring bonds were manufactured and pre-printed.” The practice was so common that, as Zaborney details, at times entire businesses were developed around the practice of temporarily providing enslaved laborers to those seeking them.⁸²⁶

Among the many references to “servants” in the records of the Richmond College Board of Trustees there are two 1859 examples which demonstrate that the “servants” noted were enslaved and that the term “hire” was used in the context of enslaved people to indicate the amount paid *for* not *to* those who were working there:

1. Unnamed people were hired out to the college by a man referred to as Mr. Cook, who was either an enslaver or an agent. Cook was paid by Richmond College (via Robert Ryland) for

⁸²² Takagi, “Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction,” loc. 103, Kindle.

⁸²³ Takagi, “Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction,” loc. 115 Kindle.

⁸²⁴ “Hiring Negroes,” *Southern Planter*, December 1852, [link](#), article also cited in John T. O’Brien, “Factory, Church, and Community,” *Journal of Southern History*, November 1978, 514.

⁸²⁵ O’Brien, “Factory, Church, Community,” 514.

⁸²⁶ Zaborney, *Slaves for Hire: Renting Enslaved Laborers in Antebellum Virginia*, 25, Kindle.

additional laborers in the campus owned “hotel” then being run by W.B.F. Hyde: “Pd. svts’ hire to Mr. Cook for Hyde.”

2. A man named Martin was enslaved by an unknown person. During the period of his hire *to* Richmond College, he was also hired out *by* the College for a short period and then for a longer period to someone with the last name Allen. The institution, in effect, subleased Martin, earning money from his labor while someone – it appears to be Robert Ryland – earned a commission on the arrangement:

1858

July 31. Martin’s hire [received] from Allen \$5.75...

1859

Jny [January]12. Martin’s hire [received] less commissions 46.25⁸²⁷

⁸²⁷ Robert Ryland, “President’s Account,” June 7, 1859, Trustees Records, University Archives, VBHS; Minutes of the Richmond College Board of Trustees, August 4, 1857, VBHS.

APPENDIX B: TWO BAPTIST INFLUENCES

ROBERT BAYLOR SEMPLE

Robert Baylor Semple was pastor of Bruington Baptist Church from its establishment in 1790 until his death in 1831. He was also the uncle of Robert Ryland's half-brother, William Semple Ryland (1798-1861). It appears to have been Semple who guided at least part of Robert Ryland's formal education though his connections to two institutions Ryland attended: Humanity Hall, an academy in Hanover County, Virginia originally overseen by Semple's former teacher, and Columbian College, where Ryland earned two degrees and Semple was a key administrator.⁸²⁸ The links between Semple and Ryland were extensive and in several cases were directly linked to the younger man's professional development.



ROBERT BAYLOR SEMPLE.
(Reproduced from an oil portrait in possession of the Library of Richmond College.)

Robert Baylor Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of Baptists in Virginia*, Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society (1894), frontmatter

Semple and Ryland were both precise observers and recorders of their own congregation's histories. Aspects of Semple's approach to ministry were reflected in Ryland's later writing about his own pastoral role. In 1822, when Ryland was seventeen years old, Semple described a revival using language very similar to Ryland's observations of First African Baptist Church decades later:

In another church of my care, a revival has gone on for some months, chiefly among the people of color. About one hundred and seventeen have been baptized, of whom more than one hundred are colored; I wish my hopes of these were as sanguine as they are in respect to the subjects of the other revival. So closely are ignorance and superstition united, that I find it hard to keep these poor creatures from building upon visions and dreams. In many of them, however, the clearest evidences are furnished of a work of grace.⁸²⁹

Like Semple, Ryland also kept precise records of the enslaved and free Black people he baptized during his ministry at First African Baptist Church, sharing them with the *American Baptist Memorial*, a potential patron of the church as well as family and friends. Also like Semple, Ryland commented on what Semple referred to as the "visions and dreams" of some Black congregants.

Despite his own enslavement of dozens of people,⁸³⁰ Semple was antislavery in some of his principles and when writing about the colonization movement, he described enslavement as "a most deadly evil:"

If the colonization plan should fully succeed, a radical change for the better will be effected in three distinct nations: our own nation will be rid of a most deadly evil; the African race

⁸²⁸ James B. Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 306-307, 316.

⁸²⁹ Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 312.

⁸³⁰ Taylor, 344; Semple's son referred to the family home as a "family of sixty, black and white"

among us will take their stand as an independent, civilized people, cultivating the soil, and breathing the air which Heaven seems to have destined for them; the savage tribes on the African continent will, through them, rise to refinement and civilization; and, what is infinitely better, will acquire a knowledge of that gospel which brings life and immortality to light. Why should not our free colored population go back to the land of their forefathers?”⁸³¹

Ryland used similar language three years after the Semple likely wrote these words, referring to enslavement as “evil” and “legalized crime.” Given Semple's educational influence over Ryland, and the similarity in their description of what drew them both to colonization, it is likely that he was an early influence on Ryland's own enthusiasm for the movement. Three elements of Semple's justification for colonization – the “deadly evil” of enslavement, the potential missionary potential of formerly enslaved people among those he described as “savage” – were also the forces in Ryland's early commitment to the movement, though in later years records show Ryland's motivations narrowing to missionary work and relocation rather than an avenue to ending enslavement.

While Semple enslaved people and never argued for abolition, in his role as a church historian he recorded some indications of the power of Black church members, which was mirrored in Ryland's accounts of members of First African Baptist Church in his *American Baptist Memorial* essays in 1855. Semple described a Williamsburg church as having been “made up almost, if not altogether, of people of color.” The church had been led by a Black man named Gowan Pamphlet, an enslaved preacher, who rebelled against the Association when it “advised that no person of color should be allowed to preach, on pain of excommunication.”⁸³² Despite his exclusion, Pamphlet developed a church of five hundred people, and with force of those numbers the congregation was brought into the Dover Association in 1791.⁸³³ Semple credited both Pamphlet and an enslaved preacher named Moses, who was “often taken up and whipped” for continuing his ministry, “with the establishment of the Williamsburg Baptist Church.”⁸³⁴ Again, in an echo of Semple, in 1855 Ryland shared the experience of Joseph Abrams, a member of First African Baptist Church and an enormously powerful voice in Black ministry, who, like Moses, had been whipped for preaching.⁸³⁵

ANDREW BROADDUS

Andrew Broaddus was affiliated with Salem Baptist Church, then known as Upper King and Queen Meeting House, thirty miles from the Ryland family church, Bruington Baptist. Broaddus was an

⁸³¹ Taylor, 315-316. Taylor does not state this but Semple's reference in the same passage to the “late disaster in Liberia” indicates it was written following the death of Lott Cary, so approximately 1821

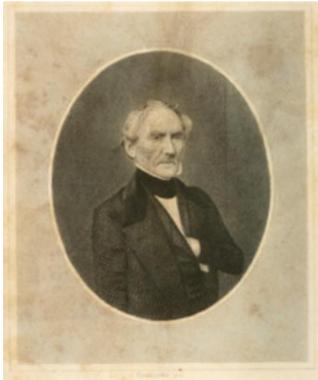
⁸³² Robert Baylor Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of Baptists in Virginia*, Richmond: John O. Lynch, Publisher (1810), 114-115.

⁸³³ Semple, 115; Nancy Alenda Hillman, “Between Black and White: The Religious Aftermath of Nat Turner's Rebellion,” Master's thesis, College of William and Mary (2005), 22-23, [link](#).

⁸³⁴ Semple, 114; Hillman, 22.

⁸³⁵ [Robert Ryland], “Reminiscences... No. 4, 354.”

antislavery Baptist who in 1835 publicly stated, “I am a friend to the rights of the human family... I am, in principle, opposed to slavery, and, consequently, I am in favor of emancipation” but, in the words of historian Charles F. Irons, he “chafed at the manner in which the American Anti-Slavery Society had demanded immediate emancipation without considering the ramifications of such a plan, and he argued that the South should be left alone.”⁸³⁶ Ryland had known Broaddus since he was a child, and he described the older man as one of his earliest religious influences. In his adulthood, the two were connected “as intimately as the disparity of our ages and the remoteness of our localities would allow.”⁸³⁷ Broaddus' final sermon was delivered at First African Baptist Church, where he exhorted the enslaved and free black congregation to “Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are fearful of heart, be strong, fear not. Behold! your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense, he will come and save you.”⁸³⁸ The two exchanged public communications on matters of faith in the *Religious Herald*, with Ryland writing under the pseudonym of “Onoma.”⁸³⁹ Broaddus designed the seal for the Virginia Baptist Seminary which continued to be used when the institution became Richmond College, and then the University of Richmond.



Portrait, Andrew Broaddus, *The Sermons and Other Writings of Andrew Broaddus*, frontmatter

Following Broaddus's death, Ryland wrote an extensive appreciation of his life for the *Religious Herald* that revealed details of their relationship and demonstrated Ryland's lifelong inclination toward specificity and candor in his writing. He wrote that he and Broaddus shared “no pledge of friendship” nor “intimacy of communication;” and this, Ryland continued, meant that nothing “can blind my judgment and tempt me to give too high a coloring to the portrait.” After describing Broaddus as having been, when at his best, “the most perfect orator that I have ever known” – a quality Ryland valued highly – he detailed Broaddus's overwhelming shyness, his depressive symptoms, and his dread of public notice which would cause him to stumble at the very moment a congregation was most anticipating.⁸⁴⁰ While extolling aspects of Broaddus's spiritual and ministerial gifts, Ryland wrote that Broaddus had been “poorly adapted... to elbow his way through the rough world.”⁸⁴¹ Ryland also detailed what he viewed as a noticeable diminishment in Broaddus: “[F]or the last fifteen years, there have

⁸³⁶ “To the Editors of the Whig,” *Religious Herald*, 11 Sept. 1835, quoted in Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 173-174.

⁸³⁷ Robert Ryland in Andrew Broaddus, *The sermons and other writings of the Rev. Andrew Broaddus : with a memoir of his life*, New York: Lewis Colby, 1852, 540
<https://archive.org/details/sermonsotherwrit00broa/page/284/mode/2up?q=ryland>.

⁸³⁸ A. Broaddus [Jr.], *The Sermons and Other Writings of Andrew Broaddus*, New York, Lewis Colby (1852), 550.

⁸³⁹ Broaddus, *Sermons*, 478.

⁸⁴⁰ Robert Ryland in A. Broaddus [Jr.], *Sermons*, 542.

⁸⁴¹ Robert Ryland in A. Broaddus [Jr.], *Sermons*, 548.

been a manifest decline in his intellectual abilities... the vivacity, the pathos, the magical power of his eloquence, had measurably departed.” Ryland wrote that “[h]undreds of persons who have heard him discourse in this period have been disappointed.” This comment – striking for a public appreciation of this sort – was jarring enough that, when it was included in a collection of Broaddus sermons in 1852, Andrew Broaddus, Jr., Broaddus’ son and the book’s editor, added a note of disagreement: “Persons who attended Mr. Broaddus's ministry regularly, during the latter part of his life, differed from President Ryland... There was less originality, but more pathos, in Mr. B.'s preaching toward the close of his life.”⁸⁴²

While Jeremiah Bell Jeter's sketch of Broaddus's life that was included in the collection of Broaddus's sermons also mentions the man’s social difficulties, Ryland's extensive description of Broaddus challenges – particularly the “trammels of despondency and fear” that apparently afflicted him – and his equally detailed appreciations of Broaddus's gifts – is an example of Robert Ryland’s tendency to closely observe those around him. It was also typical of his overall approach to communication, sharing the unvarnished truth as he saw it in both his criticism and his praise.

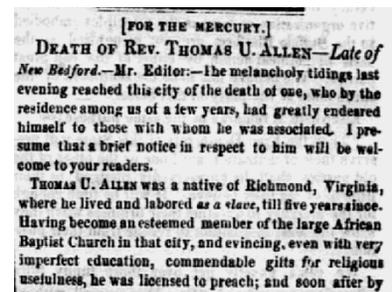
⁸⁴² A. Broaddus [Jr.], *Sermons*, 542.

APPENDIX C: DEATH OF THOMAS U. ALLEN, TRANSCRIPTION

For the Mercury.

DEATH OF REV. THOMAS U. ALLEN – *Late of New Bedford.*

– Mr. Editor. – The melancholy tidings last evening reached this city of the death of one, who by the residence among us of a few years, had greatly endeared himself to those with whom he was associated. I presume that a brief notice in respect to him will be welcome to your readers.



[FOR THE MERCURY.]
DEATH OF REV. THOMAS U. ALLEN—*Late of New Bedford.*—Mr. Editor:—the melancholy tidings last evening reached this city of the death of one, who by the residence among us of a few years, had greatly endeared himself to those with whom he was associated. I presume that a brief notice in respect to him will be welcome to your readers.
THOMAS U. ALLEN was a native of Richmond, Virginia, where he lived and labored as a slave, till five years since. Having become an esteemed member of the large African Baptist Church in that city, and evincing, even with very imperfect education, commendable gifts for religious usefulness, he was licensed to preach; and soon after by

THOMAS U. ALLEN was a native of Richmond, Virginia, where he lived and labored *as a slave*, till five years since. Having become an esteemed member of the large African Baptist Church in that city, and evincing, even with very imperfect education, commendable gifts for religious usefulness, he was licensed to preach; and soon after by the appropriation of his pastor and other friends, he entered on a course of solicitation of the means requisite to purchase his freedom, intending afterwards to secure ample education, and devote himself to the welfare of his race, either in Africa or this country, as God's providence should direct.

While Mr. Allen was thus employed, I first met him in Philadelphia and New York in the spring of 1844. Having furnished him some aid, and commendation to the benevolent in New England, I saw him no more till I met him as the Pastor of the Second or Colored Baptist Church in this place the following year. It seems he had secured the remaining sum demanded for his freedom, and had been persuaded to accept the pastorship of this church instead of pursuing a course of study. He continued his services in this connexion [sic], struggling with the great disadvantages of his want of education, which he at the same time used laudable efforts to improve, till the early part of last summer, when he obtained his dismissal from pastoral duties, and became a student in New Hampton Literary and Theological Institution, N.H. Here his studious habits, his gentlemanly and Christian deportment, won the esteem of his teachers and fellow pupils, and he was regarded as eminently promising. At the close of the Summer term near the end of August last, when on his way to visit his friends in this city, his course was arrested by insidious disease, in Boston, and after five or six weeks illness, he peacefully expired at an early hour yesterday morning, in calm and assured hope of the blessedness of those gospel consolations which he had so often and earnestly preached to others.

To unusual strength and vigor of mental endowment our brother added good common sense, strict Christian integrity, a persevering determination to overcome the obstacles in his way, together with a warmth and consistency of religious zeal which greatly endeared him to his more intimate associates. Despite the infelicities of his color, and his early associations and [illegible; possibly "language"] he will long and favorably be remembered here by the Church which he served, his fellow pastors, and many kind friends in the community at large, by whom he was encouraged and helped on his way. Though early removed, may his example and success cheer others on their humble way towards the attainment of similar excellence of character.

New Bedford, 3d Oct., 1849. RB ["Death of Thomas U. Allen," *Bedford Mercury*, October 5, 1849, Early American Newspapers, Newsbank]

APPENDIX D: "VINDICATION OF PRESIDENT RYLAND" 1857, IMAGES
 [From the Robert Ryland Papers, 10.004-.006, Virginia Baptist Historical Society; originally published in the *Religious Herald*, December 24, 1857]

Vindication of President Ryland.

I. GRADUATING CLASS.

RICHMOND COLLEGE, Dec. 14th 1857.

At a meeting of the Class of Moral Philosophy of last session, under Rev. Mr. Ryland, President of Richmond College, the following preamble and statements were unanimously adopted and signed by the members of the Class:—

Whereas, A communication appeared in "The South" of Saturday last, which contains a misrepresentation of the position and principles entertained by President Ryland on the subject of slavery, we deem it our imperative duty to make the following statement of facts:

That, while it is true that he uses as a text book Dr. Wayland's Moral Philosophy, which contains sentiments on the subject of slavery at variance with those of the Southern people, still he (Dr. Ryland) has repeatedly expressed his reluctance to continue the use of said work, urging as the reason for his continuance that he considered it more clear and conclusive on the general principles of the science than any other work extant.

Again: That he expressed in the most decisive manner, his disapprobation of the principles maintained by Dr. Wayland, and that he always spoke favorably of the institution of slavery.

And, moreover, that he omitted that portion of Dr. Wayland's work which embodied his views of slavery—not even requiring us to read it—but earnestly recommended to our perusal and study the works of Dew, Stringfellow, Bledsøe, and others.

And that we, prompted by no other consideration than the desire of vindicating the character of Dr. Ryland from the charges preferred against him in the communication alluded to, do here enter it as a truth, which we stand pledged in honor to sustain, that Dr. Ryland has never, in a single instance, attempted to poison our minds with "Abolition principles."

We would state, also, in this connection, that Dr. Ryland is an owner of slaves, and so far as we have means of ascertaining, has always been.

WILLIAM H. AGNEW,	D. WM. GWIN,
WM. E. HATCHER,	HARVEY HATCHER,
WM. G. HALYBURTON,	J. I. HARVEY,
WM. S. PENICK,	S. H. PULLIAM,
WM. SLATE,	J. B. TAYLOR, JR.,
	JOS. A. TURNER.

JOS. A. TURNER.

II. BOARD OF TRUSTEES.

Whereas, an article was published in *The South* on the 12th inst., over the signature of "*Amicus Doucلاس*," charging that the President of Richmond College, has "dared, and still dares to use his most strenuous exertions for the overthrow of slavery—for sowing the seed of abolitionism and implanting a spirit of Northern fanaticism in the minds of those entrusted to his care;" that, "with a zeal that would be truly laudable in a more glorious enterprise, he devotes all his time and talents to the accomplishment of his fiendish purposes;" that "there are young men of undoubted talents and of wisdom, fit to adorn much older heads, who have by his villainous labors alone become so thoroughly imbued with his abolition principles that they do not hesitate to openly avow and advocate his sentiments." And whereas, we, as the legal guardians of the college, are responsible to the public for the character of the instruction imparted by its faculty; and whereas, Mr. Roger A. Pryor, editor of *The South*, having been called upon, has refused to give the name of the author, and assumed the responsibility of the charges himself.* Therefore,

1. *Resolved*, That from our long and intimate acquaintance with President Ryland, the fact that he is a Virginian and a slaveholder, our knowledge of his views on the subject of slavery as publicly and privately expressed, and such investigation as the brief period which has transpired since the said publication has permitted us to make, we unhesitatingly declare our belief that the said charges are wholly false.
2. That for the entire satisfaction of the public mind, we will continue our investigation, until we have arrived at as full a knowledge of the grounds of these charges as we can attain, and that when said investigation is ended we will without reserve publish the result.
3. That A. M. Poindexter, James Thomas, Jr., and L. R. Spilman be and are hereby appointed a committee to conduct this investigation, and to report as soon as a thorough investigation can be made.
4. That the said committee are hereby instructed to call upon the editor of *The South*, and request him to aid them in their labor by furnishing them a statement in full of the facts and evidence upon which he bases the allegations of the article aforesaid.

J. B. JETER, *President pro tem.*
 JOHN M. MURRAY, Sec'y B. T. R. C.
 December 15th, 1857.

APPENDIX E: SELECTED SERMONS OF ROBERT RYLAND, TRANSCRIPTIONS

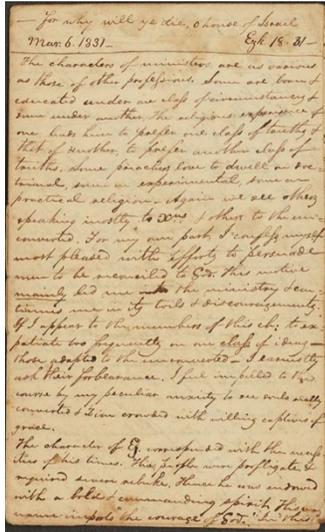
MARCH 1831

[Robert Ryland Papers, Sermons, 54.193-197, Virginia Baptist Historical Society]

— for why will ye die, o house of Israel

Mar. 6. 1831_⁸⁴³

Ezk. 18.31_



The characters of ministers are as various as those of other professions. Some are born & educated under one class of circumstances & some under another. The religious experience of one leads him to prefer one class of truths & that of another, to prefer another class of truths. Some preachers love to dwell on doctrinal, some on exp [this may be experimental or experiential], some on practical religion_ Again we see others speaking mostly to Xns. [Christians] & others to the unconverted. For my own part, I confess myself most pleased with efforts to persuade men to be reconciled to God. This motive mainly led me to the ministry & c [illegible] me in its toils & discouragements. If I appear to the members of this Ch. to expatriate too frequently on one class of ideas_ those adapted to the unconverted_ I earnestly ask their forbearance. I feel impelled to this course by my peculiar anxiety to see souls [illegible; possibly “really”] converted & Zion crowded with willing captives of grace.

The character of Ez. corresponded with the ministers of his times. His people were profligate. & required severe rebuke. Hence he was endowed with a bold & commending spirit. His very name im— [illegible] “the courage of God.” In this [page 2] Chap. he enforces the sentiment that men are accountable for themselves. The wickedness of the parent would be accounted to him & of the child to him. vs. 2d. & c [etc.] 19 & c [etc.]_ The righteousness of the one would prove no alleviation to the guilt of the other.

In this [illegible], requires a new spirit. God demands truth & holiness in the inward parts. Some persons would deem such exhortations heterodox. but as God makes the requisition, we must repeat it. The propriety of such a procedure is shown by Dr. Scott. It is like the Savior’s mandate to the sick of the palsy to rise & walk. The poor invalid would have been mocked unless Jesus had given him strength. All he could do was to believe, to trust_ to supplicate. So with us in a moral point of view. To require us to make a new [heart symbol] were to insult our impotency unless God should aid us. But he has promised to do this. Nay he has already given us so much assistance_ is willing to give us still more_ It is ours, therefore, to believe, to pray_ to put forth all out powers, and in this sense_ we may be commanded to make ourselves a new spirit, while all the honor of its accomplishment justly belongs to the Lord. If [illegible; likely “any”] man shall live up to the [appears to be deg. For “degree”] of light given him, should use diligently all the faculties he possesses, should read_ pray_ hear_ inquire & strive to his uttermost energy and should then fail of divine [page 3] aid & divine acceptance, his condemnation will not be his own fault. But if these duties are not done, then his destruction will be his own work, his iniquity his ruin!_

1.

⁸⁴³ Ryland’s use of dashes in place of periods and commas has been retained in these transcriptions.

Men are exposed to death. The law runs to Adam [“Thou shalt surely die!” He ate & spiritually died. In subsequent legislation the allwise Ruler said “The soul that sinneth, it shall die”. All have sinned, and All are liable to die eternally, The sentence is universal. It includes rich & poor_ young & old_ male & female. Unless ye repent ye shall all likewise perish_ unless ye believe that I am he ye shall die in yr. sins[.]

2.

Yet the question may be asked Why? why will ye die?_ Is God unable to save? - No. He is the almighty. In his [illegible] is treasured up vigour ever young. & incapable of exhaustion. He is girded with omnipotence. With him all things are possible. He who subdued Saul of Tarsus_ who converted hundreds of stubborn Jews_ is able to save the vilest sinner here today. He can make your sins as white as snow_ can govern yr. temper_ restrain your pride & bring down yr. lofty imaginations. Of Jesus the N.T. says_ “The S. of man hath power on earth to forgive sins.” “Able to save to the uttermost all &c [etc.]_ Is God [underline] unwilling? Hear his word. Vs 32. See also 33.11 - In N. Tes. the same phraseology is employed. I Tim 2: 4._ What stronger language can be found?_ This oath is pledged. It cannot fail of being true. But his actions speak more emphatically than his words. How great was that love_ how strong that compassion in the Eternal mind [p. 4] which prompted him from the beginning to lay the scheme of redemption for man. A scheme in whose development & execution it was necessary for his Son_ only begotten son to visit this O. to suffer the just for the unjust_ to weep_ to groan_ to bleed_ to die for his enemies! Oh sinner on the cross of Jesus, you read in characters of blood_ “God is willing to save from death”_ Else why those tears_ that agony & bloody sweat?_ Why the gift of the Spirit_ The inspiration of Apostles_ the commission of ministers_ the establishment of the church_ the conversion of thousands of willing souls? Why, then, will you perish in yr. sins? Because you are determined to die. because ye receive honor one of another. because yr. [heart symbol] are fully set in you to do wickedly_ unwilling to abase yourselves in the dust before him_ prefer sloth & pleasure to obedience & live!

[3].

Will ye? - Why are ye willing to die?_ The mind of the unregenerated is unwilling to be saved. “Ye are not willing to come to me that ye might find life.” The carnal [heart symbol] is opposed to God_ his ways_ worship_ people & nay it is enmity with God, it is not reconciled to his law neither indeed can be. But this is its [underline] guilt [end underline], not its misfortune. And is it possible for you to be willing to be lost?- Will you rush on with a knowledge with an assurance that death is at the end of yr. way? [page 5] Men are willing enough to be happy in heaven but they are not willing to be holy on earth. They disdain the idea of renouncing pride, crucifying self & receiving salvation as a sovereign favour.

4.

Ye. Let the murderer, who in the face of day sends his victim, unprepared into eternity_ let him determine to perish. Let the liar, the swearer_ the debauchee persist in urging his way down to despair & misery. but Oh why should you, who are so polite in yr. manners_ so punctual at meeting_ so attentive to the word_ so conscious of its vast importance, why should you perseverance in impenitence & unbelief and so suffer the pains of death?_

5.

Die. Natural death is the most fatal of all breathily calamities. It is the worm at the rood of every gourd. It is the gall that mingles itself in all our cups of delight_ the thorn that surrounds each blooming rose. Men [underline] know they must die & the anticipation often withers their brightest joys. The bed of _sickness is before my fancy & how solemn the scene! The room is dark and still. the attendants are watching around the bed with gloomy forebodings. The body is pale and emaciated. The mouth is dry with untamed fever. the

pulse is faint & irregular [p. 6] the ghastly eyes are fixed_ beholding for the last time the objects of sense, the cold sweat of death is collected on the forehead, the tears & groans & despondency friends tell that the Last hour is near. & Oh! what an awful thing got the soul & body to part! -This is natural death But there is another death to wh. [which] the text alludes_ that of the soul_ That will be dying forever. It will be transfixed with the spear of death eternal, and will wrath perpetually under its bleeding agonies. It will be shrouded with the winding sheet of endless darkness, and laid in the vault of hell. God is able to destroy both soul & body in hell not that he will annihilate them, but extinguish their happiness. Their powers will be enlarged only for increased misery. The memory will be tortured by the recurrence of wasted life, despised promises_ & abused mercies. The conscience will be graded with the pangs of un[illegible] guilt. The sinner will curse God_ and long to die but will not. God will then have closed the book of life, & locked against you the gates of heaven. This is the second death Why will you expose yourself to this death? Oh where all the righteous shall be embraced in the arms of God_ shall shine as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father_ shall pluck immortal fruit from the tree of life h[illegible] by the eternal throne, you will be shut out. The melodies that will break on your ears [page 7] will be wailings of the damned. The sights with the eye will see are companions in mystery chained in darkness. How painful to see a fellow creature confined for life in a dungeon but oh! to see the soul & body confined in adamant chairs and enveloped in the blackness of darkness forever! this is the 2d. Death!_ And why will your thus die? You would be less to blame if you should injure yr. health yr. property_ yr. name_ yr. family_ yr. happiness here. but oh! Have mercy on yr.self on yr. soul_

6.

Of Xs [Christians] I will inquire “Why are you made such”?_ It could not have been because you were better by nature & practice, than those around you. For you felt otherwise in the hour of yr deliverance. You felt then that you were as bad or worse than they. It cannot be because your prayers & repentances constituted the meritorious ground of your salvation. For they were mingled with impurity and sin. Yet they were necessary means to prepare the [heart symbol] for divine grave. Why then? Rivers of oil_ fountains of tears_ could not atone for sin. It was owing to the pure mercy of God. No motive out of himself could have existed strong enough to induce Him to write your name in the Lamb’s book of life_ It is [page 8] an act of surprising grace that any one of you should ever be permitted to see God’s face in peace. It is not by works of righteousness &c [etc.] “Pardon for infinite offense” &c. [etc.] What a weight of obligation rests on you to love & reverence God! - The object of yr. conversion is to glorify God. to do good your fellow sinners. You should ardently strive for the bestowment of pardoning grace on yr. fellow sinners. Oh for a precious revival of religion! The would the joys of saints & the cries of distressed penitents still more consecrate this building and cast around it a sweet remembrance of Liars prosperity_ Let mourners take courage and approach a mercy’s seat. Jesus still lives to answer prayer. Oh come to him with all your guilt and sorrow of [heart symbol] & he is able to rescue you from the plagues of sin and from the condemnation of hell. Give yr. [heart symbol] up to him and venture on his almighty goodness_ his [illegible; possibly “unwavering”] power. And you shall this day feel the transports of Divine love and be constrained to glorify God_ May you continue in his service & gain everlasting life!_

[RICHMOND, 1852]

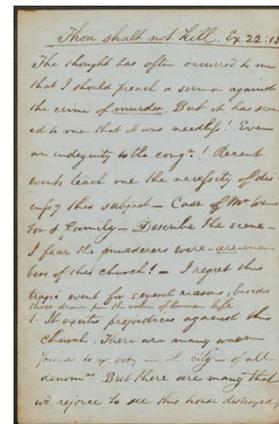
[Draft, "Thou shalt not kill, Robert Ryland Papers, 54.0983-985, Virginia Baptist Historical Society; final version published by the *Daily Dispatch*, August 6, 1852, [link](#)]

Thou shalt not kill. Ez. 22:13

The thought has often occurred to me that I should preach a sermon against the crime of murder. But it has seemed to me that it was needless! Even an indignity to the congr.! Recent events teach me the necessity of discussing this subject_ Case of Mr. Winston & family_ Describe the scene_ [Note: in the published version, Ryland chose not to detail the scene here] I fear the murderers were — are — members of this church!_ I regret this tragic event for several reasons, besides those drawn from the value of human life.

1. It excites prejudices against this church. There are many warm friends to yr. body in the city_ of all denomns. But there are many that wd. rejoice to see this house destroyed, [54.0984] & this organization totally extinguished. Now every case of public crime committed by a member tends to excite popular odium + to endanger our quiet worship. Two motives_

2. It tends to augment the severity of discipline in families _ in farms & factories _ in our city police & throughout the State. God has given this county to the whites. They are the law-makers_ the masters_ the superiors_ The colored people_ even if not in bondage are the inferiors_ [Note: this portion of the final text was quoted in Brophy (North Carolina Law Review, 2013); drawn from the Hammersley printed version] In this state of things submission is not only commandd by God, [superscript addition] see I Tim 6:1-4. Titus [end superscript addition] but it is yr. only safety + happiness - Why do I inculcate submission? Is it for the food of the master? Not particularly, but for the good of the colored. Because resistance with the strong must necessarily result in the discomfiture of the weak_



Thou shalt not kill [pencil addition] Radical law_

1. God has always regarded human life as the most sacred of all things. None can restore_ therefore none can destroy it. Gen 9:4 Even the life of brutes can be lawfully destroyed by man only by divine permission_ [superscript addition] Gen. 9:3 [end superscript addition]_ & then it is restricted to purposed of food & safety. But man image of God [sic]_ none shall kill, unless he has become a murderer Gen. 9:6 = [here Ryland uses the double dashed that are more commonly found in his earlier letters]

2. The Providence of God has been signally displayed in the detection of this crime. The ingenuity of lawyers_ the erudition of judges_ the m[illegible; note: in Ryland's printed version, this is "the stirrings of conscience"], the concurrence of circumstance all tend to expose_ However secret however. covd. by darkness, it still comes out!_

Eppe_ Dr. Webster_ +c [here Ryland is referring to two notorious crimes]

3. The word of God studiously forbids whatever leads to this awful crome_

a. Covetousness. Its tendency is to remove the holder of the thing coveted, + to possess it forbidden_ not covet wife_ house_ ox_ ass +c [etc.] It is idolatry.

b. hatred. Whatever we hate, we wd. destroy, + hence the bible says "Whosoever hateth +c no [illegible; note: in the printed version Ryland continues the quote "and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in

him”] can cherish this feeling. He may be angered for a moment, but it cant [sic] be [Ryland-1-097-54-0985] permanent_ It evaporates. The gospel is a system of love. God is love_ All the law is love_ Christ is the incarnation of love.

c. Revenge. God has claimed to himself the prerogative of tak.g vengeance. “Veng is mine” +c When Cain slew Abel, God pronounced a woe on this who should slay him Gen. 4:15_ If you should be injured, it does not justify yr injuring others in turn. How did Jesus act? Quote [here Ryland stacks three verse recommendations over each other] I Pet. 2:18-25 [;] I Pet 4:1[;] & 15 [return to standard line] Go thou & do so _

4. The infliction of murder is the greatest probable evil [Note: in the published version Ryland uses the word “injury” here] that can be done a man. It sends him in a moment_ unprepared _ to judgement. The best men need some time to prepare. It severs the ties of life in a most cruel manner. To lose a wife [etc.] by natural death is bad_ but to have her brains knocked out & her person mangled_ Oh! It is terrific! It fills with a sense of danger the survivors_ destroys their confidence. [subscript] Remark.. [return to standard line; Note: at this point in the published version, Ryland details his own pain at seeing his wife’s death: “I felt as if the horizon of my life were overcast with dark clouds, all my schemes of happiness were bleated; the world itself was a blank. And yet there was ONE ground of consolation — her death was from the hand of God — He had given, He had taken away.”]

5. The murder if not detected spends a miserable life! Conscience stings_ the pale image of the victim haunts him [etc.] Let us pray with David Ps 5 [ink smudge; illegible followed by what appears to be Ryland’s standard etc. “+c” — note: in the published version, Ryland ends with Psalm 51:10: “Deliver me from the blood guiltiness...”]

APRIL 8, 1864

Excerpts: “Mt. Olivet Ap 8 64, Judges 6:24” [RRP, 54.0150, Virginia Baptist Historical Society]

When the Israelites sin^[superscript “d”] against God, the often punished them by giving them up into the hands of their enemies. vs. 1_ In this state of things they cried unto the Lord for deliverance. When they had humbled themselves & turned away from their sins, he usually sent some [illegible]& good man to work out their salvation. Such was Gideon. As he was threshing wheat to hide it from the Midianites, the angel of the Lord & vs. 12_ Gideon seemed to doubt the truth of the revelation. vs. 13_ He is assured of Divine succor_ vs. 14 - Still he mistrusted & received a re-assurance. vs 15-16_ As if to confirm his faith still more he asked for a sign _ [^{superscript “vs. 17”}]_ And the a. of the L. put forth the end of his staff & touched the flesh & the unleavened cakes that Gideon had brought for his repast, & there rose up fore out of the rock & consumed the f. and the u. cakes && Then G. built an altar there unto the L. & inscribed on it a name [illegible, folded paper] significant alike of his strong desire & of the source whence alone its gratification could be expected Jehovah Shalom_ The Lord_ peace!_ The Lord send peace!

1.

Like the ancient Is_ we have sinned, as a nation & as individuals, fearfully against God. Had our history been written, as was theirs, by the pen of inspiration, our apostasies would have appeared equally great & equally numerous with theirs. No people had received more signal blessings than we_ & in the light of those blessings, our sins certainly assume a dark & terrible aspect_ We have been guilty of intemperance_ sab^[superscript “th”]breaking_ profanity_ & licentiousness to an alarming degree. We have cherished worldliness_ pride_ self-confidence & ingratitude. Perhaps the characteristic sin of our people has been the love of money which God denounces as idolatry_ It has passed into a [illegible] that the dollar is almighty among us. Wealth is the great destruction. It is the passport to any society_ an atonement for almost every

sin_ a substitute for well nigh every virtue. How small a proportion of our citizens are even nominal christians. How few professed Xs are really spiritual, devoted, whole hearted disciples of Christ_ How few families [illegible] morning & evening worship around the peaceful fire_ [illegible] How few train their children & their servants for God & for Heaven. Our children [illegible] &c we have often incited to mere worldly promotion. Our servants_ transplanted to our shores by a wonder working Providence for a wise & gracious end_ their evangelization_ we have too often regarded as mere animals_ designed to labor for our sustenance and not as children of a common Father placed under our care...

2.

A war, gigantic in its proportions_ unparalleled in modern times for its ferocity_ signalized already in the history of our race by the number and violence of its battles_ is upon us. It has destroyed by disease & the sword probably 400,000 of the [illegible, folded paper] 200,000 of our own citizens. It has broken the hearts of thousands of wives & daughters & mothers & sisters_ It has filled the land with widows & orphans & bereaved parents, with young men maimed for life and ruined in constitution. It has desolated our fields_ burned our towns & villages_ desecrated our houses of worship_ closed our seats of learning & science_ & scattered poverty and woe broad cast all around. Fifty years of peace & industry will scarcely put us back to the same measure of prosperity that we enjoyed when the war began. And yet the war is not ended...

I admit that the North had no good ground for molesting us. The several States_ all equal_ sovereign & independent_ united for specified purposes, under a written constitution. This document prescribed common duties & gave equal privileges to all the states_ leaving each to select & to control its own internal institutions. As long as it was observed by all the States it was binding on all. As soon as it was broken by some, it ceased to be binding on the others. No statesman at the North has ventured the assertion that we began the infractions of the constitution. It sanctioned confidently a domestic habit which had long prevailed at the South & which, against loud & solemn warnings, the Northern politicians openly and avowedly purposed to destroy. This was a plain, public & persistent violation of the Constitution. It left the while South perfectly free to declare herself absolved from the compact. The guilt of breaking up a once glorious Union & of casting away the blessings it yielded, rests on those who, in spite of their oaths of office, violated that Constitution on which the Union was based. It is, therefore, sheer falsehood to throw the responsibility of dissolving the Union & of originating this war on the South...

I admit that humanely speaking our enemies are the guilty authors of our troubles_ yet still I maintain that our sins [see list of sins above] may lie back of this cause & may be the great motion in the mind of God for permitting our enemies to pour out such a flood of iniquity upon us... I have long believed that war is the scourge that God employs to chastize [sic] proud & wicked nations...

3.

"... How may we expect to bring this terrible war to a close?" The answer to this question grows out to the previous remarks. If sin is the cause of war_ to obtain the pardon of our sins past_ and to remove our sins present & future are the great antidotes to the war...

When I see the theatre opened + crowded with giddy multitudes within the very sound of cannon thundering death against us_ when I see the ball-room lighted up + thronged with young ladies whose brothers may even then be engaged in deadly strife + who may receive by the next telegram tidings of their mangled + lifeless bodies lying unburied on the ghastly battlefield_ when I see the crowd of speculators and extortioners that are growing rich on the sufferings of the country_ that devise all kinds of tricks to create an artificial scarcity + raise prices beyond etc reach of ordinary buyers_ when I see the good farmers of the county_ heretofore the

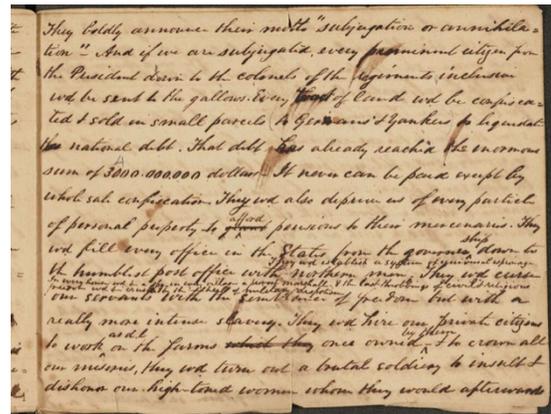
purest + best class in the community_ secretly rejoicing at the [illegible; probably “famine”] prices that their products command_ seldom abating a jot or a tittle of those prices even to the wives + widows + orphans of the brave soldiers who stand as a brazen wall around their property_ [illegible; possible “and”] when I see drunkenness increasing with fearful rapidity_ in our cities_ with its kindred host of gamblers_ + prostitutes_ + loafers + profane swearers, + thieves + murderers, I exclaim involuntarily “How can God bless such people with honorable peace?” It is righteousness that deliverereth from death_ it is sin that brings reproach on a people...

4.

... Let the women knit socks & make clothing for our noble defenders. Let them especially give up, cheerfully, their husbands, sons, & brothers for the public defence [sic]. If you say, in effect, I wish all the husbands to go except mine, you deserve to be subjugated. Let the women frown upon all deserters & stragglers_ upon all who skulk away from duty & we wd have a larger & a braver army. Let them seize every fit occasion to encourage the hearts of their soldier friends...

5.

... We are battling with a shrewd, persevering + desperate enemy. They have a powerful navy_ a population double ours_ flourishing manufactures_ We are fighting for our homes, our alters_ our wives_ our children [,] for everything that makes life earth desirable. If we are conquered, we lose liberty, property, life. I do not think that many persons are fully aware of the deep + remediless agonies that subjugation wd bring upon us. What is now the program— [illegible] of the enemy? They no longer fight for the reconstruction of the Union_ That [small fold]— tin which is long since exploded. They boldly announce their motto “subjugation or annihilation”_ And



if we are subjugated, every prominent citizen from the President does the colonels of the regiments inclusive wd be sent to the gallows. Every tract of land wd be confiscated + sold in small parcels (to Germans + Yankees) to liquidate the national debt. That debt has already reached the enormous sum of 3[“4” penciled above] 000.000.000 dollars_ It never can be paid except by whole sale [sic] confiscation. They wd also deprives us of every parcel of personal property to grant afford pensions to their mercenaries. They wd fill every office in the States from the governorship down to the humblest post office with Northern men. They would establish a system of universal espionage In every house wd be a spy_ in every village a provost marshal_ + the the last throbbing of civil + religious freedom wd be crushed by the heel of military despotism[.] They wd curse our servants with a really more intense slavery. They wd hire our private citizens to work as d.l. [possibly “day labor” or “day laborers”] on the farms once owned by them_ + to crown all our miseries, they wd turn out a brutal soldiery to insult + dishonor our high-toned women whom they would afterwards [0158] Employ as cooks_ + milk-maids_ as washers + seamstresses. Oh. I wd rather that the whole adult population of these States_ men and women_ should die on the plains of battle if we could thus gain indep.nce [sic] than that we should all live + be subjugated. Our short lives would be a small sacrifice for the freedom + happiness of millions yet to be born...

All that we ask for is simply to be let alone. We demand all our territory. Let the border states choose their position. If they prefer the North, we don't want them. We are a free, civilized_ Christian people, fully equal to the task of self-government. And we wish to be recognized by others as such + then to address ourselves to the noble arts of peace. We wish to beat our swords into plow - shares + our spears into p. hooks_ to cultivate

the earth ill it small as the garden of the Lord_ to educate our children for the high + delicate functions they may be called to discharge_ the evangelize our servants + write on their hearts the doctrine of the cross_ We wish to send the gospel to heathen nations till every tribe + kindred of earth shall learn Messiah's name. This is the peace we pray for. + until it is established, let us not cease to battle even to the death...

They [those in the North] have constantly suppressed the truth in regard to their defeats + exaggerated their successes_ They have shown a lack of confidence in their generals by changing them after every disaster. They have resorted to modes of warfare not sanctioned by civilized usage. They first disavowed all right + purpose to interfere with the domes institutions of the states + now openly proclaim their purpose to abolish them. At first they only [possibly "enticed"] our slaves fro- [folded paper obscures word, likely "from"] quiet homes_ they now forcibly abduct them + put them in the front of the battle. (The very enlistment of colored soldiers is a confession of conscious weakness)...

Let us pray for & cooperate with our President & his cabinet_ Let us sustain, at every sacrifice our generals & their brace armies_ Above all, let us put our trust in God_ aim to please & glorify him in all our private & public affairs, & humby [sic] commit our destiny to his gracious disposal_ To his name [illegible, folded paper] glory world without end. Amen.

APPENDIX F: "TO DR. ROBERT RYLAND," BY WALTER HENDERSON BROOKS,
TRANSCRIPTION

"To Dr. Robert Ryland"*

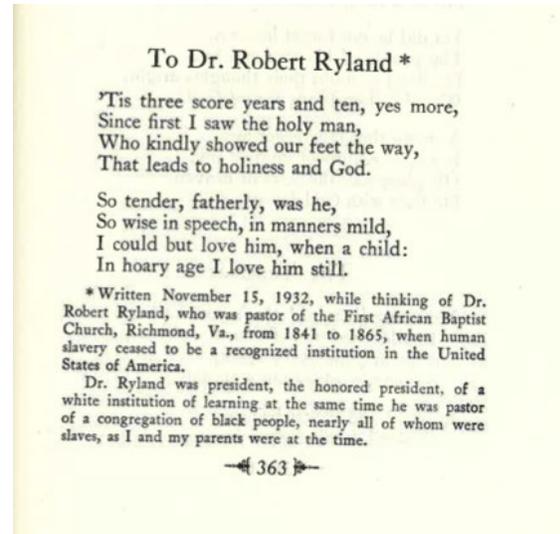
'Tis three score years and ten, yes more,
Since first I say the holy man,
Who kindly showed our feet the way,
That leads to holiness and God.

So tender, fatherly, was he,
So wise in speech, in manners mild,
I could but love him, when a child:
In hoary age I love him still.

The little school-room, 'neath the church,
The church itself, have passed away,
But the hymns we sang, the lessons taught,
The love of righteousness, abide.

The dear good man, who loved the slave,
Who sought him, in the love of Christ,
Long since has passed to his reward:
His labors live to praise his God.

And God forbid, that we forget
His Christlike service, and his love
For thousands, then in bondage held,
His love for precious souls like mine.



Yet he did not forget his own,
The people of his race and hue.
He lived to mold their thoughts aright,
Who'd follow Jesus, Son of God.

A crown that fadeth not away
Is his, in realms of endless joy,
His glory like the stars of heaven.
He lives with God for aye.

* Written November 15, 1932, while thinking of Dr. Robert Ryland, who was pastor of the First African Baptist Church, Richmond, Va., from 1841 to 1865, when human slavery ceased to be a recognized institution in the United States of America.

Dr. Ryland was president, the honored president, of a white institution of learning at the same time he was pastor of a congregation of black people, nearly all of whom were slaves, as I and my parents were at the time.⁸⁴⁴

⁸⁴⁴ Walter Henderson Brooks, *The Pastor's Voice*, Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, Inc. (1945), 363-4. Library of Congress.

APPENDIX G: LETTER, ROBERT RYLAND TO JEREMIAH BELL JETER, JANUARY 27, 1880, TRANSCRIPTION

[RRP, 14.074, undated addition in pencil in Ryland's late-life handwriting]

From
Dr. Robert Ryland

Bro J

I began this letter without intending it for the Herald. Even now I don't request its publication. If, however, you see no objection to its appearance in the paper, or should prefer it, I leave it with you.

Yrs

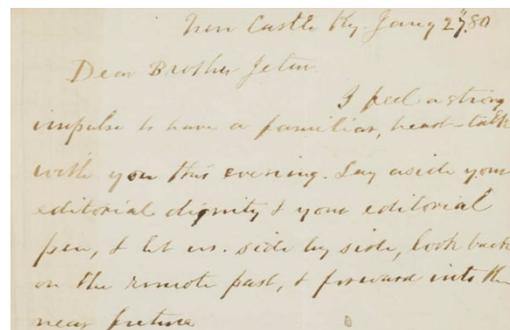
RR

[14.072]

New Castle, Ky. Jan'y 27. '80

Dear Brother Jeter,

I feel a strong impulse to have a familiar heart-talk with you this evening. Lay aside your editorial dignity & your editorial pen, & let us, side by side, look back on the remote past, & forward into the near future.



New Castle Ky. Jan'y 27, 80
Dear Brother Jeter
I feel a strong
impulse to have a familiar, heart-talk
with you this evening. Lay aside your
editorial dignity, & your editorial
pen, & let us, side by side, look back
on the remote past, & forward into the
near future.

I was baptized in August 1824, licensed to preach in 1826, though I had spoken in meetings for a year previously, was ordained, prematurely, to the ministry in the spring of 1827, & settled as a pastor in Lynchburg in May of the same year. Since that time, I have been regularly preaching the gospel either as a pastor or as a "supply." In looking around me, I find you only surviving of all those with whom I was associated in my early ministry. Not another is left. How steadily has death pursued his business of removing men away from earth! I am keeping a register of all the Baptist [14.073] preachers of my acquaintance who have died within my recollections.⁸⁴⁵ With some of them, I was intimate, with others I had only such acquaintance as is gained at our annual gatherings. I keep the record by me & occasionally read it over to call to mind the faces & the virtues of those most esteemed. I do not wish to forget them. This exercise affords me a real, but a sad pleasure. The register contains just two hundred and two names. My dear Brother, we two are nearing the end of our pilgrimage. The time left us cannot be long[;] it may be very brief. How do you feel in prospect of a near eternity? God has greatly blessed both of us, you in some respects, me in others. You have been raised, to a deservedly high position in partly by your inherent qualities, & partly by concurrent events, to a deservedly high position among our people, & to a deservedly high place in the estimation of society at large. When you compare your present self with the Bedford plow-boy, "Jerry Bell," of 1818, don't you feel [sic] surprised at the contrast? Should the temptation ever try to infuse into your heart a feeling of undue self-complacency, you would have only to reply, "What have I that I did not receive?" Yes, God gave you the talents, & the opportunity to improve them. And wonder, gratitude, &

⁸⁴⁵ This extensive list is located in Robert Ryland's papers held at the Virginia Baptist Historical Society.

humility must deeply impress your heart when you review the past. But soon, leaving all the success & victories of life, your naked spirit will take its mystic flight into the unseen world, & stand before the awful Judge. Bring home this matter to yourself. Think calmly, deeply, reverently of that flight, & tell me, What are your exact impressions? What is your hope? And what is the distinctive ground of that hope? Nothing artificial, nothing professional, no amount of human approbation can possibly avail us before the last ordeal! In regard to myself I will say that my Heavenly Father has greatly blessed me also, but in a different way, With far less original [14.072] capacity of mind & much better opportunities for early culture than you, I have not enjoyed the same facilities for subsequent development that you have. My entire life has been an unbroken scene of drudgery. The five years in Lynchburg, the twenty-nine at the Richmond College & the African Church, the four years of war, the three in Richmond immediately after the war & the twelve in Kentucky, have all been occupied in hard work, but have not been promotive of mental development. With but scanty leisure during these years, for liberal study, which would have afforded my the most intense delight, I find myself now on the verge of seventy five, knowing but little, & wielding a very limited influence! Among the mercies of my life, however, I enumerate excellent health, a large measure of domestic happiness, seven affectionate children & fifteen beautiful grand children. My Kentucky career has been a constant struggle, but not exactly a failure. I hope when I came hither that I should find large openings for ministerial usefulness. But in this I have been disappointed! I don't "take" as a preacher, among the Kentucky Baptists. At least they have not seemed disposed [to] take me as a pastor. I have found employment only in small & decaying churches, that could not command the services of the more acceptable brethren. The system of monthly worship, too, which prevails so extensively in our country churches, even when possessed of wealth, has greatly lessened the demand for pastoral work in this state. I have denounced this suicidal system on all suitable occasions, but with little effect. The antiquated, money-saving, but soul-[illegible; possibly "busting"] "monthly meeting" is still adhered to. I have usually preached somewhere every Lord's day, & am now the pastor of a little flock in this village, which convenes on the first day of every week. [14.074]

The attitude of education in Ky. is rather singular. Schools are very numerous, but the demand for the higher grades of scholarship is so low as to tempt most of the schools to bid for patronage by cheapening the cost & lowering the standard of graduation.

The gospel seems more precious to me than ever before, except on a few exciting occasions. Often I propose to myself the same questions that I have above, perhaps impertinently, addressed to you. And when I endeavored to realize death as at hand, & have inquired what would be my condition if I were now in its embrace, I have come to the conclusion that if Jesus does not take me up in his arms, as a nurse does a baby, & carry me to heaven, I shall be lost! The tendency of age with me is to simplify the gospel as to its saving virtue. I am a sinner. Christ died to save sinners. I trust wholly in Him. These are the simple grounds on which I expect to rest in a dying hour. And I have an abiding confidence that He who has held me up so long in life, will not leave me to die alone.

I was quite concerned to hear of late that Mrs. Jeter was a great sufferer from rheumatism. I trust, by this time, she has found some alleviation — if not, the only course left is to say, "Thy will be done." The health of my entire family is excellent[;] how great a blessing! With a sincere prayer that you may live as long as your usefulness shall continue, & an assurance of my long-standing & unabated affection for you_ an affection which I have generally been too busy to remind you of, I am

Yours in hope of heaven through Christ Jesus,

R. Ryland

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