

Black History 1800s A Detailed Timeline

Early 1800s

William & Mary sells most of its enslaved people, due to economic hardship after severing their relationship with the crown. William & Mary instead begins "renting" enslaved people for housekeeping and other chores. In the early part of the nineteenth century, the College gives its few enslaved people a dollar each for Christmas, and it is known from the record that the dollars were mailed to each enslaved person as the College also paid postage.

1807

John Wallace De Rozaro, a free black gunsmith, becomes William & Mary's very first black applicant. He seems to be well-liked, seeing as 30 white men asked the General Assembly to grant Rozaro a firearms license the previous year. At age 20, Rozaro asks to attend lectures at the college, since "He has been his own Master in reading, writing, arithmetic, & as he says superficial and solid measurement; he has also taught himself a little of the Latin Language." Bishop James Madison refuses to allow him to sit in on lectures at the college, saying he should instead pursue work in an armory.

1817

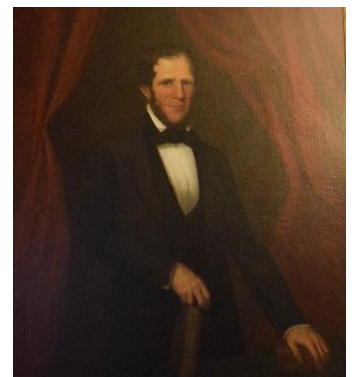
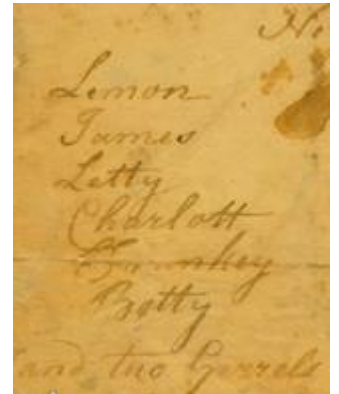
"Lemon, a man enslaved by William & Mary, dies. William & Mary pays for his coffin."

1827

Reverend Adam Empie serves as the 12th president of the College. Apparently, his opposition to slavery and his willingness to officiate black marriages causes friction at Bruton Parish and William & Mary, and he decides to resign as president. This is part of the reason why he is succeeded by prolific slavery apologist, Thomas Roderick Dew as the next president.

1832

Professor and future President Thomas Roderick Dew becomes renowned as the chief ideologue for the defense of Southern slavery. He died during an extended honeymoon in Paris. In 1939, at the height of Jim Crow, Dew's body is reinterred in the crypt of the College Chapel. His life and works are praised in an elaborate ceremony.



1844

Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, a professor at the college, defends the institution of slavery.

1850s

“**George Greenhow**, the free black custodian at the College, learns to read and write from a W&M student for whom Mrs. Greenhow does laundry; with a fine sense of irony, Greenhow liked to boast that he was ‘the only Negro ever educated at William and Mary.’”

1859

Enslaved individuals are forced to work into the late evenings by candlelight in the basement. During the 1859 fire, a man at the school accuses the enslaved people of starting the fire, due to their use of candlelight. However, another man defends the enslaved individuals, stating that he had seen their candle go out prior to the fire.



1861

“In 1861 Ewell issues a general order of impressment that required enslaved people and freemen from the area to build earthworks to support Confederate forces on the peninsula. The College Building served as hospital and barracks for Confederate soldiers until the Battle of Williamsburg on May 5, 1862.”

1862

Rumors of the Union Army taking over Williamsburg encouraged free blacks working for the Eastern Lunatic Asylum, which was the city’s largest employer of both blacks and whites, to do anything but work. (Hahamovitch 32)

1865-1880s

After the war, many former enslaved people remain in the service of their enslavers. In particular, **Malachi Gardiner** stays with the Ewell family after the war. Ewell called him “The Professor.” With the Wren Building burned and the College in ruins after the Civil War, President Benjamin Ewell and Malachi Gardiner keep the College officially open by ringing the College bell at the beginning of each semester. Although, Ewell is well into his seventies at this point, severely arthritic, and going blind, so Gardiner probably did most of the bell ringing and inspecting the structures on campus. Their relationship was remembered by Richard Bright who recalled how Ewell would stop at the Bright House: “Gardiner ‘would



become naturally restless' and would try to defend himself from the onslaught of mosquitoes. This greatly irritated Ewell and he threatened to make Gardiner walk home if he did not sit still. "'Malichi' [sic] would only grin, knowing that the Colonel was devoted to him and under no circumstances would he let him walk home." (Hahamovitch 33)

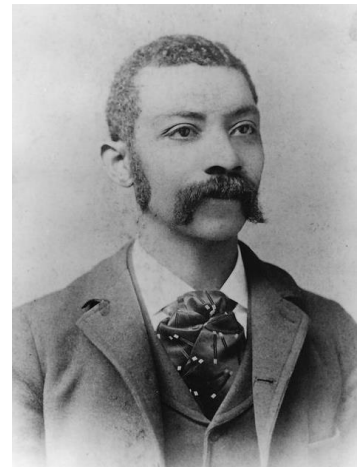
"Freedpeople build shanties and raise livestock on the lawn in front of the Wren Building's remains."

1880s

The Black community experienced political power for the first time. "The town elected two African Americans to its city council in the 1880s. **John Cary**, who served from 1888 to 1890, was the last African American on the city council for more than a century. By the turn of the Twentieth Century, these rights were snatched away under the auspices of 'Jim Crow'" (Hahamovitch 8)

This is also a thriving time for African American businesses. Of the 22 merchants in Williamsburg, 4 are African American-run, including **Samuel Harris' Cheap Shop, Crump Restaurant, Crutchfield Barber Shop and Tea House, and Skinner's Tavern and meat market**. These establishments were visited by both white and black patrons, and this success led to the creation of the black, middle-class elite. (Hahamovitch 6)

In fact, the richest man in Williamsburg (and perhaps in the state of Virginia) was an African American man, named **Samuel Harris**. Originally from Richmond, Harris owned the Cheap Store which was located on the corner of Botetourt and Duke of Gloucester Street, starting in 1872. By 1890, the Cheap Store was the largest commercial enterprise in town and Harris became the leading merchant, owning "a stable, a barber shop, coal and lumber yards, a blacksmith's shop, and a saloon." Of any shopkeeper, Harris paid the highest taxes. He was even one of the original stockholders in the Peninsula Bank. He also spent his riches purchasing land in the town and surrounding country, and it was his money that went towards the re-opening of William & Mary, thus saving a school that Black people were not allowed to attend. (Hahamovitch 7)



1888

The school reopens and **Henry 'Doc' Billups** starts working at the school.



Billups was beloved on campus for cheering up homesick freshmen, going to great lengths to make sure that students did not get in trouble, and providing illegal alcohol, so much that he was nicknamed the “Professor of Boozology.”

He also worked as a janitor and rang the bell at the end of each class, which was something he took great pride in.

In 1945, he attended a zoning meeting in Williamsburg. At the meeting, someone said something derisive about the College and Billups stood up and replied, “I represents the College of William and Mary and when you talk about the College you talk about me.” With the incoming of female students, he was less eager to participate in the hijinks of students. He passed away in 1955. (Hahamovitch 33)

More here: <https://libraries.wm.edu/exhibits/world-henry-billups-jim-crow-william-and-mary>

Sources:

The Lemon Project (<https://www.wm.edu/sites/lemonproject/>)

The Lemon Project Historical Timeline

(<https://www.wm.edu/sites/lemonproject/researchandresources/historicalline/index.php>)

"Integration at Work: The First Labor History of the College of William and Mary" by Cindy Hahamovitch, Professor, Lyon G. Tyler Department of History

(https://www.wm.edu/sites/lemonproject/_documents/wm-labor-history-and-hahamovitch.pdf)

"John Wallace De Rozaro: W&M's first black applicant?" by Erin Zagursky, utilizing research by Jody Allen (<https://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2016/john-wallace-de-rozaro-wms-first-black-applicant.php>)

"Adam Empie" from Swem Special Collections Wiki

(https://scdbwiki.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php/Adam_Empie)

Susan Kern

Kimberly Renner

Thank you so much to the Lemon Project for doing this important research!