



Washington College advertised slaves for hire in 1826.

EMMA BURRIS-JANSSEN, a 2007 graduate of Washington and Lee, is the author of “An Inheritance of Slavery: The Tale of ‘Jockey’ John Robinson, His Slaves, and Washington College.”

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An honors thesis in the Department of History, the paper provides the most comprehensive look available to date at the circumstances under which the 84

enslaved men and women became the property of Washington College, and how the college trustees benefited by hiring them out for work in the community. As Burris-Janssen writes: “Their stories, even filtered through white accounts, are as diverse as they are difficult to uncover. The slaves owned by Washington College were men and women known to the historical record through their first names, prices, and relationships with white men. A great deal, however, happens in life when the record keepers are not looking.” Burris-Janssen’s paper is available at <http://myw.lw/burriss>.

In August 2013, Washington and Lee President Kenneth P. Ruscio established a special working group to examine the role of African Americans in the history of the university. In his charge to the group, President Ruscio emphasized that its work should include a straightforward look at the history of enslaved people at the institution and should also identify themes, trends and important moments up to the present time. The group created a web-based timeline of the history of African Americans at Washington and Lee, which was published in the summer of 2014 and can be viewed at <http://myw.lw/1w3oOfE>. The historical marker that recognizes the history of the enslaved men and women who were owned by Washington College in the 19th century was installed in a memorial garden between Robinson and Tucker halls in March 2016.



WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

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Names	Supposed age	Supposed Value	
1 Barney	78	Charge	
2 Moses (Crappa)	52	50	
3 Daniel (Shoemaker)	82	50	
4 Landon (Blind)	49	50	
5 Keziah	74	50	
A DIFFICULT, YET UNDENIABLE, HISTORY			
12 Alexander son	2	100	
13 Andrew	32	450	1150
14 Susan his wife	29	300	
15 John	14	300	
16 Daniel	9	250	
17 Robert	7	200	1050
18 Jeffery	5	150	
19 Esther	3	100	
20 Anderson (3 months)	1/2	75	
21 John (Boy)	36	400	
22 Nancy his wife	26	250	975
23 Sarah Ann	9	200	
24 Eliza	7	175	
25 John (diseased)	4	25	
26 Nancy	3	75	
27 James (Parson)	48	300	
28 Mary	45	100	
29 James	10	250	1125
30 Frances	5	150	
31 Eliza	3	75	
32 Dick (McCollom, lame)	83	50	
33 Hannah his wife	51	Charge	

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

A Difficult, Yet Undeniable, History

Washington and Lee University's involvement with slavery is a regrettable chapter of its history that must nonetheless be confronted and examined. The most well-documented episode in that chapter is the 1826 bequest of 84 enslaved African Americans to Washington College from "Jockey" John Robinson, a prominent Rockbridge County landowner.

Robinson's estate included "all the negroes of which I may die possessed together with their increase," and his will directed that these enslaved people "shall be retained, for the purposes of labour, . . . for the space of fifty years after my decease. . . . At the expiration of these fifty years the trustees aforesaid are released from all restraint as to the disposal of the negroes & may sell or retain them as the results of their labour shall demonstrate to be best."

A historical marker on the north side of Robinson Hall, one of the buildings of the historic Colonnade, reproduces two lists from the university's archives. One of those lists, from 1827, is titled: "A list of negroes belonging to the Estate of John Robinson recd at death time" and contains the names of 84 men, women, and children along with their ages, appraised value, and such additional details as whether or not they had been hired out by the college to members of the Lexington community, and for what amount of money.

A second list, titled "A list of slaves belonging to Washington College," is from July 1834 and



This historical marker recognizes one episode in the history of slavery at Washington and Lee and is the centerpiece of a memorial garden next to Robinson Hall.

shows that the college owned 67 enslaved persons. The first half of this list includes each individual's name, age, and "supposed value," while the second half comprises the names of 28 individuals who were then being hired out by the college, along with the annual income they were earning for the institution.

In 1836, the Washington College trustees sold a large majority of the slaves it had received from Robinson to Samuel S. Garland, of Lynchburg, Virginia. During the ensuing 20 years, the college sold additional enslaved persons to local residents. Records indicate that as late as 1857,

the college still owned three elderly, incapacitated people.

Kenneth P. Ruscio, Washington and Lee University's 26th president (2006–2016), addressed this history in 2016 when he said: "At Washington and Lee, we learn from the past, and this is an episode from which there is much to learn. Acknowledging the historical record — and acknowledging the

contributions of these individuals — requires coming to terms with, and accepting responsibility for, a part of our past that we wish had been different, but that we cannot ignore."

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—KENNETH P. RUSCIO

26TH PRESIDENT OF WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY