

Slavery at Fountain Rock and the College of St. James, Maryland:

A Report¹

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Names of individuals known to have been enslaved on the Fountain Rock/St. James site are printed in **bold** in the text.

The site that is now the Saint James School campus, about six miles south of Hagerstown, Maryland, was originally inhabited by the native peoples of this region, including, in the eighteenth century, the Shawnee people and members of the Iroquois confederation. In the mid-eighteenth century, European immigrants began to settle in what would later become Washington County, pushing out the remaining natives and bringing with them enslaved Africans. Around 1792, a white couple named Samuel and Maria Ringgold came to the site they called Fountain Rock and established one of the county's largest plantations there.

Slavery at Fountain Rock

Fountain Rock became the home of the Ringgold family and the people they enslaved. Samuel and Maria Ringgold almost certainly brought slaves to Fountain Rock from Kent County, Maryland, in the 1790s; slave labor almost certainly helped to build the mansion and other buildings on the new plantation. By 1800, forty people were enslaved at Fountain Rock. In 1810, there were 49 slaves. Ten years later, 64 men, women, and children were enslaved at Fountain

¹ There is undoubtedly more to be learned about slavery on the site in both periods. The evidence is fragmentary and the process of writing this history is still in an early stage.

Rock, making it one of the largest slaveholdings in western Maryland.² Because so many people were enslaved at Fountain Rock, it seems the housing for them included (unusually for western Maryland) a large two-story stone building. This structure was still standing on the grounds in 1919, and a published photograph of it exists.³

In contrast with our popular image of slave plantations, people enslaved on farms in western Maryland weren't growing cotton or tobacco. In this region, farms grew grain and other less labor-intensive crops, so the demand for slave labor was lower than in the Tidewater region or the deep south. Because of this, enslaved men were often trained in crafts such as carpentry, stone masonry, and blacksmithing; this meant they could be hired out (for their owner's profit) when they weren't needed on the farm. Enslaved women were used in a variety of farm and domestic work, and were also hired out. At Fountain Rock in 1820, of the 80 people (black and white) living on the plantation, only thirty were reportedly working in agriculture, and fourteen were working in "manufactures"—which might include milling, distilling, smithing, masonry, cabinetry, spinning, weaving, and so on.⁴ Both male and female slaves did varied indoor and outdoor work on a site like Fountain Rock.⁵

Enslaved people lived with the knowledge that they could be sold at any time. For the Ringgolds, as for most enslavers, slaves were not just workers; they were also assets. The

² U.S. Census records for Marsh Hundred, Washington County, MD, in 1800, 1810, and 1820.

³ Rosemary Minnick, "The Saint James School by the Spring 'Bai Yuka'," *Maryland Cracker Barrell* (Oct. 1971), photograph with credit to St. James School; Russell Nelson, *Reminiscences* (privately printed [1973]): "I arrived ... in July, 1919.... When I came here the slave quarters were still standing where the baseball field is now."

⁴ 1820 Census, Marsh Hundred, Washington County.

⁵ For a detailed record of enslaved people at work on a comparable (though smaller) plantation, see *Ferry Hill Plantation Journal: Life on the Potomac River and Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, 4 January 1838 – 15 January 1839*, ed. Fletcher M. Green and Thomas F. and Nathalie W. Hahn (Shepherdstown, WV: 1975). Be aware that Green's introduction to the book is outdated and describes both master and slaves in implicitly racist ways. More recent scholarship on slavery at Ferry Hill includes Max L. Grivno, *Historic Resource Study: Ferry Hill Plantation* (National Park Service, 2007), and Robert C. Chidester, "Critical Landscape Analysis as a Tool for Public Interpretation: Reassessing Slavery at a Western Maryland Plantation," *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship* 6/1 (Winter 2009): 34-54.

Ringgolds bought and sold enslaved people like livestock, sometimes mortgaging them or taking them to settle debts. In 1807 Samuel Ringgold advertised, “For Sale, Two Negro Women with four children each, and two Negro Girls,” at Fountain Rock. In 1816, he advertised, “For Sale, A Number of valuable Negro Men and Boys from 14 to 25 years of age; also, several females of different ages.”⁶ The most likely buyer for people being sold in quantity would be a professional slave trader, who would sell them on to the deep south. One of the terrors of slavery in western Maryland was the fear of being sold south, and throughout Maryland such sales happened with some frequency.⁷

From these and other transactions, we have the names of some individuals enslaved at Fountain Rock. In 1820 Samuel Ringgold acquired six young people from a Hagerstown man, apparently in part settlement of a debt. They were:

Ben , age 20	Maria , age 15	Harry , age 11
Jesse , age 14	Cynthia , age 12	Mary , age 7

Before this, in 1805, at least nine enslaved people at Fountain Rock had a stroke of good fortune when Maria Riggold died and freed them in her will. Their ages and how long they had lived in slavery are not recorded, but their names were:

Jim Danby	Harry	Amos
Jerry	Nan	Jenny
Judy	Mary	“Yellow” Jack

Any children of these individuals were also to be freed, according to the will. Another enslaved man, **Felix**, was given his freedom by the will, but on delayed terms: he had to serve Maria

⁶ *Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser*, 23 Jan. 1807; *ibid.*, 1 May 1816.

⁷ See Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom*, 72-7; Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*, rev. edn. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 12.

Ringgold's married daughter Anna Maria Tilghman for four years, and then he would be free.⁸ Felix probably had to move to the Tilghman plantation, called Rockland.

Rockland, less than two miles across the fields Fountain Rock, was a similar slave-worked plantation. There a young enslaved man named Jim Pembroke was growing up during the years that Fountain Rock flourished. Jim Pembroke eventually escaped from slavery, changed his name to James W.C. Pennington, and became a well known abolitionist. His memoirs, published in 1849 under the title *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, paint a vivid and detailed picture of what enslaved people experienced in the vicinity of Fountain Rock, including family life, food, clothing, work, master-slave relations, and slave resistance; anyone interested in knowing about slavery in the Fountain Rock neighborhood should read this short book.⁹

Pennington described in detail the brutality of his own master, Frisby Tilghman, but writes that Tilghman was *not* "one of the most cruel masters."¹⁰ Presumably Pennington was comparing Tilghman to other slaveholders in the neighborhood, and interestingly he did have something to say about Samuel Ringgold:

One of the wealthiest slaveholders in the county, was General R., a brother-in law to my master. This man owned a large and highly valuable tract of land, called R.'s Manor. I do not know how many slaves he owned, but the number was large.... Slaves have a superstitious dread of passing the dilapidated dwelling of a man who has been guilty of great cruelties to his slaves, and who is dead, or moved away. I never felt this dread deeply but once, and that was one Sabbath about sunset, as I crossed the yard of General R.'s residence, which was about two miles from us, after he had been compelled to leave it.¹¹

⁸ Maryland Register of Wills Records 1629-1999, FamilySearch.org, Washington County Records, Will Book B, p. 98.

⁹ James W.C. Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith, or, Events in the History of James W.C. Pennington...* (London, 1849).

¹⁰ Pennington, 9.

¹¹ Pennington, 69-70. Pennington wrote more about the "R." family, including details that confirm they were the Ringolds, but he recorded no other information about their slaveholding.

Pennington also wrote about the presence of native Africans in the slave community at Rockland, and about his own African heritage. Because the time period of Fountain Rock (1792-1825) overlapped with the final years of the legal African slave trade (which officially ended in 1807), we can be sure that people born in Africa lived at Fountain Rock, and that stories of Africa were told around the fires and hearths of the slave quarter there.

One of the people who passed on such stories at Fountain Rock was a woman named **Sophie Gowins** (a.k.a. Eliza Thomas). Born in Frederick County in the eighteenth century, she had been taken by her enslavers to Georgetown (now in Washington, D.C.) and then back to Frederick, promised her freedom, but sold instead when her enslaver died unexpectedly. Samuel Ringgold purchased Gowins, her husband **Josh Gowins**, and their five children at the estate auction, and brought them to Fountain Rock. Gowins recalled the stories her own enslaved grandmother had told her about Africa:

They ketched her—la! I’ve heard her tell many a time, how she left her babies sleeping in her hut, while her husband was gone away to fish. She warn’t afraid of nothing, and she went down to the shore a-gathering broom-sedge. The pirates had spread bright-colored kerchiefs over the bushes. They stuck to the thorns, and while she was a-pulling of ’em off, they bound her hands, and carried her away to the hold of the ship. Many a dead body was lifted from her side and flung overboard during the long, hot voyage; but she lived, lived to see more children of hern, in old Virginny.

Sophie Gowins undoubtedly told this story in the slave quarter at Fountain Rock. Later, Gowins recalled her time with the Ringgolds: “I spun and sewed and quilted and lived comfortable, for they treated me well, they did. I had two [more] children, but they died. It was no matter for that, they went free to Heaven.”¹² Her husband Josh also died during this time. Yet Gowins could

¹² Caroline Healey Dall, “A Breeze from Lake Ontario,” in *The Liberty Bell* (Boston: National Anti-Slavery Bazaar, 1853), 33. The abolitionist who published Gowins’ account noted, “Contrary to my usual practice, I have preserved in this sketch the true names of Eliza’s owners.” However, Dall did not claim that “Eliza Thomas” was a real name, and a lengthy obituary published in the *Hagerstown Mail* on 24 Dec. 1877 (“Death of a Centennarian”) suggests that Sophie Gowins never used the name “Eliza Thomas” after she returned to Hagerstown following the Civil War, and

speak positively of her years at Fountain Rock, compared with what would come later (as we shall see below).

Another person enslaved at Fountain Rock was **James Creek**. Born about 1798, he may have been brought from Kent County to Washington County, but he had relatives living in Hagerstown. Physically, Creek struck people as looking like a Native American; he may have had some Native ancestry. He was a tall, lively, “talkative” young man, who stood up for himself amongst his peers. But like so many other enslaved people he adopted a different demeanor when dealing with his enslavers, with “a downcast look, and slow in his gait, and apparently humble in his manners when spoken to....” This was his survival mechanism. At Fountain Rock, Creek worked in the house as a “waiter”—that is, a servant whose tasks included serving food—and outdoors “in the garden.” On Sunday, April 21, 1816, eighteen-year-old James Creek took charge of his destiny and left Fountain Rock for freedom. (Weekends were the most common time for escapes, because slaves in western Maryland were usually given Sunday off from work and wouldn’t be missed until Monday morning.) Samuel Ringgold posted a \$100 reward for Creek’s return. Whether Creek got safely away is unknown. We can assume there were other attempted escapes from Fountain Rock too, given the frequency of escapes in Washington County.¹³

The 1820s brought hardship for everyone at Fountain Rock. By 1825, Samuel Ringgold had gone bankrupt, and his trustees had begun selling off his assets, including the people he held in slavery. A Hagerstown newspaper advertised “30 valuable Negroes” to be sold from Fountain Rock on March 24, “consisting of men and boys, women and children—some being as fine

that it may have simply been invented by Dall for her essay. (Too many of elements of the 1877 story—including the surname Gowins—align with the 1853 story for these to be two different women.)

¹³ *Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser*, 29 May 1816.

hands as any in the state.” Horses, cattle, and sheep were put up for sale at the same time. Not all of Ringgold’s assets were liquidated at this time, though; when he died four years later (in 1829), more sales apparently ensued. Sophie Gowins remembered being sold as part of the Fountain Rock estate settlement:

The Gin’ral died, and there was another auction, and they sold one of my girls away from me. My husband was dead, and they sent me away to ole Virginny, with four children. Two on ’em went, I don’t know know where, and two on ’em went with me... It’s a cussed place, that ole Virginny, and there I was worked to the death.¹⁴

Her mistreatment in Virginia eventually drove Sophie/Eliza Gowins Thomas (now remarried) to make a harrowing escape to Canada.¹⁵ Another man enslaved at Fountain Rock became free after General Ringgold’s death, though the reasons are unclear. According to the Reverend Thomas Henry, a local African Methodist Episcopal preacher, “Samuel Ringgold ... had a waiter whose name was **John Francis**. After the death of Gen. Ringgold, Francis was set free, and he came to Hagerstown to live, which was in the month of February.”¹⁶ Francis died about four months later, and Henry buried him.

From 1825 (the date of the Ringgold bankruptcy) onward, many of the Fountain Rock slaves were probably dispersed, like Sophie Gowins, to Virginia and further south. Like Gowins and her daughters, families were broken up, as happened routinely when enslavers sold their human property. Some people who had been enslaved by the Ringgolds were sold locally, or (like John Francis) they stayed in the neighborhood after gaining their freedom. After the Ringgolds left Fountain Rock, the African American community living nearby still included

¹⁴ Dall, 33. It’s also possible that she was sold in the 1825 sale and mis-remembered the occasion for it. There are no records of slaves being sold after Ringgold’s death.

¹⁵ Dall, 33-7. She would return to Hagerstown after Emancipation, die there in 1877, and be buried at Williamsport; *Hagerstown Mail*, 24 Dec. 1877.

¹⁶ Henry, *From Slavery to Salvation*, 14-15.

people who had been enslaved there (see below). Their descendants probably still live in Washington County today.

Slavery at the College of St. James¹⁷

In 1841, the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland purchased Fountain Rock as the site of the new College of St. James, which opened the following year. Many of the donors to this educational venture were local Episcopalians who held slaves, meaning that the College was funded by wealth generated by the labor stolen from enslaved people across the state of Maryland.¹⁸ Bishop Whittingham, the moving force behind the College's founding, was also well aware that the College was viewed favorably by southerners because it was located in a slaveholding state. The bishop of North Carolina wrote to Whittingham, "Your school ... has the advantage over [St. Paul's,] College Point[, New York,] of being in a slave state." One man wrote to Whittingham about an Alabama mother who was interested in sending her son to St. James's because she was "unwilling to send him to a free state."¹⁹ Slavery helped the College attract a majority of its student body from southern states and from slaveholding families in Maryland.²⁰ The tuition money that paid the bills at St. James's came in significant part from slave labor. Proslavery

¹⁷ Much of this section is based on my chapter, "Slavery, War, and Destruction: The College of St. James, 1861-1864," in *Saint James School of Maryland: 175 Years*. ed. W.L. Prehn (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, forthcoming in 2021), 51-85.

¹⁸ Diocesan Archives (Baltimore, MD), Vertical File "College of St. James," list of local donors in Bishop Whittingham's hand. Listed, for example, are donors Dall, Dorsey, Fitzhugh, and Galloway, who in 1840 held 49, 4, 20, and 10 slaves respectively; 1840 Census, Williamsford and Hagerstown, Md., NARA M704, roll 169, p. 202; roll 171, pp. 108, 114, 134. For the role of slavery in American higher education generally, see Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivory: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), especially 47-111.

¹⁹ Diocesan Archives, Levi Stillman Ives letter to WRW, 15 July 1841; William Alexander letter to WRW, 5 July 1845.

²⁰ Students numbers are drawn from the College's annual published *Register*, a nearly full series of which is held at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore. All evidence indicates that no students brought slaves with them to the College. Students slept in common dormitories, and the austere living arrangements made no allowance for personal servants; see, e.g., *Register*, 1860; Hall Harrison, *Life of the Right Reverend John Barrett Kerfoot...* (New York: James Pott & Co., 1886), 329-30.

opinion was the norm among the College's constituency, and indeed the Rev. John B. Kerfoot, the headmaster, in an 1861 letter to a friend, blamed the looming war on forces including "infidel and lawless abolitionism."²¹

The College itself was nestled in a neighborhood with a significant African American population, at least half of whom lived in slavery, but who formed a single community. Some of those individuals were enslaved at the College. The Rev. Russell Trevett, professor of classics, owned three people in 1850: a 50-year-old woman, a 20-year-old woman, and a seven-year-old girl. Kerfoot held an enslaved family in circumstances that will be described below. M.C. Clarkson, a local man who served as secretary of the College, owned a 30-year-old man in 1850. Slaves lived on many neighboring farms, such as the six people enslaved in 1850 by John W. Breathed, a strong friend and supporter of the College.²² The exact amount of slaveholding at the College is hard to gauge and was no doubt fluid. For instance, the College may have hired enslaved workers from their owners, as so many locals did. An 1853 newspaper ad could be a sign of this: "Wanted! At the College of St. James—4 Good Trusty *Colored Women*, 2 as Cooks and 2 as Chambermaids. The highest wages will be given."²³ Another newspaper ad, placed by a nearby farmer in April 1861, reminds us of the stark difference between the lives of the privileged white youths who studied at the College and the black youths who lived in the same neighborhood: "Negro Boy for Sale. Will be sold at private sale a healthy Negro Boy, between 13 and 14 years old, slave for life. Terms and prices to suit the times. John Reichard, Executor of John Ringer..., College of St. James P.O."²⁴ Yet the College also reached out to incorporate local African Americans, both slave and free, into its spiritual community: they came to the

²¹ Harrison, 199.

²² 1850 Census, slave schedule, Washington County, MD, District 1.

²³ *Herald of Freedom & Torch Light*, 19 Oct. 1853.

²⁴ *Herald of Freedom & Torch Light*, April 17, 1861, 3B.

College chapel to worship; the College clergy baptized local black children; and the College at one point ran a “regular Sunday evening service for the colored persons of the College and in its neighborhood.”²⁵

The Brooks Family / Catharine Peeker

In 1843, the Rev. John Kerfoot, headmaster of the College, purchased an enslaved woman named **Catharine (“Kitty”) Brooks** and her young daughter, **Eliza Robison**, paying \$425 for the two of them.²⁶ His intent from the beginning (“my original design”), he later wrote, was to free them both when their purchase price had been paid off by their labor. Kerfoot kept a record of Kitty’s earnings—perhaps from being hired out—and manumitted her in 1848, five years after he bought her. In the meantime, Kitty seems to have married Samuel Brooks, and while she was enslaved by Kerfoot she and Samuel had three children (**Caroline Virginia, Joanna, and Mary**), all of whom Kerfoot freed with her, making no financial claim to them. (Legally, children borne by an enslaved woman were the property of her enslaver.)

But Kitty’s labor had not, by Kerfoot’s calculations, cleared the entire debt she owed for the purchase price plus interest. Kerfoot was still \$132 in the red for the transaction, so he “retained” Kitty’s eldest daughter, twelve-year-old Eliza Robison, with the avowed intent of freeing her at some future date; he also stated that Robison “requires such care as I do not expect she would receive from her own family.” Four years later (in 1851) he sold Robison for \$125 for

²⁵ College clergy reported baptisms of two black infants in 1847, two in 1848, one in 1849, one in 1854, two in 1860, and one in 1862; Diocese of Maryland *Convention Journals, passim*. In 1859 Vice-rector Dashiell baptized free black Rachel Hinton and her three children; St. Mark’s Parish Register 1, pp. 50-1.

²⁶ Washington County Circuit Court (Land Records) 1858–1859, IN 13, pp. 298–300, MSA CE 18-18 (online); this unusual document is the basis for much of what I say here about the Brooks family and Kerfoot.

a term of sixteen more years of slavery, and in 1852 he formalized a deed of delayed manumission for her.²⁷

Another version of Kitty Brooks' story may be an anecdote included by the Rev. Thomas Henry (a local A.M.E. preacher) in his autobiography. Henry wrote that a woman named **Catharine Pecker** was being held in the Hagerstown jail awaiting sale to the south. Rev. Henry was present when a "gentleman" contacted Catharine's mother, Deborah Pecker, to inquire about her family's plight, "brought" Catharine Pecker out of jail, and then purchased Catharine's young daughter as well. This gentleman "took them both down to St. James' College ... and in less than three years they were both free."²⁸ I have been unable to find records of any women named Pecker being enslaved, bought, sold, or freed in Washington County, or any records at all of a Catharine Pecker. But if Catharine Pecker was the same woman as Catharine "Kitty" Brooks, the the two stories dovetail fairly well. There are some discrepancies between the version in Henry's memoirs, written decades later, and the Brooks documents that were written contemporaneously with the events they recorded.²⁹ But the matching or very similar elements of the stories are strong: in the 1840s, an enslaved woman named Catharine and her young daughter were purchased by a white man connected with the College of St. James, for the purpose of

²⁷ Washington County Circuit Court (Land Records) 1852-1853, IN 7, p. 90, MSA CE 18-2, and IN 10, pp. 163-4, MSA 18-5 (online); originals at Washington County Historical Society, Hagerstown, [slave] documents nos. D25 and BS201. No more is recorded of Robison's legal situation, but in 1860 she and her four-year-old son were living with Kitty and Samuel Brooks, and she died in 1864; U.S. Census, Washington County, MD, for 1850, 1860, and 1870; and Samuel W. Piper, Washington County, Maryland, Cemetery Records, vol. VI, p. 31 [59] (entries for Ebenezer A.M.E. Church).

²⁸ Henry, *From Slavery to Salvation*, 43.

²⁹ Kerfoot purchased Brooks and Robison from Richard Tilghman Holliday, by "lifting" a debt for \$425 in the Hagerstown Bank; R.T. Halliday in turn had bought them from a William Holliday; Land Records, Liber YY, p. 834. Rev. Henry stated that Catharine Pecker had been "sold to a gentleman named Jonathan Hager. He found her to be crippled in one hand, and returned her to jail again." This may be a faulty memory on Henry's part, or it may mean that one of the Hallidays had tried to sell Catharine to Hager but the sale had failed. In another discrepancy, Henry described the young daughter as thirteen years old and "living with Alexander Neale," whereas Eliza Robison was about seven years old when Kerfoot bought her, and the sale documents make no mention of Neale. Again, the age could be a mistake on Henry's part, and the daughter could have been hired out to Neale, not owned by him.

rescuing them from slavery and/or sale to the south; not many years later the woman was free, and in less than a decade the daughter had received a deed of manumission. Indeed, it seems unlikely that two such episodes occurred. Thus we probably have two accounts of this event, one from Kerfoot and one from Henry.

Rev. Henry's account implicitly raises the possibility that he, a black A.M.E. preacher, reached out to Rev. Kerfoot, a white Episcopal priest, for help in preventing an enslaved mother from being sold south.³⁰ It suggests that Kerfoot was known in the local black community as someone who was sympathetic to enslaved people and might be willing to invest money in helping them toward freedom. Such an interpretation further complicates the story of race and slavery at St. James.

Margaret Collins

Margaret was a free employee of the College, but her story illustrates the way that slavery constrained the lives even of free people of color. Margaret (whose original surname is unknown) was born free in 1826; her first husband was an enslaved man named B. Green (first name unknown). They had two sons, Joshua Harrison Green and Benjamin Edward Green.³¹ The children were free because, under law, children had the same status (free or slave) as their mother. In 1845 or soon after, B. Green was sold to slave traders and taken to New Orleans, where he remarried within three years. This was the wrenching reality faced by black couples whose marriages had no standing in law and who were routinely separated forever by sale. Margaret took up a job at the College of St. James, where she met a College waiter named

³⁰ I owe the suggestion to Jean Libby, who makes it in her commentary on Henry's text; Henry, *From Slavery to Salvation*, 99.

³¹ Maryland State Archives, C2838-2; for Green's name see Kerfoot's letter.

Collins (his first name is unknown). Seven years after the loss of her first husband (so, in the early 1850s), Margaret and Collins were married, on a “vacation,” by a black preacher. A few years later Collins fell ill and died. Three more years passed, and in 1861 Margaret planned to marry again, this time requesting that Rev. Kerfoot perform the ceremony. He was willing, and indeed argued strongly on her behalf, but the bishop of Maryland forbade it, on the grounds that Margaret’s first husband was still alive.³² We can conclude that Margaret and her fiancé probably found a less rule-bound black preacher to marry them instead.

The Civil War Cook

During the Civil War, a black woman whose name we do not know was working for the College as cook. She had children with her on the site. In June 1863, as the Confederate army was moving across Maryland toward Gettysburg, a white man from Winchester, Virginia (about 40 miles south of the College), arrived at St. James looking for a woman who he claimed was a slave belonging to his father. He identified the College cook as this woman and seized her by force. Now, if she was the woman he was looking for, the United States considered her a free woman under the terms of the Emancipation Proclamation (because she had been enslaved in Virginia, a state in rebellion). Yet the Unionist faculty of the College watched passively as the man from Winchester forcibly removed the cook and her children from the premises and carried them back with him to Virginia. One of the teachers wrote in his diary, “It was a sad sight.”³³

³² Maryland Diocesan Archives, Kerfoot letters to Bishop Whittingham, 27 Mar. 1861; William Francis Brand, *Life of William Rollinson Whittingham, Fourth Bishop of Maryland* (New York: E. & J.B. Young, 1883), ii. 102-3.

³³ “The Civil War Diary of Joseph H. Coit,” ed. James McLachlan, *Maryland Historical Magazine* 60 (1965): 254. George W. Seevers, age sixty-three, held twenty-four people as slaves in Winchester in 1860 and had a twenty-seven-year-old son Robert; 1860 Census, Winchester, Frederick County, VA, NARA M653, roll 1347, p. 450, and Winchester slave schedule, p. 11.

The Last Living Fountain Rock Slave?

In November 1864, a new Maryland state constitution freed everyone still enslaved in Maryland.³⁴ The College of St. James had closed its doors for good a few months earlier, too battered by the war to continue in operation. But after the war it was reincarnated as Saint James School, under headmaster Adrian Onderdonk. A final story of slavery on the site comes from this era.

Violet McAbee was employed as an elderly servant at Saint James School in the 1870s and 1880s. Onderdonk family lore held that she was living on the site when they arrived and “had always lived on the property”; McAbee claimed to be the daughter of one of the Ringgolds’ slaves and (as the Onderdonks recalled) to have seen George Washington when he had visited Fountain Rock.³⁵ In 1880 her age was recorded as seventy, which would make her birth date 1810. But her recorded age in 1880 may have been a guess; if she really remembered seeing the former President, who died in 1799, she must have been in her mid-eighties (or older) in 1880. McAbee was allegedly born in Virginia, so she may have seen George Washington during her childhood there, not at Fountain Rock.

Violet McAbee does not appear in any earlier Census records that I have found. The obvious explanation for her absence from the Censuses of 1850 and 1860 (when all free people were supposed to be listed by name) is that she was enslaved in those years. McAbee may have been living at the College of St. James in that period, as a slave—after all, the Onderdonks later believed “she had always lived on the property.” How the continuity of her enslavement from

³⁴ The Emancipation Proclamation had not freed slaves in Maryland, as it applied only to territories in rebellion.

³⁵ *Memoirs of Adrian Holmes Onderdonk*, ed. Stevenson W. Webster (privately printed, 1974), 13; 1880 Census, Williamsport, p. 4.

Fountain Rock to St. James would have happened—if it did—is unclear.³⁶ Alternatively, she may have been one of the many free blacks who were probably missed by the Census takers of the mid-nineteenth century.

Violet McAbee may also have had at least one relative living at St. James in the 1870s. Although most other McAbees in nineteenth-century Washington County were identified as white and lived relatively far from St. James, a “Lace McAbee,” otherwise unknown, was buried at St. James School in 1877. Lace was recorded as being about 70 years old.³⁷

Lost African American Burials

More than one cemetery lay on the site that is now Saint James School. The Ringgold family created a cemetery for themselves. There must also have been a slave burial ground at Fountain Rock—possibly a section of the Ringgold cemetery—but its location was never recorded. Beginning in the 1840s, there was a separate College cemetery as well. The College cemetery included both African American and white graves; the following African American individuals are known to have been buried there:

Matilda Pearce (age 20), died 1855, enslaved

William Thompson (age 19), died 1858, enslaved by John W. Breathed

Ellen Thompson (age 24), died 1858, enslaved by John W. Breathed

Perry Gillis (age 4 weeks), died 1858

³⁶ “She had always lived on the property”; *Memoirs of Adrian Holmes Onderdonk*, 13. It is possible that Onderdonk was misattributing to McAbee a similar story told by Sophie/Eliza Goins Thomas (see above), who had lived elsewhere before her enslavement at Fountain Rock, who claimed to have visited Mount Vernon in her youth, and who visited the Onderdonks at St. James School in her later years; *Hagerstown Mail*, 24 Dec. 1877.

³⁷ Piper, *Cemetery Records*, vol. I, p. 93 [319]. The gravestone itself is now lost; the record may have been a misreading of “Nace.”

These funerals were performed by Episcopal clergy associated with the College and with nearby St. Mark's Church (Lappans), and thus were recorded in the parish register of St. Mark's.³⁸ We can assume that other burials also took place in the College cemetery and were unrecorded. In addition, the graveyard contained headstones for people who may or may not have been African Americans (further research is needed): Lace McAbee (c. 1803-1873; see above), John B. Marke (no dates), Ellen Page West (1866), and "H.M.S." (1803-1860). There were also headstones for at least six white people in the cemetery, as well as fieldstone grave markers.³⁹

Over the course of the twentieth century, the burial grounds at Saint James School were destroyed, as the school constructed new buildings and athletic grounds over them. Some of the markers were moved to new locations, but the unmarked graves were lost. This is a common fate of early African American cemeteries.

³⁸ Boonsboro, St. Mark's Episcopal Church (Lappans), Parish Register 1, p. 68.

³⁹ Piper, Cemetery Records, vol. I, pp. 93-4 [319-20].

APPENDIX:

Account of Purchase and Manumission of Kitty Brooks by John B. Kerfoot

The following text is recorded in the Washington County Land Records, Liber IN 13, pp. 299-300. It is a very unusual record, both of the financial arrangements and of some of the thinking behind a manumission. It records only the white man's thoughts; we are left to imagine what part Kitty Brooks and her family played in negotiating these arrangements. Note the explicit statement that Kerfoot "received wages" that Brooks had earned. This implies that, rather than simply earning the price of her freedom by working directly for Kerfoot, she was hired out to someone else, who paid her wages to Kerfoot. Alternatively, he may have placed her on the payroll of the College of St. James, of which he was headmaster. The hiring out of enslaved people was common practice in Maryland.

At the request of the Rev. John B. Kerfoot, the following account was recorded August 3rd, 1858.

My account of the purchase and manumission of Kitty Brooks, etc.

April 1843. Paid to [*i.e.*, for] Kitty Brooks and her daughter Eliza (7 years old)

to Richard Tilghman Holliday by a note in Bank	\$425.
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lifting R.T.H.'s note in Hangerstown Bank.

Paid interest on the note in Bank, 2 years	<u>51.</u>
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\$476.

Received wages, services, etc. as per book

in the next 15 months	84.50
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in the next 4 months	<u>32.</u>	<u>\$116.50</u>
April 1845 leaving due to me Apr. 1st 1845		
This does not include money etc. I gave to K.B. in sickness etc.	\$359.50	
August 1, 1846, received wages 15 months at \$9	\$135.	
August 1, 1847, ditto 10 months \$90 less amt. \$20	70.	
April 1, 1848, ditto 8 months \$71 less amt. \$20	52.	<u>\$257.</u>
Ditto: Leaving due to me April 1, 1848, without any calculation of Interest	} \$102.50 }	
An easy and favorable (to Kitty) estimate on Interest since April 1845, to have been		
on other average of debt, say \$250 to Aug. 1, 1846	30.	
on other average of debt, say \$150 to Aug. 1847	9.	
balance to Apr. 1848 etc.		
	Say in all	<u>\$30.</u>
Balance of money paid out by me in purchase		
and discount in Banks and still on April 1, 1848, not repaid		102.50
Add interest to above		<u>30.</u>
		\$132.50

Since my purchase of Kitty Brooks she has borne three female children, the only children of her present husband Samuel Brooks. I now on the 11th day of May 1848 manumit Kitty Brooks, according to my original design, and also manumit and wholly liberate these three children allowing Kitty also her own wages etc. from the 1st day of April last. In as much as I am not yet

fully repaid my outlay of cash there being \$102.50 of which outlay (in which I have not included aid in money etc. given to Kitty), and as the child Eliza now about 12 years old requires such care as I do not expect she would receive from her own family, I retain her with the design to manumit her at such a time and under such circumstances as my own discretion may direct; of which design etc. its probability of fulfilment I give no other proof than this account and paper and the deed of Manumission of Kitty and her three infant children given herewith. This statement is thus made and give to the husband and father Samuel Brookes for his satisfaction and that of any one else who may have any right or call to interest themselves in the matter.

Fountain Rock, Washington County, Md. May 19th, 1848. John B. Kerfoot.