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Community Networks of Memory and Strength in Black Richmond:

How religious, educational, and financial Institutions shaped and strengthened the cultural and
physical development of Jackson Ward

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Architecture

by

Katherine Redwood Taylor-Hasty

2025

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2025

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Community Networks of Memory and Strength in Black Richmond:

How Religious, Educational, and Financial Institutions Shaped and Strengthened the Cultural

and Physical Development of Jackson Ward

by

Katherine Redwood Taylor-Hasty

Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture

University of California, Los Angeles, 2025

Professor Dana Cuff, Chair

This dissertation investigates how the African American community in Jackson Ward used the location, geography and design of their religious, educational, and economic buildings to plant roots and strengthen their institutions and community, creating institutional networks of memory. Drawing on architectural analysis, archival research, Sanborn maps, and the material histories of the Maggie L. Walker House, Virginia Union University campus, and Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, the project argues that Black Richmonders were not only passive subjects of segregationist policy but active producers of networks of memorial spaces that simultaneously accommodated and contested the racial order.

The study intervenes in scholarship on architectural and urban history, spaces of memory, monuments and memorials, Southern studies, and Black studies by demonstrating that

Jackson Ward's memorial environment emerged through continuous negotiation between community action and structural constraint. Black churches, fraternal orders and mutual aid societies, schools, banks, and small businesses collectively reshaped the neighborhood through building, renovating, and adapting structures in ways that supported economic advancement, fostered social and memorial networks, and articulated visions of collective uplift. These practices reveal how the built environment served as an arena through which Black residents pursued stability, property ownership, and political autonomy despite legal and economic roadblocks designed to limit mobility and suppress wealth accumulation.

By foregrounding the interplay between political structures and spatial practices, this work offers a new framework for understanding Black neighborhoods as dynamic producers of architectural meaning, memory, and urban form. Jackson Ward emerges not as an isolated anomaly or solely the product of racist policy, but as a complex urban landscape shaped by conflict, aspiration, and community labor. This reinterpretation expands the architectural and urban historiography of Richmond and contributes a model for analyzing Black sites of memory across the United States.

This dissertation of Katherine Redwood Taylor-Hasty is approved.

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Introduction

“The Negro...put up the Lee Monument, and should the time come, will be there to take it down.”¹ These were the words written in the *Richmond Planet* by the editor, John Mitchell Jr. eleven days after Richmond’s Robert E. Lee equestrian statue was erected. It took 131 years, but eventually Mitchell’s prophecy came true on September 8, 2021, following months of protests, political maneuvering, and a court case.² It was the removal of this statue, the events leading up to this long-awaited event, and the discussion of spaces of memory that it prompted that inspired the topic of this dissertation and the thesis that it proposes.

Prior to the summer of 2020, and the protests sparked by the murder of George Floyd, there were thirteen Confederate monuments in Richmond, Virginia, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.³ These included the five infamous Confederate monuments of Monument Avenue: from west to east they portrayed Matthew Fontaine Maury, a Confederate naval officer and oceanographer, unveiled in 1929; Stonewall Jackson, a rather infamous Confederate general, unveiled in 1919; Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederate States, unveiled in 1907; Robert E. Lee, the Confederate general—the crowning glory of the whole avenue—unveiled in 1890, it was the first monument to go up and the last to come down in 2021; and finally, J.E.B. Stuart, another Confederate general well known for his brutality, unveiled in 1907.⁴ Today, the number of Confederate monuments in Richmond stands at zero, as the monuments were removed

¹ John Mitchell, *Richmond Planet*, June 7, 1890.

² Gregory S Schneider and Laura Vozzella. “Robert E. Lee Statue Is Removed in Richmond, Ex-Capital of Confederacy, After Months of Protests and Legal Resistance: Hundreds of Cheering Onlookers Witnessed the Removal of the Statue of the Confederate General, Which Had Stood 60 Feet Above Monument Avenue for 130 Years before Racial-Justice Protests in Richmond Led to Its Removal.,” *The Washington Post*, September 8, 2021.

³ “Whose Heritage? Map,” Southern Poverty Law Center, March 12, 2025, <https://www.splcenter.org/whose-heritage-map/>.

⁴ Schneider and Vozzella, September 8, 2021

or destroyed in the year following the George Floyd and Black Lives Matter protests.⁵ However, their presence for over a century was a physical reminder of Richmond's role in the Civil War and the city's symbolism in the canon of white supremacy.

Conversely, the African American population of Richmond left virtually no monumental footprint on the city until the 1970s. The first public monument to an African American, the Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson statue, was erected in 1973, eighty-three years after the Robert E. Lee statue was unveiled.⁶ This did not mean that the African American community had left no physical mark of their presence in Richmond; they had left their mark—their memory—in the buildings and institutions that they constructed.

This dissertation will explore the role of religious, educational, and financial institutions in the cultural and physical development of Black neighborhoods in post-emancipation Richmond, Virginia. Institutions within and around Richmond's historically Black neighborhood of Jackson Ward will stand as case studies to investigate how the location, geography, and designs of these institutions facilitated the evolution and growth of the community. First, we will discuss Richmond and Jackson Ward, their history, and why they were chosen as the case-study city and historically Black neighborhood for this dissertation.

Why Richmond

Richmond was chosen as the site for this research for three main reasons: (1) the city's large African American population, consisting of both enslaved and free people; (2) its place within the American memorialization landscape; and (3) the way it sets up a dialogue between

⁵ "Whose Heritage? Map," Southern Poverty Law Center, March 12, 2025, <https://www.splcenter.org/whose-heritage-map/>.

⁶ Robinson was born and raised in Richmond. He gave back to the community; for example, he paid for a stoplight to be installed on Adams and Chamberlayne Parkway to protect children walking to school. "Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson Statue (U.S. National Park Service)," National Parks Service.

white and Black monuments. The first point will be explored in the next section as we examine the Black history of Richmond and Jackson Ward.

On the second point, Richmond's position as the most well-known Confederate capital has given the city an important symbolic role in the minds of both white and Black southerners as a representative of the Confederacy as a whole. As will be discussed later in this chapter, this led to the white-controlled monumental landscape of Richmond—particularly the monuments on Monument Avenue—to take on a regional (Southern) significance that extended beyond the attention paid to monuments in other important cities in the region such as New Orleans or Charleston.

On the third point, the monuments (mostly Confederate) erected by the white Richmonders were the typical European-influenced forms: marble standing soldiers, men-on-horseback, and obelisks. They were intended to communicate strength and endurance, signifying not only that the Confederacy had been strong, but that it (and its people) would endure forever despite what they viewed as an unfair and wrongful defeat. In the case of the Confederate monuments, they were meant to physically represent the white supremacist ideals for which the Confederacy fought; permanent markers of the racial (racist) politics of white supremacy.⁷

In contrast, this dissertation argues that Black memorial space exists within the institutions created by Richmond's Black communities. Critically, these institutions are located within segregated Black neighborhoods, operating completely separately (both physically and administratively) from their white counterparts. This strictly enforced physical separation

⁷ Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

produces a Richmond that functions under a particular kind of segregation: a monumental segregation that ensures that Black and white Richmond not only do not share space, but do not share memory. Further, this dissertation argues that these institutions themselves operate within networks of memory embedded in the Black spaces of the city.

Why Jackson Ward

Today, Jackson Ward is an approximately 42-block area bounded by the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike to the north, Broad Street to the south, North Belvedere Street (U.S. 1) to the west, and North 2nd Street to the east.⁸ This dissertation will discuss structures (both extant and demolished) both to the north and south of the freeway divide.

The name ‘Jackson’ has been associated with the area since before it became an official political subdivision. The name refers to how the area north of Broad Street (then “H Street”) was called ‘Jackson’s Addition’ from at least 1835, when it appeared under that name in that year’s Bates Map of Richmond. It could also refer to a popular local bar, James Jackson’s (beer) Garden. However it came to be named, the neighborhood officially became the separate political subdivision of Jackson Ward in 1871, joining Jefferson, Monroe, and Madison Wards in their naming theme.⁹

At its height in the 1920s and 1930s, Jackson Ward was home to about 8,000 Black families.¹⁰ The district became known as the ‘Black Wall Street of Richmond’ because of its prominence in the city and nation as a center of Black business, culture, and entertainment from

⁸ Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff, (1976) “Jackson Ward Historic District NRHP nomination form.”

⁹ Kathryn Cowell, et al. “Jackson Ward.” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1976

¹⁰ Michael Eric Taylor, thesis, *The African-American Community of Richmond, Virginia: 1950-1956* (1994).

1890 through the 1950s.¹¹ Jackson Ward was one of the most prosperous Black neighborhoods in Richmond. Other majority-Black neighborhoods developed in Richmond, such as Carver and Shockoe Bottom; however, Jackson Ward has remained an important focal point of Black Richmond's history and economy.

Jackson Ward's spatial relationship with the city's white-controlled downtown played a major role in the neighborhood's development. The ward is located less than a mile from the Virginia State Capitol and just under two miles from the Robert E. Lee Memorial on Monument Avenue. Partially as a result of this proximity, white Richmonders responded forcefully to any actions from within the Black community. Jackson Ward was progressively cut off from the city center and then from the rest of Richmond—first by the aggressively policed border along West Broad Street and then, after 1958, by the freeways.¹² Most of the sites of memory within and around Jackson Ward are located several blocks removed from the West Broad Street border, which suggests that Black Richmonders have responded—and continue to respond—to these borders.

Early Black History in Richmond:

The town of Richmond was established on the north side of the James River in 1733 by prominent planter Colonel William Byrd II. Named for the English town of Richmond (now part of London), which occupied a similar location on the Thames River, the town was formally recognized and incorporated by the Virginia General Assembly in 1742, by which point it had a population of about 250 people.

¹¹ John G Zehmer and Robert P Winthrop, *The Jackson Ward Historic District* (Richmond, VA: Dept. of Planning and Community Development, 1978).

¹² K. I. Grandison, "The Other Side of the Freeway," essay, in *"The Other Side of the Freeway."*, ed. A R Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Chesson, M. B. (1981). *Richmond After the War: 1865-1890*. Virginia State Library.

Richmond benefited from its location on a relatively calm section of the James River, making it a prime site for a major port and for water-powered mills. Many of the major towns of the colonial era were located on the coast, such as Williamsburg and Norfolk. These cities and their ports were useful for intercontinental trade along the coast, but as settlements began to be established further inland, large river ports—such as the one built in Richmond—became invaluable to trade in the colonies. Indeed, the city quickly developed, fueled by national and international trade brought in by the port. In 1739, only six years after the town was founded and before it was incorporated, the Henrico Parish church—the most important church in the county—began plans to relocate to the new town. This move meant that not only was the main religious authority of the county now located in Richmond, but also that the vestrymen (who ran the parish, which was the local religious and civil authority) would meet there, showcasing the swift rise in power of the new town.¹³

Beyond profiting from its port, Richmond's economic development—and Virginia's as a whole—was made possible by slavery and the slave trade, already firmly established in the colony by the time of Richmond's founding. The first ship carrying enslaved Africans to Virginia arrived at Port Comfort (Jamestown) in August 1619 with “twenty and odd Negroes.”¹⁴ Over the following century, as more enslaved Africans were brought to Virginia on Dutch and British slave ships, the rights (or lack thereof) of enslaved people—and the supposed inferiority of the Black race—were enshrined in the culture and in the law. By 1730 the population of Virginia was about 33% enslaved Africans. The sorry truth was that “by the last half of the seventeenth century, Virginia had already taken on the trappings of a plantation society but

¹³ Marie Tyler-McGraw, *At the Falls: Richmond, Virginia and Its People* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

¹⁴ John Rolfe, “Letter to the Virginia Company,” in Kingsbury, *Records of the Virginia Company*, III: 243

needed an enslaved labor force to stimulate its economy.”¹⁵ Virginia, and the Virginian economy, could not operate on the labor of whites and indentured servants. The growth of their imported, enslaved African labor force was the engine that propelled the economy, the planter class, and the city of Richmond toward wealth and industrialization.¹⁶

Black Neighborhood Since the Antebellum:

Jackson Ward—or the area that would become Jackson Ward—has been a space of congregation for African Americans since the Antebellum period, when it was one of the three major areas of concentration for the population of free Black people in the city (the others being Shockoe Bottom and Shockoe Valley). Although free Blacks were more numerous, this did not mean that white people did not live in the area. True segregation did not come to the city until after the Civil War and Reconstruction. As Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg Kimball explained “nothing approximating a ‘segregated’ neighborhood existed [in the antebellum period]...clusters of free Black inhabitants along Broad and Main Streets most likely represent the shops of artisans who jostled for business with white, native and immigrant shopkeepers.”¹⁷

Richmond had spent the Revolutionary War as a somewhat important but relatively small town within the wealthiest state in the newly established Union. By the time the first shot in the Civil War was fired seventy-eight years later, Richmond had transformed into an economic and political powerhouse. Unlike other Southern states, Virginia managed to balance the development of a modern economy while maintaining a socially conservative elite, all backed by

¹⁵ Lewis A. Randolph and Gayle T. Tate, *Rights for a Season: The Politics of Race, Class, and Gender in Richmond, Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), p. 41.

¹⁶ Randolph and Tate, 2003

¹⁷ Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg D Kimball, “Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond,” *Journal of Urban History* 21, no. 3 (March 1, 1995).

the largest enslaved population in the United States. Richmond's antebellum history is a prime example of this balancing act.

As a centrally located city on a major river, much of Richmond's wealth came from trade. Beyond its port, Richmond was also the hub of a network of railways, importing and exporting goods from across the state and the nation. The city also became a major producer of goods, including processed wheat, corn, maize, cotton, and wool, as well as worked iron. The vast majority of the land on the interiors of the Southern states was given over to agricultural production, mostly on large plantations utilizing large, enslaved workforces. Agriculture was the mainstay of the Southern economy and even within the cities of the South, the region's reliance on staple agriculture was clear—cotton was king. Historian David R. Goldfield explained these “urban plantations”: “The proliferation of small urban places meant, among other things, that marketing staple products was the main if not the only economic activity of much of the urban South...” The ties between the planters and the urban merchants were so close that the cities even appeared to follow the agricultural calendar, dormant through the summer until the new crops came in the fall.¹⁸

Richmond—and the South as a whole—owed its economic success during the antebellum era to slavery. According to research conducted by Benjamin Campbell using the University of Virginia's now-defunct Historical Census Browser, by 1800 Richmond had a population of 5,737, of which 2,837 (about 49.5 percent) were white, 2,900 (about 50.5 percent) were Black. Of the Black population 2,293 (about 80 percent) were enslaved, and 607 (about 20 percent) were free.¹⁹ By 1860 the enslaved population in Virginia was at roughly a half million, with

¹⁸ John Michael Vlach, “‘Without Recourse to Owners’: The Architecture of Urban Slavery in the Antebellum South,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 6 (1997): 150.

¹⁹ Benjamin P. Campbell, *Richmond's Unhealed History* (Richmond, VA: Brandylane Publishers, 2012).

Richmond alone being home to over 11,500 enslaved people. The form of slavery practiced within Richmond, while just as brutal and inhumane as that practiced on the Virginian plantations, had some notable differences. These differences are important to how we understand the race relations that serve as a backdrop to this study.

One of the most important components of urban slavery was the coexistence of freed and enslaved Blacks in the same neighborhoods and households. The enslaved workforces of most Southern plantations lived on the plantations, surrounded by other enslaved people; in these mixed-status households and neighborhoods, enslaved and free Blacks were able to share their experiences and ways of living in a space relatively safe from the scrutiny of white Richmonders. It was standard for even the smaller farms to include separate housing for the majority of their enslaved workforce. In cities space was at a premium, especially in Southern cities which were small and crowded, even by the standards of the time.²⁰

There were two general types of urban homes. For those who had few (or enough space to house all of the enslaved people) or no enslaved people, those few enslaved people “lived in the homes or in the shops of their owners...Space was found for them somewhere in the house: in the attic, in the cellar, or perhaps in a room attached to the rear of the house.”²¹ This was the typical status quo for most urban enslaved people of the time. However, this arrangement could become very uncomfortable, not just for the enslaved people, but for their white masters as well. If the family was unable (or unwilling) to build ‘on-campus’ housing for the enslaved people, many urban slaveowners allowed their enslaved workers to ‘live out’—that is, “to reside someplace beyond the confines of their owners’ premises.” This practice became increasingly

²⁰ Gregg D. Kimball, *American City, Southern Place: A Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000).

²¹ Vlach, 1997, p.151

popular among owners and enslaved people as the antebellum era advanced. The enslaved Blacks themselves mostly found lodging wherever they could, but many ended up in shanty towns on the borders of town, in tenements, or in their city's growing mercantile and industrial districts. In these spaces, the enslaved Blacks often intermingled with the free Black community.

²² This was how the historically African American neighborhoods of Richmond, like Jackson Ward, were born.

For those families who had more enslaved people than they could house within the main house, and who did not want to utilize the living-out system, the usual remedy was to build a detached service structure, creating urban compounds that could function like miniaturized plantations. The typical home (or compound) of the family who owned many enslaved people consisted of “the master's house, its yard, and its servants [enslaved] quarters.”²³

It is perhaps unsurprising, given their treatment in the city, that Richmond experienced its fair share of enslaved runaways in the years leading up to the Civil War. Enslaved Black people desperate to escape to the North worked alone, in groups, and with abolitionists to make it across the border into Maryland—the closest non-slave state. One famous example was Henry Brown “who squeezed himself into a box 3 feet 1 inch long, 2 feet wide and 2 feet 6 inches deep.” Friends then successfully shipped the box—and Brown—to Philadelphia, where he emerged several days later, appearing none the worse. From then on he was known as “Box” Brown; which is the name given to the monument that honors him in Richmond today.²⁴

Many Southern cities had significant free Black populations living alongside those who were enslaved. Where Richmond was special was the wealth and relative autonomy this population

²² Vlach, 1997, p.158-159

²³ Vlach, 1997, p.151

²⁴ Virginius Dabney, *Richmond: The Story of a City* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1990).

was able to achieve. Within the Black enclaves and neighborhoods of the city, Black Richmonders thrived—setting up their own businesses, churches, and schools. Free Blacks owned and operated barbershops, stables, grocery stores, fruit shops, confectionaries, blacksmith shops, banks, and more. In 1860 one out of every 4 free Black families owned property, allowing many families to build wealth.²⁵ The fact that several Black families were able to build wealth during the Antebellum is key to understanding how historically Black neighborhoods like Jackson Ward were able to rebound and develop rapidly and effectively during and after Reconstruction.

After the Civil War Black people flooded the city and congregated in the neighborhoods where the free Blacks had lived and worked in the Antebellum, including Jackson Ward. As more Black families moved in, more white residents moved out, and the area became majority Black. By the late 1880s “race progress” had become the most popular method for gaining the respect and status to gain political and social rights. As part of this push, the Black people of Jackson Ward began to construct the urban environment around them to reflect their dreams and wishes for themselves and their race. As Brown and Kimball described, the “larger and more elaborate businesses, churches, and homes were used to signify this historical progress.”²⁶

Civil War History:

Shortly after the election of Abraham Lincoln to the United States presidency, in the winter of 1860-1861, the Civil War began with the secession of six Southern states from the Union: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. By the close of spring

²⁵ Dabney, 1990

²⁶ Brown and Kimball, 1995

1861, they had been joined by five more states—Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.²⁷ Four horrific years later, and having lost over 600,000 men, the Civil War was over, the Confederacy was no more, and the institution of slavery—over which the war had primarily been fought—was legally ended.²⁸ Richmond played a key role in the Civil War as the longest-serving capital of the Confederacy, and as an integral part of the home front.

Richmond was the capital of the Confederacy from May 1861 to April 1865. It followed Montgomery, Alabama (January-May, 1861), and was itself followed for a single week by Danville, Virginia (April 3-10, 1865). Soon after the Virginia Secession Convention proclaimed Richmond as the new capital, President Jefferson Davis and his cabinet took up residence in the city. It was from here that they directed the war effort and attempted to run the struggling, newly formed Confederacy.

The railways and ports that had made Richmond invaluable to the Virginian (and Southern) economy were now turned to carrying supplies and men to the various armies across the warring nation, as well as to the suffering towns and cities on the home front. Additionally, the city's factories and metal works churned out weapons and supplies for the troops. While most of the guns and ammunition were sent to the front lines, some were kept warehoused in the city in case of an invasion that eventually came to pass.

As the men of Richmond mobilized to fight and supply the war, the women of Richmond secured the home front. The women of Richmond, like many Southern women of the time, took on many roles during the war. They nursed the sick and wounded in the city's fifty hospitals,

²⁷ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁸ James M. McPherson, *This Mighty Scourge: Perspectives on the Civil War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023).

prepared care packages for soldiers, and cared for the rural refugee families that flocked into the city as the war emptied the villages, plantations, and towns of the South.²⁹

As the war progressed, the Confederate government quickly realized that it could not clothe its entire army alone and began asking for uniform donations. The white women of the South responded by starting sewing and knitting societies. The allegiances and friendships forged through these and other war-born associations would play a large role in the post-war lives of many white women,³⁰ and serve as a model for the women-run benevolent societies that Black women built up in the ashes of Reconstruction. The white women of the home front would be honored and glorified after the war in monuments to Confederate women and in Southern literature written about the war.

The chaos produced by the war provided opportunities for many enslaved Black people to escape from enslavement. During the first years of the war, increasing numbers of enslaved families—men, women, and children—attempted to escape, with mixed results. Many of those who were unsuccessful lost their lives in the attempt. The common treatment of recaptured enslaved people during the war was hanging, regardless of gender.³¹

While many Black people, both enslaved and free, fled Richmond during the war, many were forced to remain and contribute to the Confederate war effort. Around ten thousand enslaved and free Black Richmonders built fortifications around the city between 1862 and 1863. Another few thousand were sent to the railroads, either maintaining the all-important lines, or working on new additions like the Piedmont Railroad.

²⁹ Dabney, 1990

³⁰ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

³¹ Drew G Faust, Thavolia Glymph, and George C Rable, “‘A Woman’s War: Southern Women in the Civil War,’” essay, in *A Woman’s War: Southern Women in the Civil War*, ed. Edward D.C. Campbell and Kym S Rice (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 1–28.

A few brave enslaved and freed Blacks remained in the city to work as spies for the Union. One famous Richmond example was Mary Elizabeth Bowser, a free Black woman. With references supplied by fellow spy Elizabeth Van Lew, Bowser was hired to the personal staff of Mrs. Jefferson Davis at the Confederate White House. From her post, she provided important information to Van Lew, who sent it to the North via the secret underground.³²

The people of Richmond, Black and white, suffered significantly during the war. Poverty was rampant and food shortages were common. Farmers continued to bring their goods into the city, but they began to withhold their wares from the market to wait for higher prices. Food speculators added to the suffering by buying up and storing large quantities of staple goods such as salt, flour, sugar and bacon, safe in the knowledge that the resulting shortage and rising demand would only increase their profits.

A stark contrast was apparent between Black and white, the rich and the poor, which only intensified as the war progressed. Many were on the verge of starvation, while others continued to dine on imported wines, duck, and oysters. Unconcerned about their next meal, wealthy white Richmonders funded a healthy black market around illegal nonessential luxuries such as liquors, silk stockings, gowns, and perfumes.³³

While they were not dining on imported wines, duck, and oysters, many Black Richmonders, both enslaved and freed, were able to make more money during the war years than they had before, and were therefore able to afford to “buy delicacies in the markets that white people [could] not afford; ride in hacks, which white people could not afford, and dress in raiment that

³² James D. Horan, *Desperate Women* (New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1981).

³³ Dabney, 1990.

nobody ought to afford.”³⁴ This was because of the labor shortage caused by most of the young white men, being conscripted into the Confederate army, which meant that the remaining black labor force was in high demand. Many of the able-bodied black men were conscripted themselves, either to fight or otherwise serve on the frontlines, put to work building fortifications, or in the iron works. This left the remaining Black population as the main source of labor for the city.

Enslaved labor was also lost to successful escapees, the number of which increased during the war. The labor shortages were so serious that the Confederate government published advertisements asking owners to lease the remaining enslaved people on their properties to the city. As Stephen Ash described it, “the many Black people remaining in the city’s wartime labor pool were much sought after by employers, and some found their own niches in private enterprise.”³⁵

The relative increase in wealth experienced by Black Richmonders during the war was offset by the increased scrutiny that white Richmonders placed upon them. Slave revolts and rebellions such as Gabriel’s (1800), and Nat Turner’s (1831) still loomed large in the minds of white Richmonders, and they were wary of the potential for rebellion that the war itself provided. They were not afraid of a successful rebellion, as they had a permanent Confederate army stationed near the city; rather they feared the chaos and violence that an uprising could bring. As such, more stringent rules were placed on the movement of Black Richmonders, enslaved and freed alike. For example, beyond not being able to carry weapons of any sort, no private gatherings of more than five Black people could take place without white supervision; enslaved people were

³⁴ Stephen V. Ash, *Rebel Richmond: Life and Death in the Confederate Capital* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), p. 175.

³⁵ Ash, 2020, p.174.

not allowed to leave home at night without written permission from their owner or employer; and free Black people were required to register annually with the court and to carry their registration papers at all times when out in public. These rules were brutally enforced, usually with whippings, by three law enforcement groups: day policemen, night watchmen and the Public Guard. The Public Guard was created by the Commonwealth of Virginia in the wake of Gabriel's Rebellion, and consisted of "a standing armed force of ninety men charged with keeping a close eye on black Richmonders and defending the capital's public buildings in the event of an insurrection."³⁶ These rules continued to be enforced during the war, with even more scrutiny given to Black people as white Richmonders grew wary that their enslaved Black laborers and 'servants' were being badly influenced by Northern abolitionists and free Black Richmonders.

The slightest indication of dissent from a Black person could result in whippings, or even in the forced sale of the slave. For example, in April 1864, William, an enslaved man, was convicted of "abetting the attempted escape of a slave." He was sentenced "not only to "receive nine and thirty lashes on his bare back, to be well laid on by the sergeant at the public whipping post," but also to be sold and transported out of the state so he could never again endanger slavery in Virginia."³⁷

Before and during the war, enslaved and freed Blacks sought ways to come together as a community and support each other, even as their families continued to be torn apart through sales. One such method was through the church. Five Black churches existed in Richmond prior to and during the war, including First African Baptist Church, which will be mentioned in later chapters. Although they were, by law, led by white ministers, they fostered community among

³⁶ Ash, 2020, p.162.

³⁷ Ash, 2020, p.164.

their Black congregants through activities other than the weekly services. For example, “they sponsored Sunday schools, raised funds to aid the needy—not just needy free Blacks but also slaves of neglectful masters—and oversaw Black baptisms, weddings, and funerals,” establishing the roots of what would become an influential institution in the lives of many Black people after the war, as will be discussed later.³⁸

Early Black fraternal organizations were also present in Richmond during the war. The ten or more organizations “brought Blacks together for camaraderie and mutual assistance.” For example, the Union Burial Ground Society was founded in 1848 by free Blacks “to advance the welfare of our race and...its morality, and...for the interment of the dead.”³⁹ Some of the organizations hosted annual balls, which were a high point in the Black social calendar before and during the war.⁴⁰

Less formally, many freed and enslaved Blacks found community through neighborhoods where free Black homeowners gathered, like Jackson Ward. When they were able, many Black homeowners took on enslaved borders, giving them the opportunity to live in a Black community, relatively protected from the racism and white supremacy that would be experienced in the rest of the city.⁴¹

Enslaved and free Black Richmonders rebelled and resisted the rules and petty cruelties imposed upon them by white Richmonders during the war in various ways. As Ash put it, “many slaves routinely evaded the laws forbidding them to drink or go about at night without a pass; free Blacks in large numbers ignored the requirement to register with the authorities; slaves and

³⁸ Ash, 2020, p.171.

³⁹ Ash, 2020, p.171.

⁴⁰ Ash, 2020.

⁴¹ Ash, 2020.

free Blacks alike paid little heed to the ban on gatherings of five or more without a white person in attendance...nor were the ordinances banning self-hire and independent lodging and boarding by slaves well enforced, for many masters were happy to let their bondsmen and women defy those rules to save themselves the trouble of arranging matters.”⁴² In other words, the war provided perfect cover for many Black people to counter some of the oppression of slavery, racism, and white supremacy, even if they were not able to escape from bondage entirely.

As had occurred in the closing year of the Revolutionary War, Richmond was attacked in the final year of the Civil War. In April 1865, it became clear to residents that Richmond could no longer be defended. With a Union army quickly closing in, thousands of Richmond residents attempted to flee, along with President Davis and his family. Much of the population had fled by the morning of April 3, 1865, when a delegation of city officials formally surrendered the city to the Union army of U.S. General Godfrey Weitzel; but President Davis and the Confederate army left behind a burning city, causing death, destruction, looting, and chaos.⁴³

While panic spread through Richmond’s white citizenry, the city’s Black population was celebratory at the approach of the Union army. They knew that the arrival of the Union army meant their freedom. Many enslaved Blacks who had been forced to remain in the city used the chaos caused by the fires, looting, and fleeing citizens and Confederate soldiers to escape. Some enterprising Black people used the general mayhem to free imprisoned slaves in the city’s various slave jails. The anarchy was accompanied by violent acts throughout the city, but there were no documented reports of enslaved people (or free Blacks) being killed on a mass scale in

⁴² Ash, 2020, p.172

⁴³ The fleeing Confederate army deliberately destroyed the city’s tobacco warehouses and the fires used for the deed spread to the business district. The fires also spread to the docked, fully loaded Confederate battleships, as well as to the city arsenal, resulting in multiple explosions. Further chaos was caused as barrels whiskey were poured into the street and people used any available receptacle to collect and drink it, resulting in many quickly becoming inebriated. For further reading about Richmond at the end of the war see Dabney, 1990; and Campbell, 2012

the city. There were reports of Confederate soldiers shooting looters, but no mention is made of whether the looters were Black or white.⁴⁴

Richmond emerged from the smoke of the fires as a shell of its former glory. The heart of the business district was gone. “Nine hundred buildings, including some 230 of the best business houses were gone, with their contents, plus three bridges across the James [River], the Henrico County courthouse, the General Court Building, two railroad depots, several tobacco warehouses, all the banks, the state armory, and a church...Only the granite customhouse...was still standing for a distance of seven blocks on both sides of Main Street.”⁴⁵

With the occupation of the Union army, the remaining white population of Richmond was given access to federal assistance. Most of the city’s food supply was destroyed in the fires, but the federal government stepped in to provide handouts of codfish and corn meal. The Federal Relief Commission reported that during the first seventeen days of the occupation they issued 128,132 rations in Richmond. With their pride reduced by their hunger, most of the population relented to receiving help from their “conquerors.”

The occupation of Richmond represented the end of the war for many of the city’s citizens, and was quickly followed by the actual end of the war with Lee’s surrender at Appomattox on April 9. Six days later, Lee returned to Richmond accompanied by several of his loyal officers. Once people realized that Lee had arrived, crowds gathered along the streets, cheering and throwing their hats in the air in celebration of their tired hero. Even the Union soldiers joined in the tribute out of respect for the general’s accomplishments during the war. Thus ended the war in Richmond. The city was bankrupt; its residents were starving; its returning soldiers were

⁴⁴ Dabney, 1990.

⁴⁵ Dabney, 1990, p.193.

penniless, wounded in body or in spirit; and many of its best young men had been killed. The future seemed grim for white Richmonders without the crutch of its former slave economy, as the assassination of Lincoln spelled the end of the relatively tolerant policies he had proclaimed. Conversely, Black Richmonders were celebrating as the Northern army entered the beleaguered city. It was reported that “such fervent ejaculations as ‘Bless de Lord!’, ‘Glory hallelujah’...were heard on all sides” of the street as the Union army passed, particularly the Black cavalymen who were greeted as heroes.⁴⁶ For Black Richmonders, this was a time of jubilation and triumph. Black Richmond prepared to take full advantage of their newfound freedom and citizenship. They were “determined to create family life while they simultaneously solidified and expanded their cultural institutions,” in order to quickly grow and strengthen their communities.⁴⁷

Even beyond its role as the Confederate capital, the suffering of Richmond during the Civil War enhanced the image of the city as the representative of the Confederacy. Through its travails during the war and the destruction it endured at the end, Richmond came to be seen as a symbol for every Confederate city—for the Confederacy as a whole—in the eyes of both white and Black Southerners. As the war came to a close and the Reconstruction Era began, the symbolic place that Richmond held in the hearts and minds of Southerners impacted the experiences of both its desolate white and euphoric Black residents. White Richmonders were left grief-stricken by the loss of the Confederacy and many of their best young men. That grief and anger would soon be turned back onto the Black population through violent campaigns to maintain white supremacy in society, the construction of monuments, and the propagation of the Lost Cause myth.⁴⁸ For Black Richmonders, the end of the war was a time of joy and great hope for the

⁴⁶ Dabney, 1990, p. 193

⁴⁷ Randolph and Tate, 2003

⁴⁸ Developed by the desolate, white Southerners after the war, the Lost Cause myth is a pseudohistorical interpretation of the Civil War that claims that the war was not fought over slavery, but over state’s rights, and that the South lost because of superior

future. As Randolph and Tate explained, "following nearly 250 years of enslavement, Black men and women could reclaim their hope and dignity, search for loved ones who had been lost in the slave system, establish familial and community relationships, and take on the mantle of freedom."⁴⁹

Important cultural and economic sites:

Jackson Ward was the location of many important architectural sites for the African American community in Richmond (see Figure 1), several of which the community constructed themselves. This dissertation will examine three such sites (see Figure 2)—Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church (Figure 3), the campus of Virginia Union University (Figure 4), and the home of Maggie Walker (Figure 5)—but other important Black constructed sites constructed for the Black community include Ebenezer Baptist Church, the headquarters of the *Richmond Planet* (a prominent Black newspaper, and the headquarters for the Grand United Order of the True Reformers.⁵⁰ The three case studies were chosen because the building(s) were constructed by African Americans between 1865 and 1920 in or around Jackson Ward, they still stand today, and they are part of a religious, educational, or financial institution.

Jackson Ward was an important site of Black business and culture, as well as being the home of many among Black Richmond's most preeminent members. Several of Richmond's most important historic Black churches are in Jackson Ward, including Sixth Mount Zion Baptist

Union numbers rather than because of inferior military strategies or the North having the superior cause. It also argues that slavery was a positive experience for the enslaved. For further reading about the Lost Cause see 1. Edward H. Bonekemper, *The Myth of the Lost Cause: Why the South Fought the Civil War and Why the North Won* (Washington, DC: Regnery History, 2022) and Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2019).

⁴⁹ Randolph and Tate, 2003, pgs. 73-74

⁵⁰ Cowell, Kathryn et al. "Jackson Ward." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1976

Church, Ebenezer Baptist Church, and Third Street Bethel A.M.E. Church.⁵¹ While other majority Black neighborhoods in the city had their own churches, many of the city's most prominent African Americans attended church services in Jackson Ward, as its churches had the largest congregations and the more prominent pastors/reverends.

Jackson Ward was also home to several Black educational institutions. As a majority Black neighborhood, the city of Richmond provided elementary and secondary schools for the neighborhood children. For example, in 1866 the Black neighborhood was able to build and open the Navy Hill School. A Black militia had to stand guard while the school was being built to prevent it from being destroyed by whites violently opposed to Black education.⁵² Initially, these schools were staffed by white teachers; eventually they were replaced by African American teachers in some of the schools, but retained white principals for many years. Despite receiving little to no support and assistance from the local or state governments, the neighborhood did host a few well-regarded secondary schools, particularly the Colored Normal School, which was where more than a few of the neighborhood's best-known natives received their high school education.⁵³

Jackson Ward is also located near Virginia Union University (VUU), a historically Black university. VUU is supported by and supportive of the community within Jackson Ward. Students of the university, both historically and presently, have resided, worked, and spent leisure time in Jackson Ward. They supported the Black-owned businesses that had transformed the neighborhood into a 'Black Wall Street'; they attended the neighborhood's many historic

⁵¹ R Gavins, *The Perils and Prospects of Southern Black Leadership 1884-1970* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1977); Chesson, M. B., 1981

⁵² Brown and Kimball, 1995

⁵³ Gertrude Woodruff Marlowe, *A Right Worthy Grand Mission: Maggie Lena Walker and the Quest for Black Economic Empowerment* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 2003).

Black churches; and the neighborhood provided housing, support, community, and protection for the students of the university.⁵⁴

Jackson Ward did not become a Black economic powerhouse by accident. In a case where racism and segregation actually helped ensure the thriving of Black businesses and professionals, the segregationist ban on Black people plying their trade and purchasing goods and services in the larger white community, forced the Black community to create their own economy within the zone of the city that they occupied. In the case of Jackson Ward, that zone was made up of a dense streetscape that allowed for a walking-based commerce on the main commercial streets (like SecondStreet).

Assisted by Black-run banks in the area—such as Maggie Walker’s St. Luke Penny Savings Bank (discussed in Chapter 1), the Savings Bank of the Grand Fountain United Order of the True Reformers, and the Knights of Pythias’ Mechanics Savings Bank—and a population embarrassed and angry with the treatment they received in white-owned shops, Jackson Ward was the home of many Black businesses. Most of the economic activity was focused on Second Street, with Broad Street mostly being left to white shops with the exception of a few notable examples, such as the St. Luke Emporium. The area was filled with banks and insurance companies but also theaters, and shops of many kinds. The likes of Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald and Bill ‘Bojangles’ Robinson performed at Jackson Ward’s famous Hippodrome Theatre. Jackson Ward was also called ‘the Harlem of the South’ for its cultural influence.⁵⁵

As such, Jackson Ward was a neighborhood practicing racial uplift, especially through people like Maggie Walker. She, through her economic leadership, assisted in creating—and

⁵⁴ Lauck, J. L. (2016). From the Ashes of Glory: The Rise and Fall of Jackson Ward. *Student Publications*, 471.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey L Lauck, “From the Ashes of Glory: The Rise and Fall of Jackson Ward,” *Student Publications*, 2016; Atiya Jordan, “From Tulsa And Beyond: A Nation Of Black Wall Streets,” *Black Enterprise*, June 19, 2023.

epitomized in herself—a sense of racial pride and cooperation in Jackson Ward. The concept and ideology of Black uplift (or racial uplift) was born in the Reconstruction-era South and spread as Reconstruction gave way to the brutality and violence of the Jim Crow era. It was the creation of a Black elite desperate to separate themselves from the unwashed Black masses before they were lynched. This ideology preached “self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, accumulation of wealth, and accommodation” as a way for “New Negroes” to differentiate themselves from “the ignorant, lazy, dishonest and dangerous Negro that impedes our progress,” as Rev. Elam White described his fellows in 1902.⁵⁶

The growth of this Black middle class (made up of families like the Walkers) was also important to the success of Jackson Ward. This group was made up of professionals: artisans, preachers, postal workers, seamstresses, teachers, and small business owners. With more disposable income than the working class, this demographic drove the economy with their work and with their wallets.⁵⁷

Richmond Planet:

The *Richmond Planet* was Richmond’s best known Black newspaper. Founded in 1882, it became the voice of Black Richmonders—and many Virginians—until 1938.

The paper was the result of a pooling of resources by thirteen formerly enslaved men. The men chose from among their number Edwin Archer Randolph (a graduate from Yale) as their first editor-in-chief; James E. Merriweather and E.R. Carter as contributing editors; and Reuben T. Hill as manager, while the rest wrote the occasional article. The paper was not the

⁵⁶ Irvine Garland Penn, *United Negro: His Problems and His Progress* (Charleston, SC: Legare Street Press, 2022).

For further reading on the Black middle class, their growth and their ethics, see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

⁵⁷ Gaines, 2012

primary occupation of most of the men: most worked as school teachers, though a few, such as Randolph and Carter, were also active in politics.

In 1884 John Mitchell Jr. became editor-in-chief of the paper—a role he would continue in for forty-five years. Beyond writing articles and editing the paper, he contributed editorial cartoons and even his own artwork. The paper also purchased new press equipment. The paper was completely transformed under Mitchell’s leadership, becoming known as an unfaltering defender of the Black community and a steadfast advocate against racial injustice. It reported on lynching across the country, as well as on the actions of the Ku Klux Klan, and on segregation, even as its articles and editorials fiercely advocated for political and civil rights for African Americans. By 1904, the paper was turning a modest profit, having reached 4,200 in weekly circulation, and had become known as “one of the South’s most forceful Black voices.” The editorials and cartoons “denounced racial prejudice and exposed those who perpetrated acts of violence against African Americans.” Mitchell remained editor-in-chief until his death in 1929. The *Richmond Planet* continued to be printed for only nine more years before merging with the *Afro-American* in 1938.⁵⁸

The *Richmond Planet* played an important and influential role in the shaping of the opinions of many African Americans across the country. It was also the paper of record for Jackson Ward, reporting on local events as well as national and international news. As such, the paper and its articles have become an integral part of the archives of the three cases examined in this dissertation. The stories of Maggie Walker, Virginia Union University and Sixth Mount Zion are chronicled in the *Richmond Planet*, with articles detailing some of their highest and lowest moments.

⁵⁸ “The Richmond Planet, Masthead, Richmond, 1893,” Omeka RSS, accessed September 8, 2025.

National Register nomination:

On July 30, 1976, Jackson Ward was added to the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district. Five years later, Richmond opened its first Black History Museum which documented numerous sites of Black history. Despite these gains, histories of Richmond still only glancingly acknowledge the importance and impact of spaces such as Jackson Ward, Virginia Union University, and Evergreen Cemetery to the neighborhood and to the Black community of Richmond. This dissertation seeks to begin to address that explicit omission by centering Jackson Ward and its own commemoration of Black history.

Literature Review

This literature review seeks to ground the research and findings presented in this dissertation in the existing literature on place-making and spaces of memory.

Place-Making:

The concept of place making was born in the 1960s within the fields of urban design and urban planning, where it was used to describe a physical transformation and end product of a created space. It developed as a response to modernism and to the planning practices of the early part of the twentieth century, which had produced generally uninviting and sterile spaces. Urbanists Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte saw the need for urban spaces that responded to the people living in and interacting with them, rather than the early twentieth century focus on the automobile.⁵⁹ The term was later adopted and expanded upon by numerous other disciplines such as urban planning, sociology, and architecture. Over the years, the concept has evolved significantly. Today, Akbar describes place-making as a set of “reiterative social practices, meanings that are made and remade on a daily basis.” In other words, places are made by the

⁵⁹ Keidar et al. 2003. “Progress in Placemaking.” *Planning Theory & Practice* 25 (1): 143-151

people who use them, by the meanings that they ascribe to places through the ways that they use them.⁶⁰

The changes to our current understanding of place and place-making can be traced back to the 1990s, when study of place-making was focused on the decision-making process. In 1998, Patsy Healey described how the expectations of the urban planner changed from being the builder of places alone, to being a facilitator of institutions within communities creating their own (hopefully ongoing) place-making undertakings.⁶¹

The shift in the 1990s opened the concept to the idea that place-making could be practiced by anyone—not only by professionals. Henri Lefebvre’s notion of “lived space,” the space where life and human experience are felt, is grounded in this concept. Expanding the concept even further, Lepofsky and Fraser revealed their theory of “flexible citizenship,” which put forward that “place-making is not only for professionals and neighborhood residents, but must be open for other stakeholder groups that have a decision-making role even though they are not residents of the particular target neighborhood.” In other words, place-making is not just for professionals and those who live in the area, it is for anyone who interacts with the space.⁶²

Spaces of Memory:

Richmond is home to many monuments and memorials and is known in particular for its Confederate commemorative landscape. As the former capital of the Confederacy, the city hosted the Confederate government, and the sites from which the Confederacy was run have been marked or preserved to this day—such as the White House of the Confederacy.⁶³ While

⁶⁰ Poeti Nazura Akbar and Jurian Edelenbos, “Positioning Place-Making as a Social Process: A Systematic Literature Review,” *Cogent Social Sciences* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2021).

⁶¹ P. Healey, “Building Institutional Capacity through Collaborative Approaches to Urban Planning,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 30, no. 9 (September 1998): 1531–46.

⁶² Akbar and Edelenbos, 2021

⁶³ Malinda W. Collier, *White House of the Confederacy: An Illustrated History* (William Byrd Press, 1994).

white Richmonders erected monuments and memorials to the Confederacy and the Lost Cause, Black Richmonders built and cultivated what we call spaces of memory: spaces such as the sites that will be examined in this dissertation, which represented historical moments and the cultural heritage of Black Richmond. This section of the literature review will examine the development of the literature around spaces of memory.

Sites of memory came to the forefront of discussion in the international preservation community in the 2010s, but the concept had been discussed within the circle of historians since at least the 1980s.⁶⁴

The first major theoretical work on “sites of memory” came from French historian Pierre Nora, who published “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Memoire” in the 1989 issue of the humanities journal, *Representations*, followed by the three volume book series *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* in 1996.⁶⁵ It is Nora who is credited with first defining spaces/sites of memory, or “les lieux de memoire” (“the places of memories”) as “any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community.”⁶⁶ In this article, and the books that followed it, Nora discussed the relationship between memory and history and outlined the characteristics of spaces of memory.

Nora explains that spaces of memory are ‘spaces’ “in three senses of the word—material, symbolic, and functional.” Sites of memory, according to Nora, can be defined by their materiality. They can be portable (e.g. Jewish Tablets of the Law); topographical, “owing

⁶⁴ International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, rep., *Interpretation of Sites of Memory January 31 - 2018 Study Commissioned* (UNESCO, n.d.).

⁶⁵ Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁶⁶ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” *Representations* 26, no. 1 (April 1989): 7–24.

everything to the specificity of their location and to being rooted in the ground” (e.g. Archives Nationales in the Hotel Soubise); or monumental, “...not to be confused with architectural sites alone. Statues or monuments to the dead, for instance, owe their meaning to their intrinsic existence; even though their location is far from arbitrary, one could justify relocating them without altering their meaning. Such is not the case with ensembles constructed over time, which draw their meaning from the complex relations between their elements: such are mirrors of a world or period, like the cathedral of Chartres or the palace of Versailles.”⁶⁷

Sites of memory can be defined as such by their function. This can refer to anything from a memorial society or veteran’s association that memorializes an otherwise inexpressible event that would otherwise be forgotten along with the people who had actually experienced it, to objects like manuals and dictionaries designed to educate future generations.

Finally, sites of memory can be defined as such by their symbolism. For example, Nora distinguishes between sites that are dominant and those that are dominated. Dominant sites are “spectacular and triumphant, imposing and generally characteristically have the coldness and solemnity of official ceremonies.” Conversely, dominated sites “are places of refuge, sanctuaries of spontaneous devotion and silent pilgrimage, where one finds the living heart of memory.” Nora used the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Paris and monuments to Paul Valery as examples of dominant monuments, and the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes and Jean-Paul Sartre’s burial place as examples of dominated monuments.⁶⁸ While the symbolic aspects of these sites are influenced by their physical and functional qualities, the (for example) difference between dominant and dominated sites is not purely physical or functional. It is based on intangible

⁶⁷ Nora, 1989

⁶⁸ Nora, 1989

characteristics—how they make visitors feel when in these spaces, and what the spaces mean to those visitors.

This concept has been applied to the Black built environment by architectural historians such as Craig Barton. In his essay “Race and Memory in the Urbanism of the American South,” Barton discusses how majority Black East Selma (Alabama) was physically and socially separated, and architecturally distinct from majority white West Selma. He argues that the Black community was anchored by two of the city’s oldest Black churches, functioning as sites of memory for their dual role of spiritual sanctuary and “symbolic political representation for the Black community.”⁶⁹

In 2018 the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) published a report on interpreting sites of memory for the World Heritage Centre of UNESCO. While the majority of the report focuses on possible preservation practices for sites of memory, the document also contains a section devoted to defining sites of memory, and explaining what spaces and objects qualify in this relatively newly recognized memorial typology.⁷⁰

Building on Nora’s definition, the report posits that sites of memory could include: “places such as museums, cathedrals, mosques, temples, palaces, cemeteries, archives and memorials; concepts and practices such as commemorations, mottos, and all rituals; and objects such as inherited property, commemorative monuments, manuals, emblems, basic texts, and symbols.”⁷¹ According to this definition, sites of memory do not just refer to physical spaces of

⁶⁹ Craig Evan Barton, essay, in *Sites of Memory: Perspectives on Architecture and Race*, ed. Craig Evan Barton (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001), 1–12.

⁷⁰ International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, rep., *Interpretation of Sites of Memory January 31 - 2018 Study Commissioned* (UNESCO, n.d.).

⁷¹ International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, rep., *Interpretation of Sites of Memory January 31 - 2018 Study Commissioned* (UNESCO, n.d.), 14.

memory, but may also include singular objects without inherent spatial components (e.g. texts) as well as commemorative practices.

Dissertation Overview and Methods:

In order to carry out this research I conducted a series of site visits to three religious, educational and financial institutions in Jackson Ward, combined with visits to their relevant archives. This field work enabled me to perform a case-study analysis of the three sites.

Criteria Development and Case Study Selection:

The case study sites were selected based on the following selection criteria:

- Located in or around Jackson Ward
- Constructed by Black individuals or communities
- Extant
- Constructed between 1865 (end of the Civil War) and 1920
- Part of a religious, educational, or financial institution

Selected Case Studies:

Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church is a Baptist church in Jackson Ward. It was first constructed in 1887, and both its original architect and its renovations architect were African American. The church and surrounding community banded together to afford both the land and construction costs, and also constructed the church building themselves.

The Maggie Walker House, also located in Jackson Ward, was the home of Maggie Walker—an important part of Jackson Ward and Black Richmond history. A Jackson Ward native, Walker became a leader of one of Richmond's most successful Black mutual aid societies, the Independent Order of St Luke, as well as one of the first Black women to own and run a bank in the United States. Walker conducted much of the work for both institutions from her home on Jackson Ward's most affluent blocks. Originally built in 1883 by one of the city's first Black architects, each further addition was conducted by African American architects and builders.

Construction for the Virginia Union University campus began in 1899. The Historically Black university was the result of a merger between two—eventually three—smaller Black colleges. While the architect of the original campus structures was a white architect from New York, the buildings themselves were constructed by Black builders and workers.

Archives:

I visited two archives in the course of this research. The archive at the Maggie Walker House, cared for and curated by the National Park Service, contains archival materials from the life of Maggie Walker. The collection includes her letters, photographs, writings, and materials relating to the Independent Order of St Luke (the African American fraternal order of which Walker was a member) and to the St Luke Bank, of which Walker was president.

The archives at the Virginia Union University contained archival materials relating to Virginia Union University and Maggie Walker, as well as documents relating to the history of Jackson Ward, including maps and newspaper articles.

There is no significant archive for the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, beyond their museum and archival materials for John Jasper—the church’s first and most influential pastor. There are photos and oral histories passed down within the congregation, but very little written artifacts relating to the church’s history. As will be discussed in the chapter relating to the church, in order to supplement the materials that were found, I utilized newspaper archives to explore how the church—and the other sites—were discussed at the time, and I conducted an interview with the current church historian. While a few other newspapers are referenced, the majority of the newspaper articles utilized in this dissertation come from the Jackson Ward based, historic Black newspaper, the *Richmond Planet*. I accessed archives for this newspaper at

both the Library of Virginia (in microfiche format) and at the Library of Congress (in digitized format).

A Brief Discussion of Monument Avenue

The story of the Monument Avenue Confederate monuments showcases the relationship that Richmond has with the institutions memorializing the Confederacy—groups such as the Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans—who led the push to erect monuments on increasingly visible and politically charged sites. The saga of the removal of the monuments emphasizes the ways that the local and state level institutions were involved in the building, maintenance and ultimate removal of the monuments, a level of attention rarely afforded to African American monuments, except in a few cases. These cases, which sparked my interest in the topic of memorialization, stressed the lack of understanding and attention given to Black institutions and the spaces of memory that they produce.

Statues of Confederate generals and soldiers, as well as monuments to the Confederacy more broadly, began to be erected almost as soon as the war ended. At first, memorials appeared in cemeteries and on battle fields across the South—the mournful tributes of grieving white mothers, wives, and daughters. These early memorial spaces were racialized but not explicitly political, focused on the tragedy of the immense losses suffered by nearly every city, town, village and family in the South. They were typically funded and erected by white citizens who had experienced the war. However, as always happens, the war generations grew old, became less active, and died, but the movement they had begun to ensure that the generations of Southerners that followed would never forget the ‘lost cause’ and those who died for it, did not die with them. Instead, a new generation—young white men and women who had not experienced the war—took up the mantle of monument construction and embraced the potential

of the political message that these monuments to the lost cause could create. The vast majority of the monuments that we see (or saw, since many have been removed in the last several years) in public spaces—in front of the local courthouse or public library, or at the center of the roundabout of a major public boulevard, in the name of your local public school or important street—can be dated to this second, more blatantly political, wave of monument building.⁷²

The Robert E. Lee equestrian statue, was erected in the first wave according to its date of construction, but also carries a political message more akin to later monuments. Almost immediately after the death of General Robert E. Lee in 1870, former Confederates began to discuss the possibility of a statue honoring their hero. By June 1887, plans to construct a monument to the general in a field just outside the city limits were made official, following a public subscription campaign encompassing all the former Confederate states. The location of this first large-scale attempt at commemorating the Lost Cause in Richmond was of great symbolic importance to white Southerners. This was not, as were many Confederate monuments of the time, solely (or even mostly) a representation of a grieving family or community. This statue was meant to convey a political message: Southerners saw the construction of the monument as a sign that they—and the beliefs that they had fought for—were not completely defeated. As such, every aspect of the monument was discussed and debated throughout the South.⁷³

The Robert E. Lee statue was unveiled on Monument Avenue on May 29, 1890, with great pomp and circumstance. Approximately 150,000 people attended the unveiling ceremony, including two of General Lee's daughters, Mary Custis Lee and Mildred Childe Lee. The Lee

⁷² Sarah Shields Driggs, Richard Guy Wilson, and Robert P. Winthrop, *Richmond's Monument Avenue* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁷³ Driggs, et al. 2001

Monument Association—the result of a merger between the original Lee Monument Association (a veterans’ group founded by Jubal Early, a notorious Confederate general) and the Ladies’ Lee Monument Association (made up of the board of the powerful Hollywood Cemetery Memorial Association)—had spent about \$52,000 (\$1,845,988.57 in 2025⁷⁴) in the construction of this bronze equestrian statue.⁷⁵

It is important to note that the statue could be considered as part of a set of major monuments that were put up along a purpose-built avenue, known to history as Monument Avenue. Monument Avenue is one of Richmond’s historic main avenues, located to the west of the main city center, and north-west of Jackson Ward. It is made up of east and southbound roads, divided by treelined, grassy malls, and lined with stately houses. It is unique in Richmond—and perhaps in the United States—because it was born for the express purpose of memorializing the Confederacy and the Lost Cause. The city of Richmond has grown and expanded to encompass Monument Avenue, but when the avenue was inaugurated with the installation of its first statue—Robert E. Lee—it was surrounded by fields. Since then, five additional monuments were added to Monument Avenue, and a wealthy white neighborhood exploded to life around the new monumental center of the city.

Of the six monuments that were erected on Monument Avenue, five were Confederate monuments: Matthew Fontaine Maury, Stonewall Jackson, Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and J.E.B. Stuart. Only the final monument portrayed an African American, Arthur Ashe, the first

⁷⁴ “Inflation Rate between 1890-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$52,000 in 1890 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed September 9, 2025, <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1890?amount=52000>.

⁷⁵ Driggs, et al. 2001

African American professional tennis player—unveiled in 1996, sixty-seven years after the previous monument.⁷⁶

It is perhaps unsurprising that white Richmonders largely responded with great pride and joy to the installation of each of the Confederate monuments. Hundreds of thousands of people attended each successive unveiling, and prominent Southern leaders were called upon to give rousing speeches at the events. The white local newspapers dedicated whole spreads to each new monument, and followed the ins-and-outs of the processes to fund and build these monuments to their heroes. More nationally focused newspapers also covered the unveilings—*The New York Times*, for instance, published a commemorative cover page for the event, including a chromolithograph by A. Hoen, featuring a large portrait of Lee, surrounded by Confederate monuments and landmarks, as well as etchings of Stuart, A.P. Hill, Albert Sydney Johnston, and Jackson. In fact, the entire day's issue (all eleven pages) was dedicated to the event, showcasing histories of the war, a list of the festivities, and information about future monuments.⁷⁷

Monument Avenue—and the Lee monument in particular—would continue to be the site of many Richmond-based Confederate memorials, celebrations, and gatherings for white supremacists well into the twenty-first century. Even as other cities erected statues to Lee and other important Confederate leaders, the Richmond equestrian statue continued to garner particular interest and meaning, as the first major statue and the statue erected for the Confederate capital.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Driggs, et al. 2001

⁷⁷ Driggs, et al. 2001

⁷⁸ Driggs, et al. 2001; Sabrina Tavernise, “Virginia Removes Robert E. Lee Statue From State Capital,” *New York Times*, September 8, 2021; and Chris Suarez, Mel Leonor, and Sabrina Moreno, “‘This Statue Represents Division:’ The Nation’s Largest Confederate Statue No Longer Stands on Monument Avenue,” *The Richmond Times-Dispatch*, September 8, 2021.

The African American communities of Richmond also responded to the statue. When the Richmond city council voted on appropriating \$7,500 (\$263,570.60 in 2025⁷⁹) to fund the unveiling ceremonies, three Black city councilors—including John Mitchell Jr, editor-in-chief of the *Richmond Planet*, the main local Black paper—voted against the order.⁸⁰ Beyond reporting on the monument itself, they responded to the celebratory parades that accompanied the unveiling of the monument, with their own parade five months later. Mitchell organized a parade for October 16, 1890 (Emancipation Day). About 5000 marchers took part in the 2-mile-long parade, including representatives from 40 business, fraternal, and civic organizations, and escorted by Black militias and bands. At the end of the parade about 10,000 people gathered to listen to the chosen speakers, including president of Livingston College (in North Carolina), Reverend Joseph Charles-Price and John Mercer Langston, Virginia’s sole Black congressman.⁸¹

⁷⁹ “Inflation Rate between 1890-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$7,500 in 1890 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed September 9, 2025, <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1890?amount=7500>.

⁸⁰ “The Lee Monument Unveiling: Thousands Present—Confederate Flags Everywhere Displayed,” *Richmond Planet*, May 31, 1890.; “Rebel Flags,” *Richmond Planet*, June 7, 1890.; “The South May Revere,” *Richmond Planet*, June 7, 1890.; “An Old Colored Man,” *Richmond Planet*, June 7, 1890; “The Negro,” *Richmond Planet*, June 7, 1890.

⁸¹ “The Lee Monument Unveiling: Thousands Present—Confederate Flags Everywhere Displayed,” *Richmond Planet*, May 31, 1890; “A Gala Day: The Parade A Success,” *Richmond Planet*, October 18, 1890; “Thanks,” *Richmond Planet*, October 25, 1890.

Appendix

Figure 1: Map of Jackson Ward with important Black cultural institutions marked

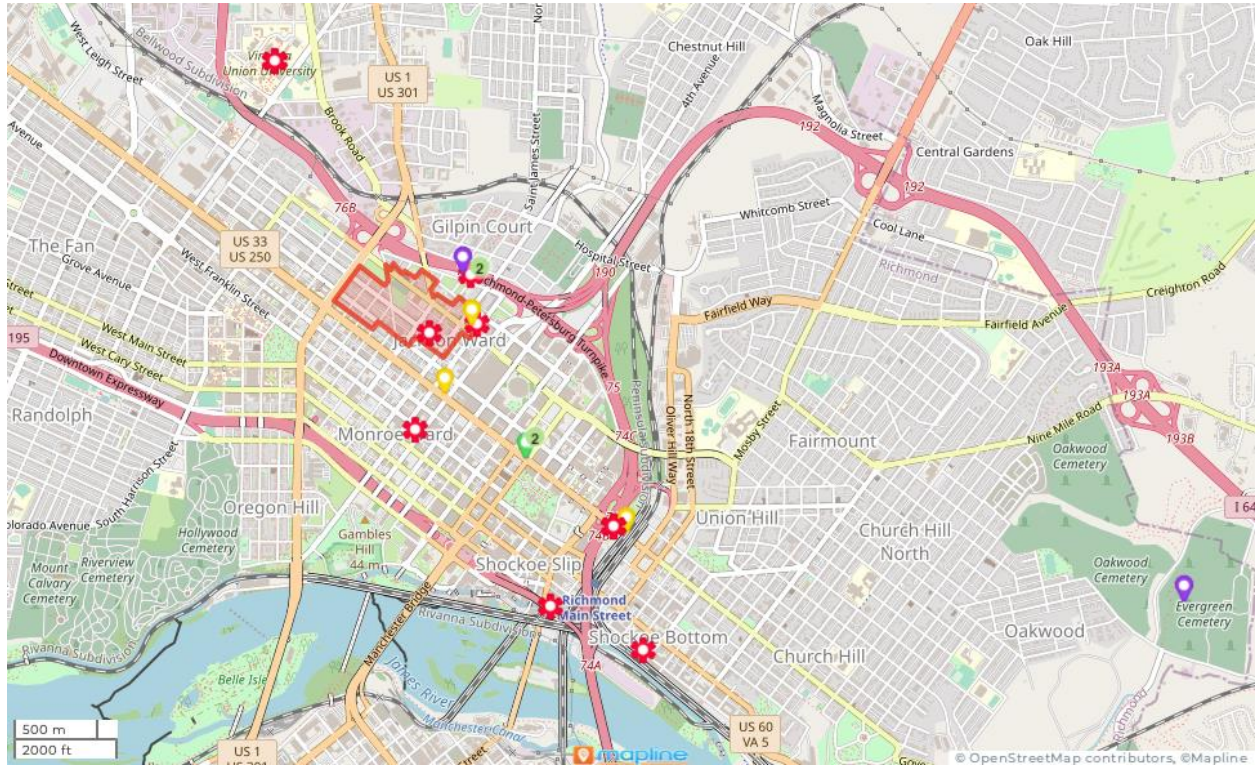


Figure 2: Map of Jackson Ward with the three case studies marked (Maggie Walker House in yellow; Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church in purple; Virginia Union University in red)

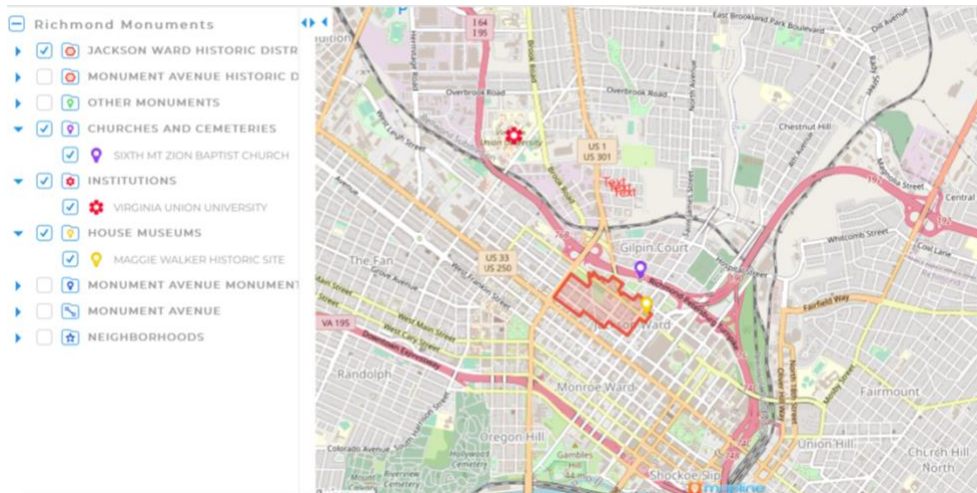


Figure 3: Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, photograph by author



Figure 4: Postcard of VUU university, c.1930-1935



Figure 5: Maggie Walker House; photo by author



Chapter 1 - Maggie Walker House

The Maggie Walker House (MLW Figure 1) is an historic house and site in Richmond, Virginia. It was the home of Maggie Lena Walker (MLW Figure 2), the first African American woman to charter a bank, and the first to become president of a bank. The Walker home, located at 110 East Leigh Street,⁸² reflects the multiple roles that Walker played, the most important of which were as family matriarch, community leader, and banker. Maggie Walker, and her house, offer a uniquely cross-sectoral view of African American life in Richmond, as the Maggie Walker House was not only the Walker family home, but also Maggie Walker's office from which she led the Independent Order of St Luke and the St Luke Bank, and a meeting space for some of the most influential citizens of Jackson Ward. In this chapter we will explore how Maggie Walker and the Maggie Walker House exemplify Jackson Ward's role as a Black economic hub of the South, but beneath this important role, Jackson Ward also provided and required a context of Black racial cooperation and race pride; a role which Maggie Walker both assisted in creating as well as epitomizing it herself. This chapter provides a brief overview of Walker's life, the triumphs and tragedies that influenced her.

⁸² The official designation of 110 East Leigh Street is 110½ East Leigh Street. In 1888 another building was constructed between it and 108 East Leigh Street, prompting the '½' designation. Records have used both designations when referring to the property. I will be using 110 East Leigh Street, except in the case of direct quotations.

Maggie Walker Background

Maggie Walker was born Maggie Lena Draper on July 15, 1867 to Elizabeth Draper. After her mother's marriage to her stepfather William Mitchell in May 1868, her name was officially changed to Maggie Lena Mitchell. Walker was raised with her half-brother, Johnnie in a house on College Alley.⁸³

She attended school and church within Jackson Ward. As will be discussed later, her education at some of the best schools available to Black children in Richmond, had a significant impact on Walker and the person (leader, activist, matriarch) that she would become.

Maggie Mitchell married Armstead Walker Jr, whom she had met during a church event, on September 14, 1886 at the Frist African Baptist Church. Rev. Holmes, who had been so influential in Maggie's Church life as a young girl, performed the marriage rites. Armstead was a successful brick contractor who would go on to build many important buildings in Jackson Ward. He was also a fellow Normal School graduate, and Walker knew many of his family members well.

The couple may have started their life together living with Armstead's parents, but by 1888 they had moved into their own home at 719 North 3rd Street. It was here that Walker gave birth to the couple's first two children: Russell Eccles Talmage Walker (born December 9, 1890) and Armstead Mitchell (born July 8, 1893). Tragically, their third son died at seven months old on February 4 1894. In April of that same year Walker's brother, Johnnie, also died at age 24.

With the grief and loss associated with their 3rd Street home, it is perhaps unsurprising that the family moved sometime in 1894. Their new home was at 907 North 7th Street. The

⁸³ Gertrude Woodruff Marlowe, *A Right Worthy Grand Mission: Maggie Lena Walker and the Quest for Black Economic Empowerment* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 2003).

family of four was soon joined by Margaret Anderson, a young relative of Armstead. Walker and Armstead adopted the child, called Polly, and she became Walker's invaluable household helpmeet, helping with the housework and caring for the children. Polly continued to live with and help Walker until Walker's death, even after her own marriage in 1911.

The family resided at 907 North 7th Street until 1905. It was there that Walker gave birth to her last child, Melvin DeWitt Walker (born August 10 1897). By the time Melvin was born, Walker had become deeply involved with the Independent Order of St Luke (IOSL), which will be discussed later in this chapter. Her leadership role was growing, and she had turned her attention to trying to improve the organization to the best of her ability. When questioned on how a housewife had so much time to spend focused on issues outside of her household, she claimed that her household was so well run that she needed something else beyond her domestic role to stop herself from becoming a "spendthrift."⁸⁴

Education

Smart and dedicated to her studies, Walker excelled in school throughout childhood. She began her education at the Valley School in 1872, followed by two years of secondary education at the Navy Hill School, the only school in Richmond at the time to have exclusively Black faculty, although it was required to have a white principal.

Walker then attended the Armstrong Normal and High School,⁸⁵ the best Black public school in Richmond. The 'normal' designation meant that the Colored Normal School prepared students to become teachers, a popular and esteemed profession within the African American

⁸⁴ Marlowe, 2003

⁸⁵ The school was named for General Samuel Chapman Armstrong. Marybeth Gasman and Roger L Geiger, eds., *Higher Education for African Americans before the Civil Rights Era, 1900-1964* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).

community. Armstrong Normal and High School, as the name suggests, accepted students to both the regular high school degree and the teaching degree. An article published in the *New York Globe* in May 1883 (Walker's senior year) described the school as having about 300 students, including seventy who studied in the 'Normal Department.'⁸⁶ The Normal Department students were allowed to gain teaching experience with their high school classmates, conducting primary classes taught in the basement.

With only forty openings available for the Normal Department, competition was fierce, and Walker had to take an entrance exam to gain admission. The course took three years—junior, intermediate and senior. The course to become a teacher was not easy, as graduates had to be proficient in all of the standard subjects. Walker's classes included "United States and ancient history, penmanship, literature, writing, debating, arithmetic, algebra, physiology, physics, chemistry, geography, and astronomy." Special attention was placed on composition, penmanship, literature, and rhetoric.⁸⁷

In the fall of 1881, Walker's expected graduation year, the school board made the already demanding course even more difficult by adding a language requirement of French, German, or Latin. This meant that Walker's entire class had to remain for an extra year to fulfill the surprise new requirement; there was no graduating class in 1882. The following year, when Walker finally graduated, only ten of her incoming class were with her, many of whom would go on to become important and influential members of African American society. Walker's graduating cohort included John Mitchell (no relation), future owner, editor and publisher of the *Richmond*

⁸⁶ New York Globe, 5 May 1883 (according to Marlowe this article may have been written by T. Thomas Fortune)

⁸⁷ Candice F. Ransom, *Maggie L. Walker: Pioneering Banker and Community Leader* (Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2009).

Planet newspaper; Mary Cary, future medical doctor; Wendell P. Dabney, future editor of a Cincinnati newspaper; and still others would become notable lawyers and educators.⁸⁸

Walker graduated in 1883, but even that happy event was at first marred by a cloud of discrimination. The Richmond school board's long-standing policy was to host separate graduation ceremonies for their Black students. White students would have their graduation ceremony in the Richmond Theater, and Black students' ceremony would take place at a local church, usually First Baptist because it had the largest seating capacity (about two thousand). Walker's graduating class protested the policy and forced the school board to allow their ten-person class to have their graduation ceremony at the Richmond Theater, just like their white counterparts. This would be Walker's first official stint as a community organizer, and she and her fellow graduates would learn several valuable lessons from the experience.

After informing their principal, Lizzie Knowles, of their decision to insist on graduating from "...the Richmond Theater or nowhere," the determined group of ten attended a meeting with their principal, faculty, and the school superintendent. The meeting consisted of the students being told that they "were far better off than their ancestors" and that they should be grateful for what they already had. They were also informed that, if they continued to insist on graduating from the Richmond Theater, they would not be allowed to graduate at all. The ten students refused to back down, arguing that "our parents pay taxes just the same as you white folks, and you've got no business spending big money out of those taxes to pay for the theater for white children unless you do the same for Black children."

Walker and her classmates learned many invaluable lessons from their fight for equality with their white counterparts. Perhaps most importantly, they learned that their fight for racial

⁸⁸ Muriel Miller Branch and Dorothy Marie Rice, *Pennies to Dollars: The Story of Maggie Lena Walker* (North Haven, Conn: Linnet Books, 1997).

uplift would involve more than proving their academic and professional abilities. Their successful fight to force the school superintendent to allow their class to graduate from the same venue as white graduates showed the students the power in their collective, community movement. These were lessons that the future community leaders among the group, including Maggie Walker, took to heart.

The role and profession of teacher was held in high esteem in the African American community. Education was highly valued as a respectable route for individual and race advancement and uplift, and those who were able to achieve it—as well as grant it—were held very dear. Additionally, teaching had become a popular occupation for both men and women as one of the few non-menial jobs open to Black people.

Just as Walker was completing her final years of high school, African Americans in Richmond achieved an unexpected series of victories in the realm of education. Virginia Governor William E. Cameron had entered office in January 1882 as a member of the Readjuster Party. He and his party had restored the decimated public-school budget, allowing for the opening of several new schools and the hiring of over 3000 new teachers across the state. He also appointed two Black men to the Richmond school board, which resulted in a lawsuit. The court, in a turn of events that surprised everyone, ruled in favor of retaining the appointees. On May 22, 1882, First African Baptist Church hosted a “general meeting of the colored citizens of Richmond” to draft a set of resolutions to present to the school board. In addition to praising Governor Cameron and the Readjusters for what they had already done for African American students in Virginia, the resolutions they presented included a demand for colored teachers and colored principals in colored schools. The school board listened and acted: by the following academic year (fall 1883), all African American schools, with the exception of the Normal

School, had Black faculty and principals.⁸⁹ The graduation boycott organized by Walker and her fellow classmates of 1883 graduates is considered part of this broader movement of educational equity within Richmond's public school system.⁹⁰ It should be noted that these actions took place thirteen years before the Supreme Court's infamous "separate but equal" ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (May 18, 1896), which legalized racial segregation across the United States.⁹¹

This state of affairs would last a tragically short time, as Black principals were only tolerated in Richmond public schools for a single year. The school board fired all the Black principals as well as all of the Black male teachers in the spring of 1884. No complaints had been made against the fired teachers, and no charges had been brought against the ousted principals; the school board simply wanted them removed, part of the continued backlash to Reconstruction and the quickly growing list of Jim Crow policies and laws. No moves were made to remove Black women teachers, and so Walker was allowed to continue teaching in Richmond. White principals and teachers were quickly brought in to replace the outgoing faculty, but the response of the remaining Black women teachers (including Walker) is sadly not recorded.

Walker, having just graduated as the new African American teachers were being appointed for the 1883-84 academic year, was one of the twenty-two new Black faculty hired for that year. Walker was assigned to the Valley School for her first year of teaching. It is not known what class Walker taught in her first year. We do know that she started her second-year teaching first Primary B and was paid \$35 per month (approximately \$1,113.99 in 2025⁹²). That spring, she taught third Grammar B, and then taught third Primary B for one month. The following year,

⁸⁹ Marlowe, 2003, pg. 17

⁹⁰ Branch and Rice, 1997

⁹¹ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

⁹² "Inflation Rate between 1883-2025: Inflation Calculator," \$35 in 1883 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed August 11, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1883?amount=35>.

in her third and final year, she taught third Grammar A, and received \$42.50 a month (approximately \$1,395.11 in 2025⁹³). Walker's salary would have been considered high for the time, especially compared to the salary of domestic workers and laborers. However, that is only before taking into consideration that, if a teacher could not teach for any reason and required a substitute, the teacher was required to pay one dollar a day to the substitute out of their own paycheck. Work obligations like this helps to explain the high demand for sickness insurance among professionals at this time—something that benevolent societies like Walker's Independent Order of St. Luke would help to provide.

The importance of education in the African American community at this time cannot be overstated. The teaching profession drew some of the best minds the community had to offer, with many members of Richmond's Black elite having been teachers at some point in their careers. Teachers were often the best-educated members of the community and took on community roles reflecting this. In addition to teaching, many Black teachers doubled as ministers, journalists, and newspaper editors. Over time, schools and various teaching associations, became places where members of the Black elite regularly gathered together and formed connections. For example, there were fourteen other teachers at Valley School when Walker joined in 1883. Included amongst them was John Mitchell Jr., future editor of the *Richmond Planet*; fellow Normal School classmate Mary Cary, who would go on to marry W. P. Burrell, the future G. W. Secretary of the Grand Fountain of the United Order of the True Reformers; and Emma Walker, sister of Armstead Walker and Walker's future sister-in-law. These valuable connections would prove very helpful to Walker in her quest to uplift the Black community in Richmond.

⁹³ "Inflation Rate between 1884-2025: Inflation Calculator," \$42.50 in 1884 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1884?amount=42.50>.

Just as many smart young Black women of her time, Walker remained in the public school system as a teacher for only three more years. Her ultimate departure from the school was forced upon her by marriage, as at the time married women could not be teachers.⁹⁴ Walker would utilize her experience as a teacher in forming and then expanding youth groups within the Independent Order of St. Luke.

The House

Walker purchased the building that would become the Maggie Walker House (MLW Figure 1) in 1904. The house stood at 110 East Clay (or Leigh) Street. Known as ‘quality row’, this part of Clay Street was one of the best residential streets in Jackson Ward or in Black Richmond as a whole. The house, the focus of this chapter, had a history prior to being purchased by Maggie Walker, which we will discuss before describing the changes made by Walker.

The house was first built on the 110 East Leigh Street lot in 1883. Since then, the building has been the home of three different families: the Fergusons, the Jones, and the Walkers. The original residents of the house were Dr. James Ferguson and his family, who purchased the property from the estate of Joseph Jackson as an unimproved lot in 1882. The City Directory lists John Ferguson as a Black teacher in 1884 and then as a physician in 1885. Robert Parker, a Black coal and wood merchant, is also listed as residing on the property in 1885, with Ferguson having sold him one-half interest in the property. Dr Ferguson owned the property from 1882 until 1888/89.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Suggs, Celia Jackson. "Maggie Lena Walker." *Negro History Bulletin* 63, no. 1-4 (Jan, 2000): 39-44.

⁹⁵ Margaret Pearson Mickler. (1982). Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Historic Structure Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service.

Ferguson must have immediately begun construction, as the house appears for the first time in the Richmond city records in 1883. He hired the Black architect, George Boyd, to design and build his new home.⁹⁶ The proposed house was described by the *Virginia Star* newspaper as “a very handsome brick house...two stories high, stock brick front and will contain some nine or ten rooms and be furnished with all the modern improvements.”⁹⁷ The *Virginia Star* was a well-respected Black newspaper in Richmond. Established in 1877, it was the first Black run newspaper to circulate in Richmond.⁹⁸ The newspaper’s main readership was the educated Black middle-class; those who acquired relatively high-paying jobs as teachers, lawyers, and doctors, or business owners, those who could afford to potentially buy or build a house like the 110 E. Leigh Street house. Eager to differentiate themselves from poor Blacks, the Black middle-class adhered to a strict code of respectability; which included cultivating a refined domestic situation. The home, and everything and everyone inside of it, was a stage on which respectability could be shown. Black newspapers were one way that the aesthetics of respectability could be disseminated.⁹⁹ The sharing of the description of the home of a local doctor could be seen as a way for the newspaper to show readers what a respectable home looked like, or, perhaps, as a show of respectability by the Fergusons.

The final product was a comfortable two-story, five room house, and, likely, with a detached frame kitchen at the back of the site, as shown in the 1895 Sanborn Insurance Map (MLW Map 2). The map shows other similar properties in Jackson Ward with detached frame

⁹⁶ Mickler (1982)

⁹⁷ *The Virginia Star*, November 18, 1882, Richmond, VA

⁹⁸ Library of Congress, “The Virginia Star (Richmond, Va.) 1877-18?? |,” Library of Congress, accessed December 3, 2025, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn83027093/>.

⁹⁹ For further reading on respectability in the Black middle class see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

kitchens. This structure was most likely destroyed when the kitchen was added to the house itself in 1889.

Beyond constructing the house, Ferguson also made improvements to the property; evidenced by the increase in the lot value. In 1883 the lot value was appraised at \$600 (approximately \$19,096.93 in 2025¹⁰⁰), according to Ferguson's taxes; by 1884 he had improved the lot to the extent that the appraised value of the lot alone rose to \$2600 (approximately \$85,286.63 in 2025¹⁰¹). A notation in the tax records attributes the rise in value to improvements on the property.¹⁰²

It is unclear exactly when the Fergusons and Parker sold the property, but by 1889 the property was owned and occupied by Dr. Robert E. Jones, his wife Emma, and their family. Over the course of his family's approximately fifteen-year occupancy, Dr. Jones made at least three major changes to the house: (1) adding a kitchen to the rear of the house; (2) extending the upstairs hallway and adding five more rooms to the previously two room second floor; and (3) adding the west wing on the first floor.¹⁰³

The 1889 addition of the present kitchen probably occurred almost immediately after Dr Jones' purchase of the property. According to the 1982 Historic Structure Report "the kitchen was built onto the north wall of the dining room, and the dining room east wall rebuilt two feet eastward to match the dimensions of the kitchen addition." At the same time, a second story was added above the dining room and kitchen. Despite being completed in 1895 and included in the

¹⁰⁰ "Inflation Rate between 1883-2025: Inflation Calculator," \$600 in 1883 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1883?amount=600>.

¹⁰¹ "Inflation Rate between 1884-2025: Inflation Calculator," \$2,600 in 1884 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1884?amount=2600>.

¹⁰² Mickler (1982)

¹⁰³ Mickler (1982)

Sanborn Insurance Map for that year, the addition was not included in the relevant tax records. This was probably because of the extreme devaluation of property in Richmond's Black neighborhoods during the late 1880s, as post-Reconstruction economic, social, and housing policies began to take their toll.¹⁰⁴

In 1892 Jones added an office onto the west front of the house. The addition consisted of a single room (Room 101) on the ground floor and two smaller rooms above (Rooms 201 and 202).¹⁰⁵ Madison Jones, one of Dr Jones' children, confirmed that the additions had been made for an office, where Jones would see his patients.¹⁰⁶ On the house floor plans, Room 101 is labeled as a library, since this was how the room was used during Maggie Walker's tenancy. Photographs of the house at the turn of the century show that the house had two separate front entrances (MLW Figure 3), which supports the claim that the space had been built to be an office. That same year the property assessment increased by \$300 (approximately \$10,597.75 in 2025¹⁰⁷). The value increase is attributed to the office additions because the neighboring buildings did not increase in value, which suggest that the rise was not the result of a higher assessment rate.

In 1897 Jones extended the front of Room 101, to its current size. The roof and ceiling were also raised up to the same level of the original east section. At this time Dr Jones also added a partition dividing Room 101. It is not known exactly why Jones made the partition, but one

¹⁰⁴ The Post-Reconstruction Era saw the deliberate neglect of Black neighborhoods, as well as systemic campaign to restrict Black families from purchasing or renting homes outside of the predominantly Black neighborhoods. Howard N Rabinowitz, "The Ordering of Black and White: Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865–1910.," *Journal of American History*, 1978; Christopher Silver, "The Racial Origins of Zoning: Southern Cities from 1910–40," *Planning Perspectives* 6, no. 2 (May 1991): 189–205; Amy E. Hillier, "Redlining and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation," *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 4 (May 2003): 394–420.

¹⁰⁵ Mickler (1982)

¹⁰⁶ Tour of Maggie L Walker House, conducted by NPS Park Ranger, Richmond, VA, July 27, 2022

¹⁰⁷ "Inflation Rate between 1892-2025: Inflation Calculator," \$300 in 1892 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1892?amount=300>.

explanation is that he wanted to have a separate examination room in which to see his patients with more privacy.¹⁰⁸

We can see from the phased house plans from the Historic Structure Report (MLW Figure 4) that, when Maggie Walker purchased the property in 1904, it consisted of 14 rooms, with the main rooms consisting of 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, a kitchen, dining room, living room and library. She would transform the house into a family home, office, and community gathering space.

Despite the semi-public roles of the house, brought about by Walker's own public role within the community, the Maggie Walker House remained, primarily, the family home of the extended Walker family.

The primary function of the Maggie Walker House was as the family home of the Walker family. Family was of the utmost importance to Walker, and her home reflected her desire to have her family around her. Throughout her tenancy, Walker continued to renovate the house, adding more rooms and extra lounge space to ensure that the family home was large enough to comfortably house her children, their spouses, and eventual grandchildren. She also housed, at various points, her mother, an aunt, two servants, and some borders.

The Walkers purchased the house at 110 East Leigh Street in 1904. The house was purchased solely in Maggie Walker's name, showing the unusual level of independence, for that time, experienced by Walker from her husband. In 1904 the Walkers were a family of five: Maggie Walker, her husband Armstead Walker Jr, their sons Russell Eccles Talmage Walker (born December 9, 1890) and Melvin DeWitt Walker (born August 10 1897), and their adopted daughter Margaret [Polly] Anderson.

¹⁰⁸ Mickler (1982)

Location

The location of the house on Leigh Street is significant because it places the Walker home in the midst of Jackson Ward. On ‘MLW Map 1’ (MLW Appendix) the Maggie Walker House is marked by a purple marker in the midst of the Jackson Ward neighborhood which is filled in red. The map shows the Maggie Walker House at the heart of the district. As will be discussed later, this location put the Walker home near to some of the most important churches in the area, as well as near to the business districts of the neighborhood (Clay Street) and the city (Broad Street).

The location of the house on Leigh Street is also significant as the house is located in the midst of Black Richmond’s “quality row.” This was the name given to the Leigh Street East 100-block during the Jim Crow era for not only containing some of the largest and most impressive Black owned family homes, but also for the quality of people that called the block home. To own a home on quality row was a sign of greater wealth and accomplishment as only the wealthiest and most accomplished families and individuals in the neighborhood could afford the homes, such as dentist, doctors, lawyers, and successful business owners. These were the homes of Richmond’s Black upper-middle-class families, who used their homes as a signifier of both their wealth and respectability.¹⁰⁹

Some of Black Richmond’s most successful individuals lived on quality row. One of the first Black community leaders to build on Quality Row was Dr. David A. Ferguson. A founding member of the National Dental Association, he lived at 107 East Leigh Street. When he died in 1935, Ferguson was known not only for his work in the dental field, but also for his work uplifting the Black communities of Richmond. Beyond providing a needed service for the

¹⁰⁹ Tour of Maggie L Walker House, conducted by NPS Park Ranger, Richmond, VA , July 27, 2022.

community through his dental practice, Ferguson played an instrumental role in establishing several professional organizations for African American dentists and aspiring dentists, after being denied admittance into the existing national professional organizations. He was also politically active, writing letters to the editors of newspapers including the *Washington Post* and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, advocating for the loosening of restrictions on Black people throughout the South. He even participated in the ‘boosting’ of Richmond’s thriving Black communities through the publication of a photographic booklet called *Negro Enterprises & Residences*.¹¹⁰

Quality Row’s distinction as a place where successful Black Richmonders lived and worked continued through the Civil Rights era. One example of this is 118 East Leigh Street, which was the office for the law firm of Oliver W Hill and his associates, Martin A Martin and Spotswood Robinson. Hill, Martin and Robinson became renowned civil rights attorneys. Although they argued many desegregation cases, they are best known for arguing the *Dorothy Davis et al. vs. the School Board of Prince Edward County* case, which is better known to history as one of the five cases that made up the 1954 landmark Supreme Court case, *Brown vs Board of Education*. Unfortunately, the building was not preserved or designated, and was ultimately absorbed into the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site.¹¹¹

The Leigh Street house was also within walking distance of a few Black churches. Two of the oldest churches within the neighborhood were Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church and Ebenezer Baptist Church.¹¹² We will discuss Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church in another

¹¹⁰ Bryan S. Kessler, "David Arthur Ferguson (1875–1935)," *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, Library of Virginia (1998)

¹¹¹ "Quality Row (U.S. National Park Service)," National Parks Service, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.nps.gov/places/quality-row.htm>.

¹¹² The oldest church congregation is that of Third Street Bethel A.M.E. Church, founded in 1850. "Third Street Bethel A.M.E. Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1975.

chapter. Ebenezer Baptist Church, located at 216 W. Leigh Street, was founded in 1856. This church was actually founded as an offshoot of the First African Baptist Church, and, like its parent church, was initially led by a white pastor, with that pastor being the one to gain authorization to purchase the plot of land the church now stands upon.¹¹³ While Ebenezer Baptist Church has played an important role in the growth and development of Jackson Ward, I chose to focus in a later chapter on Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church because it was led, from the start, by Black leaders.

Renovations

Before they had even moved in, Walker and Armstead began making several minor alterations to their new home, some of which may have been completed by Armstead himself, including the addition of new electric and heating systems. They also ensured that the kitchen was fully outfitted with the most up-to-date appliances of the time.

No further major renovations occurred for the following fifteen years, as Walker raised her family, although several changes occurred within the family. In 1915, tragedy struck the family with the accidental death of Armstead. As was gleefully recounted in the Richmond newspapers, Russell mistook his father for a burglar and shot him. A police investigation followed, but Russell was not charged.¹¹⁴ Walker—and her relationship with her eldest son—would never be the same. Seven years later, in 1922, Walker’s mother passed away, followed the next year by Russell. Each death was devastating to Walker, but she professed to being particularly disheartened by Russell’s death and feeling “alone in the world.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ “Church History: Ebenezer Baptist Church, Richmond, VA,” Ebenezer Baptist Church, Richmond, VA, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.ebenzerrva.org/church-history>.

¹¹⁴ “Noncommittal Verdict in Walker Shooting,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, July 3, 1915.

¹¹⁵ Suggs, 2000

On a happier note, both of Walker's sons married in the 1910s—Russell marrying Hattie (Harriet) in 1912, and Melvin marrying Ethel in 1919. Both sons and their new wives continued to live with Walker after marrying and raised their own children in the family home. Polly also remained in the household despite her own marriage to Maurice Payne (their year of marriage is unknown). She would stay in the house with her adoptive mother until Walker's death.

By 1920 twelve people lived at 110½ East Leigh Street, according to the U.S. Federal Census: Maggie, Russell, Melvin, Polly, Elizabeth, Hattie, Ethel, Maurice, two grand-children (Maggie Laura Walker and Armstead DeWitt Walker), and two servants (Alpha Alfreds and Alphonso Robinson, chauffeur). According to the 1920 U.S. Federal Census, no other households on quality row included residential servants, which suggests that Maggie Walker's wealth was exceptional in comparison to her neighbors on quality row.¹¹⁶ Whereas affluent white neighborhoods were separated from poorer neighborhoods, Black neighborhoods such as Jackson Ward contained a more diverse economic profile. Wealthy white families were allowed the mobility to move to wealthier neighborhoods as their wealth increased, whereas wealthy Black families were constrained by segregation to remain in the same neighborhoods despite their economic capacity.¹¹⁷

With the addition of three married couples and two young children, Walker determined that additions were needed. In 1922, she embarked on a massive remodeling project, resulting in the addition of seven rooms on the first floor (rooms 102-105 and 112-114) and five rooms on the second floor (rooms 203-206 and 215), as shown in the 1922 additions in MLW Figure 4, and the numbered rooms in MLW Figure 5. As she explained in her diary entry on December 31,

¹¹⁶ Ancestry.com. 1920 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Year: 1920; Census Place: Richmond Madison Ward, Richmond (Independent City), Virginia; Roll: T625_1911; Page: 25A; Enumeration District: 144.

¹¹⁷ Sliver, 1991

1922, “my house was remodeled for the comfort of the children and their families at great cost.” By the end of the 1922 renovation (see MLW Figures 4 and 5), the house had gained four new bedrooms, a new bathroom, a laundry room (MLW Figure 6), a playroom for the children, a family room or den, and two more closets.¹¹⁸ According to the Maggie Walker House tour, the family room was primarily used by Walker’s sons as a space for them to smoke, drink, listen to the radio and spend time with their friends.¹¹⁹

It is unknown who was hired as the architect for these additions, but it is likely that Charles Russell, the first licensed Black architect in Virginia, was involved, as he is known to have visited the house many times throughout the 1920s. Additionally, as the architect for the St. Luke Building, he would have been well known to Walker. The Richmond native graduated from the Hampton Institute (Hampton, VA) in 1899 with an undergraduate diploma and a certificate in carpentry. He continued his architectural training as a carpentry supervisor during the construction of the Tuskegee Institute campus, and was able to complete an architectural apprenticeship.¹²⁰ The training Russell would have received at Tuskegee was unique. The school offered a labor-based pedagogy championed by Booker T. Washington, where students provided the labor by which the school was built and fed under the supervision of faculty and foremen. As architectural historian Maura Lauking wrote, “building materials came from the land itself via the brickyard, food was grown as part of the agricultural program, and even skilled labor was performed by students under the observation of foremen.”¹²¹ Russell would have been one of

¹¹⁸ Marcia M. Greenlee. "Maggie L. Walker House." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1974.

¹¹⁹ Tour of Maggie L Walker House, conducted by NPS Park Ranger, Richmond, VA, July 27, 2022

¹²⁰ Wilson, Dereck Spurlock (2004). *African-American architects: a biographical dictionary, 1865-1945*. New York: Routledge. p. 510.

¹²¹ Tuskegee was an important source of Southern Black builders and architects of the era, providing an education as well as hands on job training. For more on Tuskegee see this 2022 article by Maura Lauking: Maura Lucking. “Self-Suggestion in the Tuskegee Machine: Technical Drawing under Jim Crow.” Grey Room, no. 87 (April 2022): 6–43; and her dissertation: Maura

those foremen, assisting fellow Black men as they learned the art of building, while also gaining valuable building experience himself.

Russell was hired as the superintendent of university grounds and as a manual-training instructor at Virginia Union University in 1907, prompting his return to Richmond. Once back in Richmond, Russell took on numerous architectural commissions for several buildings in and around Jackson Ward, including businesses, homes, churches, and multi-use buildings, many of which were demolished during the construction of the interstate highway. Beyond his work on the Virginia Union University campus, Russell is best known for the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank, Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, and the Richmond Beneficial Insurance Company.¹²²

It is particularly interesting that Walker had a laundry room (MLW Figure 6) built in her house. Walker's mother, Elizabeth, had been a laundress. The laundry business was a popular occupation for women with young children at home, as it allowed women to set their own hours around their domestic responsibilities. It provided them with a greater sense of autonomy than domestic labor which was the primary occupation for many Black women of the time.¹²³ Domestic labor (cooking, cleaning, and nursing) was demanding work. Primarily done by Black women, as it had been during slavery, domestic jobs were often low-paying, exploitative, and requiring long hours.¹²⁴

Lucking, "Settler Campus: Racial Uplift, Free Labor, and Land Tenure in American Design Education, 1866-1929." Order No. 30314409, University of California, Los Angeles, 2023.

¹²² Wilson, 2004. p. 510.

¹²³ Marlowe, 2003, p.4

¹²⁴ For a contemporary on the travails of domestic labor see Lucy Maynard Salmon, *Domestic Service* (Charleston, NC: Legare Street Press, 2022).

For academic analysis of domestic labor see Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983); Tera W. Hunter and Hunter, Tera W., *To 'joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Tracy L. Walters, "Overview: The History of Black Women's Domestic Labor from the Twentieth Century to the Present." In *Not Your Mother's Mammy* (Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2021); and Enobong Hannah Branch and Melissa E. Wooten, "Suited for Service: Racialized Rationalizations for the Ideal Domestic Servant from the Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century," *Social Science History* 36, no 2 (2012): 170-171

Elizabeth most likely would have had a set of regular clients. She would collect the clothes from the homes of her client, and then wash and iron them at her own home. The clean laundry would then be delivered back to the client's home. The pay was quite low for the amount of labor involved, only a few dollars a week, and Elizabeth would have had to first pay to replace the soap, fuel, and starch used on the job, before she could feed her family. This was a very labor-intensive job: "water had to be fetched and the clothes boiled, scrubbed, rinsed, wrung, hung, starched, and ironed."¹²⁵

The laundry room that Walker built included large sinks, scrubbing boards, irons, and hanging racks, so that all of the stages of the washing process could be completed within the one room. It even included a mangle press, which was used to press large linens such as bed sheets and tablecloths. This was a room that was planned by someone who knew and understood what this process entailed, which isn't surprising since Walker had helped her mother in her work as a child—picking up and delivering the clothes, and doing marketing for the small business. The building of the laundry room can be seen as Walker's ode to her own past and to the work her mother, a single mother of two, had done to keep her family housed and fed. It is not known exactly why Walker chose to build this site of memory: Elizabeth was certainly not continuing to work as a laundress after Walker's economic success, and Walker herself was not doing the family's laundry. It might have been because of a simple desire to use the latest technologies, or to make the task less arduous.

Walker's experience helping her mother with her laundry business would have actually been an invaluable part of her education as a young Black woman with a future in community organizing. Historian Elsa Barkley Brown has argued that laundering was often a cooperative

¹²⁵ Marlowe, 2003, p.4

venture during this time. A group of women would do laundry together, rotating between houses. As we see in many cultures before the advent of the washing machine and commercial laundries, women used the time they were together doing laundry to talk, often discussing issues in the community and how best to solve them.¹²⁶ Walker would have been exposed to these discussions and this culture as she helped her mother, giving her an early glimpse into the world of community building and organizing. The laundry room not only represented a link to her familial past but also represented one of the avenues through which Walker became immersed in the community of Jackson Ward.

The final additions Walker made to the main house occurred in 1928. By that year, she had been diagnosed with diabetes, and was further debilitated by the resurgence of an old knee injury (a broken knee-cap in 1908). This made the numerous stairs in the house difficult to navigate for the aging woman. Leg braces only temporarily alleviated the issue, and in 1928 Walker was confined to a wheelchair. A pragmatic woman, she immediately began making plans to alter her home to allow her as much mobility as possible. Walker's diary entries note how she consulted with Charles Russell on Friday, January 13, 1928, about the installation of an elevator connecting the garage and the back of the house. By February 18, she was writing that the "house at 110 E, Leigh [was] still pulled to pieces awaiting the installation of an invalid's lift," and declared on March 1 that the elevator (MLW Figure 7) had been installed for \$1,500 (approximately \$28,198.68 in 2025¹²⁷). The installation process was clearly quite inconvenient for those attempting to live in the house, but the elevator allowed Walker to continue to have full

¹²⁶ Elsa Barkley Brown, "Mothers of Mind," *Sage* 6 (Summer 1989): 7.

¹²⁷ "Inflation Rate between 1928-2025: Inflation Calculator," \$1,500 in 1928 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1928?amount=1500>.

access to the house. While the master bedroom was on the second floor, her library, the kitchen, and family rooms were all on the first floor.

Within the same month, Walker again hired Charles Russell to make another addition to the house. On March 5, 1928, Walker and Russell applied for a building permit to enclose the east-facing porch on the second story with “a sash 3’ above the floor.” This alteration allowed for the addition of a small bedroom, dining room and kitchen to be added just off of Walker’s bedroom—presumably for the use of Walker as her health further deteriorated. Additionally, Walker purchased a seven-passenger Packard sedan from Mooers Motor Car Company and had the back seats adjusted to fit her wheelchair. She was thus able to continue working and travelling with little issue.¹²⁸

The additions Maggie Walker made to the Leigh Street house demonstrate not only her commitment to creating a home that would grow and expand with the family, but also her dedication to racial uplift through supporting Black businesses and hiring Black labor—practices that she learned in school and in the church.

Furnishing

Maggie Walker’s family preserved many of the furnishings that she had in her home, and examining them can grant us some insight into Walker’s sense of self and her position in society. It is important to note that the only assurances we have of the placement of specific furnishings during Walker’s occupancy are photographs and interviews from her grandchildren. Adding to the difficulty in knowing the locations of the furnishings is that the family experienced a burglary on August 17, 1979.

¹²⁸ Mickler, 1982, p.57

The library is located just off the main hallway. Doctor Jones, the previous occupant, had used the room as a medical exam space. When Walker moved-in she converted the space to a reading room and home office. The most prominent furnishings are the bookcases: five wooden, glass-front cabinets. Diplomas achieved by various family members hang on the walls alongside photographs of Walker's colleagues and prominent African Americans.

Walker used the library as a space to hold important meetings, some of which supported her political efforts and provided a convening space for Black women to engage in political and social discourse.¹²⁹ Maggie Walker's life was an example of the constantly shifting gender dynamics in participation in the Black public sphere in Richmond. Even as men strove to push them out many women were not only active in political spaces, but vocal and, in some cases, became leaders. In her essay, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," Elsa Barkley Brown argues that without women's activism during and after Reconstruction and their fight for racial equality even in the face of their own gendered exclusion, Black civil rights may have been further delayed.¹³⁰

As the space where she would work and take meetings the library was an important indicator of how Walker wanted herself (and her family) to be viewed. In this context the diplomas and photographs become more than shows of familial and racial pride, they are an indication of the family's professional achievements, portraying the family as well educated and successful. The collection of books is a show of how cultured the family is, as well as an indicator of having enough wealth to afford a private collection.

¹²⁹ Tour of Maggie L Walker House, conducted by NPS Park Ranger, Richmond, VA , July 27, 2022.

¹³⁰ For further discussion of women's role in the Black public sphere see Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 1994): 107-46.

The choice of whose photographs are featured is also interesting. Beyond portraits of family and friends, Walker also surrounded herself and her guests with the photos of Black luminaries. For example, a set of illustrations features portraits of Roland Hayes (notable tenor and composer), Mary McLeod Bethune (educator and activist), Dr. Robert Russa Moton (educator and author), and Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois (sociologist, writer, historian and activist), which were part of “The New Negro” anthology put together by Alain Locke in 1925.¹³¹ Notably, these were not historic figures, they were contemporaries of Walker whom visitors to her home would have recognized. Showing their images in the library indicates that Walker knows and understands the state of Black culture and politics, that she knows and associated with the most prominent and influential members of the Black intelligentsia.

The dining room was the most important room in the house, as the furnishing indicated. This was the room where important guests would gather to eat and discuss the important topics of the day, including civil rights and politics. The room was furnished with ebony wood furniture, paired with a pressed-tin ceiling. The center-piece table sat at the center of the room; today, it is set with the family china set, which features a repeating rose-petal motif. Roses were Walker’s favorite flower and she uses the motif in other places in the house, such as on the wallpaper. Two armoires with glass doors display the family glassware and silverware. For example, there is a silver sugar bowl with twelve demitasse spoons. The china, silverware and glassware were yet another indication of the wealth of the Walker family under Maggie Walker.

During the 1922 remodel, Walker had a side porch enclosed to create a den. It sits directly behind the library, and next to the dining room. The room was mostly used by Walker’s sons as a space for leisure and entertaining friends, particularly Melvin (the younger Walker

¹³¹ Tour of Maggie L Walker House, conducted by NPS Park Ranger, Richmond, VA , July 27, 2022.

son). The room contains an electric record player with a built-in radio. The Walker's music collection mostly contained classical and popular music. The electric record player was a luxury item in 1922. The models were just being released and were more expensive than the older wind-up record players.¹³² To have purchased an electric record player for her home was a show of wealth and affluence that visitors to the Walker home would have appreciated.

Walker's bedroom was decorated rather simply. It is clear that most of the luxury items were reserved for the public areas of the house. The centerpiece of the room was the four-poster bed with a dark wood frame. A set of family photographs decorates one wall as well as the dresser. A leather chair sits to one side, ready for a visitor. The most important part of the room concerning Maggie Walker is the balcony, which has a view out over Jackson Ward. The way the bed is positioned, Walker would have been able to look out over the neighborhood from her bed if the balcony door was opened. She likely chose to position the bed in this way, enabling her to view the neighborhood that she helped to build from her home, even from her bed.

The furnishings make it clear that the Walker home was a multipurposed space. It was a family home, but it was also meant to be a space for receiving and entertaining guests, as well as an office space. Walker was aware of the multi-purpose nature of her home and furnished it accordingly.

Church

The institution of the church was, in many ways, the center of community life within Black neighborhoods. As Lincoln and Lawrence explained in *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, besides their roles as sites of worship and religious practices, these

¹³² Tour of Maggie L Walker House, conducted by NPS Park Ranger, Richmond, VA , July 27, 2022.

buildings were also sites of gathering, both political and social. Societies and social groups without headquarters or buildings of their own often met in churches.¹³³ Activists planned protests from the pews, and protestors gathered in the church halls before events. These churches, in conjunction with African American fraternal societies, were an organizational and leadership source for civil rights movements.¹³⁴ As congregations met at least once every week, the church also became a place where important news and information were shared within the community.¹³⁵

We can examine Walker's church experience as an example of this. Walker attended the First African Baptist Church (FABC; Figure 8) from her birth.¹³⁶ In Walker's lifetime, the FABC was located at the northeast corner of College Street and East Broad Street, where the congregation had worshiped since 1876, when the church was built. The FABC remained at this location until 1955, when the building was sold to the Medical College of Virginia, part of Virginia Commonwealth University.¹³⁷ The congregation moved to its current church at 2700 Hanes Avenue in the neighborhood of Barton Heights.

The FABC was founded in 1841 as the result of a split within the multiracial First Baptist Church. Anxious and suspicious of the growing Black majority in the congregation, the white parishioners of the First Baptist Church built a new, white-only church and sold the old building to the remaining Black congregation, made up of both free and enslaved Blacks from Richmond

¹³³ Lincoln, E.C., & Lawrence, H. M. (1990). *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

¹³⁴ Matthew W. Hughey and Gregory S. Parks, "'Black Fraternal Organizations: Systems, Secrecy, and Solace'," *Journal of African American Studies* 16, no. 4 (July 25, 2012): 595–603.

¹³⁵ Lincoln, E.C., & Lawrence, H. M. (1990).

¹³⁶ Mickler, 1982.

¹³⁷ Alexander, Edward P. "First African Baptist Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1969.

and the Tidewater region. The church building and congregation were renamed, adding “African” to its title.¹³⁸

Even though African Americans in the area now had their own church, it came with conditions from the Baptist Churches of Richmond (an organization made up of the three white Baptist churches in Richmond) which would ensure that the newly formed FABC remained under the thumb of white Baptist leaders. The new rules ranged from inconvenient and petty—such as requiring the congregation to only gather for worship in the daytime—to outright controlling, such as having themselves “annually appoint a committee of 24 white members to superintend the religious instruction and discipline of the African Church;” and demanding that “the Pastor of the African Church shall be a white Baptist minister of good standing in the denomination, selected by the superintending committee.”¹³⁹ For this reason, the Black congregation’s pastors were white until after the Civil War.

In 1867 Rev. Dr. James H. Holmes, became the congregation’s first Black pastor. A former slave, he was a gifted speaker and preacher who attracted hundreds of new members to the rapidly growing church. In a city with no dearth of African churches, FABC not only became the largest church in Richmond; it was among the largest churches in the country. Holmes’s pastorship lasted thirty-two years (until his death on November 25, 1900), and under his leadership around 5,800 people were baptized, including Walker, whom he baptized in 1878.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Kimball, Gregg (2000), *American City, Southern Place: A Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond*, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press.

¹³⁹ “Our History: First African Baptist Church, Richmond, VA,” First African Baptist, accessed December 3, 2025, <http://www.firstafricanbaptist.org/our-history>.

¹⁴⁰ “James H. Holmes, Minister Born,” African American Registry, December 9, 2024, <https://aaregistry.org/story/james-h-holmes-minister-born/>.

Church minutes note that Maggie Mitchell was third on the list of 376 people who “were received for baptism May 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, and 31, and June 1. The greater portion of the above 376 were baptized Sunday, June 2, ’78, the remainder June 9.” In the approximately six weeks between May 24 and July 14 the church accepted 1,105 new members, a 30-40% increase. A new gallery was added to the church to accommodate the new members. FABC Minutes II, 77, 82, 88, 92

Holmes was difficult to replace. Eventually, after a rather acrimonious debate, Rev. W. T. Johnson was chosen as Holmes's successor.

Walker was a dedicated and active member of the church from the age of eleven, when she became a full member, until her death.¹⁴¹ While Walker had been exposed to the world of community organizing and building through her mother's laundry group, it was in the church that she was able to utilize and develop the skills that she had seen.

As with many active church members of the time, Walker's recruitment into church life came through Sunday school. The FABC's Sunday school was the oldest and largest in the city, having started an immensely popular literacy-based Sunday school in 1865. Walker began attending Sunday school in the early 1870s, having been persuaded to come by superintendent William White.¹⁴² His son wrote of how White met Walker one Sunday towards the end of the Sunday school session:

...the only child in sight was one bright-eyed little girl who looked not at all clean and neat as she should have been on Sunday. She was very poorly dressed, in fact, but that made no difference to Dad. He stopped her skipping and playing, asked the usual – what's your name, where do you live, and who's your mother and father...The answers came straight, the eyes never wavering. She was Maggie Lena Mitchell and lived up in College Alley. Her mother took in washing and ironing and her father was dead. Thus introduced, the girl was asked if she'd like to come along and go into the basement where there were other children. Maggie said yes. It was the first time she had been inside the sacred edifice, although she lived not a block away. But the little girl liked what she found, and next Sunday, clean and neat as a pin, she came back. Maggie Lena had made her first step up.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Suggs, 2000

¹⁴² Marlowe, 2003

¹⁴³ White, "I Remember," 60

White introduced Walker to the church and church life, and she would later list him as one of only four people whom she considered to be “a major formative influence” on her life in her diary.¹⁴⁴

Through the church, Walker was placed at the heart of her community. The church, as will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter on Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, was the lifeblood of the Black community. Not only was it the location for weekly church services, it was also the place where important community meetings were held and where many community groups and organizations met. As an active church member, Walker would have interacted with people of all ages and from different parts of her community at church. It was through organizing with the church that Walker honed the community-organizing skills that she would use as a leader of the Independent Order of St. Luke.

Racial Uplift

Walker received her most important lessons on racial pride at Navy Hill, the school where she completed her two years of secondary education. The school loomed large in Richmond’s African American society as the only school at the time with an exclusively Black faculty from its inception, although the school was required to have a white principal.¹⁴⁵ Walker’s teachers at Navy Hill included Peter Woolfolk, the first Black teacher in Richmond, and O. M. Stewart, the second. It was Stewart whom Walker particularly called out for having taught her about the importance of race pride and cooperation. About thirty years after leaving Navy Hill, she paid tribute to her former teacher, saying that the faculty at Navy Hill had

¹⁴⁴ She also included Lizzie Knowles, Rev. Holmes, and her mother: Maggie Walker Diary 1925:4 June 1925

¹⁴⁵ Richmond Branch, Freedman’s Bank, M816, Reel 26, Record 1687, National Archives

“...created...an undying ambition to be something, and do something, to lift ourselves and our people from the degradation of innocence and ignorance and poverty to competence, culture and respectability...”¹⁴⁶ Walker took these lessons to heart. We see her dedication to the development of race pride and cooperation in her hiring of African American architects and builders, as well as in her work as a leader in the Independent Order of St Luke (IOSL).

Walker’s drive for the uplift of the Black race was pursued through multiple avenues, one of which was through directly supporting Black lives through supporting Black businesses. Walker was a member of Booker T. Washington’s National Negro Building League,¹⁴⁷ which sought to develop Black economic power through uniting Black business owners in an economic network. The organization ultimately aimed to use Black economic success to help achieve racial equality in the United States.¹⁴⁸ Walker diligently dedicated whole sections of multiple speeches to encouraging her fellows to “buy Black.” She particularly encouraged her fellow Black women—who were often in charge of the household economies of their families—to try to buy from Black businesses as much as possible.¹⁴⁹

As was explained, the additions and renovations for Walker’s Leigh Street home were designed by Charles Russell, a well-known local architect. While it is possible that Walker chose to hire Russell because she was unable (not allowed or could not afford) to hire a white architect, it is also possible that she chose the architect because she wanted to, among other considerations, hire from within the Black community. As a Black woman born and raised in Jackson Ward, Walker likely would have wanted to support the businesses and careers of her fellow Black men

¹⁴⁶ Marlowe, 2003

¹⁴⁷ Marlowe, 2003

¹⁴⁸ Adam Chamberlain and Alixandra B. Yanus, “Organizing Black Business: The National Negro Business League, 1900–1915,” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 22, no. 1 (October 17, 2024): 48–65.

¹⁴⁹ Marlowe, 2003.

and women, especially those from Jackson Ward. In the Jim Crow South, it would also have been very difficult, if not impossible, to shop in white-owned establishments in the city. We could see the decision to hire Russell as a way for Walker to support the Black economy while also giving a Black architect an opportunity. As was discussed previously, Walker's house was located on the most affluent street in the neighborhood. To be able to have a construction project on 'Quality Row' would have been a plum job for an architect, and for the building company.

Another avenue through which Walker and her cohort pursued racial uplift was through the funding of and membership in various fraternal and benevolent societies. Over her lifetime Walker maintained memberships in several groups and societies, including the Women's League, the Women's Missionary and Educational Society of Virginia, the Acme Literary Association, and the Virginia Teachers' Association, of which she was the first president.¹⁵⁰ Later in her life, she would join—and even lead—more organizations, including local chapters of the National Council of Colored Women, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as well as serving on the board of the Industrial School for Girls, founded by Janie Porter Barrett, a close friend. Walker also played a role in some of Armstead's organizations as his wife. His primary fraternal organization was the Richmond Patriarchy of the Odd Fellows, granting Walker a place in the group's Ladies' Auxiliary. As both a member and an officer, Walker helped to plan events such as their five-day Easter celebration, which required distinct activities planned for each day of the huge fundraiser.¹⁵¹ Walker herself devoted the most attention to her work for the IOSL, a mutual benefit (or mutual aid) society. In order to

¹⁵⁰ These organizations were comprised of societal peers who, together, helped to set the normative standards by which the Black middle class would live. The women who participated in the Black women's club movement exemplified and modeled Black middle-class values such as frugality, domesticity and proper character. The women's leagues of the various men-only fraternal organizations were also an important source of female leadership in middle class Black society. See Sheena Harris, "Margaret Murray Washington: A Southern Reformer and the Black Womens Club Movement," essay, in *Alabama Women: Their Lives and Times*, ed. Lisa Lindquist Dorr and Susan Youngblood Ashmore (University of Georgia Press, 2017), 143–58.

¹⁵¹ Marlowe 2003

understand the important financial and fiscal role that Black mutual-benefit societies played in Black communities, we first need to understand the state of Black banking after the Civil War.

Black Banking

As has been established, Maggie Walker is best known as the first Black woman to charter and run a bank. This incredible accomplishment cannot be fully appreciated without discussing the state of Black banking in Maggie Walker's time.

During the Antebellum era free Black people had been forced by the restrictions placed upon them regarding ownership of resources and access to white controlled banks, to set up their own segregated loan system, with the small number of wealthy free Black people giving loans directly to their fellow Blacks. They recognized that Black families would never be able to create significant wealth without access to banks and bank credit, leading to a desire many Black people, particularly northern Black businessmen, to set up a Black banking association, but this would take many years to achieve.¹⁵²

The Freedman's Savings and Trust Company was chartered in March 1865 by the U.S. Congress in order to provide a bank where newly emancipated African Americans could safely place their hard-earned money. Fifty white trustees were appointed to manage the private bank and, at first, the bank thrived. Thousands of African Americans deposited their money in the bank, and within five years, thirty-seven branches had been opened across seventeen states, mostly focused in cities with large African American populations such as Richmond and New

¹⁵² For more about the desire for Black banks in the Antebellum see Mehrsa Baradaran's book chapter: Mehrsa Baradaran. "Forty Acres or a Savings Bank." In *The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap*, 10–39. Harvard University Press, 2017.

Orleans. At its most prosperous the bank held about \$3.7 million in 1872 currency (approximately \$82 million in 2023 currency).

In 1874, the bank failed and was closed by Congress due to rampant bad speculative investments by the trustees, fraud, and general administrative mismanagement. The all-white Board of Trustees had resigned several months before the closure of the bank in an attempt to restore public trust in the institution; and they even brought in Frederick Douglass to be president in March 1874. Douglass deposited \$10,000 (approximately \$284,189.47 in 2025¹⁵³) of his own funds to encourage more depositors but it was too late. The bank was closed on July 2, 1874, with all depositors who had not withdrawn their funds prior to the closure losing all of their savings. The government had not safeguarded the deposits, and the majority of depositors would not see a penny of their savings ever again. Those who did receive payouts had to wait months, if not years, with payouts not starting until November 1875.¹⁵⁴ In the end, of the \$2,939,925 (approximately \$85,916,635.47 in 2025¹⁵⁵) owed, depositors received \$1,731,854 (approximately \$50,611,858.74 in 2025¹⁵⁶), with depositors reimbursed a maximum of 62 cents per dollar of deposited cash.¹⁵⁷

The results of the Freedmen Bank failure for Black communities across the country were catastrophic. As Katrin B. Anacker put it, “the lack of reimbursement of these losses has influenced Black intergenerational wealth transfer, down payments, and homeownership rates

¹⁵³ “Inflation Rate between 1874-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$10,000 in 1874 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed October 21, 2025.

¹⁵⁴ Anacker, 2015.

¹⁵⁵ “Inflation Rate between 1875-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$2,939,925 in 1875 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1875?amount=2939925>.

¹⁵⁶ “Inflation Rate between 1875-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$1,731,854 in 1875 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1875?amount=1731854>.

¹⁵⁷ Daniel C. Giedeman, “Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and the Freedman’s Savings Bank,” *The Review of Black Political Economy* 38 (2011).

and return on investment in homeownership.”¹⁵⁸ As a result of the bank failure, many African Americans suffered the economic distress of losing all of their savings. Thousands lost their savings overnight, through no fault of their own—not only destroying dreams of what might have been done with those savings, but also annihilating an avenue for generational wealth within African American communities. The trauma of the experience fostered a deep-seated distrust of banks and financial institutions within African American communities that persisted for decades. It is into that economic and emotional environment that fraternal organizations like the Independent Order of St. Luke stepped in to provide community-based economic services.

Many of these mutual-aid organizations (as well as others) established their own banks as a way to form a stable economic base for a growing Black middle class. The “Bigger and Better Negro Business” campaign was started “to convince African Americans that the betterment of their race required them to support their commercial and financial institutions.” Organizations like the Colored Merchants’ Association successfully convinced many African Americans that “business and property ownership were viable means of escaping poverty and achieving economic independence” and, as a result, “a multiplicity of loan associations, credit unions and building and loan societies were opened,” many of which were associated in some way with the mutual-benefit and fraternal societies.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Anacker, 2015.

¹⁵⁹ Trinkaus, J., & Puryear, A. (1997). Turning nickels into dollars: Maggie Walker and the Consolidated Bank and Trust Company. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 20(2), 479–495.
For more information on Black banking at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century see Lila Ammons, “The Evolution of Black-Owned Banks in the United States between the 1880s and 1990s,” *Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 4 (March 1996): 467–89; and Shennette Garrett-Scott, “‘All the Other Devils This Side of Hades’: Black Banks and the Mississippi Banking Law of 1914,” *Business History Review* 95, no. 4 (2021): 631–70..

Black Fraternal and Benevolent Societies

The Black fraternal and mutual benefit organizations can be considered an offshoot of white organizations. These organizations thrived throughout the 1800s, with independent orders of popular organizations such as the Freemasons, Elks, Knights of Pythias, and the Odd Fellows being founded. By the late nineteenth century, over six million white American men (over a third of the nation's adult white male population) were members of approximately 350 fraternal orders. These organizations were very influential in the social and cultural development of their members, encouraging the practice of the traditional middle-class "values of sobriety, thrift, temperance, piety, industry, self-restraint, and moral obligation." In return for their loyalty and conformity, members could expect initiation into rituals of brotherhood, financial assistance and support, and access to health, widow, unemployment, and burial funds.

Black fraternalism grew alongside the white fraternal movement. While the white fraternal organizations were very influential, the Black fraternal organizations became essential for the survival of their members and communities, as they "learned how to deal with forced migration, degradation, discrimination, and...dehumanization" both during and after slavery. These organizations, along with the church, became the linchpins of Black communities across the South, providing for their needs in the face of governmental abuse and neglect.¹⁶⁰ One example of this was the Free African Society, formed in 1787 by two Black ministers in Philadelphia. The Society was the result of Richard Allen and Absalom Jones' concern at the distressed state of the ghetto in which they lived, and by their ejection from the white Methodist Church they had attended for refusing to sit in the "nigger pew." The ministers encouraged their fellow African Philadelphians to form "a society...without regard to religious tenets...in order to

¹⁶⁰ J. W. Trotter, "African American Fraternal Associations in American History: An Introduction," *Social Science History* 28, no. 3 (September 1, 2004): 355–66.

support one another in sickness and for the benefit of widows and fatherless children.”¹⁶¹ W. E. B. Du Bois described the group as “a curious sort of ethical and beneficial brotherhood” constituting “the first wavering step of a people toward organized social life.”¹⁶²

The first official Black fraternal organizations spread during the 1800s among free Blacks, starting with the Freemasons. Throughout the nineteenth century, parallel versions of the Masons, Knights of Pythias, Elks, and Odd Fellows grew up within free Black communities, with many receiving charters from their European counterparts (often from England) as a way to bypass the American orders’ policies of racial exclusion. At the same time, a number of independent orders unique to the Black communities also arose, such as the Grand United Order of the True Reformers and the United Brothers of Friendship and Sisters of the Mysterious Ten.¹⁶³ These organizations—as with the fraternal organizations of whites, Asians, and other immigrants—while maintaining their dedication to providing for the social needs of their communities, also began to focus on providing specific economic support through mutual-aid programs. They developed more extensive and robust insurance programs and invested more heavily in orphanages and job training and placement courses. Many of these organizations began to be known as mutual-aid societies, rather than as fraternal organizations, and several, such as the Grand Order of True Reformers, had large female memberships.¹⁶⁴

When the Civil War ended, and all enslaved African Americans were set free, the existing orders and organizations grew in membership and were joined by many new organizations as well. All through Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era, many African

¹⁶¹ Walter B. Weare, 1993. *Black business in the new south: a social history of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company*. London: Duke University Press.

¹⁶² W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1899) p. 19-21, 23.

¹⁶³ Trotter, 2004.

¹⁶⁴ David T. Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967* (Chicago, IL: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Americans and African American communities joined and relied upon these organizations. They were instrumental in shaping African American collective identity through rituals of brotherhood, as well as assisting their members financially. Just as their white counterparts did, these Black organizations set up health, widow, unemployment and burial insurance funds; many also started their own banks; most assisted in the care of the unhoused, the sick, and the elderly; and aided members in finding jobs.¹⁶⁵ One example of a successful Black fraternal society was the organization that Maggie Walker joined and, eventually, helped to lead, the Independent Order of St. Luke (IOSL)—which developed into one of the most successful mutual-benefit societies in the United States.

Independent Order of St. Luke

The IOSL was founded and primarily run by African American women. The organization provided much-needed economic security for the African American men, women, and children (with a focus on women and children) in their communities by investing in those very communities. The IOSL primarily provided financial benefits for its members, such as sickness and death payments, as well as insurance and banking services. The organization also ran schools and orphanages, built and maintained hospitals and homes for the elderly, and provided food and nursing for the needy and sick.

Like many other mutual benefit societies, the IOSL was a successor organization. In 1856 Mary Anne Prout, a free Black woman, founded the St. Luke Society, in Baltimore, Maryland. The group's meetings were held in Prout's church, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, which allowed the group to evade the city's ban on organization of free Blacks. Charitable

¹⁶⁵ Paul Lawrence Dunbar, "Hidden in Plain Sight: African American Secret Societies and Black Freemasonry," *Journal of African American Studies* 16, no. 4 (March 8, 2011): 622–37.

societies were exempt from the law, but also had to pay a \$5 tax, provide a written letter of permission from the mayor, allow police to access any meetings, and prove all members to “be of good character.” Any meeting taking place in a church was exempt, even from police surveillance—a loophole that not only saved the organization money but also provided a measure of protection for its members from state intimidation and police violence.

The St. Luke Society had been created by women for women and stayed true to this focus. The Society primarily provided sickness and death benefits for women and children in the city. Even though the payouts were relatively small, they did provide some measure of economic security to free Black families. The organization also ran schools and orphanages, built and maintained hospitals and elderly homes, and provided food and nursing for the needy and sick. The majority of the Society’s funds were provided through small, consistent payments by its members and by fundraising events both large and small. Prout herself was a prolific fundraiser. She sold cakes and preserves, and knocked on doors throughout Baltimore to ask for donations, on top of organizing popular, multi-day fairs and festivals that raised tens of thousands of dollars for the cause.

The St. Luke Society was also an example of female leadership within Black churches. The Society was somewhat constrained in its feminist actions by being within the church; technically, the Society “operated within the church’s imprimatur but not necessarily under its strictures.” This meant that while women maintained significant control over the operation of the Society, this did not translate to any increase in leadership within the formal church leadership. Prout, who herself “led prayer meetings...held funeral processions for deceased children who had been members of the order, [and] sometimes conducted graveside services in the absence of a male pastor or elder,” never openly questioned the status quo exclusion of women from the

pulpit and church leadership. She did, however, call into question the assumption that women were inherently ill-equipped to lead. In fact, Prout likely would have seen her work as a natural extension of women's traditional role within the home and society—as the primary caretakers of the children, the poor, and the infirm.¹⁶⁶

While the St. Luke Society had been a boon to African American families in Baltimore just before and during the Civil War, it quickly became clear that more was needed in the postwar landscape. While they were now officially free from slavery, the vast majority of Black women and their families remained in a state of great economic vulnerability. They not only faced the continued threat of physical (and often sexual) violence, also had to cope with exploitative, low-paying employment contracts, long-term separations from their families and communities, and institutions unwilling or unable to help them. Prout recognized that the Black women and families that she served needed more support to meet the ever-growing list of challenges and barriers facing them. Her response was to found a new organization, the Grand United Order of St. Luke (GUOSL), in 1867.

Unlike its predecessor, the GUOSL was established completely separately from the church. It was one of many similar organizations that, no longer constrained by bans on Black secret societies, were formally incorporated in Baltimore through the mid-1860s. Separation from the church allowed the GUOSL to create branches outside of Baltimore and without requiring a host church. It also allowed the organization to become more heavily involved in social and labor activism beyond the limitations of the church. The GUOSL developed into a combination of a mutual aid-society, labor union, and social activist organization in one.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Shennette Garrett-Scott, “Who Is So Helpless as the Negro Woman?: The Independent Order of St. Luke and the Quest for Economic Security, 1856–1902.,” essay, in *Banking on Freedom: Black Women in U.S. Finance Before the New Deal* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019), 41–72.

¹⁶⁷ Garrett-Scott, 2019.

The Independent Order of St. Luke was a splinter movement from the GUOSL specific to the city of Richmond. In the antebellum era, Richmond had been one of the few major Southern cities where industrial slavery thrived and had been home to one of the nation's most diverse slave labor systems, with enslaved and free Blacks laboring on the same private and public works projects, as well as in the same mills, mines, quarries, factories, shipyards and warehouses. Even as the city's free and enslaved work-forces largely worked together, they also largely lived together in flourishing all-Black neighborhoods scattered throughout the city. This promoted particularly strong communities that continued to exist after the Civil War and collectively strove to protect their hard-won freedoms and access to economic opportunity. Spurred by a desire and need for economic transformation and activism, a Richmond-based branch of the GUOSL (St. Luke Lodge No. 9) was established after the Civil War. The branch quickly moved to separate from its parent organization. Richmond had already emerged as an autonomous center of Black economic, cultural, and political power; community leaders now sought to ensure a similar level of independence within the Order.

In 1869, under the leadership of William Forrester and his father, Richard Forrester, Lodge No. 9 officially splintered from the GUOSL and created the Independent Order of the Sons and Daughters of St. Luke, which was later shortened to the Independent Order of the St. Luke (IOSL). Importantly, the new organization was incorporated in Richmond. Almost immediately the charter members elected William Forrester to be their first Right Worthy Grand (RWG) secretary. Forrester would lead the upstart order for the following thirty years. The next year (1870), Richard Forrester and two other trustees opened a bank account for St. Luke's

Lodge No. 9 at the Freedman's Bank in Richmond, further solidifying their disunion from the GUOSL.¹⁶⁸

Although the IOSL was not a women's fraternal order, many of the members and leaders were female. We see this in an undated photo of Maggie Walker and forty-one IOSL staff, who were all women. This is unsurprising in light of Elsa Barkley Brown's research into the role of women in civil society in Richmond at this time. As they were being pushed out of civic life in politics and the church, many women turned to the benevolent societies as spaces where they could openly take part in public and political life, as well as become leaders.¹⁶⁹ While Maggie Walker achieved heights of power and influence unusual for a woman even within a benevolent society the image shows that many women were not only taking part in the society but also lending their time, effort and voices to political causes.

The majority of the IOSL's funds were provided through small, consistent payments by its members and by fundraising events both large and small.¹⁷⁰ The Lucy Garnett Independent Order of St. Luke receipt card collection, 1941-1953, contains forty-one receipt card from the IOSL, reflecting payments for services such as assessments, taxes, regalia, the fraternal bulletin, and supplies. One receipt card shows that Garnett paid \$2 for assessments and supplies in 1949.¹⁷¹

Through providing services, the IOSL allowed the residents of Jackson Ward to be able to take care of themselves and one another. Unable and unwilling to rely on the state or city government to ensure that their community was cared for and received the services it needed,

¹⁶⁸ Garrett-Scott, 2019.

¹⁶⁹ Brown, 2024.

¹⁷⁰ Garrett-Scott, S. (2019).

¹⁷¹ Receipt card, 1949, Lucy Garnett Independent Order of St Luke receipt card collection, 1941-1953, Museum purchase, Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library.

mutual-benefit societies like the IOSL were able to fill the gaps left by disinterested and hostile white-controlled institutions. In the case of Jackson Ward and the IOSL, the neighborhood needed a way to provide work and life insurance to its residents—many of whom worked in occupations that required physical labor— and so the IOSL provided insurance. The community needed a bank where they could hold their money and receive financial services without encountering racist people and policies; Walker and the IOSL started a bank.

Walker conducted most of her own work and the work of the IOSL out of her home, especially after she became confined to a wheelchair later in her life. Throughout her time as a leader in the IOSL, Walker held meetings and hosted events in her home.¹⁷² African American dignitaries from across the country came to Walker’s home—evidence of her importance not only to her own immediate community but also to the national African American community. It is not known if they all visited the Walker home, but we do know that Walker met and spoke with nationally important Black leaders and intellectuals such as Marcus Garvey, Booker T. Washington, and W. E. B. Du Bois. When Walker proposed starting a bank through the IOSL, she was given the opportunity to observe the inner workings of the Merchants National Bank of Richmond, one of the oldest and most well-respected banks in the city. This access was partially the result of the professional relationships she had built with powerful white businessmen in Richmond as secretary-treasurer of the IOSL but may also have been the result of her white biological father pulling strings of his own.¹⁷³ Whatever the reason, this episode is a clear

¹⁷² Garrett-Scott, S. (2019). “Let Us Have a Bank”: The Independent Order of St. Luke and the Quest for Economic Security, 1856-1902. In *Banking on Freedom: Black Women in US Finance Before the New Deal* (pp. 41–72). Columbia University Press.

¹⁷³ Garrett-Scott, S. (2019). “Let Us Have a Bank”: The Independent Order of St. Luke and the Quest for Economic Security, 1856-1902. In *Banking on Freedom: Black Women in US Finance Before the New Deal* (pp. 41–72). Columbia University Press. The identity of Maggie Walker’s father is uncertain; some have said that he was an Irish Confederate soldier; others have named author and abolitionist, Eccles Cuthbert. Whatever his identity he had little to nothing to do with Maggie’s life. Garrett-Scott, Shennette. ““Who Is So Helpless as the Negro Woman?”: The Independent Order of St. Luke and the Quest for Economic Security, 1856–1902.” In *Banking on Freedom: Black Women in U.S. Finance Before the New Deal*, 41–72. Columbia University Press, 2019. Mickler, 1982

example of the respect Walker wielded in her own right, which she used to the benefit of the whole community.

Despite her decreasing mobility in her later years, Walker was able to leave the house and was chauffeured by her own private driver. It can therefore be seen as a deliberate choice to host business and political meetings in her home rather than at the IOSL buildings or at any other more formal venue. Walker wanted to have the people she was meeting in her home—the space that she had purchased and built upon with her own money. It could be argued that she wanted the opportunity to show what she and the African American community at large was capable of creating: a beautiful, well-furnished, and well-cared-for home capable of hosting formal dinners and meetings. Interviews conducted with Walker’s granddaughter, who grew up in the family home with Walker, revealed that the children were not allowed into the dining room except on special occasions and that the room was otherwise only used during Walker’s business dinners and for important guests.¹⁷⁴ Walker wanted the space to remain pristine in order to impress visitors. The home was not only a show of Walker’s pride in her own accomplishments but also pride in the accomplishments of her community.

The Bank

“Let us have a bank that will take the nickels and turn them into dollars,” is what Walker announced to a room full of women IOSL members when she first proposed her plan to open a bank in 1901. That year the focus of the IOSL—and of Walker—was on the planning and construction of the new St. Luke’s Hall (MLW Figure 9). Once construction was completed on the Hall in the spring of 1903, by late summer of that year the IOSL’s lawyer had drawn up a

¹⁷⁴ Tour of Maggie L Walker House, conducted by NPS Park Ranger, Richmond, VA, July 27, 2022.

charter for Walker's bank. At that point, the bank did not even have a vault, but due to the determination and resourcefulness of Maggie Walker, the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank would open its doors with great ceremony on November 3, 1903.¹⁷⁵ The bank shared its location with the St. Luke Emporium department store (MLW Figure 10) until the store's closure, after which the bank moved into its own building. The new building (MLW Figure 11), designed by Charles T Russell, was located at the corner of First and Marshall Streets, and opened its doors in November 1911.¹⁷⁶

According to Garrett-Scott's book on Black women in finance, *Banking on Freedom*, Walker and the bank board had an expansive vision of how they would turn nickels into dollars. Beyond growing 'customers' money through investment in profit-making (and job-creating) business and property holdings" the board "wanted to encourage individual savings for collective wealth building" by directly investing in and extending credit to "for-profit, capital-intensive projects that built up Black communities."¹⁷⁷ This can be seen as another indication not only of Walker's investment in the growth and prosperity of her community, but also her belief in supporting Black businesses as a form of racial uplift. Instead of investing in any potential profit-making venture, Walker and the board that she chaired invested the community's money in businesses and projects that benefited the community, and in-so-doing encouraged the further development and strengthening of the Jackson Ward community.

The bank did not only look out for Black businesses; it was also invaluable for its customers. In an essay on Maggie Walker, Elsa Barkley Brown commented that "the bank recognized the meager resources of the Black community, particularly Black women...In fact, its

¹⁷⁵ Garrett-Scott, 2019.

¹⁷⁶ Garrett-Scott, 2019.

¹⁷⁷ Garrett-Scott, S, 2019.

establishment as a penny savings bank is an indication of that.”¹⁷⁸ Walker and the members of the bank’s board were very much aware of what the average Black person (especially women) in Jackson Ward made, and what they could and couldn’t afford. As a result, the minimum loan that the bank would provide was set at \$5. Typically, banks would require a 50 percent down payment for home loans; Walker’s bank would accept 10 percent down payments. The bank also helped homeowners by allowing them to refinance their home loans as a way “to avoid the large and potentially devastating principal repayments that typically came due after three to five years on home loans during the era.” As a result of generous bank policies like these, “by the early 1920s at least 600 members of the community had paid off their home mortgages in full.”¹⁷⁹

The St. Luke’s Bank thrived under Maggie Walker’s leadership. While the bank’s main rival—the True Reformers Bank (bank of the Grand Fountain of the United Order of True Reformers—was forced to close in 1910,¹⁸⁰ St. Luke’s Bank only continued to grow. In 1904 (a year after opening), the bank’s assets sat at \$37,870 (approximately \$1,367,851.63 in 2025¹⁸¹); by 1910 asset value had risen to \$120,813 (approximately \$4,088,121.16 in 2025¹⁸²); and by 1920 it sat at \$529,883 (approximately \$8,516,941.93 in 2025¹⁸³).¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁸ Elsa Barkley Brown, “Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no. 3 (April 1989): 610–33.

¹⁷⁹ Garrett-Scott, 2019.

¹⁸⁰ The True Reformers Bank was forced to close after an embezzlement scandal was quickly followed by the defaulting of several large loans. “True Reformers Complete Business”. Richmond Planet. September 24, 1910. p. 1.; “Efforts to Save Colored Bank”. The Roanoke Times. October 30, 1910. p. 2.

¹⁸¹ “Inflation Rate between 1904-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$37,870 in 1904 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed August 14, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1904?amount=37870>.

¹⁸² “Inflation Rate between 1910-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$120,813 in 1910 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed August 14, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1910?amount=120813>.

¹⁸³ “Inflation Rate between 1920-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$529,883 in 1920 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed August 14, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1920?amount=529883>.

¹⁸⁴ Garrett-Scott, 2019..

The St. Luke Emporium

The St. Luke Emporium was a department store associated with the IOSL and the brainchild of Maggie Walker. The store sold “clothing, hats, and other dried goods” to its majority-Black customers. In addition to the department store, the building also housed the St. Luke’s bank for a few years. The curator at the Maggie Walker National Historic Site, Ethan Bullard, described the St Luke Emporium as “a microcosm of Walker’s vision of economic empowerment...Staffed predominantly by Black women and a few Black men, it was a place where Black customers could shop, deposit, withdraw, and invest all under one roof, while keeping the proceeds within the Black community.”¹⁸⁵ Just as with the bank, Walker set up a space where her Black community could support one another while also taking care of their own needs. Walker had told her fellow Black women (and men) to ‘shop Black,’ and now she was literally creating the space to do so. The Emporium was a site where Black shoppers could not only be certain of having ‘shopped Black’, but also where they could shop safely without needing to worry about segregationist laws, rules, and regulations. The store’s existence was news across the country, with a Black newspaper in Indianapolis (*The Freeman*) reporting on the securing of the store charter: “...twenty-two women on March 11th secured a charter from the corporation commission and will at once open a big store to be known as St. Luke’s Emporium.”¹⁸⁶

As the newspaper advertisement (Figure 12) states, the store was located at 112 E. Broad Street. This is significant because not only was Broad Street the main business thoroughfare of Richmond (and continues to be to this day), it was also the primary dividing line between the

¹⁸⁵ Garrett-Scott, 2019.

¹⁸⁶ “Race Gleanings.” *Freeman* (Indianapolis, Indiana) XVIII, no. 14, April 8, 1905: [7]. *Readex: African American Newspapers*.

white and Black parts of Richmond. Beyond Broad Street and into Jackson Ward, white Richmonders would largely leave Black Richmonders alone to do what they will in their part of the city. In placing a Black department store on Broad Street, Walker and the IOSL were encroaching on white territory.¹⁸⁷ In his 2020 article “Down Where the South Begins: Black Richmond Activism before the Modern Civil Rights Movement, 1899-1930,” Marvin Chiles describes the response to John Mitchell Jr purchasing a house “in the all-white West Clay Street neighborhood adjacent to Jackson Ward” where he wanted to open his Mechanics’ Savings Bank. First, white residents protested; then a woman offered to sell her home to him and was refused; finally, West Clay Street’s Citizen’s Protective League (CPL) attempted to use the local government against Mitchell. One week later, the streets committee in City Hall granted Mitchell his relocation permit, telling the furious CPL members that “he will put the Bank there. If you do not permit him to put it at Third and Clay Streets...you will have a house there with Negro tenants.” Mitchell did not sit on his laurels after winning. The following year Mitchell bought two more houses in the Clay Street neighborhood and rented the buildings to Black tenants. In response, the CPL threatened Mitchell’s potential tenants with violent threats helpfully signed “the white Residents of Clay Street.” (“If any Negroes move in this house, they do so at their risk. The white residents of Clay Street are determined that no Negroes shall live in their neighborhood.”) Thankfully, while the letter frightened some prospective tenants, those who did move in did so without recorded incident.¹⁸⁸

As with Mitchell’s bank and Black tenants, the Black store in the white business district was not accepted lying down. The Emporium faced resistance even before opening its doors.

¹⁸⁷ Garrett-Scott, 2019.

¹⁸⁸ Marvin Chiles, “‘Down Where the South Begins’: Black Richmond Activism before the Modern Civil Rights Movement, 1899–1930,” *The Journal of African American History* 105, no. 1 (January 2020): 56–82.

Walker recounted the experience in 1906, saying, “when it was found out for what purposes the property had been bought there was an attempt made to buy the premises from us at an advance of several thousand dollars more than the purchase price. In addition to this there was a personal offer of \$10,000 in cash if we would not start the Emporium.” The offers were not accepted and the Emporium opened in the IOSL’s desired location.

Pushback from white Richmond did not stop after the store opened. Soon after the opening of the Emporium, Walker was notified of the formation of the White Retail Dealers’ Association (WRDA) which accepted as members “every white man and woman selling anything at retail.” While the group was formed after the Emporium opened, its members did not confine themselves to harassing the Emporium. According to Walker, “when the WRDA decides to crush out a Negro merchant, the wholesale merchants are notified not to sell the Negro...saying if they do, they will not receive the patronage of the white merchants.” This underhanded tactic was effective in at least one instance with the Emporium. Wholesalers did not outright refuse to supply the store but instead, just as effectively, began to demand cash payment and to refuse the expected 60-day credit still being offered to white merchants.¹⁸⁹ Thus, the success of the Emporium was subdued by maliciously deployed supply chain problems. The economic challenges faced by the Emporium persist even to this day, where Black entrepreneurs, businesses, and perspective home-buyers are priced out of markets based on their race.¹⁹⁰ By denying them access to financial levers which were otherwise afforded to white businesses, the WRDA effectively priced the Emporium out of prosperity.

¹⁸⁹ Garrett-Scott, 2019; Chiles, 2020; Brown, 1989

¹⁹⁰ Loan discrimination against Black entrepreneurs is a documented issue. Data shows that Black business owners face more impediments in accessing credit when compared with white business owners. An example of a recent study addressing this issue include a CFPB study that found that “lenders [are] less likely to encourage Black entrepreneurs and more often steer them toward alternative financing.” “CFPB Pilot Study Finds Differential Treatment in Small Business Lending Markets,” Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, November 13, 2024.

The struggles of the Emporium were not confined to combating the tactics of the WRDA. Just as, if not more, problematic was the insurmountable economic ceiling created by the limited incomes of the store's main customer base. There were not enough Black people with large enough incomes to afford to shop regularly at the Emporium. Additionally—and to the great personal consternation of Walker herself—she believed that many Black shoppers were simply unwilling to 'buy Black,' either by supporting the Emporium or other Black-owned businesses. In one of her speeches, she questioned her audience on the topic: "Why do we insist on pushing ourselves where we are not wanted? Or are we so simple and short-sighted that we are willing to give the white man every dollar that we can muster when he is daily telling us to get away from him?" Despite Walker's heartfelt and imploring speeches and newspaper ads encouraging people to shop at the store,¹⁹¹ the Emporium was shut in 1911. However, the bank did remain in the building until moving to a new location.¹⁹²

St. Luke Herald

"What we need is an organ, a newspaper to herald and proclaim the work of the Order. No business, no enterprise, which has to deal with the public, can be pushed successfully without a newspaper." These are the words Walker used when proposing the creation of an IOSL newspaper at the IOSL Convention in 1901. The Convention accepted Walker's proposal and *The St Luke Herald* began publication the following year, with its first weekly edition published on March 29, 1902.

¹⁹¹ For example, on July 30, 1910, an advertisement ran in the Evening Journal announcing "Monstrous Dollar Offering" on August 1, which would allow a customer to purchase "\$4 and \$6 trimmed hats...\$2.00 and \$2.50 skirts...\$3.00 1-piece dress...[and] \$2.50 skirt and waist" each for \$1.00. St. Luke Emporium, "Monstrous Dollar Offering," *Evening Journal*, July 30, 1910.

¹⁹² Garrett-Scott, 2019.

The newspaper was produced—writing, editing, printing—directly out of the IOSL headquarters, the St. Luke Building. This state of affairs reflected the purpose and desired impact of the newspaper: to bring IOSL members (leaders and general members) from across the country together around a shared set of beliefs and facts; to advertise the St. Luke Bank and Emporium as well as other Black businesses; and to serve as a forum for civil rights activism and Black political commentary. As Walker herself put it in that same 1901 speech, the *St. Luke Herald* was “a trumpet to sound the orders, so that the St Luke upon the mountain top, and the St Luke dwelling by the side of the sea, can hear the same order, keep to the same music, march in unison to the same command, although miles and miles intervene.”¹⁹³ The newspaper’s production location within the IOSL headquarters (a building owned outright by the organization) showcased its loyalty to the IOSL and to the Black communities it supported—with no undue influence from outside (white) sources and forces.

The reach of the St Luke Herald grew with the IOSL through the first decades of the twentieth century. By 1916 (four years after starting publication) the *Herald* had 4,000 subscribers; by 1924, that number was 6,000. Five years later, the *St Luke Herald* had eclipsed the *Richmond Planet* as Richmond’s leading African American weekly newspaper.

Like the St Luke’s Bank, *The St Luke Herald* thrived under Walker’s leadership—and for several years after her death. The Great Depression would spell the end for the newspaper, with the Depression having hit the IOSL with declining membership, member dues going unpaid or late, and the profits brought in by ventures the IOSL had invested in decreasing as the world economy slowed to a crawl. Cuts made across the organization appeared in the newsroom as a significant cut to the size and scope of the newspaper, with the *Herald* going from a weekly,

¹⁹³ “St. Luke Herald (U.S. National Park Service),” National Parks Service; Marlowe, 2003

twelve-page newspaper to a monthly, 12-page, letter-sized bulletin, renamed the *St Luke Fraternal Bulletin*. Additional pain was felt in the newsroom after St Luke senior staff (including senior members of the writing and printing staff) took 10- to 70-percent pay cuts to protect the jobs of newer employees. The *St. Luke Fraternal Bulletin* survived through World War II and into the 1980s, along with the IOSL, but it never achieved the wide reach or journalistic stature of *the Herald*.

The *St. Luke Herald* is considered to have been one of the major African American newspapers of the South in the early 1900s. Alongside the *Richmond Planet*, it reported both local and national news while providing editorials focused on the Black interpretation of events as well as commentary on Black issues. By the 1930s many Black newspapers had collapsed, followed by several more during the Great Depression. By World War II, fewer Black newspapers remained, but those that had survived, had a nearly nationwide circulation, such as the *Chicago Defender* and the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*.¹⁹⁴ Maggie Walker's choice to found a Black newspaper shows that she understood the importance of communication and the press to the growth and strength of local and national African American communities. She recognized that African Americans could not be reliant on white publications to collect, write, and disseminate accurate news about and to African Americans; that to control the news meant that she could control the narrative and perspective that people were taking. Not only was the newspaper a clever way to keep IOSL members informed of IOSL (and general) news, the newspaper was a way to shape the narrative about the news, economics, banking, shopping, and culture.

¹⁹⁴ Marlowe, 2003

Death

Maggie Walker died at the age of seventy from diabetic gangrene at 8:30 p.m. on December 14, 1934, in her bedroom at 110 East Clay Street. She was surrounded by her remaining family. The Richmond community—both Black and white—mourned her passing. Her funeral, held at First African Baptist Church, was one of the largest ever held in Richmond. Walker was buried in Evergreen Cemetery, next to her husband and son.

Walker was given several posthumous awards and honors. IOSL members put together a formal memorial program at the city auditorium. The newly constructed Maggie Walker High School was named in her honor in 1936. The month of November continued to be celebrated as “Maggie Walker Month” by many of the organizations, businesses, and families she had supported. They continued to honor her after her death by placing statues and images of her in their homes, businesses, and schools during the month.

Epilogue

Walker’s daughter-in-law, Hattie F. Walker, continued to live in the house until the late 1960s. Hattie did not make any major alterations to the house while she lived there. She died in 1974, leaving the property to her daughter, Dr. Maggie Lewis. 1975 saw the property designated a Virginia Historic Landmark, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and declared a National Historic Landmark. In 1978, the house was designated as a National Historic Site. The statement of significance for the NRHP nomination form notes that Walker was “intensely active in church and fraternal work early in life,” portraying her as a banker, community leader, and organizer through her work with the church, the Independent Order of St. Luke, the St. Luke Bank, and the Richmond Council of Colored Women, where, as founder and president, she “guided the council in a drive to raise thousands of dollars to assist the Virginia Industrial School

for Colored Girls.” While the statement touches upon many of Walker’s accomplishments, it closes by stating that “Maggie Lena Walker is of national historical significance because she was the first woman known to be president of an American bank.”¹⁹⁵

The Historic Structure Report offers a similar assessment of the significance of Maggie Walker and the site, stating that the site “is significant primarily because it was the home of Maggie Lena Walker, a pioneer Black financier and executive, whose success in the fields of banking and insurance between 1890 and 1920 was a widely recognized example of achievement by Black women that constructively influenced the development of feminism and race relations in the first half of the twentieth century.”

The Historic Structure Report statement of significance goes on to discuss the architectural significance of the site and surrounding area: “Physically [her neighborhood and her house] are expressive of the values which led to her success...her house is characterized by self-confidence and delight in evidence of upward mobility.” Architecturally, the house is described as stylistically reflective of “the changing fashions of the years in which they were built.”¹⁹⁶ Overall, according to the Historic Structure Report, the importance of the Maggie Walker House lies in its being representative of the economic and social upward mobility experienced by Black families in Richmond at the time. Maggie Walker herself can be described as an outlier in the level of economic and professional success that she achieved, but her home reflected the mores and stylistic taste of African Americans of her day.

In 1979, a year after the house’s designation to the National Register, the National Park Service purchased the property from Dr. Walker, with assistance from the Maggie L. Walker

¹⁹⁵ Greenlee, 1974.

¹⁹⁶ Mickler, 1982.

Historical Foundation. Since purchasing the property, the NPS has conducted a large restoration project which included “electrical rewiring, plumbing repairs, insulation and roof replacement, painting of the façade, and the rebuilding of the rear carriage house wall.”¹⁹⁷ In purchasing the property, the NPS also took over custodianship of the archival materials belonging to Maggie Walker that had been preserved by her family. This archive includes her personal diaries, letters, photographs, and some household management items (receipts, order slips, etc.), as well as paperwork relating to the Independent Order of St. Luke. The house and the archive are cared for and maintained by the NPS and the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation.

Today, the property operates as a historic site dedicated to telling the story of Maggie Walker’s life and work. The house operates as a house museum and an archive for both Walker and the Independent Order of St. Luke.

The NPS offers tours of the Maggie Walker House. The tour focuses primarily on the life of Maggie Walker, with little time spent discussing the IOSL or the St. Luke Bank. Instead, the tour centers on Walker’s family life, emphasizing her role as a wife and mother and the home she built around her family. Discussion of her work—her professional and economic accomplishments—occurs primarily around the library, living room and dining room, where Maggie Walker conducted most of her work affairs and meetings.¹⁹⁸

This emphasis on the family life of Maggie Walker makes sense given that the primary function of the house was as a family home. The tour centers her role as a homemaker, narrating how she became a generational entrepreneur and respected community leader while also raising

¹⁹⁷ Mickler, 1982.

¹⁹⁸ Tour of Maggie L Walker House, conducted by NPS Park Ranger, Richmond, VA, July 27, 2022.

a family. Exhibitions in the visitor center offer more detail about her role in the community and her accomplishments as founder of a newspaper, a store, and a bank.

However, the choice of emphasis in the house tour does a disservice to the scope of the impact that Maggie Walker had on her community and on history. She said herself—and her actions confirmed—that her family was very important to her, but her role as a wife and mother, as a homemaker, was not her primary role and not the role that made her an exception to the rules of Black womanhood. An important historical takeaway from the story of Maggie Walker and her house is that the house was both the site where Walker managed both family and her business and activist activities. To focus primarily on the familial aspect of Walker's story ignores the dual nature of both Walker and her house—the ways that concepts of Black racial cooperation and racial pride were explored and enacted in Walker's life and in the development of her home.

MLW Appendix

Archival materials

The main source of archival materials for this chapter is the archive at the Maggie Walker House Historic Site, managed by the National Park Service. This archive contains the papers (documents, writings, photographs, receipts, etc) of Maggie Walker herself, as preserved by her family. It also contains materials relating to her time leading the St Luke Bank and the Independent Order of St Luke, although the main archives of these organizations are housed elsewhere. The Maggie Walker House Historic Site house tour was also an important source of information about the house itself, and the Walker family's life there.

Other archival materials were collected from the archives at the Virginia Union University, as well as newspaper articles (mostly from the *Richmond Planet*) from the Richmond Public Library and the Library of Virginia.

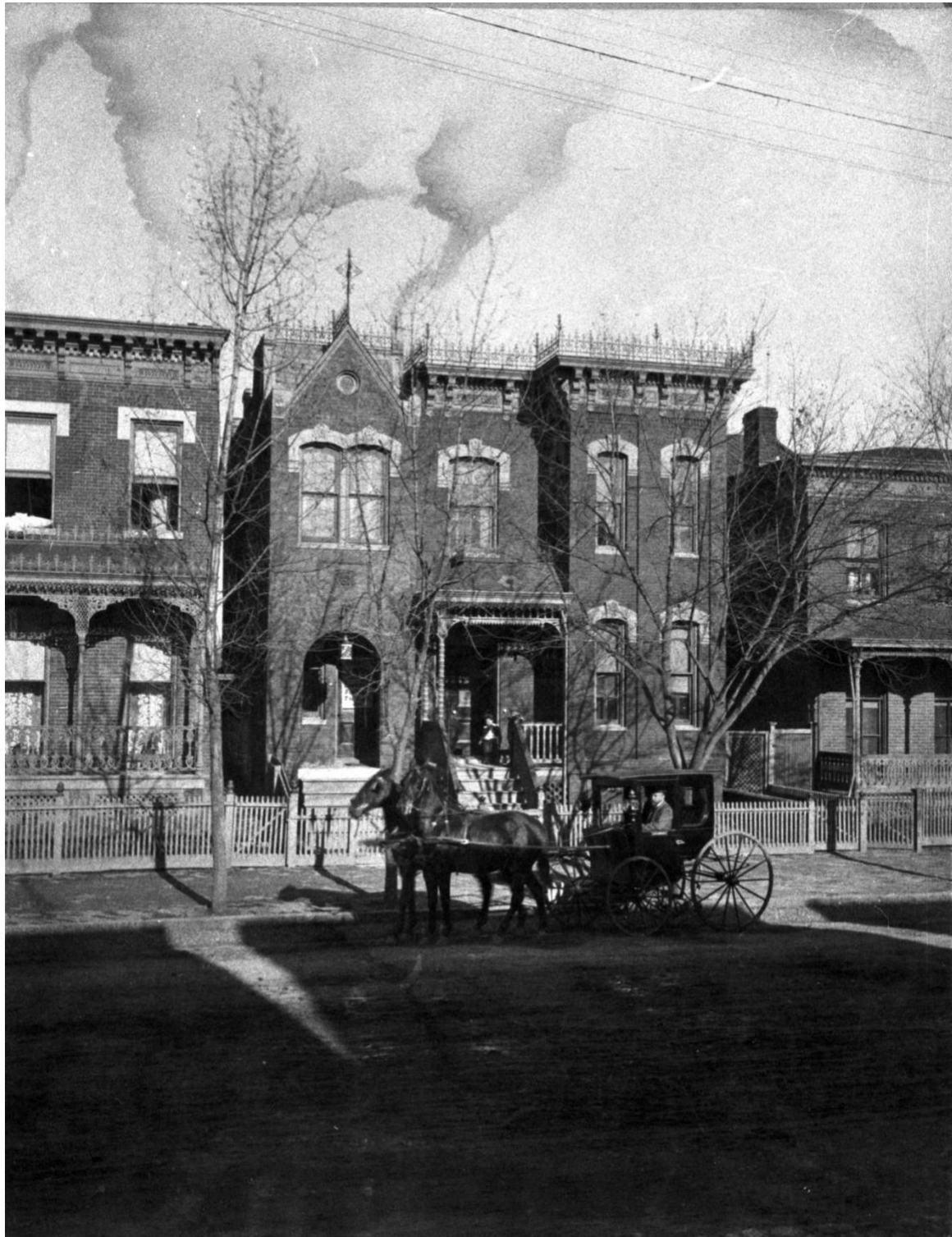
MLW Figure 1 - Maggie Walker House. Photo by author



MLW Figure 2 - Maggie Walker. c.1898-1910. Photographic Print
Courtesy of National Park Service, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, MAWA 62



MLW Figure 3 -110 E Leigh Street. Unknown Date. Unknown photographer
Courtesy of National Park Service, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site.



The figure displays six architectural drawings of the Maggie Walker House, organized into two columns and three rows. Each row represents a phase of development, with a plan view on the left and a section view on the right. The drawings are labeled with 'PHASE 1 - 1883', 'PHASE 2 - 1889', 'PHASE 3 - 1892', 'PHASE 4 - 1897', 'PHASE 5 - 1922', and 'PHASE 6 - 1928'. The drawings are also labeled with 'S. L. Walker' and 'Maggie Walker House'.

PHASE 1 - 1883

Plan view: Shows the initial layout of the house, including the main living area, kitchen, and bedrooms. A small section view is shown to the right.

Section view: Shows the profile of the house, including the roofline and internal structure.

PHASE 2 - 1889

Plan view: Shows the house with additional rooms and a more complex layout. A small section view is shown to the right.

Section view: Shows the profile of the house, including the roofline and internal structure.

PHASE 3 - 1892

Plan view: Shows the house with further modifications, including a new wing. A small section view is shown to the right.

Section view: Shows the profile of the house, including the roofline and internal structure.

PHASE 4 - 1897

Plan view: Shows the house with significant additions, including a new wing and a porch. A small section view is shown to the right.

Section view: Shows the profile of the house, including the roofline and internal structure.

PHASE 5 - 1922

Plan view: Shows the house with further modifications, including a new wing and a porch. A small section view is shown to the right.

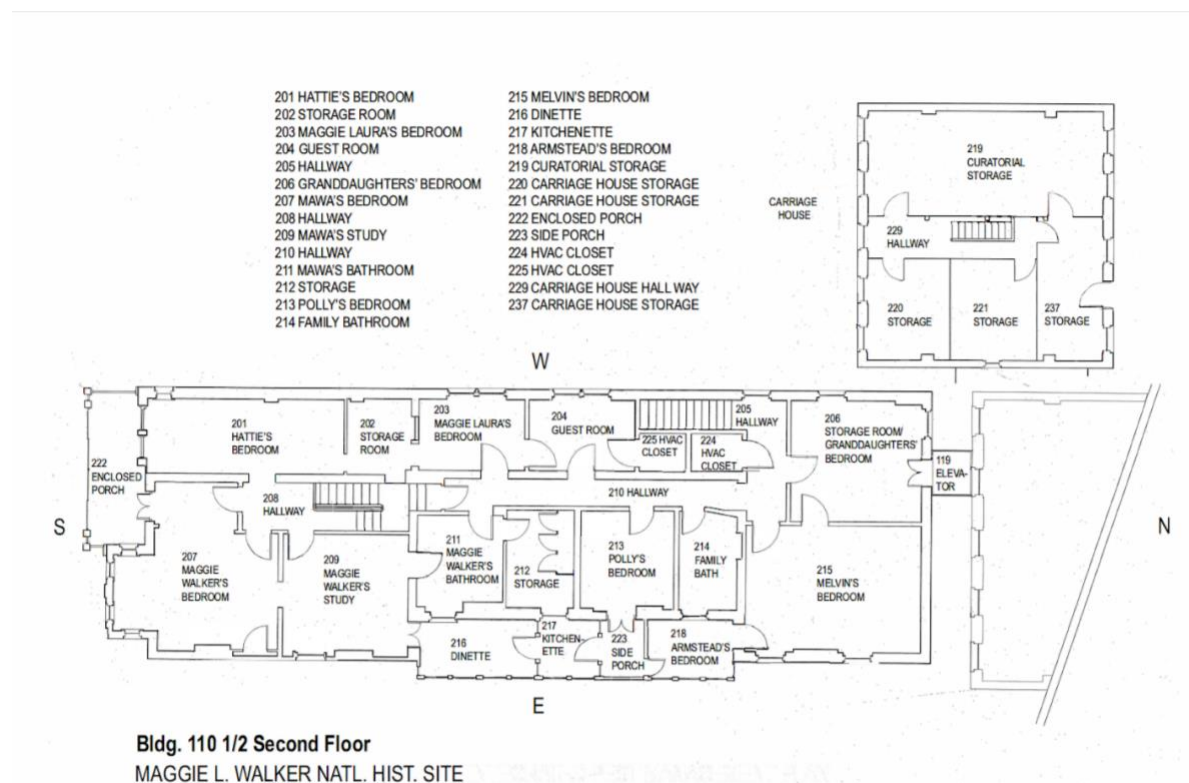
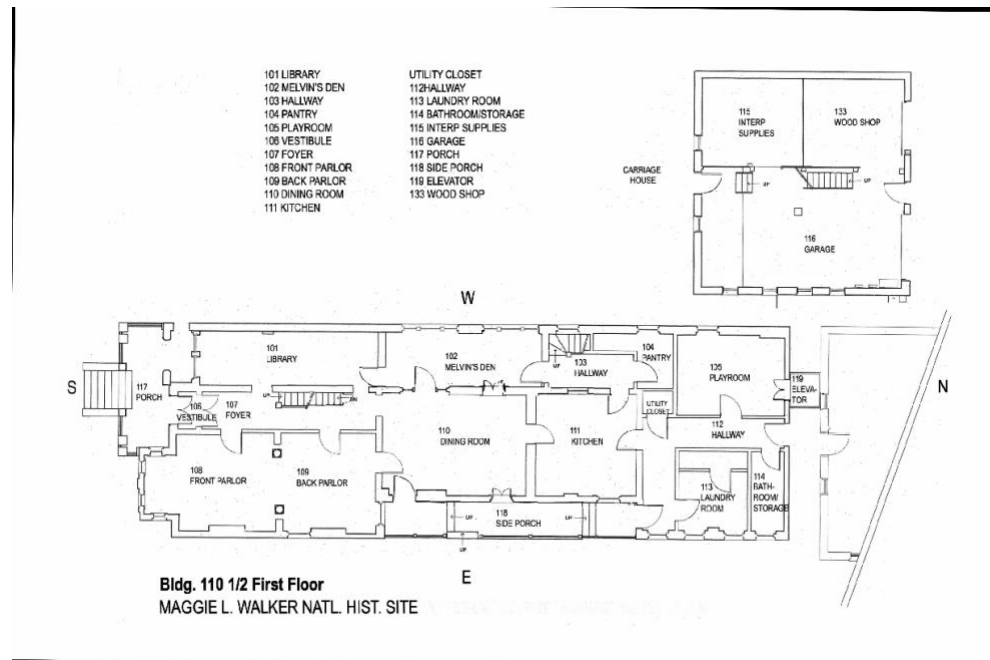
Section view: Shows the profile of the house, including the roofline and internal structure.

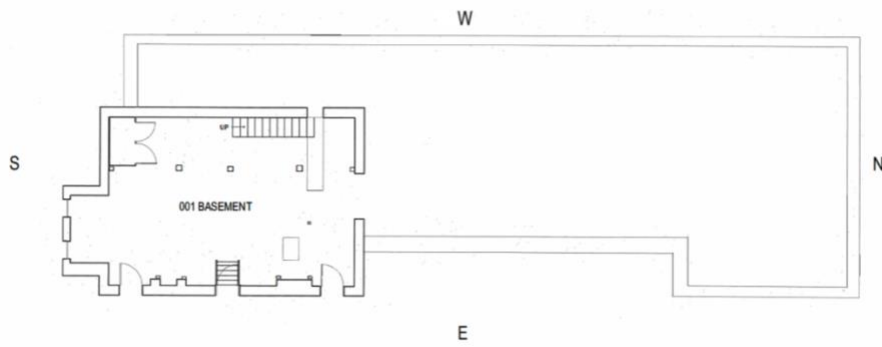
PHASE 6 - 1928

Plan view: Shows the house with final modifications, including a new wing and a porch. A small section view is shown to the right.

Section view: Shows the profile of the house, including the roofline and internal structure.

MLW Figure 5 - Floor Plan, Historic Structure Report
Courtesy of National Park Service, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site.





Bldg. 110 1/2 Basement
MAGGIE L. WALKER NATL. HIST. SITE I

MLW Figure 6 - Laundry Room; photo by author; December 16, 2021



MLW Figure 7 - Private Elevator; photo by author; December 16, 2021



MLW Figure 8 - First African Baptist Church, photo by Calder Loth, 2020, Virginia Department of Historic Resources



MLW Figure 9 - St Luke's Hall

Courtesy of National Park Service, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site.



MLW Figure 10 - St Luke Emporium and St Luke Penny Savings Bank (112 Broad Street) *Courtesy of National Park Service, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site.*



MLW Figure 11 - St Luke's Penny Savings Bank at 329 N 1st Street
Courtesy of National Park Service, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site.



MLW Figure 12 - Advertisement in Richmond Planet Library of Virginia

RICHMOND PLANET, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

1905 ST. LUKE EMPORIUM 1906

First Anniversary and the SECOND EASTER OPENING, MONDAY, APRIL 2d, 1906.

WE BEG TO ANNOUNCE that we have just received from the factories and wholesale stores of the North and East, some of the most attractive goods, superior in quality and moderate in price, ever displayed in Richmond. A personal selection of these goods makes it possible for us to guarantee them in every respect. We take this means of thanking our patrons and extending to them an invitation to inspect our stock, from basement to third floor.

HATS We are offering One Hundred Pattern Hats of Latest Parisian Design—No Two Hats Alike for the unheard of sum of \$3.00—women. Take Elevator for Our Millinery Parlor, Second Floor—and find that we are offering the Best and Cheapest Goods to be found in town.

LADIES SUITS, SKIRTS AND SILK SHIRT WAISTS. It is worth a trip to see our Men's Shirt Waist—This is One Taste. You can't duplicate it for the money, anywhere in town. Both Long and Short Sleeves—2d Floor—take the Elevator.

SUITS Give Suits all the rest. If you want to be stylishly attired, you will not miss one of our tailored suits—all the latest and newest styles. The suits range in prices from \$9.99 to \$30.00, fit like a glove and perfect in finish. Separate Skirts from \$1.50 to \$15.00. We have made a specialty this Easter to fit the Ladies' Women's Slim Waists, Skirts and Suits. Take the Elevator, get off on 2d floor, and we will do the rest.

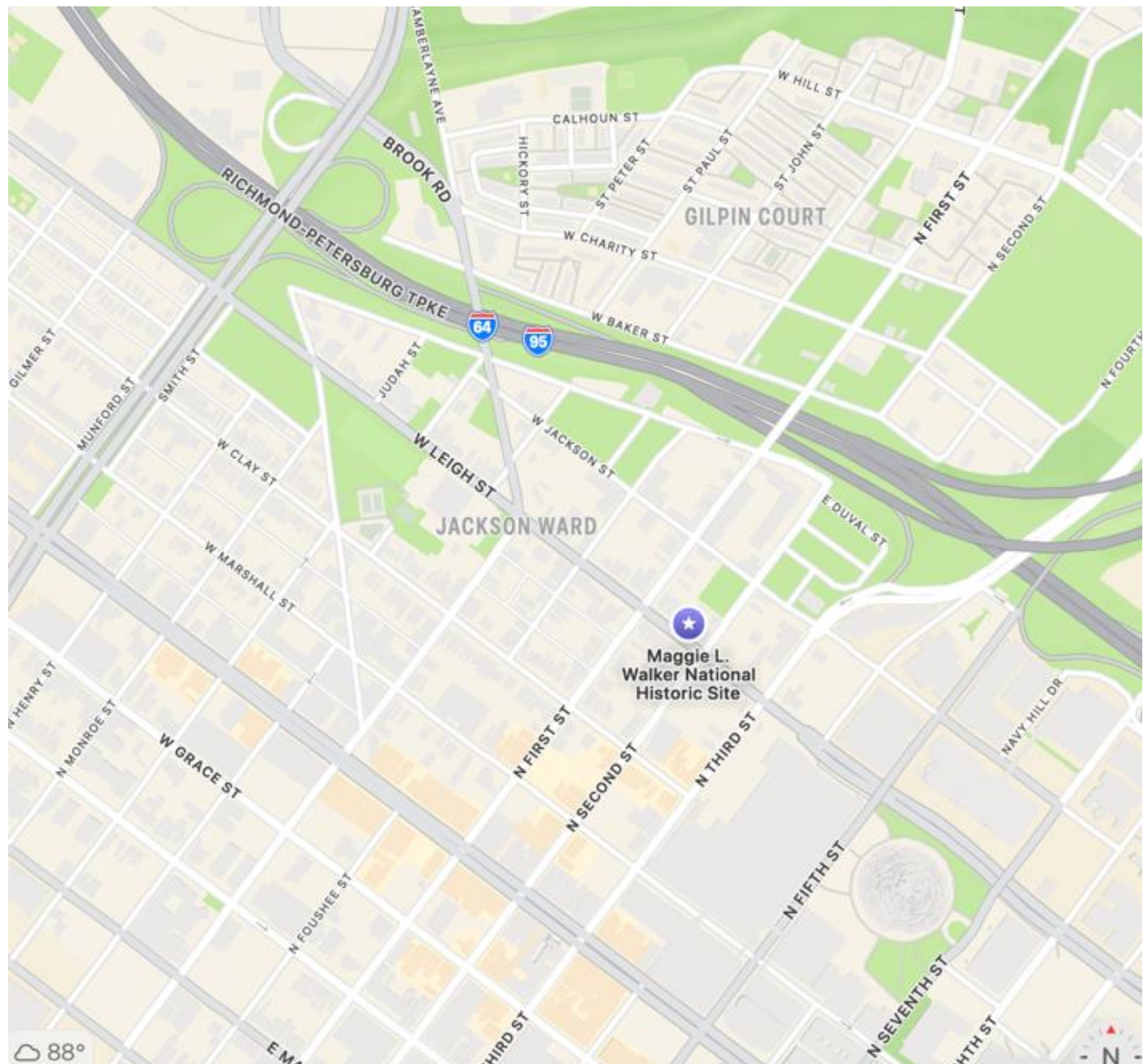
SHOES Our Shoe Department contains shoes for everybody. We can fit Mamma, Papa, Baby, Grandma, Grandpa in Low Shoes, High Shoes, Patent Leathers, Canvas, Kid, all grades and qualities from 98c to \$4.00. You look the look, and we undertake the other feat of fitting them snugly and cheaply. Take the Elevator and Foot, foot.

GENTS' GOODS Our Gents' Department has been stocked with Slacks, Coats, Ties, Cuffs, Collars, Socks, Underwear, Suspenders, Handkerchiefs, and many more. After you have inspected them, keep in and look us over and see if we can't save you money.

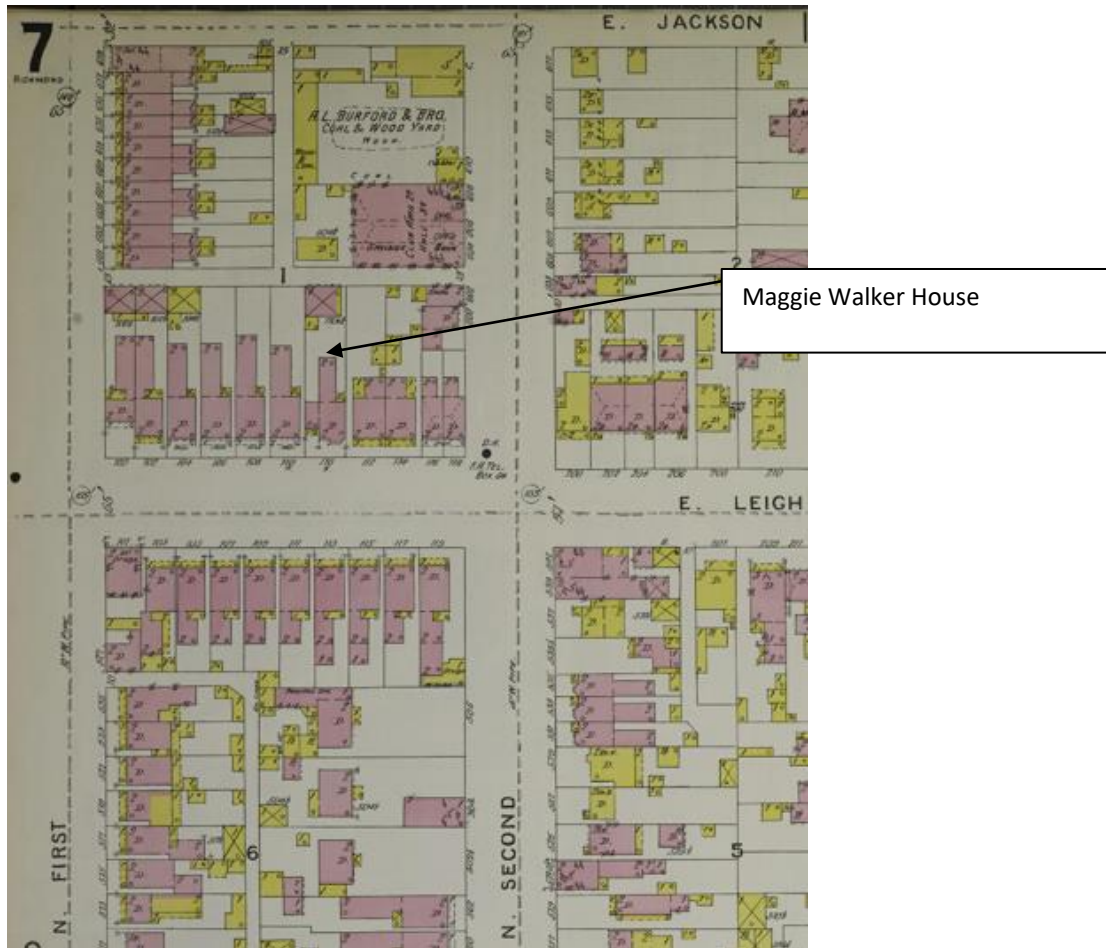
SAINT LUKE EMPORIUM, OUTFITTERS TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN.
112 E. Broad St., Phone, 1926—L. Quick Sales, Smallest Profits, Immediate Delivery.

Do You Know Them?

MLW Map 1 - Map of Jackson Ward



MLW Map 2 - *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Richmond, Independent Cities, Virginia*. Sanborn Map Company, 1895. Map.
Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, Sanborn Maps Collection



List of Archives:

Box 2, Folder 6, Maggie Lena Walker Papers, 1897-1935, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site.

Box 3, Folders 6-29, Maggie Lena Walker Papers, 1897-1935, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site.

Box 4, Folder 2, Maggie Lena Walker Papers, 1897-1935, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site.

Box 12, Folder 1-18, Independent Order of St. Luke Records: 1877-1970. Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site

Box 13, Folders 1-4; 8-10; 21; 26-28, Independent Order of St. Luke Records: 1877-1970. Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site

Box 14, Folders 1-6, Independent Order of St. Luke Records: 1877-1970. Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site

Box 15, Folders 2-10, Independent Order of St. Luke Records: 1877-1970. Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site

Chapter 2 - Virginia Union University

The Virginia Union University is an urban university located at 1500 N. Lombardy Street (VUU Figure 1) whose history is so unlikely that it is surprising it has not been told in full. The campus occupies sixty-four acres in the city of Richmond. Founded in 1899, VUU has continued to contribute to the history and culture of African Americans in Richmond.

As one of only five HBCUs in Virginia—and the eldest of the institutions by three years (Hampton University was founded in 1868 as Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute)—VUU, and its earlier iterations attracted students from all over Virginia and the South. The closest HBCU to VUU, and the one most likely to overlap in terms of student body, is Virginia State University, founded in 1882 and located in Petersburg Virginia, about 25.9 miles away. The oldest HBCU, the African Institute, (now Cheyney University), was founded in Pennsylvania in 1837 and was followed in the 1850s by Miner Normal School (Washington D.C., 1851), Lincoln University (Pennsylvania, 1854) and Wilberforce (Ohio, 1856). The majority of HBCUs were founded between 1865 and 1900, with the largest number established in 1867—including Alabama State University, Howard University, Morehouse College, and Talladega College.¹⁹⁹ VUU (as the Culver Institute) emerged as one of the first institutions offering higher education to newly freed African Americans in the South. Even as more HBCUs opened their doors, African Americans were severely limited in their options for seeking higher education compared with their white peers.²⁰⁰ Therefore, VUU continued to be an attractive option for African Americans throughout the country, even as the majority of its students

¹⁹⁹ Khalid A White, “The History of HBCUs: Lessons on Innovation from the Past,” essay, in *Reimagining Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, ed. Gary B Crosby, Marcus A Chanay, and Adriel Hilton (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2021), 5–13.

²⁰⁰ Vann R. Newkirk, *New Life for Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2014).

remained local to Virginia. The Richmond Institute even attracted foreign students, graduating a student from Laos (Nigeria)—Samuel M Harden—in 1879.²⁰¹

This chapter examines the rich social and architectural history of VUU to see how it has become not only a source for education and pride for the Jackson Ward community, but also symbol of achievement and potential. While Maggie Walker, the IOSL, the bank and the Emporium embodied Black business and economic excellence, this chapter explores how VUU became the site that embodied Black educational, professional and cultural excellence.

Black Education

Virginia Union University and its role in the neighborhood of Jackson Ward exemplify the important function that education and educational institutions have played in the development of Black neighborhoods post emancipation, as both sources of leadership and as sites of resistance.

Scholars have long recognized the important role of education, particularly higher education, within the African American community. For many newly freed African Americans, education was seen as both a path towards a higher paying job and as a way to prove their equality to white men. Historian David W. Blight described the view towards Black education: “with bricks, mortar, and sometimes curriculum provided or influenced by northern white philanthropy, colleges became the mainstay of Black hopes.”²⁰²

After the Civil War hundreds of schools and colleges were established and opened with the sole purpose of educating the newly emancipated men, women, and children. These early ‘colleges’ were not the higher education institutions we see today. The vast majority of their

²⁰¹ Raymond Hylton, *Virginia Union University* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014).

²⁰² David W Blight and James Horton, “The Age of Emancipation,” essay, in *A History of the African-American People* (London: Salamander, 1995).

earliest students were illiterate, unable to take true collegiate level courses; therefore, these colleges primarily provided elementary and secondary-level courses. Once students had mastered that primary curriculum, normal and theological training was offered. The goal of these institutions was to produce as many teachers and preachers for the Black community as possible, as well as to prepare their graduates for their roles as citizens. Some HBCUs did offer formal collegiate courses for those who were ready for and wanted to pursue advanced study. However, according to the U.S. Bureau of Education, only thirty-three Black colleges were offering college-level courses in 1915.²⁰³ The Colver Institute is an example of an educational institution that primarily offered elementary-level courses to an adult population. Wayland Seminary, as the name suggests, provided a higher level of education, focusing on providing a theological education as well as preparation for professions such as teaching. In its earliest years, VUU offered courses at college, high school and preparatory levels.²⁰⁴

Such was the African American population's desire for Black schooling that many communities did not wait for benevolent offers of education from the government, aid societies, or private philanthropists. Instead, they chose to seek education for themselves. Southern Blacks in particular quickly created networks of 'Sabbath schools' through both formal and informal church-linked organizations. These schools provided private, self-supported elementary classes throughout the week. They met wherever they could: "in church basements, private homes, warehouses, pool rooms, and shacks... To them education, religion, and property were the means to gain personal respect, economic security, and racial progress"²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Newkirk, 2014.

²⁰⁴ Hylton, 2014.

²⁰⁵ Roebuck et al. 1993.

The importance of VUU (and other HBCUs) to the African American community was not only about providing the opportunity to get an education, or to learn to read and write, or to prepare for a career or job. It was about self-respect and pride; about Black men and women being able to provide for their families; about a community that was once forced to look to white men and women for their very survival, being able to support itself with dignity and pride.²⁰⁶

VUU has historically been, and continues to be, a source of leadership not only for Jackson Ward, but also for the broader African American community in Richmond. As a university, its most obvious leadership role has, of course, been the education of future leaders of the African American community. In the university's early years, the school provided a steady stream of well-educated professionals who helped to transform Jackson Ward into a southern Black Wall Street. Beyond the accomplishments of its graduates, the school also provided leadership to the community through its faculty and those who were associated with the school. Many leaders in the community who never attended VUU as students nonetheless taught classes or gave money and time to the university. For example, Charles Russell, who designed several buildings on the campus, was a professor at the university.

²⁰⁶ Roebuck et al. 1993.

For further reading on Black education and Black colleges and universities see James' Anderson's "The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935" where he argues that southern Blacks—not whites—were primarily responsible for the success Black education after the Civil War as they funded, built, and sustained their own schools in the face of white racist resistance. James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010). For an overview of the history of HBCUs see Allen, Walter R., Joseph O. Jewell, Kimberly A. Griffin, and De'Sha S. Wolf. "Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Honoring the Past, Engaging the Present, Touching the Future." *The Journal of Negro Education* 76, no. 3 (2007): 263–80. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40034570>.

Virginia Union University Background

Virginia Union University is the amalgamation of two—eventually three after the admission of women in 1920 due to the merging with Hartshorn Memorial College—schools: Richmond Theological Institute (formerly the Colver Institute) and Wayland Seminary and College. The schools each had their own original buildings, and when they were combined, a separate property was purchased, resulting in the current Virginia Union University campus.

Colver Institute and the Richmond Theological Institute

The Freedmen’s Bureau was established in 1865 by the federal government as the agency responsible for assisting refugees, poor whites, and freedmen. As one of its many programs, the Bureau partnered with private northern groups to provide an elementary education—mostly focused on literacy—to African Americans and poor whites nation-wide, although it was focused on the South in particular. The Bureau did not operate any schools directly, instead coordinating and financing them in collaboration with northern missionary societies such as the American Baptist Home Mission Society.²⁰⁷ The Colver Institute was one of approximately twenty schools for freedmen founded across the South by this organization.²⁰⁸

Named for its founder, Dr. Nathaniel Colver, the school was first housed in the infamous Lumpkins Jail, nicknamed the Devils Half Acre. Prior to the war, Lumpkins Jail (VUU Figure 2) had operated as a slave jail and holding facility. Richmond was a trading hub for many goods traveling into, out of, and through the South—and enslaved people were no exception. Slave

²⁰⁷Julian B. Roebuck and Komanduri Srinivasa Murty, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Their Place in American Higher Education* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1993); Angel David Nieves, *An Architecture of Education: African American Women Design the New South* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2021).

²⁰⁸Matthew Laird, rep., *Archaeological Data Recovery Investigation of the Lumpkin’s Slave Jail Site*, 2010; David Zucchino, “‘With Unearthing of Infamous Jail, Richmond Confronts Its Slave Past.’,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 2008. For further reading on the interactions between HBCUs and white missionaries and philanthropists see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); and Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

owners and brokers brought enslaved people to Richmond to sell in the city's auction houses.

The sale could take several days to be completed, and during that time, enslaved people would be housed in slave jails, or slave-pens, such as Lumpkin's Jail, often for a daily fee.²⁰⁹

The prohibition of the importation of enslaved labor in 1807 coincided with an increase in demand in labor as new cotton plantations were being established throughout the South. Many plantation owners in Virginia and Maryland quickly came to the conclusion that, with the coming labor shortage and the fact that much of the soil had been exhausted from years of cotton cultivation, there would be more profit in selling human beings than in any cash crop that they could grow in the ground. They guessed correctly that demand for an enslaved workforce would grow and that they could breed the supply with no concern for competing with imported labor. Several Virginian slave traders and plantation owners were very successful with this new 'cash crop,' with some particularly successful 'entrepreneurs' of the trade producing as many as six thousand enslaved children on their properties.²¹⁰

As the preeminent trading center of the state, Richmond transformed into a powerhouse in the trade of enslaved people. By the start of the Civil War, Richmond's swampy downtown—Shockoe Bottom—was the primary slave-trading district in the United States north of New Orleans and, perhaps more importantly, the city was the hub of the U.S. internal slave trade. In a single decade (1830-1840) "it is estimated that between 10,000 and 11,000 people were sold

²⁰⁹ Laird, 2010.

²¹⁰ Ana Edwards and Phil Wilayto, "The Significance of Richmond's Shockoe Bottom: Why It's the Wrong Place for a Baseball Stadium," *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter* 15, no. 1 (April 2015): 6–17.

The story of the business and partnership of Isaac Franklin, John Armfield, and Rice Ballard, as told by Joshua Rothman, is an excellent source for further understanding the business of the slave trade as a thoroughly modern business. The book describes the networks and infrastructure utilized by the slave trade including slave jails, warehouses, purchasing agents, and steamships. Joshua D. Rothman, *Ledger and the Chain: How Domestic Slave Traders Shaped America* (Basic Books, 2023).

each year from Richmond and transported by ship, railroad, or by foot, fastened together in ‘coffles,’ to the sweltering fields of their new owners.”²¹¹

With the slave trading infrastructure of the city—jails, auction houses, whipping posts, gallows etc.—concentrated in and around Shockoe Bottom, the ‘district’ encompassed by “Main, Marshall, Fourteenth, and Nineteenth Streets became one of the great wealth-producing areas of the South.” The ‘slave district’ was not only populated by slave dealers and the enslaved; you would also find the industries that supported and upheld the trade, such as lawyers, blacksmiths, dry good store owners (to clothe enslaved people properly for auction), auctioneers, and jail wardens. Shockoe Bottom alone had between forty and fifty auction houses, with most of them standing on Fifteenth Street, known at the time as Wall Street. Auctions were also held at other locations around the city, including the Exchange, St. Charles, and City Hotels, the Metropolitan and Odd Fellows’ halls, and Bell Tavern, located a block or so west of Fifteenth.” Enslaved people were also sold on the Fifteenth-to-Nineteenth Street stretch of East Cary Street at the offices of commodity brokers.²¹²

Located only three blocks from the state capitol building, Lumpkins Jail was one of the largest of the five major slave-holding businesses in Shockoe Bottom, buying and selling enslaved people from the 1830s until the end of the Civil War in 1865. The compound consisted of four buildings (VUU Figure 2): Lumpkin’s house, the kitchen house, a guest house, and the jail itself. An avid slave trader himself, Lumpkin housed his clients in the guest house. The jail was a simple, two-story brick structure, approximately forty feet in length (VUU Figure 3). The conditions in the cells were horrific, with multiple enslaved people held for days, or even months

²¹¹ Edwards et al. 2015; according to Oxford English Dictionary a coffle was “a gang of slaves chained and driven along together.” Oxford English Dictionary, “coffle (n.),” December 2024.

²¹² Edwards et al. 2015

in shackles.²¹³ It is unclear the number of people that were held in each cell, but it was common for cells to be so crowded that people were described as being “on top of one another.”²¹⁴

According to an account of the life of Anthony Burns, who was held in the jail, by Charles Emery Stevens, “the place of his confinement [was] a room only six or eight feet square, in the upper story of the jail, which was accessible only through a trap-door. He was allowed neither bed nor air; a rude bench fastened against the wall and a single, coarse blanket were the only means of repose.”²¹⁵ The punishments meted out to disobedient enslaved people were considered harsh even by the standards of Southern plantation owners.²¹⁶

Robert Lumpkin was not the first owner of the site. It was owned by two other men prior to Lumpkin and the slave-holding facility was already extant when he purchased the three lots for approximately \$6000 on November 27, 1844.²¹⁷ Lumpkin was a slave trader and ran the facility with an iron fist. However, while he was known to be a brutal master, he was also reportedly a devoted family man. A man of contradictions, Lumpkin freed one of his enslaved people, Mary, and married her. They went on to have five children together, whom he cared for enough to ensure their education. He is said to have periodically sent Mary and the children to Philadelphia when he was behind on his debts to ensure that they would not be sold back into slavery to pay off his debts. Lumpkin was fond enough of his wife to leave everything to her after his death in 1866, following the collapse of his business as enslaved people were freed across the South after the Civil War ended.²¹⁸

²¹³ Laird, 2010

²¹⁴ Charles Emery Stevens, *Anthony Burns: A History* (Boston, MA: John P. Jewett and Company, 1856).

²¹⁵ Stevens, 1856.

²¹⁶ Laird, 2010.

²¹⁷ Laird, 2010.

²¹⁸ Laird, 2010.

Mary Lumpkin did not allow the buildings to sit idle after her husband's death. In a pointed turn of events, in 1867 she leased the facilities at Lumpkins Jail to Dr. Nathaniel Colver so that he could open a school for formerly enslaved people. The school utilized all of the structures on the site. It is reported that the former jail cells were used as classrooms and that Colver and other teachers gave lectures from the place where enslaved people had been auctioned off—a just reversal of history.²¹⁹

The Colver Institute was only housed in the jail for three years, moving to the former United States Hotel building. Three years later, in 1873, Mary Lumpkin sold the property in its entirety to Andrew Jackson Ford and his wife, Mary Lucy Ford. City land books from the 1870s show that the jail building was demolished some time before 1876. In subsequent years, the property was sold again, this time to the founders of the Richmond Iron Works. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps show that the ironworks foundry and machine shop were built on top of the former Lumpkin complex. The site remained buried until the mid-2000s, when archaeologists started an excavation there. They uncovered the foundations of the jail as well as artifacts from the site's days as a slave jail, including books, shoes, clothing, and toys.²²⁰

The location of the Colver Institute on the Lumpkin complex is significant for three main reasons: (1) its physical presence within blocks of the state capital building; (2) the reality of educating formerly enslaved Black men in the same jail cells where enslaved people were held; and (3) the story of Mary Lumpkin.

It is likely that part of what made Lumpkins Jail so successful was its central location, close to the Virginia state capital building. Purchasing enslaved people was not cheap—

²¹⁹ Laird, 2010

²²⁰ Laird, 2010

especially after the United States banned the importation of new enslaved labor—and the poorest white families often could not afford to have even a single enslaved person. The ownership of large numbers of enslaved people was really only possible for the wealthiest of families and large plantation owners. This meant that the vast majority of Lumpkin’s clients would have come from the most prominent families in Richmond, and the surrounding area—many of whom frequented the state capital buildings and centers of power in the city on a regular basis. The proximity of the slave jail allowed for it to be only a short distance for Lumpkin’s clients to travel from other locations that they would likely frequent within the city. This same proximity lent symbolic weight to the later school’s presence. That a school educating formerly enslaved men would be close to the center of power for at least some of their former masters, is visually compelling. The white slave owners of the South had just fought—and lost—a war to ensure that the very same men being educated within the jail would remain enslaved; and they were forced to watch as those formerly enslaved men were taught to read and write in the very same place where they would have been chained and tortured just a few years prior. As much as the leasing of the property by the school was primarily a matter of convenience, it can also be seen as an act of defiance—a visual assertion of transformation and resistance.

While some members of the Black community welcomed the school with open arms, it was met with distrust from other segments of the population. According to historian Adolph Grundman’s 1978 article, *Northern Baptists and the Founding of Virginia Union University*, the major obstacle was distrust of educated ministers. As Grundman put it “some of the older men had no use for “book made preachers;” they preferred men who had “a Bible in their hearts.”” The solution was “a summer practicum through which prospective ministers would receive practical experience in nearby churches, as well as acquaint the people with the goals” of the

school. Rev. Charles E. Corey, Colver's successor as leader of the school, would take the best students from the summer institutes as his assistants, and if they were successful, he would have them sent to northern schools where they could do college level courses. It was through this program that Joseph E. Jones and David N. Vasser were able to attend Madison University (now Colgate University) in 1871, and returned to Richmond upon graduating to teach at the Colver Institute for many years. The summer program won Corey, and the Colver Institute, approval from both Blacks and whites.²²¹

The location of the Colver Institute on the Lumpkin property is also symbolically significant as a physical and honorable reversal. A place once dedicated to the torture, imprisonment, and sale of human beings was repurposed into a site of education and uplift. As was mentioned earlier, the former jail cells were used as classrooms; the very sites of torture became spaces where the formerly enslaved could gain the tools to improve their lives and the lives of their families in a nation where they were now free. Some of the men who had actually been held in the jail as slaves returned as students. There was also great visual and spiritual power in teachers giving lectures and speeches from the podium where slave auctions had taken place. The entire site had been a symbol of cruelty and dehumanization, but was then transformed into a symbol of Black advancement through education.

The story of the Colver Institute and Lumpkin's Jail is incomplete without mentioning Mary Lumpkin—the formerly enslaved mistress, made wife, of Robert Lumpkin. The fact alone that Robert Lumpkin left his property to the formerly enslaved Mary was remarkable. It is especially surprising given the reputation Robert and the jail had, with even the notoriously brutal plantation owners of Virginia calling the treatment of enslaved people particularly cruel at

²²¹ Adolph H. Grundman, "Northern Baptists and the Founding of Virginia Union University: The Perils of Paternalism," *The Journal of Negro History* 63, no. 1 (January 1978): 26–41.

Lumpkin's facility. It was because Lumpkin left his estate to Mary in its entirety, with no requirements to hold the property for their surviving children, that she was able to rent the site to Dr. Colver and the Colver Institute and then eventually sell the property.

There is a long and tragic history of white, male, slave owners forcing physical and sexual intimacy onto enslaved Black women—often forcing these women to give birth to children from the unions who were themselves enslaved. There are famous examples of long-term 'relationships' growing between white men and enslaved mistresses, some even lasting through to the death of one partner. One such example was the relationship between Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson, which lasted until Jefferson's death in 1826. In the nearly forty-year relationship, Hemings bore six children fathered by Jefferson, four of whom survived to adulthood. Jefferson acknowledged the children but they were enslaved until Jefferson's death, when he freed them in his will.²²²

Mary Lumpkin was described by one abolitionist minister as "large, fair-faced...nearly white," suggesting that she was purchased or raised as a 'fancy girl.' Fancy girls were "the highest-priced slaves on the market...sold and registered as 'nurses,' 'domestics,' or 'housekeepers,' but...specifically bought as concubines." According to Alison Marie Weiss, this was a type of enslaved woman that was raised to be in the household—too light skinned to be put out in the fields where the darkest of enslaved people were relegated. Fancy girls, and often their children too, were kept in separate, nicer cells than the general enslaved population in slave jails and holding facilities. Many of these 'fancy girls' were brought up within the plantation household itself as the daughters of domestic slaves. They were often, therefore, trained to entertain company, hold a proper conversation, and even, in the cases of some young enslaved

²²² Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

girls with particularly doting white fathers, taught refined accomplishments such as piano-playing, painting and singing. Most importantly, fancy girls were trained to have just enough of the refinement and purity of a white woman to be acceptable, but with none of the rules and expectations for their treatment by white men that protected white women. Some white men became so attached to their favored enslaved mistresses that they built a separate ‘Little House’ cabin for the concubine and her children, that mirrored the ‘Big House.’”²²³

The history of the ‘fancy girl’ and Mary Lumpkin’s story itself, make clear that the relationship between the Lumpkins was very much one of coercion rather than as a true marriage. It is important to note that the Lumpkins’ relationship would not have been recognized as a marriage until after the Civil War, which Robert died soon after. Robert could and did recognize his children but Mary would have only been his concubine, at best, with no legal recognition beyond what Robert chose to leave in his will. Robert Lumpkin purchased Mary around 1840 when she was about eight years old. She was forced to act as a wife to a man twenty-seven years her elder, and she gave birth to the first of their five (or possibly seven) children when she was thirteen years old. Beyond bearing children and running the household, Mary had enough relative freedom of movement on the property to interact with imprisoned enslaved people such as Anthony Burns, to whom she gave a “testament and a hymn book” for comfort while he was in the jail. Mary, without the presence of a white Mrs. Lumpkin, acted as a mistress of the house, but with no legal or social status beyond what Robert Lumpkin allowed her. Meanwhile, two of her daughters, who were reportedly light-skinned enough to be white-

²²³ Alison Marie Weiss, “‘A Plumb Craving for the Other Color’: White Men, Non-White Women, and Sexual Crisis in Antebellum America” (dissertation, 2013); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

passing, were sent to finishing school in Philadelphia. It is not known what training or provision was given to the couple's sons.²²⁴

As was said previously, the Colver Institute moved from the Lumpkin complex to the United States Hotel building, located at Nineteenth and Main Streets. By this time, the school's name had been changed to the Richmond Theological Institute. It continued to educate young Black men—many of whom would go on to become leaders in their communities, often through church leadership. In 1899 the school officially combined with the Wayland Seminary to form Virginia Union University.²²⁵

Wayland Seminary

The Wayland Seminary and College was founded in 1867 in Washington D.C., by the same American Home Baptist Mission Society which was responsible for founding the Colver Institute. It was named in honor of the fourth president of Brown University, Francis Wayland; a white American Baptist minister and educator who was known as an early advocate of the antislavery cause. The school found its first home in a two-story house on Nineteenth and I Streets NW (VUU Figure 4). It grew quickly, and in 1876 the school purchased a building on Meridian Hill, at the end of Chapin Street. Coburn Hall was soon joined by several other buildings on the expanding campus, including a chapel, Davis Library, and Parker Hall, where the school's female students studied. At its largest, the school had approximately 120 boarders.

²²⁴ Kristen Green, *The Devil's Half Acre: The Untold Story of How One Woman Liberated the South's Most Notorious Slave Jail* (New York, NY: Seal Press, 2022); Sydney Trent, "In 1866, She Inherited a Notorious Va. Slave Jail," *The Washington Post*, February 3, 2020; Genevieve Carlton, "Mary Lumpkin Was Raped by Her Enslaver Then Sold His Land and Turned It into a School for Black Students," *All That's Interesting*, September 6, 2022.

²²⁵ Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff. "Virginia Union University." National Register of Historic Places nomination file, June 1981. State Historic Preservation Office, Richmond, VA.

Tuition was set at one dollar per month; including expenses, students could expect to pay about sixty dollars per year.²²⁶

At first, the school was meant to educate and train Black freedmen for religious ministry. However, in response to the broader educational needs of the newly freed Black population, the school expanded their offering of academic subjects to include both academic subjects and preparatory instruction at the basic and high school levels alongside its college-level courses. As both a seminary and college, Wayland offered a range of disciplines beyond divinity, meant to prepare its students for a wide variety of vocations, including in the sciences and teaching. Throughout its thirty-two years as an independent institution, Wayland Seminary and College played a vital role in the education of many Black men and women who would go on to play important roles in the development of Black culture and society in the United States. Some of the school's most prominent alumni include Kate Drumgoold (author), John Wesley Terry (labor leader), Harvey Johnson (pastor and civil rights activist in Baltimore, MD), and, most notably, Booker T. Washington (author, educator, and thought leader).²²⁷ Washington attended Wayland Seminary for eighteen months in 1878 and 1879, before returning to teach at his alma mater, Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute. Washington did not discuss his time at Wayland Seminary in great detail, beyond noting that it reinforced his belief in the superiority of an educational system that stressed self-help and the development of practical skills unlike the more academically focused Wayland Seminary. His subsequent time at the Hampton Institute under

²²⁶ "The School on Meridian Hill," *The Washington Post*, March 25, 1999.

²²⁷ "The School on Meridian Hill," *The Washington Post*, March 25, 1999.

the care of Samuel Chapman Armstrong, were far more influential, shaping his educational philosophy as well as his practical training.²²⁸

The Campus (construction history)

In 1899 Wayland Seminary officially joined with the Richmond Theological Institute (formerly the Colver Institute) to form Virginia Union University (VUU). The newly established university purchased sixty-five acres of land that, at the time, lay just outside of the city, where they proceeded to quickly build the campus' first buildings.²²⁹ As seen in VUU Figure 6, photographed around 1909, the campus was in open land at the time of construction and remained so for several years after the university opened. This is also evident in the 1905 Sanborn Map (VUU Map 2), where we can see the VUU campus right at the edge of the developed portion of the map.

It is important to take note of the fact that a Black university was able to afford to purchase sixty-five acres in 1899. This was a remarkable feat, and one which the administration was able to accomplish with help. Beyond the funds earned by Richmond Theological Institute (RTI) and Wayland Seminary, as well as any money able to be spared from the American Baptist Home Mission Society, the university was also assisted by university land grants from the federal government, and from northern philanthropists. Considering that the RTI had been a staple in Richmond's Black society for several years at this point, it is also likely that the university received donations from locals—particularly from Jackson Ward and wider the Richmond Black

²²⁸ Robert J. Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker t. Washington* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*, May 28, 2009.

²²⁹ Selden Richardson and Maurice Duke, *Built by Blacks: African American Architecture and Neighborhoods in Richmond* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011).

community—as well as collections from the local churches.²³⁰ One such pledge came from Rev. Evans Payne, who promised that his church would donate \$15,000 to the new university following a meeting hosted by Ebenezer Baptist Church.²³¹ Jackson Ward was, at this time, rapidly developing economically. The people and businesses of the neighborhood were thriving. This was a neighborhood and community which could afford to invest in a new project, especially one which could benefit both the neighborhood and future generations.

Not only could the community afford to invest, but it was also accustomed to having to provide for its own educational needs. The Colored Normal School was founded in 1867 under the order of the Freedman’s Bureau. The original school building received supplementary funding from various northern societies, with the building labor entirely provided by the local Black community. When the school opened, it had two teachers and sixty-five students, but demand quickly outpaced the space. The African American community came together to provide for community needs that the government was unwilling to meet. A larger building was required, and was built, again with the labor provided by the local community. The new building was located at the end of North 12th Street, and opened in 1873—the same year the first official class graduated. The community was very proud of the new school building they had designed and built. It was described by a visitor as “fine,” a word not often utilized to describe anything associated with this community. Despite having built the new school building with little help or support from the city, the building only remained in the community’s control for about three years. In 1876 they were forced to turn the school over to the Richmond school board, which proceeded to strip all of the quality equipment installed in the school—especially the valuable

²³⁰ Candice F. Ransom, *Maggie L. Walker: Pioneering Banker and Community Leader* (Minneapolis, MN: Twenty-First Century Books, 2009).

²³¹ “The Meeting a Success,” *Richmond Planet*, March 6, 1897.

chemistry materials and maps—and redistributed them to local white schools.²³² Therefore, the Jackson Ward community was not new to having to create their own schools from scratch when needed. VUU was on a larger scale, but it was, ultimately, just another instance where the community would provide when the government would not.

Upon purchasing the sixty-five-acre site with the help of university land grants and generous Northern philanthropists, the university embarked on an aggressive building campaign from 1897 to 1901, constructing a series of stunning Richardsonian Romanesque Revival buildings, called the ‘Noble Nine.’ Buffalo, New York architect John H. Coxhead was hired to design the original campus buildings, and he went on to design and construct the school’s first nine buildings.²³³ Coxhead’s office put out calls for “all labor and materials required to erect and complete the buildings...” in the *Richmond Planet* on many occasions—an attempt to garner local funding, tools, materials, and manpower for the project.²³⁴

It was not unusual for Black institutions to hire white architects; other HBCUs of the time were also hiring experienced white architects to design their first campus buildings. For example, Virginia State University, founded in 1882 and the closest HBCU to VUU, chose Harrison Waite, a prominent white architect from Petersburg, to design its first campus building in 1888.²³⁵ One reason for this could be the lack of licensed Black architects in the state. Virginia’s first licensed Black architect, John Lankford, was not licensed until 1922.²³⁶ There were Black builders—such as Armstead Walker—but few black architects.

²³² Ransom, 2009.

²³³ Raymond Hylton, *Virginia Union University* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014).

²³⁴ Office of John Coxhead, “Sealed Proposals - Office of John Coxhead,” *Richmond Planet*, February 9, 1898.

²³⁵ Ann Carter Lee, “Virginia State University,” SAH ARCHIPEDIA, February 19, 2020.

²³⁶ Victoria Kaplan, *Structural Inequality: Black Architects in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); “A Credit to His Race.” *Potosi Journal*. April 20, 1898. p. 4; Charles Russell was the second and licensed later that same year.

As we can see in the photo of Kingsley Hall under construction (VUU Figure 5), Coxhead's call for labor was answered. It is not known exactly who the men in the photo were; whether they were local or hired from further afield; the photo does confirm that Coxhead (or the university) hired a Black workforce. Based on the date of construction, some of the workforce also could have been trained at schools like Tuskegee University (or Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Students as it was known then), where students were taught trades such as building and carpentry through hands-on lessons. Many of the Tuskegee students learned their trade through work-study programs where they helped to build the campus buildings.²³⁷

The school opened with the first buildings unfinished, as was noted by the *Richmond Planet* on November 21, 1896: "The Virginia Union University has opened for business and the outlook is encouraging although the stone buildings are not as yet completed."²³⁸ By 1900 the first seven buildings were complete, including "one lecture hall, dormitory, dining hall, library, chapel, and two faculty residences," The school had advertisements published in the *Richmond Planet* (at least), such as that published in the October 7, 1899 edition, praising its "exceedingly strong faculty; beautiful and extensive grounds; finest of school buildings; large library; [and] new equipment."²³⁹ In recognition of the impact of the Northern philanthropists' contributions, many of the newly constructed buildings were named after donors.²⁴⁰ For example, Kingsley Hall (1897-1901), which was named for Chester Kingsley, the president of the American Baptist Home Mission Society.²⁴¹

²³⁷ Maura Lucking. "Settler Campus: Racial Uplift, Free Labor, and Land Tenure in American Design Education, 1866-1929." Order No. 30314409, University of California, Los Angeles, 2023.

²³⁸ *Richmond Planet*. (Richmond, VA), Oct. 14 1899. <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84025841/1899-10-14/ed-1/>.

²³⁹ *Richmond Planet*. (Richmond, VA), Oct. 7 1899. <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84025841/1899-10-07/ed-1/>.

²⁴⁰ Kollatz Jr., Harry. 2015. "Building Virginia Union." *Richmond Magazine*, March 25, 2015.

²⁴¹ Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff. "Virginia Union University." National Register of Historic Places nomination file, June 1981. State Historic Preservation Office, Richmond, VA.

As we see in VUU Figures 1 and 6, the campus is typical of the American college or university campus: situated within the countryside or wilderness, with plans that emphasize spaciousness and optimize open green space. As Paul Venable Turner points out, even the schools located in cities, like VUU in Richmond, “have often gone to considerable expense or inconvenience to simulate a rural spaciousness.”²⁴²

Turner goes on to argue that campus design was not just about aesthetics, it was about creating the ideal (or idealized) community, a space for the democratic ideals that planners believed were embodied in the rural campus plan.²⁴³ The goal was to create an ideal community through spatial organization—picturesque landscapes, quadrangles, greens, axial plans—that encouraged students and faculty to live, learn, and interact according to republican virtues (duty, honor, concern for the greater good, industriousness). These were the very ideals that Black people knew were not only being promoted at white universities, but were also those that white people believed that they (Black people) could never achieve. The perceived lack of these virtues was what some Black scholars believed was part of what was stopping the majority of white people from accepting the equality of Black and white Americans.²⁴⁴ These virtues also overlapped with the virtues of respectability sought in middle class Black families. By planning a picturesque campus VUU’s leaders were trying to show that Black Americans could embody the republican virtues, and through a show of virtue, gain respect and greater rights.

The campus also became a way for American colleges and universities to create identity and prestige. The comprehensive master plans designed specifically for colleges and universities

²⁴² Paul Venable Turner, *Campus: An American Planning Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

²⁴³ Turner, 1995

²⁴⁴ To read about Black respectability politics read Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2012) and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17, no. 2 (January 1992): 251–74.

by architects (for example Olmstead and Eliot for Stanford and McKim for Columbia) used the landscapes and architectural works created to tell narratives about the tradition, modernity, and authority of the university.²⁴⁵ This is particularly important in the case of Virginia Union University which, as one of the early Black universities (and the only Black university in Richmond) needed to establish its own narratives of tradition and authority in the face of racism and segregation.

Today, VUU's campus retains the look of a rural oasis within an urban setting. While the campus has been built up significantly over the last century, the buildings remain generously spaced out, with ample green space.

Legitimacy and the Romanesque Revival

The design of the VUU campus can be seen as a particularly significant way to understand VUU because the campus began as a blank slate along with the university. No structures existed on the campus prior to the construction of the first nine university buildings. Therefore, every building on the campus can be viewed as a deliberate choice made by the university—every location, style, and material was selected to reflect the university's priorities. One of these priorities was to convey legitimacy.

VUU's campus architecture is a source of legitimacy both for the university itself, and also for the community it occupies. The choice of the Romanesque Revival as the architectural style of the campus was more than a choice of aesthetics, it was a way to express cultural authority and gain legitimacy through using a style that was becoming associated with universities.

The Romanesque Revival originated in Europe in the early to mid-nineteenth century. As the name implies, it was inspired by the generally more austere Romanesque style developed in the

²⁴⁵ Turner, 1995

eleventh and twelfth centuries. The style is largely characterized by its use of round arched windows and doors, recessed entrances, pointed towers, symmetrical facades, ornamental corbelling, heavy masonry walls, and brick and limestone facings.²⁴⁶

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the rise in popularity of the Romanesque Revival in university and educational institutional architecture in the United States, with universities like Harvard and Tulane adding buildings in the style to their campuses in the 1880s and 1890s.²⁴⁷ The style was particularly popularized at that time by the work of Henry Hobson Richardson, a prolific architect who designed city halls, courthouses, commercial buildings, schools and churches across the country. He became so associated with the style that Romanesque buildings erected between 1880 and 1900 in the United States, such as the first buildings at VUU, are still called ‘Richardsonian Romanesque’ to this day. The variation is recognized by its use of rounded masonry arches that sit over windows and entryways, solid masonry walls, recessed windows, decorative wall patterns, towers, and a feeling of enormity or heaviness.²⁴⁸

While VUU’s first campus buildings were recognizably Romanesque Revival, there were some key differences. The most notable difference was the use of granite instead of the typical red brick. The rough-hewn gray stone façades, along with the thick walls and towers, projected a figure of strength and permanence. Both were important messages to send for an African American university and community in the midst of a skeptical and suspicious, white-controlled city. Another key difference was the lack of rounded arched windows and doors on some of the

²⁴⁶ Kathleen Curran, *The Romanesque Revival: Religion, Politics, and Transnational Exchange* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

²⁴⁷ Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff. “Virginia Union University.” National Register of Historic Places nomination file, June 1981. State Historic Preservation Office, Richmond, VA.

²⁴⁸ Curran, 2003

buildings. At Kingsley Hall, for example, there are only three windows with rounded arches, the three central windows of the third floor; all other windows are unadorned. This was certainly not done through lack of ability, as they do appear on the building, and on some of the other original nine buildings. As with Sixth Mount Zion Baptist church, which will be examined in the next chapter, these small differences can be seen as a deliberate diversion from the style which, unlike the Gothic Revival, was still being established. The divergences could, therefore, be seen as a way to create their own aesthetic as not only a university, but a black university.

While none of the other universities in Richmond were constructing Romanesque revival buildings on their campus, Jackson Warders would have been at least slightly familiar with the style. In 1895 the First Battalion Virginia Volunteers Armory was constructed in the Romanesque style. It is notable in this context because it was constructed expressly for the use of Richmond's African American volunteer battalion, as the space where the battalion not only trained but also hosted recreational activities and social gatherings. With its red bricks and carefully crafted crenellations and turrets, the armory resembled a medieval castle. While the structure was designed by Richmond's white city engineer, Wilfred E. Cutshaw, the brick subcontractor was Armstead Walker, husband of Maggie Walker.²⁴⁹ It is unknown what specific other buildings that Armstead Walker worked on. No record was found of which brick subcontractor was used when the Walker's renovated their home, or for the building of the St. Luke Building, although it is likely that Walker hired her husband (or his firm) to lay bricks for the buildings that she was associated with.

The African American building community—if not the entire community—not only would have been familiar with the Romanesque Revival, they had just directly participated in

²⁴⁹ Edwin Slipek, "The Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia," *Architecture Richmond*, 2016.

constructing a building in that very style just a few years prior. Therefore, it is unsurprising that when it came time to build, the university chose to use a style their builders were already familiar with, one that was also already associated with universities.

VUU was not among the first HBCUs in the country, but it was the first Black university in Richmond to have a proper campus. The school needed to look like a university, which meant that its architecture needed to be in a style that looked like it belonged on a university campus. The Romanesque Revival made the campus look the part.

Architects

As mentioned earlier, John H. Coxhead designed the original VUU campus buildings. He was only responsible for the initial campus plan; a later campus plan—still in effect today—was drawn up by the school’s own Department of Architecture. Coxhead was an experienced and well-educated architect. He graduated from Cooper Union School of Design in 1881 and then attended the newly opened architecture school at Columbia University. His formal education complete, he went on to work on projects across the country, primarily remaining on the east coast. By the time he was commissioned to design the VUU campus, he had designed hundreds of buildings. Although best remembered for his churches, his portfolio also included schools, commercial buildings, and courthouses. One of his best-known works is the Delaware Avenue Baptist Church in Buffalo, NY, which happens to be another Romanesque Revival work.²⁵⁰

According to his obituary in the *New York Times*, Coxhead practiced primarily in Buffalo and Washington D.C., although he designed several buildings in other cities. He worked as an architect for the Army Air Corps, for whom he designed hangars and airfields, as well as several

²⁵⁰ Nancy Blumenstalk Mingus, “John H. Coxhead: Buffalo’s Forgotten Architect,” *Buffalo Spree*, July 2000.

hospitals for veterans around the country. Models of some of the structures he designed were shown at the 1933-34 Chicago World's Fair.²⁵¹

Charles T. Russell, as noted in the previous chapter on Maggie Walker's architectural ambitions, designed an additional four faculty houses for the university in 1899, none of which survive today. Russell also participated in the restoration and renovation of the original buildings. It was during this set of renovations that most of the original buildings received upgraded interiors, bringing them up to modern building codes as well as making them compatible with modern appliances. As was mentioned previously, Russell was also a member of the faculty at VUU, further deepening the connection between the university's physical and intellectual development.²⁵²

Location

The location of the university is significant because of its physical proximity to Jackson Ward (see VUU Map 1). The campus is not within the Jackson Ward neighborhood; it lies approximately 1.2 miles from the center of the neighborhood, functioning as a geographic outpost of Jackson Ward. Today the area surrounding the campus has been developed, but when the university opened, the majority of the nearby land would have been open or farmland. Travel between the campus and Jackson Ward would have been relatively easy, allowing students and faculty to commute back and forth with little difficulty.

The earliest classes of students primarily (if not entirely) lived on campus in the dormitory provided. However, they would have ventured into Jackson Ward for both social and economic

²⁵¹ Special to the New York Times, "John H. Coxhead, an Architect, 80: Oldest Member of American Institute Dies Practiced More Than 53 Years WORKED FOR AIR CORPS Planned Many Fields, Hangars Widely Known for Design of Buffalo Baptist Church," *New York Times*, May 26, 1943.

²⁵² Richardson et al., 2011

activities. Most likely, many of the students would have attended church in Jackson Ward. They would have frequented the shops and restaurants of the neighborhood, gotten their laundry done by local women, and attended the social events there. This dynamic is significant because it would have made Jackson Ward the social center for the university, with the two sites functioning as extensions of one another. Students of VUU would have spent a significant amount of their leisure time in Jackson Ward, while Jackson Ward residents also worked at the university as faculty, staff, and service providers. In this way, the university and the neighborhood maintained a mutually beneficial relationship—one made more visible and more powerful by their close physical proximity.

VUU can be understood as a site of resistance because of its location—both in its current form and in the historical locations of the institutions that preceded it. The Colver Institute and Wayland Seminary maintained campuses in symbolically significant locations. As was discussed earlier, the Colver Institute's first campus was on the property of the notorious Lumpkin's slave jail, where people had been imprisoned, tortured, and sold. There, they educated Black men in the very same cells in which they would have been tortured only a few years previously, and listened to lectures from the same stage on which men who looked like them had been sold. The property was also located near the center of Virginia politics, within walking distance of the state capital building. The school was not hidden or peripheral—it stood at the heart of the city, and by extension, at the heart of the state. The school not only took a place of African American suffering and transformed it into a space of learning, dignity, and resistance, it did so in a location that was almost unavoidable, unable to be easily ignored. Through its very location, it rebelled against those in power who were against the idea of African Americans improving themselves through education.

Wayland Seminary made its campus in the political heart of the nation, Washington D.C. While the property itself was not inherently significant, the school's very presence in the capital city was a statement of resistance. Founded in the same year as Howard University (1867), Wayland Seminary provided a path through higher education for Black young adults, preparing its students for a wide variety of careers. As with Colver Institute, Wayland Seminary's location within the capital could be seen as rebellion against those within and around the federal government who opposed the government's support of Black education. In a more positive light, it could be seen as a show of how the policy of providing educations for Blacks was being used and working. Not only were Black students attending school, many were also seeking and attaining advanced degrees.

The current campus' location can likewise be seen as a statement of resistance. VUU stands less than a mile from the former site of the Robert E. Lee monument on Monument Avenue. The monument's cornerstone was laid on October 27, 1887 and was unveiled on May 29, 1890—approximately nine years before VUU would be founded. While neither site is visible from the other,, the geographical relationship between them is undeniable. The choice of location for the VUU campus can easily be read as a response to the Robert E. Lee monument; an assertion that the Black community was present, strong, and unyielding, despite efforts to erase it.

African Americans in Richmond resisted and protested the installation of the Lee monument. John Mitchell Jr., editor of the *Richmond Planet* and a member of the Richmond City Council, was one of the three Black councilmen who voted against the body's appropriation of \$7,500 for the unveiling ceremony. Mitchell also used his position as editor of the popular newspaper, to make his opinion on the matter of the monument clear to the newspaper readers, writing that “these emblems of the ‘Lost Cause’...had been perforated by Union bullets,” and that “the South

may revere the memory of the its chieftains. It takes the wrong steps in so doing, and proceeds to go too far in every similar celebration. It serves to retard its progress in the country and forges heavier chains with which to be bound.”²⁵³ The symbolism and message of the Robert E. Lee monument was clear to the African Americans who lived in and around Richmond. Although they could do nothing to stop the monument from being installed, they did not do so quietly. It was a discussion point among the leaders of the community, and commented on in newspaper editorials. Although VUU opened its doors nine years later, its existence so close to Monument Avenue and the Robert E. Lee monument in particular, creates a relationship between the two sites that is difficult to ignore.

Epilogue

Today Virginia Union University stands as one of the 107 storied Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States. In 2023, the school had an undergraduate population of 1,170, and 492 graduate students offering thirty-two undergraduate academic degrees as well as fifteen masters degrees, and a doctoral degree in ministry.²⁵⁴

VUU has stood as a source of education, leadership, and pride for the Jackson Ward community, and also as a symbol for how far that community has evolved. From the institution’s earliest iterations as the Colver Institute and Wayland Seminary and into the present day, VUU has educated Black men and women from primary through collegiate and graduate levels, providing an invaluable resource and transformative experience for the community.

The very existence of VUU— and of other institutions of higher education for African Americans—can be, and has been, understood as a form of resistance. Early pioneers of Black

²⁵³ Kevin M Levin, “Richmond’s Confederate Monuments Were Used to Sell a Segregated Neighborhood,” *The Atlantic*, June 11, 2020.

²⁵⁴ “Virginia Union University.” 2023. US News. US News & World Report, 2023.

higher education, such as W. E. B. Du Bois, viewed Black education ultimately as a way for Black men and women to become socially and economically self-sufficient, and not have to rely on the altruism of whites men and women who were too entrenched in racism to eradicate it.²⁵⁵ In that light, the construction of schools by and for Black people was an acknowledgment that they had to rely on themselves, rather than the generosity of white benefactors, to move forward as a community and race. In this way, it is a form of resistance against the reliance the racist, white society wished to foster in Black people—that Black advancement was impossible without white assistance.

Even as Black communities struggled to educate their children (and their adults as well), they used those educational spaces as sites for not just intellectual development, but also political and social growth. According to Vanessa Siddle Walker's foundational 2014 text, despite the roadblocks put in their way, Black communities and their educators worked to create educational environments at all levels of education that celebrated Black joy, strength, and perseverance; spaces that allowed Black youth to thrive and grow, both personally and culturally.²⁵⁶

In some outhern states prior to the Civil War, enslaved African Americans were banned from receiving even a basic education. In these areas, the very act of learning to read and write was an act of resistance—both for enslaved people and for some free Black people. Although these prohibitions on the education of African Americans were lifted following the Civil War, the education of Black people continued to be a source of contention and worry for people in power, particularly in the South, where it was seen as contributing to making the African American population (who outnumbered whites in many cities and states) even more of a threat to the

²⁵⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks: Essays and Sketches* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1967).

²⁵⁶ Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential an African American School Community in the Segregated South*(Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

power of white southerners. In this sense, the very act of educating African Americans—especially the act of giving them access to higher education—could be seen as a form of resistance.

While outside assistance was required in the form of an architect and philanthropic donations, the VUU campus was, in many ways, built by the community itself. Men of the community provided a large number of the workforce that constructed the buildings. The local churches, and likely local businesses and business leaders, donated funds for the construction of the school, recognizing the importance of establishing a center of higher learning within the area. VUU can be seen as more than an HBCU for educating Black men and women from around the country (which it does); it is Richmond's HBCU— and, more specifically, it is Jackson Ward's HBCU.

VUU Appendix

Archival Materials:

The main source of archival materials for the Virginia Union University is the university's archive. This collection contains preserved papers, photographs, and drawings related to the University's history. The school also holds some relevant historic maps as part of their special collections.

Newspaper articles—mostly from the *Richmond Planet*—and maps were obtained from the Library of Congress and the Library of Virginia.

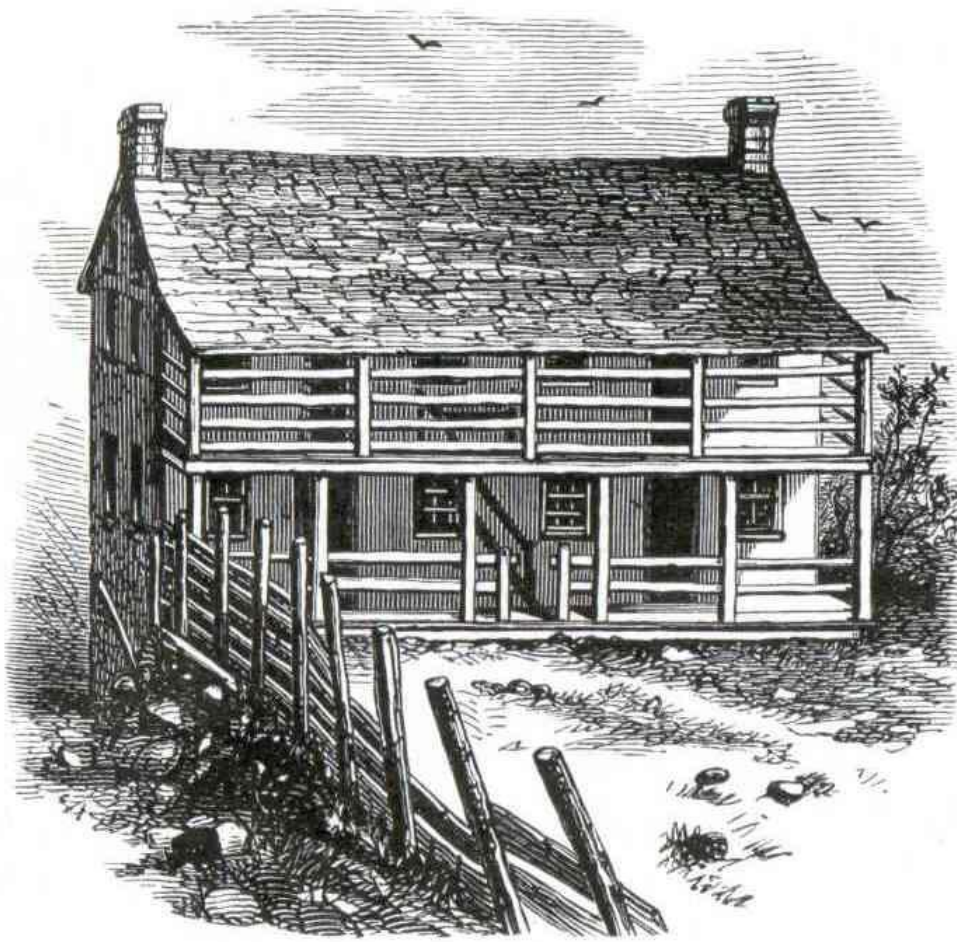
VUU Figure 1 - Postcard of VUU university, c.1930-1935. William Shuman Collection of Richmond, Virginia Postcards, Accession Number 2004-09-12, Special Collections and Archives, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University. Accessed via Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries



VUU Figure 2 - Digital Reconstruction of Lumpkin's Jail Complex, Reconstruction by BAM architects, <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=41838>.

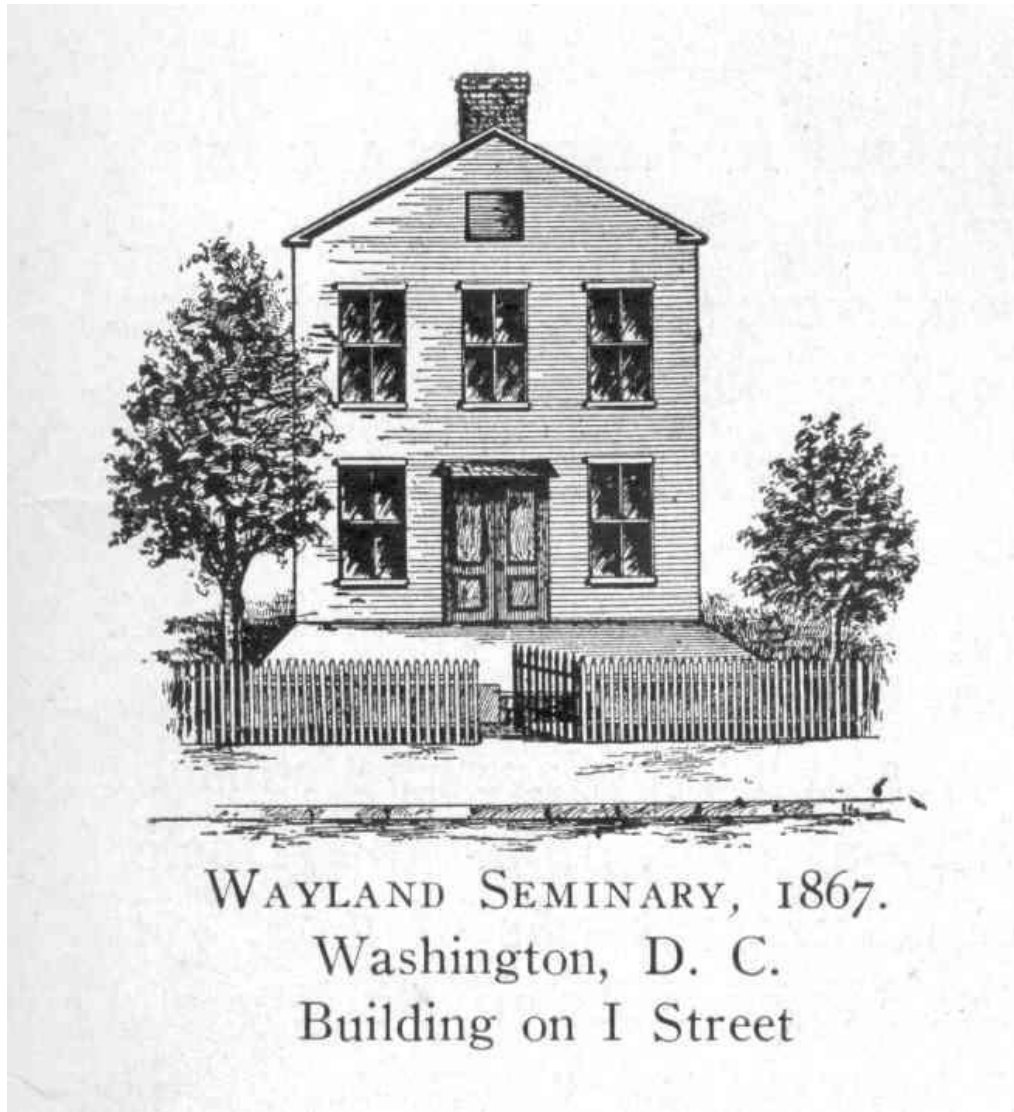


VUU Figure 3: 1895 Depiction of Lumpkins Jail. Corey, Charles, H. Corey, Charles Henry. *A history of Richmond Theological Seminary: With reminiscences of Thirty Years' work among the colored peoples of the South.* Richmond (VA)
Courtesy of Virginia Union University Archives and Special Collections



LUMPKIN'S JAIL

VUU Figure 4 - Wayland Seminary, *Courtesy of Virginia Union University Archives and Special Collections* From: Fisher, Miles Mark. *Virginia Union University and some of her achievements: Twenty-fifth anniversary, 1899-1924*. Richmond (VA): Brown Print Shop, 1924.



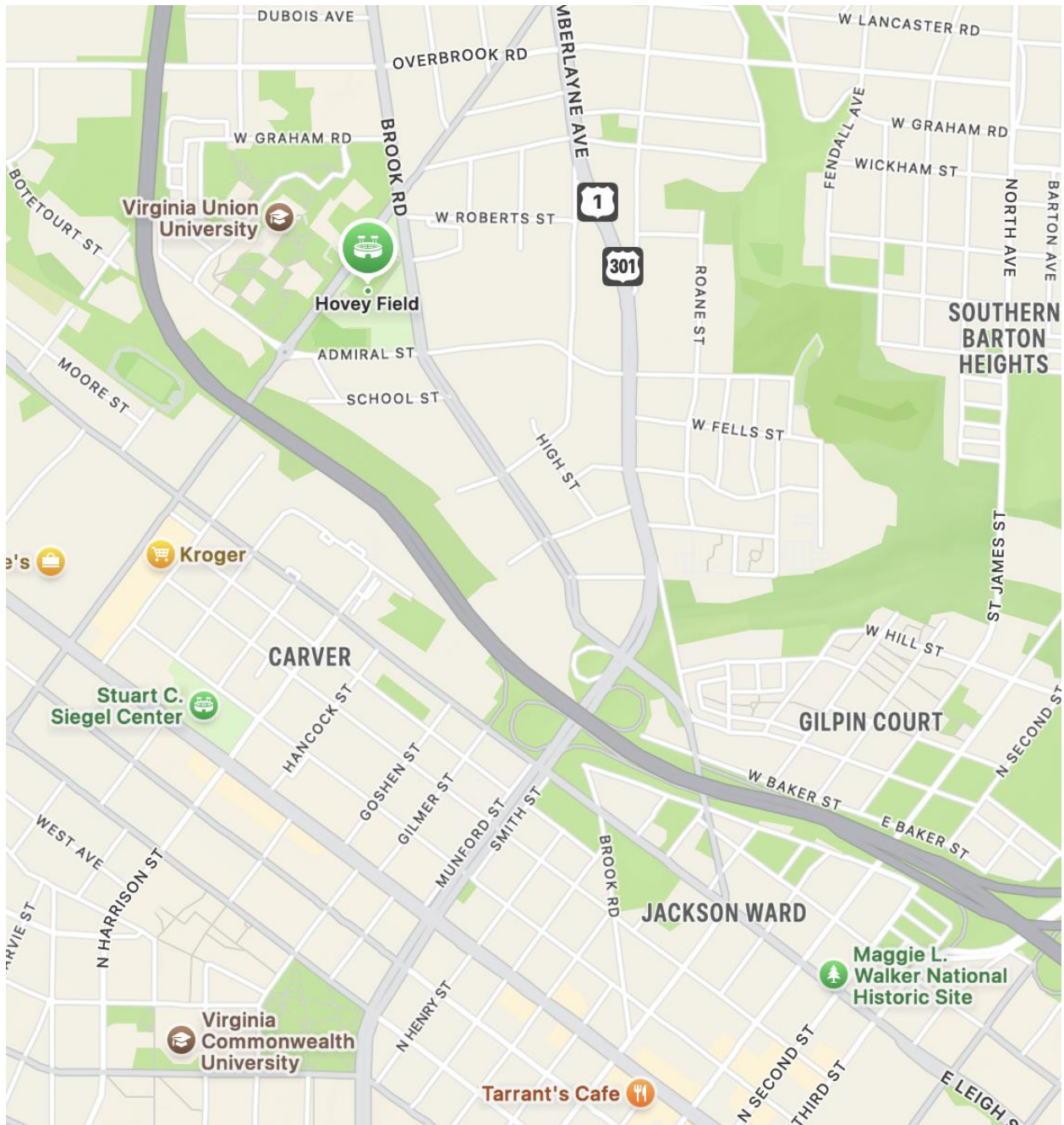
VUU Figure 5 - Kingsley Hall of Union University, Richmond, Va.; at Library of Congress



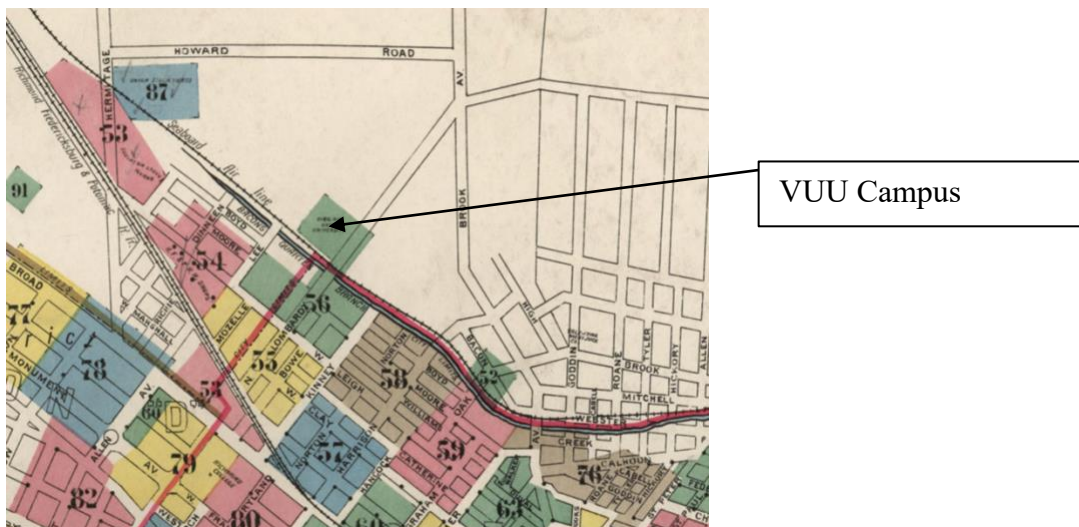
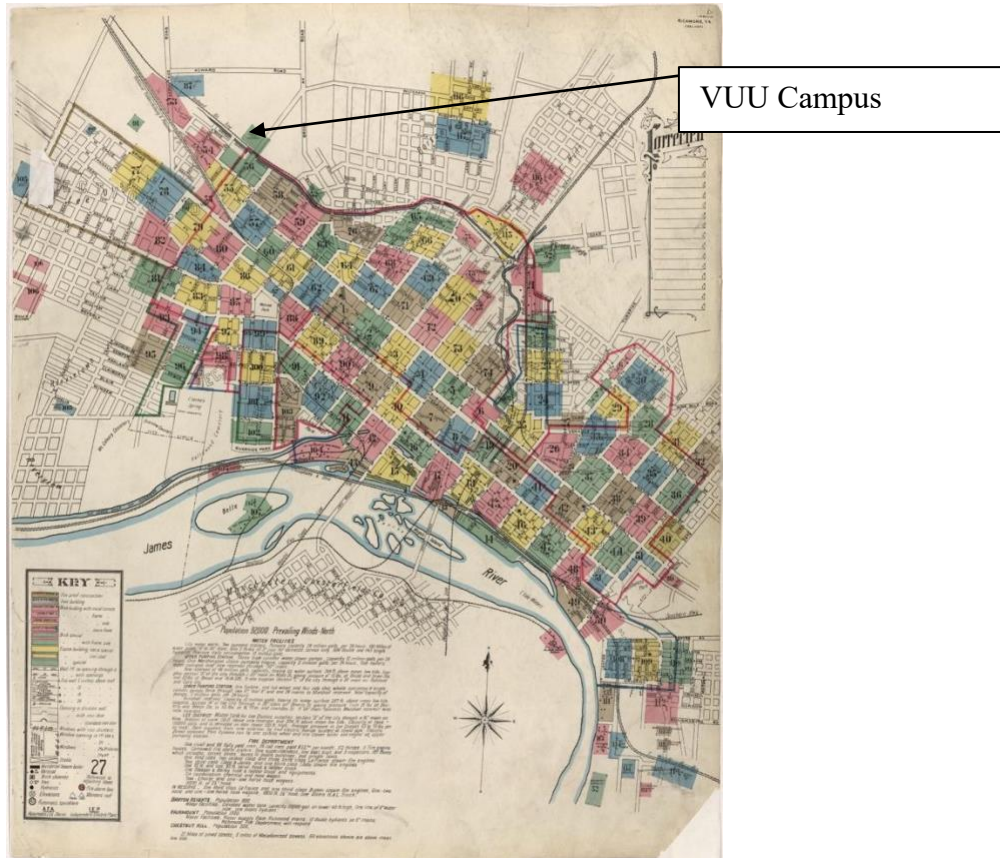
VUU Figure 6 - Virginia Union University c. 1909; Haines Photo Co. (Conneticut, Ohio);
at Library of Congress



VUU Map 1



VUU Map 2: 1905 Sanborn Map, Library of Congress
Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, Sanborn Maps Collection



Chapter 3 - Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church

Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church (SMZ Figure 1) is located at 14 West Duval Street, at the corner of Duval and St. John Streets (SMZ Map 1), in the heart of Jackson Ward. It has been at its present location since 1887, when the then twenty-year-old congregation moved into its newly built sanctuary.²⁵⁷ Since that time, it has stood as a powerful representation of the influence of the Black church within African American communities—an institution of spiritual, social, and political leadership that predates the Civil War.

The Black Church has provided leadership within the communities it has served since the formation of the earliest Black congregations during the slavery era. Enslaved people were strongly encouraged by slaveowners to convert to Christianity during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many did convert, particularly amid the Second Great Awakening; others resisted conversion, holding to their own religious practices and beliefs or professing no religion at all. White, protestant, evangelical pastors preached a pro-slavery interpretation of the Bible, hierarchical vision of Christianity where it was divinely ordained for enslaved people to obey their white masters. This theology made many white slaveowners eager to encourage religious participation among the enslaved, even facilitating conversion and religious practices by establishing congregations led by enslaved Black preachers and allowing enslaved people to have time to attend church on Sundays.

However, even as white masters attempted to shape and control the religious practices of enslaved people, much of their faith practice remained beyond the dominion of slaveowners in what became known as the ‘invisible institution.’ Out of sight of their enslavers, Black preachers

²⁵⁷ Mary Wingfield Scott, *Old Richmond Neighborhoods* (Richmond, VA: William Byrd Press, 1984).

presented their own radical (for the time) interpretations of scripture, reinterpreting biblical stories of suffering and redemption, finding hope and divine justice in narratives of deliverance. As D. A. Dunkley notes, “during slavery, African Americans...manifested their Black radicalism in churches organized to promote antislavery perspectives and radicalize Blacks and whites into transforming the social order toward racial equality.”²⁵⁸

The Black Church²⁵⁹ that emerged following emancipation was a combination of the ‘invisible institution’ of the enslaved Blacks and the institutional church nurtured and developed by free Blacks. Any vestiges of social or familial organization within the Black community had been, at best, disrupted—and often destroyed—by slavery and the Civil War. Once the war ended, the institution that had shaped and directed the lives of millions of Black individuals and families vanished, leaving people to rediscover how to organize their lives. In his influential book *The Negro Church in America*, E. Franklin Frazier observed that the Church and organized religious life “became the chief means by which a structured or organized social life came into existence among the [Black] masses.”²⁶⁰

The Church became involved in nearly every aspect of life, acting as the primary agency of social organization and moral guidance. From pulpits, converted sheds, and living rooms, Black preachers spoke about the importance of family and marriage, the value of a proper education, and the power of group politics. Churches also played an important role in the growth of the Black beneficial societies, with many of the societies being funded—or even founded—by

²⁵⁸ D A Dunkley, “Black Radicalism in the Episcopal Church: Absalom Jones and Slave Resistance, 1746–1818,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 91, no. 3 (2022): 263–90.

For further reading on the Black church during the Antebellum era see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁵⁹ I am using the ‘Black Church’ here to refer to Black Christians who could be part of many different denominations, including Baptist, AME, Catholic, and Presbyterian.

²⁶⁰ F. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1964).

churches or church leaders. These beneficial societies, working alongside Black churches, provided a social safety net for many Black communities by offering much needed services such as job training, elder care, child care, education funding, banking, health insurance, and life insurance. They exemplify the ways Black communities were able to organize to fulfill community needs in the wake of the abandonment of these communities by post-Reconstruction governments. The founding and support of these organizations was one of the ways that churches as institutions provided material assistance to their communities, and to the national Black community as a whole.²⁶¹ As a source of social organization, the Black Church played a pivotal leadership role within the community, especially in the South, where white-controlled institutions were often vehemently against assisting Black communities or themselves harming these communities.²⁶²

The Church has also been an important site for organization within the community. The location of the church near the physical center of the neighborhood places it in the perfect location to be an influential social force. As with many African American churches, Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church not only organized charitable works from within the church itself, but also established or funded multiple charities and charitable organizations that assisted those in need. Before the growth of the African American fraternal organizations, the Church was the primary source of charitable assistance. As was discussed earlier, many of the African American fraternal organizations focused on providing financial assistance in the form of insurance and loans. The Church provided more physical relief, in the form of food and shelter. For example, the Church

²⁶¹ E. Franklin Frazier and C. Eric Lincoln, *The Negro Church in America* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1988).

²⁶² For further reading on the Black Church see Henry Louis Gates, *The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2022). and Milton C. Sernett, *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

set up homes for orphans, unwed mothers, and the elderly; providing food and shelter for some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church was one of the first major buildings built by and for the African American community in Richmond. The African Americans of Richmond had been building their own houses and commercial buildings before, during, and after the war. However, this was among the first buildings that they built to be used by the entire community. This was a project, planned, funded and executed by the church community, utilizing the relative wealth built up within the parts of the community made up of Blacks who had been free before the Civil War. The best African American builder in the community designed the building, and led the construction effort, which was conducted by Black builders.²⁶³ The Church is a symbol of the strength of the financial, social, and leadership strength of the community; a sign of what can be accomplished when the community pools its resources.

Church Background

Of all the Christian denominations present in the United States during the Antebellum era, the Baptists were among the most popular for enslaved and free Blacks. This was due in part to the denomination's willingness to bestow more rights to Black members than any other denomination, including full membership and, in some cases, the ability to take on administrative roles within the church. Many Baptist churches were fully integrated, with Black and white congregants worshipping together. By 1840, 400 white, Baptist, Richmonders worshipped regularly with 2000 Black Baptists. Another popular denomination for Black Christians was the Methodist Church, from which the African Methodist Episcopal Church would later emerge.

²⁶³ "Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996.

Unfortunately, membership—and even integrated worship—did not mean equality. Church space was strictly segregated, and Black congregants were barred from leadership roles. Black Baptists were emboldened by the fact that they had the greater numbers despite having the lesser rights. Consequently, in 1840 a group of Black Baptist Richmonders demanded a church of their own.

Their bold request was not easy to fulfill, not least because it came only nine years after Nat Turner's Rebellion (1831). This deadly attempt at freedom had sparked increased concern about unsupervised Black worship, as Nat Turner had been a preacher. In response, the Virginia General Assembly banned Black preachers and independent Black worship. The law was enforced with whippings.

In 1841, the deacons of Richmond's First Baptist Church agreed to allow the creation of the first African Baptist Church, but with several stipulations to accommodate Virginia's strict laws. The stipulations included: (1) the African Baptist Church of Richmond would consist of the Black congregants of all the Baptist churches in Richmond; (2) thirty Black deacons would be chosen "from the most experienced and judicious members of the body"; (3) "The Baptist Churches of Richmond shall annually appoint a committee of 24 white members to superintend the religious instruction and discipline of the African Church"; (4) the pastor of the African Church has to be white, and chosen by the superintending committee; and (5) all public worship must occur during the day. Despite the strict stipulations—and the continued prohibition on Black preachers—the Black Baptists had their own congregation.

The first pastor selected by the superintending committee was Rev. Robert Ryland, who would later serve as president and a founding leader of the University of Richmond. As was stipulated by the rules set out, Ryland was the church leader and made the sermon at every

service. However, he permitted the Black deacons to present an opening prayer at the start of services. These ‘prayers’ were known to last more than half an hour, and were more like sermons than simple prayers, as the deacons used the opportunity to preach to a congregation grateful to have messages delivered by what were essentially, black preachers in all but name.²⁶⁴

After the Civil War ended and all the enslaved people were freed, the laws banning the formation of a truly independent Black church, with a Black preacher, were nullified. John Jasper then set out to form his own, independent church. On September 3rd 1867, Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church was officially organized by “Rev. John Jasper and Rev. Peter Randolph, with nine members. Wm. Banks, Ralph Hilton, James Barrett, Deacons, Peter Baker, Francis Cary, Henry Clarke, Abbie Clarke, Mary Wells, with Gandison Taylor first clerk of the church.”²⁶⁵ The congregation adopted the name ‘Sixth’ to signify that it was the sixth Black Baptist church established in Richmond, and ‘Mt. Zion’ to distinguish it from the other congregations.²⁶⁶

Originally, so myth goes, the congregation met in an abandoned Confederate horse stable on Brown’s Island, making use of buildings that had survived the great fire which had swept through the city as the Confederate army fled the advancing Union forces. According to a drawing of the structure that was used by the church (SMZ Figure 4), this structure may have actually been a house—possibly slaves-quarters—based on the size of the door and the window (the door of a stable would have been larger). The congregation grew quickly and struggled to

²⁶⁴ *Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church History*, [smzbc.org](https://www.smzbc.org), accessed 2025, <https://www.smzbc.org/our-history>.

²⁶⁵ A. W. Parham, “Record of the Sixth Mt. Zion Baptist Church- 35th Anniversary. September 3, 1867- September 1, 1901,” *Richmond Planet*, August 31, 1901; Also note that the first A.M.E church (Third Street Bethel A.M.E Church) was founded in 1857 by a group of enslaved and free African Americans; Third Street Bethel A.M.E. Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1975.

²⁶⁶ *Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church History*, [smzbc.org](https://www.smzbc.org), accessed 2025, <https://www.smzbc.org/our-history>; Benjamin Ross, interview, September 4, 2025.

find a proper home. In 1867 they worshipped in the home of a member, Peter Baker. Beginning in June 1868, they were able to use a carpenter (or cooper) shop on the corner of Fourth and Cary Streets, but were quickly pushed out because the white locals did not want a Black church worshipping in their vicinity. The winter of 1868 was spent using “a large room in Cary Street between Third and Fourth Streets” However, the space was too small for the fifty-member strong congregation and the Church convened a committee to find a larger, permanent place to worship.

Within two years of opening, in June 1869, the congregation purchased a plot of land, the parcel that would become 14 West Duval Street for about \$2000²⁶⁷ (approximately \$47,507.06 in 2025²⁶⁸) According to a history written by the church’s first historian, the congregation never had trouble raising money and paid off the debt incurred with the purchase within two years. By then, the house that stood on the property was deemed too small to accommodate the still growing congregation, and an annex was added to the rear of the structure, forming a T-shaped plan. The addition cost about \$5,050 (approximately \$133,720.69 in 2025²⁶⁹). As soon as they paid off that debt, the congregation chose to renovate the interior of the original structure, costing an additional \$1,200 (approximately \$31,866.49 in 2025²⁷⁰). This building was still inadequate for the congregation’s needs, and in 1887 the congregation chose to demolish the original structure and build a new sanctuary, which would cost them \$24,000 (approximately

²⁶⁷ “Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church.” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996.

²⁶⁸ “Inflation Rate between 1869-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$2,000 in 1869 → 2025 Inflation Calculator, accessed September 1, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1869?amount=2000>.

²⁶⁹ “Inflation Rate between 1871-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$5,050 in 1871 → 2025 Inflation Calculator, accessed September 1, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1871?amount=5050>.

²⁷⁰ “Inflation Rate between 1871-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$1,200 in 1871 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed December 5, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1871?amount=1200>.

\$816,121.26 in 2025²⁷¹). The construction of this building will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.²⁷²

An examination of the Beers Map of 1877 (SMZ Map 1) and the Baist Map of 1889 (SMZ Map 2) shows that the church was surrounded primarily by residential buildings. However, there were a few other important spaces that were significant within the community nearby, including Baker Public School, and the Colored Orphan Asylum.²⁷³

The original Baker Public School building, located at 100 W Baker Street, was built in 1871. From 1871 until 1979, the three school buildings constructed on the site have served the African American community, providing primary school education for black children in Jackson Ward throughout Reconstruction and Jim Crow/ eras. The school played an important role in the development of Jackson Ward as a social and economic hub for African Americans in the South. The site was eventually cut off from the neighborhood by the construction of Interstate 95 (later I-64) in 1957. This severed the school from Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church as well. The interstate divided the two sites, with Sixth Mount Zion Baptist remaining on the side of the interstate with the rest of the neighborhood, and the school isolated on the far side of the highway.²⁷⁴

Despite the barrier of the highway, the Baker Public School continued to serve the community of Jackson Ward for an additional twenty-two years, closing in 1979. Two school buildings remain extant today. The original 1871 building was demolished in the 1930s and

²⁷¹ “Inflation Rate between 1887-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$24,000 in 1887 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed September 2, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1887?amount=24000>.

²⁷² Benjamin Ross, interview, September 4, 2025.

²⁷³ Beers, F. W. Illustrated atlas of the city of Richmond, Va. [Richmond, Va.: F. W. Beers, 1877] Map. Section A; G. Wm Baist, map, *The Baist Atlas of the City of Richmond* (Philadelphia: G. Wm. Baist, 1889).

²⁷⁴ “Baker Public School.” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2016

replaced in 1939 with a two-story, three-wing Art Deco structure. A Colonial Revival annex was added in 1913, standing south of the 1939 building. The site (with its two surviving buildings) has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 2016, recognized for “standing as a reflection of the growth and transition of an important African-American community in Richmond, Virginia...as well as the development and changes to the institution of public education as a whole.”²⁷⁵

The Friends’ Asylum for Colored Orphans was incorporated in 1872 by the Society of Friends. The city council granted the organization a lot at “the corner of St. Paul and Charity Streets” on which to construct “a building suitable for the care and education of orphan children of colored parentage.” Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church was among the organizations which became the trustees for the new institution.²⁷⁶ The asylum’s location near to the church is significant: it spatially reflects the relationship between the church and other important aspects of the social safety net that African Americans were putting into place throughout their communities. Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church established and funded various charities that supported the elderly, children and families; its proximity likely facilitated assistance to the asylum as well. The church’s central location within Jackson Ward ensured that it would be in a physical position to take part in the network of social assistance that grew within the neighborhood.

Ultimately, the Friends Asylum for Colored Orphans was, like the Baker Public School, physically separated from the church and the neighborhood by the highway. Unlike the school, the asylum building survived and remains in use. The site functioned as an orphanage until 1931,

²⁷⁵ “Baker Public School.” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2016

²⁷⁶ Friends’ Asylum for Colored Orphans, “Charter and By-Laws of the Friends’ Asylum for Colored Orphans, in the City of Richmond, Va” (Richmond: R.L. Hewlett & Bro., printers, 1883).

when it was closed and revamped as a foster care agency operated by the Children's Aid Society, and was renamed the Friends' Association for Colored Children in 1932. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s services continued to be added, including adoption, in-home counseling, and day nursery services. In the mid-1950s foster care services were suspended and replaced by additional assistance to unwed mothers and the creation of an on-site pre-adoption boarding home. Now called the Friends' Association for Children, the organization continues to provide family support and childcare for low to moderate-income families.²⁷⁷

Later additions to the immediate vicinity included St. Luke Hall, the headquarters of the Independent Order of St Luke, located at 900 St. James Street, and the headquarters of the *Richmond Planet* newspaper at 604 N. 2nd Street.²⁷⁸

Today, the church's property consists of about four acres (SMZ Map 4), stretching along Duval Street from Chamberlayn Parkway to First Street, although only a small portion of this plot was part of the original church grounds. In 1924, the church purchased the parcel to its east and constructed an annex to be used as a Sunday school and educational center.

The 1950s saw the construction of Richmond Petersburg Turnpike, which destroyed much of the surrounding property and cut the church—and a significant part of Jackson Ward—off from the rest of the community. In 1994, the church purchased the two large plots to its east and west, remnants of the destruction wrought by the turnpike construction.²⁷⁹ To this day, Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church remains pushed up against the parkway, with its remaining property spread out to either side of the building along the busy highway.

²⁷⁷ Knicely, Donna. Richmond (VA), Friends Meeting, December 18, 2000.

²⁷⁸ "Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996.

²⁷⁹ "Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996.

Construction History

Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church is an example of the Norman Gothic Revival architectural style. The current church building reflects two major phases of construction: the original sanctuary constructed in 1887 (the Jasper/Boyd Sanctuary) and a significant expansion completed in 1925 (the Russell/Bailey renovation). Additional minor modifications were made between 1901 and 1924 as needs arose.

Reverend John Jasper (the church's first and most renowned pastor) commissioned the church building in 1887, with the original sanctuary structure being built by local Black builder, George Boyd. Photographs of the building prior to 1925 show a building very different from the one seen today. According to the NRHP nomination, the original building was "a modest Norman Gothic building" consisting of "a simple building on a raised basement with a crenelated bell tower centrally placed on the front façade of the building."²⁸⁰

The original bricks were red common bricks laid in a common bond with a reddish mortar. The brick-and-stone refacing (refaced in 1925) covers most of the original exterior, but you can still see the unaltered original brickwork on the eastern façade of the building, although it is largely hidden. The original brick façade also featured "brick arches, brick corbelling, and brick piers dividing the bays of the building." The original cornice also had brick corbelling and "a small wooden boxed cornice."²⁸¹

The building included a basement consisting of the same fellowship hall that was installed in 1887. The cast iron columns of the fellowship hall support the main level of the sanctuary. Today the columns are boxed in, and the fellowship hall itself has been repaneled.

²⁸⁰ "Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996.

²⁸¹ "Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996.

The sanctuary interior appears much as it did prior to the 1925 renovations (SMZ Figure 5). Photographs show that the contemporary pews, gallery, and pulpit were already present in the original building. The original cast-iron columns that support the gallery remain, and the church has retained its original wooden wainscoting. There have been a few significant changes. The original slatted gallery railing was replaced with a solid railing in 1925. The original pressed metal ceiling was covered with acoustical tile when the central air-conditioning system was installed.

It is unclear what window types were present in the original 1887 buildings. Church tradition states that the congregation installed the extant stained-glass windows and art between 1901 and 1924, with the projects beginning after John Jasper's death in 1901. A 1924 photograph shows the stained-glass windows that now flank the Jasper Museum situated in front of the sanctuary, suggesting that the windows were originally installed on the main façade and later relocated to the Jasper Museum. The majority of the windows are comprised of tan and cream-colored 'art glass,'²⁸² which refers to a type of handcrafted, decorative glassware that was popular from the 1880s until the 1930s.²⁸³ Each window has a scallop motif at the base. Three windows were added to the center of the southern (front) elevation during the 1925 renovation. The congregation also purchased a memorial window dedicated to the memory of Jasper. The window featured "a garden lined with lilies and roses, with a sun dial as its centerpiece," commemorating Jasper's most famous sermon, 'De Sun Do Move.' At the time, a bust of Jasper by Edward Valentine accompanied the window; it now stands in the Jasper Museum.

²⁸² "Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996.

²⁸³ Harold Osborne, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the Decorative Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

The 1925 renovations were led by African American architect, Charles T. Russell, and builder T. Lincoln Bailey. They updated the building to reflect a more contemporary interpretation of the Norman Gothic style. The façade was refaced with dark brown wire cut brick, except for the eastern façade mentioned earlier, with limestone used for the coping and window hoods. The facades of the building additions and the Jasper Educational Annex constructed during the 1925 renovations, reflected the new sanctuary façade.

The most considerable Russell-Bailey modification was the new southern front addition, which pushes the façade out several feet from the original. They demolished the original central tower, and installed a larger, off-center (western) tower. This ‘new’ tower houses a belfry, with the church bell, and hosts a gallery stairwell. A three-bay entrance portal was placed at the center of the new façade, opening into a new vestibule. Above the portal, they placed a large stone tablet reading:

**“Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church
Organized by Rev. John Jasper
Sept. 3. 1867
Rebuilt 1887 – Remodeled 1925”**

The new southern façade had an impact on the interior sanctuary space. The addition permitted new seating to be added to the balcony, and allowed for the accommodation of a Jasper memorial room, which continues to this day to house artifacts from the life of John Jasper and the church.

A rear (north) wing was also added during the Russell-Bailey renovations, which made the largest impact on the sanctuary interior: providing space for the new organ and gallery level choir loft. They also added a large, segmental-arched art glass window above the choir loft.

The third and final major component of the Russell-Bailey renovation was the building of the Jasper Memorial Education Annex. The new education building was added to the eastern side

of the sanctuary building, recessed from the sanctuary's façade. The structure had two levels, to correspond with the sanctuaries main level and basement. A light well separated the two structures, while they were connected via their northern and southern ends. The exterior of the building was left largely unornamented, to ensure its visual subordination to the more important sanctuary building.

The Annex contains a series of classrooms on its east side, with the hallways on the west side. Skylights and windows that face the light well illuminate the hallways. The ceilings are of pressed metal throughout most of the building.²⁸⁴

The Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church gains significance from its building process, the manner in which it was constructed. For the two years between its founding in 1867 and the congregation's purchase of the Duval Street lot in 1869, the congregation grew and raised money. Prior to founding the church, Rev. John Jasper had preached throughout Virginia and its neighboring states. He became known for hosting all-day meetings in the country, where he would preach the gospel and conduct mass baptisms. He is said to have baptized around 300 people in a four-hour period one Sunday. Although not yet as famous as he would become, Jasper was already drawing crowds, contributing to the rapidly growing congregation. Jasper was also likely able to contribute fees collected from speaking engagements (guest preaching and eulogizing) to help pay for the new church building.

Nearly all the money for purchasing the lot and constructing the building came directly from the congregation. This is significant because it demonstrates that the church drew members with enough economic stability to contribute regularly. Located in Jackson Ward, the congregation included many free African Americans—people who had been free prior to

²⁸⁴ "Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996; Benjamin Ross, interview, September 4, 2025

emancipation and, in some cases, had never been enslaved. Many among them could afford to donate, enabling the church to raise the \$2,000 (approximately \$46,202.21 adjusted for inflation in 2024²⁸⁵) needed within two years.

Although the lot was purchased in 1896, the sanctuary itself was not constructed until 1885, roughly sixteen years later. In the intervening years the congregation successfully raised the funds to pay all of the costs associated with the new building project: the architect, the builders, and the materials.²⁸⁶ While the total cost is unknown, it is clear that the church was constructed by an entirely Black workforce (SMZ Figure 2). The endeavor of building this church, one of the first churches created entirely by the Black community for themselves in the area, was a community-wide process, with members contributing both labor and money. In this way the very existence of the church is representative of the power of the collective.

Gothic Revival

The second way that the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist church gains significance through its architecture is through the institutional legitimacy conveyed by its chosen architectural style itself: the Gothic Revival.

The Gothic Revival was promoted by the influential Christian organization, the Cambridge Camden Society. This group of English academics, clerics and laymen believed that the Gothic style best expressed Christian principles. As Anglican cleric, Rev. George Ayliffe Poole wrote, “A Gothic Church, in its perfection, is an exposition of the distinctive doctrines of Christianity, clothed upon with a material form; and is as Coleridge has more forcibly expressed it, ‘the

²⁸⁵ “Inflation Rate between 1869-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$2,000 in 1869 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed August 26, 2025, <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1869?amount=2000>.

²⁸⁶ “Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church.” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996; Benjamin Ross, interview, September 4, 2025.

petrification of our religion.” In the Gothic, these clerics and church leaders saw a physical embodiment of a more principled and morally grounded form of Christianity—one they sought to emulate by reviving the architectural form. Beginning in 1841, the Society published their own periodical magazine, *The Ecclesiologist*, which encouraged Anglican churches to embrace ritual and symbolism, and offered Gothic style church plans for the use of those building new churches. In the United States, many denominations quickly embraced the Society’s advice—particularly the Episcopalians. The Gothic style thus acquired a moral authority lacking in other popular architectural styles, like the Classical and Federalist styles.

Even as the Gothic style was popularized within Church architecture, it was also adopted for domestic architecture. In the United States, this domestic Gothic style was championed by Andrew Jackson Downing through his widely circulated books (such as the immensely popular *Cottage Residences* published in 1841) and periodicals. Downing emphasized the picturesque and romantic qualities of the style in drawings of cottages nestled in scenic wooded landscapes. By the mid-century, the Gothic style had become a staple for use in religious, commercial, civic and domestic buildings of all kinds, including “houses, barns, stores, courthouses, churches, prisons, and universities.”²⁸⁷

In the Southern city of Charleston, during the Antebellum the Gothic Revival became particularly associated with the service buildings located behind elite urban residences—so-called ‘backlot buildings.’ Based on their finish, location and scale, these service buildings and slave quarters were already visually subordinate to the main houses, but some slave owning Charlestonians added Gothic Revival features to further differentiate them from the main residences, most of which utilized a classical architectural vocabulary. The choice of Gothic

²⁸⁷ Agnes Addison Gilchrist and Phoebe B. Stanton, “The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture: An Episode in Taste, 1840-1856,” *The Art Bulletin* 52, no. 4 (December 1970): 466.

Revival for this was intentional. The Gothic Revival's associations with the Middle Ages resonated with Antebellum Southerners who romanticized the era's hierarchical social order and its widespread acceptance of slavery. As Clifton Ellis and Gina Haney described it, "the Gothic Revival outbuildings in Charleston's backlot might not be a simple desire of an elite for fashionable aesthetic expression, but rather the logical and deliberate choice of Charleston slaveholders as they constructed a paternalistic ideology in defense of slavery."²⁸⁸ While it is not clear that slaveholders in Richmond utilized the Gothic Revival in their backlots, this practice in Charleston shows that the Gothic Revival was being utilized widely in both public and private architecture during the Antebellum and would have been a recognizable style for Southern African Americans.

While the Gothic Revival achieved great popularity nationwide and within the Antebellum South in particular, it was not widely adopted in Virginia. Architectural tastes in the Commonwealth were dominated by the various Classical Revival styles through the nineteenth century, and most white churches in the city built during the time utilized the style. This did not mean that Gothic Revival buildings were not being built; in fact, several important Gothic Revival buildings were constructed in Richmond both before and after the Civil War. Most notably for the purposes of this research are the Old City Hall (1884-1894). and the Second Presbyterian Church (1848).²⁸⁹ The Old City Hall was constructed at the same time as Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, while the Antebellum Second Presbyterian Church is an earlier example of a Gothic Revival church in Richmond.

²⁸⁸ Clifton Ellis and Gina Haney, "Visual Culture and Ideology: The Gothic Revival in the Backlot of Antebellum Charleston," *The Southern Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2007).

For more on the architecture of antebellum Charleston see Maurie D. McNinnis, *Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

²⁸⁹ Chris Novelli et al., "Classic Commonwealth: Virginia Architecture from the Colonial Era to 1940" (Richmond Virginia , 2015).

As a descendent of the ‘Gothic’ style, the Gothic Revival was an architectural style strongly associated with church architecture. The church tower, in particular, would remain a staple of church architecture across denominations and styles. The Gothic Revival can be most readily identified by the use of pointed arches, towers, verticality, and highly decorative traceries and finials.²⁹⁰

The features of the Gothic Revival would have been a recognizable church architectural style to Richmonders when the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church was built. In addition to widespread examples across Europe and the United States, there were churches in Richmond that utilized the style. Second Presbyterian Church, located on 5 North 5th Street, was built in the Gothic Revival Style in 1848.²⁹¹ Many members of the congregation—especially George Boyd and Reverend Jasper—would have seen such examples and understood the style’s association with ecclesiastical authority.

Therefore, when it came time to build their own church, it made sense to choose the Gothic Revival style—a style already recognized across the city as emblematic of church architecture. The style was not only chosen for the aesthetic value. The Gothic Revival conveyed a level of legitimacy to the building and the institution it housed. While African Americans were not explicitly prohibited from having their own churches, the concept was still relatively new. Many Black congregations at this time were still meeting in church buildings belonging to white congregations. In order to gain the recognition of white Richmond, Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church not only needed to have a church building, it needed to have a church building that

²⁹⁰ Gilchrist and Stanton, 1970.

²⁹¹ H. Peter Pudner and Elizabeth Cheek “Second Presbyterian Church.” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1971

looked the part. The Gothic Revival style, with its castle-like tower, pitched roof, and pointed arches, would make their church legible as a proper religious institution.

However, while Sixth Mount Zion Baptist church is recognizably Gothic Revival, Boyd did deviate from the strict style. In the original church building (SMZ Figure 3) the iconic parapeted tower remains, as does the steeply pitched roof. They even included a nod to the Rose Window typical of the Gothic Style, with a small round window in the gabled roof. One notable change from the style is the rounded arch window instead of pointed arches. Additionally, the windows and door lack the highly decorated crowns; instead featuring relatively plain limestone crowns over the windows and doors. These deviations are also important in that they show that even though Boyd created a recognizably Gothic Revival church, he made changes to give the style a slightly new take which could be claimed by the Black community. Yes, they might have copied an established church architectural style to gain legitimacy, but they also made it their own.

John Jasper and Fundraising

John Jasper was born into slavery on a plantation in Fluvanna, Virginia, in 1812. By his teens he was in Richmond, living and working as an enslaved laborer on the compound of Samuel Hargrove. While enslaved, he learned how to read and write from another enslaved man and, when he became comfortable reading, he opened a Bible. He became born-again and began attending the same church as Hargrove, sitting in the back with the other enslaved worshippers. He began preaching early, with his fire-and-brimstone style of oration quickly gaining him popularity. Jasper became an in-demand preacher for funeral eulogies and would travel around the area to deliver them. Every employer would have to pay one dollar to Hargrove to compensate for the missed labor.

Jasper was part of the founding congregation of First African Baptist Church, and was baptized by Rev. Robert Ryland. He was a popular deacon under Ryland and was frequently chosen to give the prayers—lengthy mini-sermons in their own right—at the beginning of the services. By the time he formed Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, Jasper was in his fifties and already a well-known and admired preacher. The money he earned from speaking at funerals and giving guest sermons at other churches was used to help pay off Sixth Mount Zion’s building debts, as he would fill churches to capacity.

Jasper was able to contribute significantly to the congregation’s fundraising following the debut of his most famous sermon, *The Sun Do Move*, in March 1878. The sermon propelled him to national and international fame. He would preach it 273 times at venues across the United States, as well as to the Virginia General Assembly, and congregations in London, and Paris.²⁹²

The oratorial skill of Reverend Jasper was instrumental in drawing the large crowds and funds needed to acquire the land and materials to build the new church. According to the current church historian, newspapers would publish notices when Jasper would deliver the *Sun Do Move* sermon, and people—both black and white—would come from all around Richmond, the area, and the state to hear him preach. Jasper encouraged his congregants to leave the front rows open for their white visitors and would charge for the seats.²⁹³

Another way that the congregation raised money was through internal organizations. Groups such as the ushers and choirs would fundraise for the church regularly. The congregation also formed specific fundraising bodies known as brigades. Each brigade was responsible for conducting its own fundraising operations. The first brigades were established as early as 1887,

²⁹² Edwin A Randolph, *The Life of Rev. John Jasper, Pastor of Sixth Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Richmond, Va.; from His Birth to the Present Time, with His Theory on the Rotation of the Sun* (R. T. Hill & Co., 1854).; Benjamin Ross, interview, September 4, 2025.

²⁹³ Benjamin Ross, interview, September 4, 2025.

according to the interview conducted with Benjamin Ross. Eventually there would be sixteen brigades. The church honored the brigades and their inaugural leaders through the construction of sixteen stained glass windows—each inscribed with the name of a brigade and its leaders.²⁹⁴ Largely due to these efforts, the congregation was very successful in their fundraising and was able to continue to pay off the debts accrued by their building projects, usually within a few years of each project's completion.²⁹⁵

Location

There are three main reasons why the location of this church is important and contributes to the overall memorial significance of the site. First, it is located in the heart of Jackson Ward. Even before the Civil War, the neighborhood that would become Jackson Ward, was a popular living area for freed Black people and for enslaved people who lived off-property, and it was nicknamed 'Little Africa.' After the Civil War the neighborhood grew rapidly and Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, as one of the first churches founded by and for African Americans in the city, was perfectly positioned to provide a spiritual home for the growing community. It quickly became one of the most popular churches in the area, with a charismatic and activist pastor, and a loyal, active congregation.²⁹⁶

Beyond helping to attract a large congregation, the church's location at the heart of Jackson Ward also made it a natural meeting space and community center. The end of Reconstruction saw the swift implementation of draconian Jim Crow laws, which made the

²⁹⁴ Benjamin Ross, interview, September 4, 2025.

²⁹⁵ Benjamin Ross, interview, September 4, 2025.

²⁹⁶ Virginius Dabney, *Richmond: The Story of a City* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1990).

congregation of Black people in many public spaces in the city impossible. The church, with its central location, became a place where people could meet and organize in relative safety.²⁹⁷

The second reason for the significance of the church's location is its proximity to the 100 block of East Leigh Street. These single family, multi-story townhouses on this street were among the largest and grandest in the neighborhood. The block was nicknamed 'Quality Row' by locals for its impressive homes and the prominence of the families that lived there. As one of the closest churches to Quality Row, many of the families who lived on and around it attended Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, bringing their social clout and wealth with them. The size and relative prosperity of some congregation members allowed Sixth Mount Zion Church to participate in many charitable and community outreach programs. For example, the church was one of the first Black churches in the city to have its own organized charity with a designated social worker. The charity administered assistance to people in need across the city. In 1918, the church spearheaded the creation of a senior citizens' home called the Negro Baptist Old Folks Home, where elderly members of any church could be cared for in their final years.²⁹⁸

Urban Renewal and Resistance

The third and final reason for the importance of the church's location is that it is one of the few survivors of its surrounding blocks to remain after the construction of the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike, a part of Interstate 95. (SMZ Map 3)

As mentioned earlier, the scourge of urban renewal struck Jackson Ward in the 1950s. With clinical precision, the construction project cut its way through the heart of the

²⁹⁷ Michael Eric Taylor, "The African American Community of Richmond, Virginia: 1950-1956," *Core.Ac.Uk* (thesis, 1994), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/232773245.pdf>.

²⁹⁸ "Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996.

neighborhood, destroying many of the properties that surrounded the church. The church is, in fact, the only building standing on the northern side of Duval Street from Chamberlyn Avenue all the way to downtown Richmond, the portion of the street that runs along the interstate.²⁹⁹ In doing so, the turnpike physically cut the church off from the rest of the neighborhood. More than 700 homes and businesses were destroyed to clear space for the highway, leaving the area around the church decimated and desolate (SMZ Figure 6). Many businesses and institutions that did not have their buildings demolished later failed thanks to their location on the wrong side of the highway.

This is, sadly, not a unique story. Facilitated by urban renewal and slum clearance policies, the interstate highways ripped through cities and, primarily, neighborhoods of color in cities across the United States. As Raymond A. Mohl aptly described it, “the interstate system’s urban expressways, or freeways, not only penetrated the cities but they ripped through residential neighborhoods and leveled wide swaths of urban territory, ostensibly to facilitate automobility,” and that “public officials and policy makers, especially at the state and local level, used expressway construction to destroy low-income and especially Black neighborhoods in an effort to reshape the physical and racial landscapes of the postwar American city.”³⁰⁰ Jackson Ward’s experience is exemplary of the larger pattern of destruction of Black neighborhoods during the urban renewal era.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Taylor, thesis, 1994

³⁰⁰ Raymond A. Mohl, “Urban Expressways and the Racial Restructuring of Postwar American Cities,” *Jahrbuch Für Wirtschaftsgeschichte / Economic History Yearbook* 42, no. 2 (January 2001).

³⁰¹ The destruction wrought by urban renewal in predominantly Black neighborhoods has been well documented across the nation. One scholarly account of this include Nathan Connolly’s work on Miami, which explores the impact of the real estate market in urban renewal through “solidifying racial segregation” by, among other methods, packing Black residents into “concrete monsters” (his term for dense apartment buildings). N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016). Also see Charles Connerly’s book on how Birmingham city officials methodically and clinically used urban renewal to maintain racial segregation in the city. Charles E. Connerly, *Most Segregated City in America”: City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920’1980* (University of Virginia Press, 2013). For a Richmond specific narrative of urban renewal see Benjamin Campbell’s book. Benjamin P. Campbell, *Richmond’s Unhealed History* (Richmond, VA: Brandlyane Publishers, 2012).

While the story of the destruction caused by urban renewal is not unique, each survival story can be seen as remarkable, if not unique. Due to the advocacy of the church's senior pastor at the time, Rev. Dr. Augustus Walter Brown Sr., it was determined that the church was of sufficient historical importance and value to be preserved. The highway authorities offered the congregation three options: (1) reconstruct the church building in another location, (2) move the church to avoid the highway, or (3) move the path of the highway to avoid the church. The church and highway authorities agreed to move forward with the third option, largely for the sake of saving John Jasper's church. As a result, the turnpike curves around the church, making it a highly visible landmark along this major thoroughfare of the East Coast of the United States.³⁰² This event is also significant because it shows that the church's historic and cultural value was recognized even before the building was officially listed as a historic site nearly forty years later.

As was noted earlier, the church purchased the neighboring plots to the east and west in 1944; plots that happened to have survived the turnpike construction's destruction.³⁰³ The combined plots sit against the turnpike to this day, with the church visible from the interstate itself.

Ebenezer Baptist Church

It is helpful to our discussion of the significance of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church to look at another historic Black church in Richmond: Ebenezer Baptist Church; known at its

³⁰² RFM Team, Regina Warriner, and Joan Tupponce, "Destroying a Community to Build a Road," Richmond Family Magazine, March 21, 2023; "John Jasper Ministry (Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church)," Our Christian Heritage, March 3, 2025; Drew Sisk, "Jackson Ward: Displacement and Buried History," GDES Workshop, September 13, 2016.

³⁰³ "Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996.

founding as Third African Baptist Church. It is considered the other major historic Black church in Jackson Ward, and one of the most important historic Black churches in Richmond.

The Ebenezer Baptist Church was founded on July 16, 1865, three months after the Civil War ended and terminated the rules barring independent Black churches. Several members of the First African Baptist Church declared the need for a new African Baptist church. Rev. Dr. Robert Ryland, their pastor, chaired the committee responsible for finding a site for the new church. A lot at the corner of Leigh and Judah Streets was identified and declared acceptable by the committee on October 5, 1856. By December 7, 1856, Rev. Ryland had purchased the property for \$541.23 (approximately \$20,096.94 in 2025³⁰⁴). Building began that winter, with funds raised through a subscription-based book sale. The first services in the new building were held in the basement on March 7, 1858, led by Rev. W. T. Lindsay. The new sanctuary was dedicated on April 4, 1858, with its membership composed of “all members of First African Baptist Church living west of Second Street and north of Broad Street.”³⁰⁵

While both Sixth Mount Zion and Ebenezer Baptist Churches are early Black Baptist churches, their beginnings are quite different. Sixth Mount Zion was established independently of any other Baptist church. Ebenezer was a true offshoot of FABC, and was given help early in its existence from the leadership of its parent church, such as assistance in securing a site for its new sanctuary.

It is also important to note that Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church has only had Black pastors, while Ebenezer Baptist Church had at least one white pastor; the first, Rev. W. T.

³⁰⁴ “Inflation Rate between 1855-2025: Inflation Calculator,” \$541.23 in 1855 → 2025 | Inflation Calculator, accessed September 1, 2025, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1855?amount=541.23>.

³⁰⁵ “Church History,” Ebenezer Baptist Church, accessed September 2, 2025, <https://www.ebenzerrva.org/church-history>.

White.³⁰⁶ This is most likely because the laws effectively criminalizing unsupervised Black worship were not fully abandoned until around 1867, nine years after Third African Baptist Church was founded.³⁰⁷

Impact

Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church and its role in the neighborhood of Jackson Ward is an example of the important function that religion and religious institutions have played in the development of the Black neighborhood post-emancipation. This role can be seen in three main areas: (1) leadership, (2) organization, and (3) gathering.

Before exploring these areas, it is helpful to establish how we understand the role of the Church. Our understanding of the role of the Church in the growth and development of the African American community has evolved over decades of study. Much of the research falls into two main categories. First are those historians who see the Church as an institution that helped encode and enforce slavery and racial inequality. Scholars such as Mocombe (2006) and Reed (1997) examined the roots of the Black Church and saw an institution established and encouraged by white slave owners to socialize the Black community (both enslaved and free) to the ideas of natural inequality, slavery, capitalism, and the Protestant Ethic. To these historians, the church was a source of control, suffering, and ultimately death.³⁰⁸

The second main category consists of scholars who believe the church was “a *sui generis* Black (native) institution, constituted by its Africanism, preaching style, and songs, that became

³⁰⁶ “Church History,” Ebenezer Baptist Church, accessed September 2, 2025, <https://www.ebenezerrva.org/church-history>.

³⁰⁷ Shennette Garrett-Scott, “Who Is So Helpless as the Negro Woman?”: The Independent Order of St. Luke and the Quest for Economic Security, 1856–1902.,” essay, in *Banking on Freedom: Black Women in U.S. Finance Before the New Deal* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019), 41–72.

³⁰⁸ P. C. Mocombe, “The Black American Church: A Reactionary and Ideological Apparatus of Slavery.,” *Journal of Research in Philosophy and History* 7, no. 2 (2024): 28–43.

a dialectical revolutionary force of solace and freedom for Blacks against slavery, segregation, discrimination, etc.”³⁰⁹ Historians who subscribe to this theory, such as Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) and Tomlin (2019), concluded that the institution was a tool used first to build up the community, and then to critique white Christians for not living up to the principles and ideals put forward by their professed faith system.³¹⁰ This second theory posits that the institution absorbed many practices from African culture and religion, such as songs and preaching styles. This rather kind interpretation of the Church’s role in African American society largely ignores the origins of the Black Church as a tool of slave owners to subjugate and control their slaves through religion.

Mocombe, seeing the problems in both theories, later proposed that both positions were true. He argued that “the black church, especially as established in America, was both a slave institution of death and a reactionary force that has led to death as Blacks, especially the Black bourgeoisie, use and used it against White Christian America to integrate the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of the society, which is exploitative, oppressive, and a threat to all life on earth.”³¹¹

The case of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church shows a church leadership and congregation that remained dedicated to serving its community. The church has been led by charismatic and involved pastors who have encouraged financial and political participation from their congregations, always striving for the betterment of the community and Black uplift. While the institution of the Black Church was born in slavery, Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church was

³⁰⁹ Mocombe, (2024).

³¹⁰ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

³¹¹ Morcombe (2024)

formed in the ashes of slavery, and was at its height of influence in a time when African Americans were pushing for improved social and racial justice. While it is important to note that the institution of the Black church was a creation of slave owners, churches like Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church show that individual church communities can still be a source of social good for African American communities.

Since the pastorship of Reverend John Jasper, the lead pastor of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church has become an important leader within the Jackson Ward community, spiritually, socially, and politically. For example, it was Reverend Dr Augustus Walter Brown Sr. who led the congregation and community in the fight to save the church from demolition during the construction of the Highway. One could even argue that the church was saved as a direct result of the power and influence of its first leader, John Jasper. Long before the existence of the National or State lists of historically significant sites, the leaders of the city of Richmond recognized the cultural importance of the church because of its leaders. In this way, they also acknowledged the importance and leadership of the church itself within the community.³¹²

While we could understand the hiring of a Black architect and building workforce as simply a result of the racism of the era (no white architect would want to design or help construct a church for African Americans) or cost; there is another possibility. We could view the hiring choices as a form of racial uplift, although that term was only just beginning to be used at the time. Racial uplift was the response of some middle-class Black people and thought-leaders to the problem of the prevalence of so many anti-black stereotypes during and after Reconstruction. The idea of racial uplift was to show the falsity of the stereotypes through education. Leaders such as Booker T Washington believed that more African Americans (if not all) should have

³¹² "Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996.

educations that emphasized skilled labor, such as training in carpentry, agriculture, and needlework. Washington would go on to found the Tuskegee Institute, which provided manual training for its African American student body.³¹³ Others, such as W. E. B Du Bois, believed that the emphasis should be on higher education and the creation of a professional class that would provide leadership for African American communities.³¹⁴ The building of the church could be seen as both a form of racial uplift through education by providing experience for African Americans (mostly men) in building and providing them with skills that were transferable to other jobs.

It also could be seen as a form of racial uplift in that it provided an opportunity for the community to show the rest of the city (mostly the white part of the city) the hard work that they were able and willing to put into providing a church for themselves. They were not relying on assistance or handouts in any way; they had planned, designed, built, and funded the project themselves. The construction of the church could be seen as the community saying that the stereotype of the lazy African American is wrong—or at least, that it does not apply to them. According to Booker T. Gardner, Booker T. Washington had been convinced that “Negroes must prove themselves, must demonstrate tangibly and concretely that they are worthy of the blessings of emancipation.” The growth of industrial schools like Tuskegee, reflected this belief that Black people must first show that they deserved their rights through their hard work.³¹⁵ While it is not known if the leaders of Sixth Mount Zion subscribed to the same beliefs as Washington, examining the choice of architects and builders through the lens of Washington shows that they

³¹³ Booker T. Gardner, “The Educational Contributions of Booker T. Washington,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 44, no. 4 (1975): 502.

³¹⁴ Derrick P. Alridge, “On the Education of Black Folk: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Paradox of Segregation,” *The Journal of African American History* 100, no. 3 (June 1, 2015): 473–93.

³¹⁵ Gardner, 1975

can be seen as a way to prove the ‘worthiness of the blessings of emancipation’ of this particular Black community.

The construction of the church would not have been possible without the presence of powerful and competent community leaders. As the preeminent spiritual leader of the community, John Jasper had the influence to bring together the different sectors of the community to ensure that the church would be built. It was his power as a preacher and speaker that brought the congregation together and persuaded many people to not only join the church but also give money. He worked closely with George Boyd in designing the church and likely assisted in the hiring of the construction workforce from within the community.

The church was able to provide this type of assistance both because of its location in the heart of the community, and because of the concentration of social power within the congregation. Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church was, and continues to be, one of the largest Black congregations in Richmond. It was also located within the most affluent African American neighborhood in the city, serving the so-called Black Wall Street of the South. Some of the families in the area could trace their wealth back to before the Civil War, with Jackson Ward being home to several free Black people, as well as hired out slaves who were able to keep their wages. This was a church and congregation that could command the resources of the city’s most prominent African Americans towards the most important issues facing the community; and they did.

Sixth Mount Zion Baptist church, like many Black churches across the city and the South, was seen as a space of safety and refuge for the community. It was not only the space where they gathered every Sunday but also where many social groups and organizations met. The church building was seen as belonging to the community and, consequently, open for use to

fulfill the needs of said community. Therefore, many groups that did not have their own buildings or facilities used the church.

This was a relatively common practice within Black communities developed out of the outright ban on the organization of free Black people in many cities prior to the Civil War. For example, the Black fraternal organization the Independent Order of St Luke (IOSL) first met in the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church to evade Baltimore's (MD) ban on the organization of free Black people.³¹⁶ While they did not face formal bans on assembly during or after Reconstruction, the danger associated with Black people gathering together in public was enough to institute a *de facto* ban. Black people in Richmond utilized the same strategy to avoid attracting the attention of white Richmonders, and hosted meetings of a wide range of organizations and groups in the church building.

The construction of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist church is also an example of the community's desire to mark their presence and permanence for themselves, their community, and for the white residents of Richmond. The construction of the church was a sign of the strength of the church's community within Jackson Ward, showing that the neighborhood would support the church financially and respond to the church's needs, with or without support from white Richmonders. Instead of seeking a new or foreign architectural style for their church, the community (or at least Boyd and Jasper) chose to use a style recognized and understood throughout the city. Their use of Gothic Revival shows a desire to have even the white people who ventured into Jackson Ward immediately recognize the building as a church. In this way Boyd and Jasper show some degree of the double consciousness that as W. E. B. Du Bois

³¹⁶ Shennette Garrett-Scott, "Who Is So Helpless as the Negro Woman?": The Independent Order of St. Luke and the Quest for Economic Security, 1856–1902.,” essay, in *Banking on Freedom: Black Women in U.S. Finance Before the New Deal* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019), 41–72.

discussed; their preoccupation with the way the church (and therefore the congregation) would be perceived could also be viewed as a preoccupation with the way the white world would look upon the church and congregation and how they would measure up the church against themselves and their own churches.³¹⁷

Epilogue

Today the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church continues to operate as a thriving Black community church, with around 800 members.³¹⁸

It was listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR) on June 19, 1996, and on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) on December 16, 1996. According to the NRHP nomination form, the church gains its significance from being “associated with the lives of persons significant to our past,” in reference to the church’s first leader Reverend John Jasper; and for “embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction,” in reference to the church’s Gothic Revival style. These listings can be viewed as the official acknowledgement of what had been recognized when Rev. Dr. Augustus Walter Brown Sr. was able to persuade the highway authorities to reroute the turnpike around the church, saving it because of its importance to the community and to history.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Strivings of the Negro People* (Boston, MA: Atlantic Monthly Co, 1897).

³¹⁸ Benjamin Ross, interview, September 4, 2025.

³¹⁹ Kathryn Cowell et al. “Jackson Ward.” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1976.

In the 1980s, the church embarked on a \$1 million renovation plan. This project involved, (among other things), installation of new doors and an elevator, lowering the church ceiling, adding restrooms, and the fitting of a new alarm system.³²⁰ According to the Church historian, the congregation has continued to update the church as needed, and conduct maintenance and repair, with regular fundraising undertaken to ensure that the church's debts are managed.³²¹

The construction and maintenance of the church were, ultimately, a community project an example of the power that could be mobilized by the community working together. This bringing together of the community around a community need is not uncommon within African American communities. The slavery era was a time when the African American family was very fragile. Owners could, and often did, sell slaves with no regard to the family ties that might be severed as a result. Therefore, the community became the family in many respects. When an enslaved person needed something and their immediate family was not available, the community (the other enslaved people in the household, on the plantation, or on neighboring plantations) could step in; which put a large amount of importance on the creation and maintenance of community ties at a 'neighborhood' level within an enslaved African Americans life, as Anthony E. Kaye described.³²²

This was also the case with freed (or never enslaved) Black people who, despite not being enslaved, were still at risk from the violence and tragedy of rampant racism. Communities, mostly centered around African American neighborhoods, developed as a way to provide safety and support in numbers. As is well understood, the end of slavery was not the end of racism, and

³²⁰ *Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church History*, *smzbc.org*, accessed 2025, <https://www.smzbc.org/our-history>.

³²¹ Benjamin Ross, interview, September 4, 2025.

³²² Anthony Kaye, "'In the Neighborhood': Towards a Human Geography of US Slave Society," *Southern Spaces*, September 3, 2008.

many of the problems that faced African American communities during and after Reconstruction remained; making the strength of communities an important factor in the well-being of many African Americans.³²³

The church building project can therefore be viewed not only as an example of the community coming together to provide for itself, but also as an effort to strengthen itself. The very act of working together to achieve the feat of planning, funding, and executing each stage of the construction and renovation of the church served as a way to strengthen community bonds; something that would benefit the entire community.

³²³ Shennette Garrett-Scott, “Who Is So Helpless as the Negro Woman?”: The Independent Order of St. Luke and the Quest for Economic Security, 1856–1902.,” essay, in *Banking on Freedom: Black Women in U.S. Finance Before the New Deal* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019), 41–72.

SMZ Appendix

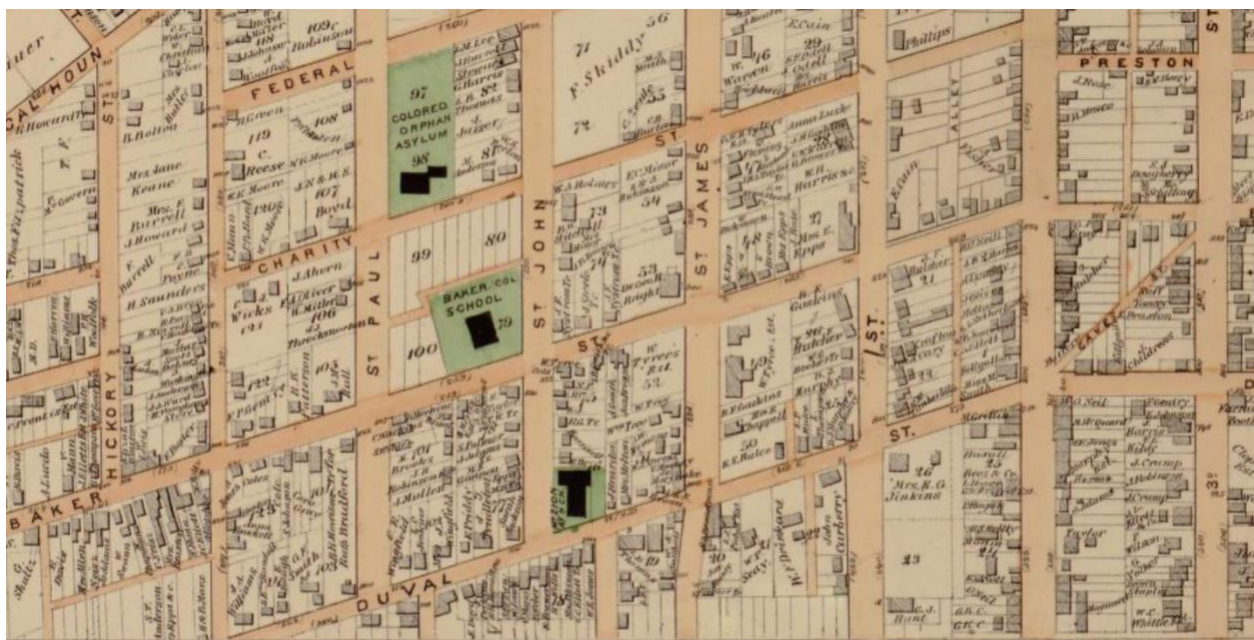
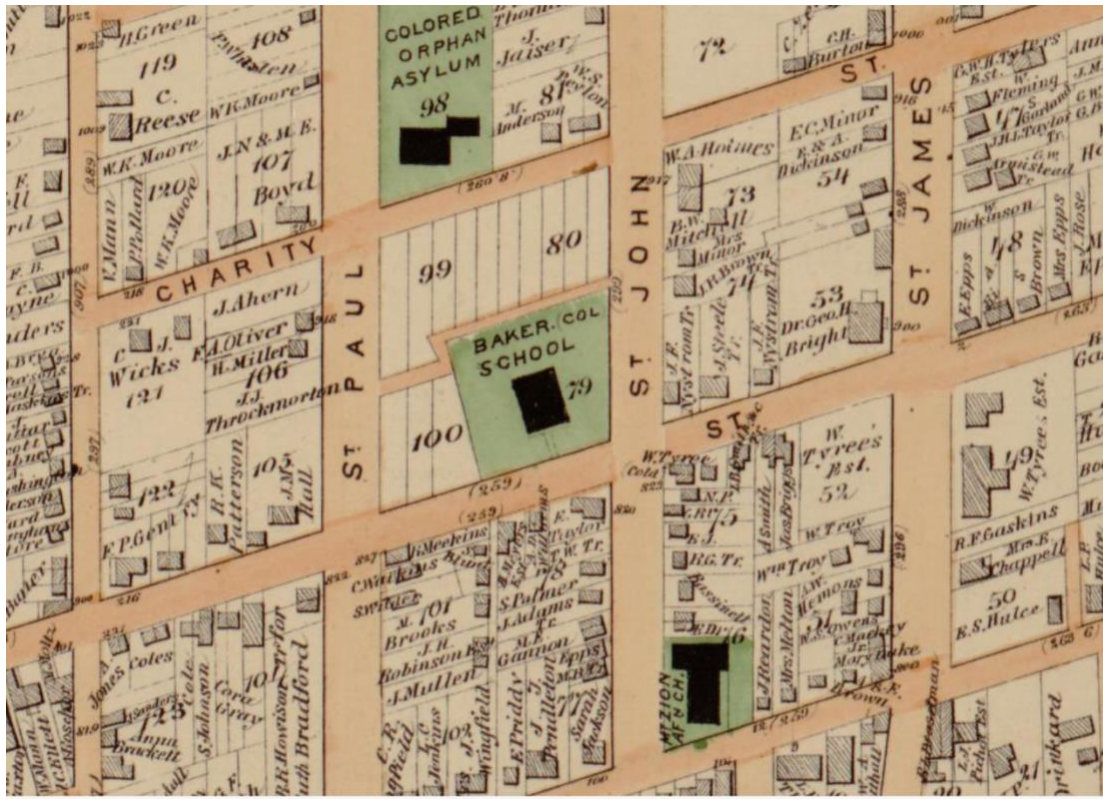
Archival Materials:

The Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church's archive is primarily composed of photographs and documents held by the church itself. The church also maintains an archive of materials relating to John Jasper, its first and most well-known pastor, housed in the Jasper Museum. Some newspaper articles about the church—mostly from the *Richmond Planet*—are held by the church, though they can also be accessed through the Library of Virginia.

It is important to note the structural unevenness between the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist church archive and the archives associated with the Maggie Walker House and Virginia Union University. In the case of Maggie Walker, her archive was preserved by her family and later by the National Park Service. As an institution, Virginia Union University retained much of its own archival materials. This is not the case at Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, which suffered both from its archival materials being dispersed amongst church members and their families and from the broader systemic disparities facing Black institutions. Black churches, like many other Black institutions, do not receive the archival resources or institutional support that comparable white institutions receive. As a result, archives are structurally uneven between white and Black institutions.

In the case of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, many of the economic and building records available for the Maggie Walker House and for Virginia Union University are missing. The report written by the church's first historian, A. W. Parham, is invaluable for providing a narrative account of the church's early movements. The current church historian, Benjamin Ross, also wrote a document detailing the church history in 1986. However, beyond these documents, few records and only limited word-of-mouth accounts remain or were accessible.

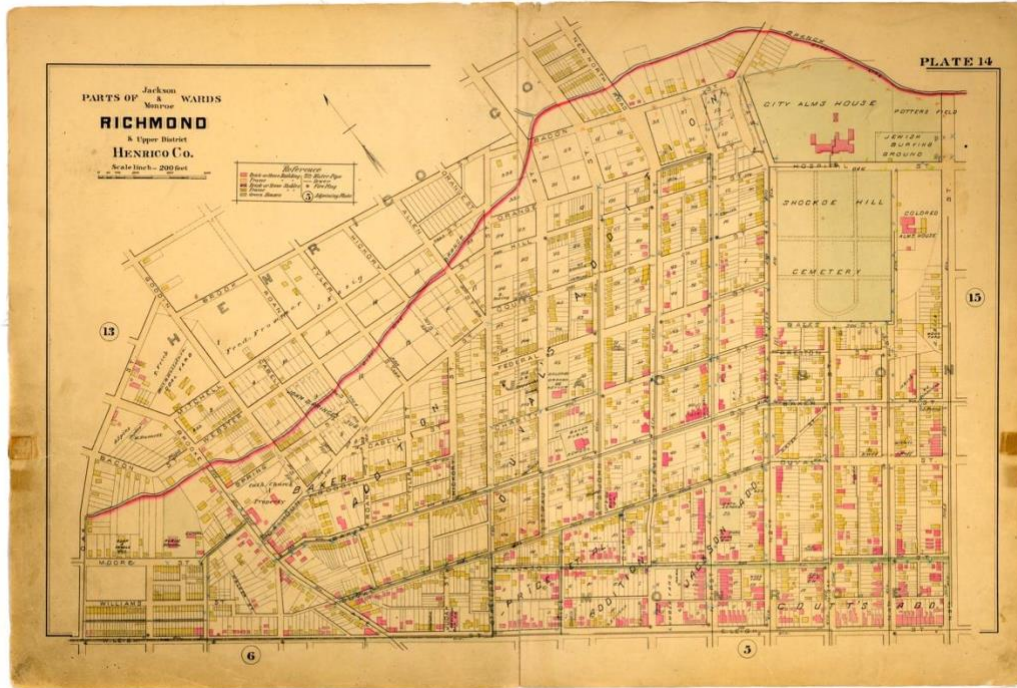
SMZ Map 1: Beers Map of Richmond (1877) p.4; Held by Library of Congress
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SMZ Map 2

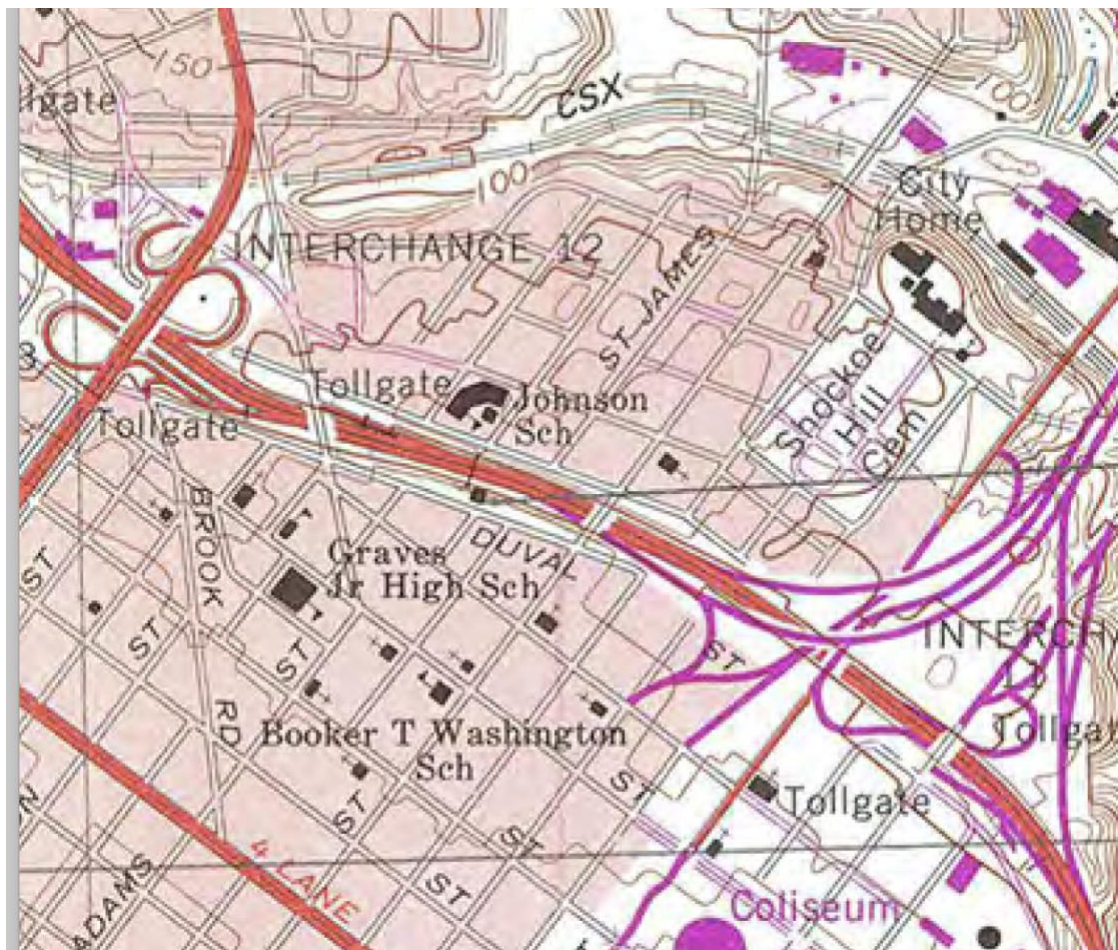
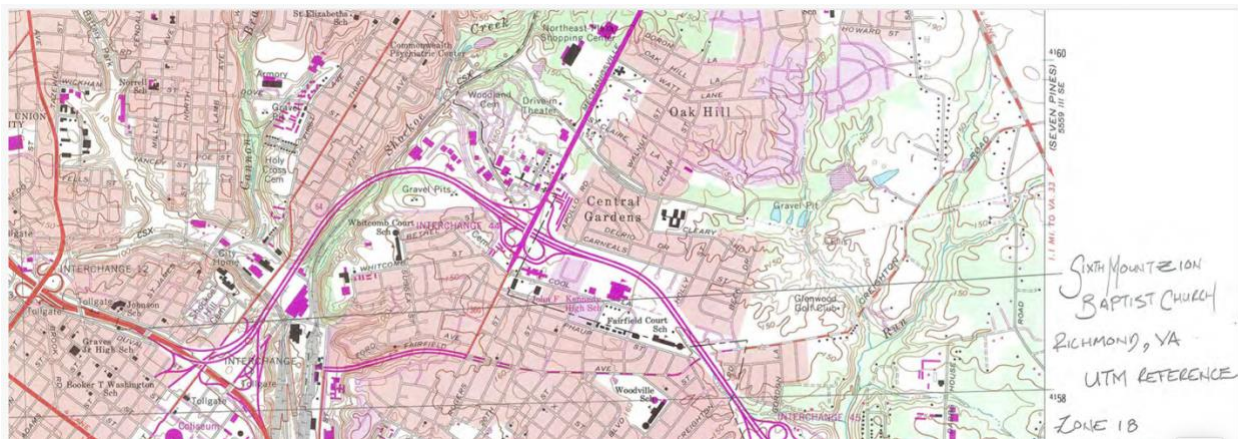
19_Parts of Jackson & Monroe Wards Richmond & Upper District Henrico Co.

George William Baist, 1889, Plate 14. Courtesy of Virginia Commonwealth University Special Collections and Archives

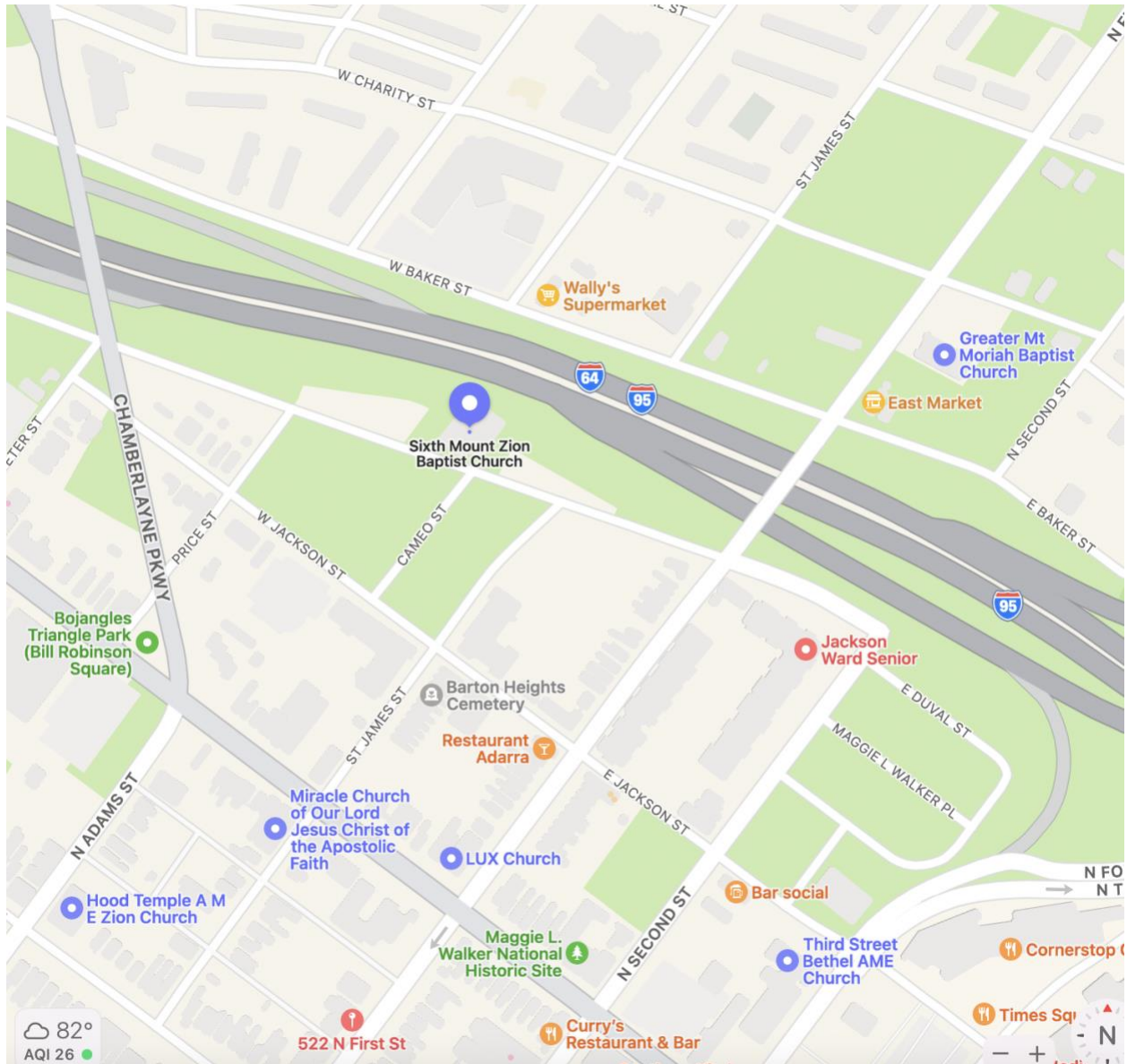




SMZ Map 3
1996 Map of Richmond



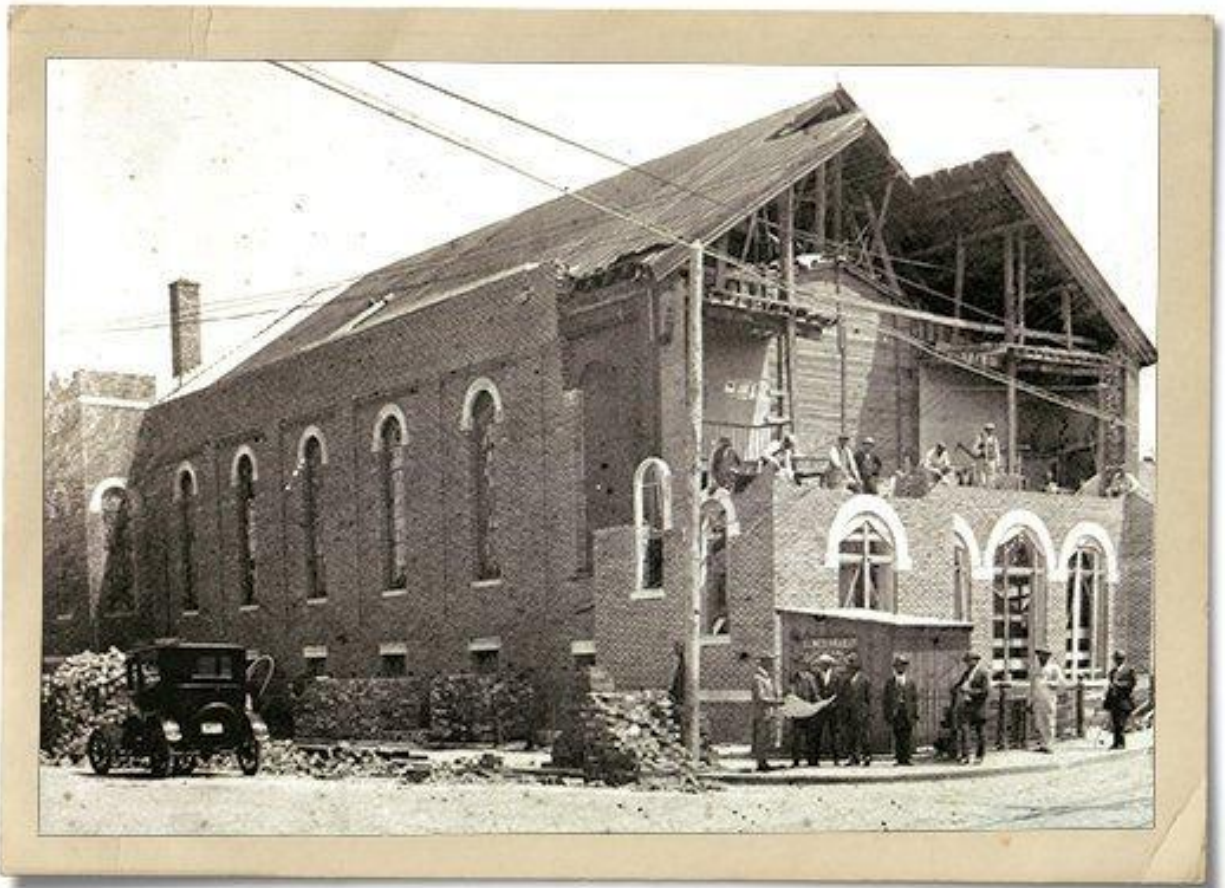
SMZ Map 4
Map of Richmond 2024



SMZ Figure 1 – Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, photograph by author



SMZ Figure 2 - An expansion in the early 1920s under architect Charles T. Russell and general contractor I. Lincoln Bailey. Courtesy of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church.



SMZ Figure 3 - Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church 1887. Jasper-Boyd Church (1887-1924).
Courtesy of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church



SMZ Figure 4 - Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church 1867. Courtesy of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church



SMZ Figure 5 - Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church Interior 1890-1924, photographer unknown.
Courtesy of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church



SMZ Figure 6 - Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, 1957, photographer unknown. Courtesy of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church



Chapter 4 - Conclusions

Through examining these three sites, we see how the African American community built up the institutions that it needed, (such as educational and financial institutions, as well as welfare programs such as food assistance, job training, and work insurance)—institutions that the white-controlled Richmond government was unwilling to provide,³²⁴ and more importantly, that built collective, long-term strength and resilience among Jackson Ward's Black residents. This research contributes to our understanding of how this community created the social networks and physical infrastructure that supported these institutions.

Proposal

Based on the conclusions presented in this chapter, I would like to suggest the following framework for understanding the community impact of a site through its geography and design. The framework rests on a set of four questions about how the construction of the site (1) involved specific communal groups (for example, church congregations, the business community, or students); (2) fulfilled a spatial need; (3) fostered community pride; and (4) fostered community leadership.

Firstly, the involvement of specific communal groups was a key factor in the construction of each of these three sites, contributing to the speed with which they were constructed. The level of communal involvement gives us a glimpse into the relationship the institution (or its leadership) had with different community groups; as well as providing an idea of the level of

³²⁴ The government of Richmond curbed the ability of Black Richmonders to access white controlled institutions such as schools, banks, churches, beneficial societies, and other welfare organizations. They then limited Black institutional formation through disenfranchisement and the violent implementation of racist employment and housing policies that would suppress the economic development and the social and political autonomy of Black neighborhoods for generations to come. Rabinowitz 1978; Silver, 1991; David M. P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

investment the community has in the project. In the case of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, the congregation was involved in both the payment for and the construction of the church's building projects, through donations and fundraising. In each case, the church was able to fundraise within the community to pay for (or pay back the loans on) its construction projects, showcasing a strong institutional relationship with the community, demonstrated by the willingness of individual community donors as well as congregants, to open their wallets to help the church. In both the Maggie Walker House and the Virginia Union University cases campus leaders were able to rely on the community in the physical construction of the building projects utilizing local Black architects as well as a Black (likely local) construction crew. The community banded together to fund and create these projects, showing a strong commitment to both the community as well as to the institutions they were building.

Second, we need to understand what kind of spatial need was fulfilled by the site. While their institutional uses are important, the community needs that these spaces fulfill not only tell us about the potential needs of the community but also the methods used to fulfill those needs. As will be discussed later in this chapter, these three spaces not only provided homes for the institutions they contained, but also created much-needed networks of proximity between each other for the community. As a Black community³²⁵ in a segregated city (and state) it was imperative that the community remain as self-sufficient and self-contained as possible, with Jackson Ward residents spending as little time as possible in white controlled areas of the city.

³²⁵ According to the 1900 U.S. Census, the Black population of Richmond city was 32,230. However the report summary of results states that "the census of the negroes in 1900 was probably less accurate than that of the whites...but it is believed to be not more than 2 per cent below the truth"; Walter Willcox, rep., *The Negro Population* (Washington, DC: United States Census Bureau, n.d.). The overall reported Black population in Virginia was 660,722 out of a total population of 1,854,184. Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, *Historical census statistics on population totals by race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, regions, divisions, and states* § (2002).

The construction of these institutional buildings helped to ensure that the people of Jackson Ward would have one less community need that had to be fulfilled by white-run institutions.

Third, it is important to understand how these spaces foster pride in the community. This may not be present in every case; however, pride in the community contributes to the strengthening of the community as a whole. This was important in the face of Jim Crow segregation; the coming together of the neighborhood around these buildings and institutions increased the strength of Jackson Ward's public sphere to withstand and even thrive under segregation. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the community's pride in their institutions and the buildings they constructed can be seen in the way they were spoken about, particularly in newspaper articles discussing the institutions as they were built and opened. Some measures for assessing the evolution of community pride in these institutions are the monitoring of media mentions, funding patterns, and membership engagement over time.

Lastly, we need to examine how the site fostered leadership from within the community. This analytical framework adds to our understanding of how the construction of these sites affected their communities.

Community Involvement and Collective Construction

An important throughline in each of these sites is that some aspect of their construction involved the community. Each of the case study organizations put forth a proactive and enterprising narrative about the community by making each of these three large projects community projects. The purchase of the land for, and the construction of, Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church was funded by the congregation and the speaking prowess of their founding reverend. It was then designed by a Black architect and built by a Black construction crew. Evidence for this Black workforce comes from images of the construction site, as well as

anecdotal evidence from the community. As Benjamin Ross, the Sixth Mount Zion Church Historian, commented during an interview in September 2025, no written evidence exists to confirm that the original church building was constructed by the Jackson Ward community, but the builder (Boyd) lived in Richmond (if not in Jackson Ward) and had many building projects in the neighborhood. Ross suggested that Boyd had local building crews (or a specific crew) that he worked with, who would have been familiar with his working style. Based on the timing of the building of the church, it is unlikely that a white building crew would have been willing to work on a Black church, let alone under a Black head builder, and so the community built the structure itself.³²⁶

Virginia Union University was largely funded by Northern donors, wealthy philanthropists who provided funding for many Black schools (primary, secondary, and tertiary) in the South.³²⁷ The first campus buildings were designed by a white architect, but the construction itself was completed by a Black construction crew. The architect for the renovation of some of the original buildings, as well as the design of several other campus buildings, were designed by a Black architect on the university faculty. Again, evidence for a Black workforce comes from a photograph of the construction site of one of the buildings. As was discussed earlier, the original white architect, Coxhead's New York office called for labor and materials from Richmond, even advertising in the *Richmond Planet* to ensure local builders would see the request—an appeal the building community answered.

³²⁶ Benjamin Ross, personal, September 4, 2025.

Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church is an institution and site that deserves more archival attention. The church has written and published its own history, but very little academic work has been produced regarding this specific church. Much of the original construction history is unavailable (either in private collections of congregants or destroyed) which has hampered research into the church building.

³²⁷ Julian B. Roebuck and Komanduri Srinivasa Murty, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Their Place in American Higher Education* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1993).

Finally, the Maggie Walker House was originally designed by a Black architect and was most likely built by a Black construction crew. Walker hired a Black architect to lead the renovations of the house and likely used her husband's construction team to complete the work. It is likely that even after his death, she continued to work with Black construction companies; if not because of Armstead, then because of her own professed devotion to buying Black. As noted earlier, Walker regularly spoke about buying Black in her speeches, calling upon her fellow Black women to support the businesses of their neighbors.

In each case, local Black men were hired to build these structures, if not also to design the buildings. Many of the men who worked on these projects (brick makers and masons, painters, carpenters, etc.) would have learned their crafts while enslaved.³²⁸ They now could apply their skills for the enrichment of their own communities rather than for the betterment of white society, while also earning a wage. For these men, the transition from enslaved laborer to wage earner was a vital step toward economic independence and self-empowerment. The achievement of individual economic independence also strengthened the local economy as well as institutions which relied upon community wealth (through taxes, membership fees, and donations) for funding.

While the hiring of a Black workforce may well be the result of Black congregations, schools, and homeowners being unable to hire white architects and work crews, it could also be the result of a deliberate choice to support their own local economy and buy or hire Black. The success of Black Wall Streets, such as in Tulsa, was at least partially attributed to the community consistently buying Black; and part of the reason residents were able to frequent Black-owned

³²⁸ For further reading on Black Builders during the Antebellum see Catherine W. Bishir, "Hiring out: Enslaved Black Building Artisans in North Carolina," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 30, no. 1–2 (September 2023): 99–122; and Tara A. Dudley, *Building Antebellum New Orleans: Free People of Color and Their Influence* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2024).

businesses so consistently was that Black people were not allowed to do business in the white parts of the city.³²⁹ Black people were, in many cases, permitted to shop in white stores in Richmond, and people promoting the ‘buy Black’ movement like Maggie Walker had a difficult time persuading people to give up shopping at white stores that often had more variety and better quality goods than were available at Black stores. The ‘buy Black’ movement was born out of the need for Black people to achieve economic self-sufficiency in the midst of segregation. Beyond Black economic leaders like Maggie Walker, the movement was led by activists like Marcus Garvey and his Black nationalist Universal Negro Improvement Association.³³⁰

Whether or not the majority of those living in Jackson Ward fully ceased shopping at white-owned establishments, when it came to the community’s construction projects they appear to have purchased materials from Black-owned businesses and hired Black construction workers, keeping the economic benefits of the project within the community.

Fulfilling a Spatial Need: Network of Proximity

The importance of the locations can almost not be overstated. The sites are all located within 1.5 miles of each other, with the largest distance between two sites (the Maggie Walker House and Virginia Union University) at 1.4 miles. The Maggie Walker House and Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church are within comfortable walking distance of each other, only 0.3 miles apart, and are both considered to be within the heart of Jackson Ward. Virginia Union University is a short bus ride away. Prior to the construction of Route 64, Virginia Union University would have

³²⁹ Kimberly Fain, “The Devastation of Black Wall Street - JSTOR DAILY,” JSTOR Daily , July 5, 2017.

³³⁰ Gertrude Woodruff Marlowe, *A Right Worthy Grand Mission: Maggie Lena Walker and the Quest for Black Economic Empowerment* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 2003). For further reading on the buy Black movement see Jessica Gordon Nembhard, “Cooperative Ownership in the Struggle for African American Economic Empowerment,” *Humanity & Society* 28, no. 3 (August 2004): 298–321; Louis Ferleger and Matthew Lavalley, “Lending a Hand: How Small Black Businesses Supported the Civil Rights Movement,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2018; and Lawrence B. Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

been even more easily accessible from the center of Jackson Ward. These sites were not just a part of the community, they were physically embedded within the community.

They create what is known as a network of proximity, a way of describing the relationship between geographic spatial form and the way urban space is used. According to architect and urban planner Francesca Mandelli, today's urban models of proximity "propose an urban expansion that decomposes the city into autonomous cells with well-defined shapes and dimensions, linking proximity planning to urban form, spatial dimension, and the characteristics of the built environment."³³¹ In other words, the spatial configuration of a space (be that within a single building or across a neighborhood, group of neighborhoods, or an entire city), directly impacts how people interact with each other. In the case of Jackson Ward, this means that the physical proximity of the case study sites (and Jackson Ward as a whole) increased the likelihood of social interactions. The location of the sites within the community made the sites more effective as spaces for community organization and gathering.

Mondelli does not speak specifically to segregated cities and the differences that networks of proximity might make within them. She suggests that applying the 15-minute city model might exacerbate the segregation of peripheral areas if proximity is allowed "to become a driver of segregation" by not improving the public transportation network as well.³³² Jackson Ward was already physically, socially and economically segregated from white Richmond, which had its own networks of proximity which excluded the majority Black neighborhood. Jackson Ward developed its own network of proximity which in turn excluded white Richmond, creating a network in which the people of Jackson Ward could be self-sufficient.

³³¹ Francesca Paola Mondelli, "There in 15 Minutes? The Impact of Urban Morphology on the Perception of Proximity and the Use of Public Space," *Cities* 168 (January 2026).

³³² Mondelli, 2026

It is important to note that this network of proximity was created out of necessity. The laws and practices of segregation required that a Black neighborhood like Jackson Ward remain within its specific geographic bounds, with the property around the neighborhood kept strictly controlled by white civic leaders and landowners.³³³ The creation of this network of proximity, along with the fostering of its own Jackson Ward public sphere—physically grounded in religious, economic and educational institutions—was a necessity for survival.

Fostering Racial Pride

These sites were each, in their own way, a source of racial pride for the community of Jackson Ward. Not only were these sites built by and for the community itself, each site utilized a different architectural style, effectively copying the complex styles that their designers and builders would have seen in white institutional buildings. The choice to emulate these architectural styles was not just a show of power or wealth, but can also be seen as a way for the African American community to show that their community could produce architects and builders with the same skills and abilities as their white counterparts.

The community's pride in the structures that they produced can be seen in the newspaper articles published about the institutions as they were constructed and opened. In the case of VUU, as noted earlier, the school had advertisements published in the *Richmond Planet*, praising the school's grounds as "beautiful and extensive," its faculty as "exceedingly strong," and its buildings as "the finest of school buildings."³³⁴

We can also see a form of racial pride in the fact that none of the architects chose to adhere strictly to their chosen style. In each case, they put their own interpretive spin on the

³³³ Rabinowitz 1978, Silver, 1991

³³⁴ *Richmond Planet*. (Richmond, VA), Oct. 7 1899.

style, making sure that enough elements remained visible so that it would be recognizable, but adding touches that did make the building unique. In this way, they can be understood as beginning to develop an African American version of these styles.

Spaces to gather

All three sites have been used as spaces for meeting and organizing. Gathering spaces are an essential component of a healthy, thriving community and neighborhood. They include everything from community centers, parks, and playgrounds, to meeting rooms, schools, and gymnasiums; essentially any space that is open to the neighborhood or community. As was discussed earlier in the dissertation, throughout the slavery era Black people were restricted from gathering. In Virginia, fears of a slave revolt led to the prohibition of not only Black preachers, but also the gathering of groups of Black people in one space. Ignoring the restrictions on assembly enslaved people gathered in secret, in cabins and backlots, and in the woods or fields. Post-emancipation, Black people embraced the ability to gather in the open as a sign of their freedom. Churches, social clubs, and HBCUs became central meeting spaces for the social life of Black communities, and as spaces where Black culture was created and preserved.³³⁵

Academic researchers Ghezelloo and Hokugo write that the gathering spaces in residential areas in particular “represent pillars of the social life of communities [that] act as shared resources in which experiences and values are created through participation and communication.”³³⁶ They discuss how these sites of gathering are even more important in times of disaster and recovery, as sources of community development and strength. Scholarship on

³³⁵ Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

For further reading on Black public spaces see The Black Public Sphere Collective, ed., *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book* (Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996).

³³⁶ Yegane Ghezelloo and Akihiko Hokugo, “Effectiveness of Gathering Activities and Spaces for Community Recovery in GEJET-2011-Affected Areas,” *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 22, no. 2 (March 20, 2022): 476–93.

community recovery is relevant to Jackson Ward as a segregated Black neighborhood that has historically been denied the resources provided to majority white neighborhoods, creating daily crises within the neighborhood. Ghezelloo and Hokugo's article discusses the way these sites of gathering are used in times of crisis and disaster; in Jackson Ward, a neighborhood under siege from segregation and violent suppression, these sites could operate as crisis centers for the economic, social, and political disasters that hit the community.³³⁷

Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church opened its doors and facilities for use by various community groups and homeless organizations. Virginia Union University hosted its own on-campus organizations, as well as permitting some larger community gatherings to take place on campus or in campus facilities. Maggie Walker, in using her home as an office in her later years, turned the Leigh Street townhouse into a meeting space for leaders in the IOSL and visiting luminaries of African American thought and culture.

What is special about this set of buildings is that the community built and owned these spaces itself, which means that we can assume any trait or attribute that enhances the site's ability to be a gathering space was a deliberate choice. Unlike a space that was later adapted into a community space, these three sites were always meant to be community spaces. Therefore, their very design can tell us something about not only the institution that built them, but also the community they were built to serve.

Spatial Community Network

We can expand upon the idea of these sites as intentional community gathering points by also considering how the location of the sites creates a spatial community network of gathering

³³⁷ Ghezelloo and Hokugo, 2022

spaces that materially reinforces the community by their physical proximity to each other and their locations at the heart of the community. Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church and the Maggie Walker House in particular, are both within blocks of the main neighborhood thoroughfares, with the most important businesses and entertainment sites in the neighborhood. Everyone in the community passed by one or more of these sites on a regular basis, making them easy sites for gathering and contributing to their roles as sites of meaning and memory within the community.

Networks of Memory

The term that ties the three case study sites together better than ‘monument,’ ‘memorial,’ or ‘site of memory,’ is ‘network of memory.’ These sites gain more memorial significance from their presence within a network of sites than from their individual significance. For example, the Maggie Walker House has an important historic role in telling the narrative of Maggie Walker and her role in the community as a businesswoman and leader within Richmond’s Black public sphere, but it gains more significance when viewed within the context of other sites associated with the Independent Order of St. Luke, such as the St. Luke Building, the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank building, and the St. Luke Emporium. This network of sites tells the larger narrative of the strength and influence of the Independent Order of St. Luke within Jackson Ward, and the leadership roles that many women took within the Black beneficial society movement.

Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church and Virginia Union University may be understood as individual sites of historical importance in the context of the Black church and Black higher education in Richmond. Sixth Mount Zion acquires further significance when considered alongside the network of other historic Black churches in Richmond, historic Black churches in the South, or even historic Black southern Baptist churches. Virginia Union University belongs

to the network of memory around HBCUs, and historic Black educational facilities within Richmond.

Establishing Tools and Mechanisms for Advancement

The Maggie Walker House, by association with the IOSL and the St. Luke Bank, serves as an example of an institution that worked to establish tools and mechanisms for the advancement of Black people in Jackson Ward.³³⁸ The IOSL, from its inception as the St Luke Society, existed to benefit the Black community. Through its organizational lifetime, some of the services the IOSL provided included life, sickness, and work insurance, a bank that would give loans to prospective Black home or business owners, job placement, job training, child care, homes for abused women, homes for single mothers, homeless shelters, and senior citizens' living spaces. This was an organization, like the Black mutual aid societies before and after it, that was designed to respond to the unmet needs of the Black community, in a way that was accessible and affordable.³³⁹

Resistance

Beyond creating spaces for organization and gathering, the sites also became spaces of resistance against the violent racism found right outside the community. In the cases of VUU and Sixth Mount Zion, their construction can be seen as evidence of the power and resources that could be gathered by the Black community in Richmond, despite the bureaucratic and administrative roadblocks, often based in racism, put in front of them. Maggie Walker, in

³³⁸ The St Luke Emporium and the newspaper have had little academic examination. Another potential area of inquiry is the architecture of the Independent Order of St Luke. The organization had its own headquarters in Richmond, as well as other buildings out of which they ran their associated charities and groups.

³³⁹ J. W. Trotter, "African American Fraternal Associations in American History: An Introduction," *Social Science History* 28, no. 3 (September 1, 2004): 355–66.

choosing to purchase and renovate a house on ‘quality row,’ can be viewed as making a statement of resistance to the Black community (and, perhaps, the Richmond community at large). As a married woman purchasing property in her own name in the wealthiest part of the neighborhood, Walker made a statement of resistance against the expectations for women, especially Black women.

More Recent Richmond History

In June 1980, *Ebony*, a popular magazine in the Black community, published a surprising cover story: “Richmond: The Confederate Capital Finally Falls to Blacks.” The article referred to the fact that, as of that year, the city’s leaders were now majority Black. The City of Richmond had “a Black mayor, a Black city manager, a predominantly Black city council, a Black school superintendent, a Black fire chief, a Black treasurer, a Black personnel director, a Black assistant city manager, and a Black assistant to the mayor.”³⁴⁰ To go from a time when Black people could not hope to hold more than a single seat on the city council following the end of Reconstruction, to holding the majority of public offices within the city, was a huge feat. In order for this shift to occur, Richmond—and the Black community—had to fight for desegregation and civil rights. Later movements also brought chaos and change to the city, such as the Black Lives Matter protests, which prompted the removal of Confederate monuments throughout the city.³⁴¹

Desegregation

Richmond, as the capital of Virginia, played a major role in the desegregation of public life in the commonwealth. As the former capital of the Confederacy, images of integrated schools,

³⁴⁰ “The Confederate Capital Finally Falls to Blacks,” *Ebony*, June 1980.

³⁴¹ Gregory S. Schneider and Laura Vozzella, “Protests Erupt in Violence in Richmond, Where Residents Say the Ongoing Turmoil Has Eroded Their Support for Demonstrations,” *Washington Post*, August 12, 2020; Leah Dickerman, “A Note on a Monumental Moment,” *Museum of Modern Art*, June 10, 2020.

shops, and restaurants in the city whose most popular tourist attraction was a street decorated with monuments to Confederate leaders served as a potent symbol both for and against segregation. Richmond featured in both the school and general desegregation fights.

The response of Richmond and broader Virginian officials alike to the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* has been described as near-hysterical in its determination to maintain 'massive resistance.' Entire legislative bodies turned their attention to stopping integration. Finally, after exhausting all options, the leadership of the resistance movement declared defeat, and on February 2, 1959, twenty-one Black students (four in Arlington, seventeen in Norfolk) started classes at previously all-white public schools for the first time.³⁴² School integration came to Richmond the following school year.³⁴³

As the years passed it became clear that the Richmond school board was unable or unwilling to effectively integrate the city's schools. In April 1971, a judge concluded that Richmond was incapable (or simply unwilling) to integrate its schools without drastic measures. His order would become known as 'cross town bussing.' Schools were forced to integrate as Black and white students were literally bused to different schools within the district. As a result, white families fled the Richmond school district.³⁴⁴ This state of affairs continued into the

³⁴² Benjamin P. Campbell, *Richmond's Unhealed History* (Richmond, VA: Brandylane Publishers, 2012).

³⁴³ On September 6, 1960, Gloria Jean Mead and Carol Irene Swann began classes at previously all-white Chandler Junior High School. "Integration is Quiet in City" declared the *Richmond News Leader's* banner headline. They reported that "there were no racial problems at Chandler" caused by the integration of the two girls to the school. Meanwhile, for the rest of the commonwealth, only 170 of the 204,000 Black students in the Virginian public school system attended integrated schools that year. In the following decade, the Richmond school board mirrored the attitude and tactics of the commonwealth and, helped by state and city officials, attempted to decrease the levels of integration in Richmond's public schools. The effects were clear. In 1961, there were 31 Black students in formerly all-white schools in the city. By 1963 only 312 of the 26,000 (1.2%) Black students in Richmond attended a racially integrated school. Campbell, 2012.

³⁴⁴ "By 1976, 12,000 white students had left the Richmond public school system, and Black enrollment had reached 80%." Campbell, 2012

present, with white families continuing to flee the Richmond public school system, as the quality of the school system has also declined.³⁴⁵

Given the role that our three case study institutions played in the development of Jackson Ward, we expect them to play large roles in the Civil Rights Movement and in desegregation in Richmond. They did; from banks and churches quietly funding the bail bonds of protesters, to the VUU faculty and administration choosing not to interfere when students skipped classes to protest. The participation of these institutions was a prime example of the developmental and leadership role that they played within Jackson Ward, and in communities like Jackson Ward.

The Richmond 34 Came From VUU

Segregation encompassed all aspects of public life as, in the post-reconstruction world, white Richmonders fought to maintain white supremacy through strict segregation and violence. One particularly noticeable and potent form of segregation occurred in shopping: which shops Black people were allowed to enter and which parts of the stores they were permitted to use. This form of segregation collided with the segregation of restaurants and lunch counters in Thalhimers' department store in downtown Richmond, on Broad Street. There, on February 22, 1960, thirty-four VUU students went into Thalhimers' storied Richmond Room restaurant, sat, and asked to be served in non-violent protest of the store/restaurant's segregation.³⁴⁶ They were arrested by police officers with police dogs, taken to the police headquarters and booked. According to members of the Richmond 34, reaching their bail was a true community effort. Churches, sororities, fraternities, local businesses, individuals and VUU itself (in the form of its

³⁴⁵ Campbell, 2012.

³⁴⁶ Campbell, 2012

president) gave generously to meet the bail of each of the thirty-four protesters. They were released, to applause through the streets.³⁴⁷

The protests sparked a string of boycotts which eventually resulted in the full desegregation of the city's core retail district.³⁴⁸ In this way, Richmond's institution of Black higher education and excellence helped to spur one of the most important protests in Richmond's history, and in the Civil Rights Era.

Monument Avenue Today

Calls for the removal of the more publicly visible Confederate statues, like the Robert E. Lee equestrian statue, have persisted almost since the moment these statues were erected. Large-scale, organized, and persistent calls for their removal in the present day escalated following the June 2015 Emanuel A.M.E. Church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina, and the deadly August 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in nearby Charlottesville.³⁴⁹

The Confederate statues of Monument Avenue survived those calls, if only because the Richmond City Council chose to establish the Monument Avenue Commission to recommend a course of action. The commission report recognized "four main opinion groups with views about the future of Monument Avenue's Confederate monuments: (1) keep the monuments; (2) keep and contextualize the monuments; (3) relocate the monuments; and (4) remove the monuments." The report's recommendation was a mixture of the four views, suggesting relocation or removal for the Jefferson Davis monument, which was identified as "the one most unabashedly Lost

³⁴⁷ *Honoring Members of the Civil Rights Movement in Richmond* (Richmond Flying Squirrels, 2024), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLIBQEOWu5U>.

³⁴⁸ Campbell, 2012

³⁴⁹ "Whose Heritage? Map," Southern Poverty Law Center, March 12, 2025.

Cause in its design and sentiment,” but leaving the other monuments in place with some form of interpretation and commentary on the history and meaning of the monuments.

As the city council contemplated what to do with the Confederate monuments, the 2020 murder of George Floyd and the nationwide protests that followed forced swift decision-making. On June 10, 2020, protesters at a Black Lives Matter protest took matters into their own hands and toppled the Jefferson Davis statue from its pedestal. Levar Stoney, the mayor of Richmond, took the opportunity presented by the public safety crises and announced the imminent removal of the J.E.B. Stuart, Matthew Fontaine Maury,³⁵⁰ and Stonewall Jackson monuments, and within a week the statues were gone. Only the Robert E. Lee statue remained. The four other monuments had belonged to the City of Richmond, giving Mayor Stoney the power to remove them. The Lee statue was owned by the Commonwealth of Virginia, meaning Stoney had no power over the monument. Instead, the decision to remove the monument fell under the jurisdiction of the state courts, as the state strove to remove it and people who believed the removal was a form of erasing their history sued to keep it in place. Eventually the case made its way up to the Supreme Court of Virginia, which decided in favor of the state. It took another year, but in September 2021, the Governor of Virginia, Ralph Northam, ordered the removal of the statue.³⁵¹

The story of the Monument Avenue Confederate monuments—particularly the saga of the Robert E. Lee monument—showcases the communitarian aspects of Richmond’s sites of memory, from both the white and Black communities. They remind us that monuments and sites of memory gain their memorial value from their representation of a shared communal memory,

³⁵⁰ The Matthew Fontaine Maury statue is part of the Monuments exhibit at The Geffen Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. The Charlottesville Robert E. Lee statue was melted down to ingots which are also displayed in this exhibition. *Monuments*. Geffen Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA, October 23, 2025-May 3, 2026

³⁵¹ Paul Kiem, “Righting History: Monument Avenue, Richmond, Virginia,” *Agora (Melbourne, Vic)* 57, no. 3 (2022): 28–31.

culture, and set of experiences; that they are created to ensure that the experiences of a community are never forgotten. In the case of the Confederate monuments of Monument Avenue, the sites of memory were created to ensure that the memory of the Lost Cause, of the Confederacy and its culture of white supremacy, endured. As was argued in this dissertation, not only were the African American sites of memory created to safeguard the community's memories and culture; the very act of creating them helped to build and strengthen the community itself.

As of September 2025, no plans have been made to replace the Confederate monuments of Monument Avenue with any other monumental or artistic work, much to the disappointment of some. As one resident of Monument Avenue, Caroline Bowers, said, "I'm not sure I can even put into words what I see other than disappointment. There's nothing there that has any meaning or purpose."³⁵²

At first, the city had big plans for the repurposing of the land where the monuments had stood. The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts was tasked with leading "a major community-driven plan to reimagine the area." The project, 'Reimagining Monument Avenue,' was publicized as "a significant community-driven effort involving historians, urban planners and artists to redesign historical sites in Richmond." Even the state allocated funds (\$1 million) for the future project but it quietly folded in 2021 and the city again took responsibility for what to do with Monument Avenue.³⁵³ The city council chose to replace the monuments with plantings. As one resident of Monument Avenue described the process, "they came out here on the hottest day in July and

³⁵² Tyler Layne, "Richmond Has No Plan to Reimagine Monument Avenue, Years after Statues Removal: 'I'm Disappointed,'" CBS 6 News Richmond WTVR, April 17, 2024.

³⁵³ Tyler Layne, "VMFA Scrapped from 'Reimagine Monument Avenue' Project; Richmonders Confused about Next Steps," CBS 6 News Richmond WTVR, April 27, 2022.

planted trees, and that was an obvious suicide mission for the trees. They just withered and died.”

At first, Mayor Stoney insisted that the landscape solution was only temporary and that a community driven plan would eventually be implemented. However, by April 2024, Stoney stated that there were no plans for the future of Monument Avenue, adding that the planters were to remain on Monument Avenue following his departure from office at the end of the year. Stoney claimed that Richmond’s funds should go to areas that needed it, such as the Southside of the city. Regarding memorializing Black history, he said that “I think we should focus also on developing the area in Shockoe Bottom where the enslaved should be memorialized. That should be the focus. That’s going to be the focus of my administration.”³⁵⁴

The inauguration of a new mayor, Danny Avula, has not produced any change to the situation on Monument Avenue (or in Shockoe Bottom). The planters and dead trees remain in place, just as Mayor Stoney predicted.

Epilogue

In the decades following the end of the Civil War, white Richmonders installed statues to their Confederate leaders and soldiers throughout the city. These stone monuments and memorials were meant to stand as symbols of the eternal endurance of the Confederacy and white supremacy; they were static symbols around which white Richmonders attempted to build a culture and community meant to persist and remain the same. Their lack of enduring meaning became more apparent as the monuments and memorials were removed without harm to their surrounding communities, leaving behind empty space.

³⁵⁴ Layne, 2024

To combat the Confederate monuments, Black Richmonders did not erect counter monuments to their own leaders and heroes. Instead, they built institutional networks of memory; educational, religious, and economic institutions that would not only carry their community history forward into the future, but would evolve with it as it grew and developed. The primary lesson of this dissertation is that Jackson Ward, and majority Black neighborhoods like it, did not choose to replicate the static monuments and spaces of memory created by their white neighbors, they created living institutions that formed their own networks of memory.

Throughout this dissertation, we have seen how three institutions have been used to collectively develop and strengthen the Black community in Jackson Ward through establishing networks of proximity, creating spaces for gathering, fostering racial pride and leadership, and a combination of imitation and innovation. As we have seen, these institutional networks of memory created a web of spaces that provided a social and economic safety net for Jackson Ward residents, as well as serving as a source of cultural memory for the community.

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