The University of Virginia utilized the labor of enslaved African Americans from the earliest days of its construction in 1817 until the end of the American Civil War. Most of the university’s first enslaved laborers were rented from local slave-owners and worked alongside whites and free blacks in all the tasks associated with constructing the Academic Village. When the first students arrived in March 1825, enslaved African Americans worked in the pavilions, hotels, and the Rotunda; maintained classrooms, libraries, and the library; and served the daily needs of the students and faculty, especially in providing cooking and cleaning services. This self-guided tour is an introduction to some of the significant people, places, and events that shaped the early history of African Americans at the University of Virginia. For further information see slavery.virginia.edu.

**Key**
- Site open to the public
- Exterior viewing only, building not open to the public
- Historic location only
- Historic marker
- Parking

**Front cover:** Sally-Cottrell Cole was an enslaved maid and seamstress who labored for Professor Thomas Hewitt Key in Pavilions VI and VII between 1824-1827. Professor Key arranged for her manumission upon his departure from the University in 1827. Cole remained in Charlottesville until her death in 1873.

**Back cover:** Henry Martin

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**UVA Walking Tour Enslaved African Americans at the University**

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**The Rotunda and Bricks on the Lawn**

One of the most overlooked legacies of enslaved labor are the bricks that cover the Academic Village. Enslaved laborers dug the clay, helped fire the bricks, hauled them to the grounds, and laid them to build the university. The brick making began in the summer of 1817, and the enslaved laborers working on this task were a diverse group of mostly men, but included at least one woman and several children. An enslaved man named Charles was responsible for digging the clay and mixing it with the help of six enslaved boys rented out from John H. Cocke in 1823. Enslaved laborers named Dick, Lewis, Pecorn, and Sandy were also assigned to the brickyard, and worked long hours by the kiln. Enslaved laborers also carved out the terrace levels on the lawn, creating the unique landscape that you see today. Many of the enslaved laborers were highly skilled at construction, carpentry, stone cutting, and blacksmithing, who were forced to work alongside free black and white laborers, contributed to some of the more intricate design work seen in the details of the architecture on grounds. In 1823 as part of Rotunda construction, free man of color Robert Battle hauled over 176,000 bricks and a few tons of sand to the University during a five-month stretch. For his Herculean efforts, he was paid $170.

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**Enslaved Labor Plaque**

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**The University Gardens**

Garden 3

Over the decades, dozens of buildings were added to these spaces including: smokehouse, kitchen, wood and coal storage sheds, and quarries. Enclosed by walls and thus largely hidden from the university community, these spaces provided work for enslaved children, to cook and do laundry, and to perform the many other tasks required of the enslaved community. These were the primary spaces where the university community gathered, and which provided a sense of community and social interaction. Over the decades, most of these buildings were torn down, only a few remain. In the mid-twentieth-century the Garden Club of Virginia redesigned the gardens to their present appearance.

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**The Mews**

The building now known as the Mews was built around 1830. It is one of the few surviving original outbuildings. Built as a detached kitchen, it also provided accommodations for some of the professor’s enslaved laborers. These kitchen quarters were modeled after plantation kitchens, which were usually detached and situated near the main house. These buildings and the enslaved cooks and domestic servants integral to the formal functions of the University’s community, providing meals and domestic service to the professors and their families. The building has since been enlarged and was renamed “The Mews” when Professor Pratt moved here in 1923.

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**Hotel A**

Hotel interlaces the East and West Ranges. These buildings were rented to hotelkeepers, each of whom rented many people who were not paid for their labor to prepare meals and provide cleaning for the students. On a daily basis, the enslaved social bring fresh water to the students and lend their fires. They regularly cleaned the rooms and public spaces of the Academic Village. In addition, in the basements and gardens they prepared the meals that were served to students in the hotels. This work required extensive labor force. In 1830, the Conways who operated Hotel A rented twelve people who may have lived in the basement and in outbuildings. At all times, the population of enslaved people living and working in the Academic Village was between 90 to 110 in the decades before emancipation. In the course of carrying out their responsibilities, free and enslaved African Americans interacted with white students in the hotel dining halls, student dormitory rooms, and throughout the Academic Village on a regular basis. On occasion, these daily interactions could end in cruel and violent, faculty records document that students resulted to physical violence upon the bodies of free and enslaved for a variety of ‘offences,’ including indiscipline, improper language, or expression of lack of attention to duties. For example, Mr. Rose complained to the faculty when a student risked one of his enslaved workers and C.D.oblin objected when a student threw a knife. Even when students were judged by faculty to be at fault, the actions very nearly led to suspension.

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**Pavilion VI and Garden**

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**Pavilion X**

Pavilion X and V were places where William and Isabella Gibbons, who were both enslaved at UVA, lived and labored. Overstated by different faculty, they were able to maintain family connections and become visible despite the constraints of slavery. Mr. Gibbons was owned by Professor Henry Howard and later worked for Professor William H. McGuire in Pavilion IX. Mrs. Gibbons was a domestic servant in the household of Professor Francis Smith in Pavilions V and VI. Although their marriage had no legal standing, William and Isabella Gibbons preserved their union and raised their children while living in slavery, legal restrictions and the strong opposition of white society severely limited access to education for Virginia slaves. William Gibbons learned to read by carefully observing and listening to the white students around him. His daughter Belle recalled that he could not have learned to read and write, “unless my mother taught me secretly.”

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**The Crackerbox**

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**Walking Tour Enslaved African Americans at the University of Virginia**

This self-guided tour introduces some of the people, places, and stories related to early African American life at the University of Virginia. Between 1817 and 1865 the University relied on the labor of enslaved African Americans, whose presence was undeniably central to the building and functioning of the University of Virginia. This walking tour is an initiative of the President’s Commission on Slavery and the University, a group committed to acknowledging and memorializing the lives and legacies of enslaved laborers at UVA.

To learn more visit slavery.virginia.edu
**Walking Tour**

**Mrs. Gray’s Kitchen**

In 1829, the Board of Visitors approved the construction of a one- and a half-story "office" with two rooms to the rear of Hotel E. Built between 1829-1830 and referred to as Mrs. Gray’s kitchen, this structure would have served as both residence and work space and was operated directly by enslaved laborers. Mrs. Gray expanded the kitchen structure when she added an "apartment" for the lodging of servants in 1844. John and Cornelia Gray operated the hotel between 1825-1845 providing food and services to students and faculty. Census records document that a total of 13 enslaved individuals resided in the Gray household in 1850. One of these individuals was the domestic servant William, a young boy in early 1850s, whose white students boarding with Mrs. Gray had complained that William was "impertinent" and that he did not "attend well" at the rooms. Under pressure from the faculty, William was "softened" by serving the student dormitories. In late 1853, Mrs. Gray complained to the faculty that a student boarder, William W. Harris, "struck her servant William in her presence" and that Harris behaved in a very rude and insulting manner to her. Harris replied stating that "if he would do so [strike her servant] wherever it pleased him." Faculty reviewed the complaints and authorized to her. Harris replied stating that "if he would do so [strike her servant] wherever it pleased him." Faculty reviewed the complaints and concluded that William was "highly offensive in manner, and impertinent in language to Mr. Harris" and it is habitual as in his conduct to others." William was subsequently removed from any contact with students.

**Catherine Foster Site**

During the expansion of a parking lot east of and adjacent to Venable Lane in 1993, University staff discovered several grave shafts. Archival research identified the historic purpose of the graves as belonging to Catherine Foster, a free black woman who purchased the property in 1833. Subsequent archaeological research conducted on the property identified a total of 32 graves as well as an early nineteenth century house and landscaped yard. As free laborers and seamstresses, owning property adjacent to the University during the antebellum period was a significant asset for "fifty" Foster and her daughters and grand-daughters. During the postbellum period the area surrounding the Foster residence became known as Canada, a predominantly African American occupied neighborhood. The 2 ½ acre historic parcel remained in the Foster family until 1906. The memorial adjacent to the South Lawn complex commemorates the Foster residence, the larger landscape, and the cemetery believed to contain members of the Foster family and adjacent Canada community.

**Gibbons House**

The Board of Visitors voted in March 2015 to name the new first-year dorm building "Gibbons House" after William and Isabella Gibbons. The President’s Commission On Slavery at the University (PCSU) established an educational exhibit in an alcove on the first floor of the Gibbons House dormitory to teach first-year students about the narratives of the building and the larger history of slavery at UVA. The building was formally dedicated in summer 2015 and later that same year, descendants of Isabella Gibbons were honored with a reception at Gibbons House.

**University Cemetery**

In 2012, Archaeologists discovered 67 mostly unmarked grave shafts, which likely contain the remains of both enslaved and newly freed African Americans. The graves were left undisturbed in 2014, the PCSU organized a formal service at the First Baptist Church, followed by an evening vigil led by renowned African American poet Brenda Marie Osbey to celebrate, honor, and remember the men, women, and children who were buried in the cemetery. Renowned poet Brenda Marie Osbey wrote a poem, “Field 19, especially for the cemetery service. The poem was read at the commemoration.

**Gooch Dillard Grave Site**

The land upon which the Gooch-Dillard dormitory stands was originally part of Pedimont, a 290-acre plantation acquired by Reuben Maury in 1809. Pedimont was passed down through the Maury family until its acquisition by the University in 1947. As Maury’s plantation holdings grew, so did the number of enslaved people he owned. In the decades between 1820 and 1860, Maury owned between 25 and 62 enslaved individuals.

Prior to the construction of the Gooch-Dillard dormitory Mrs. Alisa H. Clark, a free descendant, recalled the location of a cemetery containing the remains of enslaved workers who lived and worked on the Pedimont plantation. In 1982 University archaeologists conducted limited testing in the area adjacent to the proposed dormitory construction site. Although only nine graves were identified, it is believed that the cemetery is much larger and may contain the graves of many individuals.

**Violence Against Enslaved Individuals**

In the course of carrying out their responsibilities, free and enslaved African Americans interacted with white students in the dining halls and dormitories, and throughout the Academic Village on a regular basis. On occasion, these daily interactions could and did turn violent. Faculty records document that students resulted to physical violence upon the bodies of free and enslaved laborers for a variety of "offenses," including insubordination, impertinent language, or a perceived lack of attention to duties.

In particular enslaved individuals working for hotelkeeps in the dining halls and dormitories faced the greatest threat. Failure to change a plate at the dinner table, or perceived negligence in preparing a dormitory room or changing bed linens could result in a violent interaction. Enslaved individuals who did not speak to white students with respect and deference were also putting themselves at risk of violence. Student slave evidenze at the University included strikings and beatings, as well as threats of whippings, and even sexual assault. This physical punishment was carried out with or without the consent of the master. Complaint against a slave for an offense could lead to their removal from duties, even from the University. In the same manner even when students were judged by faculty to be at fault, their actions were only reprimanded and very rarely led to suspension.

**Photography**

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