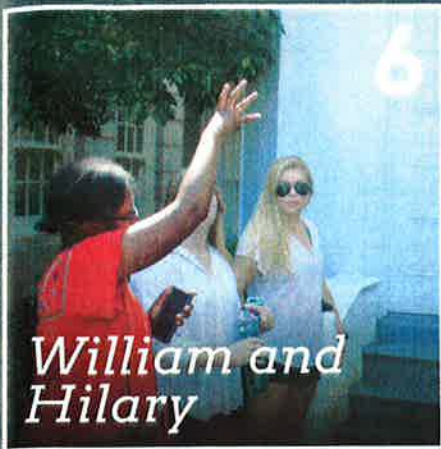


Winter 2019

mosaic

THE HANDS
THAT BUILT
THE CAPSTONE





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William and Hilary



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Broadway to Bryant-Jordan: Bernstein's Best



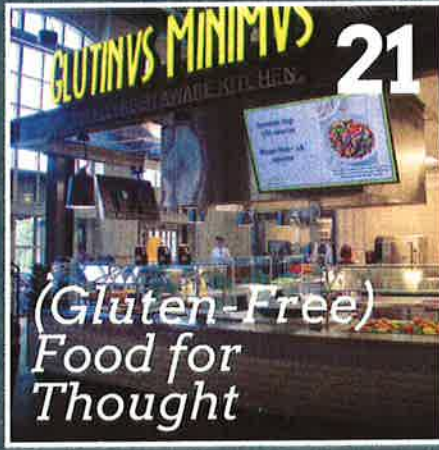
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Formula SAE



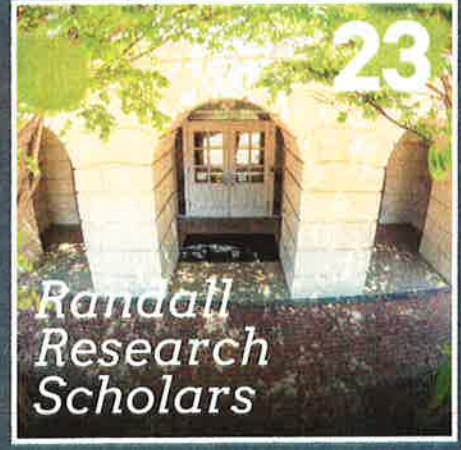
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Finding Her Roots



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(Gluten-Free) Food for Thought



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Randall Research Scholars



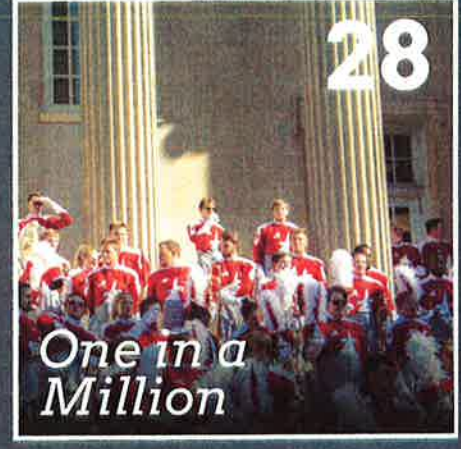
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El Circulos Capstone



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We Make Things Up As We Go Along



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One in a Million



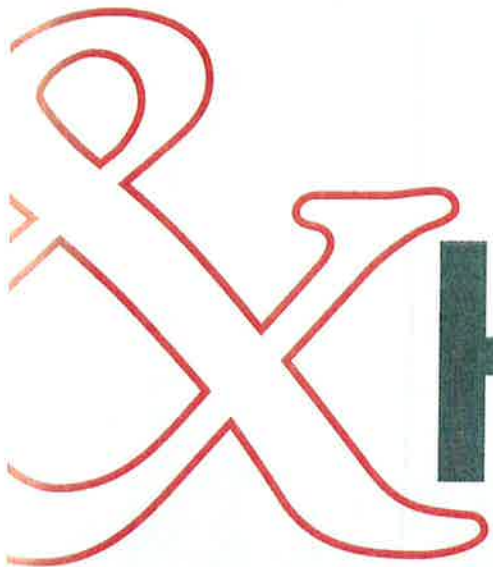
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Almost To The Moon

Community on Campus

WILLIAM





HILARY

By: Rebecca Griesbach and Will Raney

For the last five years as a history professor at The University of Alabama, Dr. Hilary Green has been searching for a man named William. But it took her about three years to realize it.

Since she received her Ph.D. in history from UNC Chapel Hill in 2010, Green has written two books on resistance and memory in the American South, where she tells the stories of enslaved people who, with minimal resources, forged their own freedom by becoming literate. These same people would later maintain that freedom by building institutions for Black education, worship and political mobilization.

Scrawled on a whiteboard in Green's office is her schedule for the month. A book review. Two book chapters. Conference after conference after conference.

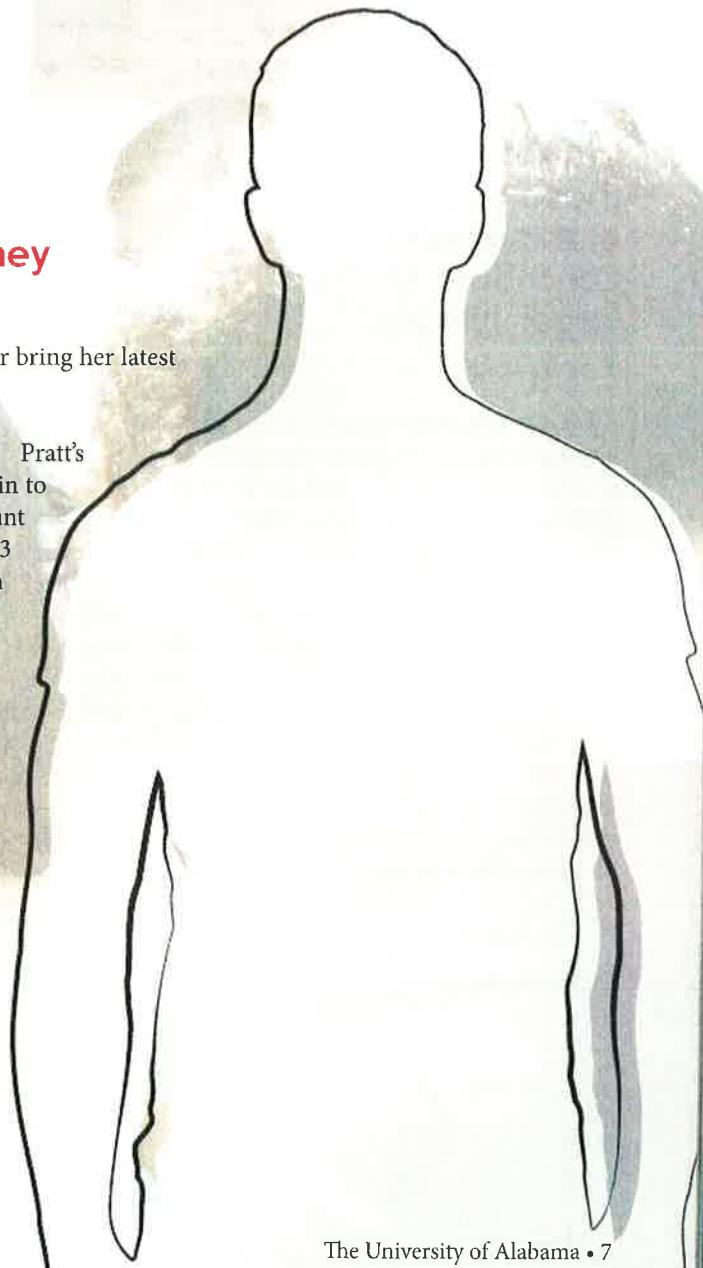
But it's what she does in her free time, she says, that is most significant. Adjacent to her schedule is a drawing of the President's Mansion, with the names of enslaved people and a James Baldwin quote she had written around the border, and behind her desk is a table with a bill of sale and slave receipt she decoupage'd on top.

It was in that same office where two inquiring students, while scrolling through

an 1860 census, helped her bring her latest project to life.

"So, we found Isabel Pratt's will," Green said with a grin to her Honors class of Blount liberal arts students. All 13 of them looked at her with surprise. They had been studying the history of slavery at UA, and they knew what kind of gems documents like this could uncover.

Isabel was the wife of Horace Pratt, a UA professor who, like many faculty members at the time, owned enslaved people. When Horace died in 1838, his will revealed that Isabel took over his property, and, notably, his slaves. By 1860, the Pratt slaves would be worth several thousand dollars, and many of them worked on campus as well.



But their fates have been a mystery to historians until recently.

Among those mysteries was that of an enslaved man named William.

“Through these three different people, we get a more complicated view of what slavery looked like and how those differences of experience help contribute to the larger history.”

For the last two years, Green has been piecing together William’s biography in an attempt to add color and depth to the existing stories of Luna, a female slave who, Green says, was owned by Professor Barnard and was subjected to sexual violence by his students; and of Sam, a male slave whose name appears in the university’s Apology Book, where students admitted to chastising and beating him.

William’s life, Green would later find out, tells a different story, not solely of exploitation or rebellion, but one that speaks to the immeasurable contributions of enslaved people who cooked in, cleaned

in, and built facilities that students and faculty used every day – and still do.

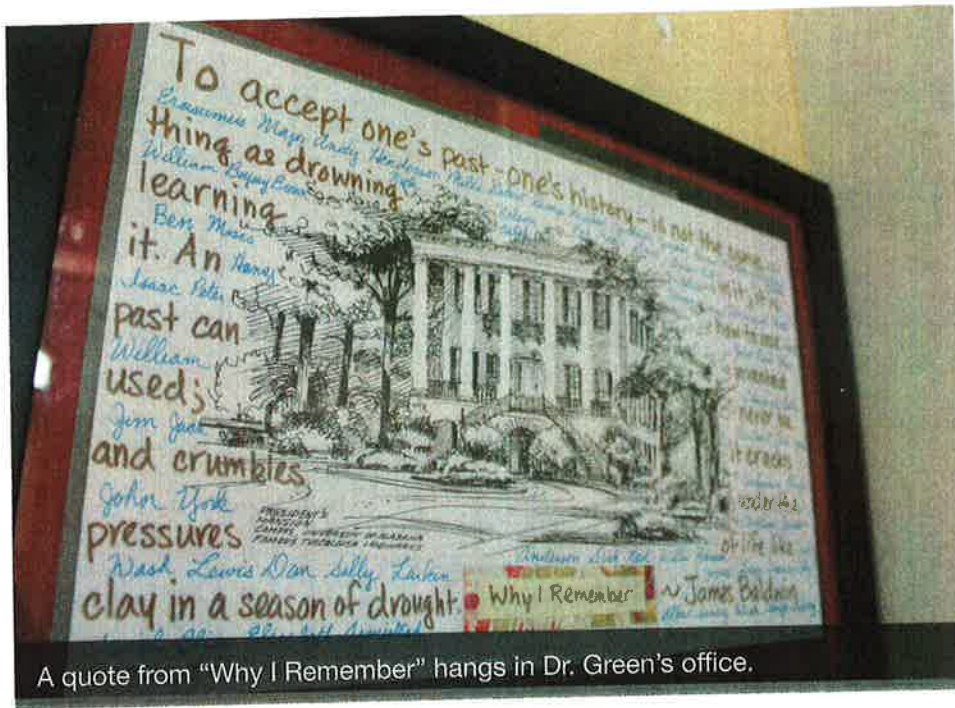
“All of them came together at one point and shared this space,” Green said. “So through these three different people, we get a more complicated view of what slavery looked like and how those differences of experience help contribute to the larger history.”

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

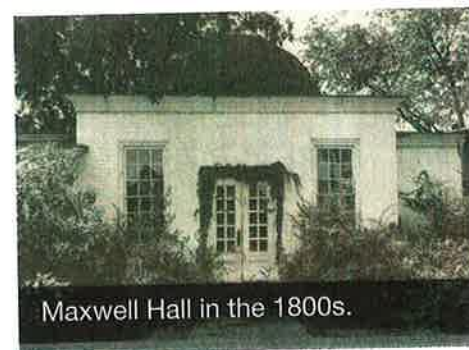
Green is the pioneer behind “Hallowed Grounds,” a series of year-round tours that feature sites significant to the university’s connection to slavery. Once she started that project, the library quickly became Green’s second home. Housed in Hoole’s Special Collections archives is a treasure trove of documents from the Antebellum era, and Green can recite plenty of them from memory.

“It was Record Group No. 1, slave receipts 90A through 90D,” she said, without pause.

That’s where she found William.



A quote from “Why I Remember” hangs in Dr. Green’s office.

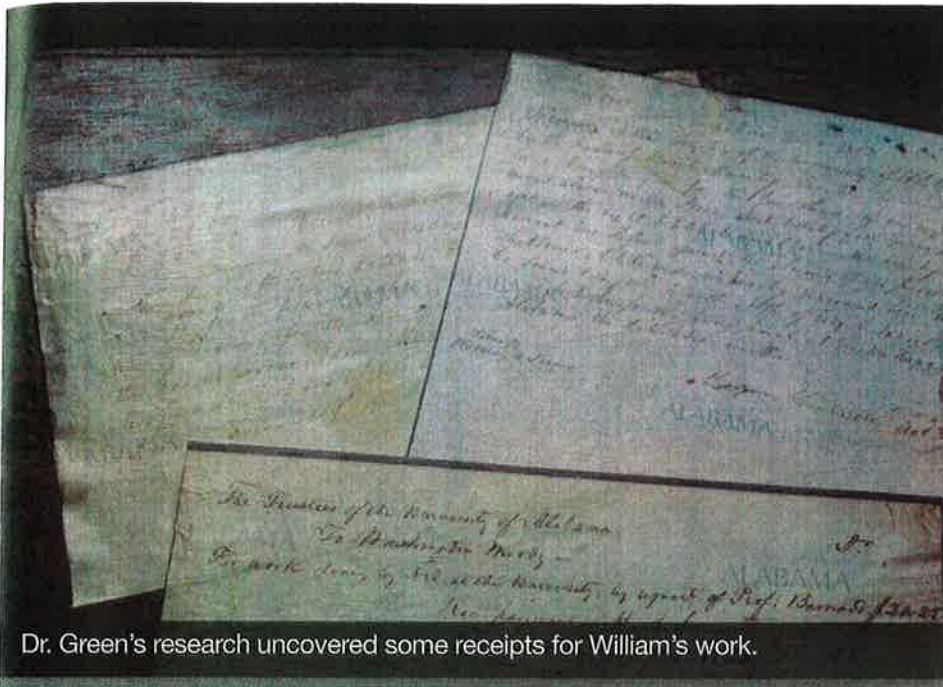


“If [William] was still on campus, I know he would be able to walk by Maxwell Hall and say, ‘I built that.’”

As Green would later find out, traces of William were scattered throughout the archives, spanning over 30 years. This time, Green wasn’t falling down a rabbit hole she was actively pursuing it, and now she’s sharing her findings.

On a breezy September day, Green led her Blount class to the red-brick building that was as of this writing houses Creative Campus and she pointed toward the roof, to the copper-plated dome that took a year and a half to build when the hall was renovated in the 1850s.

Most of William’s work, Green explained likely burned down during the Civil War



Dr. Green's research uncovered some receipts for William's work.



Dr. Green speaks to her Blount class

But she knows one thing for sure.

"If [William] was still on campus," Green said, "I know he would be able to walk by Maxwell Hall and say, 'I built that.'"

It was clear that William lived in two worlds: The Pratt plantation and on campus. Unlike most enslaved people, Green explained, he was trusted enough to leave one world to work at another. In faculty meeting notes following the 1838 eulogy of Horace Pratt, Green discovered why.

After Horace's death, the faculty held a meeting to discuss the continued use of William's services. They marked that decision by continuing a relationship with Horace's widow Isabel. From then on, the name "William," instead of "Pratt's carpenter" appeared in their documents when they solicited his work.

The use of William's name, usually followed by his trade, was a sign of respect,

Green said.

"You need a pot? Go to Dave the Potter," Green said. "In this way, it becomes 'William the Carpenter.' That's how you know you're getting high-quality stuff, because William the Carpenter is doing it."

"So he's using and exploiting the system of slavery and then most likely carrying it back."

William was in fact producing quality work. He was replacing windows and floors and doors, building ornate furniture for faculty residences and molding for the walls, and he was teaching others to follow his lead.

Work orders show that he bought his own tools, had several apprentices, landed gigs outside of campus and, according to the slave receipts, he was commanding 45 to 50 dollars a month, which would amount to about \$750 in 2018 numbers. That's the highest amount that enslaved people on campus could earn, and a rate, Green said, that was likely undercutting free African

American laborers in the area.

"He is a person that is highly skilled in comparison to other enslaved people that work on our campus, and it's because of that skill, the university saw valuable enough to continue this relationship," Green said.

To be a skilled carpenter was essentially a ticket to economic freedom, Green said, and William was likely making the most of his job at the university. While searching the slave receipts, Green found out that he could read a rate, and he was also making his own measurements and doing the math to calculate those rates. That led Green to ask more questions.

"In a way I wonder if it's most likely that he's using this college campus to advance his own learning, and that when he goes back to his normal family... is he teaching that generation?" she said.



**“It is important
because we as a
campus have yet
to reconcile this
past, and until
we do we can’t
move forward as a
community.”**

- Dr. Hilary Green

The admiration of William, Green said, likely followed him from one world to another.

“He’s here for several decades,” she said. “Probably those who are here temporarily might look to him like, ‘How do I survive this? How do I go through this? How do I, if I get in trouble, who could I turn to?’”

And William the Carpenter would have answers.

“So he’s using and exploiting the system of slavery and then most likely carrying it back,” Green said.

THE FINAL CHAPTER

For the last two years, Green has created a textbook out of a working spreadsheet. She’s mastered Microsoft Excel, using it to store her findings and cross-check them. Since then, she has used those tools to uncover the name, occupation, pay grade, physical contributions, education, and age of an enslaved man on campus.

But one thing remains unclear: Green has no idea where William is buried. And, until the discovery of the will, William’s paper trail, which started in 1833, presumably met its end in 1864.

“I don’t know if he survived the Civil War,” Green said, just days before finding Isabel’s will. “If he moves, he just disappears.”

She checked all the censuses. She checked her favorite site, FindAGrave.com. She checked the Information Wanted ads that freed slaves would buy in hopes of reunification. No luck.

For Green, that silence is significant.

As the university recovered from war damage, she said, the metaphor of the phoenix, a symbol from Greek mythology that represented rebirth, began to surface among university leaders, namely the in minutes from board of trustees meetings. But often swept under this rhetoric of

“rising again out of the ashes,” Green said, were the stories, and the documentation, of enslaved people like William.

“So it goes from named individuals and carpenters and named drummers,” Green said, noting that enslaved people participated in the military drum corps, “to Negro drummers, the Negro slaves. Their names get erased.”

The stories of early African Americans on campus have been trapped between manilla folders and private spaces, limited to oral histories and the dark depths of the archives. For Green, bringing those stories into current conversations is a never-ending task.

“It’s never over; I’m always looking,” she said. “For me as a historian it’s like, the ever treasure hunt.”

* * *

Then the will arrived.

Just a year before the abolition of slavery, Isabel did not seek to free William, who would have been 79 at the time. Instead, she wrote:

“The residue of my property (consisting at present of notes and bonds, and my carpenter William), not named in the above provisions, I desire to be equally divided among all my children, to share, and share alike: Namely to John W. Pratt, my son; to my daughter Isabel Jane Porter, and my daughters Sarah E. and Mary A. Pratt.”

That didn’t sit well with Scott Manges, one of Green’s students who was assigned to write about William.

“It’s unfortunate to find out that he was never really free,” said Manges, a freshman studying mechanical engineering. “Despite the hard work that he did at the university, and even at his old age, Isabella didn’t free him.”

For Manges, the work that’s being done to remember William is crucial, and he said it should be supported by university administrators.

“[Enslaved people] were the backbone of the University,” Manges said. “They did all the labor. They cut the grass by hand. They shouldn’t be forgotten.”

Through her classes, through the story of William, and through her walking tours, Green has been advocating for greater awareness of the university’s racist past since she set foot on campus. And now her work is finally being acknowledged.

On Oct. 16, 2018, UA approved the formation of a commission to study slavery at the university – a long-fought campaign that’s come after schools such as Auburn, the University of Mississippi and 43 others have done the same. Green was one of the faculty members to draft a proposal for the commission, and she was there for the two crucial votes that led to its creation nearly a year and a half later.

“It is important because we as a campus have yet to reconcile this past, and until we do we can’t move forward as a community,” Green said.

If you would like to learn more about William, Dr. Hilary Green’s research, or the history of slavery on UA’s campus, you can visit her website at hgreen.people.ua.edu, take one of her walking tours, or visit the Special Collections in Hoole library.