

Slaves at Volusia: Photographs of Felix Richards' Slaves near Alexandria, Virginia
by Amy Bertsch

In 2007, the Office of Historic Alexandria began work on public interpretation for historic Freedmen's Cemetery, an abandoned Civil War-era African American burial ground reclaimed by the City of Alexandria that year. For this interpretation, Dr. Pamela J. Cressey, the City Archaeologist, sought more information about a photograph of African American women and children taken near Alexandria that historian Timothy Dennee had used for the Friends of Freedmen's Cemetery website. Early the following year, Dr. Cressey, aware of my interest in African American history, asked for my assistance in documenting the photo and getting permission to use it.



That spring, I located the photo and a second one (above) of the same subjects, both taken at a place called Volusia, in a private collection. The photographs date from the Civil War and show two African American women and seven small children. The women appear to be doing laundry, with baskets and tubs nearby and one of the women pressing clothes with an iron. Handwritten

on the reverse of the first photograph is the notation, “Slaves at Volusia the Residence of Felix Richards at Volusia Va. near Alexandria.” On the second, below the image, is the note “Felix Richards’ Slaves.”

Research into these photographs allow us to explore the lives of nearly a dozen enslaved African Americans who served their owners and soldiers alike before finding freedom.

Volusia

Volusia was a property of approximately 155 acres located about three miles west of the former town limits of Alexandria, Virginia.¹ Volusia (also spelled in records and newspaper accounts as Volucia, Volutia, Valusia, Vallusia and Valucia) was owned by Allen Macrae and his wife, Ann “Nancy” Douglass Terrett, the daughter of William Henry Terrett.² Terrett had owned nearly 1,000 acres near Holmes Run, some of which became Volusia.

Allen and Nancy Macrae had six children, sons George, John and Allen, and daughters Virginia Louisa, Eliza and Amelia Ann.³ In 1851, Amelia married Felix Richards and though several other Macrae children married and lived nearby, Volusia was owned and maintained by Amelia and Felix Richards.⁴ Newspaper descriptions, deeds, and a claim against the federal government provide good details about Volusia and its buildings.⁵

The property was on the north side of the Little River Turnpike, near Holmes Run at Cloud’s Mill, also known as Triadelphia Mill. Volusia had streams, springs, fields, orchards, and woodland. On top of the hill, to the north, stood the mansion house, a two-story brick house with eight rooms and a basement. Out buildings included a stable, corn house, barn, and shed, all clustered together southeast of the main house. An ice house was located between the main house and farm buildings, and the servants’ house or slave quarters stood northwest of the main house, across a fence and in the wooded area.

When the Civil War broke out, Union troops immediately took up positions in the hills surrounding Alexandria. Several homes near Volusia were abandoned by Confederate supporters and destroyed by Union troops. The Richards were loyal to the Union and remained on their property, sharing it with Union troops for most of the war. Amelia recalled that the parlor at Volusia served as a headquarters of sorts and that Volusia’s fencing, timber, tools, wagons, animals and crops were at the Union’s disposal.⁶ Fifty years after the war ended and five years after Amelia died, Congress awarded the estate of Felix Richards \$5,300 for damages and losses caused by the Union army at Volusia.⁷

Volusia was sold, first by Amelia Richards to James Patterson in 1896, and then by Patterson to attorney Chester A. Gwinn in 1915.⁸ In the late 1940s, as the suburbs grew following World War II, the property was acquired for construction of a 2,100-unit apartment complex and shopping center called Shirley-Duke.⁹ The City of Alexandria annexed approximately seven square miles from Fairfax County in 1952, property which included Shirley-Duke and much of the land around Holmes Run. Shirley-Duke became Foxchase in 1980 and is still called that today.¹⁰

The Enslaved

Though Union loyalists, the Richards owned slaves, as did the Macraes before them. Alexandria area manumission records for John Harris in 1823, 37-year-old Linny Brown in 1841, and 24-year-old Ann Brown in 1843, show all had once been owned by Allen Macrae.¹¹ In 1855, Felix Richards offered a \$20 reward for the capture of Sarah, a “Servant girl” who was last seen at the Marshall House in Alexandria and who Richards had purchased a year earlier in Charlottesville.¹²

An enslaved woman named Julia and her children, Lucinda, Henrietta, Davy, Kitty, Wilson and Levin, are identified as belonging to the Macraes in an 1843 deed of trust.¹³ All but Henrietta are later listed in Nancy’s will in 1858; the subsequent estate appraisal gives ages for these slaves and for three children, Jesse, Henry and William, who were born after the deed of trust was issued.¹⁴ A birth record shows that William was born to Lucinda in 1856.¹⁵

Nancy’s will specifies that her son George could choose either Wilson or Levin, and after a year, he could use or hire out Davy. The rest of her “servants” could have the “choice of their homes” either with her children or elsewhere but were not permitted to be sold outside of Alexandria or Fairfax. Nancy also stated that she did not want her sons-in-law to have control over her slaves and that they would be “exclusively for the use” of her daughters. Profits from the hiring out of her slaves would be shared with each of her grandchildren, up to \$5 each per year.

Certainly there were plenty of opportunities to hire out slaves. Just to the north of Volusia stood Vaucluse, the property of Thomas Fairfax and later the primary residence of his daughter, Monimia Fairfax Cary. Fairfax, a follower of Swedenborgianism, opposed slavery and had manumitted his family’s slaves decades earlier. However, Vaucluse relied on labor supplied by hired servants, who were simply slaves leased out by their owners.¹⁶ While there is no evidence that Vaucluse’s servants were owned by the Macraes or Richards, the birth record for Lucinda’s son William indicates that she had been hired out to a J. Terrill when William was born.

In her will, Nancy Macrae bequeathed specific articles of clothing to her three female slaves. Julia would receive her shawl, Kitty would receive her purple calico bonnet, and Lucinda would receive her gingham dress, aprons and a straw bonnet. A chancery suit filed in 1859 by the administrators of Nancy’s estate identified another slave, a minor named Fanny. A Fairfax County court order issued in November of 1860 directed that Felix Richards would receive “Jesse, Lucinda & Child (named Fanny) at 1000 dollars.”¹⁷ The same order divided the remaining slaves among Nancy’s other children with Julia and Levin going to John A.W. Macrae, William to Allen Macrae, David to Albert G. Gardner who was married to Virginia Louisa Macrae, and Kitty to Alexander C.N. Smets who was married to Eliza W. Macrae. Presumably Wilson was given to George Macrae who had been given the choice of Wilson or Levin.

Property tax records after Nancy’s death show that Felix and Amelia Richards had two slaves and careful examination of those records indicates they were likely female. In 1861 and 1862, the total number of slaves was requested for tax purpose but in 1863, the total number of male

slaves was recorded; the Richards had no male slaves in 1863 after having two slaves the previous two years.¹⁸

According to the joint statement of B. Russell Barbee and Albert G. Gardner documenting the Richards' losses at the hand of the Union Army, there were "Eleven Negroes taken away namely Frances, Lucinda, Harriet, Charles, Marshall, Martha, Julia, Mary, William, Jesse and Fanny" whose value they estimated at \$4,000.¹⁹

The fate of one of Volusia's young slaves is known. Jesse became a servant to a Union officer whose regiment camped on the Richards' land. According to a former officer with the Third New Jersey Volunteers, Jesse served Lieutenant Robert Dunham after joining their camp in August 1861. He stayed with them after the regiment left Northern Virginia and died in July 1862, near Harrison's Landing along the James River, at age 15.²⁰

The Hughes Family

Because there were no last names listed for the slaves at Volusia, locating and positively identifying Julia and her children after emancipation is difficult. The most likely family name for them appears to be Hughes. In the 1870 census, living in the Alexandria, there were 67 black women named Julia, including one Julia Hughes, age 65.²¹ There were five Wilsons, including one Wilson Hughes, age 30, and there was one Levin, 25-year-old Levin Hughes.²² Julia and Levin Hughes were living in the same household.

Levin Hughes had married Catherine Williams on 17 December 1868 in Alexandria.²³ They had a daughter Henrietta and by 1880, they were living in Washington, D.C.²⁴ Levin's twin brother Wilson was married to a woman named Anna, who was also known as Annie. Anna Johnson and Wilson Hughes were married in Alexandria County (now Arlington) on 5 February 1863.²⁵ They later had several children and lived in the area of Wolfe and South Alfred streets.²⁶

Wilson had served with U.S. Colored Infantry during the Civil War and after his death in 1883, his widow Anna filed a pension application.²⁷ The application includes their marriage certificate which identified Wilson's parents as Jessie and Julia Hughes and an affidavit from Wilson's brother, Levin. Wilson joined the service in September 1864, contracted malaria and was treated at L'Ouverture Hospital in Alexandria, before being discharged from the service in July 1865.²⁸

Wilson and Levin's older brother David Hughes, identified as Davy in Nancy Macrae's will, had married Frances Scott, who was also enslaved at Volusia, in 1851, according to a pension application Frances filed after David died in 1884.²⁹ Like Wilson, he also served in the U.S. Colored Infantry with Virginia Colored Guards until July 1865. After the war, David lived in Washington, D.C., with his family until his death in 1884. In her application, Frances stated that her husband was born a slave "on a farm place called Vallusia 3 miles from Alex, Va." She identified David's owner as "Nancy McCray" and stated that her owner at the time of her marriage was Felix Richards.³⁰ She also provided a list of her children and their birthdates, with Harriet, Charles, Marshall, Martha, Julia and Mary born before 1861.³¹

Julia Hughes later lived with a daughter in Akron, Ohio, in the late 1870s and later returning to the Washington, D.C., area, where she lived with Levin in 1890.³² Julia moved back to Akron in the 1890s and died there in 1902.³³ An article covering her death contained some likely exaggerations, like her age and a memory of seeing George Washington in Alexandria, but the identification of the family that once owned her as “McCrea” is consistent with Allen and Nancy Macrae.

A search of Alexandria and Fairfax birth, death, marriage, and census records for the years after the war failed to yield more information about Lucinda or Kitty. But a manumission record may offer some additional clues about the Hughes family. In 1840, a 21-year-old Jesse Hughes was freed in Alexandria by Robert Jamieson.³⁴ Though it is not known if this Jesse Hughes is the same person who is identified as Wilson’s father and Julia’s husband, it is interesting to note that Jamieson also freed Linny Brown, a slave who had once belonged to Volusia owner Allen Macrae.

The Photographs

The owner of the two laundry day images has four other photographs taken at or near Volusia. All have the same handwriting on the back, and all six have consistent lighting and similar landscape details, like tree stumps and barren tree branches.

One of them shows a small wooden structure which is described as “Lt Col Langley’s quarters NH 5th Vol at Volusia.” In 1863, Samuel Langley recalled that the Fifth New Hampshire Volunteers “encamped on the grounds of Felix Richards” from 2 December 1861 to 10 March 1862.³⁵ During that time, Colonel Edward E. Cross, commander of the Fifth New Hampshire asked Amelia Richards allow her “servant to wash a few clothes” for him, offering to “cheerfully pay almost any price” for the service.³⁶

In her claim against the federal government, Amelia Richards confirms the presence of the Fifth New Hampshire at Volusia in 1862, stating, “Genl. Howard’s command occupied the East portion of Volusia for five months in 1862_& Col. Edward E. Cross, commanding 5th N.H. vol’s, contracted with my husband for the delivery to his regt. of three hundred cords of wood at \$4.50 per cord.”³⁷

Based on the fact that the Fifth New Hampshire was at Volusia from late 1861 to early 1862, it is very likely the photographs of Langley’s quarters and of Felix Richards’ slaves were taken during that time. The use of the word “slaves” to describe the subjects in the laundry day images appears to be accurate. Slavery still existed in 1862 and according to property tax records, Felix Richards owned two slaves in 1862. He died in 1864 and slavery was abolished the following year.³⁸

The women in the laundry day photographs are adults and both appear old enough to be mothers to the children in the photographs. It likely that the images feature sisters-in-law Lucinda and Frances and their children (l-r) William, Fannie, Mary, Martha, Julia, Harriet and either Charles or Marshall.

The photos can be attributed to James E. Larkin, then a lieutenant with the Fifth New Hampshire. Larkin enjoyed a photography hobby and had photographic equipment with him when his regiment was encamped on the Richards' property.³⁹ In his diary, he noted that he had taken "18 pictures at fifty cents each" on 21 January 1862. Over the next two days, Larkin took an additional \$35 worth of photographs, or approximately 70 images, based on his rate estimate.⁴⁰

The subjects of some other photographs are related to the Fifth New Hampshire, including the quarters of Samuel Langley, and it seems reasonable that Larkin would have taken images of his and his comrades' surroundings and experiences. The handwriting on the photographs has some strong similarities to that in Larkin's diary and letters, and Mike Pride and Mark Travis, who have studied the Fifth New Hampshire extensively, believe it matches Larkin's.

Indeed the photographs are rare in that they actually show enslaved people. Engravings and drawings of slaves in the United States and Caribbean from the 18th and 19th centuries show them at work and being punished and sold, but few photographs of enslaved individuals exist. Photography emerged as slavery was in its final years so the opportunities to photograph enslaved people were limited, but the images at Volusia show people who were enslaved at the time the photographs were taken.

(Note: Since this report was drafted in 2011, the National Museum of African American History and Culture acquired one of the photos. The author has shared all research associated with the photo and the Hughes family with NMAAHC.)

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- ¹ Property sale notice. *Alexandria Gazette*, 14 Apr 1852, p. 3.
- ² Chapman, Sigismunda Mary Frances, *History of the Chapman and Alexander Families* (Dietz Printing: Richmond, Va., 1946), pp. 35-36.
- ³ Richards, John S., letter to James W. Ballard, 9 Feb 1917, *J.R. Allison v. Virginia Lee Richards*, Chancery Case 1917-0067, Fairfax County Court, Fairfax, Va.
- ⁴ Marriage announcement, *Alexandria Gazette*, 29 Apr 1851, p 2. Richards, Amelia A.H., Cong. #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- ⁵ Property sale notices, *Alexandria Gazette*, 15 Jun 1850, p. 3, and 14 Apr 1852, p.3. Fairfax County, Va., Deed Book U4:313. Richards, Cong. #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- ⁶ Richards, Cong. #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- ⁷ Death notices, *The Washington Post*, 6 May 1910, p. 3. “Will Get War Claims,” *The Washington Post*, 5 Mar 1915, p 3.
- ⁸ Richards, Cong. #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives. “Buys the Valusia Farm,” *The Washington Post*, 17 Apr 1915, p. 14.
- ⁹ Harness, Conrad P., “Vast Rental Program to Cover To Cover Washington With New Apartments,” *The Washington Post*, pp. 1R and 9R.
- ¹⁰ “First Tenants Move Into Foxchase,” *The Washington Post*, 1 Nov 1980, p. E6.
- ¹¹ Slave Manumissions in Alexandria Land Records, 1790-1863, compiled by Timothy J. Dennee, <http://www.freedmenscemetery.org/resources/documents/manumissions.shtml> , accessed 23 Mar 2008.
- ¹² Reward notice, *Alexandria Gazette*, 25 May 1855, p. 3.
- ¹³ Fairfax County, Va., Deed Book I:3.
- ¹⁴ Fairfax County, Va., Will Book Z:85 and Z:147.
- ¹⁵ African-Americans Births in Fairfax County, 1853-1859, transcribed by Suzannah Foster, <http://www.freedmenscemetery.org/resources/documents/fairfaxbirths.pdf>, accessed 30 Mar 2008.
- ¹⁶ Harrison, Mrs. Burton (Constance Cary Harrison), *Recollections Grave and Gay* (Charles Scribner’s Son: New York, 1911), pp. 16 and 22.
- ¹⁷ Order of Padgett, G.H., et al., 5 Nov 1860, *Administrator of Ann D. Macrae v. Allan Macrae, etc.*, Chancery Case 1860-031, Fairfax County Court, Fairfax, Va.
- ¹⁸ Fairfax County, Va., Personal Property Tax, 1861-1863.
- ¹⁹ Barbee, B. Russell and A.G. Gardner., 25 Oct 1863, Cong. #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- ²⁰ Collet, M.M., 14 Feb 1863, Cong. #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- ²¹ U.S. Census, 1870: Alexandria City, Va., Fourth Ward, p. 32.
- ²² U.S. Census, 1870: Alexandria City, Va., Fourth Ward, pp. 33 and 80-81.
- ²³ Virginia Marriage Index, Grooms: 1860-1869, p. 367.
- ²⁴ U.S. Census, 1880: Washington, D.C., District 27, p. 39
- ²⁵ Virginia Marriage Index, Grooms: 1860-1869, p. 368.
- ²⁶ Alexandria City Directory (1876-1877), p. 89.
- ²⁷ Civil War Pension Application #426256, Certificate #297032, Record Group 15, National Archives.
- ²⁸ Civil War Pension Application #426256, Certificate #297032, Record Group 15, National Archives.
- ²⁹ Civil War Pension Application #485519, Record Group 15, National Archives.
- ³⁰ Civil War Pension Application #485519, Record Group 15, National Archives.
- ³¹ Civil War Pension Application #485519, Record Group 15, National Archives.
- ³² U.S. Census, 1880: Akron, Summit County, Ohio, Third Ward, p. 63. *Boyd’s City Directory of the District of Columbia, 1891* (Washington, D.C., 1891), p. 534.

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- ³³ *Akron Official City Directory, 1899* (The Burch Directory Company: Akron, Ohio, 1899), p. 403. "Died at the Age of 109 Years, Mrs. Julia Hughes, a Typical Southern 'Mammy' Died Saturday Night," *Akron Daily Democrat*, 3 Mar 1902, p. 1.
- ³⁴ Slave Manumissions in Alexandria Land Records, 1790-1863, compiled by Timothy J. Dennee, <http://www.freedmenscemetery.org/resources/documents/manumissions.shtml>, accessed 13 Apr 2008.
- ³⁵ Langley, S.G., 16 May 1863, Cong. #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- ³⁶ Cross, Edward E., 23 Dec 1861, Cong. #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- ³⁷ Richards, Cong. #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- ³⁸ Death notice, *Alexandria Gazette*, 29 Oct 1864, p. 2.
- ³⁹ Pride, Mike and Mark Travis, *My Brave Boys: To War with Colonel Cross and the Fighting Fifth* (University Press of New England: Hanover, N.H. and London, 2001), pp. 60 and 66.
- ⁴⁰ Larkin, James E., diary entries, 21 through 23 Jan 1862, New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N.H.