

June 14, 2019

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### On Joe and the Burial Place(s) of the Enslaved at William and Mary

I continue to think that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century W&M had a burial ground on its 330 acre campus and that it buried those it enslaved (and possibly its Indian students) there. We have no documentation of that, except several references to the College providing coffins.<sup>1</sup> But those record no further expenses such as shrouds, transport to the grave, or digging the grave. I presume there would have been no such expenses since other of our enslaved would undertake such tasks as part of their job.

Where such a burial ground might be is impossible to know, at least so far. The [dig](#) on Harrison Avenue, behind the old St. Bede Church, followed the right clues I think—ground that we thought was waste and had never been farmed; that lay at the rear of our property (like the 1859 cemetery near Blow Hall); that was near flowing water (reflecting African burial customs); and that was marked by periwinkle or English Ivy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bursar's Books, June 1817, "a Coffin for Lemon"; Kristin A. Zech notes an expenditure in 1766 of five shillings for a coffin for a black child ("So Well Endowed": Economic Support of The College of William and Mary During the Colonial Period." Honors Thesis. [History Department, College of William and Mary, 2001] p. 66). One other entry in the Faculty Minutes (Jan. 5, 1830; p. 462) is to a funeral for one of our enslaved: "Ned belonging to the College having died the President is authorized to pay the necessary expenses of his Funeral." What these expenses were is not clear.

<sup>2</sup> Emily Williams cites an unpublished paper by Ywone Edwards-Ingram as noting that though blacks made up more than 50% of Williamsburg's population in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century, "there is little evidence of their burials" (p. 82), though "many [20] were buried on marginal land near College Landing" (p. 120; the figure of 20 graves, dating from between 1790 and 1820, is in footnote 103 and notes the discovery was made in connection with the 1976 extension of South Henry St.) (Emily Williams, "Stories in Stone: Memorialization, the Creation of History, and the Role of Preservation," Ph.D. thesis, University of Leicester, School of Archeology and Ancient History, 2018).

But we have evidence, I think, that one of our enslaved workers, Joe,<sup>3</sup> was perhaps buried off campus in roughly November 1837. An account book<sup>4</sup> Thomas Roderick Dew kept for expenses to be reimbursed by the College contains this entry:

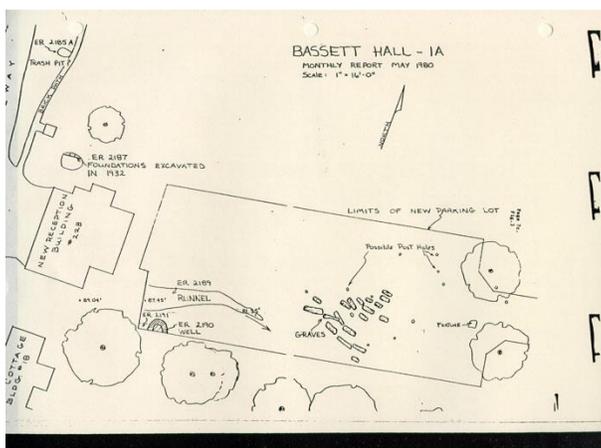
.50 cts for digging Joes Grave + .50 \$4 to R. Bucktrout      5 00

R. Bucktrout is Richard Manning Bucktrout whose later “[Day Book and Ledger](#)” records his business activities between 1850 and 1866, including income from burying Williamsburg’s dead, black and white, rich and poor, free and enslaved.

That Dew paid Bucktrout \$.50 to dig Joe’s grave and a further \$4.50 suggests to me that Joe was buried off campus in a coffin bought from Bucktrout and transported by him to the grave.

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Another burial site (likely antebellum) containing the graves of 18 African-Americans, is located beneath the parking lot of Bassett Hall.



(map in Rockefeller Library)

The Debrass family burial ground is close to the Williamsburg Inn swimming pool, and there is a small burial ground I know nothing about not far from the original site of the First Baptist Church; one burial of a member of the First Baptist Church is located close to the original foundation (I thought the mention of the graveyard was on a map in a CW Historical Report but if so cannot now find it; the mention of a burial close to the church is mentioned by a member of the church in Tommy Bogger, *Since 1776: The History of First Baptist Church, Williamsburg, Virginia* (Williamsburg: First Baptist Church, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> See the appendix for more on Joe and his labors for the College.

<sup>4</sup> In Swem, SCRC, “Office of the President, Thomas Roderick Dew Papers,” UA 2.05. The account book is Acc. 1983.12 in Oversize Box 1. See page 30.

Why a burial would have been outsourced, I don't know. As far as I can tell, whatever 18<sup>th</sup> century burial ground we might have had we would still have owned; if we had enslaved people available surely they would have taken the matter in hand. But if Joe had been hired from another owner, it's possible he would not have been eligible for burial in a College burial ground. These questions remain mysteries to me.

I do think Joe was possibly buried in a potter's field all but forgotten today, but which I think was a common burial ground before the opening of Cedar Grove in 1859.

The evidence that such a potter's field existed is not crystal clear, though I think it reasonable to assume that any town of a certain size would, in the nature of things, require a place to bury paupers.

Williamsburg was a city for 160 years before Cedar Grove opened, and, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at least, did pay for burials for the indigent (see [October 30, 1856](#); [January 1862](#); [1862](#));<sup>5</sup> I would guess the practice was necessary and common in earlier days as well.<sup>6</sup>

So what is the evidence for such a burial place?

Some of it may be the way Richard Manning Bucktrout refers to Cedar Grove (it had no such name during the time of his Daybook); he refers to it as the "new burial ground" or the "new semitary" (see [November 18, 1861](#), [November 8, 1861](#)) (and once as the "Wms [Williamsburg] Cimatary" [see [December 18, 1861](#)]).

"New" can be, of course, simply a fact, not something that distinguishes the burial ground from an "old" one. In one instance, however, I think that distinction may have been involved, for Bucktrout first wrote "the burial ground," and then went back to interpolate "new," to my mind suggesting that he intended to distinguish two grounds (see [November 18, 1861](#)).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kelley Marian Brennan notes that in June 1832, the City paid Bucktrout "\$6 for making coffins for the city's poor" "The Bucktrout Funeral Home, a Study of Professionalization and Community Service," MA Thesis (History Department, College of William and Mary, 2007), p. 13 (<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1961795668/?pq-origsite=primo>).

<sup>6</sup> Another [site](#) in Williamsburg was, apparently, for the remains of those executed at the gallows out Capitol Landing Road.

<sup>7</sup> John Seel kindly shared several items with me which he found at CW's Rockefeller Library. One is a sketch map (from 1868; see below) of Bassett Hall and the area east, west, and south. To the west and labeled as belonging to "J. W. Curtis" is land apparently enclosed by a fence, the southern border being labeled "outside fence." Immediately south is an area with markings that are not clear. This area is labeled "Old Burying Ground."

Other evidence comes also from a 1931 interview with a professor at the College: “In an interview with Professor Peebles he said that he had been told that not only had the Bucktrout Cemetary [sic] in back of his house always been used as a burying ground for public charges and negroes, but that it had been used as a French Revolutionary cemetary [sic]” (see p. 9 [here](#)).<sup>8</sup>

That the 137 French soldiers who died locally after the siege of Yorktown were buried there suggests to me that the site was already a place for burials. The soldiers could not have been buried in an Anglican churchyard, nor in family or private burial grounds. But burying them at or adjacent to a potter’s field would have been a rational choice (implying no disrespect whatsoever).

All this, I think, points to the existence of a largely forgotten potter’s field and may point to the burial place of Joe, in 1837.

If a potter’s field was in existence where I think it was in both the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and if one of our enslaved laborers, even if on hire, was buried there, it seems to me at least possible that other of our enslaved might be there as well.

Last thoughts: [Ivor Noel Hume](#) cites a 1661 law that “required every parish to provide three or four spaces [sic] to be fenced for ‘publique buriall.’” That law seems particularly to

“Old” in this instance might distinguish the ground from the new burying ground, or it might suggest the ground dates from earlier days. Either meaning is helpful to my argument.

John also gave me a copy of a *Virginia Gazette* essay (May 27, 1998) by Anne Cutler, a great-granddaughter of Richard Manning Bucktrout. She mentions the plat of Bassett Hall and dates it to 1868; also she quotes an unpublished memoir by her aunt, Minnie Braithwaite Jenkins, about the “old Revolutionary burying ground, where soldiers of both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars were buried.” She mentions that “a great many others” were buried there, speculating that those might include “Blackbeard’s pirates.”

Anne mentions that “as a child walking ‘in the graveyard in the woods in back of the homeplace,’” she came “across a newly dug grave ... with a headboard of wood with printing on it ... [and] a little mayonnaise jar with violets in it.” Anne died in 2015 at the age of 97.

Anne told me [once](#) that her brother “grew up playing amongst the graves and at least once came home with some French military insignia.”

<sup>8</sup> One other piece of evidence is surely inferential but perhaps relevant. In February 1859 a local black, Pleasant Baker, [killed himself](#) at the site of the soldiers burial ground. Certainty is of course impossible, but five years earlier, July 5, 1854, Baker’s [daughter had died](#) and might have been buried near where he killed himself. Perhaps his choice of the site reflected a deep and continuing sorrow.

focus on the burial of free and enslaved blacks and seems to require each parish to set up some form of a potter's field:

ACT XV.

*Buriall of Servants or others privately prohibited. (b)*

WHEREAS the private buriall of servants & others give occasion of much scandall against diverse persons and sometimes not undeservedly of being guilty of their deaths, from which if the persons suspected be innocent there can be noe vindication **(c)** if guilty noe punishment, by reason they are for the most part buried without the knowledge or view of any others then such of the family, as by neerenesse of relation (as being husband wife or children **(d)** are unwilling) or as servants are fearfull to make discovery if murther were **(e)** committed: ffor remedy whereof as alsoe for takeing away that barbarous custome of exposing the corps of the dead (by makeing their graves in comon and unfenced places) to the prey of hoggs and other vermine, *Be it enacted* that there be in every parish three or fower or more places appoynted (according to the greatnes or littlenes of the same) to be sett apart and fenced in, for places of publique buriall, for that precinct, And further that before the corps, and if none, yet according to the decent custome of all Christendome they may accompany itt to the ground, **(f)** *And be it further enacted* that noe persons **(g)** whether free or servants shall be buried in any other place then those soe appointed, unles such who by their own appointment in their life time have signified their desires of being interred in any particular place elsewhere.

From: <http://vagenweb.org/hening/vol02-03.htm>

Will Molineux has pointed out to me that a potter's field is sanctified ground, appropriate for Christian burials, and suggests that the College, as an ecclesiastical institution, would have offered a Christian burial to those it enslaved, whether on its land or at a potter's field. Fred Boelt has emphasized to me the lack of any evidence whatsoever, but notes that plantation owners habitually designated an area for the burial of their enslaved; he suggests that for residents of Williamsburg living on urban lots with no access to such areas, the hundreds of those they enslaved might well have been served by some kind of central or common burial ground.

## Appendix

On Joe and his life of forced labor for the College, we have a fair number of records, more in some ways, actually, than for Lemon. I reproduce those below; they raise as many questions as they answer.

It's not entirely clear to me that Joe was enslaved by the College. William and Mary appears to pay a tax on him (if my reading is correct) and pays for his funeral, both of which would seem to suggest ownership and responsibility. But a much earlier arrangement (January 1, 1780 [sic, for 1781]), as the College hired out one of its own enslaved, suggests that the person doing the hiring could be held responsible for the tax.<sup>9</sup>

"College Servant," although it seems to imply College ownership, seems a kind of title or status that can apply to a man enslaved and leased to the College—at least so suggests a number of entries in the Faculty minutes about George, leased from Professor Millington.<sup>10</sup>

Whatever his status, Joe seems to be owed clothing and meat; a monthly payment of \$2 appears to be a payment to Joe in lieu of meat.<sup>11</sup>

There may well be two Joes at issue here, at least so I conclude from the first entry below, July 31, 1827. I think "Joe the College servant" is the subject of the later entries (though I cannot be certain) and is not the Joe at the same meeting who is hired out for the remainder of 1827. Dew's entry for October 18, 1836 also seems to distinguish "Mary Gavins Joe" from, perhaps, another Joe.

I have not checked transcriptions from the Faculty Minutes (those transcriptions below are the ones that do not have screenshots of the original entries; those that have screenshots are from the Thomas R. Dew account book).

July 31, 1827 (p. 279): "Resolved that Joe the College servant be placed under the Control of Mr Gresham the Steward, and that he be requested to make him cut sufficient pine and oak wood for

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<sup>9</sup> "Journal of the President and Masters or Professors of William and Mary College," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 15: 3 (Jan., 1907), p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> From the Faculty Minutes:

p. 330, Jan. 17, 1843: "In the above accts a sum of One Hundred and fifty Dollars due to John Millington for the hire of George, the College servant was by mistake omitted; therefore ordered that he have permission to draw upon the Bursar for the same."

p. 385, Dec. 16, 1844: "Resolved that George the present College Servant should be again hired from Profr. Millington as collge Servt. For the year 1845 on the same terms as before."

p. 420, Jan. 5, 1846: "George, hired heretofore of Prof. Millington, as the College Servant, was hired for the year 1846 for the sume of \$150, Prof. Millington paying all his expenses."

<sup>11</sup> The terms for support such as food and clothing were known in Williamsburg as "found." The OED records a meaning along these lines as "obsolete":

b. To endow, make provision for the maintenance of (persons who are to perform certain functions). *Obsolete.*

But in the Bucktrout daybook the term appears several times, e.g.:

Dec <sup>r</sup> 7 <sup>th</sup> 1850	Messers Sands and Cowles	Paid
	to 6 days work of my man	6.00
	William at \$1 a day and found	

the use of the College, and keep him employed in and about the College, and the Garden assigned to the President when not engaged in cutting Wood; that the Steward be requested to have the wood cut by Joe when sufficiently seasoned hauled up, for which he shall be paid what is reasonable—and that the Wood be stored away and secured against pillage.”

July 31, 1827 (p. 279): [The Rev. William H. Wilmer,<sup>12</sup> President had just died] “Resolved that as far as the College is concerned Mr. Edloe may have the Services of Joe (hired by Dr. Wilmer at \$50) for the Residue of the year, he paying \$20.03 Cents for hire, and furnishing 5/12 of his Clothing, and that the College will pay the Residue of his Hire, and furnish 7/12 of his Clothing.”

Feb. 28, 1832 (p. 111): “Resolved that Joe be permitted to cultivate for his own use one Square of that part of the College Garden which is not appropriated as a garden by the Steward.”

On page 29, headed “W<sup>m</sup> & Mary College to T R Dew Debtor 1836-37,” is an entry for October 18, 1836:

<i>To Mary Gavins Joe, for August Sep. &amp; Oct. 1836</i>	19	5 00
To Mary Gavins Joe, for Aug <sup>st</sup> . Sep. & Oct <sup>Nov</sup> 1836		5 00

Also on p. 29, in several entries beginning in January 1837:

<i>To Mrs Debriss for Joe's clothes \$3.50. 20<sup>th</sup> Jan'y \$16.85 to Mahone</i>		20 35
To Mrs Debriss for Joe's clothes \$3.50. 20 <sup>th</sup> Jan'y \$16.85 to Mahone		20.35

<i>To 110 lbs of pork 10 cts per pound Feb'y 10 for Joe</i>		11 00
<i>To Joe for Feb'y \$2 for Joe To \$10 advanced to Mr Morris 22<sup>nd</sup> March</i>		12 00
<i>7<sup>th</sup> March to \$2 for Joe To \$10 advanced to Mr Morris 22<sup>nd</sup> March</i>		12 00
<i>23<sup>rd</sup> March to \$2 to Joe for meat to \$32.10 paid to D. Galt 6<sup>th</sup> April</i>		34 10
<i>8<sup>th</sup> April to \$2 to Joe for month Paid to Wise \$16.75 April 8</i>		18 75

<To> To 110 lbs of pork 10 cts per pound Feb'y 10 for Joe	11 00
To Joe for Feb'ry \$2 for Joe To \$10 advanced to Mr Morris 22 <sup>nd</sup> March	12 00
7 <sup>th</sup> March to \$2 to Joe for meat to \$32.10 paid to D. Galt 6 <sup>th</sup> April	12 00
23 <sup>rd</sup> March to \$2 to Joe for meat to \$32.10 paid D. Galt 6 <sup>th</sup> April	34 10
8 <sup>th</sup> April to \$2 to Joe for month [?] Paid to Wise [?] \$16.75 April 8	18 75

<sup>12</sup> Incidentally, Wilmer, according to Wikipedia, expended much of his income on purchasing and freeing enslaved people.

To \$2 to Joe for May	To \$12.08 paid to Joseph Grisham on a/c Mistake in Mt.	14 08
To \$1.50 to Joe instead of meat	To \$6.75 to Morriss 15 <sup>th</sup> May	8 25
		16 10

To \$2 to Joe for May To \$12.08 paid to Joseph Grisham [?] on a/c Mistake in [illeg.] 14 08  
 To \$1.50 to Joe instead of meat. To \$6.75 to Morriss 15<sup>th</sup> May 8 25

[from the Faculty Minutes]:

p. 78, June 29, 1837: "To Mr Jesse Cole for blacksmithing dated 31<sup>st</sup> Inst last \$6:25."  
 "Messrs Sheldon & Maupin... Joe's Cloathing Paint &c. to 29<sup>th</sup> June 1837 11.13"

p. 86, July 6, 1837: "The following orders were passed in respect to repairs of the College Premises, and were to be attended to during the Vacation:

That Joe the College Servant is required to cut four cords of wood weekly during the recess, and that Mr. Pryor the constable be employed to measure such wood and see that this order is fulfilled.

Likewise that Joe whitewash and clean the College chambers and Lecture rooms."

On p. 30, under "W<sup>m</sup> & Mary College to Thomas R Dew Debtor 1837-38," are several entries:

To \$2 to Joe for July	To \$6.75 expenses of M <sup>r</sup> Parks	To \$5 to Mr Brown	13 75
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To \$2 to Joe for July to \$6.75 expenses of M<sup>r</sup> Parks To \$5 to Mr Brown [?] 13 75

To \$2 to Joe for Oct	To \$1.75 for scouring College 6 <sup>th</sup> Oct.	3 75
To tax on Joe & Poor Levy [?], 98 cts	Paid Mr Millington \$74.63	75 61
To Dr Cole on a/c Richardson	\$7.63 to Pryor for supervising Joe	12 63
To 4\$ for Manuel of Class in Lit.	\$2.50 for paper \$2 for Joe Oct.	8 50
To \$2 to M <sup>rs</sup> Debriss for Joe's Clothes	.25 cents for stove pipe, put up	2 25

To \$2 to Joe for Octr to \$1.75 for scouring College 6<sup>th</sup> Oct. 3 75

To tax [?] on Joe & Poor Levy [?], 98 cts Paid Mr Millington \$74.63 75 61

To Dr Cole on a/c Richardson \$7.63 to Pryor for supervising Joe <sup>\$5.</sup> 12 63

To 4\$ for Manuel of Class in Lit. \$2.50 for paper \$2 for Joe Oct. 8 50

To \$2 to M<sup>rs</sup> Debriss for Joe's Clothes .25 cents for stove pipe, put up 2 25

.50 cts for digging Joes Grave + .50	\$4 to R. Bucktrout	5 00
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.50 cts for digging Joes Grave + .50 \$4 to R. Bucktrout 5 00