# of Virginia"

Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

CHARLOTTE SCOTT, "a freedwoman," was born in what is now Lynchburg, Virginia. She was born a slave sometime between 1803 and 1805 and was owned by succeeding members of the Scott family. The Scotts lived on a large plantation along the James River, about four miles above Lynch's Ferry. (Today, the property is divided among the Virginia Episcopal School and Westminster-Canterbury, the former Reusens industrial complex, a large apartment complex, and numerous residential neighborhoods.)

The presentation of the Freedman's Memorial included a speech by Mr. James E. Yeatman, the president of the Western Sanitary Commission, in which he highlighted the role Charlotte Scott's former owners played in championing her cause. Yeatman explained that, upon hearing of President Lincoln's death, Charlotte Scott "went in great distress" to Margaret Scott Rucker "her mistress—that had been, for she was then free—and said to her: 'The colored people have lost their best friend on earth! Mr. Lincoln was our best friend, and I will give five

"The colored people have lost their best friend on earth! Mr. Lincoln was our best friend, and I will give five dollars of my wages towards erecting a monument to his memory."

dollars of my wages towards erecting a monument to his memory.'" Charlotte Scott's former master, Dr. William Parks Rucker, "a Union refugee, from Virginia...who took along with him Charlotte Scott, and perhaps others belonging to him," initiated the contacts that put her founding five-dollar contribution into the hands of trustworthy fundraisers. Several months after the president's death, Charlotte Scott's "grain of a mustard seed" had grown to a grand total of $16,242.

The story told at the ceremony offered only a glimpse at the relationship between Charlotte Scott and her former owners, a husband and wife from two well-known Central Virginia families. The long version—a wider and slightly more detailed overview of the connections among the Scotts, the Ruckers, and their slaves—is complicated and compelling, and it begins with a land purchase that took place about thirty years before Charlotte Scott was born.

Lincoln Park

Not all city plans are completed as designed, not even plans for the new Capital City of Washington developed by the distinguished architect and civil engineer Pierre L'Enfant. One square, about a mile east of the Capitol, was meant to hold a monumental column from which all points in the continent would be measured. Instead, the location became the city dump.

The land was needed for more important purposes in 1861. The rubble was cleared away and the Lincoln United States General Hospital for wounded Union soldiers was established—a large hospital often visited by Walt Whitman. After the Civil War, the canvas-covered log buildings were removed, but the Lincoln name had become attached to the square, later called Lincoln Park.

ORATION

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

WITH AN APPENDIX.

Photo courtesy of Virginia Episcopal School

Five dollars in 1865 was equivalent to $385.52 today.

The Scott Plantation

In 1784, twenty-eight-year-old Captain William Scott, a Revolutionary War veteran, bought 1,150 acres on the James River from his brother-in-law, James Gatewood. On the north side of the river the land lay in Amherst County, and on the south side of the river the land straddled the recently delineated line between Bedford and Campbell Counties. The tract started well above Judith Creek at Trents Ferry and extended close to the frontier town that would become Lynchburg.

The current Virginia Episcopal School campus is likely the site of the dwelling house and some farm buildings built by William Scott on the Campbell County portion of his newly purchased plantation. Prior to the purchase, Scott had married his Caroline County neighbor Ann Jones. The couple settled in Spotsylvania County and started a family that eventually included twelve children.

Writing about the white farmhouse known as Mingea Cottage, architectural historian Calder Loth pointed out that a portion of the brick foundation was "typical of the Federal-period Flemish bond of the Virginia Piedmont...circa 1800." The foundation had "apparently survived" from an earlier structure on the Scott plantation (now the Virginia Episcopal School campus). Mingea Cottage was demolished in 2013.

Sympathy **or Savvy?**

When Captain William Scott granted his sons Thomas and Hugh joint ownership of sixteen slaves, he stipulated that the slaves remain together on the plantation. Since slave marriages were not legally binding, any effort to keep a slave family intact seems like a thoughtful, humanitarian gesture. However, in the South's slave-based economy, keeping slave couples in close proximity also made good business sense. According to Reginald Washington, senior archivist with the National Archives and Records Administration:

> Slave marriages had neither legal standing nor protection from the abuses and restrictions imposed on them by slaveowners. Slave husbands and wives, without legal recourse, could be separated or sold at their master's will. Couples who resided on different plantations were allowed to visit only with the consent of their owners. Slaves often married without the benefit of clergy, and as historian John Blassingame states, "the marriage ceremony in most cases consisted of the slaves simply getting the master's permission and moving into a cabin together."
>
> The marriage arrangement of couples who resided on different plantations ("broad" marriages) was often the cause of great concern for most slaveowners. Fearing that slave marriages between plantations could potentially contribute to lost time from work and increase the risk of slaves developing attitudes of independence, owners encouraged their slaves to marry on the plantation where they lived. When this was not possible, wealthy owners would in some cases buy the spouse of his slave...Children of "broad" marriages were the property of the slave woman's owner, and the owner of a slave man had no legal right to their services. Between 1865 and 1867, most Southern states in some form or another legalized former slave marriages and recognized the children of such marriages as legitimate.

Reginald Washington, "Sealing the Sacred Bonds of Holy Matrimony: Freedmen's Bureau Marriage Records," *Prologue Magazine*, Spring 2005, Vol. 37, No. 1, http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2005/spring/freedman-marriage-recs.html.

When Scott died in 1818, his will left land, livestock, and personal property—including some of his slaves—to his seven oldest surviving children. Other slaves and the remaining 900 acres of his plantation went to his wife for her use during her lifetime and then to their two youngest sons, Thomas and Hugh, to be divided equally between them when she died. William Scott also left sixteen named slaves for these two sons.

In 1831, Ann Scott took mercy on her two youngest sons and decided not to make them wait any longer for their inheritance. She drew up a document giving Thomas and Hugh her land and slaves in exchange for care for the rest of her life—and she lived another fifteen years. By this time, Thomas was already married to Margaret Parks Burks, who had grown up across the James River in Amherst County, and they had two children. Hugh was newly married to Margaret's sister, Elizabeth Jane Burks, known as Jane.

Before 1831, the two sons had unofficially divided the slaves, and they had also divided the land into two sections where they were already farming. Thomas kept the manor house and surrounding land in Campbell County, across from the family cemetery, and his mother continued to live with his family. Hugh lived on the Bedford County portion, and he also farmed about two miles of fertile land along the James River in Campbell County.

The two Scott families that lived on the remaining 900 acres along the James experienced many marriages, births, and deaths between 1831 and 1860. The matriarch Ann Jones Scott died in 1846. Thomas lost his first wife two years after the birth of their third child. He married again, had two more children, and also lost his second wife. Four of Thomas's children, including his daughter Margaret, the final owner of the slave Charlotte Scott, were all married in the 1850s. Hugh Scott and his wife Jane had three children, two of whom were married by 1860.

7th at the death of my beloved wife I give and devise all the lands herein before
devised to her for life to my two Sons Thomas H Scott and Hugh [illegible] Scott and their
heirs forever to be equally divided between them I also give and bequeath to my
Said two Sons Thomas and Hugh the following Slaves with the increase of the
females, Hanna, George, Willis, Bridget, Suckey, Spencer, Theodore, Fountain,
Ambrose, Betsey, Nancy, Lucy, China, Easter, Charlotte, and Sam It is my
will that these Slaves be kept together untill either of my Sons arrives at the
age of Twenty One years or marries and then that the Said Slaves be equally
divided between them 8. I lend to my beloved wife all the Stock upon the
Lands herein before devised to her for life, also the Crop which may be growing
upon the Land at the time of my death, with all my plantation utensils [illegible]

The Scott Slaves

The slaves owned by the Scotts also experienced many births and deaths between 1831 and 1860. There may have been slave marriages, but families were certainly separated as slaves were given or loaned to various Scott family members. The record is largely silent on the fate of the Scott plantation's enslaved population, owned first by William Scott and then by his sons Thomas and Hugh, except for those slaves who were alive and named at the time wills or deeds were made.

Over the years, the Scotts seemed to have tried to keep at least some slave families together. When William Scott died, his will left a group of sixteen slaves to be used jointly by Thomas and Hugh, and it was William's desire that the group of slaves be kept together, not sold off the plantation.

Two slaves named in William Scott's will were very young in 1818, and they are unusual in that they can be traced into the post-war period. Hugh inherited a slave named Willis, and Thomas inherited another named Charlotte, the slave destined to become "a freedwoman from Virginia." As the brothers' farms were adjacent, there would have been opportunities for the slaves to see each other, and it is possible, based on later information, that Willis and Charlotte had a slave marriage.

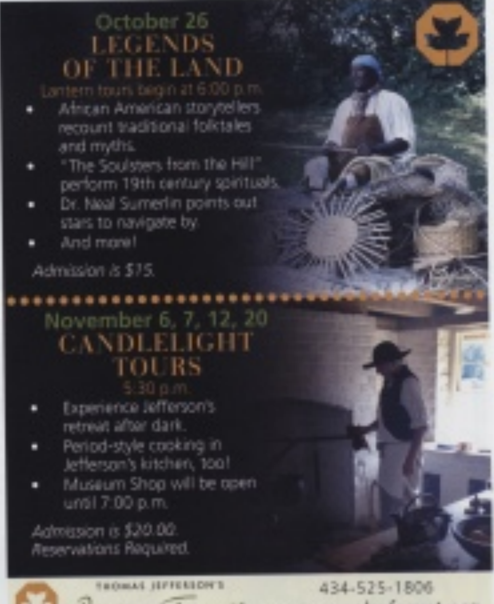
Patrolmen and Soldiers

Increasing political tension about slavery was tearing the country apart in the 1850s. The two Scott brothers, Thomas and Hugh, along with their adult sons, were assigned to serve time patrolling at night for runaway slaves. At the same time they had to hope that their own slaves would not join the bands of runaways in the area.

According to the 1860 slave census, there were forty enslaved people owned by Thomas and Hugh Scott,[2] and none of the Scott slaves were fugitives on the particular days that census takers recorded data for the two brothers. It is not known if any of their slaves ran away during the war, but most slave owners were concerned about the possibility.

When Virginia seceded from the Union in April 1861, Thomas and Hugh had eight sons or sons-in-law combined, all of whom were eligible to volunteer for the military. Six of the eight men did serve. Hugh's son-in-law John Cabell Ward was a captain in the Virginia 11th Infantry Regiment, and his son Frank was a private in the Virginia 2nd Cavalry. Thomas's son Grigsby was also a private in the Virginia 2nd Cavalry. Dr. Cyrus Pain Bryan, one of Thomas Scott's three sons-in-law, was briefly a private in the Bath Grays and then served in the Virginia Legislature. Another son-in-law, James Staples Rucker, was in Moorman's Company of the Virginia Horse Artillery. The third son-in-law of Thomas Scott was Dr. William Parks Rucker, elder brother of James Rucker and a colorful character, to say the least. Dr. Rucker was a staunch Unionist.

2 Three of the slaves, all women, were older than forty years old. Seventeen of the slaves were children age twelve and younger. Thomas owned five men and five women between the ages of thirteen and forty, while Hugh owned four men and six women in the same age range. Roughly half of the slaves owned by the two brothers were in the age bracket considered appropriate for performing exhaustive labor often demanded of slaves.



The Rucker Rift

The Rucker family, originally from Amherst County, divided their living between the old Rucker home place near Tobacco Row Mountain and Lynchburg where the father and grandfather of William and James were successful tobacco merchants. William and James were both very young when their parents died, two years apart. The boys were then raised by family members. The brothers married sisters, but the two men had opposing views about the Confederacy, and their sister-wives apparently agreed with them, or at least tolerated them. [See below].

William studied law at the University of Virginia. In 1852, he married his second cousin Margaret Ann Scott, the younger daughter of Thomas Scott and his first wife, Margaret. After their marriage, William and Margaret Rucker lived with her family at the Scott home place in Campbell County, and their first child, Hedley Scott Rucker, was born there. Rucker then left his wife and son with her father in Campbell County while he attended medical school in Philadelphia. After graduation in 1855, he moved his family to Covington where he practiced medicine until 1862.

When Thomas Scott died in May 1861, his daughter Margaret inherited three slaves, including Charlotte who had been loaned to Margaret for many years. The will described Charlotte as a woman, valued at $500. At that time, Charlotte and several other Scott slaves from Campbell County—all owned by Margaret or promised to her—were already living with the Ruckers in Covington.

While owning slaves was uncommon in the western area of Virginia, support of the Confederacy was strong in Allegheny County. The Ruckers, however, displayed the inverse. William and Margaret owned numerous slaves, but Rucker was a staunch Unionist and refused on several occasions to declare his allegiance to the Confederacy. Margaret's convictions are unknown except that she extracted a promise from her husband that he would not join the Union army.

Burning Bridges

Rucker was a wealthy and respected doctor in Covington. He also owned several small businesses near Covington including an inn named Steeles Tavern for a previous owner, which he leased out to a pro-South man.

The inn was a stage stop for travelers, and Rucker often met strangers there, demanding strict privacy for his meetings. The innkeeper became suspicious that Rucker was a Union spy and reported his concerns to local Confederate officials. When these officials confronted Rucker, he again refused to take the Confederate oath and was then attacked by a hostile crowd. In self-defense, Rucker stabbed the leader of the mob with a knife, and held off the rest of the attackers with a pistol. After he was arrested, Dr. Rucker was forced to sew up his wounded victim, who died the following day. Since Rucker had studied law before he studied medicine, he conducted his own defense in the murder trial that followed and, amazingly, was acquitted.

Rucker continued practicing medicine in Covington and at the same time maintained contact with the Union army. In February 1862, he traveled to a plantation he owned near Summersville in Nicholas County, about sixty-five miles west of Covington. On the way to his plantation, Rucker met with Colonel George Crook who was stationed with the 36th Ohio Infantry in Summersville. Rucker later claimed that during this meeting it was he who suggested burning the Cow Pasture River Bridge on the Virginia Central Railroad east of

Two Brothers, Two Sisters, Two Armies

James Rucker, younger brother of William Rucker, was married to Nannie Scott, the youngest child of Thomas Scott and his second wife, Belinda Grigsby Scott. Nannie Scott Rucker was a half-sister of William's wife, Margaret Scott Rucker. James Rucker's response to the increasing tension between the North and the South during the 1850s led him on a sojourn to Kansas.

In 1854, a group of settlers in the Territory of Kansas built Lecompton, a town on the Kansas River fifteen miles east of Topeka. The town grew rapidly and by 1857 it was not only the seat of government for the Territory, it also became the headquarters of the proslavery faction in Kansas. The abolitionist John Brown and other free-soil advocates lived nearby, and their resistance to proslavery forces received national attention. Both proslavery and free-soil advocates were flocking to Kansas in order to influence an upcoming election that was to decide whether Kansas would be a free or slave state.

Newly married, James and Nannie Scott Rucker took up residence in Lecompton sometime after 1857 and the couple had two children born there. On January 1, 1861, Kansas was admitted to the Union as a free state and the James Rucker family soon returned to Virginia.

Tragic events rapidly affected this young family. The two children born in Kansas both died after the family returned to Virginia. Happily, another son was born in March 1862, but two months after the new baby was born, James enlisted in Moorman's Company of the Virginia Horse Artillery. His enlistment occurred while the Lynchburg papers were publishing derogatory articles about his brother William.

Nannie Scott Rucker died in October 1862 when her baby was just seven months old. The final tragedy occurred a year later. James Rucker was wounded and captured by Union army forces near Culpeper after the Battle of Brandy Station, a battle in which his brother-in-law, Grigsby Scott, also fought. James was sent to the Old Capitol Prison in Washington and died from dysentery in the prison hospital a few weeks later. The orphaned James Clifton Rucker was left in the care of the Scott family during the war. After William and Margaret Rucker settled in Lewisburg, West Virginia, Clifton went there to live with his aunt and uncle.

Clifton Forge.

After he had agreed to help the Union army, Rucker moved to his Nicholas County plantation, thought to be a safer location, while Margaret continued to live in Covington with their four sons and their group of Covington-based slaves.

Rucker's role in planning the bridge burning might not have been as central as he claimed, but one thing is certain: as a civilian guide, Rucker led a group of seventy-five Union cavalrymen who successfully burned the railroad bridge on May 19, 1862, a significant but not disastrous loss to the Confederacy.

After the bridge-burning incident, as Rucker and the Union cavalry were returning to the Summersville area, they stopped in Covington and added Margaret, the children, and a few Rucker slaves to the entourage. One of the slaves that Margaret took with her was her personal maid, Charlotte.

Two months later, Rucker went to stay overnight in a house near Summersville that was occupied by Union officers. Shortly after he arrived, all the men in the house were captured by a Confederate cavalry unit, led to the house in a night raid by the notorious spy Nancy Hart.

Rucker and the Union officers were first taken to Salt Sulfur Springs, then to Lynchburg, and finally to Richmond. In Richmond, all the Union officers were released in a prisoner exchange while Rucker was sent to the brutal Castle Thunder prison, a former tobacco warehouse on Cary Street, converted by the Confederacy to house political prisoners, including those charged with treason.

An antagonized Governor John Letcher insisted Rucker be tried for treason among other charges such as bridge-burning, murder, and stealing. In response, Colonel Crook, the Union officer in western Virginia, sent word to three prominent Lewisburg residents that they would be hanged if Rucker were harmed.

Though Rucker had been offered a commission in the Union army (five times, he claimed), he had turned it down, and therefore had to be tried for the ten charges made against him as a citizen, not a soldier. Still, there was a lengthy argument between the Confederate and Virginia authorities concerning who would get to try him. It was finally decided that Rucker should be tried as a citizen by the Virginia authorities, and that he would be returned to Covington for trial. Rucker was sent by the Virginia Central Railroad as far as the bridge over the Cow Pasture River that he had helped burn and then by wagon on a very bumpy road to Covington—a delicious irony.

Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

Castle Thunder Prison, a former tobacco warehouse on Cary Street in Richmond

Hints of Hypocrisy

It is hard to imagine the enmity that must have existed between William and Margaret Rucker and their extended Lynchburg family during the fall of 1862. How did Margaret feel about her husband collaborating with the Union army while her brother Grigsby and brother-in-law James Rucker (William's brother) were serving in the Confederate army? In the previous six months Grigsby had been fighting in the Valley with Jackson and most recently had helped cover the retreat from Antietam. James had just fought at the Second Battle of Manassas. Besides her siblings, Margaret had been close to her cousins, the three children of Hugh and Jane Scott, including her cousin Frank, who was then in a Northern prisoner of war camp. If there was any communication between Margaret and her siblings—older sister Mary Scott Bryan in Warm Springs, younger sister Nannie Scott Rucker who was close to death, or her brother Rice in Campbell County—it must have been strained at best. Since May, *The Lynchburg Daily Republican* newspaper had been carrying a running account of Dr. Rucker's escapades that his Lynchburg family would have had to work hard not to read.

During this tumultuous time, while Rucker was in jail in Covington, Margaret and William managed to correspond. They decided that she should move to a safer location. Margaret, their four sons, and her household slaves were transported to Marietta, Ohio, but before the Federal army would transport the group, Margaret was required to free her slaves. No records of manumission have been found—perhaps freedom simply was bestowed by crossing the Ohio River—but Margaret's family and their newly minted free servants remained in Marietta for the rest of the war.

While Rucker was still in the Covington jail, he and Margaret sold all their real estate and also sold—not freed—the rest of their slaves. As it turned out, this was a wise financial decision because real estate property values plummeted during the war and personal property values invested in slaves disappeared.