



Storer College: An American Phoenix

Gallery 1

West Virginia Day Exhibit, 2015

West Virginia & Regional History Center

WVU Libraries

Harpers Ferry, Crossroads of History and Geography

Storer College was conceived not only at a pivotal time in American history but also in a pivotal place. Located at the confluence of two major riverways (the Potomac and Shenandoah), Harpers Ferry was also the converging point of the National Road, the B&O Railroad and the C&O Canal. It was, in fact, a gateway for points east and west, north and south.

Harpers Ferry was also strategic for another reason -- it was home to a Federal Armory and Arsenal where as many as 100,000 weapons were stored at a given moment.

Abolitionist John Brown was cognizant of all of the above when he selected Harpers Ferry as the launching point of his proposed slave insurrection. While he was not able “to end the war which ended slavery,” in Frederick Douglass’s words, “Brown began the war that ended slavery and made this a free Republic.”

Brown’s Raid made Harpers Ferry ‘hallowed ground’ to those involved in the Civil Rights movement. The establishment of a Mission School for freed slaves in 1865 reinforced the town’s aura in that respect, as did the first meeting on American soil of the Niagara Movement in 1906.

William Roberts Junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah, ca. 1809

This early watercolor view of Harpers Ferry by a visiting British artist depicts a Federal Arsenal building.



United States 8th Regiment Order Book, Harpers Ferry, 1799-1800

This order book belonged to the U.S. 8th Regiment, Harpers Ferry.

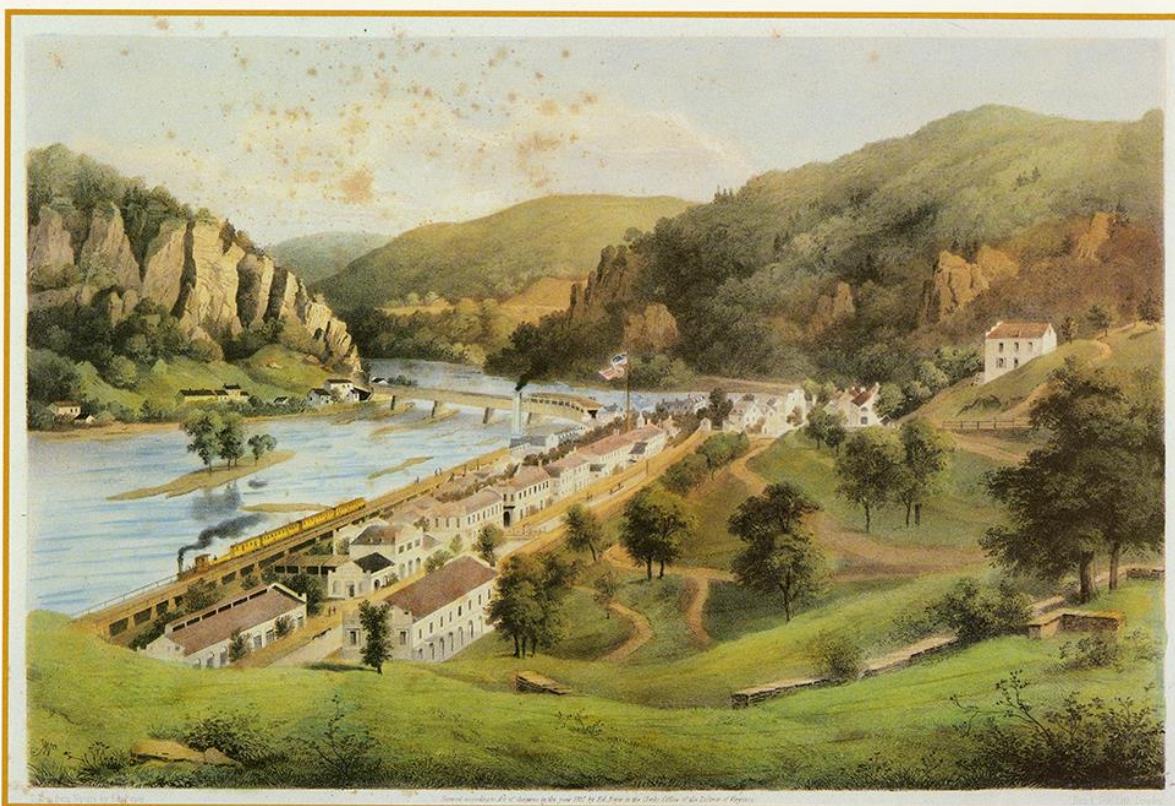
The regiment was stationed at Harpers Ferry both to protect the Federal Armory and secure the strategic confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers. The order book pages displayed here contain an order announcing the death of General George Washington and proclaiming that:

"At daybreak, sixteen guns are to be fired in quick succession, and one gun at the distance of an half hour till sunset, during which the Procession of the troops to the place of Interment."



Edward Beyer, U.S. Armory in Harpers Ferry

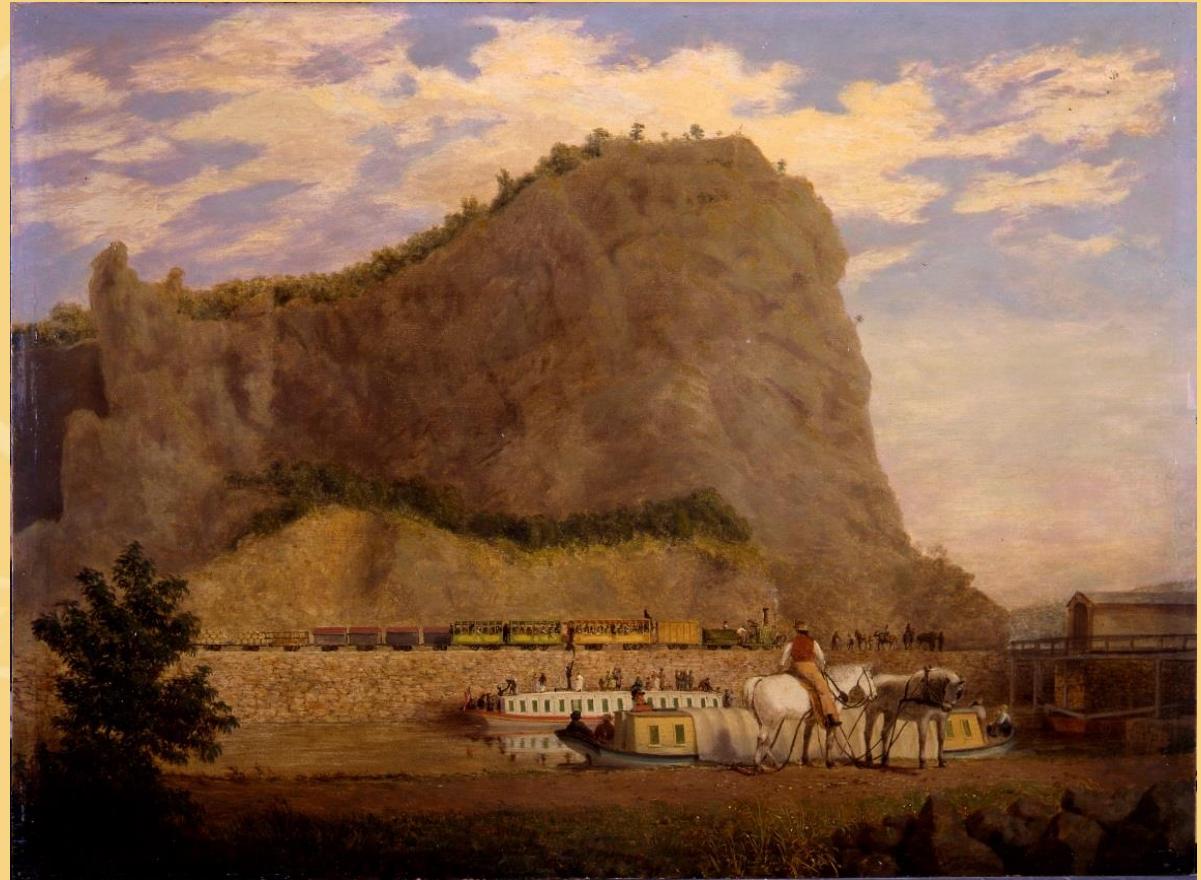
This lithograph from Beyer's famous *Album of Virginia* (1858) provides a splendid view of the U.S. Armory on the eve of John Brown's Raid.



U.S. ARMORY IN HARPERS FERRY.

George Harvey, *Scene of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and Chesapeake & Ohio Canal at Harpers Ferry, ca. 1836*

This colorful scene captures Harpers Ferry's vibrance as a hub of rails, roads and rivers.

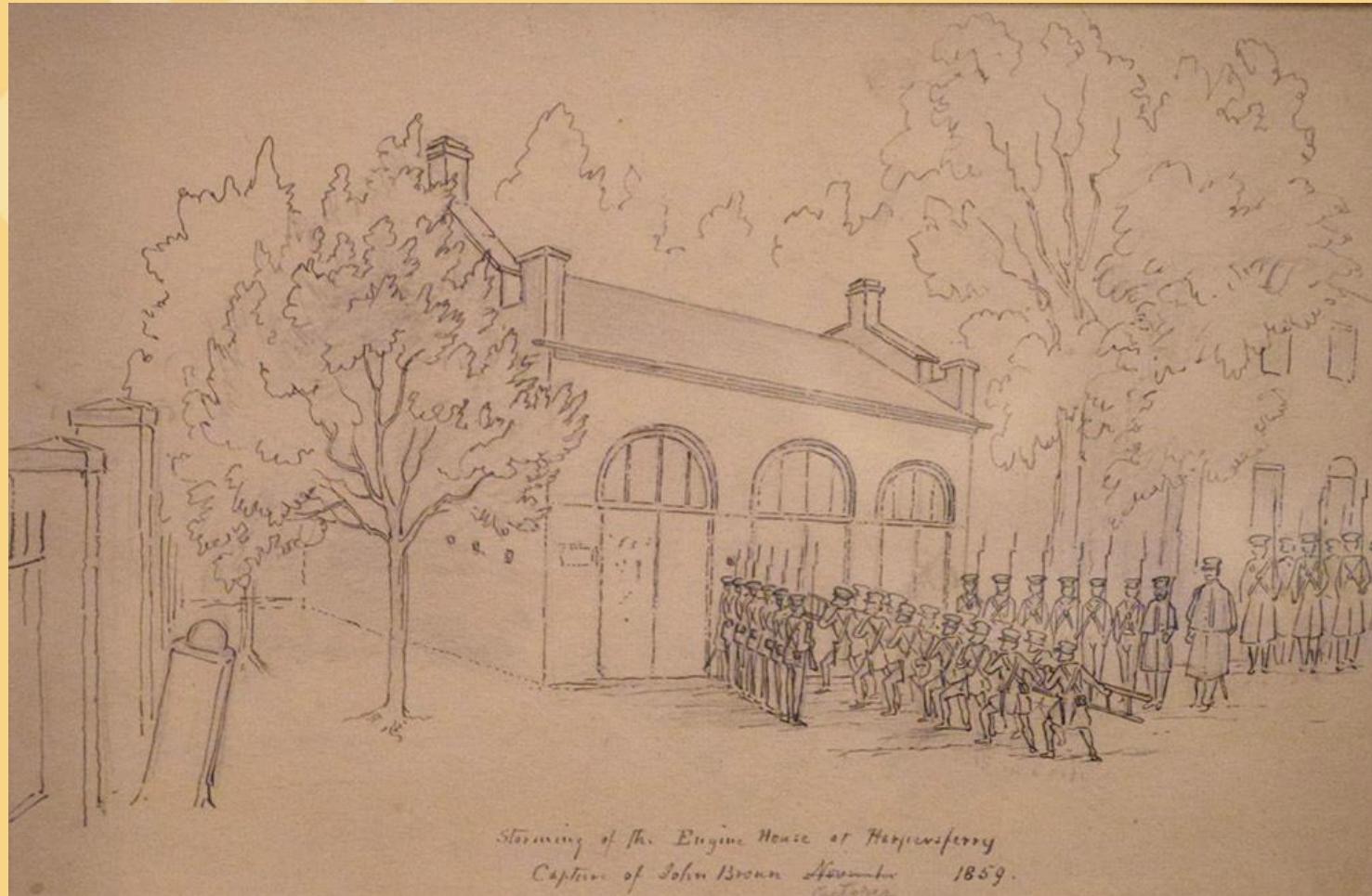


U.S. Harpers Ferry and Springfield Muskets and a Cavalry Saber

Established by Congress in 1792, the Harpers Ferry Armory was producing muskets by 1799. The armory held as many as one hundred thousand weapons including some 15,000 muskets manufactured either in Harpers Ferry or in its sister armory in Springfield, Massachusetts at the time of Brown's Raid. Included in this case is a Harpers Ferry Musket dated 1852 (top) and a Springfield Rifled Musket dated 1863 (bottom).



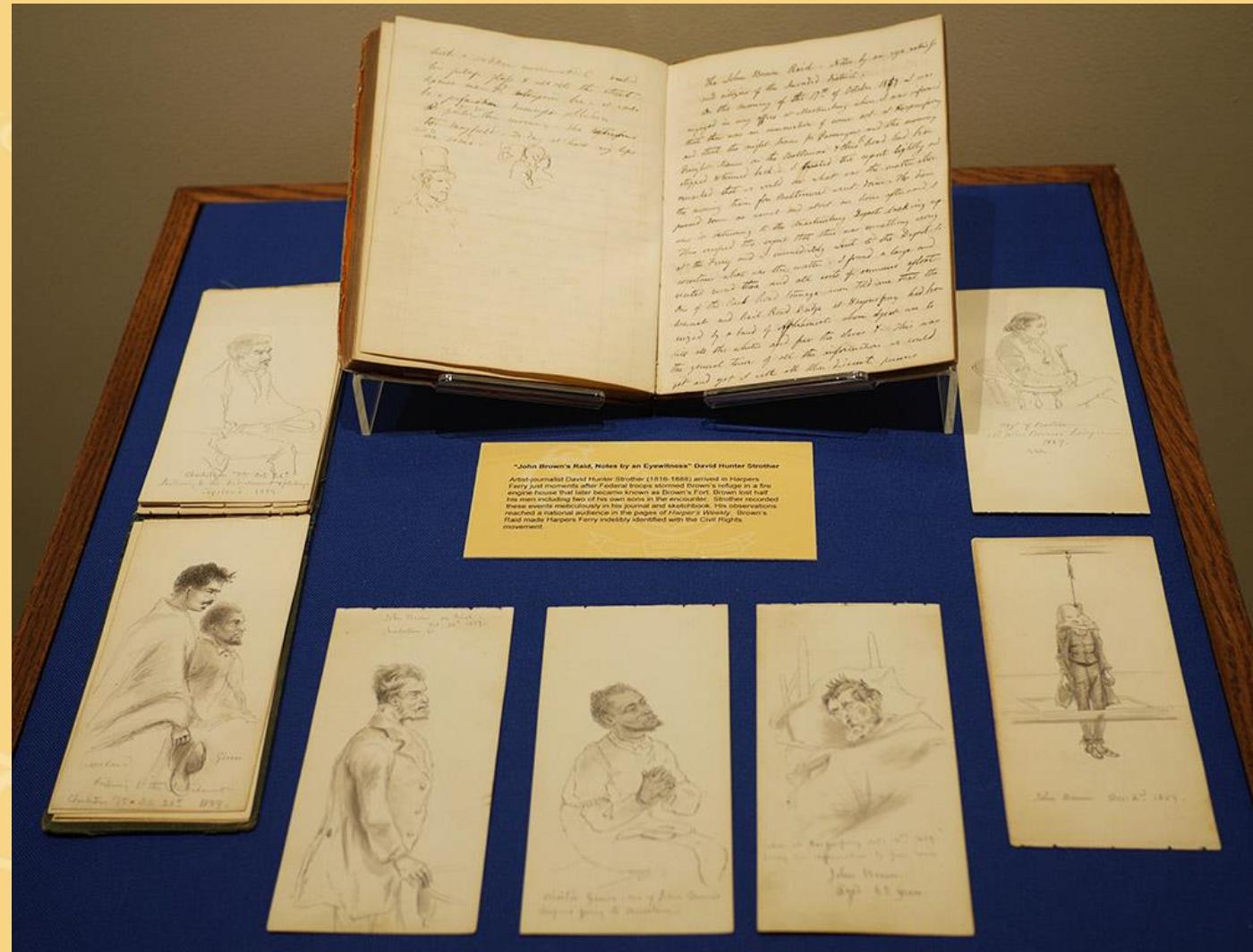
David Hunter Strother Sketch: *Storming of the Engine House at Harpers Ferry, Capture of John Brown, October 1859*



Storming of the Engine House at Harpers Ferry
Capture of John Brown October 1859.

“John Brown’s Raid, Notes by an Eyewitness” David Hunter Strother

Artist-journalist David Hunter Strother (1816-1888) arrived in Harpers Ferry just moments after Federal troops stormed Brown's refuge in a fire engine house that later became known as Brown's Fort. Brown lost half his men including two of his own sons in the encounter. Strother recorded these events meticulously in his journal and sketchbook. His observations reached a national audience in the pages of *Harper's Weekly*. Brown's Raid made Harpers Ferry indelibly identified with the Civil Rights movement.

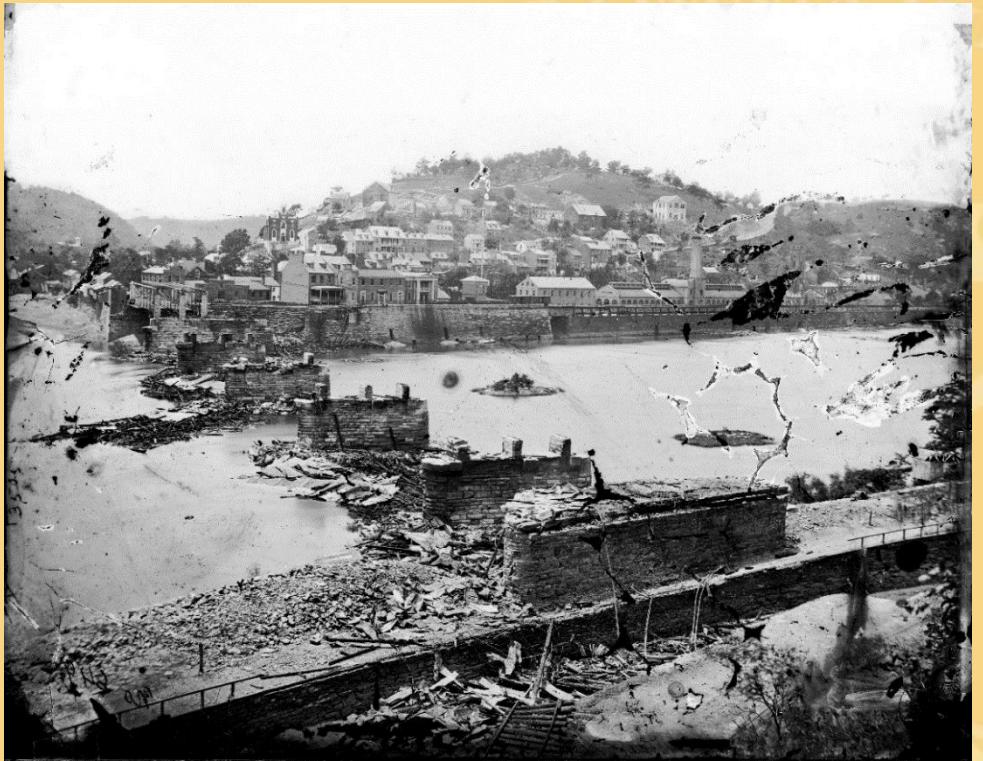


Stereoscope View of John Brown's Fort ca. 1861

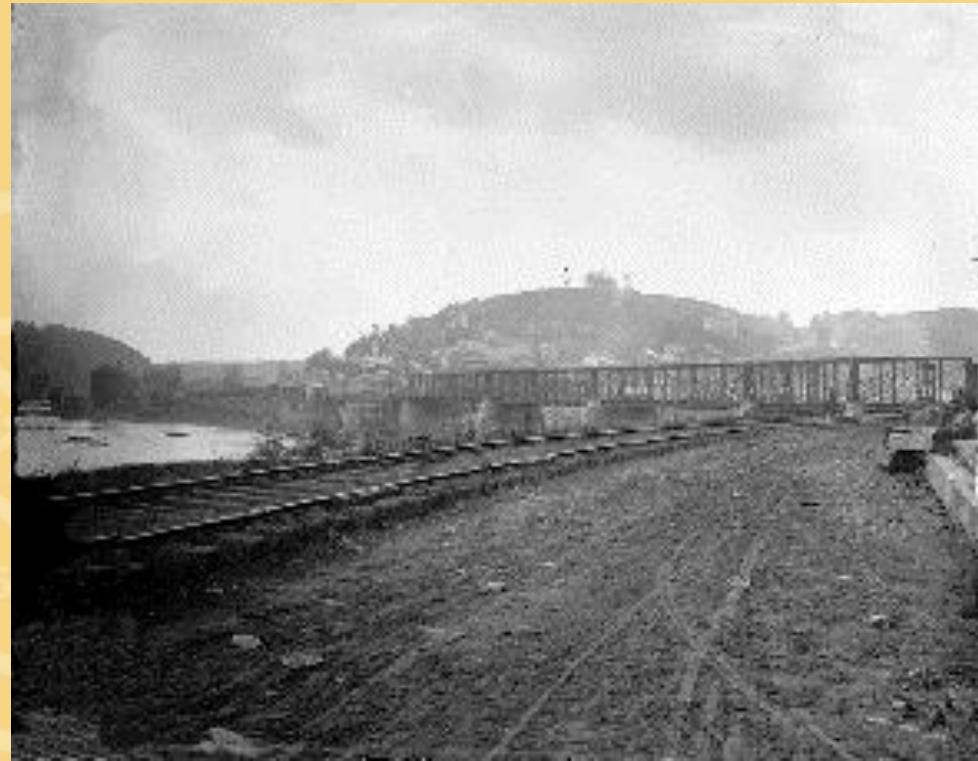
While the precise date of this stereocard of the Harpers Ferry Engine House is unknown, it is likely that the building and its doors bear at least some marks sustained during John Brown's extrication from the structure by U.S. Marines under Colonel Robert E. Lee on October 19, 1859.



Harpers Ferry (and Lockwood House) ca. June 1861 (left) and ca. 1863 (right)



These photos show the town of Harpers Ferry immediately after the destruction of the B&O Bridge across the Potomac by Confederate troops in June 1861 (left) and after the bridge was reconstructed (right).



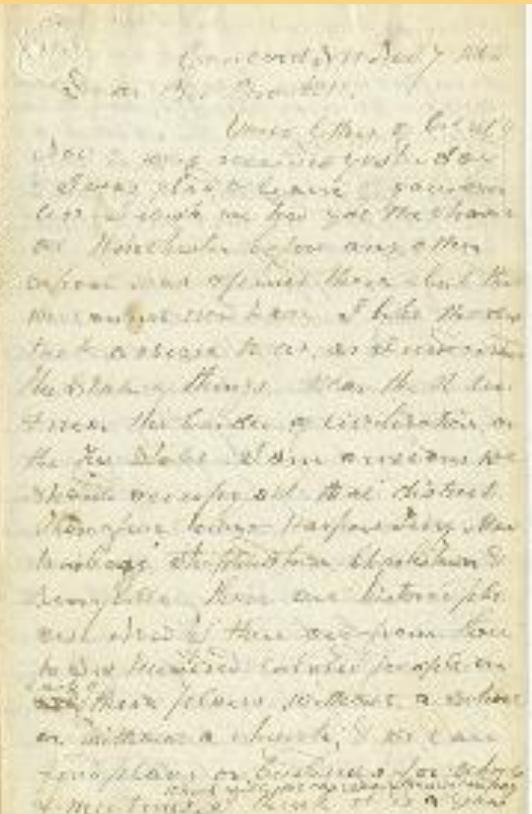
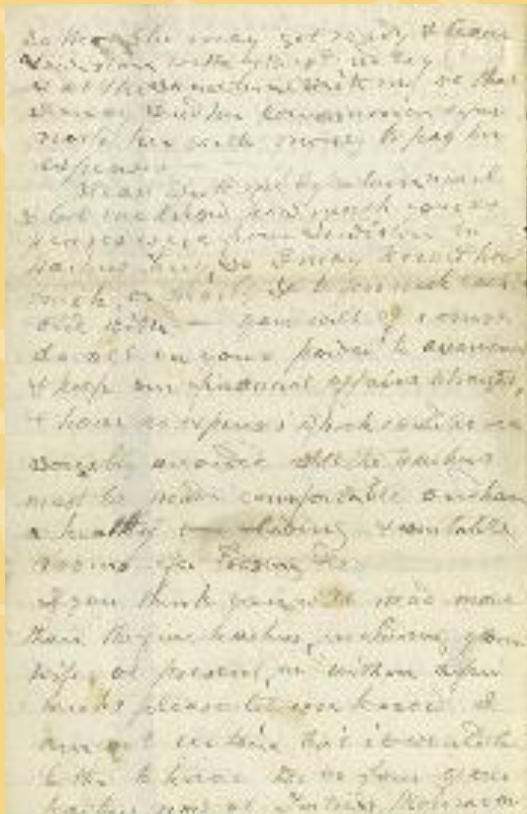
Lockwood House, the first home of the Freewill Baptist Mission School and Storer College, is mostly obscured by trees at the top of the hill in the center of the photo at left. The house is clearly visible in the photo at right. One of the finest residences in Harpers Ferry, Lockwood initially served as the home of the Armory paymaster. Converted into a military hospital in 1862, it later became the headquarters of Union Brigadier General Henry Lockwood. Major General Philip Sheridan also used the building briefly in 1864. Storer College founder Nathan Brackett first visited Lockwood House while serving as a chaplain and member of the Sanitary Commission in 1862.

Note that most of the trees surrounding Lockwood had been cut down by the time the photo at right was taken. The trees were used for assorted purposes including firewood by military troops.

Silas Curtis to Nathan Brackett, October 20 & November 7, 1865

These letters of October and November 1865 contain detailed instructions to Brackett regarding the establishment of schools and churches in Jefferson and Berkeley counties.

"I like the district assigned to us" Curtis notes, as the region was both near the railroad and "near the border of civilization," i.e. "the Free States."



A Circular and an Appeal Announcing the Creation of Storer College

Both an announcement and an appeal, this circular outlines the creation of a benevolent “Commission for the Promotion of Education in the South” and its goal of providing opportunities for the nation’s recently liberated population in the South.

CIRCULAR.

Four millions of people have been recently liberated from bondage in this country and admitted to full citizenship. They are now a part of the nation in a new and higher sense than ever before. Free to choose their own method of life and strong in the possession of the ballot, they are to be a power in the land, and their fortunes are closely linked to ours. Long kept in ignorance, they need education that they may be saved from the mischievous abuse of their power and taught how to employ it so that it shall truly strengthen the nation and enoble themselves. They are very generally eager for knowledge. They prize the opportunities which are afforded them, and where schools have been established and maintained for their benefit, they have made considerable and cheering progress.

Benevolent Associations in the North have been active and earnest in providing schools for their benefit, and are still busy with this good work. The impoverishment of the South by the war, the absence of any adequate system of public education in the Southern States, the unsettled condition of political affairs, and the lingering prejudices which have divided society in castes, have all served to hinder and postpone the establishment of any proper system of public education among the masses of the people of both races. Hence, the chief educational work has been done by northern money, northern enterprise and northern teachers. It is a good and great work which has been thus accomplished. It was the only method in which the education of any considerable number of the people could have been secured.

But this was a temporary and partial supply. The people of the North cannot undertake to provide the money and the teachers to educate the masses of the southern people, black or white. It would involve a drain upon the wealth, the generosity and the intelligence of the northern people which they cannot bear. And the people of the South neither desire to have this work done for them, nor would it be for their benefit if we were to do it. Their interest in public education is already awaking and spreading, and they are gradually repairing the wastes of war by the organization of their industry.

Their present lack is teachers, quite as much as money. And the time has come for us to direct our efforts to the work of aiding to provide the needed teachers from among themselves. To do this requires the establishment of NORMAL SCHOOLS, in which the pupils who have already mastered the rudiments of education, and who have the capacity to become good teachers, may be trained for that special work. Natives of the South can gain the confidence of the people and adapt themselves to the state of things in that section more readily than northern born instructors are able to do. A

southern teacher, well trained in a Normal School, will be able to live at the South at half the cost of supporting a northern teacher of equal ability, and can work with double the advantages. *To raise up teachers for the southern people from among themselves is, therefore, the great work of to-day.* It is at once the most effective and economical method in which we can operate, and it will bring our northern effort to the speediest end and by the shortest and smoothest road.

A company of 25 gentlemen have secured an Act of Incorporation under the name of “The Commission for the promotion of Education in the South,” for the purpose of aiding this good work. A Normal School will be opened at Harper's Ferry, West Va., on the first day of October, 1867. A benevolent gentleman in Maine has given Ten Thousand Dollars to assist this undertaking, on condition that an equal amount shall be raised for the same purpose on or before January 1, 1868. The larger part of this sum is already secured, and agents are at work obtaining funds with very cheering success. Much more than this amount is likely to be secured before the time specified. In addition to this, a liberal grant of money is assured us from the Freedman's Bureau. It is very desirable that ample funds should be secured immediately, while the wants are so pressing, so that the work may go forward on a large scale. Prompt effort is especially demanded. A given amount of funds now will accomplish much more than will be possible a year hence.

We commend this educational enterprise to the sympathy and co-operation of every Christian, philanthropist and patriot. It is a most important undertaking, such as alone can properly end the work done by our soldiers in the field. They saved the nation, this will ennoble it; they wrought out the freedom of the slave, this will make his liberty a treasure to himself and his life a blessing to the country.

The work is specially undertaken in aid of the Freedmen, but as will be seen by reference to the “Regulations,” the school will be open to both sexes, and no pupil will be excluded on account of race or color. Provision is made for building the Institution into a College at some future day, but the Normal School work will be the main thing probably for some years to come.

The names of the members of the Commission will be found herewith. Donations may be sent either to the Treasurer or to the Assistant Treasurer, as may be preferred, and will be duly acknowledged.

In behalf of the Commission,

GEO. T. DAY,
I. D. STEWART, *Committee.*
S. CURTIS,

Dover, N. H., August 15, 1867.

that all our institutions shoul^t be open to black students. Why should we now build a college from which white students shall be excluded? Away with all caste. I fear this is a snare for us. What do devil has moved a Congregationalist to tempt us with.

Gens truly,

James Colder.
Historical



I have received
a letter from Dr. Cheves this eve. saying tho
you will not be here to participate in our
convention, and requesting me to forward
to you a letter previously received from him.

I regret to hear that you will not be
with us, as I am sure you could have
helped us much in our plans for missionary
work. I could not get a fair ticket in
advance for you, but had made an arrange-
ment which would have amounted to the
same thing:

His plan for a "Colored College" does not
strike me favorably. We, as a denomination,
profess to be opposed to caste, and claim that

Opposing Voices

Letter by First Lady Varina Banks Howell Davis (right)

Considering that educating slaves was potentially a capital offense in Virginia prior to the Civil War, it is not surprising that the establishment of schools for that express purpose was opposed by many southerners. The author of the letter at right, Varina Banks Howell Davis, was once the First Lady of the Confederacy, Mrs. Jefferson Davis. As late as 1906, in a letter to a friend in Weston, West Virginia, Davis decries "education of the black race" warning apocalyptically that "if the whites do nothing we shall soon have an educated horde of bridle idlers who will trample on the poor creatures of our race and ruin our country."



Letter by James Colder, First Free Baptist Church, Harrisburg, PA (left)

The creation of a college exclusively for African Americans evidently had opponents within the Freewill Baptist church itself. In the March 17, 1867 letter at left, Pastor James Colder of Harrisburg writes, "This plan for a 'Colored College' does not strike me favorably.... Why should we...build a college from which white students shall be excluded...?" Colder goes on to point out that excluding white students, should they wish to attend, was in effect reverse discrimination. It was perhaps in response to such opinions that Storer College's acts of incorporation, written six months later, included the provision that the school would be open to all races.

our own poor factory and country people. In the meanwhile the Northern, so called, philanthropists and men with more millions than they need are pouring them into the Tuskegee hopper and if the whites do nothing we shall soon have an educated ~~pop~~ bunch of idlers "heeled" with knowledge who will trample on the poor creatures of our race and ruin our country - I want to talk with you about this, and should like your opinion about it - With every good wish for you and yours, believe me dear Mrs Bennett

yours faithfully
V. Jefferson Davis.

April 6th 1906.

183.00.444.2d.

My Dear Mrs. Bennett,
Your card will be
sure to Mrs. Brackell who will
go to the lecture with a great
interest. I am not equal to the
emotion of going at night.
I trust you will come to
me soon again not for
short a visit as the last
you kindly made to me.
There is one subject

circular. He will probably give to Normal schools in scholarship say \$75 or \$100 for each student and of this, the institution would probably have one half for tuition, and the student the other half towards his board. Gen. Howard is hoping for aid to his school, as Dr. Sears says he sees no reason why we may not stand on the same ground as Gen. H's school. I shall write Gen. H. as soon as you return me the paper signed, and shall suggest to him several points, as Dr. S. will consult him in a few days. Dr. S. leaves next week - is to visit the South. If we can establish a first class Normal School at the Ferry in connection with our University - Stanton University, don't laugh) I have no doubt but that we

ference in the paper I send you. Will you please sign it, if you approve it, and return it to me by first mail. I am instructed by Bros. Collier and Ball to ask Gen. Howard to make his conditional subscription to this "provisional committee", for the reason that he may die, or Johnson may remove him before we can get incorporated. If he will make the subscription to us, we will give bonds for the safe keeping of the funds.

I left Harrisburg Tuesday morning for New York, and N. Y. yesterday morning leave for home this morning - called on Dr. Sears last evening - gave him your address - send you one of his circulars. You see the plan in the

"opos" o.n.c.

N. B. Please sign your name on the paper at Stanton, Va. I shall send the paper to Bros. Day, Knobell, Bentis, Brewster, and Goodman for their signature - but shall go first and consult Bro. Storer.

AM 2621/B2/E2

Stanton University???

In this remarkable letter of April 25, 1867, Oren Cheney reports to Freewill Baptist leadership his successful appeal to U.S. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton for the transfer of Lockwood House and three other buildings recently abandoned by the military for use by the Freewill Baptist Mission School. Stanton's consent prompted Cheney to suggest that the institution be named "Stanton University." "Don't laugh," he added!

Cheney and Stanton

Freewill Baptist Educator Oren B. Cheney (1816-1903)

In addition to playing a key role in founding Storer College, Cheney was the founder of Bates College in Lewiston, Maine.

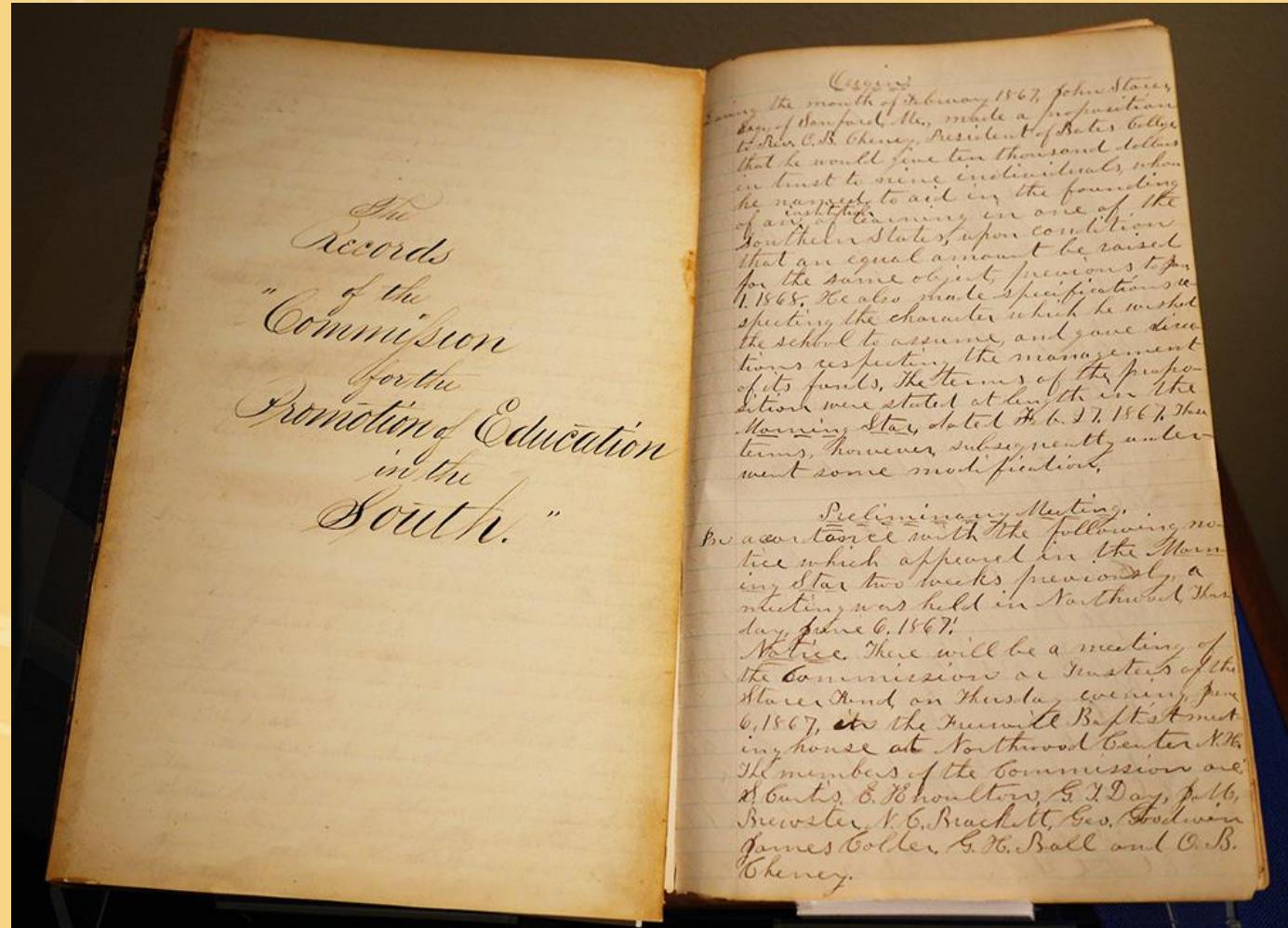
Spectacles of U.S. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton (1814-1869)

As Lincoln's Secretary of War, it was Stanton who approved the transfer of Lockwood House and three other Federal buildings to the Freewill Baptist Mission School initiative in 1867.



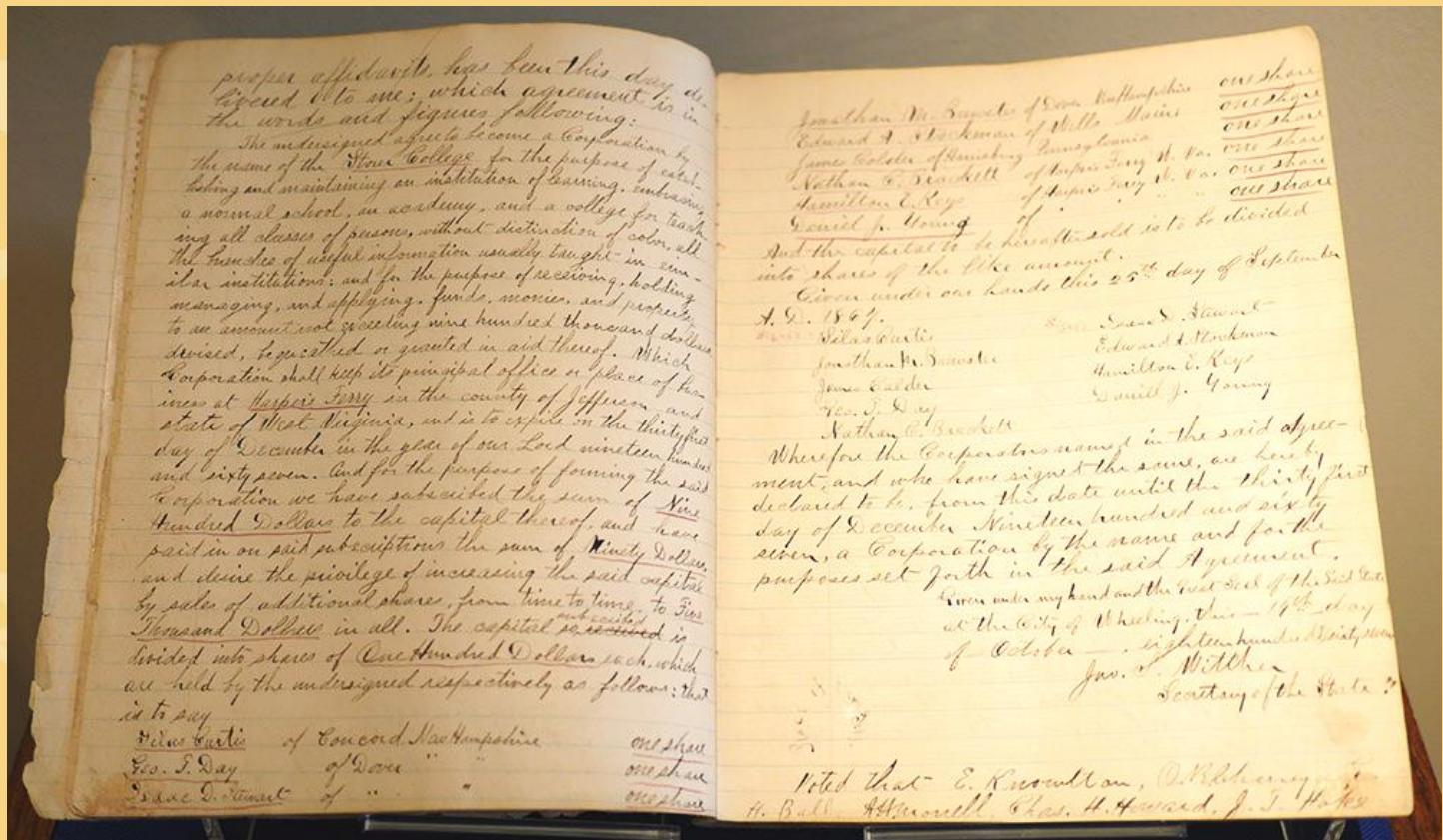
“To raise up teachers for the Southern people from among themselves...”

The Commission for the Promotion of Education in the South was established by the Freewill Baptist Church and incorporated by the New Hampshire legislature to raise, receive and transfer funds to the new institution, Storer College. Among the members were Nathan Brackett, Silas Curtis and Frederick Douglass.



Original Articles of Incorporation and Stockholders Minute Book to Storer College

"The undersigned agree to become a Corporation by the name of Storer College for the purpose of establishing and maintaining an institution of learning embracing a normal school, an academy, and a college for teaching all classes of persons without distinction of color, all the branches of useful information usually taught in similar institutions..."

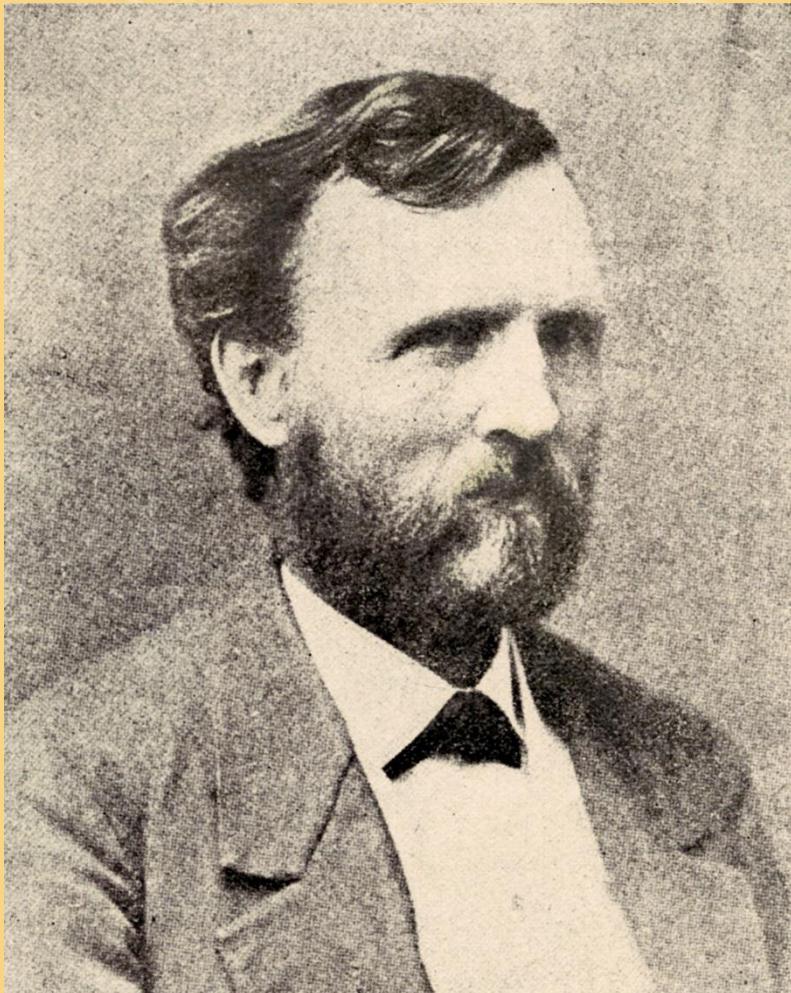


Lockwood House, the first home of the Harpers Ferry Mission School

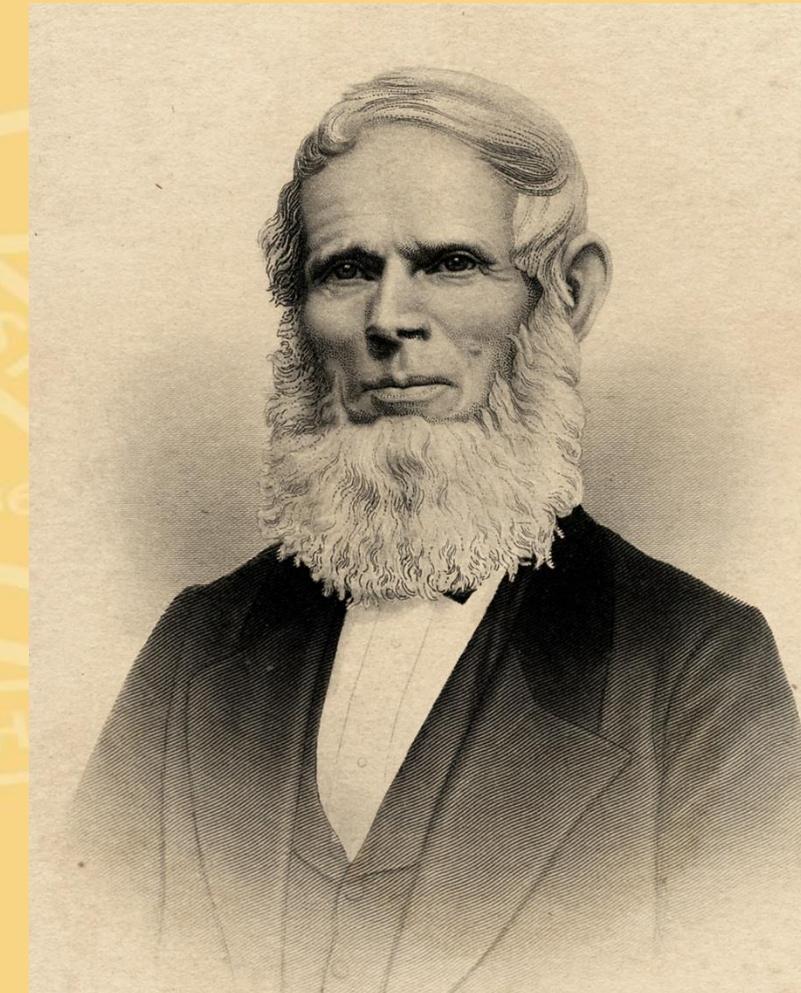
From *Frank Leslie's
Illustrated News*,
September 3, 1864



Nathan Cook Brackett (1836-1910)
President of Storer College, 1865-1897



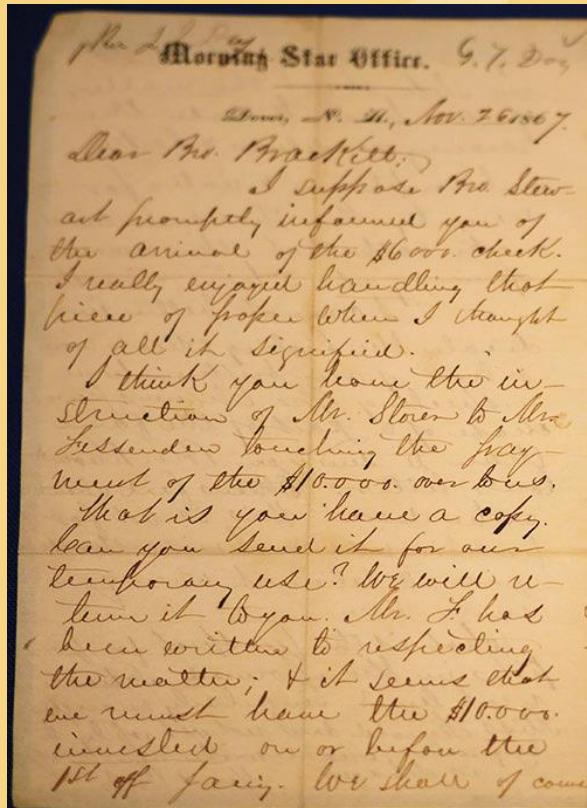
John Storer (1796-1867)
Benefactor of Storer College



Making the Dream a Reality

"I really enjoyed handling that piece of paper"
Rev. Day to Brother Brackett, November 26, 1867

In this letter to Nathan Brackett, Reverend George Tiffany Day expresses his joy at personally holding a check for \$6,000 from the Freedman's Bureau. The check helped fulfill the goal of raising \$10,000 in funds to match John Storer's pledge of \$10,000.

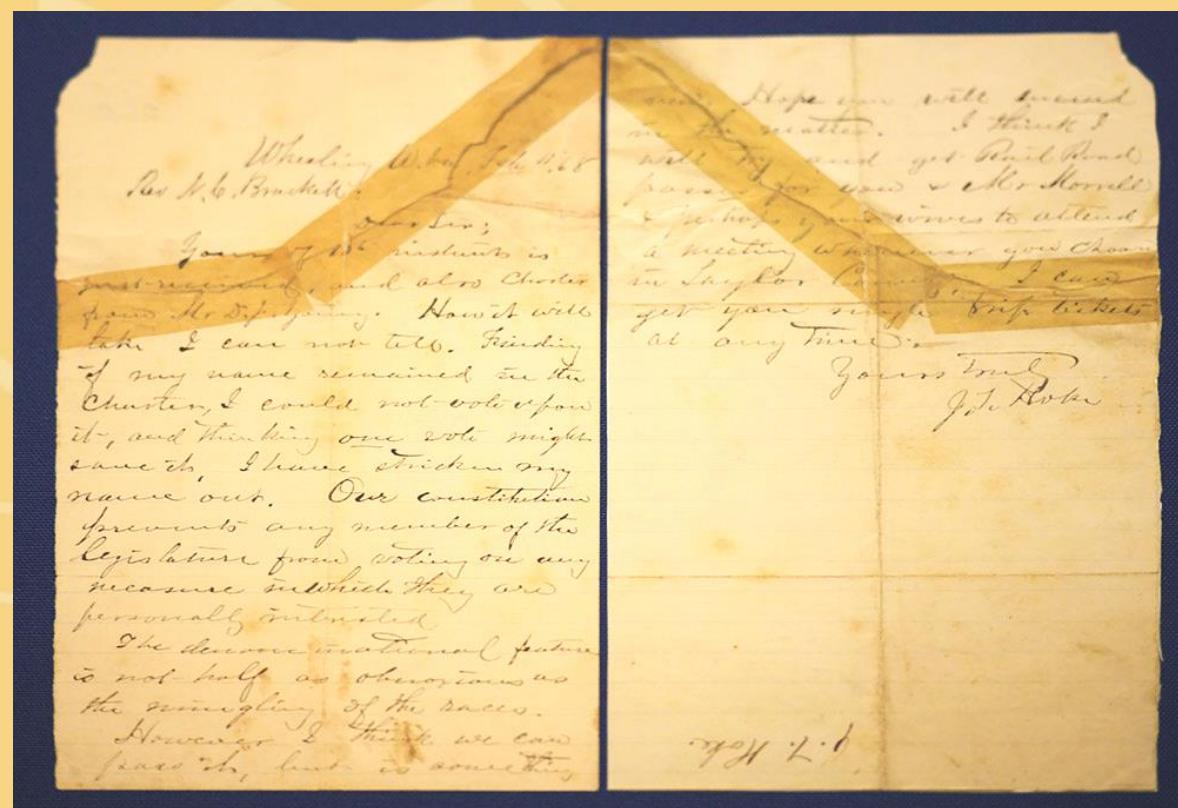


try to see that there is no slip about the matter, if we have to call the money ourselves, & to be substitutions & votes for security, the Treasurer must make oath that this amount of money is on hand & invested. I cannot better indicate the feeling which more or less of our brethren have respecting Bro. Cheney's purchase of a part of the farm than to send you Bro. Knowlton's letter. Others feel about as he does. This is not for public use, & I will enclose it when you write me.

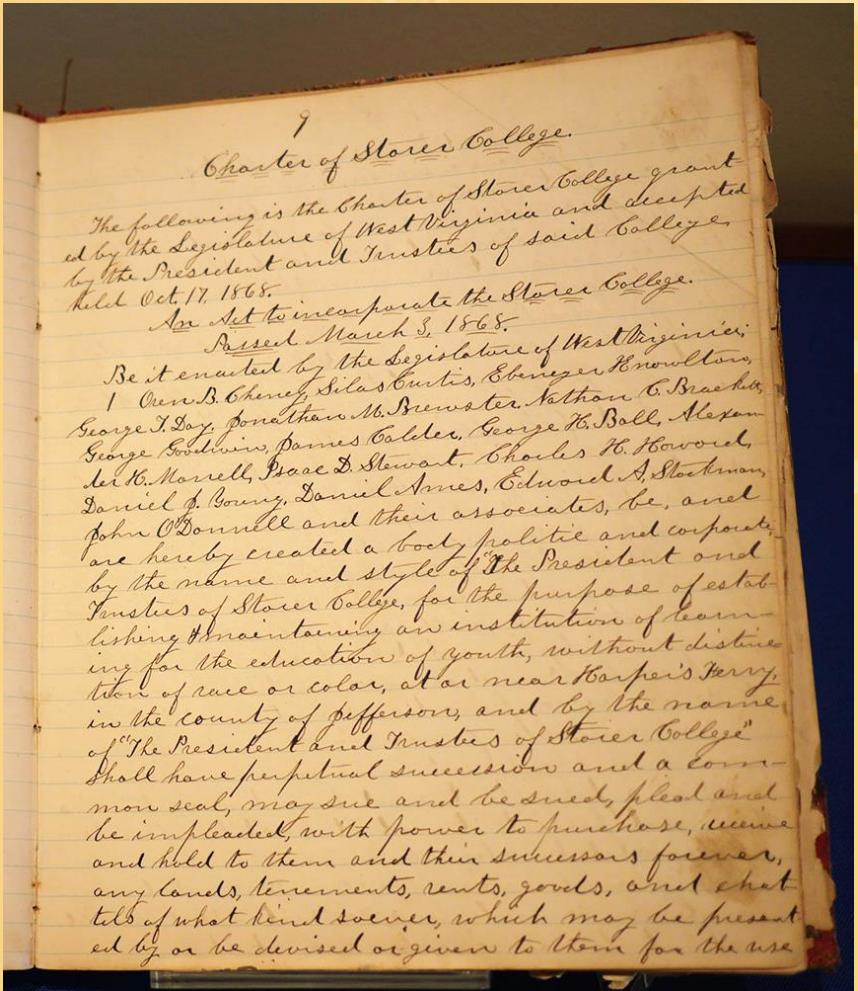
What is the prospect for pupils in the Normal School next term? Singularly enough Miss Lyndon does not yet reply to my note. Shall write again if it is delayed. Yours truly
Geo. T. Day

"I hope you will succeed in the matter"

Joseph Hoke, WV State Senator from Martinsburg and a member of the *Commission for the Promotion of Education in the South*, wrote to Brackett during the 1868 legislative session, stating his belief that the Senate's vote on the Storer Charter would be close. Fearing that his vote may not count due to a conflict of interest, Hoke declared he would resign from the Commission in order to vote for the charter.



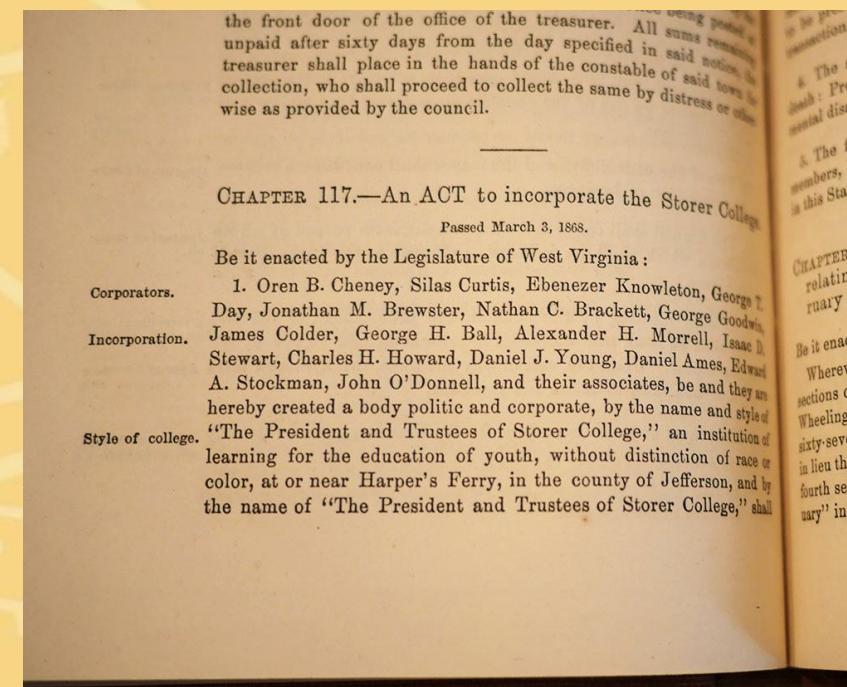
The Incorporation of Storer College



Charter of Storer College, Record Book No. 1 (left)

William P. Hubbard, Clerk of the House of Delegates, transcribed the legislative act that provided for the incorporation of Storer College. The Act includes language that created Storer as a racially integrated school "...for the purpose of establishing & maintaining an institution of learning for the education of youth, without distinction of race or color..."

West Virginia Legislature, "An Act to Incorporate the Storer College," Passed March 3, 1868



Looking Down the Shenandoah River from Camp Hill, Harpers Ferry



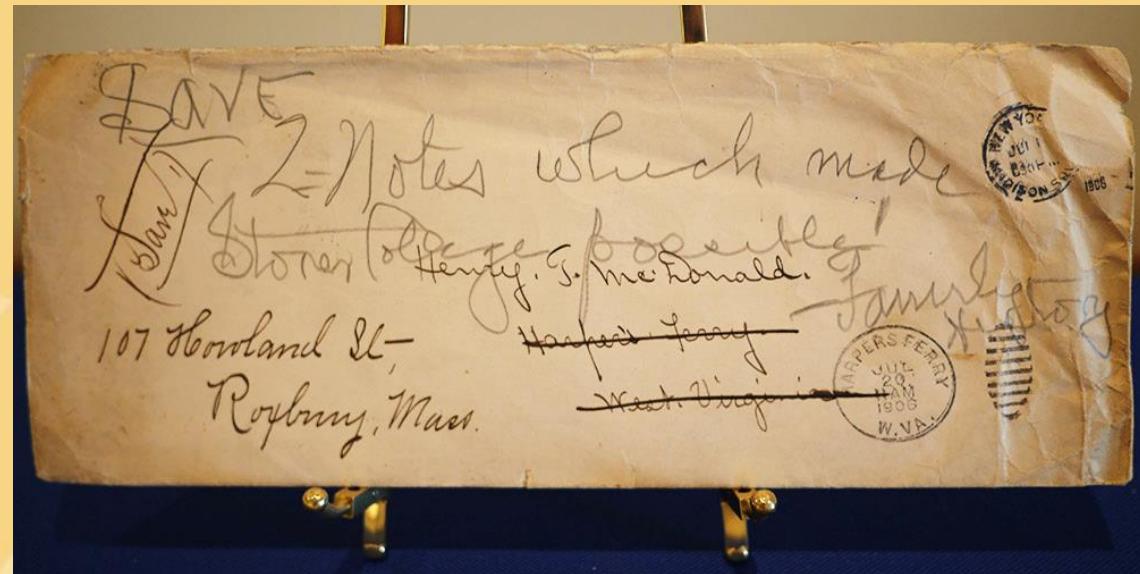
LOOKING DOWN THE SHENANDOAH RIVER FROM CAMP HILL. HARPER'S FERRY, W. VA.

This scene affords an excellent view of Lockwood House at upper left.

“2 Notes Which Made Storer Possible”

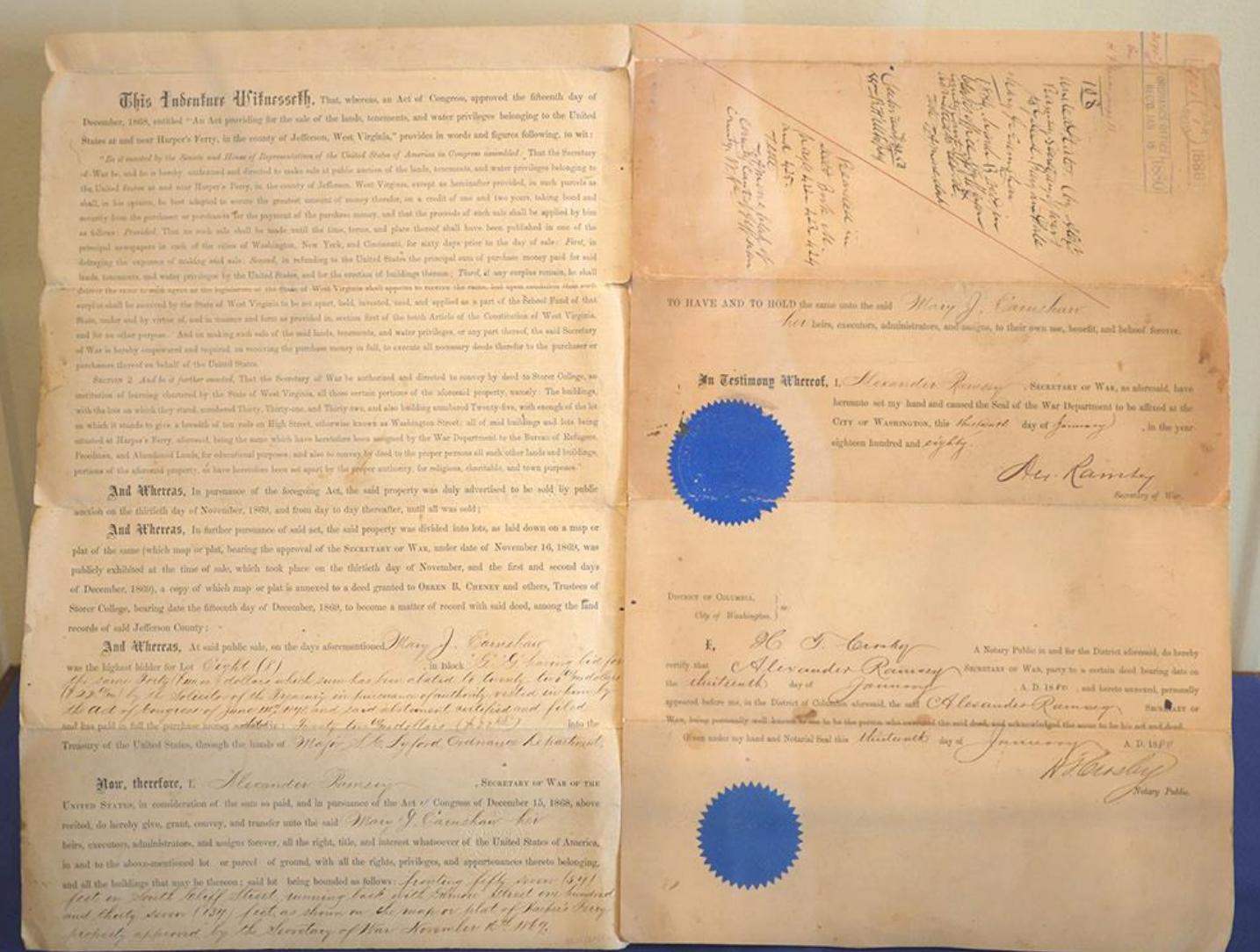
These two notes totaling \$2300 represented part of the funds needed to match

John Storer's grant of \$10,000 to found Storer College. The matching fund total was raised with the tremendous help of a \$6,000 contribution from the Freedmen's Bureau. Note the revenue stamps on the back of the drafts. These designate that taxes were paid on the transactions. The handwriting on the envelope quoted above is believed to be that of Storer President Henry McDonald.



The Deed to Storer College

This document legally transferred four buildings and the land upon which they stood to Storer College, fulfilling Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton's 1867 pledge to Oren Cheney.



Looking Towards the Gap from Camp Hill, Harpers Ferry, W. Va.

This “sepia albertype” postcard shows the hill upon which the Storer campus rests.

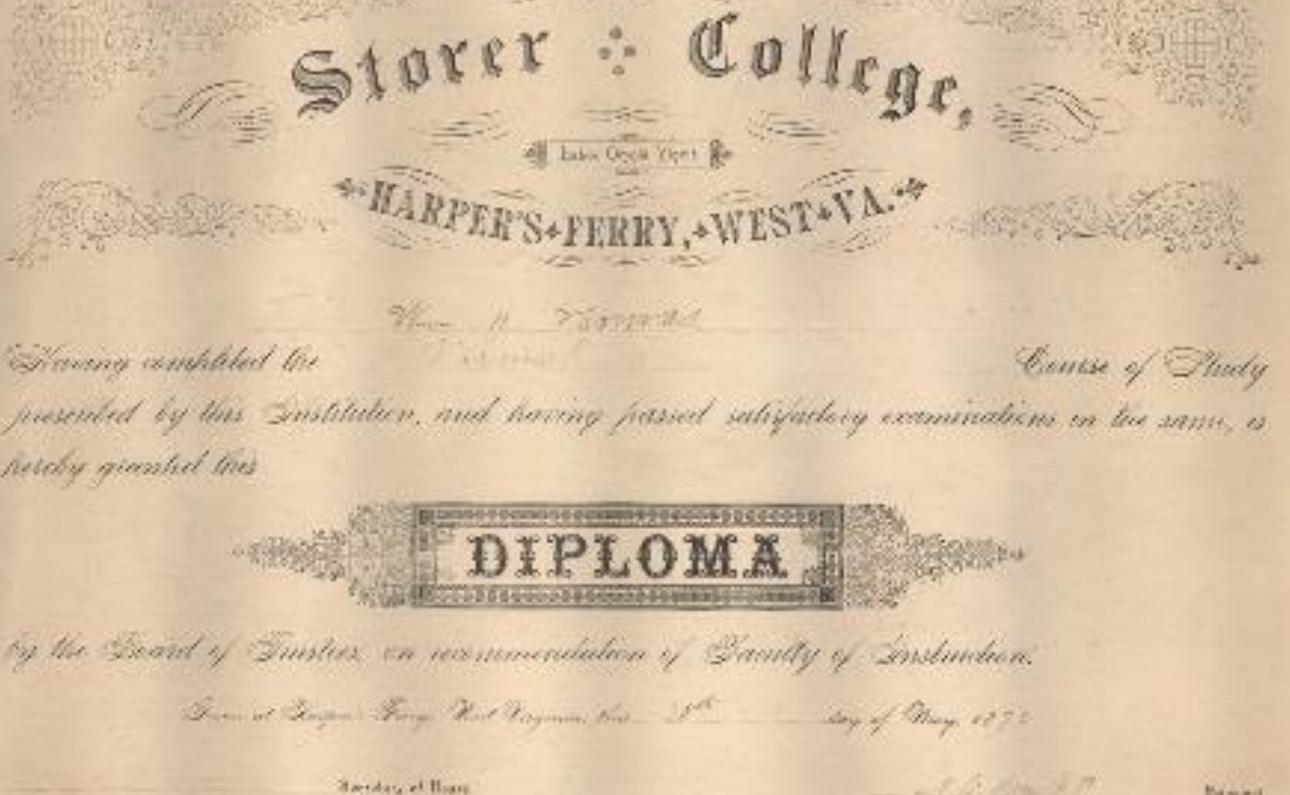
Lockwood House is indicated as number ‘(1)’ at the ‘x’ at the top of the hill. Numbers 2, 3, 4, and 5, denote Brackett, McDowell, and Franklin halls and the Storer Gymnasium.

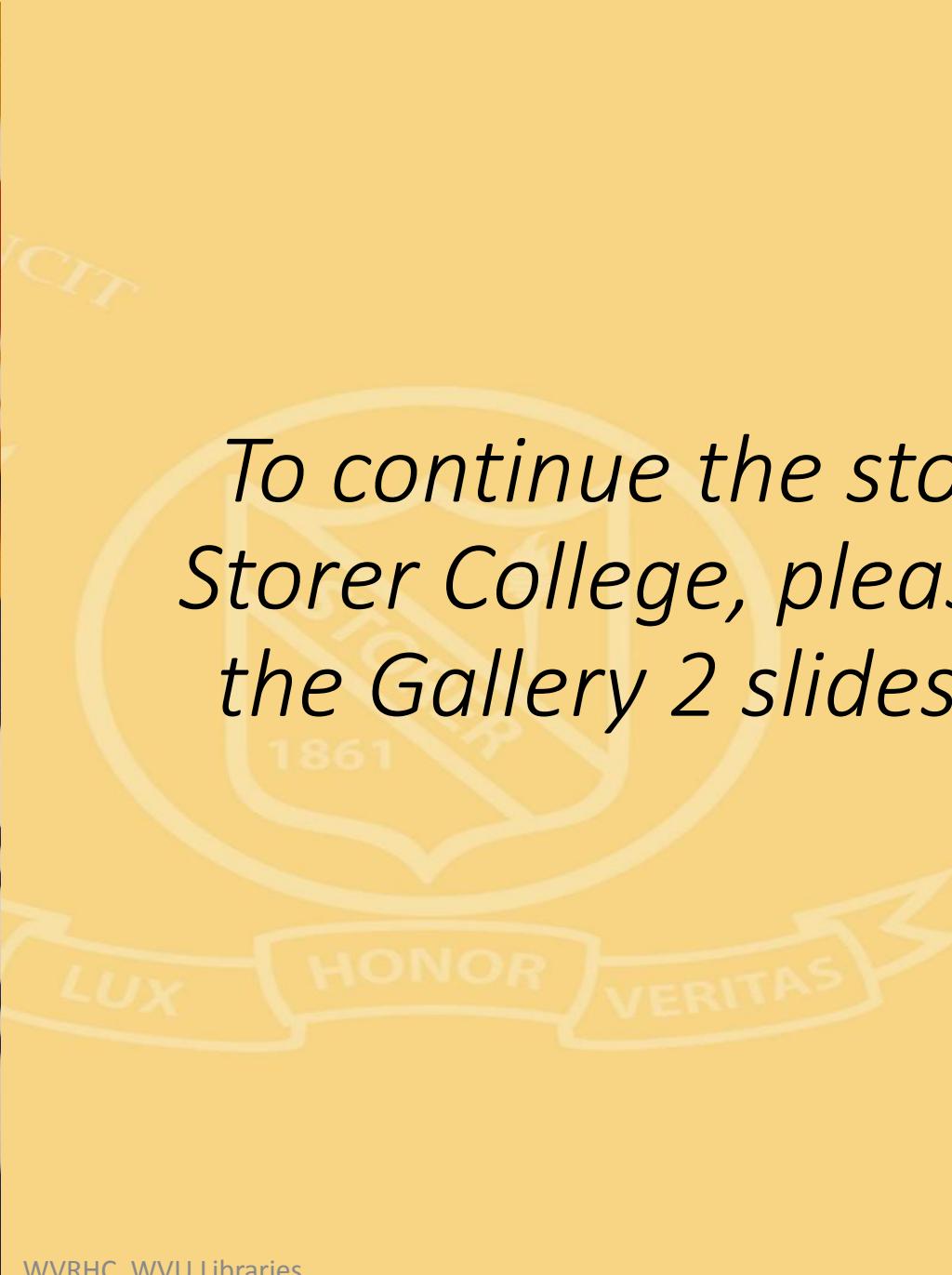


Early Storer College Diploma

The founders of Storer College forged a school offering ‘higher education’ at assorted levels consisting of three divisions -- a preparatory academy, or high school, a normal school for training school teachers, and a college division.

This diploma was conferred to William H. Thomas, a graduate of the Normal School program, on May 30, 1872. After graduation, Thomas continued his education at another institution, eventually earning a Doctor of Theology degree. In 1909, Dr. Thomas settled in Newport, Rhode Island, where he became the leader of the A. M. E. (African Methodist Episcopal Church) New England Conference in 1909.





*To continue the story of
Storer College, please see
the Gallery 2 slideshow.*