Slave Redemption refers to the practice of purchasing, or otherwise acquiring, the freedom of slaves before and during the American Civil War. This was typically accomplished through the support of abolitionist groups in the North.

Master Ayres

Charles Rufus Ayres of Fauquier County, Virginia was murdered by his neighbors in 1859 in a dispute over a farm gate. This incident changed the lives of his family, friends, and slaves forever.

Charles Rufus Ayres was the only son of Charles Wesley Ayres and Catherine “Kitty” A.M. Floweree. He went by his middle name, Rufus, likely to distinguish himself from his father. Rufus Ayres was orphaned at an early age. In 1837, his widowed mother married Alfred Rector, a prosperous merchant for whom the village of Rectortown, Fauquier County is named.

Rufus attended Yale University in 1843, leaving after one year. He later attended the University of Virginia from 1847 to 1849. Although he was educated as a lawyer, Rufus apparently preferred the life of a farmer. By mid-nineteenth century standards Rufus was also very wealthy.

At 2 o’clock in the afternoon on Friday, November 11, 1859, Rufus Ayres was conducting business in Rectortown, Virginia when he encountered his neighbor, forty-four-year-old, William Wesley Phillips. According to eye-witness, Nelson Gibson, the two men, who had been involved in a dispute over a farm gate, got into an argument.

The argument escalated. Ayres, who was armed with a Colt revolver, menaced Phillips with the weapon.
At the Fairfax Museum and Historic Blenheim...

Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center

New Exhibit at Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center

Opened July 4:


The Fairfax Story - Hamill Gallery. Permanent Fairfax history exhibition.

Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center

“Second Sunday” Programs

Programs are held at 2 p.m. on the second Sunday of each month. Unless otherwise noted, programs are held at the Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center, 10209 Main Street. Free (unless noted). Check back to find out about additional programs planned throughout the year. Information: 703-385-8414.

Sunday, March 8, 2 p.m.

“The Suffrage Prisoners at Occoquan Workhouse”

Alice Reagan, Professor of History at Northern Virginia Community College, will look at the women imprisoned at nearby Lorton for Picketing in Washington, D.C. in 1917 for the right to vote.

Sunday, April 10, 2 p.m.

“Discovering the Universality of the Soldier Experience”

Andrew H. Talkov, Vice-President for Programs, Virginia Historical Society will use drawings and photographs to explore the experiences of soldiers in the Civil War and the Vietnam War.

Welcome New Members!

The President & Board of Directors of HFCl extends a hearty welcome to all new HFCl members.

Philip Anton Patricia Hall
David & Claudia Brown Edward & Elaine Senft
Michael Cherworth

Volunteers and docents are sought for the city’s historic buildings: Ratcliffe-Allison House, Historic Blenheim and the Civil War Interpretive Center and Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center. Additionally, volunteers may be interested in assisting with walking tours and special events. For information email or call 703-385-8415.

The city has published a free self-guided walking tour brochure that provides a brief history of the city and noteworthy buildings in the Old Town Fairfax Historic District. This brochure is available from the Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center, 10209 Main Street, or call 703-385-8414.

Select historic buildings are open during city special events, including the Chocolate Lovers Festival, Civil War Weekend, Independence Day Celebration, Fall Festival and Festival of Lights and Carols. To arrange group tours of city-owned historic buildings email or call 703-385-8414.

The Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. It includes a variety of building and monument types and styles, including:

Fairfax Courthouse (1800)

Ratcliffe-Allison House (1812)

Joshua Gunnell House (c.1830)

William Gunnell House (c.1835)

Ford House (c.1835)

Fairfax Elementary School (1873)*

Old Fairfax Jail (1885)

Old Town Hall (1900)

Marr Monument (1904)

*Fairfax Elementary School was converted into the Fairfax Museum & Visitor Center in 1992.

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Sunday, May 9, 2 p.m.

“Dr. Kate Waller Barrett: More than a Mother to Many”

Curator Susan Inskeep Gray will explore Dr. Barrett’s contributions to Progressive Era reform initiatives beyond her leadership of the National Florence Crittenton Foundation, which established homes for unwed mothers and their children.

Historic Blenheim Civil War Interpretive Center

“Blenheim’s Civil War Soldier Signatures: A Diary on Walls”

Permanent Civil War Soldier Graffiti exhibition.

Historic Blenheim Civil War Interpretive Center Program Series

Programs are free and held at the Civil War Interpretive Center at Historic Blenheim, 3610 Old Lee Highway (unless otherwise noted). Check back to find out about additional programs planned throughout the year. Information: 703-591-0560.

HOURS BEGINNING JAN. 2014: 10am to 3pm, Tuesday through Saturday. 1 p.m. guided tour of historic house and site. FREE.

Saturday, February 28, 2 p.m.

“SPECIAL WWII Program

“D-Day (+1) thru The Battle of the Bulge: The 70th Anniversary”

Local historian and author Jim Lewis will recount the American battles across France and Germany from June-December 1944.

Saturday, March 21, 2 p.m.

“The Richmond-Petersburg Campaign, October 1864”

Hampton Newsome will describe the October 1864 battles between Grant and Lee in Virginia. He will examine the Confederate attacks along the Darbytown Road on October 7 outside Richmond, one of Lee’s last offensive operations of the war. The talk will also cover Grant’s major offensive on October 27 to seize the South Side Railroad, the last open rail line into the Confederate stronghold at Petersburg. Mr. Newsome is the author of Richmond Must Fall: The Richmond-Petersburg Campaign of 1864, and an editor of Civil War Talks: Further Reminiscences of George S. Bernard and His Fellow Veterans.

Saturday, April 25, 2 p.m.

“Fairfax Civil War Day” 10 A.M. - 5 P.M. at Historic Blenheim


Saturday, May 30, 2 p.m.

“William ‘Extra Billy’ Smith: The Governor’s Odyssey”

Following the collapse of the Confederate lines at Petersburg on April 2, 1865, Governor Extra Billy, began his “odyssey”—a thousand-mile journey to take the pulse of Virginia citizens, govern the Commonwealth, and to avoid capture by the Federal Army. Living historian Dave Meisky, portrays Extra Billy Smith as a member of Lee’s Lieutenants.

Other Information of Interest:

Walking Tour

11 am Guided walking tour (approx. 90 min.) of Old Town Fairfax with stops at the Fairfax County Courthouse, several antebellum homes with a Civil War history, and the City of Fairfax Cemetery (formerly Fairfax Confederate Cemetery).

Location: Meet at Fairfax Museum and Visitors center, 10209 Main Street, Fairfax 703-385-8414. Wear comfortable shoes and bring water.
Phillips, who was unarmed, mounted his horse and started to ride off. He turned and insulted Ayres with a parting epithet, "You are a damned son of a bitch!" Highly offended, Ayres lashed out at Phillips with a small riding crop that he was carrying. William then rode off ominously exclaiming to Ayres, "You'll pay for that." Phillips returned to his house which was located a mile or so outside of town. He armed himself with a rifle and an Allen revolver. He returned to Rectortown on horseback accompanied by his oldest son, eighteen-year-old, Samuel C. Phillips, who was armed with a double-barreled shotgun.

The two men searched all over town inquiring of several people as to Ayres whereabouts. They were about to give up, when the Phillips’ stopped in front of Andrew Crider’s shoemaker shop. They encountered an unidentified man standing in front of the shop. They asked him for a piece of paper as they wished to leave a message for Rufus Ayres. The man opened the door of the shop to retrieve the requested paper, unaware that Ayres was inside. Ayres, who had heard Phillips outside, already had his Colt revolver in his hand and was moving toward the open door. The unidentified witness immediately seized Ayres and pushed him back inside the shop and tried to restrain him. Hearing the commotion inside, Phillips and his son dismounted and leveled their guns at the window.

From inside the shop, Rufus Ayres shouted, “Let me go, they will shoot me through the window.” William Phillips allegedly called out to Ayres, “Have you got your pistol now? If you have, I've come to kill you.” Ayres replied that he did. The unidentified individual holding Ayres called out to Andrew Crider to hold Ayres while he went back outside in an attempt to restrain Phillips. Rufus Ayres broke free and advanced to the window and fired at the elder Phillips. The shot missed. Ayres then moved to the open door and fired a second shot, missing Phillips again. Simultaneously, William Phillips discharged his rifle. The shot struck Ayres in the left breast. Ayres staggered backward, clutching the wound with his right hand, exclaiming “They have got me through the heart.” Samuel Phillips then fired his shotgun. The blast struck Ayres in the hand and the breast. Ayres fell backward, dead. He was just thirty-three-years old.

William Samuel Phillips were immediately arrested. They were refused bail and placed in the Faquier County Jail.6

On Sunday, November 13, 1859, Charles Rufus Ayres was buried in the “Church-yard of the village, followed by a large concourse of sympathizing friends and relations.” The Reverend Charles H. Shield of the Rectortown Episcopal Church “gave some very appropriate remarks.”8

The Rectortown Episcopal Church, South was disbanded by Union soldiers under General George B. McClellan in the fall of 1862. Its former location is the Rectortown Episcopal Church-yard of the village, Alexandria Gazette, December 6, 1859, p. 2, c. 7.

Three weeks later, William and Samuel Phillips were arraigned on murder charges. They were tried the following spring in Faquier County Circuit Court before Judge John Webb Tyler. The case was prosecuted by Rufus Ayres friend and executor, William H.F. Payne, Commonwealth’s Attorney for Faquier County. Both men were convicted of manslaughter and were sentenced to 3 years in the State Penitentiary in Richmond, Virginia by an angry Judge Tyler.9

**Freedom?**

The murder of Rufus Ayres was a senseless tragedy. At the time of his death Rufus Ayres was considered a wealthy man. He owned more than 500 acres of land that surrounded the village of Rectortown, Virginia.10 His farm included the Milan Mill and adjoined the Rectortown Depot on the Manassas Gap Railroad.11 Rufus likely benefited substantially from the relationship with his step-father, Alfred Rector, who owned a store and a grain warehouse substantially from the relationship with his step-father, Alfred Rector, who owned a store and a grain warehouse.12

*It bequeath two hundred and fifty dollars yearly to Harriet E. Rector, while she lives a modest, virtuous and single life away from the Rector family.*13,14

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7 Follow The Drinking Gourd was an African American slave song sung by conductors on the Underground Railroad to transmit encoded instructions, in song, to slaves escaping Northern states. The term “drinking gourd” simply refers to a hollowed out gourd used by slaves as a water dipper. But this term is used in this passage as a code name for the Little Dipper constellation which is visible in the night sky year round. The last star in the “handle” of the Little Dipper is Polaris, the North Star, the slaves would easily be able to recognize this constellation and by travelling at night could follow a North to freedom.

*Opponent of Slavery and Intemperance…,* © 1896, J.B. Lyon, Albany, NY.

14 Lawrence, Autobiography, 148.

8 Lawrence, Autobiography, 143.

9 Lawrence, Autobiography, 149.

10 Lawrence, Autobiography, 141.


15 Lawrence, Autobiography, 149.

16 Lawrence, Autobiography, 160.

17 Lawrence, Autobiography, 166.

18 Lawrence, Autobiography, 166.

19 Lawrence, Autobiography, 184.

20 Lawrence, Autobiography, 184.

21 Lawrence, Autobiography, 184.

22 Lawrence, Autobiography, 184.

23 Lawrence, Autobiography, 184.
She volunteered as a nurse for the Union army in 1861. She was sent to Washington, DC and from there to the Convalescent Hospital on Seminary Hill, Alexandria, Virginia. It was here, in late 1863 that she first encountered Viana, Sallie, and Fanny Ayres.

In 1873, Catherine Lawrence lost her home for non-payment of a debt.

"Catherine Lawrence’s place in the village of Mexico, was sold at sheriff’s sale this morning by Sheriff Lyman, on a small execution, and was bought by S.R. Spooner (or the amount of the execution, about $90)."

In 1875, Catherine, now destitute, applied for and received a pension for her service as a Nurse during the Civil War. She also relied on the charity of friends.

Catherine S. Lawrence published her autobiography titled: Autobiography: Sketch of the Life and Labors of Miss Catherine S. Lawrence, who In Early Life Distinguished Herself as a Bitter Opponent of Slavery and Intemperance in 1893. The primary focus of the book is her life as a Union army nurse and the adoption of Viana, Sallie, and Fanny.

In 1900, Catherine S. Lawrence “writer” was boarding in the home of James R. Main, Ballston, Saratoga County, New York. She died in Albany, New York in 1904 and is interred at the Old Stone Fort Cemetery, Schoharie, NY.

The Catherine S. Lawrence Tent 107 of the Capital District Daughters of the Union Veterans of the Civil War, in Albany County, New York is named in her honor.

Stephen Lawrence (1773-1832) and Maria Mann (1775-1883). Children of Stephen and Maria Lawrence: - Matthew Lawrence, infant son; Old Stone Fort Cem. Schoharie, NY. - Maria Lawrence b. 1794 - Henry Lawrence (1798-1888); m. Catherine Rinehart (1799-1844); bur. Old Stone Fort Cem. Schoharie, NY.

In a later codicil, he cut Harriet Rector, his step-sister, out of his will entirely:

“I hereby revoke the above bequest to H.E. Rector being satisfied from circumstances I have ascertained that she is in every respect unworthy of any honorable consideration.”

Although he was a Union man, Rufus was also a slaveholder. According to his estate records he owned at least 12 slaves. Like many slaveholders, Rufus, who was unmarried, took full advantage of the relationship and had at least three children by his slaves Mary Fletcher, Jane Payne, and Ann Gleaves. However, unlike most slaveholders, he acknowledged them and provided for them in his last will and testament.

Well my ol’ missus promised me,
Raise a rukus tonight
When she died she’d let me free,
Raise a rukus tonight
She live so long dat her head got bal’,
Raise a rukus tonight
De Lawd couldn’t kill her wid a big green maul,
Raise a rukus tonight

In his will, Rufus Ayres freed all three women and their children and provided “five hundred dollars, or some sufficient sum of money for their settlement in a free state.” Rufus also stipulated in his will that “the two oldest children of Mary, Vianna & Sallie, and the oldest child of Gleaves and Jane, each after it reaches the age of ten years old, one hundred dollars annually a piece, to be applied in raising and educating them.”

Although Jane, Mary, and Ann were now free, all three women faced an impossible choice — leave Virginia, or return voluntarily to slavery.

A Virginia law, enacted in 1806, required that emancipated slaves and free blacks had to leave the state unless they petitioned the Virginia General Assembly to remain. The act further prescribed that if slaves thereafter emancipated shall remain in the State more than twelve months thereafter they shall forfeit the right to freedom and be sold.

Additionally, in 1856, the Virginia General Assembly passed An ACT providing for the voluntary enslavement of the free Negroes of the Commonwealth. Under this statute, free female Negroes, who were at least 18 years old, and free male Negroes, who were at least 21 years old could choose their own master upon petition to the local circuit court. The children of free female Negroes, born before the voluntary enslavement of their mother, were to remain free. In her petition filed with the Fauquier County Circuit Court, on September 5, 1860, Mary Fletcher describes the choice she made and the reasons why:

“[She] was born and raised in the County of Fauquier and that all her kindred and friends are now living in the county. That she is married and her husband is a slave who could not accompany her. That she has several children, besides those provided for by the will of her late master, all of whom are young and helpless, and that if she goes away she parts from all whom she has ever known and goes, a friendless stranger, to a new state encumbered by helpless children. Your petitioner declares that she deliberately prefers slavery in Virginia to freedom outside of it.”

Ann Gleaves testified that “she prefers to remain a slave in Virginia amongst her friends and relatives, than to go amongst strangers helpless and encumbered with the child who is several years too young to enjoy the protection of her masters.”

Jane Payne testified that “she has no kindred outside of the said County of Fauquier and no friends to whom she can go. That her child, for whom temporary provision is made by her late master’s will, is several years under the age at which she can claim the benefit of this provision. That she is in delicate health and that to go alone,
encumbered with a helpless child, amongst strangers would subject her to great hardships, to avoid which, she declares, that she desires to become a slave. "23"  

All three women initially petitioned to become the slaves of William H.F. Payne; 24 the executor of Charles R. Ayres estate, and his friend. The court appears not to have acted on their petitions however, presumably because that had not first petitioned the Virginia General Assembly. On March 13, 1861, all three women received permission from the Virginia General Assembly to petition the Fauquier County Circuit Court to select a master. 25 All three then went back to court on April 1, 1861. Ann M. Rector, 26 the half-sister of Charles R. Ayres, was listed in their petition as their new prospective owner. However, when they were examined individually by Judge Tyler, all three indicated that they did not wish to be slaves to Ann Rector. Their original petitions to become the slaves of William H. Payne were formally dismissed in September 1861, and no final action appears to have been taken on the petitions to name Ann Rector as their mistress.  

Although the three women failed to choose a new master, they were still reduced to slavery. According to Virginia law they had remained in the state for more than twelve months. However, before their status could be challenged in court the Civil War began. 27

The Escape

The women returned to Rectortown and the home of Alfred Rector. There they were under the charge of Kitty Rector, Alfred’s wife, and their daughter Ann Rector. Grandma Kitty, or Kidda, as Rufus’ mother was known, was a kind and benevolent woman. Grandma Kidda told the women to remain with her until her death then make their way to Union lines. They took turns carrying Fanny, a small amount of food, they walked east toward Fairfax County and Union lines. They took turns carrying Fanny, and Fanny (Fletcher) Ayres; Bettie (Payne) Ayres; and, Selina (Gleaves) Ayres. The group likely included Jane Payne’s other daughters, Ellen and Rachel Payne, along with several other unknown slaves. They were all led by a slave by the name of Uncle Ben, who had been Rufus Ayres personal body servant.  

When de sun goes down an’ de quail call,  
Follow de drinkin’ gourd  
Den it’s time, chillun, one an’ all,  
Follow de drinkin’ gourd  
Keep a movin’ de Cap’n say,  
Follow de drinkin’ gourd.

Viana Ayres, age 12, at the time of her adoption in 1864.  
Source: Autobiographies, Sketch of the Life and Labors of Miss Catherine S. Lawrence, by Catherine S. Lawrence, © 1896.

Ann Gleaves

Ann Gleaves (May 1845-?????) m. William H. Gillison (Aug. 1835-?????) res. Bloomfield, Loudoun Co., VA in 1870; Census of 1900 res. Loudoun Co., VA also states they had been married for 35 years (1865) and had nine children, five of whom are living. In 1910, Ann Gillison was living in the home of Amelia Wilkins, her daughter. Ann Gillison, then 65 years old. She was a widow and employed as a Laundress. In 1920, Anne Gillison, “Mother-in-law;” was living in the household of John Williams who was married to Armita Wilkins age 32.  

Jane Payne was the daughter of Betty Payne and Henry Payne. She married a Sydney Payne. The known children of Jane Payne were:  
Nellie B. Payne (aka Mary Elizabeth Payne; aka Betty Payne) b. December 1859; d. 1932; m.  
William H. Peters, age 67 (1853), “widowed,” is living 100 yards from a factor market & about 100 yards from a soap factory.  

She says that Payne left her without any just cause and that if he (Payne) will not live with her she wants him to assist her in supporting his children. She states that she learned that Payne is now living with a woman (cold.) by the name of Martha Page. She says that they live above the old wharf near the “old market” & about 100 yards from a soap factory.  

I am satisfied from this woman’s statement that this man Payne has treated her badly. He should, in my opinion, be made to assist her in the support of his children.  

He also has parents here who are supported at government expense. Their names are George & Rachael Payne. They are 100 years old each and would like to see their only son Sydney.  

respectfully request that steps be taken to ascertain if this man Payne is still in Richmond & is so that he be required to assist his wife Janes in support of his children.  

I am, Sir  
Very Respectfully  
Your Obt. Servt.  
W. Augs. MacNulty  
2nd Lieut. V.R.C & Asst. Supt. Freedmen’s d.c.  

The Freedmen’s Bureau provided Jane Payne with transportation to Warrenton, Virginia in July 1866.  

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respectfully request that steps be taken to ascertain if this man Payne is still in Richmond & is so that he be required to assist his wife Janes in support of his children.

I am, Sir
Very Respectfully
Your Obt. Servt.
W. Augs. MacNulty
2nd Lieut. V.R.C & Asst. Supt. Freedmen’s d.c.

The Freedmen’s Bureau provided Jane Payne with transportation to Warrenton, Virginia in July 1866.
suggest that Mary Fletcher perhaps did not die, when, and where they indicated.

First, there is a Mary Fletcher who died in April 1866 at the Freedmen’s Village in Arlington, VA on April 29, 1866 and was buried there. This is now Arlington National Cemetery. She is buried in grave #4168.45

There is also a Freedmen’s Bureau work contract between an L.A. Scanland, of Fauquier County and a Mary Fletcher, of Alexandria, whereby Mary Fletcher agrees to work for L.A. Scanland as a house servant, in her Fauquier County home, for one year, at $4.00 a month, beginning January 17, 1867.44

Finally, there is also a Mary Fletcher, born in 1845, who is listed on the intake registers of the Freedman’s Village, with two children John, age 3, and Mary, born December 1867. In the remarks section is recorded “Homeless and Destitute.” 43 A surviving letter to Horatio N. Howard, Acting Assistant Surgeon, and Superintendent of the Freedman’s Village states the following:

“March 11, 1868
H. N. Howard, A.A.S, U.S.A

Doctor,
Will you please admit Mary Fletcher and her two children to the home at Freedman’s Village. She states that she is without a home and on account of her having two you children it is impossible for her to get a service place. I have no means for her accommodation.

I am, Sir
Very Respectfully,
Your obt. serv’t.,
S.C. Lee
Bvt. Lt Col., U.S.A.
Sub/ Asst., Comr. 40

Mary Fletcher was known to have had children other than Viana, Sallie, and Fanny.

Children of Mary Fletcher and Charles Rufus Ayres and an unknown slave:

- Viana Fletcher Ayres b. 1850; d. c. 1871.
  - o Viana A. Fletcher? m. ______ Liston
- Sarah Ann Sally Fletcher Ayres b. c. 1852; d. October 21, 1867, Lexington, MA. 67
- Fanny Ayres b. 1859; d. unknown
- John Fletcher b. 1865; d. unknown
- Mary Fletcher b. December 1867; d. unknown

Jane Payne
There is a Freedman’s Bureau work contract between a Charles Green, of Prince William County and a Jane Payne and her daughters Ellen and Rachel. In the contract, Jane Payne agreed to work for Charles Green, along with her daughters, as servants in his Prince William County home for one year, at $8.00 a month, beginning February 8, 1866. The contract further specified that Green would provide “all the necessary clothing for the child Rachel.” 41

Jane Payne apparently returned to Fauquier County after the war. A surviving letter to Lt. W.W. McNulty, Asst. Supt. states the following:

“Bureau of R.F.& A.L.
Office of the Asst. Supt.
Warrenton, Va., May 11, 1866

Bvt. Brig. Genl. O. Borwn
Asst. Coms &c.
Richmond, Va.

General
I have the honor to report that there is a colored woman living by the name of Jane Payne with three small children. She states that her husband, Sydney Payne (cold.), by who she had said children, is now and has been in Richmond, Va. since the surrender of Lee and has never during that time furnished her with anything toward the support of herself & children. This woman is now in a very delicate state of health.

... Continued next page
They would spend another night on “rebel ground” before arriving at Fort Williams, a Union army fortification just west of Alexandria, Virginia. Their route, as the crow flies, from Rectortown to Fort Williams was approximately forty-two miles, and passed directly through Fairfax Court House (now Fairfax City). However, their actual route was likely considerably longer as they had to avoid the roads, Confederate cavalry, and enemy pickets. What is true is that after traveling for two days and nights they arrived at Fort Williams as Uncle Ben would later state, “mostly dead and starved.”

After the slave escape, W.H.F. Payne, the executor of Charles R. Ayres, fearing more slaves would try and run away, sold the remaining slaves of the estate for $8,000. 36

“In the fall of 1862, being then in command of the outpost at Warrenton [I] succeeded in capturing a few of the slaves of whose plans to escape [I] had been informed. I not knowing where to keep them, and what better to do with them, sold them and I invested their proceeds in Confederate bonds.”

Catherine S. Lawrence

Just before Christmas 1862, Viana, Sallie, and twelve-year-old, Viana Ayres. With a trembling voice, Catherine asked her servant woman, “Helen, see them.” Catherine was shocked to learn that the girls were actually light-skinned slaves. Helen then pleaded with Catherine, “...[she] has no one to see to her...I’ll go with you to the other two girls, if you will take her.” Catherine responded, “Oh, Helen, not now, I am going away tomorrow, and I have no time now.”

The following day Catherine was visited by Helen and twelve-year-old, Viana Ayres. With a trembling voice, Viana said to Catherine, “This one [Fanny] you can have as your own. I have no home for myself, nor for her. I reckon she’ll be better off with you, than with me. I have a sister [Sallie] younger than I am. I reckon I must look after her some.” Catherine agreed. She was certain she could find a home for Fanny with a family in New York. She promised that she would come back the Lewis’ as Sallie was dying. The two sisters were together when Sallie died on October 21, 1867. The location of her grave is unknown.

After Sallie’s death, Doctor Lewis had the gall to write to Catherine and offer to adopt Viana. He made the same promises to adopt and educate her as he did with Sallie. The Rumsey’s, with whom Viana had been living, however, thought this was Viana’s best opportunity for a good life. Reluctantly, Catherine agreed but swore to keep an eye out for any selfish motives by Doctor Lewis. Shortly afterward, Viana was found to be living in Auburn, New York caring for Doctor Lewis’ mother, a virtual slave. While Doctor Lewis never formally adopted Viana, her name was changed to Mary Ayres Lewis. 37 Viana (aka Mary) likely divided her time between the home of Doctor Lewis’ mother, Delecta Barbour Lewis, who lived at 43 Perrine Street in Auburn, and the home of Doctor Lewis’ brother, Loran L. Lewis, who lived at 48 Franklin Street in Auburn. 38 In fact, the 1871-72 directory for the city of Auburn lists a “Mary J. Lewis, domestic” at 48 Franklin Street.

In January 1871, Catherine received word that Viana was sick at Auburn, New York. She had a bad cough and cold. However, she succumbed quickly to what was likely another case of consumption. Viana died in September 1871. The kindly John A. Rumsey, sent a carriage for Catherine and Fanny to attend Viana’s funeral which was conducted by the Good Templars, a temperance organization, of which Viana was a member.

Surprisingly, at the time of her death Viana had acquired a significant personal estate. According to the U.S. Census of 1870 her personal property was valued at $2,000. Viana allegedly left a will, which was probated before finally being settled in 1895. William H.F. Payne, the original executor, tried to sort out the heirs, to determine where they were, and if they were still alive. The following letter from R.A. Rector to W.H.F. Payne, written in May 1889, provides the clue:

“Fanny may be the Albany woman but though she was the fairest person that I ever saw with negro blood I think it hardly possible that she could be a blonde, be that as it may, she has no interest in the estate and I have no idea that she ever had a child except the four mentioned in his will and the one born of Mary on his farm after his death. Though Viana wrote one of her friends that it had been said that she and Fannie were not whole sisters she seemed quite indignant and asked her to contradict it, which she, of course, could not do, but they remained under the impression that they all had one father.”

Mary Fletcher

Although Catherine Lawrence was told the “family all died,” she, and Fanny herself, would later state in depositions that Mary Fletcher died in Rectortown Virginia before the slaves escaped. However, there is evidence to...
Viana came to live with them, the Rumsey’s were very wealthy. They resided in a mansion, Rumsey Hall, on Terrace Row in Seneca Falls.

Viana was baptized in the Seneca Falls Wesleyan Church where she was also a member of the choir.

In the meantime, Catherine, Sallie, and Fanny went to live with Catherine’s brother, Henry Lawrence, in Schoharie, New York. In April 1865, Sallie was sent to live with Doctor Diocletian Lewis in Lexington, Massachusetts. In a letter to Catherine Lawrence, Doctor Dio Lewis, who operated a female seminary in Lexington, promised to adopt Sallie into his family and educate her. Unfortunately, he did neither. According to Catherine Lawrence, Doctor Lewis “held Sallie as a servant, and that without pay.”

About 1866, Catherine Lawrence purchased a home in Mexico, New York. She arranged for Viana to attend the Falley Seminary in nearby Fulton, New York. At about this time Catherine received a letter from Doctor Lewis informing her that Sallie was sick and wanted to come home for the summer. Catherine brought Sallie back to Mexico and for the first time in several years all three sisters were together again.

Viana continued at Falley Seminary until she too, like her sister, was abused while in their care. One of the teachers had an insane brother who could not be left alone. This teacher recruited Viana to care for her brother while she was at school. The teacher promised to give Viana her lessons at night, but apparently this arrangement was not honored. Catherine Lawrence sent Viana back to the Rumsey’s in Seneca Falls at the end of the term. Sallie’s condition was, said, “You must...take her back she is consumptive and we can’t have her die here.”

Shortly after arriving in Sharon Springs, Viana was sent to live with John A. and Anna (Freeland) Rumsey of Seneca Falls, New York. John Rumsey, was a manufacturer of iron pumps and fire apparatus. He, along with his brother, Moses Rumsey, and another partner, started Rumsey & Company, Ltd. in 1864. According to their letterhead they were “Proprietors of the Seneca Falls Pump and Fire Engine Works.” By the time

Fanny is Redeemed

In the spring of 1863, Catherine and Fanny traveled to Brooklyn, New York. On the way, Catherine determined that she would adopt Fanny as her own daughter and see that she was baptized and properly educated.

In Brooklyn, Catherine met with the abolitionist preacher, Henry Ward Beecher. Reverend Beecher was a famous evangelical abolitionist. He had recently held a mock slave auction and conducted a baptism for a redeemed slave in his Plymouth Church in Brooklyn. Reverend Beecher took one look at Fanny and immediately and do the same for Viana and Sallie, as well.

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Several weeks later, on Sunday, May 10, 1863, Catherine and Fanny were waiting patiently at the end of a long line of parents inside Plymouth Church. This Sunday was the regular day of baptismal of infants. Reverend Beecher was concluding his baptismal duties before an immense crowd. Reverend Beecher, a skilled and gifted preacher, had carefully staged the day’s events for maximum dramatic effect. After he baptized the last child, he turned to his audience and stated that there was one more child to be christened. A flutter of excited murmuring rippled through the congregation. Beecher stepped off the pulpit and walked over and gathered up Fanny in his arms and carried her, alone, to the center of the altar. Fanny, her head nestled against his chest, timidly eyed the crowd. Beecher addressed his congregation,

“This child was born a slave, and is redeemed from slavery!”

There was an audible gasp from the astonished, and equally horrified, parishioners who assumed the child to be white. Beecher continued,

“A benevolent woman, who was nursing our sick soldiers in the hospital at Fairfax, found her, sore and tattered and unclean, and requested the good sister who has adopted her, to bring her North and take her to Brooklyn, New York. On the way, Catherine determined that she would adopt Fanny as her own daughter and see that she was baptized and properly educated.

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Continued next page

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Reverend Beecher was telling the audience that because of her near-white complexion, Fanny, and others like her, were in danger of being abused by their white masters, or worse, of being sold as Fancy Girls, a 19th century euphemism for light-skinned slave prostitutes, which were then common in New Orleans. Beecher, his voice rising with emotion, continued,

"The whole force of my manhood revolts and rises up in enmity against an institution that cruelly exposes such children to be sold like cattle."

Beecher was interrupted at this point by spontaneous applause from the audience. He concluded, repeating:

"Look upon this child, and take away with you the impression of her beauty, and remember to what a shocking fate slavery would bring her! May God strike for our country! May God strike for our armies and the right, that this accursed thing may be utterly destroyed."

Renewed and sustained applause erupted from the congregation. Reverend Beecher then baptized her Fanny Virginia Cassiopeia Lawrence. Fanny, for her birth name; Virginia, for where she came from; Cassiopeia, for the mythological Greek Queen of unrivaled beauty; and, Lawrence, the sir name of her adoptive mother.

Afterwards, the Reverend Beecher requested that the congregation contribute liberally to help her adoptive mother "defray the expense of educating the child." The donations were said to be sizable. One gentleman later told Catherine Lawrence that he had given one hundred dollars.

After the service, Catherine Lawrence waited "a suitable time, but received no returns" from Beecher or the church. She then called on Reverend Beecher to ask him about the donations, but he directed her to the church treasurer. The treasurer stalled, telling her, "that they had not all paid in their subscription[s]," which she was told amounted to about $1,200. Catherine Lawrence would later bitterly write, "I was deaconed out of it all. Whoever received the benefit of it the public has a right to judge."

After her baptism, Reverend Beecher arranged to have Fanny photographed. In fact, Fanny posed for photographs at least seventeen different times, sometimes with her adoptive mother, Catherine Lawrence. The truth is Reverend Henry Ward Beecher exploited Fanny from the pulpit, and later with her image, as propaganda to further his abolitionist aims. It worked. Fanny’s photographs were distributed widely. The little carte-de-vista (CDV) photographs of Fanny were wildly popular in the North, making Fanny the most photographed slave child in history.

Sadly, Catherine S. Lawrence too, used similar exploitive tactics with her adoptive daughter. Ostensibly, this was to raise money for Fanny’s education. Fanny sang at church gatherings and Sunday schools at which, donations were encouraged.

"THE SABBATH SCHOOL CONCERT"

... At the close of the speaking, a little girl named Fanny Lawrence (an adopted daughter of Miss Lawrence, of Fulton, who followed the fortunes of the late war for more than three years as hospital nurse) sang a beautiful solo with fine effect. About four years of ago she, with some forty other slaves, escaped from bondage by getting into the Union lines, after traveling for several days amid great danger. She is a beautiful child, of light, fair complexion, blue eyes and flaxen hair, has a fine voice, and, with proper culture, she will become a most excellent singer. At the close of the meeting a collection was taken up to aid Miss Lawrence in educating the above named child and two other children (adopted by Miss L.) who were rescued from slavery. The sum raised was about fifteen dollars.

In the evening of the same day a Union Sabbath School meeting was held at the Baptist Church...Before the meeting closed, Miss Lawrence’s little girl, of whom mention is made above, sang another solo, which greatly pleased the audience. At the close of the meeting the sum of fifteen dollars was raised from the sale of photographs of this little girl. One
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gentleman gave two dollars for a photograph, and another gentleman gave three dollars. We learn that a number of these photographs (25 cents each) are on sale at Loomis & House’s Store, in this village. 82

Shortly afterward, Catherine and Fanny returned to Washington, D.C. Catherine once again took up her duties as a Nurse in the Union army hospitals of Washington, D.C. In the summer of 1864, Catherine and Fanny drove into Virginia to retrieve Viana and Sallie. Both girls were right where they had been left, near the Convalescent Hospital on Seminary Hill, Alexandria.

A New Life Up North

Sometime after August 1864, Catherine, Viana, Sallie, and Fanny left Virginia for good. They traveled by railroad to Sharon Springs, New York. On the way, Sallie remarked that she had not seen a real Yankee yet as she was told “that they all had horns and looked awful.”83

Shortly after arriving in Sharon Springs, Viana was sent to live with John A. and Anna Rumsey, Seneca Falls, New York. John Rumsey, was a manufacturer of iron pumps and fire apparatus. He, along with his brother, Moses Rumsey, and another partner, started Rumsey & Company, Ltd. in 1864. According to their letterhead they were “Proprietors of the Seneca Falls Pump and Fire Engine Works.”84 By the time

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After Viana’s death, Catherine and Fanny returned home brokenhearted. Fanny attended school and grew into a woman. Unfortunately for Fanny, her life too, did not end well.

“While the little one that I adopted and educated, married one whom I opposed, knowing his reckless life rendered him wholly unfit for one like her. When sick and among strangers, he deserted her and an infant daughter and eloped with a woman, who left her husband and two small children.

My three Southern children are all laid away, for which I thank my heavenly Father.”

No reasonable person would ever argue the evil of slavery, but at least in the South a slave was called a slave.

Epilogue

Fanny Ayres Lawrence

(a ka Fanny Virginia Cassoepia Lawrence)

In the course of researching this article I came across an interesting clue as to what may have happened to Fanny. The estate of Charles R. Ayres, was contested several times before finally being settled in 1895. William H.F. Payne, the original executor, tried to sort out the heirs, to determine where they were, and if they were still alive. The following letter from R.A. Rector to W.H.F. Payne, written in May 1889, provides the clue:

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Source: Library of Congress, Washington, DC

Mary J. Lewis, domestic at 48 Franklin Street.

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There is also a Freedman’s Bureau work contract between an L.A. Scanland, of Fauquier County and a Mary Fletcher, of Alexandria, whereby Mary Fletcher agrees to work for L.A. Scanland as a house servant, in her Fauquier County home, for one year, at $4.00 a month, beginning January 17, 1867.64

Finally, there is also a Mary Fletcher, born in 1845, who is listed on the intake registers of the Freedman’s Village, with two children John, age 3, and Mary, born December 1867. In the remarks section is recorded “Homeless and Destitute.”65 A surviving letter to Horatio N. Howard, Acting Assistant Surgeon, and Superintendent of the Freedman’s Village states the following:

“March 11, 1868
H.N. Howard, A.A.S., U.S.A.

Doctor,
Will you please admit Mary Fletcher and her two children to the home at Freedman’s Village. She states that she is without a home and on account of her having two children it is impossible for her to get a service place. I have no means for her accommodation.

I am, Sir
Very Respectfully,
Yours obt. serv’t.,
S.C. Lee
Bvt. Lt. Col., U.S.A.
Sub. Asst., Comr.”66

Mary Fletcher was known to have had children other than Viana, Sallie, and Fanny.

Children of Mary Fletcher and Charles Rufus Ayres and an unknown slave:

- Viana Fletcher Ayres b. 1850; d. c. 1871.
  - o Viana A. Fletcher? m. ________ Liston
- Sarah Ann Sally Fletcher Ayres b. c. 1852; d. October 21, 1867, Lexington, MA.67
- Fanny Ayres b. 1859; d. unknown
- John Fletcher b. 1865; d. unknown
- Mary Fletcher b. December 1867; d. unknown

Jane Payne

There is a Freedman’s Bureau work contract between a Charles Green, of Prince William County and a Jane Payne and her daughters Ellen and Rachel. In the contract, Jane Payne agreed to work for Charles Green, along with her daughters, as servants in his Prince William County home for one year, at $8.00 a month, beginning February 8, 1866. The contract further specified that Green would provide “all the necessary clothing for the child Rachel.”68

Jane Payne apparently returned to Fauquier County after the war.

A surviving letter to Lt. W.W. McNulty, Asst. Supt.states the following:

“Bureau of R.F. & A.L.
Office of the Asst. Supt.
Warrenton, Va., May 11, 1866

Bvt. Brig. Genl. O. Borwn
Asst. Coms &c.
Richmond, Va.

General
I have the honor to report that there is a colored woman living by the name of Jane Payne with three small children. She states that her husband, Sydney Payne (cold.), by who she had said children, is now and has been in Richmond, Va. since the surrender of Lee and has never during that time furnished her with anything toward the support of herself & children. This woman is now in a very delicate state of health. Fearful of vicious wild hogs, which then freely roamed the countryside. After walking all night, an estimated seventeen miles, they stopped the next morning to rest in a thicket. They ate a meager breakfast and lay down on the ground and slept.

Several hours later, Uncle Bill woke with a start. He had been sleeping with his ear pressed to the ground and thought he had heard the sound of approaching horsemen. Panic ensued. Belongings and children were quickly gathered up and everybody ran headlong through the woods. After they had gone a couple of miles, they stopped the next morning to rest in a thicket. They ate a meager breakfast and lay down on the ground and slept. Hearing this, Viana and Sallie began to cry for their lost sister. Uncle Ben would later say, ‘Their cries were more than I could bear.’69

Uncle Ben agreed to go back for Fanny. He told the group to keep going, but to break branches and mark trees so he would be able to find them. Ben ran back to the spot where they had left the child. He searched but could not find her. His heart grew heavy thinking about the poor child being devoured by wild hogs. He called out softly to her, ‘Fanny? Fanny?’ his voice barely a whisper, fearful that either the rebels or the hogs would get him too. He was about to turn and leave when he saw some bushes moving a little ways off. He moved cautiously forward not knowing who, or what, it might be. On drawing nearer he saw the child, Fanny, rising and crying softly. Uncle Ben gathered her in his arms and asked her why she did not answer him when he called. She replied, ‘Cause, I was afraid the hogs would hear me!’70

Ben lifted the child onto his shoulders and raced back towards the rest of the slaves. He recalled:

“Her tiny hands clenched my woolly hair, she knew how to ride that way, and I didn’t gallop my best till I overtook the rest of the company, and didn’t I keep an eye on that little gal all the rest of the time, till I sot her down inside Union lines at Fairfax?”71

In the meantime, the rest of the group had continued on. They looked back periodically, staining to see if Ben and Fanny were in view. They began to lose hope, and thought that Ben and Fanny were lost, captured, or worse, eaten. However, faithful old Ben had been moving steadily throughout the day following the signs left for him. Shortly after sundown, Viana and Sallie start crying again for their lost sister. Someone looked back and saw what they thought was a beast with two heads coming at them fast. Viana and Sallie began to wail, “Something’s coming to eat us up.”72 Then they recognized that it was Uncle Ben, with Fanny on his shoulders – the beast with two heads. Suddenly everyone was jumping and singing and praising the Lord for their safe return.
encumbered with a helpless child, amongst strangers would subject her to great hardships, to avoid which, she declares, that she desires to become a slave.”

All three women initially petitioned to become the slaves of William H. Payne, the executor of Charles R. Ayres estate, and his friend. The court appears not to have acted on their petitions however, presumably because that had not first petitioned the Virginia General Assembly. On March 13, 1861, all three women received permission from the Virginia General Assembly to petition the Fauquier County Circuit Court to select a master. All three then went back to court on April 1, 1861, Ann M. Rector, the half-sister of Charles R. Ayres, was listed in their petition as their new prospective owner. However, when they were examined individually by Judge Tyler, all three indicated that they did not wish to be slaves to Ann Rector. Their original petitions to become the slaves of William H. Payne were formally dismissed in September 1861, and no final action appears to have been taken on the petitions to name Ann Rector as their mistress.

Although the three women failed to choose a new master, they were still reduced to slavery. According to Virginia law they had remained in the state for more than twelve months. However, before their status could be challenged in court the Civil War began.

The Escape

The women returned to Rectortown and the home of Alfred Rector. There they were under the charge of Kitty Rector, Alfred’s wife, and their daughter Ann Rector. Grandma Kitty, or Kidda, as Rufus’ mother was known, was a kind and benevolent woman. Grandma Kidda told the women to remain with her until her death then make their way to Union lines. Grandma Kidda died in August 1862. After her burial, the slaves made their escape from Rectortown.

When de sun goes down an’ de quail call,
Follow de drinkin’ gourd
Den it’s time, chillun, one an’ all,
Follow de drinkin’ gourd.
Keep a movin’ de Cap’n say,
Follow de drinkin’ gourd.

She says that Payne left her without any just cause and that if he (Payne) will not live with her she wants him to assist her in supporting his children. She states that he learned that Payne is now living with a woman (cold.) by the name of Martha Page. She says that they live above the old wharf near the “old market” & about 100 yards from a soap factory.

I am satisfied from this woman’s statement that this man Payne has treated her badly. He should, in my opinion, be made to assist her in the support of his children.

He also has parents here who are supported at government expense. Their names are George & Rachael Payne. They are 100 years old each and would like to see their only son Sydney.

I respectfully request that steps be taken to ascertain if this man Payne is still in Richmond & is so that he be required to assist his wife Janes in support of his children.

I am, Sir
Very Respectfully
Your Obt. Servt.
W. Augs. MacNulty
2nd Lieut. V.R.C & Asst. Supt.
Freedmen’s d.c. ~60

The Freedmen’s Bureau provided Jane Payne with transportation to Warrenton, Virginia in July 1866.

Jane Payne was the daughter of Betty Payne and Henry Payne. She married a Sydney Payne. The known children of Jane Payne were:

- Nellie B. Payne (aka Mary Elizabeth Payne; aka Mary Payne) b. December 1859; d. 1932; m/1 Robert Neville, Carriage Driver; m/2 Moses J. Peters (1855-????) Dec. 27, 1879, Loudoun Co., VA; res. of Montclair, NJ in 1887 and 1900. In the Census of 1910, they owned their own home and had 5 children three of whom were living. In 1920 Moses Peters, age 67 (1853), “widowed,” is living in Loudoun Co., VA.

- Selina A[nn?] Gleaves Ayres b. Aug. 1859; m 1 Robert Neville, Carriage Driver; m/2 Rachel Payne b. unknown; d. unknown

- Ellen Payne b. 1867; d. unknown; was arrested in 1867 for stealing clothes in Fauquier Co. and confined in Fauquier Co. Jail.

- Rachael Payne b. unknown; d. unknown

Ann Gleaves

Ann Gleaves (May 1845-?????) m. William H. Gillison (Aug. 1835-?????) res. Bloomfield, Loudoun Co., VA in 1870; Census of 1900 res. Loudoun Co., VA also states they had been married for 35 years (1865) and had nine children, five of whom are living. In 1910, Ann Gillison was living in the home of Amelia Wilkins, her daughter. Ann Gillison, then was 65 years old. She was a widow and employed as a Laundress. In 1920, Ann Gillison, “Mother-in-law,” was living in the household of John Wilkins who was married to Arminta Wilkins age 32.

- Selina A[nn?] Gleaves Ayres b. Aug. 1859; m/1 Robert Neville, Carriage Driver; m/2 Moses J. Peters (1855-????)

- Stillborn Daughter (1880-1880)
- Herbert Frances Sclocum (1881-1881)
- Harold Sclocum (1882-1882)
- Ambrosio Sclocum (1884-1885)
- Carlford Sclocum (1890-1891)

- Ellen Payne b. 1857; d. unknown; was arrested in 1867 for stealing clothes in Fauquier Co. and confined in Fauquier Co. Jail.
- Rachael Payne b. unknown; d. unknown

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- Bessie P. Peters b. VA, Jan. 1881
- Infant Peters, age “0”, d. Sept. 26, 1890, Montclair, Essex Co., NJ
- Eugene Peters b. Oct. 14, 1892; draft registration card states res. 28 Orange Rd., Montclair, NJ. This same address as brother Otis Peters; employed as a Mechanic for Herman Albers, 565 Bloomfield Way, Montclair, NJ; has wife and 4 yr. old child.
died in 1832, when Catherine was just twelve years old.73

Sheriff of Schoharie County, New York from 1805-1810, County, New York.72 Stephen Lawrence, who was the Lennon, Unison, V A and had a wife and four children. June 1917 indicates he was a Butler employed by Mrs. S. Wilkins b. Aug. 22, 1886, Linden, V A; draft reg. card of

Catherine Lawrence was born in January 1819 in Schoharie, NY.

She volunteered as a nurse for the Union army in 1861. She was sent to Washington, DC and from there to the Convalescent Hospital on Seminary Hill, Alexandria, Virginia. It was here, in late 1863 that she first encountered Viana, Sallie, and Fanny Ayres.

In 1873, Catherine Lawrence lost her home for non-payment of a debt.

“Catherine Lawrence’s place in the village of Mexico, was sold at sheriff’s sale this morning by Sheriff Lyman, on a small execution, and was bought by S.R. Spooner (or the amount of the execution, about $90. 74

In 1875, Catherine, now destitute, applied for and received a pension for her service as a Nurse during the Civil War. She also relied on the charity of friends.

Catherine S. Lawrence published her autobiography titled: Autobiography: Sketch of the Life and Labors of Miss Catherine S. Lawrence, who in Early Life Distinguished Herself as a Bitter Opponent of Slavery and Intemperance in 1893. The primary focus of the book is her life as a Union army nurse and the adoption of Viana, Sallie, and Fanny.

In 1900, Catherine S. Lawrence “writer” was boarding in the home of James R. Main, Ballston, Saratoga County, New York.75 She died in Albany, New York in 1904 and is interred in the Old Stone Fort Cemetery, Schoharie, NY.

The Catherine S. Lawrence Tent 107 of the Capital District Daughters of the Union Veterans of the Civil War, in Albany County, New York is named in her honor.

Stephen Lawrence (1773-1832) and Maria Mann (1775-1883). Children of Stephen and Maria Lawrence: - Matthew Lawrence, infant son; Old Stone Fort Cem. Schoharie, NY. - Maria Lawrence b. 1794 - Henry Lawrence (1798-1886); m. Catherine Rinehart (1799-1844); bur. Old Stone Fort Cem. Schoharie, NY.

In a later codicil, he cut Harriet Rector, his step-sister, out of his will entirely:

“I hereby revoke the above bequest to H.E. Rector being satisfied from circumstances I have ascertained that she is in every respect unworthy of any honorable consideration.”76

Although he was a Union man, Rufus was also a slaveholder. According to his estate records he owned at least 12 slaves.77 Like many slaveholders, Rufus, who was unmarried, took full advantage of the relationship and had at least three children by his slaves Mary Fletcher, Jane Payne, and Ann Gleaves. However, unlike most slaveholders, he acknowledged them and provided for them in his last will and testament.

Well my ol’ missus promised me,
Raise a rukus tonight
When she died she’d set me free,
Raise a rukus tonight
She live so long dat her head got bal’,
Raise a rukus tonight
De Lawd couldn’t kill her wid a big green maud,
Raise a rukus tonight 78

In his will, Rufus Ayres freed all three women and their children and provided “five hundred dollars, or some sufficient sum of money for their settlement in a free state.”79 Rufus also stipulated in his will that “the two oldest children of Mary, Vianna & Sallie, and the oldest child of Gleaves and Jane, each after it reaches the age of ten years old, one hundred dollars annually a piece, to be applied in raising and educating them.”80

Although Jane, Mary, and Ann were now free, all three women faced an impossible choice—leave Virginia, or return voluntarily to slavery.

A Virginia law, enacted in 1806, required that manumitted slaves and free blacks had to leave the state unless they petitioned the Virginia General Assembly to remain. The act further prescribed that if slaves thereafter emancipated shall remain in the State more than twelve months thereafter they shall forfeit the right to freedom and be sold.81

Additionally, in 1856, the Virginia General Assembly passed An ACT providing for the voluntary enslavement of the free Negroes of the Commonwealth. Under this statute, free female Negroes, who were at least 18 years old, and free male Negroes, who were at least 21 years old could choose their own master upon petition to the local circuit court. The children of free female Negroes, born before the voluntary enslavement of their mother, were to remain free.82 In her petition filed with the Fauquier County Circuit Court, on September 5, 1860, Mary Fletcher describes the choice she made and the reasons why:

“She was born and raised in the County of Fauquier and that all her kindred and friends are now living in the county. That she is married and her husband is a slave who could not accompany her. That she has several children, besides those provided for by the will of her late master, all of whom are young and helpless, and that if she goes away she parts from all whom she has ever known and goes, a friendless stranger, to a new state encumbered by helpless children. Your petitioner declares that she deliberately prefers slavery in Virginia to freedom outside of it.”83

Ann Gleaves testified that “she prefers to remain a slave in Virginia amongst her friends and relatives, than to go amongst strangers helpless and encumbered with the child who is several years too young to enjoy the benefit of her masters will.”84 Jane Payne testified that “she has no kindred outside of the said County of Fauquier and no friends to whom she can go. That her child, for whose temporary provision is made by her late master’s will, is several years under the age at which she can claim the benefit of this provision. That she is in delicate health and that to go alone,
Phillips, who was unarméd, mounted his horse and started to ride off. He turned and insulted Ayres with a parting epithet, “You are a damned son of a bitch!”²⁴ Highly offended, Ayres lashed out at Phillips with a small riding crop that he was carrying. William then rode off, ominously exclaiming to Ayres, “You’ll pay for that.”²⁵

Phillips returned to his house which was located a mile or so outside of town. He armed himself with a rifle and an Allen revolver. He returned to Rectorstown on horseback accompanied by his oldest son, eighteen-year-old, Samuel C. Phillips, who was armed with a double-barreled shotgun.

The two men searched all over town inquiring of several people as to Ayres whereabouts. They were about to give up, when the Phillips’ stopped in front of Andrew Crider’s shoemaker shop. They encountered an unidentified man standing in front of the shop. They asked him for a piece of paper as they wished to leave a message for Rufus Ayres. The man opened the door of the shop and received the requested paper, unaware that Ayres was inside. Ayres, who had heard Phillips outside, already had his Colt revolver in his hand and was moving toward the open door. The unidentified witness immediately seized Ayres and pushed him back inside the shop and tried to restrain him. Hearing the commotion inside, Phillips and his son dismounted and leveled their guns at the window.

The Rectorstown Episcopal Church, South was demolished by Union soldiers under General George B. McClellan in the fall of 1862. Its former location is now the Rectortown Cemetery. Rufus Ayres is likely interred in this cemetery, although no gravestone for him has been found there.

Three weeks later, William and Samuel Phillips were arraigned on murder charges. They were tried the following spring in Fauquier County Circuit Court before Judge John Webb Tyler. The case was prosecuted by Rufus Ayres friend and executor, William H. Payne, Commonwealth’s Attorney for Fauquier County. Both men were convicted of manslaughter and were sentenced to 3 years in the State Penitentiary in Richmond, Virginia by an angry Judge Tyler.²⁶

Freedom?

The murder of Rufus Ayres was a senseless tragedy. At the time of his death Rufus Ayres was considered a wealthy man. He owned more than 500 acres of land that surrounded the village of Rectorstown, Virginia.²⁷ His farm included the Milan Mill and adjoined the Rectorstown Depot on the Manassas Gap Railroad.²⁸ Rufus likely benefited substantially from the relationship with his step-father, Alfred Rector, who owned a store and a grain warehouse in Rectorstown. However, Rufus apparently held some animosity for the Rector family as indicated by a bequest in his will.

“I bequeath two hundred and fifty dollars yearly to Harriet E. Rector, while she lives a modest, virtuous and single life away from the Rector family.”²⁹,³⁰

²⁴ Follow The Drinking Gourd was an African American slave song sung by conductors on the Underground Railroad to transmit encoded instructions, in song, to slaves escaping Northern states. The title phrase “the drinking gourd” simply refers to a hallowed out gourd used by slaves as a water dipper. It was often used as an alternative name for the Little Dipper constellation which is visible in the night sky year round. The last star in the “handle” of the Little Dipper is Polaris, the North Star, which allows slaves who could easily be recognized among a group and navigating by moonlight could be guided to a safe haven in the North to freedom.

²⁶ Catherine S. Lawrence, in Early Life Distinguished Herself as a Bitter Opponent of Slavery and Intemperance…, © 1896, J.B. Lyon, Albany, NY.

²⁷ Lawrence, Autobiography, 168.

²⁸ Lawrence, Autobiography, 168.

²⁹ Lawrence, Autobiography, 141.

³⁰ Lawrence, Autobiography, 141.
**ESCAPE OF A FRIEND FROM MOSBY.**

_Fairfax Court House, Virginia._

January 2, 1865.

My dear Sister—Ere this time you will have learned that I was captured by Mosby’s men on the 27th of December, the ninth day of our raid. One more day would have found me back in camp with my regiment, 4th New York Cavalry; but fate said the word, “the arrow sped,” which means to take him along on the grass. A short way up the mountain there were six more of the raiders. They took me into their tent and robbed me of everything, even my coffee and sugar, and then broke my head when they could not find anything more to rob. They then set out in search of the 1st Rhode Island Cavalry. They were taken under similar circumstances, and in his company they managed to escape. It being late when we were captured, we were marched about five or six miles, when we were halted and put into a brushwhacker’s house. The next day we started for Culpepper, 32 miles, and reached there about dark. The citizens begged of the guard to hang us as we passed. They refused to let us stop in Culpepper for the night, and started for Orange Court House, 21 miles further. A mile or two between Culpepper and Orange Court House, we made our escape, and, after marching all night, struck the Hapshamnook about noon next day. The river had overflowed its banks at the time; but, notwithstanding, we effected a crossing, and in less than one hour we reached the other side in perfect safety. Before starting we formed plans so as to strike the Potomac, but necessity caused us to alter that part of the programme, and strike the Orange and Alexandria railroad, until we reached our pickets at Fairfax Station on the last night of the old year. Our legs and feet were freckled, and our old worn-out boots were torn from our feet by the thick network of underbrush, which the snow completely covered from view. On our arrival, the officers treated us with much kindness and respect, and we were, under the protecting folds of the starchy banner, and though yet unable to move, we hope to be all right soon.

The weather was extremely cold, and being stripped of our best clothes, we suffered much. Our determination was to escape, or die in the attempt. Trusting in God, who did not forsake us, I am now writing from the saddle without horse and suffer our friends for life.

Your fond brother,

CHARLES MAGUIRE,
Co. E, 4th N. Y. Cavalry.

_The Irish-American Weekly_, January 14, 1865, p. 2. c. 7.

***THE PRESIDENTIAL BALL***

A Train Fired on by Guerrillas.

_The Washington Post_, January 17, 1865, p. 3, c. 3.

Information was received here of a raid from Fairfax Court House, consisting of some sixty or seventy Yankees, into Prince William county on Saturday last. Wm. Smith, Thomas Lynn, James Lynn, Wm. Davis, and one or two other citizens, together with some eight or ten soldiers at house on Longburg, were captured by the Mosby’s and carried off. The raiders returned on Sunday. Rifles in this section are constantly expected, and the authorities are on the qui vive.

쒔ntined on page 19

### Historic Blenheim Civil War Interpretive Center

**“Blenheim’s Civil War Soldier Signatures: A Diary on Walls”**

Permanent Civil War Soldier Graffiti exhibition.

### Historic Blenheim Civil War Interpretive Center Program Series

Programs are free and held at the Civil War Interpretive Center at Historic Blenheim, 3610 Old Lee Highway (unless otherwise noted). Check back to find out about additional programs planned throughout the year. Information: 703-591-0560.

- **Wednesday, February 28, 2 p.m.**
  **SPECIAL WWII Program**
  **“D-Day (+1) thru The Battle of the Bulge: The 70th Anniversary”**
  Local historian and author Jim Lewis will recount the American battles across France and Germany from June-December 1944.

- **Saturday, March 21, 2 p.m.**
  **“The Richmond-Petersburg Campaign, October 1864”**
  Hampton Newsome will describe the October 1864 battles between Grant and Lee in Virginia. He will examine the Confederate attacks along the Darbytown Road on October 7 outside Richmond, one of Lee’s last offensive operations of the war. The talk will also cover Grant’s major offensive on October 27 to seize the South Side Railroad, the last open rail line into the Confederate stronghold at Petersburg. Mr. Newsome is the author of Richmond Must Fall: The Richmond-Petersburg Campaign of 1864, and an editor of Civil War Talks: Further Reminiscences of George S. Bernard and His Fellow Veterans.

- **Saturday, April 25, 2 p.m.**
  **“Fairfax Civil War Day”**
  10 A.M. - 5 P.M. at Historic Blenheim
  **Walking Tour**
  11 a.m. Guided walking tour (approx. 90 min.) of Old Town Fairfax with stops at the Fairfax County Courthouse, several antebellum homes with a Civil War history, and the City of Fairfax Cemetery (formerly Fairfax Confederate Cemetery).

- **Saturday, May 30, 2 p.m.**
  **“William ‘Extra Billy’ Smith: The Governor’s Odyssey”**
  Following the collapse of the Confederate lines at Petersburg on April 2, 1865, Governor Extra Billy began his “odyssey”—a thousand-mile journey to take the pulse of Virginia citizens, govern the Commonwealth, and to avoid capture by the Federal Army. Living historian Dave Meisky portrays Extra Billy Smith as a member of Lee’s Lieutenants.

- **Continued on page 19**
Sandra Wilbur

At the Fairfax Museum and Historic Blenheim...

Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center

New Exhibit at Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center

Opened July 4:


The Fairfax Story - Hamill Gallery. Permanent Fairfax history exhibition.

Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center “Second Sunday” Programs

Programs are held at 2 p.m. on the second Sunday of each month. Unless otherwise noted, programs are held at the Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center, 10209 Main Street. Free (unless noted). Check back to find out about additional programs planned throughout the year. Information: 703-385-8414.

Sunday, March 8, 2 p.m.

“The Suffrage Prisoners at Occoquan Workhouse” Alice Reagan, Professor of History at Northern Virginia Community College, will look at the women imprisoned at nearby Lorton for Picketing in Washington, D.C. in 1917 for the right to vote.

Sunday, April 10, 2 p.m.

“Discovering the Universality of the Soldier Experience” Andrew H. Talkov, Vice-President for Programs, Virginia Historical Society will use drawings and photographs to explore the experiences of soldiers in the Civil War and the Vietnam War.

Volunteers and docents are sought for the city’s historic buildings: Ratcliffe-Allison House, Historic Blenheim and the Civil War Interpretive Center and Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center. Additionally, volunteers may be interested in assisting with walking tours and special events. For information email or call 703-385-8415.

The city has published a free self-guided walking tour brochure that provides a brief history of the city and noteworthy buildings in the Old Town Fairfax Historic District. This brochure is available from the Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center, 10209 Main Street, or call 703-385-8414.

Select historic buildings are open during city special events, including the Chocolate Lovers Festival, Civil War Weekend, Independence Day Celebration, Fall Festival and Festival of Lights and Carols. To arrange group tours of city-owned historic buildings email or call 703-385-8414.

The Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. It includes a variety of building and monument types and styles, including:

Fairfax Courthouse (1800) Ratcliffe-Allison House (1812) Joshua Gunnell House (c.1830) William Gunnell House (c.1835) Ford House (c.1835) Fairfax Elementary School (1873)* Old Fairfax Jail (1885) Old Town Hall (1900) Marr Monument (1904)

*Fairfax Elementary School was converted into the Fairfax Museum & Visitor Center in 1992.

Welcome New Members!

The President & Board of Directors of HFCI extends a hearty welcome to all new HFCI members.

Philip Anton Patricia Hall
David & Claudia Brown Edward & Elaine Senft
Michael Chenworth

In the Next Issue...

Going Home From Appomattox. Will retell the story of the surrender at Appomattox and the long journey home for Lieutenant Thomas J. Murray, of Fairfax Court House, in his own words.

Mottrom Dulany Ball: of Fairfax County, Fairfax Court House, and Alexandria, Virginia, was a musician, poet, teacher, lawyer, soldier, and A Founding Father of Alaska.

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A Sad Story of Redemption

by
William Page Johnson, II

“...we give them in telling their stories.” — Gerda Lerner

Slave Redemption refers to the practice of purchasing, or otherwise acquiring, the freedom of slaves before and during the American Civil War. This was typically accomplished through the support of abolitionist groups in the North.

Master Ayres

Charles Rufus Ayres of Fauquier County, Virginia was murdered by his neighbors in 1859 in a dispute over a farm gate. This incident changed the lives of his family, friends, and slaves forever.

Charles Rufus Ayres was the only son of Charles Wesley Ayres and Catherine “Kitty” A.M. Floweree. He went by his middle name, Rufus, likely to distinguish himself from his father. Rufus Ayres was orphaned at an early age. In 1837, his widowed mother married Alfred Rector, a prosperous merchant for whom the village of Rectortown, Fauquier County is named.

Rufus attended Yale University in 1843, leaving after one year. He later attended the University of Virginia from 1847 to 1849. Although he was educated as a lawyer, Rufus apparently preferred the life of a farmer. By mid-nineteenth century standards Rufus was also very wealthy.

At 2 o’clock in the afternoon on Friday, November 11, 1859, Rufus Ayres was conducting business in Rectortown, Virginia when he encountered his neighbor, forty-four-year-old, William Wesley Phillips. According to eye-witness, Nelson Gibson, the two men, who had been involved in a dispute over a farm gate, got into an argument. The argument escalated. Ayres, who was armed with a Colt revolver, menaced Phillips with the weapon.