

Virginia's slave-trading center being revealed by archaeological dig in downtown Richmond

By STEVE SZKOTAK | **Associated Press** | Aug 7, 08 1:50 PM CDT in **US**

In a district where young professionals live in airy lofts and flock to trendy restaurants and clubs, historians are intent on revealing the buried remnants of Richmond's bustling slave-trading past.

Construction equipment began digging this week in Shockoe Bottom at the former site of Lumpkin's Slave Jail, an infamous stop in the former Confederate capital's once-thriving commerce in enslaved men, women and children.

The Richmond Slave Trail Commission is attempting to link key stops in slavery's footprint _ from a James River port where slaves were transported to an old, long-forgotten burial ground and, ultimately, the former site of Lumpkin's Jail. The ambitious project aims to explore the legacy of slavery and the Civil War beyond heroic memorials to Confederate leaders that were erected in the city.

"We've had to take bits and pieces to put the story together, to get a better understanding of a culture, of a time," said Councilwoman Delores L. McQuinn, who chairs the 12-member city panel.

The Lumpkin project will probe 5 to 10 feet deep in an area approximately 180-by-80 feet. The \$200,000 undertaking, financed primarily by the city, will be completed in about two months. Artifacts from the dig will be held by the state.

"We want to find as much of the complex as we can," said archaeologist Matthew R. Laird, who studied old city records to locate the jail. "We're hopeful we'll find evidence of the jail."

Lumpkin's Jail was named after Robert Lumpkin, who was known as a "bully trader" for his rough tactics. One historical account of Lumpkin's Slave Jail told of the "whipping room."

"The individual would be laid down, his hands and feet stretched out and fastened in the rings, and a great big man would stand over him and flog him," wrote Charles H. Corey, a historian and clergyman who witnessed the events.

While Lumpkin left no records of his business, Laird said he had a "reputation as being sort of a shady figure" in an economy that would be expected to produce nothing less.

"They knew they were trafficking in human misery, but somebody had to do it," he said.

Today, Shockoe Bottom mixes the modern with the old _ former tobacco warehouses converted into pricey condos and lofts and graceful antebellum buildings where fusion food is served on linen tablecloths.

But there is little physical evidence of the city's slave-trading days.

By some estimates, the former Confederate capital saw 300,000 slaves bought and sold from 1808, when the U.S. banned the international slave trade, to the end of the Civil War. That would rank Richmond second only to New Orleans in the slave trade during that period.

The site of the dig has seen much history since Lumpkin's Jail was torn down in the 1870s. The steady hum of traffic along Interstate 95, which was built atop a portion of the site, could be heard during a ceremony Wednesday to launch the dig. A foundry and a rail building had once stood there as well. The clock tower of the city's restored, century-old French Renaissance train station looms over the property.

In its slave-trading heyday, Shockoe Bottom brokers, buyers and plantation owners stayed at one of the many hotels and boarding houses in the area. For slaves, who may have lived as families on a plantation, a trip here was a fearful time.

"Once people wound up there, they knew they were leaving their family," Laird said. "It was quite terrible."

Ana Edwards, an activist who has been involved in the preservation of a historic blacks-only burial ground near the Lumpkin site, said the story of Shockoe Bottom's slave-trading history is essential to understanding American history.

"This was a corporation, this was a business development," Edwards said. "Slavery was the key element on which the economy was developed."

The decline of labor-intensive crops such as tobacco led to a vast movement of slaves during the Civil War. Too many acres had been devoted to the crop and successive plantings depleted the soil, so farmers shifted to crops that no longer required slave labor. Slaves for farm labor were still needed in the Deep South.

The history of Lumpkin's Slave Jail and its proprietor is not without some irony.

Lumpkin married a black woman, and Mary Lumpkin inherited the jail complex. She ultimately leased it to a Boston clergyman, the Rev. Nathaniel Colver, who established on the site a school for freed slaves. It is now known as Virginia Union University.

Los Angeles Times

With unearthing of infamous jail, Richmond confronts its slave past

Black and white residents walk together across the excavated site where tens of thousands were imprisoned while they waited to be sold.

By David Zucchino
December 18, 2008

Reporting from Richmond, Va. -- The place called Lumpkin's Slave Jail was indeed a jail, but it was much more than that. It was a holding pen for human chattel.

In Richmond's Shockoe Bottom river district, the notorious slave trader Robert Lumpkin ran the city's largest slave-holding facility in the 1840s and 1850s. Tens of thousands of blacks were held in the cramped brick building while they waited to be sold.

Those who resisted were publicly whipped.

"The individual would be laid down, his hands and feet stretched out and fastened in the rings, and a great big man would stand over him and flog him," a clergyman wrote after witnessing the punishment.

On Wednesday, black and white Richmond residents walked together across the rain-slicked cobblestones, excavated this month, that mark the outlines of the old slave jail. This former Confederate capital's announcement that Lumpkin's Jail had been found was the latest acknowledgment of its painful slave history.

Since Richmond's City Council formed the Slave Trail Commission in 1998, the city gradually has been confronting both the enslavement of blacks and their contributions to the city.

"This is a part of our history that was covered up for too long," said Charles Vaughan, a retired bus operator and commission member.

A descendant of slaves, Vaughan stood staring at the jail's spectral remains Wednesday, wondering whether some distant relative once was imprisoned there.

Richmond, which is 57% black, long has honored its Confederate past with monuments to Gen. Robert E. Lee, President Jefferson Davis and thousands of rebel soldiers. But only with its decade-long examination of the slave trail -- which includes the jail, an adjoining Negro Burial Ground, and the slave marketplace and docks -- has it shone a light on its legacy of slavery.

"It was hushed for so long," said Ana Edwards of the Sacred Ground Project, which erected a historical marker for the cemetery, which is covered by a university parking lot. "Slavery was not something anybody wanted to address."

Blacks called Lumpkin's Slave Jail "Devil's Half Acre." Some died there from abuse or disease. Thousands more were fed and groomed for sale at nearby slave markets, then sent by boat or rail to toil on farms and plantations throughout the South.

"They were literally sold down the river," said Philip J. Schwarz, a professor emeritus of history at Virginia Commonwealth University, standing a few feet from the jail site and gesturing toward the nearby James River.

From 1808, when the United States outlawed the international slave trade, to the end of the Civil War, an estimated 300,000 slaves were sold in Richmond. Lumpkin, known as a "bully trader" for his harsh treatment of slaves, sold the men, women and children who became slaves in Southern states, where slavery remained legal.

Archaeologists discovered that Lumpkin's jail was actually a complex of brick buildings.

In addition to the 20-by-41-foot, two-story jail, there was a kitchen, Lumpkin's residence and a boarding house where antebellum slave owners stayed while their slaves were readied for sale.

Digging through 15 feet of muck and fill dirt beneath a city-owned parking lot, archaeologists unearthed cobblestones and brick drains that formed the jail's perimeter.

The jail was torn down in the 1870s.

"We're standing on a time capsule of Richmond's history," Matthew Laird, an archaeologist on the dig, said as he led commission members across the water-logged site. "It's exciting to find such an intact and well-preserved site."

The discovery of the jail site continues the city's "public acknowledgment of Richmond's enslaved African Americans," said Delores L. McQuinn, City Council vice president and chairwoman of the Slave Trail Commission.

"Many of us here were trying to work through this without the facts," McQuinn said. She was referring to fellow African American commission members who came of age when Richmond's white leadership ignored the contributions of slaves and their descendants on the city's past.

Because of the Slave Trail and the commemoration of "this infamous jail," McQuinn said, "generations to come won't have to do as much work to find out who they are and where they came from."

Kathleen Kilpatrick, director of the state Department of Historic Resources, said the jail has national significance. She called it "ground zero" for understanding the slave trade.

David Herring, who heads a local historical conservation group, said the slave trade and the city are inextricably linked: "Richmond would not be here without the slaves that built this city."

The jail site is steeped in slavery's history. Near the jail was a city gallows where Gabriel Prosser, who led an 1800 slave revolt known as Gabriel's Rebellion, was executed.

On auction blocks nearby, the family of Henry "Box" Brown was sold to a North Carolina plantation owner. According to some accounts, Brown escaped a similar fate by packing himself into a wooden crate labeled "dry goods" that was shipped to Philadelphia and freedom.

When Robert Lumpkin died, he left his jail to his widow -- Mary Lumpkin, a black woman and former slave. In 1867, she gave the property to a minister who established a school for freed slaves.

Over the years, the school evolved into what is now Virginia Union University, a historically black college.

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NORFOLK EXAMINER

Dec 17, 2008 10:34 AM

Richmond dig reveals evidence of slave jail

RICHMOND, Va. - Archaeologists are revealing some of their finds from a historic Richmond site that once was the center of Virginia's slave-trading past.

The discoveries announced Wednesday include the remains of a brick foundation at what was once known as Lumpkin's Slave Jail. A cobblestone courtyard and the remnants of a kitchen were also found.

Lumpkin's Jail was named after Robert Lumpkin, who was known as a "bully trader" for his rough handling of enslaved men, women and children.

According to historians, the jail was the largest holding center in the former capital of the Confederacy from 1840 until the end of the Civil War.

The discoveries are part of a dig to uncover remnants of Richmond's slave-trading history, much of which has disappeared through the years.

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THE RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH, "Richmond slave jail's foundation found"

MELODIE N. MARTIN TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER Published: December 18, 2008

With young black men used as bait, dogs were trained to track and pursue runaway slaves in the cobblestone courtyard of a Richmond slave jail.

Hidden for more than a century, the courtyard of round, gray stones and other remnants of Lumpkin's Slave Jail lay exposed yesterday in the corner of a Shockoe Bottom parking lot.

Archaeologists have spent the past four months digging 8 to 15 feet down to uncover "an amazingly intact urban complex," which included brick foundation walls, said Matthew R. Laird, principal investigator with the James River Institute for Archaeology in Williamsburg.

The dig recovered thousands of period artifacts, including ceramics, glassware, bottles, a shoe and animal bones.

The discovery completes more than five years of planning. The exact location was identified through the use of an 1835 city survey map.

"Finally, Richmond has discovered its beginnings," said David Herring, executive director of the Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond Neighborhoods. "Richmond would not be here without the slaves that built this city."

The latest phase of the excavation costs \$500,000, most of which was provided by the city of Richmond. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources provided \$50,000 of that, said Kathleen Kilpatrick, executive director of the department.

NBC12.com

Old Lumpkin's Jail uncovered in Richmond

Posted: Dec 17, 2008 07:34 PM EST
Updated: Dec 22, 2008 11:11 AM EST

By Rachel DePompa

RICHMOND, VA (NBC12) - An infamous piece of Richmond's history is now uncovered. Archaeologists have located the foundation of the Old Lumpkin's Slave Jail in Shockoe Bottom. The jail was where tens of thousands of African men and woman were sold in the slave trade.

Under mounds of mud and muck, a long buried part of Richmond's past came back to light.

Prior to the Civil War, Richmond ran the largest internal slave market in the country. Archeologists uncovered thousands of artifacts like old shoes, bottles and dishes. They also found a cobble stone courtyard, the foundations of the jail and remains of the kitchen.

Kathleen Kilpatrick says, "We really think that this is so key to understanding the market to understanding the human experience. And understanding where we go from here."

Robert Lumpkin owned the facility and eventually married one of his slaves. After the Civil War Mary Lumpkin turned the site into a school to educate freed slaves, the spring board for Virginia Union University.

"Where before they were building, Richmond was built on their backs and they moved out and built their own communities and carved out their own niches in Richmond," says David Herring.

Just a few hundred feet from the jail is a slave burial ground. It's a parking lot right now organizers hope to connect these two sites and eventually excavate here.

Supporters say delving into this once forgotten past will benefit thousands of Richmonders in the future.

"I think that what it does for the generations to come and those who are here they won't have to do as much work as we have done to try to find out who they are. Where they're humble beginnings are from," says Delores McQuinn.

The plan is to eventually create a trail through Shockoe Bottom, following the history of slavery in that area.

The Lumpkin's Slave Jail site will be covered and protected, but supporters hope to one day build a genealogy center and museum.

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