

# Excavation begins at site of slave jail in Richmond

By ZACHARY REID

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

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(l-r) City Councilwoman Delores McQuinn, head of the council's Slave Trail Commission, Kathleen Kilpatrick, executive director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Jeannie Welliver, project manager, city of Richmond, and David Herring, executive director, Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond Neighborhoods (ACORN) applaud as Pat Montgomery, vice president, Messer Construction digs the first dirt at the Lumpkin Slave Jail. (ZACHARY REID/RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH)

Right on cue, Pat Montgomery took the first scoop out of the mystery of what lies beneath a downtown parking lot.

In the coming weeks, his crews at Messer Construction will help unpave the way for the history of Lumpkin's Slave Jail to emerge.

The moving will be slow, but the person behind the dig is prepared for the wait.

"We're not sprinters, obviously," City Councilwoman Delores L. McQuinn, head of the council's Slave Trail Commission, told a small group gathered yesterday on the site. "It's taken quite a distance to get here."

The here in question is a downtown parking lot just south of the spot where East Broad Street swoops underneath Interstate 95.

The project is a full-scale excavation of the site believed to have once been the home of a slave jail. Tens of thousands of slaves are believed to have passed through en route from Africa to their American owners.

In recent decades, the spot has been a city-owned parking lot.

To the steady cacophony of rush-hour traffic, McQuinn and others associated with the project took turns sharing the importance of the dig before Montgomery was cued to plunge the shovel of his Cat M318 into the earth.

"This is a story that has been under asphalt way too long," said Jeannie Welliver, a project-development manager in the city's economic development department.

"All across the commonwealth, we have history that is literally beneath our feet," said Kathleen S. Kilpatrick, the executive director of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

The project, she said, will "literally pull back the layers of time."

The pulling will be slow, Montgomery said.

His crews need to remove the top 5 to 8 feet of dirt -- the range accounts for a slope that was long ago evened out -- but they'll have to work around power lines and storm sewers on the way down.

The tedious nature of the work didn't squelch the excitement of David Herring, the executive director of the Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond Neighborhoods.

"It's an Indiana Jones moment," he said.

With Jones the professor in mind, McQuinn agreed after the first scoops had been removed.

"It's exciting to get to this point," she said.

But the real excitement, she said, will be when the project is complete.

"It's going to be a greater story for generations to come," she said. "They're not going to have to piecemeal it."

# Dig begins to unearth Lumpkin's Slave Jail in Shockoe Bottom

## NBC 12 - Richmond, Virginia

Aug 6, 2008 01:50 PM EDT

By Jola Szubielski

An archaeological dig to unearth Lumpkin's Slave Jail officially began Wednesday morning behind Main Street Station in Shockoe Bottom.

The excavation for artifacts and the historic foundation from the 1800's comes two years after the site's discovery.



Surrounded by a thriving city and beneath layers of asphalt and soil lies a piece of history ready to be uncovered after almost two centuries.

"We are anxious to see where we go from here, to literally pull back the layers of time," says Kathleen Kilpatrick, director of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources Executive.

It was two years ago that the Richmond City Council Slave Trail Commission realized the importance of this sight, sitting just feet below the surface, remnants of Lumpkin's Slave Jail.

"It was a project that we thought was absolutely necessary to help in development of the slave trail as well as tell the story of Richmond history and this country's history," says Delores McQuinn of the Richmond City Council Slave Trail Commission.

To honor the ancestors of the past, Lumpkin's Slave Jail was one of the largest holding facilities in Richmond, until the end of the Civil War. Tens of thousands of slaves were held brought here, waiting to eventually be moved to slave owners living in various states.

On Wednesday morning, the first step towards unearthing the secrets of the past. The jail's foundation and artifacts dating back to the 19th century.

Ultimately, the jail took on another use. When owner and operator, Robert Lumpkin died, he left this property to his wife, who too was a former slave. Mary Lumpkin, played a part in establishing the jail as a school for freed slaves, the beginnings of what we know today, as Virginia Union University.

"Those stories are critically important, not just to understand the past, but building through that understanding a stronger future," says Kilpatrick.

Commission members are hopeful too that the finds here will ultimately help them piece together the history of the adjacent burial grounds.

# Dig reflects search for black Southern heritage

*Associated Press - August 7, 2008 7:25 AM ET*

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) - Archaeologists will peel away a downtown Richmond parking lot to reveal what was once a bustling slave-trading center.

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

Construction equipment was poised Thursday at the former site of Lumpkin's Slave Jail, where slaves were held for auctions that attracted buyers from the throughout the South.

The city's historic Shockoe Bottom was then a slave-trading hub.

Lumpkin's Jail was named after Robert Lumpkin, described by one contemporary as a "bully trader" for his rough tactics.

# Archaeological Dig Could Affect I-95

CBS 6 - Richmond

Aug 7, 2008 07:05 AM EDT

As the archeological dig gets underway for the Lumpkin slave jail, crews will be keeping a close eye on this nearby retention wall which supports I-95, making sure that the wall is not compromised during the dig.

City officials will be meeting with VDOT engineers here at the site on Thursday to determine if the dig could threaten the wall.

The entire excavation is expected to last 16 weeks as archeologists dig for remnants of the jail's foundation and artifacts used by African Americans held in the slave jail from 1840 to 1865.

"We would need to know how close we can get up to it, or keep away from it and if something needed to take place then we would of course shore up that side," said Steven Skinner, Richmond City Council spokesperson.

Skinner says they are not expecting any problems, but if VDOT engineers determine that precautions need to be taken to ensure the integrity of the wall, the city will make it happen.

"It's going to be safe. If we see any kind of challenge to that, then we'll of course shore it up, but most likely it won't get to that point where it has to be shored up but if it does have to be shored up then we have plans for that as well."

# Lumpkin's Dig Begins

For the next few months, archaeologists will examine earthen history beneath the old Lumpkin's Jail site in Shockoe Bottom.



[Dionne Waugh](#)

*Richmond.com*

**Wednesday, August 06, 2008**

The bulldozer let out a deep hum as it scraped up the first chunk of top soil from the old [Lumpkin's Jail](#) site in Shockoe Bottom.

Richmond City Councilwoman **Delores McQuinn** (7th) smiled at the sight. Standing with members of the city, the **Virginia Department of Historic Resources** and the **Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond Neighborhoods**, she watched Wednesday morning as more than two years' worth of work began to show.

"Finally! We're at this point," said McQuinn, who is the head of the **Richmond Slave Trail Commission**.

"It's taken a great distance to get here, but we're not sprinters," she told the small group that gathered to watch the first layers of dirt removed in preparation for the archaeological dig.

"This is a project that's absolutely necessary to tell the story of Richmond's history, and this country's history. Today takes us beyond just telling a story. It helps us understand a culture and honor the ancestors of the past."

For the next eight to 12 weeks, about five to six archaeologists will be sifting and sorting through the soil in the 80 feet by 160 feet lot, which is about one-third of an acre, just behind the old **Main Street Station** with I-95 traffic buzzing overhead. Though part of

the old jail is believed to be under the interstate, the dig is not expected to affect the road.

The jail, which sat upon a half acre of land known as "Devil's Half Acre," was the largest slave trade site outside of New Orleans before it was liberated during the Civil War in the 1800's.

**Robert Lumpkin** was the owner of Lumpkin's Jail, a two-story brick house with barbed wire windows, and where hundreds of thousands of slaves were housed as they brought into the country and sold to slave owners.

Lumpkin eventually fell in love with one of his slaves, Mary, whom he freed and married and left the property to when he died. She later leased it to a man who began teaching freed blacks and that school grew into what became Virginia Union University today.

When the **James River Institute of Archaeology** did the initial test trenches two years ago to confirm the site was indeed Lumpkins', they found the remains of a house foundation and a road trail.

After the first eight to 10 feet of dirt is removed, archaeologists will begin hand excavation, said **Matt Laird**, senior researcher with the institute. Found artifacts will be catalogued and stored at the **Virginia Department of Historic Resources**.

"My hope is that generations to come will say we were a generation who cared," McQuinn said. "I hope it won't be as difficult for them."

# Dig Begins At Lumpkin's Jail

CBS - Channel 6 - Richmond

Aug 6, 2008 06:31 PM EDT

Digging is underway again at the site of the old Lumpkin's Jail in Shockoe Bottom. It was Richmond's largest slave holding pen from 1840 to 1865. It's located near the intersections of east main and east broad streets just east of main street station.

The site's been used as a parking lot in recent years. Archeologists will look for the foundations of the jail complex and other artifacts under eight feet of landfill. The project is expected to take several months.

# Dig at Richmond slave jail begins today

Richmond Times-Dispatch

Wednesday, Aug 06, 2008 - 09:06 AM Updated: 01:05 PM



(l-r) City Councilwoman Delores McQuinn, head of the council's Slave Trail Commission, Kathleen Kilpatrick, executive director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Jeannie Welliver, project manager, city of Richmond, and David Herring, executive director, Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond Neighborhoods (ACORN) applaud as Pat Montgomery, vice president, Messer Construction digs the first dirt at the Lumpkin Slave Jail. (ZACHARY REID/RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH)

The dig starts today on the site of Richmond's infamous slave jail.

At 9 a.m., the first scoops of dirt were to be removed from a spot expected to yield artifacts from the mid-19th century. Several weeks later, archaeologists are expected to find evidence of Lumpkin's Slave Jail.

The project is expected to take several months. The first couple of weeks will be devoted to removing the top layers and prepping the site for more extensive research. Once that's done, the process of sifting through ruins begins.

The site, bounded today by East Main and East Broad streets just east of Main Street Station, once housed tens of thousands of slaves en route to the people who purchased them. In recent years, the spot has been a parking lot.

Learn more about the [Richmond slave trail](#), which follows the path of countless slaves as they entered Richmond.

# Lumpkin's Dig Threatens I-95, Officials Say

Style Weekly

by Chris Dovi

August 6, 2008

In a case of excavators not wanting to become the excavated, archeologists at the former Lumpkin's Jail site in Shockoe Bottom are proceeding cautiously at the west edge of the dig near the area that borders Interstate 95. Officials worry the dig at the notorious slave jail site, which starts this week, could weaken the hill supporting the highway.

Organizers of the Lumpkin's dig, planning to bring to light more of the history of the antebellum jail belonging to notorious Richmond slave trader Robert Lumpkin, realized within weeks of breaking ground that the dig may threaten the steep 20-or-so-foot embankment carrying I-95 across the Bottom.

Since recognizing the issue, City Council spokesman Steve Skinner says city officials have consulted with the Virginia Department of Transportation and with engineers to determine what — if any — measures will be needed to shore up the interstate slope. A portion of the Lumpkin's site is under I-95, but that area will not be part of the excavation, which will concentrate on an area approximately 160 feet by 80 feet.

"We're moving forward and working to make sure the western boundary of the site does not compromise the integrity of the I-95 corridor," Skinner says. "We're confident that plans we have in place will ensure that that is not an issue."

The dig — the second on the site — is scheduled to last about 16 weeks. Skinner says engineering to ensure the highway's integrity could increase the cost of the dig, but that it's unclear by how much.

Also in the works, according to City Councilwoman Dolores McQuinn, whose Slave Trail Commission seeks to preserve significant slavery sites such as Lumpkin's, is a proposal by Virginia Commonwealth University to set aside approximately 60 parking spaces across East Broad Street from the Lumpkin's dig to commemorate the black burial ground believed to be on that site. As with Lumpkin's, the majority of that area is believed to be under the interstate.

"I think the discussion is going to continue," McQuinn says of the burial ground conversations.

# Digging to start at site of slave jail in Richmond

Richmond Times-Dispatch

by Zachary Reid

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

Tuesday, Aug 05, 2008

The big dig starts tomorrow on the site of Richmond's infamous slave jail.

At 9 a.m., the first scoops of dirt will be removed from a spot expected to yield artifacts from the mid-19th century. Several weeks -- and several feet of top soil -- later, archaeologists are expected to find evidence of Lumpkin's Slave Jail.

"It's exciting," said 7th District City Councilwoman Delores L. McQuinn, head of the council's Slave Trail Commission. "Even though we had to wait, it's well worth it."

The project, several years in the making, is expected to take several months. The first couple of weeks will be devoted to removing the top layers and prepping the site for more extensive research. Once that's done, the painstaking process of sifting through ruins begins.

"Every layer, you're finding something," McQuinn said. "It's sort of a tedious process, with a lot of things done by hand."

The site, bounded today by East Main and East Broad streets just east of Main Street Station, once housed tens of thousands of slaves en route to the people who purchased them. In recent years, the spot has been a parking lot.