

Confederates in OUR Attic

A Campus Conversation



“Confederates in OUR Attic”

The WKU Diversity, Equity, & Inclusive Workgroup hosts “Confederates in OUR Attic,” a Deliberative Dialogue concerning named campus buildings. Should we rename buildings named after slave-owners? Should we end the tradition of naming campus buildings, period? Should we consider these buildings named after slave-owners simply part of our history? Are there other options?

What **IS** Deliberative Dialogue?

Deliberative workshops are facilitated group discussions that provide participants with the opportunity to consider an issue in depth, challenge differing opinions, and develop views/arguments to reach an actionable position. These workshops are similar to focus groups, although there tends to be more focus on deliberation. Each session will last approximately two hours.

“Deliberative dialogue is a form of discussion aimed at finding the best course of action. Deliberative questions take the form “What should we do?” The purpose is not so much to solve a problem or resolve an issue as to explore the most promising avenues for action.” ([Scott London](#)).

“How does this dialogue work?”

Participants will be given an issue guide to review prior to the workshop as well as a shorter form that frames the questions to be discussed. In groups, moderators will lead breakout sessions in civil conversations around the issue of WKU named buildings. The actionable position of each group will be shared with all participants at the conclusion of the workshop.

“Dates & Times”

Session 1: October 9, 2:30pm - 4:30pm

Session 2: November 19, 4:30pm - 6:30pm

(Zoom links and material will be sent prior to the sessions)

SLAVERY AND CONFEDERATE CONNECTIONS

ROBERT OGDEN, PLEASANT J. POTTER, CHARLES J. VAN METER

By David Lee, WKU University Historian

SHORT GUIDE

Slavery played an important role in the early history of Warren County, Kentucky. In 1860, the county had a total population of 17,320 people of whom 5,318 were enslaved, about 30% of the county's residents. The 1860 Census listed 792 Warren County residents as slaveholders. The county was also home to 203 free Black people. The production of tobacco was by far the largest agricultural enterprise in the county, and river commerce was a growing part of the local economy. Both made extensive use of enslaved labor. The builders of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad, which connected those two cities through Bowling Green, also used enslaved labor.

Robert Ogden

Born into a slave holding Virginia family in 1796, Ogden came to Warren County, Kentucky, in 1815. "Robert Ogden's sole aim in life," his step-daughter Angela Rochester Strange wrote, "was to die rich." Ogden had limited success in reaching that goal until he married Georgianna MacDowell Rochester, a wealthy widow, in 1836. The couple had a child who died within a year, and Georgianna herself died in 1839. Although Georgianna had three surviving children from her first marriage, one of them, Angela Rochester Strange, remembered, "Through kindness, [Ogden] won the confidence of the children, giving him the opportunity of handling unmolested, the property, so he did die rich." Ogden invested successfully in land and horses, and slavery played a major role in his prosperity. Strange estimated that Ogden and the Rochester children collectively owned about 200 slaves. The 1860 Federal Census shows Ogden himself enslaving about 40 people. That same census recorded his personal wealth as \$125,000, including the value of the people he was enslaving. Ogden died in 1873.

Pleasant J. Potter

Potter was born in Warren County in 1820. His father, Frederick, began to acquire slaves in the 1820s, and the boy grew up in a slave holding family. In 1860, Frederick Potter owned twenty-two slaves, and the 1860 Census estimated his worth at nearly \$100,000. In 1845, Pleasant Potter married Julia Hill, also from a slaveholding family. By 1850, at the age of thirty, Pleasant Potter owned six slaves, and he also owned six slaves in 1860. That year he had an estimated wealth of about \$26,000. Potter was a farmer and surveyor, and he also took an active role in public affairs and economic development throughout his life. He served as Warren County Sheriff, as Bowling Green Water Commissioner, and as a member of the General Assembly. A champion of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad, he served on the L&N board and invested in Bowling Green Woolen Mills which was managed by his nephew.

Charles J. Van Meter

Van Meter was born into a Warren County slaveholding family in 1826. His father, Jacob Van Meter, owned 21 slaves in 1860 and operated substantial farming interests. For a time, Charles Van Meter managed his father's farms, including his enslaved labor force. In 1856, Van Meter, with his brother and an associate, built a steamboat and developed a very successful river transportation business headquartered in Bowling Green. The 1860 Census recorded his personal wealth as \$13,000. When the Civil War began, Van Meter served the Confederate Army as a civilian contractor transporting provisions and mail to Confederate forces. Van Meter's steamboat business flourished after the war, making him wealthy. In 1878, he married Kate Moss Woodall. Her four brothers served in the Confederate Army, one of whom was killed in action. Both Van Meter and his wife were active in Lost Cause organizations after the war. Kate Van Meter served for many years as President of the Bowling Green chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Charles Van Meter provided financial support to the Jefferson Davis Home Association, an organization seeking to memorialize Davis at his birthplace in Todd County, Kentucky.

Below are three options to be used as a guide for conversations. These options are based on actions taken by other colleges and universities faced with buildings and colleges named after slaver owners. You do not have to settle on one of these options - you may, and probably will, combine ideas for each option or come up with something on your own. This is merely meant to be a starting place. Remember, this is not designed to solve the problem but to explore the most promising avenues for action.

Option 1: Leave the names on the colleges/buildings and create a multi-disciplinary center for historical research with a memorial fund for the children of Jonesville.

This would be similar to the actions taken by George Mason University.

Option 2: Simply remove the names from the buildings in question, where documentation that connects slave ownership exists.

This would be similar to the University of Cincinnati and Vanderbilt University.

Option 3: Remove the names Ogden, Potter, & Van Meter and replace with family names connected to slavery and the history of WKU. This would include legacy funding for families connected to WKU's history with slavery and Jonesville.

This option would be similar to the actions taken by Yale University and Georgetown University.

Supporting Documents:
Provided by David Lee, WKU Historian
&
Peggy Gripshover, Professor of Geography

Can be found in the long guide

Sources

Biographical Encyclopedia of Kentucky of the Dead and Living Men of the Nineteenth Century (J. M. Armstrong and Company, 1878).

Confederate Veteran Magazine

James P. Cornette, “The History of Ogden College” (Partial fulfillment of the Requirements in Education 500, Research in the History of Southern Education, George Peabody College for Teachers)

James Cornette, **A History of the Western Kentucky State Teachers College** (Doctoral Dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1938)

W. P. Greene, **The Green River Country** (J. S. Reilly, 1898)

Jesse Butler Johnson, “The History of Ogden College,” (MA Thesis, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1929)

Jesse B. Johnson and Lowell Harrison, “Ogden College: A Brief History,” **The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society** (July, 1970), pp. 189-220

Lowell Harrison, **Western Kentucky University** (University Press of Kentucky, 1987)

E. Polk Johnson, **A History of Kentucky and Kentuckians: The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Industry, and Modern Activities** (Lewis Publishing Company, 1912)

Lynn Niedermeier, **That Mighty Band of Maidens: A History of Potter College for Young Ladies, Bowling Green, Kentucky 1889-1909** (Landmark Association, 2001)

Angela Rochester Strange, **House of Rochester in Kentucky** (Democrat Printing Company, 1889)

Kenneth H. Williams and James Russell Harris, “Kentucky in 1860: A Statistical Overview,” **The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society** (Autumn, 2005), pp. 743-764.

Western Board of Regents Minutes, 1927, 1968

United States Federal Census, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870

University Archivist Suellyn Lathrop provided a great deal of information including a copy of Robert Ogden’s will, obituaries of Potter and Van Meter, and a letter from Herman Lee Donovan to Kelly Thompson describing the cane presentation.

THE PRECEDENT: What have other campuses done?

NOTE: There are dozens of these cases. The following are highlighted for examples only. The text of the articles, news reports/stories, webpages are copied full-text and linked.

George Mason University:

Full-text Article from [Diverse Issues in Higher Education](#)

by [Sara Weissman](#)

George Mason University Decision/Solution:

THE ENSLAVED CHILDREN OF GEORGE MASON PROJECT

PROJECT WEBSITE

EXCERPT COPIED FROM WEBPAGE: Gunston Hall Plantation overlooks the Potomac River. Whether by boat or land, anyone who approaches the property can observe its grandeur. The inside of the manor house is just as impressive. Delicately carved wood and expensive wall paint reflect the status of a colonial gentleman who generated considerable wealth. An early American patriot, George Mason IV (1725-1792) called Gunston Hall home, and it was there that he likely conceived of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, which provided language for the first ten amendments of the Constitution. This grand figure now stands in statue form on the Fairfax campus. His last name graces university t-shirts. Nowhere do we find information that George Mason was a committed slaveholder. Our institutional namesake enslaved many individuals, including girls and boys, and never freed them.

Patriarchal power defined George Mason IV's life. He fathered a big family, married twice, and owned more than 100 people of African descent with no legal claim to their humanity. Mason voiced opposition to the slave trade but did little to undermine slavery. Most important, this prominent advocate of liberty was largely silent about the violent oppression of America's fundamentally unfree institution.

By closely examining public, family and personal records, the Enslaved Children of George Mason (ECGM) project hopes to illuminate the 18th-century histories of African Americans living on the Gunston Hall Plantation just miles from our dormitories.

OTHER LINKS (GEORGE MASON):

George Mason University [PROJECT PAGE](#)

George Mason Honor College & Gunston Hall [PROJECT PAGE](#)

George Mason Memorial Fund [PROJECT PAGE](#)

News: [George Mason Erects Memorial](#)

News: [University Project to Address Slavery](#)

Yale University:

Valerie Pavilonis | valerie.pavilonis@yale.edu

Full-text from THE YALE NEWS, ["Cancel Yale?" Not Likely.](#)

YALE CENTER for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition

The Gilder Lehrman Center Legacy Fund

EXCERPT FROM LINK ABOVE: "Twenty-one years ago, the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at the Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies was founded at Yale University. The Gilder Lehrman Center was the first institution in the world wholly devoted to scholarship, public education, and outreach about the global problem of slavery across all borders and all time. In a world that needs this work now more than ever, we invite you to join us in sustaining our mission to foster an improved academic and public understanding of the role of slavery, its destruction, and its legacies in the functioning of the modern world.

To support the annual programming, outreach, and other key activities of the Gilder Lehrman Center, please contribute to the [Gilder Lehrman Center Legacy Fund.](#)"

OTHER LINKS (YALE):

News: [Yale Changes Name of Building Honoring Slave Owner](#)

News: [Yale, other colleges facing backlash of buildings named for slave owners](#)

Georgetown University:

Full-text story from [HERE](#)

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Georgetown University moved to atone for its historical links to slavery on Tuesday by holding a religious service and renaming buildings after African-Americans, including for one of 272 slaves sold to help fund the Washington school.

OTHER LINKS (GEORGETOWN):

News: [Georgetown Apologizes, Renames Halls after Slaves](#)

News: [Georgetown to Rename Two Buildings](#)

News: [Georgetown Apologizes for 1838 Sale of More than 270 Enslaved, Dedicates Buildings](#)

News: [The First Reparations Attempt at an American College Comes From Its Students](#)

University of Cincinnati

[Max Londberg](#), Cincinnati Enquirer

Full text from [HERE](#)

UC's board votes to take slaveowner's name off its College of Arts and Sciences

(Also at University of Cincinnati)

University of Cincinnati to remove Marge Schott's name from baseball stadium

Full-text from [ESPN HERE](#)

The University of Cincinnati will remove Marge Schott's name from its baseball stadium, citing the late [Cincinnati Reds](#) owner's "record of racism and bigotry."

received grants from the Foundation."

Vanderbilt University

This article was written in collaboration with the [Vanderbilt Historical Review](#). From the Vanderbilt Political Review: Full-text copied from [HERE](#)

The Legacy of Slavery at Vanderbilt

By [Avi Mediratta](#) and [Sydney Bub](#)

Vanderbilt Decision/Solution

[Alexa Bussmann](#), Content Development Director, Vanderbilt Hustler

April 14, 2019: Full-text from [HERE](#)