



Storer College: **An American Phoenix**

Gallery 1

West Virginia Day Exhibit, 2015

West Virginia & Regional History Center

WVU Libraries

Harpers Ferry, Crossroads of History and Geography

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

The regiment was stationed at Harpers Ferry both to protect the Federal Armory and secure the strategic confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers.

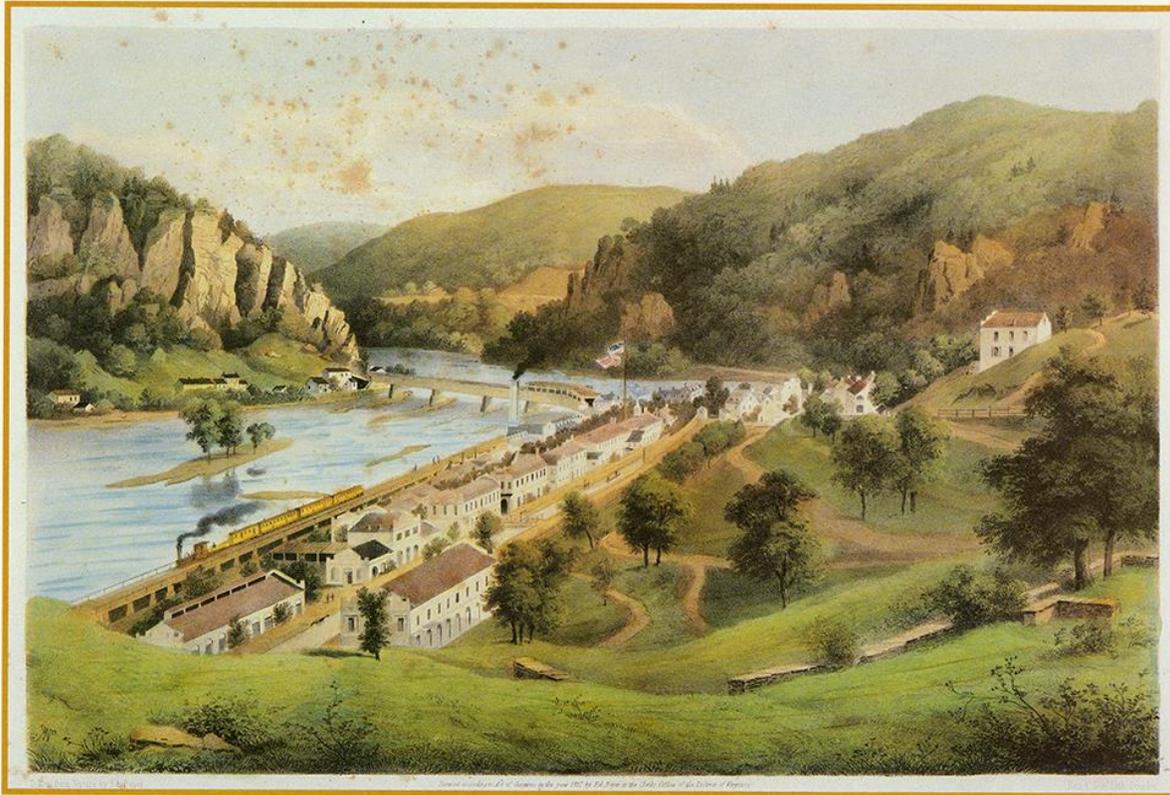
The order book pages displayed here contain an order announcing the death of General George Washington and proclaiming that:

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



Edward Beyer, *U.S. Armory in Harpers Ferry*

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



U.S. ARMY IN HARPERS FERRY.

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

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

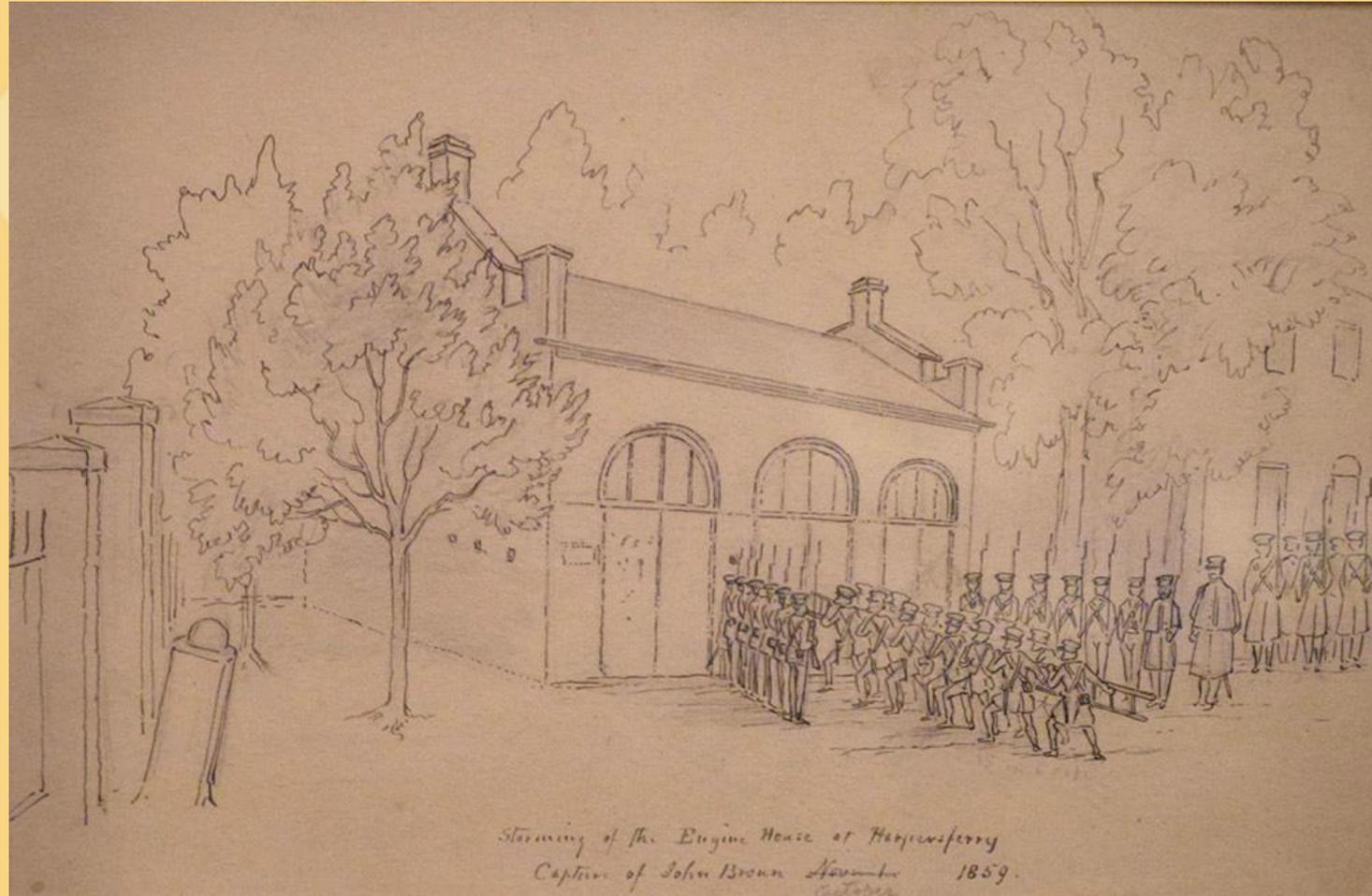


U.S. Harpers Ferry and Springfield Muskets and a Cavalry Saber

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



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



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

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



Stereoscope View of John Brown's Fort ca. 1861

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



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



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



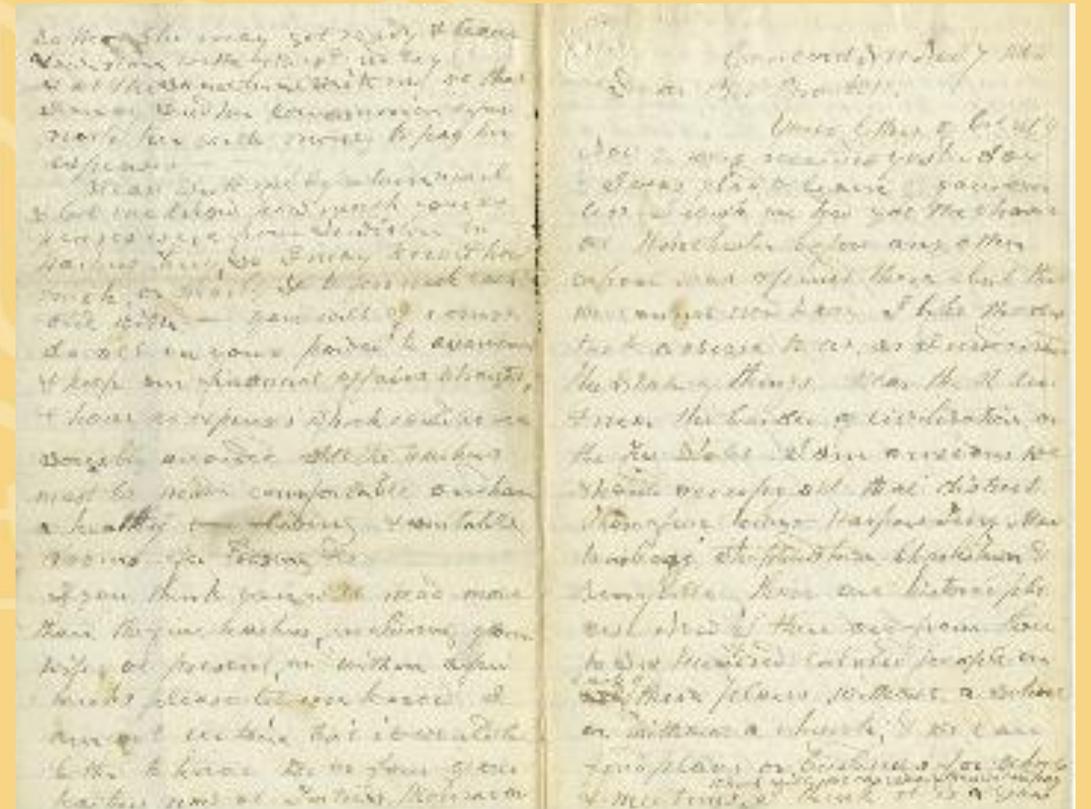
Lockwood House, the first home of the Freewill Baptist Mission School and Storer College, is mostly obscured by trees at the top of the hill in the center of the photo at left. The house is clearly visible in the photo at right. One of the finest residences in Harpers Ferry, Lockwood initially served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

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

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

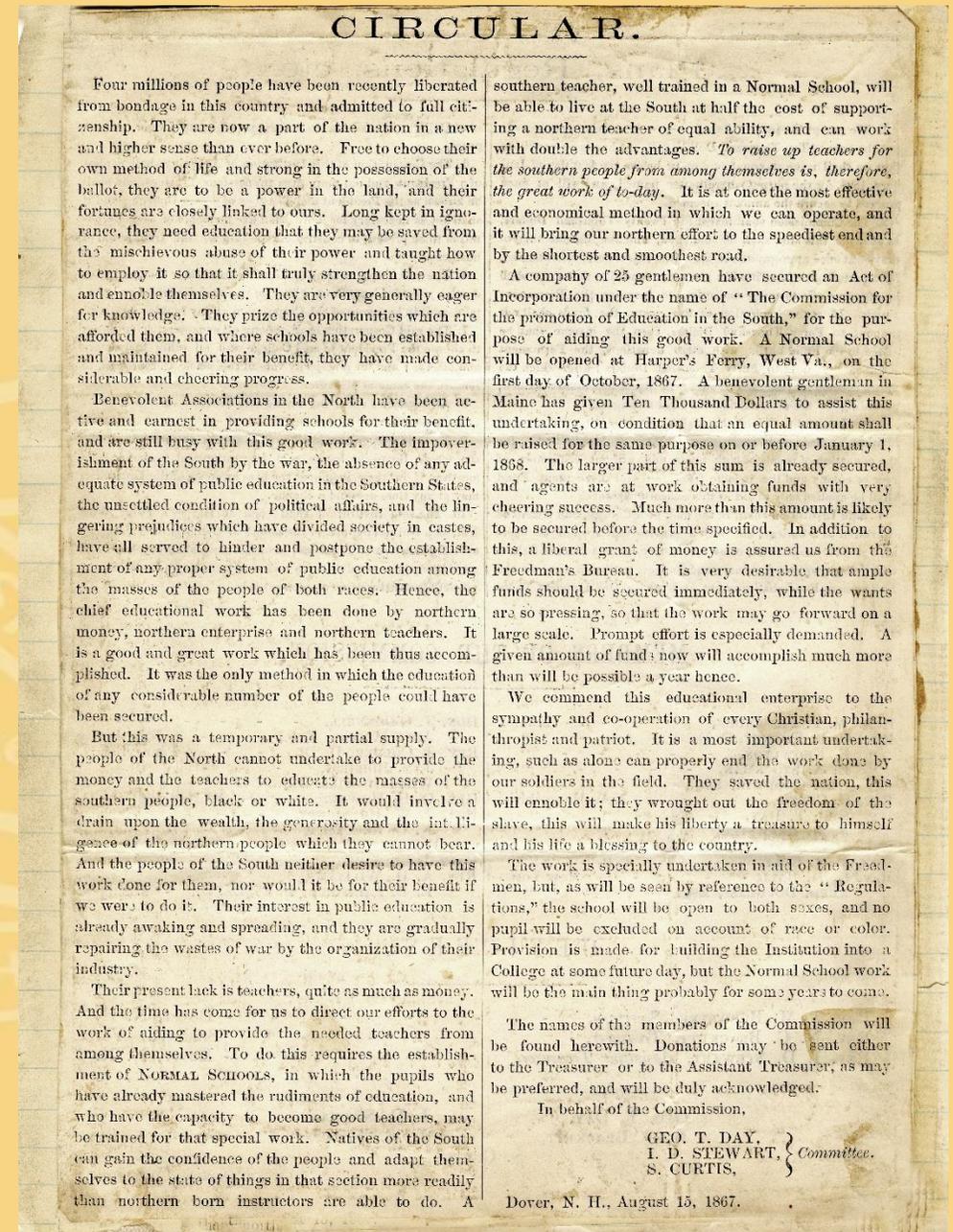
These letters of October and November 1865 contain detailed instructions to Brackett regarding the establishment of schools and churches in Jefferson and Berkeley counties.

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



A Circular and an Appeal Announcing the Creation of Storer College

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



Opposing Voices

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

Yours truly,

James Calder.
Historical

Letter by First Lady Varina Banks Howell Davis (right)

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



our own poor factory and country people. In the meanwhile the Northern, so called, philanthropists and men with more millions than they need are pouring them into the Justice hopper and if the whites do nothing we shall soon have an educated horde of brindle idlers "reared" with knowledge who will trample on the poor creatures of our race and ruin our country - I want to talk with you about this, and should like your opinion about it -

With every good wish for you and yours, believe me dear Mrs Bennett

Yours faithfully

V. Jefferson Davis.

April 6th 1906.

First Free Baptist Church.
Rev. JAMES COLDER, Pastor.

Harrisburg, Mar. 18th 1867.

Rev. N. C. Bennett,

Dear Bro.,

I have received a letter from Dr. Chimes this eve. saying that you will not be here to participate in our convention, and requesting me to forward to you a letter previous received from him. I regret to hear that you will not be with us, as I am sure you could have helped us much in our plans for mission work. I could not get a free ticket in advance for you, but had made an arrangement which would have amounted to the same thing.

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

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

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

1867

have at heart in which Mrs. Galloway is the active promoter - the education of the ignorant whites in the South. Our people have sat supremely ignorant with the knowledge that we are the superior race liberally contributing to the education of the black race and making no apparent practicable movement towards educating

1867. 10. 24. 1867.

My dear Mrs. Bennett,

Your cards will be I am sure a great pleasure to Mrs. B. and should go to the lecture with a good notice of going at night. I trust you will come to me soon if you are not going short a visit as the last you kindly made to me. There is our subject.

circular. He will probably give to Normal schools in scholarship say \$5 or \$100 for each student and of this, the institution would probably have one half for tuition, and the student the other half towards his board. Gen. Howard is hoping for aid to his school, and Dr. Sears says he sees no reason why we may not stand on the same ground as Gen. H's school. I shall write Gen. H. as soon as you return me the paper signed, and shall suggest to him several points, as Dr. S. will consult him in a few days. Dr. S. leaves next week - is to visit the South. If we can establish a first class Normal School at the Ferry in connection with our University - Stanton University (don't laugh) I have no doubt but that we

ference in the paper I send you. Will you please sign it, if you approve it, and return it to me by first mail. I am instructed by Bro. Collier and Ball to ask Gen. Howard to make his conditional subscription to this "provisional committee", for the reason that he may die, or Johnson may remove him before we can get incorporated. If he will make the subscription to us, we will give bonds for the safe keeping of the funds. I left Harrisburg Tuesday morning for New York, and N. Y. yesterday morning - leave for home this morning - called on Dr. Sears last evening - gave him your address - send you one of his circulars. You see the plan in the "report" over.

A. B. Please sign your name on the paper at Stanton, Va. I shall send the paper to Bros. Day, Knoultton, Cantis, Brewster, and Goodwin for their signature - but shall go first and consult Bro. Storer.

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Stanton University???

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

Providence, April 25, 1867

Dear Bro.
I spent the Sabbath in Baltimore - went to Harrisburg Monday - met Bro. Ball there - he enters into our plans with much earnestness. Bro. B. Bro. Collier and myself called on Senator Cameron. Senator C. pledged us his aid by way of securing the property at the Ferry. Bro. Collier is to visit the Governor of Virginia at the proper time in view of asking for \$50,000 from that State. Bro. Ball is to see Gerrit Smith and others asking aid.
We have thought best to have some kind of an organization at once, and you will see the result of our con-

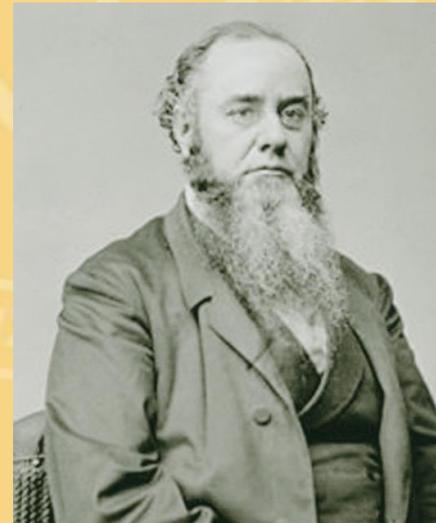
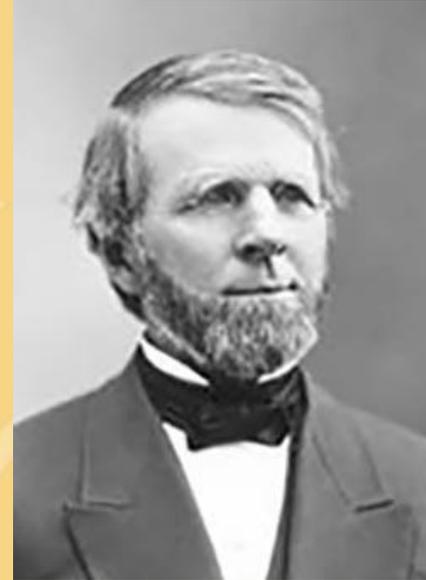
Cheney and Stanton

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

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

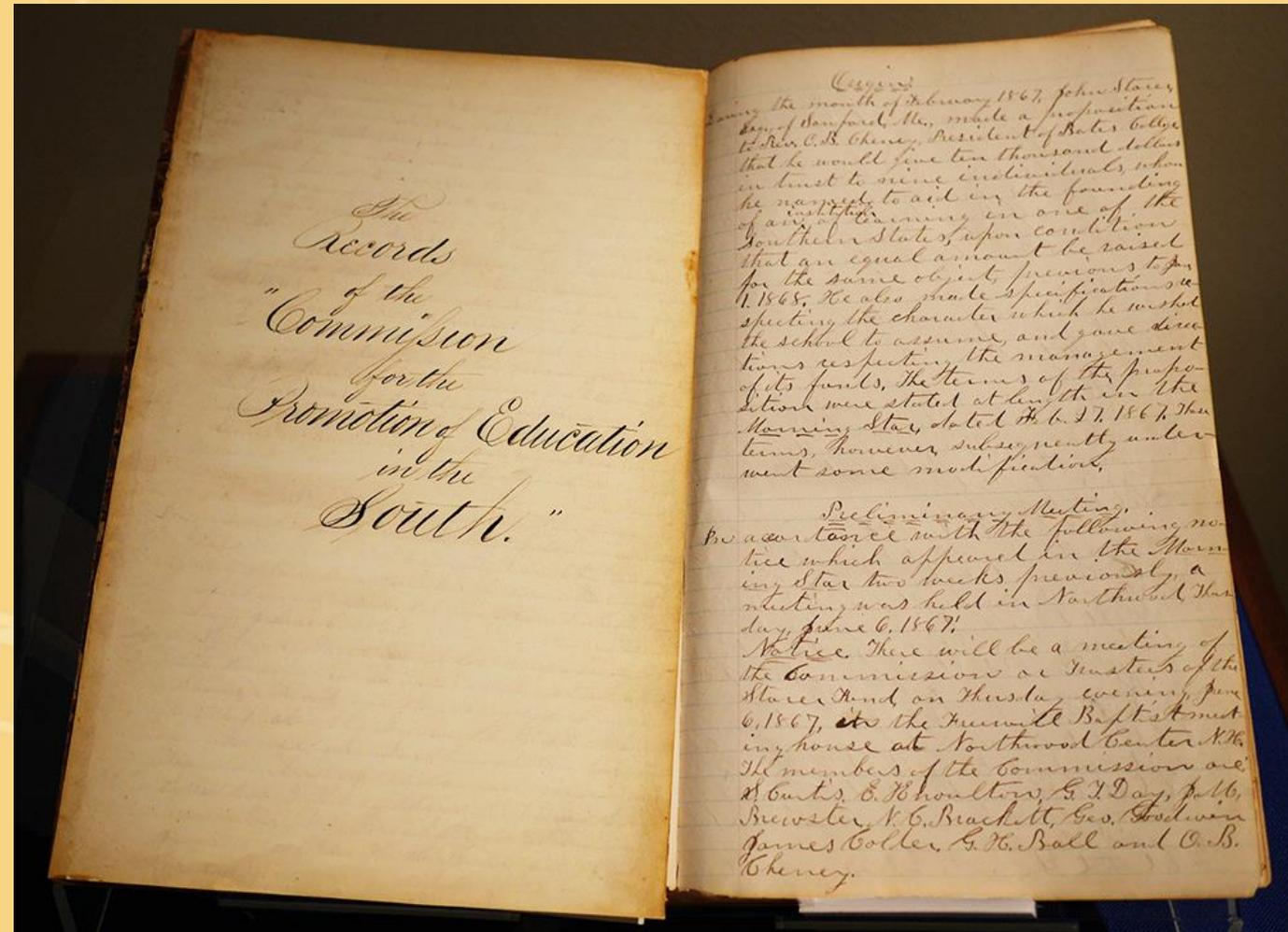
Spectacles of U.S. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton (1814-1869)

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



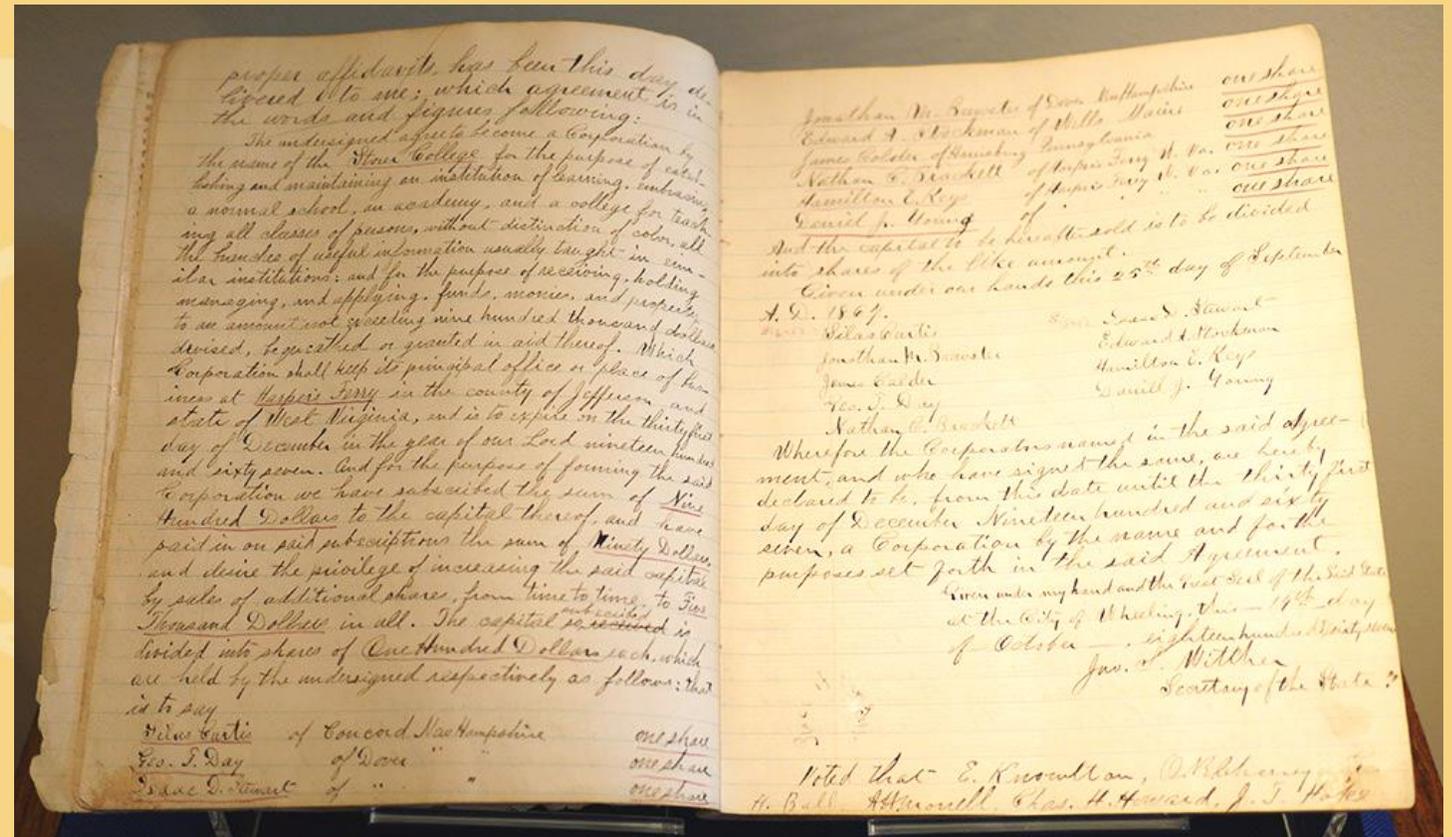
“To raise up teachers for the Southern people from among themselves...”

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



Original Articles of Incorporation and Stockholders Minute Book to Storer College

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

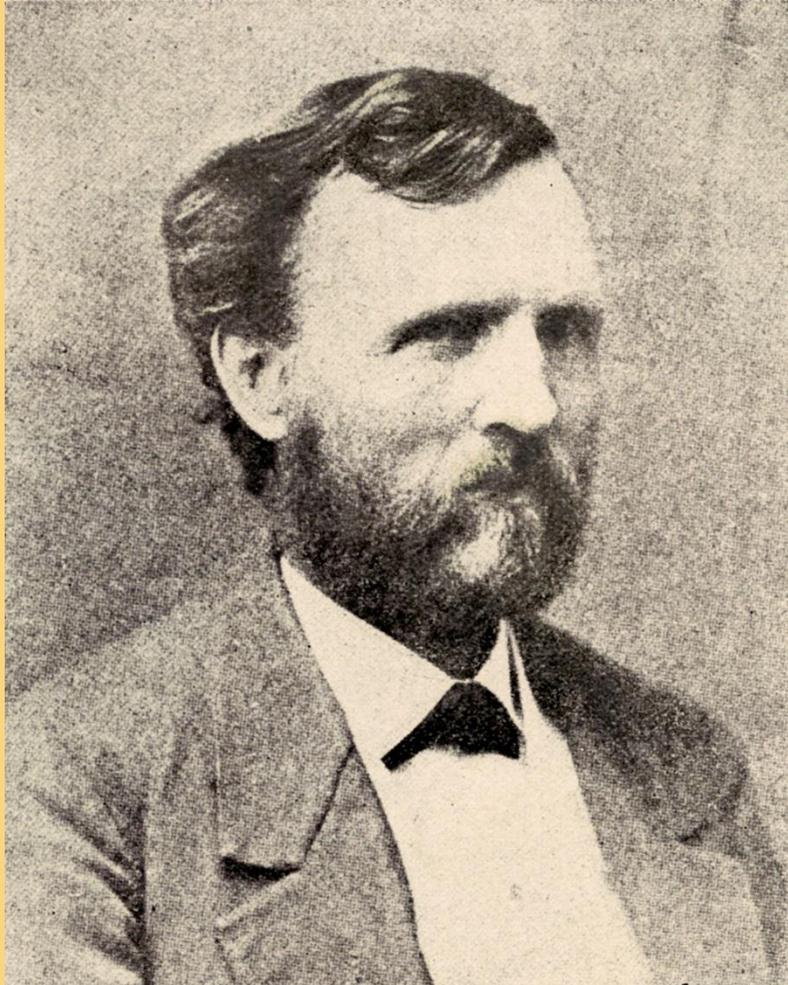


Lockwood House, the first home of the Harpers Ferry Mission School

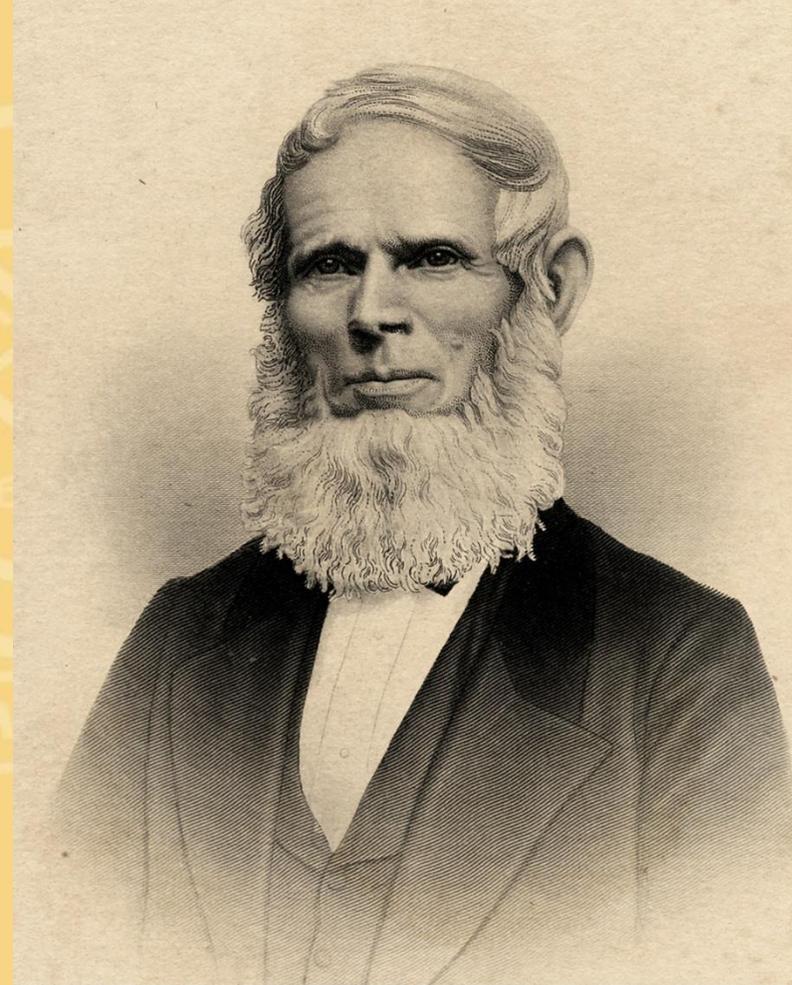
From *Frank Leslie's
Illustrated News*,
September 3, 1864



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



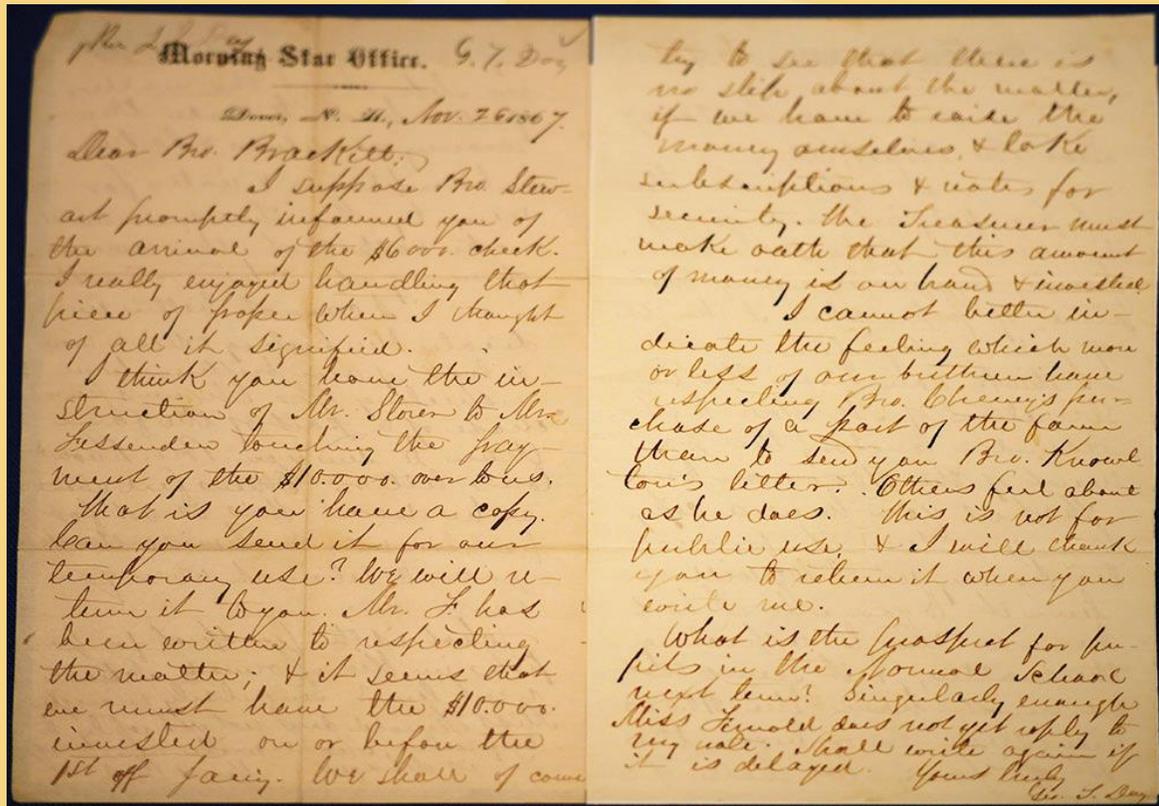
John Storer (1796-1867)
Benefactor of Storer College



Making the Dream a Reality

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

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



"I hope you will succeed in the matter"

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

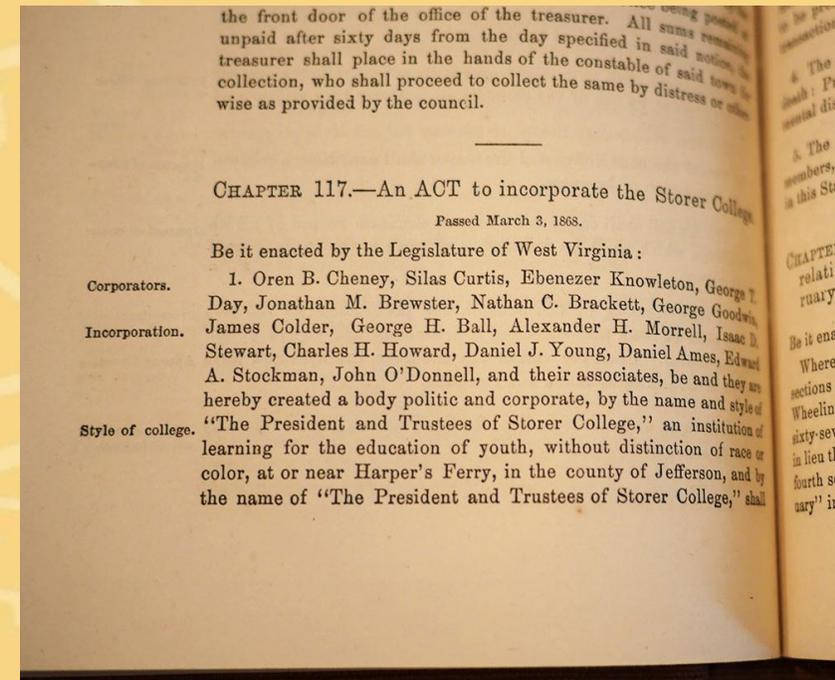


The Incorporation of Storer College

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

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

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



Looking Down the Shenandoah River from Camp Hill, Harpers Ferry

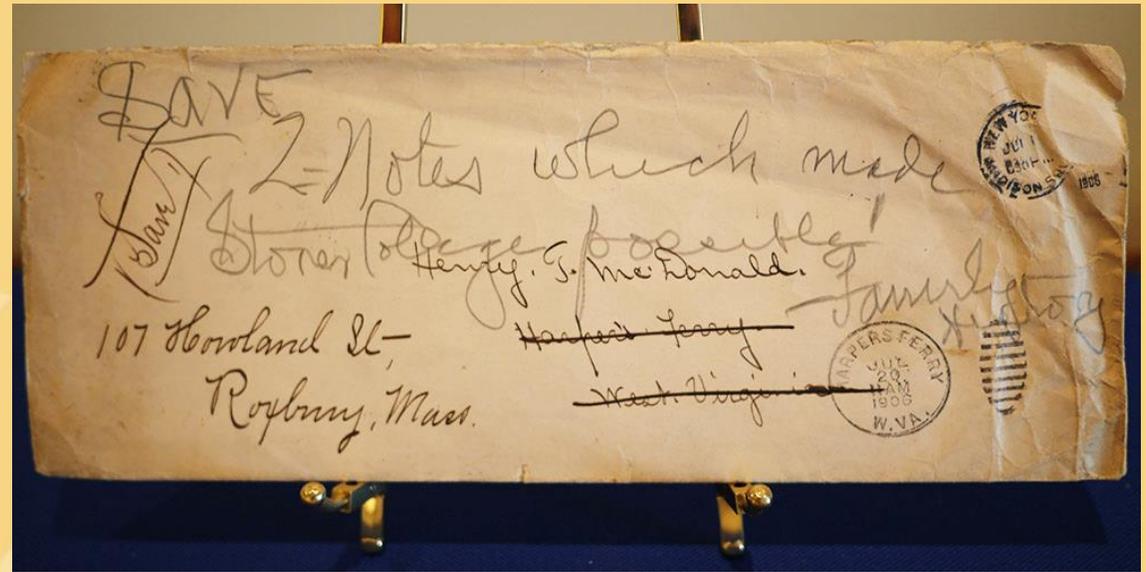


LOOKING DOWN THE SHENANDOAH RIVER FROM CAMP HILL. HARPER'S FERRY, W. VA.

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

“2 Notes Which Made Storer Possible”

These two notes totaling \$2300 represented part of the funds needed to match John Storer’s grant of \$10,000 to found Storer College. The matching fund total was raised with the tremendous help of a \$6,000 contribution from the Freedmen’s Bureau. Note the revenue stamps on the back of the drafts. These designate that taxes were paid on the transactions. The handwriting on the envelope quoted above is believed to be that of Storer President Henry McDonald.



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

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

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



Early Storer College Diploma

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

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

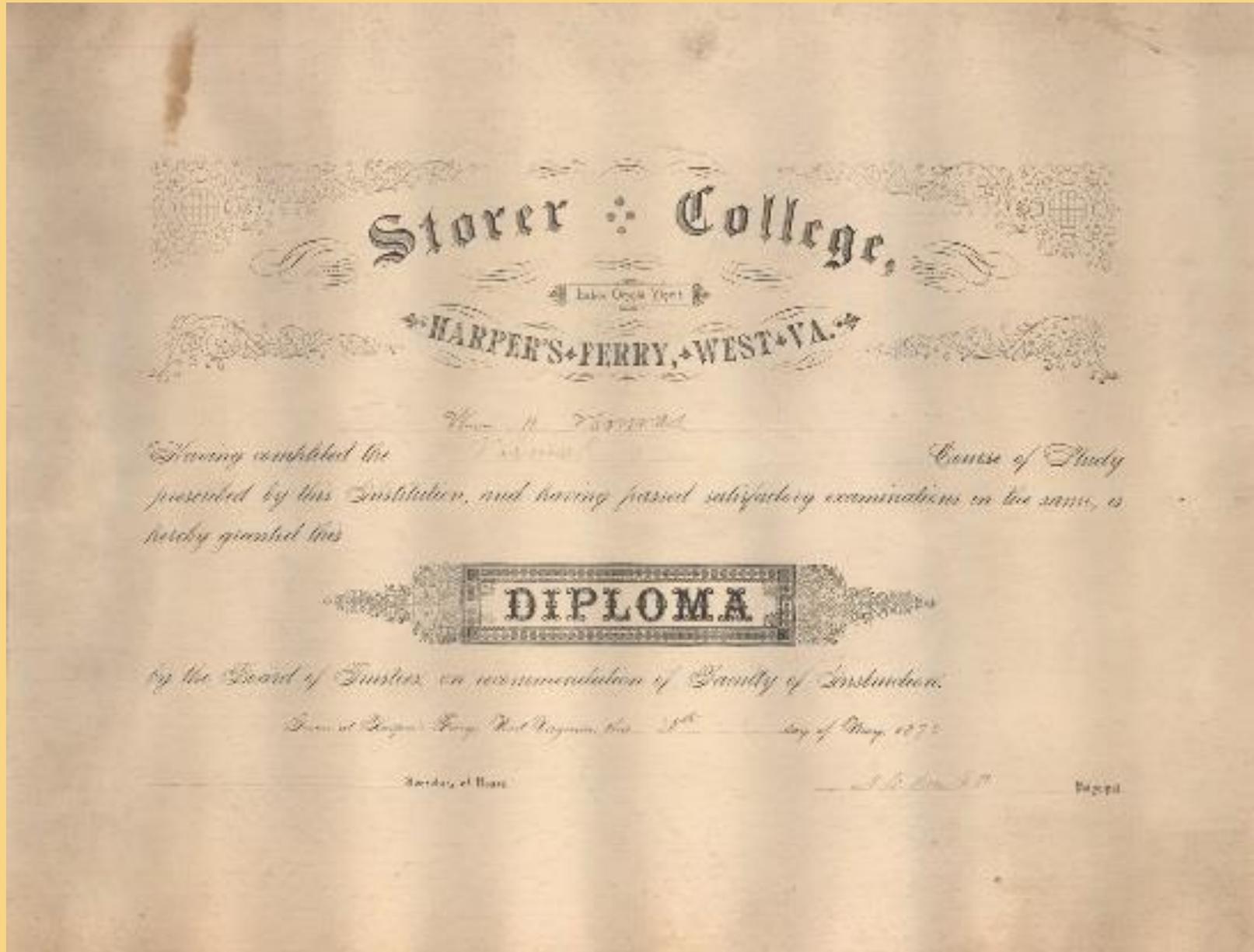




Exhibit Continues
Next Gallery

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