

The Eye of the Storm: Civil War Richmond

Slavery / Freedom Walking Tour



Introduction

This Slavery and Freedom tour begins at the public entrance to the Virginia State Capitol and takes us east to the oldest section of Richmond and the site of one of the nation's largest slave markets before and during the Civil War.

According to the 1860 census, approximately one-third of Richmond's residents that year were black. More than 11,000 were slaves living in the city. Many thousands more African-American people — men, women and children — were here in Richmond temporarily, to be bought and sold by dealers concentrated in the district we will be



visiting on this tour.

Union occupation put an end to slavery here, and Abraham Lincoln put an exclamation point to that fact when he visited the city April 4, 1865, greeted by joyous crowds of newly freed slaves. This tour intersects part of the president's route through the city that day.

Also during this tour we'll visit a very old market area, tobacco warehouses converted to hospitals during the war, and the site of the notorious Libby Prison.

This tour takes a little more than an hour to walk.

Many of Richmond's black residents — both slaves and more than 2,500 free blacks — enjoyed a slightly

higher degree of freedom here than they might have in a more rural setting.

A large percentage of Richmond's slave population was "hired out" by country owners for labor in the city. In many cases, slaves lived independently. They were free to find their own lodging, make the most of their own time and earn money with overtime work.

But, wary of this "at large" slave population and thousands of free blacks, city leaders restricted their freedom with the enforcement of laws that, among other things, barred all blacks from riding in carriages and carrying canes on the street. Blacks were forced to disperse within 30 minutes of church services and were made to carry their papers at all times. Those violating these laws were subject to penalties including whipping and, for the free blacks, being sold into slavery.

More than half of Richmond's slaves labored in the city's tobacco warehouses and factories. However, many others, free and slave, worked in virtually every industrial enterprise in Richmond, in many cases holding important skilled positions. Many — slave and free — worked as barbers, teamsters, carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, housemaids and cooks. Some free blacks owned their own shops and a few owned slaves of their own.

The war created a shortage of white workers, and blacks were called to fill the gap. The Tredegar Iron Works alone hired more than 1,000 slaves during the war.

1 Exchange and Ballard Hotels (site)

1841 (*Exchange*)

1855 (*Ballard*)

The Exchange Hotel was located on the southeast corner of 14th and Franklin streets, the Ballard across 14th Street. Both are long gone.

One Richmond resident recalled that the Exchange Hotel was "a terrifically over-crowded hostelry at all Confederate times,..." housing generals, diplomats and assorted dignitaries.

Former U.S. President John Tyler, later a member of the Confederate Congress, died in the hotel Jan. 17, 1862. Famed Confederate spy Rose Greenhow stayed in the Ballard in June 1862 and was visited there by President Davis.

One observer noted that during Abraham Lincoln's visit April 4, 1865, a person was seen waving an American flag in the walkway between the hotels.

Slave sales were common in and around the hotel. Guests could see easily from east-facing windows one of



the largest slave markets in the country operating a block or two away in Shockoe Bottom.

Advertisement in the March 26, 1861, Richmond Dispatch:

To remain in, or near the city, an able young negro man, about twenty-two years of age, also, a woman, good Cook and Washer, about forty-five years old, and a good Teamster, (not restricted to the city) for sale or for hire the balance of the year.

Apply at once to E.A. Cocke,

Office on 14th st., Exchange Hotel Building.

One of the finest hotels in Richmond for decades, the Exchange once hosted a post office, reading room, baths, stores — and at least one slave auctioneer's headquarters. In the 1850s, John Ballard bought the Exchange and built the Ballard House across the street. The merged hotels then were connected with a walkway over Franklin Street. Among the guests and visitors at the Exchange Hotel prior to the war were Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, songstress Jenny Lind, and the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII.

Many Confederate notables, including Robert E. Lee, chose the Exchange during post-war visits to the city.

2 14th and Main streets

Please face south, away from Capitol Square.

This was a busy corner during the war — the intersection of the downtown commercial district to your right and the market and warehouse district to your left.

Looters swept through here during the infamous April 2, 1863, Bread Riot. Shops were cleaned out or damaged in and around this intersection

as the mob proceeded east and south. Although history is cloudy on the point, the riot ended here or near here as Virginia Gov. John Letcher, backed by the Public Guard, threatened to shoot the insurrectionists.

A few blocks south on 14th Street is Mayo's Bridge, which crosses the James River as it did during the war. It was the last remaining bridge available to Confederate troops as they evacuated the city April 3, 1865. The Richmond and Danville Railroad Station and its bridge across the river were located adjacent to the bridge. President Jefferson Davis and other Confederate officials used this



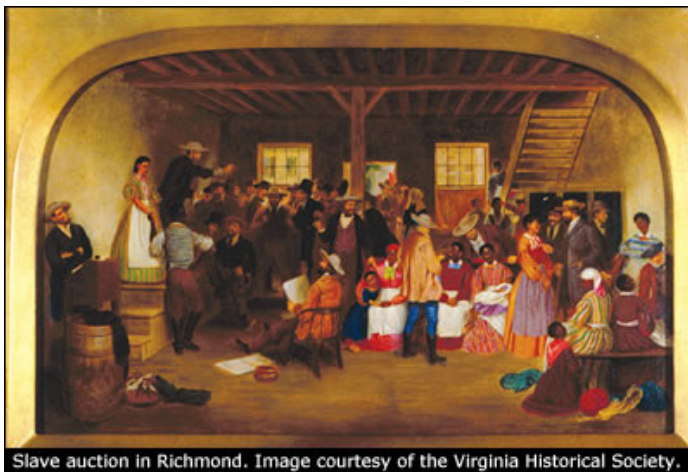
railroad to leave the city late the night before.

The Evacuation Fire April 2–3, 1865, ignited by the evacuating Confederates, began in warehouses a block south of here.

Abraham Lincoln, on his tour of the city April 4, passed through this intersection followed by a growing group of newly freed slaves and curious citizens. Blocked from continuing west on Main Street (to your right) by fire debris and falling walls, he turned north and passed the Exchange and Ballard hotels on his way to the Confederate White House.

3 The Slave Markets / Slavery Reconciliation Statue

Northwest corner 15th and Main streets



Slave auction in Richmond. Image courtesy of the Virginia Historical Society.

Stand in the plaza surrounding the Slavery Reconciliation Statue. Before and during the war, you would have been surrounded here by one of the largest slave market complexes in the country.

An interpretive sign across Main Street locates sites associated with the slave trade in this area.

An estimated 300,000 slaves were bought and sold in Richmond prior to the war. Most were “sold South” to the growing sugar and cotton plantations. The sale of slaves continued in Richmond into the last days of the Civil War.

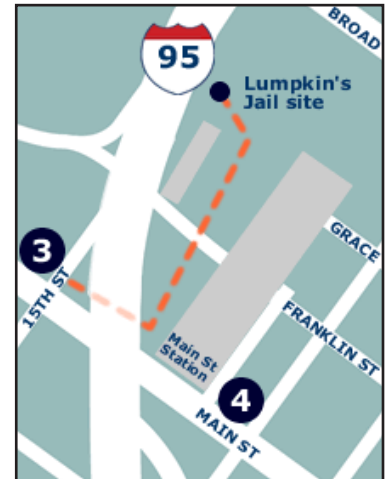
Red flags outside the buildings announced auction sales. Major dealers offered dozens of human beings for sale each day in their own facilities. Smaller sales also were conducted in the back rooms of commercial buildings and hotels.

Historians are beginning to quantify the economic impact of slave sales in Richmond. Sixty-nine “traders,” “agents” or “auctioneers” are listed in the 1860 Richmond City Directory. A half-dozen “major” traders sold hundreds of slaves each day in the city, according to announcements in the newspapers of the time.

Richmond’s slave trade was the most lucrative business in Richmond by far — easily outdistancing the tobacco, iron and flour milling industries. The profits were huge. One auction house recorded \$2,671,572 in annual income in 1859.

Total annual slave sales in Richmond would have “equaled several hundred million in 2003 dollars,” according to Jack Trammel in a Washington Times article.

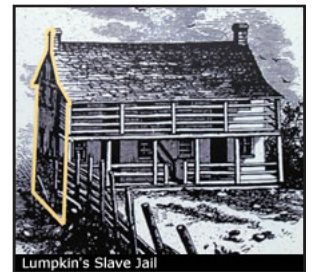
The economic impact didn’t end on the trader’s floor. Richmond businesses piled up more money insuring, clothing and housing transient slaves.



Lumpkin’s Jail Site

No buildings directly identified with the sale of slaves survive in Richmond. But archaeology recently uncovered the site of one of the most notorious slave operations in the city, Lumpkin’s Slave Jail.

Take a short walk (see dotted line on the map) to the site of Lumpkin’s, which actually was a cluster of related buildings, operated from 1840 to the end of the war. A post-war description of the Lumpkin site is included in the book *Built by Blacks*, published by the Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond Neighborhoods:



“Lumpkin’s slave jail consisted of about half an acre of land near the center of the older portion of Richmond. The patch lay very low in a deep hollow or ‘bottom,’ as it might be called, through which a small stream of water ran very slowly. In approaching the place from the Franklin Street side, the descent was quite gradual and easy by means of a narrow, crooked, untidy lane. Around the outer borders of the said half-acre was a fence, in some places ten or twelve feet in height. Inside of the fence and very close to it was a tall old brick building, which Lumpkin had used for his dwelling house. Nearby were other buildings, also of brick, where he used to shelter the more peaceable of his slave-gangs that were brought to him from time to time to be sold. But in the corner of the plot was the chief object of interest

— a low, rough, brick building known as the ‘slave jail.’ In this building Lumpkin was accustomed to imprison the disobedient and punish the refractory. The stout iron bars were still to be seen across one or more of the windows during my repeated visits to this place. In the rough floor, and about at the center of it, was the stout iron staple and whipping ring.”

Hoping to escape with his remaining “property” as Richmond fell in 1865, trader Lumpkin led a group of chained slaves to the nearby Richmond and Danville Railroad. He was denied a place on the last train and presumably his slaves were freed.

Plans for the Lumpkin’s Jail site are under development. A picture and some description are offered at the archaeological site.

The Reconciliation Statue

Artist: *Stephen Broadbent*

Dedicated in 2007, this memorial stands very near the heart of Richmond’s slave market before and during the war.

The triangle represents the regret of three communities that were involved in the slave trade: Richmond; Liverpool, England; and Benin, West Africa. Identical statues are located in all three places.



4 The First Market

17th and Main streets

This is one of the oldest farmers’ markets in the country, dating at least from the establishment of Richmond as a city. Its location near the James River and Shockoe Creek



(now running underground) and on Main Street made it a convenient location for farmers and shoppers.

Known as the First Market during the Civil War, the site then featured a two-story brick building as its centerpiece.

Shoppers here during the war constantly contended with shortages caused by the friction between civilian and military needs, a flourishing black market and Union military activity in the area (which prevented shipments to the city).

Prices skyrocketed during the war:

Prices per pound		
	May 1862	April 1864
Bacon	36 cents	\$7.42
Butter	\$1.20	\$9.50
Flour	\$7.12	\$250.00
Corn	85 cents	\$45.00

One Richmond woman insisted that “by 1865 food was so scarce, and the currency so inflated, that when you went to market, it was said that ‘you carried your money in your market basket, and brought your provisions home in your purse.’”

Lincoln passed by the market on his way up from the river during his visit April 4, 1865.

5 Wartime residences

1708–1710 E. Franklin St.

1842–1844

6 Wartime structure

1721 E. Franklin St.

1817

7 Masonic Hall

*South side of Franklin Street
between 18th and 19th streets
1787*



Having survived the Civil War, the venerable the Masonic Hall appeared threatened after the surrender of Richmond, but was saved by a bond of brotherhood stronger than war.

Maj. Atherton Stevens, of the 4th Massachusetts Cavalry, was a staff officer to Gen. Godfrey Weitzel. He was also a Mason. Stevens was in the first wave of Union troops to enter Richmond on April 3, 1865. His detachment of 40 men took possession of the Capitol and there raised their regimental guidon in place of the Confederate flag.

After being relieved at the Capitol, Stevens and his men made their way through the smoldering chaos of the streets to secure the Masonic Hall, where they took in families of local Masons displaced by the fire.

Stevens posted soldiers around the building to protect it and the families within from scavenging locals. Two weeks later a Richmond Mason wrote heartfelt thanks to the Lodge in Cambridge, Massachusetts, praising the thoughtful and timely actions of brother Mason Maj. Stevens and his men.

This is the oldest Masonic structure built for that purpose in the United States. John Marshall, George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette were visitors here. The building served as a hospital during the War of 1812. One of the largest meeting places in Richmond before the war, the Mason's Hall was rented for various community events, including an exhibition by tightrope acrobats.

8 Grant's Tobacco Factory

*Northeast corner 19th and Franklin streets
1853*

*Confederate General
Hospital No. 12
(later the Wayside Hospital)*

Many of the large buildings that housed pre-war tobacco operations in this area were transformed during the war into hospitals for sick and wounded Confederates. This building, owned by William H. Grant (a neighbor of Jefferson Davis), was converted in December 1861.

During the Seven Days Battles in June 1862, the women of Richmond hastened to aid the overwhelmed hospital staffs.

One young girl working in an unspecified Richmond hospital approached a soldier's cot. "Can't I do something for you, Sir?" "No thank you, Ma'am." "Can't I wash your face for you?" "Well, if you insist, ma'm, but 14 ladies have washed it already today."

As the war dragged on, the number of seriously wounded increased. Richmond minister Moses Hoge noted sadly, "No one knows what war is who has not seen military hospitals...."



Grant's Tobacco Factory

9 Enders Warehouse

*20-26 N. 20th St.
Civil War hospital*

10 Wartime structure

*Old Stone House
1914 Main St.
c. 1740s*



The Old Stone House 1865

Richmond's oldest surviving building now houses the Poe Museum.

11 Libby Prison (site)

20th and Cary streets

This was the site of one of the most notorious of Richmond's Civil War prisons.

In early March 1862, the Confederate government appropriated a ship outfitting business, owned by Luther Libby and his son, for use as a prison for captured Union officers. The conversion happened so quickly that the Libby name remained on the building.

An estimated 30,000 prisoners were held here during the war with as many as 1,200 Union officers held at a time in the 32,000-square-foot brick structure. Underfed, crowded and faced with unsanitary conditions, the literate prisoners here wrote home about their condition, contributing to Libby's lasting unsavory reputation.

Libby Prison commandant Maj. Thomas P. Turner received an additional charge in March 1865, after the Confederate War Department authorized the recruitment of "Negro Soldiers."

The Richmond Examiner noticed: "The company of Negroes recruiting at the...corner of Cary and 21st Streets...now numbers 35 members, all uniformed and equipped, and are drilled daily.... Maj. Turner hopes to recruit and equip a command of eighty or a hundred in a few weeks, and treat the citizens to a publick exhibition of their proficiency in the drill before turning them over to General Lee."

A small contingent of Confederate black troops did drill in Capitol Square and may have participated in the retreat to Appomattox. Meanwhile, Maj. Turner destroyed Libby prison records and fled the city.

Following the war, the building was dismantled and shipped to Chicago for exhibition. Libby Prison was torn down again in 1897 and its materials were used in various construction projects in the Chicago area. Artifacts from the prison are now on display in many Richmond museums.

Note: This section of the city, now separated from the nearby James River by the floodwall, was a warehouse district before and during the war. Although no Civil War-era buildings survive, the area maintains something of its wartime atmosphere. The Civil War prisons Castle Thunder and Castle Lightening once stood across Cary Street from each other between 18th and 19th streets.

James River landing

The last stop on this tour is near the Richmond Canal Walk's eastern entrance. Take the Canal Walk west from 17th Street about a block and stop at the "Box Brown" exhibit (about 16th and Dock streets).

Now blocked from view by the Richmond flood-wall, the James River landing here has been an active area throughout Richmond's history.

On May 24, 1607, the first Englishman landed nearby, at the foot of the James River rapids. By the mid-1700s a trading post and ferry were operating here. Small industry followed in the early 1800s.

All the James River bridges (wagon and railroad) were burned by retreating Confederates, and so Union engineers quickly constructed a pontoon bridge near here at 17th Street. This is the bridge Robert E. Lee used when he returned from Appomattox April 15, 1865.

The floodwall was added in the 1980s to help control the floods that have plagued this low-lying area of the city. The Canal Walk continues west to Brown's Island and the Tredegar Iron Works.

The exhibit here, "African Americans on the Waterfront," includes an exhibit devoted to "Box" Brown, a slave working in a nearby tobacco warehouse, who devised a novel method of escape. With the help of an accomplice he was nailed inside a 2x3-foot wooden box and "shipped" by rail to sympathetic arms in Philadelphia.

President Abraham Lincoln landed near here, arriving by boat to begin his visit to Richmond April 4, 1865.