

Reconstruction and Redemption in Lexington

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ALTHOUGH the Civil War has been covered amply by historians writing about the Valley of Virginia, the immediate postwar years have received scant attention. This chapter fills a part of this gap through an examination of the Reconstruction period in the small Rockbridge County town of Lexington. While a troubled time politically and socially, Reconstruction was, for Lexington, a period of considerable prosperity. Lexington's economic recovery was both rapid and complete. Reports of Freedmen's Bureau agents, local newspaper accounts, courthouse records, files of Washington College and the Virginia Military Institute, and correspondence of students, townspeople, and northern schoolmarmes sent to Lexington to instruct the freedman—all shed light on Lexington's Reconstruction history, which divides into several phases. After an initial period of uncertainty about the extent to which Lexington's racial norms were to be reconstructed, a group of students and townspeople, in league with the local newspaper,

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conspired, in 1868, to redeem the town for continued white domination and to return as closely as possible to the *status quo antebellum*. While focusing their efforts primarily on Lexington, the town's cadre of "Redeemers" also extended their efforts from time to time into outlying parts of the county.

Reconstruction was over for Virginia by 1870, with the return to home rule (and white domination) under the Underwood Constitution. Contrary to the intent of its drafters, this document had been adulterated through a postconvention compromise which allowed near-universal white male suffrage in conjunction with black enfranchisement. The statewide Redemption, however, was preceded in communities like Lexington by another form of Redemption, the restoration of white control over the social order. Ironically, Lexington's societal Redemption was effectively completed before the full implications of Congressional Reconstruction politics were realized in the town. White Lexingtonians had suppressed the black population's aspirations for a new order prior to the replacement, in late 1868, of its elected town council by a councilmanic slate appointed by the military commander of Virginia. The final two years of political Reconstruction in Lexington, under this non-elected government, were anticlimactic. The victors in the battle for Lexington already had been determined.

In many respects, Lexington was not a typical Shenandoah Valley town. Not only was it the county seat, serving as the legal and commercial center for Rockbridge County, but also it was a college town. Its two academic institutions, Washington College and the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), provided employment to many locals and stimulated a constant influx of persons not native to the area. Moreover, Lexington's prewar population of approximately two thousand (which included the student bodies of the two colleges) was about two-thirds white and one-third black. About 5 percent of the total population in 1860 had been free blacks, giving Lexington a higher percentage of both free and enslaved African Americans than most other valley communities.¹

1. Edwin L. Dooley, Jr., "Lexington in the 1860 Census," in *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society [1975-79]* [Lexington, Va.] 9 (1982): 190-91. For additional information on Lexington's black community in the 1850s, see Ellen Eslinger, "Antebellum Liquor Reform in Lexington, Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 99 (1991): 162-86. See also William Fitzhugh Brundage, "Slavery in Antebellum Rockbridge County," Northern Fellowship Research Papers, 1983, Mary Moody Northern Library, Stonewall Jackson House, Lexington, Va.; and Megan Haley, "The African-American Experience in Thomas 'Stonewall' Jackson's Lexington" (unpub. paper, 1994); both on file in Mary Moody Northern Library, Stonewall Jackson House, Lexington, Va. For a thorough account of industrial slavery in Rockbridge County,

Unlike neighboring towns to the north in the valley, Lexington had been subjected to but one military attack during the Civil War, and that had come late in the conflict, when Union forces, under the command of Gen. David Hunter, briefly occupied the town, destroyed the buildings of VMI, burned the home of former Gov. John Letcher, and inflicted minor damage on Washington College property. During the war, in fact, Lexington had served as a place of refuge for some wishing to escape areas of the valley and the state which were more frequently the scene of military engagements. One such refugee, Cornelia McDonald, had moved from Winchester to Lexington with her six children in the summer of 1863.² Among the last refugees to arrive were a number of displaced freedmen, who, presumably searching for work, assistance, or family members separated from them during years of bondage, set up on encampment in some abandoned buildings at the fairgrounds on the edge of town.³

At war's end, the Lexington populace, black and white, was for the moment economically devastated. Even so, Reconstruction soon brought prosperity. In the summer of 1865, Mrs. McDonald's eldest son, Harry, felt compelled to take on work as a day laborer on a nearby farm even though, as his mother remarked, "the thought was terrible . . . of his working for the same wages, and by the side of negroes."⁴ However, the economic situation improved quickly and amazingly. Although the 1865 wheat harvest had failed, the other crops did well, providing much-needed income for the rural farmers who used Lexington as their market town.⁵ By the fall of 1865, young Harry McDonald was able to leave the fields and enter Washington College when it reopened in its hastily repaired buildings. Robert E. Lee soon accepted an offer to assume the presidency of the college, thus attracting hundreds of additional students.

Local boarding houses, already enjoying the benefits of the rapidly increasing college student trade, were further stressed when VMI reopened before its barracks were fully rebuilt, forcing the cadets also to

with some comments about slavery in Lexington, see Charles B. Dew, *Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge* (New York: Norton, 1994).

2. Cornelia Peake McDonald, *A Diary with Reminiscences of the War and Refugee Life in the Shenandoah Valley, 1860-1865* (Nashville: Cullen and Gertner Co., 1934), pp. 187-89.

3. Capt. George B. Carse to Maj. W. Stover How, March 1866, in *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Virginia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications No. 45).

4. Cornelia McDonald, *Diary with Reminiscences*, p. 263.

5. E. Nash Boney, *John Letcher of Virginia* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1966), p. 223.

look for accommodations in town. As early as October 1865, the *Lexington Gazette and Banner* proclaimed in an editorial the critical need to construct additional dwellings and commercial buildings, noting that many potential residents and entrepreneurs were being compelled to locate in other communities due to their inability to find lodgings or business property to rent in Lexington.⁶ General Lee, taking stock of the situation, urged his college's Board of Trustees, in 1867, to authorize construction of a college boarding house to help meet the demand. By charging a "barely remunerative rate," this operation would also assist in driving down the price of private lodgings in the community.⁷

Townspople found themselves priced out of Lexington's housing market, too. One such resident noted that, late in 1866, "in consequence of high rents & the difficulty of getting a house," he had been compelled to surrender his own lodgings and move in with his father-in-law.⁸ Lexington during Reconstruction was a bustling place, and one undergoing a major expansion in population, if not in housing stock. Despite the housing shortage, the population of the town, fueled largely by expansion at the colleges, continued to grow unabated throughout the decade. The 1870 U.S. Census reported that the number of persons residing in Lexington had nearly doubled since 1860. Notably, the ratio of whites to blacks had remained nearly constant since the 1860 count had been taken.⁹

Given the large number of college students resident in the town, the Lexington population, not surprisingly, was much more youthful than most places of similar size. Lexingtonians also were well armed, with all the consequences one might anticipate in an overcrowded and testosterone-laden community. It was a place where confrontations frequently escalated from pushing to shoving to gunfire, and where weapons were readily available to meet challenges to one's honor or status. A Lexington saloon manager estimated in 1867 that many of the town's blacks and "at least two-thirds of the students at Washington College were

6. *Gazette and Banner* (Lexington, Va.), October 4, 1865.

7. R. E. Lee to Board of Trustees, Washington College, June 17, 1867, in University Archives, Special Collections, James Graham Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.

8. Deposition of M. G. Burgess, January 11, 1867, in Case Papers, *John Letcher and Others v. Thomas L. Perry; John Letcher v. J. K. Edmundson and Others*, in Box 132, File 414, Office of the Clerk of the Court, Rockbridge County Courthouse, Lexington, Va.

9. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Manuscript Population Schedules, Rockbridge County, Va.* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, M-593).

armed."¹⁰ When one adds to this mix the social, economic, and political instability brought about by the sudden transfer of nearly one-third of the population from bondage to freedom, the situation in Lexington aptly can be described as volatile.

Most of Lexington's new arrivals were welcomed with open arms by the town's white residents. General Lee, Commodore Matthew Fontaine Maury, and the new students and cadets all were seen as splendid additions to the community. There were others, however, whose coming the white citizenry resented and opposed. For example, there were the refugee freedmen who had encamped at the fairgrounds. Although the local overseer of the poor provided the vagrants with some assistance, the Rockbridge Agricultural and Mechanical Society, which owned the ten-acre tract, attempted to demolish the buildings the freedmen were occupying (temporary structures erected there during the war) and to sell the land.¹¹

Agents of the Freedmen's Bureau, another group of outsiders who were *persona non grata* even more than the freedmen themselves, opposed the plans to evict the freedmen from the fairgrounds. Lexington had been chosen as the headquarters for Freedmen's Bureau personnel assigned to Rockbridge County and the adjoining counties of Alleghany and Bath. Last, but not necessarily least detested, among the unwanted arrivals were several New England teachers who came to Lexington under the auspices of the American Missionary Association to operate schools for the freedmen.

In her diary, wartime refugee Cornelia McDonald recorded the first known encounter of Lexingtonians with the Freedmen's Bureau staff. She wrote that, late one afternoon in May 1865, "a clerky looking man in a round hat and a jaunty coat stepped up on my porch as I stood there and requested in an impudent manner to know which of my sons had torn down a handbill which had been pasted on our garden fence by his order." Thinking that the agent would reconsider the grievousness of the offense when he met the guilty party, she produced the culprit, her eight-year-old son, Roy. Sensing that little Roy was an unreconstructed Rebel, the agent gave him a severe scolding, only to be greeted by Roy's "mocking face and fiery black eyes as they looked up from under the yellow curls." At this precise moment, elder brother Harry returned

10. Deposition of E. A. D. White, February 7, 1867, in Case Papers, *Letcher v. Perry*.

11. Capt. George B. Carse to Maj. W. Stover How, March 1866, in *Records of the Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*; Charles B. Turner, "Agricultural Expositions and Fairs in Rockbridge County, 1828-1891," in *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society [1980-1989]* [Lexington, Va.] 10 (1990): 394.



This view of Lexington's Main Street was taken about 1865, as evidenced by the fact that the Virginia Military Institute on the hill above the town still shows damage done to the school during the raid on Lexington by Union soldiers in 1864.

from his day's labor in the fields alongside former slaves and, brandishing his riding whip, ordered the bureau agent off the property.¹²

The McDonalds then resided along a lane connecting the campuses of Washington College and VMI. It was inevitable that similar confrontations would occur between federal personnel and students or cadets. One such early incident was a verbal confrontation, late in 1865, between Captain Robinson, either a Bureau agent or a regular U.S. Army officer, and VMI student Stephen Decatur Barrow, a new cadet who previously had served in the 38th Louisiana Infantry. Robinson took offense at Barrow's insults and reported the matter to Francis H. Smith, VMI's superintendent, who investigated the case and sent Cadet Barrow to make amends to Captain Robinson. Although Barrow continued to deny having used the inflammatory language which had been attributed to him, he did apologize, and Robinson agreed to drop the matter. Superintendent Smith attempted to smooth the troubled waters further with a letter to Robinson reminding him that, previous to the incident, he had, both in personal conversation with cadets and in general orders posted to the entire corps, stressed "the importance of avoid-

¹² Cornelia McDonald, *Diary with Reminiscences*, p. 283.

ing all occasion for disorder or ingallantry, and especially all remarks calculated to reflect on any [federal officials] who were on duty here." Noting that the cadets had "generally" abided by the suggestions he had made, Smith thanked Robinson for having "made allowances for youthful indiscretions" in the Barrow case.¹³

During the next few years, there were numerous incidents involving freedmen, townspeople, and "outsiders" which attracted the attention of Lexington's bureau contingent. Some were as trivial as those involving the McDonald brothers and Cadet Barrow; others were of a much more serious nature.

Both students and teachers in the schools organized in Lexington under the auspices of the American Missionary Association (AMA) were objects of frequent hostility and threats. In March 1866, a black girl was accosted by a young white boy who took offense at her chanting "Uncle Sam is rich enough to send us all to school."¹⁴ A few months later, a young freedman named Eli King was stoned by a white boy on his way to class.¹⁵

The three AMA teachers likewise were subjected to threats and abuse. One of them, Julia A. Shearman, reported that a local storekeeper had refused to sell her any milk, that she had been cursed by the drunken son of the same shopkeeper while leaving the Presbyterian Church, and that the sexton of the church subsequently had been instructed to inform her that she and the other teachers no longer could occupy the visitors' pew which they had used while attending services. The Washington College students were equally hostile; Miss Shearman reported that they refused to let her pass them on the sidewalks and that they would "stare and laugh at us & make rude remarks as they dare." The AMA schoolhouse also served as the teachers' residence, and Miss Shearman blamed the college men for pelting the building with rocks almost nightly. There were, however, some successes to report; their black students numbered well over a hundred, and the storekeeper's son had apologized when he sobered up (although the Presbyterian Church still was declared off-limits to those of her calling). Moreover, Miss Shearman explained, some white people had actually requested instruction in reading and writing. She had even been asked by a German

13. Francis H. Smith to Captain Robinson, December 24, 1865, in Argosy Collection, Manuscripts Department, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

14. Capt. George B. Carse to Maj. W. Stover How, March 1866, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

15. "Records Relating to Murders and Outrages," July 6, 1866, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

immigrant ("a violent 'Secesh' and a negrohater") to teach his children his native language, which Miss Shearman spoke fluently.¹⁶

Perhaps, though, these successes did not outweigh the hazards of the Lexington work. After enduring a year in the town, Julia Shearman and the other female teacher, Sarah Burt, accepted positions at other AMA schools and left Lexington. Erastus C. Johnston, their male colleague, spent the summer of 1866 at his former home in Newbury, Vermont, before returning to Lexington in the fall of that year, not as a teacher but as a businessman, to operate a mercantile establishment in one part of the building occupied by the freedmen's school. The work of educating blacks was taken up by others sent by a different organization, the Free Will Baptist Home Missionary Society.¹⁷

The Freedmen's Bureau had numerous opportunities while in Lexington to intervene in the local judicial process; on occasion, it conducted its own court. One of the more notable early instances of the Lexington bureau's involvement in local legal affairs was the case of a freedman who, in April 1866, pressed charges of assault and battery in the local magistrate's court against three cadets. Captain Carse, the bureau's agent-in-charge, reported that, since the freedmen "had given the Cadets as good as they sent, the parties were bound over to keep the peace only." Because the case involved cadets, and since it was the first case ever heard in Lexington where a black person brought suit against whites, most of the students and cadets attended the proceedings. Consequently, these had to be moved to the county courthouse. Carse used the occasion to lecture the assembled student bodies and AMA teachers, and threatened to close the Washington College and VMI unless the disturbances ceased.¹⁸

Bureau agents and AMA staff alike consistently accused the students and cadets of being the most frequent offenders against themselves and their black clientele. Although the bureau agents reported that the VMI cadets could be heard "at any hour of the day or night singing rebel songs,"¹⁹ they could not have found much fault with the cooperation they received from the leaders of the two colleges. The pattern which had been established by VMI's superintendent in the Robinson-Barrow

16. Julia A. Shearman to Rev. Samuel Hunt, January 27, 1866, in American Missionary Association (AMA) Papers, Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn., microfilm.

17. Deposition of Erastus C. Johnston, February 7, 1867, in Case Records, *Letcher v. Perry*.

18. Capt. George B. Carse to Maj. W. Stover How, May 1, 1866, *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

19. Capt. George B. Carse to Capt. R. S. Lacy, August 1, 1866, *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.



This frame structure on Randolph Street, the original portion of which was constructed as a white academy in 1819, served as an African-American schoolhouse in Lexington from 1865 to the 1920s. (Jackson Davis Collection [MSS 3072], Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library.)

case was followed again and again by both college administrations. Charges would be brought to their attention by the bureau agents. General Lee or VMI's Smith would investigate, remedies would be proposed, and penalties (often expulsion) would be assessed. These actions would be accompanied by statements of regret and promises that efforts would be made to prevent similar occurrences in the future. General Lee investigated such a confrontation at the freedmen's school on the night of Washington's Birthday in 1867, involving several of his students. Initially, four college students were suspected of having perpetrated the incident, but a fifth was discovered by the college to be more culpable, and he was dismissed by the faculty.²⁰ A year later, Lee rebuffed a suggestion that he intervene in the matter of one of his students leaving unpaid a laundry bill owned to a freedman, but this was an exception to his standard policy of dealing with bureau complaints.²¹ In most cases,

20. R. E. Lee to Capt. J. W. Sharp, April 13, 1867, in Lee Papers, Special Collections, James Graham Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.

21. R. E. Lee to Capt. J. W. Sharp, April 13, 1867, in Lee Papers.

Lee and VMI's Francis H. Smith were willing to assist the bureau in its efforts to see that justice was done in matters involving freedmen and students. Quite possibly, they were motivated by a goodness of spirit towards black Lexingtonians, but certainly they also were aware that bad publicity in the northern press would complicate their fundraising campaigns with nonsouthern supporters. Furthermore, there was always the possibility that the bureau might make good on its threats to close down the colleges, should the students continue to harass the freedmen and their advocates.

The most frequent venue for violence in Lexington was its streets and sidewalks. The AMA schoolteachers and their pupils reported being jostled, shoved, and even stoned on their way to and from shops, church, or school. In one case, a young black woman named Mariah was pushed to the ground when she asserted her right to proceed on the sidewalk rather than step aside to let a cadet and his date pass without hindrance.²² In a case without racial overtones, John L. Ellis, a newly arrived cadet, shot and killed a local citizen in front of the Lexington Hotel, where Ellis was awaiting the opening of the fall term.²³ Sometimes, as in the case of the shooting incident involving Ellis, and in some of the taunting of schoolteachers, excessive consumption of alcohol was a contributing factor.

More often than one might expect, however, sexual mores played a role in instigating interracial violence, for, in Lexington, liquor and firearms were more readily available than female companionship. The ratio of men to women was high, due to the presence of the two all-male colleges, one of whose students reported that Lexington had only forty "blushing maidens" and seventy-nine "old maids" to offer.²⁴ The AMA schoolteachers were quite perplexed by the frequency with which their female students were accosted by college students or cadets. One of them, Erastus Johnston, wrote, "it seems to be the chief amusement of many of the Students at Washington College and the Military Institute here to seduce young colored girls. And they (the girls) never having known a will of their own, submit to the brutal desires of these monsters who call themselves men." The intractability of the problem is shown by Johnston's assertion that, if every girl in the night-school class who slept

22. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, April 30, 1867 (1st letter), *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

23. *Gazette and Banner*, August 1, 1866. Interestingly, Ellis had been discharged from Confederate service because his mental instability was thought to be a danger to his fellow soldiers. See Dr. James T. Ellis to Francis H. Smith, August 6, 1866, in VMI Archives, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Va.

24. *Southern Collegian* (Washington College, Lexington, Va.), April 9, 1870.

with students or cadets had been expelled, there would have been none left.²⁵

The sexual appetites of the student population may have exacerbated the interracial conflict in Lexington during the immediate post-bellum period. It almost certainly explains the murder of Patrick Thompson, a freedman, by John C. Johnson, a law student at Washington College. As recounted by a Freedmen's Bureau agent in the *New York Tribune*, the freedman happened upon the student while the college lad was conversing with a black woman on Main Street. Thinking that the student "probably meant to accomplish her ruin, the black man stood a moment to watch." Words were exchanged, and the freedman refused to move on, as Johnson commanded him to do. The student then ducked into a nearby house where some of his classmates lived and returned with a revolver, pursued the freedman, and shot him. According to the *Gazette and Banner's* version of the events, the freedman's deathbed description of his attacker did not fit law student Johnson and this resulted in Johnson's acquittal.²⁶ The *Gazette and Banner* conveniently ignored an early article it had published, which described Johnson's capture near Fishersville, some forty miles from Lexington. The editors thus had to offer no explanation as to why Johnson, if innocent and totally uninvolved, would have been apprehended on the run.²⁷

In 1867, political events transpired that helped set the stage for the denouement of Reconstruction the following year. In a close election held that January, the incumbent mayor, J. K. Edmundson, and councilmen were rejected by the voters in favor of an insurgent slate led by the former governor, John Letcher. While it is probable that the Letcher contingent represented a somewhat more moderate, conciliatory, and cooperationist faction than the incumbent town government, the voting seems to have turned more on matters of personality rather than of ideology or philosophy. Edmundson and the incumbent council, however, refused to turn over their offices to the victors, compelling the Letcher slate to ask the local court to enforce the voters' mandate. Local Judge Hugh Sheffey accepted most of the challenges brought against the Letcher voters and awarded the victory to the incumbent council and mayor. It was Sheffey's contention that the electoral commissioner had the ultimate right to decide which of the potential voters were eligible to exercise the franchise. Otherwise, he asserted, anyone, including

25. Erastus C. Johnston to the Rev. Samuel Hunt, April 30, 1866, in AMA Papers.

26. *New York [City] Tribune*, November 25, 1866, quoted in *Gazette and Banner*, December 19, 1866.

27. Capt. George B. Carse to Capt. R. L. Lacy, August 1, 1866, *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

"women, minors, negroes, [or] indians," could maintain their right to vote, thus causing elections to become, in the judge's words, "a farce."²⁸

Judge Sheffey's decision was still fresh in the minds of Lexingtonians, and the furor resulting from the election had not yet quieted down, when, in March 1867, Virginia was transformed into Military District Number One, and a new phase of Reconstruction began. The new order offered the franchise to black voters, a prospect which alarmed white Lexingtonians. Even if universal male suffrage was the end result and no whites were disfranchised, the ratio of black to white voters in Lexington would approach fifty-fifty, since the largely underage student population would remain ineligible to vote. With a white electorate divided as a consequence of the recent mayoral election, and with the likelihood of a substantial black electorate soon to be enfranchised, Maj. James B. Dorman, an ex-Whig, prewar Unionist, and Douglas supporter in 1860, joined the new Freedmen's Bureau agent-in-charge, Capt. J. W. Sharp, in an appearance before a freedmen's meeting at the local fairgrounds. All the speeches were models of moderation, and the event went well except for one brief interruption by a drunken college student, who was led away by some of his classmates. Sharp told the freedmen "to cultivate friendly relations with the whites; to be sober and industrious; to respect their contracts; and to be respectful and courteous in demeanor"; and to register and vote. For his part, Major Dorman "urged confidence and harmony between whites and blacks . . . [and] alluded to the wonderful change that had taken place in their relations." Dorman concluded his remarks by commending Captain Sharp for his comments and suggesting that his audience should "confide in the whites among whom they live as their best friends."²⁹

Major Dorman's remarks reflect the activism identified by Jack Maddex in his *Virginia Conservatives, 1867-1869*, as one of several responses by white politicians to the challenges presented by Reconstruction. These Virginia Conservatives (i.e., Democrats and most former Whigs) were, Maddex reports, divided into several camps. One disdained to participate in a political process which now seemed irredeemably despoiled by the participation of carpetbaggers and African

28. Case Papers, *Letcher v. Perry*; and Judge Hugh Sheffey, February 22, 1867, re *John Letcher and Others v. Thomas L. Perry; John Letcher v. J. K. Edmundson and Others*, in Rockbridge County Law Order Book (1852-67), pp. 544-47, Office of the Clerk of the Court, Rockbridge County Courthouse, Lexington, Va.

29. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, May 31, 1867, *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*; Ollinger Crenshaw, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Convention of 1861," in *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society [1946-48]* [Lexington, Va.] 3 (1949): 7.

Americans, many of whom were Radical Republicans. A second group was pragmatically willing to cooperate with Republicans (especially the more moderate Republicans), on the assumption that, as the party in control nationally, only the Republicans could grant wished-for concessions. The third faction (the group to which Dorman belonged) believed that a sufficient number of black voters could be persuaded to support their former masters to offset the ballots cast by Radicals of both races.³⁰

Throughout 1867, Captain Sharp, in his ongoing correspondence with Gen. Orlando Brown, the Freedmen's Bureau regional commissioner, gave a detailed account of how Lexington was reacting to the new circumstances brought about by Military Reconstruction. For the most part, his accounts indicate that whites were behaving in a manner conducive to forming an alliance with the black citizenry. Sharp commented favorably upon the local magistrates' handling of cases involving blacks,³¹ and he singled Major Dorman out for praise for his attempts to defend several freedmen on trial for stealing some bacon. Later he noted that many of the black population did not adequately appreciate Dorman's efforts on their behalf.³² By August, Sharp was telling Brown that the testimony of black witnesses, even against white defendants, was being given full credence by the local courts and that some of the white citizenry were complaining that the magistrates were more likely to look kindly on black defendants than white ones.³³ In addition to being a calculated move by white Lexingtonians to court black support, this turn-about also was in part a response to the strengthened hand given the Freedmen's Bureau under Military Reconstruction. For example, Sharp indicated to his superior that he was pursuing the case of J. C. McKenzie (who had been found guilty of willfully shooting a black man, William Lusk, but declared innocent of the associated charge of malicious intent to kill) primarily to enhance the bureau's image as the enforcer of the legal rights of freedmen. He hoped especially to impress the strength of his position upon the local college students, "who require peculiar management as they have a strong esprit du corps among them, are freed from the restraining influences of home and its responsibilities,

30. Jack Maddex, *Virginia Conservatives, 1867-1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), pp. xxiii-xxiv, 50-55.

31. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, April 30, 1867 (1st letter), *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

32. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, April 30, 1867 (2d letter), *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*. Dorman was a noted Lexington Unionist before the Civil War. For a description of his Unionist activities prior to 1861, see Crenshaw, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Convention of 1861," pp. 7-14.

33. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, August 31, 1867, *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

and can leave the neighborhood at any moment should any misconduct on their part call for such action."³⁴ As subsequent events would prove, it was, in fact, the student population which would take the lead in frustrating hopes for black advancement in Lexington. The large number of young men—many of them veterans of Confederate service, freed from parental control and able to remove themselves quickly from the community should circumstances require—is one reason why social Redemption was accomplished so quickly and effectively in Lexington.

By the end of 1867, Sharp reported that relations between the races in Lexington had deteriorated, due to pressures resulting from the political campaigns waged during the first year of Military Reconstruction. The efforts of Major Dorman and other white leaders to secure black electoral support had failed abysmally. In the fall election for delegates to the upcoming Constitutional Convention, which was to consider the critical question of who deserved the franchise, only 7 of 132 black voters had cast ballots for the Conservative ticket; the other 125 African-American votes had been given to the Radical Republicans, who had been successful in convincing black voters that it was not in their interest to entrust their future to the Dorman camp. Immediately after the election, there had been talk among white employers of dismissing those of their workers who had voted with the Radicals. Even though these threats had not been carried out, according to Sharp, talk persisted in the community of two kinds of immigration (one bringing whites into the area and one forcing blacks to leave). This was causing "a great ferment" among the freedmen. That the Imboden Company, the most prominent firm engaged in schemes to import white laborers to the southern states, opened a branch in Lexington, corroborates Sharp's assessment of the interest in increased white immigration.³⁵

All in all, Captain Sharp was not optimistic about the situation developing in Lexington after the autumn elections. He reported that, even though, to the casual observer, the community seemed tranquil, he felt duty-bound "to look under the surface of society and watch the passions that are seething beneath."³⁶ Sharp's next report, dated December 28, 1867, indicated that his fears had been realized. Several shootings of freedmen during the Christmas week left him sufficiently alarmed to urge that a company of soldiers be sent to Lexington to restore law and order.³⁷ Sharp also had communicated his concerns to the Lexington

34. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, September 20, 1867, *ibid.*

35. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, November 30, 1867, *ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

37. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, December 28, 1867, *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau.*

Town Council, whose response was worded curiously. The council asked permission of General Schofield (the commanding officer of Military District Number One) to pass ordinances establishing a townwide curfew and controlling the sale and use of alcoholic beverages. The council, however, felt that no clearance from higher authority was needed to enact an ordinance banning the carrying of firearms and other weapons, either openly or concealed, or to appoint a new assistant to aid the police sergeant. Another new ordinance authorized either the town sergeant or his assistant to deputize up to ten citizens to assist in maintaining law and order in time of crisis. Significantly, the council directed the mayor to confer with the faculties at Washington College and VMI to "ask their cooperation in effecting and preserving the Public Peace."³⁸

The Town Council's wish for additional authority to deal with the situation in Lexington apparently was not fulfilled by General Schofield; neither were troops sent at this juncture, as Captain Sharp had requested. Rather, Sharp was replaced in Lexington by a higher-ranking and more determined bureau operative, Bvt. Brig. Gen. Douglas Frazar. Frazar, only thirty-two when he arrived at his Lexington posting, was a native of Danbury, Massachusetts. Before the war, he had been involved in the East India trade as a merchant and ship captain. His war service included a stint with the 13th New York Cavalry, assigned to guard the District of Columbia, and subsequent duty as a colonel with the 104th U.S. Colored Troops. Frazar had been raised to the rank of brevet brigadier general in March 1865 as a consequence of his faithful service.³⁹

The storm which had been brewing would break in full force on Frazar's watch. White citizens, having seen their overtures spurned by the black populace in the selection of delegates to the Constitutional Convention, and having witnessed a serious division develop among white voters in the recent councilmanic elections, now were fearful of losing political and social control. More than a few of the townspeople and college students would unleash their fury upon a local African-American population, which, accurately as it turned out, now suspected the worst of at least some of Lexington's majority racial group. General Frazar's arrival in Lexington coincided with this shift in local attitudes; it also may have intensified it, since, given his resumé, it seems likely

38. "Minutes of the Council of the Corporation of Lexington, 1860-1873," December 30, 1867, City Hall, Lexington, Va. (Hereafter cited as "Council Minutes, Lexington.")

39. Roger D. Hunt and Jack R. Brown, *Brevet Brigadier Generals in Blue* (Gathersburg, Md.: Olde Soldier Books, 1990), p. 216.

that Frazar was more devoted to the cause of racial fairness than his predecessor, Captain Sharp.

The first major incident in the momentous and decisive year of 1868 involved Erastus Johnston, who had challenged the hegemony of white Lexingtonians in two ways. First, he once had taught in the freedmen's school. Second, he currently was operating a store there, catering to the town's black population. Now the Vermonter had the audacity, or foolhardiness, to join in one of the community's major winter recreations, ice-skating on the North (now the Maury) River. As a reward for his chutzpah, he was set upon there by more than fifty of the skaters already enjoying the river's frozen surface. Johnston reported that he was punched, kicked, beaten with sticks, and knocked down several times, primarily by college students. The mob had given him warning that he would be tarred and feathered should he not leave town within the next ten days. When Johnston attempted to address them as "young men," he was bullied even more until he called them by their preferred appellation, "gentlemen." Fleeing from the river, Johnston returned to his store, only to be followed by some of his "gentlemen" tormentors, who attempted to break into his shop while threatening to kill him.⁴⁰ As had become the custom of the Freedmen's Bureau in such matters, General Lee was asked to conduct an investigation. Based on a list provided by bureau agent Frazar and a statement prepared by Johnston, six students were interviewed, and several of them were dismissed from the college.⁴¹

Johnston was not the last person to be singled out in 1868 for eviction from Lexington; the attacks on him were but the first round in a battle to be waged that year for control of the town. Of more interest to Lexingtonians than the skating ruckus involving the outsider Johnston

40. Affidavit of Erastus C. Johnston, February 5, 1868, in University Archives, Special Collections, James Graham Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.

41. Student affidavits filed with Johnston affidavit in University Archives, Special Collections, James Graham Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va. A somewhat different interpretation of the incident appears in most twentieth-century treatments of Lee's presidency of the college. See, e.g., Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 4:345-46; Marshall Fishwick, *Lee After the War* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1963), pp. 163-64; Ollinger Crenshaw, *General Lee's College* (New York: Random House, 1969), pp. 153-54; and Charles B. Flood, *Lee: The Last Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), pp. 176-78. Freeman and all who follow his account of the fracas credit Lee's actions solely to his desire to achieve sectional reconciliation. All of them mention Johnston's having threatened with a pistol a twelve-year-old youth who had cursed him, although none of the students questioned cited, in their own defense, any provocative action by Johnston.

was the case of a freedman, John Burns, which cut to the very heart of the matters alarming the white population. Burns had been found guilty of burglary and the attempted rape of a young member of the local prominent Echols family. Douglas Frazar reported that the "evidence shows no proof of guilt, and [the] case appears to have been gotten up by the friends of the girl to clear her from fault in the eyes of the community."⁴² Freedman Burns had been defended (inadequately, in Frazar's estimation) by William Wallace Scott, a Confederate cavalry officer who had attended VMI in 1865. Scott had returned to Lexington in 1868, following completion of the law course at the University of Virginia. He was a lawyer, the local news editor of the *Gazette and Banner*, and the Lexington agent for the Imboden Company, organizer of schemes to encourage white laborers to move into the southern states.⁴³ Frazar, convinced of Burns's innocence and horrified at the sixteen-year prison sentence he had received, insisted that the case be appealed to Henry H. Wells, the newly appointed provisional governor of Military District Number One (i.e., the former state of Virginia). Wells had overturned the verdict.⁴⁴

Cadet James W. Gridgers, not previously known for his interest in political topics, made room in his journal (in which he recorded primarily his daily routine and ruminations about his self-diagnosed poor health) for a brief but cogent comment on March 29: "Great deal of talk about K. K. Klan around here."⁴⁵ Indeed there was. Soon the "talk" would be in print for all to see. The Ku Klux Klan never was very strong in Virginia during Reconstruction and rumors of a Klan presence were new to the Lexington area. In Virginia at large, the two primary bursts of Klan activity came at the time of the referendum on convening a Constitutional Convention in March 1867; and in the spring of 1868, when the convention was completing its work, heavily influenced by the Radical majority chosen to draft the document.⁴⁶

In March 1867, Lexington's Conservative leadership had not yet despaired of electoral success; by the spring of the following year, they

42. "Records Relating to Murders and Outrages," April 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

43. Alumni File, in VMI Archives, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Va.; Gen. Douglas Frazar to Gen. Orlando Brown, July 31, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*; *Gazette and Banner*, May 15, 1868.

44. Douglas Frazar to Gen. Orlando Brown, July 31, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

45. John W. Bridgers, "Journal, 1867-1868," in John W. Bridgers Collection, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

46. Richard Lowe, *Republicans and Reconstruction in Virginia, 1858-1870* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), pp. 125 and 141.

(and students from all parts of Virginia and the South who came to study at the town's two campuses) had seen their hopes for controlling the political process dashed. Now at least some were willing to take up the ways of the Klan (or create the appearance of having done so) in order to frustrate the will of the so-called "Underwood" Constitutional Convention and restore white control of Lexington's social order. The issues of the *Gazette and Banner* for April 1, 8, and 15 all contained much news of the Klan; in fact, one might surmise that the newspaper's publisher (Samuel Houston Letcher, brother of the former governor and defeated mayoral candidate) and news editor Scott (soon to be implicated in Klan-type activities in the nearby rural settlement of Collierstown) were attempting to *make* news as much as report it. The *Gazette and Banner* of April 1 ran an item which had the appearance of an advertisement and was replete with cryptic insignia and coded messages. This "notice" was accompanied by a "news" story headed "The KuKlux Klan." Referring to the "advertisement," the story read in part:

This formidable and mysterious order of men or devils, are rapidly spreading all over the country. By reference to our advertising columns it will be seen that they have organized a Division or Chapter or whatever they may choose to call it, in our midst, and on Friday night last, notices were posted at all the corners of the streets summoning them to Council and deliberation. . . . About 10 o'clock on Saturday night from 40 to 50 persons variously represented as from seven to ten feet high, clothed in all the habiliments of the grave, were seen marching up the street, and entering the graveyard at the head of town, and did not again make their appearance until about 3 o'clock in the morning when they passed through the town, all mounted on their white horses, save one, who seemed to be their leader, who bestrode a coal-black steed with fiery nostrils.

Editor Scott coyly concluded his column by stating, "The advertisement is Chinese characters to us, but those concerned will doubtless understand its import."⁴⁷ Undoubtedly, Scott fully understood the import of his paper's entries; probably they were intentional fantasies of his own making.

The paper's April 8 edition reprinted on its front page an article from the *Lynchburg Virginian*, lauding the Klan. Moreover, Scott's local news section reported, "We understand that within the last 18 days, twenty negroes have died in Lexington and its immediate vicinity. Too much liberty, as has been predicted over and over again will prove a direful curse to the entire race, and deprived of the watchful and interested care of their former masters, they will rapidly die out and disap-

47. *Gazette and Banner*, April 1, 1868.

pear from among us." More direct references to the Klan appeared elsewhere in the paper, including an example of the kind of "watchful and interested care" which Scott was promising the freedmen: "The KuKlux are said to have made their appearance in various portions of the county. . . . Our supposition is that this is the year for the appearance of the seventeen year locust, the KuKlux are designed to supply their place as a special visitation for Radical iniquities. Look out darkies."⁴⁸ The Klan made its third and final appearance in the Lexington press on April 15, when a story elaborated upon the presumed escalating death rate among local blacks.⁴⁹

Enough had been said, apparently, for events soon transpired which exceeded the expectations and helped to fulfill the goals of Scott and his Klan conspirators. On May 2, a freedmen's meeting was convened to discuss the work of the Virginia Constitutional Convention. Samuel McDowell Moore, a leader of the Conservatives and the scion of several of Lexington's most prominent families, took up the cause previously championed by Major Dorman and gave the main address, "endeavoring to convince them [the freedmen] that their interest was identified with that of the white race, and that they ought, therefore, to vote against the Constitution, or not vote at all." General Frazar (whose presence at the meeting had not been anticipated by Moore) countered with remarks which the local newspaper characterized as "intended to excite the prejudices of the negroes against the white people." Frazar, it was noted, had termed freedmen's "having to give way to white people on the side walks, and in the stores, as indignities to which they were not bound to submit."⁵⁰

A subsequent encounter between the wife and son of Judge John Brockenbrough (professor of law at Washington College) and Caesar Griffin, newly emancipated by Frazar from his customary deference, gave the *Gazette and Banner's* intrepid local news editor the basis for a bold-face headline in the May 13 edition: "The first Fruits of the Incendiary Address made to the Negroes on Saturday the 2nd Inst., by a Member of the Freedmen's Bureau." The accompanying story

48. *Gazette and Banner*, April 8, 1868. This theory of the disappearing freedmen probably represents a combination of wishful thinking among local whites (generated by the immigration society movement) and an attempt to frighten the black community and its friends. Ideologically, Scott's analysis of the plight of the emancipated African American more likely derived from the proslavery argument than from any concepts of the Social Darwinists. See Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 111ff.

49. *Gazette and Banner*, April 15, 1868.

50. *Gazette and Banner*, May 13, 1868.

recounted not only the speech of Frazar at the freedmen's meeting, but also the events of the ensuing week, which the *Gazette and Banner* deemed to be direct consequences of the bureau leader's remarks. Editor Scott described a heart-rending tale of unmerited insolence toward Mrs. Brockenbrough as she approached "Silverwood," her Main Street home, insults which were bravely met by her son Frank:

As Mrs. Judge Brockenbrough was returning home about 11 o'clock of the night from a visit to her brother's family, accompanied by her youngest son, a youth of about 18 years of age, they found the side walk occupied by a number of negroes, male and female. Young B[rockenbrough] requested them politely to let his mother pass, and, after some hesitation, all of them, but one, made way for her, but that one, a negro man or boy, by the name of Caesar Griffin, swore he would not give way for any d---d rascal, and continued to use various offensive expressions. When Mrs. B. entered her house, her son and his older brother returned to the gate. Frank having in his hand a small stock or switch, and jumping over the fence, approached the negro, with the stick raised, who immediately fired a small pistol, sending a ball through the breast bone of young B., into his body, inflicting a very dangerous, if not fatal wound.⁵¹

The Brockenbrough incident, with its teenage hero brandishing a whip-substitute like a prewar overseer or master against a black carrying a pistol, quickly became a *cause célèbre* and was reported with appropriate, if conflicting, outrage in both the southern and the northern press. Lexington residents were sure to include summaries of the event and updates on the condition of young Brockenbrough in missives to out-of-town friends and relatives. Hugh Moran, a classmate and friend of Frank Brockenbrough's older brother, wrote to his father that Caesar Griffin barely had escaped lynching, and added, "It has quite a wholesome effect for some of the students to shoot one [freedman] occasionally."⁵²

51. *Ibid.* The Griffin case was not the first time that a Brockenbrough offspring had had a run-in with Lexington blacks. Two years earlier, another of the judge's sons had come to the attention of the Freedmen's Bureau for a rather full day of outrages, including an assault upon a black man and woman (possibly an incident parallel to the J. C. Johnson-Patrick Thompson episode) and a physical attack upon a "colored boy" who had asked for wages due him. Both cases were heard in the Mayor's Court, where the culprit was compelled to pay court costs in the first instance and saw his case dismissed in the second. Probably this Brockenbrough was not Frank, but his older brother, a Washington College student, a former VMI cadet (who had participated in the Battle of New Market), and a "second" in the encounter with Griffin. See "Records Relating to Murders and Outrages," June 1866, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

52. Hugh A. Moran to "Father," May 10, 1868, in Moran Papers, Special Collections, James Graham Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.

In his letter home, Lewin Barringer, another college student, provided additional information about the attempted lynching, indicating that the students "came near killing several other negroes through mistake, but fortunately they all escaped though shot at a great many times."⁵³

One of the lynch mob participants later was identified by General Frazar as the newspaper editor, W. W. Scott,⁵⁴ who, not surprisingly, included none of the drama of the attempted lynching in his *Gazette and Banner* coverage of the Griffin case. Marshall McDonald, eldest son of Cornelia McDonald and a faculty member at VMI, wrote to his fiancée a month after the incident, reporting Brockenbrough's recovery, condemning Frazar, and praising Lexingtonians for showing "extreme moderation and forbearance in not hanging" General Frazar. In the same letter, McDonald gave evidence of the polarization which the Griffin-Brockenbrough incident had engendered in the white community by raising suspicions about the intentions of their black neighbors to an irrational pitch. McDonald wrote, "The negroes are about to give a supper to build their church, and consequently several smoke houses have been broken into lately."⁵⁵

More outrages against the freedmen and law and order were to follow during the summer of 1868. In July, a group of nightriders descended upon Collierstown, a rural community about ten miles southwest of Lexington, attracted by a meeting scheduled there to make plans for canvassing the county in preparation for the upcoming elections. Frazar related that "no overt act was made to break up the meeting but so many men were seen hiding in the bushes and riding the roads after dark that the Freedmen abandoned their work and took to the woods for safety. It is one of those cases where it would be impossible to prove much against the aggressors and yet each Freedman and some white Union men declare that they are convinced and know that they (the

53. Lewin Wethered Barringer to David Moreau Barringer, May 11, 1868, in Barringer Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Brockenbrough case and the Johnston fracas are the two primary racial incidents covered by the biographers of Lee's postwar years. For varying treatments of the Brockenbrough incident, see Crenshaw, *General Lee's College*, pp. 151-52; and Fishwick, *Lee After the War*, pp. 165-66. While Fishwick credits Lee with making a dramatic personal appearance to forestall Griffin's lynching, no evidence of that exists in the contemporary accounts.

54. Douglas Frazar to Gen. Orlando Brown, July 31, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

55. Marshall McDonald to Mary E. McCormick, June 4, 1868, in Marshall McDonald Papers, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

freedmen) would have been fired upon if they had attempted to speak."⁵⁶

The ringleader of the Collierstown gang, Frazar indicated, was none other than the *Gazette and Banner's* local news editor, William Wallace Scott, Esq., the former cavalryman who now was actualizing what he had only fantasized in his April columns. Scott's right-hand man during the Collierstown escapade was identified by Frazar as Col. Charles T. O'Ferrall,⁵⁷ a native of Frederick County, Virginia, and a Confederate veteran who, in 1868, was studying law with Judge Brockenbrough at Washington College in preparation for a political career. While a student, O'Ferrall ran a boardinghouse for students and also managed the Lexington Hotel, a prominent hostelry where some students lived. The colonel was well known in the Upper Shenandoah Valley as a horseman and owner of fine racing steeds.⁵⁸

Still another incident occurred in August, when a college student named John Mizner was arrested for the violent rape of a young black woman, Lizzie Harper. According to Frazar, the Lexington town authorities conspired to permit his escape from jail and justice.⁵⁹

The denouement for Frazar, the Lexington Freedmen's Bureau, and Lexington's townsfolk, white and black, transpired quickly, as the events of the summer of 1868 seemed (contradicting the season) to snowball. A detachment of Federal troops was summoned at Frazar's behest to maintain law and order in a community now beset with nightriders and mob violence. Frazar brought no charges against Scott and O'Ferrall for the Collierstown operations, because no overt acts of violence had been committed there. Although rape-suspect Mizner never was returned to jail, Caesar Griffin remained incarcerated in lieu of \$600 bond until his case finally was heard in September and he was sentenced to two years in prison. Frazar had expressed personal anger at the exorbitant bond

56. Douglas Frazar in Gen. Orlando Brown, July 1, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

57. "Records Relating to Murders and Outrages," July 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

58. *The Alumni Directory and Service Record of Washington and Lee University* (Lexington, Va.: The Alumni, Inc., 1926), p. 125; Franklin L. Riley, *Gen. Robert E. Lee After Appomattox* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 112; *Gazette and Banner*, October 24, 1866.

59. "Records Relating to Murders and Outrages," August 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*. Although this source spells the name "Mizver," Mizner certainly is the person intended. Mizner, from Nicholasville, Ky., was a member of the Class of 1870 but left Washington College after attending the school for only two years. See *Washington and Lee Alumni Directory, 1749-1975* (Lexington, Va.: Washington and Lee University Alumni, Inc., 1976), p. 137; and *Alumni Directory* (1926), p. 118.

(considering that, contrary to newspaper accounts, Brockenbrough was not badly injured) and at the long delay in scheduling his trial.⁶⁰

Frazar, as it turned out, was gone by the time the verdict was handed down. By his own testimony, his decision to call in troops to bring the town to heel had backfired. He reported to Gen. Orlando Brown, his superior within the bureau, that "the presence of troops had exasperated instead of quieting the students."⁶¹ The succeeding summer months had seen Frazar called before Gen. John M. Schofield, commander of Military District Number One, to explain, in a general way, why Lexington had experienced such tumult since his assignment there⁶² and, specifically, why his life had been threatened by three young men carrying concealed weapons who had stated to their friends an intention to shoot him.⁶³ Frazar was reassigned to another posting, and soon the troops whom Frazar had requested were withdrawn as well.⁶⁴

General Schofield obviously was intent upon defusing a volatile situation by removing from Lexington the most visible signs of federal authority (the troops and the Freedmen's Bureau's General Frazar). It is likely not just a coincidence that, at the same time, Schofield relieved Lexington's elected town council, replacing them with new councilmen who could take the Ironclad Oath affirming that they had not voluntarily given aid to the Confederate cause. The new councilmen, all whites, included a wagon maker, a cooper, a shopkeeper, and a stonemason; all were in their late fifties and thus had been too old for compulsory service in the Confederate army. All were long-term residents of Lexington, and their status as merchants and craftsmen was not atypical for Lexington's councilmen during this period. They represented a continuation of federal authority, but with a gentler, more neighborly face. The new council did nothing during its term of service (which lasted until March 1870) to threaten the white hegemony which had been established prior to their appointment and seemingly affirmed by General Schofield's actions. Like their predecessor board, this council concerned itself primarily with the extension of streets and water service for the growing town and with improvements to the fire protection system.⁶⁵

60. Douglas Frazar to Maj. R. S. Lacy, May 31, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

61. Douglas Frazar to Gen. Orlando Brown, May 31, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

62. Marshall McDonald to Mary E. McCormick, June 4, 1868, in Marshall McDonald Papers, Duke University.

63. Douglas Frazar to Gen. Orlando Brown, August 31, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

64. *Gazette and Banner*, September 16, 1868.

65. Council Minutes, Lexington, November 9, 1868.

Such momentous events were bound to have a backwash, and the Griffin verdict was overturned in December by John C. Underwood, federal judge for Eastern Virginia and the man whose name was attached in common parlance to the hated new Virginia Constitution.⁶⁶ Frazar was able to vent his rage against Lexington in a long article in the *Boston Evening Traveller*. Some of his remarks were directed at northern philanthropists, and, though he inexplicably renamed Washington College, his message was clear. Frazar proclaimed, "Money sent to the South, as has been done, to keep in operation an institution such as Lexington College, is simply, in my mind, paying traitors to teach their damnable treason to the flower of Southern youth."⁶⁷

By the end of 1868, passions had cooled, the blacks' brief period of self-assertiveness had dissipated, the situation had returned to the *status quo ante* Frazar, if not the *status quo antebellum*, and Lexington for all intents and purposes was redeemed, even with the federally appointed town council still in place. Both Federal troops and the Freedmen's Bureau were gone, and the United States government finally acceded to the request of Superintendent Smith and permitted VMI cadets once again to possess firearms. Hugh Moran, from his vantage point at Washington College, reported that the cadets were "as proud of them as a boy with his first pair of boots."⁶⁸ Seemingly placid black voters once again listened respectfully to speeches from local Conservative white politicians like John Letcher, who at one such gathering was praised by a freedman named John Collins, who recalled Letcher as his beloved boyhood playmate.⁶⁹

The *Gazette and Banner*, now under new management and renamed the *Virginia Gazette*, commented favorably upon the new-style freedmen's political meetings. The paper's strident Negrophobic tone had disappeared as quickly as it appeared. Under its new masthead, the paper condemned an incident in which two drunken students fired upon and slightly wounded a freedman. The *Virginia Gazette* approvingly noted that the victim had "received every personal and medical attention at the hands of friends of the misguided young man."⁷⁰

66. *Gazette and Banner*, December 17, 1868. Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: Biography*, 4:360, reports that Underwood's reversal itself was later reversed by Chief Justice Salmon B. Chase, while he was sitting as a judge on the U.S. Circuit Court in Richmond.

67. *Boston Evening Traveller*, reprinted in *Gazette and Banner*, November 11, 1868.

68. Hugh Moran to "Mother," February 27, 1869, in Moran Papers.

69. *Gazette and Banner*, February 10, 1869.

70. *Virginia Gazette* [Lexington], February 3, 1869.

Tranquillity had been restored, and the old sympathies had been revived, but at a cost. The *Virginia Gazette* for June 16, 1869, provided what may well have been intended to serve as "the authorized version" of the recent uproar. The editorial, imbued with racist assumptions, was triggered by the lynching of Jesse Edwards, a freedman who had been in the county jail accused of the murder of a white girl, Susan Margaret Hite:

The Scotch Irish are a patient but tremendous people. When aroused, their anger is terrible. In the dead of night, silently, deliberately, but surely, has righteous retribution been meted out by the hands of some of this quiet race, to a man who had outraged the county by his crimes. . . . The people of Rockbridge have indeed been patient. They have seen a son of one of our most honored citizens [Judge Brockenbrough] shot down in cold blood on our streets, and the would be murderer go unwhipt of justice; they have seen the burglar and intended ravisher [Freedman John Burns, not Washington College student John Mizner] escape with impunity; they have suffered much and long; . . . they have felt that not only life, but what was far dearer than life, was to a great extent at the mercy of a race inferior in all respects save the brutality and indignity of its passions. . . . At the door of Underwood and his vile crew of pretended administrators of the law, with "GOVERNOR WELLS" at their head, do we locate the murder of MISS HITE, and the swift and awful retribution that has visited her murderer.⁷¹

Events seemed to have come full circle when, in 1870, the Washington College student publication, *Southern Collegian*, published a witty description of a typical student's day. It culminated with a nocturnal journey to the black section of town, where, by 11:30, the student is asleep with an African-American woman he previously had sighted on Main Street and had been fantasizing about as "a black Venus."⁷²

The daughter of VMI's Col. J. T. L. Preston, in her memoirs, gave an explanation of why Lexington's white citizenry triumphed over the "evil Yankees." Giving special credit to the role played by the students of Washington College and the VMI cadets, she wrote, "Lexington was under Federal military rule for a while, but it had a rather meek garrison; the presence of a thousand young Southerners in our midst, many of them ex-soldiers, did not invite insolence on the part of a handful of blue coats."⁷³ She makes no reference to the blacks' role in the battle for

71. *Virginia Gazette*, June 16, 1869.

72. *Southern Collegian*, May 21, 1870.

73. Elizabeth Randolph Preston Allan, *A March Past* (Richmond, Va.: Dietz Press, 1938), pp. 213-14.

Lexington in the Reconstruction years, but it is obvious that insubordination or assertiveness of African Americans was even less tolerable than that of the "meek garrison" or the Freedmen's Bureau. Assorted townspeople, members of Lexington's legal community, the local newspaper (which one of them helped edit), Washington College students, and recent VMI graduates—all these were prime movers in the wave of lawlessness which plagued the town and Rockbridge County during the spring and summer of 1868 and helped redeem the area from the threat of control by the Freedmen's Bureau and the newly enfranchised and emboldened blacks.

It is not certain what role, if any, the moderate faction of Conservatives earlier present in Lexington politics played in these developments. Whether they were accidentally, coincidentally, or intentionally quiescent in the events which transpired during Redemption, it can be presumed that they were not displeased with the outcome. Once Redemption of the social order had been achieved, by means of violence and threats of violence, it was deemed safe to return to Conservative politics and to court those black voters who "could be trusted."

The events of 1868 certainly must have served as powerful lessons to Lexington's African American community. Their true protectors, Federal troops and the Freedmen's Bureau agents, had departed, leaving the affairs of the town firmly under the control of its white citizenry. Neither W. W. Scott nor Colonel O'Ferrall remained in Lexington long after helping the town redeem itself. O'Ferrall settled in Rockingham County, Virginia, where he served as county judge and member of the House of Delegates. After three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, he concluded his illustrious political career with a term as Virginia's governor, from 1894 to 1898. In that capacity, ironically, he is best remembered for his campaign to secure passage of an antilynching law.⁷⁴

Scott returned to his native Orange County, Virginia, where he benefited frequently from O'Ferrall's patronage. When O'Ferrall was in the state legislature, Scott was secretary to the State Democratic Committee; O'Ferrall as a congressman was assisted by Scott, who was clerk to a House committee; when O'Ferrall became governor, Scott was appointed state librarian of Virginia.⁷⁵ Upon Scott's death in 1929, one of his eulogists described him as "one of the few real Confederate soldiers left—such soldiers as galloped through the pages of John Esten Cooke. He was a cavalier both in tradition and experience. His death at

74. Minor T. Weisiger, "Charles T. O'Ferrall, 'Gray Eagle' from the Valley," in *The Governors of Virginia, 1860-1978*, ed. Edward Younger and James Tice Moore (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1982), p. 141.

75. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, January 17, 1929.

the age of 84 emphasizes the fact that his dashing compatriots of the sixties—compatriots who made heart-gripping history—are a fast-dwindling group."⁷⁶

The "heart-gripping history" which Scott and his cavalier cohorts helped make during his few years in Lexington was not specifically mentioned, but the chilling effects of the work accomplished by Scott and "his dashing compatriots" lingered on for many decades. Even after Scott's death, Lexington's black population still awaited the coming of full freedom.

Redemption came early to Lexington, and the sequence and timing of events in the town's Reconstruction and Redemption may not be typical of the rest of the Shenandoah Valley. Certainly, Reconstruction Lexington did not conform to the general assumption that the early postbellum years were, at best, a period of economic stagnation. Obviously, a number of factors influenced Lexington's experience which were not present elsewhere in the region and which may have produced a more violent denouement for Federal Reconstruction efforts in Lexington than elsewhere in the valley. Undoubtedly, the larger than average black population, the presence of a Freedmen's Bureau office, and, perhaps most importantly, the substantial number of young, non-native students at VMI and Washington College all played a major part in determining Lexington's course during Reconstruction. While not an urban folk by anyone's definition, Lexingtonians were differentiated from the typically rural valley dwellers by their town's role as a county seat, marketplace, and college town. There is, however, some evidence of independent nightriding activities in outlying parts of Rockbridge County which, in at least one instance, were assisted by Lexington's nascent Klan. Nevertheless, regardless of the tactics used to restore white supremacy in areas of the valley to the north of Lexington, the end result was the same there as that accomplished in Lexington and Rockbridge by their self-described but questionably labeled "patient but tremendous people." The terms, as employed by the local newspaper, refers to the Scots-Irish natives. If the role of the college students in effecting Redemption was as large as the record appears to indicate, it is worth noting that the permanent residents of Lexington wished to take credit for the students' accomplishments as if they were their own.

76. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, January 18, 1929.

