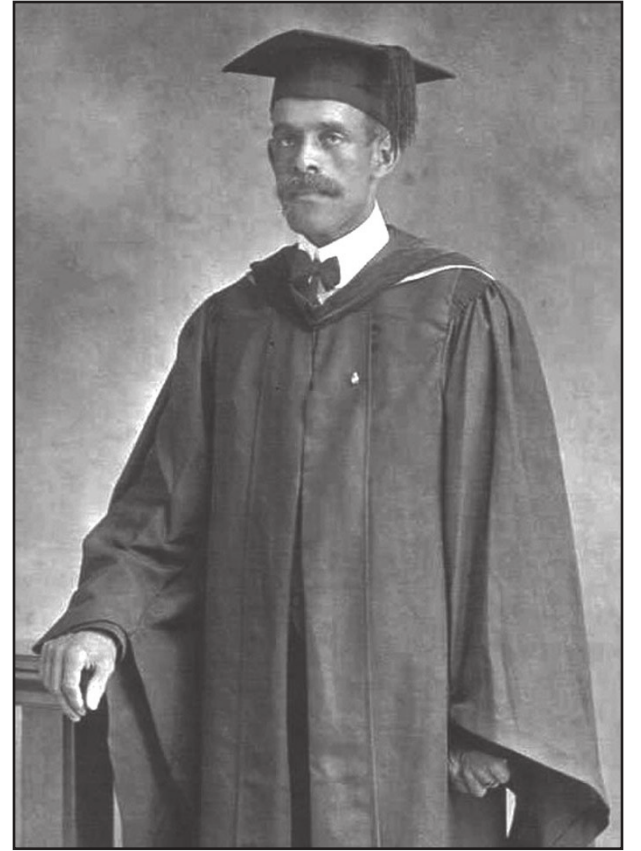


GILBERT C. WALKER, “rescuer of the bulldozers,” served as Virginia governor before spending four years in the U.S. House of Representatives. The Chicago Tribune on Dec. 22, 1876, noted Walker’s bill to prevent the stationing of troops at elections in any state, providing freer hand to various methods of voter intimidation and fraud (see clipping on page B2).



CORALIE FRANKLIN COOK (1861-1942) was born in Lexington to parents enslaved by former Governor McDowell. She was married to longtime Howard University professor dean, George W. Cook, and became a celebrated national leader for Black female suffrage, while also leading arts, education, and political associations in Washington, D.C.



CHARLES S. HARPER (1880-1963) earned degrees from Lincoln University, Morgan State Normal and Howard University (his 1908 graduation picture shown here). In 1902, he returned to his native Lexington to teach at the Colored School on South Randolph Street, where he likely attended himself.

# ‘Bulldozing’ And Disenfranchising

*How Voting Rights Were  
Taken Away From Blacks*

*For a window of nearly two decades, Virginia negotiated the arrival of a generation of multiracial male voters, politically influential church associations, newspapers and fraternal orders, and even Black delegates elected to the General Assembly ...*

*Editor’s note: The Rockbridge Historical Society is continuing its exploration of the local dimensions and legacies of Virginia’s groundbreaking, multiracial election of 1867. This third installment examines the broader rollback of Black voting rights and rise of Jim Crow, when Virginia’s conservative political order and constitutional terms were restored by the turn of the 20th century.*

*For Black History Month in February, the series will offer a counterpoint to those challenges by profiling local models of African-American cultural aspiration and educational achievement during that era, while also attending to the two historic black cemeteries that served the Lexington community. All are co-written by Eric Wilson and Larry Spurgeon, RHS’ executive director, and new secretary, respectively. The full series is being archived on RHS’ Local Black Histories page at RockbridgeHistory.org.*

## Reconstruction In Virginia

In many ways, the last third of the 19th century was trying for most everyone in Rockbridge, with families broken in the still-unsettled wake of enslavement and Civil War; with constrained resources and recurrent national financial panics; with lawsuits and violence contesting who could legally count in the political rebuilding, or would matter in the radically shifting social structures; and with the economic and educational opportunities that shaped personal and communal change through local, state and national growth, and roll-back.

These decades have variously come to be chronicled as the eras of Reconstruction, Redemption, and the Rise of Jim Crow. Or of Reunion, The New South, and The Lost Cause. They remain periods often overlooked in school coursework, museums and popular culture. Yet their concerns highlight dynamics that hold powerful resonance today.

Beyond the most profound impacts of Emancipation, and economic rebuilding after four years of war, the first and most significant changes in Virginia’s political landscape came with the state constitutional convention of 1867 and the 1869 constitution that was produced (both shaped by the votes of black men, for the first time), and the 1868 presidential election that the commonwealth missed out on. Like Texas and Mississippi, Virginia could not send electors to the Electoral College due to its delay in fulfilling all requirements for political restoration to the Union. The delay largely came from the compromises to balance universal male suffrage to both “negro” and “white” men, and in rejecting the “Iron-Clad Oath,” a loyalty test designed to limit voting rights from many former confederates.

For a window of nearly two decades, Virginia negotiated the arrival of a generation of multiracial male voters, politically influential church associations, newspapers and fraternal orders, and even Black delegates elected to the General Assembly (none from Rockbridge among the latter). Crucial contests over the funding of public schools, repayment of pre-war state debts – including

those in the war-born West Virginia – and between local, state, federal and military authorities would play themselves out through and beyond that era.

The restraints and gains of the first federal Reconstruction and Civil Rights acts in the 1860s-70s, were effectively repealed in 1876, when a deadlocked presidential election was brokered. The agreement to let Republican Rutherford Hayes assume the presidency, in exchange for the removal of federal troops and reconstruction agents from the South, signaled in earnest the rollback of African-American political participation after a first decade of influence.

## And Then Came The Bulldozing

Today, the word “bulldozer” can only mean one thing: a forceful instrument of well-engineered machinery that can both destroy or lay new foundations, whether made for children by Tonka, for contractors by John Deere, or the first 1923 prototype invented by Kansans James Cummings and Earl McLeod. But the word dates earlier. And it’s not that kind of instrument.

The origins of the bulldozer lie in the practices of voter suppression. And while it was often casually explained in



ABOVE, this “Colored ballot box” used in King George County dates from 1867. AT LEFT, months before the approval of a new Virginia state constitution in July 1902, this 1901 broadside affirms the return of white supremacy at the ballot box. New voting regulations disenfranchised approximately 90 percent of Black Virginia men who voted at the turn of the 20th century.

**NO WHITE MAN TO LOSE  
HIS VOTE IN VIRGINIA.**

**This Assurance Given by Men Who Are Most Competent to  
Speak with Authority.**

**A Meeting was Held in Richmond on October 17, 1901, at which Chairman Ellyson  
Presided and Hon. John Goode and Mr. Montague Made Speeches—All Three  
Declared the Policy of the Convention in Language That Cannot Be  
Mistaken. Great Enthusiasm Aroused.**

**STATE CHAIRMAN ELLYSON.**

the 1870s (described as “a fixture among Americanisms” in 1878), it’s shocking to our ears and eyes, signaling the amount of force needed to subdue a bull (i.e. a “bull-dose”; an alternative etymology of “bull-dozen” more precisely calibrates that force to the equivalent 12 whippings).

The word “bulldozer” was less commonly used in the Upper South, though a writer for The Chicago Tribune attests to the practice and word’s sweeping reach by describing an 1876 House bill introduced by U.S. Congressman Gilbert Walker (who somehow managed to serve as both a Republican and Democratic governor of Virginia, across two terms, 1869-1874):

“The member of Virginia has come to the rescue of the bulldozers and the rifle clubs, by the introduction of a bill making it a penal offense, subject to a fine of \$5,000 and imprisonment of up to five years, for any officer of the army or navy to keep troops at or near the place of any general or special election, in any State, for ten days prior to such election.”

More coyly, the reporter quibbles by suggesting that any soldiers asked to protect the polls, for their parts, may

have to “go down in a coal mine, or up in a balloon.”

In Virginia and elsewhere, the new math of electoral politics saw the mobilization of new interracial groups such as “Union Leagues.” One such League in Colliertown was mentioned in Part I of this series, by a Richmond reporter here to monitor the election. While newspapers like The Lexington Gazette were left to editorially lament the impact of new “colored voters,” other means were also in visibly in play.

As local news editor Doug Harwood has shown, the 1868 elections here were accompanied by terrorism, along with public calls to re-establish a “White Man’s Party ... [to prevent] a War of the races.” This, the same year that the new state convention was meeting.

Another article published in 1889 (and rather categorically titled “The Bulldozing”) more casually laments the use of such threats. But the logic is different, not questioning the morality of violence, but its practical need, given slates of municipal candidates similar enough to concentrate goals and limit community factions. The editor suggests

*See Vote, page B2*



# Vote

*continued from page B1*  
 “compromise” between rival conservative groups, “to share the emoluments of office.” This would both allow the vigilante “Regulators ... to return to their fields, working their corn,” and spare them “necessity ... of bulldoz[ing] the other faction ... and that class of voters [who are] dangerous, and cannot be depended on to maintain good government.”

Coupled with this portrait of contemporary electoral tactics is another eye-catching item, seen with this story. It notes that the town’s postmastership – an office of political patronage then – was offered to, but declined by “Mrs. Stonewell Jackson” [sic]. Mind you, this is an article in *The Weekly Messenger* of Martinville, Louisiana, and nearly three decades after she had left Lexington to return to her childhood home in North Carolina.

Together, however, these late 19th century chronicles demonstrate the joint influence of physical, political and symbolic power: who controls patronage, and the press; and the broad reach – as with Walker’s congressional bill – of the restoration of many pre-war social and political structures.

In the rocketing rhetoric and contradictions of the era, some Southern Democrats would come to accuse radical Republicans of bulldozing, in turn, a familiar rubber-and-glue volley of epithets. A stew of new political parties – Conservatives, Radical Republicans, more moderate Union Republicans, Readjusters, Redeemers – all jockeyed for legislative control in Richmond, in local districts, and across the South. The sometimes dizzying proliferation, combination, fractures and dissolution is no small part of what’s made this era easier to skip past, in favor of more fa-

miliar binaries of enslavement and emancipation, Confederate and federal, and Jim Crow assertions of “separate but (un)equal.”

Tellingly, the original, vivid usage of “bulldozer” effectively disappears by the end of the century, when disenfranchisement through the legal rewriting of voter qualifications largely displaces the ‘bull-doses’ of extra-legal threats, violence, and election-tied lynchings (look up the Hamburg Massacre, 1876).

In the sweeping reversals generally known as “Redemption,” the newly restored conservative establishments in all 11 former Confederate states re-wrote their Constitutions between 1885 and 1908, Virginia’s in 1902.

And as Ed Ayers has noted in assessing “The Roots of Segregation” (see RHS’ YouTube channel), Virginia would come to have one of the lowest voter participation rates in the entire country by the 1920s, at 20 percent. Put another way: what’s the point of voting, for anyone, if the game’s already decided?

### The 1902 Virginia Constitution

Virginia’s 1902 Constitution – the signal triumph for the state’s ascendant Democrats, paralleling other restorations of the era and region – used strategies like poll taxes and literacy tests that restricted voter eligibility among Black and poorer white men.

An “understanding clause” (with discretionary questions about constitutional details) provided further latitude for disqualification, although a backdoor for white voters was opened with the “grandfather clause” – another phrase that originated in this era. Under the grandfather clause, white men whose grandfathers fought in the Civil War were allowed to vote. Descendants of United States Colored Troops,

those from Rockbridge and beyond, would be characteristically disqualified here.

In May of 1902, one month before the Constitution’s final approval, the *Lexington Gazette* weighed in on the stakes at hand, and how things had come to pass: “How to get rid of the negro vote and eliminate him from politics has sorely troubled the minds of many of the convention. The enfranchisement of the negro at the time he became a voter was a crime, but we did not commit it” [i.e. Congress did that in 1867, not us].

But with the new hegemony now in place – “No White Man to Lose His Vote, in Virginia” heralds a 1901 broadside from the state chairman – the core concern now centered not on race, but on popular sovereignty. Worryingly, the approved Constitution would not be presented to the people themselves, as had been done by Republican leadership in 1869: “The right of the people to approve or disapprove the work of their servants is undeniable, and the people cannot see how 100 men have the power to say that the people shall take the new Constitution whether they want it or not, and that certain people shall vote on it, and certain people shall not. This is tyranny.”

The tyranny figured here is no longer the U.S. Constitution and congressional law. The tyranny is that the people of Virginia (however “certain people” is now defined) would not ultimately be given the right to vote on the state Constitution that was shaped by the delegates they had elected. Four weeks later, the same editor U-turned to proclaim the adoption of the Constitution as good politics, achieving the needed party outcomes. Though its lack of popular ratification would be tested in front of the Virginia Su-

preme Court in 1903, the state’s new Constitution was retroactively dated as official as of July 10, 1902, without ballots cast by individual Virginians. It would remain in place until 1971.

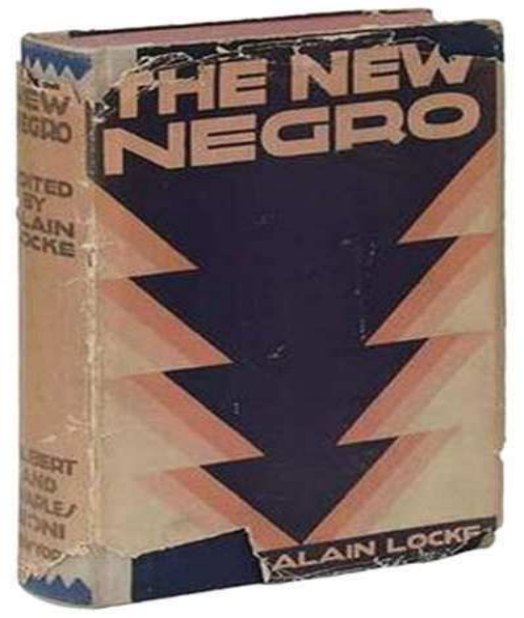
### The Next Generation

In the face of those contemporary trials, it’s also important to recognize local men and women who did achieve different types of prominence, even though their biographies may come as news, relative to 150 years of academic scholarship, newspapers, exhibits, documentaries and monuments.

Part 2 of this series looked to earlier post-Emancipation achievements by focusing on 1867 electors like pre-war freeman and restaurateur James Humbles, and William Washington Sr., emancipated from the Lee family to become one of Lexington’s most prosperous real estate entrepreneurs. More portraits of the generation of children and neighbors who followed them will come in this series’ next segment.

The challenges of the late 19th and early 20th century were real, disillusioning, and sometimes crippling or deadly for African-Americans, locally and nationally. And yet, as historian Henry Louis Gates Jr. has noted, that is the very stage from which Black communities during the era worked to establish their own archetype, and means of aspiration and advancement.

During these years, “The New Negro” (the popular phrase taken from Alain Locke’s 1925 book title) would come to figure as “Black America’s first superhero,” in Gates’ own recent, colorful rendering. Indeed, Rockbridge would enjoy its own share of leadership, and heroism, anchored within this community and advanced with others beyond.



“THE NEW NEGRO,” Alain Locke’s 1925 anthology of fiction, poetry and stories, gave a name to a new cultural archetype for many African-Americans during the Jim Crow era.

Mr. WALKER, presumably the member from Virginia, has come to the rescue of the bulldozers and rifle clubs by the introduction of a bill making it a penal offense, subject to a fine of \$5,000 and imprisonment for five years, for any officer of the army or navy to keep troops at or near the place of holding a general or special election in any State for ten days prior to such election. Mr. WALKER does not say what shall be done with the unfortunate soldiers in case of a Presidential or other election, when, to avoid punishment for being “at or near” some voting-place somewhere, they would have to go down in a coal-mine or up in a balloon.

THIS ARTICLE in *The Chicago Tribune* on Dec. 22, 1876, notes Rep. Gilbert Walker’s bill to prevent the stationing of troops at elections in any state.

### MARTINVILLE, LA. APRIL 6th.

Mrs. Stonewell Jackson, widow of the hero of the late war, was tendered the postmastership of Lexington, Va. The lady declined the appointment.

THIS NOTICE of Lost Cause political patronage – offering the postmastership of Lexington to the widow of Stonewall Jackson – was placed near an 1889 article about Bulldozing in the *Louisiana Weekly Messenger*.

**Natural Bridge State Park**  
 thanks the businesses and organizations who participated in our 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Festival of Trees.  
 With your support, we collected over 4,000 donated items for the very thankful Project Horizon.

Many thanks and recognition of achievement go to:

- Balloons Over Rockbridge
- Center of Gravity
- Chefs Catering
- Dino Kingdom
- Fine Points Salon
- Friends of NBSP
- Laynes Country Store
- Lexington-Rockbridge Chamber of Commerce
- Lowes of Lexington
- Natural Bridge Garden Club
- Natural Bridge Zoo
- Orrison Tree Service
- Project Horizon
- Rockbridge Area Community Services
- Rockbridge Area YMCA
- Rockbridge Bird Club
- United Way of Rockbridge

We appreciate the support and invite you to join Natural Bridge State Park in giving back to our community during our next Festival of Trees.

Sponsored by the Friends of Natural Bridge State Park.

6477 South Lee Highway  
 Natural Bridge, VA 24578  
 540-291-1330

800-933-PARK (7275)  
 www.virginiastateparks.gov

**I LOVE**  
 Virginia State Parks

*Coollest Deal of the Year*

**SAVE BIG**  
 on your advertising during the 31 days of January

Spark up your sales this month with this special offer from The News-Gazette.

Just for the month of January, get **31% off** our open ROP ad rates for any ad size, from a 2 x 2\* all the way up to a full page! Even if you have an existing contract with a discount rate below 31%, you can still take advantage of this deal and get an additional discount up to 31% off open rate!  
**PRE-PAYMENT REQUIRED.** All major credit cards accepted.  
 Book any size ads that start in January and run additional dates in February and March, all at 31% off.\*

Keep your customers coming in your business during what’s normally a slower time of the year. Remember, people still buy this time of the year, and you need to make sure you capture those sales!

Call our advertising department today at (540) 463-3113 or email [amikels@thenews-gazette.com](mailto:amikels@thenews-gazette.com).

\*All ads qualifying for the special 31% discount must be paid for when placed. Advertisers on contracts may qualify for discounts up to 31% by prepaying. Ad campaigns or multiple runs scheduled in January to run through March 29, 2021 may qualify for the 31% discount but payment must be made at the time of scheduling. Discounts do not apply to line classified advertising, special sections or publications, web or mobile advertising or preprinted insert advertising. Excludes Service Guide.

**The News-Gazette**  
 Call our advertising department today at (540) 463-3113 or email [amikels@thenews-gazette.com](mailto:amikels@thenews-gazette.com)