



## History of Virginia Union University

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**The dream, the hope, and the resilience of people continues** as we move forward in freedom, justice, and equality that expands, embraces, explores, the many ways to experience the presence of the Divine outside the walls of our edifice and into our communities home and abroad. As part of our month long Black history Month Celebration, this morning we honor our Historical Black Colleges and Universities for their contributions in the advancement of people of color through educational, social, ethical and Judicial reform. However there is one HBCU, whose historical beginning is uniquely different and difficult to envision, Virginia Union University, currently located on 84 acre campus in the heart of North Richmond. VUU prides itself on having a legacy of producing world-renowned leader in the sciences, entertainment, sports and political fields, most notably Douglas Wilder, Americas first Black Governor, but that's not the start of Virginia Union University history or the phoenix it would become raising out of the ashes of slave brutality to form a prestigious religious and academic university. VUU story is also the story of shared human values, People embracing the love of God and daring practice the act of inclusion for all peoples. Many of these people were white missionaries, who lost-their lives to a righteous cause, and a former slave's generosity and gift that continues the mission of promoting the best through excellent.

VUU's story begins in a place called Lumpkin's Jail, even though it was not a jail, but a two room holding pen for slaves in Shockoe Bottom, it also known as the Devils half Acres, because of the brutality its owner Robert Lumpkin afflicted upon the slaves waiting to be sold and it was also the place where slaves owners would bring their slaves who tried to escape to be punished because Lumpkin was well known for his cruelty, and horrific public beatings of slaves. Living conditions for the captured were inhuman with men, women, and children cramped in spaces with little room for movement, food or water, let out once a day for bowel relief. Fights, and murder, occurred frequently within the holding pens. It was frowned upon because damage goods reduced the value of his property; Lumpkin would severely beat a slave as example to maintain control over the others through fear.

Robert Lumpkin was merciless and like his cohorts he frequently rape young slave girls at will. It was a twelve year old light skinned slave girl named Mary that Lumpkin took a personal interest in and later freed and married and moved her into his home where was she able to benefit from some of the privileges of her white counterparts. Over time Mary would give birth to five children. Before the the start of the Civil War Mary and her children relocated to the free state of Pennsylvania at her urging because she feared for her children's freedom. She remained in Pennsylvania until the death of husband in 1866.

At his death Mary Lumpkin inherited among Lumpkin's land holdings, and his slave jail. So when she heard that missionaries were seeking a place to teach former slaves to read and write she immediately sought them out and leased the jail to an abohtionist minister named, Nathaniel Clover. The jail was dismantled, removing the iron bars, the chains, and the whipping post to create classrooms. It was not an easy task, many of the missionary were beating and killed for teaching freemen to read and write. But their faith in God, humanity and Mary Lumpkin's gift prevailed. What was once called 'The Devil's Half Acre, is today called God's Half Acre" Black History is Americas History, Americas History is Black History, and all History is shared history.

**Let's celebrate together.**

\*You can view the [VUU History video](#) in its entirety on YouTube