

## **“From many an ancient river ...”**

**By Joe Stinnett**

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The Civil War ended in April 1865, but the disdain for Lynchburg’s African Americans only got worse in the pages of the Daily Virginian newspaper. So, when researching my weekly newspaper pieces on the Civil War and the end of slavery, I was relieved to see what I perceived as good news in the Oct. 19, 1865 edition of The Daily Virginian, headlined, “To Our Former Masters.”

“To Our Former Masters: — We, a portion of your former slaves, have formed ourselves into a society, known as the African Emigration Society, for the sole purpose of migrating to Liberia, on the west coast of Africa, to convey the light and civilization we have received here, even in a state of slavery, to our heathen brethren on that benighted and long-neglected continent ... none of us will carry with us the prejudices and ill-will that might arise from our being held in bondage by you, as slaves ... (signed) Mack Nuchols, Jno. J. Garland, Isam Bourne, Charles Lewis, Wm. Eubanks, Charles B. Loving, George W. Rose, Levi M. Norvell.”

### **Slide 2 — Map of Africa**

These 172 men, woman, and children from Lynchburg and Central Virginia were the largest group of emigrants who went to Liberia from the U.S. until nearly the end of the century.

But they weren’t the only ones. In fact, they were part of at least 400 local people who emigrated there between 1828 and 1865, with the assistance of the American Colonization Society. Statewide, more than 3,700 people emigrated between 1820 and 1865, according to the Virginia Emigrants to Liberia project at UVA.

The colonization movement originated in Virginia, with Lynchburg and its residents, black and white, playing important roles. Much of the financing for the actual emigrants came from the North, especially Philadelphia.

It's important to keep in mind that the Atlantic Ocean was not a one-way street for the American emigrants. They not only kept in contact with friends, relatives, and former masters via letters, but also traveled back and forth.

### **Slide 3 — map of Liberia**

I should cite some of my main sources here before I go any further. There is a wealth of documentation about the American Colonization Society preserved in the many volumes of its annual journal, the African Repository. A UVa database and two other books were key as well: "An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia" by Maria Tyler-McCraw, and "Careysburg," by Benjamin G. Freeman IV.

Mr. Freeman, a sociologist, is a native Liberian of American ancestry, who left the country during the civil wars of the late 20th century, and now lives in Baltimore.

He is a descendant of John Freeman and his wife, Melinda Colbert Freeman. John Freeman was hired by Thomas Jefferson in 1801 and later purchased by Jefferson. He worked in the White House with Jefferson, accompanied him on trips to Monticello, and was sold to President James Madison and continued to work in the White House. He became a free man in 1815 and bought property in Washington. His wife, Melinda, was owned by the Jefferson family at Monticello and was a niece of Sally Hemmings. His descendant, also John Freeman, emigrated to Careysburg, Liberia 1860.

The 1865 Lynchburg group also went to Careysburg. Located in a more elevated area than coastal Monrovia, Careysburg was established in the 1850s after the early settlers and missionaries discovered that malaria — the fever — was less intense there than on the coast.

Estimates of the percentages of American emigrants to Liberia who perished from malaria and other causes range from 20 percent to the more probable 50 percent. One emigrant who sailed with some of the Lynchburg people described "the African fever" as a series of debilitating fevers, where the sufferer seems to improve every other day, but eventually is weakened to the point of death.

Malaria involves a series of chills, fever and sweating with body temperatures as high as 107 degrees F. Sufferers, who endure headache, malaise, vomiting, diarrhea, an enlarged spleen, kidney problems, convulsions, and loss of

consciousness, often still die, according to Duke University DDT and Malaria information. Children are especially likely to succumb.

Much has been written about the efforts and politics and motives behind the movement to send free blacks and later freed slaves to Africa. Tonight, though, I want to talk mostly about the people and the families of Lynchburg and Liberia.

First, a little background: The American Colonization Society was founded in 1816 to help black Americans leave the United States and establish a colony, in Africa, and in the process to Christianize the native people there.

There's no doubt about the evangelical aspect of the country's founding. But was it basically a scam to get rid America of the black people, free and enslaved, and solve the problem of slavery? Or was it an effort to give enslaved people and their descendants a better life?

Consensus on these questions was lacking, which hampered the colonization movement. The Virginia legislature endorsed the movement, but appropriated little money for it.

The voyages were mostly financed by donations from well-meaning people in the Northern states. The 1865 Lynchburg group's voyage was paid for by the people of Philadelphia.

Northern abolitionists opposed the colonization movement. They wanted an end to slavery, not to see the free blacks, or the enslaved, expelled from the country.

The religious nature of the ACS remained at the forefront, with its representatives in Africa also serving as missionaries. Many of the emigrants themselves hoped to bring the Gospel to the local residents, who of course already had their own non-Western religions and beliefs.

I was struck several times while researching this paper on how much the Liberia story resembles that of Jamestown: Colonists undertake a poorly planned journey to an unknown land, suffer hardships, disease, and a lack of supplies, and hope to convert the native people.

But a big difference was the almost constant back and forth communication between the Liberians and the Americans. Letters from relatives made people here

well aware of the dangers. At one point, the ACS had its own ship making several trips a year back and forth.

#### **Slide 4 — 1816 timeline**

The Rev. Joseph Turner of Bedford, his wife, Lucinda, and their two children, Harriett, 13, and Elizabeth, 2 are the first emigrants to Liberia from Central Virginia listed in the records, in 1829. Friends in Lynchburg donated \$90 to pay for their passage.

Rev. Turner was the first Lynchburg emigrant to die, but his wife survived. The Lynchburg Colonization Society memorialized him shortly thereafter:

“... the Rev. Joseph Turner, a man of colour, late of the county of Bedford, hath departed this life since his arrival at the colony of Liberia; Resolved, that this society bearing in mind his worth, high respectability and distinguished virtue while living, do deeply deplore the loss of the deceased, and sincerely sympathize with his surviving relatives, and also with the Colonists at Liberia, for the loss they have sustained in his death.”

Around this time, the Lynchburg society reported that as many as 100 local “free people of color” were interested in emigrating. Several slave owners had also expressed interest in freeing their slaves if the colonization society would pay to send them to Liberia. Most of the Lynchburg emigrants after the Turners were former slaves who had been emancipated on condition they emigrate.

The national society apologized for not having the money to send everyone who wanted to leave Lynchburg in 1829. Money might not have been the only impediment, with more news of malaria deaths circulating in Lynchburg by 1830. McCraw-Taylor cites a letter from John Wynn, a free resident of Lynchburg, who “wrote that free black people here had received letters from a group of emigrants from Lexington who passed through Lynchburg saying that many had died, apparently from malaria.”

In 1830, about 40 members of the Mars family, from Lynchburg and Franklin County, emigrated to Liberia aboard the ships *Caroline* and *Jupiter*. A number of them were freed by “various benevolent people” near Lynchburg, according to the *African Repository*.

The first group went on the *Montgomery*, which sailed from Hampton Roads on June 1, 1830. The voyage took about a month. The Lynchburg group on this ship included Abraham Mars, 50, a farmer; Peggy Mars, age 26; Aaron, 24, Hercules, 18, and Andrew, 16, all three listed as farmers; and several children including Nancy, 11; Lewis, 8, Ann, 6; Jane, 5, and George, 1.

Almost all of them died, either on the voyage or from the fever when they reached Liberia. All the children I mentioned died.

A number of factors were working against the Mars family.

They were accustomed to the clear air of the Blue Ridge Mountains, which made them particularly susceptible to malaria in the tropical climate of Liberia, according to contemporary reports.

The whole journey was an example of bad planning by the colonization society. The Mars family arrived at the start of the rainy season, which meant they couldn't raise any crops or produce for four to five months. The country was tough, and the colonists weren't equipped with even the most basic tools, like axes.

Measles broke out aboard the second Mars ship, killing 20 out of 107 emigrants before they even reached Liberia, children primarily. There was no shelter for the emigrants at their intended destination at Caldwell so they were to stay at Monrovia "until they have had the fever."

Looking at the bright side, as always, the colonization society noted that the Monrovia suburb of Caldwell, where the Mars family was bound, had 30 students in the village school in 1830

These reports in the *African Repository* contain much boosterism. The 1830 annual report noted that the interior of Africa was healthy, that the fever should lessen as the land was cleared, that people from the southern lowlands of America were less susceptible to fever, and that "advancements in understanding the fever" would combine for a better future.

Phrases like the following, comparing Liberia to Jamestown and Plymouth, were no doubt inspirational for people looking for a better life for their family: "Men of thought, of energy, of benevolence are alone prepared to labor successfully in enterprises which are to be realized only in their greatness and their glory, by a future age."

The land in West Africa that became Liberia was heavily forested, and tropical, with two seasons, wet and dry. Coffee and sugar grew well. The average temperature in Liberia is 80 degrees near the coast, and 65 degrees in the mountains — the interior of the country is on a high plateau. The rainy season runs from May through October, and annual rainfall can average 205 inches in the flatland to about 70 inches in the higher elevations.

The Americans who began to arrive in the 1820s were far outnumbered by the Africans, members of some 20 different tribes, who lived there already.

Along with the Americans, another group of recent arrivals were the “Congoes.” These were Africans who had been kidnapped and sold, then rescued from slave ships after the international slave trade was outlawed in 1807. Rather than returning them to their homes, the British and American navies dumped them in the Liberian colony, where they suffered discrimination by both the American colonists and the native people.

Among the native Africans were the Kruu. Expert coastal mariners, they sailed out to greet incoming ships, becoming dock and harbor workers as the colony grew. They were anti-slavery. They were adept at music and dancing, something that didn’t always go over well with pious, uptight Americans.

### **Slide 5 — Kruu men in boat**

In the 1848 book, “Journal of an African Cruiser,” edited by Nathaniel Hawthorne, an American merchant-sailor recounts this anecdote from a visit to Liberia: “Tonight we had a Kruo-dance on the forecastle. It was an uncouth and peculiar spectacle, characterized by singing, stamping, and clapping of hands, with a great display of agility.” (Sounds like a Sun Ra concert). But the writer didn’t stop there: “Native dances may be taken as no bad standard of comparative civilization of different countries,” he sniffed. “A graceful quiet dance is the latest flower of high refinement.”

### **Harriett — 1829**

Now, I’d like to talk about the folks who emigrated, in chronological order, starting with the aforementioned 1829 voyage of the Harriett, which included the free Turner family, from Bedford.

Two future presidents of Liberia were also on this voyage — Joseph Roberts, then 21, of Richmond, who became the country's first president; and James S. Payne, 10, also of Richmond, who was president from 1868 to 1870 and again from 1876 to 1878. Both were born free.

Also aboard was Abduhl Rahhaman, a “Moorish Prince” and his wife. He was an African prince and soldier who lived in what is now Guinea when he was captured and sold into slavery in the southern U.S. where he lived for 40 years until he became somewhat of a cause celeb after writing to relatives back home. He was assumed to be a Moor because he wrote in Arabic. He died four months after arriving in Monrovia.

The Turner's ship left Hampton Roads with 160 emigrants, from Virginia and Maryland, a mix of emancipated and free African Americans. “Many of those had long been free and had acquired considerable property, and took with them a very liberal supply of provisions, household furniture, tools, and agricultural implements, and articles for trade,” said the AR.

It is regarded as one of the founding voyages of the country, although about a quarter of the emigrants had died within a month. Teen-ager Harriett Turner from Bedford died of a “diseased brain” in 1836.

### **Liberia — 1830**

The second group of Lynchburg emigrants, aboard the ship Liberia in 1830, included the local Cook family, as well as the Erskine family from Tennessee. The Erskines had stayed in Lynchburg after arriving in Virginia too late to catch the Harriett. Their emigration was paid for by the Pennsylvania ACS.

Lynchburg was somewhat of a crossroads for migrants from the west on their way to Baltimore or Norfolk. Describing another group of emigrants years later, an ACS agent from Abingdon wrote, "Our company numbering 70, passed through here to day, and it is expected they will reach Lynchburg in two weeks from this time. Several of these emigrants will have horses, wagons, etc., to sell when they get to Lynchburg. They are depending very much on the sale of these to get to Liberia."

A letter from the ship's captain in the African Repository gives some detail on the 1830 emigrants. The Erskine family was led by a Presbyterian minister, the Rev.

George Erskine, who had purchased the freedom of the other family members. His mother, 80, had been born in Africa.

The ship's captain also wrote, "I had on board another interesting man by the name of Cook. He was about 70 years of age, and had a very patriarchal appearance. His family amounted to about 30 in number, who all evidenced the benefits resulting from the counsel, admonition, and direction of a good old man, whom they loved and respected. They were Methodists from Lynchburg, Va."

Rev. Erskine preached each Sunday on the way over. The captain complimented him on the sermons, and asked him about his views on emigration. He replied,

"I am going to a new country to settle my family and myself as agriculturalists; to a country where we shall at least be on a level with our fellow citizens; where the complexion shall be no barrier to fulfilling our most exalted station. I shall cultivate the land assigned me by the colonization society, and if please God to spare my life, shall be always ready to do good as opportunity offers."

Offering a bit of insight into life shipboard, the Liberia's captain suggested that future emigrants receive a better menu. Instead of biscuit and dried beef, the navy ration, he suggested corn meal, fish, molasses, and plenty of potatoes.

The captain said that all 58 emigrants aboard the Liberia arrived in good health and settled in Caldwell near the St. Paul's River. Around this time, the population of the colony was about 1,200 — 12 years after the colony was founded and eight years after Monrovia was founded.

Erskine himself wrote to the ACS in early April, requesting that the society establish schools, noting that of the "present emigrants" 17 out of 48 could read "the Holy Scriptures" — and 31 could not. The Presbyterian Synod of Richmond had collected money to build a small school, also serving as a chapel, where Erskine was to be the minister. And the Liberian Herald newspaper was established around this time in 1830.

Both Mrs. Erskine, and a daughter, and Mrs. Cook, had died by April of the African fever, which had also killed the colony's recently-arrived physician. The AR reports that a "goodly number" of the Liberia passengers had contracted the fever but were recovering. By September, a "considerable" number of the Liberia and Montgomery emigrants had died, including the Rev. Erskine. He had partially recovered from the fever when he made a trip to Millsburg, got wet, and suffered a

relapse, according to a letter from the colonial agent. The agent noted that his death was “a great calamity” for the little colony.

*(slide 7 — village)*

A group of re-captured Africans, taken from a slave ship in the Barbados, also arrived around this time and none had contracted the fever. Meanwhile, the slave trade continued, with a “slave factory” operating only 43 miles from Monrovia, and an estimated 900 slaves, captured in the interior, shipped away in a period of three weeks.

**Montgomery — 1830**  
**Carolinian — 1830**

These are the two voyages in 1830 that almost completely wiped out the large Mars family, as I mentioned earlier. Twenty-eight of the 70 emigrants aboard the Montgomery had been freed by “various benevolent persons” in Lynchburg.

We know about the Mars’ family tragedy, not from the colonization society, but from the letters of a prominent Philadelphia citizen, James Forten. Forten was a free-born black man who was a businessman, sailmaker, revolutionary war veteran, and activist. He was also a foe of the colonization society, believing that the organization was trying to rid the country of free blacks. He had agents among the people of Liberia relaying him information outside the ACS.

Joseph Mechlin Jr., colonial agent, returned to Liberia on one of these 1830 voyages. Despite the fact that almost 20 percent of this group of emigrants died, Mechlin said things are going well overall, better than expected, with 25 stone houses built — still not many considering that at least hundreds of emigrants were in Monrovia by this point. He said an inland expedition was planned to seek a healthier area.

The 1830 ACS report devotes a couple of pages to trying to quell fears of disease and death, noting that the interior of Africa was quite healthy, that as the land was cleared and opened up the fever would ease, that people from south and lowlands of American didn’t suffer as badly from it, and that advancements in understanding of the fever would all combine for the better in the future — and that it was all worth it anyway to christianize Africa.

## Jupiter — 1832, 1833-34

The Lynchburg Colonization Society's most active era was the early 1830s. R.H. Toler, a local newspaperman, made an remarkable speech to the local society during its annual meeting in 1832. (It possibly was even longer than a Spheeris speech.) He said he believed that black people had the same potential as whites if given a chance; and said slavery was founded by our money-loving ancestors who didn't want to work so hard themselves. *I'm summarizing, but that was the gist of it.*

"I am decidedly of opinion that with a short notice, a full cargo of manumitted slaves would be furnished from this part of Virginia," Toler said.

The 1832 Jupiter voyage included 19 members of "the Harris family from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia," who all survived, according to the repository. Another family of Harris's from the Fredericksburg area also emigrated around this time. The Harris's were related to the Henry's, who lived in Rockbridge, and a cousin, Patrick Henry, was a free man who one source identifies as a store keeper in Lynchburg in the 1840s, who later emigrated himself. A Harris cousin from Fredericksburg later became Secretary of State in the new country.

These family connections again show that emigrants likely knew what they were getting into and were not just automatons shipped overseas by their masters.

At least 28 other people from Lynchburg/Campbell County were aboard the 1833-34 voyage of the Jupiter, the freed slaves of William Atkins of Campbell County. Many were children, and the group included about 15 separate families and individuals.

One local emigrant, Nelson Eilbeck, 22, was listed in the records as a "scrivener" who "writes, etc." I would love to know more about him but was unable to find anything.

Several reports said that most of the Campbell County emigrants survived their initial bout with the fever, with only a few dead as of March or April.

These Campbell County families included:

- Francis Avery, 65, who died in 1838 of consumption;
- Sarah Berry, 23;

- the Cook family of four, including Sarah, 8, who could write, and her sister Ann, 12, who died of the fever soon after arrival, along with her mother, Clara, who died in 1835 of consumption;
- the aforementioned Nelson Eilbeck, 22, a scrivener;
- Charlotte Forsythe and a child. Her husband, John Forsythe, a painter, had arrived earlier in the year.
- The Grey family, which included a father and two adult sons, all sawyers.
- James King
- Phillip U. Martin
- the Morton family
- The Olphin family
- Maria Pegram, 25, who has “spells.”
- James Poston
- The Stokes family of seven, including Edward Stokes, a shoemaker; and
- Henry Wilson, who survived malaria only to die of typhoid fever in 1837.

Americans who emigrated to Liberia often spent their six months of society-provided support trying to live out the fever, arriving at the wrong time to plant crops. Then, once the six months were up, at best they could expect to be, “a penniless stranger, without house or food.” So, they had to rent or borrow a saw, find a companion, and wade into the swamps to cut wood. Without oxen, the wood had to be hewn on the spot, which often took four days, then somehow hauled back to Monrovia, another two days’ work, where it could be sold. After a couple years of this, a man might earn enough to build a plain frame house for his family, the repository says.

### **Slide 6 of Liberian village peaked roofs**

### **Slide 7 of 1839 timeline**

### **Saluda — 1839**

Twelve members of the Campbell County Diggs family, also freed by William Atkins, emigrated in 1839 aboard the Saluda. (That same year, a colonization society missionary visited Lynchburg, riding a pony name “Liberia.”)

These Campbell County emigrants included Matthew Diggs, 50, a farmer; his wife, Eve; and their children, Buster, 22, a laborer, Rebecca and Ellen, both 19, as well as school children Eveline, Arthur, John, and Joseph. Two other children, Samuel, 13, died of fever, and Martha, also 13, died of unknown causes, by 1840.

The Saluda itself had been purchased by the ACS with plans to sell it “to colored men qualified to navigate it” to take emigrants to Liberia. That sale did not materialize so the ship sailed under a white captain, with an African American crew.

Two other members of the Walker family freed by William Atkins ,arrived in 1842.

### **Globe — 1843**

The next year, 1843, the Lynch family sailed to Liberia, aboard the Globe. Fifteen members of the family were freed by William B. Lynch. (Five more Lynches came in 1865 with the large Lynchburg group.) Nancy Lynch, 41, a seamstress, was the head of the household, but was in feeble health. Nancy, 19, was her daughter.

William B. Lynch gave the ACS \$500 to pay for their passage, the only instance I found in which a local slaveowner paid for his former slaves to emigrate. Generally, they freed slaves only on the condition that someone else pay.

The African Repository says that Lynch, a “young gentleman” of Lynchburg, “feeling the deepest concern for the welfare of these servants ... visited the northwestern States, and observing the unfortunate condition of their colored population, persuaded them to choose Liberia for their home, and after supplying them with the necessary articles of clothing, mechanical tools, and implements of agriculture, accompanied them to Baltimore ...”

They were first quartered in fever-ridden Monrovia, where Morris, 25, Emeline, 10, Moses, 7, John, 5, George, 6, and Charles Lynch, 2, died almost as soon as they arrived. Elmira (Mary) Lynch, 13, survived to move down the coast to Cape Palmas, where she married Washington Brown in 1848, according to another record.

### **Liberia Packet — 1849**

In 1848, the will of a Mrs. Teass from Lynchburg or Campbell County freed Nina Davis and her three children, and they sailed aboard the Liberia Packet, which made regular trips between the continents. Also aboard was John B. Phillips, a lawyer, from Lynchburg. An interesting occupation: Was he a free man? No emancipator is known.

Other Central Virginia folks aboard the Liberia Packet on this voyage were Billy and Esther Helms and their two children, emancipated by William Helms. Billy Helms was a millwright. Esther died soon after arrival of fever.

This voyage of the packet also brought over tobacco and powder. The ACS was hoping to establish a monopoly in these and some other items in Western Africa but was unsuccessful, with British merchants already doing business there and not anxious to cooperate with any competition.

### **Liberia Packet — 1850, 1851**

Aboard the 1850 voyage of the packet were Louisa Miller, 25, and Samuel Miller, 18, freed by Samuel Miller, the well-known Lynchburg citizen, as well as a group from Lexington. A poem, apparently written by a Lexington emigrant, was read at the departure ceremony there:

“Ours may be a lot of trials,  
Bravely we will meet them all.  
For the sake of our dear children,  
we will bear what may befall ...”

In 1851, Anaca Miller, 24, who could read, and Betsey Miller, 17, were freed by Samuel Miller and came to Liberia on another voyage of the packet.

**Slide 8 — Senate**

**Slide 9 — President Robert**

**Slide 10 — Mrs. Roberts**

**Slide 11 — 1850-51 timeline**

### **Banshee — 1853**

In 1853-54, 22 members of the Cheatwood family, ranging in age from 2 to 80, emancipated by John Cheatwood of Bedford County, went to Liberia aboard the Banshee. Other passengers were from Maryland, North Carolina, Indiana, and Kentucky.

Virginia emigrant William Burke wrote about a month after arrival that the voyage was rough but added, “This certainly is a fine place for anyone who has money or

goods to sell to get along very fast. At the same time, I am happy to say that a poor man may also live if he has health and if he is industrious. ...”

About a third of the 261 people on this voyage died either enroute or soon after they arrived. Whooping cough broke out aboard the ship on the way over.

Most of the survivors settled on the St. Paul River. An ACS doctor in Liberia wrote early the next year that they are doing well, somewhat to his surprise, since when they got there, a few began “freely eating fruit” and “drinking spiritous liquors.” — Who wouldn’t want a few drinks after a trip like that?

Later that spring, the ACS again tried to rationalize the sickness and death, claiming that some deaths “are to be expected” with this many people and that emigrants really didn’t need to worry about disease if they took care of themselves. The ACS estimated the death rate at 3 percent — but as I said earlier, it was probably closer to 50 percent. The child mortality rate worldwide was about 30 percent or more in the 19th century.

Blaming of the victims is prevalent throughout the ACS reports, for such causes as “excessive or unnecessary effort in pulling a canoe 12 or 14 miles,” “inflammation of the bowels produced by eating too much pine-apple and oranges,” and “hard drink and exposure.”

“They frequently disregard the advice of the physicians.” (This sounds like some of my older family members.)

### **Sophia Walker — 1854**

In 1854, Eddie Davis, 78, and 14 other members of his family were freed by Arthur B. Davis of Amherst and emigrated aboard the Sophia Walker. Except for Mr. Davis, all the family members were under 40, including two infants, James and Paulina. The family included seven men, two women, and six children and teenagers. Also aboard were three free Amherst residents: Susan F. Johnson, 18, Francis A. Johnson, 3, and Ann Eliza Wilson, 28.

Two physicians also sailed about the Sophia Walker, bring the total number of doctors in country to four. The ACS had sent about 8,800 people to Liberia by this time, according to its records.

Again, there was much sickness on the voyage itself, with 20 children dying on the ship and 8 eight or nine more shortly after arrival.

Now, some American emigrants decided not to stay in Liberia. Aboard the ship with the Davis family of Amherst were Nancy and Carey Bell, of Kentucky. They only stayed two years, then returned.

Amazingly, to me anyway, Nancy Bell was interviewed about her life by the Cincinnati paper in 1923 when she was 88.

She said that she saw 60 people buried at sea on the journey. “The bodies were wrapped in a shroud, weighted with sand to make them sink, and tipped off a board into the ocean ... sharks would attack the bodies almost immediately.”

She and her husband brought Liberian coffee back to Kentucky which they were able to sell for \$1 a pound because it was so good. Her husband served as cook in the Union army during the Civil War and later became the first African American elected to a town council in Kentucky. He wasn't allowed to serve because his opponents discovered that he was still technically a citizen of Liberia.

**Slide 12 — Three villages**

**Slide 13 — 1857 timeline**

**M.C. Stevens —1857, 1858, 1859**

The Mary Caroline Stevens made multiple Atlantic crossings in the late 1850s, bringing 27 members of the Rogers family from Liberty (Bedford), freed by Timothy Rogers; and nine members of the Banks family of Nelson County, freed by N. Dettor. Another Miller, emancipated by Samuel Miller, sailed on the 1857 voyage.

The Banks family — two grandparents, their son and his wife, and their children — came in May 1858, bound for the newly established town of Careysburg. The Banks were among about 50 emigrants and 17 missionaries on the May 1858 voyage. Fifteen more members of the Banks family arrived in 1865 with the large group from Central Virginia. A doctor brought quinine out to the 1858 ship before it landed, and there are no recorded deaths among the Banks family, despite 40-50 cases of measles among the children.

One of the return voyages of the Mary Caroline Stevens in 1858 is good example of the back and forth nature of the Liberian experience.

Among those bound for America were a minister returning for ordination as a bishop in the M.E. Church, two young men for medical training in New England; a merchant seeking to purchase a small vessel; a Presbyterian minister and graduate of Alexander High School returning for ordination; an “old fogey Liberian” originally from Charleston; another emigrant who didn’t like it (his wife and children were in America); a widow from North Carolina who was visiting Liberia when her husband died there; and a woman from Savannah who had come to Liberia with her husband. He went back with money to get their children, but met a younger woman and ran off. Over 60 years old, with no support, she first asked to go back to her former master and he said OK, but only as a slave — so she worked something out with friends to go to the North instead.

Bedford’s Rogers family emigrated in 1858 and 1859. They included Fanny Rogers and her nine children, ages 12-23; Mary and her four children, ages 5-12; Frank, 46, and Tom Rogers, 37, and Sally Rogers, 50, and five children, ages 12-20; and Aberilla, 42, and her three children, ages 16, 18 and 20.

Their 1859 departure from the Baltimore docks was auspicious. Following a religious service, John H.B. Latrobe, president of the ACS, addressed the group, noting he had first seen emigrants off from those very docks 35 years ago.

The send-off included readings from the 35th chapter of Isaiah, and the 46th Psalm, and much discussion of Bible ministry to unknown lands, fitting since there were 17 missionaries on the M.C. Stevens passenger list.

Waiting to board, the emigrants heard a reading of the English missionary hymn, “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains.”

*From Greenland’s icy mountains, from India’s coral strand;  
Where Afric’s sunny fountains roll down their golden sand:  
From many an ancient river, from many a palmy plain,  
They call us to deliver their land from error’s chain. ...*

Then, from the ship’s deck, they called for the song to be sung again, “started by a little colored girl named Sophia Glasgow, and sung by them with great effect.”

The AR summed it up with a really lovely sentence:

“Preparations having all been made, the noble ship was shortly there afterwards towed to the mouth of the harbor, and took her departure for the coast of West Africa.”

The colony of Liberia had become a country 12 years before, in 1847. The Rev. John Seys, a key figure in the history of Liberia, gave a summary of the state of things there just before the American Civil War.

An examination had been recently given at Alexander High School where classes included Greek, Latin, Tacitus in German, algebra, arithmetic, geography and Ceasar’s Gallic Wars. On hand were “His Excellency President Benson” , along with ex-president Roberts. Seys cited “a degree in improvement in classical literature which was most satisfactory.”

The examination was conducted by a “colored” instructor, said the ACS, which reported that the students themselves could go on to be teachers to replace white teachers, of whom it was said: “They could not endure the climate and so must leave.”

Seys continued that agriculture was finally getting some needed attention, and said that Liberia would become exporter of sugar, coffee, and cotton before many years.

Seys sounds a bit like Parson Robert Rose who explored the Central Virginia mountains in the 1700s. With six trips to Liberia, Seys was an old Liberian hand: Quoting another minister, he said, “America in Africa is the solution to the great problem of Africa in America.”

As special agent for the ACS, Seys had helped establish the inland community of Careysburg in 1857. Careysburg was the destination of the large 1865 Lynchburg group and will be the focus of most of the rest of my paper.

#### **Slide 14 — Careysburg map**

A group of regional kings, chiefs, and headmen granted a deed for the 20-square mile Careysburg settlement to the ACS. Missionaries had established a settlement there in 1856 with the assistance of King Zodah, who wanted the first interior settlement of the American Liberians to be in his territory.

Zodah and another king received trade goods worth about \$10,000 in today's dollars.

One of the first Americo-Liberian buildings in Careysburg was a log church built in 1857 by emigrants from Albemarle County. By this time, the little country was mostly on its own, with even its own representatives sometimes bucking the colonization society. Seys defied an order from the ACS executive committee to break up Careysburg and send its settlers to other towns. He disregarded the message and the society later thanked him.

The slave trade was still active, and the "Congoes" were still arriving in Liberia. Seys was aboard a ship in 1859 ferrying 85 recaptured Africans to Bassa, Sinou, and Cape Palmas counties.

Liberia was an independent country where only blacks were allowed to be citizens, but patronizing treatment of the emigrants by the white ACS leadership continued. A Careysburg superintendent noted around this time in a letter that many of the immigrants were "not intelligent, but they were industrious."

*(Slide 11 — village and town)*

*(Slide 12 — high style Monrovia)*

Emigrant Joseph Peacher, from South Carolina, came over in December 1858 with some of the Campbell County people, reported a couple months later that he was well satisfied in Careysburg. Peacher had cleared his land in Careysburg and was building a house.

An advocate of agricultural improvement, he was planning lectures on farming and agriculture, and sent by return ship samples of starches Liberians could make from cassava and a arrow root. He has also suggested to the locals corn, ginger and ground nuts as possible agricultural products, and seems to have formed a local agricultural society.

In mid-1859, the native people of the country had not been totally pacified. One of their kings, Sandfish, was advocating peace, but the Vey people were raising cain, raiding and pillaging and robbing. At the same time, the Americo-Liberians were eyeing the native territory for further settlement.

The 1859 voyage by the Mary Caroline Stevens was the last group of Central Virginia emigrants to leave for Liberia prior to the Civil War.

The M.C. Stevens made a final pre-war voyage in 1860. Aboard was John R. Freeman, the emigrant ancestor of the Baltimore author. "Like many other emigrants, he had heard that Liberia was 'the land of liberty,' the true promise of freedom. At the time, Liberia had gained her independence. A strong and vibrant Negro race was on the rise," Mr. Freeman writes.

*(Slide 13 — reporter)*

### **H.P. Russell — 1865**

A crowd of several thousand citizens, black and white, gathered in Lynchburg at the train station in November 1865 for the departure of the 172 men, women and children from the area who were emigrating to Liberia. It was the beginning of a journey that would take them by train to Baltimore where they would board the H.P. Russell and sail Nov. 4 for Liberia.

Here are the familiar surnames of the local emigrants:

### **Slide 15 of family names**

Abbott, Alexander, Averett, Banks, Bourne, Braxton, Cabell, Campbell, Carter, Christian, Copeland, Crawford, Dudley, Dunnington, Dyson, Edward, Eubanks, Goggin, Hafland, Jones, Lee, Leftwich, Lewis, Loving, Lowrie, Lynch, Mayes, McCraw, McKnuckles, Moore, Noel, Noorman, Norvell, Palmer, Proffitt, Randall, Robertson, Robinson, Rose, Ross, Rucker, Scott, Sherman, Shoemaker, Smith, Tate, Tomlin, Waller, Warren, and Warwick.

All had been enslaved until the end of the war. They included blacksmiths, shoemakers, tobacconists, carpenters, a butcher and a baker, as well as farmers and laborers, mostly Baptists.

With the end of the war, colonization was no longer seen as impediment to freedom in America, so there was a renewal of interest in colonization for its own sake, according to the New York chapter of the ACS. This voyage was the idea of the former enslaved people themselves, not the colonization society.

They were led by John McNuchols. He was a "man of unusual shrewdness and practical good sense," a plasterer, bricklayer and skilled craftsman.

He was highly regarded by the entire community, according to a contemporary account, and had aspired to emigrate to Liberia for years. As a slave, he had been sold for the high price of \$2,200, which was stated by colonization society as an indication of his intrinsic worth.

“Their well-organized exodus suggests that planning had begun before or during the Civil War and that they had conferred with Virginia emigrants in Liberia,” writes Taylor-McCraw. It was coordinated with William Douglas, a Liberian from Albemarle County, who was an agent for the ACS.

Lynchburg freedman Levi M. Norvell had a hand as well in the planning. He wrote to the colonization society in September 1865 that hundreds of freedmen here were anxious to emigrate, “now that the fetters of degradation have been burst asunder.”

Norvell and other members of the Lynchburg group met with an agent of the ACS early in September. The agent wrote: “The male adults are generally young and nearly all good mechanics. Eight are carpenters, seven are boot and shoe makers, three are blacksmiths, two are bricklayers, &c.&c. Those that I saw were men of good appearance, nearly all of light complexion, and evincing much practical sense and good judgment.”

The national colonization society raised money from the people of Philadelphia to finance the emigration of the Lynchburg families.

The trip attracted the attention of a prominent Liberian even before it began. The Rev. Alexander Crummell, an African-American, was a Cambridge-educated Episcopal priest who moved to Liberia in 1853. He returned to the U.S. in 1872 when called to a church in Washington, D.C., and later taught at Howard University. A well-known African nationalist, perhaps he was visiting Philadelphia when this was written to the Lynchburg emigrants:

“... When you come to think of all the future of yourselves and your children, when you contemplate their temporal status as men and as citizens it seems to me most judicious to set up your homes in a land where you can have no rivalries of prejudice and caste; where you can reach at one bound the full stature of free men; where everything in church and state is your own; where you will rank at once among the upbuilders of a new state; where every avenue of preferment is open before you, according to your mental and moral fitness for superiority ...”

In closing, he writes, “... please God, we shall meet on the shores of Africa, and I wish you, your wives and children, a very pleasant passage and safe arrival in Monrovia.”

The local families boarded a train and left Lynchburg at 8 p.m. on Oct. 31, 1865, bound for Baltimore. It “was a scene of unusual and affecting interest for several hours prior to the departure of the train with the emigrants” reported the repository. “... Religious services were held, hymns were sung, and prayers offered for the safety and welfare of those who were about to leave for the land of their fathers.”

Unlike earlier voyages, this one was uneventful. They carried their possessions and supplies in large boxes and arrived in Monrovia on Dec. 14, 1865, after a voyage of 40 days, a bit longer than usual. Their mattresses served as their berths, and they suffered some sea sickness, but all arrived in good health.

A few months later, the AR reported that only four of the 172 emigrants had died. The Lynchburg group did not linger in unhealthy Monrovia, moving within a week to Careysburg.

**Slide 16, engraving of nice building and street**

**Slide 17, portrait of unknown man (reporter?)**

**Slide 18, African Repository quote**

In 1865, the Republic of Liberia was beginning to get on its feet. The first senior class of Liberia College graduated this year. Monrovia itself has been described as resembling a typical Southern town.

A lengthy report about the Lynchburg Emigration Society in the AR sums up the 1865 status of the former colony thusly:

“Liberia is too apt to be compared with our own colonies in the wilds of Washington, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho and Montana. We must however bear in mind the many drawbacks under which the colored settlers have labored. Though the African Republic during the last four years has been deprived of much of the aid usually furnished from this country, it has been making steady progress in material interests and in influence and usefulness. The era of thatched abodes and of framed dwellings is passing by and the citizens are generally erecting brick buildings. The cultivation of sugar and coffee and other products is largely

increased. The authority of the Republic continues to spread over the native tribes which surround it.”

The Americans, who numbered about 13,000 by 1867, had established themselves as the rulers and the elite of the country whose total population may have been 100,000. Within the Americo-Liberians, the former Virginians held sway. And within the Virginians, the upper crust were not the former slaves who had been emancipated, but rather the people who had been free already.

McNuckles soon introduced himself to Liberia’s third president, Daniel Warner, a native of Maryland, at the president’s brick mansion in Monrovia.

“Mr. McNuckols and a fellow emigrant called to see me a day or two after their arrival here and expressed themselves in the most encouraging manner respecting the general aspect of the country so far as they have been able to observe it,” Warner wrote in January 1866.

McNuckols himself wrote back to Lynchburg from Careysburg on Jan. 5, 1866:

### **Slide 19 McNuckols quote**

“I am now in Careysburg and enjoying good health, and hope this may find you well and in good spirits. ... We all got to our place of acclimation and settlement just before Christmas, on the 20th December, 1865. The Methodist sabbath school had a pic-nic, and then on new-year’s day a society called “The Union Sisters of Charity” turned out, and at church had beautiful addresses from a young man from Monrovia, Rev. Mr. Dillon, and Rev. Mr. Ware, pastor of this church.

“All the men are in fine spirits, and are about to get a small furnace sufficient for present use, and if it does well we shall continue and enlarge it. Iron ore is plentiful here. We have not drawn our land yet, but we will do so shortly, and build all the cabins before the six months are out.

“We all present our thanks to the members of the Colonization Society for the kindness they have shown us and the colored race. Say to Brother Jack Averett and F. Irwin to come here. All the heart can wish in freedom can be seen here and enjoyed.

“Please write me as soon as you can, and let em know how you are getting along, and all about Lynchburg. Present my respects to aunt Nelly, and tell her she ought to be in Liberia. ... I, remain, yours, John McKnuckles.”

The African Repository picks up the story of the Lynchburg families a few months after their arrival, reporting that they cut cleared their allotted properties, southwest of Careysburg proper, planted crops, and built 60 houses.

Sixty houses sounds like an exaggeration.. The Liberian Herald said the Virginia emigrants had built 14 houses on both sides of a wide creek. They picked the area because of the creek and the abundance of timber, according to a letter from a missionary who praised their industriousness.

Unfortunately, their leader did not live to see this success. After years of hoping and planning for a better life for himself and his family, McNuckles died a few months after landing in Liberia.

He had been specifically warned by his doctor, Daniel Lang, not to travel to Monrovia because of the danger of fever.

Disregarding doctor’s orders, McNuckles went anyway and returned sick, succumbing on April 17.

His brother, Woodson McKnuckles, wrote back to Lynchburg almost immediately about his brother’s death; “A gloom overspread us, and how could it be otherwise.”

### **Slide 20, Woodson McKnuckles quote**

Despite his brother’s passing, he remained a fervent advocate of emigration: “If our folks in America had a correct idea of this country and the advantages that would in time accrue to them by coming, nothing would stop them from emigrating here. It is true we are poor; we came to the country poor, but by labor and perseverance we can soon better our condition.”

Again we see the interconnectedness of the American and Liberian experience, as his brother writes that John McKnuckles had planned to procure a “saw and fixtures” for the settlement on a trip back to America later in the year and had “made arrangements to sail.”

His death was “a great shame,” wrote Dr. Lang, who added that the Lynchburg man would have been “of great benefit” to the community. He also said that the Lynchburg group was one of the best group of emigrants in his experience.

Despite the connections with Lynchburg and Virginia, more research is needed to reveal the full story of what happened to our Lynchburg families as they assimilated into their new country.

### **Slide 21 — Monrovia town photo from 1890s**

Another source says that people from Lynchburg including the Knuckles, Whartons and Braxtons emigrated in 1866, and tried to establish themselves, but that “many died and others returned to America.” Robert Knuckles, who now lives in the United States, has said that five Knuckles brothers went to Liberia, and three returned to America.

Whatever their exact genealogy, the Knuckles were well-known citizens of Careysburg and their new country. Three men named Knuckles were mayors of Careysburg — Gabriel E. Knuckles Sr., Willis D. Knuckles, and Daniel Knuckles — in its first 100 or so years. Jonathan Knuckles, who was 94 at the time, was interviewed for Mr. Freeman’s Careysburg book in 2012. He was a prosperous sugar cane farmer there for much of the 20th century. The Americo-Liberians continued to control the country’s government until 1980.

### **Slide 22 — Family on back porch**

Here is a photo of the Knuckles family of Careysburg in 1965, 100 years after the Lynchburg group emigrated, looking for all the world like they are on a back porch in Central Virginia.

So, to conclude — Liberia today: I find it ironic that a civil war here in America was responsible for launching the big Lynchburg group of emigrants, because the horrific Liberian civil wars which didn't end until 2003 were in turn the most significant events in the history of the country since its founding. Liberia and its institutions and infrastructure have not recovered from the devastation. Then, more recently, many people died in the Ebola outbreak.

Careysburg survived the early part of the Liberian civil war, in part because of a Voice of America base which the rebels mistakenly believed was protected by U.S. Marines. But eventually it was ransacked, Freedman writes. He fled the country to

the nearby Ivory Coast in 1990 and came to the United States in 1994. He has returned to visit since then, noting that little remains of his old hometown except memories as it transitions into a poor suburb of Monrovia.

It's all very sad. This is from a Library of Congress document about Liberia: "Out of a population estimated in 2006 at about 3 million, 150,000 died as a result of the conflict, 750,000 fled the country and more than 1.2 million were internally displaced. Monrovia and many of Liberia's towns and villages were ravaged, burnt and looted. ..."

Today, Liberia has a democratic government and a woman president, who seems intent on moving the country forward. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011. While I was researching this paper, the New York Times did a small travel piece on the nightlife scene in a revived Monrovia, making it sound a little bit like hipster Brooklyn. It has one of the highest birth rates in the world, with about 43 percent of the population under 14.

Descendants of the native people make up 95 percent of Liberians. Descendants of the American colonists, and the Congoes, constitute only about 2.5 percent of the country's population of about 4.1 million, which is 85 percent Christian.

### **Slide 22 — flag map**

And, bringing the story full circle, as a result of the civil wars, Careysburg has lost about 90 percent of its population — mostly to the United States.