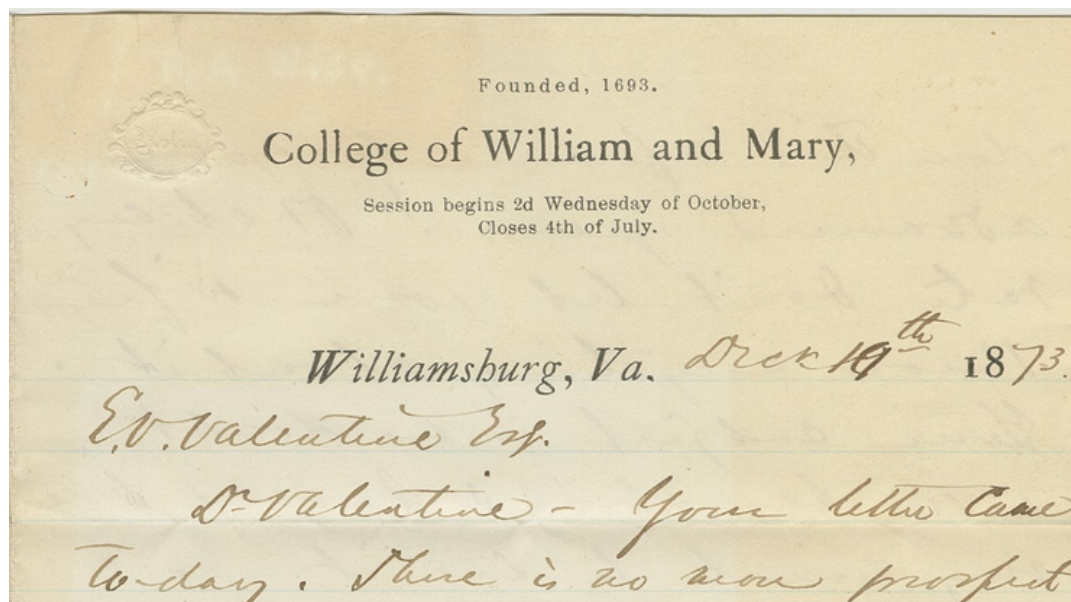


COLLECTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

Letter from Richard A. Wise to Edward Valentine, December 19, 1873



ERA

Post Civil War,
Reconstruction

THEMES

Lost Cause Myth,
Public Memory,
Public Art

CITATION

Edward Virginius Valentine
Papers, 1838-1930,
MSC0057.03,
The Valentine

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. Describe Richard A. Wise's reaction to praise he read about Edward Valentine's *Uncle Henry* sculpture.
2. What kind of statue does he suggest Edward Valentine should create more of to be displayed in people's homes? Why?
3. Why would Wise feel comfortable sharing his openly racist opinions with Edward Valentine in 1873? What does this letter tell us about possible attitudes toward Black citizens at the time?
4. *Uncle Henry* was produced as artwork to be displayed in people's homes. What is the connection between artwork displayed in people's homes and political beliefs?
5. What does Wise mean when he says "Be the historian in clay & marble of the deeds of Virginia."?

CONTEXT

Richard Aslop Wise wrote this letter to Edward Valentine in 1873 after hearing about Valentine's new sculpture, *Uncle Henry*. Wise was born in Philadelphia, but raised and educated in Virginia, graduating from the Medical College of Virginia. He served in the Confederate Army under J.E.B. Stuart and then under his father and former Virginia Governor, Henry Alexander Wise. As a member of the Republican party, he served in the Virginia General Assembly, the U. S. House of Representatives and attended every state convention from 1879 until his death in 1900. At the time of this letter, he was teaching chemistry at the College of William and Mary.

Language Disclaimer

This primary source is a historical document that uses words and expresses views that may be racist, sexist, homophobic or otherwise offensive. The Valentine does not endorse or support such terms or views. However, we recognize that these documents contain important historical information and context. As such, we present them in their original form without editing, redacting or deleting content.

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Transcription of Letter

Richard A. Wise to Edward V. Valentine, December 19, 1873

College of William & Mary letterhead

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Williamsburg, VA, Dcr 19th 1873

E.V. Valentine, Esq

Dr. Valentine - Your letter came today. There is no more prospect of the removal of the College than there is the falling of the moon. The [illegible] [illegible] to the contrary notwithstanding. I had read the "Enquirer's" notice of your "Uncle Henry" before receiving your paper - and was much pleased at its' complimentary remarks about you. I am right selfish about many things & a good deal of an egotist - hence is pleases me when I see an old schoolmate succeeding even if he was a 'big boy' at school when I was a little one. Pardo

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Pardon this reference to your advanced years! Or at any rate don't let your wife know anything about it. Your subject is no doubt well handled & I would like very much to see it - or a photograph of it as I cannot go to Richmond this Xmas. To tell you the truth however I am now the avowed enemy of the negro. And I cordially hate everything that belongs to them as a class. They are inferior beings & can never be elevated. They are daily retrograding in the common attributes of civilization. I loved them well enough once - I recognize the fact now that worst of their faults arise from the low leaders who incapacitated

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Incapacitated them & have traded on their ignorance and superstition ever sine the war ended. But they are in the attitude of the favorite day gone now from being bitten by a mad animal - & it becomes my duty, however much I hate it to rid myself of them. We have had negro ad nauseum. Get Anthony Trollope's book on the West Indies & the Spanish Main & read his account of the negro character shown in Jamaica. They are only fit for slaves - & this incident today have them back in slavery. I want to be rid of the whole pestering mess. Make another small statuette of Stuart on his horse - you will find

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Plenty of home buyers. Me for one. But the South is sick, sick, sick, of the nigger. If you can make more selling to the North & wish their "ebony idols" or no doubt you can, why just forage on the enemy as much as you please. Make a statuette of Mosby on a scout, Stuart on a raid. Lee as he appeared on his horse in the Army above his soldiers. Stonewall Jackson sitting before a real camp fire &c & you will do good work. Now is the time & it should be lost. The materials are each day dying out. Be the historian in clay & marble of the deeds of Virginia.

Yr friend
R.A. Wise

Founded, 1693.



College of William and Mary,

Session begins 2d Wednesday of October,
Closes 4th of July.

Williamsburg, Va. Dec 19th 1873.

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