

*The
Devil's
Half Acre*

THE UNTOLD STORY OF
HOW ONE WOMAN LIBERATED THE
SOUTH'S MOST NOTORIOUS SLAVE JAIL

KRISTEN GREEN

NEW YORK TIMES-BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
SOMETHING MUST BE DONE ABOUT PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY

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May 5, 2023

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A few years ago, school officials dedicated a road through campus in her name “Mary Lumpkin Drive” and put up a plaque to her, calling her “the mother of VUU.”



Sketch of Robert Lumpkin's slave jail in Richmond, Virginia. (Courtesy Richmond City Council Slave Trail Commission)

Mary
Lumpkin
lived in
Lumpkin's
Jail with
her
enslaver.

What makes Mary Lumpkin important

- 1) She saw that her children were educated.
- 1) She freed her children and herself.
- 1) She turned the slave jail into an educational center for Black men.

She and her daughters were among two million girls and women enslaved prior to the Civil War.

Sam arian Cem etery in
New Richmond, Ohio,
where Mary Lumpkin
is buried in an
unmarked grave.



Roughly a million people were moved from the Upper South to the Lower South prior to the Civil War as part of that trade.

In 1840, Virginia was responsible for shipping about half of all enslaved people who crossed state lines en route to the lower south.

Slavery was the state's most profitable industry.

“ When they told me my
new- born babe was a girl,
my heart was heavier than
it had ever been before.
Slavery is terrible for
men; but it is far more
terrible for women.”

- Harriet Jacobs



“ I have rape- colored skin.
My light- brown- blackness is
a living testament to the
rules, the practices, the
causes of the Old South.”

- Caroline Randall Williams, poet

“ She went mourning for him
all her days, like a bird robbed
of her young.”

- James Randolph, of his mother mourning the sale of his brother

**These children
have to be free.**



Mary Lumpkin
valued
education. She
sent her girls
to Ipswich,
Massachusetts
to be educated.

Ipswich Female Seminary, courtesy of
the Ipswich Museum

Ipswich
Female
Seminary
booklet
1856.

5

NAMES.	RESIDENCES.
Martha D. Lumpkin, - - -	Philadelphia, Pa.
Anna E. Lumpkin, - - -	Philadelphia, Pa.
Mary J. Mann, - - -	Ipswich.
Caroline E. Nourse, - - -	Ipswich.
Sarah E. Ordway, - - -	North Beverly.
Abby M. Orne, - - -	Marblehead.
Sarah D. Page, - - -	Newburyport.
M. Theresa Patten, - - -	Richmond, Me.
Harriet Pearson, - - -	Ipswich.
Emma L. Pillsbury, - - -	Hampstead, N. H.
Susan W. Porter, - - -	East Randolph.
Rosa Porter, - - -	Augusta, Me.
Mary Pratt, - - -	North Bridgewater.
Margaretta S. Richardson, - - -	Dorchester.
Susan P. Rutherford, - - -	Ipswich.
Ellen E. Sawyer, - - -	Dover, Me.
Susan Smith, - - -	Ipswich.
Frances S. Southgate, - - -	Ipswich.
Amelia C. Temple, - - -	Worcester.
Fredeline J. Thomas, - - -	West Farms, N. Y.
Phoebe A. Toner, - - -	Ipswich.
Emily C. Upton, - - -	Salem.
Mary F. Wade, - - -	Ipswich.
Susan Wait, - - -	Ipswich.
Maria J. Wales, - - -	East Abington.
Harriet A. Watson, - - -	Salmon Falls, N. H.
Abby M. Webster, - - -	Amesbury.
Mary D. Wheelwright, - - -	Byfield.
Anita E. Wheelwright, - - -	Byfield.
Lucinda White, - - -	E. Randolph.
Ruth White, - - -	E. Randolph.
Mary P. Wilde, - - -	E. Randolph.

1 *

1860 census- Philadelphia

Page No. 51

SCHEDULE 1.—Free Inhabitants in 7th Ward City of Philadelphia in the County of Philadelphia State 51
of Pennsylvania enumerated by me, on the 11th day of June 1860. Erwin Jackson Ass't Marshal
Post Office Philadelphia

1	2	3	Description.			7	Value of Estate Owned.		10	11	12	13	14
			Age.	Sex.	Color.		Value of Real Estate.	Value of Personal Estate.					
327	424	Bernard Walters	36	do		Hotel keeper ✓		500	Prussia				
		Ann	31	♀					do				
		Henry	13	♂					Pennsylvania	1			
		John	11	♂					do	1			
		Henry	9	♂					do	1			
		Will	7	♂					do	1			
		Ann	6	♀					do				
		Catherine	2	♀					do				
		Reverend Wright	29	♂		Bar keeper ✓			Prussia				
		Jane Wilson	30	♀		Laundress ✓			Prussia				
328	425	Thomas Butler	49	♂		Printer ✓			Pennsylvania				
		Ann	40	♀				2000	do				
		John	36	♂		Printer ✓			do				
		Charles	28	♂		Printer ✓			do				
		Henry	25	♂		Marshall Maker ✓			do				
329	426	William Glover	48	♂	do	Shoemaker ✓		2000	South Carolina				
		Catherine	45	♀	do				do				
		Julia	11	♀	do				do	-	1		
		Conquena	10	♀	do				do	-	1		
		John	7	♂	do				do	-	1		
		George	5	♂	do				do	-	1		

This is the first time we see the Lumpkin children in Philadelphia.

I give and bequeath to “ Mary F.
Lumpkin, who resides with me” my
real estate in the city of Richmond.

Feb 14 1866, Robert Lumpkin Will (Richmond City, Hustings Wills,
No. 24, 1866- 1867, Reel 852, p 419- 422)

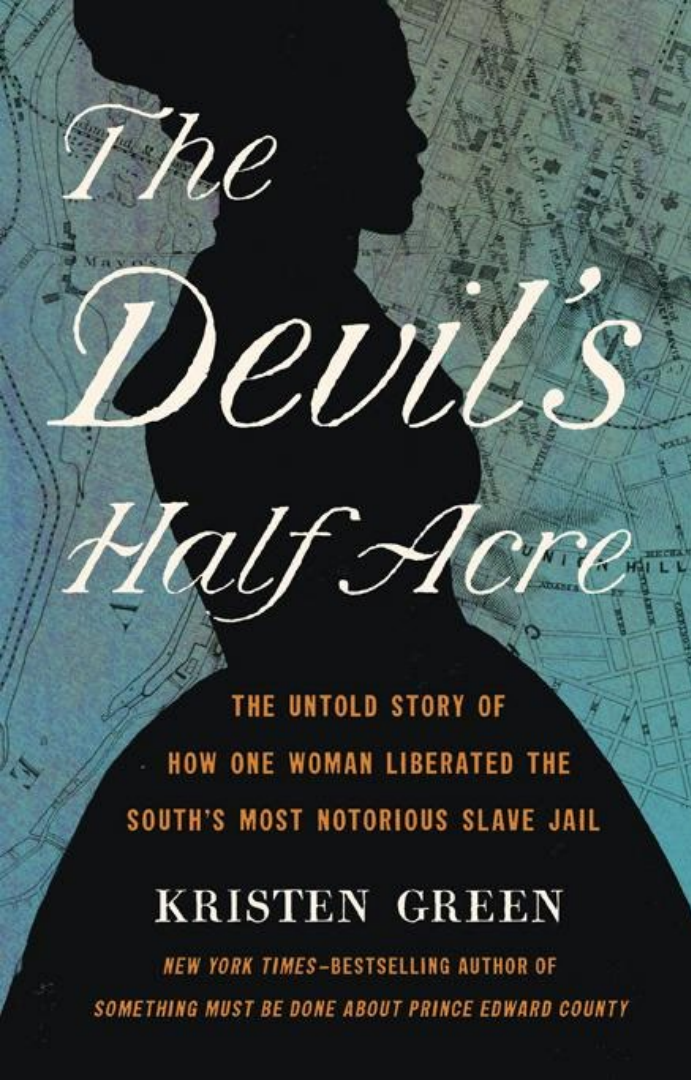
Mary Lumpkin enabled the founding of a school for free Black men. It laid the groundwork for Virginia Union University.



In 2020, the school, one of the first HBCUs in America, named a street Mary Lumpkin Drive and installed a plaque calling her “mother of VUU.”

Photo by Regina Boone, *Richmond Free Press*





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