

Lawrence, Fannie Virginia Casseopia, carte de visite

Fannie Virginia Casseopia Lawrence carte de visite

May 1863

Title Statement

Lawrence, Fannie Virginia Casseopia, carte de visite Fannie Virginia Casseopia Lawrence carte de visite MSS 16638

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Publication Statement

Publisher: Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

P.O. Box 400110

University of Virginia

Charlottesville, Virginia 22904-4110

URL: <https://small.library.virginia.edu/>

2021-12-09

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Creation: This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2026-03-05 17:41:37 +0000.

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Unit ID

/repositories/3/resources/1170

Unit Date

May 1863

Mixed Materials

BW 40 (box)

Container

1 (folder)

Language

English

Extent

.03 Cubic Feet 1 letter size folder carte de visite

Condition Description

Good

Repository

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research use.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

This collection was purchased from L & T Respass Books by the Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia Library on 21 September 2021.

Preferred Citation

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Biographical / Historical

Fannie Virginia Casseopia Lawrence was born an enslaved child in 1858 in Rectortown, Fauquier County, Virginia. and possibly died in New York sometime before 1895. Fannie's mother was said to be Mary Fletcher, an enslaved person to Fannie's biological father, Charles Rufus Ayres, who was a white lawyer and farmer. Since her appearance was white, she was one of the enslaved children made famous in the new medium of photography in the 1860's and was exploited as a poster child for the abolitionist movement because supporters for abolition thought that white people would be more sympathetic to her if she looked like one of their own children.

William Page Johnson II, who wrote an article about Fannie Lawrence and her birth family for the Historic Fairfax City newsletter in 2015, reported that Rufus Ayres took advantage of enslaved women and had at least three children by Mary Fletcher, Jane Payne, and Ann Gleaves. In November 1859, Ayres was killed by a neighbor ("Fatal Affair" in Richmond's Daily Dispatch). After Ayres' death, his will stipulated that the enslaved women and children be free. Unfortunately, because of laws at the time, they would have to leave the state of Virginia to remain free, and they wanted to stay with family members who were still enslaved.

During the Civil War, in 1862, Mary Fletcher, Fannie Lawrence and several other enslaved persons, fled to Union territory. Fannie was adopted by a Civil War military nurse named Catharine Lawrence who was acquainted with the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, abolitionist brother of Harriett Beecher Stowe, and author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Lawrence took Fannie, who was about five years old at the time, to New York. There, she was baptized by Beecher as "Fannie Virginia Casseopia Lawrence." It was at this point that they exploited Fanny as a "redeemed slave child." Johnson wrote that Beecher told his congregation of the terrible fate awaiting Fannie had she not been adopted by Lawrence. Sometime shortly after that, photos of Fannie were taken and widely distributed.

While Johnson doesn't say Fannie was abused or neglected in any way, he describes the tactics Beecher and Lawrence used as "exploitive." There are many facts about her life that are not known. She may have married and had children. Her date of death and burial site are also unknown, although it's believed to be somewhere in New York.

Sources: Johnson, William Page II, "A Sad Story of Redemption", *The Fare Facts Gazette* Winter 2015 Volume

12, Issue 1 <https://www.historicfairfax.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/HFCI1201-2015.pdf>

Mitchell, Mary Niall. "Rosebloom and Pure White," Or So It Seemed." John Hopkins University Press Project Muse, *American Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2002): 369-410. doi:10.1353/aq.2002.0027. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/2546/pdf>

Ramsey, Suzanne, "The 'Redeemed Slave Child'" *appetite4history* National Public Radio November 22, 2016 <https://appetite4history.com/2016/11/22/the-redeemed-slave-child/>

Content Description

This collection contains a carte de visite of Fannie Virginia Casseopia Lawrence, a formerly enslaved child. The caption states "A Redeemed Slave Child, 5 years of Age. Redeemed in Virginia by Catherine S. Lawrence; baptized in Brooklyn, at Plymouth Church by Henry Ward Beecher in May 1863. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1863, by C. S. Lawrence, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York." Photographed by the Kellogg Brothers, Hartford, Connecticut.

Fannie was widely photographed during this period. Scholar Mary Niall Mitchell, in her article "Rosebloom and Pure White," Or So It Seemed" notes "to fully understand the appeal of these portraits and the particular ways in which audiences might have read them, we must look in several directions: to Civil War stories of 'white slaves,' popular representations of white and black children in the nineteenth century and those of girls in particular, to antislavery ideas and white audiences' fantasies about light-skinned enslaved women, to the significance of the new "truth-telling" medium of photography, and into the labyrinth of race that both guided and confused white northern sympathies. Although it is difficult to know who saw these images or purchased them, their production at a time when white working-class people were openly opposing the Civil War—most notably during the New York Draft Riots of 1863—suggests that they were aimed at a broad northern audience rather than just limited to middle class viewers. Indeed, the girls' portraits seem to have been, in part, an effort to circumvent issues of class by pressing the argument that southern enslavement threatened the freedoms and privileges of all white people."

Mitchell, Mary Niall. "Rosebloom and Pure White," Or So It Seemed." *American Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2002): 369-410. doi:10.1353/aq.2002.0027.

For more information about the practice of using photographs of enslaved children who looked white to support Abolition, see this piece from National Public Radio: <https://www.npr.org/sections/pictureshow/2012/12/10/166093470/a-black-and-white-1860s-fundraiser>

Keywords

African Americans -- History -- 1863-1877

United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- African Americans

cartes-de-visite (card photographs)

Freedmen

Girls

Lawrence, Fannie Virginia Casseopia

General

Reparative note: Photographs were a new medium in the 1860's and were being used to take pictures of enslaved children that looked white to attract the sympathy of white people for support of abolition. Fannie Virginia Casseopia Lawrence was photographed many times for this purpose. According to scholar Mary Niall Mitchell, associate professor of history at the University of New Orleans,

"They realized that the sympathies that people would have for children who looked white but had been slaves was going to be greater than the sympathy they might have for black-skinned children," she says.

William Page Johnson II, board member for the Fairfax County Historical Society wrote an article about Fannie Lawrence pointing out that her adopted mother Catherine Lawrence and her friend Henry Ward Beecher exploited Fannie and her photographs to gain support for abolition.