



## Confederates in the Collegium: The Influence of J.E.B. Stuart's Leadership on the Development of Virginia Tech

by [Patrick W. Carlton, Ph.D. \\*](#)  
[Colonel, AUS \(Ret.\)](#)



Major-General J.E.B. Stuart

The Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, now Virginia Tech, was created during the aftermath of the American Civil War and Reconstruction, a time of turmoil and dislocation among the populace of the state. Many young men, former Confederate soldiers, were at that time searching for meaningful life's work in what must have been an atmosphere of dismay and sorrow over immediate past events. A number of these men migrated to Blacksburg in 1872 and the years immediately following, drawn by the opportunity for service with the newly created land grant college of Virginia.

Others became associated with VAMC as a result of their their political connections and service to the Commonwealth. A surprising number of these individuals had served at some time during the Civil War with the Cavalry Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia, headed from 1862-1864 by MG James Ewell Brown Stuart. . It is argued in this paper that the association of these impressionable young men with the preeminent cavalry leader of the Confederacy may well have influenced their values and leadership styles in subsequent years. In addition to this discussion of the "Stuart influence," a discussion of participation by other former Confederates in the early life of the college will be included.

Setting the stage for this discourse, James Ewell Brown Stuart was born at "Laurel Hill" in Patrick County, Va., in February 1833. Following schooling in Wytheville and two years of college at Emory and Henry College, he was appointed in 1850 to the United States Military Academy at West Point, where he completed his training and graduated with the class of 1854. Commissioned a Brevet Second Lieutenant of Cavalry, he served for a year with a Mounted Riflemen regiment in Texas, then transferred (1855) to the newly formed 1st Cavalry Regiment, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas in the grade of Second Lieutenant.

Within three months he was promoted to First Lieutenant and, in that rank, participated in a number of skirmishes with hostile Cheyenne warriors. During one of these skirmishes he had opportunity to save a fellow Lieutenant, Lunsford L. Lomax, about whom more later. While sabering Lomax's Cheyenne attacker, Stuart was wounded in the chest by a pistol shot. The wound, fortunately, proved to be only temporarily disabling, and Stuart continued his U.S. Army career until the outbreak of the Civil war in 1861. Resigning from the U.S. Army, Stuart accepted a commission as Lieutenant Colonel with Virginia state troops in May 1861, following which rapid promotions advanced him to the grade of Major General by July 1862, along with command of the Cavalry of the Army of Northern Virginia. He continued in that capacity until mortally wounded on May 11, 1864, during the fight at Yellow Tavern. Thus ended the career of this charismatic leader of men.

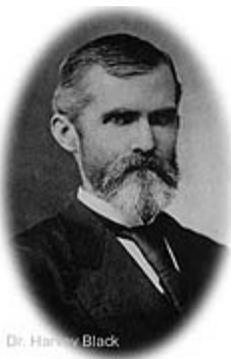
MG Stuart's connection with the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, (now Virginia Tech), is based upon the men who he trained and with whom he served during the Civil War. A number of former Stuart subordinates appear on the rosters of VAMC during several decades following its creation as one of Virginia's two land-grant colleges. Some former Confederates served as administrators, some as faculty members, and some as members of the Board of Visitors.

<b>The Stuart Connection - Former Confederates at Virginia Tech</b>		
<b>MG J.E.B. Stuart's Cavalry Corps 1861 - 1865</b>	<b>VAMC Staff</b>	<b>Other Prominent Confederates At VAMC</b>
MG Fitzhugh Lee Cmdg Div Cavalry ANV	Cpt Charles L. C. Minor II President - 1872 - 1879	BG James H. Lane Commandant of Cadets, 1872 - 1880
MG W. H. F. Lee Cmdg Div Cavalry ANV	Cpt Thomas N. Conrad President - 1881 - 1886	Dr. (Surgeon) Harvey Black Rector, BOV, 1872 - 1873
MG Lunsford L. Lomax Cmdg Bde Cavalry ANV	MG Lunsford L. Lomax President - 1886 - 1891	BG Joseph R. Anderson BOV, 1872 - 1873
LTC W. W. Blackford Co CDR, Engr. Officer 1st VA Cavalry & Stuart's Staff	LTC W. W. Blackford Professor -1880 - 1882	
Cpt Thomas N. Conrad Chaplain & Scout 3rd VA Cavalry ANV	Pvt John M. McBryde President - 1891 - 1907	
Cpt Charles L. C. Minor II Vol Aide, 2nd VA Cavalry Later Cpt of Ordnance ANV	<b>Board of Visitors</b>	
Pvt John M. McBryde 1st SC Vol Inf. 1st SC Cavalry ANV	MG W.H.F. Lee 1873 - 1878; 1886 - 1888	
	MG Fitzhugh Lee 1878 - 1881	
	Mr. W. Alexander Stuart (Brother) 1872 - 1874	

The enclosed diagram illustrates the positions held by various persons of interest during the Civil War and, subsequently, at VAMC. MG Fitzhugh Lee, a nephew of GEN R.E. Lee, commanded a division of Cavalry under Stuart, as did MG W.H.F. "Rooney" Lee, GEN Lee's son. Another serving Cavalry commander was MG Lunsford L. Lomax, commanding a brigade in Fitz Lee's division and, later, a division of cavalry under LTG Jubal Early during the 1864 Shenandoah Valley campaign. MG Stuart's brother, William Alexander Stuart, a resident of Saltville and provider of supplies for the Confederate army, also figures in the future activities of the fledgling college. (He did not serve in uniform during the war.)

At a more subordinate level, one encounters LTC William W. Blackford, who served as company commander, assistant adjutant and engineering officer with Stuart and, later, as second-in-command of the 1st Regt., Engineer Troops, ANV. Also associated with Stuart's command were a lay Methodist preacher, CPT Thomas Nelson Conrad, who performed duty with the 3rd Va. Cavalry, in Fitz Lee's Division; and CPT Charles L.C. Minor II, a volunteer

aide with the 2nd Va. Cavalry and, later, chief ordnance officer of the Dept. of S.C., GA, and FL reporting to MG Samuel Jones. Representing the Confederate enlisted force is Private John M. McBryde, who served, initially, in the 1st South Carolina Infantry and, subsequently, with the 1st South Carolina Cavalry, a unit associated with Stuart's Cavalry Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia. All these men would appear at VAMC following its creation in 1872.



Dr. Harvey Black

Other prominent "Confederates in the Collegium" include Dr. Harvey Black, who served as one of LTG Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's surgeons, and who participated in the amputation of the General's arm following the battle of Chancellorsville; BG Joseph R. Anderson, who commanded an infantry brigade during the Seven Days (1862); and BG James H. Lane, a Brigade commander in LTG A.P. Hill's Corps and participant in Pickett's charge at Gettysburg. (1863) This group by no means exhausts the list of former Confederates who served at VAMC, but does provide an idea of the degree of participation by such veterans.

Following the war and, with the readmission of Virginia to the Union in 1870, the state applied for and received Morrill Act funds for the establishment of a land grant institution within the state. Following considerable debate and "wrangling", it was decided to divide the funds between the Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute, a historically Black school, and a newly formed college to be established in Blacksburg, VA. The latter would be established in the donated building of a Methodist boy's school, then headed by former CPT Thomas Nelson Conrad. The Preston and Olin Institute building, along with a \$20,000 pledge from the citizens of Montgomery County, constituted a "sweetener" which apparently exerted a considerable influence on the state-level decision makers. Dr. Harvey Black, then president of the board of trustees of the Preston and Olin Institute, was among those influencing the decision to locate the new college in Blacksburg.

The first board of visitors of the fledgling institution was named by Governor Gilbert Walker in 1872, taking office immediately. Among the members of the board were Dr. Harvey Black, who became the first Rector of the board; BG Joseph R. Anderson; William A. Stuart, of Smythe and Wythe Counties; COL John Penn, of Patrick Co; MAJ William T. Sutherlin, a native of Danville; MAJ Joseph Cloyd, of Pulaski Co.; and ; and COL Lewis E. Harvie, of Amelia Co. Harvie was succeeded in late 1872 by MG W.H.F. Lee as an ex-officio member of the BOV. All these men were former Confederate soldiers.



Brigadier General  
James H. Lane

The newly constituted board met at the Yellow Sulphur Springs resort , near Blacksburg, in August, 1872, at which time they appointed the staff members of the new college. These were: CPT Charles L.C. Minor, II, as President; BG James H. Lane, as Commandant of Cadets and Professor of Military Science; Gray Carroll, as Professor of Mathematics and Modern Languages; and Charles Martin as Professor of English and Ancient Languages. Serving as College Physician was local doctor and former Confederate Corporal William Wm. B. Conway, M.D.

CPT Minor held A.B. and LL.D. degrees from Univ. of Virginia. A native of Hanover County, he had taught school prior to and following the end of the Civil War. He saw service, first, as a volunteer aide to CPT Charles Blackford, with the 2nd VA. Cavalry, part of Stuart's command, apparently with no rank whatsoever. Commissioned CPT of Ordnance in 1862, he saw service with a cavalry brigade in S.W. Virginia and, in 1864, was assigned duty as Chief Ordnance officer of the Dept. of S.C., GA, and FL, reporting to MG Samuel Jones. He served in that capacity until cessation of



CPT Charles  
Blackford II

hostilities, returning to the profession of teaching at that time.

Minor was a member of a prominent family which numbered among its members Professor John Minor, who taught law at UVA. His aunt Mary Minor married Wm. Blackford, one of whose five sons, LTC W.W. Blackford taught at VAMC from 1880-82.

Interestingly, the file on CPT Minor contains letters of presidential nomination from LTC W.W. Blackford, along with those of his brothers LT Launcelot M. Blackford and CPT Charles Blackford. A letter from Prof. John Minor of UVA is also included, along with a letter from Prof. William H. McGuffey, (of McGuffey's reader fame.). Circumstantial evidence suggests that McGuffey's letter was written at the request of W.W. Blackford who was, along with his brothers, apparently anxious to assist his first cousin in securing the presidency.



LT Launcelot M.  
Blackford

It is interesting to note that, following Pres. Minor's dismissal in 1879, he migrated over a period of several years to Alexandria, VA, where he assumed a position as Associate Principal of the Episcopal Boys School, headed by his cousin, LT Launcelot M. Blackford. Blood was obviously thicker than water in the relationship between the Minors and the Blackfords!

President Minor's tenure of office was not without excitement. Among his antagonists on the faculty was BG James H. Lane, the Commandant of Cadets and a veteran of Pickett's charge in 1863. (The 18th North Carolina, of Lane's Brigade, held the distinction or, more likely, bore the stigma, of having mortally wounded LTG T.J.

"Stonewall" Jackson during a "friendly fire incident" at the battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863.) Minor and Lane clashed on the issue of proper military discipline at the college. Their dispute erupted into fisticuffs in March, 1878, at which time Pres. Minor, goaded beyond his usual capacity for restraint, punched BG. Lane during a faculty meeting. Both men were haled into court by the County Sheriff and found guilty of disturbing the peace. As Temple, says, " a serious decline of morale and effective leadership had set in." (1)

Following CPT Minor's removal from office in 1879, one of several politically inspired "purges" of the staff at VAMC, interim presidents served until early 1882, at which time CPT Thomas Nelson Conrad, formerly headmaster of the Preston and Olin Institute and, since 1877, a professor at VAMC, assumed the presidency of the college. Conrad, a lay Methodist preacher, had served as a chaplain and scout (read "spy") under JEB Stuart, spending considerable periods of time in Washington, DC carrying out intelligence gathering missions on behalf of the Confederacy. Captured and incarcerated on more than one occasion, Conrad also participated in a failed plot to kidnap President Abraham Lincoln. His book, "The Rebel Scout", makes fascinating reading. (2)



CPT Thomas  
Nelson Conrad

CPT Conrad's tenure of office was, like those of his predecessors, plagued by political difficulties, some of his own making. Having been continually active in state level politics since the close of the Civil War, he was disadvantaged, in 1885, by the election of a

Governor representing "other party", MG Fitzhugh Lee, who had served on the BOV from 1878-81.



MG Fitz Lee

Governor Lee promptly reappointed another JEB Stuart associate and former BOV member, MG W.H.F. Lee, to the Board, along with several other former Confederates. These men promptly dismissed CPT Conrad and appointed MG Lunsford L. Lomax, who had commanded a brigade in Stuart's cavalry corps under the immediate command of Governor Lee, as the new president. MG Lomax served until 1891, at which time he resigned under a cloud generated by serious misbehavior and vandalism within the student body. As had become traditional, several members of the faculty were released at the same time. MG Lomax went on to serve as one of the editors of that monumental work, *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, and as a member of the Gettysburg Battlefield Commission.

President Lomax was succeeded by President John M. McBryde, then serving as President of the University of South Carolina. McBryde, a respected scholar, had served briefly during the Civil war, first as a private soldier with the 1st South Carolina Volunteer Infantry, then with the 1st S.C. Cavalry, part of Stuart's Cavalry. He contracted swamp fever during the summer of 1862 and was released from the army at that time, seeing no further military service. He served during the remainder of the war as a minor civilian official with the Confederate government, in Richmond. McBryde, an excellent administrator and scholar, is credited with being the "father" of Virginia Tech as a high quality institution of higher learning. His tenure extended from 1891 until 1907, at which time he retired for reasons of declining health.



MG W.H.F. Lee

Among the most interesting and, perhaps, intriguing of the former JEB Stuart Confederates who served at VAMC was a man of somewhat lesser rank, LTC William Willis Blackford, CSA. Blackford was the scion of an old Virginia family, born in Fredericksburg, educated at UVA and, at the beginning of the Civil War, a resident of Abingdon, VA. Blackford, a trained engineer, had married the daughter of former state Governor Wyndham Robertson, who maintained a summer home outside Abingdon, and had subsequently gone into the plaster of paris mining business with his father in law.



MG L.L. Lomax

When the war began, Blackford joined the 1st VA Cavalry and served, successively, as first lieutenant and company commander, then as engineer officer on MG JEB Stuart's staff. He was later appointed lieutenant colonel of the 1st Regiment, Engineer Troops and, in that capacity, served until the Confederate surrender at Appomattox. Blackford had unique opportunities to observe the activities and to assess the personality of MG Stuart and, following the war, set down his observations in one of the best memoirs on Stuart's activities produced by contemporaries. (3) As was true of so many civil war pieces, it languished in manuscript form until brought to the attention of Douglas Southall Freeman, then preparing his monumental work, *Lee's Lieutenants*, (4). Freeman

arranged for publication of the Blackford work in 1945 under the title *War Years with Jeb Stuart*. (5)

Following the war Blackford returned to Abingdon, where tragedy struck in the year 1866, with the death of Mary Robertson Blackford. She was laid to rest in the Robertson family plot, joining three of her small children, all of whom had preceded their mother in death. Four other children survived. Blackford, who was then employed as chief engineer with the Lynchburg & Danville Railroad, subsequently spent time in Louisiana as operator of a

sugar plantation given to him and his children by his father-in-law, Wyndham Robertson. In 1880, following weather-induced destruction of these holdings, he assumed the position of Professor of Mechanics and Drawing, plus duties as Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, "with general charge of the shops," at VAMC. (6) Blackford soon undertook the development of a plan for beautification of the campus through the planting of numerous trees and other attractive plants. The BOV directed him to prepare and execute a long-range plan, which he accomplished to the satisfaction of all concerned. Despite the lack of funds to support these efforts, significant improvements were gradually accomplished.

Political tragedy struck once more in the Fall of 1881, with the election of Governor W.E. Cameron, who promptly replaced the VAMC BOV. The board, in turn, released all staff members of VAMC, with the exception of the treasurer. LTC Blackford was, once again, unemployed. Subsequent presidents of the college, however, continued to implement the campus beautification plan. after his departure. Blackford is credited with developing the vision that resulted in the beautiful campus surroundings VT now enjoys. His legacy lives and his influence is felt to this day! Blackford was next employed with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, in which capacity he served as construction engineer until 1890. At that time he purchased property on Lynhaven Bay, in Princess Anne Co., and engaged in oyster planting experiments for the next 15 years. His end came in 1905, when he succumbed to apoplexy. Blackford had directed that his body be returned to Abingdon, where it now rests alongside Mary Robertson Blackford , close to the graves of three of their seven children.



The writer and reader now return to a claim made at the outset of the paper; to wit, that service with MG J.E.B. Stuart, CSA, positively influenced the development of half a dozen ambitious and intelligent young men, whose later service to the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College was both useful and noteworthy. Of course, the question of "nature versus nurture" figures in the leadership equation . All were scions of fine and accomplished families, with "good blood in their veins." They were energetic and hungry for success, having just endured agonies of war which most contemporary Americans , happily, have been spared. Clearly, these men were success oriented and deadly serious about their work. These qualities they brought to the professional table. Yet, most young men, it can be argued, tend to develop their leadership patterns through observation of role models during early years. Most of these men had close and favorable contact with. MG Stuart and, one may surmise, later emulated at least some of the general's leadership and managerial practices. While "Beauty" Stuart built no reputation as a scholar during student days at West Point, he was clearly a charismatic leader-the kind of man that others would follow into "the cannon's mouth", and whom they would support in deadly earnest, even at the risk of their lives. The "work ethic" and high order personal qualities that JEB Stuart modeled for his subordinates came , I believe, to be part of their daily behavioral patterns, serving them well during their subsequent service at Virginia Tech. For this contribution it is argued that present day "Hokies" can justify giving a nod of thanks to the "beau sabreur" of the Confederacy, Major General James Ewell Brown Stuart.

(1) Harry D. Temple, The Bugle's Echo, vol. I (Blacksburg: VTCC Alumni Assn., 1996), p.137

(2) Thomas N. Conrad, The Rebel Scout (Washington D.C.: The National Pub. Co., 1904), passim.

(3) The other is H.B. McClellan's The Life and Campaigns of Major General J.E.B. Stuart (Richmond: J.W. Randolph and English, 1885).

(4) Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, in three volumes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942-1944.)

(5) W.W. Blackford, War Years with Jeb Stuart (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945.)

(6) Temple, Bugle's Echo, 152.

*\*Patrick Carlton was associate professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, College of Human Resources and Education, at Virginia Tech. In 2000 Dr. Carlton was appointed professor of Educational Leadership, College of Education with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). He was named professor of Public Administration in the School of Environmental and Public Affairs at UNLV in 2012. He retired as a Reserve*

Officer in the rank of Colonel after completing 30 years of service. He retains the copyright to this work, dated in the year 2000.

[Return](#) to the Historical Virginia Tech Page.

---

[VT History](#) | [Digital Library and Archives](#) | [Special Collections](#) | [University Archives](#)

**Send questions or comments to:**

[Tamara Kennelly](#), Univ. Archivist  
Virginia Tech University Libraries  
P.O. Box 90001  
Blacksburg, VA, 24062-9001

URL:  
*http://spec.lib.vt.edu/archives/125th/confeds/confeds.htm*  
**Last Modified on: Monday, 28-Jan-2013 09:37:50  
EST(tk)**

Page Design by [Scott Spyrison](#) and [Tamara Kennelly](#)