“We Have Lived & Loved as Brothers”: Male Friendship at the University of Virginia 1825-1861

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INTRODUCTION & HISTORIOGRAPHY

During the late antebellum period, the University of Virginia was widely regarded as the premier institution of Southern learning. Its student body was composed almost exclusively of the favored sons of the richest and most influential men of the region. As such, Jefferson’s University served not only as a mirror reflecting elite Southern culture but as an active agent of its ideological, and social development. Its first years saw a litany of violent outbursts that drew much comment at the time and indeed much focus even today. While Thomas Jefferson and the early professors did their best to get the institution off the ground, a casual observer could be excused for thinking that many of its students were just as fervently trying to tear it down brick by brick and column by column. Night time escapades and ribaldry, as well as spontaneous and organized violence, led to extensive property damage and malicious excesses including arson, theft, fistfights, stabbings, beatings, rapes, threats of bodily harm, and ultimately murder. Professors, townspeople, local woman, slaves, and other students were all victims of this animus, although in differing ways reflecting their social standing.

While such explicit violence gained significant attention and outcry then as well as now, the University of Virginia, and its comparable institutions across the South, nurtured friendship and comradery among the young men who would soon be enthroned at the top of its social and political hierarchy. While some students were driven by their deeply held conception of honor towards confrontation and jockeying for recognition from their peers, the very same men also developed close friendships with their classmates and deeply enjoyed the comradery that college life afforded. Beyond expressive emotional connections, students occasionally recorded physical displays of their friendships that were generally supported by the homosocial
environment that the isolated college campus afforded. This project explores the variety of male relationships that thrived at the University of Virginia as well as how these fit into the larger framework of Southern ideas of honor and the unique status that attending college conferred towards achieving elite Southern manhood. While previous scholarship has positioned violent confrontations driven by a decadent honor culture as the central facet of student life, using the many affirmations of the students themselves, this paper depicts how intimate friendships between students had just as much influence, if not more, on their day to day lives, and development as Southern men.

In his seminal work Southern Honor, Bertram Wyatt-Brown presents a complex, yet rigid social code that presided over centuries of Southern manhood, carefully guiding and motivating its many adherents.\(^1\) Certain faux pas that crossed generally understood lines had logical, and often violent outcomes. In this work, Wyatt-Brown nails down the most crucial aspect of Southern honor: its performative nature. A man’s honor was largely an external affair, based not on adherence to internal moral values, but on others perceptions of his obedience to cultural norms. In Southern Honor and parallel works from the same era, honor is the defining signifier of white male reality, constantly providing a careful delineation of status and pushing certain actions in a given situation. In these works, and in wider cultural representations, the elite men of the antebellum South have gained a simplistic reputation for reflexive violence, where the wrong word, or even look, could lead to confrontation and death.

\(^{1}\) Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1982).
More recent works have loosened many of the authoritative opinions offered by Wyatt-Brown’s generation. In *All That Makes a Man*, Stephen Berry reconsiders the central motivating factors of Confederate men, going so far as to largely reject honor as a defining factor in a slaveholder’s life, noting that what had been described as a strict code, was actually much more nebulous, and less compelling than Wyatt-Brown had posited.\(^2\) While helpfully suggestive, Berry’s extensive minimization of honor is somewhat perplexing. While surely less concrete than previously portrayed, the myriad of primary sources and the easily ascertainable deadly effects of its long prevalence in Southern society require the continued consideration of Southern honor, a fact that cannot be wished away by a few carefully curated quotes. In *The Last Generation*, Peter Carmichael offers a more compelling retooling of Southern honor. Instead of rejecting the concept, Carmichael details a nuanced shift in Southern masculinity culminating in the 1850s and 60s, where honor played a central, although different role than it had in previous generations. These men, Carmichael argued, were driven by desire to be Christian gentlemen, pious yet forceful actors on behalf of their own self-enrichment but also for the advancement of their state and Southern way of life.\(^3\) While violence had a less primal influence on these men, they did not shy away from it, as is clearly seen by their overwhelming service in the Confederate army.

The unparalleled focus on the reflexive violence of white Southern men has affected almost every aspect of their portrayal across decades of scholarship. Even as the historiographic


stranglehold of Southern honor as an all-consuming motivator has been largely rejected, its echoes continue to muddy the water. Even Stephen Berry, who rejected much of honor’s influence, failed to fully consider the consequences of this rejection, arguing that “men were constantly on their guard, watching each other for signs of respect and disrespect, competing with each other for mates, honors, and distinctions. Even in friendship, there was a standoffishness, an unwillingness to appear weak, vulnerable, or emotionally needy.” This conception of men as hopelessly disconnected and isolated from each other, even in intimate settings, pervades the entirety of *All That Makes a Man*, which focuses almost exclusively on all-consuming relationships with women. While certainly grounded in truth, this portrayal inherently limits his male subjects’ reality, immediately downplaying the importance of male friendships and relationships, an oversight that this project aims to rectify. Beyond Berry’s limited idea of “a rough camaraderie between males,” a variety of early sources from University of Virginia students, especially autograph albums, clearly show the written echoes of an expansive emotional world that dominated male experiences, at least while attending college. While the limits of these connections beyond student life are largely outside of the scope of this paper, the many accounts of fervent devotion warrant future reexamination of male relationships later in life.

This exploration of the bonds of collegiate friendship formed by the first generations of students at the University of Virginia expands upon an established tradition of scholarship detailing the intricacies of once overlooked same-sex bonds during a century that did much to

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4 Berry, 40.
5 Berry, 40.
stifle casual relationships between members of the opposite sex. Since the publishing of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s iconic “The Female World of Love and Ritual” in 1975, numerous articles and books have expanded upon the framework of supportive friendship, often coupled with none too subtle romanticism and even eroticism, that so often played a central role in the lives of women, and men. Through the scholarship of E. Anthony Rotundo, Karen Hansen, and Bruce Dorsey, amongst others, the convoluted networks of nineteenth century male friendship and intimacy, as well as the often blurred border between emotional dependency and romantic feelings have come into clearer focus.

As with much other writing on this time period, the research and study of primary sources and cultural indicators have overwhelmingly focused on northeastern Protestantism and the many variations therein. Even books proclaiming a wider consideration of American masculinity, like American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity From The Revolution To The Modern Era skew heavily in this direction. While Southern manhood and masculinity has recently become a focus for renewed scholarship, in the capable hands of Stephen Berry and other scholars, these works have tended to parse out the broader implications of manhood and masculinity in the mid-nineteenth century. More targeted studies, specifically on the interrelations between Southern men, and of the carefully designed homosocial environments that bred close friendships, have been few and far between with one notable exception. The fervent interest in the Civil War has ensured extensive analysis of the wartime bonds of

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brotherhood forged under fire, Confederate and Federal, and the ties of comradery that led
tens of thousands of men to willingly sacrifice their lives. Nonetheless, the exclusively Southern
focus of this project, combined with a central emphasis on a small, rural community, albeit a
cosmopolitan one, represents a needed step towards expanding understanding of different
molds of nineteenth century American manhood.
PART I: THE STUDENTS & THEIR UNIVERSITY

The environment that fostered the close male friendships and intimacy discussed below did not simply spring into being with the opening of the University of Virginia in 1825. By this time, William and Mary had been operating for more than a century and Hampton-Sydney College and the future Washington and Lee had been open for decades. The University of North Carolina and various other institutions across the South were likewise well-established. Each of these schools fostered similar environments, albeit with their own idiosyncrasies, that brought together elite white men from around their states and created ample opportunity for the future leaders of the South to become acquainted.

Even well into the nineteenth century, however, hardly one percent of white Virginian men attended college. Outside of the small student cadres of burgeoning professionals and planters in training, close male friendships still developed and flourished across the South. Although limited research has been done in this area, Anya Jabour’s article “Male Friendship and Masculinity in the Early National South: William Wirt and His Friends” offers an in depth glimpse into an earlier iteration of male interdependency and emotional support. In her article, Jabour details the extended friendships between Wirt and a half dozen of his fellow Virginian lawyers from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As Wirt never attended college, his close friendships developed from the shared trials and tribulations of professional life, as well as through an informal mentoring system, whereby established lawyers showed their younger brethren the tricks of the trade. What started as professional relationships

quickly encompassed family and emotional life as well. As Jabour concluded, “Evidence from William Wirt and his friends suggests that male friendship in the early national South, as in postrevolutionary New England, was characterized by a new emphasis on affection and companionship. Male friendship in the early republic meant emotional intimacy and mutual loving.”

Beyond providing evidence for a significant current of intense male relationships in Southern culture, this case study bears direct relevance to the subject at hand. Although Wirt and some of his coworkers chafed at their professional status outside the landed gentry that ruled over Virginia, many of these men gained in wealth and prestige throughout their career. As such, many of the men studied by Jabour had children, or other male relatives, who would attend the University of Virginia and become undisputed members of the Virginia elite. Indeed, the younger brother of William Cabell, one of Wirt’s correspondents, would serve on the very first Board of Visitors tasked with overseeing the creation of the University of Virginia. Another of Wirt’s cohort, Littleton Waller Tazewell, would send his son to the very first session of UVa in 1825.

Throughout the first thirty-five years of its existence, the University of Virginia’s student body underwent little significant change. While the number of students increased over the years, and thousands of students matriculated, although significantly fewer graduated, the demographic composition remained almost static. As was true across the entire South and throughout most of the country, the University of Virginia was attended solely by white men.

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9 Jabour, 90.
Southern universities, however, unlike some of their northern counterparts, offered almost no economic aid or price reduction to allow anyone outside of the economic elite to enroll. As the University of Virginia was both the most prestigious and expensive of Southern schools, it is likely that it remained even more economically segregated than its closest peers. In his dissertation “Students and Student Life at the University of Virginia, 1825-1861,” Charles Wall Jr. found that of thirty rural Virginians matriculating in 1830 all but one of their families owned slaves. Of the remaining rural twenty-nine matriculates, twenty-six of their families owned more than ten slaves and five students’ families owned over forty slaves, representing a handful of the richest plantation owners in the state. A similar random sampling of the Virginia students entering in 1850 found that six out of thirty-one students came from families that owned no slaves, while the vast majority, twenty-five, yet again came from those who did. This limited shift is due to the creation of a scholarship by the state legislature in 1846 which granted access to a student from each of thirty-two regions of Virginia unable to pay the high tuition fees.

While the age range for entering students was fairly large, with the class of 1830 seeing both a 15-year-old and a 26-year-old matriculate, the majority of students during this period fell in the familiar range of 17-21. Upon its opening, the University set sixteen as the age requirement for entrance although by 1831 younger students could attend if they had an older

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10 Charles Wall Jr, “Students and Student Life at the University of Virginia, 1825-1861” PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1978.  
11 Wall, 46.  
12 Wall, 71.
brother enrolling as well.\(^{13}\) In 1830, the average age of entering students was 18 3/4 years. Twenty years later, the average student age had increased to 20 1/3 years old.\(^{14}\) This rise was likely caused by multiple factors including more effective secondary schools that could better prepare students for the rigors of college life as well as the admittance of a few scholarship students who may have taken more time to achieve the prerequisites, not having had access to the best schools or tutors from childhood. Unlike at some northern universities, where students sometimes delayed or left college to earn wages to pay tuition, the generally privileged nature of UVa students as well as the comparably high cost of education limited this trend from developing in Virginia.

In one small sense the University of Virginia did stand out from its southern peers. Unlike many of the other state universities, UVa was in fact a regional school. Between 1825-1842, 28% of its student body came from other Southern states, over three times the percentage of South Carolina College during a similar time period.\(^{15}\) Thus, while the University of Virginia managed to introduce a semblance of geographic diversity, for the most part, it remained racially, economically, and culturally uniform. The students who befriended each other on the college’s grounds, interacted primarily with other privileged sons of the South who had all been raised to enforce, and reinforce, their cultural and racial supremacy.

\(^{13}\) University of Virginia (1831). *Enactments Relating to the Constitution and Government of the University of Virginia: For the Use of the University.* Charlottesville: Printed by Cary, Watson & Co.

\(^{14}\) Wall, 52.

\(^{15}\) Wall, 44.
As more and more colleges flourished across the South, attending university, if not actually graduating, became a crucial step towards manhood. Although very few men still attended college, in the rarified air of the plantation homes of Virginia, studying at a university became a decisive stepping stone to not only a career, but also a wife and family. While older generations might still view some of the graduates as immature “puppies,” the young men themselves repeatedly associated attending college with the end of boyhood and their emergence into the world of men. In his reminiscences of his college years, Thomas Malone remembered that “at home I was considered a boy, and cannot recall that in my life I had ever visited a young lady, except my cousins” before going on to account his first chance at courting a woman at the University.\(^\text{16}\) In his diary, Ethelbert Coleman noted a similar sentiment, although he pinpointed graduation as the pivotal moment:

> Today I have passed through the Green Box, & they have promised me a diploma... Dr Horner told me truly, that this was a most important epoch in our lives: I am now in truth & reality leaving the verge of Boyhood, & entering the theatre of manly pursuits, where I am to act a real permanent part, in the Great Drama of Life.\(^\text{17}\)

In the surviving collection of autograph albums, entering the world of men remained a common theme. In one such entry M. W. Blackburn remarked that “[college days are] the link in the chain of events which connect... boyhood with manhood.”\(^\text{18}\)


\(^{17}\) Diary Entry for March 12, Papers of Ethelbert Algernon Coleman, 1819-1926, Accession #7014, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

\(^{18}\) Entry by M. W. Blackburn, Robert Sanderson McCormick Autograph Album, 1868-1870, Accession #RG-30/17/1.162, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
Alongside the crucial importance of attending university, getting married and starting a successful career stood as the ultimate markers of full manhood. While university thrust one into the world of men, it was only a foothold. Invocations of success and future achievement often invoked both marriage and a career with similar frequency and importance. In a typical autograph album entry showing this duel focus, W. R. Quick joked to Bennet Taylor, an aspiring lawyer, “may your clients be rich and quarrelsome, your wife rich & not quarrelsome....”

Discussions of future wives, both serious and less so, — “Dearest Brown If you should turn fool and die any time shortly, please leave me your wife”— remained common refrains across the years.

Much has been made of the nineteenth century university as a male dominated sphere, as indeed it was. At the University of Virginia, a male proctor oversaw the meetings of the male Board of Visitors who in turn commented on the job performance of male professors who taught male students. Nonetheless, women were ever present. The professors’ wives and daughters lived with them on campus, mere feet from student dormitories. Many of the student boarding houses were run by women who often lived with female relatives. Female slaves were also employed on campus by professors, boarding house owners and other officials of the University. As domestic slaves of boarding houses, black women were in close proximity with students, tasked with cooking, cleaning, and a never ending list of various other tasks, often at the beck and call of the young men themselves.

19 Entry by W. R. Quick, Autograph Album of Bennett Taylor, 1859, RG-30/17/1.821, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
20 Entry with Illegible Signature, William LeRoy Broun Autograph Album, 1850, 1854, 1884. RG-30/17/1.056, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
Many more women, although not officially affiliated with the University, lived in the surrounding area. Anyone from a prostitute to the respectable daughter of the Virginia gentry could be sought out with limited effort. This nonetheless represented a significant break from most students’ early lives, growing up with their mother and sisters. Whereas a close relationship with female relatives was almost a given for most male children, at the University of Virginia relationships with women were more complicated. Although they often failed, students were expected to follow strict social codes for interacting with women of any race. Female slaves were seen as outside the bounds of anything mirroring an emotional relationship, friendship or otherwise. While exploitative sexual relationships were highly possible – in one infamous case, three students raped a twelve-year-old slave girl – slaves remained primarily outside the recorded emotional world of white students. Young men seeking connections with their social equals found more opportunities in a variety of balls and social events that were held both at the University and in Charlottesville. Outside of these larger events, paying visits and courting local women became a major focus of some students’ time ostensibly spent studying at the University.

More illicitly, visits to prostitutes appear to have been relatively common. In a diary entry from May 12th, 1835, Charles Ellis casually recorded stopping by a prostitute’s house, reporting that he:

Went in the evening with Harrison to the house of one of these common women, but found no inducements to proceed any farther, and indeed I can not see what pleasure any man can derive from embracing such filthy sluts as
abound here, since he cannot even do that with the danger of catching the Wildfire, a College name for Gonorrhea.  

In a meeting of the faculty in May of 1842 a student was accused of keeping a woman, implied to be a prostitute, in his room on campus for multiple days, perhaps even lending his room out to other students. The repeated discussion of students seeking prostitutes appears throughout the minutes of faculty meetings over the years. Other forms of scandalous sex also undoubtedly took place, although few records remain. Shortly after the opening of UVa in 1825, a dismayed Cornelia Randolph, the granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson residing in nearby Monticello, recorded that a local white girl, had been discovered in a student’s room:

> There is one shocking piece of Scandal afloat. it is that M’ Raphael’s sister whom you may have remarked as a very bold impudent girl was missing one night & found at twelve o clock in one of dormitories of the students & it is said that it is not one but many that she visits, but really this is scandal of too black a dye to write.

Simply put, students could pursue their studies with little direct interaction with women, or pursue women with little direct interaction with their studies. Gessner Harrison, an early student who later became a professor at UVa, often remarked on the amount of time he went without talking to any women, claiming that “I have not been in the company of any lady

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21 Charles Ellis, Diary Entry, May 12 1835, Diary and Letters, 1834-1836, Accession #8745, Small Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
22 Faculty Minutes from 1841-1842 Session, University of Virginia Faculty Minutes Vols. I-XIX, 1825-1970, RG-19/1/1.461, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
23 Cornelia Randolph to Ellen Coolidge, July 13 1825, Correspondence of Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge, 1819-1861, Accession #9090, 38-584, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
5 Minutes since I have been here, and will not untill I go home.”

On the other hand, the diaries and letters of many of his peers abound with accounts of balls, courting, and general remarks on the attractive and enthralling women they met during their time in Charlottesville.

Reports of sex of an even more unthinkable kind, “the crime against nature,” or sodomy, i.e. anal sex, do not exist in any known manuscript nor do references of other male-male sex acts such as mutual masturbation, oral sex or even more casual occurrences of shared nudity and touching. Although various references to meaningful, yet limited, physicality between male students exist, and will be discussed below, these instances generally fell well within the range of the accepted bonds of male friendship and were considered completely separate from the realm of sex. In any case, many phrases and actions that would be deemed highly suggestive, if not outright sexual today, had yet to gain any such connotations as the twentieth century concept of homosexuality simply did not exist. The words and phrases pleasure, intercourse, making love, and sleeping together, amongst many others, were completely devoid of sexual implications, heterosexual or otherwise.

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24 Gessner Harrison to Ann Moore, Circa October-November 1826, Box 2, Harrison, Smith and Tucker Family Papers, 1790-1936, Accession #3825, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

25 During this period, the term sodomy covered a vague collection of taboo varieties of sexual intercourse including bestiality, anal sex, any sexual acts between men, rape, and sex with a child. In some cases, it could even be used to refer to oral sex. In many official settings, legal officials refused to say sodomy instead invoking epithets such as “the crime against nature,” and the abominable crime not fit to be named among Christians.” Additionally, masturbation was more commonly termed “onanism.”


26 Katz, 39.
such as holding hands, sharing a bed, walking arm in arm, and taking pictures while embracing were usually simple signifiers of close, albeit sometimes romantic, friendship.

While a discussion of overt erotic interactions may seem out of place in this exploration of genteel male friendship, a single surviving correspondence from 1826 between James Henry Hammond, a student at South Carolina College and eventual scandal ridden governor of South Carolina, and Jeff Withers, a future judge, requires one to confront this possibility. In two letters, the men candidly and jovially relate their pleasure at nakedly playing together in bed. Among other shocking lines Withers writes, “I feel some inclination to learn whether... you yet have the extravagant delight of poking and punching a writing Bedfellow with your long fleshen pole—the exquisite touches of which I have often had the honor of feeling?”

While these letters originally surfaced in the scholarly world in the early 1980s, almost no similar documents have come to light. As such, it is entirely possible that this casual, pleasurable sexual relationship was an outlier, although it is hard to imagine this vignette as anything approaching unique. It is also plausible, however, that men themselves or their descendants during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the dominant narrative of homosexuality as both sinful and deviant prevailed, destroyed similar accounts to save themselves from scandal. Given the almost identical age, time period, gender, and social class of Withers and Hammond and the students at UVa, it is not unthinkable that such actions happened at Jefferson’s University.

Nonetheless, contrary to many portrayals, the University of Virginia offered fertile ground for deeply emotional, meaningful male relationships that often included a romantic, although not noticeably erotic, undertone. Given the ubiquitous nature of male same-sex desire across history, and its unarguable presence in the United States less than two hundred years ago, students with innate romantic and erotic desire for other men, and thus other students, were present at the University of Virginia at this time. Even after careful readings of surviving sources, however, these men remain obscured amongst hundreds of their peers. These students, it seems, were generally able to conform and perhaps even thrive in the wide-ranging societally accepted realm of male friendships, their legacy perhaps surviving in some of the most effusive affirmations of friendship and love that are at the core of this project.

While there were countless casual opportunities for burgeoning friendships to form between students, student run organizations quickly became a focal point of social life at the University. Founded only months after UVa officially opened to students, the “Jefferson Literary and Debating Society” became a mainstay of the institution. Joined in 1831 by the “Washington Literary Society and Debating Union,” these dueling groups held a variety of events including weekly meetings, student debates, formal dinners, and public orations.28 These functions, specifically the debates and public speeches offered a formal opportunity for students to compete in one of the most respected skills of the day: oration. Becoming an officer or being chosen for an annual speech were great personal achievements. Throughout many sources from this time, including autograph albums, literary societies are continually referenced, both

in passing accounts of daily life, but also as guiding institutions, shaping both a student’s friendships and worldview. While these groups were not the only student organizations at the time, with various other groups appearing in school records from time to time, such as the vaguely named “Academic Society,” the prestige and influence of two literary societies were unmatched until the rise of fraternities in the 1850s.  

From its very opening, Jefferson’s University was plagued by rumors of its irreligiosity. Jefferson, the author of the Virginia Statue for Religious Freedom that guaranteed a clear division between religion and state government, had fought his entire life for freedom from imposed religion. Unlike almost every other university in the country, UVa did not have an official religion and did not require theological instruction or directly employ a clergyman. Coupled with accounts of excessive ribaldry and violence, the University was constantly disparaged for these singular traits. In reality, religion was still ever present although largely at the prerogative of the individual. Jefferson had imagined an informal arrangement in which a diverse array of protestant professors and outside clergymen could hold unaffiliated sermons or theological instruction as needed. While some students largely neglected their eternal salvation, Christianity remained a powerful force for many members of the student body, with church attendance, prayer, and biblical study consuming much of their time outside classes. Gessner Harrison, who often wrote of the depravity of his fellow students, nonetheless managed to succeed at the University, becoming a professor and spending over thirty years of his life teaching at UVa, all the while remaining an extremely devout Methodist. Even before

29 Bruce, 359.
30 Bruce, 365-70.
the 1840s, when students founded a variety of exclusively Christian organizations, shared religious fervor brought student together. The aforementioned Gessner Harrison and Henry Tutwiler roomed together at the University, drawn together, in part, by their religiosity, which would remain a major theme in their correspondences for the rest of their lives.³¹

With the explosion of the Second Great Awaking, which was in full swing in Charlottesville by the 1830s, UVa saw a renaissance of religious engagement.³² Driven in part by a reaction against the dangerous escapades of a handful of students, including the murder of professor John Davis in 1840, and a nationwide expansion of benevolence groups and religious charities, the temperance movement found success on UVa’s campus in the 1840s. The first temperance organization was founded in 1841, and by 1843 it had collected seventy-eight pledges from students and professors to abstain from all alcohol.³³ By 1849 the national organization the “Sons of Temperance” had opened a chapter at UVa and in 1856, Temperance Hall was dedicated to the movement. While the temperance crusade gave a more official air to shared religious commitments, as they had for decades, students continued to attend a variety of churches in Charlottesville and religion remained a crucial factor in many student relationships.

While the earliest ancestors of American fraternities date back to the eighteenth century, modern Greek fraternities first appeared at universities in the 1820s, with the

³¹ Gessner Harrison Papers, 1827-1862, Accession #12762, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.; Harrison, Smith and Tucker Family Papers, 1790-1936, Accession #3825, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
³² Carmichael, 59-88.
³³ Bruce, 130.
founding of the Kappa Alpha Society at Union College in New York.34 By the 1830s fraternities began to spread across the country with “the first Greek letter fellowship” Gamma Pi Delta appearing at UVa by 1836.35 The first formal fraternity at UVa, Delta Kappa Epsilon, was not submitted for approval to the faculty until April of 1853.36 The faculty promptly rejected its formation, given the many secretive aspects and the students refusal to outline its charter or rules. Two sessions later, however, the fraternity was openly allowed on campus. While many similarities existed with literary societies, which continued to operate and thrive, fraternities were more explicitly social, and much more secretive. Whereas literary societies aspired to intellectual advancement, at least on paper, the primary aim of fraternities was the extension of its titular brotherhood, bringing together students into a close knit in-group. Inspired in part by popular nationwide secret societies like the Masons, fraternities involved a varied combination of secret meetings and rituals. By 1861, there were eleven fraternities operating at UVa.37

The decadal trends outlined above give only the most basic overview of student engagement. In reality, each student carved their own way through the grounds of UVa, often playing a small part in multiple college wide or even national trends. In 1850 Fred Kosner Jr. wrote to Thomas Jones that he would “ever associate with your name the most pleasing

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35 Bruce, 130.
36 Faculty Minutes from 1852-1853 Session, University of Virginia Faculty Minutes Vols. I-XIX, 1825-1970, RG-19/1/1.461, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
37 Bruce, 166.
recollections of his College career – whether of the Lecture room, the social gathering in the Society Hall; or the more hallowed spot ‘the place where prayer is want to be made,’” showing clearly the many opportunities for befriending fellow students and incorporating both student organizations and outside religious institutions into a student’s personal experience. A decade later, an entry by Edward H. Ingle shows similarly diverse settings of friendship writing: “with many pleasant recollections of our associations on ‘Carr’s Hill’, in the ‘Jeff’, and in the ‘Southern Guard’ I am your sincere friend.”³⁸

³⁸ Entry by Edward H. Ingle, Edward S. Hutter, Jr. Autograph Album, 1860-1861, RG-30/17/1.0317, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
PART II: AUTOGRAPH ALBUMS: A LANGUAGE OF FRIENDSHIP

Held amongst the millions of manuscripts of the Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia are roughly five dozen volumes. Varying in style and size, these autograph albums represent some of the most comprehensive sources for discovering the nature of collegiate friendship during the antebellum era. Beginning with a few books from the 1830s, most of the albums were compiled in the 1850s and 60s, although the tradition would continue well beyond the end of the Civil War. While some of the surviving volumes are simply blank books, many were published explicitly as autograph albums. Many of these were designed specifically for use by UVa students. Between the dozens of pages waiting to be filled with signatures and superlatives, were printed pictures of the University’s professors mixed in with the occasional etching of the University landscape and an ever-present homage to Thomas Jefferson. Perhaps the most elaborate of these is “Bohn’s Album of the University of Virginia” printed in Washington, D.C. in 1859, which billed itself as “Beautifully Illustrated with Twenty Steel Engravings and Portraits of the Professors and Officers.” Complete with an elaborate recreation of the Lawn and Rotunda on the front cover, this book reflected the showy pretentions of many of the elite students enrolled at UVa at this time.39

Once purchased, students would pass the albums around at the end of the “session,” the single nine-month term held at UVa from October to June. At UVa the structured designation of class year had not yet developed, with Jefferson originally conceiving of the typical student spending three sessions at the University. This was rarely the case, with a

39 Thomas B. Lyons Autograph Album, 1860-1861, RG-30/17/1.0318, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
significant percentage of students attending only a single session. As such, students often used the same album for multiple sessions, collecting signatures and messages from friends who may not return the next year. On occasion, a student would change universities and keep the same album, mixing in the signatures from new acquaintances at Princeton or UPenn alongside those of his fellow Southerners at UVa.

The entries themselves vary significantly. Some albums are composed almost completely by entries from other UVa students, while many contain snippets by local young women. Professors commonly wrote a few lines on the page of, or next to, their picture and a handful of the albums contain entries by younger family members. Amongst the entries by students, while many are very short, only a few are limited to the namesake autograph. A typical entry stated simply: “Most truly your friend Wm H Lyons.” Repeated again and again with slight variation, this simple record abounds in every album. Slightly longer entries, while still fairly generic also occupy a significant number of pages: “Congratulating you upon your success, & hoping that your favorable auspice may continue thr[ough] life I am very truly your friend.” Almost always, these entries were followed by the writer’s signature and hometown, and often listed the location and date of the inscription as well.

University classifications such as roommates, classmates, and boarding at the same hotel are mentioned sporadically throughout. Much more common are references to student
activities outside of class including shared membership in literary societies, fraternities, and in the lead up to the Civil War, student militias. At the most basic level, all of these living arrangements and activities served as points of possible interaction from which friendship, or animosity, could flourish. Even amongst the relatively diverse possibilities for self-grouping, the vocabulary of friendship remained consistent. No matter the setting, students primarily referred to their mutual attachment as friendship, largely eschewing other modes of interpretation.

Familial bonds, for example, were only occasionally appropriated to describe feelings of attachment. The young men primarily referred to each other as brothers in reference to their shared membership in a fraternity, largely independent from proclamations of affection mirroring familial bonds. There were multiple exceptions to this trend as is seen in a brief entry by Sam Bagly in which he wrote above his name “the signature of one of the ‘Family.’” Another student, a childhood friend and classmate of Albert Davidson, wrote that “the friendship which commenced so early in life, has strengthened... until now dear Albert there exists between us, rather a brotherly feeling than that of simple friendship.” This lifelong friendship, an outlier in a setting where most students had known each other for a few years at most, warranted a rarer affirmation of brotherhood.

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43 Entry by Sam Bagly, Autograph Albums of William Henry Fitzhugh Payne, 1849-1850, 1902, Accession # RG-30/17/1.031, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
44 Entry by R. S. Suckett, Albert S. Davidson Autograph Album kept at the University of Virginia, 1856-1857, 1862, RG-30/17/1.071, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.
The primary focus on bonds of friendship at UVa, instead of brotherhood or other familial links, is in contrast to Anya Jabour’s findings in her aforementioned article, "Male Friendship and Masculinity in the Early National South." Amongst William Wirt and his multigenerational friends, invocations of brotherhood and fatherhood were a central way of relating to each other.\(^45\) While it is unclear what exactly this shift in discussions of friendship represents, it is possible that it is primarily based on the more diffuse source base of autograph albums. While Jabour’s article focuses on a few particularly close friends, autograph album entries spanned from casual acquaintances to deep friendships, suggesting that illusions to brotherhood, beyond the fraternity setting, may have been reserved for a limited subset of male relationships.

In a similar vein, although Christianity and discussions of God’s influence on a happy life, and the afterlife, are incredibly frequent topics, there is no broad attempt to use shared Christian fellowship as a noticeably separate way of relating to one another emotionally. In a friend’s album, William Dabney claimed that “It softens the pains of parting to think that we will surely meet again beneath the cloudless skylight of immortality… Sincerely your friend & brother in Christ.”\(^46\) This entry is fairly typical in its invocation of heaven, and its general religious theme, although it is the only example of a student explicitly invoking some sort of “Christian brotherhood.” While religion was clearly a central facet of many student’s lives, affecting almost every aspect of their worldview, and certainly guided some students’ choice of

\(^{45}\) Jabour, 95.

\(^{46}\) Entry by William Pope Dabney, Thomas W. Jones Autograph album kept as a student at the Univ. of Virginia, 1849-1850, RG-30/17/1.034, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.
friends, in these albums, UVa students did not regularly articulate Christianity as offering an alternative form of friendship or a specifically secular mode of comradery.47

Mixed among the dozens of student autograph albums in the University of Virginia Special Collections are two collected by young women living near the University.48 Like the autograph albums of their male counterparts, these books are filled primarily with entries by University of Virginia students. In almost every other aspect, however, these books differ, giving crucial insight into the highly gendered world of the University. Page after page of both female autograph albums are filled with gushing poetry, some quoted from romantic authors like Byron, while others contain original compositions. In one of the albums, owned by Margaret Pollard, many of the entries containing romantic poetry are signed only with initials, a significant break from the most obvious aim of an autograph album, collecting the signatures of friends, acquaintances, and admirers. This attempt at limited anonymity is the one of the only explicit acknowledgements of an albums’ semi-private nature. Whereas the students seemed largely unconcerned with the prospect of their peers seeing their entry as they signed another

47 This stands in marked contrasts with in Bruce Dorsey’s ”’Making Men What They Should Be’”. In it he details the possible Christian interpretation of male friendship and same-sex sexual encounters in 1830s New England, describing a well-developed emotional and romantic worldview between a handful of clergymen that found themselves at dire odds with their community. Bruce Dorsey, ”’Making Men What They Should Be’: Male Same-Sex Intimacy And Evangelical Religion In Early Nineteenth-Century New England," Journal of the History of Sexuality 24.3 (2015): 345-377.
48 Autograph album of Margaret C. Pollard, University of Virginia, 1830, Accession #760, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.; Staley Autograph albums, 1863-1872, RG-30/17/1.074, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
man’s album, although some more private memories were likely self-censored, the florid prose dedicated to young women warranted partial obfuscation.

The stark gendered nature of these entries mirrors other surviving accounts of the many differences between relationships amongst the students and those they had with young women. The diary of Charles Ellis, as well as others from this period, depict socially acceptable freewheeling male interactions in comparison to available, but closely constrained audiences with respectable women. Outside of classes and studying, Ellis details long walks with friends, and hours spent drinking, and joking in other students’ rooms, among a myriad of other casual, and generally friendly, encounters. Interactions with young women of a high social standing generally meant a scheduled interaction at her home, in the company of family members or at a larger outing or gathering, surrounded by dozens of peers. As the entries in the albums depict quite well, intimacy and casual relationships were much more easily available between students than across the gender divide.49

Throughout the thousands of entries in dozens of students’ albums, a fairly consistent vocabulary of male friendship emerges. While the length and sentiment of each entry varies, a few key words and phrases appear over and over. From the context and general conviction underlying the repetitive usage it is possible to detail a fairly well developed and tiered vocabulary of friendship between the students over the years. The most common and succinct entries, most likely reserved for passing amiable acquaintances, are variations of “your sincere

49 Charles Ellis, Diary and Letters, 1834-1836, Accession #8745, Small Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
friend” or “your true friend” followed by the author’s signature. In many cases, this standard ending was incorporated into longer messages, as was the case when P. F. Witherspoon remarked to Henry Howze, “Words were invented for “lip-service” – action alone is the language which can express the deep friendship of the heart – and justice should be the Interpreter. So let it be with us - & I am Your true friend –.” Nonetheless, throughout the thousands of entries, “true” and “sincere” are the most common descriptors of friendship and are often used instead of longer antidotes that conveyed stronger friendship or deeper personal knowledge of the recipient. True and sincere friendship, although genuine, was somewhat limited.

In longer or more personalized messages, generally referenced alongside anecdotes of the shared joys and sorrows of student life, or hopes for the future, “affectionate” or “warm” friendship comes to the fore. Powhatan Ellis invoked this sentiment when he wrote to William Broun, “Hoping that you may remember me with same kind feelings, That I shall always have towards you, I remain, always, Your affect[ionat]e friend.” Often used alongside these monikers were invocations of pleasure or pleasant times spent together, typified by W. H. Pleasant: “while memory holds her seat, so long, my dear Broun, will your name be

50 Entry by P. F. Witherspoon, Henry Y. Howze Autograph Album kept at the University of Virginia, 1851-1853, RG-30/17/1.075, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.
51 Entry by Powhatan Ellis, Jr., William LeRoy Broun Autograph Album, 1850, 1854, 1884. RG-30/17/1.056, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
remembered with the warmest pleasure. For your success & prosperity in every undertaking you have the most ardent wishes of your sincere friend.”

When students searched for a phrase to describe their closest confidants with whom they felt they had developed an unparalleled bond, they often settled upon describing their “intimate friendship” or shared “intimacy.” Intimate friendship could be gained through extended interactions including hours of conversation, evenings of studying, or nights of drinking. It could also encompass the shared physicality of being roommates, nursing each other during illness or long hikes in nearby mountains. Simple exposure though, was not enough. The rarity of the invocation as well as length and sincerity of the messages clearly indicate that intimate friendship represented an important emotional bond that heavily influenced both parties, and was seen as one of the greatest acquisitions from time spent at the University of Virginia.

While there is no truly “typical” entry, as each one represented an individualized relationship, this message from E. Holmes Boyd to Thomas Lyons, exemplifies many aspects of intimate friendship.

It is a source of pleasure to any one to acknowledge & profess Friendship to him for whom he cherishes feelings of the strongest attachment. But it is a far greater pleasure to me to know that our Friendship has not only been expressed by words but exhibited mutually by our actions. From the first of the session our acquaintance, one with the other, has been intimacy & I trust that this intimacy

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52 As mentioned previously, at this time pleasure had not yet been infused with any hint of sexuality, lacking the physical connotation of today’s understanding and was commonly used to describe anything from the joys of receiving a long awaited letter to the shared warmth of a close male friendship.; Entry by W. H. Pleasants, William LeRoy Broun Autograph Album, 1850, 1854, 1884. RG-30/17/1.056, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
will make progress with time & continue to hold us united as true & sincere
Friends. Wishing you all possible success I am most truly

Like many other students, Boyd references becoming close friends relatively quickly, especially
noteworthy in light of the many authors who have depicted Southern men as awkward,
standoffish, isolated, and violent. In addition, like the entry by P. F. Witherspoon quoted earlier,
Boyd alludes to the actively expressed nature of their friendship. Much more than mere
nineteenth century florid prose, these men made sure to reiterate their deep emotional bonds
as well as to express these feelings through their day to day actions.

Throughout the dozens of autograph albums, friendship remains the dominate frame
invoked across the entire spectrum of relationships, from casual acquaintance to much deeper
connections. Love, on the other hand, generally plays a secondary role, appearing only
sporadically from album to album. Love is used most often in brief quotations of poetry and
literature. In one instance, James Kith quoted Hamlet to Joseph Turner “‘With all my love I do
commend me to you: / And what so poor a man as the ‘the subscriber’ is / may do, to express
his love and friending to you / God willing, shall not lack.’” While it is possible that quotations
were sometimes used to convey emotions that the writer felt too awkward or unable to
express in his own words, in most cases, there is little indication from the corresponding entries
that these men felt unrepresentatively strong feelings for the men they quoted words of love.

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53 Entry to E. Holmes Boyd, Thomas B. Lyons Autograph Album, 1860-1861, RG-30/17/1.0318,
Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
54 / added to signify line breaks for clarity. Kirth substituted “the subscriber,” meaning himself,
I.v.190-3.;
Entry by James Kith, Joseph A. Turner Autograph Album, 1859-1868, RG-30/17/1.791, Special
Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
Instead of representing its own emotional framework, in these cases affirmations of love appear to be supplementary expressions of affection well within the accepted range of friendship and were likely motivated by the popularity of both classical literature and contemporary Romantic poetry among the students.

In the fewer entries where love appears outside of quotes, there is once again limited evidence to suggest any particularly unique emotional connection, as love is used interchangeably alongside other key words such as “affectionate,” “pleasurable,” and “intimate.” In a handful of instances, however, mentions of love occur alongside feverous outpouring of emotion that parallel or even surpass the most fervent pledges of intimate friendship. Such is the case of the entry left by George Howard for Thomas Jones:

We have lived & loved as brothers. Not a word unkindly spoken, not a look, nor a reply has ever ruffled the calm Ocean of peace & pleasure... You have been my supporter & comforter when I most needed an encouraging word or the council of a brother. My heart is full! My soul swells with the deepest emotion. Oh! That I could express the half that I feel on parting with a friend that I so ardently & devotedly love!55

In this message of extreme emotional attachment, love does seem to imply a higher connection reaching beyond even the closest friendship, and beginning to mirror some of the lovesick diary entries by UVa students pining after their female love interests.56 Similarly to his use of love, George Howard’s invocation of brotherhood is also somewhat atypical. While most other students used “brother” primarily to refer to other fraternity members, Howard has

55 Entry by George Howard, Thomas W. Jones Autograph album kept as a student at the Univ. of Virginia, 1849-1850, RG-30/17/1.034, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.
56 Journal of Robert Garlick Hill Kean, 1852 Dec. 28-1871 Feb. 1, Accession #3070-a, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.
repurposed it to represent his close relationship to his peer. This one entry brings together a combination of appropriated familial ties, a more typical vocabulary of friendship, as well as a less common connotation of love, to express an emotional connection at the most extreme end of the spectrum of antebellum male relationships at UVa. George Howard, it seems, was combining and repurposing words to explain a relationship that he that may have felt was not represented by more typical expressions of friendship. While it is difficult to infer much more from such a brief emotional snapshot, and largely pointless to try to project a modern sexual identity onto this nineteenth century man, this entry shows just how empty many scholarly assumptions are about the limited and frivolous nature of antebellum Southern white male relationships.

Across the many albums there is no clear dividing line between ascertainment of friendship and declarations of romantic attachment. In many cases they appear so intertwined as to be inseparable. If the concept of romance is limited to explicit expressions of love then male romance, although common, was a secondary feature in these relationships. If a slightly broader conception in which strong feelings of friendship, emotional attachment and dependence warrants the label, then male romance was ever present at the University. This discussion, perhaps overly simplistically, focuses on language that mirrors more historically accepted, i.e. heterosexual, romantic connections, highlighting the instances in which the language of friendship slipped the farthest towards typical ways of relating to and courting young women. While the examples cited below are some of the most profuse, they are hardly outliers. Indeed, the entirety of this project suggests that romantic expressions of feeling
between two male students were an acceptable part of the spectrum of male relationships amongst elite antebellum Southern men.

In many cases, romantic versions of many trends in autograph albums existed side by side with more straightforward messages. While many students had nicknames for each other, most often they were simple plays on the man’s name. In an entry in William Broun’s album, however, John Page refers to his friend as “mon petit caprice,” or my little whimsy, alongside a request for his classmate to follow through with his marriage “shd temptation prove too strong.” What exactly the temptation was, an unmentioned female, or the close bond of male friendship, goes unstated. Another entry in Broun’s album also has romantic overtones. In it, George Bassett pledges that if he ever meets Broun in later years “my heart will still beat in unison with yours & my hand shall grasp yours in token of our friendship.” Occasionally, this romantic strain appears to have been openly laughed at, perhaps inspiring Thomas Opie to write to Thomas Grayson, “‘As sure as grass grows ‘round the stump, / So sure you are my sugar lump.”

One of the more explicit examples of romantic sentiment can be seen in an entry in the album of Bennett Taylor. In it Richard Maury quotes the familiar phrase, “For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health till death do us part.” This appropriation of a

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57 Entry by John Page, William LeRoy Broun Autograph Album, 1850, 1854, 1884. RG-30/17/1.056, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
58 Entry by George Basset, William LeRoy Broun Autograph Album, 1850, 1854, 1884. RG-30/17/1.056, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
59 Entry by Thomas Opie, Thomas Fitzhugh Grayson Autograph album, 1860-1861, Accession #RG-30/17/1.033, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
60 Entry by Richard Maury, Autograph Album of Bennett Taylor, 1859, RG-30/17/1.821, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
standard wedding vow, tying two “sincere” male friends together, instead of husband and wife, stands out as one of the few direct blurring of romantic musings with sexual object choice. Whereas playful aspirations to shared bachelorhood and lifelong bonds, including allusions to forming a friendship mirroring a romantic, and perhaps even sexual, marriage are not unknown amongst nineteenth century men, at the University of Virginia this seems to have been a rare way of expressing fervent friendship or even romantic attachment.61

As with mentions of love, quoted snippets of poems contain some of the most romantic sentiments in these albums. In general, students copied short sections of published poems although it was not uncommon for them to compose a short piece themselves. Quoting a popular novel of the day, a classmate wrote to Thomas Jones that “I grieve to leave thee for thou have entwined thyself around my heart like a vernal garland, and I shall carry away with me the remembrance of its sweetness.”62 Likewise James Roland quoted to Thomas Grayson, “And must I stain this virgin leaf / So fair, so pure & so like thee, / It grieves me, but it is thy will / And that is always law to me.”63

A more perplexing and suggestive entry in Warner Baylor’s album contains an example of an original poem.

I’m caught. I’m caged. I’m in the trap

62 Entry with an Unreadable Signature, Thomas W. Jones Autograph album kept as a student at the Univ. of Virginia, 1849-1850, RG-30/17/1.034, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.
From Caroline Lee Hentz, Linda; or, the Young Pilot of the Belle Creole: a Tale of Southern Life, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Peterson, 1850).
63 Entry by James Roland, Thomas Fitzhugh Grayson Autograph album, 1860-1861, Accession #RG-30/17/1.033, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
My love I cannot smother  
So never think to set your cap.  
Dear Doctor now for another? 

Your friend...  

Unfortunately, the gender of the author is unknowable. Baylor’s album contains many entries from both men and women, although the rest are signed explicitly. The genre of poem fits neither more typical entries of poems by men, which often contained highly stylized and florid references to abstract love, nor poems recorded by women, which were generally slightly lighter, and more constrained by societal ideals of propriety. Professions of unrequited love are almost nonexistent in these pages. Testimonials of intimate friendship and love between students were almost always assumed to be reciprocated, formed as they were over months and years of shared experiences. Such a frank, albeit slightly playful, entry from a female acquaintance would also be outside the norm. It is possible that even Baylor himself did not know the author, as someone could have written the entry as the book was being passed around to various acquaintances.

Mapping the prevalence and examples of male physical contact at the University of Virginia is a somewhat more straightforward affair than parsing the thin, and often nonexistent, line between friendship and romance, although it depends on a frustratingly small source base. For the most part, entries in autograph albums dealt with emotional relationships and rarely mentioned explicit physical intimacy of any kind. Nonetheless, the few casual mentions of male physical contact, often almost as an afterthought, suggest that basic physical

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64 Anonymous Entry Signed “Your friend,” Warner Lewis Baylor Autograph Album, 1854-1855, 1860, RG-30/17/1.0315, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
interaction was somewhat unremarkable, and likely fairly common. In addition to the allusion to holding hands mentioned previously, A. J. Garnett admonished Henry Williams not to “forget a friend, whose head you held upon a memorable Sunday evening,” suggesting an extended period of close and emotionally meaningful contact.\footnote{Entry by Algn. J. Garnett Autograph Album of Henry Williams, 1855, Accession #RG-30/17/1.133, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.}

Beyond autograph albums, various mentions of physicality appear in student diaries and reminisces, as well as letters and other manuscripts. In his 1835 diary, Charles Ellis makes several references to caring for inebriated classmates, including sitting with them, and putting them to bed.\footnote{Charles Ellis, Diary and Letters, 1834-1836, Accession #8745, Small Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.} References to nursing fellow students during common bouts of sickness also appear in many student accounts of life at UVa.\footnote{Although much of the tending was likely done by enslaved workers, male students did spend long hours at the bedsides of their sick friends, talking and reading to them.; Journal of Robert Garlick Hill Kean, 1852 Dec. 28-1871 Feb. 1, Accession #3070-a, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.} As students could often be sick for extended periods, sometimes even dying after prolonged illnesses, the emotional significance of having another man to provide care and comfort for a sick student should not be overlooked. In many cases, students shared small rooms at their boarding houses, ensuring prolonged close contact, although there are not any mentions of sharing beds, a common practice at the time.

In another diary entry dated November 24, 1835, Ellis includes an account of a dance at the University. After detailing his opinion of the present women, Ellis continues that the dance “broke up at eleven, and [we] had a great Bull-dance after the departure of the ladies.”\footnote{Charles Ellis, Diary Entry, November 24 1835, Diary and Letters, 1834-1836, Accession #8745, Small Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.}
the women went home, an all-male dance followed, offering one of the few explicit examples
of shared male physicality in a group setting. These various references to hand-holding, cradling
another student’s head, nursing drunk or sick students, and all-male dancing, show that
students at UVa touched and held each other for a variety reasons within the blurred spectrum
of friendship and romance although largely divorced from explicit erotic connotations.

Another avenue for male physical intimacy are the many accounts of fights between
students. Referenced much more commonly than the examples listed above, fist-fights were
frequent occurrences, as were altercations with knives and even guns. As E. Anthony Rotundo
noted, “Nineteenth-century boys, for one thing, expressed their feelings for each other in
physical ways much more than verbal ones. Fist fights and wrestling matches not only bespoke
boyhood rivalries, but they served as a disguised channel of affection in a boy’s world that
forbade gestures of tenderness.”69 Although Rotundo oversimplifies the range of conventional
relationships that have been explored in this paper, as indeed written expressions of profuse
emotional connections were clearly acceptable, his suggestion does offer a compelling
interpretation for at least a small amount of the rampant violence at UVa. Fights could break
out for a variety of reasons, be they casual or serious, and it is not hard to imagine, especially
with widespread student drunkenness, that some confrontations began as more jovial excesses
of masculine posturing triggered by the thrill of potential physicality. Rotundo, however, was
discussing a trend among slightly younger boys. As is evidenced by the significant injuries,
student fights at UVa were often deadly serious. While alternative expressions of physical

69 E. Anthony Rotundo, "Romantic Friendship: Male Intimacy and Middle Class Youth in the
attraction or desire may have been present, they surely remained a tertiary cause of decades of violence at the University of Virginia and its peer institutions.
PART III: WHAT DOES HONOR HAVE TO DO WITH IT? EXPLAINING VIOLENCE & FRIENDSHIP

As portrayed in this paper, the University of Virginia appears a bizarre place. Scandal after violent scandal rocked the University, whose students ran roughshod over any attempt at reinsing in their actions. At various times, professors and administrators seriously worried that the state would revoke the meager funding it provided as more and more accounts of ribaldry and assault circulated across the state. Far from being a beacon of scholastic learning and showcasing the rightful social supremacy of the sons of the Virginia gentry, the University of Virginia teetered on the very edge of respectability. *Rot, Riot, and Rebellion* sums up the prevailing, if seriously limited, picture of the University at this time:

With a sense of honor easily bruised, [students] were reflexively violent. The wrong word, the wrong look could easily lead to a scuffle, if not a duel. Calling a young man a “puppy” – innocuous by today’s standards—could get one shot. Cursing in the presence of a lady could lead to a whipping.\(^{70}\)

Throughout the many references to student violence in the minutes of faculty meetings, and the journals of the chairman of the faculty, two broad categories of student violence can be discerned. On the one hand was rioting, a common occurrence at universities across the country. During these incidents, anywhere from a handful to dozens of students would assemble on the central lawn at night, often drunk, and shoot pistols, scream, scuffle, curse, sing, break windows, blow horns, light fires and break into the rotunda and ring the bell. While disruptive, and dangerous, these frequent bouts of ribaldry often had no specific motivation,

\(^{70}\) Rex Bowman and Carlos Santos, *Rot, Riot and Rebellion: Mr. Jefferson’s Struggle to Save the University that Changes America*, (London: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 1-2.
instead developing from a highly combustible combination of drunken excess, social privilege, and other societal factors.

In some cases, more targeted attacks sprang out of the extravagant violence of riots. Angered by the noise, and general breakdown of authority, professors would often attempt to apprehend rioters, who in turn attacked their assailants. Professor John Emmet was punched and pelted with bricks as he attempted to identify rioters, and years later professor John Davis was shot, and later died, after grabbing the collar of a rioting student.\(^71\) The motivation for rioting, and the resulting violent attempts to avoid discovery, are certainly linked to Southern honor, as students often saw any direct challenge, no matter how warranted, as an infringement on their sense of entitlement. The intense focus on reputation in Southern culture, where an immoral act itself was often less compromising than the scandal of discovery likely heightened Southern students’ uncommonly quick recourse to violence during riots.

Nonetheless, the multitude of probable influences, including excessive drinking, social privilege, distain for authority, unhappiness with specific school policies, among others, as well as the prevalence of rioting at Northern colleges clearly show that Southern honor was not the prevailing factor in these incidents. Additionally, in many cases drunken revelry was a form of student bonding, furthering friendships as students shared both the danger and glee in avoiding detection. While the number of rioters was generally only a small fraction of the student body, the occurrences also led to a wider shared experience between students. When trying to punish the perpetrators, professors were continually frustrated by a wall of silence from all students,

\(^{71}\) Bowman, 36-8.; Bowman, 132-5.
who viewed turning in their peers as dishonorable. When professors tried to break this unspoken rule, student resistance was intense, focusing most of the displeasure at the professors instead of the guilt members of their cohort.\textsuperscript{72} Thus, contrary to previous portrayals, some forms of violence at the university likely strengthened student bonds and certainly led to shared experiences for the majority of the student body.

More targeted, ritualized violence, on the other hand, primarily resulted from verbal insults or slights, perceived, if not always intended. While acts of violence at the University of Virginia, and across the South, have often been portrayed as instantaneous, split second decisions in which a single faux pas could shatter a genteel dinner party, conversation, or college lecture, this was not the case in a large percentage of incidents at UVa. In a vignette in \textit{Honor and Slavery} Kenneth Greenberg details an incident at South Carolina College where a student pulled a chair out from another at a dinner party causing him to fall. Confronted after dinner, the offending student offered profuse apologies that failed to diffuse to situation. Greenberg implies that this led to the threat of a duel although the outcome remains unhelpfully vague. While this story highlights one reality of Southern honor, it is unclear how the preexisting relationship between the two men affected the incident. Entries in autograph albums and various other references clearly show that UVa students brazenly joked with each other on a variety of casual and serious subjects and remained close friends.\textsuperscript{73} Just as today, the same action undertaken by a friend likely had a very different reaction if done by a stranger or a perceived enemy.

\textsuperscript{72} Bowman, 35-40.
While records exist for many serious conflicts between students and professors it is likely that many, if not the majority, of less serious student confrontations went largely unrecorded. As such, it is hard to determine if these fights were more instantaneous, perhaps serving as a way to blow off steam and avoid a more drawn out, public, and ultimately dangerous confrontation. In accounts of more serious incidences, including fist fights, stabbings, and duels, contrary to popular belief, a large number of the altercations had a significant delay between the initial incident and the culminating violence. Indeed, in order for most confrontations to escalate from an insult to a serious assault, multiple drawn out steps, dictated by a common understanding of honor culture had to be taken. While contemporary commentators, and modern historians, have been quick to highlight the fights and duels that did take place, the multitude of conflicts that were diffused before blood was drawn are often overlooked.

One such instance appears in Memories of Three Scores and Ten, a much later reminiscence of student life during the 1850s. In it, Richard McIlwaine details a confrontation, and threatened duel, that was resolved fairly simply and peacefully. After an unspecified confrontation, a friend came to McIlwaine looking for a second for a duel. Determined to avoid violence, McIlwaine reached out to the second of the other student, following the standard procedure in the lead up to a duel, stating:

The next step was a visit from the second of the other party, whom I found to be a pleasant, modest gentleman... After preliminary courtesies, I said frankly, "I am opposed to duels and do not recognize them as proper modes of settling difficulties... I want to settle this matter amicably, if possible." He responded

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promptly and, much to my surprise and delight, said, "I agree with you entirely...." When he had finished I said, "It seems to me the following terms are just and ought to be satisfactory to both parties," then specifying my terms, to which he gave his cordial assent. They were written out, agreed to and signed by both of the opposing principals, and the trouble satisfactorily settled.75

Such successful intercession was not always possible. In 1839 Professor Gessner Harrison was publicly whipped by two students. As chairman of the faculty, Harrison had overseen the expulsion of a student, and the suspension of another. A full month after the two students had been ordered from the campus, they returned, determined to avenge their honor, which they felt had been wounded by their punishment, specifically by the verbal assertion by Harrison that they had disgraced themselves. The two men confronted Harrison, asking, as was typical, for him to retract his insult. When Harrison refused, one of the students asked if he would fight back if assaulted. Harrison, a devote Methodist, demurred, and was restrained and whipped repeatedly.76 Once again, instead of a sudden outburst of egregious violence, the honor code formalized the process, allowing the students enough time to plan the confrontation and offered an option for the retraction of the insult, giving the possibility, however socially untenable, of an alternative to violence.

The numerous reported duels and attempted duels thwarted by outside parties in the early history of the University of Virginia are proof in and of themselves of the heavy influence that honor held on the campus. Young men were willing to die to defend or clear their reputation, a simple fact that cannot be overlooked or explained away. Existing accounts of confrontations on the grounds of the University, show a few clear lines that could instigate dire

75 Mcilwaine, 99.
76 Bowman, 9-10.
reactions. Publicly insulting another man, no matter how warranted, was seen as a worthy provocation to violence. Disrespecting a well to do white women could also lead to an altercation, as could physically grabbing or accosting a student for whatever reason. None of these actions were that hard avoid in day to day college life. While violent reactions may seem irrational today, if the fault lines were relatively understood amongst the extremely homogeneous student body, for the most part, conflicts could be prevented if students took the effort. As fighting did occur, and duels were issued, it is clear that avoiding violence simply was not a priority for a significant section of the student body. Nonetheless, there is no indication that the potential for violence had a serious chilling effect on male bonding and intimate friendships between students. What has almost exclusively been overlooked is that at the same time that some students were punching, stabbing, and shooting at each other, a plurality of their peers, and likely the brawlers themselves, were cementing friendships, passing long hours in their dorms studying or drinking, going for hikes in the nearby mountains, nursing each other back to health, swapping gossip on the newest belle in town or musing about their future wives. If familiarity bred the contempt that led students to assaults and duels, it more often bred the intense friendships that have been outlined above.

Simply put, friendships were a more muted affair, developing through repeated interactions around shared classes, boarding houses, literary societies, or religious fervor. While not exactly private, these day to day interactions lacked the immediate visual appeal of a sudden bought of violence. No newspaper reported that two students spent an afternoon sharing their inner thoughts in a dorm room, while a flurry of stories would be written if two students undertook a duel. Likewise, even accounts by the students themselves are heavily
biased towards recollections of violence or controversy as can be expected. While students wrote in the broadest sense about their emotional connections in autograph albums, summing up months or years of friendship in a paragraph or a page, these records pale in comparison to the detailed accounts of various acts of collegiate violence.

While a few students found little to bond over, many others became close friends very quickly. Even the deeply religious Gessner Harrison who was continuously repelled by the sinful nature of the students around him cemented a lifelong friendship with Henry Tutwiler while attending UVa. Many of the profuse entries in the autograph albums mention parting after attending only a single session together. If students did not cross certain boundaries broadly defined, and connected on a personal level, close friendships were possible, common, and deeply affirming. After a certain point, these perceived boundaries of honor began to break down. A subset of entries in the autograph albums are incredibly jovial, and some even openly mocking. Close friends clearly felt comfortable saying and acting in ways that would have been offensive if pursued by strangers or casual acquaintances. In this way, students developed a set of semi-private and private ways of interacting that largely avoided breaking into significant acts of violence. Accounts of confrontations at UVa do not speak of bosom friends driven to a duel after one unthinking comment. Given the highly public nature of insults of honor, and the need for others to be aware of the slight, it is possible that even more serious faux pas between friends could be overlooked as long as they remained secret. It was when others began to hear of the accusations that perceived or real external pressure could spur a man to direct confrontation.
The idea that good friends, in casual situations had to watch their every word for the merest hint of insult is spurious. Indeed, many of the friendships detailed in the autograph albums are categorized by the ability to bear one’s soul to the other student and receive understanding and compassion in return. Whatever their proclivity to select acts of violence, the first generations of students at Jefferson’s University had little trouble forming deep bonds that challenge and expand our current understanding of relationships between antebellum Southern white men.
CONCLUSION: FRIENDSHIP & WAR

The various settings for student friendships ebbed and flowed over the years, with boarding houses, lecture rooms, literary societies, churches, temperance organizations, ballrooms, and fraternities all offering different outlets for bonding during the antebellum period. Although the autograph albums analyzed for this project are primarily from the late 1840s to the 1860s, when considered alongside earlier letters, diaries and reminiscences, the language surrounding friendships and emotional relationships appears fairly uniform across the first decades of the University of Virginia, with one notable exception.

Like so many other aspects of day to day life, even intensely personal student friendships were fundamental influenced by the oncoming Civil War. As the regional conflict deepened, and military confrontation loomed, a new vocabulary of marshal friendship became more and more prevalent, often becoming the primary way students related to each other in their autograph albums. Although this trend of martial friendship likely begun to develop somewhat earlier, as students formed companies as early as 1831 in the aftermath of Nat Turner’s rebellion, the extreme campaign rhetoric of the election of 1860 and South Carolina’s secession lit a fire under numerous UVa students who were aggressive secessionists.77

In late 1860, University of Virginia students formed two companies termed “the Southern Guard” and “the Sons of Liberty.”78 While other student organizations took years to

77 Gessner Harrison to Dr. Peachey Harrison, August 28 1831, Harrison, Smith and Tucker Family Papers, 1790-1936, Accession #3825, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
gain popularity, with many falling to the wayside with little impact, these “companies” quickly became a central focus of student life. Outside of more organized avenues, secessionist fervor in the face of immediate confrontation brought together students in a way that underlying commitments to slavery and white supremacy never had. Whereas earlier students had broken into the Rotunda for the mere drunken thrill, in early April of 1861 seven students broke into the building and flew the Confederate flag from its dome. On April 13th, Thomas Jefferson’s birthday, a military parade was held on the Lawn.\textsuperscript{79} Six days later, on the night of Virginia’s secession, the two student companies marched to the infamous federal arsenal in Harper’s Ferry to surprise the federal troops suddenly isolated from their national government. By the time the students arrived, however, the U.S. troops had burned the arsenal to the ground and retreated. Although they marched back to the University a few days later, this first student “campaign” of the Civil War had a sharp impact on the men who undertook it.\textsuperscript{80} Perhaps buoyed in part by their bloodless “victory” at Harpers Ferry, fifty out of one hundred and thirty eight graduates in 1861 immediately formed an official company and rode off to war. Although estimates vary, roughly twenty-five hundred alumni, or 25% of all attendees, fought for the Confederacy, and around five hundred died.\textsuperscript{81}

In the handful of autograph albums from 1861 accounts of long nights of studying and wishes for a prosperous future are largely superseded. While war was firmly on the mind of the

\textsuperscript{81} Dabney, 26.
students, it did not occlude their tendency to write about their close friendships. Instead, the students combined entries about martial skill, and expectations for a quick rise up the military ranks with allusions to the deep bonds formed by marching and learning together. While there is little indication that a few days of borderline play acting radically reshaped the various friendships that had developed over the preceding months, students quickly started appropriating military vocabulary to express their friendships. William Robinson’s entry to Edward Hutter neatly depicts the newfound military context alongside the more recognizable vocabulary from the previous decades, writing “I was one of your devoted followers to harper’s Ferry, and I shall never forget your kindness to us there in your capacity as ‘Captain’ My intercourse with you at the University has been very pleasant, and I shall always regard you as one of my best friends.”

Both the longer trends of male friendships and the specifically martial interpretation of the late 1850s and 1860s, suggest that former UVa students were well primed for the homosocial aspects of army life, where navigating numerous complex hierarchical and interpersonal relationships under fire became a matter of life and death. As Peter Carmichael’s The Last Generation outlines, recent college students, UVa alumni chief among them, played a crucial role as secondary officers in the Confederate Army, serving as essential links between commanding officers and the rank and file. Whereas Carmichael traced the army officers’ personal experiences back to their college days, this work shows how these young officers were drawing on decades of homosocial tradition built year after year by their forefathers at UVa.

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82 Entry by William Wirt Robinson, Edward S. Hutter, Jr. Autograph Album, 1860-1861, RG-30/17/1.0317, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
This transition from college friendship to martial comradery also raises important questions, and suggests certain conclusions, about the longevity of white male relationships in the antebellum area. In the aforementioned "The Female World of Love and Ritual," Carroll Smith-Rosenberg detailed the lifelong female relationships that often served as anchors of nineteenth century womanhood. Since this publication in 1975, various researches have attempted to pin down the corresponding prevalence of similar relationships between men. In Romantic Friendship: Male Intimacy and Middle Class-Youth in the Northern United States, 1800-1900, E. Anthony Rotundo asserted convincingly that many male youths formed crucial same-sex friendships that heavily influenced their childhood development. Whether these relationships commonly continued throughout life, however, largely remained unanswered. In her study of William Wirt’s cohort of close friends, Anya Jabour showed how sustained same-sex male friendships could play crucial roles in the lives of Southern men, although her limited sample size makes extrapolating this conclusion difficult.

While the exclusive focus on college friendships limits this paper’s addition to this debate, its findings nonetheless contain several pertinent additions. First of all, this project shows that close male friendships could, and did, thrive in the collegiate setting of the University of Virginia. In this case at least, and likely among other college students and elite white Southern men, society encouraged essential male friendships not just in youth but into young adulthood and early manhood as well. Secondly, given the onset of the Civil War, a conflict that forced hundreds of thousands of Southern men into close confines and unimaginable situations, there is every indication that the relationships fostered in youth, and cemented at college, had room to adapt, grow, and deepen, on the campaign trail. Finally, the
massive casualties of Confederate troops in the Civil War shattered the peaceful aging of friendships that has been observed elsewhere by Jabour and others. Even the privileged gentlemen students of UVa died by the scores ending the possibility of countless lifelong friendships.

In this regard, autograph albums took on a crucial, and macabre, secondary role. In a number of the albums from the years before the Civil War, the entries from college are only part of the story. Written in the margins of page after page, are short updates on the lives, and deaths, of their classmates.

Late Captain of the... artillery – Killed in the one of the recent engagements around Richmond this year (1864).83

He fell at Sharpsburg & a state mourned his loss.84

Died in 1862 – after being a member of Legislature for several years & a private in the C.S. Army –

Killed in the summer of 1862 in Stuarts raid a Captain in the C.S. Army

Killed at Malvern Hill July/62 in the battles around Richmond a private in the C. S. Army –

Major 4th Va Calv[ar]y Killed at Racoon ford in fall of, 6385

83 Written Under Entry by W. Wyatt, Joseph A. Turner Autograph Album, 1859-1868, RG-30/17/1.791, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va., William Fitzhugh Payne
85 Written Under Entries by Chas. T. Friends, Wm. Latanie, George L. Yomen, and William B. Tewton, Autograph Album of St. Thomas J. Philips, 1852-1853, Accession #RG-30/17/1.163, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
In this way, autograph albums show the utter destruction of many friend groups as entry after entry is modified to include the wartime death of a college acquaintance. Beyond simply bringing home the human destruction of the Civil War, with accounts of horrible deaths sickeningly juxtaposing with naively hopeful dreams of the future and fond remembrances of jovial times passed, these entries show that while the men may not have been able to keep in close contact, or maintained their intimate friendships, former classmates were following the careers of their friends from afar, and keeping a record of their achievements, and all too often, their early deaths. Denied by war the privilege of peacetime friendships, the former students honored their dead friends by enshrining their sacrifice to the Confederacy alongside their earlier affirmations of love and intimacy.