

BY Othello Richards

On the cloudy and rainy Saturday morning September 13, 2014, 13 members of the Richards and Coleman family arrived at the Lexington VA Visitor Center around 8:45 a.m., and were welcomed and greeted by Dr. Neely Young. A few minutes later, the group commenced its planned tour to sites where Rev Othello Richards and his wife Mary lived and worked. Travel was by a rental van driven by Dr. Young, and also by car driven by James Garnett.

Notably on this journey, we arrived at the then home of Susan McDowell Taylor, the home where Othello Richards lived and worked, and where he served as a house slave. The house has now been sold and is occupied by the current owner. From the look of the stones on the stairs at the front entrance of the house, one can clearly see that this house was very elegant. There was a feeling of reverence as we stood on the grounds, knowing that was where our ancestral patriarch worked and patiently waited with faith for the time when he would be set free and would purchase the freedom of his family.

Moving on from the Susan Taylor's house, we drove to her grave, and that of her father, Col. James McDowell. Their tombstones are still there. It was Susan McDowell Taylor who subsequently became the owner of Othello Richards when her father deeded him to her. She subsequently freed Othello Richards in 1848. This is a very historic graveyard. General Stonewall Jackson's grave also is there.

We then proceeded to visit the home of James McDowell who served as governor of Virginia from 1843-1846. Othello Richards lived and worked there as well. It is a building, which has been well preserved and one can clearly see how stately it must have been "in the day". We walked through the building and admired the stately architecture inside and outside. The building is now a hotel.

We then drove to the property once owned by Elizabeth McNutt Edmondson, where Mary, Othello Richards' wife lived, worked, and raised her children. The house sits on a very high hill, and the property is currently gated. We could not gain entrance to the property to see the house close up, but we could see a part of it from where we stood. We walked around the area outside of the gate; however, the surrounding area is still pretty much rural.

After leaving the house where our ancestral matriarch lived, Dr. Neely took the tour through other places of Lexington, narrating stories of life during the era of Othello Richards. We saw an area where the slaves lived. Most of the structures there have since fallen down. The tour ended 12:45 p.m. We then gather for lunch around 1:00 p.m. at the Sheridan Livery Inn on 35 N. Main Street, Lexington, VA 24450. The menu was all American cuisine with a southern flavor. Dr. Young decided to leave the restaurant a little early to proceed with the presentation.

After lunch, which ended around 2:15 p.m., we proceeded for the presentation on Othello Richards at the Randolph Street United Methodist Church located at 118 S. Randolph Street, Lexington, VA. Othello Richards attended this church. When we arrived, members of the public had already

gathered, and Dr. Young was about 10 minutes into the presentation. He acknowledged our arrival and continued with the presentation. After he concluded, he asked each one of us to introduce ourselves, and to make a brief statement. He then passed out handouts on the presentation to all in attendance. The floor was then opened to questions by the audience. In general, questions were heavily centered on the social fabric of current-day Liberia as it relates to diversity. Everyone in the Richards and Coleman entourage weighed in, and this led to a very lively discussion. At the conclusion, group photos were taken by the press and by others present. The press and members of the public came up and spoke with individual family members before we left.

Members of the family in attendance were: Freddie Hill, James Richards, Othello Richards, Margaret Richards, Cianna Richards Grizmala, Stanley Grizmala, Melvina Coleman, Florence Thomas, Liam Thomas, Rev. Dr. Genevieve E. R. Garnett, Rev. Dr. James Newton Garnett, J. Parkinson, and Pearine Davis-Parkinson.

At the end of our visit Dr. Neely told the group that he is willing to research President William D. Coleman who was born in Ashville, Kentucky and organize guided of his birth place for a fee.