

ROSCOE B. STEPHENSON

ATTORNEY AT LAW

COVINGTON, VIRGINIA

TELEPHONE 5846

P. O. BOX 487

June 23, 1954

Dr. Francis Pendleton Gaines  
Washington and Lee University  
Lexington, Virginia

Dear Dr. Gaines:

In the Times Dispatch of yesterday, there is a letter from William B. Hill saying that John Chavis, a Negro, was a teacher in Mecklenberg County in 1789. He further states that he was educated at what is now Washington and Lee.

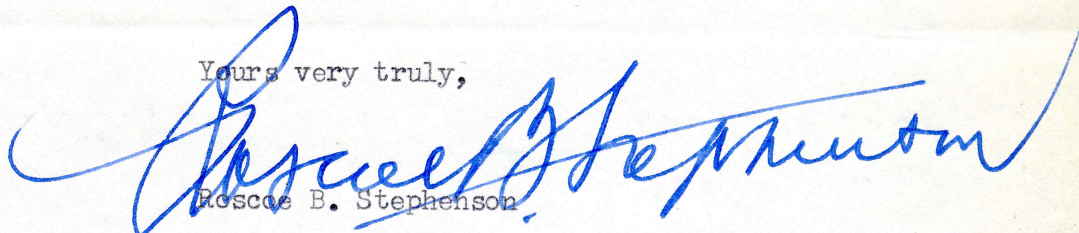
I am of opinion that this is a figment of the writer's imagination. I understand he is a teacher of Sociology and they seem to have adopted the policy of non-segregation.

If you know, I would be glad for you to ascertain if there was such a person as John Chavis ever connected with Washington and Lee. My opinion is that it is untrue from beginning to end.

I enclose copy of a letter that I am writing William B. Hill.

With my kind regards, I am,

Yours very truly,

  
Roscoe B. Stephenson

RBS/pc

Enc.

*PS*  
The reception tendered the alumni by Mrs. Gaines & yourself was wonderful - you have a lovely place out there.

ROSCOE B. STEPHENSON

ATTORNEY AT LAW  
COVINGTON, VIRGINIA

TELEPHONE 5346  
P. O. BOX 487

June 23, 1954

Mr. William B. Hill  
Boydton, Virginia

Dear Sir:

I have read your letter in the Times Dispatch of yesterday, in regard to the Negro, John Chavis.

It would be interesting to know what your authority is for the statement that he was educated at Washington and Lee University, or what is now Washington and Lee University.

I would appreciate it if you would give me your authority for this statement, as I had never heard it before.

Yours very truly,

Roscoe B. Stephenson

RBS/pc

P. S. I enclose stamped, addressed envelope for reply.

R. B. S.

June 24, 1954

Mr. Roscoe B. Stephenson  
P. O. Box 487  
Govington, Virginia

Dear Mr. Stephenson:

First of all I must thank you for your gracious comment about the little party we had out at our home. It was a great joy to have you.

We have no college records which indicate that a Negro was ever enrolled as a student at Washington and Lee. Personally I do not think any such incident happened.

But the story of John Chavis is clouded in some mystery. He seems to have been an extraordinary Negro who was commissioned by the Presbyterian Church of the United States in 1801 to become a missionary to his own people.

(I think his master set him free because of his unusual religious ability and influence but I am not sure at this point.)

It seems that in 1802 he decided to go to North Carolina and needed the protection of a court certificate. Thus the Rockbridge Court issued a kind of order, and presumably gave him a copy, certifying that he was free, that he was authorized by his church for this type of missionary work, and that he had been given the privilege of attending classes at Washington Academy.

It was also reported that for a time he attended Princeton probably as a private pupil of certain professors there. My guess is, but it is not more than a guess, that he came here as a private pupil of certain professors who wanted to help him in his religious career.

As much of this story as is known can be found in the North Carolina HISTORICAL REVIEW (Vol. 7, Number 3), July, 1930.

With best wishes always, I am

Cordially yours,

Francis P. Gaines