

Below is a letter from Bishop James Madison (1749-1812), President of William and Mary (1776-1812), concerning the earliest known application by a black to attend lectures at William and Mary (Protestant Episcopal Bishops Collection, [MS 21], Yale University; copy at Swem, SPRC).

The letter is to William H. Cabell (1772-1853; W&M Class of 1793), the Governor of Virginia. Of Rozarro, the applicant, we know little, but Jody Allen tells me his name is familiar; she recalls a petition from whites in the area to the General Assembly asking that a law forbidding firearms to blacks be waived in the instance of a Rozarro, which would seem to comport with this letter. The name occurs too in the ante-bellum register of free blacks in Charles City County (<http://www.charlescity.org/fnr/>).

An earlier president of the College, William Dawson (1704?-1752) had as early as 1743, during Lent, instructed for 40 days a religion class that included both the College's students and "near 40 white Servants, Indians, and Negroes." In 1760, on the recommendation of Benjamin Franklin, a philanthropy in London, the Associates of Dr. Bray, established a school for the religious instruction of local black children, free and enslaved. That the school was affiliated with the College recognized the College's involvement in religious education for blacks (See Terry L. Meyers, "Benjamin Franklin, the College of William and Mary, and the Williamsburg Bray School," Anglican and Episcopal History, 79:4[December 2010], 368-393). TLM.

W^s July 30 1807

Dear Sir

There is in this neighborhood a free black man, of so uncommon a Character in Respect to Genius, and good Conduct, that I have informed him, I would take the Liberty of writing to you to know, whether he could be admitted as a Workman or in the Armoury. He has already distinguished himself for his Ingenuity in stocking [?] & repairing Guns; & I am inclined to believe, that in a little time, he would be class'd among the most <ingenious> ^{skillful} and useful artists in that Institution. He has been his own Master in reading, writing, arithmetic, & as he says superficial and solid measuration; he has also taught himself a little of the Latin Language, & has evinced this in strongest Solitude to attend the Lectures in College. I hence [?] thought, that the Mind of such a Man, considering the peculiar Situation of our Country, ought, if possible, to be directed into a safe Channel, & ardent as he really appears to be, in the Acquisition of Science, I, not withstanding, advised him to apply himself to those Trades, which he has commenced, & by perfecting himself in which he may obtain a comfortable living. He has resolved to follow this Advice, & if he can be admitted into the Armoury, -- upon wages proportioned to his Skills, he will attend, with the fullest Certificate of good character. His name is Rozarro; ^{he is} a native & a Landholder, & about 20 yrs of age.

I am Dr Sir

With the sincerest Respect
Yr Friend and Sert [?]
J Madison