**About the Development of *Glimpse* Rachel Y. Thompson**

As a member of the board of the **Friends of Thomas Balch Library** and its Education Sub-committee, I became interested in a project organized by the Loudoun County Heritage Sites Consortium, which envisioned a series of fieldtrips for students in Loudoun County Schools. One fieldtrip stop would be Thomas Balch Library, where students would view documents supporting aspects of their study of African American history. I agreed to write the lesson, with help from the Balch staff, and members of the Friends Black History Committee. We piloted the lesson with a fieldtrip group from Loudoun Country Day School in March 2003. It proved to be a productive afternoon. Although such fieldtrips are always encouraged, in talking with teachers about how much time and money is available for making such visits, we realized that because school staffs are constrained by limiting schedules and budgets, this might prove difficult. That led to a different idea and approach: why not bring Thomas Balch Library to classrooms not only in Loudoun, but elsewhere, through the Friends of Thomas Balch Library website.

In setting up the web project, I decided against writing a series of lessons on single topics of African American history, since that seemed too limiting. Why not offer the teacher a set of documents, drawn from the rich resources of the Balch Library, that he/she would feel free to use in support of curriculum already in place? Still, the site must have an organizing structure; otherwise, although important documents would be included, it might seem no more than a stack of assorted, loosely related information. What emerged as an organizing framework was a list of overarching concepts about African American history called “Essential Understandings,” with supporting documents drawn from the history of Loudoun County.. In writing the Essential Understandings I relied on my past experience as an American history teacher and curriculum designer, Program of Studies guidelines set by the Loudoun County school system, and the Virginia Standards of Learning. Since these county and state guidelines closely mirror those established by most school systems, many classrooms outside of Loudoun will also find this site useful.

In addition to this framework, it was important to include supporting materials that would provide a context for the primary documents, including a chronology, narrative, and map describing African American history in Loudoun County . We included excerpts from another excellent source, *Black Laws of Virginia*, that provides an array of antebellum and postbellum acts by the Virginia legislature bearing on the lives of African Americans in this state. Along with this information, we established links to presidential proclamations, constitutional amendments, U.S. Supreme Court cases, and acts of Congress relevant to these units of study. With these resources, the teacher should be well equipped to help the students interpret the meaning of the primary documents at the site.