

## Department of Historic Resources

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STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKER  
“NEWTOWN CEMETERY”  
TO BE DEDICATED IN HARRISONBURG

*—Marker recalls founding in 1869 of Harrisonburg’s historically  
African-American cemetery—*

*—The marker’s text is reproduced below—*

RICHMOND – A state historical marker issued by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources that recalls the founding of Harrisonburg’s Newtown Cemetery, a historically African-American burial ground, will be dedicated Saturday.

The unveiling and dedication ceremony begins at 2 p.m., April 16, at Immanuel Mennonite Church, located at 400 Kelly Street in Harrisonburg. The Northeast Neighborhood Association (NENA), the sponsor of the marker, is hosting the ceremony, which is open to the public.

Speakers during the ceremony will include Harrisonburg mayor Chris Jones; Karen Thomas, president of NENA; Emmitt Lee, a trustee of the cemetery; local historian and author Ruth Toliver; Dr. Carole Nash of James Madison University; Matthew Bucher, pastor at Immanuel Mennonite Church; Deanna Reed, member of NENA; and Randy Jones of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Musical contributions will be provided by the JMU Contemporary Choir.

Newtown Cemetery, which was listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register in 2014 and the National Register of Historic Places in 2015, was founded soon after the Civil War when “African Americans established the community of Newtown,” in the marker’s words.

“In 1869 five trustees purchased land,” according to the marker, “for a cemetery open to ‘all persons of color.’ By 1920, the cemetery had expanded three times to accommodate Harrisonburg’s growing African American population,” the marker reads.

Today the cemetery, a central landmark in the Newtown neighborhood, contains nearly 1,000 burials including a large number of unmarked graves. Among those buried there are Civil War-era U.S. Colored Troops and veterans of World Wars I and II, Korea, and Vietnam. Burials also include Ambrose Dallard, a community leader and businessman during the Reconstruction Era; Elon Rhodes, the city’s first black council member, as well as noted educators including Lucy F. Simms.

Virginia’s historical highway marker program, which began in 1927 with the installation of the first historical markers along U.S. Route 1, is considered the oldest such program in the nation. Currently there are more than 2,500 official state markers, most maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation, as well as by local partners in jurisdictions outside of VDOT’s authority such as the City of Harrisonburg.

**Text of the marker:**

**Newtown Cemetery**

African Americans established the community of Newtown in this area after the Civil War. In 1869 five trustees purchased land here for a cemetery open to “all persons of color.” By 1920 the cemetery had expanded three times to accommodate Harrisonburg’s growing African American population. Among the nearly 1,000 burials, some unmarked, are Civil War-era United States Colored Troops and veterans of World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Also interred here are Harrisonburg’s first African American city council member and several noted educators, including Lucy F. Simms. The cemetery is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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