

Department of Historic Resources

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13 NEW STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKERS APPROVED

—New markers cover topics in the counties of Augusta, Caroline, Chesterfield, James City, King William, Nelson, and Northumberland; and cities of Alexandria, Newport News, Petersburg, Portsmouth, Richmond, and Suffolk—

[The full text for each marker is reproduced at the end of this release.]

RICHMOND – A civil rights case that led the U.S. Supreme Court to rule in 1967 that a Virginia law prohibiting interracial marriage was unconstitutional, the 1791 decision of a wealthy planter to free more than 500 enslaved persons he owned, and an early 20th-century rural community settled by Scandinavian immigrants are among the topics covered in 13 new state historical markers recently approved by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

The marker titled “Loving v. Virginia” will rise in **Caroline County** to commemorate a lawsuit that involved Richard Loving, a white man, and his wife, Mildred Jeter, “a woman of African American and Virginia Indian descent,” the marker will read. Loving and Jeter married in 1958 in Washington D.C. and were subsequently arrested at their home in Caroline County “for violating Virginia’s laws against interracial marriage.”

The Lovings were convicted and sentenced to one year in jail – or have the sentence suspended if they departed Virginia. The American Civil Liberties Union challenged the conviction. After the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals ruled against the Lovings in 1966, the case reached the U.S. Supreme Court, which struck down laws prohibiting interracial marriage.

The decision of Robert Carter III, considered one of the wealthiest men in the U.S. in the 1790s, to manumit his slaves will be highlighted in a marker slated for **Northumberland County**. A

“deed of manumission” Carter filed at the Northumberland County Courthouse on September 5, 1791, “eventually freed more than 500 enslaved African Americans owned by Carter in several Virginia counties,” the approved marker states. “To retain them in Slavery,” Carter wrote, “is contrary to the true principles of Religion and Justice,” the marker will relay.

A new marker, “Norge Depot,” for **James City County** will pay tribute to a Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company depot constructed in 1907-1908. The depot served a rural community of Scandinavian immigrants who were recruited to the area before the depot’s construction by a Norwegian-born railway agent, Carl M. Bergh. The marker notes that the Norge Depot was relocated in 2006 a half-mile away from its original site in order that it could be restored and preserved.

Railroad history also informs a forthcoming **Augusta County** marker that recalls the village of Stokesville, which “became a boomtown after the Chesapeake Western Railway was extended” to the community in 1902, according to the approved marker. The town’s population grew to 1,500 by 1905 as people arrived to work in “lumber mills, bark tanneries, a stave and heading factory, and other enterprises,” the sign will read. After 1910 the town declined, and a 1949 flood “destroyed most of its remaining structures.”

Settlement and transportation history in **Nelson County** are at the heart of a marker focusing on the Greenwood-Afton Rural Historic District, which is listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. The 16,300-acre district covers the Rockfish Gap, “the lowest passage through the Blue Ridge Mountains for a span of more than 110 miles,” according to the forthcoming marker. “The district has been a focal point for routes converging from the east toward the gap since the days of buffalo trails and Native American footpaths,” the sign will read.

Settlement of **Richmond’s** Oregon Hill is to be highlighted in a marker commemorating the neighborhood. Originally laid out as a town in 1817 in what was then Henrico County, the working-class neighborhood developed slowly during the 19th century. Oregon Hill drew “white laborers, including European immigrants, and a smaller number of free African American

workers” attracted to its “affordable housing near the city’s numerous factories,” the marker will read. The city of Richmond annexed Oregon Hill in 1867.

To the south of Richmond, a 1790 Chesterfield County meeting house that evolved into Bethlehem Baptist Church will be recalled in forthcoming marker. “From 1880 to 1885, Bethlehem member Nannie Bland David served as a missionary to Nigeria,” according to the approved marker. “Her dying words, ‘Never give up Africa,’ inspired later missionaries,” it will read. Bethlehem Baptist included a significant number of African Americans in its congregation who established “separate churches in the 1840s and shortly after the Civil War.”

Five other approved markers discuss religious and educational topics in Virginia’s African American history during 19th and 20th centuries:

- “Mt. Nebo Baptist Church,” **King William County**: The church traces back to the Civil War. “The Gothic Revival-style sanctuary was built in 1887,” according to the approved text. Civil rights attorney Oliver W. Hill visited the church in 1952 and urged the congregation to challenge the “separate-but-equal” doctrine that fostered segregation.
- “Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church,” **Alexandria**: It originated in the early 1830s after black members of the city’s Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church founded their own sanctuary building, which was completed by 1834. The church hosted lectures by Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington in the late 19th century.
- “Mount Calvary Cemetery Complex,” **Portsmouth**: Established by African Americans beginning in 1879 on land adjacent to a “potter’s field.” The cemetery was enlarged later to create a four-cemetery complex. The burials include many community leaders, Civil War U.S. Colored Troops, and veterans of other wars.
- “George W. Carver High School,” **Newport News**: Opened in 1949 as a consolidated African American school for grades 1-11, replacing “inadequate, overcrowded facilities in the 1930s and 1940s.” According to the future marker, “Homer L. Hines, the school’s only principal, inspired students to high achievement.” Carver closed in 1971.

- “Booker T. Washington High School,” **Suffolk**: Opened in 1913 for black students in grades 1-8. A larger school was constructed in 1925, and in 1937 a senior high curriculum was added after black residents in the community campaigned for the expansion. The school was relocated, due to overcrowding, in 1953 and its last high school class graduated in 1969, after which the building served as an intermediate school and later elementary school.

Additionally, the marker “Prince Hall Masons in Virginia” will be erected in Petersburg to highlight two rival Grand Lodges of African-American Freemasons in the city that in 1875 united to “form the present-day Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Virginia, Free and Accepted Masons, Inc.,” in the words of the future sign. The Prince Hall Masons originated in 1775 in Massachusetts, with the first affiliated lodge in Virginia established in Alexandria in 1845.

The Virginia highway marker program, which began in 1927 with installation of the first historical markers along U.S. Rte. 1, is considered the oldest such program in the nation. Currently there are more than 2,500 official state markers, most of which are maintained by Virginia Department of Transportation, except in those localities outside of VDOT’s authority.

The manufacturing cost of each new highway marker is covered by its sponsor.

More information about the Historical Highway Marker Program is available on the website of the Department of Historic Resources at <http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/>.

Full Text of Markers:

(Please note that some texts may be slightly modified before the manufacture and installation of the signs. Also locations proposed for each sign must be approved in consultation with VDOT or public works in jurisdictions outside VDOT authority.)

Loving v. Virginia

Richard Loving, a white man, and Mildred Jeter, a woman of African American and Virginia Indian descent, married in June 1958 in Washington, D.C., and returned home to Caroline County. In July they were arrested for violating Virginia's laws against interracial marriage. The Lovings were convicted and sentenced to one year in jail, suspended on the condition that they leave Virginia. The American Civil Liberties Union unsuccessfully argued their case before the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals in 1966. In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled in *Loving v. Virginia* that laws prohibiting interracial marriage violate the Constitution's 14th amendment.

Sponsor: DHR

Locality: Caroline County

Proposed Location: TBA

Sponsor Contact: Randy Jones, randy.jones@dhr.virginia.gov

Freedom for Slaves of Robert Carter III

On 5 Sept. 1791, Robert Carter III (1728-1804), one of the wealthiest men in the United States, filed a deed of manumission at the Northumberland County Courthouse. This document eventually freed more than 500 enslaved African Americans owned by Carter in several Virginia counties. "To retain them in Slavery," Carter wrote, "is contrary to the true principles of Religion & Justice." The deed, structured to withstand resistance by Carter's heirs and neighbors, liberated slaves gradually in small groups. Because children were freed when they reached adulthood, the manumission took decades to complete. Many of the freed people became tenants on Carter's land.

Sponsor: Northern Neck of Virginia Historical Society

Locality: Northumberland County

Proposed Location: 72 Monument Place, Old County Courthouse, Heathsville

Sponsor Contact: Stevenson Walker, yeocomshan@yahoo.com

Norge Depot

The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company constructed the Norge Depot 600 feet north of here in 1907-1908. Several years earlier, Norwegian-born railway agent Carl M. Bergh had recruited Scandinavian immigrants who lived in the American Midwest to settle on farmland in this area, forming the community of Norge. The depot allowed for passenger service and facilitated the shipment of agricultural products. The building, relocated half a mile north in 2006 when faced with demolition, was later restored. It is the only surviving example in James City County of the standardized, mass-produced railroad architecture that became popular late in the 19th century.

Sponsor: James City County Historical Commission

Locality: James City County

Proposed Location: 7364 Richmond Road (U.S. 60)

Sponsor Contact: Ellen Cook, Ellen.Cook@jamescitycountyva.gov

Stokesville

The village of Stokesville, established by 1901, became a boomtown after the Chesapeake Western Railway was extended here in 1902. Tram lines into the mountains brought timber to the railhead. Lumber mills, bark tanneries, a stave and heading factory, and other enterprises attracted many workers, and the town's population reached 1,500 by 1905. A passenger depot, post office, hospital, hotels, stores, and a church served the community. Stokesville declined after 1910 as the area's timber supply dwindled. A flood in 1949 destroyed most of its remaining structures. The town was named for the Stokes family, financial backers of the railroad.

Sponsor: Sangerville-Towers Ruritan Club

Locality: Augusta County

Proposed Location: south side of SR 730 (North River Road) just east of its intersection with SR 718 (Stokesville Road)

Sponsor Contact: William Parker, valyparrot@yahoo.com

Greenwood-Afton Rural Historic District

At its western edge, this 16,300-acre historic district takes in Rockfish Gap, which at 1,903' elevation is the lowest passage through the Blue Ridge Mountains for a span of more than 110 miles. The district has been a focal point for routes converging from the east toward the gap since the days of buffalo trails and Native American footpaths. Passage of major transportation routes through Greenwood and Afton has enhanced the agricultural economy of these communities and allowed the district to serve as a vital link between two culturally distinct geographical provinces of Virginia, its Piedmont to the East and its Shenandoah Valley to the West.

Sponsor: Western Albemarle Association

Locality: Nelson County

Proposed Location: Eastbound Interstate 64 scenic overlook near mile marker 100

Sponsor Contact: Doug Gilpin, wdg@gilpinarchitect.com

Oregon Hill

The Henrico County town of Sydney, laid out here in 1817, was slow to develop. Oregon Hill, a working-class Richmond neighborhood just east of Belvidere Street, expanded westward across the county line to this area during the 1850s. Many white laborers, including European

immigrants, and a smaller number of free African American workers settled here, attracted by affordable housing near the city's numerous factories. Richmond annexed this neighborhood in 1867. Philanthropist Grace Arents contributed buildings for educational, religious, and social institutions between 1890 and 1912. The Oregon Hill Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991.

Sponsor: Oregon Hill Neighborhood Association

Locality: Richmond City

Proposed Location: 911 Idlewood Ave.

Sponsor Contact: Todd Woodson, candylandmusic@earthlink.net

Bethlehem Baptist Church

Bethlehem Baptist Church, first known as Cox's Meeting House and then as Spring Creek Church, was formally organized several miles northwest of here in 1790. Founding pastor Benjamin Watkins served for 41 years. African Americans constituted a significant portion of the congregation before departing to establish separate churches in the 1840s and shortly after the Civil War. From 1880 to 1885, Bethlehem member Nannie Bland David served as a missionary to Nigeria. Her dying words, "Never give up Africa," inspired later missionaries. After relocating once in the 19th century, Bethlehem Baptist moved here in 1897 when its new sanctuary was completed.

Sponsor: Bethlehem Baptist Church

Locality: Chesterfield County

Proposed Location: 9600 Midlothian Tpke.

Sponsor Contact: Gaylor Atkins, bgatkins1@verizon.net

Mt. Nebo Baptist Church

African Americans held worship services in a nearby railroad toolshed during the Civil War. Jesse Dungee, later a member of the Virginia House of Delegates, organized the congregation (now known as Mt. Nebo) in 1866. The Gothic Revival-style sanctuary was built in 1887. During a boycott of West Point's segregated schools in 1952, attorney Oliver W. Hill told a large audience here that challenging the separate-but-equal doctrine was "worth going to jail for." Eight parents were later convicted of violating Virginia's compulsory school attendance law. In 1957 the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals ruled in *Dobbins v. Commonwealth* that this application of the law was unconstitutional.

Sponsor: Philip Bradley

Locality: King William County

Proposed Location: 1224 Kirby St., West Point

Sponsor Contact: Philip Bradley, Philip@reidtoriangroup.com

Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church

At the end of the 18th century, African Americans constituted almost half the congregation at Alexandria's Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church. With support from Trinity, black members founded a separate congregation early in the 1830s, and their sanctuary was completed here in 1834. The church, initially known as Davis Chapel, was renamed in 1845 for Bishop Robert Richford Roberts, a former pastor of Trinity. Members quickly established a Sunday school that offered general education and religious training. Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington lectured here late in the 19th century. The sanctuary was remodeled in the Gothic Revival style in 1894.

Sponsor: Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church

Locality: Alexandria

Proposed Location: 606 A South Washington Street

Sponsor Contact: Robert Hicks, Rdh6302@verizon.net

Mount Calvary Cemetery Complex

African Americans purchased land about a quarter mile southwest of here in 1879 to establish Mt. Olive Cemetery. The property adjoins a potter's field thought to be a burial place for victims of the yellow fever epidemic of 1855. Later, Mt. Calvary and Fishers Hill Cemeteries were founded nearby, creating a four-cemetery complex. Buried there are many community leaders, including Baptist minister John M. Armistead, educators Ida Barbour and I. C. Norcom, and journalist Jeffrey T. Wilson. Also interred there are formerly enslaved persons, Civil War-era U.S. Colored Troops, late-19th-century elected officials, and veterans of World Wars I and II.

Sponsor: VDOT

Locality: Portsmouth

Proposed Location: corner of Des Moines and South Streets

Sponsor Contact: Kenneth Stuck, kenneth.stuck@vdot.virginia.gov

George W. Carver High School

African American residents of Warwick County campaigned for new public schools to replace inadequate, overcrowded facilities in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1949 the county opened Carver High School, constructed here at a cost of more than \$500,000. The 20-classroom consolidated school served students in grades 1-11, with grade 12 added in 1955. In July 1958 Carver was incorporated into the Newport News school system. Homer L. Hines, the school's only principal, inspired students to high achievement. Carver High School closed in 1971 as part of the city's desegregation plan, and the building became an intermediate school.

Sponsor: Carver High School Alumni Association

Locality: Newport News

Proposed Location: 6158 Jefferson Ave.

Sponsor Contact: Helen Tillery, Htillery2@yahoo.com

Booker T. Washington High School

The Suffolk School Board opened Booker T. Washington School here in 1913 to serve African American children in grades 1-8. Ninth grade was added during the 1920s. Overcrowding prompted the construction of a larger building here in 1925. Black residents successfully campaigned for the addition of a senior high curriculum, and the first high school class graduated in 1937. Administrator J. F. Peele Jr. provided leadership for four decades. Again overcrowded, the school relocated to a new building one and a half miles east in 1953. The last high school class graduated in 1969. Washington became an intermediate school and later an elementary school.

Sponsor: Booker T. Washington High School Alumni Association

Locality: Suffolk

Proposed Location: 201 Lee Street

Sponsor Contact: Julia Bradley, msjcmb@aol.com

Prince Hall Masons in Virginia

In March 1775, a Masonic lodge attached to the British army initiated Prince Hall and 14 other free black men as Freemasons in Massachusetts. Meeting provisionally as African Lodge No. 1, the black Freemasons gained full privileges in 1787 when they organized African Lodge No. 459 under a charter from the Grand Lodge of England. The first affiliated lodge in Virginia was established in Alexandria in Feb. 1845. After the Civil War, two rival Grand Lodges operated in Virginia. On 15 Dec. 1875, these two Grand Lodges met at First Baptist Church—Harrison Street in Petersburg and united to form the present-day Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Virginia, Free and Accepted Masons, Inc.

Sponsor: Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Virginia

Locality: Petersburg

Proposed Location: 236 Harrison Street

Sponsor Contact: Charles Jones, cj7949@verizon.net

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