

Department of Historic Resources

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Contact:

Randy Jones

Department of Historic Resources

540.578-3031 (cell)

Randy.Jones@dhr.virginia.gov.

STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKER
"HIGH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH"
TO BE DEDICATED IN DANVILLE

—High Street Church, tracing back to 1865, was a base for Civil Rights organizers in early 1960s and hosted the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who spoke there in 1963—

—The marker's text is reproduced below—

RICHMOND – A state historical marker issued by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources that highlights the history of High Street Baptist Church and its role during the civil rights movement of the early 1960s when the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke there will be dedicated to kick-off the church's 150th anniversary.

The dedication and unveiling ceremony for the marker will begin at 10 a.m., Wednesday, March 18, at High Street Baptist Church, located at 630 High Street, in Danville. The event is open to the public.

Speakers will include Dorothy O. Harris, a teacher in Danville in the early 1960s who became a civil rights volunteer and recording secretary at the church during those years; Danville Mayor Sherman Saunders, who will present a Certificate of Recognition on behalf of the city to church officials; and Jim Hare of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Jerome Morris Jr. will provide a musical contribution during the ceremony.

Following the dedication ceremony, a public reception will be held at the church.

High Street Baptist Church traces its founding to 1865 when “emancipated African Americans withdrew from First Baptist Church, where they had worshipped from the balcony, and founded a congregation later known as High Street Baptist Church,” in the marker’s words.

Church members erected their first sanctuary in 1873, but “fire destroyed that structure and its replacement, constructed in 1878,” the marker states. The current Romanesque Revival-style church was constructed in 1901.

During the 1960s the church became a hub for non-violent activities and protests against segregation and discrimination through the leadership of its pastor Lendell W. Chase, then president of the Danville Christian Progressive Association. In July 1963, the church hosted Dr. King, who in the following month gave his now famous “I Have a Dream” address on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

The City of Danville, the sponsor of the marker, is covering its manufacturing costs. The sign was authorized by the Department of Historic Resources last December.

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 Danville.

Text of the marker:

High Street Baptist Church Q-100

In 1865 emancipated African Americans withdrew from First Baptist Church, where they had worshiped from the balcony, and founded a congregation later known as High Street Baptist Church. Members erected their first sanctuary here in 1873. Fire destroyed that structure and its replacement, constructed in 1878. The present Romanesque Revival church was built in 1901. High Street Baptist served as a base for organizers of the local civil rights movement and hosted the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963. Pastor Lendell W. Chase was president of the Danville Christian Progressive Association, which coordinated nonviolent protests against segregation and discrimination.