Department of Historic Resources

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For Immediate Release
May 15, 2015

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STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKER
"THAXTON TRAIN WRECK"
TO BE DEDICATED IN BEDFORD COUNTY

— Historical marker recalls 1889 train wreck, one of the worst in Virginia; 18 people perished—

—The marker's text is reproduced below—

RICHMOND – A state historical marker issued by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources that recalls one of the worst train accidents in Virginia history, in which at least 18 people died, will be dedicated next week.

The dedication and unveiling ceremony for the marker will begin at 11 a.m., Tuesday, May 19, at the marker's location at 5013 West Lynchburg Salem Turnpike (US 460), just west of Thaxton, in Bedford County. The event is open to the public.

Speakers will include historian Michael E. Jones, author of *Lost at Thaxton: The Dramatic True Story of Virginia's Forgotten Train Wreck*; Allan Jones, sponsor of the marker, who will discuss the impact of the train wreck on the Cleveland, Tennessee; and Michael Pulice of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

The Thaxton wreck occurred on July 2, 1889, after a heavy storm flooded nearby Wolf Creek which, in turn, saturated an embankment known as Newman's Fill. "About 1:25 a.m.," in the words of the marker, "[Newman's Fill] collapsed under the weight of Norfolk & Western Passenger Train Number Two, heading east from Roanoke. The train plunged into the washout."

The wreck left surviving passengers stranded for hours, according to the marker, "while passengers inside died in a fire that ripped through the wreckage." As a result, at least 18 people died in one of the worst railroad accidents in Virginia history.

Among those who died were three young prominent residents of Cleveland, Tennessee, where a monument was eventually erected to honor the deceased.

The "1889 Thaxton Train Wreck" marker was sponsored by the Allan Jones Foundation, which covered the cost of the marker's manufacture. The sign was approved by the Department of Historic Resources in September 2014.

"The Thaxton crash has been called one of Cleveland's most infamous tragedies because three prominent citizens were killed—William Steed, John Hardwick and William Marshall," said Allan Jones, a philanthropist and founder and CEO of Check Into Cash. "When I learned no historical marker had ever been placed at the site, I wanted to get this changed as soon as possible."

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.

Text of the marker:

1889 Thaxton Train Wreck

On 2 July 1889, a heavy storm turned nearby Wolf Creek into a raging river. The railroad embankment known as Newman's Fill, just north of here, became saturated. About 1:25 AM, it collapsed under the weight of Norfolk & Western Passenger Train Number Two, heading east from Roanoke. The train plunged into the washout. Survivors remained stranded for hours, while passengers trapped inside died in a fire that ripped through the wreckage. At least 18 people perished in one of Virginia's worst railroad accidents. In

Cleveland, Tennessee, a monument was erected to honor three young residents killed in the wreck.

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