

Department of Historic Resources

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STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKER
HONORING PIEDMONT BLUES GUITARIST JOHN CEPHAS
TO BE DEDICATED

*— Historical marker will be dedicated in Town of Bowling Green;
dedication will be followed by performers playing Piedmont blues on
Courthouse Lawn—*

—The marker's text is reproduced below—

RICHMOND – A state historical marker issued by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources honoring internationally known, legendary blues guitarist John Cephas will be dedicated later this month during a ceremony in the Town of Bowling Green.

The dedication and unveiling ceremony will begin at 11 a.m., Saturday, June 21, at the marker's location at the intersection of Broaddus Avenue and Main Street in Bowling Green.

Speakers at the event will include representatives from the Town of Bowling Green, the Bowling Green Arts Commission, and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Distinguished guests attending the ceremony will include members of the Cephas family.

The dedication will be followed by a performance from musicians who will pay tribute to Cephas and the Piedmont blues style he pioneered and perfected during a long career that took him to venues throughout the world. The tribute begins at 1 p.m. on the lawn of the historic Caroline County Courthouse on Main Street in Bowling Green.

Next year, the Bowling Green Arts Commission will launch an annual “Bowling Green John Cephas’ Piedmont Blues Festival.”

Born in Washington D.C. in 1930, Cephas was a long-time resident of the Bowling Green area in Caroline County. “He was influenced at an early age by his mother’s singing, and a cousin taught him the highly syncopated and danceable guitar style now known as Piedmont Blues, which employs a complex, finger-picking approach,” in the marker’s words.

“Cephas performed at rural dance parties and as a gospel singer, developing his rich voice. He, and harmonica master Phil Wiggins, made numerous awarding-winning albums and performed all over the world,” the marker reads.

In 1987, Cephas earned a W.C. Handy Award as Blues Entertainers of the Year. And in 1989 he received a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Department of Historic Resources sponsored and approved the marker for Cephas in 2009, the year he died. As the sponsor, the agency covered the manufacturing costs of the sign through a federal highway grant.

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 2,400 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:

**John Cephas
1930–2009**

Born in Washington D.C., John Cephas grew up there and in Caroline County. He was influenced at an early age by his mother's singing, and a cousin taught him the highly syncopated and danceable guitar style now known as Piedmont Blues, which employs a complex, finger-picking approach. Cephas performed at rural dance parties and as a gospel singer, developing his rich voice. He, and harmonica master Phil Wiggins, made numerous award-winning albums and performed all over the world, earning the W. C. Handy Award as Blues Entertainers of the Year in 1987. Cephas received the coveted National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1989.

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