

Department of Historic Resources

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For Immediate Release

August 13, 2015

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STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKERS

"AUGUSTA STONE CHURCH" &

"THE REV. JOHN CRAIG (1709-1774)"

TO BE DEDICATED

—Augusta County historical markers recall the establishment of Presbyterianism in Virginia's western frontier in 1740s and the life of Rev. John Craig—

—The markers' texts are reproduced below—

RICHMOND – Two new state historical markers issued by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources that highlight the oldest Presbyterian church in continuous use west of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Irish immigrant pastor who helped establish Presbyterianism in the Shenandoah Valley will be dedicated this weekend.

The dedication and unveiling ceremony for the markers will begin at 11:15 a.m., Sunday, August 16, at their location alongside Augusta Stone Presbyterian Church, located about five miles north of Staunton just off U.S. 11 on Old Stone Church Road, near the community of Fort Defiance.

Speakers during the ceremony will include Linda Petzke, president of the Augusta County Historical Society; Bill Blair, a retired professor at James Madison University; Randy Covington, a retired professor at Bridgewater College; and Randy Jones of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

The ceremony is open to the public and a reception in the church fellowship hall will follow the dedication.

The marker titled “Augusta Stone Church” recounts that the church opened in January of 1749, replacing “a log meetinghouse built shortly after the congregation’s founding in 1740.” During the Seven Years’ War, the church’s pastor John Craig and its members “fortified the structure with log palisades and watchtowers to defend against Indian attack,” the sign reads.

Those modifications to the church “inspired the name Fort Defiance adopted by the community that grew around the church,” in the marker’s words.

Augusta Stone Church was “enlarged and remodeled in 1921-22 and a new wing was added in 1956,” the marker concludes.

A complementary historical marker discusses the life of the Rev. John Craig, who was born in County Antrim, Ireland, in 1709. In 1734, Craig immigrated to North America and was ordained a Presbyterian pastor in 1740 of two churches in the Shenandoah Valley, Augusta Stone and Tinkling Spring.

Craig “traveled the backcountry to preach, baptize settlers, and organize congregations,” in the words of the historical marker. He is buried in the Augusta Stone Church cemetery along with his wife, Isabella, and their six children.

This year marks the 275th anniversary of the founding of congregation that built Augusta Stone Presbyterian Church. The church sponsored both historical markers and covered the costs of their manufacture. The Virginia Board of Historic Resources, which must authorize all new and replacement state historical markers, approved both signs in March of this year.

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.

Texts of the markers:

Augusta Stone Church

The Augusta Stone Church, Virginia's oldest Presbyterian church in continuous use west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, opened on 22 Jan. 1749. It replaced a log meetinghouse built shortly after the congregation's founding in 1740. At the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, Pastor John Craig and members of the church fortified the structure with log palisades and watchtowers to defend against Indian attack. This defensive position inspired the name Fort Defiance adopted by the community that grew around the church. The building was enlarged and remodeled in 1921-22, and a new wing was added in 1956.

The Rev. John Craig (1709-1774)

John Craig, born in County Antrim, Ireland, and educated in Edinburgh, Scotland, immigrated to America in 1734. Ordained pastor in 1740 of the two churches later known as Augusta Stone and Tinkling Spring, Craig was Virginia's first settled Presbyterian minister west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He led the construction of Augusta Stone Church and its defensive reinforcement. Craig, an Old Side minister who resisted the Great Awakening, traveled the backcountry to preach, baptize settlers, and organize congregations. With his wife, Isabella, he established a farm and raised six children. The Craigs are buried in the cemetery to the east.

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