

Department of Historic Resources

(www.dhr.virginia.gov)

For Immediate Release

July 16, 2015

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STATE RETIRES TWO HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKERS IN DINWIDDIE COUNTY; ANOTHER COUNTY MARKER TO BE REFURBISHED BY VDOT

***— The Virginia Department of Historic Resources seeks sponsors
to update and replace “retired” historical markers that pertain to
events from the Revolutionary War and Civil War —***

RICHMOND – Residents of Dinwiddie County may have noticed three longstanding state historical markers in the county – “Chamberlain’s Bed,” “Campaign of 1781” and “Where Hill Fell” – are no longer standing.

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) in consultation with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), which partners with DHR on the marker program by installing and maintaining signs, has retired two of the signs, “Chamberlain’s Bed” and “Campaign of 1781.” The “Chamberlain’s Bed” marker had sustained a serious crack, while the “Campaign of 1781” marker was weathered and deteriorated. In each case, the marker’s text offered only minimal information about the event it described.

The third sign, “Where Hill Fell,” which highlights the death of Confederate General A. P. Hill in April 1865, will be refurbished and repainted by VDOT, and be re-erected once that is completed.

The two damaged markers date back to the first decade of the historical marker program, which began in 1927 with the first markers erected along U.S. 1. The “Chamberlain’s Bed” marker was erected in 1929. The “Campaign of 1781” was erected in 1934.

During those early years, historical markers provided far less information than they do today, when the average marker text is around 100 words. For instance, in its entirety the “Campaign of 1781,” which relays an event from the Revolutionary War, merely states in 17 words, “The British cavalryman Tarleton, returning to Cornwallis from a raid to Bedford, passed near here, July, 1781.”

The “Chamberlain’s Bed” sign is nearly as terse at 40 words. It reads: “That stream flows into Stony Creek a mile west. On March 31, 1865, Pickett and W.H.F. Lee, coming from Five Forks forced a passage of Chamberlain’s Bed in the face of Sheridan’s troops, who were driven back to Dinwiddie Courthouse.”

Rather than spend VDOT funds to make extensive repairs to signs that had limited educational value, DHR agreed to retire them and use the opportunity to find sponsors for modern, updated replacement signs that can provide more information about the respective topics of the two markers. “To be clear,” said Jennifer Loux, DHR historian and coordinator of the marker program, “the *topics* are not being retired—just the physical signs.”

DHR encourages any organization or individual who would like to sponsor a replacement marker for either sign to contact DHR’s Jennifer Loux at (804) 482-6089 or by email at Jennifer.Loux@dhr.virginia.gov.

In 1976 the state stopped funding the historical marker program, after which new markers – with some exceptions -- have typically required sponsorship by way of individuals or organizations to cover a sign’s manufacturing costs. Although in recent years the General Assembly has approved funds for a full-time position for a marker program historian and coordinator, by and large only rarely is there state funding to create new markers.

Sponsorship covers the \$1,630 costs to manufacture a marker, which is cast by a foundry in Marietta, Ohio. DHR also asks that sponsors work with the department as well in coordinating a dedication ceremony for a newly minted and erected marker.

The process for developing a replacement marker is the same as for new marker. It entails that a sponsor work with DHR to craft a new text that meets the modern marker program's standards for historical scholarship and educational value. Each proposed text is reviewed by DHR's internal editorial committee and then is presented to the Virginia Board of Historic Resources, which must approve all state markers, at one of its quarterly meetings. With the board's approval and a sponsor's funds, the marker can then go into production.

In the past year, four new markers have been erected in Dinwiddie County. They are "Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley (1818-1907)," "Winfield Scott (1786-1866)," "Origins of the 4-H in Virginia," and "Dinwiddie Normal Industrial School (Southside High School)."

More information about the historical marker program and an online database of the approximately 2,500 historical markers currently dotting Virginia's roadsides can be accessed on the DHR website at www.dhr.virginia.gov.

As a partner with DHR, VDOT performs routine maintenance on historical markers – except in jurisdictions outside its authority. VDOT typically inspects the signs and their supporting poles for erosion, rust, or other indications of deterioration or damage. The agency periodically repaints signs as needed. It also determines the best places to locate new markers to ensure that they are installed in safe and secure locations.

In 2017, the historical marker program celebrates its 90th anniversary. It is believed to be the oldest state historical marker program in the nation.

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