

## Department of Historic Resources

([www.dhr.virginia.gov](http://www.dhr.virginia.gov))

**For Immediate Release**

July 3, 2014

### **Contact:**

Randy Jones

Department of Historic Resources;

540-578-3031; [Randy.Jones@dhr.virginia.gov](mailto:Randy.Jones@dhr.virginia.gov)

## **EIGHT NEW STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKERS APPROVED**

*—Markers cover topics in counties of Fairfax, Mecklenburg, and Shenandoah, cities of Charlottesville, Lexington, Petersburg (2), and Richmond—*

**[Note: The full text for each marker is reproduced at the end of this release.]**

RICHMOND – The adoption by Virginia’s General Assembly of a statute establishing religious freedom, the life of a free African American who became the first president of the African nation of Liberia, the battlefield promotion a Civil War hero, and the founding of a college fraternity in 1865 inspired by Robert E. Lee are among the topics covered in eight new state historical markers recently approved by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

The historical marker “The Old State Capitol,” proposed for installation in **Richmond**’s Shockoe Slip, recalls that in 1780 “Virginia’s capital was moved from Williamsburg to Richmond to increase its accessibility and avert British attack by sea.”

The marker highlights the site where commercial buildings once stood in which the General Assembly met in 1788. “Here,” in the marker’s words, “Thomas Jefferson’s Virginia Statute for Establishing Religious Freedom, which decoupled religion and government, was adopted through the extraordinary efforts of Del. James Madison.” The sign’s text adds that the law served as a model for similar statutes in other states and “laid the foundation for the religion clauses of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.”

“The Old State Capitol” marker is sponsored by the First Freedom Center.

A marker slated for **Petersburg** will recall the life of Joseph Jenkins Roberts, who “was born free in Norfolk” and was elected in 1847 the “first president of Liberia.” Before moving to Liberia with his family in 1829, Roberts “worked in a barbershop at Wythe and Sycamore Streets” in Petersburg and “gained an education by reading extensively,” according to the sign’s approved text.

Roberts later returned to the U.S. on several diplomatic visits and helped found Liberia College (now the University of Liberia) and was its president.

Another marker to rise in **Petersburg** will highlight the “on the spot” battlefield promotion of Civil War hero Col. Joshua L. Chamberlain, a native of Maine who fought for the Union army. The promotion occurred in June 1864 after Chamberlain “received a near-fatal wound while leading a Union brigade in a charge against Confederate works defending Petersburg,” the marker’s text reads. General Ulysses S. Grant promoted Chamberlain to Brig. Gen. of Volunteers for “gallant conduct.”

“Chamberlain returned to duty in November and was wounded again in March 1865,” according to the marker. During the surrender at Appomattox the following month, “he commanded the ceremony at which the Army of Northern Virginia formally surrendered its arms.” Chamberlain served as governor of Maine from 1867 to 1871 and received the Medal of Honor in 1893.

The Chamberlain marker is sponsored by Dean Clegg, a Rochester, NH, resident and a guide at the Chamberlain House Museum in Brunswick, ME, according to a recent article in the *Bangor Daily News*.

A marker to be erected in **Lexington** will highlight the founding of Kappa Alpha Order in 1865 at Washington College – today’s Washington and Lee University. “The fraternity held its first meetings on campus, at the Lexington Hotel, and at the Ann Smith Academy,” the marker will read. “Members modeled their organization on the gentlemanly conduct they believed was best exemplified by Robert E. Lee, the college president.”

The Sigma Sigma Sigma Sorority and its national headquarters will also be honored with a new marker in **Shenandoah County**. Founded in 1898 at the State Female Normal School – now Longwood University -- in Farmville, Tri Sigma is headquartered in the Mabel Lee Walton House in Woodstock. “The Walton family built the house in 1914, the year after Mabel Lee Walton became Tri Sigma’s third and ultimately longest-serving national president,” according to the marker’s approved text. Mabel served as president for 34 years. “Tri Sigma’s philanthropic efforts, including a campaign to eradicate polio in the 1950s, have aided hospitalized children throughout the country,” the marker concludes.

Of the three other state historical markers approved by DHR’s Board of Historic Resources in June, two deal with events during the Civil War.

In **Fairfax County**, the sign “Fields of Fire” will highlight the early Gettysburg Campaign and the actions of the Union XII Corps, which camped near Fairfax Court House on June 17, 1863, after passing through the smoke and heat created by fires in dry fields and woods. Departing the encampment at daybreak on June 18, the corps “ate breakfast at Hunter’s Mill and halted by 11 a.m. because of extreme heat, 99 degrees in the shade,” according to the marker text.

In **Charlottesville**, a historical marker will commemorate William F. Gordon Jr. and Enderly, the circa-1859 Greek Revival-style home built by Gordon, who served as clerk

of the Virginia House of Delegates from 1859 to 1865. “He was temporary secretary of the convention that met in Richmond in 1861 to debate Virginia’s secession from the Union,” in the marker’s words. “As special emissary of the convention, he delivered a copy of the Ordinance of Secession to Confederate President Jefferson Davis in Montgomery, Alabama.”

In **Mecklenburg County**, a marker was approved for West End High School. The original West End High School was established in 1935 with the assistance of the Jeanes Fund, which supported educational efforts in rural African-American communities. “In 1951, the U.S. government purchased the West End property for the development of Buggs Island Lake,” the sign will note. The county opened a new West End High School in 1953, which still stands today.

The West End marker is sponsored by the school’s national alumni association.

The Virginia highway marker program, which began in 1927 with erection of the first historical markers along U.S. Rte. 1, is considered the oldest such program in the nation. Currently there are more than 2,500 official state markers, most of which are maintained by Virginia Department of Transportation, except in those localities outside of VDOT’s authority.

The manufacturing cost of each new highway marker is covered by its sponsor.

More information about the Historical Highway Marker Program is available on the website of the Department of Historic Resources at <http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/>.

### **Full Text of Markers:**

*(Please note that locations are only proposed; they have yet to be confirmed with VDOT or other officials in jurisdictions not overseen by VDOT; also, some texts may be slightly modified before installation.)*

#### **West End High School**

Just to the east is the former West End High School, which served African Americans during the segregation era. With the help of Matilda M. Booker, Mecklenburg County’s Jeanes Fund supervisor of education for blacks, local parents established the school in Clarksville in 1935. In 1951, the U.S. government purchased the West End property for the development of Buggs Island Lake. Using state funds set aside for a major school-construction initiative under Gov. John S. Battle, the county built a new W.E.H.S., which opened here in 1953. The last class graduated in 1969, when the building became a junior high school.

**Sponsor:** John Royster, President, West End High School National Alumni Association

**Locality:** Skipwith, Mecklenburg County

**Proposed Location:** Corner of SR 698 (Middle School Road) and State Highway 49, approximately 7 miles north of Clarksville, Virginia

### **Mabel Lee Walton and Sigma Sigma Sigma**

The Mabel Lee Walton House at 225 N. Muhlenberg Street is the national headquarters of Sigma Sigma Sigma Sorority, founded in 1898 at the State Female Normal School at Farmville (now Longwood University). The Walton family built the house in 1914, the year after Mabel Lee Walton became Tri Sigma's third and ultimately longest-serving national president. During her 34 years as leader and almost 70 years of membership, she promoted ideals of integrity and service. Tri Sigma's philanthropic efforts, including a campaign to eradicate polio in the 1950s, have aided hospitalized children throughout the country.

**Sponsor:** Marcia Cutter, Executive Director, Sigma Sigma Sigma, Inc.

**Locality:** Woodstock, Shenandoah County

**Proposed Location:** Corner of Main St. (Route 11) and Locust St.

### **Joshua L. Chamberlain—Promoted “on the spot”**

In this vicinity on 18 June 1864 Col. Joshua L. Chamberlain received a near-fatal wound while leading a Union brigade in a charge against Confederate works defending Petersburg. Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant promoted him to Brig. Gen. of Vols. “on the spot” for “gallant conduct.” Chamberlain returned to duty in November and was wounded again in March 1865. On 12 April at Appomattox he commanded the ceremony at which the Army of Northern Virginia formally surrendered its arms. He was governor of Maine from 1867 to 1871 and received the Medal of Honor in 1893.

**Sponsor:** Dean Clegg of Rochester, New Hampshire

**Locality:** Petersburg

**Proposed Location:** Corner of East South Blvd and Warren Street

### **Enderly**

Built ca. 1859 in the Greek Revival style, Enderly was the home of William F. Gordon Jr. during the 1860s. Gordon served as clerk of the Virginia House of Delegates from 1859 to 1865. He was temporary secretary of the convention that met in Richmond in 1861 to debate Virginia's secession from the Union. As special emissary of the convention, he delivered a copy of the Ordinance of Secession to Confederate President Jefferson Davis in Montgomery, Alabama. From 1861 to 1862, Gordon was a private in the 19th Virginia Infantry. He represented Louisa County in the House of Delegates (1875–1877).

**Sponsor:** David Christopher Lewis

**Locality:** City of Charlottesville, Virginia

**Proposed Location:** 603 Watson Avenue

### **Founding of Kappa Alpha Order**

One half mile east, students at Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) founded Kappa Alpha Order in 1865. The fraternity held its first meetings on campus, at the Lexington Hotel, and at the Ann Smith Academy. Members modeled their organization on the gentlemanly conduct they believed was best exemplified by Robert E.

Lee, the college president. New chapters took root across the South and beyond. Kappa Alpha Order's philanthropic efforts have aided the Muscular Dystrophy Association. In 2004 the fraternity moved its National Administrative Office here to Mulberry Hill, which is listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.

**Sponsor:** Kappa Alpha Order and Kappa Alpha Order Educational Foundation

**Locality:** Lexington

**Proposed Location:** 416 W. Nelson Street, on the corner of Frank Parsons Way and Route 60

### **The Old State Capitol**

In 1780, Virginia's capital was moved from Williamsburg to Richmond to increase its accessibility and avert British attack by sea. On this corner, in commercial buildings confiscated from Loyalists, the General Assembly met until 1788. Here Thomas Jefferson's Virginia Statute for Establishing Religious Freedom, which decoupled religion and government, was adopted through the extraordinary efforts of Del. James Madison. This law, the model for many other states, laid the foundation for the religion clauses of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Here, too, Virginia relinquished its claim to the Northwest Territory and began its contentious debate over ratification of the federal Constitution.

**Sponsor:** Randolph W. Wyckoff, First Freedom Center

**Locality:** City of Richmond

**Proposed Location:** Northwest corner of the intersection of South 14<sup>th</sup> and East Cary Streets

### **Fields of Fire**

On 17 June 1863, early in the Gettysburg Campaign, the Union XII Corps camped just north of here. The men left Fairfax Court House at daybreak, ate breakfast at Hunter's Mill, and halted by 11 AM because of extreme heat, 99 degrees in the shade. Devastated by sunstroke casualties two days earlier during the grueling 25-mile-long march north, the corps continued to suffer. Brig. Gen. Alpheus S. Williams, the First Division commander, noted on the 17th that "the dry old grass of the fields and woods got on fire, and filled the air with smoke and additional heat."

**Sponsor:** Hunter Mill Defense League

**Locality:** Fairfax County

**Proposed Location:** Just north of the intersection of Water Falls Lane and Hunter Mill Road (Route 674), on the northwest side of Hunter Mill Road.

### **Joseph Jenkins Roberts (1809-1876)**

Joseph Jenkins Roberts, first president of Liberia, was born free in Norfolk. After moving to Petersburg, he worked in a barbershop at Wythe and Sycamore Streets and gained an education by reading extensively. In 1829 Roberts and his family sailed for Liberia, a settlement of the American Colonization Society. There he became a prosperous

merchant. Elected president when Liberia won independence, he served from 1848 to 1856 and again from 1872 to 1876. He made several diplomatic visits to the U.S. A founder of Liberia College (now the University of Liberia), which opened in 1863, Roberts was its president until 1876.

**Sponsor:** DHR

**Locality:** Petersburg

**Proposed Location:** Near the intersection of Wythe and Sycamore Streets