

Department of Historic Resources

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For Immediate Release

October 8, 2014

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NINE NEW STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKERS APPROVED

—Markers cover topics in the counties of Accomack, Albemarle, Bedford, Henry, James City (2), Loudoun, Lunenburg and Pittsylvania

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

RICHMOND – A fort in the Chesapeake Bay where formerly enslaved men were trained as marines in the British Navy, the bright-leaf tobacco barns of Southside Virginia, French military assistance to the American cause during the Revolutionary War, and one of the worst train wrecks in the commonwealth are among the topics covered in nine historical markers recently approved by the state’s Department of Historic Resources.

“Fort Albion,” a historical marker slated for Accomack County’s Tangier Island, recalls that during the War of 1812, “British forces commanded by Adm. Sir George Cockburn established Fort Albion on the southern tip” of the island. “The fort, which included barracks, a hospital, a church, parade grounds, and gardens, housed hundreds of African Americans who had gained their freedom by escaping to the British,” the sign will read. Many African American men who ended up on the island “enlisted as Colonial Marines and received military training” at the fort.

From Fort Albion the British launched raids up and down the Chesapeake Bay, including those on Washington, D.C., and Baltimore. The British abandoned the fort in 1815 and today it is an archaeological site under the waters off of Tangier Island, which is located about 15 miles from Virginia’s Eastern Shore peninsula.

A historical marker for Pittsylvania County, “Bright-Leaf Tobacco Barns,” will highlight the emergence of these buildings in Southside Virginia during the latter decades of the 19th century, when growers began curing tobacco leaves using wood stoves. “Inside these barns,” the sign will read, “tobacco leaves were hung from sticks that rested on horizontal tier-poles,” and heat distributed through the barn by flues or ducts “cured the leaves while protecting them from smoke.” The barns “fell into disuse with the introduction of bulk-curing barns in the 1970s,” the sign’s text concludes.

The marker is sponsored by Preservation Virginia, which is also leading efforts in Southside Virginia to repair tobacco barns and raise awareness of the region’s tobacco heritage.

Two historical markers to rise in James City County will recall “French Troops at Jamestown” and a visit to the U.S. by the Marquis de Lafayette many decades after he fought on behalf of American independence during the Revolutionary War.

“Lafayette’s intense advocacy of the American cause,” the sign will read, “had convinced French King Louis XVI to send troops and ships, which proved crucial to the American victory at Yorktown” during the Revolutionary War. The sign will also note that on October 22, 1824, Lafayette’s itinerary brought him close to Jamestown on his travels from Williamsburg to Norfolk. During the war, Lafayette commanded American troops during the Battle of Green Spring, which took place in James City County on July 6, 1781.

The “French Troops at Jamestown” sign will relay that on September 2, 1781, roughly 3,000 French troops arrived at Jamestown on their way to the siege of Yorktown. The next month, French troops under the command of the Comte de Rochambeau “captured the strategically important Redoubt Number 9 at Yorktown,” according to the sign’s approved text. The American and French victory over the British at the Battle of Yorktown ended the Revolutionary War.

The two signs are sponsored by the James City County Historical Commission.

One of the worst train wrecks in Virginia will be commemorated with a historical marker in Bedford County.

The “1889 Thaxton Train Wreck” marker will recall that a heavy storm on July 2, 1889, resulted in flooding of a creek that “saturated” a railroad “embankment known as Newman’s Fill.” Early the following morning around “1:25 a.m., [the embankment] collapsed under the weight of Norfolk & Western Passenger Train Number Two, heading east from Roanoke,” the marker will read. “The train plunged into the washout,” stranding survivors for hours. Many “passengers trapped inside died in a fire that ripped through the wreckage.” Eighteen people were killed in the accident.

The marker, slated for installation along U.S. 460/221 near Thaxton, is sponsored by the Allan Jones Foundation.

The four remaining historical markers also approved in September by DHR’s Historic Resources Board are—

- “Free State,” which honors an **Albemarle County** “community of free African Americans” that emerged at the end of the 1700s. It was founded by a free black woman, Amy Farrow, whose son, Zachariah Bowles, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, resided there and “married Critta Hemings of Monticello, younger sister of Sally Hemings,” the marker will read. The community gave rise to the Free State Colored School and the Central Relief Association. The marker is sponsored by the County of Albemarle.

- “Fair Oaks” will commemorate the circa-1881 **Loudoun County** home of Alexander Moore. Fair Oaks is a “vernacular interpretation of the Italianate architectural style,” the sign will read. The property was originally part of the Aldie Manor tract, whose owner Charles Fenton Mercer built nearby Aldie Mill. “From the 1830s to the 1970s, six generations of the Moore family owned and operated the mill, which created substantial wealth even in the difficult post–Civil War years,” the sign will read.
- “Chatmoss,” in **Henry County**, will highlight a former plantation, “one of about 50 Hairston family plantations in Virginia, North Carolina, and Mississippi,” according to the sign’s text. “Alcey and Samuel Harden Hairston received the 2,900-acre Chatmoss from Alcey’s parents, Samuel and Agnes Hairston, among the wealthiest couples in Virginia,” the according to the text. The Queen Anne-style plantation house at Chatmoss burned in 1928 and the property eventually gave rise in 1958 to Chatmoss Country Club, which is sponsoring the historical marker.
- “St. John’s Protestant Episcopal Church,” in **Lunenburg County**, will recall the church was consecrated in 1832. “The building burned in 1948,” according to the forthcoming marker. “Stained glass windows and communion silver were salvaged and later used at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Kenbridge,” the sign will read. The marker is sponsored by the Lunenburg County Historical Society.

The Virginia highway marker program, which began in 1927 with installation 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.)

Free State

Free State, a community of free African Americans, stood here. Its nucleus was a 224-acre tract that Amy Farrow, a free black woman, purchased in 1788. Her son Zachariah Bowles, a Revolutionary War veteran, lived here and married Critta Hemings of Monticello, younger sister of Sally Hemings. Free State residents farmed and practiced trades, accumulated personal property, and did business with local whites. The small community expanded after the Civil War and by early in the 20th century was home to

the Free State Colored School and the Central Relief Association, a local benevolent society.

Proposed Location: Corner of Belvedere Boulevard (Route 651) and Free State Road

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.

Proposed Location: near 5183 W. Lynchburg Salem Turnpike (U.S. Route 460/221), Thaxton

Bright-Leaf Tobacco Barns

By the latter decades of the 19th century, bright-leaf tobacco harvested across Southside Virginia was typically cured in hand-hewn log barns outfitted with wood-burning stoves. Inside these barns, tobacco leaves were hung from sticks that rested on horizontal tier-poles. Flues (or ducts) distributed heat, which cured the leaves while protecting them from smoke. The leaves were then stored in pack barns, graded for quality, and sent to auction. Flue-cure tobacco barns were retrofitted with oil and gas burners after World War II and fell into disuse with the introduction of bulk-curing barns in the 1970s.

Proposed Location: 10432 Route 29, Blairs, next to a restored bright-leaf tobacco barn

Fair Oaks

Built ca. 1881 as the home of Alexander Moore, Fair Oaks is a vernacular interpretation of the Italianate architectural style. Moore's property was originally part of the Aldie Manor tract owned by Charles Fenton Mercer, noted legislator and reformer, who built nearby Aldie Mill between 1807 and 1809. From the 1830s to the 1970s, six generations of the Moore family owned and operated the mill, which created substantial wealth even in the difficult post-Civil War years. Fair Oaks, with its intact complex of agricultural outbuildings, is listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.

Proposed Location: 23718 New Mountain Road, Aldie

Chatmoss

Chatmoss was one of about 50 Hairston family plantations in Virginia, North Carolina, and Mississippi. This vast network encompassed tens of thousands of acres and was worked by thousands of enslaved African Americans. Alcey and Samuel Harden Hairston received the 2,900-acre Chatmoss from Alcey's parents, Samuel and Agnes Hairston, among the wealthiest couples in Virginia. Samuel Harden Hairston died in 1870 when a gallery at the Virginia Capitol building collapsed. Fire consumed the original Queen Anne-style plantation house on 4 July 1928. An English country-style house replaced it but later burned. In 1958 Chatmoss Country Club was established on the site.

Proposed Location: 550 Mt. Olivet Road, Martinsville

St. John's Protestant Episcopal Church

Four and one half miles northwest stood St. John's Protestant Episcopal Church of Cumberland Parish, consecrated by Bishop William Meade on 30 June 1832. The Rev. Charles C. Taliaferro was its first minister. The church's predecessor, Flat Rock, had been built by 1760 on nearby Flat Rock Creek. With its recessed entrance and low-church chancel arrangement, St. John's reflected the distinctive style of church architecture then popular in Virginia. Lunenburg's Flat Rock Riflemen enlisted here on 20 May 1861. The building burned in 1948. Stained glass windows and communion silver were salvaged and later used at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Kenbridge.

Proposed Location: Intersection of SR 138, South Hill Road, and SR 612, St. John's Church Road (or intersection of Brickland Road and South Hill Road)

French Troops at Jamestown

On 2 Sept. 1781, about 3,000 French troops of the Gatinois, Agenois, and Touraine Regiments arrived at Jamestown from the West Indies. Commanded by the Marquis de Saint-Simon, they camped near here before participating in the siege of Yorktown. On 14 Oct., Gatinois soldiers and the Royal Deux-Ponts Regiment, under the Comte de Rochambeau, captured the strategically important Redoubt Number 9 at Yorktown. Following the British surrender, Rochambeau's troops established winter camps between the James and York Rivers. Three companies of the Royal Deux-Ponts Regiment occupied quarters near here. In July 1782, the French army departed for New England.

Proposed Location: Jamestown Road (Route 31), 0.35 miles from Jamestown Ferry

Lafayette's Visit

On behalf of a grateful nation, President James Monroe invited the Marquis de Lafayette to visit the United States, his adopted country. Lafayette's tour of all 24 states in 1824 and 1825 drew large crowds and sparked a renewal of patriotism. On 22 Oct. 1824, his itinerary brought him through this vicinity as he left Williamsburg for Norfolk. During the American Revolution, Lafayette's intense advocacy of the American cause had convinced French King Louis XVI to send troops and ships, which proved crucial to the American victory at Yorktown. Near here, Lafayette had commanded American troops at the Battle of Green Spring on 6 July 1781.

Proposed Location: Jamestown Road (Route 31), 0.35 miles from Jamestown Ferry

Fort Albion

In April 1814, during the War of 1812, British forces commanded by Adm. Sir George Cockburn established Fort Albion on the southern tip of Tangier Island. The fort, which included barracks, a hospital, a church, parade grounds, and gardens, housed hundreds of African Americans who had gained their freedom by escaping to the British. Many of them enlisted as Colonial Marines and received military training here. From this base the British launched raids up and down the Chesapeake Bay, including those on Washington, D.C., and Baltimore. In March 1815 they left the island and destroyed the fort. The site is now under water.

Sponsor: DHR

Proposed Location: TBD