

Department of Historic Resources

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11 NEW STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKERS APPROVED

—New markers cover topics in the counties of Brunswick, Fairfax (2), Fauquier, and Loudoun; and the cities of Alexandria, Bristol, Lynchburg (2), Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg—

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

RICHMOND – Among eleven new historical markers recently approved for placement along Virginia roads will be signs that highlight a diplomat who helped 1,200 Jews escape the Holocaust, a top-secret Army post that intercepted radio transmissions during World War II, the church where George Washington served on the vestry, and a 19th-century educator and reformer, Margaret Mercer.

In **Lynchburg** a marker will recall the career of James Rives Childs (1893-1987), a diplomat and author who spent his youth in the city. During World War I Childs served as a code breaker in France, and in 1923 began a 30-year diplomatic career. “During World War II, as charge d’affaires at the American Legation in Tangier, Morocco, Childs helped 1,200 Hungarian Jews obtain entry visas for Spanish Morocco and escape the Holocaust,” the marker will read. Childs received the Medal of Freedom in 1946.

Fauquier County will see the marker “Vint Hill Farms Station,” which recalls a top-secret U.S. Army post established there to intercept enemy radio transmissions during World War II. The Signal Corps’ cryptographic school was housed in barns at Vint Hill Farms. On November 10, 1943, Pvt. Leonard A. Mudloff is credited with intercepting a message from Oshima Hiroshi, the Japanese ambassador to Germany. The “Oshima intercept” detailed German coastal fortifications and other military assets and plans in western France, and thereby contributed crucially to the plans for the Allied invasion of Europe on D-Day in June, 1944.

In **Fairfax County**, George Washington’s service as a vestry member of Truro Parish will be remembered with the highway marker “The Washingtons at Pohick Church.” The Virginia General Assembly established Truro Parish in 1732. “Washington served several terms as church warden and is credited with leading the effort to replace the old Pohick Church,” the marker will read, “with a new building that opened” in 1774. Washington

donated furnishings to the church and attended services with his wife, Martha Dandridge Custis Washington, a devout Anglican.

The life of reformer Margaret Mercer (1791-1846) will be the focus of the marker “Belmont Chapel” to rise in **Loudoun County**. In 1836, Mercer purchased Belmont plantation, where she established a prominent academy for young women and waived tuition for those unable to afford it. An advocate of liberating enslaved African Americans and resettling them in Liberia, Mercer commissioned the construction of Belmont Chapel, which opened in 1841. “The chapel hosted Episcopal services and a Sunday school at which African Americans were educated alongside whites,” the marker will read. The chapel burned in the 1960s and today the site is occupied by St. David’s Episcopal Church, which opened in 1990.

Four other markers will commemorate individual religious buildings: Bethlehem Baptist Church in Fairfax County; First Baptist Church in Williamsburg; Third Baptist Church in Alexandria; and Reedy Creek Baptist Church in Brunswick County.

- The Bethlehem Baptist Church congregation traces its origins to services led by Samuel K. Taylor (ca. 1836-1912), an enslaved preacher who escaped a Caroline County plantation during the Civil War. After the war, he erected a church with lumber from dismantled Union army stables and established a school there. The congregation later erected a new sanctuary in 1884, and a brick church in 1930. The present-day sanctuary opened next door to the old church in 1993.
- First Baptist Church is home to one of the oldest continuous congregations organized by African Americans, and traces its origins to brush arbor meetings convened by 1776 at a plantation. The congregation moved to Williamsburg in 1856 and erected a brick sanctuary and opened a school for black students in the 1860s. Its longtime pastor the Rev. John Dawson served in the Senate of Virginia from 1874 to 1877. The congregation relocated to its present sanctuary in 1956, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke in 1962.
- Third Baptist Church, organized in 1864 by formerly enslaved African Americans, moved to its present-day church site in 1865 and in the 1890s the congregation built a Romanesque Revival sanctuary. The church’s first minister, the Rev. George Washington Parker, co-founded the First Select Colored School in 1862.
- Reedy Creek Baptist Church, founded by 1772 by Zachariah Thompson, a Baptist minister based in North Carolina, is the oldest-continuing Baptist church in Brunswick County. Before the Civil War,

many enslaved African Americans were accepted as members of the church but worshipped in a segregated balcony section. The present sanctuary opened in 1956, but remains of the original church exist on the property.

Elsewhere in Virginia, African American educational history during the early 20th century will be the focus of the “Megginson Rosenwald School” marker in **Lynchburg**. The school arose around 1923 in the Pleasant Valley community, then part of Campbell County. Former slave Albert Megginson (1831-1923) donated two acres for the school, a two-classroom building constructed with financial support from the local African American community, the county, and the Julius Rosenwald Fund.

A marker in **Bristol** will commemorate the Walnut Grove Plantation and Col. Robert Preston (1750-1833). During the Revolutionary War, Preston joined military expeditions against the Cherokee and Loyalists. Gov. Thomas Jefferson appointed Preston the first surveyor of Washington County in 1779, and Preston constructed his Walnut Grove residence by around 1800. Today it is among the oldest houses in Washington County.

In **Virginia Beach**, the Revolutionary era will be recalled with the marker “Skirmish at Kemp’s Landing,” which highlights a fight between a detachment of British soldiers on November 15, 1775 led by royal governor of Virginia Lord Dunmore to disrupt Princess Anne County militia men who had formed to resist British authority. Dunmore’s force, enlarged by African American volunteers who had escaped slavery, took a number of prisoners and scattered the Patriot militia. Dunmore’s success emboldened him to declare martial law and offer freedom to slaves willing to fight for the British.

All these new markers were authorized by the Virginia Board of Historic Resources during its public quarterly meeting convened on March 15 by the Department of Historic Resources.

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 some texts may be slightly modified before the manufacture and installation of the signs. Also locations proposed for each sign must be approved in consultation with VDOT or public works in jurisdictions outside VDOT authority.)

Belmont Chapel

Margaret Mercer (1791-1846), educator and reformer, purchased Belmont plantation in 1836. Here she ran a prominent academy for young women, waiving tuition for those unable to afford it. Best known for advocating the liberation of enslaved African Americans and promoting their resettlement in Liberia, Mercer also gained recognition for her book *Popular Lectures on Ethics* (1841). She commissioned the construction of Belmont Chapel, which opened here by 1841. The chapel hosted Episcopal services and a Sunday school at which African Americans were educated alongside whites. Long an important community center, the chapel burned in the 1960s. St. David's Episcopal Church opened here in 1990.

Sponsor: St. David's Episcopal Church and School

Locality: Loudoun County

Proposed Location: 43600 Russell Branch Pkwy.

Sponsor Contact: Ken Courter, marketing@sdlife.org

Bethlehem Baptist Church

This congregation traces its origins to services led by Samuel K. Taylor (ca. 1836-1912), an enslaved preacher who escaped from a plantation in Caroline County during the Civil War. He preached in private homes here in Gum Springs and, after the war, erected the first African American church on Fairfax County's segment of the Potomac Path, an old Indian trail and forerunner of U.S. Route 1. The sanctuary, built with lumber from dismantled Union army stables, also housed a school. The congregation erected a new sanctuary in 1884 and in 1930 built a brick church that hosted meetings of the local NAACP chapter and other organizations. The present sanctuary, built next door, opened in 1993.

Sponsor: Gum Springs Historical Society

Locality: Fairfax County

Proposed Location: 7836 Fordson Road

Sponsor Contact: Ronald Chase, gshsfeva@gmail.com and Tina Lucas, tina.m.lucas1@gmail.com

First Baptist Church

This church, home to one of the oldest continuous congregations organized by African Americans, traces its origins to brush arbor meetings held by 1776 at a nearby plantation. The congregation moved to a Williamsburg carriage house and in 1856 completed a brick sanctuary on Nassau Street. A school for black students opened there in the 1860s. The Rev. John Dawson, longtime pastor, served in the Senate of Virginia from 1874 to 1877. First Baptist moved into its sanctuary here in 1956. During the Civil Rights era, the Rev. David Collins led demonstrations for fair hiring practices and joined the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke here in 1962.

Sponsor: First Baptist Church

Locality: Williamsburg

Proposed Location: 727 Scotland St.

Sponsor Contact: David Lewes, dwlewe@wm.edu

James Rives Childs (1893-1987)

Diplomat and author J. Rives Childs lived here in his youth. During World War I, he served in the U.S. Army as a code breaker in France. After working for the American Relief Administration in the Balkans and the Soviet Union, he began a 30-year diplomatic career in 1923. During World War II, as chargé d'affaires at the American Legation in Tangier, Morocco, Childs helped 1,200 Hungarian Jews obtain entry visas for Spanish Morocco and escape the Holocaust. He received the Medal of Freedom in 1946. Childs was later U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia. He wrote the textbook *American Foreign Service* (1948) and was an authority on 18th-century scholar and adventurer Giacomo Casanova.

Sponsor: Jane Baber White

Locality: Lynchburg

Proposed Location: 911 Rivermont Ave.

Sponsor Contact: Jane Baber White, janebaberwhite@gmail.com

Megginson Rosenwald School

The Megginson School was built here ca. 1923 for African American students in the Pleasant Valley community, then part of Campbell County. Albert Megginson (1831-1923), formerly enslaved, purchased land in this area after the Civil War and later donated two acres for the school. The two-classroom building was constructed with financial support from local African Americans, the county, and the Julius Rosenwald Fund, which helped build more than 5,000 schools and supporting structures for black students in the rural South between 1917 and 1932. African American resident Wiley Gaines purchased school buses that transported students to this and other local segregated schools.

Sponsor: Cynthia E. Gaines

Locality: Lynchburg

Proposed Location: 136 Spinoza Circle

Sponsor Contact: Cynthia Gaines, Cynthia.Gaines@dhp.virginia.gov

Reedy Creek Baptist Church

By 1772, Zachariah Thompson, a Baptist minister based in North Carolina, had founded a church here on Reedy Creek. This is the oldest-continuing Baptist church in Brunswick County. Members later helped organize a number of other congregations in the region. Before the Civil War, many enslaved African Americans were accepted as members of Reedy Creek but worshiped from the balcony. A cemetery was established here early in the 20th century, and the present sanctuary opened in 1956. Remains of the original church exist on the property.

Sponsor: Reedy Creek Baptist Church

Locality: Brunswick County

Proposed Location: 1949 Reedy Creek Road

Sponsor Contact: Chad Patton, Chad.Patton@southside.edu

Skirmish at Kemp's Landing

Lord Dunmore, royal governor of Virginia, led a detachment of the British 14th Regiment to this area on 15 Nov. 1775 to disrupt militiamen forming in resistance to royal authority. The Princess Anne militia, waiting in a thicket, fired on the British advance guard. Heavy return fire scattered the militia and killed several men. Dunmore's force, augmented by African American volunteers who had escaped from slavery, took a number of prisoners, including Col. Joseph Hutchings. The emboldened Dunmore issued a proclamation declaring martial law and offering freedom to slaves willing to fight for the king. Many militiamen and others subsequently signed oaths of loyalty to the Crown.

Sponsor: Christopher Pieczynski

Locality: Virginia Beach

Proposed Location: corner of South Witchduck Road and Singleton Way

Sponsor Contact: Chris Pieczynski; Christopher.Pieczynski@gmail.com

Third Baptist Church

Alexandria, occupied by Union troops in 1861, attracted many African Americans escaping slavery. In Jan. 1864, a group of formerly enslaved people organized Third Freedmen's Baptist Church (later Third Baptist Church). The congregation moved to this site in 1865 and built its Romanesque Revival sanctuary in the 1890s. The church's first minister was the Rev. George Washington Parker (ca. 1832-1873), who had been free before the Civil War. He worked with the Rev. Clement Robinson to start the First Select Colored School in 1862, was a local Republican Party leader during Reconstruction, and was the first African American member of the Alexandria Common Council.

Sponsor: Third Baptist Church

Locality: Alexandria

Proposed Location: 917 Princess St.

Sponsor Contact: McArthur Myers, Alexslim62@comcast.net

Vint Hill Farms Station

In June 1942 the U.S. Army established a top-secret post at Vint Hill Farms to intercept enemy radio transmissions. These barns housed the monitoring station. The Signal Corps' cryptographic school, which taught personnel to encode, decode, and translate messages, was moved here. Pvt. Leonard A. Mudloff is credited with intercepting a message here from Oshima Hiroshi, the Japanese ambassador to Germany, on 10 Nov. 1943. It described German coastal fortifications in western France, troop strengths, and contingency plans. The "Oshima intercept" was a crucial contribution to the planning for D-Day, the Allied invasion of Europe. The post operated through the Cold War, closing in 1997.

Sponsor: Julie Broaddus

Locality: Fauquier County

Proposed Location: Farm Station Road northwest of intersection with Lineweaver Road

Sponsor Contact: Julie Broaddus, julie@oldbusthead.com

Walnut Grove Plantation

Col. Robert Preston (1750-1833) acquired 720 acres here in the 1780s and established Walnut Grove. Preston had emigrated from Ireland in 1773 and worked as assistant surveyor under his relative William Preston, who laid out vast areas of western Virginia. During the Revolutionary War, Robert Preston joined expeditions against the Cherokee and Loyalists. Gov. Thomas Jefferson appointed him the first surveyor of Washington County in 1779. Preston's frame house, built here ca. 1800, is among the county's oldest. By the 1830s about 30 enslaved African Americans were laboring on his land. William Clark, of Lewis and Clark, breakfasted at the home of Preston's son John at Walnut Grove in 1809.

Sponsor: Bristol Historical Association

Locality: Bristol

Proposed Location: Lee Highway (Route 11), just east of Route 5300

Sponsor Contact: Tim Buchanan, Buchanan03@bvunet.net

The Washingtons at Pohick Church

George Washington, like his father before him, served on the vestry of Truro Parish, which the Virginia General Assembly established in 1732. Colonial vestries managed parish affairs and provided crucial services to the community, including care for widows, orphans, the poor, and the sick. Washington served several terms as church warden and is credited with leading the effort to replace the old Pohick Church, about two miles south, with a new building that opened here in 1774. He donated furnishings to the church and attended services here with his wife, Martha Dandridge Custis Washington, a devout Anglican. Their home, Mount Vernon, is six miles to the east.

Sponsor: Mary Elizabeth Conover Foundation, Inc.

Locality: Fairfax County

Proposed Location: 9301 Richmond Highway, Lorton

Sponsor Contact: Larry Nelson, strategicalliances@conoversystems.org

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