

Department of Historic Resources

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Contact:

Randy Jones

Department of Historic Resources;

540-568-8175; Randy.Jones@dhr.virginia.gov

Ten New State Historical Highway Markers Approved

—Markers cover topics in the counties Albemarle, Fairfax, King George, and Pittsylvania, and the cities of Fairfax, Farmville, and Richmond —

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

RICHMOND – Representing the rich spectrum of Virginia history, ten new historical markers approved by the Department of Historic Resources include signs to commemorate a community founded by slaves freed by Thomas Jefferson’s cousin, a marker for the oldest active Jewish cemetery in the South, and one to honor the first Confederate officer killed in the Civil War.

“Free Blacks of Israel Hill,” a marker to be erected in **Farmville**, recalls the “ninety formerly enslaved persons who received freedom and 350 acres from Judith Randolph under the will of her husband, Richard Randolph, cousin of Thomas Jefferson.” In the marker’s words, “These ‘Isrealites,’ and other free African Americans worked as farmers, craftspeople, and Appomattox River boatmen.” The marker, which was sponsored by the Farmville-Prince Edward Historical Society, notes that “Israel Hill remained a vigorous black community into the twentieth century.”

In **Richmond**, the “Hebrew Cemetery” marker will highlight a Jewish burial ground established in the early 19th century by the Congregation Beth Shalome, “which was formed by 1789 and merged with the Congregation Beth Ahabah in 1898,” as the marker states. A military section of the cemetery also “contains the graves of thirty Jewish Confederate soldiers.”

“The First Confederate Officer Killed,” a marker planned for **Fairfax**, honors Captain John Quincy Marr, of the Warrenton Rifles, “who was struck by a stray bullet” and died June 1, 1861 during a skirmish with “a detachment of Co. B, Second Cavalry,” in “the Town of Fairfax Court House,” according to the marker. Marr was “the first Confederate office killed in the Civil War,” as the marker reads, “in the first land conflict of organized military units” during the war. The marker was sponsored by Historic Fairfax City Inc. and the Fairfax County History Commission.

Among the other new markers approved by the Department of Historic Resources last month are signs honoring the achievements of two women in Richmond.

“Grace Evelyn Arents 1849-1926,” to be erected in **Richmond**’s Oregon Hill neighborhood, recalls Arents’ work “as an urban reformer and philanthropist” who sought “to improve the daily life of individuals regardless of race, gender, or class.” Arents developed a community complex that included a church, school, library, medical clinic, and a house for teachers. She also “established a night school for working children, built public baths and playgrounds, and funded numerous social programs.” The marker states that her “legacy continues in the activities of St. Andrew’s Church, St. Andrew’s School, and the William Byrd Community House in Oregon Hill.” The marker is sponsored by St. Andrew’s School.

Another marker slated for **Richmond** recalls the life of Mary-Cooke Branch Munford (1865-1938). Munford “served as the first woman on the Richmond School Board, helped organize the Virginia Inter-Racial Committee, advocated equal educational opportunities, and worked to improve rural high schools,” in the words of the marker. It was her efforts that opened the doors of the College of William and Mary to women in 1918. The marker is sponsored by Brownie Troop 411-Mary Munford Elementary School, with funding provided by DHR.

Other recently approved markers include—

- “Civil War Action at Mathias Point,” in **King George County**, which recalls the death of Commander James H. Ward during fighting along the Potomac River, making Ward “the first U.S. Navy officer killed in action in the Civil War.” The marker is sponsored by the King George County Historical Society.
- “Historic Green Spring,” in **Fairfax County**, which highlights “the unique 1942 collaboration” of architect-designer Walter Macomber, who did restoration work for Colonial Williamsburg, and landscape designer Beatrix Farrand, “the sole female member of the American Society of Landscape Architects at its founding in 1899,” at Green Spring, a 1784 brick house. The marker is sponsored by Friends of Green Springs.
- “Southern Albemarle Rural Historic District” (**Albemarle County**), which commemorates “this nationally significant district” that “encompasses 83,627 acres” and “reflects the architectural and cultural influences of former residents Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe.” The marker is sponsored by Jennifer Hallock, a resident in the district.
- “Hargrave Military Academy,” Chatham, in **Pittsylvania County**, which honors this academy founded in 1909 and chartered in 1911 as Chatham Training School, before it permanently added military training “as an integral part of the school’s curriculum” during World War I. The marker is sponsored by the academy.

- “Spottswood W. Robinson III,” which recalls the life of this Richmond native who “fought against Jim Crow laws” and “helped to argue the U.S. Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*”; he became “the first African American to serve in a number of judicial capacities,” including Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

All ten markers were approved by DHR’s Board of Historic Resources when it convened for its quarterly meeting on March 19.

The Virginia highway marker program, which began in 1927 with the installation of the first historical markers, is considered the oldest such program in the nation. Currently there are more than 2,100 official state markers, mostly installed and maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation.

The manufacturing costs of new highway markers are paid for by the sponsors, except for those markers sponsored by the Department of Historic Resources.

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:

Grace Evelyn Arents 1849 - 1926

Grace Evelyn Arents worked tirelessly as an urban reformer and philanthropist to improve the daily life of individuals regardless of race, gender, or class. She developed a church complex that included St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, St. Andrew’s School, the Grace Arents Free Library, a teachers’ house, and a medical clinic. Arents also established a night school for working children, built public baths and playgrounds, and funded numerous social programs. She supported the formation of the Instructive Visiting Nurse Association. Her legacy continues in the activities of St. Andrew’s Church, St. Andrew’s School, and the William Byrd Community House in Oregon Hill.

Civil War Action at Mathias Point

In May 1861, Confederate forces commanded by Brig. Gen. Daniel Ruggles and Maj. Robert Mayo began constructing gun emplacements at Mathias Point, which is located 2.5 miles northwest on the Potomac River close to the Virginia shore. This battery, as well as others, interfered with Union forces shipping troops and supplies to Washington, D.C. On 27 June 1861, the gunboat, USS *Thomas Freeborn*, commanded by Comdr. James H. Ward, shelled the batteries held by the Confederate forces. While sighting the bow gun, Ward was mortally wounded, the first U.S. Navy officer killed in action in the Civil War.

First Confederate Officer Killed

In the early morning hours of 1 June 1861, a detachment of Co. B, Second Cavalry, entered the Town of Fairfax Court House and engaged the Warrenton Rifles in the first land conflict of organized military units in the Civil War. The skirmish resulted in the death of Capt. John Quincy Marr, who was struck by a stray bullet, the first Confederate officer killed in the Civil War. Marr's body was found at daybreak near this location.

Free Blacks of Israel Hill

To the west lies Israel Hill, settled in 1810–1811 by approximately ninety formerly enslaved persons who received freedom and 350 acres from Judith Randolph under the will of her husband, Richard Randolph, cousin of Thomas Jefferson. These “Israelites” and other free African Americans worked as farmers, craftspeople, and Appomattox River boatmen; some labored alongside whites for equal wages and defended their rights in court. The family of early settler Hercules White bought and sold real estate in Farmville and joined with white citizens to found the town's first Baptist church in 1836. Israel Hill remained a vigorous black community into the twentieth century.

Hargrave Military Academy

One of the few private military academies in Virginia, Hargrave Military Academy was founded in 1909 by John Hunt Hargrave and the Rev. T. Ryland Sanford as Chatham Training School. It was chartered in 1911 and became affiliated with the Baptist General Association of Virginia in 1913. Chatham Training School provided a general education for boys. During World War One, military training was permanently added as an integral part of the school's curriculum. The school was renamed Hargrave Military Academy in 1925 in honor of the founder.

Hebrew Cemetery

Richmond's Hebrew Cemetery was established in the early 19th century by Congregation Beth Shalome, which was formed by 1789 and merged with Congregation Beth Ahabah in 1898. The cemetery was listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and National Register of Historic Places in 2006. It is the oldest active Jewish cemetery in the South. Many leading Richmond merchants, civic leaders, and rabbis are interred here. Hebrew Cemetery displays traditional Jewish burial ground characteristics in its overall simplicity of plan and marker decoration, yet also contains more decorative elements. A rare military burial ground section contains the graves of thirty Jewish Confederate soldiers.

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Historic Green Spring

A 1784 brick house, a spring house, and a designed landscape showcase the unique 1942 collaboration of two American masters of design, Walter Macomber and Beatrix Farrand. Green Spring is the only known place where both designers' work is extant. Macomber, restoration architect for Colonial Williamsburg and Mount Vernon, completed a Colonial

Revival rehabilitation of the buildings that reflected the growing popularity of the style for domestic architecture. Farrand, the sole female member of the American Society of Landscape Architects at its founding in 1899, designed the gardens around the brick house with her trademark clarity of outline and transition from formal to informal landscapes.

Mary-Cooke Branch Munford

Mary-Cooke Branch Munford received her primary and secondary education in Richmond and New York. Prevented from attending college by her mother, Munford became an avid reader and developed an active social conscience. She served as the first woman on the Richmond School Board, helped organize the Virginia Inter-Racial Committee, advocated equal educational opportunities, and worked to improve rural high schools. Through her efforts, women were admitted to the College of William and Mary in 1918. She also served as a trustee of the National Child Labor Committee. Munford's work exemplifies the public activism countless women pursued during the Progressive era.

Southern Albemarle Rural Historic District

Bounded by the James River to the south and the Rivanna River to the north, this nationally significant district encompasses 83,627 acres. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2007, it includes buildings influenced by Jefferson's Classical Revival ideals. The beauty of the Piedmont landscape is revealed in the panoramic vistas, farmlands, and vineyards. The district reflects the architectural and cultural influences of former residents Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe. The landscape remains predominantly agricultural with large farm complexes, historic villages, and an early transportation network of roads and waterways.

Spottswood W. Robinson III

Born in Richmond, 26 July 1916, Spottswood W. Robinson III fought against the Jim Crow laws that made African Americans second-class citizens. A skilled trial attorney, he worked for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund and helped to argue the U.S. Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*. Robinson was the first African American to serve in a number of judicial capacities: U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia (1964-66), U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia (1966-89), and Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia (1981-89). He died in Richmond on 11 Oct. 1998.