

Department of Historic Resources

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TEN NEW STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKERS APPROVED

—Markers cover topics in the counties of Buchanan, Gloucester, Lancaster, and Shenandoah; and the cities of Hampton and Richmond, and the Town of Smithfield—

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

RICHMOND – Four new state historical highway markers, recently approved along with six others by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, honor the contributions of individual women and organizations founded by women in shaping Virginia and U.S. history.

Together the ten newly approved signs reveal the rich spectrum of Virginia history, highlighting topics that range from colonial plantations and leaders, to the Civil War in the Shenandoah Valley, women’s suffrage, and an early government laboratory to research flight.

A marker titled “Equal Suffrage League in Virginia,” slated for installation in **Richmond**, will summarize the founding of this organization in November 1909. Eventually becoming the League of Women Voters, “the ESL grew to more than 100 local chapters and 30,000 members statewide,” and “held public suffrage rallies and supported social reform movements to urge the General Assembly to amend the state constitution,” according to the future marker.

The marker “Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs)” will be erected in **Gloucester County** and recall the role of women pilots during World War II, as well as former WASP and county resident Margaret Ann Hamilton Tunner, who died last year. “The WASPs delivered more than 12,260 aircraft, often with only a road map for navigation, but Congress disbanded them in 1944 without benefits. Due largely to the efforts of surviving WASPs like Tunner, in 1977 Congress acknowledged their military service and granted them Veterans status,” the marker will read.

A marker honoring Dorothy Irene Height, who was known as the “Godmother of the Civil Rights Movement,” will be erected in **Richmond**, where she was born in 1912. Height, as the marker will read, “was Chair and President Emerita of the National Council of Negro Women for more than four decades. As a leader in the Young

Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Height fought at the organization's 1946 convention to ensure integration of YWCA facilities nationwide. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1994 and received the Congressional Gold Medal in 2004." She died earlier this year.

A marker for Missouri native Helen Timmons Henderson is slated for installation in far western Virginia. A teacher by trade, Henderson "was dismayed by **Buchanan County's** limited educational opportunities when she moved nearby with her husband, and helped establish Buchanan Mission School in 1911," the marker will read. Eventually winning a seat in the General Assembly, "she was also the first woman to preside over the House of Delegates."

These four markers focusing on women are part of a larger diversity initiative of the Department of Historic Resources to create new signs that highlight people, places and events in the history of African Americans, Virginia Indians, and other minorities and their contributions to the history of all Virginians.

The other six markers approved by the Board of Historic Resources during its quarterly meeting June 17 are, as follows:

- "Chesterville Plantation," for installation in **Hampton**. Chesterville was the birthplace of George Wythe (1726-1806), a signer of the Declaration of Independence. The Chesterville Plantation was destroyed by fire in 1911.
- "Major Edward Dale," to be erected in **Lancaster County**. Major Dale and his wife Diana Skipwith Dale "were among the earliest settlers in Lancaster County." Dale served in various local offices and was a member of the Virginia General Assembly.
- "Navy Hill" will be installed in **Richmond**. This sign recalls the neighborhood "named as a tribute to nearby naval victories during the War of 1812." It emerged as "a vibrant African American community by the turn of the century" and was eventually destroyed by the construction of Interstate 95.
- "National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics," to be placed in **Hampton**. This marker will highlight NACA, which was established in 1915 and subsequently created the Langley Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory at Langley Field in 1917. "In 1958, the NACA was superseded by the modern NASA and the laboratory was renamed the Langley Research Center."
- "Action at Mill Creek," for installation in **Shenandoah County**. This marker recalls a skirmish during the Civil War between Union cavalry under the command of Brig. Gen. George A. Custer and Confederate under Brig. Gen. Thomas L. Rosser. During the fight, Federal troops lost "50 men as well as wagons, cattle and sheep."
- "Ivy Hill Cemetery," to be erected in Smithfield, in Isle of Wight County. This cemetery was established in 1887 and contains the graves of "many prominent local

residents including the founder of Gwaltney Hams,” as well as Civil War veterans, and many business and community leaders. The cemetery was listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and National Register of Historic Places in 2006.

The Virginia highway marker program, which began in 1927 with the 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 2,100 official state markers, mostly erected and maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation.

The manufacturing cost of each new highway marker is covered by its respective sponsor, except for those markers developed by the Department of Historic Resources as part of the nearly decade-long program to create new markers that focus on the history of women, African Americans, and Virginia Indians. Markers created by DHR are funded by a federal Transportation Enhancement grant.

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:

Chesterville Plantation

One mile north is Chesterville, birthplace of George Wythe (1726-1806), a prominent Virginia attorney, judge, legislator, and signer of the Declaration of Independence. Wythe inherited the family plantation in the 1750s and operated it until the 1790s. After Chesterville's sale in 1802, the Hudgins and Winder families owned and farmed it until the 1930s; the house was destroyed by fire in 1911. The National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics purchased Chesterville in 1950. By the 1970s, archaeological excavations had identified a stone foundation believed to be from the house where Wythe was born.

Sponsor: NASA LaRC Historic Preservation

Major Edward Dale

Major Edward and his wife, Diana Skipwith Dale, were among the earliest settlers in Lancaster County. They lived nearby on surrounding land, as part of a 350-acre plantation purchased from William and Jane Clappam in Dec. 1664. Between 1653 and 1695, Dale served at various times as the Westmoreland County clerk, a member of the Virginia General Assembly, and as the clerk, justice, high sheriff, “Collector of Publique and County Levies”, and “Commissioner of the Fort” for Lancaster County. The Dales' children married into the Carter, Harrison, and Rogers families.

Sponsor: Charles R. Carter, The Carter Society

Navy Hill

The Navy Hill neighborhood, named as a tribute to nearby naval victories during the War of 1812, was settled by German immigrants beginning in 1810. It became a vibrant African American community by the turn of the century. Navy Hill's distinctive character was embodied in the buildings here between North Third and Thirteenth Streets. Navy Hill School was the only Richmond public school to employ black teachers. Area landmarks included the Bill "Bojangles" Robinson home, Good Samaritan Society, Phyllis Wheatley YMCA, and numerous churches. The construction of Interstate 95 destroyed Navy Hill in the 1960s.

Sponsor: Virginia Biotechnology Research Park

National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics

The National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) was established by Congress in 1915 to "supervise and direct the scientific study of the problems of flight." The NACA created the Langley Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory at nearby Langley Field in 1917. Overseen by an advisory committee including Orville Wright and Charles Lindbergh, the laboratory created and used specialized wind tunnels and facilities to research and accelerate aeronautic technologies during peacetime and wartime from the 1920s to the late 1950s. In 1958, the NACA was superseded by the modern NASA and the laboratory was renamed the Langley Research Center.

Sponsor: NASA LaRC Historic Preservation

Action at Mill Creek

During the Civil War, Union Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan began "The Burning" of mills and barns in the Shenandoah Valley on 6 Oct. 1864, after defeating Confederate Lt. Gen. Jubal A. Early at the Battle of Fisher's Hill. After passing through Forestville, Brig. Gen. George A. Custer's Vermont Cavalry formed the rear guard across Mill Creek here. Confederate Brig. Gen. Thomas L. Rosser flanked the position. The 11th and 12th Virginia Cavalry charged and the Federals withdrew, losing 50 men as well as wagons, cattle, and sheep. Local resident Confederate Capt. Hugh R.T. Koontz, was killed and was buried in Mt. Jackson.

Sponsor: Mt. Jackson Museum,

Ivy Hill Cemetery

One half-mile north, Ivy Hill Cemetery, established in 1887, is the resting place of many prominent local residents including Joseph W. Luter, Sr., Smithfield Packing Company co-founder, and P.D. Gwaltney Jr., founder of Gwaltney Hams. Others buried here include U.S. Congressmen Joel Holleman and Dr. John W. Lawson; Richard Randolph “Dick” Turner, second in command of Richmond’s Libby Prison during the Civil War; leading business and community leaders; and many veterans. The cemetery’s monuments and landscaping make it a fine example of the rural cemetery movement. It was listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and National Register of Historic Places in 2006.

Sponsor: Mr. Peter Knauth, of Smithfield

The Equal Suffrage League of Virginia

A group of women dedicated to obtaining the vote and expanding women’s traditional roles formed the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia at 919 West Franklin Street in Nov. 1909. Under Lila Meade Valentine’s leadership, the ESL grew to more than 100 local chapters and 30,000 members statewide. The ESL held public suffrage rallies and supported social reform movements to urge the General Assembly to amend the state constitution. Although the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution passed in 1920, when the ESL became the League of Women Voters, Virginia did not ratify it until 1952.

Sponsor: DHR

Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs)

The Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs), including Gloucester resident Margaret Ann Hamilton Tunner (1917-2009), transported and flight tested aircraft and towed targets for the U.S. military during World War II. More than 25,000 female pilots applied but only 1,074 completed the rigorous training and were accepted. The WASPs delivered more than 12,260 aircraft, often with only a road map for navigation, but Congress disbanded them in 1944 without benefits. Due largely to the efforts of surviving WASPs like Tunner, in 1977 Congress acknowledged their military service and granted them Veterans status. In March 2010, all WASPs were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal.

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Dorothy Height (1912-2010)

Dorothy Irene Height, known as the “Godmother of the Civil Rights Movement,” was born in Richmond on 24 Mar. 1912. Height, an advocate for African American rights

and pioneer of social welfare reform and economic development for black women, children, and families, was Chair and President Emerita of the National Council of Negro Women for more than four decades. As a leader in the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Height fought at the organization's 1946 convention to ensure integration of YWCA facilities nationwide. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1994 and received the Congressional Gold Medal in 2004.

Sponsor: DHR

Helen Timmons Henderson (1877-1925)

Helen Timmons Henderson was the first woman nominated and one of the first two elected to Virginia's General Assembly. A Missouri native and teacher by trade, she was dismayed by Buchanan County's limited educational opportunities when she moved nearby with her husband, and helped establish the Buchanan Mission School in 1911. Encouraged by her commitment to education and leadership abilities, local Democratic Party members invited her to run for Buchanan's 1924 Assembly seat. A tireless advocate for southwestern Virginia, she was also the first woman to preside over the House of Delegates. She died in 1925 before she could seek reelection.

Sponsor: DHR

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