

Department of Historic Resources

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FIVE NEW STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKERS APPROVED

—Markers cover topics in Bath County (3) and the cities of Lynchburg and Petersburg —

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

RICHMOND – The Virginia Department of Historic Resources has approved three new historical markers for installation in Bath County as well as a new marker for Lynchburg and one for Petersburg.

The Bath County markers will highlight the lives of artists William Sergeant Kendall and his wife Christine Herter Kendall, who co-founded Garth Newel Music Center, writer and suffragist Mary Johnston, and business woman and philanthropist Letitia Pate Whitehead Evans.

A sign in Lynchburg will commemorate C. W. Seay, an educator who fought for equal rights for African Americans, and a new marker in Petersburg will recall the Bishop Payne Divinity School.

The “Garth Newel” marker honors the Bath County estate that William and Christine Kendall established in 1923, after they settled in Virginia. William Sergeant Kendall, a student of the renowned American painter Thomas C. Eakins, “was known for his society portraits and paintings of children” according to the forthcoming marker. Christine Herter Kendall, also an artist, “became a patron of the arts in the region” and “helped cofound the Garth Newel Music Center in 1973, thereby ensuring the continuity of the house as a space for art and music.”

The “Mary Johnston” marker recalls the life of this “novelist, historian, playwright, suffragist, and social advocate,” in the sign’s words. “Johnston published 23 novels between 1898 and 1936 and became the first woman to top the best-seller lists in the 20th century with “To Have and To Hold” (1900),” according to the marker’s approved text. Johnston moved Bath County in 1912 and built her estate “Three Hills in a grand Classical Revival style.”

The “Letitia Pate Whitehead Evans (1870-1953)” marker recalls that Evans owned Malvern Hall in Bath County. “A woman of noted business acumen,” the forthcoming

marker states, Evans “was elected in 1934 to the board of directors for the Coca-Cola Corporation, becoming one of the first women to serve on a board of a major American company. Evans was a “prominent philanthropist” who “made donations to numerous religious, educational, and charitable organizations across the South, including large gifts to institutions in Virginia.”

Lynchburg’s new marker, “C. W. Seay (1900-1982),” highlights Seay’s life as an educator. Seay “was principal of Dunbar High School, Lynchburg’s secondary school for African Americans,” the marker will read. “A pioneer in the struggle for equal opportunities for blacks, for 30 years Seay shaped Dunbar High School into a school of academic excellence.” Seay also “served two terms as Lynchburg’s first black city council member since the 1880s and the first black vice mayor,” according to the marker text.

The “Bishop Payne Divinity School” historical marker to be installed in Petersburg honors this school that began “in 1878 at the St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church Normal and Industrial School,” the sign will state. “For 71 years it prepared black men for the ministry in the church.” The school’s prominent students included James Solomon Russell, the founder of Saint Paul’s College in Lawrenceville, and George Freeman Bragg Jr., a noted civil rights advocate. “In 1949 the school merged with the Virginia Theologocial Seminary in Alexandria,” according to the forthcoming marker.

All five of the new historical markers were approved by DHR’s Board of Historic Resources during its quarterly board meeting on March 21.

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, a key partner with the Department of Historic Resources in the marker program.

The manufacturing cost of each new highway marker is covered by its sponsor, except for those markers developed by the DHR, in this case the Evans and Johnston markers, as part of an ongoing effort to create new markers that focus on the history of women, African Americans, and Virginia Indians.

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 official; also, some texts may be slightly modified before installation.)

Garth Newel

Artist William Sergeant Kendall (1869-1938) and his wife Christine Herter Kendall (1890-1981) built this house soon after they arrived in Virginia in 1922. Garth Newel, Welsh for “New Home,” served as their residence and studio. A student of Thomas C. Eakins, Sergeant Kendall was known for his society portraits and paintings of children. A noted artist herself, Christine Kendall became a patron of the arts in the region, co-founding the Bath County Regional Art Show in 1964. She later helped cofound the Garth Newel Music Center in 1973, thereby ensuring the continuity of the house as a space for art and music.

Sponsor: Garth Newel Music Center

Locality: Bath County

Proposed Location: Near Garth Newel in Warm Springs, Virginia

Bishop Payne Divinity School

The Bishop Payne Divinity School began here in 1878 at the St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church Normal and Industrial School. For 71 years it prepared black men for the ministry in the church. Giles B. Cooke (1838-1937) headed the vocational school and helped develop the divinity school. In 1884 the school was named after the Rt. Rev. John Payne, the first bishop of Liberia. Prominent students included James Solomon Russell (1857-1935), who founded Saint Paul’s College in Lawrenceville, and George Freeman Bragg Jr. (1853-1940), who became a priest and civil rights advocate. In 1949 the school merged with the Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria.

Sponsor: Virginia Theological Seminary (Episcopal)

Locality: Petersburg

Proposed Location: 400 Block of S. West Street

C.W. Seay (1900-1982)

Clarence William “Dick” Seay, who lived here, was principal of Dunbar High School, Lynchburg’s secondary school for African Americans. A pioneer in the struggle for equal opportunities for blacks, for 30 years Seay shaped Dunbar High School into a school of academic excellence, holding that a “successful school and its community are inseparable.” He later became the first high school principal elected to the presidency of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. After his retirement in 1968, Seay taught at Lynchburg College and served two terms as Lynchburg’s first black city council member since the 1880s and the first black vice mayor.

Sponsor: Hermina Walthal Hendricks

Locality: Lynchburg

Proposed Location: 1300 Pierce Street

Letitia Pate Whitehead Evans (1870-1953)

Born in Bedford County, Letitia Pate Whitehead Evans bought nearby Malvern Hall in 1927 and used the house as a retreat before it became her principal residence. A woman of noted business acumen, she was elected in 1934 to the board of directors for the Coca-Cola Corporation, becoming one of the first women to serve on a board of a major American company. She held that position for nearly two decades. A prominent philanthropist, she believed that “wealth is only a trust” and made donations to numerous religious, educational, and charitable organizations across the South, including large gifts to institutions in Virginia.

Sponsor: DHR

Locality: Bath County

Proposed Location: On 220 near drive to Malvern Hall in Warm Springs

Mary Johnston (1870-1936)

Mary Johnston, a novelist, historian, playwright, suffragist, and social advocate, lived here at Three Hills. Born in Botetourt County, Johnston published 23 novels between 1898 and 1936 and became the first woman to top best-seller lists in the 20th century with *To Have and To Hold* (1900). She became an early and influential member of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia. Later she used her writing as a platform to condemn lynching. As a result of her increasing activism on then-sensitive social issues, her commercial popularity declined. In 1912, Johnston moved here and built Three Hills in a grand Classical Revival style.

Sponsor: DHR

Locality: Bath County

Proposed Location: 348 Three Hills Lane, off of US 220 in Warm Springs