

Department of Historic Resources

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FIVE NEW STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKERS APPROVED

*—Markers cover topics in the counties of Albemarle (2), and Fairfax,
and the cities of Hampton and Richmond —*

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

RICHMOND – A new historical highway marker commemorating the decision of Union Maj. General Benjamin F. Butler to declare runaway slaves “contraband of war” and a sign recalling the largest contingent of “enemy prisoners of war” ever encamped on U.S. soil were among five new state historical markers approved recently by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

The new marker “Benjamin F. Butler’s Contraband Decision” is slated for installation in Hampton at Fort Monroe, which became known as “Freedom’s Fort” as a result of Butler’s decision during the Civil War.

The marker recounts that on May 23, 1861, three “enslaved men arrived at Fort Monroe.” On the following day, when “Virginia Maj. John B. Cary came to ask for the return of the slaves, citing the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Butler refused to return property that he considered ‘contraband of war.’”

Butler’s “decision soon became official Federal policy,” according the text of the new highway marker, and resulted in “many thousand of enslaved men, women, and children” fleeing to “Union lines seeking refuge” throughout the remainder of the Civil War.

One of two new signs approved for Albemarle County, the “Convention Army–The Barracks” highway marker recalls that during the American Revolution, in January 1779, “4,000 British and Hessian troops captured following the Battle of Saratoga in New York arrived” in Albemarle County, just outside Charlottesville.

The troops “constituted the largest number of enemy prisoners in America’s history,” according to the new sign’s text. Most of the prisoners “lived in primitive huts spread out over several hundred acres of the barrack’s encampment where they endured great hardships.” By February 1781, “the last of the prisoners had been relocated,” the marker concludes.

Another marker for Albemarle County highlights the rise of Advance Mills, a village that “grew around a single mill that John Fray constructed in 1833 on the north fork of the Rivanna River.” Like similar mill villages that arose around Virginia, Advance Mills faded with the advent of electric power, industrialization, and the automobile.

A new marker slated for Richmond commemorates the “Indian School in Fulton.” Richmond City Schools owned a house in the Fulton neighborhood where “eight to ten Pamunkey and Chickahominy children were educated...by three white teachers,” according to the marker.

The Indian school was established in 1928 after “parents of students at the Fulton neighborhood’s white Robert Fulton School objected to the presence of several Virginia Indian students.” The Indian school closed in 1930 after the students’ “Indian families moved from the neighborhood.”

A new marker for Fairfax County, titled “Cavalry Engagement Near Hunter’s Mill,” recalls a November 1861 skirmish between Confederate Col. Robert Ransom Jr.’s 1st North Carolina Cavalry and Union Capt. Charles Bell’s mounted troops.

All five markers were approved by DHR’s Board of Historic Resources during its quarterly meeting in Richmond on September 22.

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 2,200 official state markers, most of which are maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation, a key partner with the Department of Historic Resources in the historical marker program.

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 a 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 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:

(Please note that locations are only proposed; they have yet to be confirmed with VDOT or other officials.)

Advance Mills

Villages such as Advance Mills were once common features of rural Virginia, serving as economic and social centers. Advance Mills grew around a single mill that John Fray constructed in 1833 on the north fork of the Rivanna River. By the twentieth century,

Advance Mills had expanded to include facilities to process corn, flour, wool, sumac, and lumber for local farmers. A general store also sold goods to nearby residents. Industrialization, electricity, and the increasing efficiency of automobiles led to the disappearance of Advance Mills, as well as other similar communities around Virginia, in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Sponsor: Virginia Department of Transportation

Locality: Albemarle County

Proposed Location: Route 743, just west of a bridge over the Rivanna River

Cavalry Engagement Near Hunter's Mill

On 26 Nov. 1861, a 120-man detachment of Col. Robert Ransom Jr.'s 1st North Carolina Cavalry attacked 94 men of the 3rd Pennsylvania Cavalry under Capt. Charles Bell. Ransom's men took Bell's detachment from the rear as the Pennsylvanians headed north on Lawyers Road out of Vienna. The panicked Union troops suffered significant losses in the two-mile long engagement, with one killed, six wounded, and 26 taken prisoner. Regarding his cavalry, recently appointed Confederate Brig. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart reported: "The result of this our first engagement with the enemy's cavalry is, I doubt not, highly satisfactory to the General-In-Chief."

Sponsor: Hunter Mill Defense League

Locality: Fairfax County

Proposed Location: Intersection of Kedge Drive and Route 673

Convention Army-The Barracks

In Jan. 1779, during the American Revolution, 4,000 British and Hessian troops captured following the Battle of Saratoga in New York arrived here after marching from Massachusetts. Known as the Convention Army after the instrument of their surrender, the troops constituted the largest number of enemy prisoners in America's history. Most lived in primitive huts spread out over several hundred acres of the barracks encampment where they endured great hardships. Supplying and guarding the Convention Army taxed the resources of the local community and militia. By Feb. 1781, the last of the prisoners had been relocated.

Sponsor: Thomas Jefferson Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution

Locality: Albemarle County

Proposed Location: Intersection of Route 658 and Route 601

Benjamin F. Butler's Contraband Decision

Three enslaved men arrived at Fort Monroe from Sewell's Point on 23 May 1861 seeking freedom. Union Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler put them to work on Union fortifications after learning that they had escaped from constructing batteries for Virginia forces. The following day when Virginia Maj. John B. Cary came to ask for the return of the slaves,

citing the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Butler refused to return property that he considered “contraband of war.” His decision soon became official Federal policy. By the war’s end many thousands of enslaved men, women, and children had fled to Union lines seeking refuge.

Proposed by: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

Locality: Hampton Roads

Proposed Location: Fort Monroe

Indian School in Fulton

In 1928, parents of students at the Fulton neighborhood’s white Robert Fulton School objected to the presence of several Virginia Indian students. At that time, the only schools for Indians in Virginia were located in rural tribal communities. The Fulton School’s principal supervised an ungraded school for the Indian students in a house owned by Richmond City Schools on Nicholson Street. From eight to ten Pamunkey and Chickahominy children were educated there by three white teachers until 1930, when the school closed because the Indian families moved from the neighborhood. **90 words**

Proposed by: DHR

Locality: City of Richmond

Proposed Location: TBD

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