

Department of Historic Resources

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Eight New State Historical Highway Markers Approved

—Markers cover topics in the counties of Caroline, Chesterfield, King and Queen, and the cities/towns of Lynchburg, Richmond, South Hill, and Williamsburg—

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

RICHMOND – The history of Virginia Indians during the early period of European settlement in the Tidewater region is among the range of topics covered in eight new historical highway markers recently approved by the Department of Historic Resources.

Other new markers cover topics ranging from a renowned Piedmont-style blues musician to a Chesterfield County mill to the founding of the Town of South Hill in Mecklenburg County.

The “Destruction of Chickahominy Indian Towns,” a marker that will be installed along the Chickahominy River between **New Kent** and **Charles City** counties, recalls when English colonists and Governor Leonard Calvert of Maryland burned and destroyed Indian towns and food supplies, and imprisoned Chickahominy people in 1645. “By 1652, the Chickahominy people had left their homeland to live in what is now King William County,” the sign reads.

A marker approved for installation in **Williamsburg**, titled “First Williamsburg Goal Inmates,” notes that “about forty Nanzattico Indians” were imprisoned in 1704 in the recently established jail after they were “accused of complicity in an assault on a family of English colonists in Richmond County.” The Virginia Council later had the Nanzattico deported to Antigua to be sold into slavery, except for those Indians under age 12, who were “kept as house servants to Council members,” according to the marker.

“Pamunkey Indians Attacked by Nathaniel Bacon,” a marker for installation in **King and Queen County**, recalls events during the insurrection known as Bacon’s Rebellion, led by colonist Nathaniel Bacon in 1676. Sympathizers of Bacon drove Pamunkey Indians -- “who had been allies of the Virginia colonists since 1646”—from their town on the Pamunkey River. Later that same year, Bacon’s forces also killed and captured Pamunkey people in an unsuccessful attempt to capture their tribal leader Cockacoeske.

These three markers, all funded by the Department of Historic Resources from a federal transportation grant, arise from the department's ongoing initiative to recognize significant people, places, and events in the history of women, African Americans, and Virginia Indians in the Commonwealth.

Two other newly approved markers also stem from this same initiative. One sign commemorates former Caroline County resident and legendary Piedmont blues guitarist, John Cephas, who passed away earlier this year. The other marker honors Ora Brown Stokes, who advocated for the protection and improved welfare of African American girls and women during the first-half of the 20th century. Stokes was born in Chesterfield County, raised in Fredericksburg, and spent much of her career in Richmond.

Other markers approved during the September 17 quarterly meeting of the Board of Historic Resources, one of the Department of Historic Resources' two boards, highlight

- the founding and early history of South Hill, in **Mecklenburg County**;
- the operations of the now-vanished Matoaca Mill in **Chesterfield County**;
- and the influence of Abram Frederick Biggers on the public schools of **Lynchburg** and **Campbell County** during the latter 19th century.

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 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 developed 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:

South Hill

In 1889 South Hill's founding fathers laid out the town's boundary in a circle radiating 5/8s of a mile from a point within the intersection of the Atlantic and Danville Railway tracks and the Boydton Plank Road (now U.S. Rt. 1). South Hill was incorporated as a town on 16 Feb. 1901 and remained one of only three circular municipalities in the United States until an annexation in 1967. Tobacco, brought to market at the town's many warehouses, greatly influenced South Hill's growth and economy. By 1907, it was the third-largest flue-cured tobacco market in the state.

Sponsor: Town of South Hill

Proposed Location: South Hill, 201 S. Mecklenburg Avenue, U.S. Route 1.

Abram Frederick Biggers and Biggers School

Abram Frederick Biggers (1838–1879), a lawyer by profession, was appointed the first superintendent of the Lynchburg and Campbell County schools in 1870. As a part of his effort to build a strong system, Biggers toured northern states to study their schools. He is credited with building one of the best school systems in the state. The Lynchburg schools opened to more than 700 students segregated by race in nine rented buildings. Biggers School, designed by August Forsburg, was the largest in Lynchburg when it opened in 1881 with a capacity of 305 students. The school served the community until its demolition in the autumn of 1967.

Sponsor: Gene Tomlin, Lynchburg

Proposed Location: Lynchburg, 501 5th Street

Matoaca Mill Site

Originally named the Providence Manufacturing Company, Matoaca Manufacturing (Mill) had its beginning here late in the 1700s on land then known as Olive Hill Plantation. Initially operated as a grist mill, by 1838 it was producing cotton cloth and paper. The mill contained 4,000 spindles and 170 looms. The paper it produced was used by publishers in Petersburg and other southern cities. The mill reached its highest number of employees by 1880, the majority of whom were women and children. Early in the 1880s, the mill modernized its plant equipment by adding auxiliary steam engines.

Sponsor: Matoaca Woman's Club

Proposed location: Chesterfield County, Pickett Ave (Route 600), approaching bridge at access

John Cephas 1930–2009

Born in Washington D.C., John Cephas grew up there and in Caroline County. He was influenced at an early age by his mother's singing, and a cousin taught him the highly syncopated and danceable guitar style now known as Piedmont Blues, which employs a complex, finger-picking approach. Cephas performed at rural dance parties and as a gospel singer, developing his rich voice. He, and harmonica master Phil Wiggins, made numerous award-winning albums and performed all over the world, earning the W. C. Handy Award as Blues Entertainers of the Year in 1987. Cephas received the coveted National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1989.

Sponsor: Department of Historic Resources

Proposed location: Caroline County, location to be determined

Destruction of Chickahominy Indian Towns

In February 1645, Governor Leonard Calvert of Maryland, who was in Virginia bringing gunpowder to the European colonists, sailed into the Chickahominy River to help them in their attacks on the Indians. The English burned Chickahominy towns, destroyed stored valuables and food, and took many prisoners. One of four forts built to contain the Indians was soon constructed at the Chickahominy town of Moysenac. By 1652, the Chickahominy people had left their homeland to live in what is now King William County. They returned to their original territory decades later, but by then colonists had claimed the valuable riverside lands.

Sponsor: Department of Historic Resources

Proposed location: Charles City or New Kent, near Chickahominy River, location to be determined.

First Williamsburg Gaol Inmates

On May 3, 1704, two Chickahominy Indians called Coscohunk and James Mush were accused of burning the house of another Chickahominy, Tom Perry. They were held in the new Williamsburg Gaol overnight and released into the custody of the Chickahominy tribe. In September, about forty Nanzattico Indians, accused of complicity in an assault on a family of English colonists in Richmond County, were sent to the Gaol. They remained there until May 1705, when the Virginia Council ordered those 12 or older to be transported to Antigua and sold into slavery. Their children were kept as house servants to Council members.

Sponsor: Department of Historic Resources

Proposed location: Williamsburg, location to be determined

Pamunkey Indians Attacked by Nathaniel Bacon

Although the Pamunkey Indians had been allies of the Virginia colonists since 1646, early in 1676 they were driven from their main town on the Pamunkey River by sympathizers of insurrectionist Nathaniel Bacon, and took refuge in Dragon Run Swamp. In August, Bacon's forces searched for tribal leader Cockacoeske there, capturing an old woman identified as her nurse, whom they killed after she deliberately misled them. Bacon then found the Pamunkey and attacked, killing 7 and capturing another 45. Cockacoeske escaped into the swamp and hid for two weeks, emerging almost starved. The tribe returned to the town after Bacon's death in October.

Sponsor: Department of Historic Resources

Proposed location: King and Queen County, near the Dragon Run Swamp's southern edge

Ora Brown Stokes
1882 - 1957

Ora Brown Stokes was born in Chesterfield County and raised in Fredericksburg. During her life, Stokes worked to improve the lives of African American women and girls. For twenty years she was employed as a probation officer with the Richmond City Juvenile court. She organized the National Protective League for Negro Girls and a local chapter of the Council of Colored Women. Stokes was also president of the Southeastern Section of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs and the Virginia Negro League of Women Voters. She maintained a Richmond address here at 1607 Brook Road until the end of World War II.

Sponsor: Department of Historic Resources
Proposed location: Richmond, 1607 Brook Road

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