

# THE GOVERNOR'S BLACK HISTORY MONTH HISTORICAL MARKER CONTEST

Governor Ralph Northam's inaugural Black History Month Historical Marker Contest encouraged schools during the month of February to feature a different marker each day from *A Guidebook to Virginia's African American Historical Markers*, which was published for the first time by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) in late 2019. The Governor's office provided teachers with resources to guide history discussions, promoted Black History Month events around the Commonwealth and initiated the competition for students to submit ideas for new historical markers to DHR.

The Governor's Office received 285 entries from students across the Commonwealth. A team of historians at the Department of Historic Resources (DHR) reviewed them and selected the ten entries featured here based on the Historical Highway Marker criteria. The Virginia Board of Historic Resources approved the first group of winning markers at its public quarterly meeting in June. The remaining five winners from the contest are expected to be manufactured and erected in 2021.

As the leaders of tomorrow, it is critically important for students to develop a deeper understanding of Black history in the Commonwealth over the past 400 years, The Black History Month Historical Marker Contest gave students and educators alike an opportunity to research local heroes, and celebrate the incredible contributions Black and brown individuals have made to Virginia history. I am so proud of the educators and students who are helping us tell a more complete Virginia story through their participation in this contest.

Atif Qarni  
Secretary of Education



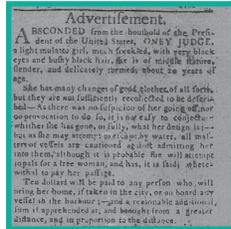
## BARBARA ROSE JOHNS (1935-1991)

Barbara Johns, civil rights pioneer, was born in New York and moved to her parents' native Prince Edward County as a child. In April 1951, at age 16, she led a student walkout to protest conditions at the segregated Robert Russa Moton High School, where facilities were vastly inferior to those at the county's white high school. The students, demanding a new school, sought aid from the Virginia NAACP, which instead offered to represent them in a lawsuit seeking an end to segregation. *Davis v. Prince Edward* was the only student-initiated case consolidated into *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public school segregation was unconstitutional.



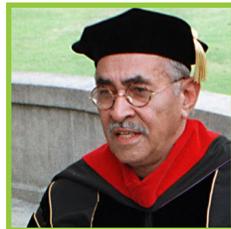
## CAMILLA ELLA WILLIAMS (1919-2012)

Camilla Williams, operatic soprano, grew up in Danville. In 1946 she became the first African American woman to secure a contract with a major U.S. opera company, making her debut in *Madama Butterfly* with the New York City Center Opera. Williams starred in Columbia Records' recording of *Porgy and Bess* (1951), performed with the Vienna State Opera and other prominent companies, toured internationally as a soloist, and served as a cultural ambassador for the U.S. State Department. In 1963 she performed in Danville to raise funds for civil rights demonstrators, and she sang the national anthem at the March on Washington before Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech.



## ONA JUDGE (CA. 1773-1848)

Ona (or Oney) Judge, born into slavery at Mount Vernon, became Martha Washington's personal attendant as a child. After George Washington was elected president in 1789, Judge was brought to New York City and later to Philadelphia to serve his household. Washington periodically sent her back to Virginia to skirt a Pennsylvania law that might have granted her freedom based on long-term residency. In 1796, after learning that she was to become a gift for Martha Washington's granddaughter, Judge escaped from Philadelphia to New Hampshire. There she married, had three children, taught herself to read and write, and lived for more than 50 years, having resisted Washington's attempts to recover her.



## WYATT TEE WALKER (1928-2018)

Wyatt Tee Walker, pastor of Gillfield Baptist Church from 1953 to 1960, served as president of the Petersburg branch of the NAACP and as Virginia director of the Congress of Racial Equality. He worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and for several years was his chief of staff. In 1960 Walker became the first full-time executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He helped organize major civil rights protests including the Birmingham (Alabama) Movement and the March on Washington. For 37 years Walker was pastor of Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem, NY. In 1978 he organized the International Freedom Mobilization to combat apartheid in South Africa.



## SERGEANT WILLIAM H. CARNEY (1840-1908)

William Carney, born into slavery in Norfolk, gained his freedom and settled in New Bedford, MA, ca. 1856. He enlisted in the 54th Massachusetts Vol. Infantry Regt. in Feb. 1863, shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation authorized African American men to serve in combat in the U.S. Army, and was soon promoted to sergeant. On 18 July 1863, as the 54th led an attack on Fort Wagner near Charleston, SC, Carney retrieved the American flag from the regiment's wounded color guard. Under heavy fire, he carried the flag to the fort's parapet and then, despite serious wounds, withdrew it when his unit was pushed back. For this action Carney received the Medal of Honor on 23 May 1900.



### ANGELO (fl. 1609–1625)

Angelo (Angela) was likely born in the West African kingdom of Ndongo, part of present-day Angola. Captured and sold to slave traders, she was forced onto a Portuguese ship. Two English privateers, the White Lion and the Treasurer, attacked the ship as it neared Spanish America, removing Angelo and some 60 other Africans. The White Lion arrived at Point Comfort, VA, in Aug. 1619, followed by the Treasurer, with Angelo aboard. There she and about 30 others, the first documented Africans in Virginia, were sold. Angelo labored in the Jamestown household of Capt. William Peirce, planter, merchant, and political and military leader. She last appears in colonial records in the muster of 1625.



### EVELYN THOMAS BUTTS (1924–1993)

Evelyn Butts, civil rights activist and community organizer, worked to secure voting rights for African Americans. In 1963 she initiated a federal lawsuit asserting that Virginia's poll tax, which citizens had to pay before they could register to vote, violated the U.S. Constitution. The case, combined with a similar suit filed in Fairfax County, reached the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections* (1966) that the poll tax requirement in state elections was unconstitutional. Butts conducted voter registration drives and helped establish Concerned Citizens of Norfolk, which resulted in the election of African Americans to public office.



### GOWAN PAMPHLET (ca. 1748–ca. 1809)

Gowan Pamphlet, ordained Baptist preacher, led clandestine religious gatherings of enslaved and free African Americans by the late 1770s. To avoid patrollers, they met in wooded areas outside Williamsburg. An enslaved worker at the Kings Arms Tavern and likely literate, Pamphlet molded the loosely knit worshippers into an organized Baptist church by 1781. In 1793, he gained membership for the 500-member church in the white regional Dover Baptist Association. Freed in 1793, Pamphlet owned part of a lot in Williamsburg and 14 acres in James City County by 1805. The congregation, later known as First Baptist Church, began worshiping on Nassau Street in Williamsburg early in the 19th century.



### KATHERINE COLEMAN GOBLE JOHNSON (1918–2020)

Katherine Johnson, mathematician, graduated from West Virginia State College and was a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. She was a teacher before the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (later NASA) hired her in 1953 to work in the segregated West Area Computing Unit at Langley Aeronautical Laboratory. Soon transferred to the Flight Research Division, she performed crucial calculations for path-breaking missions including the U.S.'s first manned spaceflight (1961), first orbital spaceflight (1962), and the first manned moon landing (1969). Before retiring in 1986, she also worked on the Space Shuttle. Pres. Barack Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2015.



### MAGGIE LENA WALKER (1864–1934)

Maggie Walker, an African American entrepreneur and civil rights activist, promoted economic empowerment for the Black community. In 1899 she was elected head of the Independent Order of Saint Luke, a mutual aid society and insurance company facing a dwindling membership. Under her leadership, the organization grew to more than 100,000 members. Walker founded the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank in 1903, becoming the first Black woman in the U.S. to establish and serve as president of a bank. She helped organize a major boycott of Richmond's segregated streetcars in 1904 and served on the national boards of the NAACP and the National Association of Colored Women.

Virginia's historical highway marker program, which began in 1927 with installation of the first markers along U.S. 1, is considered the oldest such program in the nation. Currently there are more than 2,600 official state markers, most of which are maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), except in those localities outside of VDOT's authority.

More information about the Virginia Historical Highway Marker Program is available at [dhr.virginia.gov/highway-markers/](http://dhr.virginia.gov/highway-markers/)

This is another win for the Commonwealth. To move Virginia forward, it is vital that we prioritize telling a more complete narrative of our story. The extraordinary individuals represented in these markers are Black lives that mattered. In real time, we are building a road map for the country as millions across the nation reflect about Black oppression and the systemic reforms necessary for healing, reconciliation, and racial equity.

Dr. Janice Underwood  
Chief Diversity, Equity, and  
Inclusion Officer.

The purpose of the Virginia Historical Highway Marker Program is to educate the public by presenting an objective and truthful version of history. It is past time for Virginians to more fully understand and appreciate the experiences and many contributions of African Americans who shaped the Virginia of today. The actions taken in June by the Board of Historic Resources to include in the program the group of markers resulting from the Governor's first Black History Month Contest could not be more timely or fitting.

Julie V. Langan  
Director, Department of  
Historic Resources