

Black History Month Historical Highway Markers

Marker descriptions provided by [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

Name of Marker	Location	Dates	Summary of Contribution
Dorothy Height	<i>At 1400 Hull Street, Richmond</i>	1912-2010	Dorothy I. Height, civil rights leader, was born in Richmond and lived in this neighborhood until 1916. For more than 50 years she worked for racial justice and gender equality. Serving on the national staff of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) from 1944 to 1977, Height fostered interracial dialogue and moved the YWCA toward full integration. As president of the National Council of Negro Women for 40 years, she promoted economic development and voting rights and advised United States presidents. She worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and was a chief organizer of the March on Washington in 1963. Height was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1994.
Booker T. Washington, Birthplace	<i>At Booker T. Washington National Monument, Franklin County</i>	1856	Booker T. Washington was born a slave on the nearby Burroughs plantation on April 5, 1856. He graduated from Hampton Institute in 1875 where he became an instructor. Because of his achievements as an educator, he was selected to establish a normal school for blacks in Alabama which later became the Tuskegee Institute. Recognized as an orator and author of <i>Up From Slavery</i> , he exerted great influence both in the Republican party and as a humanitarian for the benefit of his fellow blacks. He died November 14, 1915.
First Southern African American Girl Scouts	<i>On the campus of Virginia Union University in front of Hartshorn Hall, Richmond City</i>	1932	In 1932, the first African American Girl Scout troop in the South began meeting nearby on the Virginia Union University campus. Sponsors of the troop included Lena Watson, Janie Jones, and Mary Virginia Binga. Girl Scouts enjoyed activities such as camping, earning badges, and learning first aid. The Richmond Girl Scouts served as a model for other southern localities as the Girl Scout organization moved toward integration. Initially, Girl Scout activities in Virginia were segregated but by 1947 African American and white high school girls were working together on the Richmond Council newsletter.
John Day	<i>N. Main Street at the intersection with Valley Street, City of Emporia</i>	1797-1859	<i>On N. Main Street at the intersection with Valley Street.</i> John Day, a free African American cabinetmaker and brother of Thomas Day, cabinetmaker and builder, was born in Hicksford (present-day Emporia) on 18 Feb. 1797. Licensed in 1821 as a Baptist minister, he sailed in December 1830 to Liberia, where in 1853 he became pastor of Providence Church in Monrovia, the capital. In 1854 he established Day's Hope High School. He was a delegate to Liberia's constitutional convention, a signer of its constitution and its Declaration of Independence in 1847, and the second chief justice of its supreme court. Day died in Monrovia on 15 Feb. 1859.
Dr. Robert Walter Johnson	<i>On Pierce Street, between 14th and 15th Streets,</i>	1899–1971	The desegregation of tennis was due in large part to the efforts of Dr. Robert W. "Whirlwind" Johnson. The first African American to earn staff privileges at Lynchburg General Hospital, he also worked to overcome barriers keeping young African Americans out

	<i>City of Lynchburg</i>		of tennis. As founder of the Junior Development Program of the American Tennis Association, Johnson sponsored African-American players from across the country in tournaments, and coached and mentored them on backyard courts here at his home. Among those he trained were Wimbledon Champions Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe. Johnson was posthumously inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 2009.
Henry Box Brown	<i>On Jefferson Highway (Rte. 33) approximately 2000 feet east of Cross Country Road (Rte. 522), City of Richmond</i>	1815-1889	Born into slavery about 1815 at The Hermitage Plantation near here, Henry Brown was working in Richmond by 1830. Brown mailed himself to Philadelphia, and freedom, on 23 Mar. 1849 inside a three-foot-long box. Brown became a spokesperson for the abolitionist movement and symbol of the Underground Railroad. He published with Charles Stearns the <i>Narrative of Henry Box Brown</i> and exhibited a moving panorama, “The Mirror of Slavery.” Forced to leave the country in Oct. 1850 after the Fugitive Slave Act because of the threat of re-enslavement, Brown moved to Great Britain where he toured as an entertainer. He returned to the United States in 1875 and died sometime after 1889.
Nathaniel Lee Hawthorne	<i>In Victoria on Mecklenburg Avenue at intersection with W. 10th Street, Lunenburg County</i>	1923–1975	Nathaniel Lee Hawthorne, civil rights leader, campaigned for racial and social justice for the people of Southside Virginia. A native of Lunenburg County and a World War II veteran, he conducted his work despite death threats and other attempts at intimidation. Operating from the “Freedom House” in Victoria, Hawthorne chaired the Lunenburg branch of the NAACP from 1965 to 1974 and was a coordinator of the Virginia Students’ Civil Rights Committee. He led efforts to desegregate schools, register voters, gain equal access to restaurants and stores, and secure African American representation in local government. In 1965 he organized a voting rights march that passed along this route.
Wendell O. Scott Sr.	<i>On Wendell Scott Drive between Arnett Boulevard and Locust Lane, Danville</i>	1921–1990	On 1 Dec. 1963 in Jacksonville, Florida, Wendell O. Scott Sr. became the first African American to win a NASCAR Grand National race. He lived here in the house he built after his return from World War II. Persevering over prejudice and discrimination, Scott broke racial barriers in the sport of NASCAR, with a 13-year career that included 20 top five and 147 top ten finishes. He retired in 1973 after an injury suffered during a race in Talladega, Alabama. The International Motorsports Hall of Fame, among 13 halls of fame, has inducted him as a member.
John Mitchell, Jr., “Fighting Editor”	<i>E. Marshall and E. Clay Streets, Richmond, Virginia</i>	1863	Born enslaved near Richmond in 1863, John Mitchell, Jr. came of age in the tumultuous post–Civil War era. In 1883, he launched a daring journalism career, becoming editor and publisher of the black-owned <i>Richmond Planet</i> once located near here. Known as the “Fighting Editor,” Mitchell crusaded against lynching, served on the Richmond City Council (1888–1896) and founded the Mechanics Savings Bank in 1902. In 1904, he led a boycott of Richmond’s segregated streetcars. In 1921, he ran for governor to protest black disfranchisement. Mitchell served as <i>Planet</i> editor until his death in 1929. He is buried in Evergreen Cemetery.

Anthony Burns	<i>In Falmouth at 401 River Road, Stafford County</i>	1834-1862	Anthony Burns was born into slavery near here. In 1854 Burns escaped from Richmond to Boston. His owner demanded his rendition under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Burns's arrest on 24 May 1854 inspired abolitionists to attempt his rescue, but 1,500 troops escorted Burns aboard a revenue cutter to return him to Virginia. The episode increased abolitionist sentiment across the North, with an abolitionist dubbing the affair "the New Crime Against Humanity." Antislavery activists, including African American Bostonians, freed Burns through purchase in 1855, after which he attended Oberlin College. He became a minister and died in Canada West (later Ontario) in 1862.
Richard and Mildred Loving	<i>On Richmond Turnpike (Rte. 301) just north of intersection with Sparta Road (Rte. 721), Caroline County</i>	1958	Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter, of different racial backgrounds, grew up near Central Point, 11 miles east of here. They fell in love and in June 1958 were married in Washington, D.C. After returning to Central Point, they were arrested for violating the state's laws against interracial marriage, which made it a felony for interracial couples to leave Virginia, marry, and resume residence in the state. The Lovings were convicted in 1959 at the Caroline County courthouse. The case reached the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals, which in 1966 upheld the state's laws. In 1967 the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark ruling in <i>Loving v. Virginia</i> overturned all laws prohibiting interracial marriage.
Richmond's First African American Police Officers	<i>At the intersection of W. Leigh Street (Rte. 33) and Brook Road, City of Richmond</i>	1946	On 1 May 1946, Richmond's first professional African American police officers were hired and assigned to the First Precinct at Smith and Marshall Streets. They were Howard T. Braxton, Doctor P. Day, Frank S. Randolph, and John W. Vann. On 16 December 1949, Ruth B. Blair became the first professional African American female police officer hired and assigned to the Juvenile Division. On 18 July 1964, Sergeant Randolph was promoted to Detective Lieutenant. While challenged by segregated conditions and discriminatory practices, their perseverance created an inspiring legacy.
Lt. Col. Howard Baugh, Tuskegee Airman	<i>At corner of N. Sycamore and Old Streets, City of Petersburg</i>	1920-2008	Howard Baugh (1920-2008) was born and raised in Petersburg. He graduated from what is now Virginia State University in 1941, joined the U.S. Army Air Corps, and completed pilot training at Tuskegee Army Air Field in 1942. Deployed to Sicily with the 99th Fighter Squadron, Baugh flew 135 combat missions during World War II and was credited with 1.5 aerial victories. He later served as Director of Flying Training at Tuskegee. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters, the French Legion of Honor, and the Congressional Gold Medal. A 2006 Virginia Aviation Hall of Fame inductee, he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.
Gabriel's Rebellion	<i>On Richmond Turnpike (Rte. 301), 500 feet north of Pamunkey River</i>	1800	On 24 Aug. 1800, slave Ben Woolfolk met with other slaves at nearby Littlepage's Bridge to recruit individuals for an insurrection planned for 30 Aug. The insurgents led by Gabriel, a slave owned by Thomas Henry Prosser of Henrico County, intended to march into Richmond, capture Governor James Monroe, and force him and other leaders to support political, social, and economic equality. Intense rains delayed the scheme. Mosby Sheppard of Henrico County notified Monroe of the conspiracy after his slaves, Tom and Pharoah,

	<i>bridge, Caroline County</i>		made him aware of the plot. Monroe called out the militia, who captured many of the alleged conspirators. Trials were held in a number of jurisdictions, including Caroline County, resulting in the execution of Gabriel and at least 25 supporters.
Chauncey E. Spencer, Sr.	<i>On Pierce Street between 13th and 14th Streets, City of Lynchburg</i>	1906	Chauncey E. Spencer, Sr., aviation pioneer and Civil Rights activist was born in Lynchburg on 5 Nov. 1906, the son of poet Anne Spencer. He moved to Chicago and by 1934 began pursuing his pilot's license. As a charter member of the National Airmen's Association of America, he and Dale L. White in 1939 made an aeronautical tour from Chicago to Washington, D.C., to lobby for the inclusion of African Americans in the Army Air Corps. This included meeting Senator Harry S Truman. Spencer also worked for the U.S. Air Force and was a public servant in Michigan and California. He lived here from 1977 until his death on 21 Aug. 2002.
Richmond 34	<i>On E. Broad Street (Rte. 250) between N. 6th and N. 7th Streets, City of Richmond</i>	1960	On 22 Feb. 1960, 34 Virginia Union University students, 11 women and 23 men, refused to leave the segregated dining facilities here at Thalhimers department store and were arrested. Charged with trespassing, they were later convicted and fined. This sit-in was part of a wave of protests across the South inspired by recent sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina. The arrests of the Richmond 34 sparked the Campaign for Human Dignity, which organized boycotts and picketed Richmond businesses. Thalhimers and other retailers subsequently desegregated. In June 1963 the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the convictions of the Richmond 34 in <i>Randolph v. Virginia</i> .
Ota Benga	<i>On Dewitt Street at intersection with Garfield Avenue, City of Lynchburg</i>	ca. 1885–1916	Mbye Otabenga, later known as Ota Benga, was born in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 1904 the Rev. Samuel P. Verner, adventurer and former Presbyterian missionary, brought Benga and eight other Congolese purported to be "Pygmies" to be displayed at the St. Louis World's Fair. Two years later the Bronx Zoo in New York exhibited Benga in its "Monkey House" alongside an orangutan. Outraged African American ministers secured his release from the zoo and placed him in an orphanage in Brooklyn. In 1910 Benga was brought to Lynchburg to attend the Virginia Theological Seminary and College. Despondent over his inability to return to Africa, he committed suicide in 1916.
Luke Jordan, Blues Pioneer	<i>On Jefferson Street at intersection with Horseford Road, City of Lynchburg</i>	1892–1952	Singer-guitarist Luke Jordan (1892–1952) was a familiar presence on the streets of Lynchburg from the 1920s until World War II. Jordan and other African American musicians in the Southeast merged blues with an existing repertoire of ballads, ragtime, and tent-show songs, creating a syncopated and upbeat style now called Piedmont or East Coast Blues. The Victor Record Company, seeking blues artists to satisfy popular demand, recorded Jordan in 1927 and 1929, issuing classics such as "Church Bell Blues" and "Pick Poor Robin Clean." The Great Depression hurt sales and ended Jordan's career, but he remained an important and widely imitated Virginia blues musician.
Carl Martin—Early Musical Pioneer	<i>In Big Stone Gap at the Harry W.</i>	1906-1979	Carl Martin was born in Big Stone Gap in April 1906. He grew up in Southwest Virginia and moved to Knoxville, Tenn., in 1918. He performed regionally on the guitar, mandolin, bass,

	<i>Meador Jr. Coal Museum on E. 3rd Street N at the intersection with Shawnee Avenue E, Wise County</i>		and violin at coal camps, dances, and in traveling shows. In 1930, Martin’s string band recorded two instrumentals for Vocalion, released under the band name “Tennessee Chocolate Drops” for a black audience and the “Tennessee Trio” in the white old-time music series. Martin moved to Chicago in the 1930s, recording blues and performing with such artists as Big Bill Broonzy and Tampa Red until serving in World War II. The 1960s folk revival brought Martin before new audiences. He died in Detroit on 10 May 1979.
Oliver White Hill Sr.	<i>On Gilmer Avenue NW at intersection with 4th Street NW, City of Roanoke</i>	1909–2007	Oliver White Hill Sr., Presidential Medal of Freedom honoree, worked to dismantle Jim Crow laws in the United States. Over his nearly seven-decade career as a civil rights attorney, Hill challenged inequities in education, employment, and public facilities. With law partner Spottswood W. Robinson III, Hill argued <i>Davis v. Prince Edward County</i> , one of four cases consolidated into the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision <i>Brown v. Board</i> . Hill lived here at 401 Gilmer Avenue NW with Lelia and Bradford Pentecost from 1913-1923. After completing high school, college, and law school in Washington, DC, he returned to Roanoke’s Gainsboro community in 1934 to practice law. Hill settled in Richmond in 1939.

For more information and a full list of historical markers in Virginia visit: www.dhr.virginia.gov/highway-markers. *A Guidebook to Virginia’s Historical Markers*, compiled by Scott Arnold and published in 2007, is available from most bookstores or directly from the University of Virginia Press.