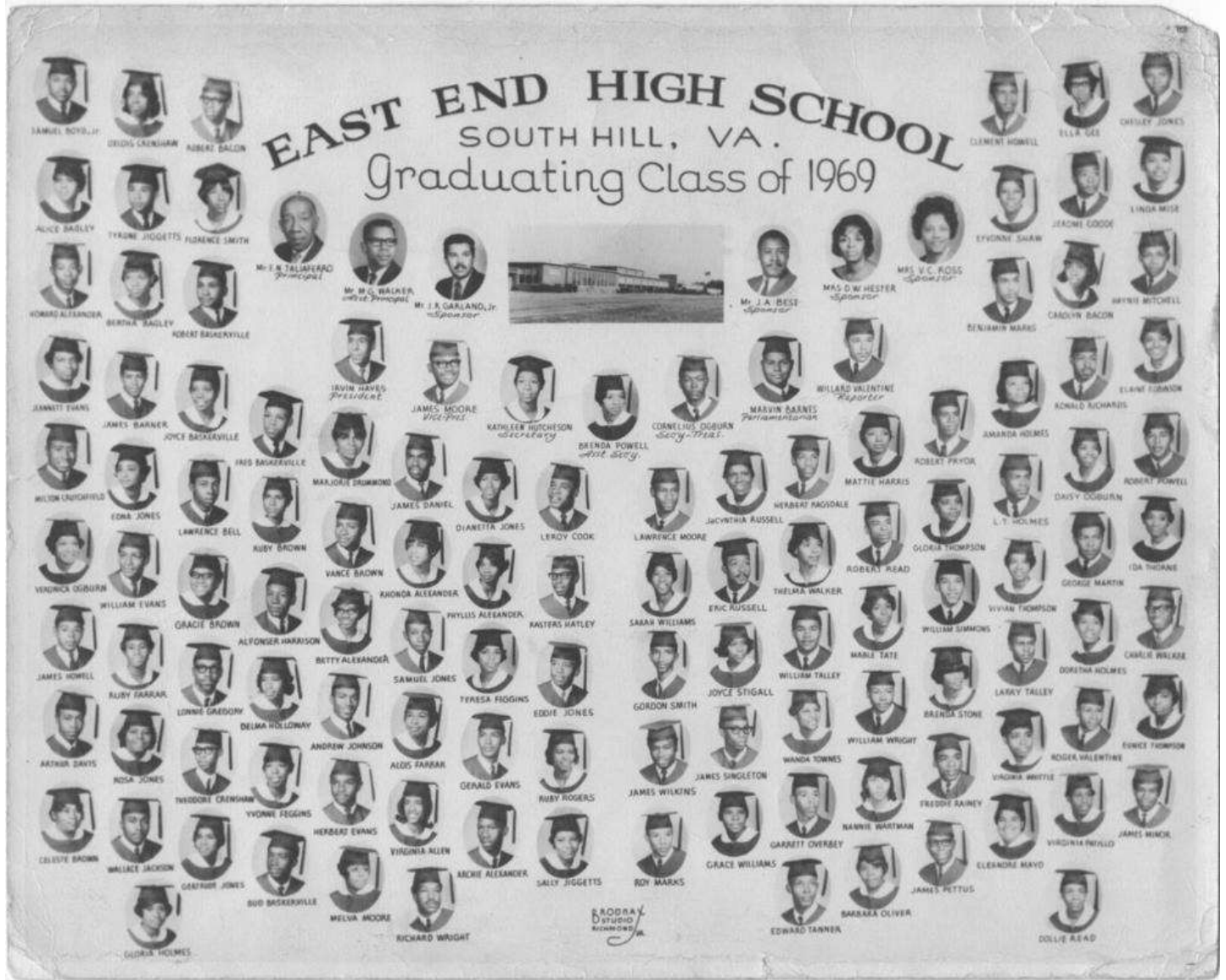


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DHR announces approval of 14 new State Historical Highway Markers; East End High School to be highlighted

Dec 29, 2021



Fourteen new historical markers coming to roadsides in the commonwealth will highlight a nationally-recognized Lynchburg resident who saved antique and heirloom roses from extinction, two men who shaped Virginia's post-Civil War constitution of 1869 which granted Black men the right to vote, and the "Martinsville Seven," among other topics.

The Virginia Board of Historic Resources approved the markers earlier this month during its quarterly meeting hosted by the Department of Historic Resources (DHR).

A forthcoming Lynchburg marker about Carl Porter Cato (1913-1996) spotlights this “nationally recognized rosarian,” who was known for collecting antique roses and saving them from extinction. A founder of the nationwide organization Heritage Roses Group, Cato identified several heirloom roses once believed to be lost and saved other rare roses by sending specimen cuttings to gardens across the U.S. Currently, Lynchburg’s Old City Cemetery showcases a collection of Cato’s antique roses.

Virginia’s Constitutional Convention of 1867-68 figures prominently in two forthcoming markers:

In Clarke County, the marker “John C. Underwood (1809-1873)” recounts Underwood’s experience in Clarke where he settled in the early 1850s—but departed in 1856 after his anti-slavery activity drew harassment from fellow residents. In 1863, President Lincoln appointed Underwood a federal judge for Virginia’s eastern district. After the Civil War, Underwood advocated for equal rights for African Americans. He was elected president of the state’s constitutional convention that produced the document ratified in 1869 and known as the “Underwood Constitution.” It granted Black men the right to vote and established free public schools, among other democratic reforms.

Born enslaved, Samuel F. Kelso (ca.1825-1880), one of Lynchburg’s first Black teachers after the Civil War, also attended Virginia’s Constitutional Convention, to which he was elected to represent Campbell County and Lynchburg. Kelso introduced a resolution calling for free public education open to all on an equal basis. He also was a delegate to the National Convention of the Colored Men of America, which advocated for African Americans’ civil rights as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

The Underwood Constitution was replaced in 1902 by a new state constitution that imposed new restrictions on voting and disfranchised large numbers of African Americans and working-class whites.

The “Martinsville Seven” consisted of seven Black men convicted in 1949 by six all-white, all-male juries of the rape of a white woman. After the men were sentenced to death, NAACP attorneys appealed the sentences, submitting the first petition to the U.S. Supreme Court arguing that capital punishment had been disproportionately applied against African Americans in violation of the 14th Amendment. The case drew international attention and petitions for clemency but the Commonwealth of Virginia executed the men in February 1951, the most executions for a rape in U.S. history.



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In 1977, the Supreme Court ruled that execution for rape was cruel and unusual punishment, and in August of 2021 Gov. Ralph Northam issued posthumous pardons to the Martinsville Seven.

Seven other new markers address topics in Virginia's African American history. Two touch on civil rights:

The marker "Norvel LaFayette Ray Lee (1924-1992)" relays that Lee, a native of Botetourt County who served in the Air Force, was arrested in 1948 in Covington for refusing to leave the whites-only section of a train car. The Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals reversed his conviction in 1949 on the grounds that the state could not enforce segregation laws on a local train if a passenger held a ticket for interstate travel. In 1952, Lee earned an Olympic gold medal in boxing.

In Fairfax County, the marker "Sullivan v. Little Hunting Park, Inc." highlights a U.S. Supreme Court case. The suit stemmed from a racially-based denial by the board of Little Hunting Park to comply with a white member's request to transfer pool membership to a Black family renting his house. In 1969, the Supreme Court ruled that the exclusion of an African American family from membership in a community recreational association constituted illegal housing discrimination. The case led to desegregation of neighborhood clubs across the U.S.

Reconstruction-era African American churches and a Christian mutual aid society are the focus of three markers:

Union Run Baptist Church in Albemarle County took shape soon after the Civil War when the Rev. Robert Hughes and other freedmen organized the congregation, which purchased a nearby church building and re-erected it on land deeded to them in 1867. The church served as a school and a community center and the property as a burial ground.

Chief Cornerstone Baptist Church in Buckingham County was established by 1876. It arose on land sold to the congregation by a formerly enslaved married couple. Members worshipped under a brush arbor before building a log sanctuary. The property also provided a burial ground for the community.

Norfolk will see rise the marker “United Order of Tents,” about the United Order of Tents of J.R. Giddings and Jolliffee Union, which was founded by and for Black women. In Norfolk, soon after the Civil War two formerly enslaved women organized the mutual aid society Tents’ Southern District #1. It provided financial assistance and burial insurance, established nursing homes, sponsored scholarships, and supported civil rights activists. Its membership nationwide grew to about 50,000 in the 20th century.

The late 19th- and mid-20th century eras ground two other African American historical markers:

In Hampton a marker will identify the one-time house of William H. Trusty (1863-1902). He moved with his family to Hampton around 1871, joining a large community of emancipated African Americans that became Phoebus. Trusty became an owner of commercial and residential real estate there. A civic leader, Trusty was elected to the Phoebus town council. His widow resided at the house until 1940.

East End High School in Mecklenburg County will be highlighted with a marker. It opened in 1953 to serve African American students during segregation. The school’s last class graduated in June 1969.

Two new markers recall places with Colonial-era roots:

Rapidan Baptist Church in Madison County traces to January 1773. The congregation—like other Dissenters—faced prosecution for refusing to comply with the laws that privileged the Church of England, Virginia’s established church. In 1789, James Madison won the support of many local Baptists during his campaign for the U.S. House of Representatives by assuring the Rapidan church’s pastor that he would support a constitutional amendment guaranteeing religious freedom.

Layton’s Landing Wharf and Ferry in Essex County had a ferry operation as early as 1679. In the early 1700s, the Ley and Layton families ran a ferry, a tavern, and wharf there. By the mid-1700s, the community boasted a lively hub of commerce centering on a public tobacco warehouse. From the 1830s to 1937, Layton’s Wharf was a stop on a robust Baltimore to Fredericksburg steamboat route.

Another marker coming to Essex County will recall Saunders's Wharf, also a stop on the busy steamboat route linking Fredericksburg and Baltimore. Situated along the Rappahannock River, Saunders's Wharf operated between the mid-1800s and 1937, experiencing a lively trade in agricultural products, livestock, raw materials, and manufactured goods, and the comings and goings of passengers.

After approval by the Board of Historic Resources, it can take upwards of three months or more before a new marker is ready for installation. The marker's sponsor covers the required \$1,770 manufacturing expenses for a new sign.

Virginia's historical highway marker program began in 1927 with installation of the first markers along U.S. 1. It is considered the oldest such program in the nation. Currently there are more than 2,600 state markers, mostly maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation,

The marker caption for East End High School is as follows:

East End High School

East End High School opened near this location in Sept. 1953 to serve African American students during the segregation era. Mecklenburg County built the school with a grant from the Battle Fund, established under Gov. John S. Battle as Virginia's first program for providing direct aid to localities for school construction. Students came from Mecklenburg County Training School, the Thyne Institute, and other schools in the eastern portion of the county. E. N. Taliaferro was East End's only principal. The last class graduated on 5 June 1969. Mecklenburg County schools were fully desegregated that fall under a federal court order, and the building became a junior high.

- Sponsor: East End High School Historical Highway Marker Committee
- Locality: Mecklenburg County
- Proposed Location: Intersection of SR 650 (Dockery Rd.) and Highways 1 and 58