

Department of Historic Resources

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ELEVEN NEW STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKERS APPROVED

—New markers cover topics in the counties of Bedford, Franklin, Loudoun, Orange (2), Pittsylvania, and the cities of Lynchburg (2), Portsmouth, and Staunton, and Fort Lee—

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

RICHMOND – Among eleven new historical highway markers recently approved by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources are signs highlighting women’s history in the military and art, African American history in education and recreation, as well as a sign for a Lynchburg dentist who pushed for dental care for servicemen in the U.S. Army.

The marker “Women’s Army Corps Training Center,” slated for installation near Fort Lee, located between Petersburg and Hopewell, will recall a Women’s Army Corps (WAC) training facility established at then-Camp Lee in 1948, “when the corps gained Regular Army status,” in the words of the marker’s approved text. “Run entirely by women, the center offered basic training, specialty training, and officer courses,” the sign will state.

In 1953 the movie “Never Wave at a WAC,” starring Rosalind Russell, was filmed at the training center, where about 30,000 WACs were trained between 1948 and 1954, when the center relocated to Fort McClellan, Alabama. The historical marker is sponsored by the Friends of the Army Women’s Museum Association.

A marker, sponsored by Randolph College, to rise in Lynchburg will recall the life of artist Georgia Weston Morgan (1869-1951), who studied painting at Randolph-Macon Woman’s College and in Paris. Morgan was a co-founder of the Lynchburg Civic Art League in 1932, and in 1936 she helped establish the city’s Federal Art Gallery, a Works Progress Administration project. At Lynchburg College, Morgan chaired the art department for 30 years. She was also elected to the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors and her work was exhibited at the Paris Salon and in galleries in the eastern U.S.

Another Lynchburg marker will also highlight a Morgan family member, Dr. Robert Withers Morgan (1844-1904), father of Georgia Weston Morgan. Dr. Morgan was serving in the Confederate army when he became

“troubled by the lack of dental care for soldiers,” in the words of the marker’s approved text. Morgan studied dentistry after the Civil War. “During the 1880s,” the text states, “he formulated dental hygiene products including Dental Chewing Gum, Dental Chewing Tobacco, and Dental Scotch Snuff, which were manufactured in Lynchburg.”

Morgan eventually had a hand in drafting “preliminary legislation that was the basis for congressional approval in 1901 of the first contract dentists to serve the U.S. Army,” in the words of the text. The marker is sponsored by the Lynchburg Dental Society.

African American educational history during the 20th century will be highlighted with two new markers in **Orange County**.

One sign will honor the county’s Shady Grove School, which was constructed around 1923 for African American students on land purchased by the Orange County School Board in 1894. The two-room Shady Grove School was influenced by the architecture of contemporary Rosenwald schools, although neither the community nor the county received money from the Julius Rosenwald fund for the Shady Grove building. Shady Grove School served African American students in grades 1 through 7 and closed in 1954 with the opening of Lightfoot Elementary School, which will also be recalled in a new historical marker.

That sign will honor the African-American training school named for Pennsylvania native Isabella Lightfoot, who was educated at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute and taught African American children in Orange County from the 1880s to the 1930s. “With other African American patrons,” according to the marker text, “[Lightfoot] donated funds for a school built” in Orange County in 1930, named the Isabella Lightfoot Training School. The school was later enlarged to serve black students through the 11th grade until the opening of George Washington Carver Regional High School in 1948. In 1953, Lightfoot school burned and that same year the county constructed a new brick Lightfoot Elementary School for African Americans. The county desegregated its schools in 1967-68.

Both the “Shady Grove School” and the “Isabella Lightfoot Training School” historical signs were sponsored by the George Washington Carver Alumni Association.

Another marker also focusing on African American history is slated for the City of **Staunton**. The “Montgomery Hall Park” sign will recall that this municipal park, established for African Americans during the segregation era, opened on July 4, 1947. The park came about after leaders in the black community “persuaded Staunton City Council to purchase about 150 acres for the project,” according to the marker’s approved text. Part of the former 19th-century plantation Montgomery Hall, the land purchased gave rise to Montgomery Hall Park, which featured a swimming pool, bowling alley, and picnic facilities. The park drew African Americans from throughout central Virginia. Staunton’s park system was desegregated in the late 1960s.

The sign was sponsored by the African American Research Society and Booker T. Washington Alumni Association.

Other historical markers approved for manufacture and installation by the Virginia Board of Historic Resources during its quarterly meeting on June 18 include the following:

- “New Jerusalem Lutheran Church” in **Loudoun County** will recall that the church was formally established in 1765 and it was among “Virginia’s earliest Lutheran congregations east of the Blue Ridge Mountains.” The church founders were “Palatine Germans who immigrated to [Loudoun County] from Pennsylvania and Maryland in the mid-18th century.” The current church sanctuary was dedicated in 1869 and the church cemetery includes Revolutionary War soldiers.
- “Cedar Grove Cemetery” relays that the Town of Portsmouth established the cemetery just outside town limits in 1832. Burials in the cemetery include veterans of the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Civil War, and the grave of John Luke Porter, co-designer of the Civil War ironclad *C.S.S. Virginia*.

In addition, three signs to be erected in Bedford, Franklin, and Pittsylvania counties will discuss the origins of Smith Mountain Lake, which was created by two dams—Smith Mountain and Leesville—that Appalachian Power constructed between 1960 and 1963 to generate hydroelectric energy. The damming of the waters of the Roanoke and Blackwater Rivers eventually formed Smith Mountain Lake, which reached “full pond” in March 1966. “With 500 miles of shoreline, the lake became a recreational destination and gave rise to a thriving lakeside community,” according to the approved text for the sign to be erected in Bedford County, which the county’s department of tourism co-sponsored.

The wording of each Smith Mountain Lake sign is slightly tailored to reflect the county in which it is erected and all three signs were sponsored or co-sponsored by the Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce.

The Virginia highway marker program, which began in 1927 with 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 2,500 official state markers, most of which are maintained by Virginia Department of Transportation, except in those localities outside of VDOT's authority.

The manufacturing cost of each new highway marker is covered by its sponsor.

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 some texts may be slightly modified before the manufacture and installation of the signs.)

Georgia Weston Morgan (1869-1951)

Artist and educator Georgia Morgan studied painting at Randolph-Macon Woman's College and at the Académie Julian in Paris. She was a co-founder of the Lynchburg Civic Art League in 1932 and helped establish the city's Federal Art Gallery, a Works Progress Administration project, in 1936. Both groups promoted arts education and exhibition for people of all socio-economic backgrounds. She chaired the art department at Lynchburg College for 30 years and was elected to the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors. Her work, primarily miniatures and landscapes, was exhibited at the Paris Salon and in galleries from Maine to Florida.

Sponsor: Randolph College

Locality: Lynchburg

Proposed Location: Centerview, 1900 Memorial Avenue

Women's Army Corps Training Center

The Women's Army Corps (WAC) Training Center was established at nearby Camp Lee in 1948, when the corps gained Regular Army status. The first staff members transformed overgrown fields and dilapidated buildings into usable facilities. Run entirely by women, the center offered basic training, specialty training, and officer courses. Gen. Omar Bradley and U.S. Rep. Edith Nourse Rogers visited WACs at the base, designated Fort Lee in 1950. The feature film *Never Wave at a WAC* (1953), starring Rosalind Russell, was filmed here. About 30,000 WACs were trained at the center before it moved to Fort McClellan, Alabama, in 1954.

Sponsor: Friends of the Army Women's Museum Association

Locality: Fort Lee

Proposed Location: Oaklawn Boulevard, 100 yards SW of intersection with Lee Avenue

Sponsor Contact: Amanda Vtipilson, Amanda.n.vtipilson.ctr@mail.mil

Isabella Lightfoot Training School

Isabella Miller Lightfoot, born in Pennsylvania and educated at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, taught African American children in Orange County from the 1880s to the 1930s. With other African American patrons, she donated funds for a school built here in 1930, named in her honor. The building, later enlarged,

served students through grade 11 until George Washington Carver Regional High School opened in 1948. Operating as an elementary school in subsequent years, the building burned in 1953. That year the county constructed a new brick Lightfoot Elementary School on Route 522 for African Americans. County schools were desegregated in 1967-68.

Proposed Location: 12135 Marquis Road (Rte. 669), Unionville, Orange County

Shady Grove School

The Orange County School Board acquired five acres here in 1894 and established Shady Grove School for African American students. With contributions from African American patrons, the county erected a new two-room frame building here ca. 1923. Although the school received no money from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, its design reflected the architectural influence of that program, which helped construct thousands of schools for African Americans across the rural South. Shady Grove, which served grades 1-7, closed in 1954 when the brick Lightfoot Elementary School opened six miles northeast. The frame building was restored in 2007.

Orange County schools were desegregated in 1967-68.

Proposed Location: 21024 Piney Woods Road, Orange County

Montgomery Hall Park

Montgomery Hall Park, a municipal park for African Americans during the segregation era, opened on 4 July 1947. The Rev. T. J. Jemison of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, an African American community leader, persuaded Staunton City Council to purchase about 150 acres for the project. The land had been part of John Howe Peyton's Montgomery Hall plantation, established early in the 19th century. A committee of African American citizens appointed by City Council managed the park, which featured a swimming pool, bowling alley, and picnic facilities and drew crowds from throughout central Virginia. Staunton's park system was desegregated late in the 1960s.

Proposed Location: Approx. 50 feet south of intersection of Montgomery Avenue and Stuart Street, near entrance to park, in Staunton

Smith Mountain Lake: Bedford County

Appalachian Power Company constructed Smith Mountain and Leesville Dams between 1960 and 1963 to generate hydroelectric energy. The waters of the Roanoke and Blackwater Rivers formed Smith Mountain Lake, one of two resulting reservoirs, which reached "full pond" (795 feet above sea level) on 7 March 1966. This 40-mile long lake, the largest wholly within Virginia, covered 20,600 acres that had primarily been farmland. With its scenic coves and 500 miles of shoreline, the lake became a recreational destination and gave rise to a thriving lakeside community. Smith Mountain Lake State Park was established on 15 July 1983.

Proposed Location: Smith Mountain Lake State Park, 1235 State Park Road, Huddleston, VA

Smith Mountain Lake: Franklin County

Appalachian Power Company built Smith Mountain and Leesville Dams between 1960 and 1963 to generate hydroelectric energy. West of Smith Mountain Dam, the waters of the Roanoke and Blackwater Rivers formed Smith Mountain Lake, covering 20,600 acres that had primarily been farmland. On 7 March 1966, the lake first reached "full pond" (795 feet above sea level). Forty miles long, the lake features 500 miles of shoreline, of which 275 miles lie in Franklin County. Smith Mountain Lake became a popular recreational destination and gave rise to a thriving residential community. It is the largest lake wholly within Virginia.

Proposed Location: northbound Route 122, between Bridgewater Plaza and Hales Ford Bridge (near 16430 Booker T. Washington Highway) in Franklin County

Smith Mountain Project: Pittsylvania County

Appalachian Power Company constructed Smith Mountain and Leesville Dams on the Roanoke River between 1960 and 1963 to generate hydroelectric energy. Between the dams, the river rose to form 3,400-acre Leesville Lake. West of Smith Mountain Dam, the Blackwater and Roanoke Rivers covered 20,600 acres that had primarily been farmland, forming Smith Mountain Lake. On 7 March 1966, Smith Mountain Lake's water level first reached "full pond" (795 feet above sea level). The largest lake wholly within Virginia, it became a popular residential area and recreational destination. The two lakes have a combined shoreline of 88 miles in Pittsylvania County.

Proposed Location: Smith Mountain Lake Dam Visitors Center, 2072 Ford Road, Sandy Level, VA

Dr. Robert Withers Morgan (1844-1904)

Dental innovator Dr. Robert W. Morgan lived here. Troubled by the lack of dental care for soldiers while he served in the Confederate army, he studied dentistry after the war. During the 1880s he formulated dental hygiene products including Dental Chewing Gum, Dental Chewing Tobacco, and Dental Scotch Snuff, which were manufactured in Lynchburg. Working with Rep. Peter Otey, Morgan drafted preliminary legislation that was the basis for congressional approval in 1901 of the first contract dentists to serve the U.S. Army. He was one of three members appointed to the Army's first Board of Dental Examiners.

Proposed Location: Centerview, 1900 Memorial Avenue, Lynchburg

New Jerusalem Lutheran Church

New Jerusalem Lutheran Church, formally established in 1765, was among Virginia's earliest Lutheran congregations east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Its founders were Palatine Germans who immigrated to this area from Pennsylvania and Maryland in the mid-18th century. They constructed their first sanctuary, a log building, on land given by George William Fairfax. Services were conducted in German until about 1830. The present Late Greek Revival-style sanctuary was dedicated in 1869, and its bell tower was added in 1903. The cemetery's earliest legible stone dates to 1770. A number of Revolutionary War soldiers are buried here.

Sponsor: New Jerusalem Lutheran Church

Proposed Location: East side of Route 287 (Berlin Turnpike), near intersection with Route 676 (Lutheran Church Rd.), Loudoun County

Cedar Grove Cemetery

The Town of Portsmouth established Cedar Grove Cemetery just outside town limits in 1832. A trove of 19th-century funerary art, the cemetery contains monuments and statues handcrafted in the Victorian, Greek Revival, and Egyptian Revival styles, many bearing symbolic motifs. Buried here are at least 10 veterans of the Revolutionary War and 47 veterans of the War of 1812, including Capt. Arthur Emmerson, a hero of the Battle of Craney Island. Also interred here are John Luke Porter, co-designer of the ironclad *C.S.S. Virginia*, and many Confederate soldiers and sailors. The cemetery is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Sponsor: Cedar Grove Cemetery Foundation

Proposed Location: Fort Lane outside cemetery in Portsmouth

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