

**Name of Nominee: James W. D. Bland (1844-1870)**

**Date and Place of Birth:** 1844, Prince Edward County, Virginia

**Death:** 1870, Richmond, Virginia

**Geographical area of Virginia with which the nominee is associated:**

South central Virginia (Southside)

**Contributions to Emancipation or Freedom in Virginia or the nation:**

James W. D. Bland was a highly respected politician during Reconstruction.

He represented Prince Edward and Appomattox counties as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868. Voters elected him to the Senate of Virginia representing Charlotte and Prince Edward counties in 1869. In the Senate, he served on the Committee for Courts of Justice and advocated for education to be the state's highest priority. Bland sponsored the bill that incorporated Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (later Hampton University), enabling it to receive federal land-grant funding.

Bland's career was cut short when he was attending a session of the Supreme Court of Appeals and the third floor of the State Capitol collapsed. Bland was one of approximately 60 observers killed in the accident.

James W. D. Bland was born free on February 27, 1844, in Prince Edward County, to Hercules and Mary Bland. His father, who was a cooper, purchased the freedom of his mother to ensure that his own children would be free. J. W. D. Bland worked with his father, until 1864, when he attended an American Missionary Association school in Norfolk, where he studied and also served as a teacher.

At the Virginia Constitutional Convention, Bland served on three committees: the Elective Franchise and Qualifications for Office, Revision and Adjustment, and Rules and Regulations. He advocated measures that granted full equality and political rights to African Americans, such as the one he introduced that guaranteed the right of "every person to enter any college, seminary, or other public institution of learning, as students, upon equal terms with any other, regardless of race, color, or previous condition." Bland voted with Radical Republicans on most measures, but struck a conciliatory tone with conservative whites by objecting to sections of the constitution that required test oaths and denied former Confederates the right to vote and hold office.

**Sources:**

[http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Bland\\_James\\_William\\_D\\_1844-1870](http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Bland_James_William_D_1844-1870)

[http://mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov/lincoln/african\\_americans.html#Senators](http://mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov/lincoln/african_americans.html#Senators)

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# BLACK HISTORY VIRGINIA PROFILES



## LEARN MORE

Reading,  
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SOURCES:  
Dictionary of  
Virginia  
Biography:  
Times-Dispatch

More profiles:  
[www.timesdispatch.com/blackhistory/](http://www.timesdispatch.com/blackhistory/)

## JAMES WILLIAM D. BLAND

PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY

Written by Robin Farmer • Designed by John G. Ownby

**B**orn a free man in 1844 in Prince Edward County, James William D. Bland would become a part of the political fabric of the state and a force for inclusiveness after the Civil War.

Young Bland learned carpentry and barrel-making from his father. Ironically, it was a slave who taught him to read and write. During the latter part of the Civil War, he became a teacher for other blacks in Norfolk.

Bland returned to Prince Edward after the Civil War. Former slaves had been set free and could vote. For the first time, blacks had the opportunity to be elected to office. On Oct. 22, 1867, voters picked Bland to represent Appomattox and Prince Edward counties at a state constitutional convention. He had the overwhelming support of blacks. Only one white voter voted for him.

As a representative, he sometimes came under fire for his views, some of which now seem far ahead of his time.

He recommended changing the preamble to the Constitution by replacing "men" with "mankind, irrespective of race or color."

Bland's inclusiveness, his commitment to universal suffrage, extended in another direction, as well. Despite the lack of support he had received from white voters when he ran for office, Bland objected to provisions that would deny former Confederates the right to vote and hold public office.

Standing against many fellow Republicans — black and white — he denounced segments of the proposed constitution requiring former Confederates to swear oaths of loyalty to the Union and denying some of them the right to vote.

In 1869, Bland was elected to the Senate of

Virginia, where he supported public education as the state's most pressing priority.

Bland was known as a conscientious legislator respected by blacks and whites. Some say his was a voice of compromise during a time of turmoil.

Accounts of the time said he was a tall and graceful man, an eloquent speaker with a modest demeanor. He was popular with the voters and a favorite of the press.

Whatever his gifts, his time was cut short.

On April 27, 1870, Bland was among a large crowd waiting for the Virginia Supreme Court to convene in the state Capitol. Around 11 a.m., the third floor collapsed, killing James and 61 others.

The Richmond Daily Dispatch, one of the newspapers that eventually became the Richmond Times-Dispatch, described the scene:

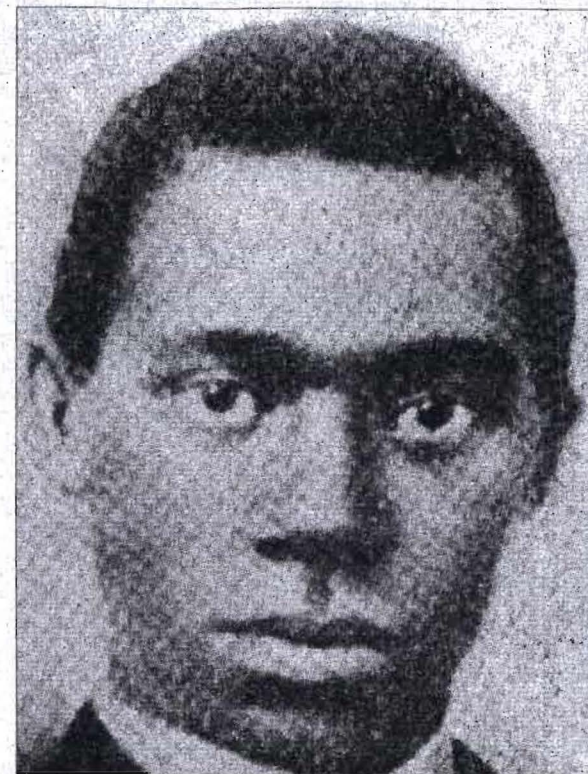
*As the dust cleared away a little, a mass of timbers and rubbish of every description was desecrated, and the reflection of the numbers of human beings crushed beneath its weight, dead and dying, was sickening.*

*Add to this the cries and groans of those in the agony of death, and there is a picture to make the stoutest hearts quail.*

The Senate passed resolutions in Bland's memory and set aside \$52 for funeral costs. He was buried in

Farmville.

About a month after his death, Bland's one major bill passed. The measure incorporated Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, enabling it to receive federal land grant funding.



THE LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

1844

Bland  
born

1850

U.S. census shows  
blacks are 15.7  
percent of population;  
about 1 in 9 is free

1861-1865

Civil  
War

1867

Bland elected  
representative to  
state constitutional  
convention

1868

14th Amendment,  
guaranteeing  
citizenship for  
blacks, ratified

1869

Bland  
elected to  
state Senate

1870

Bland  
dies

2-24-03 2-24-03



**Name of Nominee: Mary E. Branch (1881-1944)**

**Date and Place of Birth:** 1881, Prince Edward County, Virginia

**Death:** 1944, Baltimore, Maryland

**Geographical area of Virginia with which the nominee is associated:**

South central Virginia (Southside)

**Contributions to Emancipation or Freedom in Virginia or the nation:**

Mary E. Branch was the first African American female college president. She was appointed president of Tillotson College in Austin, Texas in 1930 and served until her untimely death in 1944. A struggling institution when she arrived, Branch expanded student enrollment and the faculty and renovated the physical campus. She transformed Tillotson into a four-year, collegiate institution that was accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in 1943.

During the Great Depression, Branch was active with the National Youth Administration in Texas. She also served as president of the Austin chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She was also one of the founders of the United Negro College Fund.

Mary E. Branch was the daughter of Tazewell and Harriet Branch. Her father Tazewell (1828-1925) was born a slave, learned to read and write, became a shoemaker and landowner in Farmville, and later serving two terms in the House of Delegates from 1874-1877. Mary and her siblings attended elementary school in Farmville and then she completed her higher education at the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (now Virginia State University). She later joined the faculty there and also served as the college's housing director. Branch Hall at Virginia State University is named in her honor.

In the summers she attended the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia University, and the University of Chicago, where she earned her bachelor's degree in 1922 and her master's degree in English in 1925. Late in her career she received honorary degrees from Virginia State College and Howard University.

Two schools in Farmville were named for her: Mary E. Branch #1 Elementary School, located on Main Street in Farmville, and Mary E. Branch #2, located at the intersection of Main and Griffin Blvd, formerly the Robert Russa Moton High School from 1939-1953 and now the Moton Museum

**Sources:**

<http://www.huarchivesnet.howard.edu/0005huarnet/branch.htm>

<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbray>

[http://www.encyclopediaofvirginia.org/Branch\\_Tazewell\\_1828-1925](http://www.encyclopediaofvirginia.org/Branch_Tazewell_1828-1925)

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Beatrice White (presenter) [blwhite3@embarqmail.com](mailto:blwhite3@embarqmail.com)

## Mary Elizabeth Branch



Mary Elizabeth Branch was born on May 20, 1881, in Farmville, Virginia, the daughter of Tazewell and Harriet Branch. Her father was a member of the House of Delegates of the General Assembly from 1874-1877. She attended the public schools of Prince Edward County and received her higher education in the normal department of Virginia State College, Petersburg, Virginia. Later she continued her education at the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia University, and the University of Chicago. From the latter she received the degree of bachelor of philosophy and the master of arts degree in English, and did additional work toward the doctorate degree in philosophy in the School of Education. Her career as an educator consisted of twenty years of service as a member of the faculty of her Alma Mater, Virginia State College. After leaving Virginia State College, Miss Branch taught English for one year at the Sumner Junior College, Kansas City, Kansas. From 1926-1930, she served in the position of dean of women at Vashon High School, St. Louis, Missouri. In August of 1930, she came to Tillotson College at the invitation of the officials of the American Missionary Association, under whose auspices the college is operated, to serve as its president.

When Miss Branch arrived in Austin, Texas, Tillotson College was in a notorious state. Buildings were in need of repair; academic standards were low, and a state of decline was everywhere.

Miss Branch shouldered these responsibilities and bore them with confidence and with a smile. She sent her teachers into all parts of the Southwest in search of good students and the enrollment began to increase by leaps and bounds. With her own hands, she helped with the planting of flowers and shrubbery to make the campus more beautiful.

Shortly after her arrival at Tillotson, Miss Branch instituted a four-year home economics department which is still unique among Negro colleges of the Southeast. Outstanding among her achievements was the building of the library from two thousand volumes to twenty-five thousand volumes at the time of her death.

She was born a Methodist, reared as an Episcopalian, and adopted Congregationalism when she was made president of Tillotson College. A commendable trait of hers was that she made her personality felt both in the local community and in the nation. She was an active leader in the NAACP, state and national interracial organizations, and served one year in the exalted position of assistant moderator of the General Council of the Congregational Church. For her prominence and achievements, she received the celebrated awards of the degrees Doctor of Pedagogy from Virginia State College and the Doctor of Laws from Howard University.

After studying about the accomplishments of local citizens during Negro History Week, the elementary school children of Farmville requested that their school be named in honor of Miss Branch.

Citizens of Prince Edward County will recall the image of a woman with a big sympathetic heart; a woman who has left ambitions that will spur, inspire, and challenge Negro youth; and the first woman of her race to achieve the presidency of a four-year, class "A" college.



*Fiftieth Anniversary*  
*of*  
*Martha E. Forrester Council*  
*Of Women*



Motto — "Lifting As We Climb"

*Farmville, Virginia*

**Name of Nominee: Reverend L. Francis Griffin** (1917 - 1980)

**Date and Place of Birth:** 1917, Norfolk, VA

**Death:** 1980, Farmville, VA

**Geographical area of Virginia with which the nominee is associated:**  
South central Virginia (Southside)

**Contributions to Emancipation or Freedom in Virginia or the nation:**

Known nationally as “the fighting preacher,” the Reverend L. Francis Griffin was the central civil rights leader in Prince Edward County from the time of the Moton student walkout in 1951 through the school closings from 1959-1964. His children were the plaintiffs in the *Griffin v. Prince Edward* case, which was the Supreme Court case that reopened Prince Edward County public schools in 1964. He served as a mentor and spiritual leader to generations of young people in Prince Edward. Griffin served as president of the Virginia State Conference of the NAACP

Griffin was born on Sept. 15, 1917, in Norfolk and moved to Farmville with his family when his father, the Rev. C. H. D. Griffin, became pastor of Farmville’s First Baptist Church, founded in 1867. A World War II veteran, L. Francis Griffin returned to Farmville in 1949 to succeed his father as minister of First Baptist Church.

He was the president of the Prince Edward County Christian Association as well as the president of the Prince Edward County NAACP. Griffin died on Jan. 18, 1980.

**Sources:**

[http://www.richmond.com/special-section/black-history/article\\_301894d8-6b0f-11e2-b51f-001a4bcf6878.html](http://www.richmond.com/special-section/black-history/article_301894d8-6b0f-11e2-b51f-001a4bcf6878.html)

[http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/media\\_player?mets\\_filename=evr8523mets.xml](http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/media_player?mets_filename=evr8523mets.xml)

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***The Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church***  
**14 W. Duval Street**  
**Richmond, Virginia 23220**  
**804-648-7511**

November 25, 2016

Brenda Edwards  
Senior Research Associate  
Division of Legislative Services  
201 North Ninth Street – 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Ms. Edwards:

The Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church is please to support the efforts for the creation and construction of the Virginia Emancipation Proclamation and Freedom Monument. As such, we are proud to submit in nomination the name of our founding pastor, Reverend John Jasper (1812-1901), to be included on the monument.

**Reverend John Jasper**

Born a slave on July 4, 1812 in Fluvanna County Virginia.  
Died March 28, 1901 in Richmond, Virginia.

Although born a slave, John Jasper became one of the most celebrated preachers during his lifetime. Best known for his unusual sermon, *De Sun Do Move*, John Jasper preached to thousands of Virginians of all races, and all levels of society. Supporting documents on the life of John Jasper and his contributions to Virginia are found in **attachments A and B**.

He reached the height of his extraordinary career in 1867 when he organized the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church in an abandoned confederate stable on Richmond's Brown's Island located on the north shore of the James River. **See attachment C** for an artist's drawing of the first church building on Brown's Island.

The City of Richmond has honored John Jasper and the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church in various ways. (1) On Brown's Island along the Canal Walk, there are two historic medallions that acknowledge Jasper and the creation of the church. **See attachments D, E, F and G.**

At current church site located on Duval Street, the city and state has recognized Jasper and the church with a historic plaque and a Virginia State Highway Marker. **See attachments H & I.**

Thank you so much for the opportunity to nominate the name of Reverend John Jasper for inclusion on the Emancipation Proclamation and Freedom monument. If you need further information, or clarification about John Jasper or the documentation submitted, please give me a call.

Best Wishes,



Benjamin Ross  
Church Historian  
Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church  
Rossbc@verizon.net  
804-240-3559 (cell)

***Celebrating 150 years of Christian Service (1867-2017)***



In September of 1867, out of the ashes and ruins of post-Civil War Richmond, Virginia, John Jasper raised up a new church on Brown's Island in the James River, and he christened it the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church. Jasper's nascent congregation first met to hear the word of God in an old abandoned horse stable. In an ironic twist, the structure was formerly used by the Confederate Army. Here, the formerly enslaved preacher, now in his early fifties, helped to foster a spiritual revival in a city that was mired in chaos, rubble, and recent emancipation. The dynamic and infectious style of preaching that Reverend Jasper employed began to draw more and more congregants, and eventually the modest horse stable no longer could serve the church's needs. After several temporary locations the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church found a permanent home when it purchased a small chapel on Duval Street in the Jackson Ward section of Richmond. Immediately Reverend Jasper's church became further ingrained in the fabric of the community. Jasper was renowned for his marvelous and powerful sermons that attested to the glory of God, but it was his 1878 sermon, "De Sun Do Move," that turned this former slave into a nationally known figure. With this sermon, Jasper, on behalf of his devout brothers and sisters, humbly responded to the assertions of modern science and its secular proponents. Audiences, rich and poor, black and white, were captivated by his words. From memory, Jasper delivered this homily several hundred times to throngs of citizens, and each time argued that the word of God, as manifested in the Holy Bible, was sufficient to answer the mysteries of the world.



**Reverend John Jasper (1812 – 1901)**



-The advent of the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church ironically began in an abandoned Confederate horse stable on Brown's Island in the James River. The Reverend John Jasper commenced his pastorate there in 1867. Due to Jasper's dynamic preaching the congregation grew rapidly, and it soon outgrew the space provided by the Brown's Island horse barn. *Sixth Mount Zion Church*





Richmond Riverfront

# canal walk

*James River &  
Kanawha Canal*

1.25 MILES  
OF RIVERFRONT  
HISTORY

Richmond Riverfront

# canal walk

*Haxall Canal*

1.25 MILES  
OF RIVERFRONT  
HISTORY

477 АЧМЕУ - D



Confederate war effort.

Tredegar Iron Works, 1865. Library of Congress



#### ● JOHN JASPER

Born in a slave cabin, John Jasper became one of the most famous preachers of his time. Freed by Emancipation in 1865 at the age of 53, he founded the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church in one of the buildings that had housed the Confederate Laboratory on Brown's Island. In 1870, the congregation moved to Duval Street, where it remains today.

John Jasper, 1870s. Valentine Museum

#### ● CONFEDERATE LABORATORY

During the Civil War, the hazardous work of loading powder was carried out on Brown's Island because of its separation from the city by water. On March 13, 1864, a huge explosion in the laboratory killed 46 workers — mostly women whom hard times had forced into this dangerous occupation.



#### ● R&P RAILROAD PIERS

From many spots on Brown's Island, the remains of the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad bridge are visible. This was the railroad that brought Jefferson Davis to the city to be inaugurated as President of the Confederacy in 1861. When the city fell to the Union army four years later, all the James River bridges, including the R&P, were burned.

Jefferson Davis, 1850s. Valentine Museum

#### ● BROWN'S ISLAND

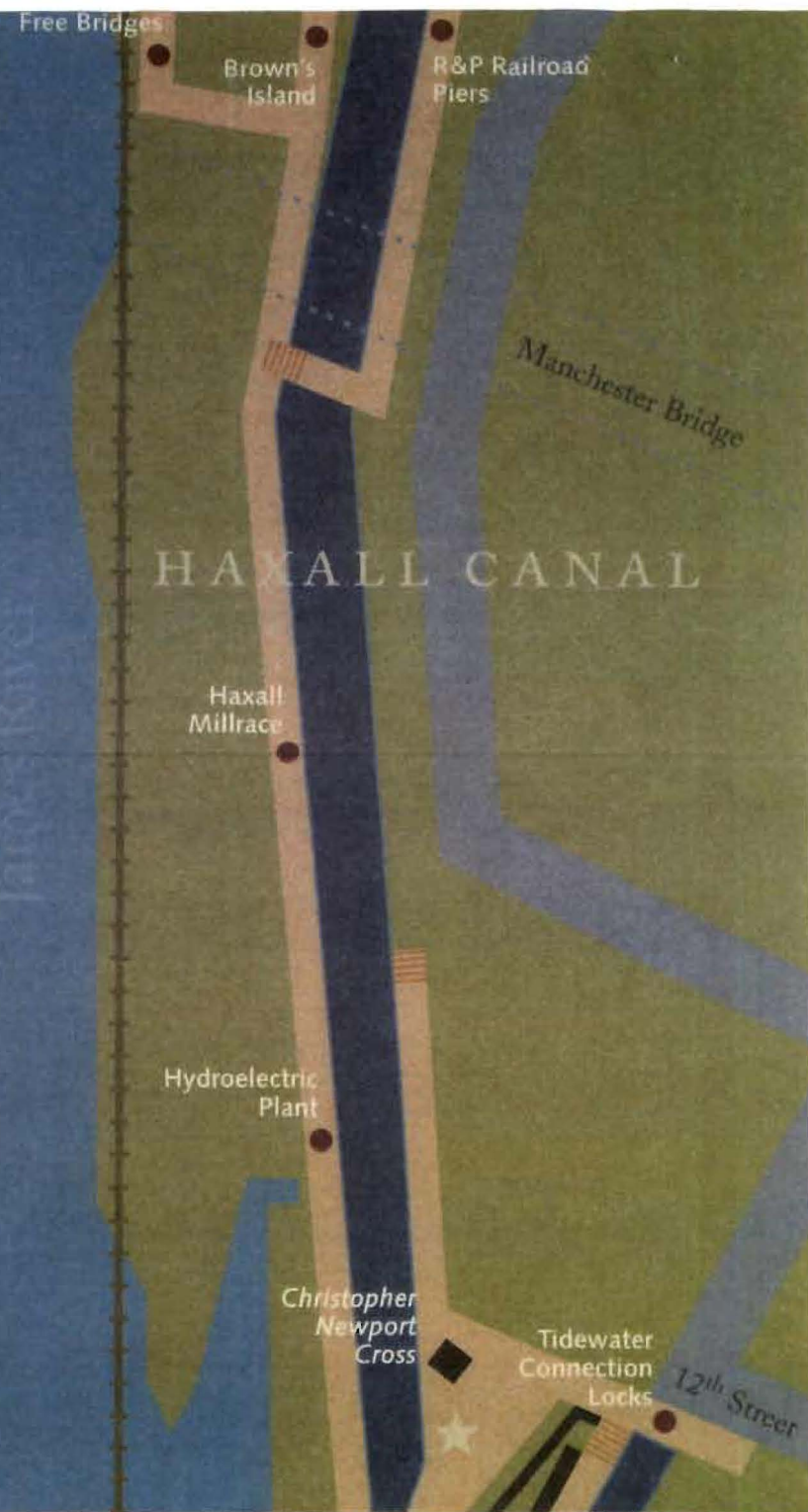
Brown's Island was created when the Haxall Canal was extended west to the Tredegar Iron Works. Encircled by waterways that provided power and transportation to flour mills, foundries, and paper companies, Brown's Island has been at the center of Richmond's industrial activities for more than 200 years. The CSX Railroad still runs along its southern edge.

#### ● MANCHESTER AND FREE BRIDGES

For years, the only river crossing for vehicles and pedestrians was Mayo's toll bridge, at 14th Street. Complaints about the tolls eventually led to the opening of Richmond's first "free" bridge in 1873. The day after it opened, thousands crowded onto the Free Bridge to watch the Reverend John Jasper conduct a large group-baptism ceremony in the river. The bridge was replaced in 1972 by the Manchester Bridge, which includes a legally mandated free walkway.

Baptism below the Free Bridge, 1873. Valentine Museum

#### ● HAXALL MILLRACE



Attachment - E



HISTORIC  
MEDALLION  
FOR JOHN JASPER  
ON BROWN'S ISLAND  
AND FOUNDED OF THE  
SIXTH MT. ZION BAPT. CHURCH  
IN 1867.



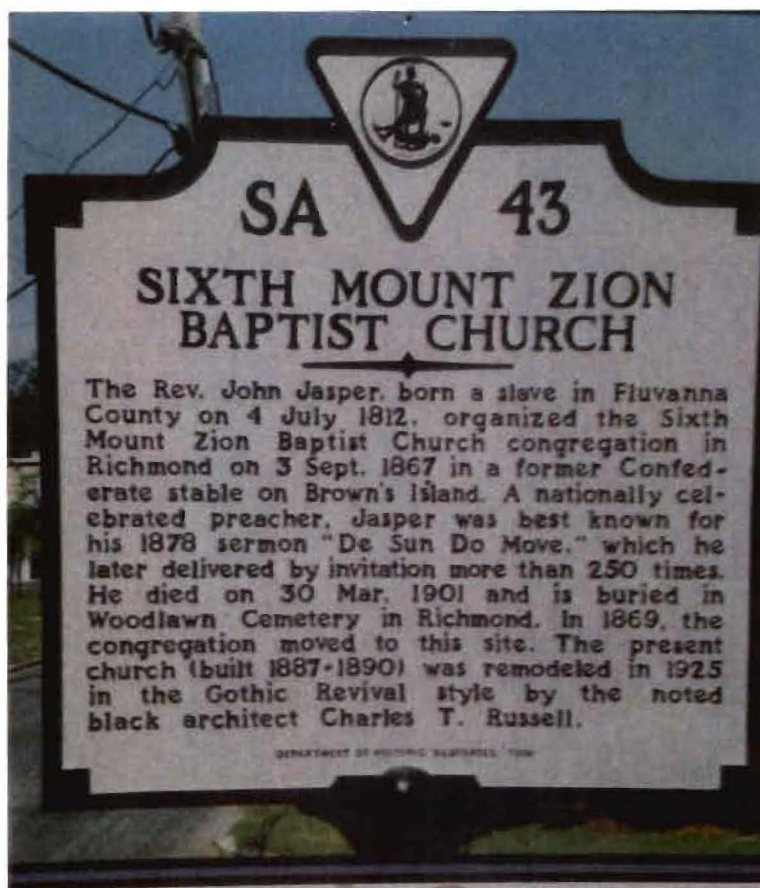
# ATTACHMENT - G

Historic Medalion  
that mentions John Jasper  
and the opening of the  
Manchester & Free Bridge.











**Name of Nominee: Robert Russa Moton (1867-1940)**

**Date and Place of Birth:** 1867, Amelia County, Virginia; grew up in Prince Edward County

**Death:** 1940, Capahosic, Virginia

**Geographical area of Virginia with which the nominee is associated:**

South central Virginia (Southside)

**Contributions to Emancipation or Freedom in Virginia or the nation:**

The former Robert Russa Moton High School is now a National Historic Landmark and Virginia's leading civil rights museum. Built in 1939, the school was named for Robert Russa Moton, the second principal of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama who had grown up in nearby Rice, in eastern Prince Edward County.

Robert Russa Moton was born August 26, 1867, in adjacent Amelia County to Booker and Emily Brown Moton, who had been recently emancipated, but the family moved to Rice soon after Moton's birth. Moton's mother and the daughter of his parents' former plantation owner taught him to read at an early age, and he attended the newly established public schools in the county.

Moton attended Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, founded in 1868 to train teachers and to give African Americans the opportunity to learn professional skills. During his time as a student, Moton returned home to teach school in Cumberland County. He graduated in 1890, and the next year, was called back to Hampton to serve as commandant of male student cadets, a position he served in for almost 25 years.

At Hampton, Moton gained a reputation as a leader highly interested in expanding education for African Americans. In 1900, he was elected president of the National Negro Business League, and in 1912, he helped to found the Negro Organization Society of Virginia, which had the motto "Better Schools, Better Health, Better Homes, Better Farms." He met and worked closely with Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute, and Washington recommended Moton to succeed him as principal – a role Moton assumed upon Washington's death in 1915.

Moton served as principal of Tuskegee for 20 years, during which time he introduced liberal arts courses into the curriculum, expanded the physical campus, and increased the school's endowment. He also served as an adviser on race relations to U.S. Presidents and succeeded in having black doctors staff a black veterans' hospital built at Tuskegee after World War I. In 1935, Moton retired to his home Holly Knoll in Capahosic, Virginia, where he died in 1940.

**Sources:**

[http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Moton\\_Robert\\_Russa\\_1867-1940](http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Moton_Robert_Russa_1867-1940)

[http://www.tuskegee.edu/about\\_us/legacy\\_of\\_leadership/robert\\_r\\_moton.aspx](http://www.tuskegee.edu/about_us/legacy_of_leadership/robert_r_moton.aspx)

Robert Russa Moton, *Finding a Way Out: An Autobiography*

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/moton/menu.html>

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