

# EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION & FREEDOM MONUMENT

## Finalists: Pre-Emancipation

**Mary Jane Richards Bowser (Mary Elizabeth Bowser)**

fl. 1846-1867, *Richmond*

*As the author of the entry in EV admits, there is still a great deal of disagreement among scholars about aspects of Mary Jane Richards Bowser's story. There are many myths about her and still questions about her alleged spying activities in the Confederate White House.*

Mary Richards Bowser was born into slavery and later became a missionary to Liberia, a Union spy in the Confederate White House during the American Civil War (1861–1865), and a teacher at freedmen's schools. As a child, she was owned by the Van Lew family of Richmond; Elizabeth Van Lew, who had arranged for her to be educated in the North and provided her with de facto freedom prior to the war, ran a pro-Union intelligence ring in which Bowser played an important role. After the war, Bowser gave a series of talks in New York about her wartime espionage and worked with the Freedmen's Bureau as a teacher, first in Virginia and then in Florida and Georgia. She last appears in the historical record in 1867, when she wrote a letter describing her plans to join her new husband "in the West Indies." Whether she did is not known. Despite Bowser's accomplishments, many claims regarding her, even those made in purportedly nonfiction accounts, are untrue or remain unsubstantiated. Originally known as Mary Richards, the slave-turned-spy used at least two different married names and several pseudonyms throughout her life. She also made contradictory claims about herself, frequently embellishing, altering, or omitting biographical details to appeal to particular audiences. Her biography exemplifies the challenges historians continue to face in uncovering the experiences of individuals whose race, class, and gender limited the way their lives were documented. [See Mary Jane Richards Bowser in Encyclopedia Virginia.](#)

**Henry "Box" Brown**

Unknown-1897, *Richmond*

Henry Box Brown was an abolitionist lecturer and performer. Born a slave in Louisa County, he worked in a Richmond tobacco factory and lived in a rented house. Then, in 1848, his wife, who was owned by another master and who was pregnant with their fourth child, was sold away to North Carolina, along with their children. Brown resolved to escape from slavery and enlisted the help of a free black and a white slaveowner, who conspired to ship him in a box to Philadelphia. In March 1849 the package was accepted there by a leader of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. As a free man, Brown lectured across New England on the evils of slavery and participated in the publication of the *Narrative of Henry Box Brown* (1849). In 1850, a moving panorama, *Henry Box Brown's Mirror of Slavery*, opened in Boston. That same year, Brown, worried that he might be re-enslaved, moved to England, where he lectured, presented his panorama, and performed as a hypnotist. In 1875, he returned to the United States with his wife and daughter Annie and performed as a magician. Brown died in Toronto on June 15, 1897. He stands as a powerful symbol of the Underground Railroad and enslaved African Americans' thirst for freedom. See the [Library of Virginia's entry on Henry "Box" Brown.](#)

**Anthony Burns**

1834-1862, *Northern Virginia and Richmond*

Anthony Burns was a fugitive slave from Virginia who, while living in Boston in 1854, became the principal in a famous court case brought in an effort to extradite him back to the South. Born in Stafford County, Burns was the property of the merchant Charles F. Suttle, who later hired him out to William Brent, of Falmouth. In 1854, Burns escaped slavery and traveled to Boston, where he wrote a letter back to one of

his brothers. Intercepted by Suttle, the letter revealed Burns's whereabouts, and Suttle and Brent themselves traveled to Boston and claimed Burns under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The subsequent rendition trial sparked the interest of antislavery activists, and an attempt at freeing Burns by force killed a federal marshal. Burns eventually lost his case and was sold to a man in North Carolina. Boston activists later purchased his freedom, however, and he attended school in Ohio and lectured on his experiences. He ended up in Canada, where he died in 1862 from health problems related to his post-trial confinement. See [Anthony Burns in Encyclopedia Virginia](#).

### **William Harvey Carney**

1840-1908, *Norfolk*

Born enslaved in Norfolk, William H. Carney expressed an early interest in religion and attended a school run by a local minister. His father escaped during the 1850s to New Bedford, Massachusetts, and he purchased Carney and his mother out of slavery when they were not freed as promised by their owner's will. After the Emancipation Proclamation authorized African Americans to participate in combat, Carney joined the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, the first black military unit raised in the North. The 54th Regiment led the charge on July 18, 1863, against Fort Wagner, one of the strongest defenses around Charleston, South Carolina. When the flag bearer was shot down in battle, Carney saved the American flag and planted it on the parapet. When the troops fell back he retrieved the flag, despite having received several serious wounds. As he handed it over to his regiment, Carney said, "Boys, the old flag never touched the ground." He was honorably discharged in June 1864 and returned to New Bedford. Carney worked as one of the earliest U.S. letter carriers after the war, and he frequently spoke in public about how he saved the flag. In 1897 he received a standing ovation while attending the unveiling ceremony for the Boston monument to Colonel Robert Gould Shaw of the 54th Massachusetts. After 37 years, Carney received the Medal of Honor on May 23, 1900, for his heroism during the assault on Fort Wagner. When Carney died in 1908, the U.S. flag flew at half-mast at the Massachusetts State House. See the [Library of Virginia's entry on William Harvey Carney](#).

### **John Dabney**

ca. 1824-1900, *Richmond*

John Dabney was a renowned Richmond-based caterer through much of the nineteenth century. Dabney began acquiring his reputation while enslaved, even serving one of his famed mint juleps to the future Edward VII during the prince's 1860 visit to America. He was in the process of purchasing his own freedom when the American Civil War (1861–1865) and slavery ended. Known for his integrity, he could secure credit from banks, which he and his wife used to purchase several properties and open a restaurant. While outwardly conforming to the expectations of white society, he privately harbored no illusions about his clients' racism. Dabney inwardly experienced the "two-ness" that the sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois described in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), of being "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings." Exemplifying his popularity, all four of Richmond's daily newspapers reported his death. See [John Dabney in Encyclopedia Virginia](#).

### **Gabriel**

ca. 1770s-1800, *Henrico County*

Gabriel's Conspiracy was a plan by enslaved African American men to attack Richmond and destroy slavery in Virginia. Although thwarted, it remains one of the half-dozen most important insurrection plots in the history of North American slavery. Named after an enslaved blacksmith who emerged as the most significant leader of the plot, Gabriel's Conspiracy originated during the spring and summer of 1800 in a Henrico County neighborhood north of Richmond and extended primarily across Hanover County into Caroline County and south toward Petersburg. Two slave men betrayed the plot just hours before a torrential rainstorm prevented the conspirators from gathering on the night of August 30, 1800. In response, Virginia authorities arrested and prosecuted more than seventy enslaved men for insurrection and conspiracy. Twenty-six of those found guilty were hanged and eight more were transported, or sold

outside of the state, while another suspected conspirator committed suicide before his arraignment. A small number of free blacks were also implicated and one was prosecuted. The alleged involvement of two Frenchmen in the plot provided fodder for Federalist attacks on Thomas Jefferson's candidacy for the presidency that year. The aborted uprising also provoked refinements in the state's slave laws at the next meeting of the General Assembly, including the adoption of transportation as an alternative to capital punishment for some slave offenders and calls for an end to private manumissions and for the deportation of free blacks. See [Encyclopedia Virginia's entry on Gabriel's Conspiracy](#).

### **James Lafayette**

ca. 1748-1830, *New Kent County*

James Lafayette was a spy during the American Revolution (1775–1783). Born a slave about 1748, he was a body servant for his owner, William Armistead, of New Kent County, in the spring of 1781. At the time, Armistead served as state commissary of military supplies, and his position allowed Lafayette—then known only by his first name—access to the front lines of war. Lafayette's race made it easy for him to pass between lines, and he began serving as a double agent, spying for the Americans while pretending to spy for the British. After the war, the marquis de Lafayette attested in writing to James Lafayette's service, and the former spy petitioned the General Assembly for his freedom, which was granted in 1787. Around this time he took the surname Lafayette. Late in 1818 Lafayette petitioned for and won a military pension. He lived on forty acres of land he purchased in New Kent County, traveling to Richmond twice a year to collect his pension. He reportedly greeted the marquis de Lafayette on the Frenchman's tour of Virginia in 1824. James Lafayette died in Baltimore in 1830. See [James Lafayette in Encyclopedia Virginia](#).

### **Dred Scott**

ca. 1799-1858, *Southampton County*

Scott was an enslaved African American man in the United States who unsuccessfully sued for his freedom and that of his wife and their two daughters in the Dred Scott v. Sandford case of 1857, popularly known as the "Dred Scott Decision." Scott claimed that he and his wife should be granted their freedom because they had lived in Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory for four years, where slavery was illegal. The United States Supreme Court decided 7–2 against Scott, finding that neither he nor any other person of African ancestry could claim citizenship in the United States, and therefore Scott could not bring suit in federal court under diversity of citizenship rules. Moreover, Scott's temporary residence outside Missouri did not bring about his emancipation under the Missouri Compromise, which the court ruled unconstitutional as it would "improperly deprive Scott's owner of his legal property."

### **Nat Turner**

1800-1831, *Southampton County*

Turner, a slave preacher and self-styled prophet, had led the only successful slave revolt in Virginia's history, leaving fifty-five white people in Southampton County, Virginia, dead, the slaveholding South convulsed with panic, and the myth of the contented slave in tatters. On Sunday, August 21, 1831, Turner met in the woods with a small band of co-conspirators—Henry, Hark, Sam, Nelson, Will, and Jack—and made plans to seize their liberty from the white people of Southampton County. They would start at the home of Turner's master and, after striking him dead, kill every white person they encountered while gathering arms and recruits at plantations throughout the region. The revolt lasted a mere twelve hours and was crushed by a massive force of state militia and armed civilians, backed by federal troops from nearby Fort Monroe, which quickly converged on the region. White vigilantes, defying the orders of civil and military authorities, maimed and killed dozens of slaves and free persons of color suspected of complicity. The heads of suspected ringleaders were placed on signposts in the public roads to inspire a "salutary terror" in the black population and diminish the threat of renewed attack. Turner himself eluded capture for more than two months, finally surrendering to a local farmer who found him hiding in a makeshift cave. See [Nat Turner in Encyclopedia Virginia](#).



# EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION & FREEDOM MONUMENT

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## Finalists: Post-Emancipation

**Dr. Virgie M. Binford**

1925-2017 – *Central Virginia*

Virgie M. Binford dedicated her life to education as a teacher, supervisor, and consultant with the Richmond school system, a supervisor of the Follow Through program for children in kindergarten through third grade, and owner of the consulting firm I-U-CAN Co. She also served on the faculty of J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, was the first black woman to serve as moderator of Hanover Presbytery, now the Presbytery of the James, and was a motivational speaker.

**James Wesley Douglas Bland**

1844-1870 – *Prince Edward County*

J. W. D. Bland was a highly respected African American politician during his brief career. Born free and educated, voters in Appomattox and Prince Edward counties elected him one of their delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1867–1868. He served on three major committees and reached out to conservative whites by opposing test oaths and disfranchisement for former Confederates. He was elected to the Senate of Virginia in 1869, where he became a conciliatory figure in a racially volatile era. Focusing on education, he sponsored a successful bill that established Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (later Hampton University). The next year Bland was among a large crowd attending a session of the Supreme Court of Appeals in the State Capitol. The floor collapsed, killing him and about sixty other observers.

**John Andrew Bowler**

1862-1935 – *Richmond*

John Andrew Bowler was born on March 1, 1862, in Richmond, Virginia. He attended Navy Hill School. Bowler built the East End School, the first school for African Americans in the Church Hill neighborhood of Richmond. He was the first minister of the Mt. Olivet Baptist Church. He died on October 7, 1935, and is buried in Evergreen cemetery Richmond. The former Springfield School on Twenty Six Street in Richmond was renamed in his honor in 1948, and Virginia Union University awarded him an honorary D.D. degree.

**Rosa L. Dixon Bowser**

1855-1931 – *Amelia County and Richmond*

Rosa L. Dixon Bowser, educator and civic leader, played a key role in implementing reforms that affected Virginia's African Americans. Bowser was most likely born enslaved. After the American Civil War (1861–1865), she moved to Richmond with her family and enrolled in public school, where she showed remarkable intelligence. She went on to become a teacher in Richmond's public schools. Her efforts on behalf of educators helped create Virginia's first professional African American teachers association, and she later served as its president. Throughout her teaching career Bowser, like her contemporaries Janie Porter Barrett and Maggie Lena Walker, worked for societal improvement. She played a major role in African American reform organizations, industrial schools for black children, groups supporting universal woman suffrage, and associations publicly opposed to lynching and racial segregation. The first branch of the Richmond public library to be opened for African Americans was named for Bowser in 1925. She died of complications from diabetes in 1931 at her home in Richmond. See [Rosa L. Dixon Bowser in Encyclopedia Virginia](#).

**Lucy Goode Brooks**1818-1900 – *Richmond*

Lucy Goode Brooks played the primary role in establishing the Friends' Asylum for Colored Orphans, an orphanage for African American children in Richmond, after the American Civil War (1861–1865). Born into slavery, she married Albert Royal Brooks, whose master allowed him to operate a livery stable and eating house. Although he eventually purchased his freedom and that of Lucy Brooks and several of their children, one daughter was sold by her owner to bondage in Tennessee. After Emancipation former slaves flocked to Richmond to look for missing family members. Having lost one of her own children to the slave trade, Lucy Brooks had a special concern for the plight of parentless children. She worked with the Ladies Sewing Circle for Charitable Work, a local Society of Friends meeting, and several black churches to create an orphanage. In March 1872 the General Assembly incorporated the Friends' Asylum for Colored Orphans, which remained in operation for almost sixty years. Brooks died in Richmond in 1900. See [Lucy Good Brooks in Encyclopedia Virginia](#).

**Evelyn Thomas Butts**1924-1993 – *Norfolk*

Evelyn Thomas Butts was a civil rights activist and Democratic Party leader from Norfolk who helped overturn Virginia's poll tax. Her lawsuit challenging the tax was combined with a similar action by four Fairfax County residents and argued before the U.S. Supreme Court as *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections* (1966). Butts conducted voter registration campaigns and helped establish Concerned Citizens for Political Education. The political organization achieved two key victories late in the 1960s with the election of Joseph A. Jordan as the first black city council member of the twentieth century and the election of William P. Robinson as Norfolk's first African American member of the House of Delegates. By the end of the 1970s Butts was considered one of the region's most important African American political leaders. See [Evelyn Thomas Butts in Encyclopedia Virginia](#).

**Peter Jacob Carter**1845-1886 – *Northampton County*

Peter Jacob Carter, a member of the House of Delegates (1871–1878), was the Eastern Shore's predominant African American politician in the decades following the American Civil War. Born in Northampton County, Carter escaped from slavery and then served for more than two years with the U.S. Colored Infantry. In 1871 he won election as a Republican to the House of Delegates representing Northampton County. He was reelected three more times, and his eight-year tenure was one of the longest among nineteenth-century African American members of the General Assembly. Carter was a Funder Republican—that is, he supported the aggressive repayment of Virginia's antebellum debts—a rare position for an African American politician. Conservatives gerrymandered Carter out of his district ahead of the 1879 elections, and he lost his bid for a seat in the Senate of Virginia. He retained much of his political power, dispensing federal patronage and chairing the state's delegation to the Republican National Convention in 1880. He left the party to join William Mahone's Readjusters, a Republican-allied coalition that sought to readjust Virginia's payment of its antebellum debt. Carter was rewarded for his support by being elected doorkeeper of the Senate of Virginia in 1881 and appointed rector of Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (later Virginia State University) in 1883. He died in 1886, probably of appendicitis. See [Peter Jacob Carter in Encyclopedia Virginia](#).

**Jennie Serepta Dean**1848-1913 – *Prince William County*

Jennie Serepta Dean founded the Manassas Industrial School for Colored Youth. A former slave, Dean attended schools in Fairfax County and Washington, D.C., and in 1878 began to establish a series of Sunday schools. She was a skilled fund-raiser, securing money from African American and white donors in Virginia and in northern cities to support her plan to open a school that would teach skilled trades to

young African Americans. The Manassas Industrial School for Colored Youth opened in 1894 after nearly six years of fundraising. Dean served on the school's board of directors and executive committee. She died in 1913. See [Jennie Serepta Dean in Encyclopedia Virginia](#).

### **James Farmer**

1920-1999 – *Fredericksburg*

James Farmer was a civil rights leader who pioneered sit-in demonstrations during the 1940s and led the Freedom Riders of 1961. After graduating from Wiley College, in Texas, Farmer moved to Chicago to serve as race relations secretary for the pacifist group Fellowship of Reconciliation. Dedicated to fighting Jim Crow laws, in 1942 Farmer helped form what became the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). The organization selected Farmer as its national director in 1961, bringing him to prominence. The violent reaction by southern whites to the Freedom Riders was the first in a series of confrontations and arrests for his work on behalf of African American civil rights. Farmer left CORE in 1966 and later served briefly in the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Farmer moved to Spotsylvania County about 1980 and became a professor at Mary Washington College in 1985. That year his book, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement*, was published. Farmer received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1998. See [James Farmer in Encyclopedia Virginia](#).

### **Reverend Dr. Curtis West Harris**

Born 1924 – *Hopewell*

Curtis West Harris, Sr. 's civil rights work began in 1950 when he served as President of the Hopewell chapter of the NAACP. Harris was ordained a Baptist minister in 1959. In 1960, he was arrested and sentenced to 60 days in jail for his role in a sit-in at segregated Georges' Drugstore in Hopewell, Virginia. Later in that year, he protested the segregation of the Hopewell swimming pool, which led to the pool's closure. In 1966, Harris led a peaceful demonstration against the building of a landfill in Hopewell's African-American community and was confronted by the Ku Klux Klan on the steps of City Hall. While he served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Harris was cited for contempt by the Boatwright Committee of the Virginia General Assembly for not revealing the names of individuals associated with SCLC and not responding to the questions asked by the committee. Martin Luther King, Jr., along with more than a hundred Virginia ministers and laymen accompanied Harris to his contempt trial in Hopewell. Harris worked with King on multiple civil rights initiatives, including the March on Washington and the Selma to Montgomery marches. He continued to fight for civil rights in the decades that followed, leading march against discrimination in Colonial Heights, filing a discrimination complaint against a Fort Lee military unit, and marching against a proposed ethanol plant in Hopewell. In 1998, Harris became the first African-American mayor of Hopewell.

### **Andrew I. Heidelberg**

1943-2015 – *Norfolk*

Andrew Heidelberg, one of the "Norfolk 17," was among the first African Americans to be integrated in Norfolk's public schools. During his senior year at Norview High School in 1961, Heidelberg made the school football team and was the first African American to play varsity football at a formerly all-white public school in the South. That same year, his team won the Eastern District Championship. In 1967, Heidelberg became the first African American Branch Manager, Credit Officer, and Commercial Loan Officer in Providence, Rhode Island. In 1976, he co-founded Heidelberg, Clary & Associates, Inc. After firm closed, he worked at Barclays and Banco de Ponce of NY as Vice President and Corporate Manager. He later served as Assistant Treasurer and Chief Deputy Treasurer for the City of Hampton in 2003 until retirement. Heidelberg was selected by Governors Mark Warner and Tim Kaine to serve as a member of the Brown v. Board of Education Scholarship Awards Committee for consecutive terms (2005-2011). In 2006, he published *The Norfolk 17: A Personal Narrative on Desegregation in Norfolk, Virginia in 1958-1962*. He also finished a screenplay based on his non-published book *The Colored Halfback*. In 2009, he

returned to Norview High School to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of "Massive Resistance" in Virginia and was inducted into the Hampton Roads Sports Hall of Fame in 2015.

### **Dorothy Irene Height**

1912-2010 – *Richmond*

Dorothy Irene Height, was a civil rights and women's rights activist, dedicated to issues affecting African-American women, including unemployment, illiteracy, and voter awareness. She was the president of the National Council of Negro Women for forty years and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1994 and the Congressional Gold Medal in 2004. She earned an undergraduate degree in 1932 from New York University and a master's degree in educational psychology the following year. She pursued further postgraduate work at Columbia University and the New York School of Social Work. Height started working as a caseworker with the New York City Welfare Department, and at the age of 25, she began a career as a civil rights activist, joining the National Council of Negro Women. In 1957, Height was named president of the National Council of Negro Women, a position she held until 1997. During the 1960s, she organized "Wednesdays in Mississippi," which brought together black and white women from the North and South to create a dialogue of understanding. Height was also a founding member of the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership. American leaders regularly took her counsel. Height served on a number of committees, including as a consultant on African affairs to the Secretary of State, the President's Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped, and the President's Committee on the Status of Women.

### **Reverend John Jasper**

1812-1901 – *Richmond*

Rev. Jasper was born into slavery on July 4, 1812 in Fluvanna County, to Philip and Tina Jasper and was one of twenty-four children. Philip was a Baptist preacher while Tina was a slave of a Mr. Peachy. Jasper was hired out to various people and when Mr. Peachy's mistress died, he was given to her son, John Blair Peachy, a lawyer who moved to Louisiana. Jasper's time in Louisiana was short, as his new master soon died, and he returned to Richmond, Virginia. Jasper experienced a personal conversion to Christianity in Capitol Square in 1839. Jasper convinced a fellow slave to teach him to read and write, and began studying to become a Baptist minister. For more than two decades, Rev. Jasper traveled throughout Virginia, often preaching at funeral services for fellow slaves. He often preached at Third Baptist Church in Petersburg, Virginia. He also preached to Confederate Soldiers during the American Civil War (1861-1865). After his own emancipation following the American Civil War, Rev. Jasper founded the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church in Richmond, which by 1887 had attracted 2500 members and served as a religious and social center of Richmond's predominantly black Jackson Ward—providing a Sunday School and other services. Jasper's vivid oratory and dramatic speaking style brought renown and calls for him to preach throughout the Eastern United States. He delivered his last sermon a few days before his death at age 88.

### **Charles Spurgeon Johnson**

1893-1956 – *Roanoke*

Growing up Bristol, Virginia, Charles Spurgeon Johnson experienced racial discrimination that led to his lifelong fight for equal rights. His well-educated parents sent him to an academy in Richmond, and in 1916 he earned a bachelor of arts from Virginia Union University. His studies in sociology at the University of Chicago were interrupted by World War I, in which he served as a noncommissioned officer with the 803rd Pioneer Infantry in France. After returning to the United States, he was deeply affected by his experience in the 1919 Chicago race riots. Subsequently he conducted most of the research on the riots for the Chicago Commission on Race Relations. As a result of his work, the National Urban League appointed Johnson director of its research department in 1921. In 1928 he left New York for Nashville, Tennessee, to chair Fisk University's social sciences department. Johnson saw racial segregation as a threat to American democracy and prosperity. He systematically documented the negative economic and social effects of segregation on African Americans and made Fisk a center for studies on race relations in



the South. Elected president of Fisk in 1946, Johnson was the first African American to hold the post, and under his leadership the university flourished. Widely recognized for his expertise on race relations, Johnson served on regional, national, and international organizations and commissions, including government appointments in 1946 to an advisory committee on postwar educational reforms in Japan and as a U.S. delegate to UNESCO. See the [Library of Virginia's entry on Charles Spurgeon Johnson](#).

### **John Mercer Langston**

1829-1897 – *Petersburg*

John Mercer Langston served as Virginia's first African American member of Congress (1890–1891) and as the first president of Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (later Virginia State University). The son of a white Louisa County planter and the woman he freed, Langston grew up in Ohio, where, as an attorney and local office holder, he helped recruit African American troops during the American Civil War (1861–1865). After the war, his involvement with the Freedmen's Bureau as inspector of schools brought him back to Virginia. In 1870 Langston became dean of Howard University's law school and served as acting president of the university from 1873 until 1875. In 1885, the Virginia State Board of Education named Langston president of the new Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute. The new school grew under his leadership, but the Democrat-packed board of visitors did not renew his contract two years later. In 1888 he sought the Republican nomination for Congress, but party leader William Mahone engineered his defeat. Langston ran an independent campaign in which a Democrat was named the winner. Langston disputed the election results, however, and eventually Congress seated him for the final months of his term. He lost reelection and returned to Washington, D.C., where he published an autobiography. See [John Mercer Langston in Encyclopedia Virginia](#).

### **Mildred Loving**

1939 - 2008 – *Caroline County*

Growing up in Caroline County, Mildred Jeter Loving (July 22, 1939–May 2, 2008) fell in love with Richard P. Loving. In 1958 they married in Washington, D.C., because he was white and she had African American and Native American ancestry. A few weeks afterward, the couple was arrested at their home for violating Virginia's law against interracial marriage. They were each sentenced to one year in jail, with the sentence suspended so long as they lived outside the state and did not return together. The Lovings moved to Washington and had three children, but Mildred Loving did not like living away from her home. In 1963 she wrote to the U.S. attorney general for help. At his suggestion, she contacted the American Civil Liberties Union, which filed a motion in the county court to vacate the sentence and allow the Lovings to live in Virginia as husband and wife. The local judge refused and the ACLU filed subsequent unsuccessful suits in state and federal courts. The United States Supreme Court heard their case, and its unanimous ruling on June 12, 1967, overturned Virginia's law, stating that the freedom to marry a person of another race was an individual civil right that a state could not deny. Loving and her family returned to Caroline County, where they lived quietly in the home they built together. She often demurred that "all we ever wanted was to get married, because we loved each other," but Loving's courage ensured that interracial couples no longer faced legal discrimination against marriage. See the [Library of Virginia Entry on Mildred Loving](#).

### **John Mitchell, Jr.**

1863-1929 – *Richmond*

Born a slave in Richmond on July 11, 1863, Mitchell attended Richmond Colored Normal School and was appointed editor of the *Richmond Planet* in 1884 at the age of just twenty-one. For forty-five years, the *Planet* covered local, national, and worldwide news especially lynchings, segregation and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. Mitchell's reports, editorials and cartoons denounced racial prejudice and ridiculed its perpetrators. Mitchell was a community activist and politician, a leader of the Knights of Pythias, President of the National Afro-American Press Association, and Founder and President of a commercial bank. In the spring of 1892, at the age of 28, he was elected to Richmond's Board of Aldermen from

Jackson Ward, and he was re-elected in 1894. Mitchell ran for Governor in 1921 as a part of a so-called "Lily Black" Republican ticket. The National Afro-American Press Association elected Mitchell to consecutive Presidential terms in the early 1890s. There he led fellow newspaper editors in an organized outcry against "Southern outrages," and lynchings, and in their endorsement of the work of Ida B. Wells. Mitchell frequently travelled to communities where lynchings were reported to be imminent at great danger to himself. In 1904 he led a boycott of the Richmond streetcar system when the company imposed segregated cars. As founder and President of the Mechanic's Savings Bank, Mitchell strove to make it the place Richmond's African-Americans saved their money and did their banking. Later, Mitchell was accused of misusing the bank's funds. In a fight that was to go to the State Supreme Court, Mitchell countered the charges and accused the State's establishment of retaliating against him for his run at the Governorship. Mitchell's legal battle was to drag on for over a year. Responding to his public pleas for solidarity, the community increased savings entrusted to Mechanics Savings Bank and contributed to a John Mitchell, Jr., Defense Fund. While his conviction was ultimately set aside and he was cleared of all charges, the Mechanics Savings Bank went into receivership in 1923. Mitchell would not recover from this blow. His savings and assets were all but stripped away. He remained editor of the Richmond Planet until 1929, when fittingly he collapsed in the office of his beloved paper, and died at his home December 3, 1929. See the [Library of Virginia's entry on John Mitchell, Jr.](#)

### **Lucy F. Simms**

1855-1934 – *Harrisonburg*

Lucy F. Simms was born a slave in 1855 on the Gray family estate "Hilltop" along Harrisonburg's eastern edge. She began teaching when she was just 17 or 18 years old and was able to attend Hampton Institute from 1874 to 1877. Upon graduation, "Miss Lucy" returned to the Valley and taught for a year at Zenda, a black community north of Harrisonburg. She then moved to Harrisonburg city schools, first teaching in a church room and then the new Effinger School. She taught there until the end of the 1933-34 school year and died on July 10, 1934. Lucy Simms' career spanned 56 years, with only one half-day lost due to illness. According to one writer, she is remembered as "a person of strong moral convictions. She could not abide dishonesty. Although loving and kind to her children, she also administered punishment when she deemed it necessary." In her obituary, the Daily News-Record stated, "The record of the faithful colored teacher has few if any parallels in Virginia. All of the pupils who have entered the primary grade at the Effinger Street School since its establishment have passed under motherlike care. She taught three generations in many of the Harrisonburg colored families and it is estimated that 1800 boys and girls were instructed by her." Harrisonburg named its new school, built in 1938-39, in her honor. See the [Heritage Museum's entry on Lucy Simms.](#)

### **Gregory Hayes Swanson**

1924-1992 – *Danville*

Gregory Hayes Swanson filed an application in 1949 to seek a master's degree in law as part of a larger strategy to desegregate higher education. Despite earlier court rulings, the University of Virginia's board of visitors still refused to admit Swanson. A team of NAACP lawyers, led by Thurgood Marshall, successfully sued for his admission in the federal courthouse that now houses Jefferson-Madison Regional Library. After the hearing before the Federal Court of Appeals on Sept. 5, 1950, Swanson became the first African-American to attend the University, enrolling as a graduate student in the law school 10 days later. Swanson had a long and distinguished career as an attorney with the IRS. [See Richmond Times Dispatch article on Gregory Hayes Swanson.](#)

### **Reverend Wyatt Tee Walker**

Born 1929 – *Petersburg*

Wyatt Tee Walker graduated from Virginia Union University in Richmond in 1950 and from its Graduate School of Religion in 1953. From 1953 to 1960 he was pastor of Gillfield Baptist Church in Petersburg, where he became president of the local branch of the NAACP and was arrested for trying to borrow a

book about Robert E. Lee from the Petersburg Public Library. Walker served as the first full-time executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference from 1960 to 1964. He played a major role in the Civil Rights movement and worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Walker was arrested during a Freedom Riders protest in Birmingham in 1961 and helped organize the 1963 march on Washington. In 1966 Walker became pastor of Canaan Baptist Church of Christ, in Harlem, New York City. During the 1970s he advised the governor on urban affairs. In 1978 Walker organized the International Freedom Mobilization to protest apartheid in South Africa and later welcomed Nelson Mandela to his church in New York. Walker also studied African American church music and became a nationally recognized authority on the subject. He published more than a dozen books on religious and musical subjects and later took part in documenting the Civil Rights movement. After suffering a stroke in 2003 and retiring from his ministry, Walker returned to Virginia, where he lives in Chester and remains active in promoting Christian brotherhood.

**Dr. James Edward Maceo West**

Born 1931 – *Nottoway County*

James Edward Maceo West was born February 10, 1931, in Farmville, Virginia, and is an American inventor and acoustician. He holds over 250 foreign and U.S. patents for the production and design of microphones and techniques for creating polymer foil electrets. West received a BS in Physics from Temple University in 1957. In 2001, West retired from Lucent Technologies after a distinguished 40-year career at Bell Laboratories where he received the organization's highest honor, being named a Bell Laboratories Fellow. West then joined the faculty of the Whiting School at Johns Hopkins University where he is currently a Professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. In 2007, West received an honorary doctorate from NJIT. Along with Gerhard Sessler, West developed the foil electret microphone in 1962 while developing instruments for human hearing research. Nearly 90 percent of more than two billion microphones produced annually are based on the principles of the foil-electret and are used in everyday items such as telephones, camcorders, hearing aids, baby monitors, and audio recording devices among others. Dr. West is the recipient of the National Medal of Technology and Innovation, and in 2010, along with Gerhard M. Sessler, West was the recipient of The Franklin Institute's Benjamin Franklin Medal in Electrical Engineering. He is also an inductee to the National Inventors Hall of Fame and an elected member of the National Academy of Engineering. Throughout his career West has been a fervent advocate for greater diversity in the fields of science and technology. While at Bell Laboratories, West co-founded the Association of Black Laboratory Employees (ABLE), an organization formed to "address placement and promotional concerns of Black Bell Laboratories employees." He was also instrumental in the creation and development of both the Corporate Research Fellowship Program (CRFP) for graduate students pursuing terminal degrees in the sciences, as well as the Summer Research Program, which together provided opportunities for over 500 non-white graduate students.