



A TRAIL OF TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS

Unveiling Black History
in **Hampton Roads**

Compiled by Dr. Amelia Ross-Hammond, Virginia Beach Councilwoman, Founder and Chairman of the Virginia African American Cultural Center, and Kurt Krause, Virginia Travel Association President.

Acknowledgment

The content within *The Trail of Trials and Triumphs: Unveiling Black History in Hampton Roads* is a product of a collaborative effort between Dr. Amelia Ross-Hammond, Virginia Beach City Councilwoman, Founder and Chairman of the Virginia African American Cultural Center, and Kurt Krause, Virginia Travel Association President, whose contributions, expertise, and insights were instrumental in making this project possible.



Virginia African American Cultural Center

Mission: To collect, preserve, interpret, inform and celebrate Virginia's African American history, culture and community and to educate the public about African American contributions in all areas of endeavor.

Vision: The Virginia African American Cultural Center (VAACC) will be the statewide leader in generating historical and cultural content through programs, artistic performances and curated exhibits.

Support also comes from the Virginia Tourism Corporation
and the Coastal Virginia Tourism Alliance.

VIRGINIA
IS FOR
HISTORY
LOVERS

COASTAL
VIRGINIA
TOURISM ALLIANCE

A TRAIL OF TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS

Unveiling Black History in **Hampton Roads**

In the tapestry of American history, few regions resonate with the echoes of the African American experience as profoundly as Hampton Roads, Virginia. This mosaic of cities has been an indelible part of Black history from the Africans who brought the skills and trades of their homeland to North America, providing expertise in navigation and agriculture, helping to shape the industry and waterways of the New World, through the Civil Rights movement and into the present day, where its legacy continues to shape our nation.

Each city in Hampton Roads carries stories of both struggle and triumph. Hampton's Fort Monroe, where those first Africans arrived, later became known as "Freedom's Fortress" during the Civil War. Williamsburg's historic First Baptist Church, founded in 1776 by enslaved and free African Americans, continues to stand as a testament to spiritual resistance and perseverance. Norfolk's role in the Underground Railroad and the courageous Norfolk 17 who integrated its schools demonstrate the region's significance in the long march toward equality.

Portsmouth's Emanuel A.M.E. Church and Newport News' Newsome House Museum celebrate the resilience and achievements of individuals who helped shape these communities despite formidable obstacles. As well as more storied stops including First Landing State Park in Virginia Beach, Chesapeake's Unknown & Known Afro-Union Civil War Soldiers Memorial, the Belmont plantation in Southampton County, and the Smithfield Schoolhouse Museum in Isle of Wight County. Together, these sites tell a story of determination that has influenced not just Hampton Roads, but America itself.

This guide offers a carefully curated two-day journey through these historic treasures, and is an invitation to explore, to understand, and to appreciate the depth and breadth of Black heritage in Hampton Roads, a region where history is not just remembered, but vibrantly alive.

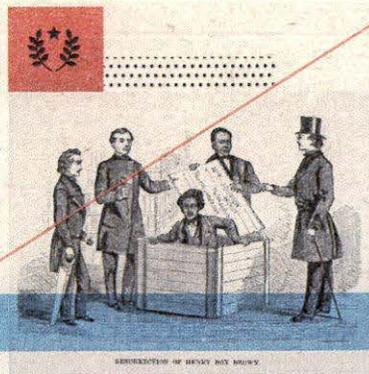
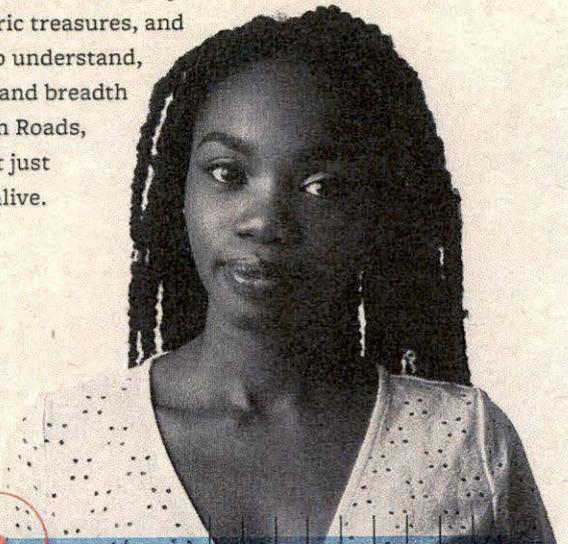


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Table Of Contents	4
How To Use This Guide	5
Two-Day Itinerary Overview	6
Day 1	8
Day 1: Morning	
Fort Monroe	8
Hampton University Museum & The Emancipation Oak	9
Day 1: Early Afternoon	
Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center	10
Newsome House Museum & Cultural Center	10
Day 1: Late Afternoon	
Colonial Williamsburg	11
Day 2	12
Day 2: Morning	
Great Dismal Swamp Underground Railroad Pavilion + Tour	12
Day 2: Early Afternoon	
Portsmouth Colored Community Library Museum	13
Map	14
Day 2: Early Afternoon	
Self-Guided Underground Railroad Tour of Portsmouth	16
Day 2: Late Afternoon	
Waterways to Freedom Self Guided Tour	17
More Storied Stops	18
To Be Continued	26

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome to an experience that will transform your understanding of American history and your place within its continuing story. This guide will assist you in retracing the steps of those who helped shape American history, from the shores where the first Africans arrived in 1619 to the vibrant communities that continue to celebrate this rich heritage today.

At the center of this guide you will find a **detailed map** showcasing not just important locations, but also the connections between these historic sites. We've woven each stop into a compelling **two-day itinerary** that begins at Fort Monroe in Hampton and ends at Norfolk's historic waterfront. Each site listing provides everything you need for a seamless experience—precise addresses, recommended visit durations, and accessibility information. While we've created this itinerary to tell an unforgettable story, let your curiosity be your guide and explore where your interest takes hold.

To fully immerse yourself, we recommend reading each site's historical overview before arriving, downloading suggested information in advance and allowing moments for reflection between locations. Remember, you're not merely following a map—you're retracing paths of courage and celebrating triumphs of the human spirit.

Planning Tips:



Check operating hours, as some sites have seasonal schedules.



Bring comfortable walking shoes for historic areas and tours.



Carry water, especially for outdoor sites like the Great Dismal Swamp.



This journey through Hampton Roads reveals not only the past, but the enduring legacy of African American history that continues to shape our present and future. **Thank you for sharing your experience with us.**

ITINERARY OVERVIEW

DAY 1

Fort Monroe

Location: 30 Ingalls Rd,
Fort Monroe, VA 23651

Allow: 2 hours

Hampton University Museum & The Emancipation Oak

Location: 14 Frissell Ave,
Hampton, VA 23669

Allow: 1.5 hours

Newsome House Museum & Cultural Center

Location: 2803 Oak Ave,
Newport News, VA 23607

Allow: 1 hour

Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center

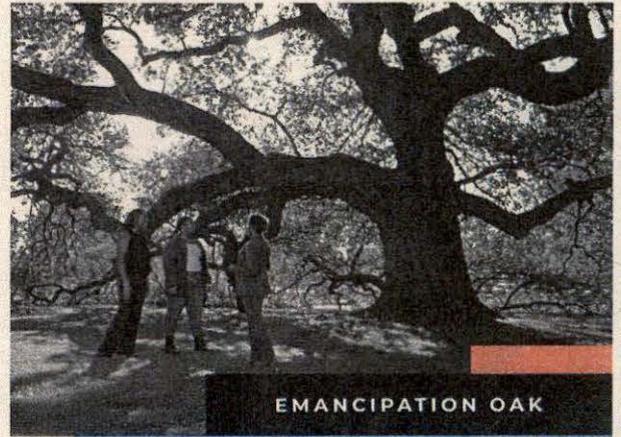
Location: 2410 Wickham Ave,
Newport News, VA 23607

Allow: 1 hour

Colonial Williamsburg

Location: Colonial Williamsburg Historic Area,
101 Visitor Center Drive,
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Allow: 1.5 hours



EMANCIPATION OAK

The Emancipation Oak stands near the entrance of the Hampton University campus.



HAMPTON UNIVERSITY

Students learning the finer points of dressmaking at Hampton University circa 1900.

DAY 2

Great Dismal Swamp Underground Railroad Pavilion + Tour

Location: 3100 Desert Rd, Suffolk, VA 23434;
Booked tour departs from Suffolk Visitor Center,
524 N Main Street, Suffolk, VA 23434
Allow: 2 hours

Portsmouth Colored Community Library Museum

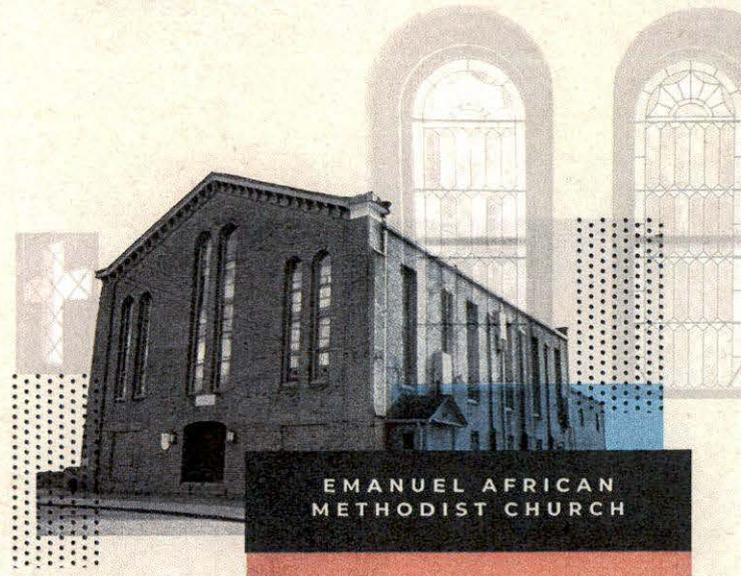
Location: 904 Elm Avenue Portsmouth VA, 23704
Allow: 1 hour

Self-Guided Underground Railroad Tour of Portsmouth

Location: Starting point at Crawford House
Allow: 30 minutes

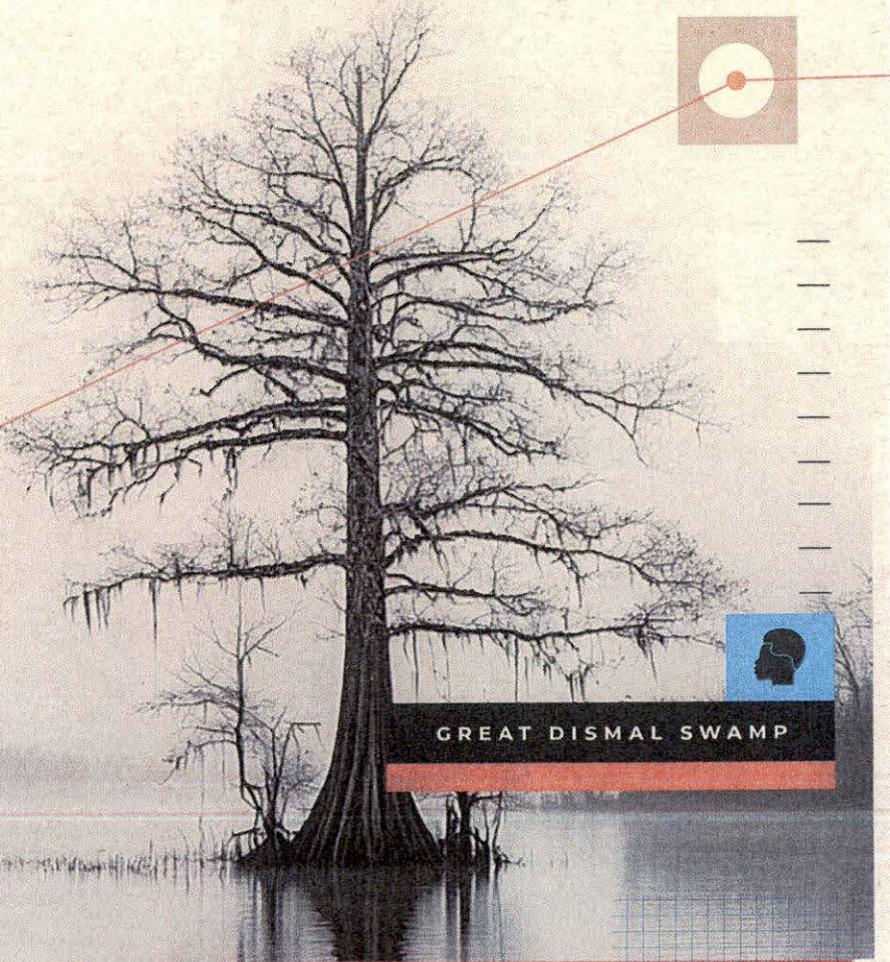
Waterways to Freedom Self-Guided Tour

Location: Town Point Park, Waterside Drive
Allow: 2 hours



EMANUEL AFRICAN
METHODIST CHURCH

After burning down, the church was rebuilt with hidden alcoves for the Underground Railroad.



GREAT DISMAL SWAMP

DAY 1: Morning



FORT MONROE VISITOR AND EDUCATION CENTER

This statue depicts Frank Baker, Shepard Mallory and James Townsend, some of the first contrabands who escaped Confederate lines to Fort Monroe.

Our journey begins where Black history in America begins—with the arrival of the first documented Africans to English North America at Fort Monroe.

In late August 1619, the English warship *White Lion* anchored at Point Comfort, carrying human cargo that would forever change the course of American history. These “20 and odd” Africans, originally captured from the Portuguese slave ship *São João Bautista*, had been taken from the Kingdom of Ndongo in present-day Angola. The colonists traded food provisions for these first Africans, setting in motion a chapter of American history that would span centuries.

Among these first Africans were Antony and Isabella, who would later be moved to a plantation in today’s Hampton. There, they had a son named William Tucker in 1624—the first documented African child baptized in English North America. The Tucker family’s legacy continues today, with descendants still living in the Hampton Roads area.

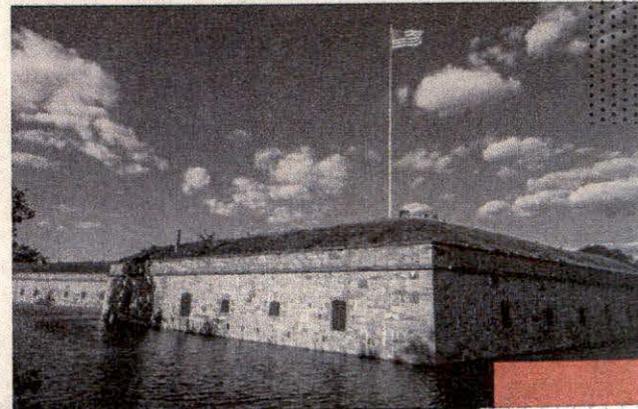
Fort Monroe’s significance in African American history grew even more profound during the Civil War, when it became known as “Freedom’s Fortress.” In 1861, Major General Benjamin Butler made the landmark “Contraband Decision,”

refusing to return three escaped enslaved men—Frank Baker, Shepard Mallory, and James Townsend—to Confederate forces. By declaring them “contraband of war,” Butler created a pathway to freedom that thousands would follow.

Today’s visitor center brings these stories to life through thoughtfully curated exhibits, from the “First Arrival” gallery to the “Contraband Decision” display, featuring personal accounts and archaeological findings that span this remarkable history.

Fort Monroe

Location: 30 Ingalls Rd, Fort Monroe, VA 23651
Allow: 2 hours
Accessibility: Fully accessible



FORT MONROE

Fort Monroe was a vital Union stronghold during the Civil War and was known as “Freedom’s Fortress.”

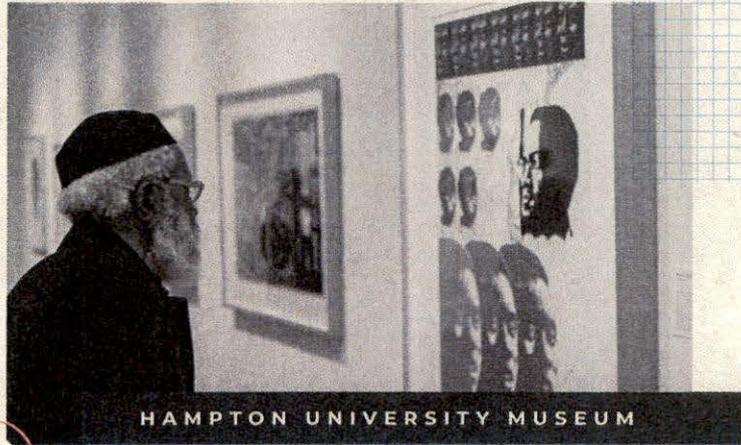


Our next stop is at the **Hampton University Museum** — the oldest African American museum in the United States and a testament to educational perseverance. Founded in 1868, the museum began collecting artifacts during the same era that Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (now Hampton University) opened its doors to educate newly freed Black Americans. The “From Freedom to Education” multimedia presentation allows visitors to experience firsthand accounts of the earliest students—many formerly enslaved—who traveled great distances seeking knowledge at Hampton. Through their preserved letters and diaries, their voices emerge with extraordinary clarity across the centuries.

Following its recent comprehensive renovation, the museum now seamlessly bridges historical narratives with contemporary relevance. New interactive exhibits chronicle the Civil Rights Movement’s impact on campus life, featuring photographs and memorabilia from student-led demonstrations and the university’s role in advancing educational equality. The “Living Legacy” gallery features distinguished alumni who transformed their education into pathways for community advancement and social change and include highlights like costumes created by Hampton University graduate Ruth E. Carter, which were pictured in films like “Malcom X.” and “Coming 2 America.”

Hampton University Museum

Location: 14 Frissell Ave, Hampton, VA 23669
Allow: 1 hour
Accessibility: Fully accessible

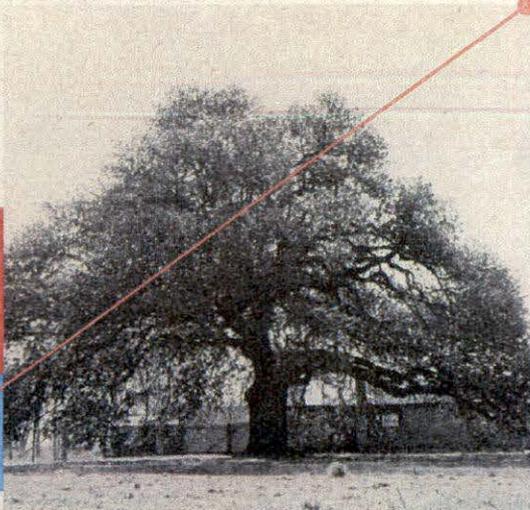


As you complete your museum tour, just a short walk away on campus grounds remains the home to one of the most significant living symbols of African American history: the **Emancipation Oak**. This magnificent southern live oak, with a canopy spreading over 100 feet, witnessed the first Southern reading of the Emancipation Proclamation beneath its branches in 1863. The tree, estimated to be over 300 years old, also served as an early classroom for newly freed people eager to gain education. Today, visitors can view this majestic oak recognized by the National Geographic Society as one of the “Ten Great Trees of the World.”

Emancipation Oak at Hampton University

Location: Emancipation Dr., Hampton, VA 23667
Allow: 30 minutes
Accessibility: Partially accessible

The Emancipation Oak stands near the entrance of the Hampton University campus.





Scan to Learn More

DAY 1: Early Afternoon



NEWSOME HOUSE

The Newsome House was the first structure owned by an African-American to receive a National Historic Preservation Award.

Joseph Thomas Newsome's story embodies the rise of Hampton Roads' Black professional class in the Post-Reconstruction era. Born to formerly enslaved parents in Sussex County, Newsome pursued education with determination, eventually becoming a prominent attorney, journalist, and civic leader. His elegant Queen Anne-style home, built in 1899, became a centerpiece of the community, hosting luminaries such as Booker T. Washington and serving as a gathering place for civil rights activism and voter registration drives. The restored house museum offers visitors an intimate look at early 20th-century African American middle-class life. Select original furnishings and family artifacts can be viewed, as well as exhibits detailing Newsome's legal career and his founding of the Newport News Colored Voters League. The museum's research center houses an extensive collection of documents relating to local African American history, making it a valuable historical resource.

Newsome House Museum & Cultural Center

Location: 2803 Oak Ave, Newport News, VA
Allow: 1 hour
Accessibility: Partially wheelchair accessible



DOWNING-GROSS CULTURAL ARTS



"Working in the Spirit": The Visionary Art & Life of Elder Anderson Johnson exhibit.

The Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center, originally built in 1918 as the Walter Reed School, represents the evolution of African American cultural life in Newport News. Named for Norvleate Downing-Gross, a dedicated advocate for social services and education, the center houses the Anderson Johnson Gallery. Johnson, a renowned folk artist, transformed his Newport News home into a work of art called the "Faith Mission." The gallery preserves portions of this remarkable environment, including painted doors and windows from his home, offering visitors insight into his unique artistic vision and spiritual perspective.

Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center

Location: 2410 Wickham Ave, Newport News, VA
Allow: 1 hour
Accessibility: Handicap accessible

DAY 1: Late Afternoon



Scan to Learn More About the Bray School

Colonial Williamsburg's African American interpretation program brings to life the stories of both free and enslaved Black residents who made up more than half of the colonial capital's population. The tour takes visitors to sites including the **Bray School**—the oldest extant building in the United States dedicated to the education of Black children. Though the school's curriculum reflected period attitudes about slavery, it provided literacy to hundreds of free and enslaved children between 1760 and 1774.

The First Baptist Church site represents one of America's oldest Black congregations, established secretly in 1776 by enslaved worshippers who met in the woods to pray. Visitors hear the story of Gowan Pamphlet, an enslaved tavern worker who became the congregation's first pastor despite laws forbidding enslaved people to preach. The church's original bell, silent for decades, now rings as a symbol of freedom and perseverance.

The tour also shares the remarkable story of **James Armistead Lafayette**, an enslaved man who served as a double agent during the Revolutionary War. His intelligence reports to the Marquis de Lafayette proved crucial to American victory at Yorktown. After years of petitioning, and with Lafayette's support, he finally received his freedom in 1787. These individual stories, brought to life by skilled interpreters, illuminate the broader African American experience in colonial Virginia.

Colonial Williamsburg

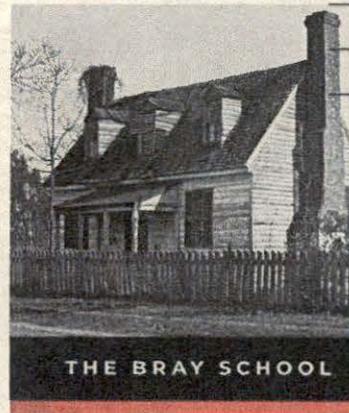
Location: Colonial Williamsburg Historic Area, 101 Visitor Center Drive, Williamsburg, VA

Allow: 1.5 hours

Accessibility: Fully accessible

Note: Tour routes and content may vary; check daily program guide for details

The Bray School is the oldest surviving building dedicated to the education of Black children in the U.S.



THE BRAY SCHOOL



Colonial Williamsburg's Governor's Palace.



COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG

DAY 2: Morning



Scan for
Tour Info



The Dismal Swamp was a refuge for Black insurgents as well as African Americans fleeing slavery.

Deep within the mysterious expanse of the **Great Dismal Swamp** lies a powerful testament to the human spirit's yearning for freedom. This vast wilderness, spanning approximately 2,000 square miles in the 18th and early 19th centuries, became a crucial refuge on the **Underground Railroad** and home to one of the largest known Maroon communities—groups of escaped enslaved people who created hidden societies in the swamp's dense interior.

The very features that early colonists found forbidding—thick vegetation, water-logged terrain, and seemingly impenetrable forests—provided perfect cover for those seeking freedom. Elevated areas known as "mesic islands" became sites of permanent settlements, where communities developed complex systems for survival and mutual support. Archaeological evidence reveals these settlements housed hundreds of individuals, each with their own unique social structures and economic systems.

Moses Grandy, who documented his experiences in the swamp in his 1843 narrative, described both its perils and its promise: "The slaves know the swamp well; the whites very little... They traverse it with ease." This intimate knowledge of the

landscape proved crucial for both survival and supporting others on their journey to freedom. The swamp's waterways, including the **Dismal Swamp Canal**, served as both transportation routes and navigation guides for those seeking passage north.

Today's visitors can explore this remarkable history through the **Underground Railroad Education Pavilion**. Interactive exhibits detail the swamp's role in resistance to slavery, featuring archaeological findings, first-person accounts, and recreated elements of Maroon settlements. The pavilion's design incorporates elements that help visitors understand how the natural environment provided both challenges and opportunities for freedom seekers.

Great Dismal Swamp Underground Railroad Pavilion + Tour

Location: 3100 Desert Rd, Suffolk, VA 23434;
Booked tour departs from Suffolk Visitor Center,
524 N Main Street, Suffolk, VA 23434

Allow: 2 hours

Accessibility: Pavilion is accessible; some trails may have limited accessibility



GREAT DISMAL SWAMP

DAY 2: Early Afternoon



Scan to
Download
Guide

The Portsmouth Colored Community Library stands as a powerful symbol of African Americans' determination to achieve education despite the barriers of segregation. **Established in 1945**, it was the first freestanding library building in Portsmouth to provide library services for African Americans, operated by African American staff. The building's modest size belies its enormous significance in the community's pursuit of knowledge and self-improvement.

Reverend M. B. Birchette and other community leaders fought for years to establish this facility, recognizing that access to books and learning materials was crucial for advancement. The library became not just a repository for books but a center for community learning and gathering. Its first librarian, **Mrs. Bertha Edwards**, was known for her dedication to helping patrons navigate the collection and encouraging young people to develop a love of reading.

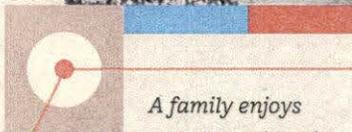
Today, the restored building serves as a museum that tells the story of both the library itself and the broader struggle for educational equality. **Original furnishings and artifacts** help visitors understand the day-to-day operations of this historic institution. Exhibits explore how the library served as a vital community resource during segregation, featuring photographs, documents, and oral histories from those who used its services.

Portsmouth Colored Community Library Museum

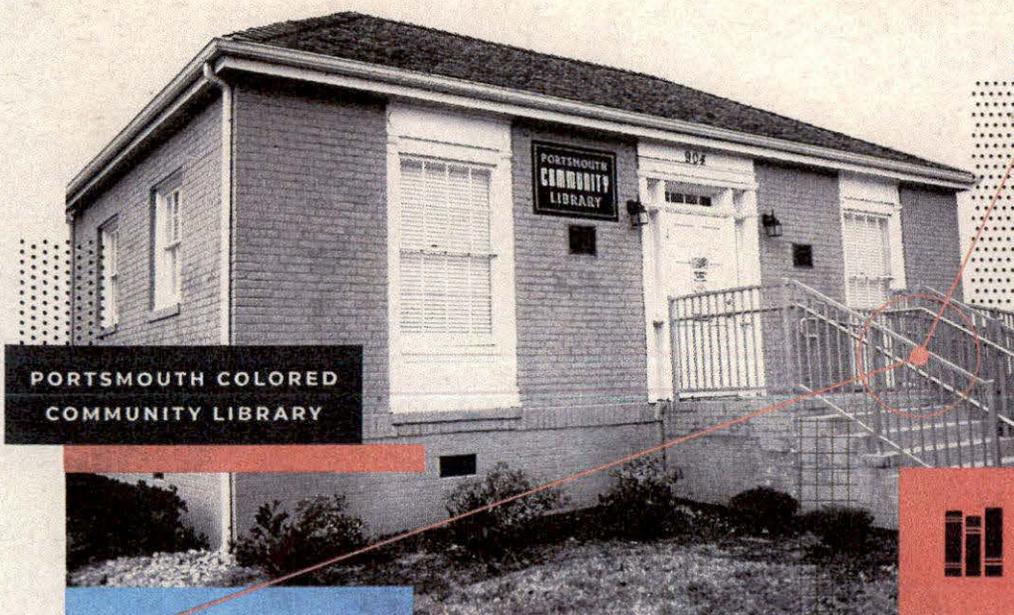
Location: 904 Elm Avenue Portsmouth VA, 23704

Allow: 1 hour

Accessibility: Fully accessible



A family enjoys a book outside of the Portsmouth Community Library.



PORTSMOUTH COLORED COMMUNITY LIBRARY



The Portsmouth Community Library was the city's only segregation-era library for African Americans.



WILLIAMSBURG

5

YORKTOWN

Chesapeake Bay

POQUOSON

NEWPORT NEWS

HAMPTON

Atlantic Ocean

2

1

17

3

4

64

664

ISLE OF WIGHT

NORFOLK

60

17

9

7

8

PORTSMOUTH

264

VIRGINIA BEACH

SUFFOLK

58

17

6

13

CHESAPEAKE

58

DAY 1

HAMPTON

- 1 Fort Monroe Visitor Center
- 2 Hampton University Museum
& The Emancipation Oak

NEWPORT NEWS

- 3 Newsome House Museum & Cultural Center
- 4 Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center

WILLIAMSBURG

- 5 Colonial Williamsburg

DAY 2

SUFFOLK

- 6 Great Dismal Swamp
Underground Railroad Pavilion + Tour

PORTSMOUTH

- 7 Portsmouth Colored Community Library Museum
- 8 Self-Guided Underground Railroad Tour of Portsmouth

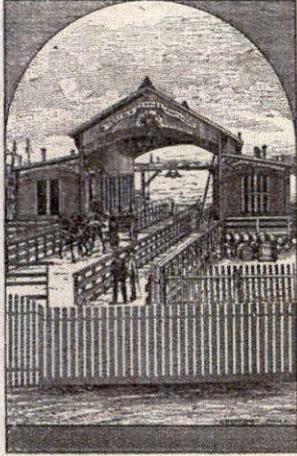
NORFOLK

- 9 Waterways to Freedom Self-Guided Tour

DAY 2: Early Afternoon



Scan for Audio Tour



Portsmouth's active harbor provided cover for slaves stowing away on strategically selected ships.

Portsmouth's role in the **Underground Railroad** comes alive through a remarkable walking tour that connects three key sites instrumental in the journey to freedom. This self-guided experience allows visitors to walk in the footsteps of those who risked everything for liberty.

The tour includes **the Crawford House**, where enslaved worker Eliza Baines played a crucial role in coordinating escapes. As a hotel worker, she had access to information about ship arrivals and departures—intelligence that proved invaluable for those planning their journey to freedom. The building's architecture reflects the period when Portsmouth served as a bustling port city, with hidden spaces that may have sheltered freedom seekers.

At **300 North Street**, visitors encounter a site strategically located near the Elizabeth River. The house's proximity to the water made it an ideal location for coordinating water-based escapes. The stop at **316 North Street** includes the basement where Clarissa Davis found refuge during her journey to freedom, offering a tangible connection to one of the many individual stories of escape.

Self-Guided Underground Railroad Tour of Portsmouth

Location: Begin your self-guided tour at the Portsmouth Welcome Center at 206 High Street, Portsmouth, VA 23704

A plaque commemorating the hotel is located at Crawford Parkway and Queen Street

Allow: 30 minutes

Accessibility: Paved walkways, mostly flat terrain

Audio Tour: Scan the QR code above to download the audio tour before starting



DAY 2: Late Afternoon



Scan to
Download
Guide

Norfolk's waterfront tells a powerful story of freedom, where its harbor and rivers served as vital links in the Underground Railroad network. Along these waterways, thousands of enslaved people found passage to liberty aboard sympathetic ships bound for northern ports.

The Waterways to Freedom trail, winding through downtown Norfolk's historic waterfront, preserves this remarkable heritage. Here, anti-slavery ship captains and crew members risked their own freedom to transport escaped enslaved people northward, often concealing them among cargo or in hidden compartments below deck.

Underground Railroad agent **William Still** documented nearly 750 escape accounts in his 1871 book, "The Underground Railroad," with many journeys beginning in Hampton Roads. His meticulous records name several vessels that regularly transported freedom seekers, including the City of Richmond, the Pennsylvania, and Augusta steamships, as well as the Kesiah schooner. These ships, operating under the guise of routine commerce, created a maritime network of resistance that stretched from Norfolk to Philadelphia and beyond.



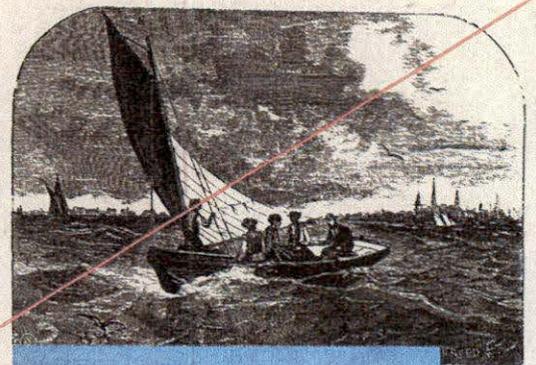
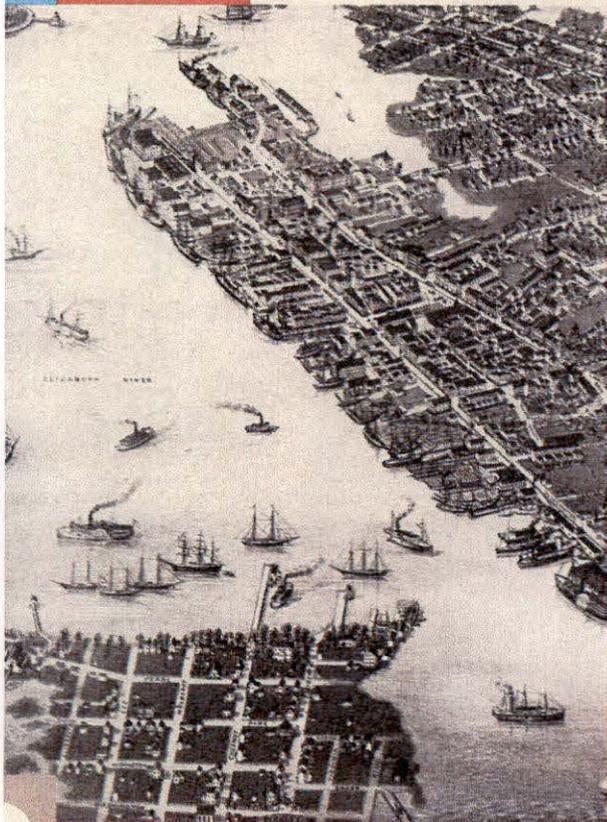
William Still was a major contributor to the success of the Underground Railroad.

Today, visitors can explore this compelling history through the self-guided Waterways to Freedom trail. As you walk along Norfolk's harbor, the Waterways to Freedom digital guide along with interpretive markers help tell the story of how these waters offered both possibility and peril for those seeking freedom.

Waterways to Freedom Self-Guided Tour

Location: Town Point Park, Waterside Drive
Allow: 2 hours
Accessibility: Paved walkways, mostly flat terrain
Note: This is a non-linear tour, offering interest points for exploration

**Information in the Waterways to Freedom guide is compiled and written by Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Professor of History, Norfolk State University. Special thanks to Joseph Jenkins Roberts Center for the Study of the African Diaspora.*



Enslaved individuals used Norfolk's waterways to escape to the North.

MORE STORIED STOPS

Two days is not nearly enough time to tell the full story, but it's a start. For those seeking more stories of courage, achievement, and community building, we've added additional points of interest from across Hampton Roads to help deepen your understanding of the region's rich Black history and ongoing legacy.

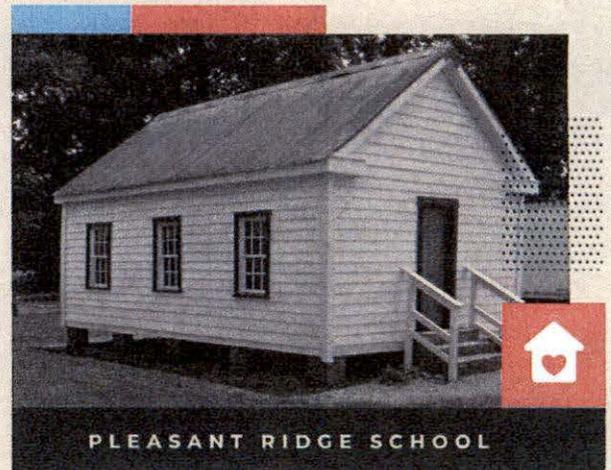
VIRGINIA BEACH



Scan to
Learn More

The one-room **Pleasant Ridge School** in Pungo opened for Black children around 1886 and served African American students for 70 years prior to integration — despite having to be reconstructed after being destroyed by a fire around 1918. In 1989, school alumni, with the help of donations and assistance from Sheriff Frank Drew, restored the schoolhouse, which was recently added to the National Register of Historic Places.

The **Historic Seatack Neighborhood** is the oldest African American community in the United States and the hometown to luminaries Pharrell Williams, Timbaland, NFL player Eli Harold, Astronaut Alan B. Shepard, and Actress Chyler Leigh. In the 1920s, the parents of Seatack formed the Seatack Public School League of Princess Anne County and later provided the land for the original Seatack Elementary School that opened in 1952. These first formal education efforts of Seatack citizens lead to demand for the first high school for African American children in Princess Anne County that started in the 1930's.



The restored Pleasant Ridge Elementary School, now located next to Asbury United Methodist Church in Virginia Beach.

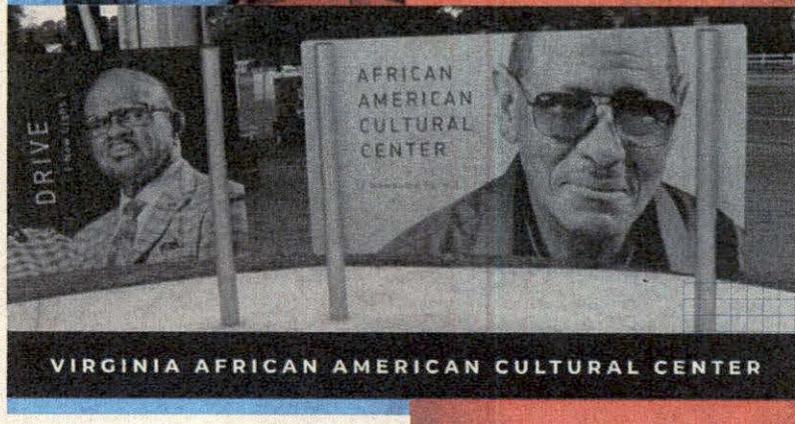
During segregation, Princess Anne County kept denying the African American community's requests for them to build a high school. The African American community raised money and bought land for a school and eventually, with the help of some grants, were able to get the county to build **Princess Anne County Training School**. This four-room school opened in 1938 as the first and only high school in Princess Anne County for African Americans, continuing to educate African Americans until 1969, very late in the desegregation process. Today, Renaissance Academy houses the Princess Anne County Training School/Union Kempsville High School Museum, which features exhibits and original artifacts from students, faculty and the school.

Between 1945 and 1965, **Seaview Beach and Amusement Park** was a vibrant, attractive and popular place where African Americans socialized, dined, danced and played during segregation. Seaview had an amusement park with rides and a midway, and featured shows by celebrities like Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, and Louis Armstrong. WRAP DJ "Big Daddy Jack" Holmes established the well-known slogan, "See you at Seaview!"

After the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt launched the Civilian Conservation Corps to provide work for millions of young men, including 250,000 African Americans. An all African American regiment, Company 1371, constructed trails and built cabins in what is now known as **First Landing State Park**. Although Black workers built the park, they were not allowed to use it. In 1951, a group of local African Americans filed suit against the Virginia Conservation Commission for being denied entrance to the park. The suit wasn't heard until 1955, and officials chose to close



The VAACC's public art installation showcases portraits representing a resident in each of the 14 historically Black neighborhoods in Virginia Beach.



the park that year rather than integrate it. The park reopened its trails in 1961 and its campgrounds in 1962. Today, the park's interpretive programs help visitors understand this pivotal moment in American history while celebrating the resilience of early African American communities.

The **Virginia African American Cultural Center** currently utilizes its open space to showcase informative and inspirational graphics, and is also home to a basketball court sponsored by the NBA and Something In the Water, used to host various events and educate others about African American culture. The cultural center, soon to be constructed, will incorporate cultural learning classrooms for Visual, Performing and Literary Arts, exhibits and exhibit spaces, and much more.



SEATACK COMMUNITY

Members of the Seatack Volunteer Fire Department No. 12, taken in 1948.

MORE STORIED STOPS



The Norfolk 17 became the first African American students to attend the previously all-white schools in the largest school district in Virginia.

NORFOLK



Scan to
Learn More

Norfolk's storied past resonates through powerful landmarks of civil rights history. The **Norfolk 17** mural honors the brave students who integrated the city's schools in 1959 despite "Massive Resistance," while the **Martin Luther King Jr. Monument** commemorates Dr. King's influential visits and their impact on local civil rights activism. These sites, along with **Norfolk State University's** legacy of excellence and the historic **Attucks Theatre**, known as the "Apollo of the South," chronicle a community's determined march toward equality and cultural achievement.

CHESAPEAKE



Scan to
Learn More

The **Cornland School Museum** stands as a testament to the resilience and determination of the African American community during the era of segregation. Established in 1902, this one-room schoolhouse provided education for Black children at a time when such opportunities were scarce. Operating until 1952, the school served grades one through seven, often with a single teacher instructing multiple age groups. Students walked miles to attend classes, underscoring their commitment to learning. The Cornland School has been meticulously restored and now serves as a museum, preserving its original features like the potbelly stove and wooden floors. As part of Chesapeake's African American Heritage Trail, it offers visitors a glimpse into the educational struggles and triumphs of the Black community.

At the **Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways Museum**, you can discover the story of William "Billy" Flora, a free-born African American from Virginia who served as a Patriot soldier during the American Revolutionary War. Fighting under Colonel William Woodford at the Battle of Great Bridge in December 1775, Flora became widely recognized as the hero of the conflict.



Est. in 1902, The Cornland School is part of Chesapeake's African American Heritage Trail.

PORTSMOUTH



Scan to
Learn More

From Revolutionary War hero William "Billy" Flora to pioneering librarians, Portsmouth's African American history reveals profound stories of determination. The **Flora Monument** honors his crucial role in the Battle of Great Bridge in 1775 and subsequent success as a businessman. The **Portsmouth Colored Community Library**, established in 1945, broke new ground as the city's first freestanding library with African American staff, while **Emanuel AME Church** stands as a beacon of spiritual strength and community resilience.

NEWPORT NEWS



Scan to
Learn More

In Newport News, the story of African American resilience and achievement unfolds across numerous sites that span from colonial times to the present. The **James A. Fields House**, once home to a prominent African American attorney and civic leader, exemplifies the rise of Black professionals

in the Post-Reconstruction era. Today, its restored rooms and exhibits tell the story of Fields' remarkable journey from enslavement to respected community leader.

Blocks away, one man's love for community changed the way Black residents gathered. William Ward Pinkett was a well-known tailor and jazz trumpeter who owned what became known as **Pinkett's Beach**. He opened his private waterfront property for Black residents to enjoy the beach, host cookouts, and also witness baptisms. This area later became part of **King-Lincoln Park**, the current location for many family gatherings and events.

Throughout the city, you will find vibrant murals that bring to life the ongoing story of African American cultural expression and the pursuit of social justice. As part of the **Newport News Street Museum**—created in collaboration with the Contemporary Arts Network (CAN)—these striking works of art showcase a powerful blend of abstract and figurative styles, masterfully executed by acclaimed regional and national muralists.

We invite you to discover, reflect, and celebrate the vibrant African American experiences that shape Newport News. Across 23 miles, witness the creativity, innovation, and strength that define a lasting legacy.

Austin "Auz" Miles, "Where There is Love & Inspiration" mural, presented in partnership with the CAN Foundation.



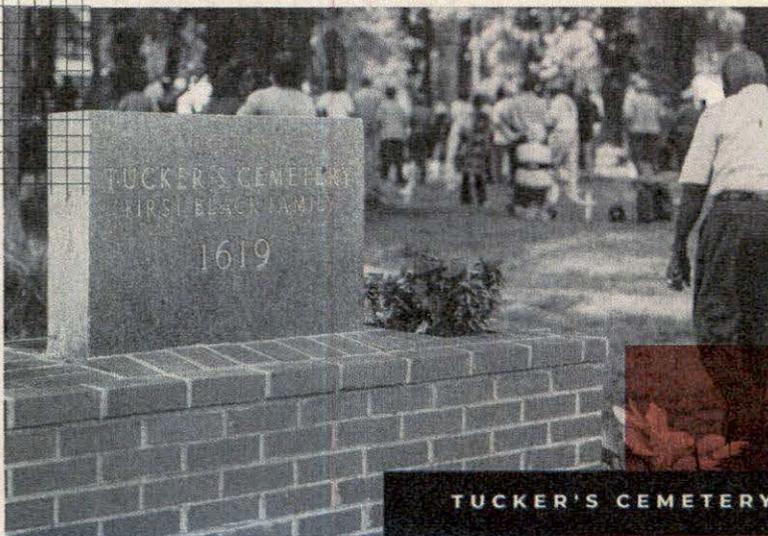
MORE STORIED STOPS

HAMPTON



Scan to
Learn More

Hampton's African American heritage resonates deeply through sites like the historic Buckroe Beach, where Hampton Institute administrators and **local African American businessmen** established the Bay Shore Hotel in **1898** as a pioneering recreational haven. The Little England Chapel, built in 1879, stands as the only known African American missionary chapel still surviving in Virginia, offering visitors a glimpse into early Black religious education and community life.



TUCKER'S CEMETERY

Aberdeen Gardens stands as a testament to African American self-determination during the New Deal era. Initiated in 1934 as a Hampton Institute project, this planned community was Virginia's only Resettlement Administration community built for African Americans. Designed by an African American architect and constructed by African American workers, its 158 brick homes with garden plots revolutionized housing standards for Black families during the Great Depression. Today, the **Aberdeen Gardens Historic Museum** preserves this legacy, showcasing an original 1930s home with furnishings donated by original residents.

The nearby **Tucker Family Cemetery** creates a powerful connection to Hampton's earliest African American history. This sacred ground serves as the final resting place for William Tucker's descendants, creating an unbroken line from the first landing in 1619 to the present day. Archaeological studies suggest it's one of the oldest African American burial grounds in the country.

Together with landmarks like Fort Monroe's "Freedom's Fortress," the **Emancipation Oak** where the first Southern reading of the Emancipation Proclamation occurred, and the Hampton University Museum's extraordinary collections, these sites tell a powerful story of resistance, education, and achievement in the face of adversity.

Tucker's Cemetery is the final resting place for generations of the William Tucker Family.

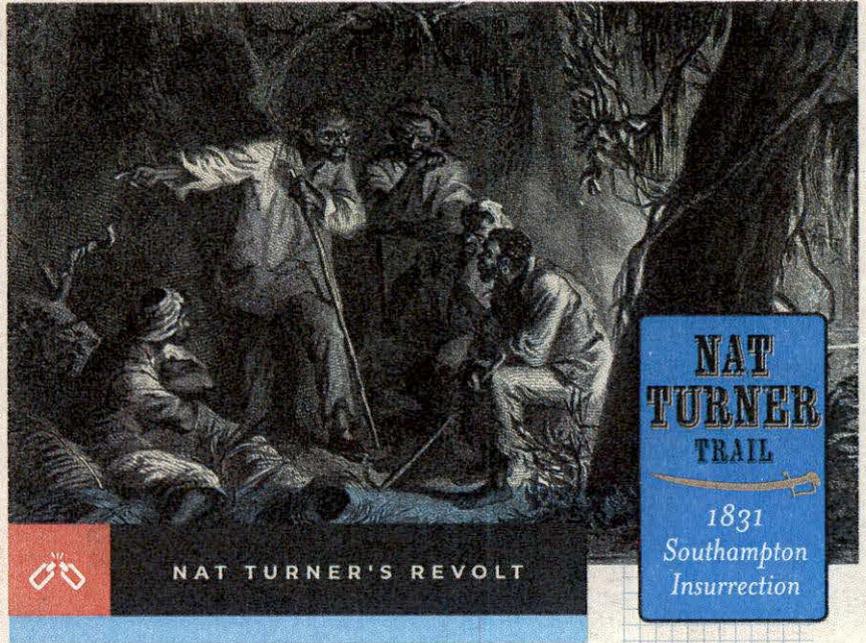
SOUTH HAMPTON



Scan to
Learn More

Southampton County features several significant sites related to the Nat Turner Insurrection of 1831. **Belmont plantation** in Capron marks where the rebellion began, with its restored late 18th-century house standing as a historical landmark. The **Rebecca Vaughan House**, relocated to Courtland and preserved in the **Southampton Agriculture and Forestry Museum's Heritage Village**, represents the insurrection's final killings. Additional sites include **Turner's hanging location**, the **Southampton County Courthouse** displaying his sword, and **historical markers** on Route 35 in Boykins and at the intersection of State Route 35 and Meherrin Road commemorating this pivotal uprising in American history.

After the Civil War, **Shiloh Baptist Church** became a cornerstone of Black community life and independence. As part of the widespread movement of African Americans establishing autonomous religious spaces free from white control, the church provided crucial spiritual guidance, education, and social support. The formation of the Colored Shiloh Baptist Association in August 1865, which included Shiloh Baptist Church, marked a significant milestone in Black spiritual autonomy in Virginia. Through its connection with the Virginia Baptist State Convention (established 1867), the church supported educational institutions and humanitarian efforts for newly freed people, establishing a legacy of community engagement that continues today.

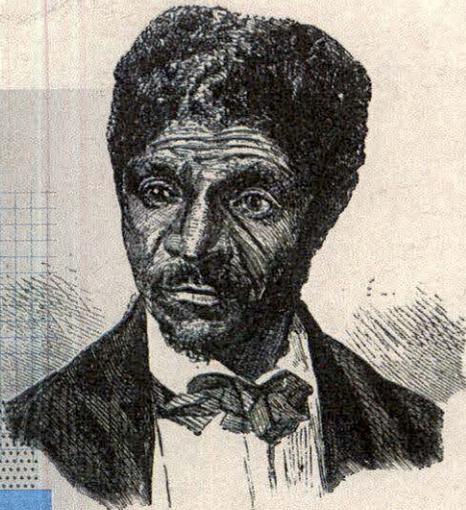


In August 1831, following **Nat Turner's revolt**, white residents and militias retaliated by killing countless African Americans throughout Southampton County and beyond, regardless of their involvement in the uprising. At this intersection, where Turner's forces turned toward Jerusalem (now Courtland), a Black man's severed head was displayed on a post as a terror tactic to discourage future rebellions. In 2021, the road's name was changed from the disturbing "Blackhead Signpost" to simply "Signpost," with a historical marker displaying the story.

Turner's rebellion intensified the debate over slavery and abolition.

MORE STORIED STOPS

A historical marker for **Dred Scott** stands at the intersection of Route 58 and Buckhorn Quarter Road near the Blow Plantation. This marker commemorates Scott, who was enslaved in the county during the early 1800s, and his family's momentous legal struggle for freedom that led to the infamous Supreme Court decision. The marker also acknowledges the Blow family's significant role in supporting Scott's legal battle and eventually purchasing his freedom after the court ruled against him.



DRED SCOTT

Born in South Hampton County, Dred Scott was an African American slave at the center of the U.S. Supreme Court's pivotal Dred Scott decision of 1857.



FREEDOM PARK

Freedom Park is home to one of the nation's earliest Free Black Settlements.

WILLIAMSBURG



Scan to
Learn More

Freedom Park preserves one of America's earliest free Black settlements, established in 1803, offering visitors a tangible connection to these pioneering communities. The "**Peace Quilt**" mural in Midtown Row highlights the region's Black History and culture. At the **Jamestown Settlement**, the compelling "From Africa to Virginia" exhibit traces the complex journey of the first Africans who arrived in 1619, contextualizing this pivotal moment through authentic artifacts, immersive displays, and poignant narratives that connect Virginia's colonial past to its present day.

ISLE OF WIGHT

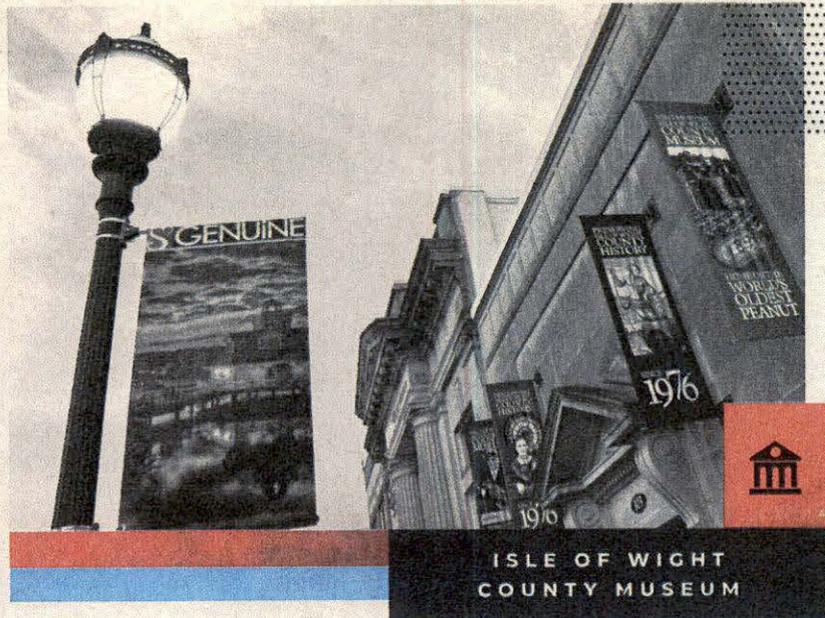


Scan to
Learn More

The **Smithfield Schoolhouse Museum** in Isle of Wight County stands as a powerful testament to African American educational determination. Built in 1932 as an addition to the Christian Home School, the museum's carefully preserved classroom, complete with period furnishings and artifacts, offers visitors an intimate window into the era when African American communities across the South partnered with philanthropist Julius Rosenwald to create educational opportunities.

Tyler's Beach, a historically significant Black community on Virginia's James River north of Rushmere, has a rich history dating back to 1922 when Nettie Tyler purchased 10 acres from Willie Rife. Previously, the land was used by Warraskoyack Indians, then owned by Justinian Cooper (1636), and later Timothy Tynes who freed and gifted it to his slaves in 1802. From the 1920s to mid-1970s, it thrived as one of southeastern Virginia's few beaches open to Black families, featuring restaurants, dance halls, hotels, and performances by Marvin Gaye, James Brown, and Sam Cooke.

Inside the Young-Laine Courts Building is the Randall Booth Record Room, an exhibit on the history of the Isle of Wight County courts. The space features a painting highlighting the heroic efforts of **Randall Booth**, the enslaved man who saved Isle of Wight County's court records in 1862. Booth's actions protected what are now some of the oldest and most complete court records in the United States. These preserved documents provide valuable information for historians, genealogists, and the general public.



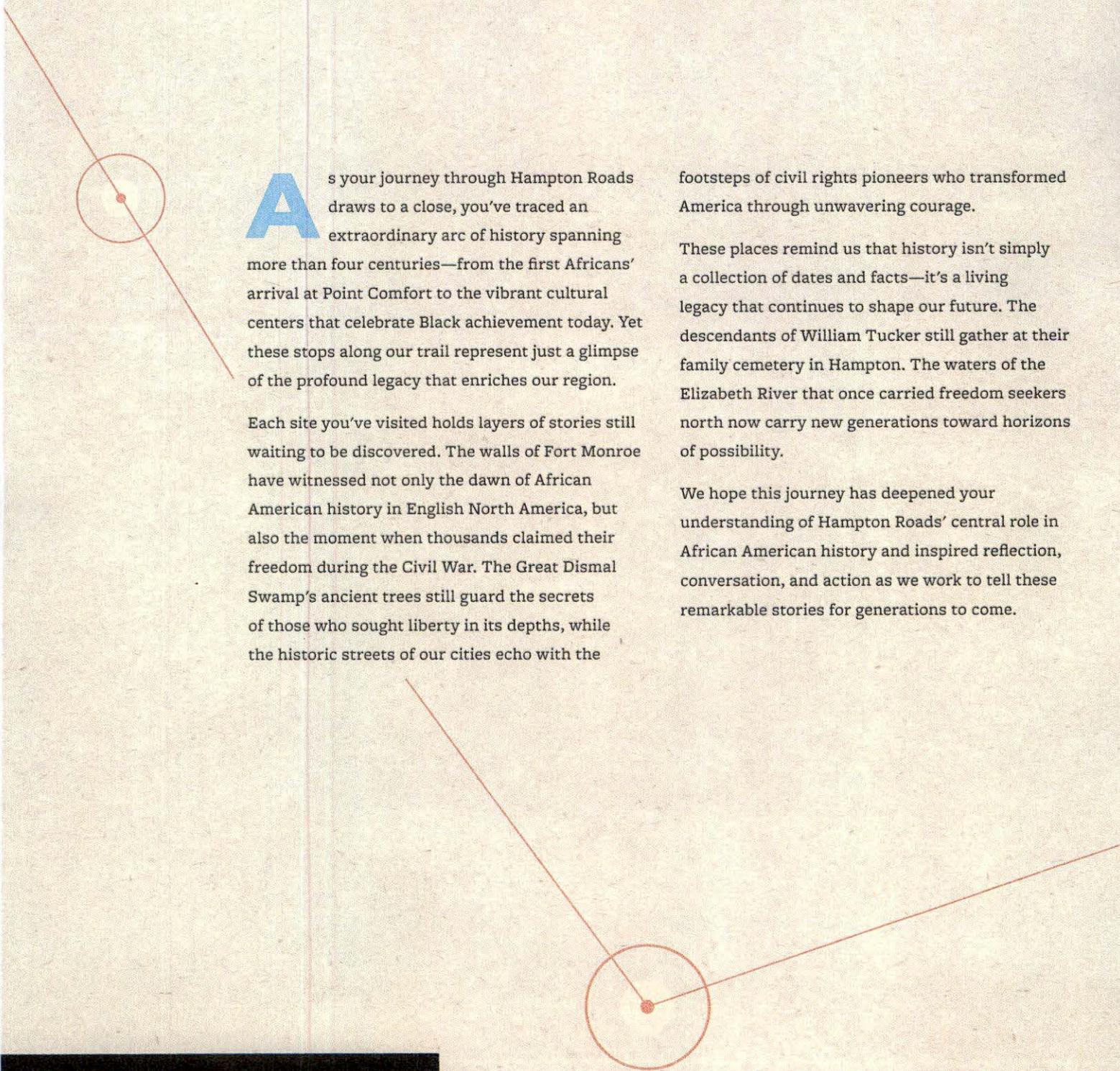
ISLE OF WIGHT
COUNTY MUSEUM

At the base of **Wharf Hill at 13 Main Street** in Smithfield stands a **historical marker commemorating the former Black Business District**. As the peanut industry declined, Wharf Hill transformed into Smithfield's thriving Black business district from the early 1900s until the early 1960s. The area buzzed with activity from dawn to dusk, hosting a diverse array of establishments including markets, garages, a shoe shop, barbershops, funeral homes, restaurants, beauty parlors, and more. These businesses provided essential goods and services to the community during this vibrant period in Smithfield's history.

Founded in 1976, the **Isle of Wight County Museum** tells the story of the county through its interactive exhibits including a turn-of-the-century country store as well as displays interpreting colonial history, the Smithfield ham industry, the Blackwater River, the Civil War and the Cold War. It is home to the World's Oldest Ham and the World's Oldest Peanut.

Founded in 1976, the museum tells the story of the county through its interactive exhibits.

TO BE CONTINUED



As your journey through Hampton Roads draws to a close, you've traced an extraordinary arc of history spanning more than four centuries—from the first Africans' arrival at Point Comfort to the vibrant cultural centers that celebrate Black achievement today. Yet these stops along our trail represent just a glimpse of the profound legacy that enriches our region.

Each site you've visited holds layers of stories still waiting to be discovered. The walls of Fort Monroe have witnessed not only the dawn of African American history in English North America, but also the moment when thousands claimed their freedom during the Civil War. The Great Dismal Swamp's ancient trees still guard the secrets of those who sought liberty in its depths, while the historic streets of our cities echo with the

footsteps of civil rights pioneers who transformed America through unwavering courage.

These places remind us that history isn't simply a collection of dates and facts—it's a living legacy that continues to shape our future. The descendants of William Tucker still gather at their family cemetery in Hampton. The waters of the Elizabeth River that once carried freedom seekers north now carry new generations toward horizons of possibility.

We hope this journey has deepened your understanding of Hampton Roads' central role in African American history and inspired reflection, conversation, and action as we work to tell these remarkable stories for generations to come.

A TRAIL OF TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS

Unveiling Black History in **Hampton Roads**



Virginia African American Cultural Center

VIRGINIA
IS FOR
HISTORY
LOVERS

COASTAL
VIRGINIA
TOURISM ALLIANCE