

A Timeless Legacy

Local History

Sites To Visit

Notable Newport News
Natives & Residents



Since before the founding of our nation, African-Americans have played a vital role in creating what is now the United States. In fact, Africans first came to Virginia in the early 1500s — almost a century before the first permanent English settlement in America at Jamestown in 1607 — as explorers and as members of Spanish and French Jesuit missions.

One such explorer was **Estévanico**, an African from Morocco, who was captured by the Portuguese and enslaved by a Castilian who took him on an expedition to conquer Florida. Estévanico — also known as “Stephen the Black” and “Stephen the Moor” — led further expeditions to the southwestern states.

While the Tidewater/Hampton Roads area is but a small part of Virginia, it is filled with stories of African-American heritage. This beautiful part of Virginia, from the sparkling sands of Virginia Beach to the bustling city of Newport News, has grown and prospered for hundreds of years, thanks in no small part to the timeless legacy of countless African-Americans, young and old, rich and poor, slave and free.

Come and discover this rich heritage in Newport News. Your journey may well take you past the site of **Camp**

Butler, the first African-American school in Newport News, established in 1861, or the original site (28th Street) of the oldest church in Newport News, the First Church of Newport News Baptist, organized in 1864. Its present home is at 2300 Wickham Avenue.



The **Salter's Creek** neighborhood, in the eastern end of our city, began as a post-Civil War African-American community. And **Young's Mill**, on present day Warwick Boulevard, near Oyster Point Road, tells two poignant stories. In the 1850s, it was probably operated by Thomas Wright, Sr., a free black who enslaved family members. Just a handful of years later, the mill became a Union campground during the 1862 Peninsula Campaign.

We welcome you to our little corner of Virginia and invite you to explore and experience our heritage, past and present, and share in our plans for the future.

Newport News
in Coastal Virginia



ENDVIEW PLANTATION

Built in 1769, and once occupied by both Union and Confederate forces, **Endview Plantation** today helps tell the story of African-Americans in rural Virginia in the late 1800s. Between the Revolutionary War and Civil War, African-Americans made up over half of the population of Warwick County. Archaeological data, family stories, census information, tax records and period maps provide evidence of the African-American presence at Endview.

Slave quarters were scattered around the vicinity of the house and there are anecdotal references to a slave graveyard near the spring. On the eve of the Civil War, records indicate 12 slaves living at Endview.

In early 1864, the Federal government confiscated the plantation and relocated seven African-American families to the site to farm. By the end of the year, the property had been returned to the Harwood family, and the former slaves living there were forced to leave. Today, Endview Plantation is a Virginia Civil War Trails site.

362 Yorktown Road (Exit 247 from I-64). 757-887-1862; www.newportnewshistory.org. \$8 adults, \$7 seniors & military, \$6 children (7-18), under 7 free. Open Thu-Sat, 10am-4pm. Closed major holidays.

JAMES A. FIELDS HOUSE

James A. Fields (1844–1903) was born a slave in Hanover County, Virginia. In 1862, he and his brother escaped slavery and found refuge at Fort Monroe in Hampton.

His restored home is historically significant for its long association with the development of the social and civic life of the African-American community in Newport News. The house was used by Mr. Fields as his law office and primary residence from 1897 to 1903, and was just one of the 15 properties he owned in Newport News.

In 1908, four doctors pooled their savings and asked the Fields family for use of the top floor to start a hospital. From these modest beginnings, Whitaker Memorial Hospital was born. Other than the city jail's infirmary, this institution represented the only outlet for hospitalization for blacks, and provided two years of generous service to the black community.

But what makes this house more than just the home of an African-American pioneer is the beauty of the architecture. This regal home sits high above the street, reminding passersby of a red brick castle. The James A. Fields House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. It is also a Virginia Civil War Trails site.

617 27th Street (Exit 6 from I-664). 757-813-6014. www.jamesafieldshouse.blogspot.com. Open by appointment. \$5 adults; \$4 seniors & military, \$3 children (4-12).

LEE HALL MANSION



Lee Hall Mansion is the only large antebellum plantation house remaining on the lower Virginia Peninsula. Its architecture is a blending of many different styles, including Italianate, Georgian and Greek Revival. The interior features a symmetrical Georgian floor plan with rooms opening into a long central hall, while the exterior has both Italianate and Greek Revival features. Completed in 1859, Lee Hall is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is also a Virginia Civil War Trails site.

Lee Hall's first owner, Richard D. Lee, successfully applied the principles of scientific farming, which were increasingly being used in the mid-Atlantic region during the 1850s and 1860s. Confederate generals Joseph E. Johnston and John B. Magruder used Lee Hall as their headquarters during the initial phase of the 1862 Peninsula Campaign.

There were 38 enslaved African-Americans who labored at Lee Hall prior to the Civil War. Their descendants, as well as those of other African-Americans, both slave and free, represent a vital component that, melded with the Native American and European cultures on Virginia's Lower Peninsula, has produced a distinctive and vibrant cultural tapestry.

163 Yorktown Road (Exit 247 from I-64). 757-888-3371; www.newportnewshistory.org. \$8 adults, \$7 seniors & military, \$6 children (7-18), under 7 free. Open Thu-Sat, 10am-4pm. Closed major holidays.



THE NEWSOME HOUSE MUSEUM & CULTURAL CENTER

The Newsome House Museum & Cultural Center is the restored 1899 residence of the African-American attorney J. Thomas Newsome (1869-1942) and his wife, Mary Winfield Newsome. Born to Joseph and Martha Ann Newsome, former slaves on Princeton Plantation near Sussex Courthouse, he was the sixth of seven children. He received his primary education at the New Hope Baptist Church in Sussex County and entered Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute at Petersburg in 1891. After graduation in 1894, he taught school in Sussex County for a short time before deciding to enter Howard University's Law School in Washington, D.C. He graduated in 1898 as the class valedictorian.

Moving to Newport News in 1900, he became a respected lawyer, journalist, churchman and civic leader, and prospered as part of the post Civil War South's new urban African-American middle class. His elegant Queen Anne residence was the hub of the local black community in Newport News and was twice visited by Booker T. Washington.

The Newsome House remains today one of the timeless historic fixtures in the city, and is listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. It was the first structure owned by an African-American to be a recipient of a National Historic Preservation Award (1992). It is also one of the cornerstones of Newsome Square, a group of three properties along 28th Street which preserve a significant example of the East End's historic streetscape.

2803 Oak Avenue (Exit 3 from I-664). 757-247-2360; www.newsomehouse.org. Open Thu-Sat, 10am-5pm. Closed Sun and major holidays. Open by appointment Mon-Wed. Suggested donation: \$2.

CORNELIUS & CARRIE R. BROWN EDUCATION CENTER

The Cornelius & Carrie R. Brown Education Center is also part of Newsome Square and currently houses the archives for The Newsome House Museum & Cultural Center.

Carrie Brown (1912-1997) was a retired Newport News elementary school educator and community leader. She proposed the concept of Newsome Square, created The Newsome House, Inc. to acquire the historic Newsome home from the heir and spearheaded the effort to restore it as a museum honoring the legacy of J. Thomas Newsome.

1249 28th Street (Exit 3 from I-664). 757-245-1628; www.newsomehouse.org. Open by appointment only; please call in advance. Free admission.

THE MARINERS' MUSEUM & PARK / USS MONITOR CENTER

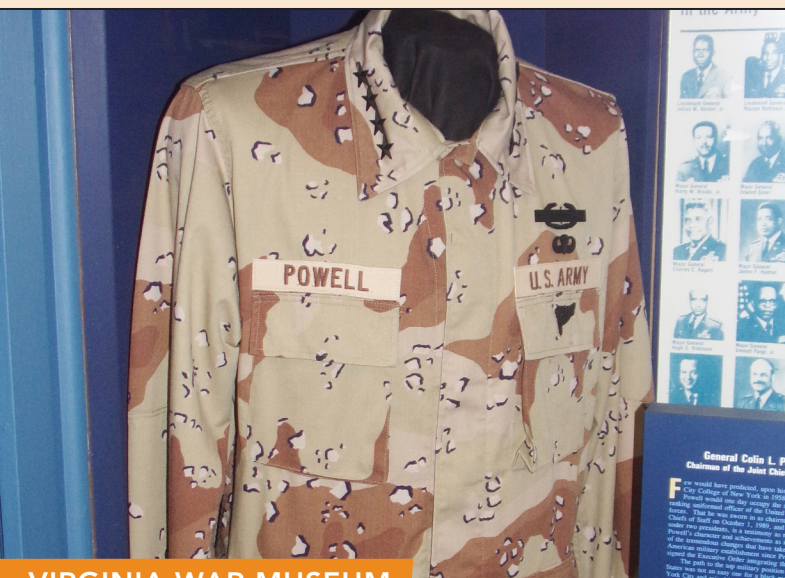
The Mariners' Museum & Park, one of the largest and most comprehensive maritime history museums in the world, houses a treasure trove of more than 35,000 items inspired by human experiences with the sea.

Designated by Congress as America's National Maritime Museum, the permanent galleries display treasures such as Captain John Smith's map of the Chesapeake Bay and the delicate miniature ships hand-crafted by August and Winnifred Crabtree. The Chesapeake Bay Gallery includes oral and written histories of an African-American waterman and the International Small Craft Center contains African canoes and other small naval vessels.

Among the many stories told in the new **USS Monitor Center** is that of Siah Carter, a courageous runaway slave turned permanent USS *Monitor* crew, who remained in the Union Navy even after the sinking of his ship. Personal artifacts, historical photographs and re-creations of portions of the ship's quarters allow visitors to learn more about Carter and others onboard this iconic ship. The Mariners' Museum & Park/USS Monitor Center is a Virginia Civil War Trails site.

100 Museum Drive (Exit 258A from I-64). 757-596-2222. www.marinersmuseum.org. Open daily, 9am-5pm. Closed Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. \$1, movie extra.





VIRGINIA WAR MUSEUM

American military history from Colonial times to the present comes to life at the **Virginia War Museum**, where outstanding collections of personal artifacts, weapons, vehicles, uniforms and posters tell stories of courage and conviction.

The Marches Toward Freedom gallery explores the roles of African-Americans in the military since 1775. One such soldier was James Bowser, a free black who fought in the Revolutionary War. Future generations of his family would continue his tradition of military service, and many would remain in the Hampton Roads area.

Among the artifacts on display are a presentation sword given to Charles Young, one of the first three African-Americans to graduate from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1889, and a uniform jacket belonging to General Colin Powell, the first African-American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the first African-American Secretary of State. Photographs and personal artifacts from members of the famous Tuskegee Airmen are also featured in the gallery, as is an exhibit about life on the Great Plains as a Buffalo Soldier. The Virginia War Museum is a Virginia Civil War Trails site.

9285 Warwick Boulevard in Huntington Park
(Exits 258A or 263A from I-64). 757-247-8523;
www.newportnewshistory.org. Open Thu-Sat, 9am-4pm.
Closed major holidays \$8 adults; \$7 seniors & active duty
military; \$5 children (7-18), under 7 free.

HISTORIC SMITH'S PHARMACY

Originally opened in 1941, **Historic Smith's Pharmacy** has been a fixture in the East End community for decades. It even served as an after-work gathering place for shipyard workers in the Jim Crow era. At one time patrons could get their prescription filled, gather to hear local gossip, catch up on sports scores, or enjoy a banana split or a chili-cheese hot sausage. Now listed on the National Register

of Historic Places, the Historic Smith's Pharmacy is currently closed, but it is hoped that it will re-open soon, complete with its original fixtures, display cases and classic soda fountain.

3114 Chestnut Avenue (Exit 3 from I-664).

DOWNING-GROSS CULTURAL ARTS CENTER

The **Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center** is housed in the former Walter Reed School, originally built in 1917, and the home of Newport News' first public library for black residents in the 1940s. Named for Norvleate Downing-Gross, the first executive director of the Newport News Office of Economic Opportunity, now the Office of Human Affairs, this historic building has taken on a whole new identity.

In 2008, it was reborn as a center for the arts in the Southeast community. The Center houses the 265-seat Ella Fitzgerald Theater and the Thaddeus Hayes Dance Studio, as well as rehearsal rooms, art and music studios and classrooms. Visitors enjoy both professional and community-based arts, dance and theatrical productions and special events.

Future plans call for the addition of a permanent gallery to display the work of nationally known folk artist Elder Anderson Johnson (example shown at right.) The wall murals from Elder Johnson's Faith Mission were saved by concerned citizens and the Newport News City Council in 1993 and will be among the items on view in the new gallery.



2410 Wickham Avenue (Exit 3 from I-664). 757-247-8950;
www.downinggross.org. Call for current hours and exhibit
and performance schedules. Free; fees for some events

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MEMORIAL PARK/PLAZA

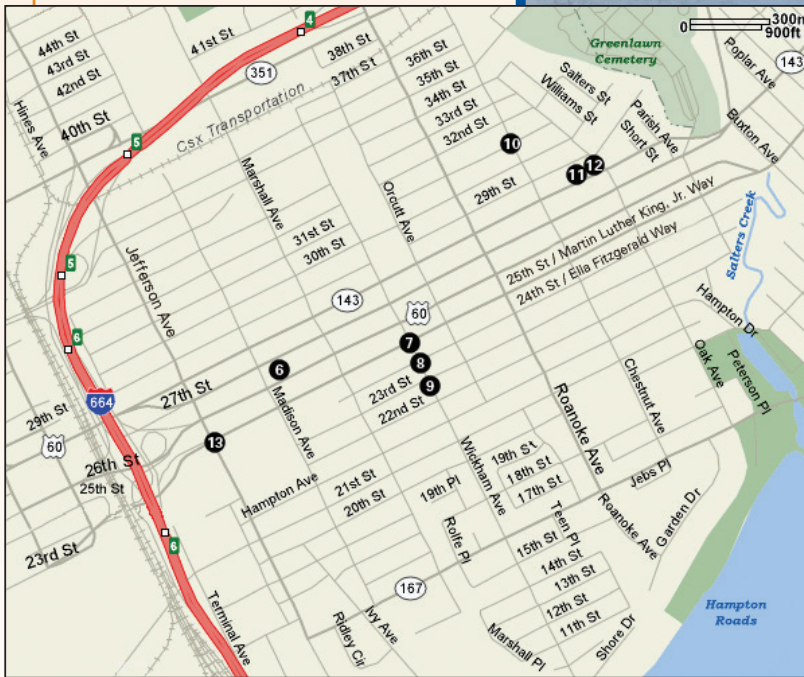
Once a bustling hub of the black community in Newport News' East End, JAMA (Jefferson Avenue Merchants Association) Square at 25th Street and Jefferson Avenue has taken on a new look and a new role in the city's history as the **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Park / Plaza**. This highly visible site honors the legacy of Dr. King, who visited Newport News in 1958 and 1962 and spoke at the historic First Church of Newport News (Baptist).

25th Street / Martin
Luther King, Jr. Way
and Jefferson Avenue
(Exit 3 from I-664).
757-926-1400. Free.



While in **Newport News** stay another day to enjoy our excellent restaurants, cafés and eateries, many of which serve up fresh seafood from the Chesapeake Bay. For retail adventures, take the time to explore our many boutiques, specialty and local retailers, antique shops and shopping areas.

- 1 Lee Hall Mansion**
163 Yorktown Road (Exit 247 from I-64).
757-888-3371. www.newportnewshistory.org
- 2 Endview Plantation**
362 Yorktown Road (Exit 247 from I-64).
757-887-1862. www.newportnewshistory.org
- 3 Young's Mill**
Warwick Boulevard near Oyster Point Road
(Exit 256A from I-64). 757-886-7777. Sunrise
to sunset. Free.
- 4 The Mariners' Museum & Park /
USS Monitor Center**
100 Museum Drive (Exit 258A from I-64).
757-596-2222.
www.marinersmuseum.org



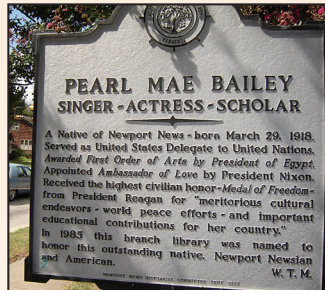
- 5 Virginia War Museum**
9285 Warwick Boulevard in Huntington
Park (Exits 258A or 263A from I-64).
757-247-8523. www.newportnewshistory.org
- 6 James A. Fields House**
617 27th Street, (Exit 6 from I-664).
757-813-6014.
www.jamesafieldshouse.blogspot.com
- 7 Pearl Bailey Public Library**
2510 Wickham Avenue (Exit 3 from
I-664). 757-247-8677. Call for current
exhibit schedule and hours. Free.
- 8 Downing-Gross Cultural
Arts Center**
2410 Wickham Avenue (Exit 3 from
I-664). 757-247-8950 or
www.downinggross.org
- 9 First Church of Newport News (Baptist)**
2300 Wickham Avenue (Exit 3 from I-664). 757-247-3033.
Call for current schedule and hours. Free.
- 10 Historic Smith's Pharmacy**
3114 Chestnut Avenue (Exit 3 from I-664).
- 11 Cornelius & Carrie R. Brown Education
Center**
1249 28th Street (Exit 3 from I-664). 757-245-1628.
www.newsomeshouse.org
- 12 The Newsome House Museum &
Cultural Center**
2803 Oak Avenue (Exit 3 from I-664). 757-247-2360.
www.newsomeshouse.org
- 13 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Memorial Park / Plaza**
25th Street / Martin Luther King, Jr. Way and Jefferson Avenue
(Exit 6 from I-664). 757-926-1400.

NOTABLE NEWPORT NEWS NATIVES & RESIDENTS

Newport News has long benefited from the extraordinary achievements of African-American men and women, including civic and government leaders, successful business owners, health care pioneers, teachers and many more. Here are only a few –

Our city has a great history of athletes who have gained state and national recognition. One of them was **Walter Bowser**, a standout quarterback and multi-sport athlete at Huntington High School. In 1966, he became the state's first black player of the year selected by the Virginia Sports Writers and Sportscasters Association.

Two of this country's best-known musical performers, **Ella Fitzgerald** and **Pearl Bailey**, were born in Newport News. Today we celebrate their legacy with the annual Ella Fitzgerald Music Festival, the Ella Fitzgerald Theater, both at the Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center, and the Pearl Bailey Library in the city's historic Southeast community.



Both folk artist **Elder Anderson Johnson** and renowned dancer **Thaddeus Hayes** called Newport News home for many years. So did Jessie Rattley, who launched her campaign for political office from her kitchen table and became the first African-American, and the first woman, to serve as mayor of Newport News.



L. Marian Fleming-Poe also broke barriers to become the first black woman admitted to the Virginia Bar. And although he was born in Washington, D.C., Congressman **Robert C. (Bobby) Scott**, the first black elected to Congress from Virginia since Reconstruction, calls Newport News home.



JAMES A. FIELDS HOUSE

Additional African-American heritage sites can be explored in our neighboring cities of Hampton, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach and Williamsburg. Call the Newport News Visitor Center at 888-493-7386 or 757-886-7777 or visit www.newport-news.org.



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