



Newport News Tourism
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Experience Black History Month in Newport News

Newport News, VA, Feb. 1, 2024 – Black History Month serves as a vital reminder of the resilience of African Americans who have contributed to many fields – from activists and civil rights pioneers to leaders in politics, science, business, and more. In Newport News, there are a variety of ways to celebrate the African American experience. We invite you to join us at one or more of the events below that highlight Black history and achievements:

African American Railroad Inventors

Lee Hall Depot

February 3; 1 to 4 p.m.

Kick off Black History Month with a visit to Lee Hall Depot for an afternoon celebrating two influential African American railroad inventors: Elijah McCoy and Lewis Latimer. Participate in hands-on science and engineering activities and tour the historic train station and caboose. Free giveaways for children while supplies last. Presented in partnership with Newport News Public Library. For details, click [here](#) or call 757-888-3371.

Black History Month at the Virginia Living Museum

Virginia Living Museum

February 3-4, 10-11, 17-19, and 24-25; 1 to 2 p.m.

Every weekend in February, a STEM science activity will be held for guests of the Virginia Living Museum. Additionally, throughout the month, the museum will spotlight on its social media platforms and its on-site monitors a different Black scientist, such as Dr. Andre Douglas, a Chesapeake native who was selected to join NASA's 2021 astronaut candidate class. Click [here](#) for details.

Finding My Folks: Connecting Through Genealogy Research

Free virtual workshop on ZOOM

February 8; 6 to 7 p.m.

Looking to create a family tree and not sure where to start? Join the Tidewater Genealogical Society and Newport News Public Library for this free virtual [workshop](#) to learn what's needed to start searching for family members; resources available to help conduct a genealogical search; best practices when conducting a search; special help available in the Virginiana Room at the Main Street Library and in the Tidewater Genealogical Society Library. Click [here](#) to register.

The Color Purple: The Musical

Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center

February 9-10, 16-17, and 23-24; 7 p.m. Fridays and 1 p.m. or 7 p.m. Saturdays

The Color Purple is a musical based on the 1982 novel and its 1985 film adaptation. The musical follows the journey of Celie, an African American woman in the American South from the early to mid-20th century. The original Broadway production ran from 2005 to 2008, earning 11 Tony Award nominations in 2006. An enthusiastically acclaimed Broadway revival opened in late 2015 and ran through early 2017, winning two 2016 Tony Awards, including Best Revival of a Musical. Click [here](#) for details.

The Freedmen's Bureau and US Colored Troops on the Virginia Peninsula Historic Endview

February 10; 10:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., 2:30 p.m.

In honor of Black History Month, visit Historic Endview to learn more about the African American experience on the Virginia Peninsula during the Civil War. The day includes scheduled talks at 10:30 and 1:30 about local Black soldiers who joined the US Army to fight for their freedom. Presentations at 11:30 and 2:30 will explore the Freedmen's Bureau, which was established to assist freed people after the Civil War and provided housing for some formerly enslaved families on the Endview property. In between presentations, participate in hands-on activities and pick up a map of our new driving tour, "The Civil War on the Virginia Peninsula: The African American Experience." For details, click [here](#).

Doris "Dorie" Miller: An American Hero

Main Street Library, 110 Main St.

February 10; 2 to 4 p.m.

Join Ed Moore of The Mariners' Museum as he explores the life of Doris "Dorie" Miller, the first African American winner of the Navy Cross and a Medal of Honor nominee for his actions at Pearl Harbor. Afterward, try out a WWII-style recipe using limited ingredients to make a well-known favorite: sweet cream! Call 757-926-1350 for details.

Shipwrecked: A True Civil War Story of Mutinies, Jailbreaks, Blockade-Running, and the Slave Trade

The Mariners' Museum and Park

February 22; 7 to 9 p.m.

Historian and author Jonathan W. White tells the riveting story of Appleton Oaksmith, a swashbuckling sea captain whose life intersected with crucial moments of the mid-19th century, most importantly the extraordinary lengths the Lincoln Administration went to destroy the illegal trans-Atlantic slave trade. White takes readers into the murky underworld of New York City, where federal marshals plied the docks in lower Manhattan in search of evidence of slave trading. Once they suspected Oaksmith, federal authorities had him arrested and convicted, but he escaped from jail and became a Confederate blockade-runner in Havana. Always claiming innocence, Oaksmith spent the next decade in exile until he received a presidential pardon from U.S. Grant, at which point he moved to North Carolina and became an anti-Klan politician. Through a remarkable, fast-paced story, this book

will give readers a new perspective on slavery and shifting political alliances during the turbulent Civil War Era. Click [here](#) to register, whether attending in person or watching online.

We Stand for Justice: A Salute to African American Heroes of Newport News

Main Street Library, 110 Main St.

February 24; 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

An annual ceremony that honors African Americans whose activism has produced an enduring historical legacy and who have contributed to the cause of social justice in the City of Newport News. For 2024, we celebrate and honor three local African Americans who were pioneers in their professional lives:

- Lillie B. Knight, the first African American woman in the Newport News Sheriff's Department.
- Mary C. Smith, the first African American librarian in Newport News.
- Philip S. Walker, the first African American acting judge on the Peninsula.

These three honorees took up heavy but inspirational burdens that showed future generations of African Americans what was possible. We hope their memories continue to inspire their community to break through barriers. Included is a mini documentary on their contributions. Performances by Dreams in Motion Dance Company, Say it Loud Band, and children from the Warwick Kids Academy are also planned. A reception follows the ceremony. Admission is free and no registration is required. These three honorees will join the 42 eminent individuals previously honored by *We Stand for Justice*. The collection of past honorees' posters will be displayed at the Grissom Library and Pearl Bailey Library during the month of February.

In Celebration of Faith Ringgold

Grissom Library, 366 DeShazor Drive

February 24; 1 p.m.

Artist and activist Faith Ringgold's art varied from painting to quilts, sculptures, performance art, and children's books. She took the traditional craft of quilt and reinterpreted its function to tell stories of her life and those of others in the Black community. Join us as we create family and community inspired art projects with fabrics, papers, and found objects. Each family group will leave with a one-of-a-kind artwork to cherish. Registration is required. Click [here](#) to register or call 757-926-1350 for details.

Benjamin Wigfall and Communications Village

Torggler Fine Arts Center

Through March 24

Explore the life and legacy of Benjamin Wigfall (1930–2017), an artist, educator, and champion of arts equity. This exhibition highlights the period from his early years in Virginia in the 1950s to his founding of Communications Village, a community art space in Kingston, NY, in the 1970s. Wigfall's experience at Hampton University, where he enrolled in 1949, was critical to his career. He graduated with a degree in art education in 1953 and went on to earn an MFA from Yale University in 1959.

Wigfall returned to Hampton as an assistant professor of art in 1955. He remained there until 1963, when he accepted a position at the State University of New York, the school's first Black professor of art. While teaching there, Wigfall selected a close-knit Black neighborhood in nearby Kingston for the location of his studio because it reminded him of Church Hill in Richmond. Named Communications Village, his studio became a place for making art and mentoring youth. *Benjamin Wigfall and Communications Village* showcases the development of an artist whose importance spans modern art, arts education, and community activism. For details, click [here](#) or call 757-594-0800.

Bio-myths: Photographs by Nakeya Brown
Torggler Fine Arts Center
Through March 24

Nakeya Brown (b. 1988) is a Maryland-based photographer who has engaged in the history and material culture of African American beauty products for the last 10 years. Her artwork captures the spaces, textures, emotions, and memories of these products and the women that used them, offering insights into African American histories and enduring questions of beauty, memory, and self-definition. Born in Santa Maria, CA, Brown received her BA from Rutgers University and her MFA from The George Washington University. She has had solo exhibitions at the Davis Gallery at Hobart and William Smith Colleges (Geneva, NY), Green Grassi (London), Catherine Edelman Gallery (Chicago), the Urban Institute for Contemporary Art (Grand Rapids, MI), and the Hamiltonian Gallery (Washington, DC). Her group exhibitions include the International Center for Photography (New York), the Museum of Contemporary Photography (Chicago), the Silver Eye Center for Photography (Pittsburgh, PA), and The Katonah Museum of Art (Katonah, NY), among others. She has been an instructor of photography at the American University (Washington, DC) and Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore). For details, click [here](#) or call 757-594-0800.

We hope you make plans to check out these events as we celebrate Black History Month in Newport News! To see additional Black History programs offered at all Newport News Public Library branches, click [here](#). For more information about other February events, call the Newport News Visitor Center at 757-886-7777 or visit www.newport-news.org.

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