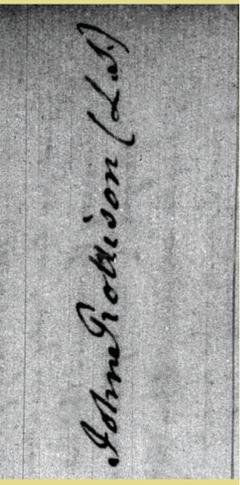
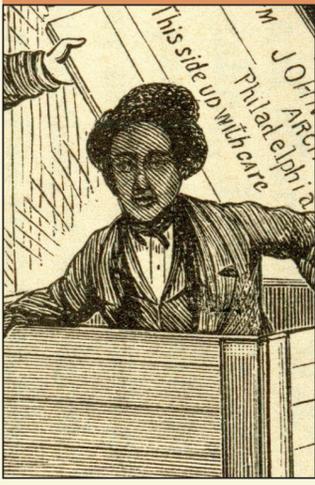


John Rollison



Henry Box Brown



Lucy Francis Simms



2011 African American TRAILBLAZERS in Virginia History



People of African descent have been a part of Virginia's—and America's—story since European settlement of the continent began, yet the contributions of African Americans have often been ignored, obscured, or underappreciated by those who recorded history. In observance of African American History Month, the Library of Virginia is pleased to honor eight distinguished Virginians as African American Trailblazers for their contributions to their communities, state, and nation.

The men and women featured as Trailblazers in Virginia History offer powerful examples of individuals who refused to be defined by their circumstances. Their lives are a testament to the determination and perseverance displayed by extraordinary people during challenging times. It is these many contributions that the African American Trailblazers program seeks to share.

To learn more about these individuals, all of whom have used their unique talents and creativity to push for equality and inclusion in American society, visit our Web site at:

www.lva.virginia.gov/trailblazers

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Robert Walter Johnson



Henrietta Lacks



Wendell Scott



Annie Belle Daniels



John Arthur Stokes



John Rollison (d. 1780), York County
ENTREPRENEUR AND LANDOWNER

John Rollison negotiated the legal and social restrictions of men of color in colonial Virginia to become a well-respected, wealthy man in York County.

Nominated by James Cameron, Jr., Williamsburg

Henry Box Brown (1815 or 1816–after February 26, 1889), Richmond
ABOLITIONIST AND PERFORMER

After his family was suddenly sold out of the state in 1848, he shipped himself in a wooden crate to freedom in 1849.

Nominated by Brynn Sprinkle and Maya Wimer, Mary Johnston's first-grade class (2009–2010), Clark Elementary School, Charlottesville

Lucy Francis Simms (d. 1934), Harrisonburg
EDUCATOR

Born into slavery, Lucy Francis Simms was a highly respected elementary school teacher in Harrisonburg for more than fifty years.

Nominated by Deniece Frye (2009–2010), Skyline Middle School, Harrisonburg

Robert Walter Johnson (1899–1971), Lynchburg
PHYSICIAN AND TENNIS COACH

Robert Walter Johnson was a driving force behind the integration of the sport of tennis.

Nominated by Leo Goldman IV, in Susan Bayne's kindergarten class (2009–2010), J. G. Hening Elementary School, Richmond

Henrietta Lacks (1920–1951), Clover
PRINCIPAL IN A MEDICAL CAUSE CÉLÈBRE

Henrietta Lacks's cells, known in the medical world as HeLa cells, were the first human cells to be grown successfully outside the body for more than a short time. They have proved instrumental in significant medical breakthroughs and ongoing medical research.

Nominated by Virginia Rose Cherry, Richard Bland College

Wendell Scott (1921–1990), Danville
STOCK CAR RACER

Wendell Oliver Scott was the first African American to drive in the highest level of stockcar racing and remains to date the only African American to have won a major NASCAR race.

Annie Belle Daniels, Newport News
ENTREPRENEUR

Annie Belle Daniels, the founder of the Madam Daniels School of Beauty Culture, is an influential civil rights and political activist in Newport News.

Nominated by Fredrika Conyers-Glover's African American Studies class (2009–2010), Phoebus High School, Hampton

John Arthur Stokes, Prince Edward County
CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST

As a student at Robert Russa Moton High School, John Stokes helped lead a strike by pupils to gain better education facilities, an act of defiance that contributed to the integration of public schools in the United States.

Nominated by Sally Miller's fourth-grade class (2009–2010), William Fox Elementary School, Richmond

John Rollison

(d. 1780), York County
ENTREPRENEUR AND LANDOWNER

Born to a free mother, **John Rollison** (d. 1780) lived in York County and worked as a shoemaker, although he had other business concerns as well. In a time when property ownership could be tenuous for African Americans in Virginia, he owned multiple lots in Williamsburg and York County as well as material luxuries and a slave. In addition to raising his own children, Rollison was the guardian of his orphaned nephew.

In 1748 Rollison neglected to pay the tithable, or tax, on his mother and wife. This may have been a way he protested an unfair system that did not require the same tax on white women. During the Revolutionary War, Rollison provided supplies for the navy and militia troops. In 1777 he and his son, along with other male landowners in York County, swore an oath of allegiance to the new government of Virginia. Rollison wrote his will in February 1780 and had died by October 16, 1780, when his will was proved in the York County Court. On the appraisal of his estate taken after his death, Rollison was given the honorific of “Mr.,” a title usually reserved for white men of standing in the community.



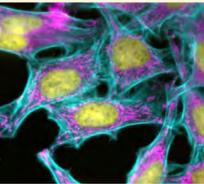
Nominated by James Cameron, Jr., Williamsburg

Henrietta Lacks

(1920–1951), Clover
PRINCIPAL IN A MEDICAL CAUSE CÉLÈBRE

Born Loretta Pleasants in Roanoke, **Henrietta Lacks** (August 1920–October 4, 1951) went to live with relatives in Clover, in Halifax County, after her mother died. As a child, she worked on a tobacco farm with other members of her family. She married David Lacks on April 10, 1941, and had five children.

Lacks and her children joined her husband in Turner Station, Maryland, in 1943. In 1951, Henrietta Lacks was diagnosed with cervical cancer. While she was receiving treatment in a segregated ward at the Johns Hopkins University Hospital, researchers took a small piece from Lacks’s tumor, without her knowledge, for research purposes. While experimenting on the sample, scientists observed that Lacks’s cells reproduced—thived in fact—outside of her body, a result researchers had unsuccessfully attempted to secure for decades. Lacks died of cancer on October 4, 1951, and was buried in a family cemetery in Clover.



The “immortal” cells from Lacks’s body continued to grow, and researchers around the world began to conduct experiments with them. The cells, known as HeLa (taking the first two letters of the donor’s first and last names), proved to be instrumental in a number of scientific breakthroughs. After the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis funded a factory at Tuskegee University to produce HeLa cells, Jonas Salk conducted experiments to demonstrate that his polio vaccine could be successfully used on humans. HeLa cells were the first human cells sent into space aboard flights and were used to study the effects of radiation. More recently, HeLa cells were some of first to be genetically mapped. Today, billions of HeLa cells are in use in laboratories around the world.

Nominated by Virginia Rose Cherry, Richard Bland College

Henry Box Brown

(1815 or 1816–after February 26, 1889)
Richmond
ABOLITIONIST AND PERFORMER

Born into slavery in Louisa County, **Henry Brown** (1815 or 1816–after February 26, 1889) became a skilled worker in a Richmond tobacco factory. About 1836 he married Nancy, an enslaved woman owned by another master, and the couple had at least three children. Brown was able through overwork to rent a house for his family. In August 1848 Nancy Brown’s owner suddenly sold her and the children out of the state. With nothing to keep him in Richmond, Brown resolved to escape to freedom. Working with a free black dentist and a white shoemaker, he concocted a scheme to ship himself north. On March 23, 1849, his co-conspirators sealed Brown into a wooden crate and placed it on a train bound for Philadelphia. After twenty-six hours, Brown arrived at the office of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, where he was unboxed, alive and free.

As Henry Box Brown, he began an active career lecturing and performing. He worked with the artist Josiah Wolcott and others to create a moving panorama to illustrate his lectures about slavery. *Henry Box Brown’s Mirror of Slavery* opened in Boston on April 11, 1850. During the lecture, Brown would climb into a replica of the box and re-create his unboxing. By October 1850, after an abortive kidnapping attempt and fearful that he would be arrested and returned to Virginia under the new federal Fugitive Slave Act, Brown sailed for England, where he remained for more than a decade.

In his performances in England and Wales, Brown mingled his antislavery lecture and panorama with entertaining acts. In 1875 he returned to the United States with a wife, whom he had married by 1859, and a daughter. The family continued to perform as late as February 1889. The date and place of his death are unknown.

Nominated by Brynn Sprinkle and Maya Wimer, Mary Johnston’s first-grade class (2009–2010), Clark Elementary School, Charlottesville

Wendell Scott

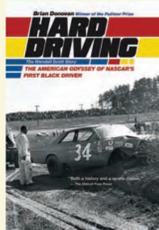
(1921–1990), Danville
STOCK CAR RACER

After working as a taxi driver and a moonshine runner, **Wendell Oliver Scott** (August 28, 1921–December 23, 1990) began racing professionally late in the 1940s. Owners of the Danville raceway approached Scott about racing, with hopes of increasing African American attendance at their events. The officials had consulted with local authorities, who reported that Scott had several speeding offenses and that he was the one moonshine runner that they could not catch.

In 1959 Scott won the Sportsman Division championship at Richmond’s Southside Speedway and NASCAR’s Virginia State Sportsman Championship. In 1961, after nearly 200 wins, he decided to leave the Sportsman and Modified racing leagues and move to NASCAR’s major division, the Grand National racing circuit.

Racing in nearly 500 NASCAR Grand National (later Sprint Cup) events, Scott earned more than \$180,000. He won one checkered flag, in Jacksonville, Florida, on December 1, 1963, but was denied the opportunity to publicly celebrate his only Grand National victory. At the conclusion of the race, Scott was scored a lap down and the second-place finisher, Buck Baker, was declared the winner. Scott contested the decision, and hours later NASCAR overturned the ruling, citing a scoring error. Although Scott never accepted the explanation, he handled the slight with dignity, as he did in scores of other instances of discrimination that he faced in his personal and professional life.

A racing accident in Florida forced Scott to retire from competition in 1973. He finished his career with 147 top ten finishes in 495 Grand National starts. He was named to the National Sports Hall of Fame, the International Motorsports Hall of Fame, the National Motorsports Press Association Hall of Fame, and the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame.



Lucy Francis Simms

(d. 1934), Harrisonburg
EDUCATOR

Lucy Francis Simms (died July 10, 1934) was born into slavery about 1857 and grew up near Harrisonburg on a plantation owned by the Gray family. In 1877 she graduated from Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (later Hampton University). She returned to Rockingham County and taught at a small country school in the African American community of Zenda. A year later Simms began teaching at the segregated school in Harrisonburg. For the 1883–1884 academic year, she served as acting principal for the Effinger School, where she taught primary grades until her death.



Dedicated to her profession, Simms attended teacher training schools during the summer, occasionally as an instructor. She helped organize the county’s association for teachers and served a term as auditor of the Negro Teachers’ Association and School Improvement League of Virginia, which worked to increase support for universal education and better public schools for African Americans. Over the course of her fifty-six-year career, Simms taught an estimated 1,800 students and had a profound influence on her community.

The City of Harrisonburg recognized her accomplishments when it opened the Lucy F. Simms School in 1939. The public school systems of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County honor their outstanding teachers with the annual Lucy F. Simms Educator of the Year awards. The Lucy F. Simms Continuing Education Center continues to operate in the 1939 school building in Harrisonburg.

Nominated by Deniece Frye (2009–2010), Skyline Middle School, Harrisonburg

Annie Belle Daniels

Newport News
ENTREPRENEUR

Annie Belle Daniels has parlayed her position as a businesswoman into political activism and community leadership. She grew up as one of eleven children on an Alabama farm. Inspired by African American leaders and entrepreneurs Madam C. J. Walker and Mary McLeod Bethune, she built a highly successful cosmetology business. Daniels began learning her art from local women and furthered her education at schools in Savannah, Georgia, and Newport News, where she moved in 1945. Daniels opened her own salon in 1948 and dreamed of creating a school of cosmetology. In 1959 she opened the Madam Daniels School of Beauty Culture on Chesnut Avenue and has since trained thousands of students. In June 2010, the City of Newport News dedicated a historical marker in her honor at that location, citing her “untiring humanitarian service and her contributions to the general welfare of the city.”



Madam Daniels believes deeply in civic duty and has advanced the cause of social and political equality for African Americans through her work with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Daniels, who grew up under Jim Crow laws and segregation, leads through hard work and by example, personally recruiting many new members for the civil rights organization, campaigning to increase voter registration, and raising funds for various political and charitable works. She has helped numerous candidates for election and volunteers as a precinct worker. Among her many awards are several from the local and national NAACP for her membership activities and leadership, a Distinguished Citizen Award from the City of Newport News (1990), and Hampton University’s President’s Citizenship Award (2005).

Nominated by Fredrika Conyers-Glover’s African American Studies class (2009–2010), Phoebus High School, Hampton

Robert Walter Johnson

(1899–1971), Lynchburg
PHYSICIAN AND TENNIS COACH

Following a college career playing football at Pennsylvania’s Lincoln University as a Negro All-American, **Robert Walter “Whirlwind” Johnson** (April 16, 1899–June 28, 1971) coached football for four seasons in Virginia and Texas before entering Meharry Medical College, in Nashville, Tennessee. After completing his studies, Johnson established a medical practice in Lynchburg, where he became the first African American to receive obstetrical privileges at Lynchburg General Hospital. His perseverance and advocacy opened the door for other minorities following in his footsteps.



In Lynchburg, Johnson discovered and fell in love with tennis. Because he came to the sport too late to establish himself as a top singles athlete, he instead dedicated himself to doubles play and to discovering and coaching younger talent. Johnson formed the Junior Development Program of the American Tennis Association, a program through which he invited dozens of young African American tennis players to learn and train at his personal courts. Through this program Johnson discovered and mentored several successful professional tennis players, most notably Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe, the first two African American Grand Slam champions.

In 1972 the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame inducted Johnson. He was also inducted into the Mid-Atlantic Tennis Hall of Fame in 1988 and the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 2009. Johnson’s personal accolades included being named an NAACP Life Membership chairman and a recipient of the Spiro T. Agnew Honorary Citizenship Award. The Dr. Robert Walter Johnson Home and Tennis Court were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2002.

Nominated by Leo Goldman IV, in Susan Bayne’s kindergarten class (2009–2010), J. G. Hening Elementary School, Richmond

John Arthur Stokes

Prince Edward County
CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST

Born in Kingsville, Prince Edward County, **John Arthur Stokes** grew up in the Jim Crow South, a time and place in which public schools were segregated by race. He attended Robert Russa Moton High School, the county’s only school for African Americans, located in Farmville. The one-story school was built for 180 students, but there were more than 450 pupils when he began his senior year in 1950. The school had only eight classrooms, an office, and an auditorium, but no gymnasium, cafeteria, or science lab and few educational resources.



Recognizing the inequalities between Moton and whites-only schools, Stokes, with his classmate Barbara Johns, helped lead a strike by all the students in April 1951. They walked out and refused to return to class until construction began on a new high school for African Americans. With advice from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the students decided to demand integration of all county schools, rather than seek only a new, separate school. In May *Davis et al. v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, Va., et al.* was filed on their behalf to integrate the county schools. The U.S. District Court in Richmond rejected their lawsuit. On appeal, the case was combined with other lawsuits under *Brown v. Board of Education*, and on May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that public school segregation was unconstitutional.

A year after graduating from Virginia State University, Stokes became an educator in Baltimore, Maryland. In 2008 the Virginia Civil Rights Memorial was placed at the State Capitol, with likenesses of student protestors commemorating the Moton school strike. Stokes lives in Prince George’s County, Maryland.

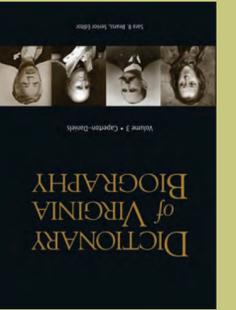
Nominated by Sally Miller’s fourth-grade class (2009–2010), William Fox Elementary School, Richmond

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Learn more about trailblazing African Americans in the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography* (Richmond: The Library of Virginia, 1998-) and on the Library’s Virginia Memory Web site at www.virginiamemory.com. Instructional materials and nomination forms for the 2012 project are available at www.lva.virginia.gov/trailblazers.



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