

Lott Cary

ca. 1780–1828 | Charles City County
BAPTIST MINISTER & SETTLER OF LIBERIA

Lott Cary (ca. 1780–November 10, 1828) was born enslaved in Charles City County. Early details of his life are uncertain, although later biographies embellished various stories. In 1804, his owner hired him out to work in the tobacco warehouses of Richmond. There Cary experienced a religious conversion about 1807, became a lay preacher by 1815, and was later ordained a Baptist minister. About 1813 he had saved enough money by his labor to purchase his freedom and that of his two children by his first wife.

Interested in mission work, he helped found the Richmond African Baptist Missionary Society in 1815. When the American Colonization Society announced plans to settle American freedpeople in West Africa, Cary decided to go. Several white Richmonders provided financial assistance for a group to sail in 1821. Cary was among the settlers who founded the town of Monrovia in the colony of Liberia, of which he was elected vice agent in 1826 and 1827. He established a joint stock company to improve Monrovia’s harbor and helped extend the colony’s territory. He served as the pastor of Providence Baptist Church and president of the Monrovia Baptist Missionary Society. While preparing munitions to defend the colony in November 1828, Cary was killed by an accidental gunpowder explosion. After his death, advocates of colonization used Lott Cary’s life story to promote the idea of a successful colony, making him one of the most famous black men of the early 19th century.

William Harvey Carney

1840–1908 | Norfolk
MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT

Born enslaved in Norfolk, William H. Carney (February 29, 1840–December 9, 1908) expressed an early interest in religion and attended a school run by a local minister. His father escaped during the 1850s to New Bedford, Massachusetts, and he purchased Carney and his mother out of slavery when they were not freed as promised by their owner’s will. After the Emancipation Proclamation authorized African Americans to participate in combat, Carney joined the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, the first black military unit raised in the North.

The 54th Regiment led the charge on July 18, 1863, against Fort Wagner, one of the strongest defenses around Charleston, South Carolina. When the flag bearer was shot down in battle, Carney saved the American flag and planted it on the parapet. When the troops fell back he retrieved the flag, despite having received several serious wounds. As he handed it over to his regiment, Carney said, “Boys, the old flag never touched the ground.” He was honorably discharged in June 1864 and returned to New Bedford.

Carney worked as one of the earliest U.S. letter carriers after the war, and he frequently spoke in public about how he saved the flag. In 1897 he received a standing ovation while attending the unveiling ceremony for the Boston monument to Colonel Robert Gould Shaw of the 54th Massachusetts. After 37 years, Carney received the Congressional Medal of Honor on May 23, 1900, for his heroism during the assault on Fort Wagner. When Carney died in 1908, the U.S. flag flew at half-mast at the Massachusetts State House.

Earl Francis Lloyd

1928– | Alexandria
BASKETBALL PIONEER

Growing up in a racially segregated neighborhood in Alexandria, Earl Lloyd was a basketball standout at the city’s Parker-Gray

High School and became a star at West Virginia State University, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in 1950. That year the National Basketball Association’s Washington Capitols signed Lloyd. On Halloween night, he became the first African-American athlete to play in an NBA game, scoring six points in a loss to the Rochester Royals. A week later he was ordered by the Army to report for duty only 16 days into his professional career. The Capitols folded during his military service and the Syracuse Nationals (later the Philadelphia 76ers) purchased Lloyd’s contract. He returned to the NBA in 1952, where he built a reputation for his tough-as-nails defense and rebounding. Lloyd and a teammate became the first African Americans to win the NBA title when the Nationals captured it in 1955.

During the 1957–1958 season he took over the team’s coaching duties when the head coach was ejected from a few games. Lloyd ended his playing career in 1960 with the Detroit Pistons, for whom he was the NBA’s first African-American assistant coach. He became the league’s fourth black head coach in 1971. He later worked as an automotive executive and for the Detroit Board of Education. For his contributions to the sport, Lloyd was inducted into the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame in 1993 and the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2003.

James “Plunky” Branch

1947– | Richmond
MUSICIAN & EDUCATOR

Born in Richmond and educated in the city’s segregated schools, James “Plunky” Branch attended Columbia University in New York City. By 1971 he had moved to San Francisco, where he formed Juju, a musical group that combined rhythm and blues, jazz, soul, and African musical influences. Returning to Richmond in the mid-1970s, Branch and his group have continued recording and performing, most recently as Plunky & Oneness. In 1982, their song “Every Way But Loose” made the top 10 on the London soul music charts. Branch was a founder of the Richmond Jazz Society in 1978.

Branch has released more than 20 albums through his independent record label, worked as a studio musician, including for the hit sitcom *The Cosby Show*, composed hundreds of songs, and produced a documentary, *Under the Radar—A Survey of Afro-Cuban Music*. Working with the U.S. Information Agency and the Virginia Commission for the Arts, Branch has educated audiences at home and around the world about the cultural significance of music. He has lectured on African-American music at Virginia Commonwealth University and directed the Virginia Union University Jazz Ensemble. He received jazz fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and was named by the governor to a task force to study the value of state funding of the arts in Virginia. Eager to share his talents and knowledge, Branch serves as an artist-in-residence and performs in public schools around the state and in 2012 was named one of the Richmond Public School system’s Living Legacies.

Sheila R. Baxter

1955– | Franklin
BRIGADIER GENERAL
ARMY MEDICAL SERVICE CORPS

Growing up in the city of Franklin, Sheila Baxter excelled at basketball. When she played at Virginia State College (later University), she was its first female player to score 1,000 points over the course of her career. In 1977, she earned a bachelor’s degree in health and physical education. One of the few women to join the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps at Virginia State, Baxter was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Army Medical Service Corps in 1978. She later received a master’s degree in health services administration from Webster University and also attended the Army War College.

Stationed around the country and overseas, Baxter was assigned posts of increasing responsibility in medical logistics, including a tour in Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Storm. Promoted

to brigadier general in 2003, she was the first woman and the second African American to hold that rank in the Medical Service Corps. In her final post, Baxter was commander of the Madigan Army Medical Center and the Western Regional Medical Command and was responsible for coordinating medical care and support for active-duty, National Guard, and Reserve troops in six states. The screening and health assessment program for returning troops implemented at Madigan during her tenure became a model for the Army. Her decorations include the Distinguished Service Award.

Inspired by mentors who helped her achieve her goals, Baxter has made time throughout her career to help and advise young adults. After retiring in 2008, she earned a Divinity degree and continues to work with veterans as a chaplain.

Jamelle Smith Wilson

1968– | Hanover County
EDUCATOR

In 2011 Jamelle Smith Wilson became the 12th superintendent of schools for Hanover County Public Schools, a district that currently serves almost 20,000 students. She began her career as a high school English teacher and since that time has been a curriculum specialist, assistant principal, and principal. She was assistant superintendent for Instructional Leadership in Hanover from 2003 to 2011.

A native of Spotsylvania, Wilson was the first in her family to attend a four-year university. She has been an educator since earning her master’s degree in teaching from the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia in 1991. She later earned a master’s in English from Virginia Commonwealth University in 1998 and a doctorate in education from the University of Virginia in 2002. She has dedicated her career to ensuring that all her students—particularly the underserved and underrepresented—are exposed to meaningful educational opportunities. During her tenure, the Hanover school system has maintained its reputation for excellence by exceeding core subject and graduation benchmarks for full accreditation based on the Virginia Department of Education’s Standards of Learning test results.

Wilson is a passionate supporter of the community development work of the Greater Richmond YMCA and chairs its board. She also serves on the board of governors for the International Baccalaureate, an advanced educational curriculum offered at Hanover County’s high schools that aspires to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

Beth Anne Brown

1969–2008 | Roanoke
ASTROPHYSICIST

Beth Anne Brown (February 4, 1969–October 5, 2008), a Roanoke native, turned her love of science and science fiction into a career. Valedictorian of her class at William Fleming High School, she attended Howard University and in 1991 received her undergraduate degree in astrophysics. In 1998, Brown became the first African-American woman to receive a doctorate in astronomy from the University of Michigan. As a graduate student there she developed a still-popular course called Naked Eye Astronomy.

Brown joined the National Aeronautics and Space Administration as a National Academy of Science/National Research Council Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Goddard Space Flight Center before moving to Goddard’s National Space Science Data Center. In 2006 she received a NASA Administrator’s Fellowship and served as a visiting assistant professor at Howard University. Brown published several articles on her research on elliptical galaxies. She shared her passion for astronomy and community by developing education and outreach projects for NASA, including its Multiwavelength Milky Way website. As an executive board member of the American Society of Black Physicists, she encouraged young African Americans to enter the field. Her last position with NASA was assistant director for Science Communications and Higher Education in its Science and Exploration Directorate.

After Brown’s sudden death from a pulmonary embolism at age 39, her mother established the Dr. Beth A. Brown Science Foundation to provide scholarships to graduating high school seniors who pursue degrees in astronomy or physics. In 2012, William Fleming High School named its science and pre-engineering hall in Brown’s memory.

1. Lott Cary*
2. William Harvey Carney*
3. Earl Francis Lloyd
4. James “Plunky” Branch
5. Sheila R. Baxter
6. Jamelle Smith Wilson
7. Beth Anne Brown*
8. Alonzo Harding “Zo” Mourning, Jr.

*deceased



Alonzo Harding “Zo” Mourning, Jr.

1970– | Chesapeake
BASKETBALL PLAYER
& PHILANTHROPIST

Chesapeake native Alonzo “Zo” Mourning, Jr., starred on the basketball court at Indian River High School. At Georgetown University he was the first player named the Big East Conference’s Player of the Year, Defensive Player of the Year, and tournament Most Valuable Player in one season. He graduated in 1992 and was drafted with the second pick in the National Basketball Association Draft. Mourning became one of the league’s top players during his 15-year professional basketball career. He won the NBA Defensive Player of the Year award twice and earned All-Star honors seven times.

After playing on the gold medal-winning team at the 2000 Summer Olympics, Mourning discovered that he suffered from the rare kidney disease focal segmental glomerulosclerosis. He missed most of the 2000–2001 season and the entire 2002–2003 campaign. Mourning ultimately received a transplanted kidney donated by his cousin. Though mostly a substitute during his final years on the court, he played a key role in giving the Miami Heat its first NBA title in 2006. His playing career ended after a leg injury in 2007, and he entered the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2014.

During his basketball career, Mourning and his wife became involved in several philanthropic activities. They established the Mourning Family Foundation in 1997, which has raised millions for a mentoring program and an inner-city youth center. In 2001, he founded Zo’s Fund for Life, which has raised more than \$2 million to aid people suffering from kidney disease.

2015 STRONG MEN & WOMEN

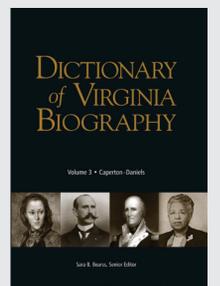
IN VIRGINIA HISTORY

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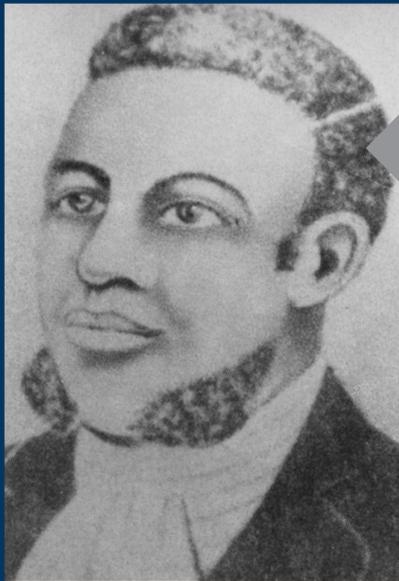


Learn more about distinguished African Americans from Virginia in the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography* (Richmond: Library of Virginia, 1998–2006) and on the Library of Virginia’s websites, www.lva.virginia.gov and www.virginiamemory.com. Instructional materials, classroom activities, and nomination forms for the 2016 project are available at www.lva.virginia.gov/smw.

A joint project of the Library of Virginia and Dominion.



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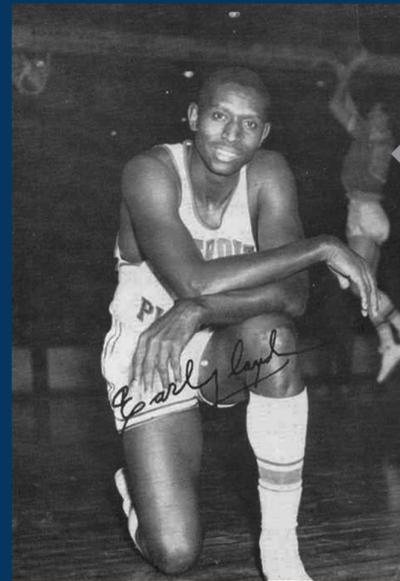
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Born into slavery, Lott Cary purchased his own freedom and became an early leader in the new West African colony of Liberia.

William Harvey Carney

1840–1908
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MEDAL OF HONOR
RECIPIENT

For his bravery during battle in the American Civil War, Sergeant William H. Carney was the first African American to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.



Earl Francis Lloyd

1928–
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BASKETBALL PIONEER

Earl Lloyd was the first African American to play in the National Basketball Association and the league's first African-American assistant coach.

James "Plunky" Branch

1947–
Richmond
MUSICIAN AND
EDUCATOR

For decades, multi-talented saxophonist and bandleader James "Plunky" Branch has promoted the cultural importance of music at home and abroad.



Sheila R. Baxter

1955–
Franklin
BRIGADIER GENERAL
ARMY MEDICAL
SERVICE CORPS

Brigadier General Sheila Baxter was the first female and the second African-American brigadier general in the Army Medical Service Corps.

Jamelle Smith Wilson

1968–
Hanover County
EDUCATOR

Jamelle Smith Wilson is the first woman and first African American to lead the Hanover County Public School Division.



Beth Anne Brown

1969–2008
Roanoke
ASTROPHYSICIST

An astrophysicist at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, Beth A. Brown worked to inspire women and minorities to pursue careers in science.

Alonzo Harding "Zo" Mourning, Jr.

1970–
Chesapeake
BASKETBALL PLAYER
& PHILANTHROPIST

Hall of Fame basketball player Alonzo Mourning, Jr., is a champion of charitable causes and persevered against kidney disease.



2015
**STRONG
MEN &
WOMEN**

IN VIRGINIA HISTORY

People of African descent have been a part of Virginia's—and America's—story since European colonization of the North American continent began. Yet the contributions of African Americans have often been ignored, obscured, or underappreciated by those who recorded history. In observance of Black History Month, the Library of Virginia and Dominion honor eight distinguished Virginians, past and present, as *Strong Men & Women in Virginia History* for their important contributions to the state, the nation, or their professions.

These men and women offer powerful examples of individuals who refused to be defined by their circumstances. Their biographies are a testament to the determination and perseverance displayed by extraordinary people during challenging times. These individuals demonstrate how African Americans have actively campaigned through education and advocacy for better lives for themselves, their people, and all Americans. It is these many contributions that the *Strong Men & Women in Virginia History* program seeks to recognize and share.

To learn more about these extraordinary men and women, all of whom have used their talents and creativity to push for equality and inclusion in American society, visit our website at:

www.lva.virginia.gov/smw

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