

SENATOR JENNIFER L. MCCLELLAN  
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NINTH SENATE DISTRICT



SENATOR MAMIE E. LOCKE  
VICE CHAIRWOMAN  
SECOND SENATE DISTRICT

## DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MEMORIAL COMMISSION 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission (the Commission), a statutory and bipartisan agency of the Virginia General Assembly, was created in 1992 to honor the memory and legacy of Dr. King and to continue his work through educational, historical, and cultural programs, public policy analysis, and public discourse on contemporary issues.

The Commission planned, developed, and maintained several projects in 2017, which included:

### **Emancipation Proclamation and Freedom Monument**

Dedicated to the contributions of African American Virginians in the fight for freedom, the Emancipation Proclamation and Freedom Monument (the Monument) will feature a 12-foot bronze statue representing newly freed slaves and will highlight notable African American Virginians. The monument, designed by Thomas Jay Warren of Oregon, is targeted to be completed in 2019 on Brown's Island in Richmond.

#### ***Virginians on the Monument***

In 2016, the Commission put out a statewide call for nominations from the public for individuals to appear on the Monument's base and held a series of five public hearings across the Commonwealth to solicit feedback. Nearly 100 nominations were received from members of the public, schools, museums, and historical organizations. In 2017, the Virginians on the Monument work group, consisting of legislative members, educators, historians, and community leaders and led by the Commission's chair, Senator Jennifer L. McClellan, narrowed the list of nominees to 30 finalists. The Commission then held a second series of public hearings in Blacksburg, Alexandria, Charlottesville, Norfolk, and Danville in July and August of 2017 to solicit public comment on the finalists.

Weighing public comment and written feedback, the work group met to select 10 individuals for inclusion on the Monument and made its recommendation to the Commission at its September 20, 2017, meeting, which the Commission approved.

To represent the time period up to 1865, before emancipation, the Commission selected the following individuals:

**Mary Elizabeth Bowser**, a spy for the Union in the Confederate White House;

**William Harvey Carney**, a former slave who fought in the 54th Massachusetts Voluntary Infantry Regiment and, for his actions at Fort Wagner, was the first African American awarded the Medal of Honor;

**Gabriel**, who led one of the half-dozen most important insurrection plots in the history of North American slavery;

**Dred Scott**, an enslaved man whose unsuccessful lawsuit for his freedom led to the infamous Supreme Court decision that persons of African descent were not United States citizens; and

**Nat Turner**, leader of the only successful slave revolt in Virginia's history, shattering the myth of the contented slave.

To represent the time period from 1865 to 1970, the Commission selected:

**Rosa Dixon Bowser**, an educator, women's rights activist, and social reformer who founded the first African American teachers association and co-founded the Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and the National Association of Colored Women;

**John Mercer Langston**, Virginia's first African American member of Congress and the first president of what is now Virginia State University;

**John Mitchell, Jr.**, a community activist, the first African American to run for Governor of Virginia, and editor of the *Richmond Planet* newspaper, which covered local, national, and worldwide news, including lynchings, segregation, and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan;

**Lucy Simms**, a prominent educator who taught three generations of African American children in the Harrisonburg area; and

**Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker**, a Petersburg minister, civil rights activist, chief of staff to Dr. King, and co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

### ***Site preparations***

Working with the Department of General Services (DGS), the City of Richmond, and Venture Richmond, the Commission endeavored to secure necessary permissions for the site on Brown's Island and take first steps toward installation of the Monument.

- The Department of General Services conducted for the site a land survey (\$7,500), a Phase I Environmental Study (\$2,800), and a title search (\$1,950). The estimate for DGS project management fees is \$5,000.
- In early 2018, a paper will go before Richmond City Council to request that the City convey an access easement on Brown's Island to the State of Virginia in order to allow access to the Monument site, which is encircled by City property. A second paper will request modification of an agreement between the City of Richmond and Venture Richmond in order to place the Monument site under the control of the State of Virginia.
- The Commission's counsel plans to finalize the Commission's contract with the Monument's artist, Thomas Jay Warren, by early 2018. Upon signing the contract, the artist will have an 18-month timeline for completion of the Monument.
- Venture Richmond will pay costs estimated at \$80,000 to be reimbursed by the Commission to relocate the Mill, the existing artwork at the site of the Monument.

A final budget for the Monument is pending. The Commission has a \$500,000 budget allotment and will solicit private funds, using the Virginia Capital Foundation as fiscal agent, to cover as much of the cost of

the Monument as possible. The Monument fund has begun accepting donations. Upon finalization of the budget, the Commission's Fundraising Work Group will meet to adopt its fundraising strategy.

## **King in Virginia**

The King in Virginia Subcommittee (the Subcommittee) of the Commission met to discuss upcoming 2018 activities of the King in Virginia Project, which will involve programming in each of the Virginia localities that Dr. King visited, ongoing research, and collection of materials related to Dr. King's visits to be archived on the Commission's website. Dr. King's documented visits to Virginia occurred from 1953 to 1967 and took place in 12 localities in the Commonwealth: Charlottesville, Danville, Farmville, Hampton, Hopewell, Lynchburg, Newport News, Norfolk, Petersburg, Richmond, Suffolk, and Williamsburg.

The Subcommittee developed plans for a series of 2018 Beloved Community Conversations to be held in each of these localities, focused around the theme of Dr. King's fourth and final book, "Where Do We Go from Here." The programs, free and open to the public, will serve as a means to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination. The first two programs in Richmond and Charlottesville are tentatively planned for March 2018.

## **African American Legislators in Virginia**

Nearly 100 formerly enslaved African men served in the General Assembly of Virginia between 1869 and 1890 until subsequent state constitutions, the Black Codes, and Jim Crow laws stripped away the franchise for African Americans. The Commission's website is home to a comprehensive database of these legislators, detailing their lives and contributions to Virginia's history. Working in partnership with the Library of Virginia, the Commission continues to support and maintain this database.

## **2017 Legislation**

Three resolutions put forward by the Commission were agreed to by the House of Delegates and the Senate of Virginia in the 2017 legislative session:

*SJ 391 Celebrating the life of Adelaide Marie Payne Griffin*

*SJ 427 Commemorating the 150th anniversary of Virginia's Underwood Convention of 1867*

*SJ 447 Commemorating the 50th anniversary of Loving v. Virginia, 388 U.S. 1 (1967)*

## **Looking Ahead**

The year 2018 marks a major anniversary year for the Commission, which will commemorate the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination with its series of Beloved Community Conversations across the state. Other programming will include:

- Partnership with the Richmond Symphony to host "Remembering 1968: A Tribute to MLK," on February 3 and 4, 2018, at the Dominion Arts Center in Richmond.
- A series of events hosted in partnership with the Library of Virginia and the Capitol Square Preservation Council to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Constitutional Convention of

1867–1868. Programming will include panel discussions, lectures, and an exhibit in the Capitol Extension.

- Commemorative resolutions to be put forth in the 2018 legislative session recognizing the 50th anniversary of *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*, the 150th anniversary of the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, and the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In 2017, the Commission's longtime staff member, Brenda Edwards, who had served the Commission since its creation in 1992, retired. The Commission recognized and thanked Ms. Edwards for her decades of service and dedication at its March 27, 2017, meeting.

**Staff contacts:**

Lily Jones, Research Associate  
900 E. Main Street  
Pocahontas Building, 8th floor  
Richmond, Virginia 23219  
(804) 698-1886  
ljones@dls.virginia.gov

Amigo Wade, Senior Attorney  
900 E. Main Street  
Pocahontas Building, 8th floor  
Richmond, Virginia 23219  
(804) 698-1862  
awade@dls.virginia.gov