

WINTER 2024

FOCUS ON
PRESERVATION

Market Square, Roanoke, Va.



ROANOKE VALLEY PRESERVATION FOUNDATION

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Please send RVPF Newsletter submissions to
Whitney Leeson, wleeson@roanoke.edu.

Kegley Preservation Awards

RVPF Annual Meeting and Awards Reception

Five awards were presented on November 15 at the Foundation's annual meeting and Awards Reception at the historic Gainsboro Branch Library. The Foundation promotes the protection and stewardship of historic, cultural, and natural resources in the Roanoke Valley through education and advocacy. "Recognition of people, programs and projects that help to promote good stewardship and preservation of these resources is an important part of achieving the mission of the Foundation," explained Alison Blanton, Awards Committee co-chair.

Named in honor of George Kegley, a founding member of the Foundation and Awards Committee Chair for many years before passing away in 2022, the awards have been presented for more than 25 years.

Blanton noted that this year's list focuses on promoting awareness through education with an emphasis on heritage education, including three awards recognizing efforts that promote a better understanding of local Black History. Introduced last year, the Roberts Heritage Education Award for achievements in preserving the Black History of Roanoke will be given to the Gainsboro Branch Library this year. This award is named in memory of Margaret and Alice Roberts for their unrelenting commitment to documenting and preserving the history and achievements of the Black community in Roanoke.



Photo Credit: Whitney Leeson

Thank You to Kegley Preservation Awards Committee Members for their dedication to RVPF: Alison Blanton and Whitney Feldmann (Co-chairs); Anne Beckett, Judy Harrison, Rob Logan, Mike Kennedy, and Katie Gutshall.

“Hidden in Plain Site” Documentary Award for Heritage Education



Photo Credit: Trish White-Boyd

Trish White-Boyd led the Roanoke Hidden Histories Committee in their effort to tell the stories of the African American experience in Roanoke through everyday places in the city that are often overlooked and, in some cases, entirely erased. In partnership with the Harrison Museum, the broad-based community volunteer group raised funds to sponsor two public history projects - the documentary “Hidden in Plain Site” and the Henrietta Lacks statue in the newly renamed Lacks Plaza.

The documentary, which premiered in May 2023, was produced by the Richmond-based Hidden in Plain Site organization and provides a multi-media virtual tour of five sites associated with overlooked or lost places of Black history in Roanoke. It uses current and historical images along with remembrances by community members to bring this hidden history to life.

The memorial Henrietta Lacks statue, which replaces the Robert E. Lee statue in the plaza across from the Municipal Building, was dedicated in September. The statue commemorates the involuntary contributions to science and medicine made by Lacks through the use of her cells without her permission. Many people were not aware that Lacks was a Roanoke native until her childhood home was demolished several years ago.

The goal of the Hidden Histories Committee is to continue to engage and enlighten the public by telling the often painful stories of the African American experience in Roanoke while also celebrating the achievements of this community.

Gainsboro Branch Library The Roberts Heritage Education Award

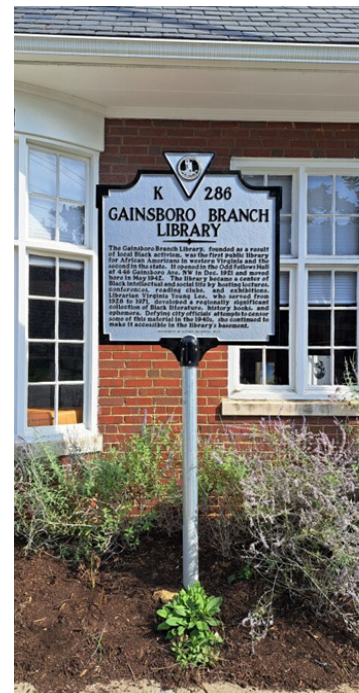


Photo Credit: Megan Mizak and Whitney Leeson

The Gainsboro Branch Library has a rich history in the African American community of Roanoke and Southwest Virginia. After 800 community members petitioned the city for a library, it was established in 1921 in a vacant storefront. At the time, it was only the second library for African Americans in Virginia and the fourth in the South. The library outgrew its space by 1929 and Virginia Y. Lee, who served as librarian from 1928 to 1971 and was recognized recently with a state marker at the library, advocated for a new and larger facility. Receiving only \$20,000 in city funds (compared to \$100,000 for the main “white-only” library), Lee petitioned St. Andrew’s Catholic Church to donate the land and oversaw the design of the current Tudor-Revival style library, which opened in 1941.

Thanks to Lee’s leadership, the library houses a much envied collection of books and other materials on Black history, modeled after Black studies collections at leading national Black colleges, such as Hampton Institute (where Lee attended) and Howard University. When the city instructed Lee to remove this collection, she hid it in the library basement for safekeeping with access secretly provided to the library’s Black patrons. It is the largest collection of Black studies in Southwest Virginia and includes many first editions donated by nationally known Black authors.

Through the dedication of Lee and subsequent librarians, the Gainsboro Branch Library has stood as a center of education and knowledge for Roanoke’s African American community for over 100 years. As the primary repository for much of the Black history of Roanoke, the library is a tremendous asset. The dedicated members of the library staff continue to be good stewards of this valuable resource as they assist researchers, enlarge and curate the collections, and support the Black community through various heritage education programs and events.

Virtual Downtown Tour & Wayfinding Award for Heritage Tourism

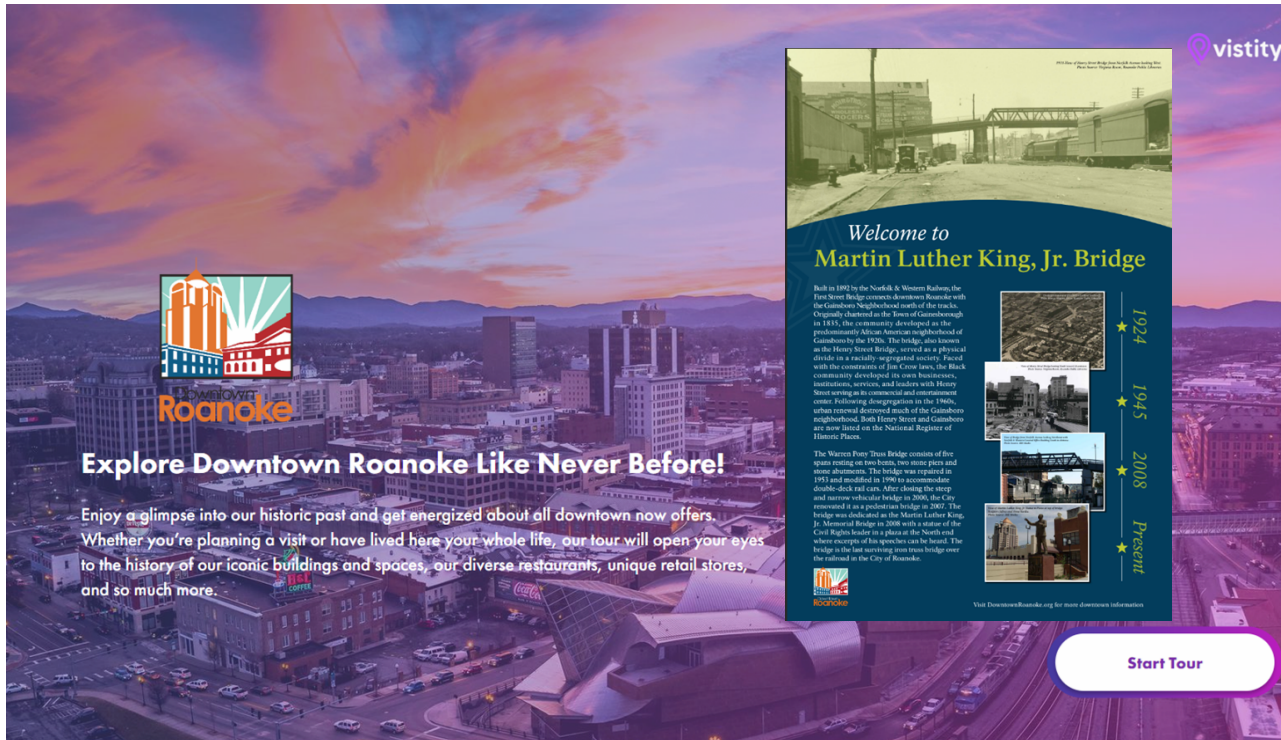


Photo Credit: Downtown Roanoke, Inc.

In May 2023, Downtown Roanoke, Inc. (DRI) launched an interactive virtual tour of downtown Roanoke on their website as a new way to explore the downtown district from anywhere. The new Downtown Roanoke Virtual Tour provides visitors and local residents with an easy way to explore and familiarize themselves with Downtown Roanoke – both past and present. The virtual tour features high-resolution, 360° panoramic views that allow users to navigate and zoom in to see the area in greater detail. The tour also allows users to learn more about the history of downtown with historic “then” and “now” photos.

In addition to the virtual tour, DRI recently completed the implementation of a larger-scale, regional wayfinding system consisting of 33 signs and 5 kiosks spread throughout Downtown Roanoke. Spearheaded by Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge and also made possible by regional grants from the Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia, these wayfinding signs will help downtown visitors navigate more easily to their desired destinations by providing clear direction, as well as historical information, to points of interest throughout downtown. DRI worked closely with the RVPF, the Virginia Room at Roanoke Public Libraries, the History Museum, and Ken Miller with N&W Historical Society to locate historic information and photographs to include in the virtual tour and wayfinding system. These two heritage tourism initiatives are a great new tool that recognizes the importance of Roanoke’s history as part of what makes the city such a unique place to live, work, play, and visit.

To access the virtual tour, visit: <https://www.downtownroanoke.org/vistry-tour>

Evergreen Burial Park Award for Community Outreach

What brought a small-town Iowa boy to Roanoke in 1982 to one of the valley's most long-lasting and successful businesses? Don Wilson came to work at Evergreen Burial Park as a natural-born salesperson! After working his way up, he bought the company and serves as the President of Evergreen Memorial Trust. The company is headquartered at Evergreen Burial Park, which also oversees four other regional cemeteries.

Evergreen Burial Park began in 1916 on the Old Solitude Farm in what was then Roanoke County. The cemetery was designed by the Hare and Hare architectural landscape firm of Kansas City, Missouri, and its popularity was established from the start. Many notable individuals and their families are buried in the 54-acre cemetery including Virginia Governor Lindsay Almond, fifteen Roanoke mayors, several Norfolk and Western presidents, and over 3,000 veterans of all wars dating back to the Civil War.

The cemetery is a rich archive of history with its extensive burial records as well as a welcoming place for visitors. In addition to keeping meticulous records, Don and his staff provide numerous community-related events for the public. For the past 18 years, he has conducted a fall historical walking tour highlighting some of the more interesting individuals and stories of the social history of Roanoke. On Arbor Day Sunday, arborists lead a tree walking tour highlighting the specimen trees, including some planted from the original landscape design. On Memorial and Veteran's Days, flags are placed on all veteran's graves. In 2020, the Robert E. Lee Monument was relocated to Evergreen from Downtown Roanoke. From its continuous forward-thinking management since 1916 to Don's leadership, the cemetery and its parklike setting provides a unique background to tell the stories of Roanoke, Virginia.



Photo Credit: Don Wilson

“Finding Your Roots” Genealogy Workshop Award for Heritage Education and Research

The Colonel William Preston Chapter, NSDAR presented a free 3-hour African American "Finding Your Roots" Genealogy Workshop in February 2023 to 55 attendees at the Gainsboro Library. The workshop featured Ms. Ruth D. Hunt, member of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society – New York City Chapter, and New York City Chapter, NSDAR.

Twenty-five volunteers/genealogists representing Daughters of the American Revolution, Sons of the American Revolution, and the Roanoke City Library were also there to learn how to research African American genealogy and to assist attendees with future computer workshops.

During the workshop DAR genealogist Nancy Canova presented a power point on how to navigate the section for African and Native Americans and other people of color at DAR.org and how to complete the DAR application. She also promoted an 874-page book researched and written by NSDAR called *Forgotten Patriots* which lists over 6,600 African American Patriots who served during the American Revolutionary War. At the conclusion of the workshop, DAR members Wendy Warren and Nancy Canova presented the *Forgotten Patriots* book to the Roanoke City Library's Virginia Room so many can reference it.

This chapter held two follow up genealogy workshops at the Virginia Room in April and June. The workshops picked up where Ms. Hunt left off in building ancestral charts using the library computers to document birth, marriage, and death records for each generation.

It was a very successful event and inspired those in attendance a desire to research their roots and provided an educational opportunity for all. The DAR plans to continue this outreach with another workshop in February 2024.



Photo Credit: Col. William Preston Chapter, D.A.R.

Pints for Preservation--Historic Trivia Hurrah

Our fourth annual Pints for Preservation Pub Crawl was a huge success with 24 teams registered. Fierce competition ensued but one team emerged the clear winner. Congratulations to Amanda Givens and her supporting cast of trivia buffs, including Gary Hollis, a chemistry professor at Roanoke College who appeared on Jeopardy's Professors Tournament and also in the show's Champions Wildcard Tournament.

Thanks to the Pints Committee for all their hard work from finding sponsors and creating the scavenger hunt, to printing posters and securing prizes for the winners. They are: Megan Mizak, Lynsey Crantz-Allie, Michael Lawson, Alison Blanton, and Whitney Leeson. Thanks also to Krystal Vaught and Anne Beckett for working the event.

A special thanks to our sponsors Brown Edwards, Balzer & Associates, Brian Wishneff & Associates, and D. David Parr, Jr., Esq.; and participating businesses--Hotel Roanoke, Crescent City Bourobn & BBQ, Well Hung Vineyard, Billy's, and Liberty Trust.



Photo Credit: Whitney Leeson

Great Turnout at RVPF Pub Talks

The Past and Future of Explore Park

We had a great group of people (20+) that gathered on August 20 at the Twin Creeks Brewery Outpost at Explore Park to learn more about the history of the park and the County's plans for its future. Doug Blount, former Director of Parks & Recreation and current Assistant County Supervisor, led the discussion with helpful insights provided by Dr. Rupert Cutler, who was part of the group that originally envisioned Explore Park. Those in attendance included local residents and preservation enthusiasts who brought varying perspectives to the conversation.



There was general consensus within the group that the County is well aware of the significance of the historic resources in the park and will be good stewards of those resources as they work to repair and maintain them while also exploring ways to use them in a way that is meaningful, appropriate, and sustainable.

The Changing Skyline of Downtown Roanoke

Freelance writer Mason Adams and the October 11 conversation he led about the changing skyline of downtown Roanoke drew such a large crowd at Liberty Trust that we had to split into three groups! It was an eclectic gathering that attracted long-time locals, newcomers to Roanoke, downtown residents, architects, historians, educators, in addition to our usual preservationists. As a result, the conversations varied among small groups.

People enjoyed learning more about Roanoke's first skyscraper and how its completion in 1910 transformed the city. Hearing about our historic downtown as a vital part of contemporary downtown living from a variety of perspectives was an added bonus. The pub talk also provided attendees with an opportunity to meet new people who appreciated our downtown architecture as much as we do.



Photo Credit: Whitney Leeson

RVPF Reply to Roanoke Times “Letter to the Editor”

The Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation thanks *The Roanoke Times* for reporting on the 2023 Kegley Preservation Awards and appreciates this opportunity to respond to Ms. Campagna’s comments in her 31 December 2023 letter “More to Gainsboro’s History” with additional information. Our website at www.roanokepreservation.org provides more information about the annual awards as well as our many other activities and projects that support the preservation of natural, historic, and cultural resources in the Roanoke Valley through education and advocacy. The RVPF strives to be inclusive of all people and perspectives as we promote an understanding and appreciation of our rich and complex history.

The RVPF recognizes that this mission cannot be accomplished without the dedicated work of many people. In 2020, we honored the contributions of Evelyn Bethel, who served as RVPF president in 2000, with a Lifetime Achievement Award for her tenacity and perseverance in advocating for the Gainsboro community. At that time, we also announced that an award would be named in her memory to recognize future advocacy efforts on behalf of the Black community as we felt this was a particular passion of hers and best represented the impact of Bethel and her sister, Helen Davis. In 2021, the RVPF recognized Margaret and Alice Roberts with a Lifetime Achievement Award for their commitment to documenting and sharing the history of Gainsboro and the Black community through archival research. We also initiated the Roberts Award for Heritage Education and presented this award for the first time in 2023 to the Roanoke Higher Education Center for the Gainsboro History Project. These two awards will be presented when warranted by people, activities, and projects that embody the passionate commitment of these women who worked so diligently, each in their own way, to preserve the Black history and communities of Roanoke.

Regarding the award to the Col. William Preston Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), we feel strongly that it is important to recognize and encourage the current efforts of the national organization as well as the local chapter to expand their membership, research, and resources to be more inclusive. The 15 August 2022 article in *The Roanoke Tribune* about the long fight to overcome discrimination by the DAR and efforts by Ruth Hunt to assist veterans and people of color in tracing their family history inspired the local chapter to sponsor the “Finding Your Roots” genealogy workshops. This project supported the national DAR initiative to expand their continuing research to discover over 6,600 names and stories of Patriots of color who supported the American Revolution. The effort now focuses on reaching out to educate the African American and Native American communities to the information available to them in their search for their roots. This initiative also aims to make the historical, educational and genealogical resources about people of color and women during the Colonial period more accessible through the DAR website and outreach programs.

Finally, the RVPF has promoted awareness of the Old Lick Cemetery since 1998 when it was included on the Endangered Sites listing of older cemeteries in Roanoke City. More recently, we presented Joe Cobb with a 2021 Kegley Preservation Award for his work “Honoring their Breaths” that documented the removal of graves from the city-owned Black cemetery to Coynor Springs as part of the construction of Interstate 581. In May 2022, the RVPF hosted a presentation by Cobb on this research as part of National Historic Preservation Month. Additionally, the cemetery was recognized as part of the “Hidden in Plain Site” documentary, which received a 2023 Award and was shown at the annual Meeting and Awards Reception this year. Currently we are working closely with Friends of Old Lick Cemetery to conduct in-depth research and develop interpretive panels to tell the history of the Old Lick Cemetery as well as other adjacent cemeteries that no longer exist.

We appreciate the interest of Ms. Campagna and others in the RVPF awards and offer this information to encourage them to learn more about our organization and what we, as volunteers, have done and continue to do to promote awareness and appreciation of the resources that tell the story of the people and places of our past. We welcome any and all who share the passion of people like George Kegley, Evelyn Bethel, Helen Davis, Margaret and Alice Roberts, the DAR, Joe Cobb, and Friends of Old Lick Cemetery - to support RVPF and become involved in our ongoing work.

Sincerely,
Alison S. Blanton
RVPF Awards Committee Chair

Meet Our New Board Members

Brenda Allen



Photo Credit: Brenda Allen

Brenda Allen is a native of Massachusetts and resident of Historic Gainsboro for almost 30 years. She is married, mother of two children, and grandmother of two grandchildren. Brenda received her masters from the University of Lowell, MA in business administration with a concentration in human resources. Her son received a masters degree from Virginia Tech in engineering and her daughter received a masters degree from Howard University in journalism and international studies. Brenda is passionate about making things better for our communities, discovering and preserving the history of untold stories as well as places for generations to come. She is an active member of the Gainsboro Neighborhood group, currently serves on the Roanoke Review Architectural Board, and look forward to serving as a Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation board member!

Constance Crutchfield



Photo Credit: Constance Crutchfield

Constance Crutchfield is retired from Roanoke City Circuit Courts and now works part time for the Commonwealth Attorney's Office. Before working for the City, Constance spent 15 years working for various airlines and loved every second of it. She has been involved with numerous organizations over the years, including the American Business Women's Association and the VFW Women's Auxiliary, and currently serves as president of the Gainsboro Neighborhood Organization. She is also a member of the historic St. Gerard's Catholic Church. Constance cares deeply about the future of the Gainsboro neighborhood and has worked tirelessly to preserve the history of Gainsboro and to create a sense of community within the neighborhood. She is an avid lover of the theater, all genres of music, and travel. Her favorite travel destinations include anywhere that she can relax on the beach!

Eric Helms Monday



Photo Credit: Eric Monday

Eric's family roots have always been in Southern Virginia. He attended the University of Virginia for both undergraduate and law school, working throughout at the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, and living in one of Jefferson's original Lawn rooms during his final undergraduate year. After law school Eric clerked for U.S. District Judge Jackson Kiser. He was Martinsville City Attorney from 2003 to 2023, and is now General Counsel at the Roanoke Airport.

Eric has served on numerous civic boards and was named a Virginia Law Foundation Fellow in 2021, an honor granted to the top 1% of Virginia lawyers. He is also general counsel for the Virginia Society of the Sons of the American Revolution and president of the Fincastle Resolutions SAR chapter in Roanoke. He is a member of the Commonwealth of Virginia's Commission for the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution.

Fishburn Mansion / Mountain View Master Plan 2024

The Board of Friends of Mountain View, Inc. and City of Roanoke Parks and Recreation cordially invite you to learn more about our work to improve and restore the historic Fishburn Mansion, greenhouse/garage, caretaker's cottage, and grounds of Mountain View, 714 Thirteenth Street, S.W. Roanoke, VA.

**Open House Event
Fishburn Mansion
Sunday, February 4, 2024
3:00 - 5:00 pm**



Photo Credit: Friends of Mountain View

Come review our project work to date. Learn about our progress and next steps. We value your input.

Can't visit us? Send your comments to info@friendsofmountainview.org

Want to stay informed? <https://roanoke-va.civilspace.io/en/projects/historic-fishburn-mansion>

Grants from the Fishburn Foundation and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources provided project funding for a technical team of architects, engineers, planners, historians, and builders to evaluate existing conditions, explore opportunities for the historic buildings and grounds, and develop strategies for funding improvements and expanding recreational programming.

ROANOKE VALLEY PRESERVATION FOUNDATION & FRIENDS OF MOUNTAIN VIEW



WICKETS & WINE



Save the Date
May 18, 2023

A fundraiser to benefit the
preservation & restoration
of historic Mountain View



Historic Roanoke Cards

Featuring Five Unique Photographs

Support RVPF and buy several packs of cards to give to family and friends throughout the year. Each pack of cards features five images of historic Roanoke landmarks courtesy of Roanoke Public Libraries, The Virginia Room. They are: **Campbell Avenue, Burrell Memorial Hospital, Hotel Roanoke Fire, Mountain View, and Jefferson Street.**

To purchase cards please contact wleeson@roanoke.edu.

One Pack of Cards sells for \$12.00

Two Packs of Cards sells for \$20.00

Three Packs of Cards sells for \$25.00

Mailing fee is \$2.50.



Photo Credit: Whitney Leeson and Roanoke Public Libraries, The Virginia Room

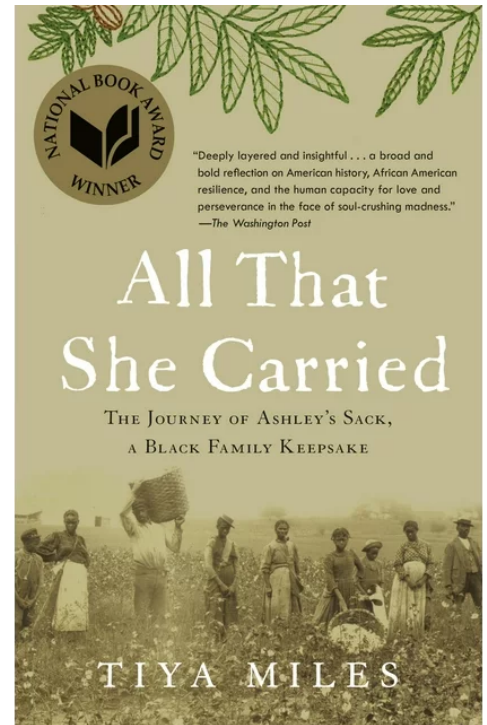
Historic Preservation Reads

Two Preservation Books for Readers with a Fondness for History

***All that She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake* (2022) by Tiya Miles**

In 1850s South Carolina, an enslaved woman named Rose faced a crisis: the imminent sale of her daughter Ashley. Thinking quickly, she packed a cotton bag for her with a few items, and, soon after, the nine-year-old girl was separated from her mother and sold. Decades later, Ashley's granddaughter Ruth embroidered this family history on the sack in spare, haunting language.

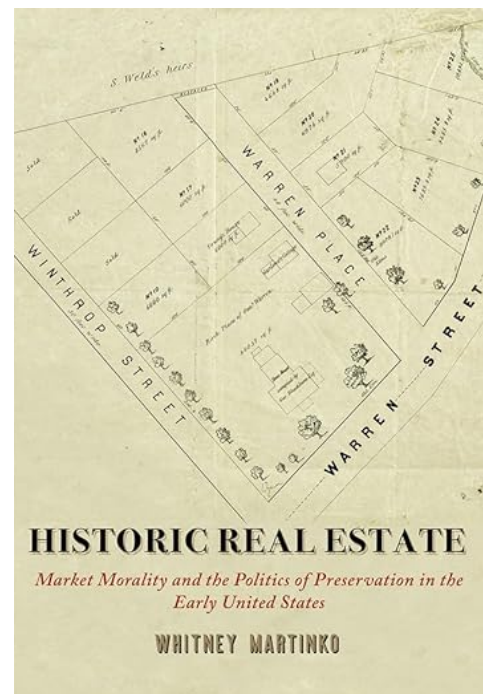
Historian Tiya Miles carefully traces these women's faint presence in archival records, and, where archives fall short, she turns to objects, art, and the environment to write a singular history of the experience of slavery, and the uncertain freedom afterward, in the United States. *All That She Carried* is a poignant story of resilience and love passed down against steep odds. It honors the creativity and resourcefulness of people who preserved family ties when official systems refused to do so, and it serves as a visionary illustration of how to reconstruct and recount their stories today.



***Historic Real Estate: Market Morality and the Politics of Preservation in the Early United States* (2020) by Whitney Martinko**

A detailed study of early historical preservation efforts between the 1780s and the 1850s.

In *Historic Real Estate*, Whitney Martinko shows how Americans in the fledgling United States pointed to evidence of the past in the world around them and debated whether, and how, to preserve historic structures as permanent features of the new nation's landscape. From Indigenous mounds in the Ohio Valley to Independence Hall in Philadelphia; from Benjamin Franklin's childhood home in Boston to St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina; from Dutch colonial manors of the Hudson Valley to Henry Clay's Kentucky estate, early advocates of preservation strove not only to place boundaries on competitive real estate markets but also to determine what should not be for sale, how consumers should behave, and how certain types of labor should be valued.



Have You Heard About Our Plaque Program?

Bringing "History to the Streets"

Historic homes and buildings in the Roanoke Valley can now be recognized under a Historic Plaque Program administered by RVPF. The program not only brings 'history to the street' for those passing by your home or building, but also brands them as desirable locations for potential home buyers, tenants, and business owners to live, work, and/or invest in. Installing a plaque on your home or building helps others understand its historical significance in our community. Several sites already have plaques including Fire Station No. 1, the Virginia Museum of Transportation (Norfolk & Western Freight Station), the Municipal Building, owners of historic homes, and most recently, Restoration LLC in commemoration of their recent restoration of historic Villa Heights located in NW Roanoke.

Plaques are 10" x 7" cast bronze ovals with brown pebbled backgrounds forged by Paul W. Zimmerman Foundries (responsible for casting most National Register of Historic Places plaques across the country). The cost per plaque is \$375 and includes research for the text to be used on the plaque (the building's historic name, brief description, and construction date), the plaque's production, shipping, regulatory approvals from the city, and installation.

For additional information, visit <http://www.roanokepreservation.org/historic-plaque-program/> or email wleeson@roanoke.edu

"It has been said that, at it's best, preservation engages the past in a conversation with the present over a mutual concern for the future."

William Murtagh

First "keeper" of the National Register of Historic Places



The **Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation (RVPF)** is a 501c3 nonprofit organization established in 1988 to preserve the historic, natural, and cultural resources of the Roanoke Valley (City of Roanoke, City of Salem, Town of Vinton, Roanoke County, Botetourt County, and Franklin County, Virginia). It was founded as - and continues to be - a grassroots, volunteer-driven organization. Since its inception, the RVPF has been active in a variety of preservation efforts. Consistent involvement and advocacy has resulted in increased public awareness and successful preservation projects. Although the Foundation's focus is on the past, its major accomplishments are the result of planning for the future.

"THE FUTURE" OF PRESERVATION

We partner with community groups to bring promote local history - Gainsboro History Walk

We advocate for preservation of important buildings - The Claytor Clinic (currently on the Endangered Sites List)

We give tours of Roanoke to share local history and preservation

We partner with RideSolutions for History By Bike Tours - Vinton Tweed Ride

We install plaques on historic buildings - formerly endangered, Villa Heights has been saved and renovated

We create and install community signs to commemorate and celebrate local history - Evans Mill & Crystal Spring



P.O. Box 1366, Roanoke, VA 24007
www.roanokepreservation.org

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