



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2016.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Stafford

Program Title: Telling the African-American History Story in Stafford County, VA

Program Category: Parks and Recreation

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Anthony Romanello

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 

Telling the African-American History Story in Stafford County, VA

Short Overview of the Program

In recent years, Stafford County has worked to better tell the story of its rich African-American history. The African-American community has been an integral part of the County from the times of the County's founding. The County has used a multi-pronged deliberate approach to achieve this, always looking for new opportunities to bring history alive for our students, citizens and visitors.

Stafford has established a "Trail to Freedom" throughout the County, complete with signage that describes the harrowing journeys of men, women and children seeking freedom. During Stafford's 350th Anniversary Celebration in 2014, it was natural to have a weekend devoted to the Trail to Freedom.

Stafford renovated and restored the Stafford Training School, an important African-American school, and supported its nomination and eventual acceptance to the National Register of Historic Places. The County took the opportunity during the 350th Anniversary to commission an "African-American History Wall" located in the school (now a community center and called the Rowser Building) which will be available to visitors for perpetuity.

Stafford has used the Virginia Department of Historic Highway Marker program to tell the story of Anthony Burns, a Stafford slave whose story helped inspire abolitionists; abolitionist Moncure Conway; and the Stafford Training School/Rowser Building.

Stafford also commissioned a "Cultural Resource Study of Slavery-Related Buildings and Sites in Stafford County, VA" to identify and help to save rapidly disappearing sites related to slavery.

These efforts ranged in price but all were innovative in their own way. There is no real right or wrong way to tell a story except to not tell it at all. Being creative and using different avenues

can afford a wide range of possibilities. Stafford County is proud of its efforts to tell its African-American story and continues to look for ways to make its history more inclusive.

The Problem or Need for the Program

Stafford County was founded in 1664. The county began with a mix of Native Americans, newly arrived Europeans and Africans brought here in bondage. Over the years, there were many people and places that were pivotal in the story of African-American history in Stafford County. That history was not always recounted as it should have been. Stafford County has taken many steps to recount its rich African-American history to benefit and honor its African-American community and to provide the attractions that visitors ask for and seek. The problem became how to best bring that history alive. How do you take events and people from the past and communicate their extraordinary accomplishments and contributions to a modern-day populace? How do you afford to do this? Do you do it all at once or over time? Should it be ongoing? These are all questions considered when trying to solve the problem.

Description of the Program

Stafford used a multi-pronged approach to tell the African-American story over the course of several years – a historical tour, signage, a cultural study and building preservation. Some of the efforts were natural offshoots of the County's 350th Anniversary Celebration in 2014. Others, like the slavery-related sites study listed below, have documented and set up sites for possible future preservation.

- **Trail to Freedom** – A speech by John Hennessy of the National Park Service on the story of John Washington prompted the creation of the Trail to Freedom. John Washington was an enslaved man in Fredericksburg who crossed the Rappahannock River to freedom in Stafford County in April of 1862. Washington could read and write and later wrote the story of his life

and escape. He was one of thousands of slaves from Fredericksburg and the surrounding counties who fled to Stafford County in 1862 when the Union Army was deployed in Stafford. It was likely the largest single exodus of slaves in America up to that time. In 2009, Stafford worked with the city of Fredericksburg to create a “history trail” that could be traveled by foot and car with interpretive signs to describe the harrowing journeys of men, women and children seeking freedom. At the time, African-American heritage tourism was on the upswing with the help of easier genealogical research through the internet. Stafford arranged bus tours and discovered there was a need and appetite for this kind of offering.

- **Stafford’s 350th Anniversary Celebration Trail to Freedom Event and Rowser African-American History Wall** – Stafford County celebrated its 350th Anniversary in 2014 with a vast array of programming and five signature events. One of those events was the “Trail to Freedom” weekend, an event over two days that centered on Stafford’s African-American history. There were heritage tours by motor coach to three different destinations along the Trail to Freedom. Re-enactors at each stop illustrated life during the Civil War. Planning for the day was coordinated through the Trail to Freedom community organization who assisted greatly with every detail.

At the conclusion of the Trail to Freedom tours, an unveiling was held of the African-American History Wall at the Rowser Building. Stafford issued a request for proposal to develop the large-scale mural and the resulting artwork depicts a timeline of African-American history in Stafford. The Stafford NAACP was integral as a partner with Stafford County in selecting the history depicted and producing the mural. The mural will be displayed at the Rowser Building in perpetuity for citizens and visitors to view.

The second day of the event consisted of a dramatic recitation of the journey of John Washington along with a special presentation recalling how spirituals were used to send secret messages.

- **The Stafford Training School/Rowser Building** – Opened in 1939, land for the Stafford Training School was purchased with funds raised by African-American parents who wanted a better education for their children. The school was the hub of the African-American community for years and the efforts of students from the school sparked the eventual integration of schools in the entire Fredericksburg region. Recognizing the historical value and significance of the school, the Stafford Board of Supervisors authorized funds to renovate the school in 2006. In 2007, the County dedicated the building as the “Rowser Building,” named for Ella Rowser, a popular African-American teacher who taught at the Stafford Training School.

In 2013, the Stafford Training School/Rowser Building (used today for offices for the parks department and as a busy senior and community center) joined 20 other Stafford properties on the National Register of Historic Places. Stafford citizens and historians Norman Schools and Frank White worked together to complete the application for the designation. Stafford County held a special ceremony for the dedication of the plaque designating the school’s inclusion on the Historic Register.

- **Historic Highway Markers** – Another way Stafford has found to interpret African-American history is through the Virginia Department of Historic Resources Historical Highway Marker program. The distinctive black and white signs are placed along roadways to commemorate people, places, or events of regional, statewide or national significance. Stafford has three markers dedicated to its African-American heritage: the story of Anthony

Burns is located on a marker near his birthplace; a marker near the home of Moncure Conway documents his dedication to abolition; and the Rowser Building has a marker detailing the role of its students in achieving integration.

- **Cultural Resource Study of Slavery-Related Buildings and Sites in Stafford County, VA**

In an effort to document and save disappearing historical sites, the Stafford County Board of Supervisors commissioned a Cultural Resource Study of Slavery-Related Buildings and Sites in the county. Despite decades of documentation on the County's historical sites, recorded sites related to the African-American experience are few in number and even scarcer in written literature. Dovetail Cultural Resource Group, Dennis Pogue, LLC and students from the University of Mary Washington's Center for Historic Preservation worked with staff to identify the existing above-ground and below-ground historic properties with an association with enslaved individuals. The study involved communications with the local community, a background review, fieldwork on these 30 properties, archival research, GIS mapping and the production of the final report on the findings. The final study was a 264-page document that made recommendations for further studies and documentation to help preserve as many of the sites as possible. The 30 sites, ranging from around 1750 through 1860, included freestanding kitchens, cemeteries, slave quarters and mills.

The results of the study have already been used to shore up and preserve the Sanford Farm slave quarter on property owned by Stafford County that is now a park at Lake Mooney, Stafford's newest reservoir. Plans call for eventually opening the building to visitors.

Stafford is always on the lookout for better ways to tell its story. These methods worked and ranged from very low cost to a higher cost (for renovations) and were all ways other localities could adopt to do the same.

Use of Technology

- **Trail to Freedom** – Stafford website, 350th website, Microsoft Word, Excel, Publisher, County and 350th Facebook pages, County Twitter page, GIS
- **Stafford Training School/Rowser Building** – Stafford website, Microsoft Word, Publisher, County Facebook and Twitter pages, Public Works computer software
- **Historic Highway Markers** – Stafford website, Microsoft Word, Publisher, County Facebook and Twitter pages, GIS
- **Cultural Resource Study of Slavery-Related Buildings and Sites in Stafford County** – GIS mapping, photography, CAD drawings, Stafford website, Microsoft Word, County Facebook and Twitter pages

The Cost of the Program

- The Trail to Freedom History Trail – \$5,000 from Stafford County with a \$5,000 matching grant from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities.
- **Trail to Freedom Day During the 350th Anniversary Celebration** – The cost of the tour was \$23,750 and was paid for by a combination of donations from three local businesses - the Quantico Corporate Center, Hilldrup, and The Walton Group, and the County.
- **Stafford Training School/Rowser Building** – The cost of the mural was \$47,500 and it was covered by contributions from Stafford County and three local businesses - the Quantico Corporate Center, Hilldrup, and The Walton Group. The renovation of the school in 2006 cost \$3.2 million, authorized by the Board of Supervisors, as part of the 2001 Bond Referendum.

- **Historic Highway Markers** – Each highway marker cost approximately \$1,700. Stafford Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities paid for the Rowser marker. The Anthony Burns marker was covered by a diversity program administered by the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Moncure Conway was paid for by the Stafford County Historical Society.
- **Cultural Resource Study of Slavery-Related Buildings and Sites in Stafford County** – The total cost of the study was \$36,260. The cost of the study was covered grants from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, cash and in-kind matches by the University of Mary Washington, cash and in-kind matches from Stafford County and a volunteer in-kind match.

The Results/Success of the Program

Stafford has been successful in its efforts to tell the story of African-American history simply because the story was told. Stafford spoke for individuals who may or may not have had the means or voice to tell their story – people who lived, worked, loved, played and built lives in Stafford County.

Thousands of people have toured the Trail of Freedom, witnessed Stafford’s 350th events, viewed the unveiling of the Rowser African-American History Wall and historical markers and downloaded the results of the slavery-related sites study. Educational lesson plans were integrated into Stafford County schools for the 350th Anniversary celebration. Stafford children now have a more inclusive view of the history of their county.

Stafford’s work in identifying slavery-related sites made the Spring 2016 edition of *Preservation* magazine, a publication of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The magazine lauded Stafford’s as being “proactive in planning,” wanting to know what its historical resources are and making plans for preserving those resources.

Perhaps the biggest success of all is what all these efforts mean to the older generation of African-American citizens who have proudly come back for each unveiling and event. The men and women who grew up here in a very different time are now seeing the history of their people being told and embraced by the citizens of Stafford County. The actions by the County have drawn the community closer together. The tears, pride and grace shown during the efforts to better tell Stafford's African-American story show that Stafford is continuing to abide by its motto of "Progress Since 1664."

Brief Summary

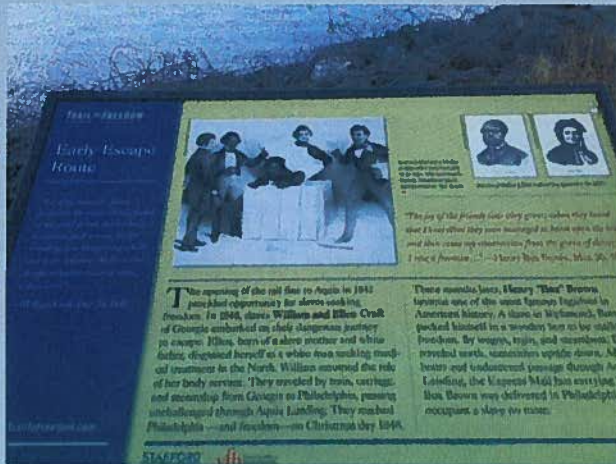
As a child in Depression-era Stafford County, VA, Frank White was not allowed to attend school with white children because of segregation. His son David became the Chief Secondary Officer of Stafford County Public Schools and is currently the Superintendent of Schools for King William County. In 1854, Stafford native Anthony Burns escaped slavery only to be forced to return under the Fugitive Slave Act. His escape inspired abolitionists and he later gained his freedom and became a minister. These stories of adversity and triumph define the more than 350 years of African-American experience in Stafford County. The people who know these stories and the landmarks related to them are fading away. Stafford County and its Board of Supervisors have made it a priority to document and preserve the county's African-American history to honor and recognize the many contributions of African-Americans to the county. Stafford is achieving this through the help of local historians, civic organizations, historic tours, a permanent history wall, road markers, a slavery-related structure study and the historic preservation of a school integral to African-American life.

Stafford's efforts resulted in the narration of a story that needed and deserved to be told – the wonderful and rich history of Stafford's African-American residents and their contributions to

the progress in the county. Doing this during the lifetime of those who grew up in a less inclusive society makes Stafford's efforts more compelling. Stafford also brought citizens together and enhanced their participation by partnering with local historians, community groups and businesses to complete this mission. The results improved our services to our constituents by providing them historical displays and sites to visit and by integrating more local history into lesson plans for schoolchildren. The program was innovative because Stafford had never made efforts on this scale before. The Trail to Freedom was a completely original idea as was the special Trail to Freedom weekend during the 350th Anniversary Celebration. The African-American history wall was the first display of its kind in Stafford County to detail African-American history. Before these efforts, most African-American history in Stafford existed as verbal stories handed down through generations or as written narratives in books little known by the public. Some of the history existed only as yellowed items pasted in scrapbooks or awards or honors displayed on someone's mantle. Stafford gathered all these things together and found a way to find the larger audience they deserve. This has resulted in a more comprehensive representation of all of Stafford's history as well as an increase in opportunities for historic tourism. Stafford is simply telling its story in a better way.

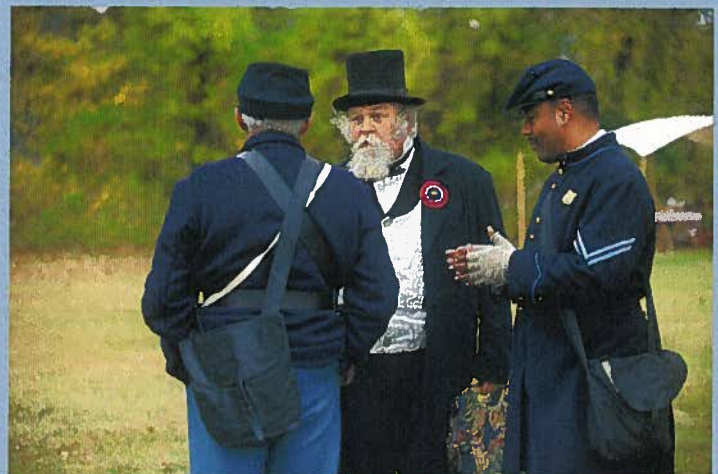
Supplemental Materials

Trail to Freedom



One of the Trail to Freedom historic trail markers located at Aquia Landing in Stafford County.

Scenes from the Trail to Freedom Day during the 350th Anniversary Celebration in 2014.



STAFFORD
Virginia

Supplemental Materials

Rowser Building/Stafford Training School



Rowser Building and former students



A classroom of students at the Stafford Training School



Rowser African-American History Wall



The crowd gathering for the special unveiling of the wall

Supplemental Materials

Historical Highway Markers



Supervisors and special guests gather at the dedication of the Anthony Burns historical highway marker. The marker is located next to the Moncure Conway marker.



Supervisors and special guests gather at the dedication of the Stafford Training School (Rowser Building) historical highway marker.

Sanford Slave Quarter



Work has been done to shore up the slave quarters as well as to protect from termites.