

## **Hampton Heroes**

*The Martin Luther King Jr. and Hampton Heroes Memorial Plaza pays tribute to the national civil rights leader, as well as to people who worked for civil rights and social justice in Hampton.*

### **Contrabands: Enslaved Journey to Freedom (2019)**

*Early in the Civil War, three enslaved men sought asylum at Fort Monroe. A decision that they were, essentially, property seized during war allowed them to stay. This haven in Hampton drew thousands more people and began the call for emancipation.*

**Frank Baker, Shepard Mallory, and James Townsend.** The brave act of these three men who escaped from slavery in Norfolk to Hampton opened a door to freedom for thousands.

**Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler.** As commander of Fort Monroe, he declared the three men “contrabands of war” and refused to return them to their enslavers.

**James A. Fields.** Born enslaved, Fields escaped during the Civil War and worked for the U.S. Army and Freedmen’s Bureau, later becoming a lawyer and holding public office.

**George Washington Fields.** Younger brother of James, he graduated from Hampton Institute and became the first Black person to graduate from Cornell Law School.

**Mary S. Peake.** A free Black woman, she taught enslaved children and later Contraband children, sometimes under what is now known as the Emancipation Oak.

**William Roscoe Davis.** An early Contraband, he raised money for Black schools, opened a school, operated the Point Comfort Lighthouse, and became a preacher.

**Gerri L. Hollins.** A musician and educator, she was dedicated to preserving and telling the Contraband story and founded the Contraband Historical Society.

### **Hidden Figures (2019)**

*Many Black women were hired in NASA Langley Research Center’s West Computing group as human computers during a wartime labor shortage, completing mathematical calculations while being forced to use segregated facilities.*

**Katherine G. Johnson.** She calculated the first space flight trajectories and launch windows, drawing the trust of John Glenn and other astronauts and launch crews.

**Mary W. Jackson.** A human computer who became NASA’s first Black female engineer, she had to seek permission to attend graduate classes at the white high school.

**Dr. Christine M. Darden.** Though she had a master’s degree, she started in the now-integrated computer pool but moved into aeronautical research and was the first Black woman to be a senior executive at Langley.

**Dorothy J. Vaughan.** The first Black supervisor at Langley headed the West Computing group, taught herself coding, and ushered her team into the computer age.

**Miriam D. Mann.** One of the earliest of the Black computers, she is known for her research as well as fighting to remove the segregated area of the lunchroom.

**T. Melvin Butler.** As the personnel officer at Langley, he hired the human computers, including the first Black women. He then actively recruited at historically Black colleges and universities.

**Margot Lee Shetterly.** A Hampton native who brought the women's contributions to light, writing the book "Hidden Figures," which became an award-winning movie.

### ***Public School Integration (2019)***

*When the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the integration of public schools in 1954, Virginia refused to comply and threatened loss of state funds for localities that integrated. In 1961, the state gave students the right to apply to another school (although approval was not mandated). That allowed Hampton to create a plan to integrate schools.*

**Sen. Hunter B. Andrews.** The chairman of the Hampton School Board who led the effort to integrate city schools, he remained an advocate for education as a state senator.

**C. Alton Lindsay.** Wanting to avoid the school closures in other localities that defied integration, he worked with Andrews on the integration plan.

**Dr. Jerome H. Holland.** President of Hampton Institute in the 1960s, he pushed for desegregation. All-Black Phenix High had been located on the college campus.

**Robert A. Rice.** The son of a faculty member at Hampton Institute, he was the first Black student to apply to and attend Hampton High School in 1961.

**Del. Dr. Mary T. Christian.** This longtime educator and activist was instrumental in integration and continued to advocate for education during her 14 years in the General Assembly.

**Mary E. Johnson.** As supervisor of the public Black elementary schools in Hampton, she chose the teachers reassigned to new schools to ensure a smooth transition.

**William M. Cooper.** This lifelong educator became the first Black person on Hampton's school board in 1962, as integration was becoming a reality.

### ***Founding Hampton Institute (2019)***

*Founded in 1868 with help and funds from the American Missionary Society, Hampton Agricultural and Normal Institute (now Hampton University) was formed, largely to educate teachers and teach job skills to the new freedmen.*

**General Samuel C. Armstrong.** With the support of the American Missionary Society, he founded Hampton Agricultural and Normal Institute and served as principal.

**Rev. George Whipple.** As a founder of the American Missionary Association, Whipple helped establish Hampton Institute in 1868, secured its state charter, and served as trustee.

**Rev. Lewis C. Lockwood.** An organizer and planner with an evangelical zeal, he supported Mary Peake's school and eventually organized several schools for freedmen.

**Booker T. Washington.** Among the earliest students at Hampton Institute, he was encouraged to establish a similar school, Tuskegee Institute.

**Robert Russa Moton.** Another early Hampton alumnus, he passed the bar and remained to serve his alma mater as dean of men for 25 years.

### ***Advocates for Mental Health (2020)***

*For centuries, people with mental illness had been hidden away, even feared. These reformers advocated for legal changes, resources and funding for community-based treatments.*

**Richard Marshall Bagley, Sr.** During Dick Bagley's 20 years as a delegate, he headed a legislative panel that recommended changes transforming how the mentally ill are treated.

**Rufus B. and Evelyn W. Easter, Jr.** This couple helped found a chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Insight Enterprises Inc. and the Peninsula Center for Independent Living.

**Harriet Nachman Storm.** She served on the local Community Services Board, as well as state boards for the Mental Health Association and Alliance for Increased Mental Health Awareness.

### ***Modern-Era Trailblazers in Public Service***

*Many of these public officials broke barriers in their service to the community as a "first." They worked for justice and equality; advocated for the community, especially those who had little voice of their own; and made a lasting impact on Hampton.*

*(2020)*

**Dr. Mary T. Christian.** The first Black person since Reconstruction to represent the 92nd District, she won seven terms and championed education and healthcare.

**William M. Cooper.** This lifelong educator became the first Black person on Hampton's school board in 1962, as integration was becoming a reality.

**James L. Eason.** The first person to be elected mayor of Hampton by the residents, not selected by City Council, he served 16 years and supported development, diversity, and the Healthy Families initiative.

**Juanita F. Gupton.** Gupton was appointed Hampton's first female Clerk of Circuit Court, handling a wide variety of documents, including land records, marriage licenses, divorces, and probate work.

**Ann Hitch Kilgore.** The city's first female mayor, she shepherded many progressive economic and civic initiatives, including school integration.

**John M. Phillips, Sr.** The first Black man in the 20th century to be elected to Hampton City Council, he was re-elected twice and became Hampton's first Black vice mayor.

**Wilford Taylor Jr.** Hampton's first Black judge, he served two terms as chief judge of the district court and four terms as chief judge in circuit court.

**George E. Wallace.** He set several firsts for the city. He was the first Black city manager and became a city council member and vice mayor. He was also the first Black man elected mayor.

**Yarborough B. Williams, Jr.** The first Black person to serve on City Council in the modern era, he was also the first Black vice president of Newport News Shipbuilding.

*(2021)*

**Linda D. Curtis.** The first woman elected as Hampton Commonwealth's Attorney, she had a commitment to helping crime victims and helped establish a victim services program.

**BJ Roberts.** The first Black American elected as sheriff, he led the department to three national accreditations in his 28 years in office and was also noted for his community involvement.

*(2024)*

**Will Moffett.** A neighborhood leader who pushed the city to create the Y.H. Thomas Neighborhood center, he became a city councilman and leader who built bridges and advocated for youth.

### ***Trailblazers in History (2021)***

*These individuals were trailblazers during the city's history. Their impacts stretch from the first settlers in Hampton to the Civil War to Civil Rights. Some were national figures who played a role in Hampton.*

**Ruppert Sargent.** An Army first lieutenant, he threw himself on a grenade in Vietnam to save others and was the first Black officer awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously.

**George Wythe.** A founding father who signed the Declaration of Independence, this judge had a profound influence on generations of state and national leaders, including Thomas Jefferson.

**William Trusty.** A successful businessman, he was elected to the council of the town of Phoebus in July 1901, becoming one of the first Black Americans to be so elected in a Virginia municipality.

**William Tucker.** The first named Black child born in English America, William was the son of Anthony and Isabella, who arrived at Old Point Comfort in 1619.

**A.W.E. Bassette.** A lawyer, educator, and civic leader in Hampton's Black community, he was a founder of the People's Building and Loan Association of Hampton.

**Alice Mabel Bacon.** An educator, social worker, and diplomat who raised the funds to establish the Dixie Hospital and Hampton Training School for nurses at Hampton Institute in 1891.

**Harriet Tubman.** The famed Underground Railroad conductor nursed sick and elderly refugees and freedom seekers at Fort Monroe who had escaped from slavery during the Civil War.

**Rosa Parks.** Long before she became famous for refusing to give up her seat on a bus and triggering demands for equal rights, she was a hostess of the Holly Tree Inn at Hampton Institute.

### ***Community Leaders (2021)***

*A community leader is someone who becomes a force for good in one's neighborhood or city, usually not because they are elected or because it is their job, but because they see a need and jump in to fill that need.*

**Chester Lee Brown.** As pastor of Hampton Baptist for 40 years, he focused ministerial efforts toward ensuring equal treatment and cooperation among all races and marched for civil rights.

**Anderson W. Clary Jr.** The pastor of historic Queen Street Baptist Church for 23 years, he served on numerous local and state associations as well as School Board and City Council.

**Jacob Heffelfinger.** A Union soldier injured in the war, he began a lumber company as Hampton was rebuilding. His passion was restoring St. John's Episcopal Church.

**Lillian Epps Johnson.** One of the first Black civilian nurses in any American military installation, she received local and national honors for her community involvement.

**Lillie Mae Jones.** A strong advocate for building community in Phoebus, this professional nurse also started health ministries at Zion and Queen Street Baptist churches.

**William Alfred Smith.** This longtime attorney took on civil rights cases, including desegregation of schools and businesses, fair housing, fair employment, and racial equality in appointing judges.

### ***Aberdeen Gardens (2024)***

*This groundbreaking neighborhood was built for and by African Americans in 1935 as part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program. The neighborhood provided modern homes to Black workers and became a close-knit community.*

**Arthur Howe.** As president of Hampton Institute, he submitted the proposal for Aberdeen Gardens to the federal Resettlement Administration in 1934 and remained a champion of the project.

**Hilyard R. Robinson.** One of the best-known Black architects of the time, he was appointed senior architect for the Resettlement Administration and directed the design of Aberdeen Gardens.

**William R. Walker, Jr.** Appointed community manager of Aberdeen Gardens in 1936, he was the only African American to hold a head supervisory role on such a project in the United States.

**Evelyn D. Chandler.** Active in many organizations, including serving on the Virginia Historic Review Board, she spearheaded the push for the neighborhood's Historic Designation.

**Roosevelt Wilson.** A community leader, he served as president of the Aberdeen Gardens Historic and Civic Association and the Historical Foundation of Aberdeen Gardens in the 1980s and 1990s.

**Claude Vann Jr.** After growing up in Aberdeen, he returned and assisted in the restoration of the Aberdeen Gardens Museum Complex and helped lead the foundation.

**Claude Vann III.** Foundation and neighborhood leader, he also created partnerships to maintain Black American cemeteries and co-chaired the city's 2019 commission.

**Margaret Wilson.** Born and raised in Aberdeen, she shares its stories locally and nationally and ensures that new city officials know the history of the neighborhood and its current needs.