

## *Historic preservation still unites us*

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### **Body**

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The first months of 2017 mark the end of Preservation50, a remarkable year-long commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act. On Dec. 16, Congress and President Obama ensured that the national preservation program will thrive into the future by reauthorizing the Historic Preservation Fund until 2023.

Preservation has long been an important enterprise in Virginia. Thomas Jefferson performed what many consider to be the first scientific archaeological investigation in the Americas, on a Native American mound near Charlottesville. The Mount Vernon Ladies Association, formed to save George Washington's deteriorating estate in Fairfax County, galvanized a nationwide preservation movement. In 1889, Preservation Virginia became the first statewide preservation organization in the United States.

Virginia's leadership in historic preservation has grown in the modern era. Monticello and the grounds of the University of Virginia are UNESCO World Heritage sites. A new national park is being forged at Werowocomoco on the banks of the York River, once the home of Chief Powhatan (and his daughter Pocahontas), who negotiated with the first English settlers. Through diligent efforts by private citizens and leadership by Sens. Tim Kaine and Mark Warner, Congress recently authorized expanding the boundary of Petersburg National Battlefield by 7,238 acres; it may soon become one of the nation's largest historical parks.

Many of the places Americans hold dear would have been lost without the nation's historic preservation program, the inception of which has its roots in the commonwealth. In the 1960s, a group of Virginia historians grew concerned about widespread losses of historic places. They authored a report calling for a legal framework to identify, preserve and interpret historic buildings, archaeological sites and monuments. Lady Bird Johnson, among others, championed their call.

The NHPA requires federal agencies to consider their projects' impacts on historic and cultural sites, organizes a system of state and tribal offices to review and research historic sites and establishes the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to advise the president and Congress. The NHPA helps protect and sustain historic places that anchor economic revitalization and ensure a more sustainable future. The act cemented heritage preservation as an American value that enriches our communities, promotes a shared and vibrant American identity and educates future generations.

Managed by the Virginians who founded Cultural Heritage Partners, Preservation50 has united an unprecedented coalition of history-minded organizations, federal and state agencies, American Indian tribes and private businesses to mark the act's substantial effects. Heritage preservation generates significant economic value, with heritage tourism standing out as one of the top drivers of job creation in Virginia. Preservation Virginia recently released an economic impact study revealing that more than 85 percent of leisure travelers to the commonwealth visit our heritage attractions, spending more than \$7.5 billion annually.

Sarah Curtis

## Historic preservation still unites us

Virginia's historic tax credit incentive has leveraged nearly \$4 billion in private investment to rehabilitate and reuse more than 2,300 buildings. Structures such as the Paramount Theatre in Charlottesville, the Stonewall Jackson Hotel in Staunton, Laurel Brigade Inn in Leesburg, and large sections of Richmond's Shockoe Bottom and Manchester districts are in use today because of Virginia's robust tax incentives for rehabilitating places that matter.

Our Department of Historic Resources, a major legacy of the NHPA, shepherds and approves these tax credit projects, recommends sites to the National Register and Virginia Landmarks Register, and partners with federal and state agencies to develop and support the sites that so many people visit.

As we celebrate our historic preservation successes, we must also craft an even more meaningful future, which means grappling with sometimes-uncomfortable history. Strengthening historic preservation means incorporating voices and preserving places that tell the stories of all Americans. We are literally uncovering these stories through the excavations of the Lumpkin's and Bruin's slave jails in Richmond and Alexandria, the Grand Contraband Camp in Hampton, and the work at the Germanna settlement near Culpeper. We preserve this history at Richmond's East End and Evergreen cemeteries through every grave marker we relocate and every person's story we tell. We must also recognize that longstanding inequalities in the treatment of historic sites mean that many of our most compelling places, like Petersburg's Pocahontas Island, remain vulnerable.

It is an honor for our family to live in Virginia's Executive Mansion, the nation's oldest active governor's residence, constructed in 1813. From our windows, we see legislators walking to the State Capitol, a National Historic Landmark designed by Thomas Jefferson and constructed in 1785 that served as inspiration for the U.S. Capitol Building. May we Virginians, and all Americans, continue to enjoy history through preservation and never take for granted that its lessons are the guideposts to a better future.

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## Graphic

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Maggie L. Walker, the first female bank president in the U.S., is buried in Evergreen Cemetery, on the Richmond-Henrico County line. ALEXA WELCH EDLUND/TIMES-DISPATCH Maggie L. Walker, the first female bank president in the U.S., is buried in Evergreen Cemetery, on the Richmond-Henrico County line. ALEXA WELCH EDLUND/TIMES-DISPATCH 2/21/2017: Maggie L. Walker, the first female bank president in the U.S., is buried in Evergreen Cemetery, on the Richmond-Henrico County line. ALEXA WELCH EDLUND/TIMES-DISPATCH Maggie L. Walker, the first female bank president in the U.S., is buried in Evergreen Cemetery, on the Richmond-Henrico County line. ALEXA WELCH EDLUND/TIMES-DISPATCH

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