

# Jefferson County Black History Preservation Society

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## Message from the President

James L. Taylor

### GREETING AND WELCOME TO THE FIRST EDITION OF THE JCBHPS NEWSLETTER

Jefferson County is rich in history. For many years, there have been lacks of information on African-Americans and their contribution to this history. Since the year 2000, four men that have been researching and collecting African-American history of Jefferson County. Much of this information have been passed down from parents, grandparents and other members of the community. It was decided that this information need to be preserved and organized. Thus, the Jefferson County Black History Preservation Society (JCBHPS) was started.

Nathaniel Downing [now deceased] was elected Vice-President, James Tolbert, Secretary, and George Rutherford, Treasurer. The Society was incorporated by the state of West Virginia and granted 501c{3} status by the Internal Revenue Service. To learn more about the founding members visit the JCBHPS website [www.icblackhistory.org](http://www.icblackhistory.org) and look under the "About Us" tab.

Our goals are to collect, promote, preserve and disseminate Black History of Jefferson County. This is accomplished by writing books, exhibits, presentations, adult education classes, highway markers, wayside markers, etc. The Society also purchased historic property which is in the process of being preserved.

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ARTS AND LETTERS AWARD

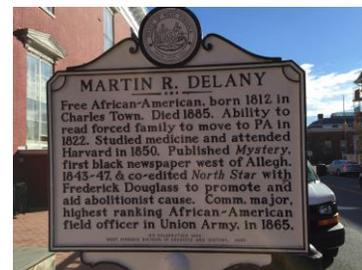
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## West Virginia Highway Markers

James Tolbert

Jefferson County may have the distinction of having the most West Virginia Highway Commission markers noting Black history in the state. Working with Black legislators and local Black history advocates from Huntington and Charleston, the Preservation Society was able to have installed five highway markers which is enormous. There are markers regarding Star Lodge#1 Free and Accepted Masons, the 2006 Niagara Movement National Conference, Johnstown Black Community, Hall Town Church and School, the Old Stone House and Martin R. Delany.



The Delany highway marker is located outside the Jefferson County historic courthouse.

## Charles Town Landmarks Commission Wayside Signs

In 2014, the Society work with the Charles Town Historic Landmarks Commission to place a wayside sign on South West Street describing the Black schools in Charles Town. Another is planned outlining the several Black businesses on or near the street, which, during segregation, was the main African-American commercial corridor.



## **The Webb-Blessing House Restoration Project**

George Rutherford

The Webb-Blessing House consists of two homes that were joined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This unique structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places, played a significant role in Charles Town's history.



The lot sits on East North Street, once a major thoroughfare between Winchester and Alexandria, Va. Samuel Washington deeded it to Ezekiel Dean in March 1797, who, in 1829 deeded it to Isaac and Charlotte Gray, They were described as "person of color". Soon afterwards James Webb, a free Black, built the stone house. The Blessing family resided in the clapboard house by the end of the Civil War. John Blessing, a baker and confectioner, prepared meals for John Brown while he was incarcerated. Before he was hung, Brown gave his Bible to Blessing as an expression of gratitude. The JCBHPS purchased both structures in 2003 and named it the Webb-Blessing House.

### **WEBB HOUSE**

The stone Webb House has two levels. The fireplace on the lower level was used for cooking and heating. The upper level consists of a large room used as a bedroom. Plans are to restore the house to the 1860's era.



### **BLESSING HOUSE**

The Blessing House also has two levels, with two rooms on the lower level and three on the upper level. It is intended that one of the upper level rooms be used for the storage of books and exhibits, another as a public research center. The third upper level room, known as the "Nathaniel Downing Room" serves as a meeting room. Downing was a chartered member of the Society. The front room on the lower level is dedicated to the Blessing Family. Here, Doug Perks and the Sons of the Confederacy have developed the exhibits and displays. Ollie Blessing, who was an educator in Jefferson County, also taught kindergarten in the family home.



The second lower level room is known as the "Jefferson County African-American Military Room". Developed by the Marshall-Holley-Mason American Legion Auxiliary #102 and funded by the American Public University System, this display honor African-Americans from Jefferson County who served in the Civil War to the Vietnam War.

### **FUTURE PLANS**

One of the original hand-dug wells that provide water to Charles Town residents was located in front of the Webb House. The Society plans to install a replica well at the same site. Also, the Webb House once was a popular stage coach stop along the old highway.

The Society has partnered with Ellen May and the Dolley Madison Garden Club to restore the backyard yard to a mid 19<sup>th</sup> century garden, as it most likely was when the house was occupied. This includes a vegetable garden, flower bed, fruit tree, out house, benches and patio. The members has already planted flower. It is anticipated that this project will be completed by early summer.

## **DID YOU KNOW**

JEFFERSON COUNTY WAS CREATED FROM BERKELEY COUNTY BY AN ACT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA ON OCTOBER 20<sup>TH</sup> 1801. THE NEW COUNTY WAS NAMED IN HONOR OF THOMAS JEFFERSON.

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ON DECEMBER 9, 1801, THE FIRST SLAVE MANUMISSION OCCURRED IN JEFFERSON COUNTY WHEN CONGRESSMAN ROBERT RUTHERFORD WENT BEFORE THE JUSTICES AND HAD PLACED ON RECORD THE FACT OF HIS HAVING MANUMITTED THREE OF HIS SLAVES, MENTA, JOSEPH AND ADAM.

## **CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

### **MARTIN L KING JR. FREEDOM TRAIL MARCH**

**JANUARY 10, 2016**

3PM BETTY ROPER AUDITORIUM

CHARLES TOWN, WV

### **BLACK HISTORY SOUL FOOD TASTING PROGRAM**

**FEBRUARY 28, 2016**

3PM WAINWRIGHT BAPTIST CHURCH.

CHARLES TOWN, WV

### **JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION**

**JUNE 18, 2016**

11AM TO 3PM EVITT RUN PARK

### **Don Redman Concert**

June 25, 2016

6pm Harpers Ferry National Park

Harper Ferry, WV

### **African American Culture & Heritage Festival**

August 19 -21, 2016

Charles Town, WV

### **Storer College Alumni Association**

August 6 & 7 2016

Harper Ferry

## **Delta Sigma Theta Arts and Letters Award**

The Eastern Panhandle Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority recognized the JCBHPS with its prestigious "Arts and Letters Award" for its work. The Society has been a leader in West Virginia in researching and documenting Jefferson County African-American history since 2000. During this period, the West Virginia Senate also passed Resolution 29 recognizing the work of the Society.

## **Jefferson County African-American Historic Landmarks**

Over the years, the Black community has not recognized many of the county structures which contributed to our history as significant. Over the past three years, the Jefferson County African-American Landmarks Commission has recognized nearly 25 sites deemed important to the life and progression of the county's Black population and history.



The Commission has presented metal plaques to churches, Star Lodge Masonic Hall, Page Jackson High School, Fishermen Hall and St. Philip's Parochial and Industrial School and other sites. A Landmark Digest will be published in the near future.

## **HERITAGE TRAIL BROCHURES AVAILABLE**

African American history in Jefferson County can't be separated from our American history. From slavery on the massive farms to the blow against slavery in Harpers Ferry, to the Niagara Movement against the economic discrimination to end Jim Crow; it all took place in Jefferson County, and it all influenced a change in the social structure in America. The JCBHPS invites you to experience the Heritage Trail outlined in this truly unique brochure. Over 35 historical sites have been identified; their GPS and latitude and longitude coordinates are included. The walking tour around Charles Town features 16 sites, and can be completed in around 90 minutes, while the entire driving circuit takes about four hours to complete.

So travel the roads, view the scenery, tread the streets, touch the doors, and enter the same building that some of our ancestry crafted. Some sites are no longer there but wayside markers provide an overview of their importance. Also, the brochure is an excellent teaching aid for students, and is full of history notes and photos.

JCBHPS  
P.O. Box 569  
Ranson, WV 25438

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

NAME  
ADDRESS  
CITY, STATE ZIP

## **Friends of Webb/Blessing**

You can become a Friend of Webb Blessing by contributing \$25 or more each calendar year. We are an incorporated 501c(3) tax exempt organization. All funds received will be used to continue the restoration of the WB house. Friends will receive the annual newsletter, be informed and invited to all special events. make all checks payable to JCBHPS and mail to P.O. Box 569, Ranson, WV 25438. We appreciate your encouragement and support. Thanks

Visit us:

Website: [www.jcblacckhistory.org](http://www.jcblacckhistory.org)

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