A Walk Through African American History

When in 1924 the Prince William School Board informed the Brown School, located on Prince William Street, that it needed running water and sewers to stay open, it said no money was available to help the struggling school. The Manassas African American community would not let their school close. By 1926, they raised enough money for a new school building on Liberty Street, and Dr. John Williams - a prominent physician and Brown alumnus - personally purchased and installed radiators and laid a water line to the school in the heat of summer.

The Brown School played an important role in educating young African Americans when schools were segregated. Its story—and many other stories that document the struggles and triumphs of African Americans in Manassas—will be brought to light in the first phase of a sign project that will eventually form a city-wide interpretive trail.

Other signs that will be installed this summer will feature African American entrepreneurs who provided services and goods in a segregated town; veterans and the American Legion Post 114, founded in 1946 when African American veterans were denied membership in White veteran’s organizations; and the historic Rose Hill Cemetery, established as an African American burial ground.

Choosing which stories to tell has been the work of a citizen committee collaborating with staff: Myra Brent, who also serves on the Architectural Review Board; Dr. Thurma Goldman, President of the Jennie Dean Education Foundation; Linneal Naylor, who descends from the enslaved Naylor family of Liberia; E.J. Scott, Vice President of the Prince William Area NAACP; and Lyshawn Dean, Warwick Steer; and Don Wilson, who all serve on the Manassas Historic Resources Board.

“These markers will finally get the rich history of the African American community in very visible locations,” Manassas Museum Curator Mary Helen Dellinger says. “These stories have remained largely untold, or folded into the larger story of White Manassas history, so it’s time to tell them in their own right.”

Although African American history signs will eventually be located throughout the City, along with existing signs that mark notable local history, the early focus will be on the historically African American neighborhoods. A 1917 segregation ordinance restricted African Americans to neighborhoods south of the downtown railroad tracks, so a Museum intern working on the sign project focused research on Lincoln, Grant, Douglas, Prince William, Jefferson, Lincoln, McKinley, and School Streets, tracing land deeds and conducting oral interviews with longtime residents.

Another Museum intern researched aerial and insurance maps to help recreate the location of buildings on and near the Manassas Industrial School (MIS) campus in anticipation of an interpretive walking trail on the MIS/Jennie Dean Memorial site. That trail will complement the recent update to the Memorial, which now includes a plaza with a statue of MIS founder Jennie Dean. The site already includes a kiosk with information about the school, its buildings and Jennie Dean.

An interpretive sign that tells the story of Liberia's enslaved was installed in fall 2020 at Liberia House Historic Site. At Grace United Methodist Church, another interpretive sign, commemorates the slave dwelling on the former Clover Hill Farm. Visiting these sites will be a fitting way to commemorate February’s Black History Month. Visit manassascity.gov/parks to find out more.
A Moment with the Mayor

It has been a month already and I’m starting to settle in! It’s February, also known as the LOVE month, and I can think of no better time to encourage each of you to share love through a kind word or deed!

I have been busy, as you can imagine, and I’ve made some much-needed updates to the “people’s” (Mayor’s) office with some new paint and a dedicated space for council members to have meetings with constituents and conduct the work of the City! I encourage you to reach out at any time to meet with me or any council member.

Many have asked about our LOVE and HOPE signs located at the Harris Pavilion and I thought it would be a great idea to highlight these signs this month. Mark Olsen has agreed to provide us with a little history behind this Manassas treasure that is often the backdrop for photos and social media posts. Please read below.

Michelle Davis-Younger

About nine years ago, the Virginia Tourism Corporation asked localities to put up their interpretation of the word LOVE in their downtowns to spread the Virginia theme, Virginia is for Lovers. Local businessman Mark Olsen, who owns Olde Towne Landscaping, took it upon himself to have the LOVE sign created by Wilcox Woodworks, another City of Manassas business. Barbie Olsen, Mark’s wife, painted the sign and Mark and his team placed the sign on the railcar behind the Harris Pavilion.

At first, this sign was only meant to stay up for a few months. However, it has become an iconic part of our Historic Downtown. Brides, engaged couples, prom couples and many others have posed for portraits standing in front of the LOVE sign. The LOVE sign has been replaced and refurbished as needed over the years, and then in 2020 when everything seemed darkest in the early days of the pandemic, Mark Olsen added the word HOPE next to the LOVE sign.

He said it was a “Labor of Love” for his City and that the Hope needed to be smaller than the LOVE, because after all, the most important thing is love.

Vaccine Heroes

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started almost a year ago, we have waited with hope for things to get back to “normal.” In less than a year, scientists have created not one, but two vaccines that have been deemed safe by the Food & Drug Administration with possibly more on the way.

The federal government has gone to work doling out vaccines to hospitals and elder care facilities to get our most vulnerable populations vaccinated first. Local health districts have been tasked with getting vaccines out to doctors’ offices, dentist offices, and first responders like fire fighters, EMS and police. But they are also responsible for the general public and following the Governor’s guidelines.

Information about vaccinations changes moment to moment. The Prince William Health District has done a fabulous job at keeping the City of Manassas updated on information, but sometimes, information is a moving target. We will try our very best to keep you updated with the latest information available on Facebook at www.facebook.com/cityofmanassas and on channel 23 (Comcast) or channel 38 (Verizon). You may also want to keep an eye on the Virginia Department of Health website at www.vdh.virginia.gov/covid-19-vaccine.

The following pictures are of the new vaccine clinic at Beacon Hall on the George Mason University Manassas Campus. It is directly across from the Hylton Performing Arts Center. There are also a few pictures of some of our heroes - the nurses and volunteers giving so much of their time and talents to help us all.
As is typically the case, we have not left all of the prior year (2020) concerns behind us as we have entered into a new year (2021). The first few weeks have been challenging as we have dealt with difficult questions. Some of these questions are what it means to have a peaceful transition of power, what it means to sacrifice some of our personal preferences for the greater good and what it means to determine how to allocate scarce resources in the battle against an ongoing pandemic. In the midst of the turmoil, however, I am hopeful that our lasting legacy will be to reclaim America’s place as “a beacon on a hill for freedom loving people everywhere.”

In order to reclaim this beacon, we must show the world what it means to cherish our freedom and liberties. This cannot be done with empty words and attacks on our fellow Americans. We must show through our actions and deeds that we respect democracy, that a peaceful government transition will be the norm, that we can disagree with others and still respect the rights that we all cherish as Americans.

Now is the time to support our institutions by building on the ideals that serve as the foundation of our democracy. We need to celebrate our shared experiences and values that cannot be replicated anywhere else in the world while recognizing and seeking to understand our differences. Our public servants need to know that they have our support in carrying out the public functions that we have asked them to undertake to make our communities safe and welcoming places to live.

I am proud that in Manassas we are doing things to bring people together instead of drive them apart. We have just completed a transition in elected leadership through an impartial election process. We are celebrating our diversity as Council has appointed a Diversity and Inclusion Task Force to engage every segment of our community in an open, honest, discussion of race, racism and diversity. The Task Force will seek to identify barriers and propose concrete solutions and paths of action to City Council that promotes racial reconciliation, economic justice and equity.

Over the past several months of the pandemic and through the holiday season, I have seen many people step up to help individuals in need in our community. Our non-profit and faith communities continue to offer hope and support. I have seen your City staff continue to deliver quality services regardless of the hardships and obstacles they have faced.

Given the recent issues in the nation surrounding law enforcement, one of the examples that I am extremely proud of involves the men and women who make up the Manassas Police Department. Through the leadership of Chief Douglas Keen, the Department has again stepped up to the challenge to not only meet the criterion established by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), but to be recognized with the “Accreditation with Excellence Award” for setting benchmarks for public safety professionalism. CALEA Accreditation is the Gold Standard for Public Safety Agencies and represents an ongoing commitment to excellence by each member of our Manassas City Police Department. This is a commitment that is not found in all communities.

We are not always perfect but we can continue to strive for a more perfect union. It is often difficult to recognize the positives that are ongoing around us as we are struggling through economic turmoil and a pandemic. I encourage you to take the time to look, as I can assure you, there are many positives to see in your community. Regardless of what 2021 holds for us, your City staff will continue to strive to make Manassas a better place to live, work and play throughout this year and beyond.

Stay safe and healthy,
W. Patrick Pate

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**Manassas Faces**

The Manassas Museum needs your help in creating its next exhibit. On June 4, Museum staff will open *Manassas Faces*, a temporary exhibit that features people in our community who work hard behind the scenes to make Manassas a great community. With that in mind, the Museum wants to know who YOU think should be featured in the display. Send us your nomination by March 2, along with a brief explanation of why you picked them. Anyone, regardless of age or profession, can be nominated. We look forward to working with all of you on this fun new exhibit that spotlights our friends and neighbors.

For more information, contact Museum Curator Mary Helen Dellinger at mdellinger@manassasva.gov.
The City of Manassas Happenings

Find these events and more in the City of Manassas, Virginia. For more information go to www.visitmanassas.org.

Winter Farmer’s Market - Saturdays, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. - The Winter Farmer’s Market will be held under the Harris Pavilion this year.

Now - May 23, 2021 - Manassas Museum Exhibit: The Power of Play - The toys in this exhibit may be familiar or foreign, but the joy of time spent playing is something we can all remember fondly. The vintage toys on display are from the Museum’s collection and from private collectors. The exhibit is free during the Museum’s open hours.

Now - March 27, 2021 - Rene Dickerson: A Retrospective Art Exhibit - Viewing by appointment: jexum@virginiaartfactory.org - the cumulative work of nationally acclaimed artist René Dickerson

Feb. 8, 10, 12 at 7:30 p.m. – What’s the Next Move: Line Dances! at the ARTfactory

Feb. 8-11 from 7-8 p.m. on Zoom - Drawing Faces ONLINE with Live Instructor - For ages 13-18 - contact the ARTfactory at www.virginiaartfactory.org

Feb. 13 & 20 at 2 p.m. - Manassas Industrial School/Jennie Dean Memorial Walking Tours; Walking tours of the Jennie Dean Memorial and the site of the Manassas Industrial School. Masks and registration required. manassassechoes.com

Feb. 15-22 from 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. - Watercolor Loose & Expressive ONLINE w/ Mike Flynn - contact the ARTfactory at www.virginiaartfactory.org

Feb. 24 at 3 p.m. - Stories of Preservation & Progress Talk - Join us each month for this series of talks that showcase local and regional history. Visit @cityofmanassasleisure on Facebook to watch this virtual program.

Feb. - March 3 from 6-8 p.m. - On with the Show! For Ages 12-18 - Pre-registration required at www.virginiaartfactory.org

March 5-31 - Manassas Museum Exhibit: Artistic Expression - The eighth annual Osbourn High School art exhibit will feature the works of students at Osbourn High School.

Mar. 6 at 7:30 p.m. – Manassas Symphony Orchestra: Amadeus!

March 12 - 14 - Manassas Ballet - Peter and the Wolf and More

Important Information

For COVID-19 vaccine information, call 703-872-7759 or visit www.vdh.virginia.gov/prince-william/

View Public Hearing Notices & New Development Applications

manassasva.gov/comhearing

Get Social!

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www.youtube.com/user/manassascityva

To contact the City of Manassas Connection newsletter, email pprince@manassasva.gov

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