

## PROMINENT BLACKS OF HARRISONBURG

Prior to the Civil War, the downtown Harrisonburg area contained a vibrant, property owning African American community. African-Americans have been an integral part of the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Community since the beginning of our history in the 1700s. Although several black-owned businesses prospered, no fraternal organizations, churches, or schools existed in this part of the Valley until after the Civil War. Today sites and events in the area showcase the pride and celebration of our black heritage. The annual African American Festival and restoration efforts at Long's Chapel at Zenda are among these.

### Day One

Let's start at Lucy F. Simms School (built 1938-39 - closed 1966). This was the last elementary and high school for the black children of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County during segregation. It was closed due to integration in the 1960s. In 2005, the Simms School building was renovated and re-dedicated as "The Lucy F. Simms Continuing Education Center."



Next enjoy Ralph Sampson Park, site of the former Hilltop Plantation (c. 1820-1874) now a city park named for Harrisonburg native Ralph Sampson Jr., a famous basketball player. The park has a picnic shelter and playground.

Walk through the Newtown Cemetery. Lucy F. Simms, her mother Jane Simms Wilson, her half-brother U. G. Wilson, and Malinda Rice are buried here. Malinda Rice was the mother of Mary Rice Allen, black daughter of Harrisonburg's only Civil War General, John Robert Jones. In 1873 Malinda Rice, an emancipated slave from Singers Glen, was hired by General and Mrs. Jones as their housekeeper. Two years later, Malinda gave birth to Mary. To his credit and contrary to custom, he acknowledged Mary and her brother Willie as his children and supported them financially.



Head downtown to Joshua Peters Livery Stable (c. 1820s). This is now Bella Luna Wood-Fired Pizza. Take a look at the large livery door that once allowed all grades of horses, cattle and cows through to be sold or exchanged.

A few blocks away, stop in at the Hardesty-Higgins House (c. 1848). This was the home of Isaac Hardesty, the first mayor of Harrisonburg in 1849. Later in the war, the Strayer sisters were renting the house when Union General Philip H. Sheridan's army occupied the town in 1864. A young slave woman named Fanny cooked the soldiers' rations in exchange for a share, which she took to wounded confederates in a nearby hospital. At the end of the occupation, Fanny and her elderly parents left for freedom with Sheridan's army.



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### Day Two

Today head out to Long's Chapel/Old Athens Church at Zenda. (c. 1869) Hannah and William Carpenter deeded land for a church to Trustees of the United Brethren in Christ Church. This new church was called Long's Chapel, but was also known as Old Athens Church. This was the original name of the community of newly freed black slaves who settled here after the Civil War. The settlement was also known as Zenda. The church was used as a school where Lucy F. Simms began her teaching career. The name likely came from the popular novel of the time Prisoner of Zenda.

After soaking in the history of Harrisonburg's Black community head to Skyline drive and take in the majestic views of the Valley or hike the Appalachian Trail.



### Day Two

Massanutten has been the home to mountain bike racing for over 28 years with the Massanutten Hoo-Ha XC race. In more recent years Massanutten has added an Enduro Race to their Hoo-Ha weekend. Watch some video of the amazing trails all built and maintained by the Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition. Note, these trails are accessed on the Keezletown side of the mountain. NOT through the resort nor near the ski slopes.