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**Library of Virginia receives NEH grant funding to support a new exhibition on the history of Richmond's Jackson Ward neighborhood**

The Library of Virginia Foundation has been awarded a \$282,975 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) on behalf of the Library of Virginia for the implementation of a new exhibition on the history of the Jackson Ward neighborhood of Richmond, Virginia. The award is part of \$37.5 million in [NEH grants for 240 humanities projects nationwide](#) to support vital education, research, preservation and public programs.

The Library is a partner on the exhibition with The JXN Project (JXN), a historic preservation nonprofit organization dedicated to capturing the pivotal role of the ward in the Black American experience as one of the country's first historically registered Black urban neighborhoods. Titled "House to Highway: Reclaiming the Hidden History of Jackson Ward," the exhibition will explore the historic neighborhood that was the center of Richmond's Black community through the lens of the Skipwith-Roper family.

"When JXN began to explore the question 'Who is Jackson?' alongside the Library of Virginia, little did we know that it would lead to such a rich discovery about not only Jackson Ward as a community — but also the city, the Commonwealth and the country as a whole," said Sesha Joi Moon, Ph.D., Executive Director of The JXN Project. "As the project continues its mission to advance restorative truth-telling and redemptive storytelling as a pathway to reparative historic preservation, we hope that 'The Skipwith-Roper Homecoming' will emerge as a more representative model in the treatment of historic structures."

The exhibition will be presented in two venues — at the Library of Virginia for 10 months in 2025, and as a long-term exhibition at JXN's reconstruction site for the Skipwith-Roper Cottage in Jackson Ward, which is expected to open as part of the ward's anniversary week in April 2026. A traveling version of the exhibition will also be available to public libraries, small museums, community centers and other small venues throughout Virginia. The Library and JXN will collaborate on educational and public programming related to the exhibition content, which is also supported by NEH.

"We are incredibly grateful that NEH is supporting the efforts of the Library and The JXN Project to tell the important story of the Skipwith-Roper family and Richmond's Jackson Ward community," said Dennis T. Clark, Librarian of Virginia. "These records from our collections reflect an important part of our nation's history regarding the Black freedom struggle and Black political power from the Civil War to Reconstruction and beyond."

In what may be the first time the history of Jackson Ward and its community members have been explored using a timeline of more than 250 years (1767–2026), "House to Highway" will use a combination of archival

records, maps and photographs from the Library's collection. The archival records pertaining to Abraham Peyton Skipwith and his descendants document the extraordinary achievements of the Skipwith and Roper families.

“‘House to Highway’ is the culmination of research and the beginning of the next phase of this important partnership with JXN, which is public engagement through exhibitions, programs and educational resources,” said Scott Dodson, Executive Director of the Library of Virginia Foundation. “We are honored to help share the Skipwith-Roper family’s story and are thrilled that this project has been recognized by NEH for its worthwhile contribution to the humanities.”

The earliest known accounts of Abraham Peyton Skipwith date back to 1767, when he was enslaved in Williamsburg before filing a legislative petition to be freed in 1785, ultimately purchasing freedom for himself around 1789 and later manumitting his wife and members of his family. In 1793, Skipwith purchased parcels of land on the northern edge of Richmond in the area that would later become Jackson Ward, a gerrymandered electoral district created in 1871 to contain and suppress political power among Black Richmonders. He built one of the earliest dwellings in the area, becoming the area’s first known Black homeowner of what is one of Richmond’s oldest documented homes — also known as the Skipwith-Roper Cottage.

The last known Black homeowners of the cottage were forcibly removed from the dwelling due to eminent domain in the 1940s as part of the construction of the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike, which displaced more than 1,000 families, destroyed schools and businesses, and tore apart the Jackson Ward neighborhood. According to Moon, through JXN’s research alongside the Richmond Times-Dispatch, it was discovered that the cottage, which was thought to have been erased from the annals of history, was instead dislocated for private use in a nearby county on a tobacco plantation with ties to the Confederacy for only \$25 — where remnants of it remain today. This dislocation was especially notable as Skipwith was one of the first known Black Richmonders with a fully executed will in 1799, which bequeathed the property, as well as other prized possessions such as a gun, gold broach, silver watch, livestock, and horse and buggy, to his descendants — and in his own words, “to them and their heirs forever.”

In 1976, Jackson Ward became the first urban Black neighborhood listed on the National Register of Historic Places and also was recognized as a historically significant neighborhood in the City of Richmond. It is estimated that 1 in 4 Black Americans can retrace their roots to the rivers in the Richmond region, according to Moon, and JXN endeavors for its reconstruction of the Skipwith-Roper Cottage to emerge as a destination of choice during the U.S. Semiquincentennial — with “House to Highway” providing an important interpretation of the ward’s untold contributions across the national landscape.

JXN considers Skipwith the “Founding Father of Jackson Ward,” and as the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence approaches, “House to Highway” will help to tell our nation’s history in all its complexity and diversity through the eyes of one man, his descendants and his community that was torn apart but is slowly reclaiming its history.

**Find related images here:**

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/cbo6e6mbrgx5w4zxl9i9/ANkBkfgJIS1OkAHI5uVv1jw?rlkey=5jsdpb6qd6mfu6tk7xnnio7sh&dl=0>

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## **ABOUT THE LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA AND FOUNDATION**

The Library of Virginia is the state's oldest institution dedicated to the preservation of Virginia's history and culture. Our online offerings attract nearly 4 million website visits per year, and our resources, exhibitions and events bring in nearly 100,000 visitors each year. The Library's collections, containing more than 130 million items, document and illustrate the lives of both famous Virginians and ordinary citizens. The Library is located in downtown Richmond near Capitol Square at 800 East Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23219. Learn more at [www.lva.virginia.gov](http://www.lva.virginia.gov).

The Library of Virginia Foundation supports the Library of Virginia and its mission by raising private financial support, managing its endowment, helping to bring Virginia's history and culture to life. Learn more at [lvafoundation.org](http://lvafoundation.org).

## **ABOUT THE JXN PROJECT**

The JXN Project (JXN) is a 501(c)(3) organization committed to reparative historic preservation through research. Its mission is to drive restorative truth-telling and redemptive storytelling by capturing the pivotal role of Richmond, Virginia, in the evolution of the Black American experience. Foremost among the project's goals is to recontextualize the origin story of the nation's first historically registered Black urban neighborhood, also known as Jackson Ward. Visit [thejxnproject.org](http://thejxnproject.org) to learn more.

## **ABOUT THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES**

Created in 1965 as an independent federal agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities supports research and learning in history, literature, philosophy and other areas of the humanities by funding selected, peer-reviewed proposals from around the nation. Additional information about the National Endowment for the Humanities and its grant programs is available at [neh.gov](http://neh.gov).

