

Valentine Richmond History Walks

Self-Guided Public Art Walk of Historic Jackson Ward

Text-Only Version

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All directions are in italics. Start your tour at the intersection of Marshall Street and 2nd Street.

Jackson Ward

Today you will be touring a snippet of Jackson Ward, concentrating on the murals, many of which tell the stories of this historic neighborhood. Jackson Ward has a rich history that you will only begin to scratch the surface of on today's walk.

First a quick overview of its past; prior to the Civil War, Jackson Ward was a mix of free persons of color, European immigrants, and American-born white artisans. After the Civil War, Jackson Ward became the largest African American community in Richmond and a nationally important center of African American economic and cultural activity.

It has been called The Harlem of the South and The Black Wall Street. Jackson Ward was the location of banks, clubs, insurance companies, and commercial and social institutions. State sponsored segregation developed in Richmond after the Civil War due to detrimental beliefs concerning the rights of African Americans which lead to restrictive public policies. By 1940, Jackson Ward had become home to approximately 5000 African Americans. In effect, Jackson Ward functioned politically and economically as a "separate city" within the larger metropolis.

The area began to decline in the 1950s. One reason was the construction of the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike (195) in the mid-50s, the result of federal redevelopment

policy, called urban renewal, that supported clearing out of inner-city neighborhoods deemed "slums," predominantly African American neighborhoods, to build new infrastructure. The interstate was cut through the middle of the neighborhood, displacing 2,000 people and demolishing their homes. Empty buildings and houses deteriorated over the years. Today efforts among longtime neighborhood residents and new renovation efforts have started reversing the decline. Many historic homes have been put on the National Historic Registry. Old buildings are seeing new life as restaurants and businesses open up in neighborhood. Also, new construction is being added.

You will cover just a portion of the neighborhood today, but we encourage you to explore the rest, in particular the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia. This tour is only ten blocks, but chock-full of history and murals, so let's get started...

The first mural is on the southeast corner, on the side of Jkogi at 325 N. 2nd Street.

Bojangles Mural by Aniekan Udofia

How did Richmond become the city of murals? In 2012, Shane Pomajambo, the owner of Art Whino, a DC based art gallery was looking for a city to use as a canvas for his mural project. Richmond has a large Arts and Culture District, which gives business and individuals regulatory fee rebates and expedited permit reviews. Thus the Richmond Mural Project was born with the goal of creating 100 murals in 5 years. This is just the first of several mural projects Richmond has experienced since then.

This mural of Bojangles by Aniekan Udofia was created in the Richmond Mural Project's first year. For this mural, Udofia worked with the desired concept of the building's owner who wanted to celebrate neighborhood legend Bojangles. Born Luther Robinson in Richmond in 1878, he was orphaned in infancy and reared by his grandmother. Robinson quit school at age seven and began work as a professional dancer the following year. Bojangles (the name referred to his happy-go-lucky attitude) starred in

vaudeville, musical stage, and movies. He performed in fifteen movies, but his movie fame came primarily from the films he made with Shirley Temple. There is a statue of Bojangles in Jackson Ward on Leigh Street.

The way Udofia creates his murals is to first develop a concept, and then sketch. When he is happy with the sketch, he scans the image into his computer so he can project the sketch on the wall. He outlines the mural and then colors it in.

Walk west on Marshall Street, south side of the street. Stop at Jamerica Restaurant on 400 N. 2nd Street.

Jamerica Restaurant Mural by Sir James Thornhill

This is the first of a number of murals we will see by native Jackson Ward resident Sir James Thornhill. Murals are very common both inside and outside commercial businesses in the city. This mural is oil-based. The owner of the restaurant is an immigrant from Jamaica and he wanted to show the importance of international Black leaders to people everywhere. Beginning on the left, the mural starts with the intertwining flags and reggae singer Bob Marley. Next, there is Jamaican Queen Nanny (Nani) who was an outstanding military leader and became a symbol of unity and strength for her people. Following her, you see Marcus Garvey who was born in Jamaica and was a proponent of Black separatism. He preached pride in Black culture and advocated for Black people returning to Africa. Next is Nelson Mandela, who fought against apartheid in South Africa, and then Dr. King, who Thornhill, purposely put behind the bars to recreate the image of King in a Birmingham jail. And finally, Harriet Tubman, who is a symbol of people choosing a better life. The links between the murals represent how people are interconnected in a global community.

Walk west on Marshall Street.

Bank Mural by Ramsey

One effect of the Richmond Mural Project was that it spurred the drive of the artistic community in Richmond to create mural projects by local artists. One of these groups the U.N.I.T.Y. Street Project was founded by painters and muralists Sir James Thornhill and Hamilton Glass, as a series of history-laden murals.

“U.N.I.T.Y. stands for “Upholding, Networking and Inspiring Together in celebration of Yesterday. Its mission is to preserve the history of the Jackson Ward area through mural art. Hamilton Glass believes this isn’t Richmond’s typical mural art. What’s different is that they are trying to educate the people who are moving into Jackson Ward.

This group is a direct response to the Art Whino’s Richmond Mural Project. Asking what types of murals do we want to see in our city, while beautiful, interesting and provocative murals are art, should murals be more personal and have meaning for the community? These are questions to keep in mind as you continue your tour and see the different murals in just this one area of the city. The next few murals are from the U.N.I.T.Y. project in 2016.

The mural on this old bank building is by Keith Ramsey who grew up in Williamsburg and as a child of public school teachers, he was encouraged to paint, create and problem solve throughout his childhood. Currently, living and working in Richmond, Virginia, along with paintings and furniture Ramsey creates 3-dimensional pieces incorporating steel, antiques and found objects inspired by the “steampunk” and “found punk” movements.

At Marshall Street and 1st Street.

Jackson Ward Legacies Mural by Hamilton Glass

This U.N.I.T.Y. mural pays tribute to two Jackson Ward legacies: James Russell Stallings, Sr. and Neverett Alexander Eggleston Sr.

Stallings never really knew his parents and was reared during the Great Depression years by his great aunt. He dropped out of the Richmond Public Schools at age 13 and went to work at a chicken factory before joining the U.S. Air Force as a cook.

Stallings managed a rent-a-car company for 37 years, and on the side he began buying properties in Jackson Ward building an extensive number of Jackson Ward real estate holdings. Importantly, Stallings acquired buildings that he considered historic. Those properties included the St. Luke Bank building; Slaughter's Hotel, Miller's Hotel, Perry's Restaurant and the Hippodrome. Stallings believed that by saving these buildings he was preserving important African American history in the neighborhood. Many of those buildings have been renovated by his son Ron.

Eggleston was born just before the turn of the century in Henrico County. As a young man, he left home for New York City, where he witnessed firsthand the Harlem Renaissance as he worked as a server in a hotel. Almost certainly, it was there that his vision for an Eggleston Hotel was conceived. Moving back home in the early 1920s, he started working as a cook at the Lakeside Country Club.

In 1935, he bought Miller's Hotel at Second and Leigh. The renamed Eggleston Hotel was a gathering place for Richmond's Black elite, a comfortable retreat for African American travelers and a favorite stop for celebrities, who were not allowed to stay in white establishments.

This mural was created by Hamilton Glass. He was born in Philadelphia but today lives with his wife and 2 children in Richmond. His work uses lines and geometric forms which hint at his first profession, architecture. You can see many Glass murals in Richmond; he produces about 40 murals a year.

Walk back toward Marshall Street to Premier Bank, corner of 1st Street and Marshall Street.

Premier Bank Sign

These U.N.I.T.Y. Project murals celebrate Jackson Ward's financial and Premier's history. Today's Premier Bank has quite a pedigree, on November 2, 1903, the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank opened for business led by Maggie Walker, the nation's first female bank CEO. St. Luke Penny Savings Bank encouraged the community to "turn their nickels into dollars." It would live on as the Consolidated Bank and Trust Company and become the

oldest continuously operated Black-owned bank in the United States. (It was merged with Premier Bank in 2011 and its charter was discontinued.)

Turn left and continue west on Marshall Street. Parking lot on left before you reach Adams Street.

Elephant & Koala Mural by La Pandilla

This mural was painted in April 2012 as part of the Art Whino's Richmond Mural Project by Alexis Diaz, an artist from Miami by way of Puerto Rico. In addition to his solo work, Alexis often works collectively with his friend and fellow artist Juan Fernandez, under the name "La Pandilla" (The Gang). Both artists are known for intricate line detail, splashes of vibrant color and the melding of fantastical animal imagery. Once bright blue, the color has faded over the years but if you get up close you can still see the detail in the line work.

If you are taking this tour on a day without cars parked in front of the mural you will be able to see how the mural originally looked, parked cars have blocked sun from bleaching out the bottom portion of the mural. Murals are not permanent. Changed by weather, the sun and sometimes a new owner buying the building and painting over an existing mural, some murals really are here today, gone tomorrow.

Continue on Marshall Street, on the right to 114 W. Marshall Street.

Art 180 & Atlas

ART 180 creates and provides art-related programs for young people living in challenging circumstances, encouraging personal and community change through self-expression. This is the group's home for Atlas, an art center for teens. While murals are the most visible presence of Art 180, the group offers programs ranging from hip hop song writing to documentary filmmaking.

On the right at 200 W. Marshall Street.

Gallery 5

The gallery opened its doors in 2005 in an effort to save the life of a National Historic Landmark known as Steamer Company No. 5. It is Virginia's oldest firehouse and Richmond's oldest police station and jailhouse. This building was built in 1883, when it opened as a larger replacement for the building that occupied the lot since 1849, it housed horse-drawn fire equipment and, on the upper floor, a police station with four cells.

Gallery 5 is an award-winning, visual and performing art center that has become an arts venue for local and regional audiences. It showcases cutting-edge contemporary art exhibitions and is a participant in First Fridays, which is held on the first Friday of every month. That's when the galleries on and around Broad Street in the Richmond's Arts District open their doors, people fill the streets, and local restaurants and shops are open for business.

Corner of Jefferson Street and Marshall Street at 201 W. Marshall Street.

Richmond Dairy Company Building

Built in 1914, the Richmond Dairy Company building remains one of Richmond's best examples of the creativity and eccentricity of Richmond architecture firm Carneal & Johnston. The building was commissioned by the Richmond Dairy Company, which was started in 1890. The company went out of business in 1970, but the forty-foot tall milk bottles remain. The building has served many uses over the years, including its current form as rental apartments.

During the 80s the building became a squatter community, taken over by a mix of people experiencing homelessness, VCU art students, and high school kids looking for a place to party. It was in this mix that the metal performance band GWAR was born when lead singer Dave Brockie, who was in another band at the time, began helping a fellow art student and Dairy squatter make crazy space pirate costumes eventually incorporating them into the GWAR sets. (If this tour makes you hungry and or thirsty check out GWARbar, the bar/restaurant opened by the surviving members of the band after Brockie's death in 2014).

Turn around on Marshall Street, walk to Brook Road.

Emrick Chevrolet Mural by Hamilton Glass

This building built in the mid-1920s was an Emrick Chevrolet dealership. It was renovated in 2005 into condos.

Paying homage to the building's past, artist Hamilton Glass created a mural with the look of a 1920s hood ornament. Today, this is still one of his favorite murals. Although, he said, "It is hard to look at your own work without seeing mistakes or something you would have done differently. Sometimes you just have to say, I'm done and walk away."

Make a right on Brook Road. Make a right on Adams Street. Stop at the corner of Adams Street and Broad Street.

John Mitchell, Jr. Mural by Visibly Hidden

This mural painted in 2018 by George Fernandez, aka, Visibly Hidden celebrates John Mitchell Jr., who was born into slavery in 1863. He became editor of the Richmond Planet at the age of 21. His paper crusaded against lynchings, segregation and the rise of the KKK. In the years following the Civil War, white Richmonders began to create the Lost Cause narrative and celebrated Southern military leaders to justify their reasons for discriminatory practices against free Blacks. Mitchell had this to say in an editorial he wrote about the Lee monument dedication in 1890, "The South may revere the memory of its chieftains. It takes the wrong steps in so doing, and proceeds to go too far in every similar celebration. It serves to retard its progress in the country and forges heavier chains with which to be bound."

He was also the founder and President of Mechanics Savings Bank. In 1890, he was elected to Richmond's City Council representing Jackson Ward and he ran unsuccessfully for Governor in 1921.

Walk east on Broad Street.

Maggie Walker Statue

The 10-foot bronze statue was created by Maryland based sculptor, Antonio "Toby" Mendez. The statue shows Walker at 45-years-old standing tall surrounded by inscriptions tracing the life of the woman who early on helped her mother, a formerly enslaved woman, by delivering clothes as a laundress. She was educated at the Richmond Colored and Normal School, and then became a newspaper publisher, teacher, bank founder, businesswoman, civil rights leader, entrepreneur, and mother.

Her statue is facing Broad Street, where African American people weren't always welcome. During segregation South of Broad was for whites, north of Broad, for Black people. She stands at the gateway of her community, Jackson Ward. Maggie Walker's home is a National Historic site on Leigh Street.

Walk east on Broad Street, on the left at the corner of Foushee Street and Broad Street.

Mending Walls Mural by Hamilton Glass & Matt Lively

Mending Walls is a project founded this summer by Hamilton Glass. This project was inspired by the protests stemming from George Floyd's death. Twenty-eight artists of different races, genders and backgrounds will collaborate on pieces of public art. The project hopes to bring healing through public art while adding something meaningful to the conversation of Black Lives Matter and racial justice.

The fifth mural to be painted by this organization showcases the images of Hamilton, a Black artist and Lively, a white artist, as children and shared objects from their childhood. Today these artists are friends and frequent collaborators but this mural dives into how similar lifetime experiences can still give each artist different perspectives and circumstances in life.

Continue east on Broad Street, make a left on 1st Street. Immediately on the left...

Girls for a Change Mural by Hamilton Glass & The Girls

Another U.N.I.T.Y. project by Hamilton Glass, he worked with Girls for a Change students from John Marshall High School. Girls for a Change is a Virginia-based organization whose mission is to empower and support girls of color to enact social change and to work for a brighter future for black women. Glass and the girls met for 12 weeks to design their own mural. Girls for a Change members, Glass, and 60 volunteers from Virginia Credit Union gathered together to paint this mural in October of 2017.

Continue north on 1st Street, cross Marshall.

Major Taylor Mural by Sir James Thornhill

This mural was commissioned for the UCI Road World Championship bike race that took place in Richmond in September 2015. It features Major Taylor, who was born November 26, 1878, in Indianapolis, Indiana. Cyclist Marshall Walter "Major" Taylor began racing professionally when he was 18 years old. By 1898, Taylor had captured seven world records. After 14 years of grueling competition and fending off intense racism, he retired at age 32.

Continue north on 1st Street, Walk past GoodPeoples Studio and turn right into the alley. If you get to the award-winning soul food restaurant, Mama J's, you have gone too far.

Alley Mural by Nils Westergard

Nils grew up in Northern VA and graduated from VCU. He is a prolific muralist with work all over the city, but is also in high demand overseas. Most of his murals start with a

photo he has taken usually of one of his friends modeling an idea he has. Then he turns that photo into a mural. This mural is of Michael Millions, a local rapper, and is on the side of Goodpeeples recording studio.

Keep walking through the alley and turn left.

Food Mural by Arts in the Alley

Painted in 2013, this group which is no longer together, aimed to revitalize inner-city and downtown neighborhoods by cleaning up alleys and streets (trash removal, weeding, and cleaning up graffiti) on a Friday and Saturday, and on Sunday the alleys would be transformed into a brighter and better place through painting murals. Each event created between 5-15 murals, and at least one "Children's Mural". Many of the original Arts in the Alley murals from this event have been painted over.

Move to the left for the mural behind Goodpeeples Studio at 401 North 1st Street.

Grand Piano Mural by Sir James Thornhill & M. Pittman

This was a commissioned piece of work by the owner of the building, Barkey's Record shop. The store has relocated to Broad St. but continues to sell spiritual material. The mural honors two Richmond Gospel greats. Marie Goodman Hunter was one of the first Black teachers at Fox elementary school in the city. She was also a soprano singer and an actress. Larry Bland led The Volunteer Choir for 50 years. This gospel choir performed one of their last concerts at the 2018 Richmond Folk Festival. Started in 1968 at the Second Baptist Church, this choir was a trailblazer in gospel music presentation; Bland combined powerful renditions of traditional gospel songs with costuming and precision choreography to create a "show" choir.

Walk east through the parking lot toward 2nd Street.

Play Me a Tune Mural by Jacob Eveland

Painted as part of the 2016 Richmond Mural Project, the owner of this building requested that the mural reflect the history of Jackson Ward. Because of Richmond's rich musical history, Eveland decided to incorporate jazz and classical music themes into this project. Eveland drew inspiration from his grandfather, who collected phonographs, and from the James River, with the mural incorporating a herring as well as various musical instruments.

We hope you enjoyed your tour, walk south on 2nd and you will return to the corner of Marshall and 2nd Street, where you started.

Explore Richmond Stories

Richmond's City history museum, the Valentine has been collecting, preserving and interpreting Richmond's 400-year history for over a century. Located in the heart of historic downtown, the Valentine is a place for residents and tourists to discover the diverse stories that tell the broader history of this important region.

Visit

Tuesday - Sunday | 10a.m. - 5p.m.

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