

“How We Juneteenth”:

RHS & Community Groups Celebrate City & State Holiday (June 14-19, 2021)

-Eric Wilson, RHS Executive Director

Please enjoy some of the cues below – and an array of hotlinks to extend your historical contexts and curiosities – for a survey of upcoming local events celebrating Juneteenth. Here in Rockbridge, and broadly, a prompt to consider (in the spirit of an influential, interactive feature from the [New York Times](#), linked here from last year):

[How We Juneteenth](#)

Ahead of June 19, there’s a week’s run of virtual programming in the run-up – thumbnailed at the top, detailed further down – kicking things off with our own [Rockbridge Historical Society Program on June 14, “Fighting for Freedom.”](#)

LEXINGTON
JUNETEENTH
CELEBRATION
JUNE 19, 2021

Join us for a Juneteenth celebration commemorating the emancipation of slavery in the United States.

Events are from 12-4 at HOPKINS GREEN and 5-7 on WASHINGTON STREET between S. JEFFERSON and S. MAIN

- Juneteenth Art Show
- Kuumba Dance Ensembles
- West African Drum and Dance
- Live Music: Oasis Island Sounds
- Free Raffle – Win Gift Certificates!
- Restaurant Specials at Heliotron, Pronto, Blue Sky, The Gin Hotel, Sweet Things, Southern Inn, Tonic and Salerno’s

For more information, including details about a June 14 Zoom program with the Rockbridge Historical Society, “Fighting for Freedom: Black Union Soldiers from Rockbridge,” go to: my.wlu.edu/Juneteenth

Brought to you by the City of Lexington, Project Horizon, Washington and Lee University, CARE Rockbridge, Rockbridge NAACP 58 West Rockbridge, the Rockbridge Historical Society, Historical Lexington Foundation, Randolph Street United Methodist Church and First Baptist Church of Lexington.

[CLICK HERE](#) for more details on the [Specific Events](#) running through the next two weeks, along with a [lively article](#) from Washington & Lee News Office how this range of groups have jointly invested our missions, vision, and resources to bridge new audiences, and great expectations.

my.wlu.edu/Juneteenth

June 14: [“Fighting for Freedom: Black Union Soldiers in Rockbridge,”](#) RHS Program, 7:00 – 8:30 PM. [CLICK HERE](#) for Free Zoom Link to illustrated slideshow presentation by Larry Spurgeon, Cinder Stanton, moderated by Eric Wilson, with remarks by one of the featured soldier’s descendants. Scroll down, for fuller details.



Though the names of these particular men are unknown, at least one Rockbridge-tied man is known to have served in this regiment, the 107th United States Colored Infantry, originally organized in Louisville, Kentucky. These Black Union soldiers, were photographed a half-year after the war's end, November 1865. They're posted at Ft. Corcoran, just across the Potomac from Georgetown, D.C., and at the foot of the land formerly owned by the Lee family: the estate had been converted to a national military cemetery, and freedmen's village, during the War. Pictured further below, in a more musical key, are members of the same regiment's band (both pictures, Library of Congress).

June 15: [“On Juneteenth” with Annette Gordon-Reed](#), 1:00-2:00 PM. [CLICK HERE](#), for Zoom Link, and Q&A, hosted by Monticello, and Andrew Davenport, and descendant of the [Getting Word](#) project, which continues to archive oral histories of African American families whose ancestors were enslaved at Monticello. Dr. Gordon-Reed is a Professor at the Harvard Law School, an eminent American historian, and chronicler of the early members and descendants of the Hemings families, just a few of the hundreds who lived and worked on Jefferson's Monticello Plantation (with a small few of them freed). See below, for more.

June 17: [“Miss Juneteenth”](#) 5:30 – 7:00 PM. Join a [Virtual discussion](#) of this 2020 film ([Trailer HERE](#)), part of the *Looking At Blackness* (LAB) Film Series in Washington & Lee University's Yearlong Series, [Activism and Black Life](#). For information on the advance film screening and group discussion on the 17th, [CLICK HERE](#).

“How we Juneteenth” ... in Rockbridge

In the rich run of summer's cultural and national holidays – from May Day and Memorial Day, through Flag Day and the Fourth of July – Juneteenth now stands squarely in sights. And RHS continues to sound its annual chords, and share new contexts, since the 2018 publication of its Rockbridge-themed [“Journeys to Juneteenth,”](#) in 2018.

Juneteenth's historical roots recognize one of the many, varied, and significant moment of American Emancipation. Famed by military action, and backed by the Civil War service of a southern and northern sweep of [“Black Men in Blue”](#) that ‘final’ declaration in Galveston, Texas, June 19, 1865 complemented rather than completed the extended struggles for singular freedom, or sectional abolition. To be sure, it added crucial and sweeping force to the diverse collective and individual efforts through which enslaved people across America had already found their different paths to new liberties, whether through self-forged freedom, or through the support of others. And to be fair, these acts and achievements still stood alongside the sometimes tenuous [Illusions of Emancipation](#) that faced people before and after the words of Lincoln, and the arms of the Union Army: here in Rockbridge, across Virginia, and across the borderlines of southern and northern states and emergent territories, in their different ways.



Emancipation Day, June 19, 1900, Eastwoods Park, Austin, TX (Texas State Historical Association). As with most national celebrations, patriotic symbols and musical performances play important parts in the shaping of communal identities. One generation after Emancipation, this photo signals the spread of Juneteenth's origins in Galveston, on the Gulf of Mexico, here through the Texas state capital, and increasingly to families, communities, and states spanning from the Atlantic to Pacific Coasts.

In the century and a half since, and well beyond Texas, “Juneteenth” initially provided a crucial spur in [the search to locate and re-unite families that had been separated or sundered by slavery](#). Over many the decades, that similar spirit has drawn [reunions of churches, schools and kin](#) that connect generations through time, and geographic migrations.

For another image in this continued arc, pause to click-zoom and peer into this Juneteenth chromolithograph from 1919 (Library of Congress). This striking image spotlights President Lincoln’s Preliminary Emancipation of September 1862, before its full wartime measures went into effect on January 1, 1863 (another of the several dates celebrated by many African-Americans, then and since, as “Emancipation Day”).

Though they are not pictured here, the U.S. War Department’s authorization and enlisting segregated regiments of [United States Colored Troops](#) in May 1863, would prove crucial to Union victory two years later, although the final military liberation of Texan slaves was not announced until two months after Lee’s surrender at Appomattox. Crucially, through another period of legal limbo, the formal abolition of slavery in the United States would have to wait until the 13th Amendment was constitutionally ratified, December 6, 1865 (another key landmark that somewhat surprisingly has no mention in this mass-produced print).



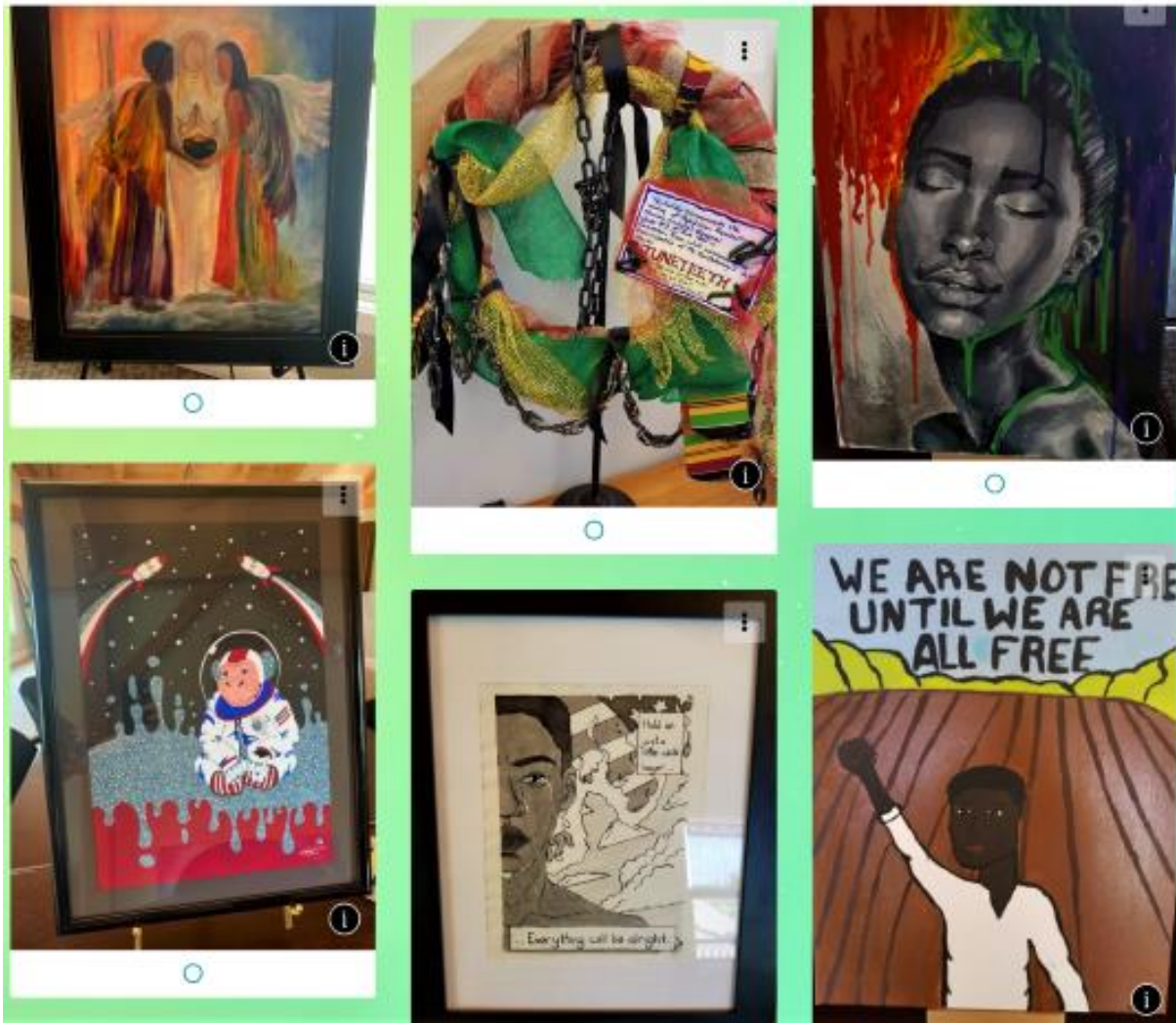
But 50 years after the War and Reconstruction, this striking, sweeping image links the liberating efforts of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. They're jointly flanked by the artistic, educational and scientific achievements of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Booker T. Washington, along with a host of both Black American soldiers who fought, were decorated, and died in France in World War I.

Proud heirs to the U.S.C.T., that next generation of U.S. soldiers had hoped to return to enjoy the fruits of a growing Black middle class (signaled by the school, cars, and clothing at bottom right). Yet they found themselves square in some of the country and century's most profound and violent racial divisions, in the ['Red Summer of 1919,'](#) and shortly before the [Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921,](#) its centennial just observed this week on June 1.

In recent years – further spurred by national and international protests against racial injustice, hate, and violence – reflections and celebrations have keeled toward broader themes of freedom in order to broadly [bend the arc of the moral universe](#) toward equity, through other [new ethical and even artistic grounds.](#)

This will be the second year that Rockbridge Historical Society has collaborated to mobilize our own mission in local history, and our capacities and resources for educational outreach and community engagement, by spotlighting grounding historical contexts. We've continued to extend our [Partnered Publication Series with the News-Gazette,](#) enrich our multimedia [Local Black Histories Portal,](#) and launch a [RHS YouTube Video Archive.](#)

We used some of those materials to help complement and cross-promote Project Horizon's inaugural 2020 Juneteenth Art Show. You can read about last year's event [HERE,](#) and see a range of its prizewinning submissions; the contest was such a success that they've repeated the multigenerational event, with [Online Community Votes for Awards, 2021.](#)



Entries in the 2020 Juneteenth Art Contest, sponsored by Project Horizon & Nelson Gallery.

Through the first half of 2021, a widening range of community organizations, civic groups, and businesses have joined together over the past several months to plan and sponsor a diverse range of activities and interactive opportunities. And as national observances have similarly and broadly gained momentum, Lexington's two flagship universities – with the support of the City of Lexington's City Council and staff, further affirming on the [local](#) and [state holiday](#) first recognized last year – now partner to cultivate educational, cultural, and civic grounds that further advance and diversify community engagement.

On Saturday, June 19, join RHS on Hopkins Green from 12-4 PM, for conversation, questions, and some historical giveaways. A spool of DJ'ed music will set the stage through the first half of the afternoon. From 2-4, kids and adults can step in time with the beats of the Kuumba West African Drumming and Dance Ensembles. During the reception at the Nelson Gallery from 5-7, Oasis Island Sounds' Steel Drum Band will continue to ring outside, with the City's temporary closure of W. Nelson St.

You can also take the day's rewards home, through themed-reading lists from local public & university libraries and from RHS; book and gift certificate raffles; art sales that afford you the chance to invest in local artists and institutions.



Claudia Cutler, "The Last Slaves of Galveston" (2020, mixed-media calligramme). Indulge a personal nod to art and history to share the mixed-media calligramme created by Lexington artist, Claudia Cutler, that I was moved to purchase at last year's inaugural event. As Cutler notes: "calligrammes are a form of 'concrete poetry,' a type of poem in which the visual structure of the words and the typography are designed to complement the meaning of the text." Titled "The Last Slaves of Galveston," its mixed-media forms are interwoven with words from Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Union General Granger's notice of the last freeing of American slaves in Texas, and the sweeping words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: "No One is Free Until All are Free."

[VOTE for your Favorite Artwork](#) [through June 18](#)

... after browsing pictures this year's entries online. Your crowd-sourced input will help award \$2,000 in prizes to artists of all ages, with an additional opportunity to share particular praise, or post comments. Local neighbors can also visit the Nelson Gallery, Wed-Sat 12:00 – 5:00, to see this creative community work, up close, in person. For more details, see [Project Horizon's May News-Letter](#), or this [WSLS News Story](#).

Finally, you can cap your evening at several downtown restaurants featuring Juneteenth-themed food. Many of the recipes that local chefs will be serving draw on the soul food traditions of African and African-American cooking, and featuring the [holiday's spirited, symbolic color: RED:](#)



"Juneteenth Food Altar," New York Times, June 19, 2017, gathering a range of foods traditionally sourced from African roots, some cultivated from seeds secreted through the 'Middle Passage,' by people enslaved through the transatlantic slave trade. Many ingredients would be worked into southern American 'soul food' traditions, and symbolically-colored red dishes and drinks, such as hibiscus tea, or red velvet cake.

Monday, June 14, 7PM: Kicking off this commemorative week, [RHS' Zoom program, "Fighting For Freedom: Black Union Soldiers from Rockbridge,"](#) provides grounding contributions to broaden the known narrative: affirming Freedom and Emancipation not merely as due or overdue rewards that were partially-proclaimed, or partially granted. For many people held in bondage, these freedoms would be seized, in secrecy, or by force, taking a chance to risk their ideals and opportunities. Sometimes, that also meant leaving their own families at risk, in the uncertain worlds faced by both free black Americans, and those still enslaved.

[CLICK HERE](#) for free program Zoom Link.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read full [News-Gazette](#) feature.

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Fighting For Freedom

RHS Event Highlights Black Union Soldiers From Rockbridge

The Rockbridge Historical Society will host a free Zoom presentation by Cinder Stanton and Larry Spurgeon about Rockbridge men who served in Black Union regiments during the Civil War on Monday, June 14, at 7 p.m. RHS Executive Director Eric Wilson will moderate the presentation. The Zoom link is available at RockbridgeHistory.org.

Almost 180,000 African American men served in the Union army, more than 10 percent of its total number. More than 60 Rockbridge men enlisted in 15 states and 27 regiments of the United States' Colored Troops (USCT) plus the famous 54th and 55th Massachusetts regiments.

These men took many different paths to dozens of different recruiting stations. Some, born free in Rockbridge, had chosen to travel to free states in the North in the years before the war to find better living conditions. Others, freed by their owners, were obliged to leave the county and the state because of an 1806 law declaring that emancipated slaves must leave Virginia within a year.

The men who enlisted in Western states like Missouri and Kansas had been taken there, in slavery, by white Rockbridge families migrating west. And perhaps as many as 10 men claimed their own freedom when Gen. David Hunter's federal forces occupied Lexington in June 1864. They traveled with the

Union army over the mountains into West Virginia, then enlisted within a few weeks.

All of them were inspired to join the crusade to end slavery and would have shared the determination of the soldiers of the 55th Massachusetts "to prove ourselves worthy of the world's history, between Freedom and Slavery... and to prove to be true our fitness for liberty and citizenship, in the new order of things now arising in this, our native land."

Although they enlisted relatively late in the war, these soldiers saw action at several well-known engagements, including the assault on Fort Wagner, the siege of Petersburg, and the battle at



THESE MEMBERS of the 107th U.S. Colored Infantry were photographed in 1865 at Fort Corcoran, near Washington, D.C. One of the Union soldiers from Rockbridge County served in this regiment. (Library of Congress)

the Crater. Nine Rockbridge men served with the only Black regiment to march in the parade for Lincoln's second inauguration, and some were present at Appomattox.

Soldiers in the USCT died at a far higher rate than white soldiers, mostly from disease. About a quarter of the Rockbridge men died, all but one from disease. Of those who survived the war, many

successfully applied for invalids' pensions. Many were active in veterans' organizations and some were buried in national cemeteries.

Many stories of these remarkable individuals will be told, including a member of the Hemings family of Monticello who had been owned by two of Lexington's best-known citizens. One of his descendants will join the

presentation to talk about his ancestor.

While none of these soldiers returned to Lexington and Rockbridge County to live after the war, it is hoped that some of their collateral descendants may carry memories of their relatives' contributions to creating "the new order of things" and might participate in honoring and remembering them.

The more than 60 known Rockbridge-tied men who found a range of ways to serve in Black Union regiments during the Civil War have been lesser known, relative to the larger and long-chronicled registers of the hundreds of local soldiers who fought for the Confederacy, hoping to maintain their own freedoms and lifestyles of antebellum Virginia. But with new research, these local stories can now be more authentically told. Many of them detail lives, families, and communities that witness experiences before, during, and after the war: some of them woven from the fabric of everyday lives, some of them quite dramatic.

This illustrated, livestreamed slideshow will be jointly presented by:

- **Lucia ‘Cinder’ Stanton**, whose skill and reach in historical research, genealogy, and oral histories made her so instrumental as one of the co-founders of Monticello’s [Getting Word](#) program, along with her book [Those Who Labor for My Happiness: Slavery at Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello](#).
- **Larry Spurgeon**, who also serves as RHS Secretary, brings his professional expertise in law, genealogical research, and recent publications on the [enslaved individuals who lived at Jackson House](#), RHS’ 5-Part series on [The Legacies of Rockbridge’s First Multiracial Election, in 1867](#), and other [local 19th century histories](#).



Photographed at Ft. Corcoran, VA, 1865, band members of the 107th United States Colored Infantry, the same regiment pictured above (Library of Congress)

Their collaborative, sustained, and still-emerging archival finds illuminate perspectives that can be both personally and plaintively intimate. In other connective patterns and paths, however, they also offer systematic insights about how the capacities and expectations for American military service were growing, at large, along with the different and unpredictable routes taken to personal and cultural freedom.

In a particularly meaningful contribution, the program will also include comments shared by an Ohio descendant of one of these local soldiers, who seized his own opportunity to freedom, leaving Lexington in 1864 to enlist in the United States Color Troops.

Moderated by RHS Eric Wilson, the program will conclude by welcoming questions and comments from our digital audience, stretching to all quarters of the country, and even our fellow researcher in Kenya!

Tuesday, June 15, 12 PM A [Livestreamed Program and Q&A](#), hosted by Monticello, featuring Dr. Annette Gordon-Reed, Harvard Law School Professor, and best-selling author of books illuminating the [histories of Sally Hemings, and Monticello's enslaved families more broadly](#). She will address the holiday's historical contexts, her own personal experiences growing up in Texas, and the state's particular stakes and regional heritage, as they've radiated from those first celebrations in Galveston.

[With the release of her new book, "On Juneteenth,"](#) she's shared a run of interviews situating the holiday with her broad reflections on family, race, history, and law, in contemporary and intercultural terms. This interactive presentation and audience exchanges invites new, relevant understandings of Juneteenth, which has become an even more resonant landmark in the recent amplification and organization of civic, institutional, and international calls for racial and economic justice.



The program will be moderated by Andrew Davenport, PhD student at Georgetown University, and a [Getting Word](#) descendant. He has written about that genealogical database and outreach program for a wide range of magazines and publications, discussing his own family's histories, changing interpretive programs at Monticello, as well as its groundbreaking Juneteenth reunion for descendants, in 2018.

Davenport's article in [Smithsonian Magazine](#), published on the eve that celebration, includes an extensive account of the oral history initiatives and scholarly contributions of Cinder Stanton, one of the featured presenters in our [RHS Program, June 14, "Fighting for Freedom: Black Union Soldiers in Rockbridge."](#)



Juneteenth Reunion 2018, when over 300 descendants of families who were once enslaved at Monticello gather on the iconic, nickel-stamped steps of Jefferson's home, facing the West Lawn of his Piedmont plantation.

Thursday, June 17: 5:30-6:30 PM. Discussion of the 2020 film, Miss Juneteenth ([Trailer HERE](#)). For advance viewing instructions, [CLICK HERE](#). To register for the conversation, [CLICK HERE](#). This event is part of the *Looking At Blackness* (LAB) initiative in Washington & Lee University's yearlong series, [Activism and Black Life](#). Details are subject, so please consult the embedded links for updated information.



Happy Holidays in the weeks and summer months ahead ...

... however you continue to observe them,

... and whoever you're able to connect with, again, this year.

[Join or Give to RHS](#)



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ROCKBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Virginia Association of Museums