

Historic Preservation and Placemaking

Heritage Resources Branch

Historic Preservation Information Series



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

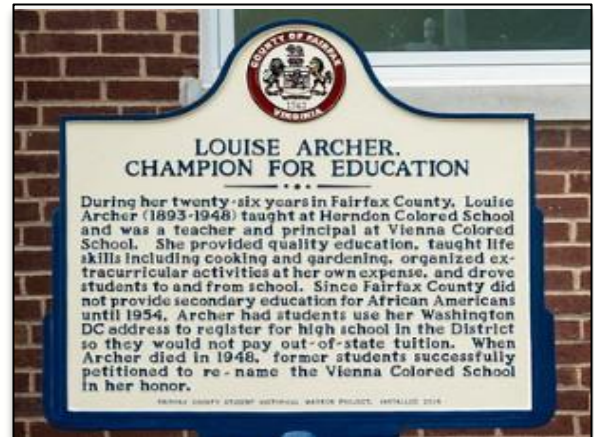
Department of Planning and Development

Historic Preservation and Placemaking

Placemaking is a planning strategy that focuses on the unique elements of a community's identity - such as its buildings, culture, history, and character - to create vibrant and meaningful spaces. Historic preservation often plays a critical role in this process by safeguarding significant architecture, cultural landmarks, and places of intangible heritage. Preservation professionals work in partnership with communities to identify, maintain, and interpret these elements, ensuring that local history and community character not only endures, but actively informs the design and development of public spaces.

Elevating Community Stories Through Placemaking

Placemaking gives residents an opportunity to express their community's history, values, and identity, and to celebrate a shared past. Interpretative efforts often focus on elevating stories of underrepresented populations, highlighting histories that are often overlooked and untold. By incorporating historic character-defining features into new designs or preservation projects, placemaking helps preserve the diverse legacy of a place.



Louise Archer Historical Marker, Installed 2025. Photo Credit: Fairfax County



Contraband and Freedmen's Cemetery Statue, City of Alexandria, Photo Credit: City of Alexandria

Questions? Please contact Heritage Resources Branch, DPD at dpzheritageresources@fairfaxcountygov or 703-324-1380 for more information

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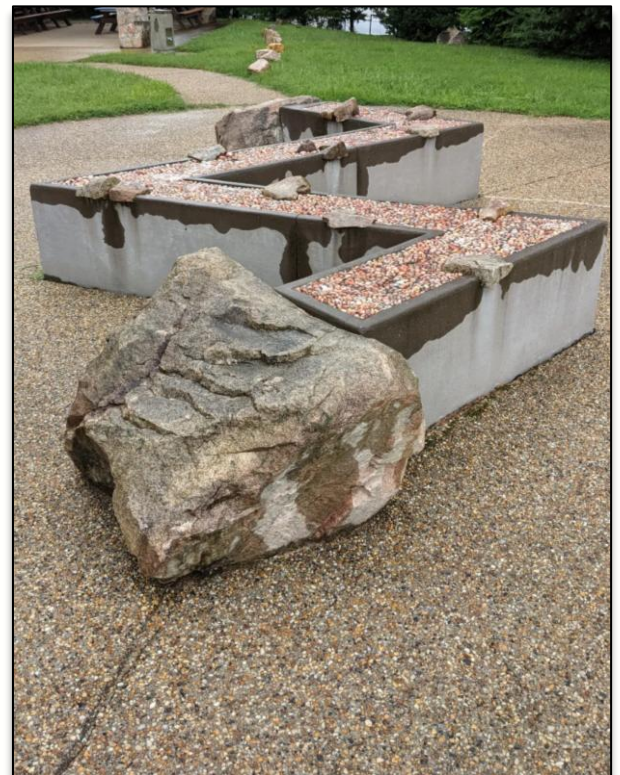
Preserving Community Memory Through Interpretation

Communities often honor their local history by creating signs, artwork, or displays at or near important historic and cultural sites. This process, called "interpretation," shares the stories of people, places, and events that shaped a place. Interpretation can take many forms, including:

- Informational signs with text and images
- Murals on buildings
- Statues or sculptures
- Walls featuring historic photos
- Benches, landscaping, and other design elements

Both Fairfax County and the state of Virginia have programs that place historic markers throughout the region to highlight these stories and connect residents to their shared histories and heritage.

Places which no longer exist can still continue to hold great significance. To identify such places, preservation professionals gather public input to learn what places a community values, and what stories they want to tell. This input is used in the development of public displays, and helps to inform preservation policies, ensuring that the community's heritage is not only remembered, but remains an active part of shaping the community's character and identity for future generations.



Tinner Hill Zigzag Sculpture, Falls Church, Photo credit: Atlas Obscura

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