Dangerfield Newby (ca. 1820–1859), Culpeper County
participant in john brown’s raid
Dangerfield Newby was one of five African Americans who took up arms against slavery with fellow abolitionist John Brown at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in October 1859.

Amaza Lee Meredith (1895–1984), Lynchburg and Petersburg
artist and architect
Amaza Lee Meredith broke through racial and gender barriers in architecture and artistic design.

Oliver White Hill (1907–2007), Richmond
attorney and civil rights leader
Oliver White Hill served as counsel in the groundbreaking Brown v. Board of Education case in 1954.

Edna Lewis (1916–2006), Orange County
chef and author
Edna Lewis created nationwide interest in southern cuisine and demonstrated that food could be more than just nourishment, but also a celebration of life.

Evelyn Thomas Butts (1924–1993), Norfolk
principal in a case to invalidate the poll tax
Evelyn Thomas Butts led a successful challenge of Virginia’s poll tax all the way to the United States Supreme Court.

Claudia Alexander Whitworth (1927– ), Roanoke
humanitarian, philanthropist, and editor and publisher of the Roanoke Tribune
Claudia Alexander Whitworth has worked diligently over the decades to improve the quality of life in Roanoke.

John Cephas (1930– ), Caroline County
renowned blues musician
John Cephas has become a world ambassador representing the Virginia Piedmont Blues tradition.

Leland Devon Melvin (1964– ), Lynchburg
astronaut
Leland D. Melvin inspires young people and encourages them to aspire to careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

People of African descent have been a part of Virginia’s—and America’s—story since European colonization of the continent began. Yet the contributions of African Americans have often been ignored, obscured, or underappreciated by those who recorded history. In observance of African American History Month, the Library of Virginia is pleased to honor eight distinguished Virginians as African American Trailblazers for their contributions to the state and nation.

The men and women featured as Trailblazers offer powerful examples of individuals who refused to be defined by their circumstances. Their biographies are a testament to the determination and perseverance displayed by extraordinary people during challenging times. Through education, advocacy, entertainment, or armed rebellion, these individuals demonstrate how African Americans have actively campaigned for better lives for themselves and their people. It is these many contributions that the African American Trailblazers program seeks to share.

To learn more about these individuals and to explore educational resources about their lives, visit www.lva.virginia.gov.
Amaza Meredith
(1895–1984), Lynchburg and Petersburg
ARTIST AND ARCHITECT

Amaza Lee Meredith (1895–1984) was born in Lynchburg to Emma Kennedy Meredith, an African American, and Samuel Meredith, a white carpenter. Graduating in 1915 at the age of 18, she earned a black diploma in art from Virginia State University and taught in Botetourt County and in Lynchburg's Dark Hill School. From 1920 to 1924, and 1934, she received a degree in teaching as well as a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in education from Columbia University. Hired in 1933 to teach art at Virginia State College for Negroes, Meredith became chair of the art department, a position she held until her retirement in 1959. She exhibited her artwork at galleries in Charlottesville, Virginia, and New York. Meredith was the first black artist to receive a state art award, and she designed a memorialist style home at the center of the Virginia State campus. Among Newberry's two-story, single-story building featuring a geometric structural design. In 1947, Meredith and her sister Maude Terry began Amaza North, a development of 120 lots for vacation homes for African Americans at Har Scrub, Long Island. 

Newberry died nearly $742 below the $1,000 price that Harriet Newby's owner had set for her as a child, but he was unable to make the payment. Shortly after the sale, he joined John Brown in the planning for the raid on Harper's Ferry. During the spring and summer of 1859, his wife wrote to him three times about what time he may sell me and then all my bright hops. It is said Master is in want of money [:] if so I know not what he will do or what time he may sell me at all on my bright hops of the affair on the Island."

People, she was a leader in the civil rights movement in Virginia. In the spring and summer of 1859, her husband wrote to her to support her three daughters after her husband's death. Evelyn Thomas Butts
(1895–1984), Norfolk

Evelyn Thomas Butts (1895–1984), Norfolk, took to heart her daughter's words to support her three daughters after her husband's death during World War II. The wife of President of the Roanoke Tribune, a weekly newspaper established in 1941, she attended the Roanoke newspaper. She assisted her with public relations and bookkeeping for the Roanoke Tribune. Later that year, she married Clifton Whitworth Jr., who helped her with her father's newspaper. 

The paper. Today the Roanoke Tribune has won numerous awards, including the W. C. Handy Award as a style commonly referred to as East Coast or Piedmont Blues. This highly syncopated and danceable guitar technique is performed widely in Virginia and the Carolinas, and harmonica master Phil Wiggins have made numerous successful recordings, earning the W. C. Handy Award as "blues instrument of the year" in 1983. In recent years, Cephas has composed his own songs and recorded unique arrangements of tunes by Skip James and others. 

When her father was incapacitated by an automobile accident in 1973, she took over the Tribune's operations. That same year, she married John Cephas, who hailed from Virginia's Piedmont region. In 1975, she took over the Tribune from her husband, and continued her work in the often male-dominated field of journalism at newspapers in New York and Ohio. 

In November 1945, Meredith filed the first suit in federal court challenging the constitutionality of the poll tax that Virginia imposed as a prerequisite to voter registration. Anne E. Harper and others from Fairfax County File a second suit, which of which reached the United States Supreme Court. Solicitor General Thurgood Marshall argued in support of Meredith's assertion that the poll tax placed an unfair burden on voters of color. 

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