



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2023.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).


PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico
Program Title: Parsons Community Center
Program Category: Parks and Recreation

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Victoria Davis
Title: Public Relations Specialist
Department: Public Relations
Telephone: 804-501-4933 Website: www.henrico.us
Email: dav127@henrico.us

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Brandon Hinton
Title: Deputy County Manager for Administration
Signature: 

Program Overview

In September 2021, the Division of Recreation and Parks completed a redesign and installation of exhibitions in the Orientation Center of Meadow Farm Museum at Crump Park. These exhibitions focus heavily on the three cultures that have occupied the lands of Meadow Farm for thousands of years. The redesign culminated in a rededication of the building under the name “Parsons Community Center.” The renaming of the building focuses on an enslaved family and is now a space to foster conversations about history rather than the interpretation of history.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

For 40 years, the story of Meadow Farm was told through the lens of the families who owned the property, relegating the other stories to the background. These other stories are now shared through the redesign and new exhibits.

Highlighted by archaeology excavated from 8,000 B.C.E, the Native American cultures who occupied the lands and used them as trading posts between Siouan and Algonquin-speaking peoples is illustrated in the “Our Native Land” gallery. In the Gabriel and Parsons galleries, the story of the enslaved is illustrated through original artwork commissioned for the exhibit and the memorial wall to the enslaved men, women, and children associated with Meadow Farm. The Sheppard gallery presents the stories of the Sheppard family, the construction of the original farmhouse, and the stewardship of Meadow Farm by Henrico County.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

The opening of the Parsons Community Center to the public was a much-needed upgrade to a historical site available to the public since 1981. Since its opening, the Parsons Community Center has quickly gained a following for its programming and exhibition. The redesign and usage of the existent spaces gave intentionality to all spaces. It has embraced the full history of Meadow Farm and has not shied away from the more difficult aspects that are not as attractive. It presents stories of turmoil, peace, struggle, ease, failure, success, bondage, freedom, and much more. It has become a place for all people, as it is more reflective of multiple cultures. It is a place for people of different learning styles, stages of historical knowledge, and different ages.

How Program Was Carried Out

The objective of the project was to reimagine the exhibit spaces of the Meadow Farm Museum's Orientation Center into a more interactive and inclusive space. This process was based on the concept of "Three Cultures, One Land." Meadow Farm was used by three distinctly different cultures but is now available for hundreds of different cultures. For over 40 years since Meadow Farm's opening, the story of the Sheppard family and their ownership of Meadow Farm has been told. In 2019, the staff began the process of bringing the stories of "everyone else" to the forefront of not only the tour content of Meadow Farm Museum, but the exhibitions and programming of the Orientation Center. After several conversations and the revelation of much of the documentation about the enslaved, the decision was also made to rename the Orientation Center the "Parsons Community Center" after the Parsons family who was enslaved to the Sheppard family, but also thrived independent of the Sheppard family after emancipation.

The new exhibition highlights the lesser-known histories of Meadow Farm Museum. One visitor commented, "I have been visiting Meadow Farm for over thirty years and have NEVER heard these stories." The most prominent story of Meadow Farm's history circulates around the planned rebellion of Gabriel, an enslaved blacksmith from nearby Brookfield Plantation. Gabriel and hundreds (some accounts say thousands) of supporters planned to overtake the Virginia government by storming the Richmond Capital and holding Governor James Monroe hostage. Gabriel's plot was thwarted by a late evening thunderstorm, which prompted two of the conspirators to inform their owner of the plot. Tom and Pharoah, enslaved to Meadow Farm, informed Mosby Sheppard of the plot, and he notified Governor Monroe, who called out the militia. Gabriel and dozens of other conspirators were eventually captured and hanged for his role in the plot. For their loyalty, Tom and Pharoah were purchased from the Sheppard family by the Commonwealth of Virginia and granted their freedom.

In the Parsons gallery, the story of the enslaved families is illustrated through the Parsons family. Their story tells of a family whose route to freedom came through the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution. Nancy Parsons was purchased in 1809, and until 1939, she and her descendants were intertwined with Meadow Farm and the Sheppard family. Through further research, Nancy's great-great-great-grandson and his family were "rediscovered" in Pennsylvania and the exhibit was able to connect dots in his family story.

Financing and Staffing

The cost to renovate and redesign the center totaled \$85,100. Costs are broken down below:

- \$75,000 – Design, Fabrication & Installation of Exhibits, Fabrication of Reception Desk, Upgrade to lighting
- \$3,300 – Art Acquisition
- \$6,800 – Sound Paneling
- \$0 – Artifact Acquisition & Installation

Program Results

Since reopening to the public in September 2021, visitation numbers to the Parsons Community Center have increased to better than pre-COVID numbers. School groups now request visits to the Parsons Community Center. Heritage tourism numbers have increased, and the building is now used for community meetings by local sports associations, civic organizations, and regional partnerships. In August 2022, Henrico County hosted the 12/13 Babe Ruth World Series at nearby RF&P Park, during which the Parsons Community Center served as home base for players' check-in and coaches' meetings. During the subsequent days of competition, numerous attendees of the tournament requested tours of the facility and were amazed by the amount of history contained in the space.

Brief Summary

The redesign of the Orientation Center of Meadow Farm Museum at Crump Park includes exhibitions that focus heavily on the three cultures that have occupied its lands for thousands of years, culminating in a rededication of the building under the name "Parsons Community Center." The renaming of the building focuses on an enslaved family of Meadow Farm and is now a space to foster conversations about history rather than the interpretation of history.

For 40 years, the story of Meadow Farm was told through the lens of the families who owned the property, relegating the other stories and people to the background; stories now shared through the redesign and new exhibits, embracing the full history of Meadow Farm and not shying away from the more difficult aspects that are not as attractive. It presents stories of turmoil, peace, struggle, ease, failure, success, bondage, freedom, and much more. It has become a place for all people.

**Parsons Community Center
Supplemental Material**





"I have adventured my life in endeavoring to obtain the liberty of my countrymen, and am a willing sacrifice in their cause."

- Anonymous enslaved insurrectionist

GABRIEL'S REBELLION

Ready to Act

By the late 18th century, the number of enslaved people in the United States had grown significantly. Many of these people were from the West Indies and the Caribbean, where they had been exposed to revolutionary ideas and the concept of freedom. In the United States, they often found themselves in a state of constant rebellion, ready to act against their oppressors.



Attempted Escape

Many enslaved people sought freedom by escaping to the North or to the West Indies. Some were captured and returned to their owners, while others were able to reach freedom. The story of Gabriel's Rebellion is a powerful example of the struggle for freedom.

Midnight Meeting

DEATH or LIBERTY

