



November 29, 2021

Julie Langan
Director, Department of Historic Resources
2801 Kensington Avenue
Richmond, VA 23221

Dear Director Langan:

As organizations devoted to the promotion of America's commitment to historic preservation, we write in support of the nomination of the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places.

For the past several years, the Coalition for American Heritage has worked to mobilize support for federal legislation to protect and preserve African American burial grounds. Because of America's history of unequal treatment based on race, many African American burial grounds are overgrown, unrecognized, and untended. However, these cemeteries are a powerful testament to the people and events that shaped our nation. Burial sites are places of tribute and memory that connect communities to their past.

The Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground is a vital part of American history. As the final resting place of approximately 22,000 people, both enslaved and free, it may be the nation's largest cemetery of its kind. Unfortunately, like many historic African American burial grounds, the site's significance was often disregarded by officials at all levels of government.

The Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground was disrupted on multiple occasions: road work in 1883, construction of a viaduct in the late 19th century, plundering by grave robbers seeking cadavers for medical study, and the leasing or sale of land to construct rail facilities and foundries. Systematic racism and discrimination meant that white decisionmakers ignored the protests of Richmond's African American community over these desecrations.

As a coalition, we are committed to ensuring the protection and preservation of historic African American cemeteries. We urge the Virginia Department of Historic Resources to recognize the significance of the Shockoe Hill Burying Ground Historic District and support its inclusion in the National Register.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maurin F. Welkeiser".

Policy Director
Coalition for American Heritage