

MEDIA ALERT
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Virginia Museum of History & Culture Acquires Arthur Ashe Jr.'s Family Tree Tracing the Blackwell Family back to 1735

Richmond, VA – The Virginia Museum of History & Culture (VMHC) has acquired one of three rare family trees, drawn by hand on canvas, and belonging to relatives of Arthur Ashe, Jr.'s family, the Blackwells. Completed in 1971, the intricately detailed feat of genealogical inscription traces the family lineage back to 1735 and includes more than 5,000 names.

“The addition of the Blackwell Family Tree is a milestone for our collection,” said President and CEO Jamie O. Bosket. “We are honored to provide a permanent home to this important work at our institution. It is even more fitting that the tree should be added today, just a week after City Council approved honoring Arthur Ashe by renaming the Boulevard where the museum is located.”

Ashe’s cousin, Thelma Doswell, Certified Genealogist and Blackwell Family Historian, is credited with the creation of the tree. She passed away in 2012. According to Ms. Doswell’s research, the Blackwells are traceable back to a slave auction in 1735, when an African woman named Amar and her daughter, Tab, were purchased by plantation owner James Glenn Blackwell. Amar and Tab had arrived in Yorktown, Virginia, from Senegal, West Africa, on the slave ship *Doddington*.

Ashe’s cousin, JoAnne Blackwell, has been the steward of the tree since 2012. Her great grandfather, James, was the brother of Ashe’s great great grandfather, Hamit. Ms. Blackwell travelled from Laurel Springs, New Jersey, to donate the 9' x 11' work on canvas to VMHC on February 22, 2019.

There are three Blackwell Family Trees in existence. The earliest tree was completed in 1959. At 6' x 8', it has 1,500 names and is a part of the collections at the Library of Congress. Another 10' x 14" canvas with 5,000 family names was completed in 1991 and resides at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture.

The VMHC first learned about the Blackwell Family Trees from an article in *Richmond Magazine*, “An Open Book” by Editorial Director Susan Winiecki, which ran in the December 2018 issue.



Genealogy at VMHC

- Search the [Unknown No Longer](#) database of names of enslaved Virginians
- Search for names in the [VMHC research library](#) using Ancestry.com for free
- Start your own family tree with a kit from the VMHC museum shop – \$8.95 (in store only)
- Learn more about the origins of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in the [Story of Virginia](#) exhibit

VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF HISTORY & CULTURE

The Blackwell Family Tree will be on display at VMHC beginning June 19, 2019, as a part of the new exhibition, [Determined: The 400-Year Struggle for Black Equality](#). *Determined* is presented by Altria Group and is a legacy project of AMERICAN EVOLUTION™. Additional support is provided by Bank of America. The tree will join a variety of artifacts relating to the life of Arthur Ashe in the collections of VMHC, including Ashe's tennis racket, gym bag, wristband, tennis ball, and numerous items related to Ashe's monument in Richmond that was designed by sculptor Paul DiPasquale.

The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is owned and operated by the Virginia Historical Society — a private, non-profit organization established in 1831. The historical society is the oldest cultural organization in Virginia, and one of the oldest and most distinguished history organizations in the nation. For use in its state history museum and its renowned research library, the historical society cares for a collection of nearly nine million items representing the ever-evolving story of Virginia.

The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is located at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond's Museum District. Hours are Monday – Sunday 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for the galleries and museum shop, Monday – Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for the research library. For more information call (804) 340-1800, visit VirginiaHistory.org, or connect with the Virginia Museum of History & Culture on Facebook and Twitter.

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