



VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Story of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pistol, Pop, Peanut and Pedro **Four Negro League Baseball Players at Free Event Hosted by Virginia Historical Society**

Richmond, VA—On Saturday, August 11, 2012, from 10:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m., the Virginia Historical Society (VHS) will host four Negro League baseball players at its museum located at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond. Henry “Pistol” Mason, Joe “Pop” Durham, Mamie “Peanut” Johnson-Goodman, and Pedro Sierra will participate in an interview-style educational program answering questions about their Negro League ball-playing days and Civil Rights struggles in the 1950s and 1960s.

After the discussion, they will sign autographs and take pictures with visitors. In addition to meeting Negro League players, two Richmond Flying Squirrels baseball players will participate in the event.

The event—**“Pistol, Pop, Peanut & Pedro: The Negro League Baseball Experience”**—is free and open to the public. Seating is first come, first served. The program is co-presented by The Center for African American Genealogical Research, Inc. (CAAGRI), the Richmond Flying Squirrels, the Urban League of Greater Richmond, and the VHS.

Of the close to 3,000 men—and three women—who played baseball for a Negro League team, fewer than 175 are still alive. Their appearance in Richmond marks the first time Mason, Durham, Johnson-Goodman, and Sierra have participated in an event together in the city.

“The VHS is renowned for its manuscript and artifact collections spanning 400 years, but it’s not everyday that we are able to meet the people who are the history-makers,” said Dr. Paul Levenson, VHS President and CEO. “By using their talent and dogged determination, Hank, Joe, Mamie, and Pedro pursued their love of America’s national pastime and contributed to the continuing stories that define Virginia and the nation. In the process, they broke records, color barriers, and glass ceilings.”

“I think one of the unique things about working in baseball is getting to learn about the history through stories from former players,” said Flying Squirrels Vice President and COO Todd “Parney” Parnell. “The Negro League players have an incredible story to tell, and whether you’re a baseball fan or not, I think it’s worth attending this event at the Virginia Historical Society just to hear the stories of individuals who sacrificed for future generations.”

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Post Office Box 7311
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The first known baseball game between two named black teams was held in 1860. Because African Americans were not accepted into the major and minor baseball leagues, they began to form their own organizations in the 1880s. The **Negro League**—made up of various black major league teams from across the country—organized in 1920 and operated until 1960 when a flood of African American players signed with recently integrated Major League Baseball (MLB) teams. Of the five Virginians inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame, four played in the Negro League.

Born in Marshall, MO, in 1931, **Henry “Pistol” Mason** was offered a position on the Kansas City Monarchs baseball team at 19 years old. On opening day in 1952, Mason pitched sixteen innings to defeat the Philadelphia Stars. In 1955, Mason broke barriers by becoming the first African American to play for the Schenectady Blue Jays, a Philadelphia Phillies farm team. After two seasons, with records of 12-4 (1955) and 14-7 (1956), leading the league with seven shutouts and placing second in the league with 176 strikeouts, Mason joined the Phillies in 1958 and played until 1962. After retiring from baseball, Mason became a pastor in Kansas City. He moved to Richmond, VA, in 2001.

Joe “Pop” Durham, a native of Newport News, VA, began his professional baseball career as an outfielder in 1952 with the Chicago American Giants. The St. Louis Browns signed him in 1953. The following season, Durham reached the major leagues with the Baltimore Orioles, the second African American to play for that franchise. On September 12, 1954, he became the first African American to record a home run for the Orioles. In his major league career, Durham spent time with the St. Louis Cardinals, served as a scout for amateur free agents, and as the Orioles Community Coordinator. He became coach of an Orioles minor league team in 1990 and retired from coaching in 1996. He currently lives in Maryland and serves as an Orioles Baseball Club representative.

Mamie “Peanut” Johnson was born in 1935 in Ridgeway, SC. At 18 years old, she was recruited as a pitcher for the Indianapolis Clowns and reported to training camp in Portsmouth, VA. Johnson played professional baseball from 1953 to 1955 winning 33 games, losing eight, and having a batting average from .262 to .284. Johnson was one of only three women to play in the Negro Leagues. After her baseball career, Johnson worked as a nurse for thirty years. Prior to the 2008 MLB First Year Draft, Johnson and other living players from the Negro League were drafted by Major League franchises. Johnson was selected by the Washington Nationals, the team closest to her current residence of DC.

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Born in Cuba in 1938, **Pedro Sierra**'s baseball career began in 1954 when, at 16 years old, he went to pitch for the Indianapolis Clowns. He played for the Clowns from 1954 to 1955, and then for the Detroit Stars from 1956 to 1958. After two-and-a-half-years in the U.S. Army, Sierra played with the Minnesota Twins (1962-1966). While in the Canadian Provincial League (1967-69), Sierra led that league in wins and shutouts and was named team MVP. In 1970 he played for Washington Senators farm teams and from 1971 to 1975 Sierra joined Mexican teams. After a distinguished 22-year baseball career, in 1976 Sierra began working for the Montgomery County (Maryland) Department of Recreation, a job he held for 25 years. Sierra currently resides in Maryland.

“This is an American story about American sports,” said Paula Royster, CEO of CAAGRI. “We are celebrating the lives and accomplishments of these Negro League players, but also recognizing that they were pioneers for civil rights. It’s a story—a history—that is less known. We are honoring the players by bringing their experience into plain view.”

After the free educational programming portion, CAAGRI is hosting a ticketed luncheon. At the event—which begins at 12:30 p.m. and costs \$35 per person—CAAGRI will present a 2012 Living Legacy Award to each of the four Negro League baseball players. The lunch includes a silent auction, raffle, and door prizes. Proceeds from the auction—which includes memorabilia related to the Negro League—will be given to the Negro Leagues Baseball Grave Marker Project, a nonprofit organization started in 2003 to provide headstones for the unmarked graves of former Negro Leagues baseball players. Tickets for the lunch may be purchased at www.caagri.org.

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For more than 180 years, the **Virginia Historical Society** (VHS) has been the steward of our state—and often national—history. The VHS features award-winning exhibitions that are entertaining and educational for visitors of all ages. Although designated the Official State Historical Society, the VHS is a privately funded non-profit organization that relies on contributions from individuals, corporations, and foundations to sustain its operations. The VHS is located at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond. Admission to the research library and museum galleries is free. Museum hours are Monday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday 1 p.m.–5 p.m. Library hours are Monday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. For group tour information, call (804) 342-9652. For more information, call (804) 358-4901, visit www.vahistorical.org, or find the VHS on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/vahistorical) and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/vahistorical).

The Center for African American Genealogical Research, Inc. is the leading provider of unique digital collections critical to the African Diasporan and genealogy researchers. With partnerships in Accra and Prince’s Town, Ghana, CAAGRI records, maintains and preserves rare documents and oral family histories for future generations to enjoy. With innovative projects like the Sankofa Project, we are able to incorporate traditional genealogy research with DNA to bridge the relationships lost and torn by the Trans Atlantic Slave trade while delivering the technological skills necessary for indigent African Diasporan communities to compete in a global marketplace. Additional information on CAAGRI can be found at www.caagri.org.

The **Richmond Flying Squirrels** are a Minor League Baseball Club located in Richmond, VA. The club is a member of the Eastern League and Double-A Affiliate of the San Francisco Giants. For more information, visit www.squirrelsbaseball.com.



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