

## Department of Historic Resources

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### STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKER HONORING FIRST LONG-TERM POLISH SETTLEMENT IN VIRGINIA TO BE DEDICATED

*—“Sunray” historical marker recalls Polish settlement was established  
in 1908 in Norfolk County, now City of Chesapeake —*

*—The marker’s text is reproduced below—*

RICHMOND – A state historical marker issued by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources honoring Virginia’s “first long-term Polish settlement,” known as Sunray, will be dedicated in the City of Chesapeake this month.

The dedication and unveiling ceremony for the “Sunray” historical marker will begin at 11 a.m., Saturday, December 21 at the sign’s location in front of the old Sunray schoolhouse, located at 621 Homestead Road, Chesapeake.

Speakers during the ceremony will include Father David Cupps of St. Mary’s Catholic Church; Chesapeake Mayor Alan Krasnoff; Delegate Lionel Spruill Sr.; Victor Pickett of the Chesapeake Historic Preservation Commission, and Pamela Schenian of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

Following the dedication ceremony, there will be a public reception in the Parish Hall, St. Mary’s Catholic Church. Parking for the ceremony is also available at the church lot.

The Sunray community, originally known as the Piast colony, a name honoring Poland’s first royal dynasty, became Sunray after the Virginia Railway Company opened a depot there in 1910, according to the marker.

Polish “immigrants first worked in mines and factories on the East Coast and then moved to” Sunray, “a farming community platted by the Southern Homestead Corp. of Norfolk,” according to the marker. “They had

to dig drains and grub the stumps of timbered lands, but soon built prosperous family farms. They maintained ties with the Polish diaspora and continued to be joined by new colonists for decades,” the marker concludes.

The “Sunray” sign was sponsored by the Sunray Farmers Association, which covered the cost of its manufacture. The marker’s text was approved by the Board of Historic Resources during its quarterly meeting in September of this year.

The Sunray Agricultural Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2007 and in the Virginia Landmarks Register in 2003.

Virginia’s historical highway marker program, which began in 1927 with the installation of the first historical markers along U.S. Route 1, is considered the oldest such program in the nation. Currently there are more than 2,400 official state markers, most maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation, as well as by local partners in jurisdictions such as the City of Chesapeake that are outside of VDOT’s authority.

Text of the marker:

**Sunray**

In 1908, the first long-term Polish settlement in Virginia was established in Norfolk County, now Chesapeake. The Piast colony, named for Poland’s first royal dynasty, was called Sunray after the Virginia Railway Company depot that opened here in 1910. The immigrants first worked in mines and factories on the East Coast and then moved to this farming community platted by the Southern Homestead Corp. of Norfolk. They had to dig drains and grub the stumps of timbered lands, but soon built prosperous family farms. They maintained ties with the Polish diaspora and continued to be joined by new colonists for decades.

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