

What is the Fayette Street project?

What is FAHI? And what is the VFH?

FAYETTE STREET runs along a two-mile stretch of road from the Courthouse square uptown to the current Martinsville city limits at its west end. It begins just above Prillaman's meat market, passing by the memory of what was Baldwin's Block between Moss and Barton, crossing under the new lights at Market Street, and catching up with Mount Zion A.M.E. and Grace Presbyterian churches, oldest of the historic black churches on Fayette Street. Community Market No. 2 is thriving, but No. 1, the former H.M. Hairston's – said to have once been "like Kroger's" – is abandoned, as is the Paradise Inn, though neither has quite disappeared like the swimming pool and motel built at Sandy Beach where Fayette Street becomes simply Route 57 again.

THOUSANDS of men, women and children have lived and played, worked and prayed, raised families and said their goodbyes along this corridor of streets. Still home to many of Martinsville's African American citizens as well as a place for worship, Fayette Street however is not the vibrant center of the social and business centers that it once was, or could be again.

TWO YEARS AGO, the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities (VFH) and the Fayette Area Historical Initiative (FAHI) formed a partnership to use the humanities — literature, art, history, music, culture, but in this case, especially local history — to foster community development and re-development in the area. FAHI, a Martinsville grassroots organization, together with the non-profit VFH, a 30-year-old nonprofit foundation in Charlottesville, Virginia, sought and received two years of grant funding from the Martinsville-based Harvest Foundation and the Public Welfare Foundation in Washington D.C.

THE GOAL OF FAHI volunteers, working with staff members from the VFH, is to collect, preserve and interpret the Fayette Street experience through recorded oral history, public forums and workshops, lectures and other special programs. Some of these programs have included the following:

- A "Jackson Ward" photo exhibit - Jan./February 2005
- Presenting/Discussing Difficult History - March 2005
- Photographic Preservation - April 2005
- Oral history training - April 2005

JUNE 2005 marks the end of the first half of this exciting project. "Working and Playing on Fayette Street" is the first of two exhibits designed to display this local history. But much remains to be done. Many more people have stories and pictures to share.

**504 Fayette Street is the
new office site for FAHI**



*WORKING AND PLAYING ON FAYETTE STREET: an exhibit created
through the partnership of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities
and the Fayette Area Historical Initiative.*

