

LIA at Work

Literacy InterActives, Inc.

a nonprofit organization www.literacyinteractives.org

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2019-2020

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LIA Works: Henrietta Lacks Life Science Center, Culture, and Immortality in Southside Virginia

What do the Henrietta Lacks Life Science Center and the Parker Sydnor historic log cabin site in Southside Virginia have in common?

Both of these exciting new projects emerge out of discoveries of vital happenings in the past



that can now benefit us in many positive ways, which intersect medical science, culture, and history. Bridging such dynamic learning spaces with innovative projects helps to develop new approaches to forging opportunities for interactive learning—what Literacy InterActives and its mission are all about.

There is the discovery of the immortal cancer cell line known as HeLa cells that were taken from Mrs. Henrietta Lacks, an African American woman who was born in Halifax County, VA. She died in 1951 and cells collected from a biopsy of her cervical cancer were cultured without her knowledge or permission to develop a cell line, called HeLa.

What does this kind of immortality mean? In research labs all over the world, her cells never die. This “immortality” enabled the HeLa cells to reproduce endlessly and be used globally by medical researchers who could test their theories and validate their results on an identical base line of living cells. For over five decades research using HeLa cells led to numerous medical advances, saving lives—and making a lot of money for a lot of people, but not for Mrs. Lacks’s descendants who have lived in poverty.

In 2018 at its annual board of directors’ luncheon, LIA welcomed Matt Leonard, then executive director of the Halifax

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Literacy InterActives Announces Two New Board Members

Literacy InterActives is excited to welcome two new board members who will serve LIA and its vast community with their exceptional skillsets and dedication that will have a lasting impact on our work; and help to advance our primary initiatives.

Sonja Ingram is an archaeologist and a historic preservationist. She has a master’s degree in historic preservation from the University of Maryland and began working for Preservation Virginia, the nation’s oldest statewide historic preservation organization, in 2008. Established in 1889, Preservation Virginia is a multifaceted organization for education and advocacy programming. It has six public historic sites that protect and showcase Virginia’s historic places.

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“A while back, the marble yards charged so much that the colored people down in this part never had any stones in the graveyards at all. But I’ve brought ‘em in reach and now they’re puttin’ ‘em up, even for people been dead 50 years.”

Parker Sydnor
Friday, September 13, 1946
Richmond Times-Dispatch



2017-2019 Venues
Parker Sydnor Historic Log Cabin Project

Video Showcase: “Parker Sydnor Virginia Historical Highway Marker Dedication.” Virginia Forum. Jamestown Settlement and Colonial Williamsburg, VA

Literacy InterActives, Inc. Sponsorship St. John Baptist Summer Camp 2017

“From the Virginia Forum to Visiting with “The Old Plantation.” www.parkersydnorhistoric.org

“Parker Sydnor Virginia Historical Highway Marker Dedication.” Trailer and Promotional Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dm-X0AUBNA> 1:16

Emily Jones, “History Buffs have a Home in Mecklenburg County.” *The Mecklenburg Sun*. Summer Lake Edition. June 2016. 33-38. Print.

New Board Members, continued from page 1

As Preservation Virginia’s Manager of Preservation Field Services, Sonja helps individuals and organizations across the state to protect important historic sites by providing technical and educational services. Sonja is also the manager of Preservation Virginia’s Tobacco Barns Program. Before joining Preservation Virginia, Sonja was the Assistant Director for the Archaeological Conservancy’s Eastern Regional Office. She was also historic preservation planner for the city of Frederick, Maryland and she worked as a land preservationist for Loudoun County, Virginia and Frederick County, Maryland. She currently lives in Danville’s Old West End Historic District.



Cameron Patterson is the Managing Director, of the Robert Russa Moton Museum in Farmville, VA. “I have the amazing honor and privilege of working in support and advancement of the Robert Russa Moton Museum, which is a National Historic Landmark.” Moton is the “Student Birthplace of America’s Civil Rights Revolution.”



Cam is a museum and higher education professional with a proven record of success working in various education and non-profit settings. His work focuses on building community and helping organizations promote equitable and inclusive practices.

A great read!

I see the urgency to begin stabilization and restoration of the Sydnor log cabin site. Visit LIA’s website for updates on making your contribution to the LIA Building Fund Campaign!

Dr. Peter V. Bergstrom,
Vice President
Literacy InterActives, Inc.

Culture and Immortality, continued from page 1

County Industrial Development Authority (IDA), to talk about the development of the Henrietta Lacks Life Science Center (LSC) in South Boston, VA and its connections to history and cultural crossroads in southern VA. A few months before Leonard spoke at the LIA luncheon, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam signed into law the establishment of the Henrietta Lacks Commission—a board tasked with developing and implementing a plan to construct the biomedical cancer research and treatment center in Halifax County.

“Meaningful projects like this one require strong collaborations and take time to develop,” explained Leonard. “This project will be transformational for Halifax County, the entire southern Virginia region, and beyond. It is significant historically, economically, and socially.”

Preserving and Promoting Legacy

The impact of Henrietta Lacks’s remarkable legacy takes her immortality from the local to the global. On the other hand, Parker Sydnor’s home place legacy moves from the global understanding of burying the dead with respect to his local implementation of immortalizing the dead by carving tombstones. Born enslaved in Halifax County, Parker Sydnor (1854-1950) was a tombstone maker. His life work served to craft and build tombstones that would be a “rememory” for African Americans. He also crafted tombstones for local white Americans and was featured in a 1946 edition of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.

**Next Steps:
Shovel Ready for Stabilization and
Rehabilitation**

- a place to learn
- a place to work
- a place to play
- a place to gather
- a place to nurture
- a place to conduct use-inspired research
- a place to remember the past...the log cabin

www.parkersydnorhistoric.org

Through his “writing among the dead” (he became literate after Emancipation) he had the idea that African Americans should have their names carved into their grave stones, which generally had not been done during slavery. He wanted “colored people to have stones in their grave-yards” for remembering even if they had been “dead for fifty years.”

The Henrietta Lacks Commission envisions the LSC as a state of the art facility that will be a cancer research and treatment center located at the home and burial site of

Henrietta Lacks in Halifax County. In her book, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, journalist Rebecca Skloot tracks down the story and the source of the amazing HeLa cells, Henrietta Lacks, and documents the cell line’s impact on both modern medicine and the Lacks family.



With strategic educational partnerships and successful collaborations, LIA envisions the Parker Sydnor historic log cabin site as a home place center for interactive learning with new ideas for the intersection of science, history, and culture to bridge communities and honor our legacies.

Angelita Reyes



In Memory Of
Doris Ruth W. Hester
1928-2018



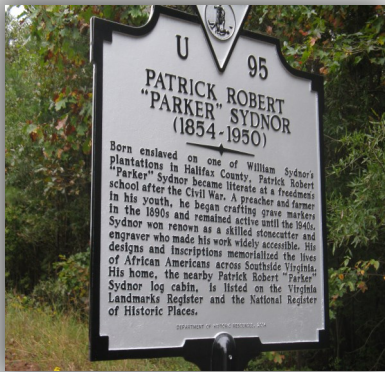
Our dearly beloved, Mrs. Doris W. Hester of Clarksville, VA passed away on October 28, 2018. Miss Doris, as some of us called her, was a most dedicated and cherished friend and member of the LIA board of

directors. Mrs. Hester exemplified unwavering devotion and enthusiasm for LIA’s mission and for its board members. She was a dear friend.

But far more than her commitment to LIA, Mrs. Hester was a mathematician, educator, and longtime community leader. Graduating from high school at 16, she then went to St. Paul’s College. She also received fellowships from the National Science Foundation to attend Syracuse University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Simmons College. It was commendable if not exceptional for her to attend MIT in the 1950s as an African American, southern woman.

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"Bridging Our Communities"



A Virginia historical highway marker commemorates the Parker Sydnor historic log cabin site for statewide significance and national integrity.



Angelita Reyes and Susan L. Taylor, former editor-in-chief of *Essence* magazine at the National Museum of African American History and Culture History

Parker Sydnor
HISTORIC SITE

- A place to learn...the Visitors Center
- A place to work...the heritage food gardens
- A place to play...the children's play area
- A place to gather...the amphitheater
- A place to nurture...the caretaker's house
- A place to remember the past...the log cabin

Literacy InterActives, Inc.



A Nonprofit Organization, 501(c)(3)

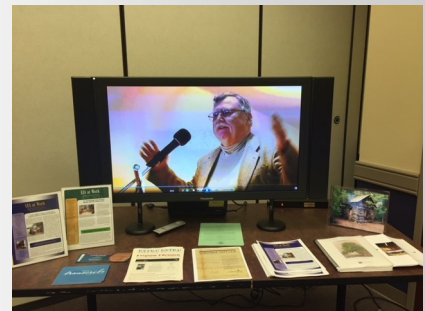
LIA serves as a resource organization using technology, culture, public history, and education to bridge communities. We promote and develop interactive and interpretative programming through use-inspired research and civic engagement.



Interacting with the *Negro Motorist Green Book*. National Museum of African American History and Culture



Interactive exhibit at the National Museum of African American History and Culture



Peter Bergstrom as Vice President of LIA. Visit our YouTube video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiuCQvE3yho>

In Memory, continued from page 3

An avid bridge player, Mrs. Hester could often be found at the local YMCA for weekly matches and teaching the skills of the game. Mrs. Hester's list of civic activities reflects her boundless love for the county and its people.

As a lifelong member of St. Matthew Baptist Church, Mother Hester was instrumental in its growth and outreach. She served as superintendent of the church school, was the church's representative at the quarterly Baptist Convention, as well as a member of Bluestone Harmony Convention, which as part of its mission provides scholarships to deserving students.

She was, indeed, a gift to the community and to humanity.



Let us then employ properly this moment of time allotted us by fate, and leave the world contentedly; like a ripe olive dropping from its stalk, speaking well of the soil that produced it, and of the tree that bore it. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

Bless the Lord, oh my soul and all that is within me; Bless his holy name. *Psalms 103: 1*

