

LIA at Work

Literacy InterActives, Inc.

A Nonprofit Organization www.literacyinteractives.org

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In this issue

LIA at Work focuses on the sense of place and its relationship to ongoing initiatives and Internet networking technology. We're pleased to announce that the VA Tech Community Design Assistance Center completed the Sydnor log cabin site master plan. View the architect's concept on Facebook!

Newsletter Contributors

Peter V. Bergstrom, PhD
Mattie Cowan
Shannon Lujan
Alexandria J. Reyes, Esq.
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With special thanks to
Danelle Weber

Now 95, Saunier Reflects on Meeting Parker Sydnor, Mecklenburg County Tombstone Maker



Paul Saunier, Jr. of Charlottesville, VA, with Angelita Reyes.

How often do you stop to consider that we are all a part of living history? Do you begin to feel like you could “touch history” if you had the opportunity to intimately connect with people, places, or things from the distant past? Angelita Reyes, professor at Arizona State University and founder of Literacy InterActives, Inc., had such an opportunity to touch living history when she recently met with Paul Saunier, Jr., of Charlottesville, VA.

Paul Saunier, Jr., a retired administrator from the Office of the President at the University of Virginia, touched history even more in the summer of 1946 when he interviewed Parker Sydnor, a skilled and literate African American tombstone carver. Sydnor died in 1950 and his Mecklenburg County home place is now a recognized historic site in Virginia.

Saunier, who celebrated his 95th birthday in June, remembered meeting Patrick Robert “Parker” Sydnor. As a staff writer and photographer for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Saunier’s assignment was to find “pieces-of-interest stories” about uncommon occupations in Virginia. Saunier shared with Reyes original letters and photos related to the Sydnor interview. The items had been filed away, if not forgotten in a desk drawer for nearly seventy years.

Who prompted Saunier to find out about Sydnor in 1946? Former mayor and

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CARNEGIE GRANT SUPPORTS LIA PROJECT

The Patrick Robert “Parker” Sydnor historic preservation initiative has been awarded a Carnegie Humanities Investment Fund (CHIF) grant for \$60,000 as an “Interdisciplinary High-Impact Place Studies Project” through Arizona State University (ASU). CHIF funds the project’s infrastructure, providing ground-level support that allows participants to implement the major goal of the initiative. In this case, the LIA log cabin initiative focuses on “place studies” that showcase public history and historic preservation.

The capacity-building, two-year grant will help to advance high visibility of the project through Interactive website networking, social media, a promotional video production, business crowdsourcing (for valuable insight, innovation, and stronger bonds with stakeholders and potential investors), and targeted op-ed pieces. CHIF will enable a strong marketing lever-

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"When stories are not shared, we lose the rhythms of our past and our sense of place and connection to the communities that form our present."

The Public Historian
November 2012

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of the American Civil War
Commission

Meet a Board Member



Peter V. Bergstrom hails from Wisconsin where he received his AB (1970) and MA (1973) from Marquette University. After receiving his PhD in early American history from the University of New Hampshire (1979), he spent ten years as a research associate

with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

He has held teaching appointments at Illinois State University, the College of Wil-

liam and Mary, Hampton University, and Old Dominion University.

Dr. Bergstrom is the author of *Markets and Merchants: Economic Diversification in Colonial Virginia, 1700-1775* (1985) and has been a long-time contributor to the Virginia Biographical Dictionary project sponsored by the Library of Virginia. He lectures on Virginia history and genealogy for numerous historical and genealogical societies in Virginia, New Hampshire, and Illinois.

In 2003 Peter moved with his wife to Greensboro, NC. He is active in the Virginia Forum and has been a member of the LIA board of directors since 2013.

Coming in 2015! LIA Youth Workshop: Personal Leadership Challenge 101

Meet a Board Member



Mattie Cowan is a life-long resident of Halifax County, VA and has worked at CenturyLink Telecommunications for thirty-seven years.

She has served in several management positions and is currently lead process analyst for the Eastern Region

local engineering and construction organization. Cowan attended Danville community college where she studied business administration. She continued her studies in business management while employed at CenturyLink.

Active in the business community, Ms. Cowan serves as vice chair on the Halifax County Planning Commission and serves on the Halifax County Industrial Development Authority. She is president of the Halifax County Business and Professional

Council, a member and past president of Wind Beneath the Wings, Inc., and president of the Virginia State Baptist Ushers Union.

Ms. Cowan also served as president of the Halifax County Chamber of Commerce, treasurer of the United Way, a member of the Halifax County Improvement Council, treasurer of the Mentor Role Model Program, and a trustee of Virginia's A. L. Philpott Manufacturing Extension Program (GENEDGE).

Ms. Cowan attends Spanish Grove Baptist Church in Scottsburg, VA, and volunteers on the Finance Committee and is a member of the Usher's Ministry.

In her leisure time, Mattie is an award-winning golfer and regularly competes in regional golf tournaments. Mattie has two adult daughters, two-step children, and four grandchildren.

Mattie brings a wealth of community, fundraising, business, and nonprofit experience to the LIA mission.

Saunier, continued from page 1

then town clerk of Scottsburg, C. A. McKinney contacted Saunier about an “odd fellow who works in our little town.” C. A. McKinney wondered if Saunier would be interested in doing an article on “Uncle” Parker. McKinney wrote that



Sydnor was “indeed a character” and that he sold at least 100 tombstones a year.

Sydnor mixed his own special cement formula, and he maintained work sheds in Halifax and Mecklenburg counties. At 88 years of age and still working, Sydnor received gravestone commissions for numerous church cemeteries.

Curious about this “odd fellow,” Saunier drove

from Richmond to Scottsburg to meet and interview the elderly man, born into slavery, and who made tombstones as both a business and faithful service to the community. We can read Sydnor’s words from the distant past, “I’m glad to do it to beautify the graveyards.”

Saunier told Reyes that the 1946 story “went over well with readers of the *Times-Dispatch*.” The article was a “big advertisement” with vivid photos that increased Sydnor’s business “two to three times.” Sydnor received a large order from Charlotte County for seventy-five dollars—a lot of money in those days.

The remarkable newspaper story about Sydnor and his tombstone making helps us to know more about the historic past and the integrity of a rare craftsman. Saunier touched living nineteenth-century history through an industrious African American who had once been enslaved on a Virginia plantation.

Visit us on Facebook to learn more about how you can become involved in the historic preservation initiative for building cultural bridges—as Paul Saunier did many years ago.

- Shannon Lujan and Angelita Reyes

Photo courtesy of Paul Saunier, Jr. Used with permission.

Carnegie Grant, continued from page 1

age that can significantly assist with securing a major grant for the historic preservation goal.

Angelita Reyes who will spearhead the grant management indicates, “The long-term mission of the initiative is to bring people of different backgrounds together as stakeholders who will build vibrant communities for the public

good.” The CHIF project has a collaborative team of award-winning consultants and architects who will assist with the LIA innovative commitment to diversity. Congratulations to LIA and to the CHIF team!



Prestwould to Boydton: Roads from Slavery, to Freedom, to Land Ownership

LIA board member and independent historian, Peter Bergstrom of Greensboro, NC, attended the 2014 conference of the Virginia Forum, which was held at George Mason University. The following is a summary of his lively and well-received PowerPoint presentation about one woman’s historical and geographical road journeys from slavery, to freedom, to land ownership.



Vickey Skipwith (1856-1936) was born enslaved at Prestwould plantation in Clarksville, VA. Following Emancipation, she took the surname of Skipwith and began her life journey to the meaning of freedom. In 1888, Vickey Skipwith bought a tract of land, becoming the first African American woman to buy real estate that had been owned by Prestwould. ***Read More by Peter Bergstrom....***



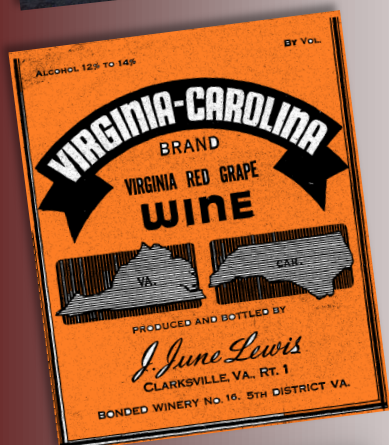
Admin Assistant Enables Carnegie Grant

Shannon Lujan, a PhD candidate at Arizona State University, has been hired to assist with the LIA historic preservation project with funding from the Carnegie Humanities Investment Fund for 2014-2015. Shannon’s passion for place studies is what first attracted her to the Patrick Robert “Parker” Sydnor historic preservation project. Her dissertation research focuses on American literature and place studies. She believes that in an ever-complex global environment, place provides meaningful connections. For the LIA project, Shannon manages data collection related to business networking media.



Lujan also prepares and applies digital documents and innovation to increase crowd sourcing, including Wikipedia entries. She will help to coordinate a promotional video for the project. We’re pleased to have Shannon on board.

"Bridging Our Communities"



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 resources and diversity.



Community stakeholders in Southside Virginia participated in lively meetings with the Virginia Tech State University Community Design Assistance Center team to discuss conceptual ideas for the future development of the Patrick Robert "Parker" Sydnor historic log cabin site. A place to learn. A place to work. A place to play. A place to gather. A place to remember the past. The architectural site master plan is complete. The site master plan offers the appeal of living history tourism, economic development, interactive learning, and an embedded sense of place. The site master plan is available for viewing and your comments on [Facebook](#).



The Virginia Historical Highway Marker program commemorates facts, people, events, and places prominently identified with the history of the nation, state, or region. The National Park Service has approved statewide significance for the Patrick Robert "Parker" Sydnor historic log cabin site.