

# LIA at Work

Literacy InterActives, Inc.

A Nonprofit Organization [www.literacyinteractives.org](http://www.literacyinteractives.org)

VOL. 1 NO. 5 SUMMER 2015

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### Galleria on the Lake



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## Virginia Highway Marker Commemorates Tombstone Engraver at Historic Log Cabin Site

WE did it! Literacy InterActives sponsored the Virginia historical highway marker dedication ceremony that honored the life and occupation of Patrick Robert "Parker" Sydnor (1854-1950). Parker Sydnor was born into slavery



and earned renown as a skilled and literate Virginia engraver and stonecutter of grave markers by the turn of the 20th century. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources issued the Commonwealth's prestigious high-

way marker in October 2015.\* Attending the event were four generations of Sydnor's descendants, local community and nationwide stakeholders along with dignitaries including Clarksville Mayor Kevin Allgood, Jim Hare of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and Virginia Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr.

Distinguished guests included Dr. Peter Wallenstein, Virginia Tech; Dr. Christopher Graham, UNC Greensboro; Larry Darnell Shields, Norfolk, VA; and Ania Rzeszutko, Tucson, Arizona. The last surviving grandson of Parker Sydnor, John Ross Jr., and the youngest 3rd great granddaughter of Sydnor, Ummu Thomas, joined the commemoration and civic dedication. The dedication was a public event.

Parker Sydnor gained literacy after the Civil War by attending a Freedmen's Bureau school. He began crafting grave markers in the 1890s and remained active in his funereal stonecutting business throughout the 1940s. Literacy enabled Sydnor's popularity and skills as a stonecutter to grow and he "memorialized the lives of African Americans

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## South Boston Golf Wins for LIA

Team Dr. Waller-Graham was the first place winner of the sold-out Literacy InterActives Golf Tournament held at Green's Folly Golf Course in South Boston, VA. Mattie M. Cowan, board member of LIA and an award-winning golfer, coordinated the successful and entertaining golf tournament in October 2014. The team consisting of David Graham, Brenda Waller-Graham, A. C. Holt, and James Graham won the A Flight championship. Green's Folly Ladies won 1st place for the women's league in the tournament.

The fundraising golf tournament begins LIA's capital campaign for the historic and cultural preservation of the Parker Sydnor log cabin. The restored and rehabilitated "living history" log cabin will become a part of the site's heritage tourism and educational programming. The

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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*



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2015 Venues  
Parker Sydnor Historic Log Cabin  
Project

National Council of Public History  
Nashville, TN

Virginia Forum. Richmond, VA

Blog: Whig Hill  
Christopher Graham

Collegium on African American  
Research. Liverpool, England

You Tube Video: Virginia Historical  
Highway Marker

CHIF Project  
[www.parkersydnorhistoric.org/](http://www.parkersydnorhistoric.org/)

Mecklenburg County  
Sesquicentennial Committee  
Leadership Commendation  
[http://www.virginiacivilwar.org/members\\_awards.php](http://www.virginiacivilwar.org/members_awards.php)

## Meet a Board Member

Ummu Bradley Thomas, is the president of Freddie Bell Jones, Inc. She is a Nationally Certified Results Oriented Management Trainer with specialization in organizational consulting, grant



writing, and work place training. Ms. Thomas is also a trainer in leadership skills, business development, welfare-to-work, and teamwork seminars. She has developed over 60 soft skills programs that are presented at nonprofits, government agencies, businesses, schools, Head Start Centers, and community colleges. Ms. Thomas serves as the Chief Protocol

Officer for the Consulate of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

At Freddie Bell Jones, Ummu conducts regional needs assessments, focus groups, customer surveys, and client surveys. She has published 14 personal development curriculum workbooks under the series “The Polish that Pays” and has been quoted in the *Reader’s Digest*, the *Washington Examiner*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. Ummu also trains male and female youth ages 14-21 in self-help skills and business etiquette.

In addition to her entrepreneurial work, since 2011 Ummu has served on the Planning and Zoning Board of Caroline County in Maryland. Ms. Thomas brings impressive business management skill-sets to LIA that will advance our mission. We are delighted to have Ummu Bradley Thomas join LIA. Welcome! ❖

## Meet a Board Member

Dorothy David’s dream was not deferred. From an early age, Dorothy was intrigued with numbers and over 20 years ago, she decided to go into business as an accountant.



While many people would have been discouraged, Ms. David persevered. She worked harder to grow her dream business. She became a certified tax consultant and went to college for business administration. Continuing with her unwavering mission, Dorothy attained an MBA in accounting.

Dorothy M. David is the CEO of the enterprising D. M. D. Tax & Accounting Services. “When you start a business on

your own, you don’t always know where to start. The tools and knowledge I got from my courses in business administration are phenomenal and exactly what I needed to get on track,” said Dorothy. She was among the first entrepreneurs to enroll in the [Community Business Academy](#)—an intensive 12-week program that was launched by the Jersey City-based nonprofit organization, Rising Tide Capital.

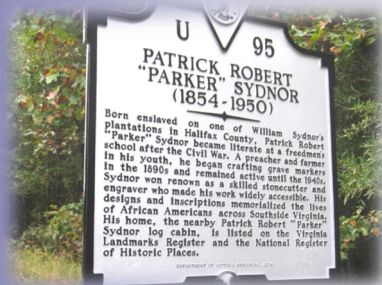
Dorothy David now works with virtually 160 clients on an annual basis, which includes 8 established small businesses. More than 20 years after she decided to acquire her own business, Dorothy is living her dream.

In addition to her civic engagements, David is a member of the American Association of Notaries. She is licensed in six states as an insurance agent with New York Life insurance Company.

The LIA Board of Directors extends a hearty welcome to Dorothy M. David. ❖

**Historical Marker, continued from page 1**

throughout Southside Virginia,” explained Angelita Reyes, Founder and CEO of Literacy InterActives. Parker Sydnor is among the small and rare group of African American funereal stonecutters recognized in Commonwealth history. Virginia’s Illustrious historical highway marker program, which began in 1927 is the oldest



such program in the nation. There are more than 2,500 official state markers for famous people, places, and events.

After the morning ceremony, attendees gathered at a catered lunch hosted by LIA. Mattie M. Cowan, emcee for the lunch program, thanked St. Matthew Baptist church congregation for the rainy weather use of their facilities at the dedication site. In addition to community support, the dedication event received support from Food Lion, Galleria on the Lake, Benchmark Community Bank, and Walmart Corporation. Corporate, community and private support attest to the diverse economic and cultural appeal of the Sydnor historic preservation project. Stakeholders attended a late afternoon wine and cheese gathering at Galleria on the Lake, hosted by art gallery owner and businesswoman, Linda Davenport.

A post on the Parker Sydnor Historic Site Facebook page said of the dedication event and Parker Sydnor, “a beautiful reminder that where we come from is not always determinative of where we end up! Thank you to all who came to the dedication ceremony!”

\*The editor delayed the annual issue of *LIA at Work* in order to feature the Virginia historical marker dedication event.

**TEXT OF THE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKER**

**Patrick Robert “Parker” Sydnor (1854-1950) U-95**

Born enslaved on one of William Sydnor’s plantations in Halifax County, Patrick Robert “Parker” Sydnor became literate at a freedmen’s school after the Civil War. A preacher and farmer in his youth, he began crafting grave markers in the 1890s and remained active until the 1940s. Sydnor won renown as a skilled stonecutter and engraver who made his work widely accessible. His designs and inscriptions memorialized the lives of African Americans across Southside Virginia. His home, the nearby Patrick Robert “Parker” Sydnor log cabin, is listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.



**DORIS HESTER RECEIVES DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD**

Literacy InterActives presented its first distinguished service award to Mrs. Doris Hester at the historical highway marker dedication luncheon that took place in October 2015. LIA’s theme is “bridging our communities” through service to create positive change at home and wherever

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**LIA Golf Tournament, continued from page 1**



Team Wilkerson at the LIA Golf Tournament Fundraiser in South Boston, VA. October 2014

***It’s Not Too Late, But...***

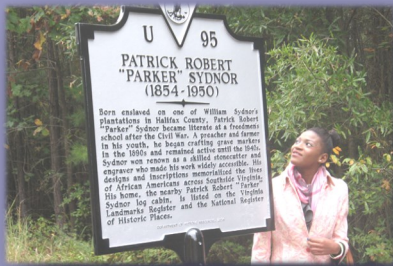
***When I returned to the cabin site in 2015, after two rainy and colder than normal winters in southern Virginia, I was prepared to see more deterioration than the Sydnor log cabin has actually suffered. Nevertheless, we feel the urgency to begin stabilization and restoration of the cabin in 2016. Visit LIA’s Facebook page for updates on the 2016 Building Fund Campaign!***

***Dr. Peter V. Bergstrom  
Literacy InterActives, Inc.***

site will also generate economic development assets for Southside Virginia because of its organic appeal. Visitors will engage with educational as well as recreational interactive displays and activities. Virginia Tech’s Community Design Assistance Center crafted the site’s architectural master plan that includes a seasonal public history center, heritage trails, a picnic area, and outdoor classrooms. ❖



# “Bridging Our Communities”



Ummu Thomas,  
3rd great granddaughter of  
Parker Sydnor



LIA Distinguished Service Award  
Community Humanity Unity



Mrs. Doris Hester, lifelong educator



## 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.

*Coming in October 2016!*  
**Second Annual  
LIA Golf Tournament  
Fundraiser  
Green's Folly Golf Course  
South Boston, VA**



1st place Winner: Green's Folly Ladies  
Janet Johnson, Paigie Allnutt,  
Wanda Jeffress and Norma Chaney



2nd place Winner: TWIGS  
Myra Smith, Shirley Cook,  
Valerie Willis and Carmella Hart

### *Special Thanks!*

**Arizona State University  
Carnegie Humanities  
Investment Fund 2014 - 2016**

Angelita Reyes, PhD; Project Director  
Craig Barton; Daniel Gilfillan, PhD  
Claudia Sadowski-Smith, PhD  
Douglas B. Sydnor, FAIA  
Mark Tebeau, PhD  
Shannon Lujan, ABD

### Distinguished Service Award, continued from page 3

humanity takes us. The award recognizes individuals who through their dedication and valuable contributions to the community, have made remarkable differences in our lives. One such extraordinary person, is Doris Hester. A retired high school principal and mathematician, Mrs. Hester is a shining beacon for positive social change through service and civic engagement.

Doris Hester attended the historic West End High School in Mecklenburg County. She was awarded a prestigious National Science Foundation fellowship to Syracuse University from where she graduated with a Masters degree in mathematics.

In 1996, Doris Hester was an Olympic Torch bearer. Out of a

nationwide search, she was chosen as a “community hero” to carry, or run with, the Olympic torch in its 15,000-mile relay across communities in America.

Doris Hester serves on many organizational, church, voter registration, and civic boards that include LIA and the Mecklenburg County YMCA Board of Directors of which she is president. Although she has retired from being a high school principal, Mrs. Hester has not retired from practicing and believing in service to humanity, the empowerment of education, and interracial unity for positive intergenerational social transformation.

Literacy InterActives salutes Mrs. Doris Hester. ❖