

# LIA at Work

## Literacy InterActives, Inc.

501(c)(3) nonprofit organization • [www.literacyinteractives.org](http://www.literacyinteractives.org)

*Sponsor of the Parker Sydnor Historic Preservation Site*

V O L . 3   N O . 3   2 0 2 4

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## Literacy InterActives Receives \$258,000 African American Civil Rights Grant for Preservation of Historic Sydnor Cabin

With the determination and grit of a marathon runner, Literacy InterActives (LIA) has proudly secured a substantial milestone by acquiring \$258,000 from the National Park Service African American Civil Rights grant program.

In partnership with Preservation Virginia,



Photo Credit: Peter Hedlund, *Encyclopedia Virginia*.

LIA will effectively use the funds to preserve the historic Parker Sydnor log cabin in Mecklenburg County, Virginia. This funding, administered by the National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior through the Historic Preservation Fund, will include engineering, architectural services, complete building stabilization, and rehabilitation.

The Parker Sydnor historic site, a remarkable part of the 19th- and modern 20th-

century civil rights era, is associated with framing civil rights through literacy and education. Patrick Robert "Parker" Sydnor (1854-1950) was a literate African American farmer, preacher, and well-known stone carver of grave markers. He was born enslaved on a William Sydnor plantation in Virginia. Parker Sydnor's remarkable journey from slavery to literacy, learning to read and write at a Freedmen's Bureau School after the Civil War, is a testament to the transformative empowerment of literacy for African Americans after Emancipation.

"We are confident in our collaboration with Preservation Virginia as we work together to achieve meaningful results on this unique preservation project, the first of its kind that focuses on African American historic preservation in Mecklenburg County," said Dr. Angelita Reyes, executive director of Literacy InterActives.

"This project represents the inclusive history of Civil Rights and education in Virginia and beyond. Our public programs and community engagement highlight timely, multi-layered approaches to literacy. Literacy is more than reading a newspaper or a book in today's world. Literacy is lifelong learning about the world around us—for example,

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## Of a More Perfect Union: VA250 and Beyond

On July 4, 2026, the United States will commemorate the 250th or the Semiquincentennial of the Declaration of Independence. According to Rosie Rios, Chair of the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission, "America's 250th anniversary is about more than reflecting on our past; it's about honoring the contributions of individuals who built this country, the innovations that put this country on the map...."

Given Virginia's leadership role in the nation's founding, the Virginia 250 Commission (VA250) is at the forefront of this national commemoration. VA250 has chosen "To Form a More Perfect Union" as its theme. The Parker Sydnor Historic Site project in Mecklenburg

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## Advisory Council News!

LIA has an Advisory Council of local, regional, and national consultants who help us to pursue our mission with new directions that will advance our community initiatives and collaboration.

Come and join us!

Contact:

Cameron Patterson at  
434 426 6606 or email:  
info@literacyinteractives.org



Select Highlights for  
Literacy InterActives, Inc.

National Park Service African  
American Civil Rights Grant, 2024  
Longwood University Internship  
Program, 2023

National Park Service Underground  
Railroad Network to Freedom  
Grant, 2023

"This is Us: Preserving Our Church  
Histories," Virginia Humanities  
Grant, 2021-2022

American Association for State and  
Local History Leadership in  
History Award, 2021

Black History Month Series  
*The Mecklenburg Sun* and  
*The News & Record*, 2020-present

National Trust for Historic  
Preservation Diversity Scholars  
Award, 2020

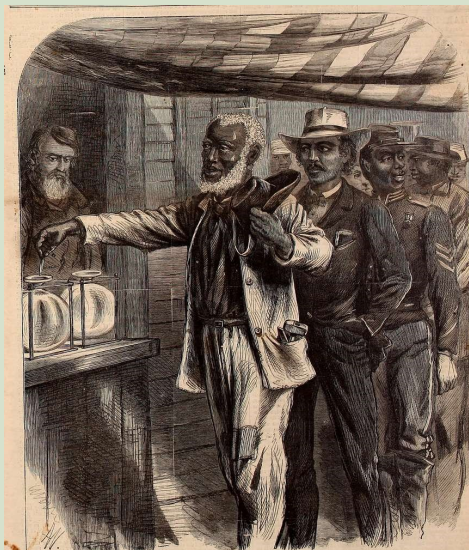


To support the historic  
preservation efforts of LIA,  
tax deductible monetary gifts  
according to tax guidelines, may be  
made via PayPal at  
Literacy InterActives at  
<https://www.paypal.com/us/fundraiser/charity/1858117>

VA250, from page 1

County, Virginia, is set to make a significant impact with its plans for VA250.

From perspectives of freedom, diversity, belonging, and democracy, the 250th means more than the historical moment of July 4th. "By telling everyone's story, we can tell a story so rich, so intricate, that it transcends the divisions of the past and binds us together in a shared future," said Senator Mamie Locke, VA250 Vice Chair. "Commemorating Virginia's history involves triumph and tragedy, and its richness lies in acknowledging all perspectives." 🌟



"The First Vote" *Harper's Weekly*, vol. 11, no. 568 (November 16, 1867). Courtesy Library of Congress



### LIA Intern Hailey Belote

created the LIA StoryMap tracing Underground Railroad routes in Mecklenburg County, Virginia.

See: ArcGIS StoryMap at <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/17ba149ad5b046b8a639bcc40a837301>

The StoryMap indicates runaway slave ads and the routes that identified freedom seekers took from and through Southside Virginia escaping North to freedom. Freedom seekers who could read or write enabled their self-liberation and the civil rights of literacy.

## Meet a New LIA Board Member!



### Karen Lewis

Karen Lewis is an Associate Professor of Architecture at The Ohio State University. Her research and teaching address how visual and information systems shape, create, and inhabit architectural spaces.

Early in her academic career, Professor Lewis was selected as a finalist to design the Flight 93 National 9/11 Memorial in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Her proposal "Memory Trail," was one of five chosen from more than 1,000 international entries. Ms. Lewis's current research visualizes the Underground Railroad (URR) and slavery through mapping, drawing, and writing. Her dedication to the project has brought her to Mecklenburg County in Southside Virginia where the URR existed for African Americans in their struggle for freedom during enslavement. In addition, Karen is eager to uncover more about her family history, which includes enslaver ancestors in Southside. Karen brings enthusiasm and an impressive skill set to our mission.

We welcome Karen Lewis to the LIA board of directors!



we have the literacy of technology, cell phone usage, financial literacy, health literacy, cultural literacy and so on. Historic preservation is one of the “literacies” that enables the empowerment of place and people.”

The nation’s first statewide nonprofit historic preservation leader founded more than 100 years ago, Preservation Virginia, is a privately-funded organization seeking to inspire the public in supporting, fostering, and sustaining Virginia’s historic places.

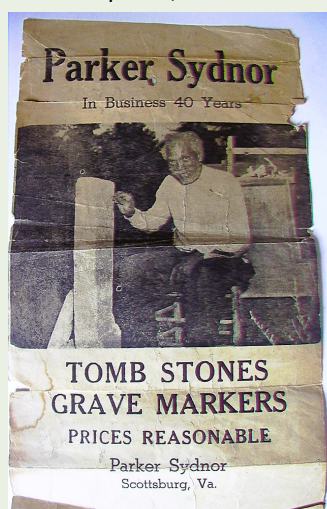


Its mission engages with leadership in advocacy, education, revitalization, and stewardship.

“As Virginia’s statewide preservation nonprofit, a priority for us is to offer support to local organizations working to preserve unique historic sites in their communities,” said Elizabeth S. Kostelny, CEO of Preservation Virginia. “We’re thrilled to have assisted with the African American Civil Rights Grant. This is an important next step in making this special place more accessible to the public.”

The name, “literacy interactives,” represents the legacy of Parker Sydnor who valued reading and writing. Born enslaved, he didn’t have legal access to schooling until after the Civil War. The naming also engages with the heritage of all African Americans connected to civil rights and the historical struggle of getting an education in the context of slavery and the Jim Crow era.

In 1946, Paul Saunier Jr., a reporter from the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, interviewed Parker Sydnor in Southside.



Saunier traveled from Richmond, VA, to the small town of Scottsburg in Halifax County to meet Parker Sydnor and learn about his “odd” business of carving cemetery headstones.

In the interview, Sydnor expressed his dedication to carving headstones for his people. During enslavement, African Americans couldn’t have cemeteries with headstones. We have a published photo of Parker Sydnor and his business

flyer that the Saunier family generously gifted to LIA.

Sydnor’s mission was to ensure that writing or carving the names of the deceased in stone was a way they could be remembered and honored by their families, churches, and communities. Although many of Sydnor’s headstones

may have crumbled over time, a number of them still mark their presence throughout southern Virginia, reminding us of the rich history and heritage of his work.

As the steward of the Parker Sydnor log cabin, LIA aims to open the historic site to the public. “We want to invite everyone to engage with each other at a new community gathering space that promotes education, diversity, and belonging,” said Dr. Reyes. The Sydnor historic site has moved from being an endangered place to a future site of community impact.

The National Park Service announced its Fiscal Year 2024 awards of \$23.4 million to 39 projects in 16 states and the District of Columbia as part of the Historic Preservation Fund’s African American Civil Rights Grant Program, which focuses on the preservation of sites and stories directly associated with the struggle of African Americans to gain equal rights.

To learn more or join us in helping to make Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream a reality, contact Dr. Angelita Reyes at 434 738 5788 or visit <https://literacyinteractives.org/>. Your involvement is crucial to our success! 🌱

**Welcome!**

**New LIA Advisory Council Members**

**Becky Carter and Robert Thaxton**

**Literacy  
InterActives**

### **Sheriff R.W. "Bobby" Hawkins Jr. Visits Sydnor Historic Site and Becomes a Bestie**

LIA board members Sarah Jencks and Karen Lewis, joined by Glenn E. Reyes, president of the local NAACP chapter,



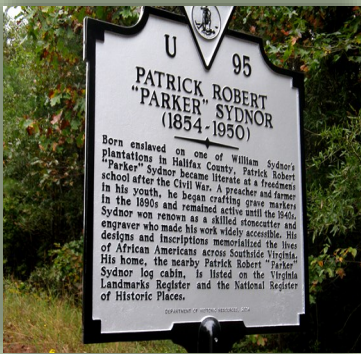
traveled to Boydton, VA to meet with the sheriff of Mecklenburg County, R.W. “Bobby” Hawkins Jr. They consulted on the goals of the Parker Sydnor historic preservation and interactive literacy project. The meeting provided an opportunity to showcase how project collaboration and com-

munity involvement can also foster sustainable economic development in the county. Sarah and Karen had an inspiring and productive afternoon with the sheriff.

Thank you, Sheriff Hawkins! 🌱



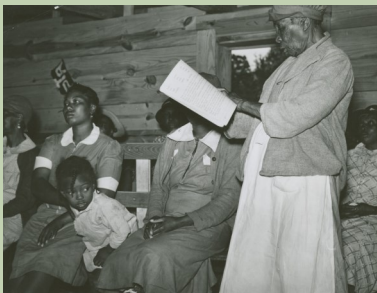
**“In the 21st century literacy is more than reading a newspaper or a book.”**



The Virginia historical highway marker commemorates the Parker Sydnor historic preservation site for statewide significance and national integrity.  
Photo courtesy of Ania Rzeszutko



Community workday at the Parker Sydnor historic site. Volunteers stabilize the log cabin for historic preservation. LIA has received a significant National Park Service grant.



An 82 year-old woman learns to read in the 1930s. Literacy was an essential part of freedom and civil rights for African Americans.  
Courtesy of The New Public Library on Unsplash



In today's world literacy includes new learnings, new applications, and being accurately informed via reliable interactive media,



Under the direction of Dr. Audrey Horning and doctoral student Graham Callaway undergraduate students from William & Mary participate in an archaeological survey at the Parker Sydnor historic site.



Becky Carter, LIA Advisory Council Member, visits the Parker Sydnor log cabin. Mrs. Carter brings her expertise and enthusiasm to the preservation initiative.



The legacy of empowering descendant communities is upheld through great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren of Parker Sydnor (1854-1950) and Betsy Burwell Sydnor (1871-1919). (Left to right): Glenn E. Reyes, U.S. Department of Homeland Security federal agent (ret.); Dr. Angelita D. Reyes, university professor emerita; Thurston G. Reyes, lighting designer; and Alexandria J. Schroeder, lawyer.



**“So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.” Baha’i Writings**