



VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Story of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 29, 2012

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Virginia Historical Society Honors Nine with Special Awards Winners from Across the State Include Students, Educators, Authors, Volunteers, and Philanthropists

Richmond, VA—At a special luncheon on July 18, 2012, the Virginia Historical Society (VHS) presented awards to individuals who have made significant contributions to research, education, and the mission of the society. A total of nine VHS awards were presented to teachers, a collector, an author, students, volunteers, and staff.

“It is in history that many of us find comfort, that we find meaning,” Dr. Paul Levensgood, VHS president and CEO, said to award winners and their guests, trustees, and staff present at the event in July. “We are here as a refuge and as a place to learn and put our lives in context. What else but history, and perhaps faith, allows us to do that? With these awards handed out today you will see those who have excelled in the fields of scholarship, service, and support of the Virginia Historical Society.”

Venu Katta, a student at Mathematics and Science High School at Clover Hill in Chesterfield County, was awarded the 2011 Bobby Chandler Student Award. This award, made possible by the Kip Kephart Foundation, is given to a secondary school history student who demonstrates intelligence, creativity, and research skills using primary source materials. Katta was recognized for his work on an applied history class project, “Catherine Street, Detroit 1930, A Community Analysis: Convergence of Immigration, Migration, and Perseverance.” Katta’s project examined a single neighborhood composed of Eastern European immigrants and African American migrants from Alabama. Katta is the seventeenth recipient since this award was created in 1996. Six out of the last seven Bobby Chandler Student Award winners have attended Clover Hill High School.

Dr. Allen Frey of Manakin was awarded the 2011 Lora Robins Award for his work as a collector, preservationist, and educator. The Lora Robins Award, created in 2000, recognizes an individual who best emulates Lora Robins’s splendid leadership, generosity, and foresight in collecting the evidence of Virginia’s history for the benefit of future generations. For more than twenty-five years, Frey has been collecting historic items relating to the American presidency and political campaigning. He has willingly shared his extensive personal collection and knowledge with interested persons and organizations, including several collaborations with the VHS.

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David Paterson of the Naval Education and Training Command in Norfolk was awarded the 2011 Historical Mystery Prize. In August 2011, the VHS unveiled the new online contest that would recognize the most persuasive argument made to answer the featured mystery, a particularly thorny unresolved issue from history. The first mystery the VHS put forward concerned a letter written in 1807 by President Thomas Jefferson to his treasury secretary, Albert Gallatin, in which Jefferson included a cryptic comment that read, “The appointment of a woman to office is an innovation for which the public is not prepared, nor am I.” The VHS was looking for the identity of the woman to whom the president was referring. Paterson used contemporary newspaper articles and correspondence in the National Archives to prove—within two weeks of the VHS posting the challenge—that Jefferson was referring to Rebecca Long, the widow of Henry Long, who had been the keeper of the lighthouse in Wilmington, North Carolina.

Rebecca L. Donlon, a teacher at Liberty Middle School in Fairfax County, was awarded the Brenton S. Halsey Teaching Excellence Award. For sixteen years, the VHS has awarded the Brenton S. Halsey Teaching Excellence Award to a Virginia educator who displays scholarship, enthusiasm, and creativity in the classroom. For 2011, the award—which is named in honor of former chairman and long-time friend of the society Brenton Halsey—was presented to Donlon for her work as the Collaborative Team Leader for 8th grade civics. Donlon oversees civics instruction for the entire school, which includes students with diverse backgrounds and students with special needs.

Lauren Brown, a sixth grade student at Paul Laurence Dunbar Middle School in Lynchburg, was awarded the 2011 Anne R. Worrell Middle School Student Award. The Anne Worrell Award is given to a middle school student who exemplifies distinction in historical research and scholarship. Applicants must submit a paper or classroom project that is creative, uses primary source materials, and demonstrates an understanding of some facet of American history. The award is named in honor of Charlottesville resident Anne Worrell, a former member of the board of trustees, current honorary vice chairman, and long-time VHS supporter. Levenson said Brown’s teacher, Keith Bennett, commended her work on a documentary film, “Barbie: A Controversial Icon.” In her film, Brown examined the history of the doll, which grew to become incredibly popular with children and collectors alike. Levenson said it was “an honest and direct look at the history of the doll and the various controversies—done without indignation or parody.” This is the third year that the VHS has given the Anne R. Worrell Middle School Student Award.

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Dr. Keith Dickson, faculty member of the Joint and Combined Staff Officer School of the Joint Forces Staff College in Norfolk, was awarded the 2011 Richard Slatten Award. The Richard Slatten Award, made possible by a generous bequest from the estate of Kathleen L. Slatten and the Slatten-MacDonald Fund of The Community Foundation *Serving Richmond and Central Virginia*, recognizes distinguished contributions to Virginia biography. Dr. Dickson's book, *Sustaining Southern Identity: Douglas Southall Freeman and Memory in the Modern South*, has been highly praised. Levensgood shared what one reviewer said about the book. "Dickson's penetrating and skillful look at Douglas Freeman offers not only a discerning interpretation of the newspaper editor/historian and his work, but also a captivating lens through which to consider both Freeman's words and the sentiments that prompted them." Dickson is the fifteenth winner since the Richard Slatten Award was created in 1997. He joins a list of recipients that includes Civil War historian James I. Robertson, Jr., and Robert E. Lee scholar Elizabeth Brown Pryor.

In 1985, the William M. E. Rachal Award was established to honor the overall best article to appear in the VHS journal, the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*. The 2011 award, named for Will Rachal, the editor of the journal from 1953 to 1980, was granted to Mark Sturges for his article, "Enclosing the Commons: Thomas Jefferson, Agrarian Independence, and Early American Land Policy, 1774-1789." The prize committee stated that Sturges demonstrates "an outstanding ability to explain clearly and in fairly simple terms early modern philosophies about natural rights, property, and Jefferson's changing ideas about whether local, centralized, or corporate authorities should control land distribution. Equally impressive is his use of a wide range of sources to explain Jefferson." Sturges is a doctoral candidate in American literature at Pennsylvania State University.

Every year the society recognizes the outstanding volunteer of the year with the Patricia Rodman and Martin Kirwan King Volunteer Award. The 2011 the award was given to Henrico County resident Lee Ball, who has been volunteering in the Advancement Office at the VHS for more than a year. Levensgood said, "From lending a hand on bus trips, to designing spreadsheets and streamlining data entry, Lee has done a little bit of everything. He comes in almost every Tuesday and Thursday, eats lunch at his desk, and is often one of the last people in the office to leave. He is a true asset to the VHS and the volunteer program."

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The Howson W. Cole Award was created to honor Howson Cole, senior archivist at the VHS for nearly four decades before he retired in 1991. The award recognizes staff members who have shown great dedication to the VHS and is not given every year—only years in which the award committee feels it is merited. The 2011 Howson W. Cole Award recipient is Louisa County resident Doris Delk. Levengood called Delk “the guiding force behind the VHS Museum Shop for nearly two decades” noting that under her supervision, the society’s e-commerce, wholesale, and royalties businesses were initiated. Delk retired in the spring of 2012.

Levengood concluded the luncheon and awards presentation by saying, “The VHS could not accomplish our goal of linking past with present and inspiring future generations if it were not for the many people we have gathered and recognized here today. All of the award winners should be proud of helping the VHS connect people to America’s past by telling the unparalleled story of Virginia.”

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For more than 180 years, the **Virginia Historical Society** (VHS) has been connecting people to America’s past through the unparalleled story of Virginia. The VHS—a history museum and research library—features award-winning exhibitions that are entertaining and educational for visitors of all ages. The Society is the only museum with all of Virginia’s history under one roof—all centuries, all regions, and all topics are covered. Although designated the Official State Historical Society, the VHS is a privately funded non-profit organization that relies on contributions from individuals, corporations, and foundations to sustain its operations. The VHS is located at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond’s Museum District. Admission is free. Museum hours are Monday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday 1 p.m.–5 p.m. Library hours are Monday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. For more information, call (804) 358-4901, visit www.vahistorical.org, or find the VHS on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

