



# VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The Story of Virginia*

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## **Virginia Historical Society Honors Twelve with Special Awards Winners from Across the State Include Students, Educators, Collectors, Authors, Historians, and Volunteers**

Richmond, VA—At a luncheon in July, the Virginia Historical Society (VHS) presented awards to eleven individuals and one group who have made significant contributions to research, education, and the mission of the society. The VHS presented eleven different 2012 awards to teachers, a collector, a historian, students, a volunteer, 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. “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.”

“The VHS is an extraordinary resource,” said Pam Kiecker Royall, Ph.D., the keynote speaker at the event. “There is so much great work being done.”

The Distinguished History Service Award was presented to the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission. The commission, established in 2006 by the Virginia General Assembly, was recognized for its thoughtful deployment of resources to create a wide variety of statewide programs that engaged all Virginians in a reflection of the transformative Civil War years in American history.

Calling the Distinguished History Service Award “very special,” Levensgood said this was only the second time the VHS has bestowed the honor. “It is impossible to quantify what the commission’s work has meant to our state and our nation. It is impossible to know exactly what the commission’s legacy will be. But it is the opinion of the Virginia Historical Society that it will be profound.”

Members of the Commission present to accept the award included Vice Chairman Sen. Charles J. Colgan, Sr., Sen. Walter A. Stosch, Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr., and Jack Ackerly, as well as staff members Dick Hickman and Cheryl Jackson.

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Megan Ganley, a Vienna resident and junior at Fairfax County's Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, was given the 2012 Bobby Chandler High School Student Award. Made possible by the Kip Kephart Foundation, this award is presented to a secondary school history student who demonstrates intelligence, creativity, and research skills using primary source materials. Ganley's paper, "Real American Heroes," surveyed and analyzed comic books from the golden age of American comics, the 1930s and 1940s. Ganley examined changes in American culture, exploring such themes as immigration, women's rights, patriotism, urban crime, and the changing nature of the American Dream.

M. Cricket Bauer of Alexandria was awarded the 2012 Lora Robins Award for her work as a collector and preservationist. This award, created in 2000, recognizes an individual who best emulates Lora Robins's leadership, generosity, and foresight in collecting Virginia's history for the benefit of future generations. When Bauer sought to honor the memory of her late husband, Brian Pohanka, she acquired at auction the near complete Zouave uniform of Charles S. Hopkins of the 5th New York Volunteer Infantry, along with numerous associated pieces, including a photograph of the young soldier and his letters home from Virginia. After caring for these Civil War artifacts for some years, Bauer endeavored to find the best home for the collection—a place where they would be permanently preserved and professionally maintained, as well as appropriately shared with a broad audience, including students. That proved a long and involved process, as Bauer sought out institutions, visited them, and interviewed appropriate staff.

"We are so grateful that such exacting analysis led her ultimately to the Virginia Historical Society," said Levengood. "We in turn feel it most appropriate to honor all of her efforts with an award that recognizes a true commitment to collecting the evidence of Virginia's past and to sharing that in an informed way with many of our fellow citizens."

Every year the society recognizes an outstanding volunteer with the Patricia Rodman and Martin Kirwan King Volunteer Award. The 2012 the award was given to Donald Tobias of Henrico County, who for almost twenty years has been a volunteer for the VHS. As a garden volunteer at Virginia House, Tobias worked on projects including rebuilding a gazebo, constructing storage sheds, and building stone walls. Since 2009, he has also been volunteering with the VHS building maintenance staff.

Kathleen Nealon, Ph.D., a teacher at Fairfax County's North Springfield Elementary School in Springfield, was awarded the Brenton S. Halsey Teaching Excellence Award. For seventeen years, the VHS has presented the award—named in honor of former chairman, current honorary vice chairman, and long-time friend of the society Brenton Halsey—to a Virginia educator who displays scholarship, enthusiasm, and creativity in the classroom. The 2012 award was presented to the Burke resident for her work conducting staff development workshops for her colleagues showing how to use primary sources, replica artifacts, paintings, and maps to engage young learners.

Eleanor Matthews, a Lynchburg resident and sixth-grade student at Paul Laurence Dunbar Middle School, was awarded the 2012 Anne R. Worrell Middle School Student Award, the fourth given by the VHS since it was created. This award is presented to a student who exemplifies distinction in historical research and scholarship in middle school. Applicants must submit a paper or classroom project that is creative, uses primary source materials, and demonstrates an understanding 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. Matthews's video project, "The Dust Bowl: A Turning Point in American History," was not a class assignment but an optional project. The selection committee praised the submission, noting it was "visually compelling, with an especially well done annotated bibliography."

Fairfax County resident Cynthia A. Kierner, a professor of history at George Mason University, was awarded the 2012 Richard Slatten Award. This 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. Kierner's book *Martha Jefferson Randolph, Daughter of Monticello*, has been highly praised. A book reviewer complimented Kierner, saying her account of Martha's life is well-reasoned and persuasive. "She is able to present Martha as compelling, multi-dimensional, and, ultimately, sympathetic. This book is a welcome addition to Jeffersonian scholarship." Kierner is the sixteenth winner of the Richard Slatten Award, which was created in 1997.

In 1985, the VHS established the William M. E. Rachal Award to honor the overall best article to appear in the society's *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*. The 2012 award, named for the editor of the journal from 1953 to 1980, was granted to Linda Rowe for her article, "Gowan Pamphlet: Baptist Preacher in Slavery and Freedom." The prize committee said about Rowe, "We admire the scholarly detective work that Rowe performed to shed meaningful light on the biography of an individual for whom the documentary record is thin. We found her work to be judicious and carefully researched, but also fresh and creative." Rowe is a Williamsburg resident and a historian for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

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 a staff member who has shown great dedication to the VHS. It is not given every year—only years in which the society feels it is merited. The 2012 Cole Award recipient is Johnnie Taggart of Henrico County. Cole hired Taggart in March 1987. For two decades, she provided essential support for the processing and preservation efforts of the manuscript department, handling and describing personal papers, business records, and legal documents. In 2006 she was promoted to assistant archivist, the title she held when she retired in June 2013.

The VHS established the C. Coleman McGehee Award in 1995 to recognize the best article in the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* written by a graduate student. The prize was created in memory of C. Coleman McGehee, who served as president of the society from 1992 to 1994, and after retiring as a banker, went back to school as a history graduate student. The 2012 McGehee award was presented to Mark Sturges for his article “Enclosing the Commons: Thomas Jefferson, Agrarian Independence and Early American Land Policy, 1774–1789.” The article appeared in volume 119, number 1, of the *Virginia Magazine*. The prize committee recognized that Sturges “shows an outstanding ability to explain clearly early modern philosophies about natural right, 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, from English and Virginia history and law, to literary tropes and Jefferson’s experiences travelling in Europe.” Sturges is a doctoral candidate in American literature at Pennsylvania State University.

Levengood also recognized two current VHS employees who won the 2012 President’s Award for Excellence. Jennifer Nesossis of Richmond is the society’s programs officer. She has been on staff since 2003, when she started as a work study student, and, most recently, has been heavily involved with the VHS website redesign. Paulette Schwarting, director of technical services, has worked at the VHS for almost twenty-five years. The Henrico County resident is responsible for acquisition, cataloging, preservation, and conservation of published materials, including rare books. The President’s Award for Excellence is given for outstanding performance and special achievement. The recipients were nominated by their VHS peers.

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 182 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](http://www.vahistorical.org), or find the VHS on Facebook and Twitter.