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COVER PHOTOGRAPH by REBECCA D'ANGELO

CORRECTION

In our April issue we failed to attribute the photo of Hiram Steele on page 6 to our friends at the Library of Virginia. The attribution should have read: "Courtesy of the Library of Virginia".

NORTH OF THE JAMES

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Former Virginia State Penitentiary Site to Receive Historical Marker

by DALE M BRUMFIELD

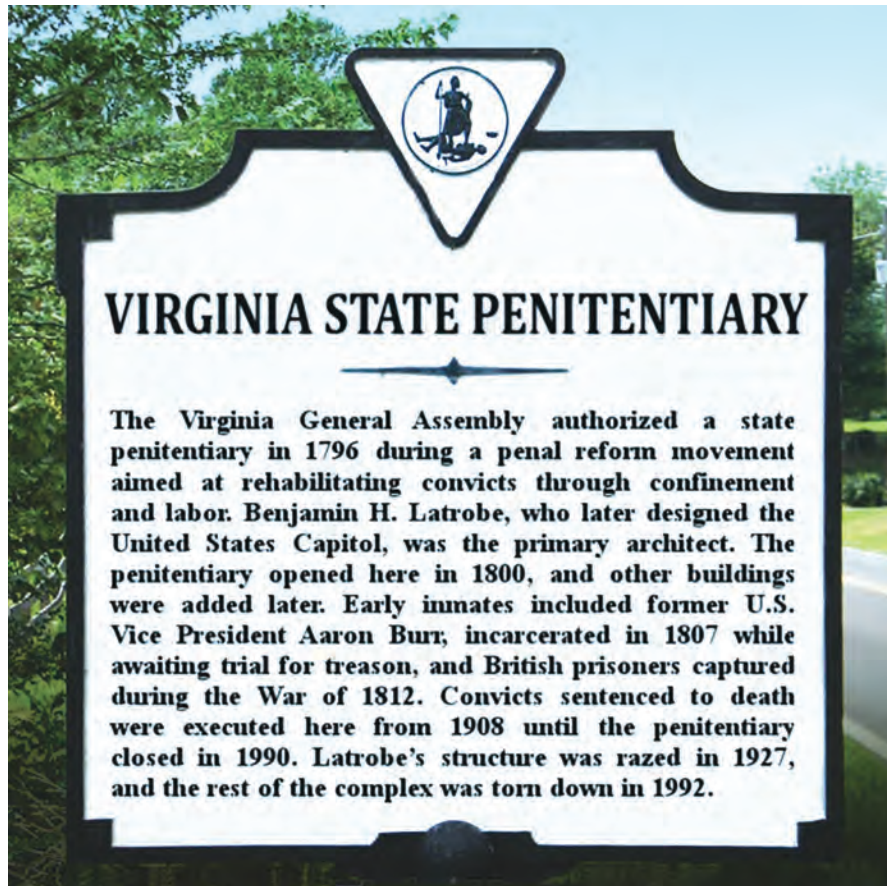
THE COMMONWEALTH of Virginia diligently maintains about 2,500 historical highway markers, commemorating a variety of bygone structures, people and events. But it was discovered quite surprisingly there was no sign or marker noting the former presence of the notorious Virginia Penitentiary, which sat for almost 192 years at Belvidere and Spring Streets in Richmond.

In fall, 2016 that will change. The Virginia Department of Historical Resources (DHR) has formally approved a historical marker, sponsored by this writer, to be placed on the penitentiary property with the kind permission of the current owner. And, a year later in fall, 2017, the first full history of the Virginia Penitentiary – also written by this writer – will be released by Arcadia Publishing, Inc.

“The Spring Street Hotel,” or “The Wall” was America’s first modern prison, but was later called “the most shameful prison in America” by the ACLU in the 1980s. It was the scene of violence, riots, fires, even an earthquake in 1888. Then one day it was gone – expunged in 1992 from the 12-acre property and replaced by Afton Chemical Company, a subsidiary of New Market, Inc.

The penitentiary was commissioned by the General Assembly in 1796 and designed by Benjamin H. Latrobe, who was also the second architect of the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington D.C. Construction on a hill overlooking the James River on the far western outskirts of town began in August, 1797.

The prison was the first to embrace Thomas Jefferson’s theory of labor in confinement, meaning the inmates worked during the day then spent night and Sundays in solitary. When the first 21 inmates were admitted in 1800, however, it became apparent there were problems. The solid oak cell doors had no windows, so guards had to open them to check the inmates, leaving them open to ambush. Eleven and twelve-year-olds were kept in the same cells with the adults. Clothes were made from a coarse German fabric and daily food rations consisted of mush, Indian bread, boiled potatoes



Mock-up of the proposed penitentiary historical marker.

and a “gill” (about a half-cup) of molasses. There was no heat in winter and no circulation in summer. Sewage was emptied from buckets into a nearby holding pond, where the stench became unbearable. It was hell on earth.

Former Vice President Aaron Burr was held in the penitentiary for over a month in 1807 as he awaited trial for treason. It was an improvement from his incarceration his first night in a downtown, vermin-infested 10-ft square debtor’s prison room that he had to share with another couple.

In 1865, when the confederates pulled out of Richmond in the face of Grant’s union army and set the riverfront warehouses on fire. The penitentiary guards also bolted, followed by all 287 inmates, taking an estimated 7,000 pairs of shoes with them. About 100 inmates were recaptured.

Two hundred thirty six condemned prisoners died in the electric chair in the basement of building A, including a mentally disabled black teenager named Winston Green, who – with no legal counsel – was sentenced to death

in 1908 for grabbing a young white girl by the hips.

In summer, 1968, 14 prisoners protesting unsanitary living conditions, low daily wages, corporal punishment and their denial of legal rights staged a sit-down strike in the penitentiary yard. Despite prison officials and the governor waving off the strike as insignificant, by August over 800 inmates joined in. The institution was locked down, and the ringleaders were stripped naked and placed in solitary confinement for up to 21 days in 110-degree cells. Some had no mattress; others had both hands temporarily duct-taped to the bars.

During the strike those in solitary confinement communicated with each other through a makeshift intercom system made by dipping the water out of the toilets and talking through the pipes. Punishment for “talking through the commodes” included being shot with tear gas and having the mattress taken away. In the 1970s several court cases emerged from that strike that improved prison living conditions nationwide, including the elimination of

bread and water as punishment.

The process of getting an historical marker installed begins with an application provided by the DHR on Kensington Avenue in Richmond. Their mission is to “foster, encourage, and support the stewardship of Virginia’s significant historic architectural, archaeological, and cultural resources.”

While any citizen or group can sponsor an application, there are very specific rules: a living person cannot be commemorated, and the event must have occurred at least fifty years ago. Likewise, a place or person must have attained its significance at least fifty years ago, although there are exceptions if the event, place, or person is of extraordinary historical significance. No topic will be considered by the Board if it is impossible to authenticate the information to their satisfaction. Marker verbiage cannot exceed 100 words.

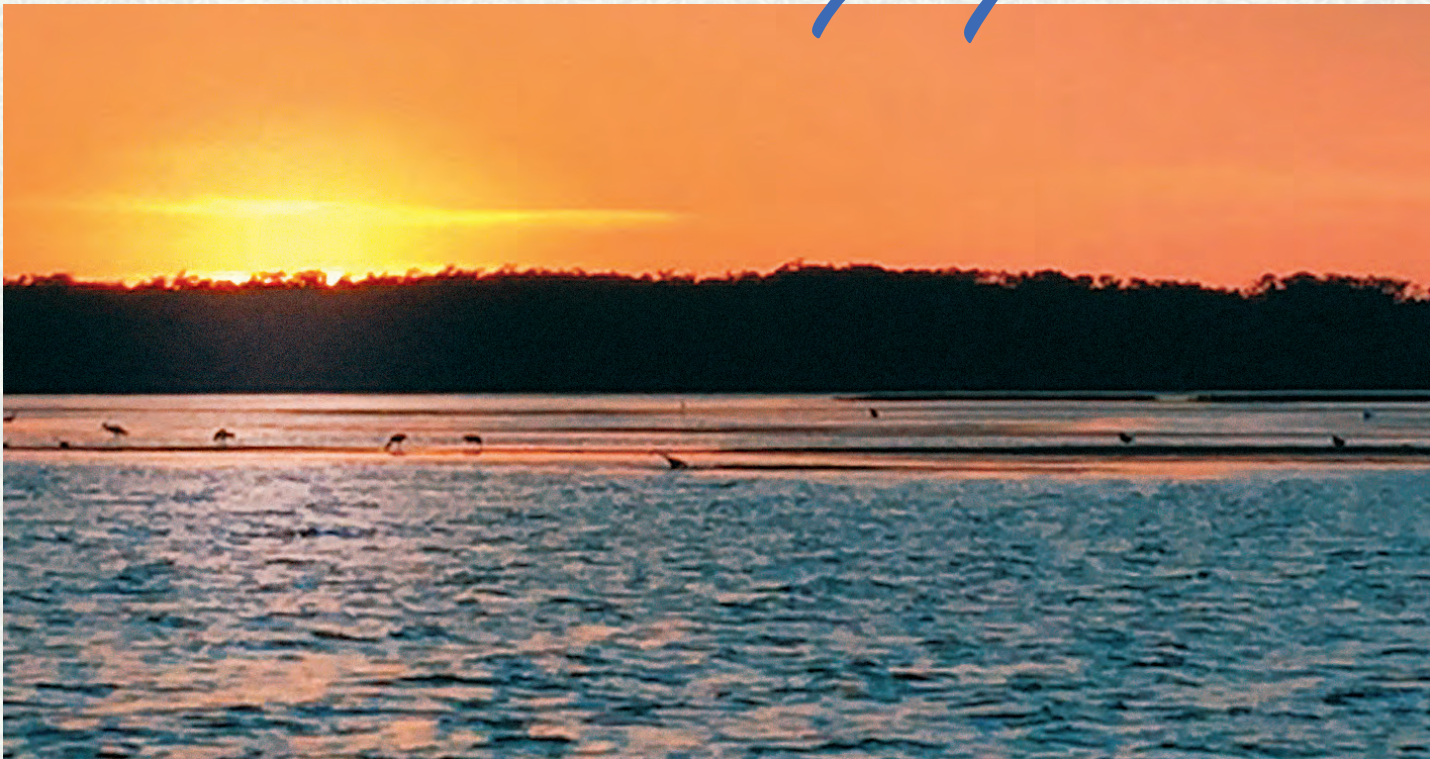
Once the completed application is received, the Marker Program Historian and Coordinator Dr. Jennifer Loux edits the proposed marker text for accuracy and in a manner designed to maximize the likelihood of its approval by DHR’s Marker Editorial Committee. That committee, made up of historians and copy editors, then evaluates the marker’s historical accuracy, writing style and level of significance. If the committee approves the project, it is presented to the Virginia Board of Historic Resources for ultimate approval at one of their quarterly meetings. Once approved, the marker is cast by Sewah Studios, a foundry in Ohio. Payment for the casting and installation – about \$1,800 – is the responsibility of the sponsor.

The penitentiary marker was approved by the DHR Board on June 16, 2016 at James Madison’s Montpelier, in Orange County. An unveiling ceremony will be announced after the marker is received.

“The marker program links important stories about Virginia’s past to the places where they unfolded, providing a unique and very visible way to educate the public,” says Dr. Loux. “The new Virginia State Penitentiary marker will be an excellent addition to our system because it will inform readers about an important institution that has vanished from the landscape, but should not be forgotten.” **■**

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ART

Gordon Parks: Back to Fort Scott At the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts



Husband and Wife, Sunday morning, Detroit, Michigan, 1950, Photograph, gelatin silver print

AN EXHIBITION featuring works by the noted African American photographer Gordon Parks will be on view from July 23 to October 30 at the VMFA. The 42 photographs that comprise *Gordon Parks: Back to Fort Scott* examine the realities of life in the segregated America of the fifties.

As the first African American photographer hired full time by Life magazine, Parks was frequently given assignments involving social issues affecting black America. For an assignment on the impact of school segregation, Parks returned to his hometown of Fort Scott, Kansas to reconnect with childhood friends – all of whom went to the same all-black elementary school. To hear their stories, Parks traveled to Kansas City, Saint Louis, Columbus, Detroit, and Chicago, and his narrative shifted its focus to the Great Migration north by African Americans. The resulting series of photographs were intended to accompany an article he planned to call “Back to Fort Scott,” but his story was

never published. Organized around each of these cities and families, this VMFA exhibit features previously unpublished photographs as well as a seven-page draft of Parks’ text for the article, and presents a rarely seen view of the everyday lives of African Americans years before the civil rights movement began in earnest.

A section of the exhibition is exclusive to this presentation. *Parks at Life: Works from VMFA’s Collection* includes eight photographs by Parks that appeared in subsequent photo essays

for Life, and copies of those issues will also be on display.

“We are honored to present an exhibition featuring works by Gordon Parks, one of the most celebrated African American artists of his time, whose photographs reveal so much about this significant moment in our nation’s history.” VMFA Director Alex Nyerges says. “We are also pleased that this exhibition gives us an opportunity to highlight photographs by Gordon Parks from our own collection alongside those from the Gordon Parks Foundation.”

A groundbreaking photographer, musician, writer, and film director, Gordon Parks used his talents to shape the public’s understanding of pressing social issues. Several of his photo essays that were published in Life magazine introduced millions of readers to ideas that challenged, as well as changed, the way they saw their nation and themselves. A pioneer among black filmmakers, Parks wrote and directed *The Learning Tree* (1969), which was based on his autobiography, and directed the popular movie *Shaft* (1971), which exemplified the blaxploitation genre and had an award-winning soundtrack. The Gordon Parks Foundation permanently preserves his work, makes it available to the public through exhibitions, books, and electronic media, and supports artistic and educational activities that advance what Gordon described as “the common search for a better life and a better world.” **NJ**





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National Night Out On MacArthur Avenue

MacArthur Avenue's National Night Out will be held rain or shine from 6-8 pm on August 2 in the 4000 block of MacArthur Avenue. One of the largest events of its kind in the Richmond metro area, this annual event draws hundreds of people to Bellevue's central commercial strip. Sponsored by the Bellevue Merchants Association and the Richmond Police Department,

it is an evening of fun activities—including the ever-popular misting tent. Many merchants on MacArthur in for the occasion, offering a variety of food and drinks, everything from root beer floats and cookies to snow cones, ice cream, garlic knots, strawberry lemonade and food samples. And it's all kid friendly.

Filipino Festival at Our Lady of Lourdes

Now in its 11th year, the Filipino Festival draws thousands of guests to the outdoor venue located in Northside at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church on Woodman Road. Virginia's largest Filipino Festival is known for its warm and friendly atmosphere, along with delicious dishes such as lumpia, lechon, empanada, pancit, and adobo, and nearly non-stop entertainment that includes traditional and contemporary performances, live bands, and plenty of line-dancing. There are also crafts and games for the children, plenty of vendors, and a 5K fun run-walk for muscular dystrophy.

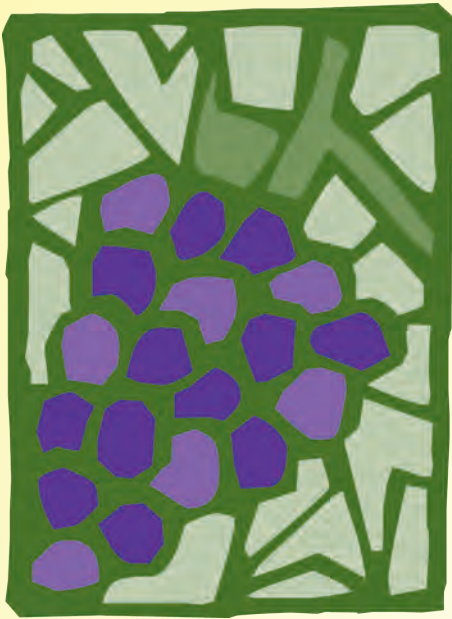
Kat Simons of Mix 98.1 and Bill Bevins, of Star 100.9 emcee musical performances by Remnants Rock-N-Soul, Soul Proprietors, Pinoy Republik, and D'Originals. Admission is free.

The Festival is the church's largest fund-raising event of the year. The Filipino Festival charities include the

Aileen Colorado Fund for Muscular Dystrophy, the Richmond chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the Hunter Holmes McGuire Veterans Hospital, the Lakeside Rescue Squad, and the church's community-wide, outreach programs. Additionally, the Festival provides scholarships to students at the parish's blue-ribbon school which is open to children of all faiths. This year, the Festival adds the Alzheimer's Association and Gallagher Speak Up. Past charities included natural disaster relief to Haiti and the Philippines, Reach Out for Life, and Lamb's Basket.

The Filipino Festival is from 5-10 pm, August 12, and 10am-10pm, August 13. For more information and full menu items, go to www.filipinofestival.org or phone (804) 262-7315.

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RAINBOW MINUTES

by BRIAN BURNS and JUDD PROCTOR

PFLAG Founder, Jeanne Manford



JEANNE MANFORD, A champion to the LGBT community and founder of the national support group Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), died on January 7, 2013 in her home in Dale City, California. She was 92.

In April, 1972, Jeanne wrote a letter to the New York Post after her son, Morty Manford, was beaten at a gay rights protest in New York City. In part it said,

"I have a gay son and I love him." Soon after, she marched alongside her son in the Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade holding a sign that read – "Parents of Gays: Unite in Support of Our Children." The crowd embraced her. Within the year she'd formed a parent support group in New York City, which blossomed into PFLAG.

Jeanne Manford was posthumously awarded the 2012 Presidential Citizens Medal by President Obama on February 15, 2013.

Flying the Flag of Pride

The rainbow has played a part in many myths and stories related to gender and sexuality in Greek, Native American, African and other cultures. In the LGBT community, it represents pride and diversity.

The original pride flag, designed by Gilbert Baker in 1978, had eight colors.

In 1979, the flag was modified to its current six-stripe format – red representing light, orange for healing,


yellow for the sun, green for natural serenity, blue for art, and purple for harmony. This design is officially recognized by the International Congress of Flag Makers.

In 1994, a huge rainbow flag thirty feet wide and one mile long was carried by 10,000 people in New York's Pride Parade, commemorating the 25th Anniversary of Stonewall.

The Word Gay

Possibly the first published appearance of the word "gay" as related to a same-sex relationship appeared in Gertrude Stein's "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene," published in 1922. Here Stein writes about a lesbian couple, Maud Hunt Squire and Ethel Mars, who met at the Cincinnati Art Academy in the 1890s. Both were artists in their own right and had visited Stein and her partner Alice B. Toklas at their salon in Paris.

In the piece Stein manages to use the word gay in almost every sentence. In part, it reads:

"They stayed there and were gay there, not very gay there, just gay there. They were both gay there, they were regularly working there, both of them cultivating their voices there, they were both gay there." 

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A SUMMER DAY IN BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

could last for close to an eternity if the weather was just right. Every moment of that kind of day—from the time the sun rose, until long after it slipped away into the lightning bug night—pulsed with enough sounds and sights and smells to fill a thousand lifetimes.



Dobby and his daughter Harper “working” at 10 Italian Cafe.

In the car with his parents and two older brothers, riding along Fairfield Avenue, he saw his own surname emblazoned onto the white sandstone of a gently curved building clad with glass bricks, which caused him a chill and a bolt of pride. At his grandmothers’ home in the neighborhood of Black Rock, he would walk to the bank of Ash Creek, a tidal stream where gulls

and egrets would feed. And when the tide went out, he could smell a combination of river rot and diesel fuel, and could see shopping carts and old tires embedded in the slick, blue-black

mud. On the opposite shore rose ancient towers of industry, a small skyline of factories, and farther upstream was the Bullard factory with its giant oval logo slapped on the side of a water tower like a massive eye that caught the real eye of this boy. Later, they would visit more family members who lived on the other side of Ash Creek a half mile to the east. Their home site was an urban oasis, with vegetable and flower gardens, and an old potting shed, built along the railroad tracks, and flanked on two sides by industrial buildings. He and his brothers, when the air vibrated with the diesel power of a locomotive, would get as close to those tracks as possible and watch the long procession of boxcars, each one emblazoned with an N and an H, monstrous letters, the signature of the New Haven Railroad created by Paul Rand, one of America’s preeminent graphic designers. But the boy knew nothing about that. He would watch simply those letters flicking by as the train’s speed increased, until it was a blur, except for that wordmark of NH. When the sun finally set and the coals of a fire burnt orange, his grandparents and parents and brothers and aunts and uncles, would skewer cubes of bacon, hold them close to the orange coals and let the grease drip on a solid slab of bread, then layer it with green pepper rings and thick-sliced tomatoes and sliced spring onion, and drip more bacon fat onto the vegetables, and then eat this Hungarian dish called greasy bread, and nothing else in the world ever tasted as good. And he would listen to the stories of his elders, three grandparents first-generation Hungarian, and Spike, the lone first-generation Irish grandfather. They would talk of distant times when battles were fought between kids from Hunktown and other kids from Micktown. And the boy’s ears were trained on the words, as if his eyes were looking at images. He would hear the clink of glasses half-filled with ice and Canadian Club, and someone would say, after taking that first satisfying sip, “Ah, cuts the grease.”

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN
PHOTOS BY REBECCA D'ANGELO

A LIFE IN DESIGN



Born Douglas William Dobe in Bridgeport, he is now sitting in a chair in his living room in an old house on the North Side. I've known Doug for more than 30 years, worked with him at Thalhimers in Sales Promotion (he was a paste up artist; I was a copywriter), and he's designed North of the James for about a decade, the entire "book", ads as well as editorial.

Though Doug only lived in Connecticut for four years before his family moved south to Annandale, Virginia, they would head north a couple times a year to visit family, often during the summers.

"I mentioned the New Haven Railroad cars going by, seeing that massive NH zooming by, orange and white, orange

and black," he says. "This stuff just spoke to me; it killed me."

In Connecticut, Doug would develop a lifelong love of the contrast between the natural and the industrial and how nature will always take back what humans have encroached on. "Till this day I'm still so fond of this interface between nature and man," he says. "I've always been fascinated with that. It always seems to be that interface where nature is taking back what man has done. I don't think it's some kind of noble lesson. I just think I've always loved that decay because it poses an interesting quandary to me, and I think that came from Ash Creek."

Bridgeport also informed him about where he had come from and who had

preceded him. "I think that coming from an ethnic background gives my past so much weight," he says. "All four grandparents came over as infants or young children. It's like you can almost reach back and touch it, it's that close.

And the Hungarian side also helped shape his world view. "Hungarians can be a pretty dark group of people," says Doug. "I hear it in Hungarian literature and music. It's a curious culture and I've got some of that in me. I have a real dark side to me. What I feel from the Hungarian side is a dim world view. Seeing things as they are, not polishing them up. Dark is dark and you reckon it and look at it and appreciate it for what it is."

Which is not to say that his relatives were dour. "My grandmother Helen, Ilona, was a very small, woman and she was alternately funny and weirdly stern," Doug says. "And she, like all of my grandparents, were very loving."

But it was his grandfather Spike, William Matthew Kane, who had the greatest influence on Doug. "He was a gentle, wonderful, kind man who I think of as my guardian angel," says Doug. "I sat in his lap when my grandmother passed and I watched him cry. He's the reason I cry when I get emotional. It was a gift from him. He was so funny, and a lot of my sense of humor that drives my daughter crazy is this nonsense he would talk. He would make up these stories about Mickey the Mope, and we would hear them over and over again. And I do the same thing with Harper, my daughter. Spike would see somebody on the street and make these comments about what was going on in their head or where they were going and we would be rolling, laughing. He was magic."

Doug grew up in Northern Virginia in a brand new split level in a subdivision called Willow Woods within the triangle formed by Fairfax, Annandale and Burke. Like a thousand other subdivisions popping up all over Northern Virginia in the sixties.

Even in elementary school, Doug was showing a shine as a graphic artist. "I felt like I wanted to be a graphic designer from a very early age," he says. "Whenever I drew pictures in art class,

I wanted to put words with it and I wanted them to feed off of each other. I don't remember being chastised for that, but I remember teachers saying, 'Just draw the picture, you don't have to make a story out of it.'"

And he would try to follow that advice, but then he was pulled into creating a narrative with words and images. "We were painting a landscape," Doug remembers. "And I purposely made the landscape very, very flat and kind of depressing looking. No bright colors. And I took a lyric from a Paul McCartney and wrote, 'it's just another day'. In my head it was supposed to capture something of the song at the time, it was like I was illustrating the song lyric. I couldn't just draw the landscape like everybody else; I had to make this statement of some sort."

In sixth grade when his class was told to draw Revolutionary War soldiers, Doug couldn't do just that. He drew the soldiers marching into battle, and then began inserting voice balloons and the men were suddenly talking about the reality of war. One soldier was saying how frightened he was of the impending fight. Another was in tears. And yet another simply said, Buck up.

"I already had this anti-authoritarian streak in me," says Doug. "I couldn't just draw the battle like everybody else was drawing it, I had to put my spin on it because I thought my spin was somehow important to get out to people."

But he did well in elementary school, had crushes on teachers and so on. Things went south, though, when he entered junior high and high school. That was in the early seventies and many schools were trying an experiment with open classrooms, an experiment that failed miserably. "I just got so bored," says Doug. "I wish I had just said, 'This is a road I've got to travel down,' but I couldn't and I tried."

Midway through his junior year, all of that changed. His reports cards would consistently be graced with Ds and Fs. It was near the end of a grading period and Doug was sitting with his family at the dinner table. When his father asked him what he thought his grades would be like, Doug said: "Probably about like usual."

"I remember my dad slamming his fork onto the plate and it bouncing up and almost hitting the ceiling he was so mad because he had tried so hard to get me to buckle down," he says. "And he said to me, 'Goddamn it, I'm going to have you in private school so fast your head is going to spin.'"

That was on a Thursday. The following Monday morning, Doug was taking a battery of tests in the administration building at Flint Hill Prep in Oakton.

"That turned me around," he says. "I've thanked my father for it several times, but at the time I hated his guts for it." Flint Hill had small classrooms with four walls and Doug found a cadre of friends and buckled down. He finished out his final years with As and Bs, grades that would enable him to attend Northern Virginia Community College for a year before he could get the necessary credits to enroll at Virginia Commonwealth University.

That move to the true South is when everything changed. Doug rode in the back seat as the car headed down I-95, but just before they got to Richmond his father pulled off to Route 1 to slow the pace. "This was a touching thing about my parents," Doug says. "I have a feeling that my dad suddenly went, 'Holy crap, we're almost there.' And he wanted to slow it down. That's something I would do if I were taking Harper away to another city."

As they cut over from Brook Road to Chamberlayne Avenue, Doug could see in the distance the fairly scant skyline in Richmond, but it was like seeing the Emerald City of Oz for the first time. "My heart felt like it was going to explode with joy," he says. "I thought, 'That's my new life right ahead of me.' I remember seeing this vista and it was a clear day. I knew in my heart it was going to be a new beginning for me, and I knew that it was important."

His father and mother helped him move his footlocker, television, dorm fridge into his room at Chalkley House a dorm that bordered Shafer Court, the very omphalos of VCU, in those years. The very next afternoon, Doug strolled down to Shafer Court where Sunset Lou & The Fabulous Daturas were busking in front of the Hibbs Building. They were singing about living and working in Crystal City and never seeing the light of day.

"And I remember my mouth dropping and going, 'Oh my God, I feel like I'm home. Oh my God, where am I?'" Doug says. "Richmond was mine. It felt like my city, and it kind of became my playground."

Because he didn't know many people during those first few weeks, Doug mounted his old Fuji and began biking



Dobey at home drawing out some ideas for a new project.

all over the city and beyond. "I found myself going way south on Southside down Jeff Davis on my bike and found myself going way north to Doswell," he says. "I was lonely and I was just starting to meet people so I did what I always used to do in Northern Virginia. I went for a bike ride. It burns out stuff, and it helps me clear my head. It's always been like a movie to me. This film strip of stuff going on and these cool things that would be nice to share with somebody until I realize that I'm sharing them with myself."

School itself—that first year, at any rate—was an absolute joy. "That was my art foundation year, which was like kindergarten," says Doug. "It was rigorous, but it was so much fun. You know, you draw and do projects, and there are no clients to please."

He remembers one of those projects vividly and the finished product alarmed the instructor.

"The assignment was simple," Doug says. "We had to transform a chair."

Doug's initial idea was to suspend a chair by guy wires off the side of Chalkley, positioned so that it would be impossible for anyone to sit in it. In the end, he figured it would require too much work.

And then like a light bulb going on in a thought balloon above his own head, Doug had an idea—he would electrify a chair. Not create an electric chair for executions, but actually electrify a chair. He liberated an old oak chair from the Cabell Library, a chair that bore the official seal of VCU's precursor, RPI. He went to the Sears then at Allen and Broad streets and bought a number of ceramic insulators, baling wire and some good-sized nails. "I nailed a bunch of insulators into the seat of the chair and a bunch of insulators up the ascenders of the back of the chair, and then strung baling wire between them," he says. He attached the two lead ends of baling wire to the cord from an old lamp, and then plugged it in. "The wire got so hot it just started glowing, and I

left it on for ten or fifteen minutes to see if it would do anything beyond glowing, but that's all it did."

So on the day of the critiques, after everyone else in the class had made their presentations, Doug presented his chair, which was sheathed in large black garbage bags. He asked someone to draw the blinds and turn off the lights. He then unveiled the transformed chair, and with a showman's aplomb plugged the chair into an outlet. Within seconds, it glowed like the coils of a toaster.

"My instructor started to freak out he said, 'Okay, okay that's great,'" Doug says. "And I said, 'Well, wait a second, wait for it.' And I took a piece of loose leaf paper and put it on the seat and it immediately caught fire. And he was like, 'Okay, okay, that's great. Can you put that out and unplug that?' So I should have gotten an A on it, but I got a B because my instructor asked me where I got the chair from and I told him I took it from the library. That was part of my budding punk rock persona. I was proud of the fact that I had stolen the chair from the university that was grading me on it. It spoke to shock value and performance and it was smart."

That persona he speaks was already being formed while he was in Northern Virginia. He would read *GQ* and *Esquire* for men's fashion, even worked for a short time at a men's clothing store. But his personal style was most informed by punk uniforms. "That would mold my sense of style," he says. "I adopted the skinny jeans and the deck shoes, the slip-ons. Personal style has always been a big deal to me. You develop a look, or you develop a uniform, or you develop a way of presenting yourself. And you throw curveballs into it sometimes. Today, it's black shoes and boots, jeans and a decent shirt."

Not long after moving into the dorm, Doug joined VCU's Concert and Dance Committee. During a meeting while they were discussing the upcoming Halloween Dance, which was going to feature The Ramones, they asked for a volunteer to do dressing room security. Doug's hand shot skyward.

The night of the performance, Doug was in the bowels of the old Franklin Street gym. "Dee Dee's drawing German propaganda on the chalk board," he remembers. "Joey is complaining about not having the right kind of mineral water. It was like watching a cartoon. I was going, 'Oh my God, these people are real human beings, they're not the guys on the record they're the guys in front of me.'"

A one point, Joey complained about his new leather jacket being too hot. Johnny asked to see the jacket. He held

it in his hands, brought a switchblade out of his pocket, flicked it open and began carving the blaze orange lining out of the jacket. And then he tossed the tailored leather jacket back to Joey. "It won't be hot anymore," he said.

"I was like stupid, wide-eyed, I couldn't believe it," Doug recalls.

And the evening got even better. As fate would have it, that same night on network television they were running a film with Kiss and the Ramones wanted to watch it. But there was no TV in the old Franklin Street Gym. "And I was like, 'Well I've got a TV in my dorm,'" says Doug. "And they said, 'Will you get it?' So I left there walked half a block to my dorm unplugged my TV, carried it back to the gym, plugged it in and said, 'It's black and white.' It was a little black and white TV. It was this pivotal moment. Any intelligent person knows that the people on the records are just people. But to actually experience that with these guys who were such cartoon characters. And then of course I watched the show from the side of the stage which makes you feel really cool. That was the first live punk show I ever saw."

There was something about that night that was also pivotal for Doug. "I did a flyer for the Ramones show and it

was my first paid gig," Doug says. "The CDC (Concert and Dance Committee) gave me fifteen bucks. That was my first design job. I'm not proud of the way it looks at this point in my career." But he does have it squirreled away somewhere, because all four of the Ramones (Marky in the place of Tommy) signed it.

Life began accelerating and everything seemed to dovetail. He had his sense of style down, personally and politically, knew how to look and act a certain way. He had found his music and became somewhat of an authority on the subject. He produced hundreds of playbills for punk bands over the years. He became a sort of guru to other aspiring graphic artists and punk rockers. This, too: People just loved him. Men and women alike.

During the second interview session, as I set up the microphone on the coffee table between the couch and Doug's chair, Harper Lee, his daughter, enters the front door. Like her father and mother, Liza Corbett, Harper, who's still in high school, has already found her style. She does a little modeling for Blue Bones Vintage. Harper leaves us and heads up to her bedroom.

"I have a personal style," Doug says. "And if I can get abstract for a min-

ute, it's a personal brand and my Facebook persona is not me. I don't bitch and moan about stuff on Facebook, like relationship stuff or money troubles. It's very unattractive. I will paraphrase Fran Leibowitz, who said: 'Spilling one's guts is just as attractive as it sounds.' If you're one on one with somebody having a conversation and the natural progression leads to that, that's two people having a conversation and that's important in life, but to share something wholesale is just not my style. It's a personal style that's developed into a brand. There's a separation between me and social media. On social media I have a brand and I present myself in a certain way. I'm clever and attractive and funny and politically aware and I share what I think is pertinent to people I care about."

When I ask him about the Dutch angles he employs when shooting photos of just about anything, he grins. "It's a cheap trick," he says. "I learned it in college. But seriously, I can give you a lot of reasons why I shoot photographs on an angle like that. It's a shorthand, because if I take a picture of a building and if it's not squared up exactly right it drives me crazy as a designer. If I put it on an angle, it's a different animal. I can adjust it. And I like to fill the cor-

ners, and if I shoot something square, there's a lot of wasted space."

Not long ago he gave a couple of images to a close friend of his and she hung them on her wall on a diagonal like a pair of diamonds. "It really opened my eyes to how I look at the images that I've already been taking on an angle," says Doug. "I see them in the camera and in my head as a lozenge shape, and that's how they're supposed to be looked at."

Doug would leave VCU a semester shy of graduation, and he wouldn't look back. Eight years after he left VCU, his father generously offered to pay for his final semester of schooling, but Doug declined. He was a seasoned graphic artist by then. "I think of myself as a graphic artist more than a graphic designer or an art director," he says. "Because I look at graphic problems more as art than as commerce. And it's important to me that people look at what I've designed and go like, 'Wow, it doesn't just do what it's supposed to do, it goes beyond that.'"

Over the course of his professional life, Doug has used every technique imaginable in his graphic art.

"I bridge a lot of gaps," he says. "In graphic design I was old school. I even set type at one time when I worked at the men's

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clothing store up in Northern Virginia. I worked in the warehouse and asked if I could make the signs. They had a press; it was awesome. So I got to work with moveable type. I reveled in the process of it, getting ink on my hands." He used letter press and stencils, cut and paste with waxed strips of lettering. It was a successive chain, each link moving him forward with the latest technologies.

Over the course of his career, Doug has worked in virtually every capacity as a graphic artist and designer, and from each position he learned a trick or two of the trade.

"I'm proud of all the publication work I've done over the years," he says. "Besides North of the James, there was Throttle in the eighties, all the pubs I got to work on at the VMFA when I was just starting out, Style Weekly, and my stint as art director at Richmond Magazine."

"At Thalhimers, using wax machines and paste up informed my later work and informs my work to this day," he says. "Nothing is cemented until you burnish it down. And even then you can still fiddle with it. And I still kind of think that way on the computer. Disparate objects that you're moving around. It's an easier way to work, but it's still the same concept. You set

your type, you choose your font. In old school paste up, you would cut out individual words and letters and kern them and track them differently, and that's much simpler on the computer, but it's the same outcome."

When he talks about his days at Richmond Engraving, it sounds almost like an apprenticeship. "I learned more at Richmond Engraving in six months than I learned during the entire time I was at VCU," he says. "And that's not disparaging VCU," he says. "It's about process and taking an idea to its finished form to go to print. When I worked at Richmond Engraving I did a little air-brushing, which was like old school Photoshop. I learned tricks about different exposures and flashing and bringing up focal points in photographs."

We move to the highest tier of graphic art—the logo, a sort pictoglyph that unites words with images, where the picture is worth a thousand words, and the word is worth a thousand pictures.

"Less is more," says Doug. "Simplicity, boldness, color, immediacy, and dynamism." He mentions one of the most recognizable logos in history, which was designed by the same man who created the New Haven Railroad logo that so fascinated Doug when he was

just a boy. "Look at Paul Rand's IBM logo," he says. "He pared everything down to just the three letters, which is what the company is, and made the letters out of bars that spoke to movement and somehow abstractly computer paper and things like that. But it's so goddamned bold and beautiful. Just blue and it's so strong and so bold."

And then he talks about another logo. "Coca-Cola, the color branding, and the script that shouldn't work, but works," he says with enthusiasm. "It's worldwide now and it's immediate. You can see a fragment of a Coca-Cola logo and say, 'Oh it's Coke.' The top curve of the C that arches, it's insane and it's beautiful. It just shines like nothing else."

Along with the word and its typeface, the other key element in truly successful logo creation is color. "You have to limit your palette," Doug says. "And that's true for design in general. You have the entire spectrum to choose from and you have to limit it to two or three colors. A couple complimentary colors and then a tertiary color that complements them both or works against one of them for effect. That's where you want to be. Because your eye doesn't want to jump around the page, your eye wants to see a cohesive whole and limiting the palette tends to

do that. I call it separation. If you have too many things going on, you have to go through certain layers to get to the message. And that's not right. The message should be immediate."

Doug mentions a handful of logos he designed that bring him great joy when sees one out of the corner of his eye. "There's the joy of wandering around town and seeing my logo work out there," he says. "Kuba Kuba, Artworks on Hull Street, Deep Groove (Records), James River Family Dentistry out in Bon Air, my Red Army logo at City Stadium. Seeing my for sale signs around town for Chris Small."

One of his greatest joys from the very beginning has been designing record packages. "When I was growing up I wanted to design album covers and T-shirts," he says. "All of the records and CD covers I've been asked to design over the years, The Dads lost album, Loincloth—my first metal logo, the work I've done with Bio Ritmo, the new Miramar CD . . . what an honor. And the body of work I've done with the band Honor Role. It was an amazing partnership with four musicians who gave me full reign to do whatever I wanted to. They let me interpret their band and their music visually. Two albums, three singles and then a compi-

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At times, Doug seems almost fearful that he is tooting his own horn a little too loudly. "The irony is I'm in the promotion business and it's difficult for me to promote myself," he says. "There are certain people in town that are really successful at things they do and they're not very talented at it. But they're good at self-promotion and they're good at worrying people, and I mean this in the Southern sense, to get people to do what they want them to do, and I find that really unattractive and I find that really unethical."

As with many of us, Doug feels a certain unease with the political events of recent years, and he frequently produces graphic art to combat ideologies that are opposed to certain freedoms. "I get pissed off about something and I'll do this thing and it will go viral and it's fun and it's lovely and then it scares the hell out of me," he says. "There have been a couple of things I've done online that have gotten shared and gotten picked up by boingboing and then you're out in the arena of the world. If I go back and read the comments on this stuff, it's frightening." So he stays away from that

sort of thing because he knows what can happen. "I know the woman that painted Donald Trump with a micro-penis got her ass kicked by Trump supporters," he says. "So I do things anonymously for certain radical groups that I'm friends with, but I purposefully do it anonymously because I don't want my name attached to some of the more radical things I do. The political stuff is really important to me. There are certain things that I find unconscionable like the NRA and Trump and homophobes and misogynists and people that want to impose their political views on other folks. That's why I do graphic work for the Alliance for Progressive Virginia."

A knock comes at front door and Harper answers it and leaves with a friend of hers. Doug moves up in his chair toward the microphone and speaks very softly now. He tells me that when he met Harper's mother, Liza Corbett, it was truly love at first sight and first sound.

"It went from zero to sixty in a day and I fell in love," Doug says. "She is kind of a wild free spirit, funny, charming, very pretty. We were a high profile couple, people liked us together, and we were good together and we did something good couples do, we filled gaps in each other's personalities."

Somewhere along the line though, things began to change. "Our marriage has always been up and down, it's always been a difficult path," says Doug. Liza was a good partner to me and I was a good partner until things got too unwieldy. So through those years things were more good than bad, and then a segue to more bad than good, then a segue to unnavigable, where there were so many roadblocks that I had to make a decision to get out for the sake of us all."

Doug and Liza separated about four years ago, but through it all they have managed to keep the world a safe and constant for the product of their love—Harper Lee Dobey. "The fact that it's just me and Harper now is very, very important in my life," Doug says.

Doug Dobey is at the top of his game. His work is in constant demand, and his platter always full. "I'm lucky that I'm as busy as I am," he says. "I do my day-to-day graphic work, I do logo design after logo design. North of the James magazine is my base and it has been for years. It's working on something I love that I have a sense of ownership about. I really f***ing care about the magazine, and I love working with you."

And then there's this, which is really

extraordinary. "I've done this amazing body of work with Shadetree Sports, all my international cycling work," he says. "I mean, who the hell gets to work with the Giro d'Italia and top class cycling teams? It's nuts. Just talking about the Giro, one week every summer we turn the entire Titanic Quarter in Belfast pink. Pretty much everything onsite is something I designed. And I'm the guy that tells Northern Ireland where they can and can't park, what roads they can't cross. All those no parking signs. That always makes me laugh."

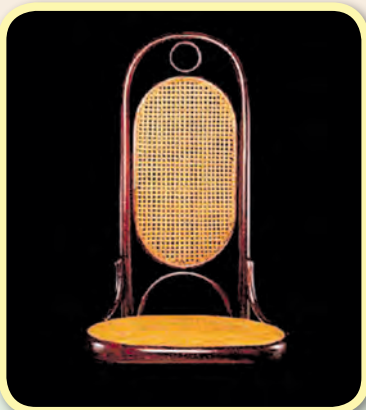
He reaches for his Mac, which never seems to be more than an arm's length away. He opens it like a sacred book and his fingers move instinctively to the keyboard and his eyes to the screen. He touches one key.

"I tweak and tweak and tweak, and at the end of the day it looks like I just put type and an image together," says Doug Dobey. "Which is everything. The message is there and there's no static. That's where all the fussing and nuance and kerning and fiddle ****ing ends up. You see something that's pure and says what you want it to say without any extraneous information."

And then this: "If it doesn't drive the story, you pull it out." **NJ**

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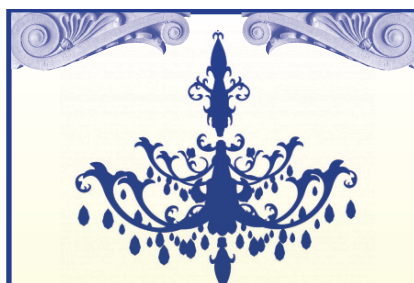
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BOOK REVIEW

Feeling the Sting

by FRAN WITHROW

I F YOU ARE LIKE ME, WHEN you see a stinging insect your first thought is to get out of the way. But not Justin O. Schmidt, an entomologist who is fascinated by bees, wasps and ants. I must confess I never thought about ranking how much the stings of those creatures hurt, but Dr. Schmidt did, and set about rating the painfulness of their small but potent defense mechanisms.

Schmidt delves deep into the world of insects, explaining why they developed stingers in the first place and what their other modes of defense are. Later chapters focus on specific types of insects: from sweat bees to fire ants to yellowjackets. He explains why some venomous insect stings hurt so much while others are less toxic, and explores other ways insects protect themselves, such as with bright colors or hard, slippery shells.

But back to pain. Just how bad can it be? Though a sweat bee sting is pretty mild, what about a bullet ant or a bumblebee? Schmidt's pain scale (created partly through personal experience) describes the discomfort (or agony) for you so you no longer have to wonder.


The pain scale Schmidt developed ranges from a pain level of 1 (a little shock of annoyance) to 4 (you feel as if your hair is on fire and you can't stop screaming). I accidentally mowed over a yellowjacket nest once and thought I had been shot. Schmidt rates yellowjacket stings a "2," so I can't imagine the pain of a velvet ant or a tarantula hawk (both a 4).

You might think that, given the potential pain these insects could cause, we would be well within our rights to do away with them when we see them. However, Schmidt reminds us that they actually do a world of good: for instance, bees and wasps love flies, caterpillars, and other annoying pests (not to mention their huge role as pollinators).

And that brings me to his chapter on honeybees. He discusses how humans have helped create less aggressive bees through artificial selection. He says the symbiotic



relation between humans and honeybees means we will ensure that honeybees, as producers of a food we enjoy and as pollinators, do not face extinction. I waited curiously for him to comment on mosquito sprays and their effect on honeybees. Unfortunately, he never mentioned this controversial topic. But I thought about it as I delivered your "North of the James" last month. I walked by many yards full of clover. I saw three bees.

My copy of this book was an uncorrected proof, so it was liberally sprinkled with awkward sentences that I'm sure were addressed before publication. There are also some forays into chemical makeup of insect toxins (which I skimmed lightly). But by and large, this is an intriguing book. I won't look at a wasp in quite the same way again. And I will be doubly sure not only to give it a wide berth, but also to ensure that it can go on its merry way. They are pretty amazing insects, after all. 

The Sting of the Wild: The Story of the Man Who Got Stung For Science

By Justin O. Schmidt, Johns Hopkins University Press, 320 pages, \$24.95

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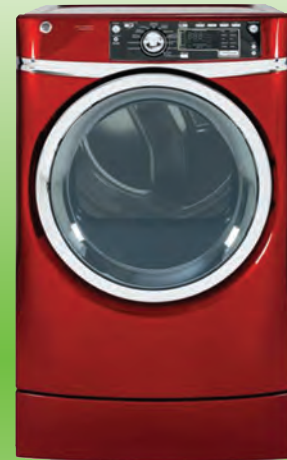
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