

NHF

The Nora Houston Foundation, Inc.
Post Office Box 15033
Richmond, Virginia 23227-0433

**The Board of Directors of
The Nora Houston Foundation, Inc.
Cordially invites you to
The Dedication and Blessing of Miss Houston's
Grave Marker
On the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Ratification of
The 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution**

Tuesday, August 18, 2020

7:00 p.m.

**Shockoe Hill Cemetery
4th & Hospital Streets
Richmond, VA 23219**

**Remarks by the Honorable M. Hannah Lauck
Judge of the United States District Court for the Eastern
District of Virginia**

The Main Entrance to the Cemetery is the East Gate on Hospital
Street
Parking is Available along the Side of Any of the Streets inside the
Cemetery

No RSVP Necessary
This Event is Open to the Public
Please Feel Free to Share this Invitation with Others

The Dedication and Blessing should conclude by approximately
7:30 p.m.

No Seating will be provided – Please Bring your Own if Needed

Direct Questions to John Tucker, President of the Foundation:
jtuckeriii@comcast.net or 804-837-4900

Biography of Nora Houston

Nora Houston was born in Richmond, Virginia on June 24, 1883. She was the only child of Dr. Henry Houston, a prominent physician, and Josephine Dooley Houston. Dr. Houston died in 1885 when Nora was two years old. Josephine did not remarry.

Two relatives played important roles in Nora's upbringing. One was her aunt, Alice Dooley. Alice, an active member of St. Peter's Catholic Church in Richmond, was a social activist. Through the Social Service Federation and the Catholic Woman's Club, which Alice helped to establish in 1914, she assisted many women in avoiding or removing themselves from lives of prostitution. She was instrumental in encouraging social activism in her niece. The other noteworthy relative was Nora's uncle, Major James Dooley. Major Dooley was a successful attorney who served six years in the Virginia General Assembly. He made his fortune, however, largely through investments in stocks and railway development. He was also a patron of the arts and owned an impressive personal collection of artwork. Major Dooley was a philanthropist—he supported the City's public library, the medical college, various schools and Catholic organizations. Upon his death in 1922, he left \$3 million to the St. Joseph's Orphanage (Villa), which at the time was the largest bequest ever received by a Catholic organization in the United States. Upon the death of his wife, Sallie Mae, in 1925, his estate of Maymont was bequeathed to the City of Richmond.

Growing up on Franklin Street in Richmond, Nora's next door neighbor was Lilly Logan, a prominent artist. At the age of 10, Nora began studying at Lilly's studio. Another young girl, Adele Clark, also enrolled there. Nora and Adele quickly became friends, and that friendship lasted a lifetime. In their teenage years, both joined the recently formed Richmond Art Club. There, they were taught by illustrator William Sheppard and sculptor Edward Valentine. Later, two young progressive artists, Anne Fletcher and Hallie Taliaferro, taught at the Club. The latter had been trained in Munich along with William Chase Merritt, who became a prominent instructor in New York City. In 1904, Chase invited Taliaferro to have several of her student's apply for scholarships to Chase's school. Nora did so and was awarded a scholarship for the 1905-06 academic year.

At the age of 22, Nora enrolled in Chase's school. After her first year, she was offered the position of "monitor," and thus remained at the school for a second year. Her friend Adele was awarded a scholarship to the school for the 1906-07 year. The two friends were reunited and roomed together. In addition to Chase, the ladies were taught by Robert Henri and Kenneth Hayes Miller. They were encouraged to go outside of the studio and to paint depictions of working class subjects and immigrants. It was during this time that Nora painted the works *Mediating Armenian*, *Armenian Woman* and *Armenian Woman in Meditation*.

Nora returned to Richmond in the summer of 1907. She set up a studio and began to take commissions. During this period, she painted *Self Portrait* and a portrait of her mother – *Josephine Dooley Houston*. She also painted a portrait of her friend John Powell. Powell was a pianist who had studied in Vienna. His tales of Europe convinced Nora that she had to travel and study there.

In February 1908, Nora set sail for Paris and enrolled in the Academie Colarossi. There, she was introduced to the schools of Cubism and Fauvism. It was also during this time that she painted *Paris Quay*.

Nora returned to Richmond in late 1909. She and Adele began teaching at the Art Club, and Nora became the director of the Club in 1910. Among their students were Theresa Pollack, whose influence in the Richmond art world remains to this day, and Edmund Archer, who would go on to be the Curator of the Whitney Museum in New York City. During this time, Nora developed an interest in depicting life in the Jackson Ward section of Richmond. She painted *Fourth Street Winter*, *Fourth Street Summer*, *Nicolina* and *Young Negro Woman*. In 1916, Nora and Adele left the Art Club and opened their own studio, Atelier. The studio was at first located on Franklin Street, but they moved it to Richmond's Ginter Park (3614 Chamberlayne Avenue) in 1928.

In November of 1909, Nora, Adele, Nora's mother and her Aunt Alice attended the first meeting held in Richmond of a group of women seeking the right to vote. The group evolved into the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia. Nora was a delegate to the League's first convention in November of 1911, and later served as recording secretary for the League.

Nora traveled throughout Virginia speaking on behalf of women's suffrage. She and Adele also used their artistic skills in designing banners and leaflets for the League. Their efforts were successful in that, by 1916, a suffrage league existed in every town in Virginia with a population of at least 2500. Their efforts were not successful, however, in persuading the Virginia General Assembly to support suffrage; that body rejected bills granting the right to vote to women on three occasions between 1912 and 1916. Stung by these rebukes, the League changed its focus and began concentrating its efforts on the passage of a federal constitutional amendment. The amendment passed, and became law in August of 1920.

Nora and Adele quickly mobilized women to register to vote in the 1920 elections. Unlike many of their contemporaries, Nora and Adele sought out black women to register. They canvassed Jackson Ward and personally assisted hundreds of black women with the registration process. They also invited leaders of the black community to their studio for get-out-the-vote strategy sessions. Their relationship with the black community led to Nora's appointment as chair of the Richmond Commission on Interracial Cooperation. Under her leadership in the 1920s, the Commission established goals of improving housing and creating libraries and schools for the black community. It issued documents condemning the Klan, lynching and sexual exploitation of black women. Nora's relationship with the black community led to her obtaining permission to paint one of her signature works, *Suffer the Little Children to Come Unto Me*, a depiction of First Holy Communion at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, then located in Jackson Ward.

During this time, the Governor of Virginia appointed Nora to head the Children's Code Commission (CCC). It was tasked with reviewing laws related to children's health, labor and education. At the time, it was not unusual for children as young as eight to be forced to work ten hour days. Nora was appalled. Her involvement with the CCC led her to paint *The Children's Amendment*. The work depicts dozens of children ascending a staircase. Their path is protected by 18 guardian angels and by 14 women bearing shields, guarding against looming ominous figures that posed a danger to the children. Under Nora's leadership, the CCC introduced 28 bills in the General Assembly, passing 20. Among other things, the bills focused on the juvenile justice system, child labor and children's hospitals.

Nora was also actively involved with the Catholic Woman's Club of Richmond. She joined the Club at the urging of her close friend and spiritual advisor, Most Rev. Denis J. O'Connell, the seventh Bishop of the Diocese of Richmond. Nora served as President of the Club in 1934. Under her leadership, the Club instituted study groups in areas such as art appreciation, social justice and civic matters. She and the Club addressed the needs of homeless and neglected children, placing them in St. Joseph's Villa or with Catholic families.

As part of the New Deal, the Virginia Federal Art Project was established. It hired struggling artists to paint murals for government buildings. In 1937 Adele was hired as its Director. Nora was hired as an artist and a supervisor. In that capacity, Nora painted a mural for the Rosa Bower Branch library, the first library for black Richmonders.

In her spare time, Nora continued to paint during the 1920s and 1930s. Her works from this period include *Little Cottage in Limerick*; *Jubilate Deo, Omnis Terra (Sing Joyfully to God, All over the Earth)*; *Laudate Dominum de Terra, Dracones et Omnes Abyssi (Praise Ye the Lord from the Earth, You Great Sea Creatures, and All Depths)*; and *The Rotunda at the University of Virginia*. Nora witnessed the last gathering of Confederate veterans in Richmond in 1932, depicting the scene in *The Last Parade of Confederate Veterans*. During this period, Nora exhibited her work throughout Virginia, and in Chicago, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and New York City.

Nora Houston passed away from a sudden and unknown illness on February 20, 1942. Her funeral was held at St. Peter's Catholic Church in Richmond, and **she was laid to rest in the Houston family plot in Shockoe Hill Cemetery. Her grave is unmarked.**

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Virginia Museum of History and Culture, and the Valentine Museum own several of Nora's works. The bulk of her work, however, was left in the custody of Adele, her life-long friend. Desiring to find a home for Nora's work to be preserved and displayed, Adele gave the paintings to her parish, St. Paul's Catholic Church in Richmond, in 1972. Adele passed away in 1983 at the age of 100. The Church transferred ownership of the paintings to The Nora Houston Foundation, Inc., a Virginia non-profit corporation, in 2015. See www.norahouston.org for more information.