

Rutland Sculpture Trail to Honor Author, Local Leader and Philanthropist Julia Dorr

Mary Moran, Mary Powell and Joan Gamble Fund Ninth Artwork

Rutland – Three women with decades of service to Vermont will fund the ninth addition to the Rutland Sculpture trail – a tribute to trailblazing Rutland author, community leader, and philanthropist Julia Dorr.

Dorr, a prolific prose and poetry writer, was among the most acclaimed female writers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Her work drew the interest and friendship of distinguished authors including Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendall Holmes, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who she hosted in Rutland. She was an early and strong advocate for women’s education and rights, and a Rutland community leader. She founded the Rutland Free Library and the Grace Congregational Church’s women’s cultural group, Fortnightly, which she led for 33 years.

Joan Gamble, a strategic change consultant, Mary Moran, retired superintendent of Rutland City Schools, and Mary Powell, president and CEO of Green Mountain Power, will personally fund the marble tribute to Dorr. It will be installed on the lawn of the Rutland Free Library. Amanda Sisk will design the piece, which will be carved by Evan Morse. They also teamed up to produce the Ann Story sculpture on West Street.

“Julia Dorr was a groundbreaker, earning accolades for her writing at a time when few women were afforded the opportunity to be published,” Moran said. “Once she got a foot in the door of the publishing world, she threw it open and charged through it, and built a career that lasted more than six decades.”

Dorr’s first published work was a poem her husband surreptitiously sent to “Union Magazine” in 1847. The following year, her story “Isabel Leslie” won a \$100 prize – more than \$3,000 in today’s dollars – and was published in “Sartain’s Magazine.” Her poems and short stories were published in the most prominent magazines and journals, and she published novels, travel books and poetry compilations until her death at 87 in 1913. Gamble, previously a member of the library board of directors, said she was initially inspired by Dorr’s community commitment and founding of the Rutland Free Library. “When I started reading more about her, I was also impressed with her literary accomplishments and the fact that she continued writing and publishing well into her 80s,” Gamble said. “She is an incredible role model for women of all ages.”

Powell said Dorr’s success, leadership and advocacy for women and girls were incredible given that her career began 17 decades ago. “Women continue to fight for equal opportunities today, a battle Julia Dorr started fighting generations ago, in a very different era,” Powell said. “She was a true pioneer as a writer and women’s rights advocate, and was one of Rutland’s most inspiring residents.”

“From the moment I heard about the Rutland Sculpture Trail, I had a vision of a statue of Julia Dorr, the woman most responsible for Rutland Free Library’s creation, looking out over the city from in front of the building,” said Randal Smathers, director of the library. “I could not be more thrilled to hear that it is going to become a reality.”

Carol Driscoll, executive director of the Carving Studio and Sculpture Center (CSSC), said Dorr was on the list of prospective honorees from the earliest discussions about the trail. “She was an incredibly successful writer, but an equally effective community leader and benefactor,” Driscoll said. “She loved Rutland.”

The Rutland Sculpture Trail is an initiative led by the CSSC, GMP, MKF Properties, and Vermont Quarries to create art and interest in downtown, generate community pride, and honor important local and regional history. The artworks, carved from stone quarried and donated by Vermont Quarries, are being installed in and around downtown Rutland, and presented as gifts to the city.

Two other pieces are nearing completion, honoring Martin Henry Freeman, a Rutland native who became the first African American college president in America, and Alcoholics Anonymous founder William G. Wilson, known as “Bill W,” who was born in Dorset and lived for many years in Rutland. A sculpture honoring Paul Harris, founder of Rotary International, was commissioned last month, and is expected to be completed in 2020.

Completed sculptures in the series include:

- “Stone Legacy,” a tribute to the region’s stone industry, which stands in the Center Street Marketplace.
- A tribute to Rudyard Kipling’s “Jungle Book,” which stands outside Phoenix Books.

- A piece honoring Olympic skier and environmentalist Andrea Mead Lawrence, on Merchants Row near Center Street.
- A sculpture of Revolutionary War hero Ann Story and her son Solomon, which stands at the corner of West and Cottage streets.
- A piece honoring 20 African Americans enlisted or drafted in Rutland to fight in the 54th Regiment in the Civil War, the first black regiment in the north, mounted on the Center Street wall of the Castleton Downtown Gallery.