

Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission 2007 Annual Report

The General Assembly created the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission in 2006 for the purpose of preparing for and commemorating the sesquicentennial of Virginia's participation in the American Civil War. The Commission is charged with:

- Planning commemorative programs and activities that are designed to involve all citizens and result in a positive legacy and long-term public benefit;
- Encouraging civic, historical, educational, economic, and other organizations throughout Virginia to organize and participate in activities to expand the understanding and appreciation of the significance of the American Civil War; and
- Providing technical assistance to localities and nonprofit organizations to further the commemoration of the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War.

During its second year, the Commission continued to take the national lead in planning for the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War. Commission members reached out to provide assistance to other states through the American Legislative Exchange Council, Southern Legislative Conference, National Conference of State Legislators, and State Historical Administrators annual meetings. The Commission worked closely with statewide partners, such as the Civil War Trails Program and the Virginia Tourism Corporation, to develop plans to place Virginia at the forefront of the national commemoration, and supported the efforts of preservation groups, such as the Civil War Preservation Trust, by unanimously passing a resolution to encourage battlefield preservation.

A Development Officer was hired to lead fundraising efforts for the commemoration period, and the Commission authorized the formation of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Foundation, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization established to accept gifts, grants, donations and bequests in support of the sesquicentennial commemoration. The Commission adopted both a Strategic Plan and a Case Statement to guide its efforts, and sponsored legislation to allow for the sale of a special revenue-sharing license plate for the sesquicentennial (SB 73 and HB 631, 2008).

A number of subcommittees were formed to further the Commission's work, including an Advisory Council and three workgroups focused on primary aspects of the commemoration: Coordination, Signature Events and Activities, and Education. An overview of each subcommittee is presented below, along with a synopsis of plans that are in development or under discussion.

Advisory Council

A large and distinguished Advisory Council was appointed to serve in a consultative capacity to the Commission, respond to questions directed to it by the Commission, and help form a vision for the commemoration period. Comprised of historians, educators, state and local government

officials, and representatives of the museum community, battlefields and parks, and Civil War-related organizations, the Advisory Council brings together many of the important stakeholders. The Advisory Council held a day-long meeting in March and made a number of recommendations, which form the nucleus of the Commission's goals for the commemoration period:

- Diversity: The commemoration will be inclusive of and meaningful to all Virginians, particularly:
 - Diverse racial and ethnic groups
 - Citizens who are new to this country and those who do not have a hereditary link to the American Civil War
 - Young people and others seeking to understand the relevance of the American Civil War to today's society.
- Inclusiveness: The commemoration will seek to portray a fair and balanced story of Virginia's participation in the American Civil War that includes African-American, Union, and Confederate perspectives.
- Statewide Accessibility: The commemoration will be statewide, involving all localities and encompassing all Civil War-related institutions, museums, battlefields, parks, and facilities.
- Education: The commemoration will include a strong education component designed to ignite a renewed interest in Virginia's historical heritage. Opportunities will be provided to re-examine the lessons of the past and the legacies of the Civil War to understand how they affect the present and continue to shape our future.
- Permanence: The commemoration will imprint Virginia history and leave a positive and rich legacy well beyond 2015.

Workgroup 1 (Coordination)

Chair: Sen. John H. Chichester

Workgroup 1 (Coordination) is tasked with oversight and monitoring of:

- Location, event, and information coordination throughout the Commonwealth (including coordinating museums, battlefields, parks, and events)
- Local sesquicentennial committees
- Other states' sesquicentennial commissions
- National sesquicentennial planning and events
- Welcome Center information, kiosks, and/or orientation film
- Publications, website, etc.

Plans in development and under discussion:

Statewide coordination: With the strong support of the Advisory Council, the Commission made the decision that it will lead the linkage, coordination, unification, and support of existing

museums and sites, in lieu of building a new facility specifically for the sesquicentennial commemoration. Such statewide coordination and promotion will be through media that may include: (i) a technology-rich interactive website, (ii) specialized maps and brochures, and (iii) films, computer kiosks and GPS units located at welcome centers and other locations to enable visitors to easily identify destinations and plan their visits throughout the Commonwealth.

Local sesquicentennial committees: To ensure that the commemoration reaches throughout the state, each locality was asked to form a local sesquicentennial committee to work with the state Commission. Localities are encouraged to plan special events and exhibitions that highlight the Civil War-related history of the community, being sure to include all perspectives of the Civil War era and highlight lesser-known stories, particularly those that relate to the African-American experience during the Civil War. The Commission will work closely with the local committees, providing technical support, and promoting tourism to the locality through its interactive website. The Commission is also examining the feasibility of offering financial assistance for local programs through a matching micro-grant program. Of 134 localities in the Commonwealth, over 30 have already established sesquicentennial planning committees.

Interactive website: A new design for the Commission's website (www.VirginiaCivilWar.org) was launched to widespread acclaim. By the end of the year, the website had almost 100,000 hits. In addition to providing news and information about the Commission, the website will serve as a portal for sesquicentennial activities, featuring an interactive map of Civil War destinations and statewide calendar of events with the goal of making travel easy for consumers. A dynamic timeline of Virginia's participation in the Civil War will be created for the website, and podcasts and videos of battlefield tours will be incorporated.

Workgroup 2 (Signature Events and Activities)

Chair: Speaker William J. Howell

Workgroup 2 (Signature Events and Activities) has oversight and monitoring of:

- Establishment of unifying themes, stories, and goals for the commemoration (to tie together signature events, grant recipient programs, etc.)
- Commission-sponsored events, lectures, symposia, films, battlefield tours, etc.
- VHS Traveling exhibition
- Mobile (tractor-trailer) exhibition
- Document preservation project
- Public relations and marketing

Plans in development and under discussion:

Museum exhibitions: The Commission is partnering with the Virginia Historical Society (VHS) to develop a major traveling exhibition, “*An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia.*” The 4,000 sq. ft. exhibition will be in two parts (battlefront and home front), and will be rich in artifacts, documents, and dynamic interactivity. In keeping with the Commission's goals, the exhibition will examine Virginia's participation in the Civil War with an inclusive, cross-sectional approach that represents all perspectives. Preliminary plans call for the

exhibition to open in Richmond in February 2011, with both parts traveling during the next four years to museums in or near Abingdon, Hampton, Fredericksburg, Lynchburg, Manassas, Roanoke, and Winchester.

"An American Turning Point" will also serve as the resource for the development of two related traveling exhibitions. The first is a low-security panel exhibition that extracts from the larger exhibition, enabling it to travel to smaller museums and venues throughout Virginia and in other states. Second, the Commission is researching the development of a mobile museum, or tractor-trailer exhibition, tentatively called the *Civil War 150 HistoryMobile* that will travel during the sesquicentennial period to communities throughout Virginia and outside of the state to promote Civil War education and tourism. The *HistoryMobile* will highlight dynamic interactive displays, along with high-quality reproductions of artifacts. Both of these exhibitions are exciting in their ability to bring a museum experience to areas that are traditionally underserved.

Sesquicentennial Conferences, Tours, and Events: The Commission is planning a number of signature events, such as: (i) a conference series featuring the nation's finest historians that is intended to foster broad public understanding of the history of the Civil War; (ii) interactive battlefield tours developed for widespread access through the Internet; and (iii) high profile events to commemorate the beginning of the sesquicentennial, important milestones, and a national culmination event marking the end of the Civil War at Appomattox Court House. The Commission solicited support and assistance in hosting Signature Conferences and meetings or tours from all public and private institutions of higher education throughout the state.

Kickoff events (2009): Understanding that commemorating the Civil War includes more than an examination of battle tactics and strategy, the Commission has planned events that begin in 2009 as an opportunity to look at events that preceded - and perhaps foretold of - the war to come. Chaired by Dr. Edward L. Ayres, the topic of the first Signature Conference will be *"The Coming of the Civil War."* The symposium will be designed for a general audience, offered to the public free of charge, and broadcast widely through the Internet. It will be held at the University of Richmond on April 29, 2009.

In addition, the Commission is working in partnership with Harper's Ferry National Historical Park to plan a multi-state inaugural event to be held at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia on June 25-26, 2009. The event will serve as the national kickoff for the sesquicentennial, in conjunction with the 150th anniversary of John Brown's raid on the federal arsenal.

Document Digitization: The Commission is exploring a partnership with the Library of Virginia to undertake a major initiative to identify, catalog, and preserve Civil War documents that are currently in private hands, through digitization and web access. This initiative may be combined with the *HistoryMobile* to maximize promotion of the program. Those who wish to donate artifacts or documents will be directed to an appropriate repository within the state.

Marketing: The Virginia Tourism Corporation was designated to serve as the Commission's public relations and marketing specialists, and asked to develop a marketing plan for the commemoration period.

Workgroup 3 (Education)

Chair: Del. Algie T. Howell, Jr.

Workgroup 3 (Education) is planning activities that are geared toward education, including:

- Involvement of schools, students, teachers, administration, and PTAs
- SOL review and resources, curriculum framework, resources for teachers, etc.
- Teacher institutes
- Higher education involvement
- Law school symposia
- Public library participation

Plans in development and under discussion:

Educational Film: The Commission has approved and fully funded an educational film to be produced by Blue Ridge Public Television and the Virginia Tech Center for Civil War Studies, which will be distributed free of charge to every school, library, and historical society in the state. The DVD will be divided into nine 20-minute segments that can either be viewed altogether or separately for use in the classroom. The nine segments will focus on the background of the war, military campaigns, the African-American experience, leading Virginia personalities, the common soldiers, homefront activities, and legacies of the war for all Americans.

Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program and Field Trips: The Commission is committed to developing and supporting programs that reach directly into the classroom, and teacher training is crucial in that endeavor. The National Park Service offers the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program, a program designed to enable classroom teachers to experience the duties of park rangers during the summer and “bring the parks into the classroom” through curriculum-based lesson plans that draw on their summer experience as park rangers. The program was begun in Colorado and involves all of Colorado’s National Parks and teachers from underserved school districts. Public schools are encouraged to select their own teacher representatives for the program and are required to agree to certain terms to participate in the program. For purposes of the commemoration, the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program at national Civil War battlefield parks in Virginia could be adapted to provide learning experiences for teachers relating to American Civil War history.

As the number of teachers that can be served through the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program is necessarily limited, the Workgroup is also developing an appropriate instructional program to accommodate the need to offer expanded opportunities for Civil War battlefield immersion experiences for classroom teachers. The Field Trip Program offered by the Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT) directly meets the Commission’s needs in this regard. It involves three days and 10 workshops, and is tailored to be consistent with the Standards of Learning for History and Social Studies. In previous years, the CWPT has partnered with Virginia Tech for the delivery of the Field Trip Program. Each participant in the Field Trip Program receives a

complete and bound publication of the Field Trip materials and workshops. The CWPT has offered to partner with the Commission to develop Field Trips for teachers.

Members of Workgroup 3 are also developing and refining a work plan that will:

- Identify the lingering “hard and controversial” issues of the Civil War and its legacy, and determine whether and how the controversy between the traditional and contemporary methods of teaching Civil War history should be addressed.
- Identify the audience for educational and outreach purposes.
- Develop a complete annotated information package containing various resources on the Sesquicentennial for teachers and teacher preparation programs.
- Ensure the Commission’s goals of a balanced approach and inclusiveness in proposed programs, activities, and events.
- Include opportunities for educational and informational programs, activities, and events that are designed to accommodate the needs of mature adults and the general public throughout the Commonwealth.
- Provide an annotated compilation of Sesquicentennial Anniversary activities offered by the Commission and other entities for distribution to the education community, which is defined as public and private K-12, and public and private higher education, including graduate and professional schools.

For more information on the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission, please visit: www.VirginiaCivilWar.org.

The Commission does not anticipate filing a further report at this time.