

VIRGINIA SESQUICENTENNIAL OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR COMMISSION

Advisory Council Meeting
Dr. Sandy Treadway, Liaison to the Commission
August 11, 2010

Summary

I. Welcome and Opening Remarks

Members of the Advisory Council were welcomed to the annual meeting by Dr. Sandy Treadway, Librarian of Virginia. Speaker William J. Howell, Chairman of the Commission, greeted members and spoke of the Advisory Council's importance in providing input from a wide array of constituencies. Speaker Howell discussed the positive tourism and economic impact of the four-year commemoration, and asked members to continue to look for ways that sesquicentennial programs can reach out to all Virginians in an inclusive and educational manner. Last, Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr. spoke about Virginia's critical role in the sesquicentennial and the many opportunities that lay ahead.

II. Overview of Plans in Development - Cheryl Jackson, Executive Director, Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission

Ms. Jackson reviewed the Advisory Council's previous recommendations, many of which have formed the core of the Commission's programs. Paramount among those early recommendations was: (i) beginning the commemoration in 2009, to coincide with John Brown's Raid; (ii) ensuring that the commemoration is statewide; and (iii) supporting, enhancing, and highlighting existing Civil War museums and historic sites. Ms. Jackson presented a detailed overview of the Commission's plans in development:

- **Signature Conference series:** The annual conference series began in 2009 at the University of Richmond, and was widely hailed as setting a model for the sesquicentennial nationwide. Each conference will cover a particular aspect of the Civil War that when taken together will tell all aspects of the conflict, its causes and its legacies. The tentative conference schedule is as follows:

2009: *America on the Eve of the Civil War*
Conference Chair: Dr. Edward L. Ayers
University of Richmond, April 29, 2009

2010: *Race, Slavery and the Civil War: The Tough Stuff of American History*
Conference Chair: Dr. James O. Horton
Norfolk State University, September 24, 2010

2011: *American Military Strategy and the Civil War*

Conference Chair: Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr.
Virginia Tech, May 21, 2011

2012: *Leadership and Generalship in the Civil War*

Conference Chair: Lt. Gen. John Knapp
Virginia Military Institute, March 22, 2012

2013: *The Home Front in the Civil War*

Conference Co-Chairs: Dr. Scott R. Nelson and Dr. Carol Sheriff
College of William and Mary, Date: TBD

2014: *Civil War in a Global Context*

Conference Chair: Dr. Peter N. Stearns
George Mason University, Date: TBD

2015: *Memory of the Civil War*

Conference Chair: Dr. Gary Gallagher
University of Virginia, Date: TBD

- DVD for schools: In partnership with the Virginia Tech Center for Civil War Studies and Blue Ridge Public Television, the Commission distributed an Emmy-nominated program, *Virginia in the Civil War: A Sesquicentennial Remembrance*, free of charge to every public school in Virginia in Fall 2009. The DVD consists of nine 20-minute chapters, divided for ease of teacher use in the classroom. Chapters include: The Coming Storm; First Blood; The Common Soldier; Caught in the Conflict: The Home Front; The War Goes North; Behind the Lines; Virginians at War; The Overland Campaign: Lee Faces Grant; The Legacies of War
- *Civil War 150 HistoryMobile*: Development continues in partnership with the Virginia Historical Society and the Fredericksburg/Spotsylvania National Military Park on the *HistoryMobile*, a self-contained and immersive exhibition housed in a single-expandable tractor trailer that can travel throughout Virginia and to other states. Substantial funding for the fabrication of the *HistoryMobile* has been provided by a Chairman's Special Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as by generous grants from the Wal-Mart Foundation and Altria. A Request for Proposals for design/build of the *HistoryMobile* will be sent out by the end of August enabling construction to begin by year end. The *HistoryMobile* will debut at the kickoff event in Manassas in July 2011.
- Interactive website: The Commission has made available a rich array of Internet resources, including an interactive Then/Now map that details hundreds of Civil War-related sites in the state, a Statewide Calendar of Events, Vodcasts of Civil War sites, and web resources for teachers.
- *Walk in their Footsteps*: The Commission is developing a research portal that provides regimental history information on both Union and Confederate regiments' service in Virginia. This comprehensive database will offer a launching point for users to create a "battle plan" to map out and visit the actual sites where their ancestors may have fought while serving during the Civil War. The database may be featured on a kiosk outside of the *HistoryMobile* as it travels throughout the state and will be accessible via the Commission's website.

- **Special Events:** Commemorative events began in June 2009 with a successful joint kickoff event at Harpers Ferry with West Virginia's Sesquicentennial Commission. Planning is underway for large-scale commemorative events at Manassas (July 21, 2011) and Appomattox (April 9, 2015). In addition, local committees are planning events to mark key anniversary dates throughout the state, all of which will be highlighted on the Commission's website.
- **Grant Program:** The Commission has designated over \$200,000 to its Sesquicentennial Tourism Marketing Grant program. Administered by the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC), this grant program provides matching funds to local sesquicentennial committees and their partners to market Civil War events and destinations statewide.
- **Travel Kiosks:** Through federal enhancement grant funding, the Commission is working with VDOT, VTC, Civil War Trails, the Civil War Preservation Trust, and Virginia Wineries to develop and place information kiosks in the 13 Welcome Centers throughout the Commonwealth, promoting all that Virginia has to offer to visitors.
- **Currently,** 126 of the 134 localities have formed local sesquicentennial committees to work with the Commission and develop programs that highlight and enhance local history.

Advisory Council members were supportive of all of the programs presented, and complimented the comprehensive array of programs. Members discussed the effect of staff turnover on use of the educational DVD in future years, and how to ensure that new teachers are aware of the DVD. Staff from the Department of Education agreed to send reminders to school contacts each year of the commemoration period.

III. Overview of *An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia* - Andrew Talkov, Sesquicentennial Exhibit Coordinator, Virginia Historical Society (VHS)

Mr. Talkov offered a detailed description of the gallery exhibition entitled, "*An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia*." Rich in artifacts, documents, and high-tech interactives, the exhibition will emphasize the impact of the Civil War from the battlefield, home front, and African-American perspectives. The exhibition will be organized thematically rather than chronologically, in order to better travel to other venues, and will pose questions rather than present answers, allowing visitors to sort through the issues and form their own conclusions. Sections of the exhibition are tentatively entitled:

"Why Did the Civil War Happen?"

"Who Was the Traitor and Who the Patriot?"

"Who Freed the Slaves?"

"How Did Civilians Suffer?"

"Why Richmond?"

"The First Modern War?"

"Speed or Strength?"

"Victory or Death at the Crater?"

"Men of Color to Arms?"

"The Deadliest Enemy?"

"War or Murder?"

"Did the Civil War End at Appomattox?"

The gallery exhibition will open at the VHS on February 4, 2011, and will travel to museums in Roanoke, Abingdon, Lynchburg, Winchester, Quantico and Hampton beginning in 2012. It is scheduled to close in 2015 at Appomattox. Panel exhibitions that can travel more easily and be displayed in much smaller venues will be developed to complement the museum exhibition.

IV. Civil War 150 Legacy Project: Document Digitization and Access - *Renee Savits, Library of Virginia*

Ms. Savits with the Library of Virginia presented an overview of the Civil War 150 Legacy Project: Document Digitization and Access. To date, the Library of Virginia has completed pilot projects at Danville and Winchester that yielded over 800 images of Civil War related documents that are available for viewing at www.virginiamemory.com/CW150. Ms. Savits, coordinator for the eastern region of the state, and Laura Drake Davis, coordinator for the western region, are in the process of contacting localities to schedule visits to identify, scan and digitize additional Civil War documents that are currently held in private collections. In addition to publicizing the project using the well-established network of local sesquicentennial committees, Library staff also intends to promote the project by attending meetings of national groups such as the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH).

Advisory Council Members discussed the project in depth and expressed their strong support for the Legacy Project due to its unparalleled potential to identify and preserve previously unknown documents related to one of the most important eras in American history. The program was also praised for its ability to engage people directly in the commemoration, allowing them to explore their personal connection to the Civil War.

V. Ask, Answer, and Analyze Session

The afternoon session began with remarks from the Honorable Lisa Hicks-Thomas, Secretary of Administration, who offered greetings from Governor McDonnell. Secretary Hicks-Thomas commended the Advisory Council and expressed the Governor's enthusiasm for its efforts to develop a commemoration that is inclusive and promotes Virginia. Secretary Hicks-Thomas reported that the Governor's office is working closely with the Commission, and recently sent President Obama a letter of invitation to the commemorative event at the Manassas National Battlefield Park on July 21, 2011.

Mitch Bowman, Executive Director of Virginia Civil War Trails, offered comments regarding the impact of the sesquicentennial in increasing heritage tourism in Virginia. Mr. Bowman stated that since 1995 and the creation of Civil War Trails, there has been a four-fold increase in the number of tourists that actively seek out Civil War sites. Such visitation will only increase during the sesquicentennial, due in part to the Advisory Council's guidance and the hard work of the Commission.

"Ask, Answer, and Analyze" breakout sessions were held, where members could offer comments, feedback, and suggestions on a number of topics. The following recommendations were generated:

- Be sure to present information as questions rather than didactic statements, in order to generate inquiry and conversation.
- Send out a summary of panel exhibition specifications to localities to determine appropriate venues.
- Use all available means to promote the Civil War 150 Legacy Project including: educator conferences, the public library system, statewide associations, and churches.
- Continue working on effort to promote sesquicentennial commemoration to international visitors.

VI. Wrap-up and Adjournment

Ms. Jackson thanked members for their support and invited them to stay involved as the commemoration begins in earnest. Members were asked for their assistance in getting the word out about the wide array of programs being developed, to partner with the Commission wherever possible, and to work to ensure that Virginia remains the destination for the Civil War sesquicentennial.

Dr. Treadway thanked members for their participation and indicated that she would report on the Advisory Council's deliberations at the next meeting of the Commission.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.