

**VIRGINIA SESQUICENTENNIAL OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR COMMISSION**  
**Report of the Executive Committee**

Speaker of the House of Delegates William J. Howell, Chairman

April 9, 2010

10:00 a.m.

Executive Committee members present: Speaker William J. Howell, Senator Charles, J. Colgan, Sr., Delegate Algie T. Howell, Jr., Dr. Paul A. Levengood, and Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr. Commission members present: Delegate Scott L. Lingamfelter and John P. Ackerly, III

**I. Call to Order**

Speaker Howell called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance.

**II. Walkthrough of Virginia Historical Society exhibition: "*An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia*"**

Dr. Levengood introduced Andrew Talkov, Sesquicentennial Exhibit Coordinator with the Virginia Historical Society, to present a walkthrough of the planned exhibition, "*An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia*." Mr. Talkov began by explaining that the exhibition is not chronological but topical and is primarily meant to portray the experience of Virginians in the Civil War. Additionally, Mr. Talkov said that while the exhibition is large it cannot answer all of the attendant questions regarding causes, events and legacies of the Civil War. With this in mind, curators decided to frame the components of the exhibition with rhetorical questions that prompt the visitor to think through issues.

Mr. Talkov reviewed logistical aspects of the exhibition explaining that due to space considerations at other venues, the exhibition is divided into two parts: Waging War (primarily focused on the battlefield) and Surviving War (primarily home front). After an initial engagement at the Virginia Historical Society (VHS) during 2011, the exhibit will travel throughout Virginia to museums in Roanoke, Abingdon, Hampton, Winchester, Appomattox, Lynchburg, and the Manassas area. Smaller venues will display half of the exhibit at a time. Speaker Howell requested that the VHS check back with the Fredericksburg Area Museum to determine whether it can accommodate the exhibition. Senator Colgan also suggested that VHS staff contact George Mason University as it has a new cultural center that could be an ideal venue for the exhibit.

Mr. Talkov presented an overview of the components of the exhibition including: *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?*; and *Did the Civil War End at Appomattox?*

Several members pointed out that while a topical approach to the exhibition is interesting, visitors will likely expect a more chronological progression that includes information on the major battles in Virginia. Dr. Levengood and Mr. Talkov assured the Executive Committee that there is substantial text that will help to contextualize the exhibition for visitors. Further, Dr. Levengood explained that in the experience of the VHS, visitors do not necessarily proceed through an exhibition in a particular route but rather wander to portions that are of personal interest.

Executive Committee members continued to discuss the overall content of the exhibition, suggesting that many visitors will expect more content on the battles and personalities of the Civil War. Dr. Levengood pointed out that the Civil War battlefields in Virginia are already being interpreted well. Further, the intent of the exhibition is not to supplant the battlefield experience but to show the all-encompassing nature of the Civil War, hopefully inspiring visitors to go see the many Civil War sites throughout Virginia. The ultimate goal of any exhibition is to appeal to people at different levels and provide an experience that is as educational and accessible as possible. However, VHS staff will take the Executive Committee's comments into consideration and provide a preface to the exhibition that frames the Civil War in Virginia overall.

### **III. Adjournment**

Due to the length of the walkthrough presentation, further business was held to the next meeting of the Executive Committee, and the meeting was adjourned.