

Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission



Workgroup 3: EDUCATION
The Honorable Algie T. Howell, Jr., *Chairman*

Meeting Brief: November 26, 2007

The Education Workgroup held its first work session on Monday, November 26, 2007, in Richmond for the purpose of constructing its work plan to implement proposed commemorative programs, activities, and events. The Workgroup welcomed four new members. Several presentations relating to tasks assigned by the Commission constituted the focus of the agenda. A prolonged discussion ensued concerning the “message” that students and the public should receive during and about the commemoration of the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War.

Virginia in the Civil War: A Sesquicentennial Reflection

Cheryl Jackson, Project Manager, on behalf of Dr. Robertson, briefed the Workgroup regarding the educational DVD that is under production by Blue Ridge Public Television and Virginia Tech. She noted that the program will be divided into 9 twenty minutes segments covering the following aspects of the war: (i) coming of the war; (ii) slaves and freedmen; (iii) military campaigns; (iv) leading personalities of the war years; (v) the common soldiers; (vi) women and the home front; and (viii) the war’s legacies for modern America. The DVD will be distributed free of charge to all public schools. The anticipated distribution date is August 15, 2009. Ms. Jackson also explained that funds for the production of the DVD have been disbursed to Virginia Tech. She commented further that the Education Workgroup has been asked to assist Dr. Robertson with the distribution of the DVD to public schools.

Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program

The Workgroup reviewed the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program of the National Park Service, which is 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 under-served 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 representative of the Richmond National Park Service has informed staff that the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program in Virginia would be adapted to impart information and provide experiences at Civil War national park sites that are related to the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War and the Standards of Learning.

Field Trips

The number of teachers that can be served through the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program is limited. In response to a request to expand opportunities for the Civil War battlefield immersion experience for classroom teachers, the Workgroup was directed to devise an appropriate instructional program to accommodate this need. The Workgroup determined that the Field Trip Program offered by the Civil War Preservation Trust directly meets the Commission’s needs in this regard. Mr. John Blanton, Education Coordinator for the Civil War Preservation Trust, addressed the Workgroup concerning the Field Trip Program. The Program involves three days and ten workshops, and is tailored to be consistent with the Standards of Learning. In previous years, the Trust has partnered with Virginia Tech for the delivery of the Field Trip Program. Each participant receives a complete bound publication of the Field Trip materials and workshops. Mr. Blanton offered to partner with the Commission via the Workgroup to provide Field Trips for teachers, which was accepted by the Workgroup.

Work Plan

At the August organizational meeting, staff was directed to canvass the Workgroup members concerning priority programs, activities, and events in order that a work plan may be developed. A decision matrix was mailed to all members and a proposed work plan was developed to stimulate discussion at the work session on November 26, 2007. In the ensuing discussion, members raised several concerns and questions regarding the "message," the audience, inclusiveness, the inundation of teachers with materials from various sources, the need to reach teacher preparation programs, the disproportionate focus on K-12, and the most efficacious methods of delivering products and information to the education community and the public. While noting the exceptional reputation enjoyed by the Virginia Tech Civil War Center, many members expressed concerns about the difficulty of overcoming the "message" of the DVD, particularly in the classroom, if it is not consistent with the stated goals of the Commission. It was stressed that the lingering "hard and controversial" issues of the Civil War and its legacy, and the controversy between the traditional and contemporary methods of teaching of Civil War history are decidedly influential factors that must be addressed. The members agreed that more information was needed before a work plan could be completed. Recognizing that it would be impossible and perhaps, inappropriate, to embrace all perspectives and philosophies of the Civil War and its legacy, the Workgroup agreed that Delegate Algie T. Howell, Chairman, should assign several members of the Workgroup, working with staff, to refine and develop the work plan as follows:

1. Compile the Workgroup's questions concerning the DVD for response by Dr. Robertson and distribute response to Workgroup.
2. Compile the Workgroup's questions concerning the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program for response by Ms. Cynthia MacLeod and distribute response to Workgroup.
3. Convene a Roundtable of historians serving on Workgroup 1 and other noted experts to discuss and identify the lingering "hard and controversial" issues of the Civil War and its legacy, review the "message" of the DVD, and determine whether and how the controversy between the traditional and contemporary methods of teaching of Civil War history should be addressed, including in the DVD. **(The convening of the Roundtable and collaboration with historians on Workgroup 1 is specific to this task only).**
4. Identify the audience for educational and outreach purposes.
5. Identify and develop a complete and consolidated informational package of resources on the Sesquicentennial for teachers and teacher preparation programs that carry the imprimatur of the Commission.
6. Ensure the Commission's goals of a balanced approach and inclusiveness in proposed programs, activities, and events in the Workgroup's adopted framework.
7. Ensure that the Workgroup's adopted framework includes programs, activities, and events statewide to reach mature adults and the general public.
8. Provide an annotated compilation of Sesquicentennial Anniversary activities offered by the Commission and other entities for distribution to the education community.
9. Identify and propose existing entities with which the Commission can collaborate, co-sponsor, or partner to facilitate the Workgroup's objectives.

Next Meeting

The Chairman has requested that members assigned to refine and develop the work plan and to convene the Roundtable accomplish these tasks as soon as possible in order that they may be prepared to report to the Workgroup when it reconvenes in the spring, after the 2008 Session. The Chairman has directed the staff to work with Workgroup members to complete the work electronically, the extent possible.