

VIRGINIA SESQUICENTENNIAL OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR COMMISSION 2008 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.

Virginia continues to lead the nation in planning for the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War. Working closely with the American Association of State and Local History, staff hosts quarterly conference calls with sesquicentennial planners in 12 other states to exchange information and seek opportunities to work collaboratively. During 2008, representatives of the Commission met with members of the Virginia congressional delegation and representatives of the National Park Service, all of whom were impressed by Virginia's plans and supportive of the Commission's endeavors. Further, the Commission had a presence at a number of annual meetings and conferences, including: the National Conference of State Legislators, American Legislative Exchange Council, American Association of State and Local History, Civil War Trails, Virginia Municipal League, Virginia Association of Counties, Virginia Association of Museums, and the Virginia One Tourism Conference.

The Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation was established to accept gifts, grants, donations and bequests in support of the sesquicentennial commemoration. The Foundation's Board of Trustees is comprised of: William J. Howell (*Chair*), Charles J. Colgan (*Vice Chair*), Dr. Charles F. Bryan, Jr., J. Alfred Broaddus, J. Stewart Bryan, III, Albert C. Eisenberg, Dr. Irvin E. Hess, Algie T. Howell, Jr., Eddie N. Moore, Jr., E. Claiborne Robins, Jr., and Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr.

The Commission was awarded a \$40,000 planning grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities in support of the museum exhibition and HistoryMobile. Further, the *Civil War 150 Council* was established and is comprised of individuals and organizations providing scaled levels of financial contributions in support of the Commission's plans.

Commission Meetings

The Commission held meetings at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley in Winchester, Fort Monroe in Hampton and in Richmond. The full Commission considered and approved the following items and actions in 2008:

2009 Signature Conference: "America on the Eve of the Civil War" - Dr. Edward L. Ayers, Conference Chair (Approved by Commission April 29, 2008)

Hosted by the University of Richmond, Dr. Ayers intends for the conference to offer a fresh perspective and challenge participants to forget that they know how history turns out. The focus of the conference will be the situation in the United States in what turned out to be the eve of the Civil War, focusing on the central events and changes of the late antebellum era. Dr. Ayers proposes a program that will be conducted in an interactive format with speakers from varied perspectives. The format will have participants discussing recent events and what effect they may have, limiting themselves to what was known in 1859. Speakers would represent a diverse range of intellectual, cultural, economic, and historical perspectives, and would analyze facts and predict outcomes in a format akin to "Meet the Press." Topics would be:

- John Brown's Raid
- The State of the Nation: The Census of 1859
- Virginia and the Booming South
- Predictions for the Election of 1860

Central Virginia PBS was named as the vendor for filming, broadcasting, and DVD production of the conference, and UVA Press was selected as the publisher of the conference proceedings. An RFP for book sale vendor was issued, with the University of Richmond bookstore selected ultimately.

Strategic Marketing Plan - Virginia Tourism Corporation (Approved by the Commission April 29, 2008)

Upon request of the Chairman, the Virginia Tourism Corporation developed a strategic marketing plan for the sesquicentennial. Civil War tourism is already high in Virginia and Civil War tourists tend to stay longer and spend more than average visitors. However, challenges remain, including: (i) there are better known battlefields in other states; (ii) overall, the number of visitors to historic sites is declining; and (iii) the fact that there are so many Civil War destinations in Virginia may present confusion for visitors.

Richard Lewis of the VTC presented the message of the sesquicentennial as one that states American life - the very structure and evolution of our society - can be traced to the Civil War. So much of what America is today can be traced to the effects of the Civil War and, now more than ever, Americans are poised to discover how learning about it has an impact upon how they view their democracy and society. Virginia was the epicenter of the most pivotal event in American history; the stories of the enormous sacrifices, the tragedy, the triumph and the legacy are all told here - - and everyone should hear those stories. Thus, the goal of the marketing plan

is to raise awareness of Virginia as a Civil War tourism destination and position Virginia as a top-of-mind choice prior to, and during, the sesquicentennial.

The VTC was funded for the first two years of the marketing plan.

Internet Battlefield Tours (Approved by the Commission April 29, 2008)

The Commission will partner with National Park Service sites to create Vodcast tours of the battlefields for use on the Internet, to educate and encourage travel to those sites. Fredericksburg/Spotsylvania National Military Park will create a pilot program under the direction of John Hennessy that can be modeled by the other NPS sites. The Commission approved \$10,000 to fund the initial pilot Vodcast.

Other programs

The Commission also approved:

- A micro-grant program, administered by the Virginia Tourism Corporation, to aid local sesquicentennial committees in promoting events and activities throughout the state.
- "Sesquicentennial Moments," an occasional series of notes written for the general audience that are intended to highlight the state of the country 150 years ago.
- A draft outline of annual military, cultural, and social themes and future Signature Conferences through 2015.
- Working with the Library of Virginia to develop a legacy project on document digitization
- Establishing a Memorandum of Understanding and formalized approval process for use of the Commission's logo
- Partnering with the Civil War Preservation Trust during its 2009 Teacher Institute in Spotsylvania.
- Placing kiosks throughout the state with information on Civil War-related travel destinations, based on the interactive "Then/Now" map on the Commission's website, perhaps partnering with the 35 existing kiosks in Virginia State Parks.

Advisory Council

A large and distinguished Advisory Council serves in a consultative capacity to the Commission, responding to questions directed to it by the Commission, and helping 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 important stakeholders. The Advisory Council held a day-long meeting in June to receive an update on plans to date and provide input on a number of questions.