

Civil War Sesquicentennial taking shape in Virginia

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A cannon sits on a Civil War battlefield in Manassas, Va.

(WTOP Photo/Hank Silverberg)

[Hank Silverberg](#), wtop.com

MANASSAS, VA - It is the seminal event in U.S. History and 150 years later how to commemorate the American Civil War in 2011 still creates a stir.

Virginia is a little bit ahead of other states in their plans for commemorating the war, but there is a conscious effort not to make the same mistakes as 1961, the 100th anniversary. That year there were battle re-enactments and celebrations of "southern heritage" fueled by the heat of the civil rights movement.

Delegate Bill Howell (R-Fredericksburg), the Speaker of Virginia's House of Delegates and the Sesquicentennial Commission Chairman, says this time they want to take a different approach.

"This is a commemoration. It's not a celebration. I think 50 years ago there was primarily re-enactments of battles and what we're trying to do is make it an education opportunity in Virginia."

Howell says the commemoration, which will be spread out over four years, could be a big tourism boom to the state where more than 100 civil war battles were fought.

"We're going to do a lot about what was happening on the home front. We're going to do a lot about the impact on the slaves and the African American population."

One example is Manassas, which will spend \$100,000 for nine days of events in July 2011, 150 years after the first Battle of Bull Run. That will include a re-enactment, but also concerts and other events.

While planning has moved along in Virginia, 20 other states which considered events, including Maryland, have not moved as quickly.

Several attempts to set up a National Sesquicentennial Commission have failed in Congress but U.S. Senator Jim Webb (D-Va.), who says his ancestors fought on both sides, has introduced another bill in an attempt to create one.

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