

# Commission sends schools Civil War history lesson

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More than 2,000 DVDs explaining the causes, conflicts and consequences of the Civil War have been mailed to all public schools in Virginia.

The three-hour history lesson was produced by a member of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission who led the nation's centennial commemoration.

"In the centennial, if we made a big mistake it was that we overlooked the young. We can't do that again," said James I. Robertson, a history professor at Virginia Tech who in 1961 was appointed executive director of the U.S. Civil War Centennial Commission. "A nation that forgets the past has no future."

Robertson has worked as executive producer of "Virginia in the Civil War: A Sesquicentennial Remembrance" for the past 2 1/2 years. The program, divided into nine 20-minute segments that can be shown independently, has been sent to elementary, middle and high schools.

The Virginia Center for Civil War Studies at Virginia Tech produced the program in partnership with Blue Ridge PBS and the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission.

Public library systems will receive a free copy of the DVD, which also will be sold for \$20 on the commission's Web site.

It examines the war from multiple perspectives, such as the role slavery played in dividing the nation.

"We show history with its warts as well as its beauty marks," Robertson said.

President John F. Kennedy named Robertson to change the direction of the U.S. commission after centennial events became more of a celebration than a commemoration.

The Virginia commission that is planning events marking the 150th anniversary from 2011 to 2015 is taking a different approach. "Race, Slavery and the Civil War: The Tough Stuff of American History" is the topic of its next signature conference, to be held Sept. 24 at Norfolk State University.

The commission, meeting yesterday in Richmond, received word that it has received a \$950,00 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to finance two more projects.

The Virginia Historical Society will get \$500,000 for a traveling exhibit that will open in Richmond in February 2011. The remaining \$450,000 will be used for the Civil War 150 HistoryMobile, a high-tech exhibition geared toward students that will travel Virginia by tractor-trailer.

In other action yesterday, the commission approved granting \$262,226 to the Library of Virginia for a digital legacy project that will scan privately held Civil War manuscripts such as letters and diaries.

With the increasing mobility of society, such original documents are in danger of being lost, said Lyndon H. Hart, director of the library's description services branch.

The 150th commemoration may be the last opportunity to find information from "people who knew people who knew people" involved in the war, he said.