

Families invited to share history on Civil War

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DANVILLE - A team from the Library of Virginia will be at the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research in Danville Saturday, Nov. 22, to evaluate and digitally scan family collections of original manuscripts from the American Civil War.

The preservation program is sponsored by the Virginia Commission on the Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, which was established by the General Assembly in 2006 to plan and commemorate the 150th anniversary of Virginia's participation in the Civil War.

The Library of Virginia is cooperating with the Danville Civil War Sesquicentennial Planning Committee to scan and preserve family documents from 1861 to 1865.

The goal of the project is to assemble family documents and make them available through the library's and commission's websites for research by students and scholars.

Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History also hopes to obtain copies to use locally.

Sarah Latham, chairman of the Danville Sesquicentennial Planning Committee, said that material of greatest interest includes personal diaries and letters, unique published items (handbills, notices, broadsides), manuscript maps, period images of events, muster rolls, battle reports, dispatches, telegrams, passes, paroles, and oaths of allegiance.

She noted that the project does not include artifacts such as uniforms, weapons, and other military items.

"The sesquicentennial is an excellent opportunity to help preserve documents still in private hands that record the details of everyday life and the effect of war on the social, political, economic and religious life of the community," said Latham.

"These letters and other documents bring the events of 150 years ago to life in a way that no textbook can."

In addition to scanning documents, the committee invites residents to share their family Civil War stories on videotape as part of a regional oral history project.

Staff from the Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History and Library of Virginia will be available from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. on Nov. 22 to scan documents and collect oral histories.

Appointments are recommended to avoid long waits. For more information or an appointment, call the museum at 793-5644.