

Mecklenburg County develops plans for Civil War 150th anniversary

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Did you know that Mecklenburg County has a local Civil War Sesquicentennial (CW 150) Committee that is planning special projects to help mark the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War?

The local committee brings together representatives from several organizations in the area. They include Mecklenburg County Director of Economic Development Angie Kellett, Virginia Tourism Corporation Tourism Specialist Sandra Tanner, Mecklenburg County Public Schools Assistant Superintendent Dr. Kim Evans, Southside Regional Library Director Leigh Lambert, and recently retired Southside Planning District Commission Regional Planner Carol Corker, who will continue to serve as SPDC liaison.

This local committee functions under the guidance of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission, which includes Delegate Thomas C. Wright, Jr. as a member, and aims to uphold the Commission's main goals: inclusiveness, diversity, education, and statewide accessibility.

The diversity goal strives for the commemoration to be meaningful to all Virginians. The inclusiveness goal strives for events and exhibitions that will portray a balanced story of Virginia's participation in the Civil War and includes:

African-American, Union, and Confederate perspectives,

Stories from the battlefield and home front, and

Causes and enduring legacies of the Civil War.

The goal of statewide accessibility strives to involve all localities and to encompass all Civil War-related institutions. Education is the underpinning of the commemoration, and this goal is intended to ignite renewed interest in Virginia's rich historical heritage.

In March 2009, the Mecklenburg Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution in support of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission. This resolution set forth the formation of a local committee to aid in the planning for the commemoration period with a focus upon furthering economic development and tourism. Since then the local committee has pursued some unique opportunities to lay the ground work for a commemoration that spans 2011 to 2015.

In September 2010, local committee chair Leigh Lambert worked with Southside Virginia Genealogical Society President Scott Wright to bring Library of Virginia's Renee Savits to SVGS' Open House at R.T. Arnold Library. Savits coordinates the CW 150 Legacy Project for Virginia's Eastern Region. This project focuses on document digitization, providing access to privately-held journals, diaries, and other Civil War-era documents. When Savits came to South Hill last fall, she digitized precious family heirlooms from several area residents' collections.

She returned in December to the Boynton Public Library for a special scanning project in which she digitized many documents from a local history buff's extensive collection. While not all of the Mecklenburg digitized items have been posted on the Legacy Project's website, several are currently available for viewing at <http://www.virginiamemory.com/cw150>; after accessing the related website, type a Keyword search, "Mecklenburg," to view the current local offerings.

The committee plans to continue to work with Savits to preserve and make accessible more historical documents. It also envisions partnering with the Mecklenburg County Public Schools on various CW 150 writing and art contests. Other visions include a driving tour with a web-based map, highlighting Mecklenburg County landmarks like Prestwoud Plantation, Randolph-Macon College, Boyd Tavern, Buffalo Springs Lithia Spa, and the Patrick Robert "Parker" Sydnor Log Cabin plus their Civil War-era significance.

During April 2011, the R.T. Arnold Library will feature a display of artifacts and various resources, along with "living history" available on several special days throughout the month. In addition, Boynton Public Library has acquired a free commemorative DVD, "Virginia in the Civil War: A Sesquicentennial Remembrance", presented by the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies.

Similarly, the six branches of the Southside Regional Library are among 4,000 libraries selected as recipients of the 2010 "We the People: A More Perfect Union" Bookshelf, a grant initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities in cooperation with the American Library Association. As award recipients, all SRL branches will soon have cataloged copies of "The Civil War: A Film by Ken Burns" with public performance rights plus "The Civil War: An Illustrated History" by Geoffrey Ward, Ric Burns, and Ken Burns.

With multiple viewpoints in mind, the local committee invites interested groups and individuals to contact chairperson Leigh Lambert at 434-738-6580 and/or llambert@srilib.org to share ideas for commemorative projects and events.

For more information about the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, visit <http://www.virginiacivilwar.org/>.