

New brochure highlights Civil War history

By [Joe Tennis](#) | Features Writer / Bristol Herald Courier
Published: April 22, 2010

While telling ghost tales to kids at a couple of Abingdon, Va., elementary schools recently, I found myself going back in time – to the Civil War. Practically all of the great ghost tales of Abingdon – and the surrounding area – are tied to that confusing and convoluted turning point in American history. Many are tied, too, to the Martha Washington Inn – once a private home and, later, a women’s college.

Abingdon – and Virginia’s Washington County – hold a great deal of stories about places touched by the war, spanning 1861 to 1865.

And it’s not just about alleged hauntings. Much of the lore has to do with the salt, coming from Saltville, Va. Troops fought over this precious commodity – at a time when salt was used to preserve food. And, in turn, they beat up on places like Abingdon as they were moving over the mountains to reach Saltville.

You can read about much of this in a new brochure – “Washington County’s Civil War History.” The brochure includes a walking tour of Abingdon, stopping at The Tavern, built in 1779 and used as a field hospital; the Sinking Spring Cemetery, containing the graves of many Civil War soldiers; and the Washington County Courthouse, built to replace a courthouse that had been burned during the Civil War.

Another stop is the Andrew Russell House, used as headquarters for the Confederate Military Department of Southwest Virginia.

“It’s a walking tour of the many historic homes and sites,” said Melissa Watson, the library manager of the Historical Society of Washington County, Va., which produced the brochure.

The brochure, also, arrives as Virginia prepares for the sesquicentennial recognition of the Civil War – a subject still rife with both romance and controversy.

Operating under the theme “Understanding Our Past, Embracing Our Future,” Virginia will commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Civil War by offering a series of inclusive programs, said Mike Shaffer, chairman of Washington County’s Sesquicentennial Committee.

The statewide commemoration begins in 2011 and runs through 2015 – encompassing various Civil War-related institutions, museums, battlefields, parks and facilities in the Commonwealth, Shaffer added.

“This brochure, which highlights current structures that were standing during the Civil War, will create a journey back in time for visitors to our area,” Shaffer said. “The walking-tour map of Abingdon affords tourists a range of Civil War-related stops.” Brochures are available at the Abingdon Visitor Center; Washington County Chamber of Commerce; and the Historical Society of Washington County.

Want to learn more? Shaffer is speaking on the Civil War in Washington County, Va., during the upcoming meeting of the Historical Society of Washington County, held on May 6 at the Martha Washington Inn in Abingdon, 150 W. Main St. Social hour is 6 p.m., with dinner at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$30 per person. To reserve tickets, call (276) 623-8337 or e-mail mshaffer@hswcv.org.