

Historical groups plan Civil War 150th anniversary

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In Central Virginia, the legacy of the Civil War is all around us, says Doug Harvey, director of the Lynchburg Museum.

Harvey and other local groups already have begun planning how they'll mark the 150th anniversary of the war, which started in April 1861 at Fort Sumter, S.C., over the next four years.

Harvey said museum staff are gearing up to turn their first floor gallery into an exhibit devoted entirely to the Civil War.

Then, in 2012 and 2013, a Virginia Historical Society traveling exhibit will come to the museum in two parts, "Surviving War: The Home Front" and "Waging War: The Battle Front."

Harvey also will be working closely with a Lynchburg committee organizing events; the group formed eight months ago as part of a statewide commission that was created in 2006 to prepare for and commemorate the sesquicentennial.

It's made up of people from local heritage and Civil War groups, like Historic Sandusky, the Lynchburg Historical Foundation and the Civil War Roundtable; Old City Cemetery; local colleges and reenactment groups; and the Lynchburg Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"Each year, the idea is to sponsor events and projects in each locality and, once a year, to have a signature event," said Greg Starbuck, executive director of Historic Sandusky and one of the committee's leaders.

In 2010, the signature event was the premiere of "Hunter's Raid: The Battle for Lynchburg," Starbuck's film about Union General David Hunter's 1864 raid through the Shenandoah Valley, which culminated in the Battle of Lynchburg.

In 2011, it will be a concert of Civil War music, set for next fall, from the Lynchburg Symphony Orchestra.

"It's really exciting because of the potential for teaching and educating and exposing Civil War topics," he said. "One of the best ways is through music. You've got some sad songs, you've got the patriotic, 'Let's fight' songs, and even humorous (ones)."

In the spring, Lynchburg will participate in the state's document digitization program, which will send employees from the Library of Virginia across the state to copy Civil War-era letters, photos and other documents from people's private or family collections.

"What they want to do is add that information to the body of research," Starbuck said. "I've seen and heard about so many letters that no one's seen except for the family. ... This is a way to mine what's out there as far as Civil War material."

"The last time we saw a great unloading of the attic was with Ken Burns," he added, referring to Burns' 1990 PBS documentary about the war. "It was a great boon for researchers."

The committee is also working on other projects.

Starbuck said they're applying for matching grants, from the commission, to obtain new markers for Old City Cemetery and a Civil War plaque for E.C. Glass High School, the site of one of the P.O.W. camps for Union soldiers

"Up until now, the previous Civil War markers were put in largely by municipal efforts," he said. "This is a great way to get the community involved in the process."

A similar committee has formed in Appomattox.

Anne Dixon, director of Appomattox County Parks, Recreation and Tourism, said they'll be focusing mostly on 2015, the anniversary of General Robert E. Lee's surrender there.

She said they would be participating in the document digitization program in April. And, once the new Museum of the Confederacy opens in Appomattox 2012, it will host living history events, lectures and speakers.

"We're trying to get a master schedule together, so nobody steals the limelight from anybody else."

Ernie Price, chief of education and visitors services at the Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, said they've identified a theme for each year and will host exhibits and events, including their bi-annual living history encampment weekend, to support it. Other events are still in the planning stages and depend on funding.

Themes include mobilization for war in 2011, the Union soldier in 2012, the Confederate soldier in 2013, the home front in 2014 and the surrender in 2015.

The National Parks Service will also be holding signature events in various localities each year to mark significant battles.

Price said they'd be keeping their eye on Manassas in 2011 because it will give them some idea of what to expect here in 2015.

"We view it as a four-year process," he said, "starting now."