



Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission
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**Virginia Leads the Way in Commemorating the American Civil War
State Commission Receives \$950,000 from National Endowment for the
Humanities for Nationwide Educational Resource**

Richmond, VA—The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) recently awarded the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission \$950,000 to support its efforts to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War. The Commission, in partnership with the Virginia Historical Society (VHS), will use the funding to execute *An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia*, a four-part, multi-year educational resource for the nation. The Commission is only the third organization to receive the NEH Chairman's Special Award since its inception in 2006.

“Virginia leads the nation by being the first state to create a sesquicentennial commission and begin planning for the commemoration,” said Speaker of the House of Delegates William J. Howell. “In the absence of congressional action to form a national commission, *An American Turning Point* will serve as a visible focal point of a national commemoration. This is fitting because between 1861 and 1865, northerners, southerners, and Europeans alike saw Virginia as the military, political, and psychological epicenter of the war. The war in Virginia is part of our national memory.”

The General Assembly of Virginia created the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission in 2006. A legislative commission led by Speaker Howell and Senate President pro tempore Charles J. Colgan, Sr., is charged with planning for and commemorating the 150th anniversary of Virginia's participation in the American Civil War, which begins this year (the anniversary of John Brown's Raid at Harpers Ferry) and runs through 2015 (the anniversary of Robert E. Lee's surrender to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox). In September 2008, NEH awarded a planning grant to the Commission to support development of *An American Turning Point*.

An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia has four components: a 3,000-square-foot gallery exhibition to be shown at the Virginia Historical Society in 2011, then at seven regional museum in Virginia from 2012 to 2015; an interactive mobile exhibition in a 53-foot expandable tractor-trailer, which will travel throughout the U.S. from 2011 to 2015, bringing Civil War history to the people; a small, short-term, mobile panel exhibition designed for schools, libraries, and non-traditional venues; and an online resource that combines aspects of the gallery exhibition with public programming opportunities and activities for the general public.

An American Turning Point explores personal experiences and poses questions to visitors that often challenge conventional wisdom. The exhibition seeks to portray a balanced story of Virginia's participation in the Civil War that invites discovery and includes multiple perspectives: Union, Confederate and African-American; battlefield and home front; and causes and legacies of the war. As with all of the Commission's programs, the educational resource will have elements that are meaningful to all Virginians, including diverse racial and ethnic groups, young people, and those who do not have a hereditary link to the American Civil War.

In addition to the four components of *An American Turning Point*, the Commission is sponsoring an annual conference series on a variety of topics related to the Civil War; working with the Center for Civil War Studies and Blue Ridge Public Television to produce a DVD for classroom use; launching a document digitization program with the Library of Virginia; and using technology to reach younger audiences, through vodcasts and immersive interactives.

“This is a commemoration, not a celebration,” said Paul A. Levenson, President and CEO of the Virginia Historical Society. “Every effort has been made to ensure that this is not your father’s Civil War project. *An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia* looks at racial, class, and gender divisions, and treats the Civil War equally as a military event and a social upheaval with profound consequences. We recognize that the war continues to elicit powerful emotions—both the VHS and the Commission have undertaken this project as a way to increase public dialogue and enable people to understand this seismic event in new and personal ways. We hope this resource ignites a renewed interest in Virginia's historical heritage.”

Created in 1965, the National Endowment for the Humanities is an independent federal agency and one of the largest funders of high-quality humanities programs in the United States. NEH offers Chairman’s Special Awards of up to \$1 million support projects of national visibility that are of compelling interest to the general public, show exceptional promise of dealing with important humanities ideas in new ways, and are likely to attract large numbers of visitors.

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