

The Virginia Civil War Commission: Understanding Our Past, Embracing Our Future

“Virginia is the Mother State. America began with the Old Dominion. Its sons - Patrick Henry, George Mason, Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Marshall - led the new nation forward. No state did more, or contributed more, toward the formation of the United States.

Yet only seventy-five years into the national experiment, Virginia found itself literally caught in the middle of an approaching war between North and South. In January, 1861, with one Southern state after another leaving the Union, Illinois Sen. Stephen A. Douglas reassured his countrymen. "All depends on the action of Virginia," Douglas said. "Save Virginia, and we save the Union."

– *Dr. James I. “Bud” Robertson, Jr.*
Remarks made to the Commission, Sept 12, 2006.

Virginia could not be saved. In April of 1861 with the firing on Ft. Sumter and President Lincoln’s call for the organization of Union troops to help suppress the Southern insurrection, the fate of Virginia was forever sealed. Initially, the Commonwealth voted down secession, but through rising tensions and President Lincoln’s offensive move, Virginia seceded from the Union and joined the Southern states.

Virginia’s role in the Civil War was crucial for many reasons:

- The bookends of the War were here in Virginia: the site of the first major land battle of the war (Manassas) and the end of the war (Appomattox);
- Sixty percent of the Civil War’s battles –three out of every five -- were fought in Virginia;
- Richmond served as the Capital of the Confederacy. “On to Richmond” was the battle cry for four bloody years. Once Richmond fell, the war ended within days.

Virginia as a National Model

Virginia distinguishes herself through notable historical events and initiative. In 2006, recognizing the pivotal role Virginia played in our nation’s greatest conflict, the Virginia General Assembly, through passage of House Bill 1440, authorized the formation of a commission to plan for and commemorate the American Civil War. The Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission, chaired by Speaker of the House of Delegates William J. Howell, will commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Civil War beginning in 2009 through 2015.

Virginia leads the nation by being the first state to create a Sesquicentennial Commission and formally begin planning for the commemoration. The Commission is working with

other states to encourage planning efforts, offer assistance and seek ways to work collaboratively. In addition, the Virginia Commission is monitoring congressional legislation (H.R. 1131), that would create a federal Sesquicentennial Commission.

Purposes of the Commission

The Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission will lead the effort in fulfilling the following objectives throughout the commemorative period:

- Plan, develop, and carry out interdisciplinary programs and activities appropriate to commemorate the Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War.
- Encourage civic, historical, educational, economic and other organizations throughout Virginia to organize and participate in activities to expand the understanding and appreciation of the significance of the American Civil War.
- Provide technical assistance to localities and nonprofit organizations to further the commemoration of the Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War.
- Develop programs and facilities to ensure that the Sesquicentennial commemoration of the American Civil War results in a positive legacy and long-term public benefit.

EXECUTIVE DRAFT

Goals of the Commission

As Commission Chairman William J. Howell has said, “the Sesquicentennial Commemoration is a solemn remembrance of the Americans - men, women and children, black and white, from the North and the South -- who lived, fought and died for that which they believed. There is much we can learn from them and from that extraordinary conflict, for the lessons of history are meant to be examined, understood, and applied.”

Some may question commemorating such a divisive event; however, the Commission’s objective is not to glorify the Civil War or validate any of the issues that are believed to have caused the war. Rather, the Commission’s intent is to commemorate this watershed event in American history in a manner that supports the following goals:

- ***Diversity:*** The commemoration will be inclusive of and meaningful to all Virginians, particularly:
 - Diverse racial and ethnic groups
 - Citizens who are new to this country and those who do not have a hereditary link to the American Civil War
 - Young people and those seeking to understand the relevance of the American Civil War to today's society.
- ***Inclusiveness:*** The commemoration will seek to portray a fair and balanced story of Virginia's participation in the American Civil War that includes the African-American, Union and Confederate perspectives.
- ***Statewide Accessibility:*** The commemoration will be statewide, involving all localities and encompassing all Civil War-related institutions, museums, battlefields, parks, and facilities.
- ***Education:*** The commemoration will include a strong education component to ignite a renewed interest in Virginia's historical heritage. Opportunities will be provided to re-examine the lessons of the past and the legacies of the Civil War to understand how they affect the present and may continue to shape our future.
- ***Permanence:*** The commemoration will imprint Virginia history and leave a positive and rich legacy well beyond 2015.

Economic and tourism opportunities

The 150th anniversary of the American Civil War also holds tremendous economic and tourism opportunities for the Commonwealth. Virginia was the epicenter of the Civil War in the 1860s and remains the primary focus of Civil War history that visitors can see and experience today:

- Virginia has, exclusively, more Civil War sites than any other state, including over 400 sites that are linked by the Civil War Trails program. In addition to touring the battlefields, travelers can visit world-class museums, historic homes, cemeteries, Civil War libraries and research centers and much more.
- 'Heritage tourism' is one of Virginia's largest and most lucrative economic resources. Civil War history scholars and enthusiasts flock to the Commonwealth from all over the United States. Data from the Virginia Tourism Corporation shows that the Civil War traveler tends to stay longer and spend more money than the average visitor to Virginia.
- The story of Virginia's participation in the war can be found statewide. There is not a county, city or town in the Commonwealth that was unaffected by the Civil War. There are hundreds of Civil War-related sites throughout the state that serve to educate Virginians and tourists concerning the Commonwealth's pivotal role in the war. The presence of Civil War history throughout the geographic region of the state enhances Virginia's appeal to tourists by minimizing the need to travel to a specific place to experience history. Regardless of the location of citizens and visitors in the state, Civil War history is always nearby.

Accomplishing the Commission's Goals

In order to properly commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, the Commission has established a variety of strategies and events to help in meeting its objectives:

- ***Coordination:*** The Commission will coordinate and monitor: (i) programs and activities at museums, battlefields, parks, and events throughout the state; (ii) local sesquicentennial committees; (iii) other states' sesquicentennial commissions; and (iv) commemorative events and planning at the national level.
- The Commission will lead the coordination and provide support of existing museums and sites. The Commission will promote Civil War museums and sites through (i) its interactive website; (ii) development of specialized maps and brochures; and (iii) films and computer kiosks at Welcome Centers and locations throughout the state to make it easy for visitors and citizens to identify destinations and plan their visit throughout the Commonwealth.
- The Commission will request each locality in Virginia to form a sesquicentennial committee to plan commemorative events at the local

level, providing technical assistance as needed. Local committees will be composed of representatives from tourism, education, economic development, local Civil War-related museums and battlefields, and the governing body. Each locality will be encouraged to hold roundtable community discussions about goals and directions for the commemoration.

- ***Signature Events and Activities:*** The Commission will sponsor signature events and activities to commemorate the Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, consistent with the stated goals. Such events may include: signature conferences and signature tours, law school symposia and educational films. In addition, the Commission will support two statewide exhibitions: (i) a two-part museum exhibition that will open at the Virginia Historical Society in 2011 and thereafter travel for three years to several locations throughout the Commonwealth; and (ii) a tractor-trailer exhibition ("*History Mobile*") featuring key artifacts and documents together with high tech maps and displays that will visit every Virginia county seat and possibly travel out-of-state to promote Virginia Civil War 150 tourism.
- ***Themes:*** The Commission will develop themes to (i) unify the statewide commemoration and (ii) link exhibitions and events throughout the Commonwealth that are endorsed by the Commission. The traveling exhibition, the *HistoryMobile*, and all other Commission-sponsored signature events or activities will amplify these themes.

Your Commitment to Virginia and Our Nations' History

The American Civil War occurred nearly 150 years ago, but its effects can still be felt in all corners of the United States today. In the coming years, the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission plans to commemorate and help promote a better understanding of the issues that contributed to the Civil War and the effects of the war on Virginia, the United States and the world. Programs and initiatives will be designed and provided by the Commission to leave a positive and lasting legacy for the benefit of all Americans as well as the creation of new learning opportunities for the heritage tourism traveler. It is with your generous support that the Commission can honor the sacrifices made and fulfill its mission of *understanding the past and embracing our future*.

Remembering Virginia and Our Nation's History

Today, the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission and its newly created foundation begin Phase I of the fundraising campaign to seek support for the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War and Virginia's key role in our nation's greatest conflict. The Commission's established goal for Phase I of the campaign is \$5million. The gift opportunities listed below are ways to support this historical commemoration in achieving its initial set of objectives. The dollar amounts indicated represent values for commemorative purposes, and, unless otherwise instructed, the Commission will apply your gift in its discretion to the goals of the campaign.

Education

- Traveling Museum Exhibition* *\$4 million*

A major statewide traveling exhibition, rich in artifacts, documents, and high-tech components, which will open at the Virginia Historical Society (VHS) in Richmond in February 2011, and thereafter travel for three years to Roanoke, Abingdon, Lynchburg, Fredericksburg, Winchester, Manassas and Norfolk. The exhibition will be in two parts: Battlefront and Homefront, which will travel separately.

- HistoryMobile* *Cost to be Determined*

The History Mobile, or traveling tractor trailer exhibition, will feature key artifacts and documents together with high-tech maps and displays. This concept is based on a highly successful program for the statehood bicentennial in Tennessee in 1996 and is currently being executed in Kentucky. The tractor trailer exhibition will travel to every locality in Virginia and possibly out-of-state to promote the Sesquicentennial.

- Signature Conferences (7)* *\$700,000*

A series of signature conferences, in cooperation with Virginia's public and private institutions of higher education, addressing broad political, social and economic themes, as well as military history of the Civil War. These conferences will be designed for general audiences and the presentations will be published afterwards.

- Signature Tours* \$200,000

Historians and other experts will provide the Commission with rare, personalized tours of significant battlefields and other Civil War-related sites throughout the Commonwealth. Afterwards, these tours will be housed on the Sesquicentennial website for students, teachers and travelers to download for classroom or personal use.

- Law School Symposia (9)* \$500,000

In collaboration with Virginia's accredited law schools, the symposia will serve to educate and examine the historical, political, social and legal context of the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the United States Constitution, their significance to the foundation of the Rule of Law, and their relevance to the legacy of the Civil War and contemporary national and global issues. In addition, a moot court will be held in collaboration among Virginia's accredited law schools to address the constitutional, social and political issues related to the application for statehood.

- Interactive Website* \$100,000

Appealing to today's youth and Civil War travelers, the Commission has established a first rate website to serve as the hub for all Virginia Civil War information. The website will contain webcasts of signature conferences, tours and symposia; a searchable database of digitized documents and artifacts and countless interactive maps and information for use by scholars, novices and students.

Creating a Lasting Legacy

- Educational DVD* \$350,000

A three-hour DVD, produced by Blue Ridge Public Television and Dr. James I 'Bud' Robertson, Jr. of the Virginia Tech Center for Civil War Studies, will be distributed free of charge to every school, library, archive, and historical society in the Commonwealth. The program will be divided into nine 20-minute segments to allow for ease of teacher use in the classroom. The nine segments will focus on the background of the war, military campaigns (3 installments), African-American experience, leading Virginia personalities, the common soldiers, home front activities (including women and medical care) and the legacies of the war for all Americans.

- Digitization of Documents and Artifacts* *Cost to be Determined*

A major initiative to collect, catalog and preserve Civil War documents and artifacts through digital scanning. This initiative will provide an opportunity for the public to access rare documents for generations to come.

Land Preservation

Cost to be Determined

More than 50,000 acres of Civil War battlefield land is currently threatened by population and commercial growth in Virginia. It is estimated that if preservation efforts are not dramatically increased in the next 5 years, much of this land will be lost. The Commission will help support the efforts of local and national groups throughout the Commonwealth to conserve this land and ensure a lasting legacy through preservation

Heritage Tourism

Technology for Education and Tourism

Cost to be Determined

A wide range of technological materials will be created to enhance and enrich the experience of the Civil War travelers. Visitor centers, historic sites and centers will house high-tech, interactive maps and information highlighting Virginia tourism resources. Technology will also be used to help travelers with personal navigation systems access sesquicentennial information and locate nearby historic sites.

Visitor Interactives

Cost to be Determined

Kiosks will be placed in visitor centers, museums and historical sites across the Virginia to help guide travelers and provide a synopsis of the Civil War within all localities. Excerpts from Dr. Robertson's film and the signature tours will enhance the kiosks and help bring to life the impact and essence of the Civil War.