

**VIRGINIA SESQUICENTENNIAL OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR
COMMISSION**

Report of the Executive Committee

Speaker of the House William J. Howell, Chairman

April 2, 2008

Signature Conference: "America on the Eve of the Civil War: Conversations at the Moment" - Dr. Edward L. Ayers, Conference Chair

Dr. Ayers presented his vision for the first signature conference, to be held at the Camp Concert Hall at the University of Richmond on April 29, 2009. Dr. Ayers intends that the conference will offer a fresh perspective and challenge participants to forget that they know how history turns out. The focus of the conference will be the situation in the United States in what turned out to be the eve of the Civil War, focusing on the central events and changes of the late antebellum era. Dr. Ayers proposes a program that will be conducted in an interactive format with speakers from varied perspectives. The format will have participants discussing recent events and what effect they may have, limiting themselves to what was known in 1859. Speakers would represent a diverse range of intellectual, cultural, economic, and historical perspectives. They would analyze facts and predict outcomes in a format akin to "Face the Nation" or "Meet the Press." Possible topics would be:

- John Brown's Raid
- The State of the Nation: The Census of 1859
- Virginia and the Booming South
- Predictions for the Election of 1860

The Executive Committee endorsed Dr. Ayers' proposal and will recommend it to the full Commission. Upon endorsement, Dr. Ayers will invite the speakers to participate.

Update on Projects in Development

Museum Exhibition - Dr. Charles F. Bryan, Jr.

Dr. Bryan offered an update on the museum exhibition, "An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia." Staff has identified hundreds of drawings, paintings, objects, and artifacts for the exhibition and is in the process of negotiating loans with lending institutions. The exhibition will make extensive use of audio/visual and technology components, including databases for searching Civil War soldier records and an interactive that shows the routes slaves may have used to escape to freedom. Commission staff will share data being developed for an interactive timeline on the Commission's website with the VHS for the exhibition's "150 Years Ago Today" feature.

Educational DVD - Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr.

Dr. Robertson gave a status report on the DVD, which is aimed at 8th graders. He has written five of the nine scripts, which will necessarily be concise as the running time for each segment is only 20 minutes. Blue Ridge Public Television has purchased high definition cameras and filming will begin later in April at major Civil War sites, including Manassas, Harper's Ferry, and Antietam. Theme music selected for the DVD is "Shenandoah," performed by Bobby Horton. The DVD is scheduled for completion in August 2009, but Dr. Robertson is hoping that it will be finished in June/July so that it can be previewed. Members of the Executive Committee requested notification prior to the beginning of post-production for donor recognition.

Comprehensive Marketing Plan for the Sesquicentennial - Richard Lewis, National Public Relations Manager, Virginia Tourism Corporation

Upon request of the Chairman, the Virginia Tourism Corporation developed a strategic marketing plan for the sesquicentennial. Civil War tourism is already high in Virginia and Civil War tourists tend to stay longer and spend more than average visitors. However, challenges remain, including: (i) there are better known battlefields in other states; (ii) overall, the number of visitors to historic sites is declining; and (iii) the fact that there are so many Civil War destinations in Virginia may present confusion for visitors.

Mr. Lewis presented the message of the sesquicentennial as one that states American life - the very structure and evolution of our society - can be traced to the Civil War. So much of what America is today can be traced to the effects of the Civil War and, now more than ever, Americans are poised to discover how learning about it has an impact upon how they view their democracy and society. Virginia was the epicenter of the most pivotal event in American history; the stories of the enormous sacrifices, the tragedy, the triumph and the legacy are all told here - and everyone should hear those stories. Therefore, the goal of the marketing plan is to raise awareness of Virginia as a Civil War tourism destination and position Virginia as a top-of-mind choice prior to and during the sesquicentennial.

The marketing plan will begin with research and will integrate tactics such as public relations, advertising, targeted e-mail, sales, special promotions, international marketing, community outreach and support, and resources of the Virginia Tourism Corporation and Virginia Film Office. An estimated budget for the marketing plan throughout the sesquicentennial is \$8,246,500.

Status of Ongoing Activities - Cheryl Jackson

1. Local Sesquicentennial Committees: Thirty-six localities have established local committees to date. As a whole, they are enthusiastic about the opportunities provided by the sesquicentennial, glad to be part of the statewide coordination effort, and understand

the Commission's message to plan balanced, inclusive commemorative events. Staff is meeting with the committees regionally to provide information about the Commission, its plans to date, and to discuss the role of the local committees. Speaker Howell will send follow-up letters later in the spring to localities who have not responded. Members of the Executive Committee were asked to help get the word out in areas that have not formed a local committee and undertake outreach efforts by speaking to groups such as: Rotary Clubs, Kiwanas, local historical societies, American Legion, Civil War roundtables, etc. Staff will coordinate those speaking engagements and provide support as needed.

2. Statewide Partnerships with Colleges and Universities: Speaker Howell wrote to the President of each public and private university in the state soliciting their interest in partnering with the Commission either to host a Commission meeting and tour or host a Signature Conference. Proposals were received from 15 institutions, which are being compiled into a schedule for the sesquicentennial.

3. Special License Plate Legislation: HB 631 (May) and SB 73 (Howell) were enacted during the 2008 Session of the General Assembly, creating revenue-sharing license plates for the sesquicentennial. A one-time cost of \$15.00 will be assessed for each plate, of which \$5.00 is directed to the Commission. The legislation exempts the Commission from typical requirements related to special license plates. The plates should be available for sale through DMV on or around July 1, 2008.

4. Interactive Website: The website continues to remain popular, generating over 130,000 hits and 9,000 unique visitors since its redesign in September. The interactive portion is in development, with a "Then/Now" theme, that highlights the Civil War history of each locality along with an inventory of Civil War-related destinations for visitors to experience today. Destination data has been provided by the Virginia Tourism Corporation. Local committees will provide much of the historical information and augment the travel information.

5. Funding Plan: Michael Jay of the House Appropriations Committee reviewed the Commission's appropriation and staff presented a draft funding plan for Commission-sponsored programs and events.

Development Activities - Danielle Watkins and Pam Seay

Development staff is meeting with foundations, individuals, and statewide corporations to present the Commission's Case Statement and discuss partnership opportunities. A major corporation in the trucking industry has generously offered the in-kind donation of a tractor for the HistoryMobile exhibition, which must be finalized before December 2009. Several grants are pending with the National Endowment for the Humanities, including funding for the museum exhibition and document digitization Legacy Project.

501(c)(3) Corporation: Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Foundation - E. M. Miller, Jr.

The Foundation has been chartered as a corporation with the State Corporation Commission and an application is pending with the Internal Revenue Service for a tax-exempt status. An initial meeting of the Board of Trustees will be held in the near future.