

VIRGINIA SESQUICENTENNIAL OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR COMMISSION
Report of Workgroup 2 (Signature Events)
Speaker of the House William J. Howell, Chairman
September 24, 2008

Call to Order- Speaker Howell

Workgroup members present: Speaker William J. Howell, Graham Dozier, Prof. Ervin Jordan, Jr., Dr. John Mountcastle, Dr. Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, and Bruce Wingo.

Speaker Howell welcomed workgroup members and those present at the meeting. He also introduced Dr. Paul Levensgood, who will succeed Dr. Charles F. Bryan, Jr. as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Virginia Historical Society in November.

Inaugural Signature Conference: "*America on the Eve of the Civil War*"

Carolyn Martin of the University of Richmond offered an overview of the first annual Signature Conference, which will be chaired by UR President, Dr. Edward L. Ayers, and held on Wednesday, April 29, 2009 in the Robins Center. Geared specifically for the general audience, the innovative conference format will find panelists speaking from the perspective of someone living in 1859 - two years before the first gunshots of the Civil War were fired. Four sessions will be offered, each with at least four participants: "Taking Stock of the Nation in 1859," "The Future of Virginia and the South," "Making Sense of John Brown's Raid," and "Predictions for the Election of 1860." Dr. Ayers will moderate and participate in each session, styling discussions on news shows such as "Meet the Press" and "Face the Nation."

Cheryl Jackson demonstrated online registration for the conference, which launched earlier in the week. The conference is free to the public but seating is limited to 2,500, so early registration is encouraged. Partner institutions throughout the state, including museums, parks, and Civil War sites, will be asked to join in publicizing the conference by linking to the website and distributing printed materials. Speaker Howell stressed the importance of such cross-promotion, and urged partner sites to do all they can to help get the word out. In addition, staff was directed to issue an RFP for the conference book sale vendor to Civil War museums in the Richmond area.

John Felton of Central Virginia PBS discussed a proposal for filming and broadcasting the conference that includes live broadcast via C-SPAN and webcasting, development of four stand-alone programs on DVD, a one-hour highlight reel for prime-time broadcast, and *e-clips* prepared for schools. Speaker Howell asked Mr. Felton to work with PBS affiliates across the country to ensure widespread distribution of the one-hour highlight program. The workgroup indicated its consensus that Central Virginia PBS serve as the vendor for filming and broadcasting the conference.

Dick Holway of UVA Press presented a proposal for publishing the conference proceedings. Since the conference format is unique, Dr. Ayers' recommendation is that an edited transcript of

the panel discussions be compiled by a graduate student for publication. In response to questions, Mr. Holway indicated that publication time may take up to one year, although this project could be fast-tracked. The workgroup indicated its consensus that staff work with UVA Press to develop a contract for publication of the proceedings that both supports the conference format and falls in line with the overall conference budget.

Kathy Panoff of the Modlin Center for the Arts discussed a music theatre work that is being commissioned specifically for the sesquicentennial by the University of Richmond, the Virginia Arts Festival and the Virginia Opera. Set to debut in April 2011 at the Virginia Arts Festival, the piece will travel throughout Virginia and to other states during the commemoration. Award-winning composer Ricky Ian Gordon is attached to the project, which has a budget of \$300,000 for which private sponsors will be sought. Ms. Panoff asked the Commission to serve as a promotional partner, allowing localities to use micro-grant funding towards the cost of bringing the piece to the area. Speaker Howell invited Ms. Panoff to present her request to the full Commission at its November meeting.

Project Status Updates and Discussion - Cheryl Jackson

- Traveling museum exhibition - *"America's Great Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia"*

The Virginia Historical Society (VHS) continues to develop the museum exhibition, which will open in February 2011 and travel throughout the state during the commemoration. Two venue changes have been made to the proposed travel schedule, deleting Fredericksburg and adding Appomattox provisionally. The Commission received a \$40,000 planning grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities in support of the exhibition and its derivative components, a traveling panel exhibition and a mobile museum.

- Civil War 150 HistoryMobile

The Commission has hired Out of Bounds, a mobile marketing company based in Los Angeles, for consultant services in the development of the design of the HistoryMobile as well as the identification of content from the VHS exhibition that can be modified for the mobile museum. The Commission has extended Out of Bounds' contract through January.

- Educational film: DVD production

Production continues on the DVD being produced by Blue Ridge Public Television. At the request of the Commission, Dr. Robertson provided an outline of the eight 20-minute segments: Painful Road to War, First Manassas to Second Manassas, Homefront, Common Soldiers, Antietam to Gettysburg, Personalities, Slow Death of Lee's Army, Legacies of the War.

- National sesquicentennial kickoff: Harper's Ferry, West Virginia (June 25, 2009)

Plans continue to be developed in cooperation with the state of West Virginia and Harper's Ferry National Historical Park for a media event that will mark the 'national kickoff' of the sesquicentennial.

- "*Sesquicentennial Moments*"; "Ask an Expert" questions

One of the strongest opportunities of the sesquicentennial is the chance to reach beyond the Civil War buff to also engage the general audience, helping them understand the relevance of events that occurred before, during and after the Civil War. Staff has developed an ongoing series of short essays, *Sesquicentennial Moments*, which will highlight what was happening in the country 150 years ago. The first two have been written and posted on the website: "Kansas - The Shooting Begins," and "Lincoln-Douglas Debates." A rubric and schedule of suggested topics have been developed; guest authors are welcome.

Likewise, members of the public can connect with experts online through the Commission's website, www.VirginiaCivilWar.org, submitting questions related to any aspect of the war. Staff will submit the questions to the panel of experts, publishing selected responses. Historians serving on, or closely associated with, the Commission, Advisory Council or one of the workgroups are welcome to serve on the expert panel.

- Proposed conference schedule, annual themes, etc.

Staff reviewed the proposed schedule of annual themes and conferences. After some discussion, it was suggested that two of the conferences be switched, to alternate a military focus and homefront focus in successive years.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.