

Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission

November 9, 2006

The second meeting of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission was held November 9, 2006, at Pamplin Historical Park in Petersburg.

Civil War Centennial

NATIONAL CENTENNIAL COMMISSION

Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr., Alumni Distinguished Professor, Virginia Tech

Dr. Robertson offered reflections on the 100th anniversary commemoration of the Civil War. The centennial was a commemoration of the deeds and sacrifices of the 1860s and was not done in a celebratory manner.

The National Centennial Commission worked with 34 state commissions and over 300 local centennial commissions. It coordinated activities to avoid repetition of effort, sponsored national programs such as the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation held at the Lincoln Memorial, and published books and monthly bulletins. The commission took the lead in the first major efforts to preserve historic sites and grounds, and urged local participation. It did not endorse any product, book, film or toys, and did not sanction battle re-enactments. President Kennedy prohibited re-enactments on federal property, including national battlefields.

Dr. Robertson said that the centennial commemoration went far in sparking a deep awareness of the tortuous journey America has made in its history and urged the present commission to focus sesquicentennial efforts on educating the nation's children. He cautioned that the 150th anniversary commemoration will be much different from the 100th anniversary, because the mood of the country has changed significantly.

VIRGINIA CENTENNIAL COMMISSION

Cheryl Jackson, Division of Legislative Services

The Civil War Commission was established by the Virginia General Assembly in 1958. It sought to inspire Virginians, and "strengthen the unity of the country through mutual understanding . . . that there was dedication and devotion on both sides." The goal of the centennial commemoration was to highlight character of individuals. Perhaps because the centennial coincided with the civil rights struggle, the issues of slavery and race relations during the civil war were largely ignored. The sesquicentennial commemoration will seize this missed opportunity to fully explore Virginia's diverse heritage.

In applying lessons that can be learned from the centennial for the current commemoration, it is important to note that the goals are similar: commemoration, education, and travel. However, the ways in which these goals will be accomplished, the stories that will be told, and the people

included will be quite different. While the centennial period was guided by inspiration, the sesquicentennial commemoration is guided by inclusion.

Sesquicentennial Planning to Date

VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Dr. Charles Bryan, President and CEO

Dr. Bryan briefed the Commission on Civil War 150, a group that is being coordinated by Dr. Rick Beard, the Executive Director of the Abraham Lincoln Library in Springfield. The group, which is composed of the heads of historical societies and museums, was formed for communication and coordination among the states and has met twice. Members have discussed coordinating an exhibition that can travel throughout the states, encouraging citizens to donate relics to their state historical societies.

FREDERICKSBURG AND SPOTSYLVANIA NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

Russ Smith, Superintendent

The National Park Service (NPS) has over 70 sites related to the Civil War, with 11 in Virginia. The centennial commemoration period, which overlapped with the 50th anniversary of the NPS, was a time of revitalization of the park service. Since then, the visitor centers and interpretive media have been frozen in time with some displays looking the same as they did when they were built 50 years ago. It is hoped that the sesquicentennial period will spark another renewal for the NPS.

In preparation for the sesquicentennial, the NPS has begun to improve interpretive media at certain sites, launch a civil war website, and meet with individual sites. Challenges that lie ahead are funding, competing priorities, lack of direction and overall coordination, and the need for federal legislation directing efforts.

CIVIL WAR PRESERVATION TRUST

Jim Campi, Policy and Communications Director

The Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT) is the number one entity protecting Civil War battlefield land in the United States, having helped to preserve more than 23,000 acres in 19 states. In Virginia, the CWPT has protected more than 11,000 acres, securing \$18 million in federal battlefield grants for Virginia sites since 1999.

Mr. Campi noted the economic benefits of preservation through "Heritage Tourism." Civil War visitors to Virginia tend to stay for 4.1 nights and spend \$547 per visit. More land preserved translates into longer stays. For the sesquicentennial, CWPT plans to encourage further federal and state funding of battlefield preservation, increase acquisition efforts in high-risk states like Virginia, and promote the anniversary through news media and partnerships with National Geographic and the History Channel.

WHITE HOUSE AND MUSEUM OF THE CONFEDERACY

Waite Rawls, Executive Director

Mr. Rawls presented the findings of the Peer Review Report by the independent study panel that was commissioned to make recommendations on the location of the museum. The report recommended that the White House should not be moved and that the collection must stay together, but must move to survive, staying in Richmond, if possible. Strategic alliances are being discussed for a new location for the collection. The lead time on moving is very short, due to the

financial position of the museum and the preparation that will be necessary for the sesquicentennial.

PETERSBURG NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PARK: ITS HISTORY AND FUTURE

Chris Calkins, Chief of Interpretation

Mr. Calkins described the importance during the civil war of the Petersburg Campaign, which lasted nine and a half months, was fought over 176 square miles, and marked the beginning of the end for the Confederacy. The Petersburg National Battlefield currently encompasses 2,659 acres and is spread out over 37 miles. With the completion of the park's General Management Plan, legislation will be introduced to expand by 7,238 acres. Unable to preserve all of the land that made up the Petersburg battlefields, epicenters were chosen for preservation at Reams Station, White Oak Road, Hatcher's Run, Peebles Farm, and Five Forks.

New themes for interpretation, based on customer surveys, will include: Causes of the War, Plantation and Slave Life, Civilian Life and Impacts, Women in the Petersburg Campaign, African American Experience, Leadership and Command, Supply and Logistics, and the Burial of the Dead.

PAMPLIN HISTORICAL PARK AND THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE CIVIL WAR SOLDIER

Will Greene, Executive Director

Mr. Greene gave background information on stalled federal legislation, which was first introduced in the mid-1990s, naming the U. S. Civil War Center at Louisiana State University to head the sesquicentennial in partnership with Gettysburg College. Subsequent bills to create a federal sesquicentennial commission have been introduced in each session of Congress since that time, but none have passed.

Mr. Greene also shared his thoughts on sesquicentennial commemoration plans that recognize that Virginians do not all share the same heritage, including goals to:

- Connect the lessons of the 1860s to contemporary life.
- Include people from all walks of life.
- Inspire lifelong learning.
- Realize a sesquicentennial commemoration that is inclusive and unites all Americans.

Work Plan and Next Meeting

Following the meeting, Mr. Greene led Commission members on a tour of the park and museum. The Commission will meet again on January 9, 2007, in Richmond.

Chairman:

The Hon. William J. Howell

For information, contact:

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