

Civil War events proceed despite lack of funds

By [Katharine Lackey](#), USA TODAY

States and communities across the country are coming together to commemorate the Civil War's sesquicentennial without federal funding or a national commission.



Efforts to provide federal funding for Civil War commemorations have thus far been unsuccessful. The Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission Act, a bill introduced by Rep. [Jesse Jackson Jr.](#), D-Ill., died in committee last year. Andrew Wilson, Jackson's spokesman, says the congressman is working on updating the legislation and reintroducing the bill, which could provide grants for programs and activities.

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In light of this economic challenge, the Civil War Trust, a non-profit dedicated to preserving battlefields, views connecting local, regional and state organizations not just as an opportunity, but as an obligation, says spokeswoman Mary Koik. The trust's website, www.civilwar.org, links sesquicentennial events going on across the country.

"You can read all you want in a book, but for a lot of people, it never quite clicks until you see it," she says.

Programs and events are ratcheting up — and in some cases have already begun — ahead of the 150th anniversary of the firing on [Fort Sumter](#) in [Charleston, S.C.](#), on April 12, considered the first cannon fire of the war by historians.

Charleston is planning a program that spans several days and includes lectures, re-enactments, movies, music and a solemn display of lights at the fort, says Robert Rosen, president of the Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie Historic Trust. That's despite receiving no funds from the state, Rosen says.

One of the few to receive state money is the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission, which has secured a \$2 million annual appropriation since 2008, says Cheryl Jackson, the commission's executive director. Such funds have let the state provide a mobile history tour that will crisscross Virginia, as well as free educational programs for teachers, she says. Despite being the site of one of the war's iconic battles and a well-known tourist attraction, Gettysburg wasn't as lucky. It received no state funds. But that's not stopping the Gettysburg Convention and Visitors Bureau from pulling together five years' worth of plans, which will center around the 2013 anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg and the Gettysburg Address, says Carl Whitehill, the bureau's spokesman.

"There's a real interest in the human toll and the fact that when both troops left, 25,000 wounded and dead soldiers were still here. ... It took months and months to clean up this town," Whitehill said.

The planning committee for Pennsylvania Civil War 150, which was able to secure some national grants, is organizing a Civil War road show with a mobile museum traveling to all 67 counties in the state over the course of four years, says Barbara Franco, executive director of the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission. The Georgia Civil War Commission saw its state appropriations fall from \$50,000 four years ago to \$10,000 last year, says John Culpepper, chairman of the commission. With neighboring states experiencing similar, if not more dire, circumstances, Culpepper founded the Tri-State Civil War 150th Commemoration Association, which serves Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee, to create a portal for events and connect those states.

Like many organizers, Culpepper says the 150th anniversary will be an inclusive look at the Civil War, with an increased emphasis on the efforts of African Americans and women in the conflict.

The Washington, D.C.-based African American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation and Museum has taken the histories of all the United States Colored Troops regiments — identifying where they were organized and participated in raids or skirmishes — and created a database, says museum curator Hari Jones. "African-American history is much more a part of graduate education and ... that filters down through the museums and state and local historical societies," says Daryl Scott, vice president for programs at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

A broadening in the study of history has led to a better understanding of the war and those involved, including the 186,000 blacks who enlisted in Union armies, adds James Robertson, a professor who teaches Civil War history at Virginia Tech.

"We've come a long, long way in civil rights, and I think it's possible for blacks and whites to mark the Civil War with the reverence it deserves," he says.