

Danville to commemorate Civil War



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Headstones stand at attention among fallen leaves Thursday in the U.S. (Danville) National Cemetery on Lee Street.

By [ABBY MAGRUDER](#)

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The Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History will be the anchor for a major commemoration of the American Civil War starting next year.

Sarah Latham, chair of the Danville Sesquicentennial Planning Committee, needs Danville area residents to help with a major project to record the history of that era. The Library of Virginia will have a team at the Institute for Advanced Learning & Research on Saturday, Nov. 22, to digitally scan family records from the Civil War. The team will be here from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and an appointment is recommended.

“Danville will be the first stop as they travel throughout the state,” Latham said.

The Library of Virginia is looking for letters, personal diaries, photographs, muster roll, battle reports and signed oaths of allegiance after the war. Uniforms, weapons and other items used in military life can't be used for this project.

After the items have been scanned, family members will have the opportunity to record oral history about their ancestors who served in the Civil War. Families will get a copy of their document after the item is scanned.

F. Lawrence McFall, a local historian, said the importance of these local documents can never be underestimated. He said people shared with him papers they've kept for generations that helped in the writing of his book about the Civil War in Danville.

"The importance of local documents, you can't stress it enough because that's the way correct history is written," McFall said. "They do tell the stories better than some published works."

A six-year endeavor

Latham said sesquicentennial Civil War activities will begin in Danville early next year and run through 2015.

James I. Robertson, a Danville native and Civil War expert, has agreed to provide the first address March 21. The goal is to have a lecture series with four talks a year through 2015.

The Danville Civil War Sesquicentennial Planning Committee was named by Danville City Council to represent the community at the state level.

Latham said the theme is "Understanding Our Past By Embracing the Future."

The focus of the local activities will include the Confederate side, along with the role of local blacks and Union soldiers.

Latham said Danville's role in the Civil War is more than being the last capital of the Confederacy.

Danville and Pittsylvania County supplied thousands of troops to the Confederate cause, she said. Arms and ammunition were made here, and the city provided rations for soldiers among other responsibilities, Latham noted.

McFall said men left to fight for the Confederacy two days after the attack on Fort Sumter in South Carolina.

During the Civil War, Danville was a wealthy community because of tobacco.

Latham said Danville City Council took great strides in providing for the needs of widows and orphans with food and supplies.

Step back in history

Latham said she hopes the event also will include talks on medical treatment during the Civil War and historical interpretations — one that will either be a black Confederate soldier or a black Union soldier.

Tours of Civil War-era facilities also are planned, and work could be done to the Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History that would make the building look more like a Civil War-era building. Organizers also hope to look at railroads, supply depots, arsenals and other topics of interest that come up.

Danville will play a large role in the celebration in 2015 with its role as the last capital during the surrender at Appomattox.

McFall hopes the events will educate another generation about the Civil War and the role Danville played in it.

“It does not seem like 50 years since I stood ... and heard Bud Robertson deliver his speech on the lawn of the museum,” he said. “Danville was not an idle town, but a bustling commerce center and didn’t suffer financially as other places did in the South.”

Contact Bernard Baker at bbaker@registerbee.com or (434) 791-7986.

To make an appointment for the Nov. 22 event at the Institute for Advanced Learning & Research, call (434) 793-5644.