

Loudoun Kicks Off Civil War Sesquicentennial Events

By Margaret Morton

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The county's roster of special events gets going this year as 2011 marks the 150th anniversary of the civil conflict that tore the nation in two.

The Loudoun Sesquicentennial Committee and its members are planning a number of events throughout the year, commencing with a focus on the heated run up to President Abraham Lincoln's election in the spring of 1861 and the bitter arguments over secession.

To kick off the sesquicentennial calendar, Mosby Heritage Area Association Education Director Richard Gillespie will present "That Spring the War Came: 1861 in the Mosby Heritage Area" as part of the Lovettsville Historical Society's lecture series. Gillespie's talk will be held at 2 p.m. Sunday, April 10, at St. James Church in Lovettsville.

The lecture will focus on what Gillespie terms the region's "reluctant entry to the Civil War," relating the saga that unfolded in the region in the spring of 1861 through stories associated with the area's historic places.

Historical Society Secretary Ed Spannaus noted they were called "conditional Unionists" and made a painful choice when "the nation they celebrated and had helped make fell apart into civil war." The questions of how-and whether-the nation could move forward amid the political turmoil haunted "ever-practical Whiggish Northern Virginia" in the early months of 1861.

Also the Sesquicentennial Committee and the Thomas Balch Library of History & Genealogy will provide an opportunity during which town and county residents can bring in their family documentation from the Civil War era and have them scanned for future generations to enjoy and learn more about the war.

The project is part of the Civil War 150 Legacy Project Document Digitization and Access that has been created by the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission and the Library of Virginia.

Project staff members will be on hand April 9 to scan the documents brought in by county and town residents from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. at the Balch Library on West Market Street in Leesburg. An appointment is recommended as only a limited number of walk-ins can be accommodated. To reserve a specific time, contact Tracy Gillespie at 703-327-9777 or e-mail her at tgillespie@nvrpa.org.

The ultimate goal is to create an online collection of original Civil War-era manuscripts still held in private hands. The documentation may include diaries, letters, reminiscences, damage claims, sketches and drawings, photographs and any other printed materials. The period to be covered is 1859-1867, chosen to reflect the social, political, military, business and religious life in Virginia during the Civil War and the early years of Reconstruction. The scanned materials then will be posted online via the websites of the Library of Virginia and the American Civil War Commission.

Also in April, the Loudoun County Civil War Roundtable will give a presentation by Frank Cooling: "The Gathering Storm-the Road to Fort Sumter." Cooling's talk will be given at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 12.

For more information on coming Civil War events, go to the Visit Loudoun website, www.visitloudoun.org. A dedicated sesquicentennial website at Visit Loudoun is currently being prepared. n