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Alexandria Hosts Civil War Sesquicentennial Community Meeting

*March 27 Event to Help Plan Local Commemoration of Civil War 150th
Anniversary*

On behalf of the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC), the [Office of Historic Alexandria](#) and the [Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association](#) (ACVA) will co-sponsor a third Civil War Sesquicentennial community planning meeting on Saturday, March 27, from 9 a.m. to noon. The meeting will be held in the North Lodge Room of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial, 101 Callahan Drive, Alexandria, and free parking is available. This meeting is open to all, and public participation is most welcome.

The purpose of the meeting will be to announce working committees and begin planning events and programs for Alexandria's commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. This is part of a statewide effort of the [Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission](#), to develop a greater understanding of the cause, impact and aftermath of the war based on the theme "Understanding Our Past, Embracing Our Future." Activities associated with this initiative are planned to take place from 2011 through 2015.

Alexandria's Civil War heritage is very unique in that it reflects the history of the Union, the Confederacy, and African Americans. The overwhelming majority of Alexandrians were loyal to the South, with one of its most prominent citizens, General Robert E. Lee, commanding the Confederacy's Army of Northern Virginia, and hundreds of men from Alexandria serving with the Confederate Army.

Although Virginia had voted to secede from the Union in 1861, Alexandria played an unusual role due to its proximity to the federal capital and occupation by Union forces throughout the war. In addition to being used as a center for military supplies, transportation and medical care throughout the war period, Alexandria was also the site of a major Union earthwork fortification known as Fort Ward, built to defend the capital against an attack from the west. Now the best surviving example of the "Defenses of Washington," Fort Ward was restored by the City of Alexandria in the early 1960s to commemorate the Civil War Centennial.

The Union presence in Alexandria made it a destination for enslaved African Americans seeking freedom. Thousands of refugees arrived here, but without adequate food, shelter and medical care, hundreds of them died. The military authority ordered that a cemetery be established in 1864 and over the next five years, approximately 1,800 people were buried there before the federal government abandoned the cemetery. In 2007, the City acquired the site, today known as the Contraband and Freedmen's Cemetery Memorial.

This meeting will assist the HARC, the Office of Historic Alexandria and ACVA in developing a plan that reflects these and other themes of Alexandria's Civil War heritage.