

# **VIRGINIA SESQUICENTENNIAL OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR COMMISSION**

**Advisory Council Meeting  
March 27, 2007**

## **Summary of Recommendations**

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### **Critical Guiding Principles**

The following guiding principles should be considered in the design and execution of the commemoration. The commemoration should:

#### **Be inclusive**

- Non-divisive, telling all sides of the story even when controversial (e.g., American Civil War Center at Tredegar)
- Promote good, objective history of the period of 1861 to 1865 that is relatively free of bias; a dispassionate history worthy of the twenty-first century
- Historically honest; based on scholarship
- Promote serious discussions of causes and events
- Interpret complex social and political circumstances of the war
- Identifiable themes that guide commemoration events

#### **Be well marketed and well funded**

- Must appeal to people worldwide
- Should inspire travel and tourism to Virginia
- Broad program appeal

#### **Utilize and promote existing resources**

- Maximize Virginia's heritage tourism efforts
- Preserve existing battlefields
- Promote on-site learning at museums, battlefields and other facilities

#### **Have a central location or hub(s) to help draw visitors**

- It can be a site or region, such as Richmond

#### **Be compelling to all ages and backgrounds**

- Utilize cutting-edge technology in a variety of ways to tell the stories
- Involve all of Virginia's geographic areas and segments of the population
- Ensure the story is relevant to today's population
- Tell how the war shaped the country we have today
- Make the Civil War as accessible to as many people as possible

- Have fun activities for children and families

**Create strong ties to education**

- Link the commemoration to SOLs
- Provide resources to educators

**Create a lasting legacy**

- Serve as a springboard for continued interest beyond 2015
- Create a strong physical and intellectual infrastructure

## **A Vision for the Commemoration**

**The commemoration will feature signature events that bring focus to the story.**

Significant signature events will be held in Richmond and other locations to attract visitors and provide periodic focal points through the commemoration time period. Signature events will create “buzz” and excitement and serve as springboards for other activities.

**People will use virtual tools to make tangible connections to the past.**

A highly interactive website will permit residents and visitors to take virtual tours of sites and facilities to encourage visitation. People will be able to “Click on it, then Walk on it” to gather information about the site or facility, visiting hours, directions, etc.

**There will be a one-stop short for Civil War travel and tours.**

The website will provide direct, convenient links to travel information such as hotels, restaurants, airlines, etc. A travel “toolkit” will be available to help them package activities and plan their trip. Customized downloadable tours will be available. Commemoration guidebooks will be available at all travel centers.

**Existing assets will be used and coordinated.**

There will be a high degree of community participation across the state. Existing Civil War Trails systems will be closely linked. Commemoration plans and information on events will be present at non-Commission events. Virginia will interface with other states to coordinate activities and promotions.

**A strong infrastructure and legacy will be established.**

An orientation center (or centers) will serve as a hub (or hubs) for visitors. Sites and “real stuff” (artifacts, etc.) will be highlighted. Reserved and restored land will enhance the story and visitor experiences. Full time Commission staff will help coordinate planning and events. A central database of resources will be created.

**Clear linkages will be established between history and contemporary life.**

Multimedia messages will emphasize the relevance between the Civil War and our country today. A Commemoration icon will help bring visibility to events. “Civil War Minutes” on radio and TV will generate excitement and interest.

**People will have direct experience with history – the “cool” factor.**

There will be numerous opportunities for hands-on experiences. Visitors will get goosebumps from direct contact with the past – materials, sites, voice, etc. Relating personal experiences from a variety of perspectives will help people travel back in time.

**There will be strong education and outreach programs.**

Scholarship programs will be available for students. Teacher institutes and other educator outreach activities will take place. Educational resource packs will be available for elementary, middle and high school students. Programs discussing the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments will take place in primary and secondary educational institutions. The role of immigrants and Native Americans will be highlighted as well as stories of people on the home front. If the commemoration is truly an educational experience, it will make everyone feel a little uncomfortable and cause them to rethink preconceived notions.

## **Responses to Commission Member’s Questions**

Commission members requested Advisory Council input on eleven specific topics. Bullet points reflect specific recommendations by one or more Council member. Areas of disagreement and consensus are noted.

**1. Are specific new facilities needed and if so, what should they be and where would they be located?**

*Overview: Responses were divided - a headquarters is needed, but a new building is not necessarily needed; existing facilities could also serve the purpose well.*

- No new building is needed for the commemoration
- Dedicated headquarters building in Richmond. Allows for integrated staff and physical focal point for media and visitors
- Establish a Civil War Visitor's Center in Richmond. It will serve as the hub for state sites and include other state information as well.
- Orientation center in Richmond/headquarters - - but not new site or building in and of itself. Point to where to go.
- Don't build a big new Visitor's Center. Find somewhere existing or where a small addition can be made.
- Make certain that what is built can also be maintained.
- Find an appropriate facility for the Museum of the Confederacy; Use state property by the Science Museum
- Maximize exhibit space in state welcome centers and visitor centers (upgrade existing facilities)
- Establish computer sites (i.e., kiosks) for interactive sessions. Can be at rest stops, information centers, state buildings, etc.
- Treat this event like our Olympics: Have a big vision, Visitor's Center, etc.

- Establish a capital projects fund for state Civil War sites
- Preserve battlefields

## **2. To what extent should state financial support be provided to organizations wishing to participate? What criteria for assistance should be used?**

*Overview: The level of funding available for the commemoration must be established early, to determine how to best spread the resources (e.g., offer grants to localities and/or museums, or allocate most resources to marketing campaign)*

- Military term: Concentrate your forces for maximum impact
- Benefit all organizations by linking through website.
- Funded mandate to VTC to increase Civil War marketing
- Funding for specific needs with a compelling connection
- Use state funds to stimulate local and private sector matches
- Use state funding for central coordination of anniversary events
- Commission can handle signature events and offer funding to localities and local groups to spark participation (grants with guidelines)
- Fund site preservation. Examine the threat, educational capacity and significance of each.
- The state did not offer funds for the 50<sup>th</sup> observance of *Brown v. Board*, why should this be different? Museums and institutions who participate in this commemoration might even earn money from increased tourism.

## **3. How can Virginia maximize the assets of museums, Civil War sites and other resources for the commemoration?**

*Overview: Through coordination and providing a "hub."*

- State support for a central "office" to identify cooperative opportunities, resources and to act as a coordinator
- Build a center, fund staff and promote it through marketing
- Make sure that existing sites coordinate and plan together, to reduce duplication and have complimentary activities, programs, etc.
- Link activities through the website
- Build on Time Travelers program and Virginia Civil War Trails
- Give financial support for conservation and preservation needs (so the "product" will be ready)
- Identify sites in need of support and preservation and address specific needs

#### **4. When should the official commemoration begin?**

*Overview: There was nearly unanimous consensus on this point. One author suggested that the commemoration begin in April 2010, allowing a one-year lead-up, and others commented that was too late.*

- 2009: So as to include John Brown (Harper's Ferry) and Lincoln's election, so that by 2011, the awareness is high.

#### **5. How can we involve all Virginia localities?**

*Overview: Provide information to localities, involve them, and provide funding.*

- Offer \$3,000 "challenge" grants to towns willing to hold a commemorative event (with defining criteria and quality control).
- Ensure that local governments are aware of troops from their locality who fought in the Civil War. Even if no battle took place in their locality, there are many human interest stories that can and should be told.
- Asking each locality to focus on the 1860 census would be excellent; focus also on the news articles in the local newspapers in 1859 and 1860. Many Virginians might be fascinated by the content of those news articles about the sectional dispute and the move toward secession.
- Give all communities ownership (e.g., a place on the website, etc.)
- Use Time Travelers program
- Develop a program to encourage the study of real people in community during the war and share these stories. Use these stories in the schools, to help students study local stories about the war.
- Issue a local history challenge with prizes: "Uncover the Hidden Story."
- Make sure that localities know about National History Day and how they can participate.
- Help with research about their locality's involvement in the Civil War era.
- Link state, NPS and local facilities and events.

#### **6. What specific types of events, exhibits, lectures, etc. should be held?**

- Suggested themes for each year:
  - 2010: Virginia's Role in 1860 Election and Secession
  - 2011: Manassas
  - 2012: Peninsula Campaign
  - 2013: Emancipation and Citizenship (including 13th, 14th, 15th amendments)
  - 2014: The Overland Campaign (include Battle of New Market Heights)
  - 2015: Lincoln Visits Richmond; Appomattox (Grand Finale)
  - 2016: Fort Pocahontas

2010: Virginia and the Election

2012: Possible Success

2013: Turning Point

2014: Beginning of the End

2015: Acceptance and Life under Reconstruction

- This should be completely educational and the best approach is to gear an educational program for public schools. Aside from that, use of local libraries as sites for exhibits would work. Lectures by scholars like Gary Gallagher would also be good.
- Teaching: "Personal Field Trips"
- Seminars sponsored by colleges and universities throughout the state and across the commemoration period.
- Lectures and presentations on preservation and the loss that can occur.
- USCT: Battle of New Market Heights. Establish a Medal of Honor Memorial Park. Promote the USCT Civil War Weekend Tour. Talk about "Civil Rights in a Civil War."
- Emphasize April 1861 and April 1865
- "History Healing and Hope" - use as a model of people sharing information to better understand each other.
- Hold facilitated "reconciliation sessions."

## **7. How can we capture the interest of students and young adults?**

- Make it interactive and relate to real people
- Relate it to their lives today; use media that they think are "cool"
- Provide teacher resources and training opportunities
- Ask them to transcribe local letters/diaries
- Use Time Travelers program
- Make the stories personal to their community: interactive, use of technology (e.g., "In My Backyard")
- DVDs that contain a good Powerpoint history
- Using the Internet and public television in combination, to reach those who cannot afford a computer.
- National History Day contests
- "Personal Field Trips"
- Provide an educational tool kit to schools
- Make new research available
- Hold a national "Teach-In"
- Create a video game with Civil War themes
- See the Woodstock, VT chorus/story about the Civil War that was put on by students - fabulous
- Have American Girl-type dolls to address Civil War stories, fashions of the times, roles of women both free and enslaved, women who followed the men, and tell stories of women who enlisted or otherwise participated (i.e., Harrisonburg)

## **8. How can we make the commemoration relevant to those whose heritage is not directly linked to the Civil War?**

*Overview: Show how the Civil War shaped the country as it is today.*

- This can happen only if we approach the commemoration dispassionately, and as if we have no heritage associated with the Civil War. "Heritage" often obscures objectivity; it is like a biographer writing about his own mother. Such a biography would be extremely limited.
- Talk about the legacy of liberty
- Discuss larger issues of war, civilians, mobility, etc.
- Tie in themes of other countries' civil wars
- Show the relevance of the results of the war to contemporary society (i.e., the impact of the war on our current society and paths to improvement).
- Emphasize the enduring human interest stories of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Virginians - men, women and children
- Show how the Civil War "created" America of today
- Make the history "cool"
- Highlight scientific and medical advancements from the period

## **9. Who is the target audience?**

*Overview: Everyone, but focus on Virginians first, then travelers from other states.*

- #1 Virginia; #2 United States; #3 World
- All Virginia citizens and travelers
- Everyone, here and abroad
- Civil War "buffs" here and abroad
- All those interested in reconciliation
- Focus on "self-selected" audience ("buffs") first and develop a broader interest as 2011 nears.
- Future generations

## **10. What role, if any, should re-enactments play? What should be reenacted?**

*Overview: No consensus.*

- Reenactors will hold events independent of the Commission. We should have a presence (tent) but not a role as sponsor.
- Critical battles; events that signify changes
- Reenactments as Time Traveler events for stamps
- Highlight events beyond the battles
- A draw for tourists
- Opportunity for school trips

- Could serve as signature events to kick off and conclude commemorative activities.
- Do living history first-person interpretations

## **11. What types of media should be used, and how?**

*Overview: Make the commemoration about personal stories as much as possible, rather than just facts, using DVDs, interactivity, etc.*

- Make effective use of Virginia.org and Virginia Civil War Traveler websites. Ensure that they are linked to the Sesquicentennial website.
- Produce TV "minutes" (e.g., Bicentennial minutes)
- Virginia is for Liberty Lovers
- Show orientation videos in state welcome centers and visitor centers
- Use DVDs, Podcasts and books
- Heavy radio presence
- Use broadcast and print. The Commission provided the content and localities air/print it.
- "You Are There" 30- or 60-minute programs dramatizing key stories
- Story Corps (like NPR) mobile audio/visual recording booth at events to capture family stories from the Civil War era
- Podcasts
- Church archives
- Internet chat room for kids to talk about places they've visited, what they've learned in school, family stories, etc.
- Pop-ups that give a Civil War fact (e.g., "Did You Know. . .") when accessing any Virginia government website