

VIRGINIA SESQUICENTENNIAL OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR COMMISSION
Summary of Workgroup 1 (Coordination)
September 6th, 2007

Members Present:

Senator John H. Chichester (Chair)
Delegate L. Scott Lingamfelter (via teleconference)
John P. Ackerly, III

Alisa Bailey, Virginia Tourism Corporation
James Campbell, Virginia Association of Counties
Mitch Bowman, Virginia Civil War Trails
Margo Carlock, Virginia Association of Museums
Alleyn Harned (designee of Secretary Patrick Gottschalk), Asst. Sec. of Commerce & Trade
Christopher Jackson, WebDreams Designs
Kathleen Kilpatrick, Department of Historic Resources
Joseph H. Maroon, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Missy Neff (designee of Secretary Preston Bryant), Assistant Secretary of Natural Resources
Don Pierce, Civil War Traveler

An organizational meeting of Workgroup 1 was held to discuss coordination efforts pertaining to the sesquicentennial commemoration and the role of local sesquicentennial committees. Members shared their thoughts, ideas and perspectives for the 150th anniversary commemoration, including the importance of strong local involvement. There was widespread agreement that localities should be asked to promote what is in their community, with the Commission serving as the umbrella under which all activities will fall.

Staff Report - Cheryl Jackson, Project Manager/Staff Coordinator

Staff presented an overview of the work of the Commission to date by outlining its objectives, accomplishments, and goals. The makeup of the Commission's three workgroups was presented, along with information pertaining to the activities of local committees during the Civil War centennial.

Plans in development include: (i) a statewide coordination effort, through which the Commission will link, coordinate, unify, and support existing Civil War-related museums and sites; (ii) working with the Virginia Historical Society to develop a major statewide traveling exhibit of artifacts, documents and high-tech components; and (iii) a HistoryMobile tractor trailer exhibition that will travel to every city and county in Virginia.

Plans currently under discussion include a digitization project to collect, catalog, preserve and digitally scan Civil War documents and artifacts; and establishment of a grant fund for Civil War programs, including teacher workshops, in-school activities, conferences, exhibits, speakers' bureaus, etc.

Overview of Civil War Trails and Civil War Traveler Programs- Mitch Bowman, Executive Director and Don Pierce, Publisher

Mr. Bowman reported that Civil War Trails is a coordinated effort to enhance the understanding of Virginia's Civil War experience by interpreting and linking, where appropriate, previously uninterrupted and unconnected sites. There are currently 406 Virginia Civil War sites within 96 localities. Of that number, 352 interpretations exist now where previously there was nothing.

To be considered a Civil War Trail “site,” three criteria must be met: (i) the site must be clearly and accurately interpreted, which is accomplished in partnership with the Department of Historic Resources; (ii) parking must be available; and (iii) the site must be maintained by the locality. The Trails program connects many varied sites, ranging from National Parks Service battlefields-including thousands of acres, visitor centers and personnel support - to obscure country crossroads with only an illustrated sign to explain what happened at the location. Commitment from the local government is key to the program’s success. Historical societies within the locality draft the text for the interpretive signage, while the locality maintains and markets the site.

Mr. Pierce explained the Civil War Traveler website, which supports the Civil War Trails program and provides Podcast tours to certain battlefields.

Roundtable Discussion of Local Sesquicentennial Committees - Hudaidah Bhimdi

Staff reported that Spotsylvania has formed the first local sesquicentennial committee and is currently soliciting members. To every extent possible, suggested membership for local sesquicentennial committees should include representatives of:

- Office of the chief administrative official
- Governing body (i.e., City Council or Board of Supervisors)
- Tourism industry organizations
- Chamber of Commerce or economic development office
- Education community (e.g., Superintendent, teachers, PTA representatives, etc.)
- Local battlefields and National Park Service personnel
- Civil War museums and facilities
- Public and private nonprofit organizations and agencies engaged in commemorating historical events

Specific suggestions regarding local participation includes:

- Invest localities in the HistoryMobile project by asking them to contribute something that will be displayed (e.g., essay contest winners); Consider customizing the HistoryMobile with information specific to the locality that it is touring.
- Requesting each locality to record Podcast tours of area battlefields
- Offer matching grants to localities as seed money to establish programs that meet certain criteria and support the Commission’s goals

- Provide technical assistance to local committees by aiding searches for grants, in-kind resources, grant-writing, etc.
- Ensure that localities understand that the *opportunities* provided by the sesquicentennial also create an *obligation* to present the history that is uncomfortable and unpleasant as well as that which is exciting.
- A fundamental goal any program should be answering the question, “Why does the Civil War matter?”

Next meeting: The next meeting of Workgroup 1 will be held on Wednesday, December 5, 2007 at 1:00 p.m.