

Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission
September 26, 2007
Belmont Estate - Fredericksburg

A meeting of the full Commission was held in Fredericksburg at The Gari Melchers Home and Studio at Belmont. David Berreth, Director of Belmont Estate, welcomed members and provided a brief history of the artist and his estate. Edwin Watson, President of the Fredericksburg Area Museum and Cultural Center, also welcomed the Commission and discussed the rich Civil War history in the area.

Battlefield Preservation

Linda Wandres, Executive Director of the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust (CVBT), provided an overview of the organization, which was organized as a nonprofit lands trust in October 1996. The singular focus of the CVBT is to preserve the hallowed grounds of central Virginia's Civil War battlefields from development and destruction. Over the past 11 years, the CVBT has worked to save over 700 acres at each of the four major battlefields in the Fredericksburg area, with the most recent success being a collaborative effort to preserve the Slaughter Pen Farm at a price of \$12 million. Ms. Wandres stated that unless battlefields are preserved soon, they will be lost to development forever. She pledged the continued proactive support of the CVBT to the Commission's endeavors, and asked for state support, through grants and other financial initiatives, for battlefield preservation.

Jim Lighthizer, President of the Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT), presented a Sesquicentennial Battlefield Initiative to save sacred land prior to 2015. The CWPT has identified more than 50,000 acres of threatened Civil War battlefields in Virginia located in the state's fastest growing regions, such as Hanover, Henrico and Spotsylvania counties, as well as the Shenandoah Valley. Mr. Lighthizer reiterated that land not saved before or during the sesquicentennial will be lost forever. To that end, the CWPT requests an appropriation of \$5 million each year for the Virginia Civil War Battlefield Preservation Fund. The Fund requires a 2:1 match of nonstate funds, thus making a \$5 million annual investment result in \$15 million that goes to battlefield protection per year. Commission members agreed that the Initiative is important and could be the lasting legacy of the sesquicentennial.

Sesquicentennial Planning - Local and Federal

Henry Connors, Jr., member of the Board of Supervisors, briefed the Commission on the plans of the Spotsylvania Sesquicentennial Committee, the first local committee established to coordinate with the state Commission. The Spotsylvania committee is just beginning to meet, but includes 15 representatives from county administration, tourism, the education community, National Park Service, museums, and other partners from both the public and private sectors. The committee agreed to focus on three things: tourism, education and legacy. The hope is to work together regionally, partnering with other jurisdictions and the National Park Service battlefields to coordinate and co-sponsor events. The committee also desires to leverage assets by working with museums, such as the Museum of the Confederacy, the American Civil War Center and the National Slavery Museum. A core goal of the committee is education - making Civil War

history interesting and compelling to a new generation in an effort to spark, cultivate and nurture a lifelong love of history.

Russ Smith, Superintendent of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, updated the Commission on planning at the federal level. Federal legislation (H.R. 1131) continues to be stalled in Congress, which hinders planning throughout the National Park Service (NPS). Nonetheless, Superintendents have come together to start planning and develop action plans. There are over 70 parks in the NPS having ties to the Civil War. Themes developed for the sesquicentennial to date include: (i) preserving and restoring landscapes; (ii) restoring parks; (iii) making better use of technology; (iv) document preservation; (v) connecting existing stories; (vi) developing a national tourism strategy; (vii) implementing education initiatives, such as the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program, in which teachers work on an NPS battlefield during the summer and return to the classroom during the school year; and (viii) establishing a "Sister City" program.

Staff Reports

Speaker Howell introduced Danielle Watkins, the Commission's new Development Officer. Ms. Watkins is working with Pam Seay, Vice President for Advancement at the Virginia Historical Society, to establish fundraising goals and apply for grants to fund the Commission's programs.

Cheryl Jackson, Project Manager and Staff Coordinator, reported that the Commission's website has been redesigned and is being met with positive feedback, getting hundreds of hits in the first few weeks. Ms. Jackson further reported that Speaker Howell established three workgroups earlier in the year to focus and facilitate the Commission's work. Each of those workgroups has held an organizational meeting. Ms. Jackson delivered reports from Workgroup 1 (Coordination), chaired by Sen. Chichester, and Workgroup 2 (Signature Events and Activities), chaired by Speaker Howell. Brenda Edwards, Senior Research Associate, updated the Commission on the progress of Workgroup 3 (Education), chaired by Del. A. T. Howell.

Senator Chichester offered a report of the Executive Committee, which has met twice since the last Commission meeting to receive updates on current activities and consider other programs. The following programs were approved:

1. HistoryMobile (Approved in concept)

The Executive Committee has discussed developing a mobile exhibition, featuring a few key artifacts and documents plus high-tech maps and displays, which would travel to every county and city in Virginia throughout the commemoration period. Members of the Executive Committee and staff have researched three current and past tractor trailer exhibitions, all of which were extremely successful: the Kentucky Historical Society's "*HistoryMobile*," the Tennessee State Museum's "*Tennessee Treasures*," and the Newseum's "*NewsCapade*." Staff was asked to form a task force to examine further options and address logistical issues. The task force will submit recommendations to the Executive Committee at a later time.

Budget: TBD

A motion to approve in concept was made by Sen. Chichester, and seconded by Del. A.T. Howell and Sen. Deeds. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Educational DVD (Approved)

Blue Ridge Public Television has submitted a proposal to partner with the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies at Virginia Tech to create a three-hour DVD on Virginia and the Civil War. The DVD would be produced for the use of schools and would consist of nine 20-minute segments, including: the coming of war, military campaigns (3), the African-American experience, the life of the common soldiers, personalities, the home front (including women and medicine), and the legacy of the war. The DVD will be distributed free of charge to every school, library, historical society, and archive in the state beginning in August 2009. Dr. Robertson has volunteered to work with the Department of Education to ensure that the DVD is incorporated into the history curriculum and that appropriate teacher resources are developed.

Budget: \$350,000

A motion to approve was made by Sen. Chichester, and seconded by Del. Lingamfelter, Del. A.T. Howell and Sen. Howell. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Signature Conference Series/Signature Tours (Approved in concept)

Staff is developing a series of Signature Conferences and Signature Tours, in cooperation with Virginia's public and private institutions of higher education, addressing broad political, social and economic themes, as well as the military history of the Civil War. These conferences would begin in 2009 and be designed for the general audience, rather than a purely academic audience, although the presentations could be published afterwards.

This series of conferences would be intended to set the national standard for interesting, informative discussions by the most distinguished scholars, at the highest level, to foster the broadest possible public understanding of the great themes of the Civil War era, including the causes of the war; why the North won and the South lost; and the impact and continuing legacy of the war. The conferences will be broadly accessible. In cooperation with public television, the conferences could be televised, and recorded for use in secondary schools and colleges and viewing on the commission's web site.

Staff is working with members of Workgroup 2 (Signature Events and Activities) to develop the proposal further.

Budget: TBD

A motion to approve in concept was made by Speaker Howell, and seconded by Mr. Ackerly. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Grants to localities (Approved in concept)

The Executive Committee has briefly discussed offering micro-grants to local sesquicentennial committees for programs that support the Commission's goals or amplify its themes (e.g., transcribing the 1860 Census, support of the document preservation project, etc.). Committee members agreed that grants to institutions should be handled through the standard appropriations process that award grants to non-state agencies. Staff has been asked to develop criteria for such a grant program for further review by the Executive Committee.

Budget: TBD

A motion to approve in concept was made by Speaker Howell, and seconded by Del. Wright and Del. Lingamfelter. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Formation of 501(c)(3): Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Foundation (Approved in concept)

The Executive Committee endorses the formation of a nonprofit corporation to accept donations, grants, gifts and bequests in furtherance of the work of the Commission. Staff is drafting Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, which will be reviewed and approved by the Executive Committee and filed with the State Corporation Commission at the appropriate time.

A motion to approve in concept was made by Del. Landes, and seconded by Del. Wright. The motion passed unanimously.