

Tredegar National Civil War Center Foundation

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Mark Your Calendar

September 23, 2003 Chicago Historical Society: Tredegar Center presents *A New Nation Forged: Legacies of America's Civil War*, a history conference featuring some of the country's finest historians and modeled on our workshop last fall and the programs presented in Charlotte and New York. Plans are still under development. For more information, call (804) 788-6484.

November 2003 Atlanta History Center: Tredegar Center presents *A New Nation Forged: Legacies of America's Civil War*. Plans are still under development. For more information, call (804) 788-6484.

TREDEGAR NATIONAL CIVIL WAR CENTER FOUNDATIONSM

Union, Home, Freedom – Tracing the Stories of the Civil War...

newsletter

Issue No. 3 Summer 2003

Foundation Staff Moving to Tredegar



Progress continues as Foundation staff members prepare to move their offices to the Tredegar Office Building on the Tredegar site in September 2003. Our new location will allow guests a first-hand opportunity to walk the ironworks site, visit the National Park Service Visitor Center, and view the new home of the Tredegar National Civil War Center. We will send out new contact information in August. □

Tracing the Legacies of America's Civil War

Historians, Tredegar Center staff members, and individuals from local host communities are gathering around the country to hear, explore, and reflect on the legacies of our country's most divisive, yet formative experience—the Civil War. As part of the Center's growing public education offerings, evening programs have been held in Charlotte in conjunction with the Levine Museum of the New South and in New York in association with the New York Historical Society and Gilder Lehrman Institute. Combined, these programs have engaged more than 450 individuals in lively and constructive conversations about the legacies of America's Civil War.

Each program is open to the public and features three leading scholars who initiate a dialog on the legacies of the Civil War from the perspectives of Unionists, Confederates, and African Americans. Audience members are

encouraged to participate in the discussion and share their thoughts and experiences on the relevance of the war and its effects on our society, institutions, and way of life. A reception, at which the scholars and audience continue their discussion, concludes each event.

Unique to these programs are their format and interest in the audience perspective and participation. By engaging members of the public in a dialog about the war and its relevance today, Center staff and exhibit designers can consider their insights as the exhibition's gallery tentatively titled *Legacy and Memory* is developed.

Additional programs are planned for Chicago, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles in the coming year. Look for our event updates and mark your calendars. We hope to see you there! □

President's Letter

H. Alexander Wise, Jr.

The Tredegar National Civil War Center will open new perspectives on an old subject. The gateway to understanding the larger meaning of the conflict that still shapes our nation should be at "ground zero," in Richmond. Here armies clashed more often and intensely than in any other comparable space in America, decision-makers fretted, politicians maneuvered, society buzzed, preachers looked for God's hand, profiteers prospered, prisoners pined, spies pried, slaves labored and then seized freedom, and Abraham Lincoln came to see what war had wrought.

Our overview exhibit will explore causes and legacies as well as the course of the war, each from the Union, African American, and Confederate perspectives. Ultimately, the story is one—the product of the dynamic interaction of the parts. We will present evidence to show what happened from each angle. So far, more than thirty institutions across the country have pledged to lend us artifacts to supplement John Motley's outstanding African American collection.

Although the Center is not yet open, we are already achieving our mission. In Charlotte on April 2, we presented an abridged version of *A New Nation Forged: Legacies of America's Civil War* to nearly 100 of our friends from the Levine Museum of the New South and the Charlotte Museum of History. In New York on June 12, the

Fund-Raising Picture

Rearranging a line from Charles Dickens, the Tredegar Foundation's fund raising over the last couple of years can best be characterized as "the worst of times and the best of times." Tredegar, like all nonprofit organizations, has faced the most difficult fund-raising environment in more than twenty years, according to mainstream media. Across the country, we have witnessed the results of a declining economy, a bear stock market, and other uncertainties, causing many nonprofits to close their doors or postpone major projects. Being a start-up organization has only increased our challenge to succeed under these circumstances.

Nevertheless, the idea of establishing the Tredegar National Civil War Center resonates throughout the Richmond community and the entire country. As we introduce our *Union, Home, Freedom* concept to new audiences we invariably hear accolades for the project. Our established programs like the current Civil War legacies panel discussions featured on page 1 have attracted enthusiastic audiences wherever we have held them. Richmond has embraced our vision to establish the Center at

New York Historical Society and the Gilder Lehrman Institute for American History joined us in bringing the program to a standing-room-only audience of 350. We are currently planning events on the same model to be held at the Chicago Historical Society in September and the Atlanta History Center in November. Programs with the Smithsonian Institution, the Huntington Library, and Colonial Williamsburg are on the drawing board for next year. The popularity of the legacies programs illustrate the appeal of our broad approach and demonstrate our intention to be a learning center as well as a tourist attraction.

Since our last newsletter appeared, we have made considerable progress toward groundbreaking. We have commitments totaling \$9 million, almost half what is needed to build and operate the Center through the opening period. We are preparing to move to the Tredegar site this fall, and we have already erected our first small exhibit in the Gun Foundry. Closer identification with the site will help our fund raising and our ability to manage the project as it moves into the construction phase. We're encouraged that citizens from across the country—individuals, businesses, foundations, and governments—have chosen to invest in this project. With your continued help and that of new friends in New York, Charlotte, and elsewhere, it won't be long now till groundbreaking. □

the Tredegar Iron Works, and we are building excitement in other cities like Atlanta, Washington, Chicago, Phoenix, Memphis, Charlotte, and New York.

We also have had many fund-raising successes. Recent examples of major gift support include The Tredegar Corporation and Media General, Inc., each pledging \$100,000. Additionally, the Commonwealth of Virginia again supported our vision by allocating \$150,000 during this last budget cycle, and we received our first allocation from the federal government of \$201,000. Recent foundation commitments include \$250,000 challenge grants from both the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation and another private Richmond foundation. Our many individual major gift donors will be recognized in a later issue.

External factors may continue to affect fund raising generally. However, from our experience in the community and across the country we know the Tredegar National Civil War Center will be a success. Thank you to all of those who have made a financial commitment so far. □

The Civil War: A 21st-Century Conversation



James O. Horton, Ph.D., Benjamin Banneker Professor of American Studies, The George Washington University, and Director of the African American Communities Project of the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

Few events in American history evoke more popular interest and outright controversy than the Civil War. In interpreting its causes and meaning, Richmond, the last capital of the old Confederacy, often occupies a special place. There, heated debate has arisen over a portrait of Robert E. Lee along the Canal Walk and, more recently, the placement of a statue of Abraham Lincoln. These are symbols of a struggle that cost more than 600,000 American lives and could easily have destroyed the nation. Even more than a century later, the central issues of that war cut to the core of America's national identity. They are the most difficult aspects of American history for Americans to discuss openly and honestly. In this context it is no simple assignment to present and interpret our nation's most troubling history for the general public, yet that is exactly what the Tredegar Center seeks to do, and to do it in Richmond, Virginia.

This is a challenging task and no part of it more so than addressing the causes of the war. Although the best historical scholars over the last generation or more have argued convincingly that slavery and race were at the heart of that war, and although most Americans at the time of the war understood this fact and said so, today that argument is more difficult to make beyond the range of professional historical discussion. For many Americans "The War," as it is still referred to, remains too personal to be considered dispassionately. As historian James McPherson explained in a recent article, it is especially difficult for southern whites "to admit—that the noble Cause

for which their ancestors fought might have included the defense of slavery." Evidence of slavery's significance in bringing on secession and the war that followed is abundant in the letters, speeches, articles, and resolutions written by those who established and supported the Confederacy. While the United States did not seek abolition in the slaveholding states at the start of the war, the testimony of Confederate leaders and their supporters makes it very clear that slavery was at the core of what most Southerners considered the "Southern way of life." This is the cause for which many Southern whites, slaveholders and non-slaveholders alike, were willing to leave the United States. Even for those who argued for states' rights as the most important cause, the question remains, a state's right to do what, to protect what? We know that Southern states' rights advocates had no aversion to supporting federal law over state law as long as that federal law was the Fugitive Slave Act, which superceded Northern state "personal liberty laws" prohibiting state facilities and personnel from being used in the capture and return of fugitive slaves. On the eve of war, Confederate president Jefferson Davis claimed that the slave states must secede because the U.S. government could not be depended on to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act, a curious position for a states' rights advocate to take.

Confronting this history is difficult but it is ultimately critical to our society. It can provide a historical context for some of the most important social, political, and economic conversations of the 21st century. The Tredegar Center can offer a place where the descendants of slaveholders, Southern unionists, slaves, and abolitionists can find education and perhaps common ground on which to have needed conversations. As one who believes in the power of education, I argue from the premise that knowledge will facilitate the understanding that may enable Americans finally to come to grips with the Civil War and the issues of race bound up with that critical American struggle. The Tredegar Center will tell this rich and complex story. I enthusiastically support its effort. □

6th Annual Richmond Civil War Days

Richmond Civil War Days, held on April 25-26, 2003, at the Tredegar Iron Works, began on Friday evening with a showing of silent movies about the Civil War and an exhibit of battlefield photography by Jan Faul.

Approximately 1,200 people came to the historic Tredegar grounds on Saturday for activities that included musket and cannon firings, music by First African Baptist Choir and Southern Horizons, railroad displays, Civil War military encampments, archaeological displays, children's games of the 19th century, a book signing by DeAnne Blanton, author of *They Fought Like Demons*, balloon rides and lectures on Civil War ballooning, a Civil War medical demonstration, and guided tours of Belle Isle.

Participants included the Virginia Aviation Museum, Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Museum of the Confederacy, Pamplin Park, John B. Cary School, and Franklin Military Academy. The event was sponsored by the Richmond Civil War Day Committee, Richmond National Battlefield Park, and Tredegar National Civil War Center Foundation. Next year's event is planned for April 23-24. □

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