

THE CHALLENGE OF CREATING THE CIVIL WAR RESEARCH CENTER AT THE VHS

It is impossible to understand America without understanding the Civil War. Though many educators, commentators and journalists lament the demise of humanities and history education in secondary schools and higher education, the public's thirst for knowledge about the Civil War has never been greater. Record attendance at battlefields, Civil War visitor centers, museums and increased scholarship underscores the continued need for a pipeline to deliver information to a growing global audience.

A dramatic change to the VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY collection is happening now.

As part of an innovative agreement between the VHS and the Museum of the Confederacy (MOC), the vast paper-based Civil War collection of the Confederate Memorial Literary Society (CMLS) housed within the Eleanor S. Brockenbrough Library of the MOC, is being moved to the VHS. This is vitally important as there was no certainty that the collection would remain intact in Virginia had an agreement not been reached.

The pairing of these two collections will create an unparalleled center for studying the war and how it has affected the history of the entire nation. The Center will hold clues to the roles before, during and after the conflict of all those affected – from Union and Confederate soldiers to civilians, slaves, free blacks, women and immigrants. The vast holdings will demonstrate the war's effect on American religion, and culture (including its art, literature and music), as well as the changes it wrought on American industry, technology, education, medicine and politics.

This extraordinary addition to the Society's archives results from the partnership of the MOC and the American Civil War Center at Historic Tredegar to create a new American Civil War Museum (ACWM). In the best interest of historical scholarship, the MOC will place its immense Civil War records at the VHS for processing, conservation, digitization and far greater accessibility.

Recognizing that the Virginia Historical Society's infrastructure for archival care represents the absolute best practices in the field and knowing the sterling reputation for research service offered by our library, the MOC leadership concluded that their research collections could not be placed in a more secure environment, or be placed in another library that offers the same attention to detail and patron service as the VHS.

The possibilities for collaboration with other archives, universities and museums are only limited to what we can imagine today.

The Financial Challenges

The VHS has installed compact shelving and special fixtures for storing maps, prints and other oversized items and has engineered a climate-controlled environment to meet the most exacting industry standards.

Besides the physical storage of this immense collection is the challenge of **virtual storage** because our goal is to create large numbers of digital copies for greater public access. The projected quantity of the new digital images has made it necessary to invest in a digital assets management system (DAMS) to store, organize, find, retrieve and share the digital files. The DAMS will allow for cloud storage, backup, usage tracking, potential e-commerce and more.

The DAMS is Google searchable. That means that any researcher anywhere, who may not have prior knowledge of the Virginia Historical Society, can do an online search and be immediately directed to our holdings. The accessibility of these collections complements the James I. Robertson, Jr. Civil War Sesquicentennial Legacy Collection. National and international scholars and educators will be able to access these invaluable sources in Richmond or remotely via the web.

After months of a discovery phase of the project to inventory the CMLS holdings, we now know that we will be receiving 1,243 linear feet of materials from the Museum of the Confederacy:

207 linear feet of manuscripts, ledgers, and small bound volumes

144 linear feet of oversized manuscript volumes

90 linear feet of pamphlet materials

336 linear feet of books which comprise the Boucher and Markham collections

183 linear feet of books from the general collection

117 linear feet of rare books

38 linear feet of Confederate imprints

96 linear feet of bound and boxed newspapers

32 linear feet of periodicals

Three large file cabinets of oversized materials including maps, posters, broadsides and ephemera.

In addition, the Center will make available about 100 linear feet of unprocessed Civil War materials previously donated to the VHS.

We will also take responsibility for the digitization of 7,172 photographs, the originals of which will then return to the custody of the American Civil War Museum: 350 daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and tintypes (mostly cased), 2,390 cartes-de-visite and an assortment of albumen prints, cabinet cards, stereographs, glass negatives, lantern slides, etc.

Committed to date: \$1.2 million for compact shelving
\$600,000 for processing of the collection

Need to raise: \$400,000 for continued processing of the collection
\$1 million for archivist endowment

The world's largest independent repository of Civil War archives

And, we know the Center will grow. Other Civil War archives in private hands have been promised to the VHS and others may come to us by gift or purchase, particularly as the Center becomes more widely known.

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