



# VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The Story of Virginia*

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Jennifer Guild, Senior Officer for Public Relations and Marketing  
(804) 342-9665, [jguild@vahistorical.org](mailto:jguild@vahistorical.org)

## **Iconic American Music Memorabilia on Display in New Virginia Historical Society Exhibition**

### **Show Features Pete Seeger's Banjo Head, Original Copy of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and 1859 Handwritten Version of *Dixie***

Richmond, VA—On Saturday, June 29, 2013, the Virginia Historical Society (VHS), in partnership with the Virginia General Assembly's Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission, opened *Revolutions: Songs of Social Change, 1860–65 and 1960–65*.

The exhibition—a Commission signature event to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation—uses more than thirty objects to explore music that defined the Civil War and civil rights eras. It is broken into six sections: patriotic, sentimental, spirituals, freedom, dixie, and ballads. There are also two audio visual units that invite visitors to listen to performances and read lyrics of material featured in the show.

“Songs are more than a form of entertainment; they are cultural touchstones used to convey ideas, inspire patriotism, reward sacrifice, and encourage loyalty,” said VHS head of program development and *Revolutions* co-curator Andrew Talkov. “In both 1860 and 1960, Americans believed they were standing at the brink of great events. Young, charismatic presidents had just won hard-fought political contests promising reform that would reduce injustice and inequality in the United States. By 1865 and 1965, both presidents had been assassinated, leaving not only their promised reforms in jeopardy but also a nation coming to terms with the meaning of war.”

Most of the items in *Revolutions* are from the VHS. Highlights include an array of Civil War–era sheet music from the society's extensive 4,629-piece Virginia-themed sheet music collection and a handwritten version of *Dixie's Land* (known today as *Dixie*) by composer Daniel Decatur Emmett for a blackface minstrel troupe in 1859, the year the song was created.

Loaned items include an original copy of the patriotic anthem *Battle Hymn of the Republic* by author Julia Ward Howe coming from the Gilder Lehrman Collection at the New-York Historical Society and a 160-year-old fully intact banjo from the Blue Ridge Institute & Museum at Ferrum College. In addition, the inscribed banjo head used on folk music icon Pete Seeger's instrument for nearly four decades is traveling from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame + Museum. This is the first time this banjo head has ever been publically displayed since the Rock Hall received the donation from Seeger in 2010.

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Post Office Box 7311  
Richmond, Virginia 23221  
[www.vahistorical.org](http://www.vahistorical.org)





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“We are always pleased to work with other institutions,” said Rock and Roll Hall of Fame + Museum curatorial director Howard Kramer. “Pete Seeger has been a leading force in American folk music. This exhibit at the Virginia Historical Society is a bold move to examine parallels in U.S. history in a new light.”

“Visitors will be surprised that much of the twentieth-century music they are familiar with has nineteenth-century roots,” said Dr. Laurant Lee, exhibition co-curator and VHS curator for African American history. “Folk singers of the 1960s used songs from the 1860s to convey and express feelings about the times in which they were living. It was not happenstance that these musicians were looking back to draw on history; they were keenly aware of what they were doing. They were putting a soundtrack to a revolution.”

“Comparing songs from these two periods offers an opportunity to explore the ways in which their unique power transcends time,” Talkov added. “Music has a past, just like everything else.”

The *Revolutions* exhibition is on display at the VHS until January 5, 2014. Admission is free.

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For more than 182 years, the **Virginia Historical Society** (VHS) has been connecting people to America’s past through the unparalleled story of Virginia. The VHS—a history museum and research library—features award-winning exhibitions that are entertaining and educational for visitors of all ages. The Society is the only museum with all of Virginia’s history under one roof—all centuries, all regions, and all topics are covered. Although designated the Official State Historical Society, the VHS is a privately funded non-profit organization that relies on contributions from individuals, corporations, and foundations to sustain its operations. The VHS is located at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond’s Museum District. Admission is free. Museum hours are Monday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday 1 p.m.–5 p.m. Library hours are Monday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. For more information, call (804) 358-4901, visit [www.vahistorical.org](http://www.vahistorical.org), or find the VHS on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

