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Virginia Historical Society to Commemorate WWI Centennial in 2018 Major Exhibitions and Programming Will Explore The Great War's Impact on America

Richmond, VA — The Virginia Historical Society will host one of the largest commemoration programs for the centennial of World War I (1914 to 1918). In a conflict that redefined the world, our nation, and the Commonwealth, more than 100,000 Virginians served and nearly 4,000 lost their lives. To remember this critical time during an important anniversary, the VHS will welcome a major exhibition, *WWI America*—the largest traveling show about the Great War in the nation. The exhibit will open on February 17, 2018, and the VHS will be the only *WWI America* venue on the east coast.

“This timely exhibition on WWI reflects a crucial and defining time in our nations’ history as well as that of the Commonwealth,” said VHS president and CEO Jamie O. Bosket. “This expansive and immersive exhibit, and the multitude of programs we will feature along with it, will be history rich and deeply moving.”

Hundreds of original artifacts and important personal narratives in *WWI America* tell the story of the war overseas, and its dramatic impact on the home front. Items such as President Woodrow Wilson’s hat and cane, baseball legend Christy Mathewson’s gas mask, and a helmet worn by Latin American activist José de la Luz Sáenz will be displayed. Major factors that influenced Americans, such as the sinking of the *Lusitania*, threats to U.S. commercial shipping by German U-boats, and the infamous Zimmerman telegram will be represented. Minor legacies like sunglasses, cigarettes, safety zones, wristwatches, brassieres, and passports will also be featured. Special elements include an interactive display for visitors to explore the variety and quantity of U.S. products shipped overseas; a recreated movie house showing popular films of the period; and an IQ station where guests can take the first-ever written intelligence test given to recruits to select candidates for officer training. Important and timely nation-changing movements will also be covered, including the prohibition of alcohol and women’s struggle for the right to vote.

Joining this large-scale exhibit will be one of the society’s own making that will highlight the specific role of Virginia and Virginians in the war, showcasing dozens of artifacts from its own collections. Visitors will see a Red Cross uniform worn by Carrie Triplett Taliaferro Scott of Richmond; the naval uniform worn by Walter Alfred Clayton, Jr., of Crewe, who served on the U.S.S. *Batjan*—a Dutch freighter used by the U.S. Navy to transport ordnance to France; and the helmet and goggles of Air Corps pursuit pilot Walter S. Robertson, born in Nottoway County, who, after his service in the Great War, served his country from high level appointments in the U.S. Diplomatic Corps and U.S. State Department.

In addition, the VHS will coordinate a statewide veteran memorial project to honor the thousands of soldiers who lost their lives during this global conflict. Tributes to these fallen heroes will adorn the front of the museum from early 2018 through the 100th anniversary of Armistice Day on November 11, 2018.

WWI America was produced by the Minnesota Historical Society in partnership with the National Constitution Center, the National World War I Museum at Liberty Memorial, the Oakland Museum of California, and the Bullock Texas State History Museum. The exhibit has been made possible in part by major grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the human endeavor.

Founded in 1831, the Virginia Historical Society is the oldest cultural organization in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and one of the oldest and most distinguished history organizations in the nation. Located in the Museum District of Richmond, Virginia, the VHS houses its collection of nearly 9 million items and serves as the state history museum with permanent and special exhibitions as well as a vibrant portfolio of public programs. The VHS is located at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond’s Museum District. Hours are Monday – Sunday 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for the galleries and museum shop, Monday – Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for the library. For more information about the VHS call (804) 358-4901, visit vahistorical.org, or connect with the VHS on Facebook and Twitter.

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