



# VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The Story of Virginia*

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## **Virginia Historical Society Begins Work on Massive Civil War Mural Conservation Project** **\$375,000 Grant Will Help Save an American Treasure**

Richmond, VA—The National Park Service and the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities—in collaboration with the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation—recently awarded \$14.3 million in federal competitive Save America’s Treasures (SAT) grants to 61 organizations and agencies that will conserve nationally significant cultural and historic sites, buildings, objects, documents, and collections.

Among the recipients is the Virginia Historical Society (VHS), awarded \$375,000 to clean and conserve Charles Hoffbauer’s Memorial Military Murals depicting Confederate leaders and soldiers during the spring, summer, autumn, and winter “seasons” of the American Civil War. Save America’s Treasures received 338 grant applications from eligible federal agencies; state, local, and tribal governments; and not-for-profit organizations. The VHS, a private nonprofit, received the largest monetary award granted to any applicant in Virginia and the largest SAT grant the organization has ever received.

“The Memorial Military Murals by Charles Hoffbauer are an American treasure because they are one of the best examples of how elements of the United States population overcame the pain and destruction of our bloodiest conflict,” said Dr. Paul Levensgood, VHS President and CEO. “They are the preeminent visual artistic symbol of what came to be known as the ‘Lost Cause,’ a southern response to defeat in the American Civil War.”

The oil paintings were commissioned by the Confederate Memorial Association and painted by French artist Charles Hoffbauer (1875–1957)—a leading historical muralist of the early twentieth century—between 1913 and 1920. There are four main murals, two measuring 26’ x 14’ and the largest two spanning 36’ x 14’, and four smaller flanking panels that are 3.5’ x 14’ each. Outside of the cycloramas at Gettysburg and Grant Park in Atlanta, these murals are one of the few large-scale pieces of Civil War artwork on public view.

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“The time to conserve these precious paintings is now,” said Cleo Mullins, chief conservator of Richmond Conservation Studio, the firm hired to complete the conservation project work. “Hoffbauer’s murals are threatened structurally. Of primary concern are the numerous areas where the paint layers are actively flaking and areas where the glued canvas has detached from the plaster wall. Overall the paintings are unpleasantly mottled and obviously soiled from almost one hundred years of airborne grime. After the cleaning work is complete, the aesthetic benefits will be rather spectacular.”

“The complete cleaning, restoration, and protective coating of the murals will be accompanied by upgrades to the gallery that houses them, including cleaning and repairing the skylight, repainting the remaining surfaces, and refurbishing the hardwood floors,” said Levengood. “This plan will not only stop and correct the loss and damage already affecting the murals’ condition, but it will also offer further protection to prevent future threats and ensure continued proper maintenance. The project will provide the ideal conditions for the murals so that they may be enjoyed by the public—free of charge—for many years to come.”

The Memorial Military Murals conservation project is scheduled to be completed in 2014. As allowable by the work, the VHS plans to let visitors view the conservation project as it progresses.

“We are overwhelmed by the generosity of the granting agencies for this valuable award, but, because of the magnitude of this vital conservation project, the \$375,000 will not cover all expenses associated with this meticulous multi-year effort,” Levengood said. “With this grant, the National Endowment for the Arts challenges the VHS to raise the additional funds needed from the private sector. We hope that with renewed interest in Civil War history during the sesquicentennial commemoration from 2011 to 2015, the public will take pride in preserving that history and will support all efforts to tell the story of Virginia and our nation.”

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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.

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