



VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Story of Virginia

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Virginia Historical Society Wins 2011 AASLH Award of Merit Museum Honored for Leadership and Interpretation of History for Civil War Exhibition Currently on Display

Richmond, VA—The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) recently announced that the Virginia Historical Society (VHS) is the recipient of a 2011 Award of Merit from the AASLH Leadership in History Awards committee. The VHS was honored for *An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia*, a 3,000-square-foot exhibition featuring more than 200 objects and 17 audiovisual programs, currently on display at the Society's museum through December 30, 2011. *An American Turning Point* is a signature project of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission and is a major component of the commonwealth's commemoration of the Civil War sesquicentennial from 2011 to 2015.

“*An American Turning Point* differs from past examinations of the Civil War by giving equal time to the conflict as a social upheaval experienced by more than just soldiers; by giving voice to previously overlooked participants; by expanding the traditional narrative of the war handed down in schools for generations; and by organizing the project through questions that often challenge conventional wisdom,” said Dr. Paul Levengood, VHS President and CEO. “The VHS has undertaken this project as a way to increase public dialogue and enable people to understand the war in new and personal ways. By providing communities throughout Virginia with a place to reflect upon the many complex issues surrounding the American Civil War, the VHS will help foster positive and constructive dialogue.”

AASLH bestows Leadership in History Awards to establish and encourage standards of excellence in the collection, preservation, and interpretation of state and local history in order to make the past more meaningful to all Americans. The Leadership in History Awards, in its 66th year, is the most prestigious recognition for achievement in the preservation and interpretation of history and brings public recognition to small and large organizations, institutions, and programs that make contributions in this arena.

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The Award of Merit recognizes excellence for projects (including civic engagement, exhibits, multimedia, preservation projects, publications, public programming, and special projects), individual achievement, and general organizational excellence. The award is given for exceptional and meritorious work—action over and above the ordinary call of duty—and new and promising ideas, approaches, and innovations that will serve as a model for the field are given special consideration.

“An American Turning Point is an example of the very best of modern interpretive techniques that tell a story and prompt the visitor to consider the Civil War and its effects on humans, both then and now, in a gripping new light,” said Richard Lewis, Public Relations Manager for the Virginia Tourism Corporation, in a letter to the AASLH awards committee in February. “Those who experience the exhibit will be led to a new understanding of the transforming impact of the Civil War on people in Virginia during that time. They will also be prompted to re-examine their own beliefs about the war and to come to a greater understanding of how the Civil War still impacts America 150 years later. This exhibit brilliantly engages a wide spectrum of ages, interests, and perspectives.”

In his letter to members of the AASLH awards committee, Dr. John Kneebone, Associate Professor of History at Virginia Commonwealth University, said “Throughout, the exhibition takes up contentious historiographical issues, offers its own clear interpretation, and then does so in terms of public history, by being accessible, interesting, and inviting to other interpretations. The most important message of the exhibition is, in fact, a direct reflection of contemporary scholarship: the Civil War is the stories of all who experienced it.”

In 2011, AASLH conferred 59 national awards honoring people, projects, exhibitions, books, and organizations. Presentation of the awards will be made at a special banquet during the 2011 AASLH Annual Meeting in Richmond, Va., on Friday, September 16, 2011. The banquet is supported by a generous contribution from the History Channel.

An American Turning Point was made possible by the Virginia Historical Society in partnership with the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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“In the absence of congressional action to coordinate a national commemoration and with each state struggling to produce sesquicentennial programming in an era of scant budgets and economic recession, the Virginia Historical Society’s *An American Turning Point* serves as a visible focal point of a national commemoration,” Levensgood added.

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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, or find the VHS on Facebook and Twitter.

The **American Association for State and Local History** (AASLH) is a not-for-profit professional organization of individuals and institutions working to preserve and promote history. From its headquarters in Nashville, Ten., AASLH provides leadership, service, and support for its members who preserve and interpret state and local history in order to make the past more meaningful in American society. AASLH publishes books, technical publications, a quarterly magazine, and monthly newsletter. The association also sponsors regional and national training workshops and an annual meeting. For more information about AASLH, visit the www.aaslh.org.

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