

Civil War 150 Legacy Project: Document Digitization and Access

by *Laura Drake Davis and Renee Savits*

The 150th anniversary of the American Civil War provides an unparalleled opportunity to examine the conflict that defined our nation like no other. One third of the battles were fought in Virginia, and four years of war ravaged the Virginia landscape. To prepare for and commemorate the sesquicentennial of Virginia's participation in the American Civil War, House Bill 1440 was introduced in the Virginia General Assembly in 2006, creating the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission. The commission has developed numerous plans for the commemoration, including traveling exhibitions, conferences, educational resources, document digitization, and much more. In 2010, the commission and the Library of Virginia (LVA) partnered to establish the Civil War 150 Legacy Project: Document Digitization and Access, a statewide online collection of original Civil War manuscripts that remain in private hands.

A multiyear digital project, the Civil War 150 Legacy Project: Document Digitization and Access focuses on manuscript materials created during the period 1859–1867 that reflect social, political, military, business, and religious life in Virginia during the period of the Civil War and the early period of Reconstruction. The library's experience and recent acquisitions have determined that many original manuscripts concerning the



A digital donor shares material with Library of Virginia Archivist Jessica Tyree (left) prior to scanning in Danville.

Civil War are still held and maintained in private hands. These items range from single letters and diaries to substantial collections of correspondence between soldiers and families at home. These first-hand accounts, often in fragile or deteriorating condition, are carefully guarded treasures that many families are reluctant to relinquish. By scanning these items and providing online access, the CW 150 Legacy Project will allow individuals to retain their original items, yet preserve the intellectual and historical content of these valuable documents.

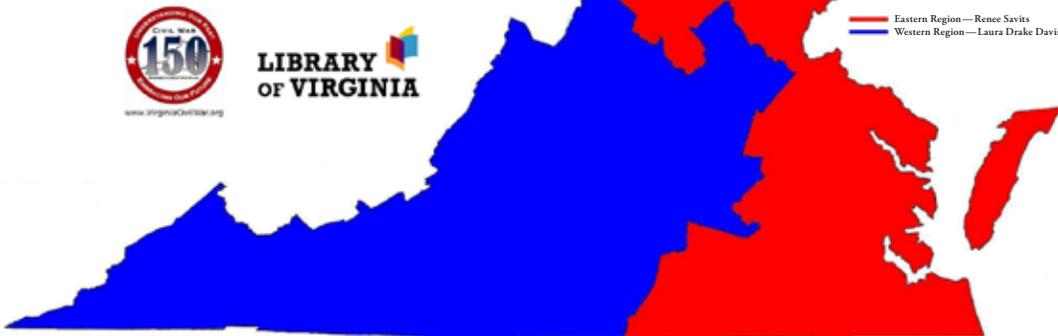
Working with local sesquicentennial committees established

by the commission and through a partnership with LVA and a network of statewide connections, the

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The CW 150 Legacy Project: Document Digitization and Access



Renee Savits will coordinate CW 150 Legacy Project efforts in the Eastern Region (light); Laura Drake Davis will coordinate efforts in the Western Region (dark).

CW 150 Legacy Project will provide individuals an opportunity to have their historic letters, diaries, and other collections scanned to preserve their valuable intellectual content. The goals of the CW 150 Legacy Project are to provide a central digital repository for newly discovered original materials; to seek a broad-based collection, both geographically and topically; to foster cooperation through partnerships with local commissions, heritage organizations, and libraries; and to enhance the commission and library's websites using selected materials gathered during the project.

The digital images will be stored by LVA and made available through both websites. All digital images will be scanned at a high resolution and cataloged using current archival cataloging standards and Dublin Core metadata standards. When the commission ceases its work in 2015, the commission website will be transferred to LVA as a state archival record and made available through the library's website.

In the pilot phase of the project, LVA archivists traveled to Danville and Winchester, Virginia, to gauge interest in the process. Individuals contributing materials for scanning—or "digital donors"—made appointments with their local sesquicentennial committees to minimize wait times and ensure that

donors could be accommodated during their scheduled times. At the appointments, digital donors met with LVA archivists, who scanned the material for inclusion in the CW 150 Legacy Project. Information about the scanned materials was collected from each digital donor onsite and used to augment the library catalog records that would accompany the scans. Following the scanning of materials, images were loaded into LVA's digital asset management system, DigiTool, and made available through the Virginia Memory website (www.virginiamemory.com). During the pilot phase of the project, a total of 909 images were created from public events in Danville and Winchester and materials from private collectors.

Following the success of the pilot project, LVA and the commission decided to proceed with the CW 150 Legacy Project in earnest. In June 2010, two library staff members, Renee Savits and Laura Drake Davis, were selected to coordinate the project, with each assigned to a specific region of Virginia. The coordinators have established formal policies and procedures for the CW 150 Legacy Project and have made contact with local sesquicentennial committees to schedule scanning events.

The first scanning events of the project are scheduled for fall

2010. A list of scheduled scanning events will be available on the commission's website, www.VirginiaCivilWar.org/legacy. The coordinators are currently contacting individual local sesquicentennial committees to schedule events and appointments and assist with publicity. Following each event, materials will be cataloged and loaded onto the Virginia Memory website. The CW 150 Legacy Project materials can be accessed through www.virginiamemory.com/cw150.

The CW 150 Legacy Project: Document Digitization and Access has potential to become a premier resource for Civil War-era materials in Virginia and to help make the Civil War relevant today. By unearthing the numerous manuscripts and collections in private hands across Virginia, the commission and LVA aim to provide access to the personal stories of those who lived in the 1860s, giving today's society a better sense of the challenges they faced, the hardships they endured, and the difficult decisions they made that led to our nation's greatest conflict. This material will strengthen our knowledge of this pivotal event by confirming or repudiating current scholarly opinions and long-held beliefs—either of which can only enhance our understanding of this era in history. **VI**