



VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Center for Virginia History

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Virginia Historical Society Open Mondays Beginning February 2011

Richmond, VA—Last year the Virginia Historical Society (VHS) made the history museum and research library more accessible to visitors by offering free admission. This year the VHS is further expanding accessibility by opening on Mondays.

Beginning Monday, February 7, 2011, the Virginia Historical Society will be open seven days a week. The museum and shop operating hours will be Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Sundays from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. The library will be open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Free admission will continue throughout the year.

“Reopening on Mondays will allow visitors the maximum amount of time possible to see *An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia*, a 3,000-square-foot show featuring more than 200 objects and 17 state-of-the-art audiovisual programs,” said VHS President and CEO Paul Levenson.

An American Turning Point uses the experiences of Virginia’s men, women, and children to promote an understanding of those who struggled to survive the American Civil War.

“Their stories are revealed in the fabric of every uniform, the blade of every sword, the handle of every tool, the imagery of every drawing, the words of every letter, and the notes of every song,” said Levenson.

The exhibition encourages visitors to consider how a single event, separated from us by 150 years, can influence and address the questions of today: what was gained, what was lost, what was undecided, and what is left for us to resolve? It is on display at the VHS from February 4 through December 30.

In addition to *An American Turning Point*, there are eight other exhibitions on display at the VHS in 2011.

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For more than 178 years, the **Virginia Historical Society** (VHS) has been the steward of our state—and often national—history. Headquartered at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond, the VHS features award-winning exhibitions that are entertaining and educational for visitors of all ages. 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. Hours: Monday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday 1 p.m.–5 p.m. Admission is free. For group tour information, call (804) 342-9652. For more information, call (804) 358-4901 or visit www.vahistorical.org.

Virginia Historical Society Creating Searchable Online Slave Database

Grant from Dominion will Fund the Path-Breaking African American History Project

Richmond, VA—The Virginia Historical Society (VHS) recently received a \$100,000 grant from Dominion Resources and The Dominion Foundation to fund the creation of *Unknown No Longer: A Database of Virginia Slave Names*. This free, online database will contain personal information about enslaved Virginians gleaned from some of the more than eight million processed manuscripts in VHS collections.

“The *Unknown No Longer* database is the first of its kind and will serve as a national model,” said VHS president and CEO Paul Levensgood. “The database will be a valuable tool for academic researchers, family historians, and genealogists alike. A website visitor could enter as much or as little information as he or she knows about a particular African American to conduct a search. The results can lead to previously unknown connections between people, families, and places.”

“This project is an example of both the VHS and Dominion’s commitment to using technology to increase access to historical collections and our dedication to reaching out to a diverse constituency.”

The road from emancipation and Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement and the election of Virginia’s first black governor is well documented in Virginia history. But early African American history (from the arrival of the first slaves through the Civil War) is often represented only through the words of white observers, freed persons who looked back on slavery many years later, or the records generated by others about African Americans who achieved recognition for their actions. For most enslaved Americans, the only physical record of their existence may be a name in a register kept by a slave owner.

Unknown No Longer will be searchable through the use of a variety of keywords, such as name, gender, location, occupation, and plantation. It will also include images of original source documents for easy reference.

“We have witnessed a growing audience frequenting the VHS in search of information that our records might provide, such as names of enslaved people, plantation sites, occupation and family relations, values, and birth, death, or sale dates,” said VHS chief

librarian Frances Pollard. “We want to provide the more than 2 million visitors to our website another, more detailed tool to access remotely specific information about potentially thousands of people.”

“We have researched other slave database websites and found *Unknown No Longer* to be unique in design and approach,” said VHS curator of African American history Dr. Luranett Lee, who will oversee the *Unknown No Longer* research. “Existing databases profile specific plantations and ship manifestos with African names of their human cargo or other forced migratory information. *Unknown No Longer* will be the first database of names that relate back to plantations or places of work across all of slaveholding Virginia.”

The VHS will be officially launching *Unknown No Longer* in September 2011 with 1,000 names in the searchable database. Information in the database will be updated as relevant material in the VHS manuscript collection is processed and new documents come into VHS possession.

“*Unknown No Longer* is a dynamic project,” said Levensgood. “With items entering the VHS collection annually, there will always be important new sources of information available. We hope that many researchers will take this opportunity to use the Virginia Historical Society’s documents and materials to discover a connection with the past.”

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