

City Point Takes Center Stage in 2014-2015 Commemoration



One hundred and fifty years ago the course of Virginia's history -- and its future -- was forever changed by the American Civil War.

No one at the outset could have foreseen the wholesale destruction or staggering loss of life that lay ahead. Nor the abrupt end to slavery and a rewriting of the Constitution that followed. They did not and could not have anticipated how war between the states would reshape the political and economic landscape, or

fundamentally redefine how we Americans would come to see ourselves both as a people and as a nation.

Today we are no better than our forebears at reading the Future. BUT we can work to understand and appreciate, and indeed *learn from the Past*.

Civil War Sesquicentennial. For the past five years the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission has encouraged local communities across the Commonwealth to shine a line on those momentous events of the 1860s. It all began in 2009-2010. Statewide attention focused on John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry and the many causes leading to war.

In 2011, prominent Virginia state and local officials, academic historians, and thousands of citizens from across the state converged on Manassas to participate in a wide range of activities marking the actual outbreak of fighting. The following year saw Northern Virginians joined by Richmonders and communities along the James as they commemorated the Peninsula Campaign, Fort Monroe ("Freedom Fortress") and the spread of emancipation in the Tidewater region, and the battles of Second Manassas and Fredricksburg.

Commemorative events for 2013 centered on the battles of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg in the east and Vicksburg in the west, also the Emancipation Proclamation, and of course the release of Steven Spielberg's movie *Lincoln* -- which prompted a nationwide discussion on the war's social and political impact.

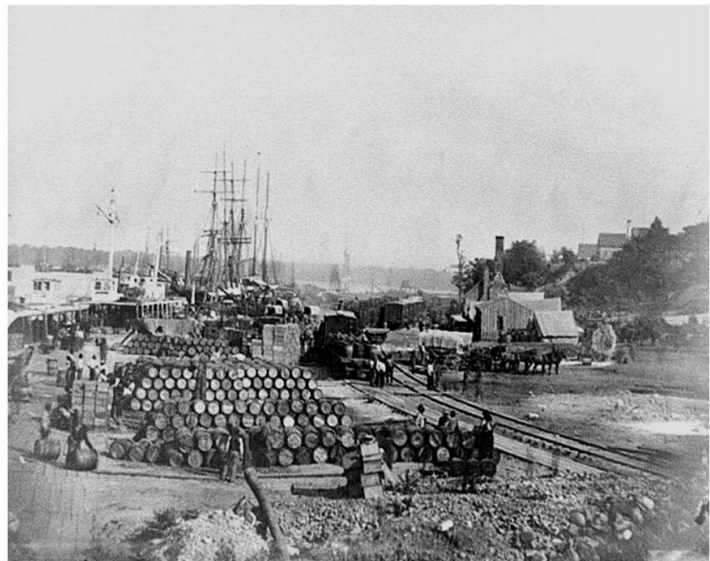
As this year closes, attention is already shifting to events planned for 2014-2015 marking the final climactic end to the Civil War. Georgia will hold numerous events commemorating the battle for Atlanta and the impact of General Sherman's famous "March to the Sea." While here in Virginia the focus will be on General Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign, from the Battle of the Wilderness to Cold Harbor, and beyond.

Spotlight on Hopewell and Old City Point. When General Grant made the fateful decision to cross the James River in June 1864 and attack Lee's forces defending Petersburg, he immediately brought the war front and center to City Point (present-day Hopewell).

Situated at the confluence of the James and Appomattox rivers, City Point made a perfect supply base for the invading Union Army. As fighting raged on the outskirts of Petersburg the first Union supply ships began arriving. A beehive of activity quickly transformed the sleepy little hamlet into one of the busiest ports *in the world*.

As many as 200 ships a day landed and off-loaded hundreds of thousands of tons of supplies destined for the fighting front. Construction workers built over a half mile of wharfs along the shoreline, as some 2,000 newly hired contract stevedores (mostly ex-slaves from the surrounding countryside) moved goods into just-built warehouses, or onto the interminable line of six-mule wagons going back and forth from Petersburg.

In the nine and half months that City Point was operational it was *the biggest* Union supply base in the entire Civil War. The US Military Railroad Construction Corps built the longest military railroad in the war (over 22 miles) and ran as many as 25 engines and 275 railroad cars along the Petersburg lines. Union quartermaster and commissary personnel stored as many as 9,000,000 soldiers' rations and 12,000 tons of hay and oats for the animals on an average day. And operated a field bakery capable of producing and delivery upwards of 100,000 rations of fresh bread daily.



There were seven hospitals established at City Point to take care of the wounded, including the Depot Field Hospital (located in the vicinity of today's John Randolph Medical Center), that covered 200 acres and was capable of treating as many as 10,000 patients.



General Grant established his headquarters in a cabin on the lawn of the old Eppes plantation. (Both the cabin and Appomattox Manor are still there for today's visitors to see.) During the siege of Petersburg Grant was visited by President Lincoln twice, also by General Sherman, Admiral Porter, members of a Confederate Peace Commission headed by the Confederate Vice President, Alexander Stephens ... and many other military and civilian dignitaries.

This was indeed a place like none other that existed anywhere else during the war. It was unique in every sense. As the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War in Virginia enters its final two years *all eyes will be focused on Hopewell / City Point*. Ours is a remarkable story ... one that we are privileged to share with our fellow citizens of the Commonwealth, and with the nation at large.