



## **Report of the Massachusetts Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission**

**(April 4, 2011-July 1, 2015)**

**To: His Excellency, Governor Charles Baker**

The Massachusetts Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission was organized under Executive Order 529, signed by Governor Deval Patrick on 4 April 2011. (See attached) Under provisions of the order 20 commissioners or their designees were appointed. The commission also was fortunate to have several advisory committee members as well as a number of interns. We are particularly thankful to UMASS-Dartmouth for providing interns who received academic credit for their service and to the office of Representative Sean Garballey who also arranged for an intern, Mark Episkopos, who is still serving with the commission.

The commission would be remiss if it did not pay tribute to its chair, Robert Von Wolfgang. Robert chaired both the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and the Civil War Sesquicentennial. Robert made numerous contributions to both these commissions but

unfortunately ill-health has prevented his attendance over the last couple of years. We thank him for all he has done to advance the study of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War.

The commission was tasked with several responsibilities. These included developing a program of activities to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, operating an educational website, and compiling an inventory of places associated with the Civil War in Massachusetts.

A group of individuals associated with the Lincoln Bicentennial Commission (either commissioners or advisory committee members) continued to meet informally after that commission disbanded in anticipation of the formation of a Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission. This made it easier to get the commission up and running once established.

The commission examined the reports of the Civil War Centennial Commission (1961-1965), which while it accomplished a lot and actually had a budget, met only three or four times a year. It was determined that the Sesquicentennial Commission would meet monthly in order to better facilitate its work. This was done with the exception of February and March 2015 when weather conditions and problems with the MBTA caused the cancellation of two meetings.

The commission determined that we would formally launch our work with an event at the State House. This was held on April 12, 2012. Many Civil War reenactors participated, along with members of the General Court, and the public. The event was highlighted by remarks by Speaker of the House Robert DeLeo and a reading of the Gettysburg Address by Governor Deval Patrick. Commission member Dr. John Stauffer of Harvard University addressed the gathering on Frederick Douglas's influence on Abraham Lincoln. (See Boston *Globe* article attached for coverage of kick-off event). The speech was subsequently published in the *Lincoln Herald* (summer 2012) by vice-chair Thomas Turner who is the editor of that publication.

Since the commission had no budget to work with, our role was primarily to publicize and endorse various Massachusetts Civil War commemorations. Among some of the highlights of our work:

1. A Civil War encampment and reenactment in Green Hill Park in Worcester in October of 2012 and October 2013. Vice-chair Turner met with the planners in Worcester and they came to Boston to a meeting to brief the commission and obtain our endorsement. These events were very successful and drew hundreds of spectators. Unfortunately rising fees to hold the event in Green Hill Park caused a cancellation in 2014 and as of the date of this report the event has not been rescheduled.
2. The Civil War Roundtables of Greater Boston and its president, Commissioner David L. Smith, were also very important in terms of the commemoration. Two of the many events endorsed by the commission were the appearance of Lincoln reenactor James

Getty at Tremont Temple on September 22, 2012. Getty portrayed Lincoln during his visit to Tremont Temple and to Massachusetts when he campaigned for Zachary Taylor in 1848. The Roundtables also held a dinner where they presented their Oliver Wendell Holmes Award to Chief Justice Emeritus of Rhode Island, Frank Williams.

3. The Egremont Historical Commission and its secretary Susan Bachelder worked with the Bardin family to inventory, catalogue, and protect a group of Civil War letters and memorabilia. The documents were brought to the State Archives and thanks to commission member Michael Comeau, Executive Director of the State Archives, the documents were inventoried, preserved in archival quality folders, and returned to the family. Additionally, the Egremont Historical Commission held a well-attended Civil War picnic attended by the vice-chair and intern Erin Kochanek.
4. The Commission worked with historian Barbara Berenson to develop a Civil War Tour of the State House. This has now been incorporated into the regular tours given by State House docents.
5. The Commission also sponsored a Civil War Christmas at the State House on December 9, 2014. This event included a Civil War musical group and readings by Representative Chris Walsh and members of the 54<sup>th</sup> Mass. Advisory Committee member and Commission Secretary Maria McConnell presided over this event.
6. Dr. Ian Delahanty prepared several poster displays including one about Charles Gardner who received the Medal of Honor. Dr. Delahanty wrote the narrative and the Secretary of State's Office prepared the graphics. The displays along with attractive brochures were set up in Doric Hall. A copy of a second exhibit on a Massachusetts drummer boy

who was with the 6<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts during its bloody passage through Baltimore on April 19, 1861 was taken to Baltimore for display by commission member Joe Bella.

7. Dr. Delahanty also worked with Susan Greendyke to select materials for a display of Grand Army of the Republic materials stored at the State House. When space is available this material will be placed on public display.
8. To commemorate the Lincoln assassination a lecture series was held at the State Archives. The film "The Conspirator" was shown to 125 students from Weston and vice-chair Turner spoke about his role as a historical consultant for the film. Turner subsequently delivered a lecture on how Americans have interpreted the assassination, Kate Larson spoke about Mary Surratt, John Stauffer lectured on the photographs of the Civil War and particularly the assassination, and Frank Williams spoke about the trials of civilians by military tribunals.
9. The Commission has also worked with the Department of Veterans Services and State House curator Susan Greendyke to examine the space available at the State House for the Sons of Union Veterans (successor to the Grand Army of the Republic.) General Law provides for space for the Sons which is currently Room 27. This would provide a meeting space for about 8 people but is very limited in being able to house additional papers or memorabilia. The Commission recommends an inventory of all space used by veteran's groups in the State House to determine if additional space might be allocated to the Sons of Union Veterans.
10. On several occasions the Commission discussed plans to hold meetings in other locations outside of Boston but the fact that most commissioners came from and

worked in the Boston area and a lack of budget never made this feasible. We held two meetings outside the State House, one at the Massachusetts Historical Society and one at the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism. We are grateful to both of those organizations for hosting us.

11. Although there was no Sesquicentennial Commission at the federal level we maintained contacts with groups in other states. Chairman Von Wolfgang, Vice-Chair Turner, and Commissioner David L. Smith met with Chief Justice Emeritus Frank Williams, chair of the Rhode Island Sesquicentennial Commission, to discuss possible joint programs. Dr. Frank Smith of the African-American Civil War Museum invited us to send someone to Washington D.C. for the Grand Review in May of 2015 and to give a presentation about commission activities. While we were not able to send a representative we did answer a questionnaire about our activities. (See attached.)

One of the challenges faced by the commission was its website. The Lincoln Bicentennial Commission had a website which was maintained by UMASS-Amherst. This website was converted to Sesquicentennial Commission use but was not initially maintained and updated due to an issue as to who would be responsible for the costs. It took over a year and a half before a contract was signed with UMASS to pay a graduate intern to post materials including notices of events, agendas, minutes, and links to educational materials. The commission also set up a Facebook page in an effort to make a younger audience aware of its activities.

Regarding our mandate to categorize and inventory Massachusetts Civil War sites, the commission instituted the "Treasures in the Attic Program." Working with the State Archives, emails and follow-up emails were sent to historical societies, commissions, libraries, and other repositories, asking them to provide a listing of any Civil War materials in their collections. We received a fairly good return although the responses ranged from great enthusiasm to outright opposition, due to some concerns that a listing of objects in a repositories collection might lead to lessened security. Dr. Ian Delahanty, Vice-Chair Dr. Thomas Turner, and Executive Director of the Archives Michael Comeau, are still finalizing this project. The plan is to leave a copy of the final inventory list with the State Archives, Bridgewater State University, and perhaps other state educational institutions, so that the location of these materials will be available to future researchers..

Possibly the commission's most significant legacy is a grant program which was launched to repair and maintain Civil War monuments, gravesites, and documents. Many thanks are due to commission member Senator Stanley Rosenberg who convinced his legislative colleagues to appropriate \$100,000 in FY 13 and \$200,000 in FY 14 for this purpose. This money was used to provide matching grants and some overhead money was used to employ a UMASS graduate student to maintain the commission website ([www.ma150.org](http://www.ma150.org)) where information and grant applications were displayed. The grants were matching and administered by the Department of Veterans Services. A sub-committee of the commission

reviewed the grants and made recommendations. Over 60 projects were funded. (Consult the Department of Veterans Services for specific details.)

One example of a completed project was the repair of the gravesite of General Nathaniel Banks in Waltham. A rededication ceremony was held which attracted a large audience.

Unfortunately, due to budget problems this program was indefinitely suspended during FY 15. While the executive order establishing the commission expires on September 30, 2015 we recommend that if the fiscal picture brightens this would be a worthy project for Massachusetts to continue in the future.

While the commission can look back with pride on its accomplishments despite a lack of budget and a bit of a late start, there are certain lessons and concerns for the future:

1. A commission that is dealing with a particular time frame such as the Civil war (1861-1865) should probably be organized and appointed in a more timely manner.

Commissions in states such as Virginia and Pennsylvania were established several years before the sesquicentennial commemoration commenced. This allowed for a lot more planning and application for grants.

In contrast, we were not authorized until April of 2011 and given the background checks needed to appoint members, we were not able to be fully up and running for another

year, although we were meeting monthly. This deprived the commission of precious time.

2. This problem ties in with the funding problems noted throughout the report. The Executive Order states that the commission will seek grants to fund its activities but grants are very competitive and even if successful can take months or even years to obtain. It is somewhat unrealistic to form a commission without proper lead time and believe they can easily gain funds in such a manner.
3. Also, some thought should be given to the actual membership of a commission. It is one thing to decide that certain governmental positions should be included on the commission, but it is essential to determine if the persons holding those positions or their designees are really interested in serving. A number of commission members picked designees who made admirable contributions although frankly there were other members who rarely or never attended and who despite repeated pleas did not send anyone to represent them. Since the members serve at the pleasure of the governor the commission has little authority to deal with this issue. The best way to tackle the problem would seem to be to appoint members who are really interested in the commission's business.
4. Given the difficulties the commission had with its website, the state surely has means to provide such a site for any commission which it establishes. This could be done for free or relatively inexpensively on one of the numerous websites which the state already utilizes. In the electronic age you can't publicize your activities unless some means are provided.

Alternatively, a Commission might be able to rely entirely on social media such as Facebook or twitter which can be set up at no cost. However, it cannot be assumed that all commission members are familiar with such social media. Therefore, someone should be specifically appointed to the commission to oversee social media.

5. Similarly commissions need to have the means to take minutes. Chairman Von Wolfgang was initially able to utilize interns for this purpose however this did not prove to be entirely satisfactory. We were fortunate that Maria McConnell joined the advisory committee and agreed to take minutes which she did in a very professional manner. Again, it would be prudent from the beginning to appoint someone to the commission whose duty would be to take notes.

Finally the commission intends to meet informally after September 30 in support of the state's final commemorative event "The Return of the Flags." On December 22, 1865 Massachusetts units marched up Beacon Hill and Governor John A. Andrew emerged through the front door of the State House to receive their returned battle flags (eventually to be displayed in the Hall of Flags.) We are working with the Sons of Union Veterans who have raised money and are planning a similar event for December 22, 2015. (See attached for details.) We hope that your excellency or an appropriate designee will be able to participate in this reenactment. This event will be a fitting climax to the Civil War commemoration and conclude the commission's activities.

I think I speak for all the commission members when I say we hope that our activities over the past four years have helped to raise the awareness of the citizens of Massachusetts about our Commonwealth's participation in the Civil War, a tragic yet watershed event in American history. I would add that as an historian who taught courses about both the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln at Bridgewater State University for almost four decades, that it has been my honor to serve as vice-chair (acting chair) for this historic commemoration.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Thomas R. Turner

Vice-Chair

Massachusetts Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission