DISCOVERING THE CIVIL WAR

A new traveling exhibit from the National Archives
Goals

• To peel back 150 years of accumulated myths and punditry to reveal a Civil War that is little known.

• To present the most extensive display ever assembled from the National Archives’ incomparable Civil War holdings.

• To give visitors the chance to walk in the shoes of researchers, unlock secrets, solve mysteries, and uncover unexpected events in our records.
The exhibit is unconventional in every way. It will be thematic, not chronological. Rather than following a story arc from Sumter to Appomatox – it deals with topics like, “how do you raise an army?”, “how do you find leaders?”, “what happens after a battle?”, and “what was the global impact of the war?”

As a traveling exhibit, “Discovering the Civil War” will be displayed at 5-6,000 sq. ft. At the National Archives, where our O’Brien Gallery is roughly 3,000 sq. ft, we extend the engagement over nearly a year, showing “Beginnings” in Part A followed by “Consequences” in Part B.
Visitors will experience an engaging media presentation of an archivist in the stacks, inviting them to join her in making discoveries in the records of the National Archives.

Promising that there's more to the story of the Civil War than they learned in school, she pulls out a wide variety of records that relate to the different themes of the exhibit and places them into the "current" overhead, a dynamic display which runs throughout. Visitors are encouraged to explore these interactive records as they begin their own journey of Discovering the Civil War.
The exhibit will feature fascinating environments and compelling interactives, but what makes the exhibit extraordinary is surprising records.
Here, the Ladies of the Philadelphia arsenal complain to the Secretary of War that since he outsourced their sewing jobs to a private company, their wages have been cut in half—and with their husbands away at war, they don’t know how they will survive.
Visitors will encounter this naturalization oath administered in 1861 in Alabama, hastily improvised by crossing out “United” and writing in “Confederate” States. The “country” the immigrant hails from happens to be “New York.”
In this poster, the U.S. Navy tells men how to avoid service in the U.S. Army. The Navy seems to promise $50,000,000 in prizes from captured vessels. But notice the small print, “already awarded.”
Individual records will be given context by the exhibit environment.
Here a facsimile of Lee’s resignation sits atop a pile of other resignations of officers and West Point cadets at the beginning of the War. It is our introduction to the topic of “Finding Leaders.”
The theme, “We Were There,” introduces visitors to some unexpected participants in the war efforts, not only the previously mentioned Philadelphia Arsenal workers, but also Emma Seely - whose pension file in the National Archives states that she was known to her fellow soldiers as Frank - until her secret was revealed.
We also deal with unexpected places – for example we suspect most visitors won’t realize that the Japanese Shogun’s government was waiting for delivery of an American-manufactured warship released only as our conflict was ending and Japan’s Civil War was beginning.
Compelling Interactives

Our interactives have been designed to fulfill our promise that, rather than trying to recreate 1860, we will let visitors see the war through the lenses of 2010 technology.

Notice the current of records at the top of the following elevations. It will run throughout the exhibit. Visitors will be able to reach into the current and pull out records for closer examination or to launch an interactive.
Here, the relationship of Union and Confederate generals documented in our records, are discovered through a social networking interactive.
Here, the surprising elements of the Christiana Riots are revealed in a high-tech simulation news room.
In the “Local Fight” area, an interactive invites visitors to join a real life story of searching through the stacks on the trail of a cryptic notation about hostage executions. Follow our curator through a remarkable account of vengeance, technology, and Abraham Lincoln’s prudent judgment.
Fact Sheet

- 5,000 to 6,000 sq. ft.
- Opens in Washington, DC, O’Brien Gallery – April 2010
- Venue length: about 3 months
- In addition to the exhibition, there will be a catalogue, an education package, and a dynamic website.
Become Involved

THE FOUNDATION FOR THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

JOIN US.

Bring to life the original records of the American Civil War. Help create DISCOVERING THE CIVIL WAR.

The National Archives is diving through the stacks, opening Hollinger boxes, and untangling the red tape to find the most fascinating, thought-provoking, and moving records- records that will inspire discoveries for visitors nationwide, from new audiences to period scholars.

The Foundation for the National Archives, with help from you, will enable the design, fabrication, and tour of the interactive framework which will invite Americans from coast to coast to use these records to “Discover the Civil War.”
Pledge your support now to ensure the creation of a state-of-the-art, innovative exploration of the Civil War. Participate in the national recognition marking the 150th anniversary by supporting this important traveling exhibition and its companion educational activities, public programs, publications, and online initiatives.

You- or your company, or your foundation- can become a major partner in DISCOVERING THE CIVIL WAR.

Contact- To make a contribution or to get more information:

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