

Civil War: Events to commemorate 150th anniversary

S.C. groups working to acquire funding

By ROBERT BEHRE - The (Charleston) Post & Courier

CHARLESTON —

South Carolina's efforts to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Civil War — which began first with the state's fateful decision to secede and later with the first shot fired at Fort Sumter — are gradually coming together, even as organizers scramble for dollars to pay for it all.

The 150th anniversary of the South Carolina Secession Convention in December will be observed in a low-key manner, mostly with a series of lectures.

But the 150th anniversary of the first shot will be a bigger spectacle, with concerts, new exhibits at the Gibbes Museum of Art, films, a star shell fired by the National Guard above the Charleston Harbor and still more lectures.

The exact scope and cost of the plans still are being worked on, and some local history buffs also are taking matters into their own hands.

John Tucker, former superintendent of Fort Sumter, is helping coordinate the schedule with the Fort Sumter-Fort Moultrie Trust, the Lowcountry group taking the lead on the sesquicentennial observance.

It's a five-year-long effort — the same span as the war, and Tucker said things are gradually falling into place, particularly for the coming year. A new website chronicling all the plans went live last week.

"I think this is going to be a really exciting time for us," Tucker said. "The Civil War was much more than a defining moment. It may be the most defining moment in American history, along with the American Revolution and the U.S. Constitution. When the

Constitution was written, 6 percent of the population had full liberties. Today, we have liberties for 100 percent of the population. A lot of that came as a result of the war and what came after the war.”

The trust has raised about \$55,000 and is seeking an additional \$25,000, said Charleston City Councilman Blake Hallman, who also serves as the trust’s treasurer. Charleston has pledged to raise an additional \$100,000 in private money, and Hallman will appear tonight before local lawmakers to seek \$75,000 in state money.

“We’re doing everything on a shoestring,” he said.

The \$68,000 budget for December’s lecture series is almost covered, but organizers hope to raise hundreds of thousands of additional dollars for April’s events.

Hallman said any donations to the commemoration would be leveraged into millions of dollars of revenue for local hotels, restaurants and other businesses, as Civil War enthusiasts descend upon the city. A College of Charleston study found the Hunley funeral in 2004 had a direct economic impact of \$5.1 million.

Even though South Carolina hasn’t found as much money to support the commemoration as other states, particularly Virginia, there are grass-roots movements cropping up.

James Wheeler of James Island has been disappointed by the lack of interpretation at Fort Johnson, the former James Island earthen fort that has been razed and converted into a campus for wildlife-related agencies and students.

That’s why he recently helped establish a new Sons of Confederate Veterans camp. About 75 people attended its inaugural meeting last week.

Wheeler talked about Fort Johnson’s history and hopes his group will be able to spearhead efforts to provide more historical information at the state-owned site.

“We want to get something there that tourists would be willing to go over and take a look at,” Wheeler said. “There’s so much history there, but there’s nothing there to interpret it.”

There’s also a Civil War lecture series under way at the Exchange Building, including a talk at 6 p.m. Wednesday by Sharon MacDonald on Union generals versus Charleston.

And the Charleston Civil War Roundtable — a group dedicated to discussing the war in detail — is getting into the act. It plans to hold a special event in October to commemorate its 50th anniversary, new president Jim Monroe said.

While the firing on Fort Sumter might be the biggest local observance in the 150th anniversary, local organizers also are expected to plan special events for the 150th observance of the 54th Massachusetts’s famous attack on Battery Wagner (as depicted at the end of the movie, “Glory”), Robert Smalls’ commandeering of the Confederate ship planter, the war’s end and the emancipation of slaves.

Read more: http://www.thestate.com/2010/08/30/1440094/civil-war-events-to-commemorate.html?story_link=email_msg#ixzz0y8an9j9H