

Civil War Museum Receives Wisconsin Humanities Council Grant March 14, 2008

The Civil War Museum has been awarded \$10,000 grant from the Wisconsin Humanities Council to develop a theater program for the Museum.

The theater program brings to life eight personal stories of lives that were touched by the Civil War, slavery, and life in the newest states. Nancy Mathews, Kenosha Public Museums Senior Curator of Education and program creator, commented, "The Theater Program provides an engaging, interactive learning experience about the involvement of the Upper Middle West in the Civil War. It gives insight to different perspectives and personal experiences of the diverse population of the Upper Middle West in the Civil War and broadens the insight of the typical visitor of the Upper Middle West's role in the Civil War." The theater program will offer its first performances this summer at the Civil War Museum.

The characters will be brought to life by using first-person interpretation. The actor will refer to the past in the present tense and encourage verbal interaction from the audience. Actors will wear appropriate costumes and use accurate props from the Civil War era. After each presentation, visitors will have the chance to interact with the actors and ask them questions. The Theater Program will give visitors the opportunity to experience the historical figure's story in an interactive, engaging, and entertaining manner.

Scripts and characters are developed based on research conducted using primary sources such as diaries, letters, and contemporary newspapers. Five of the characters will be based exclusively on the lives of specific people. The other three individuals will be composite characters, such as a rural woman farmer, an urban free black, and a Southern sympathizer. These personal stories were developed using different primary and secondary sources and synthesized them together to create a fictional but plausible character. There is very little information about these people, however, their stories should not be forgotten.

The first characters that we will develop and debut are Cordelia Harvey and Caroline Quarlls. These women have fascinating stories from two different perspectives. Museum visitors will feel Kenosha-native Cordelia Harvey's personal heart-break of losing her husband, Governor Louis Harvey, in the early days of the war and discover her instrumental work with the Sanitation Commission. Visitors will also feel the pain and excitement as Caroline Quarlls remembers her journey to find freedom in Canada while pursued by slave catchers. An actor will portray her reminiscing about her journey, while writing to Lyman Goodnow, her Underground Railroad Conductor, of Waukesha, almost forty years later. Quarlls' story is based on the rare letters she wrote to Goodnow which are part of the Civil War Museum's collection.

The Wisconsin Humanities Council supports public programs that engage the people of Wisconsin in the exploration of human cultures, ideas and values. The Civil War Museum Theater Program is funded in part by the Wisconsin Humanities Council, with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the State of Wisconsin. Any views, findings or conclusions or recommendations expressed by the project do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.