



“House Divided's Grand Launch”

Dickinson celebrates sesquicentennial with a weekend of enlightening public events

by *MaryAlice Bitts Jackson*

House Divided project co-director Matthew Pinsker, Brian C. Pohanta '77 Chair in American Civil War History, introduces the launch-weekend's keynote speaker, Civil War historian David Blight. Dickinson celebrated the April 15 launch of the House Divided project with a grand series of events.

Held the week that the nation marked the 150th anniversary of the start of the Civil War, the launch included a film festival, an interactive teachers' workshop, app-assisted tours of a major Underground Railroad site and a lecture by a nationally noted historian. Like the online educational resource they celebrated, many of the events used technology to illuminate a pivotal moment in America's history—as experienced by a community that uniquely emblemized the nation's divide.

A campus divided

Located approximately 20 miles north of the Mason-Dixon Line, Dickinson claimed a nearly equal number of Northerners and Southerners in its student body at the start of the Civil War. It also had educated noted Civil War figures on both sides of the conflict, including President James Buchanan, U.S. Chief Justice Roger Taney, anti-slavery activists and soldiers. So, when Maj. Robert Anderson's Fort Sumter garrison came under Southern attack on April 12, 1861, the college community was thrust into a particularly wrenching situation.

Dickinson junior William Willey, a Virginian, described the eruption of public anxiety in an 1861 letter to his father, written soon after the newly inaugurated President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to enlist in the war. “The depot is crowded with women bidding adieu to their husbands and sons, and all appear to be mad with excitement,” he wrote, expressing fear that he may not be able to stay at the college long enough to graduate.



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Stories such as these bring the complex struggles associated with the Civil War into sharp focus. And the House Divided project tells these stories in a compelling way, offering multimedia clips, online photos and documents, calendars, timelines, interactive tools and other resources that make Civil War history more accessible to digital-age K-12 students. In all, a combined 450 students, educators and history buffs turned out to celebrate the launch of this powerful tool on April 15-16.

Walking in the footsteps of war

One of the weekend's most anticipated attractions was a series of augmented-reality walking tours of downtown Carlisle. In spite of heavy rain and high winds, approximately 100 visitors took the app-assisted tours, guided by Dickinson faculty and students. Participants downloaded a Civil War Carlisle app onto portable devices, such as such as cameras, GPS-enabled smartphones and tablet computers. The app allowed them to access historical photos, additional information and other enhancements about the history of the sites they visited.

Because of the dismal weather, the tours were abbreviated and moved indoors. Still, for the first time since 1991, visitors got an insider's view of Carlisle's Old Courthouse, recognized by the National Park Service Network to Freedom as one of the country's top Underground Railroad historic sites. They also could access information about the other sites on the tour: the original U.S. Army Barracks, which was burned down by Confederate troops and later rebuilt as the Carlisle Indian School; the Lincoln Cemetery/Memorial Park, where the remains of many local African-American Army veterans are buried; the Bentz House, where noted abolitionist Frederick Douglass spoke; Dickinson College and the Cumberland County Historical Society.

"You definitely got the sense that in a few years this will be not only a staple of historical tours, but a revolutionary tool that will be used throughout various aspects of life," said Laura Hechtlinger '12. "I was blown away."

Teaching teachers

Educators, homeschooling parents, education majors and history buffs attended a Saturday teachers' workshop—some from as far away as Utah and Idaho—to learn how to harness House Divided technology in the classroom. The morning workshop was led by House Divided project co-director Matthew Pinsker, Brian C. Pohanka '77 Chair in American Civil War History. According to future history teacher Taylor Bye '12, it was a great success. "What stood out to me was the general enthusiasm of the teachers," he said. "Frankly, part of me envies the K-12 students who will get to use this new database in the classroom."



Civil War Memory

That evening, 150 people braved the unpleasant weather to attend a keynote address by David Blight. The eminent Civil War historian examined the ways in which we interpret the Civil War today. "It was captivating," said Bye, who was fascinated by Blight's connection between the modern perception of Southern culture and the Southern-music tradition.

"He really got me thinking about this war and the reasons we remember it," said House Divided project contributor Justin Farrell '13.

Cinematic lives

The launch weekend also included a Friday-evening documentary-film fest at the Carlisle Theatre that drew an audience of approximately 300. Hosted by House Divided co-director John Osborne, associate professor emeritus of history, the festival screened three brief films that explored the lives of local men who had fought in the Civil War.

David Gillespie '11's film described the life and combat death of a local Civil War officer, James Colwell. A documentary by Osborne and House Divided assistant-director Don Sailer '09 told the biography of local resident John Taylor Cuddy, a teenage soldier who served under Colwell and died as a prisoner of war.

Colin Macfarlane '12 told the life story of Henry Spradley, a freed slave and Civil War veteran who worked as a Dickinson janitor after the war. In the video, Macfarlane noted that Spradley was so well-loved on campus and in town that his funeral was held in Bosler Hall to accommodate the crowd of mourners. "The documentaries showed how history can be entertaining and moving," Macfarlane later said. "I believe this idea of extending history beyond the scholarly gates is exactly what the House Divided project embodies."

After Macfarlane's documentary, members of Carlisle's West Street A.M.E. Zion Church performed gospel songs and delivered brief remarks in honor of Spradley, who had been a member of their church. The festival also included a live performance of Civil War instrumental music by a brass quintet led by Contributing Faculty in Music Ron Axsom. Singers David Chochrane '14, Laura Costa '10, Matt Linnehan '13 and Christopher Theodorou '13 created a short film showcasing vocal arrangements of four traditional tunes.

Five years ... and counting

The success of the launch weekend is "a testament to [the fact that] the Civil War will not only remain relevant but will be reinvented in an exciting manner for people to study and research," said history major Jason DeBlanco '14.



The weekend also represented a much-anticipated milestone for the faculty, students and staff members who contributed to the project over the past five years. (A short list includes Pinsker, Osborne, Sailer, Macfarlane, Gillespie, Farrell, Web Programmer Ryan Burke, Associate Director of Library Collections Christine Bombaro, Senior Academic Department Coordinator Elaine Mellen, Associate Professor of Music Robert Pound, Assistant Professor of Music Amy Wlodarski and Heather Jaran '13, William Nelligan '14, Leigh Oczkowski '12 and Tim Smith '11, as well as students in Pinsker's History 304 class.)

Although the interdisciplinary team will continue to expand the online tool until the 150th anniversary of the war's end in 2015, House Divided already has earned rave reviews. American Civil Wartouted it as "one of the most compelling sesquicentennial online projects" and A History Teacher's Blogproclaimed it "the ultimate Civil War resource." House Divided also was the subject of a special program on C-SPAN.

Perhaps most significantly, the project also is making a splash in K-12 and undergraduate classrooms, said Pinsker. "We have high hopes that we can change the way people teach and learn about the Civil War era in American history," he said.

Interested in taking a Civil War tour of downtown Carlisle? The Old Courthouse will remain open on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. for guided and self-guided public tours. Anyone may conduct free, self-guided tours by downloading the app. The public cost for guided tours is \$8/person; the tours will soon be offered free to Dickinsonians. Learn more about Civil War events in the Cumberland Valley.

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Original Link – <http://www.dickinson.edu/news-and-events/features/2010-11/House-Divided-s-Grand-Launch/>