Archival Resources on the Web—Adam Groves, Assistant Editor, Illinois Fire Service Institute

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Civil War Resources on the World Wide Web

The War Between the States. The Lost Cause. The War of Northern Aggression. The War of Southern Aggression. The names may be inconsistent, but interest in the American Civil War has been a cultural and historical fixture for generations. Sesquicentennial observances beginning in 2011 and continuing until 2015 have encouraged historical repositories to continue developing innovative tools for accessing Civil War resources on the World Wide Web.

"Discovering the Civil War," http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/civil-war, is an Internet companion to a physical exhibit originally presented at the National Archives and currently traveling to other repositories, including a display in Michigan this summer at The Henry Ford. The on-line exhibit presents digital versions of historical resources from the holdings of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), including photographs, maps, letters, diaries, and government documents from both the United States and the Confederate States. Users can access these digital materials under the "Exhibit Preview" section, but only by browsing and not by searching. The on-line exhibit also links to significant Civil War-related documents that were digitized and made accessible as part of the "Our Documents" initiative, http://www.ourdocuments.gov, including the Gettysburg Address and the Emancipation Proclamation. As an additional supplement to "Discovering the Civil War," NARA is maintaining a Twitter feed, http://twitter.com/discovercivwar, which shares quick Civil War facts and links to relevant on-line primary and secondary resources.

"The Last Full Measure: Civil War Photographs from the Liljenquist Family Collection," a physical exhibit currently on display at the Library of Congress, is also on-line. Digitized copies of nearly four hundred photographs from the exhibit are available at http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/civilwarphotographs and can be browsed in HTML format or by using Microsoft Silverlight. The quality and quantity of digitized materials are impressive, as are the valuable accompanying resources. Brief tutorials entitled "The Photographic Processes," "Photographers and their Studios," and "Revealing Details" teach viewers the difference between ambrotypes and tintypes, explain how photographers staged portraits inside and outside of studios, and share tips for examining tiny details to learn more about photograph content.

The Library of Congress has also provided Internet access to Civil War resources via "American Memory," http://memory.loc.gov/ammem. Users can browse or search numerous collections documenting the war, including "Civil War Maps," which includes images of original reconnaissance and battle maps; "Band Music from the Civil War Era," which provides access to digitized sheet music for more than seven hundred songs; and "Selected Civil War Photographs," featuring more than one thousand digitized photographs. Confederate leaders are well-represented among the photograph collections, but, overall, there are not very many resources that document the war from a Southern perspective. "American Memory" does include a number of digitized collections that provide a more intimate look at the war through scanned letters, diaries, and other manuscript materials, but these resources are mainly from politicians in Washington, D.C., soldiers in the Union Army, and civilians in the North.

Artifacts from both the United States and the Confederate States are well represented in many of the Smithsonian Institution's museums, and, in 2002, the Smithsonian introduced "CivilWar@Smithsonian," http://civilwar.si.edu, as a centralized Web site, providing access to holdings from the institution's ample collections. Visitors to the site can view hundreds of images that show uniforms, weapons, flags, war records, and posters from the Civil War era, as well as paintings, busts, stamps, and sheet music commemorating the war. The design of the Web site is definitely outdated, and the fact that it can only be browsed and not searched is disappointing, but the quality and diversity of the digitized resources that the Web site showcases, particularly the artistic representations of the war, are nevertheless remarkable.

The National Park Service has specifically targeted Internet audiences by developing numerous learning tools that are available at "The Civil War: 150 Years," http://www.nps.gov/civilwar150. An interactive timeline entitled "Legacy of the Civil War: Then and Now," dynamically traces the progression of the war by documenting key events 150 years (to the day) after they occurred. The timeline is updated several times a month, and each entry links to Civil War-era primary sources and also contrasts the Civil War event with a modern one. For example, the entry for March 12, 1861, documents the debate over whether Abraham Lincoln should use force to secure Fort Sumter and Fort Pickens, which were under siege in the South. The entry provides links to digitized newspaper coverage of the debate and also compares it to the question of U.S.

military intervention in Libya in March 2011. In addition to the timeline, "The Civil War: 150 Years" also features scholarly essays about the war that are supplemented by links to relevant primary sources, as well as a Twitter feed, http://twitter.com/CivilWarReportr, in which a fictional newspaper reporter covers the war in "real time."

Aside from "The Civil War: 150 Years" Web site, other digital resources from the National Park Service are available at http://www.nps.gov/cwindepth/civilwar.htm. Users can browse through descriptions of both major and minor military campaigns, access dozens of lesson plans developed for use at specific historic sites, and download videos and podcasts describing specific battlefield sites and memorials. Of particular note is the "African Americans in the Civil War" exhibit, http://www.nps.gov/cwindepth/africanamericans.htm, which documents slavery, black soldiers, and the Underground Railroad, and provides teaching curricula on the African-American experience in specific Civil War battles. In addition, the "Civil War Soldiers & Sailors System," http://www.civilwar.nps.gov/cwss, features a searchable database indexing more than six million soldiers and 20,000 sailors who served during the war. The database lists soldiers who were awarded the Medal of Honor and shares brief histories of more than four thousand Union and Confederate regiments.

A number of historical agencies and repositories in the Midwest are also providing on-line access to Civil War resources to honor the sesquicentennial: "Illinois Civil War—150th Anniversary," http://www.illinoiscivilwar150.org, features an interactive timeline listing significant Civil War events. Although the timeline can only be browsed, and at this time only has content for the years 1860 and 1861, many of the timeline entries are supplemented by useful links to photographs, newspaper clippings, biographies, and other resources that repositories throughout the country have made available on the Web.

"Indiana and the Civil War 150th," http://www.in.gov/history/INCivilWar.htm, is a handy pathfinder that links to dozens of Civil War-related digital collections and Web sites. The site not only highlights Indiana-based collections, such as those available at the Indiana State Library, the Indiana Historical Society, and the Colonel Eli Lilly Civil War Museum, but it also shares collections and Web sites from outside the Hoosier State.

"Michigan & the Civil War," http://seekingmichigan.org/civil-war, provides access to digitized Civil War resources, including manuscripts, service records, and photographs from the Archives of Michigan. It also encourages users to share Civil War-related photographs and videos via Flickr and YouTube, and advertise reenactments, lectures, memorials, and concerts on an events calendar.

"Missouri Civil War Sesquicentennial," http://mocivilwar150.com, shares digitized images and detailed historical summaries that describe key individuals and battles from Civil War-era Missouri. The site also serves as a convenient resource center for helping tourists locate Civil War battlefields, cemeteries, monuments, markers, and museums throughout the state.

"Minnesota and the Civil War," http://visitmnhistory.org/minnesota-and-civil-war, is a portal to Civil War collections at the Minnesota Historical Society. Users can search and browse through scanned photographs and documents and view digital images of artifacts, including uniforms, weapons, equipment, and, most notably, a collection of regimental battle flags. In addition, the "Civil War Daybook" blog is updated daily with a digitized historical resource related to the war.

"Ohio Civil War 150," http://www.ohiocivilwar150.org, produced by the Ohio Historical Society and partners throughout the state, features numerous impressive digitized archival resources that users can either search for or browse by item, collection, or exhibit. The site also actively promotes user participation in helping to share and preserve Civil War resources by providing on-line discussion forums and by encouraging civilian users to scan and submit family photographs and artifacts to the on-line repository.

"Wisconsin in the Civil War," a digital collection at the Wisconsin Historical Society, http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/civilwar/, contains more than 16,000 digitized letters, diaries, memoirs, photographs, maps, and newspaper clippings related to Wisconsin soldiers. Users can browse for resources under general categories such as "Stories," "People," "Places," "Regiment," or "Battle," or take advantage of an effective search tool that is powered by CONTENTdm.

In the 1990 Ken Burns documentary film *The Civil War*, historian Shelby Foote memorably quipped, "We think we are a wholly superior people. If we'd been anything like as superior as we think we are, we would not have fought that war. But since we did fight it, we have to make it the greatest war of all times. And our generals were the greatest generals of all time. It's very American to do that." This widespread interest in and reverence for the Civil War will undoubtedly continue to grow as more people are exposed to original photographs, manuscripts, artifacts, and other treasures that are made available on the World Wide Web.