

## Interpretative Themes for the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area

One way non-profits, local government units, and partners from the commercial sector can support the goals and priorities of the HCWHA is through interpretive projects that relate to the social, economic, and political aspects of the war years; the period immediately following the war; Maryland's unique location on the Mason-Dixon Line and its status as a border state. In some cases, mini-grants and project grants of the Maryland Heritage Area Authority may support such endeavors.

Interpretation is providing truthful information in interesting ways that engage people emotionally, answering the unspoken query: "So what? How does this relate to me?" The stories that answer this question can be told using many vehicles, including exhibits, lectures, living history programs, books and other publications, websites, all variety of media, curriculum materials, and outdoor signage. Specifically, the HCWHA management plan offers this six-theme framework for interpretation in the heritage area:

- **An Era of Change** - The two decades leading up to the outbreak of war saw a number of major developments that began to change long-established patterns. Technology changes (such as transportation improvements and telegraphs) societal tensions (especially as related to the shift from agrarian to an industrial economy), and The Abolitionist Movement (including the triggers of the Dred Scott decision and John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry) may be explored under this category.
- **Maryland as a Borderland** - The Mason-Dixon Line, the Maryland-Pennsylvania boundary, can be said to be the most famous line in America, traditionally thought to separate North from South. The state's location translated into divided sympathies within communities and even families. Maryland also bordered the federal capital and was therefore a strategic military location. In addition to geographic borders, cultural divisions (such as German and Anglo-American influences) and divided loyalties that put a strain on community life are ideas related to Maryland as a Borderland.
- **Maryland as a War Zone** - Because Maryland's location was crucial to keeping the Union intact and secure, especially the federal capital of Washington, D.C., extraordinary measures were taken to keep the state from siding with the Confederacy. Beside Maryland's pivotal location, interpretive projects might ask what it was like to live in occupied towns and countryside and feature actions of mercy and healing that were extended to thousands of soldiers that lay wounded and dying following the battles of Antietam, South Mountain, Gettysburg, and Monocacy.
- **Reunion & Reconciliation** – Interpretation may extend to seething passions and issues of reunification. The heritage area offers opportunities to explore the challenges of reuniting families and resuming everyday life. How the nation managed to reunite is may also be probed.
- **Aftermath** – Changing economies, the role of African Americans during Reconstruction, commemoration and caring for the dead, and veteran's reunions are post-war interpretive themes for the heritage area. Interpretation will also consider how the Heart of the Civil War came to be regarded as hallowed ground. When did war become a memory, and its memory become history? The process of memorializing, and sometimes mythologizing, history may be explored.
- **Shadows of the Civil War** - War's influences—some positive, some problematic—linger on our political and cultural landscape. Political and social tensions continue around the issues of states' rights, individual and community relationships to government, and race relations. There are excellent opportunities to explore a number of these shadows of the Civil War in the heritage area. Additionally, living history programs on location at battlefields and other sites interpret the history in war's shadow.