

Virginia Commission on the Centennial of Woodrow Wilson's Presidency

June 21, 2011



Photo courtesy of the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library and Museum located in Staunton, Virginia.

The Virginia Commission on the Centennial of the Woodrow Wilson Presidency (Commission) held its inaugural meeting on June 21, 2011, in Richmond. The Virginia General Assembly charged the Commission, established by SB 350 (2010), with planning, developing, and implementing statewide programs and events to commemorate the centennial of President Woodrow Wilson's election and presidency (1913 - 1921). The Commission elected Senator Emmett Hanger and Delegate Brenda Pogge as chair and vice chair, respectively.

Website

Members of the Commission received a preview of the Commission's website, which will provide the public with information about President Wilson's life, presidency, and legacy; resources for further study; and the Commission's latest news and events. The website will also highlight significant sites related to President Wilson, including his birthplace and the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library and Museum located in Staunton.

Woodrow Wilson

Members viewed a brief video clip on Woodrow Wilson, 28th president of the United States, Nobel Peace Prize Winner, and native of Staunton, Virginia. The son of a Presbyterian minister, Woodrow Wilson received a bachelor's degree from Princeton University, a law degree from the University of Virginia, and a doctorate from Johns Hopkins University. A noted professor of political science, Woodrow Wilson enjoyed a successful academic career, eventually serving as president of Princeton University before entering political life as Governor of New Jersey. One of only eight native Virginians to hold the highest office in the land, Woodrow Wilson oversaw the nation's mobilization for entry into World War I. In 1918, President Wilson addressed the U.S. Congress, presenting his "Fourteen Points" and introducing his idea of a Covenant of a League of Nations, which was included in the Treaty of Versailles. After the U.S. Congress voted against accepting the Treaty of Versailles, President Wilson embarked on a nationwide tour to gain support for the League of Nations, the precursor to the United Nations. During his travels, President Wilson suffered a stroke, rendering him unable to finish his journey. He completed his presidency and died in 1924.

Commission Organization and Duties

Staff presented an overview of SB 350 (2010), the enabling legislation that details the Commission's duties. The responsibilities of the Commission include:

- Planning, developing, coordinating, and implementing statewide programs, events, and activities to commemorate the centennial of Woodrow Wilson's election and presidency.
- Promoting and encouraging research and scholarship on and an interdisciplinary examination of the life and legacy of President Wilson and the historical importance of his presidency.

- Offering educational and cultural opportunities to increase historical literacy of the Woodrow Wilson election and presidency, highlighting significant events and achievements during his administrations, and assessing the effect of his presidency on contemporary society.
- Encouraging civic, historical, educational, economic, and other organizations throughout the Commonwealth to organize and participate in activities to expand the understanding and appreciation of the significance of Woodrow Wilson's presidency.
- Identifying and implementing various means to increase public knowledge and awareness of Woodrow Wilson and memorializing and preserving his history and legacy.

Staff reviewed several organizational items, the Ground Rules for Legislative Commissions and Advisory Groups, and the role of the citizen advisory council. The Commission selected a domain for the website, gave staff permission to begin work on a logo, and decided to further deliberate several choices for a theme for the commemoration. The Commission also accepted the nominations for the Citizens Advisory Council and added an additional name to the list originally compiled; staff will contact the nominees.

Work Plan

Staff noted that the commemoration offers a unique opportunity to provide a bridge from the Wilson era to contemporary events, emphasizing the importance of history to current affairs and the chance to reach out to students, teachers, scholars, and World War I descendants and enthusiasts, in addition to partnering with other state and national commemorative groups. Discussion included mention of current federal legislation to create the World War I Centennial Commission and the work of the Wilson 100, a partnership of the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library; The Boyhood Home of President Woodrow Wilson in Augusta, Georgia; the Woodrow Wilson Family Home in Columbia, South Carolina; and the Woodrow Wilson House in Washington, D.C.

Staff presented a first draft of a commemorative work plan, which was adopted by the Commission and organized commemorative activities by legislatively mandated objectives. Highlights of the plan include:

- Hosting several signature events.
- Working with the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia and the Virginia Department of Education to provide supplemental educational materials consistent with History and Social Studies Standards of Learning.
- Partnering with appropriate groups on the local, state, and federal level.
- Pursuing federal legislation for a commemorative stamp or coin.
- Hosting symposiums and coordinating exhibits.
- Commissioning white papers on aspects of President Wilson's life, election, presidency, and legacy.

Dr. Wilson, Commission member, former archivist of the United States, and president and CEO of the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library and Museum, distributed to Commission members and staff a listing of exhibitions and events that the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library has been developing in anticipation of the upcoming centennial. The Commission directed staff to integrate the activities and events into the Commission's work plan to the extent practicable. Dr. Wilson also mentioned that the Library has been working on World War I commemorative activities, including contact with the National World War I Museum in Kansas City and a trench exhibit at the Library. The Library is also working on a symposium and traveling exhibit on the Election of 1912 for next year.

Armistice Day 2011

Armistice Day (now known as Veterans Day) is celebrated on November 11. The Commission voted to send a letter to Governor McDonnell endorsing and requesting that he move upon HJR 608 (2011), which provides for the statewide observation of a moment of silence at 11 a.m. on November 11, 2011, in honor of the sacrifices of the men and women who have served in the United States Armed Forces. The Commission also directed staff to issue a statewide press release as the anniversary of Armistice Day approaches and to request that the Superintendent of Public

Instruction issue a Superintendent's Memo to school divisions encouraging public schools of the Commonwealth to also observe a moment of silence.

Conclusion

Members discussed the exciting opportunity the Commission on the Centennial of the Woodrow Wilson Presidency presents for residents of the Commonwealth to have a Virginia conversation on the presidency of Woodrow Wilson and reflect on what it was like to be an American 100 years ago and now.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the full Commission and first meeting of the Citizen Advisory Council will be posted on the General Assembly website as soon as information is available.

**VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON THE
CENTENNIAL OF WOODROW WILSON'S
PRESIDENCY**

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