

Published February 2nd, 2011

Lee and Grant Exhibit Opens at Saint Mary's College

By Sophie Braccini



Front and center: Chris Amador and Steve Hessenauer of Moraga were among many dressed for the occasion Photo Doug Kohen

the cause. This exhibit and supporting events help to make the Civil War more present and vivid to northern Californians."

The Lee and Grant exhibition is toured by Mid-America Arts Alliance and was developed by the Virginia Historical Society. "We were lucky that I heard about it at a conference and got Saint Mary's on the waiting list," says Heidi Donner, Public Information & Educational Programs Manager at the Hearst Art Gallery. Donner believes that the presence on campus of Professor Guarneri was one of the reasons why the College got the show.

The exhibition contains material appropriate for all ages and level of knowledge. "It is even more student-friendly than I thought," noted Guarneri after its installation on campus, "there are a lot of interactive kiosks, reproduced uniforms and tents, quizzes, and questions. A key tactic seems to be to make students, from elementary grades on, evaluate history for themselves."

According to Guarneri the exhibit is particularly interesting for two reasons. First, it views the Civil War through the actions and personalities of its two leading military heroes, allowing visitors to compare and contrast Lee and Grant as men, generals, and representative types of the South and North, respectively. "Lee was the aristocratic, Christian slaveholder with a strong record and reputation who was out to defend his personal honor and regional loyalty, while Grant was an average and rather unsuccessful northern soldier and businessman who rose quite unexpectedly to greatness by harnessing the Union's vast resources behind a patriotic fight to save the nation," said Guarneri, "They had very different attitudes toward slavery, which is something this exhibit shows and which tends to get buried in all the adulation of Lee."

The second new thing about this exhibit is its focus on how these men were remembered and commemorated long after the war. Whether they were seen as heroes or disappointments depended, over the years, on such factors as people's continued devotion to the Union or the "Lost Cause," lingering comparisons with the two presidents, Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, on the desire for reconciliation between the North and South, and by the second half of the twentieth century, on a renewed sense that the cause of ending slavery was just and overdue.

The Gallery hopes to attract school groups to the exhibit. "The exhibition is free for children (the cost for adults is \$4), and we will give tours to school groups who reserve ahead of time," says Donner, "teachers can get the lessons plans before coming to visit and we will keep them available even after the exhibition is over."

On opening day Guarneri presented the lecture, "Only a Question of Time and Patience: An Inside View of Grant's Campaign against Lee," and displays by members of the National Civil War Association [NCWA] in period costume were included in the day's program. Guarneri will deliver the lecture again in mid-February. He is finishing a book on the Civil War portraying the war as seen through Lincoln's "eyes," Assistant Secretary of War Charles A. Dana.

On March 19th a reenactment of the Civil War will take place on campus. This offers a chance to tour the camps and learn first-hand about weapons, food, army life, telegraph operations, and Civil War medicine. "Cannons blasting show that the war used modern technology to raise the level of violence and destruction," explains Guarneri, "Skirmishes in a small way evoke the noise, confusion,

LAMORINDA WEEKLY | Lee and Grant Exhibit Opens at Saint Mary's College | Moraga
individual heroism, and carnage of war."

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA