

TV series about Michigans role in Civil War airs Nov. 11

By Donna Ullrich Nov 2011

"Thank God for Michigan," President Abraham Lincoln is reported to have said when the young state was the first to send troops to aid in the Union Army's efforts in the American Civil War.

Michigan's contributions to the war effort are the focus of *The Michigan Experience: The American Civil War Years* series to air on public television over the four years of the Civil War's sesquicentennial (2011-2015).

The production is the work of iMichigan Productions (iMP), a nonprofit educational production company based in Grand Blanc.

John Gibney, director of the Monroe County Historical Museum calls the production, "The most factual depiction to date."

Rodney W. Brown, the show's producer and director, said the show is the direct result of an interview he'd done with director Ken Burns (*Civil War*, *Jazz*, and *Baseball*).

When Brown asked Burns how he decided what to omit from his epic PBS production, Burns said he was often asked why elements of the war were omitted and his answer was simply "time." There wasn't enough time, said Burns. At the same time, Burns said he hoped the local media would take up where he had left off to tell the local and regional stories of the Civil War.

That, said Brown, "was my turning point.

"Tell Michigan's stories," he thought to himself.

From Burns' challenge came iMichigan Productions and its first project, Michigan's role in the Civil War.

The first episode of the series will begin airing on or around Nov. 11 on all of the public television stations in the state. Check local listings.

The four, one-hour episodes cover Michigan's role in the Civil War including its 90,000 soldiers, its senator who orchestrated the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments, its agricultural and equestrian contributions to the war effort, its navy, cavalry and ambulance builders and its Civil War cemeteries.

Through the state's Civil War re-enactor community and historians, viewers hear the voices and stories of Michigan's many regiments, its government and daily life. These stories include those of the 102nd Regiment of Detroit, Michigan's only black regiment to fight in the war.

The production relies heavily on state historians and history educators to ensure its accuracy and that its

content mirrors state kindergarten to 12th grade history curriculum standards.

The collaboration between commercial television stations that have joined forces with iMichigan Productions on behalf of this project is unprecedented in the state.

News anchors from the seven major markets ♦ Marquette to Detroit ♦ serve as hosts for segments of the first episode. They are Steve Asplund of WLUC-TV, Marquette; Suzanne Geha of WZZM-TV, Grand Rapids; Judy Markee of WWMT, Kalamazoo; Diana Lewis of WXYZ, Detroit; Bill Harris of WJRT, Flint; Sam Merrill of WNEM, Saginaw; and David Andrews of WILX, Lansing.

Brown said the commercial media partners recognize the value of this production to their own communities and to the state as a whole.

"This program celebrates a legacy of commitment, achievement and sacrifice by our Michigan ancestors. Everyone who watches this show will see themselves and be renewed in their pride for their Michigan heritage," said Brown.

Station Manager Kent Wieland of WKAR-TV of East Lansing, which will air the show, said of the production, "As the Civil War constitutes a grave and pivotal point, not only in our national history but that of Michigan, the story of Michigan's involvement is a story that needs and merits greater exploration. This documentary series examines Michigan's role and provides a better understanding of the impact of Michigan's involvement."

Already available for the project is a Living History Narratives page at the iMP web site. Visitors can hear from a slave, from soldiers, from Sarah Edmonds of Flint, who dressed as a man to enlist in the Union Army, and from President Lincoln, Gen. Robert E. Lee and Gen. George A. Custer. Living history impressionists present the first person narratives on the site.

Additional airdates for the program are expected around Black History Month, Flag Day, Memorial Day and in the spring in anticipation of the 8th grade Civil War curriculum.

In pre-production with the final three episodes of the project, iMP was founded in 2010 by Brown and partners Leon Collins and Donna Ullrich, both of East Lansing.

iMP creates multi-media productions that are educating and stimulating and about Michigan. In addition to the television programs, iMP is in the process of creating a robust e-learning center to provide teachers, students and life-long learners with free resources and tools to enable them to further their exploration and learning on each iMP project topic.

Go to www.imichiganproductions.org for more information and to see trailers of the show.

Michigan and the American Civil War Quiz

Take this quiz about Michigan's contributions to the Civil War effort.

1. Why was President Abraham Lincoln reported to have said, "Thank God for Michigan"?
2. Was George Armstrong Custer a Michiganian?
3. How many Michigan soldiers paid the ultimate sacrifice in the American Civil War?
4. What role did Flint resident Sarah Edmonds play in the Civil War?
5. What was Michigan Sen. Jacob Howard's contribution to the U.S. Constitution?
6. Where was Abraham Lincoln when he got an idea that he later patented - the only U.S. president with a patent.
7. Michigan's only Black regiment, the 102nd, came from what Michigan city?

8. How did a 16-year old kid from Michigan earn the Medal of Honor?
9. What Michigan city did Sojourner Truth call home?
10. What soft drink would not have been invented without the Civil War?

Answers

1. As young as Michigan was at the time (only 24), it was the first state to respond to President Lincoln's call for support of the Union Army's efforts. Ultimately it sent 90,000 troops, horses, and a myriad of resources and supplies.
2. Yes. He hailed from Monroe.
3. 14,753 Michigan soldiers did not come home from the Civil War.
4. Sarah Edmonds dressed as a man to enlist in the Union Army and fight in the Civil War.
5. He penned and was instrumental in the passage of the 13th (abolition of slavery), 14th (equal protection) and 15th (voting rights and citizenship for African American men) amendments to the U.S. Constitution.
6. When the barge he was traveling on got caught on a sandbar in the Detroit River, President Lincoln hit on an idea for freeing the barge. He later patented the idea.
7. Detroit.
8. In June of 1862 George D. Sidman was a 16-year-old drummer boy with the 16th Michigan Infantry, Company C. In the midst of an assault at Gaines Mills, Va., Sidman volunteered to carry the regimental flag and rallied his comrades in the face of grave danger until he was wounded in the hip. For his distinguished bravery, Sidman was awarded the Medal of Honor. His Medal of Honor is on display in the Michigan Historical Center. He is buried in Arlington Cemetery.
9. Battle Creek.
10. Vernors Ginger Ale. James Vernor, at 19, began experimenting with a ginger ale recipe. He put his plans on hold and enlisted as a Union soldier with the 4th Michigan Cavalry. Before leaving for war, James placed his ginger ale extract into an oak cask. At the end of the war, he returned home, opened a drug store in Detroit and opened that old oak cask. To his surprise, the four years of aging blended his secret ingredients to perfection. Vernors is reportedly the nation's oldest soft drink.

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