

North Carolina Civil War Soldiers Timelinehttp://cinch.nclive.org/timemap/civil_war/*Reviewed by Rebecca Russell, Rice University*

As part of Commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War in North Carolina, 2011-2015, the State Archives and the State Library of North Carolina are collaborating on several projects to document the state's participation in and contributions to the war.¹ The North Carolina Civil War Soldiers Timeline provides eyewitness accounts of the Civil War from the viewpoint of the men in the battlefield and their families' perspective on the home front. Eighteen letters from the State Archives have been digitized, transcribed, "plotted on a Google Map and tied to a timeline so that users can follow a soldier's path both geographically and through time."² Users can explore content on the site by selecting an individual soldier to follow through the war or browsing among the 18 soldiers. Clicking on colored dots on the map brings up an "info bubble" that provides additional information about the soldier's service. Thumbnail images of letters are visible in the info bubble and notes are provided describing the subjects discussed in the letter. Links to additional documents in North Carolina Digital Collections (NCDC) are provided for many of the letters.

An interesting feature is the "View Soldier's path through war" which provides a map with known locations marked and a route a soldier may have taken, including their home, battle sites, and place of death. The timeline helps users visualize the experiences of a single soldier and connect him within the larger context of war.

The Soldiers timeline uses digital mapping tools to plot the soldier's location geographically and chronologically. These tools enable collection managers to present collections in a new way. It also allows users to dictate how to experience the digital collections. The user is not overwhelmed with the material and can connect with the personal experience of a soldier, creating their own "exhibit" by selecting and viewing information.

The exhibit is most successful when linking information mentioned in a soldier's letter to relevant primary sources from the NCDC. Descriptions of battles, hospital conditions, disease, and artwork supplement the letters and connect the letters from the State Archives with the rich Civil War collections in the State Library of North

¹ North Carolina Civil War Sesquicentennial "Mission" page, accessed May 14, 2014
<http://www.nccivilwar150.com/mission/mission.htm>

² State Archives of North Carolina, "Digital Collections and Publications," accessed May 14, 2014
<http://www.ncdcr.gov/archives/Public/DigitalCollectionsandPublications.aspx>

Carolina.³ The timeline also acts as an access point to digitized materials in the NCDC. All documents are freely accessible, full-text searchable and include additional descriptive metadata, and copyright information.

Weaknesses in the timeline exhibit include the omission of an “About Page.” Details about the project were discoverable from the State Archives of North Carolina Resource list and the North Carolina Civil War Sesquicentennial site, but it would be helpful to provide researchers and archivists with information about the project within the exhibit display. Another weakness is accessing information on the timeline. Users are required to drag the hand tool from right to left to display the different years of the war. As letters are plotted by month and day, it can take some time to browse through the dates. A slider would be more efficient and easier to use.

The Soldiers Timeline is a good example of a collaborative effort to preserve state history and culture. Employing new tools to visualize a soldier’s progressions through the Civil War, the State Archives and the State Library of North Carolina created an interesting exhibit that establishes connections between documents and also increases the discoverability of the materials. Similar projects have utilized mapping tools to create interpretive exhibits, but what is compelling about the Soldiers Timeline are the connections it makes from the letters to other digitized documents, maps, battle sketches, regiment histories, and images. It is a useful tool for educators, historians and students interested in learning more about the Civil War.

³ North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, “Government and Heritage Library,” accessed May 14, 2014
<http://www.ncdcr.gov/About/OurDivisions/Library/GovernmentandHeritageLibrary.aspx>