

Museum of the American Revolution Addresses “Historical Amnesia”

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

In 2009, the American Revolution Center released the results of a national telephone survey of over 1,000 adults in the US about their knowledge of the American Revolution, its significance and its legacy. Although 89 percent of respondents thought they could pass a basic test on the American Revolution, 83 percent *failed* the test, which covered the beliefs, tenets and liberties established during the Revolution. Many respondents did not even know the century in which the American Revolution took place.

According to Dr. Bruce Cole, former president and CEO of the American Revolution Center, a non-partisan, non-profit organization, “Many people are unaware that the everyday freedoms and liberties they enjoy—reading newspaper editorials, expressing a dissenting opinion while attending a public meeting, or

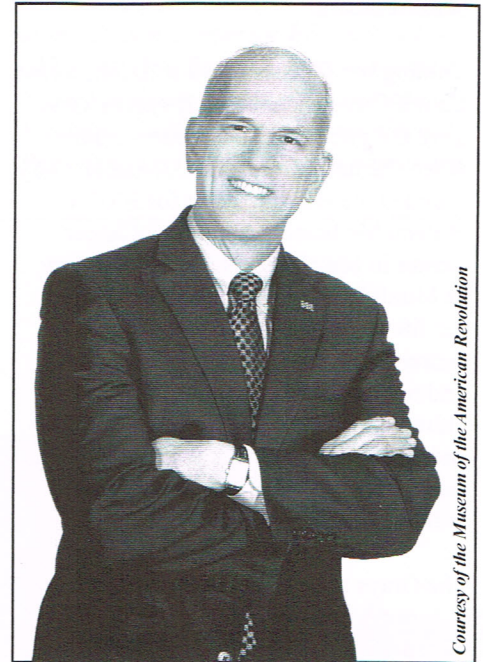
worshipping at a religious institution of their choice—are the legacy of the American Revolution.”

Michael Quinn, current President and CEO of the museum and a Center City resident, came to the Museum because, in his words, “this is the most important project in public history today. A national museum on the American Revolution is long overdue—and urgently needed. There could be no better place for this museum than in Philadelphia, the headquarters of the American Revolution.” Quinn is well qualified to lead this effort. He previously held the positions of President and CEO of James Madison’s Montpelier and Deputy Director of George Washington’s Mount Vernon.

To tell the story of the Revolution and to address what Cole calls “historical amnesia,” ARC planned the Museum of the American Revolution. From its birth as an idea to its emergence as a real place people can visit, there are many steps to creating a museum, including developing a theme, assembling a collection, constructing a building, hiring a staff, and building a groundswell of anticipation from an enthusiastic audience. The Museum of the American Revolution has been building excitement in virtual reality for a number of years through its e-newsletters describing its collections, the progress of the building, and stories from the Revolutionary period.

The Museum will cover the American Revolution from the days of British America in the 1760s through Washington’s Inauguration as President in 1789. Collections contain items owned and used by General George Washington, and other rare and historic artifacts including weapons, uniforms, flags, personal diaries, paintings and sculpture, manuscripts, and books.

Recent announcements describe the donation of a fifer’s music book, a loan of eight cannons, and the hand-sewing repair of George Washington’s Headquarters Tent. Additional news items have covered the construction of the museum building,



Michael Quinn, President and CEO, Museum of the American Revolution.

Courtesy of the Museum of the American Revolution

staffers in charge of collections, and a traveling exhibition. A recent one, “Women and the War,” an excerpt from John Ferling’s book, *Whirlwind: The American Revolution and the War That Won It*, describes the difficulties women faced during the long conflict.

Philadelphia-area philanthropist H.F. “Gerry” Lenfest is Chairman of the Board of Directors. The Museum’s campaign goal is \$150 million to complete the project and set up an endowment, and Lenfest has issued a challenge grant, which will double the impact of funds donated to this project.

The Museum of the American Revolution is planned to open in Spring 2017 at Third and Chestnut Streets, a site announced in 2010. Designed by Robert A.M. Stern Architects, the building will rise three stories above street level and will house exhibition galleries, theaters, educational spaces, a café and a retail store.

For more information about the Museum, to read the historical excerpts, to join the email list, and to donate, please go to www.amrevmuseum.org/



Nancy Colman

The night after Paris suffered its worst terrorist attack since World War II, the city of Philadelphia showed its solidarity, as did cities around the globe, by displaying the blue, white and red of the French Tricolor atop Liberty Place, seen here from Rittenhouse Square, and the pyramid topping the Mellon Bank Building.