

Museum shares Confederacy

Steve Szkotak ASSOCIATED PRESS

RICHMOND | With surgical gloves, S. Waite Rawls III, president and chief executive officer of the Museum of the Confederacy, opens a large drawer in the basement of the building to reveal a display of dolls the size of children - just part of what he calls the "world's most comprehensive collection of Confederate artifacts." Museum officials hope people will get to see more such exhibits in 2011 when they take them to three historic Virginia sites.

At any time, just 10 percent to 15 percent of the museum's holdings are on display. The rest remain tucked away in gray cabinets, stacks of boxes or, in the case of delicate flags, clear, sealed containers.

Though half of the collection will remain in Richmond, the exhibits will draw from roughly 15,000 artifacts - including such military accouterments as saddles and medals; 510 of the 13,000 known wartime flags in existence, including one stitched by Robert E. Lee's wife and four daughters; 250 uniform pieces, including the one Lee wore when he surrendered at Appomattox in 1865; and 5,000 domestic items such as serving bowls the size of small tubs.

The collection of dolls includes "Lucy Ann," which was used to smuggle quinine over enemy lines. The medicinal compound was hidden in the doll's head - a compartment revealed when her hat

and hair are removed.

Mr. Rawls said the origin of each item is as significant as the overall collection, which he values in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

"How did we get all of Robert E. Lee's stuff? From his son," Mr. Rawls said. "How did we get all of Stonewall Jackson's stuff? From his widow."

Despite such an impressive collection, the number of museum visitors has declined steadily.

The museum, next to the executive mansion of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, is difficult to find amid the ever-expanding Virginia Commonwealth University medical complex, which towers over the mansion and the museum.

Interest in Confederate history has waned over the past few years, especially among newcomers and black Southerners who see no celebration in the Confederacy.

Critics have called the museum a shrine, a relic of the Old South.

The American Civil War Center, which is on the other side of downtown Richmond, is cast as a contemporary answer to the museum. It strives to present the black, North and South perspectives of the Civil War, with a greater emphasis on education than artifacts.

John Motley, chairman of the board of the Civil War Center, said he visits the Museum of the Confederacy each year because of the quality of its collection and programs.

He disagrees with the museum's point of view but said, "I think it is critical for the telling of the history of the United States that the valuable MOC collection is preserved."

Mr. Rawls is mindful of the perception, but strongly disagrees.

"We tell the Confederacy's story in depth," he said. "There are very few people who are willing to face the controversies of the Civil War, and we do."

The exhibits will be in Appomattox; Fredericksburg, where one-third of all Civil War casualties were recorded within a 20-mile radius; and Fort Monroe, a Union outpost in Hampton where Davis was imprisoned after the war.

Mr. Rawls envisions 400,000 visitors annually at the three locations and the museum, which is 10 times greater than the museum's annual visitors.