

Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission 2022 Annual Report



I. Background

The Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission (VA250) was created by the General Assembly for the purpose of commemorating the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, the Revolutionary War, and the independence of the United States (2020 Acts, c. 914).

The Commission has the following statutory powers and duties:

1. Formulate and implement a program for the inclusive observance of the 250th anniversary of the independence of the United States and the Revolutionary War in Virginia, including:
 - a. Civic, cultural, and historical education and scholarship concerning the ideals of the American Revolution and their contemporary relevance
 - b. Visitation of museums and historic sites, including battlefields
 - c. Creation and publication of historical documents and studies
 - d. Cooperation with agencies responsible for the preservation or restoration of historic sites, buildings, art, and artifacts
 - e. Establishment of exhibitions and interpretive and wayfinding signage
 - f. Arrangement of appropriate public ceremonies
 - g. Comprehensive marketing and tourism campaign encompassing CY 2025 through 2026
 - h. General dissemination of public information regarding Virginia's involvement in the American Revolution and its legacy today
2. Submit to the Governor and General Assembly an annual executive summary of the interim activity and work of the Commission no later than the first day of each regular session of the General Assembly.

Commission members and staff are listed below:

Members

*The Honorable Terry L. Austin, Chair, *Virginia House of Delegates*

*The Honorable Mamie E. Locke, Vice Chair, *Senate of Virginia*

Chief Stephen R. Adkins, *Chickahominy Indian Tribe*

Edward H. Baine, *Dominion Energy Virginia*

Diane Bechamps, *Virginia Tourism Authority*

Jean Ann Bolling, *Mechanicsville VA*

*Jamie O. Bosket, *Virginia Museum of History and Culture*

Leslie Greene Bowman, *Monticello*

Gretchen Bulova, *Office of Historic Alexandria*
*Christy S. Coleman, *Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation*
*H. Benson Dendy III, *Chairman Emeritus, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation*
David Duncan, *American Battlefield Trust*
*Clifford B. Fleet, *Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*
*The Honorable Hyland F. “Buddy” Fowler, Jr., *Virginia House of Delegates*
Sue Gerdelman, *Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation Board of Trustees*
*The Honorable Aimee R. Guidera, *Secretary of Education*
Peter Hedlund, *Virginia Humanities*
Kathy Jordan, *Library of Virginia*
Julie Langan, *Department of Historic Resources*
Jerri Marr, *Colonial National Historical Park*
Eric Monday, *Virginia Bar Association*
*The Honorable Thomas K. Norment, Jr., *Senate of Virginia*
*The Honorable Kenneth R. Plum, *Virginia House of Delegates*
Katherine A. Rowe, *William & Mary*
Chief Anne Richardson, *Rappahannock Tribe*
Jackie Stone, *McGuire Woods LLP*
*Scott M. Stroh III, *Gunston Hall*

* Executive Committee member

Staff

Cheryl Wilson, *Executive Director*
Elizabeth Mancano, *Deputy Director*
Patrick Daughtry, *Director of Major Gifts*
April Chatmon, *Executive Assistant*
Trevor Grimm, *Director of Marketing and Communications*
Susan Nolan, *Director of Institutional Giving*

Commission Meetings

The Commission held five meetings in 2022 and its Executive Committee met once. Commission meetings, which had been held bi-monthly, changed to a quarterly schedule and the Executive Committee meets on the call of the Chair. All meeting agendas and minutes can be found at: va250.org/meetings.

II. 2022 Activities

While the work of the Commission has been underway for two years, activities and plans ramped up considerably in 2022, with the hiring of dedicated staff, addition of legislative members and election of a new Chair (Delegate Austin) and Vice-Chair (Senator Locke),

approval of a strategic plan and accompanying programs, launch of an interactive and dynamic website (www.VA250.org) , development of a VA250 marketing strategy and branding elements, generous start-up funding from the state, laying of groundwork for private development efforts, creating alliances with hundreds of partners, and establishment of Local VA250 Committees across the state. In addition, the Commission joined as sponsor of one of the first semiquincentennial events in the nation, “For 2026: A Five-Year Conference Series.”

Legislative and Budget Actions

Several legislative actions in the 2022 Session of the General Assembly made a positive impact on the Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission:

- House Bill 6 (Acts, c. 687), patroned by Delegate Ware, and Senate Bill 22 (Acts, c. 685), patroned by Senator Locke, added five legislative members to the Commission. Members appointed by the Speaker of the House were: Delegate Terry L. Austin, Delegate Hyland F. “Buddy” Fowler, Jr., and Delegate Kenneth R. Plum. Members appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules were Senator Mamie E. Locke and Senator Thomas K. Norment, Jr.
- The state budget (Item 237, 2022 Special Session I, c. 2) appropriated \$7 million to the Commission, with a commitment to full funding of at least \$15 million in the next biennium.

III. Strategic Plan

The Commission approved a Strategic Plan in July 2022, with themes and goals to guide the commemoration in Virginia, as follows:

VA250 Key Themes

The Declaration of Independence, adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, announced to the world that 13 North American colonies had separated from Great Britain. In formalizing the separation, the colonial representatives articulated the causes of a revolution that had been underway for more than a year and would take many more years to consummate.

Were the Declaration of Independence merely a revolutionary document, it would be an essential part of our nation’s history, applicable to one people at one time. Instead, as Lincoln observed, the document declared essential truths applicable to all people, at all times. Thus was the American experiment bound up from the start with universal

principles: that all people are created equal and endowed by their Creator with the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that governments are created to protect these natural rights; and that governments ultimately are accountable to the people.

After the Declaration, it would take the American revolutionaries five long years to outlast the powerful British military and another six years to fashion an enduring Constitutional charter. Yet, out of the fraught events of our founding commenced our great, perpetual project: to form a more perfect union in which the Declaration's universal promise gains ever more universal acceptance and application.

"Never before in the history of the world has a sociopolitical document expressed in such profound, eloquent, and unequivocal language the dignity and the worth of human personality," Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. declared in an Independence Day address in 1965. And yet, as Dr. King candidly noted, too often have we failed to practice the democratic principles we so proudly proclaim.

No generation – not the revolutionary generation, and not any since – has fulfilled the Declaration's promise. Yet, for nearly 250 years, we have been ennobled by the pursuit, inspired by the progress, and strengthened by the struggle. Over time the United States has woven principles of equality and justice into our laws and become the greatest example of liberty and opportunity in human history. The philosophical and legal foundation laid in the Revolutionary Era is the sturdy structure on which we have built and are building still.

Virginia's history is America's story: promising yet complex - a multicultural story that in the Revolutionary era was Native American, European, African, and American; Patriot and Loyalist - and is now so much richer for its diversity. The Virginia Semiquincentennial will embrace all facets of the history of the era and celebrate the origins and ideals of a revolutionary new nation - now a beacon of hope and opportunity for the world.

1. Virginia is a powerfully historical place, home to sites and stories essential to our American story.

- Virginia's historic places include the stories of both prominent and ordinary people.
- Virginia's native peoples were first to shape the place that is the Commonwealth and continue to shape Virginia and the nation.
- Virginia's honest reckoning with the paradox of our origins in both freedom and slavery aims to be a national model.
- Virginia's sites and museums reveal chapters of our founding narrative: key ideas about American governance including the first representative assembly in British America, the Virginia Resolution for Independence, Virginia Declaration of Rights, Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and the Statute of Religious Freedom.

- Much of America’s richest history happened here in Virginia – native lands, a founding colonial settlement, the American Revolution, the Civil War, Civil Rights, and so much more.

2. The Revolutionary challenge continues.

- The American experiment has resulted in the most robust and longest democracy in history.
- The American Revolution was a time when passionate activists, summoning the courage to challenge centuries of an established world order, led a revolution that would change the world.
- American optimism, passion for change, and desire for economic self-improvement have been driving forces for progress, improvement, and innovation.
- The American founders could not have envisioned inclusion and diversity as we know it, but their work inspired Americans over more than two and a half centuries to fight for a more equal society.
- The 250th anniversary of independence is a chance to assess our resolve to deliver on the American “promissory note” of freedom, equality, property rights and “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”
- The 250th anniversary of independence is an opportunity to honor those who fought for American independence, to commemorate battles and other important events of the American Revolution, and to celebrate the richness of Virginia’s stories.

3. In Virginia, the American Revolution was a war, and more than a war.

- It was a war waged by Virginians, which divided some communities and families and brought others together.
- It was a revolution of ideas, with many sources of inspiration for ideas about freedom including from European enlightenment thinkers, and ancient Greek and Roman philosophy.
- It was a revolution for expressions of liberty, including from enslaved people seeking freedom, and Native Americans asserting sovereignty.
- It was a revolution for property rights of American colonists, including the right to self-govern.
- It was a revolution for religious freedom, including the end of persecution of dissenting ministers, equal treatment for dissenters, and the end of a state-supported and mandated church.
- It was a struggle that produced a promise of equality in the Declaration of Independence, participation in government as promised in the Constitution, and protections defined in the Bill of Rights.
- It was a struggle that led to the confiscation or destruction of Loyalist property in Virginia, with minimal due process or compensation.
- It was a struggle that resulted in many Loyalist Virginians fleeing the state forever.

- It was a struggle whose conclusion excluded many Virginians of the time, but which has inspired disenfranchised, subjugated, and disempowered groups to fight for their rights as Americans based on our founding documents and the ideals they express.
- 4. We can tell our history to reflect the fullest American story.**
- Virginia’s semiquincentennial of the American Revolution will serve as a continuum of recent Virginia commemorations that examine all facets of our history, while celebrating this milestone anniversary with and for all Virginians.
 - The story of Virginia is the story of America: land of hope and opportunity, leading the journey toward a more perfect union.

IV. Signature Programs in Development

Building on the themes and goals articulated in the Strategic Plan, the Commission is developing the following programs and plans:

i. “A Common Cause to All” Semiquincentennial Kickoff event (March 10-12, 2023)

Virginia will mirror the Committees of Correspondence, by inviting colleagues in other states, state commissioners, representatives of Virginia local VA250 committees, and key stakeholders to spend a weekend of mutual learning and collaboration in Colonial Williamsburg March 10-12.

As this will be the first gathering of states to mark the 250th, Virginia will lead the nation by inviting collaboration, sharing information, and seeking ways to partner during the semiquincentennial, signaling our commitment not only to a meaningful commemoration for Virginia, but for every state and the nation. The product of the gathering will be a signed resolution of mutual support, collaboration, and partnership.

ii. Signature Conferences

The Commission will either develop, or join as partner, in a series of conferences, which include:

- a. “For 2026: A Five-Year Conference Series,” in partnership with the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, William & Mary, and Colonial Williamsburg
 - The VA250 Commission joined as sponsor, which included a pre-conference RevEd Teacher’s Summit, and provided for webcasting and archiving of plenary sessions, “The Test of Time: How We Commemorate Historical Moments” and “Juneteenth’s Revolutionary Roots.”

- b. “The Legal Revolution”: The Virginia Bar Association and the Virginia Law Foundation will organize a series of conferences throughout 2025 and 2026. Held at public law schools across Virginia, these seminars will examine the nation’s founding documents and founding fathers, both as lawyers and as leaders, who enabled American to become the greatest example of individual liberty and opportunity in the world.
- c. Partnership with Monticello for a conference in 2026 on the meaning of the Declaration of Independence

iii. Museum exhibition (with panel exhibition to travel statewide)

The Virginia Museum of History and Culture (VMHC) and Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation (JYF) propose to develop in partnership the signature exhibition for the Commonwealth of Virginia’s commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The exhibit will incorporate the key themes and four supporting elements identified and approved by the VA250 Commission. Specifically, the proposed exhibition acknowledges that Virginia’s history is America’s story: complex, diverse, and promising, a multicultural story that in the Revolutionary era was Native American, European, African, and American, and is now so much richer for its continuing diversity.

Focusing on Revolutionary events in 1775 and 1776, the Virginia Semiquincentennial will embrace the inclusive history and narrative breadth of the era, and mark the origins of a revolutionary new nation, the events that preceded and followed it and the people who contributed to its formation. Using the most compelling exhibition techniques coupled with art, artifacts and documents, the exhibition will inspire a deep appreciation of the continental and global forces, and individual actions by iconic and ordinary people that brought about the model of democratic government that would be duplicated the world over.

- ***Primary Exhibition:*** Together in partnership, JYF and VMHC will conceive, design, produce, and install a major exhibition of approximately 5,000 square feet to be on display at the VMHC from approximately March 2025 through January 2026, and then on display at JYF from approximately April 2026 through January 2027.
- ***Panel Exhibition:*** Together in partnership, JYF and VMHC will conceive, design, and produce a traveling panel version of the exhibition that will be deployed for display across the state (and beyond as desired) from approximately March 2025 through December 2027.

The exhibition will have at its core the following primary themes and supporting pillars:

1. Virginia is a powerfully historical place, home to sites and stories essential to our American story.
2. The Revolutionary challenge continues.
3. Here in Virginia, the American Revolution was a war, and more than a war.
4. We can tell our history to reflect the fullest American story.

iv. Mobile Museum

A “museum on wheels” housed in an expandable tractor-trailer that will travel, free of charge, to schools, local events, festivals, and fairs throughout Virginia and to other states. The mobile tour will begin in 2024 and continue throughout the commemoration. The mobile museum will be hands-on, interactive, and immersive, with content derived from the museum exhibition and content from the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown. Based on the popular VMFA ArtMobile and Civil War 150 HistoryMobile, the mobile 250th tour will serve as the visual centerpiece of Virginia’s 250th commemoration and will draw visitors to sites across the state and beyond.

v. Education

The Commission will partner with schools and educational institutions to supplement K-12 education through programs which may include:

- Multi-partner Teacher Institutes held annually in locations across the state
- Resources for teachers (curriculum development, classroom resources, etc.)
- Robust education content aggregator on website as a one-stop resource for educators
- Essay contest on theme topics to engage students
- Development of lesson plans, classroom resources, and takeaways for students/teachers visiting the mobile museum that correspond to SOL points
- Podcasts, videos, blogs with history content

vi. 250th Anniversaries and Key Special Events

The Commission will develop, or join with partners to support, events to mark key anniversary dates. While the following list is not exhaustive, such anniversaries include:

2023 Events (marking events that occurred in 1773):

Committees of Correspondence 250th (March 10-12, 2023)

2024 Events (1774):

Fairfax Resolves 250th - Key document that rejected the supremacy of British authority (July 18, 2024)

Lafayette Grand Tour 250th and 200th (Fall 2024) – multiple locations
Will also commemorate Lafayette’s cross-country tour 50 years after the Revolutionary War (in 1824). Example: Fredericksburg is planning a large-scale city-wide event involving the National Park Service and multiple museums.

Yorktown Tea Party 250th (Weekend of events, Thursday November 7, - Saturday, November 9, 2024)

2025 Events (1775):

Virginia Bar Association (VBA) and Virginia Law Foundation (VLF) Law Symposium (three-part conference series in 2025 and 2026)
The Legal Revolution: Virginia Leads the Way to Liberty 1776-2026

Fincastle Resolutions 250th – First American pledge of resistance to tyranny unto death (Monday, January 20, 2025)

250th Anniversary of Patrick Henry’s “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death” speech (Sunday, March 23, 2025) St. John’s Church, Richmond - Major event with dramatic readings by famous Virginians in the areas of sports, entertainment, politics, etc.

250th Anniversary of the Arrival of Lord Dunmore (Sunday, June 8, 2025)
Yorktown

250th Anniversary of the Battle of Hampton (October 26, 2025)

250th Anniversary of the Battle of Great Bridge (December 9, 1775/2025)

2026 Events (1776)

Sail 250 (May – June 2026) - Six-port sail docking in Alexandria and Norfolk

250th Anniversary of Fifth Virginia Convention: Virginia’s Independence Day (Friday, May 15, 2026) Williamsburg - General Assembly Special Commemorative Session in Colonial Capitol with international dignitaries

250th Anniversary of Virginia Declaration of Rights (Friday, June 12, 2026)
Gunston Hall

250th Anniversary of Declaration of Independence: “Let Freedom Ring”
(Saturday, July 4, 2026):

1. Statewide naturalization ceremony at key locations with big-name speaker simulcast of keynote speech (Monticello, Mount Vernon, Montpelier, Colonial Williamsburg, State Capitol, Red Hill, Gunston Hall, Stratford Hall, etc.)
2. Statewide tolling of bells 13 times at a 2:00 pm ([Joint Concurrent Res 25, 1963](#))
3. Massive fireworks show at key locations, parades, etc.
4. Events to honor military and veterans

250th Anniversary of Formation of First Baptist Church (October 2026) Williamsburg – One of the country’s earliest African American congregations, founded by free and enslaved Black worshippers.

Looking ahead to 2031 (1781):

250th Anniversary of Arrival of Lafayette (March 2031), **Siege of Yorktown** (September 29, 2031), ***Yorktown Victory Day/British Surrender at Yorktown** (Sunday, October 19, 2031)

V. Statewide Coordination and Local VA250 Committees

The Commission coordinates, supports, and amplifies activities across the Commonwealth, including (i) programs and activities at museums, battlefields, National Park service sites, and historic sites across the Commonwealth; (ii) local Virginia 250 committees; (iii) other states’ 250 efforts; and (iv) the national America 250 Commission.

In Summer 2022, the Commission requested each of Virginia’s 134 counties and cities to form a Local VA250 Committee to coordinate activities and events across the state. To date, more than 80 localities have done so, with many local governing bodies passing resolutions of support.

Local committees are typically composed of representatives from tourism, education, economic development, museums, historic sites, local historical and cultural groups, universities and colleges, Tribal representatives, the governing body, and other stakeholders.

The Commission provides direct support to Local VA250 Committees in the following ways:

- Each local committee has a unique login on the VA250 website, enabling the direct addition of information to the Statewide Calendar of Events. In addition, a dedicated page is being developed for each locality, with its own unique URL (ex: www.VA250.org/charlottesville), allowing localities to highlight their community history, stories, and activities or to link to another established site if preferred.

- Each local committee will have an individualized logo based on the VA250 Commission's logo.
- Local VA250 committees are eligible for grants to fund marketing/advertising as well as content development
- Promotion of local events, activities, anniversaries, etc, on VA250 social media including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter
- Access via va250.org to written and other resources providing researched assistance with planning for and attracting consumers at the local level
- Press release templates for VA250-related announcements

VI. Grant Program

The Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission offers grant-funding opportunities to partners and Local 250 Committees using a three-tiered approach as follows:

a. VA250 Partner Programs/Events

Grant funding opportunities to support a program or event by a Local VA250 Committee or partner organization that involves (i) use of the Commission's logo; (ii) placement of event on the VA250 Statewide Calendar of Events; (iii) apply for/awarding of a matching grant of up to \$10,000 through the programs administered by the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) or Virginia Humanities (VH); and/or (iv) amplification of partner event at Commission-sponsored programs/events, social media, website, etc.

1. Grants offered by the Virginia Tourism Corporation support marketing for 250th related events and activities, including the placement of Road to Revolution and similar road signs.
2. Grants offered by Virginia Humanities support content development for 250th related events and activities
3. Grant criteria will follow the normal criteria established by VTC and VH

b. VA250 Signature Partner Programs/Events

Grant funding opportunities to support a program or event primarily developed by a partner organization that involves funding of up to \$25,000 by the Commission to expand a singular program to achieve a broader statewide reach. The Commission will enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the primary planning partners, develop the statewide reach of the program, and staff, support, and promote the program as one of its own.

Criteria:

- i. The program must offer a statewide reach and involve at least three partner organizations
- ii. There must be a lasting legacy or digitally archived component
- iii. The program is not eligible for a VA250 grant administered by VH or VTC, but is of significant import and lasting value to the commemoration

Example: “For 2026” Conference partnership with Omohundro Institute, William and Mary, and Colonial Williamsburg

c. VA250 Signature Programs/Events

Grant funding opportunities to support a major program, exhibition, or event with statewide reach that is either (i) planned, developed, funded, and promoted by the Commission or (ii) developed by a partner organization in full cooperation with the Commission and promoted as one of its Signature Programs/Events.

Example: Museum and traveling exhibitions developed by partner agencies

In addition, the Commission highlights, promotes, and encourages participation in other grant programs, including those by VTC, Virginia Humanities and VMHC (Commonwealth History Fund).

VII. Looking Ahead to 2023

While 2022 saw a tremendous upswing in activity planning Virginia’s commemoration, even more awaits in 2023, as programs begin, and plans take more definitive shape.

- The Semiquincentennial Kickoff Event, “A Common Cause to All,” will be held in Williamsburg on March 10-12, bringing together 250th planners from across the state and nation for collaboration and shared efforts
- The Commission’s website (www.VA250.org) and social media presence will continue to grow more robust, as a comprehensive Marketing Plan is finalized and implemented
- Development efforts will continue, to complement and enhance the state’s support of the commemoration
- Education initiatives and speaker’s series programs will be further refined
- Planning will begin in earnest for the museum exhibition, panel exhibition, and mobile museum

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