

## Closing out

Towson pulls away late to eliminate William & Mary.  
**Sports**



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## Planning America's 250th birthday

Colonial Williamsburg is gearing up for a multistate celebration in 2026

By Sian Wilkerson  
Staff Writer

WILLIAMSBURG — More than two centuries after Virginia took one of the first steps toward revolution, people gathered on Duke of Gloucester Street on Sunday to commemorate the occasion.

The event was the culmination of “A Common Cause to All,” a weekend hosted by the VA250 Commission and Colonial Williamsburg to launch multistate planning efforts for commemorating America’s 250th anniversary in 2026.

Sunday marked the 250th anniversary

of Virginia’s resolution establishing its Committee of Correspondence, a critical moment in the journey that led to the United States declaring independence in 1776. The committees established communication between the colonies, unifying them under a common cause for the first time.

Speaking to a crowd that included representatives from around the country, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation’s Kurt Smith, portraying Thomas Jefferson, stood on the porch of the Raleigh Tavern and called the moment “auspicious,” “gargantuan” and “audacious.”

“On March 12, 1773, we have decided that no longer are we sitting desperate and disparate within our individual geographic boundaries, but rather we have found ourselves united amongst our common

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The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation’s Kurt Smith, portraying Thomas Jefferson, speaks to an audience of approximately 300 conference participants from 34 states attending “A Common Cause to All,” a nationwide planning event hosted at Colonial Williamsburg in support of America’s upcoming 250th anniversary in 2026.

BRIAN NEWSON/THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION



The Ladies for Liberty will perform their boogie-woogie sounds Saturday and Sunday during Jamestown Settlement’s Military Through the Ages. Pictured are Deanna Hampton, from left, Wanda Martin and Nancy Cheak. PHOTOS BY BOB RUEGSEGGGER/FREELANCE

## Honoring the Greatest Generation through music

Group to sing at Jamestown Settlement’s military remembrance

By Bob Ruegsegger  
Correspondent

When Wanda Martin started the Ladies for Liberty in Louisville, Kentucky, in 2009, it was out of love for the music of the World War II era. Performing that music was an appropriate way — in her mind — to pay tribute to the Greatest Generation.

Martin and her husband were pilots for many years and volunteered at air shows — not flying, just volunteering. She had the opportunity to meet World War II aces Gen. Chuck Yeager and Col. Bud Anderson.

“I was lucky enough to talk to those gentlemen and find out about what they missed most (about WWII),” Martin said. “It was the music.”

At the time Martin owned a recording studio in Louisville. She did voice-overs and sang harmony, so she knew she could do the music. She was convinced, in her patriotic heart, that performing the music of the Greatest Generation was what she was destined to do.

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Ladies for Liberty sing with reenactors at a previous Military Through the Ages event.

## Tea time in York County

Experience of spending an afternoon in a Victorian parlor re-created by shop

By David Macaulay  
Correspondent

YORK — It has been years since I last took afternoon tea at Claridge’s.

Even if I still lived in London, I would balk at paying £75 (\$89) a head for tea, cream and scones.

Fortunately, Peninsula expats who pine for the real thing, rather than the sticky sweet iced drink that’s only fit for cleaning drains, need no longer fly eight hours across the Atlantic. York Gardens & Tearoom successfully re-creates the Victorian parlor afternoon tea experience.

Jimmy Howell did not intend to set up an English tearoom when he started work on a nondescript former tobacco and vape shop on Route 17 in York County. The owner of ChesBay Landscaping planned to set up a garden center.

He hoped to sell teas and herbs in the front part of the building, but his love of tea changed his original vision.

“We’ve pretty much abandoned the garden center idea and turned it into a tearoom with gardens at the back where you can take afternoon tea and have dinner,” he said.

Visitors to York Gardens & Tearoom are ushered into a space filled with antique furniture, Victorian dolls, fine China and Wedgwood and pictures of the royal family. The gardens behind the tearoom are more still-to-do than Kew on a dark February day, but Howell aims to complete a croquet lawn, patios, terraces and a water garden in time for Easter brunch.

“I love England,” Howell said. “I like the whole English tea thing and its origins. An event for one single person grew into a worldwide phenomenon.”

Howell was referencing the Duchess of Bedford, one of Queen Victoria’s ladies-in-waiting. The increasingly busy pace of life in Victorian England pushed dinner back to 9 p.m., and the duchess was not happy about it, according to the British Museum. She ordered afternoon tea, bread, butter and cake to her private quarters, and it became a habit. She later invited guests, starting a tradition with the wealthy classes.

Howell is a fan of the Victorian era. “I told the designers I want it to feel like you are walking into someone’s parlor back in the early 1900s,” he said.

Howell, 52, is yet to visit England but hopes to make a trip soon. He has loved England from an early age.

“There’s something about the royals in America that always seems to capture our attention,” he said. “Our roots being from Britain, it doesn’t come as a surprise

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## Music

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Martin retired from her marketing job after many years and put her full time, investment and faith into the organization she called “Ladies for Liberty.” Currently, there are four trios that perform as Ladies for Liberty.

The troupe will be performing this weekend at Jamestown Settlement’s Military Through the Ages, an event that focuses on military history. The event, which has been held for nearly 40 years, includes musical performances, reenactors and demonstrations to show how the military has evolved through the centuries.

Ladies for Liberty evokes the music of the Andrews Sisters, a singing group from the swing and boogie-woogie eras. Their harmonies, choreography and hairstyles reflect those of the iconic trio whose music encouraged Americans to maintain a positive national spirit during the darkest days of World War II.

“I have always looked for something in my life that I wanted to do to be useful, something that means something to somebody,” Martin said. “It’s the music we make that means everything. When you’re looking out at people (in the audience), you can see it on their faces, and you know how they feel.

“You know that you’re making a difference. That’s what the Ladies for Liberty are all about.”

While they employ the style of the Andrews Sisters in their performances, Ladies for Liberty want their own identity because they are developing other more modern patriotic salutes. Martin said she “looked above” for inspiration in finding a name for her musical troupe — a name that would encompass all that her organization will eventually do.

“If we had been the so-and-so sisters, that would date us so much we could not go into more modern patriotic salutes — or into Vietnam or Korea,” Martin said. “The name Ladies for Liberty encompasses everything. I love the name. It’s a wonderful name for what we do.”

Martin is the owner-manager of the Ladies for Liberty organization. She came up with the name for the group, selected the music and designed the uniforms — outfits — that members of the crew wear during performances. Trimmed with gold piping and gold buttons, the uniforms mirror those worn by women in the military, accented with diaphanous red, white and blue silk scarves.

Nancy Cheak, of Shelbyville, sings with one of the Ladies of Liberty trios. Her father was a Navy veteran who served in the South Pacific during World War II.

“Our hearts are in this music,” Cheak said. “We love each other. We love the music. We love what it represents — the Greatest Generation. We enjoy connecting with our audiences and helping them reconnect with that era by sharing the music with them.

“We tell little stories and anecdotes about the songs that help current generations connect with the Greatest Generation. We don’t want that to be forgotten.”

Cheak performed with the trio in Saint-Laurent during the 70-year commemoration of the Normandy Invasion, where Allied forces began pushing German troops out of France. She sang on several occasions during the commemoration for a French-born D-Day veteran on Omaha Beach.

“We sang for a French-American veteran. His words to us were: ‘I love you because you bring me the good memories from those times, and you erase the bad memories.’”

Deanna Hampton, also from Louisville, has been a member of the Ladies for Liberty organization for 18 months.

She was drawn to the group when she saw them performing for numerous veterans and others at retirement centers. Hampton said that as they age, they seem to lose touch with what is going on in life. Hearing the music of the era helps to reconnect them.

“I love this,” Hampton said. “It’s all about the music. It’s about that tight three-part harmony.

“You just don’t hear that so much anymore. Not only are we reinvigorating this music for that Greatest Generation, but for a whole new younger generation that is totally unfamiliar with it. We’re just trying to keep it alive and fresh for this generation that’s up and coming.”

Hampton’s father was also a World War II veteran. Her singing with the Ladies for Liberty is a tribute to her father’s patriotism and his love for his country.”

“Our music is truly energizing,” she said. We don’t really feel fatigue after we get through with a performance. We’re just really energized by it.”

*The troupe’s “Boogie Woogie Memories” CD offers a sampling of the music that was popular in America during World War II. See [www.ladiesforliberty.com](http://www.ladiesforliberty.com) for more information.*

### Want to go?

Ladies for Liberty is scheduled to perform at 11 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Saturday and 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Sunday at Military Through the Ages. The weekend event at Jamestown Settlement features patriotic musical performances as well as nearly 600 reenactors depicting armed forces from 500 B.C. to modern-day soldiers with the Virginia Army National Guard.

Other things to watch for: Artillery firing demonstrations will be presented at noon Saturday and Sunday, with weapons ranging from a 17th century swivel gun to a modern-day howitzer. A military pass-in-review will take place at 3 p.m. Sunday, with recognition of reenactor units.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will display its Mobile Vet Center near the museum’s main entrance.

For more information, including a schedule of events, visit [jyfmuseums.org/militarythroughtheages](http://jyfmuseums.org/militarythroughtheages). Admission to Jamestown Settlement, open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily year-round, is \$18 for adults and \$9 for children ages 6-12.



At noon on both days of Military Through the Ages, there will be demonstrations of comparative artillery firings, including the Virginia Army National Guard firing its 105 mm howitzer, shown here. **BOB RUEGSEGGGER/FREELANCE**

## Celebration

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cause for all,” he said to a round of cheers.

Throughout the weekend, representatives from around the country and the state were in Colonial Williamsburg to collaborate, share information and think of ways for states to work together during the semiquincentennial in 2026.

“The commission has been planning this particular kickoff program for almost a year,” VA250 Executive Director Cheryl Wilson said.

“Realizing that the 250th anniversary of Virginia’s committee of correspondence was coming, the commission started talking about ways to commemorate that, but also to bring together other states ... mirroring (the idea of the colonies working together) ... so that we can start to collaborate and partner.” Beginning Friday, the program included panels and discussions as well as presentations from guest speakers such as “60 Minutes” Bill Whitaker, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Stacy Schiff and Jeffrey Rosen, president and CEO of the National Constitution Center. Topics



Attendees gathered first at the Courthouse in Colonial Williamsburg before following the Fifes and Drums in a procession down Duke of Gloucester Street to Raleigh Tavern, which served as a critical stage for Virginia’s political ambitions amid intensifying debate about liberty. **BRIAN NEWSON/THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION**

included the history of the occasion being marked, how to celebrate the country’s founding in a way that will be meaning-

ful for all Americans and a check-in on commemoration plans from each state. For Colonial Williamsburg President

and CEO Cliff Fleet, getting the chance to host the event at the site where history was made so many years ago was a special opportunity. “It’s an absolute honor to be in Williamsburg at this moment in time and to be able to use our incomparable assets to host this remarkable gathering,” he said.

“What we are doing is obviously recognizing an event that occurred over 250 years ago leading up to the revolution, which occurred right here in Williamsburg, which was the first call for collaboration between the colonies about Great Britain.”

The theme of collaboration was a point of emphasis during Smith’s speech at Raleigh Tavern on Sunday, as was the importance of continuing to learn and grow.

“This is the power of conversation,” he said, channeling Jefferson. “It’s the power of history. It’s the power of this city, to bring together amalgamated minds, and together we might move forward to find some common cause for all.

By God, today is going to be the day. I believe it. And I believe in you, and by you being here, it gives me great hope.”

*Sian Wilkerson, [sian.wilkerson@pilotonline.com](mailto:sian.wilkerson@pilotonline.com), 757-342-6616*

## Tea

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that a lot of Americans favor Britain.”

He bought the former smoke shop at 1126 George Washington Memorial Highway in June 2022. The York Gardens & Tearoom opened Dec. 8, and business is brisk, Howell said. However, signage is an issue along the historical corridor in York County.

He recently acquired a metal princess carriage, which is parked close to the road to draw attention to the business. It will later be painted white with a gold crown and relocated to the gardens.

The tea served at York Gardens & Tearoom is sourced from Davidson’s Organics. The tearoom boasts over 40 varieties of teas and an afternoon service that includes Duke of York High Tea with soup, fruit and cheese plate, along with English finger sandwiches with tea; Petite York High Tea, which combines tea with fresh-baked scones, English finger sandwiches and fresh fruit garnish; and Burgess Cream Tea with scones, York cream and lemon curd or preserves.

Howell considered importing clotted cream from Devon, England, but found it was too expensive; instead he makes “York cream.” We ordered Earl Grey with lavender tea and winter fruit and flowers tea with blueberry and apple cinnamon scones and York cream. The scones are made on site and make for a delicious accompaniment to the tea. We also tried chocolate chai tea, which is more popular with younger tea drinkers.

Howell has a colorful career that includes



York Gardens & Tearoom owner Jimmy Howell, left, with chef Denise Dudley and server Jonathan Savoie stand beside the princess carriage, which helps draw passersby on Route 17. **DAVID MACAULAY/FREELANCE PHOTOS**

working as a food and beverage director for La Quinta Hotels. He also spent three years as a monk at a monastery in Michigan. He liked the idea of giving up everything but ultimately decided the lifestyle was not for him, even though the monks enjoyed afternoon tea.

There is a certain irony in finding an English tearoom in Yorktown — the scene

of the Redcoats’ final surrender to the Continental Army and the French in 1781. Howell is unfazed.

“Our roots come from there, so it really is about getting back to family,” he said of Great Britain. “While we had our differences, it’s still our family.”

*David Macaulay,*



**TOP:** Cream tea at the York Gardens & Tea Room.

**BOTTOM:** Zara Macaulay drinks tea at York Gardens & Tearoom.