



**Virginia American Revolution 250 (VA250) Commission  
African American Leadership Advisory Council**

Fort Monroe Visitor & Education Center

Tuesday, October 29, 2024

10AM

**Meeting Notes**

**Members present:**

The Honorable Mamie E. Locke, *Chair*

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas

Dr. Edward L. Ayers (*Virtual*)

The Honorable Martin D. Brown

Eric Claville

Alicia Cohen (*Virtual*)

Dr. Maureen Elgersman Lee

Connie Matthews Harshaw (*Virtual*)

Professor Ervin Jordan (*Virtual*)

Patrice Lewis (*Virtual*)

Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander

Rohulamin Quander (*Virtual*)

Phyllis Terrell

Dr. Vanessa Thaxton-Ward (*Virtual*)

Cainan Townsend (*Virtual*)

Major General Cedric T. Wins (*Virtual*)

**VA250 Staff & Invited Guests:**

Cheryl Wilson, *VA250 Commission*

Katherine Dabney, *VA250 Commission*

Desirée Roots, *ATLAS Partnership*

Emily Cole-Jones, *ATLAS Partnership*

Jerold Solomon, *ATLAS Partnership*

Hank Moseley, *Sail250 Virginia (Virtual)*

John Hutcheson, *Fort Monroe*

Aaron Whittington, *Fort Monroe*

Dr. Francoise Bonnell, *Fort Monroe*

**Chair's Remarks and Charge of the Advisory Council**

Senator Mamie Locke convened the meeting at 10:01 am, welcomed everyone, and reiterated the charge of the Advisory Council in support of VA250 Commission.

Senator Locke then introduced two new members to the Council, **Eric Claville**, who has joined from Norfolk State University where he serves as Executive Advisor to the President for Government Relations, and **Alicia**

**Cohen** who is a member of the Loudoun VA250 committee and coordinator of their Early African American Special Interest Group.

Chair Locke then introduced Cheryl Wilson to give her report on the July 4 program at the Virginia State Capitol and Mobile Museum.

**VA250: Recap of July 4 program at Virginia State Capitol, and Mobile Museum, *Out of Many, One*, update**

*Cheryl Wilson*

Ms. Wilson shared the July 4<sup>th</sup> [video](#) that captures the highlights of the 2024 Independence Day celebrations at the Virginia State Capitol, and gave a brief overview of plans for July 3<sup>rd</sup> celebrations in Roanoke and July 4<sup>th</sup> at Fort Monroe for 2025. She invited all members of the advisory council to share ideas and thoughts about who should be involved in the activities of the day and how the program should be shaped.

Ms. Wilson then shared a PowerPoint presentation with draft renderings of the VA250 Mobile Museum Experience that is slated to debut in December of this year. Ms. Wilson shared a content overview of the exhibition and gave details about the many interactives that will be featured as part of the overall experience.

Members discussed the importance of teaching about the role of religion and the influence of the Great Awakening on the American Revolution.

**Bray School Dedication Ceremony**

*Dr. Maureen Elgersman Lee*

Dr. Elgersman Lee gave an overview of the upcoming Bray School dedication ceremony, which is to take place on Friday, November 1. Featured speakers include Smithsonian Institute Secretary Lonnie Bunch, Senator Mamie Locke, and Justice John Charles Thomas. The Bray School building is the oldest surviving building where Black children were taught in the U.S. and was originally located on the campus of the College of William & Mary. The building was moved in 2023 to its current location at Colonial Williamsburg. Colonial Williamsburg, in partnership with William & Mary, is restoring the building to its 18<sup>th</sup>-century appearance, and it is expected to fully open to the public in Spring of 2025.

In addition, Dr. Elgersman Lee shared that *The Williamsburg Bray School: A History Through Records, Reflections, and Rediscovery* book, which is the William & Mary Bray School Lab's first book project will be available the first week of December.

**ATLAS Partnership and *Gabriel, The Musicial***

*Desirée Roots, Emily Cole-Jones, Jerold Solomon*

Ms. Cole-Jones gave an overview of ATLAS Partnership and shared that their work falls into three categories: historic preservation, program preservation, and new initiatives. They are committed to safeguarding the rich legacy assets of professional theatre in Central Virginia.

Mr. Solomon who is part of the creative team behind the musical *Gabriel*, shared about the development and production of the original script which debuted at Firehouse Theater in Fall 2022. *Gabriel* tells the story of Gabriel's Rebellion, one of the most important slave uprisings in Virginia and American history.

Ms. Roots shared that the production will open at Hanover Tavern in September of next year, a location where five of the men who participated in Gabriel's Rebellion were enslaved. The production will then follow the same path that Gabriel took as he sought to escape, transferring to the Perkinson Center in Chesterfield, and then moving to Norfolk.

Discussion from the committee touched on the many untold stories, and questions about what historical figures and narratives are missing, buried, or forgotten? The council agreed that truth telling is important in order to be inclusive, and that freedom meant very different things, as it does today, to each individual.

## **Sail250**

*Hank Moseley*

Mr. Moseley presented an overview of the Sail250 gathering of tall ships and military ships that will sail the East Coast to celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> in June 2026. More than 60 ships from 20 countries are expected to fill the harbors of Hampton Roads and will participate in the Parade of Sail on Friday, June 19, 2026 which coincides with the Juneteenth celebrations in Hampton, VA and Fort Monroe. Mr. Moseley offered information on the resources and educational materials that can be found on the Sail250 Virginia website.

Senator Locke discussed the many career opportunities in shipbuilding and related maritime industries as a theme to include in the planning. Ms. Cohen agreed and highlighted the importance of the maritime community in Virginia.

## **Thoughts on African American Inclusion Ideas**

*The Honorable Mamie Locke*

Senator Locke invited council members to share ideas on how the 250th commemoration can be more inclusive. A robust discussion ensued with the following key thoughts and themes.

### **Messaging and Communication:**

- Mr. Quander emphasized the need for communication and education across Virginia to promote inclusivity. He suggested using various organizations to spread awareness and celebrate American and Virginian history, emphasizing the need for collective action.
- Mr. Brown stressed the importance of a clear message focused on freedom and agency. This message should convey the ability to resist, rebel, and fight for freedom even when it is taken away.
- Mr. Brown also highlighted the significance of recognizing the dignity and agency of African Americans in their struggle for freedom.
- Ms. Lewis emphasized the need to identify the target audience before determining the communication strategy.

### **Telling Hidden Stories:**

- Mr. Claville proposed collaborating with universities to uncover and share hidden stories from history. The goal is to reveal the full truth, even the terrible aspects, to foster appreciation for the resilience and resurrection of marginalized communities.

- Mr. Brown suggested using the theme of "we made it" and telling intergenerational family stories, like the Tucker family's journey from slavery through history, to resonate with people.

### **Reaching Black Audiences:**

- Dr. Newby-Alexander suggested targeted advertising to reach black audiences.
- Potential outreach avenues include black podcasters, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and the Divine Nine network.
- Dr. Newby-Alexander emphasized the need for innovative social media strategies to engage young people with hard truths, moving away from traditional approaches.

### **Leaving a Lasting Legacy:**

- Ms. Harshaw stressed the importance of leaving lasting markers of inclusivity in preparation for 2026.
- This involves telling stories and creating a sustainable message.

### **Integrating Marketing Efforts with VA250:**

- Ms. Harshaw talked about the importance of integrating marketing efforts with VA250 to promote initiatives and encourage involvement.
- This includes inviting the press and highlighting the interconnectedness of the story.

### **Inclusive Reenactments and Historical Interpretation:**

- Ms. Cohen suggested using reenactments and historical interpretation to engage diverse audiences and she cited a program in Pennsylvania that trained youth to become reenactors, showcasing the importance of representation.
- The goal is to create opportunities for people from all backgrounds to participate in historical activities and tell their stories.

### **Funding and Support:**

- The discussion highlighted the need for funding initiatives to support individuals and communities that have been historically marginalized.
- Telling the truth accurately was emphasized as a crucial aspect of these initiatives.

### **Dr. Elgersman Lee proposed three key themes:**

INFORM: Utilizing platforms like VA250 and the commission to disseminate information.

INSPIRE: Sharing inspiring stories like the Tucker family's historical journey.

EMPOWER: Providing funding and resources to enable individuals and communities to tell their stories.

Action items included creating a shareable document to initiate the process, discussing funding strategies, and establishing an ambassador program involving HBCUs and other organizations.

**Senator Locke adjourned the meeting at 11:55 am.**