

AMERICA
MADE IN VIRGINIA

OUT OF MANY
ONE

VA250 Mobile Museum Experience

VA★250

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The VA250 Mobile Museum Experience tells the story of Virginia's pivotal role in the American Revolution. From Patrick Henry's 1775 cry, "Give me Liberty, or Give me Death", to General George Washington's victory at the Siege of Yorktown in 1781, all Virginians whether man or woman, Indigenous peoples, freed and enslaved peoples, all played critical roles in the sacrifice, strife, and ultimate earning of American independence. "Out of Many, One: The VA250 Mobile Museum Experience" tells their stories—and America's history, made in Virginia.

Specials thanks to the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, Library of Virginia, Museum of the American Revolution, the Virginia Museum of History and Culture, and so many other partners throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

“OUT OF MANY, ONE”

E Pluribus Unum: out of many, one. Americans encounter this phrase daily. It is on our currency, on official flags and seals of the United States government, and many state flags feature the phrase- but what does it mean? The phrase originally referred to the coming together of the thirteen original colonies to create a new nation. Over time, it has come to refer to American unity, the coming together of Americans to sustain, improve, and create a more perfect union.

In the beginning of the new nation, not everyone was included in the promises laid out by the Founders. After 250 years into our nation's history and the ideals put forth in the Declaration of Independence, more Virginians, and Americans, have been brought into the story - the story we are still writing today.

“Liberty, when it begins to take root, is a plant of rapid growth.” – George Washington, Letter to James Madison, March 2, 1788

“GIVE ME LIBERTY!”

On March 23, 1775, Patrick Henry's stirring rallying cry echoed through the chambers of St. John's Church in Richmond, Virginia: "Give me liberty, or give me death!"

Addressing delegates to the Second Virginia Convention, Henry's words galvanized Virginians' support for independence from Great Britain. Though no true transcription of Henry's famous speech exists, biographer William Wirt interviewed those in attendance to recreate his powerful words:



'The war is inevitable and let it come ! I repeat it, sir, let it come . It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms ! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God!

**I KNOW NOT WHAT COURSE
OTHERS MAY TAKE;
BUT AS FOR ME, GIVE ME
LIBERTY OR GIVE ME DEATH.'**

VIRGINIA: 1775

“Citizens of the Land”

As many as 30,000 Indigenous people lived in Virginia when English colonists arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. For generations they resisted, negotiated, collaborated, and sometimes fought back in the face of colonial attempts at control. By 1775, Virginia’s government acknowledged only a few tribes, but tribal communities and cultures survived – and still do today.

“The Builders”

On the eve of the American Revolution, almost half of the population of Virginia were enslaved African Americans. A much smaller percentage of African Americans were free in Virginia, but many still had limited rights. Both enslaved and freed African Americans helped shape what would be considered distinctly American culture through music, dance, culinary arts, and many of the landscapes we still see today. While a majority lived their entire lives as property without legal rights, many enslaved Virginians contributed to American and Virginia’s culture. The American Revolution presented both free and enslaved Virginians with new challenges, new opportunities, and difficult choices. Throughout the course of the war, both the British and Continental armies offered enslaved African Americans a chance for freedom in exchange for service. Nearly 600 African Americans took up arms in support of independence from Great Britain, and countless African Americans worked to support the war effort through logistical measures.

VIRGINIA: 1775

“Loyalists”

Not everyone supported the Revolution. Some remained loyal to the British Crown. Known also as “Tories”, “Royalists”, or “King’s Men”, these individuals believed that the Patriots were committing acts of treason. Virginia’s legislature made life incredibly difficult for loyalists throughout the Revolution by confiscating land; and engaging in public humiliation, violence, and in some cases, forced exile. One such example is Lord Thomas Fairfax, whose secondary estate “Belvoir Plantation” was confiscated under the Virginia Act of 1779. Lord Fairfax was forced to abandon the property and instead was only able to live in his Clarke County, Virginia, property of Greenway Court. Following the Revolutionary War, the plantation was abandoned, and at the turn of the 20th Century, was transformed into modern-day Fort Belvoir. Lord Fairfax is but one of many examples of loyalist treatment in the Revolutionary War. Others chose to leave the 13 Colonies and start new lives in England or Canada that were more sympathetic to their beliefs.

“Revolutionary Men and Women”

In 1775, free, property-owning men from wealthy families dominated Virginia’s politics, but the coming of Revolution gave smaller farmers and tradesmen opportunities to be heard. For many, the possibility of independence was an opportunity to be heard politically and create a more inclusive government. Approximately 50,000 men served in the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War.

VIRGINIA: 1775

Women were excluded from the political process, but that did not stop them from participating in revolutionary and Patriotic actions. Women boycotted the purchasing of certain British goods, some learned how to live off their land and produce items they previously purchased from British merchants. Some, like Betsy Ross, learned to spin thread and weave cloth for soldiers and other Revolutionary War participants. Others, like Molly Pitcher, actively participated in combat. Elite women helped influence politics through their husbands. Women such as Martha Custis Washington became camp followers and followed their husbands throughout the war, supporting both their husbands and other soldiers between fighting. Some took jobs outside their traditional roles, managing farms and businesses in the absence of men who joined armies.

The Revolutionary War in Virginia involved sacrifices from all its inhabitants. Men and women, regardless of social class, background, or race, all helped to contribute to the creation of the new nation. While some fought for vastly different reasons, the intent was the same – to create a new nation, where all are created equal.

REVOLUTIONARY VIRGINIANS

James Armistead Lafayette (1748-1830)

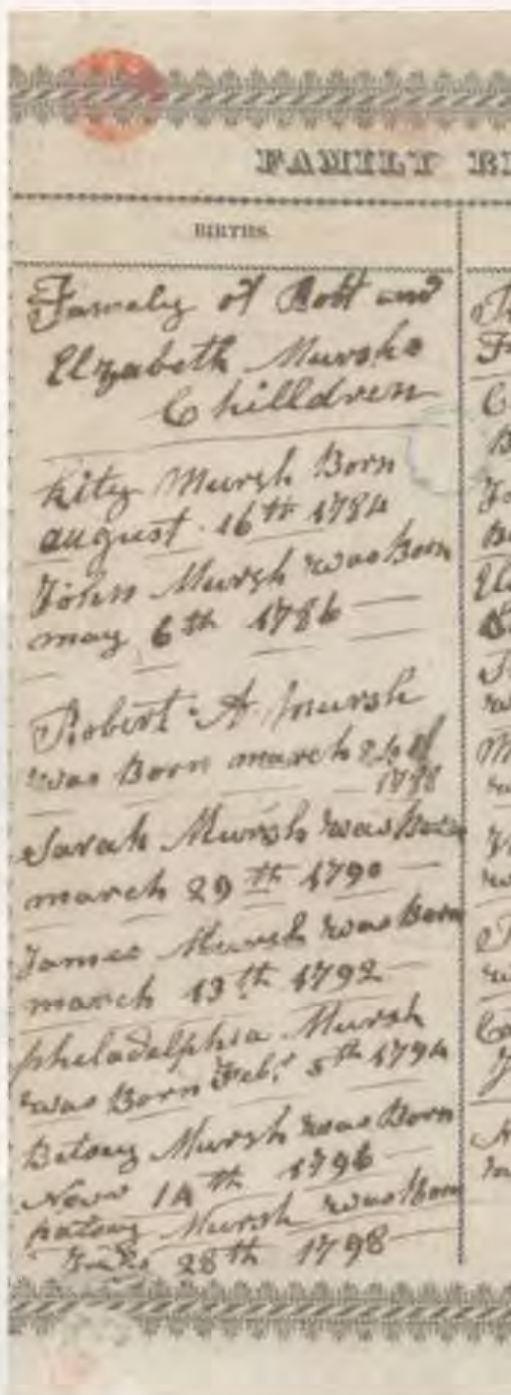
Born into enslavement in New Kent County in 1748, James served as a spy under the Marquis de Lafayette for the Continental Army as it approached Yorktown, Virginia, in 1781. James carried messages of conversations and smuggled papers out General Cornwallis' headquarters to provide the Continental Army the necessary information they needed to trap the British at Yorktown in September of 1781. Following the Revolution, James was forced back into bondage until 1784 when the Marquis de Lafayette petitioned to the Virginia House of Delegates for James' freedom. The Virginia legislature finally granted him freedom in 1787. Once free, James took the surname Lafayette in honor of the Marquis. He resided in New Kent County following his emancipation.



REVOLUTIONARY VIRGINIANS

Robert Mursh (1758-1837)

Robert Mursh was a member of the Pamunkey Tribe who attended the Brafferton Indian School at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg. In 1776, at the age of 18, he enlisted in the 15th Virginia Regiment in the Continental Army. He fought with General George Washington's army in the Battles of Brandywine and Germantown. He also spent 14 months as a prisoner after the American surrender at the Battle of Charleston in 1780. After the war, he married Elizabeth, a member of the Pamunkey Tribe. Robert became a Baptist minister serving the local indigenous communities. The United States granted him a pension for his service in the Continental Army.



INDEPENDENCE: 1776

By early 1776, calls for independence swept throughout Virginia. The defiant words of Virginians from over 50 communities helped galvanize other American colonies around the idea of independence. Their resolutions, or “resolves” instructed elected representatives on how to respond to British tyranny and oppression.



...all importation to, and exportation from, this Colony ought to be stopped, except with such Colonies or Islands in North America as shall adopt this measure.

Prince William County, June 1774

To extort from us our Money without our consent... is totally incompatible with the Privileges of a free People, and the natural Rights of Mankind.

Fairfax Resolves, July 1774

...we declare that we are deliberately and resolutely determined never to surrender... to any power upon earth, but at the expense of our lives.

Fincastle County, January 1775

On June 7, 1776, Virginian Richard Henry Lee presented an important resolution to the Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia:

“Resolved: That these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.”

The Virginia Declaration of Rights

Written by George Mason, the Virginia Constitutional Convention adopted the Virginia Declaration of Rights on June 12, 1776, —weeks before Thomas Jefferson and the Committee of Five presented their Declaration of Independence to the Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia.

George Mason was born in present-day Fairfax County in 1725, the son of a wealthy planter. George established his own plantation at Gunston Hall and served in the Virginia House of Burgesses. Mason played crucial roles in subsequent Virginia Conventions including supporting the raising of independent militia companies.

Mason was the primary author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights and the Virginia Constitution—both influenced subsequent foundational documents such as multiple state constitutions, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights.

The Virginia Declaration of Rights enumerates Virginians' rights and the role of the government as "instituted for the common benefit, protection, and security" of the people. Among its 16 sections, the document declares a separation of government powers, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion.



Virginia Goes to War

The coming of the American Revolution meant that Virginia had to mobilize for war. Communities raised militias and collected arms and supplies to support them, and scrambled to produce materials that would help the war effort, such as: iron, gunpowder, salt, food, guns, and ships. The industries that grew up around communities to support the war effort have left their marks on Virginia's landscapes, some can still be seen today. Look at the map of war-time industries in Virginia. What was made in your region? What revolutionary-era sites have you visited in your hometown?

On December 9, 1775, British troops and members of Dunmore's "Ethiopian Regiment" clashed with patriot forces at Great Bridge. It was Virginia's first significant land battle. Billy Flora, a free African American militiaman from Portsmouth, was the last sentinel to yield to the British advancing across Great Bridge.



On August 8, 1780, patriots attacked a Shawnee settlement, Peckuwe (Piqua), near what is today known as Springfield, Ohio. The battle forced the Shawnee out of their traditional hunting grounds. Shawnee warrior Black Hoof (Catecahassa) may have been present at the Battle of Piqua. After the Revolution, he fought American efforts to remove the Shawnee from their lands.

Battles in Virginia

APRIL 20-21, 1775 – GUNPOWDER INCIDENT

OCTOBER 26, 1775 – BATTLE OF HAMPTON ★

NOVEMBER 14, 1775 – BATTLE OF KEMP'S LANDING

DECEMBER 9, 1775 – BATTLE OF GREAT BRIDGE ★

JANUARY 1, 1776 – BURNING OF NORFOLK

JULY 8 – 10, 1776 – BATTLE OF GWYNN'S ISLAND ★

SEPTEMBER 1, 1777 – SIEGE OF FORT HENRY ★

MAY 10 – 24, 1779 – CHESAPEAKE RAID

JANUARY 5, 1781 – BURNING OF RICHMOND ★

JANUARY 8, 1781 – BATTLE OF CHARLES CITY
COURTHOUSE ★

MARCH 8, 1781 – SKIRMISH AT WATERS CREEK ★

MARCH 16, 1781 – BATTLE OF CAPE HENRY

APRIL 25, 1781 – BATTLE OF BLANDFORD
(PETERSBURG)

APRIL 27, 1781 – ACTION AT OSBORNE'S

JUNE 26, 1781 – BATTLE OF SPENCER'S ORDINARY

JULY 6, 1781 – BATTLE OF GREEN SPRING
(JAMESTOWN FORD)

JULY 9, 1781 – FRANCISCO'S FIGHT ★

SEPTEMBER 5, 1781 – BATTLE OF THE CHESAPEAKE ★

SEPTEMBER 25, 1781 – OCTOBER 19, 1781 – SIEGE OF
YORKTOWN ★

SEPTEMBER 11, 1782 – SECOND SIEGE OF FORT HENRY ★

★ Denotes American Victory

VICTORY AT YORKTOWN

"We have got [the British] handsomely in a pudding bag... I am all on fire. By the Great God of War, I think we may all hand up our swords by the last of the year in perfect peace and security!"

-American General George Weedon to Nathaniel Greene,
Fredericksburg, September 5, 1781

In the fall of 1781, the war abruptly turned in favor of the Continental Army. After six years of alternating decisive victories and demoralizing defeats, the Americans' dramatic triumph at Yorktown resulted in the security of American independence. In September 1781, George Washington's army, aided by more than 7,000 French soldiers, trapped a British army under Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia. On September 5, the French Navy drove away a British fleet off Cape Henry, Virginia. The British navy's defeat meant Cornwallis could not escape by sea or retreat on land.

On September 28, the American Army and French allies moved from Williamsburg and pinned the British into their lines around Yorktown. For three weeks, Washington's army besieged the British. American and French cannon fired as many as 1,500 shells a day. Foot soldiers sniped at British lines. As the British ran low on supplies, they forced civilians—mostly enslaved refugees, many of them sick with smallpox—out of their lines.



VICTORY AT YORKTOWN

On October 14, the Americans and French mounted a nighttime assault that captured the last of the British outer defenses. The British had no more ground to give. On October 19, Cornwallis surrendered 7,247 soldiers, 840 sailors, and 244 cannons: the largest surrender of the war.



While the Revolutionary War would not formally end until the signing of the Treaty of Paris on September 3, 1783, the Battle of Yorktown signified the final blow to British military forces in the 13 Colonies. While the Patriots and British forces were locked into a stalemate for most of the war, Britain was losing ground in their other colonies throughout the New World due to the French, Spanish, and Dutch powers exerting their military pressure on other colonies, including Jamaica, the Bahamas, Barbados, Gibraltar, and Grenada, which resulted in the British shifting their focus from the 13 Colonies to their other, more lucrative, colonial possessions.

Following Yorktown, the British began to loosen their grip on the 13 Colonies, resulting in the Treaty of Paris' signing on September 3, 1783, formally concluding the Revolutionary War.

TOWARD A MORE PERFECT UNION

The Founders who wrote the Declaration of Independence in 1776 left much to be done. While Americans who fought for independence achieved it for some, for others, they had more work to do to form a more perfect union. While the Founders were imperfect, their words and actions changed the world forever. Their ideas and beliefs in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness echo across the globe as individuals sought freedom and liberty.

The Founders gave us ideas, values, and beliefs. They created a Constitution and a system of government that had the ability to change over time. They knew their ideas they espoused and the democratic government they created would require thoughtful and dedicated hard work every single day.

**AND, THEY KNEW, THE NATION
WOULD CHANGE WITH TIME.**

CHANGE MAKERS

The Founders knew that the nation would change over time, and the work of improving our nation connects us to each other and connects generations. Learn more about these Virginians who have worked toward a more perfect union.



The mobile museum features only a handful of changemakers. People who actively seek to create positive change, often by imagining new possibilities, taking action, and collaborating with others.

Each of us has the opportunity to be a changemaker.

Participate in your Democracy

As Americans we are promised a meaningful voice in our government. After all, that's what it was all for! Sometimes, it's easy to take that for granted. Those born outside the country who wish to become citizens must go through a process to do so, including many years of studying to pass a test that demonstrates their knowledge of American history and civics.

How well do you know your American history and civics?

1. What is the supreme law of the land?
2. We elect a president for how many years?
3. When was the Constitution written?
4. Who was the first president?
5. Why does the flag have 13 stripes?
6. How many Justices are on the Supreme Court?
7. What are the rights in the Declaration of Independence?
8. The House of Representatives has how many voting members?
9. What do we call the first ten amendments to the Constitution?
10. The idea of self-government is in the first three words of the Constitution. What are they?

NOTES



VA250

America. Made in Virginia.

The Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission (VA250) was established to commemorate Virginia's role in the 250th anniversary of American independence. Virginia's semiquincentennial is about more than just our past; it reflects how our founding continues to shape our present and future. This is why VA250 has chosen "*To Form a More Perfect Union*" as its theme. VA250's mission is to educate Virginians, including our students, about our history, our founding ideals and our system of government; to engage every community and all regions in events that tell a complete story; and to inspire Virginians to recommit to the values inherent in American citizenship.

Join the Semiquincentennial Movement

Join the
Conversation



Educational
Programs



Volunteer



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Support VA250



VA250.ORG



From the first English settlement at Jamestown
To the surrender of the British at Yorktown
From “give me liberty, or give me death!”
To “all men are created equal”
From Washington and Jefferson
To Madison and Mason
From Powhatan and Pocahontas
To James Armistead Lafayette and Gowan Pamphlet
From the ideas that inspired it
To the battlefields that decided it
There is simply no America without it
And no better time than now to reconnect with your country
In the place that made it possible

AMERICA. MADE IN VIRGINIA.

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