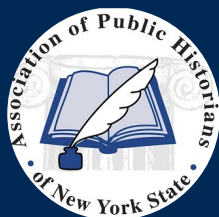


THE NEW YORK STATE 250TH

COMMEMORATION FIELD GUIDE



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Table of Contents

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.....

.....

.....

The 250th Commemoration: An Opportunity for the Historical Field

2026 will mark the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the foundational document of the revolution that occurred between 1774 and 1783 and resulted in the creation of the United States of America. What is now the State of New York played an immense and vital role in both the Revolutionary Era and the subsequent 250 years of American history. Planning for such an important commemoration in a comprehensive way at the local, regional, and/or state level can be a daunting task. Because of this, the Association of Public Historians of New York State (APHNYS) has partnered with the Office of State History at the New York State Museum to produce the New York State 250th Commemoration Field Guide which provides suggested commemorative themes, ideas, and information to help planners at the local and regional level in all parts of the state.

On February 24, 2022, Governor Kathy Hochul signed into law the “New York State 250th Commemoration Act,” establishing a state commission to facilitate the planning and development of the commemoration of the 250th in New York State. This bill was introduced in the State Assembly by Assembly member Carrie Woerner and in the State Senate by Senator Shelley B. Mayer and passed both houses of the legislature unanimously. The 250th Commemoration Act draws particular notice to the potential of the 250th commemoration to consider both the complexity of the American Revolution itself and the continuing struggle to achieve the ideals of the Revolution that at the time excluded a large portion of the population. **The Legislative Intent of the 250th Commemoration Act states:**

“the legislature finds that New York played an immense role in the lead up to and execution of the American Revolution during the period of 1774-1783, and was the site of several important battles, skirmishes and other

events that were internationally significant during the Revolutionary era. The American Revolution itself was imperfect and many, including women, African Americans, and Native Americans, did not benefit from its ideals of liberty and freedom. However, the struggle to fully realize the ideals of the Revolution has continued over the past 250 years as is evident in New York's leading role in such revolutionary civil rights movements as the women's rights and abolitionist movements, the underground railroad, and the LGBTQ movement" and "the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution should also be an occasion for recognition of New York's vital role in the Revolution itself as well as the ongoing struggle of marginalized groups to achieve the ideals of the Revolution. This commemoration should be statewide, involving all the people of the state through imaginative and innovative programs, grants, events, exhibits, new and expanded facilities, and marketing to engage the people of the nation and from all parts of the world."

Many of the New York State 250th Commemoration Field Guide themes are drawn from the Legislative Intent of the 250th Commemoration Act and align with themes established by the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) in their [*Making History at 250: The Field Guide for the Semiquincentennial*](#), published in 2021. However, focus has been given to the particular history of New York State, with the understanding that the state has many sites of revolutionary struggle beyond the American Revolution itself. For example, New York State is the birthplace of the American women's suffrage movement as a result of the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. At the convention, Elizabeth Cady Stanton presented the Declaration of Sentiments which she based on the language of the Declaration of Independence, highlighting the fact that women were among the large swaths of the population not included in the Founders' vision of who would be a full citizen of the new nation. New York State is home to many other important sites of revolution including those associated

with the abolitionist movement (such as the [Gerrit Smith Estate](#), [Timbuctoo](#), and the [John Brown Farm](#)), the Underground Railroad (the [Underground Railroad Education Center](#) and the [Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center](#)) the struggle for labor rights (the [Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire](#), the [Kate Mullany National Historic Site](#)) and the ongoing LGBTQ+ movement for equality (the [Stonewall National Monument](#) and the [Pride Center of the Capital Region](#)), among many others.

By thinking about this commemoration beyond the American Revolution itself, we are able to consider the ever-evolving history of our state and nation over time. Expanding the scope of the commemoration also allows us to reach new audiences that in the past have not seen themselves in commemorations of the American Revolution, while at the same time ensuring that every community in the state can engage with at least one theme, whether that community was the scene of a battle or other event directly related to the Revolution or not. New York State today, just as it was as a colony 250 years ago, has a diverse and changing population and it is vital that the commemoration engage with all communities. This is in no way to downplay or minimize the importance of the American Revolution and New York's role in it. We know that New York State played host to many important battles and other events in and around the Revolution, perhaps none more important than New York's role in the failed Burgoyne Campaign of 1777. New York also was the site of George Washington's attempt to completely destroy members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy who were allied with the British during the Sullivan-Clinton Campaign of 1779. There are numerous existing sites and battlefields associated with New York's role in the American Revolution, all of which are vital to telling this part of the history of the nation.

The Founding Fathers wrote, *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness,"* as the guiding principles of a new nation. New Yorkers continue to lead in efforts to expand these ideals to include everyone. This part of the Revolution continues.

We ask you to consider each of the themes in this field guide as suggestions for how your community or organization can begin to think about commemorating the 250th anniversary of the founding of this nation. Each local community and region of the state has its own unique story to tell which together tell the history of the state itself. We urge you to take this once per half-century opportunity to help tell that history so that it may be preserved for the coming centuries.

Thank you.

Ray LaFever

President

Association of Public Historians of NYS

Devin R. Lander

New York State Historian

Office of State History

New York State Museum

New York State Commemorative Field Guide

Interpretive Themes

1. Indigenous History is New York's History

Authentic Indigenous perspectives and history are pivotal to an accurate telling of the history of the Revolution and the 250 years that have followed. However, past commemorations have either erased this perspective entirely or decentered it from the history by presenting the Indigenous people who once owned all of the lands that make up New York State as somehow living only in the past. By including authentic Indigenous perspectives and history in planning and programming related to the 250th, groups and communities can ensure that a truly accurate history of both the Revolutionary era and the following two and a half centuries can be told. To do so, planners should include authentic Indigenous perspectives and history, preferably in partnership with actual members and leaders of local Indigenous communities, throughout the planning process and the resulting programming.





Questions that can help inform planning and programming around this theme include:

- What Indigenous peoples or Nations lived in your area prior to settler colonialism? Do they continue to live in your area today? If not, where are they today?
- How do we know about Indigenous people? How can a specific understanding of the role of women in Indigenous societies as well as the role of conflict and peace between Indigenous peoples and Nations help to inform our understanding?
- What relationships did Indigenous nations have with colonial era New Netherland and the British colony of New York? What was first contact between the cultures like? Often the conflict is highlighted, but there was also peaceful trade and coexistence. How and why did this change over time?
- What were the various political and military alliances formed by different Indigenous peoples during the Revolution? Why did certain nations align with the British while others aligned with the Americans?
- What was the impact of the Revolution on Indigenous lands, culture, and society, both statewide and in your region? Why were some Indigenous peoples forced to leave the state entirely?
- How has the evolving relationship between the U.S. government, New York State, and Indigenous peoples continued to be one both of conflict and of peace? How is the Revolution viewed today by Indigenous peoples?

Notes:



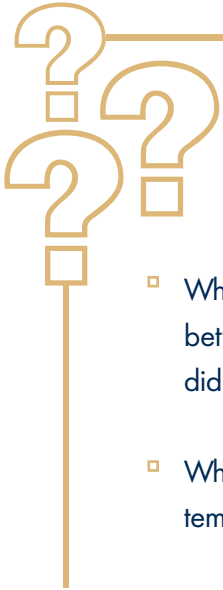


2. Choose Your Side

The American Revolution is considered by some to be the country's first civil war. Families, friends, and neighbors found themselves on opposing sides of a violent conflict while also experiencing incredible change and loss. Men, women, soldiers, civilians, enslaved Africans, free African Americans, Indigenous peoples, and others were all affected by the Revolution and had to balance the social, economic, and political changes wrought by the war. Exploring these changes, as well as the motivations behind declaring loyalty for a side, will allow the full story of the American Revolution to be presented.

Investigating the ways that everyday people saw their lives change will expand the narrative of the American Revolution beyond the experience of soldiers and wealthy white male politicians and give a voice to women, minorities, and other members of society.





Questions that can help inform planning and programming around this theme include:

- What was everyday life like on the homefront? What were the similarities and differences between various groups of people, particularly for women and the enslaved? What changes did families make in their everyday lives?
- What non-traditional roles opened to women during the Revolution? Were these new roles temporary or did they last after the Revolution ended?
- How did each side gain support for their cause? What motivations contributed to people's decisions to support either side?
- What were the risks of declaring yourself a Loyalist? A Patriot? Remaining neutral? How was this different for enslaved people and/or Indigenous peoples?
- How did each side define "freedom" and use those definitions to gain support? How did the Patriots deal with the irony of enslaved people living in a "free" nation?
- How did relationships evolve between different groups of people as the Revolution progressed?

Notes:





3. Power of Place

Political boundaries, geographic boundaries, and the natural world have changed over time and were in flux throughout the Revolution and the years following. Powerful reminders of New York's revolutionary past proliferate the landscape. From sites of conflict where the crucible of the War for Independence was decided, to sites of revolution where the ideals of the revolution were contested and expanded—at Seneca Falls, at Timbuctoo, at Stonewall, at Attica—where New Yorkers fought for expansion of those political, civil, and human rights that made up the founding ideals of the American experiment.

New York State is also marked by sites of erasure and dispossession as the Revolution's "winners" and "losers" redefined the landscape. The expansion of colonial settlement and the rise of the "Empire State" often came at the expense and displacement of the region's Indigenous peoples. Relationships between people and land shaped conflict, economics, and community development. The preservation of space, particularly space in which an important event took place, reflects social values and community memory.

This commemoration affords an opportunity to reexamine our communities and to ask new and significant questions about our history; to reexamine our ideas about the landscape, the natural and built environments; and to locate a shared past.



4. We the People

“We the People of the United States...” So opens the preamble of the United States Constitution, written in 1787 and ratified in 1789, establishing a new republican government based upon the ideals of the Revolutionary generation. While the nation’s founding documents were authored by members of the white, male political elite, the ideals of the American Revolution were not exclusive to them. The events of the Revolution had significant impact on the lives of women, Indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, free African Americans, and others.

Many of these groups were left out of the founding vision of the American experiment. The definition of “citizen” has changed throughout history, as has what it means to be an American. For the past 250 years New Yorkers have fought to expand the meaning of citizenship in the United States to incorporate peoples of diverse backgrounds more fully into the political, economic, and cultural life of the nation. These battles have come at the ballot box, in our schools, and in the streets. This struggle has not been preordained. It is not guaranteed. It continues.



Questions that can help inform planning and programming around this theme include:

- How did New York’s diverse population experience and influence the events of the American Revolution? How can we highlight stories that have not been widely told, including those of enslaved people, women, and Indigenous peoples?
- How have debates about who is considered “American” or a “citizen” taken place in your community? Who gets to decide? How, when, and why have the definitions of who “belongs” changed in New York State and your local community?
- When and how did different groups of people gain the status of citizenship? What rights and responsibilities does that include?
- Who has been, or remains, excluded from fully participating in our democracy?

Notes:





5. Unfinished Revolutions

The Founders wrote, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness,” as the guiding values of a new nation. Yet, the new nation and its constitution at first only protected the rights of landowning white men: women, enslaved people, Indigenous peoples, and the poor were not allowed to vote or otherwise take part in the democratic experience. New York itself remained a slave state until 1827. Yet, the fact that the constitution itself could be amended has led to positive change.

Over the past 250 years, New York has been the battle ground for a variety of struggles over concepts of freedom and equality. From the struggles for Indigenous sovereignty and gradual emancipation, to the birth of the U.S. women’s suffrage movement, from the Underground Railroad and abolition movement to the uprisings at the Stonewall Inn and Attica Prison, the ongoing fight for basic equality and human rights has taken center stage across New York State. Reconciling the ideals of the Revolution with the continuing struggle towards a more just society allows 250th planners to broaden the focus of the commemoration to include other movements towards justice. In doing so, it also can broaden the audience to include communities that haven’t seen themselves in traditional commemorations that focus solely on battles and elite political leaders.

As we think beyond the Revolution itself, what other revolutionary movements have taken place in your community? Some examples include the women’s suffrage movement, the abolition movement and the Underground Railroad, the Indigenous rights movement, the struggle for religious tolerance, the struggle for worker’s rights, the civil rights movement, and the environmental movement.



Questions that can help inform planning and programming around this theme include:

- What has been the response to these revolutionary movements within your community? Has there been progress? Setbacks?
- How have the nation and state’s founding documents been used in the ongoing struggles for change? For example, the Declaration of Sentiments in 1848 used direct language from the Declaration of Independence to make the case for a woman’s right to vote.
- How have perspectives of individuals or communities changed over time as the struggles to fulfill the ideals of the Revolution take place?

Notes:





6. Changing Interpretations of the Revolution

The 250th is an opportunity for local government historians, academic historians, historical sites and museums, and social studies teachers to renew public engagement in the field and practice of history. It is an opportunity that only comes around once every fifty years. The 250th presents an opportunity to explain to our audiences what we do as historians and how we do it. It presents the opportunity to illustrate how the interpretation of history changes over time as we discover new sources and new perspectives. Important figures such as Benedict Arnold, George Washington and Alexander Hamilton have all undergone, and continue to undergo, evolving interpretations of their actions. The 250th allows us to illustrate to our audiences how and why these interpretations evolve and the complexity of the historian's task in interpreting evidence and crafting a narrative of the past.



Questions that can help inform planning and programming around this theme include:

- How was the Revolution commemorated in the past in your community? How did that change over time and what does that tell us about the field of history?
- What types of sources do historians use to interpret the past? Examples can include written records, oral histories, oral tradition, material culture, and archaeological evidence. How does each resource help add to a more complete interpretation of the past?
- Whose stories have been collected in archives, museums, and libraries that have previously been excluded? Has that changed over time? How does whose stories have been and are being collected affect the production of history?
- What ways are there to use historical evidence from the Revolutionary era in your community to uncover parts of history that have not been told?

Notes:



Steps You Can Take

The 250th Commission legislation declares that it will commemorate the era of the Revolution from 1775-1783, which translates to from 2025-2033. That means that from the time of the publication of this Field Guide there is less than 2 years until the commemoration should begin. Planning needs to begin now.

There are many ways for local government historians, historical societies, and museums to begin this process. In several counties and regions across the state there are commissions, committees and even non-profits being formed to coordinate and facilitate 250th related planning and programming. A regional approach allows municipalities and organizations to coordinate efforts, share resources, and identify local stories that relate to the themes highlighted in this Field Guide. A regional approach will also make funding applications more powerful should funding be made available at the state or federal levels. Below are different types of regional efforts currently underway:

Organizational Initiatives

Fort Ticonderoga

Fort Ticonderoga will “commemorate the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution as the conflict that shaped our nation. To serve our mission of preservation and education, Ticonderoga will explore the individuals, alliances, triumphs, and challenges of the long war to achieve American independence and their lasting impact on the United States and the world.”

For more information: fortticonderoga.org

Contact: Dr. Matthew Keagle, Curator: mkeagle@fort-ticonderoga.org

Fort Plain Museum and Historical Park

The Fort Plain Museum and Historical Park is planning a series of conferences related to the commemoration of the 250th.

For more information: fortplainmuseum.org

Contact: Brian Mack, Board Member: info@fortplainmuseum.org

County and Regional Initiatives

Orange County

Under the leadership of the County Historian, Orange County has created a 250th Commemoration Commission. They are currently creating a countywide field guide for use in 250th planning in Orange County.

For more information: [orangecountygov.com](https://www.orangecountygov.com)

Contact: Johanna Porr Yaun, Orange County Historian: JPorr@orangecountygov.com

Saratoga County

Under the leadership of the County Historian, Saratoga County passed a resolution on July 20th, 2021 creating the Saratoga County 250th American Revolution Commission. The Commission is currently planning a series of events beginning in 2022 that will last throughout the commemorative era. For more information, see the sample resolution on page 15.

Contact: Lauren Roberts, Saratoga County Historian: lroberts@saratogacountyny.gov

Tompkins County

The Tompkins County Historical Commission is the lead organization for planning and programming related to the 250th in the county.

Contact: John Wertis, Town of Ulysses Historian: bwwfarmtoday@aol.com

Ulster County

On May 13, 2022, Ulster County Executive Patrick K. Ryan signed an executive order creating the Ulster County RevWar 250th Commission, which will “serve as the focal point for event planning, discussions, and everything else necessary to serve the goal of observing and commemorating the July 4, 1776, Declaration of Independence as well as the eight years of the American Revolution from 1775 to 1783, and what it means to be a free country and an ‘American.’”

For more information: [clerk.ulstercountyny.gov](https://www.clerk.ulstercountyny.gov)

Contact: Nina Postupack, County Clerk: countyclerk@co.ulster.ny.us

Warren County

Under the leadership of Warren County Historian Stan Cianfarano and Queensbury Town Historian John Berry, Warren County has created a commission to facilitate county-wide planning related to the 250th.

For more information: warren-washington-250-warrencountyny.hub.arcgis.com

Contacts: Stan Cianfarano, Warren County Historian and John Berry, Queensbury Town Historian

Westchester County

Revolutionary Westchester 250 is a non-profit organization that is coordinating the planning and programming related to the 250th commemoration in Westchester County.

For more information: [rw250.org](https://www.rw250.org)

Contact: Constance Kehoe, President: 1776rw250@gmail.com

Sample Resolution from Saratoga County

7/20/21



SARATOGA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

RESOLUTION 216 - 2021

Introduced Chairman Kusnierz

ESTABLISHING THE SARATOGA COUNTY 250TH AMERICAN REVOLUTION COMMISSION

WHEREAS, milestone anniversaries commemorating significant historical events give our citizens the opportunity to reflect on our past and gain a better understanding of the way these people, events and ideas shaped our county, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution will be observed from 2025 through 2033, and throughout that period the geographical area that would become Saratoga County played a significant role in several events, conflicts, meetings, raids and transportation routes; and

WHEREAS, in the year 1777, one of the most important events of the entire Revolution, the surrender of the Army of British General John Burgoyne to American General Horatio Gates following the success of the Americans at the Battles of Saratoga, known as the Turning Point of the American Revolution, happened within our borders and changed the course of the war; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of this uniquely important role, it is appropriate for Saratoga County to commemorate this anniversary by planning events and activities that engage its citizens and provide an opportunity to learn about our common heritage, develop pride of place and celebrate our shared history; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors authorize a Saratoga County 250th American Revolution Commission consisting of 13 official members (in honor of the 13 original colonies) tasked with planning and organizing all ceremonies, events, activities and celebrations recognizing the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution in Saratoga County; and it is further

RESOLVED, that members of the commission will be appointed by the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors and shall include himself, the Town of Saratoga Supervisor, the Town of Stillwater Supervisor, the County Administrator, the County Historian, the Director of Saratoga County Veterans Services, the Superintendent of the Saratoga National Historical Park, a representative from the Saratoga County Historical Society, a Saratoga County educator, a representative from the local chapter of the DAR or SAR, a representative from a living history organization and two Saratoga County citizens at-large; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that individuals serving as members of the commission not representing an elected or appointed office shall serve a term of three years, eligible for reappointment; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the functions, scope and activity of the Saratoga County 250th American Revolution Commission shall be solely and strictly of an advisory nature and the acts or statements of the Saratoga County 250th American Revolution Commission or any of its members individually or collectively shall in no way bind or be deemed to bind the County of Saratoga, its agents, or employees or the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors or any of its members; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the members of the Saratoga County 250th American Revolution Commission shall receive no salary or compensation for their services; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the commission will submit a report to the Clerk of the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors bi-annually to inform the board of its meetings, plans, activities and events; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the Saratoga County 250th American Revolution Commission will be active from the date this resolution is passed until December 31, 2033.

Federal and State Resources

State Resources

National Initiatives

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