

**REPORT OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION 250
COMMISSION**

**Report and Work Plan of the
American Revolution 250
Commission
(Chapter 915, 2020)**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



SENATE DOCUMENT NO. 8

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
2021**



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Office of the Governor

Atif Qarni
Secretary of Education

December 30, 2020

To: The Honorable Ralph Northam, Governor of Virginia
The Honorable Richard Saslaw, Majority Leader, Senate of Virginia
The Honorable Eileen Filler-Corn, Speaker, Virginia House of Delegates

From: Atif Qarni, Secretary of Education

Subject: Report and Work Plan of the American Revolution 250 Commission

Dear Sirs and Madame,

I am pleased to submit the enclosed report and work plan on the American Revolution 250 Commission's plan to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, the Revolutionary War, and the independence of the United States, as required by HB 1421 and SB 407 from the 2020 Session and now § 2.2-2548 in the Code of Virginia.

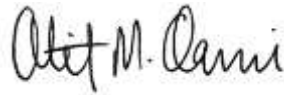
Pursuant to the above, the Secretary of Education convened a steering committee of three key leaders who had already been engaged in conversations about the commemoration well before this year. The 250 Commission's steering committee includes Scott Stroh, Executive Director of Gunston Hall, Christy Coleman, Executive Director of Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, and Jamie Bosket, CEO of the Virginia Museum of History and Culture. This group met several times over the spring, summer and fall of 2020. The steering committee members provided important guidance on the future work of the Commission. And as required by the statute, these individuals submitted names for consideration by the Governor for appointment to the Commission.

In the fall of 2020, Commission members were formally named and the group met twice to get the work underway. The full list of Commission members is included in Appendix A of the attached report.

This report and draft work plan fulfills the requirements of the legislation and sets the stage for the next phase in the Commission's work. The Secretary of Education will continue to convene the Commission until such time as the legislative members are appointed.

If you require any additional information on the Commission's work, please contact Fran Bradford, Deputy Secretary of Education, at fran.bradford@governor.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Atif M. Qarni". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Atif Qarni
Virginia Secretary of Education

Cc: The Honorable Ghazala Hashmi, Senator, Senate of Virginia
The Honorable Paul Krizek, Delegate, Virginia House of Delegates

AMERICAN REVOLUTION 250 COMMISSION
Report to the Governor and General Assembly
December 30, 2020

Executive Summary:

The American Revolution 250 Commission (250 Commission) was established as an advisory commission within the executive branch of state government by the General Assembly in 2020. The purpose of the Commission is to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, the Revolutionary War, and the independence of the United States. The following report contains information on the Commission’s progress since its inception, and an outline of their plan for the work ahead.

Introduction:

In 1776, the signing of the Declaration of Independence was a symbol of the American quest for freedom and democracy. The American Revolution was a momentous event not only in the history of the United States of America, but its legacies have had a resounding effect across the globe over the past 250 years. This grand undertaking led to establishment of a republic with a government dedicated to the ideals of liberty; however, rights did not include all Americans.

As we approach the 250th anniversary of these events, the Commonwealth seeks to commemorate this history and shine a light on the essential role Virginia played in the founding of the United States. Virginia has a proven record of celebrating past events in a way that reflects who we were as a Commonwealth and nation then, who we are now, and who we want to be. The commemorations culminating in 2007 and 2019 will serve as great examples as we endeavor to celebrate and reflect upon the events of the American Revolution with fidelity.

As the Virginia Bar Association (VBA) recently noted in its statement to the 250 Commission—

The Declaration of Independence and other founding documents of the Revolution, and their authors, are products of a different historical era—one which condoned slavery, did not recognize the legal or political rights of women, restricted the franchise exclusively to white men of property, and to the extent it considered of Native Americans at all—largely viewed them as obstacles to frontier expansion. The hypocrisy of that time made the Revolutionary principles of liberty, equality and freedom inapplicable to almost two-thirds of the Nation.

These words nevertheless laid the foundation for the eventual emancipation of Blacks and of women, for the enfranchisement of all Americans, for fundamental concepts of equal and social justice, and for the achievement of civil rights on the basis of race, gender and sexual orientation.

The legal foundations of the Revolutionary Era have, in the ensuing 250 years, proven to be both enduring and universal, and have endowed genuine and lasting meaning to those words committed to paper two and a half centuries ago. They have come to be true for all Americans, and, while our “more perfect union” remains a work in progress, the foundations of the Revolution have enabled the United States to evolve into the freest expression of individual liberty and opportunity in human history.

This context helps lay the foundation for the Commission's work and outlines the challenges to properly commemorating such a complex and important point in our nation's history. The Commission recognizes that the American Revolution was just the beginning of the nation we have become today. The Commission strives to develop initiatives and support other organizations throughout the state that thoughtfully represent the paradox of liberty and bondage in the Revolutionary period. It is the Commission's desire to initiate robust dialogue on what a more perfect union means to Americans today. The 250 Commission is tasked with helping tell this complicated story to all Virginians, Americans, and the World in partnership with communities, educational and cultural institutions, and more.

Pursuant to the legislation approved in the 2020 General Assembly Session, the Secretary of Education convened a steering committee of three key leaders who had been engaged in conversations about the commemoration well before this year. The 250 Commission's steering committee is composed of Scott Stroh, Executive Director of Gunston Hall, Christy Coleman, Executive Director of Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, and Jamie Bosket, CEO of the Virginia Museum of History and Culture. These individuals helped set the stage for the selection of Commission members, and provided important guidance on the future work of the Commission. In the fall of 2020, Commission members were formally named and the group met twice to get the work underway.

This report and draft work plan fulfills the requirements of the legislation and sets the stage for the next phase in the Commission's work.

Work Plan for the American Revolution 250 Commission

Beginning January 1, 2021 Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation will act as the lead state agency and fiscal agent for the Commission pursuant to the legislation. The Secretary of Education's Office will continue to convene the Commission at least through the first quarter of 2021. The steering committee will continue to provide leadership to the Commission's efforts as appropriate.

- **Meetings:**
 - This Commission will continue to meet monthly in 2021 until General Assembly Members are appointed. At that time, the full Commission, in consultation with the steering committee, will determine its meeting schedule.

- **2021 Activities:**
 - The Commission will seek to address key questions that will define the scope of the Commission's work and any associated activities, including such questions as defining the revolutionary time period to be commemorated, establishing when commemorative events begin, and any others which may emerge. Preliminary considerations on these matters are noted below.

 - The Commission will develop a plan for and begin to solicit, accept, use, and dispose of funds appropriated by the General Assembly as well as any gifts, grants, donations, bequests, or other funds received by the Commission for the purpose of aiding or facilitating its work.

- The Commission shall appoint and establish an executive committee composed of members of the Commission, to include the Commission's chair and vice chair and one representative designated by each of the following: the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, the Virginia Museum of History & Culture, and Gunston Hall by March 1, 2021.
- The Commission shall appoint and establish an advisory council, as required by and with the members listed in the statute by April 1, 2021.
- **Recommendations:**
 - Prior to General Assembly member appointments, the Commission will continue to develop future legislative and budgetary recommendations in regards to staffing and funding needs, and proposed internal organizational structure.
 - The recommendations will specifically address the formulation and implementation of a program for the inclusive observance of the 250th anniversary of the independence of the United States and the Revolutionary War in Virginia, including
 - (i) civic, cultural, and historical education and scholarship concerning the ideals of the American Revolution and their contemporary relevance;
 - (ii) visitation of museums and historic sites, including battlefields;
 - (iii) creation and publication of historical documents and studies;
 - (iv) cooperation with agencies responsible for the preservation or restoration of historic sites, buildings, art, and artifacts;
 - (v) establishment of exhibitions and interpretive and wayfinding signage;
 - (vi) arrangement of appropriate public ceremonies;
 - (vii) a comprehensive marketing and tourism campaign encompassing year 2025 through year 2026; and
 - (viii) the general dissemination of public information regarding Virginia's involvement in the American Revolution and its legacy today.
 - These recommendations would be affirmed by the full Commission including any General Assembly members once they are appointed.
 - The Commission will submit these budgetary and legislative recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly by September 1, 2021 to be considered for inclusion in the Governor's proposed budget for FY 2022-24 and for the 2022 legislative session.

Three Pillars to Guide the Commission's Work:

At its December 11 meeting, the Commission discussed three areas important to guide its work: organizational style and structure, thematic focus, and time period of focus. While there are still many determinations to make within each area, the Commission made some strong progress to help guide its efforts.

- *Organizational Style and Structure:* In the area of organization style and structure, the Commission agreed that a hybrid structure would be most effective and impactful. Taking advantage of lessons learned from previous state commemoration successes, this hybrid approach calls for a smaller central support staff at the lead state agency, the strong use of an advisory committee(s), and the strong coordination and leveraging of the work of local government, non-profit, educational, and cultural organizations across Virginia. This would allow for the support of several signature events and activities, but also focus on encouraging, supporting and amplifying activities across the Commonwealth.
- *Thematic Focus:* More discussion is needed on the thematic focus of the Commission's work. The Commission was presented with a set of draft themes, which were produced by an informal working group of statewide museums and cultural organizations. These themes, along with a statement provided by the Virginia Bar Association will be used to drive the conversation forward. There will need to be a balance in telling the difficult parts of the story as well as showing the best of Virginia. There is also a need to shape our thematic focus to have synergy with national efforts.
- *Period of Focus:* Members of the Commission will continue to discuss the period to be covered by the commemoration, but there is a recognition that the focus starts with the 1775-1777 period. There is also recognition that this commemoration is about ideas more than specific anniversary dates of the American Revolution. Further, the initiating legislation calls for the Commission to sunset after 2027 and the federal 250th commemoration effort is focused on that period as well – both reinforce this initial period of focus. However, several Commission members are interested in a broader time frame.

Upcoming Meetings:

Meetings will be posted on the Commonwealth Calendar and are open to the public. For meeting access and relevant materials, please email tori.noles@governor.virginia.gov.

- Friday, January 8th from 10am-12pm, Zoom
- Friday, February 12th from 10am-12pm, Zoom
- Friday, March 12th, from 10am-12pm, Zoom

American Revolution 250 Commission Roster

- **Chief Stephen Adkins** of Charles City, Chief, Chickahominy Indian Tribe
- **Edward H. Baine** of Chesterfield, President – Dominion Energy Virginia
- **Diane Bechamps**, Vice President Marketing, Virginia Tourism Authority
- **Jamie O. Bosket** of Richmond, Chief Executive Officer, Virginia Museum of History and Culture
- **Leslie Greene Bowman** of Charlottesville, President, Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello
- **Gretchen Bulova** of Fairfax County, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria, City of Alexandria
- **Christy Coleman** of Chesterfield, Executive Director, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation
- **Spencer R. Crew** of Reston, Historian, Acting Director, National Museum of African American History and Culture, Smithsonian Institution
- **H. Benson Dendy III** of Richmond, Chairman Emeritus, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation
- **David Duncan** of Fairfax, President, American Battlefield Trust, Secretariat of the United States Semiquincentennial Commission
- **Cliff Fleet** of Williamsburg, President and CEO, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
- **Sue H. Gerdelman** of Williamsburg, Trustee, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation and Board of Visitors, William & Mary
- **Matthew Gibson**, Executive Director, Virginia Humanities
- **Kym A. Hall** of Williamsburg, Superintendent, Colonial National Historical Park and Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail
- **Julie Langan**, Director, Department of Historic Resources
- **Eric Monday** of Martinsville, Attorney for the City of Martinsville, Virginia Bar Association
- **Atif Qarni** of Glen Allen, Secretary of Education
- **Chief Anne Richardson** of Indian Neck, Chief, Rappahannock Tribe
- **Scott M. Stroh III** of Mason Neck, Executive Director, Gunston Hall
- **Mike Strom**, State Archivist, Library of Virginia
- **Jacquelyn E. Stone** of Richmond, Partner, McGuireWoods LLP
- **Karin Wulf** of Williamsburg, Executive Director and Professor, Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, William & Mary

