

250th Commemoration Commission Inaugural Meeting

May 16, 2024

10:30am-4:30pm

Huxley Theater, New York State Museum
Albany, NY

Welcome from the Co-Chairs

Commissioners Betty Rosa and Randy Simons welcome everyone to the meeting.

Phil Giltner from Parks started the administrative matters sections of the meeting.

Commissioner Simons welcomes Joe Crowley.

Joe Crowley from the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission and former U.S. Representative spoke. He discussed the Federal 250th Commission. There are vacancies waiting to be filled. He is currently the only New Yorker on the commission. He is hoping filling the vacancies changes that. There are also no members from New England. The commission requested \$100 million. They did receive 15 million in the last budget.

Senator Shelly Mayer and Assemblymember Carrie Woerner spoke about creating the legislation to form the state 250th commission.

Business Meeting

Phil Giltner presented on the statute. He outlined the legislation that formed the commission. He covered the intent, structure and goals of the commission. The differences between “shall” and “may” in the legislation.

Phil Giltner coordinated a discussion on commission procedure. As an advisory board we have more flexibility in deciding how to operate. He asked the members if they would prefer to adhere to formal or informal rules.

Commissioner Georgette Grier Key requested some formality. Perhaps adopting a version of Robert’s Rules of Order.

There was a motion from Commissioner Simons, seconded, and moved.

Discussion on if we will require correspondence and treasury reports and make them publicly available. And will we set next meeting dates at the end of meetings. Will the commission operate with a simple majority vote? Yes.

Commissioner Simons makes motion to adopt formalized system of voting, required motions to vote, adjourn and convene. Seconded

Commissioner Jenn Voigtschild asks if the commission have a simple majority for all things? Discussion over what quorum will be. 10 would make a quorum, 6 of that 10 would make a majority.

Commissioner Rosa offered adopting rules used by the Board of Regents as a model.

Connie Kehoe asked if virtual attendance count toward quorum?

Since the commission has no money that would be a practical solution to the logistics of meeting.

Commission meetings are not subject to Open Meetings law, so we have some flexibility.

Commissioner Jeanette Moy asks that we not make the final motion. That we table the discussion of rules and operation and return with recommendation everyone feels comfortable with.

Commissioner Grier-Key rescinds the earlier motion that the commission can clarify what that motion should entail. A discussion of the motion began.

Commissioner Simons makes a motion to have record of meeting, written and taped. Aan posted on the website of the commission to the public. Seconded. Passed.

Motion to create rules of procedure. Based on but not equivalent to the Rules of the Board of Regents and a light version of Robert's Rules. We will secure copies of these rules, review them and then decide if they will be adopted. Commissioner Kehoe makes the motion. Seconded and passed.

Phil begins discussion on how the commission will structure itself. We may need to make smaller groups to complete tasks for the commission.
Perhaps subcommittee to write the strategic plan, to work on outreach, and for fundraising.

Commissioner Simons agreed that those all sound suitable. Perhaps we create those subcommittees after conversations where those projects are brought up.

Commissioner Grier-Key believes the strategic plan will inform what subcommittees the commission will need. The strategic plan should be created first.

Commissioner Rosa agreed with Commissioner Grier-Key.

Commissioner Katherine Nicholls brings up that we are already behind. The commission should look at what the 1976 commission did and what other states are doing. The coordinate with other states to work together.

Commissioner Rosa says that some of that research has already been done. Devin Lander can share that research.

Phil Giltner shares that there is a Mid-Atlantic and New England commissions that some of us have been in touch with. Same with the national group.

Commissioner Moy asks if we can use the afternoon to discuss and hear about the work that has already been done. We can hold off on this discussion until we hear about that work.

Commissioners Rosa and Simons calls for a lunch break to begin. The meeting will reconvene at 12:30

Lunch Break

Public Meeting Resumes

Member Introductions are made.

Commissioner Simons begins the presentations. He presents on the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation preparation for the 250th. This year is the Parks Centennial. The origin story of Parks is connected to the Revolution. Washington's Headquarters was the first state historic site in the country in 1850. Niagara Falls was the first state park in 1885. But there was no unified oversight. In 1924 the State Parks Act created structure and oversight of these locations.

There were over 84 million visits to state parks and historic sites last year.

Parks has 250 properties. 44 have ties to the Revolutionary War. The 250th will be the longest serving commemoration in New York City. It will happen alongside the Parks centennial, Erie Canal anniversary and the end of slavery in New York State.

The commemoration means we have to look at our full history. We tell our history from diverse perspectives. Native Americans, enslaved, women, tenant farmers, children, LGBTQ+ communities will be a part of the 250th story.

A priority is to tell stories previously ignored or not told. Parks will be doing this through a series of projects. One being Philipse Manor Hall. New exhibits space, restoration and reinterpretation.

The site has been recognized by school groups and used by school groups.

John Jay Homestead is going through a restoration. New Windsor Cantonment linking the site with Purple Heart.

A number of restorations and renovations across historic sites like Old Fort Niagara, Senate House, Crown Point, Knox Headquarters, Fort Montgomery and Fort Ontario.

Interpretive upgrades at Washington's Headquarters, Clermont and Senate House.

Master planning is critical to seeing the full picture of these sites.

Land acquisition also a priority. New Town, Fort Crailo, and Sackets Harbor have already benefitted from this.

Starting Liberty Trail, and smartphone program that uses animation and narrative to depict battle lines at sites.

Parks has new digital access to collections through EMuseum.

New kiosk system will be launched later this year. With stories, artifacts etc. Content will be searchable and connect visitors to the sites. Features 28 themes: Haudenosaunee experience of the Clinton Sullivan campaign, war refugees in the Revolutions, African Americans as patriots and loyalists, monuments and memory, myth busting, etc...

A sneak peek of one of the videos was shared. It depicts the stories of the men and women Philip Schuyler enslaved.

Commissioners Betty Rosa and Devin Lander presented on the New York State Education Department's work. The Office of Cultural Education held a series of meetings in 2019 to help the department understand what the field expected, and the field was already thinking related to the 250th. Takeaways included that the 250th should be a commemoration not just a celebration and that the unfinished revolution should be considered. This all informed the 250th Field Guide. The field guide was a collaboration between the Office of State History and the Association for

Public Historians of New York State. The guide provides suggestions for the 250th and includes 6 themes related to New York's role in the Revolution and the subsequent unfinished Revolution.

1. Indigenous History is New York's History
2. Choose Your Side
3. Power of Place
4. We the People
5. Unfinished Revolutions
6. Changing Interpretations of the Revolution

A website was just launched as well. It is hosted by the State Museum's website and will act as the commission's official website. The website will include events, grant opportunities, news, research resources and information on other regional 250th initiatives.

During the 2021 Association for State and Local History conference in Buffalo Commissioner Lander arranged a panel of Native American scholars to discuss the importance of including authentic indigenous voices in the 250th.

The New York History Conference will be held this June at the Cultural Education Center to bring together the history field.

The Office of State History creates a podcast, *A New York Minute in History*, with episodes on the 250th.

The New York History Journal will be publishing a special 250th issue in Spring of 2026.

Other potential projects include an exhibit with a Revolutionary Era sloop that was discovered underneath the World Trade Center, a panel exhibit available to be downloaded and displayed by any history organization, exhibits at the State Fair.

Will also be connecting the unfinished revolution with the anniversary of gradual emancipation.

Will partner with the African American History Commission to commemorate this anniversary.

Ross Levi presents on Promoting Heritage Tourism at I Love NY.

I Love NY is the official destination marketing organization of New York State. They promote tourism, work with transportation partners, tourism associations, local tourism promotion agencies, etc...

I Love NY uses advertisements, their website and social media, experiential marketing, public relations etc... to promote.

The I Love NY website has an active calendar of events, seasonal events and a newsletter. Social media accounts has a combined 2.2 million followers.

Segment Tourism: Path Through History is I Love NY's heritage tourism program. 700 sites and attractions are listed and included under Path Through History themes. Path Through History weekends are twice a year, in the spring and fall.

I Love NY can work with the commission to promote 250th tourism.

Market NY is a grant program to increase community tourism.

External Presentations

Leslie Morlock, Saratoga National Historical Park

National Parks Service sites strive to tell an inclusive and honest history.

Saratoga National Historical Park is the site of the Battles of Saratoga. 5 locations are within the site: the Battlefield, Monument, Victory Woods, Schuyler House and the Surrender Site.

The battle of Saratoga was a turning point in the Revolutionary War. The site can use the momentum of the 250th to elevate the visibility of the site, build relationships with partners, incorporate broader interpretations of inclusive history and establish deeper ties to Native American stories.

Goals

- Holding Citizen ship Ceremonies at National Park Sites. Saratoga currently holds 2 per year.
- Research on the Schuyler House.
- FDR's Hyde Park- research disability representation at the site.
- Investment into historic resources
- Restoration of Neilson House Farm. Paths will be updated and made accessible, new exhibits will be installed.
- Online tours, updating digital content of Schuyler House and Neilson House.

Encampment weekends held in September and October.

In memoriam events held commemorating Patriot deaths at Saratoga. This is an ongoing research project. Information has been compiled on approximately 500 men so far.

Art Cohn, Spitfire Shipwreck in Lake Champlain

The preservation of the Spitfire shipwreck could be a legacy project of the 250th commemoration. The shipwreck was a part of the Battle of Valcour Island (1776). Cohn presented a brief history of the Battle of Valcour Island and the importance of Lake Champlain during the Revolution. The Spitfire was one of the ships sunk during the battle.

Finding shipwrecks is easy, managing and preserving them is difficult.

Environmental issues and invasive species cause problems. Zebra mussels were discovered in Lake Champlain. Zebra mussels cause the deterioration of metal fixtures on shipwrecks. During a survey of the bottom of Lake Champlain between 1996 and 2003 an unidentified wreck was located. Two divers went down and identified the wreck as being the Spitfire. It was covered in mud and mostly intact, including the mast. After twenty years of study decisions have to be made about what to do with the wreck. The boat will deteriorate, the mussels will continue to damage. The boat should be recovered, conserved and become a centerpiece in a museum in Plattsburgh, New York. This would connect the public to the history, create a heritage tourism destination and open the doors to new research.

Chris O'Brien, SAIL 250 NYS

Sail 4th 250 seeks to bring the tall ships to the Port of New York on July 6, 2026. This would be a international goodwill event. A similar event was held for the 200th of the Revolution on July 4, 1976.

The tall ships will also be accompanied by an International Parade of Sail, an official review of ships and other events. A joint military flyover/historic aircraft flyover has been proposed.

Dozens of military ships would be in the harbor as well as thousands of civilian vessels.

July 5-9, 2026 the tall ships will travel up the Hudson, stopping at various sites on the river, ending in Albany.

Commission Discussion and Deliberations

Goals: NYSED and Parks will design the format for discussion and adoption of rules for the commission.

Strategic Plan: Will have to wait until we have established rules. Commissioners Rosa and Simons' staff will form the strategic plan or compile the materials for the plan.

Next meeting: the commission will meet quarterly. Tourism Industry Association has a retreat September 12. Staff will look at dates in early September and early October. The location is up for discussion. Could be outside the Capital Region. The commissioners will be sent a list of proposed dates.

Public Comment

There were no questions.

Commissioner Simons makes a motion to adjourn. Seconded. Moved.