AMERICA 250 | CT PLANNING GUIDE

In 2026, the United States will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the founding of the country. It is an opportunity for reflection on the ideals of the nation's founders and a time to consider the path forward in expanding our realization of those ideals today.

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USING THIS GUIDE

2026 will mark the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the foundational document of the revolution that occurred in the late 18th century and resulted in the creation of the United States of America.

Planning for such an important commemoration in a comprehensive way can be a daunting task. Because of this, the America 250 | CT Commission has produced this planning guide to provide suggested commemorative themes, ideas, and information.

The Commission encourages partnerships between various organizations within your community—museums, libraries, community centers, schools, municipal offices and commissions, and others who contribute to creating vibrant local spaces—in order to develop a commemoration that includes a variety of voices and perspectives.

GUIDING VALUES

Events surrounding the commemoration of the 250th will take a variety of forms, from celebratory to analytical to commemorative, and will involve people with a variety of backgrounds and beliefs. Regardless of what form their participation takes, we ask organizations to work to align their initiatives with inclusive themes and values, to make welcome as many people from across Connecticut's communities as possible, and to encourage people to consider the future repercussions of today's actions. To do so, all projects, events, and programs should call for mutual respect and empathy. All activities should be accessible to as many people as possible; please bear in mind and attempt to accommodate socioeconomic, physical limitations, language, and other potential barriers to access. We ask, too, that organizations support one another in our collective efforts, including by sharing knowledge and resources whenever possible. Center relationships and the process of developing trust, and be honest and candid with all involved in the process.

BEYOND 1776

The founding legislation for the National Endowment for the Humanities states, "Democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens." We recognize this as the foundation for reinvigorating our democracy. By recognizing this moment in our history, the nation has the opportunity to lay the groundwork for a reawakening of civic engagement by encouraging the participation of all residents.

By thinking about this commemoration beyond the events and actions of 1776, we are able to consider the ever-evolving history of our state and nation. Expanding the scope of the commemoration 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 an event directly related to the American Revolution or not.

There are many ways for local government, historians, historical societies, civics groups, and museums to begin this process. In several towns across the state there are commissions and committees being formed to coordinate and facilitate 250th-related planning and programming.

If you choose to do so, please send your information to Cyndi Tolosa, Project Manager for the America 250 | CT Commission, at ctolosa@ct250.org. Your information will be added to the website and shared with people who may be looking to get involved.

CONNECTICUT THEMES

Many of the America 250 | CT themes are drawn from Governor Ned Lamont's Executive Order 22-2 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*.

Each community or organization may choose to use one or all of the themes in this planning guide as inspiration to begin to think about commemorating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Each local community has its own unique story to tell and unique role in the history, culture, and civics of Connecticut.

TELL INCLUSIVE STORIES

The 250th serves as inspiration for CTH, its grantees, and the people of Connecticut to deal with and share stories that represent all of its people, past and present. For much of our history, the United States has excluded people—women, free and enslaved African Americans, Indigenous people, immigrants, people with disabilities, the poor, and many others—from full participation and representation in the nation's political, economic, and cultural life. This commemoration is an opportunity to continue the nation's reckoning with the past, both its glory and its missteps and flaws. By telling previously untold stories we will enable everyone to find a place in our nation's narrative.

What stories remain untold in your community?

Whose voice has been heard in the past? How is this an opportunity to lift other voices?

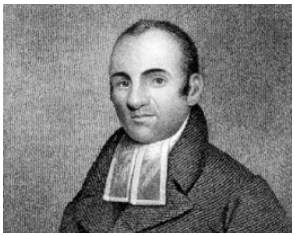
Electric Boat submarine

Ideas

- How has **education** played a role in inclusion and exclusion?
- How can **industry** open avenues to untold stories?

People

- John Anderson, Black governor
- Lemuel Haynes, minister
- Hannah Bunce Watson, publisher
- Toney, Black Loyalist refugee
- Capt. John T. Gonsalves, captain of the Charles W. Morgan



Lemuel Haynes

Places

- Amistad Schooner, New Haven
- Mary & Eliza Freeman Center, Bridgeport
- Foreign Mission School, Cornwall
- Windham Textile Mill
- Old New-Gate Prison and Viets Tavern

New-Gate Prison Yard

Events

- Robert Jacklyn and Land Ownership for People of Color - 1719
- Amistad Trial - 1839
- Opening of the American School for the Deaf - April 15, 1917
- Passing of the Gay-Rights Bill - May 1, 1991

American School for the Deaf

POWER OF PLACE

Connecticut is comprised of eight counties, 169 towns and cities, five recognized tribes, and countless communities with unique identities and contributions. The creation of a community-based structure will allow each of Connecticut's towns and cities to define their own programs and ideas about how they can engage their citizens. The building of an understanding of our American past will begin in the public spaces dedicated to learning: libraries, community centers, local museums, and historic sites. CTH will ensure the alignment between Connecticut's 250th activities and those of the greater region and nation, building relevance and aligning the state with other areas.

What makes your community unique?

What places and stories are typically preserved and valued? What other places exist?

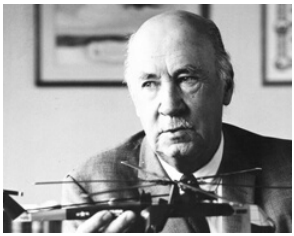
Keney Park, Hartford

Ideas

- Who was a part of your **community** historically and how did that change?
- How did the **natural environment** shape your community?

People

- Abigail Hinman, New London
- Gladys Tantaquidgeon, Uncasville
- Igor Sikorsky, Stratford
- Hannah Occuish, New London
- William Lanson, New Haven



Igor Sikorsky

Places

- Fort Griswold, Groton
- Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route
- Mashantucket
- Prudence Crandall House, Canterbury
- Naval Submarine Base, New London

Prudence Crandall House

Events

- The Sons of Liberty topple statue of King George III - July 9, 1776
- British burn Danbury - April 26, 1777
- British burn Fairfield - July 7, 1779
- Washington & Rochambeau meet in Wethersfield - May 21-22, 1781

Toppling statue of King George III

DOING HISTORY

To renew public engagement with history, the public must be invited to participate in the process of doing history. CTH will work with organizations in the cultural sector to drive collaborative and innovative approaches to celebrating the nation's 250th. Using avenues such as the digital humanities, cross-sector convenings, and engagement with social studies teachers, we will build a collaborative environment and provide access for all state residents to cultural experiences. Inviting audiences to engage with the historical method can help them become more comfortable with the ambiguous, contested, and always-evolving nature of history. The commission's work will focus on the role of Connecticut, its people, sites, and historic context of the time. It can boost tourism in the state by amplifying the story at historic sites, trails, and buildings, and by constructing programs around notable events.

What is history? How is it different from "the past"?

CAO website

Ideas

- What **primary sources** are available? How do they allow us to make sense of the past?
- Where do we find sources for **previously untold stories**?
- Who holds **knowledge** in different communities? How is it shared?

People

- Amos Doolittle, engraver
- Henry Barnard, education reformer
- Wallace Nutting, antiquarian
- Theodate Pope Riddle, architect
- Joshua Hempstead, diary 1711-58

Theodate Pope Riddle

Places

- Connecticut Museum of Culture & History, Hartford
- Connecticut State Library, Hartford
- Hempstead Houses, New London
- Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame
- Hartford History Center

Joshua Hempstead Diary

Events

- Annual burning of Benedict Arnold effigy
- Black Lives Matter protests, June 2020
- Connecticut State Historical Records Advisory Board, est. 1976
- Lafayette's Farewell Tour, 1824-25

Burning Benedict Arnold's effigy

FOR THE COMMON GOOD

As we reckon with what the nation's 250th means in Connecticut, we will encourage civic engagement to continue to build our communities, state, and nation using the democratic ideals outlined in our founding documents. The 250th anniversary offers an opportunity to reconsider the origins of our government, democratic institutions, and broader civic life, and a chance to reflect on the ways we have changed them over time. Discussions about our democracy and civic intuitions can help strengthen understanding, inspire action, and reveal ways that all of us can participate in and shape our democracy.

How can understanding the origins of our government inform civic engagement today?

How do we determine who is an American?

Signing of the Constitution

Ideas

- How have ideas of **citizenship** changed since 1776?
- What is a **representative democracy**? How do we encourage or discourage participation and representation?
- How have our **founding documents** changed in the last 250 years? Why?

People

- Thomas J. Dodd, state senator
- Ella Grasso, governor
- Isabella Beecher Hooker, suffragist
- Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., civil rights leader
- Maria Colón Sánchez, activist

Martin Luther King

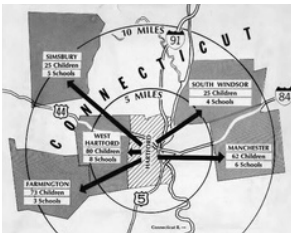
Places

- Legislative Office Building, Hartford
- Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center, Mashantucket
- Old State House, Hartford
- Peace Center of Connecticut, Hartford
- Litchfield Law School, Litchfield

Litchfield Law School

Events

- Adoption of the Fundamental Orders - January 14, 1639
- CT General Assembly Approves the Declaration of Independence - October 10, 1776
- Sheff v. O'Neill - March 3, 1999
- Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation granted federal recognition - October 18, 1983



Map of school bussing (Sheff v. O'Neill)

RESOURCES

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The **Connecticut Council for the Social Studies** will be hosting conferences for students and teachers focused on the themes of the 250th.

Teachers and students are encouraged to participate in **Connecticut History Day** and develop projects related to the 250th and the themes for this commemoration.

ConnecticutHistory.org is a state public history resource that provides engaging, well-researched stories about Connecticut history that link to reliable primary and interpretive resources.

Connecticut's **Kid Governor** immerses 5th graders in a real election for the CT Kid Governor, a fellow 5th grader who will represent them during a one-year term of active leadership. The program teaches about state government, voting, elections, and civic participation.

The Museum of the American Revolution has put together a **Summer Reading List** for 2023 young readers, covering books appropriate for ages 7-14.

TeachIt provides inquiry-based activities that reinforce the principles found in the state social studies frameworks to help Connecticut's teachers bring Connecticut history into the classroom. Additional lessons will also be created.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Connecticut Archives Online (CAO) was undertaken by the Western Connecticut State University Archives in 2008 and is a project that facilitates searching archival holdings in our state.

Connecticut Collections (CTCo) is a resource for teachers and students, researchers, other organizations looking to learn more about their own collections, and history and art lovers. It brings together resources from museums and archives throughout the state in one place.

The **Connecticut Digital Archive (CTDA)** is part of the Digital Preservation Repository Program at the University of Connecticut. It is dedicated to the maintenance, delivery, and preservation of a wide range of digital resources for educational and cultural institutions and State Agencies in Connecticut.

Connecticut Explored is the nonprofit magazine of Connecticut history. Anyone with an interest in the untold stories of Connecticut's past can satisfy their curiosity with each issue of *Connecticut Explored*. The magazine offers a variety and range of stories that connect our past to our present and future.

administered by CTHumanities

CT Humanities (CTH) is the non-profit organization recognized by the State of Connecticut to coordinate and lead the plans for commemorative, educational, and civics-based initiatives leading up to and during 2026. CTH will serve as the administrative agent and act as the nonprofit fiduciary on behalf of any activities undertaken by the America 250 | CT Commission.

As the principal grantmaking organization for history, cultural, and civics organizations in Connecticut, CTH will bring together communities and cultural resources throughout our state and lead the sector in developing a meaningful commemoration.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION

In order to recognize this moment in our history, Governor Ned Lamont established the America 250 | CT Commission with Executive Order 22-2. The mission of the commission is to plan and coordinate activities commemorating the 250th anniversary of the nation's founding; and enhance tourism, economic development, historic education and preservation, and outdoor recreation within the state; and coordinate, engage, and liaise with the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission, and other local, county, and state commissions, as well as private and public organizations and partners. The Commission will develop, encourage, and execute an inclusive celebration, commemoration, and observance of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence through civic, cultural, and historical education events and programming; and will promote the documentation, identification, and preservation of cultural and historic resources, including archives, buildings, landscapes, objects, and sites related to the semiquincentennial period.

To learn more about the America 250 | CT Commission, including upcoming meetings and to read the Executive order, visit CT250.org.

STAY CONNECTED

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www.ct250.org

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