

Hon. Denise W. Merrill
Chair

Jason R. Mancini, Ph.D.
Vice Chair

Membership

Nicolas Angeli
Connecticut's Old State House –
Youth Leader

Stephen Armstrong
Connecticut State Department of
Education*

Anthony Champalimaud
Member of the Public

Kathryn D'Amato
Office of the Governor*

Steven Hernández, Esq.
Commission on Women, Children,
Seniors, Equity & Opportunity

Andrew Horowitz, Ph.D.
Connecticut State Historian

Michael Johnson
Mashantucket Pequot Tribal
Nation*

Robert Kret
Connecticut Museum of Culture
and History

Catherine Labadia
State Historic Preservation Office

Douglas Lord
Connecticut Library Association

Merle McGee
Member of the Public

Deborah Schander, MLIS, JD
Connecticut State Librarian

Elizabeth Shapiro
Department of Economic and
Community Development*

Jonathan Slifka
Department of Aging and Disability
Services

Joe Smith
Mohegan Tribe*

Hon. Stephanie Thomas
Secretary of the State

Maisa Tisdale
Mary and Eliza Freeman Center for
History and Community

Sally Whipple
Connecticut Democracy Center

Amrys O. Williams, Ph.D.
Connecticut League of History
Organizations

**designee*

January 31, 2024

To the Honorable Governor Ned Lamont and Members of the General Assembly:

Pursuant to Executive Order No. 22-2, signed on July 1, 2022, the chair and vice-chair planned for and convened the membership of Connecticut's Semiquincentennial Commission. The first meeting was held on November 18, 2022 at Connecticut's Old State House in Hartford. Four additional meetings were held in 2023, as well as numerous subcommittee meetings.

Commission Members

Chair, Hon. Denise W. Merrill, Member of the Public
Vice-Chair, Jason R. Mancini, Ph.D., CT Humanities

Nicolas Angeli, Connecticut Democracy Center – Youth Leader
Stephen Armstrong, Connecticut State Department of Education (designee)
Anthony Champalimaud, Troutbeck – Member of the Public
Andrew Horowitz, Ph.D., Connecticut State Historian
Michael Johnson, Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation (designee)
Robert Kret, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History (CMCH)
Catherine Labadia, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) (designee)
Douglas Lord, Connecticut Library Association (CLA)
Merle McGee, Everyday Democracy – Member of the Public
Deborah Schander, MLIS, JD, Connecticut State Librarian
Elizabeth Shapiro, Department of Economic & Community Development (DECD) (designee)
Jonathan Slifka, Department of Aging and Disability Services
Joe Smith, Mohegan Tribe (designee)
Hon. Stephanie Thomas, Secretary of the State
Maisa Tisdale, Mary and Eliza Freeman Center for History and Community
Sally Whipple, Connecticut Democracy Center
Amrys O. Williams, Ph.D., Connecticut League of History Organizations (CLHO)
Kathryn D'Amato, Governor of the State of Connecticut (designee)
Steven Hernández, Esq., The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO)

2023 Commission Progress

Early in the year, the commission recognized the need to take a step back to examine the values that would guide the commission's work (Goal 1 of 2023 Action Plan). The commission enlisted the assistance of Richard Josey of [Collective Journeys](#) and scheduled four "listening sessions," guided discussions around inclusivity. Community groups and the general public were invited to voice thoughts and/or concerns, and were encouraged to think deeply about what America 250 | CT should look like.

The listening sessions and other discussions led to the creation of the America 250 | CT Vision which examines the goals of the anniversary in Connecticut, and what

success looks like. An America 250 | CT Values Statement was also created to reinforce the need to involve and engage as many people as possible, and to encourage organizations to work together. Both the [Vision and Values Statement](#) were formally adopted in July.

The by-laws of the commission were the focus of the governance sub-committee throughout 2023. Sub-committee members reviewed examples from other state commissions to determine the best approach for Connecticut. After several rounds of writing and revising, the sub-committee presented the completed by-laws to the full commission. The [by-laws](#) were formally adopted in October.

In October the commission chair started the discussion about potential signature events by presenting several ideas focused on large-scale events throughout the state. Commission members and members of the public joined the conversation with additional thoughts and ideas, which will be reviewed further throughout 2024.

Coordination with National and Regional Organizations

In 2023, commission members and their representatives participated in the following regional and national convenings:

- Zoom calls hosted by the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission
- A Common Cause for All in Virginia - March 10-12
- A northeast states gathering in Fort Ticonderoga - June 21-22
- The Association for State and Local History Conference - September 5-9
- RevEd Conference - October 25-27

At the July 12, 2023 meeting, the commission decided it would not formally partner with the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission. America 250 | CT Commission will maintain a liaison relationship, but will not execute a contract that binds Connecticut's commission to the national commission. It was noted that a handful of other state commissions also declined the national commission's proposal.

Outreach and Fundraising

Commission members have conducted site visits, interviews with media outlets, and participated in planning meetings throughout the state. A representative list includes:

- Commission Chair Denise Merrill and State Historian Andy Horowitz were interviewed by Mark Pazniokas of the CT Mirror
- Commission Chair Denise Merrill and Vice-chair Jason Mancini participated in a conversation with Catherine Shen of CT Public Radio's Where We Live
- Presentations to the museum community with the CT League of Museums at their annual conference and at two webinars free and open to all (Goal 2 of 2023 Action Plan)
- Site visits have taken place at Fort Trumbull in New London, the Webb Deane Stevens Museum in Wethersfield, Keeler Tavern in Ridgefield, Discovering Amistad in New Haven, and the Old New-Gate Prison and Copper Mine in East Granby
- Created a Connecticut 250th [Resource Database](#) in partnership with other organizations around the state (Goal 1 of 2023 Action Plan)

CT Humanities is the non-profit organization recognized by the State of Connecticut to coordinate and lead the state's plans for commemorative, educational, and civics-based initiatives leading up to and during 2026. Therefore, CTH will serve as the administrative agent and act as the nonprofit fiduciary for America 250 | CT with the support and guidance of the commission.

To support these efforts, Connecticut Humanities established the 250th Leadership Committee, an ad hoc committee of the Board of Directors. This committee will assist the Board of Directors by (1) overseeing advancement strategy related to the 250th efforts, namely fundraising, constituent relationships, and external communications; (2) providing guidance to senior CTH staff on attracting private sector support for the 250th;

and (3) operating with an understanding of and in cooperation with CTH Institutional Advancement Committee efforts to eliminate potential conflicts. The committee will act in alignment with the CTH mission, vision, and values to advance the goals of the America 250 | CT Commission.

Commission Chair Denise Merrill and the committee have conducted outreach to all mayors and first selectmen of Connecticut municipalities. Chair Denise Merrill and co-chairs of the Leadership Committee, Jonathan Harris (Eversource Energy, Director of Regulatory Affairs) and Sarah Harris (Mohegan Tribe, Vice Chairwoman), have presented at the following gatherings around the state:

- Council of Small Towns - Wednesday, September 6, 2023
- Lower Connecticut River Valley COG - Wednesday, October 25, 2023
- Naugatuck Valley COG - Friday, December 15, 2023
- Connecticut Council of Municipalities - Tuesday, January 9, 2024

Through this outreach, the commission has begun to establish its network of municipal contacts, with about 20 identified to date (Goal 2 of 2023 Action Plan).

Other outreach efforts that will be overseen by CT Humanities in 2024 include:

- Manage a calendar and website to raise awareness, build excitement, and encourage civic participation in activities around the semiquincentennial.
- Bring together organizations across Connecticut to celebrate the history of all residents, to be managed through CTH granting programs.
- Collaborate with community-level committees in towns across the state to direct programming from the grassroots level.

To date, CT Humanities has secured the following support for America 250 | CT:

- \$11,000 from 2 private donors
- \$135,000 from 2 private foundations

We will continue to solicit support from corporations, foundations, and other private donors in 2024.

Subcommittee Work Plans

Community & Organizational Engagement Subcommittee: The Engagement Subcommittee will promote an expansive and inclusive sense of America 250 | CT, identifying ways to engage a broad array of Connecticut residents in the commission's activities. This will require particular attention to finding ways to engage underrepresented groups that may not see themselves in this anniversary. The subcommittee will also encourage community-based activities, identifying community groups that may want to get involved, ensuring they are aware of the anniversary, and encouraging them to be as collaborative and inclusive as possible in their events.

Education Subcommittee: The Education Subcommittee will engage teachers, educators, and administrators in order to gather resources for teaching and studying the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, working to ensure that multiple perspectives are shared to encourage analysis and critical thinking. It will share events with teachers in order to spread the work to students and their families about events that are happening. It will also look for opportunities to allow students to participate in the commemoration.

Governance Subcommittee: The Governance Subcommittee worked on researching and writing the commission by-laws, ensuring that the IDEA values of the commission were incorporated. After the adoption of the by-laws at the October commission meeting, the committee began work on the 2023 annual report. Governance subcommittee members have started to talk about future projects, offering support and assistance to other subcommittees as needs arise.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) Subcommittee: This subcommittee will work with representatives of all other subcommittees to oversee efforts to make the 250th commemoration in Connecticut an inclusive experience for people from different backgrounds.

Marketing & Tourism Subcommittee: In partnership with the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development's Office of Marketing, the Marketing & Tourism Subcommittee will encourage and inspire the whole Connecticut tourism industry to create and offer America 250 | CT experiences. In 2024, the subcommittee will establish a brand, brand identity, brand guidelines document, and brand tool kit including video assets. It will revamp the commission's website and advise on the state's marketing plan for 250th activities.

2024 Commission Goals

Goal 1: Uncover and share stories that represent all the people of Connecticut, past and present.

Action Step 1: Promote the commission, its themes, and resources around the state.

Schedule: Ongoing

Benchmark 1: Participate in at least 6 festivals and fairs around the state

Benchmark 2: Conduct interviews and participate in conversations in local media outlets

Benchmark 3: Have organizations use commission website to promote local events

Action Step 2: Build on and share the resource library for CT history, featuring the four themes that the commission has established for CT's commemoration.

Schedule: Ongoing

Benchmark 1: Add to list of books and online resources on CT250.org website, particularly focusing on teacher resources

Benchmark 2: Share resource recommendations with all CT libraries and community liaisons

Goal 2: Create a community-based structure that will be used for commission work moving forward.

Action Step 1: Identify an America 250 | CT liaison in each town and city.

Schedule: January 1 – June 30, 2024

Benchmark 1: Identify 169 liaisons across the state, working with Councils of Government as able

Benchmark 2: Share liaison contact information with the public via website

Action Step 2: Encourage collaboration and inclusion in each municipality with participation from elected officials, community leaders, libraries, schools, community centers, local museums, and historic sites.

Schedule: Ongoing

Benchmark 1: Have conveners (Connecticut League of History Organizations, Connecticut Humanities, Connecticut Library Association, Designated Regional Service Organizations, etc.) encourage collaboration and meetings between organizations

Benchmark 2: Engage Tribal leaders, members of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, church leaders, and other community leaders in underrepresented groups

Benchmark 3: Encourage commission members to participate in these events, showing commission support for local organizations and events

Action Step 3: Host sessions to share the [America 250 | CT Planning Guide](#) and encourage brainstorming of ideas on how to align with commission themes.

Schedule: Ongoing

Benchmark 1: Update planning guide quarterly with new ideas and information

Benchmark 2: Host at least one session quarterly with partner organizations

Goal 3: Invite the public to engage with America 250 | CT themes.

Action Step 1: Identify historic events, sites, trails, buildings, and stories relevant to CT History that can be used to boost tourism in the state.

Schedule: January 1 – April 30, 2024

Benchmark 1: Identify at least one event, site, trail, and building per county that can be used as a starting point for research and activities

Benchmark 2: Share information with the public via website, including a timeline

Benchmark 3: Encourage scholarly research on underrepresented CT stories

Action Step 2: Using information collected, work with a curatorial team to develop an inclusive exhibition exploring Connecticut's role in the Revolutionary War that can be shared with all municipalities.

Schedule: May 1 – December 31, 2024

Benchmark 1: Gather a representative curatorial team to ensure multiple perspectives are taken into consideration

Benchmark 2: Conduct research and draft an exhibition script that can be told in three panels that will be fabricated in 2025 for distribution in 2026

Action Step 3: Encourage organizations around the state to engage with public history and civic literacy.

Schedule: Ongoing

Benchmark 1: Host at least one capacity-building workshop around community-centric history practices

Benchmark 2: Partner with the Secretary of the State's office to support civic engagement efforts

2024 Commission Meeting Dates

Commission

Wednesday, January 17, 2024 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Wednesday, April 17, 2024 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Wednesday, July 17, 2024 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Wednesday, October 16, 2024 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Community & Organizational Engagement Subcommittee

Thursday, January 11, 2024 – 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Thursday, February 8, 2024 – 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Thursday, March 14, 2024 – 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Thursday, April 11, 2024 – 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Thursday, May 9, 2024 – 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Thursday, June 13, 2024 – 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Thursday, July 11, 2024 – 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Thursday, August 8, 2024 – 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Thursday, September 12, 2024 – 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Thursday, October 10, 2024 – 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Thursday, November 14, 2024 – 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Thursday, December 12, 2024 – 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Education Subcommittee

Tuesday, January 30, 2024 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Tuesday, February 27, 2024 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Tuesday, March 26, 2024 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Tuesday, May 28, 2024 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Tuesday, June 25, 2024 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Tuesday, July 30, 2024 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Tuesday, August 27, 2024 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Tuesday, September 24, 2024 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM
Tuesday, October 29, 2024 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM
Tuesday, November 26, 2024 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM
Tuesday, December 17, 2024 – 3:30 to 5:00 PM

Governance Subcommittee

Monday, February 5, 2024 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM
Monday, May 13, 2024 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM
Monday, August 12, 2024 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM
Monday, November 18, 2024 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) Subcommittee

TBD

Marketing & Tourism Subcommittee

Wednesday, February 14, 2024 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM
Wednesday, May 15, 2024 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM
Wednesday, August 14, 2024 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM
Wednesday, November 13, 2024 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Subcommittee Chairs

Wednesday, February 14, 2024 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Wednesday, March 13, 2024 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Wednesday, May 15, 2024 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Wednesday, June 12, 2024 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Wednesday, August 14, 2024 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Wednesday, September 11, 2024 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Wednesday, November 13, 2024 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Wednesday, December 11, 2024 – 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM