

Ohio Commission for the U.S. Semiquincentennial

Approved Meeting minutes – Quarterly meeting

State Library of Ohio

Columbus, OH

December 12, 2025

Commission members present:

- Doug Preisse (co-chair), Van Meter-Ashbrook
- Michael B. Coleman (co-chair), Ice Miller, LLC
- Kathryn Dean-Dielman, Lorain County Historical Society-immediate past board president
- Kelly Falcone Hall, President & CEO, Western Reserve Historical Society
- Steve Hambley, Medina County Commissioner
- Thomas Hankins, member of the Friends of Fort Laurens
- Nancy Hollister, former Governor & Lt. Governor
- State Representative Adam Holmes
- Melinda Huntley, Ohio Travel Association-executive director
- Vincent Keeran, clerk of the Ohio Senate
- Megan Kvamme, Muskingum County entrepreneur
- State Senator Susan Manchester
- Charley Moses, board president, Ohio History Connection
- Kim Murnieks, Office of Budget and Management-director
- Paul Oyaski, former Mayor of Euclid
- Elizabeth Pierce, executive director, Cincinnati Museum Center
- Mayor Sharetta Smith, city of Lima
- Ted Strickland, former governor
- Leslie Wagner, immediate past president of the Ohio Local History Alliance
- Sarah Wickham, director, TourismOhio
- Megan Wood, Ohio History Connection executive director & CEO

Absent: State Senator Hearcel Craig; Chief Justice Sharon Kennedy; Adam Levine, executive director, Toledo Museum of Art; State Representative Joe Miller; David Painter, Clermont County Commissioner; Samantha Turner, Youngstown City Council; Ginger Warner, chair, Ohio Arts Council; Mackensie Wittmer, executive director, National Aviation Heritage Area

Staff: Todd Kleismit, executive director
Chris Hurtubise, communications director
Quanta Brown, operations director
Molly Kreuzman, Ohio Goes to the Movies program director
Bethany Berry, Ohio Goes to the Movies program coordinator
Taylor Tomu, community engagement specialist
Abby Reynolds, donor relations
Olivia Whapham, communications coordinator
Steven Withers, outreach & communications coordinator

Guests: Jen Aultman, Director, Historic Sites & Museums, Ohio History Connection; Hillary Bates, Community Affairs Director, City of Westerville; Chuck Bluestone, Bluestone Law Group; Lacey Bonar Hull, America 250-Ohio contractor; Jon Brewster, Project Director, Ohio History Connection; Charisse Burgess, Client Relations Specialist, Ice Miller; Ryan Burley, Director of Library Operations, State Library; Rebecca Carr, Muskingum 250 Committee; Donna Collins, Executive Director, Ohio Arts Council; Patrick Denier, Ohio Attorney General's Office; Michelle Frances, Executive Director, Ohio Library Council; Patricia Garling, Franklinton 250 Community; Steve George, Chief Advisor to the CEO, Ohio History Connection; Krista Horrocks, SHPO Administration, Ohio History Connection; Andrea Jordan, Darke County; Kim Kiehl, Executive Director, Ohioana Library; Susan Leininger, Ohio Society-Daughters of the American Revolution; Jamie Marsh, Videographer, Ohio History Connection; Frances McGee Cromartie, Daniel Cooper DAR Chapter; Colton Morton, ODRC Social Studies Teacher; Chris Nehring, Ohio Society-Daughters of the American Revolution; Doug Stein, Civic & Education Outreach Manager, Supreme Court of Ohio; Cheryl Subler, Executive Director, CCAO; Lisa Underwood, Ohio Travel Pavilion

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OPENING: State Library Mandy Knapp opened the meeting with an overview of the State Library and the services it provides Ohioans. Director of Library Operations Ryan Burley presented several rare historical documents from the State Library collections, including a letter to Arthur St. Clair written by Alexander Hamilton and signed by George Washington.

CALL TO ORDER: Commission Co-Chair Doug Preisse called the Commission meeting to order at 10:46 a.m. Co-Chair Preisse shared words of remembrance to honor founding director of the National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center and America 250-Ohio Commissioner John Fleming, who passed away in September. Co-Chair Preisse led a moment of silence to honor Dr. Fleming and his legacy.

Megan Wood took the roll and there were (20) commissioners and (23) guests in-person, (13) guests online, (10) commissioners were absent. Ms. Wood confirmed the presence of a quorum.

MOTION: Kathy Dean-Dielman made a motion to accept the amended meeting minutes. Seconded by Tom Hankins. The motion passed.

Executive Director & Staff Reports

Todd Kleismit provided an update on commission business and events.

- America 250-Ohio has participated in the following events since the commission last met:
 - Hosted the 2nd annual Underground Railroad Gathering at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center on Sep. 21 & 22, 2025.
 - Hosted a teacher workshop at Fort Laurens on Sep. 25, 2025.
 - Sponsored and participated in America’s River Roots Festival Oct. 8 – 12, 2025.
 - Participated in three events promoting The American Revolution documentary by Ken Burns.
 - Partnered with Carillon Historical Park to launch the Ohio Innovation Trail on Nov. 18, 2025. This is the fourth trail launched as part of the commission’s Trails & Tales program.
- Director Kleismit provided a brief overview of initiatives led by the National America250 Commission and Freedom250, the White House task force.
 - Freedom Truck Mobile Museums – A fleet of six mobile museums or “freedom trucks” are traveling the United States throughout 2026. They are available for states to request at local events.
 - Great American Road Trip – Involves 250 stops at historic sites, national parks and landmarks across the country.
 - History Rocks! Tour – U.S. Department of Education Secretary Linda McMahon and other education leaders will visit schools in all 50 states to recognize excellence in civic education.
 - Freedom Train – Plans developing to create a 2026 version of the Freedom Train that will traverse the Washington, D.C. to Philadelphia corridor in early July.
 - Our American Story – A year-long, cross-country journey collecting thousands of recorded interviews to help tell America’s story.
 - America Waves – An American flag will travel to every state and U.S. cemeteries overseas. The largest U.S. flag ever made will also be unveiled on the National Mall on July 4, 2026.

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- America Gives – An initiative to challenge individuals and organizations to increase their level of volunteering in 2026.
- Director Kleismit provided the following commission staff updates:
 - Olivia Whapham is the new Communications Coordinator.
 - Steven Withers is the new Outreach and Communications Coordinator.
 - Mayra Betances is the new Homecoming & Picnics Coordinator.
 - Two Regional Coordinators will be hired in January 2026 to enhance the commission's presence around the state.
 - Abby Bloor has transitioned from the role of Executive Assistant to Donor Relations Officer.
- Quanta Brown reviewed the three financial documents contained in the meeting packet: 1) Income Statement reporting FY26 expenses through October 31, 2025 2) FY26 GRF Budget document reporting funding allocations to commission projects 3) FY26 Operations Budget
- Ms. Brown reported that \$1.6M of the \$8.75M FY26 GRF allocation has been spent to date. Ms. Brown noted that the carryover dollars that have been discussed in previous commission meetings will appear in future budget reports after the FY26 allocated GRF dollars are spent.

Spotlight on Ohio Libraries

Michelle Francis, Executive Director of the Ohio Library Council (OLC), presented a brief overview of the Ohio Library Council, an organization that supports the 251 public library systems and over 7 million library cardholders in Ohio. Ms. Francis highlighted the many ways the OLC is participating in many America 250-Ohio activities and programs in 2026 and shared several examples:

- Multiple libraries are participating in Ohio Goes to the Movies and hosting movie screenings.
- Ohio Goes to the Movies – held webinar for public libraries last year and so many libraries are hosting OGTMM events across Ohio
- Libraries are collecting oral histories and archiving stories for their communities. Several library systems received an America 250-Ohio grant to do this work.
- Library book clubs are focusing on Revolutionary War era history and America 250-related topics.

Spotlight on Ohio State Fair Time Capsule

Chris Hurtubise provided a brief overview of the State Fair Time Capsule project.

- A time capsule was buried on the Ohio State Fairgrounds in 1976 and is scheduled to be unearthed in January 2026, consistent with the original intent that this time capsule be opened 50 years after its burial in 1976. The contents of the time capsule are unknown due to lack of historical records; once unearthed, the Ohio History Connection will conserve the contents.
- Future plans are underway to create and bury a new Ohio State Fair Time Capsule in 2026 in honor of the nation's 250th anniversary. A working group representing the commission, the Ohio State Fair and partner organizations is developing plans for the project.
- Organizations across Ohio will be invited to contribute materials for inclusion, and the objects will be collected between January and June 2026. The new time capsule will be dedicated on the final day of the State Fair, August 9, 2026.

Spotlight on Public Archaeology at Fort Laurens

Jen Aultman, Director of Historic Sites at the Ohio History Connection (OHC), and Jon Brewster, Project Director and Senior Archaeologist at OHC, provided an update on public archaeology and restoration

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efforts at Fort Laurens, Ohio's only Continental Revolutionary War fort and a National Historic Site. Ms. Aultman outlined three primary components of the Fort Laurens restoration project currently underway in anticipation of the nation's 250th birthday:

- Public Archaeology Program – Ongoing archaeological investigations are being conducted to better understand the fort's original layout and features. This work will inform future restoration efforts to help visitors better visualize the historic fort.
- Museum Exhibit Upgrades – Plans are in progress to completely redesign and update the visitor center museum exhibits to provide enhanced interpretation and educational opportunities for the public.
- Tomb of the Unknown Patriot Restoration – Renovations to the tomb plaza have largely been completed, and a rededication ceremony for the Tomb of the Unknown Patriot is planned for June 27, 2026.

Committee Reports

Committee Co-Chairs reported the following updates on their committees' activities:

- Revolutionary War Graves – Krista Horrocks, Department Manager of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), provided a brief update on the Revolutionary war Graves project.
 - Approximately 2,987 veterans' graves have been recorded to date across 941 cemeteries using the Survey123 app. Ms. Horrocks reviewed the county-level data identifying areas with lower participation and encouraged commissioners to assist with outreach efforts to the counties.
 - The Survey123 app will remain open for data collection beyond the originally planned closure date. While long-term data collection will continue, the goal is to finalize a dataset for July 4, 2026. The collected data will remain publicly accessible through the SHPO webpage.
- Heritage Tree Plantings – Leslie Wagner provided an update on the Heritage Tree Planting initiative.
 - Ms. Wagner reported that the program launched successfully in Allen County, with a total of 21 white oak trees planted during the 2025 spring and fall seasons. She noted that all trees and supplies were sourced from Ohio-based partners, and that participating communities have hosted public dedication ceremonies to celebrate local history and stewardship.
 - Ms. Wagner shared plans are underway to significantly expand the program in 2026, with outreach continuing to counties that have not yet confirmed participation. She also announced progress toward additional statewide sponsorships to support the expanded effort.
- Public Awareness – Elizabeth Pierce provided an update on recent committee activities. Highlights include the 40-page insert in Ohio Magazine featuring America 250-Ohio events and programs, as well as the website design refresh which will be rolled out in January 2026. Ms. Pierce also reviewed the increased earned media coverage the commission has received, social media engagement, and partnerships supporting statewide promotion. Commissioners were encouraged to amplify content by sharing information through their personal and organizational networks and to submit local events to the America 250-Ohio calendar.

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- Signature Events & Programming

Melinda Huntley provided a brief update on committee activities, noting that the committee's initiatives are designed to bring the nation's 250th anniversary into everyday community life through locally driven, participatory experiences. She emphasized that while the projects vary in format, they share a common focus on statewide reach, local partnerships, and long-term legacy.

- **Public Art** – This initiative, led in partnership with the Ohio Arts Council and Donna Collins, continues to expand statewide. Hundreds of murals have been documented through the Murals Across Ohio program, highlighting local history and community pride. Work continues to progress on the women's monument honoring Ohio women leaders. The artist, Brenda Council, is working in the Alan Cottrill studio in Zanesville. The monument unveiling is scheduled for 2026. The committee is exploring legacy materials, including a commemorative publication, to preserve and showcase the artwork beyond the anniversary year.
- **Ohio's Homecoming & Picnic** – Over 80 communities across Ohio have committed to hosting a picnic event. The committee has also secured support from major sponsors, including Presenting Sponsor Cenovus Energy, and is planning a large-scale Signature picnic in Central Ohio on July 4, 2026, in partnership with cultural and civic organizations, featuring daytime activities and an evening drone show. Planning continues on two additional signature picnics in Lima (June 27, 2026) and Toledo (July 11, 2026).
- **Buckeye Train** – The event will take place on Sat. April 25/Sun. April 26, 2026 and includes train rides and festivities at Dennison Depot. On Saturday a train ride will run from Columbus to Dennison Depot; on Sunday, the train will run from Newark to Coshocton to Dennison Depot. Tickets for the train are sold out for Saturday. Lots of free activities will be happening in Dennison for guests who do not ride the train, including a car show, a USO performance, vintage aircraft flyovers and historical interpreters. Registration for car vendors will open soon.
- **Trails & Tales** – Trails & Tales continues to expand, with four themed trails officially launched – Air & Space, Creativity, Lake Erie to Ohio River and Innovation. The Innovation Trail was the most recent trail to launch on Nov. 18, 2025 at Carillon Historical Park in Dayton. Collectively, there are 333 historic and cultural sites participating in the Trails & Tales program. The initiative has generated significant media attention and includes ongoing collaboration with tourism partners, authors, and site operators to support visitor engagement and long-term sustainability. The next trail to launch will be the Ohio Transportation Trail in April 2026, to align with the Buckeye Train event and Transportation Month.
- **Ohio Goes to the Movies** – OGTTM has seen strong participation across Ohio; the team launched a statewide events calendar featuring film screenings and related programming organized by community partners. Additional initiatives include digital publications highlighting Ohio's film history and partnerships with cultural and hospitality organizations to integrate Ohio-themed movie programming into local venues.

- Education – Paul LaRue provided an update on committee activities, highlighting statewide

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collaboration and educator engagement. He reported on the America 250 Citizenship Seal program, teacher workshops, service-learning partnerships with ServeOhio, and student engagement initiatives. Mr. LaRue noted upcoming programs including the Northwest Ordinance Symposium, History Bee events at the Statehouse, and partnerships with the Ohio School for the Blind and Ohio School for the Deaf.

- 88-County Engagement – Mr. Kleismit provided an update on the 88-County Engagement initiative, reporting that more than 320 communities have formally joined as America 250 -Ohio communities. Outreach and coordination efforts with statewide organizations are ongoing to ensure participation across all counties.
- Under-Told Stories - Kathryn Dean-Dielman and Frances McGee Cromartie provided an update on recent Under-Told Stories activities. Highlights included the following:
 - The committee's presentation at the American Association of State & Local History (AASLH) annual conference on September 14.
 - The 2nd annual Underground Railroad Conference held on September 21 & 22 at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center.
 - The continuing monthly blog series highlighting lesser-known Ohio stories. The presenters emphasized the importance of inclusive storytelling and encouraged continued participation and content submissions from commissioners and community partners.
- Philanthropic Partners - Mr. Kleismit noted that fundraising efforts are ongoing, including donor recognition plans associated with the Semiquincentennial Grove at Ohio Village.

Discussion & Announcements

With no announcements to make or new business to introduce, the meeting concluded.

MOTION: Nancy Hollister moved to adjourn. Steve Hambley seconded. Motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 1:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Abby Reynolds Bloor on behalf of Commission Secretary, Megan Wood.