

**Ohio Commission for the U.S. Semiquincentennial**  
Approved Meeting minutes – Quarterly meeting  
Cincinnati Museum Center  
Cincinnati, Ohio  
September 11, 2025

*Commission members present:*

- Doug Preisse (co-chair), Van Meter-Ashbrook
- Michael B. Coleman (co-chair), Ice Miller, LLC
- State Senator Hearcel Craig
- Kathryn Dean-Dielman, Lorain County Historical Society-immediate past board president
- Kelly Falcone Hall, Western Reserve Historical Society
- Thomas Hankins, member of the Friends of Fort Laurens
- State Representative Adam Holmes
- Melinda Huntley, Ohio Travel Association-executive director
- Vincent Keeran, clerk of the Ohio Senate
- Charley Moses, board president, Ohio History Connection
- Kim Murnieks, Office of Budget and Management-director
- Paul Oyaski, former Mayor of Euclid
- David Painter, Clermont County Commissioner
- Mayor Sharetta Smith, city of Lima
- Ted Strickland, former governor
- Samantha Turner, Youngstown City Council
- Leslie Wagner, immediate past president of the Ohio Local History Alliance
- Sarah Wickham, director, TourismOhio
- Mackensie Wittmer, executive director, National Aviation Heritage Area
- Megan Wood, Ohio History Connection executive director & CEO

*Absent:* John Fleming, PhD, museum professional; Steve Hambley, Medina County Commissioner; Nancy Hollister, former governor; Chief Justice Sharon Kennedy, Megan Kvamme, Muskingum County entrepreneur; Adam Levine, executive director, Toledo Museum of Art; State Senator Susan Manchester; State Representative Joe Miller; Elizabeth Pierce, executive director, Cincinnati Museum Center; Ginger Warner, chair, Ohio Arts Council

*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, executive assistant

Guests: Jason Alexander, Hamilton County Clerk of Courts; Chuck Bluestone, Bluestone Law Group; Lacey Bonar Hull, America 250-Ohio contractor; Tracie Braun, Clermont County; Mary Ann Christie, Ohio Women's Suffrage Commission; Donna Collins, Executive Director, Ohio Arts Council; Taylur Cunningham, Dennison Railroad Depot Museum; Patrick Denier, Ohio Attorney General's Office; John Dichtl, CEO, American Association for State and Local History; Rachel Doellman, Great Parks of Hamilton County; Steve George, Ohio History Connection; Jeff Herbert, Hamilton County Genealogical Society; Robert Horner, Administrative Director, Supreme Court of Ohio; Joe Hornsby, Councilmember, City of Wyoming; Krista Horrocks, SHPO Administration, Ohio History Connection; Lorita Jennings, Hamilton County Clerk of Courts; Susan Leininger, State Regent, Ohio DAR; Haley Martin, America 250-Ohio contractor; Frances McGee Cromartie, Daniel Cooper DAR Chapter; Chris Nehring, State Vice Regent, Ohio DAR; Whitney Owens, Chief Learning Officer, Cincinnati Museum Center; Pavan Parikh, Hamilton County Clerk of Courts; Patrick Poole, author; Shawna Rood, executive director, Mas y Mas Music Foundation; Doug Stein, Civic & Education Outreach Manager, Supreme Court of Ohio; Cheryl Subler, Executive Director, CCAO; Helen Tracey-Noren, Communications Specialist, Colerain Township; Wendy Zucal, executive director, Dennison Railroad Depot Museum

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**CALL TO ORDER:** Commission Co-Chair Doug Preisse called the Commission meeting to order at 10:41 am.

Due to recent changes in the Ohio Revised Code’s public meeting rules, Mr. Preisse noted that today’s commission meeting and all commission meetings will continue to have a hybrid format with in-person and virtual attendance options for commissioners and guests.

A moment of silence was observed in remembrance of lives lost and impacted by the events of September 11, 2001.

Whitney Owens, Chief Learning Officer of the Cincinnati Museum Center, welcomed the group to Cincinnati and provided a brief overview of the history of the Union Terminal. The Cincinnati Museum Center will host multiple programs in 2026 to celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> and will display a copy of the Holt broadside of the Declaration of Independence, which is one of the few remaining copies that were printed and signed by all the colonies on July 9, 1776.

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:** Mayor Sharetta Smith made a motion to accept the amended meeting minutes. Seconded by Kathy Dean-Dielman. The motion passed.

### **2025 AASLH Conference Overview**

John Dichtl, President & CEO of the American Association of State & Local History, provided a brief overview of AASLH’s four-day annual conference that’s currently being held in Cincinnati. The purpose is to energize the history and museum community, and 46 states and five countries are represented at this year’s conference. AASLH supports the state 250 commissions in the following ways:

- Convening the state commissions at the annual conference and facilitating working sessions.
- Producing the Field Guide for commemorating the 250<sup>th</sup> which includes themes, resources and planning tools for state commissions.
- Promoting the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary and encouraging all types of organizations to participate.

### **Executive Director & Staff Reports**

Todd Kleismit and staff gave their reports.

- Director Kleismit provided a brief overview of National America 250’s upcoming programs:
  - America’s Field Trip – A multi-year contest that invites students to submit essays, artwork and videos in a contest with a chance to win a trip to an iconic American historic site.
  - 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.
  - America Gives – An initiative to challenge individuals and organizations to increase their level of volunteering in 2026.

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- 2026 Commission Meeting Dates and Locations:
  - March 13, 2026 – Toledo Museum of Art
  - June 12, 2026 – People’s Bank in Marietta
  - September 18, 2026 – Dawes Arboretum in Newark
  - December 2026 – Ohio Statehouse
- The calendar function is live on the website and open for organizations and individuals to submit events for promotion by America 250-Ohio.
- Two additional barns have been painted and dedicated in commemoration of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. One barn in Coolville (Athens County) is themed to the Northwest Ordinance and the second barn in Clermont County is themed to the Underground Railroad.
- America’s River Roots festival is Oct 8 – 12. America 250-Ohio is a sponsor and will have a booth presence each day of the festival.

**2025 Ohio State Fair Recap**

Chris Hurtubise reported on the commission’s successful engagement at the 2025 State Fair. This year’s booth was in the Lausche Building, which hosts youth exploration activities. The Lausche Building’s 2025 theme was “Celebrating America”, and the commission presented an enhanced guest engagement experience with costumed characters, games, crafts, props, a photo op backdrop and free swag. The commission engaged with over 8,000 people. Next year’s fair experience will highlight the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary theme even more with more décor, the opening of the new Ohio Building, and the reveal of the time capsule that was buried on the fair grounds in 1976.

**Revolutionary War Veterans Graves Identification Project**

Krista Horrocks, Department Manager of SHPO Administration at the Ohio History Connection, presented a brief update on the Veterans Graves Identification Project. An estimated 7,000 Revolutionary War veterans are buried in Ohio. This project will create a comprehensive database that includes veterans’ burial locations, GPS coordinates and photographs. The project incorporates data collected by the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution, as well as new data captured by crowdsourcing. To date, 230 individuals have input data since the project launched on Memorial Day and over 2,200 graves and 673 cemeteries have been documented. Data collection will continue through Dec 31, 2025, and then the data cleanup phase will occur throughout 2026. Ms. Horrocks provided a brief overview of the project’s data collection portal and the live results dashboard on the SHPO website.

**FY2026 Commission Budget**

Todd Kleismit and Quanta Brown reviewed the FY26 GRF Budget, FY26 Operations Budget and Fundraising Spending Plan documents and shared the following highlights:

- The final FY26 state budget allocated \$8.75M to the commission.
- The commission staff’s FY26 budget proposal allocates approximately \$5M of the \$8.75M to projects and programs, \$3M to operations and \$750K to a strategic project fund. The strategic project fund will support high-impact projects around the state that are already in progress and align with America 250-Ohio’s goals. The management committee will review and approve funding proposals.
- Total FY25 spending was \$2.25M out of the allocated \$3M. A plan for the carryover dollars will be developed in 2026 after increased project spending is underway and staff can determine where best to allocate the carryover funds.

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**MOTION:** Melinda Huntley moved to approve the Final FY26 budget. Senator Hearcel Craig seconded. Motion passed.

**Committee Reports**

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

- **Public Awareness**

Chris Hurtubise provided a brief update on the committee's work on behalf of commissioner Elizabeth Pierce.

- Ms. Hurtubise reported on the commission's growth on social media, including an increase of 1,400 followers on Facebook and 250 followers on Instagram. Social media engagement also remains strong.
- America 250-Ohio has also received strong earned media due to multiple events and program launches, with 87 stories this summer and 75M impressions received.
- 41,000 active users have visited the America 250-Ohio website this summer.
- Monthly eNews has grown to 3.5K subscribers with a very strong average open rate of 50% (industry standard is 15-18%).
- 4<sup>th</sup> Grade History Pass Partner network has grown to include over 60 partners.
- Several upcoming events and programs the Public Awareness Committee will support include:
  - Promoting a special America 250-Ohio insert (40 pages of content) in the Nov/Dec edition of Ohio Magazine.
  - Promoting the recently launched events calendar on the America 250-Ohio website. So far 70 events have been added by communities around the state.
  - Working with PBS stations in Ohio to support The American Revolution documentary series by Ken Burns, which airs November 16, 2025.
  - Supporting the Underground Railroad Conference, the launch of the Innovation Trail, and county Heritage Tree plantings.
  - Producing a 2026 calendar.

- **Signature Events & Programming**

Melinda Huntley provided a brief update on activities of the committee.

- **Public Art** – Donna Collins is leading the Public Art Initiative and two major projects.
  - Murals Across Ohio links public murals that celebrate Ohio's people and places. 208 murals have been identified and added to the program to date. A digital map with photos and information on the artist is available on the commission website.
  - Earned coverage of the murals program includes 10 news stories with 5.2M impressions and more than 464K impressions generated by social media.
  - The Ohio Women's Monument will be unveiled during the summer of 2026. The artist, Brenda Council, is working on the monument at the Alan Cotrill Studio in Zanesville and progress is posted every week on the Ohio Arts Council's social media pages. People can also go to the studio Monday through Friday and watch her work in-person.
- **Ohio's Homecoming & Picnic** – Megan Wood is leading this effort. Three signature picnics are being held in collaboration with Visionary Sponsor Cenovus Energy. They will occur in Central Ohio, Toledo and Lima.

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- The Central Ohio Picnic has several new partners supporting the effort including CAPA, the Columbus Symphony Orchestra and the Ohio Statehouse.
  - Community picnics are being organized by America 250-Ohio Communities, and the commission will support and promote them with kits and digital resources. Nearly 70 community picnics are signed up with an estimated 100,000 total attendees.
  - The call for hosting a community picnic was released to the 250 communities in April and the team is currently soliciting communities and finding ways to cross-promote with OGTTM and the Buckeye Train.
  - **Buckeye Train** – Wendy Zucal and Jason Johnson are leading this effort.
    - The Buckeye Train celebration will take place on April 25 & 26, 2026 and include two days of trains, planes and automobiles. This involves a car show of 250 cars, aviation flyovers, WWII re-enactors, entertainment, food and more.
    - The Buckeye Train had a successful launch on June 26, 2025 with over 250 people attending. Tickets became available after the launch, and they've sold so quickly that the team has added two additional passenger cars.
    - McDonalds is the Buckeye Train ticket sponsor.
    - Anyone interested in volunteering for this event can reach out to commission staff.
  - **Trails & Tales** – Melinda Huntley leads this effort with Lance Woodworth of Destination Toledo.
    - Six statewide driving trails are being developed that link cultural and historical sites across Ohio around a theme that highlights Ohio's contributions to the nation and world. The Air & Space Trail launched in May 2024 and the Creativity Trail launched in February 2025.
    - The third driving trail, the Lake Erie to Ohio River Trail, launched at Geneva State Park on Aug. 8, 2025. The trail tells the stories of Ohio's waterways – Lake Erie, Ohio river and canals.
    - Two additional components will be added to each of the trails to enhance the guest experience– an app that is GPS activated and a Passport where guests who visit 15 or more sites on each trail will receive a patch.
    - Creativity Trail continues to receive a lot of engagement, interest and earned media and has generated 80M impressions to date.
  - **Ohio Goes to the Movies** – Highlights from OGTTM include:
    - The team has secured participating venues in all 88 counties. Venues include historic theaters, libraries, drive-ins and traditional movie theaters.
    - Molly Kreuzman is speaking In October at the University of Cincinnati at the Association of Film Commissioners International, attended by 180 film commissioners from across the globe.
    - The OGTTM movie database continues to be a valuable resource and is available on the OGTTM website.
    - OGTTM has also launched a monthly digital magazine which has approx. 3,000 subscribers.
- Education

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Taylor Tomu provided a brief update on behalf of co-chairs Rep. Joe Miller and Paul LaRue.

- The Ohio Council for Social Studies is hosting their annual conference in October. Rep. Miller, Mr. LaRue, Ms. Tomu and committee member Kimberly Huffman will present a session and share opportunities for engagement.
- The Northwest Ordinance Conference will take place Jan 30 & 31 at OSU and will focus on scholarship and how to teach and elevate the importance of the Northwest Ordinance. The conference is for educators, teachers, scholars, historians and students.
- Mr. LaRue has created a companion curriculum to the Revolutionary War Graves Identification project available for teachers and students.
- On Sep 25, the committee is hosting a free teacher workshop at Fort Laurens to share resources and tools for teaching Revolutionary War-era history in the classroom.
- The committee is partnering with ServeOhio on the Service Learning Institute, which provides grants to schools and educational organizations across Ohio for students to create and implement service learning projects.

- 88-County Engagement

Taylor Tomu provided a brief report on the committee's activities on behalf of Samantha Turner and Cheryl Subler.

- Over 300 communities spread across all 88 counties have signed on to participate as an official America 250-Ohio Community.
- The committee released the "Get Started" and "Get Working" onboarding guides for communities to help them with their 2026 planning.
- The next phase will involve identifying community liaisons for communities that don't yet have ones assigned and connecting them with statewide resources.

- Under-Told Stories

Kathy Dean-Dielman and Frances McGee Cromartie provided a brief update on the Under-Told Stories Committee's work.

- The committee publishes stories monthly on the America 250-Ohio blog featuring overlooked Ohioans and events. They are seeking guest authors to contribute blog stories, especially stories that highlight under-told histories in different parts of the state.
- This Saturday, Sep 13, 2025 – the committee will host a roundtable at the AASLH conference. The session is called *Bridging Journeys: Parallels Between U.S. Immigration and Underground Railroad Freedom Seekers*. Frances McGee Cromartie will facilitate a panel discussion with an immigration lawyer and a scholar on the Underground Railroad.
- September 21 -22, 2025 – 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Underground Railroad Conference will be a two-day event at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. Sunday afternoon will be a free admission day for the public that will include presentations by interpreters and exhibits by local students that demonstrate their understanding of freedom and freedom seekers. Sunday evening will feature a key-note speaker and dinner. Monday will include sessions with scholarly examinations of the Underground Railroad, focusing on methods of teaching and interpretation.

- Philanthropic Partners

Co-Chair Chuck Bluestone provided a brief update on the committee's work.

- The committee has raised \$770,000 to date. Additionally, the committee just secured a \$15,000 pledge from a new donor.
- The commission is working with the Columbus Brewing Company to release a specially

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branded America 250 beer and can in 2026, with other program integrations around the beer release.

- Mr. Bluestone reported on a new giving campaign the committee is rolling out specifically for individuals. Donors of \$1,000+ will be recognized in the new Ohio Semiquincentennial Grove that's being planted in the revitalized Ohio Village. Donors will have their names engraved on a bronze plaque in the style of Ohio's historical markers and will be invited to the Ohio Village's re-opening in summer 2026.
- Mr. Bluestone has been sharing this giving opportunity with his network and has received a positive response. Mr. Bluestone asked commissioners and committee members to share this opportunity and referenced the template letter available for their use in the meeting packets.

**Discussion & Announcements**

Co-Chair Priebe invited commissioners and guests to the Cincinnati Hilton directly following this meeting to participate in the AASLH Conference meet and greet for state commissions. The next Commission Meeting will be held on Friday, December 12, 2025, at the State Library in Columbus.

**MOTION:** Mayor Sharetta Smith moved to adjourn. Kelly Falcone-Hall seconded. Motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 1:40 p.m.

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