Ohio Commission for the U.S. Semiquincentennial

Unapproved Meeting Minutes – Quarterly Meeting

Peoples Bank

Marietta, Ohio

June 12, 2026

Commission members present:

- Doug Preisse (co-chair), Van Meter-Ashbrook
- State Senator Hearcel Craig
- Kathryn Dean-Dielman, Lorain County Historical Society-immediate past board president
- Thomas Hankins, member of the Friends of Fort Laurens
- Steve Hambley, Medina County Commissioner
- Nancy Hollister, former Governor & Lt. Governor
- 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
- Elizabeth Pierce, executive director, Cincinnati Museum Center
- Samantha Turner, Youngstown City Council
- Paul Oyaski, former Mayor of Euclid
- Mayor Sharetta Smith, city of Lima
- Ted Strickland, former governor
- Leslie Wagner, immediate past president of the Ohio Local History Alliance
- Megan Wood, Ohio History Connection executive director & CEO
- Frances McGee-Cromartie, retired judge and active member of DAR
- Denise Driehaus, County Commissioners Association of Ohio president
- Ginger Warner, chair, Ohio Arts Council

Commission members absent:

- Michael B. Coleman (co-chair)
- Kelly Falcone Hall, President & CEO, Western Reserve Historical Society
- Megan Kvamme, Muskingum County entrepreneur
- Adam Levine, executive director, Toledo Museum of Art
- Mackensie Wittmer, executive director, National Aviation Heritage Area
- State Senator Susan Manchester
- Chief Justice Sharon Kennedy
- Sarah Wickham, director, TourismOhio
- State Representative Joe Miller

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 Bloor, donor relations

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Steven Withers, outreach & communications coordinator
Lacey Bonar Hull, monthly themes project coordinator
Haley Martin, project coordinator
Michael Brennan, regional outreach ambassador (Cleveland area)
Andrea Jordan (regional outreach ambassador (Darke County area)
Kacey Brankamp, executive assistant

Guests: Donna Collins, Executive Director, Ohio Arts Council; Patrick Denier, Ohio Attorney General's Office; Steve George, Chief Advisor to the CEO, Ohio History Connection; Krista Horrocks, SHPO Administration, Ohio History Connection; Doug Stein, Civic & Education Outreach Manager, Supreme Court of Ohio; Wendy Zucal, Executive Director, Dennison Railroad Depot Museum; Taylur Cunningham, Marketing Coordinator, Dennison Railroad Depot Museum; Brian Chavez, Senator, Ohio Senate; Kevin Ritter, Representative; Ohio House of Representatives; Aidan Reagh, Discover Vinton County; Rich Donahue, Lawrence County; Matthew and Brenda Lucas, Revolutionary War Graves volunteers; Melody Young, Ross-Chillicothe Convention and Visitors Bureau; Terressa Reep, DAR; Becca Carr, Muskingum County; Elaine Naples, Crawford County

CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOMING REMARKS: Commission Co-Chair Doug Preisse welcomed everyone and called the Commission meeting to order at 10:39 a.m. Co-Chair Preisse noted the significance of the moment on the cusp of the 4th of July. He thanked the Commissioners, partners, community members, and all who've contributed to the work of the Commission. He gave a special acknowledgement to Senator Susan Manchester who recently welcomed a baby boy. He acknowledged the elected officials and other guests in attendance, and welcomed Senator Brian Chavez and Representative Kevin Ritter to give remarks.

Co-Chair Preisse introduced Tyler Wilcox, President and CEO of Peoples Bank, who welcomed the Commissioners and guests.

Commissioner Nancy Putnam Hollister also welcomed the Commissioners and guests to Marietta.

Co-chair Preisse recognized Wendy Zucal and the Dennison Railroad Depot for the Buckeye Train and Transportation Celebration. He presented a commemorative gift on behalf of the Commission.

Commission Secretary Megan Wood took the roll and there were (21) commissioners and (15) guests in-person, several guests online, (9) commissioners were absent. Ms. Wood confirmed the presence of a quorum.

ADOPTION OF MEETING MINUTES: Senator Hearcel Craig made a motion to accept the March 13, 2026 Commission meeting minutes and Nancy Hollister seconded the motion. The motion passed.

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

- Public Awareness – Chris Hurtubise provided an update on recent committee activities. Among the highlights:
    - Events calendar has over 1,000 events listed.
    - Significant earned media in the last quarter with 225 media placements; 500+ million impressions.
    - Strong social media presence and awareness with 55% growth from previous quarter.
    - 100,000 website visits in last quarter; second most visited page is events calendar
    - Launched robust advertising campaign that includes a partnership with Ohio Association of Broadcasters for radio and TV exposure across the state.
    - 4th Grade History Pass PLUS program announcement on May 21; over 40 sites participating, each will receive a stipend to allow a 4th grader and up to four family members free admission. Sponsors for this program are Nordson, Honda and GE Aerospace.
    - Introduced merchandise page on website
- Education – Taylor Tomu provided an update on committee activities on behalf of Representative Miller and Paul LaRue.
    - Partnership with Department of Education and Workforce led to AM 250-OH logo placement on Citizenship seals for high school seniors.
    - First Homecoming Picnic occurred at Wayne County Career Center and Garfield Middle

School hosted an America 250 event for students.
    - Service-Learning Institute partnership allowed 4,000 students to get involved and complete a community service project.
    - Video of Ohio School for the Deaf and the Blind AM 250-Ohio event highlighted the impact of the event at Fort Laurens for the students.

- Signature Events & Programming – Melinda Huntley provided an update on committee activities.

    - Engaged more than 900 partner organizations, all 88 counties with 206+ million impressions.

    - **Public Art** – More than 500 murals have been documented through the Murals Across Ohio program, with an additional 100+ coming online in the next month. In May 2027, a public art book will be published highlighting the murals and other artwork across the state. Work continues on the women's monument by artist Brenda Councill, who is working in the Alan Cottrill studio in Zanesville. The groundbreaking was in March and is scheduled for completion this fall.

    - **Buckeye Train** – Event was very successful with 11,500 attendees from 28 states and 2 countries. Estimated economic impact: $2.5 million in visitor spending.

    - **Ohio Goes to the Movies** – More than 10,000 attendees at 129 events to date.

    - **Ohio's Homecoming & Picnic** – More than 170 picnics planned, six have already taken place. There are several large-scale Signature picnics scheduled for the Ohio Statehouse/Columbus Commons, Lima, Toledo, Youngstown and Cincinnati.

    - **Trails & Tales** – Trails & Tales' five themed trails officially launched – Air & Space, Creativity, Lake Erie to Ohio River, Transportation, and Innovation. 384 unique sites featured across all trails. Brightr Travel Passport kicked off; participants can log their site visits and earn patches. Travel Storys app also launched with GPS-initiated narration of trails sites. Final trail is Leadership which will launch in the fall. New exhibit at rest area near Wapakoneta will feature the Ohio Glass and Pottery Route and the Creativity Trail.

- Philanthropic Partners – Abby Bloor provided an update on fundraising efforts.
    - More than $1 million in private dollars has been raised to date from 16 corporate and foundation partners.
    - Recent contributors include Honda and City of Columbus City Council.
    - Ms. Bloor noted that fundraising efforts are winding down and shifting to sponsor recognition and activation.

- Under-Told Stories - Kathryn Dean-Dielman and Frances McGee-Cromartie provided an update on recent Under-Told Stories activities. Highlights included the following:
    - The monthly blog series highlighting lesser-known Ohio stories continues with emphasis on the importance of inclusive storytelling; Commissioners are encouraged to spend time reviewing the stories.
    - Classic for Columbus event raised $5,000 in scholarships to Ohio's historically black colleges and universities; will help coordinate the Sports Forum in September

- Keepers of the Culture podcast will launch on June 15; hosted by Columbus TV personality Angela Pace.
- This year's annual Underground Railroad Gathering will take place September 27-28 at Western Reserve Historical Society and will include bus tours, genealogy, speakers, and other activities.

- 88-County Engagement – Councilmember Samantha Turner provided an update on the 88-County Engagement initiative, noting that 550+ communities across all 88 counties have signed on as official 250 communities. She highlighted Ignite the Night event in Youngstown on July 5 and asked communities present to provide updates:
  - Rich Donahue reported on activities in Lawrence County.
  - Elaine Naples reported on activities in Crawford County.

- Revolutionary War Veterans Graves – Krista Horrocks provided a brief update on the Revolutionary War Graves project.
  - Nearly 600 volunteers participated in the year-long call for Revolutionary War Grave site documentation.
  - 4,344 gravesites recorded.
  - PBS News Hour featured the program that aired on national TV in May.
  - Volunteers Matthew and Brenda Lucas were recognized for having logged 806 sites, approximately 20% of total data collected.
  - The Survey123 app will remain open for data collection. The collected data will remain publicly accessible through the SHPO webpage.
  - Ross County dedicating monument to Revolutionary War veterans on July 4.

- Heritage Tree Plantings – Leslie Wagner provided an update on the Heritage Tree Planting initiative.
  - Ms. Wagner reported that 46 trees have been planted to date.
  - She noted some of the creative dedication events.
  - Several communities have taken it upon themselves to plant additional trees.
  - Ms. Wagner requested assistance to making contact with the 11 remaining counties who have not responded to staff requests.
  - Registration deadline is June 30.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT: Todd Kleismit provided an update on commission business and events.

- Mr. Kleismit thanked Nancy Hollister and the Marietta community for welcoming the commission.
- He highlighted several events and programs:
  - Spring events: Arts Impact Conference in Cincinnati, Stan Hywet in Akron, Mahogany Power in Columbus, City Club in Cleveland, and Jack Marchbanks book launch in Columbus;
  - Several recent Ohio Historical Marker dedications featuring AM 250-Ohio logo; the manufacturer Sewah Studios located in Marietta;
  - Barn mural paintings, including a final painting to occur this July;
  - DeWine Ice Cream Social on June 14;
  - Great American Bike Adventure (GOBA) and connection with Route 250;

    - Sports Forum planning well underway with some ambitious plans for events in Cincinnati, Columbus and Canton;
    - 4th of July Signature Picnic in Columbus;
    - Declaration of Independence readings on July 8 – coordinating a video montage of citizens reading the Declaration and encouraging communities to coordinate their own community readings;
    - Ohio State Fair runs from July 29 to August 9, anticipated to be bigger than ever; commissioners are encouraged to sign up for a shift at the America 250-Ohio booth.
- Director Kleismit noted the distinction between different America 250 logos at national and state level.
- Director Kleismit reviewed the Strategic Project Fund and recipients to date. He noted that the fund is now closed and is not accepting new applications unless the commission feels otherwise.
- Director Kleismit reviewed the FY26 budget and year-to-date spending through April. He noted that Ohio will deliver one of the best 250 state celebrations and will do so within budget constraints.
- Quanta Brown provided some additional comments, including noting line items that are over budget: salaries, due to additional staff being hired to meet workload demands; printing and publications, which is a reallocation of dollars from another line item.
- Director Kleismit introduced the proposed FY27 budget. Each line in the budget was reduced based on anticipated allocation for FY27. Philanthropic dollars plus some carryover from FY26 help augment the budget.
- Director Kleismit acknowledged and thanked Ms. Brown for her work on the budget.
- Ms. Brown provided some additional comments: staff plans to be conservative with the FY27 budget to allow for potential unanticipated support and to preserve a pot of money for legacy projects beyond the life of the commission.

MOTION: Nancy Hollister motioned to adopt the proposed budget. Senator Hearcel Craig seconded. The motion passed.

Discussion & Announcements

Nancy Hollister shared information about events in Washington County and encouraged commissioners to visit the museums, shops and other attractions in Marietta.

The meeting concluded.

MOTION: Melinda Huntley moved to adjourn. Vincent Keeran seconded. Motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 1:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Kacey Brankamp on behalf of Commission Secretary, Megan Wood.