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**Rappahannock Record • Southside Sentinel**  
Special Commemorative Supplement • July 2, 2026

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For 20 years, Kristen has called Middlesex County home. She understands the realities of protecting a rural community with long response times, limited resources, and the critical need for strong, experienced law enforcement leadership to change the culture of the sheriff's office, establish strong partnerships and build community trust.

This isn't politics for Kristen, it's personal. It's about keeping families safe, having the law enforcement experience to assure situations are being handled properly, supporting law enforcement personnel, and building partnerships that make this community stronger.

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**Psalm 33:12** — Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He chose for His inheritance.

**2 Chronicles 7:14** — If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear them from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

**Philippians 4:4** — Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

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# AMERICA

*celebrating* **250** years

**W**e are a nation oft divided. But this month, we put political differences aside and come together to celebrate our heritage, a nation born to be free. In July, the Declaration of Independence turns 250 and we commemorate this semiquincentennial with a supplement to the Rappahannock Record and Southside Sentinel filled with not only national trivia and facts, but stories of local historical appeal.

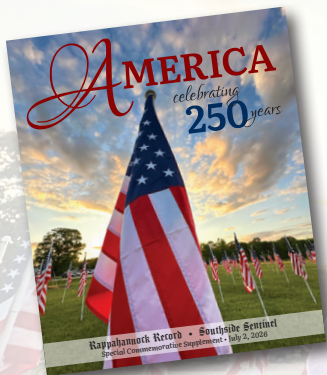
Meet 21st century craftspeople practicing centuries old trades—the volunteers with the Heathsville Forge Blacksmiths Guild. We introduce you to local historians telling the stories of families and businesses in Northumberland, Lancaster and Middlesex counties. See how they help to preserve and present our rich history.

We also introduce you to the Nickens Nine, Black family members who played key roles in the Revolutionary War, and an historical building in Middlesex where a rebellion was lit.

We hope this publication adds to your celebration and will serve as a keepsake of this national milestone.

It's a party in the USA this month. Happy birthday America!

*Susan & Lisa*  
 susan@rapprecord.com  
 lisa@rapprecord.com



## On the Cover

Old Glory stands strong.  
*photo by Tom Chillemi*

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# America then & now

Celebrations of the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the United States of America will unfold throughout 2026. As millions join in the festivities, it can be fun to compare the nation in its infancy to the one that has since firmly established itself as a global leader.

## Population

- **1780:** 2.8 million\*
- **2025:** 342 million\*\*

\* The National Archives note that the first decennial census of the United States was not taken until 1790, so the figure cited for 1780 is a widely accepted estimate of the burgeoning nation's population during the opening years of the American Revolutionary War.

\*\* This represents the U.S. Census Bureau population estimate as of late 2025.

## Income taxes - 1776: 0%

Debates regarding income taxes may seem like an ever-present component of American life, but colonists did not pay income tax in 1776. Though taxation was undeniably a notable issue throughout colonial America, the Tax Foundation notes the situation was considerably different in 1776 than it is today, when taxes are a highly debated component of American life. In 1776, the British Crown relied on tariffs and excise taxes to fund the American colonies, whereas modern Americans pay federal and, in most states, state income taxes to finance a range of public goods and services.

## Land mass

- **1783:** 800,000 sq miles
- **2026:** just under 3.6 million sq miles

The Times Atlas of World History indicates that the United States had an area of approximately 800,000 square miles in 1783. The country is considerably larger today, with a rough land mass of just under 3.6 million square miles according to the U.S. Census Bureau. To put that expansion since the nascent days of the nation in perspective, today the combined land mass of the country's two largest states eclipses the land mass of the entire nation in the early 1780s. Alaska (estimated land mass 571,000 square miles) and Texas (262,000), with roughly 833,000 square miles between them, are larger than the total land mass of the United States in 1783.

## States

According to the National Constitution Center, a series of resolutions passed by the Second Continental Congress in September 1776 officially cited the collective colonies fighting in the American Revolutionary War as the "United States."

- **1776:** 13
- **2026:** 50

## Transportation

- **Late eighteenth century:** Horses
- **2025:** 298.7 million registered vehicles

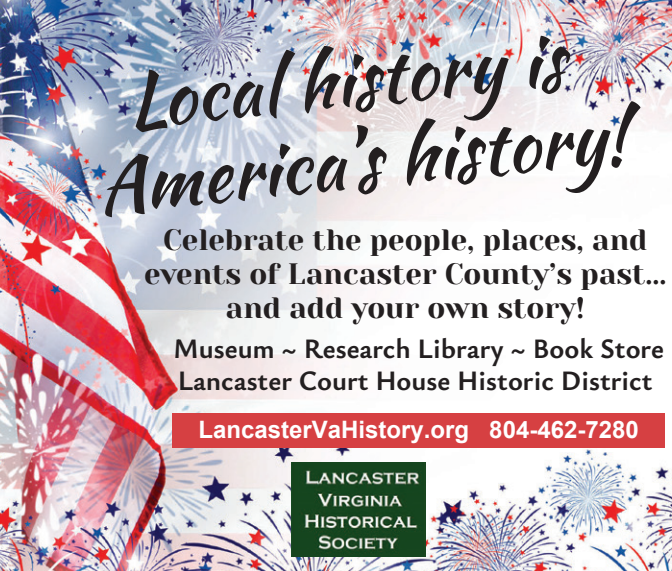
The Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress notes that walking was the most common and cheapest mode of transportation in the late eighteenth century. Horses and wagons enabled business and distance travel, but such modes were only available to those who could afford it, greatly limiting who could get around by any means other than their own feet. Getting around in the present day is a little more accessible, and a recent analysis from Hedges & Company found there were 298.7 million registered vehicles in the U.S. in 2025.



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# UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



## A nation gets a name

September 9, 1776, may not be the first date Americans think of when pondering their nation's history, but it's a significant day nonetheless. According to the National Constitution Center, on September 9, 1776, the Second Continental Congress adopted a new name for a collective of colonies that had been referred to as the "United Colonies." The name chosen on that day in late summer 1776, the United States of America, has endured. While the opening sentence of the Declaration of Independence, which was issued on July 4, 1776, refers to the "thirteen united States of America," it was a little more than two months later when the Congress passed a series of resolutions, including one in which it replaced "United Colonies" with "United States" as the fledgling nation's new name.

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On July 15, 1774, the eligible voters of Middlesex County met inside the colonial courthouse in Urbanna, seen here in a recent view, and elected James Montague and Edmund Berkeley to represent Middlesex in the Virginia Assembly and presented the Middlesex Resolutions stating that the citizens of Middlesex were opposed to Great Britain's policy of taxation without representation. Photo by Larry Chowning

# Middlesex Woman's Club first used as courthouse in colonial times in Urbanna

by Larry Chowning

Perhaps the most historic colonial building in Middlesex County is the old Middlesex County Courthouse building, known today as the Middlesex County Woman's Club building in Urbanna.

The county seat was moved in 1748 from Stormont to Urbanna and the building was built and served as the courthouse throughout the Revolutionary War period, until when, via a countywide referendum, it was moved to Saluda in 1852.

During the revolutionary period, the

Middlesex County Committee of Safety met in the building. The committee of safety served as the de facto government and local guardians of the Patriot cause. during the Revolutionary War period. They enforced trade boycotts, managed local militias, punished loyalists and effectively replaced royal authority.

Most everything concerning legality or enforcement of the Patriotic cause surrounding Middlesex County's involvement in the Revolutionary War passed through the doors of the Urbanna courthouse building.

The Pre-Revolutionary decades would bring significant change to Virginia and Middlesex County. Generally, historians consider the Revolutionary War as primarily a “national” war for independence. Middlesex County’s records of those times, however, reveal there were also deep divisions going on within this local community, as well. Although the local Scottish merchants and the large landholders in the county were very much for keeping the status quo and remaining a colony of England, the county, with its emerging smaller planters and fledgling middle class, had established a strong and active Committee of Safety to promote and direct locally this national movement for independence.

The Revolution and the decline of tobacco brought about socio-economic change, as well as a political shift of power. Descendants of these small planters and middle class citizens would rise to become the movers and makers of Middlesex and an important part of a new, vibrant nation. Middlesex County’s Committee of Safety was led by James Montague and Edmund Berkeley, elected representatives representing Middlesex in the Virginia Assembly.

It was at the courthouse in Urbanna where the Middlesex Resolutions and the county’s first county-wide public demonstration of rebellion took place. In May 1774, Virginia’s Governor Lord Dunmore dissolved the House of Burgesses after the group adopted a resolution calling for the first day of June to be set aside as a day of prayer to ask for “Divine Interposition for averting the heavy calamity, which threatens destruction to our civil rights.” Dunmore was offended by the wording.

The next day, on May 27, 1774, Montague and Berkeley were two of the 89 burgesses who met in the Apollo Room of Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg and signed yet another “Association” to boycott British trade.

On May 30, 25 burgesses met in Williamsburg and called for, and later attended, the first Virginia Convention. Middlesex’s Edmund Berkeley was one of those 25 burgesses to sign. Peyton Randolph, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Francis Lightfoot Lee were some of the more famous signers of this resolution.

It was Montague and Berkeley who brought the news home to the Middlesex people and, most likely, encouraged a meeting at the county courthouse in Urbanna on July 15, 1774. The meeting was part of a colony-wide movement to have each county draft resolutions denouncing British taxation of the colony and to elect representatives for an August convention in Williamsburg that would elect representatives to the First Continental Congress.

Sitting up front in the courthouse in Urbanna on that day were members of the old gentry class and the wealthy Scottish merchants of the town. These folks were most certainly very cautious of radical attitudes toward Britain.

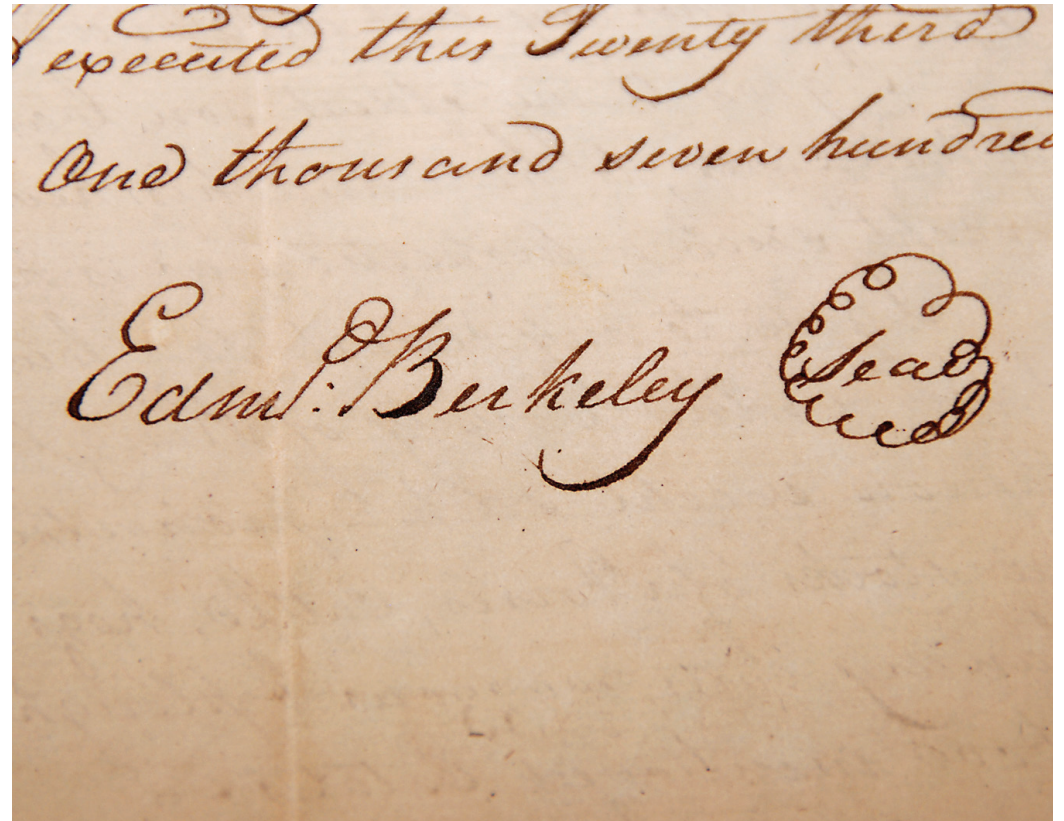
The courthouse and grounds were most likely filled as freeholders (male landowners) and others of all status crowded into the building. Surely there was debate on both sides, but at the end of the day the majority of male freeholders voted to join in the movement to denounce England’s policy of “taxation without representation.”

## Middlesex Resolutions

“After the freeholders of the county of Middlesex had proceeded in the most decent and orderly manner, to the election of representatives for the county, on the 15th of July, they were summoned to



During the Revolutionary War period, James Montague was Middlesex County’s representative in the Virginia’s Assembly, standing alongside such Virginia giants as George Washington, Patrick Henry and others. This is his signature signed and with his seal on the “Sixteenth Day of November 1781” on a document at the Middlesex County Courthouse in Saluda. Photo by Larry Chowning



Edmund Berkeley of Middlesex County served with George Washington, Patrick Henry and others in the Virginia Assembly during the Revolutionary War. Berkeley’s signature, above, can be found in the Middlesex County court records. Photo by Larry Chowning

meet at the courthouse to take into their consideration the present state of the colony, and America in general; and upon mature deliberation many of the most respectable of the Freeholders and inhabitants of the county being present, they entered into the following Resolutions,” stated Virginia General Assembly records.

There were eight resolutions drafted by Middlesex citizens to address British actions against the Boston community after the Boston Tea Party. The fourth resolution states, “that the late Act of Parliament suspending the trade and shutting up the port of the town of Boston, is an alarming circumstance to the Colonies in general, in as much as it marks out a settled plan in the British Parliament to enforce submission to their power of taxation.”

Middlesex’s resolution makes it clear that the duty on tea is a tax. “That the act imposing a duty on tea, for the avowed purpose of revenue, is a tax; and that every opposition should be expressed that may move to the repeal of the said act.”

The resolution also reflects hope that there can be a non-violent solution. “That we do not approve of the conduct of the people of Boston in destroying the tea belonging to the East India Company; and not withstanding the tax on tea must be esteemed as a violent infringement of one of the fundamental privileges of loyal and free subjects; yet we apprehend violence can not justify violence; reason and policy reclaim against it.”

Instead of violence, the freeholders of Middlesex recommended not using tea. “A desistance from the consumption of tea, and a confidence in the virtue of our countrymen, whose sense of the spirit of the law will no doubt include a total disuse of it, are a much eligible means, and more probably will work a repeal of this Act, than disorders, outrages and tumult.”

Middlesex citizens were loud and clear on the issue of taxation without representation. “On the question of the supremacy of Parliament to tax the colony, that it be the opinion of this meeting that our Representatives should oppose, and they are hereby instructed to oppose, all measures that will bring on an abrupt dissolution, whereby the business of the country will be impeded; a savage enemy ravaging our frontiers; the public creditors unpaid; a stagnation of justice . . . everything that is held sacred in civil society confronted; the just creditor deprived of his property; and the dishonest debtor triumphant; these are the bitter fruits of the late dissolution.”

The final resolve encouraged the association to prohibit the importation of “all unnecessary and luxurious articles of British manufacture (except saltpeter and spices) and all kinds of East Indian commodities.”

It was in the county courthouse building in Urbanna where the spark of American rebellion was lit. Montague and Berkeley were to go on to carry on the torch of independence for the people of Middlesex.



When the colonial courthouse in Urbanna was sold by Middlesex County in 1852, Captain John Bailey of Rosegill purchased the building and converted it into a non-denominational church building. The building is owned today by the Middlesex County Woman’s Club and it is still used as a church by multiple denominations. Captain Bailey’s body was buried on the grounds of Rosegill but was later disinterred and moved to the cemetery at Christ Church. Photo by Larry Chowning

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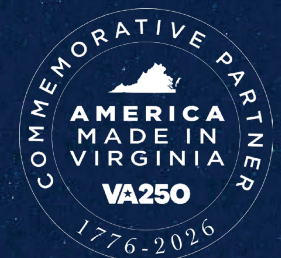
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*The* American flag has been recognized across the globe as a symbol of freedom for centuries. The Stars and Stripes is recognizable to billions of people worldwide, but the flag has undergone many changes since the United States gained its independence from Great Britain. According to the National Flag Foundation (NFF), the national flag of the United States has been revised 27 times since American colonists fought for and won independence from British rule. Of course, many of those changes occurred when a new state or new states were added to the union. Each time a new state joined the union, the flag would have to be adjusted with the addition of an extra star. The 1777 flag included a star for each of the 13 colonies that eventually became one of the initial 13 states, but the modern flag now features 50 stars as representative of the 50 states. Though the flag certainly underwent many changes since the nation's inception, the NFF notes the current flag has remained unchanged since 1960, when the 50-star version was officially adopted on July 4 in recognition of Hawaii becoming the fiftieth state in 1959.

## Made in Mathews

If you fly an American flag made in the USA there's a good chance the stars on the blue section were made right here at The Rivah. For decades, "Star Fields" located in Cobbs Creek in Mathews County has been embroidering stars on a blue background that are part of American flags.

Since 2006, Star Fields has been a division of the Annin Flag Company, the oldest and largest flag manufacturer in the United States—founded in 1847.

Star Fields does not sell flags.



Star Fields' limited edition "America 250" embellishes the original American flag sewn by Betsy Ross. Photo by Tom Chillemi



Ryan and Norm Faulkner



The NWP Energy Team

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At NWP Energy, we're dedicated to keeping our community safe, fed, and comfortable. Founded and operated locally, we proudly serve the Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula, and beyond.

Our commitment is rooted in a long family tradition. The Faulkner family has owned NWP Energy in Kilmarnock for over 42 years, with company origins tracing back more than 75 years to Humble Oil.

Humble Oil, later George Noblett Oil, supplied fuels and expanded into automotive services. In those days, fuel was delivered by barges to Humble Oil's facility on what was then known as Wharf Road.

Norman and Lois Faulkner bought the business in 1984.

Son Norm joined in 1986 to manage the retail division, and his brother Doug expanded fuel and propane delivery after joining the family business in 1992.

The Faulkners later acquired Ware Oil and Peoples Oil, combining them under the NWP name to honor their legacy.

According to Norm, NWP's success is attributable to employees' customer-centric approach. "Our team takes pride in serving our customers because they are not just customers ... they are our neighbors," says Faulkner.

Today, Norm's son Ryan continues the family legacy. Joining NWP in 2011, he and Norm opened the NWP Showroom in Irvington in 2023, featuring fireplace inserts and gas log sets.

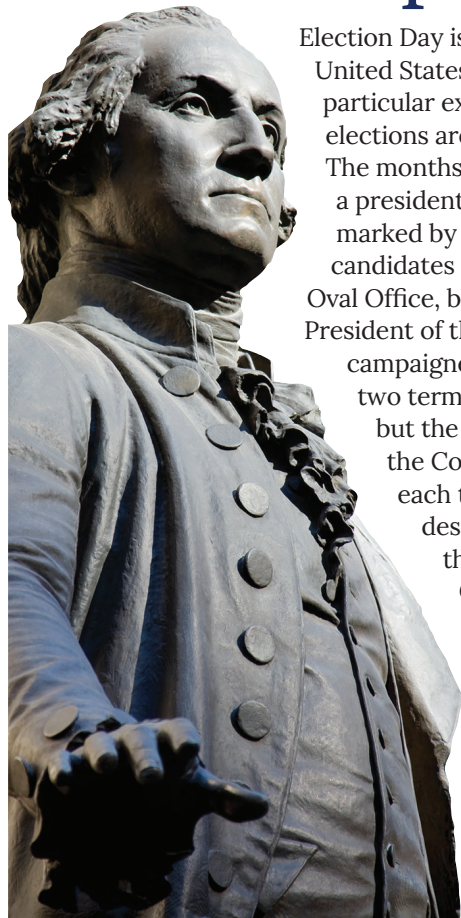
"We want our community to see the benefits of clean-burning propane. Our showroom offers fireplace inserts, gas logs, tankless water heaters, firepits, and more. In 2024, we opened the Live Outdoors pavilion with a full range of outdoor propane grills and kitchen appliances," says Ryan.

Ryan became CEO in 2025, building on NWP's successes and driving future opportunities by purchasing R. P. Waller Jr., Inc., a fuel supplier in Reedville. NWP continues to fuel brighter futures and build lasting growth.



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# An era before presidential campaigns



Election Day is an annual event in the United States, and it's one that generates particular excitement when presidential elections are held every four years. The months and even years before a presidential election are typically marked by extensive campaigning by candidates hoping to be voted into the Oval Office, but the first man to serve as President of the United States never actually campaigned. George Washington served two terms as American president, but the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army was chosen each time by the electoral college despite never campaigning for the job. According to the Miller Center at the University of Virginia, the political campaigns modern voters know well did not exist in 1788. Despite the lack of campaigning, Washington was the electoral college's unanimous choice for president in 1789, a feat he repeated in 1792.

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## What freedom of constitutional protected speech means to me

This small list in alphabetical order describes the freedom I feel to use words...

A. Admonish, B. Badger, C. Convince, D. Desist, E. Engage, F. Fulminate, G. Gibber, H. Holler, I. Insult, J. Jabber, K. Kid, L. Lecture, M. Modify, N. Negotiate, O. Opine, P. Pontificate, Q. Quibble, R. Rebuke, S. Scold, T. Tease, U. Upbraid, V. Vilify, W. Waffle, X. Be Xanthippe-ish, Y. Yap and Z. Zip.

I ended with zip because of the time I was cautioned to ZIP my mouth. This occurred in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where my husband was Air Attache at the U.S. Embassy. We moved to Kuala Lumpur in late summer of 1987 and soon after, the King of Malaysia visited "his" Royal Selangor Golf Club. Displeased with the greens, he took a golf club and whacked the greens' keeper and caused his death. The Malaysian press did not report this, but the British press did, adding that the King in his younger days as a prince, had shot someone who passed him on the Causeway to Singapore. He, in other words, was not new to

eliminating those who annoyed him.

Armed with both stories, I retitled him the King of Hearts, a reference from Alice in Wonderland when the Queen of Hearts with her golf club screams, "Off with their heads." But one evening at a diplomatic reception, I was pulled aside by an Irish woman married to a Malaysian Air Force general. Erin told me to keep my mouth shut or I could be PNG'd from Malaysia. (persona non gratis)...

Are we not living in similar times in 2026? Journalists and comedians fired for what they say? Months ago I stopped doing a cheeky blog because I feared repercussion for my daughter in the military. However, in October I will teach a course for RCC-RILL on "The Relevance of George Orwell" for our current political times.

Most of all, I thank the Rappahannock Record and Southside Sentinel for seeking submissions on "What Freedom Means."

*Gail Wilson Kenna,  
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A blacksmith is shown working at an anvil. The anvil is a large, dark, rectangular block of metal. A glowing red-hot piece of metal is being held by tongs and is being worked on the anvil. The background is a blurred workshop setting. The text is overlaid on the top left of the image.

# *Blacksmithing* **Trade Continues** *at the Northern Neck Heritage Center*

*Photos and story by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi*

**W**ith a history that dates from the 1500s, blacksmiths played an essential role in American history and were vital tradesmen in colonial settlements. Indeed, without the blacksmith, life in the 18th-century would have stopped. These craftsmen, who forged and tempered iron, made everything from tacks and nails to anchors and agricultural tools.

The craft is still being practiced in a modest forge on the grounds of the Northern Neck Heritage Arts Center at Rice's Hotel/Hughlett's Tavern in Heathsville.

"It's an old art," said Ken Kauffman, president of the Heathsville Forge Blacksmiths Guild. "We make modern items but do it the old way."

The guild held one of its spring classes on a Saturday in May. The classes are limited to eight participants and they fill quickly according to Kauffman, one of several volunteer instructors that day.

David Smith of Tappahannock, one of the eight participants, said blacksmithing was something that had always interested him. "And I wanted to learn some of the techniques, find out how they do it."

"And I found out it's a lot to it, a lot more than what I thought," he said.

The class starts early with about an hour-and-a-half instruction, learning terminology and talking through the process. Then participants go hands-on and get to make three items including a hook, leaf and center punches. They learn hammering, tapering, tempering, bending, twisting and hardening.

Sharon Marshall, also of Tappahannock, explained how she was heating up the iron and holding a magnet up to it, checking to see if it was de-magnetized and was ready to be dipped into cold oil and be hardened.

"This was on my bucket list," she said. Her friend, Bobbie Todd of Dunnsville, had asked Marshall if she wanted to sign up for the class. "I said ahhh, yesss, I'd love to do it. I've always wanted to learn."

Roger Amidon, a volunteer with the guild and one of the course instructors, has been practicing the art



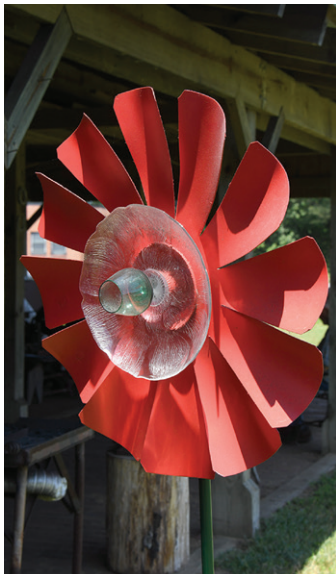
A torch is a controllable source of heat versus the fire, which allows for more precise temperature control.



From left, Ken Kauffman blows air into the fire on a portable forge as Bobbie Todd heats up a piece of iron during a class at the Heathsville Forge Blacksmiths Guild.



Instructor Roger Amidon uses an angle grinder to shine a piece of steel.



The Heathsville Forge Blacksmiths Guild creates modern designs using an ancient art. Large colorful flowers—5-foot-tall lawn stakes—are for sale at the forge.

Bobbie Todd hammers a piece of warmed metal.



A hot piece of iron smolders as it's dipped into the cooling bath.

for 40 years, starting in a guild in Arlington. He joined the Heathsville guild in 2005.

“You’re nowhere near being a smith when you’re done with [this class],” said Amidon. “It’s an introductory class for sure so people can decide whether they will love the smell of coal smoke or not.”

What they do learn is a skill that has survived many centuries, and that the art is very tedious and time-consuming.

“Blacksmithing is cool,” said Frank Reilly of Heathsville. “Maybe I’ll get really good at this and make knives. I love to cook.”

### **Forge history and outreach**

When the hotel/tavern underwent major renovations over 20 years ago, one of the rangers—or volunteers on the project—Dan Purvis had a dream of building a blacksmith forge on the property. Apparently there was a blacksmith shop in Heathsville a century ago, said Kauffman. Guild members believe it was located on what is now a vacant lot between The Buoy and a service station in the middle of the village.

Purvis said “we need a blacksmith shop again,” said Kauffman. So construction began in 2003 and the forge was completed in 2005, unfortunately after Purvis had passed away.

The working coal forge, powered by manual bellows, offers visitors a glimpse of a simpler time with most of the tools and equipment given to the shop by the Mary Ball Washington Museum and Library. However, many of the tools and the used metal—stacked behind the shop—have been donated by private individuals. Step



Frank Reilly heats a piece of iron over a torch. The iron is formed into a punch.

inside and one feels like they've stepped back in time. The burning of bituminous soft coals, purchased from West Virginia, fills the air with a smoky-mineral scent. Tools, worn from years of use, hang on the walls. When the forge is active, a volunteer is usually manning the bellows, pulling air to stoke the flames and keep the heat steady.

With 16 members, including five active, the guild strives to both educate and provide a service by making "items to sell that people would like."

Kauffman, who joined the guild in 2010, had no experience with the skill, like most of the guild members.

"You just have to be dedicated. We're all the time learning, learning from each other," he said as he tugged on the rope attached to the bellows, fanning the flames of the bituminous soft coal as the flames jumped higher in the forge. He pulled a red hot piece of iron from the heat and dipped it into a cooling bath. Steam rose both the tub. He said the kids that visit always love that.

He quickly hammered the iron to form a small leaf. It was simple but with more work it could become an elaborate piece with intricate details.

The guild offers custom work. Kauffman showed an elaborate set of handrails for a home in the final stages. The members have made a 12-foot tall T-Rex, make 5-foot-tall colorful lawn flowers and recently raffled a 6-foot tall mermaid. Smaller items like crosses, hooks and tools are always for sale in the forge.

Along with regular weekly hours, the guild is open by appointment for school field trips and during the Heathsville Farmers Markets. Classes will resume on select Saturdays in the fall.

Amidon will take the blacksmithing show on the road with his portable forge as part of the Fourth of July celebration at Port Royal.



Ken Kauffman pulls a robe connected to the bellows which increases the airflow to the coals and intensifies the heat.



Participants in the May Heathsville Forge Blacksmiths Guild class cool iron and check to see if it has been de-magnetized.



Forming a hot rod into a punch.

# Notable facts about the *land of the free*

**T**he United States of America is often characterized as “the land of the free,” a characterization that serves as a feather in the cap of the nation that will celebrate its two hundred and fiftieth anniversary in 2026. Upon hearing the phrase “land of the free,” it’s understandable if thoughts immediately go to protected rights like freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of the press. But what about the “land” in the land of free? As Americans prepare to celebrate their nation’s semiquincentennial, recognition of various geographical features of the land of the free can underscore why the United States of America is such a unique place to call home.

## The tallest mountain in the world is in America.

Climbers who train for years in the hopes of one day making their way up Mount Everest might be surprised to learn the mountain located on the border between Koshi Province, Nepal and the Tibet Autonomous Region is not, in fact, the world’s tallest mountain. While Mount Everest is the highest mountain above sea level, the world’s tallest mountain is Mauna Kea, which is in the Hawaiian islands. According to the American Geography Portal, when measured from its base on the sea floor to its summit, Mauna Kea is more than 32,000 feet tall, topping Mount Everest by a few thousand feet.

## Oregon is home to one of the world’s deepest lakes.

With a depth of approximately 1,950 feet, Crater Lake in south-central Oregon is the eleventh deepest lake in the world and the second deepest lake in North America. The National Park Service notes that Crater Lake, fed by rain and snow, is among the most pristine lakes on Earth, making it a popular destination for artists, photographers and sightseers.

## Alaska’s location makes it a particularly unique place in the land of the free.

It may surprise no one to learn that Alaska features the northernmost point in all of the United States. But it may raise an eyebrow or two to learn that The Last Frontier contains both the easternmost and westernmost points in the country. The Prime Meridian is an imaginary line that divides the Earth into the eastern and western hemispheres. According to The State of Alaska, the westernmost point in the state, and thus the entire country, is Amatignak Island. Seventy miles away and still in Alaska, but on the other side of the meridian and thus technically in the eastern hemisphere, sits Pohnoi Point on Semisopchnoi Island, which is the easternmost point in the country.

## You end up in the “same” place no matter which direction you go when departing Stamford, Connecticut.

Located in southwestern Connecticut, Stamford is in a notably unique geographic location. If you travel due east, due west, due south, or due north when departing Stamford, you will end up entering the same state: New York. This is the only place in all of the United States where traveling along the four compass points will leave you in the same place no matter the direction you choose.



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# AMERICAN HISTORY

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

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## WORDS

- ACHIEVEMENT
- AMBITION
- COLLABORATION
- COMMUNITY
- COURAGE
- CREATIVITY
- DEMOCRACY
- DISCOVERY
- DIVERSITY
- EXPLORATION
- FREEDOM
- GENEROSITY
- GROWTH
- HERITAGE
- HOPE
- INGENUITY
- INNOVATION
- KINDNESS
- LEADERSHIP
- OPPORTUNITY
- OPTIMISM
- PROGRESS
- RESILIENCE
- UNITY

Answer key, page 40



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Continued from page 23

• **John Witherspoon:**

John Witherspoon was born in Scotland in 1723 and moved to what would become the United States in 1768. Witherspoon is unique among signatories of the Declaration of Independence because he is the only active clergyman and the only college president to sign the document. Witherspoon later signed the Articles of Confederation and supported the ratification of the Constitution. Witherspoon came to New Jersey to become president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), which educated many notable figures from the era, including James Madison and Aaron Burr. All told, 12 members of the Continental Congress studied at the school while Witherspoon was president. The Presbyterian Witherspoon supported colonial independence for various reasons, and was especially opposed to the Crown's attempt to appoint an American Anglican bishop, speaking out against British interference in colonial affairs in a sermon titled "The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men" during a 1776 sermon. Like Hooper, Witherspoon was convinced independence was the path forward for the colonies.

• **Roger Sherman:**

Born in Newton, Massachusetts, in 1721, Roger Sherman was a multitalented Founding Father who began to study law in the mid-1750s after working as an author, general store owner, and surveyor, among other jobs. By 1766, Sherman was so established in the legal profession that he was appointed a judge of the Superior Court of Connecticut. Though he initially expressed reservations regarding colonists' resistance to the Crown, by 1774 he agreed to serve as a Connecticut delegate to the First Continental Congress. Sherman joined the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence in mid-1776, and later represented Connecticut on the drafting committee of the Articles of Confederation. Sherman also holds the unique distinction of being the only person to sign the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution.

# Patriots, fathers, brothers and cousins:

## The role of the *Nickens Nine* in the American Revolution

**F**rom its earliest beginnings, people of color were part of the American Revolution. Crispus Attucks, said to be Black and Indigenous, fell in the Boston Massacre five years before the shots rang out at the Battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775, marking the start of the Revolutionary War. Records indicate that that 20 to 40 Black soldiers were at those initial battles, while 120 Black militiamen fought at Bunker Hill in June the same year.

When the Continental Congress issued a call for volunteers to the Continental Army in July 1775, free Black men were among those who raised a hand. But Gen. George Washington issued an order in November of that year prohibiting the enlistment of “Negroes, boys unable to bear arms, nor old men unfit to endure the fatigues of the campaign.”

Despite continued fears of an uprising if Black men were armed, Gen. Washington repealed the order within a couple of months as the army faced troop shortages. He allowed free Black men to enlist in early 1776 but continued to ban the enlistment of enslaved men. As the war dragged on, colonies like Rhode Island, passed legislation in 1778 allowing enslaved men to join their ranks and in return, they were

by Jackie  
Nunnery

granted “absolute freedom” and compensation to their former enslavers. Somewhere between 5,000 and 8,000 Black and Indigenous men fought as patriots by the end of the war.

The British, through Virginia’s last royal governor, Lord Dunmore, issued a proclamation in 1775 promising freedom to all “indentured servants, Negroes or others free, that are able and willing to bear arms.” It was hoped that by doing so, it would deprive the colonies of workers and would damage the economy. Within a month, 300 Black men had enlisted into the Royal Ethiopian Regiment. It is estimated that number increased to 15,000 to 20,000 during the course of the war.



In exchange for their freedom at the end of the war, Black men who enlisted to fight for the British were part of what was dubbed the Royal Ethiopian Regiment. Photo by Eric Kirk, Symmetry Photo Art

## Some more free than others

While “self-evident that all men are created equal,” in reality, that did not apply to everyone. “It was what I call quasi-freedom or partial freedom,” said Dr. Karen Sutton, history professor at Morgan State University in Baltimore. Sutton wrote her dissertation on free African Americans in Lancaster and Northumberland counties, with a focus on who she called the Nickens Nine—John, James, Hezekiah, Edward, William, Robert, Richard, Nathaniel and Amos II. Sutton is a direct descendant of Amos II.

The Nickens family achieved their freedom in 1690 when “Black Dick and Chriss, his wife, were freed along with their infant daughter” in the will of John Carter II, the older half-brother of Robert “King” Carter.

However, “quasi-free Blacks were never allowed to attain the same status as Whites. Even when they served in the military, their opportunities were limited,” she said. “They could own land in civilian life but not vote, hold political office, or testify against any White person in court.”

While both sides of the war would offer freedom in exchange for battle, the Nickens family had been free for nearly a century by the time the revolution began. What were their motivations to go to war? “I believe the Nickens Nine fought in the American Revolutionary War with the hopes of true and equal freedom with their White neighbors,” Sutton said. “They hoped of a better way of life for themselves, their relatives and the broader community of African American and Indigenous peoples.”

## The Nickens Nine in the Revolutionary War

Seven of the men would leave the Northern Neck to serve in the Virginia State Navy, a fitting choice given the prevalence of ship building, fishing, crabbing and oystering as a livelihood. The men were comfortable and familiar with the surrounding waters that were now under the protection of the navy. In addition, the restrictions on Black and Indigenous men did not exist in the Virginia Navy as they did in Washington’s army.

The Nickens men served on four war ships during the course of the war—Edward, James and Hezekiah were on Gloucester and Edward would also serve on the Tarter; Nathaniel was aboard the Dragon; Richard on the Hero; and at one point Nathaniel, Hezekiah and Richard were all aboard the Tempest.

Records from *Virginia Negro Soldiers and Seamen in the Revolutionary War* by Luther Porter Jackson show that Richard “entered upon the Rappahannock fleet and soon sailed for Hampton.” He served 18 months aboard the Hero before transferring to the Tempest for another 18 months. “He was honorable discharged at the Chickahominy ship yard in Charles City County.”

William was one of two Nickens men who served in the Virginia State Line or Continental Army. William “made his contribution to the army by serving three or four years as a drummer.” It was common for teenagers to be placed in this dangerous and critical role of communicating battlefield commands that could be heard over the noise of cannons and muskets. Drummers and fife players served a vital role off the battlefield as well, signaling times of day, tasks and boosting morale. It was also more common for Black soldiers to be put in non-combat, support roles like cooking, carpentry, blacksmithing or supply transport.

James first served in the navy for three years before “immediately enlisting at the Lancaster Court House for land service for the remainder of the war. He began his career as a soldier marching from Lancaster County to the Cumberland Court House” in North Carolina to join the troops under Baron Von Steuben. “From this point he was marched with a regiment of



**Musket Shot.** Photo by Eric Kirk, Symmetry Photo Art

“I believe the Nickens Nine fought in the American Revolutionary War with the hopes of true and equal freedom with their White neighbors. They hoped of a better way of life for themselves, their relatives and the broader community of African American and Indigenous peoples.” —Dr. Karen Sutton



“Soldiers in Uniform” also referred to as “Four Soldiers,” 1781, is a watercolor from an illustrated journal kept by Jean Baptiste Antoine de Verger, a French artist and lieutenant with a French regiment at Yorktown during the Revolutionary War. The Black infantryman depicted is wearing the uniform of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment, comprised of mostly freed and enslaved Black men as well as Indigenous men, who fought in the Battle of Yorktown among others. Photo, Library of Congress, public domain

“I am happy that my Nickens ancestors were mostly “free Blacks,” a minority among early Blacks in America. I was also surprised to learn that remaining in the state was unusual for such families.” —Dr. Karen Sutton

artillery all the way to South Carolina” to join troops under General Greene.

### After the Revolutionary War

With the British loss, the thousands of Black soldiers who fought for the British had to leave with them. Approximately 3,000 now freed men relocated to Nova Scotia, while others left for Mexico, the Caribbean or England.

And while nine Nickens men left the Northern Neck, only eight returned. It is said that Hezekiah died a prisoner of war, most likely of typhus, smallpox or dysentery, but Sutton says there is an “alternative theory that he switched sides.” The names “James Nickins” and “Hezekiah Nickins” both appear on a list of Black loyalists that were sent to Canada after the war, but they do not appear in records of Nova Scotia, where they were moved to. Sutton believes others reported their names as James and Hezekiah in order to board ships leaving New York. Still another theory is after being captured by the British, he switched sides and voluntarily joined them, moving to England after the war and eventually helping found the African country of Sierra Leone. Sutton points out that there is no evidence for either theory.

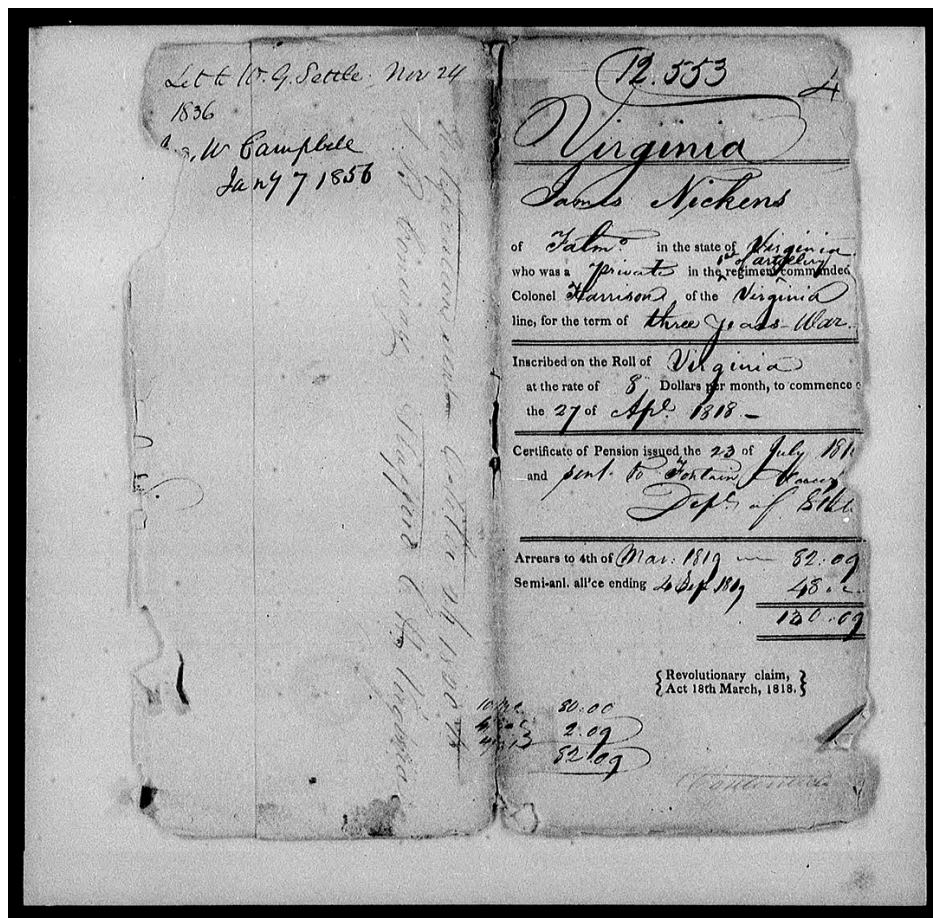
Of the remaining eight, they, like all Revolutionary War veterans qualified for pensions and bounty land grants. Records show that James, now living in Stafford, began collecting a pension of \$8 per month in 1818, when they first began issuing veterans’ pensions. The bounty land was typically about 200 acres and in southeast Ohio. In 1833 James Jr. received his father’s 200 acres, but like all of the other Nickenses, he sold it instead of moving to Ohio.

Since Hezekiah died without children, his shares went to James Sr.’s two daughters, Elizabeth and Judy. Edward settled in New Kent County. Amos II, fathered 10 children and lived to 85. Robert returned to Lancaster and started a family. Richard did the same in Northumberland County.

### Looking back on 250 years

As the country reflects on the past 250 years since the American Revolution, does Sutton, whose family contributed so much to that time, view it differently? “I am happy that my Nickens ancestors were mostly “free Blacks,” a minority among early Blacks in America. I was also surprised to learn that remaining in the state was unusual for such families.”

Sutton maintains a connection to the revolutionary history. She joined the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). “When my application was approved I learned I was the 17th African American daughter, the first in Maryland, and the first with a Black patriot. We minority daughters have an annual luncheon during the DAR annual International Conference. This year is the 20th Anniversary of the luncheon.” Sutton also is working on a book about the Nickens Nine and hopes to complete it sometime next year.



James Nickens, like all other veterans of his rank, was entitled to an \$8 monthly pension with the passing of a landmark law in 1818 to support veterans and their widows. Photo, Library of Congress



The Les Chasseurs Volontaires de Saint-Domingue monument in Franklin Square, Savannah, Georgia, commemorates the contributions of this regiment consisting of 500 free and enslaved Black men from Saint Domingue (present-day Haiti), the largest of its kind to participate in the American Revolution. In the fall of 1779, they fought in the Siege of Savannah, one of the deadliest battles of the war, second only to Bunker Hill. Photo by Carol M. Highsmith’s America Project in the Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress

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## John Tyler

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John Tyler's visage might not have survived on American currency the way images of various figures from America's early history have, but the tenth president of the United States did manage to remain newsworthy well into the twenty-first century. Tyler, who was born in 1790 and served as President of the United States from 1841 to 1845, was a father of 15. Despite passing away in January 1862, less than a year after the start of the American Civil War, Tyler still had a living grandson at the start of 2025. Harrison Ruffin Tyler, who passed away on May 25, 2025, at the age of 96, was the last surviving grandchild of President Tyler. That means the period from President Tyler's birth in 1790 until the death of his last surviving grandchild spanned nearly a quarter of a millennium.

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# Camels have a unique place in American history



Jefferson Davis's name is inextricably linked to the American Civil War, during which the politician who represented Mississippi in the United States Senate served as president of the Confederate States. But Davis's influence on the United States predated the nation's civil war, and he even played a notable role in one of the more unique events in American military history. While serving as Secretary of War in 1855, Davis ordered Brevet Major Henry C. Wayne to arrange for the importation of camels to be used for military purposes. Davis had urged Congress to establish a United States Army Camel Corps. for years, and even formally introduced measures to establish such a unit in the early 1850s, efforts that ultimately proved unsuccessful. Though few might associate camels with the United States, Davis's campaign to bring camels into the American military fold

was not as eccentric as it might seem in modern times. According to the Army University Press, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which officially ended the Mexican-American War upon its signing in 1848, added more than half a million square miles of land to the United States, a significant portion of which included desert lands in what is now the American southwest. The discovery of gold in California around this same time also increased traffic in this new region of the country, which remained dangerous even after the signing of the treaty. Advocates of a camel corps insisted the animals would allow the U.S. Army, tasked with keeping the region safe, to do their job more effectively. Though the camel experiment ultimately failed due to a number of variables, it remains a unique and lesser known event in American military history.

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INFO

# American Revolutionary War TRIVIA



• On which day were the battles at Lexington and Concord fought?

Answer: April 19, 1775

• True or False: Bunker Hill was fought on Bunker Hill.

Answer: False. Despite its name, the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775, was fought on Breed's Hill.

• The mercenary-like forces hired to fight alongside the British during the American Revolutionary War were known as what?

Answer: Hessians. Though soldiers from various German states were hired and deployed by the British during the conflict, the troops were principally drawn from the German state of Hesse-Cassel.

• This infamous figure was a decorated American military officer who rose to the rank of Major General during the American Revolutionary War.

Answer: Benedict Arnold. Though Arnold is today widely remembered as a turncoat, he accomplished much for the Americans before defecting to the British in 1780, including leading the capture of Fort Ticonderoga in 1775.

• Which of these notable rivers did George Washington lead his troops across on December 30, 1776?

- A. The Hudson River
- B. The Delaware River
- C. The Rubicon
- D. The Charles River

Answer: B. The Delaware River

• This Founding Father famously declared "Give me liberty, or give me death!" during a speech to the Second Virginia Convention in 1775.

- A. Benjamin Franklin
- B. Thomas Jefferson
- C. John Adams
- D. Patrick Henry

Answer: D. Patrick Henry

• True or False: The American Revolutionary War is the longest conflict in American military history.

Answer: False. While the eight-year-long conflict between the colonists and Great Britain that began in 1775 remained the longest war in American military history for nearly 200 years, the Vietnam War, in which America was engaged between 1960 and 1975, displaced it atop that list in the middle decades of the twentieth century. The invasion of Afghanistan, which began in 2001 and continued until 2021, has since become the longest conflict in American military history.

• True or False: Fewer than half of all colonists favored fighting for independence from Great Britain.

Answer: True. Though specific figures are hard to confirm, various historians estimate that only about 40 percent of colonists supported the American Revolutionary War, while roughly one in five identified as loyalists to the crown. The remaining 40 percent are believed to have held moderate views.

• This treaty, signed in 1783, marked the end of the American Revolution.

- A. The Treaty of Versailles
- B. The Treaty of Paris
- C. The Treaty of Tordesillas
- D. The Treaty of Accession

Answer: B. The Treaty of Paris.

• True or False: The Continental Congress declared its independence from Great Britain on July 2.

Answer: True. Though Americans annually celebrate the nation's independence on July 4, the Continental Congress declared its independence on July 2, two days before signing the Declaration of Independence.



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# Fun Facts

## about some of the colonies that formed the U.S.



It's been 250 years since the 13 colonies joined to form the United States of America, but those 13 territories continue to feature prominently throughout the country each and every day. That's because the 13 stripes on the American flag represent the original 13 colonies.

**The American flag serves as a visible reminder of the 13 colonies,** and that's not the only interesting fact about the territories that would become the United States of America.



### **There was a constitution that predates the United States Constitution.**

ConnecticutHistory.org notes that the Connecticut Colony had a framework for government by the mid-seventeenth century not unlike the one that would be spelled out in the U.S. Constitution. The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut were adopted in 1639 and are considered the first written constitution in America. Roger Ludlow of Windsor is believed to have drafted the Fundamental Orders, which consisted of a preamble and 11 orders (or laws) and mirrored trading company charters common at the time. Notably, the Orders did not reference the authority of the crown.



### **A debt sparked the founding of Pennsylvania.**

After the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660, Charles II of England took the throne. Money was tight at the time, so Sir William Penn, a British admiral, funded the rebuilding of the Royal Navy out of his own pocket. Charles II was petitioned for repayment by Sir William's son, also named William Penn, twenty years later. But the younger Penn, who had become a Quaker by this point, requested land in lieu of funds, with a goal toward establishing a place where religious tolerance was rule. The king granted the younger Penn's request in 1681, and decreed that the territory granted to Penn be named after his father. Thus, Pennsylvania got its name.



### **Colonial New Jersey was home to a notable rift in a famous family.**

Benjamin Franklin was among the most renowned and recognizable of the Founding Fathers of the United States, and his commitment to the ideals of the burgeoning nation did not waver even when

the conflict that became the American Revolutionary War divided his family. William Franklin was a son Benjamin fathered outside his common-law marriage to Deborah Read. Though William was raised by his father and Read, father and son did not see eye-to-eye on every issue, including the war. William, in fact, served as the thirteenth and final Colonial Governor of New Jersey, and remained a steadfast loyalist throughout the conflict. The prospects of victory were looking dim for loyalists by 1781, and William departed for England in 1782, never to return to New Jersey or the infant nation it became a part of. Curiously, William's own son from an extra-marital relationship, William Temple Franklin, sided with his grandfather during the conflict, and even served Benjamin Franklin while the latter negotiated a pivotal alliance between America and France.



### **Rent was cheap in New Hampshire by the mid-eighteenth century.**

The colony of New Hampshire was so sparsely populated by the end of the French and Indian War in 1762 that Governor Benning Wentworth came up with a unique way to entice people to move to what's now known as the Granite State. According to History.com, Wentworth recruited settlers by offering one-acre lots that required annual rental payments of just a single ear of Indian corn payable on December 25.

# Interesting facts about the United States



Since its inception, the United States has grown to include 50 states. As Americans in all 50 of those states celebrate the country in 2026, it can be both educational and fun to learn some interesting facts about the United States.

## Largest state: Alaska

Alaska spans more than 665,000 square miles, making it the largest state by land mass in the entire country. In fact, Alaska is so big that it's larger in terms of square miles than the next three largest states (Texas, California and Montana) combined.

## Smallest state: Rhode Island

Checking in at 1,545 square miles, Rhode Island is the smallest state in the United States. To put that in perspective, it's possible to squeeze 430 Rhode Islands into one Alaska.

## Most densely populated state: New Jersey

According to July 2023 data from the United States Census Bureau, New Jersey is home to more than 9.2 million people across 7,354 square miles, making the Garden State the most densely populated in the U.S.

## Least densely populated state: Alaska

Given its aforementioned size and vast amount of undeveloped land, Alaska's status as the least densely populated state should come as no surprise. According to the World Atlas, Alaska is home to 1.3 persons per square mile, which is considerably less than New Jersey's 1,298 people per square mile.

## California has the 4th largest economy in the world

California's economy is massive. Even though it's part of the larger United States, California's economy is massive on its own. According to data from the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis released in 2025, California boasts the fourth largest economy in the world. Only the United States, China and Germany boast a larger economy than the state of California. And California is gaining ground, as it experienced a growth rate of 6 percent in 2024, which was better than the U.S. (5.3 percent), China (2.6 percent) and Germany (2.9 percent).

## St. Augustine, FL, predates the U.S. by more than 200 years

St. Augustine, Florida, has been around awhile. Florida is home to the longest continually inhabited European-founded city in the United States. In fact, St. Augustine, Florida, predates the U.S. by more than 200 years, having been founded by Don Pedro Menendez de Aviles of Spain in 1565.



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# KEEPING *local history* ALIVE

*Note to readers: History's lessons are alive through the efforts of those who appreciate the stories of yesterday. The following stories highlight local historians with deep dedication to preserving the past.*

## Preserving history is all about people for Carroll Lee Ashburn

by AnnGardner Eubank

He's covered thousands of high school basketball games, umpired countless youth league matchups and has provided seemingly infinite insights of yesteryear to the Rappahannock Record and other publications.

Widely considered the "walking history book of Lancaster County," Carroll Lee Ashburn has spent nearly 94 years building a legacy of friendship and community preservation that spans generations and he shows no signs of slowing down.

Ashburn was born and raised in Lancaster County and has always had a deep respect and connection with the community and the people surrounding him. In 1952 he joined the U.S. Coast Guard. Following four years of service he came home and spent over 40 years working for McGinnis selling automobiles.

Ashburn also had a career in radio spanning over two decades, broadcasting area high school sports competitions, most notably his legendary basketball coverage alongside Demetrius Means.

In 1997, Ashburn joined the Kilmarnock Museum. It didn't take long for him to be elected president, a title he still wears with pride.

"I just love it. I wasn't initially very interested in the job, but I quickly fell in love volunteering here and just kept on going," he said.

For Ashburn, serving as the president of the museum is an all-encompassing job. Day in and day out, he's responsible for recruiting and facilitating volunteers, handling all publicity, organizing events and exhibits and teaching people about the fascinating area history.

It's not really a "punch-in and punch-out" type of gig. Beyond constant networking, Ashburn is constantly thinking of new ideas to promote the museum and celebrate the area's history and culture. From coordinating events and memorials like Talent Extravaganzas, The Star Wall and the Memory Garden, Ashburn's commitment to showcasing area talent and culture is a testament to his pride for the community.

*"The greatest people in the world are around here," he said. "I meet new people every single day. I can always find something we can relate to each other. Then all of a sudden, I have a new friend, and that's my goal with everyone I talk to."*



From left, at a recent viewing of "Northern Neck 250" Carroll Lee Ashburn interacts with Richard Henry Lee, portrayed by Michael Rhodes, Martha Washington, portrayed by Catherine Bennett, and Gen. George Washington, portrayed by Robert Bennett. Photo by Robert Mason Jr.

Whether you're a lifelong resident or someone just passing through, when you walk through the doors of the Kilmarnock Museum, without a doubt you can expect to learn something new.

"We've gone far beyond Kilmarnock in terms of preservation. We keep the history of the entire county, really," he said.

From the town's early settlements, to devastating fires that changed the dynamic of the area, to the traditional Holly Ball celebration and a number of military tributes to veterans,

if it happened in Kilmarnock, you can find out about it at the museum at 76 North Main Street, Kilmarnock.

Despite Kilmarnock's small size, the museum is undeniably jam-packed with noteworthy historical highlights. Even with major historical landmarks tied to the colonial seventeenth century, Ashburn's favorite moments in history are the quieter, quirky anecdotes.

The museum pays a bit of homage to the long-standing success of the Lancaster High School Red Devils Marching Band. One of Ashburn's most

favorite pieces of local history is an often forgotten event that occurred with legendary band director Robbie Spiers.

On display in the museum is a news article from October 1997 that shows Spiers in handcuffs for "marching too slow" in a Warsaw parade. According to Ashburn, Spiers remains the only band director in history to be arrested for such an infraction.

Walking through the museum, one will encounter historic military uniforms, intricate dioramas of Kilmarnock's Main Street from over

a century ago and the throne and crown of the first African American Holly Ball Queen. Wall displays feature a rich array of vintage posters and news clippings. Nearby, a dedicated corner honors Ashburn's greatest love: The Texacos.

Ashburn founded, coached and played for this legendary men's fast-pitch softball team, which dominated local sports from 1957 to 1972. Their hilarious, high-stakes history is fully on display. Ashburn has chronicled everything

from backyard matchups at a state penitentiary to treacherous boat travels for games on Tangier Island. Lynda Bird Johnson even threw out a first pitch to Yogi Bear—the literal bear mascot, not the infamous MLB catcher Yogi Berra. While the display captures the excitement, these wild stories still land best when narrated by Ashburn himself.

In recent years, Ashburn has even launched a film series at Compass Entertainment Complex where the museum helps

produce movies documenting regional history.

His projects including “A Fish Story” and “Northern Neck 250” consistently have sold-out showings.

Despite being nearly 94 years old, Ashburn has plans only to continue his preservation efforts. He has several film projects lined up, one focusing on area waterway pirates and another celebrating the women of the Northern Neck.

He's even working on establishing an annex building to

expand the museum's exhibits.

Ashburn's passion for preserving the area's culture and heritage doesn't necessarily stem from his love of history, but more of his unwavering love of the people of his community.

“The greatest people in the world are around here,” he said. “I meet new people every single day. I can always find something we can relate to each other. Then all of a sudden, I have a new friend, and that's my goal with everyone I talk to.”

## Bringing history to life

by Barbara Lovelace,  
compiled by Tom Chillemi

Barbara Lovelace has always loved history as she listened to the storytelling of her family as a young child. She wrote her first story and play in the sixth grade and always aspired to write.

Two degrees in American history, and years of bringing history to life as a living history player and writer, made the perfect combination for moving to Urbanna in 1995 with her husband Bob to tell the story of this historic town and Middlesex County.

### Where to start?

Researching the records at the courthouse, Barbara found a goldmine of colonial historic data — saved by hiding records during the Civil War — and literally from all the centuries of Urbanna and Middlesex County. To preserve this history and build on the works of others, Barbara chose to tell mileposts of the local story, researching and writing living history plays and productions. From court cases, published works, old newspapers, and private historical records, she was able to preserve and showcase local history and bring education and entertainment to the community over the years.

### Living history

Working with others who shared Barbara's enthusiasm, eight living history plays brought Urbanna and Middlesex County history alive.

They were performed at Christchurch School, the Middlesex County Historic Courthouse in Saluda, the Middlesex Woman's Club, and various churches.

Acted always by local living history players, one significant story related the history of Urbanna's founding in the 17th century, and another story showed the day-to-day happenings at Urbanna's James Mills Scottish Factor Store in the 18th cen-

ture just before the American Revolution.

Two other plays include an early 18th century vestry meeting, and a 19th century recreation of the case of a Baptist minister who served time in the Urbanna jail told stories of early faith in the Virginia colony and the 19th and 20th century increase of churches.

Court cases from before and after the Civil War revealed the culture, politics, and personalities of this time in history.

These local stories of this very historic part of Tidewater Virginia were a joy for Barbara to research, preserve, and present to the community.

### Historical society

Earlier, Barbara served as president of the Middlesex County Museum and Historical Society and appeared in various living history roles at Colonial Williamsburg and other historic properties. She portrayed early residents of Urbanna's historic homes from time to time and led a tour of Virginia plantation homes on the James River, enjoying telling history in the places it happened. She was one of the original members of a startup version of Urbanna's Founders Day in 2014. She is still involved and loves seeing this event blossoming into a colonial history fest each summer.

### Memories

Barbara reminisces that each local history presentation started with a prologue, setting the stage for the time period, the issues of the day, and the people involved, and ended with an epilogue, wrapping up the story and ending with, “As we traveled back in time . . . you were there.”

Barbara's wish, in this year celebrating our 250th life as a nation, is that the history — the story — may always be told.



# Preserving history is a language of love for Francine Aytes Hunter

by AnnGardner Eubank

For Francine Aytes Hunter, preserving local history isn't just a task or something to do; it's a form of respect towards her elders and a means of bridging racial, denominational and generational gaps through igniting unity.

A Lancaster native and graduate of Lancaster County Public Schools, Hunter's roots within the Northern Neck run deep. Currently residing in Mechanicsville, she's constantly back and forth from home to her hometown, as she's consistently working on coordinating and assisting in the execution of community projects that preserve the past generation and empower the next.

A retired occupational therapist, helping others is what Hunter does best. She's particularly passionate in supporting senior citizens, engaging the youth and helping educate those who may learn differently and not have their own voice. Her compassion and energy bleeds into her preservation work seamlessly.

"It's a labor of love," she said.

A member of the Nickens family, Hunter has been surrounded by influential and impactful community members from the time she was born.

"I developed my love for history from my elders," she said. Growing up, she and her relatives were always listening and learning from the stories of their ancestors. Always actively listening to their storytelling,

*"I always encourage young people to visit with their grandparents. And today everybody has a cellphone. I tell them, 'take out your phone and just hit record. Get their stories on tape and transcribe it later.'"*

Hunter, later was charged by her mother to serve as a voice for those of years prior and to uphold their contributions and legacies.

Hunter recalled in 2013 attending a ceremony for a

historical highway marker for Morgan E. Norris, the Northern Neck's first Black physician. Hunter's mother said to her, "We need to get one of these for Armistead Nickens."

Nickens was Lancaster County's first ever Black elected official.

Hunter, alongside a team of relatives, put in years of work to have the highway marker honoring Nickens approved and erected. In October 2022 by Kamps Mill Road, their preservation efforts paid off and the historical marker was unveiled.

Hunter's involvement in the highway marker project was just one component to her preservation strides.

She regularly coordinates and participates in educational seminars at local libraries, conducts legislative outreach and engages with the General Assembly.

Additionally, Hunter spearheads critical community initiatives, including the reclamation and restoration of the historic Old St. John's Cemetery—the county's first significant post-Civil War African American burial ground, which has nearly a thousand graves. Hunter is also deeply involved with the Northern Neck Hidden History Trail, a collaborative project that uses a multicultural lens to reveal a comprehensive historical picture of the region.

History isn't just about the prominent leaders that are remembered in textbooks,

but just as importantly it's about the many untold and important stories of those whom the towns and infrastructure were built on the backs of, she said.

The lesser known histories are often remembered best through oral story telling and without the continuation of storytelling, the history vanishes, said Hunter. Preserving those



Francine Aytes Hunter speaks at the unveiling/dedication of the Armistead S. Nickens roadside marker.

stories, however, can guarantee the efforts and impacts of those who came before will not be lost on the next generations.

"I always encourage young people to visit with their grandparents. And today everybody has a cellphone. I tell them, 'take out your phone and just hit record. Get their stories on tape and transcribe it later,'" she said.

Hunter said that what she finds most important in the work she does is bringing unity among different groups of people. Whether it be interracially, interdenominationally, or inter-generationally, bridging people together is critical.

"I find joy in bringing people together to work on community projects," she said.

Hunter advocates everyone do their own homework in terms of their ancestral history. It is important and beneficial to know one's roots and to garner a respect for those who came before as well as how their lives impacted one's own life and to detect specific family medical data to ensure health and prosperity.

Passionate about health and wellness, Hunter says having an understanding of DNA makeup and medical history could potentially make all the difference in preserving ones

own health.

To Hunter, no form of preservation is more valuable than listening and learning through dialogue and conversation.

"Memories are priceless," she said.

While she often likes to stay behind the scenes, Hunter's impact in community preservation has been important and inspiring. She doesn't do it for notoriety or recognition, but because the community and ancestral ties she's bonded to are things she truly loves.

"Music and laughter are love languages, and so is engaging in family history. That's love to me," she said.

## Middlesex County's legacy

by Larry Chowning, compiled by Tom Chillemi

Larry Chowning is the primary writer of "Signatures in Time — A Living History of Middlesex County, Virginia" published in 2012 as the first comprehensive history book specifically on Middlesex County, Va., an area first settled in 1642 that would become a county in 1668.

Chowning was born and raised in Middlesex County, attended Urbanna Graded School, and graduated from Middlesex High School and the University of Richmond. Since 1981, he has been a general assignment reporter for the Southside Sentinel, the Middlesex County weekly newspaper.

### Research

Carroll C. Chowning Sr. (1884-1964) was Larry Chowning's great uncle. Carroll Chowning had for many years been a clerk for the Virginia General Assembly and would stay at the John Marshall Hotel in Richmond during the months the assembly was in session.

He had a passion for Middlesex County history and while in Richmond researched the Virginia Assembly records on Middlesex County's role in history. He wrote down everything that Middlesex was involved in, and would later have his notes documented in four bound one-off books:

- "Middlesex Record — Volume 1."

- “Legislative and Executive Records of Virginia — Middlesex — Volume 2.”
- “Military Activities — Middlesex, Va. — Volume 3.”
- “Miscellaneous Transcripts — Middlesex — Volume 4.”

### Handed down

Sometime in the 1990s, Carroll Davies, grandson of Carroll Chowning, gave his grandfather’s collection to Larry Chowning, and the boxes were stored in an upstairs closet. During holiday affairs and between dinners, Larry Chowning would go up to the closet and read.

In 2007, Middlesex County, along with the rest of the state, celebrated the Jamestown 400th anniversary. The state encouraged the county to showcase its own history. The Middlesex Jamestown Committee was formed under the leadership of the late Pat Royal Perkinson of

Topping.

### Comprehensive History

Perkinson recognized there had been no extensive county history written and the county formed the Middlesex County Book Committee, composed of Claudia and Archie Soucek, Julie Bray, and Pat DePina. The group began work on the project and did extensive work without a principal writer. Perkinson would later approach Larry Chowning about writing the book and named Archie Soucek editor. Carroll Chowning’s bound notes were a key element in the work.

From the start of the project in 2007, it took five years to complete “Signatures in Time — A Living History of Middlesex County, Virginia” It was published in 2012. Copies of it are available for purchase at the Middlesex County Historic Courthouse in Saluda.

“The work of the Middlesex County 2007 Book Committee

and the funding of the book by the Middlesex County Board of Supervisors was one of the greatest county historical accomplishments of our generation,” said Larry Chowning.

### Completed

In November 2012 the history book was introduced to the public during a reception conducted at the ancient colonial plantation at Rosegill, located at Urbanna. Claudia Soucek said, “It has taken nearly 350 years but Middlesex County finally has a written history of our county for generations to read and learn.”

Members of the Middlesex County Board of Supervisors who at the time voted to fund the 412-page hardback county history book were Jack Miller, Fred Crittenden, Wayne Jessie, Carlton Revere and Pete Mansfield. Kenneth W. Williams and Robert Crump were supervisors at the beginning of the project.



## Those who came before us

by Marilyn South,  
compiled by Tom Chillemi

As a child, I heard many family stories of how family members and friends had traveled long distances in the hope of finding work to make a better life for themselves and their families. Sometimes, the oral histories were supported with photographs, a piece of jewelry, clothing or another artifact.

Sometimes having no item from a person told its own story of hardship.

The authenticity of a worn garment or tool shows how those before us did tasks. Using very different tools, it took far more time.

The preservation of family histories and artifacts of any race or time fosters respect for ancestral knowledge, cultural continuity, and strengthens a sense of identity and pride. Positive family and individual identity can support a very strong community by fostering an understanding and tolerance for cultural diversity.

### Learning

As a registered nurse, I spent two days a week at the bedside of patients and their families. I found that each person creates their own mini culture that frames each social network they interact with. Those cultures are very individual and strong.

Exposure to various other cultures can

soften the intensity of the view that only one’s culture is of worth. The ability of history to expose us to this diversity of cultures affords us an opportunity to be more empathetic and understanding of other personal and social cultures.

### Museum

I have worked with the Middlesex County Museum & Historical Society for more than 20 years, because a past board member, whom I respected greatly, asked me to.

Our museum is a custodian of more than 2,500 artifacts to safeguard the stories and beliefs of past generations for present and future audiences. The various cultures we have created in Middlesex celebrate diversity and promote inclusion that can help a community maintain a sense of pride and belonging. The educational opportunities our collection affords through programming, hands on exposure to artifacts and exhibits increases the awareness of individuals to the achievements of those before us.

Preserving artifacts, identifying historic places, people, and events create the culture we can grow in. Without our conscious awareness of their significance we stay stagnant.

# THE FIFTY STATES

Test your knowledge of United States geography by filling in the map.



Answer Key, page 40

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*-Leviticus 25:10, the words cast into the Liberty Bell itself*

From that bell to the bell that calls Grace Episcopal Church to worship each week, the same proclamation still rings out. For two hundred fifty years, this nation has held liberty as a birthright for all, not the inheritance of the few. As our steeple joins the chorus of this anniversary year, we give thanks for the freedom to seek God as conscience leads – and we pray this nation remains, now and always, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.



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## Presidential powers and privileges

**H**olding the office of the President of the United States of America is an immense honor bestowed upon an individual by the American people every four years. Overseeing the country comes with immense responsibility, and the president relies on a sizable team to keep order, maintain accountability and ensure operations run as smoothly as possible.

**Although it might seem that the president has absolute authority, there are certain things a president can and cannot do. The following are some of the privileges and powers that the POTUS is allowed, courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum.**

- Make treaties with the approval of the Senate.
- The implied ability to fire executive branch officials, even if it's not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution.
- Act as Commander-in-Chief during times of war.
- Veto bills and sign bills.
- Enforce the laws passed by Congress.
- Make suggestions about what should be new laws and employ a national platform to sway public opinion and convince Congress to support policy.
- Serve as the leader and mouthpiece for a political party.
- Entertain foreign dignitaries and other guests.
- Recognize foreign countries in different ways.

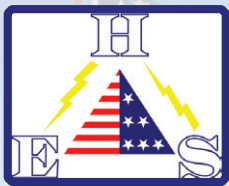
- Grant pardons to individuals found guilty of federal offenses.
- Nominate Cabinet members, Supreme Court Justices and other high officials.
- Appoint ambassadors.
- Call Congress into special session, or end sessions if they cannot agree.

**Apart from the more obvious, there are certain things the U.S. President is not supposed to do. However, although the Secret Service can advise and strongly discourage the behaviors below, the president does have the final say.**

- Current and former presidents and vice presidents aren't supposed to drive on the open road. Secret Service agents may allow them to drive around secured properties.
- A sitting president is not to use off-the-shelf personal electronic devices due to security concerns.
- Presidents shouldn't attend their children's performance or sporting events due to the extensive security preparations that would be necessary.
- Similar to driving a car, a president shouldn't take a commercial airline flight.
- For security reasons, opening windows in the White House and in the presidential vehicle is prohibited.
- A president shouldn't do spring cleaning, like tidying up an office. Under the Presidential Records Act, presidents are mandated to hang on to things that normally would be discarded by others, such as emails and paperwork.

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# “Who Said It?”

Match the patriotic quote to the speaker

**1** “America is another name for opportunity.”

**4** “Give me liberty, or give me death!”

**2** “Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it.”

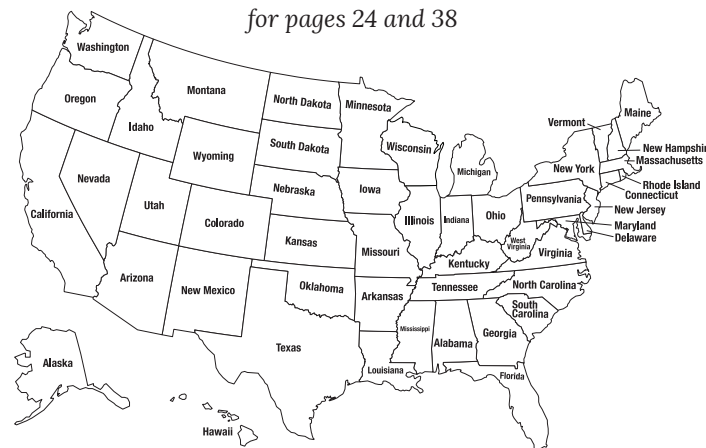
**5** “...there never was a good War, or a bad Peace.”

**3** “Within the soul of America is freedom of mind and spirit in man. Here alone are the open windows through which pours the sunlight of the human spirit.”

- A. Patrick Henry
- B. Benjamin Franklin
- C. Ralph Waldo Emerson
- D. Thomas Paine
- E. Herbert Hoover

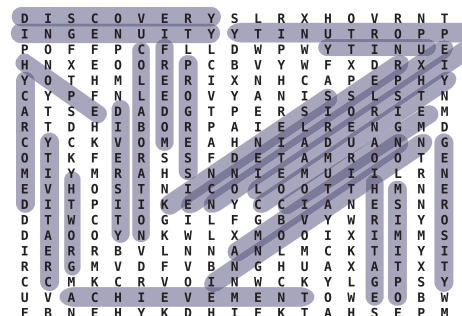
1.C, 2.D, 3.E, 4.A, 5.B

## Answer Key for pages 24 and 38



### WORD SEARCH

### AMERICAN HISTORY



## LOCAL AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

### THE STORM DIDN'T STOP THE ASSIGNMENT

*When Life Hit Hard, God Wasn't Finished*

By JEANNIE GAINES

Life brought unexpected storms—loss, illness, setbacks, and challenges that could have caused her to quit. But through faith, perseverance, and God's grace, Jeannie Gaines discovered that what was meant to stop her became part of her testimony. The storm came, but it did not stop the assignment.

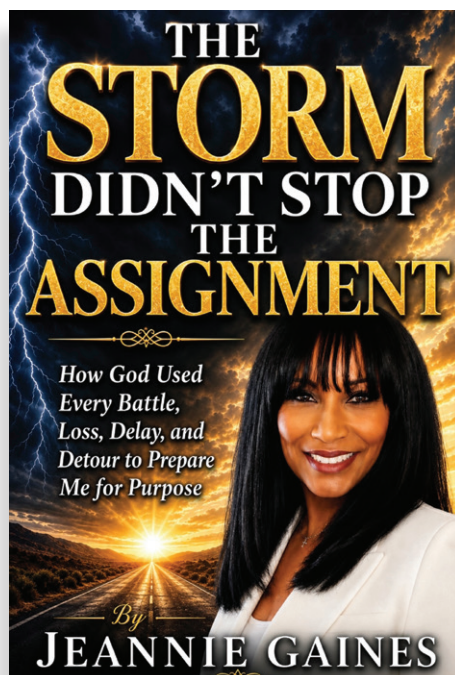
This inspiring book encourages readers to keep moving forward, trust God through difficult seasons, and remember that their purpose is greater than their pain.

*“Your storm is not the end of your story.”*

Author of Over 20 Inspirational Christian Books Available on Amazon – Search “Jeannie Gaines”

**AUTHOR • SPEAKER • ENCOURAGER**

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### Integrity. Accountability. Professionalism. Service.

These are the same values I carried throughout my career in the Marine Corps and continue to bring to my service in Middlesex County today.

### MIDDLESEX IS HOME.

You've seen me at community events, Sheriff's Office functions, local meetings, and throughout our county.

You've seen me serving.

I am a husband, father of six, retired United States Marine, and deputy sheriff. I am running because I believe Middlesex County deserves leadership that is visible, accountable, and focused on people.

For 27 years, I served our nation. Today, I serve our community.

**I would be honored to earn your trust and your vote to serve as your next Sheriff.**



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FACEBOOK: Easter for Sheriff 2026 • EMAIL: chriseasterforsheriff2026@gmail.com

Paid for by Chris Easter

# Guess Who?



1. I was born in Virginia on April 28, 1758. I am the last Founding Father to serve as a president as well as the last president of the Virginia dynasty. Wildly popular, I won my second term almost unopposed, and I am known for my stable leadership.
2. I was born in Virginia on February 9, 1773 and went on to become the ninth president of the United States. Mine is known as the shortest presidency in United States history, despite the longest inauguration speech. I was commander in chief for just over 30 days.
3. I was born in Texas on October 14, 1890. I am known for my command of the Allied forces in Europe during World War II, and later for my two terms as President of the United States. During my presidency, I focused on maintaining peace and prosperity through a strong military and alliances.
4. I was born in Virginia on February 22, 1732. I became the commander of the Virginia Regiment during the French and Indian War. I was later instrumental in a movement against the oppression of the American colonists by the British Crown, and became commander in chief of the Continental Army.

1. James Monroe 2. William Henry Harrison  
3. Dwight D. Eisenhower 4. George Washington

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A COMMITMENT TO OUR COMMUNITY.



## EXPERIENCE. LEADERSHIP. COMMITMENT.

Nearly 20 years in law enforcement. A proven leader who has served in every aspect of public safety — from patrol operations to supervision, training, investigations, communications, and critical incident management.

- ✓ **18 YEARS OF SERVICE**  
Dedicated to protecting and serving our community.
- ✓ **SUPERVISOR. MENTOR. LEADER.**  
Trained officers, developed leaders, and built strong teams.
- ✓ **RELENTLESS DUI & DRUG ENFORCEMENT**  
Aggressive in targeting impaired drivers and drug trafficking to keep our roads and neighborhoods safe.
- ✓ **COMMUNITY FOCUSED.**  
Building trust, strengthening relationships, and putting citizens first.

## ★ MY COMMITMENT TO YOU ★



### RESTORE TRUST & INTEGRITY

Professionalism, transparency, and accountability will be the foundation of our Sheriff's Office.



### AGGRESSIVE ON CRIME

Tough on drugs. Tough on criminals. Focused on real results.



### COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Stronger relationships with citizens, schools, businesses, and area agencies.



### INVEST IN OUR YOUTH

Support and expand programs like D.A.R.E., mentorship, youth outreach, and positive opportunities.



### SUPPORT OUR DEPUTIES

Training, equipment, and leadership that empowers our deputies to succeed.



### WORK WITH OUR PARTNERS

Partner with the Commonwealth Attorney's Office and local agencies to keep our streets safe.

SHERIFF'S FORUM  
SPONSORED BY THE NAACP

SEP 17 2026

LOCATION & TIME TO BE ANNOUNCED

250 YEARS OF FREEDOM

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EARLY VOTING

SEP 18 2026

SEPTEMBER 18TH, 2026

ELECTION DAY: NOVEMBER 3<sup>RD</sup>, 2026

VISIT OUR WEBSITE  
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**CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR CAMPAIGN**  
Your support helps us continue the fight for a safer Middlesex County. Every donation makes a difference!

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