

Conference Timeline – Day 2

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Note: Room locations for breakout sessions will be made just prior to the conference.

7:45-8:30 a.m. – Registration Check in.

8:30 a.m. – Welcome and Introduction

8:45-9:35 a.m. – Session 1

- **“Stories of Connecticut’s Black Patriots – John Mills, Alex Breanne Corporation**
This presentation brings the lived experiences of four Connecticut families into focus: Prince Mortimer of Middletown, Robin Starr of Danbury, Job Lathrop of Norwich, and the three sons of London Wallace of Simsbury. Through these case studies, this talk traces how Black men served in the American Revolution while still enslaved—and how, in many cases, they returned home to bondage rather than freedom. Grounded in primary records and descendant-led research, this program reveals a powerful and often overlooked history of service, sacrifice, and resilience, and challenges us to reconsider what patriotism and liberty truly meant for Black people in Revolutionary-era Connecticut.
- **“The Cause of America: Understanding Thomas Paine & Common Sense 250 Years Later” – Luke G. Boyd, Public Historian, Living Historian; National September 11 Memorial & Museum**
Explore the life of English-born Founding Father Thomas Paine, the author of Common Sense, the seminal pamphlet published in 1776 that articulated the grievances of British America against King George III, and catalyzed a spirit of Revolution. a discussion on Paine’s political influences, writing style, and his meteoric rise as a widely read pamphleteer.
- **“Nathan Hale and the Family Who Created a Hero” – Anne Marie Charland, CT Landmarks, Museum Administrator Nathan Hale Homestead**
Join presenter Anne Marie Charland, Museum Administrator of the Nathan Hale Homestead, in Coventry, Connecticut in an exploration of Connecticut State Hero, Nathan Hale and the family who shaped him from small town boy to a Revolutionary War Hero. The discussion will include background into Nathan Hale's life growing up on a farm, attending Yale, becoming an advocate of education for women and his fateful decision to become an intelligence officer for General Washington.

9:45-10:35 a.m. – Session 2

- **“Ordinary People Were Tories, Too” – Bill and Kristen Keegen, Bywater Historical Services LLC.**

Many ordinary people were opposed to the Revolution, which sometimes got them caught up in accusations, prosecutions, and confiscations of property. This talk examines the lives and difficulties of several families whose members were unwilling to abandon their loyalty to the British King and did not keep quiet enough about it in a time of strong feelings and real danger to all sides.

- **“The USS *Confederacy*: Connecticut's Beautiful but Unlucky Navy Frigate” – Damien Cregeau, Independent Historian.**

An appetizing presentation on a Continental Navy frigate built on the Thames River between 1777 and 1778 and outfitted at the port of New London. This fascinating frigate designed to impress the French was built with the help of people of color including members of the Mohegan Tribe. Captain Seth Harding of Norwich was tasked by Congress to deliver John Jay and other VIPs from Philadelphia to Europe in the fall of 1779. The ensuing fiasco at sea and how the ship and all aboard wound up down at the French island of Martinique is story material worthy of a movie.

- **“What People Heard in the Pews: The Connecticut Clergy” – Nora Howard, Historian of the Avon Congregational Church & Town of Avon**

The power of Connecticut ministers to form hearts and minds is found in diaries, proclamations, newspapers, and sermons. Ministers in pulpits and on battlefields were captured, died in prison, died by suicide and disease, and went insane. This presentation includes words from the pulpit that inspired people in the pews - from white ministers, a Mohawk Indian and minister, a Black soldier and minister, and a Black female poet. They spoke words about sin, repentance, and turning to God. But their other words to the pews gave meaning, comfort, courage, and hope for the future.

- **“The Catacomb of Loyalty: A Deep Dive into New-Gate’s Role in the Revolution” – Performance of the original play, “The Slippery Truth: Prisonbreak at New-Gate,” by Patrick Gabridge – Morgan Bengal, Museum Curator, New Gate Prison**

New-Gate Prison is recognized as the first state prison in the United States and served as a prison for Loyalists throughout the American Revolution. What can the prison’s history and the people who were once incarcerated there tell about the foundation of our nation? How were early laws enacted to force people to recognize a new form of government? Themes of citizenship, loyalty and treason were at the core of America’s early foundation. Join us to learn more about the darker (literally and figuratively) side of the Revolution and how our small museum is embracing these themes in our 250th programming.

10:45-11:35 a.m. – Session 3

- **Association for the Study of Connecticut History (ASCH) Panel – “Encountering Revolutionary Narratives: Education and Memory”**

Steve Armstrong & Allison Norrie - America 250 within the context of public education
Natalie Belanger & Sally Whipple - museum narratives and approaches to America 250

Jeffrey O'Leary - Nathan Hale statue and its restoration at Mitchell College
Thomas Balcerski and Anna Beecher - discussion/overview of Fall 2026 issue of *Connecticut History Review*: "1776 in Connecticut"

- **“Steady Habits, Revolutionary Change: Abolition and Emancipation in Wartime Connecticut” – Lucien Lafreniere, MA Candidate, Central Connecticut State University; Captain, Waterbury Fire Department; Combat Veteran United States Marine Corps**

Historians have noted that more research is needed to assess the size, impact, and character of abolition throughout Connecticut's history. This research weighs the effectiveness of the abolition movement in addition to establishing a more accurate timeline of actual emancipation. This research also argues that the abolitionist movement in Connecticut, though small, generated outsized influence on social opinions about slavery due to a corresponding evolution of religious morality generated by religious leaders and slave conversion. Religious abolition coalescing on the eve of the colonies' war with the British Empire created a focal point of change in Connecticut.

- **“The Battle of Ridgefield: How Benedict Arnold and the Patriot Militia Galvanized Revolutionary Connecticut” – Keith Marshall Jones, Connecticut Colonel Publishing Company & Ridgefield Historical Society**

The day-long-running April 27, 1777, Ridgefield battle is examined in fresh, groundbreaking detail. Learn how the British expedition to destroy General George Washington's primary New England supply depot in Danbury failed to stimulate New York Royal Governor William Tryon's promised Loyalist uprising in Southwestern Connecticut. Discover the real circumstances of Patriot General David Wooster's mortal wounding and General Benedict Arnold's gallant barricade stand. Understand how the battle galvanized CT Governor Trumbull and the General Assembly to tighten screw on Tories, beef up state defenses, and impact the crucial action at Saratoga.

11:45-12:45 p.m. – LUNCH

12:50-1:20 p.m. – After Lunch Special Session:

- **“What a Glorious Crash They Made: Musick of Connecticut's Revolution”**
What A Glorious Crash They Made features a collection of “New Songs” and Hymns published in Connecticut during the American Revolution. From the time of the Stamp Act through the British surrender at Yorktown, Connecticut's seditious colonists used these works to foment rebellion, commemorate victory, and give thanks for preservation. Richard Franklin Donohue, Tenor & Harpsichord, will share his original research and explore this fiery repertoire that in the words of John Adams “cultivated the sensations of Freedom.” The program spans the Revolutionary war years with selections like John Dickinson's Liberty Song, William Billings' Chester, Andrew Law's Middletown, and several popular British tunes with “new” texts reflecting the cause of freedom.

1:30-2:20 p.m. – Session 4

- **“A Heroic But Doomed Defense: The Battle of New London, September 6, 1781” – Matthew E. Reardon, Author/Historian; Command Historian for the Connecticut**

Military Department

On September 6, 1781, a local militia stood valiantly—though unsuccessfully—against an invading British force led by the one of the nation’s most notorious traitors, Benedict Arnold. While history has often focused on the bloody fighting at Fort Griswold, the struggle for New London itself has remained in the shadows. Based on the book *The Traitor’s Homecoming: Benedict Arnold’s Raid on New London, Connecticut, September 4-13, 1781*, this presentation brings the tactical and human elements of the raid to light, offering a fresh perspective on Arnold’s infamous return to his home state.

- **“The Web They Wove’: Women & Their Wardrobes During New England’s Revolution” – Rebecca Bayreuther Donohue**

Underpinning the sensationalism of battle reports & broadsides is the often silent steadiness of women’s work with textiles. The choices they made every day about fashion and fabric consumption & creation drove the course of Revolution just as determinedly as any congress. As southern New England commemorates the 250th anniversary of the War for Independence, it is these local lives dressed in full wool or spun silk that continue to inspire creativity, resilience, and empathy in us today. From the mythology of homespun to legends of midnight rides in red cloaks & calashes, the Dirty Blue Shirts share stories of women who waged war on multiple fronts as well as a look at what they wore as their worlds turn’d upside down. This program is presented by costumed historians and includes reproduction clothing pieces & fabric samples as well as a PowerPoint presentation with images of extant originals. – Rebecca Donohue

- **“Partisan Federalist: Noah Webster’s Fight to Preserve the Republic” – Craig Hotchkiss, Noah Webster House & West Hartford Historical Society**

Noah Webster’s writings reflect a profound depth of thought on the civic ideals and policies needed for the “united” states to survive and flourish as a “federal republic.” As one of the leaders of the emergent Federalist Party, Webster corresponded with and often debated the most prominent Americans of his time. Webster served as the editor of the Federalist’s *American Minerva*, the first daily newspaper in the nation’s capital of New York City, and as a spokesman for the Federalist Party. through the administration of John Adams. Ultimately resigned to the failure of his conservative, “republican” vision for America, Webster pivoted to undertake a new approach in his quest for national unity; after 22 years of toil, the monumental *The American Dictionary of the English Language* became his magnum opus and greatest contribution to America.

- **“Engaging the Public for America 250: New Haven Museum” – Cynthia J. Riccio, Director of Programs and Planning, New Haven Museum**

As museums nationwide prepare for America 250, this presentation examines how the New Haven Museum is using the commemoration to advance institutional priorities around engagement, inclusion, and storytelling. We will outline our planning framework, partnerships, and interpretive approach, and reflect on how America 250 can serve as a catalyst for long-term impact rather than a one-time anniversary effort. The discussion will include our public programs, the Whitney Library, and the upcoming exhibition, “New Haven’s Unfinished Revolutions.”

2:30-3:20 p.m. – Session 5

- **“On Command with Capt. Nimham’: The Continental Indian Corps of 1778” – Dave Naumec, Independent Museum Professional & Associate Researcher, Bywater Historical Services, LLC**

As early as January 1778, General George Washington considered the formation of a new Light Infantry Battalion which included a company of Indians drawn from the Continental Army itself. By March 1778, Congress approved Washington’s plans including “a body of Indians not exceeding four Hundred.” Abraham Nimham, a Stockbridge Indian Sachem and soldier of note, was commissioned Captain and his fellow Wappingers were detached from their Massachusetts Line Regiments. By July 1778 Connecticut Indians were also detached from their Continental regiments to join “Nimham’s Company.” At least twenty Connecticut soldiers can be tied to the Indian Corps. Enjoy a riveting presentation that focuses on the creation of the Corps and the ambush that led to the Corps’ demise.

- **“Collecting the Revolution: Connecticut’s History, Objects and Memory” – Beth Burgess, Museum of Connecticut History, Jodi Polsgrove, Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), and Chris Barlow, Berlin Equity Action Team.**

Using objects, archives, and places, presenters will tell the story of the CT and the Revolution through the lenses of memory and myth. Learn how our understanding and commemoration of 1776 has and continues to change over time, and the learning opportunities these relics offer us in this American moment.

- **“To Provision Washington’s Army: 1776 and the Norwich Huntington Group” – Maggie Meahl, Independent researcher (specializing in New London County history)**

We know plenty about the pivotal year 1776 in American history—from the British evacuating Boston in March to the cold, starving Continental army troops surprising the Hessians at Trenton, NJ, on Christmas Day. But do we really know what it takes to provision an eighteenth-century army with virtually no government infrastructure, funds, or military administration? Learn how the Huntingtons, of the inland port of Norwich, CT, and their maritime associates facilitated the transfer of Continental Army troops from Massachusetts to Manhattan throughout 1776. Discover how savvy ship captains shuttled these troops and equipment at Norwich’s wharves at the behest of the merchant Huntington brothers: Joshua and Andrew. The information presented is based on primary source materials from the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History in Hartford, and other primary sources.

- ~~**“From Print to Patterns: Quantifying Desertion in Connecticut’s Revolutionary War Newspapers” – Dana Meyer, Connecticut League of Museums**~~

~~Hidden in Connecticut newspapers and muster rolls, the stories of Revolutionary War deserters reveal a largely untold history. This presentation uses digital aggregation and analysis of over 200 newspaper advertisements alongside enlistment records to uncover patterns in demographics, enlistment terms, seasonality, and community responses.~~

~~Newspapers, often partisan and propagandistic, shaped public understanding of military service while functioning as a disciplinary infrastructure, enlisting civilian enforcement and exposing the limits of state authority. By combining computational analysis with close readings of print, attendees will see how digital methods illuminate the human, institutional, and geographical dimensions of desertion during the Revolutionary War.~~

Conference wrap up: 3:30